



Province of Alberta

The 26th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

March 7, 2007 to December 4, 2007
and Index

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 7, 2007**

3:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/07

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

[The Clerk read the Royal Proclamation dated February 14, 2007, summoning the Members of the Legislative Assembly to convene on this date]

The Clerk: Please be seated.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Order! Mr. Speaker.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Speaker, accompanied by the officers of the Assembly, entered the Chamber and took the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: To all hon. members, welcome home, and to all those present as guests, welcome to your Alberta Legislative Assembly. Would you join me now in the opening day prayer.

Almighty God, author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask Your blessings on all here present. We ask Your guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments for the benefit of all Albertans. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Would you please join us in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members and Guests:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, 2006 was a very exciting year for the Alberta Legislative Assembly as we celebrated 100 years of democracy in this province. Over the last century the people and events that shaped this province were deserving of celebration and recognition, and it seems only fitting that as the year came to an end, we saw another historic moment take place, on December 14, 2006, the swearing-in of Alberta's 13th Premier, the Hon. Edward Michael Stelmach.

Premier Stelmach is no stranger to history and the significance it plays in our lives. He and his delightful wife, Marie, raised their four children on the homestead which was first settled by his grandfather, Nicholas Stelmach, in 1898. History and tradition are an important part of our new Premier's life, just as they are valued by this Assembly.

In terms of public service our new Premier also has had an impressive history. In this House he has served as minister of international and intergovernmental relations, minister of transportation, minister of infrastructure, and minister of agriculture, food and rural development. In his community he has served as a county

reeve and school trustee and has held numerous other committee positions and memberships on boards and in organizations within his constituency.

From the date that Premier Edward Michael Stelmach was sworn in as our province's newest Premier, his every move and his every word will become part of Alberta's political history. There is no telling what that future history might include, but looking back in his speech from the December 14 swearing-in, his words may foretell that future when he said, "We have the means to build a stronger province and future . . . the future we want for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren." Today in this Assembly I hope we can all agree that that is the future we want and that years from now it is the history we want to look back on.

On behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta I welcome you, Mr. Premier, and you, Mrs. Stelmach, Alberta's First Lady, as you take your place in this Legislature as Alberta's 13th Premier and Alberta's 13th First Lady. [Standing ovation]

head: Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor

[The Premier, the Clerk, and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Hon. members, this past year the Canadian Forces, and Canada's army in particular, have confronted challenges not seen since Korea. The successes in Afghanistan of our highly motivated young people in uniform are deserving of greater recognition. So, too, are their sacrifices. Today in the Speaker's gallery there are three junior, noncommissioned officers from the Edmonton Garrison, who are here representing those members of our armed forces who have been to Afghanistan and may well return to that country. I'd ask each to rise in turn and remain standing as I introduce them.

From the first battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Master Corporal Peter MacLean, who is married with seven children and who has deployed on four operational tours, including Kosovo, Bosnia, and Afghanistan in 2004 and 2006; Corporal Gordon Whitton, who has served twice in Afghanistan and who was awarded a mention in dispatches. The mother of two teenage boys, Corporal Kimberly Smith-Samms completed her first overseas deployment, which was to Afghanistan, in August 2006.

It is also very appropriate to recognize Master Corporal Paul Franklin, who is seated on the floor of the Chamber. Members may recall that this gallant young soldier lost both legs as a result of a suicide bomb attack in Kandahar.

It's a remarkable testament to their character, their fortitude, and their common beliefs in the values we share as Canadians that each of these soldiers would serve again in that distant land. Let us remain mindful that our Canadian Forces are the essential guarantors of the freedoms and peace we are so fortunate to enjoy. Their hard-won successes contribute to a higher humanity in places that have seen little but strife and conflict. We are very proud of them all. [Standing ovation]

The Royal Canadian Artillery Band will now play a brief musical interlude, the details of which are in your program. The RCA Band, Canada's oldest regular army band, was founded in Quebec City in 1879. It was subsequently stationed in Montreal and then Halifax. It has seen service in both world wars and in Korea, and it has travelled across Canada and beyond our borders. Reconstituted in Edmonton in 1997, the band is today under the direction of Captain Brian Greenwood, who is in the Speaker's gallery.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Ladies and gentlemen, all rise, please.

Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, and Mrs. Kwong, their party, the Premier, and the Clerk entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne]

head:

Speech from the Throne

The Future Is Now: A Plan for Alberta

His Honour: Ladies and gentlemen, please be seated.

Fellow Albertans, welcome to the Third Session of the 26th Alberta Legislature. I am honoured once again to deliver the Speech from the Throne.

As we continue our journey into Alberta's second century, Albertans have much to be proud of and much to look forward to. Our current prosperity is the result of foresight by Albertans whose values we honour, values such as fiscal vigilance, community spirit, and self-reliance. It is a result of a strong respect for the environment and an appreciation for lifelong learning. It is because of these shared values and through the hard work of Albertans that this province is looked to as a leader in Canada and across the globe.

Alberta is fortunate, but Albertans have made good use of the resources that nature has bestowed upon our province, and they have made wise choices, including the bold and often difficult decisions made during the past decade. Many of those decisions were made with a thoughtful eye on the future. Fellow Albertans, that future is now.

Now more than ever the government must work with Albertans to ensure that the good fortune we enjoy today is not squandered. We must respect and build on the work and the sacrifices that were made in the past. We must plan ahead to ensure that the prosperity this province enjoys today is secured for our children and grandchildren. This means making the right choices so that Alberta's economic growth remains sustainable and that the world-class quality of life Albertans enjoy includes a clean and healthy environment.

A New Approach to Working for Albertans

With a wealth of new opportunities to be seized and some tough challenges to be addressed, this government is taking a fresh look at how it works on behalf of Albertans and the priorities on which it will focus. Albertans expect their government to reflect the realities they are facing today. They expect a new approach by their government, one that recognizes the unique qualities of Albertans and their province, one that recognizes the opportunities and challenges we face. Your new government has that plan.

In carrying it out, the government will be guided by the values of Albertans. It will ensure respect for the environment and compassion for others. It will be open and accountable, fiscally responsible, and inclusive. At this unique time in our history Albertans expect their government to have a clear plan and to deliver tangible results.

Ladies and gentlemen, your government will deliver on behalf of all Albertans.

Acting on Albertans' Priorities

The government of Alberta will act on Albertans' priorities to ensure a higher standard of living, greater opportunities, and an even better quality of life for all citizens of this province. The government will act thoughtfully and decisively on behalf of Albertans. The government of Alberta will govern with integrity and transparency, manage growth pressures, improve Albertans' quality of life, provide safe and secure communities, and build a stronger Alberta.

Governing with Integrity and Transparency

Governing with integrity and transparency is the first priority of this government for a deeply fundamental reason. Albertans put their highest trust in the women and men elected to represent their best interests. That trust will be honoured and respected.

Your government will introduce legislation to establish a lobbyist registry. Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, will give all Albertans public access to information regarding individuals and organizations seeking to influence government decisions. It will also take measures to improve information provided to the public about who has contracts with government. These measures will increase transparency, openness, and accountability and will enhance public trust in the institution of government.

Your government will also review the way agencies, boards, and commissions are governed to ensure greater accountability. It will look for more efficient and productive ways of conducting the business of government, and it will look for opportunities for all parties represented in the Legislature to work together to better serve Albertans.

Managing Growth Pressures

Alberta's economy is leading the country with a record pace of development. More than half a million people have moved here from other provinces in the past half-dozen years. The government of Alberta has reinforced its determination to effectively manage the pressures that come with rapid economic growth. It will act decisively to minimize the price we are all paying for prosperity and address pressures on housing, labour, infrastructure, and the environment.

Your government recognizes that adequate housing is essential for all Albertans to share in the prosperity of their province. It has created a provincial task force to find ways to make affordable housing more accessible to Albertans. It will focus on solutions for homelessness and the provision of affordable housing.

Despite so many people moving to Alberta each year, our economy is in dire need of people to answer the calls for "help wanted" across the province. To help meet this demand, your government will focus on better co-ordination of economic development, immigration, and labour force planning. It will craft a made-in-Alberta solution to labour needs.

Like the early settlers who helped build our province, immigrants today come here with hopes of creating a better life for themselves and a better future for their children. The government of Alberta will help new Albertans realize their dreams. It will encourage them to put down roots, raise their families here, and contribute to and share in Alberta's prosperity.

Your government will increase support for First Nations and Métis skills training and labour force development so that those Albertans with the deepest roots in this province will also have more opportunities to reap the rewards of Alberta's prosperity.

The current economic growth is placing great pressure on our

province's infrastructure. Your government will develop a long-term capital plan that will address infrastructure needs and inflation costs while exploring options to fund new capital projects. It will also place great emphasis on controlled spending to ensure that Albertans get the best possible value for their tax dollars.

The government of Alberta will continue to build on its solid record in environmental management with some of the most progressive legislation and action-based strategies in the country. Working with Albertans, the government will turn current environmental challenges into new opportunities. This will enhance Alberta's standing as a leader in practical, innovative, and sustainable environmental policies.

Your government will encourage all Albertans to take personal responsibility for energy efficiency and reduced consumption because the environment is a shared responsibility between government, industry, and all members of society.

Alberta's legislation for regulating greenhouse gas emissions was the first in Canada specifically addressing climate change, but this government knows more must be done. This spring the government of Alberta will introduce legislation that will complete implementation of Alberta's groundbreaking climate change plan. It will establish greenhouse gas emission intensity targets for industry under the specified gas emitters regulation. These will be the first legislated emission intensity reduction targets for large industrial emitters in Canada.

At the same time, the government will work with Albertans to outline its next steps on this important issue. By fall 2007 Alberta will have a new climate change action plan to move beyond what's been accomplished so far.

To maintain our high quality of life, it is essential that Albertans properly manage our province's water supplies. The government of Alberta's Water for Life strategy is North America's most comprehensive water management plan. Since 2003 it has provided Alberta with an action plan to manage water supplies during this time of unprecedented economic growth. It is essential to ensure that this plan is based on current realities. Later this year the Alberta Water Council will consult with Albertans on updating the Water for Life strategy and provide recommendations to government by year-end.

Your government will introduce strategies and provide new funding to respond to growth pressures related to the development of Alberta's oil sands. As a first big step the government of Alberta has committed almost \$400 million in new funding over the next three years to complete new water and waste-water treatment facilities, develop 300 affordable housing units, and address health pressures in the Wood Buffalo region. It will also create an oil sands sustainable development secretariat to better plan and co-ordinate delivery of services as this important resource is developed. In addition, the Oil Sands Multi-Stakeholder Committee will complete its work and recommend strategies and policies, based on Albertans' input, to guide future development.

Your government will also complete its land-use framework, which will guide the way to balancing the economic, environmental, and social needs of Albertans. These initiatives will mark the beginning of a new era in managing the overall environmental effects of development. It will blend Alberta's environment-related policies, including Water for Life, the climate change action plan, and the land-use framework, to ensure that Alberta's environment continues to be protected.

head: **Improving Albertans' Quality of Life**

Albertans have told their government that economic prosperity must not come at the expense of quality of life, and the government

of Alberta is listening. It will ensure that services, programs, and infrastructure are in place to maintain Albertans' high quality of life.

Albertans have always placed a high value on learning, and this government recognizes that education is key to improving quality of life. Your government will continue to look for innovative ways to improve Alberta's outstanding K to 12 education system. It will work with community partners, school boards, and educators to develop effective strategies that support teachers, parents, students, and administrators in continuing to provide a first-rate learning environment.

Your government will also increase access and quality in postsecondary education while strengthening its support for community education and literacy programs. It will work to improve high school completion rates and increase access to postsecondary education with an emphasis on the Campus Alberta approach. The government will ensure that Alberta's postsecondary institutions have defined roles and responsibilities within a comprehensive advanced learning system. Investments in advanced education will be targeted towards a comprehensive framework that will make postsecondary education, trade and occupational training more accessible to adult learners.

The government of Alberta will continue to encourage and support Albertans in taking steps to improve and maintain individual, family, and community health. A sustained focus on wellness, injury reduction, and disease prevention combined with efforts to improve productivity and accountability in health care delivery will provide the framework to ensure a sustainable public health care system.

Building the health workforce of the future will be a top priority. Albertans will see stronger emphasis on primary health care and self-management of chronic diseases through the provision of information, resources, and support.

The government of Alberta will assist people living in the community with serious mental illness, and their families, with improved access to support services and treatment. A new pharmaceutical strategy will capitalize on opportunities to improve the range of drugs available and to reduce or avoid costs. Your government will work to expand long-term care capacity, improve standards, and ensure that facilities and supports are available to seniors as the population ages. Your government will continue to improve the quality of life in First Nations and Métis communities, and it will ensure that government policies better reflect the needs of persons with disabilities.

This province is known as one of the best places to live and raise a family, in large part because of the spirit of community that Albertans cherish. Albertans value compassion, and they take pride in coming together to volunteer time and money to help others in need. Reflecting these values, the government of Alberta will lead the creation of a community spirit program for charitable giving. The program will support increases for private charitable donations through tax credits and establish a community spirit fund to provide matching grants for eligible donations to Alberta-based registered charities. The government will establish an all-party MLA committee to guide the creation of this program.

Providing Safe and Secure Communities

Albertans place a high priority on living in a peaceful society, where laws are respected and consideration for others is practised. They want to be assured that their communities will remain safe and secure as the province undergoes rapid growth and change. The Alberta government will act on this priority. It will work with communities to make neighbourhoods stronger and safer.

To this end, your government will work with community leaders

to establish a crime reduction and safe communities task force that will consult with Albertans on how to reduce crime and improve public confidence in the justice system. This initiative will build on the work being done by 13 partnering government ministries to develop and implement an integrated crime reduction strategy. Through this collaboration the province will see a future in which Albertans experience less crime, feel less fearful of crime, and work together to make their communities safer.

Building a Stronger Alberta

Albertans and their government know that the province's economic success must not be taken for granted. The Alberta government will act now to build an even stronger Alberta. It will conduct an open and transparent review of the resource royalty system through an independent committee recently established. At the end of the review Albertans must be confident that the right system is in place, one that is fair to both industry and to Albertans, who own the resources.

Your government will also develop strategies to ensure that Albertans have long-term access to reliable and diverse sources of energy for homes, small businesses, and larger industries, and it will encourage the upgrading and refining of nonrenewable resources in Alberta to obtain maximum value for Albertans and to create new business opportunities and long-term jobs.

The government of Alberta will develop a comprehensive energy strategy, which will ensure the sustainable development of the province's resources in an environmentally responsible manner, making full use of innovations such as near zero emission coal. The strategy will look at all of Alberta's energy resources with a focus on renewable resources, including electricity generated by wind and bioenergy such as ethanol and other biofuels. Development in these areas will provide new opportunities for rural Alberta and the agriculture community. While much of the focus on sustainable development is directed at industry, individual Albertans must play their part as well to promote energy efficiency and reduce consumption.

A strong Alberta requires strong municipalities. This government recognizes that municipalities provide many of the day-to-day services upon which Albertans rely. Your government has therefore renewed efforts to work with municipalities to better serve Albertans. This includes developing a long-term funding arrangement that is sustainable and recognizes the challenges municipalities have in raising revenues to provide essential services on the front lines of Alberta's tremendous growth. This co-operative effort has already yielded results that will benefit all Albertans. The provincial government has committed an additional \$1.4 billion in annual funding to municipalities, which will be phased in over the next four years.

Albertans want to be sure that revenues they entrust to their provincial government are used prudently to build a stronger Alberta today and for generations to come. Your government is taking action by developing a surplus management policy that reflects Albertans' long-term priorities. Details of this policy will be announced with the 2007 provincial budget.

Your government will ensure that savings are targeted to the province's future needs. It will strengthen the governance of its investments so that the funds Albertans entrust to it are managed most effectively.

The Alberta government will also establish an institute for agriculture, forestry, and the environment, which will put research and innovation to practical, real-world use to benefit Albertans and the environment. The institute will develop market-based solutions

to environmental sustainability challenges surrounding agriculture and renewable resource sectors such as forestry. As all Albertans know, much of Alberta's economic strength is based on natural resources.

To ensure that Alberta remains prosperous for future generations, it is essential to seize the opportunity now to further strengthen and diversify our economy. Your government will build on Alberta's traditional strengths, which include energy, agriculture, forestry, tourism, and the people of this province. It will build on these strengths to develop a robust knowledge-based economy to compete in world markets.

The Alberta government will develop a long-term strategy for technology commercialization and economic diversification. It will continue to focus on research in priority areas of energy, information and communications technology, and life sciences. In addition, it will place an increased emphasis on nanotechnology, the science of small. Research in this field has the potential to impact every sector of our economy and to diversify and sustain Alberta's prosperity for generations. Led by world-class researchers at the National Institute for Nanotechnology in Edmonton, our province is positioned to become an international leader in this field.

Conclusion

Fellow Albertans, the government of Alberta is making a solemn commitment to you. In all that it does, it will reflect your values and act on your priorities. It will conduct itself with the recognition that it is an honour and a privilege to serve as government, not a right, and that it must continuously earn that privilege. Your government will listen to and work with Albertans because together we can do great things.

We are faced with a unique opportunity to build for the future and to secure the long-term prosperity of our great province. Your government has a solid plan to accomplish these goals. It will take full advantage of that opportunity.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and may God bless you all.

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

The Speaker: Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of *God Save The Queen*. Please remain standing at the conclusion.

Hon. Members and Guests:

God save our gracious Queen,
long live our noble Queen,
God save The Queen!
Send her victorious,
happy and glorious,
long to reign over us:
God save The Queen!

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Their Honours, their party, and the Premier left the Chamber as a fanfare of trumpets sounded]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

[The Mace was uncovered]

[The Premier returned to the Chamber]

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Bill 1
Lobbyists Act

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act.

One of our top five priorities is governing with integrity and transparency, and this act, the Lobbyists Act, is an example of our commitment to this principle. Our commitment to openness in government, openness in business dealings is demonstrated in three ways through the Lobbyists Act: first, by establishing a lobbyist registry; secondly, by requiring lobbyists to declare existing contracts they have to give advice to government; and lastly, by regularly publishing an online, searchable index of who has contracts with the government. One of the key features of the legislation is the prohibition from lobbying and providing advice to government on the same issue at the same time.

The lobbyist registry will be administered by the Ethics Commissioner. It will be fully accessible on the Internet and will identify the subject matter of each lobbying activity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a first time]

head: **Tablings**

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have the honour to table a copy of the speech graciously given by His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

head: **Motions**

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I move that the speech of His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to this Assembly be taken into consideration on Thursday, March 8, 2007.

[Motion carried]

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would move that pursuant to Standing Order 52(1) the select standing committees for the present session of the Legislative Assembly be appointed for the following purposes:

- (1) Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund,
- (2) Legislative Offices,
- (3) Private Bills,

- (4) Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing, and
- (5) Public Accounts.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the following members be appointed to the Assembly's five standing committees:

- (1) Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund: Mr. Johnston, chair; Mr. Rogers, deputy chair; Mr. Doerksen; Mr. Griffiths; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Magnus; Mr. Mar; Mrs. Mather; and Mr. Pham.
- (2) Legislative Offices: Mr. Rodney, chair; Mr. Magnus, deputy chair; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Cao; Mr. Coutts; Mr. Ducharme; Mr. Flaherty; Mr. Marz; Mr. McFarland; Dr. Pannu; and Mr. VanderBurg.
- (3) Private Bills: Ms DeLong, chair; Dr. Brown, deputy chair; Reverend Abbott; Mr. Agnihotri; Mr. Amery; Ms Calahasen; Mr. Doerksen; Mr. Dunford; Mr. Eggen; Mr. Elsalhy; Mrs. Jablonski; Mr. Johnson; Mr. Loughheed; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. Mitzel; Mr. Pham; Mr. Prins; Mr. Rogers; Mr. Shariff; Dr. Swann; and Mr. Tougas.
- (4) Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: Mr. Zwodzesky, chair; Mr. Johnson, deputy chair; Reverend Abbott; Mr. Amery; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Cardinal; Mr. Cenaiko; Mr. Flaherty; Mrs. Forsyth; Mrs. Fritz; Mr. Griffiths; Mr. Hancock; Mr. Herard; Mr. Loughheed; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Marz; Mr. Mitzel; Mr. Oberle; Dr. Pannu; and Ms Pastoor.
- (5) Public Accounts: Mr. MacDonald, chair; Mr. Prins, deputy chair; Mr. Bonko; Dr. Brown; Mr. Cardinal; Mr. Cenaiko; Mr. Chase; Ms DeLong; Mr. Dunford; Mr. Eggen; Mrs. Forsyth; Mr. Herard; Mr. Johnston; Mr. R. Miller; Mr. Rodney; Mr. Strang; and Mr. Webber.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Assembly stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 3:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, March 8, 2007

1:30 p.m.

Date: 07/03/08

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome. I would ask that all hon. members remain standing after the prayer so that we may pay tribute to our former colleagues who have passed away since we were last in the House. Please join me in prayer.

As we commence proceedings today in this Assembly, we ask for divine guidance so that our words and deeds may bring to all people of this great province hope, prosperity, and a vision for the future. Amen.

Mr. Arthur Soetaert

April 14, 1913, to September 14, 2006

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Thursday, September 14, 2006, Arthur Joseph Soetaert passed away. Mr. Soetaert was elected in the 13th Legislature, June 29, 1955, representing the St. Albert constituency for the Liberal Party. Mr. Soetaert served until June 18, 1959. During his term of office Mr. Soetaert served on the select standing committees on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Municipal Law; Privileges and Elections; Public Accounts; and Railways, Telephones and Irrigation.

Mr. Bryan Strong

December 24, 1946, to December 25, 2006

The Speaker: On Monday, December 25, 2006, Bryan Melvin Strong passed away. Mr. Strong was first elected on May 8, 1986, and served until March 20, 1989, representing the constituency of St. Albert for the New Democratic Party. During his term of office Mr. Strong served on the select standing committees on Public Accounts and Public Affairs.

Dr. Kenneth Paproski

January 17, 1931, to January 25, 2007

The Speaker: On Thursday, January 25, 2007, Dr. Kenneth Robert Howard Paproski passed away. Dr. Paproski was first elected in 1971 and served until 1982. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Edmonton-Kingsway for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Dr. Paproski served on several committees: Public Accounts; Law, Law Amendments and Regulations; Public Affairs, Agriculture and Education; Private Bills; Law and Regulations; Public Affairs; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing. In addition, Dr. Paproski served on two legislative committees, one dealing with the Workers' Compensation Act and Professions and Occupations.

Mr. Arthur Dixon

December 1, 1919, to February 5, 2007

The Speaker: Mr. Arthur Johnson Dixon passed away on Monday, February 5, 2007. Mr. Dixon was first elected in 1952 and served until 1975. During his years of service he represented the constituencies of Calgary, Calgary South-East, Calgary-South, and Calgary-Millican for the Social Credit Party. During his term of office Mr. Dixon served on several committees: Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Law Amendments; Municipal Law; Public Accounts; and Railways, Telephones and Irrigation.

Mr. Dixon served as Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly from 1955 to 1963 and as Speaker from 1963 to 1972. During Mr. Dixon's tenure as Speaker he served on the Standing Committee on Public Affairs, Agriculture and Education; Special Committee to Arrange the Area Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; Special Committee to Revise Rules 74 to 104 of the Rules, Orders and Forms of Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta; and the Special Committee to Select an Ombudsman.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of the families who shared the burden of public office. Family members of Mr. Soetaert, Dr. Paproski, and Mr. Dixon are with us today in the Speaker's gallery. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember hon. member Art Soetaert, hon. member Bryan Strong, hon. member Ken Paproski, and hon. member Arthur Dixon as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Members of this Legislative Assembly an individual that is seated in your gallery, Mr. Rick Hansen. Rick is a great Canadian whose efforts have brought not only international recognition and accolades but also meaningful improvements to the quality of life of persons with spinal cord injuries and other disabilities.

Given the number of his achievements, I will highlight only a few here today. He has wheeled around the globe, developed a foundation to assist those with spinal cord injuries, and this evening Rick will be honoured by the CPA with the Christopher Reeve award to recognize his outstanding leadership and contribution to the community of persons with spinal cord injury and other physical disabilities. My wife, Marie, will be presenting him with the award this evening. Later this year he will be inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame.

He is accompanied by a number of guests: Kent Hehr, Marlin Styner, Gary McPherson and his wife, Val, and Dr. Karim Fouad. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they all receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's an honour for me today to introduce to you guests who are seated in the Speaker's gallery as well. These guests are family members of our former colleagues who have passed away since we last sat. Former MLA Arthur Soetaert is represented by his son Art Soetaert and two daughters, Lorraine St. Laurent and Claudette Meunier. If they would rise, please.

Mrs. Louise Paproski, widow of Dr. Kenneth Paproski, former MLA, is here with her daughter Marion Johnson, son-in-law Rod Johnson, and grandchildren Shea, Owen, Genevieve, and Roarke Johnson. If they would rise, please.

Mrs. Marguerite Dixon, widow of Mr. Art Dixon, former MLA and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, is here with several family members: son Donald and Janet Dixon and their daughter Emily, daughter-in-law Mrs. Susie Dixon, granddaughter Melanie Dixon, brother-in-law Burnell and Leona Perrault, nephew Steven and Crystal Perrault, and nephew Dan Galbraith. With the family is former Member of the Legislative Assembly Dennis Anderson, who represented Calgary-Currie, a long-time family friend. As I ask

them to rise, I would like to point out to all members that when Mr. Dixon was the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, his family would come from Calgary to live in the Speaker's suite. His son Donald, who is here today, must have been just a little gaffer at that time, so he must have pitter-pattered through the Speaker's suite in times gone by. If the Dixon family would rise now.

1:40

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a fellow Official Opposition House Leader. Seated in your gallery is Gary McRobb, who is the MLA for Kluane in Yukon. He was first elected to the Yukon Legislative Assembly in 1996 and re-elected in 2000, 2002, and 2006. He is the Liberal caucus critic for the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, the Department of Highways and Public Works, the Yukon Development Corporation, and the Yukon Energy Corporation. As I said, he is the Official Opposition House Leader. I would ask Mr. McRobb to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Alberta Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you Mr. Brent Rathgeber, also seated in your gallery. Mr. Rathgeber is well known to all members of this fine Assembly as he served in this Legislature as the Member for Edmonton-Calder from 2001-2004. But that is not the reason he is here today. Mr. Rathgeber has recently been nominated as the candidate for the Edmonton-St. Albert Conservative association, and he will be running in the upcoming federal election and, I imagine, equally competently representing his constituents there. I would like to ask Mr. Rathgeber to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Adam Kozakiewicz, who has served the members of this Assembly for the past seven years as a systems analyst. For those of us that find the world of computers and BlackBerries and blueberries and Palms and Bluetooth gadgets a little bit challenging, as I do, Adam was always there for all of us to make sure that these machines worked well for us and in many cases in spite of us. We will certainly miss his talents and good humour as he is moving on to a new position with the Bank of Montreal in Vegreville as a financial planner. I would like to ask Adam to rise in the members' gallery to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly on behalf of my colleague from Athabasca-Redwater a group from the Thorhild school. There are about 15 students, I believe, and they're accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Mike Popowicz. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my privilege to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly the Trinity Christian school group, who is the only group of school kids that has been able to come to the Legislature from my constituency year after year, so I'd like to thank them and their teacher, Cheryl Barnard, for that. As well, they informed me that they are staying overnight, so they have many parent helpers to help them with that: Dan Dooley, Cori Janz, Sheila Muirhead, Wendy Clay, Kent Blanton, Sheryl Anderton, Steve Miller, Joanne Smart, and Paul Wilson. I'd like to have them rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a grade 10 class from Strathcona Christian Academy. They're accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Doug Zook. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour also to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students from the Rimbey elementary school. They're accompanied by their teacher and five parent helpers. The parent helpers are Ms Bridget Wright, Ms Suzanne Hanley, Ms Janet Burghardt, Ms Starla Boehnert, and Mr. Brent Stutheit. Their teacher is Ms Cathy Coers. This class has been here all week participating in the School at the Legislature, and they've enjoyed themselves immensely. They're seated in one of the galleries, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the gentleman who maintains my constituency office. Jordan takes all of my constituency calls, and he's my right hand and my left hand, particularly when I'm here in Edmonton. I'd like to ask my constituency manager, Jordan Lien, who is seated in the members' gallery, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, the Premier already introduced Marlin Styner to us, but he neglected to introduce his spouse. As he well knows, we don't do these jobs without the support of significant others and spouses. I'm very pleased to introduce Diane Gramlich to the Assembly, who travelled with Marlin to all the leadership candidates, raising the issues of the 332,000 Disability Coalition so effectively. I am proud that both of them reside in the Red Deer-South constituency and attend faithfully Red Deer-South constituency board meetings for the PC Association. So welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of Drayton Valley-Calmar, His Worship Darren Aldous. Darren is the mayor of Breton. He's also a VP of the AUMA, chair of the environment and sustainability committee, and

chair of the upcoming AUMA energy efficiency conference, which is on April 19 and 20 at the River Cree Marriott. I would ask Mayor Aldous to please rise – he's seated behind me, in the members' gallery – and I'd ask all members to welcome him.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a first-year law student at the University of Alberta. She is shadowing me today. She is part of the Women's Law Forum, who is interested in increasing the leadership of women in public life. She is also the mother of three children, ages one, two, and three. I would ask Sheryl Savard to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the 28 members of the Yellowhead Tribal College seated in the public gallery. Under the wise tutelage of Mrs. Linda Anderson they're here to watch the proceedings today along with question period. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to introduce to you and through you three guests that I have in the members' gallery today. The first is Mr. David Keto, who is leading the support secretariat for the Royalty Review Panel. The second is Mr. Gary Horan, who is a former president of the Alberta Alliance Party and a close friend of mine. The third is Mr. Jordan Cleland, who is the government relations person for the Workers' Compensation Board and a former executive assistant of mine. I would ask all three to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: As a footnote to the Premier's introduction of Mr. Rick Hansen today, it was 10 years ago, in 1997, that Mr. Hansen was invited to speak to the hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. At that time he came to Alberta to give thanks to the people of Alberta on the 10th anniversary of his Man in Motion World Tour. By being given permission from the members to participate on the floor, he became only the third person in the history of Alberta to address the Members of the Legislative Assembly. So now, 10 years later, he returns.

Welcome to Premier Stelmach

The Speaker: Hon. members, I sent a note in the last number of days advising the Leader of the Official Opposition and the leader of the third party and other members that at this point in time, because of the unique situation that occurred December 14, 2006, with the swearing-in of a new Premier in the province of Alberta, probably this would be an opportune day for hon. members, if they wished to convey greetings, congratulations, and best wishes, those thoughts, to the new Premier, this would be a grand opportunity.

A number of members have advised me, and I will recognize whatever member wants to participate today – time management, of course, is word management – recognizing that I will give greater leverage to the leaders of the two parties than I will other members. I'm not suggesting that other members aren't as important; it's just

that this is one of those unique occasions. I'll recognize first the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and then the leader of the third party. Then other members who wish to notify me, just send me a little note or catch my eye.

1:50

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate this opportunity. Welcoming a new Premier to this House is a rare privilege – I might argue too rare – but I will say that I am absolutely delighted to offer the distinguished individual now in that chair the warm greetings of the entire Alberta Liberal caucus.

Mr. Speaker, if someone had told me a year ago that the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville would one day serve as the Premier of this province, I wouldn't have believed it, to be honest. But then it wasn't long before the rumours started to circulate: watch out for Ed. Those rumours have proven to be very true. Sure enough, when the ballots of the PC Party leadership race were counted, a soft-spoken farmer from Lamont was chosen as Alberta's 13th Premier. My congratulations. For his tenacity, his hard work, and his obvious efforts to reach out to thousands of Albertans we commend the new Premier. It was an incredible race, and he certainly earned the victory.

The new Premier inherits a challenging job, and we commend him for taking on such an immense responsibility. As Leader of the Official Opposition and the Alberta Liberal caucus one of my duties is to help the Premier serve the people of this province to the best of his ability. Sometimes, of course, that will mean asking some pretty tough questions because, after all, the people of Alberta have tough questions to ask. For example, Mr. Speaker, when I recently stopped at the Donut Mill in Red Deer's Gasoline Alley – probably everybody knows it – I had lunch and, of course, a donut. A man who was also there – and he was from Wainwright – walked up to me, and he asked some pretty pointed questions about what he perceived as the uncontrolled growth in this province. Just a few days ago at a town hall meeting in Grande Prairie people were almost in tears because of their concerns with finding affordable housing and proper health care. Folks in Drumheller, we know, are genuinely worried about southern Alberta's water supply, and they're concerned that it may not be there in the future.

The people of this province are demanding more from their leaders, Mr. Speaker, and so honesty demands that we let the new Premier know that the Alberta Liberal caucus will be speaking out for disenfranchised and disappointed Albertans with all the strength that we can muster. Albertans are expecting a lot from their elected representatives, most of all from their Premier. They want us to protect the environment. They want us to come up with a plan for long-term fiscal sustainability. They want democratic renewal. The people of Alberta want a more open, accountable, and transparent government, and they want to move Alberta forward to a sustainable future. The Alberta Liberal caucus has solid plans to achieve these goals, and we hope the Premier will work with us to those ends.

So to the Premier: congratulations, good luck, and may you enjoy a productive and rewarding time in this House. We are all of us here for Albertans. Let's make sure that they have a government that they can be proud of.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the opportunity that you've given to us to provide greetings and congratulations to the new Premier. I will save some of my political comments for question period and debate.

The Premier is a man for whom I have a great deal of respect. I believe he has acquitted himself with integrity and honour in this House. He is a friendly person, not a person who places partisanship above the normal human relations that we all enjoy.

He is the first Premier of Ukrainian heritage in the province of Alberta. I have many people of Ukrainian heritage in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and I can tell you that they are very proud of the Premier, but I remind them that he represents the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and not Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Well, they're all pretty good New Democrats, I think.

I think it's also important at this time to have someone who comes from a farming background, someone who understands the difficulties and the struggles that farmers have gone through in the last number of years in this province. As the Premier undertakes this tremendous responsibility, I wish him well. As the last Premier once said to me, I wish you good luck but not too much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise to congratulate the Premier on winning his party's leadership to become the leader and the Premier of our province. Albertans are renewed with hope as they move forward with the desire to be governed with integrity and transparency. May you be blessed with the wisdom and the courage to pass legislation and regulations that ensure equality and equal opportunity for all Albertans, resulting in an improvement in their quality of life.

As you have stated, Albertans work hard and deserve to enjoy the fruits of their labour. They are generous and give back to their communities. We commend you for your recognition of this and your statement yesterday in the media room that charitable organizations know the needs of their communities better than government, and they spend and stretch the dollars better than government. Albertans also know that they serve the people better than political parties. I ask the Premier to ensure that his new tax credit for donating to Alberta charities is better than the current credit for donating to political parties.

Albertans do not wish to be dependent on and grateful for government programs and handouts. They desire to be governed by laws and regulations that protect, not limit, their freedoms and independence. I know that the Premier understands that and has spoken a great deal about the strength and the integrity of Albertans as a whole.

Mr. Premier, you can count on the Alliance for help and support to make Alberta better, to help our families help themselves to be strong and free, *Fortis et Liber*.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise, proud to raise the issues as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the status of women . . .

The Speaker: We're in greetings to the Premier section. Okay? We'll come to you later.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can hardly resist just thanking and congratulating our Premier.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to rise and wish our new Premier all the very best. On behalf of the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills I, too, would like to welcome our new Premier into the House as Premier. In my case it's also a case of welcoming an old friend and colleague of a time that goes back to municipal days, when we were both councillors.

I can truly say that the calls I get from my constituency office reflect that Albertans from my part of the province are truly and solidly behind our new Premier and wish you all the best as the 13th Premier of our wonderful province. Together, with your leadership I'm confident that we'll even build a better province and future for our children. I wish you many successful years as Premier and winner of many elections to come.

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

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, as Deputy Chair of Committees and the MLA for Calgary-McCall I extend my sincere congratulations to the Premier for his successful leadership campaign, his victory, and for being sworn in as Alberta's 13th Premier. I wish him the very best in his term as our Premier and the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta.

People who have known our new Premier have bestowed on him numerous titles, such as Steady Eddie, Honest Ed, a man of integrity, a sincere person, et cetera. He is indeed worthy of all of these honours, and I'm convinced that he will serve Albertans well as their Premier for many decades to come.

Mr. Premier, congratulations.

2:00

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pride that I stand here today to welcome our new Alberta Premier. Welcome, Mr. Premier. In the words of Chelsea Stanley from my constituency: What d'ya at? Now, that is Newfoundlander: hi, how are you, and welcome. In my constituency of Edmonton-Manning there are many Newfoundlanders who have become Albertans. There are, indeed, many new Albertans from all parts of Canada and from other lands the world over. On behalf of all of them, sir, I wish you welcome. They all wish you well, and I know that you have their best interests in mind.

There are also many long-term Albertans in Edmonton-Manning. Many have moved over the years from Two Hills, from Mundare, from Vilna, and from all over northern Alberta. There is a strong Ukrainian-Canadian and Polish-Canadian heritage in the multicultural milieu of northeast Edmonton neighbourhoods. Folks are proud of that. Part of the area is sometimes called Little Kiev. Many are proud of you, sir, being the first Ukrainian-Canadian Premier of our great province of Alberta. I wrote you a letter when you were elected that my dear mother would be making a pot of her best borscht in heaven to celebrate your election. I'm sure that she is happy today. I wish you well. Congratulations and God bless.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to add congratulations here today from the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency. It's clear from the throne speech of yesterday that we are taking a new and fresh direction in this province, and this is all under your direction and leadership. As the Member for Wetaskiwin-

Camrose I look forward to working with you to realize your agenda and dreams for our province.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to briefly congratulate and warmly welcome our new Premier, and I rise in two capacities: first of all, as a person of Ukrainian ancestry myself to convey how deeply proud and honoured our constituency of Canadians of Ukrainian heritage is on this occasion to welcome and salute the first-ever person of Ukrainian ancestry to occupy the chair of premiership in Alberta, and secondly, on behalf of the Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations I just know that this is a very positive move that will help solidify those relationships as well. So congratulations. [Remarks in Ukrainian] May God bless you, guide you, and keep you in good health. [As submitted]

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, would you like to respond?

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first do want to say how much I appreciate your recognizing me yesterday and, of course, the kind words expressed by yourself. Also my thanks to the Leader of the Official Opposition and to the third party for their welcoming remarks and to all other members in the Assembly.

To the Leader of the Opposition, certainly we'll take your offer to help. I always have had respect for the opposition. There is a role to play, of course, in democracy in terms of the debate in this House. As family members observe the proceedings here today, those family members of those elected members of this Assembly that have departed us, my goal – and I'm sure you share the same goal – is that we win back the respect for elected people in this province that our predecessors had.

I am honoured to serve Albertans, Mr. Speaker, as their Premier. I really still struggle for those words to express how humbling it is that the people of this great province gave me this tremendous opportunity, their confidence, their trust, and most importantly their vote to lead this government and really represent the interests of all Albertans.

I'm honoured to lead such a tremendously talented caucus, behind me and across the way, into the Third Session of the 26th Legislature. I'm well served front and back. We do have a large agenda in front of us, and I look forward to working with Albertans both inside and outside this Chamber to achieve the goals that I have given this government.

Just a comment to the leader of the third party, who mentioned my Ukrainian heritage. I just heard the other day that now on a regular basis we'll have perogies and kubasa on the Legislature cafeteria menu.

Mr. Mason: Hold the sour cream.

Mr. Stelmach: Yeah. We'll try and reduce the calories.

I have a tremendous respect for this office and, of course, for the role of elected officials, and I'm just looking forward to the next number of years. I know that the Leader of the Official Opposition may want to have an introduction much earlier than I would like in this House in terms of a new Premier, but really this is what it's all about: working together to serve Albertans.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would close my brief comments and await my first question as the Premier of the province of Alberta.

head:

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

International Women's Day

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a privilege to rise today to honour women everywhere as the member who is responsible on the government side for the status of women and to recognize that in this the 30th international anniversary year the theme of the year is Ending Violence against Women.

Since Adam and Eve women in society have been equal partners in life, fostering families and sharing responsibility for improving this planet. Our ancestors, aboriginal women, First Nations and Métis women among the settlers who migrated from other developed countries have built an Alberta with their passion, their hope, and their experience and built on our capacity to become a province rich in heritage and culture and made us an amazing place in a leading nation. Women have broken land, have farmed, have fed their families, have welded, have counselled, have taught, have supported medical circumstances, and have earned their place: active in their careers, in their vocations, missions, as parents, and as community leaders. Today nearly half of the self-employed in Alberta are women. They are entrepreneurs with wisdom, commitment, ingenuity, and energy.

In this Legislature on all sides of the House we are sadly reminded that while so much is right with the women of our province, some things are still terribly wrong. Seven per cent of Canadian women still suffer violence; 24 per cent of aboriginal women have suffered violence by their spousal partner at least once, and 10 per cent of Alberta women throughout the province have suffered as a result of the experience of living with an abusive partner. Our Premier and other champions in this House continue to advocate and place resources to eradicate bullying and violence, but it is up to all of us to do more. As a mother I taught my sons that the greatest gift they could give to their children was to love and cherish their wives. We must cherish and love all others and continue to uphold the culture of respect for one another.

Today as we celebrate all women – our pioneers that have gone before, those present among us today, and all in our society – we resolve to build and nurture all men, all women, and all Albertans in a manner which assures eradication of violence and a stronger, safer place for our children and the children of future generations.

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

2:10

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Madam Minister. Those were kind words and heartfelt.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to celebrate International Women's Day, but it's tough to be properly jubilant when women face so many challenges. There are certainly many women to celebrate in Alberta: breast cancer survivors, the volunteers who serve as the hidden backbone of our economy, the barely acknowledged people all around us who teach and sling hash and weld and clean and crunch numbers and drive trucks and take care of our kids. These women show leadership and courage every day. They deserve to be celebrated, perhaps especially so in Alberta, where women have to be so self-reliant.

From 1986 to its premature closure we had an arm's-length Advisory Council on Women's Issues in Alberta, charged to help get women fully involved in the life of the province. We had a Women's Secretariat, a branch full of people working on women's

policy issues. Now we have one valiant woman working away in the corner of a different department. From a council and a secretariat to a desk.

Our health workforce, overwhelmingly female, is struggling with recruitment and retention issues, and a significant portion of this workforce is looking at getting out. This possibility has massive consequences for policymakers and citizens alike. Our precious, not-for-profit charitable and volunteer sector, also overwhelmingly staffed by women, has been eroded, downsized, and downloaded upon for years, leaving it in a very fragile state.

Child care: another issue which disproportionately affects women. We need spaces created. According to one source we have 80,000 women who have to or want to work and cannot find child care spaces for their children. As for the child care workers themselves, again overwhelmingly women, they perform a vital job for pitiful wages.

Finally, violence against women. If there's a jurisdiction anywhere in the world with the ability to tackle this issue once and for all, it's Alberta. But we still seem to be stuck in the Dark Ages on this front.

So, yes, I'd like to celebrate International Women's Day in Alberta, but I think that, instead, I'll just celebrate Alberta's women and their determination to valiantly struggle forward in the face of overwhelming obstacles.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Might we have the consent of the Assembly to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to participate on behalf of the third party in the House?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I thank you and the House for this opportunity to join with my other colleagues to say a few words on this very important day, International Women's Day. This is a day on which we should celebrate the accomplishments of women while recognizing that our society is still rife with inequalities. Last year I spoke about the persistent wage gap between men and women as well as the unacceptably high number of women who were turned away from women's shelters because they were full. These concerns persist today in Alberta and around the world.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women cautions in its message commemorating International Women's Day that all of the progress we have made can be destroyed through continuing violence against women. Violence against women is deeply rooted in structures of gender inequality. Ending violence against women requires changing our individual attitudes and breaking through barriers of culture and tradition to find nonviolent ways to resolve conflicts in personal and public life.

Violence against women is made more insidious because it so often goes unpunished. Global figures from the United Nations show us that women are disproportionately targeted. One out of every three women has been beaten or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Domestic violence is the largest form of abuse of women world-wide, irrespective of religion, culture, ethnicity, education, and class. Mr. Speaker, this House must commit to taking action to end impunity to violence against women and girls.

Alberta and Canada like to take pride in the progress we have made towards eliminating inequality from our society, but I fear that some of us have become too complacent. Last year in one of the first acts in government the federal Conservatives cut the budget of

the office of the Status of Women by 40 per cent and closed 12 of the 16 regional offices. These offices helped women's groups work their way through government funding processes and helped fund research and resource development related to women's issues.

So, Mr. Speaker, I invite all Albertans to join us in celebrating International Women's Day, celebrating past advances, and committing to fighting for justice and equality for all women. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are the members prepared to provide an opportunity to the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner to participate? Any opposed?

The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to stand and to celebrate the 30th anniversary of International Women's Day. Each of us owes our life to the women of our community for our birth and for their nurturing and loving care in our early years. We are truly indebted to the women of our society. They exemplify the best of human traits, those of kindness, generosity, caring, and loving, many of those whom only a mother could love.

Albertans have truly been blessed with stalwart women who have fought the good fight for all Albertans and Canadians as a whole, such special women as the Famous Five and groups such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving and REAL Women, just to mention a few. We are truly blessed with the women of our families, our communities, our province, and our country. We could not go on without them. They are truly capable of doing it all, and we are indebted to them.

We must ensure equality for all of our citizens, male and female, and continue to try and improve their quality of life here in the province of Alberta.

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Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal and Official Opposition.

Royalty Review Panel

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The review of the province's royalty rates may be the single most important issue this government confronts under this Premier. The makeup of the review panel is just as interesting for who is not on it as for who is. It is reasonable for industry to have a voice on the panel, but Albertans are asking me why other groups do not. To the Premier: can the Premier explain to the farmers of Alberta, whose land and livelihoods are so often affected by the activities of the petroleum industry, why they do not deserve a representative on the panel when industry does?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the issue of a royalty review came forward during the leadership campaign in the province of Alberta, and I made a commitment to ensure that all royalties – starting with oil sands, conventional oil and gas, and coal-bed methane – be reviewed in a very open and transparent manner and that information to be then put on the table for all Albertans to see. If our royalty regime is fair, there will be comparisons made to other jurisdictions. We need that information to communicate that to Albertans, and they will have the information to make their own decision.

Dr. Taft: Well, I was hoping for more, Mr. Speaker: an answer. So I will repeat the question to the Premier. Can the Premier explain to the farmers of Alberta, whose land and livelihoods are so often affected by the activities of the petroleum industry, why they do not

deserve a representative on the review panel when industry does?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the leader maybe doesn't have all the information here. I was going to say confused but not from the point of view of saying that he doesn't understand. There is legislation in place that protects the landowner in terms of the Surface Rights Act and land compensation for the entry of the oil companies onto a farmer's land or, quite frankly, onto any private land. This is a review of the royalty regime. This is a review of what we receive as Albertans, all equal shareholders in the resource that we own, and how that is calculated in terms of the resource royalty. So those are two separate issues.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that environmental issues concerning the activity of the petroleum industry are of such high concern and that royalties could be for example structured to encourage better environmental activities, can the Premier explain to the people of Alberta why no one with environmental expertise deserves to be on the panel?

2:20

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, this is a review of the royalty regime. All of the other issues, especially with respect to environment, are a separate discussion. In fact, our ministers of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development are mandated to bring forward plans to ensure a very clean environment for the next generation. Quite frankly, it's not only the oil and gas industry that we have to pay attention to but all other industry, including agriculture, to make sure that we do protect the environment for the future generation.

The Speaker: Second main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Leadership in trying times requires good judgment, yet several times the Premier's judgment seems to be lacking. When it comes to the royalty review, the Premier failed to take steps to ensure that the panelists were free from conflicts of interest. Within hours of the panel members being made public, it came to light that one of them owns millions of dollars of stock options in an oil sands company: clearly a blatant conflict of interest. My question is to the Premier. What has the Premier done to address the conflict of interest of the member of the panel who has a multimillion dollar stake in a major oil company?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all members on the royalty review committee have extensive experience in a number of areas. I can't list to you the names of all the individuals or their backgrounds, but I can certainly allow the Minister of Finance to give the background on the review panel.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On the review panel are six individuals that are very classy, intelligent individuals. We have three economists. We have a former president of Alberta-Pacific who has worked with environmental groups and has worked in the lumber industry for the last 30 years. We have a gentleman who was in the information technology business and, unbeknownst to me at the time, has actually done a considerable amount of work on finances with regard to oil companies. Lastly, we're very

privileged to have a gentleman by the name of Sam Spanglet, who is the former vice-president of Shell and two years ago was the executive of the year worldwide for Shell International.

Mr. Speaker, that kind of expertise is what we're looking for, but on top of that we have asked each and every one of the members of the committee to swear an official oath that they will not do anything that will benefit them, that they will not talk about what is occurring, that they will not speak about what is occurring in this particular review, which is an incredibly important element of this deliberation.

Dr. Taft: Business as usual, Mr. Speaker.

To the Premier: given that last week, well after they were appointed, all the panelists were asked to disclose their conflicts of interest to the government on the panel, will the Premier do the open and accountable thing and tell the people of Alberta what those conflicts of interest were?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we wouldn't even be debating this issue of the composition of the panel if it wasn't for my insistence to ensure that we have a very thorough public review of the royalty regime in this province, and that's what we're going to get at the end of this.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again: can the Premier assure Albertans that none of the royalty review panelists have business interests that will be affected by the decisions of the panel that they're serving on?

Mr. Stelmach: I can assure this House that the review will be done in a very open, transparent manner to ensure that there are no self-interests in terms of the results that end up on the table for all Albertans to observe in terms of whether the royalty regime is fair to all Albertans. Remember, we are all equal shareholders in that resource.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's first few months as leader have been tainted by questions about his commitment to openness and transparency. They're not going to diminish after today. Though he talks the talk, his decision to hold a fundraiser where individuals could purchase time with the Premier and his refusal to disclose a list of donors to his leadership campaign are clear indications that he doesn't necessarily walk the walk. With the announcement of the Royalty Review Panel questions have arisen regarding the relationship between panel members and the government. To the Premier: given that the Premier only released a partial list of his leadership campaign donors, will the Premier tell this Assembly and all Albertans whether or not any of the review panelists provided cash in kind or other contributions to his leadership campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: In fact, in terms of the leadership campaign I don't know what the Liberals have in mind in terms of what kind of disclosure or how much involvement a candidate has in raising funds. There was a committee structured that receives campaign funds. It's actually a company that was enacted to receive campaign funds. It's their responsibility. In absence of any rules by the party in terms of the campaign, we had to make rules ourselves in terms

of how funds were accepted. The committee then accepted whatever donations were made.

I just want to say this, Mr. Speaker. There's such a concern about the disclosure. Well, a lot of those that didn't disclose were like \$25, \$50, you know, donations to the campaign. But here's the thing. We will have a lobbyist registry in place that will identify any person in this province that wants to lobby the government. Also, as soon as we get the information technology in place, we'll be able to track what money goes to any person in this province of Alberta through the blue book. So we've got it now, Mr. Speaker, on both sides of the spectrum. We'll make sure that is very open and transparent, and Albertans will see not only who's lobbying government but who is getting money from the other end.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier tell this Assembly and all Albertans whether or not any of the companies the panelists are connected to contributed to his leadership campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't know because I didn't follow who gave money to the campaign. It's a committee structure. It was a company name, and that's their role. I'm not involved in collecting funds in terms of the campaign nor any other leadership candidates here.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that the minister responsible for the Royalty Review Panel hasn't released a list of his leadership donors, will the Premier direct the minister to disclose whether or not any of the review panelists or the companies they work with contributed to this minister's leadership campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: As I said before . . .

Dr. Taft: Open and accountable.

Mr. Stelmach: Yeah, and we've moved more in the last 60 days than you ever will in this Assembly. I can tell you that. We're going to have the lobbyist registry. Every person that receives any kind of money from this government will be in the blue book. That will be on the Internet. Any Albertan can pull it up. This is more transparency and openness than has been seen in this province for years, well ahead of where the opposition is today.

Speaker's Ruling Matters Referred to Ethics Commissioner

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair allowed that last series of questions because the final aspect of the question had to do with a specific contribution from a specific company to somebody's campaign, but I want to draw to the attention of all hon. members the Conflicts of Interest Act section 24(1). It says, "Any person may request, in writing, that the Ethics Commissioner investigate any matter respecting an alleged breach of this Act by a Member." Then 24(3) says, "A Member may request, in writing, that the Ethics Commissioner investigate any matter respecting an alleged breach of this Act by the Member." Then 24(6) says, "Where a matter has been referred to the Ethics Commissioner under subsection (1), (3) . . . neither the Legislative Assembly nor a committee of the Assembly shall inquire into the matter."

Now, one of the due diligence things a Speaker does prior to opening of a session is to contact the Ethics Commissioner and ask the question: does the Ethics Commissioner have a file on any member with respect to anything? The Ethics Commissioner advised me that the Ethics Commissioner had received a letter from the leader of the third party asking the Ethics Commissioner to undertake an investigation into campaign contributions. Following that, the Ethics Commissioner had received a letter from the Leader of the Official Opposition, asking the Ethics Commissioner to do one and the same thing.

So I've been advised by an officer of the Legislative Assembly, in this case the Ethics Commissioner, that two members have asked for a review. The Ethics Commissioner is taking a review, and if I read section 24(6), it says: "Where a matter has been referred to the Ethics Commissioner under subsection (1)." Section 24(3) says, "A Member may request, in writing, that the Ethics Commissioner investigate any matter respecting an alleged breach of this Act by the Member." Then it says in 24(6), "Neither the Legislative Assembly nor a committee of the Assembly shall inquire into the matter."

So we're on the edge with some of these questions, but I think I've clarified the whole thing. We'll wait, perhaps, for the Ethics Commissioner to get back to us all.

The leader of the third party, please.

2:30 Employment Standards

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week we learned that employers in the tar sands are refusing to hire skilled Albertan and Canadian building trades workers because they belong to a union. In fact, the IBEW, a legitimate union, has over 1,000 skilled tradesmen waiting for jobs because this government and the federal government allow employers to bring in cheap foreign labour. This government's labour policies ensure that unionized workers are not only passed over but can be fired because their first language is French, in order to make room for temporary foreign workers, many of whom are supplied by the companies with translators. This question is to the Premier. Will the Premier explain to the thousands of qualified, out-of-work Albertan and Canadian workers why they are being overlooked for jobs in favour of temporary foreign workers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our policy is Albertans first; secondly, other Canadians that can fill these vacant positions in all industry; and thirdly, if we can't find enough people to fill all the positions, then we'll look to other parts of the world. Of course, part of our commitment, when we say Albertans first, is to put more resources so that we can attract and encourage more participation from our Métis and First Nations in many job opportunities in the province of Alberta. Really, that is government policy, and that's what we're working on.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thousands of Albertans waiting for work.

Will the Premier commit to reopen negotiations with the federal government to amend the agreement governing temporary foreign workers in order to require employers to clearly demonstrate that no qualified Albertan or Canadian worker, unionized or not, is available for work before any application for temporary foreign workers is approved?

Mr. Stelmach: All that I know in terms of the negotiations, Mr.

Speaker, is what our minister of employment is doing now in terms of negotiating with the federal government in a number of programs. I had a difficult time hearing your question because there was more chatter from the bench here. You know, I don't make any comments when other members are asking a question. I just ask for the same respect. That's all I ask.

Mr. Mason: M. Speaker, pourquoi est-ce que le gouvernement permet à Suncor de virer un travailleur canadien syndiqué avec 25 années d'expérience dans l'industrie simplement parce que sa langue maternelle est le français? I will provide a translation. Why has the government allowed Suncor to fire a unionized Canadian worker with 25 years' experience because his first language is French?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our minister will respond to the very specific issue raised by the member.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, an issue like this would be dealt with by the Human Rights Commission. My colleague the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture has that portfolio, but I will say this. A situation between a private company and their employee, the particular details of which I am not aware, is not something which I am prepared to address in this House. It is not part of the legislation, but the Employment Standards Code. . .

Mr. Mason: Oh, so discrimination is allowed by your government.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we are neither allowing nor disallowing anything the member opposite is alleging. We're saying simply that the Employment Standards Code covers termination in specific circumstances such as maternity or paternal leave. We also talk about termination pay provisions in our legislation, but the circumstance that the employee has challenged and that has been referenced in the media today is something that I'm sure that my colleague the minister who is in charge of human rights may wish to further comment on.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly it's my pleasure to provide some comments as minister responsible for the Human Rights Commission. This morning we were made aware of the situation with Suncor and the employee, and we are in the process of trying to find out both sides of the story. We're only hearing the one side of the story. Certainly, we will encourage the individual, if he felt totally discriminated against because of a particular language issue, to deal specifically with the Human Rights Commission.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Caucus Funding

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, congratulations to the Premier. He is listening to and has shown a desire to govern the people of Alberta with fairness, integrity, and transparency. He has promised to be open, accountable, fiscally responsible, and inclusive. We commend him and his minister of restructuring and government efficiency on reducing cabinet to 18 ministers. This is a great start. In the throne speech he assured the people of Alberta that he would honour and respect the trust that people have in the MLA they have elected to represent their best interests. [interjections] Maybe you could ask your own people to be quiet. A little respect. Does the Premier believe that every voter in Alberta is of equal value and weight?

Mr. Stelmach: Did he say "every voter"?

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, I recognize that there was a bit of chitter-chatter going on. I think the question essentially was: does the Premier recognize every voter in Alberta to be of equal value and weight?

Mr. Stelmach: Every Albertan. A voter is 18 plus, but there are many Albertans that are younger than 18 years, the age of majority. So they're all important.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, would the Premier please explain to Albertans how he justifies rewarding some caucuses with funding of over \$5.50 per vote while another caucus is funded only 80 cents per vote received?

Speaker's Ruling Decisions of Members' Services Committee

The Speaker: The hon. member knows that that has absolutely nothing to do with a decision of the government or the leader of the government. That is purely a matter of the Members' Services Committee, which is constituted by this Assembly, elected by this Assembly. That is a question that's out of order.

Hon. member, proceed to your third one.

Mr. Hinman: Well, I would respectfully disagree with that.

The Speaker: Sorry. Sit down. Sit down. You can't disagree with the law you passed. Look in the mirror. You made the law. Yeah, you made the law.

Now proceed with your third question, on a subject that deserves the merit and attention of this Assembly.

Caucus Funding (continued)

Mr. Hinman: Will the Premier treat every Alberta voter equally and reduce government spending and improve democratic representation by funding every party recognized by Elections Alberta with an elected MLA with a caucus funding of \$1 per vote received?

The Speaker: Well, once again that question is out of order.

The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Teachers' Labour Dispute

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is about the quality of education. Nine thousand four hundred students are currently out of school in the Parkland school district as a result of a teachers' strike, and no end is in sight. Parents and students want to know where the government is on this issue. To the Minister of Education: what steps has the minister taken to ensure a fair and swift resolution to this dispute in Parkland?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows, the parents were here at the Legislature yesterday expressing their concern about the Parkland strike. My colleague and I met with the parents outside and then a couple of hours later met with parents inside, joined by the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert

and the Member for Stony Plain. Our commitment to the parents was twofold: number one, that we would do whatever we could to get the two sides back to the table, and this morning I have written both the school board and the ATA local, encouraging them to get back to the bargaining table immediately and put the interests of students' education as the highest priority. Secondly, we did make sure that the parents knew that Alberta Education was providing online services for students, and to that end we are funding a session on Sunday night for any parents. We will have officials of our department in Spruce Grove to ensure that students know how to access online learning.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a trustee, Mr. Minister, of the Parkland school board has recently resigned due to a lack of faith in the board's position, does the minister have confidence that the board is capable of objectively resolving this strike in the situation that's there presently?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the school board, like all school boards in Alberta, is duly elected by the citizens of that county, and until I have evidence of any wrongdoing, I would expect that both the school board and the Teachers' Association would jointly approach these negotiations in the best interest of the students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What planning has the minister done to ensure that students, especially those with upcoming diploma exams, will be able to make up for lost class time once school resumes? In other words, what's happening with those students that are missing out on their education, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I say, we are making options available online for students and have the session planned for Sunday evening. We will continue to monitor. Hopefully both sides, as I say, will put students' education first and foremost and will come to a resolution of this matter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mountain Pine Beetle

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There has been a lot of recent media attention on Alberta's mountain pine beetle infestation. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How serious is the threat facing Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How serious? Very, very serious. It's the most serious threat our forestry industry has ever faced. It's no exaggeration to say that, basically, we're at war with the pine beetle, and unfortunately the front line of this war has moved from British Columbia to Alberta.

The B.C. pine forests are a disaster. The forestry, the industry, and the revenues of that government are in shambles. They've lost 9 million hectares of wood in British Columbia. That's the equivalent of 82 million cubic metres of wood, which would build 11 million new homes in this province. One year ago we estimated

only 20,000 to 30,000 pine beetles in Alberta. Six months ago that was estimated up to 200,000 to 300,000. Today it's estimated at 2 million to 3 million. There was an infestation that came over last fall in a wind. The situation is very serious.

Mr. Speaker, doing nothing is not an option, and I can assure you that this government will take strong and decisive action to stop the spread of the pine beetle.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What action is Alberta taking to combat the mountain pine beetle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past fall and winter we've been doing extensive surveys to monitor where the pine beetles are and in what numbers. We basically have a two-level approach. Level 1 is that we identify single trees. We identify them and remove them, and we've had over 500 people in the field this winter doing that type of level 1 approach. We have a level 2 approach. When we discover stands of trees that are either infested or threatened by pine beetle, we remove those as well. In these areas we've asked industry to revise their forestry management plans to resequence their cutting sequence to take these susceptible pine stands. We've also provided grants to various municipalities to deal with the removal of pine beetle infested trees on private lands in these communities.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given the seriousness of this threat, who is the minister using as an expert to determine the appropriate response to the mountain pine beetle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We're receiving ongoing advice from the leading pine beetle experts across the country and also our counterparts in British Columbia. Last spring we had a summit on the pine beetle issue convened in Calgary with experts from around the country. We continue to work with the Canadian Forest Service, Parks Canada, and with Alberta parks and recreation. We also have a pine beetle committee made up of reeves and councillors from across the province.

I repeat, Mr. Speaker, that doing nothing is not an option for this government, and we'll take all steps that are necessary and appropriate to win this war.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Women's Issues

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is International Women's Day, a day to celebrate the achievements and potential of women around the world. However, here in Alberta the representa-

tion of women in cabinet does not inspire confidence that women are truly at the table in this government. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us why he has chosen to disregard gender balance in establishing his new cabinet?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, selecting a cabinet, of course, probably is the most difficult responsibility of any Premier or, quite frankly, a Prime Minister. But I just want to make one thing very clear to those that raise this issue in the House in terms of this Premier not having respect for the women of the province of Alberta. I know very well the contribution of the pioneers of this province, the pioneering women that are really the true heroes of the province of Alberta, with about four or five children in tow when their husband is working hundreds of miles away, whether on the railway or building a road someplace under very difficult conditions, not knowing if their husband is going to be back at the end of that work term, at the conclusion, given the unsafe conditions. There was not any kind of phone that you could pick up or fax or e-mail, certainly. Working in isolation, trying to make ends meet in the pioneering spirit: I know what the value of women is to this province. I don't have to be told in this particular House.

Mrs. Mather: I appreciate the recognition of the value of women in our society, but given that there are only two female voices in cabinet, what plan of action has the Premier developed to ensure that the interests, issues, and concerns of women will be addressed by this government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I am proud of all of the women in our caucus. In fact, we do have many women in our caucus, but one of my personal goals – and I mentioned this very publicly a number of times – is to recruit new candidates to the Progressive Conservative caucus so that they can run for office and encourage them. We've taken a bold step here in this Legislature – and, again, co-operation on both sides of the House – to change the sitting schedule so that life here as an elected member gives some form of family life as well. That's going to bring a number of people interested in running for not only our party but also across the way. That's one of my personal goals, and I'll continue to work in that area.

Mrs. Mather: Given that in the past there was an entire secretariat and advisory council devoted to women, can the Premier explain why the government now has only one staff member working directly on women's issues?

Mr. Stelmach: Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, mention was made earlier in the response to the ministerial statement. I don't know where this one staff member is. I'm sorry. I'm being very honest. We'll find out where.

This is more than just having staff in the government. It's working here with all Albertans to try to improve the desire of people of both genders and from all ethnic backgrounds to run for public office. I'm actually quite honoured and I'm humbled by the fact that some pay particular attention to the fact that I'm of Ukrainian ancestry, but, you know, people have to work hard at getting here. We're going to work with every Albertan to give them an equal opportunity. We have a lot of road to gain, obviously. I made that commitment, and I'm going to stick to my word.

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

2:50 Hospital Construction in South Calgary

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent weeks there have been many questions regarding hospital beds in Calgary, in particular regarding the construction of the south Calgary hospital. This has been very unsettling to my constituents as well as to many of the people that live in Calgary. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell us if this much-needed hospital in the south of Calgary is going to be built?

Mr. Hancock: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, this government made a commitment to the south Calgary hospital a number of years ago. A significant amount of money has been set aside in the budget and pledged for that hospital, and we expect that that hospital will be built. The plans are under way. The discussions with the Calgary health authority, in whose jurisdiction it falls, are under way. I understand that we will be getting into some discussions very quickly about the scope and the nature of the project. Yes, it's an important project, and I expect that it will proceed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. As you indicated, the Calgary health region is in plans, and they've indicated that they hope to begin that this year, to complete in the year 2010-2011. Does this minister have any reason to believe that they'll not be able to proceed as planned?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, these projects are large projects, and they have stages that they go through. I understand that the intention by the Calgary health authority is to break ground this year to service the property. In the meantime we're looking at the scope of the project and the needs of the project all in the normal course of building a large project of this nature. So far as I understand, the project is on track in terms of where it is and what we need to know about it.

The reason why it's hit the table now as a concern, I believe, in Calgary is the speculation and the suggestion of cost increases with respect to that project. Well, in a project of this size, Mr. Speaker, when you first conceptualize the project, there's an estimate of costs. There's an estimate of costs at the start. Construction costs, as is well known in this province, have gone up over time, but also as you . . .

Mr. Chase: That's because you've delayed construction.

Mr. Hancock: Nobody has delayed construction on the project. Projects of this nature and size have to be planned carefully and implemented carefully.

Mrs. Ady: This is good news. Thank you.

My final supplemental actually goes to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Although I'm aware that the Minister of Health and Wellness is doing a lot of work about health care workforce, does this minister have any assistance to ensure that when this hospital opens, we'll have doctors, nurses, and technicians to staff it?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have a 10-year strategy, along with the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, on building and educating tomorrow's workforce, a very careful plan with substrategies to help us educate and grow our own in Alberta. We are working collaboratively, the minister of health and myself, with

the minister of advanced education on marketing tools that we can get involved with, the use of e-technology, conferencing, an aboriginal workforce strategy. I'm confident that by the time we open the doors for the south Calgary hospital, there will be a robust workforce in place. The activities to date suggest to me that we've laid the groundwork for replacing those that are needed and working with the minister of health on the scope of practice issues which will help to build the capacity in the Calgary health region.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. During the 1990s the government made the worst health policy decision of the decade by closing three hospitals and eliminating 1,500 beds in Calgary. Now the construction of the desperately needed hospital in south Calgary is being held up by skyrocketing construction costs, which are a direct consequence of this government's failure to properly plan for the economic boom. My questions are to the Premier. Is the Premier comfortable sitting back watching the Calgary health region scramble to find money and possibly go into debt to construct this hospital?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary regional health authority is not scrambling, not delaying anything. These are significant cost increases. We need information to process through the various departments to see how we can reduce some of the just huge inflationary cost pressures. It's not only in this particular hospital, but it's in schools and roads that are being built. We see inflation anywhere from 20 to 40 per cent. Maybe there are ways of bringing some of that inflation down. But as we heard today, the hospital is part of our capital plan and will continue to be, and we're going to get there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Premier: how does the Premier justify a \$7 billion surplus while the health region is considering going into debt to fund this hospital?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to justify a \$7 billion surplus. It just happens that oil and natural gas were at the prices they were in terms of the world market, so we've been very fortunate. We just hope that these prices continue for some time, but we can't depend on the level of natural resources, especially those prices, well into the future. That's why we're very pragmatic and thoughtful in the way we're doing our budget to make sure that three, four years down the road we're not in a deficit position. I made that promise to all Albertans, that this province will never ever again be in an operational deficit, period.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier join with the Alberta Liberals and finally stand up for Calgarians by recommending that they fully fund the new hospital in south Calgary? Do the right thing.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't have to stand up with the Alberta Liberals. Alberta Liberals aren't funding the hospital. The money for the hospital and all other infrastructure comes from the taxpayers of the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are fed up with the lack of action by this government to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Now federal money is available to reduce emissions, and this government reverts to its old habits with their plan to give the money away to big oil to build more pipelines and to drill more wells. The public demands absolute reductions in carbon dioxide emissions and not this shell game of pipelines and enhanced oil recovery and intensity targets. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. After getting sweet deals on royalty rates and corporate tax breaks for so long, doesn't this government think it's about time that the big energy corporations started to pay their own way, especially for all the carbon dioxide and noxious emissions that they pump into the atmosphere?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess the short answer I might give to the member is that I advise him to stay tuned as I have legislation that I will be tabling immediately following question period that I think will go a long way towards answering his question.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, intensity targets are not absolute reduction targets.

Considering the huge profits that energy corporations are enjoying, why can't they build their own CO₂ pipelines and instead use public money to invest in conservation and in renewables?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the debate on the issue with regard to hard caps versus intensity, and I'm sure we'll have ample opportunity during debate on the bill.

But with respect to the specific question, I'm not aware of any decisions that have been made on how the federal dollars are going to be allocated one way or the other. There has been speculation in the media, and it would appear that the NDP have already decided that the decision has been made.

Mr. Eggen: Well, I would ask then, please, as well: when will the government stop subsidizing half measures like this proposed CO₂ pipeline, which is, in fact, mostly designed to pump more oil out of the ground and therefore will actually release more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere?

Mr. Renner: Again, Mr. Speaker, I actually look forward to the debate on the bill because obviously it's going to be interesting.

On the issue of carbon sequestration, I encourage the member again to look very carefully at the plan that the government has. I will do my very, very best over the coming weeks to explain to him how our plan will eventually lead to the ability for us to maintain an economy in Alberta and at the same time ensure that we have an environment that is around for our children, our grandchildren, and their children.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Petro-Canada Refinery Fire

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, just recently there was a very serious fire out at Petro-Canada's refinery in Strathcona county just outside of Edmonton, raising concerns about the price of gasoline and public safety. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister advise the members of the Assembly of the expected impact of the fire on the supply of gasoline in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, there has been a minor fire reported in the Petro-Canada refinery, as the member has noted, but thankfully it was contained very quickly, and there are no reported injuries. Petro-Canada reports that the incident would reduce their capacity by about 15 per cent in the short term. The good news is that it's not expected to affect the supply of gasoline in this region.

It's also important to note that there are two other refineries producing gasoline in the area, and together these facilities have a capacity of close to 400,000 barrels a day. So put in this perspective, Mr. Speaker, it's a small impact to one of the three refineries and should not have any long-term effect on our supply.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again to the same minister. Given his answer, I know that I'll go home this weekend to Whitecourt-St. Anne and they'll say: what's happening to the prices at the pumps? I think we all have noticed recently what's happened. They're going up. Has this fire caused that price increase?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that this fire has very, very little to do with the current price of gasoline at the pumps in Whitecourt or any other region in the province of Alberta. The price of gasoline is determined by the market, determined by supply and demand. The good news is, as I said earlier, that the fire is not expected to have a major impact on our supply. Other factors affecting prices would include the price of crude oil, refining costs, retailing, marketing costs, transportation, and distribution. I'm pleased to say that the gasoline prices in Alberta continue to be the lowest on average in the country, and Albertans still pay the lowest provincial tax at 9 cents a litre on gasoline we consume.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents will be much more satisfied after that answer, I'm sure.

To the Minister of Environment: can the minister tell this House what were the environmental impacts of that fire?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Energy indicated, this was a small, isolated incident, so we're confident that there are no environmental impacts as a result of this fire. As a matter of fact, measurements were taken, and they show no measurable impact with respect to air quality.

We've asked, consistent with environment legislation, that Petro-Canada provide us with an explanation of what happened and, in addition to that, with any measures that they will be putting in place to prevent it from happening again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Nonrenewable Resource Revenues

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is addicted to nonrenewable resource revenues for annual spending. However, the government's own projections show that these revenues are declining. Yesterday's throne speech made absolutely no mention of a savings plan for nonrenewable resource revenue.

I'm honoured to ask the first question of the new President of the Treasury Board, and out of respect for him, I'm going to make it easy. A one-word answer, a true-or-false question. Mr. Minister, is it true or is it false that this government relies more on resource revenues today for annual spending than it did ten years ago? True or false?

Mr. Snelgrove: To make it really simple for the hon. member, I'll let the Minister of Finance answer.

Dr. Oberg: I, too, shall make it very simple for the hon. member. The answer is: true.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you for the truth.

Mr. Speaker, my second question is for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given that a few months ago this minister advocated for a 30 per cent resource revenue savings plan and has recently been silent on the issue, I'm wondering: has the minister lost his voice?

The Speaker: Questions in the question period deal with government policies. It strikes the chair that that question had to do with a personal opinion. Now, if the hon. minister wishes to deal with it, fine, but I think we should have to move on to your third question, sir.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, it would appear as if he has, in fact, lost his voice.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: No, that's not a nice thing to say. The chair made it very clear that questions in question period deal with government policy. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was asking a question for personal opinion. The chair interceded as the chair is supposed to do. The chair in a gentle way cautioned the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford got up and made a smarty-pants comment, which caused the chair to stand up again. So would the hon. member move to his third question, please.

Nonrenewable Resource Revenues (continued)

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't wait until Tuesday.

To the Minister of Finance: a multiple choice question. How does this government expect to fund Alberta's future as resource revenues decline: (a) tax increases, (b) program cuts, (c) go back into debt, or (d) all of the above?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, again, very simply the obvious answer is: (e) none of the above. The hon. member should know that there's been legislation passed in this Assembly that limits the amount of oil and gas revenue to be utilized in our budget at \$5.3 billion. The rest of the questions that will be there are obviously questions that will be dealt with in the budget, and I would ask the hon. member to stay tuned for the budget on April 19, 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Foreign Workers

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last few months my constituency office has received numerous complaints of tragic cases where foreign workers have been under false pretenses and false promises imported to Alberta by so-called agents. Upon their arrival to Alberta these workers are paid less than what was initially promised, are charged exorbitant fees for the privilege of being employed, are accommodated in substandard dwellings, and often are threatened with deportation. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: what is Alberta doing to protect these workers from unscrupulous employers and labour brokers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a very timely question, a very good question because we have been working very hard on both our temporary foreign worker program as well as our provincial nominee program. Brokers are not entitled to charge both ways, which is, in fact, what has happened in some very unscrupulous situations. When a contractor or an employer decides that they want to have foreign workers come over, they engage frequently some international broker for that privilege. They fund that broker, and they bring those foreign workers to Alberta. Hopefully, they fulfill the obligations in the contract. It is then incumbent upon that employer to make sure that they have the proper housing, the appropriate shelter, and the amenities.

In our department we offer foreign workers the same protection that other employees have working in this province, not only in occupational health and safety but by making sure that deductions are properly taken from their cheques, that employment standard complaints are followed up on in the same fashion. We hold workshops for employers, so they know what our expectations are. We, in fact, school the brokers that might want to do business in Alberta about what our laws and our expectations are. In short, Mr. Speaker, we do our level best to make sure that we try to avoid these types of conflicts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is the minister working with the federal government to address this issue?

Ms Evans: Yes, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, as we speak, we have officials in Ottawa talking to them about all aspects of the immigration program. It is of urgent need that we get on with finding the right ways of selecting the appropriate employees for the province of Alberta. I might add that in speaking with the immigrant women that I had the privilege of meeting with today at lunchtime, it's important, too, that we work with the federal government to make sure, if people immigrate from another province, that in the transfer of their lives when they move to Alberta, we have resources to engage them appropriately in our community. The federal government seems sympathetic to this issue, and I'm assured that we will be well on our way to having a made-in-Alberta immigration solution.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. Can the minister tell us what regulations are in place and, more importantly, being enforced to stop this new industry of foreign worker exploitation?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it doesn't matter if you are looking for jobs for Albertans or for Canadians or others coming into Alberta. If you are doing that job, you have to be licensed by the province of Alberta, and you must be bonded. All directors, partners, and officers of such agencies must undergo a criminal record check, and they are also governed under the Fair Trading Act. Any breaches of this act could be subject to fines up to \$100,000. So the government is very aware of this growing industry, and we're keeping an eye on it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, shortly I'll call upon the first of six to participate today, but just to note there were 84 questions and answers today which is very, very effective. If that kind of productivity stays through to July 15, we'll just really ask all the questions there are, and all the answers will be given.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Great Kids Awards

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise today and recognize Alberta's great kids. On Sunday the hon. Premier and the Minister of Children's Services presented awards to 16 outstanding children and youth for their extraordinary achievements at home, at school, and in their communities. These great kids were selected from nearly 200 nominations province-wide. I had the honour of attending the eighth annual Great Kids awards ceremony and saw first-hand the great things that Alberta's children and youth are doing in all corners of the province.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all of Alberta's 2007 great kids. They are: Kyla Meinczinger from Stony Plain, Kendra Nilsson from Lethbridge, Samantha Semrock from Edmonton, Albert Goulet from Calgary, Alicia Baharally from Stettler, Alex Brown from Calgary, Natasha Maloney from Fort McMurray, Braden Morrison from Claresholm, Jerremy Mathews from Fort McMurray, Marie Kennedy from Edmonton, Josie Anton Roberts from St. Paul, Rique Dempsey from Stettler, Kayla Lynn Mossewah from Rocky Mountain House, Chris Mani from Edmonton, Keely Evans from Thorhild, and Fardoussa Omar from Edmonton.

As I heard the hon. Premier say, these great kids all have a promising future, and thanks to them, so does Alberta. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Provincial Men's Curling Championship

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to recognize the community of Drayton Valley and Brazeau county for hosting this year's provincial men's curling championships. I am so glad to take this opportunity to recognize both the accomplishments of tournament winners, Kevin Martin and his team, and the beautifully executed event put on by a shining light of rural Alberta.

Being involved in a variety of sports, I have a great appreciation for the time that goes into the success of an event such as the provincial men's curling championships. The time and effort that went into preparing for the Drayton Valley curling tournament, from

the event co-chairs to the volunteers and, of course, the fans, are what made it such a tremendous success. The 12 teams that competed for Alberta's Kia Cup included the Ferbey Four and many other well-known Alberta teams.

Mr. Speaker, curling has become tremendously popular in Canada, particularly in the prairies, which are home to 31 per cent of curlers in the country. One of these curlers participating in this year's tournament and leading his team to victory was, as previously mentioned, Kevin Martin. Kevin is an Alberta boy and is hailed as one of the most successful curlers in the world. He got his start in the Canadian junior championships in 1985. He made an appearance at the Winter Olympics in 1992 and again in 2002, and today he is competing in the 2007 Brier in Hamilton, Ontario. This history is what led to the use of the expression in the world of curling known as "to do a Martin," acknowledging Kevin's amazing ability to pull off what appear to be impossible shots in difficult circumstances. We wish him and Team Alberta well.

Mr. Speaker, the people and the community of Drayton Valley and area have greatly contributed to the continued growth of curling in our province. I appreciate the time I've been given to recognize their efforts and contributions, and I ask my colleagues to take a moment to applaud their efforts as well.

Thank you.

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

Hospital Construction in South Calgary

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It feels good to be back among my friends and colleagues and even the members opposite. Four weeks ago I had surgery to have my gall bladder out in Calgary and lived to talk about it thanks to the excellent doctors, nurses, staff, and management who work in the Rockyview hospital and in and for the Calgary health region, no thanks to the Conservative government of Alberta. For reasons I won't go into because my medical history is my business, so I'll just park that part of my story behind FOIP, I needed to have my gall bladder removed old school: open abdominal surgery instead of laparoscopically.

Now, doing it old school, Mr. Speaker, meant a two-day stay in the Rockyview hospital, 34 hours of which I spent in recovery on the day surgery ward on a gurney because there were no beds available in the hospital. By the time I was able to get out of my gurney to go for my first walk the afternoon of the surgery, the staff were getting patients changed into their gowns, handing them back their clothing in plastic bags, and telling them to go take a seat in the waiting room for perhaps several hours because things were backed up in the OR again and day surgery was out of beds. The Rockyview was under an almost continuous code burgundy. Well, actually, now they call it status burgundy because the word "code" implies something urgent or acute, and "status," well, is a word that reflects the chronic condition that is the hospital bed shortage in Alberta's biggest city.

Over a million people, Mr. Speaker, live and from time to time get sick or hurt in a city with the acute care capacity for a population of not much more than half a million. There's a big empty field off the Deerfoot in Calgary's deep south that's supposed to have a new hospital under construction on it, and nothing is happening because the Conservatives, with their \$7 billion surplus, won't just cut the Calgary health region a cheque to cover today's cost of building the hospital that Calgary needed yesterday. In fact, we needed it three years ago.

Mr. Speaker, Nero fiddled while Rome burned. I don't know what instrument the Calgary Conservative caucus plays, but it's time to put it down and get to work.

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

International Women's Day

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks the 30th anniversary of International Women's Day. This significant day reminds us of the progress we have made to advance women's rights and of the challenges that remain. This year's theme, Ending Violence against Women: Action for Real Results, reflects the urgent need to address violence against women. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters' fiscal year statistics ending March 2006 note that nearly 13,000 women and children were accommodated in shelters in one year. Sadly, another 13,000 were turned away because they were full. International Women's Day is a time to reflect on our collective responsibility to women and children experiencing violence, and not providing shelter for half of the women in need is truly unacceptable.

Violence against women is also the issue of poverty. The Canadian Panel on Violence against Women drew the connection between poverty and violence when they said, "Working to end poverty is integral to ending systemic inequality and violence against all women." Violence against women knows no boundaries of income, race, or geography. For women experiencing violence, poverty limits their choices and their options.

There are a number of women's organizations working hard to offer hope to women and children experiencing this terrible violence. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, the YWCA, and many other women's centres and shelters provide assistance, and I thank them for that. Their work is essential and inspirational.

I would like to congratulate Sylvia Oishi, Laraine Stuart, Jean Greer McCarthy, Pat McMillan, and Sandra Nelson on being the 2007 YWCA Lethbridge women of distinction, and I thank them for their many volunteer hours.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

3:20

Lifesaving Society

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the Lifesaving Society and the admirable service that this organization provides to Albertans. The Lifesaving Society is a charitable organization that works to prevent drowning and water-related injury through its training programs like Water Smart, public education, and safety management services. Each year in Canada the society certifies more than 500,000 people in its swim, lifesaving, lifeguarding, and leadership courses.

I wanted to also acknowledge what a privilege it was for me to attend the Lifesaving Society rescue awards and the Royal Life Saving Society Commonwealth awards earlier today. The awards recognize approximately 130 Albertans who have demonstrated personal acts of bravery or dedicated significant years of service. These individuals exemplify personal courage, and I am humbled that there are so many Albertans who were honoured in the award ceremony. I have the highest appreciation for the important and courageous work done by all the individuals involved with this organization. They provide important services that are engaged in protecting and furthering the health and safety of Albertans. I commend their steadfast leadership in educating people on water safety, lifesaving, and lifeguarding.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all my colleagues I want to acknowledge the commendable initiatives of the Lifesaving Society, and I wish them continued success in providing their valuable services.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Growth Pressures in Fort McMurray

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to speak about the urgent need for planned, orderly growth in our province, particularly in the tar sands. The current gold rush style of growth is leaving many Albertans behind. Families are feeling the squeeze. There aren't enough schools. Wait times in hospitals and emergency rooms are increasing. Families are facing high tuition fees for their kids and a shortage of affordable, high-quality long-term care for their parents. Working families face increasing housing costs, homelessness in their communities is increasing, and there is serious environmental damage.

Despite the rhetoric in yesterday's Speech from the Throne it's clear that when it comes to planning, this government just doesn't get it. As it stands, the energy policy of the government of Alberta is designed to meet American interests. What we need is a made-in-Alberta energy policy designed to meet the needs of Albertans and Canadians. A secret meeting in Houston last year in which Alberta's Minister of Energy participated has called for a fivefold increase in tar sands production within a very short time, something which would completely derail Alberta's economy. The result is that Alberta's quality of life is being sold down the pipeline for the sake of record-breaking oil company profits.

Several new projects have recently been announced for the export of raw bitumen to the United States. A proposal has been made to build an entire plant in Asia and ship it to Alberta, and worst of all, qualified Alberta building trades workers are left sitting by the phone while employers bring in thousands of temporary foreign workers.

Alberta needs a made-in-Alberta energy policy. We need a short-term moratorium on approval of new projects in order to develop a clear plan for Alberta's economic future. We must stop the rush to build pipelines to send raw bitumen to the United States for processing.

Finally, we must establish a new, more reasonable royalty regime, including a 50 per cent royalty on exported raw bitumen. These royalties will ensure that we can lay the foundation for sustained prosperity that includes all Albertans. Alberta needs a made-in-Alberta energy policy which is in the interests of Albertans.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, petitions?

Mr. Backs: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with some sadness that I present these petitions because these are petitions that deal with the need for action for Josh Hunt. These are the first of about 45,000 names put together.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please just have a chair. Does the hon. member want to do this under petitions or tablings?

Mr. Backs: Both.

The Speaker: Is the petition in order?

Mr. Backs: I think this one is.

The Speaker: You think? We're having a debate. There's a way that the chair knows because he gets a lot of stares from the table officers, who at this point are shaking their heads.

Mr. Backs: Okay. We'll table those.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give oral notice of a motion to be dealt with possibly Monday night. I beg the indulgence of the House because it's a fairly long motion dealing with temporary amendments to be made to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly once I table the House leaders' agreement. The notice of motion would be as follows:

Be it resolved that the following temporary amendments be made to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in order to give effect to the March 7, 2007, House Leaders' Agreement.

1 Standing Order 3(1) is amended by striking out "1:30 p.m." and substituting "1 p.m."

2 The following is added after Standing Order 3:

2007 sitting schedule

3.1(1) Unless otherwise ordered, the Assembly shall stand adjourned every 4th week during the 2007 Spring Sitting.

(2) Unless otherwise ordered and subject to suborder (3), the Assembly shall meet for the 2007 Fall Sitting from the first Monday in November to the first Thursday in December, inclusive.

(3) The 2007 Fall Sitting may be varied by House Leaders' agreement, which shall be provided to the Clerk who shall immediately publish a revised calendar.

(4) Nothing in this Standing Order precludes the Government from advising the Speaker that the public interest requires the Assembly to meet on a certain date, and the Speaker shall give notice that the Assembly shall meet at that time to transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that time.

3 Standing Order 4 is struck out and the following is substituted:
4(1) Unless otherwise ordered, the sitting hours of the Assembly shall be as follows:

Monday: 1 p.m. to conclusion of Motions other than Government Motions

Tuesday: 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Wednesday: 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Thursday: 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

(2) Notwithstanding suborder (1), upon the passage of a Government motion before 6 p.m. which may be made on one day's notice and is subject to debate, the Assembly may meet on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings.

(3) If there is no evening sitting, at 6 p.m. or on Monday at the conclusion of Motions other than Government Motions, the Speaker adjourns the Assembly to the next sitting day.

(4) On Monday, if there is an evening sitting, at the conclusion of Motions other than Government Motions, the Speaker leaves the chair until 7 p.m.

(5) On Tuesday and Wednesday, if there is an evening sitting and at 6 p.m. the business of the Assembly or Committee of the Whole has not concluded, the Speaker or Chair, as the case may be, leaves the chair until 7 p.m.

(6) On evenings when the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole and the business of the committee is not concluded, at 10 p.m. the Committee shall rise and report immediately.

4 Standing Order 7 is amended

(a) in suborder (1) by adding "at 1:30 p.m.," before "Oral Question Period";

- (b) by adding the following after suborder (1):
 (1.1) At 1:30 p.m., the Assembly shall proceed to Oral Question Period with the balance of the daily routine to follow.
- 5 Standing Order 8 is amended
- (a) by striking out suborders (1) to (3) and substituting the following:
 8(1) On Monday afternoon, after the daily routine, the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:
 Written Questions
 Motions for Returns
 Public Bills and Orders other than Government Bills and Orders
 At 4:55 p.m.: Motions other than Government Motions.
- (2) Subject to suborder (3), on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:
 Government Motions
 Government Bills and Orders
 Private Bills.
- (3) If the business enumerated in suborder (1) has not received a total of 3 hours of consideration, then Public Bills and Orders other than Government Bills and Orders shall be the first order of business for the Assembly on Thursday afternoon for such time until the total time for consideration for those items enumerated in suborder (1) reaches 3 hours for that week.
- (b) in suborder (6) by striking out "evening" and substituting "afternoon".
- 6 Standing Order 34 is amended by striking out suborder (3) and substituting the following:
 (3) On the Wednesday preceding the consideration of written questions and motions for returns, the Government House Leader shall indicate to the Assembly which ones the Government will be accepting, accepting with amendments and rejecting.
 (3.1) The Clerk shall read the number, text and name of the sponsor of any written question or motion for return that has been accepted by the Government when this item of business is called.
- 7 Standing Order 53 is struck out and the following is substituted:
 53 Public accounts and all reports of the Auditor General shall stand permanently referred to the Public Accounts Committee as they become available.
- 8 Standing Order 56 is amended by adding the following after suborder (2):
 (2.1) A temporary substitution in the membership of a standing or special committee may be made upon written notification signed by the original member and filed with the Clerk and Committee Chair, provided such notice is given not less than 24 hours prior to the meeting.
 (2.2) A substituted member under the suborder (2.1) shall be considered for all purposes to be acting in the place of the original member.
 (2.3) A temporary substitution in the membership shall be permitted for a specific time period or for committee consideration of a specific issue.
 (2.4) A temporary substitution may be terminated at any time by the original member of the committee.
- 9 These amendments shall have effect from Tuesday, March 13, 2007, until the conclusion of the 2007 Fall Sitting.
- 10 As soon as possible after approval of this motion, the Clerk shall publish a calendar which shows the days on which the Assembly shall meet in 2007.

And be it further resolved that the Assembly shall give further consideration on a timely basis to the necessary temporary Standing Orders that will be required to give effect to the balance of the House Leaders' Agreement.

3:30

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, the last draft that the chair was provided with was dated at 12:19 p.m. today. The motion that the hon. Government House Leader has read into the record varies from this one, so for all intents and purposes I would ask that the House leader provide a copy of the motion the House leader just read into the record to all members. *Hansard* will not be published before members return on Monday. I think it would be unfair for members to have to wait until Monday to see this written text. They should have it this afternoon in the House. Would you kindly stamp on that 3:30 p.m. and ensure that all other previous drafts are shredded so that when we arrive here to have a debate on this motion, everybody will be talking from the same proposed rule paper, please.

Now, would you proceed, sir, with the next item.

Mr. Hancock: I'd be pleased to do that, and just for the reference of members I would indicate that the pieces that I did not read in related to the House sitting in the evenings. The motion as it was worded that I was provided with provided for specific sitting times, which were not part of the House leaders' agreement. That can be brought back in when we deal with sections 5 and 6 of the House leaders' agreement and dealt with at that time. That's the difference between them as I read it, but I will make sure that the appropriate version is on the tables of every member.

The Speaker: This afternoon, please.

Mr. Hancock: This afternoon.

The Speaker: Now, are we going to deal with the Government House Leader on the next item? Do you want to give notice about written questions and motions for returns?

Mr. Hancock: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. I would move that written questions and motions for returns stand and retain their places.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Bill 3 Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Renner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, this groundbreaking legislation establishes Canada's first legislated greenhouse gas emission reduction targets for large industrial emitters. Bill 3 and the accompanying regulations require industry to reduce emissions intensity by 12 per cent by 2008 either through upgrading facilities, purchasing Alberta offsets, or investing in a technology fund to develop Alberta-based technology to reduce emissions.

Mr. Speaker, because this is primarily enabling legislation, I will also be tabling draft copies of the proposed specified gas emitters regulation at the appropriate time so that the details of our approach are more open for debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

**Bill 4
Child Care Licensing Act**

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act.

This bill is designed to give government the framework needed to create better access to innovative, quality child care programs while ensuring that enforcement mechanisms are in place to protect children and keep them safe.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

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

**Bill 5
Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007**

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise to introduce at first reading Bill 5, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

Minor amendments to health legislation will make it easier for the government to review and verify health care claims and will ease administrative procedures for Albertans who wish to opt out of the health insurance plan. Other housekeeping amendments will ensure that the act is more inclusive and will legislate the rolling adoption of guidelines and schedules.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 5 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Bill 6
Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007**

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce and move Bill 6, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007.

These amendments clarify processes to align legislation with current practices, including the approval processes of degree programs for public and private institutions. Other amendments enhance flexibility for public postsecondary institutions, including the opportunity for board members appointed to a college or technical institute board as chair in their second term to serve an additional term.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 6 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 7
Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007**

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce and move Bill 7, the Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill deals with amendments to the Private Vocational Schools Act, which is the legislation governing the licensing of vocational training offered by private institutions in Alberta. Changes to the Private Vocational Schools Act that are included in this bill are designed to enhance consumer protection and update the act so that it is more reflective of the current environment surrounding the licensing of vocational training.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 7 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 8
Vital Statistics Act**

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Vital Statistics Act.

This proposed bill consolidates the Vital Statistics Act and the Change of Name Act. It will modernize the legislation to reflect cultural changes as the legislation has not been substantially amended since 1950. It makes provisions consistent with federal and other provincial acts and improves clarity and efficiency of the legislation and, as well, updates languages and processes.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 8 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

3:40

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would ask the House for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 39(1)(d) in order to introduce bills 201 and 202.

The Speaker: Normally the chair would not intervene with respect to one side or the other side of a request, but this is a good request that allows business to get done on Monday. Anybody opposed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Bill 201 **Funding Alberta's Future Act**

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce private member's Bill 201, the flagship bill of the Alberta Liberal caucus, entitled Funding Alberta's Future Act.

The purpose of Bill 201 is to do for Alberta what every financial planner tells their clients to do: pay yourself first. This act will require the establishment of a clear, legislated plan for investing 30 per cent of Alberta's resource revenue in the heritage fund as well as other funds for critical infrastructure investments, postsecondary education, the arts, and future opportunities identified by Albertans. Over time the renewable revenue from these investments will replace the boom-and-bust budgeting of recent years and put Alberta's finances on a truly sustainable foundation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

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

Bill 202 **Consumer Advocate Act**

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce and move first reading of my first-ever private member's bill, Bill 202, the Consumer Advocate Act.

The purpose of Bill 202 is to establish an independent officer of the Legislature, a market watchdog whose mandate will be to present and protect the rights and interests of Alberta consumers. Consumers need a voice. They need someone to advocate on their behalf, and they need someone who has the power to investigate and make recommendations to address unfair market practices.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the House the requisite number of copies of a document entitled All Party* Agreement. There's an asterisk beside Party to indicate that party is defined as per the Legislative Assembly Act to be recognized parties, just so it's clear that it doesn't leave anybody out by that definition, but using that to describe the document that was acknowledged by the Government House Leader, the Official Opposition House Leader, and the House leader of the third party with respect to democratic reform initiatives relative to the procedures of the House.

We hope to bring forward, as I mentioned in Notices of Motions, discussion with respect to time frames as set out in the House leaders' agreement, which will make the House more friendly to participation by members and people who aspire to be members. Other parts of the agreement deal with how we might establish policy field committees, how we might deal with Committee of Supply, and other matters. That agreement will be the subject of various motions before the House in due course.

The Speaker: To the page that's going to take the document to have it filed with the Clerk, I want you to make a copy for all Members of the Legislative Assembly and have it placed on their desk forthwith. Just to file them in the library – not all the members have

access if they're going away for the weekend. If this thing comes back, because this will deal with changes in the House, all hon. members must be up to date, front and centre, having studied the document so that there'll be no privilege questions raised on Monday, please.

Government House Leader, I'm sorry. You were going to proceed with another one?

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Environment I'm pleased to table draft copies of a proposed specified gas emitters regulation, which was earlier referred to by the minister. These would be regulations which he would propose to be promulgated after the adoption of Bill 3, and he wanted them to be available to the House as they look at the bill.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to rise with the requisite number of copies to table a petition, the first 250 names of about 45,000 to come, put together by Gary Hunt on public safety matters.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today being International Women's Day and the theme this year being Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls, I rise to table a document which is a compilation of figures from the United Nations study on violence against women. One of the key findings of this study is that violence against women is the most common but least punished crime in the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table the requisite number of copies of a web page posted by the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. It was a web page during his campaign for the leadership of the PC Party in which he espouses the idea of saving 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenues.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, I have a number of tablings that I have to do today as well. Pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act I'm tabling with the Assembly five copies of the following Members' Services orders: number one, the Members' Services Committee Order No. 1/06, members' allowances amendment order (No. 13), which came into force on January 1, 2007; number two, Members' Services Committee Order No. 2/06, constituency services amendment order (No. 17), which will come into force on April 1, 2007; and number three, Members' Services Committee Order No. 3/06, constituency services amendment order (No. 18), which came into force on December 14, 2006. I did previously provide to all members a copy of these orders.

Pursuant to section 46(1) of the Conflicts of Interest Act, chapter C-23, the *Revised Statutes of Alberta*, I'm tabling with the Assembly the annual report of the Ethics Commissioner. This report covers the period April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006.

I'm tabling with the Assembly as well the report of the Ethics Commissioner into allegations involving the hon. Member for

Calgary-Montrose, Hung Pham, dated January 23, 2007. I distributed this report to members on January 23, 2007.

I'm also tabling with the Assembly today the report of the Ethics Commissioner into allegations involving the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, Harvey Cenaiko, dated January 30, 2007. I distributed this report to hon. members as well on January 30, 2007.

I'm tabling with the Assembly the 39th annual report of the office of the Ombudsman for the period April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006. I distributed a copy of this report to members as well on October 24, 2006.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. Pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Government Accountability Act on behalf of the ministers responsible: aboriginal affairs and northern development 2005-2006 annual report; Alberta advanced education annual report 2005-2006; Alberta agriculture, food and rural development annual report 2005-2006; Alberta Children's Services annual report 2005-2006; Alberta community development annual report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2006; Alberta economic development 2005-06 annual report; Alberta Education annual report 2005-06; Alberta Ministry of Energy 2005-06 annual report; Ministry of Environment 2005-06 annual report; Executive Council annual report 2005-06; Alberta Finance annual report 2005-06; Alberta gaming 2005-06 annual report; Alberta government services 2005-06 annual report; Alberta Ministry of Health and Wellness annual report 2005-06, sections 1 and 2; human resources and employment ministry annual report 2005-06; Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation 2005-06 annual report; Alberta innovation and science annual report 2005-06; international and intergovernmental relations annual report 2005-06; Alberta Justice annual report 2005-06; Alberta municipal affairs annual report 2005-06; restructuring and government efficiency annual report 2005-06; Alberta Seniors and Community Supports annual report 2005-06; Alberta Solicitor General and public security annual report 2005-06; Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development annual report 2005-06.

3:50

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Oberg, Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Government Accountability Act the Budget '06 2006-07 quarterly budget report, second-quarter fiscal update, and second-quarter activity report.

Pursuant to the Conflicts of Interest Act and the Legislative Assembly Act the report of selected payments to members and former Members of the Legislative Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly for the year ended March 31, 2006.

Pursuant to the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans regulation the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans annual report for the year ended March 31, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Snelgrove, President of the Treasury Board, report entitled General Revenue Fund, Details of Grants, Supplies and Services, Capital Assets and Other, by Payee for the year ended March 31, 2006.

On behalf of Mr. Johnston, chair, Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee, Alberta heritage savings trust fund '06-07 second-quarter update for the six months ended September 30, 2006.

head:

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I could prevail upon my colleague the Government House Leader to tell us what is on the projected government business for next week, beginning the 12th of March.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, March 12, at 9 p.m. consistent with the current Standing Orders we would move to government business, and I would anticipate that at that time we would discuss the motion that I gave notice of motion of with respect to the Standing Orders, specifically relative to the sitting times and dates. Time permitting, there may be time for contemplation of the reply to the Speech from the Throne.

On Tuesday, March 13, anticipating a tabling of interim supply estimates, day 1 of estimates on supplementary supply, and response to the Speech from the Throne.

On Wednesday, March 14, introduction of a supplementary supply appropriation bill, under Orders of the Day interim supply, day 1 of 2, and response to the Speech from the Throne.

On Thursday, March 15, under Orders of the Day, Bill 4 for second reading, the supplementary appropriation bill for second reading, interim supply, day 2 of 2, and response to the Speech from the Throne.

head:

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I have received a certain message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province of Alberta for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, when a second or subsequent set of estimates is to be tabled, section 8 of the Government Accountability Act requires that an amended fiscal plan also be tabled. Accordingly, I wish to table the 2006-2007 quarterly budget report for the third quarter, which serves as the amended fiscal plan. This quarterly report was provided to all MLAs on February 26. I also made the report public as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act.

Also being tabled, Mr. Speaker, is the third-quarter update for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the quarterly report tabled by the Minister of Finance provides the fiscal framework for the additional spending authority for five departments of the government.

I now wish to table the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. These will provide the additional spending authority for the five departments of the government. When passed, the estimates

will authorize increases of about \$394 million in voted expense and equipment/inventory purchases. Mr. Speaker, these estimates will also authorize a \$530,000 transfer of previously voted capital investment from the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation to the Department of Service Alberta.

head: **Government Motions**

4. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly do resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a nondebatable motion.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

5. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this motion is a debatable motion.

Having no interest from anyone, the hon. President of the Treasury Board to close the debate?

[Government Motion 5 carried]

6. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund shall be one day.

The Speaker: That motion is nondebatable, so we'll call the question.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

Committee Membership Changes

7. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the following changes to the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services be approved: that Mr. Oberle replace Mr. Knight as deputy chair, that Ms Pastoor replace Mr. Backs, that Mr. Graydon replace Mr. Lindsay, that Mr. Mar replace Mrs. Jablonski, that Mr. Melchin replace Mr. Lukaszkuk.

The Speaker: Under Standing Order 52(3) this is a motion that is nondebatable, so I'm going to call the question.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

Committee Membership Changes

8. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the following changes to the Select Special Personal Information Protection Act Review Committee be approved: that Mr. VanderBurg replace Mr. Goudreau as deputy chair, that Ms Blakeman replace Mr. Backs, that Mr. Coutts replace Mr. Johnston, that Mr. Ducharme replace Mr. Liepert, that Mr. Graydon replace Mr. Lindsay, that Mr. Lund replace Mr. Lougheed, that Mr. McFarland replace Mr. Rodney, that Mr. Webber replace Mr. Snelgrove.

The Speaker: Under Standing Order 18(1)(h) this motion is

debatable. Are there any hon. members wishing to participate? The hon. Government House Leader to close the debate?

[Government Motion 8 carried]

9. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve itself into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

The Speaker: And this motion is nondebatable, so I'll call the question.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

The Speaker: I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The hon. member advised the chair that he would be providing some words in French as part of his speech, and he also advised the chair that as a courtesy to all hon. members he'd be providing the translation for it. The chair appreciates the hon. member calling the chair, but the hon. member did not have to call the chair.

4:00

Under the Languages Act of Alberta French or English may be spoken in this Assembly at any time, and it's not a requirement that any member provide a translation. So it was a great courtesy that the chair would like to acknowledge and would like to say thank you to the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. In the future hon. members will know that that's the way it goes. There's not a requirement to provide a translation, but it would be a courtesy to provide a translation.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

head: **Consideration of His Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Ducharme moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member for the vibrant constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake it is a great honour to move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne, given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I would like to thank the Lieutenant Governor for reading the Speech from the Throne to open the Third Session of the 26th Legislature. Once again you have delivered it with such grace. Thank you for setting the tone for the Assembly as one of respect and cordiality.

As you have heard from His Honour's speech, there are many exciting initiatives in the works for Alberta. These will build on the prosperity of Alberta and ensure that the well-being of our province and citizens is fully considered and acted on.

The new year brought in a lot of change for our province. Alberta headed in a new direction when the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville was sworn into office December 14, 2006, as Alberta's 13th Premier.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. Premier for allowing me to move the acceptance of the Speech from the Throne. As this is the first of many speeches from the throne under his leadership, I am truly honoured and humbled to have the opportunity to deliver this speech during such a memorable time.

I would like to offer my support to the new Premier. I am fully confident in his ability to lead Alberta to a robust and prosperous tomorrow. Furthermore, I am an ardent advocate of his vision and priorities for Alberta. Mr. Speaker, he will join the ranks of the long list of Premiers who have worked so diligently to place Alberta where it is today.

On that note, on behalf of Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituents I would like to thank the past Premier, the hon. Ralph Klein, for his 14 years of leadership. It was a great privilege to be part of his team, and we wish him the best of luck in all of his future endeavours.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of hard work and sacrifice from all Albertans to attain the standing we are in now. This new government will ensure that Alberta remains a world leader in economic terms and as a model of quality of life.

Je veux remercier tous les Albertains pour leur soutien continu, qui nous a amené au point où nous sommes aujourd'hui.

It takes a lot of work to be a world leader. We must continue working hard and driving ourselves to exceed all expectations. As the Honourable Lieutenant Governor stated yesterday, we must build on the work and sacrifices that we made in the past to make our prosperity continue to flourish.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to warmly welcome the new ministers in this government. I am confident they will prove to be a strong Executive Council, which will meet the Premier's vision for Alberta. Ministers, rest assured that your private member government colleagues will assist and support you along the way.

Now that Alberta has been established as a model in terms of economic growth, the Premier will lead Alberta to steadfast sustainability, opportunity, and elevated well-being. While our new Premier has only been in power for a few months, he has been tirelessly consulting with Albertans. I commend him for all the efforts he has put forth to allow Alberta to continue being a province of the people.

As was highlighted by His Honour, the Premier has set a direction by which he will govern. Everything this government does will be conducted in a responsible and prudent way to ensure that the right thing is being done for Alberta. A large part of the new government's focus is on being mindful of future generations. Alberta will be left not only in the best economic condition possible; it will be passed down in a secure state for our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. This means safer communities, the best education system, a sound environment, and responsibly managed resources among others.

Mr. Speaker, it says a lot about this government that its first priority is to govern with integrity and transparency. The Premier has stated that this is his mission because Albertans want to be involved in the process of building on Alberta's prosperity. I would like to commend Albertans for that. Our new government realizes that Alberta cannot be properly guided unless it is done by all Albertans. Albertans know what they want, and we in the Legislature are here to make it happen on their behalf. We will work as a team to achieve the goals that we as a province have set for ourselves. That means that the new government will be seeking to achieve Alberta's goals through co-operation with all stakeholders. That is the only way we will achieve true prosperity and well-being.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Premier has already put forth a plan to get closer to achieving a truly transparent and open government. His very first bill presented in the House was the Lobbyists Act. With this act Albertans will clearly know who is seeking to influence the direction of Alberta and who is working for Albertans.

Furthermore, this new government recently made a commitment

to make flight logs and expenses of ministers and their staff public. These are unprecedented steps, which provide accountability and transparency within government. After only a few months in power Alberta's Premier has already provided Albertans with tangible proof of his commitment to increase transparency and accountability. Nous désirons que les Albertains soient informés par rapport aux événements qui se passe dans leur nouveau gouvernement.

Albertans and Canadians alike have been benefiting tremendously from Alberta's economic expansion. As a result of this growth we are seeing more opportunity and an improved quality of life for all Albertans. When rapid growth occurs, adjustments need to be made. Issues must be addressed in order for expansion to be executed in an acceptable manner. This government realizes that issues surrounding growth affect all Albertans. This government's priority on growth management will ensure that expansion is conducted in a manner which is directed by foresight.

Mr. Speaker, housing pressures are an issue being felt in every corner of the province. In my constituency the Cold Lake Affordable Housing Society is working diligently to address this need. I would like to thank them for their work. They are a prime example of community members coming together to create a stronger Alberta. Addressing access to affordable housing is an important part of improving Albertans' quality of life.

Through his travels throughout the province the Premier has come across the need for housing in an overwhelming fashion. Decisive action is being taken to address the situation. This government wants all Albertans to have access to Albertans' quality of life and prosperity. I would like to commend the Premier for mandating the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to create a housing task force. The task force will find innovative ways of addressing this situation. I look forward to hearing the results of this report. I am sure I will have great things to report back to my constituents.

The Premier has also put one of the most dedicated and driven MLAs to task on the labour situation in Alberta. The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry has already been extremely busy working on ways to attract immigrants to Alberta. She has been mandated to enhance the co-ordination of economic development, immigration, and labour-force planning in Alberta. She and her department will create a made-in-Alberta strategy to quell the labour shortage. As the new chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council I would like to assure her that the council will assist her in every possible way to achieve her goals.

Of course, increasing Alberta's labour pool will require other Canadians and immigrants to come to Alberta. The new government has committed itself to welcoming new Canadians into Alberta through support in communities. Je suis fier de dire que l'Alberta est une province multiculturelle croissante. Notre province accueille des gens de diverses origines, tel que française, ukrainienne, polonaise, chinoise, pakistanaise, indienne, vietnamienne, et beaucoup d'autres. Je suis certain que les communautés à travers la province de l'Alberta accueilleront ces gens à bras ouverts.

Mr. Speaker, I for one can say that my constituency will welcome immigrants from all across the world to our communities. As Alberta's economy continues to grow, these new Albertans will add their expertise and manpower to further enhance our prosperity and quality of life. Members of my constituency and I do not want to see growth stilted by a lack of labour. On behalf of the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency I would like to encourage this government and the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry to do everything in their power to address labour shortages by working to promote Alberta as a world-class destination for immigrants.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also especially pleased to see a renewed commitment to increase support for First Nations and Métis skills training and labour force. There are many aboriginal communities in my constituency which will be pleased to hear that this govern-

ment is committed to working with them to help increase their quality of life.

As I have said many times before in this House, the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake is one of the most beautiful areas in Alberta. The environment is a matter which my constituents take to heart. We are all so very pleased that under the leadership of the Minister of Environment the environment will be addressed in a real and tangible manner. I was happy to hear from the Honourable Lieutenant Governor that our new government will work with Albertans to turn environmental challenges into opportunities. That is what we do in Alberta. We are an innovative people.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this time to thank the residents of Bonnyville-Cold Lake for all of their efforts to conserve the environment. Each attempt we make to help the environment will benefit all Albertans now and into the future. My constituents and I look forward to the implementation of the climate change plan. I am proud to be part of a government that is establishing the first emission intensity reduction targets for industrial emitters in Canada. This government will work toward ensuring that our environment remains sound for tomorrow.

As a resident and a representative of the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency I am reassured that our new government is going to manage Alberta's water supply. Living near beautiful bodies of water, I know that water is a precious commodity that cannot be squandered. The Water for Life strategy has led us well in the past and will continue to do so.

Mr. Speaker, as the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake continues to grow, there is an increasing demand for land. Distributing land across various sectors is a challenging task. The government's new land-use strategy will help my constituents and other Albertans find a balance to coexist. Agricultural, industrial, and housing needs can all be met with a strong plan. Je suis fier de vous dire que la qualité de vie est extraordinaire dans notre province. Nous avons de bonnes écoles pour nos jeunes, beaucoup d'occasion pour trouver de l'ouvrage, et de nombreux services sociaux pour nos aînées. Il n'y a simplement pas de comparaison au Canada.

Mr. Speaker, there is more to being an Albertan than accessing economic prosperity. Being part of this province also means living well, safely and comfortably. This is why so many people are moving to Alberta and are staying here to raise their families. The new government is working on Alberta's education system because we know that an elevated quality of life is directly linked to working and attaining one's potential. We want to give Albertans access to all resources possible to achieve this.

Another component of enhancing Albertan's quality of life is ensuring that this province has a health care system which meets the needs of Albertans. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and his department will be working hard to find innovative ways of providing health care to all Albertans. As Alberta is growing, it is imperative that we take steps to grow our health care force in order to match the need. To that end achieving a health workforce for the future will be an aspect that the hon. minister will work diligently to achieve. This government will be committed to achieving community-based approaches to provide support to those in need. As Alberta's population is aging, this government will be working hard to expand the province's long-term care capacity. Mr. Speaker, these efforts will in turn increase their quality of life.

During my travels across Alberta I have been overwhelmed by the ways Albertans are more than happy to lend a helping hand to those in need. I am pleased that the Premier is working to create the community spirit program for charitable giving. Through the

community spirit fund the government will support and enhance charitable donations in Alberta.

In order to achieve safer communities in Alberta, the Premier has mandated the hon. Minister of Justice to lead a crime reduction and safer communities task force. Safer communities will prove to elevate all Albertans' quality of life and strengthen Alberta. As our province grows larger, it will also grow safer. This government will strive to create an environment where children, senior citizens, and the vulnerable will not have to worry about their safety in Alberta's neighbourhoods. We are committed to enhancing all of Albertans' feelings of security as that is part of a high quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Premier's final priority is to build a stronger Alberta. This priority affects many aspects of Alberta; however, a distinct list has been formulated to outline what exactly the Premier aims to work on. As the Honourable Lieutenant Governor indicated yesterday, the government will conduct a review of the resources royalty system so that Albertans can know that they are getting the right amount of revenue from their resources. Furthermore, in the months to come this new government will develop strategies to diversify sources of energy and will encourage upgrading of nonrenewable resources. This government is committed to securing energy sources for today and far into the future.

In order to create stronger municipalities, the government recently announced that it is giving \$1.4 billion to help manage infrastructure needs. This funding will be met with a long-term funding arrangement to address the tremendous growth pressures communities are facing. I am certain that the municipal governments in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency will be happy with this funding increase. Funding will help them meet the infrastructure needs of our region.

Because revenues have been spent wisely in Alberta over the last decade and the province has economic prosperity today, the value of fiscal prudence will continue with this government. One example of this value put into action is the surplus management policy that will be released in the 2007 budget. Mr. Speaker, in order to sustain and enhance our current level of prosperity, we must focus on widening our sources of expertise and revenue. This province's innovation and drive towards the energy sector has led Alberta to be an economic powerhouse. We need to continue driving forward and look at other ways to sustain our wealth. That is why this government is taking a serious look at diversifying our economy. We will be a stronger province if we have a broader base of industries. Investing in Alberta's knowledge base is an exciting way to make our province more attractive to the smartest minds in the world. It will also place Alberta on the path to a successful future.

With a focus on knowledge such as nanotechnology Alberta will be ready for tomorrow's competitive global markets, and we will continue to be a leader. Nous pouvons et nous allons le faire. I look forward to the Third Session of the 26th Legislature under the lead of Alberta's 13th Premier as we work to further all Albertans' quality of life.

In closing, I would like to once again thank the constituents from Bonnyville-Cold Lake for granting me the opportunity to represent them in the Legislature during these exciting times. Merci. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am privileged to have the opportunity to second the Speech from the Throne. I would like to commend our hon. Lieutenant Governor for delivering the speech yesterday and providing us with an inspirational vision for this legislative session. The government's plan addresses key priorities

that focus on some of the most important issues facing Albertans today. The priorities are centred on rededicating our Legislature to ensure that our government fulfills our potential and achieves our objectives.

When I arrived in Alberta as a young soldier in 1970, the province was different in many aspects. The price of a barrel of oil was around \$12 U.S. Our population was around 1.5 million, and hit songs included Diana Ross's *Ain't No Mountain High Enough*. Perhaps the hon. member from Lougheed can relate to that. Number 2 was The Beatles' *Let It Be*. So that says it all.

Alberta was developing, and over the course of time we have experienced many changes, exciting changes that have demonstrated the resolve and the passion of Albertans to further themselves and their communities. I do not believe that any of us could have predicted the successes that we would experience and the accomplishments that we would achieve.

Although our province has changed over the course of time, our unique values such as fiscal responsibility, entrepreneurial spirit, and self-dependence still resonate among Albertans today. The people of my constituency of Calgary-Hays believe in this province, and their positive attitude is reflected throughout Alberta. Albertans have a determined attitude, and their positive work ethic contributes to making this province a pre-eminent leader in Canada and throughout the world. Alberta continues to lead in many economic areas, and our province maintains the highest employment rate in the country.

I am enthusiastic about the ambitious agenda that has been set forth for this Legislature, and I am encouraged to work with all of my colleagues to meet the needs and priorities of Albertans. As the hon. Lieutenant Governor stated yesterday, we want to "govern with integrity and transparency." I believe this is a foundation for all government that is open, honest, and recognizes that we are here to do the respectable job that our fellow citizens entrusted us with. We are their representatives, and it is essential that we continue to satisfy their concerns with the urgency and efficiency that they expect.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech outlined a strategy for dealing with the enormous growth pressures that our province is currently experiencing. I believe that we are addressing these issues throughout Alberta, specifically in Calgary-Hays where we will soon benefit from the service of the new south Calgary hospital. Albertans are experiencing the impact of a continually expanding economy, and I believe that our government has a great opportunity to facilitate the construction of needed schools, roads, and hospitals. I am confident that we will develop a comprehensive plan to analyze the priority areas and provide the funding necessary to build and meet the infrastructure needs of all constituencies.

It is also encouraging that our government has collaborated with the private sector to expedite the construction of the new section of the Calgary ring road, and I hope that the construction will continue to progress in the southeast section of the city in order to alleviate heavy traffic. The extension of the Calgary ring road serves multiple purposes such as reducing commute times, improving safety conditions, and decreasing the depreciation of our roads.

I am convinced that our province's agreement with municipalities, providing them with \$1.5 billion in annual funding, is an important decision. I can assure this Assembly that the funding is needed and will be beneficial in assisting communities to meet their growing infrastructure demands.

I am encouraged by our government's commitment to improving Albertans' health and wellness. I believe that we need to continue this great strategy by providing and maintaining adequate sporting and recreational facilities. We need to motivate Albertans to be active. The benefits of an active lifestyle are numerous. We want

to encourage a health-conscious society so Albertans comprehend the added incentives to taking care of their bodies and participating in athletic events and pursuits.

4:20

Albertans value their economic prosperity; however, it should not impede their quality of life. My constituents recognize that they do not want well sites in close proximity to their community. They, as do most Albertans, believe in furthering economic development, but they recommend that it be done in a responsible and conscientious manner that furthers environmental stewardship and respects the boundaries of neighbourhoods. We want to develop a sustainable economy that has a diversified energy sector in order to extend the longevity of Alberta's prosperity.

We should continue to provide funding to initiatives that represent new opportunities for Albertans. I am inspired by the capabilities of our province, and I believe that creating stronger postsecondary programs will be important to securing Alberta's economic prominence in the coming years. I have members of my family who are currently enrolled in universities, and I understand the issues that students throughout the province are coping with. This government plans to address those issues. We have recently seen funding to increase the number of available spots for students in the health care field, and money has been allocated to support advanced technological research.

I also want to echo the objectives of the throne speech that focus on building a stronger Alberta. We are in an enviable position and have an opportunity to build on our successes by developing alternative energies and focusing on environmental sustainability. We cannot predict the future, but we can prepare with sound fiscal planning and innovative economic development. This type of preparedness will contribute to ensuring that we are investing in tomorrow's future by funding research and encouraging the talents of Albertans.

We will continue to diversify our economy and strive to reach our full potential. There is great opportunity in renewable energy sources such as bioenergy, wind, solar, and hydroelectric, all of which are examples of alternatives that represent a stronger, more diverse energy sector. As our province grows, our consumption increases, and it is important that we urge modernization and responsible use of our resources. We want to extend the benefits we currently enjoy to future generations.

Mr. Speaker, the priorities outlined by the Lieutenant Governor reflect a desire of Albertans. I believe that our priorities represent the many special individuals throughout Alberta. Some of these individuals, including those who have chosen to join the Canadian armed forces, these men and women are choosing to make the ultimate commitment as a citizen. I believe we have an obligation to support these dedicated Albertans, and I want to acknowledge their selfless sacrifice in assisting those in distress, despair, and fear. Having served, myself, for 11 years with the Canadian armed forces, I personally understand the diligence and loyalty to our country that our military personnel in Afghanistan are demonstrating both as full-time and reservist soldiers. These individuals recognize a need to volunteer their service for the betterment of our province and our country. The dedicated men and women of our armed forces face dangerous challenges abroad. I commend their efforts.

I also want to acknowledge the competent individuals in our police services who are engaged in the effort to address the safety and security concerns in our communities here in Alberta. These brave individuals are sworn to protect and ensure the safety of Albertans throughout this province. Their jobs can often be thankless, stressful, and demanding, but they carry out their duties

because they have made a commitment to the people of Alberta.

Providing safe and secure communities is a priority that I believe in strongly. As a 25-year veteran of the Calgary Police Service I've always believed that we need to make a concerted, concentrated effort toward crime prevention and reduction of crime. We need to continue to protect our communities from illegal and unsafe activities, ensuring that our cities and towns are filled with an atmosphere of co-operation and safety. Reducing hostility and violence in our neighbourhood is an objective of utmost importance. We should strive to continue to provide sufficient support for our police services and their efforts to secure our communities.

The hon. Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne highlighted priorities that reflect what Albertans feel are the most important issues to them. The speech provided a thoughtful, comprehensive account of our ambitions for this Legislature, and I am sure that this government will continually strive to fulfill these priorities. Mr. Speaker, individuals are coming to this province, just as I did many years ago, with aspirations of finding a successful career, creating a family, and being an active citizen. I am proud of the many men and women who are dedicating themselves to bettering their communities, their province, and their country. I am honoured to have the opportunity to diligently work every day to ensure that Albertans can continue to realize the benefits and experiences that this province affords us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my constituents in Edmonton-Riverview, of all Albertans, and as Leader of the Official Opposition it's my duty and my privilege to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered in this Assembly yesterday. I'm entitled to spend 90 minutes doing this. I'll try to keep my comments to no more than 85.

According to the Premier, the first priority of this administration is to govern with integrity, and we will help him to do that. As one columnist from the *Calgary Herald* wrote earlier this week: there is integrity, and then there is integrity. In other words, there's a vast difference between actions that give the appearance of integrity and those that reveal true integrity.

The throne speech delivered yesterday paid lip service to government transparency and accountability, promising a few timid steps forward toward a more open and accountable government, steps that have been taken in other provinces decades ago. Of course, we applaud the adoption of a few of the Alberta Liberal ideas that we've been advocating for so long, such as the long-overdue lobbyist registry, and making credit card expenses public is a nice gesture and an important one, though the lack of detail and context makes it nearly impossible to judge whether or not public funds were used in the public interest: timid steps at a time when Albertans are demanding a bold leap forward. Alberta needs a fully accountable, transparent government and a renewed robust democracy to meet the challenges ahead. Half measures won't cut it anymore. It's time to think big and to take action.

Alberta Liberal MLAs have spent months meeting with Albertans across the province, and the message we received is loud and clear. Albertans want open, accountable government, and they want their government to lead the way forward to a sustainable future. That's what an Alberta Liberal government would deliver because Alberta Liberals know that government honesty, accountability, and transparency aren't just abstract ideals. These qualities protect Albertans and ensure that their tax dollars are being used honestly and effectively. Alberta Liberals know that creating a sustainable

economy is not simply a dream for down the road but an absolute necessity that we must pursue aggressively to protect our environment and our way of life.

So how would an Alberta Liberal government achieve these goals? Well, first we'll get democracy and Alberta back on track. Democracy is so much more than election day, so much more than a means of hiring a few MLAs every few years. It's a living, breathing tool. It's meant to serve and protect real people, real Albertans. It's the most precious instrument of government accountability, and in Alberta it's long overdue for a tune-up.

A strong robust democracy could have protected seniors from neglect and abuse in Alberta's long-term care facilities. It could have prevented energy deregulation, which has cost Albertans billions of dollars in skyrocketing power bills, and the need to subsidize those bills to keep them under control. It could have saved untrained, unprotected workers from exposure to deadly asbestos at Calgary's Holy Cross hospital. It could have forced this government to develop a solid plan for managing Alberta's growth while protecting our environment. It's time to fix the tools Albertans need to hold the government accountable, and it's time for the governments we elect to make openness and accountability not merely a sound bite but an everyday reality.

4:30

In contrast to this government's timid steps forward toward accountability and openness I offer what an Alberta Liberal government will do to renew democracy in Alberta. Albertans value freedom, fairness, trust, honesty, and accountability. If Alberta is to meet the challenge and opportunity the future presents, government must nurture those values and provide a structure in which they can flourish.

Here's how an Alberta Liberal government will get Alberta's democracy back on track. First, fixed election dates. Election schedules should be free from political manipulation. They should occur at predictable intervals rather than at the whim of the party in power. Voters already enjoy fixed election dates in British Columbia and in Ontario. Albertans deserve this same respect from their provincial government.

Next, electoral reform. The more people who vote, the more legitimate and accountable the government. In the last election less than 45 per cent of Albertans bothered to come to the polls. That is unacceptable. Many would be more likely to vote if our electoral system reflected voter intent more accurately and if people who voted for the losing party weren't consistently disenfranchised the moment the results are in. An Alberta Liberal government would organize a citizens' assembly on electoral reform to determine if other voting systems, including proportional representation, which Alberta once had, could improve participation in our democracy. Citizens should be able to choose not merely which party takes power but how their governments are elected.

Campaign financing also needs to be changed. No one should be able to buy the loyalty of our elected officials. An Alberta Liberal government would limit corporate and union donations to \$5,000, and that \$5,000 could not be used to buy exclusive access to the Premier or his ministers. Furthermore, party leadership campaigns would be subject to legislative rules to ensure that the process of leadership selection is transparent and accountable.

Renewing the democratic process is the first step in getting democracy back on track. It's equally important to bring accountability back to government. A government that can be easily held to account for its actions is far more likely to govern in the best interests of Albertans. We are ready to bring some accountability back to government right now. This session my colleague the hon.

Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie will sponsor a bill to reverse one of the most appalling laws passed by this government, last year's legislation that hides the results of internal audits for 15 years after completion. What is this government afraid of? Albertans will find out if the MLAs in this House have the courage to vote for our bill.

The next thing we need to do to bring integrity back to government is to eliminate conflicts of interest. Whenever someone in a position of power can exploit the system for personal gain, democracy has a serious problem. Alberta's conflict of interest rules and oversights are incredibly weak compared to other provinces and the federal government. To protect Albertans from conflicts of interest, an Alberta Liberal government would make sure that ex-politicians and senior political officials wait one year before taking jobs where they could influence government, and we would restructure the Legislative Offices Committee so that the selection of the Ethics Commissioner and other Legislature officers is less dominated by the party in power.

In a political system bogged down by years of Tory inertia, complacency, and entitlement, it takes courage for Albertans to stand up and reveal government incompetence or corruption. They've often done so at the cost of their own jobs. We believe Albertans have the right to speak out against wrongdoing, so we'll protect whistle-blowers with legislation. In a real democracy people don't have to be afraid to speak out.

And what about this very building, this physical embodiment of democracy? This government has a habit of spending as little time as possible engaged in debate, making snide references to "dome disease." Mr. Speaker, democracy is not a disease, so we shouldn't be treating this institution as if spending a little more time here will kill us. For example, when we last debated the Health and Wellness section of the budget, we were doing so at a rate of a million dollars a minute. How can we possibly hold the government accountable at such a pace?

When the Alberta Liberals form government, we'll invite the opposition to spend some time with us here under the dome to revisit the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The act is intended, it is claimed, to give Albertans access to important government documents. In the best case this information can be used to help ordinary Albertans hold their government accountable, but as it stands, requests through FOIP can take months to process and cost thousands of dollars. Often requests are delayed, refused, or made unaffordable for purely political ends. We would amend the freedom of information legislation to ensure that Albertans get timely, affordable access to government publications, and we would end political interference in processing FOIP requests, including penalties for such interference. That, Mr. Speaker, is just a sample of what an Alberta Liberal government would do to get democracy back on track.

What about the priority that's taken the world by storm: creating a sustainable future? Well, as Mark Twain said, "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did." So let's not disappoint ourselves. Let's make sure that Albertans of the future will look back 20 years and say: "Aha. That's when the government finally woke up and took action on climate change and sustainability."

Is that what they'll really be saying? I don't know. A lot can happen in 20 years. It's hard to look that far into the future. None of us has a crystal ball to gaze into. It's human nature to imagine a future where everything is pretty much the same. We might allow for a few small changes. In 20 years we'll all look 10 years older, but that's about it. We lose track of time.

Scrambling to live in the now, we miss how much has changed, but if we don't register where we are today, imagine thinking back

20 years. Imagine all the way back to 1987 or even earlier. Things that we thought would last forever back then have disappeared today. Things that we now take for granted as always part of our lives, many didn't even exist in 1987.

Just 20 years ago there was no Internet, no World Wide Web. Personal computers were both pretty exotic and pretty slow. We listened to records or cassettes. There were certainly no DVDs. We shopped at places like Eaton's and Woodward's, and we thought we would forever. There were no Wal-Marts in Canada, and Starbucks was little more than one coffee bean shop in Seattle. The Berlin wall loomed over western Europe, the Iron Curtain hung heavy, and the notion of China and India as world industrial powers was almost absurd. In 1987 the last boom in Alberta had gone bust. Twenty years ago you could buy a repossessed house for a buck, and you couldn't give away office space in Calgary.

As we try to plan for a world 20 years from today, what do we see? Well, of course, nobody knows for sure, but there are experts, and there are predictions. We'd better listen pretty hard because in 1987 you could read about digital video recording coming. You could hear rumblings about the problems with Eaton's. You could see reports about potential growth in China. Of course, not every prediction is right on the money, but by the time the world reaches consensus, from a planning perspective it's often a little too late.

The world abounds with examples. How well did Kodak and Fuji plan for digital cameras? Did you know that in 1950, Mr. Speaker, there were well over 50 coal mines in the Drumheller Valley. By 1960 there were fewer than 20. In 1970 there was one. The coal is still there, but the market had changed. The railways had switched to diesel, and homes had switched to natural gas. Remember the words of Charles Darwin: "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."

As leader of the Alberta Liberal caucus I've often said publicly that in the medium to long term, the next 15 to 20 years and beyond, the issue that will overtake all others will be climate change. We aren't jumping on the bandwagon. Like scientists, we've been on the record on climate change for years, and we've diked that issue out in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

Holdout by holdout the ranks of the climate change deniers have grown smaller and smaller day by day. Scientists got there first, but we expect scientists to be on the cutting edge. Many people, many people in Alberta, felt that until consensus is wider spread, the message can and should be doubted.

Then just a few weeks ago, after the world-wide science community said that the time for discussion was over and after Prime Minister Stephen Harper said that it's no longer in doubt and years after the Alberta Liberals demanded action to deal with the problem, came the words of Jeff Rubin, chief economist for CIBC World Markets. Just several weeks ago Jeff Rubin, an economist whose job it is to recognize world economic trends before they take hold, had this to say: "Governments are waging a war on carbon." Not "will be," "are." He didn't mean the government in Ottawa or this government here in Edmonton. He meant governments around the world: in Washington and Tokyo, in London and Berlin, in Stockholm and Seoul.

We as legislators must wake up to the fact that Albertans are in a race against time to secure this province's future because our financial security, the treasure that sets this government and this province apart, is hydrocarbons. Our economy is booming, and we have unparalleled opportunity because we sit on one of the biggest, most accessible, secure, and productive deposits of carbon in the

world. The threat? Well, carbon, when it's used as a fuel with today's technologies, releases carbon dioxide, the leading contributor to climate change. Addressing climate change has become a national mission for a rapidly increasing number of countries and a corporate mission for a growing list of businesses. As a result billions of dollars a year are being spent across Europe, Japan, and the United States to find alternatives to carbon-based fuels. Sooner or later those efforts will succeed. They are already succeeding.

Of course, there is another threat to Alberta from climate change. Alberta's landscape isn't immune to the effects of climate change. Far from it. In fact, Alberta faces a double jeopardy as both the financial value of our energy resources and the health of our land and water are threatened.

When the Alberta Liberals ask hard questions in this House about water planning, about the mountain pine beetle, or about climate change, too often we're refused constructive and honest answers. But the fact is, Mr. Speaker, our glaciers are receding faster than ever in recorded history, the glaciers that feed our rivers that help supply our drinking water. The sky isn't falling, but the wind now carries the mountain pine beetle. Our winters used to be cold enough to make Alberta immune. Now our forests are infested.

The world hasn't arrived at a carbon neutral economy yet, but eventually it will. When it does, where will Alberta be? Will we be like Kodak or Fuji, left on the sidelines? Will Alberta be like the coal mines of Drumheller, or is Alberta ready to adapt? Are Albertans ready to stare the future in the face and make it blink?

We can be ready under a different kind of government. I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that it has to be an Alberta Liberal government. Unlike the current government, which is locked in the past, looking for excuses not to adapt, frightened of change, an Alberta Liberal government accepts the science and embraces the need for change and the opportunities that come with it. An Alberta Liberal government would understand that this is going to take the efforts of us all. We understand that we cannot meet this challenge by pitting one sector against another, by speaking only of the costs and the problems and the reasons not to get on with the job. If Alberta is to win this race, it is going to take the concerted effort of individuals, corporations and labour and government, of oil and gas companies and electric companies and farmers and universities and homeowners. The time of divide and conquer must come to an end. We have to work together.

How long do we have? How long will it be before the world's war on carbon is won? Of course, no one knows, but we need a target. The prudent answer is 20 years, and if 20 years seems far in the distance, remember that the starting line is right here, right now. Twenty years to secure our fiscal future. Twenty years to ensure that we are not casualties of the world's war on carbon and that we are not casualties of climate change itself. But we must start now. To a politician 20 years is a long time, but to the rest of us it's on the horizon, and to those of us with kids, it's like tomorrow.

Alberta needs direction that unites people across all sectors of society with a singular purpose to a destination that unites issues into a singular agenda so that actions can build strength upon strength. We have the time frame and the reason for the journey. We need a map and the leadership to get us there. Under an Alberta Liberal government Alberta's destination would be clear and unwavering: to be a world leader in addressing climate change in real and absolute terms. Today Canada is last among developed nations in addressing climate change. Despite the claims of this government, Alberta is last among provinces. In 20 years we must be first and a leader not just in Canada but in the world.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to directly address for a moment Alberta's petroleum sector, which understandably watches these debates with

great anxiety. I don't just mean the executive in downtown Calgary. I mean the young woman on the survey crew outside of Medicine Hat or the aboriginal entrepreneur hiring members from his band up at Fort MacKay. Alberta's petroleum sector is nothing less than an astonishing success story. We're global, we're competitive, we're comprehensive, and we're fully integrated. Because of Alberta, I would argue, Canada is to the world's petroleum industry what Germany is to the world's automotive industry. We are that important, that successful, that big.

From the shop in Edmonton where Jeanette's and my youngest son cut steel for equipment made in Alberta and shipped around the world, to the executives who lead projects off the coast of Asia and Africa, to the financiers who put the capital together, our industry is a global leader headquartered, led, driven, engineered, staffed, designed, and constructed right here in Alberta. For productivity, for expertise, for leadership the world's petroleum industry turns to Alberta. There is no other sector in Canada – none – that has the same global product reach, the technological edge, the complete integration from research and development right through to product delivery and every single step in between. The fundamental end product is carbon, but our real export is know-how.

So to the petroleum industry I say: work with us. We will seize this opportunity to collaborate. The carbon assets that you rely on are the carbon assets that make the people of Alberta prosperous. Let's harness the ingenuity, the creativity, the leadership that brought us to this point to get us to the next, to drive us to the world-wide goal of a carbon-neutral economy with all the energy we can muster. With the astonishing skills and expertise this province possesses, we will succeed. We must. We have no other choice. Industry leaders have told me they are ready, willing, and able. It is the current government that is holding things back.

4:50

The University of Calgary recently reported that oil and gas accounts for 50 per cent of Alberta's economy – 50 per cent – half the jobs, half of this government's revenue, half our personal wealth from the petroleum sector. So taking a hands-off approach, as this government is inclined to do, to a world at war with carbon is not an option. Too much is at stake. We have to work together. We have to respond to change – petroleum producers, labour unions, universities, and interest groups – because the threat doesn't come from action, Mr. Speaker, but from inaction and because we are all of us, everyone of us, Albertans, and we are in this together.

Mr. Speaker, here are some specifics of our plan to deal with climate change. Let me deal first with the most tortured and unpleasant subject: relations between Alberta and Ottawa. Fellow members, it is time to get past the sabre-rattling. Of course, Alberta's natural resources belong to the people of Alberta, and any threat to that will be fought intensely by an Alberta Liberal government, no matter which federal party is in power. That's why we need leadership now. The climate change issue is not being driven by Ottawa but by Europe and Japan, by Washington and California. It's not Ottawa that will leave Alberta behind; it is the world. The world will leave Alberta and Canada behind if we do not adapt, face the threat together, and together meet the challenges and embrace the opportunities. Let us break bread as citizens of one great country.

With an ever-tightening 20-year deadline to address climate change, there is no time to waste. An Alberta Liberal government will move immediately on several fronts. First, we'll aggressively implement a strategy to capture carbon dioxide emissions from major sources and sequester them deep underground. It's now technically feasible, and a financial framework can be worked out.

If that is in fact being announced today at Government House, we will support that initiative. Five years from now, the Alberta Liberals believe, we can have a system up and running. Five years and we can begin making an absolute reduction in CO₂ emissions.

Second, we'll implement an aggressive greening of the electricity sector. Within 10 years enough power will be generated from wind and other zero emission sources to power the equivalent of every home and farm in this province.

Third, an Alberta Liberal government will transform the natural gas rebate program to a self-sustaining building retrofit program. This will help Albertans pay for that new energy-efficient furnace or those new energy-efficient windows. Albertans will win with lower energy bills, and we all win by decreasing emissions. Why subsidize waste when we can reduce the use?

Fourth, we'll immediately establish a Premier's strategic council on carbon emissions and climate change with representatives from all sectors to engineer Alberta's drive to become a world leader in reducing carbon emissions.

And, fifth, we'll develop a long-term province-wide transportation strategy with a focus on rail and on public transit, including a route for a high-speed rail connection between Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary. It is time our airports, light rail transit railways, and roads worked together. Efficiency saves energy. The rest of the world is heading there. Why not Alberta?

These are the first steps to a sustainable environment under an Alberta Liberal government. But, Mr. Speaker, there is more to sustainability. An Alberta Liberal government will also secure a sustainable financial future. Our province has been flourishing with a government running huge surpluses funded by nonrenewable resource revenues. The key word there is nonrenewable. The current government has no strategy, no plan for managing those surpluses. It's a fiscal policy of stumble and drift. In the last 25 years the current government has spent over 93 per cent of all the petroleum royalties it has received – not invested, spent. That's on top of taxes, and it is not sustainable.

An Alberta Liberal government would be committed to converting Alberta's nonrenewable wealth into a permanent source of prosperity. During this session, the Alberta Liberal caucus will bring forward our flagship bill, the Funding Alberta's Future Act. Based on extensive research and reflecting policy we released last fall to widespread acclaim, our bill would direct the government to set aside 30 per cent of all nonrenewable resource revenues each year.

The largest portion would go to the heritage trust fund. In 20 years the Alberta government would earn more from the heritage fund than from energy's royalties. Mr. Speaker, if this House votes that down, Albertans will remember because with that bill for the first time in our history the Alberta government could have sustainable finances. No more roller-coaster rides, no more boom and bust, just quality public services and permanently competitive taxes.

This same act would secure the future of our most valuable resource: our people. How? Through education. This legislation will propose unprecedented endowment funds for postsecondary institutions, to pave the way for Alberta's postsecondary institutions to take their place among the best on the planet. Arts and culture: a real endowment to guarantee that our artists stay here where they belong.

We're not done there. As part of the same plan for fiscal sustainability the Alberta Liberal caucus would address the province's infrastructure debt head-on. Highway 63 to Fort McMurray, schools in Edmonton, hospitals in Calgary and Grande Prairie: it is all achievable; we've done the math.

Because it is so important to address the here and now, to touch people in their lives today, the Alberta Liberal caucus will bring in

a series of bills to improve everyday life for Albertans immediately. Because regional municipal planning and development are in such disarray, our shadow minister for municipal affairs and housing will introduce our sustainable communities act. Because we need to ensure an ongoing supply of water, this spring our shadow minister for the environment will introduce legislation to strengthen management of Alberta's water resources. Because Albertans are tired of being held hostage to groups like utility marketers and need help with things like landlord and tenant conflicts, our shadow minister for justice will introduce the Consumer Advocate Act to bring in real help.

Because so many Alberta families are caught in a province ranked near the bottom for child care in the entire country, our shadow minister for children's services will introduce the child care accountability and accessibility act to establish targets for the creation of new child care spaces. Because parents in Alberta are sick of soaring school fees for everything from books to computers, our shadow minister for education will introduce the restriction on school fees and fundraising act, ensuring that public education is properly funded from public sources.

Because the gaming industry in Alberta is multiplying into so many corners of our lives, our shadow minister for advanced education, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, will sponsor a bill to establish an all-party committee to review every aspect of gaming in Alberta from the role of volunteers to social problems to best management practices.

Because the best way to sustain our health care system is to protect the health of Albertans, our shadow minister for health and wellness will introduce a bill requiring health impact assessments of major government initiatives, much as we already do for environmental and social impact assessments, and as already mentioned, the Alberta Liberal caucus will bring forward a bill to reverse the government's decision to hide internal audits from Albertans.

We've come up with an ambitious agenda because Alberta is an ambitious province.

5:00

Our agenda lays the foundation for a sustainable, prosperous, and compassionate province because Albertans are demanding a sustainable, prosperous, and compassionate future. In contrast, Mr. Speaker, we've been warned to expect a, quote, light legislative agenda from the government this spring, a government with few ideas, little energy to enact them, and no particular focus.

I expect most of our bills will be voted down by our Conservative opposition. That's a shame because our agenda puts the public first, ahead of any consideration of party or politics. But Albertans will remember how their MLAs voted, and when it's time to choose the next government of Alberta, their memories will guide them.

The way things are now is not good enough, not good enough for Alberta, not good enough for the Alberta Liberals. The days of the rudderless autopilot, tax and spend, drift and stumble Conservatives have to end. They must. Coasting on our natural wealth might have been fine at one time, but in today's world it is not. If we are to choose between the status quo and the way things could be, I choose ambition. The future of our province is in all of our hands, like the financial planner answering the question, "Can I afford to invest?" with "Can you afford not to?"

Can we afford to plan 20 years out? Mr. Speaker, can we afford not to? Did Ireland go from a thousand years as the poor cousin of Europe to the wealthiest nation per capita on Earth by coasting? Has Singapore risen from a colonial backwater to a global centre by shying away from challenges? Has South Korea gone from an economy on a par with Afghanistan in 1960 – get that: South Korea

on a par with Afghanistan in 1960 – to one of the world's industrial giants today without a clear sense of direction? Has Dubai gone from a dusty, desert fiefdom to the hottest financial and tourist centre in Asia by waiting for others to take the lead? Did Alberta get where it is today by resting on its laurels? If we do not move forward, we will be left in the dust.

Mr. Speaker, Jeanette and I were recently stuck in the San Francisco airport for a nine-hour layover. So we got off the plane, and in minutes we were on a rapid-rail transit to downtown. Thirty minutes and three bucks later we stepped off in Union Square in the heart of San Francisco. In that 30-minute trip I studied a tourist map of the bay area. There were two of the world's great universities: Berkeley and Stanford. There was Silicon Valley. North were Sonoma and Napa Valley, east the Oakland coliseum, three major airports all interconnected, the downtown, the parks, the bridges, the public transit. These folks had taken all the pieces of a great city, a great region, and put them all together. No crystal balls, just some determined farsightedness had transformed all the separate pieces into one of the greatest North American planning triumphs. It's not perfect, but it is impressive.

Alberta has many of the same pieces, but we have yet to put them together. We have the makings of some of the world's great educational institutions: the U of A, the U of C, NAIT, SAIT, and others, but we're not there yet. We don't have Napa and Sonoma, but we do have Banff and Jasper. We don't have Silicon Valley, but remember that little more than a generation ago neither did they. If the world is changing and we are prepared to adapt, maybe we can be home to some future Silicon Valley equivalent. I'm talking here, Mr. Speaker, about creativity and foresight in every facet of inspired planning.

If we don't figure out where the world is headed in 20 years, we can forget about San Francisco. We're going to look more like Detroit. Remember that the world we're building today, in 20 years we hand it fully over to our kids. What will that world look like? What will Alberta look like? What will be the legacy we leave our children: our kids, mine, yours? Is right now, Mr. Speaker, really the best we can do? Is it really? We have to find a way to sustain our way of life, and to do that, we have to dream, we have to plan, we have to act, we have to manage, we have to be wise, and we have to pay ourselves first. We have to be innovative and determined.

Just a couple of weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, our office in the Legislature Annex received 20 unsolicited letters from a grade 5 class at Keheewin school in Edmonton. Each student wrote of their own concerns about climate change and global warming. One wrote: even though I'm just a kid, please take my letter seriously. Another wrote: "What can I do about this? Well, not much. But if we band together, we can do a lot more than you or me or anyone else ever imagined."

I was struck by the emotion and conviction these kids conveyed and also by the truth of a very simple message. Together we can do amazing things. Together we can make a difference, just like Kyla and Connor and Devon and their entire class are telling us. They are why we have to act and act immediately and act decisively. Our children are asking us to save their future so that they can enjoy our beautiful lands and drink clean water and breathe fresh air when they grow up. What better reason do we have?

The Alberta Liberals believe that this is our mission, our most important mission. We have the vision and the will to make it happen, to bring a new kind of government to this province. So to the grade 5 class at Keheewin school and to all Albertans we say to you: message received loud and clear.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 29(2)(a) there's provision for five minutes for brief questions or comments.

Seeing none, I recognize the hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I express my appreciation to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for – I don't know if it was by design – tailoring his speech at least to allow me my time before we have to adjourn. I appreciate that. I know that I'm always on his mind.

I would like to begin by saying that I always enjoy hearing from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, and I would like to congratulate the Premier on his first Speech from the Throne. On behalf of Alberta's NDP opposition I have the pleasure of sharing our speech from the throne for working families with you today. As Alberta's Legislative Assembly commences its new session, we have a clear message for the government and for Albertans. Alberta is currently experiencing unprecedented economic growth. Unfortunately, the Tory government's lack of planning has left many Albertans behind. The Alberta NDP has a plan that will protect and enhance the services that working and middle-class families count on. We will be their champion for their concerns.

Alberta's NDP will stand up for working and middle-class families. Alberta is currently experiencing unprecedented economic growth. A recent study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that with the exception of the very wealthy most Albertans are working harder than they were a generation ago, yet they are not getting the benefits of increased real incomes. On the contrary, Albertans are feeling the pressures of increased housing and utility costs. Many find themselves paying more for services if they can get the services at all. The businesses that are hardest hit by our current labour pressures are the small businesses, that are the cornerstone of our economy.

Alberta families need someone to be their champion. They need a government that knows what they're up against and that will take action to make their lives easier. Alberta's NDP caucus has a plan that puts working and middle-class families first. This is our speech from the throne, written with them and their families in mind. An NDP government will stand up for Alberta families by ensuring that they can access the high-quality services that they depend on.

5:10

The NDP opposition helped lead the fight against the Tory government's third-way health care privatization plan. We will continue to champion public health care so that it's there when Albertans need it. An NDP government will implement reforms that strengthen our public health care system. For example, our proposed legislation to bulk-buy drugs would save \$50 million per year by providing cheaper pharmaceuticals for Alberta families. An NDP government will continue to bring reforms to reduce wait times. We will step up efforts to train and attract more health professionals, including more family physicians.

The Conservative government has failed to ensure that class sizes are appropriate for the best possible learning. An NDP government will give schools and teachers the tools they need to provide the best learning environment for Alberta's children. With tuition fees and rents on the rise many families are struggling to pay for postsecondary education. An NDP government will make tuition and associated education costs affordable for all Albertans.

Many Alberta families are struggling to find the care their aging parents need. There aren't enough spaces in long-term care facilities, and often these facilities do not meet basic standards. The Tory government has failed to implement the Auditor General's

recommendations for improving the standards for long-term care in Alberta. An NDP government will ensure that seniors who helped build this province have safe and comfortable accommodation. We will treat our seniors with the dignity and respect they deserve.

An NDP government will give tangible support to municipalities to provide safe streets. Community policing and crime reduction strategies are effective ways to make our communities safer. Alberta needs a provincial crime reduction strategy, which includes funding for 500 new community police officers across Alberta. We will support programs for young people dealing with addictions and to help at-risk youth get off the street. An NDP government would give municipalities the tools they need to foster their communities, particularly stable and predictable long-term funding. Housing, policing, and transit will be urban priorities for an NDP government.

A severe shortage of housing has led to soaring rents, large hikes in the cost of houses, and an increase in homelessness. The Tory government's failure to plan is hurting Albertans. While the government has established a task force on housing, it is too early to tell what its recommendations will be or whether they will be accepted. An NDP government will establish a ministry of housing, which will co-ordinate initiatives such as affordable housing programs, rent review legislation, and land banking for Alberta municipalities. Homelessness in a province as wealthy as Alberta is unacceptable. An NDP government will not rest until it is eliminated.

An NDP government will renegotiate an agreement with the federal government to ensure that employers must first demonstrate that there are no qualified Albertan or Canadian workers available before receiving approval to bring in temporary foreign workers. Employers will be expected to work constructively with legitimate trade unions and the Alberta government to ensure that the labour needs of industry are met and that Albertan and Canadian workers are given priority for employment. The NDP caucus supports initiatives to support skills training and labour force development for aboriginal and Métis Albertans. We will strengthen the role of legitimate building trades unions in the training and indenturing of apprentices.

Alberta is experiencing a severe infrastructure crisis. In order to pay off the provincial debt, the Tory government has systematically underfunded provincial infrastructure. The result is that we now have a massive infrastructure debt of between \$10 billion and \$20 billion. The first step for an NDP government in addressing our infrastructure debt will be to develop a complete and honest accounting of the current infrastructure debt facing the government, school boards, hospitals, postsecondary institutions, and municipalities. We will then develop a multi-billion-dollar capital plan to systematically update Alberta's infrastructure over the next 10 years.

Projects will be funded on a pay-as-you-go basis, supplemented by low-interest financing. This honest and transparent approach is in direct contrast to the Tory government's plans to utilize P3s to build needed infrastructure projects. Under the government's plan private business would build and own many of our hospitals, roads, and schools. They would borrow money to do it and at a higher interest rate than the government. All costs plus a profit would be recovered from the taxpayers, yet the financial debt would appear on corporate, not government, books. P3s are simply a way of hiding public debt while increasing it at the same time. P3s have a long history of cost overruns, substandard quality, and unwieldy long-term contracts. An NDP government will reject this approach.

Global climate change threatens human civilization itself. The Conservative government seems unable to come to grips with its own responsibility in this matter. Uncontrolled and unplanned expansion of tar sands development not only disrupts the economy;

it will soon become the source of the largest increase in CO₂ emissions in the world. The Tory government's use of emissions intensity targets is deliberately misleading. It allows total emissions of CO₂ to continue to rise dramatically while their so-called intensity drops. We will oppose government legislation to further entrench emission intensity as the basis for Alberta's climate change strategy. An NDP government will work with industry to develop guidelines for real and meaningful limits on CO₂ emissions.

We will implement a temporary moratorium on the approval of new tar sands projects while a long-term economic and environmental strategy for the development of the tar sands is developed. This will include a plan for impacts on water and natural gas supplies, the labour market, and the environment. An NDP government will pursue a balanced approach to reducing emissions. We have already introduced legislation designed to help individual Albertans do their share. These include our 2006 bill to allow net metering of electricity and our 2005 bill to create a revolving fund to promote energy efficiency retrofits.

Alberta faces a looming water crisis. The Tory government has failed to fully fund the Water for Life strategy. Meanwhile, water licences are overallocated, population growth is outstripping our supplies of water, and the ever-growing thirst of the petroleum industry jeopardizes the long-term availability of clean water. An NDP government will make water supply and water quality a top priority.

Albertans are not getting their fair share as the owners of our precious nonrenewable resources. The energy corporations exploiting these resources are reaping the benefits of the unprecedented price of oil and the Conservative government's cut-rate royalties. Most tar sands projects still pay only 1 per cent royalty on the oil they produce. An NDP government will develop a royalty regime that is fair to Albertans, encourages the sustainable development of oil and gas resources, and ensures that bitumen will be processed here in Alberta. While recent surpluses seem large, they are small in comparison to the real value of our nonrenewable resources. We need to invest significantly more to create a renewable energy economy to ensure that our children and grandchildren inherit a green and prosperous future. An NDP government will create a green energy fund to invest in energy conservation, research and development of renewable energy, and green energy projects.

Alberta's NDP is committed to a balanced budget. An NDP government would cancel the massive corporate tax cuts supported by the Conservatives and the Liberals. When corporations like EnCana are earning \$6 billion in profits in one year, they do not need tax cuts. If corporations pay their fair share, working- and middle-class families have a chance to get ahead.

Sound land-use planning becomes critically important during periods of rapid growth. The government has a responsibility in ensuring that clear and distinct roles are set out for urban and rural municipalities. An NDP government will move to limit urban sprawl by restoring meaningful regional planning. Preservation of agricultural land and rural lifestyles will be important goals.

The government's flagship legislation is a bill to create a lobbyist registry. Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador all have such registries already, and the NDP opposition has been advocating this for a number of years. The Tory government has failed to include cooling-off periods in their legislation for former government officials entering the private sector. The Conservative government has repeatedly used Alberta's freedom of information legislation to justify hiding public information. In the last session of the Legislative Assembly the Tory government pushed through legislation that would restrict access to ministers' briefing notes and lock up internal audits for 15 years. An NDP

government will conduct an open and comprehensive review of Alberta's information laws.

5:20

The NDP opposition has proposed legislation that would create a commission on electoral reform, introduced private members' motions that would end the use of the Public Affairs Bureau as a Conservative government propaganda machine, and brought forward emergency motions to require disclosure of leadership campaign donations. True democratic reform should begin with legislation to get big money out of politics. An NDP government will eliminate corporate and union political donations and ensure that leadership contests for political parties are subject to the same limits and disclosure requirements as other political fundraising.

Alberta is at a crossroads. We can continue down the same path of uncontrolled growth, polluted air, and crumbling schools, or we

can take another path. As a province we have an unprecedented opportunity to create a green and prosperous future. We can ensure healthy families living in healthy communities, and by working together, we can build an open and inclusive democracy. We hope that Albertans will join us.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I'd move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 12.

[Motion carried; at 5:21 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 12, 2007**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 2007/03/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome.

Let us pray. As we begin our deliberations in this sitting of the Legislature, we ask for the insight we need to do our work to the benefit of our province and its people and to the benefit of our country. Amen.

Now, hon. members, we'll proceed to the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Would all participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the high commissioner for the Republic of Kenya, Her Excellency Judith Mbula Bahemuka. With the high commissioner is Mr. Kennedy Barasa, second counsellor of the high commission in Ottawa. This is the high commissioner's first visit to Alberta, and we feel honoured that she chose to come to our province less than a year into her appointment.

We had lunch today with Her Excellency, and we had some great discussions about potential partnerships in not only postsecondary but in the other areas of forestry and agriculture. As well, the high commissioner spoke very passionately about her belief in education and postsecondary.

They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two people sitting in your gallery today who are members of the Edmonton branch of the Royal Commonwealth Society. The society is a cosponsor and assists with the promotion of the annual Alberta Commonwealth Parliamentary Association student essay competition. I'd ask that Dr. John Slade, treasurer, and Mr. Joe Zasada, director at large, rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a rare privilege for me to be able to introduce to you a brand new Albertan, my brand new granddaughter. She'll be three days old at 1:58 today. Her name is Alexa Grace Kathleen Haley. She is accompanied by her dad and mom, Jeff and Layna Haley. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this province.

The Speaker: Well, I must say that I am stunned. The hon. member is way too young to be a grandmother.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour and privilege again to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a group of grade 6 students from the Rimbey elementary school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Howey, and parent helpers Lennie McFadyen, Mary Palm, Laura Baker, Mike Weatherald, Joanne McNaught, and Ann-Marie Trautman. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first is Annemarie Larsen. Annemarie is participating in a job shadowing program, so she job shadowed me this morning. Annemarie is a law student at the University of Alberta and already has a BA in psychology and philosophy under her belt, so no wonder she is going into law. She is very interested in increasing the role of women in the Legislature and is especially interested in representation of women and women's issues. I'd ask Annemarie to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

My second introduction today, Mr. Speaker, is the new outreach co-ordinator for the Edmonton-Centre constituency office. It's taken us a long time to find him, so we are very pleased to welcome Richard Engelhardt. Richard's past positions have been as office manager for the PRIDE centre, and he also worked for some time for Martin Equipment. He is currently working toward a bachelor of fine arts, with a major in sociology and a minor in psychology, at Grant MacEwan College. I would ask Richard to please rise and accept our warm welcome.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, as well, have two introductions. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent who has been in the news over the development of her three boys. They have each been diagnosed with the rare disease known as Hunter syndrome, and unless the boys are treated with Elaprase, the boys face an early, certain death. I've asked Nicole to come forward today to remind the minister that she is still waiting for a meeting. I'd like Nicole Miranda as well as her mother, Sandra Hartling, to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The second introduction, Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of the Assembly is the grade 6 class from Lago Lindo elementary school in my constituency. There are 52 of them. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Peters and Mrs. Goodall, as well as parent helpers Mrs. Heemeryck, Mrs. Lesyk, Mr. Rowley, Mrs. Mah, Mr. Odenbach, and Mrs. LaBrie. I would like them all to please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly two dedicated workers in the province of Alberta, part of the Farmworkers Union of Alberta. They are here for the third year in a row, calling for dignity and basic human rights for farm workers. If you'd stand, we will give you the welcome of the Legislature.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Deron Bilous. Deron was born and raised here in Edmonton and received his bachelor of education from the University of Alberta in 2001. He currently teaches English and physical education at Inner City high. Deron has worked with Canada World Youth, supervising international youth exchange programs across Canada and in China, Brazil, and Poland. We are proud to have Deron join the NDP team as our candidate in Edmonton-Centre in the next election. He is seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am very delighted to introduce to you and through you to this House Christina Gray. Christina teaches computer programming at DevStudios. She was born in Edmonton and has lived in the Woodvale community in Mill Woods for the last four years. She is the chair of the Edmonton Transit System Advisory Board and volunteers on the Support Network's 24-hour crisis line. Christina is also active in our community working on both the Woodvale Community League and the Mill Woods Crime Prevention Council. We are pleased to have Christina as part of the NDP team as a candidate in Edmonton-Mill Woods for the next election. I will now ask Christina to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly some staff from my department and the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation, who just spent the past two weeks braving frigid temperatures up north in Whitehorse. These individuals were there as part of Team Alberta, which was competing at the 2007 Canada Winter Games. The games bring together the best young athletes in 21 different sport disciplines once every four years, and once again Alberta proved to the rest of the country that we are a force to reckon with. We brought home 79 medals, good for a third-place finish behind Quebec and Ontario. This is the fourth time Alberta has finished a Canada Winter Games in third place, which was the goal set by the team before the games began.

Here today from Team Alberta mission staff are Cam Berwald, the team's chef de mission. Cam did an incredible job keeping 260 athletes in check and ready to compete. She was helped by Scott Fraser, the assistant chef de mission, and others who provided valuable support to Team Alberta, including Korrine Krokosh, Jerry George, Roger Kramers, Steve Pritchard, and Lloyd Bentz. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Holy Cross Care Centre

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Forty-two seniors in Calgary are currently being relocated from the Holy Cross centre long-term care facility due to inadequate care and fire code violations. This incident indicates that the facilities that care for our most vulnerable citizens do not appear to have improved since the Auditor General's scathing report into long-term care nearly two years ago. The province also refuses to implement legislated, province-wide standards for continuing care. My questions are to the Premier. Given that long-term care residents in the Holy Cross centre will be moved out over the next 30 days, how can the Premier reassure Albertans that the health and safety of the assisted living residents who will remain in the building are not also at risk?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have very good policies and procedures in place to protect those in care. With respect to assisted living it's an administrative matter, and I'll leave it to the minister of health to answer.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, do you wish to supplement?

If not, the hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: has the Premier been able to determine how long the residents were at risk before the decision was made to move them?

Mr. Stelmach: There was a fair amount of work done by the minister of health, and he'll be able to answer that question.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been some ongoing monitoring of the situation at the long-term care centre at the Holy Cross in Calgary. There was an inspection, I'm advised, by the city of Calgary on the fire and safety codes issues, and a report was issued on that in December. I was made aware of the situation early in February, I believe. The Calgary regional health authority has been monitoring the situation relative to the long-term care beds in that particular facility and working with the fire and safety codes people to make sure that safety is not compromised for the residents. There has been a fire watch put in place, as I understand it, and the Calgary regional health authority has put in place their own personnel to make sure that both the safety issues and the care issues of the long-term care residents in that facility are taken care of.

With respect to the assisted living, that is a private facility, but they still operate under the fire codes and safety codes, so the owners of the facility will have to answer to the city of Calgary's fire and safety with respect to making sure that safety is monitored on that side as well.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that the Auditor General's report on the quality of long-term care across the province indicated that clear standards of care were needed – and that was two years ago – why is this government continuing to delay on creating legislated province-wide standards of care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta has invested a considerable amount of money in the care of our seniors and will continue to do that. I know that there were additional dollars that went into the ministry's budget to move us forward towards the recommendations that came forward from the long-term care committee. We're doing the best we can. Just by memory, I think there was at least \$70 million injected into it. But if further details are required, I can have the minister respond.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Royalty Review Panel

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is failing its claims to openness and accountability when it comes to the issue of appointments to the Royalty Review Panel. Instead of a truly independent, balanced panel, we have a flawed process, blatant conflicts of interest, and serious questions about panelists' qualifications and their independence from this government. Albertans have questions they want this Premier to answer. To the Premier: given the Minister of Finance's embarrassing admission last week that unbeknownst to him one panel member – and I quote *Hansard* – “has actually done a considerable amount of work on finances with regard to oil companies,” will the Premier tell this Assembly what personal financial interests this individual may have in energy-related businesses?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans want to know at the completion of this royalty review is whether the royalty regime that's in place today is fair: fair to those that make hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of investment in the oil and gas industry and also to all of us as Albertans, as equal shareholders in the natural resources. That is the purpose of this royalty review.

Dr. Taft: Again, he's failing to be open and accountable, so I will ask him another question. To the Premier: given that the Minister of Finance admits that he was unaware of the panelist's history of working with oil companies prior to his appointment, can the Premier tell this Assembly what qualified this person as panelist in the first place other than that he is a friend of the Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, making allegations in the House like that – he doesn't know who my friends are, who my enemies are, so maybe do a little bit more research on that.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, all members of the panel are professionals. They're economists. They're people with professional designations. I expect them to live up to their commitments as professionals in those key areas, to do a very thorough review of the royalties, put all that information on the table, and Albertans will make that determination of whether the royalty regime is fair or not.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier, and I will continue until he answers: is the Premier finally prepared to answer the question of whether any panelists or their companies financially supported his or the Minister of Finance's PC leadership campaigns?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, following the question from the hon. leader last week, I made a commitment that I'd check to make sure if there was anything coming from any member of the five members on the committee. There are none at all in terms of any contribu-

tions to me, you know, to my campaign. They checked whatever company names or individual names, and there are none on the record.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I would just add to that that none of the people on the royalty review commission made any contribution to my leadership campaign.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

1:50

Holy Cross Care Centre (continued)

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. Given the old Holy Cross hospital site's ongoing list of problems and controversies since it was sold to private owners 10 years ago – toxic mould, asbestos abatement issues, fire code violations, and now the Calgary health region's conclusion that the long-term care facility fails to meet provincial standards of care – it's time to make sure that private providers of care are held accountable, and it's time to restore public confidence. Will the Premier commit to launching a public inquiry into the operations of the Holy Cross site?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, no. I have great confidence in the Calgary regional health authority, that has a contract with the owners. First and foremost, it's safety and, of course, care of our seniors in that institution. If there is any further work to be done by the Calgary regional health authority or further help that they require from this government, we'll be there to help.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the potential province-wide implications here, the ongoing problems at the Holy Cross site, the inherent vulnerability of the residents in care, and the province's duty of care to the residents, why won't the Premier do the right thing and investigate the situation?

Mr. Stelmach: The authority is responsible to the minister of health, and if the minister of health feels that either the Calgary regional health authority or someone in the process isn't doing their job, I'm sure that the minister will step in and ensure the safety of our seniors in that facility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the health minister's admission just a moment ago that he knew of fire code violations in the Holy Cross building in early February and given that the residents of the assisted living facility there have recently been notified that their rents are increasing by about 40 per cent, what is the Premier doing to rectify one or the other matter?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the kinds of long-term care services that Alberta provides are outstanding. In fact, we spend a considerable amount of money in terms of the care, the amount of insured drugs, the kind of health services. Is there more to do, generally speaking, across the province for an aging population? Certainly. Those are going to be the kind of cost pressures that are going to be coming forward in the budget that will be presented in this House. We're trying to find people to fill all of the positions – dietary and

housekeeping, not only nursing and physicians – to take care of our seniors. But I'm proud of the progress that has been accomplished and proud of the fact that we're going to move ahead in this area.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Alberta Clipper Pipeline Proposal

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During his PC leadership campaign the Premier said that exporting raw bitumen to the U.S. for processing is like scraping off the topsoil, selling it, and thinking we have a rich farm because we have cash in the bank. If we insist on selling raw product out of this province, our province will lose not only the taxes and royalties on the value-added products but also high-quality and long-term jobs. If approved, the Alberta Clipper pipeline would do just that: send jobs and taxes elsewhere for someone else's profit. My question is to the Premier. Given your promises to Albertans during the PC leadership race, will you now reject the Alberta Clipper pipeline proposal?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, well, at least someone was listening to what I was saying during the leadership campaign. Thank you very much for quoting it almost verbatim.

Part of our ongoing discussion with Albertans is how we can increase our tax base by adding more value not only to oil and gas and the petrochemical industry but also to agriculture and forestry. The discussions that are occurring with respect to how we can add value to bitumen are important to us. We are of course going through the review at the moment, and then the next step is: how can we work with industry and Albertans to ensure that the future generations have more in terms of a secure fiscal regime other than just selling off natural resources?

Mr. Mason: Words don't make jobs, Mr. Speaker.

The question to the Premier is this. Will the government reject the Alberta Clipper project, which is now under consideration and which will do exactly what the Premier said that he wouldn't do?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. leader of the third party is well aware of the position that I and this government and my caucus have taken. We're going to look at every opportunity to add value to raw products, oil and gas or agriculture or forestry.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, one more time to the Premier: will he ensure that he closes the barn door before the horse is gone and stand in this House and tell us the government's position on the approval of the Alberta Clipper project to export unprocessed bitumen to the United States?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there have been agreements put in place prior to my arrival in this particular position. All I'm saying very clearly to all industry is that part of a very important goal of this government is to add value to products, and we're going to move in that direction. We're going to discuss with various industries to put those policies in place. What has been done in the past I can't undo.

The other issue here too . . . [interjections] Just hold it. Hold it. Hold it. Don't get too excited. The other part here is that there also has to be a need to place value on bitumen. Okay? And here's the other question: some of it will have to be exported to get the value of bitumen in the world market to see how we can find the balance

in terms of what that bitumen is actually worth. So it's a little more complex than what the hon. member makes it out to be.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Agricultural Assistance

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the federal government announced \$1 billion in funding to the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, also known as CAIS. I know that Alberta farmers have been watching this program closely, especially with the challenges facing the agricultural sector in recent years. Six hundred million dollars would go to start a producer savings account somewhat like the previous NISA program, and \$400 million would go towards production costs. Farmers have been battling drought, BSE, low commodity prices, and now high input costs. My question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Food. How does this assistance purport to tackle these issues?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, this is indeed good news. While the federal money depends on budget approval, it does point in the right direction for Alberta. However, at this particular time not all of the details are in. Most of this money would go to kick-starting the savings accounts that Alberta has in fact pressed for for the last number of years. This will let the producer direct his or her own funds, with a matching grant from the government. We are also pleased that there is recognition of the cost of production in it because we all know that the costs of production are certainly on the rise all the time.

But as I said, Mr. Speaker, I still have to see the details and how they help Alberta's industry. CAIS is far from perfect, in my mind, and I hope that this is an indication that we will see some good common sense and changes coming. They are indeed long overdue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how does this announcement get to the recent challenges with eroding reference margins, and where does this put Alberta after all of the extra work that we've done with the existing CAIS program?

Mr. Groeneveld: That raises a good point, Mr. Speaker. Back-to-back disasters have put our operators in a tight position. However, no one could have seen this coming. Alberta responded a few years ago with a pilot project to provide more realistic support that reflected the real-life situation on our farms today. This is a key issue that we're hammering at with the federal government and continue to work on, but Alberta is indeed committed to some interim support, as we always have been, over and above the regular call.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister be getting some of these issues resolved at the national table?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Alberta still has a lot of work to do on the whole CAIS issue, but we've had some excellent opportunities to make changes this year. While the national policy framework that my predecessor has been working on is pretty much

complete now, we met in Leduc this last week with 60 stakeholders to move this forward and try to improve the opportunities for our Alberta farmers. I am looking forward in the next months here – I think it's on April 12 and one time in June – to meeting with the federal minister and provincial ministers to discuss this further.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Integrated Land-use Management Strategy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to fail the people of Alberta in protecting our environment and special places. The Rumsey natural area, 149 square kilometres, has been subject to increasing oil and gas development for years pending its designation as a heritage rangeland. Recent surveys of the area have revealed many examples of failed protection, weed infestation, and failed reclamation from previous resource companies. Agreement with various stakeholder groups was reached for no new roads and no new well pads many years ago. Still, new CBM wells have been recently approved. To the Premier: since public polls are also saying that they don't want to support new development on these lands, and a 2001 agreement was to phase out new development in these areas, why is this area not off limits to oil and gas development?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, my information is that there were previous agreements that had to be honoured before land was of course assigned to the special places. But I don't know all of the details, and I'll leave it to the minister responsible.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is asking a very, very important question. I need to say that the Rumsey block itself that he's talking about includes two protected areas. In the one, certainly, there is absolutely no oil or gas activity that is allowed in the Rumsey ecological reserve. But in the Rumsey natural areas energy commitments are subject to the conditions that were established in 1993, Mr. Speaker, as part of the multistakeholder plan, and that particular plan states that surface access is subject to various specific restrictions. My staff worked and is continuing to work with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to determine what conditions to attach to minimize the impact of the existing activity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: given that Albertans have waited 14 years for an integrated land-use framework that protects sensitive areas such as the Rumsey, when will we see a completed land-use strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our new Premier's commitment, of course, is to secure the quality of life and also manage growth pressures for all Albertans, and in that vein, he has given our ministry, Sustainable Resource Development, our number one mandate: coming up with, developing a land-use framework. The integrated land management process, something that is already in place, will be developed, will be folded into that. I can assure you

that Albertans are going to be very happy with this process. Public consultations are going forth starting this spring and more stakeholder consultation starting in May or June. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment: given that evidence exists that coal-bed methane activity is already affecting groundwater, what are you doing with the results, and where are the results of the past five years of coal-bed methane experimentation in the Horseshoe Canyon formation?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue related to the analysis of the water and coal-bed methane is an ongoing, continuous event. As the member well knows, we've had discussions. There are test wells that have been and are currently being drilled. The results from those wells are something that is taken over time, so the analysis will take some time. I'm sure that once we've got some kind of sufficient amount of data to make some kind of meaningful determination, we'll be pleased to share those results with the member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Federal Equalization Payments

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There seems to be some confusion over Alberta's position on the equalization formula that would potentially include natural resource revenues. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, can you please advise this Assembly what Alberta's position is on the proposed inclusion of natural resources in the equalization formula?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have a letter. When I say we, the Council of the Federation, this is all of the 10 Premiers. This letter was of course written to the then chair, the former Premier Ralph Klein, and again reiterated the position that the federal government will not include natural resource revenue in the calculation of the equalization formula. All we're doing is that we're going to hold the Prime Minister to that commitment.

Mr. Lukaszuk: My first supplemental is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Have you had an opportunity to advise your federal counterparts, in particular the Prime Minister's office, of Alberta's position as just stated by the Premier on the potential inclusion of natural resources in any potential equalization formulas?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, our Premier has submitted exactly the point regarding that we do not support nonrenewable resources being part of the equalization formula. I will table this letter that our Premier has submitted to the Prime Minister and also a copy of the letter from the Prime Minister to the government of Alberta and to our Premier, indicating that he has no intention of including nonrenewable resources in the formula. We expect him to live up to that commitment he made as a Prime Minister that comes from Alberta.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental is to the Minister of Finance. Have you had an opportunity to communicate Alberta's position as stated by this Premier on the inclusion of natural resources in any equalization formula to your federal counterpart prior to his dropping of the federal budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to reiterate to people that the federal equalization program is based on federal taxation dollars. So it is federal taxation dollars that are coming from Alberta, going to Ottawa, and then are equalized.

The second point is that if the resource dollars are included in the equalization formula, according to the O'Brien report they're potentially looking at an increase of \$900 million. If we were to receive dollars back from that – and I must emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that that's a big if – we would be receiving about \$90 million. But the most important thing for Albertans is the per capita payments. Currently in Alberta there are eight provinces who receive over \$925 per capita. In Alberta we receive \$755. If we were to go to the level of \$925 per capita, which seven of 10 provinces are at, it would mean another \$571 million for the province of Alberta, which is a huge sum.

Mr. Speaker, in direct response to the hon. member's question: yes, I have communicated this position to the Minister of Finance, and we are talking prior to the budget being released.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Funding for Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People with disabilities and their caregivers are not being given the attention or the respect that they deserve. The turnover rate for caregivers of people with disabilities ranges from an astounding 40 to 90 per cent. The community is very vocal about the need for increased funding for front-line staff in order to provide safe and adequate services. My question would be to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What plan does the minister have to ensure that people with developmental disabilities will not have to reduce the amount of care they receive because of inadequate funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province has one of the best records across the country in supplying services to those with disabilities. It is going to continue to be an emphasis of this government. I'd say that over the last seven years our funding has increased over 80 per cent, a very substantial increase when the caseload is nowhere near those kinds of numbers. We do acknowledge that this is a group of people that are in need of assistance. These are some of the most vulnerable people in our society, and we take it very seriously to ensure that they have the levels of support that they require.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another question to the same minister: what plan does the minister have to respond to the needs of the community by improving wages for front-line care workers to maintain the ones that we have?

2:10

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I met recently with the association of service providers and will continue to meet with all those providing the services to those persons with developmental disabilities. We have also just recently reallocated from our budget funds another \$11.3 million directly to developmental disability boards. That'll go

to the service providers in acknowledgement of the wages and ensure that we can meet those needs to ensure that those people can retain the staff that they require.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. That is welcome news. I'm hoping that it will be enough. What concrete action will the minister take to prove to the people with disabilities that they really are a priority with this government and it'll show in the next budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess we'll stay tuned to the next budget so that we can answer more fully that question.

It has been a priority. The funding levels have been increasing each year, and it will continue to be that. We are going to ensure that it's not just a matter of dollars; we're going to work very closely on how we get best use for those dollars in our organization. How do we ensure that we get the best creative approaches to providing those services amongst those delivering that service? We're going to work closely with those providing the services. We're going to ensure that it's supported by the funding necessary and ensure that these people are very much important to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Gravel Pit Reclamation

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the municipalities in my constituency, Camrose county, contacted me regarding the code of practice for gravel pits. They're concerned about the follow-up on the reclamation of abandoned gravel pits. If these pits are not reclaimed, they become a haven for noxious weeds and illegal dumping, which then becomes an issue for the municipality. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What can be done to address the noxious weeds and illegal dumping in the abandoned gravel pits?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to understand that as long as a gravel pit exists, it is the responsibility of the approval holder to ensure that there are no adverse effects on the environment. So to specifically answer the member's question, if the county, or any other Albertan for that matter, feels that there are environmental concerns associated with a gravel pit, I would encourage them to call Alberta Environment. We have a 24-hour complaint line: 1-800-222-6514.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. To the same minister: does Alberta Environment have a process for following up on reclamation, including a timeline for reclamation?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, once an approval holder decides to reclaim a gravel pit, there are a couple of things that happen. First of all, they are required to reclaim it to standard. It's in their best interest to ensure that they do so because associated with the approval is a security deposit that is held, and that security deposit would be held until Alberta Environment is satisfied that the gravel pit or any other kind of environmental issue is dealt with adequately through a reclamation certificate.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister: so, Mr. Minister, if these pits are abandoned and not reclaimed, then what is the process by which a municipality can have the pit reclaimed?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned in answer to the previous question the matter of a security deposit. That security deposit is established at a sufficient value that if the gravel pit has not been reclaimed, the security deposit is held, and the proceeds will be used by Alberta Environment to ensure that the reclamation is conducted appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In just 20 days the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or TILMA, between this province and British Columbia comes into effect. There has been to date no discussion in this Chamber on the substance or timing of the agreement. It was negotiated behind closed doors, away from the inconvenient prying eyes of Albertans. My first question is to the Premier. How can the Premier justify such an undemocratic, nontransparent process?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the agreement that the hon. member is talking about is actually a groundbreaking agreement that other provinces, including the province of Ontario – and Saskatchewan has already inquired to see if they can be a partner. I had a very good meeting with Premier Fentie from the Yukon, who wants to see if he can participate as well. We do have a scheduled period of implementation. There'll be more discussion with respect to this particular agreement.

An Hon. Member: Behind closed doors.

Mr. Stelmach: Behind closed doors. They always come up with "behind closed doors." Mr. Speaker, do you see the door open here or open there? No, but it's the most public facility right here in the province of Alberta, so I don't know where they're coming up with this "behind closed doors."

Mr. Bonko: To the Premier again: what additional funding are municipalities, school boards, health regions, academic institutions going to receive to enable them to be fully compliant with TILMA's many provisions?

Mr. Stelmach: This agreement, Mr. Speaker, is to break down the barriers of trade, labour mobility, procurement between the province of British Columbia and Alberta. Now, before the two cabinets met over a period of a number of years, we had rules that would actually not permit a licensed welder – a red seal welder can weld pipeline on the Alberta side right up to this imaginary line, the Alberta/B.C. border, but could not weld the same pipeline on the other side. Well, if we're going to compete around the world in terms of our exports, we're going to have to co-operate locally. That is very, very important because without that co-operation we'll not be able to maintain our global competitiveness.

Mr. Bonko: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe I'll try it again. Same question: what additional funding are the municipalities, school boards, health authorities, academic institutions going to receive to enable them to be fully compliant with TILMA's many provisions?

Mr. Stelmach: One of the first questions I hear is: how much additional funding? This is to save money to ensure that we become more efficient and more effective, and where this issue of more money coming forward – I'm not quite sure. There's about \$14 billion of economic barriers today in the country of Canada as a result of these regulations that were put in there years and years ago for no reason at all, but today they're costing all of us a considerable amount of money, and that is one of the reasons why we entered into this agreement. As I said, we have an implementation period. We'll meet with municipalities and all of the MUSH sector to make sure that everybody has the information necessary to move ahead.

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

Alberta/Montana Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have serious concerns about the construction of a 500 kV power line through central Alberta. The EUB has failed to appropriately consult the people affected by this line in a timely manner. While Albertans demand decisive action on climate change, the government seeks to approve massive new coal plants and inefficient long-distance overhead power lines for this new project. My questions are to the Premier. Considering that this 500 kV power line is designed in part as a merchant line to export electricity, why are Alberta ratepayers expected to pay the full price for this new power line?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hearings, I believe, have begun today in Red Deer in terms of the transmission line, so I'm not going to make any comments about that because it's before the board.

With respect to the other issue in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, I believe that last week our Minister of Environment tabled legislation, the only piece of legislation to be tabled in all of Canada with respect to setting some targets for greenhouse gas emissions and putting in place a process to reduce greenhouse gas emissions over a period of time, so we're taking a leadership role in this area.

2:20

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, the intensity and absolute reductions are two completely different things. The Premier is referring to the former. So I would very much like to ask the Premier how he could justify a scheme to burn coal in Alberta to produce electricity to export out of the province while Albertans are left holding the bag with all the carbon dioxide and other toxic emissions.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the first question from the party was about adding value to bitumen. Well, if you do put in an upgrader plant, which I believe they support, guess what? There'll be more CO₂ emitted. Now, all of a sudden, they're saying they're moving toward absolute. I say: you want absolute, like right now? Park your car. That'll give you absolute emissions right now.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would be delighted to, absolutely. I would consider parking my car the day that all the SUVs from the other side get parked. I would be happy to do so: same day, same service, no problem.

Mr. Speaker, considering how confused the approval process has been so far, why won't the Premier at least delay the hearings until a full and public disclosure can be made and the affected farmers in the region can be done with their calving season?

Mr. Stelmach: There are two parts to that question. With respect to

parking, that's the same old thing: always somebody expecting somebody else to take the first step. Not me, you know. If I want a 20-minute shower, it's up to me. Everybody else has to have a five-minute shower.

Anyway, with respect to the farmers those issues we've heard very clearly. Our MLAs are getting the kind of letters and questions with respect to compensation. All of those issues, I'm very confident, will be dealt with by the authority that's in place, and that's the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

The Speaker: Okay. I heard it. I'll get the light bulbs changed as soon as I can. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Oil and Gas Activity in Rumsey Natural Area

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a Texas-based company was granted approval to drill for coal-bed methane in Rumsey natural area. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Why is drilling allowed in an area that is designated as protected?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, the Rumsey block includes two protected areas, and one of them allows certain activities to happen whereas the other one doesn't.

It's important to recognize that Alberta's special places program ran from 1995 until 2001 and put over 2 million hectares of land under protection in 81 new and 13 expanded areas. As I indicated, there were four areas established under special places. We agreed to honour the existing oil and gas commitments as a matter of fairness. Ten areas, including Rumsey natural area, were under consideration for protection before special places. Their designation, therefore, allowed and followed a different process, resulting in different levels of industrial activities there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is to the same minister. Is there an opportunity to limit the amount of oil and gas activity in the Rumsey natural area?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, over 27,000 square kilometres of Alberta's great outdoors are presently preserved. I need to say that we've got over 500 parks and protected areas, covering an area about the size of Belgium, Mr. Speaker. I need to add that our continued prosperity is very much dependent on striking a balance between our economic growth and our environmental protection.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to both managing growth pressure and improving Alberta's quality of life, and to further that, my staff will keep on discussing those particular concerns with the Minister of Energy and his staff.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Family Violence

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters has just released its statistics for the past fiscal year, and the numbers are sobering. Alberta has the highest rate of domestic violence of any province, and the council's report suggests that many women and children are not getting the services they need.

To the Minister of Children's Services: given that in the past year

13,000 women and children were turned away from women's shelters because they were full, what backup plan does the minister have to ensure that these endangered women and children receive the help that they need?

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you very much. First of all, I appreciate the question. I think this is a very important area. Also, I want to say that the people that work in women's shelters have my upmost respect because I think they do incredible work rebuilding the lives of families.

One thing I would say: several weeks ago I did meet with some representation from the Council of Women's Shelters, and that was one of the reasons why I wanted to make sure that we made the announcement last week that we did, the 3 per cent retroactive to last year, April 1, 2006, because I do know that one of their top issues was staffing.

The other thing I can say is that we're very close to finalizing the women's shelter review, and that will be very telling for us. It's been a very thorough review. It took a look at where we came from when we look at the history of women's shelters, what's working really well, and how we can move forward. So I do look forward to working with stakeholders once that review is released.

Mrs. Mather: To the Solicitor General: given the essential role of police services in protecting women and children from domestic violence, what resources are dedicated to this issue to ensure that police are able to respond to cases effectively?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to reiterate that this government is committed to providing safe and secure communities for all Albertans. Specifically, in regard to domestic violence we are committed to reducing family violence, a very high priority for our government. For example, we have allocated \$1.7 million toward the Alberta relationship threat assessment and management initiative, or TAMI. It's a first in Canada. It links police, prosecutors, and community agencies to help reduce and prevent domestic violence and stalking.

Mrs. Mather: To the minister of municipal affairs: given that a reported 75 per cent of women who returned to abusive partners after receiving services cited lack of affordable housing as the main reason, a 50 per cent increase from 2005, how will the minister ensure that housing options are available for women experiencing domestic violence?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that affordable housing is a priority of this government. The establishment of the housing task force, that has been throughout Alberta, consulting with Albertans to hear some of the challenges that Albertans have, is going to report to my ministry on March 19. At that time we will go through the process, and we'll definitely have a report for this government.

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

Outbreak of Infectious Syphilis

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend

Albertans were warned about the risk of sexually transmitted infections due to a significant rise in the number of syphilis cases. Nine babies have been born with this infection in the past two years, and the infection has spread beyond the traditional high-risk groups. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. At this time can you update this Assembly on the infectious syphilis outbreak and why it exists?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, on Friday we did put out a news release in the province, indicating that we were very concerned about the outbreak of syphilis in the province, a serious increase. When you talk about 200 cases, it may not seem like a lot, but the exponential increase year over year is very significant and important enough that we want to make sure that Albertans are aware of it and taking appropriate precautions. The outbreak is widespread. It's not isolated to any particular area or any particular identifiable group. An Albertan as young as 15 and an Albertan as old as 81 have been affected.

As the hon. member has indicated, we've had nine cases of congenital syphilis diagnosed, babies born with the infection. That hasn't happened in Alberta for a significant period of time, so we're very concerned about it. We want to make sure that Albertans are aware of it and that they're taking the appropriate precautions.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: what is the province doing to reduce the number of cases?

Mr. Hancock: Well, as I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, we did put out a notice on Friday to Albertans, which was picked up by the news media. In addition, we will be engaging in a public educational awareness campaign. We're putting out notice to doctors across the province to be aware of the problem and the risk and to talk, where appropriate, to their patients with respect to it and encourage those who are engaged in unprotected sex, particularly in risky unprotected sex, to be cognizant of the issue and to be tested where appropriate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My last question is to the Minister of Education. Given that youth believe that these infections can be cured with antibiotics and there won't be any significant lasting effects, can the minister tell us how schools are impressing the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases onto their students?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there would be two areas that I would talk about. One would be the health and life skills that take place in grades 4 to 9, but probably more important is what's known as CALM in high schools, which is career and life management. These programs teach our children about the importance of healthy, caring, and, I guess above all, safe relationships. But I do need to state that these kinds of discussions also need to happen outside the classroom as parents have a responsibility to make sure that they have open and honest discussions with their children about those safe and healthy relationships.

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

Federal Equalization Payments (continued)

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As referenced by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs earlier today, this government is sending mixed messages to their federal Tory cousins on equalization payments. A month ago both the Premier and the Finance minister opposed the inclusion of resource revenues in the formula that is used to calculate federal transfers, yet according to quotes attributed to the Finance minister in today's media, the minister appears to have flip-flopped on the issue. My question is for the Minister of Finance. Given that the Finance minister's response earlier today in question period only served to muddy the waters, will he please clarify once and for all: is it his position to go along with 50 per cent of resource revenues to be included in the calculations or not?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier and the minister of international and intergovernmental relations made it perfectly clear, as did I, as to what our stand was on it. It's very important to tell the Legislative Assembly that these are the federal tax dollars. These are tax dollars that the federal government receives, albeit, I will say, too much, too high. But it is their tax dollars that they are distributing back according to a formula, the equalization formula, that was first enacted in the 1950s, so it is their right to do it. From our point of view, if the pie is there, we don't receive anything from the pie at all. We don't receive any dollars back.

So the issue that I'm concerned about, Mr. Speaker, is one thing, and that's the per capita pool and the CST and the CHT. The reason is that the federal government is double-equalizing. They're equalizing on the equalization formula, and then they're equalizing on the per capita pool. That's not right, and that's not fair to Albertans. Five hundred and seventy-one million dollars are at stake here simply because we are Alberta. I think it's extremely important to ensure that our per capita payments are the same regardless of where you live in Canada. Let the equalization pool be over here, per capita. That's very important to us.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought it was a yes or no question.

To the Minister of Finance. Given that the minister is quoted today as saying, "We also recognize that there's certainly a high chance" that 50 per cent of resource revenues will be included in the formula, "is going to come in whether we say anything or not," my question is for the minister. Has this minister given up when it comes to protecting Alberta's interests against Ottawa?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I do anything but give up when it comes to Alberta's interests. Alberta's interests are served on two fronts, on the equalization as well as on the per capita. Whether or not the O'Brien report comes in, whether or not 50 per cent of natural resources comes in is up to the federal government. Ultimately it's their dollars. But – and I will illustrate again – what is extremely important to us are the per capita dollars, which could mean a difference of \$571 million to the citizens of Alberta, and quite frankly because we live in Alberta should not be the reason why we only receive a portion of the per capita payments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My third

question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given that your department's annual report shows that it received \$5.2 million in federal transfers last year, is your department concerned about the mixed messages that are being sent to your federal Tory cousins in Ottawa?

Dr. Morton: As Minister of Sustainable Resource Development I've received a briefing on our finances, but I am not aware of that specific line item. So, Mr. Speaker, with your permission I'll get the answer to that question and get it back to the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance to supplement?

Dr. Oberg: To supplement, Mr. Speaker. I will reiterate that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development does not receive one cent from the equalization formula. It is from the per capita spending that he receives.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I get to recognize an hon. member, let me first of all acknowledge and draw to the attention of members certain activities.

All hon. members have on their desks today a copy of the Queen's Commonwealth Day 2007 message from Buckingham Palace of today's date. I just want to quote one paragraph from the Queen's message.

In today's difficult and sometimes divided world, I believe that it is more important than ever to keep trying to respect and understand each other better. Each and every one of us has hopes, needs, and priorities. Each of us is an individual, with ties of emotion and bonds of obligation – to culture, religion, community, country and beyond. In short, each of us is special.

Now, by way of recognizing special people in this Assembly, happy birthday today to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Six years ago on this date, March 12, 2001, 14 members were elected to this Assembly for the first time. So let's congratulate the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the hon. Minister of Service Alberta, the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, the hon. Minister of Energy, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, the hon. members for Calgary-Shaw, for Calgary-Buffalo, for Calgary-Bow, for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, for Edmonton-Castle Downs, for Whitecourt-St. Anne, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Six years today.

Fifteen years ago yesterday, on March 11 – sorry. Ten years ago yesterday, March 11, 1997. We do have a 15-year member, and we'll deal with him on Wednesday. But to the following members, congratulations on your 10th anniversary. I'm having the pages deliver to each and every one of you a 10-year Mace pin. To the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, the hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, the hon. Minister of Children's Services, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, the hon. Member for Strathcona, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and the hon. Member for West Yellowhead: good work. Ten years in this place.

Now, one last point before I sit down. This is the third day of this session, and on Thursday I indicated that there were 84 questions and answers. Today there were 88 questions and answers. So if we sit here for 54 days and we have an average of 86 questions, you will have exhausted 4,644 questions and answers at this current pace.

In a few seconds from now I'll call on the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

2:40

Leonard Bolger

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize a very special individual. On February 27, 2007, a great Albertan and Canadian, Mr. Leonard Bolger, passed away. Leonard Bolger was a man who was driven to advance Alberta's position as a leader in technology and innovation.

Before beginning his career, Mr. Bolger graduated from the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario, and later achieved his bachelor of science from the University of Toronto in 1954. He then joined the air force, where he flew CF-100s and was a test pilot on the Arrow program. After leaving the armed forces, Mr. Bolger worked with Shell Canada as a senior executive. He later retired as the vice-president of research and technology. Mr. Bolger served on the board of the Alberta Research Council and co-chaired the board of the Alberta Energy Research Institute since 2000.

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of serving as the MLA co-chair for four years with Mr. Bolger, and I can attest that his hard work was focused on improving Albertans' and Canadians' quality of life. He was a leader in expanding the science and technology capability of Canada, specifically in Alberta. He was instrumental in the launch of EnergyINet, a technology network sponsored by a number of governments and companies across Canada. He also served as director emeritus of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research and on the board of the Back Door, a Calgary-based organization which helps youth get off the streets. He was also a recipient of the Alberta centennial medal.

Mr. Bolger will be sorely missed by his friends and associates, who benefited enormously from his advice and counsel over many years. Thank you, Len, for your dedication to Alberta and to Canada. On behalf of all my colleagues at the Alberta Legislature I send my warmest regards and condolences to his family: Jean, Karen, David, Lesley, and Neil.

Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Live Organ Harvesting

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to raise a very disturbing issue in this House in an effort to see if we can bring some light to this situation. On January 25 a public forum was held at the U of A on illicit organ snatching and transplant tourism in China. David Matas, an international human rights lawyer, and David Kilgour, former secretary of state for Canada, spoke at that forum. They are the authors of a shocking report on live organ harvesting in China. On February 2 these two gentlemen called on all states to ban transplant tourism in China. The call was made in a report which examined an allegation that organs may be being harvested from Falun Gong practitioners, who are killed by the harvesting process.

Canadians are going to China for transplants from Calgary, Toronto, Vancouver, and some other cities, and the numbers are increasing. Canadians have been involved in this matter. Mr. Matas

points out that the organ market in China is determined by supply and demand. The supply is local to China, but the demand is in large part foreign. Matas says, "We must do everything we can to end this demand," and I agree. I want to know why the Chinese government would seem to be grossly persecuting them and what we can do as politicians and human beings to address this matter. At the very least, I would suggest that we set aside an information session to discuss the matter with knowledgeable experts.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

2007 Canada Winter Games

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday the 2007 Canada Winter Games wrapped up in the Yukon. More than 250 young Albertans made the trek north for our country's premier multisport event for developing athletes. These young Albertans battled minus 30 weather and some intense competition to reach their goal, a third-place finish right behind traditional powers Quebec and Ontario. Our athletes stood on the podium 79 times, and this includes 24 gold medals. They dominated in traditional strengths like Nordic and alpine skiing and long-track speed skating, but they also surprised by winning many medals in archery and fencing.

Team Alberta's performance shows yet again just how strong the sport development network is in our province. As the MLA appointee to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation I'm pleased to report that annual funding to the ASRPW is helping to achieve these excellent results. With this funding Alberta's sport development network continues to build athletes that are ready to take the next step to the international stage. You'll be hearing from Team Alberta 2007 athletes again in the near future as many of them will soon move to World Cup circuits competing for Team Canada. Some will even be in Vancouver in 2010 as Canada's Olympians.

Behind each athlete is a great team, that helps them be their best. The coaches, officials, and mission staff, who are also part of Team Alberta, deserve to be recognized for their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, with pride I ask the members of this House to join me in one final congratulations to Team Alberta 2007. Thank you.

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

2007 Winter Special Olympics

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to congratulate the 435 athletes, their parents, coaches, and volunteers who participated in the 2007 Winter Special Olympics. I was privileged to attend the opening ceremony of the games along with the Honourable Lieutenant Governor, the Premier, representatives from the federal government, and also my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. I also want to commend the many individuals from Calgary-East who assisted in hosting the games at the Max Bell arena. It would not have been possible without your commitment and hard work.

Through Special Olympics athletes develop sport skills, social skills, and self esteem, which assist them in becoming actively involved in recreational, educational, and employment opportunities in their communities. Special Olympics are focused on promoting a more active lifestyle and better quality of life for persons with disabilities through their participation in sport.

Special Olympics Alberta offers programs in 114 communities around the province through 32 affiliates, each with its own

volunteer management committee and volunteer coaches. There are over 1,200 volunteers working with over 3,000 athletes in 15 official sports in year-round programs.

Special Olympics continues to be a success because of the tremendous attitude and commitment of athletes and exceptional dedication of the volunteers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bell Canada Partnership with Olds College

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge a great collaboration between a private-sector company and Olds College. On Friday, March 9, Bell Canada and Olds College announced a partnership to create a state-of-the-art distributed learning facility at the Olds College campus. I want to commend the gracious support of Bell Canada. This company contributed \$3.1 million to facilitate the construction of a new community learning campus.

As the MLA for the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills I'm excited to have the chance to express my constituents' enthusiasm for this great development. The Bell e-learning centre is a great way to connect Albertans to the SuperNet. The linking advances education, research, and training. I'm encouraged that Albertans will soon benefit from this partnership, and I hopefully anticipate that we will see further initiatives such as this in the innovation and technology field.

The new Bell e-learning centre will create many educational opportunities for rural Albertans. They will now be connected to an ever-changing international community and can take advantage of their access to information. The advantages of this project will be recognized for years to come.

I want to applaud Bell's commitment to Alberta and to their partnership with the Alberta government in building the SuperNet.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

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

Greenhouse Gas Intensity Targets

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to try to confuse Albertans by talking about greenhouse gas intensity targets while European nations and American states and even other provinces are forging ahead with actual reductions. It's time for this government to be transparent and accountable on the issue of greenhouse gas intensity targets. Canada has the seventh highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions in the world. In 2004 Alberta released over 100 million tonnes of greenhouse gases into the air, and six of the top 10 industrial emitters in Canada come from this province. The government should admit to Albertans that intensity targets will do nothing to change this situation.

The Premier is talking about emissions intensity when we should be taking action cleaning up our coal-fired generators and instituting a moratorium on new tar sands project approvals. British Columbia has just announced plans to cut total emissions to 10 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020. France has committed to 80 per cent reductions by 2050, and Germany plans to reduce total emissions by 40 per cent. They're building their green economies while we're stalling with intensity targets.

Worst of all, the government is trying to pull the wool over the eyes of Albertans. Government press releases on March 7 and 8 claim that Alberta is the "first province to legislate greenhouse gas reductions" when, in fact, we are legislating only intensity. At the

end of the day this means more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

It's time for the government to be transparent and to admit that greenhouse gases will continue to increase under their plan and get on with the business of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in absolute terms.

Thank you.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 30 I wish to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move that the ordinary business of the Assembly be adjourned in order that we may hold an emergency debate on a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the imminent risk to the health and safety of residents resulting from the failure of the privately owned Holy Cross centre in Calgary to meet provincial standards of care, including the number of qualified staff required to meet basic requirements.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 9

Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 9, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Bill 10

Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce and move first reading of Bill 10, the Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act.

This bill will repeal the Horned Cattle Purchases Act, which levied a penalty on each head of horned cattle purchased in Alberta or shipped out of Alberta. The penalty was designed to prevent damage to cattle during transport. Current commercial practices and market expectations promote dehorning, making the Horned Cattle Purchases Act no longer relevant to the cattle industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that Bill 10 be moved on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on behalf of the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Bill 12

Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move first reading of the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 12 be moved on the Order Paper to appear under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 13

Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce and move Bill 13, the Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill deals with minor amendments to the Access to the Future Act, which is designed to support initiatives to enhance access, affordability, and quality for the postsecondary system. It also establishes and governs the access to the future fund. As our government continues to operationalize the access to the future fund, a number of minor amendments are required for clarity, flexibility, and to allow for the implementation of the fund.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 13 be moved to Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 14

Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 14, the Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

The proposed amendments will strengthen and clarify the legislative framework in place to support pandemic and emergency preparedness in Alberta. These amendments will ensure that government is able to respond effectively to a public health emergency. I move first reading of Bill 14.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 14 be moved on the Order Paper to appear under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

**Bill 15
Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution
Amendment Act, 2007**

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 15, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill is designated as a direct result of what we heard from children who have survived sexual exploitation as well as from their families, front-line workers, and the police. The bill is designated to enhance services to victims of child sexual exploitation. It also provides continued support for those who need it to deal with the complex issues facing sexually exploited children and youth.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 15 be moved on the Order Paper to appear under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.
3:00

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table five copies of the manager's report of Livestock Identification Services Ltd. for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2006. This report incorporates the Brand Act, the Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act, the Livestock and Livestock Products Act, and the Stray Animals Act, all required tablings by statute.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I am tabling five copies of the response to Written Question 35, which was accepted in this Assembly on August 28, 2006.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations I would like to table a letter from the Prime Minister of Canada to our Premier outlining his commitment to not include nonrenewable resources in the equalization formula.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table five copies of a letter written by Ron White of the Calgary community of Arbour Lake to his MLA, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, which he copied me, drawing our attention to the plight of seniors in Calgary and across the province and urging an emergency debate.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one is from my constituent Ian Greenwald. He had a highway motor vehicle accident back in April 2005, a very serious accident, and he has two major issues. The compensation for general damages in his case is approximately \$4,000 under the current legislation, and he's urging this government to change this legislation and compensate his family as soon as possible.

The second one is again from a constituent, Matt Gosse. He has expressed support for 100 per cent smoke-free legislation in Alberta. It is the responsibility of the government to take a leadership role on this issue and serve the best end, which is the health of all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a copy of a press release provided to me by Joe Anglin, who is working with a citizens' group in central Alberta that is formally calling upon former Premier Ralph Klein to testify under oath about his former government's involvement in the orchestrated planning of two new 500 kV transmission lines.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to table today the appropriate number of copies of a brochure that we have produced. The title of the brochure is Page Biographies, Third Session, spring sitting, 26th Legislature. I sincerely hope that you'll have an opportunity to take a look at these remarkable young people who serve as pages for us and look at a bit of their backgrounds. I mean, we're talking about grade 10 students, grade 11 students, grade 12 students, some of whom are already rather seasoned, and it's quite amazing to see what kind of professions and vocations and futures they want to have. I really won't make too much of a comment other than to say that no member of this Assembly will be allowed to take out to any golf course without my permission the page who has a 1.4 handicap.

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and Official Opposition House Leader, you are going to act on behalf of your leader with respect to the Standing Order 30 application?

Holy Cross Long-term Care Centre

Ms. Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to proceed on behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition. Notice of the Standing Order 30 has been circulated to members of the Assembly, and my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition did give appropriate oral notice earlier in Routine. As well, I note that we did file, as required, copies in advance of the time limits that are set out with the Speaker's office.

A brief outline of the situation. Forty-two long-term care residents of the Holy Cross centre located in Calgary, which provides both assisted living and long-term care services, are being transferred to other facilities because the facility does not meet fire safety codes or provincial standards of care. The Holy Cross centre does not currently have a director of care, so there are concerns about the skill level of the facility staff.

I note that as always with requests for a Standing Order 30 permission to hold an emergency debate, the test is the urgency of

why we are requesting that for today. I think that the underlying issue of great importance here – that is, the forced evacuation of seniors for glaring violations of care and safety standards and, I note, fire codes – certainly meets that standard of urgency. *Marleau and Montpetit* 584 and *Beauchesne* 389 both reference the importance of the matter themselves. I think that when we have a situation where vulnerable people who are not in a position to protect themselves are placed at risk, that becomes a very urgent issue for this Assembly. I think the issue takes on even greater significance because the Assembly was promised by the government that these problems would be fixed in the wake of the Auditor General's report that was presented in May of 2005 and that the government answered in the fall of 2005.

Now, Standing Order 30(7) requires this to be a “genuine emergency” that requires “immediate and urgent consideration,” and I think that risk to the lives and health and safety of seniors is a genuine emergency. Not all of the seniors will be moved out for a number of weeks because they are trying to find accommodation for them, so the danger and the risk remain.

There are two additional urgencies that are created here, Mr. Speaker. There is a domino effect. In trying to move those seniors into other accommodation, they are now shifting the existing lists of seniors who are looking for urgent and immediate placement in long-term care. We've now added 42 of those people onto the list, competing with everyone else, and that creates some pretty dire circumstances for those looking for urgent placement.

In addition, other residents are being left in place at the Holy Cross centre; therefore, I would argue that their risk is increased. These are the people in supported living, or assisted living, situations, which may not fall directly under the purview of the Minister of Health and Wellness. Mr. Speaker, these are not spry people. We have now got people left in place where there is a concern about adherence to a fire code, and they may not be able to leap up in the middle of the night and get themselves out of that facility, especially when we're looking at a lack of facility staff in there. So I argue that this is of such an urgent nature that we need to take this argument up today.

Although I have described the issue as being ongoing, I would argue that it is not chronic. In this situation it is specific to this one facility, and it is a failure to meet specific criteria. In this case it is the fire code violations, which have been brought to light by the Calgary fire department. They notified the Calgary health region of the issues, and the Calgary health region took additional steps because of the lack of staff.

Now, *Beauchesne* 387 requires that the issue be “within the administrative competence of the Government,” and that is certainly so. We have legislation in place in Alberta governing the operation of these facilities, and we've also had an extensive Auditor General's report on it. This is not a general “maladministration of a department,” which is spoken of in *Beauchesne* 394. It is a specific failure to monitor and enforce a particular situation. The staff shortage issue and the director of care issue are not currently before the courts.

The issue of long-term care was mentioned so generally in the throne speech as to be not meaningful in this particular reference. It's talking about making supports “available to seniors as the population ages,” so it is so general as to not be applicable to this particular circumstance. There is no government bill on the Order Paper covering this. The government media release of the 2nd of March outlining the session agenda does not cover anything specific to long-term care or seniors' housing. There is no private member's public bill or private bill that would cover this, as far as we are aware, that has been presented to the House.

3:10

We have a release date that is known for the budget, April 19, but that, I would argue, is not meeting an urgency test to allow us time for meaningful debate. We have no idea when the actual ministries covered by this would be up for debate, so we might well be weeks and weeks away. A supplementary supply budget, which might address this issue – there is nothing available in that which does. There are no government motions on the Order Paper, and under Motions other than Government Motions, again, none that we can find. We did ask two questions in Oral Question Period, but you yourself, Mr. Speaker, have been very clear with us that question period is not the time for debate, and indeed there are admonitions not to engage or provoke debate through question period.

We would argue that we have met the tests of urgency for the Standing Order 30 motion that is brought before you today, allowing us to hold a special debate on the health and safety of these residents at the Holy Cross centre.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise these issues with you, and I hope we will meet the tests that are set out.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under section 30, the Standing Order which allows for the adjournment of the normal business of the House to discuss a matter of urgent and pressing necessity, clearly, there are a few things that have to be addressed in terms of the question of what makes it urgent. The fact that the issue at hand, the issue of concern, is of utmost importance and concern does not necessarily meet the urgency test. I think we can all agree in the House that whenever you have a situation such as currently is the situation at the Holy Cross in Calgary and the actions that are being taken by the Calgary health authority with respect to that particular facility and the people there, that is a very important occurrence. Those are very important steps that are being taken.

I might go further to say that they actually show that the system works, that it is not a matter of urgent necessity but, rather, a demonstration of appropriate action. There was an inspection made by the fire and safety codes people, and there were some deficiencies noted and brought to the attention of the owners of the facility. Since that time the fire and safety people as well as the Calgary regional health authority, I am informed, have been working with the owner to make sure that the facility is safe. If there was a concern that it was unsafe for the residents on an immediate and dangerous basis, I'm sure there would have been a request for either immediate action or immediate evacuation.

In fact, that's not the case. In fact, they've put in place appropriate measures to ensure the safety of the residents. The Calgary health authority has now moved to say that they would like to have more things done and more things taken care of, and in order to accommodate that, they have indicated that they want to move out 42 residents from the long-term care facility.

That is very important. Absolutely. But is it a matter of urgent and pressing necessity for which the House should be adjourned on a day when we will be discussing private members' business in order to have a debate in the House? I would argue that it doesn't meet the urgency test.

The hon. Opposition House Leader went through the litany of what's on the Order Paper and what opportunities there will be for debate of important broad issues. In fact, there are opportunities. We just heard the Speech from the Throne, and the response to the Speech from the Throne is a perfectly valid time to raise issues of concern on any area that was either included or not included in the Speech from the Throne that the opposition or any other member of

the House feels should be included. So debate in response to the Speech from the Throne is a perfectly appropriate time to raise issues of concern.

Supplementary supply. Health and Wellness has a supply issue in supplementary supply. We'll be in Committee of Supply tomorrow, and it's open to any member of the House to argue that rather than using the supply that's being asked for for the purposes being requested, it could be used for other purposes. So there is an opportunity for debate tomorrow in Committee of Supply. There will be opportunity for debate because as hon. members know because of the projected government business last week, interim supply will be introduced tomorrow and available in committee on Wednesday and Thursday. So there will be two days in which we're in interim supply, again, which could be used to address issues of whether resources need to be available or whether a policy change needs to be made.

I think it's fair to point out that there are in the next few days many opportunities, whether it's in reply to the throne speech, whether it's Committee of Supply on interim estimates, whether it's Committee of Supply on supplementary estimates or, in fact, the appropriation bills which will follow those, in which issues can be raised before the House. It's certainly always the subject matter of debates as to whether or not, first of all, the resources of Albertans are being used in the most appropriate manner or whether there's a more urgent place for those resources to be used and, of course, the corollary discussion of whether the policies are appropriate or whether some steps should be taken.

I want to be clear that the concern with respect to Holy Cross and the actions that are being taken with respect to the 42 long-term care residents are very important concerns. They're being dealt with by the Calgary regional health authority, who has the contract with the owners of that facility and who is charged with monitoring that and, in fact, has been monitoring it, has been working with it, has been dealing with it, and is dealing with it. The steps that need to be taken are being taken.

I would suggest that there's no urgency to pre-empt the ordinary business of the House to debate something which is already being done and done appropriately rather than dealing with the regular issues of the House. The urgency has not been demonstrated. The importance is clear. The urgency is what is required to meet the Standing Order 30 test, and the urgency is clearly not there, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 30(2) says that "the Member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he or she considers relevant to the question of urgency" and then shall rule.

We have recognized the Government House Leader in response to the petition from the Official Opposition House Leader. Are there additional members who would like to participate? Well, we'll recognize, first of all, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and then the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the motion before the House pursuant to Standing Order 30, which calls on the House to adjourn the ordinary business of the House to discuss matters of urgent public importance.

I'm going to speak in support of this motion, but first please allow me for a moment to thank you for your congratulations on the anniversary of those members who were elected 10 years ago. This member, for Edmonton-Strathcona, was one of them, and I'm wearing the lapel. Thank you very much for that very thoughtful gesture on your part. Also, I would like to take this opportunity to

thank the constituents of Edmonton-Strathcona, who have supported this member over the last three elections to enjoy this privilege and honour to represent them here.

Mr. Speaker, I celebrated this 10th anniversary yesterday by participating in a public meeting in a park in the heart of the beautiful city of Lethbridge, where citizens gathered to call on this government to implement at least the Kyoto-related greenhouse gas reduction targets.

Now, turning to the motion, there are two requirements that have to be met: the procedural requirements and the criterion of urgency. On the procedural side, Mr. Speaker, I just want to confirm to the House that the New Democratic Party opposition received the notice of this motion in a timely fashion. *Beauchesne* at 387 says that a debate under this Standing Order must deal with a specific question that requires urgent consideration, and it must be "within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate."

Mr. Speaker, this motion certainly meets these criteria. As all members of this House know, it is the government's responsibility to establish and enforce standards of care in long-term facilities. I know that the government is acutely aware of this responsibility because they have suffered tremendous political pressure since information about the appalling lack of standards and support in our long-term care facilities became public. This motion also deals with a very specific concern; namely, the lack of properly enforced standards at the privately owned Holy Cross centre in Calgary.

3:20

I would note that in accordance with *Beauchesne* 390, Mr. Speaker, there is no other opportunity on the Order Paper for us to deal with this matter in an urgent and careful manner, and per *Beauchesne* 391 this issue with the Holy Cross centre is not under adjudication by a court of law. *Marleau and Montpetit* make a similar observation. I won't go into detail on that one.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few very brief comments on the matter of urgency. Obviously, the most pressing reason for urgency is that extremely vulnerable people at Holy Cross are being affected by the lack of standards. We also know that while the Calgary health region is moving long-term care residents out of the facility, residents in the assisted living areas of the facility are staying put because the Calgary health region has no authority over residential services. I am sure that over the weekend many members of the House read the heartbreaking media accounts of elderly couples being separated because of the moves. The fact that residents have had to pay an increase for such poor services adds insult to injury.

It is clear, Mr. Speaker, that the recommendations of the Auditor General in his report on long-term care have not been implemented, and this House has a responsibility to get to the bottom of why this failure has occurred. I can't help but think that many of these problems are a direct result of this government's push towards the privatization of health services and assisted living facilities rather than long-term care centres.

Mr. Speaker, to conclude, I just want to remind the House that in a similar situation in May of 2005 this House agreed to have a debate about long-term care standards after a motion pursuant to the same order was introduced by the leader of the NDP opposition.

I think that in light of that precedent which the House set less than two years ago as well as the arguments made under the procedures criteria and the urgency requirement, the House needs to support this motion, and I urge all members to do so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I, too, would say that these issues are always of significant importance, especially to those individuals impacted by this at the Holy Cross, this is not a matter of urgency specifically as it pertains to Standing Order 30, that would require dismissal of the business of the day.

To speak first, if you're talking about standards, the things that we set in place – legislation, regulations, standards, procedures, mechanisms, monitoring, all of those which come under the purview of this Legislative Assembly – this same topic has been under tremendous debate for years and continues to be under that kind of debate and has had this profile in this Legislative Assembly for some time.

There was a task force, Achieving Excellence in Continuing Care, co-chaired by the members for Lacombe-Ponoka, Calgary-Foothills, and Lethbridge-East. The opposition party worked very closely on the standards for continuing care, and tremendous work was accomplished by that committee. This was clearly in response to the Auditor General's comments on various concerns raised about this issue in years gone by. A committee was formed last year, in May, in response to that task force. There was a response by the government for updating those standards. Also, additional monies were put in place to continue to provide for some of the urgent demands in this sector. So when you talk about the standards, having worked with the Long Term Care Association and with all the various bodies associated with this, new standards are going to be fully implemented by April of this year.

The Auditor General's report and update as well on this exact topic talk about 11 recommendations: three on satisfactory progress, eight on some others that he's going to monitor yet through this year. What it does say is that there's been progress made on all of these standards for specific application of monitoring so that we do have good structures in place.

In specific relation to this issue with the Holy Cross, as one facility it is a very important matter, but the appropriate methodologies have been followed. Like the Minister of Health and Wellness talked about, there is a clinical director on-site to oversee patient care in response to the health authority ensuring that the standards are being met. So there is compliance, and there has been evidence that the monitoring is working.

In response to the facility itself, the fire safety issues, there is no imminent risk to those in that facility today. Their lives are not in peril. There is additional personnel to monitor any fire safety issues to ensure that every person's life is pre-eminent as to what is being followed. The public can rest assured that that has been worked on today with regard to the specific issue that their lives are safe, that the appropriate authorities have investigated and ensured through this transition that there would be no safety issues or peril for those individuals there.

The Speaker: I take it that's the extent of our participants with respect to this motion, so I'll now deal with this question. I am prepared to rule on this. This is the first such motion of its type in this session, so I'm just going to remind members that an application under Standing Order 30 is "to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance."

First of all, the chair confirms that the Leader of the Official Opposition gave proper notice of his intention to bring a motion under Standing Order 30. Notice was received by my office this morning at 10:40, and the subject matter was provided at that time.

Therefore, the requirements under Standing Order 30(1) have been met. I would like to remind members that Standing Order 30(1) requires notice to be provided "at least 2 hours prior to the sitting of the Assembly." If the changes to the Standing Orders are approved this evening, then starting tomorrow, notice of these types of applications will have to be provided to my office by 11 a.m.

Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed to be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether the motion meets the requirement of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that the matter proposed for discussion is related to "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

The Leader of the Official Opposition's proposed motion is to hold an emergency debate on "the health and safety of residents resulting from the failure of the privately owned Holy Cross Centre in Calgary to meet provincial standards of care." The relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debates are *Beauchesne*, paragraphs 387 to 398, and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589. Several participants referred to some of these.

The chair has listened attentively to the submissions of all members participating in the debate. Two factors here were that the chair was interested in learning how this alleged situation met the criteria for genuine emergency and, second, that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was essentially inviting the Assembly to defer consideration of Bill 201 standing in his name to debate the purported emergency.

After hearing the arguments put forward and the review that the chair has undertaken since receiving this submission several hours ago, the chair does not believe that this request meets the requirements under the standing order for an emergency debate to proceed. Some of the arguments given have already been presented. The chair does not doubt the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition's sincerity, but it's difficult to conclude that there is something so extraordinary as to constitute a genuine emergency as required under Standing Order 30(7).

To reiterate, while the member raises a serious matter, the chair does not consider it to be of such urgency to warrant postponing the business of the Assembly this afternoon. Therefore, the request for leave is not in order.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I move that motions for returns stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **3:30 Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Bill 201 Funding Alberta's Future Act

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to rise today to debate in second reading the flagship bill of the Official Opposition, the Alberta Liberal caucus. In our view, this is the kind of bill that restructures everything in this province in some way or another. It restructures how government will finance itself, it restructures how we as a society in Alberta treat our nonrenewable resources, and most importantly it restructures the future to put it on a basis of stability and prosperity, on a basis of permanently competitive taxes and outstanding public services forever.

Right now Albertans have an incredible opportunity to build a legacy for the future. The Alberta Liberals' vision for the future is the finest public services, the lowest taxes in Canada, the best postsecondary education, an outstanding life for all, and with the right strategy we can start building that future right now, Mr. Speaker. The right strategy is to pass Bill 201, the Funding Alberta's Future Act, which sets aside 30 per cent of annual nonrenewable resource revenues to rebuild the heritage fund, erase the infrastructure debt, and create a series of endowments to provide sustainable, significant additional funding – and I emphasize: additional funding – for postsecondary education and the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

Mr. Speaker, we are not alone in believing that the Alberta Liberal plan to fund Alberta's future is the right thing to do, and I hope all members take note of some of its support. For example, in an editorial last September, just a few months ago, none other than Mr. Paul Stanway, now the Premier's director of communications, wrote, and I quote: the Grits are proposing boosting the heritage trust fund to \$120 billion over the next 15 years, so when the oil and gas money runs out, the province can use interest from the fund to replace nonrenewable energy revenues; it's simple, it's achievable, and it's likely the prescription for the future most Albertans want. End quote.

During his bid for the leadership of the PC Party the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who's waving at me right now, advocated saving 30 per cent of resource revenues, just as this bill proposes. Last year none other than former Premier Peter Lougheed wrote, and I quote: in my view, the best course of action by the provincial government would be to rebuild the Alberta heritage savings trust fund by once again allocating by an act of the Legislature 30 per cent of all oil and gas revenues, including our share of oil sands net profits, to the fund. End quote.

One Mr. Jim Dinning, whose leadership bid was endorsed by about 40 Tory MLAs sitting in the Assembly, said that he would save 30 per cent of resource revenues during normal times and 50 per cent during boom times.

So, Mr. Speaker, support for the Alberta Liberal plan to save these precious nonrenewable revenues is widespread even within the Tory caucus and staff. This alone should, I expect, lead to quick passage of this landmark bill. But if this evidence of support isn't enough to convince you of the bill's merit, consider what this bill can do for Albertans. The 30 per cent of resource revenues we plan to save will be allocated to bring the most benefits to the most Albertans.

First, the act will enable the government to retire its huge infrastructure debt within just a few years by using a portion of the savings to build or refurbish new schools, hospitals, roads, and on and on and on. Retiring the infrastructure debt is more than a matter of balancing books. Retiring that debt means safer and more efficient roads, better and more accessible health care, well-maintained schools and, I might add, more of them, and safe, reliable water and sewer systems, services, and facilities that Albertans once

took for granted that the Conservative government has allowed to crumble. Paying off our infrastructure debt is the right thing to do because Albertans deserve better from their government, and they deserve infrastructure that works.

We will use 35 per cent of resource revenue savings to build a phenomenal postsecondary endowment fund. This fund will reach \$15 billion by 2020-21, generating in today's value \$790 million a year, assuming a net return of 5 per cent per year. To put that in perspective, \$790 million in new annual funding would represent a huge boost in funding to postsecondary education. For example, \$790 million is 49 per cent of the total grants given to all institutions in the 2006-07 budget. It is more, Mr. Speaker, than all the tuition paid by Alberta students in 2006.

By 2021 earnings from the postsecondary endowment fund will significantly increase by 36 per cent, in fact: in real terms, Alberta's total investment in postsecondary education. This will enable us to enhance and maintain world-class institutions, putting Albertans at the forefront of innovation. It will also enable us to strengthen our network of postsecondary institutions, making excellent postsecondary education available to all Albertans regardless of education and career goals. The postsecondary endowment fund will help fuel Alberta's continuing transition to a knowledge-based economy and will help fulfill our goal of truly outstanding education.

The \$500 million humanities, social sciences, and arts endowment fund will generate \$28 million per year toward supporting and sustaining an exceptional quality of life in Alberta. This fund will reinvigorate and sustain these important contributors to community, to quality of life, to knowledge, and to the economy. Alberta, frankly, under this government has neglected support for these areas. This fund will redress that erosion of support and go far beyond, providing sustainable, reliable funding to programs, research and scholarship, teaching, and to community service.

Once the humanities, social sciences, and arts endowment fund reaches its cap of \$500 million, this slice of the pie will then be funnelled into an opportunity fund for Albertans. Within 15 years this opportunity fund will be worth \$1.7 billion in today's terms, generating annual returns to be paid out of about \$84 million. We will work with Albertans to decide what this fund should be used for, whether that's rural development, renewable energy, citizens' dividends. The possibilities are limited only by Albertans' imaginations.

Mr. Speaker, the centrepiece, the most vital aspect of this legislation is its ability to reinvigorate the heritage fund. Of the 30 per cent of resource revenues diverted away from general revenues, 35 per cent will go to the heritage fund. When investments resulting from this act have retired the infrastructure debt, that contribution will then be channelled also to the heritage fund. The total will rise to 60 per cent. This will transform the heritage fund from a much-loved but little understood fund that has been losing real value for decades into a vital contributor to revenue stability for Alberta.

If passed, the Funding Alberta's Future Act will build the heritage fund from its current \$13.4 billion to \$120 billion by 2021. Assuming a 5 per cent real return, this will generate a \$6 billion annual contribution to base revenues and offset declining resource revenues.

A bolstered heritage fund can play an integral role in Alberta's fiscal stability. As resource revenues fall, as this government itself is predicting, income from the heritage fund will rise. This income will stream into general revenues. Through this approach core government spending and programs can be sustained without raising taxes. That means better health care, no further erosion of community and economic infrastructure, stronger municipalities and communities, stronger public education and support for seniors, leveraging our prosperity, protecting and sustaining our natural environment. It means no more tax increases.

At the same time, we will work with Albertans to address their hopes and concerns for the future with the extraordinary resources provided by our other planned endowments. These benefits alone make passing Bill 201 worth while.

3:40

But the most important reason to make this bill law is because it would put Alberta back on a solid fiscal foundation. Right now, Mr. Speaker – and every MLA of every party should be concerned about this – the government uses the revenue from nonrenewable resources to keep the province from sliding into deficit and debt. If resource revenues fall, taxes will have to go up, spending will have to be cut, and the province will return to deficit spending, perhaps all of the above.

During the last few years the government has used precious nonrenewable resource revenues to cover its irresponsible budgeting process. In 2003-04 the government spent 3 and a half billion dollars of Alberta's legacy. By this budget year the government's dependence has grown to a \$5.3 billion dependency on oil and gas revenues.

At this moment the government spends \$8,500 per person to provide public services for Albertans, but if you exclude nonrenewable resource revenue, the government collects only \$6,360 in sustainable revenues. Without our oil and gas revenues, Mr. Speaker, the province would be running huge deficits, and every increase in spending and every tax cut would widen that sustainability gap. We need to replace nonrenewable resource revenues with another source of funding before oil and gas revenues decline too far. The Funding Alberta's Future Act, if passed, sustains core government revenues without raising taxes even while resource revenues fall, and it does what every financial planner tells her clients: pay yourself first.

Norway, starting long after Alberta, has set aside a public endowment of more than \$230 billion, and it grows dramatically now every month, Mr. Speaker, generating incredible advantages for their small population. Even Alaska is way ahead of Alberta, with a balance of \$33 billion U.S.

Since 1978 this government has collected \$123 billion in resource revenues, not adjusting for inflation. Just over 91 per cent of that money was used to repay the debt and for annual spending. A mere 8.9 per cent was saved, Mr. Speaker. It's time for Alberta to get responsible again with public money. The future is incredibly bright but only if we plan for it.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, if passed, the Funding Alberta's Future Act enables Albertans to pay themselves first and to make smart provisions for the future. It will provide stable base revenues despite falling resource revenues without raising taxes and provide the capacity for stable base spending without abandoning the responsibilities of government. Bill 201 gives government and citizens a clear direction for the future, a goal we can work toward together. It sets benchmarks for achievement, it creates financial stability and sustainability, it gives the heritage fund a clear purpose and a vital role to play in our daily life, and it reduces our dependence on nonrenewable resources. It's a bill that will at long last bring some purpose and direction to governance and financial planning in Alberta. But perhaps most importantly it's something that Albertans can reach for together, uniting us in a noble, achievable purpose.

In short, Mr. Speaker, we're building a legacy – at least, we want to build a legacy – that will benefit everyone in Alberta. That legacy will only be built if all members of the Assembly support Bill 201. Therefore, I urge all of us in this Assembly to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's opportunity now for hon. members to participate. I have an indication of a number of members, and I'm quite prepared at this point in time to go through a list of seven or eight or nine or 10 to give you some idea as to when you might be up this afternoon if I had some idea of the members who would like to participate. I already have a note from the Opposition House Leader, so that helps me with that one, but who would like to participate? The hon. leader. Okay.

Well, then we'll go with the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. leader of the third party, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Did I see some other hands up? The hon. Government House Leader, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre if I can remember that.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 201, Funding Alberta's Future Act, brought forth by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Among many things, if this bill is passed, it seeks to have the Minister of Finance introduce a bill to establish a funding Alberta's future account of the general revenue fund and put 30 per cent of all nonrenewable resource revenues into this account.

Revenues put into this account would be allocated to the following areas: 35 per cent to the heritage savings trust fund; 35 per cent to the postsecondary endowment fund, which would replace the access to the future fund; 25 per cent to the capital account; and 5 per cent directed to a humanities, social sciences, and arts endowment fund. If the fund were to reach \$500 million, revenue would be directed to an opportunity fund, which has a yet-to-be-determined purpose.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has already decided exactly where Albertans' savings should go without referring to any sort of consultation to date. Now, in the hon. member's speech he referred to the possibility of dividends. I don't know. We might call those Riverview bucks. I guess that's encouraging, that there might be some future consultation with Albertans.

I'm concerned with section 4 of the Funding Alberta's Future Act, and it reads as follows:

In the Bill introduced under section 2, the Access to the Future Fund established under the Access to the Future Act shall be replaced by the Post-secondary Education Endowment Fund.

Now, I'm having a hard time figuring out why the access to the future fund needs to be replaced.

The postsecondary education fund, Mr. Speaker. I believe its objectives are as follows:

- (a) support the excellence of the post-secondary system . . . including the areas of pure and applied research, teaching and community service,
- (b) increase the accessibility of the post-secondary system . . .
- (c) [render] post-secondary education more affordable for students, and
- (d) support the continued development of apprenticeship and training programs.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to discuss what the access to the future fund, as we now know it, aims to accomplish. It is intended to provide an investment in innovations within the postsecondary system; support of improved learner outcomes; faculty, staff, and graduate student development, attraction, and retention; support of knowledge and technology transfer; and, very importantly, affordability.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, the funds have almost identical goals. The access to the future fund provides matching grants to stimulate private, industry, corporate, and other contributions from the public. The fund engages other sectors to invest in education.

Such partnerships are very valuable to a successful postsecondary education system. The fund was just created, less than two years ago, and in that short time frame the government of Alberta has committed to support the China Institute at the University of Alberta, matching a donation of some \$37.3 million; the province-wide Lois Hole Campus Alberta digital library initiative, with start-up costs of \$30 million; and the Schulich School of Engineering at the University of Calgary, matching a donation of \$25 million.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, when comparing the access to the future fund and the proposed postsecondary endowment fund, it is clear that they both have the very same purpose: to further education in Alberta. I think the hon. member should be commended for his support of good government initiatives. Since the current fund, which Bill 201 proposes to eliminate, has virtually the same goal as the proposed new replacement fund, it is unclear as to why it would be necessary to eliminate the current fund in the first place. Perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview would simply prefer to see a name change of the access to the future fund. As long as we achieve real results for Alberta students, it should not matter what the fund is called. I fail to see the need to duplicate our current fund.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the access to the future fund is likely superior to the proposed fund because it encourages individuals and the private sector to participate in investing in Alberta's education system and future. This means that the contributions from the fund are actually worth more because of the matching grants that accompany the government of Alberta's funding. Students stand to benefit more with the help of the access to the future fund because they are supported by both the government and the broader community.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be a complete waste of time to replace the access to the future fund, considering its objectives and great potential for Alberta's future leaders. I urge the members of this Assembly to strongly consider the differences between the two funds before voting on Bill 201. I think it will be clear after prudent study that the current fund meets the current and future needs of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm now going to recognize the hon. leader of the third party. But before that, he would be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, the hon. Government House Leader, the hon. Official Opposition House Leader. Was there another government member who would like to participate here? Well, after the Official Opposition House Leader, then it will be the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed then by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 201, Funding Alberta's Future Act, introduced by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. I think it's a great thing that the Leader of the Official Opposition is thinking about the future. I think we all ought to be thinking about the future in this House. I have said repeatedly that I feel that Alberta is now at a crossroads, and we need really to begin thinking about where we want to go as a province.

A couple of years ago people might have thought that we were at a crossroads as a province because we had paid off all of our debt, but I don't believe that that is true, Mr. Speaker, and I also believe that we're at a crossroads because of a number of other factors. It's

not true, because the province has simply transferred our financial debt into a debt of infrastructure, which we estimate at anywhere between \$10 billion and \$20 billion, which now must be paid off and which the government is proposing to pay off through the means of the shell game of P3s, in which private companies will incur the debt on their books and it will be hidden from the people of Alberta and, more importantly, the grassroots of the Conservative Party. I think we're at a crossroads, Mr. Speaker, because of the situation with respect to world oil prices, the world shortage of oil supplies, because of profound climate change that is now taking place and which needs to be addressed.

Now, this particular bill does not mention budget surpluses, but it is structured in a manner to build upon Conservative budgetary practices, that have resulted in the current range of budgetary surpluses. Bill 201 is a variation of the Conservative plan from the 1970s to create the Alberta heritage trust fund. Like Bill 201 the original Conservative plan entailed putting aside 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource income into the Alberta heritage trust fund every year to serve as a sustainable account for capital expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, the Conservative plan disintegrated completely in the 1980s with the collapse of global oil prices. The provincial government slid into debt, unable to balance its budget, and that heritage trust fund atrophied because of declining resource revenues. The 1980s illustrate three weaknesses of this approach: first, the unreliability of the nonrenewable resource sector for long-term fiscal stability; second, Alberta's budgetary overreliance on nonrenewable resource income; and third, the inability of a fund-like approach to work once nonrenewable income has dried up.

Mr. Speaker, we are not against an approach like this in general except that the Liberal plan doesn't deal with the fundamentals of Alberta's budgetary and financial situation. While the Liberals talk about a sustainability gap, this bill does nothing to address that and, in fact, will continue the reliance on nonrenewable resource revenue to pay for ongoing expenditures. This is compounded by the support of the Liberal party for the government's reductions in corporate income tax. We are becoming more and more dependent on nonrenewable resource revenue for ongoing expenditures for the programs that the people of Alberta depend upon.

Now, there are two basic flaws in the approach that is taken here. First of all, it doesn't see the nonrenewable resources for what they are, that is to say nonrenewable and finite. Notwithstanding the tremendous reserves that exist in the tar sands in Alberta, these are finite resources. We must as a province invest in a renewable energy future for this province, and the fund as proposed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition doesn't do that. We need a more profound, more basic approach to investment. To do that, we need to ensure that we have the full value of these resources, which are owned by Albertans, coming to Albertans, and that means fundamentally a change in the royalty structure that exists in this province.

It's unacceptable to have 1 per cent royalties charged on oil from the majority of the production from Alberta's tar sands. It's unacceptable to export raw and unprocessed bitumen. We must think big, Mr. Speaker. We need to look at the value of the resources that are slipping through our fingers as we speak and capture that value for the people of Alberta, not just for this generation but for future generations. We need to be thinking about our children and our grandchildren and even our great-grandchildren. There will come a day when we can no longer burn oil and coal for fuel. That decision will not be made in Alberta. That decision will be made for us in the world. We are already lagging behind not just European jurisdictions, not just jurisdictions in Asia, but jurisdictions in the United States.

We need to capture the value of our resources – and that's a

fundamental thing – and then the purpose to which that value is turned needs to be to prepare the economy of this province for the day when oil and coal are no longer usable or no longer have the value that they currently do. In other words, Mr. Speaker, we need to build a green and prosperous future for future generations of this province. We need to build an energy economy in this province that is based on renewable energy, and to that end the Alberta New Democrats are proposing a significantly larger fund, up to perhaps a value of \$20 billion, that would be used to invest in renewable energy and in transforming the Alberta economy into one in which renewable energy is the key engine, something that would guarantee prosperity, not to mention a clean environment for future generations.

4:00

There is nothing in this bill that deals with the use of nonrenewable resource revenue to clean up the environmental mess created by oil and gas production, particularly production in the tar sands in northern Alberta. I am surprised. Of course, the goals of the bill are admirable: to eliminate infrastructure debt, something Alberta New Democrats also support; a postsecondary education endowment fund, a wonderful idea; a humanities, social sciences, and arts endowment fund, also a wonderful idea. But the AEUB estimates that the unfunded liability to clean up the environmental damage even from conventional oil and gas exploration and development in this province is around \$2 billion. There is nothing in the Liberal bill that speaks to this question.

Mr. Speaker, I think there are some wonderful ideas in this, but it's not big thinking. It doesn't look too far to the future. It looks a little bit to the future, but it doesn't look to the horizon. It doesn't think big. The Alberta New Democrats' plan thinks big, looks to the horizon, and thinks about how we want to position Alberta in the next generation so that we can ensure both a clean environment and a prosperous future for our children and grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just indicate that while there are some great ideas in this Bill 201, it does not meet the test, in our view, of the vision that's necessary for this province. It doesn't really grapple with the very nature of nonrenewable and finite resources. It assumes that those resources will continue to exist and continue to fund government expenditures. Because of that, because of the position of the government and the Liberal opposition with respect to corporate tax cuts at a time when corporations are earning record profits, we don't think that this bill offers the answer that we need in this province and, as a result, will not support it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have eight speakers on my list. The next three will be the following: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak in strong support of Bill 201, the Funding Alberta's Future Act.

I'm going to lead off my comments by responding to the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, in particular my concern with his comment that this plan does nothing to address the need to replace nonrenewable resource revenue with a sustainable source of revenue. I'm not sure that he read the bill because that's exactly what this plan does. That is exactly the intent. It's exactly the way in which it was received by economists and respected businesspeople and any number of organizations across this province when the Official Opposition first released that policy back in September of last year. So while this member may not see

how far this bill goes towards replacing nonrenewable resource revenue, many, many people did, and in fact, as I said, that is exactly what it's intended to do.

Now, I will agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on one point, and that is that the debt in this province is in fact not paid yet. There are many people in this province who are surprised to learn of the amount of debt that we still carry. The current Finance minister when he was the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation said publicly that the infrastructure debt was sitting at somewhere between \$8 billion and \$10 billion and would be \$14 billion soon if we didn't address it. We know for a fact that the unfunded portion of the teachers' pension liability is sitting at \$7 billion more or less and grows every day at great cost to taxpayers and will cost taxpayers somewhere in the order of \$45 billion by the time that agreement is finally paid out in approximately 55 years. So for this government or any friends of this government to argue that they've paid off the debt, it's simply not the case.

I'd like to address the concerns raised by the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon when he drew some legitimate comparisons to the postsecondary endowment fund that is included in Bill 201 and the access to the future fund, which this government passed some time ago. The biggest single difference for the hon. member is very, very simple, and it's very significant, and that is this: the government's legislation capped the access to the future fund at \$3 billion. They put a ceiling on it. The first thing they did. I spoke loud and vociferously in this House against the idea of putting an artificial ceiling on that fund. So to the hon. member: our fund in this business year alone would have put \$1.427 billion into that fund and another \$1.348 billion next year and similar amounts all the way down the line. By the year 2021 you're looking at almost \$16 billion in that fund as opposed to the paltry \$3 billion that the government has committed to the fund now, and we don't know when we're going to reach that. So that is definitely the biggest single difference.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The fact that you could change the name or that the goals lauded in the bill are similar: of course. The difference is: put your money where your mouth is. That's what this bill does. Remember that this is in addition to the dollars that are already spent on postsecondary. This fund would put \$71 million into the postsecondary endowment fund this year alone. That's the first year of the program. It jumps to \$139 million in the second year and to \$202 million in the third year, and that's in addition to the money that the government is spending on postsecondary right now. So the effects are absolutely dramatic when you relieve the fund from that cap and start putting the money in there. As I say, put your money where your mouth is and really invest in postsecondary education.

I think everybody in this House agrees that a knowledge-based economy is the future of this province. Again to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood: that is exactly what this does. By funding postsecondary to the extent that this bill would and by ensuring a knowledge-based economy down the road, we relieve ourselves from the dependence on oil and natural gas.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've been an MLA for about two and a half years now, and I've travelled the province extensively, met with stakeholder groups, whether it be chambers of commerce or Rotary clubs or any number of organizations that we meet with when we're doing caucus outreach trips, met with a number of individuals over that period of time as well, and without any question the number one comment we heard – and I know that the government members heard this too; it was reflected in their leadership review vote back

on April 1 of last year – is that people want a plan. People want something, some sort of a vision, not a three-year plan or a five-year plan, for what this province is going to look like down the road. People want a long-term vision as to how we're going to not only secure a future without oil and gas revenues but make sure that there's something there for our children and our grandchildren as well.

I find it a little ironic, quite frankly, that the Conservative Party then, after having heard this same message that members of the opposition heard and after talking amongst themselves throughout the leadership campaign about the need for a plan, went and elected a new leader, a man who became the Premier, who by his own admission has no plan for savings. In fact, it was in his very first comments as Premier, his first media interview as Premier, where he said literally that he has no plan for the heritage savings trust fund. I must admit to having been incredibly disheartened when I heard the new Premier say that because the need is obvious. Most of the leadership candidates in that race other than the Premier spoke out in favour of some sort of a savings plan, some sort of level in terms of the amount of resource revenues that should be saved.

I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, the Leader of the Official Opposition, referenced some of them earlier. He talked about the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, whose plan would have saved 30 per cent of resource revenues, and I tabled a document indicating that in the House last Thursday. He spoke about former Premier Peter Lougheed advocating for 30 per cent of resource revenues being saved and the failed leadership candidate and presumptive Premier Jim Dinning, who talked about saving 30 per cent during regular times and 50 per cent during boom times.

4:10

He didn't have time during his remarks to mention a few of the other leadership candidates, and I'd just like to point these out as well. Mark Norris, who was and is to this day, I guess, a former economic development minister in this Legislature, said in his campaign material that a percentage of budget surpluses will be earmarked for the heritage savings trust fund.

We have the health minister, actually, and this is quite interesting. I'm hoping that the health minister will partake in the debate in a few minutes because I'd like to hear his thoughts on this. I'd like to hear him expand on his thoughts where he said that his priority is that nonrenewable resource revenue should be saved for the future in a manner which can expand our economy, expand our society, and pay dividends long-term into the future. I'm going to assume that the minister of health will be speaking in favour of Bill 201.

Several organizations, as I referenced earlier, have spoken out publicly in favour of the idea of saving some percentage of nonrenewable resource revenues. Just to mention a few, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation: not a group that would necessarily always be thinking or seem to be thinking along the same lines as the Alberta Liberal Party, but they certainly endorse this.

The Canada-West Foundation has done an awful lot of work, and some of that work actually comes from a man by the name of Allan Warrack, who is a former minister with this government, advocating for a savings plan of nonrenewable resource revenue.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce are strongly supportive in their Vision 2020 document of savings of nonrenewable resource revenue.

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce president, Heather Douglas, said that she strongly recommends saving 30 to 40 per cent of resource revenues. She went on to say, "We believe it will enhance Alberta's competitive advantage." This is coming from the chamber

of commerce in what is arguably the second most important financial centre in the country, and they're strongly recommending that this be done.

Mr. Speaker, in this Legislature last Thursday I asked a question of the Treasury Board minister, but the Finance minister was kind enough to respond. The question was simply: is it true or false that this government relies more on nonrenewable resource revenues to fund its budgeting programs today than it did 10 years ago? To his credit the Finance minister gave the answer that I already knew.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You've heard a lot of the numbers, already. You've heard a lot of the projections as to the amount of money that could be saved, the amount that would be available for reinvestment, the ways in which it could be invested, so I won't go through all of that again because there is much to talk about on this bill. I'll start off very briefly by addressing the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and then the hon. leader of the third party with some of the concerns that they had.

To the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, first of all, who seemed to have a problem with what we proposed to do with the access to the future fund: if that problem is something that is keeping him up at night, I would simply suggest that at the appropriate time he move an amendment in committee, and I'm sure that we can work together and collaboratively to move this ahead.

To the hon. leader of the third party. Despite what the leader of the third party says, this plan very much does evolve us out of dependency, out of a culture of addiction to nonrenewable resource revenues as a way to pay our daily bills, and though he seems to have a problem with the lack of vision surrounding this bill, I would suggest to you that this bill is full of vision. It just may not be quite as sexy as, on the one hand, getting rich quick or, on the other hand, hanging the rich. I suggest that the hon. leader of the third party leans towards the hanging the rich vision. The government? We don't know. It remains to be seen how things change over the life of this session, but certainly going back to the previous session, the previous order of things, this was a government that ideologically very much shared a vision of getting rich quick.

You know, this vision in Bill 201, Funding Alberta's Future Act, won't get you rich, won't get us rich quick – it's not about how many SUVs you can park in the driveway or how many spots you have in your garage for such vehicles – nor will it hang the rich. Alberta Liberals recognize that in order to prosper over the long term, you need to be able to create wealth and sustain wealth. This is about sustaining wealth.

I was watching television last night – I think it was last night, maybe the night before – Outdoor Life Network. They were doing a nature documentary on Alaska, actually, and they took a moment to focus on the gold rush in the late 1890s in the Klondike. Two hundred and fifty thousand people trekked up that mountainside. You can see it represented on the Alaska licence plate. Two hundred and fifty thousand people desiring to strike it rich, to find gold, trekked up that mountainside. Countless numbers of them died trying to reach the goal. Of those 250,000 would-be prospectors, would-be gold diggers, only 800 ever struck it rich.

This is about broader, deeper, more sustainable wealth. This is about getting us to a position as a province where we have sufficient wealth in our heritage savings trust fund, in our postsecondary education endowment fund, and in our other funds to generate wealth, to generate, as far as the income that the heritage savings trust fund is concerned, sustainable wealth to run the province's

year-over-year, month-over-month, day-to-day operations so that we don't have to take money – \$2,000, roughly, per capita per taxpayer per year – above and beyond what we raise from normal revenue streams, the revenue streams that all other jurisdictions have. We don't have to take from nonrenewable resource revenues and top it up because that's kind of like going to your line of credit every month to supplement your income until one day you wake up and you discover that your line of credit is maxed out and the bank won't give you any more.

I don't spend much time worrying about the prospect of this province running out of oil and gas. I suppose it could happen in my lifetime. I suppose there's a greater chance that it could happen in my children's lifetime. There's probably a very good chance that it could happen in my grandchildren's lifetime if we continued consuming fossil fuels on this planet at the current rate. But you know, Mr. Speaker, that's not going to happen. That's not going to happen.

You may have seen on the weekend that the European Union has decided to make a concerted effort over the next 15 years to generate I think it was 30 per cent of their energy needs from renewable sources. In this province especially we should take that as a warning to adjust our priorities because the way in which we will run out of nonrenewable resource revenues is not because there's no more oil in the ground in Alberta but because the rest of the world isn't interested in buying our oil. So it stays in the ground where it's worth nothing if we can't find somebody to sell it to or something to make out of it that's value-added to put down the pipeline, quote, unquote, to sell to markets elsewhere.

I would come back to the leader of the third party again and suggest that, you know, if he has a problem that we don't have an endowment fund in this particular act, in this particular bill, for renewable energy in some form or other, he could move an amendment there. I don't know how it'll fare in the House, but he could certainly try. I for one would certainly listen to his ideas on that.

Regardless of what you do in the normal course of daily business to promote the development of exportable renewable energy technology and sources that will ultimately replace the nonrenewable energy that we sell around the world, it is vital that we move off our dependence on nonrenewable resource revenues to fund the day-to-day business of living in this great province. This bill, Bill 201, does that and so much more, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

This bill will create, I think, if given half a chance, the world-leading postsecondary education culture. This bill will create an arts, social sciences, and humanities fund, which is the piece of the puzzle in this province that's missing. We endow science. We endow engineering. We endow medicine. We don't endow the social sciences and humanities yet, and we need to do that. As my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition described so eloquently a few minutes ago, this bill presents an orderly, if completely nonsexy, blueprint for taking care of our infrastructure deficit. But this bill allows this province – and I would invite members of all parties to try to get past their respective ideologies and see the vision – to prosper in perpetuity.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge members of all parties to move amendments to specific clauses in the bill that they may think are not perfect or perhaps aren't perfect. We're human on this side of the House too; we don't get it perfect every time. But I would urge all members to vote in favour of this bill in second reading. We'll take it on to committee. We'll see where it goes from there. We'll work collaboratively, and I think that together we can produce a piece of

legislation that will make for a magnificent 21st century for the province of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader, followed by the Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and enter into debate on Bill 201. I was a little miffed that the hon. Leader of the Opposition in introducing his remarks refused to refer to my leadership campaign platform and the good things that I was suggesting we do, but I'll assume that that was just an oversight and not an intentional slight on his part.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that as part of this debate it's important to reference the good work that's happened. Last year I think was the 25th year of the establishment of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. It's a good model. It's a great model. It shows what can happen with foresight, and we are now reaping the benefits in Alberta of that fund having been set up and having grown.

A few years ago the Alberta ingenuity fund, as it's called colloquially, was set up, the engineering and science research fund, and funded to the tune of, I think, \$500 million. Then only a couple of years ago the commitment was made to top up the science and engineering fund, recognizing the value and the power of that fund to Alberta and Albertans, to add to the ingenuity fund, and to establish a fund that I'm very, very proud of: the access to the future fund, and establish it with a clear commitment to having it reach \$3 billion so that on an ongoing basis, when it's fully funded, \$145 million would be available for a number of very significant purposes to advance education in our province.

In setting up that fund and having the debate around Bill 1 at that time that set up that fund, there was clear discussion about whether there should be a cap on the fund and the purposes of the fund. But the reality is that establishing the fund and putting the approximately \$1 billion that's in the fund now has clearly created an appetite in this province for people to make a commitment to advanced education, recognizing that most of the advanced education institutions that are respected around the world as being at the pre-eminence of their field have significant endowment funds behind them.

So I for one am a big proponent of the access to the future fund, and I would freely say that, in my humble opinion, the \$3 billion is a start not a finish. It's a start. It's a place that we should be aiming at and saying that we want to get there. My hope is that we will build such pressure from private donors in the province and from people who value education, who want to see this succeed, that people will be stepping forward and insisting that that fund go above \$3 billion. But it's important to have a target. It's important to have a target in there.

So I wanted to rise and just reference the fact that we have a good start in this province. The heritage savings trust fund is a good start. Now with the debt paid off, the commitment to inflation-proof the heritage savings trust fund, and in the last two years additional tranches of \$1 billion each transferred into that heritage savings trust fund: a good start. The Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, an absolutely stellar model. The ingenuity fund, which is growing into its own as we speak and will be providing in the same manner as the heritage medical research fund did, will be providing real opportunities for the future of Albertans, moving Alberta into a knowledge-based economy, making it possible for us to grow that economy and that society beyond the carbon base that we have now and into a knowledge base in so many fields.

I would agree – in fact, I’ve said it publicly; I said it during the campaign last fall, and I’ll say it again at every opportunity that I have – that we need a third piece to that stool: that humanities, social sciences, and the arts endowment fund. We should have that, in my opinion. That’s not government policy at the moment. But that’s a piece that’s needed because just as we need to advance our knowledge in engineering and science, just as we need to advance our knowledge in medicine, we need to be looking at issues in the social sciences area. We need to be able to do more research than the centre for family research can do with its modest funding now in the area of family violence, in the area of how we help children develop, as well as certainly the other side of that, in supporting the arts and making sure that we understand that the arts are important.

So those are important things that we could move forward to do. I certainly have supported those in the past and will support those in the future. I have supported in the past the idea of an energy and environment endowment, which could be a part of the ingenuity fund or perhaps a rural development endowment, using the money that we obtain today, not income but selling our assets, the oil and gas assets that belong to not just current Albertans but also future Albertans. The money that we get for those assets is a replacement asset and should be treated as such and should be husbanded and should be used as a resource to help build the future of the province.

So in saying all that, I would look at Bill 201 and say that there are some things in here that really bring forward, as the Leader of the Official Opposition in his opening remarks indicated, ideas that have been championed and championed well by members of this government as we talk about the future of the province.

Now, there was some suggestion in remarks earlier that there was a lack of a plan. Mr. Speaker, that offends me because this province has a 20-year strategic plan. That 20-year strategic plan does talk about the future of this province, and it talks about how we need to develop that knowledge-based economy: “Unleashing Innovation; Leading in Learning; Competing in a Global Marketplace; and Making Alberta the Best Place to Live, Work and Visit.” There are so many elements of that 20-year strategic plan that are important, but making use of the resources that we have today and translating it into a knowledge economy for tomorrow and a society tomorrow which engenders respect, which looks into the issues that we need to deal with. Whether it’s medical research or science and engineering research or family violence and social sciences research, whether it’s championing the arts to make this the kind of place where we want to live, those are all very important.

So why then, Mr. Speaker, having said all that, will I not be supporting Bill 201? Well, I will not be supporting Bill 201 because one shouldn’t do indirectly what one can’t do directly. This is in effect a money bill. This is a bill which is suggesting how resources which come into the province of Alberta, into the government of Alberta coffers, should be allocated, and that would be a money bill. This is a bill to direct a bill. This bill doesn’t set up any of the funds. It suggests that a bill should be brought forward in the next session.

So the Leader of the Official Opposition actually steps outside the purpose of private members’ bills to say that this is a bill from our caucus. Well, it’s not a bill from caucus. It’s a private member’s bill, and it’s a bill being brought forward by a private member although the Leader of the Official Opposition, but it’s in essence a bill to create a bill. It’s a bill which would purport to tie the hands of the Legislature by directing it to bring in a bill and setting out some of the elements that should be in the bill. So I’m not sure what would happen if the bill that came in didn’t match the bill that was directing it to come in. It’s a very convoluted way to achieve public policy. It is a good way – and I commend the Leader of the Official

Opposition for finding this convoluted methodology – to raise some important public policy issues, which I hope we will be discussing in great detail after the tabling of the budget on April 19, very, very important issues about how we use the resources of Albertans that we obtain from the sale of our natural resources and how we use them to help build the future of this province. That’s a very, very important discussion and one which merits a broader discussion than what is provided for in the confines of a private member’s bill and particularly a private member’s bill with this limited a scope.

4:30

So with those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I’d say that I absolutely love the access to the future fund, wouldn’t want to necessarily change its name, but that would just be a private concern. It’s going to have a huge impact on the future of this province. I think we should be building it, and I hope we build it past the \$3 billion to a much larger fund.

The humanities, social sciences, and the arts concept. Not a new concept. I’ve discussed that with the new president of the University of Alberta, Indira Samarasekera. In fact, she mentioned it in her induction speech when she was sworn in as president of the University of Alberta. So that’s not an idea that’s new to the Official Opposition. It’s an idea which has been discussed and which, in my view, is a great idea.

The apportioning of funds. I think there should be a policy. I’ve heard the Minister of Finance indicate that we will be bringing forward a policy with respect to apportioning of funds, so that’s not a new idea.

The question of the humanities, social sciences, and the arts fund. Why you’d limit it to that amount I’m not sure. The fact of the matter is that this government has provided leadership over its time. It provided leadership in setting up the heritage medical research fund, which has proved to be extremely valuable. It has provided leadership in setting up the ingenuity fund, the cancer fund, the access to the future fund, and there’s so much more.

The Acting Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m really pleased to be able to get up in this Assembly and speak in support of Bill 201. I had a part in developing the policy which became this bill, and I am really delighted to see it come into this Legislative Assembly. I hope that we will get the support of government because as a number of them have mentioned, they really like what’s in this bill. I’m sure we can get them to support it because it’s such a good idea.

Mr. Speaker, as an Albertan I want to see the oil and gas, the nonrenewable natural resource revenue, in this province be an opportunity and continue to be an opportunity for all Albertans into eternity. I want to see that prosperity be perpetual. Whether we are talking about oil and gas revenues reducing because the resource itself is depleting or because there’s no demand for it, even in the government’s own figures they are anticipating and planning for that reduction in revenue. As it stands right now, that oil and gas is coming right out of the ground, and we’re spending it as fast as it comes. There is no savings plan in place.

That’s why I am so keen on the ideas that are embedded in this Bill 201. It does allow us to address that sustainability gap between how much other revenue we are raising and how much we are spending for every person in Alberta. That sustainability gap is the difference that we are basically subsidizing with nonrenewable resource revenue, and we need to stop doing that. We need to be

able to find a way to replace that money and make it perpetual as an opportunity for us.

I want to see that money go into an endowment fund for the infrastructure to address, and that's to address a lot of the problems that have been identified by the opposition for choices that the government has made. It certainly paid off a cash debt, but in doing so, it created an infrastructure debt, a human services debt, a long-term care debt, a homelessness debt. There have been a number of other ways that that cash debt was paid, and we're now seeing that come up in a number of these other debts and deficits.

Included in this Bill 201 is the idea of an infrastructure fund to pay back and to get our infrastructure up to speed, which is perfectly appropriate. We're a very wealthy province. We should have the best, and I want to see us have the best. Why wouldn't we have good roads and excellent bridges in good repair and long-term care centres that are bright and lively and offer dignity to those that live there? That's exactly the kind of thing that we should be doing.

I'm delighted to see the postsecondary education fund that is anticipated in our policy and in this bill. The Minister of Health and Wellness referred to the president of the University of Alberta's inaugural address, where she was talking about the possibilities for that university and how she'd like to see it placed in the top 20 universities in North America. You know, with a fund like this, that could happen, and that makes that possibility much more real to me, and I would really like to see that go ahead.

There's been quite a bit of talk on the other side about the access to the future fund. The problem with that is that it never got the funding that it was supposed to get, and it seems to be sort of languishing there. It's just not an active, viable, forward-moving fund. This one is. It continues to have money put into it, and it's uncapped, so we really could have all centres of excellence in our postsecondary institutions. We're not limiting that to our universities but also to our colleges, to our institutes of technology, even to apprenticeship programs, which are also a form of postsecondary learning opportunity. So very exciting in what we could do to educate our population, and that in itself becomes a non resource-based opportunity for the future.

When we talk about exploring other sources of revenue and other things that we could be doing in this province that aren't so directly reliant on oil and gas revenue, here's a way of creating that and of pouring into that knowledge-based economy that everyone says is now and is the future, so that's an excellent part of this.

The heritage fund, of course, is very important to all of us. It's an integral part of who we think of as ourselves, as Albertans, and I approve absolutely of the money going into that fund and the opportunities it creates for us. But, Mr. Speaker, it will be no surprise to you to learn that my favourite part of this proposal is the humanities, social sciences, and arts endowment fund. I was very proud of my colleagues for working on this idea and recognizing that there are certainly existing endowment funds and endowments of chairs at our various universities for maths and sciences and various other kinds of research and even, as the Minister of Health and Wellness indicated, the Alberta heritage fund for medical research, but we do not support specific endowments for social sciences, the humanities, and the arts.

It's very hard to get people to step up to the plate and underwrite or encourage philosophy or romance languages or social services and the various studies that go into that and, of course, the arts, the fine crafts and fine arts. They are an excellent opportunity for us in Alberta both to create a better quality of life for us but also as a very active participant in the economy. Money into the arts stays in Alberta. It doesn't leave and go home in the pockets of oil companies that go back to the States. Money into the arts stays in Alberta,

and all kinds of opportunities could be created through that fund.

For example, we have talked in the Alberta Liberals about our commitment to doubling the funding to the arts, and we're actually looking at the possibility and feasibility of tripling the funding to the arts. You look at the additional money that would be generated out of this fund every year, and we're looking at an additional \$28 million a year. So now you can really set your imagination on fire for the possibilities of things, like more public art.

4:40

I was in Saskatoon a year ago, and I was really interested to see that on almost every street corner in their downtown area they have public art. I look around Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray. I've been in all those cities in the last year. Almost none. I can't remember any public art with the exception of the Famous Five sculpture outside the special arts centre in Calgary and the EPCOR Centre for the Performing Arts in Calgary and a few here on the grounds of the Legislature.

Imagine if we had a sculpture park here at the Legislature. That kind of thing becomes possible when we look at an endowment fund that would include the arts. Although we have put a cap on it for now, I remain hopeful that we will be able to lift that cap at some point. In the meantime I think artists could also tap into the money that's available out of the opportunity fund, which of course is available for anybody with great ideas about how to make our province even better.

So I am very much in support of this. This has been a grassroots process that has come together from my caucus members being out in the public and looking at what people wanted. They wanted a plan. They wanted to know that there was going to be perpetual opportunity and, hopefully, prosperity that was coming from our nonrenewable resource revenues, and they wanted to see savings that would continue to pay off for us. I think we've satisfied all of that, and obviously we listened very carefully to the desire for support for postsecondary education, for infrastructure, for the heritage fund, for the arts and humanities, and that special fund, the opportunity fund, just to fire our imaginations.

It's interesting to me the way the government members have responded to this because none of them have been able to really find anything to criticize out of it, but they're very quick to try and take credit for what's in here or to try and pretend that it is modelled after one of their funds.

I look forward to everyone's support. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to contribute to second reading debate on Bill 201, the Funding Alberta's Future Act, sponsored by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. The intent of this legislation is commendable. Saving for Alberta's future is an integral part of ensuring that our province remains vibrant for many generations to come. Fortunately, we've always taken saving for the future seriously in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, we have the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, the access to the future fund, the sustainability fund, the Alberta heritage medical research fund, the Alberta cancer legacy fund, and numerous other endowments and funds. The value of these funds is tens of billions of dollars, dollars which can be used to improve the future of all Albertans.

Bill 201 seeks to build upon the government of Alberta's track record of saving prudently for our future. I support the intent of his

bill. We have another proud tradition in Alberta, a practice of consulting the public on issues of importance. Gathering the thoughts and perspectives of Albertans is important in order to formulate policy that is representative of their needs. This government believes that we must continue to engage Albertans. For example, the government has launched the Affordable Housing Task Force. This government is also committed to a safe communities and policing task force. These task forces will seek the opinions of all Albertans on issues of great importance to the future of the province before implementing solutions to these challenges.

In addition to this, the government of Alberta is carrying forward with the land-use framework. This initiative will be an opportunity for the government to consult with Albertans and develop strategies to manage Alberta's land base. While Bill 201 is consistent with this government's intent to plan for the future, I have reservations because I believe that it is not consistent with our practice of consulting with Albertans. The ingenuity of our people is our greatest resource. In order to maximize the potential of this resource, we must consult with Albertans regularly on issues of importance. Bill 201 contains no mechanisms for consulting with Albertans. Rather, it recommends that changes be implemented *carte blanche*.

This government is also committed to openness and transparency. That means inviting Albertans to participate in the democratic process. I believe that it is most productive to implement these changes publicly rather than through the closed processes called for by this bill. I don't believe that we can implement such sweeping legislation without first engaging in a full and thorough consultation process with Albertans, a process that is open and transparent. Therefore, I urge my hon. colleagues to defer support until such time as this process can be completed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to speak in favour of Bill 201, the bill sponsored by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, Funding Alberta's Future Act.

Let me start by saying that this is not a surplus policy, Mr. Speaker. It is a revenue policy. The government side in the debate has highlighted the fact that they're now working on a surplus policy, and they're urging members of the opposition and members of the public to stay tuned because this policy is coming down and it should be great. What I'm saying is that we've already had our surplus policy more than 18 months ago, and now we have graduated and grown towards our own revenue policy to have a plan for this province, something that did not exist for at least the last 10 years. We are working on having a plan that incorporates surpluses, and it also incorporates revenues. So we're doing both things at the same time versus the government, who is now playing catch-up. They are now coming down with a surplus policy, and maybe two and a half years or three years from now they would have a revenue policy in place.

The second point I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, which was mentioned before, is that 40 of the hon. members in the government caucus backed Mr. Jim Dinning when he was seeking the Tory throne. Now, I am confident that they didn't all support him because he was just the front-runner in that race or he was the person with the most money or because he had the most volunteers on the ground. I'm hoping that the majority of them supported him because of his policies and because of where he stands on the issues, not simply because some of them were promised cabinet posts or

committee chairmanships. I hope some of them took the time to check his policies and see, for example, that he advocated putting 30 per cent of the nonrenewable resource revenue into a savings account for the future in regular years and 50 per cent in boom years.

Also, Mr. Peter Lougheed, who basically established the Tory dynasty, was on the record advocating and supporting something similar to what we're proposing here, basically putting 30 per cent of all oil and gas revenues, including our share of oil sands net profits, into the fund, into a savings account.

Again, these are two supposedly respected individuals, one who slayed the deficit, who was Treasurer when the on-paper debt was eliminated, and then the other person, who established the Tory dynasty, both of them speaking in favour of our idea: 30 per cent of nonrenewable resources going into a savings account for the future. So my challenge to those 40 people across is: if you believed in Jim's fiscal policies and if you like where he stood on that particular issue, then I urge you to speak.

It is really surprising that so far, Mr. Speaker, only three of the government MLAs signalled their desire to participate in this debate. Isn't securing Alberta's future a priority for all of us? Are those members not concerned about the future and what legacy we leave to our kids and their kids? Are most of them only concerned about their re-election chances? Is talk about resource policies and talk about savings for the future only sexy and attractive during election campaigns, when we need to engage and stimulate and impress citizens of this province, but once they're here under the dome, then it's no longer sexy or attractive? Should the province continue on its course to certain destruction? Should we as legislators allow this government to continue with its addiction to nonrenewable energy resources? Should we allow this government to keep throwing money at problems, to use band-aids and analgesics, to run our affairs like there's no tomorrow? Should we let them do that? Where is the plan? Where is the long-term, sustainable vision?

The hon. Government House Leader and minister of health started his debate by complaining about how the Leader of the Opposition ignored mentioning this minister's Tory leadership campaign and the promises it contained. My question, after having listened to his remarks, is simply this. Are these topics only of interest and of importance because certain members of the government caucus were seeking the leadership, were hoping to become Premier? Where does he stand on the issue now versus three months ago? Does he not think that we need to invest in Alberta's future?

4:50

The other thing is that Bill 201 is not convoluted, as the hon. minister indicated, and even if it were, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that he has enough staff in his department and enough staff in the Minister of Finance's department to explain it line by line to him and show him the merit and show him the great potential that we are throwing away here. We can also give him a briefing on this. If he was sincere and if the Premier was sincere in signalling that the Premier and his cabinet are open to listening to the opposition and working with the opposition for the benefit of all Albertans, here is their chance. We can actually tell him why we think this bill is useful and why we think this is something that is overdue, but it's not done yet. We can actually salvage some of this prosperity and put it to good use for our kids and their kids.

Now, I'm also reminded that the hon. government whip is switched off during private members' business. The hon. House leader was talking about the definition of private member's bill, and he was challenging the Leader of the Opposition, you know, as to why all members of his caucus are supportive of his idea. The answer is: we are supportive because it makes sense. In making this

remark, I am also comparing ourselves to members of the government caucus. I said that only three of them participated in the debate, and I am really not sure if more of them will be participating later.

Members of the caucus opposite have indicated to me on several occasions that during private members' business their whip is switched off, that they treat private members' business as a free vote. So when I basically questioned why they always seem to vote the same way and they always seem to vote against private members' business originating from the opposition, one jokingly told me that they all think alike. Another time the hon. Minister of Justice jokingly mentioned that they do it to protect us from ourselves, and that's basically the attitude that we have to put an end to, Mr. Speaker. This is the attitude that nothing good could come from the opposition side and that the government knows it all and the puck stops there. They basically know it all, and there's no use for the opposition.

My challenge to them is: if certainly the whip is not on, then maybe more of them should be speaking. The whip is on to prevent them from speaking or to make sure that they speak in a certain way, that they all agree. So I think that they should really not allow ideology to stand in the way of good debate, and I think that if they're true to their promise that they're going to listen to the opposition and work with the opposition, as signalled by the Premier, then I think they should allow this bill to move on to the next stage of debate, which is the Committee of the Whole, to now be able to give it the attention that it deserves and to go through it line by line and see where things could be improved, where things could be made better. I think that is the role of private members' business, and we should really emphasize it.

There's also a saying, Mr. Speaker, that tomorrow, today will be yesterday. I don't want as an individual and as a legislator, as a member of this esteemed House, to leave tomorrow to be too late, to be yesterday, a distant yesterday, where our children are going to question us and say: why did you fritter it away, and where is the money?

Everyone in this House should really vote for Bill 201 in second reading, and then if the government side remains silent for the most part, like I mentioned, or if they speak to just blindly oppose it, then I'd be reminded of another saying which I ran across the other day, and it says: a zebra cannot change its stripes. If the Premier was sincere in his pledge to listen to us and work with us, then I urge hon. members of his caucus to do the same.

If we have time, I would maybe go through some of the math that's incorporated into this just to prove to the hon. Government House Leader that it is not convoluted or hard to understand. In 1992-93 and comparing it to 2005-2006, this interval here, the population has risen slightly, by more than 25 per cent, from 2.66 million to 3.33 million. Per capita revenues and per capita spending for that same period, '92-93 to '05-06, were basically \$4,542 and \$6,611. That was at the beginning of this interval, and that's the year the hon. former Premier took over. In 2005-2006 the per capita revenues and spending went up to \$6,361 and \$8,500.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 201, Funding Alberta's Future Act. I know that I've had my name in to speak for a little while, and I think there may be one or two government members who are yet to come. I salute the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. I have a

lot of respect for him, but perhaps being patient would reveal that there are others on both sides of this House who are very anxious to speak to this bill.

That indeed is part of the theme of my remarks here today. The act does propose to create a funding Alberta's future account of the general revenue fund, and 30 per cent of the nonrenewable resource revenues will be directed into the account. Funds from the account would be distributed as follows: 35 per cent to Alberta heritage trust fund, 35 per cent to a new postsecondary endowment fund to replace the access to the future fund, 25 per cent directed to the capital account, and 5 per cent to a humanities, social sciences, and arts endowment. Once the fund reaches half a billion dollars, funds will be allocated to an opportunity fund, and its purpose will be developed in consultation with Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, this indeed is very laudable as Bill 201 does lay out one manner of managing Alberta's prosperity. While building up endowments can sustain spending over the long term, it's worth noting that Bill 201 is not the way I think our prosperity should be managed.

Governing is about setting priorities and getting results. The hon. Premier has set priorities, and we're working on delivering results; for example, governing with integrity and transparency, which includes finding more efficient ways of delivering government services to Albertans; number two, managing growth pressures, which includes controlling spending and getting the best value for tax dollars, setting out a long-term capital plan, investing \$400 million to address the issues related to the growth in Fort McMurray region; number three, improving quality of life, including making postsecondary education more accessible and a community spirit fund, which will match charitable donations; number four, providing safe and secure communities; and number five, building a stronger Alberta, which includes long-term funding commitment to municipalities of \$1.4 billion, upgrading our resources to sustain economic growth, supporting nanotechnology, which has the potential to transform the world as we know it.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's clear. The government's plan is a clear plan, and it will benefit every Albertan. It will preserve our current prosperity, and it will allow for greater prosperity for our children and our grandchildren generations beyond. Perhaps the hon. member is just a little impatient. This is only the third day of the legislative session, and a budget will be tabled on April 19, laying out the fiscal plan for 2007-2008. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has presented his plan, and I've spoken about the government's plan.

It's very clear. The government plan addresses the issues that Albertans would like to see addressed. The Minister of Finance was mandated to consult with Albertans on Budget 2007 and table it. He was also mandated to lead a financial investment and planning commission, and I'm confident that these objectives will indeed be met. We have a strong starting point to move forward from. The government has a strong fiscal position, and Bill 201 is simply not required because the Alberta government will have close to \$45 billion in net assets as of March 31, 2007, and in all sincerity this is a position that no other jurisdiction is currently in. Our capital plan commits over \$13 billion over the next three years to build roads, schools, and hospitals.

5:00

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Rodney: That's \$13 billion. Thanks for asking.

The access to the future fund is transforming our postsecondary system and is encouraging innovation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that everyone in the House and everyone in this province would agree that we have a great situation, and I

think many beyond our borders are very glad for us or envious, depending on what part of the spectrum they're on. I think it's very clear that it's the opposite of government complacency. It's a government that is acting with a plan. Government has been prudent with its resource revenue, endowments have been established, and infrastructure has been built.

For these reasons I cannot support Bill 201. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to be able to speak to Bill 201, Funding Alberta's Future Act. The Alberta Liberals are thinking about the future, something we were accused of last session by the Member for Athabasca-Redwater, something which Albertans have been waiting for for a long time, and I quote: only the Liberals would think about something that might happen in the future. In 2004 the Alberta Liberals campaigned on a surplus policy where all surpluses would be allocated, 35 per cent into the heritage fund, a fund which was envisioned by a great Albertan at one point, great visionaries who looked to the future of Alberta, something that Alberta has been lacking for some time until now.

Getting back to where the surplus would be directed: 35 per cent to a postsecondary endowment fund to ensure that we hope to have and should have a well-educated population today and tomorrow. With the increase in the amount it costs a student today, it's no wonder this government is trying to give newborns a head start with their \$500 for every baby born. We recognize that because we've been meeting with postsecondary students for the last little while. When they're coming out after graduation with bills in excess of \$160,000, where are they going to be able to start? Where is their future when they're paying off . . . [interjection] Yeah. Exactly. Where is the advantage?

They're going to need a big, bold plan from this government. Thus the 35 per cent will be welcomed to offset the climbing costs for students in the future.

The Alberta Liberals will save 25 per cent into capital investment, eliminating Alberta's infrastructure, which continues to grow beyond most municipalities' capabilities. It's evident when you drive down the roads; they're getting poorer and poorer. I'm not just referring to Fort McMurray, which recently received \$400 million, a save-the-MLA fund, but it was needed infrastructure. In Edmonton and Calgary we need that money just as well. The NDs will have to take our word for it because they're just going to be able to park their cars soon.

The last of the 5 per cent will go to the Alberta arts endowment fund, which would support the humanities, social sciences, and arts, which would cap at \$500 million. Instead of the artists going cap in hand, they'd be able to make a living. I would mention that the 5 per cent does not include horse racing. Some consider this to be an art in motion. I would disagree. This would be for real artists here in Alberta. All Albertans would benefit from this bill, something we could brag about, something we haven't been able to brag about for a long time.

We talk about advantage, and we talk about consultation. Let's talk about the cheques. There was no consultation there. It was at a whim. Albertans got \$1.2 million and absolutely nothing to show for it. There was no consultation there. There was no consultation in the trade, investment, and labour agreement known as TILMA. No consultation there either. So when we talk about consultation, let's remember what we did in the past here.

Bill 201 is offering that in 13 years we could be giving Albertans an advantage, something they're lacking today. That must be why

we no longer hear the catchphrase, the Alberta advantage. It isn't there. It doesn't exist anymore. You just have to go out and look for it; it isn't there. Homelessness continues to grow. Affordable housing is lacking; people can't pay the rent. That's the advantage. It's hard to say that when it isn't the case.

This bill would be welcomed by Albertans because it's a real plan for real issues that matter. Mr. Speaker, we the Alberta Liberals have been doing a lot of consultation around the province, and people have said that at the end of the day there needs to be a plan. There needs to be long-term sustainability in funding as well as where we're spending our monies. This plan does address this.

So I'm going to sit down, and I'm going to hear the rest of the input that other members may have. I know the time is getting near, and I do want to hear some obvious support from the other side because this is a plan that benefits all Albertans. It doesn't matter what side it came from. This is the issue. It came from a nonpartisan person here. We want to make sure that we respect and promote all views from all Albertans, and this would certainly capture that.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others who want to participate in the debate?

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I do appreciate those who spoke today and participated in the debate: the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, and the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, as well as so many members of the Alberta Liberal caucus. I guess the leader of the New Democrat caucus spoke as well.

The importance of this bill I don't think can be overstated, and there were variations on a theme in some of the comments that came up, even from the government side, including those of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. A number of concerns were raised. Certainly, if this bill passes through second reading into Committee of the Whole, we would be prepared to entertain and discuss amendments. We're always open to that. As we made clear, we don't have a monopoly on good ideas here, so we're prepared to discuss amendments. Perhaps there needs to be consultation. I might point out, however, that consultation isn't always the way of this government either, and the approach to TILMA is one recent example of that.

The process of a private member's bill, for those on the government side who aren't aware of it, precludes us from doing anything more direct than we do in this piece of legislation. So the comments from the Government House Leader on why this is a convoluted process are uninformed on that particular account. We had to do what we had to do to get the bill to the floor, and our hands are tied. Nonetheless, it's clear to everybody who reads the bill what the intention of the bill is and what the achievements of the bill would be.

So I urge all members of the Assembly to support this bill. It's the kind of bill that will free Alberta's public services from the roller-coaster ride of a resource-based economy. It will put us on a sustainable fiscal foundation for the future. It will establish a postsecondary endowment fund that will allow Alberta's technical schools and colleges and universities to reach heights unachieved in the history of this province and, indeed, in the history of this country. It will allow us systematically to deal with the infrastructure debt. It will allow an endowment fund for the humanities, social sciences, and arts to take its place alongside engineering and medicine and the sciences.

So, Mr. Speaker, I commend this – I commend this – to the people of this Assembly. It represents hard work. It represents a great deal of research. It represents support and analysis from acclaimed economists as well as acclaimed business leaders, who think the work that's done in this is solid, farsighted, and visionary. So I turn to each and every one of you in this Assembly, some of you who support these notions in principle and, indeed, have supported them in detail, and I ask you, when the time comes, to stand in favour of this legislation.

Thank you.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:09 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Elsalhy	Taft
Bonko	Miller, R.	Taylor
Chase	Swann	

5:20

Against the motion:

Ady	Graydon	Mitzel
Brown	Groeneveld	Morton
Cao	Haley	Oberle
Cardinal	Hancock	Prins
Danyluk	Herard	Renner
Doerksen	Hinman	Rodney
Ducharme	Horner	Rogers
Eggen	Jablonski	Strang
Evans	Liepert	VanderBurg
Fritz	Melchin	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 30
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 201 lost]

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

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that given the hour, we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 12, 2007**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/12

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

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

Internship Positions for Immigrants

501. Mr. Cao moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to create additional short-term internship positions within the government of Alberta to assist qualified immigrants who seek work experience for the first time in Canada.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to present Motion 501. The motive for this is very simple. This motion's aim is to help new Canadians establish themselves in Canada by creating opportunities for their first Canadian work experience with the introduction of additional short-term internship positions within the government of Alberta.

It is initially challenging to find work in Canada for any new Canadian. Employers always ask for Canadian work experience, and employers prefer to hire people with previous Canadian work experience. So many of my constituents and many Albertans whom I have encountered over the years have the dilemma that in order to secure employment, they need previous work experience in Canada. It's a catch-22. How can one meet the requirement of previous Canadian work experience if it is the first time they are applying for a job in Canada?

Yes, we can help and have helped many new Canadians by providing training in language, speaking, writing, in job search techniques, in writing resumés, and job applications. Yes, we can and have helped new Canadians in qualification assessment and skills certification. But the bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that the most critical component is the real work experience in Canada that employers require. Employers always ask for Canadian experience, as I said before, and I have experience in seeing that employers prefer to hire people with previous Canadian work experience.

Mr. Speaker, to help new, qualified immigrants to gain appropriate, meaningful Canadian work experience for which they are qualified is very important, and it is the essence of Motion 501. It encourages other levels of governments and the private sector to do the same by setting an example with the government of Alberta. Helping immigrants use their skills to reach their full potential, to their highest productivity level is the purpose of Motion 501.

We also see that we need to help to develop Alberta in terms of human resources, help to meet the labour market needs of the future. As we all know, we have experienced unprecedented growth in Alberta. Addressing the labour force challenges requires interprovincial migration and immigration from outside Canada for appropriate skilled workers.

Now, I have seen so many programs and so many immigrant services in Alberta, in different cities in our province. They have done a great job. So this motion is just to reinforce that assurance that we help to introduce new Canadians into the Alberta workforce as quickly as possible so that we have the productivity out of our new citizens, and this also helps alleviate the provincial labour shortage.

Mr. Speaker, all Albertans should have the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills, talents to apply themselves to our demanding labour market. To sustain our growth in Alberta, we require an adequate supply of workers with the right knowledge and skills. Currently, the demographic challenges are affecting the province's ability to meet the labour force demands for a prosperous economy.

We know that our population is aging. We have a low birth rate, and we have urbanization, and potential economic growth may be constrained by our supply of labour. Albertans' standard of living and the future opportunity for economic success should not be jeopardized by the lack of skilled workers. So getting more immigrants into the workforce would help alleviate staffing pressure faced by employers.

In managing the growth, the government has the priority. Mr. Speaker, immigrants must continue to play a role in countering the projected slowdown of the Alberta labour force growth, and to do that, the government is working to attract immigrants to Alberta and retain them here. I know that government actively campaigns to attract out-of-country workers and emphasizes the Alberta advantage, including high quality of life.

Motion 501 could be used as another recruiting tool to attract immigrants to Alberta. Mr. Speaker, a changing and increasingly competitive global landscape means that Alberta has to work diligently to attract and retain knowledgeable, skilful workers. As you know, many jurisdictions share the urgent need for more skilled workers, and Alberta will have to clearly differentiate itself if it is to be seen as a destination of choice.

The Alberta government also has the priority to improve Albertans' quality of life. Now, we make sure that the qualified immigrants find employment which they are rightfully trained for, suited to their ability, and that would help to increase the quality of life in Alberta. Our government also has the priority of building a stronger Alberta, and I see that Bill 501 could increase the cultural awareness in the workforce and would be transcended into personal lives and communities thereafter.

So increasing immigrants in the workforce will also help to build social cohesion, and providing first-time work experience in Canada for new Canadians will largely emphasize this point.

I look forward to hearing the debate on this mutually beneficial proposal. I urge all members of the House to support Motion 501, and I am looking forward to addressing any comments at the end of this debate.

I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I stand to respond to Motion 501. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing forward this motion. For me it's a simple issue of human rights, and I think that we are all sensitive to issues of human rights and especially situations in which disadvantaged groups are often the victims of discrimination in our country.

8:10

Of course, Canada has been a model for the rest of the world in its commitment to the basic human right that every human being has intrinsic worth. In fact, it was a great Canadian, John Humphrey, who had a hand in writing the UN declaration, the universal declaration of human rights in 1948, recognizing the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom and justice and peace in the world. So immigrants coming to Canada to live and work are entitled to freedom, fair treatment, and respect.

Mr. Speaker, it is quite easy to say these words, and there are lots

of conventions that have been signed by Canada to affirm these words, but moving them off the page into everyday reality is quite another matter. In fact, Justice Beverly McLachlin made this remark: "Formal declarations of equality are not enough to remove discrimination and exclusion." We need more than just rights talk. We need concrete actions. So I recognize that the hon. member is bringing this motion as a concrete action to put into practice what we believe about human rights in Canada.

Of course, it can be argued that the Canada in 1867 was born out of the necessity of recognizing two peoples and two different languages, so the spirit of tolerance and respect is actually built into our laws and institutions. Nevertheless, when you look at Canadian history, you see the old exclusionary thinking coming back again and again, that sees in the other a threat or someone who is different, so there's the whole process of exclusion and discrimination. We only need to think about the way our aboriginal Canadians have been treated down through the years, marginalized to the side into special groups considered separate and not so equal as they live in enclaves in this country.

Chinese Canadians came to build our railroads and were subjected to a head tax. Black Canadians came via the underground railroad to the Maritimes and were cheated of land and forced to work on public projects like slaves. Ukrainian Canadians were interned in World War I. Japanese Canadians were sent to camps during World War II. Anti-Semitism has led to discriminating practices against Jewish Canadians throughout our history. So formal declaration of equality does not translate automatically into inclusion in the workplace, and that's what this motion is addressed to, to include people who might be disadvantaged in our workplace. We have to again and again create programs to enable disadvantaged groups to participate in the workplace.

So what we're talking about here with this Motion 501 is actually an affirmative action program. We only need to look south of the border to see many, many years of affirmative action programs to make sure that all people are included in the workplace. Now, at first I thought that such a program might not be permitted by section 15 of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the famous section on equality. It's one of my favourite sections in the Charter, and this upholds the equality of everyone.

(1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

So an employer like the provincial government has to be very careful that it doesn't put into practice hiring practices that are in any way discriminative. But then we go on to subsection (2), which says:

Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin . . .

And so on. So, Mr. Speaker, actually the Charter adds a section that interprets this equality statement and affirms that affirmative action programs are extremely important.

I think the hon. member has already mentioned some references to the plight of immigrants when they come to Canada. I think the statistics speak for themselves. I mean, the key word in the Charter is "disadvantaged." It seems to me that when you look at the statistics about immigration – for example, research published by the Canadian Council on Social Development indicates that 20 per cent of those who arrived before 1986 lived in poverty for a number of years after they came here; after 1991, more than 50 per cent.

Actually, recent statistics issued by Statistics Canada state that the economic situation of new immigrants to Canada at the turn of the

millennium showed no improvement despite the higher levels of education and higher levels of skill among immigrants coming into Canada. A recent Statistics Canada report also showed that the probability of immigrants entering a period of low income was very high in their first year in Canada. Mr. Speaker, I just wonder in terms of the development of immigration programs in our country and in Alberta: what are we saying to immigrants, inviting them to come to our great province, yet they often enter into a time of dire poverty when they can't even find decent housing? So I applaud this step. This is an important step.

I received an e-mail from a local organization here in Edmonton, Changing Together: A Centre for Immigrant Women, which states that many of our women are professionals as medical doctors, nurses, accountants, lawyers, and teachers from their country of origin, yet they are the most economically marginalized immigrants when they come to Edmonton because they cannot find a job in their specialized field due to the lack of Canadian experience, just what the hon. member has mentioned: the lack of Canadian experience. So they can't get to first base in terms of entering into the workforce. In terms of opening up the internship program to immigrants, giving them the Canadian experience that I think they really need and enabling them to have their skills recognized is, I think, a step in the right direction. We need this kind of affirmative action program, and I thank the hon. member for suggesting it.

My only question is that in implementing this program, I hope that we're not just throwing people into the midst of government bureaucracy, which is difficult to fathom at the best of times, without some supportive system, some mentorship, without people there. Obviously, people who have come from another country have sometimes language problems. There's a culture shock, so there need to be mentors in place to help them along the way; otherwise, the whole idea is going to fail.

We want them to succeed. We want new people coming to Canada and succeeding, anything we can do to make that happen, and seeing this as a stepping stone to greater service in the public sector. So if they get a taste of what it's like to work in the public sector, they might consider a whole career in the public sector, and that's all to the good. That's what it's all about, I think. It's about jobs, about participating in the great wealth of Canada. The public service should be open to all Albertans regardless of their country of origin, and we must take the right steps to ensure that that happens.

So I support this motion, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have been given the opportunity to participate in the discussion regarding Motion 501, which recommends the implementation of internship positions within the government of Alberta, specifically for recent immigrants to the province. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort for introducing this motion as an opportunity to discuss possible methods of ensuring the success of newcomers.

One of the five major priorities set out by the government of Alberta is to manage growth by addressing Alberta's labour shortage and developing a made-in-Alberta immigration strategy, and we've got some of our most capable ministers working on that as we speak. The passing of this motion would be a step forward to a made-in-Alberta immigration strategy, and it would contribute to addressing the labour shortage within the public sector. However, I don't think that the labour crunch that's being experienced in Alberta is a phenomenon unique to the provincial government. This phenomenon spans the entire private sector.

8:20

I'd like to note that what this motion would not necessarily achieve is provide immigrants with opportunities to work in the areas in which they have been trained because government typically does not offer all of those kinds of jobs that immigrants come here for. I would prefer that all immigrants be offered an internship in the area of their training and experience. To restrict this proposal to internship spaces within the government is to limit the chances of its success. While this is a start to both easing integration into and addressing the labour shortage, I believe that much more needs to be done.

Why not go one step further and spread this requirement across all areas? This is an initiative that all professions and occupations would or should participate in. In Alberta we allow our professions and occupations to self-regulate. I don't think it would be a big step to actually ask the professions and occupations to provide each new immigrant a mentor and an internship in the area that they come here trained for. Imagine an Alberta where every single immigrant coming to this province would be brought together with a mentor and as an intern in the area that they have a passion for, in the area that they've studied for years overseas. I would much prefer to see a system like that. I'm told that there are over 500,000 immigrants in Canada that currently do not work in the area that they've been trained for. So not only would this kind of strategy attract immigrants from overseas, but it could attract 500,000 of them from other parts of the country who today cannot practise what they have studied for all these years in the province where they live. So imagine the potential that that might have.

I think that this is a very good start. I certainly don't want to sound like I'm being critical of the hon. member. I think it's a great start, but let's go beyond that. Let's become a province where, in fact, we do practise what we preach and we provide mentors and we provide internships for every single immigrant that comes here so that they can be gainfully employed from day one. Sure, maybe they need some upgrading. We'll let them work while they upgrade. Maybe they need some language skills. Let them work while they learn. Don't just set them aside driving cabs, as some of the examples would suggest.

Anyway, with respect to the motion I think, hon. member, that it's a good start. I just don't think it goes far enough. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually going to agree with the Member for Calgary-Egmont to a large degree. I want to say that we on this side will certainly support the motion because this is a serious problem if you talk to people. We bring immigrants over, and this is a much better solution than trying to bring temporary foreign workers over.

We're talking about people that want to have a life here and become Canadian and part of the mainstream, if I can put it that way. But when we bring them over, often we don't provide the proper backup, whether it be language skills or whatever, and many of them are struggling. If you talk to Jim Gurnett, who works with immigrants at the Mennonite association, this is a serious problem. We bring them here, and then there's not the proper backup. So I think that this is at least a serious attempt to deal with that sort of situation. I would think that if we're having internship programs within government, that would include language skills and other things that need to be there to make people function because, you know, it is a serious problem.

There are a couple of studies, we know, and I think the Member for Edmonton-Glenora talked about this. There is considerable empirical evidence that new immigrants, despite being Canadian in all legal aspects, are disadvantaged within the Canadian economic climate. I think there's some deep-rooted distrust over their abilities, skills, and qualifications. The studies show very clearly when you look at them – and I'll mention a couple of them – that new immigrants are more likely to live in poverty and receive less compensation for their level of work experience and education compared to birth Canadians with equitable skills, education, and experience. So something is wrong there. A part of the problem – and I think this is what the Member for Calgary-Egmont was talking about – lies in the systemic distrust of foreign credentials and experience.

I wanted to say that there are a couple of studies that I think come to the nub of this matter. There's a study done by Omidvar and Richmond in 2003. I won't quote the whole study, but they found that the things that the member is talking about – internship, bringing people in and making them feel welcome, providing the backup skills, valued recognition by conferring respect and recognition to this group, the human development that is involved, and involvement and engagement through citizenship – all lead to a better result for our new immigrants, and it begins to deal with the problems. It makes them a part of the culture more, but also we begin to get them into the proper jobs that they are trained for.

The other important one was Immigrant Skill Utilization in the Canadian Labour Market, by Reitz. I think this says it all, three sentences here. Finding 1 shouldn't surprise us: "Immigrants receive lower earnings premiums for education." We know that. Finding 2: "Immigrants receive lower earnings premiums for work experience." Again, part of the problem. Finding 3: "Immigrants from some origins groups earn less than immigrants from other origins." In other words, we know that if you come from a European background, you probably have a better chance of success and making more money.

I think it comes back, if I may, to the point that the Member for Calgary-Egmont was talking about. Certainly we can do this within government, but the problem is much broader than that. We are going to have to, I think, through government pressure, whatever it takes – and I see that the minister is here – move with these professional organizations and work with the unions and others to start to do the things that we're saying we need to do. We see qualified doctors driving taxis; I run into this occurring all over. I see doctors and engineers, you know, working at jobs for which they are well overqualified. Not only is this unfair to them, but when we have a shortage of all these people that we say we need, we are missing a golden opportunity here. I think that's the point that the Member for Calgary-Egmont was talking about.

So, yes, this is a good first step, and we certainly will support it, and I commend the member for bringing it forward for this discussion, but we also have to do something and work with the professional organizations, the unions, and others to begin to bring the people that we need and that are qualified into the mainstream because we need doctors, we need engineers, and we need skilled tradesmen. Some of these people already have the training. We're missing a bet here.

Mr. Speaker, I'll give other people time to get in on this debate. Again, I certainly thank the member for bringing this forward because it's an important discussion for all. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to

rise and speak to Motion 501. First of all, I want to thank the MLA for Calgary-Fort for introducing Motion 501. The government's plan to increase the number of immigrants entering Alberta will not be effective if recent immigrants are not given an opportunity to work and be part of the community.

Internships would be a great first step for recent immigrants who are just getting settled and adjusting to life in Canada. It would be even better if we expanded the range of internship opportunity to include government agencies and public service. Increased immigration will require greater availability of opportunity, so there is no reason to limit the number of internships that are available. The Ontario internship program for recent immigrants opens up opportunities in the public service for individuals from a range of fields, including finance, chemistry, communication, environment, and sciences. Expanding the scope of this program would reach more people.

Change the text to "paid internships." Many recent immigrants need to find paid work quickly to get established, find housing, and support families because it's one of the major problems when they enter the country. Because of economic reasons they need some money immediately to settle themselves. It is unreasonable to expect recent immigrants, given the rapidly increasing cost of living in Alberta, to be able to afford to work without being paid.

8:30

Paid internships would also ensure that recent immigrants don't immediately enter a cycle of poverty. As I said before, economics is a great factor when somebody settles in a new place, a strange place, especially if somebody doesn't know anybody in the new country.

Immigration, Mr. Speaker, always plays a very important role in any society, and Alberta's current labour shortages make it even more essential. Many recent immigrants have difficulty finding a job upon entering the province, leading to poverty and sometimes causing immigrants to leave the province. Many recent immigrants have noted that jobs and opportunities are not well known or well advertised. By providing clear and accessible government internships, Alberta may be able to provide a good first step for many, many new Albertans.

Interacting in a work environment can increase English language skills and pave the way to future employment, improve access to services, and encourage interactions in the community. Immigrants come to Alberta expecting an incredible opportunity to live comfortably, work, and raise families. Sadly, they are met by unexpected challenges, difficulties having their skills recognized, and even poverty in this land of plenty. Any chance that we have to increase the number of opportunities available to recent immigrants receives my full support. The Alberta advantage is not reaching all Albertans equally, as has been discovered by recent immigrants to our province. Increasing access to opportunities will help to ensure a long and happy future for newcomers in Alberta.

Internships for recent immigrants would provide much-needed opportunities but would not be enough. We want accessible language training, educational opportunities, reduced bureaucracy, and greater community support to ensure that recent immigrants can adjust and flourish in our province.

Mr. Speaker, nearly half of Canada's citizens, 47 per cent, are neither British nor French nor born in Canada. Despite Alberta's booming economy recent immigrants often have problems finding employment that recognizes or makes use of their skill sets and education. There are many, many barriers that limit recent immigrants' ability to be successful and adapt to life in Canada. Poverty is certainly one of the biggest barriers. The Canada 2001 census

showed that 20 per cent of immigrants living in Canada's cities are considered low-income families compared to only 12 per cent of nonimmigrants living in the same areas. A recent Statistics Canada report also showed that the probability of immigrants entering a period of low income was very high in their first year in Canada, from 34 per cent to 46 per cent. However, if immigrants did not enter a low-income period in the year following entrance into Canada, the rate of poverty in subsequent years fell to 10 per cent or even less. Level of education didn't significantly alter this statistic.

Mr. Speaker, other barriers to employment include lack of Canadian experience. As some other speaker already mentioned, many employers who refuse to hire recent immigrants cite their lack of Canadian experience as the reason, lack of Canadian training. Even highly trained immigrants often have trouble finding jobs appropriate to their training and abilities.

Government bureaucracy. Many recent immigrants would like to work but have trouble navigating government bureaucracy. There are often strict timelines on finding work, difficulties obtaining work permits, and high fees to obtain work permits and apply for citizenship. Navigating bureaucracy is doubly challenging if recent immigrants do not have strong family/community ties or do not speak English or for some other social reasons or maybe culture shock when they arrive in a new place, new country, new way of life.

Language barrier. As I said before, lack of English language ability may lead to unemployment sometimes, unemployment and social isolation. English language training may not be available and/or affordable.

Mr. Speaker, you know, currently we have a career bridge program, a national program in which private employers can seek qualified international applicants. The program is not for profit and has managed 6,500 paid internships since 1996. In the Ontario public service internship programs for internationally trained individuals newcomers with a minimum of three years' international work experience will be eligible for a placement of up to six months with the Ontario public service. The program is working to place up to 70 interns and has partnered with career bridge.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 501 urges the government to create internship positions within the government service for qualified immigrants seeking full-time work experience in Canada. As you know, Alberta is currently undergoing a period of unprecedented growth. The government of Alberta is actively developing ways to accommodate labour demands in the province, having recognized the need to attract immigrants to Alberta and, more importantly, the retention. There's a need for more people with the right knowledge and the right skill sets. Alberta is very fortunate to welcome many former petroleum industry workers from Venezuela, workers who are experienced, skilled, and hard working.

We must do everything we can to encourage immigrants like these to come to Alberta and to have the ability to experience their full potential in their fields, Mr. Speaker. We have to develop high-performance environments that maximize the development and application of new technologies in Alberta. Alberta employers are frustrated that more workers cannot be brought into the province faster. The program advocated by this motion is unlikely to disadvantage Albertans, who are already overwhelmed by the opportunity and the size of the growth in our economy.

8:40

Alberta's employers are able to benefit from immigration since it is one more way to address the skills shortages. Spending billions of dollars to educate and train Albertans for the workforce of the future and having hundreds of skilled and unskilled workers arriving each day from other parts of the country: this influx is not enough, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans' standard of living and future opportunities for economic success should not be jeopardized and will not be jeopardized by a lack of skilled workers. This motion is something that the Alberta government can do right now to help immigrants, Mr. Speaker. We already have exemplary programs encouraging the private sector to hire new immigrants like offering the publication *Welcome to Alberta: Information for Immigrants* and funding employment services for new immigrants. To set an example for the private sector and other levels of government, this program would go a long way. The importance of increased cultural awareness in the workforce, given the influx of immigrants from diverse backgrounds, would be another benefit.

The Alberta government employs knowledge workers and tradespeople, the exact kind of people we need to attract to Alberta to continue building a strong, diversified, and value-added economy. As is the case for all employers in a strong economy, it will be hard for the Alberta government to recruit and retain highly skilled workers. This, Mr. Speaker, would be a very good way to help fill the staffing needs of the government of Alberta while encouraging immigrants to come to this province and, more importantly, to remain here and continue to be contributing members of our society.

Recent immigrants have an unemployment rate that is only marginally higher than the provincial average. Inclusiveness requires removing barriers to immigrants' full participation as equal citizens in all aspects of life, Mr. Speaker. Everyone should share in Alberta's opportunity and prosperity.

The 2005 supporting immigrants and immigration in Alberta strategy aims to increase skill and knowledge levels, the mobility of labour, and the number of immigrants to this province. The goal is to increase Alberta's immigrant retention rate to 85 per cent. We not only want these people to come here, Mr. Speaker; we want them to feel welcome, to feel that they are contributing members of our society and that they will want to stay here and raise their children here. Alberta's approximate retention rate is currently between 70 and 75 per cent while in Ontario and British Columbia it is as high as 90 per cent.

Since industries are growing, there is need for an increasing labour force, but Alberta's labour force growth is actually slowing. Baby boomer retirees are knowledgeable, skilled workers with many years of experience, and they're not easily replaced. Over 400,000 new jobs will be created in Alberta between 2004 and 2014 at the current pace of growth in our economy, Mr. Speaker. Over 300,000 new workers are anticipated in the labour market, leaving a 100,000 worker shortfall over that time period.

Mr. Speaker, this motion proposes something whose time has come. I would suggest that its time is long overdue, and I would encourage all hon. members to support this motion.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I support the notion of this motion, but I have a number of questions and concerns. If this government believes in helping new immigrants get established, why does it undermine their chances of success by bringing in competition from temporary foreign workers, who don't have the rights of citizenship to protect them?

I would like to know what the member's definition of qualified is. Why doesn't this government facilitate the speedier recognition of foreign credentials, whether blue or white collar? We have all had immigrants come to our constituency offices with stories of the hardships they have faced. Recently I had a lady in her mid-30s who had a degree in science from a Romanian university as well as a law degree. While her degree in science was recognized, her law degree wasn't, and even with that so-called recognition the paperwork meant nothing when she applied for jobs. There has to be some kind of a test or qualification.

In high school, for example, if an immigrant has come from a country where a particular language is spoken and that language is offered at the high school level, that individual has the right to challenge the language exam and prove their capabilities. To my knowledge there does not seem to be any equivalent challenge for an immigrant to prove their qualifications and get some kind of paperwork from the government that indicates that, yes, we recognize that whether you came from Zimbabwe or Poland or Romania in the particular case with my constituent, you're qualified.

My school experience and the experiences that I've seen of a number of immigrants is that both Canada and Alberta sort of hold their arms out wide to immigrants. We encourage immigrants to come to our country, and then very quickly we abandon them. In some cases we require them to pay the new equivalent of a head tax if they're seeking economic immigration, yet when their children come to our schools, we do not provide sufficient English as a Second Language support to ensure that they're successful. Now, this is a betrayal of our invitation. I'm suggesting that if we're going to invite people, we don't abandon them. Currently 70 to 75 per cent of high school ESL students drop out before completing their matric. I don't want a similar circumstance happening to adult immigrants; in other words, we raise their hopes, but we don't provide them with the supports necessary to ensure their success.

With regard to ESL students, this past weekend in papers across Alberta the results of standardized testing were released. I can't think of anything that has a heavier negative impact on students, especially ESL students, than the publishing of their scores. This is the way this government currently treats ESL students. They offer very few exemptions to ESL students who have had very little language training and expect them to basically jump into the deep end of the pool and survive. This has been the school experience. There has been a lack of support from this government in terms of extending the number of years of support for ESL students, and until we extend that support for the students, we're not going to see an improvement in the achievement results.

The First Nations school boards in this province refuse to have their standardized test results published because they recognize the embarrassment. They have that option of keeping their scores to themselves. I wish that same option were extended to ESL students.

We have homeless refugees on the streets of Calgary. When my colleagues from Calgary participated with me this past spring in the homeless count, a number of the individuals we came across were individuals whose language was poor, most likely within their first language as opposed to their second language. There was no support for these individuals, so as a result of their language they were out on the streets. A number of them were young adults. Alberta does not have a very sterling record of having supported these individuals.

8:50

Now, before I can support this motion, which has wonderful intent, I would like to hear the practical steps that this member has to achieve his intended goals. For example, how many positions would he like to see made available? What types of public service

jobs would he suggest might be filled by qualified immigrants? What tests has the member in mind that will determine that an immigrant is qualified? How long would the internship last? What wage ranges is the member suggesting? Would this program operate similarly to a STEP program whereby the government would fund a certain amount of it and would seek some private philanthropy or industrial support to bring the wage to a living wage?

What types of support systems would there be for the immigrant on the job? What supports is the government willing to provide to maintain stability for the immigrant while they are employed in their internship? Does the support include affordable housing, educational upgrading, child care support, health care? To what extent is the government willing to go to make the immigrant motion dream a reality? What is the plan for the immigrants once they have completed the internship? Is there a program for helping a successful intern to enter the job market other than a certificate of completion? What benefits – health, dental, et cetera – would be available for both the employed immigrant and their families?

Without the specific detail and a plan this motion is doomed to fail, which would be another in a series of blows faced by the immigrant, raising their hopes only to be dashed.

Currently over 40 per cent of Albertans are considered to be operating below a functional literacy level. Recently the federal government cut half a billion dollars in the literacy support programs. Is the province willing to make up for the lost funds, which are having an adverse effect on both Canadian citizens as well as assisting immigrants?

Unless the government has answers to these questions and a detailed plan in mind to ensure a significant positive impact on immigrants beyond this philosophical concepts discussion, then nothing tangible will come from this motion. Please provide me with the detail that would allow me to support the wonderful intent of this motion.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure indeed to rise on behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Fort, who provides a motion and an opportunity for debate on something that is exceedingly important. In this past few months and few weeks I have had the pleasure of meeting with many of the nonprofit societies in Alberta that provide supports for our immigrant population, and I can assure you that their level of frustration is both complex and important for us to both define and work towards achieving our common goals.

For one thing, Mr. Speaker, this evening many people have spoken about workers that come and immigrate to Canada through the temporary foreign worker program, and I want to correct an erroneous impression, that this is a program that this government has in fact been a part of. We have counselled with the officials from the federal government about the concerns that we've had about the temporary foreign worker program, one of which was recently addressed by their extension of the program to at least two years to give foreign workers an opportunity to be both fully participatory and enjoy some of the benefits of exploring new opportunities in our country.

This particular program is a program that enables businesses, companies who have not been able to secure proper employees to fulfill the obligations that they see fit to offer. It gives them an opportunity to engage temporary foreign workers through a contractual arrangement, with the employer providing the housing, ameni-

ties such as a telephone, opportunity for adequate and affordable housing as well as other supports, including a round-trip ticket which permits the temporary foreign worker candidate to go home any time. These candidates are secured through contractors, many of whom do both assessments and coaching and training of the temporary foreign worker candidate off site in the country of origin and then provide them an opportunity to link with an employer in Canada.

It is a very complex program in that there's a variety of contractors that secure immigrants for such a program, and as such frequently we receive complaints that these groups have not given them an adequate picture of what really takes place when they arrive. Perhaps the immigrant worker that is least satisfied is the worker that enters Canada through the security of a contract or an arrangement, either economic or refugee status or family arrangement, in another province and then after a few short weeks travels to Alberta. Let me tell you what's available for that worker: absolutely nothing from supports that are provided originally originating from our federal government and provided to the province in which they gained entry.

We have a situation where people from Quebec, people from Ontario, people from Manitoba, people from British Columbia are coming in with the dollars supporting their immigrant status already secured in the province in which they landed, and they come to Alberta without these supports. Currently we have some 25,000 to 30,000 North Africans in the northeast part of this very city who are here hoping to find new lives and supports without any of that federal support that was originally gifted to the province in which they arrived. They are here because they believe that there will be job opportunities. They believe that the streets are paved with gold and that there will be something that secures for them a better opportunity economically than what they had in the province in which they landed.

Mr. Speaker, this is posing a very real challenge not only for our government and for this city but for the nonprofit agencies who provide supports for these workers. These individuals and these nonprofit groups have approached me to find out how we can best take care of these individuals and give them some hope and opportunity. One of the things that we're doing through ALIS, which is a website, is providing people in other countries an expectation of what they can expect when they arrive in Alberta both in certification as well as in the circumstances that they find themselves in in their new home.

Speaking today to the consul from the Philippines, she said that sometimes people come, and they think that if they come to Edmonton and it's 20 below, it might feel like it does in their freezer, when they open the freezer door, and it's 18 below. They don't realize that if they go to Fort McMurray, she tells me, if they find 40 below or 30 below, it is not just twice as cold, it is very cold, and it's quite a different cold than they experience in their home country. So we are challenged to make sure that people know, whether they're here on the temporary foreign worker program or through the provincial nominee program, exactly what the circumstances can be like when they get here and try to provide additional supports.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the immigrant societies tell me is just something I've heard on all sides of the House, and that is that the integration of individuals that come as immigrants is something we should give primary emphasis to. I am very pleased that Calgary – particularly Calgary, which gathers more immigrants by far, about one and a half times the immigrants that land and stay in Edmonton – as well as Edmonton, Lethbridge, Lloydminster, and Vegreville all have integrated settlement programs for immigrants in their communities. These communities have gone the extra mile to make

sure that there are welcoming opportunities not only to work with the nonprofit sector but work through family and community support groups, work through the other kinds of agencies to really make the immigrant population feel welcome.

They deal with issues that emerge, like the foreign credential program, which moved from the human resource ministry to immigration just recently with the movement of federal minister Diane Finley, who has taken that responsibility very seriously. We're aware that the foreign credential program needs work, needs improvement, and we are working on a national level with the people that are part of the various associations and professional organizations that can help this happen.

9:00

I'm pleased to report that the chartered accountants, that engineering associations, that geophysicists, and other groups that are professional groups that have looked at these issues are willing and able to provide us supports so that on our foreign credentialing program we can make it simpler for people to have an interpretation of statistics and certificates that they bring from their achievements in their own country for a better review. Recently, speaking with Colin Hansen, the Minister of Economic Development and trade in British Columbia, we have determined that on the heels of the TILMA agreement, the trade and labour mobility agreement that Alberta has with B.C., we can look together at the foreign credentialing and see if we can accelerate our capacity here.

So it's been a pleasure, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, but under Standing Orders 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort to close debate on Motion 501.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, for your information and input. I want to thank the members for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Edmonton-Glenora, Calgary-Egmont, Edmonton-Ellerslie, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, and Calgary-Varsity for your input.

I just want to make it really simple. Just imagine if you are a new Canadian landed here already, and you go and apply for a job, and they ask: do you have Canadian experience? This is your first time applying for a job, and you say: well, I don't. The one who has Canadian experience has a preference or advantage. So I want to have a level playing field. It's nothing to do with any other motives or other requirements and so on. The Member for Calgary-Varsity asked all these details. This is a private member's motion. It's not a government program. It's suggesting the government, and the government will take it and develop all those details as they see fit. So that's the number one answer to your question.

Number two, I thank the members from Egmont and Beverly-Clareview on your expanded view on that. I agree with that, but this is the first step. If we don't take the first step, we cannot have the other steps. The expansion of that is encouraging the federal government, the private sector to create this internship program for first Canadian experience.

I want very, very much to see that something like this has also something to do with integration and a feeling for our province, for our country. Just imagine that a new Canadian settles here, and then the government helps them. The loyalty goes to where? To Canada. To Alberta. So it's not just work but a mental attitude. So that's

another part that I want to emphasize. I know that if we create an example by the government of Alberta, we can ask the private sectors and federal government to walk with us.

Now, I just want to keep on this, that we have about 20,000-25,000 employees in the Alberta public service. Just imagine a small percentage of that is internship for this opportunity. It would be beautiful. So I just want to conclude there, and I ask all members of the Assembly to support this motion. It is a first step in a bigger march.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 carried]

head:

Government Motions

Amendment to Standing Orders

12. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the following temporary amendments be made to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in order to give effect to the March 7, 2007, House leaders' agreement:

- 1 Standing Order 3(1) is amended by striking out "1:30 p.m." and substituting "1 p.m."
- 2 The following is added after Standing Order 3:
2007 Sitting schedule

3.1(1) Unless otherwise ordered, the Assembly shall stand adjourned every 4th week during the 2007 Spring Sitting.

(2) Unless otherwise ordered and subject to suborder (3), the Assembly shall meet for the 2007 Fall Sitting from the first Monday in November to the first Thursday in December, inclusive.

(3) The 2007 Fall Sitting may be varied by House Leaders' agreement, which shall be provided to the Clerk who shall immediately publish a revised calendar.

(4) Nothing in this Standing Order precludes the Government from advising the Speaker that the public interest requires the Assembly to meet on a certain date, and the Speaker shall give notice that the Assembly shall meet at that time to transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that time.

- 3 Standing Order 4 is struck out, and the following is substituted:

4(1) Unless otherwise ordered, the sitting hours of the Assembly shall be as follows:

Monday: 1 p.m. to conclusion of Motions Other Than Government Motions

Tuesday: 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Wednesday: 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Thursday: 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

(2) Notwithstanding suborder (1), upon passage of a Government Motion before 6 p.m. which may be made on one day's notice and is subject to debate, the Assembly may meet on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings.

(3) If there is no evening sitting, at 6 p.m. or on Monday at the conclusion of Motions Other Than Government Motions, the Speaker adjourns the Assembly until the next sitting day.

(4) On Monday, if there is an evening sitting, at the conclusion of Motions Other Than Government Motions, the Speaker leaves the chair until 7 p.m.

- (5) On Tuesday and Wednesday, if there is an evening sitting and at 6 p.m. the business of the Assembly or Committee of the Whole has not concluded, the Speaker or Chair, as the case may be, leaves the chair until 7 p.m.
- (6) On evenings when the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole and the business of the committee is not concluded, at 10 p.m. the Committee shall rise and report immediately.
- 4 Standing Order 7 is amended
- (a) in suborder (1) by adding "at 1:30 p.m.," before "Oral Question Period";
- (b) by adding the following after suborder (1):
- (1.1) At 1:30 p.m., the Assembly shall proceed to Oral Question Period with the balance of the daily Routine to follow.
- 5 Standing Order 8 is amended
- (a) by striking out suborders (1) to (3) and substituting the following:
- 8(1) On Monday afternoon, after the daily Routine, the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:
- Written Questions
Motions for Returns
Public Bills and Orders Other Than Government Bills and Orders
at 4:55 p.m.: Motions Other Than Government Motions.
- (2) Subject to suborder (3), on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:
- Government Motions
Government Bills and Orders
Private Bills.
- (3) If the business enumerated in suborder (1) has not received a total of 3 hours of consideration, then Public Bills and Orders Other Than Government Bills and Orders shall be the first order of business for the Assembly on Thursday afternoon for such time until the total time for consideration for those items enumerated in suborder (1) reaches 3 hours for that week.
- (b) in suborder (6) by striking out "evening" and substituting "afternoon".
- 6 Standing Order 34 is amended by striking out suborder (3) and substituting the following:
- (3) On the Wednesday preceding the consideration of Written Questions and Motions for Returns, the Government House Leader shall indicate to the Assembly which ones the Government will be accepting, accepting with amendments and rejecting.
- (3.1) The Clerk shall read the number, text and name of the sponsor of any Written Question or Motion for Return that has been accepted by the Government when this item of business is called.
- 7 Standing Order 53 is struck out, and the following is substituted:
- 53 Public accounts and all reports of the Auditor General shall stand permanently referred to the Public Accounts Committee as they become available.
- 8 Standing Order 56 is amended by adding the following after suborder (2):
- (2.1) A temporary substitution in the membership of a standing or special committee may be made upon written

notification signed by the original Member and filed with the Clerk and Committee Chair, provided such notice is given not less than 24 hours prior to the meeting.

(2.2) A substituted Member under suborder (2.1) shall be considered for all purposes to be acting in the place of the original Member.

(2.3) A temporary substitution in the membership shall be permitted for a specific time period or for committee consideration of a specific issue.

(2.4) A temporary substitution may be terminated at any time by the original Member of the committee.

9 These amendments shall have effect from Tuesday, March 13, 2007, until the conclusion of the 2007 Fall Sitting.

10 As soon as possible after approval of this motion, the Clerk shall publish a calendar which shows the days on which the Assembly shall meet in 2007.

And be it further resolved that the Assembly shall give further consideration on a timely basis to the necessary temporary Standing Orders that will be required to give effect to the balance of the House leaders' agreement.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise tonight to move Government Motion 12 as it exists on the Order Paper. Government Motion 12 has the intention and the impact of implementing a portion of the House leaders' agreement which was tabled in the House on Thursday, and I just want to speak briefly to the purpose and intent.

The House leaders' agreement came together because, I believe, all members of the House would like to see the House, and private members particularly, more engaged in discussion, an opportunity to really make the Legislature the pinnacle of the governance and legislative process in this province. To that effect, we wanted to look at issues of the hours and the time that the House sits so that it was a place which had good work/life balance where members could actually engage enthusiastically in debate and in governance processes but could also go home and see their families from time to time. We could attract candidates, attract people to aspire to be members of this place but understand that they have to have a life, and they have to have health.

As Minister of Health and Wellness I particularly would like to emphasize that: that our practices in the past of sitting long hours, for which we got no credit either from members of the House or from members of the public for the hours that we sat in this place, in fact, having developed a reputation of having a short sitting time when in fact we were putting in as many minutes or hours as most legislators across the country, was not good for our health and, quite frankly, was not good public policy.

So the House leaders' agreement is an attempt to address the hours of sitting by having us sit from 1 to 6 p.m. each day, Monday through Thursday, with the opportunity for an earlier closing on Thursday if business permits it so that members can get back to their constituencies on a timely basis. Not every member will be able to do that, obviously. Members from the far south of the province and the far north of the province may not, but most members could be able to get back to their constituencies on a timely basis so they can participate in constituency events on the Thursday evening. They can have a constituency day Friday. They can participate on the weekend if necessary, but they can also have the opportunity to see their families. So the first change is to suggest that we should sit from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

There is some value in having a certainty to the timing of question

period, so the House leaders' agreement suggests that question period, notwithstanding that we start at 1 o'clock, should start precisely at 1:30 every day if possible. That doesn't preclude it starting earlier if the rest of routine has been done but to start at 1:30 each day so that we know that question period runs from 1:30 to 2:20 each day.

The concept of being able to plan lives and plan events is also important. So the concept under the House leaders' agreement would be that in a normal sitting year, realizing that we've already started this year, the House would start in the first week in February, and it would normally be scheduled to end on the first Thursday of June. I say normally scheduled to end because it may end earlier if there's no business. It may go later on motion to be debated. But that would be the normal sitting schedule that members could then plan their lives around with a provision that every fourth week be a constituency week. Some people have gotten into the vernacular of talking about a week off, but it's not a week off, Mr. Speaker. It's a week to be back in the constituency every fourth week, to be back in the constituency and to touch base with your constituents and, again, for those who travel for distances to be here to be connected with their families, which is very, very important.

So the motion that's before the House tonight implements those reforms, the reforms with respect to the House sitting time, the reform with respect to having a constituency week, setting in place a fall sitting to commence on the first Monday in November and normally to conclude on the first Thursday in December. Now, the way the motion is written, it says to sit "from the first Monday . . . to the first Thursday," but the House leaders' agreement said normally scheduled or something to that effect, so we may have to fine-tune the language later on. But it's important to get these pieces of the House leaders' agreement implemented early with the temporary Standing Orders so that we can use these time frames for the rest of the session.

The motion that's before the House tonight allows for private members' business to happen on Monday afternoon, as it does now, but the private members' motions, such as we just concluded the first one of, would commence at 4:55 on Monday afternoon and go until completion, and the House would adjourn after it was completed. The provision of the motion that's before the House tonight allows that in the event that private members' business is not afforded a full three hours on a Monday afternoon, if there was some other matter—a question of privilege, a debate on whether we should have emergency debate, or some other provision—which took us through and ate up some of the private members' time, time would be afforded on Thursday afternoon to allow that time to be made up.

9:10

I won't go through in detail the balance of the provisions here. I think there are two that bear mentioning. One is the amendment to Standing Order 53, which provides that public accounts and all reports of the Auditor General stand permanently referred to the Public Accounts Committee as they become available, and the amendment to Standing Order 56, which allows for substitutions on committees, so that a member of the House who is named to a special or select standing committee of the House who wishes to allow another member to sit in their place, for reasons of conflict of calendar or for reasons of allowing another member to bring an issue to the table, could substitute that member into their place.

The pieces on the House leaders' agreement which are not part of this motion tonight have to deal with the establishment of all-party committees of the House and how we deal with Committee of Supply. I'm looking forward to both of those items coming forward at an appropriate time soon because I think those as well are

significant changes which will make the operation of the House more open to the public, will allow us to bring the public into the process in a more eloquent way, and I think will really allow private members of the House to have a more robust opportunity to hold the government accountable for the money which Albertans give us and to examine legislation and policy and bring forward new policy ideas. But I'll save the rest of my comments with respect to that for when that is actually before the House.

The motion before the House tonight implements the front end of the House leaders' agreement, which specifically references the time of sitting, the date of sitting, the provision for a constituency week every fourth week, the time for the fall sitting, the specific time for question period, and the amendments relative to public accounts and substitutions on committees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Opposition House Leader in just a second, but first of all I'd just point out to all members that there is an errata with respect to this. The motion that's printed in the Order Paper is incorrect. That's why today you had received an erratum, the bigger document. That's the one we should be talking to and from, not the Order Paper.

The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This was a very interesting process to participate in as the Opposition House Leader. Interestingly, the Government House Leader and I had started talking about some of these changes in 2004, previous to the last election, because I think, as many parliamentarians were sensing, the rules under which we'd been operating were increasingly onerous. I had been responsible for recruiting candidates to run for the Liberal Party for the 2004 election and found it almost impossible to get women to agree to even consider running.

I know I wasn't alone. There's been quite a bit of discussion amongst many different parties provincially and federally about the difficulty of this, and what on earth, you know, have we done that people, and particularly women, would not even consider running for political office? A lot of times, you know, the point was often raised about the tone of the House and the adversarial nature of it—speaking from experience, that's true—but something we could do something about was what was seen as really unfriendly to families and in many cases unfriendly to women: the sitting hours and that kind of locked-in feeling that we got.

As many of you know, I came from the theatre, and when you got a film job, you basically sent a note to your family and friends and said: "I'm on a film shoot. You won't hear from me for whatever period of time, eight weeks, 12 weeks. Don't call. Don't expect a message. I'm gone." You got up and went to work on the site every day, and you got home at some stupid hour, and you went to bed and got up six hours later and did it all over again. To me, that's what sitting in this House felt like sometimes. You really wondered very late at night whether you were in fact being very productive, trying to negotiate legislation in the small hours of the night. So that was something that I had been interested in prior to the 2004 election, and as I said, the Government House Leader and I had talked about some of the things that could be done. I think we were both alive to it and had started to look for opportunities to improve what we were seeing.

So the night sittings are gone. The day sittings are extended by an hour. We'll see how that works. It's a longer go at a stretch. Members are certainly free to move about and to enter and leave the Chamber. I'm hoping that this is going to work, and I did agree to it in the House leaders' agreement. We're hoping that that longer day sitting will help us.

Part of what I was looking for was to spread out the hours over more time but less intense every day and in particular to try to not have to do that “Well, good-bye; I won’t see you for eight weeks or 12 weeks” because I felt that this was impacting our ability to be good constituency representatives when it was just such a mad dash to get back into your constituency. Let’s face it, this is my constituency. I didn’t have very far to go. I’m aware that most of my colleagues in this House had a very long way to go to get back to their constituency, to serve well on the Friday constituency day and through the weekend.

To me the idea that I originally started at, that we could spend two weeks in the House and one week in the constituency, seemed to make sense to me. I’m quite encouraged that this is going to help us be better balanced between being legislators and policy-makers here in this House and doing our constituency representation work, serving our constituents back in the constituency offices. I wanted the sitting to be more humane – and that was my key word – and to be more attractive to women, more family friendly.

I also wanted to see substantive issue-based all-party committees. We’ve come a fair long way towards that. I think we can still improve on it, but we’ve come a fair long way. That’s not under discussion today.

I also wanted to improve and enhance the time spent on private members’ business. We have captured that in that we will have more Mondays to spend on private members’ day. I actually was at one point pushing for Monday night sittings for private members’ business as well, but given people’s attitude to the night sittings, I think I’m not going to be successful on that one. So more private members’ business.

Of course, I have raised motions three times in the last 10 years to try and improve the Public Accounts Committee, as has my colleague the current chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. So we’re very pleased to see the improvements that have been made to the Public Accounts Committee.

I think there was a very interesting innovation that flowed from negotiations on the Public Accounts Committee where we had been allowing – well, it’s always allowed – that other MLAs could come into committee meetings and could in fact have a voice but no vote. I think the innovation of allowing people to designate an alternate to take their place on the committee with a voice and a vote is a good innovation, and I’m looking forward to that. For example, my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, who is currently on the housing task force, should he have been sitting on an all-party committee, could designate an alternate for the period of time that he was away working on the task force and have someone who is equally interested in whatever that committee’s work is come in and do it and participate fully. I think that’s an enhancement that we will all be very happy with.

I’m pleased to see that we have some solid idea of when we’re going to start. We spent a lot of time in negotiation about how we were going to end. I’m also pleased to see the guaranteed fall sitting. There is some flexibility around that, so if there’s a larger legislative agenda, then we have more time: we could add on in the fall and have a longer fall sitting. But it’s very nice to have certainty around when we would be coming into session and more or less when we would be coming out of session. I think that is very helpful.

9:20

What we have in front of us is the motion. We did six parts, I think. Essentially, what you have in front of you if you are reading the House leaders’ agreement would be captured in parts 1 to 4

approximately, which is around the actual sitting hours in the day, the constituency week, and the certainty of the start time for question period. That does allow us, by the way, to do all the business of the Routine. Nothing has been excluded there, and there are no additional time limits put on anything and no ability to sort of squish something off the Routine paper. We do start question period at a specified time, but following question period we continue with the Routine, picking up where we left off and completing it fully, which I am pleased to see.

We’ve maintained the integrity of the private members’ day with written questions and motions for returns, followed by a debate on private members’ public bills and, of course, the motions at a designated time period at the end of the day. We were trying to retain the one motion per week and to make sure that it would be able to be voted through, so I think we’ve been successful in doing that as well.

As I said, I’m happy with the Public Accounts work that’s been done here and with the innovations that we have around being able to put in place alternates with a voice and a vote.

Another change that is in here that I’ll just highlight is written questions and motions for returns, which have been a point of contention in this House in the past, I’ll admit. There was an agreement that those written questions and motions for returns that have been agreed to fully by the government, not with amendments but fully agreed to, would no longer come up for debate in the House but would be read into the record by the Clerk: the full sponsor’s name, the text, and the number. So there is a recording in *Hansard* of what was agreed to, but it doesn’t come onto the floor anymore.

I think oftentimes we found that that was a bit of a routine of sort of nodding on to take the vote and standing up and down moving things when we all knew that we were going to agree on it. So that may well offer us some more time to spend on private members’ bills and private members’ business. That will be indicated on the Wednesday previous to the Monday and will be laid out by the Government House Leader, who will tell us which ones are going to be accepted, which ones will be put forward with an amendment, and which ones will not be accepted by the government, so we have some idea in advance about that, which I think is helpful.

It’s certainly been a long process. I remember my first request for a House leaders’ meeting was immediately following the leadership race vote in December, I think, by a couple of days. We did come together for the first time on the 4th of January, by my notes, and we met pretty much every week. By the last while we met every day.

I think we’ve done good work here. I am mindful that the last significant and meaningful positive changes we saw in the Standing Orders were negotiated some time ago by the member who is now the Speaker of the House. I am hoping that the work the Government House Leader and myself and the House leader for the third party have done will stand for a similar amount of time as something that will be seen as being helpful to the House and in its own way being as innovative as what was done by the Speaker previously.

I look forward to subsequent government motions on the final two parts of the work that we’ve done in the House leaders’ agreement. Thank you for the opportunity to outline that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I obviously support the motion because my name is on it. I won’t go on long. We know what’s in it. It’s fairly straightforward.

I think that it’s a step in the right direction in terms of making the Legislature as relevant as we can and, as the others have said, as humane as possible. When we go back in the past to where we sat

all night at some sessions, I'm not sure that the level of debate was that good later on at night. I think as a general rule we'll do better work, you know, if we're not sitting here until all hours of the night.

I think what's just as important, though, for me is the idea of the three weeks on and one week back, and I especially think it would be important for people that don't live in the city to get back to their constituency for a week. Having the session go longer: I think, as was mentioned by the Government House Leader, there was a perception, I know, and, Mr. Speaker, you've said this yourself, about the minutes that we spend in here. You know, the comparison was how many days we sat, but it didn't look at the number of hours. I remember you bringing this forward to the Legislature. Now we'll be going longer in days. Eventually, it will be fixed days, and I think we'll even be above the norm. There will not be a criticism, I don't think, of anybody. I think it's an important step forward.

It was sort of interesting having to be on the housing task force. I did a lot of my work by BlackBerry. I never thought that would ever happen to me, where I had to rely on a BlackBerry, but there was a lot of back and forth during that time because we were also very busy in that committee.

The last thing I'd like to say – because I'm not going to go through it all; you people can read – is that there's often a perception because people follow question period that all politicians do is come and argue and fight. Unfortunately, that is the perception out there. But I think, in fact, that when parties get together – and it happened with the hon. member from Calgary when I was on the ethics committee – we can do good work in committees even if we have different values. I think the fact that the three House leaders could meet over a period of time and come together with this document shows the Legislature working at its best, frankly, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's a good step forward.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to be able to have a few moments of democracy and discuss this.

An Hon. Member: It's always a democracy.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, and it's always decorum, I believe, hon. Opposition House Leader, that is the real problem, why the gentler side of our society doesn't want to be in here, not the hours that we work. I find that they work just as long if not longer.

There are several areas that I'd like to address. I guess I'd start off with a few things that I agree with, and that is that the fourth week, constituency week, is an excellent proposal. I would go with the hon. Opposition House Leader that with perhaps every two weeks on and one week off we would be more in tune with our constituents and be able to serve and to recognize their needs in this House. The 1:30 QP time: I believe a set time will be of benefit to the members of the House in knowing when people want to be here to listen and participate.

Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of concerns that I guess I'd like to address. The first one is on the original document they sent out that says, "All Party* Agreement". There's an asterisk. Then down at the bottom it says, "Party defined per Legislative Assembly Act: to be recognized as a party in the House if the group of MLA's seeking that status is at least 4 Members." [interjection] Yes, your respect for democracy I suppose you're cheering for.

In the province here we state that we recognize MLAs, and the throne speech talked about that respect for those duly elected. Yet there seems to be very little respect unless this Assembly decides

how to recognize MLAs and their party status. I must say that it has been very arbitrary and very disappointing when you look back in history to where they are now. My question would be for the one Opposition House Leader that squeaked by and got the four members: how would he feel at this point if he was excluded? Last time, in 2001, with two members they seemed to be recognized and have privileges, but the arbitration line that they've drawn in the sand is disappointing. I think that it would serve all Albertans and democracy better if they recognized elected MLAs as Elections Alberta has set it out instead of the rules in here.

9:30

To address the first concern, no more evening sittings. I can appreciate the thought process and those things that have gone into that. I think that it would have benefited to have had other elected MLAs in the discussion because those that made this agreement all live here in Edmonton, and they don't understand or recognize what it means to sneak home at night, if you want to call it that, to a function in their riding. That's great for those here, but I remember that last year in the Standing Orders we made a correction, if you want to call it that, for those members that live too far away to be able to get home. We reduced the mileage from over 100 kilometres down to 60 because they weren't able to get home. From my way of figuring, there are 60 MLAs that will not be able to get home in the evenings to enhance their quality of life and to be with their families or, for sure, to be in their constituencies. So I don't think that even on a majority rule, if you want to go with that poor system, this serves the interests of Albertans or the MLAs that have been elected here.

They talk about the importance of having the evenings off and the late-night discussion that goes on. I haven't been in this House as long as most of the members in here, so perhaps I'm not as tired of the late nights, but I find that the quality late in the evening sometimes becomes more succinct and to the point instead of going on to try and fill time. Like I say, I haven't recognized the change. It seems that more often than not we recognize the time spent talking and not the words that are said, so I feel that it isn't in the best interest to say that we'll have the nights off.

I compare this to a convention. If we were to have one and assemble people from the province at a convention here and we want to serve the people, by sitting an extra 20 or 40 days and not combining that to days and evenings, what's the cost to the Alberta taxpayers to have to sit and to pay for all of that extra time when we could be more productive and in here, if you want to say, crash coursing it? It seems like a positive move to me. I think it's an education when people say to me that we don't sit very long. I sometimes think that we sit too long and that we don't have enough time in our constituency, so I do look forward to the constituency weeks, when we can get back to talk to and relate to them.

The number of times the document comes up with "inclusive" just doesn't ring true to me. Why would they use such a term when they won't look at members that have less than four sitting MLAs and say that this is a unanimous agreement when it is anything but that?

I'm very concerned with the other path that we're going to be coming up with, that isn't in discussion tonight, but the House leader referred to it a little bit. The hours and the exclusivity that they've got in the agreement are very disturbing. Once again, I don't think it's in the best interest of those that have been duly elected to represent all Albertans, and this is very much wanting to go to just a status quo system rather than allowing an open and equal opportunity for people to get in and to speak and have their time in the House.

It's interesting with my predecessor from Cardston-Taber-Warner.

His grandchildren live close to me, and I've had the opportunity of speaking with them many times. It was sad to see when talking to them. They talk about their grandfather: "Oh, is that the one that's never here? He isn't able to come to functions." By sitting longer here in the House and extending it one or two months, that will continue to make matters worse for families, to be able to be home for family functions or activities going on. I think that by trying to shorten the session and the time each day that we're here in Edmonton will be an economic benefit and also a family benefit for being able to get back to our constituencies.

I'll just refer for a minute to the all-party committees and Public Accounts. They say that they want to be able to have some alternative appointments. Again, I feel that the committees should look at and recognize all of those members that have been elected. I have asked in the past to be on the Public Accounts Committee. The House leader has said no. It feels once again that this is not an inclusive House but an exclusive one, and they will determine who can and who cannot be part of the committees and participate and have a vote in those committees. I don't see that the alternative appointment is going to be duly decided by those governing parties. There will not be a space made open to an MLA that has been elected here.

I think the Public Accounts Committee, as I said before, is perhaps the most important. Perhaps we just need to do it on a percentage of the vote that is cast throughout the province. If a person's party has received 9 per cent of votes, then maybe they should be able to have 1 in 10 on the committee and certainly overall, when you look at all the committees, the five committees, 1 in 83. I think that there should be room, and that room should be on Public Accounts.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, I'm very disappointed in many of those aspects that they've brought forward and the exclusivity of this agreement. It will continue to get worse as we go forward into the other areas of discussion later on this week. I would very much disagree with this House agreement and hope that those members who live outside the Edmonton corridor would recognize that this will not enhance the debate, it will not enhance constituency representation, it will not enhance family life, and it will not enhance the women of Alberta wanting to participate in this Assembly. So I am not in favour of this House agreement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion remains before us. Are there additional members that would like to participate?

That being the case, then I'll call on the hon. Government House Leader to close debate?

[Government Motion 12 carried]

head: **Consideration of His Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Ducharme moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Debate adjourned March 8]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, did you rise?

Mr. Hinman: Yes.

The Speaker: Well, we'll recognize you first, sir, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Please remember, ladies and gentlemen, that when we leave here tonight, we're back here tomorrow at 1 o'clock.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll put away a few papers and try and get out the next ones.

It's a privilege to be able to rise and address the throne speech. To me that's always the first and exciting day, much like spring. As we sit here in this Assembly, we look forward to: what is our potential, and what are we going to do to make Alberta better? We have an opportunity. Our potential is really unlimited, yet the vision seems very limited. Perhaps we're looking through foggy eyes.

I'd like to speak a little bit on what the Alberta Alliance sees as the vision for Alberta and what we could accomplish. The first one I'd like to talk about is the good governance that we can and should have here in the province. The importance, I feel, of elected people is to truly be accountable to those that you're representing. I looked up Webster's dictionary to read two different definitions. One is: what is a democracy, and what is a commonwealth? It says that a democracy is the doctrine that the numerical majority of an organization or organized group can make decisions binding on the whole group. A commonwealth is a political system in which the supreme power lies in a body of citizens who can elect people to represent them. We are part of a commonwealth.

9:40

The first thing that I see as a vision to make Alberta a better and more productive province is to have those elected accountable to the people. That would be to bring forth an introduction of recall for elected officials throughout the province to thereby be held accountable when they're doing things that the people are not pleased with. An example is that I very much get the feeling that this province is going to give away 50 per cent of our natural resources, and there's nothing that the people of Alberta really can do about it until the next election, and then it will be too late. The barn door will be open, the horse will be out, and it'll be flattened on the road and of little value, maybe horse glue.

The next thing would be to have set election dates. That would let the people realize when it's coming up, and the political games would stop. It's very easy for the government to sit there and to always say, "Maybe we're going to start," not allowing the people of Alberta to be engaged and Albertans to get very offish on trying to decide when the next election is going to be.

What I really feel would be important and critical in the House here – and I know that we'll have a disagreement on this – is the importance of an open and honest debate. The current government goes into caucus; it goes into cabinet. We're told that that is where the great debate occurs, yet there is no *Hansard*. There is no information on what that debate is, and every member can go back to his constituency and say "Oh, I brought that up in caucus" or "Oh, we went over that" or "Cabinet spoke on that," but there is no *Hansard*. There is no record. If anywhere, we have that debate behind closed doors. So it would be much better if we had the debate here in the Legislature and had Albertans able to look and realize what went on where.

I'd like to move on to the economy a little bit. What potential we have here in the province. It is so exciting that we've had a huge surplus the last three years, and we look at it and wonder what we are doing with it. It seems like it's slipping through our fingers. It's

sad to see that most individuals, when they have a sudden windfall that they weren't expecting, don't know how to handle it. Within a year or two they're back to the same situation. I very much feel that that's the way this current government is. This windfall has come in. They don't know how to handle it. It's a matter of: "Where can we spend it fast enough and quick enough? If we don't, someone else might get it. We can do a lot and buy popularity by doing that."

It's been mentioned, and there are different levels, but we need to look at our budget surplus. We need to look at the royalties coming in, and we need to be putting that into the heritage trust fund. We should be putting, I feel, at least 50 per cent into the heritage trust fund during these boom times and setting up and having a goal of where we want it to be. I would say that we need to build that to at least \$60 billion. The reason I'd do that is because I have a farm background, and I very much understand the importance of having two years of seed in my bin. I understand as a cattle producer the importance of having enough hay for two years because a drought can come and you're caught.

Our current fiscal spending is out of control. If we even had a bit of a down year, we'd be immediately stepping into a position where we're running a deficit, and our programs that we have running would be beyond support by the taxpayers of this province. So we need to start putting that money into the heritage trust fund, and we should be refunding it to the taxpayers via provincial income tax or the property tax, to those people that are paying it. But the vision and the opportunity are immense: where we can go and what we should do.

I'd like to spend a few minutes on the Alberta advantage. To me, an advantage is when you have the energy, when you have the knowledge, when you have the opportunity to take that, to grasp it, and to run with it. We have an immense amount of carbon energy here in the province, but we must ask and address: how are we getting it out, and is that good for our environment? As new technology is being discovered and worked on, we realize that we're not using our resources wisely. I must say that I very much agree with those who say that we need to put a moratorium on the old technology that wants to be implemented on any new infrastructure. We need to limit that and to put the moratorium on now and say that we're only going to go forward with new environmentally friendly projects. We have an opportunity. Will we seize it and do it now? It's exciting.

I went out to Ottawa to the nuclear conference. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat was there as well. It's exciting to see the opportunity, what we could do here in the province with nuclear power, and I think that that should be a debate here in the House and with Albertans to bring them up to speed on how nuclear energy has transformed in the last 40 years. We seem to be caught up in history, to say that the Bennett buggy doesn't work very good or the CANDU 1 reactor is a high risk. We can and we should be looking at that and having a debate here in the province because that is the only energy that we can produce that does eliminate CO₂ production.

It's very synergistic with the oil sands. First, it would eliminate the need of burning up an immense amount of natural gas and the amount of water that we're currently using. What's also interesting is the fact that with the electricity that you can produce through electrolysis, the hydrogen that we need to upgrade the bitumen and not have to take it from natural gas. We can actually take it through the electricity and the water to upgrade that. But we have a great opportunity here in the province to address those things.

I'd also like to address a little bit on what is the future of Alberta. We seem to be getting more and more tied up with our federal counterparts with their programs and the things that they're offering us. The most disappointing thing is that these programs continue to

be less than efficient for what we need here in the province. Because I wasn't able to get in on the debate on immigration, I'll speak a little bit on that. We need to look at the federal programs and realize that they're not serving the interest of Alberta and what we can and should start to do in an orderly fashion to get ourselves out of those programs.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The first and most important one would be the failing Canada pension plan, the equalization payments that we currently are sending out to Ottawa. It's funny that Quebec, with their personal pension plan, has a vast amount of money that they can and will reward their workers in Quebec. However, when we look at Alberta and the number that the past Finance minister says, we have a \$60 billion unfunded liability to the Canada pension plan, and that is over and above the unfunded liability to the teachers' pension plan that we always hear about. We need to look at and address and realize that we need an Alberta pension plan. If we took those expenses and what it would cost to put in there, it would truly benefit Alberta and reduce our equalization payments.

The immigration program does not work for Alberta. We just debated that in this House. I agree with the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort that we need to do something about it. But what I feel we need to do is to have an Alberta immigration program, and the Alberta Alliance would very much promote getting one. What we don't need is more government interference and more problems. What we need is an immigration program that would truly bring in immigrants that can and will stay and create a family life and have that quality and the Alberta advantage.

I speak to many employers that have got foreign workers in here. Their time is up after a year, and we're shipping them out. What we need to do is have a sponsorship program for Alberta industry that can sponsor and bring in a foreign worker and then keep them here and do away with a federal one that just isn't working. We bring in these foreign workers, and then we ship them back, and we start over with someone else. It's just as hard on their life. It's hard on their family back there. We dash their hopes by bringing them here and then shipping them out, almost like a common criminal: you've done your time here in the province, and now you're going home. We have an opportunity to do that. We need to grasp it and to set up our own.

We have a major problem with the employment insurance program. It's not set up equitably across the country. It's another one that we need to address.

9:50

The education that we have here in the province. We need to be more innovative in allowing our own students here in the province to get into our university programs. I'm amazed at how many people that I continue to talk to that say: "I wasn't able to make it into a local university here in the province. I've had to go to Saskatoon. I've gone down to the States." Whether it's for pharmacy, veterinarian, engineering, we need to readdress that and realize the importance of being able to put Alberta students first and not look at foreign students because we capture a bigger dollar and try to make universities balance that off.

Alberta Alliance would see to it that the spaces are available for Alberta students, but more important, if a student was to leave, we would still recognize them and allow them access to student loans and those things when they go out. That's literally an even better opportunity for us because we're not paying the full price, just as they come here and don't always pay the full price.

We have other problems in the Justice area. Albertans aren't able to get into and to have what I guess I would call small claims court. It's not cost effective. It's not timely. People are discouraged; they don't do it.

We need to change our funding program for small communities and not just have a cap at 5,000. It needs to be graduated and to pay for the first 5,000, the police force, and then to start reducing it after that. Once again, it's not on an equal basis and very disappointing for many communities and not cost effective.

The health care system: we have such an opportunity here with foreign doctors who want to come and not only just study but to actually practise. It's very disappointing to hear that some of the regional hospitals aren't able to bring in foreign workers because they can't get them accredited here in the province. We need to address that. We need to recognize those foreign doctors. I've lost one from my good town of Milk River that returned to South Africa because he wasn't allowed to use his full scope of practice. We've got to allow regional health boards to decide what they feel are essential services for their areas and not to wait for the province. We need to allow that competition between regional areas and to let them be innovative in the doctors they bring in to practise in their area.

Mr. Speaker, to finish off, perhaps what I'd like to do is to say that it's important that we recognize that we need to stand up for Albertans. We need to strengthen our province, and the way we strengthen our province, our communities is by strengthening our families.

We are as Canadians overtaxed. We send a huge amount of money out of the province. It's damaging to our province, to our infrastructure, to our communities, and we need to stand up and set the example here in the province on how we could do that. If our province was to start by returning 10 per cent of the taxes collected by municipal governments and income tax and corporate tax and return that to those municipal governments, they would be revitalized. Our communities would start to grow, and they'd have the money to make the decisions locally on what they want to do instead of having to look for provincial and federal programs.

We need to stand up for our families. In the coming federal budget they say that they're not going to go to income splitting. They can't afford it because they'd lose \$5 billion or \$6 billion, Mr. Speaker. What we can't afford is to continue to take that money from families and redistribute in government programs destroying our families.

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

Seeing no one wanting to take advantage of that, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to reply to the Speech from the Throne. I have talked to many Albertans in the past number of days since this Speech from the Throne was presented in the Legislature. Almost to a person the perception that has been related to me is that Albertans are pleased with this new road map, are happy with the structure and the direction that the new Premier and his government are taking.

I suspect the recent approval ratings, which had the Premier sitting at close to 50 per cent and the opposition leader languishing at an historical low of 14 per cent, will only get better for the Premier. I expect that one of the reasons for these numbers is the commitment to govern with integrity and transparency. The Lobbyists Act and access to the blue book are very important measures in moving ahead on that commitment. The promise to review the way

agencies, boards, and commissions are governed to ensure greater accountability by them is a crucial measure in gaining the trust of Albertans. People want these organizations such as health boards, the Workers' Compensation Board, the Labour Relations Board to be fair and to live up to their mandate in a way that serves the best interests of all Albertans.

The second priority of managing growth pressures is crucial to maintaining the quality of life of both new and long-time Albertans. We all expect the greatest effort to maintain clean air and clean water. The challenge of climate change must be looked at in a way that will realistically attack the question, not through the ideological, rose-coloured perspectives which so often cloud the view on this subject. Why not support the search for economical ways to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere? Just fix it. There must be a way. Why not look at hydro from the Slave River for the purpose of not using natural gas for oil sands production?

One of the greatest pressures in managing growth and spending costs is the lack of skilled, experienced people. This has brought about the need for much longer hours of work to complete jobs, more rework and mistakes, and less productivity. Training, training, training: learning and new experience must be the answer. Outrageously long hours of work, often out of town, are not the answer and often hurt families as well as community-oriented volunteer time. Why don't we just bring back Sunday, having Sunday off not just as a religious holiday but a family day? Just think about the number of hours that would be saved and therefore the number of people not needed to fill the jobs in those times.

Soon much work and workers will shift to the Edmonton region. The Heartland upgraders and other development will soon strain our transportation infrastructure in the northeast capital region. Anthony Henday and other roads must be upgraded quickly through whatever funding structure is necessary to get them operational in decent time. Co-ordination in many areas is crucial, and a comprehensive and fully supported system to do so must be devised quickly. We have enough congestion on northeast roads already, for example.

Let us be careful with our oil sands resource. Development may be at too high a level to be sustained with any efficiency, safety, or proper resource management, but we must develop the bitumen here in Alberta.

The priority of improving quality of life through learning is also a key and important aspect of this Speech from the Throne. We must be innovative. We must involve the trades in trades training. We must look at how we indenture apprentices. We must ensure that no Albertan is left behind because education is too costly.

The quality of life of children and seniors must be enhanced. I just look at the joy that the programs of the Northgate Lions seniors' centre in Edmonton-Manning have brought to many hundreds if not thousands of families, and the value of such facilities and programs cannot be underestimated.

Safety and security are vital. Providing safe and secure communities, safe and caring communities, will only enhance the lives of all Albertans. It was just a few days ago that I stood together on the steps of our Alberta Legislature with Gary Hunt, his family, and many other families that have suffered tragic and unnecessary losses due to predatory violence. The good need not die young. I very much support the crime reduction and safe communities task force that was mentioned in this throne speech and wish it Godspeed in its work as well as the work undertaken by the 13 partnering ministries.

Research and diversification are also key. There are many areas such as the important National Institute for Nanotechnology in Edmonton mentioned in the throne speech. There are others. Earlier today I spoke at the Canadian Institute for Health Information meeting presently being held here in Edmonton. It was specifically

the Institute for Human Development, Child and Youth Health, and representatives are here from across the country. Research in this area and respect for our universities and research centres will only grow, but these do need ongoing and continued support. Not only the children of Alberta and Canada but also those of countries around the world, indeed all the world, will benefit. The children are our future.

10:00

Proper stewardship of our finances and our potential surpluses are also key, and I look forward to the government's initiatives in this area. We must never, however, forget the necessity to run government so that it is efficient and run without waste and unnecessary cost. Albertans expect no less. They like to make things happen to get things done. They don't like excessive rules and useless red tape.

I support the government in its goal of increased efficiency, but I will be introducing a private member's bill on red tape reduction later in the session. Red tape is not only a concern for small and large businesses; it is also a burden on community leagues, charities, other volunteer organizations, and, indeed, individuals in many areas of life in our Alberta. In our computerized age we must find ways to get the job done without excessive delay and reams of rules and paper.

In closing, I must say that the reaction to this throne speech that

I have received from Albertans is very good. There is a very real sense that a new government is taking hold of the reins. We do await the substance, the meat on the bones, so to speak, but the reaction has been favourable. Congratulations, and I say that independently and with the unanimous support of my caucus.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions, comments.

Seeing none, are there others who wish to participate? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move that we adjourn debate on this matter tonight.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that given the hour we now adjourn.

[Motion carried; at 10:02 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 13, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/13

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in your gallery we have two guests who ensure the security of our colleagues in Ontario. They join us today to observe our legislative security operations and to share their practices from back home. They are Staff Sergeant Steve McGowan, technical services unit, legislative security service in Ontario, and Staff Sergeant Kathy Seymour, investigative/liaison unit, legislative security service in Ontario. I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon to introduce some special guests that we have from the Energy department. They're seated in the members' gallery. As I read their names, I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly: Hilda Royer, Tami Peacock, Mary Bahry, Linda Humeniuk, Mary Burrows, and Donna McBee.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three Albertans from my constituency of Stony Plain. With us today are Des King, Sheila King, and Lorne King. I believe they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to be able to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a school group from my constituency. They actually made it through the heavy snowfall from Airdrie to Didsbury, and the rest of the road was good, thank God. There are 22 people in their group. There are 20 students from the Airdrie Koinonia Christian school, one of my truly favourite schools. They always have a wonderful, positive attitude, with great teachers, a school just filled with enthusiasm. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Mr. Dean Hughes, and a parent, Mr. John Fleck. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of our House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have some guests in the gallery. One of them is Graham Wetter, who's with Credit Union Central Alberta in Calgary. The other gentleman is Mr. Darcy Peelar. Darcy's wife, Judy, is our very able constituency manager in Vermilion. I'd ask these two gentlemen to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce two groups through you to the members of the Assembly. The Neil Ross community school and Mr. Jamie Robertson and Mr. Bruce Brown, both teachers, and Mrs. Julie Richelhoff. They are sitting in the gallery. Would you please welcome them.

Mr. Speaker, thank you again. Through you and to you to members of the Assembly I have a group of students and parents from the school district of Parkland, and I'll go through the list. It's about 11 people: Jo-Anne Robutka, parent, Curtis Robutka, grade 9, and Helena Robutka, grade 7, from Stony Plain Central; Lorraine Dressler and David Graham, also parents of a grade 11 student from Spruce Grove composite; Margo Kienlen, parent; Carolyn Howatt, parent, Courtney Howatt, grade 8, Ailsa Howatt, grade 3, Jared Howatt, grade 2, from Graminia, I guess it is. Please welcome them.

Thank you, sir.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 40 brilliant grades 5 and 6 students from Holy Family Catholic school in my riding accompanied by their teachers Mr. Oberst, Mrs. Romeril, Miss Wecker, and a parent, Mrs. Kruszewski. They are all seated in the private gallery, and I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. I request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My guests have been previously introduced.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Reverend Adelina Pecchia. Reverend Pecchia is an ordained minister who has been working for the United Church for the past six years. She has worked as far away as Tanzania, in Vancouver's downtown east side, and has spent a number of years presiding over the United Church congregation in St. Paul, Alberta. Her extensive antipoverty and social justice work has helped many people in our community. Reverend Pecchia is seated in the public gallery. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly John Ashton. John is a new Albertan, having been born and raised in Ontario and B.C. In his youth he was very active with the Presbyterian Young People's Society in southwestern Ontario. He graduated with a bachelor of arts from the University of Windsor in 2003 and went on to serve as an administrative assistant for NDP Member of Parliament Brian Masse. We are very delighted that John has agreed to join the NDP caucus as part of our caucus administrative staff. I would now ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Nameer Rahman. Nameer is originally from Dhaka, Bangladesh, and came to Canada to pursue his university education. Nameer was educated at the University of Windsor, where he received his MA in political science. While there he also served as the vice-president for university affairs for the students' association. Following graduation, he was the national canvass director for ACORN, a tenant advocacy group based in Toronto. Nameer has joined us as sessional researcher for the spring session and has already impressed us with his work ethic and excellent research skills. He is seated in the public gallery, and I will now request him to please rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: 1:10

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll soon be calling on the first of six, but yesterday in the House I recognized those members who were elected six years ago yesterday on the sixth anniversary of their first election to the House and those members who were elected 10 years ago two days ago for their 10th anniversary in the House.

Today I'd like to recognize a member who has been in this Assembly for 15 years. To the hon. Member for Little Bow, congratulations and well done. It's a special day.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Black History Month

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to recognize Black History Month. This is my first opportunity to speak to this event, which occurred last month, before the House was in session.

Black History Month is an annual opportunity to celebrate the contributions made by members of the black community in Canada, which predate Samuel de Champlain's first voyage down the St. Lawrence. The Canadian Parliament officially recognized February as Black History Month in 1995 following a motion by the first black Canadian woman elected to Parliament, the Hon. Jean Augustine, MP for Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

Locally I would like to thank the National Black Coalition of Canada, Edmonton chapter, and all of the volunteers who put on various events profiling black history. In particular, I would like to commend Movements: the Afro-Caribbean Dance Ensemble, which staged a spectacular event at the Citadel Theatre that attracted over 500 people, Mr. Speaker.

The local celebrations culminated in the awards of distinction banquet on March 3, where a number of members of this region's black community were recognized for their contributions. I'm proud to say, Mr. Speaker, that one of those people was from my constituency, and that is Dr. Gwen Hooks, originally from Breton. Dr.

Hooks is a retired teacher and has written extensively about black history and black pioneers in Alberta. Another honouree is a man well known for his presence on the football field as a former member of the Edmonton Eskimos but who is also a dedicated staff member of our own Children's Services ministry, Mr. Rick Walters of Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, Black History Month is a great opportunity for members of the black community to both celebrate their history with pride and educate the wider community about their many contributions to Canadian society. I'm very proud to stand here as a member of this community.

Thank you very much.

Red Deer College Kings Volleyball Team

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, I stand in this Legislative Assembly today to honour one of the great teams in Alberta and Canadian history. Over the past 13 years the Red Deer College Kings men's volleyball team has won 10 Canadian college championships, including the last eight in a row. The Kings' postseason winning record is now 50-0.

This is a dynasty, Mr. Speaker. This is an Alberta Sports Hall of Fame team like none other. The Kings hold the Canadian record for the most championships and for the most consecutive championships. What makes this most remarkable is that seldom does the team field the same lineup from year to year. During this amazing run there is only one consistent factor: their coach, Keith Hansen. We are so proud of you, Keith.

This year's version of the Kings includes tournament MVP Gavin Schmitt, first all-star team power hitter Andrew Tallas, first all-star team setter Tanner Nault, and first all-star team libero Jason Waddell. Other members of the team are Pierre Rocque, Gilles Plouffe, Andrew Reed, Peter Shaw, Barrett Wenkowski, Jody teBulte, Kris Inglis, Spencer Leiske, James Sangster, and Colin Tajcnar. Mr. Hansen is supported by assistant coaches Bob Rutz, Trevor Pikkert, Jeff Anderson, Adam Sillery, athletic therapist Heather Fletcher, and student trainer Cole Dziatkewich.

On behalf of myself, my colleague from Red Deer-North, Mary Anne Jablonski, and all Albertans we thank you for representing our province so well and for so long.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

P3 or Not P3

P3, or not P3: that is the question:

Whether 'tis nobler in the bind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous private fortune,

Or pay now to avoid a sea of future troubles,

And by planning end them? To prolong; to repose;

No more; and by our accountable action we end

The backlog of a thousand public project debts

That Albertans are heir to. To hose, to haze;

To evade: perchance to scheme: ay, there's the rob;

For in that creep of debt what schemes may come

When we have shuffled off this political coil,

Accountability gives us pause: there's the public expectation

That makes political calamity of so long life;

For who would bear their party's whips and scorns of time,

The opposition's right, the proud government's wrong,

The lack of government conscience bullies us all;

And enterprises of great pith and moment

With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action. — Soft you now!
The Speaker tolls! Referee of these environs
Be all their sins remember'd.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Climate Change

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A hard act to follow.

Climate change and real progress. For over a decade the Alberta government has not done its job in addressing climate change. What is its job? Simply the job of governance: one, to outline the specific goals and justifications for its policy; two, to investigate objectively, without bias, what is known about the science of climate change; three, to scope out options and consult with experts on prudent action; four, to implement measures that first and foremost protect the health and well-being of people, the environment, and the economy into the future.

This government has repeatedly failed to do this. It has placed narrow, short-term economic interest above all other values, confused money and jobs with real progress. Genuine progress has to do with healthy, caring communities, clean rivers, bountiful environments, and a diverse, creative economy that supports people and the environment. Genuine progress does not result from blind faith in markets determining all outcomes.

Rather than consider the obvious and growing health and environmental impacts from burning 1,000 barrels of fuel per second on the planet, impacts that the public are bearing through our tax dollars, this government continues to subsidize fossil fuels and marginalize alternative clean energy. Successive environmental ministers sworn to protect the environment have spent millions of taxpayer dollars to attack the science of climate change and convince Albertans that reducing our emissions would destroy our economy.

To the contrary, Albertans are increasingly aware of the tremendous business opportunities in conservation as well as the value of carbon in enhancing agriculture, capturing methane, solar, wind, and geothermal power for our world. It's time to give these options, along with distributed electrical generation, the same incentives fossil fuels have received for decades. The rest of the world is leaving us behind, and it's time for government to do its job, including participating in global carbon markets and capping carbon emissions.

If this government is not prepared to face and reject its mindless addiction to fossil fuel, do the hard work of governance, and invest in genuine progress, it's time for people whose vision extends beyond the short term.

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

Wheelchair Curling Champions

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour today to rise and recognize all the wheelchair curlers in Alberta. On March 2 through 4 at the Garrison Curling Club in Calgary four teams competed against each other for the second Alberta wheelchair championships. These teams were composed of individuals from northern and southern Alberta. It was a weekend filled with high spirits and lots of fun.

Wheelchair curling as a competitive sport is relatively new in Canada and around the world but is growing in popularity. Team 2 from Calgary was composed of Robert Johns, Dale Keith, Martin Purvis, and Andrea Wojcik and was coached by Bonnie Simons and Brian Rivers. I am pleased to announce that team 1 from Calgary

won the provincial championship. That team, Mr. Speaker, was Bruno Yizek, Bridget Wilson, Anne Hibberd, and Jack Smart and was coached by Ernie Comerford. They have won the honour of competing in the national championship over the Easter weekend in Ottawa, Ontario. I would wish all members of Calgary team 1 the best of luck next month.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud that three of the curlers and their coach, Ernie Comerford, reside in Calgary-Hays. These three individuals and all curlers involved are models for Albertans. They work hard, have an active lifestyle, and they have fun while they're doing it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Warner Girls Hockey School

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise to tell you about a small community where they truly love hockey, a community where hockey rules and where everything they do is hockey. A unique feature in this community that sets it apart from other communities on the prairies is that girls hockey rules, and everything they do is girls hockey.

This community of no more than 350 people has accomplished an amazing feat by being one of the five finalists from all across Canada for Kraft Hockeyville 2007. In fact, they're the only community from the prairies to be in the final five. Their dedication to hockey is what allowed them to beat out so many other great hockey communities to become one of the last five standing.

The Warner hockey school is doing great things, Mr. Speaker, for youth in southern Alberta, raising more than \$2 million in scholarships and financial aid since its inception. They've also been able to place every girl in the program in a college or university program, all with scholarships. In fact, one girl from last year and one from this year are nearly assured berths playing for Canada in the next Olympics.

Mr. Speaker, it's with great pleasure that I congratulate the community of Warner, Alberta, on being a finalist in this year's Kraft Hockeyville challenge. Their love of the sport is what has made their bid such a successful one, and it's my hope that all members of this Legislature and all Albertans will join with me in taking the time to vote as many times as possible to get the village of Warner crowned this year's winner. Please visit the website hockeyville.cbc.ca from now until March 16 to vote for Warner. The winning community will receive the title of Hockeyville 2007 and the trophy as well as an opportunity to host a special NHL event and \$50,000 of upgrades for the arena. The winning community will also be featured on CBC in the fall.

Please vote and vote often for Warner. This little community has worked hard and is representing this province's proud tradition of community spirit.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a report called Alberta Needs Students. The report was produced by the University of Alberta Students' Union and makes a compelling argument for why tuition fees need to be significantly reduced in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table 12 letters that I have received urging the minister of health to fund Gardasil vaccinations for any woman aged 9 to 26 who wishes to have it. The vaccination is highly effective in preventing HPV infections, which can lead to cervical cancer. If Texas can do it, surely Alberta can.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is the Alberta Environment and Fisheries and Oceans Canada Water Management Framework: Instream Flow Needs and Water Management System for the Lower Athabasca River. Hopefully, this report will be read and it will be an important document in further approvals of oil sands projects in Fort McMurray.

The second document I have is a letter dated September 13, 2006, that I wrote to the former Minister of Finance, the hon. Shirley McClellan. It is in regard to the public accounts and excessive government grants to golf courses throughout Alberta totalling \$1.4 million.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from Ms Fay Becic. She is a single parent raising two daughters, 13 and 15, and also a guardian of a 12-year-old. She's not receiving child or spousal support. She's concerned about the legal aid system. Her legal costs are greater than her legal aid.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of petitions being tabled because of the wording, with the requisite number of copies, supporting Gary Hunt in his efforts for his son, Josh.

The Speaker: Are there others?

head:

Statement by the Speaker

Amendments to the Standing Orders

The Speaker: Well, we have an interesting situation that's already developed. Under the Standing Orders that were passed and approved last night, it says that the Oral Question Period should begin at 1:30, so we're ahead of schedule. So let me make some comments on these Standing Orders.

First of all, hon. members, you have on your desks green sheets of paper, and these green sheets of paper incorporate the orders that were changed and approved last night along with the existing ones. The ones that are new are the italicized parts, so that it gives you an idea of following through on them. As all members will know, we started today at 1 o'clock, and we'll rise tonight at 6 o'clock according to the rules we have.

The order of business, of course, is that the daily Routine will remain exactly the same – we went through the daily Routine today – save the Oral Question Period, which the Standing Orders that were passed last night said will commence at 1:30 p.m. There will be some discretion, obviously, that will have to be dealt with with respect to this matter, and if we arrive at this point in the agenda in the ensuing days, then we will begin the Oral Question Period ahead

of schedule. There also may be a situation where in the Routine we will arrive at situations where hon. members may be in one of the points in Routine, particularly Members' Statements, where the chair would not want to interrupt an hon. member if he or she has not concluded their ministerial statement, and we might just begin a few seconds or more after the fact.

This is going to cause some confusion for all of those thousands and thousands of people who tune into the Oral Question Period daily at 1:30 in the afternoon because they'll find that the whole proceedings are disrupted. If the television coverage does not begin until 1:30 p.m., they will not know what I'm saying right now. At 1:30 p.m. we will be into something, and the phones in my office will light up very profusely this afternoon, so we will have to convey to those thousands and thousands and thousands of people out there that there was a modification in the rules yesterday.

Tomorrow I'll make mention of the written questions and motions for returns change that was made last night as we approach that item of business tomorrow. Essentially what will happen is that if members of Executive Council have accepted a written question or a motion for a return, they will advise, the clerk will notify, and there'll be no further discussion of that particular written question or motion for a return. It will simply be dealt with by a member of Executive Council in the ensuing days and ensuing weeks. If, however, a written question or motion for a return demands an amendment or a rejection, then that will of course be dealt with on the subsequent Monday in the afternoon.

Now, this afternoon when we get into Orders of the Day, we will be getting in committee, so committee will not rise at 5:30; it will rise at 6 o'clock. Of course, in our provisions it says that the vote must be taken by 5:15. Well, effective today, the vote will be taken at 5:45. Because the Government House Leader has provided no advance notice and hasn't gone through the process yet of dealing with the House sitting tonight, it's impossible for the House to sit tonight unless unanimous consent of the hon. members is requested and given some time this afternoon to do that.

This is the start of the changes that are occurring in the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta, and there was a good discussion on it last night. Not all members agreed with the direction being taken by the majority of members. The *Hansard* deals with that. Applying these rules may require some flexibility, but most of all it will require the goodwill and the cooperation of all members, particularly in these early days. The chair would look forward to that, and he looks forward to working with all members as we apply these rules in a courteous, respectful, and professional manner.

At this point in time, Mr. Clerk, despite the fact that the television will not come on for another 30 seconds or so, I'll ask you to stand and make your announcement to the Routine item.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Royalty Review Panel

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the principle of ensuring that private interests don't interfere with public duties is a sound one, one which Albertans expect to be upheld. With the government taking in over \$80 billion worth of nonrenewable resource revenues in the last 10 years alone, surely the stakes are high enough to defend this principle when it comes to the Royalty Review Panel. My question is to the Premier. Why is the Premier allowing panel members with clear conflicts of interest to be involved in the biggest policy issue facing this government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I thought I was clear in my response to the question raised with respect to the individuals that have been selected for this panel. They are professionals. They all have professional ethics when they do a review of this sort. I said that their job is to lay out all of the information for all Albertans to look at to decide for themselves whether the royalty regime that we have in place today is fair both to all Albertans in terms of owners and also to industry, that is investing billions of dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A letter from the Minister of Energy just last month restated that the goal of the royalty regime is to, quote, encourage development, apparently without regard to whether this development is hurting Albertans' quality of life. So much for managing growth. My question is to the Premier. Given that the royalty regime is designed to ensure profitability of investments for oil companies, will the Premier admit that the outcome of this review could have a substantial impact on the future value of the stock options and other investments held by panel members?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there was some comment made with respect to managing growth. Part of the growth pressures, of course, in the province of Alberta are related to the critical human resource shortage, some to infrastructure, obviously, and to housing. Those are three clear priorities that this government is moving very quickly on, and we will report to the House on the progress on those particular areas.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A complete and utter dodge. I'll repeat so that he can hear and think. Will the Premier admit that the outcome of this review could have a substantial impact on the future value of the stock options and other investments held by royalty panel members?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, the purpose of this review is to gather information, assess the information that comes from Albertans in terms of the royalty regime, and lay it out on the table so all Albertans can have a look at it. But if the hon. member is concerned that there may be changes in the investment climate, it may be because of the lack of clarity in terms of rules with respect to greenhouse gas emissions, and that in itself may drive away substantial investment. That's why last week our Minister of Environment tabled a bill with very clear emission targets, and at least that in itself is stabilizing the investment climate in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Red Deer River Water Transfer

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Environment is currently reviewing an application for a water licence from the Red Deer River to service a massive project in the MD of Rocky View, just on the north edge of Calgary. This development will require large-scale water servicing, and the source of the water is the Red Deer River. This development is already proceeding at full tilt despite the fact the developers don't have a water licence. My question is to the Premier. On the leadership campaign the Premier called this project ridiculous and promised the people of Drumheller

that nothing would happen until he fully investigated the situation. So has the Premier investigated this, and what message does he have for the residents of Drumheller, who were never consulted and oppose the development?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't recall any comments made with respect to an application before the Minister of Environment or the quasi-judicial authority that's looking at it. With respect to this particular application I'll have the Minister of Environment answer because it is very specific to Balzac.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this particular application, but actually with respect to any application, there's a very specific process. The application is considered by a director within the department. That director considers all of the relevant factors related to stream flow, related to the amount of water that's being requested, related to the possible impact on directly affected persons and makes a decision. That decision has not yet been made on this particular application. When it is, it is appealable to the Environmental Appeal Board, and the appeal board then makes a recommendation to the minister, who will be responsible for making a final decision. For that reason, I cannot become embroiled at this stage. At the end of the day I may have to make the final decision.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The developers, the United Horsemen of Alberta and Ivanhoe Cambridge, started work on the project last summer and are moving ahead on construction fast, probably spending well over a million dollars a week. But there is, of course, one glaring problem: they have no water licence. To the Premier: will the Premier, who repeatedly makes claims of being open and accountable, tell the people of Drumheller, of Red Deer, of Stettler, of the whole Red Deer River basin who in his government has promised the developers that they will get their water?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. Leader of the Opposition just heard a very good explanation in terms of the process. There is a process followed. I guess the best way for me to explain it is that if there's a quasi-judicial authority and, as well, appeal, elected members, especially the minister, cannot make comments with respect to the question before the quasi-judicial authority. It would be similar if you were sitting as a judge in the courtroom, and you saw somebody come in and give the verdict without even hearing the evidence. There's a process to follow.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In September 2006 the MD of Rocky View approved a memorandum of understanding with Ivanhoe Cambridge and the United Horsemen to confirm in writing the MD's intent to deliver water, but it is actually the province, not the MD, under the Water Act who is responsible for all the water in Alberta. A municipality cannot make commitments to deliver water they do not already have through an existing licence. A second key piece of evidence pointing to a secret deal: members of our own caucus were told flat out that a water guarantee had been made by the province to the MD. My question is to the Premier. The evidence is clear, so it's time to be open and accountable with

Albertans. Will he make public the province's secret deal to provide water to this development?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, how could it be secret? All of a sudden he's quoting some internal documents. Let it be clear that with respect to the issue of the MD of Rocky View, whatever business they've conducted with a developer is their responsibility. That's their bailiwick. That has nothing to do with the province. The province has a completely different process. Again, if the opposition has not heard clearly, then the Minister of Environment can reiterate the whole process.

Speaker's Ruling Preambles to Supplementary Questions

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the third Official Opposition member for a question, I think that there needs to be some clarification in here. The rules that dictate the question period remain Standing Order 13(1). There's no provision for preambles in second questions or third questions, and on three occasions in those last two preambles were provided. There's no change. Question period operates the same way it did yesterday and the day before, and until the Standing Orders are changed, nothing – nothing – changes that.

Third Official Opposition main question.

Ms Blakeman: A point of order under 13(2).

The Speaker: Sure. We'll deal with it at the end of the time.

Hon. Member for St. Albert, you were to be recognized as the third Official Opposition main question. Just remember what I've just been saying.

Teachers' Labour Dispute

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The backdrop of every strike is the fact that school boards are continually asked to do more with less. As we head into the summer, when as many as 80 per cent of the school boards will be in contract negotiations, we need to know now whether the school boards will be empowered by the government to make the best possible choices for students and staff, who are crippled by the perpetual lack of funding. To the Minister of Education. School boards have a lot of responsibilities and not enough funding. How important a role does the minister think overall education funding plays in whether or not a strike happens and how long it takes to resolve it?

1:40

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure I understood the last part of the question, but I will say that the budget will be coming out on the 19th of April. At that time we will know exactly what the funding is for the coming year. But let's make one thing clear: currently education is funded in this province to the tune of around \$5 billion, 97 per cent of which goes to the school boards. So the comments made by the hon. member, frankly, are not correct.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, I failed that achievement test.

Let me try another one. Will the minister consider lobbying for funding adequacy in the upcoming budget, a strategy that would make sure that all necessary costs, including instruction, are funded properly so that school boards are not left battling with teachers over inadequate resources? Will you help us, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I did.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me try the Premier. Maybe I can get a little more insight from the Premier. I'm going to switch my focus. Mr. Premier, the people in the Parkland school division have been hearing one thing from the Minister of Education, who favours mediation, and something else from another minister, who is pushing for the disputes inquiry board. Can the Premier share with us the province's position and how this government plans to proceed as we nearly hit one month into the strike – can you help us? – and what direction the government is going to take?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe it's not one month. It's day 17, if I hear correctly. We are paying attention very carefully to the issue in Parkland. I do, though, believe strongly in, of course, the role of school boards. They're elected for a purpose, and that is to ensure that our students are educated. They also have a role to play in terms of administering the dollars that are available to them. We're watching the situation very carefully, obviously, but the ministers are in close contact, and so are the two MLAs that answer to the Parkland school board as well. So we'll just watch this as it unveils over the next few days.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Holy Cross Care Centre

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and Wellness admits that for several weeks he ignored safety code violations, including the failure to conduct an annual fire inspection, which placed 42 seniors at risk in the Holy Cross Care Centre in Calgary. The Holy Cross situation is an example of the Tory government's failed experiment in private health care. One of the private shareholders of that institution is John Huang, who is also running for vice-president of the PC Party. To the minister: why did the minister fail to take immediate action to ensure the safety of 42 vulnerable seniors by ordering their evacuation as soon as he received the report?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary regional health authority has taken all appropriate steps in this circumstance. When they were made aware of the fire and safety code inspection, they followed up with the owner of the building, and appropriate steps were taken, as I understand it, as I've been informed, to ensure that fire and safety concerns did not endanger the residents. Some of the steps that have been taken, to my understanding, would be as is normal in a case like this: to post a fire watch, to have people there 24 hours a day to be able to have that fire watch in place. As I understand it, that is what is required by the fire and safety code if the sprinkler and fire alarm systems are in question.

So they followed up. They've done what any business would do, what any prudent public institution would do. They made sure that while the owner was being requested to make corrections to deal with the violations that had been identified, the safety of the residents was not in question. When it got to a point where they felt that they needed to take the residents out of the situation – again, it's not an emergency that they need to do an immediate evacuation. But they felt that the violations were not being dealt with on a timely basis, so they took the next logical step, which was to consult with the residents and let them know that over a course in a prudent period of time they would be moving them out of the residence. It's not something that anybody is in peril. There are procedures in

place, but as I understand it, they believed that the owner was not moving fast enough to deal with the issues, so they took the next step available to them, which was to talk to the residents about moving them to other locations.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the minister is very blasé about a fire hazard affecting vulnerable seniors. Will the minister admit that this government puts the interest of wealthy and well-connected Tories such as Mr. Huang ahead of vulnerable seniors, patients, and their families?

Mr. Hancock: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. That is an absolutely fallacious statement and quite inappropriate. The Calgary regional health authority has been on top of the situation, has been monitoring the situation, and has been taking every step that they felt was appropriate and necessary to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of the residents in that facility. It has nothing to do with the politics of any individual. It has everything to do with the health and safety of the residents. This hon. member should not be drawing that inference.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's their health and safety that this minister has ignored.

When will this minister admit that the government's experiments with private health care have failed and bring the Holy Cross back into the public system?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of circumstances around this province where private operators, where nongovernmental organizations, where not-for-profit organizations provide long-term care to citizens of this province and do it extremely well. Lots of situations. There is a mix of service delivery, and long-term care for Albertans is delivered in many different models across the province.

This situation has nothing to do with profit and nothing to do with delivery. It has everything to do with making sure that that facility has the appropriate sprinkler system, the appropriate fire alarm system, and the appropriate attendants there to care for the individuals involved. If there was any question that any of those individuals was in imminent danger, they would be moved immediately.

Mr. Speaker, the health authority has taken the appropriate steps, and they've taken the appropriate steps in the interests of their patients, not in the question of profit.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Physician Supply

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that a tentative two-year amending agreement has been reached between the Alberta government, the Alberta Medical Association . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, sorry. I'll let you repeat your whole question once we can have some calm return to this Assembly. It is only day 4.

Hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, begin right at the start, please.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that a tentative two-year amending agreement has been reached between the Alberta government, the Alberta Medical Association, and the regional health authorities. My question is for the Minister of Health

and Wellness. Will this agreement cure the shortage of physicians in the province, and specifically how will rural physicians benefit from the agreement?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, no agreement is a cure-all for the challenges that we face in terms of physician supply or, for that matter, the supply of all health care professionals, but I really believe that this agreement will take us a long way in the right direction. Every province is experiencing a shortage of physicians. This agreement will help us build on our past success in retaining the physicians we have, making it appropriate to attract and retain physicians at a much higher rate than we have.

Mr. Speaker, we have over 6,000 practising physicians under the trilateral master agreement, and we attracted about 250 new physicians this year. There's a retention component in this agreement which will encourage physicians to stay in practice and to stay in Alberta. There are provisions on the clinical stabilization which will help us deal with specific, targeted areas. So this agreement will allow trilateral partners to respond more quickly to areas that are under pressure.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will the new clinical stabilization initiative that you just mentioned in this agreement address the extraordinary increases in physician practice costs across Alberta, and how will it help communities with very serious health system pressures, such as Drayton Valley has?

1:50

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the clinical stabilization initiative is a very, very important part of this agreement. It's new, and in agreement with the doctors, the health authorities, and Alberta Health and Wellness, the government of Alberta, it will allow us to target specific areas where there's a need. If there are barriers to success because the local climate will not support a full physician/clinic process or where there needs to be some support to help pull together a primary care network or if costs have gone through the roof, there's an ability to direct resources in that area.

It's not just about rural areas. It's also in areas where community clinics or physicians in the community are meeting an exceedingly high rate of growth in their costs. Let's remember that they're all paid out of the public purse, and they have not the ability to raise their own rates, so we need to be able to have the flexibility to go back in the system with those extra costs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: how will this agreement advance the attraction and retention of young doctors in Alberta, again, especially in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of pieces to the agreement. One is the provision which will help physicians join the electronics health records process, to set up their office and put in place the necessary computerized equipment so that they can be part of a comprehensive electronic health record. Secondly, it will help locate physicians in rural areas. If there are costs of establishing, costs of attracting or building the practice, it will help us to target resources in those areas. The details of the

program still have to be worked out. We have an agreement with the AMA to do that and hopefully to do that prior to the beginning of June, but it will be targeted to retention and attraction.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Red Deer River Water Transfer

(continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the stated goals of the new Premier is to govern with honesty and transparency, consulting with Albertans and listening to the wishes of Albertans. Here's the problem. This government has tried to push through the Balzac water transfer without consulting anyone in the Red Deer basin, and that's undeniable. Just ask Red Deer, Drumheller, and Stettler, none of whom were consulted and have publicly stated so. However, I quote from *Hansard* the Minister of Environment in this House on August 31: "The people of Drumheller know very well what's going on." To the Minister of Environment: since the town council has stated in Drumheller that they had no clue as to what was happening at the time of his statement, where is the honesty and accountability in this process?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'm more than happy to deal with questions that arise from a statement of fact that's within *Hansard*. I do have to advise the member that the context of the answer was when this individual was minister of municipal affairs, not Minister of Environment. As such it was my understanding and it still is my understanding – and I stand by my words – that the town of Drumheller had been contacted and was aware of the issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With climate change and the real fear of water shortage, including groundwater, in this province Albertans want to know that your department is not simply relying on staff reviews. What experts are being consulted in the Red Deer River watershed around groundwater impacts, climate change impacts, and cumulative impacts along that course presently and in the future to protect future generations?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the member refers to is precisely what the government is moving forward on with our Water for Life strategy. There are a number of different factors that come into dealing with allocation of water on a long-term basis within Alberta. In this specific application the process that is being used is the same process that is used with any other application. The director whose responsibility it is within Environment makes his decision based upon a myriad of different factors, many of which the member has referred to, and then makes a decision based upon whether or not the issuance of an additional licence would impact on either the ecosystem – the aquatics, nature of the stream – or directly affected persons.

As I explained earlier, that decision has not yet been made. Those factors are being taken under consideration as I speak.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is again to the Environment minister. What experts are being consulted in climate change and groundwater impacts and cumulative impact assessment beyond your staff to assess the true impacts of this into the future?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the answer in short is none of the above, the reason being that this is being dealt with in the context of one application. We don't go into that degree of research in dealing with individual decisions. That's why the Water for Life strategy is so important, and that's why we have just recently announced that the in-stream flow targets for the Athabasca River have now had that degree of consideration, and we have made the necessary decision for that. In time we will make the same kind of in-stream flow analysis needed for the Red Deer River.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, the users of the Red Deer River are, in fact, very concerned about the water licence application, that is going to be used to support the development at the MD of Rocky View. What's particularly disturbing is the fact that there is a waterline that goes 500 metres from the city of Calgary right by this development, and there's sufficient capacity in their water licence to service this development. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Does the minister have the authority under the Water Act to intervene in this licence application and insist that a solution be found from the existing Bow River water licence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated earlier, there is a very specific process involved in the granting of water licences, so the short answer to the question is no.

The longer answer and the explanation, as I explained earlier, is that it would be inappropriate for me to step into this situation and try to influence either the director or the Environmental Appeal Board when at the end of the day I as minister am responsible for making the final decision. So how could I be seen to be influencing those who are responsible for making this decision if I'm going to be making some kind of an impartial decision at the end of the day?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, also to the Minister of Environment: in the unfortunate event that a water licence were to be granted for this, what appeal mechanisms are in place under the act for users of the Red Deer River to appeal a decision?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly the appeal mechanism has been outlined in my answer to previous questions. Any decision whether to issue the licence or not to issue the licence, as the case may be, can be appealed to the Environmental Appeal Board, and that will then result in a recommendation that would come forward to the minister.

I want to point out to the hon. member, though, that I recognize that there are unique circumstances in this application because this is the first application that has come forward for water out of the Red Deer River since the allocation has been closed down for further licences out of the Oldman and South Saskatchewan and Bow River basin. It's for that reason that I have asked the Water Council to have a look at the existing policies to determine whether or not those existing policies should remain in place given the new circumstances that we're dealing with.

Mr. Doerksen: My final question is to the minister of municipal affairs. Can he tell me what authority he has to intervene in the impasse between the MD of Rocky View and the city of Calgary to find a solution to this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The

intermunicipal dispute resolution initiative was introduced in 1999. This is a voluntary service which includes mediation, financial support, and mediators that are made available in a dispute resolution type of situation. To access the program, one of the municipalities must send a request to the ministry requesting such a service. I want to suggest to you that that has not happened, but if there was such a situation where the request was made, our mediators would come in. They would assist the feasibility of the situation and deal with the issues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

2:00 Holy Cross Care Centre
(continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This may sound like an echo, but it is not. The problems at the Holy Cross Manor illustrated the consequences of this government's decision to deregulate long-term care. As the health minister pointed out yesterday, the assisted living residents are not technically under the jurisdiction of the Calgary health region. To the health minister: will the minister explain why these assisted living residents aren't receiving the same safety protection by the government as the long-term care residents living in the same building?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the whole area of assisted living is outside the scope of the health department, so the minister of seniors and community programs may want to supplement.

In essence, the relationship between people in assisted living is a relationship where people have, as I understand it, contracted with the owner of a building like they might in any apartment building, but they've contracted for a living accommodation with some supplemental services. That is a private relationship between the people that have moved into that assisted living facility, renting space to live with supplementary services, which is quite different than long-term care, which falls into a health and accommodation facility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Then in light of that, is this the position of this government: that residents housed on the floors that receive public funding should receive different levels of care than residents housed on the floors that are privately funded?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, when one builds a building, one may have a multitude of uses for the building. You might have a building where you could have normal apartments that anybody might rent, and then you might have another level. In fact, one of the key innovations in housing for seniors and others in this province and elsewhere is the whole idea of integrated aging in place so that you can move through the types of accommodation that you need and the support services you need. There are many seniors and others in this province who rent apartments or own their own homes and might need some assistance in terms of care coming in, and others live in facilities that have intensive care. There's absolutely no reason why that full continuum can't exist in the same building.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the answer has clearly indicated how complex this question is after deregulation.

Will the minister commit to legislating clear standards for anyone in care to apply equally across this province?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have standards of care, but it should be clear that just because a person is living in what might be called an assisted living facility doesn't mean they're in care.

An Hon. Member: You don't care.

Mr. Hancock: I care very deeply about Albertans, and one of the things that we want to do to make sure that Albertans have the opportunity to stay healthy is to respect their individual desires and wishes and their ability to care for themselves. There's a full continuum of housing, and it's not for the government or anyone else to take away people's independence when they can have it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Provincial Park User Fees

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fish Creek park is the only provincial park in the country that is located in an urban centre. Thousands of Calgarians enjoy this park 12 months of the year for its beautiful walking and biking trails and Sikome Lake. Recently there has been some musing about establishing a user fee to access this park and other provincial parks in this province. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. On behalf of my constituents and the many Calgarians that enjoy Fish Creek park, are you, Mr. Minister, looking at establishing user fees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, as the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek indicated, you know, she has a right to be concerned. I, too, have been receiving a number of calls on the musings that were spread that we might charge user fees for day use of our provincial parks. I need to say that we are certainly not contemplating day-use fees to use trails in our provincial parks, including Fish Creek provincial park. We do charge some fees for camping, including some additional fees for some services, including electricity, water, and sewer services, sometimes horse corral utilization. I need to say that those fees are very comparable to other public parks across the province, but it's certainly not our intent at this stage to charge day-use fees.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Mr. Minister, do you have plans to undertake a review to introduce fees in provincial parks?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to improving Alberta's quality of life. We want people to get out in nature, and we want people to enjoy the beautiful spots that this great province of Alberta has to offer. As part of ensuring that outdoor recreational opportunities are available, I will be developing a plan for provincial parks to accommodate population growth and the increased recreational needs of our people. There will be a review of fees but certainly not to indicate that we will be charging day-use fees. As well, we're incorporating and going through the land-use framework, and certainly that will no doubt be part of the discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is also to the same minister. Given that Albertans take pride in their parks and they think of them as tourist destinations, what priority is this government placing on our parks?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, since 2004 the Alberta government has invested a considerable amount of money in our provincial parks. We have spent some money to help repair and replace park facilities and some of the infrastructure within the parks. I need to say that this year marks the 75th anniversary of provincial parks in Alberta. In addition to hosting a number of special celebrations, including Robert Bateman prints commemorating Alberta parks' 75th anniversary – these prints will go on sale fairly quickly – we will be having a lot of activities in support of those parks.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Oil and Gas Activity in Rumsey Natural Area

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to protecting Alberta parks, this Tory government preaches about improving quality of life and respecting the environment, but then a foreign company is granted approval to drill for coal-bed methane in the Rumsey natural area, which is protected parkland. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Why is this minister allowing the interests of a foreign company to be put ahead of the environment and Albertans' enjoyment of their land?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think I did cover that yesterday. Again, I need to reiterate that the Rumsey block that the hon. member is talking about includes two protected areas. Certainly, no oil or gas activity is allowed in the ecological reserve of the Rumsey park, but in the natural area of Rumsey energy commitments are subject to the conditions that were established in 1993, and we will honour those conditions.

Mr. Agnihotri: How does this plan fulfill the minister's mandate from the Premier to develop a plan for parks and improve the quality of life?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, if we go back, from 1995 to 2001 you will notice that we put over 2 million hectares of land under protection and 81 new and 13 expanded areas. Certainly, I need to re-emphasize that for the areas that were established under special places, we also agreed to honour the existing oil and gas commitments as a matter of fairness. We are continuing to add to our parks area. We are interested in expanding our parks and camping facilities in the province, and we'll continue to do that particular work.

2:10

Mr. Agnihotri: Well, if this area is not protected from drilling wells, what exactly is it protected from? What's the point of designating land as protected if American companies are given permission to plunder it? Is that the plan to protect Albertans?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, certainly, we need to, as I had also indicated yesterday, strike a balance between protection of our parks

and the economic activity that needs to go there. Part of it is to honour the existing commitments that we had before we started preserving additional acreages, and the honouring of those commitments is extremely important to Albertans as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Postsecondary Education Costs

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last May, following an extensive review of the postsecondary education system, the government released a report called *A Learning Alberta*, the final report of the steering committee, which was followed a few months later by a much-trumpeted affordability framework for postsecondary education. As the months have passed, however, we have seen only the most minimum possible steps toward implementing elements of that framework. Meanwhile, students are going further into debt, accessibility eludes most postsecondary institutions and many students across the province, and a tight labour market continues to bleed students from pursuing advanced education.

My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. I suspect this might be the first question the minister is going to be addressing. Given that the affordability framework promised last November to reduce interest rates on student loans, will the minister commit to reducing interest rates on student loans to prime without further delay? Yes or no.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member. This is my first question of this session, so I'm pleased to respond.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member refers to the *A Learning Alberta* framework and the affordability framework, which we've been working on since November. We've brought in a few elements of that framework, including what was a key element, being the tuition policy, and something that was brought forward by medical residents in the province, being the deferment of interest while they were in residency, as well as for maternity periods of time for students studying, the interest being waived. I might add that we recently announced a tripling of the bursary amounts for disabled students under the affordability policy.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, the items which the hon. member is asking for are really budget items. They're items where we don't want to be doing a whole bunch of in-year spending and a whole bunch of in-year announcements. We want these things to be budgeted out for the whole year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll wait for the budget and hold our breath.

Given that the cost-of-living allowance for a typical student living away from home doesn't even cover the cost of residence at either the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary, what steps is the minister taking to eliminate the gap between actual living costs and student finance assistance living allowances as promised in the framework?

Mr. Horner: Again, Mr. Speaker, these are items that are ongoing, long-term type commitments that the government would have to

make as they relate to our fiscal position, i.e. the budget. It's tough for me to talk about what might or might not be in the budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think students have waited long enough for these steps to be taken.

Given that this government's tuition fee policy leaves mandatory fees in postsecondary institutions totally unregulated, will the minister assure close to 200,000 students in the system that he will not allow rampant increases in their mandatory fees?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're in the process of reviewing all of the recommendations from the affordability framework as well as other items that the student councils and student bodies have brought forward to us. I might say that the council of presidents of student unions told me that the cost-of-living allowance that's involved in the affordability framework was probably the number one priority for them. We are going to work with the institutions to try to keep our costs down as much as we possibly can. We are going to work with the institutions from a Campus Alberta approach, you know, as it relates to a plan to manage growth pressures, so that we can increase the quality of life for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Enhanced Feed Ban for Cattle

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent years Canada's beef industry has faced many challenges. Last year the federal government announced that they would be implementing an enhanced feed ban effective July 12 of this year that would ensure that no more potential BSE materials or SRM, specified risk materials, could be used in any animal feeds, pet foods, or fertilizers. This left the industry scrambling for a desperate solution. Yesterday there was a joint federal and provincial announcement committing about \$40 million to Alberta to help our beef industry to comply and adapt to the federal government's enhanced feed ban. So my question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Can the minister tell us what the long-term benefits of this funding will be?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very quickly, I'd like to kick off with three short-term benefits. The first one is helping industry comply; the second, reducing costs; and the third one is adding value to what might otherwise be just waste material. That in itself extrapolates out to a long-term benefit.

But this is also about increasing market access for Canadian beef. The bottom line is that we want to speed up the elimination of BSE in Canada. This comes on the heels of some pretty good news, which are steps to fully restore the U.S. beef trade and towards controlled risk status under the OIE, which gives us the same control status as the U.S. Perhaps more importantly, though, the cost of compliance will not be piggybacked on the primary producers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. With the federal feed ban starting on July 12, which is not very far away, does this program come in time to help the industry to get ready for this event?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, the enhanced feed ban is a federal initiative, and they have set the deadline for us. We didn't wait for a signed agreement. We worked with the industry for months to get their input and build a program that makes sense to the industry. We will however have to grandfather in some investments that these people have already made. We're moving first on the most immediate piece: infrastructure for the main facilities for the SRM.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the same minister. I would like to know if the government of Alberta is going to enhance or supplement this federal initiative.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, Alberta is recognized as a leader in this area. It shouldn't surprise anyone that we're going above and beyond the usual commitments. This is a 60-40 cost-share program with the federal government. Alberta's commitment to that is \$13 million, but we are investing an additional \$7 million. We know that the industry also has operational costs that aren't covered under the federal program, and funding research for a new value-added solution is always a cost. But the primary producers need that relief, and Alberta is here to assist.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Health Workforce Strategy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the health minister guaranteed in conjunction with the advanced education minister that an aggressive health workforce strategy was being produced that would be released in spring 2006. But in June 2006 the health minister told Grande Prairie doctors that releasing a workforce strategy by the fall was the number one priority. These promises were made almost a year ago, and shortly before the Tory leadership race led to a six-month hiatus in health policy decision-making. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Can the Deputy Premier explain to Albertans why this government let Tory party business interfere with making essential improvements to the health system?

The Speaker: Hon. member, unfortunately, in the order of precedence provided to me, there's no individual identified as the Deputy Premier. Perhaps the member would direct it to a particular member.

2:20

Ms Blakeman: How interesting: there's no Deputy Premier.

Well, then I will direct a question to the minister of health. Knowing that the work . . .

The Speaker: Okay. You've directed the question to the Minister of Health and Wellness. We've heard the question.

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the hon. member will know that on my appointment as Minister of Health and Wellness and upon being sworn in, I was delivered a mandate letter by the Premier, and one of the mandates had to deal with the implementation of a workforce strategy. It is one of the four

mandates that I have to report on within six months and within 12 months report progress on. So there's a structure in place to make sure that we accomplish that.

I can assure the hon. member that a considerable amount of work has been done on health workforce strategies with the RHAs and other service providers across the province but also in collaboration and co-operation with the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. We are working together to ensure that a workforce strategy is implemented, and in fact projects have been undertaken already in that regard.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Maybe he should have been the Premier.

To the minister of health. Can the minister then tell us: now that we've had all of these delays, and we've had repeated announcements of when we're going to get a health workforce strategy, when do we get a health workforce strategy? Give us a date.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are number of elements to the workforce strategy. One, of course, is a budgetary element. Another is with respect to placements, which the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology will be making announcements on in due course over the spring. Some of the issues in the workforce strategy are being worked on as we speak. But I can assure the hon. member that I with my two colleagues am taking the workforce strategy through a policy process in government as we speak, and it will be tabled in the House once it's gone through the review of cabinet policy committee, caucus, and government in the same careful and prudent way that we deal with all policy issues in this government.

Ms Blakeman: Careful, prudent, and much delayed.

All right. Again to the same minister, standing in for the Deputy Premier, standing in for the Premier: can the minister guarantee that all of the plans for expanding spaces for health workers in postsecondary institutions will include the necessary infrastructure, equipment, and faculty to get the job done?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not, in fact, standing in for the Premier or a Deputy Premier or anyone else. I was answering questions in my capacity as Minister of Health and Wellness because they were questions which were appropriate for the Minister of Health and Wellness, and I'm certain the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology may wish to answer questions with respect to his department.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'd love to. As the hon. minister of health has stated, the three departments are working collaboratively on developing the plan of what is the demand, what is the current capacity, what is the gap that we have to fill. Indeed, we've been talking to the regional health authorities. We've been talking to the occupational community. We've been talking to industry as a whole to figure out and to make sure that what we're designing as our plan is going to be long-term sustainable and, more importantly, is going to fill the need. That's something that the three of us have to work together on, and in due course, as my colleague the minister of health has mentioned, we'll be making some announcements on the progress.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today that was 78 questions and answers. We had 84 on Thursday, 88 yesterday, and 78 today. So the chair apologizes that he could not work in more members because that's certainly the intent.

Now, the Official Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order

Preambles to Supplementary Questions

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the House leaders' agreement should be in effect as of today. It was tabled last Thursday, and the motion that was debated and accepted last night does specifically refer to the House leaders' agreement. I'll quote from page 22 of *Alberta Hansard* from March 8, which was when that motion was put on the floor: "the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, in order to give effect to the March 7, 2007, House Leaders' Agreement." So I would argue that that is the totality of the agreement, and the Standing Orders changes were only needed to bring them into line with what was proposed in the House leaders' agreement. That should not cancel the remaining clauses of the agreement itself. I know that the Speaker had concerns, but under 13(2) could he explain his reasoning for not implementing the full House leaders' agreement today?

The Speaker: Hon. members, this parliament makes its decision on the basis of motions that are presented to it, motions that are provided to the knowledge of all members, motions that are there for all members to see, study, and review, motions that are debatable in the Assembly. Once those motions are approved, in essence that becomes the rule of the Assembly.

There was nothing in the motion last night which refers to a House leaders' agreement. In the House leaders' agreement, which was signed by three individuals, there is no motion that has been presented to the House that this chairman is aware of that would suggest that the totality of the House leaders' agreement must be put into play. There is a section in the conclusion of the House leaders' agreement that there may be several motions that may be required to deal with any particular matter. Until those other motions come forward which may deal with certain things, the current provisions will apply.

Very clearly, even if the House leaders' agreement was to be intended, there is absolutely nothing in the House leaders' agreement which provides for preambles in secondary or supplementary questions. There is one section, 3(a)(ii), I do believe, which basically says that we should try and apply a 45-second rule. That's what we've been doing in this House. On March 3, 2005, I believe, and on March 8, 2005, the chair made long statements, which are recorded, that basically say that we try and abide by a 45-second rule. Nowhere in any of this does it suggest that there should be preambles in the second or subsequent questions. That has never been the case.

In fact, most rules and most provisions you'll find are very clear that there are no preambles on secondary questions. That was certainly reiterated by the chair in the memo that he sent to all members just a few days ago. Certainly, if one wanted to highlight and review *Marleau and Montpetit*, it very, very clearly says that preambles are not to apply to supplementary questions.

So how that could have been extrapolated today, from yesterday to today, that is beyond this chair. The chair did point out in a memo to three House leaders that he would welcome an opportunity to raise a number of questions with them for clarification, but at the moment the only thing that has changed in the operation of this House is the motion that was approved by all members after debate in this Assembly. If members choose to will themselves to three

individuals and then have a motion to that effect, then that will become the rule of the House and that will be applied in the rule of the House.

But in this particular situation there are 82 members in this House who are viewed by the chair to be equal – equal – no one more important than the other, no one less important than the other, all with rights, all with privileges, and each and every member must understand that their rights and privileges will be protected by this chair all of the time. There will never be an opportunity, as long as this chair is the chair, to allow individuals to become secondary citizens in this particular Assembly. The MLA is supreme in this Assembly.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I have received a certain message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits interim supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the 2007-08 interim supply estimates. These interim supply estimates will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and the government from April 1, 2007, to July 1, 2007, inclusive. During that period it is anticipated that the spending authorization will have been provided for the entire fiscal year ending March 31, 2008. When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$9.1 billion in expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$401 million for capital investment, \$45 million for nonbudgetary disbursements, and \$463 million for lottery fund payments.

2:30

Interim supply amounts are based on departments' needs to fund government programs and services until July 1. While many payments are monthly, other payments are due at the beginning of each quarter and at the beginning of the fiscal year. Some payments are seasonal.

head: **Government Motions**

10. Mr. Snelgrove moved:

Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2007-08 interim supply estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Shall we call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

11. Mr. Snelgrove moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2007-08 interim supply estimates shall be two days.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this motion under Standing Orders is not debatable, so I will call the question on the motion put forward by the hon. President of the Treasury Board.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head **Supplementary Supply Estimates 2006-07, No. 2**
General Revenue Fund

The Deputy Chair: As agreed, at 5:45 or before that if there's no one wanting to speak further, a vote will be held.

I'll now call upon the Government House Leader to move the estimates.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move the estimates as set out in the supplementary supply 2006-2007 estimates, No. 2, and in particular move the estimates of the Department of Advanced Education and Technology in the amount of \$107,100,000, Agriculture and Food in the amount of \$50 million, Finance in the amount of \$46,570,000, Health and Wellness in the amount of \$147 million, Municipal Affairs and Housing in the amount of \$42,846,000, and the transfer under section 2 of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 from Infrastructure and Transportation to Service Alberta in the amount of \$530,000.

The amount of expense and equipment/inventory purchases to be voted under section 1 of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007, \$393,516,000, and the amount of capital investment to be transferred under section 2 of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007, \$530,000.

Members of Executive Council are here to respond to any inquiries by members or questions by members of the House or to receive any comments with respect to the estimates of each of those departments. Of course, I'd be more than pleased to deal with the estimates as set out for the Department of Health and Wellness.

In brief, with respect to that particular set of estimates I can indicate that the \$147 million that's requested as supplementary estimates for Health and Wellness applies entirely to a provision for the trilateral agreement, and I'm very pleased to say that we have a tentative agreement in place, subject to ratification by doctors. The agreement was approved by the AMA's representative forum on Saturday for sending out to its members.

We participated in a joint press conference today with the chair of the health authorities board, the president of the AMA, and myself announcing some of the highlights of the agreement. The \$147 million that we're talking about here applies to the increases and changes which would be in place if that agreement is approved for the period covering the 2006-2007 fiscal year. Of course, the remainder of it will have to be in subsequent estimates.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the chair does not have any priority identified as to which department goes first, so it's open. At

this stage I guess we'll recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks for the promotion, but probably just the House leader.

The Deputy Chair: Sorry. The House leader.

Ms Blakeman: There we go.

My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Now, I'm curious because you have just confirmed that essentially the money that you were talking about at the media conference this morning with the trilateral agreement is reflected here in the \$147 million. As set out on page 22 of the supplementary supply, it actually says, "This Supplementary Amount of \$147,000,000 is requested to fund the higher-than-budgeted cost of physician services," which is a pretty sweeping statement, so I'm going to try and nail you down to a bit more detail there.

Now, I noticed in the media release that on the second page it notes that in fact this agreement has not been accepted. The Alberta Medical Association's board is recommending that the membership vote for the financial agreement, and I'm quoting directly: "The ratification process is expected to take seven to eight weeks because of the time it takes to mail the tentative agreement and a ballot to each physician, and then have the ballot returned."

Now, if I look at the calendar and I go forward by seven to eight weeks, I'm looking at the very end of April. This is a supplementary supply budget, so if this trilateral agreement is not ratified by one of the parties, how is it in effect and expending \$147 million inside of the fiscal year 2006-07?

I noted the monies that were talked about this morning: \$47 million for the retention benefit, which essentially is \$8,000 bonuses for full-time or part-time physicians to get them to stay working; and another allocation of \$56.5 million for the clinical stabilization initiatives, although I'm wondering how that's included in this \$147 million because, in fact, this morning they said that there were no details on that program. They didn't seem to be sure about how it would actually work. The final portion of what was announced: I think the money this morning was \$103.5 million. Then there was the physician office system program to provide for the continuing computerization of the physicians' offices and the support for the 19 primary care.

So there's a bit of a timeline problem for me here, and I'd like the minister to outline how that works and on which side of the 31st of March this money is falling. What exactly is covered by the \$147 million? I would argue that much of what's in that trilateral agreement does not apply to that \$147 million, but I'm sure that the minister will tell me.

2:40

The second part of this is: where was the money – perhaps it's in the \$147 million – for the special initiative in Fort McMurray in which doctors were being paid I think it was \$1,200 a day to go up there for a period of time to stand in as the doctor for the day at the local hospital? Now, that was \$1,200 a day plus the travel plus their board and accommodation. That program, as far as I know, has been running, I think, since the 15th or 16th of February, although I'd be interested in hearing from the minister how many doctors actually have been organized to take that doctor-for-a-day shift, if you will, through this program.

I was up there just a few days before this program started. I know that at that time they didn't have anyone lined up that was coming to be able to start on that – I think it was Saturday the 16th – so I'm

interested in how many have taken advantage of the program between then and now, how many are projected until the end of the month, which would tell us the money that was spent on that particular project.

The final question in that cluster of questions about Fort McMurray is: if that money is not included in this \$147 million, then the minister anticipated this as part of his budget and it was included in the budget amount that came forward as part of the '06-07 budget amount? I'm interested that he was able to see that far into the future that he would require that money for Fort McMurray then.

I look forward to his responses to that set of three questions. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. No, I'm not that omnipotent that I could see that far in advance, particularly as I wasn't Minister of Health and Wellness at the time.

I think I could explain what the hon. member is interested in in this way. Under the trilateral agreement there are funds set aside on a fee-for-service basis and for some other program spending; the physician office systems program, for example. Under that agreement we were able to get an agreement that there needed to be some funds that provided for the provision of doctors to Fort McMurray in the circumstances that they were in. That was done while we were contemplating because negotiations, as the hon. member might know, had been going on for a considerable period of time, and there had been agreement to the concept that there would be a critical stabilization initiative. We had agreement to utilize the resources that were in the fee-for-service payment pool to assist in the payment of doctors in that manner.

The \$147 million is being requested in anticipation of the obligation that will be incurred under the agreement. As I understand it, under appropriate accounting practices we will have an obligation going back to a 4 and a half per cent fee increase. I'll have to check as to when that actually would come into effect. There's a 4 and a half per cent increase to the fee schedule for 2006-2007. The exact date is not at hand, but suffice to say that as soon as that agreement is met, we will owe for past services rendered. So in calculating the amount of funds that are needed to deal with the retroactive adjustment, that's where the \$147 million comes from.

I believe the total amount is \$579 million for the whole package that was talked about under that agreement, but \$147 million of that primarily related to the fee-for-service package. Increase in fees and increase in utilization, I think, covers that piece.

Chair's Ruling Speaking Order

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, just for clarification. As I had indicated, we do not have a precedence of which ministry goes up first, so this is more like a free-for-all, and people are asking for clarification. The chair is not necessarily going to recognize a particular minister to make a statement then followed by questions. Really, at this stage if anybody wants to raise a question, let the chair know, the chair will recognize you, and you can direct your questions to any minister that you want to direct yourself to. So the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The chair does not have clarity on which ministry goes first. That has not been clarified; therefore, until that issue is sorted out, if it is an issue, we will recognize the person that identifies himself or herself as wanting to raise a question.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Debate Continued

Mr. Tougas: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I could, I'd like to address a few of the items in advanced education, so I'm just sending a little alert to the minister over there. You know, Mr. Chairman, I remember being quite shocked and appalled when I was a rookie MLA, back in 2005, when we were presented with supplementary estimates for the first time. I was amazed that we were going to debate and approve millions of dollars in a few minutes with little or no information to go on. Well, nothing shocks me anymore, but I reserve my right to be appalled, and I have to shake my head as we approve such a huge sum of money without adequate information about where the money is going. That's my requisite political statement. Now I'd just like to ask the minister a few questions while he gets his papers in order.

First of all, I would like to thank the advanced education minister. We had a meeting before the session began, and he did promise that he would provide information if we just made a phone call. He did come through, and I'd just like to thank him for his professionalism in that regard. He may live to regret it yet, but I'm going to give it a try.

Mr. Chairman, supplementary spending has been the norm for the advanced education department over the last few years, and these numbers have skyrocketed. We've seen supplementary requests in my time in the Legislature for \$19 million, \$49 million, \$99 million, and now, continuing with that trend, over a hundred million dollars in advanced education alone. [interjection] That's not really worthy of applause. Before we get into specifics about where this money is being spent, I wonder if the minister in his response would spend a couple of minutes explaining why supplementary spending is increasing at such a rate in Alberta.

Now, I understand that there are extraordinary pressures on advanced education in Alberta. I've heard it in my visits across the province that everybody wants money, and they want it now. I'd like to hear from the minister if this increasing need for off-budget spending is a result of poor planning in the postsecondary institutions or a lag time from his department in making decisions, particularly since we're on our third minister in two years, or perhaps chronic underfunding of advanced education in the budget itself.

Now, for instance, we have a \$15 million expense in additional apprenticeship technical training spaces. There's no doubt that these are desperately needed spaces, and \$15 million probably doesn't even put a dent in how much we really need, but surely the government should have seen this shortage coming for sometime and budgeted it properly in the first place.

There is also \$15.7 million for nursing degree programs at Mount Royal College and Grant MacEwan. Again, this is welcome news, and we're fully supportive of it, but I wonder why Mount Royal had to wait until the last possible minute to find out that they were going to get funding for this program.

On a smaller budget item there's \$2.8 million for the WorldSkills Calgary 2009 competition. It's my understanding that we've known about this event for about three years, so why is it a supplementary spending cost instead of being in the budget?

Perhaps most importantly, I'd like the minister to explain the \$34.5 million in grants to match private donations. Now, the bulk of this is of course made up of \$24 million as the initial payment of a \$37 million donation of rare Chinese artifacts by the Mactaggart family at the University of Alberta. My question is: is this not what the access to the future fund was supposed to be for?

Now, if I can go back to the Speech from the Throne from 2005, the access to the future fund will "support innovation and excellence

in postsecondary education." For example, it will provide matching contributions to help create a new centre for Chinese studies at the University of Alberta. In April of 2005 the then minister of advanced education said:

The collection will provide the basis for the university's new centre for Chinese studies, which will house the world renowned expertise on Chinese culture and history.

Members will recall that in the Speech from the Throne the new access to the future fund is intended to support innovation and excellence in postsecondary education, and the creation of this new centre for Chinese studies at the University of Alberta was specifically referenced in anticipation of this gift.

So what we have here, it appears, is money coming out of the budget that is supposed to have been from the access to the future fund. My questions regarding that are: what has happened to the access to the future fund? Why is the money not going out? Why are we using budgeted sums for this?

I threw quite a few questions at you, and I'll sit down.

2:50

Ms Blakeman: Keep going. Once you sit down, you won't get back on.

Mr. Tougas: That's okay. I want to hear his answers anyways.

The Deputy Chair: The minister wishes to respond?

Mr. Horner: Sure, and I'd be more than happy to take some more questions later if you think about them.

First of all, as it relates to supplementary estimates, obviously, if we had a crystal ball – I know that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition in his alternate throne speech claims that he doesn't have a crystal ball either – to project what might be coming down in the future, we probably could have had capacity and space for everything that we need because it would be there based on our crystal ball. But we don't have that any more than the Official Opposition leader has one or anyone else.

Part of the problem that we have in terms of spaces that are coming online is that it isn't as simple as just saying: "Here's the money. Now you've got the spaces." I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark knows this. You need the facility. You need the classroom. You need the faculty. You need the equipment. You need all of those things, especially in health care. On the health care side is where we have the health workforce plan, and the intricacies of that are that you need medical practitioners to actually be teachers as well as to deliver medical aid and care to Albertans. These things take some time to plan.

We're working with the postsecondary institutions as we plan the rollout of their capacity increases. I think the hon. member mentioned: "Well, you've got \$15 million. Is it enough?" No, it's not enough, but it's the capacity that we can build quickly. We want to plan the capacity that we can build over a longer period of time. There will be more dollars to move with that, and we'll wait to see how the budget rolls out on that one. So, I mean, it's difficult. It's easy to say: couldn't you have seen the shortage coming? It's another thing to say: well, you tell me how many spaces we'll need five years from now. It's very difficult to do, very difficult for any vocation or in any of the other postsecondaries. In fact, we had a meeting on February 26 with all of the postsecondaries in the room, and we asked that very question. We said: you guys tell us what we need. That was the most difficult question for them to answer.

We had a really good discussion, Mr. Chairman, about roles, responsibilities, and mandates at that time. Part of what we're doing here today is catching up on some of those things that the

postsecondaries see as being very, very important, that the industries, whether that be health care, whether that be education, whether that be our trades training, see as very important. So that's part of expanding the access to trades training.

As it relates to the access to the future fund, obviously, if we again had that crystal ball that none of us have, we would have anticipated the amount and the totality of the generosity of Albertans over the last year and a half. Unfortunately, we weren't able to predict that. We have a huge amount of very generous Albertans who are wanting to match their dollars with universities, postsecondaries, and technical institutes to see good things happen in our facilities. So we're trying to keep up with that. However, as we plan out what we're going to be doing with the access to the future fund, we can start to add more dollars to that fund to generate more dollars every year. As the hon. member well knows, it currently is generating about \$45 to \$50 million per year. We then by formula put it out to all institutions, not just one or two, and then they work on their matching arrangements with whoever is going to provide them with dollars.

There were a few that came in very, very quickly in very, very large amounts that didn't fit the formula that we had established through the committee and the council after the fact. So we felt that it would be prudent that we try to match those donations as quickly as we possibly could so that the council and the access to the future fund could deal with the dollars that are coming in on a regular basis and work with the institutions on the philanthropy that's going to come towards them and is coming in a very big way from all Albertans. So are we catching up? Yes. Do we hope that we're at one point down the road going to be basically matching, you know, the amount that we earn out of the access to the future fund to the amount that Albertans are willing to give? That's the plan. That's where we're headed.

Just like everyone else, Mr. Chairman, I have probably 20 minutes of opening comments here that I could give, but I think that in the interests of where we're going with all of this stuff, I'll just try to keep my answers to the questions that are coming from members opposite and members behind me.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to participate in the debate this afternoon. Certainly, as we review another supplementary supply estimate, it is with interest that I note where some of this money is going, where it was, and now where it's going. There are many hon. members that want to participate in the debate, so I will start with my questions in regard to the CAIS program.

Now, we realize that the Department of Agriculture and Food is requesting a total of \$50 million, and the purpose of these funds, as I understand it, is to fund Canadian agriculture income stabilization, CAIS, the Alberta reference margin initiative. We know that there are going to be changes to the CAIS program. Certainly, there has been an ongoing issue with CAIS. I was left with the impression last fall, Mr. Chairman, that the government here was quite satisfied with the CAIS program. I was surprised to learn by observing question period in the federal House of Commons that your Conservative cousins are not only contemplating changes to CAIS; they are changing the CAIS program.

I wonder how this will affect the overpayments that have been made, specifically for the 2004 CAIS year. There have been many farmers contacting us confused and frustrated. [interjection] Yes. The hon. Minister of Service Alberta says dazed.

Certainly, I find it a complex calculation to determine a payment.

Now, the producers that have been contacting us are complaining about the fact that they have to pay back money. I know that there have been some adjustments made to that. This side of the House made some suggestions last summer to the department. The whole program is confusing. How confusing is it, Mr. Chairman? Well, in fact, I think the hon. minister of municipal affairs should give a course or give advice to farmers across this fine province about the CAIS program, and I'm just referring to the selected payments to Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Other payments listed here under the hon. minister's name include hay and post-harvest assessment payments, moisture deficiency assessment payments, crops spring price endorsement assessments, waterfowl assessment payments, crop revenue insurance coverage payments, and of course the Canadian agriculture income stabilization payment made by the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. All these payments listed are the total of \$118,000; \$93,000 of it comes from the CAIS program. That adds up on that page to \$332,000. Then other family members also have made application successfully to the CAIS program in the year ended March 31, 2006, of \$51,000. I would certainly think it would be advantageous for all farmers to get some advice from the hon. minister as to exactly how this program works.

3:00

We're looking at an additional \$50 million for CAIS funding here, and I would ask the minister: what details can the minister and the department provide to the House in regard to this money and how it is going to be used? I would be very grateful for that, Mr. Chairman. Can the minister also tell this Assembly the details of the additional funding, specifically how the federal grains and oilseeds program, the payment program, relates if at all to this funding.

Again, getting back to the federal Conservatives, last week the Prime Minister announced \$1 billion in funding for Canadian farmers. Can the hon. minister please tell this Assembly how the federal government's plan to replace the CAIS program will impact Alberta farmers, specifically again in relation to these funds. We need to know how this \$50 million will be distributed. We know the program has been cumbersome. It has been frustrating. How is it going to work now? This is a lot of money we're asking for, but at least it's less than what the overpayments initially had been. With the CAIS program, again, I would just say that I think all hon. members should seek advice from the minister on just how this program works and how to effectively fill out the application form because the producers that are contacting our office, they're not getting payments like that. Thank you.

Now, I have another issue. I'm not going to talk about the aircraft and the \$530,000 payment. I just expect that the hon. minister in charge of Service Alberta will explain to the House how this oversight was made. There was a currency fluctuation, and that necessitates the increased expenditure. It's a transfer. It's a transfer of funding. Also, if I could get answers in regard to the transfer of funding that's on page 29.

Now, people accuse this government, Mr. Chairman, of being slow, but in this case they're really fast because it's not three weeks since the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, thought that we should take money that we're using now for energy rebate programs and turn it into a fund that encourages conservation and encourages the construction of public transit. All of these are good ideas.

I notice with a great deal of interest that some money that was left over from the energy rebate program is now being used. Ninety-one million dollars, in fact, has been provided to support the public transit programs. Hopefully, the city of Edmonton, the city of Calgary, and our other expanding municipalities will all get a share

of this money. I would like to get a breakdown of that, please, because I think our municipal officials will be using that money wisely, and it would be a follow-up as to what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was talking about. I'm surprised at how quickly that was adopted – I shall use the word “adopted” – by the members across the way because usually it takes them a little longer.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, I'll use the public accounts as an example. In the fall I requested that the public accounts be put online on the government's home page, on the website. I thought it was a good idea. If we were going to be open and transparent, well, this was a good place to start. I was so disappointed in the hon. Minister of Service Alberta when I got a letter indicating that, no, that wouldn't be done, but quietly the government went ahead. They never wrote me another letter – I was so disappointed – to inform me that this was going to be completed, but it's a good idea. You can feel free to take any ideas from this side of the House if they'll make this province a better place.

I'll be interested to know in the future from the hon. minister if they are monitoring that website to see how many hits they get on it. I know that they get quite a few on the Alberta heritage savings trust fund website, so it would be interesting, I'm sure, to find out how many Albertans are keen to look up and see where the money has either been spent in supplies and services or just given away in grants. In fact, with the grants I think there should be just a separate section there on golf courses. I can't understand why we're granting so much money to golf courses that restrict access by requiring members to buy a membership.

But getting back to the supplementary estimates now, Mr. Chairman, I notice that in mid-October 2005 the province of Alberta decided that they would assist northern Alberta, the Wood Buffalo district, with \$136 million in bridge financing to help cope with growth pressures, and we all know the pressures the municipal government is under in the municipal district of Wood Buffalo. This was a loan that was made to ease the financial costs of a water treatment plant, a new waterline to Anzac, and a new solid waste treatment facility, which the municipality had previously identified as critical infrastructure to accommodate the expanding economic and population growth not only in Fort McMurray but in surrounding areas.

I see on page 29, the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, where part of the money that wasn't utilized in the energy rebates, \$11 million to be precise, is being provided for regional water systems projects. “The funding is required to enable municipalities to begin preliminary engineering work to develop regional water and wastewater systems.” Now, is this \$11 million just being granted, and if it is being granted, why is there a double standard here? Why are you granting some municipalities money? “Here, spend it on a very worthwhile engineering project.” Yet you are forcing the Wood Buffalo district to borrow money. Why make one municipal district borrow money and just give it away to the others?

Now, my last question in regard to this matter would be: does it depend on in which area of the province the project is occurring? Now, certainly, one of the current Premier's first trips after he was sworn in was to southern Alberta, where the support for his campaign was the most modest. Some would say the weakest. I will say the most modest. Off he goes. The first place he goes is to southern Alberta to shore up his political support, right? You can't fault the guy for that, you know. You can't fault him at all. But this money, the \$11 million: where is it going and why?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Would the minister wish to respond? The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and perhaps, seeing that this is a free-for-all, maybe I could just read my Committee of Supply speech. I think it would answer. If we'd have done that first, I don't think he'd have had to ask the question. Is that permissible?

Chair's Ruling Speaking Order

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, in the past a preference list or a priority list was provided to the chair, and the chair would then recognize the minister. The minister would make remarks up to 20 minutes, and then there would be questions that would follow.

Under the new rules there's no priority list that has been provided to the chair, and therefore the chair recognized the Government House Leader to move. Thereafter it is open to any member to rise and ask the question, and any minister who wishes to speak can also speak. So there's not a restriction of a priority list, but there is an open process, and anyone can participate. So at this time, hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food, if you want to speak, you're welcome to.

Mr. Groeneveld: I'm going to read my speech, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: You have 20 minutes.

Mr. Groeneveld: And a good one it'll be.

3:10

Debate Continued

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to present you with the supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. It's common for the agriculture sector to have to deal with changes. There have always been many factors that impact how well a farmer does from year to year, but in the past few years the field of agriculture has been hit hard and hit harder and seen a lot of change. The impact of drought, BSE, high input costs, and an expanding global market are just a few of the examples.

Farmers work in a climate of change. This demands that the industry and government work much harder, and we need to work together. We want programs to sustain agriculture in this province, and we have done a great deal of work to make sure that the programs we bring forward are effective business risk management programs. Rural communities in Alberta depend on agriculture, and even people who live in urban areas are impacted by what happens on the farm.

It's important to note that our agriculture sector does have a strong foundation. We couldn't weather the storms if we didn't. To borrow from an old saying, in today's climate we must be strong enough to bend. We need to be more innovative, more adept, and I'm proud to report that our growers and producers are becoming more expert business managers despite these changes. Even with the best planning and financial management there is a need for support following some unpredictable disasters. Many farmers look to the Canadian agriculture income stabilization program, or CAIS, for that support. Unfortunately, many producers have expressed concern that the funding is not responsive enough or that the formula for determining who qualifies for the funding is too narrow.

In support of the new Alberta agenda, building a stronger Alberta, our ministry plans to address these concerns with two changes related to the CAIS program. To accomplish this, we are requesting an additional \$50 million, and the changes would be as follows. This year CAIS payments are expected to be another \$20 million below forecast, which will allow us to redirect funds. Our payments will be lower due to a federal government payout last fall to our

grain and oilseed producers. In late December Alberta decided to treat these payouts as income under the CAIS program. That will reduce CAIS contributions by \$20 million and reduce the federal contribution by \$30 million.

We will extend the Alberta reference margin initiative. A reference margin is an average used to determine profitability. Through CAIS an agriculture business can get funding if they are below the average, which means they are facing financial risk that year. The problem is that the national CAIS program uses a five-year average after dropping both the highest and lowest years, and with unprecedented back-to-back disasters profits have been steadily eroding. This initiative allows producers to use the five-year average or to look at their last three years, whichever is better for the producer.

Our plan is to extend the Alberta reference margin initiative one year, at about \$70 million. We recognize that this is a short-term measure to help supplement the CAIS program, but it is a necessary measure. Through this initiative Alberta producers will not fall between the gaps, and I want to assure all hon. members that the prosperity and sustainability of our agriculture industry is a priority of this government. End of my speech.

Now, to touch on some of the questions that came before I got here. As I think probably the hon. member is fully aware, CAIS is only a part of the insurance program that we along with the federal government provide to our farmers. He talked a little about the overpayment possibility that's out there right now. I think probably we're not going to have a whole lot of changes to that because I think that to be fiscally responsible, we have to collect that money. Now, having said that, when the people filled out these applications and even when the cheques were sent to them, they were warned that they could be in an overpayment position because, at best, there were only estimates out there. I'll admit that the system is far from perfect, but we have to keep putting what we can out there for the farmers. So I think that that portion of it isn't going to change.

Now, if the hon. member was in question period yesterday, we talked extensively about the new program that was out, which of course is giving over \$1 billion through the CAIS program. That's all federal money. That's not a 60-40 component. That is all federal money. However, it is contingent on the federal budget passing, which throws a little different light on it, of course. Out of that \$1 billion, \$600 million is going to an investment-type program which goes onto the top end of CAIS and which is very much like the old NISA program, where farmers can invest money and the government will match that money. The farmers have certainly been asking for that for quite some time.

The \$400 million, I understand, is for the increasing cost of production and if passed will start to pay out to the farmers immediately. The hundred million that is left on a year-by-year basis is available in the fund so that when cost of production is not met, there's an available fund of money, so we don't have to go through the usual channels of going to Treasury Board and the time that it takes to implement such a plan. How many farmers is this going to affect? I think the devil is still in the details on how that's going to work. It will certainly make it a more attractive program. Will it make it an easier program to understand? I doubt it very much. That's something we have to work on.

But I think that just to get past that, if the hon. member looks in the books – and he did allude to the fact that we're talking \$50 million this year. It's because of the nature of the beast that the ag department works in with these programs. Last year was an exceptionally good year, and we actually lapsed just about \$291 million back to the government, but to get this year's program going again, we have to come up with \$70 million, of which we already

have \$20 million. So it leaves us a shortfall of \$50 million, which, of course, we have to understand is only to tide us over until the budget is passed. This is not new money that we're asking for over and above anything. In fact, it's less money than we have been asking for in the last couple of years.

I hope that answers the hon. member's questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be able to get up and participate in this debate on the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. I have a few different questions that I would throw out. I guess I'd like to start with just an overall view that once again we're into supplemental supply, and it's pleasing to see that the list of the number of ministers that have come forward is so short.

An Hon. Member: It's the second one this year.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, number two, but thank heavens it's only four or five and not 18. That is pleasing.

I guess perhaps I'll start with my first comments towards the hon. minister of agriculture, seeing as how he was the last one up. I would like to know exactly the breakdown of the \$50 million and how many farmers in the province he feels that that's going towards.

The number one thing, Mr. Chairman, that I get farmers asking me is: why is this so complicated? What's the percentage of the people in the CAIS program that they're reassessing and going through and coming back? Is this \$50 million because they've acknowledged that they misjudged how they assessed these farmers, or are they changing it? There are still a lot of farmers that are up in the air not knowing where they're going and where CAIS is coming from. The absolute necessity is to have this become a more simplistic form that even the accountants might be able to read. Anyways, if he could just update us on where this \$50 million is going and how many they think that it's going to.

I might mention that at the top of page 15 it starts – and each of them do – details of supplementary supply estimates. Yet this is so vague. I don't know how we can use the word "detail" to debate and to question where this money is going. So I hope that he can answer that.

3:20

I would like to go on briefly, in order that more members can get up and ask their questions, to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. We have a breakdown here on the enrolment planning envelope, \$31 million, and other program support, \$34 million. If we could get some details on those numbers. How many more openings are we getting for that \$31 million? Is it a thousand? Is it 500? What are the details that they've come up with these numbers that we're to be voting on?

Other program support: what exactly are those? We see here that there's \$15 million for additional apprenticeship technical training spaces. What are the details on that? Is it a hundred? Is it a thousand? I'd be very interested to hear where this money is going.

We have \$15 million for nursing degree programs at Mount Royal College and Grant MacEwan College. Again, I ask the question. It would be so much more helpful, when they bring these supplemental supplies, to have a spreadsheet to show us what the details are so that we could be informed and know rather than just have a big question. Fifteen million for the nursing degree program: I'd like an expansion on what that is.

We have \$900,000 for the development of social work, the Cree

language and aboriginal artist programs at Blue Quills college. What is the estimated number of students that are going to enrol in that? Do we know the size of the faculty that's going to be involved? Is there additional infrastructure that's going to be needed for that program? Obviously, the minister has the details – that's why they've put them down here – and I would appreciate the details on that.

The \$34,500,000 to match private donations to the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. I probably should be able to remember what those are for, but are those specific areas that we're matching and know exactly what they're going to, or is that kind of an open, unconditional match that the universities can use in their own discretion?

Anyways, we can continue to go on. The \$1.5 million for enhancing science literacy awareness programs. Again, what's being enhanced? Is it the number of students that can get in there? Is it equipment? Is it a new facility that they're adding on?

The \$500,000 for enhancing awards and promoting the annual gala event at the ASTech Foundation. Again, what are some details on that?

The \$3 million for the genome centre. Is that completely just for the pine beetle infestation? Do they have some breakthrough technology that's exciting that this Assembly and the people of Alberta would love to hear? We do most agreeably understand the devastation of the pine beetles and where that is going to.

Turning over again – the minister has somewhat answered this, but I wasn't clear on it – to the \$147 million. That's just to the physicians? It says here: "is requested to fund the higher-than-budgeted cost of physician services." I'm not right up to speed on the agreement that they're trying to sign, that trilateral agreement, but how many physicians are we talking? What are some more details on that actual transaction and if that's going to fit in there?

If I could skip over to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. On line 6.3.3 we have \$15 million for affordable housing programs. Again, if we could have the numbers there. It says that this spending would be offset by a transfer from the federal government. What exactly are the details on that? Above it on page 26 it says that we have a \$2 million fund for up to 600 additional units under the rent supplement program. What are the numbers that we're going to get of affordable housing programs? Some details there. I'm sure Albertans would love to know the breakdown.

Again, for the 16-plus million dollars for off-reserve aboriginal housing, what kind of numbers are we talking? Is that throughout the province, or is it in one specific area? Then we have 9 million plus dollars to assist homeless and near-homeless people through outreach teams administered by seven major community-based organizations, a total cost of \$16 million. Do we have a number on how many people are in those homeless and near-homeless situations? What's the breakdown? Are we doing a good job spending that \$16 million? Once again, a spreadsheet showing the details and where that's being split would be very helpful to the members of this Assembly in going over the details of those.

Perhaps my final question would be to the Minister of Finance: that we have a breakdown here of the \$47 million. We've got \$7 million going to reimburse the public-sector pension plan. I see that he's gone, so I don't know if he'll be answering this, but perhaps he can write it and give a written one back. Will this update it, and will it become fully funded then and we've met all of our obligations? What are the details on that one?

The \$40 million lump sum for the government's share of the management employees' pension plan unfunded pension liability. Does this now fully fund that? The question is: why are we addressing the unfunded liability on one part of the sector? I'd love

to know why we're not addressing the unfunded teachers' liability fund at this time with a supply estimate and trying to get on and repair the conditions between the government and the ATA, but I'll wait to hear that.

An Hon. Member: That'll never happen.

Mr. Hinman: With that attitude, you're correct. It'll never happen with this current government.

The Deputy Chair: Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, do you want to respond?

Mr. Horner: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to touch on a few of the questions there. There were a number of them rattled off in fairly quick succession. I'm still trying to get a little bit used to our new format as we roll from one department to another.

I can provide the hon. member with some of the detail that he was talking about. I would also point out specifically as an example the apprenticeship spaces. When we announced the \$15 million, it was put out in a fairly broad and lengthy press release that we were providing 3,600 new apprenticeship spaces across the province, that these apprenticeship spots were located in a wide range of areas of the province: north, south, east, and west. I would encourage the hon. member to perhaps check his press releases for the detail on that one as well as some of the other donation items that we've done. I would encourage the hon. member to read *Hansard* tomorrow as to my answer on the matching donations because we've done that one already as well.

The genome component of what we're doing is indeed for what is, as my colleague the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has classified it, a war against the pine beetle. That \$3 million request is for research and development at Genome Alberta related to the pine beetle infestations. The project is going to contribute to defensive solutions and progressive management practices to the mountain pine beetle based on the in-depth understanding of the relationship between the pine tree, the beetle, and the blue stain fungus.

Alberta's response to the mountain pine beetle has to date been operational, so a research response prepares Alberta to best deal with the existing problem. Again, Mr. Chairman, we're talking about timing here. The pine beetle's critical months are going to be coming up in the next three or four months. It's going to be very critical for us to actually have a plan in place. Therefore, these dollars were put out there fairly quickly.

He mentioned the enrolment planning envelope, and I'll refer back to my response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who had some very good questions at the start of this session about the enrolment planning envelope and why we are planning the spaces the way we planned the spaces. It's because you've got to have the capacity. You've got to have the teachers. You've got to have the faculty and the facilities and the labs and all of these things in play as you roll out the new spaces. That's working in conjunction with the postsecondary institutions to ensure that, you know, when the student shows up, there's actually something there for them to be a part of and to participate in.

I think, Mr. Chair, that answered most of those questions.

3:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Agriculture and Food minister also wanted to respond to the questions raised?

Mr. Groeneveld: Yes. I'll be very quick, Mr. Chairman. Unfortu-

nately, like my colleague down the way there, “A” comes too soon in the alphabet, and I guess we get shot first. So with any luck, if I answer a question again, the rest of them won’t have to. I think that maybe the question was here, and I guess that reading my little story didn’t help because that told you exactly what the \$50 million was going towards. It was to extend the Alberta reference margin initiative, and of course doing that keeps the reference margin up. Consequently, more people will be able to qualify if they have a disaster year.

The other part of the question, of course: I can’t tell you how many people it’s going to affect or are going to benefit from this because it depends on the disaster. It depends how the year goes. But the program is a little more palatable that way; it will cover more people. I would be the first to admit that it’s a complicated program. We are working on that, and we certainly will do our best to bring that around.

I think that, basically, that covers the questions that the hon. member was asking, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: I had the Minister of Health and Wellness as well as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing both indicate to me. Did you both want to respond to questions raised by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner? Is that correct? Okay.

The Minister of Health and Wellness, followed by Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Hancock: I’ll be very quick. The question was raised again about the \$147 million. I thought I’d answered it previously, but I’ll do it very quickly again. There are over 6,000 practising physicians in Alberta under the trilateral master agreement. We’ve attracted about 250 more over the past year. The \$147 million that we’re requesting is additional money to the trilateral agreement line in the budget, which provides payments for fee for service. Obviously, a good chunk of that, in fact about \$128.5 million, will go to fee for service, for rate increases, for volume increases, and for some of the existing programs, like the physician office system program and the primary care initiative. But most of that \$128 million is really for the 4 and a half per cent retroactive fee increase that we’re anticipating, so that’s accruing for that.

The balance of \$18.5 million will go for the clinical stabilization initiative, some things that we can do and will do even prior to the end of this month and have done in terms of working towards making sure that the physicians are available and supported in areas where there’s a high need or critical issue that has to be overcome. Obviously, the Fort McMurray issue is one of those.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member made mention of some of the programs or some of the funding that was in place. First I want to say that the affordable housing program, which you referred to, a funding of \$15,173,000, is required to increase the availability of affordable housing units in the province. The surplus neutral funding was received from the federal government. This program provides one-time grants for eligible capital costs to municipalities, local community housing providers, nonprofit organizations, and private-sector groups to address the community housing needs. Those are looked at on a priority basis and, therefore, selected on a priority basis to address those needs.

The same holds true for aboriginal housing, the \$16 million, which is a federal program as well, and the homeless support. After

reallocating \$6.5 million internally to this program, I still need about \$9.5 million to fund a \$16 million pilot project to assist the homeless through outreach teams administered by the seven major community-based organizations. This program provides funding for a pilot project with municipalities and community groups to provide outreach services for the homeless.

The last one that I believe you made mention of is the funding of \$2 million, which was required for 600 additional units under the rent supplement program. The rent supplement program provides assistance to low-income families, seniors, individuals, and families with special needs who cannot afford the sustainable rent accommodation.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This deals with money, and it’s on page 36, Reconciliation of Adjusted Gross Amounts. Maybe the President of the Treasury Board or someone over there dealing with dollars could help me with this. Anyway, I think it’s very appropriate when you have a number of dollars – I believe that it’s approximately \$38 million – returned to Treasury. It’s dealing with education, and sometimes that suggests to me that there’s a transfer of vote problem or maybe also a lack of insight into some of the needs.

Because school systems across the province are desperately in need of such things as support services in terms of guidance counsellors, reading clinicians, specialists in helping with special education students is one area that certainly is in great need. Another area is the whole question of operation and maintenance for schools. Across the province, specifically looking at Calgary, for example, we know the tremendous infrastructure problem there in terms of shifting populations, in dealing with older schools that are having problems.

The whole question of the elementary schools. They are certainly in need of more dollars in terms of the PUF grants, that cover children that are in early childhood or kindergarten, but many of these children now, a large percentage, are going into grade 1, and there’s no way that they can be assessed. There’s no money for that. So schools are many times extra resourced to provide that service. One of the government’s noble goals was: stay in school, complete high school. The completion of school, in fact, I believe was one of the Minister of Education’s goals.

The other thing that I had noticed: a question of busing in Calgary, the whole question now of a very serious problem all across the city of Calgary, the question not only of busing, because many times there is not a community school, but of acquiring bus drivers. Hopefully, there could be some use of that dollar, if it was available, to look at ways of recruiting and training bus drivers.

So, Mr. Chair, I’m trying to seek out information. My question is: that \$38 million, could it have been used for services across the province, for schools that need money for different kinds of things? I’m sure that there are many more than I’ve identified. Could I maybe get someone to try and take a kick at that one?

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, a lot of the accounting methods have to do with satisfying the Auditor General. But the process today is supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, that don’t deal with anything directly in the Department of Education. So you make a very good point, you know. If we can track this money to keep the Auditor satisfied, that’s fine, but I can’t help you with that broader picture on this particular day.

3:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Chairman, it is my pleasure to be able to rise today and engage in debate around the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. By way of comment, first of all, it's been a bit of a disorganized debate thus far relative to the traditional approach to supplementary supply, I guess, and I don't know if it's going to be possible to engage in an actual exchange with the minister or ministers or whether, if the answers that I seek don't satisfy me this time, I'm going to have to go to the back of the line and get back in the queue to ask another question. I'm not quite sure why this is other than I have the sense that it has something to do with a decision made on the government side not to provide a list of priority ministries or a list that in some way provides an order in which we're going to discuss these. In any event, we'll try and bring some order to chaos here.

My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. First of all, I want to commend him on spending extra money on homelessness and affordable housing. For many years in this province we have lacked collectively, I think, the political will to move affordable housing to the top of the political agenda, and there has been much movement in recent months. I like to think that I and my office were a good part of the momentum, a good part of the drivers behind this movement because, certainly, as we went through late spring, summer, and early fall, in my constituency office in Calgary-Currie I got more calls, more questions, more pleas for help around the issue of affordable housing than any other single issue, right down to the point that we've actually helped quite a number of people find new places to live because they were losing the places that they were in either because it was an apartment that was being converted to a condominium or the rent was in some cases doubling or tripling. That sort of thing. It is, beyond question, a crisis in Calgary. In fact, it's been described by at least one person with very intimate knowledge of the situation in Calgary as beyond a crisis. He says that it's a catastrophe. But it is an issue in cities all over this province and in a surprising number of towns as well.

So I commend the minister for what he has done thus far. I hope that it's just a start. I look at the throne speech and see a commitment to continue with the Affordable Housing Task Force and a commitment to continue examining the problem. I think that's good as well, but I think that simultaneously we can consult and talk and learn about the problem and also start swinging some hammers and digging some basements and making some real on-the-ground progress on this file.

So with that in mind I'm going to ask a couple of specific questions about the numbers in here, and the minister is not going to get any opposition or push back from me on the overall concept of spending this money. I am very much in support of that, but I'm curious as to what he intends to do with some of this money and how he's thought it through and whether he can provide some specific answers. For instance, on the \$2 million – sure, I'll just take this in order as it appears in the book. The Government House Leader earlier indicated that the only priority I need is right here in the book if I just take it in order, so I will, although we haven't yet. Someone has to start, and I'd be pleased to.

The \$2 million to fund up to 600 additional units under the rent supplement program. My question to the minister would be whether he has any kind of estimate as to how many more units might be needed to be covered under the rent supplement program as we go forward in this province. Of the \$15,173,000 for the affordable housing program and the \$16,142,000 for the off-reserve aboriginal

housing program, in both cases I note the sentence, "This spending would be offset by a transfer from the federal government," and I just want to make sure that I'm clear on this. Because it's federal/provincial matching funds, are we talking about an initial outlay of \$15 million and change for the affordable housing program and \$16 million and change for the off-reserve aboriginal housing program, of which 50 per cent then would be rebated by Ottawa, or is this Alberta's half of the program? In other words, is there another \$15,173,000 coming from Ottawa for affordable housing under this program and another \$16,142,000 in matching dollars for the off-reserve aboriginal housing program?

It clearly makes a difference, Mr. Chairman, because – and this will lead into my next question – as the minister well knows, the definition of affordable housing is a bit of a moving target, and the cost of building a unit of affordable housing, for those of us who've been around a few years, is really quite astounding. It's been estimated, depending on the jurisdiction that you're talking about, that the cost of building one unit of affordable housing can be in the \$130,000 to \$150,000 range. That's per unit. I'll be very interested in the minister's comments on that, by the way. But, of course, at \$130,000 a unit, \$15,173,000 would only give you 116 and a half units of affordable housing across the entire province, and as the minister knows, we have to do much, much better than that. That's building from scratch, of course.

I guess the question that follows from that is whether the minister and his staff have done an estimate yet of how many housing units in each of these two programs they would expect to produce and also where those units will go, if there was a breakdown municipality by municipality. I may be getting way ahead of myself here. I don't know. I'm just curious to see how far along the program is, at least in the conceptual stage.

If I can just go back very quickly to the rent supplement program. There is a program going on in the city of Edmonton, which, I gather, is not exactly a pilot project but might turn out to be applicable in other jurisdictions, involving a sizable property management company, the city of Edmonton, and I believe there's provincial involvement as well, which involves a portable rent supplement of a sort. I'm just wondering if any of this \$2 million actually includes some of those units or whether that's a separate program altogether.

One more thing, Mr. Chairman, and then I look forward to hearing the minister's responses. There's \$9,531,000 to assist homeless and near-homeless people through outreach teams administered by seven major community-based organizations. The total cost of the pilot project is \$16 million, and the balance of the funding has been reallocated internally in Municipal Affairs and Housing. I just want to comment on the excellence of the idea but remind the minister, of course, that these sorts of outreach programs involving outreach teams of support workers are only half of the equation. They're a very necessary half. The research indicates that they're a very necessary half of the equation to provide supported housing for individuals who need that kind of support, and they can be wildly effective.

A team or an individual who works with someone who is a hard to house individual, once he's in a unit of affordable housing, can quite literally do such things as check in with that individual a couple of times a week on the phone, make sure that they've got food in the house, that they're taking their medication if that's an issue, that they've paid the phone bill, et cetera, et cetera. That kind of arrangement, we've seen in a number of jurisdictions, can work very successfully, and this addresses the support side of supported housing. Of course, it's only successful if there's affordable housing at the end of the program.

3:50

This is one of the things we've found in Calgary, of course. The Calgary Homeless Foundation has done a wonderful job of sort of pulling together various agencies in providing all kinds of support – programs, services, individuals, outreach – for people as they climb the staircase, if you will, from being utterly homeless and helpless and without hope to dealing with everything from addiction issues, mental and physical health issues, literacy issues, job skills issues, job training, et cetera, et cetera, get them through the transitional housing phases, and we get them to the top of the staircase, Mr. Chairman. In Calgary, because there is virtually no available affordable housing, we kind of say: “Good work. You’ve completed the program, and now we’re going to push you off the back of the staircase. You’re going to fall back down into a cardboard box in the river valley because we have no affordable housing for you.”

So this part only constitutes 50 per cent of the program, and I would merely remind the minister of something that I’m sure he already knows: that we need to work very diligently, very actively on creating affordable housing in the province of Alberta so that we can meet the other 50 per cent of the need.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie for his questions and observations. First of all, I need to talk about observations because your observations in Calgary are absolutely right. You know, there is a great need, but that need is also throughout Alberta in high-growth areas, in high-need areas. I also would say that those challenges are for municipalities, they are for communities, they are for agencies, but they are for all of us as well. So the solutions not only need to come from one side of the House but from all sides of the House.

The task force that we implemented with very much a narrow time frame – and I say a narrow time frame of consultation, of solutions – was done for a couple of reasons, the one reason being that the individuals we have on that committee have expertise in some of the challenges. I want to say one other thing, that a lot of the members on that committee are very much visionary and looking at positive, proactive directions that need to be taken in order for ourselves to look toward a solution to try to address the success of low-cost housing and the homeless.

Mr. Chairman, as the hon. member probably knows, we hope to have the report from that task force by March 19, give or take a day, on the recommendations that came from people all throughout Alberta. I don’t have the figures in front of me, but we went to nine communities and, I would say, got a very excellent response and very good suggestions and solutions to issues and to some of the hardships that are felt in the high-growth communities.

I want to also say in trying to be a little bit more specific on your questions about the funding – and I’m going to talk about the funding of the affordable housing program on one hand and also the off-reserve aboriginal housing program – that it is federal funding that was brought into the budget and that we are utilizing. You have to wait for the new budget to look at how that will become matching.

I also want to say that I agree with you because I do believe that, on top of the other programs that are there for the homeless, the \$16 million is an excellent program for seven municipalities to gather, to assess what some of the major challenges are, and also how to deal with it. I think that is the essence of that program. The first one is having the communication. The second one, of course, is the

collaboration of the seven communities and the co-operation on how to deal with some of the issues. I would say that that is on top of programs that are already there.

Specifically on the comment that you made that it is a two-sided challenge: it is exactly that, a two-sided challenge. You cannot provide housing without providing some sort of a vehicle for an individual that is homeless to get from the homeless entity to maybe affordable housing to independence. I think we very much need to look at that in the solution direction.

Mr. Chairman, on the comments on how the funding allocations or the decisions are made, we do have a criteria framework for communities, agencies applying for the affordable housing program and also the off-reserve aboriginal housing program. We try to fit everybody into that criteria, and we choose the people from the highest down. Is it enough? No, it’s not enough. I’m very much looking forward to the report that’s coming from the housing task force to look at some of the presentations that have been made and their report on how the solutions should be implemented.

Also, I could speak about the \$2 million required for the 600 additional units, and that’s 600 additional units. If you look at it, you say: that sounds like a lot. It’s not very many at all. The rent supplement program definitely has a lot of needs, but I stress to you also that the solutions to affordable housing, the solutions to homelessness need to be a co-operative effort with government, with municipalities, with agencies, with communities. I think that that’s the only way that we’ll be able to have a successful direction.

So I hope that I answered most of your questions. What I will do, if you would like, is send you more details. I don’t have that report, but I can send you a more detailed accountability of how that funding will be spent, if you would so desire.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I rise to join the debate that has been under way for the last almost 90 minutes now on the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. I believe that we dealt with No. 1 in the very short sitting at the end of August last year. This is the first opportunity since that time, since the long absence from this Chamber by hon. members, that we have now before us these supplementary supply estimates second time around.

Mr. Chairman, some general comments. Over the last three years we have missed the full fall session twice, I think, in 2004 because an election was called and then last year because of a change in the leadership of the party in power and the leadership contest. Some of these estimates, some of these numbers, some of these requests may be attributable to the absence from their work of ministers in charge of their portfolios because they were busy campaigning for one candidate or another.

4:00

Now that we have these supplementary estimates before us, it becomes a little more difficult to address them also because the ministries that were there until December of 2006 have been either reorganized, merged with each other, or disappeared from the roster. So this reorganization and restructuring of the cabinet has also resulted in leaving their imprint on the estimates as we see them: some transfers from previous departments to new ones, and whatever have you. The reconciliation of numbers at the end of this booklet therefore does show how those funds may have been transferred.

That being said, I have a couple of questions for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, who now is responsible, in addition to what used to be the department of advanced education,

for innovation and science. When I look at the supplementary estimates, it's obvious that some of the numbers relate to the work that used to be the responsibility of the department that was merged into this one. If the minister would take a minute to say exactly what those numbers are that are coming from that merger in the estimates.

I should note that the minister was very courteous and helpful in inviting me as well to the first meeting, and we went over some general issues. The minister told us what his agenda was going to be for the session in general and extended the invitation to this member and others to get in touch with him if we need more information. So thank you, Mr. Minister, for that initiative.

Now, to a specific question that I have here. It relates to some numbers on page 12, the department summary, expense and equipment/inventory purchases vote. Under expenses, item 5, support to postsecondary learners, I notice that there's an underexpenditure of \$31 million with respect to that item that's being reported here, \$31 million that was not spent. Normally I would applaud if various ministries and departments underspend their estimates and the money goes back into the general revenue at the end of the year. This particular item, however, causes me some concern. There are some questions which I want to put to the minister, and I hope he will address those.

Support to postsecondary learners, I trust, includes financial assistance to postsecondary students, which includes loans and others. I've been hearing from student representatives as well as from individual postsecondary students who may have stopped into my constituency office to complain about the difficult and almost impossible to meet qualifying requirements that are in place in order for many postsecondary students to access loans and financial assistance in the province. Those conditions are so onerous, so demanding. The bar is set in such a way that many people simply find themselves disqualified.

I wonder if some of this underexpenditure under support to postsecondary learners is a result of those unacceptably stringent and high qualifying conditions for accessing financial assistance and this support. If that is so, then I want the minister, of course, also to perhaps comment as to whether he is willing to review those conditions to make those conditions less demanding, if there is, in fact, some need to revisit and review those student loan arrangements, thereby increasing access of students in financial need, knowing as we do the need for us to do everything that we can to attract more Albertans to our postsecondary system, to attract more high school graduates to choose to come to postsecondary institutions before they join the labour force if they can, knowing that our participation rate is fourth or fifth in the country, and we want to be number one.

Secondly, I also hear, of course, from students, many of whom are in pressing need of assistance. If there's a growing need, as I suspect there is, given that the costs of going to school have been escalating over the years, and if it is true that we have targets set for us as a province to have our enrollments increase and participation rates increase, and if it's also true that we want to make our postsecondary system more responsive to the labour market needs, which we are now trying to meet by inviting people from outside the province and outside the country to come here and join our labour force, then I think the answer is clear that we must make more support available to postsecondary students to attract them to our schools and to keep them there until they complete their programs. So I hope the minister will address that question.

The other item on the same page is 8, innovation implementation. I think this comes from the other ministry that's been merged with the ministry of advanced education. Again, there is an

underexpenditure in implementation – I suppose of increasing innovation capacity? I don't know exactly what innovation implementation means. So I think that probably will require only a very brief comment by the minister.

Some other questions. There is \$34.5 million for a grant to match private donations to the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. If I heard the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and the number that he quoted, that \$24 million of this will be going to the University of Alberta to the China Institute, then my question to the minister is the following. The donation from the Mactaggart family to the University of Alberta was \$37.5 million. I was present at the opening of the institute in the Telus centre on the university campus. Mrs. Mactaggart was one of the speakers, and I recall vividly her expressing both frustration and disappointment over the fact that the government of Alberta had not delivered in matching their generous donation to the University of Alberta with respect to the China Institute.

Now, \$24 million certainly goes some ways towards meeting it. The question to the minister is: has some money on top of this \$24 million already gone to the University of Alberta towards matching the Mactaggart donation, or is this the first allocation towards matching that? If it's the first one, then there is a balance of some \$11 million to \$13 million, depending upon what the total value of the donation from the Mactaggarts is, and my question to the minister then is: if there is sort of a gap of \$11 million, \$12 million, \$13 million, when is he hoping to eliminate that gap? When are you going to address that concern that Mrs. Mactaggart expressed rather passionately at that opening meeting of the institute?

4:10

Genome Alberta: is this a group of researchers located across Alberta or at one institution or at one research institute? I must confess my ignorance on Genome Alberta's location or how it operates. Is this the first allocation to this particular research entity to do research on the mountain pine beetle? The mountain pine beetle has been around across our borders now for some two or three years, and it has already wreaked havoc in the neighbourhood of \$60 billion in B.C. alone. So the threat to the economy of Alberta, that part of it which relates directly to forestry and the industries associated with it, is serious and large, a very, very serious threat. I wonder if this is the first allocation, and if so, why we have been remiss in not proactively engaging our research community to find the answers to the problem to the extent that they are scientifically available.

One last question. The minister answered this question about the supplementary allocations of \$15.7 million for nursing degree programs at the Mount Royal College and the Grant MacEwan College. Now, my understanding is that these programs start either in September, when the fall session starts, or in January, when the second semester starts. The minister had an answer that confused me, that you make funds available only when these programs roll out.

Now, is it because we missed the fall session – we didn't sit then – that these funds are being requested now, when in fact they should have been requested at least in November-December so that they would become available to these two institutions at the beginning of the term in January, the second semester term? Or am I not able to see through the complexities that the minister is privy to, and if so, will he share his ideas about how this thing really works? Why is it now that his department realized that this additional money is needed if in fact those programs started either in September or in January?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I'll be fairly brief. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had some very good questions. I know, given his history, that he has a very strong passion for postsecondary and has spent a lot of time there, probably more than I did. He was obviously more successful at the academic side than I was.

The innovation and science component of what used to be innovation and science, which is now the technology part of our department: I actually don't look at them as two different sides of the department. We are trying to blend the two of them together because they make a very good fit. There is a tremendous amount of research that is done at our postsecondaries right from the technical side all the way through to the university research that is being done in, you know, globally recognized institutions in this province, so a lot of money that goes to our postsecondary is part and parcel of some of our innovation and science package, if you will, because of the research that we do. Things like the WorldSkills competition, where we've got 850 competitors from 47 countries coming around the world to showcase Alberta's talent in the apprenticeship and trade sector: that's part and parcel of where we had the applied research as well, in some of our trade and technology institutes.

The life sciences component is also part of our innovation or technology portfolio. The genome research: they are not the first dollars that have gone to genome research for mountain pine beetle. It is a top-up. As I know the hon. member is very aware, you get to a certain point in your research, and you need to take that next step in order to try to get the benefit of the stage that you're at. So what we see is that this is taking that next step because coming up this spring, we could have a very, very serious problem. We want to be as prepared as we possibly can.

The Science Alberta Foundation. Again, I know the hon. member is aware of this foundation. It's a great foundation to get science into the classroom and helps adult learners understand what science is really all about. More importantly, it gets young people interested in pursuing a career in the sciences, so obviously helping us to fulfill the ranks of our postsecondary in our sciences curriculums. We just view that as a great way to tie the innovation or the technology side of our portfolio and the research and development that's going on and show kids why it's important that they should actually be looking at the sciences, so that they can achieve and be part of that new generation.

The Alberta science and technology awards. It's a very important step, I think, and I believe the hon. member would agree with me here too, that we have to reward excellence. We have to reward achievement. We have to reward good science. As part of that program we help leverage dollars, and these are really leverage dollars. It's not the total cost. We help leverage dollars with industry to recognize excellence in research and excellence in technology development, and that's what that's all about.

Not a lot in the package of supplementary estimate for the technology side because we're doing some very good work there. A lot of it is endowment-based, so a lot of it has already been funded and flowed through. It's my hope that, you know, when we see the next budget, we'll see some other things there.

In terms of line 5, that the hon. member referenced in the department summary, the \$31 million, he is very correct. That has everything to do with student finance. At the beginning of the year the student finance system estimates what the potential loan volume is going to be. It sets a number. That's the number that's in the

budget. If by the end of the year we have not reached that amount – really, it's a net cost. This is really a cost of what we have reimbursed to students or given out in bursaries or grants or those sorts of things, so it's the cost to the government. It's not the total borrowing; it's the cost to the government. This is an amount that represents what students did not borrow.

So what happens is that we lapse it into our department. We requested that these dollars be utilized in this supplementary estimate, so the dollars are utilized back into the things that we're putting forward today in our supplementary estimates. The hon. member asked the question: "Well, why? Why would we not have more students taking part in the student finance system?" There are a number of reasons, I found out. I initially thought, as a businessperson and a parent of postsecondary students, that it was because of the complexity or the cost. Having gone on to the web-based system that we have and made the application and gone through the system, it really isn't all that complicated.

Based on this needs-based system, we have some issues, and it was brought forward in the learning report last fall. We have some issues where we need to bring up some of the things under the cost-of-living basis. The student cars, these sorts of things, I think we probably need to address down the road, and we're going to look at that. We are working on that.

One of the things that came to me from a number of different sources was that part of the problem – these complexities are nationwide. We're not the only ones that have this type of student finance system. In fact, many places in Canada would tell you that ours is actually less complicated than some of the other provinces, which is almost hard to believe but true. What they are telling us and what some of the numbers would indicate: in a very robust economy where part-time employment is very easily had, with very good incomes from part-time employment, you will see students not wanting to borrow as much but perhaps doing more part-time work. That lowers our portion of the borrowing.

4:20

The other thing that you'll see is that because they have other income, they may actually borrow from somebody else. Not a wise move in many cases because we have a lot of remission and bursaries and grants that are included in our package, and students should take a very, very, very close look at what is best for them financially. But it is something that we've seen in the numbers, that in a good economy there's less drive for student finance. Now, we need to make our student finance more applicable to the current economy, and we are working on that, Mr. Chairman.

The access to the future fund. The original Mactaggart family donation was \$37.3 million in value, so that means that we have, by rough calculation, \$10 million to \$12 million yet to go. There was and is some discussion between the family and the university about how they were going to match. The hon. member may remember that we did announce \$12,500,000 as a match last fall. We haven't actually announced the other \$12 million, but I guess we just did. We will be chatting with the Mactaggart family – it's amazing how this works – about changing and actually speeding up the matching that they had done with the U of A, with their program. So we expect that we will actually speed this process of matching that and hope to have it done within the next year or two. That's my hope. That's the goal that we have.

The reason – again I go back to the response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark – is that this was announced at the same time that the access to the future fund was announced but not when we had the guidelines and the formula that we were going to actually use with all of the postsecondaries on the revenue that was going to

be generated from the fund. Even when the fund is fully funded, none of the institutions would be getting enough in one year to match this type of donation in one year. The intent is that they would then match it over a period of two or three years.

So this one was an upfront one that kind of was very much off-the-mark as well as a couple of others. We are endeavouring at every opportunity we can to ensure that the families are okay with how we're matching and ensure that the postsecondary institutions understand where we are financially in the access to the future fund as well as working with the council to say: you know, how can we make this thing work, and how can we fix the issue and move forward as well as plan for the access to the future fund going forward? That will be announced in the next little while.

Now, the nursing spots. Obviously, Grant MacEwan College is currently doing a four-year degree program. Mount Royal College actually is currently providing a four-year program as well. The degree comes from Athabasca University, I believe. We have been working with both institutions. This is partly a dollar value that is attributed to the health workforce plan because the nurses are a part of the health workforce plan that we have working with Health, working with immigration, EII, whatever. It is part of that plan, and as part of that plan – and I'm sure the hon. member would recognize that – it's not only the institution, the labs that have to be in play, the faculty and the teaching, but then you also have to have the spots in the health care facilities with mentoring and teaching personnel there for their – I forget the word now. When they go to work in the workplace.

Dr. Pannu: Practicums.

Mr. Horner: Practicums. Yes. Thank you. For their practicums. So we have to make sure that we have those spots available for the nurses as they're coming off the stream. Indeed, we're also currently talking to both institutions about how we might be able to expand the number of graduates that we get out of those institutions, and we hope to get some good news out of that fairly soon.

I think, Mr. Chairman, I've covered most of the spots.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to supplementary estimates 2006-07. Let me say that I acknowledge the extraordinary growth in the province and the challenging times that the government has in budgeting, and I recognize that supplementary estimates are a necessary but unfortunate consequence of that. However, extra funds are obviously not the whole answer.

I wanted to say a few words about where I think we're not spending supplementary estimates that we really should be. That, for me, is very clearly in the area of the environment. Environment is sorely lacking in resources to do the job that we've asked it to do, especially at this time of extraordinary growth and demand, clearly unable to fully fund one of the most critical areas, which is Water for Life, and have adequate inventory of our water resources so that we can manage them sustainably and groundwater mapping to assure that we know the impacts of water withdrawals on the surface as they relate to the groundwater.

I would have loved to see supplementary estimates addressing the sustainable resources and environmental management department that's been burrowing away for almost a year now to try to get some semblance of planning into the provincial land use and balance the needs of agriculture and energy, forestry and municipal growth. I would love to have seen some injection into full funding for a green

plan for this province addressing some of the energy conservation opportunities, the real business opportunities, I would add, including the business opportunities related to renewable energy, which is starting to tick along but needs at least equal incentives to what the fossil fuel industry has been receiving for decades.

I would love to have seen a little supplemental support for taking a full inventory of our contaminated sites and an adequate approach to ensuring upfront funding capital to ensure that the corporations actually pay for the damages that naturally do occur. Clearly, we need a comprehensive monitoring and enforcement system in the province that empowers our staff in Alberta Environment to do the challenging, everyday work of assessing whether our environment is in fact improving, whether it's staying the same, or in many cases clearly getting worse in terms of its quality.

So with those comments, I just needed to remind us that giving Alberta Environment .5 per cent of the provincial budget does not reflect the priority in most Albertans' minds that it should, and I would hope that this government in its upcoming budget will seriously look at doubling the funding for Alberta Environment so that it can truly reflect the high priority that Albertans, indeed all Canadians, place on protecting and enhancing the environment for future generations. That's doubly a concern with climate change and the tremendous and somewhat unpredictable devastation that's coming as a result of the climate changing: extreme weather events, new infectious diseases, droughts. Clearly, we have to show significant vision and leadership in this area.

I want to turn now, Mr. Chairman, to some of the health issues just because I'm particularly connected there and have interest in it. I'm pleased that the government has been able to settle with the physicians. That's going to go a long way to ensuring that we retain and even attract new physicians to the province, and we are direly in need of that.

Clearly, money is not going to solve all the issues, and there are a number of issues that I'm hoping the new health minister will address, including the full scope of professional practice, that have not been adequately addressed: the unhealthy work environments that staff are coping with and in some cases poorly coping with; the inadequate investment in prevention, in early intervention; the inadequate investment in home care, which could reduce the struggle with code burgundies in hospitals and move people more quickly into home-care situations, which are much more efficient and effective and satisfactory for individuals; strengthening the mental health services and their connections to the health authorities and their front-line support to address the increasing stresses and strains and concerns of people in this rapidly expanding economy with new Canadians and new residents of the province; and an area that I haven't heard discussed at all, which is the need for new experts in health impact assessment, relating to some of the massive developments that are going on in the province.

4:30

When I have consulted with health officers in the province about new developments in their area, asking them what health impact assessment is being done before some of these great developments like upgrader alley, there is a bit of discomfort, and what I often get is the health impact assessment done by a consultant for the company. We don't have the expertise, it seems, or at least our health authorities are not requesting resources to get health impact assessments independently done, to try to anticipate and mitigate the significant health impacts that many people are certainly concerned about. Some of it may be imaginary, but some of it may indeed be very real, such as those people in the upgrader alley concerned about the very high levels of fluoride being emitted from one of the plants

and now an advisory against eating vegetables in their area because of the high fluoride levels.

Without adequate expertise in the health regions, it's very difficult for people to have confidence that the government is approving projects with the full knowledge of the health impacts. We need experts, new people in the province to help us to do some of those impact assessments.

On more usual issues I wanted to raise the question of whether there is any appetite in the health minister's office to examine whether we're getting value for money in our health care system and, to that extent, whether we need some supplemental investment. Looking at exactly what has happened since regionalization occurred over 10 years ago, it's not clear to many of us that we have actually increased or improved . . .

Point of Order Relevance

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, are you rising on a point of order?

Mr. Dunford: Yes. Lethbridge-West. Yes. There are no doubt many, many people on the speakers' list today, and I am one of them. I believe that under Orders of the Day we are here to discuss specifically the supplementary supply estimates. This is not a forum to draft and deliver a speech on general government policy. I would ask the chairman's direction to the speaker if I am right or to me if I am wrong.

The Deputy Chair: Clearly, you are seeking clarification and not necessarily raising a point of order. At the estimates level we have a wide latitude for debate, and members are able to raise other concerns. We have never constrained them in expressing those concerns. I also believe the hon. member is raising issues with regard to health and wellness, which is part of the estimates that we are dealing with currently.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, you may proceed.

Debate Continued

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have one more question, and it relates to this new funding and the extent to which this may be helping to relieve some of the health pressures in Fort McMurray.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister for Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To deal with the question that was specific to the estimates: as I indicated earlier, of the \$147 million about \$28.5 million is intended to be allocated towards implementation of a form of the clinical stabilization initiative that I mentioned earlier and that was discussed earlier today as part of the new agreement.

The resources for the program that we put in place with respect to taking doctors up to Fort McMurray came out of the fee-for-service process, but this supplemental estimate will help to provide some of those funds. In any event, whether the agreement is approved or not, we still need to deal with some of the issues, and that one was one that we were able to negotiate with the regional health authority and the AMA. So in response to the earlier question from the Member for Edmonton-Centre, about 50 physicians applied to assist with the issues in Fort McMurray. Approximately a dozen have been hired, so to speak, to engage in that. All shifts have been filled until the

end of April. We've had good take-up, good support for the region through that program, and freed up the pressure on the local physicians through that process, so that proved to be a good interim measure.

Some of the other things that you mentioned I think are worthy of discussion, but I am conscious of the fact that others want to talk about the estimates that are before us. A full scope of practice, obviously, is something that I've been championing for a long time, not just as Minister of Health and Wellness. The concept and, I think, the government policy that a health care professional should be able to practice to the full extent of their capability, expertise, and training is something that we don't have yet and that we need to work hard on implementing. Simply put, we want to make sure that health service is provided by the most appropriately trained, least-cost provider so that we can lever the value of all of the health care professionals we have in the system.

That's really one of the concepts behind the primary care networks, for example. Yes, you have doctors offering primary care, but they're also able to work with other health care professionals to truly provide a full range of services and lever the health resource that we have, the people resource that we have, to make the best use of it.

A healthy work environment is absolutely a very important issue. In fact, I just spoke at the health boards of Alberta conference at noon today and noticed on their agenda that a healthy work environment was one of the topics for the conference. Healthy workplaces are very, very important. As we come through with the workforce strategy that your colleague was asking about earlier, one of the pieces of workforce strategy has got to be about healthy workplaces. How do we make sure that the people that we have are well treated, working in healthy environments, and are in fact able to fully participate because they are healthy? So that's important.

Investment in prevention. I wish you'd heard the text of my speech today and so many other times since I've been appointed. I absolutely, fundamentally believe that the way to make sure that we have an affordable, sustainable acute-care system that's there when our parents need it and when our children need it is to ensure that Albertans have the opportunity to be and stay healthy. That means living in healthy communities, having healthy activities, and being supported with the advice and assistance they need to promote their own health. That doesn't mean that we won't need an acute-care system, but if we want an acute-care system that's there when we need it, we have to promote health.

Strengthening mental health is absolutely a part of that. I think my predecessor made a very good start last September when she announced the children's mental health strategy. I'm going to do everything I can within the resources that I have available to support that initiative and to make sure that mental health support services are there. We'll be talking more about that even over the course of the spring as we bring in amendments to the Mental Health Act that allow for community treatment orders. Of course, community treatment orders are only one piece of the process. You really need to have the assertive community treatment available for people in the community. Again, I'm going to be working to make sure that we can resource that as well as possible.

Increased stress and strains. I think that's part of the workforce issue, but it's broader than that. We can reduce the stress on our acute-care system if we reduce the stress on us as individuals. The environmental impact on us in terms of what that does to our health needs to be part of the equation, and it needs to be part of the discussion.

New experts in health impact assessments. I'm very pleased to be working with Dr. Roger Palmer, the new dean of the public health

faculty at the University of Alberta. Actually, last week he was good enough to bring together a group of public health professionals, both public health officers and people who've been doing research and support in areas of public health. I think that's an area that we really need to encourage and support: how we do health assessments, how we look at the environmental impact, the environmental load, how it impacts our community and personal health. So I'm going to be interested in pursuing that. That's obviously an embryonic area for us because, as you well know, most of the pressure on the health system is to continue to fund the acute-care side. It's very difficult to move resources and focus to the wellness side, but that's one of my formal mandate statements, and I'm certainly going to try and fulfill that mandate.

4:40

Value for dollars is obviously very, very important. When you have, you know, in excess of 36 per cent of the provincial budget and a budget of the size that this province has, if we want to have more resources to do more things, we've certainly got to be able to say to Albertans that we're using the resources we have effectively and efficiently and we're using them well. So I have met with the stakeholders from the health system, with board chairs and CEOs and others that are in the system. In January I met with them. I followed up with individual meetings in certain areas, and we're meeting with board chairs again next week. Certainly, that is one of the primary concern areas that I want to bring forward, that we need to be open and accountable. The public needs to be able to have confidence that the dollars that are going into the health regions and into health care delivery in the acute-care side are being used in the most effective manner.

We need to make sure that although we have nine health regions doing delivery as well as the Cancer Board and the Mental Health Board, they are working as part of a province-wide system, we're borrowing best practices from each other rather than competing with each other, we're not duplicating in areas of chronic disease management or other areas where we can do things together, and we're making an effective use of the resources that we have.

Your questions, actually, really fed into the full scope of where I hope to go, so I appreciate that.

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

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by congratulating the government on bringing forward the estimates. Not only are they aligning, of course, with the Premier's five priorities of government with integrity and transparency, manage growth pressures, improve Alberta's quality of life, build a stronger Alberta, and provide safe and secure communities, but at the same time they're also addressing the 20-year strategic plan that this government brought forward to the people of Alberta a year or so ago.

Now, I don't want to drill too deeply into any of the five departments that are involved but just indicate that Advanced Education and Technology, of course, is important to every member here in the House and, of course, to government members particularly because of the pillar in the strategic plan, wherein we talk about leading and learning.

Agriculture and Food. I don't have any specific questions for the minister but just remind him that agriculture is not our past; it's our future. My BlackBerry just went off, and it caught a touchy spot there. [interjection] Actually, I thought it was the BlackBerry; apparently, it was the minister of Agriculture. He gave me a nice little pat for my comments. You folks might be wondering about relevance at this point, but I'll bring that into context.

The finances here: I don't want to spend any particular time on that.

Health and Wellness: we have heard from others today about some of the issues there.

Then, of course, the housing concerns in municipal affairs.

I want to spend my time, though, in Advanced Education and Technology. I appreciate the numbers that have been put forward in this particular area, but they have raised some concerns. Specifically, in terms of additional apprenticeship technical training spaces \$15,100,000 is a significant amount. What worries me is that the money may be directed to the seats themselves, forgetting entirely about the kinds of equipment, the kinds of curriculum that in the modern Alberta need to go along with those particular seats. I would like the minister, when he has an opportunity, to perhaps indicate what amount of that particular total will be for basically, then, the enrolment of Albertans but, also, what amount of that money is required to build capacity within our postsecondary system in order to accommodate the learning. Now, I can recall in previous days in advanced education that a great deal of money was required on the part of the taxpayers of this province in order to keep the colleges current with the kinds of equipment that they would then use within the particular programs. I'd hope that the amount of money that is being spent would also go toward streamlining the delivery of apprenticeship programs.

One of the things that I'm experiencing from an anecdotal situation is people calling the office indicating that their son or daughter or husband or wife has been unable to move forward in their apprenticeship program because the fact is that the employer is not in a position to let them go do their institutional training on a timely basis, that the employer is so stretched for the skilled labour that he or she is looking for that they're simply unable to allow the person to go for the other portion of their program. Now, this would be working against, then, the stated goals of this government, of course, in providing that education. So we need to be looking at the kinds of things that we can do to provide flexibility in how the program is delivered. I think that this would pay side benefits to the fact that maybe with more flexibility, if we could do it at work sites, then we're actually using equipment of real employers and real contractors rather than being required to equip a postsecondary institution.

Mr. Chairman, \$15,700,000 is there for nursing degree programs. I don't know of anybody in this Assembly that would argue with that. I've tried to listen as closely as I can to other members that have spoken, and I believe – at least what I've heard – that many, if not all, of them have been supporting the minister in this particular request. I would, though, again because of some experience in this field – it's not all-encompassing; I, like everyone else, have lots to learn. What we're finding, I believe, in many of these programs and, I think, nursing specifically is that we have to be cautious of something that is labelled credential creep.

We have to be very cognizant, I think, that the kind of training that is going on is actually meeting the demands that we have – and in this particular case, we're talking about nurses – that it actually meets the demands of the type of care that we need within that system. I mean, it's fine for a two-year nursing program to become now a bachelor's degree. I am pro-education, but I'm wondering if we're spending \$15 million in order to bring nurses with two-year programs up into four-year programs, or just what is happening. I am encouraged by the advent of the Health Professions Act where people are able to work in areas where they have the technical expertise, so I congratulate doctors as they recognize nurse practitioners. I congratulate those doctors that are involved in pilot projects. They recognize now that nurses have some understanding of the

kinds of services that someone just coming in off the street to the clinic might require, and I want to congratulate the learning system, then, providing nurses with that kind of expertise with which they can do it.

If we are ever going to get to a position of controlling costs in our health care system, we have to have a payment methodology that is not based solely on the doctor being required to touch you in order to get paid. You might have a situation that you don't need to see the doctor at all. Of course, fees for services will have to be paid and usually directed through the physician, but we need to have flexibility throughout this area.

4:50

I wanted to raise an objection somewhat tongue-in-cheek. I sit beside a Cree. I'm wondering where the Blackfoot stuff is. Where else was I going with this? Is this a video *Hansard* or just the written *Hansard* so that any of my wise remarks will go unknown because black words on white paper will hardly pick up the witty repartee in which I'm involved.

Ms Blakeman: It's audio streamed, so they get to hear every word.

Mr. Dunford: Oh, they do? There'll be thousands and thousands and thousands of people that will be listening to me right now. Hi, Alberta. You're doing good.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Any minister wish to respond?

The Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Just very, very briefly, Mr. Chairman. I have to agree with much of what my colleague from Lethbridge-West had to say, certainly, on the importance of postsecondary and how critical it is to our success and what these supplementary estimates are doing to help us along that path.

I just want to talk a little bit about the apprenticeship side of things. Of the allocation that we have, \$3.3 million has been allotted to equipment to help us make it more worker friendly, if you will, to help the employers find better spots for their employees to take the apprenticeship training when they can and when they need to. We're also looking at a number of more mobile training spaces because I agree with the hon. member that it's better to take it to where they work so that they can either utilize the equipment of the employer or the equipment that we can provide through a mobile space.

The credential creep issue. It's not just in the nursing component. It's also in other components of the health professions or in some of the other professions. It is critically important, and it's a critical component of our health workforce plan that the scope of practice has to be reviewed and has to be looked at so that if you have – and the health minister has said this on a number of occasions too – a nurse with a four-year degree or a five-year degree, that nurse is doing the things that she was trained to do with that four-year degree or five-year degree and not doing things that, well, she's overtrained to do, let's say. I think it's very, very important that we get our scope of practice and those types of rules right.

Other than that, Mr. Chairman, I'll answer any other questions in writing.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. It only took me an hour and a half to get back to complete my short round of questions with the

minister of health, just to complete that series. Mr. Minister, thank you for the information about the number of doctors that were recruited in Fort McMurray, the 50 doctors, of which 12 were put into the program. I'm wondering if we had a smooth transition between each of those 12 doctors as they came and went on their doctor-for-a-day shifts.

The way it was described to me was that, essentially, a doctor for the day admits to the hospital patients that don't have a family physician, so they become, then, the doctor on record for those admitted patients. Now, at a certain point that doctor for the day is going to leave town; whatever it is, three days later, four days later. Well, doctors have a code, and they're not allowed to just walk away from or abandon patients. They're responsible for making sure that the patient has been transferred to somebody else.

The issue that arises is that if you don't have the next doctor for the day that's come up from somewhere, what are you going to do with those patients? So this doctor may well have admitted, let's say, 15 people to the hospital over the course of four days. Now he's got to hand these 15 patients over, but you are already oversubscribed with the local physicians. That's why you were brought in as doctor for the day. The next doctor for the day is not there. Now what are you going to do with these people? You can't leave until you get them handed over to somebody. So if you can't hand them off, which you can't, then you're going to have to medevac them to Edmonton. Well, Edmonton won't take the medevacs unless they've got room. That makes sense too.

So they could end up sitting up there in Fort McMurray, and I don't know if they'd still be on the \$1,200-a-day deal if their time allocation was over, but they're now trying to transfer their patients through to Edmonton. So I'm just wondering: one, have we had direct linkages from each doctor to the next with no time lapses in between, and two, if we didn't, then what accommodation was made? You know, how many medevacs into Edmonton have we had as a result of those doctors having to transfer the responsibility of those patients to other doctors? If they weren't able to in Fort McMurray, then how many had to be medevacked out to Edmonton?

The other issue I'd be interested in hearing from the minister about – and I take it that they're not specifically addressed in the \$147 million that appears in the supplementary estimates for Health and Wellness – is the situation with the doctors in Grande Prairie, which I'm sure the minister is aware is very similar to the situation doctors in Fort McMurray are facing. Now, I've been up there a couple of times and talked to a number of them repeatedly, and they were quite at the end of their tether. I think we all became alive to this back in the summer when they had to start closing the ICU. This was at one point sort of, "Well, this is the usual summer holidays," but in fact they had departments closed for extended periods of time over the summer.

As was pointed out to me, if you don't have an operational ICU, that restricts a number of other things that you can do in your hospital. For example, you know, you can't necessarily take people into emergency because if you had to perform surgery on them and they then required an ICU to care for them following that – well, if you don't have an ICU, you can't take them into surgery because you can't put them in that position where they'd require it and you can't provide it. So I'm wondering if the minister contemplated inside this money any additional assistance for Grande Prairie. I'm aware that the most intense part of their situation is around recruitment, which isn't really addressed in the tripartite agreement. That's essentially directed towards retention. But I'm wondering if anything was anticipated here, and I feel obliged to ask on behalf of the doctors in Grande Prairie.

One of the other issues that's involved in this, and it moves

outside the scope of this minister's riding, but this is one of the occasions that I find often happens where you need a cross-ministry initiative. You've heard me talk about the need for child care spaces in Alberta. One of the places that this was brought into a very sharp relief for me was by some nurses in Grande Prairie who said: "We've got nurses here that want to work. They want to take the shift. They can't get child care, so they can't come in." So other nurses were having to double shift or to work repeated double shifts throughout the week, yet there were nurses there that were trained that wanted to work, but they couldn't get the child care relief to come in. So has the minister looked at any cross-ministry initiatives?

You know, the innovation fund – sorry; let me just find that media release. There was a section that sort of might be able to be classified as an innovation fund, the "clinical stabilization initiative," on which there weren't really any details, but it says that the "communities will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis" and finalized by June 2007. So it's outside of the parameters of the supply estimates, but maybe some work was done on it inside of this year that would allow you to do that kind of innovation cross-ministry to be able to make more of this work.

5:00

I think that also stacks up with things like advanced education and distance learning to train people in their home communities. One of the things that we know works is that if you take people out of rural areas, train them as health professionals, they're very likely to return to those rural communities to practise their particular health profession. Increasingly I think there's some innovation happening to actually deliver the health worker training out into the rural areas in the hopes that they would just keep people out there and retrain them as they continue to live in the community, and then they can serve the community as a trained health worker.

That was my series of questions to the minister of health.

Minister of advanced education, I know a number of people have questioned you, and I did try and make note of the questions. I'll maybe go back to one of the questions I asked earlier today, which was around the support, and again this becomes cross-ministry. What work has the advanced education minister done to ensure that the infrastructure, equipment, and faculty needs to support the new space creation are there for the universities?

We know that Grant MacEwan, for example, has a whole new facility that they're building in the Robbins centre for the new health diplomas and certificates and degrees that they're offering there. I'm less worried about their space needs and equipment needs and faculty needs, but I have heard from three of the universities – Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge – that that's a concern for them.

You know, I'm pushing the government hard to create more spaces in postsecondary institutions that will train health workers – and I'm talking doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals – but obviously it's more than just sticking a bunch of people in a room. You've got to have the faculty to teach them, you've got to have a room to put them in, and for the purposes of health you've got to have the equipment that they will need to use or that they should be trained on.

I'm looking to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology for what support is anticipated. Is there anything anticipated in the supplementary supply for those universities specifically? Is there additional money in here for Mount Royal and Grant MacEwan colleges for the rest of their medical programs aside from the nursing degree program?

That's good. I'll look forward to getting a response from those two ministers. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to respond to some of the questions, and I'll have to look to see whether I can get additional information. The whole question of the operation of the program in the detail that you're asking for isn't something that I have at my fingertips, so I'll check.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

I think I can say this with some degree of certainty: if there was a problem with the program, I would have heard about it. I haven't, so I'm assuming that it's working well, that doctors are going in to cover the shifts pursuant to the program that we put in place and that they're not having problems transferring patients.

I'm very conscious of the fact that what's happening in Fort McMurray can be a model for what can happen in other parts of the province as well, and that is that we are learning better how to use the full range of health care professionals, being able to deal with a patient and use the skills of the nursing staff and the other health care professionals as well as the doctors. I think we'll find this as a good incubator of a stronger model of that.

I can't answer, specifically, your question as to whether there's a problem with doctors handing off patients. I'm sure that if we were using resources medevacking patients to Edmonton or elsewhere just because of a hand-off issue, I would have heard of that. I'm going to suggest that it's not a problem, and if it is a problem, I'll get back to you and let you know.

Similar problems in Grande Prairie? Yes, there are similar problems. We have a shortage of doctors, and we have a shortage of specialists in various areas, and that's manifesting itself right across the province and, as you may have heard earlier in the day, right across the country and perhaps across North America and the world. There is a shortage, and we're feeling the impact of that shortage because our economy is strong and our province is growing.

Fort McMurray was a special case and needed immediate assistance because of its high rate of growth over an extended period of time and its relative isolation. In Grande Prairie or Edmonton or Calgary you have at least the possibility of picking up some of the issues relating to growth through infrastructure that's there, and you can absorb the impact more appropriately. Now, certainly in Grande Prairie there are issues and, as I say, right across the province. I signed a lot of part five letters in the last month. There's a lot of recruitment happening, and we're certainly working to help health authorities and regions recruit doctors and other health care professionals for their areas and working in terms of how we make sure that accreditation is not a significant problem in doing so.

There's no easy answer to it. We will be doing more to help with recruitment. There's not a lot built into the trilateral agreement related to recruitment, but part of recruitment, of course, is people having the expectation that they'll be paid fairly or that they'll be able to draw on resources in a fair way and that we'll be able to compete with other jurisdictions which pay northern bonuses or rural allowances and those sorts of things. Using the clinical stabilization initiative, we'll be able to deal specifically with issues in various communities.

As you rightly point out, the issues are not just a direct issue of saying: we need more nurses, doctors, health care professionals. It's a question of how we make the best use of the people we have and how we help them be as productive as they want to be. So whether it's child care or whether it's additional educational opportunities or whether it's allowing people to practise to the full scope of their

training and expertise, whether it's promoting primary care networks so that they can work as teams, as the bone and joint project showed us so well, getting a much greater degree of efficiency and better effectiveness for patients by working in a team approach, all of those are very important.

It can be as simple, quite frankly, as making sure that the right equipment is in place so that nursing personnel and other personnel in the hospital don't have as much back strain as we're seeing. We have an aging workforce, and we have patients that are getting heavier. It can be as simple as trying to provide resources so that we have the appropriate lifts in place and the appropriate personnel in place so that we don't lose as many people to simple things like back strain. So working on all of those areas: very important.

That's the first one I've heard about child care in Grande Prairie as being an issue, but it's indicative of a number of the things that we have to look at in the workforce strategy and why a workforce strategy is not as simple as saying: "We need more; we're going to go and get them from somebody else who also needs them" or "We need more; we're going to raise the wages in a certain area" and then have the problem that they're attracting people from another area so that we have to raise the wages there, and then eventually we're going to buy them from somebody else who needs them. It is a multifaceted approach of growing our own, making sure that we have the advanced education positions necessary so that our own Alberta students can get the education they need here at home, making sure that they come back if they've gone elsewhere for their education, offering the opportunity to repatriate Albertans who've gone elsewhere for either education or job opportunities, opening the doors for those that want to come without actually going and taking people from other people that need them but opening the door for the people that want to come, to make sure that they can practise here.

But as with any program it's got to start at home in terms of keeping the good people you've got, making sure that they're valued, making sure that impediments to them practising at full scope, if they wish to, are removed, making sure that they can give full value into the system.

I hope that covers all the issues that you've raised in terms of the health side.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Horner: I was going to respond.

The Acting Chair: Excuse me; I'll have the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology reply first.

5:10

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Absolutely.

Mr. Horner: I'll be brief, Mr. Chairman, because really the question centred around having the infrastructure faculty. I know the hon. member actually listed off all of the things that we do have to have in place before you can actually start putting bums in the seats and having the students learn and be a part of whatever program they're at.

As the hon. health minister mentioned, we are working on the health workforce strategy. It isn't just doctors. It isn't just nurses. It's LPNs. It's health care aides. It's the whole gamut of the health care workforce. We're making sure that we find the spaces that are all scattered throughout this province, actually, for those courses.

Infrastructure is critical to it. We have right now an approved capital list within our postsecondary system that is well over \$1.3 billion that is either in construction, in planning, or is moving

forward. Those are approved projects that are on the books right now. There's a lot of construction going on in postsecondary. Is that enough? No. There's a fairly substantial ask out there. The need/ask is something we have to determine.

As I mentioned when I responded to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark earlier this afternoon, we recently brought all of the postsecondary institutions to Government House for a round-table discussion not only about roles, responsibilities, and mandates but also about: what is the current capacity of our system, and where are the gaps? So the health workforce side of that was brought into the discussion but also all of those other things, all of those other gaps that the institutions are telling us we have a gap and a need in.

Then we took that and looked at it as opposed to the capacity that we have and then started to look at the asks that we have from the institutions. Does this fit with what Campus Alberta is really all about? That's really where we're going. We're talking about a Campus Alberta approach, that takes the needs that we have as a government and takes the needs of industry and the postsecondaries into consideration.

So the creation of more spaces? Yes. The creation of more infrastructure? Yes. But we want to make sure that we plan it in the right places, in the right institutions, in collaboration with the institutions. That's really where we are right now.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in regard to these supplementary supply estimates for March 2007. I've sort of divided the comments between myself and my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona. However, I just wanted to say a couple of things in regard to Health and Wellness.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We're always putting significant supplementary funding into the health budgets here in this province, and I think it's indicative of a systemic problem with the way that we choose to fund health care in the province of Alberta: not recognizing both the true costs of not dealing head-on with the root causes of people's health problems and then, secondly, I believe, looking to always go on the cheap in regard to treatment and preventative health and community health and long-term care and the like. So while certainly this is the single biggest appropriation here this afternoon, again it's symptomatic of, I think, a problem in the way we deal with both acute community health and preventative health measures here in the province of Alberta.

You know, we somehow have come to this conclusion that reducing or moving people out of hospitals is in the best interests of running a public health care system, and I beg to differ just on both the economic and the health sides. We see in our large hospitals both in Calgary and Edmonton this single-minded push to get people through the acute-care beds and out of the acute-care beds as fast as possible, but so often secondary health concerns result in that mad rush to empty beds and create turnover. What we're seeing in large hospitals now, say at the Royal Alex, is that you're having so many people returning, so many people requiring acute care and the amount of beds being reduced over time that they've had to go into an emergency mode of storing and of keeping patients in the Alex and other hospitals in Edmonton as well, putting four where there were two and three where there was one. It's not a tenable situation for delivering acute health care in the best of situations. It creates this permanent state of triage where we're having to evaluate and re-

evaluate patients not on the health care that they need but how their problem relates to the person who is next to them. Right? Looking at comparative problems – who's the sickest, so to speak – is not necessarily the best way to deliver health care.

When I look at the numbers there, again it's a very significant amount of money in terms of building bricks and mortar and equipment and purchases of that nature, but, you know, I think we need to supplement that with all of the other elements that go into creating a strong, healthy public health care system in this province.

My main comments here this afternoon will focus on the money that is being devoted to Municipal Affairs and Housing. Of course, the minister has created this task force, which I think he should be applauded for. It's interesting to see where the money is going, as perhaps a determinant of what we should do with both the results of the task force, which will be imminent, and this upcoming budget and shaping a housing strategy for the next two or more years.

We can just look to see where some of this money is going specifically. Two million more to fund 600 rent supplement program units. While this is a 12 per cent increase, I can say with personal anecdotal experience as well as from looking across the province in a more systematic way that this is not even a drop in the bucket in regard to the requirements of people who have found their rents being increased very significantly over the last six or more months to the point where many Albertans are being forced out of their rental accommodations because they simply can't afford it.

The increases that we've seen in my own constituency of Edmonton-Caldwell have been, I think, unacceptable. Many people are viewing this as an opportunity to really cash in. You know, when you're making investments, certainly you expect a certain gain and return, but you have to temper what you expect to get from an investment with what commodity you're dealing with. When you're talking about real estate and rental accommodation on real estate, you're not just dealing with bricks and mortar, but in fact you're dealing with people's lives. It is the responsibility of not just the landlord but, I think, of this Legislature as well to ensure that rental increases do not exceed the capacity of individuals to pay.

I hope that we can consider that in a more global and systematic way here in these coming weeks and months. I think that the vast majority of Albertans would certainly praise that sort of honest effort. Certainly, we don't begrudge the desire and the need for a landlord to make a buck, but we have to temper that with the people who rely on affordable rental accommodation to hang their hat and to make their homes.

There are several line items here. Fifteen million dollars more for an affordable housing program that's in partnership with the federal money; again, this is a very welcome sign. We all know and face in each of our constituencies the shortage of affordable housing, not just in the major cities but spreading right across the province in smaller centres as well. I think, again, this has to just be something that guides us to a more fundamental project for building affordable housing over a longer period of time. We must use our intelligence with this, and we must use our imagination because, of course, building a volume of affordable housing projects across the province has the potential to really be problematic. Like I say, we need to think about putting affordable housing projects in different places that we might not have thought of before. We need to build a variety of affordable housing projects as well so that we are aiming to satisfy the diversity of the population, that is growing so quickly here in Alberta.

5:20

Sixteen million dollars more for off-reserve aboriginal housing. This is in partnership with the federal government. Again, a very,

very crucial, I think, direction that we need to consider. This is a good start. There is a vast movement of people from the north in this province to the major urban centres. This population must have assurances that there is safe and affordable housing available to them when they move to Edmonton.

Affordable housing is not just the roof over your head and keeping warm at night. It is a way to stabilize a person's life in the very broadest possible way. You know, when a person is affected by addiction problems or if you're affected by unemployment problems or any number of health problems, all of those things can be alleviated by putting an affordable and reliable roof over somebody's head. It really does go a long way to stabilizing a broad, broad spectrum of social problems that we face today here in the province. So it's just like investing a penny in to pay a huge return. If someone has a stable place to stay, they can start to deal with all of the other issues that might affect the quality of their lives.

Nine point five million dollars for homeless outreach programs. Of course, just by looking at this number, it's an acknowledgement of a crisis that we are facing here in the province of Alberta. Again, you don't have to go further than outside the doors of this fine institution to see that our homeless population has simply exploded in this province like never before. It's creating a sort of tension in our society, again, that we have not seen before.

One of the reasons that I chose to enter into politics was to bridge those divisions that do exist in our society and to seek answers to assist people in all socioeconomic groups. You know, as the homeless population of each of Edmonton and Calgary and other centres grows exponentially, I can see that we are in fact losing ground on that front because people that become homeless become disenfranchised in the broadest possible way to the majority of society. It creates this real gap which becomes a chasm, and that chasm has serious implications in regard to security and safety and in regard to health concerns and all of these other things that we have to spend and plan for here in this provincial Legislature.

Once again, \$9.5 million for homeless: that's a 61 per cent increase. It is an indication, Mr. Chairman, that we've got something desperately, terribly wrong in regard to our homeless strategy outreach programs here in the provincial Legislature. I just would like to ask this question specifically: how is it that we missed the boat? In what specific area of our homeless strategy program did we miss the target so significantly that we had to put in this 61 per cent, which is only sticking our thumb in the dike of a very much larger problem, I would say? The problem is far outstripping even this significant increase. I would like to ask the minister: how are we going to redirect our homeless strategy, and what can we do to help?

The government is spending \$15 million on capital grants to build new, affordable housing units. I would be curious to ask if these units will have a fixed price, or will they be based on a market system to determine their rental or purchase prices? I would be curious to know that. Certainly, both possibilities have some merits, but I would just like to seek clarification on that.

Again, in regard to this housing/homelessness crisis, we had an estimate by the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness that suggested that 2,600 or more people are currently living without a home in the city of Edmonton. However, I think that a more telling number is that more than 6,000 people have serious difficulties being able to make their rents every month. You also have, not in those statistics, a large group of the population that is semihomeless. They live in various places at various times along the way, again a destabilizing sort of way to live.

So those are my main questions in regard to housing. I'm glad to see that we are putting forward more monies into this area.

The other area that I wanted to comment on very briefly is just in

regard to agriculture. The budget is calling here for an increase of \$50 million towards the agricultural insurance and lending assistance program. This is a managed way by which we can forward assistance to agricultural producers, which certainly I always do encourage. However, I just want to put in there that, you know, the more we can do to supplement and to assist family farms, probably the better off we are in regard to the security of our food supply, the integrity and diversity of our rural population, and a way of continuing that direct link between the past, the present, and the future here in this province, in which agriculture has played such a significant role.

You know, as we spend significant money to ensure the stability of our agriculture industry, with which I have no quarrel at all, I'm struck by the counterproductive tendencies that we engage in here in this province in regard to not supporting family farms and, in fact, encouraging large industrial farming operations. The list goes on in regard to those counterproductive measures. Perhaps we could actually save money if we were more specific in targeting family farms and looking for their individual specific needs rather than flying off willy-nilly to default to the protection and subsidization of larger, factory/industrial food operations.

Again, the issue that's just coming out right now is with the Wheat Board. You know, we can spend all this money to help out family farmers and independent operators, but then if we actively seek to undermine a basic means by which these operators have been able to pool their resources and, in fact, have a stable market for grain for so many years and take a direct attack against that, then I think that we are in fact paddling in different directions. I think that it's not the place or the jurisdiction of this provincial Legislature to be encouraging the destruction of the Wheat Board. I would ask very much for all members to stop in that endeavour.

Anyways, thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Any minister wish to respond? Are there any others who wish to participate in the debate?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

headVote on Supplementary Estimates 2006-07, No. 2 head: General Revenue Fund

The Deputy Chair: Those members in favour of each of the resolutions not yet voted upon relating to the 2006-2007 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed, please say no. The motion is carried. Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the supplementary estimates, No. 2, 2006-2007 as considered.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.
5:30

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows.

All resolutions relating to the 2006-2007 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund have been approved.

Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$107,100,000.

Agriculture and Food: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$50,000,000.

Finance: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$46,570,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$147,000,000.

Municipal Affairs and Housing: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$42,846,000.

Infrastructure and Transportation: capital investment transferred to Service Alberta, \$530,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Ducharme moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Renner]

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

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to have been given the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne as a proud member of the constituency of Calgary-Fort.

I thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for reading the Speech from the Throne. He is an exceptional representative of the Queen, and I commend him for that role.

Under the leadership of Alberta's 13th Premier this province is heading in a new, upward direction. The Speech from the Throne was a good indicator of what Albertans can expect within the coming months. I'm looking forward to it.

I would like to take this opportunity to praise the new Premier on setting out the government's priorities. As the Member for Calgary-Fort I can tell you with confidence, Mr. Speaker, that my constituents will greatly benefit from the new direction of their government. My constituents are vibrant, diverse, and industrious. Calgary-Fort is endowed with young families, and I have senior citizens alike and citizens having cultural roots from all over the world. These citizens stand to gain tremendously from the enhanced education, resources, and health care services.

I'm happy that I can return to my constituents to share with them that their government is not only looking out for the economic

prosperity of the province but that it is also concerned with the safety, quality of life, and integration of its citizens. Their government not only plans on what to do but on how to do it.

As it was outlined in the throne speech, the new Premier and cabinet will be focusing on building a stronger province. To begin this process, the Premier has addressed a need to govern in an inclusive way. The government is going to open the door to invite all Albertans to join in the process. By governing with this kind of transparency, Albertans will be truly satisfied with the direction that the province is taking and that they will have a strong role in the process of governance. This government knows that Alberta belongs to the people and that we in the Assembly are only here as representatives of Albertans. We are here to serve and to represent them with their ideas and solutions.

As a resident of the Calgary-Fort constituency I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the level and the speed of growth we are witnessing is like none other. Every day it seems like there is a new building being opened for business and a new family moving in. It's just amazing. As we have witnessed, measures need to be taken to ensure that this growth happens in a co-ordinated manner, and that is why I'm pleased that the government is focused on governing responsibly for the future of Alberta as well. We call this managing growth pressure.

Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely proud to be part of the government which has committed itself to enhancing its citizens' quality of life, and I believe that this commitment is an investment in the province. Just as investing in the infrastructure which gets us home safely from work, enhancing Albertans' quality of life will lead us to a more prosperous Alberta.

In this time of labour pressures Alberta is seeking to increase its workforce. I can tell you for certain, Mr. Speaker, that investing in education, health, and wellness will provide people with an added incentive to come to Alberta. Furthermore, the quality of these services will make them want to stay in Alberta, participate in our communities, and raise families here. That is what I want for Alberta. I want Albertans to love being Albertan. I think that the hon. Premier's priority will bring us closer to that goal.

This government is also very mindful of supporting those who have supported us for so long. With the emphasis on providing health care services to senior citizens, they can trust that they will have the care they need. They will also be pleased that this government is working to expand long-term care capacities and improve standards of care for Alberta's senior citizens.

Mr. Speaker, as a representative from a multicultural constituency, I would like to commend the hon. Premier for creating the Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. We are so pleased that our government has placed emphasis on promoting culture and recreation in Alberta. As Albertans drive themselves to perform economically, I feel that it is more important than ever to take time to enjoy Alberta's diverse culture. We must take advantage of our beautiful landscape by visiting the parks that we have. It is healthy to enjoy culture and recreation, and I would like to lend my support to the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Achieving a balance between hard work and enjoyment is crucial, and there are many opportunities to enjoy Alberta's culture, be it visiting one of Alberta's many libraries or going to diverse restaurants and concerts. I urge all Albertans to take time to enjoy life. They've worked so hard to achieve their goals.

5:40

The new government has also dedicated itself to providing safer and secure communities for Albertans. As I see it, this priority is linked to enhancing Albertans' quality of life. Alberta's senior

citizens should not have to be fearful of walking about in their communities. As the government works to provide an enhanced sense of security, Albertans' quality of life will also be enhanced as they will also be free to sleep with comfort, knowing that they themselves and their family are safe. That feeling is invaluable.

The commitment to education is a commitment to the future, and this government's drive to enhance Alberta's education system will benefit Alberta's children for years to come. I want to congratulate the Minister of Education on his effort. With the availability of resources they need, there is no limit to what they can reach and how they can contribute to our province's well-being.

The new Premier's priorities are truly all-encompassing. They move past the basics, and for that reason they will be successful. I also want to add a point here about the area that I represent – and it's probably an example of how much growth there is in the whole province but particularly Calgary – the growing population.

I learned from the city estimate that there are currently 90 people arriving, taking up residence in Calgary each day. So if I'm here for a day, I come back, and I have 90 more neighbours or friends. That's also talking about the need of those 90 people each day and also talking about the increase in the number of vehicles travelling on the streets of Calgary.

So the pressure of growth is tremendous in Calgary, and I want to emphasize that point and represent it in the area. I see businesses booming. New construction is growing. Many cranes – I could say this – are private business cranes. The construction of offices and private residences is growing fast and in a large number in Calgary.

Sometime I would like to ask members who live outside of Calgary to visit Calgary, make a tour. I am ready to be a tour guide, take them up to the Calgary Tower. Probably they could not see much because all the tall buildings have covered the sky there.

I look forward to the Third Session of the 26th Legislature under the leadership of our 13th Premier as we work to further Albertans' quality of life. In closing I would like to thank the constituents of Calgary-Fort for allowing me to have the honour of representing them in the House here, and I have the honour to be among my distinguished colleagues in this House.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to slide in under the deadline of our new 6 o'clock end of sitting day and have the opportunity to address some of the issues that were raised and not raised in the throne speech. Of course, as you're aware, Mr. Speaker, the response to the throne speech is an opportunity to bring up some of the issues and the way our constituents have reacted to the priorities that are outlined in the throne speech.

I, of course, have a fabulous constituency, which I am so delighted also includes the Legislative Assembly building. In fact, I don't need to welcome many of you because I know that your home away from home is in Edmonton-Centre, and I'm delighted to be host to you when you are travelling away from your homes. So many of you will know, but for the benefit of others I'll just go through a quick reminder of who my constituents are.

I have a high percentage of seniors. I know the highest rate in Alberta is generally thought to be 15 per cent, and we do find that in some southern Alberta communities and in a few other special places in Alberta. Camrose, I think, is one of them. But about 15 per cent of my constituents are seniors, most of them independently living. I only have one long-term care facility, and that's in the old General hospital, although we have some very interesting special

wings in that building. One of them is the Ming Ai wing, which is a special one for Chinese-speaking seniors in long-term care. They have the food that they choose to have. All of the attendants and nurses that work there speak either Cantonese or Mandarin. It's decorated to suit that particular cultural taste. It's a really innovative and very cool place to visit.

I also have developing in the constituency and promoted and a great deal of fundraising done by the Polish community, who's building an aging-in-place facility. Now I'm hearing from the Jewish community that they're looking at converting a small apartment building to seniors' residences and further from that into a long-term care facility for them. So seniors' issues are really important to me.

I also have a lot of students who take advantage of the rental housing stock that's available in Edmonton-Centre. My students are attending, obviously, just across the river the University of Alberta. The Grant MacEwan downtown campus is in the riding. It's not that far to NAIT. Alberta College is in the riding. NorQuest College. So we're quite blessed with access to postsecondary institutions here, and with that we get a lot of students.

There are a number of people living in my constituency who deal every day with mental health challenges. Many of them successfully deal with those challenges. Some of them are on AISH, but we also have a number of other people that are on AISH for other reasons.

You've heard me speak often and lovingly of my fabulous arts community in Edmonton-Centre and also a very active GLBT community.

In the centre of the community is where the refugees and new immigrants and new Canadians tend to come when they first reach Edmonton. Once they've settled and sort of found their feet, they tend to move into the outlying communities, but they start with us, and we welcome them.

We have a wide range of faith communities, ranging from St. Joseph's Catholic Basilica, the All Saints Anglican Cathedral, several synagogues, the Robertson-Wesley United, and of course a very high number of social service agencies because they cluster in the downtown area. This tends to be where their head offices are, and as a result people needing those services also tend to cluster downtown.

Interestingly, I now have less than 500 single-family homes in the constituency.

Mr. MacDonald: Say that again.

Ms Blakeman: Less than 500 single-family homes in the constituency.

Everybody else lives in – what do they call them? – a high-density multifamily unit, which is either a condominium or rental apartment of some kind. I'm pushing the 40,000 mark, so that gives you some idea of how many multifamily dwellings we have in Edmonton-Centre. I often joke that it's 20 blocks by 20 blocks by 20 storeys high, and I'm not far off the mark there.

I, of course, listen carefully and spend a great deal of time talking to my constituents and attending community events, so they feel comfortable talking to me. Here are some of the issues that have been raised over the last six months that I would like to raise in this House in relation to what's been put in front of us with the ideas in the throne speech.

5:50

For the students: student tuition. They continue to feel truly burdened with the high level of student debt that they are graduating with and really do look to us here in this House for assistance with that. It doesn't help to just make more loans available. That just

makes them come out of universities with much higher debt loads. And there are consequences to that. Right now we're experiencing that consequence in the health field, for example, where we can't get students to choose to go into family practice, even though they may want to do that, because they need to choose a speciality in which they can make more money and pay off their student loan faster or they're going to be, you know, paying off these huge student loans for a much longer period of time. So there are consequences to doing this, and I think we need to be alive to that and try to make policies that are more accommodating to students. It's a knowledge economy. We need more people graduating from postsecondary education institutions. We also, frankly, need more people graduating from high school.

So the students continue to be concerned with the debt burden, and they also have raised with me the issues around rent and utility costs. We don't see anything in the throne speech that is addressing any kind of assistance for rent other than, I guess indirectly, the programs that municipalities have come up with where they're subsidizing certain people up to, you know, a couple of hundred dollars on their rent every month. So, again, that's something that I think we need to do.

Speaking of rent, I would recommend to the government the Liberal policy which my colleague from Calgary-Currie shepherded through quite a good consultation process over a number of months with a feedback loop in it going back to stakeholders. I'll let you read the full text of that on our website. But certainly, as it involves rent, two of the things we were recommending that, really, people are asking for several times a day in my office are to hold the rent increase to once a year and to hold it to 10 per cent. I continue to advocate for that. I think a 10 per cent profit margin, or markup margin, is well above any kind of inflation rate or cost-of-living rate and should satisfy most entrepreneurs that they're making money off of their investment there.

We're experiencing people that are ending up with several hundred dollars' worth of increases several times a year. It's creating huge trauma, and that has consequences because then we end up with problems with people in unsafe housing and the stress of having to do that, and there are health problems. Then they end up in the health system. You know, these things are all linked together.

Affordable housing. I think the government has now come to understand that there needs to be government involvement in that. Expecting the private sector to volunteer, to not make money and build houses, just wasn't going to make it. We do need to have the government involvement in that if we're going to have affordable housing schemes or make it accessible to people, so I encourage them to continue to look at that.

The government has tried to do a number of things on the homeless front. I continue to encourage them to look at the transition factor here, where we're trying to transition, for example, battered women, victims of domestic violence, out of the short-term emergency shelters and into transitional housing and then beyond that into third-stage housing even and then out of the system. But if we keep insisting that they only get three weeks in a shelter and then they're dumped back out again, guess what? If they don't have economic security and they don't have anywhere else to go – please refer to my previous two topics about rent costs and affordable housing – they go back to their abuser. What other choice do they have? There are consequences to the decisions that we make in this House and that the government makes. These transitional accommodations are particularly important to women coming out of battering situations, to people trying to recover in drug and alcohol rehab

treatment. All very important, and all with very high relapse factors if we can't get them stabilized. So, very important.

Utilities. Electricity has just been a complete and total chaotic mess from start to finish, and it really needs to be addressed. It's a rip-off, and it's causing huge misfortune for people. I'm going to let my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar expand on that, which I'm sure he will in the future.

Downtown revitalization is an issue. We've been very successful. We're struggling a bit right now because we were successful. I think the municipality needs to work in partnership with the province to make sure that that continues to be a successful thing.

Arts support is the next thing on my list, and I continue to recommend to this government: you cannot go wrong with supporting the arts. You will not regret investing in the arts. Double that arts budget. Triple that arts budget. You will be paid back in so many ways in quality of life, in employment, in the ancillary factor that puts money into the communities, in the vitality that it creates in all of your communities. You cannot go wrong investing in the arts.

The environment is raised many, many times by my constituents. It's consistently the third most talked about issue there, but I'll let my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View expand on that issue.

Some very specific things now. A request to please bring forth service dog or service animal legislation. We did redo the guide dog act, but we didn't keep that open and actually make substantive changes to allow service dogs. So we still have people who, for instance, have seizure alert animals with them being barred from taxis, being barred from malls, being barred from community league halls, and that sort of ridiculousness. We really should be able to deal with that in 2007.

We have a huge issue around wages for caregivers. A number of people have raised that in the House now. It's really affecting my seniors. It's really affecting people that are on AISH. We've got to get out in front of this one. We also need to look at respite for volunteer and unpaid caregivers. I don't know how many of you are aware but certainly with older patients 80 per cent of their caregivers are their spouse. So we tend to have 80-year-old women looking after their 85-year-old husbands, and they are the only and primary caregiver. That's an awful lot of work for somebody that age. They

need some help. We need more home-care services there because that affects everybody.

Interestingly, I had a phone call from Bonita Davidson, who's a constituent and was a home-care worker, so-called self-employed. No. She was working for one person actually but didn't have WCB coverage, so when she got injured on the job, that was it. She couldn't do the work, which really put the individual that hired her in a bad position. She had to use all of her savings and sell her car because she wasn't working so she didn't get paid, and there was no WCB. That's a gap that we should be addressing.

There is a huge issue with the fragility of the not-for-profit/charitable/volunteer sector right now, which is affecting everybody in my community and, I would argue, in every community in Alberta. You're going to hear me talk about this an awful lot through this spring and fall sitting here in this House. This is dramatically affecting our whole quality of life, our delivery of social service, recreation, arts and culture, children's services, seniors' services, right across the board.

A couple of last things. Privacy issues continue to be raised, having Telus and other companies contracted as the human resource and cheque payer for a number of different groups and concerns about privacy of personal information there. And if I can put in a final plug for serious consideration of a high-speed rail link between downtown Edmonton and downtown Calgary. I think if we're going to grow up and be a big province and join the rest of the countries in Europe, for example, we need to get some rapid transit that goes across the province and is public transit based.

So, with those issues I'm happy. I will go back and report to my constituents that I've raised them in the House. I look forward to seeing what the government can do to try and address the issues that I've raised. Thank you.

I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I see that the clock is striking 6, so the House stands adjourned until 1 o'clock tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, March 14, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is again a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all of my colleagues in the House 13 special guests from the Department of Energy that have joined us today in the members' gallery. We have Sylvia Presiznuik, Gail Marusyn, Deborah Boelstler, Yolanda Hutchings, Yasmin Suleman, Donna McLachlan, Beth Holmes, Danielle Haverstock, Olena Urban, Julia Hai, Brent Fuhr, Ryan Borador, Raelyn Huseby. I would ask them all to stand, please, to receive the warm welcome of my colleagues.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 12 members of the Finance department. We talk very much about our public service and the great jobs they do, but quite simply if it wasn't for people in the tax and revenue administration, the investment management division, the strategic and business services, we wouldn't be able to carry on our work. So I'd ask Anne Bethell, Bonnie Toh, Dustin Gumpinger, Elaine Siu, Ivy Wong, James Ackroyd, Jeff Urbanowski, Jerry Brige, Jim Daye, Jonathan Herman, Trevor Bilan, and Wilfred Chan to all stand and receive the very warm welcome and appreciation of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour again to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students and their adult leaders from the Clive school. They're grade 6 students. There are 16 of them. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Marla Kolybaba and Miss Kelly Janisse. Parent helpers are Mr. Garth Rowley, Mr. Howard Hopkins, Naomi Bennett, and Mrs. Deniese Lyons. Now, this group has always been accompanied by a teacher by the name of Bob MacKinnon. He was not able to be here this year – he's been here 17 years in a row – due to some health issues in his family. So he hopes to be back next year. I would ask my students and parents to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 74 students from Leo Nickerson school in St. Albert and teachers Ms Desjardins, Mme Scharf, Mr. Paul Annicchiarico, Mrs. Wawrychuk, Mrs.

Hussey, and Mrs. Morgan and parent Mrs. Van Hoeve. I wish them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a fine gentleman from Mexico. Mr. Armando Garcia is visiting the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. He is married with two small children. He is a graduate of the University of Guadalajara, specializing in veterinary medicine. He tells me that he had an excellent academic record there, and he has the documents to prove it. He is in Canada as a temporary foreign worker; his visa expires in November of 2007. He was limited and restricted in his work, but he was working on a corporate farm out east of Provost. He was on the farm that is named on the visa, and it is named C.G. Paulgaard Farms Ltd. I would now ask Mr. Garcia to please rise. I don't know which gallery he's in, but if he would rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce the driving forces behind one of the most exciting community projects occurring in Alberta. Christy Cholak-Morin is the executive director of Arts on the Avenue as well as a director, producer, drama coach, and artist in residence with Edmonton public schools. Michelle Hayduk is a resident commercial design expert who spends much of her time volunteering with the local community grassroots organization known as Arts on the Avenue. Scott Peters is best known as a founding member of the local Celtic band Captain Tractor and has also worked in the theatre arts community with nearly every professional theatre group in the city over the past 20 years. With him is his four-year-old son, Thorin Freeman-Peters.

These three individuals are together working towards restoring and redeveloping the Alberta Avenue area. They brought about many fantastic things: the Arts Alive! fall festival, assistance for community theatre, and with the help of my constituency office the upcoming Workers Art Show as part of the May Week celebrations. They are seated in the public gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Vesna Kovacic. Vesna is currently a social work student at Grant MacEwan College and is completing her practicum in my constituency office from September of 2006. Vesna's family has been in Alberta since moving from Saskatchewan in 1979. Vesna herself moved back to Alberta to be closer to her family and to pursue a lifelong passion of becoming a social worker. Vesna has been a very valuable part of our team in the constituency of Edmonton-Calder, and we are grateful for all of her hard work. I would ask her now, please, to rise and to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this House Denise Ogonoski. Denise is a lifetime Edmontonian who started this past January as a constituency assistant in our Edmonton-Strathcona constituency office. Currently Denise is completing her political science degree at the University of Alberta. She was a media delegate at the World Social Forum in Venezuela last year and volunteered for the People's Pedal bicycle co-op.

Mr. Speaker, you and other members of the House are invited to come and visit my constituency and McIntyre park, where this co-op usually has a stall of bicycles which are available for us to use, and that would mean that we control the emissions that go into the atmosphere and create problems for us.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents I would like to thank Denise for the service she is already providing to the constituents of Edmonton-Strathcona. We all look forward to seeing her continue her excellent work. Denise is seated in public gallery, and now I'll ask her to please stand to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a long history of strong ethnic and cultural ties with the Ukraine. Nearly 10 per cent of Albertans have Ukrainian ancestry. Just to name a few in this Assembly we have Danyluk, and we have Zwodzdesky and Cenaiko, and we also have Premier Stelmach. Joining us today in your gallery is the ambassador of the Ukraine, His Excellency Mr. Ostash, and his lovely wife, Mrs. Hrymych, and their young son Danylo. The ambassador met with the Premier and other ministers and had a state dinner today at Government House. I'd like to ask them all to rise at this point. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

1:10

The Speaker: His Excellency is also a 12-year veteran of the Ukrainian Parliament.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour to have the opportunity today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Danielle Smith. Danielle is the director of provincial affairs for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business here in Alberta, an organization which many of you will know represents 9,200 businesses in Alberta. She was here today, Mr. Speaker, lobbying members of the Official Opposition and presenting the CFIB's prebudget presentation to the Official Opposition caucus. In the spirit of openness and accountability and in an effort to pre-empt Bill 1, Danielle has asked if the Canadian Federation of Independent Business might be the first organization to register as a lobbyist. They would be proud to do so. I would ask Danielle to please rise – she's in the public gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we've been on TV since 1 o'clock contrary to what the chair said yesterday.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to remind all Albertans, especially our farming community, which

includes the grade 6 class from the Clive school, that starting today and running until March 20 is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. Farm safety is a crucial part of agriculture in this province and an important part of keeping all rural Albertans safe. This year's theme, Protect Your Moving Parts, focuses on the importance of using caution when working around farm machinery. It also encourages farmers to use proper guarding and shielding to prevent accidents from occurring.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Canadian agricultural injury surveillance program, farm machinery accidents, which include being entangled, pinned, or struck by machinery, were the leading cause of hospitalized injuries on Canadian farms from 1990-2000. In Alberta there are an average of 18 farm-related deaths per year. Seventy per cent of the incidents involved farm machinery, and sadly, like most fatalities on farms, these deaths were preventable.

Education and information are the most powerful ways to impact behaviour, and I would like to applaud the organizers and sponsors of this year's Alberta Farm Safety Week for their hard work and dedication to keeping Alberta farms safe places to work and grow.

I am pleased that our government is a partner in the launch of a new ad campaign aimed at youth and new farm workers. Youth make up a significant portion of new farm workers, and farm safety education and awareness for this group is a particular focus of this government. I'm proud to be a part of a government that cares about helping our young people and new farm workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to recognize Canadian Agricultural Safety Week from March 14 to March 20.

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

Per Capita Federal Funding

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada Statistics just released a census document titled Portrait of the Canadian Population in 2006. A subtitle is Alberta: The Engine of Population Growth. The Canada census has just proven what we have witnessed for years. Between 2001 and '06 Canada's population growth was the highest in the G-8 countries. Three-quarters of Canadian population growth is thanks to the joining of people from many parts of the world. Canada's population growth between 2001 and '06 was higher than the previous intercensal period.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend our Premier in setting management of growth as one of the government's five top priorities. There is tremendous growth pressure experienced in Alberta in general and in our constituencies in Calgary in particular. Alberta's population has now reached 3.3 million. Its population growth of 10.6 per cent is the highest in the country, twice the national average. If the province continues to grow at least 10 per cent every five years, then our population would double between 2006 and mid-2030. So Alberta now has topped 10 per cent of our national population for the first time.

Myself and the majority of my constituents believe that sharing the federal financial allocation should be based on per capita. If every Canadian taxpayer follows the same national rule, every Canadian should be treated equitably. It doesn't matter where he or she lives. Alberta should receive federal funding on a fair per capita principle. Realizing that growth pressure and needs are everywhere, I would suggest that our provincial government persuade our federal government to apply the fair per capita funding principle to Alberta and that within Alberta the per capita funding principles should be considered as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Canada Safeway Charitable Donations

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For a number of years now Canada Safeway has supported local area charities through their Because We Care campaign. Each year individual Safeway stores adopt a charity and conduct a number of fundraising events in their store to raise funds for their local community groups.

The Mill Woods Town Centre Safeway store has partnered with Edmonton Meals on Wheels, that is a not-for-profit organization that relies on volunteers to provide a nutritious meal program which promotes health and wellness and independence for their clients. Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, March 10, I joined a number of Meals on Wheels volunteers and Safeway staff in helping promote this event. Since selecting Meals on Wheels as their charity in 2005, the Mill Woods Safeway has raised more than \$25,000 for this worthwhile cause.

Since 1998 customers and employees of Canada Safeway have raised more than \$9.7 million to help over 1,400 charities in Canada. I ask my fellow Members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly to join me in saluting this outstanding commitment to our local communities.

Thank you.

Vauxhall Academy of Baseball

Mr. McFarland: I attended the Vauxhall baseball academy as it held its first banquet and fundraiser this past Saturday, Mr. Speaker. This is an exciting concept: the first high school baseball academy in Canada, that is putting small-town, rural Alberta on the national map.

In its first school year the Vauxhall baseball academy has attracted 21 student players from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. Young men in grades 10, 11, and 12 have joined the Vauxhall Jets team from Calgary, Chinook, Hays, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Strathmore, Rocky Mountain House, Round Hill, Taber, and Vauxhall in Alberta as well as from Imperial in Saskatchewan, Kentville in Nova Scotia, Sussex Corner in New Brunswick, and Winnipeg, Manitoba.

This year's award recipients included one player who maintains a 95 per cent average. The goals that these players have targeted include a career in dentistry, two in pre-med, three in engineering, and one has been accepted into the aerospace program in Alabama.

The Jets' stadium, their home diamond, is one of the finest outdoor facilities in rural Canada and one of only eight lighted stadiums in all of Alberta. Vauxhall high school is a smaller 2A high school that faced the prospect of not having a basketball team this year. In a great show of support nine of the baseball Jets players stepped forward to help fill the basketball team roster for their school. On Saturday, hours before their awards banquet, the Vauxhall basketball team, competing up at the 3A level, won the zone finals. They outscored their opposition in the final game by 50 points, earning a berth this weekend in the provincial 3A basketball finals in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta.

Their principal, Todd Ojala, commended the boys on their accomplishment not only for their three hour per day basketball workout but also for all their accomplishments. They are billeted with families in the community. I want to compliment the coaches, Les McTavish and assistant coach Jim Kotkas, and all the teaching staff of Vauxhall for a very supportive program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

1:20

Warner Girls Hockey School

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some things are so good and so important and so exciting that they're worth repeating, and I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for alerting this Assembly to the hockey jewel of the province, the Warner Hockey School for Girls.

What an outstanding opportunity for young women to develop and pursue their dream of hockey. This is a classic Alberta heritage story of blazing a new path, a story of not just surviving but thriving and rising to the top where skeptics said that it couldn't be done. It all started with a question – how do we keep our high school open? – and then a dream that evolved into a hockey school for girls, followed by an unbelievable amount of hard work, sacrifice, dedication of the volunteers in both hours and donations. This is truly hockey at its best.

They have attracted young women from across Canada, the U.S., and Sweden. In just four short years the graduates from this school have received over \$3 million in scholarships and bursaries from recruiting institutions. They play in the Alberta Major Midget Female Hockey League and have won the league the last three years. They just got back from a trip to the Maritimes, where they played against the St. Thomas University team, winning a decisive 10-2 victory. The next day they played Dalhousie University, winning 3-2. They then went on to play Team Nova Scotia, where they allowed two of their top players to play for their home team. They won 7-5. A day's rest and then they played Team P.E.I. and won 3-0 and the next night 4-1.

They have now won the hearts of many Canadians on CBC's Kraft Hockeyville competition. Go to the cbc.ca/hockeyville website, watch the three-minute video, and then vote for Warner. Watch the other videos, and then vote for Warner again. Vote often, and support Alberta's hockey school. Warner has a population of 379; Cornwall, 55,000; North Bay, 53,000. Warner not only deserves our support; they need it. Let's make Hockeyville Albertaville.

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

U of A Pandas Volleyball Team

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I'm sure everybody here knows, my constituency is the proud home of the University of Alberta, and it's a great honour and privilege today to recognize the U of A Pandas volleyball team.

The number one ranked Pandas captured their seventh CIS crown with a 3-1 defeat of the defending national champions, the Laval Rouge et Or. Led by CIS player of the year and tournament MVP Tiffany Dodds, the Pandas produced a great team effort. Dodds finished the game with 17 kills, putting away the game point. Rookie Samantha Wojtkiw and Alexa Berton recorded a combined 10 blocks while Jocelyn Blair had 12 kills. Wojtkiw finished with 12 kills, three aces, and an 87 per cent hitting percentage. Jocelyn Blair and Daryl Roper were named tournament all-stars.

Special recognition should also go to their head coach, Laurie Eisler, a three-time CIS coach of the year, a Panda coach since 1991. These hard-working and dedicated young women deserve tremendous respect and admiration for their accomplishments and for bringing yet another CIS banner home to the U of A. Congratulations to the Pandas.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition from a number of signatories in Alberta, undersigned residents petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to consider providing additional funds for the Calgary health region to “proceed immediately and as originally planned with the construction of a hospital in south Calgary.”

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am presenting quite a number of tablings with the right number of copies for a petition supporting Gary Hunt in his efforts.

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

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to table a letter and a petition from 193 Albertans from the Buffalo Lake Métis settlement and the surrounding area asking the government to introduce legislation to enforce mandatory use of helmets when operating a quad, trike, or any ATV, enforce an age limit for the operation of ATVs, and for smaller ATVs to have manufacturers put governing mechanisms on because children are operating them.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m presenting a petition signed by 64 citizens in Edmonton urging the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to complete as soon as possible the overpasses and interchanges at the locations where Anthony Henday Drive, the Edmonton ring road, intersects Lessard Road, Callingwood Road, and Cameron Heights Road.

Thank you.

head:

Notices of Motions

Mr. Renner: I beg, maybe, some advice from the Speaker on the new process. The government wishes to advise the House that written questions and motions for returns stand and retain their places. Do I give notice of that motion now, or do I simply make that statement?

The Speaker: Notice.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Bill 16

Police Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, 2007.

These amendments to the Police Act will allow the establishment of a provincial body to investigate police when someone has been seriously injured or dies as a result of the direct actions of a police officer. This team would also investigate highly sensitive or serious matters involving police. The proposed amendments will also give the province the option of taking over lock-up facilities from municipal police agencies. Alberta corrections officers or Alberta sheriffs could be used for these operations.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Bill 17

Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 17, the Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 17 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 18

Judicature Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Judicature Amendment Act, 2007.

This act amends the Judicature Act to empower Alberta’s courts to deal more effectively with vexatious litigants. The Judicature Act deals with the jurisdiction powers of the Court of Queen’s Bench and the Court of Appeal. It also deals with the administration of justice in the province, including some matters of the provincial court. The proposed amendments to this act will remove the requirement to obtain the Attorney General’s consent to make an application to have a person declared a vexatious litigant. Amendments to this act will give all three courts the jurisdiction to hear vexatious litigant applications.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

head:

Statement by the Speaker

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, we’ll come back to introductions. But before we commence Oral Question Period today, in what is the second day of the operation of the “rules,” the chair would like to make a comment. As the chair indicated yesterday, there was nothing in the Standing Orders revisions adopted last Monday night concerning the operation of Oral Question Period. Section 3(a)(ii) of the House leaders’ agreement states that questions and answers shall be 45 seconds, which is the general rule that the chair has been applying since the start of the 26th Legislature in March of 2005. There was no mention in the House leaders’ agreement about preambles to questions or deviating from the accepted practice of limiting preambles to supplementary questions.

1:30

However, the chair has had an opportunity now to meet with all three House leaders this morning. This is the first time that we have met during the process leading to the House leaders’ agreement. This was a very positive step in communicating about the intention and expectations of the House leaders about the March 7 agreement. If you’ve ever seen the movie *Lost in Translation*, about the guy who goes to Tokyo, just think of that as I go through the rest of this.

After that meeting the chair will be vigorously enforcing the 45-second rule from the time the member is recognized until the end of the 45 seconds. This will apply to questions, and this will apply to

answers. It may involve stopwatches. This is how it will work in practice. When the chair rises and says, "The Leader of the Official Opposition," when that "n" is heard by one of the table officers, a click will go on in a watch. The chair will administer the House as normal, and within five seconds the chair will notice that there are five seconds left, and then bang; you know, like they do in football, baseball, and everything else. It won't be this. It'll be that. Okay?

Second thing. During the 45-second period – and this will apply to questions rather than answers – preambles will be allowed, whether main or supplementary questions. It seems to be the overwhelming desire of the members. So you've got 45 seconds for the question. In the past it was a pretty vigorous interpretation: no preambles in the second or third question. Now permitted.

The chair also wants to make it very clear that when that clock starts counting on the "n," if the hon. members stand up and cheer the hon. member for 30 seconds, the clock has been running. That means there are only 15 seconds left for the remainder of the question. Now, I know my hon. colleagues – I've been here for a number of years – so I know what the potential is of happening. Okay?

The chair wants to make one thing very clear. He has no difficulty whatsoever enforcing this provision. The chair would point out that Standing Order 13(1), which has not changed, requires the Speaker to preserve order and decorum. In the chair's experience what often causes question period to become unruly are inflammatory preambles that have little to do with the question that is to be asked. So while the chair will allow the greatest latitude to members in their questions and answers, the chair will not let question period deteriorate into a situation that would serve to bring this institution into disrepute and in the process reflect poorly on all members, especially other members who are not involved in the shenanigans.

If there are concerns about the operation of question period, the chair would encourage members to bring those concerns to his or her House leader. This interpretation was arrived at about 11:30 this morning, so some members may not be aware of it, but the deal was that the House leaders are to bring this updated version of the rule to all of his or her members.

Remember as well that we have another opportunity for members to convey their thoughts, and that is to the chair of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, as this committee is to have a role in reviewing the operation of the rule changes.

Please do not send notes to the chair, as happened yesterday. The chair wants to be very clear that he is committed to ensuring that the operation of the Assembly represents the expectation of members. It is your Assembly, and the chair has been elected to enforce your rules.

To the two independent members in the House, I'd invite them to come and visit me at 4:30 this afternoon because in addition to this clarification, the chair also provided to the three House leaders a list of questions and comments with respect to the proposed changes to the rules of the Assembly and also provided to the three House leaders, as best as one can determine, an anticipated budget to implement all of these changes and these rules. The three House leaders will provide that information to their caucus members. I will provide that to the two members in the Assembly who were not present at the meeting this morning and, if required, will table those documents in the House at a subsequent date, but I do not anticipate that this will be required.

So, Micheline, are we ready?

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Red Deer River Water Transfer

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As is often said in this Assembly, whiskey is for drinking, and water is for fighting over. The people of the Red Deer River Valley are ready to fight over the transfer of water from their river to a shopping mall on the edge of Calgary. To the Premier: how can the Premier claim that this government is supporting a fair process on the Balzac water transfer licence application when various ministers have publicly supported and applauded this project and the government itself voted \$4.8 million to help pay for it?

Mr. Stelmach: The process in terms of reviewing water licences has been in place for many years in this province, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, it might have been implemented way back when you were a Minister of Environment, so it's got a lot of history to it. It's proven that it's fair to both sides, and we will follow the process that has been established.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is another issue on which this government is so divided. Not long after various ministers applauded the project and approved the money, this Premier hit the campaign trail and called the project ridiculous. I'll table a document demonstrating that. Why did this Premier call the project ridiculous when his own government was supporting it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll wait to review the so-called documents that the Leader of the Opposition has, but I have to reiterate: there is a process in place. There's a quasi-judicial authority that's put in place to evaluate the information coming on both sides for this water application or any other water application that there is in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier called the project ridiculous and said that he would investigate it, can the Premier explain now why he has flip-flopped on this project?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader has to be very careful in the kind of words he uses. I am now the Premier of the province of Alberta, and I would not be one to break the rules that have been established through law in this Assembly. If that's the kind of leadership he expects to see from this Premier, he is dead wrong.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. I think the Premier was expected to keep his word from the campaign trail, Mr. Speaker.

As the Balzac water transfer makes so clear, there is a process for well-connected people and a process for the rest of us. Given that yesterday the Premier said, and I quote, if there have been promises made by individuals that might have been in government or are no longer in government, then I would like to know about them, end quote, has the Premier bothered to try to find out about those secret promises?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, he's the one that says that there's a secret deal. He was in the scrum yesterday. I asked him right in front of all the TV cameras: you're calling it a secret deal? You're saying to this House, I believe, that there's some sort of a secret deal. You've got the documents. Present them right now, right in front of the cameras.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the fix is in on this project. This government has placed a \$4.8 million bet that this project will be approved when last August it voted that much money, and I'll quote the government's own budget documents: to support a horse-racing track and equine centre at Balzac. Given that this government destroyed due process last year when it voted the money for this project and various ministers applauded it, will the Premier just save the people of the Red Deer River basin the trouble and cost of fighting the licence and just put an end to this water transfer right now?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the leader mentioned before that I wasn't keeping my promise to those individuals during the campaign trail. Well, we have moved very quickly on the housing strategy. We are negotiating an immigration agreement with the federal government. We've already addressed the issues in Fort McMurray. We've opened this House to more transparency, obviously, with the new agreement we have allowing for greater consideration of business and committee work. I think we've come a long way in the last – what? – 90 days.

Dr. Taft: Tell the people of Red Deer.

It's time for this government to stop playing games with Alberta's water. There should be no secret deals for that water. This makes a mockery of due process and the whole issue of consulting with Albertans. To the Premier: why should anybody trust or engage in public consultations with this government when they so clearly ignore the wishes of Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, Mr. Speaker, very clearly because they can trust us to do the right thing. Quite frankly, if the hon. leader is not aware, again, of the process that's in place, the hon. Minister of Environment can certainly articulate it again in the House.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Armando Garcia, who was introduced earlier, is a temporary foreign worker from Guadalajara, Mexico. He came to Alberta to work on a large farm expecting to receive health benefits, overtime pay, and a reimbursement of travel costs, but instead he faced a broken contract and a restrictive work visa that limits him from finding other employment. This is one case, but I fear it's the tip of the iceberg. As the number of temporary foreign workers entering Alberta increases, many workers are facing similar problems due to this government's failure to ensure that the rights of these workers are adequately protected. My questions are to the Premier. Given that an increase in the number of foreign . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to of course welcome to this Assembly Armando Garcia from Guadalajara, and I also want to state to this Assembly that I had a very pleasant visit when I was minister of international and intergovernmental relations with the then President, Vicente Fox, who asked this province of Alberta to continue the good working relationship we have with Mexico to allow people from their country to come to our province, work here, earn some money. I was astonished at the amount of GDP, Mexican GDP, that comes from Mexicans that leave their country and send money back to sustain their families back home.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will table the employment contract of Mr. Garcia later, and it appears that all kinds of things were broken. Health insurance was promised. Workplace safety insurance was promised. Lots of money was deducted from his paycheque to pay for plane fares. My question, then, is to the Premier. This man has tremendous courage coming here to speak out against his employer. What guarantees are in place to ensure that other employees who are bound to employers through their work visa will be able to speak out without any repercussions?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the details, would our minister responsible, at least today, for this issue please give us the details.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say that temporary workers receive the same protections as any other workers in Alberta, and I also want to say that the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Industry will look into this case. In Alberta this is not common. I mean, we take violations of a code very seriously and investigate every complaint that is brought forward, and we need to look at this information and the individual circumstances before we can determine what, if any, potential . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, we've just had another little test of our rule interpretation. That 45-second response time does not include an additional 45 seconds for supplementals.

The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I fear that this is the Chinese head tax all over again. People from China came here to help build the railroad, and then they were sent back. A hundred years later the Prime Minister of Canada has to apologize to them. So my question is to the Premier. I mean, are you going to have to be in a position to apologize to these workers for all the poor conditions they've been working under as they are sent back after a year? What kind of experience is this for Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, when a member of the opposition brings up the Chinese head tax, that was an embarrassment to this country at a very critical stage of development. This is very early in history, but it happened to be the same time that my ancestors came to this country. I fully understand the kind of discrimination that there was at this time, so I don't need any prompting from any opposition member to relate to me some of the issues that early immigrants had to face in this country.

Climate Change

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environment held a news conference in which he announced that Alberta was taking climate change seriously. He brought documents, he brought questionnaires, and he brought logos. That was five years ago. Today this Minister of Environment went through the same whole dog-and-pony show again. Even the logo is the same. To the Premier: how many times do we have to go through this phony consultation exercise on climate change before the government takes real action to fix the problem?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, given what the minister presented this morning in terms of climate change, I'd allow the minister to answer the question.

Mr. Renner: Well, I just very quickly, Mr. Speaker, remind the member that the world that we live in has changed significantly in the past five years, and I look forward to elaborating on further questions.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, they ignored it five years ago. How do we know they won't ignore it today? Here it was five years ago. The same thing, same logo today. The news release from 2002 said, "Results from the consultation process will be used to finalize Alberta's action plan." Which action plan, and when will it really be finalized?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I have spent the last three months since I was appointed Minister of Environment travelling around the province talking to all of the employees of Environment. The key message that I delivered everywhere I went was: in politics timing is everything. Guess what? The timing is absolutely right, and we are going to be able to do things that previous ministers could only dream of doing. Industry is onside, the public is onside, and the public demands that we take action.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister could tell us why the government has failed to take action in the past five years? This minister has been a member of that government. This Premier was a member of that government. That caucus hasn't changed, but in five years nothing has been done. What assurances do we have that you're going to do something this time?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind the hon. member that much has happened over the past five years, beginning with the introduction of Canada's first climate change legislation, the loop on which just closed with the introduction of Bill 3. This consultation takes us positively into the future instead of worrying about the past constantly as the NDP are wont to do.

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

Industrial Projects in Alberta's Heartland Area

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta industrial heartland bitumen upgraders present a tremendous opportunity for Edmonton and our capital region. Jobs, investment, and growth will all flow. It's like Fort McMurray five years ago and a bit better planned, but are we fully prepared? Regional governance has broken down. Is everyone who should be involved, and are they to the best degree? My constituents at Edmonton-Manning who will work there are very concerned. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Will we soon see some effective

regional governance mechanism in place to ensure that everyone in Edmonton's million metro region is represented in dealing with massive growth?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of my ministry's mandates is to deal with the regional planning issues and the intermunicipal disputes. On March 5 I received recommendations from the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability that address these issues. We are currently reviewing this information, and we expect to release our response later this spring. I can assure you that we are taking action to support stronger intermunicipal co-operation in Alberta.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the same minister: with transportation of workers and materials a key concern for many area residents, what steps has the minister taken to ensure that the various local governments, investors, and our provincial government are co-operating in this area?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, this is a critical issue. The province is working with our partners in municipal governments through the minister's council to come up with innovative solutions to those challenges.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, Mr. Speaker: will the minister ensure that the work proceeds quickly to widen highway 28A and take out bottlenecks to ensure the safety of the residents, the schoolchildren, and the thousands of workers that will be travelling that highway to and from work? Will it be safe, and will it be ready?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government is working with all the municipalities in the industrial heartland area to determine all the overall transportation needs in the area. As part of this we're working on a long-range plan for roads, bridges, and other critical infrastructure throughout the area. The plan will identify the urgent, short-term, and long-term projects, and from there we can prioritize the projects from within the department's construction program.

As always, Mr. Speaker, safety is a very high priority of this government. It's a primary concern. When we look at road projects, we will certainly take all the safety of the drivers, the school buses, and you know what, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Climate Change Public Consultation

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the environment minister introduced the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, that put in place emissions intensity reductions of 12 per cent for large industrial emitters of greenhouse gases. Today the same minister announced that there will be a consultation with Albertans on a new climate change plan for the future. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Will the minister explain the rationale for this consultation?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I previously indicated, Bill 3 really is the culmination of delivering on the climate change policy that was initiated in 2002. This government does take climate

change very seriously, so the announcement that I made this morning is to allow us to engage in consultations that will lead us to the next step. We've dealt with the industrial side, the industrial emitters side. We need to very seriously engage in conversation with Albertans on where we go from here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: what topics are Albertans going to be consulted on?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated this morning at the news conference, there are some critical issues that I as minister am interested in, not the least of which is: what is the role of government? Should the government be the leader? Should the government be the legislator? Should the government be directing, or should the government be simply educating? Up until now we've had largely a voluntary system in place. There are a lot of things that Albertans have been suggesting could and should happen. I'm looking forward to engaging in that conversation over the next few weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental, also to the Minister of Environment: how can people in my area get involved in the consultation?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there will be 10 public meetings throughout the province, and I encourage all Albertans who are able to participate in those public meetings to do so. In addition to that, the fact book and workbook that was introduced this morning is available online, is available on request, and will be available at all MLA offices. I encourage Albertans again to pick up those books and fill out the workbook and submit it.

In addition, I will be meeting with aboriginal groups and other stakeholders to get their feedback, all of which will be incorporated into a revised climate change plan that we will introduce this fall.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2001 the population of this province has gone up over 10 per cent, and housing costs have as much as doubled. The need for affordable housing is a critical issue for Albertans, and as the Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing well knows, to solve the crisis takes innovation, expertise, money, and the political will to keep the issue at the top of the provincial agenda. The minister's all-party Affordable Housing Task Force report is due to go to the minister next Monday. What will the minister do with the report once he gets it, and when will he release it to the people of Alberta?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member has mentioned, yes, the housing task force will report, and hopefully it will report on March 19. We will take that recommendation, and then I will present it to our government for further direction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same

minister: rents are skyrocketing in this province. Will the minister push for a temporary rent regulation capping rent hikes at 10 per cent and change the law to allow only one rent increase per year?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I have not seen the report, and I cannot prejudice or pre-empt what is in that report. That report will be presented to me on March 19, and at that time I will look at it.

Mr. Taylor: Understood, Mr. Speaker, but I would have thought the minister would have been getting the same sorts of calls from his constituents that the rest of us are getting from ours.

Given the seriousness of the affordable housing crisis, which dictates that while we're talking about it, we also need to get building, will the minister provide this House today some targets and timelines for some big-time creation of affordable housing sufficient to make a real difference?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, again, we established a housing task force to look at the challenges in housing in Alberta and the opportunity for that task force to provide us with recommendations that would help with some of the guidance on where this government needs to go.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Municipal Growth Pressures in the Capital Region

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Statistics Canada in its recent report indicates that 50 per cent of the Canadian population now resides in six municipalities, which includes the city of Edmonton. This sudden population growth and urbanization has led to ever-increasing financial strains on the city of Edmonton, which now provides social care, cultural facilities, infrastructure, and other expensive services to the entire capital region. All of these services are funded by Edmontonians through their property taxes. To the minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: is the minister aware of the revenue and expenditure inequity in the capital region, particularly with reference to the Sturgeon and Strathcona counties, which estimates that the city of Edmonton now provides some \$80 million worth of services to the surrounding region?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, in managing growth pressures, the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability has brought forward a number of recommendations to address the short- and long-term sustainable funding for all municipalities. On that committee there is representation from the AAMD and C, which represents Sturgeon. There is also representation from the city of Edmonton. A number of the recommendations for the province's consideration address opportunities for strengthening co-ordination and intermunicipal co-operation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Reports are great, but how will the minister actually address that inequity?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the municipalities face significant challenges in delivering services and infrastructure to support a growing population and economy. The Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability has developed a draft report which contains 12 recommendations in three key areas: intermunicipal relationships, roles and responsibilities, and municipal revenue sources.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental to the same minister: how will the minister assure Edmontonians that the onset of development in what's known as the industrial heartland will adequately compensate the city of Edmonton for the anticipated influx of services required?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I need to say that Edmonton needs to be involved in the planning with the surrounding communities. This needs to be done, first of all, through communication, collaboration, and co-operation.

2:00 Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility

Mr. Bonko: Despite his pledge to govern with openness and transparency, the Premier's comments Monday show that he is not committed to this with respect to the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement as it was negotiated and written and signed behind closed doors. This Chamber is only now having its say, Mr. Speaker. At best free trade agreements can benefit all involved. We have to be careful, however, that we do not restrict our ability to govern. My questions are to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What labour groups did the government consult with when it was drafting TILMA to make sure that Alberta workers would not be disadvantaged by this agreement?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, this agreement is a North American type of priority that is setting an example. As the Premier said the other day, the Premier of Ontario, the Premier of Saskatchewan, and other Premiers are interested. In fact, we are so open and so transparent that you can see it all on the website any time you wish. I'll give you the website call centre so you can view it for yourself because we are so open and transparent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Article 13 of TILMA states that the training standards recognized in one province will be recognized in the other. Since this agreement prohibits discrimination based on provincial standards, will Alberta workers with higher levels of training and certification be disadvantaged by this agreement?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, no, they will not.

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, maybe referencing article 13 wasn't specific enough for the minister because I didn't hear him mention it once. Let me help him. Article 13(1) states that "any worker certified for an occupation by a regulatory authority of a Party shall be recognized as qualified to practice that occupation by the other Party." Again, will this mean that Albertans with greater levels of qualifications will be disadvantaged by this agreement?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. But let me give you a perfect example. In other words, what the member is saying is that he doesn't want to see others be able to come from British Columbia to Alberta. For instance, an example under the old way it used to be done under the Liberals, that they support, is that a teacher wouldn't be able to come and teach in Alberta. Well, guess what? We want teachers in Alberta because our economy is growing. The Liberals may not, but we do, and that's why TILMA is supported.

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

C5 Forestry Management Plan

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent weeks I've heard a great deal of criticism from constituents and environmental groups who are very concerned with timber harvesting in the C5 area of southwestern Alberta, a part of the province enjoyed by many, many Albertans. Many are genuinely unclear regarding the government's proposed forest management plan for the area. Could the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development clarify exactly what this plan actually entails?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd like this Assembly to know that the proposed C5 forestry management plan is one of the most progressive developed to date in the history of this province. Because there are no other forestry management agreements in this area, our ministry had a free hand to use the highest industry standards and also do extensive public consultation in developing this plan. The result is a forestry management plan that recognizes that the key is that a healthy forest is the foundation for all other uses – for all other uses – not just forestry but watershed, habitat, biodiversity, tourism, and recreation. C5 does that, and I want to thank publicly today the public consultation committee and my officials for devising such a good plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Could the minister please be clear on whether the plan allows clear-cutting in the region or if it ignores watershed issues in C5, as some individuals and groups have suggested?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans should know that less than 1 per cent of the area identified in this plan will be harvested in any one given year, and when harvesting takes place, reforestation will follow immediately. The plan does not call for any massive swaths of clear-cutting. Instead, there will be contour cutting, that protects watersheds and trails and provides protection for other critical areas, and no harvesting will occur in the upper reaches of any watersheds.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question, again to the same minister: if the proposed plan is as appropriate and balanced as we are to believe, why is it that media accounts report the minister as saying that he is delaying his approval?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer is very simple. This is a good plan, but it could be made better. That's what we're going to do. The additional time, by deferring approval at this time, will allow me to receive the report of the Oldman River watershed basin committee. I expect that later this summer. I've also spoken with my department officials and asked them to take a second look at the plan, asked them if we couldn't slightly change the orientation and focus of this plan so that it dovetails with the land-use frame-

work, the mandate that our Premier has given me to protect our public forests and areas. I'm asking them to come up with a plan where forestry isn't just the end of the plan but the means by which we achieve other values, and that includes healthy forests, healthy watersheds, habitat for recreation and biodiversity, tourism and recreation, and a healthy and profitable and sustainable forestry industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Health Workforce Strategy

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to stumble along from one crisis to another. In health care we have severe shortages of nurses and other health workers. We have burnout, we have emergency room crunches, we have bed shortages, and we have other serious problems. The problem is going to get worse before it gets better with this overheated economy. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How long has the 2006 workplace plan been on the minister's desk, and why has he not made that public?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I haven't made the workforce strategy public because it hasn't gone through the policy approval process that we have, where we undertake a careful review before our CPCs, caucus, and cabinet before we adopt a policy and before we implement the policy. I inherited a lot of work that was done by my predecessor and the good folks in the ministry. I am now in the process of collaborating with the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology and working on the budget and resourcing figures that we can apply to it. But in the process of doing that, of course, there is work being done on workforce strategy. The world doesn't stop as we develop a new plan, and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: You're going to have trouble with that, Dave. [interjections]

Mr. Martin: You're cutting off my time here.

Mr. Speaker, the problem is that we have a severe crisis now. This was supposed to have been done back in the spring of 2006. Is the minister saying that this report is so damaging to the government that he has to go through another process? This was supposed to be done in the spring of 2006. Why don't we have it now?

Mr. Hancock: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. Work is happening now. Nurses are being educated in our institutions. Doctors are being educated in our institutions. Personal care aides and LPNs are being educated in our institutions. People are out recruiting internationally for new workers to come. In many different ways we're enhancing. We just signed a deal with the doctors and hope for ratification shortly on that, which will help retain and improve. Lots of things are happening.

The strategy that's being developed, the workforce strategy, which is part of my mandate – and I work collaboratively with the other two ministers I mentioned – is in process. There are lots of good strategies in it in addition to what's already being done.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, Rome burns while Nero fiddles.

The minister is saying that all these things are happening. Is he

not recognizing that there is a crisis? All he has to do is go into the hospitals in both major cities, in Grande Prairie and others. Things are happening right now, and we still don't have a plan. He says that some things are going. This was supposed to be done in 2006. I'm asking the minister: why are we still struggling along without a plan?

Mr. Hancock: There appears to be a severe shortage of audiologists as well, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member didn't hear my answer. Work is progressing. The plan will be coming out shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Student Transportation

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgarians do not have enough local schools to meet their needs, and now their children can't even make it to the schools they have. A shortage of bus drivers has left hundreds of Calgary students out in the cold every day, and the situation is reportedly getting worse. To the Minister of Education: what direct actions has the minister taken to address the issue and get Calgary students to their classrooms safely and on time?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, no one is being left out in the cold, so let's get that clear. The issue with school bus drivers, whether it's rural or in Calgary or any other region of the province, is no different than the other workforce issues that we're facing today. It's a question of qualified people, enough people to drive buses. The other issue that we have to deal with when it comes to school bus drivers is that a lot of these positions are part-time, and as you well know, it's harder to get part-time folks than full-time.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that both the Catholic and public school boards in Calgary have requested that the minister conduct a review of how the province administers transportation grants, will the minister take up that challenge and do something about it?

Mr. Liepert: Well, currently we have a committee that is looking at all of the funding framework for education. It involves the school boards, including the Catholic and public school boards. I look forward to what recommendations they come forward with to put in place a funding framework that is probably more acceptable to those who receive the funds.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister admit that the current busing problem is made worse by the government's failure to build local schools in Calgary's new and growing communities?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've made no secret of the fact, since inheriting this portfolio, that one of my priorities is going to be to get schools built where children live. We're working on doing that because, quite honestly, children riding the bus for an hour is not enhancing their education. So we're going to work hard to get schools where children live, and it's going to include some alternative ways of financing those schools.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Barley Marketing

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was the last day for Alberta farmers to mail in their votes for the federal barley plebiscite. Through this plebiscite the federal government indicated that they were consulting western Canadian farmers on their views of how they want to market their barley in the future. I learned from my constituents that the Alberta government had placed advertisements in major rural newspapers, and then I heard these same ads on the radio. Considering that this was a consultation and not a binding vote, my question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Why is the Alberta government spending Alberta taxpayer dollars on advertising to support the market choice option when other provinces either are silent or gave both sides of the issue?

Mr. Groeneveld: Alberta's marketing choice support is not new, Mr. Speaker. This has been a long-standing position based on previous votes by farmers. We trust our farmers. Alberta farmers are entrepreneurs who want to compete in the world market. In the past 70 per cent of them have told us that they want choice. If even just 1 per cent wanted choice, they should not be denied that right solely based on the province that they happen to live in.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: as some of my constituents have so claimed, did Alberta's ads promote the elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board?

Mr. Groeneveld: No, Mr. Speaker, they do not. In fact, every single ad encourages people to vote a competitive wheat board. Under marketing choice the Canadian Wheat Board will truly be able to show its capabilities. We feel it is very important that barley producers can and should be able to continue to support marketing through the Wheat Board if they wish. This is where marketing choice is different than the two other boxes. It's about having the freedom to choose.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: of the nearly \$1 million spent on marketing choice over the last four years, can the Minister of Agriculture and Food tell me in this House if all these dollars were spent on advertising?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, as the member said, this money was spent over four years, and less than half of that money went into advertising, newsletters, and website development. Most of it was invested in research and studies of open-market systems like there are in other parts of the world. We're doing our homework, and our studies are publicly available on the website.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Private/Public Partnerships

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While an Alberta Liberal government would use the \$7 billion third-quarter surplus revenues to both save for the future and pay off desperate infrastructure needs, this Tory government chooses to go back into debt through P3

alternative financing arrangements for our schools, roads, and hospitals. These same Tories created the current infrastructure crisis through their aversion to debt. The current Premier when minister of infrastructure presided over that policy. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Could he explain to Albertans why we now need to go back into debt to build schools, hospitals, and roads even though we have a surplus of \$7 billion, \$6 billion in . . .

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, for people that don't know, we're not going back into debt. We've found a way to do some alternative financing, and I'll tell you that it is a way to save taxpayers money, get the job done sooner, and allow jobs to all Albertans. That's what we're doing: better government for Albertans.

Mr. Chase: Yeah, and the minister has 30 years to hide out in retirement.

My second question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Does last week's government commitment to cover publicly the cost of overruns at Calgary's much-delayed, much-needed southeast replacement hospital indicate that it has seen the Alberta Liberal light and will reject 30-year P3 debt financing for other projects?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm not so sure what the Alberta Liberal light means. I'm not sure there's a light on over there.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, we do plan on and it's been announced that we are funding the south Calgary hospital, and it will be built as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Obviously, the minister is dealing with a 25-watt bulb.

My last question is to the Minister of Education. Why is the minister suggesting that we saddle Alberta taxpayers with a 30-year debt to not only build P3 schools but maintain and operate them privately when we have the money to build them publicly and transparently now? Debt or no debt, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, as we discussed earlier, we need schools where kids live. Despite what this hon. member says, we do not have \$7 billion laying around to spend on schools. There have been a number of P3 and alternative financing projects around the world that have been successful, and there have been a few that have been unsuccessful. The research I did was that every time a P3 was unsuccessful, it was commenced by a Liberal or a socialist government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Dodds-Round Hill Coal Gasification Project

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Residents of my constituency have great concern about the environmental impacts of a large coal mine and coal gasification project being proposed by Sherritt south of Tofield and Ryley and to the northeast of Camrose. To the minister: how can residents be assured that the province will hear and address their environmental concerns before a decision on this project is made?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the hon. member as well as the residents that he refers to that the review application process that Alberta Environment has includes ample opportunity for the public to voice their concerns. Even before this project can be considered for approval, the company must conduct an environmental impact assessment and submit that to Alberta Environment. This impact will outline all of the potential environmental impacts from the project, and then Alberta Environment will consider the EIA, environmental impact assessment, as well as any statements of concerns from the public before making a decision on this project.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister: what processes can Alberta Environment commit to to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the water quality and quantity impacts of the proposed project?

2:20

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, all activities involving water require either a licence or approval from Alberta Environment. We only issue water licences and approvals when we are confident that the quantity and quality of water will not be impacted by the development. We also consider the impacts of the development on other licensed water users. So all potential water impacts will be outlined in the project's environmental impact assessment and will be reviewed by Alberta Environment employees.

Mr. Johnson: My last question is to the Minister of Energy. What role does Alberta's Energy and Utilities Board play in reviewing and approving this project?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly this government in place in Alberta today has a plan, and we're on track to build a stronger Alberta. The gasification of coal may just be one step ahead in our plan. The EUB will play a role with respect to permitting. This particular project is in the very early stages at this present time, and an application has yet to be filed. When it is filed, the EUB will take into consideration all of the assessments and the EIA that has been mentioned already by my colleague, and certainly a determination will be made at that point.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Temporary Foreign Workers

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Temporary foreign workers here in Alberta are victims of very weak labour laws that are not enforced by this government. This government has no interest in enforcing the laws for temporary foreign workers.

An Hon. Member: That's not true.

Mr. MacDonald: Of course it's true.

Earlier in question period today the minister of municipal affairs indicated that temporary foreign workers have the same rights as other workers in the province. My first question is to the hon. minister. Why, then, is Armando Garcia working on a corporate farm in eastern Alberta and getting no overtime pay after he puts in his 40 hours a week? This man has worked 189 hours overtime in three months and has not received one extra penny for his efforts. Why is that happening?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, as I said previously, this is an individual case, and I will forward that information to the minister in charge, and we will look into it.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why is this gentleman from Guadalajara, Mr. Armando Garcia, not being covered by WCB when he's working on that big corporate farm?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, it is no different than any other farm worker in Alberta. We will take it under advisement.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, this time to the minister of agriculture. This government has a hotline called the Alberta foreign worker hotline. It's a toll-free number within Alberta, which really could read 1-877-LETS-EXPLOIT. This web page is not providing information to farm workers who are on temporary work visas or any other worker on a temporary work visa on what rights they have in this province if they're not satisfied with the job conditions. Will this website start showing workers' rights and where they can go to have those rights enforced?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the foreign worker program and temporary foreign workers are federal issues that we work under with the other, so I'm sure that the answer to the question would come through them. However, we are very concerned, and we are very appreciative that we do have the temporary foreign worker program for agriculture. It's something that is greatly needed by agriculture, as it is in most of the rest of the country. We're more than happy to work through the federal program and also with the Employment, Immigration and Industry minister on it.

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

Deerfoot Trail Maintenance

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province has helped out the city of Calgary a great deal by taking over the maintenance of the Deerfoot Trail. Given the tremendous growth in Calgary, the Deerfoot Trail carries millions of vehicles a year. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. What maintenance has been done on the Deerfoot Trail lately?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, again, I'd like to reiterate that this government takes safety – and maintenance is part of that – very seriously. The Alberta government has invested over \$200 million to improve Deerfoot Trail since the government took it over in 2000. This year the government will invest a further \$17 million for various Deerfoot Trail projects. As for routine maintenance, our maintenance contractor does a very good job of removing snow, filling cracks, when you consider how much traffic is actually on that road at all times.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Reflecting questions from my constituents about the lighting outage for about a month on the Deerfoot Trail section now known as the Calf Robe Bridge overpass, my only supplemental question to the same minister: when will the lighting be fixed for Calgarians so that we can drive safely at night to that section of the Deerfoot Trail?

Mr. Ouellette: Again, Mr. Speaker, safety is a high priority for this government. The Alberta government has a separate maintenance contract with Enmax for overhead lighting on the Deerfoot Trail. In

January Enmax started a maintenance blitz and has been out on the road working when weather and traffic have permitted them to be there. So far, Enmax has replaced or repaired approximately 300 lights, and the contractor is committed to continuing the blitz for as long as it takes. We're also working on better co-ordination, to put all of our contracts together in one to make sure that everyone can be there when needed.

The Speaker: Before we move to the next part of the Routine, just so hon. members will be brought up to date, on day 2 of the session we had 84 questions and answers, on day 3 we had 88, yesterday we had 78, and today we had 100. That's not a record, by the way.

head: **Introduction of Bills**
(*reversion*)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Bill 19
Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 19, the Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

The legislation is intended to modify the current appeal process of the Court of Appeal in hearing appeals from boards or tribunals, and the bill includes minor amendments to eight provincial statutes overall. The amendments are designed to reduce delays and make better use of the court's time.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 19 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Bill 20
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table on behalf of the leader of the NDP opposition two documents. The first is the result of a corporate registries search that shows the voting shareholders of the Holy Cross Manor.

The second is a list of candidates for the PCAA executive committee elections from the PC Party's website.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today, as promised earlier,

to table media reports from the *Drumheller Mail* indicating that the number one story in '06 was the Red Deer River water diversion and quoting this: "During his election campaign, Ed Stelmach was quoted as saying the plan was 'ridiculous'."

Thank you.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter that I wrote to the now hon. Premier. This letter is dated October 19, 2006. I am asking how the government would plan to get us out of the economic mess caused by electricity deregulation, and I haven't received a response to this letter yet.

My second tabling is in regard to my questions earlier in question period, and it is a document from Public Accounts, year end of March 31, 2005, indicating that for Cliff Paulgaard, who is a principal owner of the corporate farm C.G. Paulgaard Farms Ltd., there was a grant in that year of \$63,400. That was the year 2005.

Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the employment contract of Armando Garcia, and there's a bill that the hospital wanted him to pay – go to a bank and buy a money order and pay it – and also the pay stubs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. I would call the President of the Treasury Board to move the estimates.

head: **Interim Supply Estimates 2007-08**
Offices of the Legislative Assembly and Government

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, I would like to move the interim supply estimates, and I would like to add to their introduction that these amounts have been derived from the estimates made by their departments and their spending requirements for this period. The amounts reflect the pattern of government spending being higher in the early months than in some of the later months of the year. This pattern occurs because some payments are due April 1 and July 1 for the first and second quarters, and many annual payments fall due April 1.

These payments result from the quarterly and annual spending commitments in all areas of government, responsibilities such as health, education, children's services, and support for seniors. In addition, some payments are related to the seasonal nature of certain types of activities such as construction and agriculture. Spending in many of these areas of government responsibility is subject to a broad range of cost pressures.

These interim supply estimates provide funding authorization only until the main government estimates are approved. Approval of interim supply estimates pending the release and approval of the budget is not unusual for government. This authorization is needed so that hospitals, schools, universities, and so on can continue to

function as usual. Consequently, these interim supply estimates cannot reveal the government's spending plans until all the budget documents are tabled. Those budget documents will include comprehensive budget information in the form of the government's fiscal and business plans, the ministry business plans, and the government estimates. These estimates will be fully debated when the budget documents are tabled.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the first speaker, having received no clarification on which order goes first, we will follow the same format as outlined by the Deputy Chair of Committees yesterday.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford first.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise in response to the request for interim supply from the President of the Treasury Board. My first thought upon hearing the president's comments was that I've heard that speech before, and indeed I have. I'm going to suspect it's probably a script that the government uses every year when they find themselves in a situation where we don't have a budget come the end of the current fiscal year. So you'll have to excuse me if my comments sound familiar as well because even though I don't have a script in front of me as the President of the Treasury Board did, I'm going to guess that I'm going to reiterate similar comments that I've made in the past whenever the government has come looking for interim supply.

It's probably the most frustrating exercise for a member of the opposition: to discuss interim supply. If I can draw a parallel, it would be like my 15-year-old daughter coming to me and saying: "Dad, I need a thousand dollars. Oh, and I'll tell you next week what I'm going to do with it." [interjection] The President of the Treasury Board just told me that his daughter does that. I've had that experience, and I'm going to guess several members have. Certainly many taxpayers in Alberta have had that experience. I'm going to suggest that for most of us, probably the vast, vast majority of us when that happens, the answer is either (a) "No way" or (b) "Not until you tell me exactly what you're going to do with it." So we've got a situation here where the government is now asking for nearly \$10 billion, and they're saying: "Don't worry about it. Trust us. We'll tell you in a month and a few days what we're going to do with it."

I know it's a *fait accompli*. I know it has to happen. I understand that there are certain requirements at the beginning of the year that make it mandatory to have a little more money than might be expected if you were to ration it out over the year. I understand all of those things. As I say, we've been here before. But I hope that the President of the Treasury Board and government members in general understand how frustrating an exercise it is for those of us on this side of the House when we're expected to approve nearly \$10 billion without anything more than a single line item in the document that they've presented and absolutely no explanation as to where that money might be used or what it might not be used for. So I just hope that everybody in this House will recognize the difficult position that this puts members of the opposition in when we are asked to have this debate today and tomorrow.

Now, the President of the Treasury Board did reference the fact that there are certain obligations that are seasonal and certain obligations that are front-end loaded, as it were. But I just note that three years ago we were in a similar situation, and Bill 24, which was at that time the interim supply act, asked for \$5.5 billion, and three years later we are asking for nearly double the amount. Although, as I say, I recognize some of these peculiarities that exist

in terms of front-end loading and seasonal expenditures, I don't believe that we've had a hundred per cent inflation in the last three years. So that would be a question. I'm wondering: if three years ago \$5.5 billion was sufficient for the government to get through until the time that a budget was passed, why is it that here in 2007 we're looking at nearly double the amount being requested by the government?

I'd also like to opine, I suppose, about the need for a long-term savings plan. I know that the President of the Treasury Board and the Finance minister have both talked about having a surplus plan or some sort of a surplus allocation plan in the budget that we're going to see on the 19th of April. That, as you will know, Mr. Chairman, isn't good enough for the Official Opposition.

We have argued and presented a bill in this House, which, unfortunately, not even one single Conservative member voted in favour of, that would have established a nonrenewable resource savings plan which would have seen 30 per cent of all revenues from nonrenewable resources put into savings. That, unfortunately, was not successful even in passing second reading in this House, which is really too bad because it would have been great to at least have had the debate. However, we have no idea from this whether or not that might actually be part of it, and in fact we don't even know if there's a surplus plan involved with this because, as the minister outlined, they're not able to give us anything more than a single line item on each of these points.

2:40

The new government has talked an awful lot about openness and transparency. This is not an idea that springs from the new Premier. In fact, this is an idea that the Official Opposition has been calling for for a long time: more openness and transparency in government. Mr. Chairman, I would submit to you that it's just one more in a long stream of great ideas that have been generated by the Official Opposition caucus that this government has chosen to adopt. And you know what? More power to them. If that is our role for the time being as we serve in opposition, to supply great policy initiatives to the government and have them adopt them, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

The sustainability fund, which the government is mandated to keep 2 and a half billion in and currently sits at somewhere in excess of \$6 billion, was actually the initiative of a former Leader of the Official Opposition, Dr. Ken Nicol from Lethbridge. Of course, once the government adopted it, it changed names from a stability fund to a sustainability fund. Nevertheless, it was an idea of the Official Opposition that the government saw merit in and chose to adopt. So, as I say, if openness and transparency is sort of one of the new buzzwords or one of the five planks of the new government, we're certainly going to hold their feet to the fire because it was something that we've been talking about for a long, long time.

Mr. Chairman, as I say, I've expressed a great deal of frustration with the fact that we don't have dollars tied to actual programs here. One of the things that concerns me – and I know my colleague from Lethbridge-East will speak to this later on, when she has the opportunity to come up – is whether or not there will be funding in this \$10 billion that we're debating today for the long-term care committee's recommendations. As we know, the government has put some money towards those recommendations: far, far short of the \$250 million that that panel called for. In the meantime the situation has become absolutely desperate in terms of long-term care and their needs, particularly as it revolves around the labour shortages and the difficulties that care facilities are having attracting workers but many, many other issues, many of which have been spoken about and, as I say, a number of which I know the Member for Lethbridge-East will reference later today.

Mr. Chairman, there was an awful lot of concern expressed in my constituency recently about the need for an overpass to be built at 23rd Avenue and Calgary Trail. I'm hopeful that there may actually be some money in this \$10 billion that would go to the city of Edmonton to help them get that done. We'll find out, I suppose, in five weeks or so whether or not that's the case.

This is a huge issue for not just the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford but, frankly, for anybody who comes into Edmonton on the Queen Elizabeth highway or anybody who's hoping to leave Edmonton or, for that matter, anybody who's even doing business or commuting, visiting family members, whatever the case may be in south Edmonton. The problems created right now, particularly at 23rd Avenue with the South Edmonton Common development and now the Century Place development that's taking place, are huge. I would hope that there may be some relief here for the city of Edmonton so that they could proceed with that very worthwhile and very much needed development.

Another issue that is of particular concern to the residents of Edmonton-Rutherford, Mr. Chairman, would be the extension of the LRT project to the Century Place development: again, the sooner the better. I know that right now there is funding to move that project forward, and I know that it is actually going to happen. But as an example, we had a situation here just recently where the parents, teachers, and students at both Harry Ainlay high school and Louis St. Laurent high school were hoping to have at the minimum an underpass or an overpass over 111th Street, if not an actual station put in at that location, to prevent serious accidents and injuries taking place, and that is not going to happen due to budgetary concerns.

Again, I would hope that there may be some money in here that would address that situation and perhaps allow for an extra station or a safe crossing for students and users of those schools at 111th Street, but I'm not sure. Whether or not I get an answer from the minister on that, I don't know, but again certainly that is something that the constituents of south Edmonton are hopeful of and would dearly love to see.

Now, there are a number of departments, Mr. Chairman, that I would like to point out in particular. I suppose that we'll start with the Legislative Assembly and an interim supply of \$19.8 million being asked for to carry on the operations of this Assembly. I'm going to guess that some of that might actually be to make sure that myself and my colleagues in the room today get paid after April 1, so that would be a good thing. I know that, like most Albertans, the members of this Assembly depend on their paycheques, so I'm not so sure that I would disagree with the idea that we support the Legislative Assembly. Whether or not \$20 million is required to get us through to mid-June or so, when the full budget will be passed, I don't know. Once again, other than to say expenses and equipment, there's no explanation as to what exactly that money might be used for.

I'm going to point out in particular the departments that I am the shadow minister for, and I'll allow my colleagues to then do the same for theirs: \$33 million for the Department of Finance, Mr. Chairman, again for expense and equipment/inventory purchases, with no explanation as to what that might be, and another \$15 million for nonbudgetary disbursements, an awful lot of money again being asked for without any real explanation as to why or how it might be used.

Probably even more important, I would think, are the requests for funding for Service Alberta and the Treasury Board. Service Alberta is looking for \$98 million for expense and equipment/inventory purchases, and Treasury Board \$6.4 million. The reason I say more important, Mr. Chairman, is because as the President of the Treasury

Board would acknowledge, these are new departments. Given that they're new departments, I think it would be fair to say that there's still some shakedown taking place in terms of what exactly each department is responsible for, the shuffling that has taken place back and forth in terms of who's responsible for what. We're asked to give in excess of a hundred million dollars to these two new departments, without any explanation at all as to how that money is being used.

We don't even know, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, how many full-time employees might be employed by each of those departments. We don't know exactly what programs and services they're funding out of this hundred million dollars that they're asking for in interim supply. As I say, because it's a brand new department, there's no history that we can look at. We can't look at that department and say: well, last year they spent – you know, I'll just pick a number – \$500 million, so it would be fair to give them \$100 million in interim supply. We can't do that because it's a brand new department.

So in particular I would look to the President of the Treasury Board for a little more explanation in terms of why Service Alberta needs \$98 million and exactly how that money might be spent over the next couple of months while we're waiting for a budget to be passed and, likewise, exactly how \$6.4 million is going to be used to fund the operations of the Treasury Board over the next couple of months. Again, Mr. Chairman, because we do not have any historical data to go by. We don't know how many employees are there, and we don't know what their plans might be in terms of running programs. I think that requires a little more detail than just the single line item that we're given here.

With those comments, I'm going to take my seat and allow others to ask some questions. I would hope that the President of the Treasury Board might be able to answer some of those for me today, and if not, I would hope that we can hear some sort of a response prior to being asked to vote on interim supply amounts tomorrow afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and President of the Treasury Board.

2:50

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. I don't think that it will come as a surprise to the hon. member that I think this process of interim supply needs to end, and I have to give a lot of credit to the House leaders and to our new Premier, who said: let's start setting a date for a budget to be brought in. So from that point of view, I absolutely agree. I think we use a lot of time in here – I agree – but I think the hon. member would understand why it has to be done in this way to preserve the integrity of the budget. You know, history sometimes gives us rules we live by that are necessary. The idea that this is bigger than normal: while I give the House leaders credit for our new change, I also have to point out that we could still be here in July if we want to debate that budget long enough. That's right, July, Dave. [interjections] I could have just been saying some other name. I didn't mean him.

Yes, the process needs to change. Bringing in a budget on February 22, having the full debate before this time will be absolutely light years ahead for all: for you, for us, for our departments. It means maybe moving up our work in the fall as we develop it, and that's fine. That's what we're paid to do. But pass that. To try and speculate what might be in the budget or what might not be wouldn't really be fair. As you can probably appreciate, there are very separate issues here with the Minister of Finance and the President

of the Treasury Board. The budget projection is solely the purview of the Minister of Finance, and we would not want to prejudge or even to speculate what might be in there from the department.

So I take the hon. member's comments, and we will have a broad discussion when the budget is brought down. I think his points around the process are right on.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I also thank the Treasury Board minister for his indication that things will improve. I look forward to those improvements. We saw an improvement today in the House. Through a more transparent, accountable procedure we were able to get through a hundred questions, so we're moving in the right direction. I appreciate the President of the Treasury Board indicating that things will get better.

We have to deal with what we currently have, though, and that's what I'll discuss. We all remember that we had barely a week in terms of a fall Legislature. It basically went into the tail end of August and, I believe, a little bit into September. Had we had a fall sitting, possibly there would have been greater preparation potential of transfer. We would all have been in the House, and this work could have been done.

As it was, with the retirement of our former Premier a leadership race was called. That leadership race took up a certain amount of time, and we're basically trying to catch up for that lost time. Normally the House would have sat around the 21st of February, or usually just after Family Day. We find ourselves continually playing catch-up. We won't hear what the actual budget figures are until April 19, and obviously we can't have the legislative process and Albertans come to a grinding halt because there is no money to cover their programs.

In terms of improvements that I would like to see made, I frequently get the idea that there are almost two blue books: one for the opposition members that is a very thin version and then another book of a different colour that the government has that actually provides the details behind the millions and billions of dollars that are being called for in interim supply. Again, I want to echo what the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out. We have one-line items, and we have no idea what constitutes billions of dollars of justification for a one-line item, and to debate or discuss or approve with any understanding or basis of knowledge is absolutely impossible.

Possibly at some point in the future – trust us – will be something through the joint policy committees, et cetera, that we're moving toward which will be easier, but we're still, unfortunately, stuck in that old circumstance where information is power, and without information you're, to a great degree, powerless.

To go through the budget, we have support to the Legislative Assembly, expense and equipment/inventory purchases of \$19,800,000. If I understand this correctly, this is to get us toward the middle of April, and then I gather that some of that money will be spent later on, and we'll get a little bit more qualification for it. Again, I'm not sure, and I'd look forward to the minister explaining to me where \$19 million goes between now and April 19 in support to the Legislative Assembly. For example, is that part of our constituency budget? All these questions I would appreciate having answered.

Office of the Auditor General: \$6,200,000 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases. Again, I very much value the office of the Auditor General, and I also feel very privileged to be on the Public Accounts Committee, to which the Auditor General reports on a weekly basis when the Legislature is sitting. Now, thanks to the

wonderful arrangements of our House leaders, we will be able to meet outside of the Legislature. Again thanks to our House leaders we will have a budget for research, and we will not just be restricted to having the ministers and their aides come before us, but we can look beyond, to a variety of health regions and school boards. We have almost unlimited possibilities as to who we can call before us to account. So I think that helping out the Auditor General is a great expense.

In Public Accounts this morning the Auditor General asked us to consider prior to next week if we would benefit from a double reporting. In other words, instead of the great large reporting process that we receive at the end of the year, he's indicating his willingness to provide us with two reports. I think that this is absolutely wonderful in terms of the accountability and that the Auditor General obviously needs that extra financial support, particularly if he's going to put out two annual reports instead of the current voluminous, large one, that is very inclusive and conclusive.

Now, we have the office of the Ombudsman receiving \$800,000. Again, the Ombudsman is a very busy person in this province. There are a number of complaints that are brought to the Ombudsman because of concerns over how they were treated, whether they received their AISH payments, whether the AISH payments were sufficient, whether a person on long-term disability was suddenly cut off and forced to go prematurely onto the Canada pension plan, whether a person has been mistreated; for example, if they were promised that their 15 or 14 and a half years of service for the federal government in the military would be guaranteed as part of their pensionable service and for their participation within the provincial government's auspices. That Ombudsman is a very, very busy individual, and this money, this \$800,000, is probably well spent.

The office of the Chief Electoral Officer is asking for an increase or a temporary holdover of \$2,100,000. Now, among the expense and equipment/inventory that the Chief Electoral Officer is purchasing, I would like to think that possibly it's cameras so that we could have photo identification for all voters who come up on voting day. Although they may be of a homeless nature, they can say: "Well, I'm at the Calgary Drop-In Centre," or "I'm at the Mustard Seed. This is who I am." Possibly they don't have the money to afford a vehicle, and therefore they're not likely to have a driver's licence. Potentially the office of the Chief Electoral Officer could use some of this \$2 million to ensure that every single Albertan has the opportunity, should they wish, to have secure photo identification, that will allow them to then participate fully without a doubt as to their identity during the election process.

3:00

This is something for the health minister – I'm very pleased to see his attendance today – to consider because the health card could be a secure card in terms of identification with a picture, and that would eliminate the production of numerous copies of health cards, which have been in circulation far beyond our population yet are used as a piece of identity. So this could very well be a direction that the Chief Electoral Officer might consider. We know in Calgary, for example, the problems we had with ward 10. One of our members opposite knows very much the difficulties. I won't name that individual out of respect.

The office of the Ethics Commissioner. Now, again, the Ethics Commissioner is a very busy man. I know that both the NDP opposition and the Liberal opposition keep him hopping in asking him to inquire as to the appointments of individuals onto numerous patronage-style committees, so the Ethics Commissioner is indeed a busy man. Whether it's the royalties task force, whether it's a

health board appointment, there are a lot of individuals whose ethical background and research and potential conflicts of interest need to be considered. If \$200,000 is sufficient for the Ethics Commissioner to carry out a full review of conflict of interest, then I don't have a whole lot of difficulty with that amount.

The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Now, here's an area that I worry about. If the Information and Privacy Commissioner is being granted \$1,600,000, then why do we opposition Liberals, opposition NDP, our independent, and our member of the Alliance have to pay prohibitive amounts in FOIP requests to get information that is readily available to government members?

When we're talking open and transparent, let's look at FOIP costs, that are similar to those of the federal government. FOIP has become a burial instrument. It doesn't protect the rights of individuals. It looks like potentially the government spent \$1,600,000 for a big shovel to bury information rather than making it available, so I question that particular expenditure, but again I would like to hear more detail.

So to this point the total expenditures that I have just related to you on six departments is up to \$30,700,000. Now we come to Advanced Education and Technology with the former minister here present. I know how hard he worked as the former minister of advanced education, and I very much appreciate the work that he did.

I might also indicate that without purchasing a Conservative membership, I supported and indicated to others my support for him as the potential new Conservative Premier. It didn't work out that way, but I am pleased to see that he arrived safe and sound back in a front-bench position because I do see him as a man of integrity. As I have mentioned before, I credit him along with our House leader and the hon. NDP House leader for coming up with a progressive change in Standing Orders and regulations.

However, within the advanced education \$728 million I would love to know how that breaks down. For example, what portion would Bow Valley College get? What portion would Mount Royal College get? How about the Alberta College of Art and Design, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, and, of course, the area that I represent proudly, and that is the University of Calgary?

Now, Harvey Weingarten, the president of the University of Calgary, felt the need to borrow 1 and a half billion dollars to expand the University of Calgary's campus and programs so that we could be a world-class institution. The expansion is proceeding at a rather slow pace, I must admit. I'm up at the university on a regular basis, and I've yet to see footings, for example, for the digital library, which is going to benefit all Alberta. But if the president of the University of Calgary had received some of this money that he has been requesting for some time, he possibly wouldn't have had to put the University of Calgary at the financial risk of borrowing 1 and a half billion dollars.

I'm sure that there are members – and I don't want to get into Lethbridge. I'll leave that to my confident and competent colleague from Lethbridge-East. I'm sure she'll have questions. But I cannot think of too many better investments of money than postsecondary, whether it's for trade training, whether it's for academic pursuits, whether it's just the general improvement and understanding, arts and humanities, culture. This money could potentially be extremely well spent, but I have no idea from this line item, that indicates that \$728,800,000 has been expended on equipment and inventory purchases and an additional \$27,900,000 has been spent on nonbudgetary disbursements. I consider myself an educated man, but I have no idea what nonbudgetary disbursement items might include.

Under Agriculture and Food, expense and equipment: \$205 million. Well, that's probably in line as an expense. Alberta's third most important industry in terms of the money that it returns to the province or that it brings in would be agriculture. In fact, I guess, agriculture and forestry are similar in importance. We know that their sort of economic produce pales in comparison to oil and gas, but their practices are considerably less impactful on our environment.

Now, hopefully in Agriculture and Food there is no more expenditure. There is no more money that is going to suggest that the Canadian Wheat Board should get out of the business. I know previously somewhere from the government expenditures that almost a million and a half dollars went to discourage our current system, a system that seems to be extremely well supported in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. If a free-vote opportunity was provided without having to have an identifying number at the end of your ballot, I think more Albertans would feel that the status quo is the way to go. And those few entrepreneurial types who want to make money at the other operators' expense: we would see them for what they were. The time they spent in jail: well, that's an indication. This government seems to want to do away with co-operatives, and that's what the Wheat Board in fact is.

3:10

Children's Services: \$311 million, expense and equipment. I can't think of a better area to expend money on than Children's Services. We have a new minister, and I appreciate the fact that she is quickly getting onto that job. I guess that maybe if I look at the \$11 million of the \$311 million, that's approximately how much, I believe, was given to child care service providers to increase accreditation, subsidize spaces. Again, because the minister is here, she can probably provide a little bit more detail on the money that was expended on Children's Services.

However, this province is the only province that doesn't provide funding for child care past age six. In other words, this government assumes that once a child is in the school system, if they're capable of being in the school system, automatically all of their care concerns are over. Well, as a schoolteacher of 34 years I want to point out that schools are more than babysitting services. While we do care for children within the facility, we also educate them. We also help them to develop concerns of citizenship. We work on their cultural and artistic abilities. We do more than care for them.

What is not happening in this province and what is necessary is that child care provisions, both private and public, are increased. I had a very interesting conversation with a lady by the name of Bev Smith. Bev Smith is an extremely strong advocate for stay-at-home parents.

I look forward to a second opportunity if such provides.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate an opportunity to speak on the interim supply estimates. I would like to focus my comments in regard to education specifically, and I do have a number of questions if the hon. minister would be so kind as to enlighten myself and whoever else might be interested.

These interim supply estimates in regard to education seem to represent somewhere between 20 and 25 per cent of the total operating budget for the ministry. I wanted to make particular note that the estimates have been allocated for what is said to be expenses and equipment/inventory purchases, and it seems to be quite a significant increase over last year's numbers.

Of course, these mostly represent one-off sorts of purchases for

the ministry for things like furnishings, display cabinets, and equipment such as lab equipment and whatnot. But, you know, my concern for this long-term expenditure and the whole issue of obsolescence and wear and tear on equipment is that I'm wondering if these are expenses rolled into the core operating budget of the ministry.

Again, I would ask if we could expect sustained and guaranteed funding in the long term for such expenses because what we've seen happen in the last 10 to 15 years in public education is that, especially with school-based funding, schools have had to make decisions about letting those things go for a longer period of time since they have to focus on making sure that there's a teacher in front of the class and some books; you know, very immediate basics to look after. Those other items such as furniture and whatnot, that have a longer obsolescence period, have been neglected, so what we're seeing now is lots and lots of schools with some long-term equipment requiring some financial assistance for replacement. Thus, I believe and I think schools would believe that that belongs in part of the regular budget. Put it back, basically, something that's been in short supply over this last long period of time, since at least 1993.

It is, in fact, a strategic priority of the Education ministry to address schools' infrastructure needs, so I would like to ask a number of questions in that regard as well. For one, how in fact can this government continue its commitment to address infrastructure when, for example, our own public school system here in Edmonton states a need for 13 new schools and the ministry is committed to eight? I see a basic discrepancy there that certainly cuts short Edmonton public's capacity to replace older schools and to build into new areas. Again, sort of a way by which shortages are being planned here, and it just creates more stress on other parts of the budget.

You know, given that the 2004-2005 budget identified approximately 530 schools nearing the end of their life cycle in this province, requiring an additional expenditure for renewal or for replacements, how much of this money will be needed to ensure that even minimum standards are maintained in schools throughout the province? I think we have still a real discrepancy between what the reality is for long-term infrastructure investment and what our budgetary allocations are here, and I would like to see that addressed in this coming budget, as would thousands of students and teachers and parents across the province.

I am starting to hear more substantively that the answer the minister is looking towards in this government is using public/private partnerships to meet this shortfall, and I guess, obviously, we have a number of serious concerns in regard to using the P3 model for schools and for public infrastructure construction in general. I think the issue was in fact brought up here today – and it's a very valid one – that we are simply deferring the cost and taking it off an annual budget when we use P3s, but we are really applying that cost over a much longer period of time, whatever the contract is for, and for at least a 10 to 30 per cent increase from what the public construction of any given structure would be, not to mention other subsidiary bills that come from a private/public partnership. You know, this is a basic financial problem, but I believe that, particularly when applied to public schools, it has specific education issues and problems as well that need to be addressed or considered very clearly when we're talking about using P3s to build schools.

For example, back in 1999 Calgary's the Hamptons elementary school was built using the P3 model. Six months after it was built, the school developed cracks in its tiles and drywall, roof leaks, faulty heating and mechanical systems, and \$120,000 was needed to bring the school up to an acceptable standard. So I ask whether or not that

is, in fact, value for our money, number one, and number two, is that a reasonable expectation for the safety and comfort and health of students and teachers working in a school like that built through the P3 model?

Since this risk management model is such a big issue within P3 projects, I ask: who is going to manage the risk to safety of our children and of workers in these P3 schools and take responsibility before we end up with a substandard school being built, as we saw with the Hamptons elementary school project P3 experiment? You know, once you commit to the bricks and mortar of however you happen to build something, a school in particular, and you find it coming up deficient, it causes a tremendous amount of instability in regard to the educational needs of students and a loss of public monies from school boards. I would venture to say that the risks outweigh the benefits by a long shot in regard to using the P3 model to build public schools in the province of Alberta.

3:20

Also in regard to the Education budget, then, I just wanted to address briefly the staff, specifically librarian, shortfall in the province of Alberta. The ministry has a business plan that states that it supports the healthy development of Alberta children and youth. Those are their priorities 6 through 9 in the business plan, yet once again I see that, in fact, the number of full-time equivalents, FTEs, for librarians has dropped from 81.7 FTEs to 12.1 FTEs in the last decade while high school counsellor FTEs have dropped from 99.1 FTEs to 43.8. I would beg to ask this question: how can we ensure, as it's sometimes put in this House and as I certainly would aspire to, the best education system in the world when critical components to our children's education and intellectual development are not just lagging but, in fact, dropping precipitously? I would ask what the minister would like to do to rectify this decade-long free fall in regard to staffing levels in the key areas of librarians and counsellors. I think that this is particularly noteworthy.

You know, in relation to this as well, although the government and the ministry specifically commissioned the Learning Commission to gather up a very interesting and worthwhile report, the key recommendation of the Learning Commission was to reduce the class size average across the province. In so many school divisions we're not seeing a drop in class sizes and student-teacher ratios, but in fact we're seeing increases, especially in the higher grades. There's a certain point where students' education quality drops significantly with the size of the class. I know from personal experience that certainly anything that exceeds 30 students per class has a genuine and immediate impact in lowering the capacity for the students to achieve, and this is a very common number that is used as a standard throughout high schools around the province.

You know, I think we have to take a hard look at these things. If we do in fact want to not just build but maintain a high-quality public education system over the long term, it really does live or die in the quality that we provide to the classroom on the ground level. While we do have lots to be proud of in terms of our public education system, there are several places where we must change and focus the way that we do things. The number one statistic, Mr. Chairman, that comes to my mind is in regard to high school completion rates.

We have an embarrassingly low high school completion rate in the province of Alberta. This doesn't bode well just for now but for our long-term future as well because, you know, that really limits the capacity for our students to become gainfully employed and independent, not just now but throughout their lives. These completion rates must increase. They must be brought up to at least the Canadian average level immediately to determine that we will

stay competitive and looking after the full needs of our public here in the province over the near and long-term future.

Finally, before I finish off, I just wanted to speak about the First Nation and Métis education programs here in the province of Alberta. Again, this is a focus area that I believe requires and deserves adequate support. You know, I would like to ask the question, if the minister can tell me, of how they are looking at comparing the high school completion rates against the rest of the population. Are we keeping accurate figures as to tracking where those numbers are, specifically, for First Nation and Métis students throughout the province of Alberta? I would like to ask as well: to what extent has the government implemented and acted upon the recommendations in the native education policy review by the Métis Nation of Alberta Association, given that that report was in fact requested by the Education ministry of Alberta in the first place? Finally, what does the minister intend to do in taking steps to ensure that aboriginal students are being better served in this province?

Those are my comments, Mr. Chairperson, in regard to the interim supply estimates specific to Education. I look forward to working with the minister to ensure that, in fact, we continue to build a strong public education system here in the province.

Thanks.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to make a couple of comments. Unfortunately, I can't be in the House tomorrow, so I'd like to respond to some of the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

One of the difficulties with interim supply is that you are talking about budget expenditures that are going to be coming in a budget that you can't talk about, so it does present some difficulties. However, as was mentioned by my colleague the President of the Treasury Board, the government has a responsibility to keep the trains running on time, and we could be somewhere into the month of late May or June before the budget is actually approved, so these funds are obviously required on an interim basis.

I guess there were some general comments at the outset relative to what kinds of expenditures are being asked for. Keep in mind that 97 per cent of the dollars in the Department of Education's budget flow through two school boards, so in reality there's nothing here that isn't along the lines of normal funding of school boards and other school facilities throughout the province.

The member talked a fair bit about infrastructure and about P3s. I guess it really comes down to a philosophical difference of opinion as to whether government should build, own, and operate every building in the province or whether this should be a joint effort between the private sector, the communities, and government.

It's amazing that every time members of the opposition talk about failed P3s, they bring up the situation of the Hamptons school in Calgary. If the hon. member would care to check with the Calgary public school board, the Hamptons school was not a P3 school that was constructed in conjunction with the Calgary public school board. I would suggest that if the hon. member wants to talk about P3s and wants to talk about Calgary and wants to talk about the Calgary public school board, why don't we talk about the Radisson school, which is a P3 model that has been incredibly successful?

All I can say relative to infrastructure funding going forward on alternative financing models is that the costs will be weighed at the outset, and we will be getting the best value for dollars for the taxpayer. In addition to that, there will be no schools constructed in this province through any kind of alternative financing arrangements

that don't meet the infrastructure standards that exist today for government-funded schools.

Just a couple of other quick comments. There are a couple of questions that the hon. member asked that I will take away and get more detailed answers for, but I think it's really important to touch on the comments made relative to the Learning Commission. The member was critical of the fact that we haven't met the class size initiative as recommended by the Learning Commission, and that simply is not the case. In fact, we have implemented the Learning Commission's recommendations on class sizes in a three-year period when it was recommended in five years. Now, there are some tweaks that need to take place. There are certain circumstances where due to the kinds of classes that particular schools are offering – there are some school boards that offer a higher percentage of classes in career and technology studies, as an example, that end up having smaller classes and thereby tend to impact the academic classes. But on average with very few exceptions we have met the class-size initiative as outlined by the Learning Commission.

3:30

The member also mentioned completion rates, and as he will know, that is one of the objectives that the Premier has outlined in my particular mandate letter. I agree: it's not acceptable. While the curve chart is moving in the right direction, it's not moving at a fast enough pace.

There were a couple of other questions that I would like to get some more detailed answers for, and I will supply them to the member.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm always amazed, as some of my other colleagues have pointed out in amazement, with a budgeting process that manages to have a fairy godmother that can come along and snap her fingers and give you approximately \$10 billion to be bailed out because you didn't do the budgeting process correctly in the first place. That is amazing. I really wish I had someone to help me with my books when I'm trying to balance my bank accounts.

One of the things that I'd like to make note of is the \$800,000 for the office of the Ombudsman. It's one of the least amounts that is being asked for. Now, because they need such a small amount, does that mean that they are better than any other department at doing their budgeting? To me this is one of the most important offices that we have. I know that through my office I have many, many constituents that by the time they come to me are at the end of their tether. They're really at the end of the road. They have tried everything possible to be able to have some problem or issue that they have with the government solved. My office has a very good rapport with the Ombudsman's office, and there have been many, many cases that have been settled satisfactorily. I believe that this is a very important office for the frustrated citizens of Alberta. So if they can do such a good job in their budgeting, I can't imagine why the rest of them can't.

Under the expenses part of Education I guess my question would be: how much of those expenses actually go for salaries? I'm really concerned about extra dollars that we're going to need to complete our west Lethbridge high school. Certainly, phases 1 and 2 are going to be okay, but by the time that building is built, it basically will be obsolete by the number of children that we need to put in it, and I think it's very important that that be noted.

The other question, just sort of a basic question for all of the different departments, is: where are the interim dollars being spent?

Are these catch-up dollars, or are these dollars that are actually being used to perhaps meet new programs? Or even better, are they actually being used to meet recommendations that would have come down from the Auditor General's report, in my case certainly within Seniors and Community Supports?

Seniors and Community Supports: \$567 million is not to be sneezed at. It's sort of a cache of cash that I'm hoping would be partly to increase staffing and, certainly, under the PDD to retain the staff that we already have. Staffing in the social services in this province is one of the main issues that exists in terms of not being able to deliver really good care and to be actually allowing other people to be able to come into the system that need it. I'm referring to persons with developmental disabilities, those going into long-term care, those requiring home care, the private delivery of care to those who live in lodges, enhanced lodges, supportive living, assisted living, and designated assisted living, all of which appear to have different designations and different sorts of definitions on how they apply with each different region.

There seems to also have been perhaps a misunderstanding about what it really means to be in care. Now, my definition is: anybody who is receiving any kind of care that is delivered. I don't really care who delivers it, as long as it's being paid out of the public purse. Often it's more medical care. It would be people who require home care: bandage changes, checking on people who have left hospital early. That is medical care that's being delivered. As I said, I don't really care who delivers it, but I would like to think that some of these dollars are going to go to increase the staffing in all of these various delivery systems that are working in our social systems in this province, not just in health care but, as I've mentioned, home care and certainly in child care.

The other thing that I would like to see is that some of these dollars would be used in terms of the staffing and that they actually are creating more full-time jobs so that people are not bouncing between two jobs. Actually, some people are working 16 hours and seven days a week. That's very, very unacceptable in terms of their safety and certainly the stress that they're under within their own lives. How can we expect them to look after others when they can't look after themselves? It had been mentioned that \$250 million will be required to meet the recommendations of the Auditor General. I know that we're just talking about interim right now, but I'm hoping that some of these dollars would at least be a part of that \$250 million. I think I've mentioned that I would look at raises for our present workers.

There were a couple of recommendations for regional health authorities, and one of them was talking about capital and operating funding decisions. One of the recommendations was that the funding decisions for regional health authorities be co-ordinated. I think that's a very good idea. We appear to have some kind of competition between our different regional health authorities, which I don't think is healthy. I think it creates division in the province. To follow up on the co-ordination of the funding, I'd also like to of course see standards that were provincially defined and, again, that they would also be co-ordinated through the regions in the province.

The other recommendation from the Auditor General under health is that the Department of Health and Wellness would retain the documentation and support for its global funding methodology decisions. I'm hoping that some of these dollars might go towards that. I think it's very, very important that the people of Alberta understand how some of these decisions are being made. Decisions are being made with the same dollars, and some are going towards acute care and long-term care, but some of it is going towards health and wellness.

I would really like to see exactly how they make the decisions on

health and wellness as opposed to looking after the seniors that are in long-term care or those that are in assisted living, anyone in continuing care, which isn't just seniors, of course. It could well be the 42-year-old with muscular dystrophy. It could be young men with brain injuries. It can be anybody that's in care. It isn't just seniors.

So with those comments, I will sit down and wait to hear from the minister of, I guess, either seniors or health, who may want to address what I've just brought up.

3:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've been really interested in the changes that we've been making to make this House a more meaningful House of discourse and debate. So I'd like a little bit of clarification, if I possibly could, possibly from our House leader, on exactly what it is that we're doing right here.

Now, my understanding is that what we're discussing here is interim supply and that these are numbers that are being approved to be spent until the budget is approved. That's my understanding. So in other words, when we look at these numbers, we should be looking at these numbers to see: is this more than should be spent, essentially, to the end of the year? Is it more than what should be spent? All of the budget, the actual numbers, how all these dollars are going to be spent actually gets approved through the budget process.

You know, the points have been very well made about how we ought to be bringing the budget in on time. I don't think there's anybody in this House who would disagree with that, and I'm really glad that we have now put ourselves in a position where we have to come out with the budget in time. Essentially, I believe that we should be looking at these numbers to see if any of them are out of line. In other words, should we not be spending less? I mean, are any of these numbers more than should be spent before the end of the year? They are all going to have to be vetted through the budget process that is coming.

I look at all these numbers, and, hey, there isn't anything in here which is out of line, you know, so the only questions that I actually have are about the nonbudgetary disbursements. I believe that those things should be outlined by the ministers, so I'd like to find out from the Advanced Education and Technology minister about the nonbudgetary disbursement of \$27,900,000, and on page 7 the nonbudgetary disbursement to Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture of \$2,500,000.

Now, for the rest of the numbers, it seems to me that the question that we're trying to answer here is: are any of them out of line? If there is one of them that's out of line . . .

An Hon. Member: How do you know?

Ms DeLong: Okay. What should be spent in a year? If you look at what the current budget was for last year, you should be able to get a pretty good idea of what should be spent in each of these departments.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, please direct your comments through the chair.

Ms DeLong: Thank you.

So in terms of clarification from the House leader, I'd very much

appreciate it if you could clarify whether or not all of these expenditures will still have to be vetted through the budgeting process.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the discussion and respond to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow. Of course, she's absolutely right: what we really are talking about is interim supply. We've had over the course of the years that I've been in this House a lot of discussion, a lot of rhetoric about whether or not budgets should be in on a timely basis and not require interim supply, but the other side of the equation is that our budget is probably the most important thing that we do. We ask Albertans for resources, and then we allocate those resources in a manner which is, hopefully, the most effective and efficient use of those resources to provide common good, and that bears scrutiny.

Of course, we have a scrutiny process that follows the budget, a Committee of Supply process that follows the budget that allows us to go into detail in each of the areas and do that scrutiny before voting supply. In fact, we've had some good discussions this year, which hopefully will come to some fruition now that we've tabled the House leaders' agreement, to be able to even expand that process and make it a very comprehensive ability, up to 75 hours as provided for in the agreement, not this year but in contemplation of future years' process, to actually have this Legislature hold the government to account for the money that it's asking from Albertans and how it's going to actually spend that money. That process takes time, shouldn't be rushed, should be done thoroughly.

Now, we did put in the House leaders' agreement that the budget would come down on a fixed date, basically the second week of the House. Traditionally our Legislature has met starting in February. I think it may have started in January some years. But to bring the budget in as early as possible in the session so that you can deal with budget prior to the beginning of the fiscal year is a prudent thing to do. With the House leaders' agreement this year, in terms of putting that together, one of the objectives that I had as House leader was to deal with that. Actually, that's one of the recommendations of the Parliamentary Association, that budgets should be in prior to the beginning of the fiscal year so that they can have a good analysis prior to the end of the fiscal year. That's something we all aim for, but that's not always doable, so the process of interim supply has been available for a long time to provide for supply so that bills can be paid, so that the staff of government working for the people of Alberta can be paid, so that the operation of government goes on.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

We know that there is going to be some supply. The question is: are we using the supply in the right place? So the process of interim supply really, in my humble opinion, should be a very straightforward and almost cursory process. You know, we could go through the numbers and ask whether the Legislative Assembly needs \$19.8 million before the end of June or whether Health and Wellness needs \$3.7 billion before the end of June, but there's no real worthwhile analysis that goes into those numbers until the budget is actually tabled and you can actually go through the program spending and say: are we doing the things that we ought to be doing? Are we achieving the outcomes that we ought to be achieving? Is the money being placed in the right place? So as the Member for Lethbridge-East was suggesting, it's not sort of a fairy godmother or your

wildest dreams come true, that somebody will write you a cheque before you've justified the value for it, not at all.

We all know – at least I assume we all know – that the hospitals remain open, that the schools remain open, that the people who work for the Department of Environment will continue to work for the Department of Environment, that those in Sustainable Resource Development will continue to be in Sustainable Resource Development. Most of them will be there, and that process will continue. This ship of state, this governance process continues, and it's necessary to continue to make the payments and to continue to pay the people. That's what interim supply is.

As the Member for Lethbridge-East is talking about her dreams, in my wildest dreams this would be a fairly perfunctory process. We accord it two days in Committee of Supply because it's \$10 billion, but really it would be great to have an understanding among all parties – and we may have it; I don't remember whether we actually got it in the agreement or not; I'll have to go back and check – that if in fact the budget is tabled in the second week of February and the process of examining the budget for 75 hours takes us past March 31, we should just adjourn Committee of Supply for one day and pass the interim appropriation bill in one day so that we can continue to pay the bills and then get on with the intense scrutiny of the budget that should happen in Committee of Supply. So in my wildest dreams everybody would sit down right now and we'd vote this and get on with continuing to debate the Speech from the Throne, get on with some of the 20 bills that are now on the table with the House, some of the other government business that can happen. That would be the prudent way to deal with this.

I hope that's answered your questions comprehensively.

3:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the minister for somewhat of an explanation there. Taxpayers – and I consider myself a taxpayer as well as a parliamentarian as I'm here – are supposed to be able to ask those particular questions. We're talking about just being able to get us to the next projected budget. We've got Education, just looking at an example here: \$1.2 billion. That's huge money. We realize the day-to-day operations of the government have to continue to function. We can't run out of money, so we're just going to go on the interim. But the questions in particular instances are one line for expense and equipment/inventory purchases.

Well, again, this is what you were talking about: dreams or fairy tales – if there were a little more specifics there. I know that's going to come when the budget comes out, but in the meantime trust us on blind faith that we're putting the money in the appropriate areas, saying that it's going to be spent properly, and we'll have our ability and our chance to debate that when the time comes in the next 30 days. That's fair and fine, but go to your home life and ask that. Someone comes to you – a neighbour, your spouse, or even your kids – and says: "You know what? I need \$3,000. Trust me, I'll tell you what it's about in about a month." Are you going to be so willing to hand over \$3,000? We're talking \$10 billion here.

An Hon. Member: Take it out of their allowance.

Mr. Bonko: Take it out of their next allowance. That's right, yes. But in this case that's a large allowance. We're talking \$10 billion. Like I said, most people can't fathom that amount. We're talking about getting us through the next month. The overall budget I believe is about \$30 billion, so we're already asking for one-third of

it here at this point in time to get us through the next bit. Are we borrowing in advance of it, or is the money already spent and we're going to pay it back later? I don't know. But these are some of the questions that people could ask us.

I'm hoping that some of the monies that are to be allocated or directed would address some of the specifics that were mentioned. I mean, home care. I have a number of seniors in my particular area, and home care is, in fact, a top priority as well as housing. But for home care, just to be able to find space, to be able to find qualified people to be there, not just month-to-month but almost to guarantee it for a year because the quality does slip when you have a different person trying to learn the ropes.

We're talking about people in care, and I don't care how you describe "in care." When you're in there and someone else is looking after you, you're in care. Let's not mince words about it. We already know and can exactly describe what home care and in care mean. These are our most vulnerable people. Whether they be seniors or assisted living or completely dependent upon the aides to be able to bring them their meals and their pills, to be able to do everything for them: that's in care.

That area in itself is slumping because the industry, the occupation doesn't pay enough. It's very appreciated work. I know from when my grandparents were in there, that people were taking care of them, but there are not enough people that do take that and don't take the pay over it. They have to be compensated paywise because goodwill doesn't put food on the table and pay the rent. It's the pay. Some people do it because they enjoy working with seniors. They enjoy being in there, and they're very compassionate people. My hat is off to those types of people that do it day in and day out. In some cases it is a depressing place to be working.

Seniors' homes are another one. There are not a lot of younger people going in. It's sometimes described as a nowhere job because that's as good as it gets: serving and waiting and watching. We need to be able to pay people properly for that and at least, you know, bring the homes up to standard because when you walk into some of them, they look bloody awful. They really, really do. They look terrible. It's depressing in there: the lighting, the basements, even just the care. Even last year we were talking about people only being bathed once a week. That's disgraceful.

Let's go on to schooling, which seems to be a big topic. We're not even going to talk about the strike which is going on; I think it's day 18 or day 19. We talk about P3s to meet the inventory that's growing out there. I know that school boards would jump at the chance in some cases to take a P3 over no school at all. I know they'd be forced to take a P3 because their constituents would go absolutely ballistic if they had an opportunity to put a school in an area where kids are normally being bussed an hour and a half to two hours. Instead of being bussed, they could in fact walk to school. After 20 years of bussing you're left with absolutely nothing. We talk about the environment: it's pollution in the environment. But if we take the amount of money that we pay for bussing, put it into the school, we can maybe justify it. Could we justify it through a P3? I don't think so. But, again, as an elected board, how do you have that opportunity to discuss that? It's a real tough balancing act, especially when you're elected on that particular piece and are coming up to elections right away.

Schools and municipalities. It all sounds great. They all want the same thing. They want the infrastructure, but they don't want to pay for years and years, 30 years, in fact, to pay it off. They'd like to be able to manage it. I mean, we talk about us being the richest province, the hub, the engine, the oil that drives the economy not only in Alberta but in all of Canada, and we're talking about P3s, borrowing so that we can pay off other things later. You've got to kind of wonder about that. I think that if anyone had a clear

conscience on that, they'd want to pay it off as we go along. It would be nice if we could do that and then continue to go along knowing that we don't owe a bill at the end of the day for that particular piece.

Like I said, schooling is going to continue to be a tough one. We've got negotiations coming up. There are going to be more and more pressures on school boards to be able to meet the class size initiative and some of that. We talked about the Learning Commission. We've got a huge piece that we're going to be faced with.

Environment is another one. I mean, we've got \$40,600,000. Environment, in fact, looks like almost one of the smaller pieces. We've got huge, huge requests on environment. I don't know how we're going to be able to meet all the demand, the public backlash that we've got when we don't, as it looks here, put nearly enough money into it. The environment is, you know, probably one of the more precious things that we're going to be talking about – the land and the water and the air – over the next four to five years till we get our act together, finally, on it.

These are just a couple of specifics that I wanted to talk about. We've got, like I said, \$10 billion, and I'm hoping that in fact the budget does reflect what the ministers as well as the MLAs as well as the Premier have heard over the course of the last year from the time that the last budget was tabled. In my day-to-day discussions and my travels out in the rural areas and the towns and the municipalities we certainly hear a lot – and I'm sure you hear a lot – but quite often I don't hear a number of the government members speaking up on some of the specifics that they hear. They may do it inside their own caucus, but right here at the table I don't hear it nearly enough. That's what I think constituents want to hear: people standing up regardless of what side of the House you're on, to know that you're talking for Albertans. When Albertans see a request for money in a one-line item, they become suspicious.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I very much appreciate the Committee of Supply and the opportunities to ask questions for which, hopefully, answers can be provided, questions such as: how much debt – P3, private, for-profit debt – is the Minister of Education willing to load onto the backs of Alberta taxpayers, or how deep does the minister of infrastructure believe Albertans' pockets are, who will be forced to pay for the 30-year P3 mortgage debt that he's proposing? These are extremely important questions, and taxpayers are going to be asking them. Possibly we should be having the opportunities at the next election for this question to be asked of the taxpayers directly: do you or do you not favour going back into debt?

When it comes to education, my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Decore has a professional background as a former trustee. He knows that of which he speaks. Having myself been a teacher for 34 years, 21 in the Calgary-Varsity constituency that I represent, I believe my concerns are validated based on my past experience.

I notice that \$1,200,000,000 has been set aside for education. I don't know for what period that money is allocated. I do know that in Calgary, with regard to the bussing that's been brought up lately, children of the Calgary separate and Calgary public boards spend 100,000 kilometres per day on school buses. This is not healthy for the children. It's not healthy for the environment. Yet with the model that we currently have in terms of the floor utilization space, this government forces school boards to close community schools, which does not permit the neighbourhoods to rejuvenate and, in fact, through school closures forces more kids onto the buses.

4:00

So not only are inner-city schools being closed, such as my experience at my first school, Jerry Potts, but the children from Jerry Potts and the Calgary Varsity Acres school now have to be transported across Shaganappi Trail, a very dangerous road, to go to Marion Carson. Instead of eliminating the busing problem, we're compounding it. I'm hoping that at some point this government will realize that instead of spending money on gasoline and buses, building schools is important.

With regard to Environment, \$40,600,000. I welcome an increased expenditure on the Ministry of Environment because right now it's expected to do a yeoman's job, which it's incapable of doing because its budget is barely a half a per cent of general revenue. Hopefully some of this \$40 million that's being spent in the next little while will go to mapping aquifers. Unless you know what you've got, how can you protect it?

With regard to Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture barely 4 per cent of Alberta's land is set aside for parks and protected areas, and that "protected areas" needs to come with quotation marks. Look at the intrusion into the Rumsey natural area. Look at what's happening in Medicine Hat on the army base in terms of the failure to reclaim the land after so much drilling. There are so many concerns.

Municipal Affairs and Housing. My esteemed colleague from Calgary-Currie this afternoon asked in question period whether there was any interim process or help for renters, quite a number of them being fixed-income seniors, whose rents are doubling, tripling, whether it's a 41 per cent increase at the Holy Cross Manor, whether it's a 400 per cent increase in the case of people living in apartments in Calgary that recently got that announcement. If \$234 million is going toward assisting those people with some form of rent subsidy, especially, as I say, the fixed-income seniors or those on AISH, who are not supposed to be spending more than 30 per cent of their income on shelter – the reality is, of course, that they're spending considerably more – if any of this money is going to develop programs that are going to help them to pay their rent and not find themselves out on the street and adding to our ever-growing number of homeless individuals, then I would suggest that that money could probably be very well spent.

With regard to parks and protected areas, any investment in parks and protected areas that deals with the crumbling infrastructure that parks are currently experiencing, any expenditure on parks that takes it past the 4 per cent level – for example, the idea of using that money to establish the Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp wilderness park of approximately 1,400 square kilometres – would be a wonderful expenditure that I and many recreational enthusiasts would very much support.

Again, we've got this one line item we do not know anything about under Sustainable Resource Development, \$172,600,000. For what? Hopefully, as with the parks and protected areas, that's going to be the hiring of more resource people to monitor what is happening in sustainable resources. Maybe they'll finally have somebody sitting in a truck by Cataract Creek park monitoring the logging trucks that are not supposed to be travelling down the road at the same time as campers are trying to access that same road. That would be a terrific expenditure; likewise, having conservation officers who didn't have to patrol an area of close to 200 square kilometres by themselves at all hours of the day and night so that they could actually get into the campgrounds and educate the campers on the natural beauty of the area. That would be money well spent.

Realizing that there a number of individuals who wish to work on

their Alberta throne speeches and have an opportunity to present, I would call for the question at this point.

The Chair: Are there any others that wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to just add a little bit to my comments from earlier this afternoon in terms of the debate on interim supply and, in particular, two points that I would like to make. I was just having a really friendly conversation with the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation about my dream of promoting a high-speed rail link between Edmonton and Calgary.

Members of the House might remember that last year there was a motion from an opposition member which would have seen the Assembly urging the government to investigate and develop a full electric, high-speed rail link between Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary. Unfortunately, that motion was voted down by this Assembly, but in reviewing the *Hansard* from the debate that evening, Mr. Chairman, there was tremendous support from all members of the House to the idea of at least securing a greenfield right-of-way for future development of that train. I know, based on the conversation that we had earlier this afternoon with the President of the Treasury Board – and others have commented as well – that we're not going to see details of the dollars that are being asked for today until a budget is announced on the 19th of April.

I would implore the members opposite, the government and particularly cabinet, to look very seriously at allocating money for the securing of a greenfield right-of-way for that high-speed train between Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary as an initial step toward the eventual development of that train.

The other thing that I did want to touch on, Mr. Chairman, was the unfunded teachers' pension liability. I was reviewing *Hansard* and the debate that took place yesterday on supplementary supply estimates, and I noted that the government has put \$40 million toward paying the government's portion of the unfunded liability for the management employees' pension plan. Of course, I am supportive of any effort to pay down those unfunded liabilities on all of the plans for which there are unfunded liabilities because I do believe that it will ultimately result in a better deal for the taxpayers if we have money to pay down those unfunded liabilities.

Today we should be doing that rather than paying them out over a number of years, but of course, Mr. Chairman – I'm sure you can guess where this is going – the teachers' unfunded pension liability, in particular, is sitting at nearly \$7 billion as we speak today and, as has been referenced in this House many times, will cost Alberta taxpayers somewhere in the order of \$45 billion over the lifespan of the agreement to pay it down. It is, quite frankly, just not acceptable, given the current economic reality, that we would expose Alberta taxpayers to those sorts of payments over 50-some years.

It's so bad, in fact, Mr. Chairman, that a young person born today who becomes a schoolteacher in 22 years will pay for that agreement for their entire working career as a teacher. That's how bad an agreement that is. I understand that when it was crafted in 1992, given the economic reality at that time, it was considered to be a fair agreement for government, teachers, and taxpayers, but everybody in this House will recognize that things have changed a lot since 1992.

4:10

We're certainly in a much different economic reality today than we were in in 1992. As a result I think it's time that we looked very seriously from a fiscal responsibility point of view at paying down

a portion of that unfunded liability for the teachers' pension plan. So my plea, as well, would be to the cabinet members and, particularly, the Finance minister as he's drafting his budget and to the Education minister to make sure that there is some redress for that pension plan in the upcoming budget and whether or not a portion of the money that's being requested today for the Education department is going to cover that or not. We don't know. It's looking like \$1.2 billion is in the interim supply. Whether or not any of that is going to go towards the unfunded teachers' pension liability, we don't know, but it is my hope that, as I said, from a fiscal responsibility point of view there will be some effort made to address that situation, as there was yesterday for the management employees' pension plan.

Mr. Chairman, with those comments I'd be happy to hear a response from either the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation in regard to securing the right-of-way for a high-speed train between Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary or from the Education or Finance ministers in terms of perhaps having some relief for the unfunded portion of the teachers' pension liability.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are there others?

Mr. Martin: Mr. Chairman, the interim supply bill will have the same debate probably later dealing with the budget. But I want to say – we can't tell a lot about the budget from the interim supply – that if this is not a bold budget, as I said earlier on in question period, things are in many areas going to get worse before they are going to get better.

As people are aware – and I'm thankful to the government – there's an all-party task force on housing. Obviously I can't predict where that's going to go because we'll be working on it again tomorrow. But the stories that we heard out there – and it doesn't matter. What surprised me is that I knew of the problems, you know, dealing with rising rents and the homeless in Edmonton and Calgary, and you heard about it in Fort McMurray and you heard about it in Grande Prairie. What I found is that it's pretty well true throughout the whole province that there are virtually no vacancy rates anywhere in this particular province.

Now, it's one thing to sort of brag about growth – I call it economy on steroids – but if you're going to push the development as fast as we have in terms of the budgeting with the interim supplies here, if you're going to keep pushing this development as fast as we are, then you can't do it on the cheap. There has to be the backup, Mr. Chairman, for the needed social and physical infrastructure, and we can't keep up. I mean, when we do something here, as the minister of health did with the doctors yesterday, then the problem is going to be more severe even when you put that amount of money in at that particular time.

It doesn't matter what we're talking about: infrastructure, roads, health care, housing, education, you name it. One of the stories that we heard very dramatically from this task force, Mr. Chairman, and the public hearings was the people that are on fixed incomes, the desperation that they're facing. You know, their rents are going up, and certainly when you're on AISH or Alberta Works or the rest of it, it's not going up.

We have a whole new group of homeless out there: people that actually have jobs and families. Not that we shouldn't have been concerned about the permanent homeless out there before – we have to do something about them – but we have a whole new group out there. We estimate there are 10,000 people in this province that are homeless, and we're saying that we're not going to put the brakes to any future development. Well, the Alberta advantage is becoming a major disadvantage for most Albertans. Unless you're in the oil

industry or have some high paying job, it's becoming very difficult.

The interim supply, Mr. Chairman, will get us through to the budget, which I think is on the 19th of April, if I'm correct about that. But I will be really looking at this budget to see if it matches the difficulties that Albertans are facing right now. The interim supply bill obviously gives us some direction but not really a real idea about the serious problems that are facing Albertans. I suggest to you that if we don't begin in this budget year, starting with this interim supply, to deal with the very, very serious issues that are occurring, then we will have failed many Albertans.

I know what we were told with the housing task force, Mr. Chairman. We were told that there are great expectations of us to present a bold report. We'll see where that goes. Obviously we don't know at this point. I would also say that there are bold expectations on this government to do something in a very serious manner to deal with these problems. They'll say: okay, the interim supply will get us through till after the 19th, and we'll debate that particular bill. But if that budget doesn't recognize the very serious situation that we're facing in this province, I'd suggest that there are going to be a lot of angry people out there, and we better recognize that that's the case. So I thought that while we had a few minutes, I could begin to set the stage for the needed debate that has to be held in this Assembly. We'll get through the interim supply, and we'll look for the real budget and the real debate after that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing none, I would call on the Government House Leader to move that the committee now rise and report progress.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the Committee of Supply rise and report progress and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2007-2008 interim supply estimates, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Ducharme moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 13: Ms Blakeman]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

4:20

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured and privileged to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne. It was, as always, wonderful to have our Lieutenant Governor in this Assembly last Wednesday to read the throne speech. I always admire the dignity and humour that he brings to every event.

Before I address the throne speech, I would like to first congratulate our new Premier and sincerely thank him for all the hard work he is doing on behalf of all Albertans. I know that the residents of Drayton Valley-Calmar are very pleased with our new Premier, and we are blessed to have a man of his character and vision, a decent, honest, humble, and wise man, leading our province in these prosperous but challenging times.

Alberta's new Premier's character and vision are reflected in the Speech from the Throne. It comes as no surprise that a man of vision has offered a visionary throne speech. Mr. Speaker, there is too much at stake at present and in the future for us to rest on our laurels now, enjoying our prosperity. That is why vision is essential. Only by seeing where we can go will we be able to enact the plan that will take us there.

We are fortunate to enjoy so much prosperity in Alberta that it is easy to be blinded by it. Sometimes we forget just how fortunate we are, but we need only ask one of the immigrants who arrive in our province every day why they have come to Alberta. "Because it's prosperous," they will say. "I want the opportunity to make my dreams come true, and I want my children to make their even bigger dreams come true too."

The vision, then, is clear: for Alberta to continue to prosper, offering a higher standard of living and greater opportunities for all of us. We must maximize our prosperity by offering a clean environment, a safe place to live in a vibrant community, good health care that is there when we need it, and world-class schools for our children. These are just a few of the ways our government can turn our current prosperity into further opportunity and even further prosperity.

I am pleased to say that the five priorities set out by our new Premier and this government are exactly the plan that Alberta needs to make this happen. Many school teachers have imparted to their students the wisdom that if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Mr. Speaker, this government is not going to fail. With this Speech from the Throne our Premier has laid out exactly what we want to achieve and how we are going to achieve it.

This Speech from the Throne is about good government at the most fundamental level. Good government is what Albertans demand because it is exactly what Albertans need. The many services that Albertans enjoy will operate efficiently and productively only if the government that oversees them operates efficiently and productively.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot tell you how pleased I was to hear the Speech from the Throne emphasize transparency, openness, and accountability not just as a priority but as the number one priority. Albertans work very hard to make an honest living, and now their government is renewing its commitment to do the same. By doing all that we can to ensure that taxpayers' money is well spent and that the government operates with the highest levels of integrity, we in turn ensure that the best possible decisions are made. Maximizing our prosperity requires, first and foremost, a government that citizens respect and trust.

I'm also pleased that in the midst of our current prosperity the government is taking a hard-nosed, pragmatic look at the difficulties

which that prosperity can cause. Rapid economic growth has done wonders for our province, Mr. Speaker, but we must take decisive action to manage the pressures of this growth. In fact, I think that's our number one priority. I know that transparency and openness and honesty is what we are focusing on, but probably the largest portion would be managing the growth.

Well before the Speech from the Throne this new government established the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force to study ways that homelessness and unaffordable housing can be eradicated. It's only a matter of days before this task force makes its eagerly awaited report. We will address this issue in the same way that we are addressing every issue: with initiative, with resolve, with innovative ideas, and especially with a drive to do what is right for all Albertans. Mr. Speaker, Drayton Valley alone has a list of over 80 families looking for affordable housing solutions. I believe that this new Premier and this government will help to accomplish this goal.

The Speech from the Throne has also committed this new government to improving how our province's labour needs are met. Whether you're an entrepreneur in need of good employees, a factory owner in need of skilled people, or a software maker looking for the talent to produce the next big thing, our government will do everything it can to make sure you have the people you need to grow your business.

Now, obviously this is welcome news to the constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar, where you'll see help wanted signs everywhere, Mr. Speaker. But having the workers we need is only one part of our strategy to manage growth pressures. We must ensure that those workers can get to their jobs on efficient, safe, well-maintained roads, that their children can learn in clean, welcoming, and modern schools and universities, and that every Albertan has access to the best health care possible in world-class hospitals. Doing this while our province undergoes such growth is a task not to be taken lightly. This government is clearly up to the task of addressing our infrastructure needs while getting the most value possible from each and every tax dollar.

The residents of Drayton Valley-Calmar look forward to someday receiving the good news that a new highway 22 bridge over the North Saskatchewan River will be built. I hope that the minister of infrastructure is listening; I'm sure he is. Likewise, the families of Thorsby and area anticipate the funding for their new elementary school. These along with the need for top-up funding for H.W. Pickup and Holy Trinity Academy in Drayton Valley are just a few of the growth pressures that we hope to meet during this mandate.

Mr. Speaker, there is one issue that has received a remarkable amount of public attention recently. That issue is, of course, climate change. Well, I'm proud to have been part of a government, this government, that led the way in addressing this issue. Back in 2004, before any other government in Canada had acted, this government passed legislation with a greenhouse gas emissions action plan. That action plan is an excellent start, one that we will continue to implement and which we will build on this fall with a new plan. The Speech from the Throne commits the government to continuing our record of leadership on this issue. I look forward to a productive and lively discussion between citizens, business, and government on how we can do more to reduce the intensity of our greenhouse gas emissions.

In a similar way, since 2003 we've had North America's most comprehensive water management plan; that is, the Water for Life strategy. Now, like our climate change action plan, it has served Albertans well, preserving our natural spaces while enabling unprecedented economic growth. As the Lieutenant Governor noted in his speech last Wednesday, this government will consult Alber-

tans on how we can improve this strategy and prepare recommendations for the end of the year. By being proactive, by anticipating demands, and by ensuring that our plans measure up to Albertans' expectations, our natural spaces and our economy will continue to prosper.

Much of the know-how that makes our Water for Life strategy and our climate change action plan possible comes from our postsecondary education system. By ensuring that our universities, colleges, and technical institutes all have the resources they need to deliver world-class instruction, we can build on our record of environmental leadership. The development of the oil sands that is a big part of our current prosperity would not have been possible had the government of Alberta not had the foresight to invest in Alberta's scientists and engineers. Today further investment will help us develop more efficient processes that result in more energy at cheaper prices and with fewer environmental effects, truly a win-win for everyone.

We can also build on our record of leadership in many other kinds of innovation. From medical research that has positively affected millions of lives world-wide to the development of state of the art nanotechnology that has the potential to help millions more, our innovations are helping to build the value-added, diversified, export-driven economy that the future demands. Through the Campus Alberta approach we ensure that every Albertan has the opportunity to pursue their education no matter where they are or what they wish to study. Making education available to everyone is just another one of the ways that the government of Alberta is improving Albertans' quality of life.

Underlying our postsecondary system is our K to 12 education system, which is preparing our children to be tomorrow's citizens. Countless tests and surveys have shown what Albertans have known for a long time: a person would have to travel far and wide to find a school system as good as ours. Our students boast some of the best scores in the world in reading, science, and problem solving. As a former school trustee, Mr. Speaker, I support the government's approach of working with every stakeholder – teachers, parents, students, and administrators – to make our schools even better.

4:30

While our schools are essential parts of our communities, there is much more that can be done to build our province. Albertans are famous for their hard work, and we like to work hard even when we're not at work. What am I talking about? Well, volunteers. Volunteers contribute thousands of hours and thousands of dollars every year to help their fellow citizens. In my time as senior pastor of the Faith Evangelical Covenant Church in Breton, Alberta, I witnessed hundreds of simple acts of kindness that made all the difference in someone's life.

Thus, I was ecstatic that the Speech from the Throne promises the creation of a community spirit program for charitable giving. This program will support increases for private charitable donations through tax credits and offer matching grants to eligible donations to Alberta charities. This is an excellent way to turn the prosperity of individual Albertans into more opportunities for everyone. By offering these incentives for charitable donations, not only can we encourage more donations in the first place, but we can multiply the beneficial effects these donations will have.

A prosperous society, Mr. Speaker, must be a peaceful society. To have opportunity means nothing when the fruits of that opportunity might disappear unjustly. By setting as a priority the provision of safe and secure communities, the government of Alberta has reaffirmed that every person be able to live a life of dignity and respect, free from fear and crime. My constituency, like many others in rural Alberta, needs more RCMP. We need more special

constables to patrol our communities and to catch the bad guys. We must implement the recommendations of the crystal meth task force to curb the negative effects of this awful drug.

Mr. Speaker, the final priority that the Premier has set out for this government is to build a stronger Alberta. This requires us to ask ourselves what we don't do so well and what we need to improve on, a process that this government has already started with this Speech from the Throne. It also requires us to take a hard look at what we do well and ask ourselves how we can do that better.

We have so much energy in Alberta that we need a comprehensive energy strategy to ensure that all of those resources are developed in a sustainable, environmentally responsible way. Renewable energy will be included in this strategy, and this Speech from the Throne makes it clear that this government is committed to environmentally sound development. The fruits of developing all this energy are coming into our hands today. Few states in history have enjoyed as much wealth as Alberta presently has. By effectively managing the resources that we are blessed to have today, we will ensure that all of Alberta's future needs are met.

Mr. Speaker, when I reflect on this Speech from the Throne, I ask myself this question: if some of the first pioneers who settled in my constituency, Drayton Valley-Calmar, were to reappear today, what would they say? I think they would say: "You have done well in providing your children with an education that is among the best in the world. You have done well in nurturing a bountiful economy that gives everyone the opportunity to make something of themselves." We've done well. There's no doubt about that. Now we must develop that prosperity and opportunity into renewed prosperity and opportunity.

This Speech from the Throne marks the turning over of a new leaf to new ideas, new plans, and a new style of government. I'm proud to serve the people of Drayton Valley-Calmar in this government under our new Premier, and, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all fellow parliamentarians to serve with me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to stand to represent my Calgary-Varsity constituents through my response to the Speech from the Throne.

As a result of my past experience as a public school teacher for 34 years with the Calgary board of education, I view the Speech from the Throne as a government homework project or assignment. Regardless of whether I was teaching a grade 1 or a grade 12 class, I would work collaboratively with my students to set both short-term and long-term objectives. Together we would arrive at realistic timelines for the completion of various portions of the assignment. We would discuss how the assignment would be evaluated based on mutually conceived and agreed-upon criteria. We would brainstorm the types of resources needed to successfully complete the assignment. Through mutual support and feedback we achieved the objectives we had set out.

Wednesday, March 7th's Speech from the Throne contained none of the essential elements of a successful assignment. It was vague and evasive, without clearly defined objectives, timelines, or evaluative processes. If you don't know where you're headed, how will you know when you've arrived?

In evaluating and analyzing the Speech from the Throne, I'm going to use a similar format to that employed by the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in the researching and writing of his

latest highly acclaimed book, *Democracy Derailed*. In *Democracy Derailed* the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview first highlights the Conservative government's failure, followed by a proposed Alberta Liberal government solution. In the opening paragraphs of the throne speech we are informed that "our current prosperity is a result of foresight by Albertans whose values we honour, values such as fiscal vigilance, community spirit, and self-reliance." Obviously there is a demonstrably great divide between what the government claims to honour and what it actually practises.

Although the government's front-row seating plan has changed, there is no evidence either suggested in this throne speech or in recent government practice that fiscal vigilance will become its priority in the near future. Rather, there is mounting evidence that would indicate the opposite. These are the same people who for years running were unable to predict to the nearest \$3 billion the surplus. Nor were they able to manage their nonrenewable, resource-fuelled, gambling-subsidized surpluses. Year after year quarterly budgets meant nothing as these members dipped into and spent 92 per cent of successive multibillion dollar surpluses rather than saving for the future.

The government's dependency on and addiction to nonrenewable resource revenue has increased despite its diversification lip service. Rather than being fiscally prudent, building up the heritage savings trust fund and creating an infrastructure fund, as our Liberal caucus nonrenewable resource fiscal plan has suggested, the government has instead trumpeted P3 – private, for-profit, at public expense – plans as the solution to the infrastructure deficit in the province.

The new Alberta government doublespeak suggests that there is good debt and bad debt. As a provincial Liberal who believes in a pay-as-you-go approach while saving for the future, I fail to see the Tory logic of going back into debt. With a \$7 billion third-quarter surplus and \$6 billion and change in each of the sustainability and capital funds for a combined total approaching \$20 billion, prudent fiscal management must be exercised to provide sustainability for future generations.

Community spirit and self-reliance in and of themselves are admirable qualities. I would suggest, however, that Albertans have been stretched to their limits, volunteering more hours and more money than ever before. This is evidenced by studies showing families having ever less time to spend together and being more stressed than ever. Nonprofit agencies and in-home family caregivers, whether for children, seniors, the ill, or the disabled, need to know that their government will be there to help them when they need help.

Circumstances beyond an individual's control, such as a lack of affordable housing, the shortage of good child care, difficulties finding care for aged parents or disabled dependants, inadequate public transportation, and so on, that threaten ultimate safety and health, lead to fear, stress, and a loss of productivity, to say nothing of quality of life. As an Alberta Liberal I recognize that supporting Albertans through difficult times leads to long-term gains in many, many ways. It is also far less expensive in the long term, particularly in terms of physical and mental health costs.

The misuse of language is prevalent throughout the Speech from the Throne. They "made wise choices, including the bold and often difficult decisions made during the past decade." This is an attempt by the Premier's public affairs propaganda bureau to rewrite history. There was nothing bold or difficult in the decision that our past Premier made and which was supported without question by our new Premier and most of his current cabinet and backbenchers.

The speed at which this Conservative government paid off its accumulated \$23 billion debt on the backs of Alberta taxpayers couldn't be described as either bold or difficult. Rather, it was

personally driven and traumatic. The government copied the deplorable actions of New Zealand's Finance Minister Sir Roger Douglas of: don't blink, cut quick, cut deep, and damn the consequences. The disastrous repercussions of that solitary focus, such as the loss of half of Calgary's hospitals and the failure to maintain or replace much-needed schools, roads, and water treatment plants to name just a few, continue to be felt on a daily basis through Alberta with no apparent end or government plan in sight, certainly not in this throne speech.

4:40

The throne speech, without actually providing a plan or a road map, at least acknowledges that we must plan ahead to ensure that the prosperity this province is enjoying today is secured for our children and grandchildren. As a proud grandfather of two grandsons, Kiran and Rohan Warrier, I have great concerns about the Alberta legacy that they will inherit unless a dramatic political change takes place. An Alberta Liberal government won't sell out future generations in favour of ad hoc immediate economic gratification.

An Alberta Liberal government will save and invest our current nonrenewable resource revenue to eliminate future dependence. Using today's figures, our increased investment in the heritage trust fund, which has remained stagnant over the past 15 years of Tory mismanagement, would rise to at least \$120 billion by 2020, producing the interest-generated equivalent of the total revenue received from the royalties of gas and oil production.

The drone from the throne offered questionable assurances to Albertans when it was stated that your new government will be open and accountable, fiscally responsible, and inclusive. Accountability has to start at the top. An Alberta Liberal government will give Albertans a real voice in deciding the future of a healthy democracy in Alberta.

As to the promise that the government will be inclusive, the private, behind-closed-doors attitude continues. The Affordable Housing Task Force met frequently behind closed doors. This travelling task force was in large part prompted by the previously released Liberal affordable housing plan, drafted after considerable input from open-to-the-public forums held across the province by our deputy leader and shadow minister for municipal affairs, the MLA for Calgary-Currie. In our plan immediate legislated relief would be provided for tenants being gouged by unscrupulous landlords taking advantage of the Alberta government's refusal to intervene in a highly inflated economy. The Premier's refusal to put on the brakes has seen a steadily increasing number of vulnerable Albertans get run over.

The much-touted flagship Bill 1, whereby the Alberta government finally acknowledges the need for a lobbyist registry, something which has been in place for a considerable length of time in other provinces and within the federal government, is a superficial facade. If the government initiates contact with a lobbyist, as was the case with Kelley Charlebois, the \$400,000 Nothing Written man, or the infamous Rod Love, no details of the business undertaken need to be recorded. As long as each of the contracts these men of no notes receives is under \$100,000, no bid is required. In other words, if the government comes courting, there's no reporting.

For those who do sign up to lobby the government, no details of their behind-closed-doors meetings will be publicly available, only their names and which minister they met with. This is a far cry from the transparency that opposition Liberals have been calling for. A transparency and accountability measure that a Liberal government will enact is whistle-blower protection legislation so that people who report government misdeeds will not risk losing their jobs, as was

the case with the Alberta Securities Commission and the inadequate government investigation of same.

Another democratic integrity initiative favoured by a provincial Liberal government but absent from the Premier's throne speech will be the establishment of a citizens' assembly to review the currently flawed first past the post election system, which rewarded the Conservatives with 63 seats although they had received the support of less than 25 per cent of eligible Alberta voters. Of those few engaged Albertans, less than 50 per cent, who took the time to cast their votes, the majority voted against the government. Engaging Albertans in the democratic process is one of the key planks in the Alberta Liberal platform. For that reason, during the spring session I will be introducing a motion to reduce the eligible voting age from 18 to 16 years old.

Under the heading Managing Growth Pressures, the government claims that it will craft a made-in-Alberta solution to labour needs. This statement flies in the face of today's Alberta workplace reality, which prevents thousands of unionized Alberta tradesmen from receiving jobs/wages that recognize their qualifications. This government, which cut the number of seats of postsecondary institutions, both academic and technical, has yet to devise a plan which will pay for the infrastructure or the instructors/professors necessary to train Albertans. Among the many Albertans who have been sidelined by the boom are the rapidly growing numbers of First Nations youth, who yearn to be a part of the solution.

Instead of fostering the talent that exists within this province and across Canada, this government has sought to circumvent Canadian citizenship rights by encouraging the exploitation of temporary foreign and frequently indentured workers. Refusing to implement first contract legislation while legitimizing division 8 contracting of highly questionable quasi-unions hiding behind the cover of the Christian Labour Association of Canada demonstrates the government's attempt to manipulate rather than facilitate the job market. How the Premier's Public Affairs Bureau, the 1984 equivalent of the ministry of truth, who authored this throne speech, has the audacity to claim that "the government of Alberta will continue to build on its solid record in environmental management with some of the most progressive legislation and action-based strategies in the country" is absolutely incredible.

This government and its rubber-stamping accomplice, the Energy and Utilities Board, which is 60 per cent funded by industry and 40 per cent by the government, have an atrocious record, whether one looks at land, water, or air. The EUB approves 98 per cent of the exploration/drilling applications it receives regardless of the sensitivity of the rapidly vanishing wilderness or encroaching urban sprawl encompassing existing well sites. On the southeastern slopes in the Whaleback along the Livingstone range, the special areas that the Nature Conservancy of Canada refer to as the last five miles, ranchers, environmentalists, recreational enthusiasts, and townspeople are fighting an uphill battle to preserve the water and land against a government-endorsed, nonrenewable resource extraction onslaught.

Environmental protection in this province is a travesty. The Ministry of Environment receives less than 1 per cent of revenue in a province whose government values immediate economic gratification over long-term sustainable growth. "Water for life" and "blue gold" have nice rhetorical rings when uttered, but if you don't back up the words with science, funded conservation, and protection, they become omissions, empty vessels of a government running on empty. It wasn't until my Calgary-Mountain View colleague, our Liberal shadow minister for environment, forced their hand that this government finally agreed to do minimal baseline water testing prior to drilling. The steadily growing tailing ponds surrounding the oil

sands north of Fort McMurray, the government-permitted drilling without reclamation damage to the Suffield range, the recently approved intrusions into the supposedly protected wilderness areas, including the Rumsey, and park areas for resource extraction, as well as clear-cutting and watersheds are an ongoing testament to the fact that in Alberta the one-trick pony of resource extraction trumps environmental concerns.

An Alberta Liberal government, without bringing our currently resource-based economy to a grinding halt, will set aside no go zones to conserve and protect habitat, wildlife, and water. It will work with industry to dramatically reduce both its ecological consumptive footprint and emissions output. Only in the most extreme circumstances, in which fighting the spread of mountain pine beetles does not qualify, would clear-cutting be permitted. A Liberal government will work with industry and regions to develop a land-use strategy drawing from the report that we released last year to prompt discussion.

I personally would like to see the same expectation placed on industry that is required on a golf course; i.e., you must replace the divot. Reclamation should be required to proceed at the same rate as extraction. Emissions wouldn't just be reduced in intensity, such as the proposal to reduce intensity by 12 per cent or face the paltry penance of \$15 a tonne for polluting. An Alberta Liberal government will begin immediately to work with industry to build the infrastructure to sequester emissions. Rather than rebates, we would offer retrofit subsidies to encourage better use of our nonrenewable resources.

From affordable housing to economic diversification balanced with environmental conservation and protection, Alberta Liberals have a vision and a plan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, my first response is: balderdash.

An Hon. Member: Well, that's clever.

4:50

Mr. Boutilier: Well, it is very good, and let me expand on that so that it's comprehended by the hon. member across the way as well.

Number one, in the province of Alberta, when it comes to Water for Life, we have more than rhetoric; we have action. Specifically, this province was the only government that came forth with our South Saskatchewan River basin study, that said that we will no longer allow withdrawals from the South Saskatchewan River basin. That seems to be forgotten by the Liberals and the New Democrats, and the reason is that they don't like promoting the good things that the government is doing. I accept that they're in opposition, but sometimes they may do themselves better by recognizing the good work because it reflects the values that Albertans have.

Consequently, we can listen to political rhetoric, but at the end of the day when we talk about Alberta leading, we talk about sequestration. We talk about a CO₂ pipeline, where we're going to be able to take the emission that is going into the air, and we're going to put it into the ground. We're going to pipe it into a pipeline that can be used for enhanced oil recovery. Ultimately, unlike perhaps what the opposition wants to do, we are not going to use water; we are going to use CO₂. So my question to the hon. member is simply this: are you suggesting that you would prefer that we continue to use water and not use emissions that are going into the air? Presently, as you know, we are using water, and we are moving to CO₂ for enhanced oil recovery. Don't you agree that using CO₂ that's going into the air is a far better use of energy than water? Yes or no?

Mr. Chase: I agree that using CO₂ sequestered rather than water is

an obviously good idea, that this government has yet to implement, and I am looking forward to an Alberta Liberal government moving beyond the 12 per cent emissions intensity and capping emissions totally, working with industry to achieve real reduction inputs.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Mr. Speaker, actually, one of the very important initiatives of this government – in fact, two years ago at the United Nations in Buenos Aires the Alberta government talked about renewables, they talked about alternative energies, and they talked about science and technology, that not only can Alberta be the energy capital of Canada, but we can become the environmental capital of North America because of the good work of Alberta industry and Alberta scientists working in partnership with our government. I have to ask the hon. member: don't you agree with that type of plan that this government is exercising?

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I have spoken to a number of professors at the University of Calgary who are connected with the ISEEE organization. They are working to achieve a cleaner environment, and I appreciate the work that they are doing. The problem is that we have to get past the talk. We know that we have research to sequester CO₂ emissions. North Dakota is sending its CO₂ to fields in Saskatchewan. We know through the research that scientists have done in Alberta that we have a tremendous amount of space left by the extraction of gas and oil to sequester these emissions.

What we need is action, which should have started some time ago, considering the science is now old, to get these pipelines built. We need to work with industry to see what responsibility both government and industry and, of course, the taxpayers who fund government initiatives have with regard to sequestering the emissions. We can talk about it today, but unless we start building those pipelines, whether it's to inject in place of water in order to get at the oil and the gas, which makes tremendous sense because we win twice – we get to receive more oil and gas, and we lose the CO₂. It's a win-win circumstance. The science exists, but we need to get on with the building of that infrastructure. That's what a Liberal government would do. With research, with industry we'd get it done. We'd get it going. We'd get it going as soon as we're elected to do so.

The Deputy Speaker: The time has elapsed under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

I'd recognize the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I want to thank him for delivering what I think is the right road map for Alberta's future.

I rise today, firstly, on behalf of the constituents of Wetaskiwin-Camrose, who will benefit from numerous aspects of the speech. I also rise as the chair of the Alberta Research Council and the vice-chair of the Alberta Science and Research Authority. We are very fortunate to live in exciting times. Amongst the provinces Alberta is in a leadership position when we consider our economic and fiscal position. Albertans have a range of opportunities when it comes to education, research and technology development, employment, business, and recreation. My constituents share in these opportuni-

ties. Wetaskiwin-Camrose is very fortunate to be the home of the Augustana campus of the University of Alberta, a renowned research university. The cities of Wetaskiwin and Camrose are business service centres for the highway 2 corridor and east-central Alberta. Between the arenas, ballparks, and trails, my constituents are active throughout the constituency and on the go.

My constituents and all Albertans recognize how fortunate they are, but I think they are very interested in preserving the opportunities they enjoy today for future generations. Maintaining this prosperity is not without challenges. It goes without saying that Alberta has a significant resource bounty, whether it's oil and gas, agriculture, or forests. That said, our conventional oil and gas reserves are in decline, and developing new sources, such as the oil sands and nonconventional gas, comes with significant challenges. Traditional agriculture, as previous generations understood it, is transforming rapidly, and our forest industry was faced with punitive tariffs and now must contend with the scourge of pine beetles.

Beyond those challenges Alberta is facing competition from rapidly growing economies, such as China and India. Our water supply must contend with the potential doubling of our population over the next 35 to 40 years along with the continued industrial growth. World energy demands may see the doubling or tripling of oil sands production.

Mr. Speaker, these may appear to be daunting challenges. The easy answer would be to have government halt development or control growth. However, I do not think that we should despair or recoil in the face of these challenges. Our government very clearly has decided against taking the easy way out and has outlined its plan to address Alberta's growth challenges in the Speech from the Throne by outlining five priorities for action: one, govern with integrity and transparency; two, manage growth pressures; three, improve Alberta's quality of life; four, build a stronger Alberta; and five, provide safe and secure communities.

Today I want to talk about issues surrounding three of those priorities: managing growth pressures, building a stronger Alberta, and improving Alberta's quality of life. These three issues deal most closely with the priorities outlined in the Speech from the Throne dealing with research and development as well as technology commercialization. Research and development are critical to advancing our knowledge about the world around us to advance beyond our current technologies and methods and techniques.

But it's more than developing new technologies. We have to foster commercialization of technology in order to generate further economic growth and create jobs to sustain our prosperity. As chair of the Alberta Research Council I feel that Alberta's research institutions are well placed to respond to the vision laid out in the Speech from the Throne by addressing the challenges of growth in a long-term and sustained manner. Specifically, ARC is supporting Alberta's growth and development by increasing and protecting the value Alberta derives from its resources, by helping large, medium, and small companies grow their business, and by building Alberta's global reputation as a place of excellence in research and innovation by leverage.

Now, to move these goals forward, ARC works closely with Alberta's research institutes, including the Alberta Energy Research Institute, the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, the Alberta Forestry Research Institute, the Alberta Life Sciences Institute, and the Alberta ICT Institute, the Information and Communications Technology Institute. These institutes support the throne speech intention to focus on priority areas of research in energy and information and communication technology.

5:00

In addition, ARC participates in EnergyINet to provide Alberta-

based technology development in the energy sector. It also works with iCORE, Alberta ingenuity fund, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, Alberta's postsecondary institutions, and the National Institute for Nanotechnology to develop Alberta's innovative capacity. Research is labour intensive, and ARC is working to recruit and retain key scientists to bolster Alberta's ability in meeting these strategic challenges. I believe we are well supported by our postsecondary institutions in this regard. As well, part of attracting people into research and development is investing in state of the art applied research infrastructure. ARC is making this investment to ensure that Alberta's research agenda can be advanced.

With the right minds, ARC is able to leverage the investment it receives from the government of Alberta and deliver results in three areas of strategic importance to the province: number one, the bioeconomy; number two, greenhouse gas management and reduction; and number three, water utilization.

In terms of the bioeconomy, ARC is supporting the vision Albertans have to diversify their economy and build strong communities through the development of new value-added products. The main example is the development of the integrated manure utilization system, or IMUS, and most of you know that the pilot plant is out near Vegreville. IMUS currently converts animal by-products into biogas, which is converted into electricity or heat. The solid by-products are turned into natural biobased fertilizer, and water is reclaimed for irrigation. There are many untapped applications of IMUS, and I believe it can be used quite effectively by not only feedlots or large agricultural producers but by food processors and municipalities to handle waste products.

To support the thrust of a bioindustry in Alberta, it is noteworthy in the Speech from the Throne that an institute of agriculture, forestry, and environment will be established. I think there are many common areas for ARC and this institute to work together to find ways to support our agriculture and forestry industries for long-term economic sustainability.

A very popular topic right now is managing greenhouse gas emissions. Albertans understand the need to balance the economy and the environment. Our government recently tabled Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. This amendment puts Alberta at the front of the pack, putting in place Canada's first legislative greenhouse gas emissions intensity reduction targets for large industrial emitters. Reaching this target will require innovative solutions for carbon capture, conversion, and storage – sometimes known as CCS – to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. ARC's Dr. Bill Gunter is an internationally recognized leader in carbon dioxide management and is working to find new technological solutions that can be put in place in Canada and become adopted around the world.

If we can manage CO₂ in a responsible way, Alberta will be able to get closer to the goal of developing zero-emission coal, as outlined in the Speech from the Throne. Effective management of carbon dioxide emissions will also justify the continued development of the oil sands and will greatly assist in enhancing recovery of oil and gas. I think it's important to illustrate the potential that exists in using carbon dioxide to enhance oil and gas recovery. Based on EUB data of discovered oil in place, at today's oil prices a 1 per cent increase in recovery would translate into revenues of \$35 billion over 15 to 20 years and would create new economic opportunities. Using natural gas as an example, if recovery could be improved by 15 per cent, it would result in over \$280 billion in additional revenues over a 15- to 20-year span. This could result in substantial benefit to Alberta and underlines the importance of innovation.

Recently ARC joined its counterparts in Quebec, Manitoba,

Saskatchewan to form I-CAN, Innoventures Canada. I-CAN integrated publicly supported research infrastructure and expertise from a number of provinces in a seamless system. This will help improve productivity and the performance of Canadian industry. One of I-CAN's first initiatives is working toward reducing Canada's carbon dioxide emissions by 100 million tonnes per annum by 2012. This is a positive action for Alberta, and I'm very pleased that ARC is engaged in this national initiative.

ARC is also taking water utilization very seriously because Albertans just expect a sustainable supply of good quality water today and in the future. One of ARC's responses to the challenges of growth is implementing ways to reduce industry's reliance on water by over 30 per cent of current requirements by 2030. This could be achieved through recycling of waste water, solvent use for in situ recovery, new carbon dioxide and water flooding techniques, and enhanced gas and oil recovery processes.

Of interest to the Westaskiwin-Camrose constituency is the long-term sustainability of the Battle River. To respond to not only the concerns of my constituents but of all Albertans, ARC will deliver a water quality assurance program to ensure a supply of safe drinking water in all areas of the province.

In all three areas – that is, the bioeconomy, carbon dioxide emissions, and water management – ARC is demonstrating leadership and ingenuity to find real solutions to supporting Alberta's future growth. Through research and innovation we can find the answers to developing our resources in an effective manner, and we can deal effectively with environmental concerns and climate change. We can preserve our water, and we can create new industries to ensure that Albertans can enjoy a prosperous future for generations to come. Our government's Speech from the Throne lays out this same intention, and I believe that ARC and all Albertans will work very hard to make the ambitious objectives in the Speech from the Throne a reality.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, I recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to respond to the Speech from the Throne, and I rise today not only for my constituents of Lethbridge-East but for all of those constituents that require care in the province, those that may just need that short-term help but also those that will be in care for the rest of their lives. They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

The throne speech I thought had some certainly good intentions. I believe that it was a little bit vague. There was a vision, but again I think it was vague in perhaps not going in as much depth as I would like to have seen, but perhaps that's part of not quite getting this part of being totally transparent. There is a sentence that said, "Albertans have told their government that economic prosperity must not come at the expense of quality of life, and the government of Alberta is listening." It also goes on to say, "It will ensure that services, programs, and infrastructure are in place to maintain Albertans' high quality of life."

I totally agree that there are many, many people in this province with a very, very high quality of life; however, I believe that there are probably more with either no quality of life or certainly a quality of life that is disappearing. I think that we all will speak differently when we speak about quality of life. We will define it differently. Does that mean time for the family? I think my colleague already mentioned that there are 200 hours less that parents are spending with their children. I'm not sure that this is really healthy for our society. They either do not eat dinner together or very seldom, or

they actually eat fast food in front of a television, which I realize is a family choice, but often it's because they're in a hurry and they haven't had time to cook.

5:10

The other thing that is affecting those with the lower quality of life is what really can be defined as a living wage. Is it our responsibility? I think that that's a point for debate. Is it our responsibility to ensure that people can make a living wage, particularly those that work in the care industries? Should they have a house to live in? I believe that on this side of the House we do believe that everyone should have a roof over their head and certainly food on the table. I don't believe that we should be having to depend on food banks or soup kitchens in this province.

I really do believe that the real story from the Speech from the Throne is truly the budget because it's wonderful to have wonderful words and a great document that looks good, but unless you've got the budget and the dollars that are going to back up those words, then really all they are empty promises.

One of the things that I have noticed that has happened – and I want to make sure that it's addressed – is, of course, my constant speaking of the fact that long-term care was deregulated in this province. Really, part of the reason behind that was to decrease the dollars that would come out of the health ministry to put towards long-term care. In fairness, certainly some people were placed in long-term care, where it was most inappropriate for them to be, when in fact the object is to help people maintain their independence for as long as possible.

It says, "Building the health workforce of the future will be a top priority." I would say that we are in a crisis now. I don't think we can wait for the future. I think we have to move. The information is there. The MLA task force draft for the standards and certainly my adjunct report is more than clear. The crisis is now. We have a crisis in staffing for human services, for PDD, for continuing care, for child care services not just in terms of child development but also the child care services where we have to take children under the provincial wing, in fact, to protect them. Just within the last short period of time children in Lethbridge have been taken into protection because their parents were busted in a grow operation.

The staffing to look after the homeless. Now, the staff that we require for the homeless are actually those that would give the support to help people move from homelessness to transition to actually becoming productive members of our society. Many of these people truly don't even know how to shop properly, how to spend their dollars and make them go as far as they can in terms of good, nutritious food. These are the support people that I'm talking about.

Staffing at food banks has now become an issue. One of the other places that we have a goodly portion of this particular segment that is supported by volunteers is faith-based service delivery. I really believe that this government has got to take a look, a very hard look, at supporting the faith-based service delivery people because they really work more for the cause than they do for the actual profit. They have many, many, many years of experience delivering these services, so I would like this government to take a look at these organizations before they would look at the ones that do it for profit.

We need well-paid and well-trained people, but more importantly we must respect and create a system that doesn't destroy the souls of the people that work in the care industry. They do the impossible job every day of delivering care for ever-increasing people in need with fewer and fewer people. People who work in the care industry know what they have to deliver to the people that they're responsible for and to. When they leave at the end of the day and can't say,

"I've done the job that I need to do, and Mrs. So-and-so or Mr. So-and-so or little Tommy was truly looked after to the best of my ability," then they go home and their souls are slowly but surely destroyed. They get burnout, and they leave the industry. We cannot afford that in this province.

When long-term care was deregulated, it was deregulated into two segments. One was housing, and one was care. So we have two ministries, probably with 19 different departments in between, actually looking after the same person.

The housing, of course, has now been divided into any number of categories. What I've always been asking for are clear definitions of what those categories are and how they actually can be applied directly across the province. We have what they call supportive living, that's divided into assisted living and designated assisted living. We've got lodges, enhanced lodges. We have home care. And all of these pertain to the housing side of it.

One of the other things that was mentioned was that the government will work to expand long-term care capacity. I think we have to be very clear that we're all speaking about the same thing. What is long-term care? What I always refer to is continuing care, which, of course, then includes the long-term care portion. Long-term care as we know it today usually includes people that have high medical needs, not just Aids to Daily Living care.

Most regions are trying to decrease the number of long-term care beds in their areas. In the end it's going to prove not to be a wise move because some people are being assessed improperly and put into the wrong living accommodations.

Families also must be directly involved with the assessment of where people are going to live. Some of the things that are happening in the province are that there is an assessment tool. People are assessed. They come down to the bottom and say: this is the kind of care you require; therefore, this is where you're going to live. I believe that that is very wrong. I am really looking for the words "continuing care," and let's work within that definition. The reason I'm looking for that is because that's what the Liberals would do.

I'd like to tell a little story trying to explain the deregulation of long-term care. We have grandma sitting in a room in housing. Housing supplies board and room. Grandma may need a little bit of help because she's had a stroke; she's right-handed and is paralyzed on the right side. So with a little bit of help from people, not necessarily medically trained or with the higher skills of a PCA, they can help her get dressed, go to the washroom, and take her down to the dining room. We now have her sitting at the dining room table ready to eat breakfast. The food is put in front of her, but who is going to feed her? We have now moved from housing into care. This is where it gets very confusing because it's the same person that is to be looked after, and we've got two different ministries responsible.

Another thing that I would like to address, that I didn't necessarily see in this, is that I believe it's very important to index AISH. The other thing that I would like to see is one-third of AISH income go towards their housing. We have people out there paying anywhere from 60 to 70 per cent of their very meagre income, and they truly do live in hovels.

I also agree that the Water for Life strategy is certainly a priority. I do know that our University of Lethbridge has some of the leading scientists working on this. It will become the oil of tomorrow, but I believe that tomorrow is here. In fact, I think it was yesterday. We really have to make the protection of our water a priority that we move on instantly. Yes, I realize that money is going forward, but I don't believe that it's going fast enough, and I don't think that the EUB is coming out with decisions that are timely or that truly have been looked at with a scientist's eye.

I hope that I see a change of heart, that economic policies that are imperative for our province and, certainly, for our tax base will be matched with a social policy overlay, and that the government will work with this side in a very co-operative manner, which has been certainly expressed by this Premier. I believe that it was President Franklin D. Roosevelt who said at one point in time – and I paraphrase – that the time for competition is over and the time for co-operation is now. I believe in that saying. I think that it's very important for good governance that everyone co-operate. Ladies and gentlemen, that's what we were elected to do.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wish to participate under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't necessarily planning this, but I'm sure the hon. House leader really wants me to speak at this particular time and the Minister of Education and all the rest of them. [interjections] I thought you were begging me to speak. Anyhow, I've got a few things to say. I think I can put together some things to say.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just review where we're at, and I think that I will come to the point we talked about. I remember when we made the serious cuts back in the mid-90s. Now, clearly, at the time we had a deficit problem. I would argue that we didn't have a debt problem. But we hacked everything, especially needed social services, such as education and health care and help for the poor. So we were facing that particular problem.

Then when the economy started to get better, we still had what I call the social deficit. We were preoccupied with the economic deficit to the detriment of worrying about the rest of the social deficit. I would argue that we're still playing catch-up from the severe cuts of the mid-90s. Whether it be in education, whether it be in health care, whether it be in help for the poor, and the rest of it, we haven't caught up.

Along with this, we've developed a strategy for the oil and gas industry and the tar sands and the rest of it. Our economic strategy is to get in there, get the oil and gas out, develop the tar sands at the fastest possible rate that we can, all to get into the American market, Mr. Speaker. I know there's pressure from the Americans. I know there's pressure from the federal government to do this. They want this source that they say is secure, but that's not necessarily what's good for Alberta.

So now you tie the two things together: the cuts that we're trying to deal with to catch up and come back from – and I think even the government recognized that they had to catch up there – and you tie that on with this, as I said before, economy on steroids. We're trying to now deal with all those problems with the cuts from before and in Calgary with a hundred thousand people coming in.

We were told by the economic development department and at hearings in Medicine Hat the task force was told by people that presented there that we should expect a population in Alberta of 6 million people in the next 10 to 15 years. That's double the population now after we've had the population explosion that we know about. How do you begin to deal with the serious social and infrastructure problems with that sort of population increase? It's impossible to do, Mr. Speaker. What's the point of having 6 million people if the majority of people aren't benefiting in the so-called Alberta advantage? You know, what's generally good for the CEOs in downtown Calgary is not necessarily good for the rest of Albertans.

Let me just talk about the task force. I can't talk about what's coming out of it, obviously, but we can talk about the public

hearings. The calls that we heard right across the province – and I mentioned this earlier. It's severe. You know, we knew about Fort McMurray. We knew about Grande Prairie. We knew about Edmonton and Calgary. But I found out that everywhere in Alberta we're facing some of the same problems of low vacancy rates and homelessness in places that I didn't expect, like Hinton. That was the biggest surprise.

So where is the Alberta advantage for a lot of people in this province? How do you keep up, you know, with a 10.6 per cent increase in population coming in every year, Mr. Speaker? Admittedly people, as somebody said, come in for better jobs and dreams, but they find when they get here that they can't even find a place to live. In Grande Prairie they said: don't bother coming up even if you have a job because we have no place to put you. Now, does that make any sense at all? The reality is – the previous Premier finally admitted it – we were saying in that legislative session in the summer, the short one that we had, that the government didn't have a plan. The members opposite were all standing up and saying: yes, we have a plan; it's a wonderful plan. Finally Premier Klein uttered the truth: we don't have a plan. I would argue that we still don't have one. We talk about one, but we still don't have one.

I want to again talk just to put a human face on this, Mr. Speaker. These are calls – I've been allowed to say their names publicly – that I've had from people just the last week talking about their problems in housing and rents. Here's one: rent has gone up \$350 in the past six months. Another woman, 71 years old, is now looking for a job because she can't afford to pay her rent. She's got to go back to work. Another one: rent is going up 30 per cent. Another one works full time and still cannot afford rent. Another one calls regarding rent costs. Another one: rent has gone up \$375 in five months. Now, how do we expect people on fixed incomes and working in service jobs, even if you're well employed, to keep up with this sort of thing? How is that an Alberta advantage? I ask you that. How is that an Alberta advantage?

You know, I admit that we're having the task force, and I give the minister and the Premier credit for that. They've put opposition people on, and we've certainly got an earful. I hope that they'll listen. We'll see what the report says, and we'll see what the government does after that.

Mr. Speaker, it's not just housing – that's a big one – but we're talking about health care. The minister is here. Yesterday he crisis managed, as we do, and I don't blame the minister. It certainly was crisis management dealing with the Fort McMurray situation. All last year we talked about the problems in Fort McMurray in this Legislature. Finally they did something about it, but that will not solve the problems.

The announcement yesterday that the minister is involved with: yeah, fine. We need to do something. But, you know, when I look at the money – an \$8,000 bonus to stay for part-time doctors – that's going to be some interesting negotiation when the minister has to go deal with the nurses and other health professionals with that sort of situation. Then we look at what they're looking at, and if this isn't crisis management, tell me what is. It says, "The unique circumstances of communities under pressure," and that's every community in the province if what I'm hearing from the task force is right. [interjection] Yeah, well, you want to clap about that when people are homeless and they can't find a place to rent and the rents are going up and they can't find a doctor? You thump for that, hon. member? Go ahead and thump because Albertans aren't thumping, I assure you about that.

What it says is that the
communities under pressure . . .
That's the minister's term.

. . . and under-served areas will be addressed through the new

clinical stabilization initiative. These communities will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. A provincial framework for under-serviced areas is to be finalized.

Apparently that's about \$56 million. The \$8,000 bonuses for part-time doctors is \$47 million, and then we say that other, special funding – we're not sure where – "has been designated to address extraordinary increases in practice costs." Well, this is crisis management.

Admittedly, something had to be done, and I'm not critical of the fact that this has come forward, but it shows the problem with the lack of planning. In health care even more severe shortages – and we talked about that today, Mr. Speaker – are there with the nurses and other health professionals. What do we do about that when that comes forward? How do we get those people in again when you have a 10.6 per cent growth rate because of, sort of, this overstimulation? We're afraid to put on a moratorium for a little while with the new projects, even though Fort McMurray and others are asking for it, just to slow it down and see what we can do. The government refuses to do that. They won't put the brake on the pedal, but they want to do it on the cheap. You can't do this.

5:30

If you want to keep this pace of development up, you're going to have to spend a lot more money – and that's why I'll be interested in the budget – on the social and physical infrastructure. You can't do it on the cheap, have this pace of development and not do that. As I said, we are facing the problems from the severe cuts in the past. We hadn't caught up there.

So for a lot of Albertans this so-called advantage for the people that live here has become a big disadvantage. It has become a big, big disadvantage for many people, and if the members wanted to come around and listen to the task force, they would have heard that. We heard that very loud and clear, Mr. Speaker, from the people that took the time to come out to the task force.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I just want to allude to briefly is part of the crisis management. Now we're going to hear P3s, the big answer.

An Hon. Member: Alternative financing.

Mr. Martin: Yeah, alternative financing. It hardly has even worked anywhere.

To think that this isn't creating a debt, this is when I get amazed by this government. They're so worried that people see that they have a debt that they say: well, we'll have a P3; that's not really a debt. But when you're paying as we do on Henday and the ring road and these others, is it not a debt if you have to pay \$21 million for 30 years? Is that not a debt? You know the old saying: if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a duck, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is that they say: well, gee, this solves our problems because they'll be responsible for all the problems. Well, they've created more problems. It worked in many cases in Nova Scotia where, admittedly, it was the Liberal government that brought it in and a Conservative government that got rid of it. There were all the problems there with the schools and the shoddy workmanship. We'll have this debate in the Legislature a little more, you know, about some of the problems. But just to think that it's not a debt, only the Conservatives' economic philosophy could say: you're responsible for \$21 million for 30 years, but that's not a debt. Conservative economics, Mr. Speaker. Amazing. Absolutely amazing that they try to tell people that that's not a debt.

You know, to think that these companies . . . [interjection] Oh, I'm getting a reaction. I love that. Mr. Minister, we'll have lots of time to debate this.

Mr. Speaker, do we think that these P3 companies – and we'd be interested to see how many of them donate to the Conservative Party – that come in are not shrewd enough to think that they're going to make a good profit over that period of time? They're not in business not to make a profit. As I think the Member for Calgary-Varsity said: if you've got the money, why do you want to pay a mortgage over that period of time? We wouldn't tell individuals to do that – would we? – so that they could pay a lot of extra money over 30 years. Well, maybe Conservatives would. I'm not sure about that.

Even if you had to borrow on P3s, with our rate we can get that better and cheaper than private companies can. If we had to borrow, why would we not do it that way, Mr. Speaker? You know why we want to do it this way? Well, partly ideology. You know, this government operates from the right, with a triumph of ideology over common sense quite often. The reality is that if we had to pay for it the old-fashioned way, it would still be cheaper, but beyond ideology they want to say that we don't have a debt on the books because they've become pre-occupied with that.

As I say, even if we have to pay it over 30 years, somehow they've determined in their economics that this is not a debt. Albertans are smarter than that, Mr. Speaker. They know that. This will be an interesting debate that we can hold in the Legislature this year, on what I call crisis management.

I just want to talk a little bit about transparency, and I'm going to give the government some credit. [interjections] Yeah, I know that this is going to be hard on you. I think we've made some steps in this Legislature that are a step in the right direction. There are still some problems with Bill 1, and hopefully the government will listen, but at least we have a lobbyists registry coming forward. I don't think it's adequate enough, but at least it's an acknowledgement that we need to do that. This government refused to do that for many years, so that's at least a step in the right direction.

Some of the changes that we're making in the Legislature I think are more democratic and I think that they are a big step in the right direction. I said this on the bill yesterday, and I give the government and the Premier and the House leader credit for that.

We'll leave it when I was being positive. How's that?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River under Standing Order 29(2)(a), I presume.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to ask a question of the hon. member. I'm concerned about the stance regarding P3s, to the point where it almost seems as if this member would rather have us throw money off a bridge than see any company make a nickle in profit, and I'm really concerned. I would ask him what his response would be to the Auditor General, who said in Public Accounts last year – he can check *Hansard* – that if any minister that's undertaking a large public works project in his department didn't examine a P3 as a funding option, he would simply not be doing his job. With apologies, I paraphrase the quote, obviously. I would also ask the hon. member: if things are so awful here in Alberta, why does he think a hundred thousand people a year are moving here?

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, it happens in all boom economies. People hear that the streets are paved with gold. They hear about the big jobs in Fort McMurray and the rest of them. I don't blame them for coming. They're looking, as somebody said opposite, for their dreams and for good jobs. It's always going to happen in a boom economy. Alberta is no exception in that regard.

All I'm saying is that the boom could be tempered somewhat by the pace of development. That's a reality. When it's too extreme,

when ordinary people here in Alberta can't afford to live and there's more homeless, then we have a problem, and this government better recognize it.

The second question. As the Auditor General also said, they're not necessarily good or bad, admittedly. What he said, though, is that there better be a public-sector guarantor, that we know what we're doing with them. We found out with Henday that what the government said about the public-sector guarantor was not what happened, because it was leaked to us what actually happened, and what the government had talked about was very different from what the public-sector guarantor had said about that particular program. Take a look, hon. member, and see if I'm not right about that. So we have to be very careful if we're going to have some of these things. There has to be a public-sector comparator, Mr. Speaker. So far we haven't seen that with this government.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess that my questions and my comments are, number one: is this guy for real? I mean, he's talking like we're living in an NDP government in Saskatchewan or something. Does he really believe even half of what he's saying? I mean, come on. Wake up and look around. Things are good here, man. Admit it. We're in a boom economy right now, and that's because we have a good government.

Mr. Speaker, I know that Saskatchewan and B.C., which are both under NDP governments, are sitting on just as much resources.

Ms DeLong: B.C. is not NDP.

Rev. Abbott: Sorry. B.C. is Liberal. It's the same thing.

They're sitting on just as much resources as we have here in Alberta, and they can't make it work. So, Mr. Speaker, my question is: does he not realize that? If he doesn't, why doesn't he go there where he can be part of the gang?

5:40

Mr. Martin: That's pretty feeble, frankly. I've lived in Alberta a lot longer than you, hon. member. We don't all have to think the same way to be Albertans. Mr. Speaker, the point is: are you really saying that there are the same resources in Saskatchewan as there are in Alberta? If you are saying that, I'll say it back to you: are you for real? Are you for real? I mean, are you saying that it was this good government that came down, and there it was, that this Conservative

government said, "Let there be oil and gas," and lo and behold there was oil and gas, and therefore they're the government, and they're doing such a wonderful job? As I said to the member, if he wants to say it, I'd say the same thing back in the most positive way: get real.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the member opposite has been a great contributor to the housing task force. I do thank you for the work that you've done on that with the all-party committee. Today we heard the Liberal opposition talk about rent controls, that we need to institute rent controls because of the supply issue out there and the people can't afford to stay in their homes. I want to know from you: do you think that rent controls would bring new buildings to Alberta, would bring new construction to Alberta, would increase the supply to Albertans? You've heard from Albertans directly.

The Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately, the time for discussion and questions is over on this issue.

Are there any other participants under the throne speech?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I'd like the answer to that. All the colleagues here in this Assembly would. We've given you the power to expand.

The Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately, hon. member, the Standing Orders are made up by the Assembly. I'm here to administer them, and we don't change them on the go.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate on response to the throne speech.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just because the place is getting far too lively, I would move that we adjourn until tomorrow at 1 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 5:42 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, March 15, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for our abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you a special guest that we have today in your gallery. Victor Buffalo is the chief of the Samson Cree nation and was recently inducted into the Aboriginal Business Hall of Fame as a 2006 laureate honoured for his lifetime contribution to aboriginal businesses in Canada. This is a significant acknowledgement of his accomplishments for the Samson Cree nation. I will be speaking more about Mr. Buffalo's accomplishments later in a member's statement. However, in the meantime I'd like to ask Chief Buffalo to rise and receive the warm wishes of the Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly individuals who have helped keep Alberta's public library service strong, accessible, and part of our community fabric. First, we have several representatives of the Legislature Library here today. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to stand when their names are called: Sandra Perry, Valerie Footz, Eileen Cardy, Heather Close, Nancy DeJager, Vivianne Fagnan, Christina Liggins, Philip Massolin, Warren Maynes, and Sharna Polard.

Mr. Speaker, I also have representatives of the Alberta public library system here today. They are also seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I'll also ask them to stand: Muriel Abdurahman, chair of Strathcona county library; Ernie Jurkat, board member, Strathcona; Heather Belle Dowling, previous director of Strathcona; Peter Moloney, St. Albert library board; Dr. Sheila Bertram, Edmonton public board; Patricia Jobb, associate director, Edmonton; Maureen Wilcox, chair of Yellowhead; Clive Maishment, director of Yellowhead; Lucy Strobl, the chair of Onoway library; Yvonne Slemko, board member, Onoway; Karen Lester, the chair of Didsbury; Inez Kosinski, library manager, Didsbury; and also two last representatives from my department, Patricia McNamee and Kerry Anderson.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

The Speaker: Hon. members might wonder why there was such a long introduction permitted. Today is the 100th anniversary of the first Libraries Act in the history of the province of Alberta. These individuals are here today to commemorate that. An hon. member will provide additional information in a moment or two.

One of the people in the Speaker's gallery today, though, I'd like to point out, is a former Member of this Legislative Assembly. I'd like Mrs. Abdurahman to stand again, please.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some bright, shining stars, 46 grade 6 students joining us. Accompanying them are their teachers, Mr. Larry Neville, Mrs. Amanda Hetchler, Ms Niki Fulton, and Mr. John Ferguson, as well as parent volunteers Kelly Campbell, Geri Shier, Peter and Shelley Lawrence, Terry Davidson, Helen and Paul Overwater, Colleen Hovey, Penny Johnson, and Laura Biggs. I'm pleased that they could make their way up to Edmonton. I've visited Delburne school many times as both of my sons went from K to 12 there, and they had some very good teachers. They're joining us today in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a former employee of Health and Wellness Alberta and a famous non-Métis harvester, Mr. Mark Kastner, now an employee of the Calgary health region, and next to him his boss, a constituent of mine in Foot-hills-Rocky View but better known to most of you as the director and CEO of the Calgary health region, Mr. Jack Davis. Welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: My guests are not quite here yet, but they'll come in during question period, so what I'll do is introduce them for the record now.

I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly a group of 62 visitors from Lacombe upper elementary school, about 50 students and, I believe, about 11 or 12 parents here. First of all, the teachers are Mrs. Heather MacKay-Hawkins and Mr. Derek Rankin. The parent helpers are Mrs. Carrie Scott, Mr. Stacey Scott, Brent Brookes, Cheryl Court, Brad Johnstone, Kim Johnstone, Shona Karas, Debbie Sissons, and Mrs. Lavina Stewart. I'm not going to ask them to stand, because they're not here, but we will welcome them as they come in.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Christine McMeckan and Don Crisall. Christine and Don are United Food & Commercial Workers representatives who are currently on the picket line with workers at Palace Casino at the West Edmonton Mall. These workers went out in September, and the members are still fighting for decent working conditions and a livable wage. Christine has been a full-time union representative with UFCW local 401 since 1998, was a vice-president with the Alberta Federation of Labour for 10 years, and also chaired the Health and Safety Committee for the AFL. She has volunteered for many years to help raise funds with the UFCW for leukemia research. Don Crisall is a union organizer with UFCW local 401 in Calgary and has been for the last eight years. Most of his union experience has been with organizing workers without a union, including the Shaw Conference Centre and Lakeside Packers. They are seated in the public gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mark Wells. Mark was born in Bashaw, and he lives in Edmonton. He is a graduate of the University of Alberta with a BA in English. He has volunteered with IHuman Youth Society, helping them to produce their first play at the Citadel, and Mark was a 4-H Beef Club member in Stettler as well. Mark has now joined our staff as a sessional assistant. We're very excited with the communications and research work that he's been doing for us, and we look forward to his contribution. I'd now ask him, please, to rise and to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to be able to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Dr. Gloria Keays. Dr. Keays is a deputy provincial health officer with Alberta Health and Wellness. As part of the public health division Dr. Keays works with her colleagues to provide leadership in disease control and prevention, wellness strategy development, and health surveillance. Equally important to the work done behind the scenes is the role our provincial health officers play in communicating with the public, raising awareness of health concerns affecting the province, and calming concerns by providing Albertans with medical facts and tips to keep citizens healthy. I'd ask Dr. Keays to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

1:10

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly I think it's 50 to 60 people from Parkland county, Parkland school division: teachers, parents, and students. They are in the public gallery, I believe.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Centennial of the Libraries Act

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring recognition to the 100th anniversary of the Libraries Act. March 15, 1907, marked the start of a century of knowledge, imagination, opportunity, and history thanks to Alberta's public library service. From Zama City in the north to Coutts in the south, from Bear Canyon in the west to Lloydminster in the east, Albertans have access to the world through their local library.

Alberta's libraries have grown and changed over the last 100 years. Originally referred to as reading rooms, libraries in Alberta began as a simple collection of books and documents. Over the years libraries have evolved to include computers, audiovisual material, and a variety of new online and digitized information sources along with the traditional book collections.

Libraries are also places where learning opportunities abound, from story and craft sessions for young children to online courses for adults. Last year Albertans visited their libraries more than 17 million times in person in addition to the more than 15 million visits they made to library websites and online catalogues. This reflects the passion that we feel for our libraries and the opportunities that they hold. Albertans have access to nearly 9 million books and 1.4 million other items such as CDs and DVDs, and Albertans aren't shy

about borrowing these materials, with more than 32 million items borrowed from public libraries in 2006.

Let's not forget the efforts of library staff when it comes to seeking out answers to the questions that we have. In 2005 Albertans asked 4.8 million reference questions within libraries, and they asked 2.8 million reference questions online. Public library staff are knowledgeable, talented, and top notch when it comes to finding and sharing information. *They truly are the gateways for all that libraries have to offer.*

Mr. Speaker, many Albertans use their libraries to make their lives easier. For example, workers from crews come in to the Manning library to do their banking online. The library is the only place where they can go to do this, and it makes it easier for them to work away from home and still look after their personal business. For other Albertans their local library opens up a world of information. Patrons of the Hinton municipal library can read newspapers from all over the world online and have access to a number of databases thanks to the Alberta public library electronic network.

Libraries have been a part of Alberta since it began and, like the province, have grown and changed to meet the needs of our citizens. Whether you're looking for a book, searching for a job online, or learning how to use a computer for the first time, your local library is there for you. If you've never been to a library or even if you visit often, take the time to stop in and see what your library has to offer. You'll be glad you did.

*We have to acknowledge the members of that first Legislature for their forward thinking in passing that first Act To Provide for the Establishment of Public Libraries.**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Chief Victor Buffalo

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to recognize a distinguished Albertan and Canadian. Chief Victor Buffalo was inducted into the Aboriginal Business Hall of Fame on February 13 in Toronto. This honour is a result of Chief Buffalo's numerous contributions to the aboriginal people over the past four decades.

Chief Buffalo has actively encouraged economic development for the Samson Cree nation. In the 1970s as Samson grew, it was discovered that there was a need for financial capital to support the development of businesses. As a result, Chief Buffalo led the creation of the Peace Hills Trust in 1981. Today Peace Hills Trust is a very successful financial institution with \$400 million in assets and is involved in oil and gas development, insurance services, real estate, and retail ventures.

Chief Buffalo believes in education as the key to ensuring a strong future for aboriginal youth. This vision has undoubtedly allowed his community to take an active role in the economic life of the province. He also was active in the creation of the Hobbema cadet corps to engage young people in positive activities, keeping them away from the temptation of drugs and gang activity.

In 2005 Chief Buffalo created the ki-son-i-ya-mi-naw, and that's Cree for "our money heritage trust fund," to manage \$340 million received from the government of Canada. This fund will support the ambitions of present and future generations.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, Chief Buffalo has shown significant leadership for the aboriginal people. He has created a legacy that emphasizes self-reliance, which will secure the future of his people for many generations.

Once again, all members of the Assembly extend congratulations to Chief Buffalo for his outstanding leadership and accomplishments. Thank you.

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read in the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Dr. Robert Stollery, CM

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great sadness and regret that I rise today to mourn the passing of a true gentleman, Dr. Robert Stollery. Few other men have lived a life as exemplary as Dr. Stollery's. His service to the community began early in his life, when he was a member of the Royal Canadian Navy in World War II. In 1949 he graduated with honours in civil engineering from the University of Alberta and joined Poole Construction. His first project was building the Aberhart sanatorium here in Edmonton, and once Bob Stollery started building, he never stopped. The many impressive projects he worked on included rebuilding the Jasper Park Lodge after it was gutted by a massive fire in 1952, the town of Inuvik in 1957, and the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre at the University of Alberta from 1977 to 1985. He helped set the stage for Alberta's current prosperity when from 1980 to 1984 he oversaw the construction of the state-of-the-art Scotford refinery project, that produced synthetic crude oil from Alberta's oil sands, the first refinery of its kind in the world.

What Dr. Stollery helped build is more than bricks and mortar, Mr. Speaker. It is our community. In recent years he graciously gave his time, money, and considerable talent to the Winspear Centre for the performing arts, Grant MacEwan College, the University of Alberta, the Edmonton City Centre Church, and the United Way. He founded the Stollery charitable foundation, which since 1994 has given hundreds of grants to community programs and charities here in Edmonton and in Kamloops, British Columbia, and he revived the Edmonton Community Foundation, which annually contributes more than \$8 million to charities in the Edmonton area.

His biggest legacy is the Stollery children's hospital, which Dr. Stollery took the lead in creating. *Each year 140,000 patient visits occur at this hospital, a world-renowned centre that offers the best pediatric care to children from all over western Canada. With his passing it seems ironic that a man who built so much has left such a hole in our hearts. He will be missed.**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Grant MacEwan Griffins Volleyball Team

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise to recognize an outstanding Alberta women's volleyball team. The Grant MacEwan Griffins came home national champions this past weekend. The Griffins entered the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association tournament at Capilano College in Vancouver as underdogs. They had to defeat the number one and number four ranked teams just to make it to the final. They were up against the hometown team, but the Griffins did not let a partisan crowd get in their way, winning their very first national title.

It takes a great deal of skill and dedication to win a championship banner. This achievement builds on Alberta's outstanding reputation for good sportsmanship and excellence in athletics. They've made their school, their community, and our province extremely proud, and I want to thank them. It is with great pride that I ask the members of this House to join me in congratulating the athletes, coaches, and training staff of the Grant MacEwan Griffins.

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

Foster Parents

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a word in French,

"parenté," that looks like our word "parent" but means more. It's more than mothers and fathers. It's more than parentage or ancestors too. Probably, the closest in English is extended family. "Foster parent" is a term that pushes the envelope too. It means more than those who parent and more than those who take care of someone else's kids. It goes beyond the limits of the word "family" as we usually use it.

Families are those who will always take you in, who take all kinds of stuff from you, whether they deserve it or not. We do that supposedly because they're our flesh and blood, because we're biologically programmed to. If the ties are of adoption, they're still strong, growing out of a need to have ongoing significant others. We talk of the family as a pillar of society. They're bonds that are more than DNA, more than self-interest, more than natural need.

That is what foster parents bring, what they do, and what they are. Foster parents are the leading edge of what makes us civilized, extending next of kin to the human and global sphere. They give love and attention to those who may be with them only a short time. Mutual bonds and emotional rewards develop, but these may be cut as children move back to their own or others' homes. Foster parents show us a world where self-interest is not ultimate. They deserve far more than we give them: more in money, though they're not in it for the money, and more in respect and in recognition as role models, though most would shy away from this.

We give awards for those who rescue, who give long service, who put their lives on the line. Foster parents do all of this. In the province that pioneered Family Day, they deserve to be seen as family extraordinaire.

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

1:20

Parliamentary Democracy

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to speak in favour of our great Alberta parliamentary tradition and in defence of democracy. In our Alberta we are elected by the people, and MLAs represent their constituents. Members of this Legislative Assembly are members first, and nobody can take that away from us. From Magna Carta to today our Legislatures and Parliaments stand on the principle of representation. They rest very much today on the bedrock principle of democracy. Autocratic and controlling elites will spring up in corners of our system, but they cannot exercise total control. Albertans and all Canadians will not countenance control by the few.

In our Alberta the Alberta Act, the fight for Alberta's resources in the early 1900s, and then the energy wars of the '70s and '80s – we have clearly shown our disdain for elitist domination. But it is in the nature of some of our fellow humans, when they get even a little power over others, to exercise that power as if they can do so without restraint. In industries we see that sometimes in the phenomenon of the firing foreman. That was the guy who would use his power to fire at will or by whim. If they had to, innuendo, character assassinations, set-ups, and other deeds would be common tools. These guys don't care about the effects on the families of those at whom they take aim. In elected politics these types of characters do not care about or understand democracy, and we do see them. I have personal experience of that.

There are those in a democracy who will question the right to dissent, the right to think differently or put forward ideas in a different way. But a dissenting view may show the way to a better way to go. That different view may show the way to truth. We must respect dissent. Indeed, our parliamentary democracy, in the way it enshrines the right to dissent, in the way it protects the right to

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dissent, in the way that it safeguards our freedom of speech and to say what we think is right, is the true guarantor of our freedom in society.

I will close with a short updated quote from John F. Kennedy. It was given at Amherst College a short time before his fateful visit to Dallas, Texas.

The men [and women] who create power make an indispensable contribution to the Nation's greatness, but the men [and women] who question power make a contribution just as indispensable, especially when that questioning is disinterested, for they determine whether we use power or power uses us.

*MLAs must speak for their constituents. Thank God we have our Alberta Legislature. Thank God we can vote. Long live democracy.**

The Speaker: Hon. member, sorry. Please have a chair. Yesterday the chair was severely criticized for allowing some members to go a few seconds beyond. Today I'm getting notes because I interrupted at two minutes. You can't have it both ways. The rule is two minutes.

head: **Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I hereby submit five copies of the report of the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts covering the committee's 2006 activities during the spring and summer sittings of the Second Session of the 26th Legislature.

Thank you very much.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 30, I wish to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move that the ordinary business of the Assembly be adjourned in order that we may hold an emergency debate on a matter of urgent public importance, namely the urgent need for the Premier or the Minister of Education on his behalf to protect the educational needs of the students of Parkland county and to foster goodwill between teachers, parents, and students and the school board by appointing a special mediator to help resolve the current Parkland school division labour dispute.

Thanks.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 203 Service Dogs Act

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill, being Service Dogs Act. This bill will prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities using a certified service dog. It also makes provision for a mechanism to identify service dogs.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents

today. The first is a news release from the Alberta Teachers' Association, filed on March 8 of this year. In this release the ATA is asking the government to appoint a special mediator to help resolve the Parkland dispute.

The second is a very heartfelt letter from Ms Cheryl Sneath. In the letter Ms Sneath notes that her daughters miss their teachers, miss their friends, and want to go back to school.

Thanks.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of the recruitment and retention survey done by the Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families related to the crisis in the child and family services sector related to retention and staff.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituent Jim Sexsmith. He wants to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, the landlord to be "responsible for keeping their property in a safe and environmental condition."

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr. Lindsay, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, pursuant to the Gaming and Liquor Act: the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission 2005-2006 annual report.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Chair: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to the Standing Orders I would now ask the Government House Leader to please share with us the projected government business for the week commencing March 19.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under our new Standing Orders, of course, there is no opportunity for government business on Monday, so government business would continue on Tuesday, March 20, after Orders of the Day with the supplementary appropriation bill in Committee of the Whole, the interim supply bill in second reading; Bill 1, Lobbyists Act, in second reading; Bill 3, the climate change act, in second reading; and address and reply to the Speech from the Throne.

On Wednesday, March 21, under Orders of the Day the interim supply bill; supplementary supply bill; Bill 1, Lobbyists Act, second reading; Bill 3, climate change act, second reading; Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act, second reading; and Bill 5, Health Statutes Amendment Act, second reading; and address and reply to the Speech from the Throne.

On Thursday, March 22, the interim supply bill, third reading; address and reply to the Speech from the Throne; Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act; and Bill 5, Health Statutes Amendment Act, both in second reading.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the rule says that we should proceed

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with question period at 1:30. We do have another matter in the Routine that we have to deal with; that is, we have a Standing Order 30 application. The rules also say that we should proceed with the Routine till 1:30. So the Chair is going to exercise some discretion today by not calling and recognizing the member with the Standing Order 30 question in the event that this would be approved. If the Standing Order 30 application were upheld, there would be no question period because the House would go immediately into the discussion and the debate.

So the chair will take it that there is approval of the House to proceed with Oral Question Period and that nobody will rise on a point of anything.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: We will now recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Red Deer River Water Transfer

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been trying for the past few days to get straight answers from this government about the water transfer from the Red Deer River to the big development in Balzac, but we've received nothing concrete at all. Answering this question shouldn't be an option for this government. This is a serious matter of great concern for the people of central Alberta. Right now everybody is waiting for the decision on the water licence to be made. So my question is to the Premier. When can the people of the Red Deer River basin expect a decision from his government on issuing this water licence?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I will have the Minister of Environment give us a bit of an indication of how it's proceeding through the process. I have stood in this House, I think, three, four times answering a question with respect to the process. It's very clear. As to the timing of the decision, our minister will answer that.

Mr. Renner: The most direct answer that I have, Mr. Speaker, is that the applicant has asked that the decision be deferred until April, and that's the latest that I've heard.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier and his minister talk about process, but this process has resulted in delay after delay. The deadline's December 1, December 31, February 28, now apparently sometime in April. At that rate this whole project is going to be built and up and running before the water licence is issued. Can the Premier tell this Assembly why, in apparently such a well-established process, there have been so many delays? What's going on?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's up to the parties that, of course, make the application. There may be more information; there may be more evidence coming to the board. I'm not quite sure, but perhaps the minister has had further correspondence or knowledge of why the delay.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there's a very clear process that's involved in applications of this nature. Most go very smoothly. Most are not as controversial as this one. There is a requirement for advertising and receiving of public input. That has constituted much of the delay that's been involved in this particular application. As I indicated, at this point the applicant has asked for a further delay.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier stated yesterday that the people of the Red Deer River Valley shouldn't be concerned with this. "They can trust us to do the right thing," he said. But he isn't giving the answers. Indeed, we have a government that's put millions of dollars into this project, a government in which ministers have stood in this very room and defended it. So, my question is to the Premier. Why in the world should the people of central Alberta trust this government on this decision?

Mr. Stelmach: Because, Mr. Speaker, I do keep my word.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to quote from the horse racing journal of November 2004. I'm quoting the CEO of the United Horsemen of Alberta, and he said, quote, we will have an agreement in place with the Alberta government such that if the government ever changes its philosophy on gaming and horse racing, there will be a commitment for a buyout. End of quote. The CEO of United Horsemen of Alberta. To the Premier: is there such an agreement?

Mr. Stelmach: I didn't catch the month of whatever the leader said, month of 2004. My responsibility at that time was Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. In terms of whatever is brought up today . . .

Mr. R. Miller: You're the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: He asked a question; I'm giving an answer. So please allow me to complete the answer.

I'll get more detail on what the hon. member has brought up.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: will the Premier bring an answer whether this agreement exists or not to this Assembly by Monday?

Mr. Stelmach: Who knows? It might be even earlier. You know, I'll just check to see what the issue is, and I'll get back to the Assembly.*

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the backers of this project have publicly claimed they have an agreement with the government for a buyout, or they will have an agreement as of 2004, is the Premier's flip-flop on this project from calling it ridiculous to now seeming to defend it because he now knows that Alberta taxpayers are on the hook if this project does not proceed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, this hon. member has brought forward, first of all, the secret deal. He hasn't been able to provide any evidence of this alleged secret deal. Now he's onto another tangent. His member sitting next to him seems to know a lot about horses and when they drink water. Maybe ask your neighbour; maybe he can tell you.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

*See p. 188, right col., para. 13

Highway Bypass Project in Grande Prairie

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents of the Grande Prairie region are deeply concerned about the quality of life in their area, about the impact of growth on a wide range of things. We were recently up there for a town hall meeting. People were in tears over the cost of housing. Traffic congestion is overwhelming. Schools are struggling, as is the college. My question to the Premier: will the Premier finally commit his government to funding the much-needed bypass connecting highway 43 to highway 16? It's a mere two miles.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the bypass he's talking about is a temporary bypass. The two miles that he's referring to, it just happens to be an issue between the county of Grande Prairie and the city of Grande Prairie. The actual long-term bypass planned goes right around the whole airport, and that is a project that will take a few more years to complete. What the member is referring to is just trying to tie a short piece of road so that we don't have the hundreds of trucks passing through today's Grande Prairie bypass, which has numerous lights on it.

Dr. Taft: Clearly, he understands exactly what I'm referring to, but my question wasn't: what am I referring to? I'm looking for a decision from a Premier who wants to lead this government. A decision, please, Mr. Premier. Will your government support this bypass project, which you know so well?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I am leading the government. Not "wants to"; I am.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, not much leadership – not much leadership. One more time: will you commit your government to building this pass, or won't you?

Mr. Stelmach: I think the question was whether we're committed to looking after many of the issues around Grande Prairie. I spent a considerable amount of time with both councils, very fully aware of their needs. We are going to introduce a very thorough capital plan, and that'll be in conjunction with the budget. Many of these growth pressures that we're experiencing not only in Grande Prairie but in other areas will be addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Royalty Review

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans know that they're being fleeced by the oil corporations thanks to the sweetheart deal they get from the royalty regime provided by this government. With oil prices pushing \$60 a barrel, billions of dollars in unearned profits are leaving Alberta every year, yet this Premier has already broken his promise to conduct an open and independent review of Alberta's royalties. The question is to the Premier. How can he justify a royalty review which is dominated by friends of the oil industry and which will meet with private interests behind closed doors?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe I answered this question quite thoroughly when the Leader of the Official Opposition asked it the other day. These are professionals. They have to follow codes of ethics. They're people very proficient in the business, especially economics. They come from a very wide variety of backgrounds, and their purpose is to present the information, put it on the table, so that all Albertans can assess whether the current oil sands royalty review – and also conventional oil and gas – is fair and just both to the companies investing and to Albertans as owners of the resource.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Pembina Institute has established four criteria to determine whether or not a process is open and transparent. Guess what? This process fails all four. Albertans are not actively involved. There are no mechanisms for meaningful public input. There's been no insurance about giving Albertans full access to details, and there are clear conflicts of interest on the review panel. Will the Premier come clean with Albertans and admit that his so-called royalty review is a sham designed to deflect criticism from the government's sellout of Alberta's resources?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, shortly after the swearing-in I met with the Pembina Institute in Calgary. We had a thorough discussion, and from the meeting we had, I thought they were very supportive of the position we're taking and the fact that we're doing the oil sands royalty review. But if there's any further information, the Minister of Finance can finish.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just add that each and every Albertan has the ability online to put in their opinions. That online service will be up shortly, will be available within probably the next two or three weeks. There will be four public meetings around the province, at which anyone in this Assembly or anyone, period, is more than welcome to come and make a presentation, that will be public to everyone.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier overrule his minister and require the committee to have public hearings around the province and to not meet with private interests behind closed doors? Will he do that?

Mr. Stelmach: I just heard the minister say that we're having four public meetings in the province of Alberta. Those are public. Unless you have some other definition, I don't know, but these are four public meetings where Albertans can present evidence to the panel.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Federal Equalization Formula

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Alberta are worried and confused because this government is confused and sending out conflicting messages. On the equalization formula the minister in charge of intergovernmental affairs was quoted in the *Calgary Herald*. He is very worried about having resource revenue included in the calculations, while our Finance minister is quoted that he could care less whether the new formula incorporates resource revenue. Albertans care. Could the Premier please clarify if this government cares?

Mr. Stelmach: The government does care. It certainly cares about its people. With this particular issue it's very clear. The Council of the Federation has received a letter from the Prime Minister that indicated that there will be no inclusion of nonrenewable resources in the calculation of the equalization formula. We have moved, Mr. Speaker, as you know from a five-province standard to a 10-province standard. We've come a long way, but we'll see what happens on Monday in the budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government claims it had to shut down hospitals, schools, and delay maintenance on infrastructure along with putting off building new schools, hospitals, and roads to be fiscally responsible. Will the new equalization formula account for such things as infrastructure deficit, unfunded liability of Albertans to the Canada pension plan versus the Quebec-funded pension plan, that is very lucrative?

Mr. Stelmach: I think that question we'd better ask the federal minister responsible for treasury because they're the ones going to be responsible for splitting the pool, the equalization pool, amongst the have-not provinces.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Credible economists like Brian Lee Crowley from Atlantic Canada point out the problems of equalization. After decades it's obvious the regions are becoming more reliant on transfers. It's not a hand up; it's an addicting and entrapping handout. It is not working. Does the Premier have the fortitude to fight for all Canadians and pursue a policy that insists on a sunset clause with the federal government on a new equalization formula?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, equalization is part of the Constitution, and it will require a constitutional change. The actual allocation of the equalization pool is still the responsibility of the federal government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Private/Public Partnerships

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister of P3 education stated, "The research I did was that every time a P3 was unsuccessful, it was commenced by a Liberal or a socialist government." I would suggest the minister study harder in his social studies class. For example, let's review his Conservative government's failed P3 Calgary courthouse, the sweet private deal on the south link urgent care centre, and the cost overruns on the Anthony Henday. My questions are to the Premier. Was former Premier Klein, under whose watch these P3 failures occurred, a socialist?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if it's part of the responsibility of the Premier to talk about the political alliances of others that are not in the House. Let's put it this way: this is an area of disagreement, obviously. I know that there's a fully developed public/private partnership process actually part of government, and that's a part of the B.C. government. They do carry the Liberal label. They have built a considerable amount of infrastructure under public/private partnership, and it has been successful.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Yesterday the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation stated that we're not going back into debt. Mr. Speaker, the Premier is signing Albertans up for 30 years of payments to private companies. By any definition this is a debt. To the Premier: how much alternative financing, Enron juggling, P3 debt is the Premier willing to load onto the backs of Alberta taxpayers, who will be on the hook for the next 30 years?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has put a whole bunch of different words in there, but just to get down to the very specific, of course a good project is the southeast leg of the Anthony Henday. It'll be completed this July, fully open to traffic. Here's the thing. We will know what the payout is on it on an annual basis, including maintenance. It's a fixed cost. I can assure you that it's infrastructure that's going to be enjoyed by the next generation and the generation after, and it will show up in our financial statements.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I'm sure the next 30 years of Alberta's generations will enjoy paying for an untold interest amount over that time period.

To the Premier: how deep does the Premier believe Alberta taxpayers' pockets are when it comes to paying the price for his government's alternative financing schemes? Is this the transparency and accountability the Premier has promised? Are you becoming so transparent that we can see through you?

Mr. Stelmach: Maybe he's got something else behind the eyes; I'm not quite sure. But, Mr. Speaker, talking about transparency, any liability incurred by the government on behalf of taxpayers is and will be duly recorded in our financial statements. This is one area of very large infrastructure getting built, getting built on time, and I will say at great savings when you bring it back to the net present value. If there's a further need to explain the process to any of the hon. members across the floor, we'll gladly have them sit down with our people and explain it.

Rent Regulations

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of Albertans rent their homes or apartments. In today's rental market renters face a growing number of challenges; for example, rising rents and low vacancies. Some of my constituents who are moving out of their rental properties tell me that they are receiving their damage deposit back from their landlord without any interest included. My questions are for the Minister of Service Alberta. What is the policy on landlords paying interest on damage deposits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the policy on interest is that if a damage deposit is asked for from a landlord to a tenant, it must be put in a bank account, and it must pay interest based on a formula. Unfortunately for the renter, the formula has allowed virtually zero interest to accumulate since 2002. This year it's about .9 or .8. So they would normally get interest if interest had accrued, and it's the responsibility of the landlord to return that interest to the tenant.

Mr. Shariff: To the same minister: where can renters turn for help if they suspect that their landlord isn't following the requirements of the Residential Tenancies Act?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. Tenants – and we are contacted by many, as everyone in the House is aware of the issues right now – can contact Service Alberta consumer information at 1-877-427-4088 for information and assistance. As well, they can deal with the tenant advisory boards that are in Red Deer, Fort McMurray, and Edmonton. In any case, if they are in violation of the Residential Tenancies Act, they can take their landlord to small debts court.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ambulance Operators' Labour Dispute

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite a negotiation in progress between Flagstaff county and local ambulance workers in Flagstaff county the government has been heavy handed and pre-emptive in forcing the negotiation into a disputes inquiry board. The chaos created by the government's abandonment of the regional ambulance agreement two years ago continues. My first question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why the government uses a different set of rules for intervening with the Parkland teachers than for the ambulance labour negotiation in Flagstaff?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is one matter that the minister responsible has all the information on.

Ms Evans: It is a good question, Mr. Speaker. The health care service of providing ambulance was identified in a previously done government report as something that may be an essential service. Although we haven't yet enacted legislation to make ambulance per se an essential service at the municipal level, it is, in fact, something that we have to consider when we're looking at the safety of providing service in a situation of dispute. I've spoken with the reeve on more than one occasion about this. In the first instance we hoped not to intervene, but we did because of concerns for safety.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: why does the minister's personal belief that emergency workers should not be allowed to strike trump the workers' right to do so?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, under no circumstance would a minister of the Crown say that their own personal belief trumps the right of anybody else. What I have pointed out quite clearly is the concern that we have had about the safety of providing service. In the view of our mediator who has been working with both parties to make sure that dates and process were properly in place, the concern that has been represented to me is that safety may be compromised. I have never seen the contingency plan for providing ambulance service if the strike were allowed to take place, and even in the absence of legislation, one in prudent management would have to be concerned if anything happened.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: why is the Premier allowing the government to run roughshod over the local decision-makers' established process? Given that contingency plans were in place, why didn't the government give Flagstaff county and the union a chance to work through their own process?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I know the reeve, Bill Reister, quite well. I will give him a call and talk to him personally if there is an issue with respect to this matter, but I have full confidence in my minister that she is dealing with the issue the proper way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Seniors' Property Taxes

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1993 the Alberta government had an enormous debt, a fact of which we're all acutely aware, and every Albertan was expected to play a role to help eliminate that debt, and that included seniors. Suddenly in 1994 seniors were compelled to pay an education property tax, but at that time they understood its purpose. Well, that purpose has been served. I have some questions for the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Now that Alberta is debt free, will he eliminate the education property tax from the shoulders of seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek does appropriately mention things about programs of the past, where seniors did not pay the education property tax previous to 1993. It was felt at that stage, as all programs change in design, that we would focus more effort to ensure that we could provide the maximum benefit to the seniors in greatest need. So the programs have been designed to ensure that for those who have the greatest financial burden, we would help and assist in program design rather than saying that all seniors would be exempted from the education property tax.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I wonder if the minister would at least reduce that tax for those seniors who can't afford to pay it.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, with respect to reductions in this or any other program, part of that would also be part of municipal affairs, where that program element does specifically align. Our department at this stage does not have any specific designs for reducing the education property tax. Where I would say that we have specifically improved are the monthly cash benefits to low-income seniors. We could go through the assistance on one-time costs, like home repairs, furnace, major appliances. We could even go through how income taxes have helped reduce the burden on all seniors, for example, in keeping more money in their pockets. About \$2 billion are going to various seniors' programs, very substantial amounts.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I wonder if the minister is prepared to cap or extend the cap or fix the cap so that those needy seniors who are really in trouble paying this tax aren't faced with the added burden of ever-increasing property values, which serves to increase property tax.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, in 2004 that's precisely what this government did: cap any increases in education property tax to all seniors. They do not pay any increase that we've seen, inflationary or otherwise, in their property taxes. They have been capped at that amount since 2004.

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

Climate Change

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in his press conference the Environment minister declared to a shocked audience that climate change is real. Climate change is the number one issue for Albertans and Canadians, even above health care. In fact, man-made climate warming has been identified by the scientific community for decades, but this government has distinguished itself in ignoring science whenever inconvenient. In 2001-02 the then Environment minister spent several million public dollars convincing Albertans that cutting emissions would destroy our economy and

jobs. Evidence now shows that governments such as this are passing on a disastrous environmental and economic burden to future generations. To the Premier: since you were part . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier. Sorry.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, environment, of course, is of utmost importance to this government. That's why we're the first jurisdiction in Canada to pass legislation, tabled here in the House, for regulations. In fact, quite frankly, given the kind of responses we've had from other provinces, industry, and Albertans, I know that we're on the right track.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: since you were part of the cabinet at that time, did you support the approach to climate change? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: What approach? The fact that we tabled the bill? Of course we did. The bill has been just tabled here in the House. We're in the process of ensuring that we have a very good system of measuring emissions. Those 100 or so emitters that will not be able to meet those emission standards will be paying a credit, and we'll ensure that that credit stays in Alberta to be put into technology and further infrastructure for the benefit of the next generation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think this Premier is willing to answer a question straight.

In 2001-02 your government took an approach to climate change. Did you support it, or did you not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we were the only jurisdiction, in order to put legislation in place, with a process where we have an ability now to measure the emissions between 2003 and '05 so that we can set a baseline to see who is emitting more than in those years. I mean, what's wrong with that? We're the only province that can do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Child Care Funding

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two recent reports from Statistics Canada illustrate the dilemma faced by Alberta families struggling to find and pay for daycare spaces. Alberta is experiencing the country's only baby boom, yet Alberta had fewer daycare spaces in 2004 than in 1992. Families are feeling the squeeze because they do not receive enough support, and daycare costs to families are rising. The government hopes to attract even more workers to the province, but there are no plans to help young parents return to work or ensure family-friendly policies for new Albertans.

My questions are for the Minister of Children's Services. We read in today's paper that the government will get another chance at federal funding for daycare. Will the minister commit to using these funds and provincial allocations to provide operating grants directly to nonprofit centres to enable badly needed . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Second question.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to using these increased funds coming from the federal government,

hopefully, and adequate funding from the province to provide operating grants directly to nonprofit centres to enable badly needed expansion of high-quality care in the province to happen?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. Thank you very much. He actually raises probably my number one issue and a priority mandated by the Premier, which is to ensure that parents in this province receive accessible and affordable quality health care. There were a number of questions that were involved in your preamble there. I can tell you that we are taking this seriously. We have made a significant announcement last week that would help with the zero to six accessibility for parents of children of those ages. I've also committed on the six to 12 to work with our stakeholders, which would be municipalities and corporations and our operators, on some workable solutions to the issues that are facing them.

The Speaker: Sorry, Minister.

Hon. member, last question.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the increased availability of affordable child care encourages women with young families to work and is an important objective in light of Alberta's labour market situation, will the minister commit to extending funding for child care to children up to the age of 12 to help parents cover the cost of after school care for their children?

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. Thank you. I got cut off last time, so I'll just continue. Currently in the province we license both zero to six and six to 12 child care programs. We have the policy mandate to provide services on the zero to six. Programs through ages six to 12 are delivered if municipalities through our FCSS funding determine that it is a local priority.

I'm well aware of the issues that have been facing both zero to six and six to 12. Last week I made some announcements that immediately will improve the situation for zero to six. On the other side, that you're talking about, I have committed to taking a leadership role in working with all of our stakeholders in finding some workable solutions there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Health Care Workforce Supply

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the year 2010-2011 a new hospital will open in south Calgary. This is great news for our growing city, but as you know, a building is just a building if you can't staff the same hospital. We know that there's a critical need for more health care workers/professionals to staff this facility as well as others in the province. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What are you doing to address, say, the shortage of nurses?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I was very, very pleased to announce that Mount Royal College in Calgary has officially become a degree-granting institution and, as part of that, has been approved to offer a new bachelor of nursing degree program, its very first degree program. We've also announced that we'll be adding more spaces to another new nursing degree program, that begins this fall at MacEwan College in Edmonton. As well, this

will allow us to free up some spots at the University of Alberta. So since 1999 we have more than doubled the number of nursing spots in Alberta, and we recognize that there is a need for more.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. This is great news. However, previously nursing students from Mount Royal completed their degrees at Athabasca University. With this announcement made today, are we announcing the same seats under a new banner, or are these new seats?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, just for clarity. There was, I guess, a little confusion in some of the media today, and perhaps some of the members opposite might be a little confused as well about this issue. This morning's announcement effectively means that we will be more than doubling the number of graduates coming from Mount Royal in the next three to four years.

Mrs. Ady: My final supplemental is to the same minister. As well as nurses, of course, we need doctors and medical technicians to staff this hospital, so what is this minister doing to help us meet these health care professional needs?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to tell my colleagues that we've added a significant number of new spaces across the board in postsecondary and other health programs as well. Last fall we increased the number of first-year physician spaces to 257. That's a 13 per cent increase over '05-06, and that means that the total number of doctors to be trained will be 900 in the next four years. The total number of spaces in other health training programs – that's dentists, pharmacists, lab technicians – has increased by over 1,500. That's more than a 50 per cent increase in just eight years. We are working on our plan for managing all of the growth pressures to build a stronger Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Federal Equalization Formula (continued)

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It would seem that the Tory leadership race did not end on December 2. The Premier and the Finance minister are openly bickering about whether resource revenues should be included in the formula that's used to calculate federal equalization payments. Ordinary Albertans are confused by the mixed messages that the Premier and his ministers continue to send. My first question is for the Minister of Finance. Does this minister support Stephen Harper's election promise not to include resource revenues in the formula? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find it very difficult to comment on something that the Prime Minister has a full mandate to do or not to do. I understand that that question will be elucidated on Monday at 2 o'clock, so we certainly on this side wait with bated breath to see what the Prime Minister has to say, to see what the budget has to hold for Albertans. Both the Premier and myself are looking for fairness for Albertans in this upcoming budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Finance minister has said that he expects the federal budget to ramp up the Canada social transfer to Alberta and he doesn't seem to mind including resource revenues in the equalization formula, my question is this. Can he please tell all Albertans what kind of a secret deal he has made with his cousin the federal Tory Finance minister?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I'm actually very complimented that the hon. member would think that I would go out and do some sort of deal to benefit Albertans. I would love to be able to stand here and say that we're getting a higher per capita increase. I'm hoping. Quite frankly, I think all Albertans are hoping that the per capita formula and the CST and the CHT would go to a realistic level where we, being Albertans, receive exactly the same amount as people in the rest of the country and other provinces. I'm hoping that that will be there. Do I have knowledge of a secret deal? The answer is no.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the cost of the federal equalization program increases, the federal government will either have to raise taxes, cut other programs, or run a deficit to pay for it. Even the Premier's director of media relations has said that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development should be Alberta's lead on the equalization discussion, so my third question is for that minister. On Monday I asked the minister whether or not his ministry had any concerns about the \$5.2 million in federal transfers that they receive and whether or not that money might be in jeopardy if the equalization formula includes resource revenues. He's had a couple of days to think about it. Now my question is: are you worried about that money or not?

Mr. Mason: Just say firewall.

Dr. Morton: If you read *Maclean's* magazine, you realize that that word is very popular in Quebec, and it's why Stephen Harper is going to form a majority government by winning 30 or 40 seats in Quebec.

The member opposite should study the equalization formula. No money leaves the coffers of this government to go directly to Ottawa.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Postsecondary Opportunities

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Studies show that in the years ahead 70 per cent of all Albertans will require some form of postsecondary education. That means it's absolutely critical for all Albertans – every single one – to consider further learning. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is the government doing to help encourage all Albertans to consider, plan, and save for postsecondary education that they will so critically need?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. We are working with our postsecondary institutions in a collaborative, co-operative approach to communicate not only to the K to 12 system but to parents and to Albertans alike that the future is going to require that higher educated workforce, and the future is here in many respects. Currently we are expanding all of our apprenticeship spots, we're expanding all of our postsecondary spots, trying to meet the demand, but more importantly we're working in co-operation

with not only the postsecondaries but all stakeholders within the system to lower costs so that it's affordable and to work on the affordability framework.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question goes to the same minister. Working with institutions to help create more spaces and make things more affordable is one thing, but there is a group out there that typically doesn't consider advanced education critical. What is the minister doing to raise the level of awareness of the critical need for further education among groups that typically don't pursue postsecondary education and are at risk of falling further behind the economic curve in this booming economy?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working in tandem with the Minister of Education in the K to 12 system because the reality is that we need to have mentors involved in our K to 12 system telling students and telling parents about the opportunities that a booming economy like Alberta has but also the pathways that they need to achieve those opportunities. Certainly, we'll be looking for new and innovative ways to show students about science, about how they can achieve their potential in a postsecondary system in our global economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Child and Youth Advocate

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's most vulnerable citizens, disadvantaged children and youth, need to know that they have somewhere to turn when it seems there are no options left. A strong children's advocate can serve the interests of these individuals, but changes to the position are needed. To the Minister of Children's Services: will the minister demonstrate her government's often stated commitment to openness and transparency by having the Child and Youth Advocate an independent office that reports directly to the Legislature, not the ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say that when I'm looking at anything within this department, I'm looking through the eyes of children and families, and my focus will always be on that. It seems to me that the advocate is absolutely doing a fabulous job when he's representing the interests of our children and our youth in care. To my knowledge the way it works now is working exceptionally well. I know that on a regular basis he gets to provide us with continuous feedback on our policies. On a regular basis he can continually influence our policy, and if the concern is accountability, he is accountable to both myself and to Albertans through his annual report.

Mrs. Mather: Well, a report commissioned by this government in 2000 recommended that the children's advocate be made an independent office of the Legislature, similar to the Ombudsman or Auditor General. The report stated that this change would allow the advocate to speak freely and without government interference to better serve children, who are often suspicious of the system, and to have more credibility than it does while housed in the ministry. Can the minister please explain why seven years later Children's Services has not moved forward on this recommendation?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge the advocate does speak freely, but having said that, I don't know which report you're talking about. If you would like to forward that to me, I would be willing to take a look at it.

Mrs. Mather: If the minister has no plans to make the Child and Youth Advocate independent, will she consider creating an all-party committee, including the children's advocate, to review provincial child protection services and provide and make public recommendations about how they can be improved to better serve Alberta's vulnerable children and youth?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'd reiterate that I think the advocate is doing a fabulous job. I think that the way it's set up now works very well for our families, our youth, and for this province. I would also remind the House again that he is very accountable to us through his annual report, and he's only one of many checks and balances. We also have appeal panels, we have mediation services that are offered, and as well we have the Ombudsman.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Contaminated Sites Cleanup

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the government has introduced a new environmentally friendly program to help clean up gas station sites that have contamination from underground petroleum tanks. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. What is the current status of this program, and how much money is involved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that the province is providing an additional \$50 million to help eligible municipalities and owners of small retail gas stations to take necessary action to address contamination of underground fuel tanks. I need to say that this is in addition to the program that was brought forward in the year 2000 of \$60 million, and the program addressed 900 contaminated sites. The new program has already affected 200 applicants that were already in place and 100 . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary to the same minister: well, then, who is eligible for the new program? In other words, will this program help the average retailer out there?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the program is available to municipalities and small retail gas stations that meet the eligible criteria.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what is being done to ensure that sites that are not addressed through this program are also being cleaned up in Alberta?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act requires all owners to clean up their sites whether they're eligible for the program or not. This program assists individuals or municipalities that are eligible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, and would the third party be ready. The potential for the 18th question is here.

Edmonton Remand Centre

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After years of neglect and stalling by this government, finally the decision to construct the new remand centre in Edmonton was made last summer. However, guards are now extremely worried about their safety with respect to the proposed open concept design of the new facility, the open pod style. If things go bad, as can typically happen in a remand centre situation, our corrections officers will likely find themselves facing imminent danger, with their backs exposed. Did the Solicitor General consult with representatives of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees in general, or the local in particular, to hear their concerns with respect to the proposed design?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an excellent question. Yes, indeed we have consulted with our union to ensure that they are onside with this new state-of-the-art design, and we will be meeting with them again to ensure that any concerns they have will be addressed. This new facility is certainly state of the art and follows a model of approximately 100 other correctional facilities across North America. It's a facility that is going to ensure the safety of not only the staff but also the inmates, and we look forward to addressing those concerns.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the primary concern when we're designing a new remand centre must be the safety of those who either work or live inside. Our corrections officers work in an extremely stressful and challenging environment, and they're expected to maintain order in an environment that is inherently dangerous and disorderly. We owe it to them to take their concerns seriously. If the guards overwhelmingly favour a closed pod system similar to the one at the current remand centre, what are the chances that the hon. Solicitor General will order the design amended or changed to accommodate those concerns?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, right now we're working on a proposed design, and if anything should come forward to indicate that we need to change our direction in this design, we will certainly do that. Our top priority is to ensure, again, the safety of the inmates and the safety of our staff, and I'm quite confident this new design will address those issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: will the minister make sure that the new remand centre is equipped with immediate lockdown protocols and equipment so that in response to a riot or a similar emergency the entire facility can be swiftly controlled, keeping both guards and inmates safe?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, we have not had an incident of an escape from the present remand centre. The new centre is going to be that much more secure than the existing facility, and all those precautions will be taken. I can assure the hon. member again that the safety of inmates and the safety of staff will be a top priority in the design and construction of this new facility.

The Speaker: We arrive today, hon. members, at 98 questions and answers. That's very good.

head: 2:20 **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: We have one order of business. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on a Standing Order 30 application.

Parkland Teachers' Labour Dispute

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Standing Order 30(7)(a) stipulates that a motion under this order "must relate to a genuine emergency," and I will explain that urgency very shortly. I would also note that no other motion under Standing Order 30 has been dealt with today and that this motion only deals with a single matter which has not been dealt with in this session. It's not based on a question of privilege, and it's not a question that can only be debated on a motion on notice. *Beauchesne* 387 says that a debate under this standing order must deal with a specific question which requires urgent consideration, it must be within the administrative competence of the government, and there's no other reasonable opportunity for debate.

We are calling here today for a very specific action in this motion; namely, the immediate appointment of a special mediator to resolve the labour dispute in the Parkland county school division. Such an appointment is clearly within the administrative competence of the government. In fact, such a mediator was appointed in the past and proved to be very helpful in resolving disputes. I note that the Alberta Teachers' Association has also asked for a special mediator to be appointed at this time. Clearly, this is an action that the government is able to take, and I think a rigorous debate on this issue in the Assembly would give the Premier and the Minister of Education some clear direction to do so.

There are a number of other measures that fall within the government's administrative competence, but they are not likely to be as successful in resolving this problem as this motion I'm putting forward today.

If a debate is agreed to, I would be happy to elaborate and carefully consider the options we have before us. I would also refer to *Beauchesne* 391 and note that the dispute is not currently under the adjudication of a court of law. Certainly, the Labour Relations Board is playing a role in applying the labour codes to this dispute, but the board's involvement in no way precludes the action we are calling for here to be taken by either the Premier or the Minister of Education. *Marleau and Montpetit* also list the same criteria I have just outlined, on pages 587 and 588. So having established that the procedural criteria and the conditions laid out by the authorities have been met, I would like to very briefly speak to the urgency of this motion.

Mr. Speaker, before I was elected to this House, I myself was a teacher. I am also a parent. So I appreciate how difficult the situation is for all sides. Members of my caucus have received many heartfelt letters from residents of Parkland county pleading for some resolution to this matter in a most urgent way. I believe that all members are aware of how important education is and the foundation it lays for the future participation of our children in the economy as democratic citizens. The longer this dispute continues, the farther the delays are in setting the foundation for these children's education. There are 9,500 students in 22 schools between Entwistle and Spruce Grove, and they're all being negatively affected by this dispute.

We also need to be realistic about what is at stake. Teachers in the Wild Rose school division voted 90 per cent in favour of a strike last night. We know that negotiations for schools boards will be coming up across the province over these next few months. A proper stage needs to be set for these negotiations to be undertaken

in a positive and a constructive way. There's always a lot of finger pointing in this situation, but the point is the urgent need for the government to finally take a positive and constructive role in bringing these sides back to the table.

Just before I conclude, I want to emphasize the urgency and the importance of having this debate here this afternoon. We can recall in 2002 the province-wide teachers' strike, and I know first-hand the damage that a protracted dispute can cause. Every day that the government delays only worsens the damage, especially for students writing diploma exams. The NDP opposition opposes a harsh and arbitrary measure such as back to work legislation and believes that the government has a responsibility to immediately foster conciliation between all parties in this dispute. The children and students of Parkland are counting on this Assembly to do the right thing and move on this motion here today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The chair will recognize anybody else to participate.

Please remember, now, that we're dealing with a procedural question in the House. It has nothing to do with the strike. That's not the urgency argument that has to be heard. That's not the issue. It's urgency of this Assembly to deal with the matter: that's the subject at hand here.

The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has put forward a motion that suggests that it is urgent and vital for this House to engage in debate on the issues surrounding the situation we have in Parkland, the Parkland school dispute. I fail to recognize what this House debating this motion at this time could do to reconcile the circumstances that we find ourselves in in Parkland.

While it is regrettable that there have been 18 days where students have not been in class, the debate about the urgency of it in this House may not do anything to resolve the situation we find in Parkland. In Parkland a mediator has been available, has been offered, has been available to both sides that are party to this dispute. Both sides have been told that if they could agree on a process for reconciliation, the DIB process with certain conditions, there would be an opportunity for them to come to some reconciliation.

Mr. Speaker, we can talk in this Legislature until the cows come home, but at the end of the day we have no teeth to compel both sides to come together. The best people to have the teeth in this situation are the parents and people in that community to really compel both sides to work together either to commonly resolve it or to in effect go further and ask the government collectively for a process that can in fact initiate resolution.

The Speaker: Okay. Methinks what the hon. minister was doing was participating in the debate, not dealing with the subject as to why we need to adjourn the remainder of the House today to deal with this matter. That's what the urgency question is all about. If it's upheld, then we will have the debate.

The hon. Member for St. Albert on the question of urgency with respect to the need to adjourn the House from the regular Routine.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in support of the request for an emergency debate on the situation in the Parkland school division. As an Official Opposition shadow minister for Education I've been in close contact with board members, a representative of the teachers, as well as parents and students affected by the labour dispute. I've previously risen in the House to ask the government how they're planning to bring a fair and timely resolution to the situation. So I and my colleagues are certainly aware of the urgency of the situation.

The heading for SO 30 is Urgent Public Importance. In other words, the case for urgency logically requires an underlying issue of great importance to the public. The current labour dispute between the teachers and the board of Parkland school division certainly meets the standard of being urgent because kids' education – I want to say up front that in the long run the education system is well served by fair bargaining processes, and that leads generally to good relationships between teachers and our school boards. But in this instance that relationship appears to have broken down, and it is very important to have both sides back at the bargaining table to negotiate a settlement acceptable to both parties.

It's worth noting that the situation is aggravated by the financial constraints faced by some of the school boards across Alberta. Mr. Speaker, this issue deserves our attention today because without the two sides actually talking, a fair, mutually agreed upon resolution won't happen in time for those kids that need to get an education. The result could be that students who are preparing for their diploma exams or applying for postsecondary programs may be disadvantaged. For example, the registrar of NAIT today suggested that once students are out of school for a month, the likelihood of success and even admission is very reduced, a crisis on the part of many families and kids. As of today kids have been out of school 19 days, and the holidays are coming up very quickly. This is urgent. This is essentially a full month of school which is probably going to be missed.

Another point that makes this situation so critical is that many working parents are struggling to find adequate child care. This is placing a huge burden on parents, their families, and the community.

Now to urgency. The authors of the authority set up a number of other conditions for SO 30. *Beauchesne* 390 indicates that the public interest can be served through discussion and debate. Therefore, the public interest will be served by setting aside the ordinary business of today to discuss this extraordinary issue that is affecting the people of Parkland. I hope the government will agree that this deserves the full attention of the Assembly.

I also note that *Beauchesne* 387 indicates that the Speaker may "take into account the general wish of the House to have a debate," and I hope the government side will help us express this wish. We think it's very essential.

2:30

In terms of today's scheduled business and whether there's adequate opportunity to discuss this issue, I would argue that there is not. There is no government bill scheduled for debate today that would provide an opportunity to discuss this issue. As this is not private members' day, there is no private member's motion scheduled for debate, and the next one up for debate would also not provide an opportunity to debate this issue. The next private member's bill, to be debated on Monday, will also not provide an opportunity to discuss this issue.

Written questions and motions for returns are scheduled to stand and retain their places. The debate on supplementary supply will not provide an opportunity since this Assembly is not being asked for additional funds for education. Interim supply debate is not a suitable or sufficient opportunity since this issue requires the full attention of the entire Assembly. Replies and responses to the Speech from the Throne also do not provide the kind of opportunity for a focused debate on this single issue. I still believe it's an urgent issue to be debated immediately.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The chair has heard three speakers with respect to this matter. If there's a requirement to have more, so be it, but the chair is quite prepared to rule on this matter. Any hon. member insist that they want to participate?

Standing Order 30 is rather clear. We've had discussion with respect to Standing Order 30 before, and the Standing Order 30 application is one where the chair may allow such debate as he considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate, not the subject but the urgency of the debate, and then rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

First of all, I'd like to confirm that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has given proper notice of his intention to bring a motion under Standing Order 30. The hon. member fulfilled the requirement of section 30(1) by providing at least two hours' written notice to the Speaker's office. This arrived at 10:42 this morning. The chair also confirms that the subject matter was provided at that time, so there was opportunity between 10:42 and the hearing of these arguments now to do a little bit of research with respect to this and to consult precedent as well.

Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed is to be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether the motion fulfills the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

The member's proposed motion states: be it resolved that the Assembly adjourn its ordinary business to discuss a matter of urgent public importance;

namely, the urgent need for the Premier or the Minister of Education on his behalf to protect the educational needs of students in Parkland county and to foster goodwill between teachers, parents, students, and the school board by appointing a special mediator to help resolve the current Parkland school division labour dispute.

The chair has noted on several occasions in the past – and hon. members alluded to them too – that the relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debates are *Beauchesne's* paragraphs 387 to 398 and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589.

On an important technical note the chair notes that the wording of the hon. member's application appears to propose a decision of the Assembly; that is, to appoint a special mediator. That would run afoul of Standing Order 30(6). Standing Order 30(6) says, "An emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly."

As well, the chair would note that although this is a serious matter, the chair's understanding by checking the calendar is that this event has now been transpiring since February 16, 2007. The chair is not aware as to why this is a genuine emergency today but not yesterday or the day before or last Thursday.

The chair has reviewed these references closely in considering this request for leave and must emphasize once again to all members that to meet the requirements of urgency, there must not – not – be another opportunity for members of the Assembly to discuss this matter. Question period is one of those areas that's available to members.

To conclude, the chair does not want to detract from the importance of the issue, but the chair is of the view that there will be other opportunities afforded to the members to discuss this matter, and therefore the request for leave is not in order.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 4
Child Care Licensing Act**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act.

This new act is based on what we heard during two years of consultation with parents, child care operators, and other interested Albertans. Child care facilities are currently licensed under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act. This act covers all facilities, including those for adults and children, and being more than 20 years old, it needs to be updated. Rather than amending outdated legislation, we are proposing legislation that is designed specifically for Alberta children. The Social Care Facilities Licensing Act licenses programs based on the state of a facility, not on the quality of the program, but we know that it's the programs and the people providing the care that ensure the best outcomes for children, not the facilities.

Mr. Speaker, this new legislation gives us a new way of looking at child care. It's an innovative piece of legislation that builds on our government's commitment to continue to support and create quality child care programs and will help respond to the child care needs of today's families. If passed, the Child Care Licensing Act would focus on licensing based more on the program than the facility, encourage innovative approaches to create new child care programs while placing a priority on the safety of children. It would enable the creation of new licensing categories, one being new group family day care, where two adults can care for seven to 10 children in approved private homes. This act would allow operators to make better use of the spaces they already have. For example, under the current act operators licensed to provide out of school care have their spaces sitting empty when the children are in school and do not have the ability to move preschool children into those spaces. Under the new legislation operators will have the flexibility to use this space for any child.

This act will reward excellence. Operators who consistently demonstrate quality programming will receive multiyear licences, which would mean less time doing paperwork and more time caring for the children. As well, this act provides for more effective monitoring to ensure that operators comply with the act.

It's time for Alberta's parents and child care providers to have legislation that ensures that the children we're responsible for have the best start in life. This legislation provides the framework that we need. I'd ask all members to support this very important piece of legislation. Your support will demonstrate our government's commitment to building a quality child care system that will most definitely lead to better outcomes for children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act, and I would like to thank the minister for sharing information with me beforehand through a staff member.

Countless Alberta families can't find or can't afford the child care they need. This situation is hurting Alberta's families, and it's hurting Alberta's economy. As I travel across the province, I hear the same concerns: not enough spaces, not enough staff. So I'm glad that this bill is an effort to look at licensing along with the quality of programs.

The years 2000 to 2005 saw the federal, provincial, and territorial governments reach consensus that the early years of life are critical to children's development and future well-being. These same governments also recognized that quality early learning and child care programs play an important role in promoting the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of young children and agreed to work together to improve access to such programs. They set forth objectives to promote early childhood development so that children would to their fullest potential be physically and emotionally healthy, safe, and secure, socially engaged and responsible, and ready to learn upon school entry.

In 2005 bilateral agreements, agreements in principle between provinces and the government of Canada, further outlined principles for the development of early learning and child care, including quality: regulated to keep children safe and ensure that they are cared for by professionally qualified child development staff. Universally inclusive: open to the whole range of children regardless of their family's income, children's ability, or culture. Accessible: early learning and child care programs are broadly available to children, and the cost is affordable for parents. Developmental: programs that include both care and developmental learning components.

2:40

In recognizing that quality early learning and child care experiences contribute to healthy child development, these governments have taken on a variety of roles that extend beyond ensuring that children in licensed early learning and child care programs are kept safe from harm. Placing the licensing process within this broader policy framework of healthy outcomes for children has expanded the role of licensing beyond keeping children safe to a shared responsibility to enrich programs for children. Licensing is a very complex process, and it includes the roles of investigation, regulation, and enhancement.

This Child Care Licensing Act has been developed to work independent of the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, which is outdated, refers primarily to conditions, and addresses many different ages, services, et cetera. So I am delighted to see the clarity and the concentration on the individuals that are involved in child care only.

This act will do the following. It'll remove criteria of a facility and instead license programs based on content, developmental appropriateness, et cetera, while still retaining some facility requirements. It will enable the minister to create licensing categories outside of what currently exists – centre, nursery school, et cetera – to enable greater flexibility and meet local and specialized needs. It will ensure that parents are well informed and involved in their child's care by requiring the posting of compliance orders.

I see this act as an empowering one. I look at the potential outcomes. I think this child care specific legislation will provide a stand-alone document relating to child care outside of the previous legislation. This provides greater clarity and focus, given that child care was previously licensed under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, which covered a wide range of services like long-term care, emergency housing, and child care centres. It will also open up the definition of child care, which was previously restrictive.

I like the fact that there's going to be reduced bureaucracy here because this bill will extend the length of licences for centres who have earned a good record of services, and that will result in a reduction of the level of administrative work needed by the centre and also, of course, reduce work at the provincial level.

The clear monitoring and enforcement powers clarify the process that the director can engage in to ensure the quality and safety of programming while also setting out the steps by which the director can encourage compliance and, finally, cancel a licence.

I like the fact that we have a stable appeals process now. It's going to move away from the appointment of ad hoc committees and instead create the standing committee to hear all appeals. This will cut down on the delay time, which I've heard a lot about in the past, between filing an appeal and appointing a panel and would also allow members to develop some expertise within the field in the appeals process.

So this bill is essentially a good step. The previous act was outdated and not child care specific. This legislation is clearly designed to remedy some of those failings. The bill also clarifies the

role of the director and provides more stability to the appeals process. Stakeholder feedback has been generally positive, with some requests for greater clarity.

I'd like to look at the elements of the bill; first of all, the licensing. In order to be licensed, centres must conform to existing acts and regulations: the Safety Codes Act, the Public Health Act, child care regulations, the building standards act, and municipal zoning.

The extended timelines for centres in good standing is a good step. This will eliminate the administrative burden to centres with a good record of practice and also the department. It is important that with this increased time scale there will be monitoring to ensure that standards remain high. In regard to monitoring, the act is quite clear on what rights the director has to monitor child care programs, and it seems as though there are solid provisions to ensure access even if it's originally denied by the owner or staff member. One thing that I am concerned about is the fact that the level of monitoring is not mentioned here.

Enforcement is another concern that we have. Something that I've heard at various places in the province is that they feel that the licensing act doesn't have enough bite in it. This enforcement will provide a variety of steps to achieve compliance, and I understand that this includes probation, temporary suspension, and ultimately cancellation of a licence if needed.

The appeals process that's included here is clear. I like that it's going to have a permanent appeal committee where there will be the opportunity to develop some expertise and to reduce some of the delays.

My areas of concern are that although the bill clearly lays out how monitoring will take place, it doesn't make clear how often or how extensive this monitoring will be. In order to be effective and ensure compliance, it is essential that child care centres in all regions of Canada are monitored regularly. This is particularly important given that the bill also increases the length of licensing for providers with a good record.

As I look at the discussion guide entitled *Toward a Child Care Act for Alberta*, it proposed to include a provision about parental involvement through the creation of a parental advisory committee or a provincial child care advisory council. I'm wondering if the minister can explain why these are not included in this act. I can't see this in Bill 4.

Enforcement. There are two parts here. While enforcement is essential to protect the safety of children in child care, many child care providers with good intentions inadvertently break regulations. Many providers feel that they are not given time to either remedy problems that they were not initially aware of or to explain the circumstances that caused noncompliance, leading to enforcements that mar an otherwise positive record. It's not clear that this bill accommodates these concerns, yet on the other hand I've had people express a concern for the need for real teeth in licensing enforcement.

Consultation. This bill will directly affect child care providers, and it is unclear how many individuals in the field were consulted in the writing of this act. Providers often have the best understanding of how legislation affects their programs, and they also know the limitations caused by staff shortages and lack of funding. Consultations would provide the government with valuable insights in the crafting of this bill. We should know what the process of creating it was.

The other thing is access. The government press release states that this legislation will increase access to child care spaces by opening up the classification of child care settings. While this might be true, the fundamental problems facing child care operators still exist; namely, lack of stable funding and problems with staff recruitment and retention. It is really important to realize that licensing alone will not solve the need for spaces and staff. I hope

this bill is the beginning of addressing the crucial needs for child care spaces in this province.

Looking at the appeals process, I want to commend you on the fact that it is very clear. The stakeholders are telling me that they can understand it, and they're not expressing any concerns in regard to appeals.

I do want to take a look, though, at investigation respecting unlicensed child care programs. It says that if the director has probable grounds to believe that child care is being provided without a licence, he or she can inspect the facility under the same terms as a licensed facility, including the ability to get a court order in the case of a refusal by the provider. The director can issue an order, including a stop order, requiring the provider to stop offering the child care program. This order can be appealed. I really want to commend you on including this because I have had concerns expressed to me about facilities in my own constituency that aren't licensed and have far more than seven children.

So when I look at the whole thing, I want to say that this is essentially a good step. It was a long time coming. I congratulate you on getting it here today. There are few fields where high quality and enforced safety standards are as important as they are in child care. When parents bring their children to a child care centre, they expect that they will be safe, happy, and well cared for. This legislation will provide some positive measures to ensure that that happens.

It's one thing to set standards and quite another to provide the support to ensure that they are feasible. Child care providers are struggling with critical staff shortages, high turnover, and lack of predictable government infrastructure funding. We need to address those concerns too.

2:50

I am pleased that this government is taking some action on child care, and I sincerely hope they will keep up the momentum by increasing funding in the upcoming budget. We are facing a critical shortage of child care spaces in this province, and this shortage is negatively affecting Alberta's children, families, and economy.

Mr. Speaker, if there are no more speakers, I ask you to call the question for second reading.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has advised the chair that he'd like to participate.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to rise and speak to Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act. This bill would provide a stand-alone document relating to child care outside of the previous legislation. This provides greater clarity and a clear focus given that child care was previously licensed under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, which covered a wide range of services like long-term care, emergencies, housing, child care centres. It will also open up the definition of child care, which was previously restricted.

Reduced bureaucracy. Mr. Speaker, this bill would extend the length of licences for centres with a good record of services, reducing the level of administrative work needed by the centre and also reducing work at the provincial level.

Clear monitoring and enforcement powers. This legislation clarifies the monitoring and enforcement process that the director can engage in to ensure the quality and safety of programming while also setting out the steps by which the director can encourage compliance and, finally, cancel a licence. This bill also would move away from the appointment and ad hoc committees and instead create a standing committee to hear all appeals. I'm sure that this would cut down on the delay time between filing an appeal and appointing a panel and would also allow members to develop some expertise within the field and appeal process.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, has, I think, five areas of concern: monitoring, parental involvement, enforcement, consultation, and access. Monitoring. Although the bill clearly lays out how monitoring will take place, it does not make clear how often and how extensive this monitoring will be. In order to be effective and ensure compliance, it is essential that child care centres in all regions of Canada are monitored regularly. This is particularly important given that the bill also increases the length of licensing for providers with a good record.

The second one, parental involvement. The discussion guide entitled *Toward a Child Care Act for Alberta* proposed to include a provision about parental involvement through the creation of a parental advisory committee or a provincial child care advisory council. Can the minister explain why these are not included in this act?

Enforcement. While enforcement is essential to protect the safety and protection of the children in child care particularly, many child care providers with good intentions inadvertently break regulations. Many providers feel that they are not given time to either remedy problems that they were not initially aware of or explain the circumstances that caused noncompliance, leading to enforcements that mar an otherwise positive record. It's not clear that this bill accommodates these concerns.

Consultation. This bill will directly affect child care providers, and it's unclear how many individuals in the field were consulted in the writing of this act. Providers often have the best understanding of how legislation affects their programs and also how the limitations caused staff shortages and lack of funding. Consultations would provide the government with valuable insights in the crafting of this bill, and we should know what the process of creating it was.

Access. The government press release states that this legislation will increase access to child care spaces by opening up the classification of child care settings. While this might be true, the fundamental problems facing child care operators still exists; namely, lack of stable funding and problems with staff recruitment and retention.

Mr. Speaker, this is essentially a good step that was a long time coming. There are few fields where high quality and enforced safety standards are as important as they are in child care. When parents bring their children to a child care centre, they expect that they will be safe, happy, and well cared for. This legislation will provide some positive measures to ensure that that happens.

It is one thing to set standards and quite another thing to provide the support to ensure that they are feasible. Child care providers are struggling with critical staff shortages, high turnover, and lack of predictable government infrastructure funding.

I'm pleased that the government is taking some action on child care, and I sincerely hope they will keep up the momentum by increasing funding in the coming budget. We are facing critical shortages of child care spaces in this province, and these shortages are negatively affecting Alberta's children, families, and economy.

I definitely will support this bill, sir. Thank you.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this important piece of legislation, Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act. The care of children when they're very young is extremely critical to their growth in later years. It's critical in terms of their personal growth, their development as persons, and also in terms of their ability to do well in school and community and in society in general as they move toward adulthood through their years of schooling and growth.

So this bill, Mr. Speaker, is very timely. I want to note at the beginning that I was very pleased that the minister made sure that the opposition parties were fully briefed on the bill. On our behalf I want to thank the minister for the briefing that we received from one of her staff. The briefing was thorough. It was quite a good exchange of information and ideas. When I look at it, the preamble

gives me some hope. The very first statement of the preamble says, "Whereas the Government of Alberta recognizes the importance of ensuring the safety, well-being and development of children receiving child care."

3:00

Mr. Speaker, refocusing child care services to children's early development is a positive step forward, a step in the right direction, and I want to express our support for this change in direction and emphasis. It's a bill which is a fairly substantive rewrite of the terms and conditions under which daycare facilities are monitored, licensed, and run. This is obviously not an amendment to an existing bill but a new act that substantially overhauls the regulatory framework by shifting focus from the facilities, which was the focus under the social care facilities act, under which the child care facilities operated, to the programming under this current bill. This refocusing on the quality of the program and laying out clearly the requirements and expectations with respect to the quality of the program would form, I hope, a critical part of this act and the regulations that follow from it.

Talking about regulations, certainly during the briefing I asked a question about whether or not we the Legislature will have some role in the drafting and the development of the regulations. It certainly is my expectation that we'll be involved in the regulations of many of these bills, including this one. Although there's a fair bit of detail, it still is sort of framework legislation, and the regulations matter a great deal about how, in fact, this bill translates into actual policy changes and the substance of those policies. So I would hope that the minister will comment on the role that this House and certainly members on this side of the House will have in the development and approval of the regulations related to this bill. We're given the understanding that there may be a role for us to work with the minister and her office during the development of the regulations, so I'm looking forward to seeing that happen.

The previous emphasis, as I said, Mr. Speaker, was on facilities rather than programming. The intent of Bill 4, to completely revise the regulatory framework but grandfather the facilities recommendations and make child care programming the essential core of the bill, is an important change. The developmental needs of children will become, I think, the integral part of assessing the integrity of programs and programming. The key importance of the bill, therefore, includes regulation-making authority over all daycare facilities, enabling new categories of childcare services to be created, including some innovative programs that may be created, administrative streamlining that allows for multiyear licensing of facilities. I have some questions on this. The first licensing will be for one year, but the renewal, I think, would be for a three-year period. As we move into the next stages of the debate on the bill, we'll have perhaps some further questions on that part of the bill and if necessary will bring forward amendments that reflect our concerns with respect to the extension of the licensing to a three-year period following the first year of licensing.

Inspection and monitoring with a range of prescribed actions is good.

A permanent appeal board rather than an ad hoc one under the previous act. I think that's also a positive feature of this bill, that we have a well-established panel, appeal board, which will be able to address appeals coming to the department from either the operators or from others concerned with the quality of daycare in the province.

Mr. Speaker, while this bill is a step forward, we are concerned about both the quality of daycare services presently available in our province and the shortage of spaces. In question period I tried to draw the attention of the House to serious shortages in the availability of spaces for quality daycare in the province. As we move to tighten the regulations with respect to licensing, monitoring, and

making sure that the bill and the legislation and the regulations are enforced, enforcement and monitoring, I think I want to make sure that we don't ignore the issue of the quality of daycare that's presently available and the shortage of spaces. Both of these, the shortage of spaces and the licensing, are inextricably related issues, so the debate on this bill should provide us with an opportunity to address the question of availability of spaces as well as the question with regard to the quality of services available to families with young children.

It certainly begs the question of resources with respect to both enforcement and monitoring. While the intentions stated in the legislation with respect to monitoring and enforcement are very clear, certainly the question of availability of resources to do so on a regular basis and in a thorough manner remains an open question. Unless the resources are available, the mere commitment to monitoring and enforcement will not deliver the goods that parents in this province and members of the Assembly hope will be delivered with respect to the improvement of the quality of care and the availability of spaces in the child care area.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the licensing requirements and the focus on programming will encourage more daycare facilities to seek licensing. There are 545 child care facilities that are eligible for accreditation. There are only about 154 that have the accreditation at present. Clearly, I think there's a long way to go between the number of children who go to accredited facilities and the total number of facilities available and children going there. I wonder if the minister would have some information on the numbers of children. Of the total number who go to daycare, what percentage go to the nonaccredited daycare facilities, either in terms of percentages or in terms of gross numbers? That will help us have some idea about the amount of work that's before us that needs to be done. It's my hope that in the not very long future we will have all children who use daycare services go to fully accredited daycare centres because it is that accreditation that will underwrite or guarantee, if you wish, the quality of the daycare services that the children receive and deserve to receive.

I've indicated, Mr. Speaker, that we will be in principle supporting this bill. On the details of the bill we'll have an opportunity when the bill moves to the committee stage to seek any amendments or changes that we deem are necessary and believe will improve the bill even more than the improvements that it promises now.

Mr. Speaker, with these brief remarks I want to conclude my observations in second reading on Bill 4 and look forward to further debate on it as we move through the next stages. Thank you.

3:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, shall I call on the hon. minister to close the debate, or are there additional members?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, do you choose to close the debate, or should I call the question?

Ms Tarchuk: You can call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Interim Supply Estimates 2007-08**
Offices of the Legislative Assembly and Government

The Deputy Chair: We continue from where we left off yesterday. I have no lists in front of me.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to participate very briefly in the discussion on the interim supply amounts for 2007-2008. I'd call it a discussion because it really isn't a debate in what I see as the traditional sense of the word. In order to debate anything, I think both sides need to come armed with all the information that is available, and the end result of the debate might actually be in doubt. We don't have either of those situations here right now. We're dealing here with only three pages of single line item numbers totalling a somewhat mind-boggling \$10 million.

An Hon. Member: Billion.

Mr. Tougas: Ten billion. Oh, it's even more mind-boggling, then. Sorry.

How these numbers are arrived at and where all this money is going to be spent, specifically, remains pretty much of a mystery. Now, this is my second day of being in the Chamber for interim supply, which leads me to believe that I'm being punished by my caucus whip for some perceived slight. Among the more interesting comments to come from yesterday's discussion was a contribution from the Member for Calgary-Bow, and I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for making a contribution to the discourse of this House. We don't hear enough from backbench government MLAs, and any contribution is appreciated, so thank you very much.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Bow asked a very interesting question and one that came to my mind too. In essence, if I may paraphrase, she asked if the numbers contained in the interim supply document represented more than we should spend, or is it not enough? That's a very good question and obviously one that is impossible to answer based on the information contained in this document. The Government House Leader also made some interesting comments in response to the question from the Member for Calgary-Bow that lead me to believe that there is hope for improvement in the budgeting process, particularly in the new spirit of co-operation in the House.

Now, I'm not an accountant or a mathematician, but surely there has to be a better way to budget than the process we are participating in today. I believe that the Government House Leader was suggesting that there may be changes in the way budgets are produced and debated coming up in the near future, and as I look at these columns of numbers with unfathomable price tags, I certainly hope that in the future there will be a more realistic and reasonable way to participate in the budget debate.

The current process seems to be: don't worry; be happy; trust us. Well, I'm a trusting guy, but surely there's a better way to produce budgets and debate them than the system we're in right now. For instance, we can't realistically debate an amount of \$728 million for Advanced Education and Technology. Now, that's a staggering amount of money, but it's not even the highest total we have to vote on. We have \$3.6 billion – got it right this time – for health care, \$1.2 billion for education, and \$972 million for infrastructure. What we have here are a little more than numbers on a page with nothing to support the rationale for the numbers.

I would hope, for instance, that the advanced education money will be used to support some of the outstanding plans and projects I've heard about in my travels across the province. The University of Calgary, for instance, has great plans for the future, and the University of Alberta has a continuing goal of becoming a world-

class university. That's clearly going to take a lot of government involvement. When I was at SAIT a few weeks ago, I heard a lot about their trades and technology centre, which is a major project for SAIT that they really want to get moving on, and they actually have \$30 million in commitments from industry just waiting for the government go-ahead.

So these are the kind of things that are perhaps hidden in this document, perhaps not. Who knows, really, what any of these numbers mean? I could go on, but I won't. I promised I'd be short, and I am. I would leave that up to some of my other colleagues to expand on some of this. I would just like to repeat, though, that I believe there must be a better way to debate budget matters that serves the greater interest of all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any minister wish to respond?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to participate in interim supply debate this afternoon. Certainly, one can look at this as just an advance, but in reality there's a lot more to it than that. You look at the departments, and you realize that this money is necessary to carry on the day-to-day business of government.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark stated, it's a substantial sum of money. Hopefully, it is a great deal more than one-third of the government's annual budget. Certainly, the hon. President of the Treasury Board, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, is going to keep spending under control. I was sitting here watching him and the Minister of Finance and wondering what goes on at Treasury Board over there when they discuss what's going to be spent, where it's going to be spent, and in what time frame. I hope it doesn't come down to an arm wrestle to see who is going to get what money, where. I certainly hope that's not how it's done, and other hon. members are assuring me that's not how it's done, so that's comforting.

When we look at this government and its past expenditures, I am pleased to see that the size of the government shrank. The Premier is trying to give the perception that this is a new government. It's a stretch because the Premier, as we know, had senior portfolios in the previous government for the last number of years, going back 10 years, and before that he was, of course, a member of the Deep Six. The hon. President of the Treasury Board certainly wasn't a member of the Deep Six. He would still have been in high school.

Now, the Premier is trying to distance himself from past practices of this government, and I can see from a political perspective why that would want to be done. The past government has been spending a lot of money in questionable ways, and one way was to expand the size of government. The Premier did the right thing by putting the cabinet on a diet, and it shrank in size. Now, how much money the RAGE portfolio cost us, and how much money other portfolios cost us I can only imagine, but the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster knows full well that there's only one taxpayer.

3:20

When we look at the expenditure here, we look at support for the Legislative Assembly, for the Auditor General's office, for the Ombudsman, for the Chief Electoral Officer – there's \$2,100,000 for the Chief Electoral Officer – the Ethics Commissioner, and I want to get to that in a minute hopefully, and the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, Advanced Education, Agriculture and Food, Children's Services, and Education.

We're going to allocate \$1.2 billion for education. Now, I'm going to use this as an example, Mr. Chairman. I certainly hope those days are over. Last fall in the middle of this land of plenty

there were neighborhoods in central Edmonton, five schools in the Edmonton public school district, that did not have \$200,000 to fund a program that allowed support for children at risk the ages of three and four before they entered the kindergarten system so that they could have help to adjust when they went into kindergarten and through the elementary school system. These are children who for one reason or another aren't getting that support in the family home.

So we look at programs like this, and we don't have money to fund them. This was in September of 2006. I was alerted to this situation, and I didn't know what to do. I made some requests, and they were ignored. I thought: surely with the amount of money that we're spending in this province, we can find a little bit of money to support this much-needed program in the central neighborhoods of the city.

I looked through the public accounts, and I was seeing where we were giving grants, Mr. Chairman, to various golf courses across the province. Grants. I looked on the Internet at some of these golf courses. They may be perceived as public courses, but a guy has got to buy a membership in some of those. The memberships are various prices, and sometimes you can sell the membership. Some of these golf courses were getting grants on an annual basis for \$125,000. Some of them were using this money for irrigation systems. Some of them were using it for new golf carts, for improvements to the greens. Some of them were even using this money to reduce their debt. I did a little bit more research and added this up, and you know these grants were well in excess of a million dollars. I couldn't understand why young schoolchildren in central Edmonton could have so little, yet this government had so much for golf courses.

I'm a guy that's trying to learn how to play golf.

An Hon. Member: You think this is frustrating?

Mr. MacDonald: If you think politics is frustrating, you should try golf. I would certainly agree with you. Some of the hon. members may think I'm to the right in here, some of them may think I'm to the left, and some of them may think I'm straight down the middle, but with my golf I'm all over the place.

I thought it was quite ironic that this was a priority of the government, that we would fund these golf courses through the grant system yet ignore these schoolchildren.

Now, at the same time that I was doing my research and writing the former Finance minister – and I must say publicly that I wish her well in her retirement. I hope she has a long and healthy retirement many years into the future with her husband and her family because she certainly served this province well, and in my opinion she worked hard in the time that she was a member of the Executive Council.

I decided I would write the government a letter in regard to these grants, and the issue sort of resolved itself. There was a bit of money provided. I don't think a person should have to embarrass the government into providing for children. I don't think that is normal. But at the same time that I was doing my calculations on the golf course, the Alberta investment management branch of the Department of Finance was entertaining themselves at the Fairmont Hotel Macdonald, the same period of time, September. Now, this is a branch of Alberta Finance that we're looking at in a bill that was introduced yesterday, I believe, to turn it into a Crown corporation.

This is, as I understand it, the branch of the Department of Finance which looks after investing all our money, whether it's in the heritage savings trust fund or whether it is in various pension funds. I'm told that in total they look after close to \$60 billion worth of assets if I'm correct. They're busy people. I know that the individuals on the management team that I have met as a representative from our side of the House on the Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Committee seem to work hard, and they've got the best interests of the province at heart. They seem to be doing a good job with the heritage savings trust fund. Could they do better? Well, we could all do better. But they seem to do a fairly good job.

They manage a lot of assets. I'm curious as to the practices of this. In particular, we're going to be shining the flashlight on this Alberta investment management company as we discuss whether it should be a Crown corporation or not, a separate Crown corporation, as I understand it from the discussions we had at the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee meeting. There's a bill. Mr. Chairman, I just can't find the Order Paper at this time.

They met at the same time, again, that these children and their parents still don't know whether or not the program is going to be funded in these inner-city schools for early childhood intervention. They met, and they spent a thousand dollars on a fine meal at the Hotel Macdonald. Now, there were 12 people there, I assume, because they all had a lemon chicken dinner. Each one of these lemon chicken dinners cost \$42, for a total of \$504. They had to rent the room to eat all this stuff in because they couldn't be I guess seen in public. They had to have a private room. They had two bottles of red wine, three bottles of white wine. These bottles cost 33 bucks each. They had a couple of juices, soft drinks. I think there's a house wine – I'm not sure – on this bill. They had one Chivas Regal. They had two one-ounce martinis. Interestingly enough, they didn't have any dessert.

An Hon. Member: Because they were full.

Mr. MacDonald: They must have been full.

The total cost of this was a thousand dollars. Now, that's fine. People are entitled to, you know, a good meal. I enjoy one as well as the next person. But while we're telling one group that we can't help them out, this seems to be a land of plenty for others.

My question in regard to the interim supply is: when are we making our financial decisions? Hopefully, it's before we gather at the Hotel Macdonald because I don't think that I would be satisfied with investment decisions that were made in that room at that time. People's judgment may or may not have been impaired. I don't know. But I don't think it is appropriate to be spending the tax dollars that way. It's going to be claimed as a business expense, so I can only assume that it was business. This is how business as usual used to be done with this government, and I'm really hoping that there's an improvement and that these days are behind us. Time will tell, but I hope these days are behind us.

3:30

Now, this is an example, it's an illustration of two stories, one of plenty and one of need, probably within 20 blocks of one another in the city, and it is an illustration of just how far we've gone in forgetting what our purpose is here. These good folks in the Alberta investment management team certainly have to look after our assets, and they certainly have to make sure that our pension funds are invested in a timely and prudent fashion. I'm not saying that. But what gives with this sort of behaviour? It's the taxpayers that are footing the bill here. All I can say is that hopefully they were not there to make any business decisions in regard to the investments that are under their watchful eye.

I would urge the government at this time to please compare the lifestyle of those who are in the Hotel Macdonald, in the private chamber, having their dinner – their lemon chicken and their white wine and red wine and all the trimmings – and the fact that just 20 blocks away, 25 blocks away maximum, there are families that wouldn't have a thousand dollars in a quarter to spend on groceries let alone in one 40-minute period in a fancy hotel. Please don't forget that we have to look after those people.

We have to make sure that the children are given every opportunity to go through the public education system with confidence from the day they enter the door until the day, hopefully, that they graduate and go on to junior high and then go on and graduate from high school, that the day that they go in the doors of those public schools they're not afraid, that they're not afraid to learn, that they're not afraid to speak up because they will be ashamed that they know less than the next guy or the person sitting on the other side. Please – please – don't forget about those people.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I would like to say that as this entire budget process unfolds and as this money that we're talking about in interim supply gets to the programs and services that it funds, it will be spent wisely, it will be spent prudently, and we will never forget in this Chamber exactly who we're here to serve and who we're here to try to help out.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: I just want to go back to the start of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's speech where he talked about our new leader trying to distance himself from government. I can tell you that this new Premier has no reason to distance himself from government. As a matter of fact, no one in this Assembly on this side of the House or over there has any reason to distance himself from a government who has created a provincial economy that has allowed us to build and to develop and to grow a province that over a hundred thousand people a year want to move to. You know, yes, we can have discussions; there are growing pains.

But let's just back up and see why this new Premier doesn't have to distance himself. He worked all of his life in his community and started as reeve of Lamont county, worked on the health unit board in Vegreville and started to develop a reputation then for the nickname he has now: Honest Ed. He committed in times when raising a young family and trying to farm – and I'm sure the hon. members across and behind know how difficult it was through the years to farm – and was always compassionate, considerate of his neighbours, building a fine family.

I'm very proud to be one of the guys that eventually talked this man into running for office as an MLA. He challenged an incumbent gentleman and won. He beat Mr. Fox out in Vegreville. He grew up under the shadow of Don Mazankowski, who taught all of us in that area that he served that our reputations are what we've got, and that delivering to the people the honest goods is the most important thing you can do, and representing the people in that way is what makes you a true statesman. To this day we all know that the Hon. Don Mazankowski is still accepted in any office in Ottawa he goes to. I can assure you that long after our leader today decides that he no longer wants to spend time in this facility, he will still be regarded amongst the other provincial leaders and in the offices of this building as a truly decent man.

When they came to government and formed the group that they called the Deep Six, they brought an ideal to the back that said: "We need to watch ourselves. We need to be ever vigilant about money."

This has been one of the most compassionate Conservative governments that we've got. Why? It's because we've been able to afford that luxury. It's hard to believe some of the circumstances that some hon. members in this Chamber come from, of what a place of misery and woe we have here in this province. Yet you will recall back to the early '90s that we sat on par with British Columbia: 20-some billion dollars in debt, deficits of \$3 billion or \$4 billion a year. This Premier now along with members of his government said: we have to make some tough choices so that our children's future is in their hands. Through all of the demonstrations and all of the stuff that went on, they were part of a group that stuck to their guns. Many of those members are still here. They stuck to their guns, and they paid off the debt that we owed. They balanced our

books, and they reinvested in Alberta. The hon. member will even know how much money we've used from our heritage fund to reinvest into Albertans, and still it's at 16-some billion dollars, among other funds. It's an enormously successful government that's been here over 35 years now.

I think it's a terrible situation that the hon. opposition finds themselves in. In fact, if they have to stick to the real stories out there instead of newspaper clips that are mostly irrelevant, I'm not sure what they're going to ask here except: "How did you guys do it? How did you take a province and turn it into the leading place of the 21st century?" As I travel, I continually find people asking: "How did you do it? How did you change the mindset of people that we don't have to be in debt to be happy, that we can encourage business to invest and develop economies, where we can develop innovative and elaborate technological advances in a little province, around 2 million people at the time when they had to start and 3.4 million now?"

The Premier was part of that. His position in there was always one of including new members into the caucus, teaching them the ways the House worked, teaching them the committee structure, where to go, how to get things done for their constituency, and always in cabinet a careful and thoughtful person who chose to think things through, find out the information around the discussion, and make good decisions. He is still around Alberta regarded as one of the best ag ministers this province ever had. Many of the programs that came in under his leadership are looked at by other provinces as some of the finest tools there are today to deliver services to our farmers.

In transportation and infrastructure: while all of the government's spending was under stress, who did we take from? The Premier said: "Look, I'll do what I can. We need to continue to fund health and education as much as we can, for sure. So we'll cut back. We'll get innovative. We'll do better things." And he created some abilities in his department to deliver things when most people would have just thrown up their hands and said: well, if I can't have all the money, I can't do it. Not our Premier.

He was representing us in international and intergovernmental affairs until he did the very honourable thing and stepped out of cabinet. One of the most heart-wrenching days that he had was worrying about his staff, people that had been incredibly loyal to him for many, many years. I know that what troubled him more than any other thing was: what about them and their families?

This guy has lived a life of commitment, of compassion, of leadership within our caucus and now at the head of our caucus. For the hon. member to suggest in any way that somehow this Premier would either want or need to distance himself from what he's done in this government or what he's done in his lifetime before is just nonsensical. With that attitude I can assure you he will be very surprised when he goes to the polls and the people of Alberta say: not only do we respect that, it's 150 years since any politician earned the moniker "honest" anything. You have to go back to Abe Lincoln to get to the point that Albertans consider our new Premier now, and the polls show it.

So, yes, it's a different style of leadership. Yes, he's restructured government to become more efficient, but he never said to us: well, do it with less people. He said: "Look at what will be the best delivery model to serve Albertans." You know what? If it takes more people, then we'll get them. If it takes getting out of each other's way to deliver programs, we'll do it. If it takes more money, thanks to his leadership, we've got it. If it takes co-operation and innovation, he's the guy that invented the words.

Does he need to apologize in any way or to distance himself? Not a chance. I think the fact that he's there now, met a heck of a lot of people in this province – many of us recognize and support completely what he's done and look forward to what he's going to do.

3:40

Mr. Boutilier: Last night I had the pleasure of attending with the Premier and the Lieutenant Governor the University of Alberta, of course, a fine institution, where it was the business leader of the year. The leader actually was an immigrant that during his time had been discriminated against. In fact, he was awarded last night the business leader of the year with other names like the late Mr. Stollery, like Winspear. It was really interesting when the gentleman who received the award, Dominic D'Alessandro, who was the president of Manulife, started off with what made him successful over the last 50 years. Sitting beside the Premier, it was really quite interesting that this leader selected by the University of Alberta, in fact, talked about integrity, about transparency, and ultimately this leader was listening.

The Deputy Chair: Somebody's rising on a point of order?

Dr. Swann: Is this related to interim supply?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this chair has allowed people a wide latitude for participating in the debate, and if you want to raise some issues or want to participate in the debate, the chair will definitely recognize you. Right now the minister has the floor.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I could specifically address the issue that when Mr. D'Alessandro spoke last night to the thousand to a standing ovation, he talked about integrity. When he spoke about it, he sounded exactly like our Premier in terms of the message and his vision of where he wants to see Alberta continue to go. I found it very reassuring last night that a business leader selected by the University of Alberta, a wonderful example, was in fact using the platform that our Premier stood for in this House since, by the way, back in the early '90s, and here he was last night. I said to the Premier: Premier, it sounds like the CEO actually has stolen your vision of what, in fact, is taking place here in this province today. I think it's reassuring to Albertans and to the faculty at the University of Alberta that we are without question on the right track, specifically when it comes to interim supply.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to speak on interim supply. I think the government has requested about \$10 billion more, which is, I think, more than one-third of the total budget, I hope, and it's a huge amount of money. Everybody who's elected sitting in this House knows, you know, when they go door-knocking and ask the people, they always advise them to spend money very wisely. I'm sure everybody sitting in this House understands that, and they will make sure that this huge amount of money, which is taxpayers' hard-earned money, is spent very wisely and prudently. This fund, the \$10 billion, they are using, I think, for their operations from April to July, which is April, May June, July, only four months, and this is more than one-third of the budget.

I personally want to see this interim supply funding being spent wisely because I want to make sure that all the money the government spends this time is spent where the money is needed. I mean, my constituents keep complaining about the health care system in my area because there's a long waiting time, and there are shortages of doctors, and some people are worried that this government will sometime introduce privatization. There are lots of rumours. My point is, you know, that I'm not sure in this extra money whether this government is spending anything on health care, which is the top priority.

There are some other priorities in my constituency, like education.

Last week I talked to a group of students from the U of A, and they are still complaining about the high tuition fees. I mean, those are the priorities for the students. That's the real investment. I know that one of the speakers pointed out that the population already increased, so we need more money. Yes. I'm not against spending money on the programs. I just want to request again and again and again that we spend the money wisely on the top priorities. Health care and education are always their top priority.

Personally, in my riding there's lots of construction going on, thousands of new houses. They need a couple of new schools, recreational facilities, and libraries, and every time the government keeps on postponing the capital funds: not this year or the year after or the year after. The people are still complaining. I don't know whether this time they will use that money to build new schools in new areas like Edmonton-Ellerslie. This is a very big concern for us. Some schools that I visited need lots of renovations and are, you know, in bad shape. I have noticed that sometimes the teachers do some handyman's job and fix those problems because it's hard to find labour to do a small job. So we should not ignore those priorities.

The seniors, especially vulnerable people, are struggling. They don't get attention, especially when it's one-third of the total budget we are allocating today. I don't think it's fair if they don't get a fair share because they sacrificed their life, and it's about time we should look after our seniors as well.

In my area the road conditions are really, really bad.

I already mentioned that the hospital waiting time is nine and a half hours, and I've questioned it many times. I remember in 1990 in Mill Woods there was a big demonstration there; 50,000 people gathered there. They demonstrated against deep cuts in the health care system, and at that time the waiting time was only four hours in emergency. Nowadays it's nine and a half hours.

3:50

I don't think we are serious. I mean, every time I pick up any papers, the government is saying that they are honest, open, transparent, accountable, this or that. I think this is just talk, lip service. People are not interested in slogans. They want to see action, and that's missing.

Another important issue in my area is crime. Crime is a big issue. I mean, people are stealing cars. There are break-ins. The drug problem is there. Poverty is there. I want the government to at least consider those people because that's the top priority. The gap between rich and poor is increasing, and we should look at that. Before we spend \$10 billion, we should at least – at least – give them fair consideration.

Can this ministry be accountable and responsible with this money? This is a big question mark. I think that the two ministers – they are talking to each other – are elected to come here and listen to the views. I'm talking especially about my constituents, and if somebody is not listening, I don't think it's right. Mr. Chairman, I request once again that everybody use this huge amount of money wisely and prudently.

Another question is: how would this government spend money to improve the lives of working Albertans? A slogan is good, but what are the details? Where's the plan? It looks very nice when we see the five top priorities in the throne speech. Yes, it looks very nice in the papers, but in reality people want to see the actions, which are missing. Some groups are left behind.

I mentioned poverty. How many people sitting here went to the Bissell Centre in Edmonton? There are other low-income people who are suffering badly, and they are looking at us. They elect us. They elect us to make sure their voice is heard here. If I'm talking, and most of the people are not listening, I mean, how would they get the message? I know that everything is in the record. I request again and again: spend the money wisely and prudently.

Another question is that lots of people are complaining about their utility bills, utility bills every time. Nobody bothers. Twenty, \$30, \$50, or \$100 more, and they get the bill, and sometimes they see the hidden amount in the bills. I don't think anybody bothers why consumers paid so much hidden amounts of money every month. I think they sacrificed a lot since we had those deep cuts.

Previously there was a bill in regard to daycare centres. Daycare centres are a big issue. Lots of parents can't find daycare places. I want to make sure that at least some amount of money out of this over \$10 billion – billion, not million – reaches the area, the sector where the money is needed, especially the long-term care centres. They have shortages of staff. They have less doctors, and you know, some people are even complaining about the services there.

Another thing I want to mention, Mr. Chairman, is that some people argue here that this government is really good and that the new Premier is honest. I have no doubt he must be honest; he must be hard working. But I'll just remind this House that this government spent maybe more than 93 per cent of the energy revenue in the last 27 years. Those ministers who are talking about the new Premier were part of this government sometime. Where were they?

I mean, I'm not talking about this year. This routine, this overbudgeting and asking for more and more money, keeps on going again and again and again and again, and this government doesn't change its habit. I remember that I talked about the same issue last year, again, \$10 billion, where they are spending it, proper breakdown. Nobody knows.

Another issue on this interim supply that I want to mention is my own portfolio: Tourism, Parks, Recreation, and Culture. I mean, this sector has been ignored for decades, even during the Tory leadership contest. All the leadership contenders agreed that this sector, you know, the funding should be increased. Some said at least double, and one of the candidates said: if I become the Premier, I will increase this funding three times.

After the Tory election nobody talks, and I don't think we will find any increase in this very, very important sector. The minister is sitting there. I just want to remind him that when he sits in his caucus, at least he discuss how important art and culture and sports are for Edmonton. You know, tourism is an economic engine, and we should consider that sector as well.

As I said before, maybe we are lucky that every year we receive billions of dollars of surplus from oil and gas royalties. We should be thankful to God. But what are we doing? I mean, if we had less money, we would be in the red at this time. I think this is a very serious thing. If we have the money, we should utilize this money very wisely and spend money where the money is needed.

Finally, I want to mention the WCB. Some people are in hardship and they can't work. I remember that the PDD department in the last budget got only a 2 per cent raise, which was less than the inflation rate. I don't think it's fair for those people: less than the inflation rate. I mean, if some small family's, two kids and a single mother, earnings are, say, \$900 and the rent is \$700 to \$800, how will they survive? Then we expect them to be good citizens.

4:00

Everybody is complaining about society changing. Okay. Society is, you know, taking a bad shape or whatever. We can't blame society if we don't look after every sector. There should be a balance. We should look after those people who are unfortunate as well, not only the tiny portion of the people who are earning a hundred thousand dollars, even a million dollars, every year. They are a very small percentage of the people. If we ignore them, I'm afraid that that will be really bad for all Albertans. If we want to see Alberta flourish, we have to have a balance between all sectors, all average people in Alberta.

Another thing that I want to mention is about this amount of

money that this government will spend on increasing transparency, as they mention in their throne speech, or they are going to improve the democratic renewal. I know that they took some good initiatives in the beginning, but still it's a long way to go. Long way to go.

I would suggest that the government consider a fixed election date and maybe a citizens' assembly and give more money to all the opposition parties so that they can reach out to all Albertans. I mean, I can tell you that the resources of the opposition parties are very small. They can't even drop flyers all over Alberta because it costs over \$300,000. If their budget is, say, \$900,000 or \$800,000, how can they afford to at least convey their message to Albertans? This is not a democracy.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to enter debate on interim supply estimates 2007-2008. The House is dealing with a very important item of business: \$10 billion of expenditures for the next fiscal year that we'll be making a commitment to. Based on the document before us, it seems that there is no real, substantive basis on which to judge whether the money that's being requested here will be spent in a way that will benefit Albertans, all Albertans. There's no way to be sure that by voting for this, I as an MLA will be reflecting the interests and concerns of my own constituents properly because there's not enough information here.

This is a common problem. Every year we come to this point, and the government has to request interim supply in order to keep the big machine running while the Assembly waits for the opportunity to receive the official budget, which reveals every year whether or not the government is changing course, whether or not it's making changes in policies and, therefore, reflects budgetary commitments relative to those changes which will benefit Albertans in general and, particularly, Albertans in need.

We have seen over the last many years, for example, that the budgets that this government has been presenting have increasingly shifted the burdens of taxation over to the shoulders of the middle class. Families in the middle income bear the primary brunt of the changes in the taxation policies of this government. Secondly, we have also known over the years that it has been the consistent policy of this government to shift the burden of taxation away from high-income earners and from the corporate sector over to the shoulders of the vast majority of Albertans which fall in the middle-income category, as they say. So the so-called working Albertans increasingly shoulder the burdens of taxation.

When discussing revenue expenditures in the form of this interim supply estimates, I certainly ask myself how best to comment on this document, how best to and appropriately comment on each request made by each department. In the absence of any idea of where the government is going to go in terms of the policy – and this year in particular, Mr. Chairman, the context is somewhat more special. This is the first time that I'm facing a government which is trying to rebrand itself.

We have a new Premier, and the new Premier and his cabinet seem to have made a decision, obviously, to present themselves as a new government, an entirely new government, a government that's making some important departures from the 36 years of the government that this party in power has offered. It is a difficult task. Unless there are fundamental changes in philosophy, unless there are fundamental changes in this party's historical loyalties to particular special interests in this province, the interests of those special interests having been reflected in the policies and the budgetary decisions this government has made year after year after year, it's

very difficult for Albertans to believe that there'll be a real change in direction.

That's the context: the attempt of this government in spite of its history, in spite of its legacy of policies and plans and budgetary commitments to rebrand itself. So we'll have to wait until next month sometime before we can see if there is, in fact, any evidence, any substantive evidence, indicating that the government is willing and is poised to make decisions on budget, make changes in policy that reflect the real interests of hard-working Alberta families.

In the meantime the government must run and the money must be there to pay for all kinds of commitments that a government like ours has. So when everything is said and done, I'm sure the House will be willing to risk one more time approving this interim supply in the hope that certainly the NDP opposition and this side of the House, in general, will find that the budget reflects changes which reflect the interests of the vast majority of working Albertans, people who are hard-working, people with families, that there'll be policies that make our communities both stronger, healthier, safer, and that there'll be family-friendly items in the budget.

4:10

The one case in terms of family friendliness of the policies of the government that comes to mind is the case of provision of child daycare services in this province. Mr. Chairman, there is a great deal of concern among parents of young children that they'll find it difficult to get good quality daycare for their children. There's a severe shortage and a growing shortage of licensed, good-quality, child daycare spaces across the province. Men and women as family members, as parents of young children, decide to pursue careers, and many of them do so voluntarily because we live in a very different world today where women as well as men seek to have occupations or professional aspirations. They want to take part in the labour market.

Women, in particular, have fought over the years to have barriers in their way removed, one by one, whether they're educational barriers, whether they're barriers related to wage discrimination and wage inequity for jobs that are comparable across occupations employing men and women. They, of course, have been fighting and facing barriers in terms of traditional definitions of roles of males and females.

So while they have been fighting a valiant battle and taking steps forward in seeking equal opportunity and equity in the workplace, they find that they continue to face barriers, such as those related to availability of quality daycare for their children, which prevent them from taking advantage of the opportunities that otherwise may be before them, particularly given the favourable conditions of the labour market. A lot more women in this province probably would be working if it were the case that they could be assured that their children will receive good quality daycare while they're at work.

Many other parents, of course, face the problem of working at times when their children come back from school, and there's no adequate set of services available to look after children in the after school hours when either one or both parents may be at work. We know that it's not possible for most employees in this province to determine when they work. It depends on the needs of the employer as to when they go to work. But schools open and close at certain times of the day. There is a growing need and established evidence of that need for after school daycare for children at least until they reach the age of roughly 12 years so that they can be expected to look after themselves even if their parents are at work.

There's a need to see changes in policy, in daycare, in family supports for families to make life easier, to make things happen for men and women who want to take advantage of their professional qualifications, occupational aspirations, their educational skills, and the talents that they have that they are willing to offer and invest in

the economy in making the lives of all of us living in our communities better.

Mr. Chairman, there is a report here, before we move, with respect to the present state of family benefits as they relate to British Columbia and Alberta compared with some other international jurisdictions. A study just released earlier this month by the Institute for Research on Public Policy called *Measuring Up: Family Benefits in British Columbia and Alberta in International Perspective*, authored by Paul Kershaw, is a telling indictment of the daycare policies of the two provinces mentioned here, Alberta and B.C.

The comparisons are with some other OECD countries although these are provincial jurisdictions. Alberta and B.C. come at the bottom of the list in terms of the family support and the child care services that are provided in these provinces. This says a lot, Mr. Chairman, about where we need to go, what kind of changes we would hope the budget will reflect.

The priorities have to change in this province. The priorities have to change in many ways but certainly in terms of the provision of child daycare services. We need to improve the standards. We need to guarantee a good quality of child care. We need to make that service universally available to families and parents who ask for it, and we certainly want to make sure that young children at a very early age receive the kind of developmental experiences that will enrich their experience of growing up so that when they enter school and go through the educational system to the point where they are ready to enter the adult world and become citizens as well as earners and producers of goods that we all need, they will have become the best that they can be. The critical importance of the provision of child care with focuses on early childhood development cannot be overstated, Mr. Chairman. There are tons of studies that provide solid evidence that investment made in early years in the development of our children pays off manyfold in their lives and in the future of our communities and societies.

Similarly, Mr. Chairman, other policy changes that I hope will be reflected in the upcoming budget – reading these numbers here, I can't tell whether or not we can expect that those changes have taken place. The budget certainly would show those. In the case of seniors, for example, you know, there have been representations made to this government and to all parties represented in this House that we have in this province a seniors' advocate. We know that the seniors face growing difficulties in long-term care centres, in nursing homes, those who live in their own homes finding it difficult to pay all of the bills that they have to pay living on fixed incomes, the waiting times and the quality of care that they have to accept when they go to our hospitals and medical centres.

So there has been a proposal made by seniors' organizations that this province establish a seniors' advocate independent of the government, independent of the ministry that is responsible for seniors' services, and that that seniors' advocate be directly accountable to this Assembly. The report that I received a couple of years ago was also, I think, distributed to other parties represented in the House. It's a proposal rather than a report. The proposal spells out in detail exactly how this can be accomplished and what the mandate of such an office should be and what will be the cost and what will be the benefits. It seems to me that the benefits that will accrue to the senior citizens of this province from the establishment of such an office and the funding of this office, the seniors' advocate office, far outweigh the costs that will be incurred. It's a very persuasive and compelling document. I'm not sure if we will see in the upcoming budget that this document has received the attention that it deserves to receive and, in fact, is adopted by government as part of its desire to change policies and rebrand itself.

4:20

Similarly, Mr. Chairman, looking at the health care budget request

here from the department of health. Again, the time has come in this province to abolish health care premiums altogether. It's a regressive tax. It's called a premium, but it's a tax. It's a tax that's paid by most Albertans. It's a tax that's paid at the same rate, the same absolute amount regardless of the capacity to pay. Those families who earn high incomes – \$250,000, \$300,000 – pay the same amount as those who earn \$30,000, \$35,000, \$40,000 a year. So it's inequitable in the extreme.

It's a tax in the form of health care premiums that, therefore, should be abolished, must be abolished as early as possible to, again, reduce the inequity in the tax burden that middle-income families in particular face and experience from day to day thanks to the changes in the personal tax regime that has been introduced and has been in place in the province for years. We don't know from these estimates, from this request whether or not those changes are forthcoming.

Similarly, Mr. Chairman, I can go on to talk about infrastructure and the crisis that this province is experiencing in terms of infrastructure deficit. It's a hidden debt in the tens of billions of dollars that, Albertans are beginning to realize, has been created by a government that has spared no effort to convince Albertans that it has in fact paid that debt.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll take another chance later.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's difficult to give a critical response to the interim supply estimates as there is no detail. I am choosing to consider the Children's Services request for \$311,000,000 for interim supply. The Children's Services ministry is responsible for essential services, and it saddens me that many of the agencies under the Children's Services umbrella are burdened by the need to fund raise for funds that are necessary for the staff and programs which support our vulnerable individuals.

Recruitment and retention of staff is at a crisis level across the province. Staff are often working overtime because there aren't replacement workers. Staff are overburdened, foster parents are overloaded, and often the work that is required is not done, leaving children, families, and youth at risk.

Social services don't have a choice about the services they offer, like Tim Hortons, who can decide to close overnight. They can't close a group home. There's no place for those individuals or those children to go. Social services impact human lives. Individuals at risk and the disadvantaged deserve the same supports as others in our society.

I don't see anything, of course, and I don't know whether this interim supply will actually address the fact that there's more staff needed to help social workers do the work that the latest case model tells them that they need to do. They have a mandate, but they're not getting the resources in terms of staff to help them. Therefore, the turnover is devastating. This means that the thorough investigations to support good decisions are sacrificed because of a lack of time due to the caseloads of workers. Social workers do not have the crucial resources to meet the expectations.

The recent wage enhancements are welcome news from Children's Services for child care, but this does not include before and after school care nor child care centres who are not accredited. How can these centres attract or retain staff so that they can meet accreditation standards if they can't offer the same salaries? At a time when the lack of child care spaces is acute, this exclusion of some centres for wage enhancements may result in closures of centres.

The interim budget, of course, doesn't tell us anything about plans for agencies that are contracted for children's services, agencies who can't fill positions, agencies who can't compete in the marketplace,

agencies who can't compete with government positions, agencies who are losing staff to government positions or other businesses where they can get paid something more reasonable. Of course these agencies can't attract people who are at higher levels of income.

I particularly hope that the interim budget will address family and community support services needs. The annual FCSS budget should be indexed to accommodate increases for inflation and the cost of living and increases in the provincial population.

Our province is experiencing an ever-increasing rate of growth. However, with growth come increased social needs. The demand for services provided to support families who are separated due to work requirements has increased significantly. Increased prosperity is leading to increased family breakdown, addiction problems, and reduced community connectedness.

Most of the FCSS programs, especially those serving the sparse rural populations, have not seen a significant funding increase for several years. The cost of other programs' supplies and services, especially rent, insurance, energy, is also increasing rapidly for both FCSS programs and for nonprofit groups that are funded by FCSS. The cost of maintaining qualified staff to operate quality programs is increasing rapidly due to Alberta's booming economy.

FCSS and community services programs are already experiencing an exodus of staff to other, more competitive sectors of the economy, resulting in a loss of leadership, knowledge, and relationships within this sector. Clients of the community services sector often rely on long-standing, supportive relationships with these staff in order to effect a change in their lives. When that lack of consistency happens, often these people go back to square one.

Additionally, these populations that are most at risk are increasing at a faster rate than the general population increase. The aboriginal population is expected to increase by 44 per cent between 2001 and 2017. The number of seniors in Alberta is expected to increase from its present 10 per cent of the population to 20 per cent by 2031.

It seems that increases to the FCSS budget occur intermittently with no discernible relationship between the needs at the local level and the amount of the increases. As a result, it is impossible for municipalities to plan ahead and strategically set direction around funding priorities and sustainability. An indexed approach would therefore provide a predictable increase that would allow for longer term budget planning.

The booming economy and population growth are changing Alberta. The market economy for staffing, housing, and office rents in many communities is changing the landscape as well. A looming crisis in sector staffing, increased needs in demographic growth in certain populations are all placing demands on FCSS programs that are currently outpacing funding.

4:30

In order to keep the health and vibrancy in our communities, I believe there needs to be an increase in FCSS funding, an inclusion of a cost-of-living factor, and budget predictability. We want to keep our communities safe, strong, and healthy so Alberta can be the best of both the current economic boom and whatever is to follow it. We need to look at the need for predictable funding for this social need.

Another provision for funding that I would hope the interim budget might consider is the funding for the operation of licensed care of elementary school-aged children before and after school time. I appreciate that the Alberta government invests in a range of programs and services to meet the needs of families and that many municipalities are undergoing accelerated growth from the economic development, but this leads to growing demands for child care services. Family support networks have changed in our society. Most parents can no longer rely on extended family, friends, or

neighbours to provide child care for their elementary school-aged children. You know, the circumstances that create the need for child care in the early years continue through the elementary school years, and quality care is still essential during those years. There's no child care subsidy for the care of elementary school-aged children, and this needs to change.

I recognize that licensed out-of-school care programs provide children with adequate supervision and opportunities to participate in activities which increase resilience and build protective factors, which are important in a child's development. One of the things these programs can do is to help children learn positive decision-making, help them learn how to determine critically what is a healthy thing for them to be involved in.

Finally, the nonprofit sector needs inclusion in this interim budget. Alberta's nonprofit sector is large, vibrant, and diverse. It makes a significant contribution to the quality of life in our province, serving and involving citizens in all neighbourhoods. There are over 8,000 nonprofits in Edmonton alone. The nonprofit sector touches the lives of almost every Edmontonian and member of our population in this province by finding support for aging parents and participation in sport activities, accessing employment services, serving on community league boards, attending places of worship, using the food bank, or sending kids to an after school program.

The nonprofit sector is facing a number of serious challenges which are making it tough to find the necessary human resources to do business. This is due to uncertain and unpredictable funding, inability to raise fees, rising utility costs, competition for staff, high turnover, and declining volunteerism. The factors that are affecting this sector are, first of all, project-based funding, which makes good planning and staff retention nearly impossible. Government contracts that do not cover core costs result in staff burnout and time spent on fundraising rather than on the programming. Rising operating costs mean less money for client services. Low wages and lack of benefit packages means staff are going elsewhere. In the current economic boom there's an increasing demand for service and no corresponding increase in revenue.

This interim budget, I hope, will look at the nonprofit sector. The need for staff has reached a critical level, with many groups now unable to deliver their services safely or effectively. High turnover, vacant positions, and lack of qualified candidates are leading to program closures. Liability is even becoming an issue as safety is compromised in some situations.

On the front lines, here are some examples. The Boys and Girls Clubs of Edmonton are operating at 65 per cent of capacity because they have 35 employee vacancies they can't fill. Highlands community league had to hold a second AGM to get enough people to fill their board. Catalyst Theatre can't find a general manager to work for the salary that they're offering. Group homes can't find people to work the overnight shifts and are lowering the level of qualifications required to fill positions. Support agencies for people with disabilities have experienced a record high employee turnover rate of over 40 per cent in the last year. Staff at an employment training agency are actually making less money than the starting wage their clients are making at the fast-food restaurant across the parking lot. Staff at another social services agency are at the point of needing services such as the food bank for themselves.

Organizations are going into a deficit situation as they spend so much time and energy on recruiting, screening, interviewing, and training while key positions remain vacant, creating a vacuum. These organizations feel that they are rusting out as those that remain behind struggle to carry on. Investment in the social infrastructure is just as critical as investment in the physical infrastructure. Nonprofit groups require both short-term and long-term help in order to stay healthy and hire and retain the staff needed to maintain the province's quality of life. Many agencies and groups

are in a very precarious position, unable to fill critical front-line staff positions.

Our increase in population means an increase in demand for services. There are more people arriving and more people using food banks and clothing banks. Soccer teams, ESL classes, Brownie and Scout groups, societies to preserve cultural traditions, support groups for medical conditions: it's not just about roads and bridges; it's about healthy communities supported by nonprofit organizations with sufficient paid and unpaid labour in place to deliver the service.

We need increased funding to existing grant programs such as the community investment operation grant. We need more realistic funding for government contracted work. Government departments across the board need to fund these programs sufficiently.

Finally, I'm hoping, although I have no way of knowing, that this interim budget is going to look at once again affirming the principles of the five-point investment plan in child care, which was so good. I'm hoping that that major step that was taken will be supported and that in the future we will see expansion into the other points that this plan was intended for.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

Agreed to:

Support to the Legislative Assembly	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$19,800,000
Office of the Auditor General	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$6,200,000
Office of the Ombudsman	
Expense	\$800,000
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$2,100,000
Office of the Ethics Commissioner	
Expense	\$200,000
Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$1,600,000
Advanced Education and Technology	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$728,800,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$27,900,000

4:40

Agriculture and Food	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$205,000,000
Children's Services	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$311,000,000
Education	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$1,200,000,000
Employment, Immigration and Industry	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$221,800,000
Energy	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$96,000,000
Environment	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$40,600,000
Executive Council	
Expense	\$6,900,000
Finance	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$33,000,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$15,000,000
Health and Wellness	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$3,681,000,000
Capital Investment	\$6,600,000
Infrastructure and Transportation	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$972,000,000
Capital Investment	\$362,000,000

International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$23,500,000
Justice	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$119,000,000
Municipal Affairs and Housing	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$234,900,000
Seniors and Community Supports	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$567,200,000
Service Alberta	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$98,000,000
Solicitor General and Public Security	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$119,200,000
Capital Investment	\$6,000,000
Lottery Fund Payments	\$463,300,000
Sustainable Resource Development	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$172,600,000
Capital Investment	\$20,000,000
Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$239,700,000
Capital Investment	\$6,500,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$2,500,000
Treasury Board	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$6,400,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the votes on all of the above be reported?
Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the estimates of the interim supply for the year 2007-08 as voted.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows. All resolutions relating to the 2007-2008 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly: expense and equipment/-inventory purchases, \$19,800,000.

Office of the Auditor General: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$6,200,000.

Office of the Ombudsman: expense, \$800,000.

Office of the Chief Electoral Officer: expense and equipment/-inventory purchases, \$2,100,000.

Office of the Ethics Commissioner: expense, \$200,000.

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,600,000.

Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$728,800,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$27,900,000.

Agriculture and Food: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$205,000,000.

Children's Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$311,000,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,200,000,000.

Employment, Immigration and Industry: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$221,800,000.

Energy: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$96,000,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$40,600,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$6,900,000.

Finance: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$33,000,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$15,000,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$3,681,000,000; capital investment, \$6,600,000.

Infrastructure and Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$972,000,000; capital investment, \$362,000,000.

International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$23,500,000.

Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$119,000,000.

Municipal Affairs and Housing: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$234,900,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$567,200,000.

Service Alberta: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$98,000,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$119,200,000; capital investment, \$6,000,000; lottery fund payments, \$463,300,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$172,600,000; capital investment, \$20,000,000.

Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$239,700,000; capital investment, \$6,500,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$2,500,000.

Treasury Board: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$6,400,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Ducharme moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 14: Mr. Snelgrove]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to stand and respond to the throne speech. It's an important time for Alberta, an important time to step back and see where the province is going, appreciate what we have accomplished as a government, as a province, and the tremendous resources that we are blessed with stewarding over the coming years. I was very impressed with many aspects of the throne speech and appreciate the sentiments and the commitment that this new Premier is trying to bring to the government, recognizing that it's not, in fact, a new government. It's continuing on with most of the people that have been around for a

number of years with the Conservative government, with much the same agenda. Some are getting a bit older.

4:50

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are looking for bold leadership, especially with the hypergrowth that's going on in this province, the tremendous inflation, the stresses and strains on people, on the environment, on some of the critical airsheds, watersheds in this province. There's real concern about the lack of planning over the last decade and where, in fact, this government is going.

We've got an inefficient transportation system that's very much focused on the automobile and the individual vehicle. We've got unaffordable housing in the province. We have a serious breakdown in some aspects of the health care system, that needs to be addressed with real reform and real leadership, and real stresses in the educational system. What is the vision, I guess, is what Albertans are asking and what I'm asking today. Where is the plan to deal with a tremendous opportunity and a tremendous danger in this time of hypergrowth and inflation? How will we guide Albertans and the various institutions and the business community, and where is the ethic of community and quality of life that we have heard so much about in the speech?

Mr. Speaker, particularly what jumped out at me as the Environment critic were some of the comments about the environment which weren't given their due place in the speech but considered as a sideline under managing growth. Clearly, the environment is primary in the minds of Albertans and Canadians, and separate attention and real focus and real investment are needed on the environment. Alberta Environment has been crippled over the last 10 years with cuts and by the failure to keep up with the resources that they need and the expertise and the staffing to do appropriate monitoring, to investigate problems, to enforce legislation, and to ensure that this hypergrowth is not leaving a terrible legacy for our future generations.

With less than .5 per cent of the provincial budget Alberta Environment has become the laughingstock of industry with its soft educational approach, and I quote from one of the senior Alberta Environment staff: we facilitate and broker the interests of industry with communities. They're not in this department planning to take leadership and to set limits. They are merely brokering the interests of industry with communities and letting them negotiate and hash out what's going to happen with our environment. This is not good enough, and I think that we're very anxious on this side of the House, as many of my constituents are, that we see some real leadership, some real backbone in this Alberta Environment and this government to address the critical challenges of limits in this province.

The question, I guess, is: who is in charge of this development? I used to believe it was the oil companies, Mr. Speaker, but over time I've come to realize that in fact no one is in charge of development in the province. It's a free-for-all.

Mr. MacDonald: Are you saying that there's no plan?

Dr. Swann: There's no plan, and I would like to see evidence that this government is changing its ways and not allowing unfettered growth and a weak Department of Environment and Energy and Utilities Board to allow this to go on without appropriate assessments, independent assessments, instead of depending on the assessments of the industry to decide whether something is acceptable or unacceptable.

So when I hear in the throne speech that we're going to manage growth pressures and protect the environment, it's difficult to take it seriously. This administration has been denying climate change for the last decade and, in fact, spent 3 million public dollars

convincing Albertans that climate science was phony and that actions on fossil fuel reduction would harm our economy and eliminate jobs.

There's a huge inventory of contaminated sites, over \$8 billion by some estimates, that await reclamation. How are we going to address this, or are we continuing to leave it to future generations?

Under Bill 29 we also learned last year that this government wants to let polluters off the hook. Instead of really remediating and cleaning up contaminated sites, we will allow them to manage risk.

There's no downstream oil and gas orphan fund. It's high time we had this. It's been discussed by the previous minister. I hope this minister will take it up and address it in a serious way.

We've overallocated and poorly managed our southern Alberta river systems, and now we're up against the limits of growth there as a result of this, with climate change going to aggravate the situation. We lack the staff and the expertise to at this time inspect and enforce the legislation in relation to these developments.

Another quote directly out of the Speech from the Throne is that we will be "a leader in practical, innovative, and sustainable environmental policies." Well, I would like to ask: when is the government going to begin to measure sustainability? When are we going to see indicators to help us decide what our airsheds can manage, what our watersheds can manage, and what sustainability means to this government? Does it not include social indicators? Does it not include health indicators? Does it not include a serious commitment to environmental stewardship that will allow the economy to continue into future generations? What's the evidence that we are acting sustainably in this province?

The province is gobbling up good agricultural land for resource development, acreage owners. It's allowing all manner of activity everywhere all the time. Look at the eastern slopes, where we're going to allow continued oil and gas activity, forestry, tourism, and somehow protect our watersheds. Clearly, this is not leadership. We've set no limits on carbon emissions and no significant incentives for renewable energy options.

There is still no cumulative impact assessment before major developments. I'm thinking of the upgrader alley. I'm thinking of a number of developments, including the one now proposed for the Bow River west of Calgary. That's the old Seebe site, the old TransAlta site, a plan for 5,600 people there without any cumulative impact assessment.

We're looking for a new way of doing business in Alberta, and we're not seeing signs of that. We see a government that's scrambling to catch up to an unsustainable path and no willingness to set limits and to slow down the development in this province. The most glaring example of the lack of oversight and planning, of course, is the oil sands in Fort McMurray, where there are critical health care risks presently being overlooked as we allow expansion after expansion in the Fort McMurray area. The First Nations are increasingly outraged at the level and scope and pace of development up there. In what way is this sustainable? We have increased social unrest, and we have clear environmental risks that our children are going to have to deal with. Does sustainability really mean allowing the market to do what it does best, compete, and the lowest possible cost rules the day? The examples from the field are legion.

The speech also alludes to properly managing our water supplies. Clearly, Water for Life has been an important document that's helped to shape thinking and planning for this province, but where are the resources? Where's the expertise to help these watershed councils do appropriate planning and implement sustainable watershed management? Where in 2007 are the fundamental instruments of government to do the job? Where is the land-use framework? This is the third attempt this government has made in the last 15 years to help us decide where our priorities are: where we

will protect water, where we will protect agriculture, where we will allow industrial development, and where we won't allow these things to happen, where tourism is a priority. How long will this province have to wait for leadership on land use?

5:00

When are we going to see proper and expert cumulative impact assessments in this province? We cannot make good decisions on the basis of ad hoc or consultant reports paid for by industry, which is the way we're going today. When are we going to see genuine public consultation on how regions wish their development to proceed? When will we see a regional planning framework that supports win-win decisions for rural and urban municipalities, that respects the balance between economic, social, and environmental protection?

It's early in the mandate of this new leader, a decent man to be sure, and I'm sure that many people want to see, as we do, success in this administration. But this man has been part of the administration for the past 10 years, an administration that continues to refuse to do its job.

What does that job include? It includes establishing transparent goals out of a vision for human and environmental and economic well-being all together. The job of governance includes bringing together the best of science to assess planning and including people from various perspectives that balance the interests of all, placing environment primary, not secondary, to jobs and income. Governance includes a careful analysis of costs and benefits, short- and long-term, of the various development options. Governance includes a full debate and review of where we're going and how we're going to get there. Finally, governance includes careful monitoring and a willingness to make adjustments as the results come in.

If we're going to improve Albertans' quality of life, which is also emphasized in the throne speech, there must be an emphasis on bringing under control the hypergrowth and, in fact, the decreasing quality of life in this province: the increased levels of stress, increased violence especially in families, increasing levels of depression and other mental illness, suicide, workplace injury and death. I want to refer here especially to farm workers, who are still, in the 21st century, unprotected by occupational health and safety and unprotected by workers' compensation.

If, as this throne speech discusses, we're going to improve people's quality of life, what about those at the low end of the spectrum, Mr. Speaker? AISH continues to be, embarrassingly, among the lowest in the country. Social supports, employment insurance are not indexed to the cost of living. Again, we are giving ourselves increases each year while those at the bottom of the rung languish under very difficult conditions financially and increasingly turn to the health care system for support when, fundamentally, they need the support of this government to provide them with a decent living wage.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to look hopefully at the future. This is a time of great opportunity and of great danger if we don't deal as leaders with vision and include those in our community, particularly the most disadvantaged, in setting a course that is truly building stronger communities and demonstrating the compassion that this government talks about. Compassion is not a luxury. If we don't as governments demonstrate that leadership, we are going to see increasing turmoil, increasing breakdown, and increasing failure of a health care system that simply cannot keep up to the growing demands on it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak to the Speech from the Throne 2007.

The Speech from the Throne is an important document. It draws attention to what the government is planning to do, what changes it's planning to make to improve quality of life and to create a society in Alberta that's more just, that's more fair, where prosperity is spread across the population in a more even way than has been the case. The Speech from the Throne is about future plans with respect to strengthening and improving our educational system, both at the K to 12 level and the postsecondary level.

It is about changing direction in terms of the kind of economy that we want to create, especially in year 2007 when we're gathering momentum with respect to the determination of many countries in the world, many governments in the world to bring into being a plan, a program, and a set of policies that will effectively help us control the rate at which global warming is taking place. There is not just mounting evidence but incontrovertible and massive evidence on climate change and global warming. No one can deny anymore that the threat of global warming is a real one and that we need to act on it decisively and now. We have a very, very narrow window of putting in place policies, changing the protocols for greenhouse gas emissions, and ensuring that we have a government and a policy that makes it absolutely clear that the major emitters of greenhouse gases will not be allowed to flout the public will which says that absolute reductions in greenhouse gas emissions is a necessity and that no compromise is possible on it.

It also provides a window of opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to act on greening our economy, to bring in policies that will result in a green economy for the future, the next 50 to 80 years. There's a great opportunity awaiting us to engage in the development of technologies, scientific invention, and breakthroughs that'll put us at the forefront in this competitive world in terms of our ability to sell new knowledge, new technologies, and new programs to reduce the negative impact of global warming, to slow it down by controlling the emissions of greenhouse gases. So the opportunity is there. We are at the crossroads. We are at the centre of an industry which for Canada produces the largest greenhouse gases in terms of absolute amounts.

When I see the throne speech, it recognizes that climate change and the question of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere is something that needs to be addressed, but what it proposes to do is essentially give in to the plans and the practices of the major greenhouse gas emitters, the oil and gas industry. There's no indication in the throne speech that the tar sands development should be slowed down. It not only is leading to Alberta becoming notorious for being the largest emitter of carbon dioxide into the air in Canada – Environment Canada issued a report yesterday that we have the dubious distinction along with Ontario of being the largest greenhouse gas and other air pollutant emitters – Alberta in fact is a leader in putting into the atmosphere the largest tonnage of greenhouse gases in Canada.

5:10

I think that when we have an industry such as we have, from which our economy benefits and Canada's economy benefits, we must take leadership at the same time and recognize the responsibility of being the leaders in introducing policies, legislation, and enforcement mechanisms for the legislation so that we can demonstrate that we not only have the will but also the legislative capacity to reduce those emissions in absolute terms. They talk about reducing greenhouse intensity levels, and we have a bill before us that talks about reducing the intensity of emissions, but it does absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that it will do absolutely nothing to reduce the absolute emissions. In fact, it will lead to massive increases year

after year in greenhouse gas emissions emanating from Alberta from these industries.

So the Speech from the Throne is really disappointing. It's a betrayal of the hopes of Albertans, a betrayal of the obligations and responsibilities that we have as a province that is the site of this massive industry, from which we all benefit, to do what we need to do, to do the right thing, which is to bring in legislation which will give this government the tools to ensure that absolute reductions progressively year after year after year are obtained in this province, and that we serve as an example to other jurisdictions to do the same. But that's not there, Mr. Speaker.

Much has been said about other weaknesses and problems that this speech has. I'd like to draw the attention of the House to one major flaw that I saw in the speech. Over the last almost dozen years this is the first time that I've seen a Speech from the Throne which devotes so little space to postsecondary education. It has a mere two and a half paragraphs dealing with postsecondary education, an area of investment in human capital, in our own future in ensuring our prosperity and a green and prosperous economy for the future. It deserves and merits a stronger commitment than is expressed in the very brief mention that it receives in the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, I'll quote from the speech. It says:

Your government will also increase access and quality in postsecondary education while strengthening its support for community education and literacy programs. It will work to improve high school completion rates and increase access to postsecondary education with an emphasis on the Campus Alberta approach.

It then concludes by saying:

Investments in advanced education will be targeted towards a comprehensive framework that will make postsecondary education, trade and occupational training more accessible to adult learners.

Nowhere in this very short space, two and a half paragraphs, is a reference and a recognition that the affordability of postsecondary education is a concern that this government has. It produced a document, *A Learning Alberta*, the final report of the steering committee, and then it produced the affordability framework following that last November. I'm curious why there is, it seems, a deliberate attempt to not mention the unfinished work on affordability. That causes concern to lots of people, including over 200,000 students who are part of our postsecondary education system.

The brief comments that I've referred to are a far cry from the emphasis that was given to advanced education in previous years. The government has two recent significant reports, *A Learning Alberta* and the affordability framework, that I've just mentioned, but much of the content of the affordability framework remains to be implemented, from reducing the interest rates on student loans to moving student financing from loans towards grants and bursaries and making it more affordable for the young people of Alberta currently excluded from postsecondary education to be able to take advantage of it.

There is a great deal of concern being expressed by students. I just met with some of them the other day, and they are expressing concern that the government may in fact be dragging its feet even on its own affordability framework, its own document that it put out just a few months ago. There's a great deal of room for improvement on the affordability framework. The student representatives that talked to me do not see the government wanting to honour its commitments to the affordability issues, commitments that it made just a few months ago.

The major challenge in the area of advanced education in Alberta is attracting students to postsecondary institutions. In *A Learning Alberta* the government committed to improving participation rates. Alberta has the lowest rate of high school students moving on to postsecondary institutions in Canada. We are dead last in university participation rates in the country. We need to address the sticker

price of postsecondary education in order to change that situation, Mr. Speaker. This requires the recognition of education as a long-term social investment, a long-term guarantor of enhancing and enriching the availability of human resource and human capital in the province and in its economy.

The government must come to terms with the opportunity cost, the forgone income of postsecondary students. The reason that many Albertans who want to take a postsecondary education don't do so is the forgone income. Giving up the opportunity of earning income by entering the labour force is so much higher now than it was before, and the cost of going to school is also moving up very quickly. So add the two: the forgone income as a cost plus the actual costs of going to school, including tuition fees, residential costs, travel costs, books, and other fees. We haven't put in place conditions which will encourage students to want to go to postsecondary institutions first and then enter the labour market.

Tuition fees are the main factor in determining the affordability of postsecondary education because of their sticker price effect. This is one area where the costs are immediately and quickly amenable to public policy initiatives. Students are asking, of course, that the tuition fees must be rolled back to the 1999-2000 level. It will bring them down to about \$3,000. That will make their tuition fees the lowest in the country. But the government's tuition fee policy does nothing like that. Students have accepted grudgingly what they have been given. It's better than what was there before, but because there's no legislated cap on where these tuition fees could go and the fact that they were not rolled back to what students expected this government to do – that is, roll them back to the level of where they were in '99-2000 – they continue to be very concerned about tuition fees and their impact on the affordability of postsecondary education in general in this province. Student leaders tell us – I met with them on January 15, Mr. Speaker – that they are pushing for a maximum tuition of \$3,000 as a baseline.

Time runs quickly, Mr. Speaker. I take my seat.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and have this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne this afternoon on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. Certainly, I listened with interest on March 7 as His Honour Norman Kwong delivered this throne speech. At that point I thought to myself that this was a blueprint of where the government wants to go. You open it, and the first thing you read is *The Future Is Now: A Plan for Alberta*.

This throne speech is an admission that there was no plan. In recent years there was no plan. The former Premier, Mr. Klein, admitted that there was no plan. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View certainly outlined some of the issues that are still outstanding, and they need attention.

5:20

Now, I don't know many people that try to build anything without a blueprint. I congratulate this government for coming forward with a blueprint. It's very vague. The details are still being drawn up at the draftsman's table, but the blueprint is at least here. How much is it going to cost us economically, environmentally, and socially as a result of operating without a blueprint in the last number of years? I don't know, but the bills certainly are mounting.

There are a number of issues that are of concern to the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I would like to talk about them at this time. I see here that we're talking about improving the quality of life of Albertans, managing growth pressures, governing with

integrity and transparency, building a stronger Alberta, whatever that means, but there is no plan in here. That's why I say that it's a different quarterback, same game plan with this government. There's no plan in here to unplug electricity deregulation. There is no concrete plan in here to deal with the outstanding issue of royalties. I know that we're having this committee, and I know that it's doing its work as we speak, but I'm not confident in the outcome of that one.

We still have the issue in Edmonton and Calgary and some other communities around public school closures. What is the plan by this government on that issue? Is it still going to dictate to school boards which schools are to be closed without any rational reason? I'll never forget going to Calgary and talking to some of the Calgary city councillors there, and they reminded us not to close inner-city schools because as those inner-city neighbourhoods are developed, you're going to need the schools again. They're absolutely right, and it's a reminder that people on this side of the floor certainly will take seriously. There is nothing to address the whole issue of school closures in this speech.

Homeless people. Earlier this afternoon we heard members from across the way say that this is now a compassionate Conservative government. Well, I guess that's an admittance, Mr. Speaker, that in the past they were not compassionate. One only has to go down to Sir Winston Churchill Square and meet people down there who have no home, who are in need of care. They're not getting it. Straight and simple, they are not getting the care that they need. Many of these citizens, through no fault of their own, through unfortunate circumstances cannot look after themselves, and it's about time that this government starts to do that. It has been negligent in the past, and I don't see any improvement in that in this document.

Now, yesterday we talked in question period about issues surrounding temporary foreign workers and the whole issue of labour rights, who has them, and who does not. What does this government do? Eliminates the department of labour. I'm not saying that there shouldn't have been government departments eliminated and others reorganized. I'm not saying that, but the labour department should be a stand-alone department. It's hidden now in Employment, Immigration and Industry: EII.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Department of EII wants to increase significantly the number of temporary foreign workers in this province. In fact, we're looking at our own immigration strategy. After what I've encountered in the last couple of weeks, this government is not capable of running its own immigration policy. It's simply out of its league. It can't be done, and there are no recommendations, there are no words in this speech that will make me change my mind. We've got temporary foreign workers here that are being exploited. They've been short-changed. They've been cheated on their pay stubs. It doesn't matter if they're working as general farm labourers in Provost. We also have the same thing happening in urban areas.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is talking about bad employers. These bad employers are using recruiting agencies internationally and charging these people thousands upon thousands of dollars to enter this country, and then when they get them here, because of the restrictions on those visas they've got them here to exploit for the length of time of the visa. It is unfortunate, and this has to be changed before this province is capable of administering its own immigration policy. I'm sorry; this is not working out.

We have hourly employees that are coming here, thinking that they're going to get an economic foundation for their families and themselves, and they've been forced to turn into subcontractors, and then they have no rights. No rights. They're just paid a lump sum for an amount of work that's done. That's not what that program was intended to do, and it is totally out of hand. It is totally out of

hand. Until that's fixed, the program has to be studied, and we have to do better. A lot of these people aren't even interested in the provincial nominee program. They just want to leave this country because of how they've been treated. We need better labour laws, and we need a government that's interested in enforcing them.

Farm workers. Well, that's another issue. But there shouldn't be a corporate farm in this province that is allowed to hire people as general farm labour and not pay them overtime, not pay them vacation pay, not give them time off where appropriate, not cover them for WCB, and not give them occupational health and safety training so that they can work safely. This is the 21st century, not the 18th.

Electricity. Individuals and groups have always been coming to the constituency in Edmonton-Gold Bar complaining about deregulation. Now, the largest power bill in Alberta's history has been calculated by a group of retired professional engineers. I'm disappointed to say that this is probably the largest power bill in Canadian history. It now stands, as a result of electricity deregulation, at \$13.8 billion. This is since 2001. This, Mr. Speaker, does not include transmission costs, distribution costs, or the costs of all the middlemen, the middlemen with their hands out. They're getting all those added costs on the monthly power bills. Those costs are not included in this \$13.8 billion.

Now, business owners, farmers, tenants of apartments, and homeowners struggle monthly to pay their power bills, and we know why: electricity deregulation. This government over the 36-year period has made a lot of mistakes, but electricity deregulation is the biggest.

5:30

Now, last fall I sent the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud a letter in regard to this, and the letter stated: what will you do, if you are elected Premier, to unplug deregulation or fix this mess? I didn't get a reply. [interjection] I'm getting a reply now, Mr. Speaker. The only candidates that replied, interestingly enough, were not members of this House: a former member, Mr. Norris, and Mr. McPherson. Mr. McPherson was the first one to reply. None of the others did, including the gentleman from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, who eventually won the race. Electricity bills were going up. There were brownouts. There were emergency energy alerts all last year, and it was a priority issue for the citizens. Now, I asked all these individuals who wanted to be Premier how they planned to unplug electricity deregulation.

Since October power bills have continued to go up. The government in the past has adopted very many good ideas, but they have yet to adopt our idea for returning to an affordable and reliable electricity system for all Albertans. I see none of that in this throne speech, and that really disappoints me. I know you took our ideas on public accounts. You're welcome to them. But you're also welcome to this idea because we are going to ruin this province economically if we continue down the road of electricity deregulation. Manufacturers, some of whom have already left, unfortunately, are going to go to other jurisdictions where electricity costs are significantly lower and where the governments were smart enough not to buy into this electricity deregulation boondoggle.

Now, in six years, Mr. Speaker, deregulation again has added \$13.8 billion extra to the cost of generating electricity in this province. Again, I have to remind everyone that this does not include transmission, distribution, and billing costs. Since 2001 the extra cost of power for residential, commercial, and industrial consumers has been \$13.8 billion. Each year there have been many pennies per kilowatt hour added to your rate as a result of deregulation. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West is concerned about the cost of a kilowatt hour of electricity, and so he should be.

The true cost of generation, unless you use 2006 for an example,

should be 4.4 cents per kilowatt hour. What is it under the Tory, the Conservative plan? Eight point five cents. More than double, and it's going higher and higher because there was no long-term planning done, and we don't have the baseload generation capacity that we need. There is a shortage of electricity. The transmission system is congested, constrained, and it's to the point now that we've got to ram everything through the EUB because we have to build a 500 kV line between Wabamun and Langdon in the north-west corner of Calgary, and we're overriding the interests of the landowners.

The Acting Speaker: Any comments or questions?

Any other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to respond to the Speech from the Throne. First of all, I would like to thank all my constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity to represent them and also showing confidence in me in this Assembly. I will definitely continue to do my level best to represent the best interests of the hard-working people of Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech is, obviously, an expression of this government's desire to pursue a certain level of action over the years. What I find in this throne speech is clearly a mixed reaction from my constituents. I talked to many people recently after the throne speech. Some people saw the throne speech on the Internet, and they have a mixed reaction. Some people are saying, you know, that they appreciate that at least the government took some initiative, that at least this new government is saying that they will make some plans in different sectors.

So far I haven't seen those plans, but I really appreciate that they are taking an interest. They are planning to form some committees, to form different committees for making plans. If you see this Speech from the Throne, you know, the slogans look really, really impressive, and you see that the government has a plan, that they will respect the environment, and they will be definitely fiscally responsible and inclusive. They will have a clear plan, and in reality they will deliver it. Well, I'm anxious. I'm waiting for that moment when we will have plans on health care, education, infrastructure, child care, real plans, not just the goals outlined in this Speech from the Throne.

It looks really nice when the government says that they will go on with integrity and transparency. Transparency, yes. When the opposition members ask the questions, sometimes some ministers answer the question very nicely, but sometimes they just ignore it. We have question period in this House, but we don't get the proper answers. I don't know what they are trying to hide. If they really want to serve the best interests of Albertans, they should answer all the questions properly because during question period time we have the cameras, and Albertans are watching them. At least, they should be honest because their constituents are watching. They elected them to be responsible and accountable to them.

But definitely I am impressed to see at least the goals, the direction they have in this throne speech. Like all Albertans, my constituents also have great expectations of all of us here at this Legislature. The people are looking for their government to be guided by professionalism. I mean, when we sit here and we debate or we question during the question period time, they expect us to be guided by professionalism and be gentlemen while we are asking the question or the minister answers the questions.

To be true to the government's promise of open, responsible government, government that is frugal when dealing with Albertans' purse strings, again – I've said it before many times – they should spend money very wisely.

5:40

In this Speech from the Throne, other than goals, I have seen at least dozens of times sustainability, transparency, but I still wonder when they talk about sustainability. Why suddenly have they started thinking about sustainability? Where were they in the last 15, 20 years? Why couldn't they think about sustainability? They've already spent 93 per cent of the energy revenue in the last so many years, 25, 27 years, and if we had a proper plan, this province would have been a paradise in the world.

We are fortunate. This government collects billions and billions of dollars from royalties, and this boom will not come again and again. We had the opportunity. I think most of the money they spent not wisely, I should say, because they didn't spend money where the money was needed. For example, the social deficit is increasing, and that sector was badly ignored for decades. Now we have sufficient money, and we ignore them, and this is not fair to those people. The government has always been saying that they are good listeners, that they will listen to all classes in Alberta, but I don't think this present government has given the Alberta advantage to everybody, which is wrong. They should admit that and start thinking about those people right now.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar just now mentioned electricity deregulation. I think the majority of even the government MLAs know and understand that electricity deregulation is totally a failure, and nobody admits that. Then they talk about honesty, and it doesn't seem nice. If we are wrong, we should dare to say, "Yes, we are wrong," and then we'll think about alternatives. Unfortunately, nobody so far admits that electricity deregulation is a failure. In this Speech from the Throne are just a few slogans, a few goals, a few directions. It looks nice but is not solving the problems that Albertans want to hear about from them.

I see that here it says: improving Albertans' quality of life. I asked the question to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture the other day, and he answered my question differently, I should say. He said that he has to make a balance between the Energy ministry and the ministry of arts and culture. Even Health and Wellness has been saying this for a long time. You know, they are focusing on the quality of life, on health and wellness, and what initiatives we have done so far. This is my third session, and every time I hear the same stories. The progress is zero.

Slogans. Yes. Whenever we ask questions about education, we are top of the world. Yeah. Universities. One of the best universities in the world, you can answer. If we have the best university in the world, why are the students crying out there? Why don't you sometimes visit them and ask them: what's the problem there? They are paying too much for tuition fees, parking facilities. We live in the richest province, and the students – that's the right investment, I think – don't get their fair share. That's the biggest problem. Nobody is trying to reduce the burden of student fees.

So far, I haven't seen any announcement in this throne speech about new colleges, universities. Some new spaces for apprentices, I know that they mention that they will do that. How will they do that? If they have a plan, what type of plan do they have?

Last year the top priority was the prevention of cancer. I know that government spent tons of money on that, but I don't know after that. There was no report on whether that money we spent was worthwhile or not, whether we need some more money into that because cancer, of course, is a big problem, and we all should try to overcome those problems in the hospitals.

In this speech there's no mention of increasing the medical seats. I was born in India. I was about 20 when I moved to England. In England or Europe, even in India, underdeveloped countries, they produce the maximum doctors throughout the world – throughout the world. In Canada, especially Alberta, for example, we can't produce doctors here. Can't we afford that? Can't we afford new

colleges, new universities? Can't we increase the number of spaces? I mean, it's not mentioned, Mr. Speaker. There's nothing mentioned in this throne speech. This is a shame if we have a surplus of \$7 billion and we are not spending money in the right place.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar already mentioned the shortage of workers. I met with a few people and talked about the temporary foreign workers. It's going to be one of the biggest headaches.

The Acting Speaker: Any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, please. The hon. member has in the past expressed concern about the high rate of violent crime. In this throne speech under the category Providing Safe and Secure Communities the government is stating that they will endeavour to establish a crime reduction and safe communities task force. My question for the hon. member is: what efforts have you made to talk to community leaders, to consult with community leaders to reduce crime in the city?

Thank you.

5:50

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, in my riding there's a president, a council all over the area that consists of, I think, 11 or 12 leagues. They discuss this issue again and again. I mean, they have a meeting every three or four months because it's a big issue in that area. Crime is not a big issue just on the south side; it's all over. It's even growing in rural areas as well.

The problem is that we are not trying to find the root problems of crime. The root problem definitely, in my personal view, is social because if somebody is earning less than a thousand dollars nowadays and, as I said, the rent is so much and they have only a few hundred left for groceries, I mean, what do you expect from them? They will go outside and do something, you know, where they could earn easy money. So we should try to find out the root causes of crime. Especially, domestic violence is increasing.

The Acting Speaker: They're supposed to be brief comments and questions.

Mr. Agnihotri: Okay. Sorry. I'll finish in just 40 seconds. Okay? [interjections] Of course, yes, 40 seconds. Okay.

Anyway, thanks for asking me the question. It's a big problem.

The Acting Speaker: Any others with comments or questions? The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, a comment. I want to thank the hon. member for his concern and his efforts to reduce crime in his community. I would ask the hon. member if he's aware that crime is being reduced in the province of Alberta. The initiatives that we have in force are becoming very effective.

Mr. Agnihotri: Well, maybe crime is reduced in the papers, but in the newspapers, on the radio you see and hear every day that people are stealing cars, stabbings, murders. I mean, I don't know where you guys get the reports, but that problem is still there. I think the minister concerned should look at this problem seriously.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other comments or questions? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise at this time and move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. on Monday, the 19th.

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

Bill Status Report for the 26th Legislature - 3rd Session (2007)

Activity to March 15, 2007

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

- 1 Lobbyists Act (Stelmach)**
First Reading -- 5 (Mar. 7 aft.)
- 3 Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007 (Renner)**
First Reading -- 23 (Mar. 8 aft.)
- 4 Child Care Licensing Act (Tarchuk)**
First Reading -- 24 (Mar. 8 aft.)
Second Reading -- 166-69 (Mar. 15 aft., passed)
- 5 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (Rodney)**
First Reading -- 24 (Mar. 8 aft.)
- 6 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007 (Dunford)**
First Reading -- 24 (Mar. 8 aft.)
- 7 Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007 (Webber)**
First Reading -- 24 (Mar. 8 aft.)
- 8 Vital Statistics Act (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 24 (Mar. 8 aft.)
- 9 Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007 (\$) (Oberg)**
First Reading -- 50 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- 10 Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 50 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- 12 Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 50 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- 13 Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007 (Rodney)**
First Reading -- 50 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- 14 Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (Jablonski)**
First Reading -- 50 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- 15 Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2007 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 50 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- 16 Police Amendment Act, 2007 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 122 (Mar. 14 aft.)
- 17 Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 122 (Mar. 14 aft.)

- 18 Judicature Amendment Act, 2007 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 122 (Mar. 14 aft.)
- 19 Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 131 (Mar. 14 aft.)
- 20 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 131 (Mar. 14 aft.)
- 201 Funding Alberta's Future Act (Taft)**
First Reading -- 25 (Mar. 8 aft.)
Second Reading -- 55-66 (Mar. 12 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Consumer Advocate Act (Elsalhy)**
First Reading -- 25 (Mar. 8 aft.)
- 203 Service Dogs Act (Lougheed)**
First Reading -- 156 (Mar. 15 aft.)

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, March 19, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/19

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members, we'll be led today in the singing of our national anthem by Colleen Vogel, and we'd ask all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly six members of the Council of Alberta University Students, or CAUS, and the organization's executive director. CAUS represents more than 70,000 university students throughout the province. These students are in Edmonton today to attend the CAUS annual conference, which provides them with an opportunity to meet with government and other organizations to discuss the future of Alberta's postsecondary system. I encourage my fellow MLAs to participate in this important conference. It's a great opportunity to learn more about the challenges that they face.

I would invite each of the CAUS representatives to stand as I call your name, and I ask my colleagues to hold their applause until everyone has been introduced. With us today are David Cournoyer, CAUS chair and University of Alberta Students' Union vice-president external; Charlotte Kingston, CAUS vice-president and University of Lethbridge Students' Union vice-president academic; Samantha Power, University of Alberta Students' Union president; Joanne Luu, University of Lethbridge Students' Union vice-president administration; Emily Wyatt, University of Calgary Students' Union president; Julie Labonté, University of Calgary Students' Union vice-president external; and Duncan Wojtaszek, the executive director of CAUS. Please join me and all members of the House in the traditional warm welcome.

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly nine social workers employed by Children's Services. March 18 to 24 is National Social Work Week, and Children's Services is very privileged to have these skilled and compassionate professionals

helping our children, our youth, and families. Social workers choose their profession because they care about the people they help, and their work is vital to the success of our communities and our province. Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity of meeting with these individuals earlier today, and I believe Children's Services can count itself lucky to have these committed people working for Albertans.

I'd like to ask the following people who work tirelessly for the health and well-being of Albertans to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Danuta Potworowski, Cassidy Solikoski, Loïselle Arcand, Janet Dormer, Shirley Bourque, Mona Gunderson, Kim Weaver, Nicole Lightning, Shelley Sommervill. Also visiting today with the social workers is Rhonda Coubrough from our Red Deer regional office. Please join me in welcoming these very special guests.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to welcome 48 bright young minds from Jackson Heights school in my constituency to the Legislature today. We all know that our students are our most precious resource, and we're delighted to have you here. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Pam Schenk and Deb Colvin-MacDormand, and by parent, and in one case grandparent, helpers and volunteers James Norris, Larry Thomas, Terri Fuller, Jagdish Nischal, and Heather Slager. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the thunderous applause of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of my neighbouring MLA the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 23 students from Rimbeley elementary school. They're accompanied today by their teacher, Mr. Jim Moore, and by parent helpers Mrs. Holly Trenson, Mrs. Shantelle Boatright, Miss Abby Mann, and Mrs. Lauren Morton. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly 57 visitors from St. Gabriel school. They come from three different classes, and they are accompanied today by Mrs. Svetlana Sech, Ms Lauren Podlubny, and Ms Christine Uy. The teacher's assistants that are accompanying the group today are Mrs. Louise Dupuis, Mrs. Michelle Gascoigne, and Mrs. Fran Kraychy. They are all in the public gallery. I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Tyler Bedford. Tyler was born and raised in Alberta, having grown up in Taber. He graduated from Red Deer College last spring and is currently completing his bachelor of arts in sociology at the University of Alberta. He's also a talented musician and sings with the local band The Bright Red. Tyler is a valuable addition to my constituency

team as a part-time assistant in Highlands-Norwood. I would now ask that he rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Noah Weckel. Noah Weckel is six years old and has been a resident of Edmonton for the past four years. Noah already aspires to join us here at the Legislature and has done so since he first saw this building. He has a very keen interest in the environment, especially the conservation of our forests. Hopefully, someday he can join us and speak to the Assembly on this issue. Noah is joined here today by his great-uncle Reg Basken and his great-aunt Dorothy McRae. I would now ask that all three rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: 1:10

Members' Statements

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

Immigrants of Distinction Awards

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to recognize the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society's 11th annual immigrants of distinction awards, which I was privileged to attend this past Friday along with the Honourable Lieutenant Governor; the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry; and several other MLAs from both sides of the House. Mr. Speaker, it was indeed a memorable evening in which we saw individuals who came to Alberta from far and abroad with visions of hope and prosperity recognized for their exceptional personal achievements.

I want to congratulate all of the award nominees and recipients. These individuals achieved personal success in the categories of arts and culture, business, community services, distinguished professional, and organizational diversity. *I also want to congratulate the five outstanding students who received scholarships for their commendable personal merits and academic accomplishments.*

These immigrants are individuals who came to our province armed with determination, a strong work ethic, and aspirations of creating a better life for themselves and their families. We can surely appreciate the difficulties immigrants face when they enter a foreign society and are challenged to adapt to a new environment.

The Calgary Immigrant Aid Society has provided important, culturally appropriate services for immigrants and refugees for over 30 years. I applaud the valuable services that this organization provides to immigrants who come to Alberta to create a new life and enjoy the freedoms and the opportunities that our great province affords us all.

*Thank you, Mr. Speaker.**

Millwoods Cultural and Recreational Facility Association

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, volunteers and visionings are an integral part of our success as a province, a city, and a community. One such incredible success story is the Millwoods Cultural and Recreational Facility Association, known as MCARFA.

Last Friday I was honoured to attend MCARFA's 30th anniversary, held in the beautiful banquet facility at the equally beautiful and wonderful Mill Woods golf course, a facility and golf course, I might add, that were built by and as a result of some enormously dedicated and visionary volunteers who were instrumental in helping

to form MCARFA three decades ago. They were also responsible for having built the twin arenas in the Mill Woods Recreation Centre, the 440 track at the campus site, the blade and board and bike park, also at the campus site, and the trails, picnic sites, and pavilion at Jackie Parker park. The government of Alberta was recognized as a key partner and funder of these projects, and at least equal recognition was extended also to another integral partner, that being the city of Edmonton.

MCARFA volunteer presidents John Janzen, Max Bahnsen, Val Pohl, Joan Kirillo, George Bawden, Bob Strynadka, John Bracegirdle, and Larry Billings were also saluted and thanked. Additional MCARFA volunteers who were truly at the heart of MCARFA success were thanked and recognized for outstanding services, including 19-year volunteer and treasurer Jim Stokoe, Shaffee Ali, Larry Kozak, Stu Orr, and others. I'd also like to thank head pro Darrell McDonald and his staff: Dave Robert, Mike Ellis, Derek Homan, and Wayne Parks.

Current projects under way by MCARFA include, in partnership with the Mill Woods Lions Club and the Woodvale Community League, the Lions spray park and the ropes and rock adventures playground at Jackie Parker park.

Congratulations, MCARFA, and thank you for helping to create and maintain such a high quality of life for our Mill Woods residents and visitors. You are truly amazing, and I am honoured and proud to be among your elected representatives.

National Social Work Week

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise today and recognize that March 18 to 24 is National Social Work Week. National Social Work Week was established by the Canadian Association of Social Workers to recognize the contribution these professionals make across the country.

Nothing is more true than the theme chosen this year, Social Workers Making a Difference in Children's Lives, because everywhere a child may need help, a social worker is there. In schools they provide services to children who are having difficulties learning. They work with teachers to address special mental, physical, or behavioural needs of children. In hospitals social workers help children deal with illnesses. They work with the children's families to address issues that can arise from sudden or chronic illness. In our communities they are there to enhance the health and well-being of children, providing services in the areas of mental health, family enhancement, and crisis intervention.

Mr. Speaker, I gave you a very small example of the contributions that social workers make to the betterment of the lives of Albertans. The government of Alberta is very privileged to have these skilled and dedicated professionals delivering programs and services to our children and families. I commend the men and women who take on the profession of social work. I hope that this week we all take the time to celebrate the important contributions social workers make to our lives.

Thank you.

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

Violence against Women

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Violence has plagued human civilization since the dawn of time. It has caused infinite pain. It has hampered our progress, and it has scarred our souls. Even today, in this supposedly civilized time, the nightly news is filled with scenes of violence committed by one neighbour against another.

*[Mr. Amery was unable to complete his presentation, and the text in italics is the remainder of his member's statement]

Especially troubling are the stories of violence against women. I think that violence against women troubles us so deeply because women are seen as caregivers, as mothers, as the foundation of family life. When a woman is assaulted, it is an attack not only on an individual but also on the community, on the collective values we hold dear.

Sadly, no community is free of the spectre of violence against women. This madness is a real and undeniable problem. It's a problem without a single solution. There is no magic wand that will make it all go away overnight, but we are not helpless. This is not an insurmountable problem. With education, with respect for women, and with the conviction that violence is never the answer, we can dramatically reduce violence against women.

Colleagues, preventing violence against women must be given the priority treatment it deserves. But it's not enough to condemn. We must act. We must focus on tackling the causes, not only the effects, by backing our words and commitments with public funds. We must do everything in our power to make women less vulnerable, to make them feel safe on the streets.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MD of Northern Lights/Peace River Partnership

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday last, when I was invited to my constituency, I was asked to attend a joint meeting of MD No. 22 and the town of Peace River. I'm very pleased to inform the House that it was a very happy meeting in that the municipal district of Northern Lights and the town of Peace River signed a memorandum of understanding that sets the stage for a long-term partnership between the municipalities. The memorandum sets up joint development areas both in the MD and in the area soon to be annexed to the town, which will see development benefit both municipalities. Other opportunities for partnering are included, but of critical importance to both municipalities is the joint treatment and distribution of potable water.

Reeve Dueck of the MD was quoted as saying, "Everyone at the table understood the value and necessity of developing this long-term partnership, and it is a partnership in the truest sense of the word." Mayor Mann was quoted as saying: "We see the Municipal District and the Town as equal partners in the future development of this region. Through this Memorandum both municipalities share the risks and rewards associated with economic growth."

Mr. Speaker, I wish to offer my congratulations to Reeve Robert Dueck, councillors Joyce Vos, Ed Kamieniecki, Les Short, Darlene Frith, Ed Dollevoet, Al Dumas, CAO Theresa McKelvie, and from the town Mayor Lorne Mann, councillors Don Good, Iris Callioux, Tom Day, Geoff Milligan, Gordon Troup, Neil Martin, and CAO Kelly Bunn. Congratulations to both municipalities for acting in the best interest of their respective municipalities, for turning away from adversity and towards progress, and for setting a new standard for co-operation.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to acknowledge the efforts of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who provided mediation services delivered by Barb McNeil and Andrew Fulton.

Congratulations to all involved, Mr. Speaker.

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

Service Dogs

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to highlight four qualities we find in our canine friends. The first is their extended senses. They smell things we do not smell, respond to sounds below

our auditory thresholds and to moods we're barely in touch with ourselves. The second is dogs' capacity to bond, what humans call loyalty. As animals that think and act collectively, they are capable of accepting one of another species as their alpha leader. We use the expression "dog fight" to describe a free-for-all, but dogs are not that way. The only time they turn on each other is when their social structure breaks down.

Third, dogs exhibit amazing diversity. I'm not just referring to size, shape, and colour but the range of skills by which they serve us: guiding, guarding, pulling carts and sleds, and assisting a gamut of physical and mental disabilities. Their extended senses and bonding enable them to do this.

Fourth, dogs occupy a unique place at the border of the human and animal kingdoms. Those of you who know the stars may know that Sirius, the dog star, is the brightest star in the sky. Find Sirius, and if you see anything brighter, you know it's a planet, not a star. That's where dogs are in the firmament of our world. There's a reminder to humans here that if we abdicate our leadership and let the canine become alpha in our society, chaos breaks out, but if we hold our role responsibly as their masters and nurture them, we cannot ask for better companions. Albert Payson Terhune, author of *Lad of Sunnybank* and other beloved dog stories, wrote that if man served his dog as dogs do their masters, the kingdom of heaven would have come by now.

I commend these qualities to my fellow members and ask that they support the Western Guide and Assistance Dog Society and all service dogs.

head: 1:20

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 21 Securities Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 21, the Securities Amendment Act, 2007.

This legislation includes amendments to enhance the securities passport system and further harmonize and streamline Alberta securities laws with other Canadian jurisdictions. We have also included some enforcement and housekeeping amendments. Through this legislation Alberta is doing its part to improve investor protection and enhance the competitiveness of Canada's capital markets.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 21 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Bill 25 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 25, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission it's my pleasure to table AADAC's 2005-2006 annual report. The commission continues to provide leadership in delivering services that assist Albertans in achieving freedom from the harmful effects of alcohol, other drugs, and gambling. This report summarizes the activities and achievements of the commission in '05-06.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table one of the many letters that I've been getting from Albertans who are opposed to the proposed Dodds-Round Hill coal gasification project. This letter is from Joseph Voegtlin, who is concerned that the project will endanger the important flyway for migratory birds, disturb a number of cemeteries, and could virtually destroy an otherwise stable community.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a document I referred to last week in which the CEO of Horse Racing Alberta refers to an agreement committing to a government buyout of a project.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of an e-mail from Mark von Schellwitz, who is the vice-president, western Canada, for the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association. In the e-mail he says that the

AGLC recognizes the severe labour shortage our industry is experiencing and as a result effective immediately AGLC will consider allowing minors to work in non-licensed areas of Class A (minors prohibited) establishments on a case by case basis.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter concerning the Traffic Safety (Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution Related Offences) Amendment Act, 2003. This is a letter from a constituent of mine, Sharron Nelson, who is advocating that the proceeds from vehicles that are auctioned off be put back into actions to help the sex-trade workers themselves with their recovery and healing process rather than going into provincial revenue.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is from Nicole Burns writing to

bring attention and support for quality, licensed and monitored childcare programs for all children aged 0-12. All children should have the right to attend these childcare programs regardless of their age or their family's income level.

My second tabling is from Elaine Lefebvre writing to express "concern that there are not stronger penalties in Alberta for animal cruelty and abuse, particularly towards our companion animals."

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to table a number of individual letters and the required number of copies calling on this Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua John Hunt be tried and sentenced as an adult due to the nature of his crime, his past criminal history, and that he is close to the age of 18 years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter that I wrote to the hon. Minister of Energy. This letter is dated February 5, 2007, and it's outlining many concerns over the already high cost of the transmission line that is being proposed between Genesee and Langdon.

My second tabling this afternoon is information from the Save My CWB website. It's a website that's set up to hear all sides of the argument regarding the debate around the future of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of last Thursday's *Calgary Herald* For Neighbours article written by Alex Frazer-Harrison. Alex recounts the struggle led by Marilyn Marks to improve grandparent accessibility to their grandchildren.

The Speaker: Hon. members, when we sat last, there was a question from the Leader of the Official Opposition directed to the Premier, and the Premier had indicated that today he would provide a supplemental answer. Normally I would deal with this at the conclusion of the question period, but I sort of anticipate that this may lead to a further question today, and perhaps if we dealt with it now, that might in fact save some time. So we won't start the question period till we conclude this segment.

So, Premier, if you would like to supplement your answer, and under our rules the Leader of the Official Opposition then has an opportunity to ask an additional question, an additional response. The clock for the question period won't start until we deal with this matter first.

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your decision. There was a question raised last Thursday by the hon. Leader of the Opposition with respect to a deal that the government has made with the horse-racing association. To the best of my knowledge and after conferring with the minister responsible, checking back well into 2004, there is no knowledge of any deal, any kind of buyouts with the horse-racing association. So there is no deal, period.*

The Speaker: Leader of the Official Opposition, if you wish.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the clarity of that answer. I am wondering if the Premier could tell us if there are any deals between his government and the MD of Rocky View on this project or between his government and the developers of the project?

*See p. 157, right col., para. 12

Mr. Stelmach: No. Over the weekend the reeve of the MD of Rocky View made it very clear that there are no deals with the government of Alberta, and that's my knowledge. In terms of this cabinet, this Executive Council, there are no deals with the MD of Rocky View.

The Speaker: Okay. Now we will start the question period, and the clock will start when the "n" in Leader of the Official Opposition is stated. Proceed.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Dr. Taft: Well, we'll see where the deals land between this cabinet or previous cabinets, this government and other governments. This government did have full knowledge of the plans for the water transfer from the Red Deer River to Balzac last summer. In fact, the former Deputy Premier stated right here that there was "good interaction between a variety of ministries in this government," concerning the Balzac project, and on August 31 she stated that "a lot of work" had been done on the project, again right here in the Assembly. My question, then, to the Premier: what members of his government have been involved with the meetings with the developers on the Balzac project?

Mr. Stelmach: Since assuming the position of Premier, none – absolutely none – of the members of Executive Council have met with any developers.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I saw a replay of a famous prime ministerial debate just this weekend in which one person stood up and said, "I had no choice," and the other said, "Yes, you did have a choice." My question is to the Premier. Whether it's your current cabinet or not, you are responsible for the deals of this government. You are. I need you to answer for your whole government.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll look forward to the debate any time, anywhere. It doesn't matter the time of day. Any time.

Dr. Taft: You know, Mr. Speaker, the people of the Red Deer basin want some answers. They want answers on the water transfer for Balzac, and we're clearly not going to get them from the Premier, so let's try somebody else.

In this Assembly last August the government made clear that a variety of ministries were involved in the development at Balzac. We already know that Agriculture is in for millions, so let's get the truth on some others. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: what resources has his department committed to the project at Balzac?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as far as I know, we've committed absolutely no resources to the project.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ryley Landfill Project

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Balzac water transfer is a crucial test for this government's leadership on environmental

issues, and we can see how they're doing so far. Environmental issues don't respect municipal or county lines, and the impacts extend far beyond those. Building a truly sustainable Alberta requires tough choices that put political considerations aside. My question today is to the Minister of Environment. Given the minister's detailed knowledge of and support for the Balzac project, did this government review the memorandum of understanding between the MD and the developers before it was signed, or are they strictly hands off even when provincial water is at stake?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've answered this question in a number of forms before in the House. The process for applications and approvals of water licences is very straightforward. There currently is an application that is under consideration. To date no decisions have been made.

Dr. Taft: Again a total dodge.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's own backyard, figuratively speaking at least, is also the site of some pretty contentious projects with massive implications for the quality of life and environmental sustainability across a wide region. The area around Ryley is the site of a massive landfill project that may someday take in waste from around the continent, yet we have very limited support for regional planning. My question is to the Premier. What steps will the Premier take to ensure that the full array of regional issues is considered before further decisions on this massive project are made?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Beaver regional waste management commission went through some of the most extensive public hearings ever in the province of Alberta with respect to the development. I can't even recall the hundreds of hours of evidence that were presented to various authorities, both to the public health authority, the appeal authorities. All evidence points out that this is the most natural bathtub there is in terms of protection of water. You know, there is waste generated. We have to put it someplace. Apparently, according to the experts, this is the best.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The commission that owns and operates the dump is hoping to win the right to bring in 500,000 tonnes of trash shipped by rail from Vancouver every year. If successful, they predict that their revenues, of course, will soar, but there are residents concerned about the long-term impacts of this. Again to the Premier: given this government's generous financial support for the Balzac project, can the Premier tell this Assembly if any provincial funds have been provided to support the development of the Ryley landfill project, and if so, how much?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this person has got up a number of times in this House and made allegations without support. You now have an opportunity to put on the table the millions of dollars that went to the Balzac support by the government. Present it now, or don't mention it in any preambles. There has got to be some decency in this House. There's immunity in this House, and he behaves like he doesn't know the rules.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Computer Use Policy in Agriculture Department

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The annual report of the Auditor General of Alberta released last September found many weaknesses in the department of agriculture, food and rural development's computer security practices. These weaknesses include no password policy, no controls over unauthorized software, no acceptable use policy. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Given that the Auditor General pointed out that there was no acceptable use policy for computer use in the department, what has the government done to address these weaknesses since the report was issued in September?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the Auditor General did bring up several issues for us to look at, and we're proceeding with those probably as we speak. As far as the computer issue I am not involved in that, but my computer works off the ag department. I have no problem with my password and getting in there, and I'm not a computer genius, so I guess the thing's not too bad.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, the minister should be more involved. The website Save My CWB has a vicious, vulgar, and threatening e-mail posted. The website claims this e-mail came from the department of agriculture. The e-mail accuses farmers sympathetic to the Wheat Board of being total communists and relying on the taxpayer to prop up their farms. My question is again to the minister: given that this government has spent millions of taxpayers' dollars to try and discredit and dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board, is this e-mail posting what the Alberta government really thinks about farmers who continue to support and have faith in the Canadian Wheat Board?

Mr. Groeneveld: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak to the millions of dollars. I'm not aware of the millions of dollars. I am aware that \$1.08 million has been spent over four years, and only a very small portion of that has gone into the advertising aspect.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister should be more aware. My next question is to the minister. Given that this posting, which contains vulgar and threatening language, reflects very poorly on the people of this fine province, will the minister personally on behalf of the government post an apology on the Save My CWB website?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will post no apology for my position on the Canadian Wheat Board nor this government's position on the Canadian Wheat Board. I think it's solid. It's what Albertans are telling us what they want, and we will stick with doing it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Employment of Children

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday the Alberta Federation of Labour and the Alberta NDP received a copy

of an e-mail which said that the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission was going to approve the employment of children as young as 12 years old in kitchens of licensed premises, in other words in bars. The Alberta Federation of Labour president was quoted as saying that this is proof that the government has officially lost its mind. All the ministers that were involved indicated that they were unaware of it, so my question is to the Premier. Why is such a significant policy with such a significant potential negative effect being approved by the . . .

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a matter for the record. For 12-, 13-, and 14-year-olds any change in allowing work in bars would have to come through the Department of Employment, Immigration and Industry. The minister responsible heard about the policy direction, and when I heard about it on Friday, I put an end to it. I can assure you that after Friday, after hearing it, it's not only 12-year-olds but any minors who are forbidden to work at any bar anywhere in the province of Alberta. Period.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the e-mail says, and I quote: the AGLC recognizes that there's a severe labour shortage in our industry and "as a result effective immediately AGLC will consider allowing minors to work in non-licensed areas of Class A . . . establishments" except those that feature nude entertainment. Thank goodness for that. Why didn't his ministers know that this had been approved?

Mr. Stelmach: In my previous answer I talked about the process. It's not simply some 12-year-old walking into a bar. But after that, whatever the age, for any minor: no work in any bar. That means that maybe the hon. member may have to deal with shorter working hours in a lounge, whatever it is. But there won't be any minors working in any bar in this province of Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's pretty clear that this would have been approved without the minister even knowing about it, notwithstanding what the Premier has just told us. My question to the Premier is: will he go one step further and eliminate the use of child labour in this province altogether?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, back to the earlier point. I mentioned that there was a process in place for 12-, 13-, and 14-year-olds. That policy had to work through the process. It had to get through to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, and it would not have gone through at that point. However, all I'm saying is that after hearing about it: all minors – period – no work in the province of Alberta in any bars.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Affordability of Postsecondary Education

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Everyone recognizes the value of having a postsecondary education and what a tremendous asset it is in our knowledge-based economy and our knowledge-based society. Earlier today I had a very informative meeting with three representatives from CAUS, the Council of Alberta University Students, who are with us still in the gallery as I speak and who raised several important points that pertain to university students and to those who hope to be university students. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and

Technology. With essential living costs and all other costs on the rise, what are you doing to reduce or at least address financial barriers that university students, and others for that matter, are facing as they pursue . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Making postsecondary education affordable is a priority for this government—affordability, accessibility. In November of 2006 we released the affordability framework, which had a great deal of consultation not only with students but with other stakeholders in the system. We've rolled back tuition to 2004, and we've limited increases to the Alberta consumer price index, which I think was something that was supported in large measure by all stakeholders. That's about 3.3 per cent this year. Without those changes, students would have faced tuition fees anywhere from 6 to 11 per cent this year. An undergraduate student would save over \$3,800 over the four years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. When will your ministry return so-called tuition fees principles back to legislation, an action that will surely lessen the load of any possible tuition fee increases in the future?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not necessarily true that it would lessen the load of any possible increases in the future because the process would be very similar. What we're saying is that putting it into the regulation enabled us to do exactly what I just talked about in my previous answer, and it enabled us to do it very quickly. I can commit to the students of this province and I can commit to the stakeholders of this province that we have no intention of making any changes without very extensive consultation with them and with members of government and members of the opposition.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: from an infrastructure point of view how do you intend to provide a better balance for undergraduate facility improvements and expansions and so on in comparison with graduate facilities, research, and advanced research facilities?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, a very good question and, I know, one that is on the minds of the student population. We had a meeting this morning with CAUS, and I've met with a number of the stakeholders in the industry or in the system about the Campus Alberta approach. Really, narrowing down into what the roles, responsibilities, and mandates are of each institution within that Campus Alberta approach and managing the growth pressures to build a stronger Alberta and a stronger Campus Alberta for all students and all stakeholders, we will come up with a collaborative, co-operative approach to making sure that we have a balance to our capital in all of those institutions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

PDD Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports has reallocated \$11.3 million from the PDD

budget to assist agencies with staff retention. Those dollars flow through the PDD community boards. Although it is very, very welcome and certainly will be appreciated, it still remains only one-time funding, and there are questions around that allocation. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. These dollars come from within the PDD budget. They are not new dollars. Will the minister explain what area or programs can afford to be cut and where those dollars have been taken from?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, it is correct, actually, that the reallocation of the \$11.3 million is not new money. This is within the Department of Seniors and Community Supports. As in all budgets there are estimates. As you get closer to the year-end, you realize that not all of the estimates have been spent as budgeted for, and recognizing the priority of this need, we wanted to ensure that we could address it, that we would get all the available dollars back into those agencies providing tremendous service for those with disabilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the minister has allocated these dollars specifically for staff retention, how can you explain the recent cuts to the Good Samaritan Society's options for community living day program, that provides recreation and volunteer opportunities, cuts which impact approximately 40 staff and 60 Albertans with disabilities?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the PDD boards—there are six of them, working with all the service providers in each of their local areas—are constantly assessing the needs of those with disabilities that they're servicing, and there are continually changes from one service provider to another. That's not a new phenomenon, but it is additional dollars provided to the PDD boards to allocate to their service providers for staff retention kinds of wage issues.

Ms Pastoor: Losing staff is really quite devastating to this particular group. Does the minister realize that a one-time funding commitment is not enough? These dollars must be stable, and they must be sustainable. Can the minister assure me that this conversation is going on with Treasury and that it will be reflected in the April 19 budget?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, sustainability of providing services to those in great need, like those with disabilities, is essential. When we're looking at how do we provide this funding, even this, and looking forward, how can we ensure and provide those assurances to those with disabilities that services will be there when they need them? Those things related to the budget: they'll be related in due course on April 19.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Oil and Gas Activity in the Eastern Slopes

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oil and gas seismic activity in the eastern slopes in southwest Alberta has the potential to threaten the water supply from springs and wells for farm and ranch operations and the growing community of Nanton, Alberta. Recently both communities put significant public pressure on the oil companies, forcing them to consult further with the people on those effects. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource

Development. Given the sensitivity of the effects on native grass and the precious water, can the minister advise what protection is available to landowners and residents of the growing communities of Nanton and district?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to assure the members of this Assembly and the residents of the Nanton area that this government and Sustainable Resource Development take the issue of water quality and aquifers very seriously. For this reason there's been a policy in place since 1964, updated in 2000, that prohibits any type of drilling or surface activity, including seismic, in a protected area around the town of Nanton. So that protection is in place.

In addition, more generally for the Willow Creek area I'm happy to report that the MD there has been in discussions with Compton Petroleum. Their seismic program has ceased, pending public meetings.

Thank you.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's good news.

My first supplemental is to the Minister of Energy. The Pekisko, the Porcupine Hills, and the Livingstone Landowners groups have asked to put a moratorium on all drilling in the eastern slopes. Will the Minister of Energy look at implementing that moratorium?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the government of Alberta does recognize that there are many challenges that face this region and, of course, as you know, all regions across the province of Alberta with respect to development, including the development in this particular area, population growth, and recreational and housing demands across the province. I'd like to make it clear that we are recognized internationally for our ability to explore for and develop our resources in an environmentally responsible manner. No resource exploration takes place in this province with disregard to the environment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what can be done to implement the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board provision IL 93, as it has become known, that allows for the better planning of oil and gas activity south of highway 1, north of highway 3, and west of highway 2 into the high elevations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, thank you. The information letter that's being discussed, of course, outlines our expectations as a government for oil and gas development, planning, public consultation, and environmental impact assessments. The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board is currently working with the landowner groups and other stakeholders to update this particular letter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Access to the Future Fund

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago the government announced the access to the future fund, a projected \$3 billion pool of cash to support innovation and excellence in postsecondary education. It is a fine idea even if it is just a watered-down rip-off of Alberta Liberal policy. However, since the fund was established, the program has been mired in confusion. We know from government reports that grants totalling \$71.8 million have met eligibility criteria, but we have no way of knowing how much has been matched because we hear nothing from the ministry about the fund. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology my first question is simply this: in the spirit of openness and transparency, what is going on with the access to the future fund?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say in the spirit of openness and transparency that the hon. member might mention that the \$71.8 million number he got, he got from our department due to a written request that he gave us, which I'm more than happy to bring forward to the House.

Yes, we've matched a number of donations that were put in play prior to the access to the future fund terms of reference being put out there. We now have the council, which has developed the framework and the formula where each institution in this province can share in that access to the future fund and the amount of dollars that are coming off it every year. The generosity of Albertans, as has been said in this House many times, has been overwhelming, and we're very, very appreciative.

Mr. Tougas: Well, Mr. Speaker, across the province there's growing frustration with the administration of the fund. The government only began the process of matching the \$37 million donation by the Mactaggart family for the University of Alberta after Cécile Mactaggart shamed the government into action, and even then it is not using the access to the future fund money to do so. During a visit I paid to a postsecondary institution, a high-ranking administrator told me that the bureaucracy surrounding the fund is ridiculous. Is the minister of advanced education worried that donations may start to dry up if the government doesn't get its act together?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would love to know who the person was in that institution who felt that it was so bureaucratic. [interjections] They may be interested in the answer, seeing as they asked the question.

In spite of that, I don't believe that the council has made it onerous on any of the institutions as to how they would match over an ongoing basis. They all are aware of the formula that we're using, they're all aware of the amount of dollars that they have available to match donations, and they are all aware of where those donations are coming from and going to.

Mr. Tougas: Mr. Speaker, some postsecondary institutions in Alberta are training students on equipment that is not only older than the students but in some cases even older than the instructors. Donations of state-of-the-art equipment worth millions of dollars are not eligible for access to the future matching funds. Will the minister commit here and now to changing the regulations regarding the access to the future fund to allow for matching funds over and above the necessary stable base funding for unique donations of equipment?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're open to any of those types of ideas as well as looking at every donation on an individual basis with the institutions, but I must point out, too, that the whole idea is to provide access. That means access for seats for students. The ongoing operating costs of those seats is of concern not only to the government but also to the students. We want to ensure that those spots are available for the long term. We are working on a capital plan with the institutions to replace equipment, to replace buildings, to replace spaces, for deferred maintenance, to do all of those things with them on the capital side.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want their name to be attached to helping students get their education, their postsecondary education. We want to help them do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

CNRL Bonnyville Upgrader Project Delay

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has experienced extraordinary growth in the last few years. Much of this growth is from the unprecedented development and investment in the oil sands industry. However, Canadian Natural Resources Limited recently announced that its plans to build an upgrader to serve its in situ projects in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake area have been put on hold. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Mr. Minister, was CNRL's decision due to changes in provincial and/or federal government policies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Certainly, relative to the member's question this government does have a plan to manage growth pressure and to build a stronger Alberta, and we will be doing that. CNRL and other major players with respect to the hydrocarbon industry in this province are part of that growth and part of that strength. We have not done anything with respect to changing CNRL's plans. As you know, businesses will continue to assess their position in the marketplace, and CNRL's position here is quite simply that. This is a delay in a project. This project is not cancelled.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what impact does a delay like this have on the province's value-added strategy?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, our value-added strategy is alive and well and in place. We will continue to work with the assumption in mind that we are going to provide for Albertans continued opportunities in value-added. But in this particular case, this oil that was going to be upgraded or is going to be upgraded at some point in time by CNRL is partly oil that's being shipped out of the province now, partly new oil. It's very difficult to say at this point in time whether or not this has an impact on our ongoing plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is the minister concerned that other oil sands operators may also delay their projects?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, most certainly it's a concern for our government and all Albertans, I think. When we look at the development that the province is faced with, the economic ramifications of any of these major projects delaying, moving, being extended, of course there is some concern, but I do believe that as we move forward with these and other projects, Albertans and the industry players in the province will find that this is indeed globally the best place to invest.

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

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the tobacco industry, those with financial interests in increasing carbon emissions in the province, including this government, have misrepresented and cast doubt on the science and the cause of climate change. To understand why, follow the money. With overwhelming public pressure and evidence this government now appears to have accepted some aspects of the science relating to carbon emissions as the culprit, but conflicting messages continue. To the Environment minister: has this government accepted the science that carbon emissions are the major cause of climate change?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think the government has been very clear in the introduction of Bill 3 that we take the issue of climate change very seriously. It is widely agreed upon by the scientific community that mankind has had a significant impact on climate change. The world has always changed, will always change, but I think it's fair to say that this government accepts that at least part of that change is the result of human involvement.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government over the past decade has spent millions of public dollars denying and misinforming the public about the cause and consequences of climate change and delaying responsible actions. Experts have indicated that the cost of carbon-neutral development in the tar sands, for example, is only \$3 to \$5 a barrel. To the environment minister: will the minister fully commit to real reductions rather than false intensity targets for carbon emissions in the province?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. Bill 3 talks about very real reductions, talks about a 12 per cent reduction on a facility-by-facility basis. What it doesn't do, and what this government is not prepared to do, is restrict the development and restrict the ability of the industry to grow.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The overall emissions in Alberta are predicted to go up to 70 per cent higher than 1990 levels as a result of this approach to climate change reduction. Industry itself has said that intensity targets are not helpful to guide good business planning. Again to the Environment minister: when are we going to see absolute limits and timelines to emissions rather than these intensity targets?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, our plan is a plan that recognizes that the technology that needs to be in place in order for those hard caps to be implemented is not fully developed yet. The reason why we have introduced this legislation is to facilitate the development of that

technology and to facilitate the introduction of that new technology on a project-by-project basis.

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

User Fees in Provincial Parks

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This government seems ready to nickel and dime working Albertans again with higher park fees at the same time that they record another multibillion dollar surplus. Last week the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture said that he wouldn't introduce day fees for parks but then admitted that he's waiting to hear from the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Why would everyday Albertans be asked to swallow higher park fees when our provincial coffers are overflowing and the public actually owns these parks in the first place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, certainly, the question is a very, very important one and one that is critical to each and every individual that uses our parks. If the member would have listened last week, I thought I was very, very clear that we are certainly not contemplating any fees whatsoever for day use or use to access our trails within our parks.

Mr. Eggen: The 2004 Alberta recreation survey showed that 90 per cent of Albertans think that parks would improve their quality of life and bring their families together, but 42 per cent said that they might not do so if the cost of camping was too high. We saw what happened in Elk Island national park. When expensive day fees were introduced, people stopped visiting. I'd like to ask the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development then: why might you be considering higher park fees when your own survey shows that doing so will in fact keep working families away from the parks?

Dr. Morton: We may have to invest in some hearing aids, Mr. Speaker, for the other side there. I think the minister of parks made it quite clear that he is not contemplating any increase in user fees for provincial parks. But I would say that I thought, generally, that the opposition parties were interested in the land-use framework, which Premier Stelmach is continuing and has given me responsibility for. We're into new times. New times call for new thinking, fresh thinking, and new solutions. When it comes to land use, that's the approach I will take.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My constituents would then be paying twice for parks: once through their taxes and again through private operators at provincial campgrounds. Thirty per cent of Albertans have told the government that private operation of public campgrounds is a reason not to visit; 42 per cent say that the cost is too high already. So I'd ask the same minister: will the minister please commit to scrapping park fees and, as part of the land-use framework, bring parks back into the public fold?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think that question is more appropriate to submit to me rather than the minister of sustainable resources.

Certainly, there are existing costs in individual parks. We've got individuals that use firewood, for instance. We've got individuals that use sewers. We've got individuals that might use power. For those that camp overnight and that will use those services and incur those costs, we would expect them to cover those particular costs. There are no fees for anyone to use our day facilities or group areas as well as our trails within the parks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Waste-water Discharge into Bow River

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's Environmental Appeal Board recently gave the town of Strathmore the green light to temporarily allow Strathmore to release its treated waste water into the Bow River. Residents of the Siksika Nation who are downstream of the treated waste-water release are concerned that the release will contaminate their drinking water supplies. So my question is to the Minister of Environment. Why is the town of Strathmore being permitted to dump its waste water into the Bow River if the Environment Appeal Board has yet to issue its final decision on the appeal?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out a couple things that are included in the preamble to the question. First of all, this issue deals with treated waste water from the town of Strathmore, and secondly, the Environmental Appeal Board is considering whether or not the decision of Alberta Environment should be upheld or turned down. For that reason it's difficult for me to get into the specifics on this case but comment more in general terms.

In that regard, Mr. Speaker, I must point out that there were conditions that were put on this application that would apply to any application. Those conditions apply, including the time that the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is again to the Minister of Environment. How can the Siksika Nation residents be sure that the town of Strathmore will safely manage the treated waste water that's being put into the Bow River?

Thank you.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was explaining that the conditions that were applied are in place and will stay in place even during the stay that the appeal board put in place. Until they deal with this from a temporary perspective, Alberta Environment will work with the town of Strathmore and ensure that there is ongoing monitoring of both the discharge and the river to ensure that the terms of that discharge are upheld.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. How can the government be sure that this waste-water disposal in general doesn't impact the water supplies of other downstream communities throughout Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has some of the highest water and waste-water standards in the country, and the reason is included in the question: because practically everyone in Alberta lives downstream from someone else. If we don't have adequate

protection to ensure that the discharge from one municipality doesn't adversely affect their downstream neighbours, we will have a great cause for concern.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Private/Public Partnerships

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his report on P3 financing the Auditor General highlighted a number of concerns. The long-term debt commitments made under such agreements are only of value if we are guaranteed not to pay any more than planned. Last week in the House the Premier pointed to the southeast Edmonton ring road as a prime example of what P3 financing could do. Surprisingly enough, I couldn't agree more. In the 2005-06 annual report for the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation, page 103, we see that the P3-financed southeast ring road was \$34.6 million overbudget for that year. Could the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation please explain why these cost overruns occurred?

2:10

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I didn't read the '05-06 Auditor General's report on that portion of the ring road, so I will have to get back to the hon. member with that answer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the government announced last month that the northeast Calgary ring road would finally be built, again through a P3 initiative. As a Calgary MLA I know as well as anyone that the ring road is needed. Nevertheless, given the cost overruns mentioned just now in the Edmonton project, \$34.6 million, what can the minister offer to assure Albertans that they'll not be paying far more money than budgeted for a road they won't even own now?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I really have a hard time. I think this hon. member is speaking through both sides. I don't think he even wants a ring road in Calgary, to tell you the truth. He's just trying to stir up a little trouble here. But I will say that the actual ring road in Calgary will be done two years ahead of schedule than if we would have done it the conventional way, and we are going to have savings of hundreds of millions of dollars on that road.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I thank the minister for getting on the record in *Hansard* on the hundreds of millions of dollars that will be saved for my Calgarians, who desperately need that ring road.

What evidence, what cost does this government need before it will cease and desist with this P3 financing?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we will never cease and desist with this P3 financing because we need different alternatives to be able to handle the pressures that we have in this province, to handle the growth pressures because of our booming economy and the prosperity that we have in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Electricity Line between Edmonton and Calgary

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Energy and Utilities Board postponed its hearings for a month regarding a permit

to construct and license and operate a 500-kilowatt line between Edmonton and Calgary. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister advise the members of this Assembly about the cause for this delay?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly I can advise on the cause of the delay. Number one, as the member has pointed out, this particular matter is currently in front of the EUB, and there has been a stay, a delay in the hearings because they're taking into consideration the needs identification document that was previously approved with respect to the issue. So while they prepare their legal counsel to address the needs identification document in these hearings, there's been a delay of approximately one month.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. My constituents and I are concerned that this transmission project may not go ahead to meet the electricity needs of all of southern Alberta. Is there a potential that this project may not go ahead?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, this government has a plan to provide safe and secure communities for Albertans. Certainly, a robust and secure transmission grid, the backbone of the electrical system in the province of Alberta, is absolutely necessary to provide the safe and reliable communities that we have in our plan. I would suggest that significant generation has come online recently in the province of Alberta, and we certainly need new transmission to accommodate that.

Mrs. Ady: My final supplemental is to the same minister. I have also heard from landowners concerning the development of this infrastructure on their land. Can the minister advise me how their concerns are being taken into account?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As these hearings continue, the EUB will continue to hear evidence from interveners, from communities, and also from the applicants of this particular project. I think that the EUB has done a very good job with respect to looking at this situation. They have adjusted the hearing times and adjusted the hearing dates, and currently what you see in front of you is another responsible move by the EUB to address the situation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Employment of Children (continued)

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard government respond and express its dismay at children as young as 12 being employed in Alberta bars. However, the same government allows children down to age 12 to work in restaurants despite recommendations by the International Labour Organization that paid employment be restricted for children under 15. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Can the minister please tell us why the government appears to be worried about children's safety and well-being in one instance but not in another?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it's a very good question relative to the use of children in any labour situation. Simply put, there is a process for children to engage in the workplace provided several criteria are met. Thus far over 80 establishments, restaurants predominantly, have engaged children in circumstances where they can be greeters, where they can do some bussing of tables, where they are, in fact, in a situation where predominantly we have food service and where parents have signed consent. It's a fairly involved process of application so that they are permitted to have children.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While other provinces are struggling to keep children focused on academics until they finish high school, Alberta allows children to work when they are barely out of elementary school. Working at adult-type jobs has been associated with higher rates of dropout, low school performance, and poor attendance records. To the minister: will addressing Alberta's labour shortage sacrifice the academic success and well-being of Alberta's children?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a grandparent and a former parent one cannot generalize. It might well be of harm to some children if, in fact, they are working too much, if they are not academically inclined. That's something for the Minister of Education to comment on. What I can state is that there are very definite parameters around where and when children can work. It does involve significant parent monitoring of the capacity of that child to engage in any kind of labour.

I would suspect that the hon. member opposite that asked this question would be of the same mind I am. My children worked in delivering papers but, until they were 15 years of age, very little else.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you. The 2005 Alberta employment standards review apparently gathered community input about work standards in our province, including views about children 12 and up working in restaurants. Years have passed, and the responses to this survey are still hidden from the public's view. Will the minister do the right thing and commit to releasing the results of this survey so that we can judge for ourselves what Albertans think about this issue?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, relative to the employment standards review I would encourage the hon. member that we have more information to come out during the spring session. I'm not aware of what particular survey the hon. member is referencing, but I will consult with him later, determine what it is, and it might well be some of the information we'll provide.

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

Road Maintenance on Alexis Reserve

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you. The Alexis First Nation within Whitecourt-St. Anne has some serious safety and maintenance issues on the main road that leads into the band off highway 43. Mr. Speaker, you're well aware of this; this used to be in your constituency. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Is the minister aware of any programs that the Alexis First Nation can apply for that would help cover the costs of road repair and upgrading on the reserve?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, infrastructure on federal First Nations land falls under the responsibility of the federal government. Infrastructure funding and programs for First Nations communities, including Alexis First Nation, are the responsibility of the federal government. Highway 43 does pass through the northeastern section of the Alexis First Nations, and we maintain and operate that. We also maintain and operate highways 765 and 627 to the south of the reserve. But local roads are actually the responsibility of the federal government. We would hope that the Alexis would get together with them and make sure that their safety concerns are addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that answer, I will ask the minister of international and aboriginal affairs to comment. Is there a role for his department to assist the Alexis band and my constituents on this issue? It's hard to get the federal government to the table to take responsibility.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In spring, when there's breakup, road conditions are traditionally worse. I want to assure the hon. member that if there's any role we can play in partnering with neighbours, in partnering with the federal government to assist towards this important safety issue, it will be my pleasure to assist in any way I can.

2:20

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 94 questions and answers today. Just a reminder again that it's inappropriate in the question – well, it's inappropriate at any time – to mention the name of individuals such as occurred once today. That's a nice little reminder.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of 32 grade 10 students from Bellerose composite high school in St. Albert. They are a group of very intelligent young people who are the future of our province. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Marc Swerda, Ms Kelsey Meades, and Mr. Mark Puffer. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Orders of the Day**
head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that written questions stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head:

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that motions for returns stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head:

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

Bill 202 Consumer Advocate Act

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 202, the Consumer Advocate Act.

The drive behind or motive for this bill can be summarized in one argument, that consumers in this province, particularly in this kind of overheated market we're experiencing, need some degree of added protection against unfair market practices. I also think that the debate that ensues should as well focus on this question: what can we do to protect, educate, and assist consumers?

Market dynamics and competition usually help maintain a certain level of fairness where the interests of business and those of consumers and their rights are balanced. However, at times some, driven by voraciousness or greed, take advantage of consumers. The examples are numerous. How many times did you, Mr. Speaker, hear from your constituents that they were ripped off? How many times did the Premier or the Government House Leader or the Minister of Justice or the minister responsible for Service Alberta hear from their constituents that they were lied to or deceived? How many times did people tell the hon. members of this Assembly that they were, quote, taken for a ride? We all receive these complaints, and we all do what we can to refer people in the right direction. But sometimes these Albertans do not really have anywhere to go. They have no recourse, and the crooks cackle all the way to their banks at our expense.

What is an unfair market practice? What is this bill trying to address? Take price-fixing, Mr. Speaker, price-gouging, collusion, false advertising, or fraud. Ask people if they're concerned about fairness in the marketplace, and see which answer you get.

This bill establishes an officer of the Legislature, a consumer advocate, a market watchdog, whose mandate will be to advocate on behalf of consumers and defend their interests and rights. Consumers need a voice, and they need protection. They need someone in their corner with more than a wet towel or a spit bucket, someone who can rush to their aid if they need assistance righting a wrong. What we have now is not strong enough, and the current boom is unique. Consumer tip sheets on the Service Alberta website just don't cut it anymore.

Instead, I am proposing an advocate who will work closely with this Assembly, with the provincial government and its various departments and agencies, with fair trading directors and Service Alberta investigators, and with consumer organizations. The mandate will include a review of all legislation pertaining to consumer protection with the purpose of suggesting to the Assembly how these laws can be strengthened, how we can seal any loopholes and toughen our stance on this increasingly alarming trend in our marketplace.

The consumer advocate will also, one, assess the role and effectiveness of our province's Utilities Consumer Advocate; two,

initiate, recommend, or undertake programs designed to promote the interests of Alberta consumers; three, operate a publicly accessible database of consumer complaints, the findings of the investigations, and details regarding any administrative orders that have been rendered, charges that have been laid, or fines which were levied, something like the Consumer Beware database in the province of Ontario; and, four, conduct consumer protection related research and submit an annual report to this Assembly, an annual market, health, and fairness assessment, a state of consumer protection, if you will. He or she will even provide us with statistics respecting things such as rent, utility costs, auto insurance rates, retail gasoline prices, et cetera, in this province as compared to other Canadian jurisdictions.

The advocate will have the power to investigate concerns or issues on his or her initiative but also on the recommendation or referral by or from the Legislature or any of its committees, a cabinet minister, or the Premier, for that matter. I trust that our consumer advocate will be kept really busy monitoring and investigating to ensure fairness and compliance.

Examples? There are numerous examples, Mr. Speaker, and the severity, gravity, and frequency all seem to be getting out of hand, escalating, and spreading. Take rent gouging. The Alberta Liberal caucus knows that landlords are for the most part responsible and fair. Some, however, go beyond what is a reasonable and justified rent increase to what can be easily classified as rent gouging or robbery. Someone has to be able to stop this practice. When rent increases over the period 1995 to 2004 have only averaged about 3.8 per cent annually and now people are being asked to fork over 35 or 40 per cent more for the same unit they have lived in for years and with no significant improvements or upgrades, then something is wrong. When rent goes up twice a year, as the law currently permits, or more often, which is a punishable offence, then tenants have a reason to complain and scream in despair and disgust.

Turning apartments into condos and kicking tenants out: that's another one. The hon. Member for Vermillion-Lloydminster, in an answer given in question period on March 15, 2007, indicated that tenants can take landlords to court if landlords breach the Residential Tenancies Act. Well, small claims court costs money: \$100 if the amount is less than \$7,500 or \$200 if the amount is between \$7,500 and \$25,000. Many low-income tenants can't even afford this fee or the time requirement for a claim to move through this process, between their looking for a new place to live and trying to make ends meet, perhaps even working two or three jobs just to survive.

Rent gouging is also not as clearly defined as an offence under the Residential Tenancies Act because there is no maximum or ceiling. So these court challenges are likely also going to ultimately fail. Furthermore, one day my constituency office phoned the residential tenancies dispute resolution service here in Edmonton to chat, and the folks there actually were really clear that their mandate does not cover dealing with outrageous rent increases.

Take auto insurance. Why are Alberta drivers paying some of the highest rates in Canada? Why are the auto insurance companies hesitant to tell us how much money they make in profit each year? Why doesn't our provincial government reintroduce some form of public auto insurance? Why isn't insurance gouging vigorously investigated and acted upon? Also, pardon the ignorant question, Mr. Speaker: why do people with bad driving records seem to get more of a rate cut than those with perfect driving histories? I think the answer is simple. It's that these people represent a smaller number of customers, so giving them a more favourable rate won't hurt the company's bottom line. But it's not fair to the hundreds of thousands of good drivers in this province.

Take people buying new homes. The builder agrees in writing to a certain price then comes around and claims prices for supplies and

labour went up, offers to refund the down payment or cancel the contract, knowing quite well that someone else will be more than happy to buy this very property at the increased price in this crazy housing market. Shouldn't companies stick to their contractual agreements? That is the question.

Take retail gasoline. Pump prices jump up so efficiently when the wholesale price for crude moves upward, but gas stations drag and stall before their prices are lowered, sometimes taking days after the wholesale price goes down. Motorists need an answer to this question. Also, why are we paying more here for gasoline than places in Ontario, for example? Isn't Alberta the gulf state of Canada? Is it simply supply and demand, or is there some inclination here to charge what you can get because no one will so much as raise a finger to question you? Don't tell me that it is because we don't refine here, because neither does Ontario. They sometimes even buy their products from Europe and still pay less.

2:30

Take electricity and natural gas prices after deregulation. Boy, was that a bad decision. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has statistics and calculations proving how much residential, commercial, and industrial consumers in Alberta were ripped off. Then you add another layer, Mr. Speaker. Take the people who do the marketing for natural gas and electricity. We have all heard horror stories there. These are just some examples, and I know that other colleagues can list a few more.

Again, members of this Assembly need only ask themselves if they're happy and satisfied with the status quo. They can choose not to support this idea if they truly believe that consumers don't need any extra protection and that it is not the government's responsibility to protect and assist them. If, however, you agree that something needs to be done – and I hope that most of you will – then let's send this message together, that Alberta consumers will now have a new ally and that unfair market practices will be dealt with swiftly and strongly. If you have other ideas or suggestions and would like to put them forward in Committee of the Whole, I am definitely open and willing to work with all of you.

I urge all hon. members to support Bill 202, the Consumer Advocate Act. Protecting consumers is a priority for me, Mr. Speaker, and for the entire Alberta Liberal caucus. It should be for all members of this esteemed Assembly as well. This is not a partisan issue; this is about people.

I thank you for this opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few comments. As far as the speech goes, I've agreed with almost everything the member said. We have problems with rent, and we have problems with car insurance and others. When I look through it, I think it's in the enforcement, not that we need to create another position. That's what I think the problem is. Let's be honest. If we're going to deal with the rising rents and the gouging that's going on – and we know about it; I was on the committee, and I've heard a lot about it – there's only one way to do it. An advocate can't do much about it. It has to be rent guidelines brought in by the provincial government. If we're going to deal with car insurance, the places where it's the lowest is where they have public auto insurance. That's what we have to do.

It's policy changes that we have to do, and I honestly don't think that creating another position is really going to solve the problems that the member so ably talked about. It seems that in policy formation, with the Liberals it's either an endowment fund or another advocate laid out.

Mr. MacDonald: You're just jealous.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. That's it. I'm jealous. I'm really jealous, hon. member.

The point I'd make is that I don't think it's the fact that we don't have the laws now. When I look at a comparison between the two, what the hon. member is bringing in as a consumer advocate and what Service Alberta has, I look at the statutes to be covered: in Bill 202, the Fair Trading Act; Service Alberta, the Fair Trading Act. In the Consumer Advocate Act, Residential Tenancies Act; Service Alberta, Residential Tenancies Act. In the Consumer Advocate Act: Natural Gas Price Protection Act, Real Estate Act, utilities consumer act, other acts deemed necessary. Well, all of these acts are basically there.

Punitive capability. In Bill 202 that the member is bringing forward: make recommendations and comments on issues presented. No punitive capability. In other words, you have to have the stick along with the carrot, as far as I'm concerned. In Service Alberta they have warnings, but they can prosecute, so it's actually a little stronger. Can they accept complaints from the public? Yes in both cases.

The other point that I would make, though, is that probably the most valuable suggestion that comes from this bill is that it does recommend the establishment of a publicly accessible database of consumer complaints. I think that would be something that Service Alberta could do. I think that would be useful, to be able to have that sort of information here.

Again, I commend the member for bringing forward some important issues, but I don't think, unless we're willing to actually tackle these things in a serious way, that setting up another advocate will necessarily do anything different. I believe the laws are there in Service Alberta if we want to enforce them, and I think that that's where the problem lies. Probably what I would suggest is that Service Alberta take the positive thing that I mentioned and set up a publicly accessible database of consumer complaints.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I'm saying: very good intentions, and it's good that we're debating this. Things are needed here because there are problems, but I would say that it's more an enforcement of what we already have that we should be looking at.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, normally we'd try and get an exchange going. If there is no additional hon. member who will capture my attention, I will then recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to rise and speak to Bill 202, the Consumer Advocate Act. I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung for introducing something new, which I think was badly needed because I'm hearing lots of complaints. Maybe for some people it's minor complaints from the region, but there are complaints about some agencies, some big companies.

The highlight of this bill is to create the position of a consumer advocate, an officer of the Legislative Assembly, establish his mandate as the consumer advocate or any mechanism. I know that the government has a sort of information centre to respond to thousands of complaints, but if we established a consumer advocate, it might help to reduce the burden in this department when there are lots of complaints.

This bill also highlights and establishes the duties and powers of the consumer advocate. Basically, the purpose of this bill is to improve upon Alberta's existing consumer protection legislation.

The creation of the consumer advocate represents the renewed focus on consumer rights in Alberta. The bill speaks to and magnifies the importance of strong consumer protection.

Really, I think it's a very good idea, a very good bill. If needed, we can always amend a few things for the betterment of Albertans because we are all elected to serve Albertans. Lots of people are concerned about this issue, and we should address this issue and take it very seriously.

Now I would like to talk a little bit about the impact of the establishment of an officer of the Leg. whose sole responsibility is representing the rights and interests of Alberta consumers, the strengthening of Alberta's current consumer protection legislation. Mr. Speaker, what we have right now, as I already mentioned, is Alberta government services, now under the Ministry of Service Alberta, that has a consumer information centre which handles, I think, more than a hundred thousand inquiries from Albertans annually. The centre provides information on topics including landlord/tenant disputes, Internet purchasing, and how to lodge a consumer complaint. According to the Alberta government website, "the Office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate (UCA) works to ensure Alberta consumers have the information, representation and protection they need in Alberta's restructured electricity and natural gas markets."

2:40

Mr. Speaker, my constituents call me many times with their problems. Suppose they are renting properties – an apartment or condominium or subsidized home – sometimes the landlord has increased the rent once a year or maybe two or three times a year. Sometimes they ask for minor repairs, and there is nobody to listen to them. Lots of people don't know where to go, and maybe, you know, they just pick up the phone sometimes. They call their MLA's office, and mostly the assistants are there. They call some departments, and the departments just receive the message. It takes lots of time, delays after delays.

If somebody owns a condominium, there are lots of restrictions. They have their own condo rules. Even though they have condominium management, they are restricted to obeying the rules there. Still, it is sometimes so complicated that it's hard for elected representatives to answer those questions. The only solution for elected representatives like all of us is to approach the different departments, and that's what they are doing. But there is delay. So to reduce the burden of delay, I think this is a good idea. I commend the hon. member for taking the initiative and, you know, introducing this bill, which was badly needed.

My personal experience, being that my background is as a real estate agent, is that lots of realtors have many problems, whether their clients are buying a house or selling properties, when they write those complicated forms. Even the realtors are fully aware of lots of concerns. Still, you know, they're not lawyers. So if there's even a small error in the forms, sometimes RECA, the real estate people, take action against the realtors. It makes it even more complicated. You know, they have to go to the board sometimes to face complaints there. Those forms are sometimes complicated.

Another thing I want to discuss is that on one side there's a real estate board, RECA, and they have their own act. There's the Fair Trading Act, whatever you call it. There's the federal Competition Act as well. I think most of us might have heard the name of a new company, ComFree. I'm not taking anybody's side, you know, just trying to draw the attention of this House a little bit to a story from both sides. So ComFree is like an advertising company. They are not a real estate company. Like, the real estate board has their own board, their own ethics. They abide by the rules, and all of the

realtors upgrade their education. They have to spend certain hours every two years or year, whatever. But this new company: their background is like just advertising, and when they advertise on the Internet, sometimes they mention the words "real estate" or sometimes they write "MLS," which belongs to the real estate board. What they sometimes advertise on the website is . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but I must now recognize another member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to joint the debate on Bill 202, the Consumer Advocate Act, brought forth by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. The bill aims to establish a consumer advocate who would be an officer of the Assembly funded by the Alberta government. The proposed advocate would be mandated to review Alberta's consumer protection statutes; assess the role and effectiveness of the Utilities Consumer Advocate; publish a report with recommendations; represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of consumers in Alberta; receive, review, and investigate consumer complaints regarding any act or omission on the part of the Utilities Consumer Advocate or the director of fair trading; and initiate, recommend, or undertake programs designed to promote the interests of Alberta consumers.

Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta has been actively addressing consumer issues for many years. The government was an advocate for consumers even before the ministry of consumer affairs was created in 1973. Currently Alberta consumers are very ably represented by the consumer protection branch of the Department of Service Alberta. The department administers several pieces of legislation which help protect the rights of consumers, such as the Fair Trading Act and the personal information act. Additional pieces of related legislation: the Unconscionable Transactions Act, administered by the Department of Justice, and the Gas Utilities Act, administered by the Department of Energy.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta also has established the Information and Privacy Commissioner and Utilities Consumer Advocate. These offices work to protect consumers. The private sector is also very active in addressing consumer protection. There are many not-for-profit and industry groups which work to ensure that consumers receive fair and equitable treatment. Between the dedication of the federal and provincial governments and the private sector, there are a myriad of resources for consumers with grievances.

Mr. Speaker, of the many measures the Alberta government has set in place to protect consumers, I would like to specifically speak to the consumer protection branch. This branch's primary responsibility is to conduct investigations upon the receipt of a complaint from consumers, industry, or a competing business. When the consumer protection branch receives a complaint, it reviews the allegation to determine if there are grounds for an investigation. If it is determined that there are reasonable grounds to proceed, the case is assigned to an investigator for further study. Investigators have the authority to make any inquiries necessary to determine the facts surrounding a consumer complaint. Depending on the legislation that the complaint falls under, the investigator may also enter a business and demand that its employees produce and provide copies of relevant documentation.

When an investigation is concluded, the investigator makes recommendations of the appropriate actions to remedy the situation. If wrongdoing is found, the consumer protection branch may

reprimand the business, place restrictions on it, apply to the appropriate regulatory agency to have the business's licence cancelled or suspended, order the business to stop certain practices, order it to provide compensation – that's only for complaints falling under certain legislation – publish the investigation's findings, or refer the matter to the courts for prosecution. Furthermore, an investigator has the authority to apply directly to the courts for a judgment and to initiate civil proceedings.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, in addition to its investigative capacity the consumer protection branch also works to educate Albertans in the private sector by publishing various tipsheets, running an information service, and rewarding organizations which promote fairness in the marketplace with the Alberta consumer champion awards.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude with a brief overview of the 1999 Fair Trading Act. The Fair Trading Act outlines the obligations of businesses to consumers, defines fair and unfair practices for pricing, marketing, and collections, regulates credit, and mandates penalties and remedies for noncompliance.

Under section 6(1.1) of the act "it is an offence for a supplier to engage in an unfair practice." Some examples of unfair practice include exerting undue pressure or influence on a consumer, taking advantage of a consumer's inability to understand the nature of a transaction, using exaggeration, innuendo, or ambiguity to misrepresent a material fact, charging a price for goods or services that exceeds an estimate given to the consumer by more than 10 per cent without the consumer's consent, and including terms in a transaction that are harsh, oppressive, or one sided.

Section 6(4) of the Fair Trading Act also defines unfair practices with respect to marketing and advertising. Prohibited practices include doing or saying anything that might reasonably mislead a consumer, misrepresenting the quality, ingredients, or characteristics of goods and services, representing used or deteriorated goods as new, claiming that a specific part or repair is desirable if it is not, and falsely using an objective format such as an editorial to market goods or services.

Mr. Speaker, any person who violates the Fair Trading Act or its regulations is subject to imprisonment for up to two years. In addition to this, they may be the subject of a fine of up to \$100,000 or three times the amount they obtained as a result of illegal actions, whichever is greater. This is a significantly more aggressive penalty than can be found in any other Canadian jurisdiction.

As you can see from these two measures, the Alberta government is strongly committed to ensuring that Alberta consumers are adequately protected. Given the large number of measures in place to protect Alberta consumers from unfair practices, I urge Members of this Legislative Assembly to ask themselves if another piece of legislation, accompanied by another office, is required. Even though they are asking for one more officer, that officer will then have to be supported by a large supporting administrative staff.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, then Battle River-Wainwright and Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 202, the Consumer Advocate Act. [some applause] Thank you. Thank you. Hold your applause.

I think this is a valuable piece of legislation. I intend to speak over the next few minutes very much in favour of it. It was

interesting to listen to my colleague from Calgary-Hays as he read through some prepared notes on what current consumer protection legislation in the province of Alberta purports to do. Mr. Speaker, as we all know, there is what we say, and then there is what we do. If what we say is not backed up by what we do, then what we say isn't worth the paper that it's printed on.

I don't think that what the Member for Calgary-Hays had to share with the House here will be a tremendous amount of comfort or encouragement to the close to 60 residents of the assisted-living units at Holy Cross Manor in Calgary-Currie who were informed quite out of the blue a few weeks ago that their rent is going up on average 40 per cent on June 1, when their leases come up for renewal. They've been in that facility for a year. In fact, a couple of them told me that when they considered signing the lease in the Holy Cross Manor, they went so far as to ask a year ago what kind of increases they might be facing when their lease came up for renewal, and they were assured that it wouldn't be anything significant.

Well, I don't care if you're on a fixed income or you just won the lottery or you just struck oil. A 40 per cent increase like that is a pretty significant increase to your costs. I don't think that the remarks of my colleague from Calgary-Hays about existing legislation to protect consumers in this province are going to be of much comfort either to all of the people my office has helped find new accommodation in Calgary-Currie, where the average house price is about \$635,000 now, as they have become victims of economic evictions since we were here last spring. It's been a very, very interesting about 10 months since May of last year in our office as we have dealt with case after case after case of tenants, renters who were suddenly faced with a doubling or near tripling of their rent.

Interestingly, just on Thursday I was speaking to a woman who runs some retail outlets, a couple of them, in various parts of Calgary, who has prided herself on paying her staff over the years at least \$2 or more above minimum wage, whatever it was at the time, encouraging them to stay, to work full time, to build relationships with the clientele, get to know the product, that sort of thing. "Makes for a better employee," she says. But it's getting tougher and tougher and tougher because even at a couple of dollars an hour above minimum wage, you know, that's not enough to afford to buy a house in Calgary now or in Edmonton or Fort McMurray or Grande Prairie or just about anywhere else in this province. In fact, in the big cities in this province you need a family income of \$80,000 now to carry a house based on the average house prices that we've seen this year.

But back to rental units. She told me about one long-serving employee, a single mother who's been working for her now for a number of years and been very responsibly going to work, paying the bills, raising the child, et cetera, et cetera, and is now in a panic because she just got notification that her rent is going up from about \$900 a month to \$2,500 a month. Mr. Speaker, I wish I could tell you that this is an isolated case, but I can't because it's happening all over my constituency and not just in my constituency. It's happening all over Calgary, all over Edmonton, at least in the core areas, where most renters live. These kinds of rent increases are going on all the time.

We've dug up some statistics, Mr. Speaker, about rent increases that show, for instance, that over the past 12 months the average increase for rented accommodation across the nation was 1.3 per cent, and in Alberta it was 3.9 per cent. I don't think many people would say that those numbers in and of themselves are problematic except to note that rents are going up three times as much in Alberta as they are in the other nine provinces and through the territories.

But within that 3.9 per cent we have figures for Calgary and Edmonton and Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie that show rents increasing much faster than that, and within those figures we have many, many cases, dozens, hundreds of cases of rents being doubled and tripled and going up 250 per cent in a particularly odious little twist on things because, you know, it takes six months to get rid of the tenant if you want to turn that rental unit into a condominium. The law in this province says that you must give the tenant six months' notice, but it only takes three months to put that individual's rent up by whatever you want.

You're allowed two rent increases a year in this province, and there's no upper limit to how high you can put it. So we've had a case, at least – well, we've had several cases that I'm aware of – in my constituency of usually new owners of the same tired, old building, where the suites have been affordable for years because, admittedly, not much money has been put into them, but at least they've been affordable suites. The renters have come home from work to find two notices on their door, one saying that they're to be out in six months to make way for condo conversion. We've had as many rental units converted to condominiums in the past year in Calgary, for instance, as in the previous 10 years combined. The figures, I think, are not that different for Edmonton, and I suspect that they'll be much the same by the end of this year. So they've got the one notice saying, "You're out in six months unless you want to buy your unit" and right beside it another memo from the management office saying, "And, by the way, in three months' time we're increasing your rent from, oh, \$595 to \$2,000 a month." That is a very effective way, Mr. Speaker, of getting somebody you want to get rid of out in half the time that the law requires.

3:00

I won't take up too much more of the House's time. [some applause] I won't be allowed to, I think. Save your applause, as I said before.

The point here is that the protection that we have for consumers and rent gouging of the sort that has gone on in this province over the last 12 months is a classic example of this. The consumer protection legislation that we have in this province is not being sufficiently enforced and may not even be, as it's worded, sufficiently enforceable.

While the Member for Calgary-Hays or any other of the members of the government side of the House can stand and fill their entire 10-minute allotment of debate time reading government legislation and reading government regulations to us, people are falling through the cracks in droves in this province. They are being hurt, and this government is not standing up for their protection. Our role as legislators in this province is to level the playing field and make sure everybody obeys the rules. If they don't, we put on the striped shirts and we card them. That's what we're supposed to do, but it's been a long time since we've done that. If nothing else, Bill 202 seeks to shine the spotlight on that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, then Battle River-Wainwright and Lethbridge-East. [some applause]

Mr. Dunford: Seems I have a fan. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make a few comments on Bill 202, but because we're dealing with the principle of the bill, I won't take too long. Also, I'm not in the habit of circulating *Hansard* to my constituents, so it wouldn't be necessary to have extensive rhetoric in there just to show that I might be doing something while I'm here.

The bill is one of these quiet bills. When you first look at it, you think: "Well, gee. I think we could probably support something like that. Why wouldn't we?" Then, of course, we start to look at it, and we start to think about it, and we start to think about where it came from. It's being put forward by a Liberal member. Now, what would that normally mean in the political realms that we're used to dealing with? It usually means duplication. It usually means additional cost. I think that that is what is proposed here if we were to accept this bill. So I for one, as a free-voting member of this Assembly, want to indicate to you that I'll be voting against this bill.

One of the other comments, though, that I want to make before I sit down: I have friends and acquaintances who are involved in the formal consumer advocacy situation that happens here in Alberta and through extension, really, in every province in this country. All of them are upstanding citizens. They're serious about what they do. They take concerns of consumers to heart. They lobby municipal governments. They lobby and actually boycott at times different retailers. They, of course, have come to me as a member of the Legislature and a member of government to bring my attention to what they feel is a wrong that's been done to a consumer.

Many of us, perhaps even all of us – I don't remember the vote – supported the Fair Trading Act when it came forward, so there is a fabric within this province for consumer advocacy that is already there. I think this Premier and this new government, that we're all involved in, have taken this steps further, of course, with the priority of openness and transparency.

It would seem, in my humble view, that all of the network is in place for consumers if they feel they've been wronged to have an avenue of approach. If it's to this government, then fine. If it's to a landlord, there are landlord/tenancy kinds of arrangements. I can't think of anything that could possibly happen to me as a consumer where I wouldn't have some outlet then to express that and if I am in the right to at least try to find some sort of restitution for it.

So I think that rather than vote for a bill such as this, let's, all members of this House, welcome the openness and transparency of this new government. Let's support consumer advocacy groups. Let them register as lobbyists – there is now a law that is going to require registries – and let's let people that are involved in these actual incidents and contracts, if that's what they are, actually pay, then, for the resolution of those and not keep burdening that poor taxpayer. I want to remind everybody that whether you're a liberal tax-and-spender or you're a fiscal conservative, the burden is on the taxpayer. We, if nothing else in this House, should be stewards of the taxpayer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get this opportunity to rise and participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 202, the Consumer Advocate Act. I would certainly like to express my gratitude to the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung for bringing this important piece of legislation before the Assembly, and I would urge all hon. members to give it consideration. Please support this bill. I think it is necessary at this time.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I have been listening with interest to hon. members speak about this legislation. In fact, the previous speaker talked about the duplication and additional costs that this bill would place on the

taxpayer. Well, I don't think it would be much of an additional cost. I found that statement incredible from an hon. member who has participated in cabinet discussions for perhaps the last decade, when we've seen significant increases in spending from approximately \$14 billion to over \$28 billion now. Respect for the taxpayer certainly didn't seem to be evident whenever we saw the dramatic increase in that provincial budget over that time.

In fact, when the Utilities Consumer Advocate was created – now, there's a dog without teeth or a dog on a short leash. Whatever way you want to describe the Utilities Consumer Advocate, it certainly is an office that's not working. It was created, Mr. Speaker, by the previous government when they were very concerned about the public fallout from deregulation and they wanted somewhere to send consumers who were experiencing frustration. They needed somewhere to send them, so they set up this agency or this office, and interestingly enough they had the consumers pay for it themselves through the Balancing Pool and also through their monthly gas bills. I would have to say that with this money coming from the Balancing Pool, you would have to wonder just how independent the Utilities Consumer Advocate was and is. This would be why I would urge all hon. members to support this bill: because, of course, we're going to have an officer of the Legislative Assembly – that's the consumer advocate – and they will report directly to us, to all Albertans.

3:10

Now, we have to look at the new home warranty program. The economic activity caused by high oil and gas prices is dictating that there be a large number of new homes built all across the province. This new home warranty program is not working. Consumers are looking at this whenever they're purchasing a new house, and they're saying: oh, great, I've got a year. That new home warranty program is not protecting consumers. The cost of these houses is going up, and consumer protection, unfortunately, is going down. This is why I would urge all members to support Bill 202.

We've got record numbers of condominiums being constructed. I for one don't have confidence in the safety code system, the buildings inspection system that was implemented way back when Stockwell Day was minister of labour, prior to 1997. If we continue with the practices that are going on now in the residential construction industry, there are eventually going to be a lot of outraged and frustrated consumers. We're slapping up a lot of these condominiums and houses, and you cannot convince me that the building code is being adhered to and the inspection process is working. Guess who's going to pay for all this? Eventually it'll be the consumer, and that's why I would urge all members to support this.

Another reason would be the high cost of gasoline, the retail cost of gasoline. I said – I believe it was in the summer session – that I had confidence in the free-market system and how we retail gasoline. [interjection] I do not now. No, I can't say that I have any confidence in the system. In fact, I'm totally disgusted with the system. At the Chicago or the New York exchange or wherever you go, whichever exchange you use for crude oil, crude oil prices have softened since last summer, yet we still see these high retail prices in Edmonton. We have refineries on the east side of the city. A mile and a half away we have gasoline at 99 cents a litre. Gasoline in Olds is cheaper.

An Hon. Member: What do we pay for Coke?

Mr. MacDonald: I don't care what we pay for Coke and what we pay for Pepsi.

There are many people coming to my constituency office, and they're complaining about the price of gasoline. They have every right to complain because the price at the wellhead is not going up to reflect these prices at the pump. I'm sorry. We have a system that's gone wrong. It's not a competitive system. I thought at one point it was, but I have to admit that I was wrong. There is no way that because a refinery in Sarnia is having difficulty, the price in Edmonton should increase so dramatically. If we have a free-market system, hon. member, it's not working. The consumer advocate could certainly look into that.

Just down the street from our constituency office is the legacy of the last Conservative regime, and that's the cheque cashing place. That's the legacy. [interjection] Yes, hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, that's the legacy of the last Conservative regime: a cheque cashing place. These cheque cashing places have to be regulated. The amount that they charge in interest has to be reduced significantly. Now, I'm not going to blame this on the banks, the increase in the number of cheque cashing places, but it's a reflection on this government's previous social policies. The consumer advocate could certainly rein those cheque cashing places in.

Electricity, Mr. Speaker. Now, we all look at our bills. I spoke about the Utilities Consumer Advocate before. I'm sorry, but for instance, I visited the office, and it was like getting into Fort Knox. There was a little glass window there, that I'm sure was bulletproof, and you had to poke your head in this window, and the person on the other side would buzz to let you in. At least I got in to advocate on behalf of a constituent, and I'm grateful for that opportunity, but it tells me that there's something wrong with this system when this office needs this sort of security to protect themselves from consumers. I don't know what's going on there, but it certainly wasn't a sign of public confidence in the whole process. That's, again, why I think we should support the hon. member's bill.

We look at all these charges that are on power bills: the administration charge, the transmission charge, distribution charges. We've got fixed and variable charges; we've got other administrative charges. I'm not sure that those charges are even legal. That's something that we're going to have to examine a little bit further. The hon. Minister of Energy is assuring me that they're legal, but I don't think they are. You can't have taxation without representation, and those are taxes, hon. member. The courts determined that those are taxes. If the hon. Minister of Energy is confident in his position on whether these administration fees are really fees or taxes, then he can get up and participate in the debate. But if you look at the court case that was settled in New Brunswick this summer, I'm not so sure that this would stand up in a court of law.

If we were really interested in protecting consumers, after we make this bill a law, perhaps the new consumer advocate could initiate a legal investigation. Just exactly, these fees that we pay on our natural gas and electricity bills, are they fees, or are they taxes? If they're taxes, it's taxation without representation.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise to discuss Bill 202, the Consumer Advocate Act. I'm not going to talk about all of the pieces of legislation that already exist in the province extensively. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays reviewed the Fair Trading Act, the personal information act, the Unconscionable Transactions Act, the Gas Utilities Act, and all of the activities that the consumer protection branch can follow through in order to ensure that consumers are protected.

I'm going to take a different tack. Before that, I think that there are two members in this House right now that deserve praise. The first is the Member for Edmonton-McClung because obviously – and many of us have experience in our offices – this is an issue that needs to be addressed. Consumers are concerned about fair trading and some of the practices of businesses in Alberta, and every single member that rises in this House and presents an issue deserves congratulations, the respect of this House, and some recognition that they're bringing forward their constituents' issues.

The second member that I think deserves credit is the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, who in 1999 brought forward the Fair Trading Act. Mr. Speaker, the Fair Trading Act is more powerful and more well-structured than any other act of its kind in any other province in this country. When it was brought forward, it pulled bits of legislation from all through Alberta's legislation into one cohesive, comprehensive piece of legislation designed to protect consumers. That legislation also had some very tough provisions and penalties for people who contravene the act. Two years in prison, \$100,000 fine or three times the gains made from illegal actions is extremely punitive compared to many of the other jurisdictions in this country. It shows a clear sign that this province does have some very strict guidelines for protecting consumers.

I'd like to change the tack, maybe, from what's been discussed in this House before. As my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-West mentioned about defending the taxpayers in this province, when it comes to the taxpayers and spending taxpayers' dollars on anything, Mr. Speaker, I honestly believe in the philosophy of minimalism when it comes to government. You see, too often every government – and it doesn't really matter what type of government or what party they represent. Every single government has a tendency to take an issue that arises today and create a new piece of legislation to deal with it or some new regulations to deal with it or new penalties to deal with it without first reviewing hundreds of years of best practices and legislation and regulations to see if something has already been created to address the situation.

3:20

We have the consumer protection branch, which is a division of Service Alberta. We have the Fair Trading Act, the Personal Information Protection Act, the Unconscionable Transactions Act, the Gas Utilities Act, a whole lot of legislation and enforcement possibilities. I'm not asserting, Mr. Speaker, whether or not this legislation is adequate so far or if the consumer protection branch is equipped to do the job or whether or not they're doing an adequate job, but before we go ahead and create another office, another bureaucracy, another piece of legislation, something else that could just confuse the issue, first, I believe that we need a full review to make sure that the legislation that we have is adequate to deal with the needs. The offices that already exist: find out if they are doing a good job, and if they're not, why they're not doing a good job. That review is the most important thing to ensure that if we were going to set up the Consumer Advocate Act and create a legislative office to protect consumers, it's actually necessary and we're not duplicating something.

Mr. Speaker, I think that bringing this issue to this Legislature and the attention of the public and the media is an amazing thing. I think it's fantastic, and it's brought some very important debate here to the House that we haven't had in a long time. But I reiterate that I don't think we necessarily need to create another office. We may need to make sure that the consumer protection branch advertises more so that citizens in this province are aware of exactly what sort of level of protection they have. It may need more tools, more personnel to make sure that it can enforce the legislation properly, or it may need

to be reminded that it has some punitive abilities to protect consumers. That may be the solution to some of the issues that we've been discussing.

Mr. Speaker, I really believe that the member across from Edmonton-McClung deserves a commendation for bringing this forward. I've received calls from constituents in my office, and I'm sure that every other MLA has. These debates are important and critical. Though I won't be supporting the legislation because I think we need to have a call for a review of what we have that exists and how effective it is and maybe how to make it more effective, I think the member deserves credit for bringing this up.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the President of the Treasury Board.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I might also like to thank the hon. member across who has just complimented, certainly, my caucus member because I do support the idea of having a pure advocacy sort of person.

I've heard my colleague from Lethbridge-West talk about principles. Certainly, I believe that what is at stake here is the principle of fairness. People trust their governments. They really trust them to govern, to set legislation that will protect them. Is that the job of the government? Yes, I believe it is. At this point in time I think that I see an awful lot of attitudes of buyer beware, and trust me, buyers do not have a hope in Hades of actually being able to win against people who are immoral and unethical. Things that they do may be legal, but unethical and immoral behaviour: the buyer does not have a choice against that.

As far as the government members who have stood up and defended the particular process that we have at the moment, if it truly was working, we would not be receiving all of the complaints that we get in our office. I agree with the member across. I'm sure there isn't an MLA that sits in this House that does not have consumer advocate problems and questions that come across their desk.

One other thing: the Utilities Consumer Advocate. Of course, many, many of the problems that I have in my office pertain to the utility problems. The current person who serves as the head of the Utilities Consumer Advocate also works as a deputy minister of government services. I do have a problem with that because I believe that it represents the opportunity for a conflict of interest.

I'm going to use a couple of examples of things that are on my desk. I realize that we are speaking about principles, but I'd like to perhaps use these as examples of where the principles really aren't working. I had a constituent who got nothing but a runaround and, certainly, no accountability. I really believe that no matter what department and no matter what problem it is or how you can divide it down and say that it's some other department, it's some other elected body, the buck still stops at the desk of the minister that is responsible for that particular problem that fits under their ministry. The buck stops at the ministers' desks.

This particular constituent of mine had back problems for many years and went to a private clinic in Calgary. She paid \$150 up front and had been promised a two-hour assessment. She was given a 15-minute assessment and sent home, knowing full well that she had received a far better assessment even from her local chiropractor. Now, this is a private clinic. The health authorities have no contractual relationship, but they do refer people to the clinic. So now where was she going to go? She thought: well, let me go to the medical association. Well, the medical association said no because this was a private clinic. Then she thought: well, I'll go to the

chiropractic college because the person that did the assessment on me was a chiropractor. No. That person wasn't assessing for this particular clinic as a chiropractor. There was another dead end. Well, let's go to the city of Calgary and find out how they give out their licences. Well, pretty much they just give out their licences without really any judgment on the behaviour of the particular client or the business that they've given the licence to. So they just pretty much collect their money, and off they go.

I'm not even going to go off on a tangent about whether we should allow strip joints to be licensed. That's another whole issue. I'm going to save that for another day because I've got some good stuff.

Anyway, now we're down to the Better Business Bureau. We have gone down the whole line. The Better Business Bureau wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole, saying that medical issues are outside of their jurisdiction.

So where was this woman to go? Really, nowhere. No one was accountable. No one had the backbone to stand up and say: "You know what? Yeah, you're right." Now, this, in my mind, happens to fall under Health and Wellness, and in fairness, Health and Wellness did give my office a great deal of help with this. But this is just an example of how people fall through the cracks.

Another example that I have is the billing for utilities. Of course, that just goes on and on and on. What happens to a lot of seniors who are on fixed incomes is that they get bills, and they'll phone up. They will talk to the talking head that reacts to the talking screen, and they really have no authority nor ability to actually say, "Gee, I'm going to fix that for you," and if they do fix it, that person has to wait till the end of the month or whenever their next bill comes. If it's not fixed, they have to go right back to square one and say: it still isn't fixed. By using that system, instead of being able to correct it immediately and send out the corrected statement, sometimes people have to wait four and five and six months to get it straightened out.

In the meantime, this is creating tremendous stress, particularly for people on low incomes and, certainly, on fixed incomes. I cannot believe that in this day and age utility companies with their large resources and their huge computer banks cannot send that bill out instantly once the correction has been made, which usually is done by the person, the talking head that's working with the talking screen, so that someone at least can have redress within the week.

3:30

Some of the ones that are totally baffled by this sort of thing, of course, are immigrants. They've worked very, very hard, and they've saved, and they're not used to paying interest. They may have credit cards, but you can bet your bottom dollar that they're paid off monthly and they don't pay interest. In the meantime if a bill is incorrect, they are charged interest, and that really isn't fair.

I believe we're talking about the principle of fairness. I know the expression is that life is not fair, and I agree: life isn't fair. However, these unfair situations can be controlled. Therefore, they really are not fair to the people who are being penalized because the government doesn't have a proper advocate that is free and independent to be able to really help these people with some sort of authority to enforce, obviously, some legislation that we already have.

Many of our seniors that are caught in this, of course, have worked through depressions, they've raised families, and they've retained the values of hard work and saving. They believe, as this government does, that people should be responsible for themselves. I think that many, many people are more than willing to be responsible for themselves, but if you can't beat the system fairly, then you really don't have much of a chance.

Another thing that has been always on my mind is that big companies – utility companies, telephone companies, whatever – charge administration costs. Now, my question would be: if I am paying the administration cost, is that company writing those administration costs off as legitimate business expenses? If they are, why am I paying them? I think that's a question that should be asked. For instance, on my long-distance telephone I'm charged \$4.95 a month, and I don't even use long distance. So if they're writing it off as an administration expense against their taxes and I'm paying for it, then I want a rebate. Either that or I want some kind of tax relief from those administration costs, that truly are a normal business expense.

I think I will leave it at that, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of instances there. I could probably go on forever. But I really believe that the point is that if we're talking about principle, it must be fair.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an interesting discussion we have. Often we're going to have to accept the fact that you are the one that is responsible for contracts you enter into. If you don't think that it's within your responsibility to do the due diligence of contracts you have, unfortunately the person you're dealing with will probably get the better of you. Quite frankly, you cannot legislate goodness. As long as there has been commerce and as long as there have been two or three or four men or women doing business, sometimes bad things happen to good people, and all the legislation in the world won't help it.

Ms Pastoor: Doesn't make it right.

Mr. Snelgrove: No, it certainly doesn't make it right.

Unless we're going to hire somebody to walk hand in hand with everyone who might mistakenly buy a bad car or sign a rental deal they can't do or have to pay a utility bill they don't like, unfortunately we're going to have to do it.

You've been told already about all of the programs the provincial government has. I can assure you that the people that work not only in the Utilities Consumer Advocate but on Service Alberta's consumer protection hotlines work very hard and are an extremely good resource for the people of Alberta as they are in many ways very, very helpful in directing these people to a solution to their problems. But, obviously, you can't solve them all.

Let's look across the country at what the federal government is responsible for. We can talk about the price of gasoline or the other things we do, but the federal government is responsible for the Competition Act. I would have to say that on long weekends it's magical that the prices go up. But, you know, the federal government has looked into that continually, and they come back and say: well, that's what happens. So take that up with the federal government.

They're also responsible for consumer packaging and labelling, and I can tell you, as someone who has dealt with businesses from outside of the country, that one of the most expensive barriers to getting into Canada to sell is the restrictions on labelling products. Extremely onerous, extremely complicated, and extremely expensive, especially if you're selling lower priced consumer goods.

They also have an office of consumer affairs, which works primarily to educate people. They've got the Competition Bureau. They've got the Canadian Council of Better Business Bureaus, which if anyone wants to access and find out, "Should I be dealing with this person or not?" they'll probably be in there.

But purely on a point of saying, “Well, maybe they’ve got something there; maybe the opposition has come up with something, and us old redneck Conservatives just can’t see it,” let’s ask around. Let’s go ask the good Liberal government in British Columbia: do you have a consumer advocate? Well, British Columbia does not. It could be they don’t need one, or maybe they’re just Liberal.

Maybe the NDs have one in Saskatchewan. So we’ll go ask our good friends in Saskatchewan: “What about you guys? Do you see that you need to have a consumer advocate?” Well, Saskatchewan doesn’t have one. But, you know, Saskatchewan has been working pretty hard lately to try and catch up to us and stop the people coming here to live.

Let’s ask our good friends in Manitoba: have you got a consumer advocate? Nope. Well, what does Manitoba know? They’re just a hard-working bunch of prairie boys.

The good people of Ontario, the industrial heartland of Canada, the centre of the universe: they must have a consumer advocate. No.

Well, guess what? Let’s go to la belle province. They have everything, right? Well, they must; we pay for it. They’ve got everything. No, they don’t have one. Doggone it. I tell you what: when they find out that there’s a position they can fill with our money, they’ll have one, I can assure you, but at this point they don’t.

So let’s go to the good people in Nova Scotia, who do have an insurance consumer advocate. But they don’t have a consumer advocate in Nova Scotia either, and you would know that they are darn good people in Nova Scotia.

Prince Edward Island. Tiny little place like that; lots of people been looking for work. Well, I’m sure they would have a consumer advocate, wouldn’t they? No. They don’t have one.

We’re not done. Canada’s got another couple of hundred kilometres to go, and surely the good boys on the Rock will have one because you couldn’t possibly get bad screech there if you had a good consumer advocate. So let’s ask Newfoundland and Labrador. Well, they don’t have one either. I give up. If Newfoundland and Labrador don’t have one and nobody else seems to have one, I don’t want one either.

Mr. Chase: Well, without going into a whole series of ethnic accents, I would like to suggest that Alberta could lead the way with a consumer advocate position. We’ve heard from the Member for Calgary-Hays, who listed ad infinitum the number of departments that could potentially intervene but unfortunately don’t.

We heard the Member for Battle River-Wainwright give credit to our member for bringing up the idea of the legislation. He suggested the notion that we need some kind of a review. If our current processes, our current ministries aren’t solving the problem, then we should have a look at reviewing these various ministries. That’s exactly what a consumer advocate would do.

The consumer advocate, the way I see it, would be a point person, the buck-stops-here person, a traffic controller. This would be the person who would bring the ministries together to do the job that they currently aren’t doing sufficiently effectively to keep people from finding themselves out on the street because their rents have increased by various percentages. There’s one individual, an apartment owner in Calgary, who was going to raise his rent by 400 per cent, and there’s nothing, unfortunately, to keep him from doing so because we have no rules. We have no regulations. You can raise it to whatever you like, six months at a go.

3:40

Now, what we have here is a difference in fiscal philosophy. *Laissez-faire* translated from French means: let do, let it happen; in

other words, as it’s been expressed by our Premier, no brakes. The market dictates. Well, without getting wordy or attempting to wordsmith, I would suggest that the English equivalent right now in Alberta, what consumers are experiencing, is lazy – l-a-z-y – and unfair.

Where we differ is the fact that we don’t believe that all boats rise with the tide in our particular circumstance. We believe that there is a role for a social advocate to blow the whistle and say: rent increases of 41 per cent for fixed-income seniors are unfair. We need a whistle-blower to suggest that the 60 seniors from the sort of neighboring facility shouldn’t have to be transferred out to other facilities to have their needs met or become the unfair term “bed blockers” in acute care beds while their own homes are being looked after, while the fire regulations are being adjusted. We need an individual who will take on and co-ordinate these responsibilities.

Right now when people come into our constituency offices – and it’s not a Liberal office or an NDP office or a Conservative office – everyone hears concerns about the affordability of homes, energy, et cetera. Unfortunately, we don’t have a central individual or department that can make the changes. One of the jobs that I would assume this consumer advocate would have is suggesting the types of legislation that that individual would need in order to provide the enforcement that the MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is looking for.

We know that that enforcement is not occurring now. We know that we’re in a desperate, anomalous situation in Alberta, but there are no departments that are taking it on. We know that when we try and help out a senior, for example – is it a health problem, or is it a housing problem? – quite often there is no one who will then take that senior and lead them through the process. This is where I see the role of the consumer advocate being extremely important.

I would hope that rather than just simply dismissing the idea, all members of this Assembly would consider taking this proposal to the next level and suggesting the amendments that would do the job that they feel at this point this bill is not doing. In other words, instead of just saying, “Well, from Newfoundland to B.C. there’s no such thing as a consumer advocate,” I would like to think that for a change Alberta would be out in front and leading, saying that not only are we the richest province, but we’re the one that cares the most about our citizens, and we’re going to have an agent of the government that will have the independence to act on their behalf, who will say to that individual who raised the rent by 200 per cent or 400 per cent: “No, this isn’t what we’re going to allow you to do. We’re going to put the brakes on it right now.”

One of the sort of enlightened areas that other provinces have looked at, whether it’s B.C. or Manitoba or Saskatchewan, is public insurance. A consumer advocate is not as necessary in those provinces because they have public insurance and they have the controls that we in this province unfortunately don’t have. Now, the previous Finance minister suggested that insurance companies who were found to be gouging Albertans should voluntarily lower their insurance rates. Well, only about 6 per cent of them complied; therefore, she required them to do that. This is another job that a consumer advocate could perform.

They could set rates, of course, with government ministries in support and debate within the Legislature, and going beyond that rate of increase would be unacceptable. Whether it’s for insurance or whether it’s for rent, we need desperately to get beyond the idea that market forces are all we need. Just sit back, let it happen, ride the wave, so to speak, and everybody will be all right. Well, we’ve seen and we know in our constituencies that this not happening. Regardless of whether our constituency has elements of wealth, we know that there are individuals who are suffering in each of our areas.

This is why Bill 202, the Consumer Advocate Act, is absolutely necessary. Somebody has to take on the job that isn't being done now. That person could suggest, as the Liberal policy has suggested, that there are abnormal times such as we're experiencing now, when there should be some form of control on rent for an extremely limited amount of time. We don't want to discourage affordable housing from being built, but when a person is about to be thrown out onto the step, who's going to stand up for them? Which of these Service Alberta outfits is going to actually intervene?

We had an Affordable Housing Task Force tour the province, and we had members from all parties represented, for which I'm very appreciative, but we're not getting the report until sometime later, and we'll get whatever pieces of that report, I suppose, that will eventually be tabled. The point is that people are out and are being pushed out by these high rent prices right now. They can't hold on. The city of Calgary is already looking into a new homeless shelter. Because of the widening of 16th Avenue they're going to have to get rid of the Brick. If we had a consumer advocate who talked about fairness and affordability and orderly rent increases and orderly insurance costs instead of things spiralling continuously out of control and instead of allowing inflation to go so far up that eventually we go from boom to bust – this consumer advocate could be that champion. We need the individual to take on the responsibility that hasn't been taken on to date by the other ministries.

Please support my colleague in pushing this bill to the next level. Amend it to do what you believe it needs to do. Please don't just simply dismiss it. We need a social advocate.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to have the opportunity to speak in favour of Bill 202, brought forward by my colleague, and that is the Consumer Advocate Act, sponsored by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. I think what you see here is the quintessential ideological difference between the two major parties represented in this House. Here we have the government members, who say, "absolute minimal amount of legislation," and you have our side of the House, representing the Official Opposition, saying, "there is a role for government." Consumer protection is one of the roles we believe government should be fulfilling. Different story on the other side of the House.

Part of my experience in this House in the last 10 years has been noticing that legislation is absolutely useless if two things are missing. Those are two really integral parts of what should be outlined in the legislation, and then there should be adequate resourcing for it. By that I mean staff, budget, office space, vehicles, whatever is appropriate. Those two things that are so important for every piece of legislation and which we frequently do not see coming forward in legislation proposed by members of the government caucus are monitoring and enforcement.

3:50

Somehow these minimal schemes are put forward by government members who just don't seem to understand that it's one thing to say something, but if you don't double-check that it's actually happening, one, and two, if it's not happening, put some kind of enforcement mechanism in place to either make people have it happen or have some sort of repercussion if they don't – if you don't have those in place, why on earth would anybody bother following this? "Oh, well," I can hear them saying already, "voluntary compliance." Yeah. We've seen how effective voluntary compliance is. Oh, let me think. Climate change? Yeah, we sure got a lot of voluntary compliance on reducing emissions on that one. Now what do we

have? We have, indeed, this very government coming back and going: well, gee, I think maybe we might actually have to put a very second-rate emissions control on it because it's intensity emissions, not straight caps. But you see my point, Mr. Speaker.

Consumer protection legislation: they've listed off a ream of them. But guess what? Very little of that legislation is actually working. Why? Because there's (a) no monitoring happening and (b) no enforcement happening. So, yeah, you've got it on the books, but it doesn't work because those two elements are either not in the legislation or they're not actively resourced in order to be effective.

Let me give you an example. I have a number of condominiums in my riding, and increasingly, I'd argue, probably just about every MLA in here does have at least one condominium in their riding. So their boards are constituted as an entity either under the Societies Act or under part 9 of the corporations act. So they're supposed to have annual general meetings, which are open to all of the membership. They're supposed to have their financial statements open at least once a year for scrutiny by the members. They are supposed to have access to the minutes of the meetings. All of those things are, in fact, in the agency's or the entity's bylaws as approved by either the Societies Act or part 9 of the corporations act. So that's what they're supposed to do. The plan is clearly there.

What if they don't do it? Ah, well, there's the rub. I have actually helped some of my constituents all the way through this rather sorry little tale.

Mr. Taylor: You don't trust the private sector?

Ms Blakeman: No, I don't trust the private sector.

When I've followed this through, there is actually no backup available through what's in place by this government. So what we have is dozens of complaints that I've investigated about condominium members, a member of a condominium. They should be able to get access to the minutes of the condominium board, and they should be able to review the financial statements, they should be made aware of an annual general meeting, and they should be able to openly attend an annual general meeting. That's not happening.

This is not only occurring with condominium boards. I'm sure we've all got examples of other agencies in the charitable sector or the volunteer sector.

So if you follow this back, you actually come to one person buried deep in what would now be, I'm assuming, Service Alberta, who admits that, yes, they are responsible for that particular section of the Societies Act and part 9 of the corporations act, which is the filing of those documents and all of the rules that say that you've got to have access to the minutes, to the financial statements, and to the annual general meeting. You say: "Well, we can prove that there's noncompliance here. Now what?" "Well, sorry. I have no ability to monitor what's going on, and I have absolutely no power to enforce." You say, "Well, what's the point of actually having this legislation if, when it's not followed, there's no recourse to any kind of action to support what the government has put in place." "Well, gee, you could go to the civil court." Oh, please. How helpful. Or, rather, how incredibly unhelpful.

I mean, in most cases we're dealing with individual homeowners who are just trying to get access to an annual general meeting or read some financial statements, and you're telling them they're going to have to go to court and pay how much money just in order to get access to this? Why is this again? Oh, yes. Because the government didn't resource this appropriately and didn't empower through the legislation appropriately to actually give citizens some assistance here. As well, there would be an expectation that a volunteer agency or a charitable organization would have to resort to the courts to try

and get satisfaction on this. I mean, if I may so say, Mr. Speaker, that's truly beyond the pale, putting things back on the victim and blaming the victim and encumbering the victim with trying to find the resources to get themselves out of this when it either was in the legislation and was not empowered to enforce or was never in the legislation in the first place.

Another example I have of that is from a constituent that contacted me recently named Dan Onischuk. He's most exercised because he is being harassed by anonymous callers. How are they anonymous? Well, he goes back to the phone company, and the phone company says: oh, yes. They will give carte blanche use of anonymous phone calling for \$2 a month. They're charging others to achieve this anonymous phone caller ability, who can then continue to harass people, and the other clients of the phone company have no ability to make them stop.

So when the Minister of Service Alberta waves his hands about and says, "Well, it's their own darn problem if they can't read their contract," well, in this case there is no contract with the individual who has a residential phone line, and that's how they're receiving their phone services. There's nothing in their contract that says that they empower the phone company to now make additional revenue by charging others to achieve an anonymous status. That's not in a contract that's enforceable for a residential phone caller.

In my case my constituent has tried to go to the city police, who were unable to help him, to the RCMP, and finally I think a city bylaw officer was able to get him some satisfaction but not very much. I'm sure we're all irritated by having anonymous callers. I think there was supposed to be a no-call list put through by the federal government, and I don't care which version it was, but we've never seen satisfaction on that either.

So ultimately what we're looking at here is a government that needs to recognize that consumer protection legislation like is being proposed in Bill 202 is in fact needed, and with it needs to come the monitoring and enforcement provisions that will actually make it a useful, workable document, a contract if you will.

The last piece I want to bring up here is that if the government will not do this, cannot do this, who else is capable of doing it? No one. That's why the public looks to the government to enact consumer protection rules and regulations and to monitor and enforce them. The government is the only one that is capable of doing that, that has enough overriding authority to do it, and therefore, I would say, they have a responsibility to do it.

For the minister to say, "Oh, well, you know, we looked at all the other provinces and nobody else has one, so we won't have one," oh, please, Mr. Minister. I'm a little ashamed of you there. I mean, this is the very same government that prides itself on being a maverick government, on getting out there ahead of things with all kinds of brand new stuff that nobody has done. Except for when it comes to consumer protection. What an interesting choice to make: like to get out there in front and be on the front pages of the national paper except for where it comes to consumer protection.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege and pleasure to stand to Bill 202, Consumer Advocate Act. I, too, have had a number of concerns expressed to me as MLA in Calgary-Mountain View, especially about the rapid growth rate in the province, the inflation issues, the rent gouging. I'm sure that's coming from both students at university and postsecondary institutions, and it's coming from seniors. It's really difficult for them to know where to go for

help when their basic rights as a renter are being violated, and we see continued gouging, up to the tune of 300 per cent in one condo block that I visited.

Another big area that I've had complaints about and gone out to visit is seniors who are in private health care facilities and feel very strongly that they are being increasingly compromised in terms of their health as a result of having to spend so much of their income on rent, food, and accommodation, which has gone up very substantially over the last couple of years. This is actually compromising their ability to sleep at night in some cases and certainly to take care of themselves adequately. Those are two big areas that I've heard a lot of complaints about.

4:00

I myself have had experiences with transferring funds out of the country and feeling that there has to be a cheaper way of transferring money to some of the poorer countries in the world where there are, in fact, very high rates of interest, or user pay. I haven't seen any recourse to challenging the sometimes 15, 20 per cent of the total value of the money I was sending. That happens to be another area where I'm concerned that we need some consumer protection.

Quality of electronics: at times I've had problems with and had very poor response in the retail sector, repeated poor service. I suppose I could complain to the Better Business Bureau, but I've never felt that there was a real advocate for me as a consumer on some of these issues.

Home renovations: a similar issue where, because it's so difficult to get plumbers and electricians, there could be serious concerns about the safety of our homes. These folks are charging through the roof for some of the changes that are absolutely essential for health and safety in homes.

So the idea of a consumer advocate and a consumer protection package is eminently sensible and much needed in Alberta. Those are the key issues that I wanted to focus on, Mr. Speaker. I also know that in some of my constituents' minds is the whole area of electrical deregulation, the sense that we are paying way beyond what we should be and could be if we had maintained the electrical production under a public utility and what recourse people have. There's confusion, especially again in seniors who are being marketed to by different companies who are producing the electricity and wanting people to sign on for five or 10 years at a fixed rate, and they're not sure whether to go with the floating rate or whether to go with a company and their particular hard sell.

Without an advocate, without a support system for people who don't understand the electrical system, which many of us struggle with – it is very complicated. The billing process is difficult to understand. I have difficulty interpreting my own electrical bill. I know that seniors especially have talked to me on the street about how to deal with their feeling that the way deregulation has gone isn't necessarily fair and isn't serving the public interest.

Motor vehicle repairs and motor vehicle changes: again, many of us feel vulnerable because it's hard to assess what a mechanic may tell you from one day to the next. Getting two estimates doesn't necessarily solve the problem if they're not following ethical practice and leaving us as consumers in the dark.

I think it would send a strong message to all kinds of industries, all kinds of service organizations if we had an advocate in place, someone who took to task those who are not acting responsibly or ethically and made examples of them, frankly, and made it public, and if there was a penalty involved with a failure of ethical practice.

I am here to speak very much in support of the bill and ask my colleagues to do the same in the interests of the public of Alberta. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to make some comments with regard to consumer protection on the utility side, and just to correct some of the statements that the member opposite made just previous. You know, the Utilities Consumer Advocate and a broad representation across the province of board members have done a great job for Albertans on the utility consumer side. They have fielded thousands of calls over the last few years and helped many that had billing difficulties and problems getting hooked up, and the list goes on and on.

As well, the Utilities Consumer Advocate has created a website to make sure that people know where to get an electrical contract. You can click on different websites from there to find out prices from competitive companies. If this member is having a hard time reading his bill, there's even an opportunity there to teach you how to read your bill.

One of the things I was surprised at is the comments that the member was making with regard to utility contracts. You know, right in southern Alberta we've got a company called Enmax that's offering the EasyMax program. You hear about it on television, in newspapers. I don't know why you haven't heard about it, but I've signed up. My mom has signed up; it's such a good deal. It protects consumers from fluctuating rates in the future. It's a seven-cent contract that many of us could look at and advise our constituents about the options that are out there.

So the Utilities Consumer Advocate has done a great job on the utilities side. If the member's not aware of it, I encourage you to click on the website. Read the newspapers. In every newspaper I read, I read about the utility company's advertising rates, and you know I encourage you to encourage your constituents when they do have problems with utilities to call the UCA and contact them.

The member earlier talked about the deputy minister being the advocate. The deputy minister's not the advocate. There's a new assistant deputy minister that's acting right now – I think her name is Cathryn Landreth – and she works for the Department of Service Alberta. She's available to field questions, and there's a great team behind her to help those that want to find out more about their utility bill or if they have problems with utilities throughout Alberta.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest to speak toward Bill 202, Consumer Advocate Act. Certainly, in my experience as a member of the Legislature for Edmonton-Calder I've seen plenty of reasons to look to strengthen consumer advocacy in the province of Alberta. We have had plenty of opportunity to look at the range of problems that constituents face in regard to high rents, in regard to utility problems, in regard to a whole range of social service issues. Consumer advocacy is something that I do certainly want to see strengthened here in the province of Alberta. You know, there is just a whole range of issues that people find themselves without representation on, and as a result they can end up having to spend money in civil court or having to spend both time and effort to fight what becomes often much larger entities than themselves and up against very formidable opponents in regard to, say, utility bills or rent, landlord issues.

Consumer advocacy is, I think, something that has to evolve over time. Ultimately, I think it's a reflection of the democratic construction of our society and of people's interaction with the Legislature itself. So looking specifically at Bill 202 here, certainly, I would

like to commend the spirit of the bill. It does have quite a number of good points. However, I do have some specific criticisms that I would like to bring forward just on a practical level, just looking at different sections of the bill and where I saw some potential problems, I suppose.

The first area was on page 2, which is section 3(1)(a), which somehow entails reviewing consumer protection statutes. You know, I just want to recognize that this is already the mandate of government services, of course. The business plan of government services in fact says, "to develop and/or modernize consumer legislation." So there is that part of our existing mandate within government that would perhaps make this section somewhat redundant.

4:10

On page 3 of Bill 202 section 4(1)(b) outlines under duties and powers that the consumer advocate has to represent "to receive, review and investigate consumer complaints." Consumer complaints are in fact covered by the agency known as Service Alberta, and while certainly I do have my differences with some of the strength and perhaps the execution of Service Alberta, just in regard to the regulations and legislation surrounding Service Alberta, this Bill 202 is somewhat redundant.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The next section that I had some concern about was on page 8 of Bill 202, and this section outlines what will happen after an investigation takes place. The problem is that the most a consumer advocate as outlined here can do is issue a report to the appropriate department or ministry and have it followed up through a report in the Legislature, so I find this a bit wanting in regard to the enforcement value of this consumer advocate as described in Bill 202. Service Alberta, in fact, again, on the books less than in action but more at least in its legality, does have a range of punitive actions that it can engage once it has concluded an investigation. So, you know, just to build this legislation to somehow have it fit within existing legislation, Mr. Speaker, I found some difficulty with that part there.

Then one other section that I just wanted to point out is on page 3 of Bill 202, 4(1)(e), Mr. Speaker, and this is the section that calls for the establishment of "a publicly accessible database of consumer complaints." The establishment of this database would bring about openness and transparency for consumers and act as a stick-based encouragement for businesses to engage in ethical business practices. So I just wanted to point out that this, certainly, is the section that I like the most of Bill 202. This is something that is wanting, quite frankly, and I hope that each of us here in the Legislature looks to forward the spirit of this section, particularly in future legislation that might come before the House because this is something that I do in fact find wanting.

So those are some of the specific areas that I wanted just to point out here, and while, as I said, there certainly is a need for consumer advocacy as pointed out here by Bill 202, those are some specific problems that I might see in terms of meshing this private member's bill with existing legislation.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 202, the Consumer Advocate Act – I've been sitting intently this afternoon listening to some of the debate that's going on – and offer a few comments that might be able to assist Albertans in

determining the fact that there are a fair amount of accusations here this afternoon that say that nothing is being done and that there is nobody to go to and there is nobody to follow up.

I think it's really important for us to reiterate the fact that the Fair Trading Act in this province is a stand-alone piece of legislation that was fairly debated in this House for a considerable length of time, brought in by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I do remember having many conversations in my constituency office when this legislation was on the floor of the Legislature, particularly from businesses that felt that the legislation might have been a little restrictive. But, you know, through a whole series of consultations those problems were overcome, and probably the best legislation for consumer protection across this country now sits in Alberta.

This bill that is before us wants to make that legislation appear to be more transparent and bring things more to the floor of the Legislature through a legislative office. That would give the impression, Mr. Speaker, that there's absolutely no one to go to if you have a problem as a consumer, whatever that problem might be, if you feel that there's no place to go and you don't know where to get the information. Having an advocate in place would certainly raise the profile, but this debate in the House today gives the impression that there is no place to go.

Some members on the government side have been very, very careful in pointing out that there are places to go, particularly when we have discrepancies about utility bills and how the bills should or could be interpreted. The idea of contracts for procurement of electricity, how legalistic they were. Certainly, setting up a Utilities Consumer Advocate at that time was the right thing to do because of the numbers of complaints that were coming through. The government was proactive in bringing forward that consumer advocate, and the consumer advocate did the job that was required and continues to today.

When it comes to complaints of a normal nature, if someone feels that they have been done wrong by a contract or if they didn't have a contract and felt that the individual did not do the work that they said that they were going to do, et cetera, there are many avenues for coming forward and bringing their complaint to the Department of Service Alberta. They have people in the Calgary office, Edmonton office, and other small cities around the province to handle these complaints. They have investigative powers as well that have been brought out in the act, and they take their jobs very seriously.

I can remember a number of complaints that came through in my short tenure as minister. We'd forward them to the complaints department, and they immediately put investigations into place. Many of them dealt with companies that had a history of maybe not doing the proper thing by the people that they were providing the service to. The people that are doing the investigations know of the individuals because they do have a history, and they use the provisions within the act that are legally acceptable to do the penalties, and they leave it to the courts. Now, that's the strength of the legislation that we have in place.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to close the debate.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me first start by thanking all the hon. members who participated in this debate this afternoon: the ones who supported Bill 202, and the ones who signalled that they weren't going to support Bill 202.

Bill 202 attempts to strengthen market oversight and to offer consumers more protection. The market usually looks after itself, Mr. Speaker, but it is ultimately this government's responsibility,

any government's responsibility, to deal with unscrupulous business practices. People elect governments and legislators to look after them and to protect and promote their interests. Consumers expect and request action whenever they are ripped off, lied to, or defrauded. Today this House can send the message that we as MLAs are on the consumer's side, that we care, and that we have taken action, even if only a first step, to ensure fairness in our marketplace.

4:20

In response to the President of the Treasury Board, who said that he won't have a consumer advocate because other provinces do not, Alberta should be the leader in consumer protection as it claims to be in free enterprise, but with the necessary recognition and the unwavering statement that people come before profit and that the integrity of our processes and compliance with our legislation are not matters we take lightly.

I also want to thank the many Albertans who shared their consumer-related concerns and issues with myself and my colleagues. I want to thank them for putting their trust and their faith in us. Hopefully, today this Assembly lives up to their expectations.

In response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, the advocate will be more effective than what we have now. It offers the oversight that he said was lacking and guarantees that if government agencies or ministers choose not to act with respect to consumer complaints, this Assembly will find out, and we can discuss these deficiencies here.

In response to the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, I am not questioning the good work of our consumer protection branch employees, but I am offering an enhanced tool to deliver more protection to our consumers. We not only need to be acting in a stronger manner, we also need to be seen as acting more strongly and decisively. People need to know that there's someone on their side. This officer will not waste taxpayers' money. He or she will save Albertans a lot of money and grief.

As I close the debate, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of this esteemed Assembly from both sides of the House to support Bill 202 in passing second reading. Hopefully it makes it to committee, where some of those suggestions or concerns from some of the hon. members can be addressed. We are open to receiving amendments. We are open to working with both sides of the House.

I have to admit that I was a little disappointed that at least two of the government backbenchers who had privately told me they were going to support this bill have either absented themselves from this debate or otherwise stayed quiet. I was under the impression that private members' business is a free vote. It is in our case. It is always a free vote for the Alberta Liberal caucus. I'm hoping that they will now stand in support of Bill 202.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:23 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Miller, R.
Blakeman	Lukaszuk	Pastoor
Brown	MacDonald	Swann
Chase	Mather	Taft
Eggen	Miller, B.	Taylor

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Griffiths	Mitzel
Calahasen	Groeneveld	Morton
Cao	Haley	Oberg
Coutts	Johnston	Pham
DeLong	Knight	Snelgrove
Ducharme	Liepert	Stevens
Dunford	Lindsay	Strang
Forsyth	Lougheed	VanderBurg
Fritz	Lund	Webber
Graydon	McFarland	
Totals:	For – 15	Against – 29

[Motion for second reading of Bill 202 lost]

Bill 203 Service Dogs Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature today and open debate and move second reading of Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act.

This act will allow people with disabilities the right to be accompanied by an accredited service dog in all areas open to the general public, free from discrimination. As chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities I'm proud to sponsor a piece of legislation that ensures that a group of Albertans, those who rely on service dogs, have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of the province. Mr. Speaker, the mandate of the Premier's council is, first of all, to remove barriers that confront persons with disabilities and allow these people to pursue lives free of those obstacles that prevent full participation in society. Another mandate is to listen to the issues of the disability community and to communicate those issues back to the Alberta government. The result has been that the council has encouraged steps to be taken to improve the lives of persons with disabilities.

Since 1988 the council has advanced the cause of persons with disabilities in Alberta. One of the accomplishments of the council was the creation and release of an Alberta disability strategy. The strategy seeks for government to better co-ordinate and implement policies and programs that impact persons with disabilities. The strategy also strives to assure greater physical access for persons with disabilities, and as such the Service Dogs Act serves to advance the work of the council and the intent of the Alberta disability strategy by removing barriers and increasing access for Albertans with disabilities. This complements our government's goal to work to ensure that its policies reflect the varied needs of the disability community.

Why is there a need for a Service Dogs Act, and why are we pursuing this legislation now? Persons with disabilities who use a service dog could seek redress through the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. However, this can leave people without a clear resolution to their concerns and the possibility of decisions being made without the benefit of a clear set of standards and expectations for the training and certification of service dogs.

I want to recognize the protections provided to blind individuals under the Blind Persons' Rights Act, the BPRA. It was proclaimed in 1980, and the BPRA is an important symbol to individuals with vision challenges as it provides them with the opportunity to fully participate in society. It was amended in 2004, and it is a model in

terms of outlining the certification and monitoring of guide dogs. The BPRA has strict penalties for discrimination against a blind person who's accompanied by a guide dog.

It may be a good time right now to comment on one of the definitions in the legislation. In the definition of a service dog it says that a "service dog" means a dog trained as a guide for a disabled person." "Guide" in this case is not referring to a guide dog. In the 1983 Blind Persons' Rights Amendment Act it stated that a hearing dog is one that is trained as a guide for a deaf person. "Guide" in the broad sense of the word, then, means to assist by helping a person reach a destination or navigate through some unfamiliar space. That's the intent of the term "guide" in this legislation. Bill 203 intends to be complementary to the Blind Persons' Rights Act by extending similar rights and protections to other persons with disabilities. There's no better time to debate Bill 203 and finally enshrine in law provisions to allow those Albertans needing service dogs full and unfettered access to society.

4:40

This is not the first time that this Assembly has considered legislation protecting persons who need service dogs. In 1983 the Blind Persons' Rights Amendment Act was passed. It provided persons dependent on hearing ear dogs similar rights to persons needing seeing eye dogs. However, that amendment has never been proclaimed, and as such it will be repealed with this act.

Private members have proposed legislation to protect all persons with disabilities dependent on service dogs at different times over the past 14 years. In the early '90s a private member's bill was sponsored called the Service Dogs Act. It proposed broadening the Blind Persons' Rights Act by including all persons with disabilities. About seven years ago I also sponsored similar private member's legislation seeking to amend the Blind Persons' Rights Act to include all persons with disabilities by turning the BPRA into a service dogs act. Now, these different private members' bills received first reading but did not have a chance to proceed further.

Past service dog legislation centred on amendments to the Blind Persons' Rights Act. This was seen as one way of putting in place legal protections for individuals using service dogs and to meet the growing use of and requirements for those service dogs. In light of this demand a review of the BPRA, the Blind Persons' Rights Act, was completed in 2001. The review found that the BPRA should remain as stand-alone legislation providing protections to blind people and their guide dogs. It also recommended the development of new legislation to address the issue of assistive animals. Public feedback confirmed the view that the BPRA should remain as stand-alone legislation. Bill 203 reflects this view. It moves towards addressing the issues raised by the review relating to service dogs.

Guide dogs and service dogs serve different but complementary purposes. Bill 203 respects this difference and serves to place these principles in law. Guide dogs and service dogs serve different needs. There are certification and accreditation issues specific to service dogs that have to be addressed through regulation, much like in the BPRA, with its passing. I view the Service Dogs Act as a first step towards developing the regulations that will provide direction for the specifics of training, certifying, and using service dogs.

We need to ensure that our processes for addressing the certification of service dogs is clear. For example, one question will be: do we grandfather dogs that have been self-trained? We must also ensure that there are clear standards for the accreditation of schools for the training of service dogs. An organization called Assistance Dogs International sets training standards. It's a highly regarded organization that in the past we have looked to for help in setting standards in regulation.

Part of the process will include educating and communicating to Albertans about service dogs and the requirement of ID for both the owner and the dog. Bill 203 gives those Albertans with service dogs and those who may need service dogs in the future the protections that they need. There are issues to be addressed; for example, the need to establish a process to issue IDs to people who have service dogs. This is critical to minimize fraud and allow people with service dogs to go about their lives as freely as possible. These are workable issues. Solutions will be found to deal with certification, accreditation, and identification.

Alberta needs the Service Dogs Act to provide protection to persons with disabilities, and as a province we need to make sure that all aspects of the bill are delivered as expected by clearly stated regulations. Bill 203 will protect persons with disabilities requiring service dogs and continue to ensure that Alberta meets the unique needs of people with disabilities. We need legislation that works for persons with disabilities rather than no legislation going forward at all. I see working with the disability community to ensure that the Service Dogs Act delivers results. We'll need to keep open the lines of communication with the disability community to continue to develop responsive and responsible disability policy in this province.

I'm pleased, as I said earlier, to bring forward the Service Dogs Act. It's the best way, I think, to deal with the issue of service dogs at this time. We all know that there are many dogs out there being used these days, and there are no regulations or certification that is apparent for them except for some that have come from other organizations and have some measure of identification with them. We need to build that goodwill with the public. They need to know what service dogs are and what the rules and regulations are about them and their identification.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to see this legislation being brought forward by the Member for Strathcona. I'm aware of his history in trying to get similar legislation up previously, and I've worked with him before on this. I will have to apologize in advance to my constituent who has worked with me over so many years on this legislation because I can't remember her name. She has been very helpful in outlining the issues around guide dogs and service dogs to me, and I want to thank her as part of my debate. I apologize for not being able to remember her name.

I think this is legislation whose time has come. Actually, I'd argue that it's past due. We certainly understand as a society the value of guide dogs for assistance with those that have sight impairment. These service dogs will allow a whole range of Albertans to participate fully in the life of the province. I'm talking about dogs that can, for example, offer assistance around seizures. We know that there are a number of dogs that are now working with autistic children, to support them and also protect them, and for other people that have health issues.

That does give rise to a question that maybe the member can answer for me in further debate. The definition of disabled person seems like a very narrow definition. I'm hoping that it does in fact cover, for example, persons with epilepsy or with autism. I don't know that those would usually be classified as disabled, but, whatever, that definition needs to be able to include them. Certainly someone with epilepsy would not usually, for example, be getting benefits, as someone on AISH would, because they can generally, if they can control the seizures, you know, carry on a full working life and participate in the life of the community quite well.

But some have really violent seizures. I went to university with a fellow, and he had grand mals. Man, he was in serious trouble if he had one of those because he didn't, actually, sort of recover for quite a period of time. I'm talking like 48 hours. A dog that was with him that could sense the seizures coming and would be able to alert him to that so he could get himself in a safe place for what was coming would have been very helpful to him. So I am quite supportive of this.

Just a couple of issues I wanted to raise. One was around the definition to make sure that it was anticipated to cover people like those with epilepsy or autism, even migraines, I think, in some cases.

Secondly, I don't see the usual clauses in here that allow for the regulations to be developed in support of the legislation. I see where it's defining the minister who would be responsible, but I'm not seeing the usual clause that says: and then the minister can make regulations as he sees fit. I appreciate what the member here is saying, that regulations will be developed, but I don't see the clause in the bill that allows you to do that. So that's something we might want to look to in Committee of the Whole, to amend for that.

4:50

The other criteria that I think is missing here is a reference to training criteria. What will the criteria be as far as a trained dog? It basically talks about the application of the act, the discriminatory practices that are prohibited, issuing of identification tags, fines, and offences. Oh, I'm sorry, there it is, section 5: "The Minister may make regulations respecting qualifications." My mistake, Mr. Speaker. Then, the application to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act is where redress should be sought.

I don't see any section in here that is specific to how you would establish the criteria for what training is acceptable and what isn't. If I could just add the caution that we learned from the Blind Persons' Rights Act, in which the blind dogs are talked about, because that was narrowly defined as being products of certain schools, and I think that's too narrow a definition. I think any regs would have to outline pretty clearly exactly the test that they would have to meet rather than being a product of a particular school.

I also note under the discriminatory practices section, which is section 3, that it's quite specific as to occupancy. It's basically specific to accommodation, to occupancy and term of occupancy. But, generally, under human rights or prohibition of discriminatory practices, it applies to employment, accommodation, and to access to government programs and services. Those are the, sort of, three benchmarks. I don't see the references to the other two here, so maybe there can be an explanation on what was anticipated a little further on in debate about that.

Having raised those few points, if I might recommend to the sponsor of the bill, the British system that has a very good identification system and also testing and issuance of licences for the identification. They have what they call a public dog. That dog has to go through a series of tests to show that it can move about in public areas and not be spooked or behave in an uncontrolled manner. They'll actually put them in a median in the middle of quite a busy road, and the dog just has to stay there no matter what happens to them, which is part of their test. The dog actually has a tag with a picture of the dog and the owner, and vice versa for the owner. If I might recommend that if you haven't already investigated that, in my opinion they have quite good standards in England. They're dog mad there, so I'm sure they've had much more experience with that.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this and in support of the bill, and I'm happy to support the member with Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. I'm glad to see him trying it one more time. Let's hope that it passes this time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have been given the opportunity to join the discussion on the Service Dogs Act, 2007. I fully support Bill 203 because it allows for a wider cross-section of citizens to be fully integrated within Alberta. Bill 203 would guarantee that people who use service dogs are legally and adequately protected from discrimination. This bill would clarify and strengthen the rights of those with physical disabilities who need service dogs to assist them.

Bill 203 calls on Albertans to move towards greater understanding of diversity within our province. It eliminates the current confusion regarding people who use service dogs and makes them feel more comfortable about carrying out their daily routine, such as going for coffee, grocery shopping, picking things up from the ground. And, yes, Mr. Speaker, I recently read about a dog that can even put his owner's ATM card in the ATM bank machine. A service dog can make all the difference in the world for someone with reduced mobility. Certain chores which are essential components to leading independent lives are not equally . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, but under our Standing Orders the time limit for consideration of this business today has now expired.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Support for Alternative Energy Technologies

502. Mr. Lukaszuk moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to examine the feasibility of establishing an endowment fund and other incentives, including legislative and policy changes, to encourage the Alberta energy industry to research, implement, and commercialize alternative energy technologies.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Motion 502.

Mr. Speaker, the word "environment" has become a trendy one in recent Canadian politics. In parliaments from coast to coast this word is tossed about weapon-like, where political parties assault each other, attempting to establish themselves in the eye of the public as environmental champions.

The colour green has also gained some prominence and fashion status, with sightings of aspiring politicians clad in green scarves with Kyoto-named dogs in tow. In this Chamber, however, we are not immune to this green fever. Recently I recall members daring each other to park their vehicles and revert to walking. "Why this sudden green madness?" you may be asking yourself, Mr. Speaker. Well, because it appears that there are two camps of Canadians: believers and deniers, those who believe that our planet is in the midst of general atmospheric warming resulting from human activity and those who simply don't. Hence, Canadian airwaves, political conventions, and *Hansards* are filled with excitable rhetoric, which in itself contains enough hot air to raise our beloved planet's temperature.

Against this backdrop, Mr. Speaker, it is my humble hope to introduce Motion 502 and generate some constructive discussion which will not require us to take sides, point fingers, or don green scarves but, rather, will encourage us to examine Alberta's energy policy and determine how it can be improved. Alberta is blessed

with a superabundance of energy: coal, natural gas, conventional crude oil, tar sands, and, if you want to look at the renewable forms of energy, wood, biomass, hydropower, and of course a lot of wind and sunshine.

The confident predictions of scientists and economists of the '70s, Mr. Speaker, in which the last drop of oil would be squeezed out of the ground, have proven to be false. The inventory of available oil, for that matter, has risen to match the demand pretty well every year since then.

Our prosperity, and for that matter the prosperity of our continent, is based on the assorted energy resources. With 800 years of coal and more than 100 years worth of oil available, it's no wonder that we're the envy of the planet. You could ask why, given this vast amount of raw energy, we should really bother to think about sustainable energy. After all, we could just let things go as they are. Well, Mr. Speaker, this may not be an option that we will have. As you know, the Stone Age did not end simply because they ran out of stones. It ended because bronze was found. Similarly, I predict it will happen to our energy resources: the era of carbon fuels will end long before we hear that slurping sound in the ground indicating that we're running on empty.

We understand that carbon and the by-products that are produced when it's turned into energy cause serious health problems by polluting the atmosphere. Nitrous oxide, sulfur dioxide, and soot have all wreaked havoc on the health of people and the environment, where the concentration of those gases have accumulated. However, it isn't these gases that are receiving all the attention. It's carbon dioxide, which in itself is a harmless gas, that is now being blamed for creating the greenhouse effect, which, in turn, is causing the average temperature of our planet to rise. In general, a large portion of the carbon dioxide is generated from decaying organic matter, but over the last century the proportion of gases generated from industrial processes and transportation has increased dramatically.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of my motion is not to judge whether or not science is correct but, rather, to seize on the opportunity to build on those significant successes which we have already achieved in twinning economic and environmental goals so that we can become and be seen to become world leaders in sustainable energy production and consumption. Alberta is ideally positioned to lead the world in the development of environmentally friendly energy production and sound energy consumption. We have attracted to our province global authorities on the subject matter, who, given supporting policies and adequate funding, are ready and willing to undertake this challenge. However, the first step must be ours. We must, through review of our current legislation and policy, identify any systemic barriers and correct them.

5:00

Also, Mr. Speaker, not unlike the development of any other industry sector, our leadership will require funding, which will be leveraged against private-sector dollars. This funding would be a sound investment in Alberta's future economy, assuring that this province will remain the preferred source of energy for North America.

So what possibilities are there? Let me start by speaking a little about oil sands because that's what's driving a large portion of our economy. At the same time, the method by which bitumen is extracted from sand is what produces the majority of greenhouse gases right now. With the production rate targeted at 4 million barrels per day by 2025, Mr. Speaker, from the present 1 million barrels per day, if production methodology remains the same, the consequences are obvious. Not only that, but the whole of the project output from the Mackenzie gas pipeline will be needed to

liberate oil from the sands, leaving the initial purpose of this project rather questionable.

While there have already been significant reductions in process energy used by using solvents to leech out oil from sand, most of the production still uses heat to produce bitumen. Natural gas, Mr. Speaker, is the energy source of choice right now, which, I would argue, could be compared to converting gold into lead. However, there is no reason, given appropriate direction, why clean hydro-energy harnessed from rivers within northern Alberta could not be used to displace a portion of the energy used by the oil sands.

Hydro systems have had a bad environmental image over the last three decades, with opponents raising complaints of loss of habitat of rare species, safety, and rotting vegetation from the initial flooding, which in itself produces copious amounts of greenhouse gases. Notwithstanding this, Mr. Speaker, there are several sites that have been technologically studied and found suitable for hydro development.

One of the most suitable is Smith Rapids in the remote northeast part of the province, which I understand was the subject of extensive studies in the early '80s and then, shall we say, shelved. The site can produce approximately 1,500 megawatts of sustainable green energy without the need for a large storage area because of the depth of the gorge through which the river flows and the large flow of the river. With the oil sands production at its doorstep, the replacement of finite energy, being gas, with clean hydroelectricity, an estimated reduction of some 120 tonnes of greenhouse gases annually, should be reason enough to review these reports and give them some consideration.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the first step must be ours. Smith Rapids is not the only potential hydro source in the province. Another development of similar magnitude was suggested for Peace River at Dunvegan. As well, Canadian Hydro is now seeking approval for a 100-megawatt runoff at the Peace River.

Mr. Speaker, another way to produce clean energy would be through the use of nuclear plants to generate both electricity and steam for purposes of synthetic oil production. If we are serious about the protection of our environment, we must at least consider all options. Wearing green scarves and pointing fingers will not suffice, although it may gain one a few votes. There has been a great deal of concern expressed about the danger of nuclear energy over the years, with some justification. The horrors of Chernobyl come to mind at the mere mention of the word, but hon. members ought to be aware that Germany, France, and the United Kingdom rely heavily on nuclear energy for their core electricity needs and have yet to report a serious accident.

Nuclear plants that are properly engineered and operated produce no greenhouse gases and should be given serious consideration. Ironically, in Europe those considered as environmentalists are the main proponents of such a source of energy, juxtaposed against Europe's dirty-coal electricity generation. Again, Mr. Speaker, we must lead this debate and determine whether nuclear energy is a suitable option for this province.

Alberta is already North America's leader in the production of biomass energy, with the assistance of Alberta's research institutes. Biomass encompasses all those systems which derive energy from decaying vegetation or animal matter. The most popular item on the market right now is ethanol production. However, with some assistance from this government and the expertise of Alberta research institutes, Alberta is now home to North America's first methane gas electricity production facility, where livestock waste is converted into energy. This facility, in our own Premier's riding, converts livestock manure into electricity. This manure would otherwise be spread on adjacent land, creating greenhouse gases, threatening our fresh water supply, and causing social discontent.

Mr. Speaker, the potential for such facilities in our province is limitless. The facilities could convert municipal sewage and other organic waste into electricity. However, again the production capacity is limited by systemic barriers. If we truly care about our environment and diversification of . . .

The Speaker: I'm now unfortunately going to have to move on, hon. member, and will call on the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. Other members who wish to participate, kindly advise.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand up and discuss Motion 502. I'd like to speak in favour of this motion but have a few twists on where he talks about including other incentives and including legislative and policy changes. One of my concerns with an endowment fund when it's sponsored by the government is that it isn't always in the best interest, and we're picking and choosing winners and losers. But going on from there, the hon. member has brought up a lot of good things to discuss and good things that are happening, especially when we look around the world.

The first area that I'd like to talk about is, as he has referred to so passionately, the oil sands. It is the heart of our oil industry, perhaps, right now in terms of dollars being spent and invested, but we really do have a problem. He talked about turning gold to lead. I have to agree with the hon. member that to think that we're taking natural gas and water in order to extract the bitumen certainly seems a little bit old fashioned and out of tune with the times when we see the problems that we're having with greenhouses gases.

The area of nuclear energy. I recently had the opportunity to go to a nuclear energy conference. I've always been pro nuclear energy, but now I'm even more pro after going and listening and understanding the situations and realizing what's really going on. Here in Canada the discussion always seems to be around Long Island and Chernobyl and the disasters that were there. I would say that that's the equivalent of telling someone that we want to fly to Europe when all they know about is Amelia Earhart, and they say: "Oh, I'll never fly. That wasn't good." Yes, we've had a couple of accidents in the world, but both of those were due to great negligence and poor maintenance, and they've learned from that. It's a very safe system if it's run properly.

Here in Canada, with the CANDU 3 and CANDU 4 series close to coming online, it's a great opportunity where we could produce as much electricity as we needed in the province and use our natural resources to the best of our ability. A good Scout is taught to use his resources wisely, and Albertans very much believe in that. If we could produce heat from electricity, from the hydro, as the good member talked about, and from nuclear energy, we would free up a lot of gas that could be used for much better purposes and reduce the amount of particulates and other things that go into the air from burning the bitumen in order to extract it.

The other opportunity that it would give us and something that we could look at is that we could perhaps use the natural gas more to power our vehicles, to power farm equipment. The amount of energy that we're using could compress that natural gas and be used much more efficiently.

The point that I guess I'd like to urge, along with this motion, is the problem we have with entrepreneurs and progressive businessmen wanting to take the step forward. Often they're at a great disadvantage, especially when it comes to the U.S., in raising capital. I just want to go back a few years to when we were thinking ahead and trying to develop the next energy system. Alberta was very concerned that we were running out of oil, about what we were going to do. So the government realized that, well, we can't afford

to put our money in there, but what we will do is give some very good tax incentives for business to put their money in there.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We really need to take a look and let businesses raise the capital and be able to have the tax credits, whether that's for wind power, hydropower, or nuclear power, for whatever the technology might be, biomass or whatever. If they have this ingenious idea and the ability to get this new power, we could give the incentive to the average Canadian, the average Albertan to put money in there, much like they do with flow-through shares to explore and try to discover new oil wells and gas wells.

5:10

What we really need to come up with as a government is seed money for ingenuity and good ideas. If we are to allow that for, like I say, nuclear energy or any of these other ones, all of a sudden there'd be a great interest because the capital could be raised. Right now the biggest problem that I see and the people I talk to see in all of these areas is raising the capital. So I am very pleased with this motion. I support it, and I hope that we can come forward as a government with legislation that would hurtle us ahead into the next century.

My other big concern is that if we don't do it quickly, we're going to miss it, much like we have with our highways and our infrastructure. Right now, because we failed to do anything, there's a shortage in the industry, and it's costing us an arm and a leg. If we don't act fast and get ourselves educated on nuclear energy, the rest of the world where they have a shortage are going to jump on it. What we're going to find in one year, maybe even three years, is that there's going to be a five- or a six- or a 10-year wait to hire a company to come in and build any nuclear facilities because they've all been booked around the world. So it's something that we need to talk about, that we need to educate ourselves about quickly, and that we need to move on because the decisions that we make today will definitely define the direction that we go in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very much in favour of this motion.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the Minister of Energy.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with interest that I listened to the exchange between the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. As we discuss this Motion 502, I'm curious if either hon. member has any advance knowledge of a nuclear waste disposal site in either one of their constituencies because certainly with atomic power you have considerable amounts of radioactive waste generated, and that is an enormous problem. Where do you store that on a permanent basis? That issue is yet to be resolved. I would urge both hon. members to exercise caution in their promotion of atomic energy as a source of heat or steam in the tar sands.

Now, when we talk about this motion, it's very similar, oddly enough, to one that was put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View in 2005. It's very similar, certainly, for the member that is sponsoring this.

I'm just looking at the fiscal plan for 2005-2008, Mr. Speaker. This is the Alberta government's fiscal plan. In here they're talking about strengthening Alberta's innovative capacity. "Alberta has developed a research infrastructure that is helping the province to become a world leader in new technologies." Two years ago our budget apparently enhanced this position.

Research endowment funds. The government, I would remind all hon. members of this Assembly, "has two major research endowment funds, whose total assets are forecast to reach nearly \$1.9 billion by 2008." That's next year. "Over the three years, the two endowments are expected to support approximately \$250 million in medical, and science and engineering research in Alberta."

Now, the Alberta energy innovation strategy:

A five-year, \$200 million Innovative Energy Technologies program has been established to encourage the development of innovative technologies to enhance oil and gas recovery. The program is also designed to help find a technical solution to gas over bitumen issues.

That we really need to do because of past mistakes in the Department of Energy. Now we're finding out that these past mistakes are again costing us millions and millions and millions of dollars. Not only do we have problems with electricity deregulations, but this gas over bitumen is an issue where the bill is continuing to go up and up and up.

Also with this Alberta Energy innovation strategy, the program, as I understand it, is designed to help find a technical solution to other issues. Assistance started last year, I'd remind all hon. members, and will be provided to royalty adjustments of up to a maximum of 30 per cent of approved project costs. So that's another innovative energy technology that is supposed to cost us only \$200 million, but I suspect it'll be a lot more by the time this government is finished. It's another example of what happens whenever you operate without a plan: megabucks from the taxpayers to cover up those mistakes.

Now the energy and climate change research. I would remind again the hon. members of this House that over \$50 million in research funding is being provided over three years for oil sands upgrading, clean coal technology, water management resource, enhanced conventional recovery, alternative energy sources, and greenhouse gas emission reduction through carbon dioxide management. There are also other innovative programs. The innovation in service excellence program and emerging opportunities program will be provide \$64 million over three years to support innovation and research in both the public and private sectors.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs may not be satisfied with these programs. Certainly, if he's not – and he's calling for the establishment of an endowment fund here – I would like to ask the hon. member: what is the matter with these current programs? Are they not working? Is he not satisfied? Or do we need more?

You know, we look at the oil sands and, certainly, in the past to get it off the ground the government has been involved in this in a significant way. There are royalty holidays already in existence for oil sands projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It's surprising that they haven't been used more readily, but when I say that, I don't know for sure how they've been used because the information is top secret. It's not secret; it's top secret from the Department of Energy from the individuals, the citizens of Alberta, who own the resources. Certainly, if this government is going to be open and transparent, those top secret files on royalty giveaways with the oil sands projects have to be opened.

Now, we already talked about the atomic energy and where you can store that waste, Mr. Speaker, but earlier I talked about water management research. This is probably where the hon. member is going with this, and maybe it's out of concern for the evidence that there was no plan by this government when they were providing the information to the regulatory authorities with the latest round of approvals for oil sands projects.

The Radke report, responding to the rapid growth of oil sands developments, certainly indicates that there has been very little water

management research done. In fact, the research that has been done has essentially been ignored. If it has been completed, it has been ignored. This is a direct quote, Mr. Speaker, from issue 11 in the Radke report: "Alberta Environment has not been able to provide timely advice and direction to industry relative to water use." Again, three projects have been approved.

If this is where the hon. member is going with his motion, and if the acceptance of this motion and the establishment of an endowment fund would be used specifically to determine once and for all how much water we can license to be used in the lower Athabasca River system or how much water we can allow to be withdrawn from the North Saskatchewan River for the upgraders, then this reason alone would be enough to support this motion. It's incredible that this government would proceed with this sort of industrial development without knowing whether we've got the water to operate or not. I see the hon. Member for Stony Plain shaking his head over there, and he should know from his great deal of experience around Lake Wabamun and the coal-fired generators that use Lake Wabamun as a water source. He should know just how precious water is.

5:20

Now, I'm dismayed to read the Radke report and realize that little work has been done by the Department of Environment to advise and direct industry, upgraders, and other plants who are planning to locate in the industrial heartland about the availability of groundwater or withdrawals from the North Saskatchewan River. They go on to say in here that there needs to be a substantial increase in manpower to the Department of Environment and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to focus on these issues. Certainly, if we were to create an endowment fund, the salaries of these individuals wouldn't be coming from the interest off that endowment fund, but it's very important that finally this government first realizes that they have no plan, never had a plan, and that they take this Radke report to heart and develop a sound plan now.

Perhaps this is where the proposal, Motion 502, comes from with the hon. member because certainly we have to look at the provincial government's planning system as it relates to high-growth areas and the inadequacies that are there.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to make some comments here this evening with respect to Motion 502. One thing I would like to indicate. The hon. member opposite indicated moments ago that there's no plan with respect to water use and upgraders and that we don't know how much water we'd need to take from the North Saskatchewan River with respect to doing that particular piece of business. Very interesting, and I'm sure the hon. member would know that the city of Edmonton is engaged in discussions currently with the heartland community to use waste water from the city of Edmonton, in fact, for upgraders. So that issue has a very good possibility of an outcome there.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the motion, of course, expanding our renewable energy resources is a very important item in the mandate letter that I received from the Premier, and I will assure the House that it will be a very key component in the comprehensive energy strategy that we develop. Renewable energy is now, certainly now, and will continue to be an important part of our portfolio of energy resources. We have a number of very well defined renewables that

are at play in the province now, and most certainly we'll continue to work with industry to develop more of those. You know, the one that I think tops the list is wind power. We've got some very aggressive wind power plans in the province of Alberta, and we certainly enjoy very good success with respect to that industry and, again, continuing to work with them to allow them to expand. They are now and will continue to play an important and, I think, ever-increasing role with respect to our resources.

Mr. Speaker, most certainly small hydro projects – it's been mentioned – in places like Dunvegan. There's an excellent opportunity there for Albertans to receive electrical energy from a run-of-the-river project on the Peace River at Dunvegan. There are opportunities not only for small hydro but, I would suggest, opportunities for some fairly large hydro still remaining in the province of Alberta. When you look in the northeast, the possibilities on the Slave River, I think, are areas that this government is certainly interested in pursuing.

Renewable energy now, Mr. Speaker, I believe, accounts for about 12 per cent of the total installed capacity in the province of Alberta, and we look at that as an important piece, and we're sure that it will continue. It's very important, I think, relative to some of the things that have been said, with respect to the fact that more needs to be done in research, and more emphasis needs to be put into the development of new technologies.

I think it's important to understand there are a number of initiatives in place that encourage research and encourage the implementation of new and effective technologies for the province of Alberta. For example, Mr. Speaker, there's a \$200 million energy innovation fund that was announced last fall, and it supports clean, leading-edge, and competitive energy projects, such as \$33 million to find new, commercially viable ways to reduce emissions from coal-fired electrical generators to near zero and \$29 million to help design and build a facility to convert municipal waste into electricity. That is happening right here in the city of Edmonton.

The fund, with additional money from other programs, will allow the government to commit \$239 million over the next five years to strengthen and support and expand Alberta's biofuel sector by encouraging manufacturers to bring more biofuel products to the marketplace and another \$200 million, Mr. Speaker, to leverage industry investment in pilot projects that improve environmentally responsible conventional oil, natural gas, and in situ oil sands recovery.

Technology and innovation targeted at recovering resources that might otherwise be stranded underground will help ensure that the energy sector continues to provide economic and social benefits for Albertans well into the future. Mr. Speaker, further increases in the recovery of reserves, even seemingly small ones, make a big difference. A 1 per cent increase means an additional 600 million barrels of conventional oil, 17 billion barrels of bitumen, or 2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. That's 1 per cent.

Let's not forget that even as we encourage innovation in alternative fuel, Alberta's traditional oil and gas sectors have and will continue to provide Canadians with a secure supply of energy and Albertans with substantial economic benefits. Mr. Speaker, I can't stress enough that the government of Alberta is doing, I think, a tremendous job with respect to support with these particular programs.

Alberta advanced education oversees ASRA. The Alberta Energy Research Institute, the Alberta Forestry Research Institute, the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, and the Life Sciences Institute all work, Mr. Speaker, with funding opportunities from this provincial government and partnered with industry and institutions, towards technical solutions to some of the problems that we have with respect to alternative energy.

Mr. Speaker, I agree that the motion, as the member has indicated, is a good opportunity for us to bring debate to the floor of this Assembly with respect to the issue around alternative and renewable energy sources. We agree in the Department of Energy that it's one of the mandates that I have indicated has been set out for me with respect to going forward. The Premier of the province has indicated that it is an important piece of work for Albertans, and our integrated energy strategy will include renewables and alternate forms of energy as we move forward.

Thank you.

5:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Motion 502, Support for Alternative Energy Technologies. I first wanted to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for what I thought was quite a balanced speech in regard to the immediacy and the need to engage in alternative energy technology here in the province of Alberta, although I do have some reservations about the scope and, perhaps, the lack of focus of the motion. Certainly, the motion being such as it is, I would consider supporting it.

You know, we're looking to speak about a number of energy issues here specifically in regard to the bills brought forward this legislative session and also to engage in a general debate that is taking place both inside and outside of this Legislature. You know, it's important for us to try to embrace in the broadest way what it is to generate energy and what is, in fact, a sustainable energy future not only for this province but, indeed, for humankind in general. So when we look at, I guess, the spirit of this motion, I'm encouraged certainly. There are a number of areas that I would like to elaborate on here this afternoon.

Of course, we have the Alberta Energy Research Institute, which has been passed by the government to develop innovation in the energy sector. Certainly, the Alberta Energy Research Institute has a mandate to develop green and sustainable energy technology as part of its priority areas, six different priority areas. My concern about this is only that it doesn't engage in sustainable and green energy technologies in the manner in which these ideas deserve to be developed. Of course, we are on a sort of collision course with a crisis not just in Alberta but across this country in regard to delivering sustainable energy systems, and these green or sustainable energy technologies deserve to have the funding that we might put forward to some of these other alternative technology energy programs that we see even just starting to be brought out here in the last few days.

Indeed, if we approached funding that this new CO₂ pipeline seems to warrant, then certainly we would be moving in leaps and bounds in regard to sustainable energy technologies, not just in the research and development of them but in the implementation of alternative and sustainable energy systems here in the province of Alberta. Of course, we don't need to just reinvent the wheel, Mr. Speaker, every time we have difficulty in these areas. There's a wealth of knowledge around the world that has in fact met these challenges head-on. It's simply a matter of adapting technology that's been used around the world to our own special conditions here in Alberta. You know, for every dollar that we invest in conservation, of course, the longer we have to be able to build a system that is sustainable over the long term. Between using the existing appropriate technologies – research and development, certainly, is important – and, above all, conservation, I believe that we are most

able to deal with and meet our renewable energy needs here in the province of Alberta.

You know, since I've begun with this area, I've been working hard with groups across the province to bring forward suggestions in regard to these things. I just wanted to remind the House that I did bring forward two private members' bills in this regard, that I would like to have considered in the spirit of this motion. The net metering Bill 219 from the fall would allow private individuals to generate their own power from alternative energy sources. We would reduce our overall reliance on fossil fuels based on power generation. We would allow for the commercialization and implementation of alternative energy sources. I believe, as well, that we would engage the public in looking actively for these alternative energy sources in their own backyard, so to speak, Mr. Speaker. So I think that in the spirit of this motion and in the spirit of public sentiment and practical solutions to our energy needs I'm certainly hoping that the net metering concept will move forward here in the next 12 months or so. I think that it would be a fine, fine thing, that I would be happy to have, not just for domestic consumers but for commercial consumers as well.

Another bill that I did bring forward last year, I believe, was Bill 211. This called for the establishment of a committee to look at ways to set up a revolving fund for the purposes of retrofitting houses and businesses to make them more energy efficient. Again, you know, this is not necessarily devising some magic bullet of some new technology but, rather, making an investment in appropriate technology to make buildings, both residential areas and commercial buildings, more efficient and to in fact conserve energy such as it is. I think this is very much in the spirit of this same motion from Edmonton-Castle Downs. Again, it's an idea whose time has come not just here in Alberta but across this country.

We believe, certainly in my personal experience, that we've not taken these matters seriously to the detriment of the province. You know, the perfect statistic that might illustrate that is the fact that we have in fact increased our carbon dioxide emissions here 39 per cent from 1990 to 2003. Indeed, these emissions continued to rise and grow geometrically over these past four years since 2003.

It's important for us to consider that emissions in terms of carbon dioxide have to be reduced absolutely. The development of alternative technology to achieve this goal, in fact, is the key to establishing absolute reductions because until you build the infrastructure that allows you to decrease your reliance on carbon dioxide, it's almost impossible to fight the increase in carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere. Perhaps the results are slow in the beginning, but once you've established that system, absolute reductions would be entirely possible.

The other issue which, of course, muddies this whole debate is the fact that while we might impose alternative energy delivery systems such as the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs was suggesting, until we in fact place a moratorium on new tar sands proposals, we will never be able to get a handle on our carbon dioxide emissions because those new plants coming on stream are increasing the carbon dioxide, again, geometrically into the atmosphere, and it becomes impossible to catch up, so to speak, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, the spirit of this motion, I think, is to be commended. But there are a number of things that have to be there in concert with the intention of this motion to actually bear fruit. So if I were to make some recommendations to this motion just to sharpen it up a little bit, I would suggest that it would say something like "undertake a long-term budgetary commitment from a nonrenewable resource income" instead of "endowment fund," as it says in this motion. You know, this speaks to a firm commitment that the Alberta New Democrats have to fund priority motions and issues in regard to

using actual line items in the budget instead of using the endowment fund system. Of course, the missing link here in terms of investing in renewable resource energy development is to in fact increase the revenues that we get from nonrenewable resources to fund this transition into a green economy for the province of Alberta.

The second part that I would amend here would be to say, “so that we may reduce absolute emissions of our GHG to meet our Kyoto obligations,” at the end of the motion. Again, that would, I believe, create a perhaps more balanced motion.

So if I were to amend this – certainly, I’m not withdrawing my support of this motion in spirit – I would say something like: be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to undertake a long-term budgetary commitment . . .

5:40

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to speak to Motion 502. I appreciate that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has brought it forward at this time. Alberta is blessed with significant resource bounty. In the 2006-2007 fiscal year there is \$11.5 billion of nonrenewable resource revenue projected in the budget. There are 173 billion barrels of oil sands currently accessible and another 1.6 trillion barrels potentially available. This is in addition to the 1.6 billion barrels of crude oil, 40 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and 37 billion tons of coal that currently remain. These raw resources translate into considerable wealth for Albertans. Alberta has the highest labour participation rates and the highest GDP per capita in Canada. Our prosperity will continue for many years to come, thanks in part to over \$100 billion of investment in future capital projects.

It is very clear that nonrenewable resources are a part of Alberta’s past, present, and future. There are centuries of potential in the oil sands, and we are increasing the recovery of conventional resources. The capacity of upgrading the oil sands is now expanding and will add value to bitumen. Alberta must also set its sights on new energy sources to ensure that it remains at the front of the pack in energy development. There has been much discussion in this province about wind, solar, and nuclear energy. Each has its merits and pitfalls, but I would rather take this opportunity to discuss the potential of biomass as an emerging energy source.

Biomass is a process that captures the methane from animal by-products and household waste and converts the gas into heat for electricity generation. The biomass process can capture the methane gas from animal by-products or household waste, taking these gases out of the atmosphere to generate electrical energy. The technology for biomass is available. One example, which I’ve mentioned before in this Assembly, is IMUS, the integrated manure utilization system, which the mover of this motion referred to earlier. IMUS takes manure from a feedlot near Vegreville and converts the methane into electricity and the solid product into biofertilizer. This is an exciting concept, and one can recognize the potential in managing agriculture waste in an environmentally sound manner. It is also important to note the work that the Alberta Energy Research Institute is conducting in the field of biomass. Through the Alberta energy research strategy AERI is encouraging the use of municipal solid waste as a source of synthetic gas for electricity production. This could greatly assist municipalities in managing landfills and would provide a new source of electricity for growing cities.

Using biomass to generate energy has the potential to create a bio industry for Alberta. This industry could sustain rural communities through electricity generation and the sale of biofertilizer. It also has

the potential to limit the nuisance of municipal dumps and feedlots, which could allow for more productive land use. Perhaps most importantly, bio industry looks to limit the emissions of methane, a greenhouse gas that is considerably more potent than carbon dioxide. Instead of methane seeping into the atmosphere, it can be turned into a usable fuel. This concept is something we should all be very keen on implementing.

Mr. Speaker, in a way we are already doing the work that Motion 502 encourages. I think all members of this Assembly recognize that a broad range of energy sources will ensure the sustainability of Alberta’s economy for many generations to come. I as chair of the Alberta Research Council know that the bio industry has great potential in this province. I am encouraged that the government set aside \$200 million into an energy innovation fund. This fund will advance the vision of a sustainable energy future for this province which includes bioenergy.

New technology and approaches require public and market acceptance. It is important for government and its research institutes to engage industry and the public in thinking about new energy sources. I think that if we continue on the path Alberta is on, we will find acceptable solutions to fill our energy needs.

I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for bringing this motion forward. This debate is a good opportunity to remind Albertans of the potential of the wide range of energy sources that will sustain our prosperity for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a former teacher I believe in the importance of doing one’s research and homework. I had the good fortune to teach a young gentleman by the name of Steven Keating, who is the son of John Keating and has a more famous uncle, Brian Keating of the Calgary zoo. I had an opportunity on a number of occasions to talk to John about alternative energy sources. He provided me with a number of possibilities, the obvious ones being wind and solar. He also talked about the run of the river which doesn’t get in the way of the fish or impede any natural flow, but energy is produced as a result. That seemed, with the number of rivers that we have, a possibility that has yet to be considered.

The government’s going to have to change the direction they’re going. If they believe in alternative energy sources, then they’re certainly going to have to, first off, get rid of the cap on wind energy. Right now I believe it’s capped at something like 10 per cent, and that prevents it from being added to our grid with no negative effects that I’m aware of. There are certain communities in this province who have already experimented with solar. For example, the town of Okotoks was profiled on CBC last week for the advances that they’ve made not only in housing projects but in heating their community arenas and warehouses and so on. The town of Vulcan, I believe, has been experimenting with geothermal, which is another basically renewable form of energy that doesn’t result in emissions. Both solar and geothermal have been proven as nonrenewable energy sources used extensively in Europe. So the technology exists for us to take advantage of these various forms of energy.

I have also had, in terms of doing the research, an opportunity to talk to Dr. Maunsell of the University of Calgary, who is connected with the ISEEE project, ISEEE standing for Institute of Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy, I believe the third E is. He talked about the possibility, as part of the bitumen processing and separation, of taking out the O₂ from the CO₂, combining it with

hydrogen, and producing more water and, therefore, being less dependent on the Athabasca River because we know that any of the water that comes out of the Athabasca for use in separation of bitumen never makes its way back in. We also know what happens with the waste water in the form of tailing ponds and so on, so anything that can cut down that footprint would be very much appreciated.

Areas that I'm also familiar with – I had an opportunity to talk with a lady whose company is recognized for carbon credits. She provided a PowerPoint presentation for myself and our hon. shadow minister for Environment from Calgary-Mountain View. In it she gave examples of capturing the methane from manure, that other members have talked about, and using that energy to heat the pig barns or provide heat for chickens and so on and also on top of that getting credit for having done it. So you get sort of a double benefit. You can sell the emissions credit, and you can capture the methane. I know the city of Edmonton, for example, at its dump captures the methane and uses that energy positively rather than having it just disappear. Well, it doesn't disappear. It hangs in the air, unfortunately.

5:50

The various types of energy whereby some of the energy that is produced by heat is then recaptured and reused, that is already being used up in the Fort McMurray area, is obviously an advantage. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview in his alternative throne speech and in his response to the Speech from the Throne set 2012 as a date whereby a Liberal government would begin not only dealing with emissions intensities but actually capping emissions. In other words, a Liberal government would work with industry to sequester the CO₂ and use it, as has previously been indicated in discussions in the House, to inject and force out oil and gas. So it would be a win-win circumstance: get rid of it from being expended into the atmosphere and use it as a tool.

I do not share the enthusiasm for ethanol of the hon. mover of Motion 502. My understanding from the reports that I have read is that it takes as much energy to produce a barrel of ethanol as the ethanol provides, and while the emissions are reduced from lead forms of gas, the amount of chemicals that is necessary to be added in the form of fertilizers to encourage the various crops to grow, basically, negates the advantage achieved by ethanol. Ethanol quite often seems to be, particularly down in the States, more to do with winning votes than providing alternative energy sources.

As for nuclear energy that's a large concern of mine both because of the amount of energy that's expended and the emissions caused in the extraction and processing of uranium. Of course, as a grandfather who is focused more on the future with the birth of two

grandsons, I don't want to leave them a legacy of radioactivity, that has not been proven to me that it can be stored safely because we know that it will remain radioactive for thousands of years. We know we can sequester CO₂. It's being done throughout Europe. It's being done in Saskatchewan as it's transferred from North Dakota.

If this motion gets to the committee stage, I will enjoy the opportunity to pick and choose the parts of it that I consider to be worthwhile, most of which I consider to be worthwhile. But when we talk about ethanol, to me that's just for getting votes, not for fuel in cars. Also with my research – I see a group – thanks to the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy I've had the opportunity to go to lectures talking about alternative energy in the form of fuel cells. There is a tremendous amount of advantage in fuel cells in terms of being able to activate them in remote areas. So the research is being done. It's being done here.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, there have been a number of people who have indicated to me that they would like to participate in this debate, but I notice that the clock is striking 5:55 p.m., and we have given a full hour of debate to this matter. So under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs to close debate on Motion 502.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and with pleasure I shall do so. I'd like to thank the Minister of Energy for supporting this motion and all members of this House for supporting the motion, including the Member for Calgary-Varsity, whose comments perhaps were not as positive. I believe that, indeed, the time has come to discuss alternative energy sources in a positive manner in this province, and I encourage all members to vote in favour of this motion.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 carried]

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

Mr. Stevens: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn and reconvene tomorrow at 1 in the afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 5:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, March 20, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all our people. Let us be guided by our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you someone who is well known to the majority of the members of this Assembly: Mr. Don Tannas, now seated in the Speaker's gallery. Don was a four-term MLA for Highwood, the constituency I now have the honour of representing. He served his constituents with distinction from 1989 to 2004. In 1993 Don became the first elected Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees of the Legislature, and he served on numerous committees and sat as chairman of various organizations over the years.

Prior to being elected to the Assembly, Don was employed as a teacher and principal for the Foothills school division until 1989, taking a leave of absence from 1969 to 1971 to work with CIDA as a teacher trainer in Uganda. To this day Don has a great empathy for Africa and has visited several times during the intervening years.

Now that he is retired, he serves as executive director of the Western Communities Foundation. Also, Don is well known for his charitable work, particularly with the High River Rotary Club, which he continues to pursue. Mr. Speaker, I'm also very pleased to tell you that Don is a very active member of the Highwood Constituency Association and keeps us right in line. I'm delighted to see Don back in the House, and I now ask that he rise so that all the members may accord him a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly an honoured guest seated in your gallery. Julius Yankowsky is also no stranger to this Assembly. He served as the MLA for the Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview constituency for three terms, from 1993 to 2004. Mr. Yankowsky is presently enjoying his retirement and, of course, is keeping an active volunteering schedule. We're glad to have him join us today, and I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a colleague of mine from the Northwest Territories. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the Hon. Michael McLeod, who is the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. As you may or may not know, ministers in the Northwest Territories are multitasked. Mr. McLeod is also the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, and our relationship goes back

to the days when we were colleagues in municipal affairs as well. Accompanying Mr. McLeod is his executive assistant, Mr. Doug Pon. I would ask both gentlemen to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui j'ai le privilège de présenter en votre nom, à vous et à l'Assemblée, des invités spéciaux venant de la communauté francophone. Ils sont assis dans votre galerie et sont ici pour souligner la Journée internationale de la francophonie ainsi que les Rendez-vous de la francophonie, une célébration nationale annuelle de l'histoire et de la culture française.

Je suis heureux de vous présenter en premier lieu les membres exécutifs de l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta. L'association, connue sous l'acronyme ACFA, a son secrétariat provincial à Edmonton et chapeaute plusieurs autres organisations; donc, 14 bureaux régionaux ou cercles locaux à travers la province.

Présents parmi nous aujourd'hui sont M. Jean Johnson, président de l'ACFA, et M. Joël Lavoie, directeur général. J'aimerais également vous présenter M. Rhéal Poirier, directeur général de Francophonie jeunesse de l'Alberta, et M. Denis Perreux, membre exécutif du comité local organisateur des Jeux de la francophonie canadienne, qui auront lieu à Edmonton en 2008. Les accompagnant pour cette journée spéciale à la Législature est M. Denis Tardif, directeur général du Secrétariat francophone.

Je leur demanderais de se lever et être reconnus par l'Assemblée. Je vous invite à vous joindre à moi pour leur souhaiter une bienvenue chaleureuse.

Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to members of this Assembly a number of guests from the francophone community who are here to commemorate the International Day of the Francophonie as well as Les Rendez-vous de la francophonie, a national two-week celebration of French culture and history. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery.

I am pleased to introduce executive members of the French Canadian Association of Alberta. The association, commonly known as the ACFA, is the provincial umbrella organization representing all francophones, with a provincial secretariat in Edmonton and 14 regional or affiliate chapters across the province.

Here today are the president, Mr. Jean Johnson; the executive director, Mr. Joël Lavoie; Mr. Rhéal Poirier, executive director of the Francophone Youth Association of Alberta; and Mr. Denis Perreux, executive member of the local organizing committee for the National Youth Francophone Games, that will be held in Edmonton in 2008. Joining them on this special day at the Legislature is the executive director of the Francophone Secretariat, Mr. Denis Tardif.

I would ask them to stand to receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [As submitted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly five very talented young Alberta students. But before I do, I would just like to provide a bit of background.

Since assuming this portfolio, I've visited a number of schools in the province, and without exception at every school I go to, I've just

been incredibly impressed with the artwork of our students. So beginning today, some of that work is going to be displayed in my office in the Legislature, and it's my hope that soon the walls of my office will be covered with Alberta student artwork and that it then spreads out into the hallway and maybe down even into your offices, Mr. Speaker. I encourage every hon. member to come by our office and enjoy this great artwork.

Today with the Premier we had the pleasure of unveiling the first five pieces of student artwork, including a sketch by one of our grade 6 students of the next hockey superstar, Sidney Crosby, which happens to be hanging in my office over the fireplace. Today I would like to ask the Alberta student artists seated in the gallery to stand as I recognize them. We have Ashley Lougheed from Louis St. Laurent school, Christian Comeau from St. Boniface school, Cassiel Pedro and Joshua Dipnarine from Virginia Park school, and Victoria Barnay from Edmonton Christian school. They are all accompanied by their very, very proud parents, their art teachers, principals, and other family members. I would ask if they would all stand and be recognized and warmly received by this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How do I beat an introduction by the Ed. minister? But I think I can do it.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly guests from grade 6 of the Heritage Heights school in my Highwood constituency. This is a new school, just opened this last fall, and a week from Friday the hon. Minister of Education and myself are going to officially open this school, and a beautiful school it is. Let no one in the world say that we don't have some new schools because we do, and this one's a great one.

Mr. Speaker, the total number of students, I believe, that we have with us today is 39. They did have an enduring trip coming up; I think they got some roads that weren't great. I would like to introduce their teachers Mrs. Alison Rattai, Mrs. Ada McIvor, Mr. Bill Cunningham, and parents Mrs. Roxanne Gibbard, Mrs. Cindy Mooney, Mr. Leonard Johnson, Mrs. Debbie Hagel, Mrs. Kristyn Hall, and Mrs. Toni Bouvier, who just happens to be my niece and whom I'm very proud of. She has her daughter Brooklyn with her in that group today. I would please ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

1:10

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two representatives of the Alberta College of Social Workers. As I mentioned yesterday, March 18 to 24 is National Social Work Week.

The Alberta College of Social Workers does an outstanding job representing the social work profession in Alberta. It advocates for policies, programs, and services that serve the best public interest. Through its membership activities the college establishes and maintains standards that promote skilled and ethical social work practice. I'd like to ask Lori Sigurdson, professional affairs co-ordinator, and Rod Adachi, executive director and registrar of the Alberta College of Social Workers, to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly a couple of guests

that we've got up here from Champion, Alberta. Dick and Izzy Ellis have been lifelong residents of the village. They're very involved with the community, and Dick is heading up the Vulcan waste management authority. He's come up with a wonderful idea on how to dispose of all the waste that we have throughout the counties, and I hope he's had successful meetings with a couple of the ministers in attending the AAMD and C. I also know that they're looking forward to a tour that your staff will have for them to see this magnificent historic building. Dick and Izzy, would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three individuals from the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, of which I'm very proud to serve as chair. Seated in the members' gallery today: Mrs. Jean Dreger and Mrs. Diane Caleffi, both of Calgary, both well known to the Calgary caucus members. Both are volunteers who serve tirelessly on this council ensuring that Alberta seniors have an advocate and a place to turn for advice. Seated with them is Dianne Laird, the manager for the Seniors Advisory Council, my right arm and a very dedicated individual with the Seniors Advisory Council, and I'll tell you that she's very, very sharp. I am proud to work with them as their chair, and I'd like to ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled the authors of the book *French Canadians in the Political Life of the Province of Alberta, 1891-2005*. Seated in the gallery are Dr. Ernest Mardon, his son Dr. Austin Mardon, and they're accompanied by friend Arthur Lau. I would mention also that Austin is a member of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so very, very proud this afternoon to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an absolutely amazing group of young people. I have with me today a grade 5 class from Keheewin elementary school in the south part of Edmonton-Rutherford. These students on their own initiative undertook an exercise to write me with their concerns about global warming and climate change. As a result of those heartfelt letters, our Leader of the Official Opposition included comments from their letters in his alternate throne speech, and they were here today to share some of their ideas in terms of addressing the issues of global warming and climate change.

I'd like to ask all 23 students to rise. They are accompanied today by a number of adults: Ms Lorraine Boggs, the principal of Keheewin school, which incidentally is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year; their grade 5 teacher, Ms Cindy Pang; and teacher helpers Joy Procinsky, Debbie Ainsley, Leslie Clarke, Jeanette McDonald, and Carol Wilson. I would ask them to all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you members of the school of Neil M. Ross, 51 students, two teachers, and five helpers: Mr. Brett Arlinghaus, teacher; Mrs. Cathy Bagdan, teacher; parents Mrs. Cathy Traynor, Mr. Tony Gannon, Mrs. Dianne Hajek, Mr. Ed Karl, and Mr. Daryl Wright. Would they please rise and receive and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Dawn Freeman and Karen Mykietka. Dawn and Karen both reside in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. They serve as the editor and managing editor of the *Rat Creek Press*, both since 2004. The *Rat Creek Press* is a community newspaper that serves north-central Edmonton, including much of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Their goal is to highlight community news, activities, and recreational opportunities as well as local residents and businesses to support the growth of a strong, vibrant, well-connected community.

I would like to thank Dawn and Karen for the important contribution the *Rat Creek Press* is making in our community, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House members of the Council of Alberta University Students, or CAUS. These guests met with the NDP caucus this morning and briefed us on the state of postsecondary education in Alberta today. They provided us with valuable recommendations, and in our opinion these merit the most serious consideration of the members of this Assembly.

I would now ask each of my guests to rise as I call their names and ask my hon. colleagues to hold their applause until each has been introduced. David Cournoyer, chair of CAUS and VP external of the University of Alberta Students' Union; Samantha Power, president of the University of Alberta Students' Union; Emily Wyatt, president of the University of Calgary Students' Union; Julie Labonté, vice-president external, University of Calgary Students' Union; Joanne Luu, vice-president administration, University of Lethbridge Students' Union; Duncan Wojtaszek, executive director of CAUS. I would now ask that they receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call upon the first of six to participate, 18 years ago today, on March 20, 1989, the citizens of the province of Alberta went to the polls. There are three members in this Assembly who were elected for the first time 18 years ago. So let us congratulate the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, and the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House on their 18th anniversary as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Let us also wish happy birthday today to the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

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

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie

Mr. Ducharme: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui, à l'occasion de la Journée internationale de la francophonie, c'est un plaisir pour moi de présenter à la Chambre une explication d'un événement canadien qui s'appelle les Rendez-vous de la francophonie. Neuf millions de francophones se rassemblent à la grandeur du Canada sur une base annuelle pour célébrer les Rendez-vous de la francophonie. Cette année les Rendez-vous ont lieu du 9 au 25 mars. Durant cette période de temps on célèbre les communautés francophones afin de promouvoir la langue et la culture française tant par ses activités sociales et ses célébrations que par sa dimension humaine et communautaire.

Les Rendez-vous contribuent à renforcer les liens entre les anglophones et les francophones du Canada et favorisent un plus grand respect entre ces deux communautés de langues officielles. De plus en plus nos municipalités albertaines se joignent aux Rendez-vous en tenant des cérémonies pour reconnaître leur communauté francophone. Parmi ces municipalités cette année on compte Red Deer, Lethbridge, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Rivière de la Paix, Falher, et Fort McMurray. Félicitations à ces municipalités.

Vibrante comme elle l'est, la communauté francophone célèbre sa langue et sa culture tout au cours de l'année par l'entremise de festivals de la chanson, festivals de film, carnivals d'hiver, et j'en passe. J'aimerais profiter de l'occasion pour inviter tous mes collègues à connaître la communauté francophone en participant aux événements qui ont lieu dans leur circonscription pendant l'année.

Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today on the occasion of the International Day of the Francophonie it is my pleasure to provide the Assembly with information on a wonderful Canadian event called Les Rendez-vous de la francophonie. Nine million francophones get together for the annual Rendez-vous de la francophonie, which runs this year from March 9 to March 25. During that period of time attention is focused on francophone communities, with the idea of promoting French language and culture as much through community and human relations as through social activities and celebrations.

Les Rendez-vous contribute to the reinforcement of links between francophones and anglophones in Canada by fostering greater respect between the two official language communities. More and more of our municipalities are joining in Les Rendez-vous by holding ceremonies to recognize their francophone communities; for example, in Red Deer, Lethbridge, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Peace River, Falher, Fort McMurray. Congratulations to all of them.

Vibrant as they are, francophone communities celebrate their language and culture throughout the year through music and film festivals, winter carnivals, and other celebrations. I would like to take this opportunity to invite all my colleagues to get to know the francophone community and to take in some of these events in their own ridings throughout the year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [As submitted]

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

1:20

Cremona Cribbage Champions

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and congratulate the Cremona Legion cribbage team of Diane Davies, Jack Borton, and Bill and Donna Kidd, who have recently won the Alberta-Northwest Territories provincial championship for team cribbage. To achieve this feat, they first had to win tournaments in Cremona, Carstairs, and Cochrane. They will soon be on their way to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where they will compete for the national

championship from April 27 to April 30. I understand that some of them are watching today, and I know this Assembly will join me in cheering them on and wishing them all the very best of luck as they compete for this national championship.

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

Trojans Girls Wrestling Team Gastroparesis

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wrestling for recognition. Today I'd like to speak about two types of wrestling events. While both forms of wrestling matches are fought by individuals, the support they receive in their struggles is dramatically different. The first type of wrestling is the more traditional form of Olympic wrestling, which I had the pleasure of coaching for over 20 years. Therefore, I was extremely pleased to hear of the recent successes of 15 members of the William Aberhart high school Trojans girls wrestling team from the Calgary-Varsity constituency, which I represent. Thirteen of the 15-member team qualified to wrestle at the provincials. The girls' achievements are the result of their personal commitment and the support of their dedicated coaches, team, schoolmates, and families.

In contrast, across this province thousands of Albertans are engaged in a different type of wrestling match. These Albertans are grappling individually with the limited resource support of their second mortgaged families against the debilitating effects of gastroparesis. While gastroparesis, a motility disorder which prevents an individual from properly digesting their food and therefore being constantly on the edge of vomiting, has yet to be cured, it can be managed.

Calgary-Varsity teenage constituents Thomas and Jennifer Keith-Ferris, aged 15 and 17 respectively, along with 23-year-old Krysta Livingstone, a Medicine Hat resident, have had their quality of life returned to them through the implanting of a GES device, a gastric electrical stimulation device, which has been approved federally but not provincially. Because no medical facility exists in Alberta and since the Alberta government does not cover the costs of either the travel or the treatment of this disorder, many families cannot afford the life-restoring implant costs. Once again I'm calling upon this government to restore and increase funding for motility research, to stand in the corner of the thousands of Albertans wrestling unnecessarily with the debilitating effects of gastroparesis. Please support the efforts of Dr. Christopher N. Andrews, a gastroneurologist specializing in gastrointestinal motility disorders, based out of the Foothills hospital and associated with the University of Calgary.

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

Calgary Maple Sugar Festival

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last weekend there was a very sweet event in Calgary, the annual Maple Sugar Festival, le Festival du sucre d'érable, celebrating the unique Canadian tradition. During the era of the aboriginal people in eastern Canada they would make an incision in the trunk of a maple tree with a tomahawk, and a piece of wood was then inserted, serving as a spout to gather the sweetness of nature. When the people from France learned of this tradition, the tap hole was made with a small axe, and a wooden reed was installed, allowing maple syrup to gather in a wooden container. Around 1885 the wood reed was replaced by a metal one, and from then on the tap hole was made with the help of a steel gauge. Around 1890 the wooden pails suspended to the tree by a nail made their appearance to gather every drop of the sweetness. So that's the history part.

This Maple Sugar Festival is now part of Canadian culture. I'm very pleased that the celebration of this original eastern Canadian tradition is now in modern times in Alberta, in the far west of Canada. Indeed, it's now from sea to sea, a *mari usque ad mare*. The sweet event in Calgary was offered in an array of lively festivities in an atmosphere of family *joie de vivre*.

I want to commend the event volunteers, performers, and organizers, mainly from francophone groups.

J'aimerais remercier les volontaires, les artistes, et les organisations qui montent annuellement cet excellent Festival du sucre d'érable, apprécié par les gens de tout âge.

I want to recommend that everybody should attend this festival in Alberta each year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Continuing Care Accommodations

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent controversy surrounding the Holy Cross long-term care centre in Calgary is a deeply troubling example of the government's long-standing refusal to deal with substandard care, that is too often provided to our seniors and Albertans with disabilities in this province. Indeed, it shows the devastating impact of creeping privatization in continuing care. Albertans know that the profit motive in long-term care leads to exactly the same results as it does in any other kind of health care service: higher costs and lower quality. Private operators have a vested interest in keeping down the cost of labour and services in order to maximize profits on their shareholders' behalf.

Perhaps the most pernicious way that the profit motive is being implemented in seniors' care is the conversion of long-term care facilities to assisted-living centres. This is a growing and serious problem for many Alberta families. Not only are the expectations of care lower in assisted-living centres, but residents can receive essential care services only if they can pay for them out of pocket. All too often families are forced to pay thousands of dollars per month to maintain respect and quality of life for their aging parents or disabled loved ones. A system-wide shortage of continuing care spaces means that people who should be in long-term care are forced to wait and pay in assisted-living facilities. Meanwhile, long-term care facilities in Grande Prairie, Jasper, and other communities are expected to be closed and replaced by assisted-living lodges, where the same residents will simply have to pay more.

The minister of health should put an immediate halt to any further conversion of long-term care facilities to private, for-profit assisted-living centres. The NDP opposition will continue to push this government to take real action to ensure that Albertans have access to safe, affordable, high-quality continuing care. Guaranteed delivery of safe and high-quality care for our seniors and others in need requires immediate action to improve standards, properly monitor facilities, and end creeping long-term private care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition, the first of many, with 88 signatures on it. This petition urges the government of Alberta to "prevent the development of the Sherritt Dodds-Roundhill coal gasification project until the expressed consent of the families . . . in the affected and surrounding areas is obtained" and, furthermore, urges the Alberta government

to “develop a comprehensive energy plan that uses our abundant energy resources to develop a green and sustainable future.”

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today again I am rising to table a petition, signed by 80 residents in Edmonton, which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Edmonton, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to complete, as soon as possible, the overpasses and interchanges at the locations where the Anthony Henday Drive (Edmonton Ring Road) intersects Lessard Road, Callingwood Road . . . and Cameron Heights Drive.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 22

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 22, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this bill allows for the separation of Alberta Investment Management from the Department of Finance into a stand-alone provincial Crown corporation. The legislation also balances operational independence with the highest standards of accountability and transparency.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Municipal Waste-water Infrastructure Assistance

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier challenged me to provide evidence that this government has committed millions of dollars to the water transfer from the Red Deer River to the project at Balzac, so I will. If the Premier checks page 18 of the supplementary supply estimates from just last August, he'll find a line that commits \$4.8 million “to support a project in the Municipal District of Rockyview that includes a horseracing track and an equine centre.” This matter has been extensively debated in this Assembly and approved by a vote of this government over the objections of the opposition. To the Premier: will the Premier now admit that this government has approved millions in spending on this project?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader kept talking about a secret deal. I said: present the evidence of a secret deal. The supplementary estimates were of course debated here in the House, and it's no secret. It's a matter of the record, and he finally found it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] Prop him up, guys; prop him up.

To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: since this money is under the jurisdiction of his department, how much, if any, of this money does the department plan to spend?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. As the Premier said, I've been waiting for this question for quite some time. He just hasn't quite got down to me yet. This came out of a program that's designed for municipalities, and we've had this program for close to nine years now. It's designed to assist municipalities with costs for water and waste-water infrastructure. It's for new projects that benefit our economy and grow our agriculture processing industry. Only municipalities are eligible for this funding.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. So let's focus in, then, on the specifics of the deal concerning the Balzac water transfer. Again to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. I will assume that there's more than just a verbal arrangement between the government and Rocky View on this one. Can the minister tell this Assembly and all Albertans: what are the terms of the deal under which this money will be spent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no specific terms of the deal. This is a program that we've had around for nine years, as I've said. They qualified for the program, so when they get their proper approvals, the money will be forwarded to them. At this particular time the money hasn't been forwarded to them because all the systems are not a go yet.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A freedom of information request to the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation has informed us that there are 1,800 pages of documents relating to the Balzac water transfer in this department's files – 1,800 pages in one department. None of those have been made available to us at this point, but they indicate that a lot of work has been undertaken by this government on this water transfer. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: given the intense public interest in this issue, will the minister make the 1,800 pages of the documents public, or does he intend for them to remain secret?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I don't know anything about the 1,800 pages. I do know that there have been some applications for water that my predecessor had actually rejected and said that they didn't meet the criteria.

I don't know exactly why the person that runs FOIP in the department wouldn't – if there is some reason that we cannot give the information out because it implicates a third party that wants to say, “We don't want that information out there,” that's up to whatever the rules are in FOIP on whether or not they give out those.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suggest that the minister does his homework a little more extensively. Thank you.

A simple, straightforward question to the minister: exactly what has been done by the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation on the water transfer to Balzac?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I stated yesterday, as far as I know, there have been no deals done. I know that we had an application from the MD of Rocky View. It didn't meet the criteria, and it was turned down. Other stuff that was done, I will tell you – I shouldn't say that; I do know of another thing that happened. Ivanhoe Cambridge has been working with our department on whether or not they can have access into the property. Our department is doing their due diligence and making sure that all safety is adhered to. They're talking about interchanges and things like that, and the experts in our department have to do their due diligence and see whether or not it can be done.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This time to the Minister of Environment. Please just answer the question. Given the minister's detailed knowledge of and support for the project at Balzac, did this government review the memorandum of agreement between the MD of Rocky View and the developers before it was signed?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated many times before, the responsibility for reviewing the information is borne by officials within my department. I expect my officials to review all relevant information before they come up with a final recommendation, which has not taken place at this point.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Environmental Policy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure today to ask some questions that were inspired by the grade 5 class of Keheewin school in Edmonton-Rutherford. They're here in the members' gallery. In a series of letters expressing their concern about the environment, the emotions and concern and conviction that was displayed by these letters remind us through these children of the reason why we must work together to put the environment first. To the Minister of Environment on behalf of Lindsay from Keheewin school concerned about waste: when will we see a provincial blue box program to promote recycling?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a good question. The issue comes down to the role that government plays in encouraging people to take issues regarding recycling seriously. At this point in time the government continues to support municipalities in both financial form and from an expertise perspective in encouraging further development of recycling programs. A province-wide program, frankly, I think is not that practical because it needs to be co-ordinated at the local level by municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Emma and other students expressed great concern about deforestation, especially in our northern forests, saying, I quote: without trees we can't breathe, and without trees all the carbon dioxide will stay in the air; clear-cutting

causes more water pollution and higher costs for water treatment. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: can the minister tell us if he will stop clear-cutting practices in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll take that question on behalf of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. There are very clear plans in place in the province of Alberta with respect to forestry to ensure that we do not compromise in any way the watershed system that is so dependent upon our forests. I can assure the hon. member and the student who asked the question that issues related to water and the watershed are paramount in decisions regarding forest management.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another issue discussed by the students today with our members is that we need to stop burning so much coal and fossil fuels and encourage more solar, wind, and other renewable energies. To the Minister of Energy: can the minister tell us why we do not give the same incentives to renewable energy that we give to the fossil fuel industry?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that there are very good incentives in the province of Alberta for all energy projects, including renewable and, we're hoping, alternate energy. We continue to work. As part of the mandate that I've received from the Premier of the province of Alberta, we will develop an integrated energy strategy, and the integrated energy strategy includes all of the above. Fossil fuels are a base for Alberta. On top of that we will have very aggressive wind power; we will have hydropower; we will have green power with biomass: all forms of energy.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Employment of Children

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier confirmed that the Conservative government was asleep at the wheel with respect to major policy changes that would have seen 12-year-olds working in Alberta's bars. Flash back to 2005, and you will recall that this Conservative government approved major policy changes that allowed for children to work in restaurants without permits, and this change was made without debate in this House and without public consultation. My question is to the Premier. Why did the government turn back the clock to the 19th century with respect to child labour laws and allow children to work in restaurants?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the hon. leader is trying to get to, but yesterday I was very specific, I think, spoke very plainly, that after the minister responsible, the Solicitor General, and myself heard of the planned policy change, we put an end not only to 12-, 13-, 14-year-olds working in bars but all minors. So for the matter of the record, all minors: no working in bars and lounges in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier seems to believe that any boneheaded policy decision by this government is okay as long as he reverses himself once he gets caught. The members opposite ought to put down their copies of Adam Smith and try picking up Charles Dickens. The number of children working in restaurants in this

province is now in the hundreds. Will the Premier now admit that his policy of allowing child labour is reckless and cannot be morally justified? Will he end child labour in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, talking about the government decision: this was not a government decision. It was made by the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. There are a number of steps that this policy would have to work through, especially through the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. So it's not something that would have happened overnight; there were checks and balances in place.

With respect to young people working in restaurants, sooner or later in this province, Mr. Speaker, younger people have to learn the value of hard work, work for their parents or maybe their relatives in a safe environment under good supervision. There is nothing wrong about people learning the ethics of work.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the checks and balances in this province are the Alberta Federation of Labour and the Alberta NDP. [interjections] Well, how else did this get reversed but that we caught the government at it? Will the Premier admit that kids should be working on their homework, going to school, playing hockey, playing sports, and not working in restaurant kitchens? Will he end child labour?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we will do whatever we can to ensure that that party stays as the check and balance in this province forever. Thank you so much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Career Transition for Military Personnel

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our military services are vital to the existence and security of our nation. We enjoy our home life while our armed forces defend our way of life and system of government. Some of my constituents have served in our Canadian armed forces as tradespersons and truck drivers. They voice to me that their qualifications in the military were not recognized and certainly not easily transferred into the same civilian occupation. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What policy or specific program does our government have to help our former military personnel in their career transition?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The men and women who serve our country are strong leaders with remarkable skills. Obviously, we want to incorporate them into the regular working areas of our economy as quickly as we can because of those skills. It's important for Albertans' postsecondary credentials to be recognized globally, and it's equally important for our province to recognize credentials that are earned outside of our postsecondary system. I am pleased to say that Alberta is working with the Department of National Defence, the Canadian federal National Defence department, through the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship to recognize military trade credentials. To date the board has recognized the certificate of military achievement, qualification level 5, and will continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents, who were truck drivers in the military, told me that they have a hard time getting civilian truck driver licensing, so my only supplementary question today is to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Through what policies and programs does the government help military truck drivers in their transition to the civilian occupation?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are aware that a constituent in my colleague's riding has raised concerns about retraining. In response my department has committed to conduct a further review to determine whether Alberta should consider equivalency arrangements. Alberta does operate like other provincial and territorial jurisdictions within Canada by not accepting military driving credentials without retesting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Holy Cross Care Centre

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Canada/Alberta affordable housing program in October 2004 and January 2005 the owners of Holy Cross Manor in Calgary were granted over 3 million provincial tax dollars to build a total of 230 units of affordable housing. Enterprise Universal Incorporated hasn't been paid out the full amount yet, and thank goodness for that because not only have they not produced a single unit ready for occupancy; they haven't even made a substantial beginning on the second project. The rules say that the deadline for completing these projects is 24 months from the time the money is granted. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who clearly didn't see this mess coming: why isn't the minister on top of this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that the ministry is on top, and we have continuing consultation with developers on their progress. We also have communications with those developers to see if there are any difficulties. At the present time that is what's been done.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, the minister wasn't minding the store, and he wasn't staying on top of things, or else we wouldn't have gone two months beyond the completion deadline without the work even commencing. Or could the minister prove me wrong, perhaps, by sharing with this House, in the interests of transparency, the details of how this tight, ongoing process of dialogue works to produce results? I don't see any.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the Grey Nuns building project: part of it has been and is behind schedule. But I do want to say that the \$3.2 million that was committed, the 1950s building project for 100 seniors' units, is near completion. The second phase, or the second part of the application, which involves \$4.5 million: there has been no indication from the developer of him pulling out of the project, but I will say that we are having continuing dialogue with that developer.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, Albertans don't need excuses. Albertans need affordable homes. Everybody needs a home. Enterprise Universal now says that it does need more time and more money, or else it will pull the plug on the second project, 130 units of afford-

able housing for families and seniors, and give back the million and change the province has already advanced it. Doesn't the minister think it's about time to take them up on their offer, or is he planning to shovel even more tax dollars into this money pit?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the project that was applied for was a good project. There are criteria for those projects, and the criteria were adhered to by this developer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Child Care Funding

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The most important concern for many young families is the care of their children. Many working parents depend on the provincial government to help provide high-quality, affordable, and accessible child care. Alberta families have been struggling to find and pay for daycare spaces and after school care. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Yesterday the federal government announced \$250 million for provinces to create child care spaces. Can you tell us what this means to Alberta?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am really pleased with yesterday's news. We all know that we do have a shortage of child care spaces in this province. My understanding is that the funding will be distributed on a per capita basis, so presumably we're talking about \$25 million. I can say today that I look forward to getting more details, both in the confirmation of the amount of money that we're getting and also whether there are any requirements or conditions that go along with that funding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: I'm happy for the province, but what does this mean to the average working family in Alberta who has young children?

Ms Tarchuk: I mean, ultimately, Mr. Speaker, I can say that what this does mean is more choices for parents. It's too early to speculate on how we're going to spend the funding, but I can tell you that we will work with our stakeholders, and while we're planning, we will also build on the strengths of our five-point investment plan. Of course, any plans that we go forward with will have to go through the appropriate government approval process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's federal budget offered proof that Alberta is basically on its own when it comes to creating new child care spaces. The funding offered to Alberta is only a fraction of what was offered in the previous federal/provincial child care agreement. Provincial leadership is essential to create the new child care spaces that many Albertans need. To the Minister of Children's Services. Many individuals who would like to start child care centres cannot afford the start-up costs. Does the minister have

a plan to address these funding shortfalls, which directly limit the number of new spaces created?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even before this announcement yesterday we have committed to continuing with the five-point plan, and that has been well received across the province. Also, two weeks ago we proceeded to enhance that five-point plan. Like I just said, we welcome the funds from yesterday, and we will continue to plan for additional child care spaces in this province.

Mrs. Mather: Labour shortage remains one of the biggest barriers to the creation of new child care spaces. The shortage of child care workers with level 3 certification, the highest level of training, is causing many centres to cut spaces or close altogether. What is the minister's plan to deal with this specific labour issue?

Ms Tarchuk: I can tell you that in our planning process we're looking at all aspects of areas that will help create child care spaces, and that does include professional development accreditation. As you know, a couple of weeks ago we dealt with wage top-ups. So we are taking a serious look at that issue.

Mrs. Mather: Municipalities across the province need more child care options. From Brooks to Fort McMurray to Cochrane to Grande Prairie the message is the same: the shortage of child care spaces is hurting families, the community, and the local economy. Again to the Minister of Children's Services. Alberta used to be a leader in provincial/municipal partnerships in child care. How will the minister enhance the role of municipalities hoping to get more involved in child care provision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that I have met with several stakeholders over the last several months. We are just finalizing an FCSS review that is going through the process in the next couple of weeks, which will come forward with some recommendations for the program that the hon. member mentions. I do know that during the review it has been highlighted that funding for out-of-school programs is an issue. Like I said last week, while we've made some changes on the zero to 6, with the 6 to 12 we don't have a policy mandate now, but I have committed to taking a leadership role in working with municipalities on some workable solutions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Regional Taxation Issues

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Based on the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability report it appears that Edmontonians can look forward to some new taxes which likely will not be levied in Strathcona county as this county has ample revenue from their industrial base. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Will the minister assure the residents of the city of Edmonton that if there are any new municipal taxes introduced, this new tax regime will be administered to the entire capital region?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability released its report yesterday, and I need to say that the council's blueprint – and that is the council blueprint – for sustainability for municipalities is that report. I also would like to say that the government is still reviewing the recommendations of that report and will report later this spring.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will taxpayers of Edmonton hence be looking forward to a higher overall tax bill?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, if new taxation powers are granted to municipalities, it will be up to the individual municipality to determine the appropriate level of municipal taxation within their communities, not different than the municipal tax levies that are in place right now.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Fair enough. To the same minister: but if differences persist, will the provincial government force the Edmonton area municipalities to work together?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are certainly looking for opportunities to strengthen intermunicipal co-operation not just in Edmonton but throughout Alberta. The Premier has given me the mandate to address regional planning issues and intermunicipal disputes. As I previously mentioned, I expect to release the government's response to the minister's council very much in the near future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Education Funding

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Parkland strike is over, but there are fears that this strike was the first of many. Within the past week negotiations in two other school divisions have broken down, and over 80 per cent of school boards will be in negotiations this spring and summer. Without decisive action now the Parkland strike could be a pattern we see over and over again in the coming months. To the Minister of Education. School boards will be in labour negotiations this summer, but the province has the final say about the financial position the boards will be in. Will the minister commit to providing adequate funding to school boards to ensure that they can bargain effectively this summer?

Mr. Liepert: Well, clearly, Mr. Speaker, that is a budgetary question, and I would encourage the hon. member to ask that question about the 20th of April. But let me just say this. I'm an optimist when it comes to negotiations going forward. I tend to look at things from a positive viewpoint rather than a negative one.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's preventive that we should be talking about.

The deferred maintenance problem in Alberta schools is bad and getting worse, Mr. Minister. The Calgary board of education alone has a deferred maintenance backlog of \$426 million. Will the Minister of Education commit to addressing the deferred maintenance backlog in this province's schools so that school boards can put money into programming and instruction rather than paying off past government neglect?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, again that's a question where I would encourage the hon. member to wait for the budget. But what the province did last year was put in place a policy whereby we did put money into maintenance and modernization. I can only be optimistic that there'll be as much or more money to spend in Education in this budget than there was in the last one.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A lot of parents are waiting for that, hoping it's going to get better.

Let's try this one. The \$6.4 billion unfunded teachers' pension liability continues to be a huge problem for teachers across the province, and this government has been dragging its feet on the issue for years. Numerous leadership candidates, including the Premier, promised to take action to address this issue. Will the minister commit to finally – finally – eliminating the unfunded liability in the teachers' pension plan? Will you do something about it, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: As the hon. member is aware, that is one of the objectives that the Premier has mandated me to work on. I will be doing that, and I would ask the hon. member to stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

2:00

Affordable Housing Task Force Report

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have in front of me a release out of the municipal affairs department about the Affordable Housing Task Force, that I was a member of. If it's correct, it says that the 15-member panel spent 45 days gathering input, compiling the report, visiting nine communities with more than 800 presenters and another 600 written reports. I go down a little further, and to my dismay I see that the government will review the report and not respond till May. There's a crisis out there. We heard this. Rents are rising. There are more homeless out there, condo conversions, and we're not even going to allow the public to see this report till May. It's irresponsible. My question to the minister is simply this: why are we waiting for May to see what should be a public report released very quickly?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to concur that I did receive the report from the chair of the committee yesterday, and I do want to compliment the work that was done by the committee, the thorough work and the dedication. I also want to comment that I believe the news release commented that there will be a response from the government to the recommendations by May, not necessarily a release of the recommendations but a response to the recommendations.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, in the same release it says, "The task force's report and the government response will be released publicly at the same time." That's what it says in your own release here, Mr. Minister. My question again is simply this: why is it that all the people that took the time to present to this task force, a lot of hard work, cannot see the results of this? The government can do their analysis after, but this should be made public immediately. Why not?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I did receive the report yesterday. I am going to take the proper procedures to bring the report to government, and at that time we will release the report.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not asking the government to respond immediately. What we're asking for is the task force report to be made public so Albertans can see what's in it. Then the government can respond. That's what we want.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how to better answer the question except to say to the hon. member that I have received the report. I am going to take it through the proper channels of this government and will release the recommendations, will release the response to the recommendations as quickly as possible because I very much believe that that report is very thorough and very important to Alberta.

Electricity Line between Edmonton and Calgary

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, about two years ago the Alberta electric systems operator, the Department of Energy, and others met with the EUB in Calgary, and out of that meeting was a determination that there was a necessity for a 500-kV line from Wabamun to Calgary. Now, the other thing that flowed out of that meeting was that there were about 13 proposed locations for this line to be built. AltaLink was charged with coming up with which would be the best location. It quickly was reduced to two, without the input of the landowners along the lines. It then was reduced . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. Forty-five seconds has gone.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll proceed on the basis that I would understand that the hon. member is speaking about a particular 500-kV line that runs between Edmonton and Calgary. It's currently being reviewed by the EUB. The hearings with respect to the issue are set off until the middle of April pending the result of a legal question around the hearings.

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, the landowners are feeling that they've been dealt with in contempt, and they want the hearing to now be postponed till the 1st of June. So to the Minister of Energy: will you ask the EUB to hold off till the 1st of June, and if not, why not?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, as I had mentioned previously, yesterday and again moments ago, this issue is in front of the EUB. They are not part of this government. They operate separately from the government. They are charged with the responsibility to assess this application along with many others, and they will continue this process in due course. It's been set off now till the middle of April. I have no indication whether or not the delays would go beyond that point in time.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, the EUB has a policy that they will not determine before the hearing whether in fact the consultant and/or lawyer would be paid for. This puts the landowners in a very difficult position. Not only that but they will only pay up to \$250, and today you cannot get a lawyer or consultant for \$250 an hour. They charge around \$300 an hour. Will the minister look into that situation?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, the EUB has fairly strict guidelines around the issue of paying for people that intervene with respect to these hearings. Most certainly I will take the comment of the member under advisement with respect to moving from a \$250 an hour legal fee amount to a \$300 amount. If there's something that

the EUB is missing there with respect to the price of lawyers, certainly we could ask the EUB if they wouldn't mind reviewing that particular issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Provincial Parks and Protected Areas

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just 4 per cent of Alberta is designated as protected areas and provincial parkland. Unsurprisingly, over 10 per cent of Alberta's wildlife is endangered and threatened. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: will the government commit to expanding the parkland in this province so that we at least give these creatures a chance to avoid being wiped out?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very, very much, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is certainly right in asking that particular question. Our policies in the province of Alberta are such that we do want to protect a number of species, including wildlife and including wildflowers and various live materials that are out there. So, certainly, we are doing some of that in the province of Alberta, and we'll look at other endangered species as we move along.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the minister talked about the need to honour existing commitments to oil and gas companies operating in protected parkland. Will the minister honour his commitment to Albertans and ensure that in the future "protected" actually means "protected"?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think I also indicated last week that we had various categories of protection, and I may want to repeat those. One of them is the wilderness areas. Others are the ecological reserves that we have. We've got also Willmore wilderness. We also have wildland parks, provincial parks, heritage rangelands, natural areas, and recreational areas. In each one of those we have different rules and regulations that we adhere to. In some of them we allow absolutely no activity aside from on-foot travel and participation, yet in others we provide a broad range of activity that can happen in those areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you again. Given that the minister's mandate to defend protected areas conflicts with his commitments to oil and gas projects in protected parks, can the minister tell us if he's taking his marching orders from Premier or the Minister of Energy?

2:10

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think it's neither of those. Certainly, we are working with all the stakeholders. We are working with the energy industry. We are working with Sustainable Resources. We are working with Agriculture in establishing what can happen in all of our areas. We try, as I indicated before in this House, to achieve a balance. In some areas, again, we are protecting them wholly. In others we are saying that certain activities will be allowed to happen.

Capital Cost Allowance Program

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, in yesterday's federal budget the government of Canada announced that it would phase out the accelerated capital cost allowance program for oil sands development. There have already been a number of concerns voiced by the industry about the potential impact that this change will have on the future of the energy industry. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Because this program is being phased out over a number of years, is there a possibility that this could lead to the unintended consequence of even more rapid development, putting additional strain on our labour market and on our infrastructure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, initially I have to express my concern and disappointment with the federal government's budget statement indicating that the accelerated capital cost allowance would in fact be removed. More to the question, I would suggest that there is an economic climate in the province of Alberta, including now the situation around accelerated capital cost allowance, our review of royalties, a rather inflated cost of doing business in the province of Alberta: I think that these things added together will very likely temper applications.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, at the same time that the phase-out of the capital cost allowance was announced, new capital cost allowance provisions were announced for manufacturers. Given the minister's mandate from the Premier to increase the amount of value-added in the province, what is the potential impact on projects such as the announced or proposed upgrader projects that are happening in the industrial heartland?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker, thank you. Most certainly, the province of Alberta is going to continue to move ahead. We are very, very positive with respect to the resource base that we have in the province of Alberta. We will continue to move ahead. With respect to upgrading, I believe that there is an opportunity for us here on the manufacturing side. The feds have left a bit of room there with respect to that issue and accelerated capital costs. We will be pursuing that.

Mr. Doerksen: My next question is to the Minister of Finance. Given concerns raised by the industry that they are facing uncertainty due to this announcement and its impact on capital and investment, can he advise members of this Assembly whether this change will be taken into account during the review of the royalties?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's an absolutely excellent question. The last thing that we want to have happen to our oil industry is a one-two-three punch, with number one being the income trust, number two being the accelerated capital cost allowance, number three being potential climate change issues. So in our Royalty Review Panel I have asked the panel to take a look at the accelerated capital cost allowance, see what that has to do with the royalties, and see exactly the position that the oil sands companies are going to be in with respect to that. I think it's a very important question, and it's something that we certainly have to take a look at and take into consideration when we take a look at royalties.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Openness and Transparency in Government

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Every secretive government's dream, contrary to international standards on public openness, a huge step backward in the fight for more open and transparent government, unacceptable, noxious: these are the words that were used by experts in informational laws, political scientists, and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation to describe Bill 20, which was forced through by this government in 2006. The blanket exemptions in Bill 20 serve one purpose, and that is to protect this government from any form of public accountability. To the Premier: given that Bill 20 prevents the citizens of this province from accessing internal government audit documents for 15 years – 15 years – is it the Premier's position that such an exemption supports an open and transparent government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government has moved quickly on openness and transparency. It started, first of all, with a posting on the web of all of the manifests of government aircraft. We also are going to be making public all ministerial expenses, EA expenses on the web starting in April. We're moving today, of course, second reading of the Lobbyists Act. We're moving with the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. We have done more in the last 90 days than any government before.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that Bill 20 prevents the citizens of this province from accessing ministerial briefing notes for five years, is it the Premier's position that such an exemption supports an open and transparent government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the bill was debated and passed in the House, and it's up to me to uphold the law. That law is Bill 20, that was passed. If the opposition has other ideas that they want to bring forward to the House, so be it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier made the following statement regarding Bill 20 in May of last year, and I quote: if it does restrict openness and transparency in some way, then so be it, and I'm sure that no matter who is elected as leader, that person will find the need to change the legislation. End quote. To the Premier: given the scathing reviews from information law experts and academics regarding Bill 20, does the Premier now support the statements that he made during the leadership campaign, and will he enact changes to the legislation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll stand on my record in terms of the movement we made over the last 90 days to openness and transparency in this government, but there is more to come. In fact, we're opening up this Legislature to all-party committees, and we'll see soon where they stand on that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Highway Maintenance

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the course of this winter travelling back and forth, many of us see the deterioration on our highway network, especially when it comes to cracks and potholes and lane identification. My question today is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. I'd like to know if the maintenance of these potholes and improvements to the lane identification are part and parcel of the contracts we have with our contractors that maintain the provincial highways, Minister.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for that very important question. The hon. member is correct in that this winter has been very hard on pavement and pavement markings. Our maintenance contractors are responsible for filling the cracks and painting lines on our highways. The contractors have to work to the standards set out in their contracts, and government inspectors ensure that the work is done properly and in a timely manner.

Mr. McFarland: Second question. If that's the case, is there any way that the department and the contractors could facilitate some accelerated maintenance, especially when it comes to lane identification?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, our highway maintenance contracts are performance based and encourage the contractors to be out there and doing whatever work is necessary. Our contractors are paid only for the work they do actually perform, so it's in their best interests to be busy. If they don't do the work, then they don't get paid. There's no incentive for them to be sitting around the shop when there's work to be done outside. Of course, it's in the travelling public's interest for the contractors to be out there as well. I can assure the hon. member that our contractors are doing whatever the weather permits them to do.

Mr. McFarland: Given that traffic volumes and the weather conditions have, in fact – and I'm back on the lane visibility – deteriorated substantially, and I know that it's impossible for this stuff to be done during the winter, is there any way to get a more durable or a more timely application of some of these lane identifiers?

Mr. Ouellette: As I mentioned in my first answer, the amount of snow clearing and sanding this year has taken an unusual toll on pavement markings. My department is always experimenting with paints that are more durable and reflective, Mr. Speaker. We need to test the products first before we put them on the approved material list for our contractors to use. We also are trying more permanent inlaid plastic markings on some of our higher volume roads, and these markings are considerably more expensive than traditional paint but do last longer. They have been used successfully in warmer climates such as California, and we're hoping they will work in the Alberta climate. Should they prove cost-effective and work well, we will consider, then, putting them on the roads for . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:20

Electrical Power System

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Business owners, farmers, tenants, and homeowners struggle to pay their monthly power bills. We know why. Last fall I asked the now Premier how his government planned to unplug electricity deregulation. To date, unfortunately, I have not received an answer. Hopefully, this afternoon I will. My first question is to the Premier. Given that in six years deregulation has added \$13.8 billion extra to the cost of generating electricity in this province – and this does not include transmission, distribution, and billing costs – when will this government do the right thing and unplug electricity deregulation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this province has gone a long way in adding additional generation in this province. In fact, even with all of the cogen that's happening in the province, we still require more generation. The other is that through deregulation in terms of generation we have also looked at new generation for wind and solar and, very close to my constituency, even cogenerating electricity from manure.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. Premier: if this generation has added so much capacity to the system, why are prices continuing to skyrocket for homeowners, for commercial users, for farmers, and for businesses in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the cost of electricity – moving electricity to homes, the cost of infrastructure, the overall cost to each and every Albertan – has risen in some cases because of the fact that we haven't kept up with maintaining our transmission lines and our distribution lines over the last number of years. Then, of course, with respect to generation natural gas prices are up. We will soon have, depending on what happens from the federal government, perhaps even more in terms of electrogeneration from coal, given new rules possibly coming from Ottawa. So there's a lot to come in the area of electrogeneration, I can assure you of that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. Premier. Because there was no long-term planning done with electricity deregulation, we now see first-hand the mess with our distribution and transmission system, which adds many dollars to the bill but specifically to the cost of electricity. Why is the cost of electricity going so high?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think what he's trying to imply is that through a regulated system, then, these changes would have been made a lot faster. Actually, it's the reverse, and history has proven that.

The other is, Mr. Speaker, that in spite of all these issues that the hon. member may be raising, there are still over 500,000 people that move to this province, and more people insist on moving to the province of Alberta because, quite frankly, it is the only – only – jurisdiction in Canada that has any economic growth.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we dealt with 98 questions and answers today.

We'll now revert to where we were in the Routine, and I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for an introduction of a bill.

head:

Introduction of Bills
(*reversion*)

Bill 24
Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 24 be moved to the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Bill 204
Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan
Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007/
Loi modificative de 2007 sur les emblèmes
de l'Alberta (reconnaissance
du fait franco-albertain)

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to request leave to introduce a bill, being the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007/ Loi modificative de 2007 sur les emblèmes de l'Alberta (reconnaissance du fait franco-albertain).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to table a copy of a letter that a constituent, Bonita Davidson, has sent to me. She's a personal care attendant, and for some time she's been working as a live-in caregiver in the self-managed care program. I referred to her in my response to the throne speech. She's particularly raising issues about the need for respite care for caregivers and also the fact that many caregivers are not covered by WCB, and if they become injured, there's no assistance for them. So I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of that letter today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a press release issued by the Ed Stelmach leadership campaign, including a pledge that the teachers' pension fund unfunded liability would be addressed through a final and fair and lasting resolution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter that I wrote yesterday to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food, and it is, again, suggesting that the Minister of Agriculture and Food post an apology on the website in regard to question period yesterday.

The second tabling I have is a press release and supporting

research documents indicating that electricity costs have increased by 38 per cent since 2000 in Alberta for farmers whenever you compare them to the other western Canadian provinces, which have seen single-digit increases in their electricity costs.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two groups of tablings here today. One is from the Unity Centre in my constituency, which is a tremendous resource centre for the less advantaged in northeast Edmonton. It speaks to homelessness and the need for more affordable housing.

The second group is calling on the Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua John Hunt be sentenced and tried as an adult due to the nature of his crime, his past criminal history, and that he is close to the age of 18 years.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the prerequisite number of copies of an article talking about the Keith-Ferris family and their struggle with gastroparesis. The article is entitled Life-changing Device Helps Local Kids Stay Active: Provincial Funding Needed for Gastroparesis Patients.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituent Linda Smith. She is concerned about crime. She's urging this government to punish young offenders who commit crimes and not give them second, third, or 10th chances to keep committing crimes. Five copies, please.

Thank you.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, pursuant to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Act the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research 2005-2006 programs and financial highlights; pursuant to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act the Alberta ingenuity fund 2005-2006 annual report; pursuant to the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board 2005-2006 annual report; the Alberta Prion Research Institute 2005-2006 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Oberg, Minister of Finance, a report dated January 2006 entitled Organization and Governance Review of Alberta Investment Management, prepared for Alberta Finance by Capelle Associates Inc. on behalf of Capelle Associates Inc. and KPA Advisory Services Ltd.

head: 2:30

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 1
Lobbyists Act

The Speaker: I'm going to call on the hon. Premier. I'd just advise

all hon. members that under our Standing Order 29(1)(a)(i) the Premier is limited to 90 minutes' speaking time.

The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that extra time.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure, of course, to rise today and move second reading of Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act.

I'd like to really begin, Mr. Speaker, by touching briefly on the history of this legislation, of this bill. Last spring an all-party Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee reported back to government, and one of its key recommendations was the creation of a lobbyists registry. In addition, this bill was one of the commitments which I campaigned on last fall. I committed to taking it one step further.

This bill will accomplish three goals. First, it will require lobbyists to register; secondly, it will prohibit lobbyists from simultaneously lobbying and providing paid advice to government on the same issue; and, third, it contains provisions to have the listing of entities who receive payment from the government posted online. This is a dramatic step, a first in Canada, and one which will allow all Albertans to see and compare for themselves who is being paid to lobby government and also who is being paid by government.

Mr. Speaker, lobbying is a legitimate activity. It can be very valuable to government during the very important decision-making process. Albertans have the right to communicate with decision-makers, provide information, and, of course, their views on issues that are important to them. As the preamble to Bill 1 clearly states, "free and open access to government is an important matter of public interest." At the same time, it is important that both members of the public and public office holders know who is being paid for trying to influence government decisions. A lobbyist registry will provide for greater transparency while maintaining open access to government.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly define the role of a lobbyist. A lobbyist is an individual who is paid to communicate with public office holders in an attempt to influence government decisions. Lobbyists may be retained for a fee or may be employees or paid officers or directors. They may work for nonprofit or for-profit based organizations. Lobbyists include sole proprietors and partners in partnerships who lobby on behalf of their business.

However, not all communications with government are considered to be lobbying. For example, a person making a submission to a committee of the Legislative Assembly or in the course of proceedings before a board or tribunal is not lobbying. A constituent does not need to register. Of course, those that come, you know, on a weekly basis to our offices do not need to register before communicating with their MLA unless they are communicating with their MLA about a private bill for their own special benefit. There is no registration required if a person is asked for his or her opinion by a public office holder, nor must a lobbyist register when they want to influence a public office holder about the interpretation or application of legislation, regulations, or a government policy as it applies to the lobbyist's client.

However, a lobbyist must register if he or she wishes to influence government decisions in certain areas. These areas include influencing the content of legislation, regulations, or government policy. A lobbyist must also register if he or she wants to influence the awarding of a government grant or financial benefit or a decision to privatize a government service. The definition of "lobbyist" and the types of communications which require registration are carefully designed to ensure that registration is required in appropriate cases but without impeding access to government.

The registry will be freely accessible to members of the public in a searchable format through the Internet. Information contained in the registry will include the name of the lobbyist, the issues on which he or she will be lobbying, and the communication techniques to be used, including identifying whether they will be communicating with ministers, MLAs, or public servants.

The registry will be overseen by the Ethics Commissioner, who will have the real authority to appoint a registrar. The registrar will have the authority to issue advisory opinions and interpretation bulletins to assist lobbyists and all Albertans in understanding the registration requirements.

A second key feature of the bill is that it prohibits both lobbying and providing paid advice to the government on the same issue at the same time. This prohibition addresses an issue of concern to Albertans and works to ensure that government receives objective advice. As part of their registration lobbyists will have to provide a declaration that they are not in violation of this prohibition. The registrar will have the authority to investigate breaches of the legislation and, when in his or her opinion it's been breached, can impose administrative penalties of up to \$25,000. Breaches of the legislation could also be prosecuted through the court system. This bill provides for fines of up to \$50,000 for a first offence and as high as \$200,000 on a second or subsequent offence. These, Mr. Speaker, are the highest fines of any province in Canada. Additionally, when a person is convicted of breaching the legislation, the registrar can prohibit that person from lobbying for up to two years.

Mr. Speaker, the third element of this bill is that it provides for the publication of an index of government accounts paid. The index will be fully accessible and searchable on the Internet. The index will include individuals and corporations who are paid under government contracts. This information will be readily available to the public. It is information already collected. There will be no extra steps to take for Albertans doing business with government. The index will provide openness and transparency in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 will allow Albertans to see for themselves that lobbying activities are being done openly. This is leading-edge legislation. It demonstrates my government's commitment to governing with openness and transparency. This bill will go a long way to restoring public confidence and respect for this democratic institution. I encourage all members of the Legislature to support Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act.

I would now move that we adjourn debate on Bill 1 and return to it at a later date.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 20

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007.

The supplementary supply estimates provide additional spending authority to five government departments. All of the spending has been reported in the third-quarter fiscal updates. The estimates include capital for postsecondary institutions, agricultural assistance programs, housing initiatives and programs for the homeless, and funds for physician services.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon in second reading of Bill 20, the supplementary supply No. 2 act, which means, of course, that this is the second time this year that this House has considered a supplementary supply. [interjection] The second time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the new Premier and his new cabinet have talked an awful lot about the fact that this sort of spending is not to be seen as often, as regularly, or as much in the future. I can tell you one thing for sure: this shadow minister is going to hold them to their word. I will dog them every day to make sure that they're true to that. You will know, Mr. Speaker, that it has been a bone of contention ever since I was elected to this Chamber, that we saw quarterly updates to the budget, and in most cases we saw as much money being announced in spending at those quarterly updates as there was extra in the surplus. This is no way to run a government. It's no way to run a business. It's no way to run a household. So, as I say, I certainly intend to hold them to their word on that. I've noticed in some of the comments from the President of the Treasury Board more recently a bit of a softening on that stance, so I'm serving fair warning today that I will be watching very carefully.

2:40

You know, really, if the purpose of supplementary supply is to deal with emergent and emergency situations – and we've discussed before whether it should be forest fires or flooding or even, I suppose, you know, a downturn in the value of the Canadian dollar which causes the price of new government airplanes to rise dramatically. I suppose you could argue that that's an emergent situation as well. But when I look through Bill 20 and some of the areas where we're providing supplementary funding, bearing in mind that this bill is coming forward after the new government was sworn in and the new ministers were sworn in, yet there are a number of items in this particular bill that cause me to question whether or not they are in fact emergent or emergency.

I'm just looking, for an example, Mr. Speaker, at Advanced Education and Technology, \$34.5 million for a grant to match private donations to the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. I think my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark was referring to this yesterday. We know that some of that money is to match the Mactaggarts' wonderfully generous donation to the University of Alberta. The government has known about this for a couple of years now, Mr. Speaker. I remember the day that we had the Mactaggarts in your gallery and the announcement was made. So here we are now quite some time later and finally providing the matching grants, and it's a good thing. It's something that we were all in favour of. My question is simply this: why does this have to have been done in supplementary spending? Why could it not have been in either last spring's budget or in this spring's budget, which is really the proper place for that spending to be?

One point five million dollars for enhancing science literacy awareness programs at the Science Alberta Foundation: a wonderful initiative. I'm sure nobody on this side of the House is going to argue against the merits of spending the money in that particular program. The question is really: is it emergent? Was it an emergency? Was there some compelling reason why it had to be done in a second supplementary supply bill, or could it not either have been done in last spring's budget or have waited another month and been in the 2007-2008 budget?

Five hundred thousand dollars for enhancing awards and promoting the annual gala event at the ASTech foundation. Same argument, Mr. Speaker, so I'm not going to belabour the point.

We look at the Department of Agriculture and Food asking for \$50 million to supplement the CAIS program. Again, I'm sure there

are some very valid arguments for that being an emergency. That money is most likely very desperately needed by the folks in our agricultural community. Perhaps a justifiable expense and one that I wouldn't necessarily have a problem with.

We look, however, at the Department of Finance, and there's \$7.07 million to reimburse public sector pension plans, research endowment funds, the scholarship fund, and other minor funds for investment losses. Now, Mr. Speaker, I've reviewed the *Hansard* from last week when we were in committee debating this, and I didn't see any response from either the Finance minister or the President of the Treasury Board or the Premier indicating what happened with those particular funds and why they lost \$7.07 million in an economic environment when virtually every fund I'm aware of made money last year. Certainly, I watch the stock markets as closely as most members in this Assembly do, I'm sure, and I watch with particular interest the heritage savings trust fund, which generated a healthy return last year. I'm quite curious, and I think that before I could lend my support to this bill, I'd want to know what happened with those funds that we lost a total of over \$7 million in them. Were any actions taken against the managers of those funds or some hard questions asked as to investment decisions they were making? In this economy it's hard to imagine that funds would be losing money.

Another one that jumps out at myself – and I know that the Member for St. Albert asked a question in question period this afternoon about the unfunded teachers' pension liability, Mr. Speaker. Here we have in one lump-sum payment \$40 million that the government is putting into their share of the management employees' pension plan unfunded pension liability. Again, I reviewed *Hansard*; I didn't see any reference to this in the *Hansard*. Perhaps I missed it. But \$40 million, as near as I can tell, covers the lion's share of the government's share of that unfunded liability, and it's made in one fell swoop in the middle of a budget year, without any explanation for why it would be an emergency.

At the same time we have nearly \$7 billion in an unfunded liability to the teachers' pension plan, which we press this government constantly on. We are continually told time and again that it's going to be addressed, that there will be movement made on it. In the meantime, we carry on with the difficulty in attracting teachers. We carry on in a situation where taxpayers are funding this to the tune of some \$45 billion over the lifetime of the project as opposed to dealing with the \$7 billion liability today. So clearly for taxpayers it would be a good deal to look after some or all of that unfunded liability today.

I'm hoping that there will be some addressing of that in the budget that we see next month. Again the question is: why was this \$40 million needed in the middle of a budget year? If there's \$40 million for that particular unfunded liability, what about all of the other unfunded liabilities that the government has, certainly the largest of which is the teachers'?

I look at the Health and Wellness department getting \$147 million for higher than budgeted costs of physician services. Again, given the state of health care in this province and the urgent need for that, I'm not going to pick a bone with that in particular. I think there's probably good justification for that, so perhaps that is a good use of supplementary supply.

Likewise, Mr. Speaker, Municipal Affairs and Housing: a total of \$42.846 million is being requested. It looks like the majority of that is going to rent supplement programs: \$15.173 million for an affordable housing program, \$16.142 million for the off-reserve aboriginal housing program, and a further \$9.531 million to address "homeless or near-homeless people through outreach teams administered by seven major community-based organizations." Well, I

don't have to tell you or any member of this Assembly how important the issue of housing affordability has become.

When I give my response to the throne speech either later today or sometime in the near future, I will definitely be addressing that particular issue as it relates to the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford and how it has over the last year and a half become the number one issue in my constituency office. I'm going to guess that that's not dissimilar to other experiences that members of the House are having.

So a total of \$42.846 million going to various issues surrounding housing affordability. Again, this is an emergent issue, and this is the sort of thing that I can certainly live with in terms of supplementary spending.

I guess, to sum up, as I said, the two for Finance, both the \$7 million to address losses from various investment funds and the \$40 million in one fell swoop being dumped into the management employees' pension plan: I really have questions as to what the emergency is there, and, Mr. Speaker, as I outlined, the three different ones from Advanced Education and Technology: 34 and a half million dollars to match the donations, \$1.5 million for science literary awareness programs, and \$500,000 for the awards and promoting the gala event at the ASTech Foundation. I suppose a question that might be relevant as well, since we're discussing it, is: just exactly how much of that \$500,000 went for enhancing the awards and how much of the \$500,000 went for promoting the annual gala event? I'd be curious to know that. If there's somebody on the government side that might be able to answer that question prior to the vote being taken later this afternoon, that would be helpful information as well.

2:50

With those comments I will close for now. As I said, I would hope that this document is going to become a dinosaur, that we will not be seeing great big supplementary supply estimates anymore, or at least if we do see them, they will be restricted to true emergency situations like affordable housing crises, like forest fires and flood relief, and such instances that all members of this House would recognize as being truly important in terms of addressing midstream, mid budget and that honestly cannot wait until the budget process would take its due course.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and speak to this supplementary supply. There are a number of very important issues, I think, that are covered in this supply, and these are the earlier mentioned homeless and near-homeless funding, the affordable housing programs. These are things that should be funded.

I'm surprised that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford would mention that the China Institute should be delayed in its funding. I was just there last week and they were very, very concerned that their funding would be coming forward. That it is in fact coming forward I think is crucial to them, and it's crucial that this will get going, provide the matching funding that the Mactaggarts so generously gave, and look to push forward the economic development that the China Institute will give.

Another area that I've heard about often is the area of public/private partnerships, which seem to come up in sup supply quite a bit. The nature of public/private partnerships is that sometimes they look like rent-to-own, and we've got to look very carefully at these P3s, as they are often called. There are many types of

contracting with government and contracting actually in the private sector that are used in order to try to get a job done. Often the cost-plus way, which uses contractors, is not really the best way to go in that it just provides almost a guaranteed profit. The public/private partnerships usually use contractors. I think that to use a cost-plus mode would not be a good way to go in that type of situation.

We have had many types of P3s over the years. I mean, in my constituency, for example, the Northgate Lions seniors' centre is a good example, using the Lions Club as one of the contracting agencies, as one of the groups in a public/private partnership in order to bring about a facility that was very, very successful in coming forward over the decades and over a number of expansions in providing a tremendous service to seniors in my constituency.

The Auditor General has said that the government would be remiss if it did not look at whether it utilized public/private partnerships in its endeavours. One of the main things I think, though, in this time of expensive rising costs is to get projects done quickly. In my constituency I don't think the Anthony Henday will be able to get going unless we use P3 financing for that purpose. I think that is the best mode to do so for that, and I support that. It is important to look at that and to move forward on these projects because if we don't move forward quickly, there will be much more cost over time.

That's all I have to say on sup supply. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning is the third speaker, we now have this opportunity under Standing Order 29(2)(a) to have a five-minute question-and-comment period.

Before we get to that, might I draw to the attention of all members in the Assembly the presence in the Speaker's gallery of a former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and a former minister of the Crown, now Mrs. Shirley Cripps, formerly the hon. Shirley Cripps.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the question-and-comment period.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. In light of his remarks regarding P3s, does the hon. member have any concern over the fact that there was a significant cost overrun at the Anthony Henday Drive ring road project? The last annual report from Infrastructure and Transportation revealed that in a \$108 million budget, I believe it was, there was a \$36 million cost overrun. Does the hon. member still have that much confidence in P3s after that cost overrun?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. The nature of the P3s that we're seeing and what we've seen in Anthony Henday and how we want to see it go forward, especially, I think, in the bridge on the east portion of Anthony Henday, is to see that we will ensure through the cost – and to be truthful, I wonder if the cost overruns would not have been more in the long term on the other portions with the increases in costs that we've seen in construction, which has actually percentage-wise often risen far more than that in other areas.

If we're to move quickly in order to have our infrastructure in place for the bridge across the North Saskatchewan on the east leg, we have to get that going quickly. There will be much greater costs to our city, to the northeast, to the movement of goods and services, to so many things if we do not move quickly, and I think that's the only way that we can actually finance that at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert on the question-and-comment period.

Mr. Flaherty: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would be very interested in hearing the good MLA for Edmonton-Manning talk about the whole question that he's raised about P3s regarding schools. One of the biggest problems that we're having in this province is that the neighbourhood school and the community school concept is disappearing, and people are feeling that they're being left out. What we're leading to is the deterioration of the community and the well-being of people in the community in terms of the school being an integral part of that particular community. I get really concerned when I hear the good MLA for Edmonton-Manning suggest that this is an answer to the construction of schools as well, I imagine you imply. I'd be very interested in hearing your comments on that. I hope that you've done research on it because I'd be very interested in hearing it.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some years ago I spent five months plus, I think it was, working on a report on procurement and travelling across this country, more in the small business area but looking at larger areas like defence, education in the federal sector, many, many areas. We reported directly to cabinet in that particular function. We were full-time. We looked at all of the functions of contracting, and I chaired the small business hearings across Canada.

The function of contracting is not always so simple as that it should all be done by public servants and all the rest of it. The fact of the matter is that when you build a school, it's almost always done by a contractor in any case. It's how you put it together, how you get it going, and how you ensure that it is built in a timely fashion and in a quality fashion that counts. That's what we've got to be looking at.

I know that in many areas of the north end and where I'm at we need schools. We need them built quickly, and we've got to do it somehow. The nature of public financing sometimes calls for different and imaginative ways of doing things. I think that we've got to be looking clearly at different and imaginative ways of doing things, and sometimes, not always, P3 may be the way to go.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on the Q and C section.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's sounding an awful lot like a job application, I think.

Mr. Speaker, when I purchased my house, I signed a 25-year mortgage. I paid payments on it for 25 years, and then I owned the house. Is it not true, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, that this is just another form of debt financing?

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seem to be a popular source that needs to be questioned today, and one should not be . . .

The Speaker: I must sorely regret and intervene now. The time has now escaped us.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, I believe you caught my eye.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and

speak to Bill 20, which is No. 2. In this bill the government is asking for an additional amount of money from the last budget. I think the total money the government is asking for is \$393,516,000. You know, this is the second time since I've been elected where I saw that during the budget time they don't calculate properly, and after the budget they ask for an additional amount. This is the second time again. So I should say that this government again failed to stay within their limit, within their means.

But Albertans are looking. They are expecting from us that we should live within our means. When the government, you know, introduces the budget and makes sure that they include everything, they should anticipate what's going on in the coming time, but I think that once again they failed. They keep on spending more and more money.

The problem is that they are spending money unwisely. That's the main concern of lots of people I talk to, and they are mad about it. They said: you know, this government spent 93 per cent of energy revenue in the last 25 years. This is the Tory government's record. At one time they used to blame some other parties. That includes Alberta Liberals. "Fire the Liberals. They are spenders." But I think this Tory government is the big spender. I think they broke all the records so far.

Now, once again they are asking us to sign a blank cheque, a blank cheque for \$393,516,000, and this is the second time after the budget. This is totally out of control, and we don't have the proper details. I know they are spending on specific ministries, but there's no breakdown of how much goes where, no full details about where they are going to spend money or whether they already have spent money on any particular ministry.

This is not acceptable to most of the Albertans, and they have to change this bad habit. I don't know why, after repeating the same things again and again, this government doesn't listen. I think it's their duty to listen and to do something good for the people who elected them. But they are not listening, and I still wonder because suppose they don't spend money wisely or prudently?

Priority-wise the Premier has the mandate on certain things. Some other priorities were not even included in the throne speech. My constituents are concerned. The main concern in my constituency is hospitals: still nine and a half hours' waiting time. I don't think that they are seriously addressing that issue because this problem is still there for a long, long time. We still have shortages of doctors in our area. It's not only in Edmonton-Ellerslie, but it's all over Alberta, wherever I go. Even some members sitting in this House have mentioned it a few times, and they understand that it's a big problem all over Alberta. If it's a huge problem, why don't they take it seriously and at least guarantee Albertans that they will look after their best interests in the hospitals?

Education is another priority in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. My constituency is growing so fast. Next door to my riding is Edmonton-Whitemud and Edmonton-Mill Woods. Those three ridings are growing so fast. You know, they need schools. They need recreational centres. They need libraries. I wish those priorities would be included and that this government spend money, particularly in building new schools in Edmonton. I saw in a paper just a couple of weeks ago that this government is building eight new schools in Calgary and none in Edmonton. We are growing like Calgary, and I wish that this government would concentrate on the growing area all over Alberta. I'm not saying that they should spend money only in Edmonton but all over Alberta. Education is still the top priority, and they should take it very seriously.

Wherever you go, whether you go to Calgary, you go to Grande

Prairie or Medicine Hat, road conditions are terrible. It's terrible.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, the Messier Trail.

Mr. Agnihotri: Yeah. I mean, ask anybody. Urban or rural area roads are terrible, and I wish they would spend some amount of money in this area as well.

Another serious thing which I think we should address here is the low-income people. The social deficit, Mr. Speaker, is increasing. We should at least think about those people who are earning less than \$20,000. Still there are people who are earning \$20,000 annually, and their rent is going higher every year. Some people, I mean, are hand to mouth. They can't even, you know, afford at least a reasonable amount of money for their groceries. So with those unfortunate people we should consider them very seriously, and we should address their concerns as soon as possible before it's too late.

I remember that we increased the AISH payment after so many years, and after that there was no review. Those people – I mean, everything, all the prices have gone up. How are they going to survive? If we don't take seriously those people who don't earn too much money, that problem becomes socially very serious, and those people will go on the street and will try to earn easy money in a way that society doesn't expect. So before we are too late, we should seriously consider and address this issue.

3:10

The last time I questioned the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, he said that the crime rate in Alberta is reducing. I don't believe that. I'm sure there are lots of other people sitting in this House . . .

Some Hon. Members: I don't believe it.

Mr. Agnihotri: You don't believe it. You see, Mr. Speaker, this issue speaks for itself. It's a big, big problem in Alberta. Not only in Edmonton, not only in Calgary, not only in Grande Prairie but all over. It's even growing in rural areas. So we need some more police officers and staff to make sure that our children, our parents, especially seniors, walk freely during the nighttime. I tell you personally that it's very dangerous to even walk on the streets after 9 o'clock in some areas, and it's getting worse. So before it's too late, I think we should give this sector a little bit more priority.

Environment is a big issue. Yes, I'm glad that government has started taking an interest in environmental issues. But let's see, anyway. I don't want to discuss this issue right now because we are dealing with another bill. I will address that issue when we deal with that.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that this government is throwing money at the problems. They keep on throwing money at the problems. Still they don't have long-term, sustainable policies. They started forming some committees. Maybe they want some input from opposition parties, which is a good thing because we are all elected to serve the best interests of Albertans, right? But I don't know why they didn't have those plans for a long, long time. We always get the lip service. If they had proper sustainable policies 25 years ago – for example, I'm sure with the money that this government received from the nonrenewable resources, we could have so much, a huge amount of money.

At least, if you see the Alberta Liberals' plan, even the 15-year plan, if we had that plan, we could have savings of about \$120 billion – \$120 billion – in our heritage fund. That means that out of \$120 billion if we calculate at today's rate of interest, \$7 billion interest would have come out of that money. We could have used

that money in the general revenue. We could have the best universities in the world. We could have the best hospitals. We wouldn't have a long waiting time in the hospitals or have to sit two hours, three hours in the surgery. Whenever I go and see my doctor, I have to wait there for two, three hours, and the doctor always says: "Just tell me one problem. If you want to talk about the second one, come next time." [interjections] This is true. Maybe you get preference that we don't.

One time, Mr. Speaker, one of my good friends, a doctor, said, "You know, I can look after this." I said: "Doctor, I respect that. I don't want preference, okay?" Everybody should be equal. Yes. It's true.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, hon. member, I regret to inform you that the time for this segment has now expired.

We do have five minutes, though, for questions and comments if an hon. member would like to participate under the standing order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on this Q and C section.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to ask the hon. member if he might be able to share with us a little more about his comments regarding his visit to a doctor and having to book a second appointment if he has a second issue he wishes to discuss. This is a very serious issue. I heard members on the other side indicating that he should just get another doctor. Well, I've had constituents come . . .

The Speaker: Please, hon. member. No. I accept that it may be a serious thing, but right now we're debating second reading of a supplementary supply bill. What this has to do with service by individual doctors is beyond my comprehension. There has to be some degree of relevancy with respect to it.

Perhaps, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you wanted to participate in the Q and C section?

Mr. Martin: No.

The Speaker: Okay.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow on the Q and C section.

Ms DeLong: Yes. Thank you. I was listening to my hon. colleague, and there were some interesting things that you did say during the beginning of your speech which I think are valid questions – okay? – but I would suggest that you should also be providing valid answers. What you were questioning was the amount of money that we were spending and that we were asking for more money for particular, specific items. Now, which of those particular, specific items do you think we should not be spending money on? You also made reference to us generally spending more money, so could you please specify what things you would like to cut, where we should be spending less money?

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish, proceed.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you very much. I appreciate your question. You know, I don't mind spending. I already said that spending money on the programs is not a bad idea. I was talking about the priorities. In my constituency we have different priorities, and I want to make sure that I raise my voice for the people who elected me.

In this bill you're asking for \$393,516,000, the total amount, and on health care \$147 million. I want to make sure that if we are sanctioning \$147 million on health care – it's a huge amount – that

at least we will be able to, you know, reduce the waiting time, increase the number of doctors, staff, beds. That's what I mean. Yes, I was talking about, you know, going out of the way because every time the government introduces the budget – make sure they calculate everything. Not second time, third time, fourth time. They keep on repeating the same things again and again, again and again. That's a big problem for me, and this is not acceptable to me. This is not acceptable to all Albertans who are listening here today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional members to participate in the Q and C section?

Then that being the case, we'll now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, then followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the hon. Member for St. Albert, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. But if there are additional members of another side that want to participate, we'll insert them in.

Right now the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

3:20

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to make a few brief comments about the supplementary estimates. It's more to do with the process, but there are a couple of things I do want to go over.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We've had this debate in the Legislature, and I hope that this particular debate will be fast coming to an end. In the past we've dealt with budgets in March that really didn't mean anything. We'd pass the budget, and then in June we'd have more money, and in the summer we'd have more money, so nobody took the particular budget very seriously. I doubt that the cabinet ministers did because they could come back and say: well, I need more money.

Now, supplementary estimates were never meant to be part of the ongoing budgeting of the government, Mr. Speaker. I've mentioned this before. When I was first in this Legislature, they were set for what we'd call genuine emergencies; you know, forest fires or, I suppose, if there's a pandemic or something like this. Nobody can predict that, so that's why you need supplementary estimates. But under the previous regime, if I could put it that way, they became just part of the ongoing way we did business: bring a budget in in March, pass it in June, and then immediately it would be outdated because we'd have to have more spending.

Now, I think – I hope that I'm correct in this – that as we change and go to fixed election dates, my understanding is that we would be dealing with the budget a week or two after the Speech from the Throne, which is basically the way it used to be. If that's the case, Mr. Speaker, we really should not have a big need in the future for huge amounts of supplementary spending. I hope that's the case. I think that puts onus on the government, then, to be realistic in terms of the budget, to put some work into it because they shouldn't be coming back asking for millions of dollars – hundreds of millions of dollars in the past – for extra spending. They have to be more realistic is what I'm saying.

Mr. Speaker, it just goes to show with the supplementary estimates. Health and Wellness: I know where that is. Probably it was needed because we're in a crisis situation, as we are in so many other areas, for the doctors' settlement just recently. But surely we could have projected that we would need something like this way back when.

Municipal Affairs and Housing. Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker,

having listened to Albertans, that this is also another crisis, and this amount of money here is not really going to solve the problem. Now, we'll obviously have to wait until we see what the budget brings forward. We'll be watching it very closely.

But I guess I say to the President of the Treasury Board and the Treasurer that I hope that we've come to an end of this idea that a budget that's passed in June is outdated. That's an unacceptable way to run the people's business. There's absolutely no doubt about that. I understand that for this particular time we do need supplementary estimates, and there might be times down the way where emergencies come up that we may need it. But hopefully the budgeting process changes to the point that people are realistic, knowing that they can't just come back. I think that's the job of the two honourable gentlemen across there, to make sure that budgeting is realistic in the future and we're not passing, as I say, hundreds of millions of dollars after the budget is passed. That's unacceptable. It's not transparent. It's not open. It's inefficient, and it wastes money, Mr. Speaker.

So we will look forward in the future to this next budget. We'll certainly look forward to the next two budgets to see how this process works.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate on this bill at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 25

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. I now rise to move second reading of Bill 25, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007.

Interim supply estimates provide funding authorization until the new budget is approved. These interim supply estimates will provide the spending authority to government from April 1 to July 1, 2007. Approval of the interim supply estimates pending the approval of budget is not unusual for government. It is required whenever spending authority is required to bridge the gap between the last fiscal year and passage of a new budget. Interim supply estimates are higher this year than previously because the new budget is being introduced and debated later than usual.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak in second reading to Bill 25, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007. Let me just start off by saying that I hope that this is the last time I will ever have to rise and speak to an interim supply act.

As most members of this House know, Mr. Speaker, there are new rules contained in the House leaders' agreement, which, hopefully, will be coming to this Assembly for its approval sometime in the near future, which would establish a set sitting date, every year in February for this Assembly to meet, and a set date by which the budget would have to be brought down. My understanding and

sincere hope is that this House will adopt those rules. If, in fact, we do, in all likelihood the budget would always be passed in advance of the end of the fiscal year; therefore, we would never again find ourselves in a situation where we're being asked to approve nearly \$10 billion without any real solid explanation as to where or how that money is going to be expended other than to say that it's needed for the operation of the government until the budget is passed.

I expressed last week when we discussed this interim supply in committee that this is, perhaps, the most frustrating exercise for an opposition MLA. I think, probably, there are several government MLAs who feel the same way, that it's almost like writing a blank cheque. I used the analogy of your teenager coming and asking for an advance on their allowance and not wanting to tell you what they're going to use it for. I don't think that this is really that much different.

So, as I say, my hope is, certainly, that the House will adopt the House leaders' agreement, that we will find ourselves in a situation where henceforth we will always know when the budget will be introduced, and it will always be passed in advance of a fiscal year end, and we won't have to have interim supply bills in front of us anymore.

I would like to expand on those comments just a little bit by saying that the President of the Treasury Board indicated that it is not uncommon for governments to do this. I think what he meant to say was that it is not uncommon for this government to do this. I've done some research, and there are many examples of governments that do not routinely use interim supply or other terminology that would be similar. So, yes, indeed, it happens with regularity in Alberta. It doesn't have to happen.

Let's just be mindful of the fact, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite and their political party are in complete control of the agenda. They're in complete control. They're at nobody's mercy when it comes to when this House sits. They had complete jurisdiction over when their leadership race would take place, they had complete jurisdiction over when a new Premier and a new cabinet would be named, they had absolutely complete jurisdiction over when this House would be called back to sit, and they have complete jurisdiction over when a budget will be introduced. So the fact that we're not seeing a budget introduced until 19 days after a fiscal year ends and that that budget may not be passed until well into the month of May or perhaps even June, this is nobody's fault but their own. This is entirely foreseeable. This was entirely avoidable.

The fact that we're here today voting on \$10 billion in interim supply without really knowing what we're granting that money for could have been avoided. It does not have to have been the case whatsoever. The members opposite and their leadership and their political party, that wing of them, have to take full responsibility for the fact that we're even here debating this today.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to cede the floor to other colleagues who may wish to comment as well. Thank you.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You'll have to forgive me, but I must seek direction. We are still on Bill 20?

The Acting Speaker: We are dealing with Bill 25, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007. The other one was adjourned.

Mr. MacDonald: The other one was adjourned.

The Acting Speaker: We'll get back to it.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay.

Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to get an opportunity to speak on Bill 25. I was certainly anxious to speak on Bill 20. I have some concerns in regard to Bill 20 and, of course, the Auditor General's report on, being specific, how the CAIS program is currently administered and managed and how the Auditor General would like to see improvements made on that. Hopefully, I'll get an opportunity to discuss that with Bill 20.

Certainly, concerning Bill 25, interim supply, we see a long list of allotments to various departments. At this time my first question would be in regard to the office of the Chief Electoral Officer and the \$2.1 million that we're allocating here to be spent between now and July. I would like to ask: exactly how much money in total will we be spending in that department this year? Is this money being used to prepare for an early snap election after the April 19 budget? Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was talking about the budget in April, but is that part of the plan of this government?

An Hon. Member: Absolutely.

Mr. MacDonald: Absolutely. Well, I'm glad to see that they've got a plan of something, Mr. Speaker. It's evident that they have an absence of plans with other directives.

An Hon. Member: Order your signs.

Mr. MacDonald: Order my signs? I've got them stored out in the country, and they're ready to go.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor. The chair will be happy to recognize anyone who wishes to participate in the debate, but currently the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor. You may proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward with interest to a response from the hon. members across the way in regard to the budget on April 19 and the fact that they seem to be generously funding between now and July the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. We'll just see what happens here.

Now, certainly, we look through this and the long list of expenditures between now and July, and it's a significant amount of money. We almost seem to be cavalier, we almost seem to be casual about spending money in this Legislative Assembly, and it concerns me. There seems to be an unlimited supply of money. This is a government, I'm sorry, that treats the Treasury like a credit card without a limit, and we have to be very, very careful.

I know that the hon. President of the Treasury Board is fiscally responsible. I know that. He has proven that to me in the past. I think it would be interesting, Mr. Speaker, to be at a Treasury Board meeting to see how all this plays out. I'm sure there are many members who want to see this budget increase significantly, and there are those that want some fiscal restraint. I think that in light of the fact that we've been operating without a plan for so long and we've seen the budget increase so dramatically, caution needs to be exercised. I realize there are all these spending requirements. Certainly, we have the money to deal with them.

There are the little things that concern me with this government. For instance, I'm looking at the government's executive fleet operations, and this was a document that was tabled as Sessional Paper 525/2006. We don't seem to mind spending money on ourselves, and this is a reflection and a comment on this current government. You look at the long list of individuals who enjoy a car from the executive fleet. They're all listed here alphabetically.

Mr. Flaherty: How many are out there?

Mr. MacDonald: I don't know, hon. member, how many there are. I know there's a deal signed with a leasing company that still doesn't make economic sense to me.

I look at this, and I see Murray Smith, Alberta's representative in Washington, DC. The unit description is a 2006 Subaru Tribeca. Now, I've never heard of this model.

Mr. Flaherty: Very expensive.

Mr. MacDonald: Very expensive? It's \$42,000 to the government, and it's still worth 40 grand. Now, why do we need to supply this individual with a car at taxpayers' expense in Washington? I know there's a handsome salary involved with that job. I know there are expenses. Last year at this time I asked in debate: does this individual have an eligibility for a government pension? I was never given a direct answer about that. This former member of the Assembly seems to be doing very well. Oddly enough, he is, like the current Premier, a former member of the Deep Six, who were very concerned at one time about excessive government expenditure and wasted money.

At the same time that members of this side of the Assembly are asking for increases in support payments for clients of AISH, clients of social services, an increase in the Alberta seniors' benefits, these increases don't seem to happen. [interjection] Now, the hon. Minister of Energy says that that's good, I think, but I would have to disagree with him because as the cost of living increases, those individuals that I spoke about are receiving less and less because of, unfortunately, inflation eroding away their disposable income.

Inflation certainly has increased, hon. member, and one of the reasons why inflation has increased and these people have so much less money is because of the high cost of electricity. Electricity costs have reduced their disposable income because many of those individuals pay a power bill. I know that may be a difficult concept for the hon. minister to grasp, but some people have difficulty at the end of the month paying their power bill because of electricity deregulation. They get nervous whenever they open the bill because it's a big bill. This government made a big promise, that deregulation would reduce the cost of electricity, but unfortunately that hasn't happened.

There are groups, there are individuals who certainly need this government to be kind, to be generous because they themselves cannot for one reason or another look after themselves, but I think Murray Smith is quite capable of looking after himself and his own financial interests. It just amazes me that we are so generous with party insiders, former members of this Assembly, yet with other people we're not so generous. In fact, we're mean. Whether this government is going to change or not, I don't know, but I'm disappointed in this government. I think you can do better, and I think we can spend our money more wisely.

Whenever we look at Bill 25 and we see the amount that's going into the Health and Wellness budget, we see Infrastructure and Transportation, we see Finance, we see Energy, and we see Education, certainly these are all important and very vital portfolios, and they need to be funded. They need to be funded so that the managers of those departments can budget. We need to ensure that the civil servants are paid. We need to ensure that we can attract more civil servants because certainly as the civil service gets up there in years, we need to attract younger people into the civil service.

3:40

Now, with that, Mr. Speaker, I think I will conclude my remarks

on Bill 25. Again, I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to exercise caution. Let's be careful, let's spend the money where it is needed, and let's just look at some of the excesses. I consider our political appointee in Washington, the fact that we are looking after his wheels, to be an excess. It's excessive, it's unfortunate, and it's unacceptable.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any comments or questions?

Any other speakers?

The hon. President of the Treasury Board to close debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a second time]

Bill 20

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007

(continued)

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mr. Renner]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to speak on Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007. I will be very direct in my remarks.

I would like to discuss the \$50 million allotment to the CAIS program. Certainly, in my travels last fall I heard the CAIS program referred to, and this was in southern Alberta, south of where the current Minister of Agriculture and Food operates his farm. South of there the farmers I talked to sort of fondly referred to CAIS as chartered accountants' income support. After I read the article in the *Edmonton Sun* the other day regarding the amount that had been collected by the hon. minister of municipal affairs in CAIS payments, he and his family certainly have a very able accountant. Now, I had thought at one time that the minister would share his detailed knowledge of the CAIS application form with all farmers across the province, but it turns out that the farmers have to contact the hon. minister's accountant.

Now, the CAIS program is certainly going to change. This government's federal cousins seem to be determined to eliminate it. I was quite surprised to be watching CPAC last fall whenever the Canadian Wheat Board debate was on, and during question period the federal minister of agriculture stated that there would be fundamental changes, that the CAIS program was not working as it had been designed, I believe.

Now, we find here a \$50 million expenditure for the CAIS program. There have been, certainly, issues with the CAIS program in the past. This government was very anxious to get support payments out in 2004. In that year, of course, we had the significant overpayments, which put many farmers in a great deal of financial difficulty, and they are being gradually returned. There were some changes made last year to the CAIS program to make those returns easier.

When we consider this \$50 million amount, we should also look again at the annual report of the Auditor General of Alberta. This is volume 2. The Auditor General and his staff have been very busy in the last year. I don't know if this is a reflection on the lack of planning by this government, but there has been, of course, his annual report, which came out last November, I believe. We also

have the supplementary reports on AADAC, aboriginal affairs, Infrastructure and Transportation, Lakeland College's contracting practices, postsecondary institutions like Grant MacEwan and others with computer control problems and contracting practices, and the agriculture, food, and rural development expense accounts and what should go on there.

Specifically, the Auditor General and his staff also spent some time on the CAIS program, and this is not the first time that this has happened, Mr. Speaker. In the 2004-05 annual report, page 120, the Auditor General recommended that

the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation improve controls over the administration of the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization program by:

- documenting its policies and procedures,
- strengthening its claim verification procedures,
- maintaining sufficient documentation on file,
- developing criteria for waiving the application of the structural change,
- developing criteria to identify high-risk participants –

I guess that wouldn't include the hon. minister of municipal affairs – and

- testing spreadsheets before implementing them.

Now, that was two years ago, hon. members, and as far as the Auditor General is concerned, this government is making, as we debate this \$50 million expenditure, satisfactory progress.

The current audit findings indicate that there should be “improvement in CAIS internal controls.” Now, the corporation, as I understand it, made a number of internal control improvements to the administration of CAIS, including

- documenting and implementing CAIS policies and procedures . . .
- creating a Program Cross Compliance and Investigations unit to establish criteria to identify high-risk participants,
- working with the Department to access complete BSE information,

among others. This has been done. CAIS controls have improved, and I'm pleased to note that, but “some deficiencies continue to exist.”

The Auditor General's staff found that

program documentation and data entry improved; however, the following control deficiencies persist:

- reasonability tests – in 6 of the 40 claims [that the Auditor General's staff] examined, the Corporation did not explain variances from the reasonability tests that exceeded thresholds or the reasonability test was not completed at all;
- documentation trails – for 2 of the 40 claims, we were unable to assess how the Corporation determined certain amounts used in the calculation;
- use of spreadsheets – the Corporation has not defined the spreadsheets that must be tested – before use.

Yet as we sit quietly in here this afternoon contemplating an additional \$50 million to this program, I think we should heed the deficiencies that have been outlined here by the Auditor General.

3:50

Now, the Auditor General's report also indicates: “Control weaknesses to be improved in new CAIS computer application.” There are a lot of problems, I understand, in the Department of Agriculture and Food with computers and access to computers and whatnot, and that is reflected in other parts of this report. But this is what the Auditor General had to say.

The Corporation will rectify two control weaknesses by implementing the new CAIS computer application system, which will be used to process claims from 2005 and later. System controls to be implemented and improved include:

- reasonability test reporting on claim verification results,
- sharing common information between the CAIS, insurance and

lending computer application systems to assist with claim verification.

Now what remains. The Auditor General indicates that to finish implementing this recommendation, the Corporation needs to:

- implement and comply with the policies and procedures, including improving the documentation of reasonability test variances and calculation amounts,
- implement the new CAIS computer application system,
- develop criteria for identifying high-risk CAIS participants, [and]
- test spreadsheets used to calculate payments – before using them.

If these spreadsheets had been tested in the past, maybe farmers wouldn't be stung with this \$80 million overpayment that they have to wrestle with in their annual budgets.

That is what the Auditor General has brought up, and I would be interested to hear from the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Mr. Speaker, I can't help but want to say “and rural development” as well. It amazes me that this government would remove rural development from the ag portfolio. I'm not satisfied with that. I know that there was a lot of confusion in December when the government was reorganized, but to find this over in EII, I just don't understand it. The hon. minister made reference to this this morning when he spoke at the AAMD and C, but I wasn't satisfied with his response. The \$100 million rural development fund – I think development belongs in the department, not over in EII. There's still confusion over how all that worked. Some staff were put over in EII and then moved back. Others didn't know which way they should go.

Mr. Speaker, I think that before we go any further with this \$50 million request, we should hear from the minister, and he should explain what is being done to ensure that the Auditor General's recommendations and concerns are being dealt with before any more money from the CAIS program goes through the system and is allocated to farmers. Hopefully, the farmers will not be asked by this government for that money back because of an error in calculating the payment.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions? Hon. minister of agriculture, do you have a question, or were you wanting to speak?

Mr. Groeneveld: I want to make a comment which is probably going to hopefully answer some of the hon. member's questions. However, I've got to scat out of here in a few minutes to take a phone call from the federal minister of agriculture. Maybe he's got a direct pipeline through this inefficient computer system and knows exactly your questions and he's going to answer them that quickly. I'm not sure. At any rate, I don't think I'm probably going to get through this before you want to cut me off.

Some Hon. Members: Try. Try.

Mr. Groeneveld: Okay. Just a couple comments, and I will give you some written answers if I have to leave and I can't get this done.

I'm really quite upset with your opening statements implicating the minister of municipal affairs and this CAIS program. I think that was totally inappropriate, and as you'd like to say to me, I think probably you owe the man an apology. I think you were implying that he made some false claims. I'm not sure, but I don't think . . .

Mr. MacDonald: No. Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this is comments and questions. This is a brief five minutes back and forth.

Mr. MacDonald: A point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order on comments and questions? Okay. Go ahead.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. minister of agriculture: I did not say anything like that, and I would ask him to withdraw that. I just pointed out the facts, and the facts are in the report of selected payments to Members and former Members of the Legislative Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly, and this is for the year ended March 31, 2006. I would now ask him to withdraw that allegation.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, people have been around in this Assembly for a very, very long time. When you rise on a point of order, the chair requires a citation. There was no citation, so I hope that what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has done is clarify his statements.

Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food, if you would like to continue your comments, you may proceed now.

Debate Continued

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to touch on a few quickly. About the \$50,000 . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Fifty million dollars.

Mr. Groeneveld: I'm sorry. Fifty million dollars. Point of order, yeah. Okay. Let's get it straight.

Mr. MacDonald: It's a lot of money.

Mr. Groeneveld: Yes, it is a lot of money. However, probably what the hon. member doesn't realize is that the ag department – and basically this all comes back from CAIS because the program wasn't used – lapsed just about \$290 million in the third quarter this year.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Groeneveld: It was \$290 million, give or take a few dollars and cents.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. minister, this is supposed to be brief comments and questions. I'll ask the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar if he wants to respond.

Mr. MacDonald: Just briefly, and I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. This gets back to my opening remarks in regard to the cavalier attitude that this government has. There's a big difference between \$50,000 and \$50 million, and we've always got to be mindful of that in this House.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other comments or questions? The Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: I will withdraw the \$50,000 – I'm sorry; it was a slip of the tongue – if that will satisfy the member.

An Hon. Member: A typo.

Mr. Groeneveld: A typo. Right.

So the nature of the beast is how we work. The \$50 million sits in here, and as I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I believe, mentioned, it is in what we call a disaster fund area to keep the reference margin pilot project alive for the farmers. So what it does is keep their premiums down. It will make them more eligible to collect out of the CAIS program.

The computers: I'll quickly touch on that. That has absolutely nothing to do in this world with CAIS overpayments. That was estimates to get the money out quickly. That was through the federal system. When the people applied, they were warned that this could happen, and when they received the money, they were also warned that this could happen.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the time allocated for questions and comments has now lapsed. Any other speakers?

The hon. president to close debate?

Mr. Snelgrove: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

4:00

Bill 3

Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of points that I'd like to make respecting this bill, not the least of which is the pride with which I come forward introducing the first bill of its kind in Canada that establishes legislated greenhouse gas emission reductions targets. I want to at the outset talk just a little bit about this whole issue of intensity versus hard caps because I think that there's been much discussion in the public about how intensity will or will not lead to real reductions. I think that there are some who, maybe, don't understand how the intensity targets are reflective of the whole picture as opposed to the individual facilities that are covered under this act.

On a number of occasions I've indicated that there are approximately 100 facilities – actually there are about 104 or something like that – that are affected directly by this act. Mr. Speaker, what's important to note is that each of those 100 facilities will be affected by this requirement in a very significant way. They will be required to reduce their emissions by 12 per cent, and someone will say: well, aha, see it's intensity; it's not emissions.

The thing that we have to keep in mind when we're talking about one individual plant is that we've already established what their targets are. We already know what their emissions are through the mandatory recording. We know what their production has been over that same period of time. So we have an enumerator, we have a denominator, and we know what their intensity has been over that period of time. They are required to reduce that intensity, so simply reducing, turning down the production, won't do it because, presumably, if the technology hasn't changed, the same degree of CO₂ emissions will still come into play.

What intensity means is that from a global perspective we're not going to restrict them from expanding their facility, nor are we going to restrict someone else from opening a new facility. In fact, many of these facilities are under construction as we speak. What we are going to do is make it abundantly clear to industry that this government is taking climate change very seriously and that we expect them to begin the implementation of the necessary technology so that they can reduce their emissions by 12 per cent.

That's the essence of what this bill is all about. The 12 per cent, by the way, Mr. Speaker, is actually in the regulations that I tabled in conjunction with the bill. The bill itself puts the framework in place for regulations to set that target. So, as a result, as technology advances and as the implementation of that technology advances, it allows us some flexibility to change the targets to a more appropriate level over a period of time as it becomes clear that there may be opportunities for further reductions.

The other important thing to note is that the bill comes into force on July 1. Clearly, there is little likelihood that all of the industrial emitters will be able to change their production and install the necessary equipment or even find the necessary equipment so that they can meet the target by July 1. The government knows full well that in the vast majority of cases the options available to these industrial emitters will be severely limited, and most will be contributing to the technology fund that's provided for in the legislation.

That allows us to do a couple of things though, Mr. Speaker. It allows us to ensure that the dollars that are contributed to that technology fund remain in Alberta, that those dollars are committed to dealing with the necessary research, science, and technology so that we can see the development of some extremely promising science, that is just really on the cusp of reality, that will allow us in a significant way to manage CO₂ production over time. It will also make it clear to the public and to industry again that the government is serious.

Let's role the clock ahead and consider what the ramifications are. We won't have the final reconciliation done until sometime in early 2008, and that'll be for a six-month period. Some have suggested that we should have this effective January 1, 2008. Well, that being the case, then we don't do the reconciliation and have the initial impact until well into 2009. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think the public has made it abundantly clear that they expect this government to take action sooner than that. They expect to see the results of that action sooner than that, and that's the reason why the July 1 date was chosen.

The other point that I would like to make is that these 100 facilities represent about 70 per cent of the total industrial greenhouse emissions in the province. While this is a relatively small number of industrial emitters, they form a very significant portion of the greenhouse gas emissions in Alberta. So if we deal with this in a meaningful way, if we encourage the technology that needs to be in play so that we can indeed deal with the management of CO₂ and greenhouse gases, we have an opportunity to make a significant advancement on the climate change file.

That's not to say that this is the end of the government's commitment. As members well know, we have begun, as a matter of fact, an extensive consultation with Albertans to discuss the future of climate change and how we should be developing a climate change policy that not only deals with these 100 industrial emitters but also deals on a go-forward basis with the rest of us in our places in society that drive cars, heat our homes, drive trucks, and transport material across the province. There are, I think, ample opportunities for us to engage in a discussion with Albertans on how the government can continue to lead the charge and ensure that we are doing

everything that we possibly can to deal with issues related to greenhouse gas emissions.

The other point that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that much of this bill deals with the administrative authority that allows us to have the legislative authority and ability to actually enforce the standards. Rather than reinventing the wheel, the procedure that's used to a very, very large extent, with the exception of one or two words here or there that are appropriately changed, mirrors the legislative compliance mechanisms that we have in the other legislation that is the responsibility of Alberta environmental protection. So what we have done is create new legislation, recognizing that we need to have the same kind of compliance mechanisms to deal with greenhouse gases that we already have in place to deal with both particulate emissions when it comes to air standards and water standards and, in fact, contaminated land.

4:10

Frankly, I'm very excited, very proud to be standing here debating this legislation, the first of its kind in Canada. I encourage all members to support this legislation so we can get on with it, have this legislation passed and the necessary regulations in place so that we can meet that July 1 line in the sand that we've drawn for ourselves.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak to Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. The minister has rightly indicated that the government of Alberta wants to lead the charge. Unfortunately, they are way behind the parade and appear to be scrambling to catch up to both the science that has been there for decades calling for action and the public who are increasingly vocal, anxious, and angry that this government has been kowtowing to industry and other interests ahead of the long-term future of Albertans and our ethical responsibility on the planet.

A couple of comments in preamble. The timing of this is interesting when, clearly, this is an issue that affects all provinces and the national government is coming forward in the next weeks with a plan. So it's interesting that this government chooses to rush ahead of the federal government and put out something, anything it seems, that will give the impression of action when the federal position is the one that is going to take the lead and to which we must align ourselves and find some common ground and work together, not only that but, of course, the international community which we have already made a commitment to through the Kyoto protocol.

Other comments would have to do, I think, with just setting the stage for where this particular policy or bill fits into the whole picture of action on climate change. We talk about two general areas, Mr. Speaker. One is mitigation, or reducing the emissions. Clearly, that has to be a priority. But the second whole area of action has to be adaptation. That would address more the issues of how are we going to deal with drought, how are we going to deal with extreme weather events, new emerging infectious diseases, flooding, increased forest fires. We are paying millions of dollars every day now as a result of our inaction on climate change in this province and this country and across the world. So to imply that we are taking leadership is far from the truth when we as public are paying for the results not only of these weather events that are occurring at an increasing rate and the droughts that are increasing, but we are also paying the health costs which industry is imposing

on all of us as a result of the decline in air quality and the impacts on human health.

The second thing, I guess, that I want to emphasize is that this fits into the context of a global commitment to ethical action and leadership. Clearly, we need to fit in with other countries' and, in particular, our federal government's initiatives. The public are looking for leadership. They have been calling for leadership over the past decade, and what they have gotten is misinformation and deliberate avoidance of governance, which is to do the science, to assess the impacts, to make a cost-benefit analysis of the options, and to look seriously at what it's going to take to actually do our job as government and act in the public interest.

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, gross domestic product and jobs are not the sole measure of public interest. This is a continued problem with the way this government looks at and measures public interest. We're looking at questions of sustainable survival. We're looking at lives lost, livelihoods gone, flooding, and serious consequences on the prairies of drought and food production problems.

Again, I guess that I would have to emphasize, especially in Alberta, the great concern that Albertans have over water and the loss of glaciers. Clearly, rainfall and precipitation are going to change. We're going to have flooding in some areas and drought in others. There were expressions from the Athabasca region last night from constituents who are very worried not only about the quantity of water that's being taken out of the Athabasca but the quality as a result of our inaction on some of these issues.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, just as preamble, the whole question of intensity targets as opposed to absolute reductions. I would like to make an analogy of a family where the father drives a 10-year-old vehicle and gets about five to 10 miles per gallon, and because of his concern about improving the environment, he buys his son a small compact car. The compact car actually gets 20 miles per gallon, and he thinks he's doing something for climate change because he has gotten a little more efficient car for his family to add to his own emissions.

Another analogy might be a doctor who is dealing with a smoker. He tells the smoker that he can increase his smoking as long as he starts jogging. That will improve his health, as if there is no need to reduce and eliminate the smoking. So both analogies are to try to understand what we're doing when we talk about intensity rather than absolute reduction. We're talking about reducing the emissions out of this province. When are we going to see some action on that? That's what people are asking me.

I will say that the minister has indicated that even in July this year they're going to be demanding of industry \$15 a tonne from those large final emitters that emit over a hundred thousand tonnes per year. That's progress. I mean, I have to admit that he's taking leadership in the sense of getting payments and action by July of this year and ensuring that that's going into a fund that is going to invest in some new technology, carbon capture and storage, which should fundamentally, as a priority, go to coal-fired plants. They're the ones that are producing most of the emissions here. We should not be building a new coal-fired plant in this province without the capacity. How is it that we've now just approved a new coal-fired plant without that capacity – it's a mystery to me – if we're serious about climate change?

The other limited feature of this bill is that if some companies come on stream in 2000, they could wait nine years before they actually have to implement any emissions reductions. That hardly seems like strong leadership.

Again, it will be incremental increases in this province. If we adhere to the present plan, we will see a 50 per cent reduction in intensity, which means a 70 per cent increase in absolute emissions

in this province by 2020. This is not leadership. Albertans are very concerned about this issue, not to mention our people in the north of the country and around the world. How is it that countries like the U.K. and many in the European Union have already achieved Kyoto targets at 6 per cent below 1990 levels?

Mr. Bonko: Because they had leadership.

Dr. Swann: Well, that's the question. How is it that we can't have leadership in the richest, most technologically progressive country in the world? Well, again, as I mentioned in the House before, follow the money. We are addicted to the income from these industries just as much as the public is addicted to fossil fuels for all of our activities. We have to all be part of that solution, and fundamentally the people of Alberta want to see strong leadership on this issue. It has exceeded health care in interest and support in this country, and we don't see it being reflected in Bill 3.

4:20

A 2 per cent reduction annually in intensity for these newer emitters is hardly going to result in real progress in this province. It actually speaks to the whole question, I guess, of whether this government is serious about smart growth, about sustainable growth, about putting in place measures of sustainability as opposed to simply using the word sustainable when it's convenient, but where they're actually going to measure what sustainability means in terms of preserving and protecting social, environmental, and economic values.

I've talked about the vital difference between emission intensity and absolute emissions, and I think it would be nice to hear the minister speak to that issue. I indeed would be hopeful that the federal minister will be addressing the question of absolute reductions because that's clearly where we have to go, with progressive leadership on these. We have made commitments to the people of Alberta, to the international community to take this very seriously.

It appears from other discussions that this government in Alberta is not prepared to go further than this in terms of what comes out of the federal government. That would be profoundly disappointing to Albertans, if we're not willing to ramp up these guidelines and be consistent with tougher guidelines if they do appear. I sincerely hope that they do appear from the federal government in the next couple of weeks. In a spirit of co-operation we need to work together to solve this.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In summary, Mr. Speaker, some of the key questions I have and the reasons I can't support this bill are that there are no clear absolute targets and timelines. The cost per tonne of \$15 is way out of line with the rest of the world, where they're paying \$30 to \$35 per tonne and sending a clear message to industry about the importance of making the transition to cleaner technologies, to energy efficiency, and to investment in renewables, that could be doing a heck of a lot more than they are today in providing our energy needs in the province.

We also, I think, are being restricted in this bill to carbon trading within the province, which is a restriction that is not helpful to industry. That's not helpful to promote the interests of the whole country and to create a more competitive environment, which business appreciates.

From many of the industry people that have spoken to me, there's clearly a need for more fixed targets for them to do their business planning and to actually make a clear commitment within their

business planning and new developments, to know where to put their investments and where it's not going to be fruitful. There is a lack of clarity and a lack of consistency, and still many businesses and industrial developments are unsure where to go with this bill.

Clearly this bill needs to be integrated with other aspects of our land-use planning: agriculture, forests, and in particular water use and urban development. I hope that there will be more to come in relation to harmonizing those.

Mr. Speaker, I'll leave it there. Those are the key objections that I have and that I'm hearing from my colleagues and citizens. I'll look forward to further debate. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. If other members would like to participate, a little note would help.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a great deal of interest to make my initial comments in regard to the proposed Bill 3. At the outset I do want to express my appreciation to the hon. minister for, I guess, bringing forward this bill. This is an important debate that we have to have here in the province of Alberta. Certainly, I'm hoping as well that in the spirit of co-operation it gives us an opportunity to debate this issue specifically and the larger issue of climate change and pollution and development in this province, to seek a productive end for all members of our province.

Indeed, this issue of climate change has come to a focus point, not just in Alberta but around the world, I think probably at the very least because people can now start to see the effects of climate change with their own eyes. You know, this is a very powerful teacher, Mr. Speaker, when you can actually see things happening around you. Certainly, it is unsettling at best and potentially catastrophic at worst to watch the short-term effects of climate change and to anticipate what the long-term effects are as well.

So with this first round here, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to outline some of the, I guess, baseline information that I am drawing from so that we have a clear idea of where I will be going with this debate and with Bill 3 specifically. Hopefully, as I say, in the spirit of the Legislature as it is set up here, we can come to some sort of progressive conclusion with Bill 3 that will serve the purposes and the interests of all Albertans.

First of all, it's important to recognize that Canada produces 2 per cent of global GHG emissions, carbon emissions, but with only representation of .5 per cent of the population of the planet. According to a very recent study Alberta is producing 40 per cent of those emissions that Canada produces. So considering our smaller population, this gives us a very high percentage of actual carbon production. In fact, it means that Alberta, representing .005 per cent of the world population, produces almost 1 per cent of global GHG emissions.

You know, these same GHG emissions rose 40 per cent from 1990 to 2005, to 234 million tonnes from 168 million tonnes. At a 4 per cent growth rate, which we easily meet and probably exceed, Alberta's total carbon dioxide emissions will rise between 66 per cent and 83 per cent above 1990 levels even if intensity was reduced as this Bill 3 might be suggesting. So really these statistics make it clear that we are in fact one of the great centres of carbon dioxide production and pollution on the entire planet Earth.

Why is it important to make some changes? Of course, we know that global warming, which I would like to introduce and keep in the forefront of this debate, is in fact irrevocably changing the environment around us and of the planet as a whole: 19 of the 20 hottest years happened from 1980 onwards; 2005 and 2006 have been some of the hottest years in recorded history on the planet. We've

increased our contribution to this unfolding disaster by 40 per cent since 1990, just to keep the statistics in mind. Good environmental stewardship, Mr. Speaker, entails thinking globally and acting locally, and I'm hoping that we can start to show both of these things, which I think have been sadly lacking in the past 15 years or so.

What good are intensity levels, Mr. Speaker, if our total contribution to the problem actually increases? How does this address in any real way the first phase of the climate change bill when, obviously, total emissions have been instrumental in making the situation what it is? Thus, this issue needs to be addressed.

Allow me the indulgence of an analogy as well. My analogy is akin to an unhealthy person eating a hamburger. Let's make him "he." He states that he will reduce the fatty portion by 50 per cent and then simply just triples his intake. The person's intake may have gone down per serving, but his overall consumption actually increases, thereby negating any of the benefits of reducing the portion as such. [interjection] It's not a bad one. I'm sure we'll have more. Metaphors are something I'm strong at, for sure.

Mr. Speaker, we oppose this bill as it stands on the grounds that it does not address in any serious manner the issue of climate change, nor does it bring anything meaningful overall to the environmental agenda. Bringing in legislation that would start to roll back our GHG output until we are 6 per cent below the 1990 level I think would be a little more realistic. Start a long-term budgetary commitment to develop renewable, sustainable, and alternative energy generation and conservation technology. Three, look at ways of successfully implementing technology best habits and best practices, both vertically and horizontally across the economy, to cut our fossil fuel dependency, not just here in Alberta but in fact across the country and around the world. Even if we ignore the lack of openness and transparency when it comes to some things here in this province, let's look at what we do know in terms of climate change here in the province of Alberta. Okay?

4:30

Mr. Speaker, my main concern, then, is to put out some of these general issues. Certainly, I have a number of amendments that I would like to put forward in regard to Bill 3. I would just like to reiterate as well from the comments I made at the outset: I do commend and know that there is potential not only from the Ministry of Environment but from the opposite side to actually make a meaningful contribution here to climate change and to make a positive step in terms of legislation in regard to carbon dioxide emissions and climate change, from all sides of the House here. We'll certainly endeavour to work with everyone to create something that in fact reduces our carbon dioxide output in absolute terms and not just in terms of intensity.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) kicks in, so if there are questions that you would like to be directed to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, please advise.

There being none, then I'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to discuss Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. When I first heard that the government was in fact waking up from its long slumber with regard to climate change as well as the environment, I was a little excited when I did come across the bill. But then as I read a little bit and we were able to get some specifics, I was disappointed because of the fact that it's

time right now for Alberta, for Canada, indeed the entire world, for our governments to take a lead. We're failing here to take the necessary steps to really fight climate change. We're giving lip service again instead of real action.

There's an opportunity here for the government to talk to the industry and to the federal government, to come up with some real plans for real reductions in absolute emissions, what essentially Albertans and Canadians want. What we're receiving in this bill will do nothing to stop the greenhouse gas emissions from increasing while everyone else is prepared to take real changes.

Real governments take and show real leadership. We're stuck with the same old, tired government that hasn't really had a change of position from that of 2003: a 50 per cent reduction in emissions and intensity in 2020. The same goal was in 2003, so nothing has changed there. They will do absolutely nothing to stop the further effects of climate change. This government refuses to listen to science, to the people, and even to industry, who are prepared to take the necessary steps and changes here today for right now. They've said that, but we're still dragging our feet.

The industry, as I said, is prepared to move on climate change, and this government has stubbornly refused to deviate from their stance. This bill represents exactly the same old Tory government, stuck in the past and refusing to do what needs to be done, to take a bold leadership way. Instead, they're waiting for industry to show the way. What the world and what Alberta needs right now is its leadership, and it's vital, especially in Alberta. When our government is leading with this amount of money, we could certainly make impactful, meaningful changes not only for today but for future Albertans. We need leaders, not cheerleaders.

If we go back – and I digress a little bit. When you think about it, a lot of us have been in Alberta for a long time. Go back even 20, 30 years. What were we looking at? What's changed? What's noticeably changed? Well, our weather. If we just talk about our weather, we no longer get the huge amounts of snow that we once did. That's an automatic, definite change that we see. Maybe in the outlying areas they've got a little bit more. But over the past 20 years there's been a significant increase in the amount of changes that have been happening. As well, the summers used to be hot. They used to be long. They've been changing. Last year may be an exception. It was a nice change, but again it's changed over the last 20 years.

As a youngster I remember going up to the Columbia Icefields with my grandparents and walking on those glaciers there, on the icefields, as I've said. I've gone back with my kids just a few years ago, and they've receded a whole 200, 300 metres. That's a couple of blocks, if we want to just put it into context there. They're no longer the same ice that I stepped on as a kid. It's gone back, way, way back, and it's receded. Now, you know, kids today, what are they going to see 20 years from now? They're going to see it receding even further. This is a huge step. This is a visual step. They've been marking this decline of the glaciers, these icefields, for over 100 years. They can see it. They've measured it in sticks and time and actual dates recorded with pictures as to what has gone. That, in a nutshell, should be enough, especially out in the rural areas, out in the outlying areas, that these areas are.

Maybe it doesn't matter to people like the Member for West Yellowhead. His area is up towards that area. I've not heard him say anything. He usually just claps when we talk about coal and everything because he's so excited to have this spewing into the atmosphere, but not about real change and real effective change that's out in his area.

We're talking about, like I said, the rivers, the lakes, the streams. These are the things that matter to the kids, the same things that I

had as a young child, the same things that I want for my children and for my grandchildren, for all children of Alberta. Perhaps that's not what the other side wants, but that's exactly what I want: something that is going to be able to last, a legacy of a lifetime.

Our natural areas are something that we should be able to embrace. It's a natural tourist draw. We get thousands upon hundreds of thousands coming up to our mountains, to the Jasper and Banff areas to see the scenic areas where all of our water is derived from, which is the mountains. But that's slowly, slowly receding due, it's obvious, to climate change.

So I can't support it as it is right now. I know that we are going to be putting through some amendments. I look forward to those, and I look forward to the debate from the other side as we try and, again, achieve something for everybody, which is a meaningful climate change bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) kicks in. If there are questions to be directed to the hon. member.

Shall I call on the hon. Minister of Environment to close the debate? I have no further speakers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, then.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 3 in its second reading, the climate change act. The issue of climate change is an extremely important issue. It's grown in significance over the last several years, especially since the controversy over the science of climate change died down. I remember the debate on the Kyoto treaty and the decision by the federal government of that time to sign onto this international treaty, control of GHGs into the atmosphere, and acceptance of the challenge set before the signatory countries with respect to the absolute reductions in the GHGs, as articulated in the Kyoto agreement. I remember that the government of Alberta, under the leadership of Premier Klein at the time, was dead set to oppose the implementation of Kyoto targets and promised to bring in what they call made-in-Alberta policies and programs impacting climate change.

Nothing has happened since, but at least one thing that's been settled since that time is the organized attempt on the part of those who did not favour taking any action on the climate change issue to challenge fundamentally the integrity of the science of climate change. Thankfully, that debate is now over, and there's absolutely overwhelming agreement everywhere, globally, on the integrity of the climate science and what it's telling us needs to be done if we are not to be facing extremely serious risks with respect to future economic prosperity.

More than that, the negative impacts of climate change on our quality of life, including the availability of fresh water, the future of our lakes and rivers, and the fact of the rapid disappearance, or recession, if you wish, of our glacier formations in the Rockies suggest a kind of future which looks bleak unless we take determined, effective action to get a handle on the forces that are leading to climate change. Human activity, particularly the pumping of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, is seen as the major cause of global warming and climate change.

4:40

This bill, Mr. Speaker, is a belated attempt on the part of this government to enter the scene and claim that this government is ready to take action on climate change. To do that, the bill suggests that this government is going to focus on controlling emission intensity rather than absolute emissions as such. The problem with this fancy term, emissions intensity, is that it simply focuses on

certain reductions, a percentage reduction, 12 per cent at the moment, in the emissions per unit of energy produced. We know that the tar sands are a huge operation in this province, and the millions of barrels of oil that are extracted from the tar sands continue to grow by leaps and bounds. So the volume of production is going up exponentially, and a 12 per cent reduction in the intensity of production per unit is not going to take us even close to achieving in the short to medium run any absolute reductions.

This government has not put forward a comprehensive plan of which this particular act could be seen as a first, important, and immediate action. It vaguely promises to bring in some other measures later on, but we don't know how this particular act forms a plan of a comprehensive strategy on the part of the government of Alberta to move towards meeting Kyoto targets, which are very, very modest, Mr. Speaker. If we become partners in a national effort and a global effort to at least achieve the minimalist GHG control standards set forth in the Kyoto agreement, we will then be among those who can work actively to convince many other countries, developing countries such as China and India, to come on board later on, following, say, 2012 and the years immediately following that. Unless we take and accept our responsibility, do our part in moving countries and societies around the globe to move towards absolute reductions, I think we are risking not only instability in the climate globally, but we are risking our own prosperity, risking our own quality of life in the years to come.

Mr. Speaker, in a book just published by Nicholas Stern on the economics of global warming – and I would certainly encourage my colleagues in the House to look at what this book has to say. I heard someone talk about this book a couple of weeks ago and then requested our Legislature Library to order this book for our use. The book is around now. Presently I have it. I'm happy to return it quickly to the Legislature so that my colleagues in the House can look at this.

This serious work of scholarship, Mr. Speaker, is an eye-opener. It does two things. On the one hand, it draws attention to the massive risks that are ahead of us if we don't do anything, if we continue to talk in a convoluted way about reducing greenhouse gas emissions per unit of energy produced, the carbon-based energy produced, and deliberately turn attention away from the need to in fact achieve absolute reductions between now and 2050.

If climate change continues apace in the direction in which it has been going for the last several decades now – and particularly the last decade is very, very important in setting the pattern of change in climate – we risk putting the lives of hundreds of millions of people at risk across the globe from violent changes in weather, which lead to flooding in some places, drought in other places, jeopardizing the places where hundreds of millions of people now live across the globe. They will not have that space available to them to live. They'll be made homeless. They'll be rendered jobless and destitute.

If we wait another 30 years, by 2080 things will get worse. They'll begin to affect all of us, regardless of where we live on the globe, in ways which Nicholas Stern says should be an eye-opener for us. We should do everything that we can to stem the trends effectively enough; that is, achieve absolute reductions in a systematic way over the next 30 to 50 years to avoid that catastrophic future that the science of global warming warns us about and that is very carefully elaborated and analyzed by Mr. Stern in that book that I just mentioned.

So this bill before us, Mr. Speaker, Bill 3, climate change act, does not and will not lead us in the direction of joining those governments and those forces and those societies which are finding ways and are willing and determined to take action to move towards

absolute reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere in a timely fashion.

We know that the European Union is moving in that direction. They are in fact going to call on all of their members to undertake programs and policies that achieve that direction. I think we, as the beneficiaries and as the trustees of this important resource for our own children and their children, have also to take action. This bill, I think, falls short, Mr. Speaker, of moving us in that direction.

So it's a matter of concern. Albertans are watching us. They want us to take action. They know that we have to, what's called, balance economic considerations with our concern about protecting our environment from future harm because of climate change. But it's the issue of balance. What is the right balance? If you read Nicholas Stern's book, then you begin to look at the whole issue of balance in a very different way.

It would be very short-sighted of us to ignore the consequences of global warming if absolute reductions are not achieved within an acceptable time frame, the next 20 to 30 years. In order to get there, we have to start now. If we don't, then the economic prosperity that is claimed to be at stake if we take serious action now on climate change will become, I think, a story that we don't want visited upon us later on. Unless we take seriously the issue of climate change, the chances of risking our future are so high that we ought to look at the question of balance between our economic future and our ability to control climate change in a different way.

4:50

The very definition of balance must change. There are huge benefits to be had from developing alternative technologies, to begin to develop alternative sources of energy that will be not only not harmful to the climate and will not further accelerate the negative changes that are taking place but, in fact, will help us both become more prosperous and achieve reductions in global warming that will protect us and others around the globe equally. It's time, Mr. Speaker, that we moved away from our attachment to this language of reduction in intensity to making clear and unequivocal commitments to absolute reductions in the longer haul.

This is not a political issue. This is an issue that's global in nature, and this is where the local and the global intersect and meet in a very dramatic way. What happens elsewhere will have consequences for us. Today it may be other places that will be negatively affected, but 20 years from now we may be the ones who become, in fact, the victims of the change that we now are unwilling to see as upon us and take effective action on. Effective action can be taken, and Stern, I think, in a very detailed way tells us what actions we can take without harming necessarily either our quality of life or our current or future prosperity. There are huge opportunities, particularly for advanced societies like Canada, where we, I think, have the opportunity to act on it.

I think, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. The time has gone.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to participate in the debate at second reading this afternoon of Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. I, certainly, had a good opportunity to look at this legislation first hand at Government House on March 8. I was quite surprised there to go through the press release and then a copy of the specified gas emitters' regulation. It was the first time that I had been involved in a news conference on legislation, on a bill, where the printed regulation was the focus. No one seemed to notice there that we were looking at the

regulation and not the statute itself. I found this ironic and interesting at the same time.

This is the first carbon tax in Canada, and it's historic legislation. Some would say: well, we should call it a CO₂ tax. I could certainly live with a CO₂ tax or a carbon tax, but it is the first attempt at a carbon tax in this province. What we do with the money that is raised from this tax is also an interesting discussion.

I think at first glance that when we look at making changes to CO₂ emissions in this province, we have to give this bill consideration. I don't know how serious consideration, but we certainly have to give it consideration, as these changes in Bill 3 are designed to introduce a full range of compliance options with an appeals process supported by audit and investigative powers.

Perhaps the hon. Minister of Environment can answer these questions, or we can get answers in committee. I'm going to start with the regulation, not the bill, because I have some questions before we get to committee, and hopefully the hon. minister can provide answers. Now, when we're talking in the regulation about industrial process emissions, we need a clarification on this. I'm not trying to confuse anyone here, but total direct emissions minus industrial process emissions equal actual emissions intensity, and there's a definition in the regulations on actual emissions intensity, but it's important that we get a handle on what is an industrial process emission. There's a definition of this here under the letter (n) in the definition portion of the regulation, but I think we need this to be explained further.

Now, when we look at this, Mr. Speaker, it indicates in this regulation that industrial process emissions means direct emissions from an industrial process involving chemical reactions other than combustion and where the primary purpose of the industrial process is not energy production. So does this include cokers and reactors in a process stream? Where do they fit into all this? Does this exclude pulp mills, petrochemical plants, fertilizer plants, industrial feedlots? What exactly is the meaning of this? As I understood it at the press conference, only 70 per cent of Alberta's industrial emissions were represented by this legislation. Does that definition exclude the other 30 per cent? Again, what are we going to do with the other 30 per cent of these industrial emitters?

We all know that there was a significant royalty holiday in the oil sands projects. One of their allowed costs was equipment or capital that was employed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Certainly, there has been with some projects a reduction in their intensity, but I don't know how much money has been spent in this manner by the oil sands project owners. I would be curious if the hon. minister could provide an answer to that.

I'm going to have a lot of questions in committee on this because I have been reviewing it and reviewing it with a significant amount of interest, but with Bill 3, before we get to committee, section 8 is being repealed, and the following is being substituted.

Agreements re: interjurisdictional co-operation

8 The Minister may not enter into any agreement under the Government Organization Act providing for co-operative, complementary or compatible actions with other jurisdictions in respect of specified gas emissions unless the agreement is consistent with this Act and the specified gas emission target for Alberta established by section 3(1).

This is interesting. Why is it necessary?

Now, also we heard – and the press reported on this – that there were significant penalties under section 45 of Bill 3. You know, in the case of a corporation we're looking at a fine of not more than a million dollars. In the case of an individual, a hundred grand or imprisonment for two years or both a fine and imprisonment. Now, if you were guilty of an offence under section 44, there's also a

\$50,000 fine or in the case of a corporation a fine of half a million dollars.

5:00

So how would all those penalties work whenever we have administrative penalties also to be used? I think that if my interpretation of this is correct, the administrative penalties are going to be subject to the regulations, and everything seems to be subject to the regulations. But surely there is an answer available. If the hon. minister could provide it to the House in the course of debate before we get to committee, I would be very grateful.

Now, there is a lot to discuss in this bill, but certainly the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has been consistent in bringing up the need for CO₂ sequestration. The Premier, the current Premier, on March 8 indicated at that press conference that the enhanced oil recovery CO₂ sequestration pilot project that was going on down by Joffre had increased the flow rates on the oil wells east of Joffre by 18 per cent, which is significant. But that's pure CO₂ coming off the industrial process stream at Joffre, and it's not the capture and compression of a CO₂ gas stream from many different sources.

Now, there's talk about the pipeline that is to be built. CERI has already done some research on that. They've crunched some numbers that are a little older than this legislation, two or three years. The Canadian Energy Research Institute indicated that a 20-inch line filled with liquid CO₂ at the pressure of 1,000 psi would cost roughly about \$400 million to construct from Fort McMurray down to some of the mature oil fields surrounding the Edmonton area. There was talk that this had skyrocketed in price to \$1.4 billion. Certainly, there seemed to be excitement, and I was glad to see the federal government get excited about this project because we on this side of the House have been following the research done in other jurisdictions on CO₂ capture and storage, or sequestration, for a number of years now. I was pleased to see that the federal government and this government are at least looking into that.

I can understand why we need to study this issue, but I hope we're not spending money on research projects that are ongoing and some of which have been completed. Certainly, I think we have the same sort of geology in the western sedimentary basin as the Williston basin, and there in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, is the CO₂ monitoring and storage project that has been going on since 1999. The Alberta Research Council has been involved in this. Saskatchewan Industry and Resources is involved. EnCana, of course, is involved. The University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, the Geological Survey of Canada, and the Colorado School of Mines are also involved in it. There are quite a few people. Industry is well represented in this endeavour by EnCana, of course, by SaskPower and Nexen, Chevron, Texaco. TransAlta Utilities is also involved. Of course, the CEO, I believe, of TransAlta Utilities, Mr. Snyder, is involved in this research project that is to go on. But the results from this Weyburn project that are out are significant.

I would like to know why we have to proceed with the current study when so much work, it's apparent to me, has already been done on our behalf, and certainly with the Alberta Research Council involved, surely this government is aware of the study and the results that have come in the last six years. It seems to be a very, very good idea to sequester carbon. If it's good enough in Weyburn, I think we have the same sort of geology here in Alberta.

Now, I'm not going to go through this project in a great deal of detail, but I would urge all hon. members to have a look at this. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I believe I'll table this report for the information of all members here tomorrow. In the province of Saskatchewan, where this project is going on, this is quite interesting.

The Province of Saskatchewan is unusual in that it has long required operators to provide records of operational and well histories and the

Province has archived roughly 600 cores from the field as well as all the geophysical logs and other relevant information. All this data was made available to researchers and it provided a thorough historical dataset in addition to the pre-injection baseline dataset.

This is to allow accurate research to be done in this Weyburn oil field as far as CO₂ injection.

The CO₂ enhanced oil recovery has contributed – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview will be very interested to know this. Since they started injecting CO₂ into the mature oil field in Weyburn, they have increased production by 5,000 barrels per day. That's a significant increase in production, Mr. Speaker.

At this time . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Your speaking time is over, hon. member.

Now we have to deal with the question-and-answer and comment period. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on the question-and-answer portion?

Mr. R. Miller: Yes, Mr. Speaker. My question is whether or not the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would like to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Well, the speaking time elapsed. We heard the clock, and the words were not uttered, so I'll recognize another member. If another member wants to participate, the other member can stand up and adjourn the debate. Then we'll go on, and everything will work really well.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, would you like to participate in the question portion or in the debate portion?

Mr. R. Miller: In the debate portion.

The Speaker: Sorry. First of all, anybody else want to question or comment?

Then, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, you're recognized to participate.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 1 Lobbyists Act (continued)

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mr. Stelmach]

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. The hon. leader will be restricted to 90 minutes.

Dr. Taft: Aw, shucks. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will restrain myself. I will restrain myself. [interjections] Oh, I'm sorry to disappoint everybody.

It's a privilege to rise and debate what is a very important bill, and the government and the Premier acknowledge the importance of this bill by making it Bill 1, their flagship bill. I imagine it will get farther than the loyal opposition's flagship bill got, Mr. Speaker, which was voted down in second reading at the first opportunity. However, I imagine this bill will move forward, and that's fine. We think it's a step in the right direction. You can be sure that we'll be bringing forward a number of amendments before this debate is over.

5:10

There's a long history to Bill 1. I think it might be worth

beginning by just making everybody aware of where the term "lobbyist" comes from. At least my understanding is that if you go back through the history books and look at the operation of the British Parliament, that fabulous building at Westminster, when people wanted to influence government – in fact, this would even predate the building at Westminster – they would linger about in the lobby of the building trying to capture the Members of Parliament at the time on their way into Parliament. They would corral them and say: well, will you please do this or will you please do that or channel money this way or pass this legislation that way? That was a normal part of business, and because it was all done in the lobby of the buildings, they were called lobbyists, and that's how we end up with the term "lobbyist." So a little bit of interesting background.

The history of this particular bill is also pretty long although it doesn't go back centuries. It goes back over a decade. I think it's worth reviewing this legislation because I do believe that if this legislation were brought forward 10 or 15 years ago, it would be truly pioneering legislation, but having been brought forward now, it's really, as it stands, an effort to catch up to most of the rest of the country. And catch up we should, but I'd like us to do better than that. I'd like, before this bill is finished in this Assembly, for Alberta to be leading the country in handling its lobbyists.

An important year in this Assembly was 1996 because of the tabling of the so-called Tupper report, which was commissioned in response to a conflicts of interest scandal concerning the Multi-Corp affair. The actual title of the report is Integrity in Government in Alberta: Towards the Twenty First Century, Report of the Conflicts of Interest Act Review Panel. It was chaired by Allan Tupper, a well-known political scientist. Two other members were on it, Patricia Newman and Francis Saville. It was submitted in January 1996, and among its key recommendations was a lobbyist registry. That's 11 years ago now almost exactly.

That recommendation was taken very seriously by the Official Opposition, so that very spring a member of a previous Liberal caucus introduced the Lobbyists Registration Act, Bill 223. Of course, it was a private member's bill, Mr. Speaker, and as happens with so many private members' bills no matter how good they are, it got voted down at the first opportunity. Interestingly, though, the following year a government member introduced a private member's act also proposing a lobbyist registry. In 1997 the Lobbyists Registration Act was introduced as Bill 212. Sadly, it met the fate of most private members' bills and was voted down immediately as well.

The years ticked by. I think there were other efforts. The Member for Edmonton-Gold-Bar reintroduced the bill.

An Hon. Member: How come private members' bills are always voted down?

The Speaker: The hon. leader has the floor.

Dr. Taft: Sorry. I'm getting questioned.

The Speaker: Sorry. There are no questions. The hon. member has the floor. Please proceed.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So by 2001, after I think at least one other attempt to introduce a lobbyist registry through a private member's act was voted down, there was a provincial review. One thing led to the next, and ultimately another committee was struck, chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. I must say that all reports are that that member did a very effective job of chairing the committee and

leading a team and producing a good report, so my congratulations to the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill and to all the other members of that committee.

Anyway, that report was quite comprehensive, and among other things it recommended, once again, a lobbyist registry. Every time the idea of a lobbyist registry has been raised in this Assembly, up until this spring it's been mocked. I remember the previous Premier doing his fair share of mocking and accusing the opposition of lobbying for a lobbyist registry and things like that. I'm sure that the Speaker remembers those kinds of debates as well. However, we finally have a breakthrough here, and we have a proposed Lobbyists Act. It is a step in the right direction.

I've sometimes thought that we could call it the Rod Love act or something like that because there are a number of very specific concerns stemming from some actions in the last number of years by certain individuals closely connected to the governing party, among them the former Premier's chief of staff, in fact, two chiefs of staff of the former Premier, and their actions moving back and forth between the Premier's office and the private sector in getting hired. The case, for example, of Peter Elzinga being hired by a major oil company to lobby on their behalf to get a change in the royalty scheme or the case of Rod Love, for example, being hired by a consortium to lobby on behalf of a railroad to Fort McMurray.

People quite rightly raised a lot of concerns about those circumstances and the fact that there was no systematic way of knowing who was being paid how much, by whom, to speak with which cabinet minister. The public has a right to know, Mr. Speaker. The public has a right to understand who is lobbying which member of government on which topic on whose behalf, and that's what a lobbyist registry is about.

The effect of this bill or the intent of this bill I think, as with most lobbyist acts, is to draw a clearer line between the public interest and the private interest, and I'm all in favour of that. To the extent that this bill does that, I think it's a good idea. We want to tighten it up. But clearly there are conflicts of interest when people attempt to influence the decisions of government in such a way that may lead to their private enrichment or their private benefit, and that leads into a murky situation of real problems. As MLAs all of us need to work hard to improve public confidence in the actions of our Assembly, in the actions of our office, and I think a lobbyist registry will do that sort of thing.

I myself have wondered recently about what kind of lobbying activities are going on. I noticed, for example, a sudden surge of interest in nuclear power in Alberta, particularly among a number of government members. I found myself wondering: well, who's lobbying the government on behalf of the nuclear industry? I have no way of finding out. With a lobbyist registry I hope that we'll find out. Likewise with private health care: the surge of interest from time to time in Alberta in private health care, undoubtedly fuelled by lobbying on the part of private health industry interests. But the public has no knowledge, no capacity, no tools to find out who's doing the lobbying and on whose behalf. Similarly with P3s. And, of course, the water transfer that we've been debating so heatedly in this Assembly undoubtedly has lobbyists connected to it. In fact, I know that various members of this cabinet were well briefed on the project last summer, even earlier. Well, let's find out who did the briefing and what the outcome was there.

So that's some of the background. To the extent that the bill will make public things that are wanted to be kept private but should not be private, I think that's a good idea.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, I think it's worth noting that there are already lobbyist registries in many jurisdictions in Canada. In fact, the

federal Lobbyists Registration Act goes back two decades. It goes back to the 1980s, and it has been amended and tightened several times since then. Ontario has had a lobbyist registration act since 1998, Nova Scotia and British Columbia since 2001, Quebec since 2002, and Newfoundland and Labrador since 2005. So you can see here that despite the claims of this government that this is somehow the first in Canada, in fact, we are trailing behind.

Now, as to some of the specifics, Mr. Speaker, I think we might want to move to tighten up some of the provisions around definitions of lobbyists, the nature of their activity, exactly when somebody is considered a lobbyist and when they're considered a contractor, and if there's too much room to manoeuvre around those issues. The fact that a person might be able to switch from being a lobbyist to being a contractor with very little effort at all and sort of get around some of the rules is going to be a concern for us. But, as I say, in principle for our opposition a lobbyist registry is something that we've long called for. We'll work with the government and look forward to perhaps some constructive co-operation around bringing in some amendments to this bill and look forward to strengthening the very foundations of democracy in this province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will move adjournment on Bill 1. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, your guidance: are we still on Bill 1?

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, there was a motion to adjourn. The chair called for the vote on the motion to adjourn. There was a voice call, and it sounded to the chair like the motion was carried. So we've finished with this business, hon. member. Okay. Would the members give unanimous consent for the chair to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to participate in second reading on this bill?

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Sorry. We're back to where we were. The next order of business.

head: **Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Ducharme moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 15: Mr. Oberle]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, you've not participated yet?

Mr. R. Miller: On the throne speech response, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. R. Miller: No.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. R. Miller: I will. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my

pleasure to have the opportunity to rise this afternoon and respond to the throne speech delivered by the new Premier of Alberta on the 7th of March.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge once again the confidence that the residents of Edmonton-Rutherford have placed in me as their MLA, the continued support that they express through my office for the work that myself and the members of the Official Opposition are doing. I would just like to say that I am incredibly humbled at having the opportunity to serve the nearly 35,000 residents of Edmonton-Rutherford and represent them to the government through this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, in listening to other members of this House give their responses to the throne speech over the last couple of weeks, it's been interesting to me once again – and I say once again because it seems that history does repeat itself – to listen to members of the government when they respond to the throne speech. If you were to take their word, you would think that the world is all rosy and everything is wonderful and Alberta is heaven on earth. Then you listen to members from the NDP opposition, and you would think that the sky is falling and that Alberta is just about the worst place in the world to live and nothing is going well and everybody is suffering.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, you will know that the Official Opposition has a view of the world that I think is a little more in alignment with reality, and that is that Alberta is definitely the best place in the country to live. There is no question about that. But the reality is that with the boom and with all of the successes that we're enjoying and with all of the wealth and prosperity that is evident in this province right now comes an awful lot of responsibility, an awful lot of challenges, and an awful lot of difficulty and hardship for those that for whatever reason don't find themselves being brought along with that success and prosperity.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

So this is a much more realistic view of the world, and I would like to reflect some of that in my comments this afternoon. Yes, things are booming, and, yes, there are a lot of people that are doing very well, but, yes, Mr. Speaker, there are also a lot of people, including a lot of people in Edmonton-Rutherford, that are not enjoying all that this current economic boom can and should bring to them.

Now, I'm going to just sort of flip through the fancy book. I don't know how much it cost to print this Speech from the Throne.

An Hon. Member: What colour is it?

Mr. R. Miller: I have a member asking me what colour it is. Surprisingly, it's orange and blue, Mr. Speaker. I do find that a little ironic for reasons that I'm not going to necessarily go into right now.

My first comment really would be under the heading Acting on Albertans' Priorities. The government talks about wanting to act on Albertans' priorities, and they trot out the five platforms that we've come to know so well. I'm not even going to repeat them because, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I'm starting to get sick and tired of hearing them. This is not rocket science to trot out these five platforms that the government trots out. I understand that they now have banners they have put up at every press conference that talks about these five things. Well, you know what? It's motherhood and apple pie. Of course, we want to improve Albertans' quality of life. Isn't that what we're all here for? Did we need a couple of former newspaper columnists to dream this up, Mr. Speaker, that we wanted to improve Albertans' quality of life? Of course not. That is

absolutely what every member of this House is here for, and if it's not, then it should be.

The next heading in the document talks about Governing with Integrity and Transparency. I think the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition touched on that a minute ago. You know, certainly, as he pointed out, these are lofty goals that the Official Opposition has been pushing for for years in this province. This is not something new. This is not something innovative. In fact, it's really an example of the government finally – finally – recognizing what almost every other jurisdiction in North America has recognized over the last number of years. We're slowly but surely dragging ourselves into the 21st century.

You know, there's a hole in that particular Bill 1 that was being discussed a minute ago that's big enough that you could literally drive a truck through it. That is the section that deals with ministers contacting stakeholders and then not having to register as lobbyists. Now, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't take a lot of brains to figure out that if a minister really wants to circumvent the process and protect a stakeholder, all he has to do is go through his phone book and phone all of these various stakeholders and tell them: I want a meeting with you. Now suddenly they don't have to register as lobbyists. I'll speak more on it when I have the opportunity to speak to that bill, but clearly there was a major problem with that bill right from the start. Here we are, you know, in the early days of a new administration that's talking about integrity and transparency, and we continue to see examples of how that is not taking place.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon in question period I raised questions about Bill 20, that was passed last year in this House, which was extremely regressive in terms of allowing openness and transparency. The Premier played dodge ball with me and wouldn't even answer the questions that we were asking. So we've got a long, long way to go before we're really, truly addressing the issues of integrity and transparency.

Mr. Speaker, Managing Growth Pressures is the next subtitle here, and this is one that I'm going to spend some time talking about because it's probably the most important section in this document that the government produced and probably the one that I'm hearing most about in my constituency office from the residents of Edmonton-Rutherford. Particular in that is the issue around housing affordability.

I've mentioned it before. I come from a background of small business. I have to tell you that I find it very frustrating serving in government now, the pace at which things move even when there is a crisis. I have to say, you know, that when I was first elected two and a half years ago, we heard mostly in the constituency office about issues of WCB claims. We heard a lot about health care, particularly when the third-way debates were coming up – we still do – had a fair amount of correspondence over same-sex marriage, lots of talk about education, but, Mr. Speaker, about a year and a half ago we started getting calls into the office about housing affordability.

You know, when I was in business, if I had a call and it identified a problem and then I had another call and it identified the same problem and soon there was a pattern, Mr. Speaker, I would pick up the phone, and I'd call the plant manager. I'd say: "There's a problem here. We've got to fix this." We would put all of our resources into it, and within a short period of time it would be fixed, but unfortunately that's not the way things work with this government.

A year and a half ago we started hearing about the problems around housing affordability and some absolutely horrendous stories – and I'll touch on a few in a minute – just horrendous stories about

real people, real lives, and I know that this isn't just happening in Edmonton-Rutherford. I know that this is happening across the province, Mr. Speaker.

So a year and a half ago we started hearing about it, and then as we went through the summer, the calls became more frequent, the examples were much more serious, much more heart wrenching, and quite clearly happening all over the place. Then we move into the fall, and the Conservative Party has their leadership race under way. Suddenly they're all talking about it, and it's become an issue. Then they elected a new Premier, and he says that in 45 days he's going to establish this commission and that within 45 days they're going to report. Great.

Now we've got the report. It's in the minister's hands, and he's saying that it's going to be well into May before we see responses from the government on this. That doesn't even mean, Mr. Speaker, that we'll have action. It just means that the government is going to announce what their responses to the recommendations are.

By the time we get to some real, concrete action addressing this very, very serious issue, we're probably looking at two years having passed from the time that it first became evident in the constituency offices that citizens of this province were having real difficulty finding housing that was affordable to them. Two years, Mr. Speaker. That is just absolutely unacceptable when I know that day after day every one of us is having calls into our offices concerning this issue. Why it should take two years to get concrete action on an issue that is so terribly important I don't understand, and I do find it frustrating as somebody who comes from a business background, where you can pick up the phone and make things happen.

I want to give a couple of examples of calls that we've had in our office that deal with this. One was from a lady who's been diagnosed with a progressive illness, and very rapidly she's losing her health. She had wanted to move into some sort of assisted living that would accommodate her as her health deteriorates. Unfortunately, as is the case not just across Edmonton but across the province, there was a long waiting list to get into this particular housing that would support her in that way. Mr. Speaker, not only was there a long waiting list, approximately two years to get her into there, but they wouldn't even allow her to put her name on the waiting list at this point because her health isn't bad enough. They literally told her that unless she walks with a cane or is in a wheelchair, she cannot put her name on the waiting list.

Now, she's got all sorts of evidence from every one of her doctors, including evidence from her employers, just showing how rapidly things are progressing, and she will very soon, within a matter of months probably, be walking either with a cane or a wheelchair. But she can't have her name even put on that waiting list until such time as she is. So there's something wrong with a system that doesn't address that.

As a result of the fact that she can't move into assisted housing that will accommodate her, she's going to have to make a move now and then probably a year or so down the road, as she becomes more and more debilitated, another move. So we've got a situation of a relatively young woman who's struggling with all of the issues that come with facing this illness, and now she's going to be forced to uproot herself not just once but twice. Lord knows where she'll be moving to.

One of the issues that was illustrated – and I'm sure that it's going to affect this lady but was illustrated by another lady that came into the office as well – is the dramatic increases in rent, which most of us, I think, are recognizing as rent gouging because landlords in so many cases are asking for anywhere from 25 to 50 per cent, sometimes even more, in terms of increases over the period of a year. I've had two instances now, this other lady that I was referring

to a minute ago and now another one that was in the office last week, that are being forced to move and not just forced to move into another accommodation but, because of the dramatically increasing rents, being forced to move into another accommodation literally miles away from where they are now. You're doing exactly what my colleague from Edmonton-Decore just mentioned. You're moving them away from family and friends. They're finding that they have to move away from all of the support services that they've built up over the years.

The second lady that I'm referring to now is a senior. She's divorced and has been living on her own in the same apartment complex for over 20 years. She's now faced with the situation of having to move away from the neighbourhood that she's come to know, away from the friends that she's developed, away from the church that supports her, away from the social agencies that have supported her, and, you know, that's a recipe for disaster. This is going to be a big, big problem. As I say, just two examples in my constituency. I've had many others, and as I'm speaking, people around me are saying that they've had similar calls into their offices. So this is an issue that needs to be addressed, and it needs to be addressed before May. It needs to be addressed before April. We need immediate action to help these people.

Mr. Speaker, I see that I'm fast running out of time. I do want to touch on a couple of other things that are really important to the residents of Edmonton-Rutherford, and they do fall under managing growth pressures as well.

Certainly, the 23rd Avenue interchange at Calgary Trail, which I knew in 2004 was going to end up being an election issue – I was told that it wouldn't be. Sure enough, it did because of the way that the funding came down to municipalities from the government and the fact that Edmonton received . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, were you signalling me that you wanted to adjourn debate?

Mr. R. Miller: I was signalling you that I would like to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 Lobbyists Act (continued)

[Adjourned debate March 20: Dr. Taft]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on Bill 1, the government's flagship bill, which addresses a long-standing concern among Albertans and among my constituents in Edmonton-Strathcona. Over the last 10 years that I've served in this Assembly, this is an issue that has come and gone without any action being taken. They've taken a long time to get here.

5:40

We have a long way to go in putting in place legislation, making changes in policy, amending existing legislation to restore the confidence of Albertans in the integrity of the manner in which we do our business in this House and in this government in the province of Alberta. This bill is certainly one step in that direction. It's a step in the right direction, but we want to make sure, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans expect us to make sure and my constituents would want me to make sure that we take our time and pay attention to the details of this bill so that we get it right. Late but right.

We are followers in this respect as a province. Other jurisdictions, provinces, the federal government have had legislation speaking to this issue in place for years. We need to learn something from a sort of comparative study of those pieces of legislation and the practices that have arisen from that to make sure that our bill becomes, then, stronger as a result of the fact that we can benefit from and should benefit from looking at this experience in other provincial jurisdictions in the country.

Mr. Speaker, I've been following the activities of Public Interest Alberta, an organization which is holding hearings around the province on the issue of democracy in the province. It's seeking broad-based public input into what Albertans would like to see change in in this province to strengthen democratic decision-making, to achieve transparency in the way decisions are made in public forums such as this one, or in the government, and seeking participation by Albertans in sort of determining the future course of action which all of us collectively need to take to roll back the big tide of cynicism that has gripped Albertans over some time. This is reflected in the declining voter participation in our provincial elections over the last 15, 20 years. We all, I'm sure, are concerned about this continuing decline in the number of Albertans who turn up at the polls to vote when they get a chance every three or four years to express their verdict.

So this bill, Lobbyists Act, Bill 1, I think is a bill that is attracting lots of attention of Albertans. I was in Lethbridge the weekend before last weekend, about 10 days ago, Mr. Speaker, at one of these public forums held by Public Interest Alberta. There were about 45 people who took part in this forum. A lobbyists registry and the prospect of a piece of legislation in this province coming into being was greeted with high expectations and some gratification. At last there is action on the horizon, in the process being taken by this House to enact a law that will regulate lobbyist activities in this province, that will make public for the first time who is a lobbyist, whom lobbyists are lobbying and for what purpose.

The bill clearly is a first attempt at this. So there'll be changes that we'll be seeking in the bill both in terms of definition of a lobbyist, the activities that are considered as lobbying activity. We'll be joining the other members of the House in making improvements in the bill by way of amendments when we have that opportunity, when the bill reaches the committee stage for debate.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to, of course, lobbying, people want changes in election funding. They want some legislation to regulate that. People expect there to be some legislation in place, to have a legislation which requires a disclosure of contributions to leadership contests for political parties. So there's a long way to go before Albertans will be satisfied that we as legislators have taken actions on their behalf that they think will lead to restoration of their full confidence in the way business is done around this province by our government, by legislators, and by other public agencies that are responsible for serving the public interest.

I think, Mr. Speaker, it's important to remember and for me to

note that our exclusive obligation is to serve the public interest. Public interest is best served if democratic institutions, democratic traditions are respected, legislation is in place that requires us to act in ways which puts our conduct beyond any question with respect to integrity, openness, and our commitment to public interest: the core function of the office that I hold and the office that all of us hold who have the privilege of sitting in this House. So we are in principle in support of the bill. We see problems with some provisions in it, which have been commented on by other commentators too.

I just want to draw the attention of the House to the first reaction to the bill that came from the co-ordinator of Democracy Watch, Duff Conacher. Democracy Watch is an organization with an office in Ottawa. One of the serious weaknesses, loopholes in the bill that he puts his finger on is the request-initiated activities of what otherwise would be considered lobbying activities. So long as the request is initiated by the government from the minister's office, from a minister to seek advice and approach a consultant, that will not be considered as lobbying.

Mr. Speaker, I want to underline the fact that this is a very serious loophole that's been noted. In fact, when the federal legislation, which was more recently amended in 2005, plugged that particular loophole, the number of lobbyists registered multiplied by eight times. In other words, this loophole allows a very large percentage of people who engage in lobbying activities as defined in this act to not have to register.

So the effectiveness of the bill very much depends on our ability at this stage, while we're debating this bill, and particularly at the amendment stage, where amendments can be introduced, to plug that particular loophole, that request-initiated consultations or lobbying activities must be covered in this bill. That remains a major concern, certainly, of my caucus, and we will try to address this and, hopefully, will have the co-operation of all members of the House, make sure that this bill becomes, in fact, leakage-proof. If you allow this leakage to happen, then surely this important step that's being taken by way of this bill after waiting for years and years and years will again prove to be ineffective.

5:50

So we can't fail. We can't afford to fail in making this bill as strong, as good as we possibly can.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:51 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 21, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/21

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Pál Vastagh, ambassador of Hungary. Also seated in your gallery is the ambassador's wife, Leeze Vastagh, along with Ferenc Banyai, deputy head of mission, and Béla Balaz, honorary consul general in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, more than 40,000 Albertans trace their ancestry to Hungary, including many who came as refugees in the 1956 rebellion. Between 2001 and 2005 Alberta's exports to Hungary averaged almost \$3 million per year, consisting mostly of machinery, especially for our oil and gas sector, and also pet food. Over the past five years Alberta's imports from Hungary have averaged approximately \$19 million per year, including computer parts, telecommunications equipment, and aluminum.

On behalf of government and the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations my wife, Jennifer, and I had lunch just a few moments ago and had a great experience. I know he really enjoyed his meeting with you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to wonderful things between Alberta and Canada and Hungary.

I'd ask our honoured guests now, Mr. Speaker, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also an honour and a privilege for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a guest seated in your gallery. Mayor Judy Gordon of Lacombe is no stranger to this Assembly. She served ably as an MLA for the Lacombe-Stettler constituency for three terms, from 1993 to 2004, and we are glad to have her here to join us today. I'm going to ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Members will know that you are the chair of the very active Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, or the CPA. This province shares a common bond across the globe with over one-quarter of the world's population. I'm therefore pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members Mr. Thembekile Mzantsi, Serjeant-at-Arms, head

of safety and security, Eastern Cape Provincial Parliament, South Africa, and Mr. Hasani Ngobeni, Serjeant-at-Arms, Limpopo Provincial Parliament, South Africa. Both are here today on a two-day attachment to study the operations of our visitor, ceremonial, and security services branch. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce a number of employees from Alberta Environment who are participating in the public service orientation tour. They are seated in one of the galleries, and if I could, I'd like to quickly read off their names and ask them to stand as I do so: Sheree DeCoteau, Ashton Stewart, Judy Tran, Monique Dietrich, Frauke Meyer, Rachel Dennis, Krista Westover, Laura Partridge, Greg Nelson, Santiago Paz, Jennifer Martin, Carolyn Skoworodko, Keith Denman, Justin Sabourin, Elizabeth Smith, Jason Stianson, Angela McGonigal, Kendall Tupker, and Lorie Wagner. Again, I'd ask all of the members to give them a warm traditional welcome as they experience from the public service side what the elected representatives deal with on a day-to-day basis.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you a group of 23 provincial employees with Infrastructure and Transportation. They work in the ministry's properties division, which is responsible for the operation and maintenance of government-owned properties. These dedicated employees are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise as I read their names: Cheryl Alty, Carlo Amodió, Sandye Glass, Tara Fitzpatrick, Koby Godwin, Colette Haakman, Lauralee Harrison, Karen Herd, Rhonda Holland, David Jesse, Tanya Jerasi, Karen Johnson, Trudy Lewis, Sherry Liptak, Deborah Marriott, Mike MaGathan, Jason Ness, Peter Nietereasta, Elena Nyhus, Judy Tumm, Jerry Wasylkiw, and Siân Wright. Please join me in wishing them a traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure and honour to introduce to you a group of 37 young and enthusiastic people from Edmonton-Castle Downs, which in itself – I know you will agree, Mr. Speaker – makes them superstars. They are students of Bishop Savaryn elementary school, and they're currently studying governance in Canada. They are accompanied by a couple of teachers: Mrs. Evelyn Sopkow and Mr. Mark Harvanka. With them is a volunteer parent who I know spends a great deal of time volunteering in that school and whom I consider to be a friend as well, Mrs. Anita Armet. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour and a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some very important members of our community in Red Deer. They are from Catholic Social Services, and they are here to watch us represent them and to see how government works. They're accompanied by their group leaders

Mrs. Sherry Albrecht, Mrs. Shirley Butler, and Mrs. Suja Varghese. These people are very special people themselves because of their caring and compassion, that helps to make the lives of the people in their care better and happier. They are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly 12 very special people from the High Park community in my riding of Edmonton-Glenora. They are here in support of their school, High Park school, which is being considered for closure. I would ask them to please stand as I call their names: Clare Peters, Kristine Peters, Arlen Peters, Jackson Peters, Kim Kotyk, Jorge Kotyk, Gary Kotyk, Kim Patten, Geniene Elder, Reilley Elder-Cherry, Tess Crowthers, and Joan Deverill. I ask the House to please give them a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Council of Alberta University Students has been at the Legislature meeting with elected officials all week to make known their concerns and the concerns of students in Alberta's postsecondary institutions. On Monday they were introduced by the hon. Minister of Education, yesterday they were introduced by the third party, and today it is our turn to introduce this group as a way of showing that they have the ear of all sides of the government. Here with us today – and I introduce them to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to all members of the House – are David Courmoyer and Duncan Wojtaszek. If they would rise, please, and if you would all give these guests the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two guests who are part of the Save Our Schools group from Newton school. They are Gerry Hofs and Brenda Hovan. These dedicated members of my constituency have been working hard with other parents and community members on a proposal to save Newton elementary school from closure by the Edmonton public school board. They have an innovative plan to convince the board that Newton school is sustainable and should be saved for the good of the students, the parents, and the community. Gerry and Brenda have shown incredible commitment to the idea of community schools, and I would like to commend them for their efforts. I would also ask them to now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Michele Jackson. Michele was raised in Ottawa, Ontario, and moved to Edmonton seven years ago. She has worked on Parliament Hill as well as for the Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation, which was a nonprofit social housing organization. She has also served as an archivist in the national archives of Canada. Here in Edmonton Michele has worked for various francophone nonprofit organizations and for Western Economic Diversification Canada in communications. We were delighted to have Michele join our NDP caucus team as my

executive assistant last fall, and we're indeed fortunate to have someone with her skills and experience in our office. I would now ask that Michele rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

St. Joseph's General Hospital

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Albertans are aware, a situation has arisen in the East Central health region. My ministry took immediate action upon learning about this situation, and that work is continuing. It is unacceptable to me, as I'm sure it is to most Albertans, that this situation could arise in our health care system. I am very concerned, and I'm determined to find out how it could have happened.

Yesterday our focus and priority was on the health of Albertans who may be at risk and ensuring that those Albertans are properly informed and properly taken care of. While this remains a priority, we are moving forward, continuing to investigate, and looking at next steps. I want to be absolutely certain that East Central health has the management capacity it needs to ensure the quality of patient safety and care, so today I will be announcing that I have asked my ministry to contract with appropriate management and other experts to co-manage and support East Central staff as we move forward. The chair of the health region has also requested that pursuant to the Hospitals Act I have the ministry develop a plan and appoint a board of management to oversee the management of St. Joseph's hospital while we address these issues.

As we look deeper into the situation, let me be clear. I am committed to taking whatever further steps may be necessary. Albertans deserve to receive quality health care and expect nothing less. It is this government's and this minister's commitment to deliver just that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the Official Opposition.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to rise and respond to the minister's statement.

This situation in Vegreville is a very serious problem. Few things can be more serious than the health and well-being of Albertans. Albertans are concerned, and they need and deserve assurances that their health system is working.

There are two equally important issues here. The first is the local level and problems regarding inspection control practices at that hospital. The second is the adequacy of provincial oversight with monitoring and enforcement of standards. Alberta Liberals have long been concerned that one of the risks in this government's approach to health care reform is that its capacity for enforcement and oversight of standards has been steadily diminished throughout the 1990s. It has yet to recover.

This situation scares us. It scares all Albertans. Residents, their families, and members of the communities directly affected have a right to know that they will be okay. More broadly, Albertans want to know that their government has strong prevention practices established so that these things never happen in the first place, but if they do, they want to know that the government has a comprehensive emergency response plan in place. The closure of a hospital so critical to this community or any community is an issue of public confidence and public trust. This situation should not have happened. I look to the government for leadership.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in Ministerial Statements our rules allow a minister of Executive Council to make a statement, and our rules allow a representative of the Official Opposition to make a statement. For additional members to participate requires unanimous consent.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has caught my eye. I know he will want to rise to seek unanimous consent for the leader of the third party to participate.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I and my caucus colleagues in the New Democrat opposition are deeply concerned for the health and wellness of the residents of Vegreville and surrounding areas. I sincerely hope that further cases of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA, are not found.

I note that the East Central health region has halted new admissions to the hospital and closed the central sterilization room due to MRSA and sterilization concerns. However, there are some very serious questions which must be answered with respect to this MRSA outbreak and the hospital sterilization techniques.

During an audit the East Central region found that the sterilization of hospital equipment was not happening according to proper procedures. This audit was provided on February 13, 2007. East Central ordered the cancellation of sterilization and a cessation of surgeries in the hospital; however, St. Joseph's hospital sterilization room continued to operate. Over a month passed between the health region's order and the closure of the sterilization room. If individuals were exposed to or infected by any blood-borne or communicable diseases between the time of the order to close the sterilization room and the government taking action, then a full public inquiry must be struck in order to protect the public from further occurrences of this sort.

Mr. Speaker, it's a matter of great concern that the appropriate safeguards in our health system have eroded during the cuts of the 1990s and have not yet been corrected. The minister has promised immediate action and will put in place a board of management for the hospital, but that does not close the matter as far as the New Democratic Party opposition is concerned. We need to have an inquiry into the events that led up to the causes of this occurrence and make sure that it cannot happen again. Certainly, the delay in implementing the health region's order is unacceptable and must be explained as well as any government knowledge or responsibility thereof.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Members' Statements

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are joining communities around the world today to recognize the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This day represents a rallying point for the world to eliminate racism and intolerance. This year's international theme is Fighting Everyday Racism.

On this day 41 years ago the United Nations declared March 21 the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This special day was created to commemorate the 69 individuals who lost their lives during a peaceful antiapartheid protest on March 21, 1960, in Sharpeville, South Africa.

In Alberta a number of events are taking place all month in recognition of this day: a multicultural book reading and short story

contest in Calgary, a film showcase in Edmonton examining racial stereotypes found in Canada, a discussion in Red Deer on the harmful effects of racism on children, an event with food and cultural displays from various ethnic groups in Brooks. Students and schools throughout the province are also hosting a variety of events to commemorate the day.

Alberta's municipalities have joined an international coalition of cities against racism. This project aims to have municipalities follow key principles in order to help build communities that are respectful, safe, and welcoming. The Human Rights and Citizenship Commission and the Alberta Urban Municipalities are actively involved in supporting this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, on this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination I ask the members of this House to join me and communities throughout the province in taking action against all forms of racial discrimination and encouraging fairness for all citizens.

Mr. Speaker, let's all fight racism every day. Thank you.

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

1:20

Arts Vibrancy in Rural Alberta

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to acknowledge the artistic vibrancy that exists in rural Alberta. I recently enjoyed a performance of *On Golden Pond* at the Rosebud Theatre. The hamlet of Rosebud was once a coal mining, railway, and farming community on the brink of extinction in the 1960s. The population had dwindled to 12 people. To help revive the community, a school of arts was founded, and the Rosebud Theatre followed in 1983.

What was once a struggling community has now become the home to western Canada's largest rural professional theatre. Thirty-five thousand people a year from all across Alberta and beyond visit this theatre in a community still family oriented and still based upon a strong attachment to the land.

The success of the Rosebud Theatre has allowed the community to preserve many original buildings in the area. The local hotel is now the administration office for the theatre. The former United Church is now an art gallery, and even the theatre itself was once used for grain storage years ago. The theatre has not only saved the community, but it brought the spirit back to Rosebud. Building on the success of the theatre, the hamlet has seen even more development with bed and breakfasts, a gift shop, and galleries.

Other rural Alberta communities are revitalizing their hometowns by embracing arts and culture as well. Fifteen years ago the tiny hamlet of Kelsey, near Camrose, launched a dinner theatre event. It started as a fundraiser to help restore the local community hall, but today the Kelsey Drama Club and local volunteers continue to welcome guests from as far away as British Columbia. Stony Plain has embraced the arts in another way, with outdoor murals and sculptures depicting the town's history. This attraction is always open for everyone to enjoy, and guided tours are available.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

High Park Elementary School

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The neighbourhood elementary school is an integral part of every vital and dynamic community. In many communities the local school is the hub of social life. Given the bonds that tie families, children, parents, and grandparents to a school, it is a tremendous shock to the whole

community to learn that their beloved school is being considered for closure. A parent wrote in a letter: when you take away a community school, you take away the heart of the community. But the shock gives way to anxiety and anger, and then one by one individuals and families begin talking and gathering and planning for the future.

This is what happened in the High Park community here in Edmonton, and I want to use this moment to pay tribute to the residents of High Park for their courage, resourcefulness, and their grit. They proved what the community organizers say, that when it comes to community assets, the glass is always half full, not half empty. In the face of many barriers, including cruel, all-too-brief timelines, they never gave up, and they are here today to proclaim that High Park is their school, and it is their community.

Governments and school boards should be in the business of building up and strengthening community, not destroying it. Our legislation should make it possible for all sectors of the community – residents, parents, politicians – to all come together and work together to preserve the viability of the community.

It is obvious that closing a school has tremendous costs. It means a migration of young families out of the neighbourhood. It means the decline of social cohesion in the community. It means the breaking of the bonds of community for many generations identifying with the school. It means a spiral of decline which is very hard to turn around.

I am proud of the efforts of the High Park community, and I hope against hope that the outcome of their efforts is successful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Growth Pressures in Central Alberta

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, much noise is made in this Assembly over the growth pressures in the Wood Buffalo region, the city of Calgary, and the city of Grande Prairie. Specific responses have been made to accommodate the growth in these regions, and rightly so, but I want to remind this Assembly not to lose sight of the fact that there are other growth pressures in this province which face their own considerable challenges.

Stats Canada released the 2006 census results last week, showing the growth from 2001 to 2006. The province of Alberta grew by 10 per cent while the rest of Canada grew only by 5 per cent. Calgary grew by 12 per cent, Edmonton by 10 per cent, the Wood Buffalo region by 24 per cent, and Grande Prairie by 27 per cent. But little heralded is the fact that Red Deer grew by 22 per cent and Sylvan Lake by 36 per cent.

This puts central Alberta into the same stratospheric category as the aforementioned communities. It is no wonder central Alberta communities are anxious to protect their freshwater resources to accommodate their population and economic growth potential for the future. This is an important reminder that government programs must be balanced in their approach to address the needs of all communities, not only the ones that are media favourites and flavour of the month.

The census results also demonstrate the impact of small and mid cities on the growth patterns of Alberta, communities like Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Sylvan Lake, Spruce Grove, Strathmore, and Airdrie. While justified, I am loathe to begin a small cities caucus because I believe we govern for the province as a whole, but let it be understood that these cities have unique challenges which are not the same as large cities or the rural communities. Whether as regional centres for health care delivery or postsecondary education or centres for water and sewage treatment, they have enormous positive impact in Alberta that should not be underestimated.

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

Racial Discrimination

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a day to acknowledge that racism is still present in our society. Racism is an outdated idea and still present and accepted. Discriminatory laws and practices are very much in vigour in some places. In other places people accept silently more subtle forms of discrimination.

Racism and racial discrimination make a mockery out of human dignity. No rhetoric about equality or fairness is credible if we accept racism and racial discrimination. We must look forward and agree on the best strategy to rid mankind of the corruption and pollution that creates racism and discrimination. We must raise awareness and involve all Canadians in the movement against racism and advocate against all forms of discrimination. Through education and information we fight the ignorance and intolerance that breeds racism and discrimination.

As Canadians we should make some effort to support acceptance and diversity. First of all, speak out against racism. In this case silence is not golden. In fact, silence, too, can lead to greater discrimination, so you have the right as well as the duty to speak out. When you have a chance, stand up and protect our society's great diversity and respect our differences. We must work together to break down these barriers brick by brick. Racism can be stopped. Together we can accomplish this goal.

Thank you.

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

Role of Private Members

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Alberta have placed their trust in their representatives. We are elected to represent the people of Alberta to uphold their values and their vision. We work very hard in the Legislature, and we need to remember that the work we do does lead to great things. While some criticize, others act. Barack Obama said: do we participate in the politics of cynicism, or do we participate in the politics of hope? I participate in the politics of hope, and I chose to make good things happen.

There are days in this Assembly when the detailed work of line-by-line consideration of legislation makes most of us and the public sleepy, when the noise and chatter of question period embarrasses some of us, when the long afternoons of occupying a seat for the sake of quorum are mind-numbing. On those days some of us wonder how effective our role as a private member is. However, the good-news story is that PCHAD, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, a hard-fought-for private member's bill which I had the honour of sponsoring, now boasts some instantly recognizable good work, which warms the hearts of those who have seen the ravages that drug abuse causes among the young.

This act has had an impact. It has saved lives and saved families. Of the 232 young people who have been temporarily held for drug abuse assessment, 50 per cent have voluntarily gone into treatment. Ask me if the faces of the mothers and fathers of these children don't show real relief and a great big thank you to all in this Legislature who fought to pass this bill against enormous odds and tight deadlines. Voluntarily to treatment, 50 per cent: in that number lives are saved. This is effective work of private members. The governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan have implemented similar legislation, and I thank all members of this Assembly.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

St. Joseph's General Hospital

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's news of shocking oversights at a hospital in Vegreville has Albertans extremely worried. Not only are residents in the area concerned that they may have been affected by improper sterilization practices, but they're worried about this government's failure to alert Albertans in a timely enough fashion to a major health risk. My questions are to the Premier. How long has the Premier been aware that St. Joseph's hospital wasn't meeting standards since they seem to have had a history of problems?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister and I followed the advice of professionals, and that is our public officer of health. They posted, of course, on the doors of the hospital last Friday a public health order, and it's for those people that were going to gain access into the hospital. Over the weekend the minister of health met with officials to follow up, and we're doing whatever we can as quickly as possible to restore confidence not only in St. Joe's hospital but all hospitals in the province of Alberta.

Ms Blakeman: So the Premier knew at the same time as the public.

Again to the Premier. There was a failure on the part of this government to monitor and enforce the situation. There is no doubt that this province is going to face lawsuits from patients that may be infected due to this negligence. Has the Premier begun discussions with cabinet and legal counsel on the scale of this government's liability?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of behaviour that Albertans find upsetting. First of all, let's assess the situation. The officer of health said: minimum risk. We are going to ask all those that had any service in terms of the hospital, any kind of health care delivery service, that were in contact with the CSR – we're going to make sure that we contact them all, make sure that they're aware of the risk. But to say that we're already anticipating huge court cases, et cetera, is – you know, folks, let's first restore the confidence in the hospital.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I would have called it planning.

Again to the Premier: what deadline has the Premier set for the report by the Health Quality Council of Alberta to be completed, and will the Premier commit to making the report public immediately after receiving it?

Mr. Stelmach: The minister will respond to the actual time limit of the Health Quality Council.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I have requested the Health Quality Council to look into all aspects surrounding this situation and to report back to me. I have not as yet put a deadline on that process. We need them first to look into what it's going to take. We will be in discussions with the Health Quality Council leadership this week to talk about the nature and extent of the inquiry and what needs to be done, and we will set appropriate time frames at that time. I want to make sure that the work is done thoroughly and completely, so I'm not going to put artificial deadlines on it. But on the other hand,

we're going to make sure that they understand that it has to be done as soon as possible.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

School Closures

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals have long shown that they value community schools, but this government has proven again and again that it does not. In January the Minister of Education himself stated: I don't buy into the concept that the closure of a school is going to collapse a community. Well, we dispute that sentiment, and there are a lot of people in the gallery today that would dispute that sentiment. Will the Premier admit today that school closures have a profoundly negative effect on students, parents, and the entire community?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this province places a tremendous priority on education. In fact, I'm proud to say that in terms of comparisons to other jurisdictions, we lead in so many different areas of achievement. It's a great tribute, of course, to the teachers and our students. That is the really positive message that we want to get out to all Canadians.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Community members who are most affected by school closures feel shut out of the process. The timelines for closure are too short, and the views of the community are not taken seriously. The Alberta Liberals would encourage more community involvement in schools, not less. Will the Premier commit to extending the timeline and level of community involvement in school closures to ensure that important voices are being heard in the community?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've always taken pride in the fact that our government listens to Albertans. It does get out to every corner of the province, our ministers and caucus members.

On the administrative, in terms of regulations within the School Act, the minister can respond.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: I thought he was responding, Mr. Speaker. Sorry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has the floor.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this government is behind the trend when it comes to community schools. The Alberta Liberals have introduced excellent policy and legislation that would protect valuable community schools from closure and would expand their role in the community. The government has been happy to borrow Liberal policy in the past, so why not now? Will the Premier call for a moratorium on school closures until a clear community schools policy is in place?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, whenever we enter into discussion, of course, with respect to a possible school closure, there are very clear rules that school boards have to follow in terms of working with the community, working with parents, working with the municipality. I partook in a number of situations where the public came together in terms of the discussion of a reduction of a program within an

existing school. I think the process we have is good. If it requires some improvement, we'll certainly listen to any Albertan that would come forward with any advice.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

St. Joseph's General Hospital

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. MRSA is one of the superbugs now found in many hospitals. The most successful way to prevent this is handwashing before touching patients. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How much of the MRSA infection has been transmitted from St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville to the community? If someone infected with MRSA has gone into the community and, say, served lunch at the local seniors' centre, then it is cycling through the community and back into the hospital. What plans does the minister have to test the local population for this superbug infection?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, an interesting question. First of all, I would say that of all the admissions to St. Joseph's hospital, to my understanding nobody came into the hospital with MRSA.

The other thing I would indicate is in terms of my discussions with the provincial public health officer. The MRSA infection, although there are some community instances known about it, is primarily a hospital infection. The question about whether it has been transferred or could have been transferred out into the community is a very interesting one, and I guess that what we need to make sure is . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: how do we know that the emergency room patients are safe? They were exposed to the same contaminated equipment and unsanitary practices.

Mr. Hancock: What we need to make sure of, Mr. Speaker, is that people in the community know and understand the symptoms of MRSA, which are rashes and lesions, and, if they have those symptoms, to immediately seek medical attention.

With respect to the sterilization of the equipment: there was an immediate order put in place to stop use of equipment. All of the equipment was removed from the hospital and appropriately sterilized. So on the go-forward basis, appropriate steps have been taken to make sure that no person attending at the emergency at St. Joseph's hospital would have any concern about the sterilized equipment. That has been taken care of on a go-forward basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. A directive by the health region to close the sterilization room on February 13 was violated by the hospital for a month. Can the minister determine what went wrong here? I don't want to wait months for a Health Quality Council report. Is it a default in monitoring or in enforcement?

1:40

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that's precisely the reason why we're moving ahead today to put in place a plan and a board of management to take control of the management of that institution under the

Hospitals Act. That's the appropriate methodology in this type of institution. If that board of management is not successful in making sure that we can have total assurance of the quality of management and operation of that facility, then a supervisor can be appointed after the board of management is in place. But that's precisely why we've moved to the board of management: so that we know with certainty that directives of this nature are being followed and that all appropriate protocols are being followed in that particular hospital.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On February 13, 2007, during an audit of St. Joseph's hospital the East Central region found that sterilization of hospital equipment was not occurring according to proper procedures. East Central ordered the cancellation of sterilization and a cessation of surgeries in the hospital. However, over a month passed between the health region's order and the closure of St. Joseph's sterilization room. My question is to the Premier. Why did this hospital continue to operate its sterilization room for over a month despite being ordered to close it?

Mr. Stelmach: The Minister of Health and Wellness is following this file very closely, and he'll respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That indeed is a question that we need to get to the bottom of. But when this minister was made aware of the situation on Thursday last, March 15, I immediately briefed the Premier, and I immediately called in the provincial public health officer, immediately got in touch with the local medical health officer, and immediately an order was put in place to close the sterilization room, remove the equipment, and do proper sterilization procedures. The rest we will find out and we will take care of.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that the health region ordered the sterilization room closed and surgeries to take place elsewhere. That did not happen, and there was a potential for people to be exposed to or to be infected with blood-borne diseases, including HIV and hepatitis B and C. My question is to the minister. Was the February 13 audit provided to the minister or his department of health before Thursday, and if so, when?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, first, no services were performed of a nature that would involve the equipment in question after February 13. I'm satisfied from an inquiry that that is the case. So no Albertans were at risk at that stage. That should be made clear because we don't want to unnecessarily alarm Albertans. To the best of my knowledge the first awareness that the department had and certainly the first awareness that the minister's office and that this minister had of this situation was on March 15, and we took immediate action.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I hope the minister will be able to assure the House that there are procedures in place, that his department is informed of these types of audits in a

timely fashion in the future. The public might well have been at risk. I would ask the minister: if any individuals were exposed or were potentially exposed to any blood-borne pathogens, will the minister commit to a full public inquiry to look into the systemic failures in our health system that this exposes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that we do not want to get people unnecessarily alarmed. First of all, the audit that the member is talking about was a joint operational audit between the East Central health authority and St. Joseph's hospital, which is contracted to the East Central health authority. So it was their internal process to look at their operations. That was not an audit that we had instituted. We should have been advised of the circumstances, and they should have taken it more seriously. We'll get to the bottom of that.

With respect to the go-forward, I think the hon. member should be patient. We will have the Health Quality Council have a look at the issue, and we will determine from there what facts need to be followed up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Tax Deductions

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our booming Alberta, trades, techs, and engineers work long hours at the highest tax rate with few tax breaks. Alberta needs more trades and techs. Why not help them with their tools? We need venture capital to convert our research into commercial reality. We need qualified coaches and choreographers in volunteer roles to help keep kids off the streets. Why not tax breaks? My question is to the Minister of Finance. With the feds only giving small tax breaks for trades tools, will the minister ensure that Bill 207 from 2001 – that's on tool tax breaks – is finally proclaimed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member may or may not know, Bill 207 was passed in this Assembly. It was sponsored by, I believe, the MLA for Strathcona. It was a very progressive bill. The federal government saw the wisdom in that bill and actually followed suit a couple of years later. They brought in a tool tax deduction, and with that the tax deduction was actually carried on into the province as well. So the province is doing a tax deduction also. I would ask the hon. member, as well, that if he sees fit to have more of a tax reduction, he would be welcome to bring back the bill, and we can certainly have it looked at again in this Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. A supplementary to the same minister: with most provinces and the feds providing tax breaks for contributions to labour-sponsored venture capital funds, when will Alberta put this tax break into effect?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, across Canada the federal government does indeed give a tax credit to the labour-sponsored venture capital funds, and some provinces have paralleled this. Interestingly enough, in Ontario, which is where probably the biggest fund has

been, they've actually started to phase it out, and it will be phased out in the year 2010. Their reasons and rationale for phasing it out are quite simply that it wasn't effective. So I think there are better ways to encourage venture capital. It's certainly something that we want to do, and the hon. member's question is very well received. It is something that we have to do in Alberta, and we're looking at other ways to encourage venture capital, to encourage the higher risk investments within Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the coaching shortage in sports and culture and too many kids on the streets will the minister consider a tax credit for qualified volunteer coaching for kids?

Dr. Oberg: Again I thank the hon. member for this question. I will say honestly that it wasn't an angle that I had actually looked at. What happens typically is that the deductions for health and fitness, especially, have come on the side of the student, have come on the side of the kids participating in the sport. But I think the hon. member has an excellent idea. I think that it would fit very well under the minister of tourism, parks, and recreation and his community spirit committee, and I have asked the minister to take a look at that. I think it would work out very, very well there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Employment of Children

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. There have been a number of comments and questions in the last few days about children as young as 12 working in different places in the province. A simple question: what are the rules about this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across Canada children at the age of 12 have been allowed to work. There are very strict rules about work. For adolescents, for example, on school days they cannot work during the time that school is in session. They can only work two hours per day, and they cannot work between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. So there are some time constraints, and there are also some parameters around it. We always – always – require that parents give written consent before adolescents are allowed to work. Across Canada in many places, in many family businesses, in grocery stores, and delivering newspapers . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: has there been a change to these rules so that restaurants could hire younger workers for the purpose of addressing the labour shortage that we're experiencing?

Ms Evans: No, Mr. Speaker. There has been no change. This has not changed. All we did was stop issuing permits, and then we added a new requirement. Restaurants have to send in safety checklists, very detailed ones, for every adolescent they have working. We've had rules for adolescent employment since 1974, when restrictions were brought in to prevent children under 12

working and restrictions were put on the type of work that adolescents and children age 12 can actually do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: how do you know if employers are actually complying with these requirements and regulations?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have employment standards officers. We are adding an additional number, a significant number, in the budget that will be presented later this spring. I'll be happy to talk about that at budget time. We do checks to see if they're adhering to those compliance requirements. If an employer is found to have hired an adolescent inappropriately, we will put in place a cease-and-desist order. We will close the business. We also conduct regularly other public health inspections. Public awareness around adolescent employment has increased, and employers and employees alike are aware of the laws that we have in place for 12-year-olds.

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

1:50

School Closures (continued)

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many people in my riding were alarmed at the Minister of Education's comments: I don't buy into the concept that the closure of a school is going to collapse the community. For the past five months I've been working with members of my constituency in Edmonton-Glenora to prevent three school closures, and it is clear to my constituents and to me that there's nothing more important to a community than a school. Can the Minister of Education tell us today whether or not he believes that schools are a crucial part of communities?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, decisions by school boards to close schools, whether they are in urban centres or in rural Alberta, are always trying times for parents. But the reality is that a flat enrolment across the province and the requirement to build schools in new neighbourhoods where kids live mean that school boards are faced with decisions on school facilities that have declining and low enrolments.

Dr. B. Miller: Well, the closure process, Mr. Speaker, is brutal for a community. My constituents feel like their voices have not been heard by the school board or the government in this process. Will the Minister of Education commit to changing the government's school closure policy to allow for at least 18 months of timelines and more community involvement in closures, a step that has already been taken by other provinces, such as Ontario?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think the process that's in place is fair. It's clearly laid out, and school boards need to comply with what's laid out in the School Act. It's a reality, as I said in my first answer, that you're going to have schools that have very low enrolments, and school boards are elected to make those decisions and are making them.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, the government has proved year after year that it's far easier to close a school than it is to open a new one. The importance of community schools to neighbourhoods is profound, and many people in the High Park community are worried

about the long-term sustainability of their own community. So could I ask the minister: will he tell us what plans the government has to ensure that the community is protected and can continue to be a vital community if the school is closed?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that in a lot of mature neighbourhoods – and I certainly know this as an MLA for my constituency – there are a number of schools that 20, 30 years ago were constructed as neighbourhood schools. We are now at the point where, simply, the fact that a particular school is closed does not mean that there isn't a school in the community. So it's a decision that school boards have to face. It's not an easy one, but that's the fact.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Support for Music Festivals

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since its early roots in our province in 1908 the Alberta Music Festival Association has been promoting and developing music and speech arts in Alberta through performance and workshop-style adjudication. The association is made up of 35 local festivals, mostly organized by volunteers. Regardless of the size of the community and whether it's the Kiwanis music festival in Calgary or local festivals in Crowsnest, Athabasca, or Red Deer, children around the province have benefited from being involved in the arts and music. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Can the minister please outline what kind of support is provided for music festivals in Alberta?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the arts are very, very important and integral to the quality of life of all Albertans. You know, the government has recognized this, identifying improving Alberta's quality of life as one of this government's top five priorities. Music festivals are an important component of the arts in Alberta, and the Alberta Music Festival Association through its local festivals does an extremely good job of introducing music to students of all ages, helping them develop not only as artists but also as individuals. Funding is provided to the Alberta Music Festival Association on an annual basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The musical talent of the youth of Alberta exists across the province regardless of the size of community, and all Alberta youth who choose to pursue the performing arts are equally deserving of encouragement and support. My only supplemental is to the same minister. Can we expect funding to increase for these important community-based programs?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, in 2006-07 the budget for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts was nearly \$23 million. That was an increase of 16 per cent over the previous year. Every year funding from the foundation supports the arts in Alberta in a number of other ways, including funding to 55 festivals across the province, including music festivals. We also support arts organizations, from the Calgary Opera to the Okotoks Arts Council. We also support 260 schools in bringing artists into their classrooms. As well, we provide grants to 1,200 musicians, visual artists, and dancers.

The Speaker: Hon. member, did you have a supplementary?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Holy Cross Care Centre

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first concern is to get affordable housing built in a timely fashion. My second concern is this: when provincially funded affordable housing isn't built on time, as in the case of the Holy Cross centre, we get all our money back and give it to someone who can get the affordable housing built. We learned today that the government neglected to put into the contract with the Holy Cross a guarantee that if the project fails, we get all the money back that we're entitled to. To the Premier: can he explain why there was no clause in the contract requiring Enterprise Universal Inc. to pay back the money with interest if the project fails?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's a very specific question to a specific agreement. We'll get back to the member with respect to that specific agreement, and we'll consult with the housing minister.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to that answer.

At 5 per cent compounded, in two years the party in possession of \$1.137 million can rack up about \$120,000 in interest. That's a sizable chunk of coin, I would say, in any ordinary Albertan's books. It could pay for another affordable housing unit. Will the Premier direct all government departments to include a repayment with interest clause in all government contracts? It's our money, after all. It doesn't belong to the contractor who fails to deliver.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the priorities, of course, that Albertans talked to me about during the leadership campaign. Of course, as the new government we moved immediately on this critical issue. We now have in possession a report, a report, quite frankly, that was done by an all-party committee, really a first of its kind. The minister now is reviewing the report. He will be presenting his recommendations to the cabinet policy committee, to caucus, and to this government, and we will act on it.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, you don't need a task force to answer that question.

Interestingly, the amount of interest equals the \$120,000 that the company has already spent on demolition and design, which the government says it's not expecting to be returned. You know, I'm not very good at math; that's why I'm not the Finance critic. To the Premier: does one cancel out the other, or is the taxpayer now out \$240,000?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, I guess that's why he was a radio announcer before he got here.

An Hon. Member: Low blow. Low blow.

Mr. Stelmach: You know, I hear from across the way, "Low blow." They can snip and snipe away, make all kinds of obnoxious comments, and then in jest with a smile on my face – and all of a sudden look at how they're all getting upset. [interjections] Look at that. Whoa. Man.

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

Water Management

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the impacts of climate change, including drought, are a very real possibility in today's environment. Water scarcity as a result of climate change is a primary concern for many Albertans, including my constituents. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Water storage could become increasingly important to communities facing the threat of water shortage. What is this government doing to ensure that reliable water supplies are available well into the future for all Alberta communities?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's Water for Life strategy has been in place now since 2003, and it is acknowledged by such authorities as the Rosenberg water institute to be among North America's leading comprehensive plans to deal with water. That plan acknowledges that we have to have a long-term plan on both the conservation side as well as the management side of our water.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, during the government's public consultation process for the Water for Life strategy Albertans asked that the costs and implications of potential reservoir and diversion projects be known. To the same minister: in a government promoting its openness and transparency, what action has the government taken on this initiative under Water for Life?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Environment is in the process of working itself through the Water for Life strategy. Two of the priorities that were identified under the strategy were to first prepare an inventory of potential water storage sites. That phase has been completed to this stage. The current phase of the study is to assess the potential for those sites and put them into some kind of a priority situation. The final report will provide Albertans with ample opportunity for valuable input and comment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: if water storage is determined to be the best option for securing reliable water supplies for Albertans in the future, how will Albertans be involved?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the development of any kind of a water storage project has a process that is very dependent upon public input, community input of all kinds. I can assure the hon. member that should any of these projects that have been evaluated as having potential proceed, there will be ample opportunity for input from the public.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Public Interest Alberta released its comprehensive report on postsecondary education. The central message of the report is that our advanced education system has still not fully recovered from the deep and short-sighted cuts of

the '90s. Years of neglect have strained our education system beyond limit and leave the government rhetoric about building a learning Alberta ringing hollow. Alberta needs a concrete and comprehensive plan put in place immediately. Will the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology today commit to ensuring that all qualified Albertans have access to affordable advanced education by aggressively reducing tuition levels until they are the lowest in the country and set timelines for achieving that goal?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's a good question. I'm glad it was asked because we're doing a very similar plan like that right now with postsecondary institutions. I've mentioned several times in this House that we had a round-table discussion with all of the post-secondary institutions in the province, both public and private, on the 26th of February, and that was to develop the road map, to develop the Campus Alberta approach of roles, responsibilities, and mandates.

The issue is capacity, Mr. Speaker. Tuition is one piece of the affordability puzzle, but we need to create the spaces for those students, and that's what we're going to do in collaboration, co-operation, and by communicating with the postsecondary institutions.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I haven't heard the minister talk about timelines that are needed here.

My second question. The government's current commitment to create 60,000 postsecondary spaces by the year 2020 will create new spaces at a rate no different from the rate by which this system has been expanding anyway. When will Albertans get a firm commitment and clear timelines for significantly increasing the number of postsecondary spaces in Alberta, and will the minister commit to fully funding those spaces through operating and capital grants?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the hon. member has recognized the amount of rapid growth that we've had and the fact that we've been maintaining that rapid growth in the spaces. We will continue to do that to make the number of spaces that are necessary for those students that need to have access to our postsecondaries. In addition to that, my goal is to have that roles, responsibilities, mandate framework completed by the end of this year so that all of the postsecondary institutions and government and students and all stakeholders can look to the future and the spaces where we need them, when we need them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Successful learning requires highly skilled, permanent full-time faculty and staff. Alberta does not have a comprehensive plan for attracting and retaining the best. Will the minister commit to tabling a plan, including a firm timeline for implementation, during this session of the Legislature?

Mr. Horner: Well, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona rightly knows from his past experience, each institution does their own faculty planning. Each institution is responsible for hiring those faculty members that are responsible for delivering the courses. Obviously, if we're going to build infrastructure, we are going to propose to the institutions that we're going to fund them to deliver the programs within those institutions. As part of the overall roles, responsibilities, and mandate plan, we intend to do exactly that in collaboration with the postsecondaries.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mountain Pine Beetle Effect on Timber Harvesting

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A slowdown in the U.S. housing market has meant low prices for timber and huge pressure on the logging industry in many rural communities. This morning Alberta Forest Products Association stated that 2006 revenues were down \$569 million, and they expect this trend to continue. Despite this, the government's plan for dealing with the pine beetle requires that firms cut and process even more timber. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why are we asking timber firms to clear-cut large swaths of trees when the market cannot deal with the excess timber?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to report to the House and the hon. member that I've met several times with the Alberta Forest Products Association and many of the major lumber firms that work in this province. We've discussed our plan on the pine beetle and put it in the context of the softwood lumber process and also the market conditions in the United States. There is a strong consensus on how to move forward. We have something called the forestry competitiveness paper. I received that in January, and we're discussing that with the industry now.

Thank you.

Mr. Bonko: Will the minister direct forest companies to change this practice instead of building up timber which will lay on the ground and be susceptible to the pine beetle, or are they going to change the fact that they're going to allow them to continue to cut, putting the product, with its low commodity, at risk further?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I suggest that we take a collection up for the hon. member to send him over to British Columbia and see what the effects of doing nothing are. In British Columbia they said: stand back and wait. There's hardly any pine forest left over there. I'll put down the first \$20.

Thank you.

Mr. Bonko: The pine beetle is a threat to our forestry industry. It's a natural part of our ecosystem and will remain one in the future. We must adapt our practices accordingly. Our forests are particularly vulnerable because decades of manmade forest suppression and artificial reforestation have made them that way. What is the minister going to do to change the practices in this province to ensure that our forests are never again vulnerable to the pine beetle, as they are now?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, finally the hon. member has hit a good point here. Our forests are susceptible to pine beetle, also to disease and to forest fire. Why? Because of the success of our fire prevention over the last many years. I'm happy to report that the healthy forest initiative, that this government is in the process of developing now, will precisely through harvesting restore a healthy, age-balanced forest that will be more resistant to disease, to pine beetle, and to forest fire.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Surface Rights Compensation

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question as well is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Over the past

year I've had numerous calls from landowners very concerned about the amount of compensation they are being offered by the energy industry to access their land for drilling oil and gas wells, the installation of pipelines and power lines, and the like. I understand that the rates have not had a thorough review since the 1980s, when the Surface Rights Act was passed. Could the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development tell me if there are any plans under way to do a thorough review of surface rights compensation rates in the near future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Stand up for property rights, Ted.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An excellent idea from the NDP as well, in response to standing up for property rights, I mean, one of their few good ideas.

I have heard the same concerns as the hon. member about the Surface Rights Act and the Surface Rights Board. I recognize that no changes have been made for 25 years, since the last review, and the industry has changed tremendously since then. It's time to take a good look at it. I'm happy to report that I am prepared to consider reforms and amendments to that to improve both fair compensation and timely access.

Thank you.

2:10

Mr. Marz: I'd like to thank the minister for that answer.

My second and last question would be: will the minister commit to having a committee of MLAs, landowner groups, and industry representatives be part of such a review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, one of the first principles of this government is to listen to all Albertans when it comes to issues like this. But it would be premature for me to commit to a full task force at this point in time. I did receive just this week the surface rights review task force report of the Alberta association of municipalities and districts. It's an excellent report. I've looked at their recommendations. I'm ready to consider many of them. In fact, yesterday I committed to accepting two, indicated that two of their recommendations I'm prepared to accept already. But I want to have further discussions with Albertans before we decide how to proceed on this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Disabled Inmates at Remand Centres

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our remand centres are holding facilities designed to house people charged with committing certain crimes until they're sentenced. There are many problems surrounding our remand centres, overcrowding being the main one, leading sometimes to triple credit for time served while incarcerated in them. Edmonton is finally getting a new facility. The question is: what do we do in the current centre until we get the new one, and what do we plan for this new one that we're constructing right now? Some inmates are people with disabilities. There are no supports available to assist them with things like personal cleaning and showering, using the toilet, or doing their laundry. To the Solicitor General: can the minister tell us why there are no provisions in the existing remand centres to provide support and services to disabled inmates before they're sentenced?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. All our prisoners that are held and all those that are held in remand centres are treated with dignity and respect, and to the best of my knowledge all those that are there are given the proper care and opportunities to shower, et cetera.

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Speaker, in the eye of the law remanded individuals are innocent people until they're proven guilty. Even those who are eventually convicted still have a right to be treated with dignity, and they should be offered assistance with regard to their physical disability, as stipulated in the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. Recently in the Edmonton Remand a disabled person in a wheelchair was forced to endure terrible conditions due to inadequate support. Dragging oneself across the floor and climbing onto the toilet, having to do the same to get in and out of a bathtub surely meet the definition of a loss of dignity, contrary to what the hon. minister has just said, a violation of human rights. To the minister of tourism, parks, and culture: will this minister commit to investigating the conditions at the Edmonton Remand Centre to ensure that disabled inmates are not discriminated against because of their disability and that they get the support they need to live with dignity while they're incarcerated?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond. The Member for Edmonton-McClung has a right to be concerned. However, I would need to look at the details and get some of the information. Then I'd be in a better position to respond.

We also have the Human Rights Commission, where the member could lodge a complaint if he feels he needs to go that route.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Solicitor General. As the minister responsible for the new Edmonton Remand Centre and its design, the fate of any disabled individuals who may be housed there is in his hands. It falls to him to ensure that the new remand centre is designed so that disabled people don't have to crawl on the floor to go to the bathroom or use the shower, that their laundry is looked after, especially those with ostomies or bowel or bladder problems, and, basically, to design a more disability-friendly site. Will the minister assure us that this new site is going to have a percentage of units and washrooms that are wheelchair accessible and that there is going to be some provision to assist those with disabilities with their cleaning and housing needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member that the new facility will be designed to properly look after all of the folks that we're holding there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mountain Pine Beetle Effect on Watershed

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I read reports from British Columbia of a study linking the mountain pine beetle with increased flooding threats in affected watersheds. My question

is directed to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Is the minister aware of and concerned about the findings of this report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, this report is timely and important to Alberta, but the report highlights, if anything, the importance of taking pre-emptive action to harvest these highly susceptible, older pine stands before the pine beetle takes effect in these. So I can tell you briefly about the B.C. study. It was based on a computer model of an interior B.C. tributary system, and what it found was that in a pine beetle infested area the threat for flooding, the damage to the watershed, and the resulting threat to flooding were greater from trees being killed than from logging.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I concur with the hon. minister. As a professional forester in the province of Alberta I agree with him that that's really the only strategy that works.

I'm concerned about the report though, and I'm wondering whether the minister concurs with the study's finding that hydrological assessments are required in watersheds that are heavily affected by the beetle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I agree completely with that. Surprise. That's why in Alberta, unlike British Columbia, we've required hydrological assessments as part of forestry management plans for the last 20 years.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the minister could enlighten us on what other actions the department is taking to ensure that watersheds are protected from beetle impacts in the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to report that the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development has recently hired an additional full-time hydrologist to focus on this very area. We have strengthened our ability to assess the relationship between watersheds and pine beetle to put us at the forefront of all Canadian provinces in this area.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Capital Cost Allowance Program

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Official Opposition has long demanded a public review of the royalty structure to determine whether or not Albertans are receiving a fair share of their resource. Unfortunately, the Minister of Finance, who is overseeing this review, continues to fire shots over the panel's bow before it has even begun its work. He continues to make

leading statements on matters related directly to this review. My question is for the Minister of Finance. Does the minister have reports or studies that project what financial losses, part of what he called the one-two-three punch, will be for the oil sands companies in light of the federal government's decision to phase out the accelerated capital cost allowance? If he does have them, will he table them in this House?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would be more than happy to table them in the House. We are currently tabulating exactly what potential the accelerated capital cost allowance has of affecting our industry. We have to remember that in Canada the oil and gas industry is an incredibly important component of a very vibrant economy. Our Premier always talks about that if it wasn't for Alberta, the growth in Canada would almost be flatlined. This is a very important issue. It's an issue that we have to stand up for on behalf of our industry. My biggest fear is what the hon. member just said, the one-two-three punch: income trust, accelerated capital cost allowance, and potential climate change.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister concede that by telling the panel members to take into account the ACCA phase-out when determining their final recommendations, he has effectively undermined their independence and the mandate of the panel? And this is the panel that, I have mentioned earlier, Albertans have so long been calling for.

Dr. Oberg: Actually, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would have seen the press releases and listened to what I had said when I first announced the panel, I had actually asked them to look at the accelerated capital cost allowance at that time, and that was some two months ago. That was before we even knew what was in the federal budget. So this is something that we have asked them to look at: how taxes and royalties in general are affecting this industry.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I've long suspected that the minister knew what was in the federal budget long before the rest of us did.

My last question is also for the Minister of Finance. Does the minister have studies or reports that project the potential savings for oil sands companies who now invest in green technology, and will he table those reports in this Legislature?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, on response to the hon. member's first part of his question, I wish I did know what was in the federal budget, but unfortunately we didn't.

I'd be more than happy to do that. We're currently tabulating exactly what the accelerated capital cost allowance will do on our green projects. But we do have to remember that when we're talking, for example, about the CO₂ pipeline, that's about a billion and a half dollars versus a hundred and some billion dollars that are currently projected to be invested in the oil sands, so there is a difference in magnitude of scale on that. We thank them on the green side but not necessarily on the accelerated capital cost allowance for oil sands.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move to the next order of the Routine, just to let you know, there were 92 questions and

answers today.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a fine group of students and their teachers and parents from St. Mary's in Taber. We have with that group teachers Mr. Pat Pyne, Ms Alissa Henriette and parents and helpers Mrs. Kathy Collett, Mr. Mike Cudrak, Mr. Ed Derksen, Mr. Tony Fiedler, Ms Connie Green, Mrs. Sheila Heal, Mrs. Kathy Knibb, Mrs. Audra Ness, Mr. Joe Smith, Mrs. Judy Strojwas, and Ms Jody Green. It's a real pleasure to have visitors come this far and see the excitement that they have in wanting to know about the democratic process. Mr Pyne has made many trips to Edmonton from Taber to share this with his students, and I look forward to meeting them after. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 1,044 people asking the government to take immediate steps to halt further closures by the Edmonton public school board by amending the closure of schools regulation to provide parents and other community members with a period of not less than 18 months to formulate a revitalization plan, to strike a task force comprised of trustees and qualified members of the public to review and make recommendations regarding the Edmonton public school board's current school closure process, and encourage ongoing consultation and partnerships between parents, communities, and municipal and provincial agencies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a petition of a much larger group. These are the citizens from Edmonton-Manning who are supporting the construction of a new Edmonton remand centre but not in northeast Edmonton. There are 218 in this group.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give notice that at the appropriate time I will move that written questions and motions for return appearing on today's Order Paper will stand and retain their places.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to file with the Assembly five copies of my letter to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in response to Sessional Paper 89/2007.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness, I wish to file the appropriate number of copies of responses to written questions 33 and 34, which were asked by the hon. leader of the third party.

Also, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry I wish to table the required number of copies to written question number 27.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from Karen Baxter, the fund development coordinator for the Western Guide and Assistance Dog Society, providing information about this organization, which was founded in 1996.

The second is a letter from Erick and Katherine Guevara of Calgary regarding the issue of child care in Alberta. "At a time when the population is growing and the high cost of living demands more childcare programs, it is strange that support for all children 0-12 with appropriate benefits is lacking and is leading to crises in childcare."

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table eight letters and appropriate copies regarding the possible closure of High Park school, heartfelt letters expressing their desire to have the school stay open from Beth George; Gary Kotyk; Ron Hayter, a councillor of the city of Edmonton; Kathy Paradis; Jesse Sorensen; Judy McInroy; Alexandria Woycenko; and Gloria Krischanowski.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings, the first recognizing the fantastic accomplishments of the Calgary-Varsity William Aberhart Trojan girls' senior wrestling team that won the city this past week. They did extremely well.

My second, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of four letters with the appropriate number of copies regarding the possible closure of High Park school. These letters of concern come from Kristine Peters, Jerry and Kassie Kissel, Arnold Hickey, and Karen Johnson.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, the first being four more letters regarding the potential closure of High Park school, and these letters are from Donna Kelly, Jennifer Reeve, Hans-Juergen Kirstein, and Roberta Paradis.

My second tabling this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is the requisite number of copies of a document entitled Edmonton: Going from Good to Great. It includes the 2006 annual report of the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation. I and several of my colleagues from the Legislature were fortunate enough to attend their annual luncheon today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Anything in there about the Oilers?

Mr. R. Miller: I think the document is silent about the Oilers.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is the requisite number of copies of the University of Alberta: Celebration of Teaching & Learning program book, which is a wonderful celebration ceremony which I attended. It took place on Friday, September 8, 2006.

The second one is eight more letters from concerned parents who are writing to us and to the Minister of Education with respect to the possible closure of High Park school. These letters are from Melodie Stewart, Frank and Marion Kapuscinski, Harry and Muriel Grant, Josef Messmer, Alec Kelly, Lisa Henkel, Constable Troy Jacobsen, and Nikki Andrea.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning Public Interest Alberta, a nonpartisan public interest advocacy organization, issued a discussion paper called *Where To from Here: A Vision and Plan for Post-secondary Education in Alberta*. I'm happy to table five copies of that paper.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a couple of groups of tablings, one here is two letters from the Unity Centre calling for more affordable housing in northeast Edmonton.

Some more tablings requesting this Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua John Hunt be sentenced and tried as an adult due to the nature of the crime, his past criminal history, and that he's close to the age of 18.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to do two different tablings. The first tabling is letters and the appropriate number of copies from parents from High Park school regarding the possible closure. The letters today are from Brayden Kelly, Genène Elder, Cheryl Highfield, and Sylvia Yurko.

A second group are from the same school, concerned about the possible closure of High Park school. Those letters are from Evelyn Kelly, Doug Billey, Nickolaus Hee, and Kim Patten.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the interest of all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly the CO₂ Monitoring and Storage Project report, that is going on in Weyburn. I referred to that yesterday during second reading debate on Bill 3. I would urge all members to please have a look at this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to section 4(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act I am pleased to table in the Assembly the annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the calendar year 2005. The report includes the office's financial statements for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2005.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

2:30

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In honour of the International Day for the Elimination of Racism I would like to table an inspiring

statement released by the Canadian Labour Congress on this issue. I hope that all members have a chance to look at the statement and reflect on the role each of us plays in fighting prejudice and discrimination.

Thanks.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Hancock, Minister of Health and Wellness, the Alberta Cancer Board annual report 2005-2006; the College of Chiropractors of Alberta annual review 2006 and financial statements dated June 30, 2006; the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta 2006 annual report; pursuant to the Health Disciplines Act the Health Disciplines Board annual report January 1, 2005, to December 31, 2005; pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Alberta Mental Health Board 2005-2006 annual report; pursuant to the Health Professions Act Aspen regional health annual report 2005-2006, Capital health annual report 2005-2006, Northern Lights health region annual report 2005-2006, Peace Country health annual report 2005-2006; pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Alberta College of Social Workers annual report 2005; the Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists 2005 annual report; Alberta Dental Association and College annual report 2006; the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta 2005-2006 annual report and financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2006; the College of Alberta Psychologists 2005-2006 annual report and auditor's report as at March 31, 2006; the College of Dietitians of Alberta annual report 2005-2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Lindsay, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, victims' programs status report 2005-2006.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

Bill 20

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007

The Chair: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to move Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007, in Committee of the Whole.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Just for Albertans who aren't familiar with the supplementary supply estimates procedure, more detail is provided than is provided in the interim supply estimates, so we have more than just a single line item. In some cases we have as many as six or seven specific amounts listed, and we have a sense in a general manner of where this money is going to.

Under Advanced Education and Technology for expense and equipment/inventory purchases \$107 million has been committed. This is one of the larger commitments to supplementary supply. A question I would have for the hon. representative of the Treasury Board is if he can break this down a little bit further with regard to the amount that is going to, for example, the infrastructure – for

building, for classroom space, for seats – versus the amount that would be passed along to research, and I'll get into that in greater detail.

Agriculture and Food is receiving an additional \$50 million. Finance is receiving almost that same amount, \$46,570,000.

Health and Wellness, which continues to be one of the major expenditures of the province, will receive \$147 million.

Municipal Affairs and Housing, by comparison, is just receiving \$42 million. When I go through the various departments, I'll ask about what portion of that is going to incent affordable housing building.

Infrastructure and Transportation is receiving one of the smaller amounts. That's \$500,000. Considering the delays in projects, that seems like a very small amount of supplementary transfer.

Service Alberta is to receive \$530,000, and in Monday's discussion of the need for a consumer advocate a lot of responsibility was placed at the feet of Service Alberta. I'm not sure that that amount of transfer will provide the due diligence and enforcement that we would hope to receive from Service Alberta with the loss of the concept of a consumer advocate.

In total, the amount of expense and equipment/inventory purchases under the supplementary supply act is \$393,516,000, a number very similar to the relief that is being provided for the municipality of Wood Buffalo. It's a relatively small amount in terms of the interim supply budget, which is actually approximately \$10 billion.

From the capital investment – as I've pointed out previously, the capital fund – which contains approximately \$6 billion, a small amount is being transferred, \$530,000, leaving a considerable amount which could be put towards reducing infrastructure deficits, building schools, and a variety of worthwhile projects.

With regard to the general revenue fund again I'm pleased to note that Advanced Education and Technology score largely. As I indicated at the beginning of my presentation, we get into more details, which I very much appreciate, and we get some of the breakdowns; for example, for postsecondary institutions. The enrolment planning envelope receives approximately \$214 million, almost \$215 million actually. Of that, the supplementary appropriation is \$31,700,000.

Now, we know that postsecondary institutions are in desperate need of increased space. In Calgary alone over the last two years 25 per cent of eligible students who had the appropriate marks and could afford the high tuition increases in this province had no access. So this small amount of transfer is not going to assist tremendously in increasing enrolment, as is suggested by this enrolment planning envelope.

With regard to infrastructure for postsecondary facilities this is an area where I would like to see a much greater transfer both in the interim supply, which I'll be speaking to later, and also in the supplementary supply because the supplementary appropriation here is only \$69,100,000, and this is a concern I have because our future is determined by the quality of students we produce, whether it's from technical colleges or academic universities. It is interesting to note that Mount Royal College has recently been granted certain status as a university in the specific area of nursing. Hopefully, there will be support from the government and also, in terms of governance, further appropriate development at the University of Calgary.

2:40

I commented earlier about research, and I notice that the research innovation capacity is \$2 million. That seems like an extremely small amount given the amount of research that universities are expected and required to carry out.

The information continues with regard to ministry support services, and basically I see, in thousands of dollars, the equivalent of a million dollars. In terms of program delivery and support I gather that the government didn't consider this an area that was in need of support because there's no budget line for that item.

Postsecondary facilities infrastructure. Again, this is an area, considering that the University of Calgary just last year celebrated its 40th anniversary. There are a number of buildings at the University of Calgary which are basically falling apart. A good example of that would be the old arts and admin building. There is a dramatic contrast when you go into the accompanying Haskayne School of Business. It's a considerably more attractive and well-supported facility, largely due to the fact that the Haskayne family donated a large amount, for which the University of Calgary is very appreciative.

In the details of the supplementary estimates for Agriculture and Food I note that Canadian agricultural income stabilization – in other words, thanks to the federal government's CAIS program – \$50 million is being transferred. A number of farmers are very dependent on that CAIS program. One of the areas that I would like to see further transfers for in these supplementary estimates would be supplying farmers with a kind of equivalent of a workmen's compensation program so that farm labourers and farmers themselves and their families could be supported in the tragic event of an accident. So this is an area where I would suggest that more money could be provided in terms of supplementary estimates.

One of the areas that I am concerned about with regard to the agricultural industry is the oversight. For example, a number of farmers for years have been incented by this government to take on alternate forms of agriculture, including such questionable practices as elk and deer ranching. Previously, we know that with the onset of BSE the testing for diseases was extremely limited, and one of the reasons that we didn't find out about our first outbreak of BSE was the fact that there weren't enough testers, and CWD and testing for it was being taken up. So this is one area I would like to see more supplementary supply being extended to, and that's the testing program.

It's still in the very early stages, but my hope is that with possibly some of the money put into agriculture and some of the money put into postsecondary research, we will be able to test animals for CWD and BSE while they're still alive so that we don't end up with what personal members of my family have experienced, losing their entire herd of Angus cattle because the animals couldn't be tested while they were still living. I realize that we have to take drastic measures to ensure that the spread of disease is eliminated. I would support research into live testing, and I know that the countries to which we export the meat would be very appreciative of that as well.

With regard to Finance, treasury management has received an increase, most likely because a new department has been created to oversee Finance in terms of the Treasury Board. I'm not quite sure why that extra oversight is required when we're talking about eliminating a number of ministries. I'm appreciative of the fact that the government did reduce the number of ministries, but this was a new ministry that was added, and possibly the minister can explain to me some of the expenses associated with creating this new ministry.

Investment, treasury and risk management. Today in Public Accounts and for the last two weeks in the House I have talked a tremendous amount about risk management in the form of the risks associated with P3s: private, for-profit at public expense projects. I've also brought out the fact that despite the government's assurances with regard to risk management that there would be no cost overruns in P3 projects, it has already been noted that there was an

almost \$37 million overrun on the southeast leg of the Anthony Henday. I've already spoken about the concerns I have with the ring road in Calgary and the associated expenses.

With regard to Health and Wellness, it comes as no surprise, given the fact that the government reached an agreement with the Alberta Medical Association, that there would be supplementary monies going to this area. This is an area that I very much support in terms of the transfer of funding because in Calgary alone – and I'm sure the story repeats itself throughout the province – we are losing general practitioners. We're losing front-line staff. In Calgary we lost 41. I know that, for example, in the Wood Buffalo region there is a desperate need for doctors, to the point where doctors are being offered \$1,200 a day. They're being incented to help out the Fort McMurray circumstance. Of course, this is just an interim band-aid situation, but supplementary supply is a form of sort of meeting the need now and making the appropriate transfers.

Another area, of course, that is of concern is the management of the health services, and I look forward to the fact that Public Accounts will be calling before it the two large health regions in Calgary and Edmonton, Capital health and the Calgary health region. Also in Public Accounts today I suggested that I would like to provide support for the Wood Buffalo region, which is experiencing tremendous growth, and of course south in Grande Prairie there is a need for hospital and health support and infrastructure housing.

This province is booming, but there are expenses associated with that boom, and one is the social deficit. So when I note that \$147 million was added to the amount, I'm appreciative of the fact. I think it's money well spent, although again the detail is not quite clear. I notice that in line 3 on page 24 it says Assistance to Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Chase: I agree, but unfortunately there is no line item; there's no supplementary appropriation for this extremely important area.

2:50

Again, I'm very pleased with the discussions that occurred today in Public Accounts about the desire to have a very strong, financially effective, and supportive AADAC operating in the province. It has been noted that the AADAC organization, which deals with addictions, receives only 3 per cent of the money that is raised in terms of gambling and lotteries. It seems like it's an extremely small amount to cure the problem of gambling addiction. Of course, of all the money that we receive from alcohol taxes, I would like to see a tremendous amount transferred to the AADAC program in terms of prevention. Just adding new bells and whistles on VLTs and slots does not dampen the addicted individual's enthusiasm.

In terms of Municipal Affairs and Housing, I indicated at the beginning my concerns that there is very little money being added under supplementary appropriation. I note that the \$42.846 million is a total amount. There's a very small amount under housing services. It says rent supplement, and it shows a 2,000 figure here. Of course, we're talking in the thousands so approximately \$2 million for rent supplements. I keep referring sometimes to thousands when I should actually be noting that the book indicates that this is in thousands of dollars.

The Alberta Liberals have been calling for an emergent support in the form of rent supplements and subsidies. A number of people on AISH and on fixed incomes, who are supposedly not required to expend more than 30 per cent of their total earnings on rent, are being forced to pay up to two-thirds of their meagre \$1,000 AISH amount on rent, and that leaves very little for food or other necessities, such as transportation. So the area of supplementary supply for housing, especially to initiate affordable housing, is an area where I would definitely like to see more money spent.

Thank you. I'll look forward to rejoining.

Mr. Snelgrove: One of the things the hon. member talked about was the \$530,000 in Infrastructure. That's simply a transfer from Infrastructure to Service Alberta for the planes, so it was not supplementary spending in Infrastructure.

Mr. Chairman, it doesn't really matter to me if we want to debate Bill 25 or Bill 20 or rent controls. It's the hon. member's time, but most of what he talked about wasn't really relative to supplementary supply. They may be addressed under Bill 25, interim supply, and the budget, but the elk farming and rent controls and P3s – it doesn't matter to me, but that misinformation about the \$530,000 was directly related to my department. The other ministers may want to comment on this.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak on Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007, in Committee of the Whole. This is an estimates that's including capital for postsecondary institutions, agricultural assistance programs, housing initiatives and programs for the homeless, and funds for physician services. It's money that's viewed as urgently needed, or emergent.

I'm just thinking how nice it would be if a lot of the Children's Services agencies could have the same opportunity to bridge the gap in their budgets with supplementary supply, as our government does. These agencies need predictable and stable funding. I noticed that Children's Services is not asking for supplementary supply. I wonder why some areas are asking for additional funds but Children's Services is not.

As I look at this bill, which is asking for additional money from the last budget to the tune of \$393,516,000, this is the second time in my term here where I have experienced this request for supplementary money. In a sense it's like signing a blank cheque because we don't get much detail about where the money is going. I know that they're spending on specific ministries, but there's no real breakdown of how much goes where and the full details about where they're going to spend money or whether they've already spent some of it, as a matter of fact.

First of all, I'd like to talk from the point of view of my own constituency. Some of these things are being addressed here in supplementary supply, and I'm really happy to see that. We have a grave concern in Edmonton-Mill Woods about the waiting times at hospitals, and this is a shortage of doctors and nursing staff that's a real and ongoing concern.

I hear about the roads in urban and rural areas, I guess. It's not just in Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Another real concern I have, though, is about what I'll call the social deficit, with low-income people and more and more middle-income people feeling that they are now low income. We should think about these people who are earning less than \$20,000 and who are finding that their rent costs are going up astronomically and unreasonably. They're concerned about electricity rates. Of course, there are some that are facing homelessness. These are issues that are of grave concern in my constituency.

Environment is also a big issue, and I'm glad that the government is taking some steps to address environmental issues.

Another thing that is a big concern all over this province is the problem with addictions. There are not enough beds for detox or treatment, yet we're not asking for supplementary money to help with that area and that issue.

The purpose of supplementary supply is to deal with emergent and emergency situations. So I was looking at this and looking at Advanced Education and Technology: \$34.5 million for a grant to

match private donations to the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. My question is: why does this have to be done in supplementary spending? Why could it not have been done earlier, last spring in the budget, or in the upcoming budget? I'm not sure why that is. I also am wondering what capital projects are being funded with the \$66.3 million that's been requested. Another question: is the \$34.5 million grant from the access to the future fund, or is it from general revenues? If it's from general revenues, why hasn't the access to the future fund started paying out yet? I believe that that is what it was set up for.

Looking at the Department of Finance, there's \$7.07 million to reimburse public-sector pension plans, research endowment funds, the scholarship fund, and other minor funds for investment losses. I'm wondering how it happened that we have investment losses when we are in a wonderful, incredibly hot economic market or economic environment right now. What actions were taken against the managers of those funds? What hard questions were asked about the investment decisions that resulted in a loss? It's hard to imagine that in this economy we'd be losing money like that.

Additionally, with Finance we have in one lump-sum payment \$40 million that the government is putting into their share of the management employees' pension plan unfunded pension liability. We know that we have nearly \$7 billion already in an unfunded liability to the teachers' pension plan, which we press this government about fairly consistently. We're continually told time and time again that it's coming, something is going to be addressed with that, but we don't see the movement on that. So this is a situation where taxpayers are funding this to the tune of some \$45 billion over the lifetime of this project as opposed to dealing with the \$7 billion liability right now. It would be a good deal, I believe, for taxpayers if we could look at this unfunded liability today and get rid of it.

3:00

I'm hoping that this is going to be addressed in the upcoming budget. Again, the question is: why was there \$40 million needed in the middle of a budget year? If there's \$40 million for that particular unfunded liability, what about all the other unfunded liabilities that the government has, certainly the largest of which is the teachers' unfunded liability fund?

I look at the Health and Wellness department getting \$147 million for the higher than budgeted cost of physicians' services, and I believe there's an urgent need for that. There's probably really good justification for that request, but I'd like to ask: how will the money be allocated? Can the minister provide a breakdown of how the money for physicians' services will actually be spent, and I'm wondering why that money wasn't included in the 2006 budget. Could these costs not be predicted? How is it possible to under-budget by \$147 million? Then, I guess, always we have to ask what measures are being taken to be sure that Albertans are getting value for their money.

I look at the total of \$42.846 million going to various issues surround housing affordability. This is an emergent issue, and it makes sense to me that we are asking for this now.

I have concerns that some things are not included, like Children's Services: the need for more child care spaces, so acute in this province; the need for child care staff; the need for adequate funding for our agencies, who are struggling with all kinds of stressors these days. I'm looking at the need for predictable, stable funding for FCSS agencies and the AASCF agencies, where over and over we're hearing that it's hard to function with the tyranny of project-based funding and the uncertainty of knowing what's coming next month in terms of help and the amazing amount of energies that have to go into fundraising so they can provide the programs that we know are needed for the vulnerable in our society.

I would hope that we won't be seeing supplementary estimates anymore. I think that a good job of budgeting would make the need for this extra request for money not necessary. I would like to see that we can actually do some serious thinking and strategic planning, long-term planning so that there is no longer a need to be asking for supplemental money.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour for me to stand and speak on Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) bill. I haven't had a chance so far in second reading, and I've been following the debate in *Hansard*.

I just want to speak for a few minutes about the supplementary supply under Municipal Affairs and Housing. It was, of course, a privilege for me to be on the Affordable Housing Task Force and to go around the province and listen to people and their concerns, so immediately my attention was riveted on this portion of the supplementary supply.

The \$2 million to fund 600 additional units for the rent supplement program, of course, is an excellent move. I think that more is required because that program is such a good program. It enables people with low income to be able to move into apartments where there's a supplement to the 30 per cent of their income that is put into the rent, so the landlord receives a cheque directly from the government to provide that extra money. Given the fact that our low-income people are really struggling in this province, in many, many cases I don't know how else they would be able to find a place to live.

We are facing a housing crisis in this province, and all that we can do to help low-income people, especially on the income side of things, not just the supply side, is something that we should seriously look at. The problem is that low-income people, not just people who are on AISH or receiving money from Alberta Works but low-income people who are actually working but whose salaries don't provide enough income to provide for rents given the rise in rents in this province, need help. I applaud the government for at least making this step, and I hope that there will be more support for the rent supplement program in the future.

Now, I still want to make a comment about the next line, the \$15,173,000 for the affordable housing program to increase the availability of affordable housing units in the province. I believe that this is a part of the affordable housing trust program, but the money referred to here is actually the money that the provincial government has received from the federal government, the one-time federal funding of \$81.1 million which has been provided to Alberta over three years. I think in answer to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, who is our housing critic in the Official Opposition, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing did respond that this, indeed, was federal money, and that's the explanation for the sentence here, "This spending would be offset by a transfer from the federal government."

Well, this is a bit misleading because here's an announcement of money that's going into this affordable housing trust program, but it actually is federal money. Where's the provincial money? Shouldn't this federal money be matched by provincial money? That would be a more interesting announcement so that we would really be clear that the provincial government is committed to this program, not just using federal money but actually adding more money. So instead of \$81 million over three years if the province actually matched that money, we'd have \$162 million over three years, and that would be, indeed, good news in terms of developing

more affordable housing in this province. As I said before, we have just a crisis in housing in this province, as all of our task members heard, and we just have to be vigilant now and make the right kinds of decisions.

Of course, the minister will wait and respond to the task force. The task force report has already been delivered to him. I would like to see that report become public much earlier than sometime in May; nevertheless, we need to have the government moving in the direction of more support for affordable housing.

I could say exactly the same thing on the next item, \$16,142,000 for the off-reserve aboriginal housing program to increase the availability of housing for aboriginal Albertans living off-reserve. So this, again, is a reference to the off-reserve aboriginal housing trust, which was a one-time federal funding of \$48.4 million that will be provided for Alberta over three years. My understanding is that that federal money actually has already come and is sitting in the treasury and awaits distribution, so this is an announcement that \$16 million of that money will be distributed. That's great, but what about the rest, and what about, again, matching? What about an announcement that the province is actually going to match this federal money also?

3:10

I am very impressed by various aboriginal groups in the province, including Métis settlements and the groups that are concerned and the nonprofit organizations that are ready to move to help build this housing for aboriginal people. It's been a program that's worked in the past, and it will work in the future. But I don't see the commitment of the provincial government here reflected in these numbers. I mean, it's fine to transfer the federal money on, but what about matching this money so that we can really indeed deal with the crisis in housing in this province?

Those are my thoughts on the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) bill. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 20, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 20 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Carried.

Bill 25

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007

The Chair: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. I now rise to move Bill 25, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007, to Committee of the Whole.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to rise and participate in debate on the interim supply bill in Committee of

the Whole. Some of my remarks are going to be somewhat repetitive from the last two years as this is my third time participating in deliberations on interim supply.

In my opinion, as I have stated before, interim supply should really be minimal. It should be for emergencies or unforeseen circumstances, Mr. Chairman, and certainly not in the billions of dollars and not before each and every budget, each and every year. So the question that I basically keep asking of this House is: what is really the purpose of a budget if the government cannot stick to a budget?

Also, the issue of how late the budget usually arrives: typically one would think that a budget has sort of a fixed date, a fixed expectancy date, when we anticipate that it might be coming down. Then year after year we are faced with a situation where the budget is delayed, and sometimes it's delayed more than one time in the same interval, or in the same year.

Interim supply, by my definition, really means a cash advance. Mr. Chairman, take your credit card debt, for example. We all know that cash advances are the worst kind of transaction. I personally as an individual and in my family, in my household, never do cash advances. We budget, and we stick to our plan, and we never run out of money this way. So why doesn't this government budget as an individual or as a family? Why don't they use the same methodology as I use in my own household?

Also, having interim supply tells me as an individual and as a member of this esteemed Assembly that there is no plan. There is no overall plan where we know that we're going to need this money, and it should be built into the budget, and budgets come on time, and it's really simple and not in the tens of billions of dollars.

Another question which is really puzzling in some way. In 2004, just to use one example, interim supply was \$5.5 billion. It is almost double this amount this year when we're asking for in excess of \$10 billion for this fiscal year, 2007-2008. Why this big jump? I mean, I don't think the cost of running the government or the cost of conducting government business has increased by this amount, and I don't think it's also a factor of the fact that, you know, this year the budget is a little later than in 2004, for example. How much of a delay I don't think explains this big discrepancy.

Now, having said this, I recognize and appreciate the argument that the wheels of government have to turn and that our civil servants need to be paid in the interim until the actual budget is introduced. The question is: why is the budget more than one month late? Customarily we have expected budgets to be announced in this Assembly or in this province sometime in mid-March. Why is this budget coming on the 19th of April instead? Couldn't we have avoided interim supply altogether or greatly minimized the amount by being on time? That's the question.

Another question, Mr. Chairman – again, this is a layman asking – there seems to be an apparent conflict or duplication where now we have a Minister of Finance, or a Provincial Treasurer in the old definition, and then we also have a President of the Treasury Board. So role clarification, I think, is warranted. We need to know what each of them really does.

Mr. Flaherty: Good luck.

Mr. Elsalhy: My hon. colleague from St. Albert is saying, "Good luck," and I think that, yes, we need more than luck to understand this unique situation where we have two people entrusted to dispense and expend taxpayers' money and why we need two ministers with two huge departments, lots of staff, and making two minister's salaries, for example.

Remember, Mr. Chairman, when the former Premier created a ministry for restructuring and government efficiency following the 2004 election, adding to the government bureaucracy and trying to convince us that we needed an extra department to make government more efficient, I questioned this, and many of my colleagues in the Official Opposition questioned this. We called a spade a spade, and we said that it was such a colossal waste of money and that it wasn't making government any more efficient. But the decision stayed, and we had a minister with staff, making a minister's salary, and also in turn a large transition allowance when he is no longer an MLA, all at taxpayers' expense and with no apparent benefit.

After the last Tory leadership we were told the good news, that the size of cabinet had been reduced, but we didn't really tackle the issue of duplication or conflict, redundancy. We have two ministers likely going to share some of the responsibility or going to have overlaps, and they might be at times rowing in opposite directions or at least pulling on those purse strings in opposite directions. Then you add the hon. Premier. The hon. Premier has a lot to do with financial decisions, and from time to time he would offer an edict, or a decree, as to how things should go, and now you have an interesting triangle, Mr. Chairman, unfolding before your eyes. You have a President of the Treasury Board, you have a Finance minister, and then you also have a Premier, who all contribute to that discussion on financial matters.

Anyway, I'm not going to go through each of the 20 entries in this interim supply schedule.

Mr. Chase: You're leaving it for me.

Mr. Elsalhy: I am leaving it for my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity because he's better versed in all things financial, but I need to focus on maybe one or two of them, and I know that other members have raised the same concerns at earlier stages of debate.

First, I wanted to talk about Municipal Affairs and Housing. They're getting, if I remember correctly, about \$235 million. That's a decent chunk of coin. Hopefully, part of this would be to immediately and decisively look at issues surrounding affordable housing. What is more important to me is rent affordability. My argument, Mr. Chairman, is that for every man, woman, or child who is on the street now, who is already homeless, there are probably 10 or 11 waiting or ready to join them. So rent affordability to me is more important. It's more of an issue. The ones who are on the verge of becoming homeless outnumber those who are already on the street by about 10 to 1. So I'm hoping that some of this money is going to immediately go toward programs to offer rent subsidies, to offer relocation allowances, to increase the supply of units that are available.

3:20

Mr. Chairman, I am sure that you agree with me that the current boom is placing a lot of difficulty on Alberta families, people on low income or fixed income. The term "homeless" now is not just people who are on the street living in cardboard boxes or in shelters. We have people who are living with other people, living in basements, renting a couch at somebody's home. We have people living in their cars. I don't think that waiting for the findings of that task force that toured the province – what I'm saying is that we can't wait till the end of June to hear what the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is willing or ready or prepared to do. What we need is action right now and action two months from now and action six months from now and action that keeps going because this problem is only going to escalate with this type of market that we're living in. Municipal Affairs and Housing: I hope that some of this money is going to be put to use immediately.

Second, a combined comment on both the Solicitor General and Public Security and Justice and Attorney General. Justice is getting \$119 million, and the Solicitor General is getting something like \$600 million, if I do the math. Between them I think, again, that some of this money should immediately go to funding and providing resources for front-line police officers. Our mayors of the cities and towns, the Reeves of the smaller communities, police chiefs across the province are asking for better per capita funding, and they're asking for increased training and programs to avert crime at the front end or upstream, if you will, Mr. Chairman. Hopefully, some of this money should go toward these programs.

Today there was an announcement on sort of a crime prevention task force. It's something that has been announced, and it's going to be a nine-member panel chaired by a member of this House. While task forces are useful and while they are beneficial, sometimes we have too many of them. I think the answer to our crime issue is not to have another road show where people submit their complaints or their concerns. We've already heard these, and it's not that we are likely going to hear anything new. I think the message is loud and clear. We need more resources, we need more funding for police services, and we also need to build community assets.

What do I mean by "community assets"? If you use the model in B.C., for example, Mr. Chairman, it's basically engaging young kids and keeping young kids busy and keeping young kids away from the streets and away from bad influence. What you're doing is opening doors for them to engage them in the community, to make them use their time a little more constructively, and to prevent them from falling prey to things like drugs, illicit substances, gang violence, all that stuff. So to build community assets, offer kids scouting programs, offer them sports programs, arts programs, get them busy in their communities helping clean up the community, helping with, for example, Crime Watch. They can help with, you know, a community fair or a community barbecue or raising funds for charity or stuff like this. You add to their feeling of self-worth, but you also get them away from those negative influences that might actually get them in trouble down the road.

If you ask the mayor of Edmonton, if you ask Mayor Bronconnier in Calgary, if you ask the mayor of St. Albert, they're all likely going to tell you that asset building in the community is the way to do it plus increased funding for police services. If you ask Chief Boyd here in Edmonton about what he thinks – and he comes from Ontario, and he has spoken to members of the opposition and, notably, the hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora about this – he would tell you that asset building in the community, while it might cost a little bit up front, will save a lot of money and grief at the other end. If you, Mr. Chairman, or the hon. Minister of Justice or the Solicitor General speak to the RCMP in Richmond, B.C., for example, they're going to likely repeat my message and say: "Yes, it works. We've had it for a few years, and it is proving to be very useful."

So I'm hoping that some of this money in this interim supply would be used to really think outside the box and to try to do things that people are asking for. Having the task force is great, fine, but we could probably cut down a lot of money and time commitment by just going to the root of the problem, the cause of the problem, which is that we need more police officers on the streets.

This task force is going to cost \$1.5 million, and if you do the simple math, Mr. Chairman, \$100,000 would get you a good, strong, well-trained police officer on the street. So we could actually get 15 more police officers on our streets policing our communities for this amount of money. Instead, we're doing a repetitive consultative process, which is likely going to take some time and then yield a

report which is likely going to sit on some shelf collecting dust, and in the interim we haven't really done anything to address the issue. So I think that a better use of this \$1.5 million would have been to just go ahead and hire 15 more police officers, maybe another 15 six months from now, another 15 a year from now, and so on. This is what people are asking for, and I think this is the proper way to do it if it were up to me.

Anyway, I'm not going to take more of the committee's time, Mr. Chairman. I understand that some of my colleagues and some people across the way are eager to jump up and speak because they feel so passionately about interim supply, and I thank you for this opportunity.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciated the opportunity last week to begin discussions on interim supply. I must admit that I felt somewhat shortchanged because I knew that there were a number of members who had not had the opportunity to deliver their throne speeches, and I did not want to compromise their time at that point.

One of the circumstances that I always attempt to begin my discussions with is setting the scene. Again, this is from 34 years of being a public school teacher. For those people who are concerned about interim financing and how the government operates, we're back to the document, the very thin document, that has basically one-line items mostly in the multimillion dollar categories.

With regard to Advanced Education and Technology I've already talked about the state of decay in terms of infrastructure at the University of Calgary, but I want to talk about a very proactive group that's connected with the university, and that's the Shaganappi Trail advisory group, that consists of members from the communities that surround the south Shaganappi Trail, which kind of bisects the Calgary-Varsity area. There are representatives from the University of Calgary, representatives of the Calgary Foothills hospital, representatives of the research park, which is across the road from and will hopefully with infrastructure support have a direct linkage to the University of Calgary. It represents groups such as Parkdale, Montgomery, and of course my constituency of Calgary-Varsity.

This is a very wonderful organization, to which there is government representation in the form of Infrastructure. There's also representation from the city of Calgary. What it does is discuss concerns where one particular organization might affect directly that of another area, and of course with the University of Calgary desperately in need of expansion to meet the government's plan of 60,000 new spaces by 2020, there is a lot of desire to build.

One of the areas where I would hope that some of this \$728 million, almost \$729 million, is going toward would be the west campus. There are some very exciting plans being drawn up for the west campus, basically, which now has given a fair amount of space to the Children's hospital, the new and very exciting Calgary Children's hospital. It's also worth noting because of the close proximity that the Ronald McDonald House will be opening up this coming Friday. That's a wonderful facility that sort of sits between the university and the Children's hospital and will provide parents and children, of course, with a tremendous amount of support.

3:30

One of the ongoing concerns that's brought forward from the south Shaganappi is the delineation of responsibilities between the city and the province. The city is very pleased that the province, through its infrastructure department, is widening highway 1, the

Trans-Canada, which in Calgary cuts through a large section of my area. In fact, the southern border of the Calgary-Varsity constituency is 16th Avenue. Now, 16th Avenue has had some rather negative intrusive effects, both on the community of University Heights, that I represent, and the community of Parkdale, that my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View represents.

In the case of University Heights, in Calgary-Varsity, a very small retaining wall was built, which was supposed to be a sound barrier, but unfortunately this wall was built in a ditch, so the height of this wall is basically two feet. It doesn't quite reach the nuts on the wheels of the semis that go by, and of course the stacks on the semis tower over this wall as though it were nonexistent. That's the problem that the people north of 16th Avenue that are members of the south Shaganappi advisory group face.

Those in Parkdale, to the south, are facing a couple of problems, for which they've been looking for results from Infrastructure, that will hopefully be part of the money that we'll be talking about when we get to Infrastructure. They're facing light pollution in that the lights that were supplied that are supposed to focus on 16th Avenue are actually focusing in their backyards. We've had a number of meetings with representatives of Alberta Infrastructure, but no resolution has taken place.

Another concern that representatives of the Parkdale community have is the fact that the landscaping opposite the 16th Avenue overpass under which Shaganappi Trail flows has not had a commitment from the province to be completed. There is a little bit of decorative work in terms of cement trees, as opposed to the real version, that the Parkdale community would like to see occurring. They would like to see basically the same kind of quality landscaping that the Calgary health region has done beside the Calgary Foothills hospital extended for the benefit of the Parkdale residents. The beauty of this advisory group is that we constantly get updates from various members, including the research park across from the university, that works hand in hand with the university on developing exciting projects.

Of course, I've referred before to the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy. It is my hope that some of these millions of dollars will be going to that area although I'm also very aware of the need for tuition support for university students facing a variety of challenges due to increasing tuition costs and finding themselves having to rely on the food bank. This is a rather sad commentary on the Alberta boom, that not only are students having to go to the food bank, but some of their professors are as well. That's a rather sad circumstance.

I've already talked about my concerns about agricultural funding under supplementary supply, so I will not go into great detail in this area although I would like to see farmers being encouraged to grow alternative crops and not simply a singular suggestion that ethanol crop production is one of the areas we'll subsidize. I would like the government to support farmers as they experiment with different types of crops, different forms of crop rotation, which by so doing enrich the ground so that less fertilizer is required. So under agricultural research initiatives I think this would be a terrific expenditure.

Children's Services I referred to briefly the last time I had an opportunity to speak. I commented on the \$11 million. But now that the federal government's budget has come down, we recognize the fact that not very much money has been provided for children's services, whether it's to support the stay-at-home parents, that Bev Smith, a social advocate, has recommended, nor is there much in the way of funding to help parents with daycare or before school or after school care. It was refreshing to hear the Minister of Children's Services talk about extending the support for children beyond the

school entry level and taking into consideration what the other provinces do throughout this great nation, and that's the idea of recognizing that children need support right through to grade 6 or 12 years of age. This is an area that hasn't been sufficiently supported in the past.

Education, of course, is an area that I noted briefly before received \$1,200,000,000. But as former colleagues have mentioned, the unfunded liability itself approaches \$7 billion, and if the government does not address that, its commitment as well as that of teachers will continue. So under the education area I definitely would like to see movement taking place on the unfunded liability.

Also under Education I'm concerned that there's a trend. Instead of taking kids off buses by building schools in new areas, the reverse is happening. We're actually putting more students on buses, and they're coming from the schools that are being forced to close in inner-city areas. There's been a lot of discussion, of course, of the fact that when you take out the school, the heart of the community, then you do not incent new families to rejoin that area.

Under Employment, Immigration and Industry I note \$221,800,000. Again, an item that has received a tremendous amount of discussion in this House – and we're just getting started – is protection for immigrants; for example, immigrants who become landed immigrants, those like the 200 that are being sworn in today at my former junior high school, F.E. Osborne, in the Calgary-Varsity constituency. I've talked about the lack of support for English as a Second Language families as well as students, and we have also talked about the example of the Mexican immigrant whose contract was not recognized when he spent all the money to get here from Guadalajara.

Immigrants are the key to our future. We know that we have a declining birth rate, even given our provincial boom and spikes in the birth rate. We know that immigrants are the builders of our province and of our nation, and we want to make sure that the support they receive when we entice them to come is there. So I don't believe the \$222 million is sufficient to provide the base and protection that they require.

In terms of Energy expense and equipment again, referring to the federal government, they seem very reluctant to take away the \$1.4 billion of tax holidays. In fact, it seems to me that they've deferred that for another eight years. They're not addressing the holidays that industry has received in this province. I would appreciate explanation as to where this \$96 million is coming from. I would like to think that maybe a large portion of it will be reclamation or a more sensitive form of intrusion into areas so that in the future the degree of reclamation, such as what is currently necessary in Suffield, will be reduced by a more appropriate first-time exploration and extraction.

3:40

I spoke to quite an extent on support for environment. In my throne speech I referred to the Water for Life and the blue gold as being great things to talk about, but the fact is that we still haven't mapped our aquifers. If we put together all the data from extraction and exploration in terms of minerals and combined that information, we would have a pretty good sense of our underlying aquifers. I would hope that some of this money, the \$40 million that's being provided through interim supply, will go to accurately mapping our aquifers because without water we've got nothing left. No amount of oil or gas is going to make up for the fact that we don't have water to live on.

Infrastructure and Transportation has received \$972 million. Of course, when we look at infrastructure and transportation, basically that responsibility has been downloaded onto the municipalities. In

their latest municipal report they noted that between the years 1990 and 2005 there was approximately \$5 billion of money that wasn't transferred to support the municipalities. When we look at our infrastructure and transportation deficit, which is the result of paying down the so-called debt at such a rapid rate, basically we traded that debt, as I've said before in this House, for an infrastructure deficit. That deficit finds its total, I would guess, now approaching \$12 billion. We know that the infrastructure defrayed budget of the Calgary school board alone is \$441 million. We're not talking new infrastructure; we're simply talking repairs of existing infrastructure.

Schools for the future. The number of schools that are being required and have been on school boards' plans for years and years and years without any resolution makes us wonder at what point they'll finally be undertaken. Of course, the promise that was provided with the space utilization formula for school infrastructure was that by closing an inner-community school, that was supposed to free up the funding for a new community. Well, we've seen that that's not the case. In terms of expenditures on infrastructure I can't think of better expenditures than schools.

Of course, I am so relieved that the government has finally agreed to fund the southeast hospital and build it in a publicly transparent fashion.

I will look forward to the debate that the minister of the Treasury suggested I save my comments in terms of infrastructure and transportation for, but I have concerns about what's happening at this point.

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, my colleague, brought up concerns under the supplementary supply about how aboriginal First Nations groups were being supported. Of course, we see a very small amount being attached to International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations of only \$23,500,000. We know that Alberta, specifically here where we are in the wonderful city of champions, Edmonton, second only in importance and splendour to Calgary, is going to receive the largest off-reserve aboriginal population in Canada. Within the next five years Edmonton is going to surpass Winnipeg, and aboriginal individuals will be looking to Edmonton for gainful employment and education.

Thank you very much. I look forward to finishing off my concerns.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak to this bill, the interim supply. It's difficult to give a critical response to interim supply estimates because there's no detail, but I'm choosing to focus on Children's Service's request for \$311 million.

First of all, now that we know that the new federal plan is inadequate to meet needs, I'm hopeful that the five-point plan will remain intact with PD funding and incentives with accreditation. I'm not familiar with the plans for the coming years. I do know that there are concerns in this province everywhere I go about child care. This situation is hurting Alberta's families, it's hurting Alberta's economy, and it mustn't continue. Alberta can afford to invest in quality child care. In fact, it can't afford not to make that investment. I'm hoping that this interim budget is going to put some money into child care, and that it's, I guess, a first step towards what the budget will be telling us in the next little while.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

Like our economy our need for quality child care is growing faster than any other province, and yet Alberta only has child care spaces to accommodate about 10 per cent of our children, and child care centres face a relentless, uphill struggle to recruit and retain staff.

It's an unsustainable situation that we have, and it urgently requires solutions.

Every Alberta family should have access to quality child care, and families who care for their children at home should be supported with that choice. The Alberta Liberal caucus is committed to expanding child care in quantity, quality, and in the availability of spaces at a reasonable cost. The current situation is that we have long wait-lists for child care spaces, we have difficulty retaining staff, there are concerns about the quality of care, and parents are struggling to meet the demands of working and raising children.

Right now in Alberta our unsustainable system has regulated child care spaces for about 10 per cent of our children. Only Newfoundland and Saskatchewan have fewer. Quebec and Yukon can accommodate about 30 per cent of their children. Alberta is the only province where the number of daycare spaces dropped significantly between 1992 and 2004, and during that same period the number of spaces country-wide more than doubled. In 2004 Alberta had Canada's lowest percentage of women with preschool children in the workforce. Many Alberta mothers simply can't return to work due to a lack of child care options.

This is affecting our economy. It's affecting our workforce in the medical fields as well as many other sectors. If even half of the people that we know could be working were working, that would be about 17,000 if we compared to Quebec's ratio, that would make a hugely beneficial impact on our labour shortage. In 2004 Alberta had the lowest public spending per child care space of any Canadian province. Alberta is the only province or territory that invested less in child care in 2004 than it did in 1992, and there's no guarantee that the new funding based on discontinued federal transfers will be maintained. Alberta is the only province, I'm ashamed to say, that does not offer parents subsidies for child care up to the age of 12. In addition to all of that, Alberta places harsher restrictions on maternity and paternal leaves than any other province.

3:50

Also, I want to again mention stay-at-home parents, who need to be supported and recognized in that choice. As we look at phase 2 of our Alberta Liberal child care policy, we are consulting with people like Bev Smith, the author of *Who Cares?*, and others to address this sector.

Another area I'd like to look at is the Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta. This is a program that has an 80-20 funding partnership between the province and municipalities and Métis settlements to provide preventative social services. Currently 305 municipalities and Métis settlements participate in FCSS to provide 200 programs across the province, either as single municipalities or sometimes as multimunicipal programs. Of these 200 local programs, 187 are members of the FCSS Association.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

From the early PSS, which was called preventative social services, beginnings FCSS has grown to fill several roles in Alberta's communities. They provide ideas, resources, support facilitation, and leadership, and they're strong community partners. They ask questions, they find the answers, and they advocate for action to improve the lives of Albertans. This is an organization that needs our strong support, and one of the things that I'd like to suggest is that the annual FCSS budget be indexed to accommodate increases for inflation, cost of living, and increases in the provincial population.

The province of Alberta is experiencing an ever-increasing rate of growth, and with that growth comes increased social needs. The

demand for services provided to support families who are separated due to work requirements has increased significantly. Increased prosperity is leading to other problems: family breakdown, addiction problems, and reduced community connectedness. Many FCSS programs, especially those serving sparse rural populations, have not seen a significant funding increase for several years. The cost of other programs' supplies and services, especially rent, insurance, and energy, is also increasing rapidly for both FCSS programs and for nonprofit groups that are funded by FCSS. Then there's the cost of maintaining quality staff to operate quality programs. This is increasing rapidly due to the booming economy.

So as we look at the budget, I am hoping that we're going to see beyond this interim into the next budget some consideration for FCSS and community service programs because they're already experiencing an exodus of staff to other competitive sectors of the economy, resulting in a loss of leadership, knowledge, and relationships within our sector. Clients of the community services sector often rely on long-standing supportive relationships with the staff in order to effect a change in their lives. The staff is changing, and there isn't that consistency and the building of a trust relationship. These vulnerable are not going to have the same benefits as they would have if there were stable relationships.

The number of seniors in Alberta is expected to increase from its present 10 per cent of the population to 20 per cent in 2031. FCSS programs for seniors have proven over and over again to be a huge benefit to our province.

To me it seems that the FCSS budget increases are intermittent, with no discernible relationship between the needs at the local level and the amount of the increases. It's impossible for municipalities to plan ahead and strategically set directions and priorities and sustainability.

In summary, the booming economy and population growth are changing Alberta. The market economy for staffing, housing, and office rents in many communities is changing the landscape as well. There's a looming crisis in sector staffing. Increased needs and demographic growth in certain populations are also placing demands on FCSS programs that are currently outpacing funding. In order to keep the health and vibrancy of our communities, I believe that we need to be looking at increasing FCSS funding, making it realistic so that they can budget with some predictability.

Another concern with FCSS, I think, is their efforts to help with the homelessness initiatives. Alberta municipalities have adopted comprehensive strategies to help end homelessness in their communities. They're experiencing significant pressures due to unprecedented growth, employment, and economic issues related to the lack of social infrastructure to support their citizens, including a lack of affordable housing options. Again, this is another area where I think that the province of Alberta needs to renew and strengthen its support for a long-term plan and sustainable and predictable funding for minimizing homelessness and supporting affordable housing initiatives. I'm glad that we're seeing some of that with the supplementary budget requests.

The other great concern I have is for the provision of funding for the creation and operation of licensed care for elementary school-aged children during out of school time periods: before and after school and, perhaps, at lunch time. If we want to look at the stated goals of Alberta Children's Services – to promote the development and well-being of children, youth, and families; to keep children, youth, and families safe and protected; and to promote healthy communities for children, youth, and families – we need to provide and invest in a range of programs and services to meet the needs of families. At this point Alberta doesn't provide any funding beyond six years although the needs certainly don't end at five years.

Family support networks have changed in our society. Parents don't have extended family that they can rely on or friends or neighbours to provide child care for their elementary school-aged children. The circumstances that create the need for child care in the early years generally continue through the elementary years, and quality care is still essential during these years. I would suggest that we need to look at licensed out of school care programs that provide children with adequate supervision and opportunities to participate in activities which increase resilience and build protective factors and help them learn positive decision-making. This is an area where we are sadly lacking in Alberta.

Another area I'd like to look at is the Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families. To do this I'd like to quote from a letter I received from David Horricks, president of this association.

The Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families (AASCF) is a membership-driven association of agencies providing services to children and families throughout the province. The AASCF was founded in 1967 and has worked for 40 years to strengthen member agencies and to promote attitudes, practices and conditions that contribute to quality services for vulnerable children and families.

The AASCF currently has over 110 members from across Alberta representing agencies that serve some 80,000 children and families each year. Our agencies also employ over 7,400 people and have more than 7,900 volunteers that provide over 526,000 hours of support and assistance.

In late 2006 the issue of recruitment and retention of staff reached dangerous proportions. To verify this anecdotal assessment, a province wide survey of child and family service agencies was completed. 141 member and non-member agencies were contacted.

The results were extremely distressing.

- Annualised staff turn over [for these agencies] was 39%,
- 30% of staff work at two or more jobs.
- 68% of the positions vacated could not be filled.
- 66% of responding agencies were concerned about being unable to meet contract obligations and/or sustain high levels of professional standards.

The primary reason for loss of staff and the inability to attract replacement staff relate to low compensation and inadequate benefits. This is a particularly difficult situation since the principal competitor for staff is the same government institutions that are the main contract funder of agencies.

4:00

While the survey confirmed the serious and growing gap in compensation levels, it also provided troubling indicators of future directions.

- Large numbers of professionals are leaving the social services sector for other professional opportunities.
- The demands placed upon staff are steadily increasing with declining compensation and recognition.
- Young people are making career choices that avoid the helping professions

because they don't see a future. They don't see security and compensation.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the social support [programs] for children and families are facing serious human resource problems. It is also evident that there will be no quick or easy solution. However, if we fail to collectively confront the situation we can surely expect to experience more frequent and distressing failures of the social services [agencies].

I ask all members to seriously consider the valuable work that these agencies do and the support that they need. They can't fill positions. They can't compete in the marketplace. It's difficult to compete in this economy, and it's difficult to compete with government sites. They're losing staff to government positions or other businesses.

They got a 3 per cent increase, and they're grateful for that, but it's only for salaries and benefits. At the same time, heat, food, clothing costs have not been adjusted. No real cost-of-living adjustments have been made to this sector since 1993. Grid movement for staff costs 5 and a half per cent between all levels, so they can't attract people who are at higher levels. They have to pay less, and they're losing people.

I'm not proposing that we eliminate that gap between what government agencies can pay versus these others, but we should be doing something to help with fixed costs. Repairmen don't work at the same rate as they did in 1993. Again, I'm hoping that we'll recognize that some of these agencies can't run at capacity because they can't get the staff; therefore, they can't compete with the rest of the sector. Some agencies are running with 60 per cent of the staff that they could have, and that will result in a reduction in the number of kids that they can have, and they can't function because of the economy of scale.

Many agencies are running right now with open positions that they can't fill. There's not enough relief staff. Overtime is expected. People are burning out. If there are further drops, they're going to have to cut teachers or assistants or secretaries, and they won't be able to keep programs. I think the minimum should be 10 per cent to cover costs and to help them deal in a realistic manner and give them an opportunity to truly compete.

Again, a concern that I have is that if we look at our social workers, many of them are overwhelmed. There are too many demands, and there are not enough resources. This includes the amount of help that they can give to foster parents. Often they can't make the number of visits that they should, so the supervision may not be there, which produces risk. The problem is that we don't have enough people on the front line. I'm hoping the next budget is going to address that.

In regard to foster homes I'm wondering who establishes the criteria. What are the criteria? You know, it's possible that a foster home may not be a good placement because there are a number of young people and children now that have very serious behaviour problems. I think we're leaning on foster parents to take more and more kids, and some of them are more difficult kids. That's related to the reduction in group homes that was made in Alberta. We're getting more difficult kids, that used to go to supervised group homes, being placed in foster homes. Alberta used to have treatment foster homes for kids with extreme high needs. These were eliminated, I gather, because of expenses. Now we only have two types, general and advanced. Even the advanced are often not trained or supported, but they're still getting kids with very severe problems.

I also want to mention the issue of addiction services. There are many kids in care who are addicted and need that help. I'd like to talk about the help that we do offer, but I'm running out of time. I want to mention, though, that we don't have enough beds for detox or treatment. We've taken some small steps, and I'm hoping that we will have the opportunity in this Legislature to look at some stronger, more meaningful steps in regard to addictions.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to, as the song says, rise again. My comments are going to deal primarily with Municipal Affairs and Housing. The amount of money that is being put forward, the \$234,900,000, approximately \$235 million, seems like a large amount of money if it was in the form of a lottery prize. But with the increase in the pricing and the inflation of housing, this really is a fairly small amount. I realize

that it's supposed to be just a tide-over amount, but we know that quite often in the budgets there isn't a sufficient amount of money dedicated to affordable housing and housing developments, such that these interim budgets are necessary.

I want to speak very specifically about the terrific constituency of Calgary-Varsity, which is an older community but can be part of a solution in terms of affordable housing with some government support. I am hoping that some of this money, the approximately \$235 million that is being indicated, will go towards better planning between municipalities, in this case the city of Calgary and the province.

We have a desire to increase density. I know the city of Edmonton has come up with some very creative projects to increase density in communities in connection and in planning with the school boards to use part of the former playground area of schools to create affordable housing. In the city of Calgary, specifically in Calgary-Varsity, there is a plan, at least on the drawing board, to have two 12-storey apartment buildings built in the area of 53rd Avenue and the cross of Varsity Estates Drive. While this increased development would help eliminate the urban sprawl that is, unfortunately, one of the markers of large cities like both Calgary and Edmonton, there is not sufficient infrastructure at this point to provide for the smooth entering and exiting of the area.

Crowchild Trail has been widened, and I am very thankful to the province that they've recognized the necessity of building a series of overpasses to eliminate the former traffic lights. Nose Hill Drive is one of the ones that is rapidly progressing, which I'm pleased to see. But, unfortunately, what has happened in this Calgary-Varsity development that is being suggested is that a high-density area is being shoehorned into an area that does not have the road to support it. For example, when the Dalhousie station was added to the west Dalhousie, the Dalhousie side of Crowchild, north of Crowchild, the traffic problems that were caused by the increased volume as people cut through the area in order to reach other developments farther to the north and west have caused a great deal of difficulty. Now, with the application to build two 12-storey towers without a way of getting into the district on 53rd, what we have is basically the equivalent of a vise.

4:10

On one side we have the development of the Dalhousie station shopping centre, and we have a ground-level-only parking facility, which does not meet the necessity of current Calgary-Varsity constituents in terms of accessing the LRT. On top of that, we add these two 12-storey towers with no extra exit or entrance possibilities save, basically, a two-lane overpass into the area, as I've indicated before, the two lanes that come off Crowchild Trail to enter either to the Dalhousie station or to continue on along Crowchild Trail with the option of turning left across the overpass on 53rd. The province has suggested to the city that simply a traffic circle will get rid of the traffic flow problem.

I've been to three different community association meetings where members from provincial infrastructure have been present as well as members of the city's planning department, and I've asked about the possibility of putting just a short lane, basically, that would parallel the existing LRT and connect with the Crowchild Square development, which would allow people at least to get out of the community without having to use 53rd. They'd still have the problem associated with it. But it's unrealistic to think that people living in these towers are not going to have vehicles, that they're simply going to get onto the LRT and head off into the various areas of Calgary to work.

I'm hoping that within this \$235 million there is money – again, I'm thinking Calgary, but as my responsibility as shadow minister

is for the entire province, I would hope that there is money here for Edmonton as well, for their LRT. What Calgary is finding is that given our population one alderman, McIver, who is a very creative, hard-working individual, has talked about possibly taking seats out of our LRTs so that we could have more standing room available. Well, I would suggest that the solution is longer trains, but in order to accommodate that, we're going to need infrastructure money and municipal affairs money in support to extend the existing LRT platforms, never mind extending the LRT west in Calgary.

So expending money on transit as well as the infrastructure of roads would be greatly appreciated, and of course I know that the Edmonton LRT system has experienced a series of delays. It's not gotten to the point where it is in Calgary, but both cities desperately need to cut down on the amount of car traffic. In order to encourage public transportation, it's got to meet the demand. I don't know Edmonton as well as I know Calgary, but I know that, for example, there aren't interconnecting bus lines that run on a regular basis to a number of the industrial developments. People are basically forced to hop in their car in order to access these areas. So this is where I believe the expertise of the province when combined with municipalities, that shared expertise, as well as the necessary funding transfers would allow for a better use of our transit programs.

I very much hope that an extra lane, as I say, can be added to that short section between Shaganappi Trail and 53rd. There's a berm that exists there right now that could theoretically be taken out without interfering with the Dalhousie LRT station. I believe there is the potential of having a lane which would allow access into this development, which would cure approximately half of the problem. At least, people could get out even though they'd still have trouble getting in.

In terms of regional planning there is a need for the province to not be sort of the judge and executioner, but the province should have a role as a facilitator with regard to regional planning. I know that in both Calgary and Edmonton this is a problem. On the number of upgraders that are being suggested for the Edmonton area, the discussion over the various dumps that are being proposed, again in the Edmonton area, the municipalities need to be brought together in some form of regional planning.

We have the AUMA and the AAMD and C seemingly at odds in terms of regional planning. We have disputes between every single city and their surrounding area, whether it's Calgary and Rocky View over Balzac, whether it's Grande Prairie county or the city of Grande Prairie in terms of acquiring land. This is a common problem, and this is where we need provincial leadership. Again, it's just a one-line item, but this is an area that I would certainly promote greater investment in in terms of helping the province take a lead role in facilitating the regions together coming up with development which will eliminate urban sprawl, which will set aside zones for green space.

I don't know whether it's to the same extent as the problem in Edmonton, but there is great concern because of the fact that the Bow River in Calgary is glacier fed and that the proposed clear-cutting in the forest management agreement between the province and Spray Lakes is threatening our watershed. This is one of the reasons we need this kind of provincial leadership. We need to buy back our watershed or at least manage it.

The beauty of the land surrounding Calgary is that to a large extent it's Crown land, so we should as a province have a greater say in how that Crown land is being developed. I don't want to see lumber companies put out of business. In terms of regional planning I would like to see the government help organizations like Spray Lakes to develop a selective logging practice which doesn't eliminate the entire forest but takes out those trees that have reached

a certain maturity, that their value is considered of importance for timber. We know that the pine beetle prefers trees that are of the 80-year-old variety, so as part of our process we could select and take out those trees that are most susceptible, in areas that have proven to be infested.

Also, in terms of regional planning instead of fire suppression, consider the strategy of fireproofing around municipal areas such as Bragg Creek by encouraging the kinds of controlled burns that have been happening in the areas of Canmore and Banff. This is a much more effective way of getting rid of trees. The fire moves through, and new growth comes up whereas if we clear-cut, we dredge up the area to such a point that it takes years and years and years to recover.

4:20

The last topic that I would like to talk about has been covered to a large extent by my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, and that's the support area, Seniors and Community Supports. My colleague has gone into great and appreciated detail on the fact that supports for individuals, whether it's supports for children, whether it's supports for seniors, whether it's supports for disabled, are woefully inadequate. There is no respite care for the caregivers, and as a result they are being burnt out to a tremendous degree, and they're not being replaced. I have visited the homes of caregivers who have told me that the amount of money it would take for them to have a week's holiday would be the equivalent of three months' worth of wages that they would have to pass along to someone else to allow them to take their much-needed respite, and of course they can't do that.

With regard to opportunities for seniors for respite care, this is an area that I would hope would receive greater support so that caregivers have the opportunity to have time for themselves. They could temporarily put their loved one into respite care, get a chance to recharge their own batteries, reinvigorate themselves, and continue on being better caregivers themselves.

I will talk just briefly about an area that has always been of high importance to me, and that's Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. The province knows that for every dollar basically invested in tourism, in arts, and in culture, there's a \$12 return. By providing money for parks without the necessity of user fees, which given the wealth of this province are basically an insult, we should be able to gain greater advantage and encourage not only Albertans to get out and have a healthy experience but also be promoting our tourism to a greater extent world-wide. We have certain markets – for example, China, Japan, and Germany – who are frequent visitors to Alberta.

In terms of promoting our culture, one of the ways we can do that is to promote an Alberta film industry. There has been a lot of news in the papers recently about Alberta film producers' crews moving to B.C. because British Columbia provides greater filming incentives, and that's had a drastic effect on the film industry in Alberta.

Currently – and I guess that it relates to seniors as well as to the disabled – there is only one area, Watson lodge in Peter Lougheed provincial park, where seniors and disabled individuals have the infrastructure facilities to have a safe wilderness experience. From a disabled point of view the access to so many of our parks is extremely limited. The facilities, whether it's the washrooms, whether it's the layout of the trails, are not user friendly to anyone who is bound by a wheelchair or whose mobility is restricted. I would like to think that Alberta parks are for everyone's enjoyment and that we would make more parks available to individuals with disabilities.

If Alberta is going to continue to be a tourism destination, we have to realize that trees left standing have greater value than trees cut

down, as has been pointed out by the Member for Edmonton-Decore in terms of how little our timber is valued. A living tree provides a series of benefits, whether it's filtering the water, whether it's holding the soil, whether it's serving as habitat for wildlife, birds and animals, and a tree living has a considerably greater value than a tree that is cut down and put into board feet. This is a concern that I've especially brought up before, but I'll refer again to the Bragg Creek area and to the areas surrounding Calgary through which the Elbow and the Bow rivers run. There is great concern in the Sibbald Flats area, in the Ghost-Waiparous area, and in the Bragg Creek area.

Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The interim supply bill, Bill 25, gives me an opportunity to raise an issue that I have great concern about. I notice in Employment, Immigration and Industry the \$221 million for interim supply. I have no idea what that might be applied to. This is a department that has many different pieces to it. It used to be called human resources and employment, now Employment, Immigration and Industry, and it involves things like immigration, workplace safety, and economic development. I believe rural development is now a part of EII and also Alberta Works, and that is my concern. If a lot of this money that's being voted on for Employment, Immigration and Industry is directed to Alberta Works, then that might be a good thing, but I have no way of telling without any details.

One of my passions for many, many years has been the issue of poverty in this province. I mean, we have a very wealthy province compared to many other provinces in Canada, and many people are doing very, very well as they get very good incomes, but the gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider all the time. Low-income people, people on Alberta Works are just falling way behind.

Now, the fact is that this whole area used to be called social services. I don't know what happened to the expression "social services." It used to be called the department of social services. I don't see the term "social services" anywhere related to this department. It's almost as if the whole issue of poverty, of concern for those who have very little in our province, is just disappearing. Maybe it's the policy of the government to not have any attention on that, and then we can pretend that it doesn't exist. But, Mr. Chairman, the problem of people who are living in poverty in Alberta is extreme, and it's critical.

There was a recent report by Public Interest Alberta called *The Reality of Low Wages in Alberta*, all about the whole question of a living wage. They point out some interesting facts about Alberta. For example, the current minimum wage is really insufficient to allow individuals or families to escape from poverty. Our minimum wage has not increased for so long, and the value of the minimum wage has declined over the last 30 years. There's no indexing of minimum wage to inflation, so it just gets changed arbitrarily once in a while.

4:30

The rising costs of things like housing: again, as part of the housing task force I heard terrible stories of people that just can't handle the rising cost of homes. I mean, homes in Edmonton went up almost 50 per cent last year. So people on fixed incomes and people with low incomes and people who are getting money through Alberta Works, they can't possibly afford the housing that's available in a city like Edmonton. Rising costs put people behind, further and further behind.

There are lots of Albertans who are not earning what we could call a living wage. The numbers don't add up. They just can't put the

numbers together and be able to pay for everything that they need in terms of food and clothing and rent and so on. One in four employed Albertans earned less than \$12 per hour in 2005 – one in four earned less than \$12 an hour – and a lot of those people are people who, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods indicated, work in agencies that deal with people with mental diseases, children who need special care, have special needs. These people work for \$12 an hour, \$13 an hour, and there's tremendous pressure on them because they just can't make ends meet. Sometimes they work overtime; they work in two different jobs. They like to work in those kind of positions where they're caring for people who are needy, but they just can't do it because there's not enough money. So it's a tragedy that one in four employed Albertans earned less than \$12 per hour in 2005, and it's probably the same today.

Many working parents do not earn enough to support their families. In fact, over 86,000 children lived in poverty in the year 2004. I mean, we are used to the statistic that one in five children in the whole of Canada lives in poverty. That's no different in Alberta. So, Mr. Chairman, I hope that some of this money is going to those who need it the most, people who have lived in poverty and experienced poverty daily in their lives.

When I look at the numbers in terms of Alberta Works, sometimes it's really difficult to understand how this all fits together. I feel sorry for people who have to deal with Alberta Works and try to get what they're entitled to because sometimes it's pretty puzzling to try to figure out how it all works. But there are two categories in this social service area called Alberta Works. There's the monthly core benefits for those who are expected to work and monthly core benefits for those not expected to work. I've always had difficulties with that kind of categorization. I mean, I think there are a lot of problems when you characterize people as expected to work and not expected to work. Tying welfare benefits to work, the issue of work, I think does not demonstrate the showing of dignity to people who for various reasons will never be able to contribute much to our economy, but they're human beings and ought to receive the dignity and the respect that we all should show them.

When you look at the numbers, a single adult who is expected to work gets \$234 a month for the so-called essentials, like food and clothing, transportation – I mean, that's not very much money, \$234 a month; how do you even buy a bus pass out of that? – then for shelter, for finding a place to live, \$100 if you're living with relatives – \$100, well okay – social housing, \$120; for private housing, so getting a room or trying to rent a bachelor suite, \$168. That's all. Now, how can a person in this kind of hot economy in Edmonton, where the prices went up so much, possibly find anything for \$168 a month? I mean, it's totally absurd.

So that's a total of \$402 a month if a person is in private housing. Now, I'm not sure why there's a distinction on the housing side between living with relatives, social housing, and private housing anyway. I mean, a person who is living in poverty needs money for housing. It should be just one amount. There should be a tying of these rates to the standard of living so that when the standard of living goes up, these rates go up, instead of their being changed just arbitrarily.

I've been following these rate numbers for years. In the early '90s when the government was so concerned about paying off the debt and so many programs were cut, including social service programs, we were quite upset. Those of us who were working in the community and working with people who were living in poverty were quite upset that the numbers were cut back. That made people even more vulnerable than they already were. Through the years it seems to me that what should have happened if we're going to really get serious about dealing with poverty is to tie these rates to the standard of living.

In fact, I was a part of a group called the social economy sector group at the Alberta economic Growth Summit in, I believe it was, 1998. The social economy sector group was chaired by Bettie Hewes, a former leader of the Liberal Party in Alberta. The paper that we presented was on the importance of taking together social development and economic development.

So it's not enough just to be in favour of economic development and go full speed ahead in terms of developing our economy. Economic development should dovetail with social development so that our quality of life does not suffer, so that people who do live in poverty are able to have their needs met so that they can participate in all that this rich province offers. At that Growth Summit we proposed that welfare rates should be indexed and that the housing portion for people living in poverty, dependent on welfare should go up as the standard of living goes up. But that's not the case.

If you ask why we have so much homelessness in this province, this is one reason. People can't afford to live in the rental accommodations that are available, and to me it's a great tragedy. Even when people finally are able to move from getting welfare through Alberta Works, the expected to work or not expected to work, as soon as they get a job, then what happens? Well, one of the good things that has happened is that the health benefits that have been available to people on Alberta Works do follow people as they move into the work world. I think that that has been a good thing.

Why not also have the housing allowance follow people as they move from Alberta Works into the employment world so that they could manage even if they make minimum wage or just a little bit more than minimum wage? If they have that housing allowance that actually goes with them into the work world, then they might be able to make ends meet for a time. What happens to many families is that when they finally do get some employment, they can't make enough money to make ends meet, so they go back onto welfare. Surely we need to develop programs that can enable people to move.

So I'm really concerned. This is the one reason why I became interested in politics in the first place. For years and years and years as a minister in a church, working with people, I saw lots of people come up to the church door seeking handouts. I worked with people in the inner city. Of course, all the churches are working in the inner city in cities like Edmonton and Calgary. You know, so many churches have actually taken up the work where the government has failed. When all the cuts happened in the early '90s, then of course you saw more food banks, more people without housing, more homeless. Mr. Chairman, the people in the churches who have been doing a lot of work to help people in poverty are really tired. They have been working hard to work as volunteers in food banks, to try to attend to people in need, but they're very, very tired. I mean, for them the government has a social responsibility to enable all Albertans to participate in the great wealth that we have.

4:40

I guess that's what I want to say. I mean, with \$10 billion in interim supply, \$220 million for Employment, Immigration and Industry: what portion of that is going to help people in poverty? What portion is going to Alberta Works? Are we going to see changes in the rates, or are we going to see more homeless people, more people living on the streets, and the gap gets wider and wider? Then people may wake up and say: well, what is this economic development all about? What kind of world are we creating when we have 12-year-olds working in restaurants, not bars but restaurants? What kind of Alberta are we creating? Unless social development is intermeshed together with economic development, then I think there's really something wrong with the policies that the government is pursuing.

So those are all the comments that I have to make. Boy, I'll come back to this issue again and again and again because that's my passion. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 25, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 25 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 4 Child Care Licensing Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to take this opportunity to provide some clarification around some questions that were asked during second reading of Bill 4. First, I'd like to refer to a question that related to the consultation process which led up to the development of the bill. I know that some members are wondering who was involved with the consultation process. What we did is we conducted an extensive public consultation in 2005, which provided valuable input that guided the development of the Child Care Licensing Act. We received over 900 written submissions and input from about 225 focus group participants, including parents, operators, child care association representatives, and other interested Albertans.

In relation to space creation I've been asked if I know how the shortage in child care spaces plays out region by region. The answer is: not yet. Children's Services has traditionally collected stats that tell us how many child care spaces are available in Alberta's daycare sector as well as the number of children enrolled in these programs. We need to have better information on what the supply and demand is by region. I've asked my staff to gather this information. We are currently surveying all child care operators – daycare, family day homes, nursery schools, and out-of-school care – to determine how many spaces we have and how many more spaces we need to meet the needs of families looking for child care now and in the future. I expect to have these results later this spring.

What we do know is that the lack of spaces is largely due to the shortage of qualified staff. I'm pleased to say that we're starting to make headway in this area. This month our government announced a 40 per cent increase to staff wage top-ups for child care professionals working in the daycare centres and family day homes. This move has been welcomed by the child care community, and we feel that it will help increase the number of qualified staff, which will ultimately increase the number of spaces available to parents looking for child care. Bill 4 also supports space creation through the introduction of new licensing categories such as home-based child care and other innovative models of programming.

The legislation also supports communities coming forward to identify innovative child care programs that will meet the needs of

parents. These types of programs could require a unique consideration of regulatory requirements such as extended-hour programs set up to care for children of parents who work shift work. By licensing programs, not facilities, operators will be able to make better use of the spaces they already have. For example, under the current act operators licensed to provide out-of-school care have their spaces sitting empty when the children are in school and cannot move preschool children into spaces licensed for out-of-school care. Under the new legislation operators will have the flexibility to use this space for any child in their program who needs one.

We had some questions regarding the level of monitoring. Currently the child and family services authorities monitor programs a minimum of four times a year. Bill 4 will not change this requirement. This is a policy requirement, not a legislative one. However, programs with noncompliance to regulated standards are and will continue to be monitored more often.

There was also a question about how the province will issue multiyear licences. Programs will have an opportunity to renew their licence for up to three years. However, in saying that, I want to clarify that these licence holders will need to have a good history of complying with the regulations, meeting municipal and health standards, and dealing with parent concerns before they will be eligible for the maximum three-year licence renewal. Monitoring will continue during a three-year term, and if compliance to standards become an issue, the terms of the licence would be shortened.

With respect to questions surrounding enforcement, ensuring that programs comply with the act is a critical part of ensuring that families have access to quality child care programs. However, it is a fine line. While it's important that the act have some teeth when there is a need for enforcement due to a major noncompliance, it is also important that we have the mechanisms in place to work with the good-intentioned operators when trying to rectify minor situations. The act provides a range of enforcement options to enable the licensing officer to act based on the severity of the noncompliance such as the ability to issue a new probationary licence. Providers will be advised of the concern and the timelines for compliance in writing. In addition, enforcement actions will be strengthened by requiring operators to post notices of noncompliance. In a case where a licence has been refused or cancelled, the operator will be required to wait two years before reapplying for a licence.

I've been asked if the necessary resources are in place to ensure that proper monitoring and, when needed, proper enforcement actions can take place. I can competently say that, yes, we have the expertise and the resources to ensure that programs comply with the act.

Our discussion guide Toward a Child Care Act proposed that the act include a provision that would ensure that programs establish parent advisory committees. The guide also proposed that the child care act mandate the establishment of a provincial child care advisory council. I've been asked why these items were not included in Bill 4. During consultations we heard that requiring each program to establish a formal parent advisory committee could be problematic for small, rural, and remote programs. Therefore, we are providing more flexibility through regulation for parental involvement to take different forms based on the size of the program and the needs of the parents who utilize the service. Similarly, legislating a requirement for a provincial child care advisory council in the act limits the ability to have informal and varied forms of consultations with Alberta parents, operators, and stakeholders that ensure that this legislation and the programs and services we provide give the children we're responsible for the best start in life.

Which leads me to the question raised about who will be involved in the development of the new child care regulations. Mr. Chair, I

can assure you that there will be an open and thorough consultation. Everyone, including parents, operators, community leaders, and all elected officials, will have an opportunity to provide feedback that would be used to draft child care regulations to ensure that families have access to quality child care programs. I expect this consultation to begin this spring and be completed sometime early in the summer.

I've heard a lot of positive feedback regarding the Child Care Licensing Act, which reconfirms that we're moving in the right direction. Bill 4 will go a long way in helping government achieve its priority to ensure that quality child care is available to the children and families of Alberta.

Thank you.

4:50

Mrs. Mather: First of all, I want to thank the hon. minister for clarifying a number of questions that we did have and offering us even more information, helping us to understand the intent of this bill. Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act, is an important first step in developing a comprehensive child care act.

As I speak to the Committee of the Whole, I want to refer to the discussion guide *Toward a Child Care Act for Alberta* from July 2005. In that guide it states that

building a bright future for Alberta's children includes creating an excellent, child-development-focused child care system – a system that is supported by solid legislation and that includes parents and communities in decision making and planning . . .

Children and families in Alberta [should] have access to a broad range of regulated and non-regulated child care options.

Licensed child care includes day care centres, nursery schools, drop-in centres, out of school care programs and early childhood development programs such as Head Start.

Un-licensed child care is provided by agency-approved family day homes (operating standards and requirements for the day homes and the agencies are outlined through ministry policy and specified in service delivery contracts under the province's Child and Family Services Authorities), private babysitters and parents and families . . .

Quality child care depends on a strong, cohesive infrastructure that includes networks of community support, public awareness, integrated programs, state-of-the-art training, ongoing staff development and a continuum of programs and services that meet children's physical, intellectual and emotional needs from the cradle to the schoolroom and beyond . . .

[We know that] research over the past decade has shown that quality care for children is critical for healthy child development – whether child care is provided by parents and families or outside the home by paid caregivers. Quality care plays a key role in helping children grow into healthy, well-adjusted, self-reliant adults equipped to succeed at school, at work and in life.

Licensing defines minimum standards that protect children from harm. However, it must be used in combination with other regulatory and non-regulatory tools – including accreditation – to achieve and maintain quality standards that exceed minimum requirements. These tools must work in tandem with inspections and monitoring in order to establish accountability within the child care system.

The need for a Child Care Act was identified in the course of Alberta Children's Services' review of the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act. [That] review was launched in 2004 . . . [and concluded that] Albertans need a comprehensive, responsive Child Care Act that supports the complex needs of modern-day families and provides children with high-quality, developmentally focused care and programs. Alberta's Child Care Act should provide a foundation for

- regulation that outlines specific rules and requirements.
- policy that sets out standards and guides how rules are applied.
- operating procedures to make things work from day to day.

While we are addressing some of the recommendations from this review and this discussion guide, there are more that we are not, and I'm wondering if there will be more legislation coming to support the ideas in this discussion guide.

This act is going to do a number of things. It's going to move beyond criteria of a facility and, instead, license programs based on content, developmental appropriateness, et cetera, while retaining some facility requirements. It's going to enable the minister to create licensing categories outside of what currently exists, like the child care centres, nursery schools, and so on, to enable greater flexibility and meet local and specialized needs. It's going to ensure that parents are well informed and involved in their child's care by requiring the posting of compliance orders.

As I look at the parental involvement aspect, the discussion guide that I referred to, entitled *Toward a Child Care Act for Alberta*, proposed to include a provision about parental involvement through the creation of a parental advisory committee or a provincial child care advisory council. The minister has just explained the reasons why this parental advisory committee has not been included, and I appreciate that. I wondered though: are we going to look at a child care advisory council at the provincial level?

If we look at parental involvement, I want to ask some questions. The ideas in the discussion guide indicated that the promotion and "involvement of parents in the planning, delivery and evaluation of child care programs for their children" would help "enable the expansion of the range of child care choices available to parents." Also, this act would "set standards for child care programs."

Involving Parents.

Parents need a voice in the decision-making process that determines the type, quality and accessibility of child care and development programs available to their children. They need a voice in determining local and provincial priorities for children. They need a forum that [helps them and] allows them to serve as advocates for their children and for the child care system as a whole.

Now, I know that you have indicated that you thought that parent advisory committees would not be realistic because of the different sizes of communities and so on. What about

a provincial child care advisory council whose members would include parents, early childhood educators, child care service providers, community representatives and experts from service areas who play a role in the "quality" of children's lives?"

I'm wondering if you've given thought to that.

Finally, I'm wondering about the posted information, which would also help the parents be involved. I think it's already mandatory for licensed child care providers to post their licence, which, I would imagine, would now indicate whether it's conditional or a probationary status. The discussion guide says that they would like to see inspection sheets posted as well and "notices specifying requirements for corrective action and documenting the licensee's response."

Another recommendation was that

parents should have online access . . . to selected inspection-related information that is stored and monitored by Alberta Children's Services. This would allow parents to make comparative ratings and their own assessments about the quality of various child care programs.

The discussion guide even suggested that there should be annual report cards on their child care facility's staff qualifications, compliance with legislation and standards, and efforts to support continuous improvement, [that] these report cards would be issued by Children's Services staff from information stored on [their] databases.

The idea was that it would serve two purposes. It "would help parents make informed decisions about their children's care, [and the] report cards would help child care providers monitor and evaluate their own performance and identify areas that need improve-

ment.” Are you considering this suggestion or recommendation of report cards?

I'd like to look at access. We have the idea that we should be increasing access. Your government press release stated that this legislation will increase access to child care spaces by opening up the classification of child care settings. This might be true, but I think that the fundamental problems facing child care operators right now still exist; namely, lack of stable funding and problems with staff recruitment and retention. Licensing will not solve the need for spaces and staff. So I hope this bill is the beginning of addressing that crucial need for child care spaces.

5:00

I wanted to take a look here at another thing that related to access. The discussion guide that I referred to said that the “Child Care Act should support the expansion of the existing child care system to provide more choices for parents – in rural communities as well as in urban centres.” That requires looking at home-based child care. This would be a new licence category and would facilitate the establishment of child care in rural communities where the population may be too small to support specialized daycare facilities. The recommendation was that it “would allow two providers to care for a maximum of 10 children. Care would be provided in a private home rather than a specialized facility, operate according to specific standards, and be monitored [still] by Children’s Services.”

This suggestion of creating more spaces also involves the suggestion that you could license for school-aged children spaces being used for other children. The Minister is quoted as saying that this act would allow operators of before- and after-school facilities to make better uses of the spaces that they already have. I'm wondering if this would create possibly an unmanageable situation after school when most preschool kids are staying and after school kids are arriving, and I'm wondering how daycares could double up on spaces. The other thing to look at is the furniture and the toys and the equipment that would be needed because they're different for school-aged as compared to preschool.

Access to daycare is a real issue in Alberta, and even with the announcement of a new federal plan this week, it's apparent that providing adequate daycare is going to be primarily the province's mandate.

I'd like to also look at compliance and enforcement here. While enforcement is essential to protect the safety of children in child care, many child care providers with good intentions inadvertently break regulations. These providers often feel that they're not given time to either remedy the problems that they were not initially aware of or to explain the circumstances that caused noncompliance, leading to enforcements that mar an otherwise possibly positive record. So I appreciate the minister's stating that there's going to be consideration given for those situations.

Then, on the other hand, I've heard concerns that there aren't real teeth in licensing enforcement. So it's a difficult question. It's important. I want to again state that I think the appeals process is very clear. My feedback from stakeholders is that they appreciate that. The one question that I'm getting about noncompliance is that perhaps it's in the nuts and bolts that we could have a little bit more clarity on what the consequences for noncompliance are.

We look at what's included and what's not included in this.

The legislative foundation provided by a Child Care Act is one of many aspects of a quality child care and child development system. Alberta's Act will apply to specific components of that system – namely, to formal, program-based child care provided through child care centres, home-based child care centres . . . nursery schools, early childhood development programs, and out of school care centres.

So this act will support children who use child care services provided by these above-listed agencies.

What's not included are the

Parent Link Centres, Family Day Home Agencies, Home Visitation programs or Alberta's voluntary Child Care Accreditation program. Although such programs are key components of the child care system as a whole, they are monitored through policy, not legislation.

You know, day homes, I feel, are an important choice for parents, and many of them provide quality child care. But what's in place to ensure monitoring and safety in day homes? Again, going back to the discussion guide, on page 11 it states that the child care act that we need

- supports parents and families.
- gives children access to quality child care and quality child development programs.
- recognizes excellence and innovation.
- provides the foundation for an integrated, comprehensive system that makes the best possible use of family and community resources and addresses the needs of children from cradle to schoolroom.

I believe that this bill's intention is to do those things.

As I said earlier, we haven't addressed all of the recommendations, but it is a good first step, and I look forward to more legislation coming to address the concerns about the lack of regulated child care spaces, staff recruitment, staff retention, help from municipalities in starting child care facilities, help for existing centres so that they can flourish, increasing choices for parents, and specifically looking at zero to 12. That means looking at specialized assistance for infants and toddlers and, at the same time, looking at the six- to 12-year-olds, whose needs don't vanish when they turn six years old.

I'd like to conclude by saying that the Official Opposition supports Bill 4 because it is a very good bill. I ask you to give the same consideration to my bill, Bill 207, which is coming up in the future. I hope that when it's presented, it will be allowed to at least get past second reading.

The Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to just comment on my colleague's comments. If I can get these changes made, I'll support it.

In terms of – is it Bill 4? – increasing access to child care, St. Albert daycare providers are wondering loudly about its practicality. Bill 4 would allow, as I understand it, child care spaces licensed for school-aged children to be used for any child. The main thrust of the act would allow operators to make better use of spaces they already have.

The daycare providers in my constituency are worried, have concerns that increasing access will bring about an unmanageable rush after school. Most preschool kids stay after the kids arrive, and they see it being a very difficult type of transition. They're suggesting that the timelines would clash, so they've got concerns about that.

Another issue in St. Albert constituency is that preschool and school-age kids use different furniture and toys. There's a different type of need for that, different kids of different ages. So that is another concern.

One of our biggest problems in St. Albert is access to daycare. In St. Albert this is a very big issue: long lists, and some daycare providers are already refusing to take names for next year. So it is a big issue in my constituency.

Now I'll just get off that tune and talk briefly about two points on the basis of my past experience. I believe that monitoring daycare

is crucial for kids, and I think there should be regular inspections at different times of the day to see if standards are being implemented in the operation of daycares. I think that if it's not done correctly, you're going to find that we're going to have some serious problems with looking after children and some of the problems that they may face.

I also think there's a key fact that the government didn't allow back a few years ago in terms of educating parents. I think there should be a major effort on the part of the government to educate parents on how to select and pick a good daycare program. That could be done through videos or through brochures. Sometimes the government has what they call a hands-off policy because they might interfere with people making money out of it. I'm not so sure that that's a good cause.

Anyway, those are my comments, Mr. Chair. Thank you for allowing me to speak. I will sit down and let you go on. Thank you.

5:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to make my first comments on Bill 4 here this afternoon, the Child Care Licensing Act. Certainly, both myself and the Alberta New Democrats in general are happy with what we see in regard to this licensing act. It seems to be quite a substantive rewrite of the terms and conditions under which daycare facilities are monitored, licensed, and run. It's not just an amendment to the existing bill but truly a new act that substantively overhauls the regulatory framework of this part of society by shifting focus from facilities under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act to programming, which will be under this Bill 4. Certainly, this is a step forward, Mr. Chairman. I think that this was, in fact, long overdue.

The intent of this bill, as I see it, is to quite completely revise the regulatory framework by grandfathering the facilities' recommendations and making child care programming the central core of this bill. The goal, I believe, as far as I can read, is to see to the child's developmental needs, not just babysitting, so to speak. This is something to be applauded.

The key components that I would like to highlight in a positive light are, one, the regulation-making authority over all daycare facilities, a unifying concept which is long overdue and welcome to all parents requiring these services across the province; two, the enabling of new categories to child care services to be created, including a family group care and other potentially innovative programs that may arise in terms of what people might come up with; three, administrative streamlining, which allows for multiyear licensing of facilities, which certainly, I believe, is a reasonable bureaucratic amendment; four, expansion and monitoring, with a range of prescribed actions with regard to monitoring, which is certainly a very important part of any child care legislation; finally, a permanent appeals board that would be more substantive than the kind of ad hoc one that was in the last act.

So the bill seems to be focusing on quality of care, but we as New Democrats and, I think, representing the population would like to bring forward the importance of dealing with the quantity of care as well, just with the shortage of spaces that are available across the province, not just in major cities but all across the province. The federal government a couple of days ago, five, six days ago, abandoned its plan to create 125,000 new daycare spaces, and we find this deeply troubling, Mr. Chairman. Instead, the money was just going to be given to the provinces. So we certainly would encourage and, in fact, would like to demand that this money go directly to providing public daycare facilities across the province.

I think it's the prerogative of this Legislature to provide choice for families in regard to daycare, and the choice that we must provide, that we have the capacity to provide here, is for an affordable public daycare option that people can go to and trust with their most important family members, which are the children. Providing that choice of a public daycare system I think is an idea whose time has come in the province of Alberta.

There are 154 accredited child care facilities in the province of Alberta, and there are 545 facilities that are eligible for accreditation. Daycare spaces in real terms have fallen 7 per cent between 1992 and 2004 while nationally daycare spaces, in fact, doubled. You know, that sort of simple math I think highlights the problem that we've had with child care in this province over the last 15 years or more, and really it speaks to a problem that we have in supporting families and working families. Certainly, for most families it's the norm and it's not just a choice: it's a reality of life that both parents must work to support the family. So people are looking to daycare, and if we don't supply that, then the whole economic engine that we've grown accustomed to starts to break down.

The birth rate, as well, in Alberta is much higher than the national average. So, you know, when we throw in that factor, which is a good thing, I believe, then, in fact, this daycare shortage goes from acute to potentially a crisis. The sector of daycare in Alberta faces a two-pronged problem of both retaining staff plus the fertility rate. The demand for new spaces is much higher as well, so you have the resulting acute shortage.

The minister recently announced \$13 million to top up fees for children's and family services. I would again give some applause and kudos to the new minister. I think that she certainly has potential to do very well in her new position. She said that the government is acting to help employers recruit and retain staff at daycare centres as well as contracting agencies and women's shelters. I saw on the television last week where there was a daycare facility bemoaning the loss of workers at her facility to the fast-food service industry. You know, it just stood out as a highly ironic thing, to say that the people who are charged with looking after our most precious resource, our children, in fact have the same price rates as people working at hamburger or fish and chips places.

A March 2007 report found that Alberta ranks quite poorly when it comes to child care. It's recommended in this report that the provision of a revamped labour law with better parental components, combined with the need for public or publicly funded daycare facilities, is absolutely imperative. This is the Paul Kershaw report, *Measuring Up: Family Benefits in British Columbia and Alberta in International Perspective*, from March 2007. You know, I think this puts it, perhaps, in the most stark and obvious terms. We often talk about economic competitiveness with our immediate counterparts, both provincially and throughout the United States. This is a factor that I really think trumps many other traditional areas of competitiveness in terms of taxation and law and the ease of starting businesses. The Quebec model of affordable daycare certainly starts to rise up as perhaps one of the very top means by which, at the very least, we continue to create a competitive economic environment in the province of Alberta.

How will this bill deal with the chronic shortage of daycare spaces in the province? These are the questions that we must ask ourselves. How does the government intend to deal with the shortage of daycare spaces in high-growth areas in the province of Alberta? Can we expect the minister, please, to give us a full report of the shortages that are affecting Alberta families across the province so that we can itemize and perhaps prioritize where we should be focusing our monies and attention? Finally, if the minister is claiming that the government is helping to recruit and retain daycare

staff, what progress has been made and how do we compare nationally, especially when we're trying to make a claim that we have a great child care system? Of course, that always begs the question: compared to what?

So those are my comments that I will stay with here for now, and certainly I will have some specific section analysis in the not-too-distant future. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5:20

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. It's my pleasure to rise to discuss Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act, which I very much appreciate my government colleague bringing forward. I have spent the majority of my life looking after children in one form or another. As people are well aware, I was a teacher for a number of years of my life, and in the summers when I was going to university and when my wife was going to university, I ran a number of child care programs, so to speak, for the city of Calgary, from adventure playgrounds where children as young as five years of age could come and handle a variety of equipment – hammers, saws, nails – and build themselves a fort to a number of arts programs.

I consider it absolutely essential that children receive the best kind of care that is possible. In my new role as a grandfather now of two grandchildren I can't think of any more vulnerable group that needs the support of government than children. It might be a close sort of balance with seniors in long-term care, who in a lot of cases have reverted to their childlike trust. With regard to the children, this licensing act will provide a degree of standardization across the various forms of child care that has not been there before. This is an important first step.

Another step that I see is necessary, that we'll work towards and would support the government in their pursuit, is the accreditation of the individuals who work in the various care centres. I know that there are different levels of accreditation, from the kindly mother who chooses to not only stay home to look after her children but, in order to add a little bit to the family's economy, takes in some of the neighbourhood children as well. These various levels of support, obviously, have different rules. I think that as parents and as grandparents we know how much difficulty there is to keep, especially, toddlers safe and entertained and, I would add to it, educated. I'm sure that a number of Calgary parents and grandparents and caregivers every once in a while hit the TV channel 17 to get a little bit of respite and, hopefully, sit down with their children and sort of go through the program, rather than just simply leaving it on as the single child care monitoring device.

It's absolutely essential that children, especially children in the formative ages, have the motivation, the inspiration, a form of education which challenges them to a great degree to develop their potential because we know that those early child years are the formative years and we want to achieve a very strong foundation in those formative years.

It's extremely important, as part of this bill's success, that monitoring be established. There has been some discussion as to the fact that this bill will establish what are, sort of, the minimum standards acceptable. But I would like to think that we would through our monitoring have a process where we'd recognize the high levels of quality care – call it the copper, silver, gold standards of care – and attempt to move everyone towards what the government would consider to be the gold standard. That's where we would have individuals who themselves had the accreditation and the fluency of language – fluency of languages would be even better – to provide a successful program for children that isn't just caring and nurturing but also has an education component to it.

I look at what's happening in Calgary and I'm sure is repeated throughout the province, the number of children with single parents, and sometimes with both parents, who are forced to move each night from one church basement to another church basement, thanks to the caring provision of the Inn from the Cold program. I know that in Calgary the school board at least tries to provide stability, in that the children, without being labelled, have the opportunity to attend the same school on a regular basis even though their sleeping arrangements in various church basements vary from day to day.

Hopefully, in terms of child care we will also provide the stability for these parents and for these children, especially those who are not of school age and, basically, have no regular programming or support while the parents wait to go back down that basement later in the evening for shelter. There's nothing provided for them during the day. I would hope that as an extension of this program we would be able to provide programming and support for parents who find themselves without a home. To me, this is an important area that we need to pursue.

Specifically to Bill 4: it is a good first step. We will need to work on the accessibility, as other members have brought out, because my understanding is that the demand for child care versus the reality of it – I believe that child care meets about 10 to 12 per cent of the needs of a number of parents who would like to have the opportunity to work outside the home but because of the expense of child care don't have that opportunity to work.

It's a different category, but I would hope that in future bills, in terms of supporting child care, we would come up with an allowance similar to the old family allowance, whereby we would support children within the homes, to the point where parents would have the choice where they could say: just give me a little bit more so that I can buy those groceries and pay the bills at the end of the month so that I could keep my children at home and be their primary caregiver and be their primary educator. That is what a number of families who emphasize traditional values, unfortunately, aren't able to accommodate because of the cost of daycare, which in accredited institutions can be over \$1,200 a month, especially if it's an infant involved. But I do very much appreciate what the Minister of Children's Services has brought forward in this bill.

5:30

I am hoping, as other members have mentioned, that there is a strong monitoring component to the bill. I realize that monitoring is expensive, but there cannot be a more valuable resource than our children, and their safety and their quality of life must be encouraged and supported.

I thank the member. Mr. Chair, I would suggest at this point that we close debate and call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I would move that we rise and report bills 20, 25, and 4.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 20, Bill 25, and Bill 4.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 1
Lobbyists Act

[Adjourned debate March 20: Dr. Pannu]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me to rise and participate in debate on Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. This is, basically, the flagship bill for the government, and the substance that's being discussed is both timely and significant.

Lobbying itself is not necessarily a bad thing, Mr. Speaker. Lobbying is important in some regards because people need to be able to have access to their elected officials. Lobbying is, basically, an integral part of democracy because elected officials were elected to be conveyors of ideas. As an MLA myself I take ideas from my constituents and bring them here to this forum, to this Assembly, and as policy-makers or decision-makers we need to be accessible and be seen to be accessible as well.

So lobbying itself is not necessarily an evil or a bad thing; however, there are two main challenges to democracy with respect to lobbying. The first challenge is, basically, one that deals with openness and transparency. Governments are and should be held accountable to their citizens, and their accountability dictates that we have a certain degree of transparency.

Citizens have to be able to evaluate the performance of their representatives and their government, and they have to know who has the government ear at any one point, who is talking to whom in any particular or given department or agency. They also have to know if taxpayers' money is being spent properly, who is gaining or winning government contracts, how much they're paid, why they are paid this amount of money and for what work, and outcomes of such decisions.

Disclosure and transparency are all about leveling the playing field. As an individual I should have the same degree of access to my elected officials and my government as a person who is a professional lobbyist or a person who is paid on behalf of an agency or a group or a business or an interest to influence government decision-making. So lobbying is legitimate, but it should be and must be public.

In this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, we do a bit of lobbying ourselves on behalf of our constituents. Constituents have direct access to this Assembly as well because they submit petitions and they send us letters and other things that we table on their behalf. So this is an avenue for them to express their point of view and have the Assembly's ear and have the government's ear through the Assembly. This

is one way for them to gain this access, and no other way should be given prominence or given more importance than this particular way.

Take *Hansard*. *Hansard* is a tool that this Assembly has adopted, which we didn't have before. You know, I think that, if my memory serves me right, 35 years ago we didn't have *Hansard* in this House. But now we do, and it serves a great purpose to actually show people what we are saying. They can read the *Hansard* excerpt. They can actually check what a certain member said at any one time in any particular debate. They can review votes and proceedings, you know, who voted for what and who voted against what. Some of it is also available in audio and video, which is great.

I think the audio and video service should be inclusive, gavel to gavel. Basically, these proceedings should be taped and televised and archived in digital format from the beginning till the end. I also think that committees should be recorded in video format as well. But that's another topic.

Now, I mentioned that there were two challenges to democracy. The other one is, basically, equal access and opportunity, which I touched on briefly. In the U.S., for example, they take it a step further. They also place limits on how much lobbying a lobbyist can do or how much money a lobbyist can charge to lobby the government. We're having the same discussion here now about campaign finance reform: how much money candidates in elections can raise and from whom, which sources; how much, you know, party leadership candidates can raise money and from which sources; disclosure: how much information should be disclosed, how much information should be withheld, if at all; and things like this.

As parliamentarians, as legislators, we have an opportunity to not only bring in transparency and openness but also to send a message to the public that we mean what we say. We have to recognize that the appearance of openness and transparency is equally important as actual openness and transparency. Because politicians have such a bad reputation with the public, we are trying to convince them every day that we are hard-working, honest people and we are driven by the public good.

This Bill 1 is a good start. It's certainly a good start, and I'm willing to support it after some of my concerns are addressed and after some amendments are hopefully passed in Committee of the Whole.

Now, I will start just a little bit by talking about the preamble. In the preamble the third one reads: "whereas it is desirable that the public and public office holders be able to know who is engaged in lobbying activities." That's wonderful. We need to know who is a lobbyist, but we equally need to know who they're talking to. I don't want a registry of lobbyists that just tells me that ABC company is lobbying the government, and then it doesn't tell me that ABC company is talking to the Minister of Energy, for example, or to his deputy minister. So, yes, we need to know who is talking to the government, but we also need to know who in government is being approached.

5:40

The fifth preamble talks about where it's "desirable that the public and public office holders be able to know who is contracting with the Government of Alberta and Provincial entities." I'm hoping that we should really include how much they're getting paid as well. I don't want a database that basically tells me that ABC company won a contract for, you know, road maintenance, but then it doesn't tell me that ABC company was awarded the contract for \$2 million, for example. So these are little things that are hopefully going to be addressed in second reading and in committee.

Another question I asked myself is, basically, with respect to the disclosure component, the reporting component. This bill puts the

onus for reporting on the lobbyist, which is a good thing because they have to be held responsible and accountable, and some of them are getting paid, so I have no trouble asking them to do the reporting.

However, an outfit like Democracy Watch in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, wants the onus put on public officials to disclose because what if the lobbyist fails to disclose, inadvertently or intentionally? I think there should be an equal commitment on behalf of the public office holder – a government minister, a department head, a deputy minister, people like that – to also somehow fill in the blanks, to also somehow report who is being approached and what the subject matter being discussed is. So how do we do this? I don't know yet. This is something I am struggling with, but I think there's an equal responsibility on behalf of the public office holder to also tell us that they are being lobbied with respect to a certain subject or a certain decision.

Another thing that I thought about was, basically, with respect to charities and nonprofit groups, community organizations, and entities like this. They are going to be classified as an organization lobbyist, which is fine. Under this definition it is talking about "an employee, officer or director of an organization who receives a payment for the performance of his or her functions" with respect to lobbying. So what if it is a volunteer member of that organization? Now, they're not receiving payment, so will they be not required to report? I need clarification.

Also, what if they're a paid director? What if it's, you know, the secretary for the organization, for the United Way, or what if it's the treasurer for Salvation Army or some other group that actually fund raises to contribute to charitable work? They don't receive a certain, stand-alone, clearly defined payment for their lobbying effort, but they're paid a salary at the end of the month or they're paid an honorarium for carrying out these duties.

So is there going to be a stipulation on a percentage of your work that has to be dedicated to lobbying, where, basically, that's the definition of a lobbyist, or are we going to say that any officer who just receives any payment on behalf of this organization or in lieu of, you know, services that they do for this organization would now be captured under this definition?

Moving on, I have a concern with respect to keeping things in regulation and allowing the minister or the Ethics Commissioner or whoever is going to be in charge of this piece of legislation to put things in regulation. Take, for example, restrictions on the application of the act. Basically, to which areas does this act not apply? We added members of the House of Commons, we added employees of municipalities, we've added members of Métis settlement councils, diplomatic agents, et cetera, and after this very extensive list we also said, "any other individuals or categories of individuals prescribed in the regulations." I think we should try to change this philosophy and the preference of this government that everything should be in regulation or that the bulk or the meat of any bill or act is kept in regulation because it's flexible. Yes, a certain degree of flexibility is needed but not where it basically limits the strength of any piece of legislation itself.

Another trend which I don't like is basically, you know, the plan by this government now to include little bad things with other good things. They basically lump together questionable sections in an act or in a bill with good things. Now everybody in this House is going to be forced to either adopt it all, accept it all, vote for it all, or decline to support all of it again together. They embed loopholes or they embed sort of bypasses to allow themselves some wiggle room.

In particular, I have this issue with section 2(c), which basically allows a public office holder to bypass the system totally if he or she initiates that discussion with the lobbyist. If the lobbyist approaches that minister, for example, the lobbyist has to register, but if the

minister phones up the lobbyist and solicits information or advice, then nobody has to register. I am hoping that through deliberations in Committee of the Whole this section might be amended. Again, if we're really serious about coming across as honest people, that we have nothing to hide and that everything is going to be open and transparent, then this, in my opinion, is one section that needs to be taken out.

I mentioned that the duty to file should be shared to a certain degree with the public office holder. I'm not saying that they should do it within 10 days like a consultant lobbyist would or, you know, 30 days like an organizational lobbyist but maybe once a year. Maybe once a year there is going to be a summary from the public office holder who lobbied him or her, and maybe we should really compare the two lists, compare what the public office holder submitted once a year with all the submissions that we accrued through the year from the lobbyists themselves and see if someone somewhere is not telling us the truth.

Payment information to contractors. Again, that's very useful, and I commend the government for accepting this recommendation. But again they are leaving the details pertaining to those payments in regulation because they say "prescribed Provincial entities" and "in accordance with the regulations." So who is going to be captured under this definition? Which entities? I think this is something that we should discuss in this House and that should not be left to regulations to be done behind closed doors. Again, it's the appearance of openness and transparency versus actual openness and transparency. While I agree with the government that anything is better than nothing, we need to strengthen this further.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) five minutes for questions and comments, if any.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. This bill reminds me of a game that we all played as children, and that game was Mother, may I? We had various steps that we could take, you know. Mother, may I take a giant step? Mother, may I take a baby step? How many baby steps? I view this legislation as, rather than something that I would shout from the rooftops, more something that I might sort of pass off in casual conversation as: "Guess what? Alberta has finally done or is starting to do what the rest of the provinces and the federal government have done for some time. They're going to actually have a lobbyist registry." [some applause] That's about the volume of the clapping that I would provide for this particular bill.

When I gave my response to the Speech from the Throne, one of the areas that I pointed out and the weakness of this particular bill is that if the government comes courting, there's no reporting. In other words, if the government approaches a particular organization and requests their services, then there is no obligation on the government's part to report it because, in fact, they were doing the lobbying.

5:50

When we look at past practice with this government, which would still continue given this form of lobbyists registry, there are circumstances like Kelley Charlebois, who received a series of contracts totalling in excess of \$400,000, but there wasn't even the equivalent of a bubble gum wrapper's amount of written information on the services that he provided. This was all verbal, and of course there were no tapes and no record. So this kind of behind-the-scenes, closed-door justification of service can still take place.

I also remember Rod Love. His employment was somewhat sketchy. He was flying on government planes at the same time as he

was lobbying on behalf of a private railroad organization that wanted to extend some track up to the Wood Buffalo area. Because of his cozy on-again, off-again relationship he was allowed to have access to that government plane to do his lobbying. Well, as far as I can see from this lobbyists registry, that kind of close coziness would continue.

Another area that the government is touting as being extremely transparent is the idea that they'll post the flight manifests. Well, we've always asked for the flight logs to be posted. Again, this doesn't get into the kind of transparency that we're looking for. Simply having the name of a person who approached the government, without knowing the details of what was being discussed, doesn't provide the kinds of transparency or accountability that Albertans are looking for from this government.

I support the idea of taking the baby step, but I look forward to the government going beyond that step. A lobbyist comes in, talks to the department of infrastructure, and says: "Look, we've got a new process for the hardening of cement. With this particular technique we can speed up the drying time. This new technique will involve being able to construct without restriction, any time, whether it's summer, winter, whatever." I would like to think, John Silverman of Cements Are Us, that the information that was discussed with the minister or deputy minister or some bureaucrat within the Infrastructure and Transportation department, the actual discussion and the notes of that discussion, would be made available.

Granted, there are a whole lot of people who wouldn't go surfing the Net to see that information posted, but for those who are concerned about public accountability, such as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's Scott Hennig and so on, they would like to know what actually took place behind those closed doors other than the fact that somebody from such-and-such a company on such-and-such a day spoke to the government.

So while I commend the government for taking the smallest of initial steps, I would remind the government that for 2004 and 2005 running, they received the most secretive government award. By simply having a lobbyist registry that indicates who approached, I don't think that's going to prevent them from receiving that most unpublic, most opaque as opposed to transparent, most secretive government award.

I do look forward to discussing in greater detail during Committee of the Whole the amendments, the strengthening of this legislation,

which is absolutely necessary and which my colleague referred to as taking things out of regulation and putting them into the bright daylight of legislation. The assumption that the benevolence of a minister is sufficient to make decisions behind closed doors without even consulting his own cabinet members, never mind the opposition members, is insufficient. It's not transparent.

So I would task my hon. colleagues from the government with the homework assignment of creating real transparency. In future projects surprise us by bringing in whistle-blower legislation. Surprise us in terms of your transparency by setting election dates. You know, wow us by overturning Bill 20. Add to my Christmas wish list by putting Bill 40 back into legislation rather than regulation.

I look forward to working with the government on the standing policy committees. The reason I look so forward to this is because the minutes of those standing policy committees will be available for public viewing. It's that kind of transparency that I wish to see from this government on the lobbyists registry. To be truly transparent, provide the details of the meeting. You've really got nothing to lose if transparency and accountability are as important as it has been stated, and you have a whole lot to gain. You might even stay in as government for one more term.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone wishing to participate.

Mr. Chase: According to the operation of the House, am I allowed to adjourn debate at this point? With members' approval I would suggest that we adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 5:58 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, March 22, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and of our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui j'ai le privilège de présenter en votre nom, à vous et aux membres de l'Assemblée, des invités spéciaux venant de ma circonscription, 17 élèves du secondaire accompagnés de leurs deux enseignants. Ils sont assis dans la galerie et sont à Edmonton pour célébrer les Rendez-vous de la francophonie, une quinzaine de jours où l'on célèbre l'histoire et la culture française.

Alors, c'est un grand plaisir de vous présenter les élèves de l'école Georges P. Vanier, accompagnés de leur enseignant M. Roger Doucet, et les élèves de l'école Héritage, accompagnés de leur enseignante Mme Anita Johnson. J'aimerais aussi vous présenter un membre de mon équipe, Mme Cindie LeBlanc, directrice-adjointe au Secrétariat francophone, une finissante de l'école Héritage.

Je leur demanderais de se lever et recevoir une bienvenue chaleureuse de cette Assemblée.

Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a number of very special guests from my constituency: 17 high school students and their two teachers. They are seated in the gallery and are in Edmonton to commemorate Les Rendez-vous de la francophonie, a national two-week celebration of French culture and history. It is with great pleasure that I introduce the students from l'école Georges P. Vanier, accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Roger Doucet, and the students from l'école Héritage, accompanied by their teacher, Ms Anita Johnson. I would also like to introduce a member of my staff, Ms Cindie LeBlanc, assistant director of the Francophone Secretariat, who is a graduate of l'école Héritage. I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [As submitted]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly on behalf of the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry a class from New Horizons school, 38 in number. With them are their teachers, Ms Camie Hamilton, Mme Suzanne Le Gars, and Mr. Shaun Wilde. Also, it has been brought to my attention that there is a relative of yours in this group named Paul Matichuk. I would ask the guests to please stand and for this Assembly to give them the appropriate recognition.

Thank you so much.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you 17 students from the Neerlandia school. They're accompanied this afternoon by teacher Jim Bosma and parent helpers Rhonda Tischer, Mike Waggoner, Evelien Koekkoek, and Johanne Leonard. They are seated in the public and members' galleries this afternoon. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 42 visitors from the Gibbons elementary school in Gibbons. Along with them are teachers Mr. Don McIntyre and Ms Colleen Lowe and parents and helpers Robin Kathan, Gary Haynes, and Lorna Simpson. I believe they are seated in both the members' and the public galleries. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly today a fine example of the many hard-working and dedicated members of the public service. As chair of the Regulatory Review Secretariat under Service Alberta I am working with Angela Prokopetz, who is a secretariat director. In this fiscal year the busy secretariat will process about 275 requests from departments and regulatory authorities. Of course, all of these require an analysis by the secretariat. Angela is seated in the public gallery, and I would ask her now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed it's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all the colleagues of our Assembly a lovely lady that is an acquaintance of many of us. She has a very distinguished job, and that is to maintain our minister of culture. I would ask that Angie Goudreau stand up and that our members join me in wishing her a good day and a warm welcome.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure today to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House 16 individuals who are here visiting the Legislature as part of the Fushimi exchange. It's a junior high school exchange that's operated by D.S. MacKenzie junior high in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford.

I would like to introduce all of them if I could. The teacher that has co-ordinated the program is Ms Christine Cao. The volunteer parents today: Glen Burley, Ann-Marie Cote, and Cyndy Lang. There are six D.S. MacKenzie students, four of whom will actually be going to Japan in July – Ashley Lang, Cleah Takahashi, Cassie Carroll, Corbin MacKenzie, Chris Burley, and Sawyer Marsden – and the most important guests, of course, the six exchange students from Japan. Please bear with me as I try to work my way through their names: Nami Miyazawa, Hirono Takano, Saori Komata, Mei Sasao, Hidetaro Matsuno, and Chieri Namba. I would ask them to

all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me today to welcome to this Assembly 15 travelers from the Northwest Territories, including four members of government from both the territorial and the municipal governments. They're here to present to the Legislature a resolution, passed on March 5, named the Right to Water, and I have a laminated copy here which they have asked me to pass on to the Premier.

Let me introduce them: the MLA for Yellowknife Centre, Robert Hawkins; the MLA for Fort Smith, Michael Miltenberger; city councillor for Yellowknife, Paul Falvo; city councillor for Yellowknife again, Kevin Kennedy, with his wife, Roberta; Martin Kennedy; Christa Domchek; Juniper Falvo; Daron Letts; Doug Ritchie with Ecology North; Raymond Beaver from Fort Smith; Gilly McNaughton; Steve Whittaker; Martin Dubeau; Archie Smith from Fort Smith; Alex Beaudin; Tom Unka from Fort Resolution; Phillip Bealieu, Fort Resolution; Lindsay Telfer; Leila Darwish; and Meredith James. I'd ask them all now to stand and have the recognition of the Legislature.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mr. Perri Garvin. Perri has been involved in the labour movement for the past 30 years as a board member, a delegate, a shop steward, and a health and safety activist. Perri became a delegate to the Edmonton and District Labour Council in 1987 and was just recently re-elected as their recording secretary for his 10th term. He has been with the Alberta capital region's United Way for the past seven years as the labour co-ordinator and has worked with over 200 locals in the Edmonton region. Perri's work brings unions in the community and the United Way together in helping to make the Edmonton region a better place for all of us. Every year union members contribute a substantial portion of the United Way's fundraising goal. I would now ask that Perri rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a number of environmental activists and citizens concerned about the uncontrolled growth of the Alberta tar sands. They're here today to recognize International Water Day and to call for a moratorium on oil sands development, something that we in the NDP have long been calling for too. I was present today at their rally and commend them on their hard work and dedication to environmental issues. I will call each of their names, and please reserve applause till the end: Lindsay Telfer, executive director of the Sierra coalition; Leila Darwish, associate director of the Sierra coalition; Meredith James, Mackenzie Wild co-ordinator; along with Meghan Newman, Alli Conroy, and Mike Neuman. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

A second introduction is Robert Hawkins. Robert serves as the MLA for Yellowknife Centre in the Northwest Territories Assembly.

Robert was elected to the 15th Legislative Assembly in 2003. He was educated at SAIT and graduated as a mechanical engineer. He's here today as well to add his voice to the growing concern about the environment and the effects of industry. I'm very honoured to introduce him to our Legislature, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask him now to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have two guests to introduce to you and to the House today. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Paul Pomerleau. Paul is a proud member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers local 424. He divides his time between working in Fort McMurray and at home in Beaumont. Paul is here today to show his concern around the employment of temporary foreign workers despite some of his colleagues being unable to get work here in Alberta. Paul has lived in Alberta all his life. He and his wife spend much of their free time driving their two sons around to hockey practices and tournaments across the province. I would now ask that Paul rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction today is for Linda Duncan. Linda has been a tireless advocate on environmental issues not just in Alberta but globally. She is currently the vice-president of Sierra Legal Defence Fund, a national nonprofit organization litigating precedent-setting environmental cases for Canadian communities. She is also the vice-president of the Lake Wabamun Enhancement and Protection Association, a grassroots organization of residents and lake users concerned about industrial impacts on one of Alberta's recreational treasures. She is an active member of the Alberta Environmental Network's energy caucus as a board member. Most importantly, she's the NDP candidate in the next election in the federal riding of Edmonton-Strathcona. I would now ask that Linda rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have two guests today, and I'd like to introduce them to you and members of the Assembly, two very active women in the city of Edmonton. First of all, Docia Lysne is a tireless advocate and constituent of mine in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. She is a home provider with the Elizabeth Fry Society and vice-president of Planned Parenthood in Edmonton. She is very active in the Unitarian church and works with the Kara Family Resource Centre in Edmonton, who provide safe environments and programming to enhance the self-esteem and independence of low-income families.

Also with her today is Marion DeShield. She is the former leader of the national black women's coalition and is a senior citizen volunteer with a seniors' centre here in Edmonton. By the way, Mr. Speaker, Marion will be celebrating her 87th birthday in June.

I would now ask that both of them rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Neil McCrank, QC

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 1998 the Alberta Utilities and Energy Board has regulated the safe, responsible, and efficient development of Alberta's energy resources under the

watchful eye of its chairman, Mr. Neil McCrank. On February 21 of this year Mr. McCrank announced his retirement. His significant role in increasing the public's awareness of energy and utility issues will be greatly missed.

A native of Val d'Or, Quebec, Mr. McCrank graduated with a bachelor of law degree from Queen's University and was admitted to the bar in 1971. After coming to Alberta from Ontario in 1979 to work with the Alberta Attorney General, he served as a special prosecutor, assistant deputy minister for the criminal justice division, Deputy Attorney General, and deputy minister of the Alberta Department of Justice until his appointment as chairman of the EUB. During his tenure with the EUB Mr. McCrank has served on numerous national commissions, steering committees, task forces, and review panels related to emerging legal issues.

Mr. McCrank embodies the finest values of service to the public. He is an active community volunteer and currently serves as a board member at a number of educational institutions and professional organizations.

On behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta I would like to thank Neil for his service to Albertans as chairman of the board during this period of unprecedented growth in our energy sector. His leadership of the EUB will be missed, and on behalf of my colleagues and this Assembly I wish him all the best in his retirement.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Wetaskiwin Sports Hall of Fame Inductees

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday I will be attending the Wetaskiwin and County Sports Hall of Fame banquet. This event celebrates Wetaskiwin's impressive history of athletic competition. This year five individual and one team are being recognized for their excellence in sports and for their outstanding contributions to the community.

Valerie Greenwall-Weldon will be inducted as an athlete for her distinguished play in softball. She represented Alberta at a number of national competitions, including the western Canadian championships in 1974, the Canada Summer Games in 1977, and the Canadian junior Olympic team in 1978.

The late Tom Dorchester will also be inducted as an athlete. He was considered the Gordie Howe of chuckwagon races as he consistently won races from 1937 to 1981. Mr. Dorchester was inducted into the Canadian Cowboy Hall of Fame in 1982.

Willie Littlechild is being inducted as an athlete builder. He participated in numerous sporting events, especially hockey, as an athlete and coach. He represented Alberta at the world aboriginal games and the 2006 Canada Senior Games. As well, Mr. Littlechild has been inducted into the Alberta and Saskatchewan hockey halls of fame.

The late Ralph Pocock is being inducted as a builder for his work in building the Wetaskiwin curling rink and tennis courts. Mr. Pocock played a pivotal role in developing minor hockey in Wetaskiwin.

The Brightview Huskies hockey team is being inducted for accomplishments as a team. The Huskies were Wetaskiwin district champions from 1946 to 1952 and from 1943 to 1952 lost only three games while winning over 100.

The final inductee and special award recipient is the late Vern Henry. Mr. Henry was involved in numerous sports, including midget fastball, girls bantam soccer, and minor hockey. He also was chairman of seniors curling in Wetaskiwin.

I want to congratulate all of the inductees for the distinguished contributions to the sport history of Wetaskiwin.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Water Management

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every living system has limits to growth, and this has seldom been recognized by this government on development issues. Overallocation of the Oldman and Bow rivers systems, groundwater contamination from oil and gas activity without adequate groundwater monitoring, and threats to the quality and quantity of the Athabasca River from oil sands development have shocked and mobilized not only Albertans but citizens from the Northwest Territories, as we've seen today. Albertans are looking for enlightened leadership on our finite water resources, only 2 per cent of Canada's freshwater supply.

An independent water study commissioned by this government, the Rosenberg report, highlighted the lack of planning, investment, science, and action on Water for Life at a critical time when these are most needed. Population growth and climate change have increased the demand for wise and integrated water management. Another example is the need for collaborative planning on the eastern slopes, the source of all of our water in the province.

Integration is also clearly needed between government bodies such as Energy, Environment, and Sustainable Resource Development, that continue to compromise both land and water resource through lack of full consultation. But full integration also requires good science. We don't have the information we need on groundwater, even in the upper Bow River, our primary population water source. We know that water withdrawals affect both surface and groundwater. They're connected but in unpredictable ways that must be defined in each region. All major development must have cumulative impact assessments before approvals, as the minister has admitted in the House yesterday, but this government continues to make development decisions without that framework and without cumulative impact assessment.

1:20

Meanwhile the government has denied and delayed action on climate change, the most profound and unpredictable threat to human security on the planet, with added impacts on our water. Water is our lifeblood. It must guide development decisions above economic considerations. Alberta's future will not be defined by oil but by how we manage our water and place limits on growth. They will not accept any compromise on the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Joffre Carbon Capture and Storage Project

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to speak about a carbon capture and storage project near Joffre and Prentiss, in my constituency. This project, led by Glencoe Resources, captures carbon dioxide from the MEGlobal and NOVA Chemicals petrochemical complexes southeast of Lacombe. Once captured, the carbon dioxide is converted into a purified and liquefied form. This liquid CO₂ is then sent through an 80-kilometre pipeline grid into oil fields in the Ponoka area. It is projected that this particular project will capture about 365,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, or about 1,000 tonnes a day. This is the equivalent of taking 80,000 cars off the road. This will reduce the emissions for the two petrochemical companies by at least 25 per cent.

CO₂, when injected into certain types of partially depleted oil fields, has the ability to enhance the recovery of oil that would not be recoverable without the CO₂ stimulation. This is good news for

our province as it can represent a large increase in oil recovery from these depleted oil fields. As a result, Alberta will gain the full potential of these valuable resources.

Capturing carbon dioxide also represents a positive for the environment. Instead of releasing CO₂ into the atmosphere, this project will turn it into a valuable asset. There has been much discussion recently about managing the effects of carbon dioxide emissions. Two weeks ago Prime Minister Harper and our hon. Premier announced the creation of the carbon capture and storage task force. This task force will find solutions to implement carbon capture technology on a large scale. I hope that the task force will take the opportunity to come to my constituency to look at the Joffre/Prentiss carbon capture project. This is an innovative project that is a perfect example of what we are doing here in Alberta to solve greenhouse gas challenges, and I look forward to the adoption of this concept throughout our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Millwoods Cultural and Recreational Facility Association

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I attended a celebration of a significant group in my constituency. Inscribed at the bottom of the cover of a classy black-and-gold program was: building the community's dreams. If you heard those words in another context, you'd probably think that was an advertising slogan or the target for a fundraising drive. In this case they were not hype but a description of achievement.

The Millwoods Cultural and Recreational Facility Association is not simply one organization that has grown up on the coattails of a growing community. In many respects MCARFA has grown Mill Woods into a dynamic community, a community that if incorporated would be Alberta's third-largest city. Thirty years ago "Mill Woods cultural association" would have been an oxymoron. A friend of mine, writing a field trip manual for Edmonton public schools, was encouraging teachers to look at the resources on their doorsteps, in their own communities. "That's all very well for the rest of you," a teacher in Mill Woods complained. "Here all we have are strip malls."

The fact that this is no longer true is due largely to MCARFA. An arena complex; the Mill Woods golf course; the Jackie Parker park of picnic sites, trails, and an all-season pavilion; a 440 track adjacent to two high schools; and a rollerblade, skateboard, and bike park are projects that MCARFA has brokered among 10 community leagues, city, and provincial funding when no one group or level of government could have done this work on its own. A spray park and adventure playground are set to open this summer.

These achievements are more than fundraising and organization. They represent an impressive mobilization of volunteers across local neighbourhoods and cultures in a larger spirit. MCARFA brings together resources and contacts in an effective way that is a model for other communities.

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

Temporary Moratorium on Oil Sands Development

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our political environment reached a tipping point sometime last year. Research and scientific consensus and numerous public opinion polls combined to push some other political parties past the point of no return

on their emissions policy. Suddenly it's considered good politics to talk about emission reductions. But Albertans have good reason to be skeptical about Conservative and Liberal plans for emission reductions. The Liberals say that they would cap emissions only years into the future, while the government says that we don't need absolute reductions at all.

What neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals are willing to admit is that unless you are willing to manage growth, particularly in the development of the tar sands, then you can't manage emissions. The NDP has called for a short-term moratorium on approvals of new tar sands projects and expansions of existing ones. We understand the connection between pace of development and attempts to control greenhouse gas emissions.

By contrast, the Premier is on record saying that the government won't press the brake and has warned of dire consequences should Albertans attempt to manage the development of our tar sands. Similarly, the leader of the Liberals said that a temporary moratorium would be like locking the brakes on a speeding car. The moratorium we propose is only a short-term measure but an important one. Alberta needs a plan to deal with the serious economic, social, environmental, and infrastructure impacts of tar sands development.

A temporary moratorium on new approvals will allow Alberta to catch its breath and to get caught up. The management of our nonrenewable resources must be done in a way that lays the groundwork for a post oil energy world. It is time to talk seriously about using our present tremendous wealth to invest in a truly sustainable economic environment.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Bill 205

Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 205, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007.

This is an act that will help forestry and oil and gas industry to meet some of the targets that our Environment minister is looking at under Bill 3.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

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

Bill 207

Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce private member's Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act.

The purpose of Bill 207 is to increase the number of high-quality, affordable child care spaces available in our province. This will ensure that parents are better able to find the care that they need for their children. The bill will also improve accountability and transparency surrounding child care in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Bill 208
School (Restrictions on Fees and Fund-raising)
Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce private member's Bill 208, the School (Restrictions on Fees and Fund-raising) Amendment Act.

The purpose of Bill 208 is to eliminate school fees and fundraising in Alberta's public school system. All Albertans have the right to schooling from K to 12, and the ultimate responsibility for education funding rests with the government. This bill will provide relief to parents struggling with costs of school fees and ensure that students have equal access to education in our province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

head: 1:30 **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

St. Joseph's General Hospital

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past hour we have spoken to a woman whose father died from the MRSA superbug after contracting it at the hospital in Vegreville. This woman's father contracted the infection at the Vegreville hospital in 2003. He was moved to a facility in Viking, then to the University of Alberta hospital, where his infection was treated very seriously. He was eventually transferred to a long-term care facility, where he died of MRSA. In the fall of 2003, this same woman has told us, she contacted her MLA, who is now the Premier, to raise her concerns about safety and treatment issues at the Vegreville hospital. To the Premier: did he take any action based on the concerns that were brought to him about the hospital at Vegreville?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting that I had some contact with an individual. I don't know who he's referring to. Usually in this House documents are tabled with respect to information when they're pointing special attention to either the Premier or any member of this House. So, first of all, there's protocol.

Secondly, this is a serious matter, and I find it very upsetting that it has to come up in the House.

With respect to an individual patient, we are very concerned about the health not only of the patients in St. Joe's but in every facility in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a very serious issue. Again to the Premier: can the Premier tell this Assembly and all Albertans if any other persons have died as a result of the breakdown of infection control at the Vegreville hospital?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, this Leader of the Opposition is making an assumption, nonprofessional. I'd like to see the report that has confirmed that as a result of some health care service in St. Joe's hospital it was proven that that individual has passed away. I haven't seen that, so I'd ask him to table it.

With respect to the further protocol followed with respect to St. Joe's hospital, the minister of health can answer.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier on what we all agree is a very serious issue. These are questions that Albertans want answered. Can the Premier tell this Assembly if any other local health professionals, such as dentists, were using the sterilization facilities at the Vegreville hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is an interesting question. I don't know the answer to that question. I will make inquiries. We do have the Health Quality Council on site now looking and talking with the people who operate the hospital and the region to define the scope of the investigation that they're going to undertake. Certainly, that will be one of the things we'll want to know: to what extent was the CSR in the hospital used and for what purposes? But let's be very clear. This is not a situation where it is prudent for the opposition or anyone else to alarm Albertans. The look back that we're doing is being done because there were found to be inappropriate procedures followed, and it bears us to investigate and to let people know.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The public health issues emerging in Vegreville are just the thin edge of the wedge. What about next week, next month, next town? Albertans are worried about whether this government is capable of anticipating future problems and producing a strategy to protect public safety. My questions are to the Premier. We are already aware of one patient who died in Viking after contracting MRSA at St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville. This patient was transferred several times between hospitals. How many other potentially infected patients were transferred from St. Joe's to other sites?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is not a prudent thing to do – this is a very serious situation, and we have the Health Quality Council looking at it. We've made sure that no further incidents happen. We've made sure that the CSR there is shut down until the investigation is done and appropriate protocols are put in place. We don't know that anyone died of the thing. The hon. member has raised one individual situation and is taking that reference. We'll be happy to take that reference if you provide us with the details and investigate it and any others that people might bring forward. But it's not prudent to do this in an alarmist fashion. It's prudent to do it in a serious manner with an appropriate, responsible review, alerting people to have blood tests done, and following up appropriately.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the Premier. The East Central health region has lost 17 full-time registered nurses over the last year alone. It is common practice for staff to transfer between hospitals for shifts, especially when facilities are short-staffed. What steps are taken to reduce the risk of spreading MRSA if staff from St. Joseph's hospital rotate between facilities?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it is known and understood that the MRSA virus is one which is transmitted hand to hand, or by touch, and that the most prudent way of stopping the spread of the infection

is by properly washing hands and properly disinfecting surfaces. That is something that every health professional knows and understands, and that's something that's being reinforced for them through this incident.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. A final question to the Premier. In Vegreville there hasn't been any sort of government response, public information session, or town hall held to reassure the Vegreville residents. Why has the Premier waited so long to make himself or government staff available for an information session to inform and reassure the people of Vegreville?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we immediately sent professionals to assess the situation. They posted a public health order. The Health Quality Council is there today interviewing people in the hospital and making sure that steps are being taken immediately to deal with this situation. Once further information is made available, we will of course communicate with not only the town council, the chamber, but all of those that may be interested with respect to what we're doing in their hospital, at St. Joe's.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care Standards

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government, which has included the Premier for 13 years, has spent that amount of time dismantling Alberta's public health care system. It has politicized the regional health boards. It's accelerated the privatization of health care to the detriment of our quality public system. Vegreville is only one symptom of the problems that have ensued. We have an opportunity here to fix the system before other problems arise. To the Premier: given that the Premier along with the member from Brooks and other members of the so-called Deep Six was part of the group leading the charge to cut essential health services, does the Premier accept responsibility for the inevitable outcomes of these decisions?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Vegreville hospital, St. Joe's, is not a private facility. Again, innuendo, misleading, giving information that is totally incorrect. Secondly, in 1993 the budget was about \$3.2 billion or so, \$3.3 billion. I believe that over a period of time in that first year about \$200 million was reduced, most of that on the administrative side. The budget today is, of course, the largest per capita anywhere in the country of Canada. I believe our health professionals are doing extremely well in this province. In fact, we have people coming from other provinces to access services here.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, this isn't an isolated case. The decision of his own government has resulted in patient safety problems at the Holy Cross, in the Calgary health region, and in long-term care centres across the province by dismantling the system's capacity to set and enforce standards. Will the Premier admit that the department of health needs the very capacity to set and enforce standards that this government pressed so hard to eliminate?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the department of health has been doing a very good job. We've attracted some of the world's best in terms of cardiologists, oncologists. I mean, this is where people want to practise. We have, of course, the Alberta medical research trust fund, that again is attracting Nobel prize material not only in research, but now we are benefiting from that research in terms of new medical treatments and pharmaceuticals, new drugs, right here in the province of Alberta. I think we've come a very long way.

1:40

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has sidestepped the issue absolutely completely. Will the Premier commit to reassembling the centralized monitoring and enforcement standards in the department of hospitals that were dismantled by this very government in the 1990s?

Mr. Stelmach: What I will commit to is to ensure that we get to the very bottom of the situation at St. Joe's so that we put at ease, of course, other Albertans that may be accessing services in hospitals in this province, find out what the issue was, what the problem was, and make sure that it never happens again. That is what I'm committed to.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

St. Joseph's General Hospital

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. While the Premier may say that he wants to get to the bottom of this, this government's response so far is very similar to the response of the Harris government in Ontario to the Walkerton situation. The Vegreville hospital scandal has threatened the health of Albertans. Today I wrote to the Premier and asked him to appoint a public inquiry to get to the bottom of this matter. Will the Premier accept that recommendation from me and, I'm sure, supported by many thousands of Albertans and appoint a public inquiry?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I've asked in this House a number of times in answering questions that we not make this alarmist. What has happened in Vegreville at St. Joseph's hospital is that there was a breakdown in the protocols with respect to the sterilization of certain equipment, so the sterilization room was closed. The infectious disease specialist who was asked to examine this indicated that because of the breakdown – we're not aware that any blood-borne pathogens actually were transferred, but there may be a low possibility that that happened, and therefore it's prudent and in the best interests of the people there that we do a look back and we ask them to have blood tests done. This is not a Walkerton, and to put it into that context is alarmist. There's no sense making the people of Vegreville area alarmed about this. We're dealing with it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister says that we shouldn't be alarmed about it, but I think that Albertans would be a lot more confident if this government was seen to be taking clear action instead of giving it off to this toothless tiger, this Health Quality Council. This is for the Premier. Why won't the Premier appoint a public inquiry to make sure not just that the Vegreville hospital is safe but that all Alberta hospitals are safe?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, by having the Health Quality Council there, these are professionals in their field of practice that will assess the situation, find out where the breakdown has occurred. They will report to the minister, and of course the minister will follow the recommendations of that committee to ensure that we even further – further – improve practices in facilities across this province.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Health Quality Council has been in place apparently to take care of these things for a number of years. Where was it? Why didn't it do its job? And why won't the Premier admit that the Health Quality Council was never set up to do this kind of thing and that a full public inquiry, as was eventually forced on the Conservative government in Ontario over Walkerton, is the way that we have to get to the bottom of this?

Mr. Hancock: Walkerton involved a large number of people who were infected by bad water. In this situation the experts tell us that there's low risk. But it's prudent to look. It's prudent to go back and do the tests. This is a far different situation from Walkerton. The Health Quality Council was not the council which was supposed to make sure that protocols were followed, but they have expertise in – guess what? – health quality. That's why we're asking them to investigate why there was a breakdown, bring them in as outside people to determine why there was a breakdown, what should be done to fix that breakdown, and what we can learn from it. They will have all the authority they need to do that. They will report to this minister, and this minister will act on that report.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Water Storage

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As has been mentioned, today is World Water Day, and we here in Alberta are truly blessed with this critical resource. We must continue to use and develop this resource wisely. Our water flow agreements allow us to utilize 50 per cent of the flow of our rivers. We are unable to utilize approximately 50 per cent of our allocation, though, due to lack of storage. It took approximately 30 years to build the Oldman River dam. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: will this government release its plans for immediate action for capturing and storing Alberta's water or admit that they don't have one?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Water for Life strategy is a good one. It's quite complex. It's got many components to it, and I'll allow the Minister of Environment to respond.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, we store and divert hundreds of thousands of acre-feet of water here in the province, and we now have thousands of kilometres of canals and pipelines. Our 1906 Water Act needs to be amended as it segregates our water into industry, irrigation, and municipal use and prohibits the use of even irrigation spill water when it passes by an industrial location. To the Premier: does this government have any plans to amend this divisive water policy and stop the segregation of water between irrigation, industry, and municipal communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in answer to a question from another hon. member I indicated that the Water for Life strategy is an ongoing process. With respect to storage I

indicated that we now have identified a number of promising locations to do off-stream storage, and we are in the process of prioritizing those opportunities. We're beginning to consult on a more intense basis with Albertans on other aspects of the Water for Life strategy as time progresses.

Mr. Hinman: We're about 20 years too late, Mr. Speaker.

This government's policy on water does not allow for efficient use and wise use and storage of our water. To the Premier: will this government be open and honest, as it claims to be, and release the latest MPE study for on- and off-stream storage that Alberta Environment commissioned them to do?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I actually answered most of the question in the answer to the previous question. We do have at this point an inventory of possible locations for off-stream storage. Work is being done to have a qualitative analysis of those sites so that we can prioritize them, and we do intend to consult with Albertans and discuss the output of that report in due course.

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

Water Management

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The pace and scope of development in this province, especially the oil sands, may be good for business in the short term but is not responsible and will not sustain our water into the future. The recent Rosenberg report, commissioned by this government, was very critical of the lack of knowledge and action on responsible water management in Alberta and identified real risks for the future, yet the Premier has said that he will not slow economic growth. To the Premier: how does the Premier explain to fellow farmers this uncontrolled growth in management?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as one that has grown various crops in this province of Alberta, we do depend on the good Lord to give us a sprinkle from time to time to grow our crops. I mean, without rain we don't have any crops.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. The Environment minister admitted yesterday in meetings with municipalities that approving one project at a time without doing a total cumulative impact assessment of all activities on our watershed does not serve Albertans. That's also the message of our neighbours to the north, who travelled here for 24 hours to talk to this government about management. Despite the lack of a proper cumulative impact assessment many projects each month are approved in Alberta. To the Minister of Environment: having admitted that the approval process is not adequate to guarantee responsible development, is it not reasonable to slow down development until we have appropriate science?

Mr. Renner: Well, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, how someone can interpret words in different ways. What, in fact, I indicated to AAMD and C when I was talking with them yesterday was that we are going to be developing cumulative impact processes so that we can improve the way we deal with our environmental approval process. I never indicated at any point in the conversation that the process that we have in place now is not adequate. I just indicated that there is room for improvement, and we intend to move in that direction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With a fraction of the resources that the Alberta Environment department needs, at .5 per cent of our provincial budget, a fraction of what they used to have, and a massive increase in development and water impacts, Albertans are wondering if the government has received the message that the environment is their number one concern. The Rosenberg report reinforced concerns about gross underinvestment in Alberta Environment. To the minister: when will we see proper investment in Alberta Environment?

1:50

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I happen to be an individual who measures success by things other than the amount of dollars that are spent on me.

As for the specifics on Environment's budget, I encourage the member to await introduction of the provincial budget, which will be coming in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Community Treatment Orders

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes after incidents involving persons with mental illness, there are calls for the government to pass legislation regarding community treatment orders. I'd like to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness to explain to the members of the Legislature and to the members of the public viewing QP today what community treatment orders are.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A community treatment order, or CTO, is a tool to encourage compliance with mental health treatments in the community. It's a part of a broader strategy, and my primary concern is finding ways to improve the scope and effectiveness of community-based mental health services. Our goal is to help prevent the deterioration of individuals living with mental illness and to position them to lead a full and productive life to the extent possible. These are individuals with severe and persistent mental illness who are admitted to hospital as formal involuntary patients. They're released when they're stabilized. When treatment lapses in the community, their condition deteriorates, and they are readmitted. With CTOs we can help to prevent this deterioration. A CTO provides a patient with a plan . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, in light of that information I'd like to ask the minister if he's considering legislation regarding community treatment orders.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we are intending to bring in legislation which will involve community treatment orders, but more importantly that will be part of a broader strategy to involve enhanced services in the community, to give community-based mental health treatment, and to help work with what's called assertive treatment. CTOs should be considered as a last resort when the community health system cannot provide the support necessary to prevent deterioration of someone suffering mental illness.

So yes to the legislation being brought forward this spring but yes also to working with the community to enhance the services that are

available in the community so that we can prevent the deterioration and the necessity for readmission.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has committed to enhancing the services and working with the community in that regard. I'd ask the minister if he will be working with the community to discuss with them bringing forward this legislation because many groups are in favour of community treatment orders, but others oppose community treatment orders.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we will be bringing forward the CTOs. I want to emphasize that this was recommended by a fatality inquiry last year, that this tool should be available to us. I also have received numerous calls and letters from parents in the community who want to have this tool to help assist with their adult children.

We do want to work with the community groups, associations that have been dealing with mental health issues over the years on what is necessary to provide a full scope of service in the community for persons with mental illness, and we will continue to do that not only before the bill is brought forward but right through the process until it's effectively implemented and onward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday a High River man was seriously injured while working with cattle, and like thousands of other farm workers he is not covered by employment standards, occupational health and safety, or the labour code. He is now suing the farm owner for \$1.2 million. The Premier recently made statements in the House that all Albertans are equal, yet this government continues to deny farm workers the same basic rights that others take for granted. To the Premier: does the Premier agree that all workers in Alberta regardless of sector should be protected equally, or are some Albertans more equal than others?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this matter has come up in the House a number of times with respect to protection that farm workers have. There are, of course, those working on family farms and those working on corporate farms. These are the questions that as a caucus we have chatted about. I know that the minister of agriculture and also the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry are looking into the matter and will bring forward to our caucus, in turn, some recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I hope we get past the review/recommendation stage and get to action.

Mr. Speaker, this lawsuit could possibly have been prevented had basic workplace regulations been in place. This would have benefited the worker by helping him to avoid injury and also the employer, who might now not be on the hook for over a million dollars. To the Premier: acknowledging that the costs associated with meeting basic safety requirements and coverage may be

difficult for some agricultural operations to bear, will this government fund these costs and finally move Alberta into the 21st or even 20th century?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in many cases why should we be funding common sense? I mean, if it's a dangerous situation in any respect, just because we have regulations does not mean that somebody is going to follow them. We have many regulations. We have many laws. We have laws that say that people should stop at a stop sign, and they don't. So what is he saying? That we put a policeman at every intersection in this province to prevent people from not following the rules?

Mr. Chase: During the 1990s this government cut back on safety inspectors in all circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that some small farms may deserve special consideration in Alberta's regulation and laws, but current legislation also shields large-scale and factory farms from any responsibility for farm workers' rights and safety. Will the Premier finally agree to put protection for farm workers in place on these large-scale operations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the large-scale farm operations that I'm aware of have good, quality programs in place in terms of safety because they know that the health of their workers is critical. Secondly, it's also a liability issue for them, and they go a long way in terms of training on a regular basis. So a lot of work is being done by not only small operators but large corporate operators as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Wood Debris from Timber Harvesting

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What steps are you taking to ensure greater utilization of wood debris left over from timber harvesting in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Thank you for the cheering gallery here too.

Mr. Speaker, the debris fibre, the slash, that remains in the forest after harvesting belongs to the forest management agreement holder. That FMA holder, that company, is also responsible for removing or disposing of the debris and the cost of that removal in order to reduce fire hazard. There is some fibre intentionally left in the forest to decompose and provide nutrient. As for the remainder, the forest sector, the FMA holder, has the opportunity to process that wood debris for its own uses or to direct it to any other user.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is his department working with industry and others to explore options for wood debris?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to that question is yes, absolutely. We start, of course, by knowing what we're dealing with, and my department is now reviewing the

potential of the biomass resources in our forests. Three different ministries – Sustainable Resource Development, Energy, and Advanced Education – are looking into opportunities to direct this wood by-product, wood debris, into bioenergy initiatives. I'm happy to report that next week my department is cosponsoring a symposium here in Edmonton looking at bioproducts and bioenergy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What action is your ministry taking to examine bioeconomy opportunities related to wood debris?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Developing new uses for wood debris offers significant opportunities for sustainable economic growth in communities across Alberta to help us build a stronger Alberta. Both the Alberta Forestry Research Institute and the Alberta Research Council are supporting scientists working to develop value-added products with this debris fibre or biorefining technologies. They're looking at technologies to convert wood debris into transportation fuels, into chemicals, into power, into other materials. In fact, even opportunities for value-added products may soon exist in the plastics, pharmaceuticals, and chemical industries. One energy company, Expander Energy, has plans to convert wood fibre debris into hydrogen for heavy upgrading.

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

2:00

Holy Cross Care Centre

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apropos of nothing yesterday in question period the Premier brought up my career in radio. Perhaps like many other Albertans he misses me on the radio because now he can't get both sides of the story like he used to. I had one basic rule on my talk show, and it was this: answer my questions, and I'll leave you alone. I'm looking for the answer the Premier promised me yesterday. Can he explain why there was no clause in the contract requiring the owners of the Holy Cross centre to pay the province back with interest the affordable housing grant they were given if that project fails?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I will say that the hon. member sent me a message asking me to stay here for his question, so thank you for the message.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you for staying.

Mr. Stelmach: You're welcome. What I was going to say is, of course, that this is a responsibility of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and he'll answer the question.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there is a clause in the affordable housing program grant funding. The agreement is between the government of Canada, government of Alberta, and Enterprise Universal, such as you stated yesterday. Under the terms of the agreement . . .

The Speaker: We'll get to it, I'm sure, in the next one.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I guess we'll have to get the hon. minister to table that so we can read it. I've got constituents left, right, and centre calling my office, and they want answers to all kinds of questions they've got about the Holy Cross, going back years. So I'll try again with another question, and I don't want to hear about the affordable housing task force. Its report, which the government continues not to release to the public, is irrelevant to this question. Will the Premier direct all government departments to include a repayment with interest clause in all government contracts?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can't say that now. I'll have to investigate further and see what it applies to in all departments, what it means. Most certainly, we'll investigate and get back to the hon. member.

The Speaker: You want to supplement, hon. minister?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that the recipient must return the grant or the unused portion of grant including interest.

The Speaker: Okay. The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been looking for that answer for a few days now. Again to the Premier, and I promise that if he doesn't make fun of my old career, I won't make fun of his although, I suppose, both can involve shovelling some manure. Will the Premier please make clear to this House, the taxpayers of Alberta, and the constituents of Calgary-Currie how much money his government is going to lose on the Holy Cross gambit if the Grey Nuns affordable housing project fails to go through and get built?

Mr. Stelmach: Very tempted to – no, I won't go that way although I am very proud of my heritage, Mr. Speaker.

But specific to that, if the minister can answer in 15 seconds, fine. If not we'll get it to you.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, very clearly: none.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Affordable Housing Task Force Report

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll come back to the housing task force. Those of us that were on that task force heard numerous and often heart-wrenching personal accounts of people struggling to deal with our housing crisis. I said the other day that it is a crisis affecting thousands of people in this province. This task force: there were big expectations. The government set it up with a lot of fanfare. I'm now asking the Premier: in retrospect would the government now reconsider and release this publicly as soon as possible rather than waiting to put a political spin on it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we recognize, of course, as a government that critical shortage of housing is a real issue for Albertans. It's a quality of life issue, and we're going to work very quickly. We've got the report. We have to build the recommendations. The minister has to bring those to government caucus, to our cabinet policy committee, and in the end to cabinet. We're working very quickly. The minister said May. We'll try and do it even earlier than that.

But, you know, let's not lose sight of the fact that it's the first time that we have members from both sides of the House working on a committee. [interjections] Saying there's something secretive: there wasn't. They were there. The Liberals were there. We were there. Let's work co-operatively together toward one common goal.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's all well and dandy that the opposition was on. We appreciate that. But we have calls coming into our office: a 71-year-old woman having to go to work to pay her rent. Rents are going up \$500 in some cases. It's happening all over the province. My question to the Premier is: what do I say to these people? Just hang on; we've had a task force, and we're going to review it; don't worry about anything: is that the statement that the government is giving us?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member can say is that this is the first time that this House got together on a very important issue. We're collectively working toward the response to the report. Some of these solutions will not be overnight. There's a critical shortage; I agree. But we're going to have numerous recommendations to determine how it will be approached: working with the private sector, the public sector, trying to find the most efficient, cost-effective way of delivering more housing in the province.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the simple truth of the matter is that this is not operating in an open and transparent manner. This report is there, ready to go. The government can respond to it when they want. People want to know what's in that particular report, Mr. Premier. My question to him is simply this: is this the new idea of government transparency, that we wait to put a political spin on a report that should be out to the people of Alberta? Is this what he means?

Mr. Stelmach: One of the things about having an all-party committee is that he'll know if there's a political spin because he was on that committee, unless you can't remember what's in that report. What a stupid question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Funding for the Calgary Health Region

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary, with a population of over 1 million people and over 30,000 people moving to it in the last year alone, is facing tremendous pressures in health care. Yet for every resident Calgary health region receives \$1,064 while Capital health receives \$1,174, over 10 per cent more. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. How can the minister justify this significant disparity in funding between Calgary and Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very important to keep in mind that funding for health is not as simple as counting up the number of people and allocating the dollars on that basis. It's much more complex than that, and it's important that it is much more complex than that. Population growth rates of course are factored into the funding formulas, but attention is also paid to demographics and health services provided. Calgary has a relatively young population, a well-educated population, and we know that health status tracks education. But regions that have a greater number of seniors, for example, get relatively more resources

because medical care for seniors costs more than medical care for young people.

The Calgary health region was allocated in excess of \$2 billion in the 2006-07 budget, which is an 8.2 per cent increase over the '05-06 budget. Calgary and surrounding communities . . .

Dr. Brown: My supplemental question is for the same minister. Mental health care services have a tremendous impact on quality of life in our communities. The Calgary health region receives about 20 per cent of mental health funding in the province but is expected to serve the needs of over 35 per cent of its population. How can the minister justify that disparity?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, funding is done not just on a question of counting up people; funding is done on a basis of allocation for the services provided and based on the demographic modelling that is done with respect to the area.

For the details with respect to mental health funding I'll talk with the Mental Health Board and determine, again, whether that's being done on an appropriate basis. But it's not as simple and it's intellectually dishonest to take a look at funding strictly on a basis of numbers divided into dollars. You need to look at the people you're serving, the services you're providing, and what is absolutely necessary to be done.

Dr. Brown: My second supplemental is for the minister of advanced education. Over the past 10 years the Calgary health region has predicted and is continuing to predict that over the next 10 years we will need approximately 3,300 physicians. With the government in its present program what is it doing to ensure that adequate resources are put in place at the University of Calgary to train these physicians that'll be needed in southern Alberta?

2:10

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times in this House, we're working with all of the postsecondaries to get an approach that is a Campus Alberta type of approach to the health workforce plan, the workforce plan in the province. We're working with the three ministries that are involved in providing regional health authorities with the trained staff that they need. As it relates to the University of Calgary, we are in discussions with the University of Calgary for other health care professionals, just as we were with Mount Royal College.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Foster Care

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Providing care for children is an essential and noble task, and foster families provide an exceptional example of this. However, current circumstances are putting children and foster families at risk. Following the death of a child in foster care in January, social workers have spoken out, telling Albertans that there are too few foster families to care for the number of children in need and too few front-line staff to provide the support and monitoring essential to protect children's safety. To the Minister of Children's Services: can the minister please tell us if this labour shortage has affected the amount of monitoring and support available to ensure the safety of children in foster care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd start out by saying that we have thousands of foster parents that are doing a terrific job in this province. Our number one priority will always be the safety and the well-being of our children in care. So what I can tell you is that that's one of the reasons why we have a rigorous screening process that continues today, including home studies, reference checks, criminal record checks, medical references, first aid training. We also know that every child is unique. Every family situation is unique. We do continue with stringent guidelines on the number of children within each foster home.

Mrs. Mather: We have heard that overloading, the practice of asking foster parents to take in more children than they should be eligible to take, is increasing due to the shortage of available foster homes. To the Minister of Children's Services: do foster families have the right to refuse to take in additional children if they believe that they will not be able to provide the necessary care for those children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that they do have the right. Just to give you a little bit of information on the guidelines that we do have: new foster parents can have a maximum of two foster children in their home; experienced foster parents can have a maximum of four foster children in their home. Sometimes we have exceptions if we are trying to keep siblings together. In those cases both the foster parents and the caseworkers would agree on that placement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been reported that because of Alberta's current shortage of foster families children in need of care are sometimes housed in hotel rooms to wait until a family is available. Can the minister tell us how often this is happening and how long these hotel stays usually last?

Ms Tarchuk: I'll get the information for the member. I do know that several weeks ago I had looked into that. It's very, very small. I think that in very unusual circumstances, with the proper individuals to stay with the children, we looked at 12 cases for very short periods of time last year. But I'll follow up with that information to you.

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

Affordable Housing Grant Program

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are hearing daily from Albertans about the lack of affordable housing in Alberta. In Red Deer-North we are very fortunate to have a beautiful apartment complex that has 26 affordable housing units and 20 transitional housing units along with some market rental rate units. This building is now being sold, and it has come to my attention that as long as the affordable housing grant money is paid back to the government, a new owner is able to remove all affordable and transitional housing rental rates and charge full market rental rates. This leaves many of the present tenants with anxiety and fear about where they're going to live. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: does an owner of an affordable housing property who has received government funding have the ability to sell the property provided he does not intend . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very aware of the concern throughout the province and housing being very much a priority. Yes, the owners do have the right to sell. If the property is sold, if that individual who buys that property maintains the same purpose for the property, the conditions will continue. If the property is sold to someone who wants to change its intent, then it's pro-rated over 20 years. If that individual sells the property in a shorter time period, then it's pro-rated, and the money has to be paid back.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: is there any way that we can make adjustments to these agreements, where the new owner would agree to honour the existing terms and conditions that would keep these facilities as affordable housing units?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, what happens is that we have to abide by the same rules that an individual who is the proponent does in the terms and conditions, so if the building is sold, then we have to assume the agreement as well. If we put too many restrictions on an agreement, that will also reduce the level of participation.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I hope that we can find a way to fill that gap. Can the minister of municipal housing advise what this government is doing to increase the number of affordable housing units that are available?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you are aware and have heard many times, we have brought forward a task force. The hon. member from the third party mentioned his valuable input. I want to say that the work that the task force did is very critical to the direction that this government goes. The integrity of the work is important, and we want to make sure that we have the right responses and the right directions because the work was very valuable.

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

School Closures

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier suggested that he would listen to any Albertan that came forward with advice about how to improve the province's school closure policies, and I'm happy to provide that advice. To the Minister of Education. Yesterday I tabled a petition signed by a thousand people that suggests that it would be a great move to amend the School Act to allow the school closure process to be 18 months instead of the short timeline it is now. Would the minister like to take that advice?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, closing schools is a tough decision. I know it's foreign to our friends across the road, but some of us are elected to make tough decisions. The public school board is elected to make tough decisions, and they are making those decisions. There is a process in place, and I believe that it is serving well. Decisions have to be made, and they are making them.

Dr. B. Miller: Well, Mr. Speaker, other jurisdictions in other provinces provide an appeal process on school closures, for example, so that school board decisions can be reviewed impartially if it seems that the correct procedures are not followed. This appeals process can give parents, educators, and students a voice when they

feel that the system lets them down. Will the Minister of Education accept my advice and implement an appeal process for school closures?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, what is the right time? Is it 12 months? Is it 18 months? Is it five years? Sooner or later decisions, tough decisions, have to be made, and that's exactly what the Edmonton public school board is doing: making tough decisions.

Dr. B. Miller: And the whole community is in an uproar.

The Edmonton school board is meeting tonight and will be making a decision on the closure of High Park school and other schools. If the minister refuses to call for a moratorium on school closures, as the Alberta Liberals urged the Premier to do yesterday, will he at least commit to an open and public review – you like task forces – of the closure process to make it more human and in the interests of community vitality?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, under the School Act the decision whether to close schools or not is in the hands of the public school boards. If we start meddling in what the school boards are elected to do, these would be the first people who would be telling us that we should be staying out of the decisions of the local school boards. So you can't have it both ways.

The Speaker: There were 90 questions and answers today.

head: 2:20 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter I sent to the Premier requesting a public inquiry into the recent events at St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table several documents from Mr. Paul Pomerleau, a union member with IBEW. Mr. Pomerleau is very concerned about the use of temporary foreign workers, particularly when there are numerous people in the building trades who are looking for work.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is from a constituent of mine, Robert Murphy. He's concerned about the lack of spaces for apprentices at NAIT – his son has been trying to enrol for his fourth year for over two years without success – and that there is a great shortage of tradespeople at this time, and a large number of students would like to finish their apprenticeship programs.

My second letter is from another constituent, Neil Evans, calling on the government to take action to deal with global warming and carbon dioxide emissions: "If as a province, country and society we fail to act, and the experts prove to be right, what will we say to our grandchildren?"

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to table a number of individual letters with the appropriate numbers of copies that call on this Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua John Hunt be sentenced and tried as an adult due to the nature of his crime, his past criminal history, and that he is close to the age of 18 years.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, responses to written questions 20, 21, 22, 23 asked for by Ms Blakeman on behalf of Mr. Tougas on May 15, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, responses to written questions 24 and 25 asked for by Dr. Miller on behalf of Mr. Taylor on May 15, 2006.

head:

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader?

Well, there being no question, perhaps the Government House Leader would like to respond to the phantom question that we all know what would be.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would anticipate that the opposition and all members of the House would like to know what the projected government business might be when we return after the first of our constituency weeks, in which members will be able to return to their constituencies and touch base with constituents.

On April 3, anticipating the adjournment motion later this afternoon, under Orders of the Day the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, day 10, which of course will then result in the motion to engross the Speech from the Throne. Following that, Government Motion 14, which for members that may not have looked at the Order Paper yet, is a motion to continue Alberta Treasury Branches. It's a motion which needs to come forward every five years. Then under government bills for second reading Bill 6, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 7, the Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007.

On Wednesday, April 4, under government bills for second reading Bill 8, the Vital Statistics Act; Bill 9, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 10, the Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act; and Bill 12, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007.

On Thursday, April 5, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 13, Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 14, Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 15, Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 17, the Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007; and Bill 18, the Judicature Amendment Act, 2007.

The Speaker: Government House Leader, there is a question from the chair for information with respect to the schedule. As the hon. members will not be sitting next week and the hon. members will not return for a number of days, is the Government House Leader in a position to speculate as to when the subsequent motions might be presented to the Assembly about changes in the procedure of the Assembly? It was silent in terms of that first week.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are in discussion with the House leaders and with the table with respect to drafting those motions. I would hope that they would be available during the week

that we return. I had hoped that we'd be at a place where we could put them on notice now and deal with them when we return, but it will take a few more days to get that done, and hopefully we'll have that done by the time we return. We'll put it on notice for that week.

The Speaker: Okay. As a subsequent follow-up to that from the chairman of the Members' Services Committee to the members in the House who are members of the Members' Services Committee, normally there are 10 days' notice given by the chair for a meeting. I would like to put all members of the Members' Services Committee on notice that when these motions are in the House, when these motions are approved, there will have to be a Members' Services meeting essentially the next day, so if you would anticipate some time towards the end of two weeks from now for these motions and block some time out in your schedules. The discussion may be early in the morning as a result of all your schedules.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 20

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, should I call the question, or would you like to participate?

Mrs. Mather: I want to participate.

The Speaker: Absolutely. Proceed.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. It's a good opportunity now to take a look at the estimates that we have and what the intent is. One of the things that I wanted to make sure is emphasized is that Albertans have the environment on their minds these days. Everywhere I go, people are talking about it, and I would really like this government in its upcoming budget to seriously look at doubling the funding for Alberta Environment. I don't see any indication that there's going to be an increase there.

We need a doubling so that it can truly reflect this high priority for Albertans, indeed all Canadians, because all the people that I am aware of are placing a very high priority on this in terms of protecting and enhancing the environment and thinking about our future generations. I know that right now the Environment department has a shortage of staff. I think that we're looking at concerns with climate change and the tremendous and somewhat unpredictable devastation that is coming as a result of that climate change: extreme weather events, new infectious diseases, droughts. Clearly, we have to show significant vision and leadership in this area.

Continuing, I'd like to go on with my concerns about Children's Services, and I'm hoping that the effect of this bill will be that we will actually take a look at some of the serious concerns I raised in the last few days. One of these concerns is about the not-for-profit agencies losing staff to government positions or other businesses because they can't compete with the salaries. They can't increase the salaries to offer any kind of competition to these other agencies. They're barely getting enough money for salaries and benefits.

There's no consideration for heat, food, clothing costs, and maintenance costs. So I'm hoping the effect of this bill will be to take a look at these things more seriously in the upcoming budget.

I also want to talk about the serious problem that we have with addictions. We have more and more young people who are in group homes and various agencies who have severe behaviour concerns and often have addictions, yet we don't have enough beds for detox. We don't have enough beds for treatment. There are agencies other than AADAC who could provide help with addictions. They have the training. They also know how to handle severe acting-out problems, serious mental illness, and violent behaviours, which should be considered along with addictions treatment.

I'm wondering why it seems that AADAC is often pulling agency staff from these other areas because they are trained, yet these other agencies that could well provide the kind of treatment and services that is needed are not getting contracts. We need to look at this problem. We need to get more beds so that we can help individuals so that when they finally decide that they will go to detox and treatment, they don't have to wait weeks to get a bed, weeks that may lead them to change their minds and get involved again with negative behaviours that don't help them move forward.

2:30

Another area in terms of Children's Services is that, you know, we have another case model coming out now. It seems that the old Alberta response model, ARM, is becoming obsolete. That was implemented a few years ago, when you had two divisions of staff: family enhancement workers and core protection workers. That's becoming obsolete. I think that we're finding that there are many more high-risk court-bound families, and social workers are having to deal with far too many files, so these files then are being brokered off and then contracted out.

The model for the youth enhancement and family act was eight to 10 families per worker, where the reality is 22 to 25 on average. So front-line staff's ability to protect children continually goes down because of constant changes within the department. It's no wonder many of them are quitting after very few years of service. The new model even requires mandatory training, so again social workers will be in training for three days at a time and not working on files.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

So we're implementing a new service delivery model at the front end through this new casework model. It's going to give assessors who were formerly investigators more time, actually 45 in total, to do full safety assessments, more complicated than previous investments, and detailed assessments on guardians, caregivers, and all children that might be involved, and then mandatory case conferencing before these files are transferred to a caseworker. But they have no more resources, yet they have the same number of cases or intakes coming through. So families often have to wait for family support workers to come to help them when they're feeling desperate with difficult situations. Children with addictions, often with traumatized parents, have to wait for detox because there are no beds available.

A shortage of foster parents is a growing concern. Children are apprehended and placed in hotels with one-to-one workers because of a shortage of foster homes. These children need safe places to stay. They need the very best possible because of the trauma and stress caused by an inadequate home situation in the first place. Then they're removed from those parents, which further traumatizes them, and they're sometimes left sitting for hours in offices waiting for placement. How are we addressing the foster parent shortage?

I am hoping that this reading will open up some thought toward increasing support for front-line workers and foster parents. What are we doing to recruit, and what are we doing to improve support to these parents? I'm wondering: are you going to increase funding for the implementation of this new model? Are we going to hear that in this budget that's coming up?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know, there are apparently champions' sites, which are pilot sites, that have received 15 additional workers across the province. So once this new casework model is implemented, what resources will be added to cope with the work that is at least double that which was required previously?

I'm also very concerned about social worker safety. Social workers can't double up as often as they used to be able to when they make home visits. Stress is higher, hours are longer, and we're putting them at risk at times. For example, they're expected to go into homes, sometimes alone, and have limited access to information that sometimes turns out to be that the parents have assaulted police before or, worse yet, have firearms offences.

I've recently talked to a social worker who told me he has been called at home and told not to show up to court the next day because someone with the means was planning to kill him when he would be trying to serve apprehension papers. Social workers should not be expected to serve legal documents. This should be contracted to process servers.

There was a case in the United States in October of 2006 where a 15-year veteran of the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services was killed while facilitating a visit between a Henderson resident and the woman's 10-month-old son. The state had legal custody of that baby. It's a terrible shock, and it's interesting that the reaction of that state was to increase the number of social workers by a very large number.

I think that we need to be looking at the situation here. I know that social workers now have cellphones and may have bulletproof vests if they are on the CART teams – that's the child at-risk response teams – but what else are we doing to protect these front-line workers? What are the safety procedures? Are they realistic? You know, we can't expect them to be teaming up when the workload won't allow it. I'm asking that we look seriously, hopefully in this upcoming budget, at providing resources so that we can have more front-line workers to improve the safety but also to improve the resources available to our foster families.

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

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly in appropriation bills there's a wide degree of latitude in speaking, but the bill before the House today is supplementary supply Bill 20. Supplementary supply Bill 20 has votes in it for Advanced Education and Technology, Agriculture and Food, Finance, Health and Wellness, Municipal Affairs and Housing, not Children's Services. So under *Beauchesne's* 459, relevance, I would ask that you ask the hon. member – important as it is to talk about the budget, there will be time to talk about the budget. The hon. member has referred to the budget several times in her speaking. This discussion is about Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, and whether or not the funds that were outlined in that act ought to be voted. While one normally would ask and allow a wide degree of debate when

voting money and supply, this debate that has been happening is clearly, as the member has referenced herself, about budget.

Mrs. Mather: Can I respond?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. I appreciate that advice. My point is that this has not been included in supplementary supply, and I am wondering why? I know I said a number of times that I'm hoping that it will be in the upcoming budget, but I wanted to stress the importance of these issues. I mentioned environment. I mentioned foster parents. I mentioned addictions. I mentioned safety of social workers. Why aren't they being looked at?

The Deputy Speaker: Well, 459 is speaking of relevance, and as it points out, the minister is right. It's difficult to define, but I would ask the member to focus her comments on the task at hand, which is the supplementary supply bill before the House. Could you please carry on?

Mrs. Mather: I'm finished anyway.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I just advise you that you're not the first and certainly not the last to confuse me with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. In fact, it happens on almost a daily basis. I get his phone calls; he gets mine. I get his appointments; he gets mine. If I might just say, there was an occasion when my phone rang, and it indicated that it was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora calling. When I answered the phone, he said, "Yeah. Bruce, is that you?" I started to laugh, and he said: "Did I just call you Bruce?" So, please, do not feel bad. Yes. I will get to the point.

2:40

The Deputy Speaker: We were just speaking about relevance, so if you would focus.

Mr. R. Miller: I will get to the point of the matter, which is third reading of Bill 20, the supplementary supply, No. 2, and we always must be cognizant of the fact that this is the second time this year that the government has asked for supplementary supply.

Mr. Speaker, I have mentioned in earlier phases of debate on this supplementary supply bill my particular concern over the two line items that are being requested by the Department of Finance, and I have yet to hear anybody from the government side offer any explanation as to those two items. I'm hopeful that, perhaps, the President of the Treasury Board may enlighten us today with a little bit of information on those two. It would certainly be helpful in terms of my knowing whether or not to support this bill at third reading.

So for a reminder, we have in excess of \$7 million that is being requested to address losses by pension funds, some endowment funds, and a number of other smaller funds. My question previously has been and remains: how could these funds lose money in an economic environment where most funds are generating tremendous returns? We know that the heritage savings trust fund annually returns somewhere between 6 and 8 per cent. Other funds are up

around 11 or 12, and there are examples of funds that are doing even better than that.

Here we have, apparently, a number of funds that lost a total of \$7 million last year, and I'm wondering which funds those were. I'd like to know if any action has been taken against either the fund managers or the overseers of the investment. I think, also, a relevant question, in light of the fact that the government has now introduced Bill 22, is whether or not the losses suffered by those funds have any correlation to the introduction of Bill 22 and the establishment of the Alberta Investment Management Corporation.

The second item that Finance is requesting – as I've mentioned before and everybody knows by now, I believe – is \$40 million in a lump-sum payment to address the unfunded portion of the management employees' pension plan. This is an awful lot of money being dropped against one unfunded liability when the government has several other pension plans that they're involved in to which they owe a portion of the unfunded liability, not the least significant of which, of course, in fact obviously the most significant of which, is the unfunded teachers' pension liability. There are others, as well, that total altogether in excess of – I shouldn't say in excess because I can't remember exactly what the entire number is, but it's somewhere in the order of \$7 billion for the teachers' pension plan and approximately another billion dollars for all of the others combined, approximately \$8 billion altogether in unfunded pension liabilities.

So here we have a situation where the Department of Finance is asking for \$40 million which, as near as I can determine and, in fact, was confirmed for me by a board member of the MEPP yesterday, virtually wipes out the government's share of that unfunded liability. When I spoke to this board member yesterday, he told me that he didn't really understand why they were being chosen to have their government's share of that particular plan addressed. He wasn't going to complain, of course. They were quite thrilled when the call came that the government was going to address their unfunded liability to the tune of \$40 million. He flat out told me that he really didn't understand why their plan was chosen, not the others. He acknowledged that there would probably be a number of people looking at the teachers' pension plan, as an example, wondering why there was no redress for that unfunded liability.

So my questions to the President of the Treasury Board simply are: why this particular plan, and why this amount? We've yet to hear any mention from anybody on the government side in answer to that question. I think it's only fair that all members of this House have that information in front of them before we support an expenditure of \$40 million.

My last comment, Mr. Speaker. I know that I said this before, and I risk repeating myself. But since we are in third reading, it is my last opportunity to say that this is just a reminder that the government, particularly the new Premier early on in his mandate, has indicated that supplementary supply would be a thing that would be used only in emergencies from now on. As I have suggested the other day when we were debating in committee, the President of the Treasury Board seems to have backed away from that position a little bit. I'm going to be a hound on his trail, and I'm going to make sure that we do our very best to keep them to their word.

Hopefully, supplementary supply will be used for what it was originally intended to be used for, and that is emergency situations only. We've discussed them before, whether it be flood relief or firefighting purposes or, you know, another outbreak similar to BSE. There are legitimate emergencies where a government could justify moving away from their planned budget. But some of the items in this particular supplementary supply certainly do not appear to qualify as a genuine emergency, in my mind, and several others have made that statement as well.

So we're going to be watching them carefully, holding them to their word that supplementary supply will only be used in the future for genuine emergencies. Beyond that the government will be held to account to the very best of my ability to stick within a budget that this House passes sometime later this year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thanks. The hon. member kind of posed a question: that they would like to know more about the \$47 million.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you closing debate?

Mr. Snelgrove: I'd love to.

The Deputy Speaker: This is third reading.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the minister is anxious to get this over with, but I just want to make a couple of comments following through with some of the same concerns. I've talked about it, and I think that the minister is aware of it, that supplementary estimates have become a way of really abusing the budget process. You know, we talked about the fact that we're going to move earlier and that there shouldn't be the same demand. But when I look at these supplementary estimates, maybe the minister might comment about them. We are in – and we've talked about this – a very overheated economy. It's somewhat of a guess to know, if we keep the same pace of development, what sort of money we need for social and physical infrastructure.

For instance, Health and Wellness, Mr. Speaker. We know that there's \$147 million. We know what that's for. It's for the recent settlement with the doctors. But we also know that coming down the stream there are – and the minister of health is here – a lot of other negotiations going on.

I look at the housing. Well, it's a big increase in supports for the homeless. We talked about this task force. The needs are immense out there, Mr. Speaker.

So I guess my question is to the minister. I want to know how serious we are in terms of anticipating some of these expenditures coming up. If we're sort of lowballing it going into this budget, then we're going to be back, faced with the same situation again, with supplementary estimates. I think we all agree that this is not particularly the greatest procedure. I talked about it before: bring a budget in in March, pass it in June, and then come back in July with, you know, millions of dollars. I take it that's one of the reasons with the House leader, that we are attempting to stop that abuse somewhat by having, well, certainly, interim supplies but having the budget and the set days.

I guess that I'm not asking what's in the budget, but I'm saying that knowing something about housing, knowing something about the health care, you know, the crisis that's out there, how serious are we in terms of this budget and really focusing on these problems with the economy that we have? I've called it an economy on steroids. Or are we going to be back in the fall saying, "Well, these problems have increased," with another half a million dollars in supplementary estimates? Then we're defeating the purpose of it.

Supplementary estimates – I think the minister would agree – are not really supposed to be part of the budgeting process. They are there for emergencies. That's what they were there for in the past. Forest fires were often one that we'd have to come back and deal with before. I suppose that if there was a pandemic or something like that, you can't anticipate those things, so there's a necessity to

have them. But I'm worried – I'm worried, Mr. Speaker – that we're not going to be realistic enough in terms of this budget, and we'll be faced with the same thing come the fall. I'd like the minister, if he has time, just to comment about that.

Thank you.

2:50

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is again available if anyone wishes to rise under that. Anyone else wish to participate in the debate?

The hon. President of the Treasury Board, to close debate.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all the hon. members who have participated not just in third reading but in the other readings. I take very seriously their suggestions that we should not be back here middle of the year redoing funding, and I think this government will commit to that unless there are extreme emergencies or situations that are far beyond any government's ability to project, that we will try to stay out of here.

To the hon. member before: there is no connection to the supplementary supply estimates around Finance in Bill 22. I think Alberta has matured as a province to the level that we need to ensure that we have some of the brightest minds available to look after our – I say collectively "our," all Albertans' – investments to ensure that they are prudently looked after yet returning a good return and that our pension funds and all of our investments are getting the best return. So I think it's a positive step forward.

The hon. member asked about the \$40 million and, obviously, already knows probably more about the investment in MEPP than many other members, but I think it was prudent to take funds that were available at that time in the budget and address a need. Yes, it wasn't enough to address the teachers' pension fund, but it was enough . . . [interjection] Well, you know, every now and then you have surplus or you have to reallocate from within a department.

The Auditor General and the government's rules are strict enough that even the amount we simply move from Infrastructure and Transportation to Service Alberta to pay for the exact same thing – nothing changed in the world. The plane was bought. It didn't get paid for in the time that a new department was created with different responsibilities, and we had to come back here and show you that. So it's no new money, no different money. Yet to satisfy, I think, your concerns and Albertans' concerns and the Auditor's concerns, it's back here.

A lot of what is done is simply to ensure that if there is a reallocation from operations to capital or vice versa, that's addressed here because you voted on it or we voted on it as capital or operational dollars. These changes happen in the course of a year, and that, I think, is appropriate to come back and bring forward into the House.

I'm glad to hear that they don't want to speculate on the budget, but I am terribly afraid – and I've made our Government House Leader very aware – that I didn't really want to still be here debating it in July, but we may well be. If we have to be, so be it.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close debate on Bill 20.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a third time]

Bill 25

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is again my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 25, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is so that the different departments of government can continue to operate uninterrupted until the budget

is expected to be passed. This covers the time from April 1 to July 1, 2007. I can appreciate that it's difficult to answer some questions about supplementary supply without delving into the actual budget and what they will do. I will take under advisement the questions that the hon. members pose, but obviously I think that they and we both agree that the government must go on. We will have ample time to debate the budget when it's presented on April 19.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm not going to belabour the point because I think that as the President of the Treasury Board has indicated, we all recognize that the government must go on. However, I think that it is important that I reiterate my comments from earlier phases of this debate, and they are twofold.

One in particular that I really look forward to is the adoption of new House rules that will give us firm sitting dates, a firm date for the introduction of a budget, which is certainly not a guarantee that the budget would be passed by the end of the fiscal year. But I think that having seen that agreement and knowing the amount of time that it would normally take to have a budget move through this Assembly, there is a pretty darn good chance that in the future, if that agreement is to be adopted, we will not find ourselves here debating interim supply. That is my sincere hope. I know it's the sincere hope of the House leaders, and I think and I pray that it's the sincere hope of all members of this Legislature.

The second point, which I made earlier and, I think, bears repeating, is a reminder to all members that the government is in complete control of the agenda. The fact that we're not seeing a budget until the 19th of April and won't have it passed until sometime in late June or, as the President of the Treasury Board said, perhaps not even until sometime in July is certainly something that was within the government's control and the control of their political party. Had there been some prudent planning on the other side, we would likely have seen a leadership race in advance of December 2 and the House coming back at its normal meeting time, sometime in mid-February, and we would likely have had the budget passed in time for the fiscal year end and would not have had to have the introduction of an interim supply bill at all.

So that is my hope: that we won't be back here again next year having this same debate. I would implore all members of the Legislature to support that House leaders' agreement when those amendments do come forward so that, in fact, that will become a reality.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. President of the Treasury Board to close debate.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. members for their understanding today. It being Thursday, I'm very happy to close debate on Bill 25.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
Bill 1
Lobbyists Act

[Adjourned debate March 21: Mr. Chase]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and speak to Bill 1, Lobbyists Act. First of all, I want to commend the Premier for introducing this bill, which was long-awaited. I know something is better than nothing, but I think there needs to be a little bit more amendment to this. But as I said, this bill is in the right direction. That's why I commend his efforts. He dared to introduce this bill after maybe 20 years' struggle from different parties, including this present government.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the first thing that stuck in my mind when I saw this bill was: why now? I mean, when you see the history of this legislation, even the federal government passed legislation a long time ago, in '86, '89. Ontario had their own registration act in '98, Nova Scotia in 2001, British Columbia in 2001, Newfoundland in 2005, and Quebec in 2002, very similar acts. In Alberta a lobbyists registry was one of the key recommendations of the '96 Tupper report's review of Alberta's conflict-of-interest rules. He recommended the inclusion of a registry in an integrity in government and politics act. The Alberta Liberal caucus supported this report.

Then the Alberta Liberal Party campaigned on the lobbyists registry in 2004. In 1996 another Liberal MLA introduced Bill 223, the Lobbyists Registration Act. Even at that time this government knocked down this bill. Again in '97 one of their own MLAs introduced Bill 212, the Lobbyists Registration Act. I mean, the question that comes to my mind suddenly is: why does this government introduce this now after a long, long time? In a democratic country like this one, especially in Alberta, why has this government failed to introduce this bill for a long, long time? I think this government is trying to give Albertans the impression that they are different than the last government, but in reality it is the old wine in a new bottle. They are one and the same.

Mr. Speaker, lobbying is not a bad thing. It's an important part of democracy. In a democracy people should have the right to meet and discuss their issues and concerns with their elected representatives, like MLAs and MPs, and most people do. That's why we get some input from our constituents, and we raise their voice here in this House. This is a good thing. But the problem is that sometimes, you know, when the government is in power for a long, long time, they make some really good friends and then they take advantage of their friendship and try to play the foul game. Lobbying, as I said, is legitimate, but it should be and must be public.

I didn't go through this bill, you know, from page 1 to page 20, but I'm still confused on the definition of lobbyist. It's not clear yet, especially in this bill. I have a few questions to ask after reading this bill. First of all, what if the lobbyist fails to disclose intentionally? Suppose that we have a lobbyist and he or she or the organization – it may be public; it may be private – says: “No. We don't want to disclose something”? Where do we stand? I know that there's a mechanism in this bill that will impose some penalties. How are they going to judge whether this person is a registered lobbyist and disclose? I don't understand this mechanism like the one that we have in the federal government.

Another thing comes to mind, a question I ask myself: if we pass this bill, will the public office holder tell us that they were lobbied, what the subject was, and what decision was made? I mean, it's between the two, between the government and the lobbyist. How would we find out what subject they talked about? This is a serious thing that we should discuss before we pass this bill.

A question about the public lobbyist is that sometimes we have nonprofit, nonpolitical organizations. Most associations need to convince the elected official on certain concerns, certain issues in their area, but what if they are a paid director in an association? I

know that some nonpolitical, nonreligious associations are working for the betterment of their people, but sometimes their directors are paid. They get paid. So where do we stand? I mean, how would we deal with those people?

There's another scenario. If the lobbyist meets this Premier, well, they can say: yeah, we are registered. That's okay according to this bill, but what happens if the Premier called the lobbyist? How will we get the record that the Premier called that lobbyist and solicited information or advice on any subject. It's not clear in this bill. You know, after discussion or after all other members speak on this bill, maybe we'll find the solutions. I want to see this bill be really the best bill in Canada, even better than the federal government's. We should work really hard to find and not leave any loopholes in this bill and make sure that we amend certain things and discuss this again and again and make sure that we prepare such a document that we can lead Canada on this lobbyist registry act.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to remember that it's taken years, as I said before, of lobbying by the Alberta Liberals to finally get through to this Tory government on the need for this. Alberta Liberal MLAs pushed very hard in the past. I discussed the lobbyist registry as part of the review of the Conflicts of Interest Act last year. This is something the Alberta Liberals have been pushing for years. I mean, when we've introduced any motion or any private member's bill since I've been here, I've never seen any motion or bill passed that has been introduced by the opposition members. I don't know what's happening in this House. We are all elected members.

3:10

I mean, it's the same thing. The Alberta Liberal Party introduced this bill a few times, and some of the members from the PC Party introduced this bill. They think it's not a good idea. But suddenly now they think that, yes, we should go ahead. That's why in the beginning I appreciated the Premier. At least, he dared to introduce this bill. This is something really good that I'm pleased the government decided on even though they stole one or two pages out of the Alberta Liberals' ideas. We don't mind. I mean, there are still some loopholes in this bill that have to be filled. Those problems have to be solved before we pass this bill.

This bill brings Alberta to where it should have been 11 years ago if they had really thought about the people who elected them. We are all here working for Albertans. The Liberal Party introduced a few bills with different numbers, and they didn't go through. Now this bill will go through because it's introduced by the Premier. They have the majority. This government always talks about openness, transparency. I don't understand. Why not then? Why now? I would really be happy if somebody from the other party answered my questions. What's the problem if any motion or any private member's bill comes from the opposition party? Why don't they co-operate? Maybe they can add some amendment and pass the motion, pass the bill. Maybe they are allergic to this. I don't know.

I'm struck by the fact that this government rejected the need for a lobbyist registry because the existing one was weak, or sometimes they said that the existing one was bad. Now, after 11 years, 12 years, it's the same bill. They changed the subject a little bit on this one. I still think this bill is not exactly what we even have in the federal government. I want to see this bill better than what we have federally, to ensure that all the members sitting in this House make sure that we work hard and add some new ideas if we really want to be open and transparent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) does anyone wish to provide a comment or question?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me first of all say that this is certainly a step in the right direction. I want to give credit where credit is due, to the committee that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and I served on, in terms of the final recommendation coming for a lobbyist registry along with some other things that are coming forward about cooling-off periods. In fairness to that committee I think there was a fair amount of scepticism on the side of the government MLAs. Again, this is where I think the committee worked well. We got information from other parts of the province, and eventually it was brought forward that a lobbyist registry did make some sense. So I was pleased when the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill told me that Bill 1 would be the particular bill that the Premier was going to bring forward. I think, though, that we do have to take a look at the bill and make sure that we do it right.

I compare it to Ontario and some other bills, and I would make some suggestions at this particular time if it's going to be a flagship bill. I remember that the flagship bill last year was the smoking bill, and we had to bring in an amendment, that the government accepted, about not investing in tobacco companies. So, hopefully, in that spirit we can even make this particular bill stronger, Mr. Speaker.

Some things, I think, need to be looked at – and I think they're fairly serious – to make this a better bill. Contrary to the previous speakers, it wasn't Alberta Liberals that discovered lobbyist registries. They have been in parts of Canada for many, many years, and all of us have advocated for it for many, many years, Mr. Speaker. But I notice that there are two categories in Alberta under the lobbyist definition: a consultant and an organization lobby. In Ontario they have three. The only one that's different, I think, is probably worth looking at. There's a fair proliferation of nonprofits, too, and I think we should be fair, as they are in Ontario. They probably should be included if we're having a lobbyist registry for people. That's a minor point, but I think it's one worth looking at.

We can go into the fines. I notice that Ontario has much stricter, heavier fines than Alberta. That's something we could probably look at.

The big thing, though, is exemptions, Mr. Speaker. It seems from research we've done that they do not allow government request exemptions in Ontario. But we know very clearly that this bill at this stage – we will wait and see if the government does – does allow some exemptions, and I think they're serious exemptions, that really would water down the intent of a lobbyist registry.

The one that we look at that seems to be the one that's really a big potential for abuse has to do with government request exemptions. That is not the case in most other lobbyist registries. You could drive a truck through that loophole. What that means is that people do not need to register as a lobbyist if they've been approached by the government for information or consultations.

Well, Mr. Speaker, let's say that I'm a lobbyist, but I'm a good friend of the government. If I don't want to be registered, I'll just get them to make a call. Then I don't have to register. The government doesn't have to tell us who they're talking to. Now, that is a very, very serious shortfall in this particular legislation, and I'd hope that the government would take that back – we're going to go through Committee of the Whole – and really take a look at that because I think it has the potential to really make this particular registry meaningless. The potential for abuse is immense in that particular case.

I don't know about the monitoring, if that's going to be serious. I think we have to look at that.

The other thing in this business: we've had a one-party state here for many years. The government has been in power for a lot of time,

so there are a lot of what I would call unpaid lobbyists who held public office. It seems to me that they have access to a lot of people in government, especially if it's people that have recently retired, and I think they could fly under the radar of the lobbyist registry. They might be the most effective lobbyists you could find because they know the people opposite.

3:20

Now, I'm going to go on the assumption at this particular time that the government does want this, in fact, to be the Premier's bill, that he can be very, very proud of. So in second reading I'd like to put them on notice that these specific things – there are other things in there that we could perhaps look at and refer – are serious, serious omissions in this particular bill.

Certainly, when we were in the committee, an all-party committee, we made the general principle that we think a lobbyist registry should be there and that we could probably learn from it. We don't have to reinvent the wheel but look at other places. I'm not sure where this came from, this idea of the government getting on the phone and saying, "Come on in. I've contacted you; therefore, you're not a lobbyist." That's a serious flaw, and I would think that the Premier, Mr. Speaker, would want to see, in the nature of transparency and openness – we have plaques and his news conference now – that that is a major, major flaw and at least would do that and the other loopholes that I've talked about.

So, Mr. Speaker, we'll look forward to this going through to committee, and we'll see generally how serious the government is in terms of closing some of these major loopholes I'm talking about.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, again Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to comment on Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. Of course, this is something that is overdue, and it's appropriate now for the government to bring it. I'm supporting the intention of this act as an example of a number of kinds of legislation that Legislatures are putting into place throughout Canada, North America, and other countries because it's time to deal with the issue of ethics in the public order. Now, lots of other jurisdictions have dealt with this before this Legislature, so before we clap ourselves on the back, we should acknowledge that there has been a momentum in the direction of dealing with these kinds of issues for some time. In fact, our federal government has already had a lobbyist registry in place for a while, and so have other provinces. Nevertheless, I think this is still a good move.

For a long time I think many people who have been students of ethics have lamented the fact that there seems to be a bifurcation between public ethics and personal ethics. In fact, when I was a student many years ago, we used to talk in those terms, that there are personal ethics, that have to do with family, marriage on the one hand, and then there are social ethics on the other hand, that refer to wider issues of justice within the institutions of society, like political institutions. So I think there was a tendency many years ago to make a distinction and separate the two spheres as if our ethics in our personal life are qualitatively different from the ethics of public life.

I remember that back in the 1970s and '80s, when I was involved with churches and making criticisms of corporate life, there were a number of interfaith coalitions that were very critical of multinational corporations and the actions of corporations in regard to the Third World and so on. The response you often got from people,

even CEOs who were running these companies, was a kind of righteous indignation – you're attacking my integrity as a person – in order for them to kind of: well, I'm a good person. Well, I think we've come to realize that, you know, good persons can become part of systems that are questionable and that it's not enough to make that distinction.

The book and the movie about the Watergate incident are a good example. I remember an incident in the movie where the two *Washington Post* reporters come to the home of one of the Watergate individuals who was involved in the break-in – I think it was Jeb Magruder – and they knock on the door of the home. Magruder's wife comes to the door, and in a very defensive way she says: this is a moral home. But that movie and that whole incident illustrated the fact that people who thought they were good persons, having personal ethics, were going to work in the public sphere, and it was dirty tricks as usual. There was lots of corruption. That has led, Mr. Speaker, to a lot of cynicism about politics.

So I think that through the '70s, '80s, and '90s we've come to accept the fact that you can't make a distinction between personal ethics and social ethics, or you can't distinguish your personal life from public life. We are all human beings, and whatever we do, we are moral beings, and we are acting out, making decisions, and we should be held accountable morally for our actions. So when we talk about attributes like honesty and integrity and mutual respect, those are not just personal virtues; those comprise, really, an ethical code for public life.

We should have such an ethics code for us as legislators, as MLAs. I mean, businesses, corporations, educators, all kinds of professional organizations have developed ethical codes for their professions. It's time that we took a stand and said: "Look, we are going to abide by a high ethical code. We're going to raise the bar high." In fact, that's what the federal government did in its Accountability Act, its first legislative act presented in the present Parliament. So it's time that we attended to this issue of ethics. I mean, we've been given a trust by the people who elected us, a fiduciary trust, so we must care for that trust. We must be good trustees of the trust that they have placed in us.

Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of cynicism in politics. As the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview pointed out, he was a member of the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, and I, too, was a member of that committee. When we began our deliberations to look at the Conflicts of Interest Act, we had a discussion of that very issue of cynicism, that so many people in the general public have a cynical attitude about politicians. On any list of people that you trust, politicians are way down the list. So we have a lot of work to do to raise the awareness of people, to reinstall the confidence of people in us as politicians. Having this kind of bill is a step in that direction, to have a lobbyist registry.

If you ask the ordinary person on the street what they think about politicians, they will say something along the lines of: well, isn't it true that all politicians are corrupt or at least are forced to be in a system that is corrupt? Isn't it a truism that many people think that power by its very nature corrupts? That's a widespread opinion in the public. So we have to do whatever we can to counter that cynicism, to pass legislation that embodies the very best ethics that we have. I think there is evidence that democratic governments that do act and base their decisions on the best ethics available – respect and integrity and honesty – are actually the most satisfactory governments in the world. So it's time that we melded together politics and ethics.

3:30

That brings me to the specifics of this bill. One of the things that really bothers ordinary people when they are thinking about the

actions in politics and expressing their cynicism is that they see too often that there is undue influence on politicians. Now, whether they see limousines pulling up to the front of the Legislature to take people away, or whether they read about helicopter trips up to the tar sands, ordinary people ask the questions: "Well, who is influencing politicians? Are decisions being unduly influenced by people who have privileges, have power, have money?" So, for the ordinary person the field is not equal. There's inequality because people who have privileges, have advantages, have more influence on government than ordinary people.

I think the lobbyist registry is a step in the direction of trying to establish an equal playing field for everybody so that people know who is trying to influence government decisions. Mr. Speaker, I think that's the main basis for supporting this kind of legislation: the principle of equality, that it creates a situation in which people can be aware of what kind of influence is being imposed or is trying to persuade politicians in terms of their decisions.

Now, lobbying, of course, is not to be dismissed as something bad as the lobbying is trying to influence politicians to make a decision based on information that a lobbyist can provide. That in itself is not wrong. It's important, then, that such people who want to lobby the government and influence government should be included on a list, a lobbyist registry.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview raising the issue of paid and unpaid lobbyists. The distinction in this bill is basically that there is a "consultant lobbyist," who is "a person who, for payment, undertakes to lobby on behalf of a client." There's also an "organization lobbyist," who is "an employee, officer or director of an organization who receives a payment for the performance of his or her functions."

It's clear that those who have to register in a lobbyist registry are those who in their job are being actually paid by a company to be a lobbyist, or they're representing a client and being paid for their services. That excludes unpaid lobbyists. I'm not sure that I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I think that we need to discuss this more, perhaps.

I am glad that this excludes people from volunteer organizations and from the not-for-profit sectors of society. For many years before I was elected to this House, I helped organize church people to lobby government. I was part of an organization called the Quality of Life Commission, and none of us were paid for anything; we had no budget, actually. We managed to organize people like Lois Hole and Douglas Roche and so on to be commissioners of our Quality of Life Commission and actually write a report on poverty and then present it to the government. We met with ministers of the government to present the findings of our report.

That's a kind of lobbying. We were trying to influence government opinion, trying to get their attention, and trying to say: look, people who are poor in this province need some help, need more attention than they're getting. This was in the early '90s. Well, we were unpaid lobbyists. So I don't think that people from volunteer organizations, the volunteer sector of society, should have to sign up in a lobbyist registry. I think I support the idea of just focusing on paid lobbyists.

When I met with the Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, I saw right from the very beginning that there was great support for a lobbyist registry, so we didn't have a lot of arguments, discussion about it. We did meet with representatives from Ontario to see the model of a lobbyist registry that Ontario had already in place, and I think that was very helpful. I realized that members on the government side were very much in favour of a lobbyist registry, so we had some good discussions, but we all agreed that their lobbyist registry was a good idea and that it's time to adopt it.

The exceptions under 3(2)(c) have been raised by other members. I don't recall any discussion of those exceptions, especially the one that has already been noted, 3(2)(c). We'll have a chance in committee to discuss this further and to even, perhaps, entertain amendments. It is an exception to the whole lobbyist registry; namely, that if I as a politician, as an elected official, approach somebody who is a paid lobbyist, then whatever we discuss is somehow exempt. That person doesn't have to register as a lobbyist because I approached them rather than they approached me. I mean, that's a huge loophole, and I'm not sure why that is here. I look forward to the debate in committee to find out why this is here. This kind of undermines the intention of the whole bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) are there any comments or questions? Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise and participate in second reading on Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. This is a flagship bill for this government, and I believe the intent that's being discussed is both timely and important.

Lobbying is important because people need to be able to have access to their elected officials. Lobbying is basically an integral part of democracy because elected officials were elected to be conveyors of ideas, to represent the ideas that they hear from their constituencies to this Assembly.

However, there are challenges to democracy with respect to lobbying. One deals with openness and transparency. Governments are and should be held accountable to their citizens, and their accountability dictates that we have a certain degree of transparency. So I'm wondering if this bill will allow citizens to evaluate the performance of their representatives and their government and to know who has the government's ear at any one point. Who is talking to whom in any particular or given department or agency? They also have to know if taxpayers' money is being spent properly, who is gaining or winning government contracts and why, how much they're paid, why they're being paid that amount of money and for what work. What are the outcomes of these decisions?

I was looking at preamble 5, and I'd like to read it. "Whereas it is desirable that the public and public office holders be able to know who is contracting with the Government of Alberta and Provincial entities": you know, that is just one small part of what we need. We need to know who is a lobbyist, certainly, and we need to define that, but we need to know who they're talking to. So we need to know who is talking to the government, but who in the government is being approached? Who are they actually talking with? That's missing here. Again, this doesn't get into the kind of transparency that we're looking for. Having the name of the person who approached the government without knowing the details of what was being discussed doesn't provide the openness or accountability that we're hoping for in this government.

I'd like to think that the information that was discussed with the minister or deputy minister or some bureaucrat within the infrastructure would be available, that the actual discussion would be in notes, and that people could actually find out what was being said and what was being suggested.

3:40

I also have a concern with respect to keeping things in regulation and allowing the minister or the Ethics Commissioner or whoever is going to be in charge of this piece of legislation to put things in regulation. This could be restrictions on the application of the act.

To which areas does this act not apply? We added members of the House of Commons. We added employees of municipalities. We've added members of Métis settlement councils, diplomatic agents, and others. After this very extensive list we also say, "any other individuals or categories of individuals prescribed in the regulations." I know that the idea of regulations is that it helps keep flexibility, and I think that, yes, we probably do need a certain degree of flexibility but not if it's going to limit the strength of any piece of legislation itself. I'd like to see this legislation strengthened, and I'm looking forward to amendments.

I commend the government for taking this initial step, but I think that simply having a lobbyist registry that indicates who approached government is not enough. I look forward to the strengthening of this legislation because it is absolutely necessary to take things out of regulation and put them into legislation. I think the assumption that we need to trust in the benevolence of a minister and that that is sufficient to make decisions behind closed doors is archaic. It's not acceptable these days, and it's not being transparent.

I'm going to conclude by saying that I look forward to further amendments. I'm also looking forward to working with this government on standing policy committees because I understand that the minutes of those meetings will be available for public viewing and will demonstrate the kind of transparency and openness that we have been asking for.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there others who wish to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will keep my comments brief because I think both the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and now my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods have made some very good points in terms of the goodwill that the Official Opposition has for parts of Bill 1 and, certainly, the need for some legislation that would see lobbyists registered.

My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora raised the most valid concern that I've heard expressed anywhere yet, and that is regarding section 3(2)(c), which, I think I mentioned in here the other day, is leaving such a big hole in this legislation that you could literally drive a truck through it. I know for certain that I cannot support this bill as it sits right now. I'm hoping that the government will share our concerns over that particular section and, when we get to committee stage and have amendments brought forward, that we can either have that section entirely eliminated or at least dramatically amended so that it would be much tighter than it is right now.

The other comment that I would like to make – and I think my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods touched on it – is that this is a very good first step, a very good baby step, but so much more is needed. Mr. Speaker, I think members of this House are aware of the fact that Bill 2 has sat on the Order Paper now for – I think we're in day 9 of this Legislature sitting, and it has not yet been introduced in this House. I can assure you that I am eagerly awaiting the introduction of Bill 2 because, clearly, there's a need for complementary legislation to Bill 1, and I'm hoping beyond hope that Bill 2 might provide some of that. I do find it curious that we're into the ninth day of the spring sitting and that bill has not yet been introduced. We haven't seen any explanation as to why, although presumably there's still some work being done on it. I hope that that work will go a long ways towards addressing the concerns that members of the Official Opposition have expressed in the past regarding the need for tougher conflict of interest legislation.

As I say, a good start in Bill 1 with the one notable exception. It's certainly something that is long overdue and that, in fact, pretty much puts us light years behind other jurisdictions, not having had any sort of a lobbyist registry. I'm looking forward to supporting it with the appropriate changes that would address the concerns that we have. Hopefully, that takes place in committee stage.

Hopefully, shortly after our return in 10 days' time we'll see the introduction of Bill 2, and we'll have a better sense as to whether or not the government is addressing not just this one particular concern that we've had regarding openness and transparency and integrity of government but, in fact, several of the other concerns that we've raised in the past as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two good friends of mine. They are sitting in the public gallery. They are Mr. Wade Izzard – he's involved in the Edmonton-Riverview constituency – and Mr. Rory Koopmans. I request them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 1
Lobbyists Act
(continued)

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased that I get an opportunity to speak in second reading to the principles that are put forward in Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. I am pleased to see that the government has acted upon years and years of requests from members of the Alberta Liberal opposition, the public, and in fact their own commissioned reports. I remember that just before I got elected, there was the Tupper report, in which exactly what is being considered, although not as completely, was in fact suggested, and that report had been commissioned by the government.

In fact, I find it interesting that all the reasons that over the years the government has had for not bringing in a lobbyist registry, many of those things I now find inside the legislation here because I think it's mostly modelled on the Ontario version. That was the version they were most vehemently opposed to. So it's interesting how things come around, Mr. Speaker.

I was very fortunate to attend a COGEL conference. Now, what does that stand for? Something about government ethics and law. Council on Governmental Ethics Laws, I think. It encapsulates conflict of interest, Ethics Commissioner duties, lobbyist registry, and also financial disclosures, which, of course, is a big deal in the States as they have no laws against financial disclosure, and there's

no top limit amount on it, but, boy, everybody's got to fess up to it. They spend a lot of time trying to ferret out the people that are not fessing up to having made what amounts to a political donation.

When I attended that conference, I was really struck by how much time and effort other provinces and various states spend on monitoring and enforcement of the various acts that are being talked about here, and that would include something like a lobbyist registry. So a big part of what's being anticipated here is the monitoring to make sure that it happens and the enforcement, very vigorous enforcement if it doesn't. They had lawyers on staff that chased people down and took them to court and whupped them, and those companies ended up paying a heck of a lot of money for their indiscretions. That's a really important part of what we're doing here. And a mistake that I see this government often making is that they come out with the legislation, but it is very weak on monitoring and enforcement embedded in the legislation, and then they also don't fund it. As a result, we end up with problems in a number of areas, that I could go into at length, but I won't. For the purposes of today's debate I'll stick to talking about the principle of what's in the bill.

So the idea that we the public, the people, the citizens, and in fact the members of the opposition and interested parties, stakeholder groups, would be able to see who is talking to the government, particularly if they are paid. I think that in this case only if they're paid do they actually have to register as a lobbyist. But who's talking to the government? Who in government are they talking to? Is it a particular minister? Is it a senior bureaucrat? Who are they talking to?

3:50

To me, I want to know what they're talking about. That's one of the areas that I have an issue with because when it talks about the communication, it seems to be restricted to legislative proposals, regulations, or orders in council, policies, directives, guidelines, grants, Crown financial transfers, outsourcing, and for the consultant lobbyist the awarding of contracts and setting up of meetings. Well, those are sort of very broad categories which don't tell me much. If a lobbyist, you know, A. Guy, is speaking to the deputy minister of health about a legislative proposal, and that's the only information I get, it's not telling me much. I probably could have figured that out by hanging out in the rotunda and watching who was going by and going into whose office.

I think it's important that this be spelled out enough and it be clear enough that a citizen or any interested party can find out exactly what's being discussed because it makes a lot of difference. If A. Guy, the lobbyist, is talking to the deputy minister of health about, you know, changing the strategy for the blood-borne pathogens, that tells me something much more in depth than saying that they're talking about a legislative proposal. I think that's the level of detail that we need to be seeing come forward out of this lobbyist registry, or really it will have been a lot of puffery about nothing. Frankly, I'm sick of seeing that. I want the real goods delivered here. I want to see the action actually delivered and not a bunch of communication spin that never resolves itself into any action that you can take home or take to the bank. Just to crowd my speech with clichés and euphemisms here. I think that's what really important about that. So, that's one area that I have as a concern around what's being contemplated with this bill.

I think there are also some loopholes here, and from 10 years I can tell you that this government is famous for loopholes. Just off the top of my head, we've got the FOIP legislation. The two biggest loopholes are third party and government policy. Well, you can make almost anything disappear by using one of those two in that, you know, there's a third party mentioned in the documents, and

they won't give their permission to release the documents, so that's the end of that. Well, I think you'd be hard pressed to find a document that didn't mention somebody else, but that's often used as an excuse for shutting things down for us completely.

The other example is government policy. Well, just about anything we talk to the government about could be government policy. Policy advice, I think, is the way it's actually put. So there's another example of legislation that was meant to open up things for the public and, in fact, has been used by this government to close it down and make it more restrictive and more difficult and, frankly, more costly to get information from the government. So when we're talking about a lobbyist registry, I want to make sure from the get-go that this is about supplying real, substantive information, easily accessible without a high cost or a high red tape factor to the citizens.

Now, I've often raised in this House and with the media about the Wednesday night soirees, I used to be successful about once a year in getting the media interested in it. Sure enough, there would be, you know, film at 6 of a bunch of MLAs getting into a little van and being driven off to the Royal Glenora for a wine and dine by some group. As far as I can tell, that kind of activity would not be captured inside of what is in this lobbyists registry act. I think that's an omission, Mr. Speaker, because when I actually did inquire from the whip of the day a listing of who was organized to be the sponsors of the wine and dine evenings, and I compared that with legislation or changes that had come through over a number of years, there was a definite correlation between who had been on that list and actions that were taken by the government. That is very clearly to me a form of lobbying. You know, there was money expended there. A group of people were brought into a room. They were given very specific information, and, lo and behold, that resulted in a change in government policy. I think that kind of activity needs to be covered under what we're anticipating here as a lobbyist registry.

That's around the definition of the lobbyist, but there's an activity that's ongoing that has been identified by many members of the public as something they consider a lobbying activity that, in fact, is not being picked up under what's proposed under Bill 1. So already there's an omission there, or a loophole, if you prefer. And I've identified a couple of loopholes.

Now, I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I am supportive of a lobbyist registry. I want to see this work, but I want it to be meaningful. I'll be interested to see if the government brings forward any amendments to address the issues that have already been identified or if this is the government's final offer on the table. I think there's an opportunity here. If this government really means it when they talk about openness and transparency, then they will be bringing forward amendments that would seal off some of the loopholes or omissions that are apparent in this bill already. If not, then I'm sure we will be happy and are probably already prepared from the official Liberal opposition to do that. I mean, let's face it. I'm up here without any notes at all, and I have just managed to identify some fairly serious loopholes in this bill already. If I can do that with very little preparation, it's not going to be hard to find a number of other omissions in this bill that should be addressed to make it as strong as it could be.

I don't understand why Alberta, with all of its opportunity, with all of its riches and its resources and its intellectual power from its people, can't be out front on some of these democratic renewals, why we are always behind, why we have gone backwards from the status that we held that made us, you know, in second or third position, and we fall back.

A number of the things that we've just done to strengthen the Assembly: excellent, excellent things. I'm glad to see the support of

people in some of the changes we've brought forward already, but, you know, that brought us into the early 1990s. If we want to come up to 2007, there's a lot more work to do.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I'm seeing the same tendencies with what's in this Lobbyists Act. It's really going back and starting where everybody else was as they brought their acts in. You know, Ontario, I think, came in in '95, and then we've got some of the other ones coming in in '99, in '98, in 2001. So we're way behind the pack, for starters, and we're starting back where they did. We haven't even learned the lessons, or we're not willing to pick up the lessons of what they had learned in the meantime. I think that Ontario's has now been in place for, probably, 10 years, if not more than that, and they have already revised their bill.

There are lessons that we could be learning from what's already rolling. I know that the federal legislation has been in place for quite a while, and they have amended it a number of times. Again, we could be learning those lessons and incorporating them. What do I see us doing? Going back to where they all started. So it's not picking up on those lessons. It's repeating the same problems, and I'm disappointed in the government for doing that.

There are some other issues that I'm sure my colleagues have raised, particularly around the cooling-off time with contractors and lobbyists. Interesting that the bill prohibits people from lobbying the government and contracting with them at the same time. I'm glad to see that in here. I would accept that as a given and would have expected to see it in here, but I think there's no cooling-off period that actually is anticipated in here for these paid advisors. I think that's an area of caution that we need to look to. Perhaps it's appropriate to preclude registered lobbyists from contracting with the government altogether to make sure that the idea of being a contractor and being a lobbyist stays separate.

4:00

There's also an opportunity for unpaid lobbyists because the defining line is about whether or not you're paid. I'm guessing here that they were trying to protect the smaller charitable sector, the NGO sector, from having to take on an onerous task of registering as a lobbyist. On the other hand, what's coming through that would be retired senior officials from any number of sectors who are unpaid but come in to see their old chums on the government side and are in fact performing the same services and tasks that any lobbyist would be doing. But because they're unpaid, they're not going to be registered. I see that as another large loophole and, I think, a lesson that's clearly been learned in some of the other jurisdictions that, again, we're not taking advantage of.

I thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to rise and bring my observations to second reading on Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. I look forward to continued rigorous debate on this bill, and I do look forward to seeing if the government is going to be bringing forward amendments to close these loopholes.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if there are questions to be directed to the last speaker.

There being none, who should I recognize next? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, which is the flagship piece of legislation of the new government of Alberta. As such, it

indicates that it is a high priority for the government and a piece of legislation that they want to have associated with the government in order to show that they are at last beginning to close the democracy gap that exists in our province or, as it's often known, the democratic deficit in our province.

There are many aspects to the democratic deficit in this province, Mr. Speaker, which the New Democratic Party and opposition has long been critical of and long offered constructive solutions towards. The particular piece with respect to this piece of legislation has to do with lobbyists, of course, and people who are attempting to influence the government. So in that sense the government is to be commended for at last addressing this issue after many years of pressure from Albertans, from the New Democrat opposition, and from other opposition parties as well.

I think the act is pretty clearly based upon a piece of legislation in Ontario. That would be the Lobbyists Registration Act of 1998 in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, as far as the legislation goes, it's fine. It does require lobbyists, both paid and unpaid, both working in private practice and working for different organizations, including corporations, nonprofit organizations, and so on, to be registered. In that respect it is a step forward for the government.

There are some significant loopholes in that aspect of the bill that I want to call attention to. Paragraph 3(2)(c) is a very large loophole that would allow lobbyists to escape disclosure on the registry as long as they have been invited to lobby by the government. Mr. Speaker, the provincial Tory government is not original on this loophole. This loophole has actually been copied from the federal Liberals, who introduced this loophole into the federal law in 1995. When it was finally deleted 10 years later, registrations of lobbyists increased by eight times. It's clear to me that this loophole is very significant and may well be deliberate since it is based upon something that the federal Liberals did in the year 1995.

It's not the first time that we've seen the provincial Tories mimicking the federal Liberals, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, they only mimic the federal Liberals when it comes to the bad things that the federal Liberals do and not some of the occasional good things that they do. One example of a good thing the federal Liberals have done is bring in legislation to eliminate the big money from politics; in other words, to eliminate corporate and union donations from funding political parties. That was a good thing that the federal Liberals did in the closing days of the Chretien government. It was based on something that was done by the Manitoba NDP government of Mr. Doer, and I think that it is rather fundamental to the entire democratic issue in this province.

Unless you get the big money out of politics, politics is not and cannot be entirely in the interests of the people themselves. It is in the interests of powerful organizations who have financial means to pursue their political goals, and it sets the individual citizen at a significant disadvantage.

To come back to the bill, Mr. Speaker, paragraph 3(2)(b) is a large loophole as well, which will allow lobbyists to escape disclosure on the registry when they are lobbying to be let off the hook by enforcement agencies. Sections 6(2) and 6(3) should be changed to prohibit registered lobbyists from working for the government or any politician in any capacity or from having a business relationship of any kind other than as their lobbyist with anyone or any organization that's working for the government. For example, if a lobbyist is working for the Premier, then it would be unethical for the lobbyist to work for any other cabinet minister's department because the Premier chooses and controls all the cabinet ministers. So it would be a conflict of interest. If a lobbyist is working for a cabinet minister and lobbying the Premier or another cabinet minister, the same conflicts of interest would be created.

We believe that a new section should be added prohibiting lobbyists from working in senior positions on the campaigns of any candidates for office, and I would hasten to add that that should include working on provincial leadership campaigns. Such work creates clear conflicts of interest as lobbyists do favours for candidates, and the candidate may feel obliged to return them if they win. I think that we need a section that would require lobbyists to disclose approximately how much in total they're spending on each campaign.

Mr. Speaker, the conflict-of-interest law must also be broadened so that it covers the staff of ministers and politicians and senior government officials and bans them from becoming lobbyists for a period of a number of years, perhaps a sliding scale, one to five years, depending on the importance of the position that's involved. Certainly, our recent former Premier's involvement in the private sector would be covered by such an amendment to this bill.

4:10

The lack of a cooling-off period is perhaps the largest single flaw in this bill, Mr. Speaker. When you have a situation such as the case with the former Premier, who has intimate knowledge of the intentions of government, the strategies of government, and the thinking of government and then takes a position in the private sector, it always raises the question as to whether or not the information that that person has acquired in the public service is then being put to the benefit of his employer for commercial reasons. That's why a cooling-off period is fundamental.

Mr. Speaker, those are my comments, primarily, with respect to this bill. It's an example of the government getting it half right. We've seen this with respect to the task force on housing, where the government gets it right by involving people in the housing business and the nonprofit community and putting members of the opposition on the task force but doesn't get it the rest of the way in terms of disclosing the report publicly so that there can be public debate before the government makes up its mind.

This government has taken a half-step forward. They get part of this, but they don't get the whole thing. This bill, in my view, is another example of that imperfect understanding on the part of the new government of dealing with the democratic issues in this province, and it is a seriously flawed bill as a result. I think it could have gone much farther and actually become a significant contribution to improving the state of democracy in our province, but in doing that, it has failed.

Mr. Speaker. Those are my remarks. I thank all members for their kind patience, and I'll take my seat.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. That being the case, who shall I recognize next?

The hon. Government House Leader to conclude the debate, or shall we call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

Bill 3 Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mr. R. Miller]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to continue.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My comments will be very brief this afternoon, and it's nice to know that members opposite appreciate that. You would almost think it was Thursday afternoon and that people wanted to go home.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing that I want to get on the record is that about two and a half years ago, shortly after the November 22 election, when I found myself elected as a member of this Legislature, my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View told us at a meeting – perhaps it was the first meeting of the Official Opposition caucus – that climate change in particular and issues around the environment in general would be the issue of the next election. I have to confess that I wasn't so sure that he was right, but when you look back now nearly two and a half years later, it is quite clear that issues around the environment have risen pretty much to the top of public consciousness.

Whether you talk about water and the diversion of water from one basin to another, whether you talk about the Water for Life strategy and the fact that the government hasn't funded it, whether you talk about the transboundary issues facing Albertans in relationship to our neighbours to the north, as we saw with members of the public in the gallery today, or transboundary issues involving Albertans and the people of the state of Montana as was referenced by the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, or whether you talk about issues of transboundary water with our neighbours to the east in Saskatchewan, this is a common theme almost wherever you go in Alberta.

Certainly, issues around carbon emissions have risen to the fore. In fact, surprisingly, this government is now introducing the first carbon tax law in the country. I hear members opposite applauding the fact that they're introducing a carbon tax law. Let us be mindful that this is the same government that only a matter of months ago would have scoffed at the idea of instituting a bill dealing with carbon tax. In fact, undoubtedly – undoubtedly – we on this side of the House would have had all sorts of taunts thrown at us about our federal Liberal cousins if we had suggested that they should do so. So how times change; how times change. It really is in some ways refreshing to see the foresight and the intuition that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View had when he made those comments two and a half years ago. I think he might well prove to have been entirely bang on with his comments when the next election does come around.

I know that there are many members wanting to speak to this today. If you were to review the comments that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View gave during his remarks in second reading of Bill 3, I think he probably said everything that there is to say with the exception of one thing that I will indicate I have to learn more about. But on the surface it certainly looks to me as if the idea of keeping the offsets within Alberta is something that I can support. I'm not a big fan of the offset program, as a general rule. It's not something that I like the idea of. I know that isn't necessarily in agreement with all of my colleagues, but I have to learn more about it before anybody could convince me that that really is going to be effective. But in my own mind I will say, Mr. Speaker, that if there are going to be offsets and trading, if we can keep that in Alberta and benefit industries in Alberta and benefit the people of Alberta first, on the surface that looks to me as if it would be the way to go.

So we'll continue to have that conversation in our caucus. I'll continue to read and attempt to learn more about the offset program and how it might work here as opposed to some of the ideas that others have espoused, whether it be trading on a national level or, of course, on an international level. But that is one thing in this bill that certainly has attracted my attention.

As was said earlier when we were discussing the lobbyist registry, there is no question that this is a good first step. It may not be

everything that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View would have hoped to see in this bill, and it may not address all of the concerns that any number of people that are concerned about our environment have, but certainly it is a step in the right direction, a step that's long overdue, and ultimately, I'm going to guess, a step that will likely have the support of the Official Opposition in this House. Even though it may not go near far enough, it certainly is a step in the right direction, and I'm going to suspect that in the end we will support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

There being no one, then I shall recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to rise and speak to Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. The government's plan for climate change has a distinct clause that makes it less effective in reducing emissions in an absolute sense. Their reliance on emissions intensity as their measure to reduction instead of focusing on moving aggressively to absolute reductions makes this bill and the accompanying regulations ineffective.

Mr. Speaker, "absolute emissions" is the term used to describe the total volume of emissions from a particular source, whether it is an exhaust system of a vehicle or a stack from an industrial facility. Emissions intensity is the amount of greenhouse gases released measured against another factor such as GDP or a barrel of oil. A more fuel-efficient car will have lower emissions intensity than a less efficient model, but the two cars may still have the same absolute emissions if the more efficient one is driven farther.

4:20

If the current rate of economic growth in Alberta continues, the province's emissions could rise to 72 per cent above 1990 levels by 2020, so our absolute emissions would rise dramatically even if the government's target of achieving a 50 per cent reduction in emissions intensity by 2020 is achieved.

What is the outcome of these new regulations? They will jeopardize our ability and Canada's ability to meet the Kyoto commitment, jeopardize Canada's commitments to achieve much deeper emissions reduction targets for post-2012 commitment periods, that will become more necessary given the ultimate objectives of the UN framework convention on climate change, and will create a burden for the rest of Canada by transferring responsibility for emissions to the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, the outcome is that industry will be faced with the prospect of trying to achieve two different sets of regulations: one provincial and one federal. If the federal government regulations are more aggressive, the provincial government will not negotiate a new position unless it is for the federal government to match Alberta's plan. This is not in the spirit of co-operation and could jeopardize industry because they will have two different sets of standards and could possibly face two different sets of carbon taxes or penalties paid if they exceed an emission target. This is certainly not in the best interests of industry.

There is also an issue with Bill 3 in that it's not consistent with federal legislation in the form of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. In certain areas such as limitation period or confidentiality of information there are differences.

Mr. Speaker, we should not be supporting this bill for the simple reason that it will continue to rely on emissions intensity rather than moving toward absolute hard caps on emissions. An Alberta Liberal

government would establish an absolute emissions limit by 2012. This is absolutely necessary to achieve any real reduction and to have any impact on climate change in the near future. It seems that while the rest of the world is moving quickly to tackle climate change through aggressive measures, the Alberta government refuses to move away from allowing pollution to increase without firm action. Alberta could be at 70 per cent above 1990 levels by 2020 with no end to an increase in absolute emissions in sight.

Mr. Speaker, some of these measures have merit in principle. At least some action is being taken, but it's nowhere near enough. For instance, allowing the purchase of offsets to encourage industry to become more efficient is a good step, but limiting this system to within Alberta borders is not necessarily the best way for industry to purchase offsets.

The world is moving toward a global system. In fact, it's up and running, but Alberta will be left behind due to these regulations. A problem with a carbon trading system only within Alberta is that it is very limited in size, which could limit how many players enter the market. The price could become distorted, and companies could end up paying a very hefty price for credits to offset their emissions. There's no need to rely on an Alberta-based carbon trading system when there are other established markets to buy credits from Alberta. We'll still see an economic gain as we become more efficient and have more buyers of our credits.

As well, it seems that allowing new companies coming online to be excused from the emissions intensity reduction of 12 per cent immediately is not necessary. New facilities that come online after 2000 have no requirement to reduce their GHG emissions intensity until their fourth year of operation, at which point they will be required to reduce their GHG emissions intensity by 2 per cent and increase that level yearly, up to 12 per cent in the ninth year of operation. There should not be different standards depending on the year an operation began. All emitters should be – should be – on the same level playing field in the interest of fairness. There is no substantive reason why new emitters should be exempt from the regulations for four years.

Mr. Speaker, the government's decision to implement the 12 per cent reduction starting July 1, 2007, and forcing compliance at the end of 2007 is something that industry is unhappy with. There is absolutely no way that the large emitters can make the changes necessary to avoid paying into the technology fund, and the reaction of industry is not something we can easily ignore. The government needs to plan better and allow industry time to get prepared to comply with the new rules when technological change is required.

A more balanced approach would be to set out a time frame for industry to comply realistically with new targets and then move them toward absolute reductions. If it's the government's job to provide regulations that can foster lower carbon dioxide emissions, industry needs to know that regulations are in place to reduce the negative environmental effects of production and use. Unless government and industry work closer together to move faster on carbon capture and storage, for instance, implementation of such proven technology will crawl along, and future generations will pay the price.

Mr. Speaker, we are very disappointed that at this critical time in the future of Alberta, of Canada, and indeed the entire world our government has failed to take the necessary steps to really fight climate change. There was an opportunity here for this government to talk to industry and to our federal government and come up with a real plan for real reductions in absolute emissions. This is what Albertans and Canadians want, but what we have received is a bill that will do nothing to stop our GHG emissions from increasing. While everyone else is prepared to make real changes and govern-

ments show real leadership, we are stuck with the same old, tired government that hasn't really changed its position from the year 2003. Fifty per cent reduction in emission intensity in 2020, the same goal as in 2003, will do absolutely nothing to stop the effect of climate change. This government refuses to listen to the science, to the people, even to the industry, who are prepared to move on climate change, and have stubbornly refused to deviate from their old and tired plan.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, this bill represents exactly the same old Tory government, stuck in the past and refusing to do what needs to be done for the future of Alberta and the world. At a time when government leadership is vital, especially in Alberta, our government does not know whether to lead or be cheerleaders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be participants.

There being none, then might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to be able to introduce three guests today. They decided to stop by and see how we work here in the Legislature. It's those three up there. First of all, I'd like to introduce to you my niece Rebekah Oudman from DeMotte, Indiana – she's studying education at Dordt College, Iowa – and her friend Joanna Esselink from Emo, Ontario. She's studying fine arts, also at Dordt College. Now, most kids in college on a spring break go to Cancun or Miami or some nice place, but these kids have actually come to Alberta to see how we do things here. We're glad to have them here. The third one is my son Lorne. He is attending NAIT at the Souch campus. He is an apprentice welder at Syncrude in Fort McMurray, and he's taking some time out to upgrade his skills at the Souch campus, which is the NAIT campus on the south side of the city, and enjoying himself there with about 200 or 300 other welding apprentices. I ask them all to stand up and receive the warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, we're indeed honoured. Such an invigorating afternoon we're having here this afternoon that it should just inspire the members to even be that much more articulate.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
Bill 3
Climate Change and Emissions Management
Amendment Act, 2007
(*continued*)

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise and make some comments on Bill 3, the climate change

act, and I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to lay out some of our views on the bill and on the broader issues dealt with by the bill.

We will not be supporting the bill, primarily because it's indicative of some very fundamental misunderstandings the government seems to have about climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, and how efforts to fight global climate change have to be integrated with other economic measures. We need to make sure that our province participates in what has rapidly emerged as a global effort to reduce global climate change, and this is an effort in which this government has not taken part in a meaningful way up until this point.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Last week the Minister of Environment launched another round of consultations on climate change, which tells me the government isn't too sure about the issue. It was interesting to note that they used the same logo, the same news release, more or less, and the same shtick generally as the previous Environment minister used five years before, and that tells me, Mr. Speaker, that the only thing this government is interested in recycling is environmental policy.

We know that Canada is the eighth-worst contributor to greenhouse gases in the world. Alberta was responsible for nearly 40 per cent of those emissions. In fact, seven of the top 10 industrial emitters of greenhouse gases are located in Alberta, so we have a problem. Canada produces about 2 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions but only represents .5 per cent of the entire world's population. Greenhouse gas emissions rose 40 per cent from 1990 to 2005, and that was very significant.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Pembina Institute the newly approved Kearl oil sands mine project – they say that Imperial Oil failed to develop a plan outlining how they would reduce greenhouse gas pollution from the Kearl oil sands project. This is very troubling, considering that this project would emit about 30 per cent more greenhouse gas pollution per barrel of oil compared to a similar project. Oil sands operations are the fastest growing source of new greenhouse gas emissions in Canada, and new oil sands projects could account for up to half of Canada's projected growth in business-as-usual emissions between '03 and 2010.

Mr. Speaker, we need tough regulations in place to force the major emitters to change their ways. These megacorporations have no incentive to go green without a strong push from the government. The AEUB has consistently failed to consider the cumulative environmental impact of tar sands projects and expansions. Examples that I have used already: the Kearl oil sands project, the Voyageur project, and so on.

Mr. Speaker, electricity is Alberta's second-highest emitting sector and has increased its emissions 31 per cent over 1990 levels. Our electricity comes from coal-fired plants, which are significant contributors to greenhouse gases.

The Pembina Institute estimates that at the current rate of economic growth – and this is very significant; this is really the nub of the argument here against the government's plan for emissions-based CO₂ reduction – the government's plans will allow emissions to rise 72 per cent above 1990 levels by the year 2020. Mr. Speaker, that's a 72 per cent increase in real emissions even if this bill is passed.

The dangers posed by climate change are very well documented. Alberta is particularly vulnerable to changes in water supply and the effects of severe weather on crops. Just look at the problems we're facing now with the pine beetle, Mr. Speaker. That is directly a result of climate change because it takes 40-below winters for a sustained period in order to kill back the pine beetle infestations. These are a normal part of the ecosystem in these forests, but we

haven't had those kinds of conditions in northern B.C., where this has spread, for a number of years, so the infestation has just continued to grow because the winters required to kill back the beetles no longer exist. That's why we're faced with this.

So the economic cost in another industry of doing nothing about CO₂ emissions is enormous, and these kinds of costs will spread from industry to industry to industry. If the government continues to put all its eggs in the basket of the oil and gas industry, they're going to cause some very, very serious problems.

Mr. Speaker, the root of the issue is not just about emissions. They're just one measure of the relationship between our economy and our environment. Every day this relationship is becoming increasingly clear to Albertans. Every barrel of water that is sent down a well to bring up a little more oil is a barrel of water that can never be used for drinking, for agriculture, or to support wildlife. Every megaton of pollution that's poured into the sky increases the rates of respiratory illness, cancer, and other illnesses. To put it in the starkest terms: we may live by the economy, but our children may die by the environment. The current pace of development is having enormous costs for average Albertans. Huge sums of money are flowing out of Alberta, but the pollution stays here.

The second really important point that I'd like to make is that notwithstanding the approach of the government of reducing emissions intensity, which is like telling someone that they can have as many cupcakes as they want as long as there's a little bit less sugar in each batch as they go along, you know, we're not going to make real differences. The Liberals want to wait 10 to 20 years before they put in place some hard caps. [interjections] Well, I have some clippings here quoting the Liberal leader as saying that. What neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives realize is that unless you manage the growth in the economy, particularly the tar sands development in this province, you can't affect emissions.

4:40

You have to have some plan for growth and for managing the pace of development in the tar sands, and we can do that to maintain full employment in our province, to keep the economy humming along yet prevent disastrous impacts in the environment, in the area of social changes, shortages of labour and shortages of housing, difficulties dealing with infrastructure and so on. That's the approach that we favour. This is the approach also that former Premier Peter Lougheed has talked about. He said: why should we have more than one tar sands project under construction at a time? He said: we have to start thinking like owners.

We own this resource. We don't have to dig it up as fast as the Americans want us to so that we're exporting raw bitumen and the jobs with it or that we're importing major plants from China instead of building them here or that we're only getting 1 per cent on most of the tar sands development or that we're going to be faced with enormous problems with CO₂ production, that we're going to have to pay for carbon offsets when a carbon market comes here. We have to start thinking about the people who own this resource, which is the people of Alberta, and we need to make sure that the development takes place according to a staged plan so that we can catch up on the infrastructure needs that exist in this province.

But the current government's direction, as far as I can see, is to not touch the brake on the economy. That's what the Premier has said: we're not going to touch the brake. Well, at the same time, the United States is saying that they want us to increase our production out of the tar sands by five times. So if George W. Bush is pressing his foot right down to the floor on the accelerator and the Premier is afraid to touch the brake, then you know where the province of Alberta is going to end up, and that's in the ditch.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that we need to be real about climate change. It's a real, serious issue. It will affect not just us but our children and our grandchildren. We have to get serious about it, and I'm of the view and our party is of the view that unless you address the pace of growth in this province, you will be unable to put any meaningful measures in place that will control the output of CO₂ from this province. This province has become a serious player in CO₂ emission in the world. It's a big player. We produce a lot of CO₂, and if the plans go the way the government seems to want them to go, we're going to be even bigger still.

Mr. Speaker, the whole approach of emissions intensity is a false approach. It allows massive increases in the output of CO₂ into the atmosphere, which affects the climate. The climate doesn't care whether the emissions intensity is reduced or increased or anything like that. The climate only cares about the total amount of CO₂ that's put into the atmosphere. This bill doesn't deal with that in any meaningful way, and as a result it is absolutely irrelevant to the whole question of climate change, which it claims to address. Therefore, our party and, I'm sure, hundreds of thousands of Albertans will be rejecting this bill and rejecting the approach that the government is trying to foist on Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak to Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. We appear to be scrambling to catch up to both the science that has been there for decades calling for action and the public, who are increasingly vocal, anxious, and angry that this government has often put industry and other interests ahead of the long-term future of Albertans and our ethical responsibility on the planet. It's interesting that we're choosing to rush ahead of the federal government and put something out that will give the impression that we are really with it and that we're concerned and that we want to take a lead. But in order to really take a lead, we must align ourselves and find some common ground and work together with others in this country and, of course, the international community, which we have already made a commitment to through the Kyoto protocol.

If we are serious about addressing climate change, we must talk about two general areas. First of all, of course, reducing emissions clearly is a priority. The second whole area though is about action and adapting and paradigm shifts, that our public are now paying for the results not only of weather events that are occurring at an increasing rate and the droughts that are increasing but also the results of health costs, which industry is imposing on all of us as a result of the decline in air quality and impacts on human health. We must look at our global commitment to the ethical action and leadership that we need. Clearly, we need to fit in with other countries and, in particular, our federal government's initiatives. I think our public is looking for leadership.

We live probably in the richest place on earth and probably the most technologically progressive country in the world and do know that we are addicted to the income from industries just as much as the public is addicted to fossil fuels for all of our activities. We have to be part of the solution. The people of Alberta want to see strong leadership on this issue. It has exceeded health care in interest and support in this country, and it's not being truly reflected in Bill 3. A 2 per cent reduction annually in intensity for these newer emitters is not going to result in real progress in this province.

If we are serious about smart growth, about sustainable growth, then we have to look at putting measures in place so that we

understand what sustainability really means in terms of preserving and protecting the social, the environmental, and the economic values. I think that industry is looking at us too for some more clarification on fixed targets. They need these in order to do their business plans and to actually make clear commitments to new developments. There's a lack of clarity with this bill, and many businesses and industrial developments are unsure of what to do with this bill.

This bill needs to be integrated with other aspects of our land-use planning, agriculture, forests, and, in particular, water use, and urban development. It is disappointing that this bill deals with intensity targets rather than caps on emissions. Many members on this side of the House have spoken with knowledge and passion about the need for fixed targets.

Will there be changes now as a result of the federal plan? Was it because we want to be seen as a leader in addressing the issues on climate change that there is a rush to put forward this bill that is flawed? Will we be a leader by harmonizing and working with the entire country?

We have a global and ethical responsibility for our planet, we are interconnected, we must be trustees of our planet, and we have the potential to be world leaders.

The basic principle of carbon causing greenhouse emissions has been validated by the scientific community for over two decades. Unfortunately, politicians and media have given it a spin that has caused confusion for the public. The role of government is to do the right thing. We are supposed to be stewards of our land and resources. The right thing to do is reduce incentives for fossil fuels and increase incentives for the clean, renewable energy. It is disappointing that these essential steps are not addressed in this bill.

Albertans are increasingly aware of the tremendous business opportunities in conservation as well as the value of carbon in enhancing agriculture, capturing methane, solar, wind, and geothermal power for our world. It's time to give these options, along with distributed electrical generation, the same incentives that fossil fuels have received for decades in this province.

Thank you.

4:50

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

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on the debate.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to talk for a little while on Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. As other speakers have indicated, this is probably the most serious issue that humanity has ever faced. We've known about it for a long time, so this kind of bill, even if it is considered by some to be a step in the right direction, is overdue. We should have been dealing with this kind of issue decades ago.

The scientists have been studying climate change for many, many, many years. Many, like James Hansen, a NASA scientist, told the U.S. Congress that human beings were dangerously heating up the planet through the use of fossil fuels. Actually, when he presented his findings to the U.S. Congress, it was in 1988, so that was a long time ago. At first he tended to be marginalized, and there were many naysayers, and there were people who were posing as pseudo-scientists wandering around North America trying to deny that there was a serious problem with climate change. But that has changed, as the accumulation of scientific data has been gathered, and the public now is, obviously, really onside, and it's convinced that there is a serious issue here to deal with.

The United Nations, for example, has set up an organization called the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, to collect

the information from scientists to bring it all together, to collate it, and to publish their findings, their judgments about where we're at in regard to understanding climate change. In 1995 in their report they said that the balance of evidence suggests that it is human beings and their activity that is increasing the planet's temperature, and it is a really serious problem. Human beings, we're burning far too much fossil fuel. So that warning was taken seriously by lots of countries, and that led to the negotiations leading to the Kyoto treaty. That was a big step forward, and Canada was a party to that treaty. Unfortunately, the United States was not.

In 2006 the same organization, the United Nations' organization Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued its latest report, which really startled the world even though it wasn't saying anything basically new because it was based on accumulation of scientific findings up to that point. They said that they were more certain than ever that global warming, which is so far only about one degree Fahrenheit in the average global temperature, is caused by the activities of human beings.

They went on to document that by talking about the amount of carbon that is in the atmosphere. It's increasing at a far greater rate than ever before. We can expect further rises in temperature throughout the world. Almost all frozen areas on earth are melting, including the Arctic ice cap, so that will lead to the rise in the levels of the oceans, and we all know that.

As all Albertans, we go on a regular basis to the mountains, and we see how the Athabasca glacier has receded through the years, and it's quite startling. Even in the 30 years that I've been in Alberta, it has receded to quite an extent, and a lot of people are worried. You know, glaciers are the origin of most of our rivers as they flow across the prairies. To what extent will that be a problem in the future? When you listen to authorities like Dr. Schindler at the University of Alberta, we should be alarmed. We should be alarmed about the future.

The same report, the IPCC United Nations report, talked about changing weather patterns, hurricanes, tornadoes, heavy rainfalls, heat waves around the world, and that all the strange weather patterns will get more extreme in the future as climate change has that kind of impact on the world.

The most disturbing comment in that report though – and this brings us to this bill – is that even if we cease the increase in coal and oil and gas burning that is going on now, cease to have it rise, the temperature of the world will continue to rise. There are a lot of scientists who are now saying, very pessimistically, that it may be too late to stop the climate change that has been going on for some time, so just holding things at today's levels will not really turn things around. What we should have done – and this is decades ago – is we should have been more aggressive about cutting back greenhouse gas emissions.

What we need is to talk about a reduction in emissions, and we need to be aggressive about that and do something drastic now. The Democrats in the U.S. Congress are bringing a bill to Congress calling for an 80 per cent cut in emissions by 2050. That kind of move is to look at an actual goal, setting a goal of reductions, not an emissions intensity approach, which is the emphasis of this bill.

I have real problems with this bill. It doesn't really do what we need to have done. The emissions intensity with a staged-in approach and the ability of companies to buy offsets from other industries and so on: it seems to me that that's not aggressive enough. I like a quote from the Pembina Institute, which is the government's favourite institute on the environment. Their response to this bill is that, really, it's a joke. There's nothing here that is going to lead to a reduction in emissions, so what is the point? I'm glad we're considering this issue, but this bill doesn't seem to go far enough at all.

We need to set out a time frame for industry. We need to set out definite goals and targets, and industry has to know what our goals are. Of course, they have the technology; they have the know-how. They are moving fast to put the appropriate technology in place, such as carbon capture and storage. What they need to know is: what are the actual goals of Alberta? When the playing field is levelled and all the companies know what the goals are, then they can be busy trying to deal with the issue because everybody recognizes that it's a huge, huge problem.

The problem is that in Alberta there's not enough political will to deal with this issue. Companies are ready to deal with the issue, and industry is, but the political will is not there to take the leadership. And that's been a problem in the whole of the modern western world.

Mr. Speaker, I've been dealing with the issues in a broader way in terms of ethics and ideological positions on understanding nature and the created world and how human beings have dealt with it, and it's been especially in the west, not in the east because in eastern countries they've had long traditions of caring with compassion for the earth. You only have to think of religions like Taoism. The ancient Chinese had a long tradition of being able to deal with the harmony of human beings with the world around them. That's basically what Taoism was all about.

But it was especially in the west – and I'm ashamed to say this, but it came out of Christian teaching – that we felt that we were mandated as creatures under God to control the world, to dominate the world even, to subject the world, to subdue the world, and we have become really successful at that. In fact, the traditions in the west, the mythologies of the west have led to a kind of ideology of domination of the world. Now we look back and say: "How did we get to the position that we are so powerful that we can destroy the planet that we live on? How can we now turn that back and recover other values, like the idea of stewardship of the earth, caring with compassion for the earth?" In order to do that, Mr. Speaker, we have to have a more aggressive approach to dealing with climate change than we have in this bill.

5:00

Alberta has to take the leadership because Alberta among all the provinces is producing the most greenhouse gas emissions in Canada. So surely it's here in Alberta that we have to take the most creative and aggressive position to deal with greenhouse gas emissions. Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase to 40 per cent above 1990 levels even as early as 2004. Our energy sector, electricity sector, new coal plants, the mining sector, especially the tar sands, are contributing to greenhouse gas emissions as never before, and we have to take some leadership.

Most of us, Mr. Speaker, have seen Al Gore's movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*. It was very well received. I hope that members on the government side have all seen it. If they haven't seen it, then they have to update their knowledge of the current science. It even received an Academy Award, I believe. I think that the public is going to put more and more pressure on governments to deal with climate change and deal with it in a much more aggressive way than this government is doing.

Those are my remarks. They're fairly general remarks now, and I hope that when we deal with the bill, we can look at a lot of the specifics.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 3.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 5

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, [some applause] and thank you, hon. member. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 5, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

I'd like to begin by requesting the support of all members of this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, Bill 5 is an omnibus bill. It amends five health statutes.

Amendments to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act will improve access to practitioner records so the department can confidently verify medical claims and will strengthen the committees used by the Minister of Health and Wellness to review health care claims.

Currently the department's ability to review practitioner records is limited and requires practitioner consent. Amendments will enhance the department's authority to fully audit practitioner records to ensure that services have been provided as they've been billed. This is a response to the Auditor General's recommendations and the public's expectation that government be accountable on how public funding is being spent.

At present the minister may utilize reports and recommendations of a committee established in the act when reassessing health care claims. The current committee structure is inflexible. Membership from some professional associations and colleges is mandated. Other professional associations, as well as members of the public, are excluded. We're addressing these structural problems by providing for the establishment of a roster of health professionals as well as public representatives. From this roster committees will be established as required. Committee composition will vary. Members will be selected based on the requirements and complexity of the review.

Proposed amendments to the Health Insurance Premiums Act will reduce the administrative burden for the small number of Albertans who choose to opt out of the provincial health care insurance plan. Residents will be able to exempt themselves every three years. Currently residents are required to file a declaration every year and can only opt back in at the beginning of the next year. Changes will enable residents to opt out at any time and opt back in following a 90-day notice period. This will provide for a more customer-friendly approach to the administration of the health care insurance plan.

Other amendments are more administrative in nature. For instance, the Pharmacy and Drug Act and Public Health Act are being amended to clarify the department's legislative authority to adopt regulations, standards, and guidelines, as well as drug schedules from other resources. The amendments allow for these schedules and standards to be amended from time to time in order to ensure that regulations remain current. The definition of "guardian" in the Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act is being broadened so that it's consistent with definitions in other provincial legislation, and a typographical error which references a section number erroneously is being corrected in the Health Information Act.

In conclusion, these amendments will facilitate and strengthen the effectiveness of the day-to-day operations of the Health and Wellness department. Therefore, I ask support of the House.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I was going to move to adjourn debate, but I was just handed a note suggesting that at least one person would like to speak to that.

So with that I will take my chair, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased that I was able to listen to the sponsoring member provide his opening remarks on Bill 5, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, and I'm pleased to be able to provide some feedback to what I see in front of us today.

I'll start with a brief historical vignette, and that is that prior to the Standing Orders being changed in 2003, I think, it used to be that when we had an omnibus bill in front of us – in fact, Bill 5 covers five different statutes – members would have 30 minutes to speak to it because it was capturing more than two pieces of legislation. But after the change in those Standing Orders that provision was taken out. That can be problematic if you've got a lot of changes that are being made in the different statutes. So there's the historical vignette for this afternoon.

Now specifically to Bill 5. I'm finding this a very interesting little bill for a couple of reasons. It appears on first reading to be, sort of, a number of minor housekeeping changes that are being brought into various health acts, but let me just go through some of what's being proposed here.

As the sponsoring member indicated, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act is amending a couple of different things but specifically expanding ministerial powers to be able to select members of a committee that reviews claims submitted to the Alberta health care insurance plan. So I note that the reason behind this was that currently there are very rigid criteria for who is on committees like this. It mandates some professionals to appear but excludes others or, rather, is silent on others, which amounts to them being excluded.

The intention here is to make the committee more flexible. Well, I note that it actually puts more power in the hands of the government minister responsible for this department, who now has, you know, total control over who they would appoint to this committee. Although the member says, "Well, you know, we're going to pick from a roster," nonetheless, it is more restrictive than what we were operating on before, which did mandate representation from certain groups even if that list was too finite. But I find it interesting that that, in fact, is moving more power into the hands of the Health and Wellness minister. So I'm wondering what other options the minister considered for trying to make this committee more expansive and why we didn't just add to the list of groups that were included on the original review panels rather than setting up a whole other committee.

5:10

Related to that, I'm interested in what we can expect to see the minister put in place to ensure that there's more impartiality. If he's in total control of who goes on to these, well, you know, people tend to appoint people that they know, so there ends up being quite a bit of institutionalized patronage, that happens with this government. If you've been around for 35 years, you've got a lot of friends. You know a lot of people, and those people all tend to turn up on these various committees. So I'm wondering if the minister, in this new age of enlightenment that they are trying to achieve, has considered what other protocols or methods he could put in place to ensure that there is some additional impartiality that is brought into this process.

There's also a section that removes the requirement for a practitioner or physician to provide permission to the department to examine their medical records. This is part of auditing to verify that billing services had been done correctly. This is interesting because you would have thought some of this would have improved as we end up with all of these computer links between the doctors' offices and the department, and the billing on the plan would have been smoothed

out a bit. But I agree that it's always useful to go back to source documents. So I'm wondering why there was a decision. What caused this that it was felt that it was necessary to remove the requirement that physicians give permission? Because, in tandem with this, there will now also be the establishment of a penalty for any practitioner who refuses to give that permission. So this is a stick, not a carrot, that's being put in place here.

I'm aware that part of this as well is around the review of how physicians provide services, and I think it's a good thing that we're looking at the auditing of anything that requires an outlay of hard-earned taxpayer money. I think those audit systems should be in place, and I'm a big fan of that, but I'm just wondering if we could get a bit more detail on what led to this or what circumstances led to it. Did we have a number of cases where there was some concern around the computer auditing that's available, or did we have a number of physicians that were refusing to let us look at their records for this kind of an attest audit? How many: 100, 500, 50, 10? What is the proportion that we're dealing with here?

My concern when you start talking about health records, of course, is always patient confidentiality. So I'm wondering if patient confidentiality has been impacted at all by this change or if that's anticipated. Are they made aware in any way, shape, or form that their records are being released to the department to check a physician? It's still their information that is now going to be looked at, and I'm assuming that this information has not been stripped of identifying factors. It is their name, their health insurance number, their gender, their Canadian citizenship status, and various other health issues that are obviously part of this billing process. So are they aware that their information is going to be looked at by the department?

I'm pretty sure that it's in the act that they're not aware, but it's one of the things that I protested because I think they should be. You know, there's a discussion that could come about whether or not they would have the ability to stop that, but they certainly should be made aware that their information has been seen by more than just their doctor.

I'm also noticing that there's a provision that required consultation with the college or an organization representing the practitioner. The provision requiring consultation has been removed, and I'm wondering what's behind that. Does this remove a significant responsibility that the college currently maintains, or is it just a matter of changing legislation to reflect what's currently in practice?

The minor typo is fine. I understand that, and I don't have a question about it, obviously. Yeah. You've got to fix those typos, Mr. Speaker.

But I am really curious about this change to amend the Health Insurance Premiums Act to make it easier for Albertans to opt out of paying Alberta health insurance, especially when we're talking 255 people. A couple of things occur to me. Out of all the issues that are happening around health care in Alberta today, this is what needed to come forward in the fifth bill that we're debating in this spring Legislature? I would have thought there were other issues that were really pressing, top-of-mind, that need to get in front of the Legislative Assembly that would have trumped needing to facilitate 255 people's desire not to be in the health care insurance plan.

So I'm really curious about what prompted this. I appreciate that we're trying to remove red tape and make paperwork less onerous. Indeed, if it helps to streamline administration and save some money there that can be spent in other places, I think there's a good argument to be made in support of that, but we're talking paperwork for 255 people, and we now have let them off the hook for three years instead of one year, but we'll let them opt back in at any time instead of at the beginning of the year, as was held previously. This

just struck me as a very odd thing to be spending important time on at the beginning of our Legislative Assembly, so I'm looking for a bit more explanation on that one.

In particular, I would like to know what some of the reasons are for people opting out because I think that's an important piece of public information that we all need to know about. My concern around this – and I would love you to disprove them, actually – is that we end up with people who have enough personal financial resources to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, hon. members. We're not in committee. We have to remain in our seats.

Ms. Blakeman: Ah, yes, that minor matter of parliamentary procedure. Thank you.

I would like to know if the reasons are connected to people who have enough personal financial resources to purchase health care anywhere in the world that they want and likely are doing so. Are they, then, refusing to pay into the public health care system because they just don't want to? They don't use it, and they don't want to pay into it. I'd be interested in what the reasons are behind that. In fact, does the plan or does the protocol require that somebody state why they're withdrawing or why they wish to withdraw? I think that's very useful information.

What provisions are in place to make sure that they don't opt back in just when they need coverage, that they can't go for two and a half years with no coverage and then they discover that they need some kind of treatment, so they opt back in on 90 days, and then they're in. That's an opportunity for abuse of our system and reflects on the rest of us. So what's in place there?

Amending the Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act to capture the definition of guardian is appropriate, particularly as that should be bringing in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. I do want to make sure that we don't repeat the same mistake and put any kind of gender or familial position definition attached to that, or we'll end up with the same problems with not being Charter proof on our legislation.

The Pharmacy and Drug Act. Well, we wish that this, in fact, would be a pharmacare program, but it's not. It seems to be to clarify the authority of Alberta Health and Wellness to adopt the national drug schedules as they change over time. Strategy to come, I'm promised. Well, we're on the record now, Mr. Speaker, that there's a pharmacare strategy to come, and I'm looking forward to that.

Finally, we have the Public Health Act, which is to bring the act in line with the current policy of enabling the adoption of documents that change over time. That avoids a regulatory amendment each time a new version of standards are in place. That is a type of administrative correction that I think is exactly what we should be doing. Of course, it's always got to meet the test of public accountability and not moving more things behind closed doors.

So I'm looking forward to having those questions answered for me, but at this point I'm satisfied enough with what's being brought forward that I would be happy to support Bill 5 in second reading, and I'm happy, if there are no other speakers, to call the question on that.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member to close debate.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member has outlined a number of questions. I'm very happy to respond to them. Of course, the member may expect that I'm happy to respond to

them in Committee of the Whole. I'll consult with the professionals who deal with this on a daily basis and give an even more thorough response.

I would certainly like to call the question at this point, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

head: **Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Ducharme moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mr. R. Miller]

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

Mr. Cernaiko: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much. It's a pleasure to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor on March 7. The Speech from the Throne lays out a plan to adjust to growth pressures facing the province. It also addresses the need to preserve our prosperity for future generations. Albertans want their government to act on the issues that are important to them. They expect government to act in a way that is fiscally and environmentally responsible. The Speech from the Throne laid out five priorities: govern with integrity and transparency, manage growth pressures, improve Albertans' quality of life, build a stronger Alberta, and provide safe and secure communities.

As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission it's my responsibility to ensure that Albertans, young and old, achieve freedom from the harmful effects of addiction to drugs, alcohol, and gambling. By tackling these issues head on, we will improve the quality of life of Albertans and provide safe and secure communities. These two priorities laid out in the Speech from the Throne are of great importance to me.

Mr. Speaker, under the topic of improving Alberta's quality of life, the throne speech mentioned sustained focus on wellness, injury reduction, and disease prevention; assistance to people living in the community with serious mental illness and providing their families with improved access to support services and treatment; a new pharmaceutical strategy which will capitalize on opportunities to improve the range of drugs available and reduce or avoid prohibitive costs; improving the quality of life in First Nations and Métis communities; ensuring that government policies better reflect the needs of persons with disabilities; and establishing a community spirit program for charitable giving and donations.

On the government priority for providing safe and secure communities His Honour the Lieutenant Governor discussed working with communities to make neighbourhoods stronger and safer – a community that works together has a much better chance of defeating crime and ensuring a safe environment for our children to live, learn, and grow – and working with community leaders to establish a crime reduction and safe communities task force, that will consult Albertans on how to reduce crime and improve public confidence in the justice system, building on the work being done by 13 government ministries to develop an integrated crime reduction strategy.

The government has also committed to invest in advanced education, including university, college, the trades, and occupational training.

Mr. Speaker, managing growth pressures is another key priority for this government. We will address pressures on housing, labour, infrastructure, and the environment. I'm pleased that the Premier has asked me to sit on the Calgary committee to end homelessness. As the government representative to this committee I am thrilled to be part of this initiative. Our goal on that committee is not to reduce but to eliminate homelessness from the city of Calgary within the next decade. The successful implementation of this program could set the standard and be the template for cities across Alberta, throughout Canada, and throughout the world.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to briefly speak about the objectives of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. We will provide information and develop current and accurate information on the abuse of alcohol, drugs, and gambling. Knowledge is key in tackling these monumental problems. We will work towards prevention, offering community-based programs and services designed to prevent substance abuse related problems. We will provide treatment, ensuring a broad spectrum of programs and services that assist Albertans in their recovery from substance abuse and gambling problems. AADAC has been in existence since 1970 and provides 30,000 Albertans with treatment and 90,000 Albertans with prevention services and information every year.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to make a presentation to the Affordable Housing Task Force, chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West, I believe it is, to provide AADAC's response and/or submission to the Affordable Housing Task Force. Now, some of you may be wondering: what does the treatment of addictions have to do with affordable housing? In fact, the two are very closely linked, which is why I wanted to mention this in this response to the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne.

At AADAC our mission is to make a difference in people's lives by assisting Albertans to achieve freedom from the harmful effects of alcohol, other drugs, and gambling. We accomplish this by providing information, prevention and treatment programs and services in 51 communities across Alberta. While our reach is wide and our programs and services are comprehensive, we know that the treatment of addictions is complex and multifaceted, that it's not enough to treat just the addiction itself.

Our research tells us that housing shortages and homelessness have serious implications for addictions prevention, treatment, and recovery because socially and economically disadvantaged groups are particularly vulnerable to the effects of addiction. Studies show that youth living on the streets or in unsafe housing are at an increased risk to engage in substance use and abuse at an early age. The Canadian Medical Association reports that 10 to 20 per cent of shelter residents are chronically homeless and have high rates of alcohol and drug addiction.

From AADAC's perspective what can Alberta do in the areas of homelessness and affordable housing as we work towards our goals in the prevention, treatment, and recovery of addictions? Well, AADAC currently funds a number of shelters that provide detoxification and treatment as well as transitional housing for adults in early recovery from addiction. All of these facilities are operating at capacity.

In the short term AADAC recommends that the number of these shelters and transitional housing sites be expanded by allocating additional resources to contracted partners and providers. This will provide more Albertans with safe places where they can recover from their addictions. Also in the short term additional funding needs to be directed to hiring dedicated staff to provide support

services for individuals living in these shelters and transitional housing. Many of these individuals often require mental health and ongoing addiction counselling services that they may have difficulty accessing. Providing it onsite helps them become self-reliant sooner.

In the long term Alberta needs to ensure that housing solutions are partnered with what we call wrap-around services. Services like case management support, mobile health care, and partnerships in smaller communities are the types of things individuals in these shelters and transitional housing need as they recover. These wrap-around services are important parts of our addictions treatment continuum.

Mr. Speaker, also in the long term we must ensure that our housing options match the housing and support needs of the clients moving through the stages of recovery from addiction. This system should be tailored towards the needs of specialized groups, like young adults, women, and aboriginals. Without a safe place to live and other transitional supports, there is a high risk that AADAC clients will relapse. These recommendations would not only help prevent addictions but would also ensure that our clients could move from our treatment services into a safe environment and continue on the road towards recovery and a healthy lifestyle.

AADAC remains committed to continuing to work with the task force as it goes through its final steps and, as the minister has the report, towards new solutions in addressing homelessness and affordable housing in Alberta. We remain committed to continuing to work with all levels of government, community groups, health agencies, and our many other partners in prevention and treatment of addictions because all Albertans deserve a safe and affordable place to live. They deserve our help when they need it, and they deserve to receive the best quality care available.

Thank you very much.

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is again available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to respond in this tradition at a stage that marks the debut of a new Premier, a man I respect for his decency and dedication to our province. I wish him well, both as a worthy opponent and as a fellow citizen. I applaud his intentions to see a greater measure of decorum in our debate and to restore a measure of democracy to the workings of government. I support his efforts and hope to see these goals achieved in the life of this Assembly.

The Crown in our system stands for more than the person who wears it and the throne is far more than the person who sits on it. The Speech from the Throne, therefore, is more than the speech by the Lieutenant Governor who reads it, the Premier and his staff who write it, or the government for which it is guiding policy. It speaks to the values we enthrone as a society, which is why it is short on specifics as some critics complain. I would rather hear a throne speech that sets out solid principles with particulars to follow than a list of legislative specifics without any explicit principles. I appreciate knowing truly where an administration is coming from. When we know that, the citizens of this province may allow time to get there if those principles are adhered to. So it is on the question of vision and values that I intend to focus here.

First, I'm pleased to note that the environment has moved to the number one place this year from third place in the last throne speech and that economic issues that took up two-thirds of the last speech now share the stage with other issues. The words economy and ecology come from the same root, which means management of a

household. Environment and economic growth can no longer be looked on as separate or opposing concerns. One can add to a house at a rapid rate – a new room, a deck, a second storey, or basement suite – but if the roof is leaking, the foundation is crumbling, or the air inside is unhealthy, all the expansion is pointless and counterproductive.

It is my earnest hope that the showcasing of environment in this throne speech represents a foundational improvement and not simply a lean-to added to the front end of the house for political correctness. If this is a real effort at management of a household and not simply business as usual where business runs the front and family lives in the back, a further question follows. What is it that makes a house a home? What makes a society a community or our fastest growing province a good place to live?

Quality of life is one of our new Premier's stated priorities. This must be accessible to all, not only the well-heeled and competitive or even the average Albertan but the most vulnerable among us. Children are canaries in the mine of our industrial society. There is asthma and allergies. There are learning disabilities. The challenges of gangs and latchkey kids are by-products of rapid growth. It is only fair that the benefactors of growth help to ease the growing pains. A sustainable society must be a child-friendly society. This is one quality that makes a house a home.

I was surprised and disappointed that children are not mentioned in the throne speech: surprised because the government took an important step in the funding of child care a few weeks ago, a step I thought it might use as a springboard to the other needed initiatives for children; disappointed because children's well-being is second only to the environment that sustains us all. I can't help but speculate why children were not mentioned. Was it because children's issues are seen as spending ones, and funding having been pledged in advance, they must now wait till budget before we hear about it again? Was it because the crises for children and teenagers are not seen as high profile in contrast with other choices we face? It is not enough to look on children's issues as problems in need of solution when children are an ongoing and vulnerable part of our humanity.

The preamble to the throne speech lists compassion for others as one of the values of Albertans. I commend the reinclusion of compassion as one of our fundamental values, one that has often been neglected in the past decade. I urge the government to consider where past cuts have not shown compassion and to consider putting those wrongs right.

What is the type of society we choose to build in Alberta? There are many words and phrases that we use without thinking, and we need to look at them more carefully. Self-reliant, for instance; we usually take it to mean independent or paying your own way. We've used that value in the past decade to bus welfare recipients out of the province, to prosecute panhandlers, to deny support for farmers' co-operatives, and to roll back collective bargaining rights of unionized working men and women. We supposed that depending on a co-op or collective was of less value than every man for himself. We don't do this with our families. We recognize that they deserve our love and support simply for being here. As children grow up, they want to become involved in the world and self-supporting, and we encourage them in this. But it's a rare parent that needs to kick their kids out of the house.

What about the spouse who chooses to work at a manual job to support the other through university or trade school and who ends up earning much less than the one she worked to support? What about the stay-at-home parent whose cash flow is limited? Is the other partner who works outside justified to claim self-reliance and to walk out on family support when he finds an alternative more interesting and attractive?

This is the market mentality: maximize your income and cut your losses. What about those who for reason of infirmity, accident, or other reason depend on public support? What about the businesses that make their profit and then leave others to clean up the mess? As we look at these examples, it becomes apparent that self-reliant or independent are no longer adequate measuring tools on a planet where we are all interdependent.

Another word we use easily as a value word is market-driven. Does that mean that anything that can command a market is okay? Apparently not. Slavery, child pornography, and the drug trade have all enjoyed a thriving market. What about products that cause accidents and allergies? By the time the market catches up with scams and con artists, innocent people have suffered. Do we blame the buyer who should beware, or do we hold responsible those who produce and distribute tainted goods and services? Clearly, there is a place for regulation and monitoring, much as we may dislike the words.

Let's look at the generations before us, the pioneers that we say we admire. They regulated days and hours of business not just for religious reasons but because they believed people should not have to work seven days a week. They limited entertainment they believed was not of value to the community. They supported education not as a return on investment but because they believed it was good in itself. In the biblical creation story we read seven times, "It was good," not it was profitable or lucrative or economically viable. A civilized society is one that supports the arts and education simply because they are good.

Our families may be dysfunctional and even neurotic in doing the same things over and over and expecting a different result, yet we don't shut them down or disown them according to a balance sheet. We recognize that they need acceptance, compassion, and forgiveness. Why don't we extend the same attitude to our society? Some say that the two should be different. We look to families for love, to society for justice. You can't run a society on principles that encourage freeloaders. But what about those who have no families, whose homes are the street, or those who have spent their lives in institutions and suddenly find that they have to fend for themselves when these are shut down?

Earlier I spoke about foster parents, whose families are bigger than DNA. They are the bridge between kin and community, a step beyond a survival society and into a civilized one. We need to support them more and follow their example. We can begin by recognizing the principle of the good Samaritan that being a neighbour is about acting with compassion.

In 1936 William Aberhart came to power in Alberta using this slogan: Poverty in the Midst of Plenty. Poverty was more evident then. Today it is kept invisible. Poverty was understandable in the Great Depression. Today it is inexcusable in an economic boom. Premier Aberhart and his followers believed in self-reliance and tempered this with a belief in the biblical command to plead for the fatherless, tend the widow, and share the harvest with the poor.

5:40

Let us look to the dispossessed in our society as an opportunity to lead in the abolition of poverty. Let us look to the vulnerable as an opportunity to show tenderness. Let us look to strangers as an opportunity to show friendship, and let us look to the struggling as a chance to offer strength and encouragement.

With the enormous wealth that comes from great growth there also comes accountability. May we not be like the rich man in the parable who hoards his goods and to whom the Almighty says: you fool. Let us rather build the kind of society which is not an advantage of some over others but where all can say: it is good.

The shield of the Alberta coat of arms, which is also on the provincial flag, is a visual value statement. Most of the crest is a landscape, a prairie field with a backdrop of the foothills and the Rocky Mountains against the sky. Above is a cross of St. George, symbolizing both old-world connections and spiritual values, values that now encompass many traditions built upon those of our First Nations, for whom the land was sacred. It is the land in its natural state that stands out. If we add the blue background of the Alberta flag, we have the colour of the planet as it appears from space. The only things on this shield that are not natural are the cross on top and the crop at the bottom. These blend into the natural: the cross into the sky and the crop to the earth.

This spectrum of earth and sky has been an Alberta feature for a long time. It inspired the Marquis of Lorne, one of Canada's first Governors General, who named our province after his wife. When he visited the west in the 1880s, he set the 121st psalm to a hymn, *Unto the Hills Around Do I Lift Up*, a bit of Alberta heritage that's sung around the world. Canadian singer/songwriter Connie Kaldor has written a later version called Hills of Salvation, with the words: there is power comes from money and fear; oh, see what men can do, but the power that rests in those God-given hills is a power I know to be true.

There are many things that do not appear on the Alberta shield: our industry, our cities, and our resources. But the things that really matter are there: transcended spiritual values and the magnificent landscape with the sweep and sense of awe that we may be losing as we become more focused on our own sophistication and achievements.

Five hundred years or in another millennium from now there may no longer be an Alberta or a Canada as political entities on the face

of the Earth, but there will still be the land. Will it still inspire awe and hope, or will it be pockmarked and disfigured by tailing ponds and strip mines, landfill sites and concrete ruins of civilization? Will the aboriginal words "as long as the rivers flow" still have meaning? Will our surpluses and low taxes matter?

Two things will matter: how we leave this land we've been blessed to live on and how we treat those with whom we share it. This government in this throne speech is taking baby steps to answer the first question of the environment. It still has to face the second challenge of building a truly compassionate and human society.

I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the Government House Leader, I'd just like to remind everyone that there will be a Youth Parliament in the Assembly during the constituency week, so if you could remove your computers and all papers off your desk, that would be very much appreciated.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to temporary Standing Order 3.1(1) I would now move that we adjourn until Monday, April 2, at 1 o'clock and encourage all members to work very hard in their constituencies during the first constituency week of this session.

[Motion carried; at 5:45 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday, April 2, at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 2, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/02

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of the Rockies, the denseness of our forests, the fertility of our farmland, the splendour of our rivers, the richness of our resources, the energy of our people. Then let us rededicate ourselves as wise stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, kindly join in now in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you, sir.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly the ambassador from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, His Excellency Nguyen Duc Hung. With Ambassador Nguyen is the first secretary of the Vietnamese embassy in Ottawa, Mr. Nguyen Viet Dzung. I had the opportunity to have lunch with these two gentlemen today. In one of life's little coincidences I actually first met Ambassador Nguyen in Vietnam in a meeting I had with the Prime Minister of Vietnam a little over a year ago. Ambassador Nguyen is here today to explore trade opportunities with the province of Alberta, which, by the way, have doubled in the last two years, as well as to look at labour relations with Alberta for the potential of supplying labour to Alberta for our workforce needs. I would ask Ambassador Nguyen and Mr. Nguyen Viet Dzung to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud to introduce four people from my staff who are either brand new or relatively new policy analysts. The first is Chris Tyrkalo. He is the person that does our action requests in our branch. The second, Brandon Lundy, is newly appointed to our ministry, responsible for the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy. The third, Sylvia Lepki, has been a policy analyst since November, and

she's also working on the 10-year labour force strategy. Finally, Sheila Harrison, from the workforce development branch, has previously worked as an adviser and worked for contract service providers in career services. She is also working on many of the areas where we complement Children's Services and Persons with Development Disabilities. I'd ask them to please stand and be acknowledged by this Assembly.

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some employees of Children's Services who worked on a successful and award-winning campaign on the prevention of family violence. The Advertising Club of Edmonton, or ACE, is a nonprofit organization that through networking, professional development, and competition assists Edmonton's advertising community to strive for excellence. Each year ACE honours the best work by local agencies on regional, provincial, and national campaigns judged by a panel of senior advertising experts from across North America.

The prevention of family violence campaign called End the Silence, Stop the Violence won a number of ACE awards on March 3. Fight Circle won the public service broadcast ACE award, the television single award, and the people's choice award. I want to add that the people's choice award is selected based on a survey of Albertans. The one called Postcard won the public service print award of distinction. Finally, the entire campaign won the advertising campaign award of distinction.

Mr. Speaker, family violence is a dark mark on society, and we know that education is a key to bringing it to an end. This campaign is a big step towards bringing the issue of family violence out in the open, where we can optimize opportunities to help victims and break the cycle of violence.

I'd like to ask the people who helped develop this award-winning campaign to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Sheryl Fricke, Keltie MacPherson, Desiree Magnus, Lisa Nisbet, Tom Fowler, Deborah Hurford, Jackie Katan, and Shane Gauthier.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly four esteemed members of the Alberta pharmacy community who are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that you join me in welcoming them when they've all been introduced. All of these guests are working hard on behalf of Alberta's pharmacists to ensure that Albertans are provided with outstanding quality of care. They're here today to commemorate the enactment of the pharmacists profession regulation, which came into effect yesterday, April 1. This regulation widens the scope of practice for health care professionals and is a key component of our workforce strategy. From the Alberta College of Pharmacists we have Greg Eberhart, registrar of the college, and Mr. Jeff Whissell, president of the college. From the Pharmacists Association of Alberta we have Mr. Cam Johnston, acting CEO, and Mr. Jeremy Slobodan, board president. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have 31 students from the St. Joseph school in Whitecourt. They are accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Marilyn Wright and Mrs. Penny Bell as well as parent helpers Colleen Matvichuk, Michelle

Pederson, Kyla Rose, Ken Podulsky, Bryan Retzliff, Ken Westling, Tom Jackson, Sonya Lavallee, Kathy McIvor, Sheila Stuckless, Bea Samson. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe my guests may not have arrived yet, but I would like to introduce them to you and through you to all members when they arrive later during question period. They're a group of 21 political science students from The King's University College here in Edmonton. They'll be accompanied by their political science professor, Dr. John Hiemstra, and they'll be spending a couple of hours in the building here today studying how we do government in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce a family friend and dynamic young political science student from the University of Alberta, Ryan Fontaine. I'll ask him to stand up and receive the welcome of the Legislature.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a trusted friend, a valued supporter, a fellow Rotarian, and the past president of the Edmonton Gateway Rotary Club, Mr. Patrick Slinn. I would ask Patrick to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three guests today. They are Janet Gibbens, Hellen Shiloff, and Don Crisall. Today is the 206th day of the strike at the Palace Casino. Janet has worked at the casino for 14 years as a dealer. She is one of the leaders of the strike and has been a powerful voice for workers. The union has just won a victory against the employer's attempt to refuse the right of workers to wear union pins, and Janet's testimony helped win this battle.

1:10

Hellen Shiloff has worked at the Palace Casino since the summer of 1991 and is a pit boss. Hellen grew up in Cambria, Alberta, and has lived in Edmonton since 1966. She has been a very strong picketer on the line and since the strike began has been appointed to the union's bargaining committee. Despite the length of the strike she remains as resilient as ever.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, they are joined by one of UFCW local 401's organizers, Mr. Don Crisall. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Lexi and Brad Golinsky. Lexi and Brad are from Leduc, where Brad

is a constable for the RCMP and Lexi is an elementary school teacher. They are also avid baseball and hockey players, and last but not least Lexi is my first cousin. I'd ask Lexi and Brad in the public gallery to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm especially delighted today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly five guests seated in the public gallery. Akashya and Prabhat Sharma are visiting our wonderful country and province from my home town of Jalandhar in Punjab, India. Akashya Sharma is a physician specializing in Ayurvedic medicine, and both he and his wife are proud parents of two lovely children, Priya and Pavithar.

Accompanying them are their hosts, three long-time Edmontonians, Kamni and Shakti Goutam and their son Nauneet. Kamni Goutam is one of the pioneers in the Indo-Canadian community, having come to Edmonton in the late 1960s, and has been a long-time local businessman in Edmonton. His wife, Shakti, has been serving our community for the past 30 years through her work with seniors at Extendicare Holyrood. Nauneet, their son, is a student at NAIT studying business and marketing. I will now request my guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this great House of democracy three visitors to our Assembly today. They are Michael Janusz and his lovely wife, Irmie, as well as Catherine Obacz. Now, Michael is a former French foreign legionnaire, who distinguished himself in battle and was a 33-year engineer with CN Rail. Irmie was, of course, the executive director of the Whitecourt chamber of commerce in the past and was also the president of the executive directors across the province for chambers of commerce. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Alberta Legislature, and please welcome them.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Opportunities for New Canadians

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is the home of approximately 40,000 Vietnamese Canadians, many of whom came to Canada in the 1980s as political refugees. If you were to ask these individuals what they value the most in Alberta, the answer would resoundingly be the freedom that they enjoy, followed closely by the respect held for human rights in our province. Vietnamese Canadians are provided the same opportunities as every other Canadian to reach their full potential, and as a result many of the first and second generations are highly successful. They have become doctors, lawyers, CEOs, engineers, and scientists. They have made their dreams reality, and our society is richer because of their contribution. These same people would have probably ended up on the street or in jail had they not left Vietnam.

When people are not allowed to reach their full potential, all of society loses. It is not a coincidence that poverty usually walks hand in hand with a poor record of human rights. Take North and South Korea as examples. North Korea has everything that South Korea

has, but their human capital is grossly underutilized and not allowed to fulfill its potential. As a result, North Korea is much poorer than South Korea.

In the United States following the American Civil War, Robert E. Lee, the general-in-chief of the south, was treated with respect and dignity by the north. When asked why a general of a defeated army was treated with such respect, the reason provided was that they were all Americans, and if one was humiliated, they were all humiliated. I believe that this is the correct way to rebuild a country, and I hope that all war-torn countries can learn from that lesson.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Thaddeus Demong

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me today to draw to the attention of all Albertans through the hon. members of this House the incredible works of Dr. Thaddeus Demong, a hero of mine and a constituent of mine in Calgary-Lougheed. Thad was born and educated in Sarawak, Malaysia, on the island of Borneo. He's one of nine children of a tribal chief, and as a young man he was a top-tier Colombo plan student who fought hard to pursue studies in medicine at the University of Alberta. Afterward Thad returned to Sarawak, where as a medical officer he promoted development of a new rural hospital and public health policies in TB control and sanitation.

Dr. Demong immigrated to Canada in 1974 and began an ophthalmology residency at the U of A. He went on to obtain a fellowship in corneal surgery and then established his extremely well-respected practice in Calgary. Thad has worked extensively in establishing the Lion's Eye Bank of southern Alberta for the procurement and timely distribution of corneal tissue and has been recognized for his work by the Lions Clubs International Foundation as a distinguished Melvin Jones fellow.

In addition to all of this, Thad has participated in the Canadian vision care program, which operates in developing countries such as Jamaica and in Dr. Demong's native Sarawak. Thad has also taught medical students and residents at the University of Kuala Lumpur.

Mr. Speaker, in 2005 I was honoured to offer Dr. Demong an Alberta centennial medallion, and last month he received the 2007 immigrant of distinction professional award from the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society.

I have the utmost personal and professional respect for Dr. Demong and his wonderful wife, Carol, who have worked on so many organizations and have provided the priceless gift of sight to thousands around Alberta and around the world. I trust that members of this Assembly will join me now in expressing admiration and gratitude for the miracles that the Demongs work every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Building Leadership for Action in Schools Today

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize an outstanding group of young women attending the Nellie McClung program at Oliver school in Edmonton-Centre. These young women formed a BLAST team, building leadership for action in schools today, in their school with the help of the Alberta Lung Association and AADAC. They have done an undercover investigation, a video, a media event and public presentation, a postcard campaign to the previous minister of health, and have worked with me as their MLA. Last year I hosted this BLAST team

here in the Assembly during the debate on the cancer legacy act, and this year I am bringing forward Motion 523 to support their campaign to ban power walls.

These Nellie girls have been awarded a blue ribbon champion award by the Edmonton and Area Tobacco Reduction Network for their work in banning power walls. Now they're taking the next step in organizing a half-day conference for their peers at a rally on the steps of the Legislature tomorrow at noon, April 3, and we have asked again for a meeting with the minister in the hopes that we can convince him to join us and ban power walls. These power walls are the large tobacco displays that are a fixture in every gas station and convenience store showing the packages of most tobacco brands. This feature is why our kids know what the colour a package of du Maurier is and what the logo for a Camels pack of cigarettes looks like.

I'm very proud of the work that the Nellie girls have done over the past two years. Some members of the BLAST team have moved on but all have learned important lessons about working for the issues they believe in, how to conduct research, organize public and media events, including conferences, and how to lobby politicians to influence policy change. Supported by their teachers, parents, friends, and schoolmates, they've done a great job. My thanks to everyone involved.

Please join us on the steps of the Legislature tomorrow.

1:20

Standards of Practice for Pharmacists

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the pharmacists profession regulation and new standards of practice which came into effect on April 1, 2007. Under these new regulations pharmacists, in accordance with their standards of practice, are permitted to continue or adapt a prescription written by another prescriber, prescribe drug treatments, and administer injections such as vaccines.

To ensure the highest standards of patient safety, pharmacists who choose to prescribe must complete training established by the Alberta College of Pharmacists. Pharmacists will only prescribe for those conditions that they are competent to assess. Community- and institution-based pharmacists will still need to maintain their continuing education requirements to keep up with new drugs and therapies.

Expanding the scope of practice of pharmacists is an example of our health workforce strategy in action. By leveraging the expertise of pharmacists, we are enabling them to work better as part of the health care team, along with doctors and other health professionals, to provide a better level of service in the community.

Pharmacists are drug experts. We rely on them to answer our questions in order to maintain our health. After a minimum of five years of university training, four of which are in pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences, pharmacists are able to take on more responsibility in providing advice, assessing patients, and prescribing and dispensing drugs.

The Health Professions Act is enabling legislation that allows all health professionals to use their skills and training to their full extent. Pharmacists now have that opportunity. The pharmacists profession regulation came into force April 1. Services offered depend on the expertise of the pharmacist. Each pharmacist will choose the expanded services they will add to their practice.

Mr. Speaker, for generations pharmacists have been a trusted source of advice and knowledge about drug products, associated supplies, and complementary therapies. We are looking to pharmacists and other health care professionals to take on a larger role in providing primary health care in our communities and neighbourhoods.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Federal Barley Plebiscite

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the results of the federal barley plebiscite, that were announced on March 28. The federal barley plebiscite results show that a strong and clear majority of Albertan and western Canadian producers have chosen to have the option of selling their barley in an open market. Sixty-two per cent of western Canadian barley farmers and 78 per cent of Alberta barley farmers have voted for choice. These results confirm what the Alberta government already knew, that a strong and clear majority of Alberta producers are ready for more competitive options to maximize their grain marketing opportunities.

It is now time for action on this matter. We are pleased that the federal government will open the market by August 1 of this year. With the results in, it's time for the government of Canada, the Canadian Wheat Board, and the industry to work together to strengthen the barley marketing system.

The Canadian Wheat Board must now translate their extensive experience into success in an open market. Alberta's position has always been that there is a role for the Canadian Wheat Board in an open and competitive barley market. We are looking forward, as I know all Albertan producers are, to true marketing choice in the marketing of barley for all Canadian producers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Patient Safety in Hospitals

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans deserve to know that their health care system is safe and that when they visit a hospital, they won't come out sicker than when they went in. Albertans were understandably concerned when the government announced serious problems with infection controls at St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville. The minister of health assured us at that time that this was an isolated incident, a claim that was brought into question by revelations about problems in Lloydminster and in Canmore.

There's clearly a need for an independent, system-wide, and public inquiry. The inquiry should start by getting a complete understanding of the impact of the drastic cuts to health care in the '90s and the chronic underfunding that followed. By consistently starving the health system, this government has forced many regions and facilities to simply make do. We know, for example, that St. Joseph's hospital has been requesting a surgical washing machine for a number of years but has never been provided the funds to obtain one.

The second issue is the failure of the Conservative government to support a province-wide system for monitoring and enforcing standards in hospitals. They have asked local hospitals to do more with less and then turned a blind eye to the pressures this approach brings.

The Health Quality Council is not the appropriate body to investigate this concern, and the self-evaluation the minister requested last week is just not good enough. The minister's review will not be independent and will not be public. Neither review will seriously assess government responsibility for this crisis.

In response to the numerous e-mails, letters, and phone calls received by my caucus, today I released a petition on behalf of the NDP opposition that we will be circulating among Albertans. The petition urges the government to immediately establish a public

inquiry into the failure of the health care system to protect the safety of patients in its care and provide recommendations to correct the situation. I invite all Albertans to visit www.ndpopposition.ab.ca for more details on this petition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. chair of the Select Standing Committee on Private Bills, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

head:

Presenting Petitions

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I beg leave to present the following petitions that have been received for private bills under Standing Order 98(2):

- (1) the petition of Ian Wilms for the CyberPol - The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act, and
- (2) the petition of Dan Reinhardt for the CREST Leadership Centre Act.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling a petition with the required number of copies from the residents of Monarch Place in Red Deer-North. The petition respectfully requests a formal inquiry into the reasons for the demise of this affordable housing complex before the impending sale.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from Leona Laddish, Olga Eliuk, and Emily Palynchuk, who are the nieces of the late Dr. Myron Shewchuk. Dr. Shewchuk was admitted to St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville and subsequently passed away, apparently because of complications arising from MRSA. The authors of the letter, like the Alberta NDP opposition, are calling for a full public inquiry into our health system's infection control programs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of British Columbia's Bill 17. B.C. is debating and passing legislation regarding the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, unlike the Alberta government, which has virtually been silent on this important issue.

My second document is an e-mail from Zelma Hardin. Ms Hardin's 83-year-old mother had a fall last year, and while she was in the Royal Alex hospital, she contracted a superbug. The letter vividly describes the agony she and her mother went through.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter sent to Dr. Erik Wasylenko, who is responsible for patient experience within the Calgary health region. In her letter regarding the changes to home care, Anne Lyon, on behalf of her husband, Richard Morris, notes that "whatever

problems the region was trying to solve . . . the implementation appears unplanned and uncompassionate.”

My second tabling, entitled Turning the Key, celebrates the opening of the fabulous new Ronald McDonald House adjacent to the equally wonderful, new children’s hospital in Calgary-Varsity constituency. I would encourage the government to consider supporting Inn from the Cold in acquiring the old facility.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is from constituent Rosalee Galper. She is a woman with a progressive disability who lives independently with the assistance of caregivers using the self-managed care program. She notes that the dollar values that were satisfactory for this program in the ‘90s are far behind what is needed to both attract and retain workers today. So that’s her letter.

The second tabling. I’d like to table the appropriate number of copies of correspondence from Betty Gamble, who was very concerned with the Premier’s comments on the old Holy Cross hospital. She feels that it’s time the government cleaned up their act and put citizens first and feels that this is nothing except for entitlement by some very prominent Calgary businessmen and their slow pressure toward privatization.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

St. Joseph’s General Hospital

Dr. Taft: To the Premier: when did the Premier first become aware that there were serious problems with health care delivery at St. Joe’s hospital?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I was made aware of the issue with respect to sterilization Thursday, I believe, March 15. That was the day.

Dr. Taft: Very interesting, Mr. Speaker. Connie Marcinkoski, whose father died of MRSA-related pneumonia, has phone records proving that she contacted the Premier’s constituency office and had a 16-minute conversation in October 2003 relating her concerns about her father’s safety and care at the hospital. She never heard back. To the Premier. The Premier committed 11 days ago to look through his archive to find this information. Has the Premier followed through on his commitment to find these records?

Mr. Stelmach: This member got up in the House the first time he raised it and said it was a letter, so we were going through all of the records. You asked a question, so we’re checking to see if there was a letter written through the archives because this goes back to 2003. Subsequently that afternoon we heard one of the media interviewing the lady, and it was a phone call to my constituency assistant at that particular time.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: has the Premier returned that call yet? It’s three and a half years overdue.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the lady had called. She had spoken to our constituency assistant at that particular time, raised what I believe was an issue with respect to a health service in the hospital.

My constituency assistant thanked her for the call, and that completed that particular issue.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds, actually, like the Premier knew about this problem years ago. The Premier previously questioned whether there was any documentation to support the claims of problems at St. Joseph’s hospital. A November 2003 letter from East Central health region indicates that Robert Bruce “most likely [was] exposed to MRSA while in Acute Care at St. Joseph’s hospital in October 2003.” Further, a 2004 investigation under the Protection for Persons in Care Act recommended that St. Joe’s hospital in Vegreville “ensure all staff are trained and consistent in MRSA protocol.” Will the Premier admit that there was a serious breakdown in health care delivery at St. Joseph’s hospital?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the follow-up the minister of health will answer.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this is no secret. It’s been talked about before. In fact, I mentioned it when this issue with respect to the sterilization was first mentioned two weeks ago. St. Joe’s hospital has had a problem over the years with MRSA. It’s not an unusual problem. Other hospitals, other places not just in Alberta but right across North America have been dealing with a superbug issue. There is a level of superbug and other bacteria. People would not be surprised to know that there are bacteria and viruses in hospitals right across North America and around the world. So this is not new, and the fact that there are incidents and that there were incidents at St. Joseph’s is not new.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the residents of Vegreville and, indeed, Alberta have questions about the safety of their health facilities and the ability of this government to protect them, yet the Premier has still not made it a priority of his to meet with the residents of Vegreville on this issue. What was more important on the Premier’s agenda in the last 10 days than arranging a public meeting on this life-and-death issue?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, my agenda, where I’ve been in different corners of the province, is very public. I’ve been in very close contact with my constituents, and I can assure you I will always do a much better job of serving the constituents of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville than that person will ever do. [interjections]

Dr. Taft: Prop him up, folks. Prop him up. Clearly, this Premier needs to be propped up by his backbenchers here, Mr. Speaker.

Again I ask: what was more important on your agenda than meeting with your own constituents on this life-and-death issue?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the other reasons why I’ll better serve the constituents of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is because I tell the truth. That’s very important to this House and to all other Albertans.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask you: where is the truth in the Premier saying he only learned about this issue 10 days ago

when there's a strong paper trail indicating that his office knew about this three years ago? Where's the truth?

Mr. Stelmach: The truth, Mr. Speaker, is that there was a phone call to the constituency. He's talking about a paper trail, a strong paper trail. One phone call to the constituency, and that's raised by the Official Opposition.

But on the other hand, you know, with respect to being in Vegreville, because this seems to be a real issue for the Leader of the Opposition, the CBC had a program right out of Chin's restaurant. Our minister was there to take the calls with respect to a very specific issue with respect to health delivery. The people there were satisfied that we were doing a good job in terms of representing those constituents and the safety of health.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's not going to wash with the people of Alberta. They want a government that responds.

It's clear that cuts to the health care system have dismantled strict government oversight and left us with a patchwork of organizations trying to enforce and monitor events. Who, Mr. Premier, is responsible for protecting Albertans? Each facility? Is it the regions? Is it the Health Facilities Review Committee, the Health Quality Council, or some other organization? Who is responsible for the health care system?

Mr. Stelmach: The minister of health, who reports to me.

Dr. Taft: So, again, Mr. Speaker, why won't this Premier take responsibility, admit that this problem has been in place for years? His office has been informed. There is correspondence from the East Central health region. There is correspondence from the Protection for Persons in Care Act. There's a long set of records. Will the Premier finally take responsibility, meet his residents, follow through, and protect the interests of Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is more than just about meeting residents. This is critically looking at what had transpired in the hospital. Remember, there are two issues here. It's the lack of protocol, or protocol was not followed with respect to the sterilization of equipment, and of course the other issue was with respect to the superbug. With respect to the superbug, all we have to say: please wash your hands.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Medical Safety Standards

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, the Premier would love to wash his hands of this issue, but I think that's not going to solve it, Mr. Premier. Albertans are worried that the problems at St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville and the women's health clinic in Lloydminster are just the tip of the iceberg. They're worried that when they go into a hospital or their loved ones go into a hospital, they might come out sicker than when they went in, and the government still refuses to allow an independent, system-wide inquiry. My question is to the Premier. How can the Premier reassure the people of Alberta that our health care is safe when he refuses to appoint an independent commission of inquiry to look into this matter?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have health professionals who have

been in Vegreville for some time. These are people very respected in the profession. They are of course studying the situation and will bring recommendations forward to the minister. If there's any requirement in terms of legislation or any other thing we could do as the government, we will move immediately on it.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, there's no centralized enforcement of safety standards in medical facilities, including hospitals, in the province, and there hasn't been one since the early 1990s, when this government saw fit to eviscerate the health care system by cutting funds, nurses, and doctors, led by the Deep Six, of which the current Premier was a member. Will the Premier finally admit that this is a province-wide issue and ensure that structures are put in place that will guarantee proper inspections and a follow-up of safety standards across the province reporting to the ministry of health?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party talks about massive cuts. In 1993 to '94 the budget for health was about \$3.2 billion, \$3.3 billion, and I believe at that time the government took about \$200 million out of the total budget. Most of that was of course reducing the number of hospital boards we had across the province. So most of the substantial amount came in the reduction of administration throughout the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Alberta New Democrat opposition is starting a petition calling for an independent public inquiry. We invite all members of this House to visit www.ndpopposition.ab.ca to sign that.

I'd like to ask the Premier why it was the province has failed to provide money to St. Joseph's hospital for a surgical washing machine despite their request, which is outstanding for a number of years? Why has the government failed St. Joseph's hospital in this matter?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the government has not failed anyone.

With respect to the administrative matter the minister of health will respond.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I understand it, the piece of equipment in question is on back order, has been ordered and been approved a long time ago.

This type of equipment is not something that's approved at the level of the province but, rather, at the level of the regional health authority. The regional health authority has responsibility to make sure that appropriate sterilization processes are in place for their facilities, and if they don't have it in that one facility, they can sterilize equipment at another facility, but they have dealt with this request. They've ordered the equipment in question. That is not the issue with respect to the problem, the failure in following the protocols, which happened at St. Joe's.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The unfunded pension liability in the teachers' pension plan has been a significant issue for a number of years now, and it's becoming more of a detriment than ever before to teacher retention and teacher recruitment. I'm very aware of previous efforts and of the difficulties involved in resolving

this. Nonetheless, the time has come. I feel that a formal process ought to be put in place. So my questions are to the Minister of Education. Mr. Minister, will you implement a formal process to address, perhaps to recommence, or to renegotiate this matter as soon as possible? [interjections]

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it needs to be put on record that there is an existing agreement in place, that was signed in 1992 between the government of Alberta and the Alberta Teachers' Association, to address the unfunded liability issue. However, we also recognize that that liability now stands at some \$6.4 billion, \$2.1 billion of which, it should be noted, is the teachers' responsibility. We also recognize that this unfunded pension liability is a detriment to recruiting new teachers, so we will be addressing it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Zwoddesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among all of the wrongful cries from opposition members, I would like, please, to have a little bit of silence for this next question. Perhaps we could get their attention to support this important issue and resolve this matter instead of just catcalling against it. So my supplemental question is: what roles would the minister foresee being played by the ATA and by the Alberta School Boards Association in addressing this complicated matter?

Mr. Liepert: Well, it should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that the issue of the unfunded liability is between the government of Alberta and the Alberta Teachers' Association. To that end, I had a meeting last week with the president of the ATA to start these discussions, so that will be continuing. We would be seeking input from school board trustees as we would with any citizens of Alberta. However, this really is an issue between the ATA and the government of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Zwoddesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I think it bears mentioning that there are other jurisdictions who have faced similar issues, and one of particular interest lately, in addition to several others, is the jurisdiction of Manitoba. I'm wondering if the minister has had a chance to look at that jurisdiction's resolution to this issue, and if not, will he proceed post-haste to take a look at it?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba government last week decided to refinance their portion of the unfunded liability, and that's something that we are considering looking at, but that really doesn't address the unfunded issue that the teachers are facing, where 3 per cent of a teacher's salary today goes to paying the portion that in many cases young teachers had absolutely nothing to do with. That's the part that we're going to try and address.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

St. Joseph's General Hospital (continued)

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the situation at St. Joe's hospital seems to have led to a number of deaths. It is requiring at least several hundred tests to be administered around the province. It has now spilled over into Saskatchewan, where they're having to undertake tests as well. There have been problems in the East Central health region, particularly St. Joe's hospital, for years. The Premier

mentioned his schedule. On Monday, March 26, no scheduled engagements were listed. Why was he not able to meet with the residents of Vegreville, in his constituency, at a public meeting on this issue on March 26?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I've said this before in this House. I've said it to the media. This is again being driven by the opposition in terms of why I'm not conducting some sort of a public meeting in Vegreville. This issue, of course, is a medical matter; it's not a political one. This issue is very important to me as the MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and I've also said that we'll do whatever we have to do to ensure that this does not happen again not only in Vegreville but in any other health facility in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People in Vegreville and people around this province are concerned when one of their hospitals is closed. This is an issue of accountability. This is an issue of leadership. Why was it more important for this Premier on Wednesday, March 28, to go to Lac La Biche to address the Alberta Association of Colleges and Technical Institutes round-table than to meet with the constituents in Vegreville over the closure of their hospital?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, the hospital is not closed. So that's wrong. Secondly, to me as Premier of this province the aboriginal and the Métis are very important. We were there to see how we can include them further in job opportunities that are available in this province of Alberta. We had a joint conference with leaders from British Columbia sharing their experiences with our college leaders in the province of Alberta, trying to find, of course, new ways of providing opportunities for First Nations and Métis to be involved in not only job opportunities but to see how we can further include them in the education system.

Dr. Taft: Again to the Premier. The Premier's schedule indicates that on Friday, March 30, no appointments were scheduled. Can the Premier indicate to the people of Vegreville and the people of Alberta why he couldn't take the time to have a public meeting on the crisis in the hospital in his own constituency?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, there wasn't a crisis. Friday morning I was on my way to Fairview. I spent the whole day in Fairview meeting with NAIT. We met with a group of farmers with respect to the issue of transportation. We met with a whole myriad of different individuals.

With respect to the public meeting the minister himself was there. It was a CBC-sponsored – I forget what they called it. He gave a full explanation. You know, for something that's been advertised and is supposed to be a crisis, like the leader says, the café was only about half full, and the people were wondering why the CBC was taking up so much room. They wanted to have their cup of coffee in peace.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Peace and Police Officer Training Centre

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The 2002 report of the MLA Policing Review Committee recommended a single-site centre for policing excellence for the training and ongoing profes-

sional development of police and peace officers in Alberta. In August of 2006 Fort Macleod, within the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod, was announced as the preferred site for the proposed Alberta police and peace officers training centre, but since then nothing has happened, and we have not heard of anything. My question is to the Solicitor General and the Minister of Public Security. Can he update the House on the current status of the project?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and let me thank the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod for the opportunity to shed some light on this very much-needed project. This training centre is an important part of our commitment to provide safe and secure communities in which Albertans can live, work, and raise their families. I can assure the hon. member that in the time since Fort Macleod was selected as the preferred site last August, a lot of work has already been done to make this centre a reality. But there's still a lot more to do before we can put a shovel in the ground. At the moment they're working with Alberta Infrastructure and the town of Fort Macleod to determine building requirements. Once this process is complete, we will release a request for expression of interest . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: in keeping with the Premier's comment about safe communities, what are the advantages of a single-site facility such as this centre compared to the current training practices?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, training and professional development for law enforcement officers currently take place in a variety of locations across our province, and standards and practices are not always consistent. The new centre will help set and maintain a superior standard of training for all police and peace officers in Alberta. It will deliver basic training and professional development of police and peace officers, including special constables, corrections officers, private investigators, and security guards in Alberta. It will offer regular, recertification, and specialized training for all Alberta police and peace officers.

Mr. Coutts: My last supplemental to the same minister: will law enforcement stakeholders have an opportunity for input to the planning and to the curriculum developed for this centre?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me say that few people are as passionate and dedicated about what they do in our community as those of law enforcement and security communities. Their feedback and input are critical as they move forward with this initiative and many others to ensure safe and secure communities. We will continue to seek their input on the design and development of the centre both on an individual basis and through these provincial bodies which represent policing. We have already received much valuable input. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that all of this input is being very carefully considered.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Support for Low-income Albertans

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the leadership campaign the Premier publicly stated that it's absolutely shameful that Canada's most prosperous province cannot take better care of the people who are not able to care for themselves. Over the weekend my colleagues and I here in this Legislature were awarded an automatic salary increase of 4.9 per cent. Given that the Premier himself has stated that the government's support for our most vulnerable citizens is absolutely shameful, will the Premier commit today to giving AISH recipients the same raise that we have received?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the amount of indemnity, the increase to all of us was done by the Members' Services Committee. This is done based on a formula that was agreed to by all parties – all parties.

Now, with respect to the other question on AISH and others in the province of Alberta, we are working through how we can best support those in great need. These are, of course, AISH, and our seniors in the province, that really are of great importance to this government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seeing how the Premier has given me an inch, I'm going to go for the yard. Increases in the cost of living are affecting all Albertans, and many have not been able to keep up. Now that the MLAs' salaries have been increased, can the Premier tell us when the salaries of PDD workers, social workers, child care workers, and emergency shelter workers will receive similar salary increases?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there has been some movement recently by the minister responsible in terms of closing the gap. There is a gap between those that are working for volunteer organizations, not-for-profit, and also those working for the government. We'd like to close that. The other is to ensure that we do support the not-for-profit organizations, and that's why we have a consultation in place to see how we can increase the charitable tax credits, see how we can match out of nonrenewable resources the funding going to charitable organizations, that do such a good service in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those are good words to hear. However, I'm really sort of a time-frame kind of person. So I'm willing to donate half of my increased salary to a related charity in a show of support for having AISH benefits indexed and will table a letter to the House monthly with the details of that. Given the Premier's statements of concern on the issue, would he join with me in that pledge?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I am of course quite happy, in fact privileged, that both my wife, Marie, and I have the ability to donate to so many charitable causes in the province of Alberta. Whether it will increase by whatever the percentage was, probably much more than that because I do have great warmth in my heart for the not-for-profit and charitable organizations in this province.

You know, everybody on that side, including now the Leader of the Official Opposition, got an increase. In fact, it says this morning that for the first time the Premier of Alberta has a bigger increase

than the Premier before. Well, I guess so has the Official Opposition leader.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Calgary Industrial Sites Cleanup

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our Calgary-Fort constituency covers the largest industrial area in Calgary and our living environment is very important to my constituents, my question today is to the hon. Minister of Environment. Given that the Lynnview Ridge contamination cleanup work in my constituency has been going since last summer, can the minister update us on this file as to when it will be done?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this remediation agreement has been in place since 2005, and Imperial Oil is continuing to clean up residential properties to Alberta Environment's very strict requirements. We continue to oversee this cleanup operation and will ensure that ongoing soil samples meet our standards before approving final remediation and issuing appropriate certificates. I can't give the member a specific date, but I can assure the member that the community involvement is and will continue to be a key component in any final plan for the future in this area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given yet another situation in the northeast corner of my riding, an industrial park where a demolished oil recycling plant was located, can the minister update us on this cleanup as to when the remediation plan submitted by the property owner will be decided on so new development can take place?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, Hub Oil is not posing any significant threat as it stands today, but I understand the concern of the community in that they would like to use the site for alternate uses. The member is quite correct. The company has submitted a draft plan, and our staff are currently reviewing that plan. It's the intention that that plan will be presented to a multistakeholder committee and the public for input. Once we're all satisfied that Hub Oil's plan meets our environmental standards, work can begin to remediate the site.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. Given another situation in the southeast corner of my riding, in Ogden, where the seepage of cleaning liquid from the railway shop was discovered three years ago flowing into underground water, can the minister update us on this file again?

2:00

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, when we're dealing with old industrial sites, these are the kinds of contamination issues that have to be dealt with. In this particular case there is ongoing monitoring. Again, CP Rail is responsible and will continue to be responsible to clean up the site in an appropriate manner. Indoor air quality monitoring in homes and in the Ogden school is ongoing. Where necessary a vapour control unit is installed, and that has proven successful in protecting indoor air quality. The committee that's ensuring that the indoor air quality and all air quality in the area is handled appropri-

ately is a joint committee of Alberta Environment, the Alberta health region, and the city of Calgary, and they continue monitoring on an ongoing basis.

Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility

Mr. Bonko: Yesterday the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, TILMA, came into effect in this province. There will now be no laws, measures passed in this House that may operate to restrict or impair trade or investment or labour mobility between this province and British Columbia. My questions are to the Premier. Will he publicly release all regulatory and legislative changes required to implement TILMA?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have till 2009 to work through various authorities, municipalities, academics, et cetera, as we work towards fulfilling the agreement. You know, it's 2007, and in this country we still have to bring about changes to trade rules that were put in place many, many years ago actually to impede the movement of goods and services. In fact, we had in this province two vehicle inspection stations to measure the weight of a truck, and to me, in this country I think a kilogram is a kilogram on this side of the border and on that side. Today we have one vehicle inspection station. The truck stops once.

Mr. Bonko: Many Albertans are concerned with TILMA's impact on the province. Many support the agreement, and there are many that disagree with the agreement, yet even on its face the government refuses to bring this before the House, the democratic heart of Alberta. It prefers press releases and backroom deals to democracy and debate. When will this government bring this agreement to the House for open debate in front of the people of Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, I do have to give credit to the Premier of the province of Alberta – of B.C. . . .

An Hon. Member: Well, sure.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, to me as well.

. . . to the Premier of the province of B.C. for his vision in moving forward. This now makes us the second-largest market force in Canada. It's of great importance to future generations in terms of future wealth creation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is already having to send a letter to municipalities trying to fill a hole in this agreement. They say it was not their intention for municipalities to lose their ability to set zoning bylaws. They even promise to speak up for municipalities when these problems appear. Given that this letter holds absolutely no legal weight and TILMA now does, will this Premier commit to changing TILMA so that these problems do not arise?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I've spent considerable time with municipal leaders. In fact, I had a good chat with the president of the AAMD and C, spent some time with the two city mayors. They have not raised a concern at all with respect to TILMA. If there are further issues that come forward – like I said, we have till 2009, and we'll keep working on any issues that are raised by those authorities.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will continue the same discussion. The trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement came into force on April Fool's Day, and Albertans have virtually been told nothing, absolutely nothing about this agreement. There's been no debate, no consultation, yet this agreement could have huge ramifications not only for business but for school boards, municipalities, health regions, and even farmers. As I say, the government has been virtually silent on this. My question is a simple, straightforward one. To the Premier: why have there been no public hearings or consultations with all the people potentially affected by TILMA?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, this is a very good agreement for both provinces. It builds the second-largest trade relationship, between Alberta and B.C. As I said before, we have till 2009 to work out any kind of differences that there are. The member says, "no consultation." We've had consultation with all of the groups, from engineers to – well, I'll have the minister next time list all the groups that we met with over the last couple of years.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, frankly, if you would ask people what TILMA is, they wouldn't understand or even know about it. They've never heard of it. My question to the Premier is simply this. The B.C. government brought this forward in legislation so that people would at least know about it. Why has the Alberta government not done the same thing?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have met with all those individuals, authorities, organizations that have anything to do with respect to the agreement. There were some issues in the beginning in terms of further dialogue. We worked through a lot of them. If there are any from now until 2009, then we'll continue to work with those groups, but this is a good agreement for Alberta. It's actually, quite frankly, going to help farmers because it's going to reduce the costs of transportation from Alberta down to the coast.

Mr. Martin: That's all you'll say. Mr. Speaker, if it's such a good agreement, why hasn't it been brought forward in the Legislature here like they've done in B.C.? If it's such a good agreement, then we'd all accept it. Why haven't we done it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to TILMA, the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement that we have, it frees up organizations on both sides of the border to do good work. We're going to continue to work with those organizations to ensure that it does improve not only today's economy in the province but puts in place and secures a better economy for the next generation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Standards of Practice for Pharmacists

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents have expressed concern over the new regulations that will give pharmacists prescribing power. They feel that this is potentially unsafe given that pharmacists are not trained as doctors. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why are we moving the responsibility of prescribing drugs from doctors to pharmacists?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We value all health

professionals: physicians, pharmacists, nurses, right across the board. Changes to allow pharmacists to prescribe based on the outcome of their patient assessments is not intended to replace the physician's role in diagnosing and prescribing drug treatment or to limit other health care providers' expanded scope of practice. Pharmacists will only assess and prescribe based on their recognized competencies. They'll provide prescriptions when needed based on the outcome of patient assessments completed by them. This deals with one of the core values of the Health Professions Act; that is, to allow health care professionals to practise to the full extent of their experience, training, and expertise.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how can we ensure that pharmacists have the clinical expertise needed to prescribe drug therapies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The College of Pharmacists sets the standard of practice that determines the level of practice which can be provided by all pharmacists and any given pharmacist. Before assessing patients or prescribing drugs, pharmacists must meet the requirements established by the college. Pharmacists wishing to specialize will be required to demonstrate their competence in that specific area of practice. The public of Alberta will be assured that pharmacists who are prescribing have the competency to do so.

Mrs. Jablonski: My last question to the same minister: is it a conflict of interest to have pharmacists both prescribing and dispensing drugs?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, pharmacists prescribing drugs based on their patient assessment is similar to other medical services where health care professionals provide advice prior to providing medical treatment. We will rely on the College of Pharmacists to enforce the ethical standards under which pharmacists will practise. Pharmacists will be joining other professionals, such as registered dietitians and nurse practitioners, who have also had an expanded scope of practice, including prescribing and dispensing of drugs. This will be well under control, and the College of Pharmacists will make sure that ethical practice is followed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

2:10 Resource Development in Marie Lake Area

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Marie Lake, located just north of the city of Cold Lake, in the Alberta context is one of the few pristine lakes left with exceptional water quality. I've heard strong concerns from many landowners in the area that the lake is being threatened by a new and experimental project, already seeing considerable seismic activity, a two-kilometre tunnel from a mine shaft, and potentially up to 100 SAGD directional wells under the lake. To the Minister of Environment: can the minister tell us what effects the intense seismic activity, let alone the SAGD extraction over the next few years, will have on the aquatic environment? Can he guarantee that there'll be no adverse effects on the lake and the ecosystem?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, geophysical activity is really the

responsibility of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, so he may want to supplement my answer.

What I can tell the member about my understanding here is that the discussion regarding seismic activity is something that will involve air guns and would not involve any dynamite or explosions. Any activity that would involve fish-bearing water from a geophysical perspective would require application under the Water Act. No such application has come forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is still playing the same old tune when it comes to maximizing resource development at any cost. SAGD operations are notorious for causing hydrocarbon migration into both groundwater and surface water, in the Lloydminster area specifically. The EUB mandate is for responsible development in the public interest. To the Energy minister: is it in the public's interest to proceed with such a project, with the potential to permanently damage this pristine water body?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, no project with respect to oil sands, heavy oil, conventional oil, shale oil, deep tight gas, or any other project that we would consider for development in the province of Alberta would go ahead without the very stringent requirements that we put in place and adhere to in the province of Alberta with respect to these developments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Water for Life strategy clearly states that "healthy aquatic ecosystems are vital to a high quality of life for Albertans and must be preserved." The government's strategy then makes the guarantee that "the province's aquatic ecosystems [will be] maintained and protected." To the Environment minister: will the minister tell us whether the Water for Life strategy will take precedence over an approval by the Minister of Energy? Whose competing mandate is going to be respected here?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly the responsibility of the government and this minister is to ensure the well-being of our water systems. I indicated that no application to date has been made. No studies have taken place. No approvals have been made. So I would suggest that the question is somewhat hypothetical, to say the least.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Health Regions Board Governance

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Whitecourt-St. Anne constituency has been well served by the board members of Aspen health and Capital health. Since these regional boards were designed, very little board renewal has occurred. My questions are all to the health minister. What are your plans to introduce new memberships to health boards across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very important question. One of the mandates that I have is to look at the effectiveness and

the efficiency of our health system, and part of that is looking at board governance and making sure that we are using the resources that are applied to the system very effectively. I can tell the hon. member that I have met with board chairs on two occasions to talk about board governance, and one of the specific issues is: how do we do renewal of boards? How do we make sure that there's appropriate succession planning? We'll be coming forward with either three-year terms, perhaps two terms of three years each, or if not that, some other appropriate mechanism to make sure that there's succession planning and orderly renewal.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again to the same minister: with the substantial growth here in Alberta are we planning to add any members, especially to the growth areas of this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The size of the boards is mandated. There is an opportunity for expansion to the size of the boards upon request. But I think it should be clearly stated that there's an optimum size for board operation, and the optimum size of the board is not necessarily impacted by the size of the population that they serve.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, given the first answer, that you've had meetings with regard to renewal, when will this renewal happen? When will we see a plan? Will it be weeks, months?

Mr. Hancock: The process is unfolding, Mr. Speaker, over the course of the next few months. As members will know, there was a task force on board governance struck, which is meeting now and will be reporting I believe in June. We're doing our board review with respect to the regional health authorities on that same time track. So I hope that by the time this House meets again in the fall, any legislation process that we might need with respect to boards will be available for the House by then. That's my anticipation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Affordability of Postsecondary Education

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his 2005 taxpayer-funded fireside chat to the province the former Premier made a vow to the people of Alberta. He said, "Alberta will define a new tuition policy . . . It will be the most innovative, entrepreneurial, and affordable tuition policy in the country." With no signs of a downward trend in tuition, my questions are for the Premier. Will the Premier now reaffirm the previous Premier's statement that Alberta will have the most affordable tuition policy in the country?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as we look forward the next 20, 30, 40 years, we know that education is going to play a very key role in terms of building a knowledge-based industry here in the province of Alberta. There are many steps being taken today and into the future to ensure that we're competitive and to attract many young Albertans into postsecondary – it's not only university, but it's colleges and technical schools – and, of course further, not only with the education but additional research and also commercializing that technology in Alberta.

Mr. Tougas: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a difference between being competitive and being the most affordable, so I'm going to ask the

question again. Will Alberta have the most affordable tuition rates in the country, as the previous Premier promised?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, approximately 70 per cent of university tuition is today paid for by the taxpayer. We're looking at ways of reducing the cost to individual students by furthering use of technology, pushing out the education into smaller centres so that we can get, of course, at least the introductory courses online. That will further reduce costs. These are all proactive steps taken in terms of increasing the number of students involved in postsecondary.

Mr. Tougas: Well, still no promise from the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, affordable means different things to different people. To the family of an oil executive with a high six-figure salary, tuition in Alberta would be considered affordable, but to a struggling wage earner in my constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark, \$5,000 a year tuition plus hundreds more for books may be anything but affordable. To the Premier: for the record how does the Premier define affordable tuition?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the minister respond in terms of the amounts of bursaries and remission policy that we have in this province because, quite frankly, it's outstanding compared to other provinces.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of affordability really isn't just about tuition. As the hon. member pointed out, there are different needs in different circumstances. Our program is among the most generous in the country as it is needs based. As we roll things out under the affordability framework, stay tuned.

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

Forest Protection in Kananaskis Country

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was suggested at a meeting last week in Bragg Creek that Kananaskis Country is threatened by a clear-cutting plan which was approved by the minister of sustainable development. My question, obviously, is to that minister. What is the minister doing to protect the recreational and watershed functions of K Country?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to remind all members of the Assembly that clear-cutting hasn't been allowed in this province for several decades. The current practice of block cutting respects important structural features such as watersheds, riparian areas, trails, and sensitive biological areas. I'd also remind all members that block cutting is better than the alternative, which is beetles and wildfires, which respect none of the above.

Mr. Speaker, 58 per cent of Kananaskis Country is already protected. Of what's left, only a third is available. Less than one-quarter is subject to any logging . . .

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further comments from the meeting last week in Bragg Creek suggested that pine trees in Kananaskis Country are too small to be threatened by mountain pine beetles, that the beetles only attack large-diameter pines. I'm wondering if the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development can comment on how accurate that statement might be.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, that's half true. It is true that the beetles prefer the larger diameter trees that you find in British Columbia. But if they can't find the wider diameter trees, they're happy to take the smaller ones. I want all members to know that our forestry models use 15 centimetre diameter for our predictions, the same statistic that is used by British Columbia, a province that's lost 9 out of 10 of its pine trees. Following the B.C. model, we predict similar potential losses here. We've already found isolated incidents of smaller trees being infected. The eastern slopes are at risk, and we intend to manage that risk in a responsible manner.

Mr. Rodney: To the same minister. Perhaps I'll be just a little bit more direct. The suggestion has been made that this government is using the threat of pine beetles as an excuse to allow timber harvesting. What is the minister's response to that accusation?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, this is a simple question of risk management. You can look at what's happened in British Columbia, where they've projected to lose 90 per cent of all their pine trees by 2010 or 2012, and you can see what doing nothing does. We believe that responsible logging, responsible forestry is the answer. This is trying to balance long-term environmental health versus short-term aesthetic values. We will make the responsible choice, which is the long-term environmental health of our forests.

Thank you.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

The Speaker: We were at the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to provide a sufficient number of copies of material relating to St. Joseph's hospital for tabling: a report under the Protection for Persons in Care Act, a copy of a phone bill, and various other information on the St. Joseph's hospital situation.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to table 123 letters and the relevant copies to call upon this Assembly to "try the accused killer of Joshua John Hunt as an adult due to the nature of this crime, his past criminal history and that he is so close to the age of 18 years old."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others on tablings?

Hon. members, I have a tabling today with respect to a new brochure that we've put out called the Alberta Legislature Grounds: Self-guided Tour, which points out some 27 monuments on the grounds of this Legislature. I invite all members to go out for a walk one of these days when it gets heated in the Assembly.

Secondly, I provided to all members earlier today some information with respect to the changes as a result of a Members' Services' position on MLA remuneration that went into effect April 1, 2007. All citizens of the province of Alberta can access this information at www.assembly.ab.ca. The adjustment of 4.92 per cent follows the average weekly earnings index in the province of Alberta.

Thirdly, before we left, prior to the little break we had, I advised members of the Members' Services Committee to be on standby for a possible Members' Services meeting this week because the normal

practice is to give you 10 days' notice. I'm giving you notice now that we'll probably try to meet on Wednesday night at 6 o'clock. Now, I'm assuming that one thing is going to happen: the three House leaders are going to have a motion in this Assembly to go forward because if we don't move it, we won't make the budget process. If we don't make the budget process, well, then, what sense are the reforms?

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Education, Alberta Education School Jurisdictions audited financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2005, sections 1, 2, and 3, and pursuant to the Teaching Profession Act the Alberta Teachers' Association 2005 annual report.

The Speaker: There being no further ones, we'll deal with Orders of the Day.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Written Questions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that written questions stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head:

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that motions for returns stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head:

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

Bill 203 Service Dogs Act

[Debate adjourned March 19: Mrs. Forsyth speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to continue.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I may, because of the time last time, start again.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: I am pleased to have been given the opportunity to join the discussion on the Service Dogs Act. I fully support Bill 203 because it allows for a wider cross-section of citizens to be fully integrated within Alberta. Bill 203 would guarantee that people who use service dogs are legally and adequately protected from discrimination. This bill would clarify and strengthen the rights of those with physical disabilities who need service dogs to assist them.

Bill 203 calls on Albertans to move towards greater understanding of diversity within our province. It eliminates the current confusion regarding people who use service dogs and makes them feel more

comfortable about carrying out their daily routine, such as going for coffee, grocery shopping, picking things up from the ground. And, yes, Mr. Speaker, I recently read about a dog that can even put his owner's ATM card in the ATM bank machine. A service dog can make all the difference in the world for someone with reduced mobility. Certain chores which are essential components to leading independent lives are not equally accessible to all Albertans. While these things are essential, they are also taken for granted by most Albertans.

Personal stories are always nice to share, and I would like to share one that affects one of my constituents. It's called 4 Paws 4 Matthew. As a child with autism, Matthew is a little boy who many of my constituents in Parkland would recognize. He's a fair-haired little boy who likes to run and who many will recognize at his visits to Park 96. Matthew has many safety issues which could put his life in danger as well as various communication and social difficulties.

Matthew's family has recognized the need for a highly trained service dog and how these wonderful dogs have come to the aid of many children suffering from the same disability as Matthew. In January of 2006 the family asked for help from our community, their family, and their friends. The response, Mr. Speaker, has been overwhelming and helped raise a whopping \$13,200. Since the training of service dogs is quite expensive and predicted to take as long as two years, they hope to receive their dog at the end of this year or early 2008.

Although the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act includes protection for those using service dogs, often the general public is unaware of it. Mr. Speaker, blind persons are no longer faced with speculation concerning their rights to use guide dogs in public places. With the help of legislation the use of guide dogs has become an accepted and commonplace practice throughout our society. We have come to understand and appreciate the need blind people have for their guide dogs. Unfortunately, similar knowledge concerning service dogs is not as widespread due to the current ambiguities surrounding this issue.

The Blind Persons' Rights Act helped Alberta's visually challenged people gain access to the benefits of Alberta's quality of life. The same allowance should be extended to those with other disabilities. There have been numerous instances when people with physical disabilities who depend on the aid of service dogs have been excluded from social settings due to the confusion the general public has regarding the admittance of their service dogs into these areas. Bill 203 presents us with the opportunity to help all Albertans live happier and more fulfilling lives no matter what their disabilities. There is no doubt that people with physical disabilities stand to gain with the help of their service dogs. Mr. Speaker, for the Matthews of the world and many other Albertans who have or are waiting for a service dog, I urge members of the Assembly to support Bill 203.

I will leave you with the story of Riley, who suffers from autism. A cute, precocious seven-year-old, Riley likes trucks, tractors, and any other kind of heavy equipment. But he loves his best friend, Yogi, a golden retriever. Riley had a history of bolting but not anymore. His family waited three years to get Yogi, but it didn't take long for the dog to have a huge impact on their lives. When Yogi first came into the house, it was like ducks to water. It was just so unbelievable. The bond was instant, said his mother.

Bill 203 will help fulfill an environment where many Albertans would be able to participate more fully in society. Bill 203 is a step towards making this vision a reality. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I rise to support my colleague's Bill 203 on service dogs. I have worked extensively at the University of Calgary trying to improve the lot of disabled students. I have met with them with regard to examination rooms and accommodating schedules to recognize the fact that depending on their disabilities, they may require extra time when taking an exam. Disabled students have had quite a bit of difficulty over the years having their disabilities recognized, not to the point where they are singled out because of their disability but for the need for their disability to be supported.

I worked with one young lady in particular over the past year who had a service dog because she had the misfortune of having been run into while driving, so her spine had suffered some damage. Then on top of that she suffered from an industrial accident while working for a lumber company that didn't have proper saw guards. She had injuries to her back, and she also had severe injuries to the tendons in her right hand. As a result, she had a service dog that basically did the lifting for her, that carried her books from class to class.

Initially at the University of Calgary she was received in sort of a mixed way in certain areas. For example, she wasn't allowed into Dinny's Den. Some of her professors had a degree of discomfort with the dog, so her access was very much prevented. With all the other difficulties that she had in terms of having her disability recognized and having tuition support and funding for books and so on, just paying the daily rent was extremely difficult for this young lady. Fortunately, because everybody was willing to work in a collaborative fashion, the solution came through the recognition of the dog's qualifications.

I would like to thank a young lady that I worked with when my wife and I ran the Cataract Creek wilderness campground. Nokia, the young lady in question, trained dogs as well as being a conservation officer. While she loved working in the forest, she found that the salaries that were paid to conservation officers could not begin to compare with what the city of Calgary was offering with regard to their canine service work. In fact, her salary basically doubled that of the individual responsible for managing the Sheep River ranger station. He was sorry to lose her but realized that she had to be thinking about her financial future. Anyway, this young lady intervened on behalf of the university student and assisted the university student in receiving recognition for the qualifications and the training of this particular dog to carry the load.

Service animals basically are the links between people with disabilities and the world around them. We're more used to the idea of a dog for the blind, but the reality is that there are a large number of dogs that are performing a great variety of functions. The member opposite noted one actually being able to access an ATM, and I noticed that same article. It's amazing what animals can do.

The comradeship of an animal is also extremely important. I know that when my grandmother was in a seniors' home, the Sarcee auxiliary, there were visits by dogs that were brought in. For a senior who, depending on their family situation, may not be subject to having that many visits, these dogs perform a valuable service just in terms of their friendship and their openness. Of course, all the seniors along the route would have special treats for the dogs, so I'm sure that by the time the dog got home, there was no need to feed it. There is no doubt that this is a wonderful bill.

Another example that happened this past fall with the Calgary board of education was a young man who required the support of a service dog. Initially there was quite a bit of fear and trepidation within the school from administration, from classmates as to this dog. You know: how well was it trained? Was it friendly? Was it thoroughly cleaned? And so on. There were a whole series of issues, but again due to collaborative effort, information, and

education these initial concerns were overcome, and the young gentleman and his service dog have been allowed access. He no longer had to stay at home, but he could receive the full support of the service dog.

One thing that Bill 203 must have is a large portion of education and information support. There are a number of individuals – and I gather it runs sometimes with regard to ethnic backgrounds – that have a severe fear of dogs, and that fear might cause them discomfort. What we need to do is provide the education and information for people to realize that these service dogs are not a personal threat and that they serve a very special function.

There is another concern that we have too. This young lady who I helped at the University of Calgary had a large poster draped over the saddlebags of her dog saying: "Please do not pet. This dog is a service dog." I know the number of times I tried to drag a stray dog home and claim that it had followed me home. We have to treat people and their service dogs with respect and recognize that this isn't your regular pet, that this animal has a specific function to perform.

Therefore, I hope that as part of making Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, successful, there will be a great amount put aside to inform the public on the role of these dogs, not just taxi drivers who may question whether or not this dog can be admitted or individuals in apartment complexes who may not realize that this is no regular pet. This is the equivalent of a human companion and needs to be treated with and awarded the same degree of respect that we would provide to a person who is serving as an aide to an individual with disabilities.

I want to pass along my support for Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, and to please ask that the education and information parts of this bill along with the follow-up in terms of allowing the access to occur take place.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, then the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise in strong support of Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, 2007, and I would like to congratulate and commend the Member for Strathcona for bringing this bill forward. It's a very timely and a necessary bill as the need for service dogs develops to a higher degree in our society. This bill does clarify and strengthen the rights of service dog owners and it does ensure that things like occupancy, accommodation, service for people with service dogs is properly recognized. The need for service dogs is as clear as the need for guide dogs for the blind.

2:40

You know, the ways that we deal with problems that arise for people who are disabled are things that change over time. I remember when we started to change the nature of the corners of our sidewalks and make ramps. I talked to some folks who had vision problems. They found that their cane no longer was good for them to deal with coming to the corner because they couldn't use it to find out where the road started anymore. Now, the fact was that they needed those guide dogs. The same is very, very true for service dogs in many, many circumstances in our society. I've had many people in my constituency call me about this particular bill, and it's very interesting that there is such support for legislation of this nature.

There are savings for the province in that there are not adequate numbers of people to work with the disabled right now because of shortages in our labour market. Service dogs – and a number of my constituents have brought this forward to me – provide an alternative to realistically helping the disabled operate within our society. The savings in not having people do that I think is clear. The need for this bill is important.

I commend the arguments of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and also the Member for Calgary-Varsity and what they have said in terms of the importance of the comradeship, the partnership that these animals provide. I support this bill, and I support it very strongly.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Strathcona. The efforts the member has put forth in the sponsorship of this bill are commendable and should be applauded.

I want to acknowledge that this act benefits all persons with disabilities who need to use service dogs. Persons with disabilities who need service dogs currently lack sufficient protection. The Service Dogs Act will enable service dogs' users to lead lives free of discrimination. This act defines the use of a service dog for the betterment of every individual who relies on them throughout their daily lives.

I want to draw attention to other jurisdictions where similar legislation has been a success story. British Columbia, Quebec, Manitoba, and New Brunswick are provinces that have enacted legislation that permits service dogs, allowing persons with disabilities who need service dogs to have unrestricted access to public accommodations and facilities. These jurisdictions have recognized that persons with disabilities and their accompanying service dogs should not face intolerance.

It is imperative to outline that in the Service Dogs Act an accredited service dog will be used by individuals who are affected by a range of physical disabilities. It is important to provide persons with disabilities who need service dogs an opportunity to live and interact in their community free of bias. We should strive to recognize, as other jurisdictions have, that service dogs for persons with disabilities are an essential part of their lives. For many individuals service dogs become indispensable and are required to perform day-to-day errands and responsibilities. Service dogs are a necessity. They assist the individual to reduce some of the complications that a person with a disability faces. Service dogs provide these individuals with the capability to perform basic tasks that persons without disabilities take for granted.

I'd like to take this opportunity to refer to the example of British Columbia and this province's Guide Animal Act. This jurisdiction recognized the importance of service dogs and the useful purpose that they serve. Service dogs provide a necessary service to their dependants. We need to ensure that a person requiring a service dog is not discriminated against when they attempt to access public accommodations and facilities.

In Quebec they acknowledge that their dog guides are equivalent to a prosthetic device. Equating the service dog to a prosthetic device communicates their importance very effectively. This description makes it possible for fellow citizens to comprehend the legitimacy of service dogs and the purpose that they serve for those who use them. The Manitoba Human Rights Code acknowledges that a person with a disability is someone who relies on the use of a guide dog or other animal assistant.

I want to emphasize that Bill 203 does not reduce the legitimacy of a guide dog. It is intended to strengthen the understanding that both guide dogs and service dogs are relevant aides. This is an important distinction, and one that Bill 203 will further and sustain. New Brunswick has legislated the right for a person with a disability who needs a dog guide to have fair access to rental, residential, and commercial properties as well as the purchase of real estate. Newfoundland and Labrador also recognize that persons with disabilities who need dog guides should have equal access to housing accommodations. Bill 203 provides an opportunity to demonstrate that we care about and acknowledge the complex life of a person with a disability.

We have an obligation to acknowledge the personal challenges that persons with disabilities face. A service dog should not be perceived as a barrier. Those who can better their lives by using accredited service dogs should be allowed to do so. Service dogs for persons with disabilities serve to benefit their wellness and improve their overall quality of life. Service dogs empower their companions, providing them with the ability to actively participate in society. We have to realize, as other jurisdictions have, that persons with disabilities feel as though they have limited capabilities because they are not comfortable and need the assistance of a service dog to go anywhere. The public perception assumes that service dogs are not permitted into public areas. For persons with disabilities, this restrictive atmosphere contributes to feelings of apprehension and isolation. We must recognize that service dogs provide a potential to alleviate these feelings, ensuring that persons with disabilities can live the best possible life.

A problem that has been documented in Alberta and other jurisdictions is that people who need service dogs were being denied access to restaurants, businesses, and other public places. We need to address this issue so that Albertans, both those with and without disabilities, will understand the necessity and legitimacy of a service dog. For most citizens it is common knowledge that the visually challenged are allowed to be accompanied by a guide dog into any public setting. The intention of this bill is to establish that persons with disabilities who need service dogs are permitted to access public places without discrimination. It is Alberta's turn to recognize that the use of a service dog can only serve to better people's lives. Bill 203 will communicate to businesses and other public venues that service dogs are equal in purpose to guide dogs. We need to allow the disabled the full advantages afforded to all Albertans. It is in the best interest of everyone.

This act will also ensure that a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog will have equal access to housing. Persons with disabilities should not be discriminated against when they attempt to purchase or rent an available housing accommodation. Any potential vacancy that would be available to a person without a disability should be available to a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog. There should be no discrimination. If a person with a disability can meet the financial requirements, they should be recognized as a qualified candidate for a housing vacancy.

Bill 203 will clarify any discrepancies that are currently occurring with persons with disabilities and their accompanying service dogs. It is important to establish that the rights of persons with disabilities and their accompanying service dogs will be protected. This piece of legislation will allow a person with a disability who needs a service dog unrestricted access to all public facilities and accommodations. A distinction is especially important because of the potential conflict that could arise if a person, with or without a disability, is not aware of their rights and how to treat the situation.

Not only will these individuals be allowed unrestricted access to public areas; they will also be able to fully participate in the workforce. It is a necessity that persons with disabilities are not discriminated against when they are seeking employment. If the person with a disability is employed, their need for a service dog must be respected. The employer must recognize the reliance on the service dog and in no way limit the potential opportunities of the individual. This will allow a person with a disability to live a more fulfilling life, which cannot be achieved if they are restricted from working. The rights established in this act will enable those individuals who need a service dog to be in a better position to contribute to our society. They'll be able to improve their social status and advance their personal aspirations.

2:50

Other jurisdictions have concluded that service dogs have a minimal impact in day-to-day life. The expectations are that the service dog will be kept obedient in a manner that would be solely, in a public area, for the assistance of the person with a disability.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to applaud the intent of Bill 203. It serves to improve the lives of individuals who need service dogs. This act offers the potential for persons with disabilities to gain the respect and dignity that they deserve. Those of us who are not familiar with the struggles of physical disabilities can surely realize the comfort and useful purpose that a service dog provides. This act addresses a problem that has been well documented in the province of Alberta and several other jurisdictions. It's time to offer those who face disadvantages a chance to improve their lives. It is in the interests of our province and will benefit many.

Bill 203 will demonstrate that our government is continually trying to assist persons with disabilities by allowing them the right to be accompanied by an accredited service dog. I believe that this is a commendable piece of legislation, and it is in our best interest to pass Bill 203.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the next four speakers that have advised me of their desire to participate are the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, then the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, then the Member for Red Deer-North, then the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. If there are others, kindly advise.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be short because there are other people who want to participate in this debate. Again, like others I would congratulate the Member for Strathcona for bringing forward this bill. It's certainly designed to eliminate discrimination based on the fact that a person is dependent on a service dog. We know this can be problematic for certain people. There are bylaws in condo associations and others where you can't have pets. There are rental places – especially now, with the rent increases and lack of vacancies, this becomes an even more severe problem for people that need service dogs. So it's a good bill.

I just want to say that there could be an unintended loophole, though, that I'd like the member to think about because it allows for the minister to issue identification cards as proof of a service dog's qualification. My worry there is that, knowing how bureaucracies work sometimes, it may take a long time to get these service cards. People lose them. It seems to me that this could allow some leeway for those that might want to do it to discriminate in case the proof of a qualification isn't immediately available, and I know that's not the intention of the act.

I would say that this is a good bill, but maybe the member would take a look at what I'd call a friendly amendment stating something like this: at no point shall the lack of identification issued by the ministry abrogate the rights and responsibilities under section 3. It seems to me that if we did that, even if they didn't have the card – it was coming; with the bureaucracy they'd lost it, but it was still coming – that would still not stop the grounds for discrimination. I just throw that out to the member to consider. Other than that, we certainly will support the bill, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, then followed by the members for Red Deer-North, Cardston-Taber-Warner, Calgary-Hays, and Calgary-Fort.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to acknowledge that animals contribute tremendously to all of our lives. Our dogs, for example, aid us on our farms, help us retain our independence, offer us comfort in time of need, find missing people, and partner with the police in canine units. It's time to reward the contributions of our animal population and give them the protection and recognition that they deserve, so I thank the Member for Strathcona for bringing Bill 203, Service Dogs Act, to us.

I'd like to share a dog story that's important to our history, not purely a Canadian dog story but one with a Canadian connection. It took place in 1867, a year that has a certain significance for Canadians and a different significance for Brits. The British, as you probably know, have a reputation as dog lovers, and 1867 was the year a new dog tax and registration were introduced in Britain. In Canada, with our three plus levels of government, such a measure would come in the form of a municipal bylaw. In Britain, where there are no provincial governments except in Northern Ireland, and where dogs are really important, the new dog tax came in a bill introduced in the Mother of Parliaments, at Westminster. Dog lovers all over the country had strong opinions on this proposed law. They were writing letters and lobbying their MPs, and many of them showed up in the visitors' gallery the day the bill was to be debated.

Now, the same day there was another bill on the Order Paper, for the passage of the British North America Act to join a number of colonies in the New World into a dominion called Canada. The terms of Confederation had been debated back and forth for a long time. There had been arguments over the name of the new entity, arguments over the division of powers between the central government and the provinces, and arguments over the makeup of an upper House to be called the Senate. Does this sound familiar?

With more than three rounds of bargaining behind them, the Canadian Fathers of Confederation who made it to London for the final reading of the bill were hoping that this would be the final reading. With Canadians' penchant for debating constitutional proposals, they were hoping that some backbench member would not throw a monkey wrench into the process by coming up with some new proposal or variation. The Canadians sat, worried, in the gallery with fingers crossed and bated breath. They needn't have worried. With all of the spectators crowded in for the next bill, on the dog tax, the parliamentarians wouldn't dare begin any new discussion that would come between British dog owners and their dogs.

So Canadian Confederation passed in a matter of minutes. The MPs yawned as the bill was read, shuffled as it was explained, gave it perfunctory agreement, and saved their speeches and energies for the real business of the day: the dog tax bill that followed. Mr.

Speaker, we owe the existence of Canada to British dog lovers, and today I would like to return that favour.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

In my earlier member's statement on this topic I talked about the way dogs, working with humans, mirror and enhance our humanity. They draw our attention to moods we barely sense and accept us as their leaders with an unqualified loyalty. In providing finely tuned supports for persons with many kinds of disabilities, they have extended awareness to the ways we all are differently abled. They show sensitivity to others' needs in their gentleness to young children. We use the expression "dog eat dog." It better describes the business world than the canine one. Dogs show greater loyalty than many employers do to their employees and suppliers.

Mr. Speaker, this bill provides for dogs who work with humans to be able to do their job more effectively, without hindrance, and so helps to limit discrimination toward people who depend on them. Our passing it puts us on the road to a more human society.

In my earlier member's statement I referred to an *Ode to a Dog* by Albert Payson Terhune, author of the *Lad of Sunnybank* stories. Here I'm going to read a part of that poem about canine qualities.

Staunch friendship, wanting neither thanks nor fee
Safe privilege to worship and to guard:
That is their creed. They know no shrewder way
To travel through their hour of lifetime here.
Would Man but deign to serve his god as they,
[The Kingdom would] dawn within the year.

Mr. Speaker, by passing this bill, let us let service dogs do their jobs that they do so well, and let us do the job we need to do: the building of a human society that brings us closer to the kingdom.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to speak to this private member's bill, and I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Strathcona for his efforts over the last five years.

People have come to love their dogs so much that some of them have a hard time understanding why anyone would not be willing to welcome a dog in their homes. As the old saying goes: love me, love my dog. Harry S. Truman also thought that dogs were very important. He said, "Children and dogs are as necessary to the welfare of the country as is Wall Street and the railroads." Emily Dickinson ranked dogs right up there with human beings. She said, "They are better than human beings because they know but do not tell."

3:00

As loving and as important as my dogs are to me, they do not serve in the same way that a service dog serves its master. Whether the master be a young, autistic child, a person who is blind, or a person who is deaf, dogs joyously serve our needs in ways that are amazing. We have all heard the incredible stories of how dogs have saved the lives of family members who would have otherwise slept through a raging fire or a burglary, and we can see in our own communities guide dogs that safely lead those who are blind across busy streets and through crowded sidewalks. Dogs are amazing, and well-trained service dogs are essential to help meet the needs of their masters with disabilities.

I have a constituent in Red Deer-North who has been very active over the last few years working to help people in our community to understand why service dogs for those with hearing impairment require equal rights. Liz Craig often walks in downtown Red Deer

with her beautiful, well-trained dog, whose name is Rain, by her side, protecting her and giving her warnings from sounds that he hears that Liz cannot hear. In one sense Liz asks that all service dogs be given the same rights as guide dogs. I would like to sincerely thank Liz for all that she's done to help bring legislation forward to recognize these service dogs. She asks that service dogs be given the respect and rights of guide dogs as recognized under the Blind Persons' Rights Act.

Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, will do just that. Bill 203 will enshrine the human right of mobility for those with disability into the laws of our province. Bill 203 is about ensuring that persons with disabilities can succeed and not be discriminated against. This government has made a commitment to Albertans to consider the needs of the disability community when developing legislation and policy. Bill 203 upholds this government priority. Bill 203 will create legal recognition for service dogs and extend rights to those who rely on service dogs for assistance with everyday tasks. The Blind Persons' Rights Act guarantees that those who rely on guide dogs are protected from discrimination. The vast majority of Albertans and Alberta businesses recognizes the value of service dogs to the disability community and are amenable to their use in public places. Entrenching the right to use a service dog in law will ensure that this right is applied consistently and systematically.

Bill 203 contains provisions to ensure that the use of service dogs in Alberta is effectively regulated, and the potential for abuse of the system is minimal. Also, very importantly, Bill 203 would allow the minister to regulate training schools for service dogs. The regulation of training schools would be beneficial not only to the disability community but to the general public as well. Regulating training schools would provide an assurance that the animal is properly trained to meet everyday needs. These regulated training schools could enhance public safety by ensuring that service dogs are prepared to meet the challenges of interacting with people in a variety of settings. They would assist in making sure that service dogs are trained to deal with issues such as public transportation procedures and emergency scenarios. Bill 203 will help to clear up any confusion regarding the acceptable use of these animals.

Some groups have raised concerns about this bill. There is the possibility that this legislation could cause some confusion due to overlap with the current Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. These concerns are valid, but it would be a real tragedy if this legislation did not proceed for this reason. The beauty of legislation is that it is adaptable to changing conditions. If we see a need in the future to improve this legislation, we are able to do that through amendments and changes to regulations.

An open, inclusive, and just society is something that we as Albertans highly value. I urge all members of this Assembly to strongly consider giving their support to this bill. After all, dogs are a person's best friend, and as my husband often says, they're the best kind of people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to get up and to talk on Bill 203. I applaud the intent of this bill and the many accolades that have been given to dogs. I'm a dog lover. I'm a dog owner. I understand and really appreciate the value of dogs in our society.

It helps in many ways. For such things as the border there are many things where the dog is the most efficient and the best that we can use for finding drugs, firearms, money that's being smuggled.

Then there is the positive aspect in society. For many people that are sick, there's nothing better than a loyal companion like a dog to help them to recover, and many seniors in their homes place great importance on their dog and the comfort that they give them and also the safety. The list goes on and on.

Many members here have spoken to the benefits of dogs, but due to time shortage and to try and be quick, I'll make my remarks brief and talk about the other side, where I have a few concerns and think maybe we need some friendly amendments in order to protect the rights of all Canadians. Our freedom and rights as individuals generally end where they infringe on other people's freedoms and rights. We always need to look at that and be careful when we want to entrench a so-called new right that we think someone has been neglected in having.

My concern, Mr. Speaker, is for people with allergies. There are many people that have allergies to dogs. I'll use the example of a restaurant owner. Perhaps his whole family works in that restaurant, and they're allergic to dogs. If we entrench this to where they cannot protect their own rights, what's going to happen in a situation like that? If a dog comes into a restaurant like that, then all of a sudden the owners and the workers are put in a situation where they're having a terrible attack, and they can do nothing about it because this law is written such that they have no rights.

So my concern is that there needs to be some sort of little amendment in here that would address the rights of owners, workers, and other areas that are allergic to dogs and could have perhaps even a life-threatening situation in the presence of one. Somehow there needs to be a balance where that courtesy, that respect, that understanding is extended out, and people's rights are protected. It's not that we want to stop service dogs from going everywhere, but there are those rare occasions when there are circumstances. If this law is passed and written in stone such that they now have the absolute right to go anywhere and everywhere they desire to go, we are infringing and perhaps putting other people in danger because of that.

So I would like to see a little bit of softening of the wording on where they can go, like I say, for businesses and owners to be able to have a little bit of courtesy and respect for their rights for those things that are affecting their health. But on the whole, like I say, I love dogs. I'm a dog owner. I think the intent of this bill is excellent, but we need to look at those who it maybe isn't excellent for in the way the wording is and respect those people.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to join the discussion on the Service Dogs Act, 2007, introduced by the hon. Member for Strathcona. I support Bill 203 because it clarifies the ambiguities concerning the rights and responsibilities involved in the utilization of service dogs. No legislation specifically addresses the use of service dogs by physically disabled persons in need of assistance. Many people who use service dogs have been faced with uncomfortable and avoidable situations stemming from the vagueness of the rights of these people.

People with disabilities face additional, unnecessary burdens due to the general public's lack of knowledge regarding the nature of service dogs. People seem to be less informed about the myriad of daily tasks service dogs help the physically disabled complete. Albertans are fully aware of the extent to which guide dogs assist blind persons. There is a need to clarify the rights of those who use service dogs in order to allow the physically disabled to utilize service dogs so they, too, can receive help in completing essential tasks throughout their days.

Since there is no clear legislation addressing service dogs, the public has not come to a consensus on which protocols to follow. Each situation appears to be dealt with on an individual basis with no set standards. Mr. Speaker, if Bill 203 is enacted, it would no longer be unintentionally left in the hands of the general public to determine if persons accompanied by service dogs can enter certain establishments. Bill 203 would empower those of us who use these dogs as they would have clear and solid documents to present if their rights were being contested.

3:10

Clarification of the rights of persons with service dogs is important as it will strengthen their rights; for example, renting an apartment, entering grocery stores, or having equal access to public spaces. The Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act is intended to provide protection for physically disabled individuals who need the use of service dogs. It is currently the only protective measure set in place to safeguard the rights of physically disabled persons who use service dogs.

Provisions are often unclear regarding the recourse if the right to be accompanied by a service dog is denied. Protection under the act has proven to be insufficient. Local police currently lack a standard for enforcing the provision of the act, and more cases go to the human rights court because of the lack of clarity. It often takes extended periods of time for the courts to rule on complaints filed under the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. Bill 203 would ensure that persons with disabilities have the legal right to be accompanied by an accredited service dog in all areas open to the general public, free of discrimination, no questions asked. Mr. Speaker, with the enactment of Bill 203 it would be clearly against the law to ask someone accompanied by a service dog to leave a public area. Confusion would be eliminated, and their rights could not be denied if they were explicitly outlined in legislation.

The Blind Persons' Rights Act clearly establishes the rights of blind people and prohibits discriminatory practice against persons accompanied by guide dogs. Most people and organizations understand that guide dogs for the visually impaired are protected under the Blind Persons' Rights Act, but most do not necessarily understand that the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act does the same for persons with disabilities accompanied by service dogs. The Blind Persons' Rights Act sets the precedent for explicit rights regarding use of service dogs for all the physically disabled community.

Provisions in Bill 203 include references to service dogs themselves. This provision would make it illegal to ask someone to keep their service dog outside while in a public area. The bill would identify who is legally entitled to the use of a service dog. Only those defined under the Service Dogs Act as having a physical disability would be entitled to use a certified service dog.

Bill 203 strictly stipulates the standards of the service dogs. In order to be classified as service dogs, the animals would have to meet safety and training requirements to ensure their reliability. Service dogs are trained in such a way that while they are assisting those in need, they act as though they are on duty and are fully attentive and on task. Service dogs are used to avoid hazards, assist the deaf or hard of hearing, assist with mobility disabilities, assist with seizure response, and otherwise compensate for a disability.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 would provide more freedom and enhanced quality of life for the physically disabled. Persons who utilize service dogs would no longer have to worry about confrontations while they go about their daily chores and activities. We as Albertans want to create an environment where those with service dogs can fully participate in all aspects of the province's activities.

Bill 203 presents an opportunity to enhance social cohesion and Albertans' quality of life. It is our duty as legislators to correct this unacceptable situation and to ensure that all Albertans are treated in an equitable manner.

I urge my fellow members to support Bill 203. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak on Bill 203, Service Dogs Act, 2007, and I must commend the Member for Strathcona for bringing this excellent bill forward. He's certainly giving this House an opportunity to put stock in the commitment to doing what's right for all Albertans, including taking action on behalf of Alberta's disabled community.

Mr. Speaker, I echo the sentiments of Alberta's disabled community when I point out what a progressive piece of legislation this is for so many disabled citizens. In this piece of legislation we are continuing to ingrain the fundamental principle that all Albertans will have the opportunity to partake in our society. Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, is a positive measure in assuring that Alberta's disabled population would be afforded the opportunities necessary to excel in their communities.

As members of this Assembly it is our responsibility to ensure that the rights and the needs of all individuals are secure as per the ever-changing needs in our society.

Mr. Speaker, this bill fits well with the priority aiming to improve Albertans' quality of life. That is our government's priority, improving lives by creating policies that reflect the varying needs of disabled Albertans.

All Albertans are unique, including those with a disability. We are consistently looking at various ways that we can facilitate the ease of inclusion of all Albertans. Assistance for disabled individuals is a priority that is always undergoing fine-tuning. This includes making infrastructure improvements, with the installation of ramps and elevators, lifts for the physically disabled, and offering TTY service via telephone for the hearing impaired. The general use of dogs assisting the disabled in Alberta has been facilitated by the Blind Persons' Rights Act and the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. They have justly served both the blind and the visually impaired by making it illegal to discriminate against individuals with guide dogs. The former provides the necessary framework for regulating the use of dogs as a form of visual assistance.

As social norms continue to change, this Assembly is being presented with opportunities to ensure that our laws reflect what's right and fair in this community. The important role of the service dog is in no doubt. A specially trained service dog is one of the means available to aid in everything, from safely performing day-to-day tasks to even obtaining an education and developing a successful career. Some of us might not be aware that the use of a highly specialized canine friend is not limited to the scope of seeing eye dogs, Mr. Speaker. Other functions include assisting the hearing impaired, providing timely seizure response, aiding in the completion of day-to-day tasks, and generally enriching the lives of disabled citizens.

I'm touched every time I hear yet another heartwarming story involving Albertans, regardless of age and affliction, being better equipped to contribute to society as a result of their loyal service dog. The opportunities for service dogs to help disabled individuals are as varied as those who require the support and are often for activities that many of us take for granted. For example, cerebral palsy is a neurological disorder and causes serious physical disabili-

ties in posture and movement. For individuals with cerebral palsy, this particular dog is able to do things such as pick up dropped items, open doors, and even press the necessary speed-dial on the phone in case of emergency.

When the majority of Albertans see an individual with a service dog, they are happy to afford the dog and the handler common courtesy and the space necessary to do what they must. That's why I'd like to think that this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, is very proactive in empowering disabled persons rather than restricted to instances of discrimination, considering the hardship that can arise when viable members of our society are discouraged from doing what they need to do as a result of a service dog, especially in a culture that so openly accepts guide dogs for the blind.

I'm sure that the members in this Chamber are comforted by having a certain dog in their lives although I don't think that any of our four-legged friends are performing on quite a scale as these other service dogs.

So, Mr. Speaker, this very important bill strengthens our social infrastructure, affirming our commitment to all Albertans. When we call dogs "man's best friend," let's treat our best friends the way we treat ourselves, particularly those friends who not only play with us but also seriously work with us to help our vulnerable citizens. For this reason I call on the whole House to support this bill wholeheartedly and with every vote that you can draw on.

Thank you.

3:20

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief, but I just want to make sure that I'm on the record for having spoken to this wonderful bill that my colleague from Strathcona has brought forward. It has been many years since this has been discussed, and good on him for bringing this forward and actually getting it to the point where we're creating legislation. Certainly, in my mind, it is something that should be passed at this point.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Ms Pastoor: Perhaps I should ask my hon. colleague a question.

One of the experiences that I had where I learned the difference between a guide dog and a service dog was quite by accident with one of my constituents. I was making a presentation for a 60th wedding anniversary. When I was invited into their home, they had pictures of many dogs. Then we got into the fact that the man was deaf but also had a depth perception, in fact, that he was prone to falling. The dog that he had used for many, many years would, when he was going towards steps or if there was an incline, actually step right in front of him to warn him. I just thought that that was really wonderful, and I found this, as I mentioned, quite by accident.

One of the things that I can't believe is that the general society is still not aware of the value of these animals in our lives and that they don't realize that this is what helps these people live to their highest potential. I think of the horses that are used in our Handicapped Riding Association. I think it's been mentioned about the ability of dogs to bring out the very best in autistic children. I've also seen that work with horses.

I think that we really have to value and understand the quality of life that animals bring to our lives, not just in terms of service and in guides but also in my particular area of geriatrics, the wonderful bringing out of some people, in particular Alzheimer's, when animals are around. They love bunnies, and they love animals, and they love the cats that will come up and cuddle with them. Animals are very, very important.

In the regulations that would go along with this legislation I would like to see a very, very strong educational component put in so that we can educate the general public. I think the general public, in fairness to them, are probably no different from the rest of us. Unless something sort of really affects us personally, we often aren't aware of it. I believe that a good educational program would make general society a lot more aware. In the awareness and in the understanding I also think that we create acceptance so that at some point in time this conversation that we're having right now would be absolutely an obsolete conversation because everyone would understand and appreciate and accept that animals are important in our lives.

Also, for us that are not disabled, I think we really have to be able to have the opportunity to learn. In the learning, as I've said, and also in the acceptance I believe that it would create an empathy for people less fortunate than us and certainly an empathy for people who want to be a part of society that probably never had the opportunity to be a part of our society before.

So I stand here and, like my colleague ahead of me, ask for full support of this House for this very, very important bill for those of us who are less fortunate.

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

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona. His work for disabled people as the chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is commendable.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 is a very meaningful way of recognizing the needs of disabled people in Alberta. People who have challenges or burdens need to have the tools and the means to lead meaningful and productive lives. We all know the importance of having a strong economy and a healthy business climate. None of that is sustained without ensuring that we have strong and healthy Albertans.

Our government has made it a priority to improve the quality of life of Albertans. Bill 203 comes at a time when our government is focused on making sure its policies and directions reflect the needs of the disabled community. All Albertans are a critical component of a strong and successful province. Lifting up those Albertans who need help allows the province to meet its full productivity. The Service Dogs Act will help disabled people participate fully in society and the economy free of discrimination. It will help all Albertans to gain a greater understanding of the needs of disabled people. This bill addresses how a disabled individual can have a service dog and use the dog as a critical support to daily living.

The Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act does not provide sufficient recourse to individuals who face discrimination as a result of using a service dog. The HRCMA does protect persons with disabilities, but there are no provisions in the act that support individuals with service dogs if they are refused access to a restaurant or are not allowed to travel on a bus. Individuals should not be restricted in their day-to-day goings-on because they lack the necessary legal protections. Individuals should not be denied access to public places or transportation because of an ambiguity in legislation. As such, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 serves to build on the HRCMA by prohibiting discrimination towards disabled people who have a service dog and putting in place fines to send a message to those who act in discriminatory ways. Albertans recognize how a Service Dogs Act represents common sense.

The Blind Persons' Rights Act has been very effective in protecting blind people and allowing them to participate fully in society. Guide dogs play such a valuable role in the lives of their handlers.

Albertans understand the role guide dogs play in supporting the visually challenged. The role of the Blind Persons' Rights Act is well regarded and respected. The BPRA was amended in 2004 to strengthen its provisions relating to enforcement and identification. It is a strong piece of legislation, and it will continue to be a stand-alone piece of legislation. Through a Service Dogs Act we have an opportunity to extend the provisions of the BPRA to all other disabled people. Bill 203 also levels the legislative playing field between provinces. British Columbia has similar legislation.

Bill 203 is the right thing to do. We are giving the opportunity to persons with disabilities to get around in their communities in a way that they may have been prevented from doing in the past. Bill 203 allows for greater self-reliance. Persons with disabilities can lead more independent lives in doing their groceries, going to medical appointments, visiting family and friends. It can improve their self-esteem and confidence, and it allows caregivers and service providers the ability to try new approaches in assisting persons with disabilities and attempting new types of care.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 will protect individuals with service dogs from discrimination in accessing housing. We must ensure that they are not discriminated against if they want to rent a house or an apartment. There's a great deal of pride for an individual in his or her place of dwelling, and without protections in place for people who need service dogs, they can be limited in where they could live on their own.

Bill 203 can serve to increase the opportunities available to individuals with disabilities who seek employment. There is no better way to increase a person's self-worth and self-esteem than the opportunity to be employed. There are meaningful opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in the workforce. If barriers exist for individuals, it is incumbent on us that they are removed to allow people to lead independent lives.

3:30

Bill 203 allows individuals with disabilities to lead improved lives and I believe is moving in the right direction by giving disabled people the rights as outlined in the bill. Our responsibility, Mr. Speaker, as MLAs is to ensure that Albertans have a great quality of life. Our government is moving ahead to improve the quality of life of Albertans, most importantly, making sure that disabled individuals can participate fully in the life of this province. I think Bill 203 is a step forward towards fuller participation. Legislation allowing people to lead active, independent lives is legislation we should be keen to support.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This bill is the latest step in continuing efforts to protect the human rights of Albertans with disabilities. It reflects government's priority of ensuring that our policies reflect the varied needs of the disabled community.

It is a basic principle of fairness that everyone enjoy a full life regardless of what their abilities or possibly disabilities may be. No person should be deprived of the opportunity to participate fully in the social, economic, and cultural life of the province. For some a trained service dog provides the opportunity to live independently. It enables the successful completion of an education. It also opens the possibility of holding a job.

In Alberta more than 350,000 people, about one person in eight, live with some form of disability. Many people are quite capable and not in need of a trained dog, but a trained dog can perform more than 100 different tasks.

Service dogs raise the standard of living and the quality of life of their handlers. Research has found that within six months of receiving a trained service dog, people with ambulatory disabilities showed a significant improvement in self-esteem and psychological well-being. They were more integrated into their community, they increased their school attendance or hours of part-time employment, and they required fewer paid and unpaid hours of assistance.

Trained service dogs raise self-esteem and psychological well-being. Participants in one study reported nearly a threefold increase in their self-esteem on a standardized psychosocial status questionnaire one year after being paired with a trained service dog.

Trained service dogs help their handlers integrate into their communities. Service dogs also have a positive effect on marital status, helping separated or divorced handlers reconcile with their spouses. There is evidence showing that people are less awkward around individuals with disabilities who are accompanied by a trained service dog.

Having a trained service dog can reduce by more than two-thirds the number of hours each handler needs assistance and aid. Disability support workers can focus on enabling additional activities and have more time to assist their clients. After factoring in training costs over the course of its lifetime, a trained service dog can mean dollar savings in the tens of thousands. The province has a shortage of well-qualified staff in all facets of the health care service, and they have a hard time finding people to help individuals with disabilities. The burden also falls on family members, who cannot always offer their services all the time.

Trained service dogs are well qualified to do the demanding work of assisting people with disabilities. They're loyal, obedient, and spend their entire day helping their handler. A trained service dog becomes part of the handler's family. Those dogs can do things that people cannot. There is some evidence that some dogs can sense impending seizures and warn their handlers, and other dogs can sense low blood sugar and remind their handlers to eat.

British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Quebec, and the entire United States already have legislation protecting service dogs.

Now, this bill is designed to emulate the very successful Blind Persons' Rights Act. Many private organizations have had success training seeing eye dogs, also known as guide dogs, to assist the blind and the visually challenged. The success of these training programs has come in part because of the legislation recognizing the unique service seeing eye dogs provide.

All persons with disabilities are protected by the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, and blind persons are also protected by the blind persons act. This bill is complementary to the blind persons act, and it affirms that dogs who are aiding a person with a disability deserve the same recognition and protection of the law. Service dogs benefit both society and those they serve.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certified service dogs are an excellent way to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities as well as supplying security for people that are in the service industry and people that are their customers. In other jurisdictions certified service dog programs have been successful because these dogs have been held to the highest standards. In Alberta guide dogs, otherwise known as seeing eye dogs, have been successful. I know from our restaurant experience in our family that we have seen some of those successes.

They're due in part because of the protection they're afforded by

the Blind Persons' Rights Act, which protects certified dog trainers and dogs in training and allows an identification card to be issued for a blind person/guide dog team. The Service Dogs Act will extend these advantages to people with other disabilities, and that's the security that is needed in the service industry today.

Training standards for guide dogs are high. Dogs can only be certified as guide dogs after going through a careful selection process and several months of thorough training and testing. High standards have been set for service dogs prior to certification. Assistance Dogs International, ADI, as it's known, is an umbrella organization of not-for-profit assistance dog training schools. Sharing best practices for training, placement, and utilization of service dogs is one of their highest priorities as well as upholding the highest ethical standards for their members and having well-established and well-regarded training standards for both guide dogs and service dogs.

Most service dogs programs have a two- or three-year apprenticeship training program intended to ensure that the trainers are well acquainted with a variety of dog temperaments and are knowledgeable about a broad range of disabilities. People who are training service dogs must have the knowledge and experience to offer the highest standards of service to people with disabilities, including a selection of clients and canines, training, team matching methods, and follow-up protocols.

Relatively few dogs meet the very basic criteria to be service dogs. Breeds like golden and Labrador retrievers are good breeds to be service dogs because they tend to have the right balance of behaviour, temperament, and energy. First-rate service dogs are not overly active, yet they are still people oriented and confident.

Potential service dogs must be physically screened to ensure that they are disease free, physically capable of taking the tasks that are required of them, and not prone to chronic health symptoms. A service dog must not be aggressive, should not be protective because that is not their job. Over time dogs may begin to sense their owner's vulnerability and be protective when it's inappropriate. Service dogs are not permitted to bark aggressively, only in situations that they have actually been trained for. The point of this rigorous selection process is to find effective dogs.

Dogs that are put through this comprehensive, individualized training program are well-trained service dogs that are trained for an hour or two each day over a period of six months. At least a quarter of this time is roughly scheduled for public exposure training.

3:40

Service dogs are taught to remain within their handler's control at all times. Service dogs fail the training process if they show aggression, bark inappropriately, bite, snap, growl, jump inappropriately on strangers, beg, or sniff people. Service dogs are taught a set of basic commands including sit, stay, come, heal, and return on command when off leash. There are over 100 tasks that a service dog can be trained to perform. The exact skills each service dog is taught depend on the needs of the person they will be eventually paired with.

Training processes are conducted to the highest humane standards, and the welfare of each dog is of critical importance. Accepted training methods ensure that the physical and emotional safety of each dog is given the highest priority, and each dog is allowed to learn at his or her own pace. They're not paired with a handler until they're sufficiently physically or emotionally mature, and pairing must consider the needs and abilities of both the handler and the service dog. They can be paired with people of a broad range of ages. Personal and physical characteristics of a dog that enable it to assist with an active toddler may be much different from that of a dog being able to assist a 60-year-old businessperson.

Service dogs need attention and affection, so they are placed only with persons who are able to interact with them. Recipients of a service dog must be able to provide a physically, emotionally, financially stable and secure living environment as well.

Handlers and service dogs undergo several weeks of training together, including dog handling skills and an orientation on canine health and obedience issues. After the formal training there are regular follow-ups with handlers, with additional training to provide for handlers' changing circumstances.

A service dog team will only be legally considered a service dog team once its members have been issued identification cards by the responsible minister or a designate. That will provide the minister with a way to ensure that all service dogs meet the highest qualifications. This bill is concerned with service dogs, not service animals. There is no certification for any animals other than dogs.

Mr. Speaker, this bill provides, certainly for restaurant owners, store owners, and people that are out in the public, that for an individual entering that premises, a dog is absolutely necessary. Myself and my family, having been 38 years in the restaurant business, recognize and know that having a well-trained, licensed, and certified dog provides comfort to your customers, knowing that it is a working dog and it is safe in a crowd. It also provides security and a quality of life for persons with disabilities. This is a win-win for everyone.

I urge everyone to support Bill 203.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. First of all, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona for recognizing the needs of Alberta's disabled community through this bill.

The challenges of stress, injury, illness are typically temporary inconveniences which can usually be overcome with treatment and time. However, some diseases cannot be cured, and some injuries cannot be fully healed. Genetic predispositions, such as epilepsy, can result in a disability that can present a real and pressing impediment to mobility, daily function, and quality of life. Modern medicine is just one component in the larger goal of overall wellness.

The government is committed to wellness, an integral part of which is the development of policy that allows all Albertans to live full, healthy, and productive lives. When conditions prevent an individual from reaching their potential, we must consider and facilitate alternative means of enabling and enhancing their overall state of wellness and quality of life.

Bill 203 proposes an example of this facilitation and builds on Alberta's past innovation and success in fully ensuring that opportunity and prosperity are attainable for all. The government is committed to enacting policy that reflects the needs of the disabled community. Extensive legislative and policy framework are in place and are augmented by a series of publicly funded programs. They work in conjunction to provide opportunity and security for Albertans with disabilities. Examples are AISH, PDD, and distinct legislation which allows the use of guide dogs for visually challenged individuals. This legislation has evolved over time, resulting in unrestricted access to amenities enjoyed by the visually impaired who utilize a service animal. They can experience freedom and independence, that would otherwise be unavailable. This is an example of proactive public policy inspiring equality and reinforcing the basic moral principles of fairness and justice.

This Assembly has more than once recognized the challenges of the disabled community and provided legal protection not previously

enjoyed. Examples of how this Assembly aspired to make life more enjoyable for the visually challenged include The Blind Persons' White Cane Act in 1955, The Blind Persons' Guide Dogs Act in 1977, and the consolidation of these two acts into the current Blind Persons' Rights Act in 1980.

We are presented today with an opportunity to carry on this evolution of policy and build upon a strong foundation of inclusion with our support of this bill, Bill 203. There are Albertans with disabilities whose lives would be enriched with the assistance of a service dog, individuals who do not currently enjoy the same opportunity and legal protection as the visually impaired, groups with potential to be refused access to an establishment and could benefit from access to a service dog. This includes epileptics, those who are hard of hearing, those who are mobility impaired, and any individual suffering from a disability of any kind, such as a brain injury. There are many establishments that disabled persons could access with the help of this legislation, including restaurants, theatres, recreation facilities, schools, and of course various businesses.

The Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act provides extensive human rights protection to all disabled individuals, including those who use guide animals. This legislation has set Alberta apart as a leader in the promotion of human rights and is in theory both comprehensive and sufficient to protect those individuals addressed by the provisions of Bill 203.

There have been cases where this protection has not been sufficient. The issue of access for those using service dogs presents a definite problem which needs immediate attention. The problem is not with the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act; the problem is with public perception and understanding of the role played by guide and service dogs. A visually impaired person with a guide dog is quite acceptable, whereas an epileptic individual with a response dog may not be.

The legislative evolution of blind persons' rights in Alberta has not only provided legal protection; it has served as a function of raising public awareness of the visually impaired and their use of guide dogs. Alberta's human rights legislation provides equal protection for all individuals using service dogs. Problems with public perception is due to the fact that we do not have stand-alone legislation providing and promoting specific protection for the persons with disabilities who are not visually challenged. The provisions of Bill 203 obviate these concerns. More importantly, they take nothing away from the existing legislative structure; rather, they complement it.

In conclusion, the legislation, then, upholds the government's commitment to general wellness and the needs of the disabled. Bill 203 can meet the objectives that this commitment aspires to. Through Bill 203 there is a great opportunity to reinforce our dedication to the protection of Albertans and the future well-being of our province as a whole. Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of the Assembly support Bill 203.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. This act will ensure that persons with disabilities have the legal right to be accompanied by a service dog in all open areas in the public and to do so free of discrimination. This new act will complement the Blind Persons' Rights Act. Bill 203 extends the rights and

protections available to the legally blind and to all other persons with disabilities who need a service dog.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, while the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act provides protection to those persons with disabilities who require a service dog, there is a lack of clarity surrounding the provisions for recourse. Bill 203 will remedy this situation. Individuals who require a service dog will require identification as proof of their need for this service dog. Matters relating to the certification of service dogs and the qualification of service dog trainers will be dealt with through regulation, not unlike the process used through the Blind Persons' Rights Act. Fines will be in place if individuals claim to be disabled persons when they are not in fact so for the purpose of gaining the benefit of a service dog.

Bill 203 can also assist individuals who have faced stressful situations as a result of the general public not having sufficient understanding of the purposes of a service dog. This will enable individuals to have the opportunity to participate fully in the economic, social, and cultural life of our province. The government is committed to ensuring that its policies reflect the varied needs of the disabled community in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 builds on the mandate of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. It also advances the Alberta disability strategy by eliminating barriers and allowing for greater inclusion of persons with disabilities. I commend the Member for Strathcona for his work in this area, and I would urge all hon. members to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? Does the hon. Member for Strathcona wish to close?

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to offer a few closing comments with respect to Bill 203, Service Dogs Act. In the public gallery is Larry Pempeit, whom I'd like to welcome to the Assembly, and perhaps at this time we would ask the members assembled to give him the traditional warm welcome. We appreciate Larry's presence here.

Larry is with the Canadian Paraplegic Association and is one of many people who offer from time to time insight and advice about the challenges that people have when they have to get around the community in a wheelchair, those challenges and those barriers that exist. We're trying to do what we can with the help of the Canadian Paraplegic Association and other organizations like the Alberta Disabilities Forum and also through our work with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Those insights are important as we develop bills like this Bill 203, and their work at the Canadian Paraplegic Association is important to help eliminate those barriers that exist. So, Larry, on behalf of persons with disabilities and on behalf of the Premier's council as well I'd like to thank you for your contributions and your support. Thank you very much.

It's been mentioned several times by several speakers that Bill 203, Service Dogs Act, will parallel the BPRA, the Blind Persons' Rights Act. If one takes the two acts and puts them side by side, there is a great deal of similarity there. I really appreciate the notes that several people have sent over to me mentioning different things that they see as questions or challenges about the bill. Some things will have to be answered, and we'll answer those questions as best we can during the committee stage if we're favoured with your positive response in the vote here in a minute or two.

I'll just mention briefly one other thing that's important, and that

is, as was mentioned as well by several speakers, that education and awareness are going to be very important for this bill. It's been critical for the Blind Persons' Rights Act. It's critical that the public understand and recognize the issues and, well, what kind of work those dogs do. Currently there are often challenges that pop up with the guide dogs, that are fully legislated and regulated today, yet people sometimes don't know what the circumstances are. If this bill passes with your support, then we would see at that time some awareness being brought forward, and that will help with both the guide dogs, that are currently legislated and regulated, as well as the new service dogs, that would fall into that new category.

ID cards were mentioned, and certainly there would be an intent to have ID cards, much the same way as seeing eye dogs, or guide dogs, are used currently.

There was mention of allergies and what's going to happen in circumstances where somebody is allergic to dogs. In all of these things, certainly, there is a balance of rights that has to be considered, and accommodations have to be made in circumstances no matter what they are currently, and it will be the case with this legislation.

Again, I would ask for your support. The disability community has indicated to me and indicated to many of you who spoke today that this is important to them. It's not going to affect a great many people, but it will affect a few people very significantly.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I thank those who have offered their support in speaking and have spoken positively about this bill. I would ask all members assembled to please support this bill, and I would call for the vote.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a second time]

Bill 204

Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007/ Loi modificative de 2007 sur les emblèmes de l'Alberta (reconnaissance du fait franco-albertain)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the first speaker, I'd like to point out that this is the first private member's bill in the history of our province to be introduced in French, as we understood, when it was introduced by the hon. member in first reading. The first government bill to be introduced in French was the Languages Act of 1988.

With that, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for recognizing that I introduced that bill in French.

Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007.

The official recognition of this symbol as a provincial emblem is a way for us to acknowledge the many unique contributions that Franco-Albertans have made to our province dating back to the fur trade in the mid-1600s and recorded settlement dating back 260 years ago, to when Pierre and François de La Vérendrye, the first in a long line of French pioneers, came to our province. In 1751 French settlers from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, established a fort on the Bow River near present-day Calgary. From these humble beginnings, Mr. Speaker, Europeans of all descent have come to our province. Then as now Alberta's wide prairies and striking rivers beckoned, offering a new beginning and a chance for prosperity.

Those same prairies and rivers form the basis of the emblem that this bill proposes to recognize, Mr. Speaker. This emblem is composed of blue and white diagonal stripes that represent the waters and the roads travelled in Alberta by francophone explorers and colonists. The fleur-de-lys in the blue field in the upper left represents the francophone community, while the wild rose in the white field in the lower right is emblematic of the Alberta that we all know and cherish.

As European settlers arrived in Alberta, they gave their new settlements names characteristic of the countries they had left. The names of many towns around the province reflect the French background, places like Beaumont, Grouard, Lac La Biche, Morinville, and St. Paul. My corner of the province, in the north-west, is home to very healthy and thriving francophone communities in Girouxville, Marie-Reine, Donnelly, Falher, and St. Isidore. The French legacy in these towns is very strong. Some have even designated themselves as officially bilingual.

4:00

Our French history is not only found in towns first settled by French settlers. Today in Alberta there are over 334,000 people of French descent, more than 1 in 10 Albertans. Sixty-six thousand Albertans are native French speakers while over 205,000 Albertans are able to speak some French.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most distinctive traits of the country in which we live is the fact that we are officially bilingual. The number of Albertans who are conversant in French is, in part, a reflection of this. Officially recognizing an emblem of the Franco-Albertan community demonstrates to the rest of Canada that we believe that the French and English cultures can collaborate and coexist. The two solitudes need not be so lonely.

Other provinces have recognized the role that francophones played in their history with similar legislation, Mr. Speaker. The Fransaskois emblem has been included in the provincial emblems of Saskatchewan while Ontario has passed the Franco-Ontarian Emblem Act, 2001, that makes the Franco-Ontarian emblem the official emblem of Ontario's francophone community. This is exactly the same thing that Bill 204 proposes. I am certain that we can count on the same warm reception here that Ontario and Saskatchewan's francophone communities gave to the passage of their respective pieces of legislation.

However, Mr. Speaker, the advantages of recognizing the symbol go beyond mere symbolism. Because of our belief in a bilingual Canada, Alberta is a signatory to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which recognizes Canada's unique linguistic duality. The Charter gives parents a legal right to educate their children in either official language. Granting official recognition to the Franco-Albertan emblem will help promote the many advantages of being educated in both of Canada's official languages. Fluency in English and French is an increasingly valuable skill both here in Canada and in the globalized world. Thousands of Albertans have taken French courses in school or simply for their own interest because of the doors that bilingualism opens. Bilingualism is good in and of itself as there is ample evidence showing that it is an excellent way to keep one's mind healthy and well exercised.

Mr. Speaker, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007 is also an excellent way to recognize the contributions of l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta in the promotion of French history and culture in Alberta. This organization works tirelessly to educate Albertans about the significance of the francophone contribution to our province. In fact, the emblem that we are discussing today came about because of the efforts of the ACFA in March 1982, 25 years ago. The

Francophonie jeunesse de l'Alberta, the francophone youth of Alberta, held a contest seeking an emblem for Alberta's francophones. Jean-Pierre Grenier's winning entry has been the symbol of Franco-Albertans in the 25 years since. I can think of no finer way to celebrate the anniversary of this symbol than to grant it official recognition as the emblem of Alberta's francophone community.

I understand that there are concerns about the appropriateness of granting this recognition. However, there is nothing new about this Legislature recognizing an emblem representative of a specific cultural group. Since 1961 Alberta has recognized its proud Scottish heritage with an official tartan, and in the year 2000 we passed Bill 205 to give Alberta an official dress tartan. The emblems of this province are not static but are updated to reflect the changing composition of our society. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that it is appropriate that we grant special recognition to a symbol of the Franco-Albertan community because Franco-Albertans have had such a special impact on the course of Alberta's history.

Mr. Speaker, it is also the job of MLAs to exercise discretion in deciding what symbols are worthy of this government's official recognition. Needless to say, official recognition of a provincial emblem is not granted on a whim and is subject to debate, exactly like the debate we are having here today.

I think it is also essential to understand that the passage of Bill 204 will not in any way alter the nationally recognized flag protocols that govern the display of our provincial flag and the emblems of other organizations. Pride of place will always be given to the flag of Canada and to the flag of Alberta. Bill 204 will not change what flags are flown here at the Legislature or at any other public location around the province. The emblems of organizations are always assigned the lowest precedence in flag protocol even if they have been granted official recognition. Mr. Speaker, the experience of Ontario and Saskatchewan in recognizing their own francophone emblems is illustrative. The same flags continue to fly on government buildings and in public places in both of those provinces.

Mr. Speaker, the French influence in Alberta ranges back to the great fur trade, which opened this country nearly 400 years ago, and the first settlement back 250 years ago, before we even became a province, to today and the excellent work done by the ACFA and many like-minded organizations. The 25th anniversary of this emblem of Alberta's francophone community is a perfect time to recognize our province's rich French heritage and the continued role that French culture plays in our lives.

I hope all members will join me in approving this bill and granting official recognition to the Franco-Albertan emblem by voting in favour of Bill 204. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Chase: Les membres du Parti Libéral apprécient beaucoup les contributions des francophones dans la province de l'Alberta. Cet emblème et ce drapeau reconnaissent leurs efforts. Vive les francophones de l'Alberta. En levant ce drapeau, nous célébrons les cultures diverses des groupes de l'Alberta.

The members of the Liberal Party appreciate tremendously the contributions of francophones in the province of Alberta. This emblem and this flag recognize their efforts. Long live the francophones of Alberta. By raising this flag, we celebrate diverse cultures which make up this province.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to join my colleagues in debate on Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, sponsored by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to begin my remarks by acknowledging the tremendous contributions that the francophone Albertans have made to the history of our province and also to the development of our country of Canada. The great explorers Jacques Cartier, Samuel de Champlain, La Salle, La Vérendrye, Radisson, Des Groseilliers: these are the names that illuminated the history of our country.

Canada's oldest city, Quebec City, was founded over 400 years ago by Champlain. Francophone involvement in Alberta, as the hon. member for Peace River has mentioned, began with the fur trade, which was really the first industry in what is now our province of Alberta. The establishment of the fur industry by French Canadians and the Métis culture helped pave the way for the development of this province.

The fusion, as I mentioned, of the French culture and the native culture in Métis is also a part of Alberta which we celebrate today. I think this serves to illustrate a broader point, Mr. Speaker: that the francophone culture is, in fact, very deeply ingrained in the history of our province.

Franco-Albertan settlement, as my hon. friend has mentioned, helped to shape the province by virtue of the fact that we have many French names of places in our province. Everyday life in these communities continues to be very heavily influenced by francophone culture. Everything from architecture to literature to education draws a great deal of inspiration from the ideas that the French-speaking people have brought to our province. While it's doubtlessly true that francophones have played an important role in our history, I don't believe that making the Franco-Albertan emblem an official emblem of the province is necessarily the best way to extend that recognition.

4:10

According to Statistics Canada data 15 per cent of Albertans were foreign born; 329,000 Albertans, or 11 per cent of the population, identify themselves as visible minorities, and 16.4 per cent of Albertans identified themselves as allophones, or persons whose first language is something other than French or English. In our urban centres there is even greater diversity; 17 and a half per cent of Calgarians and 15 per cent of Edmontonians identify themselves as visible minorities, and those are, respectively, the fourth- and fifth-highest percentages in the country. For Edmonton and Calgary 20 per cent of the population self-identify as allophones. In both of those cities Chinese is, in fact, the leading nonofficial mother tongue, accounting for about 4 and a half per cent of the population in Calgary and 2.9 per cent of the population in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it's likely that the multicultural nature of Alberta is going to continue to increase in the future. At the present time the government is working hard to attract people from around the world to Alberta. It appears that, in fact, this strategy is working because nearly 16,000 people came from abroad, outside of Canada, to Alberta in 2006. So people from a wide variety of backgrounds, with origins stretching to all parts of the world, are striving to make our province the best place to live, work, and visit.

It's important, Mr. Speaker, in my submission, that we recognize the many contributions that numerous cultural groups have made to our past and continue to make to our communities on a daily basis. There are many ways that we can recognize and celebrate the cultural diversity of our province. We have designated days, designated weeks, dinners, speeches, tributes, and statements in our Legislature, and we also have more lasting and permanent monuments, statues, and memorials to various cultures. One example

would be the tribute to the Ukrainian community as recognized on the grounds of our Legislature here in Edmonton. Another would be the Sien Lok Park, which is a tribute to the Chinese culture in the city of Calgary.

So I do have some reservations, Mr. Speaker, about the content of this bill and the fact that it refers specifically to a flag, and flags of course are items which sometimes cause divisions in society. It's not simply a pragmatic matter to officially adopt flags for the many cultural groups that contribute to our province as official emblems of Alberta. There are several hundred different official emblems which are possible if we should proceed down that road. I believe that there is great significance, as my hon. friend has mentioned, in the Alberta flag. For 40 years this flag has been a unifying symbol for Albertans, and all Albertans, regardless of their language, their religion, their ethnicity, can look upon that flag with pride because it symbolizes unity, and it also symbolizes strength, tolerance, and compassion, that the people of this province stand for.

We also have a number of other symbols and emblems and songs and other items of cultural significance which we recognize here in Alberta. We have an official fish emblem. We have an official grass emblem. We have an official gemstone, or rock. We have an official bird. We have an official mammal, an official tree. What all these emblems have in common is the fact that they are commonly applicable to all Albertans. They unite us. They are something that all Albertans share, not simply one cultural group or another.

Mr. Speaker, another concern I have with Bill 204 is that it might lead to future controversies or divisions based upon what cultural groups are represented in the future under similar legislation. Would Chinese Albertans, for example, take offence to the inclusion of a distinctive Tibetan-Albertan flag as an official symbol? Would Russian descendants object to a distinctive flag for Chechen Albertans or Ossetian Albertans? Would the people of Darfur and the rest of Sudan agree on an appropriate symbol for Sudanese Albertans? Would the Kurdish people of Turkey agree with the symbol proposed by the Turkish community in Alberta? Would people oppose the adoption of an Alberta gay community flag as a distinctive symbol of our province? The problems that could arise are quite considerable.

So while I support the intentions of the hon. Member for Peace River, I'm not prepared to support the bill in its present form. I do look forward to working with him and members of the francophone community to examine other meaningful and significant ways of recognizing this important cultural group and recognizing it here, specifically in our Legislature, for all Albertans to celebrate and enjoy. I look forward to hearing the views of my other colleagues respecting this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Peace River will be glad to know that there are some people on this side that are going to support the bill. I point out that I think the previous speaker is a bit of a red herring. This is Canada. We have accepted – other provinces are moving ahead in terms of recognizing – what is the reality of our history with the Franco-Albertan emblem recognition.

I mean, when we look at the history – and I think that the member mentioned it – francophone history stems back to the 1700s, when French explorers came here. We see the legacy by the names of cities and towns around Alberta: Lacombe, Brosseau, Bonnyville, Girouxville, to say a few. Over 500 French names identifying rivers, lakes, and places can be found in Alberta. Frankly, as I understand

it, French was the first European language spoken in what is now Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this may be ancient history, but I would like to go to more modern history, something that happened right here in this Legislature, to show you how far we've come. In the early '80s there were 16 of us on the NDP side, and we had an MLA named Leo Piquette. Now, some people would remember. He got up and alerted a member across the way who was bilingual, a cabinet minister, that he was going to ask a question. He was ruled out of order. He created not only a storm in Alberta but a national storm, as this went across the country.

That was in the early '80s, and now, of course, I think it shows you, at least somewhat, how far we've come, that we can at least be debating and, I'd hope, passing that we have an official flag of the francophone community to be called the Franco-Albertan flag. As a result of that, just recently Leo has written a book about francophone rights and the fight for francophone rights. So I think that the francophone community would be very happy to see this Legislature at this time coming forward with this emblem. I don't think it takes anything away from other cultural groups. This is in fact Canada, and this is in fact Alberta, and we're recognizing the obvious, Mr. Speaker. As I say, when we think that that was just in the early '80s and that it created a national storm here in this Legislature, I think it does show somewhat how important that this particular bill come forward at this time, and it shows you how far we've come.

4:20

As I say, we will certainly support it on this side of the House. I'm speaking, of course, for this caucus. I would say that we still have a ways to go because we had the debate in this Legislature not that long ago about the number of people coming in and doing the tar sands. You may recall that a francophone worker in the tar sands was basically fired because he couldn't speak English well enough. That seemed to us rather ironic as we're bringing people – I think that the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill was right, that we have all sorts of people up there that couldn't speak English, but all of a sudden a Canadian, a francophone from Quebec, was fired for his lack of English. While we certainly recognize, Mr. Speaker, that this is a step in the right direction, the Franco-Albertan flag, I think that we still have to go some ways to protect francophone workers' rights if what's going on in the tar sands is any indication.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly commend the Member for Peace River. You'll notice that I didn't try to speak French because I can mangle the English language well enough without trying French. I think that this is a step that's especially important for this Legislature in view of the history going back with Leo Piquette and what happened in the Legislature at that time. I think this is a good step forward.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am indeed very pleased to have this opportunity to speak in support of the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, and I want to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the hon. Member for Peace River for bringing it forward at this time.

M. le Président, j'aime beaucoup la culture française, la langue française, toutes les chansons françaises, les traditions, et sans doute tous les membres de la communauté francophone aussi. Donc, je suis prêt en ce moment à supporter ce projet de loi en deuxième lecture.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 formally acknowledges a lot of

important things to our community in general and to the French-speaking community in particular. It addresses, I suppose through the symbolism that it portrays, the incredibly important role that French Canadians have played in our province, going back centuries literally. Through this recognition of the Franco-Albertan emblem we can certainly stand proud with our francophone community members and salute them as well.

We've heard some eloquent testimonies already today with respect to the role that francophone explorers played in helping settle our province and discover it and so on, the cities that are named after famous French individuals, the communities we have, and so on and so on. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this particular emblem which is of debate today has been utilized by our francophone community since about 1980 or '82, somewhere in there, so it's not a strange emblem to any of us. Alberta is such a wonderful and beautiful place with such an enormous and rich cultural heritage. Why wouldn't we take this opportunity to salute one of those at this time?

M. le Président, j'aime beaucoup ces choses, comme j'ai déjà dit. Ici en Alberta nous avons beaucoup de cultures et beaucoup de peuples qui ont choisi notre belle province, et cela inclue les francophones, plusieurs qui sont de nos premiers pionniers de l'Alberta. So it's fitting at this time to in fact honour and recognize them in this way.

Francoophone heritage, as we all would know, can be traced to the earliest days of the fur trade, when the Montreal peddlers came out to the northwest region of Canada, specifically here to Alberta, in search of adventure, business opportunities, and what have you. Métis communities soon became very prevalent, and they were Alberta's first francophone communities. Of course, these were established when the voyageurs married Cree women. Now, while Alberta's most common official language is English, it is interesting to note that French was the first European language spoken in Alberta. That is a fact. This is due, of course, to the additional fact that the first settlers to the province were of French-Canadian origins, joining in with our aboriginal friends of the day.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we have over 330,000 Albertans who can trace their ancestry to French descent. Specifically, there are about 66,000 Albertans who are classified as francophones, and I'm very proud that Alberta has the fastest-growing French-speaking population outside of l'autre belle province, Québec. Francophone Albertans live everywhere in our province. As we would all know, Edmonton and Calgary certainly have very large concentrations, but there are many other communities that you've heard of in northern Alberta: the Peace Country, St. Paul, Falher, Girouxville, et pas loin d'ici nous avons Beaumont and . . .

Mr. Ducharme: Bonnyville.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Of course, Bonnyville. How could I forget that? And so on.

I also want to emphasize that there are a number of communities with very large groupings of French speakers now in the southern half of our province as well. I encountered this particular wonderful fact just over the past couple of years when I was minister of education, and I had the opportunity to travel there and meet with them. In addition to that, our Francophone Secretariat would tell you very proudly that Beaumont, Legal, and Falher are even officially bilingual communities. It's a wonderful story to tell.

Mr. Speaker, French education in Alberta, that I've just referenced, is also a phenomenal success, and part of the reason for that success is because the number of Franco-Albertans and French-speaking Albertans is increasing very significantly. I can tell you that the enrolment in our francophone schools, run by our

francophone school authorities, has quintupled over the last few years – quintupled – and it's a testament, I think, to the incredible strength of second-language learning and third-language learning and official-language learning and so on in this province, as bolstered by an outstanding education system.

We also have a significant issue with respect to immigration and interprovincial migration and a growing popularity of our francophone, our French immersion, and our French second-language programs, all of which I know that members here support, and so do I with a great passion. Mr. Speaker, these education programs receive government funding and promotion as a vital component of our multicultural reality in Alberta. Nous sommes très fiers d'offrir et d'avoir ces programmes, et je vais toujours donner mon appui pour assurer leur succès.

The French culture and language are also legally recognized in Alberta, as has been recognized, and I won't go into that any further other than to say that that, too, is a wonderful thing. So whether you're taking French as a second language or you're involved in the immersion programs or you're involved in some other form of cultural and linguistic enterprise that features the French language, the fact simply is that it's a good thing for this province, and it's equally important that we recognize that growth and development. We have a number of French programs with a very large economic impact that are aiding our population to become more competitive in our Canadian labour market as well as internationally.

Just as I wrap up here, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the interests of our large francophone community are also represented by more than 200 regional and community organizations. That's a phenomenal statement to be very proud of. Adopting this particular Franco-Albertan emblem as an official emblem would certainly increase our awareness of this large cultural community, that is so vibrant in our province. Bill 204 would help further the idea that Alberta is indeed a very progressive place in which to live and in which to support the various cultures that are here as well.

4:30

Finally, Mr. Speaker, our Francophone Secretariat, that I alluded to earlier, also wishes to formalize, I'm sure, its commitment to Franco-Albertans. This of course is a special committee that liaises between the government and Alberta's francophone community. It represents to government the needs of the francophone community, and it supports initiatives aimed at promoting French language and culture. Our chef de mission là, Mr. Denis Tardif, et son assistante, Antonine, do a phenomenal job promoting that and working with them.

Enfin, M. le Président, je voudrais encourager tous les membres de notre Assemblée à donner leur appui pour ce projet de loi.

That having been said, I will take my seat, Mr. Speaker, merely to say that this is a good move. I'm hoping that it will be supported, and if for whatever reason it might not be, perhaps some other form of recognition equivalent to this can be pursued.

Merci beaucoup.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to speak in support of this bill, which recognizes a reality of which many Albertans may be unaware. When we look at a provincial map, we cannot escape the francophone influence. Second after aboriginal names there are probably more names of French origin in the northern half of our province than from any other source. These reflect the voyageurs who travelled together with the First Nations

and Scots, opened the west, and travelled its lakes and waterways. We see this influence in the Jasper area in Lac Boisvert and Maligne, Annette and Trefoil Lakes. We see it in Grande Prairie and Grande Cache and in Rivière-de-la-Paix, the original name of the Peace River.

Then we have settlements named after missionaries, saints, and homesteaders. North of Red Deer we have Joffre, Lacombe, Leduc, Beaumont, Breton, and north of Edmonton we have Morinville, Picardville, Legal, Vimy, up to Falher and the Peace River country, where French names predominate.

Before our province and Saskatchewan were created in 1905, there were alternative plans to create two provinces one atop each other, like North and South Dakota in the U.S. Each would have had one transcontinental railway and one branch of the Saskatchewan River, so they might have ended up being called north and south Saskatchewan. Under that plan the northern province, where a majority of the French names in both provinces are clustered, would have been bilingual or French-speaking, like the lower territories had been before our two provinces were created.

That plan lost favour in the wake of the second Riel-led uprising, the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. Anglophone reaction, some of it outright bigotry, said: no more French provinces. And the scheme was dropped about the same time as French language rights were revoked in Manitoba, which was created as a bilingual province. Mr. Speaker, think what a difference it would have made to Canada had that rebellion and that reaction not taken place. We would have had four of our 10 provinces either French-speaking or bilingual: Quebec, New Brunswick, Manitoba, and northern Saskatchewan. There would be no fortress Quebec mentality because francophone Canadians would not be limited primarily to one province but spread more widely across the country.

We can't turn back time or redraw the map now, but we can give credit to an influence and heritage where it is due. The French community has a rich history in this province. The French community plays an important role in our province. The members of the community contribute a great deal to our province, and as Albertans we are proud to recognize their heritage.

Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, is an important recognition of their history and contribution to our culture and history, and for that reason I am happy to endorse the Franco-Albertan flag as one of the emblems of this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to join the discussion regarding Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007. There is a long tradition of multiculturalism in Alberta, that has enabled the province to build one of the most prosperous and progressive societies in the world. People want to move here. Things are good here in Alberta. Real estate values are rising. There are plenty of jobs. It's just a great place to live. People from other countries and other provinces are moving to our province every year.

Mr. Speaker, through the celebration of diversity and the encouragement of cultural identity, we have become more unified as a whole. This is something we see reflected throughout Alberta, not only in our progressive government policies but also in the sense of co-operation that results from increased tolerance and understanding. In almost every town and every city across the province we see the

proud heritage and traditions of various cultures reflected in a variety of ways, from monuments and architecture to parades, festivals, and celebrations. Even in my own community of Calmar we have the Zirka Ukrainian dancers, that not only perform in Calmar but all around the province and even in other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, today we have the opportunity to provide increased recognition of the francophone heritage with our support of Bill 204. I understand that the purpose of Bill 204 is to include in the official emblems of Alberta the Franco-Albertan emblem as created and adopted by the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, or ACFA. I would remind all members of this Assembly that the ACFA is officially recognized by the *Statutes of Alberta* as the official representative of Alberta's francophone community, and they have advocated on behalf of the Francophonie in this province since 1926.

Mr. Speaker, it is fitting that this emblem similarly be given official, legislated recognition. It has been used as an unofficial symbol of the province's francophone community for the past quarter century. The Francophonie has been an integral part of this province for over 200 years. Their achievements, their language, and their culture have deep roots here. More than 1 in 10 Albertans is of French descent. That is a significant number, which I believe deserves to be better reflected in the official emblems of our province, which carry with them great significance. They are designed to paint a picture of Alberta's past, present, and future by giving official recognition to the symbolism which makes our province unique. This symbol includes adjacent fields and diagonal bands of blue and white along with the wild rose and fleur-de-lys.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Speaking of symbolism, Alberta would not be the place it is today without the contributions of its francophone citizens. They are justifiably proud of their heritage. This is why the ACFA saw fit to encourage the creation and subsequent adoption of a banner to recognize these contributions in 1982, and this is why the Franco-Albertan emblem has been used consistently by the francophone community these last 25 years. What better way to express cultural pride than through the display of a banner whose symbolism describes it so well?

The ACFA has not been alone in its creation of an emblem symbolizing French culture and achievement on a provincial level. They've been joined by the francophone communities in almost every other Canadian jurisdiction. The francophone communities in almost every province or territory in the federation have created emblems with the same purpose as the Franco-Albertan emblem; namely, to symbolize and commemorate the historical and cultural achievements of the jurisdictions' Francophonie.

Other jurisdictions, like Saskatchewan and Ontario, as has been mentioned, have done what we are doing today. They have debated the matter of officially recognizing the emblems of these groups in their respective Legislative Assemblies. The outcome of both discussions, Mr. Speaker, was positive. Members of the Legislative Assemblies of Ontario and Saskatchewan decided in both instances to adopt such an emblem as an official provincial emblem. Now, it has been over six years since Saskatchewan officially recognized the Fransaskois emblem and nearly that long since the Franco-Ontarian emblem was given a similar honour.

Mr. Speaker, there may be those who feel that Bill 204 shows undue favouritism to a particular group, such as my seatmate, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. However, there have been no hard feelings that I am aware of in either Saskatchewan or Ontario. In fact, if anything, there's been an increased sense of belonging and

accomplishment in each francophone community. So the intent of Bill 204 is to promote inclusion – inclusion. We are all united by our diversity, a point which I think bears reiteration.

The portrait of our province today is different than it was in the time of our parents and grandparents. Likewise, it will be different in the time of our children. This reality requires a degree of flexibility in all areas of public policy. It requires that our province's official emblems remain open to change so as to accommodate present and future recognition of those groups who have contributed and continue to contribute so much to our identity as Albertans.

4:40

I think that the Alberta government is more than willing to show such flexibility. We have demonstrated it repeatedly in the past. Proof is the constant evolution of not only our official emblems but our entire framework of legislation and policies aimed at promoting and enhancing cultural development and tolerance. Mr. Speaker, they have evolved as Alberta has evolved, and I believe that the proposals advanced by Bill 204 represent a desirable and necessary next step in this evolution. They illustrate the government's commitment to developing a cultural policy which will encompass Alberta's historical and cultural heritage and will improve Albertans' quality of life.

So, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to offer their support for the adoption of a symbol recognizing the contribution of Alberta's Francophonie, joining the provinces of Ontario and Saskatchewan. I support the principles of inclusion and the celebration of culture which have been so instrumental in our collective growth and for Bill 204.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Ducharme: Merci, M. le Président. C'est avec une fierté franco-albertaine que je supporte le projet de loi 204, Loi modificative de 2007 sur les emblèmes de l'Alberta (reconnaissance du fait franco-albertain).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a pride of being a Franco-Albertan that I stand today in support of Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Peace River for bringing this legislation before the Assembly and providing a unique opportunity to expand Alberta's framework of cultural recognition.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 proposes to include in the official emblems of Alberta the emblem adopted by the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta in 1982. Bill 204 captures the essence of multiculturalism that Albertans treasure and continues the tradition of private members' legislation that adds to the composition of our official emblems. We're all Albertans, regardless of heritage or background. We are privileged to live in a society that recognizes the importance of celebrating and paying tribute to the cultural contributions of our forebears.

There is some concern that this bill may promote the emblem of the francophone culture to the exclusion of others. The idea of recognizing a specific cultural group through the adoption of an official emblem is not new or revolutionary. For example, I recall Bill 205 in 2000 proposing an official Alberta dress tartan. The passage of the Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000, added a second official tartan to Alberta's official emblems. This dress tartan, in addition to the existing tartan which was adopted as an official emblem in 1961, gave recognition

to the Scottish heritage which comprises a large component of Alberta's cultural landscape. There are direct parallels between these tartans and the Franco-Albertan emblem. They are distinctly similar and their adoption equally beneficial to the common good.

The francophone community has consistently used the francophone Alberta flag for over the past 25 years, displaying it at cultural events and functions in accordance with national flag protocol. National standards of flag protocol dictate how any flag may be displayed in relation to other flags or banners. The Franco-Albertan emblem as a banner of the organization occupies a very definite place of precedence in the universally accepted Canadian flag protocol.

This protocol will not and cannot be changed by Bill 204. This means that on any occasion when the Franco-Albertan emblem is displayed, it will be displayed in exactly the same fashion as it has been displayed since 1982. It means that the national flag of Canada, the flags of other sovereign nations, the flags of the provinces and territories of Canada, and the flags of municipalities and cities will continue to take precedence over the proposed Franco-Albertan emblem. It also means, of course, that the Alberta flag's order of precedence will not change. It does not mean adoption of the Franco-Albertan emblem as an official emblem which will result in mandatory display on any structure or at any event. Bill 204 is not about forcing the culture of one particular group on Albertans. It is about providing recognition to that group through the official adoption of an existing emblem.

When considering the adoption of a Franco-Albertan emblem, you must also consider the extensive recognition that has already been granted to Alberta's francophone community. As far as legislation and policy in this area go, there is a great deal of precedent. French is an official language of Canada. Parents have a recognized legal right to educate their children in either official language, and government ensures that services available to English-speaking Albertans are also made available to those who speak French.

We have legally recognized l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, the organization responsible for creating the Franco-Albertan emblem, as an official representative of Alberta's francophone community. In this capacity we have empowered them to advocate on behalf of the Francophonie and to advance their interests.

In 1999, as was mentioned earlier by some speakers, the Francophone Secretariat of Alberta was established to recognize the commitment of Alberta francophone citizens. Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of serving as the first chair of the Francophone Secretariat, until December of 2006. The Secretariat acts as a liaison between the government and Alberta's francophone community in addition to ensuring that their specific needs are reflected in the forms of policy and services. In addition to these forms of recognition, we also look to the Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, a celebration honouring Alberta's French community, which takes place annually here at the Legislature rotunda. At this ceremony, since 1999, we raise and recognize the Franco-Albertan flag, so the flag is not new to this building.

Alberta has a long-standing tradition of offering recognition to a group which has contributed a great deal to the social, cultural, and economic prosperity of our province. Recognizing this emblem, Mr. Speaker, is in keeping with our past and ongoing recognition of francophone culture. It enhances the comprehensive and inclusive nature of our province's official emblems, a step forward not only for the 334,000 Albertans of French descent but for Albertans of all backgrounds and cultures. This represents a natural evolution of our official emblems. It reflects the significant impact of a group that has been integral in forging our collective destiny.

Consideration of Bill 204 shows the openness and flexibility of our democratic society in advancing the cause of multiculturalism. It embodies the essence and reflects the purpose of our official emblems. It reflects the commitment of this government to the ideals of tolerance and acceptance that have made Alberta the best place in the world to live. Bill 204 has potential to improve the quality of life of all Albertans by enhancing the government's priority of promoting a culturally and historically encompassing cultural policy.

M. le Président, je demande à tous les membres de cette Assemblée de supporter la loi 204. C'est pour reconnaître certainement les contributions qui ont été faites par les franco-albertains pendant des siècles et des siècles dans cette province.

Merci beaucoup, M. le Président. Thank you.

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

Mr. Cao: Mr. Speaker, thank you. M. le Président, je suis très heureux d'avoir l'occasion de parler de la loi 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, présentée par le membre pour la Rivière-de-la-Paix. J'ai applaudi sa participation et édification en avançant la culture et la langue franco-albertaine.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the involvement in recognizing and advancing francophone Albertans' culture and language by the Member for Peace River. Bill 204 is an opportunity for the province to acknowledge the cultural role and the heritage of Alberta's francophone community by including as an official emblem of Alberta the Franco-Albertan emblem.

The francophone community is strongly represented throughout Alberta. Over 334,000 Albertans are of French descent, with over 66,000 considered native French speakers and over 205,000 able to speak some French, like myself.

Prominent cultural groups have helped to lay the foundation for the great multicultural society that we enjoy and live in today. Alberta is a growing multilingual society. Nationally there have been considerable increases in the number of multilingual Canadians. Multilingualism can help reduce feelings of isolation and marginalization and also increase understanding by all of us as Canadians.

4:50

Looking into the past, the history of Franco-Albertans dates back to the early days of exploration in Canada as Europeans of French descent charted expeditions across our great country and, in fact, across the North American continent. The ancestors of Franco-Albertans were among the first to settle on the vast prairie, along our rivers and lakes, and these explorers and voyageurs came to Alberta and established communities in the hope of a prosperous future.

It should be noted that many historians conclude that Pierre and François de La Vérendrye were among the first European explorers to reach the Rocky Mountains, in 1741. Less than 10 years later 10 Frenchmen from Portage la Prairie in Manitoba travelled up the Bow River to Alberta and eventually settled and built a post on the site of what is now Calgary.

Back to the present. Franco-Albertans are participating in over 200 regional and community organizations. As you heard before, Mr. Speaker, the Francophone Secretariat, one of the organizations very important to our government, co-ordinates initiatives to promote French language and culture to ensure that francophone citizens are provided culturally and linguistically appropriate services in essential areas such as education, justice, and health.

I just want to name a few. For example, l'Association

canadienne-française de l'Alberta, ACFA, operates as a leader, providing resources and direction for many francophone organizations and community initiatives. Le Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, CDEA, facilitates economic and tourism development, strictly working for the interests of francophone business, and provides a francophone Albertan with resources, advice, consultation, and networking between Alberta and Quebec and the French in France.

Also, we have the Centre d'accueil et d'établissement d'Edmonton, or CAE, an immigrant-serving agency helping immigrating francophones from all parts of the world. It assisted in the development of the French version of the Welcome to Alberta guide, which provides basic information about Alberta for new immigrants. Services are consistent with our government priority of providing a made-in-Alberta immigration strategy. Also a group called Regroupement artistique francophone de l'Alberta, RAFA, recognizes the government of Alberta's Foundation for the Arts as a provincial art service organization and provides services and assistance in the francophone arts and associations.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been universally enhanced by the cultural, social, historic, and economic contributions of francophone Albertans, and acknowledging the Franco-Albertan emblem is an act of gratitude and appreciation historically which will strengthen the solidarity of Albertans.

Now, Alberta signed Canada's Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms accepting and supporting the linguistic duality of Canada. There are many members of the Assembly who represent Franco-Albertan constituents, so granting official emblem status to the Franco-Albertan emblem will be perceived as a sincere thanks to those constituents which have a historical . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, but the time limit for consideration of this business has now left us.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Mr. Flaherty: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

503. Mr. Flaherty moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the unfunded liability in the teachers' pension plan as a public debt that should be addressed as soon as possible in order to reduce the unfairly high contribution rates of Alberta teachers and increase the resources available for classroom services.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An unfunded liability is the amount by which liabilities exceed assets. The Alberta teachers' pension plan had a \$7.1 billion unfunded liability as of August 31, '06. Put simply, an unfunded liability is a pension account funding shortfall. In 1992 the government committed to paying two-thirds, \$4.6 billion, and the teachers committed to paying one-third, \$2.3 billion. According to the ATA, at present, based on this funding scheme, the unfunded liability is expected to increase each year until it reaches about \$14 billion in 2045, after which it will rapidly diminish until it is eliminated by 2060.

Teachers now pay approximately 4.25 per cent, and the government pays 7.25 per cent, meaning that the teachers are paying a much higher proportion than most recent agreements that have been laid out. The problem with the 1992 deal is that, one, the province is not debt-free. The current unfunded liability is \$7.1 billion. Two,

teachers, particularly after 1992, are paying for an inherited debt. Three, according to the ATA, in 2005 Alberta teachers paid 12 per cent of their salary for a pension plan, compared to B.C. which is 8.1 per cent, Saskatchewan which is 7.7 per cent, and Ontario which is 7.8 per cent. Four, teacher contributions to the fund have not been met because the government reduced teachers' salaries and the number of teaching positions.

If you look across Canada, we see that in 2005 the government in Newfoundland and Labrador paid the entirety of the teachers' pension plan unfunded liability, totalling \$2 billion, in exchange for a four-year collective agreement which included a wage freeze in years 1 and 2, and 3 per cent increases in years 3 and 4. In March Manitoba put \$1.5 billion towards the unfunded liability in the teachers' pension plan, covering 75 per cent of the liability. The province took out a loan to cover the amount, which was calculated as saving money in the long run.

What is the government's position on the unfunded liability? Well, the Premier has looked at this and said that it should be resolved and has asked in a letter outlined to the Minister of Education that he initiate negotiations on options for a reasonable, long-term solution to the teachers' unfunded pension liability issue. This is very promising.

During the recent leadership campaign the now-Premier wanted to resolve the issue of the unfunded liability in the Alberta teachers' retirement fund through a framework agreement similar to those established in other jurisdictions. He said:

I have clearly stated that the Teacher's Pension Fund unfunded liability is a matter for the Government and the ATA to negotiate a final, fair and lasting resolution. I would never use such an emotional matter as a bargaining chip in the heat of a labour dispute. It doesn't matter any more how we got to this point, I have always bargained in good faith and know that solutions can always be found if we don't create unreasonable deadlines or prejudice negotiations before we've even sat down at the table.

The now Minister of Finance examined an indexed increase in teachers' salaries and an assumption of an unfunded liability in the teachers' pension fund in return for a 10-year moratorium on labour action.

In the campaign the present minister of health in an interview at the ATA said:

The Alberta government should take responsibility for all of the pre-1992 unfunded liability regardless of how it arose. The unfunded liability is a burden on young teachers, who will never benefit from it, and a disincentive to people entering and staying in the profession. Government needs to work with the ATA and school boards to reach an agreement under which the government would take immediate responsibility for the teacher portion of the liability. Government should pay it off over a five-year period, and it should be clearly identified separate and apart from monies budgeted for the current education system.

This government has also included \$40 million for a lump-sum payment for a portion of the government's share of the management employees' pension plan unfunded pension liability in the 2006-07 supplementary supply. The Liberal caucus position is this: the unfunded liability is a problem that will only get worse if action is not taken.

5:00

There are three major reasons to resolve this unfunded liability problem, we believe. Fiscal responsibility. The unfunded liability will only increase if action is not taken now. It is predicted that the unfunded liability, if the current rate is left in place, could reach up to \$45 billion in 2060. Strengthen the education system is part (b): difficulty recruiting and retaining new teachers. Currently teachers in Alberta are contributing to their pension plan at the highest rate

in Canada. This rate has increased significantly since a deal was reached in 1992. The Alberta Teachers' Association and the former education minister have pointed out that the unfunded liability discourages new teachers from entering the field. It is also reported to affect the retention of new teachers.

Increased funding for education. Currently spending on teachers' unfunded liability is housed within the education budget even though this funding has no real impact on learning outcomes. This both skews the amount of funding that is provided to education and potentially also represents money that could have been spent elsewhere within education and areas that would have directly impacted students and learning.

The third aspect is improved labour stability. The unfunded liability has led to tense labour relations between teachers and the provincial government, which may lead to strikes, stalled negotiations, et cetera in the months to come. A previous resolution to the unfunded liability was offered to teachers in exchange for 10 years of guaranteed labour peace. This was viewed by some as coercive.

Fairness. Teachers are paying for benefits they won't receive. The percentage of the pension payments that is put towards the unfunded liability is paying down a problem that new teachers had no part in creating and from which they will not benefit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Motion 503, which seeks to address the unfunded liability issue in the Alberta teachers' pension plan, or what's formally called the Alberta teachers' retirement fund, I guess. I'd also like to thank the hon. Member for St. Albert for raising the issue because I know that both of us would like to have this matter addressed and resolved, and I'm sure that virtually all members of the House would feel somewhat similar to that.

I hope it wouldn't be the case, but as worded, I suspect that the motion might well fail. I'm not trying to be presumptuous and foretell the votes in the House, but just looking at it, it suggests to me that it might be at risk of failing. Yet I know that the hon. member is very sincere in having brought it forward, so in that particular vein of thought I would like to propose an amendment. I would like to move that Motion 503 be amended by striking out "as a public debt that should be addressed as soon as possible in order to reduce the unfairly high contribution rates of Alberta teachers and increase the resources available for classroom services" and in their place substitute "and immediately initiate negotiations on options for a reasonable long term solution to the teachers' unfunded pension liability issue."

Mr. Speaker, the amended motion would then read as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the Government to recognize the unfunded liability in the Teachers' Pension Plan and immediately initiate negotiations on options for a reasonable long term solution to the teachers' unfunded pension liability issue.

I would then like to speak to the amendment.

The Speaker: To the hon. member and to all members – please continue with the circulation of the amendment – this amendment is to a motion of a private member, Motion 503. If hon. members take a look at the document in front of us, hon. members will note that there are no signatures of either Parliamentary Counsel. In other words, as part of our tradition Parliamentary Counsel is expected to look at the proposed amendments, and if they choose because of the practices of our Assembly to advise the chair, they advise the chair by not having their initials on the amendment.

The chair was aware of this earlier today, and there's reason for us to do this. First of all, the absence of their approval does not mean that the proposed amendment is automatically out of order, but it simply means it is drawn to the position of the chair. Hon. members know that this is a private member's matter. The chair has looked at that, heard the words, and basically is of the view that the amendment does change the intent of the motion.

In keeping with tradition, particularly since 1997, while I've had the privilege of being your Speaker, a great deal of deference is shown by the chair to the position of private members and the business of private members. There's limited opportunity for members to have their motions considered by the Assembly. Even prior to the arrival of my position in the chair in 1993, when major amendments were made to the Standing Orders, there was a spirit of those amendments that the work and the advocacy of private members was to be paramount in the Assembly. Successive Speakers have limited the scope of acceptable amendments to private members' motions so that their intent is not substantially altered.

I particularly refer members to page 273 of *Alberta Hansard* for March 2, 1999, for an example of a purported amendment to a private member's motion which was ruled out of order. By ruling it out of order, it could not proceed.

In this case the proposed amendment would remove any reference to "unfairly high contribution rates of Alberta teachers," which seems central to the motion.

The chair would also like to note that there is a spirit of co-operation that has developed in this Assembly since we have arrived here in the spring of 2007, and the chair would work in accordance with the mood, the new mood of the Assembly, to see whether or not we can find a solution to this.

The solution that the chair would suggest would be that the chair would ask the member for St. Albert, the sponsor of the motion, to advise whether he is of the view that the amendment is in keeping with the intent of his motion. If he agrees and advises the chair that the amendment is in keeping with the intent of the motion, then the chair would be inclined to allow the amendment to be moved, and it would be subject to debate and subject to a vote on the floor. If the member doesn't agree, then the chair will enforce the ruling that the purported amendment is out of order and cannot be moved.

So to the hon. Member for St. Albert, would you be supportive of the amendment? You may advise me by standing and saying yes or no.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat uneasy here in the sense – can I go through you and ask a question about the amendment? Am I allowed to do that? I'm not clear on one part of the amendment, and that's the word "options." Maybe I'm out of order here but anyway: "immediately initiate negotiations on options." That's like a picture with only . . .

The Speaker: I think, hon. member, we have a greater difficulty now because the chair cannot be involved in the debate and the chair is not in a position to know what the word would mean by a person with the intended amendment. Clearly, what I need to know in keeping the process moving is whether or not the member for St. Albert would say yes or no to the proposed amendment.

Mr. Flaherty: Yes.

The Speaker: Then that being the case – you may sit down now – the House has before it an amendment that it will now consider. The debate now is on the amendment. That is the subject: not the motion, it's the amendment to the motion.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, would you like to proceed then?

5:10

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for St. Albert. I'll start by immediately addressing the question that he has put forward. The word "options" simply means that we shouldn't try and preclude some clever and possibly brilliant solutions and methods and so on that might still form part of the discussion process because, as we know, this is a very complex and complicated issue and numerous attempts have been held in the past to one way or another try and address it. So all I'm trying to point out here is that the word "options" is a friendly word there, hon. member, and I don't think that it will be a difficulty whatsoever. The spirit here is to address this liability and put in place a mechanism to have it resolved.

With that, I'll go on for the other eight minutes I have. Perhaps I won't. I would just ask for the question to be called.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, that would be an impossibility. There are a number of speakers who would like to participate this afternoon, so I'll proceed in this immediate order: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and a number of the members have advised me as well. If there are more, please advise me.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in the spirit of a new mood – I find that intriguing – perhaps we can pursue along that line. I certainly expect the mood to be always consistent in looking for what's best for the population and using debate constructively. If that's the case, then certainly I'm happy to participate with that.

I have before me the amendment to which I'm speaking to. Whilst it seems to perhaps capture some of the intention of the hon. Member for St. Albert's original motion, I think it sort of serves to somewhat emasculate that same motion that he put out there, so I find it a little bit difficult. But then a tool from my own teaching career came back to me, which is the Venn diagram, right? The Venn diagram seeks to find some commonality inside of two perhaps divergent thoughts. So by using this amendment and drawing a Venn diagram around that and then with the hon. member's original motion, we do find some common ground; that is, to at least have an acknowledgement that there is a problem.

It's an education problem only to the extent where it limits the capacity for our profession to attract new teachers and perhaps puts some constraints on labour recruitments. But, essentially, it is a financial problem. You know, when we're looking to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that we in fact close our debts off, which I believe that the Conservative government has endeavored to do and made their first priority for many, many years, then this is a glaring problem that has escaped notice, or it's just been neglected for so many years.

As I said, in the spirit of finding something in common, the amendment from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek does perhaps at least send us in the right direction, so I would in fact support this amended motion.

It's as though you're looking for some direction, and the direction is that ultimately we have to address the unfunded liability problem, not just for the teachers in this province but for the economic well-being of this whole province and the well-being of our public education system. So if this motion is an intention to move forward – and I'm looking for direction from not just our Education minister but from the Finance minister and the Treasury Board president, of

course, hon. sir – then, you know, I think we'll all be better off for trying to address this somehow.

The only question or quibble that I have with this amendment, Mr. Speaker, is using this "long term" as part of the language. It says, "options for a reasonable long term solution to the teachers' unfunded pension liability issue." I guess that technically we do have at present a long-term plan, but it involves a ballooning debt and, you know, quite an imposition, a cloud over the profession for many, many years. So I think we need to ensure that long-term in fact doesn't mean the rest of the careers of these teachers that are just now entering into the profession, but we deal with this in a most expedient and immediate sort of manner.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the Minister of Education, then the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, is it my understanding that we're speaking to the amendment now and not to the main motion?

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I would actually wish that we could dispense with this question as soon as possible so that we could deal with the actual issue at hand, so I'm going to save my comments, and I would ask the indulgence of all other members to save their comments for the actual issue. If we could get to that debate, that is what I would wish we would do.

The Speaker: Is the hon. Minister of Education choosing to speak on the amendment?

Mr. Liepert: No.

The Speaker: Is the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner on the amendment? No.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment?

Mr. Chase: No.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed on the amendment?

Mr. Rodney: No.

The Speaker: Okay. Then shall we call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Okay. So now we have a motion that's been amended. We will proceed, then, with the debate on the motion as amended.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, you want to get back in?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes. I'd like to start.

The Speaker: We're dealing with time here now, and I don't think that's appropriate anyway. You've already participated.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Motion 503 as amended. I thank the members of the House for allowing us to move forward with this. The most important thing, I believe, is that we discuss the issue, and just how it's described in the motion, as you'll know from the comments made earlier, isn't the most important thing. It's actually the issue.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from St. Albert made a number of references to the importance of dealing with this unfunded liability as soon as possible. He pointed out that there are two very important aspects to his Motion 503, the first being the educational component; that is, involving the attraction and retention of teachers, the freeing up of hundreds of millions of dollars for front-line educational services, and the possibility of improving labour stability given the number of agreements that are up for renewal this summer and fall. But there is also another aspect to this motion which is in my mind equally as important, if not more so, and that is the fiscal responsibility aspect of the unfunded liability.

Mr. Speaker, for the past two and a half years I have been asking questions in this House of the Education minister and the Finance minister, trying to have this issue addressed. It's no secret anymore, I don't believe, that the total unfunded liability at this point is nearly \$7 billion, and this will grow to some \$45 billion over the next number of years if it's not addressed now and before it is eventually paid down by the end of the agreement, which was already mentioned to be in the year 2060.

One of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, that the Official Opposition was willing to go along with the amended motion, which removes the dreaded "d" word that the government is so afraid of, the "debt" word, is that, in fact, this is already recognized as a debt in the government's own accounting. Whether or not government members recognize it as a debt, whether or not they like the word "debt" really isn't the issue. The bottom line is that on page 25 of the consolidated statement of financial position from last year's annual report, under Liabilities there is a line item that shows \$5.435 billion in pension obligations. So there is absolutely no question, no ifs, ands, or buts that this is a debt.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, nearly \$13 billion all together in debt is currently held by this government, and by far the largest portion of that is the pension obligations. So for anybody, whether it be a member of this government or somebody else, to go around and talk about Alberta being debt free is simply, categorically wrong. We have a debt. We have many debts: \$13 billion in total. But as I say, the largest by far is the pension obligations at nearly \$5.5 billion this year.

5:20

Now, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned the fact that by addressing this debt, we could free up literally millions of dollars that could be used for funding front-line services. I know that that was in the original motion, before it was amended. Whether we're talking about the original motion or the amended version of it doesn't change the fact that in the 2004-05 year actual dollars spent to fund the unfunded portion of the teachers' liability were \$124 million. That's forecasted to have been \$145 million in 2005-06. The estimate for the 2006-2007 year, which ended on Saturday, is \$152 million. Those are numbers out of the budget documents, directly out of the educational portion of the budget, and those are numbers that would be freed up were this government to address the unfunded teachers' pension liability in its entirety.

Now, I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, that the debt will grow and accumulate a total cost to Alberta taxpayers of \$45 billion over the remaining 53 years of the agreement as it currently stands. One

indication I think of just how bad an agreement this is in today's fiscal reality is that a child born today who 22 years from now becomes a teacher will pay for this unfunded portion of the pension their entire career. For an agreement that was put into place in 1992, 15 years before they were born, and they become a teacher 22 years from now, they will pay the equivalent of a car payment every month for their entire career. Sounds rather ludicrous to me.

Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague from St. Albert mentioned that just two weeks ago in this Assembly the government passed supplementary spending, which approved \$40 million to address the government's share of the unfunded liability in the management employees' pension plan. That was off-budget spending, I might remind all members. There's an example of the government recognizing that they had a share of an unfunded pension liability. They recognized that they had money in the bank, and they recognized that in the long run it was the best thing to do for taxpayers to pay off their portion of that fund. All we're asking is for them to take the same principle and apply it here with the unfunded teachers' pension liability.

To put it into terms, Mr. Speaker, that the average Albertan can relate to: when you get your monthly credit card statement, you have the option of paying a minimum monthly payment, or you can pay the balance in full, or you can pay some portion thereof as long as it meets the minimum. What we've been doing in this province for the last several years is paying the minimum monthly payment. When you've got money in the bank to the extent that this government has, it does not make fiscal sense to sit on that money and continue to pay only the minimum monthly payment.

Relate it to a mortgage: same thing. We've got a \$7 billion debt. We have, Mr. Speaker, in short-term savings alone approximately \$14 billion in the bank today. I just can't imagine how anybody could make a reasonable argument for fiscal responsibility not to be addressing at least a portion of this debt. Pay down that principal, and save us some money down the road.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, it's time that we had that debate. I would encourage the Finance minister, the President of the Treasury Board, and the Education minister to look seriously at dipping into the sustainability account as an example. Everybody knows that in the Fiscal Responsibility Act the section that refers to the sustainability account literally refers to making balance sheet improvements. If we've got in excess of \$4.5 billion more in that fund than what legislation requires us to hold in that fund, here's a perfect opportunity to address balance sheet improvements. My fear is that if we don't do that, with a general election looming some time either later this year or in the year 2008, we're going to see a spending spree like we've not seen before. Here's a perfect and legitimate reason to be using some of that money now.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I think it's legitimate to point out the concerns that many people have expressed to me over the last several days. Once I became aware of the fact that the government was going to move this amended wording, I was busily consulting stakeholders, whether it be teachers, members of the ATA executive council, and so forth, and their question is exactly that which the hon. Member for St. Albert asked: what does "reasonable" mean? There's no question that the will of this Assembly this afternoon appears to be to move this forward, to move the yardsticks and get us along the path to addressing this most serious issue. Obviously, with the amended wording "reasonable" is open to interpretation, as is "long-term."

The Member for Edmonton-Calder mentioned the fact that we do – and it's not just technically, I would say to the Member for Edmonton-Calder, but it is a fact. We do have a long-term agreement in place right now. It extends another 53 years. I would

implore the government that if, in fact, they're going to vote in favour of this motion as it's amended, 53 years doesn't cut it. Forty-three years doesn't cut it. We have to address this, and we have to address it now and to a substantial extent, not just throw a little bit of money at it in the budget and hope that it will make teachers happy and make fiscal watchdogs like myself happy but some serious commitment to addressing the reality that this unfunded liability places in front of us.

Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that there's been any time since 1992, when this agreement was first reached, where we've been in a better position to address the unfunded pension liability.

The Speaker: The Minister of Education, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the Member for Calgary-Varsity, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to make a few comments. First of all, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek for moving an amendment that I think more clearly recognizes the issue before us and the Member for St. Albert for agreeing to that amendment. Unlike the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who has just been speaking, I want to talk about the possibilities that exist here in dealing with this and not politicize the event.

If I heard the hon. member correctly, I think I heard him say that we've got \$14 billion in the bank. Is he suggesting for a minute that we should take money out of the heritage fund? This is the same group that is standing there talking about putting 30 per cent of nonrenewable resources in the heritage fund, and now you're saying that we should write a cheque for \$7 billion from the heritage fund. You can't suck and blow at the same time, member.

Mr. Speaker, this particular issue is all about recruitment and retention. It's all about encouraging our best young students to enter the teaching profession and keeping them there. That's why we're going to address this issue. We're not going to address it for political reasons, as this hon. member keeps talking about.

As we stand here today, Mr. Speaker, we have an agreement that was signed in 1992 by the Alberta government and by the Alberta Teachers' Association in good faith. We're going to try and improve upon that agreement, but at the end of the day, if we don't get improvement on that agreement, we have an agreement in place, and if that's the resolution, then we'll stick with it.

What we have before us, Mr. Speaker, is an agreement that will be negotiated. It will take some time, and we will do it fairly, and it will be done with the Alberta Teachers' Association. There was some mention about school boards. We would be happy to have input from school boards, but let's make it clear that school boards' responsibilities are to negotiate salaries with ATA locals, to negotiate contracts with their ATA locals. The unfunded pension liability is an agreement between the Alberta government and the Alberta Teachers' Association, and that's how it will be addressed.

I want to just very briefly touch upon some of the comments that were made relative to somehow, because we've got this unfunded liability, it's taking money out of the education system. Well, that is just – well, I won't say what that is. We spent in this province over \$5 billion in this budget year, and I suggest that it'll probably increase when the Minister of Finance brings down his budget on April 19. That's some \$27.9 million per school day on education in Alberta. So to somehow leave the impression that students' education is not being served because we have this 1992 agreement in place is just not correct.

5:30

I just wanted to make those few comments, Mr. Speaker, to set the

record straight. This government will address the issue. We will not politicize it. We will get a deal that is good for teachers and is good for the taxpayer.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand up and to speak to the amended Motion 503 and the problem that we're facing here in the province for some 15 years on this unfunded liability, the teachers' pension plan. There are a few points, I guess, that I'd like to bring forward. It's always about economics when we're doing things: what we can and what we can't afford. We need to look at things and put our House in order.

But to go back to 1992, when this deal was signed, I believe the number was approximately \$2 billion, between \$1.9 billion and \$2 billion. Had the government at that point put it into their plan on reducing or eliminating the debt, I believe that we would have been out in 2005.

The debate has continued – who's going to do it and what portion? – and there has been far too much politics involved in it. I agree with the hon. Education minister that it's time that politics get pulled out of this and we start in a fashionable and an economical way of addressing this.

My biggest concern with the motion is the "options for a reasonable long-term solution." I think it has been a long-term problem, but I'm asking the Finance minister and the hon. President of the Treasury Board: it has been long-term already, and it's time to address it with a much faster and appropriate method, especially in times of surplus right now. We have the means to address it.

Newfoundland, which is not in such a good position, has addressed their unfunded liability, and I would urge the government that when our budget comes out, this is addressed in a major way. The reason why it needs to be, in my opinion, addressed in a major and quick fashion – I would hope that within five years at the very longest this would be addressed – is that what happened by not giving that fund the \$2 billion in 1992 has really damaged the long-term, I guess, size of the fund.

When we look back to the Ontario teachers' fund, the Quebec pension plan, and those other ones, it's been a boom time. Had that money been in there, then even their one-third portion perhaps would be made up and they wouldn't be in such a terrible situation now. But having no money in there definitely has been to the detriment of the teachers' pension fund. So I would hope that we would address it quickly, fairly and realize at least our share and put in the \$5.1 billion and let them start investing it in a major way.

The other area that I would like to address, though, with the teachers' pension fund – and this concerns all Albertans – is that their pension fund is 2 per cent over 35 years, so 70 per cent of salary after 35 years of service to our good youth in this province is addressed. But .4 of that 2 per cent comes from the Canada pension fund, and the problem that we always seem to forget in this is that the Canada pension fund is also an unfunded liability. Last year I believe the Finance minister spoke of an extra \$60 billion-plus to that. In order to truly secure the future for all Albertans and the ATA, we need to look at having an Alberta pension fund that is funded and not left unfunded. The Quebec pension plan is very well funded at over a hundred billion dollars, I believe now, and their future is secure. But we don't want Albertans and teachers to lose possibly 15 per cent of their 70 per cent because of a failing Canada pension plan.

Once again, last year the Finance minister talked about the Canada pension plan and our possible necessity to look after that, and I'd say

that that also is where we should be funding our future liability, an Alberta pension plan as well as making sure that we fund our share of the teachers' pension plan. Therefore, the future will remain bright. We'll have an opportunity. I hope, like I say, that for this amendment the long term will only be looking at the past and the short-term future and that it'll be addressed in this coming budget. We don't want to continue the lost opportunity.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I would like to begin by correcting the Minister of Education's false financial assumptions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford never suggested using any of the money from the heritage trust fund. In fact, a Liberal government would build up the heritage trust fund to the point that by 2020 the heritage trust fund would have risen to \$120 billion given today's economic reality.

However, I would like to point out both to the Minister of Education and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek that you can paint a white horse with black stripes and call it a zebra, but that doesn't make it so. You can stick a horn on its forehead and call it a unicorn, but that doesn't make it so. The fact that the unfunded liability is still a debt whether it's taken out of this amendment or not – Albertans have the intelligence, especially those from the constituency of Calgary-Varsity, to know when a debt is a debt.

We have an unfunded liability debt approaching \$7 billion just within the teachers' unfunded liability. Let's add another billion and a half of other public unfunded pensions to that amount, so we're getting closer to the \$9 billion mark. The former Infrastructure and Transportation minister can correct me if I'm wrong, but I would say that lowballing the infrastructure deficit – and I'm not talking new construction – would probably be in the area of \$10 billion. So guess what? We're close to \$19 billion now of dedicated debt.

Now, the Education minister and the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation think that P3s are the next best thing to sliced Wonder Bread. Well, guess what? They're debt too. So let's throw on the cost for just the portion of the Anthony Henday that's under a P3. That brings our debt up to closer to \$20 billion. The Conservatives can say all they like, they can manipulate words, but Albertans are smart enough to know when a debt is a debt.

However, I do agree with the Minister of Education's assumption or statement – I shouldn't say that it's an assumption; it's a statement that I agree with – that we've got to stop politicizing. We've got to stop using teachers as pawns. We've got to look at the future, and the teachers and parents and grandparents are the ones most responsible for forming the young minds and establishing a successful future for the province of Alberta.

So we've got to address the debt. Weasel words like "options," "reasonable," and "long-term" don't truly address the debt. We don't need long-term solutions that are going to cost us upwards and exceeding \$50 billion if it doesn't get resolved in the next 53 years. We need smart short-term solutions. We need to work together both as government and opposition to get this right. We cannot continue in this conflicted mode and teachers and new teachers in generations to follow be saddled with this debt.

Two-thirds of this debt, which will continue to grow, belongs to the government. Premier Klein, the individual who liked the idea of being on autopilot, made the statement that we need to foolproof our government's solutions so that in the event of a Liberal government being elected, they couldn't screw it up. Well, let me tell you: that

advent is coming sooner than you might think, and I would love to work with you to resolve this one of many debts.

Thank you.

5:40

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

If additional members want to participate, please advise.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad we're not overpoliticizing here today. I am pleased to rise today to speak in support of the amended motion as presented by the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek. But, first a clarification: the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity wanted to clarify a few numbers. I thought I might have clarified that one-third of the debt is actually the teachers' portion. I know this because this is an issue that's close to home for me. Many of my relatives, including my dad, are educators. I was a teacher and an administrator for 13 years, as well, at each level.

Now, in that time I learned very, very well that Alberta's future is in the hands of our students and it's in the hands of our teachers and administrators who are ensuring these students have rich, rewarding learning experiences. It's in the hands of all of us who are working together to shape our education system to be the very best in the world.

We have a lot of parents in this fine House, and they know very well that education has an incredible influence on children's daily lives and on their future hopes and aspirations. They care very deeply in this House, and they care very deeply across the province. I also know that staff down the road at Alberta Education strive daily to keep ahead of the curve, and they understand what demands will be placed on our children and youth when they leave school. They care very deeply as well. Every day we see teachers in our classrooms showing that they are also very, very concerned.

I think we've all seen first-hand the dedication of teachers to children and youth in their classrooms. When students are enthused about learning, they develop a hunger to learn more and they develop an ability to think critically for themselves, and that's certainly something worth celebrating. We celebrate because it took a lot of effort, more than the student will probably ever know unless, of course, they themselves become a teacher one day. When we celebrate, because our society is better for every student who develops these attributes, we celebrate the great education system we have.

An Hon. Member: What's the relevance?

Mr. Rodney: The system works because of the great teachers, because of the world-class curriculum, because of the standards and assessments that are in place. It works, and it will continue to work as new and innovative ways to enhance and deliver education together are explored. How do we accomplish this? Three ways: keeping lines of communication open, recognizing a shared, common goal when it comes to educating our children and youth, and working together to find solutions that serve in the best interest of the student. Really, that's what this is all about.

We have one such solution presented to us today in the amended motion. As the hon. Minister of Education has suggested, it serves no purpose to politicize this issue. It really comes down to something quite simple. If students are to continue to achieve their best, whether it's graduating from high school into the job market or pursuing postsecondary education, this can only be accomplished with qualified, quality teachers in the classroom every day.

As the hon. Minister of Education stated, it's all about recruitment

and retention. So you ask the relevance: in order to attract and keep the brightest and most creative teachers, we need to make it attractive for them to come to work in Alberta and to stay working in Alberta. One way to do that, very simply, is to address the unfunded pension liability for our young teachers in the classrooms now and in the future. It's simply for that reason, Mr. Speaker, that I support the amended motion.

I would like to thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't really planning on speaking to the motion today, but certainly the debate has intrigued me and drawn me in. First of all, I'd like to say that I would like to speak in support of the motion as amended, and I certainly would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek for putting forward that amendment. I know that he has done a lot of work on this as the former minister of Education, now as a very, very hard-working MLA, working on behalf of his constituents but also on behalf of all teachers in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that this is an issue that we as a caucus, the Progressive Conservative caucus, have been certainly concerned about and working on for, I would say, a number of years now. It's something that we have brought forward. We've sat down with the local ATA presidents. We've sat down with representatives from the ATA, and we've discussed this issue, I would say, in great detail. We've received packages, handouts, letters, et cetera. We've received in-depth analysis from paid professionals with regard to the best course of action to deal with this issue, and certainly it is an issue.

Mr. Speaker, we know that if we deal with this sooner rather than later, it will be beneficial to the taxpayers. It will be beneficial to the teachers. It will just be a better thing to do. That's why I am in support of this motion.

I think that it is unfortunate, some of the rhetoric that's happened today from the other side of the House: finger pointing and this kind of thing coming from the opposition, one member calling his fellow member a weasel for accepting certain amendments. It's just unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because, quite frankly, I think that the motion as amended is a good one. This amendment is something that I think we as the government side of the House should support, and certainly I would urge my colleagues to do that.

Mr. Speaker, as I read the new motion, it says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the unfunded liability in the teachers' pension plan and immediately initiate negotiations on options for a reasonable long-term solution to the teachers' unfunded pension liability issue.

I think that that is the key right there: negotiations. We find that negotiations do work. As we all sit down around the table, we talk about the issue. We bring these issues out. We get all the facts, the real facts, the real figures on the table. Then I think that we can reach an agreement on this.

Again, I have to reiterate that I certainly support the ATA's position that this is something that we could and should deal with in the near future rather than allow it to run its full course. Certainly, the teachers are prepared to bring something forward in negotiations. Obviously, we as a government need to be prepared to bring something forward in negotiations. I think that our new Minister of Education, that spoke so eloquently earlier, is certainly the right man for the job to do this.

I am certainly wanting to lend my support in any way when these negotiations begin. As one who's followed this for a few years now

and certainly wants to see it resolved, I would just like to urge this Assembly to support this motion and to get on with the business.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm going to take a little bit of a different tack on this, and I think it comes right back to my personal experience. I think we do most of the teaching profession a disservice when we say that if we just give them more money, we're going to have better teachers. The teachers that I know that I respected the most, that taught me the most, wouldn't have done it better if you had doubled their salary. Some of the teachers that tried to teach me and others couldn't have done it better if they had doubled their salary. Most people enter teaching because they love it. Most teachers are doing something, quite candidly, that they know they don't intend to get rich at. It's a little bit like being an MLA.

But, you know, it's not just teachers. Most firemen, most policemen, most nurses go into the job they do because they love doing it. We measure their salaries, and that's how they measure, I think, what you do at coffee time and see what you can get. I don't begrudge anybody in this world trying to get all they can when they sit at a bargaining table to do it. That's an age-old tradition that we all use. Some use it better than others.

But I will say this to the Bob Bachmans of the world and the Phil McKerihsans, the people that taught for years in Vermilion that did have a huge effect and, I think, universally go through the classes: the Dean McMullens, the Angus Smiths. The teachers that literally spent their lives doing it really never cared much about what was in it for them. I think Dean got a little more after he retired and went to work for the ATA. But, I mean, there was a guy that was one of the best teachers, one of the most respected people in our community. So I think we're kind of not being fair to the teachers to sit here and say that if we just look after this pension fund, all of a sudden we'll have a whole bunch of better teachers, because we won't. It will make their lives easier.

5:50

It will make it easier to determine what we have for liabilities down the road to even get it looked after. I don't think for a minute that we understand how much our liability into these pension funds really is. Where we may think we have a funded pension in some areas now, we may find years from now that we don't. We'll have to address these things as we move along. The critical thing here is to take the opportunity we've got as a government because of some prudent financial management years ago, that gives us the opportunity now to be a partner in this discussion with the ATA about what's in the best interests of the students of Alberta, of the teachers, and of the taxpayers. The Rotarian creed would say, you know, that it's got to be fair for both sides. From my personal point of view, I think the accountability in the classroom is as critical as any of the other accounting we do with the pension plan.

So, I mean, I would like to see, and I hear many times in a row: "We don't mind paying the teachers a fair thing. We don't mind that. But we'd sure like to be able to get rid of some of the ones that make many of the good teachers look bad." Now, that's horrible to say, but ask your kids. I'm not sure how many members still have children in school, and the way my 17-year-old acts we might not have children in school on any given day. But ask the kids what they know. They know more than we give them credit for. Some teachers deserve twice as much, and some should maybe go to Fort

McMurray. But that's a different debate. [interjection] Well, they could make a lot more money up there, and they'd be happier.

So the debate around the pension fund has to be put in the context of: this isn't going to give you better teachers; it's going to give us a better idea of what we all owe. If you tell me that giving somebody more money all of a sudden makes them better, I don't buy it. I look forward to the minister and to the ATA representatives talking about this, being open and honest, and keeping in mind that it's about the student, that it's about the taxpayer and also about the teacher.

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

Ms Pastoor: Well, thank you. I just have a few minutes here, but I would like to make a couple of comments if I might. Again, the words "reasonable" and "long term" are the two that I'm having problems with on this one. I like things a little bit tighter than that.

One of the other things is that there is no question in my mind that a debt is a debt, and this is a debt. The Minister of Education was very theatrical, and I'm sure that the people in the gallery to whom he was probably playing appreciated it. One of the things that has been brought up is the fact that we are politicizing the issue. The question is: why is it being politicized? Why is it being politicized? It's being politicized because it hasn't been handled. Had it been handled in the proper manner between the government and the ATA, all of the teachers and everyone else that has been complaining about this would not have tried to bring it to the political people to have it brought out in the open. The problem is politicized because it's not being handled. It hasn't been handled properly from the very beginning.

The other comment that I heard about: teachers and nurses go into their jobs for the love of doing it. I'm a nurse. Absolutely, I went into the job to do it. However, money is absolutely not the issue. I have said time and time again that the reason that people are leaving part of the social areas of our lives is not because of the money but because they're not being allowed to do the job that they know they should be doing. We are getting burnout, and I don't think that some of these teachers are any different than the ones you were pertaining to.

The Speaker: I hate to interrupt the hon. member, but we've now

arrived at the point in time where I'm going to have to call on the hon. Member for St. Albert to close debate. Prior to that, might I just call on the Minister of Education for an introduction of guests.

head:

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to take the opportunity for the House to recognize a former member of the Legislature and the gentleman who I will be spending a fair bit of time with in rooms, arriving at a fair and equitable solution to the unfunded teachers' pension liability. I'd like to introduce the president of the ATA, the newly elected president, Frank Bruseker.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

(continued)

The Speaker: I now call on the hon. Member for St. Albert to close the debate on the amended vote.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the other side for helping us to get this done. I think it is fair and beneficial to all concerned, and I mean that specifically in terms of the parents, the kids, and the teachers. I'm looking forward to the minister – I didn't realize the Minister of Education had a temper. Loved it. I used to be able to play football, too, so you and I might get into a fight yet. So anyway, it's good, it's fair, and I think it's wonderful to see it get on the road. I hope we see an agreement as soon as possible, and I'll call the vote.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader, do you want to reply.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 5:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, April 3, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibility laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 53-plus great rising stars of our education system from Blessed Kateri school. They are accompanied today by teachers Mr. Ray Brooks, Mrs. Darlene Payne, Mrs. Krista MacGregor and, I'm pleased to add, by two student teachers as well, Mrs. Karon Dragon and Miss Gina Lowther. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the warm applause of the Assembly. Thank you for coming.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a wonderful group of young citizens who are joining us today from the Nellie McClung program at Oliver school. These are the BLAST team members that just held a rally outside hoping to convince the government to ban power walls. The students that are with us today are Eyerusalem Ghebremusse, Marissa Giroux, Shanice Morris, Jolene Paul, Shelby Fowler, Jessica Deschambeau, Janessa Hidber, Crystin Kilmarnock, Samantha Vaillancourt, Vivian Poon, Jule Silver, Taryn Pohl, Kat Fuller, Haylee Fortin, Alex Hyska, Amanda Annett, and Taylor Pinch, and they are joined by their teacher, Mrs. Heather Jubenvill, who has led them all this way. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Brian Clelland and Rory Marusiak. Brian and Rory are members of UFCW local 401 and are on strike at the Palace Casino here in Edmonton. They've now been on strike for 207 days due in part to this government's unfair labour legislation. Brian has been working at the Palace Casino as a dealer for a year and a half. Prior to working at the casino, he worked full time at Canada Post and was a member of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers for 18 years. Rory Marusiak has been at the Palace Casino for five years and also works as a dealer. Rory is a dedicated trade unionist and advocate for all workers within the gaming industry. He has played a key role throughout negotiations as an advisory committee member. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Shalini Puri. Shalini is a social work student at Grant MacEwan College and is doing her placement in my constituency office. She joined us in September and has been extremely dedicated and has demonstrated a high level of competence in handling casework and in assisting the people of Edmonton-Strathcona. Shalini received her bachelor of arts in sociology from the University of Alberta with a minor in anthropology. She's very active in the community and has helped develop a nonprofit youth organization called Jagriti, which roughly translated from Hindi into English means awakening. She's also an organizer for a biannual community-based conference on seniors' health issues called Matters of the Heart. Shalini is sitting in the public gallery. I would now ask her to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have six members who will participate today.

Just an alert to all hon. members of the Assembly: on Thursday of this week we will acknowledge and remember Vimy Ridge and that historic event in the history of Canada, so perhaps members who would be wanting to participate in Members' Statements might wish to use that as the theme of their statement on Thursday of this week.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Primary Health Care Renewal Initiatives

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about primary health care here in Alberta. We are always seeking ways to improve patient care, producing better health outcomes faster and with lower costs. In my constituency of Livingstone-Macleod a group of health care professionals under the leadership of Dr. John Rottger from the Associate clinic have been able to do exactly that through a program called the good health initiative. This program changed the way some kinds of health care were offered, including chronic disease management, mental health wellness services, health promotion and screening, and surgical services. A good health team composed of a nurse, a registered social worker, a pharmacist, and a dietitian have been able to better educate patients to dramatically reduce hospital admission rates and doctor visits.

By combining a medical clinic under the same roof with home care, public health, and mental health services, patient convenience and communication have also been improved. By collaborating with community partners, the good health team, as it is called, is also carrying out a promotional campaign to draw attention to screening for a number of preventable health conditions. This same group of professionals is now working on a project called advanced access, that has managed to reduce wait times significantly.

I commend this group of health care professionals in Pincher Creek for their efforts, and I hope that all members of this House and all regional health authorities will look to their example as the kind of innovation the Alberta health care system needs at this time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Camrose Wild Rose Sports Arena

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This fall Camrose will open a new sport development centre, a major project of the city and

county of Camrose, the University of Alberta, and the province of Alberta. This past Sunday was a special occasion for the community to gather at the old arena, the Wild Rose, to say goodbye. The Wild Rose is the oldest operating arena in the province and the third oldest in Canada, having been built 81 years ago. Sunday marked the end of its fascinating history of service to sport in this community and in this province.

A figure skater and a hockey player are painted on the south wall of the arena, symbolizing the activities of 81 years. They represent athletes and teams who grew and excelled in their sports; the exhilaration of victory and the disappointment of defeat; the strain of injury and the patience of healing; the coaching, mentorship, and encouragement of parents and teammates; the value of respect for opponents and teammates; the dedication of the icemakers, the caretakers, the scorekeepers, and all the volunteers; the appreciation of the fans who cheered these athletes on to greater heights of success; and those who just skated for the fun of it.

At Sunday's event the community gathered one last time to see their favourite Camrose Maroons hockey team of years gone by gather as alumni to play the younger Augustana Vikings, who also played a role in the history of this arena. In the intermission the Rusty Blades precision figure skaters team performed to perfection to a large, nostalgic crowd. At the conclusion Stu Bailey, who was born shortly after the arena was built and now still plays hockey for the old old-timers, a hero of the Maroons era, skated one more time around the ice to end a glorious 81 years of sport at the old rink in Camrose.

To all involved in sport history through the Wild Rose Arena, I say: thank you, and may the great memories and friendships last forever.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

1:10

Bessie Roffey

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. High Prairie, Alberta, has a great distinction that no other community has; that is, being home to Alberta's oldest and wisest person. To quote the *Spotlight* paper of March 14: it took all her breath, but Bessie Roffey, Alberta's oldest person, managed to blow out two of the three candles on her cake. That's pretty good. The supercentenarian celebrated her 110th birthday on March 2, 2007.

Born in London, England, on March 2, Bessie lost her father in 1904 at a very young age. Her mother put her two brothers in grammar school in England while she took Bessie on a journey in 1906. They travelled across the Atlantic Ocean in what she says in those days weren't the big ships they are now; they were just tubs. They survived those tubs and made it all the way to Quebec.

Both Bessie and her mom began their new life from there and subsequently moved all around North America. Although she mostly grew up in Fort Macleod, she also lived in such places as Fernie, Lloydminster, Florida, Sunnyside, and finally settled in Kinuso, where she met and married her husband, Bill Roffey.

Mr. Speaker, when asked what her secret to a long life is, she giggles with a twinkle in her eye and says: the good Lord doesn't want me, and the devil won't take me, so I am still here.

Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Roffey, as you can tell, is still lucid, recognizes people, and sure can tell you off when you need it. I've received a few of her barbs.

I'd ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Alberta's oldest resident, who I fondly call Queen Roffey.

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

School Closures

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the movie *Fahrenheit 451* a fire brigade torches a pile of books, and a boy asks: Daddy, is it true that firemen used to put out fires? As neighbourhood schools continue to close, I imagine a child asking: did all schools used to be community schools? The answer to both questions is yes.

As the west was settled, each town and village had three structures: the grain elevator, schoolhouse, and church, food for the body, mind, and soul. There was a choice of grain companies and religious denominations. Schoolhouses were common to all, the original community centres. Work bees, public meetings, dances, and parties took place there, and the local school board sponsored or approved them. To talk of community schools would have been redundant.

Though Alberta provided separate education for Roman Catholic students, our forebears recognized that these, too, were public schools, publicly funded and intended for all who chose to send their children and direct their taxes there.

Then came busing. Schools became plants and facilities, factories for delivery of educational products and services. Nonproductive lines were discontinued, underutilized outlets closed.

In the 1970s Alberta Education designated community schools to be specially funded and maintained to serve their communities. Then idealism died and bottom-line thinking took over. Government cut funding and stripped school boards of the power to raise their own revenues. Now every year families wait to see if the neighbourhood school will be on the chopping block.

With our province in the flux of rapid growth we need neighbourhood schools more than ever and not just in the boom communities. If building strong communities is a priority, then let us understand that schools are cornerstones of strong communities. I suggest that we can bring these together without sacrificing fiscal responsibility if we choose to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Trade, Investment, Labour, and Mobility Agreement

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period the Premier said that the government has "met with all those individuals, authorities, organizations that have anything to do with respect to the agreement," talking about TILMA. But the fact is that this government is only now planning to consult Albertans, when the agreement has already come into force and our hands are tied by it, and we can prove it. For starters, we know that the government put a request for proposals to do the TILMA consultation on the Alberta Purchasing Connection on March 26, 2007. The deadline for proposals was yesterday at 12:30 p.m., about an hour before the Premier assured us that everyone had been consulted.

Then, Mr. Speaker, there's this notice from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association to their members. The headline is AUMA Wants Full Consultation on New Alberta-B.C. Trade Agreement. Clearly, they don't think that they've been consulted. The notice goes on to say that they asked "last year that municipalities be consulted on any initiative to implement TILMA." The municipalities haven't been consulted. They were told to wait for the consultation, which will occur sometime this spring, well after the agreement has come into force.

This agreement will affect all Albertans, not just businesses. Farmers, school trustees, nurses, health regions, and municipalities will all be affected by this agreement. All these individuals and

organizations deserved to be consulted before this government signed this agreement. The Premier has promised to govern with integrity and transparency. The way TILMA is brought in shows a total lack of integrity and transparency.

Curling Events in Lethbridge

Mr. Dunford: Well, now for something completely different. Mr. Speaker, I know that you appreciate this, but I'm not sure everybody in the room appreciates just the hotbed of curling that Lethbridge happens to be in. Let me give some examples. In February we hosted the Scottie Tournament of Hearts, and I want to say congratulations to Jody Meli and all of those volunteers. According to all of the feedback that we have received, it was a very, very great event, and people just fell in love with Lethbridge.

Let me secondly, then, talk about the junior world championships, and of course the team from Alberta were the winners. The skip, I believe, was originally from Grande Prairie, but the third, Brock Virtue, is Lethbridge born and raised, a Lethbridgite. We're very, very proud of him. We know that his dad, George, is. A personal friend of mine, his grandfather, Charlie Virtue, unfortunately is no longer with us, but Charlie will be watching somewhere and, I'm sure, will be very, very proud of his grandson.

Now, the third one is that in the senior women's Canadian championships a team skipped by a woman from Calgary had three Lethbridge curlers on it, and I want to mention their names. There were Chris Wilson, Shirley Kohuch, and Shirley McPherson. Now, they've won this tournament. They will represent Canada at the world's in 2008. We don't know what the site is yet, but knowing Chris Wilson as well as I do, given the choice I'm sure it will be Provence or Tuscany.

So, ladies and gentlemen, that wild, windy, warm Lethbridge hotbed of curling.

head: **Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees**

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that I presented on Monday, April 2, 2007, and I can advise the House that the petitions are not in compliance with Standing Orders 90 to 94.

The committee has considered the petitions and recommends to the Assembly that Standing Order 94(1)(b) be waived for the petition of the CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act, and for the petition of the CREST Leadership Centre Act, subject to the petitioners providing proof of advertising in accordance with the Standing Orders before the committee hears the petitioners.

Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Speaker: Opposed? Carried.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to present a petition from a group of Albertans petitioning the Legislative Assembly to

“urge the Government of Alberta to hold rent increases to no more than the rise in the average monthly wage until December 31, 2010,” all gathered at one tanning establishment in my riding.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 1,062 signatures that read:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to add the drug Elaprase to the Drug Benefit List approved by Alberta Health and Wellness in order to ensure that those suffering from Hunter's Syndrome, including Jordan Miranda, Riley Miranda and Tyler Chauhan, get the care they need to reduce their suffering and live full lives.

head: **1:20 Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 23 Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 23, the Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to establish a primary repository and claims system for the unclaimed or abandoned personal property of Albertans consistent with the recommendations of the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. It will also establish a clear process for managing and resolving issues relating to property that vests in the Crown when a corporation is dissolved.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to table six copies of the Choosing Child Care booklet, which is a guide to licensed and approved child care in Alberta. This helpful tool was designed by Children's Services to provide parents with the information they need to make an informed decision about the different child care options available in Alberta. This booklet also provides parents with a telephone interview planner and a checklist they can use to determine which type of program is best suited for their child's needs.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituents Gordon and Karin Daniher. They are concerned about shortages of beds, long waiting times for detox. Thousands of people and their families are paying a horrific price, and they are urging this government to act fast, before it's too late.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from constituent Jennifer Semeniuk, who is raising the issue of rent controls. She feels that she's "an educated overworked individual who is sadly one paycheck away from being homeless." She is "disappointed in this government for not taking care of its 'average' persons and [holding] out for big business instead."

The second is from constituent Paola Guasp, who is writing with her concerns about the teachers' unfunded liability. She feels that the cost of the current generation of retirees is being passed on to a generation of teachers not yet born, and she would like to see this situation resolved.

Thank you.

Mrs. Mather: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings. The first is from Jean Luke, called foster care, in need of care. She's talking about the stigma attached to foster care. "Losing children to care or a breakdown of a family can happen to the best of us . . . We need to provide this child with a family that not only cares for them but cares about them."

My other tabling is from Debbie Goeseels asking for support for child care that is safe and affordable. She's concerned about the lack of options available for both daycare and out-of-school care.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and table two groups of documents. One is the annual report and strategic plan from the Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health plus supporting documents. I recently spoke at their conference.

Also, the second group is a hundred letters from good Albertans petitioning our Alberta Legislature to support that the accused killer of Joshua Hunt be sentenced and tried "as an adult due to the nature of [his] crime, his past criminal history and that he is so close to the age of 18 years."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: It was the hon. leader of the third party.

Dr. Taft: Oh, the third party. [interjections]

Mr. Mason: I love these moments, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Patience, please.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to table copies of 10 different letters that my office has recently received. The signatories to these letters are all urging the government to provide funding for the cancer-fighting drug Avastin. A constituent of mine, Dr. Jerrard, and his family pay \$1,750 every two weeks for Avastin treatment. The drug is already covered by the cancer boards in B.C., Quebec, and Newfoundland. The following individuals have sent letters: Sandi Halliwell, Rod Layton, Omari Lewis, Sue Williams, Brooke Rothwell, Bob Lowry, Gerry Hunt, Colleen McLeod, Linette Smith, and Hans Van Ginhoven.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of e-mails from two very concerned Calgary citizens, Laurie Fuhr and

Alexander Kurth. On April 1 a temporary homeless shelter in Calgary was closed. Unfortunately, as we know, the temperatures in Calgary remain sub zero, leaving Calgary's homeless in a very dangerous position. Laurie and Alexander are urging the city and the province to consider the situation a state of emergency and to immediately provide a temporary shelter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and table the following seven letters and the appropriate copies from Albertans concerned about the cancer drug Avastin's ineligibility for coverage by the Alberta Cancer Board. Letters were written by Norm Dyer, Cathy Thornell, Laura E. Lewis, Bob Lowry, Pat Stevenson, Maggie Bullen, and Doug Frend.

Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Sterilization Equipment for Hospitals

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week this government spent \$200,000 sending out a brochure listing its five priorities. They are painfully obvious, things like "improve Albertans' quality of life" – well, yeah – "build a stronger Alberta," and "provide safe and secure communities." As if anybody wants otherwise. My question is to the Premier. Which of his government's five priorities covers buying adequate sterilization equipment for Alberta's hospitals?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all five priorities are important to Albertans. This is really part and parcel of what I heard on the campaign trail for the leadership. Given the kind of support that I've been receiving in terms of visiting communities, again members of communities, Albertans, reiterating those priorities, showing support for them, I know that in partnership with Albertans these are the priorities this government supports and Albertans as well.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is getting pretty predictable in dodging the questions. I'm sure, for example, that the people of Claresholm would like a better answer. Last weekend the people of Claresholm had to hold a fundraiser to get donations – donations – to buy something as important to their hospital as equipment to sterilize medical equipment. Probably the people of Vegreville would like a better answer too and the people of Canmore and of Didsbury and of who knows where else. To the Premier. Will the Premier tell us which is a bigger priority for his government: medical sterilization equipment or \$200,000 worth of meaningless brochures?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the confidence of Albertans in the public health system is very important to this government, and we will do whatever we can to restore that confidence in the health system, to ensure that we learn from what has happened in the community of Vegreville. But the \$200,000 that the member is talking about is 20 cents per household. That's less than half the price of a stamp, and it got to households right across this province, so over a million households. So it's one way of communicating with Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would cost about 3 cents a household to put in adequate sterilization equipment in hospitals. The old sterilization machine at the Claresholm hospital had broken down and was beyond repair. It had been out of service for over a month. A new one costs \$30,000, a tiny fraction of the cost of the Premier's mail-out. In an age of antibiotic-resistant bacteria sterilization equipment is not an option. To the Premier: will the Premier cancel subsequent propaganda mail-outs and put that money toward essential sterilization equipment in hospitals instead?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader is not giving us the correct information with respect to Claresholm. I'll have the minister of health respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It boggles the imagination that the hon. member would want to confuse and scare Albertans in that fashion. What happened at Claresholm was a business decision made by the regional health authority to regionalize their sterilization at the High River hospital. There was never any danger to anybody there. It was an operational decision appropriately made by the board. What the board has said to the foundation and to Claresholm is that if they would like to have sterilization, that's a nice to have but not a need to have, and if they want to raise the money for it, they will operate it. But sterilization equipment is operating in High River.

The Speaker: Second main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

1:30 Monitoring of Health Delivery

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of health: sterilization equipment is a need to have.

A letter from the United Nurses of Alberta to the East Central health region raises serious concerns that residents lack confidence in the health care system and are afraid to use local health facilities. Leadership is about communications, and this Premier is failing to communicate. If residents with chest pains are too afraid of infection to go to the hospital, it is the Premier's responsibility to provide the community with the facts they need. The Premier claims that residents in this community aren't concerned. To the Premier: has the Premier considered the possibility that Albertans don't actually want this issue swept under the rug?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, actually, opposition scaremongering in this province undermines public confidence in the health system.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, leadership is about accountability. The Premier is failing to be accountable, as he demonstrates every day here. The Premier's only response about the government's role in providing infection control in the public health care system is "All we have to say: please wash your hands." Well, will the Premier be accountable to the residents of East Central health region and his own community and commit to holding a public information meeting where all the facts can be laid on the table?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I said that this is a medical issue, not a political issue. Quite frankly, I feel for the many thousands of health professionals in this province, professionals that work in the public health system, and this kind of continued attack by the opposition really undermines their confidence.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Leadership is about good management, and as we see, this Premier is failing to provide good management. Albertans are in this situation because of cuts to the health system spearheaded by this Premier as part of the Deep Six. These cuts included eliminating the government's own hospital monitoring and enforcement branch. The Premier refuses – refuses – to take responsibility for creating this mess. When it comes to protecting public health, the honour system is not good enough. Will the Premier restore the hospital monitoring and enforcement branch to the department of health?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition must be getting the questions from the third party. I think that's why he got mixed up earlier today in terms of who you called. This question was asked by the third-party opposition last week. I said that we're going to listen to the advice given to our minister by the Health Quality Council. We'll listen to their recommendations, and whatever follow-up they recommend, we will do.

Provincial Labour Supply

Dr. B. Miller: Alberta will reportedly face a shortfall of over 100,000 workers within the next 10 years, and by 2025 that number could grow to 330,000. It is clear that Alberta must catch up or get left behind. Now, Manitoba's provincial nominee program brought about 6,600 skilled immigrants into that province last year whereas Alberta's program brought in only 546. We could have a stronger program. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Could she tell us why this government failed to make better use of the provincial nominee program in previous years?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to get a question about the provincial nominee program because we have been accelerating our efforts over this past year, and we will deliver more provincial nominees in the program this coming year. We will continue to work with the federal government on the temporary foreign worker program. The bottom line is that we have been working very aggressively for the past two years under our previous Premier's leadership, under previous ministers, to aggressively put together a made-in-Alberta solution that takes advantage of the federal government's supports in assessing public security but assures that we select the right worker for the right place and the right job at the right time. A great part of this is contingent on working with our partners at the university and college level.

In the case of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, they aggressively were pursuing targeting provincial nominee candidates from the colleges and universities so that, in actual fact, if a college or university had not written in an agreement to keep that student for the benefit of the community that they came from, they could . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to statistics provided by the Department of Employment, Immigration and

Industry, only 48 per cent of Alberta's recent immigrants were able to find a job in their intended occupation. More than half do not find a job in their intended occupation. That's not good enough. What is the department doing to overcome barriers such as finding Canadian work experience and, more importantly, the transferring of foreign credentials?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with the member opposite that asked the question, that we haven't been doing as well as we are going to do. We have to do more because, in fact, we not only have immigrants that come to Alberta that need successful placements, but we have to unlock some of the barriers. The foreign credential program, a made-in-Alberta solution, will attempt to do that.

Further, Mr. Speaker, for the immigrants that come through other ports, like Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto, we have to make sure that there are settlement programs that help benefit them even though currently that isn't a part of the federal funding for our made-in-Alberta strategy.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, between 25 and 30 per cent of immigrants coming to Alberta actually abandon this province after living here for a while, compared to only 10 per cent in B.C. No wonder, because when they come here, they can't find enough housing. There's no affordable housing. There are inadequate health services, child care. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: will the minister admit that the failure to keep up with Alberta's growth in terms of services and infrastructure actually has a negative effect on our ability to address the labour shortages of Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we cost share the programming for integrated settlement services with the federal government. It's my understanding that they intend to increase those supports this year.

Quite frankly, a lot of the issues relate to the lack of preparation by the candidate coming to Alberta, not getting proper knowledge in the first instance. We're working on both web page tutorials and other means to make sure that people know that they're not likely to get a job placement and not likely to get services if they don't know what they're coming to or what they need to be prepared for. We're working to increase our supports here, but we're also working to increase the supports of . . .

Health Care Funding

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, even as the Premier and the health minister failed to take responsibility for not providing funding to Vegreville's St. Joseph's hospital, news was breaking of another hospital, this one in Claresholm, that has been asking for years to get funding in order to buy this essential equipment. This government's failure to take responsibility is being shifted to those who are not to blame. Alberta's nurses and other front-line workers are feeling the brunt of Albertans' anger because the government continually avoids taking responsibility for this mess. To the Premier: why is the government refusing to take responsibility for the health of Albertans in respect of hospitals and the sterilization procedures in those hospitals? Why are you letting the nurses take the blame?

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, Mr. Speaker, in an earlier question I supported all of the dedicated health professionals in terms of this unwarranted attack on health professionals in this province. When it comes to responsibility, I said that whatever recommendations come forward from the review in Vegreville and from working with

all health professionals in terms of how we can further improve the system, the minister of health will bring those recommendations forward to our caucus. If it requires legislation or whatever is required we will do in order to ensure that similar situations don't happen again in the province.

Mr. Mason: The Premier seems to believe that words in this Assembly are going to comfort the health care professionals who day after day after day have to put up with poor working conditions, antiquated equipment, huge waiting lines, patients that don't get seen in emergency rooms. When will this Premier commit to taking responsibility for improving our health care system and improving the lot not just of the people who need to use the health care system but the people who have to go to work every day in that system?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: You know, Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to the leader of the third party, I was thinking: how is it that listening to him absolutely sounds like this is the worst place in the world, yet our Capital regional health authority is consistently recognized as the best health authority in the world, right here in the city of Edmonton? You're a representative of Edmonton.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, once again this Premier thinks that words are enough. What Albertans need and what the health care system needs is real action. Can the Premier, then, tell us how often code burgundies occur in Calgary? If our health care system is as fine as he thinks it is, how long do people have to wait in emergency rooms in Edmonton or in his own constituency? Can the Premier stand up and tell us the facts rather than just say that everything is great?

Mr. Stelmach: Again, the hon. member is trying to put words into my mouth. I didn't say that it's all great, great, great. It requires improvement. We are spending the most per capita here in Alberta, yet we know we can improve the system by encouraging all health care providers to work together with government to reduce, of course, the waiting lines, to look at other ways of how we can create a much less, you know, bureaucratic system, to create seamless access to health in this province.

On the other comment I heard from that side in terms of Saskatchewan, the hon. member should actually ask the Premier – it might be your Premier from Saskatchewan because you're on the same side – to come here and ask how many patients actually access service here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility Agreement

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. British Columbia, our partner in the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or the TILMA, has already tabled legislation to implement this important agreement. My question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Can the minister tell us when Alberta will follow suit and table legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, yesterday a member in this House made a comment. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview indicated that there was "no consultation." That is simply not true. I quote here from the *Hansard*. He did make reference to the fact that no one was

consulted. I find it interesting that the Association of Registered Nurses, who they're very familiar with, Mary-Anne Robinson, said that this is a model that other governments should follow. So it's very obvious to me, the hundreds that we've consulted with. We will continue to be consulting with them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. The minister just pointed out that yesterday there were claims by members opposite that the TILMA is a secret deal and that Albertans have been left in the dark about it. We know that's not true, but I'd like the minister to explain if and when the government consulted with stakeholders about this agreement.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, that's what we've been doing for the last three years. It just so happens that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is not aware of that. But even more interesting: it's so secretive that all of Canada knows about it. We have Premiers calling our Premier about it. You know what I find interesting? The hon. member made reference to April Fool's Day, and you know what I say to that: if the shoe fits.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplement is again to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Companies on the border already doing business in the other provinces say that the TILMA won't affect them, so what's the real benefit of this agreement, and how will it help businesses, say, in my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I want to once again say that both our governments, in British Columbia and in this province, have always agreed that this will be in the Legislature, and that is what is happening. Consequently, as we move forward: 7.7 million Canadians from both our provinces as customers. The NDP may want to have higher prices for their voters. We don't for all of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Community Initiatives Program

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The community initiatives program, CIP, application guideline states very clearly that if a group cannot raise matching funds up to \$10,000, it will be considered on a nonmatching basis. However, documents tabled in this Assembly show that this government is breaking its own rules. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: why has this government in three years awarded not one, not 10, not 20, but 43 nonmatching CIP grants over \$10,000, totalling over \$2 million? Why?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, with CIP we try as much as possible to provide equitable funding to all towns and all villages and rural areas, including the urban centres across Alberta. We recognize that at times there are

some organizations out there that are providing a great service that are having some financial difficulties. CIP has been built to respond to our volunteers to provide a one-time, nonmatchable funding of up to \$10,000 if the need is there, and that need comes across through our staff.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier, Minister of Finance, Minister of Health, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development all have secret donors to their leadership campaign. Can this minister assure this House that groups receiving this special treatment are not secret friends of top Tories?

The Speaker: We have a point of order that we'll deal with at the conclusion of the Routine.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I don't think the question is really worthy of a response. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: given that FOIP documents show that a frat house blew a CIP grant on high-end furniture, how can Albertans be confident that they are receiving value for these specialties? Why are you not accountable?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, all of our applicants have to be registered societies, and all of our applicants have to provide financial statements as to how and when they've spent their money. I need to identify the fact that there are probably hundreds if not thousands of CIP applications going through, so when the hon. member talks about 40 applicants receiving some support, they're an extremely small percentage of the total amount of groups and organizations that we support.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Métis Hunting Rights

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta entered into interim harvesting agreements with the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Métis Settlements General Council in 2004. Those agreements were in response to a Supreme Court of Canada decision called *Powley*, and it gave the Métis a right to harvest food for subsistence. My question is for the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What is the status of these agreements, and are there negotiations under way to replace them with long-term agreements?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's a very good question. Yes, the ultimate goal of this government, working with our stakeholders and all Albertans, is to in fact reach a long-term agreement. The Alberta government recognizes and respects the Métis right to harvest. The negotiations have been ongoing. We've made some very good progress since May of 2006. Now, I will say that negotiations have been working very closely with the principals of an MLA committee relative to protecting the interests of all Albertans and our important stakeholders. It is ongoing, and I'd like to say that we're making excellent progress and will continue to do

so in the spirit of good faith in working with these important Albertans.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: can the minister advise the House what timelines have been put in place to ensure that these agreements do come to fruition?

1:50

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, in actual fact I'm meeting with Audrey Poitras, the president, and also Eldon Armstrong from the settlements. I want to say that we have an agreement, a 90-day timeline that has been established to negotiate a long-term agreement. The decision to set a timeline was based on, of course, the Alberta court ruling the hon. member has mentioned regarding the enforceability of the existing interim harvesting agreement. We are very optimistic. The expiry date is July 1. Working together and looking at our positive energy that we have had to date, we can protect the interests of all Albertans.

Dr. Brown: My further supplemental question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. In view of the imminent termination of the interim Métis harvesting agreement can the minister advise what the consequences are on the enforcement of your department's fish and game conservation laws?

Dr. Morton: The consequences are very good indeed, Mr. Speaker. It means the end of the current Métis harvesting agreement and the beginning of a new agreement, an agreement that strikes a better balance with protection of Alberta's fisheries and wildlife. Our caucus has said that the substance of the current agreement is not acceptable. The courts have said that the process used to create the current agreement is unacceptable. It's clear to all that this is a dog that cannot hunt and needs to be replaced, and that's what we'll have in 90 days: a new deal.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Foster Care Delivery

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The vast majority of Alberta's foster families are doing an incredible job, but occasionally there are exceptions. The shortage of foster families in this province means that sometimes children are being placed in homes that are not in the child's best interest. To the Minister of Children's Services: what background checks and monitoring practices are in place to make certain that children in foster homes are safe?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that the safety of the children is our number one priority here. I know that last week we had a similar question. I had shared some of the same information. But I can tell you that what we do have is a very vigorous screening process, and that does include home studies. It includes reference checks, criminal record and child intervention checks as well as medical references. We also have face-to-face interviews. I also mentioned last week that we have guidelines to specify how many children are appropriate for the experience of the foster parent.

Mrs. Mather: To the Minister of Children's Services. Social workers are doing the best job they can with the resources they have, but a number of the workers I have spoken to are afraid to go public

about this issue for fear of repercussions. These are conscientious people who want to do the right thing. What protocols does the department have in place to ensure that workers who blow the whistle on unsafe practices will be protected?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I guess what I would say there is that I also want to do the right thing. So if, in fact, this hon. member has some information that I should have or can encourage someone to come forward to me, I would appreciate that.

Mrs. Mather: This problem is largely due to the severe shortage of foster families that we face in Alberta. What is the minister doing now to ensure that Alberta has enough foster families to meet the needs of vulnerable children?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we're always recruiting foster families, so those efforts never do stop. Just to point out something of interest, though, our ratio of foster children per foster parent is actually lower in this province than most other provinces in Canada. But that's not to take away from the fact that we are always looking for more foster families.

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

Holy Cross Care Centre

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary health region has been moving residents out of the Holy Cross long-term care centre after learning that the building did not meet the fire and safety codes. Last week I heard from the family of a 90-year-old infirm lady who received a 48-hour notice to vacate the place and be transferred to a site that the family referred to as a dungeon. This stress had an adverse reaction about the health and well-being of an infirm lady. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What type of communication strategy was used to communicate the transition plan with the residents in the long-term care centre program at the Holy Cross site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In early March the Calgary health region advised all residents and families that they would be moved as soon as a new facility could be found for them. The CHR's objective was to move residents as soon as possible to have all of them moved by the end of April. The region began working with families immediately, providing facility options and the opportunity to visit facilities so that they could make the best choice available for their loved ones. Families made decisions about their loved one's moves as soon as they viewed the facilities. Some families felt that they needed to see more options, and that request was respected. The goal was to move as many residents as possible to a facility of choice, and the region paid for moving residents' personal belongings. Some families chose to do this themselves and hired moving companies, but I'm assured by the region that everyone was given ample notice and no one was rushed into making a decision.

Mr. Shariff: My first supplemental is to the same minister. What assurances can the minister give this House that the move is being handled in a caring and compassionate manner?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious situation. I'm satisfied that the Calgary health authority has done everything

it can to do the move of these residents in an appropriate manner, to give them appropriate notice, to give them appropriate choice where possible, and to respect their decisions where possible, but they also wanted to make sure that the residents were moved on a timely basis. The goal was to move them by the end of April. In fact, the region moved the last two residents last Friday. But even prior to that, I want to make sure that Albertans know that the Calgary health region did the right thing by making sure that there was clinical care in place in the facility during that period of time and that there was a fire watch in place so that no one's health or safety was in danger in that process.

Mr. Shariff: My final supplemental is also to the same minister. Is the minister willing to make a commitment to this Assembly that he will review the policy pertaining to transferring Albertans in long-term care and make it humane, caring, and compassionate?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'd be very happy to say to this House that I will work with the Calgary health authority. They've been keeping our department and this minister informed of the process, but we will be reviewing the process that they undertook to make sure that it was done in an appropriate manner, and we will be reviewing the protocols that we have in place with respect to long-term care residents and how they're treated in this province. There are good standards in place, there's good training coming, good things happening, but we can always benefit from experience and learn from those experiences, and we'll do so in this case.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Health System Pressures in Grande Prairie

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In order to support and encourage its growth, Grande Prairie needs an accessible, reliable health system, and the current system is under massive pressure. My questions are to the Premier. The health system in Grande Prairie has been operating at breaking point for months. The region will even be losing its last psychiatrist this month. Aren't the residents of Peace Country health region entitled to the same level of mental health care as residents in Edmonton, Calgary, or southern Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it builds on the priorities that we have established as a government that all Albertans should share in the same quality of life no matter where they live in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Grande Prairie is growing faster than Fort McMurray: 27 per cent since 2001. The increasing rate of growth in Grande Prairie was entirely predictable. My question is to the minister of health. Exactly what action was taken by the ministry over the last two years to prevent a health staffing and infrastructure crisis in Grande Prairie?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret that Alberta is growing, that all regions of this province are growing. Some regions are growing faster than others. Fort McMurray, of course, had a long-term sustainable growth at high levels, but areas like Grande Prairie are growing rapidly as well. It's a good problem to have, but it comes with its stresses. So we have a workforce strategy

coming to ensure that we can attract and retain the health workforce that we need. We're supporting the health regions with the support that they need, the financial support that they need, to make sure that they can deliver the services they have. I understand that the Peace health district is recruiting new psychiatrists.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Premier: will the Premier take the advice of the Alberta Liberals and members of his own caucus who support the project and commit to funding a new hospital in Grande Prairie and the redevelopment of the QE II hospital into a community health centre? Your own caucus supports it.

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't have to take their advice.

In fact, we're a lot further ahead than where the Liberal caucus is today with respect to the hospitals. In fact, there has been a significant donation of land given for the hospital by a very good citizen of Grande Prairie. Work is under way to ensure that as the housing is developed around the hospital, there's proper drainage in the entrance to where the hospital will be located, the proper roads will be in place. All that work is currently being done, so we're a little ahead of where they are.

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

Climate Change

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like most Albertans I was shocked when the Environment minister mentioned a \$5 billion sticker price for the Tory carbon dioxide pipeline scheme. This pipeline is destined to divert massive public resources into a technology that even the Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, admits is unproven. My question is to the Premier. Why would the government even consider throwing away taxpayers' money on a multibillion dollar boondoggle that would even dwarf the Ottawa failed gun registry?

Mr. Stelmach: I think part of the gun registry was a lot of CO₂ or maybe methane.

However, this is an issue where here is the only jurisdiction in Canada to bring forward legislation to not only measure greenhouse gas emissions but also put limits. Those who cannot meet those targets will actually through regulation pay offsets to ensure that we do reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions in this province, about 100 or so major emitters.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, recently federal and provincial Conservatives announced a task force to kick off the carbon dioxide pipeline dream. Days later a task force member, David Keith, said that the pipeline is designed to allay political concerns about growing CO₂ emissions from all the new tar sand projects, and in fact there are more cost-effective technologies available. The government has not done its homework, just like with their intensity target approach, and they're trying to bamboozle the public into believing that something is being done. Why hasn't the Premier or his minister produced evidence that carbon capture is even going to work in the first place?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the facts are that the fund that the member refers to is a \$156 million eco trust fund. The same kind of

dollars went to Ontario, went to Quebec – of course, more than we received in Alberta, but \$156 million to start working together on options on how we can reduce the greenhouse gas emissions, deal with other contaminants in the air like methane, sulphur dioxide. Really, quite frankly, we're way ahead of other provinces in this area.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, carbon capture is very, very expensive. It requires massive amounts of energy and materials, and worst of all it's not even a proven technology to reduce climate change. With this same \$5 billion we could invest in conservation, public transport, sustainable energy and realize actual carbon savings and build a better quality of life for Albertans to boot. Why should we throw away \$5 billion or more on what amounts to CO₂ landfill when so many more common-sense alternatives are available?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think I made it clear on a number of occasions when addressing this issue in the House that carbon sequestration is really just one of a number of alternatives that are available and that the government is exploring. This task force that the member refers to is going to be looking at the economics of sequestration, and it's going to be providing both the federal and the provincial government with some advice as to whether or not this is, in fact, something that is feasible.

I do need to correct the member when he talks about \$5 billion. Yes, I did bring that number forward, but that's not a number that creates expectation that the government is going to be involved. That's the estimated cost for not only the pipeline but the ability to actually capture the CO₂, much of it borne by . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. MRSA, or the superbug, is not new to Canada or to Alberta's hospitals. MRSA emerged soon after the invention of penicillin. It is usually considered a hospital-acquired organism, but now strains of MRSA are appearing in our community as well. It is clear that MRSA is here in Alberta, and it's here to stay. Since we now know that the bacteria is no longer just in hospitals, my questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the province doing to contain this bug?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important to point out that MRSA is not localized to Alberta. It is an issue that's being dealt with right across North America and in other jurisdictions as well. We are not unique in this circumstance. With the advent of penicillin and other antibiotics some drugs have become resistant, so we have to take extra steps to make sure that they're not transferred. Those extra steps, Mr. Speaker, are very straightforward and very simple. It's washing hands, it's proper hygiene, so preventative measures. We need to educate Albertans about the necessity to do that. We have a provincial health office which is informing Albertans through their work with the Alberta hand hygiene strategy. There has been a Do Bugs Need Drugs? program, and they're working on . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to the

same minister. Should Albertans be concerned about the possible outbreaks of MRSA in their communities or their hospitals?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I can't say that you didn't warn me about the 45 seconds idea.

MRSA outbreaks are a potential issue for all jurisdictions. Albertans should be aware that infections can be prevented if they take effective and proactive measures to protect themselves. Twenty to 40 per cent of healthy Albertans carry a bacteria that can develop into MRSA in our noses without causing any health problems at all. It's spread by person-to-person contact. Washing hands is very important.

The Speaker: Well done.

The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can you tell us how Alberta's cases compare to the rest of the country or the rest of the world?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the number of MRSA cases is increasing throughout Canada and internationally. A report that was developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada in 2005 indicated that the highest increase of MRSA since 1998 was in central Canada's hospitals. In the United States MRSA is also present in hospitals and the community, and it has been prevalent there for many years. Here in Alberta we saw the first case of community-associated MRSA in 2004 in Calgary. So it's both in the community and in hospitals. It's something that we know about, that we're dealing with. Again, I have to emphasize, even when the opposition makes light of it, that the most important thing we can suggest to both health care workers and to Albertans is that the way to prevent spreading is to wash your hands.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

St. Albert West Regional Road

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government needs to clarify its position on the west regional road with St. Albert constituents. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: is the minister committed to designating the west regional road as part of highway 2?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker – thank you for that question, by the way, hon. member – I've had a meeting with the mayor of St. Albert, and we've discussed that road. They're going ahead and doing some preliminary work on it. We're also waiting to see, when the report comes back, if it will meet all our specs, and we'll address it at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister provide a written funding commitment for the west regional road, please?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the mayor is happy with the situation that's going on there. We're doing an alignment study further to the north. We understand the traffic problems coming through the city of St. Albert, and we'll address it at the time when they finish the studies.

Mr. Flaherty: I was hoping for a yes, Mr. Speaker.

Can the minister give the St. Albert residents and businesses any indication when and how the road will be completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said, it's actually the city of St. Albert building the road. We're going to look at a later date at whether or not we will assume it as a provincial highway.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:10

Affordable Housing

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last few months in Red Deer residents of two large apartment buildings have received notification that their apartments are going to be converted into condominiums. Many of these residents are fixed-income seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income families. They are very concerned about where they will live when they are evicted. Affordable housing is a major concern throughout the province. One area that's having a significant impact on the supply of affordable housing has been the conversion of apartment complexes to condominiums. Can the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing tell us what this government is doing to help Albertans who can't afford to buy condos and want to continue to rent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that we have had unprecedented growth in the province. With the rising cost of construction developers are finding it more profitable to convert rental units into condos. I also want to say that at the same time that those individuals sell the condos, a large percentage of them in return rent them back.

Mrs. Jablonski: Can the same minister advise if this government has plans to deal with this issue?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, on March 19 we did have a report presented to us. We had 1,400 presentations, whether they were in person or through a letter. Those recommendations have been brought forward to us, and we are going to respond to those recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My final question is for the minister responsible for Service Alberta. What are the requirements of a landlord when they want to convert an apartment to a condominium?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is unfortunate that someone's loss is someone else's gain. In fact, the conversion of an apartment may become an affordable housing unit for someone else.

The fact is that 180 days' notice is required to do a conversion and, unfortunately, only 90 days for a rent increase or for a renovation. I think that with many landlords it would be naive to suggest that they're not using the 90-day opportunity to get people out. I look forward to the minister's housing task force to see if there isn't a way to align the days involved.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Calgary Northeast Ring Road

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the increase in Calgary's population, a ring road is absolutely essential to ensure traffic mobility. Visionary planning is equally necessary to avoid the problems which occur in trying to redesign or retrofit an existing major artery as has been the case with both the 16th Avenue portion of the Trans-Canada highway and Glenmore Trail. Planning involves consultation and collaboration which take into account both future needs and present stakeholders' reality. Provincial consultation on the ring road to date has been clearly substandard. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: what active consultation was undertaken before the northeast portion of the ring road P3 contract was signed?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's been a considerable amount of consultation on the northeast ring road. It started back in '04. We've had extensive consultations. We had a March open house. We had more in '05. We just had another open house the other day. We've worked together with all the different stakeholders. We've talked with the different municipalities. We've dealt with the municipality of Calgary and the municipality of Rocky View. There was lots of consultation.

Mr. Chase: Calgary residents, landowners, and local businesses have raised serious concerns about the redesign of the northeast ring road, which no longer provides access at McKnight or 32nd Avenue. With their access cut off, these people are effectively walled in, costing them millions. Again to the minister: what plan does the government have to compensate these groups, or will you commit to altering the project accordingly?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, after the consultations in '04 and '05 we made some minor adjustments and made some changes, and there will be an emergency access built at Chateau Estates to give EMS some quick access to the community. There'll be an alternate access at Country Hills Boulevard from 84th Street, that will be just east of the new interchange, 100th Street NE will be paved, and a new access will link 84th Street at 32nd Avenue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering that negotiations with the Tsuu T'ina First Nation regarding the Weaselhead crossing have been stalled for more than 40 years, what backup plan or alternate route for the ring road to cross the Elbow River does the government have under consideration?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, there are negotiations going on right now with the Tsuu T'ina nation. We have no reason to believe that we won't get a deal with Tsuu T'ina. In fact, the Tsuu T'ina are just getting some of their appraisals completed, and our negotiations will continue. That's a very important link for Alberta highways and for the city of Calgary.

The Speaker: That basically concludes question period. Yesterday there were 96 questions and answers; today there were 90.

Now we have to deal with a point of order. The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Reflections on Members

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During question period today in a series of questions brought forward by the Member for

Edmonton-Ellerslie, the hon. member, I would suggest, offended rules 23(h), (i), (j), and (l) of the Standing Orders in that he made allegations against another member, he imputed false and unavowed motives, he used abusive and insulting language likely to create disorder, and he introduced a matter into debate that offends the practice and procedures of the Assembly. But he did more than that, Mr. Speaker. What he did was tantamount to a breach of privilege. I would refer you to 24 of *Beauchesne*, at page 11, and to 64 of *Beauchesne*, at page 19.

The most important characteristic of a Member of this Legislative Assembly is their personal integrity: their honesty, their integrity. Whether the hon. member did it intentionally or whether he was just reckless makes no difference. In his second question, when he asked the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture about CIP grants, he impugned my integrity as a member of this House. He also impugned the integrity of at least two other members of this House: the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks and the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

The three of us were candidates in a leadership process last fall. The three of us did fundraising.

Mr. Martin: Did you win?

Mr. Hancock: No, I didn't win. Actually, I did win. I get to do a really great job, and I don't have to spend all my time travelling. But that's not the point.

The point is that when the hon. member raised a question about CIP grants, he asked the question about whether or not any of the CIP grants were used to fund election campaigns. In doing so, he insinuated that government money was improperly funnelled through CIP grants to my leadership campaign. There is nothing more important to me than my integrity, nothing. The hon. member may have had a point about CIP grants, but you don't make points about CIP grants by calling into question the integrity of hon. members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member is an honourable member, has honesty and integrity, and I know that he will, if prompted by you and perhaps on his own volition, get up and apologize to this hon. member and to the two other hon. members of this House that he maligned and to the members of this House.

2:20

The operation of the political process and governance in this province, Mr. Speaker, is something that we ought to hold dear. We engage in partisanship on a daily basis, and that's fine. We engage in banter. We sometimes call into question whether people are telling the whole truth all the time. We engage in a lot of this type of discourse. But we should be very cautious not to go to the point where you call into question the integrity and the honesty of another member. It ought never to be done without proof, without something to suggest it, other than just a drive-by smearing. It ought not to be raised in that fashion.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not asking for a breach of privilege in this matter. I think the hon. member didn't intend what he did. But he did do it, and I would ask him to rise and apologize to myself and to other members of this House who he maligned and to all members of the House because by raising questions in that manner, he drags all of us into disrepute.

The Speaker: Now, I take it that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre as the Opposition House Leader is going to speak to this point of order.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, if I may.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would argue that the allegations made by the Government House Leader are not in order and are not substantiated by the questions that were asked by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I understand the points that have been made with such enthusiasm and a great deal of heat by the hon. Government House Leader, but in fact the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie named individuals using their proper form in this House as members of a group that had an identifiable or common association; that is, they were members that are sitting in this House that were also all leadership candidates. They were not singled out, directed for them for . . . [interjections] They were referred to specifically as a group of people for which there is missing information for this House.

There are two facts that we're dealing with here, Mr. Speaker. One is that there were a number of donators to the leadership candidates who sit in this House who were not disclosed. This has been widely reported in the media and has been discussed in this House.

The second piece of that is that 43 grants . . .

The Speaker: Hold on here. Please, stop for a second. Political party activities have no business in this House. This is not a question of competence for a government. Now, the hon. Opposition House Leader may proceed, but we're not getting involved in something that already violates *Beauchesne*. Political contributions have nothing to do with the point of order as far as I can understand. We're dealing with a question. We're dealing with a response. Please stay on topic.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you for the advice, Mr. Speaker. The member was asking a question. He was asking a question directed for a group of people that are sitting in this House. The question was not, as the hon. Government House Leader put it, on the record. It is available in *Hansard*, and perhaps the Speaker already has a copy. I have a copy of what the member was reading from. He was asking if the groups that were receiving the grants – I'm paraphrasing here – were receiving this special treatment as being friends of top Tories. That was referring to the donators, not to the members.

So I understand that some offence was taken here, but it was not what's in the question, to be perfectly honest about it. An insinuation that has been put on the floor by the hon. Government House Leader simply wasn't made. A question was asked, however, and when we look at a number of the other citations that were made, 23(h), (i), and (j), no one was imputing anyone's motives. It wasn't even raised.

The other sections that were quoted as citations by the minister: there were no allegations made, particularly against a member. There was information sought about why these grants were being allocated outside of the criteria that the government had set forward. There were no motives talked about at all in the language of the questions, and I would argue that there was no abusive or insulting language used at all. The questions are pretty straightforward, Mr. Speaker, and there was no abusive language or descriptive language that was used. I'm referring to *Beauchesne* 484. Again, there were just no motives that were being imputed in this question.

So I would argue that although I regret it if the question was misheard, it certainly wasn't delivered that way. It was a pretty matter-of-fact question. I argue that the tests required for the citations that have been brought forward by the Government House Leader have not been met.

The Speaker: Are there others who wish to participate? Nobody else?

Well, you know, hon. members, we were actually making pretty good progress till today. The question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, the first one, which wasn't dealt with, basically says, "If a group cannot raise matching funds up to \$10,000, it will be considered on a nonmatching basis. However, documents tabled in this Assembly show that this government is breaking its own rules." Well, that wasn't even contested. There were no rules that were broken. This chair is very familiar with the rules of the community initiatives program and was an author of some of them in years gone by. It very clearly states that if a group does not have the matching portion, the \$10,000 can be allocated, so that's just a bunch of nonsense, hon. member.

Secondly, we come to the brunt of the whole business. "The . . . Minister of Finance" named, "minister of health" named, "Minister of Sustainable Resource Development" named, not part of a group as far as one can read this, named individually, "all have secret donors to their leadership campaign." Well, the chair has already pointed out that what that has to do with government business, the chair does not understand. *Beauchesne* clearly points out that political party matters are not the subject of the question period. Then the question: "Can this minister assure this House that groups receiving this special treatment" – now, the question is: what special treatment? – "are not secret friends of top Tories?" Boy, if that isn't innuendo, you know, I must have just arrived. I've been here 28 years, and this is blatant innuendo.

This is a point of order. This is not dealing with the integrity of members of this Assembly. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie can do better, and I expect him to do better, and I ask him to withdraw his words, please.

Mr. Agnihotri: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to apologize.

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, I'm going to point out the consequences of you not abiding by my request, and the consequences are not very nice. So I'm going to do this three times just so there's no misunderstanding, and the third time the hon. member will be named.

Now, this has happened before in the history of this Assembly when people have tried to make a point. Once they're named, they lose salary and everything else. Please remember that. People have done that to showboat in the past. This has happened. I was here once with one hon. member.

So I'm going to ask the hon. member to accept the ruling of the chair and withdraw his comments. That's my first request. I'm going to ask the hon. member to accept the ruling of the chair and withdraw his comments. First time.

Mr. Agnihotri: Mr. Speaker, as you said, the rules were not broken. If you read the guidelines . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down. I asked a few minutes ago if any other hon. member wanted to participate. I looked around. I waited. The hon. member did not move. The member was given a chance to participate. We've had under our process a submission provided by one, a submission provided by another. A ruling is then given. The chair has given the ruling.

Now, for the second time the chair is going to ask the hon. member to withdraw his comments. The hon. member can either withdraw his comments or not. If he would just put on the record that he doesn't want to, that's fine.

2:30

Mr. Agnihotri: I didn't do anything wrong, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to withdraw my comments.

The Speaker: Fine. The hon. member was given an opportunity to participate; the hon. member chose not to take an opportunity to participate. For the third time: will the hon. member withdraw his comments?

Mr. Agnihotri: Mr. Speaker, no.

The Speaker: That's perfectly fine, hon. member. I will now name you. This is the first time in nine years that I've actually done this. This is not a good day. It's not a good day for the member. I'm sorry, hon. member. Please leave.

Hon. members, the hon. member cannot return to the House until approval is given by the House.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Alberta Treasury Branches Act

14. Dr. Oberg moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur with the continuation of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate taking time for this very important motion after the ruling you just gave.

Mr. Speaker, section 35 of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act requires that once in every five years a motion be introduced to facilitate a debate on whether the Alberta Treasury Branches Act should be repealed. The purpose of this clause is to assure Albertans that the government will review their investment in the Alberta Treasury Branches to ensure that it continues to serve a valuable purpose. Prior to opening up this motion for debate, I would like to take this opportunity to discuss what the ATB has provided and continues to provide to Albertans.

In 1938 the members of this Assembly made the unprecedented decision to create a financial institution headquartered in Alberta for Albertans. The government invested \$200,000 in the Treasury Branches, and the first Treasury Branch started taking deposits in September of 1938. While the Treasury Branch started as Alberta's piggy bank, its purpose was quickly expanded to promote a voucher system designed to also encourage Albertans to support Alberta-made products and services. Throughout its history Treasury Branches have been supported by Albertans all over the province, and today the Treasury Branches, now ATB Financial, provide full deposit-taking, lending, and wealth management services to all Albertans and throughout the province.

I'm proud to say, Mr. Speaker, that this initial investment of \$200,000 has grown considerably. At December 31, 2006, ATB's equity was \$1.6 billion. More importantly, ATB continues to serve over 600,000 Albertans who have chosen ATB to provide them with some or all of their financial services. It operates in 245 communities throughout Alberta through 154 branches and 134 agencies. It finances roughly \$16.5 billion in loans to Albertans and their businesses.

Albertans have indicated in the past that they would like the government to consult with them before any fundamental changes are made to the status of the Alberta Treasury Branches, and we will continue to honour that request. I have been and remain very confident in ATB's ability to continue to provide excellent service to Albertans, in their ability to ensure that access to core financial services will be available throughout the province, in their ability to

attract and retain highly skilled labour within Alberta, and most importantly, Mr. Speaker, to operate in a financially responsible manner.

Therefore, as per section 35 of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act I move that the Legislative Assembly concur with the continuance of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is debatable. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure this afternoon to rise in debate on Government Motion 14, the continuance of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act.

I was prepared, Mr. Speaker, to run through some of the highlights of the performance of the Alberta Treasury Branch recently, the number of branches and so forth, but the minister has done a fine job of encapsulating some of the good work that they do. I would, however, like to also point out what a great corporate citizen the Alberta Treasury Branches have been. I've just recently been reviewing their annual report, and there's a long list of community organizations and annual events that they contribute to either through sponsorships or donations. In particular, 11 different United Way associations across the province benefited from an annual corporate fundraising campaign last year, as did STARS air ambulance, the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation, and the Alberta Children's hospital. So, clearly, not just in terms of providing financial services but in many other ways as well, Alberta Treasury Branches contribute daily to the lives and success of citizens of Alberta.

Since 1997 the Alberta Treasury Branches have been a wholly owned government corporation. In preparing for today's debate, I went back to May of 2002, the last time that this Assembly debated this particular motion, that is required, as the minister said, under section 35 of the act. I suppose that there are a couple of things that come to mind immediately when you look at that. The first one is whether or not it's sufficient under the act to only have this discussion in this Assembly once every five years. Given the tremendous amount of flux in financial markets and the changes that take place, not just locally, but if you look at, as an example, the number of amalgamations of credit unions that have taken place over the last five years, if you look at the move towards consolidation of banking services nationally and globally, it's perhaps arguable that it would be good to have this debate more than once every five years.

I also note that the minister of the day, Mrs. Nelson – of course, to put this into context, Mr. Speaker, there was an awful lot of debate in 2002 as to whether or not the Treasury Branches should be privatized – indicated in her remarks: "Before we make any decisions with regard to this institution, we must have a thorough review of the financial services industry in Alberta." I don't know whether or not there'll be an opportunity to hear from the minister today, but I'm certainly wondering whether or not that review was ever undertaken by this government and, if it did take place, in fact, whether or not the results were made available to the public, or do they sit on a shelf somewhere, as, unfortunately, we know does happen more often than anybody would likely care to admit with reports that this government receives.

Mr. Speaker, also relevant, since we're discussing the continuation of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act today, is the Auditor General's most recent report, from last year, where he outlined some concerns, none of them major. To the credit of the Alberta Treasury Branches most of the concerns that have been identified by the Auditor General over the last several years have been addressed, but I think this is an appropriate time to point out that there are still some areas of concern for the Auditor General.

One of those that he identified was lending policy compliance. He indicates that, in fact, there has been satisfactory progress toward addressing his concerns although this is a concern that he's repeated in at least the last two if not, I believe, three annual reports. So this is an ongoing concern from the Auditor General. He indicates that improvements in the processes have been made but that improved compliance results will take time, and "ATB must continue to reduce breaches of key internal controls to meet its appropriate targets for acceptable performance."

The Auditor General also identified some concerns around the branch operations compliance. Again, he's indicated that while there has been progress made, there is still room for more improvement and that this would take time. To use his exact words, he says that "although significant improvements have been made in underlying processes, further positive results will take time."

2:40

Lastly, he had a concern around the enterprise risk management strategy and again indicates that he's made a recommendation to the Alberta Treasury Branches that they "implement an enterprise risk management (ERM) strategy to assist it in identifying and managing all significant risks." So the Auditor General has some minor concerns, not major ones but certainly, as I said, relevant to today's discussion, I believe.

Lastly, I think I'd just like to point out some comments that came from a very respected banker and a very well-respected Edmontonian, Mr. Harry Buddle, at his recent retirement. For those of you who aren't aware, Harry was the president and CEO of Servus Credit Union, which was formerly the Edmonton savings and credit union. He has been very public over the years arguing that Alberta Treasury Branches have an unfair competitive advantage against local credit unions. Larry Pollock from the Canadian Western Bank also has made similar comparisons.

The concerns always have been that Alberta Treasury Branches doesn't pay provincial taxes, being a fully owned Crown corporation, and the fact that they don't return their profits to their shareholders. In that case, of course, we're talking about, you know, the government of Alberta and specifically the taxpayers of Alberta. They do not have a need to participate in the Canadian Deposit Insurance Corporation because their risk management is held by the Alberta government. So those are concerns that have been well expressed in the public in the past.

Harry Buddle made a specific point of pointing out to MLAs in the audience on the night of his retirement – in fact, there were three of us in the audience, myself and two members from the Conservative caucus, so I'm hoping that the Finance minister may already have heard these comments from his caucus members – that he had complete confidence that the new Premier and the new Finance minister would be taking steps to address these inequities, as he and others see them. So we'll look forward to seeing some sort of a response from the minister in that regard.

It's interesting now that we're into April and the TILMA agreement is now into effect. It's been in the news a lot the last couple of days, and there has certainly been some discussion in this Legislature about TILMA. Mr. Buddle also commented that although there has been a grace period extended to financial institutions, which I believe goes until 2009, he believes that TILMA will affect the operations of the credit union. He said that they will be allowed to do business outside of Alberta, and other credit unions from other jurisdictions will then be allowed to be doing business inside Alberta. So there were some very profound comments made by Mr. Buddle on his retirement.

I think, as I've mentioned, that with TILMA now being in effect, even though there is a grace period, there may be some relevant

questions there as to the impact that TILMA will have on the operations of the Alberta Treasury Branches. Again, under the current legislation we would not be reviewing the Treasury Branches Act until the year 2012, which is at that point going to be three years following the full implementation of TILMA as it affects the operation of financial institutions. So I think that is a very relevant question for the minister to be considering today as he asks the House to support the continuance of the Treasury Branches Act.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and look forward to hearing the comments of others. If there is an opportunity for the minister to respond prior to the calling of the vote, I would be interested to hear his comments. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think all of us that grew up in rural Alberta know the reason why we have the Treasury Branch. It always seemed ironic in free-enterprise Alberta that we had an institution like the Alberta Treasury Branches, but clearly – I think the minister alluded to this – in 1938 there was no choice. Other banks were not serving rural Albertans particularly well during those times, so there was a need, and it's been a very successful institution ever since. Rather, when I looked at the facts, it's not a small institution anymore. I think – the minister can correct me – that they have about \$18.8 billion in assets, and that's very significant in this province to have that sort of money. That means, frankly, that they can at least compete with the banks because they have that sort of total number of assets.

I think the key thing is that always with the Treasury Branches there was some speculation that sometimes they weren't arm's length away from the government. That's been an accusation before. I'm not sure if the legislation, how that particularly works. You know, I know that that's how the Crown corporation legislation, say, in Saskatchewan works. But they have to be seen to have nothing to do within the government. I think the minister would agree with that, although there have been times in the past, whether they were right or wrong, where there was a feeling that that wasn't arm's length, the institution from the government, which the minister could tell us what actually makes that, in fact, the case now and if there have been some changes.

The member for Edmonton-Rutherford, though, I think did raise a fairly important point about TILMA. We're in the unknown here, and that's a point that I've been trying to raise: that we've signed into an agreement that has implications not only for private business. We understand trying to get rid of some of the red tape, but a lot of our public organizations, like I mentioned, AUMA and others, just don't know where it's taking us. This is probably a good example that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has mentioned: how does TILMA affect how ATB is going to be doing its business in the future? I think that's the concern that we have.

Probably, there are a lot of good things about TILMA, but it's a fear of the unknown, not knowing how it is really going to operate. I don't think the government, frankly, has done an adequate job. They're now going to set up consultations after we're into it, Mr. Speaker. I think that it would have been nice to have had these discussions before so that when we're talking about the ATB, for example, we'd have a better idea of just what the implications are. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is correct that, you know, we won't be looking at this five years with a whole – everything could be changed by then, five years from now, because of TILMA.

So, again, as the member said, I would hope that the minister could at least give us some idea how he at this point sees TILMA and the ATB working. I know he'll say: well, they can compete in

B.C., and they can do all this and that. But I think we need to have a little better idea. Mr. Speaker, the ATB is an important institution in Alberta, and we're certainly quite pleased to participate and support Government Motion 14.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional members to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to this motion. Actually, I found it quite interesting. Typically, when there is a statute or a law in the province of Alberta and it's time to review that statute or that law, there is usually some sort of a committee that is put together to go through it and see where improvements could be made or if changes are necessary or warranted. But, then, this is the first time after I became a member of this esteemed House that something of this nature is placed on the Order Paper, and I have to admit that this is the first time I see it.

A section in the act that established the Alberta Treasury Branches requires the Assembly to concur every five years to its continuation. So I thought this was quite unique and an interesting use of language, that, you know, we're basically saying: do you agree that this should be continued? And I ask myself: what should I base my decision on? How am I going to either concur or decline? Are people required to maybe ask their constituents or ask the people who use the services of ATB to rate the operations or basically evaluate the usefulness and the service levels of ATB?

2:50

ATB is a wonderful institution, Mr. Speaker. It started in the old days to help rural Albertans, to help people in smaller communities and in agricultural communities because other banks and other financial lenders were not willing to take those risks and were not willing to come to the aid of those smaller communities. So the ATB was conceived out of a need for, you know, help and assistance and also out of a vision that these smaller communities might actually simply wither and die and disappear if no assistance was afforded to them.

On the one hand, I have confidence and tremendous pride in the usefulness and the heritage of the Alberta Treasury Branches, but it's also a question of: how can members of this House either agree or disagree to the extension of the operations and the law that governs the Alberta Treasury Branches? So we need more information: if the government is hearing from Albertans whether, in fact, they're happy with the Alberta Treasury Branch network. If they're not, why not? What this government is hearing might actually persuade me to support this motion or might persuade me to decline and not concur.

The other thing which I was discussing very briefly with my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford is that it seems that the Alberta Treasury Branches are experiencing more growth in the urban centres now than they do in the rural centres. It's basically a shift or a change in the philosophy of the Alberta Treasury Branches. More new branches are being established in the bigger centres, which are already quite well served by the ATB and other institutions; they don't need any more. And more growth in terms of transactions and the work done is experienced in the urban centres. I am just concerned that this might signal a shift, where the ATB is going, basically, where the good buck is, and it might signal the start of maybe abandoning where everything started: the rural base. So that's one concern.

The other concern which I had is, basically, if there has been any review in the last five years since this Assembly concurred before,

or 10 years. Let's take two times when the Assembly was presented with the question to evaluate all of the financial services in this province. People are concerned, and quite legitimately, with service fees and, you know, banking charges and things like this. How does the ATB as a state-owned institution compare to other institutions that do the same transactions? Are they better? How about their service? How about their fees that they charge, the dividends that they give, and the interest that they afford, and so on and so forth.

If the hon. Minister of Finance can actually tell the House if, in fact, there was a study or an evaluation or an assessment of financial institutions and financial services in this province, that would be quite useful. If not, is he willing to undertake one in the near future? Again, this industry has grown, and it's an industry that affects everybody. Some people might argue that it's even an essential service. As an essential service, as we do education and health care and long-term care and things like this, everybody uses banking. Everybody needs a bank account. We all carry debit cards. We all have accounts. This is basically something that is not like the old days when it was sporadic and far between.

Just two simple things. I am inclined to support the extension of the ATB for the continuation of the excellent work they do. But, you know, minor things to really shed light on this issue, and I'm approaching it as a layman, as I always do: why do we need to do this every five years, and why can't it just be in legislation, that is reviewed in committee where people can ask more questions and seek more information?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll be brief. It's a privilege to stand up and speak to Government Motion 14 on the continuance of the Alberta Treasury Branches. I'm very much in favour of it. From rural Alberta and just to comment to the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung: it is very much alive and serving Albertans, especially in the small, rural areas where there are no other banks. That's where the roots are, where it started. It's still very much there.

I have to praise the management of the Treasury Branches that they are able to continue those services in rural Alberta and to expand and to give those benefits in the big cities as well. The banking business is very competitive in Alberta. There's lots of banking going on, and there have been lots of amalgamations, whether it's the credit unions or in other areas, but I'm very pleased to stand up in this Assembly and to concur with the Alberta Treasury Branches Act. It does benefit Albertans, especially rural Albertans. I appreciate the fact that it's brought here every five years to be addressed and to have the concurrence of this Assembly, and I very much support it.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance to close the debate.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all the colleagues for the comments. A couple of the issues that were raised during this debate had to do with TILMA, had to do with the potential on the credit unions.

First of all, TILMA will essentially have no effect on the Alberta Treasury Branches as there is no similar entity in British Columbia. So it will have no effect. When it comes to the credit unions, there is some issue. For example, the credit unions in British Columbia and Saskatchewan potentially have other opportunities to sell insurance, to do several other things that our credit unions do not by statute, so that is something that we are working on. We do not want

other credit unions coming into Alberta and having services that ours are not mandated to give, so that is something that we are considering.

Mr. Speaker, more importantly, I do want to draw the Assembly's attention to exactly what this motion says. What this motion says is that if this motion is defeated, then the Treasury Branches Act will be repealed, and the Treasury Branches will be no more. So this is a very important vote that we have here today, and I would certainly urge all members to concur with this motion, that states: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur with the continuation of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act." If we vote this one down, that act is thereby repealed, and the Alberta Treasury Branch as an entity is finished. So I would certainly ask the Members of the Legislative Assembly to agree with this motion.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
Bill 3
Climate Change and Emissions Management
Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate March 22: Dr. B. Miller]

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to participate in debate on Bill 3, which is the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, as sponsored by the hon. Minister of Environment. The environment, of course, is the buzzword now. Everybody is talking about the environment, and everybody is trying to jump on the environment bandwagon. Why is the environment so important, and why do people worry about the future of the planet and what impact we are having on Earth?

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

People talk about climate change, Mr. Speaker, and they talk about things like global warming and things like that. Climate change is an array of things. It's a group of phenomena or a group of certain things that are happening right now that people are becoming more anxious about and more worried about, all related to the consumption and production of fossil fuels. It's not a new phenomenon. It has been occurring, but it's been intensifying and getting worse.

Now, as a layman myself, I did a little reading into climate change to see where I stand on this issue. I reached the conclusion that it means more than temperatures rising. It means more than global warming. When people talk about temperatures and they say, "You know, this has been one of the worst winters we've experienced; winter doesn't want to leave us, and we've had snow for six months," they're oversimplifying the issue. They say: where's global warming when we need it? The issue is not just rising temperatures, but that is a main thing as well. We're talking about ice caps melting, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about deforestation. We're talking about certain species that are going extinct and habitat changes or destruction.

3:00

Now, the argument that you hear again being oversimplified in certain news media is whether it's man-made or whether it's a natural cycle. What if it's both? Or what if it's only a natural cycle, but man is not helping? Man is contributing to the acceleration of

climate change either by being an active participant in causing climate change or being a passive bystander that is letting climate change happen. Either way, man has a responsibility to protect the planet. You can't really put a price tag on saving the Earth and ensuring that it's available for our children and our grandchildren in as pristine a status as possible. We're talking water, Mr. Speaker. We're talking air quality. We're talking soil, pollution, food production, and food safety. All of these things come to mind.

With this realization I also came to another realization, that anything we do is better than nothing at all. I know that this bill as presented doesn't achieve what myself and many of my colleagues in the Alberta Liberal caucus would hope it would. Again, do we agree with something that is a half measure, or do we not do anything at all? My approach is to offer conditional support, or offer qualified support, for this bill although my preference would be to implement what we in the Alberta Liberal caucus have advocated for quite a long period of time now with respect to absolute caps on emissions instead of intensity targets.

Now, if you allow me, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to walk through some of my arguments. Absolute emission is basically the term used to describe the total volume of emissions for a particular source, whether it's an exhaust system from a vehicle or a stack from an industrial facility. Emission intensity, on the other hand, which seems to be the preference of this government, is the amount of greenhouse gases released that are measured against another factor, such as GDP. It's actually a ratio or a proportion, so GDP or a barrel of oil or whatever other choice you make. A more fuel efficient car, for example, will have lower emission intensity than a less efficient model, but the two cars may still have the same absolute emissions if the more efficient one is driven further.

Let's talk about GDP, for example. One plant is spewing garbage into the atmosphere. If it's allowed to operate at three times the capacity or three times the volume that it used to before, now it's making a ton more money. In fact, its intensity targets are lowered, so basically it's either matching the requirement or even bettering it. Now we can give them an award for having reduced their intensity targets, but the end result is that they have actually caused more pollution. That's one example.

The other thing is the current rate of economic growth in Alberta. If it continues at this pace, then we are likely going to see a lot more pollution happening. We have to remember that the province's emissions actually rose by a large percentage. Analysts are saying that between 1990 and the year 2020 this could really amount to about a 72 per cent increase. So we can implement intensity targets all we want, but the end result is more garbage and more pollution.

It seems like this province is actually in a race against time to exploit every drop of oil and every tonne of bitumen that we can extract. Yes, it causes prosperity and, yes, it creates a lot of opportunities for Albertans, but we also have to be aware of the consequences.

Now, I am under the impression that my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View might be contemplating moving some amendments to this piece of legislation, and I keenly await his ideas and thoughts on this subject.

The other thing, too, is that there's also a consumer protection angle. In the second week of this Assembly reconvening for the Third Session, Mr. Speaker, I introduced Bill 202, which was calling for strengthening consumer protection in this province. It was unfortunately defeated in a division.

I'm also concerned about, you know, asking industry to pay for having not met their intensity targets. They then are likely going to off-load that increased cost in their operations onto the consumer. If there is any way we can ascertain that no unfair price increases are

passed on to the consumer, that would be something I'm definitely going to be extremely interested in. There is no incentive for companies to do anything because if it costs them \$15 extra per tonne of waste, they're just going to quite easily pass the \$15 on to the consumers. The environment is no further ahead, and the consumers are no further ahead. The company is not really forced to do anything versus an actual hard cap that comes with penalties for failure to comply.

Alberta is also the reason behind 40 per cent or so of the total industrial emissions in this nation, the highest in Canada, Mr. Speaker, higher than any of the other provinces and territories. Being the worst culprit, if you will, I think it's the only responsible thing to do to be vanguards in environmental protection in this country. If we're causing the most damage, we should be taking the lead in trying to alleviate what we can and mitigate some of those negative effects. It just defies common sense that you're going to exploit and produce and create waste and create pollution, but then you're not really worried about the future. I think that if we are accused of being the worst polluters, we should also be commended, hopefully in five or six or 10 years, for being vanguards of environmental protection and being leaders in environmental reclamation and cleaning up, basically. We need to clean up what we have destroyed.

Another argument, Mr. Speaker: are we here on a pilgrimage, basically just moving through, or are we custodians? I think we are custodians of our planet. We are allowed to use some of it, but we are also expected to save most of it. The Alberta Liberal caucus is actually advocating absolute emissions versus intensity targets, as I mentioned, and our plan, as sponsored by my friend from Calgary-Mountain View, calls for the introduction . . .

Mr. Eggen: You have friends?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. He is actually my friend, and I'm proud to be his friend, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. He has what it takes, and he understands the implications of not acting on environmental issues now. He doesn't want to wait.

In his plan he's talking about hard caps by the year 2012, which are absolutely necessary to achieve any real reductions and to have a positive and lasting impact on climate change in the near future. That's one thing, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing is leaving things in regulations. Again, this is a trend with this government, that everything is not left where it should be, in the statute itself or the law itself or the act itself. It's moved into regulations. One of the regulations in this is the specified gas emitters regulation, which has set out some new emission intensity targets and three options to achieve them for the largest industrial emitters, for the worst polluters, basically.

3:10

Regulations change. Ministers change and department heads change and deputy ministers change. So those regulations, the list of 100 or the club of 100, might be changed later to the club of 50 or the club of 25 or the club of 10. What assurances can we get that instead of just focusing on 100 now because it's sexy and attractive and people are expecting it, five years from now with certain pressure and certain lobbying this club might be shrunk to only 10? I think it should grow, and I think it should not be limited to just the worst emitters. Everybody from intermediate and up should be included in here because they all have an equal responsibility to clean up their acts.

Working with industry. I think it's necessary that industry is on board, but industry has also indicated that they are willing and ready.

The government has to offer the incentives and the carrots and then potentially also show the stick and wave it for those industries to start to comply. Industries by far are good corporate citizens within the framework of the laws and the statutes of the jurisdiction they work in, so I think we should create the environment for them to be exemplary. We should really create the environment for them to take the lead and show other people and show other jurisdictions and show the world what can be done in Alberta and how Alberta is unique.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will retake my seat. I look forward to participating at the latter stages of debate. Thank you for your indulgence.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any comments or questions?

There being none, the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in support of Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. Bill 3 builds on Alberta's leadership position on the management of greenhouse gases. I think we should be very proud that in 2002 Alberta was the first province to introduce climate change legislation. We were also first among the provinces to initiate the reporting of greenhouse gas emissions by large industrial emitters.

This act balances the growth of Alberta's economy with environmental sustainability by requiring industry through regulation to reduce their emissions by 12 per cent starting July 1 of this year. To achieve this target, industry can make improvements to their operations or buy an Alberta-based offset to apply against their total emissions or contribute to a new fund that will invest in technologies to reduce greenhouse gases in Alberta. These provisions were laid out in the specified gas emitters regulation. This is the right direction for an energy producing province, I believe. Alberta's overall emissions are obviously higher as a result of its energy production.

To push for an absolute cap or cut on emissions at this time would cause grave economic consequences. Cutting emissions intensity allows industry the capacity to invest in the development of technological solutions to climate change, and that is where the real solutions to the control of greenhouse gas emissions lie. The development of such technology will have the impact of getting long-term reductions in greenhouse gases as opposed to transferring wealth out of Alberta to purchase carbon credits in the world market.

Now, developing technology at home creates jobs in Alberta and uses Alberta expertise from universities and research facilities to its fullest potential. Alberta is in a very good position to move forward with new research and innovation. Innovation is a strong pillar in the government's 20-year plan, and we have research agencies such as ASRA, the Alberta Science and Research Authority, various research institutes, the Alberta Research Council, Alberta Ingenuity, and strong research programs at our universities. We are strategically organized to move ahead, and I will push for government and industry to invest more in developing new and better technology to control greenhouse gas emissions and, therefore, global warming. Without this emphasis, intensity reductions alone will not be enough to address greenhouse gas emissions and control of temperature.

Finding real solutions to greenhouse gas emissions was one of the goals of the COP 12. That is the committee of parties 12 environmental conference, that took place in Nairobi, Kenya, this past November. I had the opportunity to attend the conference on behalf of the government of Alberta. The conference was an excellent opportunity for Alberta's position on climate change to be promoted

on the world stage. That position was one of research and new technology to reduce greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere and capture and storage of carbon dioxide before it is released into the atmosphere.

During the conference I learned about the progress of other countries in handling climate change. In particular, Japan encouraged all countries to think about adding new tools to the Kyoto climate change tool box. Using new approaches allows the world to think beyond the Kyoto protocol of close to 10 years ago. One example is the Asia-Pacific partnership on clean development and climate change involving China, India, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the United States. This agreement focuses on working with the private sector to develop ways of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions without destroying or severely impacting the economy. It also encourages investment in the development of clean energy technology. In that regard the direction of the Asia-Pacific partnership is similar to Alberta's approach to managing climate change as outlined in Bill 3.

The COP conference also showed that Alberta has an opportunity to develop technologies, such as carbon capture, that can be sold to other countries. I think that is why Bill 3 along with a specified gas emitters regulation will place Alberta at a real advantage. If we can develop climate change solutions in Alberta, it allows us to be in a leadership position here and abroad. It's rather interesting that the recent California climate change plan builds on the principle of technology export to other countries.

I was very pleased to attend the COP conference and, frankly, believe that Alberta's position on advancing technology options to mitigate or control the real impacts of climate change was well received and of interest to many delegates.

In closing, I believe that Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, and the specified gas emitters regulation build on Alberta's proud tradition of leadership on climate change. By embracing intensity reductions and increasing our investment in research and innovation relative to technology, we have the best chance of maintaining a strong economy and using the resources from it to attain in time absolute reductions.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I just have been hearing so often this same refrain of Alberta being the first province, la-di-da, to put in some legislation in regard to carbon dioxide emissions. You know, if you're putting together something that, in fact, is deliberately . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, are you rising under Standing Order 29(2)(a) for comments or questions?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I was referring to the comments made.

The Acting Speaker: You were wanting to ask a question of the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. That's right.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Proceed.

Mr. Eggen: If you're making intensity targets as the guide, I would like to ask the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, respectfully, if he,

in fact, expects that to be converted into absolute reductions and how? You know, my understanding is that as the intensity targets increase, the absolute emissions increase as well, so it becomes a difficult if not impossible thing to put those two together, and I would suggest that this, in fact, is deliberately deceptive.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. I think that if the hon. member was listening, and I assume that he was, my point was that the end result should be absolute reductions. I believe that to be the case, but to get there, I believe that we must embrace intensity reductions along with putting a lot of resources into technology research and new technologies in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. If we don't do that, we have no resources to put into research and technology.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

3:20

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, respectfully, it's as though you want to go on a diet by eating more somehow. You know, you create the situation where you want the public to believe that they are getting reductions, but in fact you're getting intensity increase. You're getting absolute increase. So I would just expect and ask if we could have clarity from now on that this is only intensity reductions; it's not absolute reductions. I share the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose's desire to have absolute reductions, but then why don't we just do it?

Mr. Johnson: I believe that I've made my point. Once again, I believe that absolute reductions is the end result, but perhaps we would travel down different roads to get there.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, of course we're all interested in having an absolute reduction, but I wonder if the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose would agree that there should be some liability with the end user. What's currently happening is that the province of Alberta got the liability for the exploration, the drilling, all of the manufacturing of the gasoline and diesel fuel, yet it's exported to another location, and then a lot more emissions are produced. Wouldn't it be fairer if, in fact, the end user was taking a lot of the liability for the emissions, not just us in Alberta as we produce the product?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, that is a very good question. Frankly, I don't know why there hasn't been more attention drawn to what the member has just stated. I believe that there should be much more attention paid to the consumer in the end, and I don't think it's fair that Alberta should be penalized just because we are the producer. So I think you raise a very, very good point. I hope that there'll be more discussion around that very point as we move on to committee and third reading.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, did you want to rise on questions and comments?

Mr. Cao: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I just want to ask the member or maybe get some idea – let's say that I have a plant in production and

my emission is at this level, and now there is an intensity reduction because my production capacity is already at 100 per cent. Then when the law asks me to reduce intensity, that becomes absolute reduction for my plant. Is that perspective correct? Can you comment on that?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Johnson: Well, yes. I guess that would be the case if you were at the maximum, but I imagine that there would be opportunity to improve your plant or change your plant so that there would actually be ways of producing more. If that were the case, then I think that the intensity reductions would apply.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few comments about the rate of development. It seems to me that this is what the crux of this debate is about. I mean, clearly, when we're talking about intensity, I think that we would all agree, even the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, that for the time being if we're just controlling intensity, it's clear that the amount of CO₂ going out is going to be greater. I don't think there's any argument about that. He may think that down the way all this technology will come forward. It might. It might not. We're talking about a long ways down, even if we do get the technology.

The one thing that we do control is the rate of development, and that's what's causing so many problems in the province today: the overheated economy and, as a result of the overheated economy, more oil and gas, more tar sands to get in the American market as quickly as we can. Obviously it has implications for the environment, but it also has implications for all of the other things that we've been talking about in the Legislature in the last few days while we've been here; i.e., housing, health care, you name it. It's all part of this overheated economy.

The only thing that we can control, that we have authority here to do – I believe and many others do that we need to slow down this pace of development for the time being. We've called in the short term for a moratorium on development so we can catch up with our social and physical infrastructure. If we control the pace of development, it certainly will have some impact on how much CO₂ we're putting out. I think the bill says about a 50 per cent intensity reduction based on 1991 emission levels. At a 4 per cent growth rate, say, the total emissions will rise by 66 to 83 per cent above 1990 levels in the next little while. I mean, that's the reality of what we're facing.

I don't think, you know, that overnight we can stop it all, but certainly we can take a look – and the Minister of Energy is over there – at the new projects coming on, not the ones that are there. We move ahead. People are beginning to ask: well, who is benefiting by this? We're hurting the environment. Our rents are going up. Health care is in trouble. We can't keep up with the social and physical infrastructure. So what's it all about? Clearly, the Americans want us to do this, and I expect the federal government does. But that's what we can control right now: that pace of development. I think that's the major thing that we should be looking at.

In terms of the intensity reduction – and I don't know if the minister is here – this bill may be redundant, depending on what happens federally, because we're aware that the parliamentary committee, much to the chagrin of the federal Conservatives, has passed a bill. We don't know what's going to happen with that,

whether it might trigger an election or not, or whatever, but if that bill came forward and was passed in the House of Commons, our bill would probably be redundant or superseded because of what they've done. So that'll be an interesting development as we go along in terms of debate on this particular bill that we're facing. If that bill is passed ahead of this one, this probably doesn't mean much, then, because federally they would be controlling it.

Again I would say, regardless of that, just to conclude, that I think that it's the pace of development that is a concern. It's a concern with the environment, as I said, with our social and physical infrastructure, making it very difficult for ordinary Albertans right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to ask questions of the hon. member about where he thinks the government's role is in providing incentives and appropriate disincentives that would help move us more quickly along the line to absolute reduction in emissions.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a combination, I think, a combination of things. I'm talking, first of all, about the pace of development. We have to recognize that we have to do something there. Then if we're going to take the technology rather than some of the pipe dreams about pipelines and CO₂, I think alternate energy. We should be giving tax incentives. We've called for Alberta to maintain its role, if you like, as the energy capital but to start to move towards alternate energy as quickly as we can. So I think there are a lot of things that we can do, but as long as we're keeping this pace of development, even if we're giving the money for alternate energy, we'll still be falling behind with CO₂ emissions. So it's a combination of both things, I think, hon. member.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to join the debate on Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. I want to provide, first of all, some historic work that Alberta has done to show that Alberta is a leader across this country in trying to address climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. This bill in itself is another first for Alberta and for Canada, and I don't know if everybody really realizes that. Certainly, I've heard some comments that the federal government may be coming out with their own emissions and greenhouse gas legislation or targets or whatever might be coming from them. But, you know, Alberta has always been a bit of a leader, knowing full well that a lot of the emissions and our economy are based on the oil and gas industry and what we provide all across North America.

3:30

In view of this, 10 years ago, in February of 1998 Premier Klein, a former Premier of this province, named Canada's first cabinet committee on climate change, which consulted with stakeholders from the academic, environmental, industrial, and business commu-

nities about Alberta's response to global warming. In October of 1998 Alberta announced its strategy for action on climate change, a plan that was well received throughout Canada. Then in 2003 the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act passed by this government made Alberta the first province in Canada to set out a legislated framework to implement our climate change action plan. We were the first province to require large industrial emitters, who produced about 70 per cent of our industrial greenhouse gas emissions, to report those emissions. The bill that we are discussing today would not have been possible if we had not taken the initiative and led the country on this issue.

I commend the minister for his approach with this bill. It balances what is technologically and economically achievable for our large industry emitters with the need to protect our environment. This bill will allow all Albertans to enjoy both a clean, healthy, natural environment and the benefits of continued economic prosperity. Because of this government's planning and progressive legislation like Bill 3, I think we can all at least say a very good start is being made in Alberta's future.

I have another reason to be confident of that as well, and that is the government's record of environmental stewardship. As co-chair of Alberta's Climate Change Central I have seen first-hand how the government's leadership on this issue has already made a difference in our environment. I'd like to just point out a few of those programs that have been put in place by Climate Change Central that show that we have been leaders for quite a while.

Climate Change Central, or C3, is a uniquely Alberta way of responding to global climate change and its impacts. It's a public/private partnership of government, businesses, and other stakeholders who are interested in pursuing greenhouse gas reduction initiatives, that has been operating since 1999. C3 has financed feasibility studies for innovative projects like using waste heat from a new power plant to heat buildings in Grande Prairie. Projects like this one cut fuel consumption and ultimately greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2001 Climate Change Central hosted western Canada's first greenhouse gas emissions trading simulation, allowing industry, government, and environmental groups to experience a simulated greenhouse gas trading environment. Exercises like this have helped these groups prepare for initiatives like this bill that we are discussing today.

Since 2003 the ME First, a municipal energy efficiency program led by Climate Change Central, has invested \$30 million in interest-free loans to 60 municipalities. Projects like retrofitting traffic signs and recreation centres and upgrading heaters and furnaces in municipal facilities to energy efficient models have saved municipalities \$2.8 million annually but, more significantly, have reduced those municipal environmental footprints.

In a similar vein, Climate Change Central's Alberta Plus initiative gave over \$600,000 in grants to Alberta municipalities for pilot projects exemplifying energy efficient design and construction. From 2004 to 2014 these projects will pay for themselves five times over, saving municipalities more than \$3 million in energy costs and cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 24,000 tonnes.

In the past four years Climate Change Central has also partnered with the government of Canada to offer the pilot emission removals, reductions, and learnings initiative. This innovative program uses a competitive auction process to allow potential bidders to propose, for instance, reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by 100,000 tonnes between 2003 and 2007 at the price of a dollar per tonne. If this bid is successful, PERRL will pay the seller \$100,000 over the five-year period.

For a modest total investment of \$15 million, this program has explored ways to reward climate change action in sectors that may

not have a financial or regulatory reason to reduce their emissions. It has helped us test four strategies that Bill 3 will encourage on a much wider scale, including capturing and combusting gases from landfills, capturing CO₂ and storing it in geological formations and biological sinks, and developing renewable energy sources.

Climate Change Central has allowed Alberta to lead the way on climate change with innovative local projects as well, including a student/teacher initiative at Cochrane high school that has installed solar panels and a wind turbine at the school to provide electricity. The Mow Down Pollution event, that was sponsored in part by Climate Change Central, helped get polluting lawn mowers off our grass. This sounds like a small measure, Mr. Speaker, but in fact they have told me that a typical two-stroke, 3.5 horsepower gas mower produces as much pollution in one hour as is produced by a new car being driven 550 kilometres. Events like these have helped show Albertans how simple changes can make a significant contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality.

At Climate Change Central we've also carried out several education campaigns to raise Albertans' awareness of the emissions their vehicles produce. Vehicle emissions are one of the largest sources of greenhouse gases and smog. They have an effect not just on our planet but also on our health because at high levels they can cause asthma attacks, bronchitis, chest pain, and decreasing lung function.

In our homes Climate Change Central has offered rebates to people who upgrade to more efficient appliances. We have offered rebates of up to \$300 to homeowners who replace their furnaces with Energy Star qualified models, which are about 30 per cent more efficient and can save consumers about \$400 a year. We've also offered rebates of \$50 to upgrade washing machines to Energy Star qualified models. For an average family of four, these models will reduce the utility bill by about \$150 and water consumption by 33,000 litres and greenhouse gas emissions by up to one tonne.

Mr. Speaker, I think the record of Climate Change Central demonstrates how this government is committed to helping Albertans, our municipalities, and industries address greenhouse gas emissions. We clearly recognized years ago that greenhouse gas emissions were a problem, and because of this recognition, today we are well positioned to address it with initiatives like Bill 3.

Climate Change Central is also proof that public/private partnerships work. Our partners in industry, business, municipal governments, and the federal government have contributed funding and expertise that have made our projects a success. Individual Albertans have also been key partners, willing to try innovative solutions to the problem of greenhouse gas emissions.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, while Climate Change Central has done a lot to help address emissions across Alberta, this government is also making a number of efforts to ensure that its operations are energy efficient and sustainable. For the past two years 90 per cent of the electricity used in government facilities has come from green power sources, including local sources like wind power from Pincher Creek and biomass from Grande Prairie. New government buildings are constructed to the leadership in energy and environmental design, known as LEED, silver standard. When you go look at a LEED building, you know and understand that the construction has been done under certain standards. As a matter of fact, the MLAs from Lethbridge, both east and west, and myself were in the latest LEED building at the University of Lethbridge, where their aquatic centre and their physical education centre is now a LEED building. This is a widely recognized and highly regarded standard for sustainable

buildings. Other government-owned facilities have been retrofitted under the energy retrofit program, saving Albertans \$5.8 million and reducing our annual greenhouse emissions by 58,000 tonnes.

We're also finding a number of initiatives that have the potential to offer us huge payoffs both in money saved and in greenhouse gases not emitted. Last year Alberta Agriculture dedicated \$239 million in funding to help develop bioenergy in Alberta. Alberta Energy is now offering up to \$200 million in royalty adjustments to find innovation in energy technology. Alberta Environment and our pioneering Alberta Energy Research Institute are leading a \$25 million project to evaluate the long-term reliability of storing carbon dioxide in geological formations.

Mr. Speaker, addressing climate change requires strategies for emissions reductions, adaptation, energy efficiency, and conservation. This government and C3 are leading the country in all of these areas. I've seen the great work that they've done with Climate Change Central, and I'm so pleased to support Bill 3 today in second reading. This will help produce the next step in our climate change strategy.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any comments or questions?

There being none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak for a few moments on Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. Mr. Speaker, I had a rather eye-opening conversation with one of my sons the other day on the topic of climate change. He asked me if I was at all concerned about all this climate change stuff. I was a little surprised and almost a little hurt by his question. Now, to my way of thinking, what he was saying was that by the time the full effects of climate change are felt, I'll just be a grumpy old man in a seniors' centre, running out the clock while the whole world crumbles around me.

An Hon. Member: If you're lucky.

Mr. Tougas: If I'm lucky. Thank you. To live in a seniors' centre?

An Hon. Member: To get to run out the clock.

Mr. Tougas: To get to run out the clock. Okay.

So I told him that despite my obviously advanced age – and when you're 22, everybody over 30 looks very old – climate change is a great concern to me. It's his primary concern, not health care, not the economy, not crime but climate change, as it is with a lot of people his age. He knows, as I know, that everything we do today – everything – will have an impact on the Earth. I'd like to leave this Earth in robust good health. After years of heated argument over whether or not climate change is caused by human activity, even the most stubborn flat-earth types now admit that climate change is happening and that human activity is most certainly the cause.

Now, a landmark United Nations report released a couple of months ago reported that it is very likely that global warming can be directly blamed on the increase in greenhouse gas concentrations and that it is extremely likely that climate change over the past 50 years can't be blamed on anything else. That's very compelling evidence, and except for a handful of far right wing media types who see some sort of shadowy conspiracy to rob us of our SUVs, climate change has become the issue of the 20th century. That was for you, Dave.

Mr. Taylor: No. That was for the other Dave.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. Somebody named Dave will appreciate that.

With that in mind, I must compliment the government on actually addressing this vital issue. Despite the government's official statements I have no doubt that the ruling party harbours a number of climate change doubters, so I'm glad that they have actually tackled this issue.

Am I wrong on that?

Mr. MacDonald: Which party?

Mr. Tougas: The ruling party.

Now that we've all agreed that climate change must be addressed, the question becomes: how do we best approach this crisis? Clearly, real reductions are the route to go, as my friend and colleague from Edmonton-McClung has already so capably pointed out.

Albertans are blessed to live on one of the wealthiest pieces of real estate in the world. Our wealth comes from the earth, whether it is farmed for food or drained of its natural resources. Our economy is based on hydrocarbons, which when used as fuel, release carbon dioxide, which is the leading contributor to climate change. Clearly, there is a lot at stake for Alberta, more so than for any other province in Canada.

Now, does Bill 3 address this problem? Well, no single piece of legislation will address the single most important issue of our time, but clearly we have to start somewhere. The people of Alberta want to see strong leadership on this issue, because it has truly exceeded health care in public concern right across the country, but I don't think Bill 3 is going to calm the fears of Albertans.

I do appreciate hearing from the Member for Livingstone-Macleod his rundown on Climate Change Central and what's been going on there. That was quite informative, although how much the public knows about Climate Change Central is an interesting point. A lot of what he was saying was news to me, and I've been paying attention to this. So perhaps the government should start putting more effort into letting people know what is available for the Marthas and Henrys of Alberta to get out there and help on the climate change problem.

Now, as I said earlier, I'm happy that the government has chosen to address this issue. Now that the truth about global warming has been accepted, which is in itself a giant step forward for this government, it is up to all members of this Legislature and the public to help put in place the best possible plan to address this problem. At heart, however, is our view that genuine reductions are the only correct way to go. Clearly, we cannot hold steady. We have to see real reductions in greenhouse gases, not a lot of paper shuffling that makes everyone feel good, as if they're doing something worthwhile.

As we've heard from previous speakers, we need to become aggressive on this issue. The climate change issue did not arrive fully formed overnight. Concerns have been raised about climate change for many, many years, and unfortunately those years are now lost to us. It's time to get aggressive on climate change, not passive. In the United States, for instance, the Democrats in Congress are bringing forward a bill calling for an 80 per cent cut in emissions by 2050. Now, the United States, which is the largest economy in the world, has the courage to consider real targets with real goals. We're talking reductions, not an emissions intensity approach, which is the emphasis of this bill.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bill 3 calls for emissions intensity with a staged-in approach and the ability of companies to buy offsets from other industries and so

on. Well, frankly, I'm a little suspicious of offsets, Mr. Speaker. It's a little like going to confession. You can commit your sins, but as long as you confess them, the slate is wiped clean. Now, the bottom line on Bill 3 is that there is nothing here that is going to lead to real reductions in emissions.

I think that overall the government is actually playing catch-up with the public and industry. Industry is ready to go with aggressive strategies to reduce greenhouse gases. The public is most certainly on board. The only player in this scenario who is not fully on board is the government. Alberta has to be the nation's leader in greenhouse gas reduction because Alberta, among all the provinces, is producing the most greenhouse gas emissions. So surely it's here in Alberta that we have to make the most creative and aggressive position to deal with greenhouse gases.

3:50

Now I'll admit, Mr. Speaker, that I'm not a scientist, and a lot of this is very difficult to grasp, but I have to ask the one question that we have to ask ourselves: is this the best we can do? Is this bill the absolute best that can be offered up to this House?

Now, during the coming weeks there will be a lot of debate about this bill, and it will no doubt be intense and genuine and, hopefully, civil. But, Mr. Speaker, simply put, this is probably the most important bill that we'll see in our time in the Legislature, and we have to get it right.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments. The hon. member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate very much the remarks of my colleague and especially his comments about his son and the future. I wonder if his son had any suggestions. What would he consider to be responsible action from this generation to protect the environment and his future?

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to respond?

Mr. Tougas: If I could come up with a good answer, I would, yes. I haven't talked to him at any great length about his plans for it or what he sees as the possible solutions to climate change. I'm sure, though, that like a lot of young people he's looking at just about everything he does in daily life, as are a lot of people in this building right now. We start thinking about whether we should be driving the car to the store or whether we can walk, whether we can ride a bike, whether we can do a lot of the little things and start cutting back.

It's important, as I mentioned earlier, that we start to engage the public in this debate. Industry, of course, is a major contributor, but everyone in this building today and everyone in this city makes a contribution to global warming. I think we really have to push further, not so much just the industry angle and the legislation, but we have to get the public more involved in this issue. I hope that the government will push that a little bit further. As we've heard earlier, there are some very good programs in place. We just have to let people know that they are actually happening.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on 29(2)(a).

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark's comments, I wonder whether he's aware, first of all, that Ontario, in fact, is by a considerable

margin the largest emitter of carbon dioxide in the country, not Alberta as he had proposed.

Secondly, he spoke about the question of absolute reductions. I'm wondering what sort of a decrease in our living standards here in Alberta he would be prepared to tolerate if we were to shut down the oil sands or to cap them off and stop producing greenhouse gases. What sort of decline in living standards would be acceptable in order to achieve a zero increase in emissions?

Mr. Tougas: Well, first of all, if I got the information wrong regarding Alberta's emission rates or something, I apologize. [interjections] Yeah. If I'm wrong, I'll apologize.

I don't think that we have to look at it as shutting down all industry in Alberta in order to bring about real change. I mean, industry is clearly prepared to do a lot of things. They're very knowledgeable, and they have ideas that they can do things too. I don't think we have to shut down the province. For every action there's another reaction, so to speak, and if we can make some positive changes here slowly – I'm not saying we have to do this overnight. We do not have to shut down industry in this province to bring about real change in real climate change problems.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Others wishing to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've not yet had the chance to speak on Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, in second reading. I know that many of my colleagues on all sides of the House have already spoken to it, and they have covered off a number of important points. I don't intend to go on at great length about this today. I think we will have ample opportunity to do that later on in committee. I understand that there will be some amendments coming forward, and I'm sure that they will be subjected to full and rigorous debate.

There is, of course, a great deal in this bill that we could debate. But I do need to speak to this concept of intensity targets as opposed to absolute emissions. Emissions intensities need to be spoken about regardless of who puts the most greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, whether it's Alberta, whether it's Ontario, whether it's the oil sands, whether it's coal-fired generating plants, whether it's consumers spending too much time in their automobiles, whether it's the cows in the field, although that theory has certainly been somewhat discredited, I think. Regardless, it's a shared responsibility, and we share a responsibility as legislators, as citizens, as consumers, as Albertans, as Canadians to do something real about reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Emission intensities really aren't real. Emission intensity targets are really illusory. Emission intensity is the amount of greenhouse gases released measured against some other factor. It could be GDP. It could be a barrel of oil. It could probably be anything you wanted to pick, actually, although you'd have to have some general consensus, I guess, from economists, which in itself, we're told, is an impossibility to get.

There's a good analogy to be drawn here, I think, between emission intensity targets versus absolute emissions and the automobile, which is the source of a significant amount of greenhouse gases across this country, across this continent. The automobile, for all its problems, all its sins, is a considerably cleaner, more efficient, less polluting critter than it was 30 years ago. We've made great strides in the automobile industry in energy efficiency, emissions of all sorts out of the tailpipe, that sort of thing, so that if

you were to take the car that you're driving today, Mr. Speaker, and compare it to the car that you drove in 1977 or, certainly, 1967, there would be no comparison. The car you're driving today is much cleaner, has much less negative effect on the environment. Even the SUV you drive today, I would submit, has less of an impact on the environment than a big gas-guzzling V8 Ford LTD or Chrysler Newport or something like that from a generation ago.

The problem is not, though, that that individual vehicle that you drive today is so much cleaner and so much more efficient than the vehicle you drove a generation ago or the vehicle your father drove. The problem is that there are so many more vehicles on the road today than there were in 1977 or 1967. Especially here in Alberta, there are so many more vehicles on the road today than there were in 1997 or 2002. Every day more people and more vehicles move into this province. So many of us now own two or three vehicles or, in the case of some, perhaps many, perhaps whole fleets, as opposed to a generation ago.

A generation ago cities like Edmonton and Calgary took up a lot less real estate, a lot less space. Their ecological footprints, the actual footprints that they make on the land, were much smaller, so it wasn't as difficult to get around. In many cases you could actually get around on public transit if you lived close enough to the core. You still can. The problem is that so many of our citizens in both Edmonton and Calgary live so far from the core, and they come into downtown every day to go to work and turn around every evening and go home.

4:00

You all saw, I'm sure, on the front page of the *Edmonton Journal* or the *Calgary Herald*, or perhaps both if you looked at both papers the day after the latest national census figures came out, the coloured maps that both papers did to show how populations have grown in metro Edmonton and Calgary since the last census. You would have noticed that in the inner city, in the core communities, populations have increased substantially in the last five years. In the extreme fringe communities, the absolute suburbs – we joke down in Calgary: the places where you need Montana or B.C. plates, they're so far from the core – populations have gone through the roof. Of course, you're measuring a brand new community of 10,000 people against a field that was there a year or so ago. Interestingly, in between the two there's this ring of mature suburbs, mature suburban communities, not quite inner city yet but getting there, where populations had been decreasing.

It's those new communities on the fringes that are so far away from the core that we haven't yet figured out a way to make public transit work in a sustainable, predictable, reliable fashion for those people. We haven't yet been able to figure out how to get the jobs to where the people live when the people live out in the fringes. They're the ones who need the two and three and four cars to get every member of their family who has a driver's licence back and forth from where they live to where they need to be. So we put a lot more vehicles on the road, burning collectively a lot more fossil fuel, emitting individually a lot less, whether it's in terms of harmful air pollutants or greenhouse gases, than their counterparts of a generation ago, but because there are so many more cars, emitting collectively a good deal more than the total fleet in Alberta or Canada or North America used to.

It's a bit like emissions intensities. You can even make an absolute emission in one of your plants or in one area of your plant, but as the plant has grown, as the company has grown, as the industry has grown, as the economy has grown, especially if you're going to measure your greenhouse gas releases against GDPs or a barrel of oil, then suddenly while you've achieved this illusory kind

of artificial kind of made up Alice-in-Wonderland emissions intensity target, you're actually in absolute terms making things far worse.

You know, if the current rate of economic growth in Alberta continues from now right through 2020 – and, of course, we know that it won't. This is for example purposes, okay? That's kind of like saying in 1979, based on the number of people who had become Elvis impersonators since Elvis died, that by 1985 the entire population of North America was going to be Elvis impersonators. Okay? We know that that didn't happen. But let's just say for a moment hypothetically that we stay on a steady rate of economic growth in this province right through 2020. The province's emissions could rise to 70 per cent or higher above our 1990 levels by then even though we could still achieve the target of a 50 per cent reduction in emissions intensity. So we need to think in this House very seriously about that.

I'm sensitive to what members on the government side have said about the need to proceed on climate change legislation in such a way that we don't grind the economy to a halt or we don't even slow it down dramatically. It needs to be done with care and consideration and a lot of thoughtfulness. It needs to be done carefully, but it needs to be done. The rest of the world is starting to do it.

Industry always responds, I won't say better but I'll say less badly, to clear regulations imposed by government and imposed on all than it does if government says: well, you know, you've got the technology, so why don't you just volunteer to do this? Company A may be led by a CEO with a real social conscience who really would like to do that, but if he does that, if he uses his technology or the best available technology to meet voluntary targets, and the CEO of company B, who has no social conscience whatsoever, says, "Voluntary; I don't have to do it," then the CEO of company A has caused his company to pay a financial penalty, a voluntary carbon tax, if you will, for doing the right thing.

You shouldn't have to pay taxes for doing the right thing. You should have to pay taxes for doing the wrong thing if the nature of the tax, as I think we would probably all agree in this House a carbon tax would be, is essentially punitive to incent people to do something so that they don't have to pay the tax or to tax them if they don't.

So I'm sensitive to what members opposite are saying about the need to be careful not to throw the economy of this province into a tailspin by imposing restrictions or requirements that are too onerous on it, but it doesn't change the fact that we need to pursue absolute emissions. We believe on this side of the House that we need to be pursuing those absolute emissions by 2012, and emissions intensities are not going to get us there, not that I can tell.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, again Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder under Standing Order 29(2).

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I appreciate the member's comments in regard to the pressing necessity to deal with carbon emissions in absolute terms. The bottom line is, of course, as the hon. Environment minister has pointed out and yourself as well, that we're looking at perhaps a third increase in our carbon dioxide emissions within the next 10 years, and then you could see a 65 to 70 per cent increase with these intensity targets even imposed. The underlying reason for this is that we have a fivefold increase projected for the tar sands projects in Fort McMurray. So I would just ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie if he would be willing to support a moratorium on approval of new

oil sands development to try to realize the absolute reductions that he would like to see.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time, no, not an absolute moratorium. I do think that we need to consider very carefully all the things that need to be in place before additional large-scale oil sands developments are approved. That is certainly something that the residents of Wood Buffalo and their municipal government have made very clear in the last several EUB hearings in calling for a moratorium or in calling for that particular development up for consideration not to be allowed to go ahead until this government puts in place the environmental, social, and infrastructure requirements to support that kind of development.

4:10

I guess, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, that I see this almost over the short term as more of a capacity issue around what Wood Buffalo, what Fort McMurray, what other oil sands producing regions of the province can absorb in terms of the growth pressure. Ultimately, I do tend to support the notion that oil sands development should go ahead in what I would call a responsible, sustainable way. We probably don't have time right now to debate what that means necessarily, and I'm not sure that we all would agree or necessarily know exactly how to define that right now.

Another thing that we very definitely need to seriously consider is that as we develop the oil sands because there is a demand for that product world-wide now, and I am suggesting that we not continue to go flat out, gold rush mentality like we have, we need to be taking some of the proceeds, I think, from oil sands development – financial, economic, and otherwise, knowledge-based – and channelling that into the development of a renewable resource industry, a renewable energy industry, renewable alternative forms of energy not only for our own benefit and for the good of the planet but, you know, there's money in that, too, quite frankly. And I don't mind making a buck from time to time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if the Member for Calgary-Currie could tell us. He has referred to the move to absolute emissions reductions, I presume is what he meant. What is his plan, and how do we achieve that? It's a laudable goal, I would certainly admit, but are we going to turn off all the coal-fired generating plants? Are we going to park all the cars and trucks? Are we going to turn off all the gas heating to our homes? Are we going to shut down the oil sands? Those four things together make up the vast majority of where these emissions are coming from, so which one of these four things are we going to do to reduce our emissions?

The Deputy Speaker: In 20 seconds or less, hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, and the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill – sounds to me a bit like one of my former callers – no, we're not going to do those things, and we're not going to be alarmist either. A very short answer: best available technology should be three words that drive us going forward. So we're not going to shut down . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, hon. member. The time for Standing

Order 29(2)(a) has elapsed.

Are there any others who wish to participate in the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

head:

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Ducharme moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 22: Mrs. Mather]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to rise today to respond to this year's Speech from the Throne. The Speech from the Throne typically tells us where the administration wants to take us and which plans it has to achieve the outcomes it desires. This year's speech was titled *The Future Is Now: A Plan for Alberta*. Nice try. Albertans know that this government did not have a plan for at least the last decade, and it still doesn't. It may want to have a plan, it's likely scrambling to develop what looks like a plan, but so far it doesn't actually have one.

There is no plan to manage growth and ensure sustainability, there is no plan to save for the future, there is no plan to protect Alberta consumers, there is no comprehensive land-use strategy, and there is, certainly, no plan to protect our planet or to minimize damage to the environment. This government has ideas or projects, but they're all loose pieces with no glue holding them together. Former Premiers Lougheed and Klein even confirmed and admitted this openly.

The Future Is Now: well, at least that's a start, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, this administration is finally getting its head around the notion that good governments plan and that they plan more than a year ahead. They actually plan for 10, 15, 20, and even 30 years or more. The speech tells us that

the government will act thoughtfully and decisively on behalf of Albertans. The government of Alberta will govern with integrity and transparency, manage growth pressures, improve Albertans' quality of life, provide safe and secure communities, and build a stronger Alberta.

So let's see now: integrity and transparency. Mr. Speaker, that's a joke, except that it's not a funny one, and people can see right through this. This is the same government which just less than one year ago in this House forcefully passed its outrageous and disgusting secrecy and opacity piece of legislation called Bill 20.

This is the same government which stuffs potentially damaging or embarrassing documents and other things into what they loosely call a "ministerial briefing binder" to hide things from Albertans. This is the same government that hides these things for five years. Even our Privacy Commissioner didn't like this and commented on it.

This is the very government which now conceals the findings of internal audits for 15 years, which, I have argued previously, is like three or four government changes. So, yeah, some openness.

This is the same government which invoked time allocation twice last year during debate on Bill 20 when they felt that the public was starting to question their motives. Closure, or time allocation, Mr.

Speaker, is a sign of despair, and this government was desperate in its need to stop the criticism and kill the debate. It was particularly frustrating that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, who was himself an opposition member at one point, volunteered or was 'volun-told' to defend the government's position and try to explain away its embarrassing decision.

You know, thinking about this, the current Premier, his Minister of Finance, his minister of health, his Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, all of whom talked the talk about openness and transparency as PC leadership candidates during the latest Tory race, chose not to walk the walk. They all voted to shove Bill 20 down our throats and pretended that it was business as usual. Actually, this entire cabinet, with its 18 ministers, either stayed quiet or spoke in favour of Bill 20 last year.

This is not a surprise to me, Mr. Speaker. This is a government which wins cloak of secrecy awards. The audacity is unbelievable. So spare me the that was then and this is now argument, and please don't refer to yourselves as Alberta's new government because there is nothing new about you. The only thing that is new is new letterhead and business cards advertising who does what. Otherwise, it's the same old deal.

What about patronage, Mr. Speaker? Didn't we Alberta Liberals ask to have an appointments commission or a board to oversee public appointments and to offer the transparency and the safeguards required? Why did this very government – and there's nothing new about them – reject this idea? I will tell you why: because they think they can get away with it.

What about the lack of accountability? What about refusing to share with the voters, you know, who voted for whom during that race? It was mentioned in this House that this is a party matter and it shouldn't be brought up, but in the essence and in the true definition of accountability and openness this is something that people are asking about.

What about the trend to prefer verbal over written, from paying for verbal advice from people like Kelley Charlebois and Rod Love to making verbal promises to break environmental law and to carry on interbasin water transfers just because a megamall and a racetrack asked the right government person at the right time? What about the exorbitant and outrageous access to information fees and the unnecessary blacking out of information so that once citizens or the media or the opposition get back what they asked for, little of it makes sense?

Mr. Speaker, my advice to the government members is: please don't kid yourselves. Please know that Albertans are not going to buy this brand that you're trying to sell us. You had your chance, and you blew it, so move on.

Managing growth pressures. Yeah, like getting 12-year-olds to work in restaurants and bars. Now, to be fair, kudos to the Premier for killing this idea dead in its tracks, but the fact of the matter is that the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. The Alberta Liquor and Gaming Commission was, in fact, contemplating and planning, and you know they were really surprised that the government didn't go along. I find this quite puzzling and alarming.

Like importing temporary foreign workers to work here without first trying to find employment for Albertans and other Canadians. Even with those foreign workers, they're not true immigrants. Most of them come alone and leave their families behind. Most send the bulk of their paycheques back to their home countries, and they're sometimes mistreated or taken advantage of. When the employers are done with them, they're shipped back where they came from.

4:20

Also, I am really annoyed at the fact that the government's so-called plan seems to be, in essence, a make-work scheme to appease

some government backbenchers, former ministers in particular, by giving them stuff to do and creating committee or task force opportunities for them to make some more money on the side. Take the Treasury Capital Planning Committee announced on March 22, 2007, to be chaired by the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek and with at least four ministers on it. Don't you guys sit in the same caucus room? Do you need another committee to be talking to each other, a committee that meets and has expenses and has staff? How much extra taxpayers' money will this translate into to compensate the former Minister of Education, who lost his cabinet post in the latest shuffle?

Improve Albertans' quality of life, the number two thing. What does it really mean, exactly: more consumerism, higher inflation, more pollution? What about social assistance programs and minimum wage? Ontario just this last week announced that their minimum wage was going up to \$10.25. My question is: are we planning a similar move in this province?

Mr. Liepert: No.

Mr. Elsalhy: The Minister of Education is saying no. So he probably has inside information that we're not privy to.

This government talks about intensity targets, as was discussed earlier in the debate on Bill 3, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but the fact is, as we mentioned, that intensity ratios are based on GDP or other factors. So if these companies make more money and profit, they can match or exceed their intensity targets. The end result would be that more garbage is spewed into the air and lasting damage to the environment would ensue. Is this better quality of life for our children?

How about better quality of health care services? We have come to discuss many instances where less than adequate health services are talked about and incidents where the opposition and the public are defining what's happening as a crisis and the government is denying that it is and saying that everything is fine. How does that reconcile the government's claim to be trying to improve the quality of life for Albertans?

Typically, I would try to look for positive elements in any throne speech to try to not be completely critical, but today I'm finding this extremely difficult. It's a speech full of clichés and platitudes. You know, it might have been appropriate, it might have been something that was suitable for the '60s or the '70s, but this is the 21st century, Mr. Speaker, and it's time that we show leadership and offer better government. Albertans deserve nothing less.

Now, another example. Another make-work committee was announced on March 27, 2007: the community spirit fund committee, to be chaired by the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, who was formerly the minister of gaming and lost his cabinet position when the new Premier picked his team, and with seven Tory MLAs on it. Wasn't he the minister just a few months ago? Does he need to be recruited to a new committee to chair it to tell the new minister of gaming, which is now under recreation, parks, and culture, that he needs to do A or B or C? He can give that advice free of charge, and I don't think he should get paid to unseal his lips. Again, a prime example of waste and redundancy.

Providing safe and secure communities. The answer is simple in my mind, Mr. Speaker: more resources and better funding for our police officers to do their job and to start thinking about things like community asset building, which is something that the police chiefs are talking about, particularly in cities like Edmonton and Calgary. If we're only funding police services at about \$16 per capita and everyone tells us that this figure needs to be at least doubled, then something needs to be done.

However, this government – and you probably agree – has a trend, and the trend is growing. It decides instead to strike a Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force, as announced on March 21, which will cost taxpayers \$1.5 million and – surprise, surprise – will be chaired by the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek, who was formerly the Minister of Children's Services and, again, lost her cabinet post in the latest shuffle. But she was also the Solicitor General at one point in the past, so she can offer this advice to the minister for free, I think.

We all know about drugs. We all know about alcohol, prostitution, domestic violence, gangs, knife crimes, et cetera. I don't think that this task force is likely to hear anything new, and I think that instead of saving this MLA and some of those committee or task force members money, we should have instead invested this in the recruitment and training and paying of the salaries of up to 15 more police officers to patrol our streets. It's priorities, Mr. Speaker. We don't need any more task forces.

Lastly, to "build a stronger Alberta." I don't know. It's a vague statement, sort of motherhood and apple pie. On March 20 the government announced the creation of the Alberta Investment Management Corporation and told us that it will give us improved organizational governance, increased flexibility, and opportunities for greater investment returns for Alberta savings, for public-sector pensions, endowments, and other funds. Now, isn't that already the work that is being done under the Minister of Finance? Is it needed? How much extra will this cost taxpayers? Who will be appointed to the board of directors? Will they be patronage appointments? How will these directors be recruited? Mr. Speaker, it's either common sense or the lack thereof.

My concerns and comments reflect a growing sentiment that this government has grown to be too bureaucratic and big on make-work task forces and committees instead of actually taking action and showing leadership. It's a government that's all out of ideas and tired.

Communications and propaganda arms of this government are currently the busiest of all agencies and departments. They're the only organs showing residual activity in this ailing, failing body. The Alberta Liberal caucus has a plan for this province, Mr. Speaker, and it does not involve the Public Affairs Bureau. Instead of spin and trying to explain to Albertans that we have a plan to have a plan, as demonstrated by the Premier's latest and first of three \$200,000 brochures, we would instead implement our policies one by one, and people can see for themselves the kind of work ethic that the Alberta Liberals have.

Our first 100 days in office, Mr. Speaker, are going to set the stage for this province to have a sustainable, rewarding, and environmentally and people-friendly future, a future where homelessness is eradicated, dignity for the disabled is restored, social assistance and minimum living wages are indexed, taxes are kept permanently competitive, and public services are delivered at the best level in Canada. Albertans can have it all, and the Alberta Liberal caucus has the map to chart this future for them. From affordable housing to health, from quality child care to top-notch seniors' and long-term care, from superb K to 12 education to state-of-the-art postsecondary, from airtight consumer protection to real environment stewardship, we have a plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any questions or comments? The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: I just would like to ask the hon. member. This new,

big Liberal machine that's going to sweep Alberta: at their convention in Calgary how many people attended?

An Hon. Member: They couldn't count.

Mr. Snelgrove: I can believe that.

Mr. Elsalhy: I thank the hon. minister of the treasury – President of the Treasury. You see, you guys have many names now, and nobody knows what exactly he does versus the Minister of Finance, for example.

Anyways, that's an interesting question, Mr. Speaker, because this is the same, you know, front bench that argued that party business is not to be discussed in this House. But I'm going to make the hon. minister extremely pleased to know that we had 29 incumbents and declared candidates who were there.

An Hon. Member: That's all?

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, we're better than the Tories. We're better than the NDPs. You guys are scrambling to find candidates. We have contested nominations. We have had the pleasure of the company of political scientists, people from all corners of the province, rural and urban, who were there to cheer us on and to wish us luck, some of whom were long-term Tories.

4:30

An Hon. Member: How many?

Mr. Elsalhy: We have had 200-plus, yes, and it's a force to be reckoned with. Stay tuned.

An Hon. Member: Did you count the children too?

Mr. Elsalhy: There were no children.

Mr. Snelgrove: I just want to apologize for even bringing up their party in the House, Mr. Speaker. Sincerely apologize.

Mr. Taylor: We didn't even move a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister wishes to rise on (29)(2)(a)?

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. The hon. President of the Treasury Board is obviously so far ahead of his time, a visionary, that he had already anticipated that a point of order probably would have been raised, so he was able to counter that beforehand. That's why he's looking out the windshield rather than looking in a rearview mirror. We're moving ahead, this government, with our plan.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other participants, we'll move on to the next speaker. The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure today to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne. I'd like to begin by thanking the hon. Lieutenant Governor for his commendable work this year since the last Speech from the Throne. I'm always impressed by his constant humour, style, and charm despite what must be a very taxing job. He is truly an example of the best that Alberta has to offer.

I would also like to offer my heartfelt thanks to everyone in my constituency, West Yellowhead. The past year has been a good one,

though we had been tested by many challenges. The patient and hard work and community spirit of my constituents have done wonders for West Yellowhead. A thousand heartfelt thanks are due to the staff and the volunteers who have helped me with my work and to the many constituents who approached me with their concerns and their feedback. I look forward to another year serving with you and for you.

One more acknowledgement is due to our new Premier of Alberta. I'd like to join everyone in the House in offering my congratulations on his new role, and I wish him the best of luck in the coming years.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne set out a new direction for this government and for this province. It is an exciting direction that will ensure that our province continues to be a clean, safe, attractive, and prosperous place in which to live. The government's five priorities reflect the determination of all Albertans not to squander the opportunities we have today. I'm happy to see that many of the initiatives promised in this year's Speech from the Throne will have significant beneficial effects for all Albertans, especially those in West Yellowhead.

While we face many of the challenges as other areas of the province, we also have distinct challenges of our own. I believe the Speech from the Throne demonstrates this government's resolve to address these problems while also promoting local solutions to local problems. By committing to govern with integrity and transparency, this government has committed both to listening to Albertans' concerns and to improving the operations of government for all Albertans. This will in turn make government more responsive to Albertans' current and emerging needs, allowing our province to be prosperous in a sustainable manner for years to come.

The government has also committed to managing growth pressures. This is a particularly significant commitment for my constituency, West Yellowhead, where we are enjoying the benefits of our current prosperity while doing our best to ensure that no one falls behind. An excellent example of how this government is managing growth pressures is the Affordable Housing Task Force, which recently commenced its work. This task force held a session in my constituency in the town of Hinton. An impressive 70 people turned out to give their input, with 11 presentations being made to the task force. A turnout like this shows how much Albertans welcome this government's commitment to operating transparently and consulting with them. I'm looking forward to the release of the task force recommendations so that the affordable housing problem can be addressed as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

Hinton, like other communities, has faced difficulties in acquiring Crown land for expansion, but like other towns in West Yellowhead it's facing many greater difficulties because of their location in Alberta's green zone. Similarly, in Grande Cache high demand and fast growth has led to a shortage of industrial land. I've been working with both towns to obtain more land for expansion.

I'm also pleased to hear in the Speech from the Throne that this government recognizes how our current economic growth is placing great pressure on our infrastructure. Having a long-term capital plan to address infrastructure needs and inflation costs will help our province expand in a prudent manner. However, while a long-term capital plan will be most welcome, the government is already doing much to help build and maintain our infrastructure. Just recently \$13 million of funding was dedicated for development of the Edson health care centre. The government of Alberta also gave \$3 million to the town of Hinton to upgrade three kilometres of town water mains, a grant that was matched by the federal government through the Canada/Alberta municipal infrastructure fund.

Reflecting Albertans' desire to develop their province in an ecologically sensitive manner, the Speech from the Throne has

committed the government to an unprecedented set of environmental policies. Given that my constituency, West Yellowhead, is located in an area of the province that is particularly environmentally sensitive, I am happy to hear that Water for Life and the land use framework will be updated and completed.

My constituents are already working hard to protect the environment. Elk Valley Coal recently received the Alberta Chamber of Resources major reclamation award for its effort to reclaim the Sphinx Creek mining area. Those hundred reclaimed hectares will allow the channel to permanently sustain native rainbow trout while providing year-round habitat for grizzlies, elk, sheep, mule deer, and wolves.

Similarly, the Hardisty Creek restoration project was just awarded a forest stewardship recognition award from Wildlife Habitat Canada for its four years of effort to restore a fish passage from the Athabasca upstream to the Hardisty Creek. The Alberta government was one of the major financial contributors to this initiative through the community facility enhancement program.

Another priority the government identified in the Speech from the Throne is improving Alberta's quality of life. I'm glad that the government of Alberta is going to work hard to improve high school completion rates and increase access to secondary education programs. This will be beneficial to the students of West Yellowhead, where graduation rates have risen in recent years but are still below the provincial average.

Initiatives like registered apprenticeship programs will allow students to complete their academic education while working on their apprenticeship training and make a real difference in keeping some students in school until graduation. Having apprentices in training while they are completing their academic education also helps alleviate the shortage of skilled labour that is presently being felt across the province.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In my constituency, one company in particular has done an exemplary job of embracing apprenticeship training. A few weeks ago Edson's own Daniel's Welding Ltd. received the Alberta apprenticeship employees of the year award, sponsored by the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board and Alberta Advanced Education. Daniel's Welding received this award for its exemplary support of apprenticeship programs. Since 1986 this company has employed between five and 12 active apprentices while including two special-needs apprentices. It is companies like Daniel's Welding that will help make Alberta's education program a success.

4:40

Our economic success is not to be taken for granted, so government has committed to building a stronger Alberta. That we cannot take our prosperity for granted is clear in many areas of West Yellowhead where the mountain pine beetle has had a profound effect on our forest. The infestation hurts more than the lumber industry. Tourism draws thousands of people a year to my constituency, particularly to the town of Jasper. Should our beautiful forests be devastated by this blight, many businesses that rely on tourists will suffer. Within the Foothills area around Hinton, there's an estimate of almost 100,000 infested trees. The establishment of the institutes of agriculture, forestry, and the environment will help develop solutions to environmental sustainability challenges such as the mountain pine beetle and, therefore, are most welcome.

The Speech from the Throne also recognizes that we can improve our natural resources. Our coal is a serious business in West

Yellowhead and, as part of Alberta's coal, is some of the cleanest in the world. Coal generation produces half of Alberta's electricity. I'm delighted that the Speech from the Throne committed the government to further address climate change, in part by developing a comprehensive energy strategy that will make full use of innovations such as near zero emission coal. Developing technologies like near zero emission coal will allow us to continue to develop our natural resources while protecting the environment.

The Speech from the Throne states that the "government will build on Alberta's traditional strengths, which include energy, agriculture, forestry, tourism, and the people of this province." West Yellowhead exemplifies all of these strengths. Coal mining, natural gas, timber, cattle, beautiful scenery, and hard-working people all make the region prosperous. My constituency is an excellent example of prosperity despite the challenges we have in Alberta today. With the plan for our province set out in this year's Speech from the Throne, I'm confident that we will succeed in addressing those challenges and continue to prosper for many years to come.

I look forward to the hard work with my government colleagues and my constituents to fulfill the promises made in the Speech from the Throne. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. I appreciate the commitment of that area to coal and its support for that region over the years. I guess that given the government's commitment to improving our impact on the environment and the climate change initiatives, I would like to hear from the hon. member how he views the approval of a new coal facility without carbon capture capacities. Is that appropriate given what we know about the future?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, the coal in West Yellowhead, especially at Coal Valley Resources Inc., has some of the lowest carbon in the country, very little. The main reason it was built was because we used to ship it to Ontario Hydro. Since then Ontario Hydro has built mines in Pennsylvania that produce coal with a high sulfur content. Of course, there's lots of emission there. Then when you look at the property of the Cardinal River Coals operation, the other aspect with them, they had some of the highest coal content that they could ship across the world to all the coking plants in Japan and Korea. They were at a high level all the time with very low sulfur content.

Now with the new laws that the previous Minister of Environment in the last regime had brought in, we're doing that out in the area of Genesee and that, so we have very low content of CO₂. We've got scrubbers in there, so a lot of it right now the way we have it has less CO₂ emissions or the same as natural gas.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's once more an honour to rise in this Assembly on behalf of the citizens of the Calgary-Nose Hill communities of Beddington Heights, Huntington Hills, Thorncliffe, Greenview, and North Haven. I thank them for entrusting me to be their voice in this House.

I wish to begin my remarks this afternoon by acknowledging the retirement since our last session of the former Premier. The government of Premier Klein over a period of 14 years accomplished much for the people of Alberta by eliminating the deficit and the provincial debt, by having the lowest personal taxes in the country, and by creating a business climate which has attracted people from far and wide to our province.

Mr. Speaker, on December 2, 2006, members of my party chose a new leader, who was sworn in as Premier on December 14, 2006. I congratulate the hon. Premier on his victory and on his government's first Speech from the Throne. The Premier has already demonstrated tremendous energy in giving Albertans and government members and, indeed, all members of this House an enhanced role in determining Alberta's future. He has also been accessible and available to Albertans in all parts of the province and engaged them in renewing our government's vision for the future.

Mr. Speaker, many challenges remain for us in the coming year. We need to preserve and improve the quality of our public health care, to improve education and training for our young people, to address the needs of our senior citizens and of those less fortunate, to sustain and enhance our environment and wildlife resources, and to manage the challenges of a rapidly expanding population and economy.

Just as public expectations of what public health care can and should do are increasing, so are the costs of providing those services. Changes in delivery of health care are necessary. We should continue to innovate in order to optimize both value for taxpayer money and health and wellness outcomes. However, we must ensure that whatever changes are made, we continue to ensure that timely access to quality health care is never dependent on financial means. Changes in the way we fund public health care are also inevitable. We need to reform a system of health care premiums which, despite the exemption of low-income earners and seniors, continues to be a regressive form of taxation.

Mr. Speaker, this government's priorities include managing growth pressures, improving Albertans' quality of life, and building a stronger Alberta. The key to these three priorities is to invest in education. To quote Aristotle, the fate of nations depends on the education of youth. Aristotle was right. If we build on our excellent education system now by recruiting and retaining excellent teachers and by ensuring that our students succeed to the fullest of their ability, we will help create a society and a heritage of which we can all be proud.

I urge the government to implement legislation already passed by this House, but which remains unproclaimed, making school attendance mandatory until the age of 17 years. This is one of many measures to ensure that young Albertans have the basic skills required for success in our knowledge-based economy. At the same time we can help young people who are at risk of failing through programs which support them and through providing enhanced learning and career choices appropriate to diverse individual aptitudes.

Mr. Speaker, in the field of postsecondary education and training we must continue to work towards the ambitious goals of increased access, which the government set out in its Speech from the Throne two years ago, of 60,000 new spaces by 2020. We also need to meet the demands of the workforce for educational capacity in certain critical fields, including health care providers, engineering, and skilled trades.

However, despite the immediate needs of industry we should not focus narrowly on those fields of endeavour which are only of immediate economic benefit. Our government should continue to support research and education in pure sciences, social sciences, the

arts, and humanities, all of which make important contributions to our society.

Adequate and affordable housing for seniors and lower income Albertans is emerging as a priority for our government. In a tight marketplace some landlords have given tenants unreasonable increases in rents. Other constituents of Calgary-Nose Hill, faced with market values increasing on their homes, face steep increases in their property taxes.

Mr. Speaker, given inflationary pressures of over 5 per cent year over year in the city of Calgary we need to ensure that our health care and support systems respond to the needs of our aging population and allow seniors to live an independent lifestyle where possible. We must assist those who require home medical care and those who provide in-home care for spouses or other family members who are unable to care for themselves.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, Albertans rightly expect us to ensure that our natural environment is preserved and enhanced. What better way to serve the people of Alberta than by ensuring that public lands of our province are protected for the benefit and enjoyment of their children and future generations. By keeping our inventory of natural public lands intact, we preserve the beauty and splendour of our province. Resource exploitation from public lands must be done in ways that minimize long-term damage to ecological integrity inside and outside of our provincial boundaries. Land use and forestry plans and headwaters of our river systems must take into account the cumulative effects on forest ecosystems which help to retain water, reduce flooding, enhance water quality, support diverse biological systems, and provide esthetic and recreational values. Resource extraction should be restricted in some areas of special ecological value, including the Suffield national wildlife refuge.

Our water resources should be protected through a comprehensive, integrated policy of sustainable watershed management within the proposed land use framework. Such a policy must build on the Water for Life strategy. It must also recognize the cumulative effects of all land uses in the riparian, adjacent zones of our major watersheds from which we draw our drinking and irrigation waters. These integrated policies must regulate agriculture, forestry, industry, and development. These changes will not be without opposition because they will affect the rights of landowners regarding many aspects of land use.

New policies must recognize that the effects of land use may extend far beyond our provincial boundaries. Of special concern is the necessity to ensure that oil sands developments do not cause deleterious effects on downstream waters of the Athabasca River, the Slave River, the Great Slave Lake and the Mackenzie River. Future generations of Canadians will not forgive us if we do not preserve for them these irreplaceable natural treasures.

Mr. Speaker, I wish now to address some issues regarding the growth pressures which face us in the province of Alberta. While it is generally conceded that growth and population increases are good things, there may be limits upon which we are constrained, and therefore it may be reasonable to ask not whether we should be putting the brakes on increased development but whether we should perhaps take our foot off the accelerator. I would like to propose a few ideas which may help to sustain the prosperity of the province in the longer term.

First, I would suggest that the government should exercise restraint in infrastructure capital spending and set priorities in areas where bidding is competitive while maintaining the priority for building urgently needed hospitals and other health facilities.

Second, the government should restrain sales of Crown mineral rights and regulate the timing of further oil sands megaprojects in

order to spread out and sustain oil and gas exploration, drilling, and oil sands construction activity in the province over the longer term.

Third, tax cuts may be deferred until such time as the economy has slowed to a more manageable pace.

Fourth, Alberta should not attempt to meet its shortage of professionals and skill trades by simply increasing salaries and recruiting workers from other jurisdictions. Those who are newly arrived in our province do not bring roads, bridges, hospitals, and schools with them. Increasing education and training opportunities for Albertans will provide long-term benefits to the province without the added infrastructure burden resulting from immigration.

Fifth, a major portion of nonrenewable resource revenue should be invested into the heritage fund. This endowment will ensure that the children of Alberta have a bright future.

Finally, Alberta must encourage growth and diversified economic development in the rural areas of the province. Expansion of industries such as tourism, alternative energy, and value-added agriculture would enhance the sustainability of rural Alberta and help relieve the pressures on our large cities.

Mr. Speaker, a combination of these solutions would reduce inflation, provide greater value for taxpayer money, and create more stable employment and industrial capacity, thus creating longer term prosperity for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the economic prosperity and resulting growth pressures which we face will continue to provide great challenges to Alberta, but despite these challenges we have a beautiful province blessed with natural resources and a standard of living, infrastructure, and systems of education, health care, and social services which are among the best in the world. By managing growth wisely, we will build a stronger Alberta, and I'm confident that from Wood Buffalo to Waterton, from Zama City to Etzikom, from the blue Canadian Rockies to the prairie grasslands Alberta will indeed continue to live up to its motto and be strong and free.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that all of us in this House may have the purpose and the will to work together for the benefit of the people of Alberta now and in the future.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate very much the comments of the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. He mentioned the idea, rather than putting on the breaks, of taking your foot off the accelerator. Would he like to comment on what he means by that in relation to the oil sands?

Dr. Brown: Well, I had no specific comments to make with respect to the oil sands. My comments were generally that we should perhaps look at staging some of the developments that are happening over a longer period of time.

The Speaker: Additional questions?

The last speaker I have on my list is the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty-eight days ago we were summoned into this House to hear His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor read the Speech from the Throne. Of course, His Honour didn't actually write the speech. It is a long-standing British parliamentary tradition that the Queen or her representative merely read word for word the speech that the head of that particular government, in this case the Premier of Alberta, puts in front of them. I'm sure you've heard His Honour the

Honourable the Lieutenant Governor speak many times at many events, and you can tell that he had no part in the writing of the throne speech because His Honour's speeches are not only vastly more entertaining than this one was; they also have a good deal more substance.

So what did we take away from that throne speech 28 days ago? Well, that the Premier has five priorities, and as you sift through and drill down and boil them down to their essence, I understand them to be these: mom, apple pie, baseball, sunshine, and puppies. Mr. Speaker, the people of Calgary-Currie love puppies too. In fact, I'd be surprised if there's another constituency in all Alberta with as many pet pooches per square kilometre as my constituency has. Last time I checked, most of my constituents and most Calgarians, in fact, are pretty fond of sunshine too. We've got a preference for hockey over baseball. You might get some debate over apple pie versus strawberry-rhubarb versus pumpkin, I suppose. And most people do love their mothers. But they want and they expect and they are entitled to more from their government than this.

Mr. Speaker, Calgary-Currie is a vibrant, growing, and generally prosperous inner-city constituency. It's probably safe to say that generally my constituents are more prosperous than they were when I was elected although that is due in part to the number of poorer constituents who have been forced out of Calgary-Currie by the housing boom, the real estate boom, and I'll talk about that more in a moment. So if you were a Conservative, I assume hypothetically, never having been one myself, you'd probably look around my constituency and say, "These people are doing great; they're doing fine; they've got nothing to complain about," which probably goes a long way towards explaining why my constituents chose a Liberal as their MLA. While the majority of people in my constituency may be doing pretty well financially – and some are doing fantastically well, beyond my wildest fantasies – they also recognize that there is more to life than money. They know that he who dies with the most toys still dies and that he is more likely to die if he is sick and cannot get into the hospital or be seen by a doctor.

My constituents don't understand and cannot condone a government that in the richest province in the best country on Earth makes us make do with a health care system that has the capacity for roughly three-quarters the population it now serves. My constituents don't understand why there was no commitment in this throne speech around the south health campus in Calgary. They don't understand why this government has dragged its heels on that commitment to the point that construction costs have now escalated hundreds of millions of dollars beyond the original budget estimate, and the opening date has now been pushed back from 2010 to 2011.

5:00

Heck, they don't understand why the south health campus wasn't built years ago. We needed it years ago. You could tell that we were going to need it years ago. You could tell we were going to need it when they blew up the General, and that was 10 years ago. You know, they're going to have an even harder time understanding why, when it does open, the south health campus will initially be 100 beds smaller than originally planned, why it'll have to open initially with just 250 beds rather than 350 and then keep adding 100 beds a year until at least 2014. They're going to have a hard time understanding why it has to be done that way: because we don't train enough doctors and nurses and lab technologists and other hospital workers, either in the city of Calgary or the province of Alberta generally, to staff more than a 250-bed facility initially when it opens in 2011, some six months late. They're going to have a hard time understanding that. They're going to have a hard time understanding why we couldn't see that one coming.

My constituents, who care passionately about postsecondary education, as they do about health care, as they do about many things, are pleased that at long last the government has approved the baccalaureate of nursing program at Mount Royal College. But they understand that more, much more, must be done to increase our capacity to educate the health care professionals that we need. The Calgary health region alone will need 37,000 staff, including 10,000 nurses and over 3,000 doctors, over the next 10 years to meet the demands of growth in the Calgary health region and to replace the retiring baby boomers who work for the region today.

My constituents do understand what's going on in Vegreville with the closing of most of St. Joseph's hospital because in 2007 and 2006 and 2005 and 2004 and 2003, apparently, a hospital in Alberta, in the richest province in the best country on earth, has failed repeatedly to properly clean and sterilize its surgical instruments. They understand that this sort of health care scandal is brought about by a lack of oversight directly attributable – directly attributable – to budget cuts and an ideological bent that money spent on oversight is money spent on frills. This is a government that has spent the last decade or more playing the actuarial odds. My constituents understand that. They don't condone it, but they understand it. I don't know if the Premier's constituents understand why he has thus far refused to meet with them face to face to answer their questions about this crisis in his constituency. St. Joseph's hospital is in the Premier's constituency.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents would like to know the government's plan on education, both K to 12 and postsecondary. They would like to know when Mount Royal College is going to become Mount Royal University. They would like to know when the communities that don't have schools in Calgary are going to get them and the communities that do have schools are going to get them fixed. You know, none of that was evident in the throne speech. Like most Calgarians they'd like to know why there are 40 communities in Calgary without an elementary school.

Of even more direct concern to my constituents is the plan, if any, for inner-city schools. Some of my constituents believe the poor physical quality of the school buildings we still have open in Calgary-Currie is affecting their children's health. Others worry about the notion of self-fulfilling prophecy because they've seen a number of schools close already. You know, the government won't properly fund school maintenance. Without the necessary maintenance the school gets run down. Parents see the sorry state of the school and figure: well, it won't be long before they close that one down too, just like they have so many others in the constituency, so I guess I'd better put my children someplace else. Eventually community leaders worry – and, Mr. Speaker, they do worry about this a lot in my constituency – because you need a school to attract young families, and you need young families and, in fact, people of all ages to keep a community vibrant and truly livable. But that school, the last one left in the neighbourhood, will close too.

I've spoken in this House before of Western Canada high school, an absolutely legendary high school not only in Alberta but right across the west. This great institution is falling apart around its students' ears. It desperately needs to be rebuilt, has needed to be for the last seven or eight years, and could have been done back then for a fraction of what it will cost today. For that matter, I guess it could be done today for a fraction of what it will cost by the time this government finally gets around to doing something about it. But, you know, it needs doing. The west block of Western Canada high school is literally pulling away from the centre block, and there's a crack about an inch wide that runs from ceiling to floor on the lobby wall next to the school auditorium. You stand there. You look at that. You don't think you're in a high school in Calgary.

You think you're in a high school in San Francisco or Los Angeles or someplace right after an earthquake. This needs doing, like so many other things in this province that need doing.

Still on education, this one crosses ministries from Education to Advanced Education. A constituent of mine wonders why Alberta's universities continue to insist on pure math 30 as a required course even for admission into arts and social sciences programs, where once admitted, students will never have to take another math class for the rest of their natural lives, when Alberta Education some years ago designed applied math 30 for that purpose.

Now the whole math curriculum is being redesigned. Alberta Education is trying to get buy-in from math professors to, you know, review the curriculum and make sure it works, and they're not even bothering to show up for that review because they know that it doesn't make any difference. I mean, the administrations are just going to do what the administrations are going to do.

They went through the whole dog-and-pony act of reviewing the math curriculum that we have today 10 years or so ago, when it was brought in, and it didn't make any difference. They said: yeah, applied math 30 will work just fine for arts and social sciences and humanities. And still the universities require pure math 30. Sure, pure math 30 is needed for degree programs that require the university student to do a lot of math, but you don't need pure math 30 to understand Shakespeare or to get the strategic concepts behind World War II or for much else in the nonmath, nonscience realm of postsecondary study.

No, the only ones who need pure math 30, other than those in those courses of study, the math and science heavy ones, are the universities themselves. They need pure math 30 as a gatekeeper course, a way to ration limited space, a way to ration access, a way to deny admission to otherwise qualified students for whom there is no room in our postsecondary schools in this province because the government doesn't take education seriously and hasn't done so for years.

While we're on the topic of strategic concepts around World War II, Mr. Speaker, I should mention an ongoing sore point at the Military Museums, formerly known as the Museum of the Regiments, in my constituency. It is currently undergoing, really, a pretty fantastic expansion that when finished will make it, in my view, the finest military museum in this country outside of Ottawa. But about the sore point. The Military Museums does a lot of outreach to school-age children, and they're wondering why our kids are receiving less and less education about this nation's military history. The history of both world wars has been removed from the Alberta curriculum in some of the younger grades where it was previously taught. The teaching of Canada's military history should be, they argue, and I would tend to agree, part and parcel of a broader heritage, citizenship, and social responsibility package. We can't possibly expect ourselves or our children to know where we're going if we hide where we've been.

Oh, and about the housing boom that I mentioned earlier, the average price of a house in my constituency is \$635,000, or was last month. It's probably more now, because I know that the average price of a home across Calgary is now more than it was last month. It's now over \$400,000 right across the city. Edmonton is not far behind. Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray: we know that they're right up there, probably even ahead of Calgary and Edmonton. Indeed, there's an affordable housing crisis in cities and towns all over this province.

In Calgary-Currie we used to have two kinds of constituents. We had homeowners, and we had renters. Increasingly, the two kinds of constituents we have these days are homeowners and the dispossessed, people forced out of their rental accommodations by

skyrocketing rents twice, three times what they were paying before they got their notice. Or condo conversions: they're being forced out of their accommodations into a rental market with about a .2 per cent vacancy rate.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents simply want to know when we're going to get serious about creating affordable housing. By the way, that's not just my dispossessed constituents; that's my constituents who own those, in many cases, \$635,000 and up houses, because they see what's going on around them. They see that we are not making the best possible use that we could of the fantastic wealth that we enjoy right now. So they want to know when we're going to get serious about creating affordable housing, because everybody needs a home. There's no excuse not to be doing it, even as we speak.

I wrote the Alberta Liberal policy on affordable housing, and it contains the solutions. I know that because we've run this policy past the people who know affordable housing, and they've told us time and time again that it hits the mark. I know that it was used as a template by the all-party Affordable Housing Task Force the government set up after the Alberta Liberals showed the political will to move the affordable housing crisis to the top of the provincial agenda.

5:10

Now the minister is sitting on the task force report, a report prepared by an all-party committee that also included a dozen non-MLAs, members of the public, a report that should be public, a report that should have been presented on the floor of the Legislature the day it was presented to the minister. Then let the minister go off and study it all he wants, till the cows come home if they can find a home to come to, you know, and he can say: "I like this and this clause. I think that idea is terrible, and I won't support it. I want to amend this and this and this." That's fine. That's how it works in a democracy, or at least that's how it's supposed to. But no. He's sitting on the task force report, having it threaten to disappear into that black hole where the Conservatives put good ideas that they want to have go to die as if he's waiting for this to slip back down the provincial agenda.

We need to get on with the task. We need to get on with the task of building and creating affordable housing. We need to get on with the task of building and fixing our schools. We need to get on with the task of building hospitals and training doctors and nurses and so many other people. We need to get on with the task of building a knowledge economy. We need to get on with the task of having a plan and a plan of action. Mr. Speaker, those plans and those action plans are not in this throne speech. As I said at the outset, the people of Calgary-Currie, of Alberta, want and expect and are entitled to more from their government.

Mr. Speaker, you opened the Legislature 28 days ago – and I don't get to say it, unless someone wants to ask me.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: I'm very curious to know what he was going to say.

Mr. Taylor: The President of the Treasury Board might be.

Mr. Speaker, you opened the Legislature 28 days ago with a prayer that began, "Almighty God, author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding . . ." It is a prayer you use from time to time in this House to begin the day's proceedings. From those words, though, as compared to the words in the Speech from the Throne, I can only conclude that the Almighty had no part at all in the authorship of this throne speech.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that answered the minister's question.

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

[Motion carried]

head: **Government Motions**
(continued)

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

13. Mr. Stelmach moved:

Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

[Government Motion 13 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 4 Child Care Licensing Act

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act, for third reading.

I think that we've had a good discussion about the proposed legislation and what it will do to strengthen child care in Alberta. I've heard a lot of positive feedback about the act, and for me that confirms that we're definitely moving in the right direction. Good questions have also been raised, which I would quickly like to address.

There has been some discussion around how the act will ensure parental involvement and whether our government plans to develop a provincial child care advisory council. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to clarify. Legislating a requirement for a provincial child care advisory council in the act limits the ability to have informal and varied forms of consultations. By encouraging ongoing dialogue with Alberta parents, child care operators, and stakeholders, we will ensure that this legislation and the programs and services we provide continue to meet the needs of children and families.

I've also been asked if the Child Care Licensing Act will ensure that parents have access to inspection reports, staff qualifications, compliance regulations, and other continuous improvement efforts. The answer is yes. I agree that parents should have access to all relevant information regarding the program so that they can make informed decisions about their child's care and can be an active partner to support the program's continuous improvement efforts.

Operators will be required to prominently post their licence, including any conditions on the licence, monitoring and enforcement documents, and the certification levels of staff. An annual report was an initial suggestion and was replaced with a timelier process of posting relevant and up-to-date information for parents to review.

During our discussions I've stated that the Child Care Licensing Act will allow operators to be innovative and make better use of the spaces that they already have. In some cases this might mean using a space that is licensed for out-of-school care to care for a preschool child when the other child is in school. Will this create potentially unmanageable situations? No. The act is intended to help operators think outside the box and come up with innovative and creative ideas that will ensure that they make the best use of their child care spaces.

Through the consultations on the standards for a new child care regulation, we look forward to hearing from operators and other Albertans to determine what standards need to be in place to support safe, quality programs.

There has also been discussion about the government's plan to monitor family day homes. Family day home standards are set out in policy and included in the contracts between the agency and the child and family service authority. Family day homes are monitored by the agency on a monthly basis.

Questions have also been raised around monitoring programs. To clarify, licensing officers are required to monitor by on-site visits a minimum of four times per year but have the authority to visit programs at any time. If an operator fails to meet the minimum standards set out in the act and regulation, the licensing officer will have a range of enforcement actions available depending on the history, frequency, and severity of the noncompliance. The intent is, where possible, to bring the operation into compliance by providing information on the expectations and helping the operator develop a plan to meet the requirements. However, it is essential to ensure that children are safe, and if necessary licensing officers need the ability to suspend or cancel a licence as a last resort. If children are at risk, a stop order would be issued, which would require the program to close its doors immediately.

When we think of monitoring, we immediately think: what happens if the program does not comply with the act and the regulation? As you know, Alberta is the only province in Canada to offer a province-wide accreditation program for licensed day care centres and contracted family day homes. Child care programs must meet quality standards of excellence to be accredited, and I'm pleased to note that since the accreditation program began in 2004, 30 per cent, or 161, of Alberta's eligible child care programs have achieved this standard of excellence, with many more programs working toward the same goal.

During discussions I've been asked whether I know the current supply and demand for child care in Alberta. We know the number of licensed day care spaces we have in Alberta and how many children are enrolled in these programs, but we need to identify which communities are under the greatest pressure. We are collecting that information right now. Children's Services is surveying all child care operators to find out how many spaces they have, how many are available, and how many are needed to meet the demand.

I've also been asked how the government plans to deal with a determined child care shortage. Our government continues to play a strong leadership role and is working with key stakeholders to identify workable solutions that will best meet the needs of the children and their families. We've just announced increased funding to address staff recruitment and retention issues. This funding is benefiting more than 7,000 child care professionals, and since the introduction of the five-point plan in the fall of 2005, we have seen a 5 per cent reduction in the staff turnover rates in accredited programs.

Increases have also been made to the professional development funding we provide to staff working in licensed day care programs, which is contributing to a skilled workforce. Once we have the information we need to determine the actual demand, we will be in a much better position to plan our next steps. Bill 4 is a step forward when dealing with the shortage of child care spaces because it introduces new categories of programs to increase parental choice and helps existing approved licence holders to have greater flexibility in providing quality child care in both urban and rural settings.

Mr. Speaker, it has also been suggested that government needs to educate families on how best to choose child care. I agree, and in

fact the need to enhance supports for parents is part of Alberta's five-point plan. We recently developed the Choosing Child Care booklet, which I tabled earlier today. This booklet is proving to be a useful tool. We have a parent information line, 1-866-714-KIDS, which is available to answer questions, as well as 45 parent link centres, which are effectively helping parents in many parts of the province.

The Child Care Licensing Act is the first legislation in Alberta to focus solely on child care and provide the framework we need to develop program policies, standards, and procedures that will ensure children and families have access to quality child care in Alberta. I'd ask the entire Assembly to support this important piece of legislation.

Thank you.

5:20

The Speaker: On third reading, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations to the minister on a progressive bill that I think there are many positive elements to. Essentially, a good bill with a new emphasis on program quality and staff recruitment and retention is very positive news for Albertans given that we are really under the gun in Alberta to find spaces and ensure quality through good monitoring and enforcement of those standards.

I was interested to hear her comments about the existing analysis showing about 30 per cent excellence, and I wondered if she wanted to make any further comments about that. I'm wondering if I heard correctly, what that means, and how soon we'll achieve the standards that we all want.

Some of the questions that have been raised by constituents have to do with that potential conflict where we're having both older children and younger children trying to converge on the same spaces and whether there have been any specific, concrete ideas about how to deal with an overflow at certain times of the day. I'm sure there are some good suggestions there.

I'm also pleased to see the organization of a standing appeal panel. Clearly, parents and in some cases staff and owners need to be able to hash out differences in a way that's constructive and moves the bar upward.

The posting of enforcement measures is also a positive measure, I think, that will help build confidence in Alberta among all stakeholders.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. If the minister wants to comment a little more on the 30 per cent excellence rate, I would be pleased to hear further comments.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act, in its third reading. While speaking on the bill in an earlier state of debate in the House, I did express broad support for the bill. The bill has some very good features. I raised several questions that I thought needed addressing by the minister. The minister in the remarks she just made tried to address some of those questions. I'm certainly pleased with the fact that the minister is quite focused in this legislation and in her attempt to respond to questions and inquiries from this side of the House related to various features and provisions of this bill. That, I think, is encouraging, and I want to certainly express our appreciation to the minister for taking the questions seriously and responding to them.

Mr. Speaker, child care, the quality of child care and the provision of child care, is exceedingly important given the labour market situation in the province, given the desire of parents of young children to enter the labour market, and given the research information that we have available, which speaks strongly about the importance of early childhood experiences focused on development of children in child care facilities, how it contributes to their growth, development, and developmental competencies that later become very critical with respect to the degree of success that they have in educational experiences and, subsequent to that, as they become adults and move toward becoming full participants in the affairs of our society, be they political, economic, social, community related, what have you. It is, I think, a bill that does to a degree draw attention to the need for changing the quality of daycare and the scope of daycare to include developmental needs of very young children. That's one of the most positive features of it.

It also provides for experiment with some innovative programs that may be created, particularly, I think, in rural communities where the numbers are relatively small. It's very difficult for parents to drive these very young children to daycare facilities that may be in neighbouring towns or whatever, to develop programs that are innovative and address the needs of children growing up in smaller and rural communities in a situation where parents of such children may want to take advantage of the employment opportunities and labour market entry that they may desire for themselves. It remains to be seen, I think, what kind of innovative programs do arise. I think they will need some direction and, certainly, close monitoring to see that these innovative programs do in fact innovate in a way that best serves the needs of the children as defined in terms of the importance of developmental experiences, their security and safety in these facilities and programs.

The bill does pay, I think, more attention than was previously the case on both compliance and monitoring of the daycare facilities, monitoring of the quality of daycare, the compliance with standards. The minister does concede, of course, that we have a long way to go with respect to making sure that all the daycare facilities in the province, at least the vast majority of them, are fully accredited facilities and that the parents who choose to send their children to daycare do in fact have the assurance that the facilities that they're sending their children to are indeed accredited, and therefore they can expect quality daycare for their children once they enter these institutions or enterprises.

We have only about 31 per cent of daycare facilities that currently are accredited. There are close to 70 per cent that have some way to go before they will meet the accreditation standards and requirements that the daycare legislation and regulations will expect these facilities to meet, so we have a long way to go. We have a lot hanging in the balance with respect to making sure that the quality of daycare that's provided to our children is up to par. It is the quality of experience at this stage in the lives of our children that will I think mean a great deal in later years with respect to the extent to which our children grow up as healthy and competent individuals.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I'm happy to extend our support to the bill. I thank the minister for the questions that I had raised that she has tried to answer. We will wait and see as the budget comes down, on April 19 to be exact, if the provisions in this bill with respect to ensuring quality daycare are in fact supported by resources and commitment of resources on the part of this government.

With that, I close my comments on Bill 4 in its third reading. Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if there are questions.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, then, to participate in third reading.

5:30

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to take a few minutes to speak to Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act, in third reading. I would like to first thank the Minister of Children's Services, the Member for Banff-Cochrane, for bringing this remarkable legislation forward. I would also like to thank the Member for Calgary-Fort for the work that he and his committee did during the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act review. Bill 4 will ensure that parents have access to quality, affordable child care options.

Child care facilities are currently licensed under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act. This act covers all facilities, including those for adults and children, and being more than 20 years old, it needs to be updated. Rather than amending outdated legislation that licenses programs focused on its facilities, Bill 4 is designed specifically for Alberta's children. It is the first legislation in Alberta to focus solely on child care. This innovative legislation builds on our government's commitment to continue to support and create quality child care programs and will help respond to the rather complex child care needs of modern-day families.

Mr. Speaker, the child care needs of modern-day families have changed significantly. There was a time when families had the privilege of having one parent stay home to perform the most important job a parent has, which is to raise their children.

In today's world there are many reasons why a family needs to have access to quality, affordable, child care options. My daughter, a single parent, is completing her education in the bachelor of nursing program at Red Deer College, and the choice of placing her child, my granddaughter, in a day home was a difficult decision for all of us. I would however like to express my deepest and sincerest thanks to the three day home providers who looked after my granddaughter in the past five years. The love and care that she received was exceptional. If this kind of care is an example of the care that Alberta's children are receiving in daycare and day homes, then our children are in good hands. Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act, increases the opportunities for this kind of quality, affordable care.

When passed, the Child Care Licensing Act would encourage innovative approaches to create new child care programs while placing a priority on the safety of the children. Bill 4 will also provide for effective monitoring to ensure that operations comply with the act.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, this is very good legislation. I ask that all members support Bill 4, which demonstrates our government's commitment to building a quality child care system that will lead to better outcomes for our children.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will just be brief. I wanted to add my support to the passing of this bill and, again, as my other colleague has mentioned, congratulations to the minister for bringing this forward. It is absolutely imperative that we look after the children in this province because, from a very selfish point of view,

they're the ones that are going to be looking after me when I'm in the nursing home. So I want them well educated.

Another thing that I would like to point out is: thank you to the minister for working with our very hard-working shadow minister from Mill Woods. She is a very, very passionate advocate for children and has worked with the other side to put her voice into the things that she believes are necessary.

One of the things that I think is truly most important is the fact that we need the spaces. I'm thrilled with the accreditation, and I'm even more thrilled with the fact that you're using the word "enforcement." It's like music to my ears because coming out of the long-term care, where I want enforcement, it's wonderful to hear that sort of thinking coming forward.

The area that I'm concerned about, too, is the low economic strata. There are many parents working two and three jobs, and it's these children that we have to worry about, that they manage to get into good child development spaces because often they do miss out. They miss out on sports, they miss out on arts, and they certainly miss out on that extra little academic advantage that they take into kindergarten or grade 1 with them.

We were speaking about the rural spaces and how difficult it is to get them. One of the things that I would like to perhaps see is some sort of distance learning development program that could go into rural areas. That would help perhaps not someone that necessarily had a degree in education but certainly somebody that would have enough education that they could work with a long-distance development program.

Again, I would just like to say thank you to the minister. We'll see how far this is going to go with the budget, but I have some very good hopes. So thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

There being none, the minister to close debate.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to all of the hon. members, including the Official Opposition, for both your understanding and overwhelming support for Bill 4.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 16
Police Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand this afternoon to move second reading of Bill 16, Police Amendment Act, 2007.

This proposed legislation will allow the establishment of a provincial body to investigate police when someone has been seriously injured or dies as a direct result of the actions of police officers. This team would also investigate highly sensitive or serious matters involving police. The director of this team will be a civilian.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that police officers in our province do an outstanding job every day protecting Albertans and keeping our communities safe. Maintaining transparency, account-

ability, and the public trust are key to the work done on a daily basis by our men and women in uniform. The proposed investigative body would help ensure that those factors are also part of investigations into allegations of police misconduct. They will continue to consult with police agencies and police governance bodies to establish the mandate and operational model for this new team.

This isn't a new concept in many jurisdictions. We have reviewed similar agencies across the country and around the world and have taken their best practices to develop a model we think will work for Albertans.

The other proposed amendment will give the province the option to take over responsibility for lock-up facilities from municipal police forces. Alberta correctional officers or Alberta sheriffs could be used to operate these facilities. The transfer of responsibility could be an opportunity to make more police officers available for front-line duties.

Mr. Speaker, a key mandate of our new government is to be open, accountable, and transparent. This proposed legislation will supplement that mandate and ensure that Alberta remains the best place to live, work, and visit.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 16.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 7

Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 7, Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007.

I'd like to point out that all vocational training programs offered in the province by private institutions are required to be licensed under the Private Vocational Schools Act, and Bill 7 deals with amendments to this act. As such, all licensees were consulted regarding the amendments included in this bill.

These changes to the Private Vocational Schools Act are designed to enhance consumer protection and update the act so that it is more reflective of the current environment surrounding the licensing of vocational training.

5:40

To begin, the amendments included in Bill 7 change the name of the Private Vocational Schools Act to Private Vocational Training Act, and the title of the director is changed from the director of private vocational schools to director of private vocational training. This is being done to reflect that it is vocational training programs and not institutions that are licensed. Amendments included in the bill remove the provision for licences to be categorized as class A or class B based on the program's performance outcomes. From a consumer point of view, students will be better protected if programs are either licensed or not licensed rather than designating a program as class B when performance outcomes are problematic.

Today it is common for licensees to request cancellation of vocational training program licences, but there is no mechanism in the Private Vocational Schools Act to accommodate these requests at present. A licence can only be cancelled under certain circumstances upon giving the licensee 30 days' notice. Amendments included in Bill 7 provide a mechanism whereby licences can be cancelled upon the request of a licensee, subject of course to all of the licensee's obligations to students being fulfilled.

Amendments also included in Bill 7 remove the requirement that licences be renewed every two years. Removal of the administrative burden of renewing licences for over 700 programs every two years will improve administration. Programs will continue to be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure compliance.

Finally, Bill 7 also includes changes that update the act through the revision of wording used in reference to the information that is set out on licences, the manner in which notices of licence, cancellations, or suspensions are provided to students, and the manner in which notices under the act are served.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to make a few brief comments about Bill 7, the Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007. This bill impacts some 140 private vocational schools in this province offering hundreds of training programs from accountancy to hairdressing. Bill 7 changes the licensing procedure for private vocational programs, eliminating different classes of licence and switching from biennial renewals of licences to ongoing monitoring.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, I believe this bill is worthy of support. However, some clarification of the government's intentions over the new regulations is required. I expect that we will get some answers for our questions when the bill enters the committee stage. The message we had from the minister was that this was a housekeeping bill changing the wording of the legislation to reflect current practices. That does indeed seem to be the case, but those of us in opposition are always a little suspicious when a bill is pawned off as being housekeeping. Sometimes that's just another term for sweeping things under the rug, so we always have to be alert to these things.

An Hon. Member: Oh, no. Say it isn't so.

Mr. Tougas: It could happen. It's been known to happen.

The intent of Bill 7 appears to be quite straightforward. It is aimed at the removal of the licence classes, which eliminates the current situation of what you might call the second-class institutions. It also, from what we can see, slightly weakens what private institutions must do if a program is found to be unsatisfactory by the ministry.

As it stands, the legislation limits licences to two years in duration. The renewal process for these licences means, at least in theory, that every two years the program is re-evaluated by the director or minister, and this should ensure that standards do not slip. The proposed change suggests a rolling, constant evaluation.

The mechanics of this are somewhat unclear. It places more control in the director's hands, and they are no longer mandated to issue any extension. It appears that once they get their licence, they can go for some time without a formal review of any sort, just a rolling review. I'm not sure if this is exactly the case, but when we get to committee, I will be asking the sponsor of this bill for some clarification on this matter.

With regard to the areas changed by this legislation, currently there are two classes of licence for private vocational schools. A class A licence means a licence that authorizes the licensee to provide the vocational training specified on the licence and signifies that the programs are new or the programs have a student graduation rate and employment placement rate that are satisfactory to the director. A class B licence means a licence that authorizes the

licensee to provide the vocational training specified on the licence and signifies that the programs do not have a student graduation rate and employment placement rate that are satisfactory to the director or the director is unable to form an opinion about the student graduation rate or the employment placement rate in respect of these programs. At this point a program can have, as I understand it, an unsatisfactory graduation and employment placement rate yet still have a licence to provide vocational training. This bill would remove that distinction and put all the vocational schools on equal footing. My one concern is the process of evaluating these institutions, and hopefully in committee we can get into some depth regarding that process.

Also currently in place is a term limit for licences of two years. After that time they need to be renewed in the current system. This provides some impetus for oversight by the director, but it doesn't guarantee it. The renewal process is not at all complex. As long as the director is satisfied that the licensee is in accordance with the act and regulations, then the licence is renewed. Yet again it appears that the bill is simply putting into law what has already been done in practice.

My concerns are that students who are paying for these classes get maximum value for their education dollar. While it makes sense that there will no longer be a class A or class B school, we need to be vigilant that very strict standards are being applied to all institutions and that the government is adequately watching over these institutions.

So until we meet again in committee, that's all I have at this time.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 7, Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007. Let me say at the very outset that the private vocational schools in this province, most of them, happen to be not only private but private, for-profit. In my experience with this particular segment of our postsecondary system this segment is highly problematic from the point of student experience, the standards to be maintained, monitoring of the quality of the programs that may be available. So this bill, really, in my view, doesn't address the core issues that need to be addressed, and I was hoping that any initiative in the form of a piece of legislation dealing with these private vocational schools would in fact address the core issues.

In my view the major problems with our private vocational school sector – the problems are systemic to this sector – include: no independent oversight, nonexistent enforcement, payment and refund policies heavily slanted against the student and towards the institution, complete lack of transparency around tuition and other fees for instructional materials, poor quality of instruction, substandard equipment and facilities, almost laughable complaint and appeal procedures, and routine violation and denial of students' individual and collective rights.

These being, in my view, the core problems, the bill really skirts all of these issues and simply engages in some sort of minor definitional tinkering. The bill amends the Private Vocational Schools Act in three ways: by changing the name to Private Vocational Training Act, by reducing the number of licence categories from two to one – and I'll speak to this later – and finally by taking away the two-year time restrictions of any issued licences.

The category A licences are new programs or they have graduation rates deemed satisfactory. Category B licences are ones with below satisfactory graduation rates or programs where the gradua

tion rate is deemed irrelevant. The new act for some reason merges the two categories into a single licence. Additionally, licences under the old act were valid for two years. Bill 7 takes off the two-year restriction.

5:50

Considering that the government has not put a set of quality criteria on private vocational schools' education, this suspension of the two-year licence requirement in my view is a loosening of the already very poor enforcement standards. If the two-year licence is to be removed, then the ministry has to ensure that the private vocational schools are inspected regularly to ensure that education standards are being met on a continuing basis. So not only are inspections needed, but before that the standards have to be established, Mr. Speaker.

The merging of class A and class B licences combined with the removal of a two-year limitation on licences represents a downgrading of enforcement and oversight at private vocational schools. Although the ministry promises continued oversight of the sector, the current changes fly in the face of the argument. That is so because graduation rates – that is what separates class A from class B licences – and regular relicensing, which ensures that standards are maintained, represent a part of the oversight procedure. They also happen to be two criteria being removed from the act and its regulations. So there's no clear indication of what sort of oversight will take place.

Additionally, certainly, our caucus and I personally, representing the caucus, have had to deal with complaints stemming from poor management of vocational schools. In 2005 the ministry had to deal with a complaint about the private school CCII that dealt with excessive grant funding from the government, falsification of attendance records, course quality dilution, and misrepresenting course hours, et cetera. The school was assessed for penalties in excess of \$50,000, but the ministry was not able to collect more than \$29,000 from the school.

The questions that I think need to be addressed by this House really are: what kind of oversight is taking place right now within the ministry to ensure that these problems do not pop up regularly? How many private vocational schools have been audited/investigated by the ministry in the last four years? How often does the ministry review the 140-odd private vocational schools to ensure compliance of regulations?

The 2005-2006 report stated that – I'll make a reference to the exact nature of this report, Mr. Speaker, in a moment, but let me complete this observation. This particular statement, which I think is the department annual financial statement on this, stated that \$87,000 had been granted to Columbia College. That is a private vocational school. We don't know how much money has been given to private vocational schools in the 2006-2007 year. Will the hon. member check into this and maybe address the question of how these funds got allocated to the private, for-profit schools?

Will the director of the private institutions branch – is that what it is? – be checking vocational schools on an annual basis within the regulations to ensure that the minimum licensing criteria are being fulfilled?

Mr. Speaker, a few other observations here. I have before me a document which was a formal complaint lodged by a group of students who went to the Canadian College International Institute,

presumably a private, not-for-profit school for adult students, accredited by Alberta Learning and funded by the former department of Alberta human resources and employment. The sort of internal audit that was ordered by the then department of Alberta human resources and employment came up with all kinds of very serious problems with this particular institution and corroborated the substance of the complaint that was lodged with the department by the aggrieved students.

Yet it seems that there is no intention in the proposed legislation or in changes in regulations that would suggest that the government takes these problems very seriously in this private, for-profit sector and is willing and able to deal with them by way of changes in policy, by changes in regulations, or by, in fact, putting some of these changes in firm legislative language so that enforcement and monitoring of standards are addressed in a way satisfactory to all of us and, certainly, to protect the interests of students who go to these private institutions.

Mr. Speaker, the annual report from which I made a reference to Columbia College and the money that was received was an Alberta advanced education annual report, 2005-06. There's no explanation of what this money is about.

Mr. Speaker, having two categories of licences was in some ways an escape clause. You know, if an institution didn't perform up to some minimum standards with respect to graduation rates or employment placement rates, it was downgraded to B, sort of a conditional licence. It still didn't really solve the problem because much of the reporting that was done to PIB on the meeting of the standards was done exclusively by the institutions themselves, institutions against which we have heard complaints from students with respect to how unsatisfactory they found both their educational experience and the quality of the physical infrastructure and the lab facilities that they were supposed to use in order to learn the skills and competencies based on which they were going to be later on licensed.

With no independent oversight to determine the veracity or accuracy of these reports on graduation and employment placement rates, it was a joke. There was no way that the PIB, which is the private institution branch, could really have an independent source of assessing claims made by these institutions.

I think this bill really does not in my view deal with the real issues pertaining to what needs to be done to ensure that this private sector in the postsecondary education system is accountable in a transparent way both to the students who use these facilities and to the private institution branch of the department of advanced education, that has the formal responsibility of ensuring that these institutions meet licensing and standards requirements.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to close by simply saying that I have very serious reservations about the ways in which this proposed bill falls short of meeting even halfway the kind of things that need to be done in order to fix the problems in this system. Certainly, as we proceed through the various stages of debate on this bill, we'll have the opportunity to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, from the chair's vantage point it is 6 o'clock. The House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, April 4, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/04

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Member's Apology

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Clerk identifies the Routine, we do have a matter of business that needs to be concluded, a matter of business that extends from yesterday. Yesterday afternoon the chair offered to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie an opportunity to withdraw certain comments and to apologize. The member has returned today, so the chair will ask the hon. member if he is prepared to do such.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recognize that some of the wording in my questions yesterday was inappropriate for this Assembly and that there were some offending comments. I would like to withdraw the comments made during question period yesterday. I'm sorry if anybody was offended by my question. That was not my intention.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to introduce a distinguished member of our armed forces who has done much for our country and for this province and the Edmonton region. In the Speaker's gallery is Brigadier-General Tim Grant, a cavalry officer who has commanded the Lord Strathcona's Horse. Prior to his deployment to Afghanistan six months ago he was the Commander Land Force Western Area. Here on a brief mid-tour leave, he will resume his duties as Commander Task Force Afghanistan, National Command Element, in Kandahar in just a few days from now.

He is well chosen for what is surely the most challenging operational command in the Canadian army since Korea. His exceptional abilities and unrivalled experience will be put to good use as he is to be promoted to major general this summer to take a key leadership position in the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command. This organization is charged with mounting and sustaining the operations of our forces abroad.

Brigadier-General, it may be of interest to you to know that a former member of this Assembly, Douglas Corney Breton, an MLA from 1926 to 1930, served in Afghanistan during World War I as a member of the British Expeditionary Force.

Throughout his long and varied career General Grant has been supported by his very lovely and charming wife, Sharon.

The Grants are accompanied by the Honorary Lieutenant Colonel of 15 Military Police Company, Sol Rolinger, and his wife, Marilyn.

Brigadier-General Grant, please return safely to Afghanistan and take with you the thanks, the prayers, and the best wishes of the people of Alberta and convey such to all of those in your command. We're pleased and honoured to have you with us today.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, please.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 76 visitors: 66 grade 6 students from Westlock elementary school, who are accompanied this afternoon by teachers Mr. Dan McDonald, Mrs. Sandy Jones, Mrs. Maggie Cournoyer, Mr. Marcel Turcotte, and Mrs. Linda Wallace. In addition, program assistants Mrs. Randi Lethebe and Mrs. Chantal Roberts are in attendance as well as parent helpers Mrs. Donna Turner, Mrs. Lynne Proulx, and Mrs. Rachelle Koch. They are seated, I believe, in both galleries. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Danielle Smith, the Alberta director of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, representing over 9,200 Alberta businesses who serve millions of the citizens we represent. She's also accompanied today by Janine Halbesma, the senior policy analyst, as well as Daryl Hanak, the executive director of trade policy in my ministry. This organization represents the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans in serving Albertans as customers and in the work of the trade, mobility, investment agreement that we signed with British Columbia. I'd ask them to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly today.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Truly, the eyes of the financial world are on Alberta, and it is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a number of guests with JPMorgan securities. Their offices are in New York and Denver. Today, we have joining us Vivian Altman, Paul Ryan, and Marshall Crawford. Also visiting the Assembly today are Robert Clare of Sullivan & Worcester in New York and John Burns of Gowling Lafleur Henderson, based out of Calgary. I would ask them to all rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, later on this afternoon a group from Ardrossan high school will be here, and with your indulgence I'll maybe be able to introduce them at that time.

The Speaker: Okay.
Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been approximately two and a half years since I was first elected to this House, and in that time I've never had a visitor. Not until today. Therefore, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three constituents of mine from Calgary-Foothills who have come up here today from Calgary to visit the Alberta Legislature and to get a bird's-eye view of what goes on here in the House. I'd like to thank Mrs. Janice Osgood, Geoff Osgood, and Julie Osgood for coming here today to visit, and I would ask that they please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: And what is the hon. member's office room number?

Mr. Webber: My office is 701, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: All hon. members might want to visit.
The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This morning in your prayers you thanked our Creator for the bounty of our province. Later this afternoon I'll be having a meeting with a couple of my constituents. I'd like them to rise as I say their names: Erwin Zotzman and Ken Bilou. We'll be meeting regarding their concerns over the management of fish populations in Pigeon Lake and in particular the stocking of walleye and the subsequent low numbers of lake whitefish. We hope that those numbers can change. I'd like these gentlemen to rise and please receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today, in fact. First, it's a great privilege for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Bill and Margaret Kurtze of Calgary. Bill Kurtze is the nominated Alberta Liberal candidate for the Calgary-Hays constituency. Bill brings 30 years of experience in the oil and gas industry to his candidacy, including a stint as manager of the Independent Petroleum Association of Canada and another as managing director of the Propane Gas Association. Aply supported by his wife, Margaret, Bill promises to be an outstanding public servant when the voters of Calgary-Hays choose him to be their next MLA. Bill and Margaret, could you please rise and accept the warm welcome of members of the Assembly.

1:10

I'm also pleased to introduce a number of visitors from the Battle River-Wainwright area. They're seated in the public gallery: Ken Eshpeter, Jerry Iwanus, Paul Schorak, and Roger Holmes. These fine gentlemen are politically minded citizens, very active in the Alberta Liberal constituency association for Battle River-Wainwright. They've made immense contributions to their communities over the years as public servants, entrepreneurs, farmers, and volunteers. In short, they're simply really good, civic-minded people, and I'm proud to have them join us today. But, Mr. Speaker, I am most proud to introduce Jerry's terrific young daughter Jillian. She's 10 years old, a wonderful young lady. Jillian represents the future of this province, and when we MLAs make decisions in this House, we must always keep people like her foremost in our minds. Would those guests please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark I would like to introduce 46 students from Aldergrove elementary school. They're accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Christine Steil and Mrs. Sandy Colquhoun and parent helpers Ms Janet Walker, Mr. Ed Cox, Mrs. Mary Jane Meeker, Ms Tracy Miller, and Mrs. Karen Auger. I'd like to have them stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly members of the executive board of the Operative Plasterers' and Cement Masons' International Association, local 222. In the spring of 1907 a group of tradesmen in the plastering trade formed a local union here in Edmonton and were chartered as local 372 of the Operative Plasterers' and Cement Masons' International Association. For 100 years the members of this union have helped build Alberta as a province, and in 2007 they celebrate their centennial year. The legacy of their contribution and skills as tradesmen is evident today throughout our province in our hospitals, schools, bridges, and refineries. The members of this local are particularly proud of the ornate decorative plasterwork throughout this Legislature Building, which was applied by the founders of this union. Examples of that can be seen in our Chamber today.

In attendance today is the executive board of local 222, who I will now ask to rise as I call out their names: Richard Wassill, the business manager and financial secretary; Ed Arko, the president; James Conway, the vice-president and business agent; Peter Harvey, the vice-president; and Dennis Ossevoorth, the sergeant-at-arms. I would now ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my extreme pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ms Tiffany McBride, my executive assistant and the constituency office administrator for Edmonton-McClung. Ms McBride is a graduate of Queen's University, with a degree in psychology and history. She's currently enrolled at the U of A, taking introductory courses towards her law degree. I probably don't keep Ms McBride busy enough. This young lady is going to volunteer with the Habitat for Humanity women build program this summer. What's more, she also finds time to help with her very own family-run, successful mulching business, and at 23 she's also the guardian for her two younger brothers. I invite her to stand, please, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and members of the Assembly David Hohnstein and Richard Konkin. Dave has been at the Palace Casino off and on for 11 years and is currently a pit boss. Dave has made the gaming industry his career and has worked within it for 20 years. Richard is a dealer at the casino and has been there seven years. He is a member of the union's bargaining committee and provides a great deal of knowledge to the process. On any given evening you can come by the picket line and see Richard working hard for his members. They are valued members of UFCW 401, and they're looking forward to the end of the strike. I might point out that it's now the longest strike in UFCW 401's history. They are in the public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Canadian University Women's Curling Champions

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have yet another Canadian curling success story. I stand today to acknowledge the Canadian

women's gold medal winning university curling team. The team consists of four University of Calgary students: Brittany Gregor, the skip; Katrine Fiset; Heather Hansen; and of course Hayley Pattison from the village of Carbon in my constituency. The team qualified to represent Canada by winning the Canadian university nationals in Winnipeg. They then went on to compete very strongly at the 2007 World University Games in Torino, Italy.

These young women demonstrated great poise and confidence coming back from an early deficit in the gold medal match to defeat Russia. The dramatic conclusion saw Brittany Gregor make her last shot in the 10th end to lead Team Canada to victory.

They felt privileged to go abroad and challenge their abilities in an international field. They faced the most elite curlers for their age group, and through determination and great work ethic they accomplished their goal. They represented our country and their university with passion and respect. As ambassadors for their sport they displayed the qualities and characteristics of champions.

I'm sure these young women will have a prominent future in the sport of curling, and I want to take this opportunity to wish them continued success with all their athletic and academic endeavours. Once again, congratulations on their win.

Thank you.

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

Melvin Crump

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had the privilege, along with a number of my colleagues, to attend the Calgary Glenbow Museum's new permanent exhibition, *Mavericks: The Incurable History of Alberta*. This new gallery tells the story of Alberta through the lives of 48 mavericks whose stories embody the Alberta pioneering spirit, hard work, passion, and can-do attitude. Some of these historical mavericks are still with us, including former Premier Peter Lougheed and Mr. Melvin Crump. We all know of Peter Lougheed, so today I want to speak about Melvin Crump, a friend and a constituent.

In 1910, 160 African-Americans from Oklahoma came to settle in a small community about 100 miles north of Edmonton later known as Amber Valley. Out of this group came a very special individual named Melvin Crump. Melvin's childhood was not an easy one. Melvin's mother died when he was 10, then right after that his older sister died. At a young age his father and older brother left home. He was raised by his grandmother. He had to quit school after grade 8 and find a paying job, from shining shoes to killing chickens and labouring farm work.

Where Melvin really shone was his strong passion for self-learning, for human rights, and equality. He worked as a sleeping car porter on CP Rail, travelling across the country. He stood up for the rights of the black porters, who worked long hours and were paid the lowest wages. He challenged bigotry and the prejudice of those who practise intolerance. It comes as no surprise that he later became the president of the Alberta association for the advancement of coloured people. Throughout his life Melvin Crump sought respect. He received it both for himself and others.

Melvin Crump is now 91 years old and still full of life and energy. About the only aspect in Melvin's life that has slowed down is due to doctor's orders.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Farm Debt

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's total farm

debt outstanding in 2005 was \$10.7 billion. Alberta certainly is not debt free. The total farm debt in Canada in 2005 was a staggering \$50 billion. Alberta farmers owe 21 per cent of that debt. Interest payments alone on this debt totalled \$491 million in 2005. Alberta farmers owe this money to three major lenders: provincial government agencies, federal government agencies, and our chartered banks. Let's have a look at what has happened to Alberta farmers' borrowing trends in the last 10 years.

1:20

In 1996 provincial government agencies held 26 per cent of the debt. In 2005 they held 21 per cent of the debt. In 1996 federal government agencies held 8 per cent of the debt. In 2005 their loans increased to close to 18 per cent. In 1996 chartered banks held 47 per cent of the debt. In 2005 this had dropped to 41 per cent.

Farm income is certainly related to Alberta farm input costs. Fertilizer, seed, fuel, electricity, and equipment costs always seem to be increasing.

I hope interest rates for this \$10.7 billion debt continue to be manageable. I urge this government to ensure that the cost of credit does not force more farmers into unnecessary bankruptcy. I know that farmers follow commodity price reports daily. They also follow the rise and fall of interest rates for very good reason.

Thank you.

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

Excellence in Teaching Awards

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my sincere pleasure to recognize a very important group of people whose work has a personal and lasting impact on Alberta's citizens. Of course, I'm referring to Alberta's fine teachers. Through their passion, commitment, and encouragement teachers motivate our youth to achieve their individual dreams.

I think of my second son, who couldn't read; in fact, couldn't read through a repeat grade 1 year. Because of the good work of teachers by the end of grade 6 he had read almost every book in the library and is today getting ready to apply to law school. Mr. Speaker, they make a difference.

These significant contributions do not go unnoticed. Each year Alberta's excellence in teaching awards program celebrates the teaching profession by honouring outstanding teachers and principals from across our province. The excellence in teaching award offers a wonderful way to say thank you. In fact, simply being nominated is a tremendous compliment and an honour.

Mr. Speaker, the 2007 finalists were announced today, and I am very proud to say that 22 of the 130 are from Calgary. Soon this year's recipients will be honoured at a special awards ceremony. Since its inception in 1989 over 400 teachers have received an excellence in teaching award and over 7,900 have been nominated.

This program is possible with the support of many individuals who nominate teachers and organizations and who collaborate every year with Alberta Education. The supporters are the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, the *Edmonton Journal*, the SMARTer Kids Foundation, and Xerox.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this government and all Albertans and my son I want to say congratulations to all those teachers who have been recognized through this year's excellence in teaching awards program, and once again say to all our teachers: thank you.

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

Pine Beetle Control in Kananaskis Country

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Friday the 13th for the forest: killing the Kananaskis. On Friday, April 13, the Calgary Liberal caucus will be hosting a rally at the McDougall Centre at noon to draw attention to clear-cutting concerns in the unprotected Kananaskis watershed, that supplies over a million Calgarians with their drinking water. Using the threat of a pine beetle attack as a justification for razing or clear-cutting the forest, the ministry of unsustainable practices with negligible public consultation has dramatically worsened its original flawed forest management agreement by ignoring tree size, age, susceptibility, and biodiversity.

When the cure is far worse than the disease, ignores scientific evidence, and does not take into account the multivalues of a tree standing in comparison to its bulldozed, bargain basement, glutted softwood market worthlessness, then this government has lost the confidence of its electors.

The term “sustainable resources” has become an oxymoron given this government’s mismanagement of our natural capital. The term “multi-use” is in reality a code word, a licence for multi-abuse.

Pine beetles are not locusts that eat every piece of vegetation in sight. Pine beetles are selective of their hosts, preferring wider diameter trees preferably over 80 years of age, which are not typically found in abundance in either the Bragg Creek, Sibbald Flats, or Ghost-Waiparous areas, where the government has relinquished its stewardship to Spray Lakes logging.

Through selective logging and controlled burns pine beetles can be managed without sacrificing our forests, water quantity and quality. A Liberal government will balance both economic and environmental stewardship, leaving a legacy for future generations to value and share.

The Speaker: Government House Leader, I was advised that a government member had switched places for Members’ Statements from today to tomorrow. Is there another government member to participate today?

head: **Presenting Petitions**

Mr. Graydon: I’m pleased to present the required number of copies of documents containing 1,602 signatures of residents of Beaverlodge and surrounding areas, including Hythe, Elmworth, Valhalla Centre, Rio Grande, La Glace, and Demmitt, pointing out that the Beaverlodge hospital is the oldest hospital in Alberta, and it’s time for Beaverlodge to have a new hospital.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 1,005 signatures: We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to add the drug Elaprase to the Drug Benefit List approved by Alberta Health and Wellness in order to ensure that those suffering from Hunter’s Syndrome, including Jordan Miranda, Riley Miranda and Tyler Chauhan, get the care they need to reduce their suffering and live full lives.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Orders the government wishes to give notice of the following with respect to written questions and motions for return. On April 16 the government intends to deal with written questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7,

and 8. We also wish to give notice that it is the intention to accept questions 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. We’ll be presenting an amendment to Question 2, and we’ll deal with Question 3 in the usual manner. The balance of the written questions will be moved to stand and retain their places.

With respect to motions for return the government intends to deal with motions for return 1, 2, and 3. We’ll be advising that we will be accepting Motion for a Return 3. The balance will stand and retain their places.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Bill 26

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 26, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007.

The bill introduces amendments to sections 322 and 534 of the act.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to file with the Assembly five copies of my letter to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in response to questions raised during debate of Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007, on March 20, 2007.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I’m tabling more copies of letters received by my office urging the government to provide funding for the cancer-fighting drug Avastin. In doing so, I’d like to reiterate that people who require this treatment can expect to pay \$1,750 every two weeks and that the drug is already covered by the cancer boards in B.C., Quebec, and Newfoundland. Today’s letters were received from Dennis Koshman, Joanne Nelson, Korean Bennett, Lillian Procter, Barb Falk, Maggie Bullen, Brian Massey, Victor Cerhit, Allison Diebert, and Laura Lewis.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of the Beth Israel congregation 100th anniversary gala program book. This wonderful book commemorates the congregation’s centennial. The celebration took place on January 28, 2007, at the Beth Israel synagogue in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung. I attended along with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, the Minister of Finance, and the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora. It was a wonderful event. All the best to the congregation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: 1:30 **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: Before I call on the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, I have been notified that there will be a point of order at the conclusion of the Routine by the hon. Member for Edmonton-

Beverly-Clareview, and I think I should alert the hon. Government House Leader with respect to this matter.

First Official Opposition question for today. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Community Initiatives Program

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister for Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture was asked why his department is breaking its own rules for the community initiatives program by allowing nonmatching grants over \$10,000, but instead of answering our question, the minister dodged it and simply repeated the rules, the very rules that appear to have been broken so often. So my question to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: why is the minister refusing to admit that the granting rules for the community initiatives program were broken 43 times in three years, totalling over \$2 million?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very, very proud to have the first question of question period. I guess suffice it to say, Mr. Speaker, you know, that all of our applicants are reviewed, and certainly our staff go through all the applications to make sure that the group qualifies for funding. Part of the discussions that they have with the applicants is whether or not the particular amount will meet their particular needs, and those applications are adjusted then up and down. It's based on the discussions . . .

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rules are actually written in black and white, although perhaps for this government they're in grey. The culture of entitlement around this government is more obvious every day. The people of Alberta want everyone to play by the rules, especially their own government. To the same minister: what safeguards are in place to prevent political interference in the granting process?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly our workers, our staff members are the ones that actually work with the various groups. They will make the recommendations to the minister, and they will indicate where there's a need for a certain amount of compassion to allow a particular project to move forward. For the most part, you know, those recommendations are made to the minister, and the minister will agree or deny it on the basis of what comes across his desk.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. This question is to the Premier. There is an opportunity for the Premier to show real leadership here. The rules are in black and white. They appear to have been broken. So to the Premier: will the Premier invite a forensic audit of the CIP program by the Auditor General?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have great faith in our Auditor General. He's done a good job over the years, and if he sees fit to undertake whatever kind of audit he wishes, we're open. We've always followed his recommendations in all the years that I've served in this government. We've always been open and transparent, and we'll continue to do so.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a university sorority received an \$18,000 CIP grant for posh furniture, the government broke CIP application rule 7. Albertans learned today that this grant was awarded to an organization led by the daughter of a well-connected Tory. To the Minister of Tourism, Recreation, Parks and Culture: given that we only have details of this one grant and it looks highly political, can the minister assure this House that there was no political interference in any of the other grants that violated the rules?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, certainly, I did some digging around on this particular one, and I can table that later if you choose. Alpha Gamma Delta is a registered nonprofit organization. It was eligible and met all the criteria for a grant through the community initiatives program. We need to indicate as well that this organization actually does a lot of fundraising for local communities, and to date it's raised and donated money to organizations off the U of A campus. They donate money to Edmonton's Food Bank, juvenile diabetes, and women's shelters, and it was for that reason that we supported them.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. They asked for \$10,000 and got \$18,000. The volunteers of this province work hard. They're dedicated and honourable, and they expect to play by the rules. They are offended when the rules are broken. To the same minister: under what circumstances does an organization qualify for having rule 7 broken?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I want to share an example that we went through. This is a letter – and again, I'm prepared to table this one – written by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and the letter says: "They informed me that they are facing a 'grave financial situation' and without short-term emergency funding the society is at risk of having to close its doors." We responded to that particular one, and we did break our rules, if that's what it was, but it allowed this particular organization to stay alive.

The Speaker: And we'll table at the appropriate time, right?

Dr. Taft: So to the Premier: will the Premier live up to his words about transparency and openness and the secrecy around these deals and table the details of the 43 grants that were given in violation of the rules?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is another time, you know, that the Leader of the Official Opposition is making allegations. Remember, this House has certain privileges. To all those students sitting here, this House gives every elected member certain privileges, and they are not to bring about innuendo about any particular member in this House. Two weeks ago he said he had some sort of a secret agreement between the government and the horse-racing industry. He made that statement in the House. Today he's still not able to present it. So either stand up and say that you're totally wrong or deliver on that promise that you made to this House.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] Settle down. Settle down.

One of the most important issues facing this government is the issue of affordable housing. It affects so many Albertans who are demanding action from a government that has ignored the situation for years. And what a surprise, the government being unprepared for such a serious issue. Now, while hundreds of Calgarians shiver in the street with the closing down of a temporary emergency shelter, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is blathering about a report that is weeks, if not months, away from seeing the light of day. Will the minister stop prattling on about partnerships and the like and admit that when it comes to providing affordable housing, the buck stops on his desk? If I was the minister, it would certainly stop on mine.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that the government and the municipalities very much have a partnership in dealing with affordable housing and the homeless. As the hon. member across the way suggested, I want to explain that we do have a partnership in regard to emergency shelters. The province provides \$23 million, of which \$14 million goes to Calgary. The government also supplies money for the homeless, of which one-third goes to Calgary. As well, we have a program that is being brought forward between seven municipalities . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the province has got to take leadership in solving the affordable housing crisis. The cities know it; social agencies know it; builders know it; constitutional experts know it; I know it; my colleagues know it; even the third party knows it. It seems everybody knows it except the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The time for solutions is now, not a few weeks from now. Will the minister immediately release the report of the Affordable Housing Task Force so that we can get on with the job?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I think that for the dignity of all of the members that were on the task force that presented that task force report to the government on March 19, the government is looking at the recommendations, looking at what we can do, and making sure that the job is done right.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is now the captain of this ship, and as he has said, he is in charge. It is time for him to show that he is up to the challenge of making a decision. We need goals, we need targets, and we need timelines because everybody needs a home. When is the Premier going to order his minister to put down the shovel and release the report of the Affordable Housing Task Force?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, managing growth pressures is one of our top priorities of this government. Part of growth pressures, of course, is available housing, housing in different forms for the homeless, for the low-income earners, and those with young families that want to purchase their own home. We had a very good

discussion, dialogue, with Albertans, an all-party committee. The report has now been delivered to the minister. He is bringing recommendations to our government caucus. Once those decisions are made, again, we in this House will deliver to all Albertans on those recommendations to ensure that we deal with this critical situation of housing.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Donations to Leadership Campaigns

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Donations to leadership campaigns for registered political parties are not under Alberta's archaic election finance laws. A number of members of this government, including the Premier, have received substantial donations from donors who are shrouded in secrecy. As a result, Albertans are unable to judge whether or not the decisions of this government are fair and free from favouritism. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier take steps to live up to his promise of openness and transparency and introduce legislation requiring disclosure of all campaign donations for leadership campaigns, including his own?

Mr. Stelmach: That is a good question. I said in this House that this is a topic of discussion with our party, the Progressive Conservative Party, in a policy conference, whatever the party agrees to do because this is joint party and government. But the one thing I want to say, though, which the opposition fails to mention and to recognize, is that finally in the province of Alberta we will have a lobbyist registry so that everybody will know who is lobbying government and – who knows? – they may even know who's lobbying the opposition as well.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Some members of this Premier's government have still not kept their promises to reveal financial totals and donors for their leadership campaigns. All of this has Albertans wondering who has the government's ear.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down for a second. We're on the edge here. Is it a government legal requirement in Alberta to do so? The member is insisting then – he's talking about individuals. It's akin to saying the question to an MLA. You can't do it in the House, so phrase it in such a way that we deal with policy, please.

Donations to Leadership Campaigns (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Will the government introduce a policy and bring in legislation, and will the Premier as a matter of policy direct his ministers to reveal how much they raised in their leadership bids and where it came from?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I hope there won't be a leadership contest at least on this side of the House for a few years. In all fairness I hope there isn't one on that side with the third party as well. We'd like to keep him where he is. As I said in all honesty, this will be a topic of discussion at an annual policy conference, and we'll be bringing that forward.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I noticed that only the front bench applauded that remark. There are many in the back that may have a different idea.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier talks about transparency, but Albertans can see right through him. Will the Premier remove the cloud that hangs over this government as a result of secret and unrevealed campaign donations from the recent leadership campaign and introduce a policy and introduce legislation requiring real transparency in the government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we are going to work in this area, but I know what their issue is. There are a number of very good Liberals and good NDs that contributed to a lot of campaigns here, leadership campaigns, and they sure want to find out who the heck those people are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Trade Route to Prince Rupert

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The port of Prince Rupert is fast becoming the port of Alberta. The lower elevation of our Yellowhead pass to Rupert means lower carbon emissions, less fuel use, and lower costs. World maritime container traffic will almost triple by 2024, and this is the best route for the booming China trade. This port and connecting facilities must grow for our Alberta economy to continue to thrive. My question is to the Premier. What will the province do to make grow the vital port of Prince Rupert and the expansion of its container-handling facilities?

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, Mr. Speaker, I've got to commend the member for quite a visionary question in terms of where this province is going in the future. We know that to sustain this economy, we do have to increase trade, and we have to be globally competitive. The other most important issue here, of course, is that with respect to Prince Rupert it cuts a return trip by three and a half days. As well, it provides the city of Edmonton an opportunity to be a centre where we would not only collect containers, but we can also stuff them for export.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm surprised that the Official Opposition laughs because there was none of them at the conference on Prince Rupert last week.

A second question to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: what measures will this government take to ensure that railway lines are sufficient, routes are straight and safe, and that rail roadbeds are upgraded to ensure the greatest success of our Alberta Yellowhead route?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the question that the member raised was the topic of discussion in a joint cabinet meeting with the province of B.C. and the province of Alberta on how both governments can work towards securing, you know, a dedicated rail. Some dollars, of course, will go into upgrading the facility. But for agriculture and for manufacturing this has great potential in reducing our costs and getting our product back to global markets. Most importantly, product coming to Alberta, to Canada go back empty to China. We have an opportunity now to stuff them and send them back to China and actually develop the economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. A supplementary to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, Mr. Speaker: what will the minister and her ministry be doing to make sure that Alberta business and industry maximize backhaul potential to the port of Prince Rupert for Alberta products?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has instructed us as ministers to manage growth pressures as an initiative. Recently we hosted with Edmonton Economic Development, the mayors of Edmonton, Prince Rupert, and Prince George, as well as CN a meeting where we talked about how we could work more effectively together. We're participating in a study as well with Transport Canada, with Saskatchewan, and with Manitoba to look at how we can co-ordinate backhaul efforts. We recognize that this port shortens the travel time to Asia by at least one and a half days out of Vancouver and three days out of Los Angeles. So it is an excellent opportunity for development.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Solicitor General Staff College

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Early this morning there was an alarming incident at the Solicitor General staff college in Edmonton when as many as 18 people fell violently ill to the point where paramedics were called in to attend the sick. The college remains shut down, and no one is allowed to enter or leave. My first question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can he provide an update on this very serious situation at the college?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays that this is the first time that we've had an incident of this type at any of our facilities. We are working closely with Capital health to determine what caused these 18 people to become suddenly ill. I'm pleased to say that all individuals are recovering, and the staff college will not resume training until we are assured of a safe environment for all of our staff and recruits.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done to ensure that this type of incident does not happen again?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, Capital health is at the college right now. They are investigating to determine the exact nature of this illness and its cause, and based on their findings, we will take whatever action Capital health recommends to ensure that an incidence like this does not reoccur.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

1:50

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Balzac situation has always been a political problem between the city of Calgary and the MD of Rocky View. The government ignored this when someone in the government made assurances, no matter what denials we've

heard. Now Drumheller very clearly has said that they will not provide water to this project. They're standing up for their people, and good for them. This government now has no choice but to try and force a deal between Calgary and the Rocky View MD. To the Premier: does the Premier take any responsibility for this fiasco?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, a very craftily worded question: someone in the government gave a promise, but, you know, there's denial, and we don't know who, but somebody in the government. You have the evidence. Stand up in front of all these people, and tell me who the person in government is who gave this commitment. Get up. Now's your opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has hung their hat on the premise of allowing municipalities to make their own planning decisions without a regional process. In fact, the former municipal affairs minister stated in the House last August that every municipality "has the ability to make their own decisions" without any regional oversight. Well the Balzac situation is an example of just how flawed a process this is. To the municipal affairs minister: is this type of land-use planning serving Alberta's best interests?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that the minister's council has been working very diligently for a number of years looking at the best direction for municipalities in Alberta and, more recently, in the last year presented a report to myself. One of the primary subjects in that report is planning, and that's regional planning for municipalities between themselves, and I commend them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The town of Drumheller has voted unanimously to reject the proposal to supply water to Balzac. They quite rightly pointed out that any positive economic benefit to the community does not justify the potential risk. To quote the former minister of municipal affairs in this House, August 31 *Hansard*, "The people of Drumheller know very well what's going on." Well, obviously they did not know that this government was selling their water behind their backs, and they have stood up and said no. To the Minister of Environment: how does the minister justify this statement in the House?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that the statement that was made at that point in time was as valid then as it is today. The people of Drumheller have made a decision with respect to their participation in this project. No licence has been issued. I understand that the MD, the applicant, has asked that any decision be delayed so that they can explore other options. As it stands, that is the status of this particular licence application at this point in time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Resource Development in Marie Lake Area

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans are very concerned about the proposed seismic testing in oil sands development at Marie Lake, one of Alberta's few remaining pristine lakes. OSUM corporation has acquired the mineral rights beneath the surface of Marie Lake. Government rules require seismic testing

before a development application can be filed. At a public meeting last night OSUM stated that they have evidence that oil sands exist beneath Marie Lake and that seismic is not necessary. To the Minister of Energy. Albertans are fearful of possible environmental damage and aquatic life loss due to seismic. Will you waive the seismic testing requirement and allow OSUM to provide their evidence, therefore not putting Marie Lake at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I must say that under this government and under the leadership of our current Premier we have a plan to build a stronger Alberta. Let me make it very clear that absolutely no – no – resource development takes place in the province of Alberta without a very comprehensive approval process.

With respect to seismic it's critical that adequate resource information is available in order for the proponents and the government regulators to come to the proper conclusion with respect to a permit. It's necessary, Mr. Speaker, to pinpoint the location of the resource. We cannot eliminate this important tool.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: land sales for the right to explore our natural resources occur every two weeks and are conducted under the supervision of the Department of Energy. Mr. Minister, does present government policy allow all lands with the exception of parks and protected areas to be sold to the highest bidder without any consideration to quality of life and environmental sensitivities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, again, this government has a plan to improve Albertans' quality of life, and we continue with that plan. Quality of life and environmental sensitivity are top priorities when any development is considered, regardless of whether it's energy, infrastructure, forestry, the fibre business, agriculture, or manufacturing. The sale of mineral rights is only part of this process, and a number of very stringent checks and balances are in place to ensure that any development that occurs is done in a responsible manner.

Mr. Ducharme: Our new Premier has included improving quality of life for all Albertans as one of the main pillars under his leadership. Quality of life for Albertans is more than financial wealth. It includes amongst other things quality education, safe communities, good recreational opportunities, and a clean environment. By allowing seismic and industrial oil and gas operations on pristine lakes such as Marie Lake, this government allows our quality of life to erode. To the Premier: will you instruct your cabinet to stop industrial development surrounding Marie Lake until the impacts on recreational properties have been addressed to the satisfaction of the residents, who will live with the consequence of this seismic activity?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for the work that he's doing with this file. He has attended all of the public meetings and has been keeping me up to date on how this matter proceeds.

I want to tell everyone that prior to any development it is very critical that we must maintain not only the quality of life for the

residents in that area but also absolutely protect our environment. I'm going to make sure that everyone is satisfied that there is scientific evidence and a process that is followed that does satisfy the protection of the environment and the people living around that lake. I'll work with the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to ensure that this happens.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

E-mail from a Government Computer

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is failing to keep his promise of running an open and transparent government. This was proven again when the Minister of Agriculture and Food would only commit to an internal investigation into the vicious, hate-promoting e-mail that an employee sent from a government computer. Now the internal investigation is over, and the Premier and the minister refuse to give the public any details. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: given that section 3 of the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, which deals with discriminating publications such as this e-mail, applies in this case, did the minister or the department take part in this internal investigation?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware at all whether we did or did not. I certainly would have to do some research, and I could get back to the hon. member at that particular time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. That doesn't surprise me, Mr. Speaker.

To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: the Agriculture and Food employee appears to have violated Alberta's human rights laws. Is it not the minister's position that such violations are worthy of dismissal? Why was this person not fired?

Mr. Stelmach: Openness and transparency means that this government is not violating anyone's rights, especially the employer/employee relationship. Certainly that member, of anybody in this House, should know the rules.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, this time to the Premier. Certainly, the Premier should know the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act if anyone in this House should know it, and the code of conduct in section 3 was violated. Again to the Premier: why was this person not fired?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: It actually saddens me, the fact that the individual will talk about openness and transparency. Here, when we're protecting the rights of an individual – and there is a Public Service Act, and there's a code of ethics involved. This member is not aware of either one of those and is trying to trample the rights of an individual. That, really, I find quite offensive.

Postsecondary Education Funding in Calgary

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, on March 22 the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness justified the disparity in per capita funding for health care between the two metropolitan regions by answering that Calgary region has a relatively young and well-educated population and stated that "health status tracks education." My first question is for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Given the

positive correlation between parental education and postsecondary participation rates and the positive correlation between the ratio of young people in the population and postsecondary participation, and given that Calgary is a larger city and has had greater increases in population than Edmonton over the past 10 years, how can the minister justify that there are 11,000 fewer spaces for postsecondary education in metro Calgary than in Edmonton?

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is truly committed to making postsecondary education more accessible – and that means increasing capacity where it is needed – and to building a stronger Alberta overall. We're working with all of our postsecondary institutions on building that capacity, but comparing the enrolment spaces between Edmonton and Calgary is not as simple as just counting spaces. Edmonton institutions tend to serve a broader geographic region that includes all of northern Alberta whereas Calgary institutions tend to serve learners from south central Alberta as well as areas south of Calgary. Students in those areas also have the benefit of the University of Lethbridge for postsecondary university level spaces. So when you take the total south Alberta enrolment spaces and the total north Alberta enrolment spaces, actually they're about equal.

Dr. Brown: Is the minister suggesting that students in Calgary ought to travel to get their education whereas those in Edmonton can stay at home?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, quite the contrary, and the hon. member knows this very well. There are a number of institutions within the city region of Calgary that are serving a number of the students there. We've made a number of investments in the postsecondaries – Bow Valley College, Mount Royal College as well as the University of Calgary – and have actually increased the spaces there considerably, up to 7,000 spaces within the city region as well.

Students make the decisions as to where they're going to go, and sometimes students choose to go to another geographic location for a number of reasons, some of which might even be to get away from home.

Dr. Brown: For the same minister. The University of Calgary's operating grant for full-load equivalent is \$10,105, and the University of Alberta's is \$11,374, a difference of 12.6 per cent. How can the minister justify this significant disparity, which means that the U of C is shortchanged about \$30 million per year in operating grants?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't justify it; the economics do. Certain course loads cost more money to deliver, and the universities would be the first to admit that. In fact, they tell me that all the time. The course loads of medicine or in some cases agriculture, veterinary schools cost more dollars per student to deliver. We fund based on that cost. So to simply say that it should be the same even though you're delivering different course loads is not playing, really, with the truth quite properly. I think the review on equity across the province that we completed in 2005 indeed did bring equity into the system in Calgary, and the University of Calgary actually received an additional well over \$2 million to their base operating grant. We continue to monitor the situation, and we'll continue to work with the postsecondaries to ensure that we have a fair and equitable system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Tuition Fees for Postsecondary Education

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I stood with a large group of postsecondary student leaders on the front steps of this Legislature and listened to their concerns about tuition fees. This government has pushed tuition fees up by 275 per cent in just over a decade, the highest increase in the country. These student leaders have brought the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology a message, a message written on over 1,000 postcards. The students have a simple question for the ministry, which I'm happy to relay. This government claims that Alberta is debt free and is swimming in unprecedented surpluses. So why are the students forced to drown in debt?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In consultation with those very students, this government came up with the affordability framework as it relates to tuition and came up with a new tuition fee policy. Indeed, we've rolled back tuition fees to the 2004 levels. This is going to save students in one year – in one year – over \$700 on a four-year program, perhaps even over \$3,800 for their course load.

I have, actually, one of the cards the hon. member mentions because we are responding to them. We just received them. It says, "I call on you and your government to immediately reduce tuition to a level that is affordable compared to other Canadian jurisdictions leading the way on affordability." We are the fourth lowest in the country.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again today student leaders came to the steps of the Legislature for the umpteenth time to draw attention to the Alberta disadvantage that postsecondary students have been experiencing year after year. Student poverty is their daily experience, debt loads are growing, and their tuition fees remain one of the highest in Canada. Why has this government failed to take concrete action to reduce the crushing debt burden on postsecondary students, and what action is the minister proposing to take to address this serious problem?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we do not have one of the highest tuitions in Canada, and it's a misstatement of the facts to allude to that. We, in fact, have the fourth lowest tuition policy in Canada.

We are working, as I said before, with the student groups. I've met with the presidents of their associations. We're talking about the affordability framework, which includes what it does cost to go to school in the province of Alberta, not just tuition, which is only one factor of that. Capacity is a huge issue for us because even if we lower tuition or make it free, we can't get more students in it because we don't have the spaces. We need to build spaces. We need to make it accessible. We need to manage the growth pressures that we have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I asked this minister to commit to reducing tuition levels in Alberta to make them the lowest in the country, a solemn promise made by the former Premier of this province not long ago, but I got no clear answer. The government so far has failed to live up to its promise, and students are beginning to fear their government is getting ready

to renege on it. My question is simple and direct to this minister. Will his government, will he honour this promise and reduce tuition fees for postsecondary students so that they are the lowest in the country, and when will he take action to meet this promise?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I continue to say in this House and in answer to this question that we are working to make postsecondary education as affordable as we possibly can in the country. I don't believe that when the A Learning Alberta report came forward, the students who were involved in that consultation believed that tuition was the only thing out there. Tuition is a part of the affordability piece. Their living costs are a part of that. Their books are a part of that. The cost of postsecondary is also a part of that, and if we can help work with the cost of postsecondary, driving those costs down, of course we're going to make it more affordable.

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

Tobacco Reduction

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Between 2001 and 2005 Alberta retailers received a 49 per cent increase in payments from tobacco companies to prominently display their products on store shelves. These power wall tobacco displays are deliberately located at eye level right above the candy and other products clearly targeted at children. Not surprisingly, teen smoking rates in Alberta are on the rise. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the government follow the lead of most other provinces and the advice of the Alberta Liberals and introduce legislation to ban power walls?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've made it very clear that as Minister of Health and Wellness I put a very high priority on making it possible for Albertans to take their health into their own hands, and part of that strategy is, in fact, tobacco reduction. I'll be bringing forward a tobacco reduction strategy to my own caucus for approval and then hopefully forward to the House and the public in due course. But taking action on tobacco reduction is a very important part of our tobacco reduction strategy, and I was delighted to see the schoolchildren here yesterday as part of the process. I was only sorry that I had a previous commitment and couldn't have joined them on the steps.

2:10

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. We appreciate that sentiment.

Again to the same minister: aside from the cancer prevention fund this government profits from its investment in tobacco-related companies through the heritage trust fund. Is this the reason that the government is going against the wishes of 80 per cent of Albertans in refusing to implement a province-wide smoking ban?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. In fact, the question of where investment strategy lies in the hands of the Ministry of Finance, and I'm sure he'll be addressing those strategies in due course.

As Minister of Health and Wellness I can say that it's very important that we identify areas where Albertans can help to improve their health. That includes stopping smoking. I will be pursuing vigorously a strategy with respect to stopping smoking, and everything will be on the table when we have that discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. On the one hand, this government puts billions of dollars into the cancer fund, indicating that cancer prevention is essential. On the other hand, this government refuses to take simple steps to actually prevent cancer. Again to the minister: why would the government rather put money into treating smoking-related illnesses than legislate a province-wide smoking ban to prevent the illness in the first place?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government does not refuse to take steps. Just a week or so ago I was part of an announcement by the Cancer Board in conjunction with the Capital health authority and the Calgary regional health authority on colorectal cancer screening, which was a leading edge process that we're engaged in. We're very interested in identifying cancer early, in screening processes that are early, and we're working vigorously on those sorts of things. Smoking is clearly a part of it, and I intend to take action on that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The United States has requested consultation with Canada to address concerns over some issues related to the implementation and interpretation of the softwood lumber agreement. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Will any measures of the Alberta government be included in these consultations?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the U.S. concerns that led to the request for this consultation have to do with industry assistance programs developed by Ottawa and the governments in Quebec and Ontario. At the moment there are no Alberta-specific trade issues that are involved in this, and accordingly we will not be participating. Of course, we will be monitoring and paying attention to these discussions and to these talks, but the responsibility for that falls primarily to my very able colleague, the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. If the U.S. complaints go to an arbitration panel, what impact would the panel rules have on Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If it does go to an arbitration panel, the panel will be asked to rule on several important issues relating to the operation and interpretation of the agreement, but it is important to note that the softwood lumber agreement contains a mechanism to resolve these disputes, and that is the mechanism that is going to be followed. The request for consultation indicates that both parties value the agreement and are working to resolve the concerns that are being mentioned here today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. Can he explain to the House the Americans' allegation that Canada has violated the agreement re the so-called surge mechanism?

Mr. Boutilier: Yes, it's very complex, but simply stated, Mr. Speaker: under the agreement Canada can export freely to the United States when lumber prices are high, but when lumber prices are low, such as now, Canada imposes export restrictions on lumber shipments to the United States from B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec. Now, provinces can choose between two types of export restrictions, and Alberta and British Columbia have chosen a pure export tax, and the other provinces have chosen this hybrid export tax and quota system, which of course is in dispute today but we're very confident will be resolved.

The Speaker: We'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Old-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Alliance-Camrose Rail Line 43.03

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. The loss of local grain elevators has led to massive 30-wheel Super B trucks crumbling down highway 13. A viable sustainable alternative exists in the form of rail line 43.03, which runs in a straight line from Alliance to Camrose. However, CN is threatening to shut down this line, which will result in the further congestion and deterioration of highway 13. Will the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation commit to collaborating with the Battle River Producer Car Group and CN to maintain service on the line?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I want to make clear to everyone here that Infrastructure and Transportation wants to try to make sure that we can keep all kinds of traffic moving in Alberta, but I also have to make clear that the province of Alberta is not in the railroad business. We have private enterprise doing that business, and we will do whatever we can as far as strategies and stuff to try to help them keep business moving and keep grain moving in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Well, thank you. I hope we do lots of good stuff, then.

Mr. Speaker, in the mid-80s line 43.03 received \$16 million in federal upgrading assistance. With 132-pound rail it has the highest carrying capacity going, easily capable of handling major freight. Does the minister believe that the rails are of greater value ripped up and sold for scrap than offering a ready-made, sustainable alternative to take the strain off an already overburdened highway 13?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm not in the scrap business either, so I'm not sure what he's talking about there. But I do believe that in any capacity to help us move freight to any ports or anything along those lines, we will work towards that goal.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has provided land for just \$1 for a cargo terminal in the MD of Grande Prairie. Will this government show similar generosity and support the Battle River producers with regard to this rail line?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I don't think there is an MD in Grande Prairie; I think there's a county up there. I'm not aware of the exact dealings at the time or the \$1 deal. If we have excess land and a municipality can use that land, there are always agreements that can be made, and we will help them out as a province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Maintenance of Secondary Highways

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans have expressed concerns over the condition of provincial highways and, in particular, three secondary highways that are so important to our rural communities. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. What plans are in place to catch up with this growing problem?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm also very concerned about the amount of maintenance that we've been able to do on our highways in the past few years. Quite frankly, we haven't been able to do enough, but I can tell you that we are working, and I do have a four-year plan to try and do catch-up and address the back issues we've had. Funding for this program will be coming shortly, and I hope that my friend the hon. Finance minister will help me to be able to do that plan.

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, of particular concern in my constituency are highways 791 and 766. Highway 791 had recent shoulder construction on it, but it was an incomplete job, and it's in a very dangerous driving condition. Highway 766 is very rough, and I've received many complaints about damage to vehicles. Can the minister tell what plans are in place in the upcoming construction season for these two roads?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm aware of those two roads. In fact, they also run through my constituency. I understand that one of them has been partially repaired, but we need to do some more work there. My department is taking a very close look at and evaluating what needs to be done there, and our next step, I'm sure, will be to upgrade them. Unfortunately, I can't give the exact date, but we are aware of the situation and working on it.

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

2:20 Temporary Foreign Workers

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry stated in the House that the province will continue to work with the federal government on the temporary foreign worker program. If the provincial government is prepared to take responsibility for the benefits of this program, it should also take responsibility for the well-being of workers it brings in. This is an issue of basic human rights. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: what protocols, if any, does the provincial government have in place to ensure that the basic safety and employment standards are being met for temporary foreign workers?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, temporary foreign workers are dealt with the same as any other worker, and they are entitled to the same rights and protections. So our employment standards, our occupational health and safety standards, all standards that apply to any worker in Alberta apply equally to those foreign workers, whether they're here on a temporary basis or whether they are landed immigrants.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the biggest problems with a temporary foreign worker program is that these workers come here for a year or two years, gain experience, and then go home. Permanent immigration ensures long-lasting benefits for Alberta's economy. Can the minister please tell us if this government will continue to rely on unsustainable solutions like the temporary foreign worker program, instead of sustainable ones like permanent immigration and expansion of our own apprenticeship programs?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, relative to the expansion of the apprenticeship programs the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology can answer that. But let me just say that the temporary foreign worker program has a wonderful capacity to fulfill those obligations that corporations commit to when they entertain contracts for large projects, where the temporary foreign worker goes in, completes the project, and then can return home. Many of the countries that are exporting, if you will, temporary foreign workers have situations where there's a lull in their economy, and they relish the opportunity for their workers to go elsewhere in the world, take on a temporary task, and then return to their homes and their families. So this has a benefit not only to those families but also to the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard from many people working in the immigration field that Alberta is absolutely not prepared for the temporary foreign worker program. Workers are often socially isolated, bound by restrictive visas, and lack the language skills to seek help if they're being unfairly treated. Without strong protections in place more and more workers will come forward with experiences of deception, human rights violations, and abuse. Will the minister please take the initiative to investigate what is actually happening with the temporary foreign workers? The program should be suspended until there's a thorough investigation.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, this is a federal program that we are working in co-operation with the federal government on. The federal government provides monies that we also provide for integrated settlement services. While temporary foreign workers don't necessarily qualify for those funds, many of the 20 nonprofit agencies that run programs for immigrants will tell you that they have among their clients, if you will, temporary foreign workers that are receiving everything from second language programs to socialization skills.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that's worthy of note is that the corporations themselves are active. Although there has been one complaint that's been raised in this House, we thoroughly review any kind of indiscretion by anybody employing a worker in any capacity, either as a temporary foreign worker or as a landed immigrant.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 92 questions and answers for today.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports (continued)

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, I'm now tabling the appropriate number of copies of the letter pertaining to an applica-

tion which the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark submitted on behalf of a community association that received \$75,000 of unmatched funding through the community initiatives program. No rules were broken. All of the applications have been processed in accordance with the program guidelines.

The other one is the paper that I referred to on the Alpha Gamma Delta, and it provides the background information on that particular organization.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. My first tabling is from Jim Stallard, a Calgary-Varsity constituent, who is the husband of Marlene Stallard, a brave lady fighting a courageous battle against ovarian cancer. Jim passed along his thanks to me for raising Marlene's struggle in the House and asked me to acknowledge the much-appreciated efforts and support of the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Health and Wellness, and his great assistant, Wendy.

My second tabling is from Jerry Iwanus, a constituent of Battle River-Wainwright, who is very concerned about the deteriorating, hazardous conditions of highway 13, in particular the section east of Camrose at the junction of highways 13 and 56.

My third tabling is from Paola Romanelli, who attended the Bragg Creek forum last Thursday, March 29, at the community centre, at which I was a panelist. Paola writes, "Kananaskis is a great forest that residents of the area and Calgarians enjoy all seasons, it would be a great waste for us and future generations to allow this plan to go on."

My last tabling is from David Easton, who is also a Bragg Creek resident. In his letter to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development he urges the minister to "give earnest consideration to the longer term effects and the detriment of the entire community including the residents of Calgary."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to give two groups of tablings. One is from volunteers at the Unity Centre of North East Edmonton, on some personal testimonials of their need for affordable housing.

A second group is another hundred letters from good Albertans, petitioning our Alberta Legislature to support that the accused killer of Joshua Hunt be sentenced and tried as an adult "due to the nature of this crime, his past criminal history and that he is so close to the age of 18 years."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a letter dated October 31, 2006, to the former Minister of Finance, before her retirement, and this letter is from myself as chairperson of the Alberta Public Accounts Committee. I am demanding the release of the blue books immediately, and I'm pleased to say that it was eventually done by this government.

Thank you.

Mr. Graydon: With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, the documents that I tabled earlier with 1,602 signatures from people in the Beaverlodge area were not in a form suitable as a petition; however, they are in a form suitable to be presented at this time.

Thank you.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, Alberta advanced education public postsecondary institutions' audited financial statements, public colleges and technical institutes for the year ended June 30, 2005, and universities and Banff Centre for Continuing Education for the year ended March 31, 2006.

The Speaker: Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests prior to dealing with the point of order?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled a social studies class from Ardrossan high school. This class is accompanied by their teachers Mr. Paul Schwartz and Mr. T.J. Kennerd. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The second introduction, Mr. Speaker, you will recall from the '94-96 era. Page Carolyn Laird, formerly from Fort Saskatchewan, is here today. These days she works in the U.S. Senate for the Republicans. She's here accompanied by Kenneth Vogel, who also works in Washington. They are in the public gallery as well. I would ask them to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on a point of order.

Point of Order

Projected Government Business

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a point of order that I think is worth bringing up in the House today about the way we're conducting House business. On Thursdays we're given a general idea of what's coming in the following week. I understand that from time to time there are emergencies or we can't get a minister there and there have to be changes, but I think today, at least, shows you that there is no attempt at all to follow what we talked about.

2:30

I look at what was on government business for Wednesday, and there are four bills here for second reading. I see that what's actually coming – and we didn't know about this till this morning – are bills that are absolutely, totally different. None of them are the same, Mr. Speaker. What is even more worrisome is that for a major bill, perhaps the most major one that we're going to discuss here, Bill 3, the emissions act, which we just finished debating in second reading, we had no idea that this was coming down again. We had House leaders' meetings and other meetings.

Now, it takes some preparation for the opposition. I'm not going to speak for them, but I'm sure it would be true over here, that we want to prepare for these sorts of things. Now we see that it's tentatively on the agenda along with other bills that were not there. I don't know what will be on Thursday. There's not much point giving us the week's business ahead if it doesn't mean anything, if you're going to change it to where in the morning we find out that the bills are totally different. I think this is a totally unacceptable way to run government business.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I know that emergencies come up, and I understand that from time to time there have to be changes, but when the whole day changes and you don't know about it till the morning, that's not the proper way to do government business as far as I'm concerned.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to address this point. To some extent I agree with the hon. member: it is very difficult for members in this House to plan far in advance on what the business of the House is going to be at any particular point in time. There is, by the very nature of the House, some flexibility that's required from time to time. As House leaders we make an attempt to work as much as possible with all of the party House leaders to discuss what is appropriate business to be dealt with at any particular time.

I do point out, Mr. Speaker, that with the new rules that we're operating under, the time that's available for the discussion of government business is very limited, so it's necessary that we have some certain flexibility.

With respect to Bill 3, that the member brings forward, I apologize to this hon. member because I wasn't aware that he had been advised. Bill 3 is not going to be discussed this afternoon in recognition of the very issue that the member brought forward. We recognize that there are some amendments that are going to be proposed by members, and for that reason we're not going to be dealing with Bill 3.

But I have to emphasize to the member that while there is some room for flexibility, at the end of the day it is the responsibility of the government to move through the agenda as effectively as possible, recognizing, of course, that it's up to the co-operation of all members of the House to do it as effectively. So the government gives its assurance that we will do the best that we can to accommodate the opposition, but there may be times when it simply is not expeditious to meet everyone's time constraints. All I can do, Mr. Speaker, is give the assurance of our House leader and my own assurance in my capacity acting as House leader that we will work with the opposition as best we can to alleviate these kinds of concerns.

Mr. VanderBurg: I was quite aware last week, when the projected government business was announced, that the Vital Statistics Act, Bill 8, would be brought up today. It's in *Hansard*, page 299. It says clearly: "On Wednesday, April 4, under government bills for second reading Bill 8, the Vital Statistics Act." So, you know, the member stated that none of the bills projected for today was on the Order Paper. I was aware of it, and it was read here on Thursday. It's in *Hansard*.

Mr. Martin: Well, we didn't . . .

The Speaker: We only get one shot, hon. member. You know that. Okay, hon. members. Anybody else, by the way?

Well, then, let's deal with this matter. This is more a matter of information, I think, and clarification. First of all, let's remember that there are three House leaders, whose job it is to communicate with one another. There's one on the government side, there's one on the Official Opposition side, and there's one on the third-party side. I think the third-party side House leader was the one who raised the point. Incumbent upon all of this is to do some interchange with one another. This is the harmony thing. This is the you touch me, I touch you, we love one another, and we get on with business kind of thing, okay? I'm not advocating it. I'm just reflecting, okay?

Secondly, we have a Standing Order which we didn't have years

ago but we have now in the current environment. Standing Order 7(6) says:

When Projected Government Business is called on Thursdays, the Official Opposition House Leader may ask one question pertaining to the order of Government business to be brought before the Assembly in the next week.

There has to be an assumption inherent in all of this that whatever outline is given on that Thursday afternoon is, in fact, going to be the one followed the next week, recognizing the need for some flexibility. Everybody understands that.

Thirdly – and the third point is the most important one, hon. members; the third one, the most important one – is Standing Order 10, which doesn't give any excuses to anybody: "Every Member is bound to attend the service of the Assembly . . ." If you believe that, there's not an issue. You're here. The business will come up. Nobody'll miss anything. And that's the responsibility.

There are 3.3 million people out there. A handful of them will actually want to come here. Some people actually go through nomination meetings and elections to get here. There must be a reason why they've done that. So what's getting here? Obviously, they want to be in this building. They want to sit here and debate and participate. So when the chair looks out, the chair should see, actually, 82 smiley faces working in harmony with one another, conducting the business of the people of Alberta.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 21 Securities Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today and move second reading of Bill 21, the Securities Amendment Act, 2007.

This legislation follows a process that began several years ago when the provinces and territories agreed that they need to work together to inspire high investment confidence and make Canada's capital market more competitive.

In 2004 they signed a memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulations in a historic act of co-operation between provinces and territories. The agreement commits Alberta and other provinces and territories to develop a passport system of securities regulations as well as harmonized and streamlined securities legislation across Canada.

Since the signing of the agreement we have been working hard with our counterparts to meet these objectives. The first phase of the passport system was implemented in September 2005 by all provinces and territories except Ontario. It opened a single window of access to capital markets across Canada. Last month the national rule to implement a second phase of the passport system was released for public comment. Phase 2 will be implemented in stages, beginning in 2008, to further our goal of ensuring Canada's securities regulatory system meets the needs of our stakeholders, including investors and industry. In effect, it opens the single window even wider. The Securities Amendment Act, 2007, supports the passport system and other national rules that update, harmonize, and streamline securities regulations across Canada.

The legislation includes amendments that do several things: first, it will establish a common business trigger for all regulated activities, which is consistent with practice in the United States and United Kingdom; second, this amendment will require the registration of investment fund managers and individuals who perform

prescribed functions, such as a chief compliant officer or an alternate designated person; third, replace the current annual renewal system with a system of continuing registration until suspended or terminated; and, fourth, move detailed requirements to the national rule, such as particular registration categories, handling of potential conflicts of interest, and registration status upon individuals leaving their employment or being hired by another firm.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Alberta is one of the first jurisdictions to introduce these amendments. We would expect the other jurisdictions to introduce similar harmonized provisions at their earliest opportunity. We are also continuing to harmonize our security legislation in the area of enforcement. These amendments ensure that our legislation remains modern, streamlined, and harmonized with other jurisdictions. It should be noted that these changes follow significant improvements to investors' protection and enforcement in the past few years, including the introduction of civil liability provisions for investors in the secondary market.

2:40

As the second-largest capital market, it is important that Alberta continue to show leadership and keep its legislation as up to date as possible. I urge all members of this Legislature to give their support to Bill 21.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I move to adjourn debate on Bill 21, Securities Amendment Act, 2007.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 22

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I stand today and move second reading of Bill 22, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation will establish Alberta Investment Management as a stand-alone provincial corporation. To provide a bit of background, Alberta Finance's investment management division is responsible for managing about \$70 billion in assets, including public-sector pension funds, endowments, and other funds. Some of the funds include the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, which is obvious to everyone, but also the public service's pension plan, the sustainability fund, the medical research endowment fund, the science and engineering research endowment fund, to name only a few.

Our investment staff provide exceptional stewardship of these assets on behalf of Albertans, civil servants, and other clients. For example, we added 1 per cent in added value above the policy benchmark in 2006, which translated to about 435 million extra dollars. The heritage fund, Mr. Speaker, in the year 2006 returned a 14.8 per cent rate of return. Well, we know that given the right opportunity, our investment managers can do even better.

Last year a government-commissioned organizational study concluded that Alberta investment management should be moved out of the Department of Finance and set up as a provincial corporation. A stand-alone structure is consistent with the current best practices for the top public-sector investment funds, such as the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation, the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, the Ontario municipal employees retirement system, and the Canada pension plan. More specifically, the study

concluded that a provincial corporation structure would allow for improved governance, operational flexibility, and a much more focused investment culture.

We agree with these conclusions and expect that these improvements will result in a greater investment return for AIM's clients over time. For example, every tenth of a per cent in net value-added investment returns per year would mean \$16 million per year net income to the heritage fund or close to \$50 million per year on all the balanced investment portfolios AIM manages. Mr. Speaker, in the study they predicted that we would be seeing increases of 100 basis points, which would rise to around a \$500 million improvement on a per year basis if we achieve that. We're slightly more conservative, and we're expecting to receive anywhere from 25 to 50 basis points, but even at that we're looking at a potential of \$250 million.

I can certainly appreciate that there might be some concerns about putting our savings, pension plans, and other funds in a stand-alone organization, but let me assure the Assembly that this has been foremost on my mind as we developed the plan to create this new corporation and is indeed reflected in the legislation that I am moving today. While the new AIM corporation will have greater operational flexibility, the investment policies for the various funds will continue to be set by the clients, including the government and pension plan boards. I'll reiterate that: the investment policies for the various funds will continue to be set by the clients, including the government and the pension plan boards.

Furthermore, Bill 22 proposes controls and accountability tools. For example, the oversight of AIM will be turned over to a professional board of directors appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The government will have the ability to issue directives to the corporation. AIM will be subject to the Fiscal Responsibility Act, and its budget will ultimately have to be approved and published as part of the government's budget process in the same manner as other noncommercial provincial corporations. The Auditor General will be the auditor for the corporation and be entitled to attend, call, and be heard at all meetings of the corporation's audit committee. A memorandum of understanding between the government and the corporation will specify roles and expectations regarding the corporation's mandate, accountability, and reporting requirements.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it perfectly clear that we're doing this not because we're unhappy with the performance of our investment operations – our staff does a wonderful job – but we truly feel and, certainly, the study has shown us that by putting in the provincial corporation, we will give them more flexibility, that we have the potential of creating an investment centre in Alberta. This investment fund will be the fifth-largest investment fund in Canada, and it will be centred here in Alberta.

So, Mr. Speaker, I certainly urge all members of the Legislature to give support to Bill 22, which is a very critical bill. With that, I would adjourn debate on Bill 22, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 6

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Dunford: Curling capital of the world.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and move second reading of Bill 6, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007.

In 2003 the government of Alberta introduced the Post-secondary Learning Act, which consolidated several pieces of legislation to more effectively govern the postsecondary education system. As our government works with the postsecondary system to transform our practices, we continue to find ways to improve the Post-secondary Learning Act while maintaining accountability.

This bill proposes several amendments to the act that will enhance its clarity, flexibility, and responsiveness to the needs of postsecondary institutions. In addition to the housekeeping amendments around the wording of graduate student associations the amendments we are proposing concern expanded regulatory authority for the establishment of alternative academic councils, board terms at colleges and technical institutes, disposition of land, pooled trust funds, and the approval process for private degree programs.

I would like to take the time of this House, Mr. Speaker, to briefly outline each amendment. In regard to alternative academic councils the act allows for colleges and technical institutes, through a regulation, to adopt an alternative academic council model with ministerial approval. The alternative model supports colleges and technical institutes moving to degree granting. It is somewhat similar to that of a general faculties council at universities, where academic staff are more involved in decisions about academic programs. Through the consultation process on the development of the regulation colleges and technical institutes requested that eligibility criteria be reflected in the regulation for transparency and clarity. The current authority outlined in the act only allows for powers, duties, and procedures on establishment. This amendment would allow for eligibility criteria as well.

Now, what was asked for in the consultations, Mr. Speaker, was that to be eligible to adopt an alternative academic council, the college or technical institute must reflect 40 per cent of total credit FLEs, which are full-load equivalents, enrolment in baccalaureate degree programs as approved by the Campus Alberta Quality Council, and that, of course, is the amendment to meet that recommendation.

2:50

Regarding boards, currently college and technical institute board chairs may serve for a maximum of two terms as a member or as a chair. This means that a member serving his or her second term and who has gained extensive experience and knowledge cannot serve as chair if the position becomes vacant. After consultation with colleges and technical institutes we are proposing that members, if appointed chair during their second term, have the opportunity to serve one additional full term as board chair. This provides some additional flexibility but maintains the term-certain period.

The next change is regulating the disposition of land at public postsecondary institutions. This demonstrates government's commitment to the autonomous board-governed institution model and the government's role to monitor institution planning and development. Under the existing provisions institutions are required to obtain Lieutenant Governor in Council approval to sell land being used for the purposes of the board and lease land held by the board for leases of more than five years.

Let's first focus on the sale of land component to the amendment. Given that land is an important commodity, it is critical that we maintain approval on land sales at institutions to ensure that we are meeting the long-term needs of the province. However, institutions also have land donated or willed to them. Often this land is not located near the main campus and has not been part of the long-term planning for the institution. In those cases the amendment will provide some flexibility and enable boards to sell the land if that

seems appropriate. This amendment also impacts leases, such as leases for coffee shops, food courts, restaurants, and other businesses that provide services to students, staff, and faculty. This legislative change will eliminate the need for institutions to request Lieutenant Governor in Council approval for such routine operational leases.

The pooled trust fund amendment is a change that will ensure consistency with currently accepted practices. The change will allow boards to pool trust and nontrust funds and to encroach on capital. Institutions are given a variety of funds as trusts. There are many that are actually small amounts of money. To help institutions maximize their return on these funds, trust and nontrust funds need to be pooled. The Auditor General monitors institutions' investments, including those of pooled accounts, as part of its annual audit. There have never been any concerns regarding how an institution invests its trusts. In most cases the institutions advise how they invest any donated amounts.

The final amendment deals with the approval of private degree programs. Currently private institutions wishing to offer degree programs must go through a system co-ordination review by the ministry, followed by the Campus Alberta Quality Council review process. Once they meet all of the requirements, they must obtain Lieutenant Governor in Council approval for both designation as a degree-granting institution and approval of the program. This must occur each time they wish to offer a new degree program. Under the amendment private institutions would still go through the examination of how the degree fits with programs offered across the system and the rigorous Campus Alberta Quality Council review process. If the institution is proposing to offer a degree program for the first time, it would still require Lieutenant Governor in Council approval to become a degree-granting institution. However, any subsequent degree proposals would be approved by the minister, which is consistent with the approval process for public institutions.

This process would be more efficient and timely while still ensuring quality and system co-ordination. Campus Alberta Quality Council closely monitors approved degree programs to ensure that they continue to meet quality standards. As you can see, these amendments are designed to enhance the clarity and flexibility of the Post-secondary Learning Act and be responsive to the needs of postsecondary institutions.

I ask that all members support Bill 6. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today on second reading of Bill 6, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the shadow minister for advanced education on this side of the House, and speak to the bill being brought forward to the House today. In general I would like to tell the Member for Lethbridge-West that we are supportive of this bill. We like this bill. [some applause] I hope you didn't bruise your hand with all that table thumping there, but thanks for the endorsement of the endorsement.

We have just a couple of concerns with it, which I'll point out in brief here, and then we can deal with in more detail in clause by clause study in Committee of the Whole. First, let me say generally that we have not always supported all parts of the Post-secondary Learning Act. The Post-secondary Learning Act was introduced back in 2003 as Bill 43, a bill which the Alberta Liberal caucus at the time opposed, a position in line with that of student groups. It was amended in 2005 with Bill 9 and Bill 55 and in 2006 with Bill 40. Bill 40, of course, was the bill that took tuition fee limits out of

legislation and placed them in regulations, a move that the Alberta Liberal caucus strongly opposed and continues to oppose.

Bill 55, on the other hand, was something that we very much supported because that was the bill that introduced this concept – well, more than a concept – the alternative academic council. That is, as we talked about in the House at the time, absolutely crucial to making sure that when we grant institutions other than universities in this province degree-granting status, the students get full value for the not inconsiderable amount of money that they and their spouses and their parents and their loved ones sometimes have spent and sometimes that the government of Alberta has advanced them on their education. A baccalaureate degree granted in the province of Alberta that is not recognized by other institutions outside this province is not worth very much at all to someone who wants to go on to graduate study at the institution of his or her choice. Those problems have occurred, and Bill 55 could be accurately described as the first attempt to deal with that in a positive way. What Bill 55 sought to do, of course, was set up these alternative academic councils, which were a way and continue to be a way of achieving the governance requirements of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the AUCC.

Now, every university in this province is a member of AUCC. Colleges and technical institutes have not been, and for those colleges that want to move to a broader degree-granting status if not full out university status some day, membership in AUCC, a national accreditation, is absolutely key. There is no accrediting body per se in Canada. There is some thought that's given from time to time that maybe Campus Alberta Quality Council could grow into that national accrediting body, but it's not there yet. The best option that we have is membership in the AUCC because not only does that confer certain recognition and status on the member institution that's recognized by all other member institutions but it does set certain standards. This is what Bill 55 sought to do. That was why we were so happy to support it, specifically in the case of Mount Royal College, which has ambitions to become a university some day, sooner rather than later, we on this side of the House hope, as they do at Mount Royal, and in the case of any other college or institution not a university in this province at this time, or not yet, that desires to grant baccalaureate degrees that will be of full value to their students.

3:00

When we look at Bill 6 and its amendment of section 47.1, we're very much in support of that. On the surface it appears to be placing more power in the minister's hands than normally. Those of you on the government side of the House might expect me to rail on about that to some extent, but I think we understand that what's going on here is just setting out what currently occurs. Proposals for alternative academic councils need to be approved by the minister. This change just means that the minister must set out in the regulations the requirements for that approval. So we're fine with that.

In fact, we're fine with most of the bill, and we're probably going to be fine with all of the bill if we could just get a little bit of clarification on the language in a couple of the sections that are to be amended; for instance, section 67, the one that deals with changes to how land held by the board of public postsecondary institutions can be disposed of. It allows the lease of any land for more than five years without the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council as long as it is "for the purpose of providing support services to the students" – and it puts support services in quotes – "faculty or staff" of the institution. And the support services are to be determined in government regulations.

So all we need to be happy – unless, of course, you give us the

wrong answer, an answer we don't like – is a clarification on what will be considered support services. I think that when the Member for Lethbridge-West introduced the bill, he gave some indication of what those support services might be. I would like to get more clarification, and if we can do that at committee stage, we're going to be quite satisfied with where we're going with that unless, of course, there's something in there to be considered as support service that just doesn't pass muster with us. But we shall see, and we'll talk about that more at committee stage.

The other area that we have a little bit of concern about, again in terms of needing some clarification of the regulation wording, is the amendment to section 76, which gives boards the ability to withdraw some of the capital of trust funds in order to be able to withstand fluctuations in the amounts distributed by that fund. You know, trust funds are intended to serve as a stable source of funding through interest, but they can be undermined if you take out capital for short-term gains at the cost of long-term interest. So we should find out what kind of situations the government and the boards have in mind that would require these kinds of withdrawals. Again, as we go through the bill clause by clause, we can probably put those questions to the government, and I think it would be reasonable to expect that we could get a pretty specific answer on that.

So those are really the things that we're looking for. In general, Bill 6 clarifies the language of the Post-secondary Learning Act. In general, it makes legislation reflect current practices. It responds to some of the recommendations made by the Auditor General. It seeks to increase the effectiveness of the approval of degree programs. So those are all changes that we can support, and in some cases they're not terribly significant changes anyway.

So if we could get some clarification of those proposed regulatory changes, I think that this side of the House, or at least this Official Opposition Alberta Liberal caucus, would be quite prepared to support the government on Bill 6.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 6, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007. I've been listening very carefully to the speakers, each one of whom spoke on what's in the bill and what's considered desirable, a step forward, what's just routine, what's a substantive change. I think, in general, there are some minor amendments, it's true, that clarify the language of existing legislation. That's fine with us.

There are things that are not in the bill that I would have liked to see. I would have liked for the government to have used this opportunity, for example, to entrench in legislation the cap on tuition fee policy, a cap on tuition fee increases. We were very unhappy, as were the students, with respect to the absence of this legislative commitment on the part of the government when we had the last opportunity to speak to amendments to the legislation relating to this matter. So that's a disappointment. I would have thought that the new minister and the government under the new Premier would have quickly responded to the serious concern on the part of students and us to put back in legislation that matter relating to tuition fees and tuition fee increases.

That being said, there are some other matters. I think that the amendment to the existing legislation with respect to alternative academic councils adds a provision to the existing ones by way of giving the Lieutenant Governor in Council the power to establish the criteria that a public college or technical institute must meet in order to be eligible to apply for approval to establish an academic council

in a given institution. This will be done through regulation, as to what those criteria are. I want to return to it later on, Mr. Speaker, because we have received a fair bit of input and representation from the institution most likely to be affected by this change in the legislation, this particular change having to do with academic councils.

We have received representation, for example, from ACIFA, Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association. I think there are some very constructive suggestions that ACIFA makes with respect to the kind of legislative provisions that need to be spelled out and changes that need to be made in the existing regulations to strengthen the ability of academic staff to play a significant role in the determination of academic matters, as distinct from financial and other administrative matters, which have remained in the purview and under the authority of boards of governors.

Mr. Speaker, some of the provisions in this bill will certainly affect primarily colleges and technical institutes. Many of the colleges are moving towards either expanding the university type of offerings or preparing to move from two-year preparatory university-type courses to offering degrees. Some are already offering degrees. So with the expansion of the university degree programs both currently taking place and anticipated to happen to be able to respond to access challenges that we face, I think it is important to strengthen the role of academic faculties in the decision-making processes of these colleges, particularly decisions that have to do with academic curricula, academic requirements, and other important academic decisions. If we expect these colleges and institutions to in fact be able to deliver degree programs which enjoy a credibility equivalent to the one enjoyed by our universities, then surely it's important that we put in place legislative and regulatory rules which will enable academic faculties to play a requisite role, that faculties now play, within the university structures. That's what I think I would like to focus on, Mr. Speaker, after making one or two more points.

3:10

I was looking very closely at amendment 8, which amends section 124. It does in fact repeal section 124(h) to (k) inclusive and is replaced by a number of new provisions and subclauses. The only observation that I want to make about it is a little bit of concern that I developed as I was reading closely the new legislative provisions under section 124, particularly those subsections that replace existing subsections (h) to (k). For example, subsection (i) in the existing legislation reads as follows: "respecting the referral of proposed degree programs to the Campus Alberta Quality Council," and it says explicitly "for review and recommendations to the Minister." This provision is repealed and is replaced by a statement which is vaguer than the statement that I just read, that will be repealed. The new statement reads: "respecting the referral to the Campus Alberta Quality Council of proposed programs of study for which a degree may be granted."

There's not much said about that the quality council will in fact be expected to make a review and, resulting from that review, that it will be expected to make recommendations. That, to me, is perhaps just an oversight. Its absence, the failure to explicitly say that the quality council will be expected to make recommendations to the minister, suggests that the minister may in fact either ignore the recommendations or simply say that no recommendations are needed. I am suggesting that there's some vagueness there. I'm not suggesting that that's what's intended, but there is a vagueness there, and that bothers me a bit. That, in my view, needs fixing.

The other provisions that replace the existing ones certainly do refer to resident private colleges. I have this feeling – and it may be

an unfounded concern at this point – that we may be opening the door wider to nonresident institutions, some of which may, in fact, be for-profit institutions from outside of the province or outside of the country that do business in the area of postsecondary education here. Again, this is a concern that I hope can be allayed in our debate, in the discussion, but that certainly is a concern.

The concern that I have on this is not so much about profit, but as you increasingly move some programs into institutions that are private and for profit, I also find that the cost for students to go to these institutions increases very, very dramatically. Going to a private, for-profit institution for the same degree that may be available at a public university or college is much higher. Now, it is true that these colleges and universities don't directly receive any public money, and therefore one can say: "Well, they're in the market. If the price is too high, then they will not succeed. They will not attract students." But we know that given the accessibility problems, many of our students, in fact, have chosen to go to these universities not out of choice but because they have no choice but to go to these degree-granting institutions. And when they go there, they are going there funded liberally by our student finance program.

Students who are in fact going to these private, for-profit institutions to earn a degree for which they can't find a place in the public system pay much higher costs for the same thing. So the issue of equity here is introduced by the expansion and growth of the private, for-profit postsecondary sector, which is allowed to offer these degrees. That's another concern, I think, that I wanted to raise here, Mr. Speaker.

Now, with the limited time remaining, I just want to draw attention to matters related to academic governance raised by the Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association. Just quickly, I want to first of all draw attention to the kind of concerns that they raise. They support the notion of shared governance, that the academic faculty play more role in the determination of decisions, but they think that the present policy limits eligible colleges or technical institutes to those who have at least 40 per cent of FTE enrolled in baccalaureate degree programs or applied degree programs.

The difficulty with that is that it leaves most of the colleges and institutes out of the possibility to be able to establish academic councils. They hope that this regulatory requirement can be relaxed so that more colleges and more institutes, who in future may be able to offer these academic programs leading to degree programs, can have more academic input in the decisions that are related to academic matters on their campuses. So that's one issue.

The other one is that ACIFA also advocates for the revision of the academic council structure so that academic staff comprise at least a 60 per cent majority of the membership. Now I think it's a 50-plus-1 rule, that they have 50 per cent representation on these academic councils, with a possibility of this going beyond 50 to 55. What they are hoping is to again underline the importance of the academic role in the determination of academic matters, that legislatively or in a regulatory form this representation be increased to 60 per cent so that it approaches close to what the situation is at the universities around our province.

The third matter again, I think, relates to the issue of academic governance, and the amendments in this act deal with part of that. ACIFA advises that the regulation be amended so that the board and the alternative academic councils must each approve appointments to the council made under section 5(1)(a)(v). Presently this approval authority rests exclusively with the board, and ACIFA is requesting that this matter be looked at closely. If, in fact, we think that there's a great deal of value in increasing the role of academic staff making academic decisions in the governance processes, then they should

share this responsibility with the board of governors to approve the appointments, that this shouldn't remain exclusively with the board.

One more point they make is that ACIFA urges that the process to elect faculty should be jointly determined by the board and the faculties association. Again, I'm surprised – I wasn't aware of this – that currently the process to elect faculty resides with the board. I think it seems to be very reasonable for the faculties to have some say in the determination of this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to participate in the debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

3:20

Bill 8 Vital Statistics Act

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 8, the Vital Statistics Act.

Bill 8 consolidates the Vital Statistics Act and the Change of Name Act and modernizes the legislation in this area. Some of the highlights under the vital statistics provisions include prescribing information required from parents regarding the registration of birth of their child, removing the concept of child legitimacy from the legislation, and accommodating surrogacy births by requiring that the registrar replace the child's birth registration in accordance with a court order showing a genetic donor as the mother.

The provisions allow a child to be named on the birth registration in accordance with the child's cultural or ethnic heritage, subject to the discretion of the registrar. They include providing the registrar with the discretionary authority to refuse to register an improper name, such as a name with profanity. It includes creating provisions to deal with the registration of births, stillbirths, and deaths that occur on aircraft and includes giving the registrar the authority to register a presumption of death where the court determines a death occurred in Alberta. It includes setting out requirements around disinterment and reinterment permits to ensure that a body does not pose a health risk to a community before a disinterment permit is issued.

Some of the highlights under the change of name provisions include allowing minors to change their name or their child's name if they're married, an adult independent partner, or a parent or guardian of a child. The bill includes requiring an individual whose name is being changed and who is 12 years of age or over to submit their fingerprints as taken by a law enforcement agency. This provision will allow for tighter security to ensure that people are not changing their name to avoid criminal charges or past criminal activity. It includes providing the registrar with the discretion to deal with cases where it would be inappropriate to issue change-of-name certificates, such as witness protection cases. It includes providing that consents for change of name must be given by both parents or all guardians unless there's a court order dispensing with any of these required consents.

Highlights under the general provisions include requiring that the type of personal information to be included in a form be prescribed in regulation, that any decision by a deputy registrar or individual authorized under the act may be reviewed by the registrar, and that the majority of the registrar's decisions may be appealed to the Court of Queen's Bench. It includes allowing the registrar to order the

return of a certificate or certified copy if the registrar is satisfied that it is being used for fraudulent or improper purposes, and failure to do so will be an offence.

It includes increasing the time periods for releasing information about a birth or stillborn for genealogy research to provide longer privacy protection for people who are living longer. It includes having the penalties for minor offences fall under the Provincial Offences Procedure Act and includes providing directions for the court regarding information to be included in a court order for presumption of death and amending parentage on a birth registration document. It also includes allowing the regulations to set out the evidence required to register a non hospital birth, a non hospital stillbirth, and a registration of stillborn one year after the event.

All these amendments will modernize the legislation to reflect cultural changes, improve clarity, and update language and processes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to participate in second reading of Bill 8, the Vital Statistics Act, this afternoon. First of all, I'd like to thank the sponsor of the bill, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, for sharing his briefing documents with myself and my researcher. I always like to take the opportunity to thank a member from the other side when they do that because I do believe that it makes for better debate in this House and, ultimately, better legislation for all Albertans. So I do appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose and intention of this bill is worthy of support from all sides of the House, and I'm going to suggest that, ultimately, I will be recommending to the opposition caucus that it receives our support. However, I would like to point out that caution is warranted due to the sensitive nature of the issues themselves. We know that oftentimes attempts to accommodate ethnic and cultural diversity do lead to unforeseen problems, so I think it's prudent to be cautious as we proceed through debate on Bill 8.

I appreciate the sponsor's comments in moving the bill in second reading this afternoon. There are a number of questions that I do have, however, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to run through just some of them and, I suppose, also put the sponsor on notice that when this bill gets to the committee stage, assuming that it passes through second reading, as I'm sure it will, I'll have some more detailed questions in terms of the wording of the bill. Certainly, we know that at second reading the idea is to debate the intent of the bill, so I have some questions now that would be relative to that.

I note in the bill that an awful lot of it deals with the protection or storage of personal information. One of the questions that I would be wondering about would be whether or not the Privacy Commissioner was consulted in the drafting of this bill in order to ensure that none of the changes to the new Vital Statistics Act would violate the province's privacy legislation.

I note that in many cases the term "director" in the old legislation has been replaced by the term "registrar," and I'm wondering if the minister might share with us why that is the case, if there's a specific reason for that change having been made or if it's simply a matter of updating the language. In discussing this with the sponsor of the bill earlier, I understand that the Vital Statistics Act has not really been overhauled in a major way for some 50 years, so it would certainly appear as if it was time to do a major rewrite of the bill, and perhaps that's the explanation there.

I'm wondering if either the sponsor or the minister might share with all members of this House which groups or organizations were consulted in the drafting of the bill and what the primary reason or

motivation was for updating the act. As I suggested, perhaps it was just the fact that it hadn't had a major rewrite for 50 years. Perhaps some of the cultural changes that were referred to were the overriding, driving factor. I'm not sure.

Mr. Speaker, there have been serious questions raised in Alberta over the past number of years regarding the security of provincially issued identifications; in particular, drivers' licences. I think many members will be aware of a number of instances where there have been questionable practices around the issuance of driving licences, the renewal of driving licences, and so forth, so I'm wondering whether or not some of the changes to this bill might have been spurred on, in fact, by the need to improve the security measures in regard to private registries that are operating in the province.

It's been stated that this new act will reflect in many ways similar legislation from other Canadian provinces, Mr. Speaker, and again I'm wondering which other jurisdictions were consulted in drafting this bill or if the sponsor might be able to share with us exactly which provinces' legislation this is reflective of.

Mr. Speaker, organized crime has certainly become a real concern for Albertans over the last number of years, and the speaker mentioned sections of this bill that deal with name changes in an effort to make sure that criminals aren't changing their names just to avoid prosecution. I'm wondering if that is the only real threat that the government has identified or if perhaps there are other threats as well in relation to organized crime that this bill might be designed to address.

3:30

Several areas in the bill, Mr. Speaker, touch upon fraudulent activities and the need to prevent fraudulent behaviour with respect to vital statistics. I certainly think that many of us have either experienced personally or known someone who has experienced identity theft to some extent, and we've seen the ravages that that can take on individuals when they suffer loss of identification. So I'm guessing that, you know, a lot of this is designed to address those particular situations. I'm wondering whether or not law enforcement agencies were consulted in the drafting of this bill and, if they were, in fact, whether or not the sponsor or the minister might be able to share with us what their involvement was in the drafting of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, the government press release notes that the bill is being proposed in large part to recognize cultural and ethnic diversity in Alberta. I'm wondering, again, if either the minister or the sponsor might be able to share with us which groups were consulted to ensure that, in fact, cultural and ethnic diversity is respected, that we're covering all of the various ethnic and cultural groups that are represented in this great province of ours. I'm wondering whether or not the government might have plans to update other legislation that would be affected in a similar way, where there may be any number of cultural or religious groups that would be affected by other legislation and if this piece of legislation, having been fully reworked, is reworked to respect those various diverse groups, if in fact the government shouldn't be doing a review on a broader scale of other legislation and bringing it up to standard as well.

Also referenced in the government press release were remarks regarding section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and I'm wondering if that's in response to perhaps some challenges to existing laws that may have been made in Alberta based on the Charter and if that was the case, if the minister might be able to share with us whether or not that was, in fact, the case and what the specifics of those challenges might have been.

So with those questions, Mr. Speaker, I think I will take my seat and allow others to participate in debate in second reading. As I say,

I've got a number of more specific questions when we get into the committee stage, but certainly those are sort of the top of my questions that I have for the sponsor and the minister at this time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: I'll be very brief, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for this opportunity to make some comments on Bill 8, the Vital Statistics Act. Yes, it's clear that the existing piece of legislation that we have in place probably is outdated, outdated because there have been no revisions either to the language or to the substance of the bill over the last 30, 40, 50 years, and the world has changed. The world in which we live is a very different world now.

Reference is made to cultural diversity, that has increased, and that brings up questions of practices, childbirth, and other rights surrounding it. Sexual mores have changed. I notice in the bill in chapter 4 amendments for records on change of sex. I suppose that this was something that was very, very rare 50 years ago, so that's no longer the case.

But it would have been helpful if the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne had elaborated a bit on the bill in terms of what changes that are made in the bill reflect, in fact, changes in values, changes in cultural sort of practices over the years. So it would be easier to follow the bill and the changes in it, those that are related to or in fact represent a response to specific patterns of behaviour that have changed over the years because of cultural change in general and which provisions of the bill reflect, in fact, the increased cultural diversity, not just change in the same culture but a different kind of cultural pattern being present in today's society that wasn't the case, say, some years ago.

In general, by looking in a very general way, most of the changes seem to be in the form of updating to change the language or to include matters that were not included before, such as the one I just mentioned on change of sex. Others are administrative. There are lots of bills here that will need to be changed, I suppose. The bill repeals the old vital statistics one and amends the Change of Name Act while amending the Marriage Act, the Fatality Inquiries Act, the Cemeteries Act, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the Adult Adoption Act, the Family Law Act, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and the Insurance Act.

Yes, sure, there'll be changes required here that reflect changes on other pieces of legislation. Some of those pieces of legislation perhaps weren't even there when the old Vital Stats Act, that this act will replace, was voted on and became a statute of this province. Particularly, I think, because the bill will reflect matters covered by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, I wonder if either now or later we'll get some information on which parts of the act, in fact, are designed to accommodate the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. In general, Mr. Speaker, I think that the amendments that are proposed here are overdue, and in a very general way we are certainly supportive of this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available again.

Seeing none, are there others who wish to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening with interest to the discussion on Bill 8, the Vital Statistics Act, this afternoon, and I, too, would like to get on the record as supporting this legislation. This is more of a moderniza-

tion of existing legislation than it is housekeeping, I believe. Certainly, whenever we look at the press release that was issued by the government to alert the public to this legislative change – it's a little over a month ago, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne first talked about Bill 8. In a quick review of this I don't see any problems with it.

We may not notice the importance of this new legislation until we look at the *Alberta Gazette*. You can see that there's hardly an edition of the *Gazette* that is not published without a long list of individuals who for one reason or another are either changing their name or amending their name. It is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that a person can amend their first name if they've been known by a first name that is different than the one shown on their birth certificate as long as they were known by that name prior to their 10th birthday. They can also amend their name if they were never given a first name or were given a first name that was unacceptable to the registrar. All that is required to amend their name is to fill out an application form, sign an affidavit, and provide documentary evidence in support of their application.

Now, as I understand it, and I could be corrected, any person can change their name, their first name or their last name, at any time or at any age. All persons must fill out an application form, again sign an affidavit, pay an application fee. Sometimes I wonder about these application fees and whether or not they're appropriate. I've certainly heard at our constituency office people complain about the cost, the application fee. Again, Mr. Speaker, you have to provide proof of identity and marital status. Individuals 12 years of age or over must submit fingerprints taken by a law enforcement agency with their application. I believe the fingerprints are needed as part of the application to legally change a person's name, but I would like clarification as to what happens with those fingerprints after the process is completed.

3:40

Now, I had recently a constituent come to our office with an issue around her name on her birth certificate. She was born some years ago, and she was born on her family's farm. A couple of weeks after her birth her father went to town, I think to the post office at that time, to register the birth, and there was some issue around the name that was actually recorded on the birth certificate. The name that this woman had used all her life, including 45 years as a public school teacher – she had a university degree. She had lots of qualifications. But suddenly her name wasn't right. I was surprised at what it took for this to be corrected, and I was surprised at the amount of money. But if it's any reassurance to this House, I was also delighted at the response that she received from civil servants. They worked quickly and correctly to ensure that her problem with a typo was fixed. It was nothing more than a typo that was made many, many years ago.

So in conclusion, we may look at Bill 8 as a mere matter of housekeeping, but it's more than that. One only has to look at the *Alberta Gazette* to see the importance of this legislation to so many people across the province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, again Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to participate in debate?

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne to close debate.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. You know, I think I have most of the questions and some answers for members opposite. But if I run short, I'll make sure to cover them off in the next stage.

Like the last member talked about, this bill is more than house-

keeping, and I totally agree. It has some substantial changes and changes that have not been made for many, many years. In response to some of the questions with regard to the protection and storage of information, the Privacy Commissioner was definitely consulted on the fingerprints for minors. The access and privacy branch of Service Alberta reviewed the draft act for privacy concerns as well.

You know, when we talk about the new cultural, ethnic, and religious updating of this bill, the provision is intended to accommodate cultural or religious practices that do not conform with the normal naming restrictions. The courts have ruled that legislation should strive to accommodate Canada's cultural mosaic. The provision will reduce the risk of constitutional challenges, we hope. I can give the members some examples. You know, it's a north African tradition to list the father's name as the baby's last name. It's a Polish tradition to give a baby girl a variation of her father's last name; where the father's last name ends in an I, the letter A is substituted. It's a native American tradition to give the first or last name of a grandparent or a revered elder as a baby's last name. Just some examples.

There's no doubt that many of the provisions in Bill 8 are required in order to deal with modern-day occurrences.

The issue of security: there are provisions in this bill that spell out the requirement and allow for tighter security than is being currently practised under the authority of any further documentary evidence. Fingerprints are required for the police to check that individuals are not changing their names to avoid criminal charges or past criminal activity after a name change has been done. Government services is not informed if the individual has a criminal record. That stays with the law enforcement agencies.

The question was asked about the consultation, and there's no doubt that consultation on this legislation was limited to civil law, family law, constitutional law, court services, and Health and Wellness. There is a long list of stakeholders affected. I can give some examples of the stakeholders affected: hospital administration staff, physicians, midwives, government departments or agencies like Statistics Canada, Passport Canada, Service Canada, Alberta Health and Wellness. There are medical examiners that are affected, adoption lawyers, adoption services, government departments and agencies that deal with that. Of course, on the death side: the funeral homes, cemeteries, medical examiners again, researchers. The legal change and the name issues, of course: registry agents, law enforcement agents will be affected. Documentation issues: courts, vital statistics, other Canadian vital statistics jurisdictions, again physicians, registry agents. So it has a wide impact, Mr. Speaker.

On the driver's licence issue: the motivation to amend the act was to update legislation – again, like I had talked about – to bring it into modern times. The legislation has not been updated for 50 years plus. You know, we did use B.C.'s vital statistics legislation as a guide. It helped us in determining some of the pieces that we needed to modernize and harmonize as well.

I think that pretty well covered the questions, but if there's something that I may have missed, I'll make sure to cover it off in the next piece.

I move second reading.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

Bill 9

Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today

to rise on behalf of the Minister of Finance and move second reading of Bill 9.

The purpose of this legislation is to make administrative changes to the Tourism Levy Act that will provide clarity and make it consistent with Alberta's other commodity acts.

You may recall that in 2005 the Tourism Levy Act was amended to reduce the tax rate on hotel accommodation from 5 per cent to 4 per cent. That legislation also included the introduction of a penalty for late filed returns. Well, last year, Mr. Speaker, it became apparent that the penalty unfairly penalized small hotel operators relative to larger operators, and in an effort to improve the equity among these groups, this deficiency was corrected immediately through an administrative policy in the waiving of excess penalties. Bill 9 provides the legislative authority for this policy change.

Also, since the Tourism and Levy Act was introduced, it has become apparent that the levy was being overcharged by some operators. Since there is no mechanism in the act to require or provide refunds to purchasers, Bill 9 also adds a mechanism allowing a penalty for any operator who refuses to refund an overpayment to a purchaser.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007, will provide necessary administrative changes, enhance fairness, and improve operator accountability. I urge all members to support Bill 9.

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 9, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007, in second reading. When this act was first introduced two years ago in this House, it received broad support from not just the Official Opposition but stakeholders across the province. I'm pleased to say that in consultation with stakeholders this certainly appears to be addressing concerns that hotel owners, operators, and such have in mind.

It is addressing some issues that have arisen since the implementation of the tourism levy, which, I might just point out, I did still refer to as a tax in 2005. I will continue to refer to it as a tax in 2007 because if it's walking like a duck and talking like a duck – and if my colleague from Edmonton-Decore were to hear me say, “smelling like a duck,” he would have a little bit of a chuckle. But, certainly, in all respects, if it looks, acts, and sounds like a duck, it's probably a duck, and in this case a levy is still a tax.

Mr. Speaker, just a couple of quick questions for the minister. I'm not sure whether or not the Environment minister on behalf of the Finance minister would be able to answer them today, but perhaps the minister's staff will be able to get some answers to us before we deal with this bill down the road in committee stage.

I'm just wondering whether or not the minister might be willing to share with this Assembly all amounts that were overcharged by operators to purchasers for the fiscal years 2000-2001 to the present time so that we would have a bit of a sense of just exactly how big an issue this is in the industry, if it's happening a lot or if it's a relatively minor thing. Perhaps it could be broken down into small, medium, and large operators so that we have a sense of whether or not this is a difficulty, as an example, for the small operators due to the amount of red tape that is involved.

We've talked a lot in this Assembly about the need for a red tape review commission. Certainly, the small operators find the administration, the collection and remittance of taxes like the tourism levy to be particularly burdensome. That was a concern that I raised two years ago, and it's still a concern, and I'm curious whether or not

that might be part of the reason why we have these situations arising in the first place.

I'm wondering whether or not the minister might be willing to share with us the department's administrative costs for enforcing the tourism levy. Just exactly how much is it costing to collect this tax, and is it cost-effective and efficient to be doing so? Those are, I think, relevant questions that would certainly help us in debate of this particular amendment. I'm wondering whether or not we could learn how many people are actually employed by the department to ensure that operators are collecting and remitting this tax appropriately.

Mr. Speaker, in 2005 when we cut the tax from 5 per cent to 4 per cent, the greater Edmonton hotel industry implemented a 1 per cent destination marketing fee. Those who are so inclined and go back and look at debate from 2005 will see that that was one of the concerns that I raised right from the very beginning: while we were reducing the amount of tax that would be collected in the form of this levy, there was absolutely no assurance that municipalities might not move in and institute a tax to make up the difference. In fact, we know that that has happened in a number of places. So I'm wondering whether or not the minister might like to elaborate on the impact of having reduced the tax and then having some municipalities jump in and scoop that up with destination marketing fees or other like taxes.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be curious to know whether or not the minister might like to comment on the report that was issued by the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability that recommends allowing municipalities to collect a tourism tax. Again, this is an issue that's relevant in today's news and with all of the discussion that's going on around municipal sustainability these days. We know that that's just one of several taxes. I think it's eight or nine taxes altogether that are being discussed as perhaps giving municipalities an opportunity to realize some predictable, sustainable funding over the long term. So that would be an answer that I'd be curious to hear from the minister.

I'm also wondering whether or not the minister has been lobbied by the hotel industry for a renewed deal on slot machines and, if that is taking place, whether or not he might elaborate to members of this Assembly on the progress of those discussions.

I'm wondering whether or not the minister would be willing to provide a breakdown of tourism funding levels by province. How does Alberta rank in terms of other provinces when we promote ourselves as a destination not only within the country but, of course, internationally?

The industry itself has benefited greatly from this levy. I'm pleased to see that it would appear to be doing what it was intended to do; that is, put more money into the hands of the industry for marketing themselves. I note that in the last fiscal year \$48.3 million was targeted to the industry for that purpose as opposed to \$24.3 million two years prior. So clearly there's nearly double the money in the budget for the purpose of marketing that industry and marketing Alberta as a destination, as I mentioned, both nationally and internationally.

But the question, then, would be: how can Albertans be confident that we're actually getting value for that money? What sort of performance measures has the minister done to ensure that the money is being used as it was intended to be used? We know that they're getting more money, which was the whole purpose for passing the Tourism Levy Act in 2005. We know that they're getting the money that was intended for them. Now, how can we make sure that in fact it's being used the way that it was intended to be used and that we're getting good value for those tax dollars?

Mr. Speaker, I think I'll save the rest of my questions for the committee stage, when we get into a little more detail. But,

certainly, at second reading those are the questions that I have top of mind, and I look forward to hearing further debate and look forward to responses from the minister or the mover when we get to the committee stage. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to get up and say a few words, I suppose, mostly on clarity when we talk about support for municipalities. First of all, I want to say that presently municipalities in Alberta receive approximately \$723 million for support within their communities. That is not including the \$600 million that they do get from the Alberta municipal infrastructure program. I want to also comment that that is support that helps municipalities in a direct way, which does not include the support that not only my ministry but other ministries have.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about the minister's council for a second. The minister's council is a body of four individuals, which comprises the mayor of the city of Edmonton and also the mayor from the city of Calgary, the president of the AAMD and C, and the president of the AUMA. There were a number of recommendations. In fact, 12 recommendations were given to our ministry. I want to emphasize that they were recommendations to this government and that this government is looking at those recommendations, but clarify that they are theirs.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: May I remind you, hon. minister, that we are debating Bill 9, Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Danyluk: I understand, Mr. Speaker. I was just prompted by some of the discussions by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and his comments, which I thought were led a little astray, so I wanted to make sure that they were clarified.

The Deputy Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) is not available on the first and second speakers. I assumed you were debating the bill.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought the hon. minister was going to go on for some length. I was actually enthralled by it, and I was hoping that he would go on longer.

Mr. Danyluk: I could speak longer.

Mr. Martin: Please do. I, on the other hand, will be short, as usual.

Mr. Speaker, the bill obviously makes total sense. It seemed that some people were, to put it bluntly, getting ripped off and also the Treasury seemed to be getting ripped off, so this bill represents, I guess, a necessity. I think the minister said that they'd had to do it by policy, and now we're confirming it by legislation so that we have a way to deal with this.

I guess that the more important thing is that it looks like overpayments were made by purchasers of hotel accommodations, and then, as I say, the levy was not remitted back to the ministry. I'm sort of interested because I'm wondering if there are lessons here for the Finance department. If this is happening to this so-called levy of money coming in to the Treasury, are there lessons here to be learned on some of the other aspects of what we're doing in terms of the Treasury?

I ask that question because if it's happening in one department,

Mr. Speaker, it seems that it could quite likely, in budgets over \$30 billion, be happening in other departments. I'm wondering if the minister, when he's here, could allude to that, whether they see this as just an isolated case, which I doubt, or whether we have some other serious problems, and whether this could be used as a model for dealing with that.

Along with that, Mr. Speaker, I wonder what sort of money we are talking about, if they have any estimation of that. For instance, how many operators have defaulted on levy payments, and how many people have had to be reimbursed for the levy overpayment, and how much money didn't go into the Treasury during that time before the policy came in? Clearly, we had a problem here, and it's hard to tell, you know, how serious a problem it was.

Again, as I say, it'd be hard to say that we wouldn't support a bill when people were being ripped off and the Alberta Treasury was being ripped off. It seems to me that you'd pretty well have to support the bill.

I want to repeat. I wonder if there are some lessons here that we can learn in other aspects of government collection, whether they're called levies or taxes or whatever. Is this really just an isolated incident, Mr. Speaker, or does this show that we have some serious problems in Treasury and in other areas? I'd be interested in the minister bringing us up to date on this at some point.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, Bill 9 is interesting. When we look at this, certainly the highlight appears to be a reduction in the late filing penalty for hotel operators or owners. Now, in some of these cases where there were late filings, as I understand it, the fines were exceeding the actual amount owing.

We are looking at also adding a judicial collection provision so that the province can legally go after companies failing to pay the hotel tax. I don't know what kind of a problem this is. We could look at this and say that it's primarily a housekeeping piece of legislation. I think it's more than that. We only have to look at the consolidated financial statements of the province, and when we do, we also have to be mindful of the fact, as other speakers have indicated, that we reduced the hotel room tax in 2005 with Bill 21, that was introduced by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed. We saw the reduction in the hotel tax from 5 to 4 per cent, and according to the hon. member at that time and in the government press release, this change represented forecasted savings of \$11 million annually in costs for guests in Alberta accommodations.

When we go forward to the consolidated financial statements for 2005-06, it's interesting to note that for 2005 the tourism levy, or the hotel room tax, collected \$61 million. The budget for the following year anticipated that there would be a \$10 million or almost \$11 million reduction, that there would be \$50 million collected, but the actual amount collected in 2006, according to the government's own documents, was \$58 million, so the savings were not as significant as we had first been informed. Now, perhaps, Mr. Speaker, in all fairness, it was an increase in the number of hotel rooms sold. That may or may not have been the case, but it's worth noting that the savings that originally were anticipated certainly are not reflected in the budget numbers that have been presented.

Now, that's a lot of money, \$58 million, and many people have been promoting the idea of using that money to support a stand-alone ministry, a ministry of tourism. That was a notion that Mark

Norris had in the leadership race last fall, but he didn't win. You know, he didn't even make the cut to the second round of the voting, so perhaps that tells us why he didn't win: there's not a will to have a stand-alone tourism ministry.

A significant pool of this cash – I'm told up to 75 per cent of it, Mr. Speaker – is being used to promote and market Alberta hotels through tourism promotions. I would like to get an update in the course of this debate on whether or not that will continue.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was talking about municipal revenue sources and the fact that there was a drop in this tax. With this Bill 9, what would be the future? If we have a look at the report to the minister of municipal affairs that was presented on March 5, 2007, municipal revenue sources, one of the recommendations, of course – and I think we're going to get some announcements on this in the budget. I fully expect there to be an amusement tax in the budget for municipalities. I'll be surprised if there is not.

4:10

Now, on this tourism tax, if we're using it and we're going to continue to use it to promote the industry in Alberta, that's fine. But is there going to be room here for the municipalities? The hon. minister was starting to talk about that earlier, but I wasn't quite sure what he meant. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, when we look at this bill, I think it should be supported by all members of this Assembly. But in review, if we don't need the revenue stream to promote tourism, perhaps it's time that we should have a good look at maybe reducing the tourist tax even further or eliminating it completely.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to speak today on Bill 9, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007, sponsored by the Minister of Finance. This, I believe, is a very small piece of a larger problem and actually crosses between two ministries: Finance and Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

There are 17 organizations in this province that market tourism – they're called destination marketing organizations – which appear to be run on grants, not sustainable dollars, from the dollars that are raised by the 4 per cent on the tourism levy. This bill rightly addresses the problems with the fair collection of the dollars owed to the tourism levy. However, I hear complaints that Travel Alberta is insular and autocratic and that not all tourism organizations are, so to speak, in the loop.

In Lethbridge we have one of the oldest and largest destination marketing organizations in the province. It's called Lethbridge/Chinook country/southwest Alberta. They do an amazing job with the little funding that they get, and they have very dedicated staff and volunteers, led by their able general manager, Kimberly Lyall.

It is felt that tourism, at \$5 billion, is Alberta's fourth-largest industry, but with a few changes and some attention from this government this could easily be moved into the \$10 billion bracket. There is in the world today a particular interest in ecotourism and, certainly, in agricultural learning tourism. Tourism is especially important to our struggling Alberta rural communities. Without changes many current opportunities in this tourism area will be lost.

Apparently, these destination marketing organizations and other tourism suppliers were not the only ones who felt that there was a problem in accountability and the controls within the industry. The government itself commissioned a report to identify the gaps in

accountability and the controls that exist in the current tourism framework. The report was to be released to the tourism industry for general discussion and consultation. This report was named the Leitch report. It is finished but, not surprisingly, has remained on a shelf in some secret place and, hopefully, has not been shredded. It has never been released, and the problem still exists.

My questions would be: these housekeeping amendments come from where? Did they come from the Leitch report? If so, again it looks like some backroom decisions were made to bring these amendments forward. As I stated in the beginning, this is a small – and a very small – part of a very big picture. But I believe that until the Leitch report is released to the public and to the industry, we will never know why these amendments came forward, where they were made, and what information they were actually based on. These are questions that I would look forward to the answers to in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there others who wish to participate in the debate?

Does the hon. Deputy Government House Leader wishes to close debate?

Mr. Renner: No.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

Bill 10

Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 10, the Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act.

This bill will repeal the Horned Cattle Purchases Act. The objective of the act was to promote dehorning of cattle prior to public sale to prevent damage to cattle during transport. The objective has been achieved, and the act is no longer required. Producers no longer need an incentive because current commercial practices and market expectations promote dehorning. Producers now use modern methods, such as dehorning paste, et cetera, to ensure that horns do not grow back.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Horned Cattle Purchases Act came into effect on March 31, 1938, and levied a \$1 penalty on each head of horned cattle at the time it was purchased in Alberta. The livestock dealer incurred this penalty upon purchasing horned cattle from the producer. Nearly all cattle breeds were horned varieties. Polled or hornless cattle varieties were not the norm. The penalty amount was deducted from the purchase price to encourage the producer to dehorn cattle prior to public sale.

In 1939 the scope of the act was extended to persons shipping cattle out of the province. The funds were deposited in the horned cattle purchases act trust account. The trust account was used for various initiatives to improve livestock in the province and any other livestock work that benefited producers directly. The trust account also funded the administration work for livestock improvement.

The penalty was cancelled in February 1972, and the act has been in essence suspended since that time. On March 31, 1972, the trust

account contained \$1,915,625. Expenditures from the trust account occurred from its inception in 1938 and over the following years. The monies were used to fund numerous programs and services for the benefit of the livestock industry. These programs included a warble fly control program, a University of Alberta feed handling facility, and an Alberta Cattle Commission cattle marketing information service. The funds were also used for research in disease controlling grants to agricultural associations and postsecondary institutions. The trust account, Mr. Speaker, ceased operations on March 31, 1994, and the remaining assets of \$1,551 were transferred to the general revenue fund on that date.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I wish to confirm that a stakeholder consultation letter and discussion paper were distributed in August 2006 to 87 stakeholders, including industry associations, auction markets, assembly stations, livestock transporters, Saskatchewan and British Columbia officials, and the Livestock Identification Services Ltd. The majority of stakeholders expressed support for the act's repeal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate on Bill 10, the Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act. I must say to the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat that that was an excellent overview of the bill at this time. It reminded me very much of some of the historical vignettes that I have heard in this Assembly recently. Certainly, I would like to say at this time that I would support this legislation. Hopefully our cattle industry will continue to prosper, and we will all benefit economically from the cattlemen and the cattlemen's association.

Thank you.

4:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering why a major bill like this wasn't carried forward by the minister of agriculture. Then I looked over and I saw the previous minister of agriculture, and I thought: why didn't he bring this forward? It's under new management, but it's a bill.

Again, thank you for the history lesson. You did an excellent job. You didn't even smile once. You were straightforward. They certainly had the right person bring it through.

Mr. Speaker, the only thing I regret is seeing a bill of this importance not being – it seems to me that this would have been better than the lobbyist registry for Bill 1, and I don't know why the Premier didn't bring it through. Anyhow, I guess we're getting rid of a useless act that we don't need. I know that you've been lying awake at nights worrying about this, but we, too, are going to support the bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. Questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to participate in debate in second reading on Bill 10, the Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act. I wouldn't want to let this opportunity go by without jumping up and participating.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of really quick questions. I don't think there's an awful lot that can be said about this particular bill, but I do

have a couple of questions. I suppose the first would be either to the sponsor or to the minister about how it came to light that this bill would be one that would come forward. I know that it actually did come to us first last year in the miscellaneous statutes amendment act, but I'm curious what the process was that brought this particular one to light because we know for a fact that occasionally we do see bills like this that come to the House that are outdated, that are on the books and are no longer needed.

None of us will ever forget the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act, which we had a certain amount of fun with. There was some very humorous debate. I'd like to go back and reread it, actually. It was quite comical, but at the same time it dealt with a very serious issue around the marketing of vegetables in this province. Particularly in the area around Edmonton there's a long and proud history of vegetable sales, growing, and marketing, so it was actually quite important to have had that debate.

And as we all know, of course, there's a long and storied history – and the Member for Cypress Hills-Medicine Hat shared some of it with us – around the Horned Cattle Purchases Act.

Mr. MacDonald: You've never been on a cattle drive?

Mr. R. Miller: I have never been on a cattle drive, in response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but it is on my list of things to do, I can assure you.

Anyhow, that would be my first question to either the sponsor or the minister: what in particular elevated this bill to your attention, that caused it to be before us today? Further to that, then, would be: what steps is the minister taking in his department to identify other bills that might also be out of date or not any longer necessary, not any longer in current use? Can we perhaps see more of these bills in front of the House?

Again, I refer to the need for a red tape commission. One of the really neat things the B.C. Legislature has done with their legislation surrounding red tape is that for every new regulation that the government introduces, they have to eliminate a regulation. At one time, actually, two regulations had to go out when a new regulation came in. Perhaps that's something that this Chamber should consider. Maybe we should have a policy that for every new bill that this Assembly considers, we should be looking for more of these horned cattle purchases acts and dumping those off the books in a spirit of good housekeeping.

So those would be the questions that I have for either the sponsor or the minister in second reading. I certainly hope that there is more of this spirited debate because I am quite enjoying listening to the various thoughts on this act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Just in response, Mr. Speaker, maybe I could clear up a couple of issues here at the same time and answer both questions from the hon. member too. Some bills are quite onerous, and it's just maybe too much to handle by yourself, so you hand them off. So that's partly my reasoning. I watched my predecessor last year struggle with his bill, and I didn't want to go through that.

I guess, in comment to what you were saying, it's just that these are the types of acts that are there. They should be cleaned up. I suspect that probably every ministry has one or two of them, so just in respect to cleaning up the books a little.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East for the debate.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, want to partake in this very interesting repeal act. I'm really quite – what's the word? – perhaps “disappointed” that this is going through. I do have just a couple of questions. One of them is that if we're doing all this dehorning, where are we going to get the horns to put on the front of our trucks? I so miss some of our trucks with the gun racks on the back and the horns on the front. So it's a question that I would like an answer to.

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

Dr. Brown: Well, in reply to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, I think the thrust of this bill is to remove a disincentive to having horned cattle. If anything, there should be more horned cattle present in the province to put on her bumper.

The Speaker: Would there be additional speakers on this bill?
Shall I invite the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to sum it up?

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, thanks for all of the fantastic interest in this particular bill. It is a housekeeping bill, and it certainly has not been in use since 1972. The reason it wasn't repealed in 1972 is that it was felt at that time that if for some reason there was going to be an interest in or demand for horned cattle again, perhaps things should be left in place. That's why it was left. It wasn't taken out when it was no longer required in '72.

With regard to the horns, most of the horns now are fake. They're fibreglass; they last longer.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

Bill 12

Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on behalf of the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry to move second reading of Bill 12, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007.

Last winter the government settled a class-action lawsuit regarding how we handle debts in cases where a person is overpaid their assistance. At that time the commitment was made to take another look at our legislation and policies to see how we could respond to some of the concerns. The changes being proposed in this bill include protections for income supports clients and help ensure that our processes are more transparent. These changes are in line with the changes to the AISH legislation undertaken last session by the Department of Seniors and Community Supports. In addition, the proposed changes align with two of the government's mandated priorities: governing with integrity and transparency and improving Albertans' quality of life.

4:30

When the Income and Employment Supports Act was passed in 2004, it was intended to clarify the various ways that the government could collect debts owed by social assistance clients when their assistance was overpaid. For example, a debt could be incurred if a client reported changes in income too late for the cut-off time for their benefit. Although the intent was always clear, the legislation remained ambiguous and does so today. Whether automatic deductions could be made to a person's income support without first

getting a court order was not clear. As a result, we need to clarify the government's original intent as well as our current practice, where going to court is not required before a debt can be collected.

Automatic deductions from monthly assistance are the most common method of dealing with debts in almost all other direct-payment programs. These would include all other provincial social assistance programs and federal programs such as employment insurance and the Canada pension plan. This amendment act would ensure that any amounts already collected by cheque deduction under the current legislation would be considered validly collected even though the legislation was ambiguous.

People can go to independent panels to appeal decisions on their income support. For example, if the director of income support determines that a client has been overpaid, the person can appeal the decision, how much they owe, and how fast it has to be paid back.

The independent panels currently cannot decide that an overpayment does not have to be repaid; only the minister currently can. We want to make a change that allows the panels to determine this so that an overpayment does not always become a debt to the government. This would allow for a more independent and transparent process. At the same time, we will determine in regulation the circumstances that would warrant when repayment does not have to be paid. For example, the appeal panels could determine an overpayment does not have to be repaid when someone other than a client such as a landlord has benefited from the overpayment. The minister still has the ability to waive debt under \$25,000 when it is in the interest of the public to do so pursuant to the Financial Administration Act.

Some income support benefits are issued on condition that they are repaid; for example, when people get help to deal with an immediate need like a payment on a utility debt. Even though there has been no policy change, an amendment is needed to clarify that money owing in circumstances like these continues to be treated as a debt.

We're also recommending that there be a change to the legislation to make it clear that the government does not start collecting on an overpayment until a client has had a chance to appeal. This is our current practice right now, but it is not enshrined in legislation. Similar changes have already been made to AISH legislation in this respect.

We have also added in this bill a section to make it clear when a right-to-appeal notice is considered received by a client. This will make it easier to determine the beginning of the 30 days that a person has to appeal their overpayment notice. If clients can satisfy the appeal panels that they did not receive their notice, causing them to miss the appeal period, they will still be able to proceed with their appeal. This reflects the current practice.

In the appeal provisions of the bill we are also confirming that the appeal panels have the power to dismiss an abandoned appeal. The current legislation does not specifically address this. In some cases clients may start an appeal but not follow through on it; for example, they may not show up for the hearing. It must be clear when an appeal has been dealt with so that administrators know when to start collecting a debt.

The Income and Employment Supports Act governs overpayments and debt collection from AISH clients until the new AISH act is proclaimed. This is expected May 1, 2007. We've consulted with the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports to ensure that there is a smooth transition no matter which act takes effect first. For example, debts accrued under the AISH program are collected under IESA until the new AISH act takes effect.

In 2004 we brought in a new offence provision to deal with incidents such as fraud, so there is an avenue other than the Criminal

Code with which to pursue a case of fraud. That way we don't always have to criminally prosecute our clients. We're already experiencing challenges with becoming connected to the labour force. A criminal record would just put another barrier in front of these people when they try to get jobs.

We're proposing to establish a prosecution time limit of up to two years after the offence is committed or discovered so that fraud investigators have time to investigate and bring a case before a court. Since the act is currently silent on the time limit, a limit of six months is currently applied as a matter of policy, which is insufficient. This two-year time period is consistent with the time periods for prosecuting offences in other acts such as the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act.

The government has a free service that helps single parents get support. A change to the Income and Employment Supports Act will give the government the legal authority to provide child support services to all income support clients. Previously, apprentices and students funded under employment insurance were not governed under the authority of the act. Now more people will be able to benefit from child support services to help them stay independent.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, these changes to the act will strengthen the legislation to ensure that it will continue to serve Albertans well.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in second reading on Bill 12, Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for his good summary of the necessity of this bill. I think it's something that needs to be supported. It's mainly to clarify the repayment process and also deal with other issues like the appeal panels and child support and so on.

Of course, it's necessary that the government move to put its house in order in terms of the overpayment process because of the recent class-action suit against the province, as the hon. member has mentioned, when so many millions of dollars had to be paid out for alleged illegal deductions of social assistance and disability payments. So tightening up the process seems to be something that's quite necessary.

Granted, there are problems with people being dishonest about their assets and so on and misrepresenting the facts, so there has to be some sort of process of recovering debts that have been incurred and are owing to the government. This bill deals with that process of overpayments. It deals with the whole issue of child support, which seems to be a good thing, moving in the right direction. It deals with the appeals process, which seems to be important to get clear.

Now, I'll just read some issues that I think need more clarification. You know, in general I find a bill like this quite distasteful to have to deal with because it has a punitive kind of direction to it. I understand that people do not represent the truth and so on, but I mean, we're talking about people who are living in poverty here, who need income support. I think statistics would indicate that as a group they're no more inclined to engage in fraud or misrepresenting the truth than any other groups, including groups of lawyers or doctors or teachers. What we need is to have in place not just a system that's punitive and trying to get back money that's owing but also a system that ensures that people who are living in poverty have all the support systems that they need.

4:40

We've heard from stakeholders and people involved in working with people in poverty that the appeal process has been quite flawed.

It's very difficult for somebody who doesn't have the education to enable them to have the nature to go after what they need. The appeal process is very difficult, and in most cases it's important that they have some sort of person go with them to the appeal process to help them. It seems to me that the well-being of the individual must have priority in an appeal process.

When you look at this bill – and I guess we'll look at it in committee more closely – it provides the process where the director's decision concerning a person's right to appeal is communicated to the person in a number of ways, as if this is sort of covering all those possibilities: "if it was sent by registered mail or courier" or "if it was sent by fax or other electronic means." Well, Mr. Speaker, people who are under the income and employment supports are not people who are likely to have a fax machine or even have an electronic means, a computer available to them. If they even have a Hotmail address, they probably don't have access on a regular basis to a computer. In fact, they might not have a regular address too. That's a real problem. So I think that this is kind of legalistic. I mean, it's sort of covering ourselves in terms of the appeal process.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that people working on the front lines are social workers, people in social agencies. They know the people, where they can get in contact with them. There should be some sort of more human process of being able to really reach people to let them know what their rights are. This is basically what this is all about. A person has to know that they have the right to appeal, but if we don't go out of our way through the agencies that exist to enable those people to know what their rights are, then they're not likely to fulfill a 30-day requirement. I don't know. I find the whole thing too punitive, too legalistic.

I really appreciate the fact that the appeal panels are enabled by this legislation to dismiss an appeal. When all the information is received about an individual who supposedly has defrauded the system, after it all comes to light, then the appeal panel could reverse the decision that was made. I find that's an excellent addition and needs to be here.

I think that in most cases this is kind of a housekeeping bill, changing things to bring it in line with the AISH Review Committee's proposals and also the problems with the lawsuit. I regret that we don't receive a bill that really deals with the heart of the issue concerning people living in poverty. It's not the question of fraud and misrepresenting the truth and so on. The problem, if we're going to deal with poverty in Alberta, is having adequate income supports and employment supports.

My distress is that the gap between the rich and the poor is getting larger and larger all the time. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reported that the average annual pay of the top 100 CEOs in Canada in 2005 exceeded \$9 million, compared to \$38,000 as an average for employees. So the average CEO received as much remuneration by 10:04 a.m. on New Year's Day as one of his employees will be paid for the whole year. Mr. Speaker, this gap in income between the rich and poor is getting larger and larger all the time and will have serious repercussions in terms of social cohesion in our society. It's coming, even in Alberta with all our wealth. So we need to take more seriously the whole issue of income support. The income support in this province is just not good enough.

Mr. MacDonald: Do you think it should be increased?

Dr. B. Miller: It should be increased. It hasn't been increased very much at all since the early '90s, when the initial cutbacks to social services took place.

I take with me whenever I can the printout of the financial benefit summary for people who are receiving income support. There are

a number of categories: able to work, not able to work, or learners. I mean, look at the numbers. It doesn't matter what you look at, whether it's able to work or not able to work. The numbers are just too low to enable a person to have a living wage, be able to exist, survive in our society. Especially the housing allowance, which is very, very low. I mean, for a single adult it's \$100 if you're living with relatives, \$120 for social housing, and \$168 for private housing. Well, you can't get anywhere in this society with that little money. With our rising rents and lack of accommodation I fear that our lack of attention to income supports just means that we're creating more homeless people in this province.

If we are really serious about helping people in poverty – and I know that the intention of the income support program as it is outlined by the ministry, the reason they tie it to work all the time and have these categories of expected to work or not expected to work, is to move people off social assistance into the work world, where they can earn money and get an income. But in order for that to happen, there have to be adequate supports all the way along the line.

I learned that through my travels with the government Affordable Housing Task Force. Whether you're talking about emergency shelters or whether you're talking about transitional housing or social housing or affordable housing, people need supports all the way along the line if they're going to move through that continuum into the housing market. Mr. Speaker, there's not enough attention to the fact that the supports have to go with the person when they move off welfare into the employment world. Health benefits seem to move, not for everybody but for some. They move as the person finds employment. Housing allowance does not and maybe should move with the person when they move from social assistance to the employment world.

It just distresses me that we are more concerned about punitive action for the few that take advantage of the system or do not report everything they're supposed to report and get punished because of that. We're more concerned about that than we are concerned about people actually being able to live with a living wage in Alberta.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The title of the act, income and employment supports, suggests that we need to actually support these people and move them along. I would prefer to have bills that deal with that. At least we could have a proposal to index the welfare rates, the rates for people able to work and not able to work, a market-basket approach, some way of attaching the rates to inflation and to a changing standard of living so that the decisions would not always be arbitrary.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's all I want to say about this bill. In general, I think it's a housekeeping bill, and I would accept most of it. Maybe at the end of the Committee of the Whole we'll look more closely at particular parts.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

4:50

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am particularly concerned with this one, of course, because it does overlap into AISH and to all of the people that are presently living in poverty. They speak about the overpayments and that it can happen through the misrepresentation of facts by individuals or through bureaucratic errors. Then further on it says that if overpayments are based on false or misleading information provided by a financial administrator, that individual

may be held responsible for repaying the debt. I'm not sure that I understand exactly who they mean by a financial administrator. If it's someone in the government, is not the government responsible for this?

One of the other things that they are speaking of is to have people to go after to get the money that they are eligible for through child support. I certainly agree with that principle; however, in practicality many single moms are just holding their heads and certainly those of their children above water. Maintenance enforcement is backlogged, and often these women are unable to secure the dollars from deadbeat parents. Although the predominant number, of course, is women, there are certainly some men out there who are trying to raise their children minus the money that they actually should be getting from the mothers.

There are mechanisms to gain child support when the debtor is either unresponsive or does not have the financial resources to provide support, but as I've mentioned before, they are notoriously unsuccessful. We need additional support to be provided through this act to help the client come to an agreement with the former spouse or the partner or certainly the parent of the child in question and receive the support that they are owed. However, while that is happening, I don't believe that they should be denied the money that they need to live a life of dignity or, in fact, be able to raise their children properly.

I also believe that an impartial appeal process is very, very essential. It should not be appealed by someone within the department who doesn't necessarily have a vested interest but certainly would be looking at it, I believe, in a different light than someone who really is impartial.

Also, an attitude change on the front lines. I'm not saying that many of the people that work out there are not compassionate and don't feel for these people that they're dealing with, but a really good attitude change would go an awful long way to better co-operation between the government and the clients that are receiving the help. Many of them really do require that hand up. If that truly was the attitude that the former Premier loved to quote – hand up, not handout – then many misunderstandings of form filling-out and the process, which becomes very, very difficult, would be eliminated.

Many recipients feel that they are labelled cheaters before they even receive any dollars. Again, it's an attitude. Are there scam artists within the social system? Of course there are. Of course there are, as we all know. But do you know what? They are in every segment of society. We have an alleged scam artist at the moment at the very highest level, and he's currently in the courts in the United States. Again, he is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

The Nigerian telephone scam: you know that these scams, these kinds of things happen, but it truly is a very small percentage. Unfortunately, the majority often pay for that small percentage, but it doesn't have to be that way. Common courtesy and caring only take seconds, and it goes a long way. Often people have found, when they're dealing with government agencies of many kinds, that if they don't ask the right question, they don't get the right answer. I believe that government employees should be doing all they can to make sure that the right questions are asked.

I, like my colleague, also feel that the tone is very punitive and unfair. It has already been noted that in December of '05 the government did settle a class-action suit which involved \$100 million. Again, the government was accused of arbitrarily interpreting its own policies and legislation in order to recover overpayments as far as possible. I believe that it should be an impartial appeal process.

The definition for child and adult support services also makes clear that assistance includes any assistance or benefit included in this act or regulation. Some of the things that I have come across in my constituency are that people on AISH sometimes get an inheritance from a parent or someone who has died, and this is held against them. I think it's most unfair. I don't see that that part, amongst other things that can be sometimes given to people just as a present from someone who would like to help, should be held against them.

With those few words I would like to adjourn debate on this bill, and we'll continue this conversation in committee.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature a trusted friend, confidant, supporter, and someone who is no stranger to the body politic. David Peter Taylor is in the public gallery today. He is also, most notably, a page in the Senate of Canada, and he's home in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford visiting family for the Easter weekend. I would ask David to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 21
Securities Amendment Act, 2007
(*continued*)

[Adjourned debate April 4: Mr. Pham]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 21, the Securities Amendment Act, 2007, in second reading. I think the first comment that has to be made on this particular Securities Amendment Act is the question of whether or not, in fact, the minister responsible has been sending mixed messages on the position of the government of Alberta with respect to a single national regulator versus 13 securities commissions across the country.

The media was full of reports over the last couple of months quoting the minister as talking about being prepared to dismantle the Alberta Securities Commission, for example, if in fact we were able to come to agreement on a single regulator. He has spoken out about the need for Alberta to compete globally and to be part of a global community when it comes to securities regulations, yet at the same time or very shortly thereafter he was very vociferously supporting continuing to move towards the passport system that this bill enables. So there is, I think, some real question, some real doubt in people's minds as to just exactly what the position of the govern-

ment of Alberta is when it comes to a single regulator as opposed to the 13 individual commissions and the passport system that this opposition continues to enable.

One of the questions that I asked last year of the then minister and I think is relevant to ask again, Mr. Speaker, is: to what extent are we exposing Alberta taxpayers when we carry on with the development of this passport system and all of the meetings, all of the resources both in terms of time and dollars that are spent towards the passport system? Then what should happen if, in fact, all of this comes to a standstill and we come to an agreement on a single national regulator? How much have we lost in terms of time, money, and human resources preparing for a passport system that might never be fully implemented?

5:00

I never did receive what I felt was a good enough answer from the previous minister on that question, and I'm hopeful that this minister will be able to address that because I think it's a very real concern. If in fact we're sending mixed messages as to what the endgame is here and yet at the same time proceeding to spend an awful lot of money developing a system that might never be put into place, then I think that should cause concern to all Albertans and is relevant to be asked in the Assembly today.

Mr. Speaker, I know that we talked an awful lot in this Assembly over the last couple of years about the Alberta Securities Commission itself. When there were serious allegations about wrongdoing at the commission, one of the things that the Official Opposition talked about and pushed for in this Assembly as well as outside of it – and unfortunately we still see no sign of it coming forward – is some sort of whistle-blower legislation to protect employees of the Alberta Securities Commission and, for that matter, all public employees when it comes to identifying inconsistencies or instances of wrongdoing in their workplace. I note with some interest in the Auditor General's report from this past fall several recommendations in respect to the Alberta Securities Commission that the Auditor General has made, some of which the government is in agreement with and accepting and some for which they provide lengthy explanations indicating their reasons for not being in acceptance and reasons why they won't necessarily be complying with those recommendations in the near future.

I think this brings back the whole question of how effective and how efficient the Alberta Securities Commission has been for Albertans historically. Certainly, it would seem as if a lot of the issues that were raised by the opposition and by inside whistle-blowers two years ago have been addressed. I think we're back on track and managing billions of dollars in investment in this province, and that, of course, is a good thing. But clearly those questions haven't gone away in the Auditor General's mind, and I think it's fair to say that they haven't gone away in my mind either.

Mr. Speaker, I think that for the time being I'm going to leave my comments at that. Certainly, I have many questions when it comes to the intricate details of this Bill 21 when we get to it in committee stage. So I think I'll leave it there for now.

As I say, I think that Albertans in general and certainly those stakeholders that I've spoken to are looking for some clarification from this government and this minister in terms of where we're ultimately going with securities regulation in Alberta. I guess that would be my biggest single question: have we made a decision once and for all that the passport system is what we're supportive of? Are we going in the direction of a national regulator? Is this sort of a stopgap measure in the interim? We really don't know. The minister's comments, at least in the media, haven't done anything to address those concerns. In fact, if anything they've actually left the question even more open and caused even more confusion.

So I'm hopeful that we can hear some answers to that and, as I say, get into the details of the bill a little further once we get into the committee stage. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a few general comments that I want to make about Bill 21. Certainly, a couple of years ago we had major discussions about how this Securities Commission was operating. I'll come to that, but I understand that the purpose of the bill is harmonization. I understand, having worked under the Securities Commission, that it makes some sense not to have 13 different people doing 13 different things. That's not the way money flows. It flows across borders. As a result, we called a long time ago for a national regulatory body, not a federal body but the provinces getting together and working on it.

But I have some concerns about this particular bill. It seems to me that when we look at it, they're clarifying the investigative power of people appointed by the executor director and other things. I guess that's all well and dandy. But when I start to look at parts of the bill, my analysis quickly is that they're weakening the oversight ability of the executive director. By enforcing oversight based on criminal proceedings in other jurisdictions, the bill effectively enforces and streamlines a passport system, Mr. Speaker. Well, it seems to me that what we're doing here is finding the lowest common denominator among 13 different jurisdictions in dealing with the Securities Commission. To me, a national regulator should not necessarily do that. We should be looking for laws that are fair and have some teeth to them. I see, for example, that the executive director is cut down in the types of things that he can do, I understand, because some other jurisdictions don't have that.

Now, again, I want to stress that I believe in harmonization, but I don't think a race to the bottom to do this is the right way to go. I would rather see the 13 jurisdictions get together with a national regulator and have some standards that make some sense. I'm hoping that if I'm wrong about this, the minister will talk about that. But when I look at the key section that repeals documentation of a registered dealer acting as a principal, repeals section 95, page 7, repeals the invested interest disclosure of the registered dealer on securities being offered for sale, number one, that worries me.

On section 105, page 9, it repeals the executive director's ability to oversee and regulate sales information. I don't understand why we would have to do that. I understand that perhaps some other jurisdictions don't have that, Mr. Speaker. We always say in this Legislature that we're the best, you know, in the country or the best here and there, but all of a sudden we're watering down even standards that we had here with our Securities Commission that admittedly in the past maybe didn't work so well. I wonder about that.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that rather than the group of 13 not being able to get together and the only way they can harmonize regulations is by sort of going, as I said, to the lowest common denominator – it's not what I think people would expect. I just look to our neighbors to the south. I mean, they are going in the opposite direction. They're making, sort of, corporate and business ethics a high priority. They're making their laws and regulations much stricter. It seems to me here that with this particular bill, because we want to harmonize, again, to make everybody happy, we're going the other way. I don't think that's what people really would expect from the Securities Commission.

As I say, with the 13 people rather than harmonizing to the lowest common standard, we should say: okay; let's work and get national

regulators, a national group, a national regulatory body, not a federal group but a national regulatory body, and work together, not with the lowest common denominator, but with laws that are fair but have some teeth to them.

5:10

White-collar crime is just as serious as any other crime, and I think we can learn the odd thing from our American neighbours. We should be looking, as they are, the opposite way and making sure that the laws and the rules are strict enough that people won't do it because surely that's what people expect if they're investing. They want people that they can trust dealing with their money.

As I say, I'm speaking somewhat from experience, having worked in the financial business under the Securities Commission here for a number of years. We always thought that it didn't make sense to have 13 different jurisdictions doing whatever. So my argument is not to not have harmonization, Mr. Speaker. That's not my argument. My argument is: let's do it right and have a national regulatory body with some laws that have teeth. I worry that this bill seems to be: okay; we can't get agreement, so we'll all lower our standards to the lowest common denominator, and then we can have a national bill. That just doesn't make sense to me.

Unless if I'm fairly off base about this, I'm hopeful that the minister or somebody will indicate that that's not the case. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford said, "Well, if they're moving towards a national regulatory body, I would be the first one to cheer," but not if it's, as I say, to sort of cut down the rules and to have no teeth, the lowest common denominator.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd be interested from the minister in second reading, before we come to Committee of the Whole, to understand where we are going with this because there are certainly some warning bells there for me that this is not what the public would want, especially after some of the fiascos we've had here in the past. I think people want laws with teeth when we're dealing with white-collar crime.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there others who wish to participate in the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a second time]

Bill 22

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act (continued)

[Adjourned debate April 4: Dr. Oberg]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 22, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act, in second reading. On the surface this might seem like an appropriate thing to be doing, consolidating nearly \$70 billion in savings into one Crown-owned corporation and controlling the investment of that rather large pool of money. In fact, according to the government's own press release, it would make it the fifth largest pool of money in the country. But I think there are a lot of questions that deserve debate, and I'm not prepared at this point to lend my support, or otherwise, to this bill.

I think it's something that I look forward to hearing a lot more about from the minister and other members of this Assembly over the next several days as we debate it.

Probably the first thing that springs to mind would be issues surrounding the heritage savings trust fund and the management, or lack thereof, of that fund over the last many years, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I'm on record, as is the Official Opposition, as having serious concerns about the manner in which that fund has been used, the manner in which it's been contributed to, the manner in which it's been invested, and to this day, in fact, the manner in which this government continues to rape profits out of it and dump that money into general revenue. That's probably one of my most serious concerns about it. This bill, unfortunately, doesn't address the fact that in the Fiscal Responsibility Act we still have legislation that mandates that after the fund is inflation-proofed – and that, I might point out, is something that we called for for many years and has only taken place just recently, thanks to the efforts of the Official Opposition, amongst others – and after administration fees are paid, every penny of profit from the heritage savings trust fund is returned to general revenue.

In today's economic climate, Mr. Speaker, I cannot imagine that there is an argument that would fly as to why we should continue to do that. It just doesn't make any sense to me at all. It doesn't make sense to anybody out there in Alberta when I go around the province. In fact, most people aren't even aware of the fact that we continue to do this. There may have been a good reason to do it in the 1990s as the government was charging ahead in its plan to pay off the provincial debt at any and all costs. There may have been a good argument to do it at that time. There certainly isn't a good argument to do it now. In an era of \$10 billion surpluses, I cannot imagine – and I don't think there's a member in this Legislature who could convince me of a good reason why we do that. So that is the first comment I would have in regard to the heritage savings trust fund.

Earlier this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, there was debate in this Legislature about the use of power walls in Alberta and the marketing of tobacco. It was mentioned in question period that the government continues to reap large profits and invest large, large amounts of money through the heritage savings trust fund – and I'm going to assume through other funds – in tobacco companies. Now, thankfully, there was pressure put on the government last year, and they agreed not to invest money from the cancer fund into tobacco companies, but that move has not been made with the other investments.

So I think it leads, obviously, to the discussion of whether or not we should have an ethical investment policy as part of this corporation. If this act is to be approved and passed in this Legislature, is there consideration being given for ethical investment policy? I haven't seen any indication of that yet. In the past we've been told that the fund managers' primary, overriding concern is returning the biggest investment return possible to Alberta taxpayers. That's not necessarily good enough anymore. I've raised all sorts of examples in the past as to various investments that might not be appropriate or might not be supported by the taxpayers of this province, and certainly tobacco is one of those.

I think that when you look, Mr. Speaker, at some other funds – the minister, when he moved second reading of this bill earlier this afternoon, spoke of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan. The Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan regularly outperforms the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. Maybe that's a good reason why we should consider doing this. The government talks in its press release about the need to increase the return on our investments, and they're telling us that this will enable us to do so. Well, as I said, we're regularly outperformed by the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the numbers from Harvard

University, their fund, which, I will be quick to point out, actually has an ethical investment policy as part of the fund, regularly outperforms our heritage savings trust fund as well. So I think there is good argument for having a close look at the way our funds are invested and managed. I would argue that there's also, not just from a moral point of view but also from an economic point of view, a good argument to look at the idea of an ethical investment policy as well.

Another fund, Mr. Speaker, that has a very strongly worded ethical investment policy is the Norway petroleum fund, which has been raised many times in this Legislature and now sits well in excess of \$200 billion, a fund that was started only in 1996. That fund has an ethical investment policy and performs incredibly well. So, again, I think it's time that this government moves itself into the 21st century and looked seriously at where we're investing those dollars, and if this legislation will make that so, then I suppose that would be a good thing.

5:20

Questions around the governance of this fund and the directorship of this fund certainly would cause, I think, any reasonable person to look at it and wonder how those people are going to be named. The government indicates in a briefing document to myself that the fund directors would consist of the deputy minister and nine other individuals appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council and that the Lieutenant Governor in Council would also appoint the chair of the corporation. Well, we know, Mr. Speaker, that that means cabinet, the Premier are going to directly be appointing these people. What are their qualifications going to be? We don't know. That's not spelled out in here.

I think that it raises a lot of questions about political partisanship. We know that now there is a review panel that's looking at the agencies, boards, and commissions across the province and how people find themselves appointed to those boards. Hopefully they'll come back with some really solid recommendations that will ensure that the people that would find themselves named to the directorship to this corporation would be worthy individuals.

Another issue that is timely in relation to the discussion of incorporating another Crown corporation is the TILMA agreement that went into effect on April 1 of this year. We talked about this in the House yesterday, Mr. Speaker, when we were debating the government's motion regarding the continuance of the Alberta Treasury Branches. Although the Finance minister didn't speak to it, when I mentioned the fact that the TILMA agreement would clearly have some major ramifications on the operation of the Alberta Treasury Branches, the minister sat there and nodded his head.

So we know for a fact that that is true, and without any question, obviously, this corporation would also be impacted largely by the implementation of TILMA. I'm guessing that that wouldn't take place in this case until 2009, based on what I've learned of the TILMA agreement. Nevertheless, it is a factor. I'm wondering whether or not the minister can share with us his thoughts on that and how prepared we are in terms of developing this legislation to make sure that it will be in compliance with TILMA, that we won't have to be back here in another year and a half debating amendments to this legislation because of the ramifications of TILMA and so forth. So I think those are relevant questions as well.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there are others that are anxious to speak to this bill, so I'm not going to take a lot more time right now. Actually, I am going to take just a little more time. I did ask some questions of the minister in supplementary debate, and I've not heard an answer to those questions yet, so I'm going to ask them again, put them on the record again. I think it's worthwhile to do so.

In supplementary estimates, Mr. Speaker, the government asked for and received in excess of \$7 million to reimburse a number of public-sector pension plans, research endowment funds, the scholarship fund, and some other minor funds for investment losses. Now, I asked a question during supplemental supply debate, and it's worth repeating. In this current economic climate, when the heritage savings trust fund is realizing somewhere between 5 and 7 per cent and other funds are returning 8 and 11 per cent and my own RSP fund, thanks to good management last year, I think is averaging 21 or 22 per cent . . . [interjections] Obviously I'm doing a better job than some people on the other side are because they're sounding like they're a little jealous over there. The point is that in this current economic climate we have, by the government's own admission, a number of funds that lost at least \$7 million. I asked the question: what were the ramifications? Were there fund managers that were fired? How did these funds manage to lose money in this economic climate? I've not heard an answer to it, but I would like to know.

I suppose an obvious question then is: is this bill in response to the fact that a number of public service pension plans and research endowment funds and scholarship funds were losing money? I've not heard an answer to that yet either. I asked that question last week as well. I think it's relevant for people to know. Why do we have funds that are losing money at a time like this, and what steps are we taking to make sure that that doesn't happen? Maybe this is the answer to it. I don't know, but I think it's a relevant question. I hope that at some point the minister or someone on his behalf will answer those questions because, again, Alberta taxpayers deserve to know. If funds are losing money in this current economic climate, something is wrong. Something is clearly wrong. What are we invested in that's losing money? I can't imagine.

Mr. Bonko: Tobacco.

Mr. R. Miller: I don't think tobacco is losing money. I'm not sure what it is, but it certainly causes one to wonder, and I'm looking forward to some answers to those questions, Mr. Speaker.

So, as I said, I'll cut my comments a little bit short and allow others to speak to this. I look forward to further debate, and as I say I really do look forward to some answers to those very pertinent questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make a few comments with regard to the potential for this bill as it goes through the process. There are a couple of things that I wanted to try and clarify from my perspective as a member of the Endowment Fund Policy Committee with respect to the gentleman's comment that this fund hasn't been earning as much as some others, whether they be from Harvard or the Ontario teachers' fund.

I guess what I wanted to do was point out that the difference between our funds under the endowment policy committee and the AIM group is that these are all taxpayers' dollars. Everything that's held inside under the jurisdiction of the government, whether it be pension plans or the heritage savings trust fund, is all invested on behalf of all taxpayers and residents of our province, as opposed to a fund something like the Ontario teachers' fund, which is invested on behalf of the teachers only. It's a different group of people, and the risk level, therefore, can also be different.

My goal as a member of the endowment policy committee, Mr. Speaker, was to ensure that we don't take needless risk or foolish risk trying to increase our percentage by one or two points compared to what maybe the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan can also do. As

well, the Ontario teachers' group have the ability to make direct investments into . . . I'm sorry it's hard to concentrate.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the noise level is increasing in here. It's difficult to hear. Let's recognize the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I guess that what I was trying to say is that on behalf of the taxpayers we have to be a little more prudent in our investment policies. There are restrictions based on our own current legislation regarding the heritage savings trust fund; that we are not able to directly invest the heritage savings trust fund into the oil sands, for example, or we can't just take, you know, \$7 billion and buy real estate in the province of Alberta with the heritage savings trust fund.

If members are concerned that the value that we're creating off the heritage savings trust fund is not high enough, perhaps we need to go back and look at the actual originating legislation for the heritage savings trust fund and make changes to that, once again perhaps allowing direct investment into Alberta, as was the original intent of the heritage savings trust fund. When it was set up, you could invest in things like the Alberta Home Mortgage Corporation, which maybe is not a great example because it ended up losing money at the end of the day. Something else we shouldn't forget about is that when governments determine that they're going to invest directly into various enterprises throughout the province, there is a higher risk that something can go wrong with it. The purpose of the endowment policy committee was to try and ensure that taxpayers' money was protected, which I think is important.

Last year the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview introduced an amendment to the endowment policy investment mix recommending that no tobacco companies be utilized inside the purchasing arrangements of the investors. We asked if it would be possible at that time to make a slight amendment to his legislation, excluding the fact that from time to time when a purchase is made of an entire index of funds there, may well be a tobacco firm in that. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview agreed to that amendment, and we passed his legislation. So at the endowment level we've been very careful to try and, I believe, be ethical in all of the investments that we're making, understanding that from time to time when a fund is purchased, there may be a tobacco company inside that fund of a thousand other stocks. We have to also be aware that we're trying to maximize taxpayers' return while being prudent and, I hope the hon. member would agree, ethical.

5:30

Those were my main points, Mr. Speaker. I think that the concept of moving this to a Crown corporation and giving a board of governors slightly more flexibility in the way they manage these resources can enhance the return for all taxpayers, having the clear understanding, from my perspective, that the most important thing here is that the government of Alberta still sets the policy direction for the investments and that the board of governors will have to implement that direction. We would still do everything we can to maintain the security of the major portion of these investments so as to minimize as many risks as possible while trying to maximize your return. That's always been the goal. I hope that once this is in place, it will achieve an even greater return for the taxpayers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the debate, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's again a pleasure to have an opportunity to participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 22. I certainly would like to thank the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for her remarks. She is a member of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund endowment policy committee, as was the current Minister of Energy for a time. As a member of that committee I asked for an update on what policy advice was being provided by that committee. There are a lot of members on the committee, only two members of the Legislative Assembly and, I think, six or seven other individuals, and the advice the committee provides is not available to the public.

I was surprised to be driving down the road the other day listening to the radio – the hon. member may also be quite surprised – and there was a CBC radio interview with two business analysts discussing this bill. The discussion, to say the least, Mr. Speaker, in my view, and I think the hon. member would share that view, certainly was not accurate. There was considerable blame put on performance off the fund and on the committee.

I'm sure these individuals had no idea that members of the committee had been requesting information on policy advice that had been given for investments and that it was not provided. But the discussion went on and on, and it was, to say the least, interesting. I wouldn't call it accurate, but I would certainly call it interesting. Whether they're pensioners or whether they're the taxpayers who own the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, the interest of those individuals was not served with that interview.

That being said, this is quite a change in direction. I was astonished to read my briefing notes for the last time the Alberta heritage savings trust fund met to realize that we were going ahead with this. It was the first I had heard of it. I asked for the report that was referenced, the Organization and Governance Review of Alberta Investment Management. This is a report that was prepared for Alberta Finance by Capelle Associates in January 2006. This is the only supporting document that I'm aware of that exists for this major change in direction.

I realize that there have been editorials written on this. I realize that some reporters have endorsed this. But I think we've got to be very, very cautious until we get some questions answered here. It seems to be expected that there's going to be a better return on our money. I would note – and I would be very interested to hear back from other members of the Assembly – that the administrative costs for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, for the Alberta investment management team or whatever you want to call them, are quite modest. If you look at the quarterly reports or the annual reports, they don't fluctuate. They don't vary a great deal. But when you look at the internal administrative costs, you can see where they seem to be going up and up and up. Just because it goes to the private sector or to another investment advisory group doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to be better.

Now, I look at the bill and I also look at Bill 1, and I have a question for the Department of Finance. When you look at the Financial Administration Act and you look at the definition of a provincial agency, Mr. Speaker, a provincial agency means “a Provincial corporation or a Provincial committee.” This would be our Crown corporation in this case, that we're proposing here with Bill 22.

What would be the scope of the new Conflicts of Interest Act or the Lobbyists Act? We're talking about a pool of money here that some say would be \$70 billion. Others will say it's only going to be \$50 billion. Would this Crown corporation that's proposed be covered under the Lobbyists Act, or would all the investment strategies that may or may not occur, would the advice or the permission to invest in certain enterprises be outside the Lobbyists Act? Are we introducing one piece of legislation and then taking a

considerable amount of money and excluding it from that much-trumped Lobbyists Act? That's the first question I would need to have answered before I could consider supporting this bill not only as a citizen of this province and a part owner of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund but also as someone who is very interested in a lot of the pensions that are being administered in this province.

Now, this whole bill, Mr. Speaker, is again based on this report. There were individual interviews conducted, and there was a review of documents. We are talking about \$50 billion to \$70 billion here, and this bill is based on a study that held two meetings with the Investment Operations Committee, on the evening of December 7, 2005, and the morning of December 8, 2005. Those individual interviews were conducted with the deputy minister, the lead external Investment Operations Committee member, four senior Alberta investment management employees, one Alberta Justice lawyer, and the CEO of B.C. Investment Management.

There was a review of documents. The key documents that were reviewed were the heritage savings trust fund, the endowment portfolio investment policy statement, the supplementary retirement plan for public service managers, the special forces pension plan statement of investment policies and goals 2005, the universities academic pension plan statement of investment policies and goals 2005, and a document called AIM. I believe this is the local authorities pension plan operating protocol for 2005.

I would also like to see letters of support from these various pension funds that indicate that they wish this bill to proceed. I've seen nothing like that, and I want to see what other consultations have gone on with these major pension funds. What we're talking about doing here is incredible, yet there doesn't seem to be much support. Now, maybe there is, and I've missed it. Certainly, I think that is a fair request, Mr. Speaker.

5:40

Now, also in regard to the setting up of this Crown corporation – and this is in section 9 – how will the bylaws be drafted, and will they become public? I'm not certain that they will.

The Auditor General and the Minister of Finance talked about this: it's going to be the auditor of the corporation. What role, if any, will the CIA, the chief internal auditor, have in this?

Getting to section 2(5): “The Corporation must maintain its head office and principal place of business in Alberta.” I think it should be in the capital city, Edmonton, Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this gets me back to the Capelle report. I was disappointed to see where the authors of this report were a little concerned – I mean, I realize that it's a long spring here, and the Oilers aren't in the playoffs – about people being attracted to live and work in Edmonton and work for the government, that they may not get a compensation package that would be possible in other situations. This really concerns me. This is a significant amount of money.

If we were to pass this bill into law, is there some way that the School of Business over at the University of Alberta could provide some formal training or some courses to students who are interested in pursuing this as a career? Could this bill and this pool of assets and the investment strategy surrounding them also be connected to the business school at the University of Alberta? If training and recruitment of qualified professionals is a problem for these individuals to maintain, well, perhaps we can fix that.

I'm not saying to offer a portion of this investment pool to graduate students, but certainly graduate students at the U of A business school could be trained to administer this program in a professional manner well into the future. If we've got a problem, let's try to solve it that way. I wouldn't want to see these pools of cash shifted somewhere else because I think they belong in the

province, and I think this corporation, if it is to exist, should be part of the corporate culture of the capital city, Edmonton.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are other concerns with this bill at this time and other questions that I have. I again would urge all hon. members to have a good look at this and to question just exactly how this is going to work. I've read the newspaper articles and I've listened to the radio interviews and I've read the editorials and I've read the bill and I've read the Organization and Governance Review of Alberta Investment Management company or firm or department of Alberta Finance, whatever you want to call it. I think we need to be very careful, and I would urge caution for the reasons that I have outlined. Again, I am not satisfied with this one report and the direction it is providing. Surely there must be more information available than this.

In conclusion, please provide letters or information that support this bill from the various funds that we are looking at. I think that is reasonable, and it is fair, and again I am anxious to see what the relationship between this bill, Bill 22, and Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, is. Is all this money excluded from any sort of coverage by the Lobbyists Act? I hope to receive the answers to my questions before we get too far in debate in committee, and I would like to thank the Assembly for their time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with considerable interest to speak on Bill 22, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act. It's an interesting piece of legislation that just kind of popped out of nowhere, I think, for many individuals both inside and outside the House. Certainly, it's something that has significance not just in the sheer volume of money that it would be representing, this independent Crown corporation that would be created, but also just the significance of where that money comes from and where, in fact, we would be investing it.

The bill itself, in close observation, doesn't seem to be particularly remarkable in any way. The corporation looks as though it would be an entity which a great deal of Alberta's investment wealth would be run through, including some of the other funds that currently exist, like the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, and the local authorities pension plan as well.

We, of course, are hoping that the regulations surrounding this Crown corporation would allow for the independent professional management of the monies, that would ultimately result in high, reasonable, fair rates of return for these various funds and the \$70 billion price tag that's being thrown around here. I've heard other estimates, higher and lower, but certainly this would put us in the range of one of the largest investment funds in the country, up there with other investment funds, including the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec and the Ontario teachers' fund and the B.C. Investment Management Corporation, among others.

That's up in the big leagues as far as an investment fund which could have considerable clout in money markets not just here in Canada but around the world, and that is also a good thing because, of course, we want to provide a fair rate of return for these public monies. In fact, it's a projection to boost those earnings for this fund almost immediately by \$500 million, which is nothing to spit at, Mr. Speaker, by any means.

The corporation certainly looks to be, in the eyes of the New Democrat opposition, a positive step forwards. We certainly do not want to shirk our responsibilities to ensure that the details of this bill and then this Crown corporation are not left out of public scrutiny

and legislative scrutiny here especially, so we look forward to looking at each part of this bill in detail. A full analysis, I think, would be appropriate to look at this fund, using the acronym AIM, in relation to how the function of the Quebec provincial fund and B.C. provincial fund have operated and have performed in the years that they have been created. It's always a useful exercise to look elsewhere to see something similar and look to adapt and improve on the experience of others. Those are two provincial funds that do exist here currently, and we can probably learn a lot from their experience.

I hear a number of MLAs speaking about the importance of having an ethical investment component to this Crown corporation, with which we certainly are in agreement. The ethical investment funds that are available privately both here in Canada and around the world have a good record and rate of return. You can put different parameters of definition as to what an ethical investment is, but I think that is certainly within the purview of our legislative capacity here, and I think it's the responsibility of us as well, considering we're dealing with public monies here that people expect to grow but in a clean and ethical and moral manner.

5:50

So where we invest this money and how we do so – certainly, I think the intention is to build that degree of separation to ensure that direct political interference is kept to a minimum, which is very important, but also we must establish as a baseline a certain ethical structure that I think Albertans would expect from us. We do have, in my own experience here at the Legislature, a very positive precedent in that regard, where the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I think, working together with the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, put together an amendment to a bill, an investment fund that we put together last year or a year and a half ago, to have a restriction on tobacco investment. That seemed to work very well. We were certainly amenable to that amendment, and we appreciated that sort of spirit of co-operation, that I think we can apply again to building the parameters of this fund that we're talking about here.

So we certainly support the creation of this corporation, and we want to ensure that there is proper oversight and reporting of any interest that is earned and what is done with it, especially considering that things with pension funds are being lumped together with other monies. We need to have a close scrutiny of how the monies from investment profits are disbursed back into the various funds that they represent. You know, dealing with pension funds is critical, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that no monies go astray. I would also suggest, as I said before, that we want to manage our risks when we're making such an investment and to optimize our returns but within, I guess, the sort of caveat that we are dealing with public monies here and that we do that ethically and do it in a balanced, long-term manner, and we create a fund that Albertans can be proud to see grow and build for our future.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would move to adjourn the debate for this current session on Bill 22. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, given the tremendous progress that we made this afternoon and the hour, I would like to move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, April 5, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/05

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

As we pray, let us also commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917. We give thanks for the lives of the faithful men and women in our military who have defended and continue to defend the freedoms and values we cherish. Life is precious. When it is lost, all of us are impacted. On this day I would ask that all Members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly, all others present here, and those observing these proceedings in their homes join together to reflect upon the lives of Canadian military personnel lost in service to their countrymen. May their souls rest in eternal peace, and may a nation be eternally grateful. God bless.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, in the Speaker's gallery there are six officers and other ranks from the Canadian army reserves. These men are here to represent the famous four regiments of the province of Alberta. In order of seniority the regiments are the South Alberta Light Horse, the King's Own Calgary Regiment, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, and the Calgary Highlanders.

These four regiments were at Vimy Ridge on the Easter weekend of 1917. From across the province men of the 31st, the 10th, the 49th, and the 50th battalions, as part of a Canadian Corps, gained a victory at great cost. The plan and its execution was a very model of calculated Canadian ingenuity, audacity, fortitude, and bravery. I would invite each of our visitors to rise as I introduce them: from the South Alberta Light Horse, Captain Shawn Thirlwell and Corporal Kirk Routledge; from the King's Own Calgary Regiment, Warrant Officer Ronald Senior; from the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, Honorary Colonel Sandy Mactaggart and Corporal Ashley Van Leeuwen; and from the Calgary Highlanders, Lieutenant Colonel Tom Manley, commander.

On Easter Monday in Ottawa and in each of our nation's provincial and territorial capitals and on Vimy Ridge in France ceremonies will mark the 90th anniversary of a pivotal event in the development of Canada. Please join me in welcoming our visitors. In so doing, we seek to give just and proper recognition to what their forebears did in the service of their sovereign nation 90 years ago.

The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui j'ai le privilège de présenter en votre nom, à vous et à l'Assemblée, des invités spéciaux qui sont d'origine française et qui vivent en Alberta. Ils sont assis dans la galerie pour célébrer avec nous le 90e anniversaire de la bataille de la crête de Vimy. La célébration officielle se déroulera en France le 9 avril prochain et sera marquée par la présentation du monument canadien de Vimy, qui a subi une importante restauration pour l'occasion.

Je suis heureux de vous présenter M. Gilbert Delplanque, qui est originaire de Valenciennes, un petit village à quelques kilomètres de Vimy; M. Eugène Trottier, un homme bien connu dans la communauté française d'Edmonton qui a passé la majeure partie de sa vie adulte en Alberta et qui a contribué immensément au développement de notre communauté franco-albertaine.

Aussi avec le groupe sont des membres de l'Union des Français

de l'étranger. Ils sont Mme Germaine Lehodey et M. Michel Lehodey, président honoraire de l'union; M. Florian Rijavec et Mme Yvonne Rijavec, présidente honoraire de l'union; M. Patrick Balthazard, secrétaire; Mme Isabelle Vallée, trésorière; Mme Corinne Arabeyre, vice-présidente et aussi présidente de l'Alliance française d'Edmonton.

Accompagnant ces personnes pour cette journée spéciale à la Législature est M. Alain Bertrand de Patrimoine canadien du gouvernement du Canada. Je leur demanderais de se lever et d'être reconnus par l'Assemblée.

Je vous invite à vous joindre à moi pour leur souhaiter une bienvenue chaleureuse.

Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to the Assembly a number of guests of French origin who are living right here in Alberta. They are seated in the members' gallery and are here to celebrate with us the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. For this event, which will take place officially on April 9 in France, the Canadian Vimy Ridge Monument has been undergoing extensive restoration and its presentation will be at the centre of the ceremony.

I am pleased to introduce Mr. Gilbert Delplanque, a gentleman who originates from Valenciennes, a small town a few kilometres from Vimy; Mr. Eugène Trottier, a prominent member of the French community who spent most of his adult life in Alberta and contributed greatly to the development of our Franco-Albertan community.

Also part of the group are members of the UFE, l'Union des Français à l'Étranger. They are Mrs Germaine Lehodey and Mr. Michel Lehodey, honorary president of the Union; Mr. Florian Rijavec and Mrs. Yvonne Rijavec, honorary president of the Union; Mr. Patrick Balthazard, secretary; Mrs. Isabelle Vallée, treasurer; Mrs. Corinne Arabeyre, vice-president and also the president of l'Alliance française d'Edmonton. Joining them on this special day at the Legislature is Mr. Alain Bertrand, with Canadian Heritage, federal government.

I would ask them to stand up and be recognized by the Assembly. I would invite the members of the Assembly to join me in extending them a warm welcome.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [As submitted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have two introductions. First of all, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature at least 32 students from Fort Saskatchewan's Win Ferguson school. They are accompanied, of course, today: their teachers, Joanne Simpson and Shannon Webb; also parent helpers Chris Temple, Cindie Hughes, Shireen Meehan, Diana Mossing. I had a very enjoyable visit with these fine students, and I would ask everyone in this Assembly to please show our appreciation for their visit. Thank you so much, and Happy Easter.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through to all members of this Assembly an individual that is seated in the members' gallery, Mr. Brian Heninger. Brian is an experienced and accomplished businessman with significant accomplishments in business, sharing a strong work ethic, personal integrity, and also a commitment to Alberta values. He's been married for 38 years with five children, 10 grandchildren – an impressive community worker in Calgary. I want to introduce him as our Progressive Conservative candidate for the by-election in

Calgary-Elbow. I would ask Brian to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce in the members' gallery representatives from Transfield asset management. We have today David Videroni, the vice-president of operations, and Rohan May, the general manager. They're going to be of course working in Fort McMurray at the Suncor project, an important project for Alberta and Canada. Also joining them is Mike Buffham, who is president of Buffham consulting and also provides leadership in local 92, many of whose workers work in Fort McMurray as well. I would ask them to all rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Alberta Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you someone who has been a volunteer and a member of my board in Calgary-West but, more importantly, as the past president of the Dental Hygienists' Association of Alberta. Now she's decided to accept another challenge and seek the PC nomination in her constituency, and if successful in that nomination, I look forward, as should all hon. members, to having her join us in this Assembly as the Member for Calgary-Currie. I would ask Patti Wickstrom to stand and be represented.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you and to all members of this Assembly a delegation of supporters and employees from the Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society in Edmonton's west end. I'd ask that they please rise as I call out their names. They are Brad Seneca, Gregg McPhee, John Morgan, Marion Morgan, Melanie Redshaw, Linda McPhee, Brian McNichol, Marie Kristy, Lovette Ferguson, Cheryl Whiskeyjack, Shalene Jobin, Sherry Fowler, Crystal Arcand, Margo Boyd, Jessie Powder, Dorothy Scanie, Kyra Brown, Francis Bald Eagle, Dave La Swiss, Andrea Watchmaker, Florence Shone, Julie Porter-Anderson, Corey Jewitt, Patsy Conroy, and Christie De Leon. I ask that you please give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the House someone who had a very, very busy fall. I know that because I met her on a number of occasions through that process. She works with Servus Credit Union here in the capital, and I also know that she does sell flowers as well because I've had occasion to buy flowers for my wife from her. I'm of course referring to Lynette Stelmach, the daughter of our Premier, who is here today, obviously, to make sure that he's on the job for Albertans. I'd ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: I hope the hon. minister knows that he's set every male in this Assembly back 10 years by admitting publicly that he buys flowers for his wife.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, but I buy flowers for my wife.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Joan Harvey. She's a member of UFCW local 401 and has now been on the picket line at the Palace Casino for 209 days. Joan is a widowed senior who is raising two of her grandchildren. She went to work at the Palace Casino four years ago. She's travelled all over the world while her husband served our country in the Royal Canadian Air Force. Joan is seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Statement by the Speaker

The Battle of Vimy Ridge

The Speaker: Hon. members, the House will not sit on Easter Monday. On that day 90 years ago this country launched what was to be a singular and defining expression of courage, character, and of national will.

On Easter Monday, the 9th of April, 1917, the entire Canadian Corps comprising the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th divisions rose as one for the first time in the first Great War. The day's opening weather, a combination of driving snow and sleet, was not unwelcome on the Allied side. Beginning in the predawn hours 49 battalions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, numbering over 100,000 men, joined the battle. From Alberta the 10th, the 31st, the 49th, and the 50th battalions were in the thick of the action.

To see Vimy Ridge and to have read the history of the first Great War is to begin to understand the cold enormity of the challenge that faced the Canadian Corps. The ridge's brooding dominance over the plains of Douai and the intractable nature of the allied campaign to that stage pointed to a prospect of dismal failure. How did the battle go? Let me read from the diary kept, contrary to the King's Regulations of the day, by the late Private Adelbert Franklin Brayman of the 50th (Calgary) battalion Canadian Expeditionary Force. He is a great-uncle-in-law to Diane Brayman, our acting head of Visitor Services.

Just as dawn broke clear we were well over Vimy Ridge and digging in for protection. At 9:45 a.m. we had dug in ready for a counter attack which we expected. As we looked back up that ridge in the early dawn we witnessed a scene never to be forgotten. The entire face of the hill was covered with German green and Canadian khaki. Men lay out there in their blood soaked field, some dead some dying. A horrible sight but one quite necessary. All day we seemed dazed and sore and the strain was beginning to show but we were supposed to hold and we held. Vimy Ridge belongs to Canada.

Brayman had captured the essence of the moment and the national achievement. Canadians had gained more ground, took more guns, and captured more prisoners than had any previous British offensive in World War I.

In 1936 France forever deeded Vimy Ridge to Canada. A superb and fitting monument was unveiled. There King Edward VIII gave an address to the thousands of Canadian war veterans who had made in the height of the depression a lengthy and difficult pilgrimage that evoked and stirred deep, plaintive emotion. In the company of the President of France, and having spoken in French, the King said:

All the world over there are battlefields, the names of which are written indelibly on the pages of our troubled human story. It is one of the consolations which time brings that the deeds of valour done on those battlefields long survive the quarrels which drove the opposing hosts to conflict. Vimy will be one such name . . . Around us here today there is peace, and rebuilding, and hope . . . In dedicating this memorial to our fallen comrades, our thoughts turn rather to the splendour of their sacrifice, and to our consecration

of our love for them, than to the cannonade, which beat upon this ridge.

Hon. members, we know what the contribution of Canadian blood at Vimy Ridge meant to Canada. His Excellency Daniel Jouanneau, the ambassador of France to Canada, has conveyed a letter to us and the people of Alberta telling us what Vimy Ridge means to France. I would like to read the contents of his letter into our *Hansard* so that all Albertans forever will know. The letter is dated March 26, 2007.

Honourable Mr. Speaker,

On April 5th, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta will celebrate the 90th anniversary of the battle of Vimy ridge.

I know how important Vimy is to Canada. On April 9th 1917, four Canadian divisions, who were fighting for the first time as an independent corps, showed the rest of the world the great fortitude and military ability of Canadians, in a very carefully planned, and brilliantly executed attack. Two years, and many feats of arms later, this commitment gave Canada the right to sign the Versailles Treaty on its own behalf, and the right to become one of the founding members of the League of Nations.

Vimy was a defining moment for Canada, but it was also one of the most important events of our 400-year common history and friendship. France will never forget these young men, all volunteers, who crossed the Atlantic to fight for the core values of our two countries: democracy, the rule of law, human rights and international solidarity. 3598 young Canadians lost their lives at Vimy, and 7,100 were badly wounded, to help us free our soil. We will always remember their sacrifice, as a token of Canadian immense generosity.

We remember also that Vimy was fought in the context of a large allied attack, with the French focusing on the deadly "Chemin des Dames" a few days after the victory of their Canadian brothers in arms. The French people will always be grateful to Canada, and particularly to Alberta, for its support during one of the most difficult times of our history.

Please convey my warm regards and my respect to all the Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Yours very sincerely,

Daniel Jouanneau

Ambassador of France to Canada.

On Monday, April 9, on Canadian soil in France, at Vimy, our sovereign, Queen Elizabeth II, our Prime Minister, the Prime Minister of France, and tens of thousands of modern-day Canadian pilgrims, including our Sergeant-at-Arms, will rise as one. They will mark the 90th anniversary of the battle, and the rededication of the newly restored Canadian National Vimy Memorial.

We cannot be there, but today let us give thanks for the lives of those who lie there and for what they and their comrades so freely gave to this great dominion 90 years ago. The blood of our very best earned Canada the right to take its place among the nations of the world.

head:

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: Mr. Premier.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday in ceremonies taking place across Canada and in France, Canadians will celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. I say celebrate because in a war noted for senseless loss of life, Vimy Ridge was a rare example of professionalism and success. It also holds special significance for Canadians. Fighting as one unit for the first time, the Canadian corps succeeded where our Allies had failed.

1:20

It is often said that Canada became a nation on April 9, 1917, at

Vimy Ridge. There is much truth in that. Vimy was a Canadian operation and a Canadian victory, and it was recognized as such in London, Paris, and New York. For Canada's soldiers Vimy established a reputation for competence, organization, and outstanding bravery. As a result, in the famous final 100 days of that terrible war Canada's troops led the Allies to victory with great valour and at terrible cost.

Among them were many Albertans. Almost 50,000 Albertans served in what was then known as the Great War. John Pattison worked for the Calgary Gas Company before he enlisted in the army in 1916 and became a member of the Alberta Regiment. At Vimy Ridge he covered 30 yards under intense fire to destroy a heavily fortified enemy position and was awarded the Victoria Cross. Sadly, this brave Albertan was killed just two months later and is buried at La Chaudière Military Cemetery, a short distance from Vimy.

On Monday another Albertan, Herbert Peterson of Berry Creek, will finally be buried in that same cemetery. A member of the 49th Battalion, later to become the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, Peterson died just a week after John Pattison, but his remains lay undiscovered and unidentified until 2003. On Monday he will be finally laid to rest with full military honours and with several members of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment in attendance. May all their memories live from generation to generation.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. members to join me on the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge to remember and to honour these two gallant Albertans and the many other Canadians who served in the Great War.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier for his heartfelt tribute. Just a few days from now, on April 9, Her Majesty the Queen, the Prime Ministers of Canada and France, and thousands of Canadian students will travel to France to witness the reopening of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial at Vimy Ridge. The memorial has been under renovation in preparation for a momentous anniversary: 90 years since Canadian soldiers proved a nation's valour and achieved what people at the time thought would be an impossible victory. But with extensive planning, innovative strategy, brilliantly executed tactics, and the bottomless courage of individual troops, the Canadians seized the ridge and created a moment in history that has helped shape the course of our nation's destiny.

According to some historians the taking of Vimy Ridge was not in itself a hugely significant factor in the overall direction of the war, but others point out that seizing the ridge proved that the long stalemate of trench warfare could be broken, protected the French city of Arras from attack, and had a tremendous impact on Allied morale.

To Canadians the greatest impact of the Battle of Vimy Ridge is upon our collective national conscience. Vimy Ridge is part of the Canadian story now. It can be seen as the day we grew up as a nation to fight our own battles, to prove ourselves on the national stage, but we should never forget that this moment in history was bought at the cost of thousands of precious, irreplaceable lives.

In 1994 my wife, Jeanette, our sons Jordan and Spencer, and I travelled to France to visit the memorial at Vimy. We were greeted there by Parks Canada staff since the French, out of gratitude, donated some of the land at the battle site to Canada after the war. It was a little piece of home, a small, in many ways unassuming patch of hills, one ridge looking much like another, including the famous one where so many lives were lost. Jordan and Spencer explored the Allied and German trenches, which were so close

together that the boys had no problem calling out to each other. That's how close those soldiers were, nearly close enough to look one another in the eye. That's how close death loomed for the young men on both sides of the front line. The fear they felt must have been immense, yet when called upon to do their duty to take their ridge, Canadian troops used their hard-won training and experience to do what some had called impossible, and in doing so, they helped both win a war and forge a nation's identity.

So on this 90th anniversary let us all salute those gallant soldiers. Let us honour their memories, give thanks for their sacrifice, and pledge ourselves to continue defending the nation they loved so dearly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party. I'm sure unanimous consent will be provided.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Ninety years ago the Battle of Vimy Ridge was fought with Canadian troops leading a successful attack. As with every battle in war we should remember that this victory was achieved at a terrible cost on both sides. Ten thousand Allies, mostly Canadians, and 20,000 Germans were casualties, all for a few kilometres of ground. With ceremonies across the country honouring the courageous soldiers who fought in the Battle of Vimy Ridge, we must strive to remember the lessons learned from this battle and others so that the sacrifices of our soldiers are not in vain.

The lessons of history should inform our actions today by guiding us as we face the challenges of the future. Ours is not a nation forged in war but in the peaceful development of democratic institutions. Mr. Speaker, the greatest tribute we can pay to our veterans is to build a better world, a world where the words "never again" are not rhetorical but are a solemn vow to pursue peace and deny those who recklessly take up arms.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm sure, hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, that unanimous consent will be provided as well.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The greatest act of love is laying down one's life for another. Ninety years ago over 3,500 Canadian soldiers did just that at Vimy Ridge. Why? For freedom. Freedom against oppression, discrimination, pillage, and plunder. They treasured freedom more than life itself, and they treasured it for us and for future generations.

We all have defining moments in our lives: our first step, first word, first day of school. But what defines our great nation is our independence, our freedom. We need to remember our great history in this defining moment. More importantly, our next generations need to know and remember the great sacrifices so that they will avoid a repeat of this tragedy and our families, our communities, and our country will continue to be places of peace and freedom.

But it takes more than remembering. To paraphrase Albert Einstein, the world is a dangerous place to live not because of the people who are evil but because of the people who fail to do anything about it. We must speak out and protect the freedom of those around us. Our defining moments are often remembered as turning points in a big game or in this case the Great War. We must remember and realize that it is the final result or the outcome of planning, preparing, and practising that is really the enabler to great defining moments, those moments of success or failure.

The veterans of Vimy Ridge and all those who fought in this Great War are our heroes, and we are forever indebted to them. May we always honour them by protecting their gift to us: our freedom. We

can do this by following the words of Elie Wiesel, a holocaust survivor, who swore "never to be silent whenever [and] wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must [always remember to] take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the [tormented]."

We in this Assembly thank the veterans of Vimy Ridge and all other veterans for their actions and their sacrifices. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Community Initiatives Program

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mismanagement by this government has become so common that I don't think they even know the difference. Not only do they spend more per capita than any other province, they deliver less. It's no wonder, from stag parties in Vegas, the fiasco at AADAC, untendered contracts galore, hundreds of thousands of dollars to friends for verbal advice, and now lottery grants. To the Premier, a simple question, should be a simple answer: is the Premier prepared to defend the practice of handing out millions of taxpayer dollars through the community initiatives program in violation of the rules?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if it does mean looking at the very special application from the Western Guide and Assistance Dog Society, that was given dollars above what they could raise themselves so that they can have some support from community initiatives program, yes, I would.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The request didn't even go to that fund. The Premier should do his homework better.

To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: why does this department expect volunteers across this province to follow strict CIP guidelines when the department itself is ignoring its own rules?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. Certainly, when I talked to my department staff, they assured me that no rules have been broken. The guidelines allow the minister to use discretion in certain cases, as our Premier has just identified; for instance, the Western Guide and Assistance Dog Society from Edmonton-Meadowlark that we supported. Had we not had discretion, that particular organization would have had to close its doors. So we want to use discretion in those cases.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. This minister can't seem to keep his story straight. First his department's published documents say, in black and white, \$10,000 limit to unmatched CIP grants. Then the minister describes the same rule in his own words as: a strong guideline we use. Then he gets even more creative and says, quote, well, there's a lot of flexibility that's given to the approval of grants. End quote. Which is it, Mr. Minister: a rule, a strong guideline, or something the minister thinks he has the flexibility to ignore?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly, as I indicated, we want to use a certain amount of flexibility to show a certain level of compassion to those groups that come to us where they indicate a strong need for additional support over and above the \$10,000.

Mr. Speaker, I need to say that since 2002 we've approved over 4,000 CIP applications. Certainly, the question is on the 43 that were over the \$10,000, and we're going to review those. We're going to see if there's any breach anywhere, and we'll follow up on them.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Other Initiatives Program

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this government has another multimillion dollar lottery fund that it has kept as far from public sight as it can. The program has the suspiciously vague title the other initiatives program. It doesn't turn up in Alberta lottery's list of programs on its website. There's no note of it on Alberta lottery's news and events listing. There's no process for the public to apply. One of our members wrote a letter to seek funds from this program, and the request was quietly diverted elsewhere. To the Premier: how does this government justify keeping a program that has handed out over \$40 million in three years so far hidden from public sight?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, always in the interests of openness and transparency this government, of course, posts all cheques, payments made to any organization, any Albertan. They're there for the public review. They're there to be open and transparent so that people can question what dollars have been paid to various organizations. There's nothing wrong with that. I think it's just part and parcel of being open and transparent.

Dr. Taft: Nobody knows the rules around that program. The Auditor General's report says that the department has not established eligibility criteria for the other initiatives program and goes on to say that the minister "receives requests for funding either directly or through another Member of the Legislative Assembly." It sounds like there's lots of room for political manoeuvring. Yesterday the Premier claimed in this Assembly, "We've always followed [the Auditor General's] recommendations in all the years that I've served in this government." That is pure nonsense, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: why has this government failed to comply with the Auditor General's recommendation for the other initiatives program?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, he said something like: in all the years he has served in this government. I don't think you serve in any government.

The other thing is that if there's any minister that doesn't pay attention to the Auditor General's recommendations for a good reason, then I'll have a chat. But I can assure you that we follow the recommendations of the Auditor General.

Dr. Taft: Well, a chat isn't exactly leadership, is it, Mr. Speaker?

These are the kinds of funds that get governments into all kinds of trouble: no public accountability, the minister setting the rules, access by government MLAs, the Auditor General raising concerns that are ignored. To the Premier: is the Premier confident that every dollar of this program was spent in a manner that would withstand public scrutiny, and if he is, will he table the complete details of all the grants given under this program in the last four years?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, in terms of openness and transparency all grants are listed; they're public.

Dr. Taft: They're not.

Mr. Stelmach: He's chatting across and said they're not. Well, then, if he knows of something, tell me which one isn't there so that we can find out why they're not reported. Again, Mr. Speaker, this is following up on a comment that this member made the other day. He said that he has a secret agreement with the Alberta horse racing association. It's now three weeks, and he still hasn't brought it forward. Now he's making another allegation. When is this going to stop?

The Speaker: The third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Community Initiatives Program Grant

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday during question period the minister of tourism, parks and recreation was asked to explain why the government broke its own rules in regard to the community initiatives program. I was surprised to hear that the minister tabled a letter I wrote in support of a project. The minister said, after referring to my letter, that the government did "break our rules" in response to my letter. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Is he suggesting that I somehow broke the rules or that I even suggested that the gaming minister break any rules in regard to funding for this project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, my department staff has assured me that no rules were broken. In addition to that, all of our grants are made public, and they're posted. For the sake of the opposition members I will quote our address. It's www.albertalotteryfund.ca, and all of our grants are posted there. Everything is out in the open.

Mr. Tougas: Mr. Speaker, as the minister clearly knew, the association I was trying to help was the Western Guide and Assistance Dog Society, which trains guide dogs for the blind. It wasn't a request for fancy furniture for some frat house. I also suggested that the funding come from the other initiatives program, which is a fund of lottery dollars whose distribution was entirely at the discretion of the minister. So why did the minister link this entirely legitimate and above board request as an example of the government breaking its own rules on lottery funding?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the dollars that were assigned to the Western Guide and Assistance Dog Society were community initiatives dollars.

Mr. Tougas: That wasn't what I asked for at all.

Mr. Speaker, clearly this was a deliberate drive-by slur in an attempt to discredit the Official Opposition and myself. I am offended that the minister would attempt to link my perfectly legitimate, worthwhile, above board, by-the-rules request with the government's sloppy and questionable abuse of an entirely different program. This is a new low for this government. Again, to the same minister: will the minister apologize for his actions?

1:40

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, this particular organization, like any other organization, which includes all of our volunteer organizations

that apply, goes through a very serious process of due diligence. You know, we have a lot of checks and balances in place. We make sure that the regulations are followed. Certainly, you know, we want to support our volunteer groups, and this particular group, like all the other groups, goes through the same process.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Homelessness

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Working people come to this province for employment, cannot find affordable housing, and end up turned away from overflowing shelters. Some welcome. The Calgary Homeless Foundation last May counted 3,400 homeless people in their city, half of whom had jobs. Some MLAs were probably born in towns that have smaller populations than that. Calgary's homeless shelters are overflowing, and a couple have been closed. The temperature is forecast to drop to minus 8 tonight, and Calgary will be scrambling again . . .

The Speaker: You know, hon. member, we have a problem now. You made your statement, but I don't know . . . [interjections] No, no. You signed on to the 45-second rule, remember. It's over. I don't know what we're doing with that first one, but go on to your second one.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. So the question, then, to the Premier is: given that these shelters in Calgary have been closed and that there is no capacity for the homeless in that city, what is he going to do about it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, clearly, one of the major priorities of the government, of course, is to address the critical housing shortage, and the critical housing shortage is in many different areas. It's in those of the homeless, homeless because of some health issue perhaps. Then there are also the others in terms of low-income wage earners looking for housing and, of course, families looking for homes. That is why we had an all-party committee meet. We put together recommendations with their help. Help will be coming forward in terms of the report and followed up with announcements.

But with this particular Calgary situation my minister was there; he spoke to Calgary. Calgary said: look, we've got a plan in place to deal while we're closing this particular house. He may respond.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier knows that the all-party committee has given the report some time ago, and his government, despite its claim to be transparent, is keeping the report secret until the government figures out what it's going to do. In the meantime there are more homeless almost everyday on the streets of Calgary and other cities. What are you going to do for them, Mr. Premier, tonight, tomorrow night, and the night after that? Talk won't help.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government moved very quickly. We've provided considerable millions of dollars in help to the homeless across the province of Alberta, to various municipalities. We, of course, worked in partnership with the federal government. We'll continue to do that. This is a serious situation. I know that many people moved to this province in spite of the fact that, you know, we've got a critical housing shortage. They insist on moving

here because there are some jobs available, and really they want to move here because they have some hope and opportunity.

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

Provincial Tax Regime

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are burdened with excessive taxes. They're being levied by municipalities, the provincial and federal governments. Alberta families are having a difficult time making ends meet, and it's up to this government to reduce taxes on families. To the Premier: is it the policy of this government to reduce or raise taxes in its coming budget?

Mr. Stelmach: Of course, the budget will be delivered April 19, shortly after our Easter holiday. We know that the province of Alberta enjoys the largest tax exemption for families. Perhaps there's even more we can do, but I would ask the hon. member to wait till April 19 so that we don't violate our own rules.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is awash with cash, but Alberta families are not. Alberta families are asking for a reduction in their taxes. The question, again, is: will this government adopt a policy that it will return a portion of the surplus dollars to the Alberta taxpayers?

Mr. Stelmach: The Minister of Finance will be bringing forward a budget. It would be looking to find balance amongst all the competing interests in the province. I look forward to the budget being delivered and will have some answers to the questions. Unfortunately, I can't give those today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Municipalities are having a very difficult time meeting the infrastructure needs of their people. A recent minister's report is looking at levying new taxes or allowing municipalities to levy new taxes. Will this government do the right thing and assure municipalities that they will not ask them to put a new tax in place but will return proper funding to those municipalities from the current taxes that this government collects?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's why this government moved very quickly on the commitment of a new fund of \$1.4 billion to be allocated to municipalities. We know that they're facing growth pressures in every corner of the province, and the two associations and the two mayors are working on an allocation formula on how best to allocate that formula to municipalities, which will take some of the pressure off.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Internet Gaming

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Internet gambling is an issue that is staring the provincial government square in the eye, and so far there hasn't been much movement to confront this issue. The Alexander First Nation, for example, has openly stated that they're going to get into the Internet gambling scene whether or not the province approves. The Solicitor General has stated that online casinos are contrary to the Criminal Code, and he will enforce that, but the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission is fooling Alber-

tans, floating the idea of online casinos, and have stated that they're proceeding slow and steady. So what exactly is this government's position? To the Solicitor General: can the minister confirm or deny whether, in fact, his department is considering entering or allowing others to enter the Internet gambling business?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question as it's quite prevalent in the news today. I want to assure the hon. member that this government is not considering Internet gambling in any form at this particular time. However, we are obviously reviewing it in other jurisdictions to see what's happening in that particular area, but we have no intentions of pursuing that at this particular time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First Nations groups have stated that they're sovereign entities and that the province has no authority over them. They're using the Kahnawake example in Quebec to state their ability to operate such a venture under the authority of their own gambling commission. In Quebec their Attorney General has stated that these activities are illegal, but he chose to look the other way, and no charges were ever laid. Legal opinion is divided. The activities are contrary to the Criminal Code on the one hand, but there appear to be legal loopholes around the law. The issue is: how will this government react? To the Attorney General: if groups in this province forge ahead with plans to establish online gambling sites, will the minister declare the activity illegal, or will he tolerate the operation and allow it to continue?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the Criminal Code that determines legality relative to this matter has nothing to do with the rulings of the Attorney General in this province or anywhere else. I can tell you that our opinion is and has been for a considerable period of time that First Nation Internet gaming, wherever it might take place in Canada, would be contrary to the Criminal Code.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the reasons First Nations groups in Alberta are resorting to such measures is to create economic opportunities for themselves. It is no secret that they have some serious problems, and they see these gambling ventures as a way to make positive changes for their people. The real shame is that in this province, awash in cash, none of this money seems to be going directly to help First Nations people improve their quality of life or realize their potential. They have to fend for themselves. So they would go as far as openly contravening the Criminal Code if it meant opening doors, creating jobs, and improving quality of life on reserves. To the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations: what opportunities is this government prepared to provide to First Nations people in Alberta so that they don't have to get into Internet gambling?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

1:50

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and Happy Easter to everyone. I think that what is most important is this. We are

working very closely with our aboriginal peoples, as we have in the past and as we will today and into the future. I might add that the largest employer of aboriginals in all of Canada, of course, is Syncrude Canada Ltd., very prominent in my own constituency. But let me just say that we will continue to work with aboriginal leaders in terms of tremendous economic stories that are out there. They are role models for young people in terms of what is happening today and well into the future. I do believe that we're on the right track in terms of growing the economic pie, where everyone in Alberta plays an important part in that success.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Agricultural Income Stabilization Program

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Drought, grasshoppers, BSE, and rising input costs have created hardships for Alberta producers over the last five years. Recently Alberta Agriculture and Food announced a \$70 million addition, and it would be available to help producers through the Alberta reference margin initiative for the 2006 CAIS program year. This sounds like a good thing. However, some of my constituents in Whitecourt-St. Anne have expressed concerns that the ones that will benefit the most on this initiative are packers and large feedlots. All my questions are to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Are packers and large feedlot operators going to get the bulk of the money from this initiative?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite simply, meat packers are not eligible under this program and will not be getting any money under the reference margin initiative. Only farmers and agriculture producers will benefit from this. Feedlot operators are eligible, but our data show that only a small portion of the funds will go to them. This is really an extension of a pilot project that we've offered in the past three years. We've done our due diligence. We've found that the money is going to the sectors that need it most in a given year. Not everyone gets a cheque. This is about individual needs.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you for that answer. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. CAIS applications are at times confusing, and producers complain that high-priced accountants are needed to get through the red tape. How can producers be assured that they receive potential benefits as quickly as possible from this program?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, I would be the first person to agree that CAIS could be simpler, but there are some things that can be done, however. Producers can get benefits sooner if they file their taxes early and if they submit their CAIS forms well ahead of the deadline of September 30, 2007. About 55 per cent of the applications arrived within 60 days of the deadline, and this certainly causes a lot of delays. Turnaround times are also better if all the information on the form is accurate and complete.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Community Initiatives Program (continued)

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government says that they want flexibility, the flexibility to break the CIP rules. The groups who do such good work don't get the same flexibility. Most work hard to play by the rules, and they want fairness, and they want accountability. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. The grants above the \$10,000 rule average \$50,000. Will this minister admit that this is not flexibility? This is mismanagement.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I need to say that, you know, applications for CIP and CFEP grants are reviewed by our grants officers and our technical analysts to make sure that they meet the eligibility criteria and to make sure that the applications are fully completed. When they do that particular review, the recommendation comes back. Sometimes a recommendation comes back to give that organization more money, and other times it comes back to give them less money. Certainly, we review that. We use our flexibility to accommodate those that need additional financial help.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: what is the purpose of having CIP guidelines if you don't follow them?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we've approved over 4,000 CIP applications in the last few years. We're talking about 43, and I've committed to review those. I want to review the information on the 43, and if there are issues with those 43, then I will address them.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister. We have asked this question many times but get no answers, so I ask once again. Will this minister table the details, all the details of the other CIP grants that broke the rules? If you have one, table it.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, all of our grants are posted on the website, and all of the information is there. I've asked my staff to pull the 43 that he's talking about. It will take a few days. It takes time to isolate those individuals from all the rest of the grant applications. We'll review them, and we'll see where it comes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mosquito Larviciding Program

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents of Alberta, primarily in southern Alberta, are concerned that the government is no longer funding the West Nile mosquito larviciding program. Twenty per cent of people infected with the West Nile virus develop symptoms that adversely affect their quality of life, and 5 per cent develop severe diseases up to and including paralysis. My question is to the Minister of Alberta Health and Wellness. What is the province doing to protect Albertans against the West Nile virus seeing as even the medical officer of health for Palliser and a registered nurse there have contracted West Nile in southern Alberta?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did advise the municipalities in the regions that were affected that the funding for the larviciding program was not going to be continued this year, and we did it because there's no evidence that that was an effective use of

resources in this particular circumstance. However, human and adult mosquito surveillance programs continue to alert our department and health regions to changes in the risk level of the West Nile virus so we can advise the public accordingly. Those surveillance programs have been conducted in southern Alberta since 2002. Predictably, every year when mosquitoes start to appear, of course, people start to get concerned. It's important to remember that the species of mosquito that carries the West Nile . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first and only supplemental. I received letters from the municipalities in southern Alberta expressing regret at the decision not to fund the program this year. Dr. Mark Loeb, a researcher from McMaster University, is doing a study of the West Nile virus and has written that 87 per cent of the mosquito pools were positive for the West Nile virus from August 6 to 20, 2006, from the Palliser health region and the Chinook health region. My question again is to the minister. Why is Alberta Health and Wellness no longer considering funding the larvicidal program?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we still, of course, are very interested in making sure that there's proper surveillance, and people are encouraged to take the proper protective procedures with respect to the virus, and that is the most important place that we can put the emphasis.

With respect to the program itself 25 per cent of the municipalities in the high- and medium-risk zones opted out of the grant program in 2006; 79 of 104 eligible municipalities participated with a budget of about \$800,000. Approximately \$230,000 of that will be returned. The administrative costs of that program are very high. So, in short, we basically determined that that wasn't the most effective use of the resources. The municipalities now have the equipment and training to do larviciding, and we will provide the other information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Private Registry Service Fees

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans who choose to pay their traffic fines electronically through the Service Alberta website are often surprised to learn that this government charges them the same \$9 service fee that private registries charge when paying a fee in person, yet the government of Saskatchewan doesn't charge its citizens a service fee for online fine payments, nor does ICBC in British Columbia charge a fee for payments made over the telephone. My questions are for the minister responsible for Service Alberta. How does this minister justify this \$9 fee when other jurisdictions charge nothing for the same service?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we have made a long and successful tradition of not patterning our financial responsibilities after Saskatchewan or British Columbia.

2:00

Mr. R. Miller: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to guess that Alberta taxpayers are looking for a better answer than that.

A private registry may charge this fee as a means of generating revenue or for recovering the cost associated with the transaction itself. One would reasonably expect that the cost associated with an electronic transaction, a direct payment to the government, should

be significantly less in terms of staffing and processing. Can the minister please outline how this \$9 service fee is justified when a payment is submitted by a taxpayer directly to the government?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, that's a fair comment. The fees and charges are reviewed on an ongoing basis by the government, and we not only try not to; we are not allowed to charge in excess of what the reasonable cost of recovery is. So if the hon. member is suggesting that we review the \$9 fee as if that may be excessive, I'll attempt to do so; however, I think Albertans expect a reasonable cost for services that they get.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. A recent Supreme Court case, *King Street Investments versus New Brunswick*, determined that the government-imposed user fees which are not tailored to the cost of service itself do in fact constitute an unlawful tax. Will the minister table in this House documents indicating that this \$9 service fee is in fact tailored to the cost of the service, or if not, will he admit that we're unfairly taxing Albertans?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we also don't pattern our stuff after New Brunswick; however, we do show in this House all of the budget, which will be debated here in due course in a few weeks. At that time we'll be happy to debate the entire budget of Service Alberta, and you can explain then what you think we should cut.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that Alberta has a housing crisis. My constituency office is being inundated by calls about rent increases. People are being absolutely gouged, and it's happening not only in Edmonton; it's happening across the province. People are being forced to pay 50 per cent, 60 per cent of their income on housing. Tara Kuchar called my office when her rent jumped \$375 in five months. Sherry Inglis's rent increased by 30 per cent. My question to the minister of housing is simply this: what is his advice to these people with these calls when they're getting these exorbitant rent increases? What does the minister say to them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member from the third party knows, as he was on the committee of the housing task force that reported on March 19, that we are looking at that report presently, and we are running the recommendations of that report through the process so we can deal with some of the issues and concerns of people such as the individuals that wrote to you.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the report hasn't been released even. That's not going to help these people right now. They're facing these rent increases right now. Another example: Mrs. Arlene Henderson received a rent subsidy, and the landlord took up most of the subsidy right there, so she's no better off. My question simply to the minister, then: because we're in a crisis situation, would the minister as a temporary measure take action to enact legislation to immediately limit rent increases to, say, the consumer price index?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, as mentioned before, the government is looking through the recommendations. The recommendations from that report have a lot of different implications that we think are beneficial and also have challenges to renters, and we are looking at that at the present time.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, these people can't wait while you're looking. They're one rent increase away from being homeless. I'd add: you can still do the report, and you could bring in temporary measures for rent guidelines in the short run. Why don't we do that right now to help these people?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned: why don't we release the report? It is not going to help to release the report. We are looking at responses to the recommendations and the concerns that citizens of Alberta have put in that report, and we're dealing with that right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod, and then, hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, you're ceding your spot to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Wind Power Generation

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The wind power industry in Alberta has developed in the province over the last 15 years, providing green power choice for consumers. Our industry is one of the largest in Canada, and most of the production is in my constituency of Livingstone-MacLeod. But wind power generation is being limited in Alberta for two main reasons: first, there's a current cap on the amount of wind power that is allowed into the grid, and second, there are issues related to the process around transmission infrastructure. My question to the Minister of Energy: if we are in a free market system, why is the generation of wind power being capped at 900 megawatts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, we realize that wind power in the province of Alberta plays a very major role and will continue to play a major role in Alberta's integrated energy strategy. This generation forms a major piece of our plan to build a stronger Alberta. The amount of power that is supplied to the grid at any time needs to remain in balance, and the AESO have determined that to maintain that balance, we need to cap the amount of wind power that we put onto the grid at this point in time at 900 megawatts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Delays in constructing transmission lines to access the grid are actually holding up investment in rural Alberta and particularly my constituency. Can the minister advise the current status of the routing and the timelines for completing this much-needed link in southwest Alberta?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, this government has a plan to manage growth pressures in the province of Alberta, and transmission is the backbone to our electricity system. The member is referring to a 240-kV line from Pincher Creek to Lethbridge. It's needed, and we agreed to bring additional wind power onto the grid. The proponent of this particular piece of infrastructure is working to

address concerns with affected landowners, and we expect steps to be taken with the EUB in the very near future.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Minister. My last question is: since wind power generation offers a viable economic offset for gas emissions, can the minister commit to more wind power generation to assist climate change in Alberta?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, as the member has indicated, wind power in the province of Alberta is a success story. We work with the proponents to address some of the issues that have been mentioned by the hon. member. The province supports a major wind study that's being done with proponents, with the Canadian Wind Energy Association, and the study will help us to forecast wind trends and address issues of reliability. We will then have the groundwork for an expanded capacity to put wind on the grid in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Blood-borne and Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Blood-borne infections like hepatitis C, HIV, and hepatitis B have serious, potentially fatal outcomes, and rates of these infections continue to rise in Alberta. There has been a 40 per cent increase in syphilis rates in Alberta over the past year. My questions are to the minister of health. When questioned last spring about why the blood-borne pathogen and sexually transmitted infections strategy has been delayed, it was the then minister's opinion that the ad campaigns about risky sexual behaviour weren't in line with Albertans' morals and values. My question is: is this health minister going to continue this attitude, or will this strategy finally be released?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I haven't seen the advertising strategy, so I'm not sure I could make a judgment call on that, but I can tell the hon. member that it's absolutely important that we make Albertans aware of the problems that we're facing with respect to the increase in outbreaks of syphilis. I made that statement in the House a number of weeks ago. It's important that we communicate that to Albertans and important that we make sure that Albertans are aware of the necessity to be careful with respect to unprotected sex. I'm not shy about saying that.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. All right. Again to the same minister. This government has been sitting on this strategy that would deal specifically with this problem for nearly four years while Alberta's rates of sexually transmitted infections are rising at a greater rate than the national average. Will the minister concede that this government's failure to release the report in a timely manner has allowed more and more Albertans to be put at risk?

Mr. Hancock: Well, no, Mr. Speaker, I can't concede that because I haven't examined it to determine whether that's what's put Albertans at risk or whether it's unprotected sex that's put Albertans at risk. I would presume it was the latter, but I will certainly be interested in looking at the strategy and seeing if that strategy or some additional strategy could help us make Albertans more aware of the risks and what protections they take for them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister. We have been waiting since at least 2003 for the blood-borne pathogen and sexually transmitted infection strategy. Can the minister tell us if there's anything in this strategy about equipment sterilization that could have improved procedures and reduced risk of infections in Vegreville and Lloydminster? Where is the strategy?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the specific strategy that the hon. member is referring to is not something that I'm completely conversant with at the moment. I will have a look at it to see if there's anything in there that would deal with the issue that she's raised, but the fact of the matter is that we have talked to Albertans. We have tried to raise the awareness level with Albertans, particularly in light of the recent information available with respect to syphilis but also the other blood-borne pathogens. It is very important that we deal with these issues, and I will undertake to the member to review the strategy that she's talking about and see whether it could have efficacy today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Flood Preparedness

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every spring the spectre of floods raises fears across Alberta, most certainly in my constituency. To the Minister of Environment: can he inform this House how his ministry ensures that residents of affected communities are protected from potential floods?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Environment's flood forecasting river engineering team is constantly monitoring river levels around the clock and also works in very close contact with Environment Canada, monitoring weather services. The staff will issue advisories and warnings if they expect conditions will have an impact on streams and rivers. We also work very closely with municipalities to ensure that they have sufficient notification so that they'll be aware of possible potential increases in river levels. When flooding does occur, Albertans are advised directly by their municipality as to what precautions or actions they should take.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the serious flooding in southern Alberta in 2005 I'm wondering if the minister could inform this House if we've learned any lessons that would help us to better prepare and thereby mitigate or avoid flood damage?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent observation, and in fact since the floods of 2005 Alberta Environment has taken a number of steps to ensure that communities across the province have improved flood mapping in high-risk areas. This mapping helps us to much better understand the possible impact of flooding on these communities. Our existing infrastructure performed extremely well in 2005 to mitigate the impact of flooding. I'll use an example of the slow release of water from the Dickson dam, which prevented flooding in Red Deer, Drumheller, and other communities in between. So we will constantly ensure that we can do everything within our means to minimize the loss.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. I'm particularly concerned within my constituency and within northern Alberta at heavy snowpack levels in the headwaters of many of the streams and rivers that drain into the northern plains and lowlands of northern Alberta. We're at serious risk of flooding. I'm wondering if the minister could inform us which communities are particularly at risk this spring?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Environment issued just yesterday a routine water supply outlook. That outlook indicated that given the amount of snow that we have in certain areas, depending upon the rate of melt there could be issues related to flooding. That's what we continue to monitor. These include the communities of Peace River, Grande Prairie, High Prairie, Edson, Slave Lake, Cold Lake, and Lloydminster, but I have to emphasize: this is not an advisory; this is simply an observation that should melting occur at a rapid rate, these areas could be affected. We will be sure and provide adequate notice should that be the case.

The Speaker: The hon Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

E-mail from a Government Computer

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Agriculture and Food committed to an internal investigation into the vicious, hate-promoting e-mail that a government employee sent from a government computer to the Save My CWB website in Manitoba. This e-mail was vicious, it was vulgar, and it was completely unacceptable. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Now that the investigation is complete, the results have not been made public, unfortunately. However, will the minister personally post an apology on the Save My CWB website on behalf of the government and the citizens of this province and the civil servants?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, we took this very seriously. We did have a breach of the code of conduct by one of our employees in the department. I asked my deputy and the department to look into it. They did. They've dealt with it; they've taken the appropriate action. We followed the process as agreed upon by the union's collective agreement. There's been due diligence and fairness in this matter, and it's been dealt with.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: has any apology on behalf of the department been sent to the folks at the Save My CWB website who were slurred?

Thank you.

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, yes, there has. Obviously, he hasn't been reading the website like he probably should be. The staff member apologized for using the government computer. We respect that people have their own personal opinions and views on things even if they are different from this government. I'm quite satisfied. I don't know if the member opposite is looking for blood or what, but we've dealt with the matter.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: would the minister now apologize on behalf of this

government, our fine province, and all of the civil servants for allowing this to happen? Why are you making the employee apologize when you should show leadership and apologize on behalf of the entire government?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, the matter has been dealt with. It's been dealt with properly. End of the story.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility Agreement

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently received a letter from a constituent concerned about the Alberta/B.C. trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or TILMA. Among the concerns expressed to me is that this agreement will hamstring municipal and provincial governments by limiting their ability to pass laws and regulations. My first question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. How will the TILMA affect the ability of governments to do their job to enact laws and regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say to the hon. member that our Premier and Canadian Premiers clearly have indicated that this is to assist our citizens in terms of reducing costs and reducing red tape. It will have no impact at all on municipalities relative to their law-making ability and what they do in serving citizens just like we in this Legislature serve citizens, to the best of our ability in helping them as opposed to hurting them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister. In his letter my constituent says that no one is being consulted about the TILMA. Can the minister please explain what consultation, if any, has been carried out on this agreement?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, in my 45 seconds, we have and are continuing to consult. Let me give you a small example: the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the Assessors' Association, for those who go to get drugs the Pharmacists Association, for those who want to get their eyes checked the Association of Optometrists, the land surveyors, the Alberta Building Trades Council. We even met with their union people in terms of the importance because this is serving all citizens no matter what political stripe they wear. This is a great deal, and I know this Legislature will support it.

2:20

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: can the minister advise the House what has been done to publicize this agreement, the TILMA?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly I am part of that publication and will continue to be. I might add that from April 1, when the agreement came into effect, over the next two years municipalities, school boards, and others will continue to be key stakeholders as we in fact look, from 2007 to 2009, at that point, then, what impacts it will have, if any, on municipalities. So from 2007 to 2009 will be an important process of dealing with our municipalities. [interjections] I'm glad to see that some of the Liberals are even getting some of the French emotion that goes on in this House.

The Speaker: That was 91 questions and answers today.

head:

Members' Statements

The Battle of Vimy Ridge

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, far away in northern France there is a forested ridge which looks over the green farmlands of the Douai plain. From a distance it might seem a rather ordinary place, but for all of us as Canadians this ridge is hallowed ground, for there in France is a part of Canada, surrounded by a pair of magnificent white marble towers.

On April 9, 1917, 90 years ago this coming Monday, something remarkable happened on that piece of ground called Vimy Ridge. That day marked the start of a battle which, over a period of four days, saw over 3,500 Canadian men lose their lives and 7,000 more wounded. The Canadians attacked where so many previous assaults had tried and had failed and captured what many thought was an impossible objective. The brilliant military victory was the result of meticulous preparation and training, of resourceful and innovative leadership, and of unbelievable bravery, fighting spirit, and devotion to duty of the Canadian soldier.

Yet Vimy Ridge means more than a brilliant military victory in the bloody conflict of War World I. For the first time Canadians from all parts of our young nation fought as one unit, side by side under Canadian command. Vimy won for Canada respect and status as a signatory nation to the Treaty of Versailles. It won from Canadians at home pride in the courage of their soldiers and a feeling of nationhood. Vimy reminds us that Canadians from all walks of life were prepared to serve their country and make the ultimate sacrifice for their nation and for the causes they believed in.

Between those soaring white towers at Vimy stands the figure of a soldier passing his burning torch to compatriots. This soldier, called The Spirit of Sacrifice, commemorates the immortal words of Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae:

To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders Fields.

The Speaker: There'll be five additional members. I just want to keep the theme of Vimy Ridge together in the same unit. We'll go with Calgary-Hays, Lethbridge-East, Edmonton-Manning, and Calgary-Bow.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to speak to Canada's most memorable wartime triumph. Easter Monday will be the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Although this event happened almost a century ago, Canadians are still learning about the effects the battle had on Canada. As is tradition, thousands of Canadians, young and old, will travel long distances to the fields of Vimy Ridge, where the remains of brave and dedicated soldiers lie. There they will pay tribute to the 11,000 soldiers who gave their lives for the freedom of people all around the world. The visiting Canadians will stand by an overwhelming memorial that marks the soldiers' experience. This monument is Canada's largest piece of installation art outside the country.

Mr. Speaker, the Battle of Vimy Ridge was one of the opening battles of the campaign. It is also considered a major event in our history. To Canadians the name Vimy Ridge has been historically meaningful. It was the first time in our nation's history that a corps-sized formation fought as a unit. The success of the attack, resulting

from detailed planning and a variety of innovative tactics, was in stark contrast to what had happened at the Somme only months before. This event sealed the reputations of the Canadians as among the finest troops on the Western Front. The capture of the ridge by the Canadian corps was a turning point for the Allied force. The success of the Canadian forces here and at Passchendaele and Canada's Hundred Days helped earn Canada a place at the Versailles peace negotiations.

Mr. Speaker, some suggest that Canadian unity was fostered. All nine provinces were represented in this battle. But as Pierre Berton pointed out in his seminal work *Vimy*, the taking of the ridge achieved legendary status very quickly.

In 1917 this event had a tremendous impact on Canadians as a whole. Today this battle still has a large impact on Canadians. All across Canada young students have been united by learning about the battle. They have learned that the young individuals who went to war were much like the young Canadians of today. A little older than them they had families and friends much like they do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

The Battle of Vimy Ridge

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today humble and grateful for the freedom that I have to speak my mind without fear of reprisals, a freedom won with the lives of the Canadian men and women who died in the First World War in the battle at Vimy Ridge in France 90 years ago. Forces from each province joined together and did what Allied forces could not do. They stormed the ridge and conquered a long-held German stronghold, that changed the course of the war. This battle created a true sense of unity and became the birth of our nation as a nation.

Mr. Speaker, 3,600 high school students from across Canada will be going to Vimy Ridge for the rededication of the war memorial. Forty-one of these are from Winston Churchill and Lethbridge Collegiate Institute in Lethbridge. Mr. David Fletcher, a teacher at Winston, was the lead on this project, but the students, parents, and the whole community helped to raise the money necessary for this trip.

They will all wear First World War uniforms, and what is fascinating is that the buttons will be exact replicas as they were cast from the original die that is kept in the Ottawa archives. These students will represent one of our fallen who lie in the graves of France. Each student researched the story of that soldier. The research turned into a labour of love, and many managed to track family members still living.

A wonderful story out of Lethbridge is that one of the students managed to make contact with the 96-year-old sister of the soldier represented. She was found living in Calgary and was thrilled for the recognition of her brother after all these many years. The family was tracked in Scotland, and medals that had never been presented for heroism will now be given to the family. A true lifetime memory for these students.

Mr. Speaker: lest we forget. These young people will ensure we must not forget the horrors of war and the love for peace that are shared by the Canadian people.

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

The Battle of Vimy Ridge

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am humbled and honoured to stand here today and speak to the memory of the men and women

who won the great Battle of Vimy Ridge 90 years ago. There were those who cried for peace. There were the warriors and the healers. They were all our citizen soldiers. They were there, stood strong together, and went into battle that day. It was the first time that the Canadian army attacked together. Les soldats canadiens du Québec et d'Acadie, proud Canadian soldiers from Quebec and Acadia were there. Ontarians, Atlantic Canadians, and our boys from the west were all there and ready.

At 5:30 a.m. on the 9th of April, 1917, four Canadian divisions, the first 15,000 infantry, backed up by their artillery, stormed the ridge with intense fortitude and courage. Imagine thousands of rounds of hot fire searing the air around you and not turning back. Imagine charging with your bayonet into a machine gun nest and not turning back. Imagine the air turning black as artillery shells blasted craters around you. Imagine your friends, your brothers around you having their legs and arms and heads blown off and not turning back. Our boys did not turn back, and they won the day. It was an incredible sacrifice: 3,598 Canadians were killed; 7,100 were wounded. Brigadier-General A.E. Ross said, "In those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation." Albertans were there from Edmonton, Calgary, High River, Lacombe, Morinville, Lac La Biche, Atikameg, and Wabasca, from all over Alberta. Many memorials stand in testimony to the sacrifices made. I salute all those and their families who suffered. We must thank them all forever.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:30

Tartan Day

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There were very strong values that were fought for at Vimy Ridge.

I rise today to recognize that tomorrow is a significant day for the people of Scottish descent. It is Tartan Day, an opportunity for people in Alberta, in Scotland, and around the world to celebrate the many achievements of the Scottish people. We celebrate Tartan Day on April 6 because it marks the anniversary of the Declaration of Arbroath, which was signed in Scotland on April 6, 1320. Its most significant claim was that the country was ruled at the prerogative of the people and that the King could be replaced if he did anything to threaten Scottish independence. This highly significant but little known document was one of the first in the modern world to stipulate that government is ruled by the people.

Here in Canada the Scottish influence on our democracy is clear. Alberta was settled by pioneer Scots like the North West Mounted Police's Colonel Macleod and Colonel Irvine. Our Prime Minister John A. Macdonald was a Scot as was Alberta's first Premier, Alexander Rutherford. The first mayors of both Calgary and Edmonton were also of Scottish descent. And it was their comrades, the Calgary Highlanders regiment, fighting for democracy at Vimy Ridge.

I hope all our members will join me in celebrating Tartan Day tomorrow. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Shauna Seneca

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 14 of last year the city of Edmonton and its aboriginal community lost a true champion with the unexpected passing of Shauna Seneca. Shauna was only 49 years old, but in her short time on this earth she touched the lives of thousands of people. In December 1993 Shauna and her

husband, Brad, created a youth-focused program called Bent Arrow, that provided services to 16- to 24-year-old aboriginal youths who wanted to find a job, return to school, or were looking for a new direction in their lives.

In 1994 the couple established a nonprofit charitable organization and called it Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, basing it on traditional teachings and values. The name of the society perfectly illustrated Shauna's vision and belief in the essential goodness of people. Traditionally, aboriginal people took great care to make sure that an arrow was straight, in the belief that good energy made them fly straight and true. Shauna believed that children in difficult situations were bent arrows, not broken, and that with love and faith they would fly straighter.

Bent Arrow has helped countless aboriginal children, youth, and families. The society operates 14 programs from its offices on Stony Plain Road, employing 83 people. Last year I visited Bent Arrow on what was just a typical weekday. The office hummed with activity, and there was a palpable feeling of goodwill and hope. Bent Arrow is not a mere drop-in centre where people while away the hours but a place where things get done and people help people.

Bent Arrow offers nutrition programs for expectant mothers, help for survivors of residential schools, programs for healthy families, care for pregnant teens, transitional housing, a Head Start program: the list goes on and on. The mission statement of Bent Arrow states that the society

is committed to building on the strengths of Aboriginal children, youth and their families to enable them to develop spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally so they can walk proudly in both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

Sadly, Bent Arrow will have to carry on that mission without their guiding light, but there is no doubt that the spirit of Shauna Seneca will continue to watch over Bent Arrow. Shauna may be gone, but her legacy – and what a wonderful legacy it is – will last for years to come.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're allowed under our rules to have only a certain number of members provide their members' statements today. One hon. member has conveyed to me a very moving story. With your permission, I'd like him to share with you. Can we have consent to do it?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was sharing with the Speaker that about 20 years ago, when I was in my young 20s, I travelled to France where, in fact, my grandfather's 18-year-old brother was killed at Vimy Ridge on this day. My grandfather said that as a namesake, I was big on flags and I was big on emulating his traits. As a teenager I flew to France to visit Vimy Ridge – I was the only one in my family to ever do that – and I placed an ensign flag, the old Canadian flag, by his gravesite. My grandfather was still living, and I took a photo of where his brother was buried and took it back to him. I just want to say what a smile it put on my grandfather's face to see where his 18-year-old brother who had left many, many years earlier was buried and lies today.

I sincerely say that the respect that French people show for Canadians is truly something I'll never forget.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung first, then Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have eight petitions today. The first one is signed by 476 people, and it says:

We, the undersigned residents of the Edmonton-Castle Downs constituency, hereby urge the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to reconsider the location of the new Edmonton Remand Centre and work with the federal government to relocate the new site closer to the Edmonton Maximum Security prison.

The second one is signed by 33 people, and it says:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

The third one, Mr. Speaker, is signed by 35 concerned Albertans, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to:

1. Ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector, regardless of whether these workers are employed by government or by community-based or private providers;
2. Ensure these employees are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive . . . to reflect the valuable and crucial service they provide;
3. Improve employees' access to professional development opportunities . . . and
4. Introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today 1,080 signatures, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to add the drug Elaprase to the Drug Benefit List approved by Alberta Health and Wellness in order to ensure that those suffering from Hunter's Syndrome, including Jordan Miranda, Riley Miranda and Tyler Chauhan, get the care they need to reduce their suffering and live full lives.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter that was sent to my office on behalf of my constituent Arlene Henderson. Ms Henderson recently began receiving a subsidy to offset her rental cost; however, shortly after she began receiving the subsidy, her rent increased again. Basically, her situation demonstrates that subsidies are important, but they must be accompanied by short-term rent increase guidelines.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have more copies

of the letters which were received by my office urging the government to provide funding for the cancer-fighting drug Avastin. In doing so, I would like to reiterate that people who require this treatment can pay up to \$1,750 every two weeks. I would also mention that according to the people signing these letters, Members of Parliament, federal employees, members of the RCMP, and federal judges are covered for this treatment. Today the letters are from Nancy Niederhaus, Allison White, Ron McIntyre, Debbie McMunn, Andrew Gniazdowsky, Elsie Thompson, Doug Frend, Pat Stevenson, and Linda Verenka.

Mr. Speaker, I also have a letter from a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers who is living in Fort McMurray. Mr. Bluett is extremely frustrated because in the last two years he has faced three rental increases and moved twice to lower his rental costs. To make matters worse, he often finds himself unemployed while temporary foreign labour is used to replace unionized Alberta workers.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

2:40

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to present a couple of letters and the number of copies necessary from volunteers for the Unity Centre of Northeast Edmonton, Geraldine Sutton and Dale Thimer, regarding some personal stories about problems with affordable housing.

Thank you.

head:

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. If I could ask the government to please provide us with information on their projected government business for the week commencing Tuesday, the 9th of April.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As all members are aware, the House will not sit on Monday, April 9.

On April 10 we should have second reading of bills 12 and 15 and Committee of the Whole on bills 3, 21, 16, 12, 10, and 5.

On Wednesday we will have Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007; Committee of the Whole on bills 21, 22, 16, 15; and second reading on bills 17, 18, and 19.

On Thursday, the 12th, we'll be into third reading on bills 21, 22, 16, 12, 15, and as per progress on the Order Paper.

Mr. Speaker, I need to point out that this will be obviously subject to change depending upon the progress that is achieved throughout the week, so we'll work as best we can to keep the members of the opposition advised.

The Speaker: Hon. members, when we return on Tuesday – and I did send a memo to all hon. members – we will have gavel-to-gavel coverage on our website, on the Internet, of the proceedings of this Legislative Assembly, so from about 1 until 6. We're also prepared to provide such coverage if we sit in the evening providing we have notice to make sure that the technical people are in place. But effective Tuesday, 1 o'clock to 6 o'clock, everything will be on the Internet, available to the world, the performance in this Assembly: a first.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 14

Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new strain of influenza virus emerges with an ability to spread quickly and cause significant sickness and mortality. Currently, global experts are suggesting that a pandemic will occur in the next one to three years. Although the impact of pandemic influenza is unpredictable in timing and severity in the age group affected, we do know that it's likely to come in waves of six to eight weeks, result in significant absenteeism across the sectors, and put tremendous stress on the health care system. Furthermore, because a pandemic is likely to be widespread, the ability of neighbouring communities and jurisdictions to offer assistance will be limited.

As a result, the government of Alberta has developed and will continue to revise response plans. The government is developing their response plans in co-ordination with regional health authorities, municipalities, industry, and other key stakeholders. As a result of planning activities, amendments to four statutes have been identified that will strengthen the province's ability to respond effectively to both pandemics and public health emergencies in general.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

An amendment to the Disaster Services Act will enable the Lieutenant Governor in Council to declare a state of emergency due to a pandemic that would last up to 90 days instead of the 14-day declaration which is currently provided for. The declaration would lapse after 90 days unless it was continued by resolution of the Legislative Assembly.

In addition to amendments that serve to clarify the intent and to update the language used in the Public Health Act, there are five sets of key amendments to this act. The first key amendments would enable the Lieutenant Governor in Council to declare a public health emergency due to a pandemic that would last up to 90 days instead of the 30-day declaration which is currently provided for. The declaration would lapse after 90 days unless it was continued by a resolution in the Legislative Assembly.

The amendments to increase the duration of an emergency declaration under both the Public Health Act and the Disaster Services Act are only for emergencies related to a pandemic. These extended declarations reflect the fact that a pandemic will come in waves and will require a prolonged response.

The second set of key amendments will allow the minister responsible for an enactment or in their absence the minister of health to suspend or modify the application of legislation by a ministerial order in order to facilitate an effective pandemic preparation or response. For example, under the Health Professions Act if a complaint is dismissed, the complainant only has 30 days to appeal this decision. This time limit could be suspended or modified during a pandemic.

The third set of key amendments will improve the enforcement mechanisms in the act by providing for quick access to the courts for medical officers of health. These amendments will ensure compliance with orders that have been issued.

The fourth set of key amendments will broaden the liability protection provision to ensure that all individuals who have been

directed to respond to a public health emergency cannot be liable for actions carried out in good faith. Currently the Public Health Act prohibits the termination of an employee because they have been conscripted during an emergency.

The fifth set of key amendments will expand this protection to include anyone complying with an order or certificate during a public health emergency. During a pandemic this protection could also be provided to people who are ill with influenza or to persons caring for sick family members. The amendment to the Employment Standards Code will ensure that recourse is available to people who have been wrongly terminated in contravention of these provisions.

Finally, an amendment to the Government Organization Act will enable the Minister of Health and Wellness to authorize individuals or groups of individuals to perform restricted activities subject to specific terms and conditions. During a public health emergency health resources will be strained, and skilled people may be called upon to apply their skills outside of their normal scope of practice. An example might be paramedics, who are trained to give injections but are not authorized to provide immunization. During a pandemic they could be authorized to vaccinate people.

Ensuring that Alberta is able to respond to a pandemic of influenza supports the Premier's plan to provide safe and secure communities. The amendments to the pandemic response statutes will do just that.

I ask support of the House and move second reading of Bill 14 and adjourn debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head:

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

Bill 3

Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to first of all thank the hon. members for approving of Bill 3 and getting it to this the committee stage. I'd like to take just a few moments of the Assembly's time to address some of the issues that were raised during debate at second reading, and then I look forward to further discussion at committee.

2:50

Mr. Chairman, I've got a compilation of the debate that occurred at second reading, and without making specific reference to each of the speakers, I'd just like to point out that these remarks I'm about to make refer to comments and questions raised by Edmonton-Calder, Edmonton-McClung, Calgary-Mountain View, and Edmonton-Gold Bar. I think that's it.

So if I could deal with a number of the issues first of all that were raised by Edmonton-Calder. Much of what Edmonton-Calder was referring to had to deal with whether or not carbon sequestration was valid science. The member was questioning why the government would be promoting something such as carbon sequestration and talked about costs that are involved in carbon sequestration. I have

to assure the member that while carbon sequestration is a valid and viable option to pursue, it is not specifically part of this bill. As a matter of fact, the task force that was recently named by the federal government is going through a process of reviewing the economics and the viability of sequestration. We look forward to that report.

But I must point out that whether sequestration is done on a very large scale, à la pipelines, CO₂ pipelines, it really isn't a matter of if carbon sequestration could work in Alberta but how. That's very much the question. At the end of the day, though, the management of carbon in one form or another is very much an issue and part of this bill because what this bill is attempting to do is send a clear message to industry that it's the intention of this government and of Albertans that they need to do what is within their power to reduce the amount of CO₂ and greenhouse gases that they emit into the atmosphere.

We also had issues raised with respect to the discussion of whether intensity or absolute targets should be the focus of this legislation, and I want to spend just a little bit of time talking about both of those. This bill, as you know, Mr. Chairman, contemplates bringing forward intensity-based targets. The approach works for Alberta because it reflects greenhouse gas performance improvements independent of growth or decline in the economy. This approach recognizes the huge capital investment that Alberta has made in the past in a number of sectors like forestry, electricity, oil sands, petrochemicals, and so on, and we need to give these companies time to recoup their investment while at the same time ensuring that they take future action to reduce greenhouse gases. In a growing economy like Alberta's absolute reductions in emissions can be achieved, but it's important that the right policies and programs are in place to allow the economy to adjust.

A combination of both approaches could be used so that emissions intensity targets are used in the short term and absolute targets are a much longer term objective. The result of this would be immediate action on emissions, a lesser impact on the economy, and a time for researchers to develop innovative solutions. This is, in essence, Alberta's existing policy, and we've chosen to transition from intensity-based targets to absolute targets by investing in technology.

We had further comments suggesting that this bill, Alberta's Bill 3, may be obsolete given that the federal government is also contemplating passing similar legislation. I'd like to just point out to members that it's certainly not the intention of the government of Alberta to pass legislation that would duplicate legislation at the federal level. It would be ludicrous for us to think that we would put in legislation that would require Alberta industry to contribute to meeting our compliance mechanisms at the same time that as Canadian corporations they would also be required to meet any compliance mechanisms that might be imposed by Ottawa.

But there's something that needs to be noted. While it is our intention to work with the federal government and work with Canada to where possible harmonize and achieve similar outcomes, I'd like to point out two things to members. First of all, the discussion that the federal government is having at this point with respect to climate change legislation is just that. They're mired in a minority government situation. The legislation that they contemplate has not seen broad-based approval in the Commons, and frankly, Mr. Chairman, I'm not so sure that there's reasonable expectation that that legislation will actually come to pass. The alternative that the federal government has is to bring forward regulations under their existing legislation. That being the case, there are very rigid and strict requirements of public notification once the government even establishes and announces its targets. So that all comes down to the reality that any action taken by the federal government is a minimum of 12 to 18 months and more likely 24 months away.

The government of Alberta feels very strongly that we need to act and we need to act now. So if the federal government comes forward with legislation, (a) we will work with them to harmonize our legislation, and (b) in the meantime we will have taken strong action in Alberta and, actually, I would also like to say, perhaps even learned some lessons in the process so that we can assist Ottawa in the implementation of any legislation that they bring forward.

The other important factor, I think, that I want to put on the record, Mr. Chairman, is that Alberta has a strong record of regulating air emissions. We have been involved in regulating our own industry in particulate emissions for some time now. The climate change legislation that this bill, in fact, amends has been in place since 2002. We're simply amending existing legislation that had mandatory reporting, putting intensity targets and the compliance mechanisms in place.

So, clearly, we want Ottawa to recognize that as we have worked together very successfully in the past in joint management of air quality, we see no reason why we shouldn't be able to continue to operate in close co-operation with Ottawa in the future. So there's no need for members of this House to arbitrarily hold up passage of this legislation in anticipation of what Ottawa may do because they're a ways away from doing what it is that they're going to do, and at the end of the day we can continue to work with Ottawa, as we always have, to co-operate as best we possibly can.

Others raised issues regarding the fact that only about 70 per cent of Alberta's industrial emissions are represented under this legislation, and what are we going to do about the other 30 per cent? Well, that, Mr. Chairman, is exactly the process that we've been engaged in for the past week and will continue to be engaged in over the next two or three weeks as we have been holding a number of community consultation meetings throughout the province to engage Albertans in that very discussion.

Where do we go from here? We've closed the loop on climate change legislation. We've introduced the intensity-based targets for large industrial emitters. But where do we go from here? I'm very pleased to report that Albertans are not only actively engaged in attending and participating in those community consultations but are very actively involved in providing input through our website. So I encourage not only members of the public but perhaps even members of this Assembly to be involved in this consultation process. We have a number of community meetings that are yet to be held. Last night we were in Lethbridge, the night before in Medicine Hat, and we'll be in Calgary next Tuesday. So I encourage members to participate in that process, and I think that they'll see that there is active discussion and good, quality suggestions being made by Albertans, and we look forward to that.

3:00

We also had questions regarding the issue of the compliance mechanisms and asking for some clarification on the different levels of compliance. I'd point out that this legislation operates under the same principles as the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, and its regulations provide for a number of offences that can be prosecuted. There are significant maximum penalties under conviction, but there are also penalties that can be brought forward in the form of administrative penalties. They represent a compliance ladder for steps that would be taken based on any offences under the programs. You start at first on the ladder, and if that doesn't result in compliance, you can constantly move up, and that's exactly the way this legislation is designed to operate as well.

Finally, I wanted to address the issue of industrial emissions. Edmonton-Gold Bar was asking why industrial emissions are excluded and, in fact, asking what industrial emissions are. I'd like

to point out that industrial emissions are the types of emissions where there is really no technology fix that's economically viable or efficiency adjustment that could be made to reduce them in the short term. They are part of a set of chemical industrial processes, as opposed to the result of combustion. When you burn something and you send smoke up the chimney, that CO₂ that comes out is the result of combustion. When you, for example, manufacture fertilizer, you have a chemical reaction. One of the by-products of that chemical reaction is CO₂. That CO₂ is captured. It doesn't go up the stack, so to speak; it's already captured. That's the kind of activity that can be much more easily dealt with. We've already got it in a bag, so to speak. We can find ways of managing that type of CO₂ much more easily.

It's also a recognition that as a result of a manufacturing process there already has been a significant reduction in CO₂ on the combustible side since the late '90s and the turn of the century simply from an economic perspective because natural gas is a feedstock for these types of industries. They have made significant reductions in CO₂ simply because of the economies involved. This will allow us to work with the manufacturing sector, recognizing that they have some unique circumstances there, and allow us to deal with that in a reasonable way.

Finally, I want to deal with the issue in section 8 that talks about the question: why is this section being substituted? I can assure the member that the reason is purely administrative. It's an amendment to ensure the consistency of the ministerial order outlined in section 10 of the Government Organization Act. The original wording unintentionally restricted the authority. The intent remains unchanged: co-operation among other jurisdictions needs to be in the shared interest of Albertans as reflected in the expectations under this legislation. This will help us to ensure that a single set of rules applies to Alberta industry.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I think I have covered at least most of the issues that were raised by hon. members at second reading, and I look forward to further discussion at committee stage.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the hon. minister's answers to many of the questions that we've posed about what the bill will do, and I guess I'm going to be focusing more on what it doesn't do.

This bill is intended to amend the original 2003 bill, Climate Change and Emissions Management Act. The main changes are in the regulation, the specified gas emitters regulation, which has set out some new emission intensity targets and three options to achieve them for the largest industrial emitters. However, the target of reaching 50 per cent emission intensity reduction by 2020 remains the same in this bill.

It is reliance on emissions intensity that makes these changes more for show than anything else. There will be no reductions in absolute emissions, and in fact by 2020 they could double. That alone tells us that this bill and the accompanying regulations are more a reaction to public pressure and concern than a government that's prepared to show leadership on this issue of climate change that has been scientifically proven and accepted by the international community. You know, it's been validated by scientists for decades now, but the communication over the last few decades has been a problem, in that politicians and media have given it a spin that makes it confusing.

So it's not realistic for us to support this bill at this point because it continues to rely on intensity emissions rather than moving towards hard caps on emissions. This plan has some flaws that make

it less effective in reducing emissions in an absolute sense. The reliance on emissions intensity as our measure of reduction instead of focusing on moving aggressively to absolute reductions to make this bill and the accompanying regulations effective are exactly making it ineffective.

Absolute emission is the term used to describe the total volume of emissions from a particular source, whether it is an exhaust system of a vehicle or a stack from an industrial facility. Emission intensity is the amount of greenhouse gases released measured against another factor such as GDP or a barrel of oil. A more fuel efficient car will have a lower emission intensity than a less efficient model, but the two cars may still have the same absolute emissions if the more efficient one is driven further.

Although the hon. member also mentioned the goal to harmonize and to look at the national plan and, hopefully, some global responsibility, there are some questions about how what we're doing here in Bill 3 would actually work with Kyoto commitments. Will it jeopardize our ability and Canada's ability to meet those commitments? Will it jeopardize Canada's commitments to achieve much deeper emission reduction targets for post-2012 commitment periods, that will become more necessary given the ultimate objectives of the United Nations framework?

The outcome is that industry will be faced with the prospect of trying to achieve two different sets of regulations, and I do believe that industry wants to be responsible here. They want some clear leadership. They want some clarity. I think that the fact that they're now looking at two different sets of regulations is going to make this even more confusing.

Finally, I want to again emphasize that this bill is not integrating with any other aspects of our land use planning, our agriculture, forests, and, in particular, water use and urban development.

I mentioned before when I spoke on this bill that it's disappointing, again, that this bill is dealing with intensity targets rather than caps on emissions. Many members on this side of the House have spoken with knowledge and passion about the need for fixed targets.

Now, I'm also wondering again about the global and ethical responsibility that we have for our planet. We are interconnected. We must be trustees of our planet, and we have the potential to be world leaders. The basic principle of carbon causing greenhouse emissions has been validated, as I said, by the scientific community. The role of government is to do the right thing. We are supposed to be stewards of our land and our resources. The right thing to do is to reduce incentives for fossil fuels and increase incentives for clean, renewable energy. It is disappointing that these essential steps are not addressed in this bill.

Albertans are increasingly aware of the tremendous business opportunities in conservation as well as the value of carbon enhancing agriculture, capturing methane, solar wind, and geothermal power for our world. It's time to give these options, along with distributed electrical generation, true consideration and to give them the same incentives that fossil fuels have received for decades in this province. We are not doing that. We're falling far short of it, so this is a very small step and certainly not adequate.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, I welcome this opportunity to participate in committee on Bill 3. I appreciate some of the answers that have been provided by the hon. Minister of Environment regarding my questions from second reading. However, I'm going to have to go over *Hansard* and have a look because I don't think all of my questions were answered. Certainly, when we look at Bill 3 and we look at the definitions and

the intensity targets, I don't think the hon. minister was complete with his remarks. However, we'll have a look, as I said.

3:10

Now, some people think this is not enough of a start on climate change. Others think it's too much. It's a significant change, Mr. Chairman, for this government. There are still the people that consider climate change to be a hoax. I can't believe that, but there are still people who think that climate change is a hoax. Even last night I was watching the news, and I was looking at how the Australians are having to deal with climate change, and climate change is a reality. Perhaps some people in this province, since we're so far above sea level, are not as worried, but they should be. Every major urban centre in this province relies on water from the melting snowpack in the Rocky Mountains for water. So we have to be wise stewards of our environment, and this bill, I think, if we give it a chance, could be – could be – a good start.

There's no doubt in my mind that this is the first carbon tax in Canada. I was surprised, as I said, to attend the news conference at Government House on March 8, but my surprise was centred around the fact that we talked about the regulation, not the actual bill here. The gas emitters regulation that was enclosed in the package that was provided to the reporters was quite interesting. Again, the actual emissions intensity is what we have to centre on here, Mr. Chairman. What exactly is that going to mean on a per tonne basis? If you can't meet your targets and you pay the money, I think we we're looking at \$175 million annually that could be realized. What we do with this money: that's another question.

I, for one, am not nearly as concerned about CO₂ sequestration as other hon. members of this House. I've heard from some members that it won't work; it can't work; it's a temporary measure. Certainly, in Norway, Mr. Chairman, they have been using CO₂ sequestration for a number of years, 10 years to be exact. It seems to be working. We look at the dramatic increase in CO₂ sequestration projects in North America. We look at some in the western Canadian sedimentary basin. We've talked about this before. It's a technology that works. It's made a significant difference, much more than I thought, with EnCana's project in Estevan, Saskatchewan. In fact, the Alberta Research Council is involved in that. The University of Alberta is involved in that, the University of Calgary, the Saskatchewan government. The taxpayers are funding part of that. Hopefully, with this sort of commission that's been set up, all the data will be presented, and perhaps some of the skeptics will give CO₂ sequestration a second chance.

Now, the cost of this supposed pure CO₂ pipeline that is being considered for construction between Fort McMurray and some of the mature oil fields and gas fields around Edmonton of \$1.4 billion: I'm a little suspicious of that. Certainly, I have seen costs that are three and four years old, in all fairness, but they're significantly less than that. Significantly less than that. We're talking about a 20-inch pipeline, a fairly big pipeline, and we're talking about, I think, a 2,000 psi operating pressure. So whether it will cost \$500 million, a billion dollars, or \$1.5 billion, if the \$15 per tonne tax was to be used for this purpose, I think it would be a good purpose. It would be suitable.

Certainly, I think the cost of this has to be covered by industry, but we would all benefit from this, Mr. Chairman. It's worth noting that the cost of CO₂ reduction measures with oil sands projects can be reduced from their royalty payments. It surprises me that we haven't done more already, but I'm pleased that finally something is being done. We have to start somewhere. Bill 3 here may not be perfect, but whenever we consider that its main purpose is to ensure that there is a consistency with other major pieces of environmental

legislation, specifically the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, I think we have to give this serious consideration.

Now, when we're talking about the options that the government is going to have, options so that they can work with industry for achieving environmental outcomes, in this case specific reductions in CO₂ emissions, I think we're going to have to look, Mr. Chairman, at eventually having absolute targets. This is a first step, and whether we like it or not, we're going to have absolute targets. I think we can have absolute targets and still remain viable economically. In fact, I think whenever the technology is developed, we will be exporting this technology to other portions of the oil patch around the world. I see this as a natural progression of the industry. We cannot continue with our current practices of significant amounts of CO₂ released into the environment. We all know the consequences of that. Every rational person realizes that we have to change our ways.

When we look at industries, specifically the energy industry which is concentrated in Alberta, we've got to also look at other economic sectors, the transportation sector. I don't think we can pin all the blame on the energy sector. I drive a car. People in other parts of North America where we don't have this concentration of energy production drive cars. If we go to a store, a truck probably brought the goods that we are buying from somewhere else to that store. The transportation sector: we have to look also at changing our habits there to reduce CO₂ emissions. We just can't dump all our problems on the energy sector. There are many people. The packaging industry is another example of how we can change our ways.

3:20

So if we're going to change our ways and reduce our CO₂ emissions in the energy industry, then the same also applies for the transportation sector and other economic areas. We've got to work at this together, and this is where I think the co-operation has to be encouraged by this government. The government can certainly show leadership with this, and I think they are. I think this may be a small step, but it's a good step. It's the right step.

When we analyze some of the criticism of this, when we look at what other people are saying, they're right. But this is a start, and to think that three years ago this government wouldn't even acknowledge the Kyoto protocol. This is a big step for them. The money that we get on the surcharge, on the carbon tax: let's use it wisely to enhance our environment.

As I look further at this bill, Mr. Chairman, I am most anxious to participate in further debate. Again, it's not perfect – there's a lot that is needed here – but it is a start.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill 3 in committee stage. I found it quite interesting to listen to the minister's comments in regard to our debate during the second reading of this bill. Certainly, he provided some illuminating and, I think, quite revealing information in regard to where he would like to go with this bill and, indeed, where he would like to go in regard to regulating and monitoring the carbon dioxide output of the energy industry in Alberta in general. For that, I am certainly grateful to the minister. He is very forthright and takes the time to explain himself in a fairly clear way, which is a good thing.

I just wanted to respond to a couple of comments that he made, particularly in regard to carbon sequestration, and I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was just mentioning this same issue as well. Please understand from the outset, Mr. Chair, that I

am providing on behalf of our party a constructive criticism of this process, and truly a constructive criticism is in order for this juncture in regard to carbon sequestration because this technology is very much in its infancy, in its experimental stages. We need to be sure that we are not just hitching our wagon to something that isn't even quite there yet in regard to solving carbon dioxide storage problems. Certainly, we're not as a party opposed to using carbon injection for enhanced oil recovery either because, of course, this would be limiting the amount of fresh water that is currently employed to go through this same process. So it has some merit for that as well.

I've been fighting for months and months now to not mix those two messages together and somehow imply to the public that, in fact, carbon injection for enhanced oil recovery can equate to carbon storage where that carbon dioxide is, in fact, now stored under the ground forever. Those two cannot be mixed together because there are two different purposes, number one. Number two, to expect that the carbon dioxide would in fact stay under the ground is somewhat dubious if you're using it for that enhanced oil recovery purpose. So I suspect that I will be repeating that message many times over the coming weeks and months as well because it seems like a convenient merging of these two ideas together.

You know, the public wants to have some peace of mind on this issue, so if someone tells them that there is a magical cure somehow that will both enrich the province by enhancing our oil recovery from depleted wells and store the carbon dioxide that we've otherwise been producing from our coal-fired electricity plants and our tar sands bitumen upgraders and whatnot, then it sounds like that miraculous thing that will solve all the problems. People do like to want to believe those things, but I think it's incumbent upon the members of this Legislature and responsible government to in fact tell the whole truth on this issue. So that's what I'm looking to be doing as a constructive critic of carbon sequestration.

You know, just to end that particular part of my discussion here, I've been looking at carbon sequestration as many governments and agencies around the world have been doing as well, and certainly, you know, there are some interesting baseline things that we need to consider before we enter into any carbon sequestration projects wherever it happens to be in the world. Number one is to make sure we set up a system in place that will monitor the carbon dioxide that has been injected under the ground to ensure that it stays under the ground. I believe that in Norway they have been experimenting with this process and actually putting some small radioactive isotopes into the carbon dioxide that they inject under the ground and then monitoring by satellite the sites where the injection has taken place to watch if those radioactive isotopes actually leak back out into the atmosphere. I mean, that is, I guess, the experimental version of best practices for carbon dioxide sequestration at this juncture, Mr. Chair, and certainly I hope that we might be entering this possibility with the same degree of seriousness as that experiment seems to be doing.

The second issue that we have to look at very carefully in regard to carbon sequestration is the overall energy that is required to capture the carbon dioxide at the point of combustion and the amount of energy to transport that carbon dioxide: process it first, concentrate it, and then transport it to a safe underground site. You know, I've been looking, Mr. Chair, at some of the percentage figures at experimental sites that are doing the math on a given coal-fired electricity plant. It takes between 20 and 30 per cent of the total energy that's being produced by that generating facility just to capture the carbon. As you can imagine, you're having to build 30 per cent more plants, or for every four plants you have to build a fourth plant, just to produce enough electricity to generate the carbon capture process.

So you see my point: you're entering into some very kind of

dodgy ground here in terms of real saving or real value when you are including those costs when you build a carbon capture mechanism in conjunction with a coal-fired electricity plant. These are only a couple of things that I have been reading about in the last few days in regard to this, and I think that each member here should consider these issues very, very carefully.

Another issue that I wanted to bring up is in regard to debating this bill and applying the emerging research and technology that is taking place on carbon capture and sequestration and on setting up carbon tax or carbon credits and all of the things that Bill 3 implies. Really, I would like – and I think it would be an excellent reflection of the new mood, as the Speaker had mentioned before, in the Legislature here – to actually move this bill over to one of the new all-party committees that are going to be struck here in the next short while. That way, Mr. Chair, we would have the opportunity to evaluate this bill – and, certainly, we're not rejecting it out of hand – with an expanded capacity to bring in witnesses, to evaluate new information and research that's being put forward in regard to carbon capture and carbon tax and carbon credits and all of these things.

3:30

If I could think of one scientific area of advancement right now in the world, I think this whole issue of carbon dioxide and climate change has to be the most pressing and perhaps the most active. Certainly, taking this bill wouldn't preclude the possibility of its survival; in fact, with some amendments we would be happy to do so. But take this bill to the all-party committee and evaluate it with this whole broader spectrum of things that we might be able to put in place in the all-party committee to make it work, to make it float, to make it a good bill that actually does lead us down the path of carbon reduction here in the province of Alberta.

As I've said before – and I certainly say it completely respectfully but most stringently – this bill as it reads will not reduce carbon dioxide emissions and climate change that it implies here in the province of Alberta but will serve to increase it and even justify it. Neither of those things are in the best interest, I believe, of the environment or of the people of Alberta, and I think that we certainly could do better. As we move through this bill, the passage of the bill, I certainly have lots of research and ideas to put forward to perhaps serve to amend and make the bill function better.

So with that, Mr. Chair, I do in fact have an amendment that I would like to put forward here this afternoon, and we can check it out and see what you think and away we go.

The Chair: Do you have an amendment?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, I do have an amendment.

The Chair: Just submit it to the page, and they'll distribute them. I need a copy here before you speak to the amendment. We'll just wait till they're distributed.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thank you, sir.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, you may proceed.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If people would like to follow along, my amendment reads that Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 3 in the proposed section 2.1(1)(a) by striking out "and" at

the end of subclause (i), adding “and” at the end of subclause (ii), and adding the following after subclause (ii): “(iii) the measures necessary to effect a reduction in the total specified gas emissions in the province.”

This bill is actually a little bit tricky to amend because, of course, it’s working with previous legislation, Mr. Chair, that was in place. I found this to be a particularly useful area to make this amendment, though.

In general, first of all, a problem with Bill 3 as it stands is that it doesn’t set specified targets over a longer period of time. It sort of puts a benchmark in place in regard to intensity emissions and tries to impose that upon individual large emitters, and then that’s kind of it. When any large or medium or small industrial emitter would like to plan for the future and seek a direction of where these carbon dioxide emission reductions are going, I think it’s incumbent upon us as legislators to send a clear message and to set longer term expectations.

Certainly, when you speak to certain large industrial emitters, they know that the writing is on the wall in regard to having to have absolute reductions in CO₂ emissions, and indeed many large emitters here in the province of Alberta have been purchasing offsets to face the inevitability of the necessity to in fact have climate change legislation and tough climate change legislation enacted in the province of Alberta. With Bill 3, one of my big problems is that it doesn’t set targets that say that we’re going down the road to absolute reductions eventually. My amendment here, in fact, does assist with that and I think is quite illuminating for the purposes of clarification in regard to where the targets are going to go over time.

The central problem with the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act, the current amending legislation, and the proposed regulations that are in place is that they only require reductions in the emission intensity. This position is somewhat, I believe, misleading or irresponsible in a global context, where other jurisdictions are taking more significant steps towards enacting absolute reductions in their emissions.

This Conservative government seems to be only recently choosing to acknowledge even the science of climate change. It’s as though we are somehow stuck back in time with this pace of acknowledgement and then actually doing something. Somewhere between ideology and adherence to the markets, to be able to solve all of the problems that everything seems to come across, I think we lose the practical, pragmatic way to actually deal with absolute reductions, to get over the hump of intensity reductions, so I am putting forward this amendment.

This amendment adds a subclause to proposed section 2.1(1)(a), which appears on the second page of the bill if you want to follow along. The section creates an advisory committee which is tasked to examine certain issues, which is all well and good. I do have some degree of skepticism about what sort of experts might be assigned to this committee. Would we find a range of experts on climate change and environmentalists along with industry, which is fine, perhaps members of the Sierra Club, the Pembina Institute, the Parkland Institute, industry people included as well, or will we see, as we have in the past, a tendency towards industry insiders who have a foregone conclusion about, of course, what they would like?

This amendment is intended to provide some further direction to the committee, specifically to move them past certain ideas of intensity into a policy direction that will address more directly the problem of climate change. So I put it forth to the members of the Legislature here this afternoon for their edification. I hope that it might find some support there amongst everybody.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, did you want to speak on the amendment?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, please.

The Deputy Chair: You may proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I’m rising to speak in favour of the amendment that has been proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. There are two images that come to mind as I read through the bill and the notes and the background and listen to what the Member for Edmonton-Calder is saying. One is a climate change panel that was sponsored by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview shortly after he was elected; I’m thinking in 2002 or 2003, somewhere in there. It was a pretty impressive panel that was struck. It had some long-time members from the environmental movement, some experts from the university – Dr. David Schindler was there – and some others.

Really, I came away from that panel having come to understand a couple of things. One, even back then the energy companies were signalling that they knew that restrictions would be coming on the way they had been operating, and they were prepared to deal with that. Some of them had started to put stuff in place. But it’s a business. No businessperson is going to set themselves out there to be the first one that’s going to incur cost. They could experience a reduction in their profits as they put some of this in place. None of them are going to put themselves at a disadvantage by being first in this case.

3:40

I came away from that panel knowing that energy companies were well aware of the situation, had been working on contingency plans for some time, were prepared to go there and would go as needed to establish more stringent ways of doing business that would conform to environmental concerns, but they also wanted clear timelines because they felt that they all needed to start into this at the same time so that it was not a business disadvantage for them and that it had to be very clear what they were trying to achieve.

The second image that came to mind as I was listening to all of this is a parade. You hear parades and politics talked about a lot. You know, we want to be leading the parade, the idea of the politician out there with a great idea, like the parade marshal with the big baton and the high hat and all of that, leading the citizens behind him and forging new paths and new ideas. “Leading the parade” or “in front of the parade” are clichés that we often hear.

The image that I’m getting on this whole issue of climate change and environmental protection laws is that the parade has passed by. It’s that image you get when you arrive too late, or maybe you’re on your way back to the car after the summer parade in your local municipality and you can see where the parade has passed by. There’s nobody left anymore. A few people are folding up their chairs, maybe, and chatting a bit. There’s a bit of rubbish, you know, wafting down the street from a little breeze. There might be some fellow that’s coming along with a litter picker upper, and maybe somebody’s out there with a shovel cleaning up after the horses. But, basically, the parade has passed by.

That’s what I’m seeing with this legislation. This government had an opportunity to lead the parade, to get out in front of the public, to lead them along in what, clearly, needed to happen and what the scientists have been telling us for decades now. Once again, the government is choosing to come behind the parade. Let’s face it, Mr. Chair, the parade that I’m talking about here is essentially the public: the public will have these measures put in place, the public

interest to have them put in place. We have the public, who are actually ahead of the government at this point. They are the parade, and they are far ahead of where the politicians are on this one.

So I'm willing to support this amendment because it does offer some clarity in the legislation. It makes it clear that we are looking for an absolute reduction in emissions in the province, that that's where we're going. I think that's what business wants to hear from this government. If I was a businessperson, I would have been very frustrated with the prevarication, with the obfuscation that's been taking place around this issue. It's a little bit of a strange dance, can't quite be categorized in any of our familiar ballroom definitions. It's sort of a little bit of quickstep, a bit of tango, some rumba thrown in there, and a bit of tap dancing to get out of the room.

Really, what we all want is clarity, we want definitive timelines, and we want absolute reductions. I'm disappointed that the government came as far as it did with Bill 3 and still did not manage to achieve those simple concepts. I think some of that is being achieved through this motion.

I'm also very aware when I read the legislation – and this is appearing on page 2 of the bill – of this whole section that's added after section 2 about advisory committees and experts. I think the public is beginning to tire of politicians who when they don't want to make a decision have another study, another expert panel, another round-table, another task force, another public hearing. The public knows where they want to go. I think the energy sector knows where it's going to have to go. But government doesn't want to come out and commit, so we have yet another round of experts that are presumably paid to try and help the government figure out how to not do what everybody else wants them to do. Here we have this again.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to stop and say, you know: don't misquote me and say that I'm not in favour of public consultation. Clearly, I am, and I think there are very appropriate places for that to happen, but that's not what's happening here. This is about the government gathering more information to support its very slow progress here. It is about advisory committees and retaining experts, about the content and administration of the act, policies, and programs, other matters under the minister's administration, and these functions, including the seeking of input from the public – there we go again – and the manner and the time in which the functions can be performed. Then this particular amendment adds the only clarity that we get out of this, which is: “measures necessary to effect a reduction in the total specified gas emissions in the province.”

I guess that I'm not terribly hopeful that the government members would support this motion, but I certainly think they should because I think history, and not too far in the future, will very quickly reveal that we were dragging our feet at the very moments of a war that's already been won. Really, I was hoping that this government would have been braver and would have just done what needed to be done. Clearly, it's not, so we're going to delay another who knows what – another year – because of these sections that are being amended in this amending act to try and slow down the implementation of what is essentially the inevitable.

I think the amendment that's been brought forward, which I'm assuming would be amendment A1, does something to speed this process along in that it does offer some clarity about where we're trying to end up. It may well be that I can go back and work with my colleagues and our support staff to indeed come up with some of the other amendments that I think should be redirecting this bill in a different direction, with stronger leadership being shown by the government.

So with those comments in support of the amendment that is on the floor, I urge all of my colleagues in the Assembly to support it, and I will take my seat. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is indeed my pleasure to participate again in deliberations on this particular bill, Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. Now, this time I am speaking to voice my support for this amendment, that was brought to the floor by the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

In listening to the earlier part of the debate, I think I heard the hon. Minister of Environment signalling a desire for intensity targets to be a step towards bringing in hard caps on emissions. If this is the way I heard it – and I am hoping that this is the way the hon. minister meant it – then that's definitely a positive sign. This amendment would aid in taking this government and this province in that direction.

The Member for Edmonton-Calder is suggesting that the advisory committees which the minister is going to establish would add another task or would look at something above and beyond the two that are already proposed in this act. This third job for those advisory committees would be to suggest mechanisms to bring in a reduction in the total specified gas emissions. So, in a way, if the minister is going to bring in those advisory committees and tell them what he expects them to be looking at and what he expects them to be focusing on, then it doesn't really hurt to tell them that one of those little jobs that he's assigning to them is going to be: please, members of the advisory committee, look at ways where this province can bring in hard caps – intensity targets in the interim, hard caps at the end.

3:50

This is like a two-step process, Mr. Chairman, and, you know, the amendment that we're speaking to brings that clarity in. It basically sets the stage for those advisory committees to be more than people who just discuss administration and legislation and regulations, all the dry stuff. We also want scientists and experts in the field – people who understand the environment, who understand emissions, who understand emission control – to sit down and come up with ideas and give those ideas to the minister, who I hope is sincere in his signalling that hard caps are going to be brought in at some point in the future. He would use that information and that advice to look for ways to move toward that goal that we're all aspiring towards. It's, basically, the goal to one day not only arrest or cap emissions but also, hopefully, to reverse emissions and to go from a carbon-positive economy to a carbon-neutral economy and then, hopefully, a carbon-reducing economy. Many people tell us that the damage we do to the environment is irreversible and the only way we can arrest it or even reverse it in little steps is to start right now and if we don't start right now, every day we lose a generation of damage.

So in essence, I support this amendment. I don't think that there is anything in it that the government side is going to find particularly offensive or objectionable, and I urge all hon. members from both sides of the House to support it. If we're really serious about working together and if I heard the Minister of Environment right in his introductory speech earlier this afternoon, talking about hard caps being a target and an objective of this government but not discussed in that capacity in this bill, what we're hoping to do is to make this bill even better, and I will be more than keen to hear other members of this House speak in favour as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and support this amendment to Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. My colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has moved this amendment. Of course, the amendment focuses very much on the necessary measures to make an absolute reduction in the total emissions – the total emissions – and I really do think that it's reasonable to begin to talk about this question. I know that the government has put all its eggs in the basket of reduction of emissions intensity, and I understand why they've done that. I understand why: because they have a policy that allows unlimited growth in the economy regardless of the capacity of the province to support that growth, and of course any hard caps would interfere with that growth.

The real question that's not being debated here is the government's underlying policy with respect to growth. Now, back in January of 2006, I believe it was, Mr. Chairman, there was a meeting in Houston that was organized by Energy Canada and the United States Department of Energy. I believe one minister from this government was there as well as many executives from some of the biggest oil and gas companies in the world. It was the position of the United States government and, as far as I know, agreed at this conference, which was not known to the public, that they would like Alberta to increase its production from the tar sands by about five times what we're currently producing.

Mr. Chairman, let's consider the impact of the present rate of development that is occurring in this province. We talked this afternoon about housing and the rents that people are being forced to pay, people, even workers in the tar sands themselves, on the verge of homelessness because they cannot afford the housing. We've seen an increase in homelessness, and many people moving to Alberta move back. Saskatchewan for the first time had more people moving from Alberta to Saskatchewan than the other way around simply because of the cost of living in this province. We are in an enormous deficit with respect to our infrastructure, and we can't keep up with the growth that's going on.

There's the other question, Mr. Chairman, about who that growth is actually for and who actually benefits by the growth that's now taking place in this province. Now, we know that the government, in collaboration with the federal government, has encouraged companies to bring in temporary foreign workers, notwithstanding the fact that there are hundreds, in some cases thousands, of qualified unionized tradespeople, highly skilled, highly motivated, born and bred in Alberta or from other parts of Canada, that are being overlooked by these companies because of their access to cheaper foreign labour. So if Albertans aren't getting the first call on jobs, notwithstanding the fact that they're skilled and willing to work, then you have to ask who this policy is for.

Not only that, there are now a number of projects that would increase the export of unprocessed bitumen to the United States. In other words, we dig up the stuff and send it in an unprocessed form in order to create jobs in the United States. There are billions of dollars in investment going on right now in the United States to build the kind of upgraders and refining capacity to refine Alberta's tar sands. So, Mr. Chairman, "who benefits from that?" is a really good question. Not only that, to top it all off, on almost all of the oil that is produced in the tar sands today, we are receiving one penny on the dollar in terms of royalty revenue.

The American oil companies are cleaning up, making most of the money, workers from other countries are doing much of the work at the expense of Albertans, and in fact jobs are being created not in Alberta but in the United States because of the export of raw bitumen. So, Mr. Chairman, the policy of this government is in the

interests of the big oil companies and in the interests of the United States.

4:00

I happen to agree with the hon. Minister of Education's former boss Peter Lougheed that we should go a little slower on this and build the plants on a staged basis. I agree with the former Premier Lougheed's view that we need to start thinking like owners, that we own this resource. This is a valuable resource, and we are in the driver's seat. We can set the pace of development so that it benefits Albertans, we can set the price so that it benefits Albertans, and we can make sure that Albertans are the first to get jobs. We can set a pace of development that allows us to catch up on our massive multibillion dollar infrastructure deficit, and we can also make sure that we are not leaving our future generations with a massive multibillion dollar environmental liability as the sole legacy of what's happening in tar sands development in this province right now.

Let's come back to the whole question of CO₂. The government's policy with respect to CO₂ is designed, and consciously in my view – consciously designed – to permit massive increases in CO₂ output in this province. It's deliberately intended to be open-ended and allow huge increases in CO₂ production. Mr. Chairman, you don't have to go very much farther than the daily newspaper or the newscast on TV at night to realize the impact of CO₂ on this planet. That's what people don't want to address. They are very proud about reductions of CO₂ on a percentage basis as a result of emissions changes; however, they don't like to talk about the fact that global climate change is occurring at an ever-faster pace, and it is the future generations of Albertans that are going to be left with that legacy. They just don't want to reconcile those two facts in their heads, and as a result we have this piece of legislation.

Now, in my view, if the bill requires people to take a look at what measures are necessary to effect a reduction in the total specified gas emissions in the province, then that's a good thing. Why not at least study it? They may not agree with me about the pace of development in this province. They may not agree that we'll be able to control absolute emissions or that we could ever go to hard caps, but surely they would agree that we should at least be studying how that could be accomplished. That's what the amendment is supposed to do.

So, Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I just want to say that the government is sticking its head in the tar sands, when it comes to the whole question of CO₂ emissions and the pace of development in this province. The pace of development in this province and the emissions that will result will damage the quality of life of Albertans and, particularly, damage the quality of life and the economic prospects of the next generation and the generation that follows it. But this government is too interested in the quick buck, is too interested in their friends in the oil and gas industry making enormous profits so they can continue to support the Conservative Party at election time to actually care about future generations. It's this short-sighted policy that I think is going to come back and bite this government in certain parts of its anatomy in the next election.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Now, it's interesting, and I enjoyed the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highland-Norwood's comments regarding the temporary foreign workers and the labour situation in this province. Certainly, I would have to agree with him that we're providing the tax concessions and the royalty concessions, yet we're not getting the work, which is quite unusual, and hopefully it will change.

Now, specifically, when we look at the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act and we look at the definition of the total specified gas emission – it took a while to find this – I’m going to quote the gas emission target directly from section 3(1) of the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act: “The specified gas emission target for Alberta is a reduction by December 31, 2020 of specified gas emissions relative to the Gross Domestic Product to an amount that is equal to or less than 50% of 1990 levels.”

Now, section 3(2) goes on to talk about cabinet regulations and establishing interim specified gas emissions targets for the province and other items, but if we were to accept this amendment, wow, would this ever be a strong start in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in this province. It would be significant, to say the least, if we were to adopt this amendment A1.

If this was to be accepted – and I apologize to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder because I had other matters to attend to when this amendment was introduced – how does the hon. member propose to do this? Is this just going to be strictly through reductions in the energy sector, or is it going to be in the transportation sector? Is it going to be in the agricultural community with intensive livestock operations? Is it going to include the electricity sector, electricity generation or generation capacity? How is this exactly going to work? This is a substantial reduction.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any others?

Hon. members, we have before us an amendment moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, and the amendment is referred to as amendment A1. We’ll have a vote on this amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’d move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 3.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

4:10

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 3. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 16
Police Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate April 3: Mr. Lindsay]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and participate in debate on Bill 16, Police Amendment Act, 2007, in second reading in response to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security having introduced it and in my role of shadow minister to lead the debate. First, I wish to thank the hon. minister for meeting with me to provide my researcher and myself with the pertinent briefing points on the contents of this bill. I have to note that his staff were particularly helpful and accommodating, and for that I thank him. Second, I would say that my caucus colleagues are more than likely going to lend our support to this bill but are equally likely to move some amendments to make what is a tremendously good first step an even better piece of legislation.

Now, to start off, I would like to go through what we’re trying to accomplish here today. So what is Bill 16, and what are we hoping to achieve? Very briefly, it has two components. The first one, which is the more important one as well, is that it establishes an integrated investigative unit for serious incidents that involve serious injury or death that may have resulted from the actions of a police officer. So this special integrated investigative unit will conduct an investigation into the alleged incident or complaint and will make recommendations on how to deal with this particular incident and how to deal with the particular officer in question.

The second piece in this bill, Mr. Speaker, is to allow for municipal police services to utilize provincial sheriffs to take control of lock-up facilities instead of police officers themselves. So, as I say, the second piece is not as contentious. Anything we can do to free up the time of police officers to focus on more important things is probably a good idea. You know, those provincial sheriffs are available, and with proper training and the proper tools they can be utilized more efficiently, again, with the ultimate goal to free up time for our regular police officers to do more of the work that they’re entrusted to do. So the first piece is, I think, where most of the debate is going to be focusing.

Again, what are we trying to accomplish? The most important objective is to bring in some level of oversight, a mechanism with which we can investigate allegations of serious police misconduct or wrongdoing. Police officers, Mr. Speaker, are hard-working, law-abiding citizens who are entrusted with or given the task of maintaining order and peace and enforcing our laws and statutes. They are citizens just like everyone else, but they are special citizens. The majority of people have faith and confidence in our law enforcement personnel and always view them in a traditionally positive light. They are our neighbours and friends, but more importantly they are the ones we go to when we need to protect our rights and freedoms and enforce our laws.

Sometime they themselves even face serious injury or death in carrying out their duties. Their job is quite stressful, and the risks are great. However, as with any other profession, Mr. Speaker, there is the potential for a mistake to occur, for someone to go too far, for a law to be broken, or for this societal trust to be breached. Take a crop of apples as a simple example. However few bad apples there may be, they need to be dealt with or weeded out to, number one, protect the rest of the crop from corruption or illness, from bad influence basically, and, two, maintain the consumers’ trust that this particular farm produces quality apples that are disease free. This trust is necessary if we are to expect this consumer to continue to buy from this particular supplier. Now, I’m hoping that this analogy is clear. People have to continue to respect and co-operate with our law enforcement agencies.

Law enforcement agencies, on the other side of that equation, have to continue to earn that trust and confidence, and they have to deal with incidents where discipline is warranted and expected. In some cases, though, internal discipline may not be adequate, and even if it were, people need to be assured that wrongdoing is being

dealt with efficiently and quickly. Bill 16 is attempting to bring in that oversight component, where people can say: "Something happened. How can we deal with this, and how do we prevent this from happening again?" So there is a lesson to be learned.

Now, two years ago, in 2005, Mr. Speaker, in this very House we were discussing Bill 36, which also amended the Police Act back then. I want to thank, first of all, my honourable colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, who was then the shadow minister for Justice and the Solicitor General, for his work with the then Solicitor General. It was unfortunate, however, that when we were hoping to introduce an amendment to bring in civilian oversight to our police services, this amendment was rejected by the hon. government members. So two years later we have it here in a different shape, a different form, which is not bad. Two years is in some definitions long, but in other definitions – you know and we know that the wheels of government turn slowly – it's not too bad. So better late than never, basically.

Sir Robert Peel, who served as the British Home Secretary during the 1820s, basically the Minister of the Interior, the equivalent back then of our Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, is considered by many people as the founder of modern policing. Now, he had suggested that the ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of police actions. So for them to continue to be effective in their role, they have to always maintain public confidence.

He also said that police at all times should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police. That's basically going back to my remarks that they are citizens like everyone else. They have the same obligations, and they have the same rights, the police being members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to the duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence. So, basically, it's like we're all police officers, and we're all citizens. Some of us carry on the duties of police officers, and they're paid for that, but in essence we are all in the same boat. So that's what Sir Robert Peel said.

To take it a step further, Mr. Speaker, you have to look at police integrity and police independence. People argue that police can investigate wrongdoing internally and deal with it, which is probably true in most cases. But sometimes the incident is of such gravity or seriousness that an outside, independent agency or body has to be brought in to offer that assurance of impartiality and neutrality. So there is the need for actual independence and impartiality, but there is an equal need for the appearance of independence and impartiality because what we're trying to do here, again, is to maintain that trust and to maintain that confidence from the public in their law enforcement personnel.

Now, we've had incidents in this province where some concerns were raised. I have to admit that they're not too frequent, and that's really a good thing because, you know, it would be a totally different situation if every second day there was a story about some police misconduct. So I'm grateful in a way that they're separate incidents and that they're far between. However, again, it's the gravity and the seriousness of those situations, where there might have been serious injury or death, you know, undue force, or certain sensitive situations where there might have been, like I said, breach of that societal trust.

4:20

So it's good to bring in oversight, but I would argue – and I'm hoping that other members of this Assembly might second my sentiment – that it has to be civilian oversight, and I would underline and highlight the word "civilian" because they have to be really in

the driver's seat when it comes to that special investigative unit. It's very useful to bring in other officers maybe from other regiments or other services to offer that technical competence. You know, we need to investigate, and maybe we need somebody to do forensic work. We need somebody to do detective work and all that stuff. So in that regard I'm not against having police officers from other agencies join or be appointed to that investigative unit. I don't mind. But they have to have certain credentials and certain qualifications, and we're going to talk about this, hopefully, in Committee of the Whole when it's time for us to discuss certain amendments and enhancements to Bill 16.

I would argue that, maybe, we need somebody from the judiciary, and we potentially need an agent of the Crown, a Crown attorney, to be there, and we would have to request at least two if not more civilians, people who are totally unaffiliated individuals, to come onboard and to sit on such investigative unit. And I would treat this, Mr. Speaker, as jury duty. We entrust jurors to participate in really big trials, and we expect them to conduct themselves with impartiality and to be fair. I think we should treat people who are civilians who sit on this investigative unit as such, as jurors. The way we pick them could be the same way: from the phone book or from the voters list or the tax roll, you know, those databases.

So I am going to highlight and underline the word "civilian" in civilian oversight. That is what I'm hoping this bill would allow us to do. It's one thing to have a special unit to do the investigation and to release the report and to issue, you know, recommendations or to suggest sanctions, but then it's another thing to say: "You know what? It was a fully public review that was conducted, and here are the recommendations." I think the value and the weight is a lot greater that way.

Some people might argue that the public is not qualified and they might not be able to collect or interpret evidence, that they might not be able to work with the parameters. But, yes, you can have people who would give them the expert advice. All they would do is hear the advice and then base their decision on the facts and the evidence that was given to them, again, just like we do with jury duty in any court of law.

The hon. Solicitor General, when he was announcing the introduction of Bill 16, was asked by people of the media and others what the composition was going to be like of this special investigative unit, who is going to be on it, and how much it might cost, things like this. I think the way he came across is basically signalling that at least, you know, four or maybe six people will be on it each time. I'm going to use this opportunity to indicate that they don't have to be the same six people investigating all police wrongdoing all the time. It's not going to be a fixed body; I'm thinking it should be case by case. We might have three or four simultaneous or concurrent cases, so maybe we should have four teams dealing with these, each in their own city or their own part of the province.

He indicated that it must include a former police officer or someone with a law enforcement background, and I agree. But it has to be from a different service, the service that is not being investigated, and with certain credentials and qualifications as in a minimum number of years on the force or, you know, having written the detective exam or something like that.

He also indicated that it might cost between \$2 million and \$4 million annually to administer. Now, I'm hoping that this number will be in the budget and that it will be a single line item for civilian police oversight. It should be allowed that should there be more cases, maybe we need to investigate them all at once or simultaneously, that there is not going to be a backlog created, where you basically say: "You know what? We only had \$2 million this year, and we can only investigate three incidents. We are going to wait until next year's budget because we don't have the money." I think

we should be prompt and swift. That's another thing that the public will be appreciative for because, you know, it's the government and it's an agency that is swiftly looking into an allegation and dealing with it. Timeliness is very important as well.

The province's police chiefs and unions representing rank-and-file officers I think are in agreement, and that is one of the tests that we have in the Official Opposition in reaching our positions on the different bills and stuff. We ask the stakeholders, and we ask everybody who's involved in this particular field that is being dealt with in a particular bill. We were pleased to find out that they don't have any serious concerns with this bill. It's a very positive thing that they don't mind being investigated by civilians. They have no issue whatsoever with being investigated by civilians, again going back to my argument that we're all police officers and we're all citizens. In that regard I think that that was a very positive thing. If they don't mind it, I don't think the government should either.

The findings of the review, that's another thing. I think that whenever this investigative unit is invoked, whenever they're triggered, there should be, you know, a time expectation as to how quickly they should conduct their investigation. What happens to that report after? I would argue that the default should be that the report is made public. Only in very select and limited cases should this report be kept within the confines of the minister's office. It should be the default or the norm for all those investigations to be made public because we are trying to learn lessons as to how tempers flare or how people take things into their own hands or how a single incident might escalate, to learn from them and to prevent those from happening again in the future. It's an invaluable tool for us to ensure that those incidents are not repeated. I would urge the hon. Solicitor General to offer the assurance that the findings of those investigative units are always made public and that if there's going to be an exception, it's going to be made on a very limited and very focused basis.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on, but I'm going to reserve more of my remarks for Committee of the Whole because I am hoping to introduce some amendments, which I hope the House is going to find very favourable. I am looking forward to other members from my own caucus and from across the way participating. Let's make a good first step and an even better piece of legislation for the benefit of the public and for the benefit of the police equally.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make comments in second reading of Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, 2007. Now, this amendment comes after dealing with Bill 36, which made changes to the Police Amendment Act. It's interesting to see what the changes being proposed here are. It certainly doesn't go as far as we wish it would go, considering all the questions we raised about Bill 36 last year.

4:30

I would just like to make some comments about different portions of this bill. Section 46.1 is being amended to add a section. It deals with the chief of police reporting any kind of injury or death and so on or complaints to the minister, and there's an outline here of the different kinds of complaints.

- (a) an incident occurs involving serious injury to or the death of any person . . .

Now, of course, any serious matter like that ought to be reported.

- (b) a complaint is made alleging that
 - (i) serious injury to or the death of any person may have resulted from the actions of a police officer . . .

That should also be reported. I have no problems with that.

Then there's a curious statement that what also should be reported is "any matter of a serious or sensitive nature related to the actions of a police officer." Now, that raises lots of issues in terms of definition of what could be considered serious or sensitive. There's no interpretation here, so I guess it's left open.

I received some time ago a document from the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association, which represents defence lawyers here in the Edmonton area and also from other places in Alberta, and they were responding to the whole issue of oversight of police action. Of course, criminal lawyers are involved in that because they have to defend people in court, and they certainly express a great deal of respect for the work that police do. At the same time they are often put in the position of having to go to bat for civilians who feel wronged by police action.

In their submission they mention the fact that there are different kinds of complaints and that some complaints should probably stay within the police force for internal investigation; in other words, issues that are fairly minor like, for example, regulations about arriving for work on time or uniform care, personal presentation, even practices such as note taking, preparation of reports, forms of paperwork, and so on. These kind of issues internal to a police force and their action could even include, in the so-called Overtime scandal in Edmonton, one officer who was alleged to have uttered inappropriate words on a police radio frequency. So that is the kind of behaviour that should be disciplined within the police force. It's an internal matter. That's not the kind of thing that would be sent to the minister in order for there to be an investigation.

But, of course, there are middle-ground concerns that sort of fall between what could be considered a criminal action and what's considered an internal matter. Again, a good example would be from the Overtime scandal in November 2004. This incident involved a number of Edmonton police officers who were thought to have targeted two newspaper journalists, particularly vocal critics of the Edmonton police force, in hope that either of these two would actually be caught driving while impaired, so silenced in this fashion. That kind of concern is sort of in the middle, but it's sufficiently serious and of a sensitive nature to warrant a public investigation. So it's difficult. I mean, I think that would fall under 46.1(b)(ii) in that it would be considered a serious nature. But without any definition here it leaves it open and ambiguous, so I have a bit of a problem with that.

Now, once these matters are reported to the minister, then the bill states that then the minister "may do any one or more of the following," and then there's a list of matters. This amendment is going to add another option to that list, so instead of there being three options, there are four options. But I'm concerned about the "may" do any one of the following. In other words, there's not a necessity to investigate these serious matters. It's left open to the discretion of the minister to interpret the seriousness of the matter and then pursue one of the options. It seems to me that if there is a serious incident involving death or injury, that should lead to an investigation. So I think there's a problem with the wording there.

In terms of the three options the first option is that the police service would itself investigate an incident or a complaint. The second one is requesting another police service to come in and investigate the perceived wrongful action. The third option is to involve members of the public as overseers to observe, monitor, or review. Now it's being suggested – and this is the amendment – that a fourth option is that there be an investigative unit to conduct an investigation into the incident or complaint. I'd like to say a few words about the nature of that investigative unit in a few minutes. As the Member for Edmonton-McClung has pointed out, none of

these four options really deals with the important matter of providing for a civilian review, a civilian oversight.

So again I go back to the submission that I received a year or so ago from the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association, which really pleads for public, independent, civilian oversight of police in Alberta. Their summary of that plea is that they want to have investigation and prosecution of allegations of police wrongdoing conducted by a body with no connections to either the individual officers who are at the heart of the complaint or to the police force of which those individuals are members. So there's a whole question of independence and impartiality that is extremely important. When I was dealing with this issue with Bill 36, the information I received from the public, from those who are really interested in these kinds of issues, was that they're not happy with the way such investigations are carried out now in Alberta, that there should be a more independent, impartial investigation.

The Criminal Trial Lawyers go on to say that where investigation of any particular complaint reveals apparent criminal conduct and a charge is laid as a result, prosecution should be the responsibility of an independent prosecutorial agency. If it's only minor breaches of internal policy, as I mentioned before, then, of course, the police can deal with that internally as a question of discipline. But when the form of police misconduct is more serious and has the appearance of involving criminal behaviour, then there needs to be an open and public forum for examining these matters. It's a question of public confidence. The Member for Edmonton-McClung mentioned Sir Peel's principles. The police represent the public, so there has to be accountability to the public.

I find these options that are available to the minister to be, finally, inadequate. I mean, basically there are only two ways to go here. One way is to have an in-house model, and the other is to have a fully independent model: an in-house model, where police investigate themselves, or have another police force come in and investigate actions that have occurred or a fully independent model, where civilians both investigate and adjudicate the complaint.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, there is a good model, and I don't know why the Solicitor General has never seriously considered this model. There is a good model in Canada for such an open, fully independent civilian model, and that's the model of Ontario's special investigations unit. So instead of the investigation unit that's being suggested here, which is to "appoint special constables as investigators under the authority of the head of the integrated investigative unit," in Ontario there is a special investigations unit which is fully independent and a civilian oversight model which operates to oversee the police. Their mandate is to investigate the complaints brought to them and also investigate deaths and injuries that have occurred.

Now, this model actually came out of a task force on race relations in 1988 in Ontario in which many people stated that they were actually upset and concerned with the integrity of the process in which police conducted investigations because it was a question of police investigating themselves. So the task force recommended that there be new legislation that would lead to the establishment of an arm's-length, independent special investigations unit. That happened, and it received royal assent in Ontario in 1990. So, actually, in Ontario they've had long experience with this kind of investigations unit, from 1990 to the present.

The question for us in Alberta is: if the Ontario government could do this in response to citizens desiring the creation of such a truly independent civilian oversight, why can't the government of Alberta respond to the wishes of its citizens? It's a question of appearance. It's a question of confidence. I support fully the work that our wonderful police forces do throughout the province, but clearly in

the public's mind there's a problem if you don't have a mechanism in place that enables all the complaints to be dealt with by an independent body. So I find this bill quite inadequate, and I don't know why this kind of amendment is being brought. It doesn't go far enough.

I have real problems with an investigation unit that involves the appointment of special constables. Now, we just passed the Peace Officer Act, which recognizes a new role for people in Alberta: to be involved in peace officer activity on the highways of Alberta, handing out speeding tickets and so on. We've seen the special constables on the highway. I'm not questioning the ability of special constables to do that particular work. They have training to do it, and I'm sure they do work very well. But on what basis are they able to participate in an investigative process?

Some of them, I know, are former police officers who have retired and have now come back as special constables. Of course, they would have the training because they were trained as police officers to do investigations. But normally a special constable who has a number of weeks of training does not have a lot of – I don't believe any – training in the area of investigations because that's not the kind of work that a special constable does.

So I'm really surprised at this, and I'm not sure that I understand why this is here, that the minister has the option to appoint special constables as investigators. That's under 46.2(2)(b). I think when it gets to the committee, we're going to have to deal with that.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

Ms Blakeman: Sir, I just wondered what it was that the hon. member thought he was going to suggest be dealt with?

The Acting Speaker: The hon member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you. I think that the least we could do is amend this because it's completely inadequate.

I'm not questioning the ability of special constables to do the kind of work that they're trained to do, you know. That's fine. But to ask them to engage in investigative work to find out whether the particular offence that is being reported is going to lead to a criminal conviction and that there's enough evidence to lead to a criminal conviction: that's not the kind of work that the special constables are trained to do. It's police that do that or former police officers, and there are plenty of civilians out there who have that experience because of their work in the past. So I just find this quite limiting, and I'm surprised to find it here. I'm not sure what the intent was with that.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

There being none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really take pleasure in speaking to this Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, 2007, because I feel the intention is honourable. Bill 16 takes a step that the government had the opportunity to take in 2005 under Bill 36, where Bill 36 provided the framework for the minister to take three actions in response to any incident that occurs that involves death or serious injury to any person resulting from the actions of a police officer. However, as we know, these three steps are widely criticized for failing to provide the level of public oversight that was necessary in the wake of several high-profile incidents involving allegations of serious police misconduct in the following years.

So the Alberta Liberal caucus would applaud this move as responding to the concerns of the public. It's a step, however, that does not go far enough towards a truly open and accountable mechanism to deal with serious incidents and complaints.

The main problem with this Bill 16 is that the mechanism it provides to conduct independent investigations is permissive. It does not make implementing this type of investigation automatic, and that's a problem because at the very least any incident involving death should automatically trigger an independent investigation.

This is not meant to be critical of the ability of the police to investigate their members, but in real terms there's a conflict when a police officer investigates one of his colleagues, just as it would be the case in any other profession. If they were to take these investigations out of the hands of the police themselves by not allowing police to investigate police – it is critical to not only showing actual independence but preserving the appearance of impartiality and objectivity so that members of the public maintain confidence in their system. The public cannot be left with the impression that bias or favouritism or prejudice had an influence on the outcome of any investigation, especially when the matter involves serious injury or death or trauma to more than just the one victim.

I have heard from constituents who have brought forward complaints about police. It is clear that if they are to believe that the process of investigation is fair, we need to look at two crucial elements. The first is the need for actual independence and impartiality in order to ensure that the matter is being dealt with in accordance with the established procedures and values.

The second is the need to preserve the appearance of impartiality and objectivity so that members of the public maintain confidence in the system and will not be left with the impression that bias, favouritism, or prejudice had an influence on the outcome. It is essential that more serious allegations of police misconduct ought not to be left to the police themselves but, rather, conducted by a separate public body not connected to a part of the service being scrutinized. This is crucial to ensuring that there is neither actual nor the appearance of bias in reaching the appropriate outcome.

Ontario has a special investigation unit which operates to oversee the police who act in the province of Ontario. Their mandate is limited to situations in which death or serious injury may have been caused by police misconduct, but it's established as an independent, arm's-length agency of the government, led by a director and composed of civilian investigators.

4:50

So we have to ask the question: if Ontario could respond to the needs of its citizens by creating a truly independent civilian oversight, why can't the government of Alberta respond in kind to the wishes of our citizens? There should be a mechanism in place similar to the SIU in Ontario, that has a broader scope to investigate all complaints of police misconduct and to cause, where appropriate, criminal charges to be laid or disciplinary proceedings to be taken against individual officers who are believed, upon reasonable grounds, to have committed an offence or misconduct.

Having a body which is truly in fact and in law independent and separate from the police services which might be involved in any particular incident or matter would add to the overall credibility of the investigation and the conclusions. I know that I have constituents that have often asked how they can possibly believe that the police chief alone can make an impartial, fair judgment. We need a body that would be free from undue political influence. This would clearly be seen by the public at large to be independent, objective, and impartial.

It's generally accepted that Sir Robert Peel is the founder of

modern policing. Sir Robert Peel served as the British Home Secretary during the 1820s, and it was his act, An Act for improving the Police in and near the Metropolis, that was passed through the British Parliament, that resulted in the creation of the first law enforcement agency in modern history. The beliefs and principles of Sir Robert Peel are just as relevant and viable today as when first authored. In particular, these two principles apply directly:

The ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of police actions . . . Police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to the duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.

Those principles are very important, probably more so now when we've got such a multicultural society and people may come to the country with different ideas of what police are. It is in these principles, which should at all times guide police processes, that we will find credibility. It seems that the focus of police services has shifted from the intentions as outlined in these founding statements to becoming adversarial with the public.

The only way to restore the public's faith and confidence in the police is to realize that the best way for the police to effectively do their job is to work with and through the public, not to perpetuate the perception that the police are a separate entity and do not need any scrutiny in their investigative procedures. I am very proud of the police force in Edmonton-Mill Woods. We have a new police station, and it includes a community hall where different groups and agencies, not-for-profits, can have a space to meet without charge: a real effort to show that they are working to be part of the community and that they need citizens to be part of their work.

As stated in Peel's principles, police are "dependent upon public approval of police actions" to perform their duties. If that public approval is eroded, then it impairs the ability of the police to do their jobs in the best interest of the community. So I think that when a police officer investigates a crime involving a citizen, they enjoy the total independence that they would like. But when a suspect in a crime is a police officer either on or off duty, the public are entitled to that same total independence of the body conducting that investigation.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

There being none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill 16, Police Amendment Act, 2007. It certainly seems to be heading down the path that we in the NDP caucus were interested in in regard to looking for independent oversight of the police, but by that same token there are, I guess, some problems that I would like to perhaps point out to you this afternoon.

This bill seems to add one section on the establishment of an integrated investigative unit looking into matters where death or serious injury was sustained at the hands of police officers. That certainly is a good thing. The minister having the option to appoint special constables to the head of a unit for the purpose of conducting an investigation seems reasonable as well. The amendments, all told, seem to be fairly minor.

There has certainly been growing pressure throughout the province to implement some sort of independent oversight involving police officers. Under the current regulations police officers themselves conduct internal investigations, which can raise conflict

of interest charges from some people, throwing some element of doubt into the credibility of the impartiality of the procedure.

I know that the first attempt at reform was in Bill 36 back in 2005, which tried to outline clearer processes for complaints. Bill 36 as well mandated reports every 45 days on complaints. The police forces outside the immediate jurisdiction are now conducting internal investigations, and this is, again, a step forward, but certainly we could do better.

Among some of the noteworthy complaints that, you know, we've seen recently here in Edmonton were, for example, where quite a number of people were picked up and then dropped off in another neighbourhood, from Whyte Avenue up to somewhere in Highlands-Norwood, I think it was. Another thing comes to mind: the Whyte Avenue riots that we had last spring. Whenever these elements of doubt enter into the public's mind with regard to the conduct of police and their function, it doesn't serve the prevailing function of having a police force, which is to sort of represent the laws that they are meant to uphold and then be a deterrent power for people to actually look after themselves because, of course, there's not and can never be police around every corner. Rather, we rely on the internal mechanism by which people abide by the law because they've made some tacit agreement. That sense of law and order is a good thing, so whenever that gets cast into doubt, you are again casting into doubt the internal mechanism of almost all citizens of the province to abide by the law with that personal agreement that they have with the police and the law.

Looking around the country to see what is going on with other law enforcement legislation such as this, a special investigations unit in Ontario has a civilian oversight body that was established back in 1990 as part of their Police Services Act. In fact, according to that law, they cannot employ an investigator that is a police officer or ever was. So, you know, it's kind of going in the opposite direction from where this legislation might be going. This unit in Ontario is mandated to investigate all police activity where a death or serious injury has occurred, and at the end of an investigation in Ontario, the director can decide if a criminal act was carried out by the police officer or whether charges should be laid.

Now, this amendment does not explicitly state that any investigative unit is going to be formed as a civilian body, and the word "integrated" has not in fact been defined in this bill. So what I'd like to ask from the outset is: does "integrated" refer to a joint police force who is a civilian body, or does it mean to be integrated into the police service? And how does the word "integrated" affect the independence of this said board?

There are provisions for members of the public to observe, monitor, and review investigations, but that's a separate clause that already exists in the Police Act. So I think, Mr. Speaker, that the trick is to ensure that when an integrated unit does come into existence, the head of the unit and the investigators (a) have not previously been and (b) are not currently police officers. It's also important to ensure that the unit remain an independent body, so I would recommend that we look for the clarification on that word "integrated." For sure, I would like to see a commitment for a civilian-driven body. As well, I would like to ensure that this unit operates at arm's length, in an independent manner, and that it is perceived to do so by the public.

5:00

There are a number of changes that I see going on in the Solicitor General's department that I have some interest in. You know, this bill reminds me of the evolving use of sheriffs in our province and the evolution of their powers and their duties as well. Certainly, I think that as this evolves and changes – on which I would like to see

clarification too – it sort of makes the necessity for an independent commission to oversee police activities all that more urgent, I would venture to say. We saw last year about 40 sheriffs being hired to police the highways, and then we saw over the last few months the powers of those sheriffs increasing quite a lot. These sheriffs are undoubtedly doing a fine job, but again just to have some civilian oversight into their activities I think is absolutely necessary and in the best interests of the public as a whole.

I have been speaking on this when I was, in fact, the Solicitor General critic and saw the need for this independent civilian board way back probably more than a year ago. The circumstances have not changed, and as I said before, with the sheriffs in a greater role, I think that the necessity for an independent civilian board is even more important. So I wrote a letter to the then Solicitor General to seek encouragement towards this last year, and I believe that we are moving in that direction. My suggestion would be to go full bore and put that in as part of this Bill 16. I will be introducing amendments in that very direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

Any other speakers?

The minister to close debate?

Mr. Lindsay: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a second time]

Bill 12

Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate April 4: Ms Pastoor]

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 12, Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007. I appreciate that there's an understanding of the need and necessity of this bill. It has to be supported to clarify the repayment process. It also deals with other issues, like the appeals panels and child support, which are very, very important. With the problem of overpayment it's apparent that tightening up the process seems to be something that's quite necessary. There has to be some sort of process of recovering debts that have been incurred and that are owing to the government, and this bill deals with that process. It's also talking about the issue of child support, which is very important, and the fact that the appeals process is being addressed, I think, is also a positive.

I understand the concern about the overpayment issue. It's important that we support integrity in our citizens and that we have a clear understanding that applications must be honest, but to me the real problem is that we need a system that ensures that people who are living in poverty have all the support systems that they need. There is much work to do in this regard, and this bill does not begin to address this greater need. My work with my own constituents has demonstrated that it's very difficult for somebody who doesn't have the wherewithal or the education to represent themselves and go after what they need. The appeal process is very difficult and intimidating, and in most cases they need somebody to walk them through the process, to help them.

It's good that this bill is providing the process where the director's decision concerning a person's right to appeal is communicated to the person in a number of ways. I know that that's through fax and

electronic and postal and so forth, but I'm wondering if we could, perhaps, look at some other ways that would make that process more comfortable and welcoming. The social workers and the people that work in the agencies that already know the individuals, perhaps they could be involved in a process to make sure that the individuals know what their rights are. A person has to know that they have the right to appeal, but if we don't go out of our way sometimes to let them know that, certainly they're not going to fulfill a 30-day requirement. I think that often the bureaucratic part of this can be just overwhelming and intimidating.

I know that this is really a housekeeping bill, which is changing things to bring it in line with the AISH Review Committee's proposals, and that is good. But, again, the real problem, if we're going to be talking about income and employment supports, is the poverty in Alberta; it's having adequate income supports and employment supports. We know that the gap between the rich and poor is getting larger and larger all the time. This gap in income between the rich and poor is growing. It's unacceptable, and it's going to have serious repercussions. It definitely does already have serious repercussions to our society, to our sense of community, to our sense of being valued if we're seeing the gap getting larger and we're at the bottom end.

So we need to take seriously the whole issue of income support. If we're really serious about helping people in poverty, we have to have adequate supports all the way along the line. These supports have to go with the person when we finally get them off welfare and into the employment world. But we are more concerned, it seems, about punitive action for the few that take advantage of the system or do not report everything that they're supposed to report and get punished because of that. We're more concerned about that than we're concerned about people who are actually trying to do their best. They are working and trying to live without a living wage in Alberta.

The title of the act, income and employment supports, suggests that we need to actually support these people and move them along. If so, we should have a proposal to index the welfare rates, the rates for people able to work and not able to work, a market-based approach, some way of attaching the rates of inflation and the changing standard of living that we have in our society in a way that is not arbitrary.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know that this is a housekeeping bill, and I certainly accept what it is intending to do, but it does so little. We need a vision that truly addresses adequate income supports and employment supports for individuals.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

Any other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak briefly on Bill 12, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods pointed out, this is, in fact, largely a housekeeping bill, and it seems to oversee a wide range of income and employment opportunities for marginalized members of our society. Bill 12 deals explicitly with debt recovery along with the integration of the assured income for the severely handicapped program into the same structure. The bill seems to strengthen the government's ability to claim overpayments made to recipients and to their financial administrators.

5:10

The government was taken to court, as I recall, on how it collected overpayments to AISH recipients. Based on that application of the

old act and the interpretation of the AISH regulation, the government made an administrative mistake and overpaid AISH recipients back in the 1980s. The government ignored, I believe, its own regulations and aggressively pursued debt collection from AISH recipients by cutting back on their benefit cheques without offering a repayment agreement or going through any judicial oversight. The courts ruled against the government in 1999, saying that its actions were wrong. The government, however, continued the practice until 2004.

In 2004 the regulations were amended to ensure that no more than 10 per cent was to be deducted from payments. Then a lawsuit was introduced in 2004 as well by two recipients against the government concerning issues of overpayment and underpayment of AISH income and how that was being dealt with. The government settled the case, paying \$2,323 to each AISH recipient, \$1,105 to recipients under the Social Development Act, and \$698 to recipients under the Widows' Pension Act.

So in 2004 the government revamped its collection payment regulations to make them less onerous to AISH recipients, and this bill seems to be able to tighten up the government's abilities, means, and mechanisms by which it can collect money. This bill is timed to kick in once the current payment time period expires in March 2007.

It seems that the bill is just a way to clean up all of these things, and it streamlines and certainly simplifies the act. The lawsuit, however, was not based on a poorly written act or regulations but on an explicit disregard for the act as well as a misinterpretation of the regulations. So it was made far worse by the fact that the ministry seemed to act without particular concern for people who, I believe, are amongst the very most vulnerable in our society even though the mistake was the ministry's to start off with and the courts, in fact, did rule against it. I believe that it is more symptomatic of dubious management, really, than a poor act. As long as the management remains somewhat dodgy, then the end results will always remain bad regardless of how well written the act or the bill might be and might evolve over time.

So even though the government can collect the whole amount due in whatever amount of time it has, the government puts a six-month limit on underpayments to recipients. Amounts in excess of six months' underpayments need special permission. Okay? So I find that, again, to be somewhat dubious for the government to be acting in this manner. While the government seems to be justified in clawing back benefits, they're doing it against, as I said, some of our most vulnerable people in the province, and I think that that is not necessarily in the best practices of a democratic government.

So we do have some problems with this bill and some questions, that I would like to put forward in the near future, but at this time, Mr. Speaker, I will let that go till later.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

There being none, any other speakers?

The hon. minister to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

Bill 7

Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007

[Debate adjourned April 3: Dr. Pannu speaking]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a few words to say about Bill 7. This is a very important issue in a sense because it

deals with vocational schools in Alberta in terms of providing eventual employment. We know that we have so many openings in our job force in the province that we need to have strong vocational training in this province in all kinds of areas.

I notice that the act has been changed to refer to private vocational training and not schools, because there are lots of training programs that wouldn't be considered schools. So this is all about approving those programs and the funding for those programs.

I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona in his participation in the debate on Bill 7, that these vocational training institutes are for-profit institutes; therefore, there should be special scrutiny of these programs. I mean, I have heard so many examples over the years of job training programs which didn't lead to any particular job. People invested money in a program which turned out not to be a program that was up to the standards that are necessary, that didn't lead to the job that they were intending to find after they graduated from the program. So there really does have to be scrutiny of these programs, and I don't think this bill really does much to further that scrutiny.

The one thing that it does is do away with the classification of vocational training institutes in terms of a class A licence, which refers to granting these vocational training institutes a licence because the programs are new and the programs have a student graduation rate and employment placement rate that are satisfactory, and a class B licence, which refers to vocational training institutes where the programs really are not satisfactory but somehow continue. To do away with this distinction, this class A and class B, would be in the interests of students who are investing their money in these institutes and their programming. It's clear that we have to have the scrutiny, especially the scrutiny to not continue to approve a program that's unsatisfactory. That's, I guess, an important thing to change.

Then there's the question of the licence not being just every two years, but there'll be a kind of rolling review. There are no specifics about that, and it's not clear whether that will be any more effective than what we had before. This is in the area of accreditation. Now, we all know how thorough the accreditation process is at the university level and at the college level. It's very important that universities, if they're going to continue to grant degrees, get the proper accreditation. Usually the accrediting bodies consist of professional bodies quite outside this province, and there is sufficient scrutiny of the programs. There should be some sort of accreditation process for these kind of training programs so that they come up to a very high standard so that when students pay their money – and these are mostly for-profit institutions – they should be able to get what they're expecting, and it should lead somewhere. It should train them for a particular vocation so that they can enter into the job market.

This bill is very superficial, making a few changes here and there, but I'm not sure that it does anything to really effectively deal with this oversight issue: the issue of accreditation, the issue of trying to raise the standards of education in our province.

Mr. Speaker, those are my remarks, and I look forward to more conversation about this bill when it's in committee. Thank you.

5:20

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this is a bill that when one looks at it, at first glance, looks innocent. I have questions in regard to this Bill 7, the Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007, and hopefully they can be answered.

Certainly, when we look at removing a licence distinction between A and B category private vocational schools and removing the two-year term for licences and replacing it with ongoing monitorings, it looks like, you know, business as usual. When we look at what's going on in this province and what's going on outside this province and recruiting workers into this country and province, we have to be very, very careful about what we're actually going to do with this legislation.

Now, certainly, we know that there are many different agents recruiting workers across Canada for Alberta locations. There are also many agents recruiting temporary foreign workers. It is unfortunate that some of the temporary foreign workers are being asked for megabucks, thousands and thousands of dollars to gain access to this province. They're getting here, and they're finding there is very little, if any, work.

Now, there are people in this province that are offering training programs to prospective temporary foreign workers and also to prospective immigrants to this province. My question is: how are these trainers affected by Bill 7, if at all? Do their schools fit this criteria? I realize there are 140-some private vocational schools, and they're offering thousands of training programs in this province, but how is all this related?

Certainly, there are problems around the delivery of these programs. In fact, I'm going to get this investigated, but I was told that some of our red seal, interprovincial trade examinations are being sold to prospective candidates in advance, so they've got a heads-up on that exam. This is very serious, and I hope it proves not to be true. I'm told that the price for these exams is anywhere between \$350 and \$700. If by changing this training program we are encouraging this sort of activity, I would say that we have to be very cautious with this, and perhaps we should re-examine this. I for one am not convinced, after what I've heard and what I've experienced, that we can afford to have any of our training programs reduced. We certainly can't have confidence eroded in those training programs or those certification processes. This is, unfortunately, what I have been told is happening.

Now, I would like to support this legislation. When I have been reassured that my concerns are not valid regarding this legislation, then certainly I would be in favour of this legislation. But I'm not convinced because there are too many people going around, and for the training programs that have been developed over decades in this province, the standards are being eroded. I'm not convinced that this Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007, is not a further erosion of our standards and our training programs.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions? Any other speakers?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills to close debate.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. members across the room here for your comments and your questions, and I hope to have answers to some of those questions in Committee of the Whole. I would call for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Bill 13

Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you can see, I rose a little early. I'm just so excited to get this bill through the House just in time for our Easter break.

It's my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 13, the Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill deals with minor amendments to Advanced Education and Technology's Access to the Future Act, which among other things establishes and governs the access to the future fund. [interjections] I'm hearing members say agreed, but I will continue on with the speech just in case there are any questions.

The purpose of the access to the future fund is to support innovation and excellence. The fund enhances and expands opportunities for Albertans to participate in accessible, affordable, and high-quality advanced education. The access to the future fund is now in its first year of operation based on government-approved parameters. The amendments we're proposing to the provisions governing the access to the future fund will facilitate fully implementing the approved operational parameters of the fund.

The first amendment will expand the ability to make financial transactions from the fund. The scope of financial transactions will be broadened to allow the minister to use the fund to match private donations for scholarships administered through the Alberta heritage scholarship fund, such as the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board family of scholarships.

The second amendment concerns regulation-making powers. Currently the act limits regulation authority to specific initiatives that further the fund's purpose and circumstances for which a grant may be given. When the current regulation was drafted, it was felt that including broad operational parameters would provide transparency for eligible recipients. However, because of limited regulation authority, operational details could not be included. This amendment broadens regulation-making authority so that regulations can include other matters considered necessary to carry out the purposes of the act and fund. This change would mean that future regulations could outline the fund's operational parameters and provide additional detail to the role of the council that provides advice to the minister on the fund.

So, Mr. Speaker, these amendments are minor, but they will enhance the effectiveness and transparency of the operation of the access to the future fund. I therefore ask hon. members to support Bill 13.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a thrill to address Bill 13, the Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007. I don't know what I can say about a bill of this magnitude. We're looking at an eight-page document, and four of them are blank. Apparently it's a bill of such huge importance that only the Member for Calgary-Lougheed would be entrusted to see it through the Legislature, to shepherd it through.

You know, this is the third time that we've had a bill from advanced education, and all of them have been housekeeping so far. This one is even just a light dusting. This doesn't even qualify as housekeeping.

Ms Blakeman: No Pledge?

Mr. Tougas: No Pledge. Nothing. It's just like brushing off things like this. This bill is so small, Mr. Speaker, I actually read it. That's how small it is.

An Hon. Member: That's a first.

Mr. Tougas: It is a first, believe me. It's a first. [interjections] It's okay. It's 5:30 on a Thursday. It's fine.

5:30

I could go on about the Access to the Future Act and what's happening with it. I don't think anything has actually come out of the access to the future fund yet, and there are still many questions regarding the administration of it that perhaps we'll get to at some other point.

I'd like to read over some of the comments made by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed to see what this bill is all about. Perhaps there's something in here that I don't see. I'm not sure, but I don't think there's anything else in it.

Ms Blakeman: You'd have to be blind to not see it. It's two sentences long.

Mr. Tougas: It's actually 54 words.

Anyway, I'm done. If anybody else wants to tackle this mammoth project here and take it on, I'm sure we could be here for days and days and days, but for now I'm finished.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed to close debate.

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, as you know, the usual custom at this point is to suggest that questions will be answered in Committee of the Whole, but since I didn't hear one, I have a feeling we're going to push this through rather quickly in the Committee of the Whole, not just today.

With that, I would ask you to call the question, sir.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

Bill 14

Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

(continued)

[Adjourned debate April 5: Mrs. Jablonski]

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak in principle in second reading to Bill 14, the Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. I know that the sponsoring Member for Red Deer-North had spoken briefly in introducing the bill.

First of all, I want to make note that this is, in fact, an omnibus bill. It is amending four different pieces of Alberta statutes. Prior to Standing Orders being changed in 2003, I think it was, members of this House used to have 30 minutes to debate omnibus pieces of legislation, and I have to say that I do miss that. When you were amending several pieces of legislation at once, it was helpful to have more time to be able, at least in second reading, to go through more in depth. So I'll just note in passing that that's now been reduced. The second speaker, obviously, in the position I'm in right now, gets 20 minutes, but henceforth all others will have only 15 plus that five minutes that is allowed under 29(2)(a).

I want to say that overall I'm in favour of what's being proposed here, Mr. Speaker. There are a couple of hesitations that I have, and I will point them out as I get there. Just to put this bill in context, what is being predicted is that in fact we're overdue for a pandemic. What they're expecting is that in the next one to three years we will

be faced with a pandemic and that it could in fact be affecting us over a period of 18 months. That is because the infections come in waves, and you may well have some people affected in the first wave, but then there's a second, a third, a fourth, and so on. We could have pretty significant disruptions to our way of life over a period of 18 months. I think that's important to remember when we look at some of the powers that are being proposed as being added in this legislation and the extensions of time limits that are being considered here.

Now, the government is claiming that it needs flexibility, resources, and protections to be able to respond swiftly. The Speaker will be aware that I'm not a great fan of empowering the government with a lot of extra abilities to curtail its citizens, which is what often happens. But I'm also aware that we are pretty naive in this part of the world about how these kinds of pandemics affect us.

I've said before that I've spoken recently, actually in preparation for this bill, with people in Ontario about what they experienced during SARS and in Quebec around the ice storms and just how much that affected what we expect to go on. I mean, the idea that you could continue to get, in the case of the ice storm, you know, cash out of an ATM: well, no; because the power lines were down, they didn't work. So you weren't necessarily able to stock up on your cash and go out and purchase all these things that you wanted. In the case of a pandemic, I mean, the grocery store may not be open. There could be people that are quite ill, and the local corner store has to close down or close down, you know, for periods of time and reopen when everybody is well enough to work.

We just don't have a concept of what that's like. As government we have a responsibility to provide emergency services and, more than that, to attempt to get some resumption of normal servicing back, and that includes resumption of business services. So we want our public services to be restored and working efficiently as soon as possible, and we want to give some assistance or at least not hamper unduly the business sector from being able to resume their business. But this is going to be different, and we, I think, haven't wrapped our heads around what's going to happen with this coming.

Now, the one encouraging thing that I did hear as part of the briefing is that we may well get warning. It may well happen somewhere else first, and we would have some warning that it was coming to us next week or next month, which might be very helpful.

What is an influenza pandemic? I'm very grateful to the Public Health Agency of Canada for providing information. Essentially, a new strain of a virus emerges, and people have no protection against that particular strain, so it spreads pretty rapidly around the world, and this is what's known as a pandemic. It can have minor to severe complications. It can result in death in some previously healthy individuals, but certainly we're most concerned about our vulnerable citizens, who may already be frail or susceptible to pneumonia, for example, which could cause a great deal of damage to people and possibly even death.

We've had three pandemics: in 1918-19, 1957-58, and again in '68-69. So they're saying that we're basically overdue. We're 38 years since the last influenza pandemic, and they're thinking that we're well overdue for this. Nobody can tell us exactly when, but, as I say, they are expecting it in the next year to three years.

The single most important lesson I've learned is that communication is key and particularly communication between all levels of government. So in Alberta, for us, that's going to mean between local health providers, local hospitals for example, the regional health authorities, the municipalities, the provincial government, and the federal government, and that is all going to be really key. Where they have examined where they didn't do well, for example with

SARS in Ontario, the single biggest problem they had was poor communication between different levels of government and confusion and chaos in communications around what was supposed to happen. That was the biggest factor in either causing more people to become ill or not being able to prevent others from it or not being able to recover as quickly as they should have.

5:40

I think what we need to know very clearly are the roles and responsibilities of the different levels of government and the agencies that have some authority, and I would put that to the sponsoring member to be able to outline that for us. What is Alberta's role in this? How do they fit into that structure? What, specifically, are the roles and responsibilities that the province accepts?

That co-ordination needs to cover things like contracting for vaccine production, creating a stockpile of the antiviral serums, managing that stockpile system – because if you keep it too long, it gets out of date, so you have to be replacing and refreshing it – and support for quarantine services.

I was very surprised to find out how many people could be affected here. I'm still struggling to grasp this, but we are looking at between 11,000 and just under 60,000 people that could be affected in the province. That does seem like a lot of people, but that's what we need to get prepared for. Essentially, it's between 15 and 35 per cent of the population. Of course, with adequate and timely delivery of antiviral drugs, those percentages could be reduced.

There was a working agreement between deputy ministers of health from March of 2001. The roles and responsibilities of the federal and provincial ministers were supposed to have been outlined in that. I think that the minister of health should be co-ordinating – or, clearly, we'll want to hear that they're co-ordinating – with other governments to anticipate problems and, as always, to be able to have an ongoing monitoring in anticipation of additional problems. As always, you know, you've got the plan or the standards in place, and then you need to monitor it, and then you need to enforce it. That is an area where this government has faltered in the past, so I'm starting right now to make sure that those extra stages are built in and can carry along for us.

The provincial governments are responsible for mobilizing the contingency plans and resources, so it does start at the, sort of, health region level, moves to the municipality, and then up to the province, but the province is responsible for organizing all of that and, again, that the lines of communication have to be clear. Everybody's got to know who they're supposed to be communicating with, and that has to be well established prior to a pandemic affecting us.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at the acts that are being amended here, there are four of them: the Disaster Services Act, the Employment Standards Code, the Government Organization Act, and the Public Health Act. Under the Disaster Services Act essentially it's regarding the expiration of the declared state of emergency. Currently it's 14 days. They want to expand it to 90 days or to when it's terminated by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, whichever is sooner.

I'm a little interested in why the 90 days was chosen and how many times that can be renewed. The first time out we're saying that the state of emergency ends after 90 days, but can that be renewed indefinitely? If we are looking at something being in place for 18 months, do we keep coming back every 90 days, every three months, to take us through the 18-month period? That may well be appropriate, but I'd be interested in hearing exactly what the government has anticipated.

The Employment Standards Code. I'm actually pleased to see what's in there, and I'm pleasantly surprised. I have not pegged this government in the past as being particularly kind to employees, but what's happening in this is an amendment that allows an employee to make a written complaint for being suspended or laid off or terminated, I suppose, because they weren't performing their job because they'd been conscripted to perform duties by the minister. They may have been conscripted to perform duties that aren't what they regularly do, but nonetheless they're not available for their regular job, and I don't think it's fair that they get fired for helping out with something. So this amendment to the employment standards is, I think, a very good part of what's being anticipated in the proposed legislation.

The Government Organization Act is adding regulation making authority to the minister to basically authorize some people to do certain activities during the public health emergencies. Again, that may well be someone who doesn't usually do them. They might be conscripted to do something. I think we need the ability to do that.

Now, a number of amendments flow from the fourth act, which is the Public Health Act. Some of these I have some concerns with, and some I don't. For example, they're removing the term "physician" because a physician is included in health professionals. They often say: physicians or health professionals. Well, a physician is a health professional, so that's a redundancy. It's being eliminated throughout the act here, and I think that's perfectly appropriate. It actually does start to talk about health professionals as a team and as a sector, putting everybody together as a team, and I think that's a great idea.

There's a very tricky balancing act that comes in one of the sections that I'm going to watch very carefully. Essentially, it's allowing a physician to obtain a certificate of authority for noncompliance on an individual; that is, an individual who is refusing to have a test done. So a physician can get a certificate of authority and perform any test or examination that's required to determine whether the patient has a communicable disease, further detaining this individual, possibly, in a facility until they have the test results back.

I think there needs to be a very careful balance when you are restraining personal liberties. It's easy in times like this to let it get away from you. I think that we need to always be on guard and really work hard to protect people's personal liberties. This is a state of emergency we're talking about. This is a health crisis we're talking about. There may well be people who just don't understand how dangerous this can be for everybody else and that they need to be tested to see, you know, if they've been infected or if they're carrying it. I understand all that, but boy would we need to be vigilant about this because it's so easy to slip down the other side. So I will be persistent in making sure that that is applied in as balanced a way as possible.

There are new powers that are allocated to the minister. Mostly it allows the minister to do it without consulting with anybody. So there are all kinds of extra things that are added: suspend or modify the application or operation of parts of an act that the minister is responsible for if the minister thinks that the application of it may hinder or delay the action that they want done. Again, I think you've got to really work hard to balance this stuff.

The one that I was most concerned about is a clause that allows the changes, any action that the minister orders to not be made public immediately. In this day and age of mass communication and communication by, you know, cybermail, which is instantaneous, I really don't understand the reason for amending the clause so that they don't have to make these new orders public immediately. I

think there's some idea that it would be made public eventually, but I think it should be made public immediately. Most of the people know what the new game is, what the new expectation is, what the new action or order is, but also I think there has got to be an understanding that the citizens we are serving are common-sense individuals, and most of them will comply.

This government tends towards secrecy. They tend towards doing things behind closed doors. I do not understand why you would not have that kind of information out in the public domain. So I will likely be doing an amendment to change that clause because I just am not comfortable with it.

5:50

There is an additional section that I have no problem with that basically grants the chief medical officer the power to authorize someone to be absent from work if they're helping a family member who is suffering or if they themselves are afflicted so that people, you know, have the required documentation for their employment.

The last thing I want to talk about here is the termination of a public health order, and it may be that this is needed if the timeline is, in fact, 18 months. But it's basically saying that an order declaring a public health emergency expires after 90 days instead of after 30 days. So there are two kinds of timelines that are being talked about here, the first one I referred to and this one.

Finally, there is, of course, another power that's very sweeping that's been given to the Lieutenant Governor in Council, allowing it to make regulations basically regarding anything. For me, again, that always raises red flags. That's basically empowering cabinet to make regulations on whatever they want, and I think that always has to be kept in check.

The last thing that concerned me was removing the ability of individuals to hold the government accountable or responsible for their management and the choices that they've made, because basically there's a protection clause that's coming in here that would protect them from any liabilities. In other words, they couldn't be taken to court for the choices that they've made. I think, you know, most people act in good faith here, but we also as legislators and policy-makers and as government sometimes make whopping mistakes. I think it's important that we can be held accountable for that, so I'm not comfortable in completely protecting people and absolving them from any accountability on issues like that.

The issues I've raised, then, are the clear lines of communication laid out in advance and clearly understood.

I'm looking forward to continued debate in Committee of the Whole.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North to close debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour and knowing that members wish to get back to their constituents and constituencies to celebrate Easter, I would move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. on Tuesday, April 10.

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 10, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/10

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

On this day I would ask that all Members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly, all others present here, and those observing these proceedings in their homes join together in a minute of silent and personal prayer as we reflect upon the lives of military personnel lost in service to their countrymen.

May their souls rest in eternal peace, and may a nation be eternally grateful. God bless.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. I would ask that all join in in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of 44 grade 6 students from Woodhaven middle school in Spruce Grove. They participated in your mock Legislature program this morning, and I'm told that they passed two bills, one on school hours and the other on year-round schooling. They are a bright, energetic group, and they are accompanied by teachers Ms Jayna Butler and Ms Deb Schellenberger as well as parent helper Mrs. Susan Bonn and educational assistant Ms Joanne Furminger. They are seated in both the public and the members' galleries this afternoon. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a good friend of Alberta's government and, indeed, of all Albertans. Some of you would remember him as the former director of the Premier's southern Alberta office among many other accomplishments. Today he joins us as the director of government relations for the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, and I'm very proud to have him as a member of my team. I would ask that Mr. Rich Jones please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour today to introduce a group of 66 people. Sixty are students from Our Lady of Perpetual Help school. They are accompanied by teachers Elizabeth Castillo, Paul Seewalt, and Cindy Seewalt and parent helpers Noella Ross, Scott Forster, and Mrs. Tara Hannigan. They are actively involved in studying the unit in grade 6 dealing with government. We'd ask that they please rise so that we can give them the warm traditional welcome of the Legislature.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a good friend of mine and a constituent, Kevin Pizzey. Kevin is a teacher. He's the ATA local political engagement officer. He's the vice-president for the Red Deer-North PC Association, and he's a very active political enthusiast. He's also chairman of our resolutions committee and worked very hard getting a resolution into our PC association. He's married. His wife, Pauline, is a pharmacist with London Drugs. He has one daughter, 13-year-old Eponine, and a lovely young lady she is. Kevin is also a big fan of our Premier. He's in the members' gallery. I would ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a very special group of people, 13 members of Delta Master Beta Sigma Phi. This is an international nonacademic sorority, in existence since 1931. They have been very active in raising money for charities and supporting cultural and community events. I'd like to introduce Beth Corus, Bernice Forss, Myrtle Marks, Jane McIntyre, Mary Meagher, Nan Piro, Maxine Prausa, Bunty Reid, Helen Richards, Jean Robbe, Cleo Schmidt, Natalie Snelson, and Marian Scragg. I invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three dedicated workers here in Alberta: Chris Whyatt, Angie Saunders, and Richard Konkin. Chris, Angie, and Richard have been picketing on the front line for the past seven months, as we reach day 214 of the Palace Casino strike. These workers are victims of this government's failure to protect workers in creating a fair workplace for all Albertans. Chris is a brand new employee at the Palace Casino and went on strike early into his job. Angie Saunders has been at the Palace Casino for just over 10 years. She works as a pit boss and dealer and very much enjoys her job. She's deeply concerned over her rights as a worker. Richard is a dealer at the casino and has been for seven years. Richard is a member of the union's bargaining committee and provides a great deal of knowledge to the process. They are joined today by an outstanding new representative with UFCW 401, Shauna Robertson. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Sherry and Logan Inglis. Sherry and Logan are both constituents of mine in Edmonton-

Beverly-Clareview. Sherry is here today to express her concerns around rapidly rising rent increases and is joining us in our call to cap rent increases. Sherry works as a seasonal construction worker and is raising her son, Logan, who is 11 years old. They are seated in the public gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

Members' Statements

head:

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

The Battle of Vimy Ridge

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to acknowledge an indelible part of Canadian history. On April 9, 1917, our Canadian troops engaged in a great battle at Vimy Ridge. They fought valiantly and courageously against enemy forces and, ultimately, emerged victorious. Their success at Vimy Ridge was a decisive event in the First World War and helped propel the Allies to victory. But triumph was costly, resulting in more than 10,000 casualties over the six days of fighting.

The sacrifices of Canadians throughout the First World War helped to accelerate Canada to the forefront of the international community, solidifying our country as a nation that will stand against aggression to advance peace and tolerance. At the conclusion of the war Canada's significant contributions were acknowledged with a separate signature on the Versailles peace treaty. Today the Canadian National Vimy Memorial stands to remind us all of the heroism that was demonstrated by our soldiers. The monument represents their accomplishments, contributions, and sacrifices and also memorializes those lost in the conflict who have no known grave.

I want to recognize the Three Hills and Trochu high school students from my constituency who are over there this week paying tribute to this historic event by laying a wreath at the Vimy Ridge memorial site in France. It's beholden on all of us to never forget the past and the sacrifices that were made to afford us the freedoms that we exercise today. I believe that we owe a debt of gratitude to the Canadian armed forces past and present. We will remember them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Private John George Pattison Vimy Ridge Victoria Cross Holder

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, the Canadian army captured Vimy Ridge 90 years ago in a fight for peace, freedom, and hope. The victory at Vimy on April 13, 1917, gave our Canadian army absolute command of the entire ridge, which led to the capture of Hill 145, the highest point of the ridge.

I would like to remember one of our own, a fellow Albertan, who achieved a Vimy Ridge Victoria Cross, one of four. Private John George Pattison of Calgary, Alberta, was born September 8, 1875, in New Cross, England. He emigrated to Canada in 1906 with his wife and four children and worked for the Calgary Gas Company before he joined the army on March 6, 1916.

Private John George Pattison earned his Vimy Ridge Victoria Cross for most conspicuous bravery in an attack. His citation reads:

When the advance of our troops was held up by an enemy machine gun, which was inflicting severe casualties, Pte. Pattison, with utter disregard of his own safety, sprang forward and, jumping from shell-hole to shell-hole, reached cover within thirty yards of the enemy gun. From this point, in face of heavy fire, he hurled bombs, killing and wounding some of the crew, then rushed forward overcoming and bayoneting the surviving five gunners. His valour and initiative

undoubtedly saved the situation and made possible the further advance to the objective.

Private Pattison of the 50th Battalion, Alberta regiment, Canadian Expeditionary Force was killed on June 13, 1917. He is buried in La Chaudière Military Cemetery in France.

At Vimy Ridge regiments from coast to coast saw action together in a distinctly Canadian triumph, helping create a new and stronger sense of Canadian identity and pride in our province and our country.

Thank you.

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

The Battle of Vimy Ridge

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday it was an honour to officially represent our Premier at the 90th anniversary celebration of the battle of Vimy Ridge, along with my colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs and, of course, Their Honours Norman and Mary Kwong and numerous armed forces personnel and other dignitaries.

As an honorary lifetime member of the Royal Canadian Legion Edmonton Norwood Branch I paid very special homage to our fallen soldiers. As an uncle of Private Nick Faryna, who at age 23 has already served twice in Afghanistan, I prayed for his continued safety. As a former teacher I delighted in seeing several young students also in attendance, including Jessica Strome, who read a special poem, Thomas Rogers, and Monico Opreco. I highlight them, Mr. Speaker, because they attend Vimy Ridge Academy in my area of Edmonton and because their participation gave added significance to our tribute. These students are studying the horrors of war. They are learning that freedom often has its price and that thousands of young citizens not unlike them have paid that price.

This weekend six brave Canadian soldiers were killed in Afghanistan: Private Kevin Vincent Kennedy, age 20; Private David Robert Greenslade, age 20; Corporal Aaron E. Williams, age 23; Corporal Christopher Paul Stannix, age 24; Sergeant Donald Lucas, age 31; and Corporal Brent Poland, age 37. Two others were seriously injured.

As we remember these fallen soldiers and numerous others who died in defence of democracy, liberty, and freedom, we recall the brave and valiant Canadian soldiers who gave us victory at Vimy Ridge 90 years ago. They succeeded where others had failed, and their victory became a source of eternal pride for Canada and for the free world. Mr. Speaker, we must and we shall remember them.

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

Sustainable Environment Advocacy

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dr. Davids versus government Goliath. It isn't easy being green. When a famous frog named Kermit sang that it wasn't easy being green, he wasn't specifically referring to the province of Alberta, but his theme song certainly resonates here. Advocating for a sustainable environment in the face of government-dominated, immediate gratification greenback greed requires a great deal of fortitude. Fortunately for Alberta, the voices once crying in and for the wilderness are now being heard in the towers downtown, not just those of the postsecondary ivory version from which their environmental echo frequently originates.

A trio of Dr. Davids is taking on the Alberta government Goliath, armed with irrefutable science in their slings. Dr. David Suzuki, Dr. David Schindler, and Dr. David Swann may differ in how they deliver their missive missile, but the similar message in their slings

is scientifically sound. Global warming is real. Its effect isn't just being experienced in far-off Arctic and Antarctic regions portrayed in Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. Glaciers in Alberta's Rocky Mountains are disappearing at an alarmingly rapid rate, faster, it would appear, than the Alberta government's snail-like recognition of the challenge presented.

Thanks to the diligence of the Dr. David trio, the water quality and quantity message is starting to penetrate into the most infertile, brain-barren areas of the Alberta government's market-driven mind. Dr. David Schindler's message of moving people to water rather than the government's perverse preference for interbasin, nature-defying transfers, such as the proposed diversion from the Red Deer River to the Balzac race track, is starting to percolate. The government will no longer issue new water leases for the Oldman, the South Saskatchewan, and the Bow rivers. Thanks to Dr. David Swann's persistent intransigence on water monitoring, baseline testing must now precede resource drilling.

If this interim, caretaker Conservative government doesn't catch up with constituents' concerns over mapping aquifers as well as protecting and preserving watersheds, their . . .

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

Seniors' Benefits

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to rise to pay tribute to the senior citizens of our province. Seniors are the most active participants in our democracy and in our communities. They consistently come out to vote, attend town hall and public meetings, and are frequent visitors in the galleries of this Chamber. They support their families by providing child care and are relied upon to act as caregivers when a family member falls ill. Moreover, they participate on boards and in volunteer organizations, community gardens, hospitals, and health organizations.

Seniors do however face serious challenges. In the first three months of this year consumer prices increased by 4.5 per cent. For people living on fixed incomes, this can be a terrible burden. Not everyone is benefiting from the boom, and as the cost of food and utilities increases, seniors are forced to stretch their dollars further and further. Seniors' programs have never been restored to what they were before the deep cuts during the 1990s. I urge the minister to include universal dental and optical programs in the upcoming budget and to eliminate the education portion of property taxes for all seniors.

When it comes to housing, many seniors find themselves in real danger. My colleagues and I have heard from numerous seniors who face rental increases of several hundred dollars over just a few months. Seniors across the province face evictions as rental apartments are converted into condominiums. Many Albertans would benefit from the NDP's proposal to implement rent guidelines, but low-income seniors may benefit from it the most.

I'll conclude by noting that last year's budget promised that \$170 million would be allocated for improvements to long-term care by 2008-2009. This is barely half of what would be needed to meet the recommendations of the Auditor General. Recent revelations about problems in long-term care facilities show that this issue is far from resolved. In our wealthy province we have a responsibility to give seniors the support that they deserve and treat them with the respect that they have earned.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

1:20

Municipal Financing

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current fiscal imbalance for municipalities is wrong and unacceptable. Alberta families and communities throughout our province are suffering from excessive, high taxes and will continue to suffer under this government's current policies and will suffer even more if this government does not toss the idea of forcing municipalities to levy new taxes if they need more money. Our current system is not in the best interests of Alberta families and even worse for our communities. The whole structure is set up for power and control.

This Tory government is literally bringing our municipal governments to their knees and forcing them to stretch out their hands and plead for assistance, forcing them into a dependent relationship as there is no long-term, stable funding. The answers come one at a time, one project to the next, and one year at a time. This is not good government, and the Tory policy is not focused on our quality of life, security of our communities, and certainly not their sustainability.

Last year Gloria Kovach, president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, called upon the Prime Minister and the Premiers to fix the fiscal imbalance. The FCM report, *Building Prosperity from the Ground Up: Restoring Municipal Fiscal Balance*, glaringly pointed out that only 8 cents of every tax dollar collected go to municipalities, 50 cents to the federal government, 42 cents to the provincial government. It is critical that Alberta take the first step and lead this country in solving this imbalance.

Mr. Speaker, this needs to change. We need a Premier that is not only aware of the problem but has the political will to solve the problem. Granting municipalities the power to add additional taxes is not the solution. We need a new formula that ensures that a fair portion of the tax revenue is returned to the municipalities. A good start would be to return 10 per cent of the provincial income tax. This would ensure that municipal governments have a reliable revenue stream, enabling them to plan long term, something this government has failed to do even short term.

Mr. Speaker, the fiscal imbalance is a Canada-wide problem. If we really want to fix our country, we'd better fix our province first and lead by example.

head:

Introduction of Bills

Bill 27

Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I rise today and request leave to introduce Bill 27, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007.

The proposed amendment would allow for any special Alberta symbol to be added to the list of official symbols of our province. Mr. Speaker, the items would be designated as symbols of distinction rather than emblems. The amendment will help us recognize and honour our province's rich and diverse heritage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 28

Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to request leave to introduce Bill 28, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007.

This act amends the Provincial Court Act to permit a judge who

is more than 70 years of age and working full time to be appointed a part-time judge if he or she wishes. Currently the act permits part-time judges to be reappointed after age 70 but only if they started part-time service on or before their 70th birthday. The amendments also change how sittings for part-time judges can be scheduled. These changes are being proposed at the request of the Provincial Court.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Bill 29 Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 29, the Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007.

The Farm Implement Act regulates and provides licensing for dealers and distributors of agricultural equipment in Alberta. This bill will provide farmers with more choice in leasing farm implements from financial institutions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to move that Bill 29 be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Bill 30 Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 30, the Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill will contribute to providing safe and secure communities for Albertans in a number of ways. This includes formally establishing the Alberta emergency management agency, updating terminology to be in line with the national and international emergency management community, and empowering summer villages to enhance their emergency response capabilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 30 be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table some more copies of letters received by my office urging the

government to provide funding for the cancer-fighting drug Avastin. In doing so, I'd like to reiterate that people who require this treatment can expect to pay \$1,750 every two weeks for Avastin treatment and that the drug is already covered by the cancer boards in B.C., Quebec, and Newfoundland. Today's letters are from Janice Kindrat, Myrtle Jacula, Camille Loken, John Tidridge, Sylvia Traynor, Martha Schroth, Mark Balser, Marj Balser, Julia Brown, and Alastair Brown.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table today with appropriate copies. The first is from Esther von Busse, stating that "every childcare professional working with children age 0-12 should receive wage enhancement and professional development funds."

The second is from Peggy Jones, after school child care worker, who is also concerned about the lack of wage supplements for child care workers who work with children six years and older.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a number of background documents relating to a contract between the former member for Meadowlark and the provincial government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table for the information of the Legislative Assembly this afternoon the following two documents. The first is a letter dated March 28, 2007, and it's addressed to Mr. Kenneth Sigurdson. This letter is in response to an e-mail sent to the website www.savemycwb.com on March 14, 2007, from a government of Alberta computer, and it's signed: "Sincerely, [Mr.] Campbell, Deputy Minister."

The second tabling is also a letter to Mr. Sigurdson, and it is from a government of Alberta employee named Amber, and it is also in regard to the disrespectful e-mail.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and table three letters, all dealing with personal testimonials on affordable housing residence in northeast Edmonton, and two of them are from volunteers at the Unity Centre of North East Edmonton.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Before recognizing the first speaker, the chair just needs to point out to all members, particularly those four that have sent me notes, that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity violated the rules of the House on two occasions when he was giving his member's statement. You cannot do through the back door what you're not allowed to do through the front door. You cannot mention the names of current members of the Assembly in the Assembly, and there's a reason for that, a historic reason, which I will not go into right now. But, yes, two violations. Not good. Knows better.

We'll move forward.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Contracting Policies

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What's better than simply living in Alberta? Well, living in Alberta as a Tory insider. The Official Opposition has obtained documents showing that a Tory MLA defeated in the last election received a sweetheart contract with the former ministry of aboriginal affairs and northern development. The contract was entered into after the direct intervention of the minister without a competitive bidding process and was effective within two days of the former member losing his seat. To the Premier: is the Premier prepared to defend the practice of ministers directing civil servants to give untendered contracts to former and defeated Tory MLAs?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, since I've been sworn in as Premier, we've taken this government furthest in terms of openness and transparency. We've introduced the lobbyist legislation in the Legislature for discussion. We've also, of course, put all of the government aircraft manifests on the web. We're continuing communicating with Albertans on a quarterly basis on who receives any payment from the Alberta taxpayer and will continue to do so, including the introduction of the Conflicts of Interest Act in this Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The usual dodge from the Premier.

Over and over in this province due process takes a back seat to patronage. Department e-mails show that this contract with the former Conservative member was entered into at the personal request of the former minister and that at the time of the request the department didn't even know what services would be provided. There was no competition. There was no advertising. To the Premier: is the Premier convinced that the former Tory member was the one and only person in all of Alberta qualified for this job?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the administrative matter of a contract by a previous minister, I'll give that question to the present minister to respond to.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One thing about this province is that we expect value for one single cent that we spend. That's why this government is open, transparent, and that's why we're discussing it in here today.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Department e-mails indicate that this contract wasn't even contemplated until mid-December 2004, right about the time the former member incorporated a consulting company under his name. Final department approvals for the contract were given on January 24, 2005, but the contract is dated, and taxpayers were billed for nearly \$17,000 starting two months before that. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that backdating an untendered contract with this former MLA breaks every rule about good public management?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll leave that to the minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member across the way failed to mention is that, first of all, this went to the Ethics Commissioner. He was asked about the actual contract. The Ethics Commissioner concluded that there was no conflict of interest. Let me repeat that for the hon. member: there was no conflict of interest. Also, he forgot to mention, Mr. Speaker, that during that year, the Alberta centennial of 2005, that was the celebration of our 100th anniversary. I was told that Mr. Maskell was contracted to ensure that aboriginal Albertans had access and participated fully in the centennial, and that's exactly what they did, serving all Albertans.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The terms for this contract weren't finalized until two full months after work reportedly began. The job description for this hastily invented position appears to involve lots of liaising and advising and assisting, nothing tangible that we can detect. To the Premier, and I hope he answers this one: given that Alberta taxpayers have already paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to Tory insiders providing nothing more than verbal advice, is the Premier defending the practice of paying a defeated Tory MLA \$135,000 over 16 months for little more than being a stand-in for the minister?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the hon. member. He said \$135,000. Actually, it was \$141,037.27, to be very specific.

Dr. Taft: Impressively, the former member managed to fulfill the requirements of this contract before the contract even existed. Quite a feat. To the Premier: given that billing began long before the contract was finalized or the required services were even worked out, what assurances do Albertans have that the services billed by the former member actually needed to be done? Or was the contract written to justify the so-called services already provided?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can't provide all the details on the contract that's under question in the House today, but I can assure you that under my leadership perception of this sort will not happen. We'll have very clear rules in terms of whom government enters into contracts with, and the public will know not only the terms of those contracts but what they expect to receive for the payment made to any person, whether they're a former MLA or any person contracting with the government.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the life of a politician can be unpredictable. The inconvenient reality of electoral politics is that you can find yourself out of a job in a hurry. MLAs are provided with a transition allowance to help them move back into private life. Yet this former MLA collected his transition allowance of over \$80,000 at the same time that he was collecting on this juicy contract worth more than the basic MLA salary. To the Premier: how – how – can the Premier justify this double-dipping at taxpayers' expense; you lose an election and you double your salary?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's one of the reasons that I talked very seriously about introducing conflict-of-interest legislation. This is going to come up for discussion in the House when the legislation comes forward. Most importantly, I just want to make this statement: that the amount of the relocation allowance is made by an all-

party committee; it's not something that's done by the government. All members sit on a members' committee reviewing the relocation allowance. And I believe – you can correct me if I'm wrong – that it's also the only committee in the dominion of Canada that sits totally in public, right in front of the media, making those decisions.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Judicial Council's guidelines on instructing a trial jury concerning direct and circumstantial evidence say that both kinds of evidence are treated equally by the law: one is not better nor worse than the other. The Canadian Judicial Council is composed of the chief justices and associate justices of Canada's superior court. So I think it's safe to say that their interpretation of circumstantial evidence is correct. But just to be sure, to the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice: will the minister confirm for us that this definition by the Canadian Judicial Council is accurate, that circumstantial evidence holds the same weight as direct evidence in a court of law?

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Legislation

The Speaker: Well, we have to be careful here. First of all, decisions of the courts are not dealt with in the House. And seeking a definition of a statute or the interpretation of a statute is also offside. So I don't know, hon. minister, if there's a question here that you can deal with.

Racing Entertainment Centre Project (continued)

Mr. Stevens: Well, the only comment I would have, Mr. Speaker, is that I always have the utmost respect for the members of the judiciary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here are the facts supporting the premise that a deal, verbal or otherwise, exists between this government and the developers of the Balzac project. The developers are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars a day without a water licence; the province gave the MD \$4.8 million for municipal waste-water servicing for the horse-racing track in August 2006; the MD signed an MOU with the developers guaranteeing water for the project, water they had not yet received a licence for; MD councillors told members of this caucus that the former Deputy Premier guaranteed water for them and have stated that they had many discussions with her about the project; and the existence of over 5,000 pages of documents through FOIP. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that this circumstantial evidence pointing to a secret deal is undeniable?

The Speaker: Well, you know that front door/back door thing I talked about a little earlier? You're asking for an interpretation here of a statute. Now, Premier, you go forth if you wish.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, I asked them, in fact, in front of the media the other day when all of the cameras were there, to bring evidence, and the Leader of the Opposition was unable to present evidence. Today they're – I don't know – like you said, going in the back door. I don't know.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has stood up repeatedly and denied that a secret deal exists. He has challenged the Official Opposition, as he just did, to produce documents. Well, our evidence has just been presented. The circumstantial evidence in this case overwhelmingly indicates the existence of a secret deal between this government and the developers of the Balzac project. You know, if this was a court of law and the people in the Red Deer River basin the jury, the verdict would be guilty as charged. To the Premier: will the Premier right here right now deny that the evidence presented in this House constitutes proof beyond a doubt that this government made a deal with the developers to supply water for the Balzac project? Can he deny the facts?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member just proved why he used to be a radio announcer. I guess that's about all I have to say in response to that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Holy Cross Care Centre

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The termination of the contract with the Holy Cross by the Calgary regional health authority to build seniors' housing comes after a long record of problems with fire safety and care standards. There are 42 long-term care beds and the associated nursing staff that have been lost, and Alberta Health and Wellness admits that it's already short on resources. The question is to the Premier. What steps are you taking to replace these beds and keep these health professionals in the health care system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, obviously, seniors' housing is very important to this government, and we're continuing in our efforts to not only increase the number of spaces but to aggressively pursue more people to work in providing care for seniors. In fact, the minister of health has a good workforce strategy in place, and we'll continue our efforts to attract more people to Alberta to work in this area.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier didn't talk about what's going to happen to the nursing staff at the Holy Cross now that the Calgary regional health authority has terminated its long-term care contract. We don't want vague generalizations, Mr. Premier, about what the government's doing in the future. We want specific answers. There's going to be the closing of a number of important beds, laying off staff. What are you going to do about it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's an administrative matter, and the minister will deal with it.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no question that the need for nurses and other health care professionals in this province is very definitely there. There will be no problem at all for anyone who was employed with the long-term care portion of the

facility at the Holy Cross to find other positions, if that's what they wish to do, within the Calgary health region or other health regions in the province. So there is no potential of losing those important health care professionals in this province unless their desire is to go somewhere else. That's not the issue.

The issue here is that the Calgary health region saw an issue with respect to the quality of care and took appropriate steps on a timely basis to deal with it. That's what we should be looking at and saying that this is the system the way it should operate. There was an issue identified with respect to quality of care and safety. There was oversight to see whether or not that issue was going to be fixed, and when it wasn't fixed to their satisfaction, they dealt with it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, we get these long-winded answers that sort of go around the issue. The basic question is that there's a loss of 42 long-term care beds because of this government's fascination and flirtation with private health care delivery. Will the minister tell us what he's going to do to replace those 42 long-term beds, and will he admit that privatized health care creates nothing but problems and headaches?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, there is a long tradition of very competent private care as well as public care as well as nongovernmental organization care in the long-term system in this province. All three methods have been proven effective in terms of providing long-term care. That's not the issue. Yes, there are 42 beds that have been taken out of service, but I doubt that this hon. member would suggest that those 42 beds should stay in service. What we really need to be doing and what this minister is doing is working with the Calgary health authority and other regions in the province to make sure that we have the quality of long-term care that's needed for senior citizens in our province and for others who need it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Rural Alberta Development Fund

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. In 2006 all of rural Alberta was excited when the province announced the \$100 million rural Alberta's development fund. Sadly, though, I understand that to date not one project has been approved under this fund. To the minister: what is taking so long for this fund to be operational?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, this fund has \$100 million in it for expenditure over a three-year period. It has had \$206 million worth of applications. Recently, in meeting with the members of the fund management team, which is arm's length from government, they advised that they have approved about \$2 million worth of projects. The difficulty is that this is not for refurbishment of arenas or parks or rebuilding some of the facilities in Alberta; it is about dealing with new and innovative approaches.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. There have been many expressions of interest submitted. In fact, last month at the AAMD and C convention the very first question during the ministerial forum focused on when rural Albertans and rural organizations can expect to see funded projects from this fund. Can the minister let us know when they can expect further funded projects?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I understand that it'll probably be very shortly. One of the difficulties in reviewing the projects is that frequently they infringe on the perspective of not being able to fund projects in major urban cities, even though they may be benefiting rural communities. It infringes on the issue of capital projects. Many of the projects have dealt with both capital and operating funds. Finally, a very important criteria is that these projects should be able to stand alone, without government departments taking over the fund requirements in future, without them being a pothole filler.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is also to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. This morning as I met with Brazeau county council in Drayton Valley, I learned that a few applications have recently been turned down. Could the minister please outline the qualifications and expectations desired for an application to be approved under this fund?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, one of the things I could state for all hon. members is that if they have questions, they could consult with the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, who is taking a lead role in liaising with my department on the projects that could be assured to be approved. Several of them include those projects to benefit seniors, to benefit youth, to engage the participation of aboriginals in communities, to support economic development. The criteria further expand to talk about facilitating opportunities to access rural health services and expanding learning and skill development services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Stephanie Butler Homicide

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday the city of Edmonton was once again in shock and disbelief at another horrific act of violence, the city's ninth homicide of the year. One young woman is dead, a distraught husband is in mourning, and an elderly cab driver is severely beaten. The culprit, a repeat violent offender addicted to crystal meth with outstanding warrants, went from being in police custody 48 hours prior to committing murder and aggravated assault. To the Solicitor General: given that the accused in this situation was in police custody only two days prior to committing violent crimes, will the minister utilize the provisions of section 46.1 of the Police Act to conduct an investigation into this incident to determine what went wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me say that this is a very tragic event, and our thoughts and prayers are certainly going out to the families involved. The question as to whether this

is going to become a 46.1 or not is presently being investigated by the Edmonton city police. This case will soon be before the courts, and I will not make any further comments at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The accused in this tragic case had a very long history of addiction to drugs and mental instability as well as outstanding warrants. That should have been enough to hold him in custody. What is obvious in this situation is that producing \$300 in bail and a court order to stay away from his brother's house were not even close to being the measures necessary to protect Stephanie Butler and the cab driver. The actions taken were not adequate. There was clear risk. To the Minister of Justice: will the minister commit to a public fatality inquiry into the circumstances that led the justice of the peace to release the accused on only \$300 bail and the said court order when these conditions were so obviously not enough to prevent this from happening?

1:50

Mr. Stevens: Well, as the Solicitor General rightly pointed out, Mr. Speaker, this matter is before the court. It's totally inappropriate for me as Minister of Justice and Attorney General to respond to that question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a glaring problem in this province, and that is the lack of resources available to the police to enforce the conditions of court orders. Time and again the Official Opposition has raised the problem of inadequate police funding, particularly for Alberta's major cities. The government has failed to respond to these concerns, and they continue to fail to recognize that the funding formula needs to be re-evaluated due to population increases and a dramatic increase and escalation in violent crimes. Everyone knows that the police need more resources, everyone but this Tory government. To the Solicitor General: when will the minister commit to reviewing the funding formula for cities with populations over 100,000 and request raising it from the meagre \$16 per capita that it's currently at?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In regard to funding for police agencies, I do want to point out that over the last two years funding has increased by 20 per cent and has resulted in over 200 new RCMP officers out on the street. In regard to cities and those funding formulas, we are currently reviewing that. If we see a need to change, we will do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Barley Marketing

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the federal minister of agriculture announced the results of the federal barley plebiscite. Not surprisingly, almost 80 per cent of Alberta's barley farmers who responded actually voted to end the monopoly currently held on the barley market by the Canadian Wheat Board. Alberta's barley producers have long been advocates for marketing choice when it comes to wheat and barley. My question to the Minister of Agriculture and Food: what do the results of this plebiscite mean to Alberta's barley producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. The results certainly show that a strong and clear majority of Albertans and western Canadian producers have chosen to have the option of selling their barley in an open market. These results have given the federal government an even stronger mandate to now move ahead and open Canada's barley market to choice. Farmers can now expect to have the option to move their own barley if they wish.

Mr. Prins: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the same minister. I understand that he recently met with the federal minister of agriculture. Did the federal minister give you any indication of the timeline for which we can expect these changes to occur?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you. Yes, I did have the pleasure of having my first meeting with Minister Strahl last Monday in Red Deer. The minister assured me that the federal government is taking immediate action to work through the regulations to open the barley market for marketing choice. Barley farmers can now expect to work in an open market by August 1 of this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell the House what choices or options will be available to the 22 per cent of barley farmers who actually voted against choice, basically to retain the single desk? What choices do they have?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, throughout the entire process the government of Alberta has always maintained that there be a strong role for the Canadian Wheat Board in marketing choice environment. With the results now in, it's time to work together, I think, and strengthen the barley marketing system. The Canadian Wheat Board must take their experience and turn it into a success for an open market. Those who choose to market their barley through the Canadian Wheat Board will have the opportunity to continue to do so, as they always have.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Crystal Methamphetamine

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Youth addictions affect families across our province, yet little has been done by the government to ensure that this critical problem is addressed. The Premier's Task Force on Crystal Meth recommended that the province create 300 new addictions, detox, and treatment beds. This is a pressing issue, yet in the seven months since the report was released, no new youth detox or treatment beds have been announced. Can the Minister of Children's Services tell us why this government has yet to even begin to meet the target set out by the task force?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that we are working with Health on this particular issue. I do believe that this falls under the responsibility of the minister of health.

Mrs. Mather: All right. Thank you. It was recently reported that parents looking for public addictions treatment for their children have to wait a minimum of six weeks before treatment is available. This is an unreasonable period of time for parents to wait to receive help for their endangered children. Can the minister of health please explain why nothing has been done to address these unreasonable wait times?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is indeed an area of very significant concern to this minister and to this government and, I think, to all Albertans. If we want to have a society where our children can grow up in safety, in safe and caring school environments and in safe and caring communities, we do need to be able to deal with the drug-addiction issues.

The scenario that requires a lot more work is the crystal meth strategy you pointed out, but I would say that it's broader than just the crystal meth strategy. It has to deal with the whole use of illicit drugs and the issue of how it impacts our children. I'm working with other departments in a multidepartment process to review the crystal meth strategy, and I'll be bringing forward some proposals relative to what we might do in that area very shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Task Force on Crystal Meth made 23 recommendations specifically linked to addictions prevention. Prevention is a critical part of any addiction strategy since it can prevent the negative consequences of addiction that are affecting youth across this province. Other recommendations made by the task force have been ignored, so can the Minister of Children's Services please tell us if the report made by the Premier's Task Force on Crystal Meth is just another in a long line of reports that have been shelved by this government, never to be seen again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms. Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I will refer to the minister responsible.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I just indicated in my last question, it's not being ignored. In fact, as soon as it was delivered, a committee of deputies across government was put together to look at the impact of it. That has now landed on my desk, and we will be bringing forward strategies immediately. This is a very significant issue, a very significant concern for this minister and this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Graduated Drivers' Licences

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents have expressed concern over the number of young drivers who seem to be involved in serious collisions on our roads. Over the Easter weekend there was tragic rollover involving as many as nine teenagers in a minivan. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. What is the minister doing to make sure that Alberta's graduated drivers' licensing program is effective?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the accident over the weekend was a

tragedy, and as a parent my heart goes out to the families of those young people involved.

It's been three years since we started the graduated drivers' licence program in Alberta, and we said when we started it that we would review our progress and make changes as necessary. So we've hired an independent national research company to evaluate our program for new drivers and recommend any changes, and I expect to have the report out by this summer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I understand that a mother from Fort Saskatchewan is calling on the government to immediately suspend the licence of any young driver who is involved in a serious injury collision. Will the minister consider making this change?

Mr. Ouellette: As I indicated, Mr. Speaker, we're reviewing the program and are committed to making whatever changes are reasonable and appropriate. I'm not aware of any jurisdiction in North America that immediately suspends the licence of a graduated driver that's been charged with a serious collision. The registrar of motor vehicles can refer any driver at any time to the Alberta Transportation Safety Board for review of their driving privileges, and the transportation board can suspend, if need be, at any time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Other provinces have set the age limit for acquiring a learner's permit at 16, and Saskatchewan sets the age at 15. To the same minister: will the minister consider raising the age for acquiring a learner's permit from 14 years to 16 years of age?

Mr. Ouellette: Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker, that no one is allowed to drive by themselves under 16 years old in Alberta. A 14-year-old can get a learner's permit, but they must have a fully licensed driver in the car with them that is over 18 years of age. I'm not sure, until the report comes in – and we want to look at that report – why this hon. member would not like to have a young driver get more experience before they can drive alone.

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

2:00 Resource Development in Marie Lake Area

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Marie Lake is a recreational gem in northeastern Alberta but is rapidly becoming a defining issue for Albertans who care about values beyond the exploitation of oil sands. Many of us have had contact from citizens in the Edmonton area and across the province appalled at the poor process which allows land auction underneath lakes, seismic activity at noise levels that could damage fish, and oil sands development that risks not only the water quality but also the entire unique habitat. To the Environment minister: what is the Environment minister doing to ensure that greed does not destroy this unique recreational area and pristine habitat?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've addressed this question in the past from another member. The role of Environment in this particular case is very limited. Our responsibility is to ensure that the ecosystem itself, the lake bed, is not disturbed and that the air

quality is not impaired. So from that perspective, if there is no dynamite that's involved, if there's no drilling of the lake bed that's involved, then Alberta Environment is not involved, and it would fall under SRD to make the decision with respect to the fish life in the lake.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Energy minister. Unlike federal lands, provincial lands have no public review before mineral leases are going to auction. How open and accountable is a government when the public have to learn about such developments only after the land is already auctioned?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is not exactly the case. The province of Alberta does have a committee, the Crown Mineral Disposition Review Committee, established in the province of Alberta in 1974. It has been in place and active since that point in time, and there is a prereview done of any mineral lease sales before they're actually posted.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Environment minister. Your department continues to reassure people that the science is in and that all is safe. The public, however, know that only since last year have you been monitoring groundwater for gas contamination around the province, and everyone knows that you have less than .5 per cent of the provincial budget with a fraction of the staff you had a decade ago. How can Albertans believe that this pitifully funded department can stand up for the environment against such multibillion-dollar investment?

Mr. Renner: Well, it's an interesting segue, I must admit, Mr. Speaker. I fail to see the connection between the first two questions.

The fact of the matter is that, again, I've answered this question in the past. I feel that as Minister of Environment I'm more than capable of protecting the environment. As for the adequacy of my budget, I encourage the member to hold off until we introduce the budget, and we'll deal with it at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Early Childhood Education

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's high school graduation rate is dead last amongst Canada's 10 provinces. This is an embarrassment for Alberta and a deeply troubling statistic for every parent and student in the school system today. There is abundant evidence to demonstrate that an investment in a child's first years of education greatly increases the likelihood of success in high school. I'd like to ask the Education minister when he would acknowledge this fact and institute full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten as an option for all Alberta parents with young children today.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of early learning opportunities was one that the Premier recognized long before the Member for Edmonton-Calder. It is in my mandate letter, and we will be dealing with it. I would ask the hon. member to just hold off till the budget comes out, and we'll see if it's dealt with in a financial way at that time.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, we've seen successive Education ministers use the same excuse – wait for the budget; tune in – and always we're left with nothing.

Two of the highest ranked recommendations in the Learning Commission for effectiveness and value for money were full-day kindergarten and junior-years kindergarten. Alberta families deserve to be able to choose high-quality education for their children, and it's the responsibility of this government to provide them. I'd like to ask the minister: as it stands today, do you think that parents are going to choose between a high-quality, publicly funded junior kindergarten or a private daycare in a strip mall? Is that the choice that you're leaving for them now?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd hardly call \$5 billion a year nothing. Let's get it on the record that this government spends more on education than any other provincial government, including the member's socialist government in Saskatchewan. So let's get that straight.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, maybe the hon. minister should go back to social studies and realize that it's not a socialist government in Saskatchewan. Maybe we could pick up some good ideas from them nonetheless.

Full-day kindergarten projects run by Edmonton public schools have been very successful. The trend in all modern, leading jurisdictions around the world is to offer at least two years of early childhood education before grade school. Alberta families should expect nothing short of the best. Doesn't this minister think that all young Alberta students should be offered this advantage, or are the words "modern" and "leading" not descriptions that the minister would use to describe his vision of education?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, our focus is going to be on those children that need the assistance: the mild and moderate learning disabilities. That's where our focus will be. Again, I ask the hon. member to wait for the budget, and I hope he'll be pleasantly surprised.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Regional Municipal Funding

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently entities such as the SPCA, the Royal Alberta Museum, the Alberta Art Gallery, and the Citadel Theatre, who are undertaking large infrastructure projects, have approached our provincial government and the city of Edmonton for substantial funding. These facilities without a doubt provide a valuable service not only to Edmontonians but to all residents of the capital region. However, little if any funding is provided for these projects by jurisdictions outside of the city of Edmonton. As such, Edmontonians pay disproportionately for these projects, twice, through their provincial and then municipal taxes. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Since the issue of regional . . .

The Speaker: Well, unfortunately, that's it.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure what the question would be, but I can tell you that my advice to municipalities, of course, is to communicate, collaborate, and co-operate. The Premier has committed \$1.4 billion to assist municipalities with the growth pressures and the infrastructure needs that they do have.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Oh, just to be a Speaker for a minute.

Mr. Speaker, I have two supplementals, which I'm going to use effectively. My first and second questions to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: since the issue of regional co-operation has been studied ad nauseam with little voluntary co-operation from the municipalities, why won't the minister intervene and impose an intermunicipal funding formula for such regional projects as mentioned by me before?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I needed to say before that I think it's very important that there is co-operation between municipalities, and they know best what their needs are. The \$1.4 billion that has been committed is very important for the predictability and sustainability of municipalities. I want to say that it is those local municipalities and their choices in the direction of their priorities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when will I be able to assure Edmontonians that their municipal property taxes are being spent on snow removal, pothole repairs, public transportation, and on their fair share of their municipal projects rather than subsidizing regional projects?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, it is the local municipalities' responsibility to identify their projects and to work with municipalities. From that, I want to say, as my previous colleague: stay tuned for the budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

2:10 Licensing of Land Agents

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Land Agents Licensing Act creates an unbalanced playing field for those who are bound by its provisions. The act creates an unbalanced playing field, favouring the oil and gas industry over individual landowners. This was clear in the Provincial Court decision issued on March 30, 2007, in Vegreville in the case between the province of Alberta and Raymond Strom. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why does this act favour the oil and gas industry over individual landowners?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that the act and the land agent issue and the way it had developed in the first instance was to protect landowners from some – some – unscrupulous agents that posed themselves as land agents and were creating a problem with respect to landowners' rights. I think that in the first place the legislation, the act that went forward, was a good piece of legislation that was put in place to protect landowners. As it has evolved, there have been some problems and questions with respect to that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, who is in charge of the act: what chance do landowners have of negotiating a fair deal with adequate compensation when the act prevents them from hiring someone who has their interest in mind?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, recently before the courts there was an application by somebody who has been denied his capacity to continue in the fashion. I believe there was a fine administered of about \$517. That individual has an opportunity to appeal to a higher court. While that appeal period is open, I think it would be totally wrong for me to make any comment at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. It just didn't apply there.

Again to the same minister: when will this flawed legislation be amended to allow individuals to advise and represent their friends and neighbours during negotiations for surface rights leases or utility rights-of-way?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, at such time as we have passed the appeal period, I will provide opportunities for caucus to further discuss the issue.

Fibre Road Map Study

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the sustainability of the agriculture and forestry industries is of great importance to economic development in rural Alberta. Both of those sectors are facing very real challenges right now. Last year the government commissioned a fibre road map study to examine new ways of stimulating development of biologically based industry throughout the province. My question is for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Can the minister tell Albertans in the agriculture and forestry sectors when the fibre road map study will be completed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fibre road map study which the hon. member refers to gave some very serious consideration to some innovative strategies to utilize research and the infrastructure that we have in the province for research and the skilled labour force. It was developed over the course of a year with input from more than 200 industry, academia, and government participants, and it was presented to government in January of this year. A cross-ministry team is now giving consideration to all of the recommendations regarding the attraction of research and development investments, regarding the transformation of the pulp and paper sector, regarding transformation of building systems in the sector, cultivating the rural entrepreneurship that we're going to need in feedstock production and the biorefining capacity as it relates to agriculture. Many of these things are ongoing.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: when will Albertans in the agriculture and forestry sectors begin to see some tangible results from that study?

Mr. Horner: I'd say, Mr. Speaker, that we are already starting to see some of the results coming from this cross-ministry initiative in terms of the research and development. We've already initiated some projects, some policy changes to reduce risk and stimulate the growth of value-added products and other sectors and services in new business opportunities in rural and urban Alberta that are involved in agriculture as well as the fibre industry and the forestry sector. We are also supporting the industry by way of the information and the communication that is going on from this cross-ministry research team. We are focusing our research and our applied research based on the consultation with the over 200 participants.

Dr. Brown: My second supplemental question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. I wonder if the minister could advise the House what plans his ministry has to salvage the mountain pine beetle killed fibre that is present in Alberta's forests.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're looking at improving the utilization not just of the fibre from pine beetle killed wood but from all wood. Enhanced fibre usage is key to the competitiveness of our forest industry. My ministry has been consulting, working with the other minister here on research and development and also with the industry. There's a report coming forward shortly on industry competitiveness, and I look forward to sharing the recommendations in that report with the members of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Early Childhood Education (continued)

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are about early childhood education. I want to just go back to the minister and ask him. He was saying earlier that in his ministry early childhood education was not on his to-do list. I think I heard him say very clearly today that it is on his to-do list, and we will receive money in the budget. Is that correct, sir?

Mr. Liepert: Two things were wrong with that question, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I did not say that there was going to be money in the budget. I said that we anticipate looking forward to the budget. Secondly, I would like to correct the hon. member. I did not say that early childhood education was not on my to-do list. I said that taking full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten back to my caucus was not on my to-do list.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, I'm now confused. Mr. Minister, you have a wonderful background in intervention, and I'm just wondering. There are studies galore by Jenson, Patterson, and so forth that suggest that early education programs will improve achievement testing, which you people are proud of, decrease grade repetition, and that special needs placements will be much better. Is it the position of this government that the costs of funding full-day and junior kindergarten outweigh the benefits that they provide for children getting the program? Does avoiding it provide benefits for the children that are not getting it?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, currently there are a number of school boards throughout the province that have some full-day kindergarten programs in place. School boards are doing this with the intent of evaluating it. I think that will be valuable information when we get it. I'm not convinced – and I believe that that was the feeling of our caucus – that we are ready to move on full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government often claims that it is up to school boards to figure out how to use the funds they are given, but without adequate funding school boards are often forced to make tough decisions and cut even beneficial programs. The Alberta Learning Commission supports the funding

for junior and full-day kindergarten, so why won't the government? Can the minister tell us if he will lobby for adequate education funding so that school boards can afford to implement valuable early education programs across Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I come back to the fact that we spend \$5 billion on education, and 97 per cent of that \$5 billion flows to school boards. I believe that school boards have adequate resources to provide the services that they're providing. I've said on many occasions – and I think many Albertans agree with me – that we have one of the best education systems in the world, so for this hon. member to say that somehow our education system is underfunded is simply not correct.

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

Chronic Wasting Disease Control

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been hearing a lot recently about a major action against chronic wasting disease in wild deer along the border with Saskatchewan. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister tell this Assembly what the results are of his department's recent deer cull?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:20

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sustainable Resource Development staff have just completed a major initiative during the month of March along the Saskatchewan border as part of our chronic wasting disease control program. Our research indicated that it would be prudent to reduce the population of deer in two high-risk disease control areas. These areas were where infected deer had been identified during last fall's hunting season. In the control area near Empress our staff removed 449 wild deer and found three positive cases of CWD. In the second control area near Chauvin, east of Wainwright, we removed 1,400 deer and are waiting for the test results from those deer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. First supplemental to the same minister: why are we doing this cull? Is this a communicable disease?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want you to know that I was not happy to order this cull, but it was a question of risk management, and this government manages risk responsibly. Chronic wasting disease affects the nervous system of deer and elk. Infected animals cannot gain weight – they waste away – and an infected animal always dies. In certain jurisdictions where this disease has gotten out of control, 1 out of 3 deer is infected. We need to take drastic action to keep deer populations low in the high-risk areas, which will help prevent the spread of CWD. I repeat: nobody in my ministry derives any satisfaction from this cull, but we must manage this risk in a responsible manner, and we will.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. Final question to the same minister: is it dangerous for hunters and others to eat the meat from deer infected with chronic wasting disease?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no scientific evidence to suggest that this disease can affect humans, but we strongly advise against human consumption of meat from infected animals. The World Health Organization advises against allowing any products from these animals known to be infected with chronic wasting disease to enter the human food chain. We are following this advice on the meat from the deer that we have collected, and we will only allow the meat from deer confirmed not to have the disease to be made available for food distribution.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 11 grade 5 students from the Edmonton Khalsa school from my wonderful riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie, accompanied by their teacher, Ravinae Deol. They are seated in the public gallery. I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. I request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**
Gavel-to-gavel Streaming of Assembly Proceedings

The Speaker: Hon. members, might I advise once again that effective today there's gavel-to-gavel coverage, audio and video, of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, so the rest of the proceedings this afternoon until 6 o'clock, as every day until 6 o'clock, will be covered live on the Internet. Television will be leaving us very, very shortly, but citizens out there who may be watching and want to continue watching the dedicated, hard work of their elected representatives in this Chamber may do so on their computers via the Internet.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 15
Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution
Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 15, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, in 1998 I stood before this House and talked about the desperate pleas of a woman who was trying to save her daughter from a life of despair, violence, and sexual abuse. Hearing countless stories and witnessing the brutality and injustice that these children endure led me to bring forward the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act.

Since its introduction in 1999 the act has been hugely successful. Over 770 children have been helped to leave the street behind. They have received the support they need to deal with drug and alcohol addiction, histories of sexual and physical abuse, and feelings of worthlessness. Even though the legislation has been extremely successful, it's now time to take what we have learned over the past eight years and update this act. The proposed amendments are a direct result of what we heard from youth who have survived sexual exploitation as well as their families, front-line workers, and the police.

In November 2005 I held a symposium to hear their wisdom, their experiences, their successes, and their challenges. They told us that this legislation was working but needed to be updated to continue to meet their needs. To give you an idea of what this legislation has meant to sexually exploited children, you only have to listen to the stories of those who have been helped.

One young lady, who had been apprehended during the early days of the legislation, told us the heart-wrenching story of how she ended up on the streets at 12 years old. She thought she would be better off on the streets than staying in her abusive home, but it didn't turn out that way. She told us that this legislation had literally saved her life. This was the first time, Mr. Speaker, she had ever told anyone her story. This young lady told us how much it meant to her to be able to look out into the room and see respect and support and not judgment. There was not a dry eye in the house. Her story along with the stories of other children at this symposium outline how important it is for us to make changes to the act.

The nature of child sexual exploitation has changed over the years and so has the language used to describe it. We no longer talk about child prostitution but about the sexual exploitation of children and youth. Youth have told us that they have resisted asking for help because the word "prostitution" is an extremely negative term. They don't see themselves as child prostitutes, and neither do we. We need to change the name of the act to reflect these realities. The renamed Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act reinforces that children are not prostitutes. They are being exploited, and they are being abused.

Sexually exploited youth face a long and difficult road in leaving this abuse behind, and many need more time to deal with the complex issues that many of them face. Youth told us that they fear turning 18 because it means an end to the critical supports they need to protect themselves from sexual exploitation. This fact was driven home when one of the youth at the symposium explained that it was her 17th birthday, and she was scared to death that she wasn't going to be ready to deal with the issues that had caused her to be on the streets. She needed more time to ensure that she would be safe and be able to be safe on the streets. We will address these fears by continuing to provide voluntary services to those who need it until the age of 22. This will allow youth currently receiving services to complete treatment programs and help them end their involvement in prostitution.

We also need to better protect sexually exploited youth from public identification and the resulting stigma. The publication ban would be extended beyond identifying a child involved in court proceedings. Publishing any information that may identify a child who is receiving or has received services under this act would be prohibited. This brings this legislation in line with the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.

Amending the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act will help us provide better services and support to Alberta children, youth, and families, and I ask all members to support this very important piece of legislation. Your support will mean a safe and promising future for some of Alberta's most vulnerable children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I look at Bill 15, PCHIP Amendment Act, I wonder: how do we deal in law with issues of sexuality in a pluralistic, secular, and market-driven society? Since the federal Criminal Code was amended in 1968, many practices that were once taboo and illegal have been decriminalized and are now readily available for a price. We need only go online or watch television after hours to see the range of polyamorous encounters, photo and video ops, and the opportunity to live one's dream or fantasy without direct human contact and in the privacy of one's home.

These are not the grainy, unsavoury productions associated with pornography in the era in which I grew up. Some even document the family lives of the participants. And the clients and service providers are not the sordid types we once imagined. Many are professional individuals and couples. This appears to be a self-contained, self-regulating market, and we are often led to believe that those who choose not to subscribe to such erotica have no place or right to intrude on its availability to those who do. Morality, we're reminded, is a private matter.

Child pornography is something else. Young and prepubescent children do not choose this milieu themselves. It is inconceivable that those in the trade would subject their own children to it. It is hard to imagine how anyone of decency and compassion would choose to avail themselves of it.

2:30

The well-being of children is one area where a common morality still applies and where the full weight of the law is used, with public support, to restrain and punish misdemeanors. However, there is a grey zone where later adolescents who are still legally children are concerned. Although there is ample evidence of coercion in many cases, we cannot simply conclude that all minors in the sex trade are victimized.

Adolescents work in a number of jobs that are not particularly desirable, yet we do not intervene to prohibit them. How, then, can we address the issue of girls and boys, young women and men who are minors in the sex trades on a basis that is rooted in social realities and is not hypocritical or moralistic? I believe there are three bases on which we can approach this issue. The first two are those of risk and knowledgeable choice for the young participants. The third is a heightened level of sanctions for those of legal age who seek them out and patronize them.

On the first count, we recognize that there are certain jobs that entail hazards – mental, physical, emotional, and even mortal – that are not defensible for youth and may not even be appropriate for those in early adulthood. A police force will not send a stripling to work undercover with organized crime. A paint shop foreman would not send a young employee to handle hazardous chemicals. A responsible sales manager should not send raw recruits into a situation where they will be exposed to ridicule, harassment, and other emotional abuse. The fact that these are bonafide jobs from a legal perspective and that young workers do find themselves in these positions from time to time does not legitimize the practice.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the questionable aspects of the three job examples I've just cited – exposure to organized crime, hazardous chemicals, and emotional abuse – are risks to those who enter the sex trade. Unless we are prepared as an Assembly and as a society to intervene proactively to eliminate or at least regulate those risks in all jobs in which they occur, we must at least act firmly to close such jobs to those most vulnerable in them. This is not

attempting to legislate personal morality. It is setting a basic standard for public safety, mental and emotional health, and a more humane society.

For the same reason that we justify intervening legally to minimize risks, I believe the case can be made that the young do not have sufficient experience and competence to make an informed choice to enter the sex trades. This is a type of life experience that many of us who are older can be said to lack too. However, by reason of our years and second-hand knowledge of society we are able to seek out and consult with those who are aware and informed and could help us to reach an informed decision. Such networking is not available to most minors other than on the streets themselves. A next of kin or guardian approval is required to give consent to certain medical treatments for both young and old, who may not fully grasp the circumstances of the choice they are making. These conditions may apply to sex trade work for the young as well.

The third grounds for action I propose may not be in our capacity to enact. I'm referring to deterrent measures against so-called adults who seek out and avail themselves of underage sex trade workers. I'm aware that many shame-the-johns campaigns have not been highly effective. I wonder, however, whether narrowly targeted exposure of adults who sexually use the young could be more effective. I understand that such users include those whose social and professional status would be seriously threatened by publicity.

I emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that pursuing this line of thought is not intended as much to humiliate as to deter those who may currently be engaged in or contemplating sex with the underaged. To any in this situation that my words may reach, I emphasize that using a minor as an extra in one's private fantasies is not an activity that should be condoned by the free market or permitted under law. Likewise, to any who dispute that those minors in the sex trades are competent to make that choice, I reply that being able to satisfy someone's fetish or fantasy does not make them more qualified.

We need to deal not with fantasies but realities here. It is my wish that this bill and this approach may be a step in that direction, and I look forward to the opportunity to look at it more specifically and in detail.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, and if there are additional members, if they would advise.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I commend the member because I think this is an important bill, Bill 15. I know that there has been a lot of discussion with groups that are involved with people in prostitution awareness – I'm thinking of Kate Quinn and others – and they think this goes a long way in terms of trying to deal with a very serious issue.

The statistics are rather frightening to me when we see what's going on. From the Children's Services website we notice that 10 to 12 per cent of those involved in street prostitution out on the streets are children, and 85 per cent of children involved in prostitution were sexually abused prior to becoming involved. The average age that children become involved in prostitution for a female is 15 years and for a male 17 years, so we begin to see from those statistics the reason for Bill 15.

Mr. Speaker, we also notice from the John Howard Society that the factors that lead children into prostitution are sexual and physical abuse at home, forcing children into the streets as an escape mechanism, and the lack of money and work skills. Once out in the streets it's the only viable option. It's often interrelated – which comes first? – but the trade often leads to substance abuse in children, and oftentimes children will engage in prostitution to

acquire drugs. It's not only in this area. In talking to the police chief in Edmonton, the bulk of crime in the city, property crimes and other ones, has to do with addictions in the city, so these things are all interrelated.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I say, this bill, I think, goes some way in dealing with the issue. Number one, it strengthens the privacy regulations by ensuring that no child or guardian can be identified if they have come under the care of the ministry. This is an important change because previously privacy regulation would only be applicable during legal proceedings. If you don't have the privacy written into the act, it becomes harder to deal with the people there.

It changes the immediate point of contact for the children during detention from legal aid to child and youth advocates, who are better trained to deal with the issues that might arise from such situations.

Most importantly, going by the figures that I indicated in the past – and this was sort of a key provision, I think – the bill extends from 18 to 22 the age up to which children can continue to receive services provided through the ministry. Given that there is no cut-off point at which a child becomes an adult, the extension of these services represents a strong component in the recovery and protection of those abused. We know of cases where kids who are eight or nine are out in the streets, and unfortunately they say in the trade that more and more people are looking for younger kids. So we see the need to extend this because people may be just getting their act together somewhat, and then all of a sudden, whether it be addictions or dealing with the issue, they're 18, and they're cut off. So I think this is a very important part of this act.

I think the name change to the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act is an important point because this is what this bill is all about, Mr. Speaker.

Now, no one is going to say that bringing one bill in, Bill 15, is going to solve all the problems, but I think it is an important step if we're going to begin to try to deal with what is a growing problem. For those of us that work in the inner city or know of the inner city, we know that it is a growing problem. There are more and more young people out there, Mr. Speaker, and we're just basically losing some of them. This bill, I think, is a start in terms of trying to deal with a very serious issue, so certainly the NDP caucus supports this bill in a very strong way and are glad that it's coming forward.

Thank you.

2:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available for questions to the hon. member.

There being none, then I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to pay homage and recognition to my hon. colleague for bringing forth this legislation. I'll begin rather generically and then get into the specifics.

As a father, grandfather, teacher of 34 years, primarily at the junior high level, and it's at the junior high level where the prostitution recruiting usually begins, I have been frustrated at times – unfortunately, not a number of times – trying to get help for children who are being threatened within their homes, whether it's by verbal abuse, physical abuse, or physical abuse of a sexual nature. Unless you can basically provide an example of the type of bruising, either emotional or physical, that is taking place, getting help for that child is often very difficult.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview pointed out previously, a number of these students – well, children; they were students – who find themselves out on the street came from an

abusive circumstance at home. They sought escape by getting out onto the street, and that did not provide them with the escape they were looking for. Instead of their father or their mother doing the abuse, they became, basically, servants of a trade that they had no desire to enter into in the first place.

When my Calgary colleagues and I last spring took part in the homeless count, we did come across a number of students, children, in the count, and I know that there are a number of agencies – in Calgary, for example, the McMan group – that try to provide a protective circumstance, a home for children who are potentials for abuse on the street, whether it's sexual or physical. The fact that the government is willing to amend legislation and take on a greater role is very encouraging.

I do have concerns, however, and they are very similar to the concerns I had with regard to the children affected by crystal meth addiction. You can recall in our ongoing debate that the Member for Red Deer-North initially suggested that we have a 90-day treatment. Then, unfortunately, it was amended and reduced to the point where it became five days, and it basically became a voluntary circumstance. We also debated last year legislation for removing children from crystal meth homes. My concern is that these are terrible places, and we definitely want to remove the children from them, but we have to have a secure, caring, regulated environment to put the children into. The hon. Member for Edmonton Mill-Woods pointed out in question period the shortage of treatment beds, for example, for drug-affected children.

We've read horror stories in the *Edmonton Journal* about a young aboriginal girl who was under provincial protection in a foster home circumstance. We've also had a number of questions brought up about how available foster parenting is in this particular province, which is facing so many demands. I am hoping that as part of this bill there will be funding set aside to establish the type of protective, loving, and secure environment that we would want for our own children. I haven't specifically seen that legislation.

Now to go from the general to the more specific. What this bill does accomplish is better legal representation. Previously the legislation directed basically handing out the number for legal aid. The amendments will instead direct apprehended children and youth toward legal representation for children and youth, a legal body within the office of the children's advocate. The children's advocate website states:

- The LRCY program will serve children and youth from birth to age 18.

I'm pleased to see the extension to age 18.

- The service will be accessible from anywhere in the province.
- The program is focused on providing a youth friendly, consistent service.

That goes to my earlier concern about the consistency of the funding for which the service will be provided. Stakeholders have suggested that this is a positive switch given that legal aid offices often don't specialize in youth issues. This switch will also put youth into immediate contact with the children's advocate's office, which may lead them to seek advocacy and learn more about self-advocacy.

I'm very aware of the different maturity levels of students. I've had extremely mature grade 6 students who could produce magnificent research reports, hold wonderful discussions in class, excellent presentations. They had terrific maturity. But I've also seen the reverse. I've seen grade 9 students who from their outward appearance appeared to be young men and young women, but their judgment capacities were extremely limited based on their false physical outward appearances.

The other positive step that Bill 15 takes and another reason for supporting it is the increased protection of privacy. The amend-

ments to the PCHIP provide the same degrees of privacy protection that are offered under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, so it's drawing it all under that act. This is a positive step, which will protect children's privacy and could potentially improve their chances of transitioning out of prostitution.

There are also provisions that allow publication of personal details if the individual approves them or if it's decided to be in the child's best interest. By publication I'm assuming that it's of a medical nature with professionals for whom the information would be part of the overall treatment.

It also provides increased access to services. The amendment extends services to youth beyond the age of 18 in order to provide better supports during the transition into adulthood. We don't make the assumption that at 18, because of your age, you're now an adult. There is a transition period, which a number of youth will hopefully be able to take advantage of.

Services past the initial five days are voluntary and include such things as addictions treatment, counselling, health services, and training. There is a recognition, in the voluntary nature, that by age 18 you have some responsibilities and that you, with guidance, should be able to make more wise choices.

With regard to the change in terminology, the terminology of the bill will now reflect that children involved in prostitution are sexually exploited. This also is a positive step in the text, but the change in title is somewhat misleading since the act does not assist all sexually exploited children. This is what I was referring to earlier when I talked about children sexually abused in their own homes. We need as representatives of Albertans to foster a much more child-friendly and loving environment. While this will address those on the street, obviously we also need to address where the origin of the problem occurred, and that's within the home itself. The new title, as such, misrepresents the bill.

2:50

Inclusion of the terms "sexual abuse" and "sexual exploitation" into the act is a valuable step that recognizes the reality of the children's circumstances, but the title of the amended bill is somewhat misleading. The intention of this bill is not and will not be the protection of all sexually exploited children but, rather, a small subset of sexually exploited children. As I pointed out, the majority of the exploitation occurs in the home, which drives the children to the streets, where they become further victimized. While the name change is likely well intentioned, possibly through an amendment we could have it more accurately reflect its intention.

PCHIP also focuses on apprehending the victim, not the offender. PCHIP has some token punishments for offenders, but the Criminal Code offers much stronger sanctions. At its core this act still apprehends and confines children who are being sexually exploited through prostitution. Within that confinement – and this is at the heart of the issue for me and for my support for the bill – is that we come up with the most positive, protective, supportive environment that we possibly can have once these children are apprehended. Although once they're into junior high school and high school their lives and their courses are to a large degree set, hopefully we can change the course that brought them out into the street and abused them in the first place.

PCHIP is not preventative. It is widely documented that the majority of children involved in prostitution have been previously sexually abused. This act makes services available after the situation is already very severe. Better services for children, family, and communities early on would possibly prevent children from being exposed to even more sexual exploitation through prostitution. That is a matter of going right into the school circumstance and, as part

of health programs, explaining to students what type of activities are not acceptable nor should they be exposed to so that they have an opportunity early on in the process to seek help within the school from a teacher, from a counsellor, from a member of the administration.

Further isolation of the target group. It's been reported that PCHIP may have sent children involved in prostitution underground to avoid apprehension. This has meant that those offering supports and services outside of PCHIP can no longer give the support they once could. It's difficult to say how much of this is due to the rise of technology and how much is due to PCHIP. Stakeholders in other provinces have expressed concern that linking apprehension with service provision unnecessarily stigmatizes and criminalizes vulnerable children.

At the heart of the matter, however, is the well-being of the child, and that has to be our foremost consideration. That's why I am supporting the bill but with certain reservations.

The possibility of expanded apprehension. Although individuals who are 18 can now continue to receive services, once they turn 18, they are committing a criminal offence if they are involved in prostitution. It's unclear whether or not accessing services might put one at risk of arrest or prosecution. You would want the act to provide for – sorry, I keep referring to them as students; that's my background – adolescents, the young men and women. If they are apprehended, can they voluntarily, then, appeal for support, or are they automatically charged based on their age?

There are a number of considerations with regard to the bill's intention. My hope is that there will be support, that there will be places, that there will be financial support for caregivers and service providers, that that support will continue from year to year in a definitive manner so that they're not faced, as so many other organizations are, with ad hoc funding, and that the service providers who offer the support for the students or young adolescents receive the quality of training necessary to directly impact the lives of the individuals who have had the misfortune of being sexually exploited.

In summary, Bill 15 is headed in the right direction. With financial support it can be successful in helping Alberta's children. Thank you for bringing it forward.

The Speaker: Hon. members, our five-minute question and comment period is now available if there are questions to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

There being none, shall I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to close the debate?

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to close debate on Bill 15. I appreciate the support from the opposition. This is a good piece of legislation, and we'll continue to listen to what they have to say.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 3 Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments

with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. In formulating our position on this, it was very clear to us on this side how vitally important the issue of climate change is to Albertans. Indeed, across the country people are saying that climate change is the number one issue for the decade. As the richest province in the richest country we have to take very seriously our responsibility to lead on climate change issues and greenhouse gas reductions.

What we see in Bill 3 is fundamentally an administrative bill, housekeeping, harmonization with the existing act, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, and the usual issues relating to any act. It has no substance which we can debate in the House. It's disappointing, Mr. Chairman, that we can't deal at all with the issues of limits, caps, timelines, costs, investments. We have in this bill merely housekeeping items that relate to the functioning of the Alberta environment in relation to the large final emitters and the specified gas emitters regulation. All of the substantive issues that we need to deal with in this House are under regulation and cannot be debated in this particular bill. These will have vitally important impacts on the future. The next 10 to 20 years is absolutely crucial to the planet. For Alberta to take a lead on this issue is absolutely fundamental and expected, demanded by Albertans and by Canadians.

3:00

It's clear that this particular bill talks about the possibility of making reductions but doesn't require it. There's no opportunity to debate and make amendments to the emissions limits, the intensity targets that this government has articulated. There's no opportunity to debate the price per tonne that carbon exceedance would exact from these various industries. There's no ability to debate and amend the offsets and trade provisions. There's no opportunity to discuss a budget for our climate change plan for this province, and there's no opportunity to debate and amend the financial instruments that could be helpful in moving this province to the head of the pack in reducing climate change.

This is a serious issue for us and, I hope, one that the Environment minister will take to heart. Section 5, for example, enables the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations on offsets, credits, and sink rights and to establish a penalty price, but there's no opportunity to discuss what those are or to make amendments to suggest a stronger or in some cases a different wording.

Section 60 provides estimated limits for specified gas emitters, and again no opportunity because there's no clear identification of what those limits are. This is enabling; it's not an area that we can actually debate. So this is very disappointing for Albertans in general. Albertans care about the issue of climate change. They want to see leadership, they want to see action, and it's going to be a very serious issue for Albertans to realize that this bill, a flagship bill for this government in this new legislative session, does nothing to address the fundamental issues of capping and reducing our total emissions in the province.

The issue for us, Mr. Chairman, is that the international panel on climate change has said that if we exceed 500 parts per million of carbon in our environment, there will be irreparable and devastating damage throughout the world, including Alberta and particularly our north. The Stern report, the important report out of the United Kingdom, called on all countries to spend a minimum of 1 per cent of their GNP on climate reduction activities. That would amount to

a billion dollars in Alberta. We have allocated no extra funding for climate change in this province. We have no ability to debate that issue here in the House as a result of this bill. If we fail to commit 1 per cent of our gross national product to this initiative, then according to the Stern report, again, we will be paying 20 per cent of our gross national product in 20 years for the devastating consequences that climate change will wreak on this province and on this world.

We need a government that will stand up to industry, that will set clear targets and timelines and demand a fair process for the public, for nongovernment organizations, and for opposition members to debate the full scope of the implications of climate change in this province, and we have none in this Legislature. It's a travesty of the most important issue facing us in this session. Clearly, Albertans are wanting to see us invest in energy efficiency and invest significantly in renewable energy. We have to move off our addiction to carbon for energy sources.

This opposition party has talked about investing not \$15 per tonne for exceedances to the limits specified under the specified gas emitters regulation but moving quickly to \$30 per tonne for exceedances to those limits. We've talked about shifting the natural gas rebate program: instead of rewarding people for consuming more gas, shifting that into energy efficiency initiatives and renewable technologies. We've talked about removing subsidies and incentives for oil and gas and other fossil fuels and transferring them to these new economic drivers that have to come, and those are the renewables and energy efficiency technologies.

We've talked about the need for public education, for all of us to play a part in reducing our environmental footprint and our energy consumption. We've talked about energy retrofits, funding, creating incentives for people to retrofit their homes, their buildings, their institutions, and to significantly reduce our carbon emissions over the course of the next four years, to reach a cap, to reach an absolute limit that this province is putting out by 2012 and begin the downward trend that we have to do if we're going to limit the devastating impacts of climate change. It's our responsibility, Mr. Chairman, to lead on this.

We've also talked about investing in public transit and have been promoting an electric train between Calgary and Edmonton as a major contributor. When we hear the experts say that it consumes three litres of fuel per person to travel by electric train from Calgary to Edmonton and 53 litres of fuel per person to travel by airplane between Calgary and Edmonton, Mr. Chairman, it's a no-brainer. We have to move and move quickly on the whole issue of public transit in this province.

We've talked about all new energy development requiring 15 per cent renewable components to its mix. No longer can we accept purely fossil fuel energy. We have to have a mix with at least 15 per cent renewable in that mix, as they're doing already in a number of states in America and in Europe, requiring a certain proportion of renewable in all new development projects. We've also talked about the importance of carbon capture and storage and the important role that industry has in ensuring that all new energy developments, especially with coal-fired electricity plants, have the capacity for state-of-the-art carbon capture and the option for storage.

Mr. Chairman, it's with great disappointment that I stand before you having read some of the *Hansard* from last week, where an amendment was attempted to try to put on the table some of the key questions that we need to be debating here. We cannot in any way support this bill given that it's a marginal bill with no substantive issues for us to deal with and no substantive opportunity to make amendments that will satisfy our moral responsibility to the planet and meet our responsibility to the citizens of Alberta.

With that, I'll take my seat. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Sometimes we get the sense that it's the opposition's role to take the government kicking and screaming and drag them into the 21st century of climatic reality. The science is there, and begrudgingly a number of members opposite are starting to realize it, recognize it. It was interesting, providing that the Minister of Environment was accurately reported in the Calgary papers. He was suggesting that this bill didn't go far enough because it only dealt with intensity, a 12 per cent decrease, rather than the overall cumulative effect. That gives me hope that government members themselves, both cabinet and caucus, will bring forward amendments, as the opposition will, to strengthen the accountability of this bill. My hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View indicated that hiding things in regulation as opposed to dealing with it in the transparent, open, and accountable fashion of legislative debate is a rather sad limiting of this bill.

My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View has also been a participant around the province in a number of public forums that dealt with climate change. Two of the forums that are upcoming I would like to mention. This Thursday on the legislative grounds climate change, water management, and a number of issues affecting the environmental legacy and quality for Albertans will be discussed. Then this coming Friday, which I referred to in my member's statement last week and again addressed today: Friday the 13th for the forest. It's not just simply for the forest. At noon at the McDougall Centre this upcoming Friday we will be holding a rally with a number of very knowledgeable speakers who will address concerns and provide suggestions from which amendments will be made. In other words, we'll take the word on the street directly to the House, as is our job as representatives for our constituencies across the province.

3:10

One of the fortunate aspects of being the representative for the constituency of Calgary-Varsity is having a wonderful research organization at the University of Calgary, and that is the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy, that I have referred to numerous times. They, among the other good things they do, regularly hold a public lecture series on a variety of climatic environmental effects. I'm extremely fortunate to be able to have the opportunity to talk with scientists like Dr. Mansell, who is a member of ISEEE. I also have the opportunity to interact with biology professors such as Dr. Ralph Carter, who is a Bragg Creek resident and will be one of the speakers at the forum at the McDougall Centre this Friday at noon. These individuals have dedicated their lives to research and teaching and informing students and the general public on the various climatic threats and coming up with a balanced approach to dealing with them.

One of the concerns that we have, which has a direct effect on the climate and our quality of life, is the proposed clear-cutting in the Bragg Creek area, Sibbald Flats and Ghost-Waiparous included, which are part of the K Country connection. By connection I'm talking about wildlife passing through the Yellowstone to Yukon corridor. The Liberal opposition has as much concern as the government has with regard to the effects of the pine beetle, but as we've tried to point out with science, clear-cutting or razing the forest to deal with a beetle predator has a much more devastating effect than selective logging, the type of practice that takes place in Europe and that we wish would be adopted here in Alberta.

What we are calling for from a Liberal standpoint is a cumulative assessment: make sure that what you are planning has value in the long term versus just an immediate gratification in the form of

dollars right now in the bank account. Of course, with regard to future implications this is why we put out the idea of taking 30 per cent of nonrenewable energy off the top and putting it into a series of, basically, trust funds. Thirty-five per cent would go into the heritage trust fund to ensure that by 2020 we no longer have the dependency on fossil fuels that we currently have. By setting that fund aside now, even at the low royalty rates that we charge foreign nationals, we would see the fund rise to \$120 billion. The money that we currently raise through royalties could then be replaced by the interest from the fund.

We've also suggested that nonrenewable energy now be a contributor to postsecondary education. Again, we've suggested an endowment fund based on taking 35 per cent of the 30 per cent of nonrenewables and setting it aside to invest in postsecondary education, which would continue to see world-class postsecondary institutions in Alberta. We would continue to see funding for research that would help us get out of our carbon-dependent predicament that we're currently in.

The Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy looks at a variety of ways of fuelling our economy in the sense that it looks at alternative energy forms: wind, solar, and a type of energy that just has not received much pickup in Alberta, the river run version, where we can take energy from streams with very little effect on them, with no emission or negative effects.

When we take into account raw bitumen and its processing, we've got to look beyond just simple intensity targets; we have to look at an overall reduction of emissions. We have to look at what's already happened in an environmental fashion, such as flying over the moonscape area of the tailing ponds north of Fort McMurray. We cannot leave these as a legacy to our children and our grandchildren. We have to address them. We have to as part of our scientific research come up with methods of rejuvenating the soil and regrowing the landscape.

I had an opportunity this summer, with my wife and members of the opposition, to travel up to Hinton and the Coal Valley area, where, much to my delight and surprise, I saw the evidence of reforestation after open-pit coal mining. What I did not believe was possible was there before my eyes. The steep slopes were cut down. The topsoil had been preserved. What had once been gouges now turned into, basically, little mountain lakes which, because they were deep enough, were stocked with trout. Local vegetation, a variety of pines and spruce, were replanted. That gave me hope that if we looked after our environment, if the wheel of progress also had a backup spare of replant, regenerate, and rejuvenate built into the extraction process, then the balance would be achieved.

Unfortunately, right now companies, with the government's permission, recognizing the fact that the world is starting to question carbon-based fuels as energy sources into the future, are starting to be justifiably worried. So their desire to get out everything that they can, from coal-bed methane to various forms of bitumen extraction, whether through mining or in situ, creates a hodgepodge of environmental destruction. Until we address the cost of reclamation and make it a part of the overall cost of extraction, until we achieve that environmental and economic balance, our children and our grandchildren are going to pay the damage in terms of health effects.

Water is one of the areas that the government has talked about. A former Minister of Environment came up with the Water for Life strategy, and as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View pointed out, it's rather hard to implement that strategy when less than half of a per cent is given over to the Environment ministry for the policing of the Water for Life strategy. You can't implement and you can't police something if there isn't sufficient funding.

Something that we've called upon beyond the baseline testing

before extraction is the need for the accurate mapping of aquifers. Unless we know where the water is located, its quality and its quantity, we can't protect it.

3:20

The Alberta government seems to put a very low value on parks and protected areas. We know that for every dollar put into tourism, we get \$12 back. These are nondamaging type dollars. It's gravy. All we need to do is maintain our environment to a point where people will want to come and partake in it. We save money on health because people's mental health and physical health are supported by just being out in a pristine wilderness.

I had the opportunity to attend the PNWER conference last year, and I've seen varieties of presentations by Brad Stelfox, who traces the amount of drilling and logging activities from the early 1900s. Basically, we start off with a blank map, and then when you add the various agricultural uses, when you add the different types of oil and gas and drilling extractions, what was once a white map becomes so profusely dotted that there is very little space in the Alberta map that hasn't been touched or affected already. Yet industry is suggesting that they need to go even faster to get out as much product as they can before the world comes up with alternatives. This race leaves any kind of balance in its wake.

We have smart technology now. We know, for example, that North Dakota through a pipeline is sequestering gas in fields in Saskatchewan. The science isn't complete. Keeping that sequestered CO₂ down is a challenge, but it's certainly a challenge that we'd rather deal with than dealing with radioactivity through the nuclear-powered plants that have been considered for use for extraction. The claim is that, well, we won't have CO₂ emissions. No, but we'll have a lot of radiated uranium and heavy water to get rid of. I personally would not want to go in that particular direction.

One of the quantities of resource potential that's almost limitless in this province is coal. While it's not the type of coal that you can simply throw under the stack and burn – and it doesn't produce emissions, as our former Premier thought – there is a process of gasification of coal whereby instead of the CO₂ going up the pipe, the extracted CO₂ goes into the pipe, and the gas goes into the pipe. It burns at a much higher energy efficiency with considerably less emissions. So what we need to be looking at are the coal gasification possibilities.

Because companies are very concerned about their profit lines as well as environmental responsibilities, they are looking at ways of retrofitting existing plants in the tar sands so that they use less water, use less energy, and are able to cogenerate and create a more valuable product by splitting the various gases that are taken off. So instead of trucking them down to Chicago for processing, that can be done through an upgrading process here in Alberta. But we still have to deal with the effects of the emissions from that gasification and utilization.

I don't think anybody will argue that sequestering could provide a terrific solution for us, but we need to work with industry. Industry is looking for rules to play by. Just in the same way that people were reluctant to get into power plants because of deregulation and lack of the government's role in terms of supporting initiatives, energy companies need to know what the government will do in terms of not only setting standards but also providing assistance in the creation of the CO₂ pipelines.

The theory and the practice. We've seen that CO₂ can be pushed down into the old seams to get out more oil and to get out more gas, and I gather it works in the bitumen extracting process as well, but again you need energy to compress the gas, to push it down the line. So it's possible, and it's been scientifically used in Europe as well.

With the research that's happening at postsecondary institutions, that's also driven by industry, we have an opportunity to make real changes, but if we continue to plug along at a snailish pace and deal only with percentages of intensity emissions, the reality of the effects of CO₂ and greenhouse gases and so on will never be dealt with. We have a unique opportunity. We have a very sustainable resource if properly managed. We have an opportunity through the wealth that we have in the form of coal, oil, and gas, not to mention the wealth we have in Alberta's individuals and their intelligence, to make dramatic changes. We could be the leaders in the world because we have the economic basis to be the leaders, but what it takes is a will. We have to get beyond the pennies now and think about dollars later.

Albertans are adaptive. They have risen to every single challenge that has confronted them. We need to provide as a government the support for industry, the support for research, the support for the environment, and the support for the parks and protected areas that states that there are certain areas that we just won't trespass into. Currently in those parks and protected areas . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

Just a little over. Thank you. I'll look forward to re-engaging.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have spoken twice before on Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, and I just want to be sure that it's on record that I'm opposed to this bill. My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View has spoken with knowledge and in detail about the directions that we should be taking if we are going to be leaders in climate change control. I have a couple of other concerns I'd like to point out.

To me this plan for climate change has distinct flaws in that it is less effective in reducing emissions in an absolute sense. The reliance on emissions intensity as a measure of reduction instead of focusing on moving aggressively to absolute reductions makes this bill and the accompanying regulations quite ineffective. We need absolute hard caps on emissions.

Another area of concern for me is that although the hon. minister talked about harmonizing with other provinces, what is the outcome of these new regulations? I believe that they will jeopardize our ability and Canada's ability to meet Kyoto's requirements and commitments. It'll jeopardize Canada's commitments to achieve much deeper emission reduction targets for post 2012, commitment periods that will become more necessary given the ultimate objectives of the United Nations framework convention on climate change, and will create a burden for the rest of Canada by transferring responsibility for emissions to the federal government.

This bill demonstrates clear avoidance of dealing with the substantive issues like costs and timelines and targets in legislation. It has all gone to regulation. The world, our country, and our province need clarity and leadership to meet our responsibility as stewards of our environment. This bill does not give us that opportunity. We need to work together on a vision that addresses our responsibilities as stewards. That requires discussion and debate, and this bill does not allow that. It is shortsighted, and it is weak.

With that, I'd like to move to adjourn debate on Bill 3.

3:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: She adjourned debate.

The Chair: Did you introduce an amendment?

Mrs. Mather: No. I adjourned.

The Chair: Adjourned debate?

Mrs. Mather: Yes.

The Chair: Oh. Sorry.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate rising once again on specific details concerning Bill 3. In fact, I have some specific suggestions for amendments here this afternoon. Just to reiterate some of the important issues in regard to Bill 3, I think it's important to remind ourselves that, in fact, the entire nation of Canada is one of the most significant contributors to greenhouse gases in the world, and the province of Alberta is responsible for about 40 per cent of those emissions. So, you know, we have some of the top industrial emitters of greenhouse gases in the province of Alberta. Seven out of 10 of the top greenhouse gas emitters are here in the province, so it's incumbent upon us to not just address the concept of climate change but to actually put in real targets that would involve actual reductions.

According to the Pembina Institute from last fall, for example, the newly approved Kearl oil sands mine project, in fact, Imperial Oil failed to develop a plan outlining how they would reduce greenhouse gas . . . pollution from the Kearl Oil Sands Mine project . . . This is very troubling considering that this project [alone] would emit about 30% more GHG pollution per barrel of oil compared to a similar project, [which is] the Shell Jackpine Mine. Imperial Oil is failing to take responsibility for the global warming impacts of the Kearl [Lake] project.

I bring this to the attention of the Assembly, Mr. Chair, just to I guess provide an example of what happens in the absence of absolute reduction legislation from this House. Industry can only presume what is written on paper, and if the ink is not there in regard to actual reductions, then of course industry, with their bottom line to be concerned about and their investors to be concerned about, will usually defer to the lowest common denominator. It's just the fact of the way things are done. You know, in fact, if a business chooses to voluntarily do otherwise, then probably they won't stay in business very much longer. So my point is that we have to set those standards in place that are strict, that are enforceable, and that are tough so that everyone can play with a level playing field, so to speak, in regard to these large emitters.

Clearly, we need tough regulations in place to force the major emitters to change their ways. Megacorporations have no other incentive to go green otherwise. The EUB has consistently failed to consider the cumulative environmental impact of tar sands projects and expansions, and we've seen that all through this last year: Kearl Lake, Voyageur, et cetera. You know, even the outgoing CEO of the Energy and Utilities Board stated after he retired that cumulative regional impact assessments must take place in order for us to move forward in all areas of this province. So that's the tar sands section.

In regard to electricity, of course, we are producing most of our electricity through coal-fired plants, and again we have to take a hard look at what is the true cost of having our electricity coming from those sources. The last numbers that we have available, 2004: electricity and heat generation counted for 52,700 kilotonnes of climate change CO₂, and Toxics Watch estimates that at a 4 per cent

growth rate, Alberta's total GHG emissions will rise by between 66 and 83 per cent above 1990 levels. These are significant numbers that we have to take into consideration.

The root of this issue is not just about emissions though, Mr. Chair. Emissions are just one measure of the relationship between our economy and our environment. Every day this relationship is becoming increasingly clear to Albertans. Every barrel of water that is sent down a well to bring up a little more oil is a barrel of water that can never be used again for drinking, for agriculture, or to support wildlife. Every megaton of pollution that is poured into the sky increases the rates of respiratory illness, cancer, and other problems, not to mention climate change. In its very starkest terms, we may live by the economy, but our children will die by the environment that we leave them.

It's difficult to talk about intensity or hard caps without addressing the whole rate of growth of the overall economy based on energy and carbon dioxide energy emissions. The Alberta New Democrats have called for a short-term moratorium on new tar sands projects and expansions of existing ones. This is a temporary measure but a significant one and a significant differentiation from what else we're hearing in this Legislature.

Currently there is enough investment in the oil sands to keep Albertans working for a long period of time, in excess of five years. The moratorium would provide Albertans the opportunity to develop upgrader infrastructure not to mention reducing the further demands that are being placed on our health and education and infrastructure as a result of the great population increase we are experiencing in the province today.

This last month the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released some very important information on the growing income gaps between Alberta and the rest of the country. They have found that most Albertans are working much harder than they were a generation ago without seeing significant gains in real earnings. I mention this because the current pace of development is having enormous costs to average Albertans. Huge sums of money are flowing out of Alberta, but the pollution stays here. While a meagre, penny on the dollar royalty regime boosts the Conservative's short-term political interests, it does nothing to prepare Alberta for the disastrous impacts of climate change or to lay the groundwork for carbon-neutral energy production and usage, which ultimately we must do.

Real progress on climate change cannot be made until we truly come to terms with the connection between the environment, lives of working Albertans, and the pace of growth. So the NDP has a very comprehensive plan for addressing climate change emissions. We support carbon trading in principle, but we are wary of the dependence on this approach and what that could mean.

Albertans must not be left on the hook while huge emitters turn profits. It would be much more preferable if we were in a position to sell carbon credits rather than to buy them. A real plan to deal with greenhouse gas emissions needs, number one, clear targets for absolute reductions in climate change pollution in line with Alberta's portion or percentage of total emissions, number two, fiscal incentives for reducing emissions across the economy, number three, to regulate large polluters with a performance-based regulation allowing companies to invest in and to select their own solutions, and, number four, a vision for a sustainable energy future for Alberta where we become the most energy-efficient economy in Canada and the most carbon-neutral economy as well, with the strongest renewable energy industry, not just here but exporting that technology and incentive right across the country.

Mr. Chair, as I speak about each of these things in a general way, I also have specific changes to strengthen Bill 3. As I had said from

the outset, certainly just the existence of Bill 3 is encouraging to myself and to, I think, people who follow climate change because it's the first time we see an admission that there is a problem. To deal with that problem properly, we must make sure that we are allowing for Bill 3 to force absolute reductions in climate change carbon emissions and a host of other things as well.

3:40

Now, what I see the substance of Bill 3 to be is a great deal of regulation. This is problematic to me, Mr. Chair, because regulation certainly is the proverbial devil in the details that we speak about. What I'm seeing in Bill 3 here is a great deal of regulation that moves the substance of Bill 3 back to order in council. So there are certain areas here in this section that I would like to make amendments to. I, in fact, have my second amendment here, that I would like to distribute forthwith for the consideration of the House.

The Chair: The pages will circulate the appropriate copies of the amendment to all the members. We'll just give them a moment to do that. We will refer to this amendment as amendment A2.

Does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder wish to proceed on the amendment?

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. As I was just explaining to a colleague here, this amendment A2 to Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, says that I will move that Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 6 in the proposed 60(1)(q) area by striking out "and the sequestration of specified gas."

Mr. Chair, the reason that I am choosing to do this is that this is a devilishly difficult bill to amend in the first place. It has a tremendous amount of regulatory detail in it. I chose this specific area because, as I've specified before in this House, I'm certainly not opposed out of hand to the sequestering of carbon dioxide gas in the province. I think that it could potentially serve two functions: the first one, the enhanced recovery of oil from depleted wells. Certainly, I do not want to discourage this activity because, of course, it's better than using fresh water to in fact agitate and perhaps revive established wells.

Second, the sequestration of CO₂ gas, which is trying to capture carbon dioxide under the ground, again, has some potential, but there are two problems with it that I see. The first one is that the technology simply is not in place at this juncture to make it a reliable means by which we can store carbon dioxide and actually count it as being captured and not in the atmosphere.

You know, I find it troubling that we might hang our hats so definitively on technology that's not even fully there. It smacks to me of desperation and of, sort of, a blind following of a path, of the status quo: that we will just simply create or hope that some technology will come to allow us to continue to operate in the way that we always have and magically store carbon dioxide under the ground, and everybody can continue on their merry way. It sends a poor message, Mr. Chair, in regard to the other, more important things we need to do in regard to conservation, in regard to setting up alternative, sustainable forms of energy production, and the like.

My second, even bigger, concern about this sequestering is that if industry wants to do this, if they do want to sequester CO₂ – and they might indeed want to do so considering the obligations that we would hope that they would have set out from the provincial Legislature in regard to absolute reductions in CO₂ – then probably they'll look at sequestering, and that's fine. But I am very wary to use through Bill 3 the issuing of public dollars to subsidize the oil and gas industry to build their sequestering infrastructure.

As the hon. minister has pointed out in the last few weeks, a carbon pipeline, a backbone pipeline so to speak, to build a carbon capture system for the province would be in excess of \$5 billion, and I would expect it to be considerably more than that, in fact. You know, that's just an estimate of the pipeline structure. Let's not forget, Mr. Chair, that it costs between 20 and 30 per cent of all of the energy you produce in any given facility just to capture the carbon dioxide in the first place. So let's say that if we're building three power plants, you would need a fourth power plant just to do the carbon capture for the other three, so to speak.

I mean, certainly, using our powers of estimation, this is not necessarily the best use of our energy, and I just would like to be the constructive critic of such an endeavour, considering that it would cost, undoubtedly, billions and billions of public dollars, enough public dollars that would make such boondoggles as NovAtel or the gun registry and other remarkable Conservative and Liberal follies pale in significance compared to building this great carbon pipeline, carbon pipe dream, so to speak.

This is the amendment that I would like to put forward. It's simply a means by which we separate Bill 3 from the possibility of sequestration at this point in time. I think it's a reasoned and conservative-minded amendment that I hope everyone will be happy to support.

Thank you.

The Chair: On the amendment the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. My compliments to the Member for Edmonton-Calder for finding a way of amending this bill. I also share to a large extent his concerns about the use of financial instruments for sending the right message to industry, to the public, to all players in the carbon reduction strategies ahead. I can't support the amendment, though, since it essentially denies the opportunity for government to use in a prudent way the financial instruments which we have to have to change the behaviour of the public, to change the behaviour of industry.

Whether it's incentives for energy renewables, whether it's efficiency technology, we have to use the carrot and the stick in various ways to try to get the result we want, which is a net reduction in the emissions from this province. So I can't see eliminating that very key element of Bill 3. While it's not specific enough for us to even debate, it still is an enabling, identified action by government that is vital to getting climate change up on the agenda of every Albertan and every industry to ensure that we make the healthy choice the easy choice through some of these financial instruments.

3:50

Now, whether carbon capture and storage itself is at the stage where we can fully support it as a technology or even fund it as a government is another question. But this item, part (q), identifies the important role of government to use its financial and economic instruments precisely to get people to do what they need to do to reduce the impact of the greenhouse gas emissions.

So with that I'll take my seat and look forward to further discussion. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A2.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Specifically to the amendment. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Calder's reasoning in not wanting to

stick the Alberta taxpayer with the entire cost of the infrastructure associated with this sequestration. I have a great desire to protect Alberta taxpayers as well. But as my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View pointed out, the government does have a role both in directing what should be done and in encouraging the accomplishment of effective sequestration.

The royalty review is taking place right now. While we're not in agreement with the members who are members of that committee, we do support the need for a royalty review. It may be that when the royalty review is shared with us in this House, a larger amount of royalty or tax will be charged. It would have the effect, basically, of the industry, through a tax form of royalty, paying at least partially the cost of the sequestration. I do want to see more money going into our various savings funds, but protecting the taxpayer is not completely accomplished by giving up on the science associated with sequestration. We need to encourage further development of that process, which, while in its infancy, could hold great value. Obviously, we're not going to invest public funds into an unpractised science, but I think we have opportunities around the world.

So while I respect the Member for Edmonton-Calder's protection of Alberta's taxpayers from funding an industrial, valued pipeline, I believe that the industry will be encouraged by the process for further extraction. A fair amount of this will be a self-evident motivation for companies to involve themselves in this particular process instead of using water, especially if we as a government declare that the Athabasca has limits, as do all other water sources.

As my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View suggested, by both a series of requirements and a series of incentives, coupled with scientific research, we can accomplish our end. Therefore, I speak against leaving the sequestration out. I realize that it's an undeveloped science, but I would rather invest in that development.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others who wish to participate in the debate on the amendment?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Now back to the debate on the amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I certainly appreciate having the opportunity to again work with Bill 3. You can see that I'm trying to make this work somehow because, in fact, it is important to have some legislation in place that deals with CO₂ reduction in this province, preferably in absolute terms. So I would like to just draw everyone's attention, then, again to Bill 3, climate change and emissions amendment act. I would like you to take a peek at the proposed section 59(1)(c) and the proposed section 60(1)(h) as well because in fact I'm going to propose another amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: We'll circulate copies to all the members, and we'll call this amendment A3. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, would you wish to proceed on amendment A3?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Thank you. As I said before, this is a very long bill, Mr. Chair, that has lots of detail. The sections that I have pointed out here are section 59 and section 60. These are, sort of, two linked sections of this climate change act. The first allows all

prescribed information to be kept confidential. That's section 59.

The second one says that the cabinet has broad latitude to define what is to be deemed prescribed information, and that's in section 60. I would venture to say, Mr. Chair, respectfully, of course, that this government has a long and somewhat sordid record of keeping information secret. It's almost impossible to get information through our FOIP or through written questions and answers and so on. This is just another example of not only potentially keeping information secret but not allowing the Legislature to debate what kind of information ought to be kept secret.

So the first two clauses in 59(1). Everyone is looking at their bill, I'm sure, very studiously here, and those are probably okay. It certainly makes sense that trade secrets not be made publicly available. But the problem is with the broader powers to deem other information to be confidential. The problem with the approach is that it's industry driven rather than driven by any real efforts to reduce emissions. Of course, this is classically evidenced by the intensity reductions as opposed to the absolute reductions. The legislation as written mostly allows almost any piece of information to be categorized as prescribed information.

The New Democrat position is that if there is information that ought to be kept confidential, it should be also thoroughly debated in this House. It would be interesting as a test of these new all-party committees, that we're all looking forward to, to see if the government truly wants public input in these types of legislation. The proof of the integrity of the committees will rest, I believe, on bills such as Bill 3 actually passing into those all-party committees and giving an opportunity for us to look at these things in a more comprehensive way, including bringing in different groups to testify and to give us more information, industry coming in and talking to us so that we get a more balanced idea of what the regulations should actually look like.

4:00

If the government does not support this amendment – certainly, I'm not suggesting that they won't – then they should at least commit to bringing any information that's prescribed under section 59 of this bill to the all-party committees with a sincere commitment to listening to those committees and accepting their recommendations about the prescribed information. I would look forward to that litmus test, I suppose, of the change in mood of this Legislature. This would be a perfect example and a projection to show a demonstration of good faith in that regard.

I am going to leave off on this particular amendment. It's a way to cut through the potential secrecy of Bill 3 and information that would be enclosed within an industry's submission of their targets, and I think that it's in the public's interest to see that changed.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The government and the Premier in a variety of mandates given to the ministers and during question period have affirmed the importance of transparency and accountability. What the Member for Edmonton-Calder is proposing does not change the intent or the overall outcome or the efficiency or lack thereof of Bill 3. It simply makes it more accountable, and this appears to be the direction that the government has spoken of. Basically, the members opposite could provide us with a degree of their integrity and their intention in terms of accountability and transparency by dealing with the sharing of the science associated with climate change.

I spoke earlier of the desire to lead, and before we can lead, we

have to catch up, basically. We already know, for example, that Europe charges a penalty of \$30 a tonne for carbon emissions. In some cases that's a reward for the recipient, the money that's now expended on green technology, so there's a value to it.

This amendment seeks to provide greater openness, accountability, transparency to a piece of legislation that is flawed by regulation. This would be a minor step in comparison to the overall nature of the bill, but it would be a very welcome step in the name of openness and accountability.

I support my colleague from Edmonton-Calder in his attempt to clarify the importance of this bill. Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Well, I'll be very brief, Mr. Chairman. I think this is a positive amendment, and I think all Albertans want to see greater transparency, whether it's from government or industry, on this most vital issue affecting all of us and our future. In short, this is an attempt to try to ensure that voluntarily or involuntarily we get the information we need to make good decisions as government and as citizens holding government accountable, that what is reported is accurate, that it reflects the true state of affairs, and that, indeed, we are moving toward absolute reductions in carbon emissions.

I support this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on amendment A3.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to participate. Amendment A3 to Bill 3, dealing with climate change, seems to be, as hon. members have indicated before me, going toward achieving more openness and more accountability in government. One of the two sections that this amendment is trying to alter or improve is section 59, which deals with confidentiality of information, which is already quite thorough. I understand and I fully support the government not wanting to divulge information that is sensitive, as in commercial, financial, scientific, or technical information which would reveal or jeopardize proprietary business, competitiveness, or trade secrets with respect to a facility, a technology, or corporate initiatives. Sometimes, as my colleague for Calgary-Varsity was saying, there is also the safety of consumers that's in question.

However, why would the government go as far as giving itself a blanket allowance or a blanket provision to classify any information it deems worthy of being classified and put it in regulations under section 60(1)(h)? I think section 59, if we take out (1)(c), is already thorough enough. I remind the House that it's not only through integrity and through openness and transparency; it's also the appearance of openness and transparency.

I remind this House that in 2006, last year, we fiercely debated similar provisions in Bill 20, which were the amendments with respect to FOIP legislation, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Members from all three parties of the opposition argued quite forcefully that the government doesn't need to hide things from the public and the media and the opposition. We covered things like, you know, briefing binders for cabinet ministers. We talked about internal audits. Today here is an example of a catch-all allowance for regulations to hide things from public scrutiny.

I think it's worthy of support, as suggested by my colleague from Edmonton-Calder. We don't need any more secrecy. In fact, we need to go in the opposite direction. We need to open things up and allow people to see and judge for themselves. It's really not in the best interests of Albertans and even the image of the government to start hiding things willy-nilly and saying: "You know what? The regulation allows us to, so we're going to."

As my colleagues from Calgary-Mountain View and Calgary-Varsity have indicated, I think that if the government has any reason for wanting to continue to have this section here and not allow amendment A3 to go forward, then maybe an hon. member from Executive Council would stand and tell us why this section needs to be kept or maintained. You know, give us an example of what information might be captured under this definition which should be kept concealed, that no one should be privy to. Until I hear that argument from the government side, I am leaning toward supporting amendment A3, and I look forward to more debate.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to participate in the debate on amendment A3?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Now back to the debate on Bill 3. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I was very disappointed and shocked and horrified to know that that was defeated, but I'm not one to back down in looking for some positive change on Bill 3. Certainly, I've got more up my sleeve here in terms of amendments.

Another section that troubled me considerably when looking through Bill 3 was section 4 in the proposed section 5. I wanted to add something into that section to look for some kind of direction towards absolute reductions. You know, the big part of the general problem with Bill 3 is that it just sort of plucks these things out of the air, a 15 per cent – or whatever it is – intensity target, but doesn't set a program for the next five years or 10 years, which would be the most logical thing to do. Just like if you wanted to make a goal for losing some weight and becoming healthier, then you set targets not just two weeks from now, but you set up a long-term project that is going to include more significant changes over time. Bill 3 similarly fails to do that. It just plunks down this 15 per cent intensity target or whatever. Then where do you go from there?

4:10

Once again, even industry certainly looks for long-term planning. It is part of what they can expect in terms of setting up their corporation, long-term plans for their businesses, so leaving them dangling like this, I think, is a problem. As I said before, absolute reductions are important for Bill 3, and it's going to be hard to put them in there.

Also, I have another way by which we can do that, so I have my amendment here for everyone's edification. How about we call it A3? Maybe three times lucky, I'm hoping. Here it comes.

Thank you.

The Chair: This actually would be referred to as amendment A4. Again, we will make sure they're circulated to the members first and a copy to the table.

Does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder wish to proceed with debate on amendment A4?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Thanks, Mr. Chair. I have this one here, and let me just read it for everybody. They can take out their Bill 3s and carefully follow along. I am moving that Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in

section 4 in the proposed section 5 – don't be confused – by renumbering it as section 5(1) and adding the following after subsection (1). My edition goes as follows:

(2) Any regulation made under subsection (1) shall be compliant with the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, agreed to on December 11, 1997 at Kyoto, Japan, and ratified by Canada on December 17, 2002, as amended from time to time.

I guess, Mr. Chair, I chose this section because of, once again, going back to what the real task at hand is, and that is to employ absolute reductions, not just in Alberta but right across the country, to help us to comply with our international obligations under the Kyoto accord.

The Kyoto accord has taken a lot of negative propaganda over the years. Some people like to call it a tax somehow or that it's voodoo science or that it's a way for the poor to be robbing from the rich, which I kind of like, or it's somehow just this eastern plot that they've dreamed up, you know, a new national energy plan. I mean, all of this is a lot of unadulterated balderdash, I would say, Mr. Chair, because of course we, in fact, went along with the Kyoto accord not under the pain of death or anything that resembled that but in recognition of catastrophic climate change, that has already set upon us here, not just in Alberta but around the world, and it is only going to get worse over the next coming decades.

It has become absolutely accepted by reputable science around the world that we're in the midst of this climate change, and we have to make these adjustments in order to ensure the long-term survivability of not just the human race but life on the planet Earth. So with all of those weighty things behind us it seems obvious that we have to include absolute reductions in Bill 3 in 2007 to at least acknowledge these things that are going on around us. I, for one, will not stand here in the Legislature and just let those things pass by with lots of platitudes about, you know, best province in the best country in the world and happy days and everything is great when, really, they're not that great.

We're building a structure in the province of Alberta here which will increase our carbon dioxide climate change emissions by at least four or five times in the next 10 years. It seems to me, Mr. Chair, that we are doing this not through some sort of debate or some sort of generally agreed upon set of principles that the majority of the population would go along with but, you know, by a few people making these decisions in large oil companies and corporations and making many of these decisions not even in the province of Alberta, making these decisions in places like Houston, Texas, and Washington and other places such as that, looking for a strategic source of oil on the continent of North America.

I think that Albertans are happy that we are an energy producing province and that we have a strong economy based on energy production. I'm sure that the majority of Albertans would like to see that continue to be so in the coming decades for our own children and grandchildren in the future. What we have to do is change with the times, Mr. Chair, and change with the times in the way that we produce energy here in the province of Alberta. Certainly, this does not preclude the continuation of the use of carbon-based energy in the province, but it just means that we should sip that natural resource perhaps a bit more judiciously than we have been gulping it down in the past and look for a means by which we can move into a transition into a sustainable energy economy. We certainly aren't going to do that with Bill 3 allowing for geometric increases in our carbon dioxide climate change emissions. In fact, that would be quite the opposite.

You know, you come to a tipping point, Mr. Chair. I believe that is where we are in the province of Alberta. But we're in a position

of strength. It's not like someone is holding a gun to our heads. We are in a position of strength to make that transition if we (a) put a moratorium on new tar sand approvals in the province of Alberta and (b) reform our royalty structure and invest that money in renewable resource energy production, on home retrofits and start to turn the tide of climate change around here in the province of Alberta and ensure the prosperity of our population for generations to come.

That is what my amendment does. Can you believe it, Mr. Chair? All of those very lofty ideals are built into a very simple amendment of section 5(1) and adding a simple provision that we make efforts to be compliant to the Kyoto protocol, to actually reduce our carbon dioxide climate change emissions instead of increasing them as they do under the current language of this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on amendment A4.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise again on the third amendment by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, a very astute consideration given the extreme limitations of this bill for revisions and amendments. Obviously, one of the key reasons that I'm in the Legislature today and have such an interest in the political process in Alberta has very much to do with the Kyoto protocol and my outspoken support of it and my abrupt firing some four years ago now from the Palliser health region as a result of my support for this protocol. It's very close to my heart, indeed. Having attended a few international conferences on the Kyoto protocol, I have some understanding and commitment to it as well.

4:20

We've lost a decade, Mr. Chairman. If we had honoured our commitment as a nation, as a province to the rather modest target at the time of 6 per cent below 1990 levels, or roughly 30 per cent below where we are today, we would be well on our way as a nation to achieving the desirable 50 per cent reduction by 2020 and 80 per cent reduction by 2050. Very doable. It was a modest goal at the time it was signed, in 1997. It's now a very ambitious target for us within the next four years to achieve a 30 per cent reduction. That's a 7 per cent reduction per year for the next four years, so clearly a very dramatic difference now.

The sentiments expressed within this are very legitimate. They reflect, I think, all Canadians, particularly now with the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the dire warnings of tremendous food loss on the planet, water damage to property, and indeed droughts and extreme weather events across the world.

Having said that, in the amendment being recommended, there are so many provisions of this very complex, international piece of legislation that it's difficult to envision incorporating all the dimensions of it into a simple amendment to Bill 3. While I support the spirit of it and the recognition that this is a lost opportunity for Canada and that we have to start making much stronger efforts, much more concrete and absolute targets for our emissions and timelines, I personally can't in good conscience support the amendment in this particular fashion, while applauding the spirit under which it's proposed.

I'll take my seat and listen to the rest of the debate. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Listening to the debate on this amendment, I find it rather interesting because it clearly states that we're going to be in compliance with any regulation, that we're going to be in compliance with the Kyoto protocol to the United Nations framework convention on climate change. I assume that that means that the ND member who presented the amendment plus the Liberal caucus – I see that there's another member planning to rise to speak to it – agree totally with what was being proposed in Kyoto and subsequently in other conventions, which I find very interesting because one of the big reasons that Alberta opposed this protocol was because of the sale of credits.

If you remember, Russia took a long time to come in. Why? Because they were trying to exercise getting as much money as they could for their hot air. Why did they have hot air? Well, Mr. Chairman, the reason they had hot air was because in 1990 there were still a lot of those very inefficient and very much polluting industries working in Russia. Not because of environmental reasons but because of economic reasons, those are not operating today. Of course, they took the 1990 measurement and, therefore, had hot air to sell. What does this mean? This means a redistribution of wealth within the world. That's what it means. It does not reduce the emissions one iota. As a matter of fact, it could increase the emissions.

I had the fortune of being in both Kyoto and Buenos Aires at the COP meeting. Buenos Aires was extremely interesting because the UN bureaucrats took over the whole convention. It was interesting to watch one session dealing with this international trading or selling of credits. The whole idea, as explained by a bureaucrat from the United Nations, would be that if an industry or a country wanted to do something like build a hydroproject in an undeveloped country, then they could get credit for having done that. They were going to increase the emissions, but they could get credit based on the comparison of emissions had it been a coal-fired plant.

Someone from one of the undeveloped countries stood up and said: "Well, why would we accept the project? Why don't we just accept the money? We don't have the infrastructure and/or the need for the electricity. We can't distribute it, don't have electricity in our homes, don't have any way of using it, yet we could get the money." Well, one of the next speakers was a representative of the United Arab Emirates, the richest people in the world per capita. They put up their hand and said: "Whoa, just a minute. If you're going to do that, then you may reduce the revenue that we would get from the sale of fossil fuels; therefore, we want some money as well to offset what you're doing over there in an undeveloped country." This whole thing was about UN domination and the transfer of wealth.

Another very interesting discussion centred around how you would have approval to do something in another country. The bureaucrat from the UN said: "Well, it's very simple. You come to us with your project, and we measure it. We say: what does it do for the local area economically? What does it do for the state economically? Third, what does it do for the environment?" He stressed that their assessment would be in that order.

I heard the two members that have already spoken on it talk about real reduction. No, it isn't. It's anything but real reduction. With what we are doing here in Alberta with this act, you will see some reduction on unit of production. You've got a choice. If you want to keep hammering that you have a total reduction in the emissions, what you're going to end up doing, then, is of course reduce output. That's the only way you can get at it. Does that make any sense?

I have never understood why Alberta, particularly with our fossil fuels, has to take all of the liability for the exploration, the production, the manufacturing of the product. Why isn't some liability

going with that product to the end user? If that's in Ontario or the United States, let them take part of that liability.

I can't support this amendment at all. I think it's going in absolutely the wrong direction. I find it very interesting that the two opposition parties want to see the trading of emissions, the buying of hot air. It doesn't work. It's nothing more than the transfer of wealth.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I just want to correct the Member for Rocky Mountain House, who either misheard or misinterpreted my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View's remarks. He spoke against the suggested amendment, and I'm sure that part of the reasoning he spoke against it was due to the eloquent historical explanation that the Member for Rocky Mountain House offered.

I agree completely on this occasion with the Member for Rocky Mountain House about the value, or the perceived value, of carbon trading and offsets. I think that he and I would be on record as saying that we would like to see the benefits being achieved within our province rather than, as you indicated, economic wealth transfers. If something is worth doing, then it should be promoted for its own intrinsic value. We should be encouraging less wealthy nations to have forests as opposed to cutting down the forests to create more corn or more grain for ethanol because those kinds of crops don't provide the carbon sink that forests provide.

4:30

My main reason for standing up was to indicate that it's said that you can't turn a sow's ear into a silk purse, which is the equivalent challenge of trying to make Bill 3 environmentally functional. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Calder trying to have an impact on the discussion, but as my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View indicated, Kyoto has such wide and broad provisions that taking the whole package and trying to adapt it to a made-in-Alberta circumstance has limitations. Therefore, we actually are in agreement although there is a little bit of confusion.

We support the made-in-Alberta solution, but for the record Bill 3 barely scratches the surface: a 12 per cent intensity reduction, whereas the total emissions are basically ignored. It's a baby step, but we've got to go farther. We have the capabilities and the intelligence within this House and within our colleges and industry to go further. So I, too, speak against the amendment.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Chairman, I must apologize if I misunderstood the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I never heard him say that he was not supporting this amendment, so I apologize if I misunderstood what he said.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. It was certainly an illuminating experience to bring forward these amendments, which I think are all very reasonable and within the general sense that we do have to in fact make some changes to have actual reductions in our carbon dioxide.

I find it very difficult to try to figure out – nor do I ever really want to – where my colleagues on the one side are coming from. They talk about wanting to have emissions reductions, and then they don't, and then Kyoto, and then they don't. You know, the whole

thing is that you have to make a stand. You can't run it through any filter that involves oil and gas companies calling the shots, whether they call the shots through political donations, that somehow they are looking for favours – "Well, hey, don't get in our way; you can be sort of progressive but not too much" – or whatever when the public and the population in the world are looking for absolute reductions. You cannot get absolute reductions and expect to surf along with big oil at the same time. I find that a little bit disturbing.

I'm sure that one thing that Albertans are very good at is seeing people for what they are. Bill 3 is a good litmus test for us to see where people are. At least with the members opposite, I know where they are. It's all rock and roll, big oil all the way, and a highway to Hades kind of thing. Right? But then if you are, you know, otherwise in between that – either you're on one side or you're on the other. You can't be in the middle on this issue. It's not physically possible.

Mr. Chair, with that, there's nothing better than getting the last word in. You notice that the Alberta New Democrats are the ones who, working all night tirelessly, brought in four amendments to Bill 3, trying to salvage what they could from some sow's ear/silk purse combination. Right? So there we are, working tirelessly. I would like to thank the very hard-working staff that we have back at the Annex to do that. Albertans appreciate it, and certainly ultimately we will prevail because we are doing the right thing.

With that, I will adjourn debate on Bill 3 for now. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 21 Securities Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's indeed a pleasure to stand and participate in debate at this stage on Bill 21, the Securities Amendment Act, 2007. This is the first opportunity I have to speak to this bill. I understand that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford has signalled his willingness to support it, and I trust his opinion. He studied this piece of legislation and also received some information from the hon. minister with respect to the proposed changes. In my quick reading of this bill, it apparently attempts to harmonize securities legislation between Alberta and the other provinces and jurisdictions in Canada, and it also allows investors to sue public companies operating in Alberta that issue false or misleading information. Those two areas are positive.

The one area where we think something needs to be done is with respect to the failure of this amendment and, actually, the failure of the current legislative framework to strengthen enforcement. As a layman, you know, I always say that you can have all the guidelines and regulations and standards you have – you can have as many of them as you want – but enforcement is really the bottleneck. It's basically where the buck stops.

There has always been the debate whether, in fact, we need a securities commission in each province or whether we should just use one federal regulator. I have to confess that I'm not clear on the pros and cons of both models: which model is better for our case in this province and which one is more useful. Was it always the way it is now, or did we have different models at different times? I honestly don't know, and I think that this Bill 21 is creating this opportunity for us to discuss these things. Enforcement and people having recourse against companies which commit crimes or wrongdoing or fraud or things of that nature are issues that we

should be addressing and we should be addressing, quite honestly, with force.

In 2005 and 2006 the Official Opposition raised many questions with respect to the securities regulator in this province, the Alberta Securities Commission. In the opposition – and this should come as no surprise to you, Mr. Chairman – we hear many complaints from the public talking about, you know, cases or situations where members of the public who were at one point or another shareholders in any particular company lost their financial security, lost their shares, lost their savings and their pensions because someone somewhere committed a crime against them.

Now in particular, when I am the shadow minister of Justice, I'm getting all of these complaints because people think members of this House and particularly members in the shadow cabinet can push a button and get things done. I have one gentleman in particular who has repeatedly approached me with information, you know, where he alleges that he lost in excess of \$2.3 million and that his partner lost a similar amount of money. Now, what can I go back and tell this gentleman?

This bill talks about standardizing and harmonizing legislation. It talks about the ability of the public to sue. Well, he's already doing that. He's already suing, and his claim has been through the court, and it's been processed for many years. We all know that court action in terms of securities and shares and companies owning other companies and companies selling other companies and the role of the regulator and the role of the RCMP and all of these different layers – these court cases are not easy to adjudicate. They take a long time, and sometimes members of the public don't have the luxury of time. Someone is well off and financially secure today, and then tomorrow they've lost everything, and they're on the brink of bankruptcy.

4:40

So to this gentleman and to the others who approached my office with concerns: I am not sure that this bill actually addresses that. I would hope that in the future this House will be discussing means for people to seek a quicker remedy, something that is more timely. You know, we should be talking about apprehending the wrongdoers. We should be talking about restitution or compensation from the victims of crime fund and things like that.

Now, the other thing that I would like to highlight in my brief comments today is the rules which should be in place or, hopefully, are being put in place now with respect to Alberta Securities Commission employees and board members. These people are, for the most part, responsible and law-abiding individuals. Some are weak, and some might be tempted to work outside of the law. I think we should tighten our rules to prevent employees of the commission and board members from trading in companies that are being investigated.

We should also have regulations in place prohibiting those employees and board members from trading in companies that are listed with the Alberta Securities Commission, a broader prohibition to avoid any conflict of interest or, as I always maintain in this House, the appearance of a conflict of interest. In a way, we're protecting them, too, because they probably don't want to be accused of any wrongdoing. By having a regulation in place that prohibits them from owning shares in companies that appear on the securities commission, we're basically protecting them as well.

Conflict of interest legislation also governs MLAs, Mr. Chairman. You know, when we all joined this esteemed Assembly, we were told: "You have to declare what shares you own. You have to tell us how much is invested and if there are changes, if you acquire new ones or if you sell the old ones" and stuff like that. I think that

MLAs should also be prohibited from nominating Alberta Securities Commission commissioners, again, just to increase that distance between members of this Assembly and the Securities Commission and, to a larger extent, members of any board or any commission or any task force that is appointed by this government or by this Assembly. MLAs should distance themselves from this appearance of a conflict of interest.

Another concern – and I'm sure that other members are going to highlight this – is with respect to the passport system, which allows market regulators to pass the buck on enforcement files. For example, the commission may investigate just one piece or one small component of an irregularity but then move the bulk of that investigation onto another regulator. It actually prevents these investigations from being thorough and complete, and it may allow loopholes to exist where, basically, an investigation is severed or interrupted.

So in a way I am voicing concern, but it's cautious concern for this, Mr. Chairman, and I'd be interested to hear what other members have to say. Thank you.

Chair's Ruling Decorum

The Chair: Before I recognize the next speaker, hon. members, I'd like to raise a question of courtesy and respect for one another in the House. I know the committee is a more informal part of the activities in the Legislature, but a number of times this afternoon members have interrupted speakers that had the floor by walking in front of them. It's not just a question of respect or courtesy; it's also against our Standing Order 13(4)(a). "When a Member is speaking, no person shall . . . pass between that Member and the chair." So if we could be mindful of that, I think the chair would appreciate it.

Debate Continued

The Chair: I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I'd like to come back to comments I made in second reading. I understand the need, as I said earlier on having worked under the Securities Commission here for a number of years, for some sort of harmonization. It makes no sense in this global age of money that we have, I guess, 13 different securities bodies across the country. It's wasteful, and it just doesn't make any sense.

I would like some comments either from the minister or the member bringing forth this bill because it seems to me that the way they're getting out of this is – and I mentioned this; I hope that the member or somebody will come back to this – that they are actually weakening what we already have here with our own Securities Commission. Lord knows, we had enough problems here with our Securities Commission, with the rules that they had, but by looking at the bill, it seems to weaken the oversight ability of the executive director.

What I see happening here is a passport system that seems to be going to the lowest common denominator: who has the weakest rules across the country? That's how we're going to harmonize, Mr. Chairman, and I don't think that's what we want to do. That's why we've called in the past and will continue to call for a national regulatory body. I want to stress, again, that this is not the federal government. This would be the provinces getting together and putting in together, rather than the lowest common denominator, the best practices right across all the securities commissions. Surely that's what investors, especially small investors who can't be on top

of it all the time, want. Obviously, there's a risk when you invest, but they want to know that the risk is legislated and ruled by rules. If it's not, then that's going to impact the economy, especially for small companies attempting to get into the various securities commissions.

As I said before, Mr. Chairman, we see, especially in our neighbours to the south, that they're moving strongly the other way. In other words, their corporate and business ethics have left much to be desired there, and they're prosecuting big time, and they see white-collar crime as very serious.

I'm worried, and maybe I'm misreading this, but it seems to me that as we move to the harmonization, Mr. Chairman, it's a race to the bottom: we can all agree on this; therefore, we have harmonization. You know, if we've gone to the lowest common denominator, how does that in fact help that small investor? As I say, it seems to me that rather than, you know, trying to harmonize, why can't the 13 jurisdictions get together and work it out and have, as I say, a national regulatory body and at the same time look at the best practices rather than the lowest common denominator? If I'm wrong about how we're reading this bill, I certainly would hope that the government, either the member bringing it forward or the minister, would clarify what they see happening with this bill. That's certainly how I read it: that we're actually weakening a Securities Act here that hardly has a great record in protecting investors. You know, look at just what happened a couple of years ago.

Even when I was working in the financial consulting business, there was a lot of talk about our Securities Commission here not doing the job. Then when I see that we seem to be even weakening it further to harmonize with the rest of the country, I don't think that's good enough. Unless I'm misreading this bill – and somebody will tell me – I certainly would not support this sort of race to the bottom here that I see happening with the Securities Commission.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4:50

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I believe the intent of Bill 21 is to attempt to harmonize securities legislation with other provinces, that Bill 21 allows investors to sue public companies operating in Alberta that issue false or misleading information, but unfortunately it fails to strengthen the enforcement necessary. My questions basically are: who is in charge, and where does the ultimate responsibility lie?

Throughout the spring of 2006, almost on a day-by-day basis, shortcomings and confusion with regard to the Alberta Securities Commission appeared. The former Finance minister was forever put in a very awkward position of trying to defend the actions of the Securities Commission, indicating that an internal auditing examination was taking place on the Securities Commission. When the Auditor General was called in to review the Securities Commission, although they have a direct responsibility to the government, Fred Dunn's attempts to get the Alberta Securities Commission to obey his questions and provide answers were blocked at every step of the way.

The Alberta Securities Commission obviously has to have a degree of independence, but in my mind it is responsible, first, to the government of Alberta and, secondly, to the other securities commissions, and it makes sense to want to have a similar set of rules. But the shadow of doubt that arose over the Alberta Securities Commission has not moved off: the questionable trading practices that were alleged, the fact that there was no whistle-blower protection so that when employees did raise issues with regard to the

conduct of members of the Securities Commission, they basically were silenced and fired. That kind of lack of transparency in dealing with individuals, obviously, is frowned upon.

A member of my constituency by the name of Eugene Ewankow – and I have his permission to bring this up – came to me with a long and very convoluted story of an organization entitled Tobe Mines, a.k.a Stratum Resources. Now, what he was calling for in a letter that he wrote to the former Premier is as follows. He says:

I write to you while you are still Premier, a follow-up to my correspondence addressed to you comprised of a letter dated February 28, 2005, with two enclosures and another dated May 5, 2005. Please be advised that I am seeking the appointment of a liquidator for Tobe Mines Ltd., which is the subject matter of my previously written letters to you and a former Finance minister prior to our last Finance minister, the former minister of finance and energy. I make this request to the government since it is my belief that government ministries and agencies perform certain acts and deeds in a manner which amounts to abuse of power.

He provided 76 follow-up pieces of documentation. I'm not going to go into names and details because this will be the subject of an investigation, but Project Stanley was part of the Enron market manipulation, and the number of individuals who were either fired from their positions or were disbarred over the dealings of Tobe Mines is an unbelievable list.

If we're going to have faith in an Alberta Securities Commission, we have to empower the people that are employees of that commission to hold their own commission to a level of accountability and professionalism that Albertans can have faith in and, transferring that responsibility, that all Canadians can have faith in in terms of investing in Alberta stocks and companies.

There is a need, a definite need, for cleaning up the Alberta Securities Commission. Bill 21 is a start in terms of that cleaning up, but as I say, there are so many shadows of doubt that require investigation that this is far from settled. I'm not sure that Bill 21 will take us as far as we want to go, but it's a step in the right direction, and I give my Calgary colleague credit for bringing it forward. I'm sure other members will want to discuss whether Bill 21 is the vehicle that will achieve the results that it sets out as objectives.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 21, the Securities Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 21 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? It's carried.

Bill 16 Police Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with regard to this bill? The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to respond to the points and questions raised regarding Bill 16, Police Amendment Act, 2007. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung

suggested during second reading that civilians and a member of the judiciary should be part of the investigative unit. The director of this proposed investigative unit will indeed be a civilian lawyer. The director could be a defence lawyer, a Crown attorney, a retired judge, or any other lawyer. Some of the investigators will also be civilians, as will the analytical support staff and subject matter experts who have specific knowledge about matters such as undercover operations and wiretaps. Some of the investigators, or subject matter experts, may also be retired police officers from Alberta, other Canadian jurisdictions, or even abroad as these individuals possess the specific skills necessary to ensure the most comprehensive and thorough investigations possible.

I would also like to clarify that the proposed investigation unit is not a panel. It is an investigative agency independent from police services. In this sense it is more akin to Ontario's special investigative unit, the SIU, than to the Law Enforcement Review Board, the LERB, or the Ontario Civilian Commission on Police Services, the OCCOPS, both of which are civilian review panels. So to reiterate, the director of the investigative unit will be a lawyer, and there will be more than two civilians within the unit.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung also suggested that this proposed unit shouldn't be a fixed body but that there should be more than one team doing investigations at the same time if necessary. It is anticipated that the investigative unit will be comprised of two teams, one in northern Alberta and one in the south, and that the teams will investigate multiple matters at the same time. For example, at any one time a team may be investigating a death that occurred in police custody, an alleged sexual assault, as well as conducting an undercover operation of an officer who may be selling information to organized crime, among other files.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung also suggested that the number of investigations conducted shouldn't be dependent on budget. The director of law enforcement in conjunction with the director of the proposed investigation unit will determine which matters require the unit to conduct an investigation. Although there is a limited capacity within the unit, we are confident, based on our review of incidents within the province of Alberta, that two teams, north and south, will be able to adequately investigate those matters that are deemed to require outside investigation.

5:00

The hon. member for Edmonton-Glenora raised the point that the wording of "any matter of a serious or sensitive nature related to the actions of a police officer" is not solidly defined. That wording is contained in section 46.1 of the Police Act. I want to assure the member that the policy has been developed to guide the interpretation of "serious or sensitive." That policy is undergoing refinement and improvement in consultation with various stakeholders and based on research from other jurisdictions.

A number of members compared the proposed Alberta investigative model to the special investigative unit, the SIU model, in Ontario. Although SIU investigates matters of serious injury or death, including sexual assault, it does not investigate matters of corruption or allegations of a sensitive nature. The Alberta model, therefore, encompasses a wider scope of allegations than SIU in Ontario. Alberta will be the first province in Canada where an independent investigative agency's mandate would be broader than just serious injury or death and would include matters such as corruption.

It is important to have some discretion involved in the decision of what the proposed unit is required to investigate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder suggested that Ontario's SIU does not employ an investigator that is a police officer or ever was one. With all due

respect to my colleague, SIU employs many retired police officers. The qualifier is that an officer cannot be involved in an investigation that relates to someone from his or her home agency.

In Ontario hundreds and hundreds of allegations of police misconduct are investigated by the agency employing the accused officer. The only matters that SIU investigates are serious injuries, deaths, and sexual assaults. In Ontario allegations of police corruption are investigated by the officer's home agency. The Alberta model expands the scope of matters subject to the independent investigation, and in that way we'll be breaking new ground in Canada.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora suggested that he would like some clarification as to the appointment of special constables within the proposed investigative unit. The proposed unit will have some investigators who are not serving police officers. They may be retired police officers from Alberta or any other jurisdiction or other individuals with the prerequisite skills and competencies. However, in order for these investigators to be empowered to do the work required of them, they will need to have peace officer appointments authorizing them to enforce provincial and federal legislation as required.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods suggested that any problem involving death and police should be automatically investigated by the proposed unit. The director of law enforcement, in conjunction with the director of the investigative unit, will determine which matters require that unit to conduct an investigation. We feel that it's important that there should be some discretion involved in the decision of what this proposed unit would investigate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder wanted clarification on the use of the word "integrated." The word integrated refers to the fact that the two teams of the proposed unit will be comprised of a variety of people from various backgrounds. There will be retired police officers from Alberta and other jurisdictions, some of whom have specific expertise in wiretaps, undercover operations, and homicide investigations. There may also be some serving officers seconded from police services to work for the proposed investigative unit under the supervision and direction of the civilian director. The term is not intended to mean integration with police services but, rather, that the proposed investigative unit will be a unit comprised of a variety of people from different backgrounds.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder also suggests that current or former police officers should not be involved within the unit. In order for this proposed unit's investigations to be thorough, comprehensive, and of the highest possible quality, it is imperative that it draw on the expertise of some serving and former police officers. These individuals are from the pool of the best trained investigators and have a highly specific set of skills: interrogators, undercover operatives, wiretap experts, homicide investigators, and others with similar skills and competencies. I described earlier that Ontario's SIU has many retired police officers working within their unit.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder wants a commitment that this proposed investigative unit is a civilian-driven body and wants to ensure that this unit operates at arm's length and in an independent manner from police and that it is perceived to do so by the public. I want to assure this member that this is exactly what this proposed investigative unit will do.

With respect to sheriffs, their oversight and complaint process, as with all peace officers of Alberta, is covered under the Peace Officer Act. While there might be interest in exploring civilian oversight of these individuals beyond what is already legislated, the Police Act is not the appropriate piece of legislation to do this.

Mr. Chairman, a key mandate of our new government is to be

open, accountable, and transparent. This proposed legislation will supplement that mandate and help make Alberta a safe place to live, work, and visit.

Mr. Chairman, at this time I believe the hon. members of the opposition are not prepared to debate this bill, so I would move that we adjourn debate until tomorrow.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 12

Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is a bill that puts in place regulations for overpayments and repayments and the process of informing people when the money needs to be retrieved. I have no problems and have already raised issues in second reading, but I think it's work that has to be done. I appreciate the fact that there's an appeal panel now.

Bill 12, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007, outlines various changes. They are mostly housekeeping matters, but there are some improvements, I think. The appeal panel is necessary because, certainly, the circumstances of people living in poverty change so drastically that sometimes they don't know from one month to the next where they're going to be living. It's very hard for the department to get a hold of these people, and the mentioning of things like registered mail, electronic means, and so on is a bit bizarre, in my way of thinking. I guess it has to be done legally, but how can we make it possible through the department to ensure that these people find out about these situations where there's an overpayment?

There have to be some human dimensions here, where people are helped. I was suggesting in second reading that working through social agencies, this could be done. The appeal, too: people have to know what their rights are in terms of appealing, some sort of process of working through social workers and social agencies to ensure that people know that they have a right to appeal when they're required to provide an overpayment. I'm really pleased to see that an appeal panel may waive repayment, because it's important. When they see the circumstances and the whole situation that a person is in, then they have a chance to waive it, and that's good.

Mr. Chairman, as I said before, I'm not going to take issue with anything more in this bill. It's just kind of a shame that we're not really dealing with what we should be dealing with, and that is trying to overcome poverty in this province. I was particularly impressed when Public Interest Alberta published their report on making a living wage in Alberta. A living wage. I mean, we used to think about minimum wage, but a living wage is the level of pay that is sufficient to allow workers to support their families and maintain a safe, healthy standard of living in their communities. Of course, what's involved in providing for that kind of safe living wage is that there has to be adequate money to cover all expenses for food and so on. There has to be enough to support housing, shelter.

5:10

Now, Public Interest Alberta sent out a survey to Albertans to find out what it costs to live in Alberta in terms of various family configurations. They got all kinds of results. I'll just give you one example: a single parent with three children, ages three, six, and nine. On the basis of the responses they got, they figured that for that family the basic costs in terms of food, housing, transportation, and utilities would be \$2,258 a month. That's the minimum.

Well, Mr. Chairman, when you look at the welfare rates, under benefits for not expected to work, three children, a single parent, it's \$1,037. That's the most that you can get in our current program through Alberta Works. That's less than half of what Public Interest Alberta is saying that you need for a living wage as a single parent with three children. So it's impossible for a person to live in this province. Impossible. One thousand a month. You have three children. Impossible. No wonder, then, that 1 out of every 5 children in Alberta is living in poverty. I mean, we're actually forcing these people into homelessness by providing them with so little.

Mr. Chairman, this kind of bill, I guess, is necessary. You know, we had that lawsuit concerning the AISH rates, and I can understand why the government is concerned to put something in place that's going to ensure that that's not going to happen again and that there's some way of retrieving the money. But, really, thinking about overpayments to people who are living in poverty: my goodness, if a person is only getting \$1,000 a month, and then maybe they got \$1,100 instead of \$1,000, and we're going to try to get that money back? I mean, that's bizarre.

I really wish that we could rethink and reinvent the whole welfare system so that it would be more human and treat people with dignity and provide the people with what they really need: a living wage. A living wage. That's what all people in this province need. Out of the living wage they can have a home, a place to live. That's what all people deserve.

So, Mr. Chairman, that's all I have to say. I know that I keep repeating that over and over again, and maybe that's my special mission: to come to this Legislature to fight against poverty in this province. It's time that poverty ended, and we can make it happen, because we have so much wealth. So this government needs to take social responsibility to provide for those who are most desperate.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to speak on Bill 12, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007. I would like to respond to some of the comments of the hon. members in second reading and again today in committee.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods both raised some concerns about the various means by which the director's decision is communicated to the client, who might, as the hon. member has pointed out, be disadvantaged by not having access to fax machines or computers or even, as he stated, a regular address. I agree with that, and it was mentioned by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods that there might be a better way for a social worker, perhaps, to convey a decision and the right to appeal.

Now, the difficulty that the bill must address is that we now have a new provision proposed to be added for an appeal from a determination that an amount under section 35 is owed by a client and that it must be repaid to the government. The conundrum is this. There must be a definite trigger for commencement of the 30-day appeal period because the new bill proposes that until the 30-day appeal period has expired, the amount found to be owing would not become a legal debt. It doesn't become a debt until after the 30-day period has expired, so we have to have some trigger to start the 30-day appeal period. This is an improvement. The appeal period must go by, and only when that appeal period has passed is there an enablement for a recovery of the overpayment. The trigger to start the 30-day appeal period would start to run from when the client is notified.

Now, I would like to point out to the hon. members that under section 45(1) of the existing act we are still talking about actual notice of both the decision and the right to appeal. We're not talking about constructive notice. We're not talking about faxes or e-mails or registered mail or anything. We're talking about actual notice, so that has not changed.

When we talk about the deemed commencement of the 30-day appeal period, which is the new proposed provision under section 45(3), I would also point out to the hon. members that this is rebuttable. If the person satisfies the appeal panel either that they did not receive the notice or that they did in fact receive it but they didn't receive it at the time that was deemed to be the receipt notice, then there is a saving provision. So I respectfully suggest to the hon. members that there is a saving provision in the legislation which takes care of their specific concerns.

I appreciate the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora regarding his favourable disposition to the ability of the appeals panel to dismiss the claim for reimbursement. He also brought up some broader issues regarding the adequacy of income supports, which, I think he would agree, are not particularly within the purview of this bill.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East asked about the term "financial administrator" and the provision providing that a financial administrator may be made responsible for repayment when overpayments are based on false or misleading information. That would be provided that the financial administrator knew that there was no entitlement. Only if they knew that there was no entitlement and if they financially benefited from that overpayment: that's the only circumstance in which that would occur.

A financial administrator in those instances, in response to the hon. member's inquiry, is someone who stands in for the client and who is appointed under section 17 of the act, and that would usually be with the consent of the client. In some circumstances, where required, that financial administrator may be appointed by the director.

Some further general comments were made as to the observations by the hon. members that the tone of the amendments seems punitive. Well, I can say that while the amendments do contain some rather legalistic verbiage, some of those technicalities and particularly the legalities regarding the starting and the flow of the appeal periods which are being proposed are actually to clarify the whole period of the appeal, to make it clear when the appeal period starts and when it ends. As I stated, we don't have a legal debt until such time as the appeal period has actually come to an end.

I can say, Mr. Chairman, that the thrust of the amendment, certainly, is to rectify the unfairness in the former procedures. Those particular unfairness provisions were brought to the light of all in the litigation related to the overpayments to the AISH clients. I believe that this legislation does go a considerable way to introducing more fairness into the process. It allows more discretion in forgiving overpayments and waiving repayment when it's appropriate. It streamlines and clarifies the whole process with respect to finding out when the government is entitled to recover taxpayer funds that have been wrongly paid, and above all it provides for an impartial appeal process, the Citizens' Appeal Panel, in order to have a second look at circumstances where overpayments have been made and before those repayments are required.

5:20

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really appreciate the explanation given by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. I still

have some concerns about the overall intent, I guess, of Bill 12, which is entitled Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007. I think that as we look at some principles here, there's a discrepancy between what are purported principles and the bill content because the name of the bill implies much more than what is really happening. It suggests that we need to actually support these people and move them along, and I'd like to again mention that we are not doing that. We're not providing enough money for people to live based on basic needs. I once again want to propose that we need to be looking beyond this to index the welfare rates so that people will have a chance to live with some of the dignity that we all choose.

The focus of the bill is a pretty accurate reflection of the attitude that's commonly held towards the helpless in Alberta. In Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* there are lines that express this well. When he first meets Marley, Scrooge says: I think the world is a hard and cruel place; we must steel ourselves to survive lest we be crushed under with the weak and the infirm. The helpless are equivalent to Scrooge's weak and infirm. Asked for a donation for the poor, Scrooge replies: I support prisons and workhouses with my taxes; if people are in need, let them go there. When he tries to console his former partner that he was "a good man of business," Marley replies, "Mankind was my business."

I believe that Alberta is due for a Scrooge-type awakening. This government should not be above being questioned about the use of our tax dollars. Hiding behind FOIP is not the Alberta advantage. When it comes to spending, I'd rather be conned by a smooth panhandler or by somebody who's received an overpayment than refuse help to someone who needs it because there's a chance he may be bogus. If one of the world's biggest producers of energy can't afford to invest in its own people and especially the neediest among us, then we're morally bankrupt.

Former Premier Ernest C. Manning was a staunch free enterpriser, yet he balanced this with a social conscience. That's what the words "social conservative" mean, and that's what he meant when he coined them in 1968. It wasn't about regulating people's private lives and relationships but about compassion. He took seriously the Biblical commands to tend the fatherless, plead for the widow. That's how he could be a committed capitalist and a compassionate leader. He believed that one had to support the other.

Some say the current government is less right wing because they relaxed the rules for gambling and alcohol. We've got it backwards. The values are about profit. That's why the phrase "the Alberta advantage" should be questioned. It implies that the helpless are on the outside looking in. I prefer to think and speak of an Alberta opportunity we can all share. We need a broader sense of opportunity. It's time for government with a heart.

This bill does not demonstrate the basic principles of concern for the well-being of others in terms of food, housing, and transportation. The money is not a living wage. It falls short of meeting basic needs. Let's take leadership and end poverty, as expressed by my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly, you know, this small change with Bill 12 brings up certain larger issues that I hear other members bringing forward. My biggest difficulty was the impetus for bringing this bill forward in the first place, which was, I believe, a failure of the government to act on what was already pointed out to them as being a continuation of an incorrect practice. You know, we had tens of millions of dollars being clawed back from the most vulnerable members of our society, and then in the very sort of

slowest bureaucratic way possible this was finally made amends just very recently.

I know that I've dealt in my own constituency of Edmonton-Calder with many people that (a) didn't quite know what they were entitled to get back when they finally did seek restitution from the government for the money they took from these people and (b) there was always this underlying sense of fear of not being able to get what is due to these individuals who were entitled to get some money back on their AISH payments. I just wanted to speak very briefly on that because, you know, it's that sort of culture of fear and somehow warehousing away people with the most severely handicapped designation and trying to minimize any dime or nickel that these people need to live.

There is a basic sense of human dignity that I think we have to operate under as being publicly responsible for each of the members of our population here in the province of Alberta. That is a sense of dignity that lies with every single individual human being that lives in the province regardless of their circumstances. You know, it's so easy for us to go back and perhaps nickel and dime and make tiny cuts to the most severely handicapped people in our province, but I think that that sense of integrity and sense of dignity should override that. Certainly, one of the reasons that I ended up choosing to be in public office, with the kind support of the people of Edmonton-Calder, was to ensure that every single individual has the requirements that do allow them to live in dignity and with integrity. It at the very least requires a basic income that reflects the cost of living in the community that you live in.

The sooner that I see something like that brought forward in the provincial Legislature here, the happier I would be. Certainly, I think we could all rest easier in knowing that we are doing our responsibility to the people who are most in need in our province because it's only by the grace of God that we might be going in that same direction. You never know what circumstances might pass your way to put you in a position of need yourself or your family, and I think it's incumbent upon us here in the Legislature to ensure that people can live with integrity and with dignity if not without poverty.

I find it a bit rich here. Again, I'm just feeling a little bit annoyed with my colleagues to the one side because, of course, they love to talk about ending poverty and whatnot. Then I saw them voting very recently on a huge corporate tax cut for the very wealthiest people in our province. I can only say that you can't have it both ways, and when you do try to do so, you probably will end up losing on both sides. There is a certain insincerity about that as well, that I find very difficult to swallow.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Bill 12, although I'm sure not intentionally, continues to stereotype or stigmatize poverty. It makes the assumption that people are guilty until they prove themselves innocent, that they have to justify any overpayments or underpayments to them. The onus of proof lies basically on the victim.

Bill 12 doesn't address the root problems of poverty. There are no market-basket measures that automatically come in effect. There's no indexing such as MLAs are privy to, a public-sector wage increase for indexing. There's no automatic increase with regard to inflation.

5:30

This government has a very negligent history of dealing with the

most depressed Albertans. Our former Premier used to try and compete with Mike Harris from Ontario in who could artificially reduce their welfare rolls to the greatest extent. In the case of Mr. Harris I think he offered bus tickets to Alberta whereas we were so cheap that we only offered them to Saskatchewan. So there is a history of not recognizing poverty.

Of course, with the boom that we're currently experiencing in Alberta, more people are finding themselves on the poverty side thanks to lack of rent controls, lack of market management, lack of affordable housing. Food banks are popping up more so than new industries or new job potential. We've got to deal with that part of it.

My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora spoke of a potential remedy that we should be working on together, possibly in all-party policy committees, which I look forward to, and that's the idea of a living wage, a wage that would allow a person to live an inclusive life in Alberta and have their needs met, at least have a roof over their head and some kind of food allowance that would ensure that they didn't have to line up outside shelters, whether permanent or temporary.

Part of the problem with Bill 12 is the flawed appeals process. Stakeholders have suggested that the appeals process is flawed because it assumes that the appellant is not telling the truth. This is what I indicated at the beginning of the discussion. It must be recognized that while some individuals might misrepresent information, I would say that the vast majority are just trying to struggle to survive, and they need support both in the financial sense and in the counselling sense. The well-being of individuals has to take priority. People should be Alberta's number one resource.

There have been numerous complaints that clients are not given adequate notice of appeal dates. There is a clause in the amendment stating that clients can try to prove they were not aware of the date of the appeal. This comes up time and time again in my constituency office. Finally, we use the address for the individual receiving payments as our constituency address so that we can advocate on their behalf because of the number of erroneous mailings, addresses that haven't been lived at for years. The bureaucracy of the whole process is extremely flawed. The government needs to make every effort to make sure that clients are reached with important information about their cases. I have suggested before that constituency offices could be, to a degree, a little bit of a clearing house, whether it's bus passes or cheque pickups. If we can add to the streamlining of the process, so be it.

Other problems have to do with financial administrators. Some individuals receiving assistance under this act are unable to manage their finances themselves, so someone is allowed to administer their case for them. Under this administrators can be personally responsible for repaying assistance if it's decided that information was misrepresented or concealed or if assistance was misused. What this does is make two people guilty. Somebody who attempts to act on behalf of a disabled, whether physically or mentally, individual is then on the hook if that individual has trouble managing their own finances, so we punish the person who out of, hopefully, good intentions or a family member wanting to support a son or a brother, sister, mother, father. They get dragged into the debt.

Inadequate supports. One of the biggest problems with the Income and Employment Supports Act is that not enough assistance is provided, especially, as I pointed out, with regard to the cost of living. We have to realize that Alberta's inflated economy puts a tremendous amount of pressure on individuals, especially at the marginal living conditions that are now becoming more common in Alberta, particularly in the large cities but also being experienced in rural communities as well.

What we would like to see changed or added to the act would be changing how training options are offered. Right now they're focused on finding immediate employment rather than maximizing employability and skills for long-term success. So instead of taking the first job that comes along and eking by by doing three or four minimal jobs, let's look into education and raising individuals out of their poverty.

Benefits, as I've indicated before, aren't indexed, meaning that increases in the cost of living and housing are not matched by increases in income supports. We could say the same thing with regard to AISH payments. We could talk about PDD support and wages. There should be an annual increase that reflects the Alberta marketplace. The level of support offered is enough to cover only the bare essentials, giving recipients little chance to escape the cycle of poverty. The Alberta government suggests that individuals should not be required to pay more than 30 per cent of their income on housing. Of course, with no measures to prevent unscrupulous increases any number of times throughout the year, these people are preyed upon. Income exemptions are too low to support recipients trying to find employment and leave income support programs. So we're not incenting people to move on; we're basically holding them hostage at these low rates.

With regard to the child support provisions individuals receiving assistance under income and employment supports are expected to get assistance from sources other than the government whenever possible. That's laudable. We don't want to become a welfare state, but we want to encourage people and support them. Because of this, single parents are expected to make every possible effort to get all of the money they are eligible for through child support. Just simply putting deadbeat spouses up on a website does not constitute enforcement.

Mechanisms to gain child support when the debtor is either unresponsive or does not have the financial resources to provide support have been notoriously unsuccessful. I suggest that the government ends up spending more on collection agents than it does on providing support for the individuals in need. Additional support is provided through this act to help the client come to an agreement with a former spouse or partner and receive the support they are owed. That is laudable.

I don't want to take up all the time, but we need in Alberta to recognize that a number of people aren't living the so-called Alberta advantage. Unless we intervene and level the playing field and wrestle with the market, these people are going to continue to be worse off. Calgary tried to deal with a temporary homeless shelter in the form of a Brick. The cities are taking an unfair amount of the financial burden, which should be the province's responsibility. We need to get past the permanent shelters. We need to get past the temporary shelters. But until such time as we accomplish that laudable goal, we have to provide support for people.

Bill 12 has to go farther. It has to deal with the causes of poverty, not just the minimal allowances provided to poor individuals.

Thank you.

5:40

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 10
Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to rise today in Committee of the Whole to represent Bill 10, the Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act. As stated previously in the House, this legislation will repeal the Horned Cattle Purchases Act. The objective of the act was to promote the dehorning of cattle prior to public sales to prevent damage to cattle during transport. The objective has been achieved, and the act is no longer required. The penalty was cancelled in February of 1972, and the act has been in essence suspended since that time.

I'd like to thank all honourable members for their support in second reading, and I request their continued support on Bill 10. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. It's hard to avoid puns like "being on the horns of a dilemma," and "this is a thorny issue," but I don't want to come across as a city slicker, so I'm going to try and understand a little bit more of what's intended. I gather the history, as the hon. member mentioned, had to do with that there was a transport fee of \$5 placed on cattle that were horned, which I gather for most cattle is the natural state of affairs. I find it interesting, however, that there wasn't a sliding scale. For example, maybe we should have had \$15 for Texas Longhorns because the amount of damage they could do in transit would be considerably greater than your regular Angus or Anjou type of cattle.

I would also like to know if by doing away with this \$5 . . . [interjections] Sorry, did I hear a mooing coming from the other side? Somebody load that heifer. Okay. Sorry.

Meanwhile, back to the horned cattle purchases. I gather that the \$5 fee is no longer considered necessary. The person transporting the cattle no longer has to pay that \$5 fee, and I gather that, from here, it says that the fee would be deducted from the purchase price of any horned cattle, and that \$5 would be paid to the minister.

I'm assuming that this wouldn't be proposed if it wasn't a good move for farmers and ranchers, and therefore there's obvious sense to it. But at the risk of potentially casting doubt on my capabilities to recognize agricultural trends, if that \$5 fee is no longer considered necessary, will that improve the transportation of cattle both within the province and for export sales? If that is the case, then I have no trouble supporting Bill 10, the Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act. So clarification, please, and then I would be prepared to vote.

Mr. Mitzel: I think, for the hon. member's clarification, it's perhaps unfortunate if he missed second reading of that because a lot of that was explained there. For instance, when you talk about the Texas Longhorns, this was for animals 250 pounds and up. As you perhaps understand, a Texas Longhorn really doesn't achieve a three- or four-foot length of horn until they're perhaps 17 or 18 years old, and they're not transporting those. These animals are going to market. For the member's information it was a \$2 fee, not a \$5 fee, and most of the animals now are polled animals – in other words, they don't have horns, or there are other means of dehorning them – and the act hasn't been used since 1972. The funds that were in place were used to help promote animals' well-being, for instance warble control, and everything else until the fund ran down to \$1,500, and then the money was put into general revenue. As a matter of fact, it hasn't been used since 1972, and there haven't been funds since 1974. So it's just housekeeping and cleaning up.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 10, the Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 10 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 6
Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just quickly on a couple of items that came up in second reading. Support services: the definition was asked for. It will be defined in the regulation as those services that support or meet the daily living needs of students, faculty, and staff, so food and drink, entertainment, household kinds of things.

Then the pooled trust funds. Institutions often receive private donations whereby they establish trust funds similar to an endowment primarily set up to generate revenue for such things as scholarships. Sometimes with the fluctuation of the markets they're not sure which fund is up or which fund is down, so they just want to go ahead and pay out those scholarships, and then of course the markets will do what it is that they're going to do.

The Auditor General's office has noted that the act is silent as to whether an institution can encroach on the original capital to ensure the commitments outlined in the donor agreements, and of course we are interested that they continue to be met. The Auditor General's office also noted that it would be a good idea to clarify this in the act as it is the current practice.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the Member for Lethbridge-West for those answers to the concerns that we raised in second reading debate. I think that does clarify the issues for us, and we're pleased to support the bill.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 6, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report bills 21, 12, 10, and 6 and report progress on bills 3 and 16.

[Motion carried]

5:50

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 21, Bill 12, Bill 10, Bill 6. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 3 and Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the

Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, I've been encouraged that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until tomorrow afternoon at 1.

[Motion carried; at 5:51 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, April 11, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 2007/04/11

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Kelley Keehn, seated in the members' gallery. Kelley was born and raised in Alberta and is a financial expert, author of three books: *The Woman's Guide to Money*, *The Prosperity Factor for Women*, and her latest, *The Prosperity Factor for Canadian Kids*. I think I'll have to buy a copy for sure. She's also the coauthor of the book *Mutual Fundamentals*. Kelley is also a regular columnist with the Sun Media, the *Edmonton Sun*, *Canadian MoneySaver* magazine, *Husband & Wife* magazine, and the *Edmonton Commerce News*. Accompanying her today is her mother, Kathleen Keehn. I would ask Kelley and Kathleen to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the community sponsors of the School at the Legislature program. Seated in your gallery are from Priority Printing Ltd. Mr. Tim Downey, president; from CHUM television Mr. Craig Roskin, station manager, and Mr. Eric Rice, manager, creative/production services. From the Rotary Club of Edmonton we have Mr. Jack Clements and from CKUA Radio Network Mr. Ken Regan, general manager, and Ms Terry Kostek, chief financial officer.

Priority Printing, Access and Canadian Learning Television, Via Rail, CKUA Radio Network, and the Rotary Club of Edmonton are community sponsors of the School at the Legislature program. This program gives grade 6 teachers from all over our province an opportunity to relocate their classroom to the Alberta Legislature for a week. Supported by 35 teachers and over 400 parent volunteers in fiscal year 2006, over 800 students from 32 classes attended the School at the Legislature program. We're very grateful for the support we receive from our community sponsors, and we ask our guests now to rise in your gallery and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through to the members of the Assembly a group of 47 visitors from the grade 6 class, students from Woodhaven middle school in Spruce Grove. They, too, attended your mock Legislature program this morning, and I'm told from talking to them in the

rotunda that they passed school uniforms and passed later start times for school, about 10:30, I'm told. They are accompanied today by teachers Mrs. Barb Gericke, Ms Tara Issler, Mrs. Mona Holton, by parent helpers Mr. Cam Walker, Mrs. Karen Hudson, Ms Carrie Wiloughby. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a large group of very special guests from the Department of Health and Wellness. While there are a few managers and supervisors with us today, most of the individuals that have joined us are either currently interns with Alberta Health and Wellness or joined the department as interns and have stayed on following the conclusion of their internship. The staff represent business areas across the department, including pharmaceutical policy and programs, workforce policy and planning, research and evidence, continuing care, human resources, and the planning and policy branches. Staff have joined Alberta Health and Wellness from right across the country: from Calgary, from Edmonton, from Newfoundland, Manitoba, and B.C.

Mr. Speaker, these are the people who do great work for Albertans day in and day out, and they represent a whole lot more people not only in the Department of Health and Wellness but in our civil service who do great work for Albertans. I'd really appreciate it if they would stand and receive the traditional warm welcome and thanks of our Assembly.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, today I am thrilled to be joining all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly with two special colleagues, the Member for Lethbridge-West and the Member for Athabasca-Redwater, to introduce a great success story and the principals that represent two associations here with us today.

This is an historic day in Alberta. We are pleased and honoured today to introduce members of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta, the president, Dave Chalcroft; the executive director, Neil Windsor; and past president Larry Staples; and from the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta the president, Larry Stone, and executive director Barry Cavanaugh. They are here in celebration of a letter that I received today that effectively joins both associations under one act. Two associations. They made it. They made this happen. [applause] The resounding enthusiasm is well worth while.

They are accompanied today by a member of my staff, the assistant deputy minister, David Wismer, that had a lot to do with helping in this association developing together in this capacity, and Pat Lobregt. I know all members will join me in celebrating as they stand and are recognized for the good work they've done on behalf of public safety in Alberta. Congratulations.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce in the members' gallery today through you to the Assembly Mr. Roy Williams. Roy is originally from Newfoundland and has been in Fort McMurray for over 25 years working for Syncrude Canada, the largest employer of aboriginals in all of Canada. I'd ask him to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to introduce to you a group from McKernan elementary/junior high school, a group of 11 students and two adults, Mrs. Karen Jones and Mrs. Corinne Knierim. Now, I must say that McKernan is an outstanding school, having produced at least two members of this Assembly, myself and the House leader of the opposition, and I urge all the students here from McKernan to look down here and maybe someday aspire to follow in our footsteps on whatever side of the House. So, please, everybody give these students a warm welcome.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Maria Radovic and Brenda Campbell. Maria and Brenda are Palace Casino workers who are on strike. They've been on the picket line for the last 215 days while the government has failed to do anything to assist them. Brenda has worked for the Palace Casino for six years as a slot floor person. She's originally from Grande Prairie and came to Edmonton in 2001, where she went to work immediately for the Palace Casino. Maria is a dealer at the Palace Casino and has been there since 2004. She originally hails from Yugoslavia and came to Canada in 1992 and settled in Edmonton. They are joined by UFCW organizer Don Crisall. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: 1:10

Members' Statements

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

World Women's Hockey Championship

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to rise today to recognize an outstanding women's hockey team in our country. Team Canada regained the women's world hockey championship last night with a convincing 5-1 win against their archrivals, the United States. In front of a sold-out home country crowd at the MTS Centre in Winnipeg they entered the gold medal game as favourites. They did not disappoint. Canada won every game they played, combining for 32 goals scored and only five against.

Calgary's own Hayley Wickenheiser scored in the final and captained the team to victory. Wickenheiser was also named tournament MVP after leading the competition in scoring with eight goals and 14 points in five games. Along with Wickenheiser six other players from Team Canada currently live in Calgary and play for the Western Women's Hockey League's Calgary Oval X-Treme.

With the win Canada has claimed back its rightful place at the top of the women's hockey world. This is their ninth world championship in only 10 tries. Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of the House to join me in congratulating Team Canada for their victory.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

River Valley Alliance

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise to speak about the River Valley Alliance. This organization is united by a vision of transforming the lands within the North Saskatchewan River valley into a world-class integrated urban park. The alliance was formed in 1996 and consists of seven municipali-

ties holding land in the capital region. When completed, the park would stretch 88 kilometres and would link the communities of Devon, Leduc county, Parkland county, Edmonton, Strathcona county, Sturgeon county, and Fort Saskatchewan.

This park has the potential to be a world-class attraction for the capital region. It has been suggested that when completed, an Edmonton river valley park would be similar in magnitude to New York's Central Park or Vancouver's Stanley Park. As such, the park would be a monumental legacy for future generations. Collecting these lands would be akin to placing them in trust, similar to our heritage savings trust fund. The benefits accrued would not be monetary but instead would allow the citizens of the capital region the enjoyment of the river valley for generations to come. There are other benefits to a river valley park, including the promotion of physical activity and the preservation of land.

This type of project would not be possible without the leadership of dedicated individuals, and I'd like to acknowledge Sol Rolinger, current chair of the River Valley Alliance. Sol is the driving force behind the project and is working with the province, municipal partners, and the private sector to put funding in place to complete the project.

Because this project includes numerous communities, the River Valley Alliance is currently consulting residents on the project, and tonight my constituents and other residents of Strathcona county will have the opportunity to have an open house at Millennium Place in Sherwood Park from 5 to 8 p.m.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

North Saskatchewan River Water Quality

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton's two water treatment plants serve about 40 per cent of Alberta's population. This water is removed from the North Saskatchewan River to produce safe drinking water for all. The annual report 2005-06 from Alberta Environment states that water quality in the past year was better upstream of Edmonton than downstream.

Unfortunately, in the past two years there has been a dramatic decrease in water quality downstream of Edmonton in the North Saskatchewan River. Alarming, in the past two years water quality is down 24 points on Alberta Environment's own water quality index. This bad water quality is due to increased bacterial counts, nutrient and pesticide concentrations. Our neighbours downstream on the North Saskatchewan River deserve better. Bacterial counts and pesticide concentrations are too high in the river water. Polluted and poisoned rivers are unacceptable.

Alberta Environment rated the water quality at the Pakan site as only fair. This test site is at highway 855 where it intersects with the North Saskatchewan River. Some of the communities downstream from this site include Saddle Lake, Elk Point, and the city of Lloydminster, which also draws its water supply from the North Saskatchewan River. Have these communities been told that the water quality upstream is listed as only fair? Before we proceed with further development of any kind, we must clean up and protect our water sources. Pure, clean water should be a government priority. We must reverse the downward spiral in our water quality. We must learn from the harsh lessons of Walkerton and North Battleford.

Thank you.

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

Optimist International Curling Championship

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With winter coming to an end and the puck dropping tonight for the start of hockey playoffs, it might be easy to forget about the other great Canadian ice sport, that of curling. Until you've tried it, you really can't appreciate the challenge and the fun of delivering a rock and sweeping it into the four foot to win the game.

Recently two teams of young Albertans bested a six-team round robin format playdown to qualify for the 2007 Optimist International under-18 curling championships. Held in Winnipeg, this tournament brought together teams from every Canadian province, the Northwest Territories, several U.S. states, and Japan. Both teams did exceptionally well, advancing to their respective final games.

From southern Alberta and curling out of the Lethbridge Curling Club our women's team: skip Jessie Scheidegger of Diamond City, third Erica Ortt of Calgary, second Jayme Coutts of Fort Macleod – and, yes, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that that's my niece – and lead Heather Rogers of Calgary finished the round robin portion of the tournament with a 5 and 0 record. The team defeated Ontario in the semifinals but lost the final game to Manitoba to bring home the silver. The members for Little Bow and Lethbridge-West and I extend our congratulations.

From Spruce Grove and Lloydminster our men's team – skip Shawn Donnelly, third Mike Armstrong, second Tyson Armstrong, and lead Bryan Carter – defeated British Columbia in the semifinals and took an early lead in the finals to defeat Manitoba 6 to 4 and bring home the gold.

I'd like to congratulate both of these teams and their dedicated coaches, Don Scheidegger and Rolly Buchanan, for a job well done. These grades 11 and 12 students have done Alberta proud. They will be the future of competitive curling in this province, and I am sure they will bring home many more medals.

Congratulations to them all.

Climate Change

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to speak about a prominent issue for Albertans and a prominent issue for people around the world. I know that many Albertans are well aware of the report delivered last week by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The scientists that make up this United Nations group agree that climate change is real and requires action.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been and will continue to be a leader in addressing climate change, but before true leadership can be demonstrated, a clear vision is required. Albertans are helping the government of Alberta create that vision through our climate change public consultation. So far we've had five meetings across southern Alberta, and along with our Environment minister and our MLA for Calgary-Fort I was honoured to attend our meeting last night in Calgary. A hundred and seventy people showed up for a very lively discussion.

Some of the comments included: "Carbon dioxide has everything to do with climate change. It has nothing to do with it. We need absolute caps and intensity targets. We shouldn't even go there. Government must lead the charge and spend a lot of money. Government should stay out of it. It's the end of the world. It's a wonderful new beginning." Mr. Speaker, although extreme statements were made at both ends of the spectrum, at the end of the day people seemed to agree on at least this: no matter to what degree human beings may affect global warming, we need to find the right balance between quality of life and environmental concerns. Everyone has a role to play: government, industry, and individuals. It's a global problem requiring a global solution at the local level.

So, Mr. Speaker, that was last night in Calgary. Tonight in Red Deer we have another meeting. There are five more. These consultations have been very successful. We've received over a thousand responses to our online questionnaire on climate change in addition to the filled-out copies of the printed questionnaire. I encourage Albertans to be part of this consultation to help frame our next steps for a made-in-Alberta solution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mental Health

Mrs. Mather: Mr. Speaker, some of my fellow members will remember a phrase from the 1970s: when things go wrong, what can I do? That line on pamphlets and posters, billboards, and public service announcements was part of a shift in focus to mental health at a time when care was moving from institutional to outpatient.

1:20

Much has happened since. New medications are available to fine-tune mental and emotional functioning. New therapies have heightened our awareness of diet and nutrition, exercise, and other lifestyle factors. We no longer see the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual as isolated from each other in the choices we make.

Yet those with emotional and mental disorders still face barriers in their need to be accepted as part of the body of humankind. The barriers they face are in our minds more than theirs. There is the limitation of labels. Until 65 years ago autism was treated as schizophrenia. Today it is seen not as one but as a spectrum of conditions. There are limitations of our ignorance. One whose inner reality is altered can't snap out of it no matter how simple this may seem. Anyone who has been depressed, and most of us have, knows that. There are conditions that arise out of our environment, such as hyperactivity and allergies. Those who respond to high stress and high stimulation with mental and emotional symptoms are like canaries in the mines of earlier times. We may say that they are ill, but they bring us warnings of unhealthiness that affect us all. In the Bible those we would call the mentally ill were often first to recognize the truth. Their speaking it can be off-putting, but our embarrassment must not stand in the way of the acceptance of our fellow human beings. That is the first step in our common healing.

The incidence of mental illness is on the rise in Alberta. Prosperity is no guarantee of prevention. It is likely that someone you know will experience a mental health problem. If we work towards increasing awareness about mental health and illness, we create a climate in which the topic can be discussed without fear, and that's an important step to a mentally healthy Alberta.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm presenting another 55 signatures from concerned Albertans, mostly from the communities of St. Albert, Edmonton, and Morinville, with respect to employees who work with people with disabilities. The petition is asking for: one, pay parity for those employees regardless of whether they work for government or for community-based or private providers; two, to recognize the work they do and to make sure that their wages are competitive; three, to grant them access to professional development opportunities; and, four, to bring into place outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from 24 residents of northeast Edmonton. They petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta “to hold rent increases to no more than the rise in the average monthly wage until December 31, 2010.”

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to table a petition with 28 signatures. The petition urges the government to recognize the importance of community schools by amending the closure of schools regulation to provide parents and other community members 18 months to formulate a revitalization plan in response to proposed closures; two, to strike a task force comprised of trustees and members of the public to review Edmonton public’s current school closure process; and, three, to encourage ongoing consultation and partnerships between parents, communities, and municipal and provincial agencies to ensure that public schools continue to fulfill the educational and civic needs of Alberta’s communities.

head:

Notices of Motions

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, given that the House did not sit on Monday of this week, private members’ business was not dealt with, so the notices that I gave last week will also apply to next week with the exception of Motion for a Return 3. I wish to advise the House that the government will be introducing an amendment rather than accepting as was advised last week.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to table some more copies of letters received by my office urging the government to provide funding for the cancer fighting drug Avastin. In doing so, I’d like to reiterate that people who require this treatment can expect to pay \$1,750 every two weeks for Avastin treatment and that the drug is already covered by the cancer boards in B.C., Quebec, and Newfoundland. Today’s letters are sent from Norm Hotte, Barb Hotte, Ryan Hotte, George Traynor, Judy Mott, Jutta McAdam, Wilma Korthuis, Valerie Scranton, and Barry Bullen.

Thanks very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of two documents. One is a printout of the website of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Showcase, being organized in part by the former Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The other is the details on billings for his work.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, and it is a newspaper article from the *Calgary Herald*, dated Wednesday, July 12, 2006. It’s in regard to a question later on today in question period.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three letters to table. One is from Stan Leonard in Calgary, concerned about a dramatic rise in his apartment rent this year.

The second is from Nadine Fletcher and Joel Hagen, concerned and opposed to the Horseshoe Lands development of the old Seebe site.

The third is from Lorne Haugen, a resident around Marie Lake, opposed to the development there.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is from Ashley Jones, with praise for the government supplementing child care wages but expressing concern that it does not apply to staff who work with children six years to 12 years.

The second one is from Denise Gagne, Red Deer, with concern and dismay about the lack of maintenance on highway 2 and the increased risk to people using the highway.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. The first is an e-mail from Bob Borreson of Bon Accord. Mr. Borreson has provided an excellent analysis of health care premiums and supports the NDP call for their elimination.

The second is a note to the Premier from Joan Harvey. Ms Harvey is a member of UFCW and is on strike at the Palace Casino. She writes that she was disappointed in the reception she received by government members and says, “Since I voted PC all my life their lack of response to myself and coworkers [is] disheartening.”

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ve got two sets of tablings here. One is from a volunteer at the Unity Centre of North East Edmonton, reflecting a personal story regarding affordable housing.

The other is letters from a group of about 100 Albertans calling on the Legislative Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua Hunt be tried as an adult due to the nature of his crime, his past criminal history, and that he is so close to the age of 18 years.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is my pleasure today to table the appropriate numbers of copies of the sixth School at the Legislature report card, 2005-2006. As we heard earlier today, this is a Legislative Assembly educational program for grade 6 students, cosponsored with community partners Priority Printing, Access Media Group, and CKUA Radio, along with Via Rail Canada, and the Edmonton downtown Rotary Club.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The water licence that the MD of Rocky View has applied for to service the Balzac project has been sitting with the Ministry of Environment for months now. They’ve delayed a decision on this application time and again, and

we still have no idea as to when this decision will be made. What we are looking for and what many communities are looking for is some clarity and some information that so far has been sadly lacking. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister provide a firm date as to when his ministry will make a decision on this water licence?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I cannot provide a firm date because, as I've advised the House on previous occasions, the applicant has asked for a deferral of the decisions so they can explore other options.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A FOIP response received by our office indicates that the government will provide partial access to records on the Balzac project, but they are exempting untold numbers of pages because of cabinet confidences and advice from officials. In other words, the cabinet of this government had discussions concerning Balzac dating well back into the summer of 2006, and they are not going to release the contents of those discussions. To the Premier: will the Premier release the contents of these cabinet confidences so that everyone can see what was discussed behind closed doors?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are long-established rules and traditions with respect to cabinet documents. This is a situation that arose where the opposition had made an allegation that there were some secret deals. They said they had proof. Yesterday they were trying to skirt around it by bringing circumstantial evidence. This has been going on and on and on. All I say is that if you have the names of the individuals, bring them forward here in the House – you have immunity to do that – and also bring forward this alleged secret document. Here's an opportunity.

1:30

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the FOIP material we received, part of the Balzac project was being promoted by the developers as, and I quote: a legacy for the Deputy Premier. The briefing note also states that as a result of prior meetings with the Minister of Finance, the project would have good potential to obtain support from this government through the rural development fund. There is no doubt now that this project was widely discussed by this government in circles at the highest levels. To the Premier: given that part of the Balzac project was being shopped as a tribute to the former Deputy Premier, can the Premier still deny that his government was intricately involved in this project and made assurances that water would be provided?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again I'm saddened by the fact that the member of the opposition would bring this forward in this House, covered by immunity, making allegations against a former member that cannot defend herself, and bringing these allegations forward without any proof. That's not parliamentary tradition, unfortunately. Again, it seems to be the kind of innuendo that keeps being brought up day in and day out by this opposition.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Contract with Former MLA

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's see if we can make progress on another topic.

On May 2 coming up the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, among others, are presenting the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Showcase. Up to 4,000 schoolchildren are expected to attend an event both in Edmonton and again in Calgary. This event is being co-ordinated by Bob Maskell. Along with organizing the event for the government, his company is also receiving a registration fee of \$10 per child. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that the reason Mr. Maskell has this job is because of the political interference that got him his first sweetheart deal?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the gentleman in question is of Métis descent, has years of experience not only as a teacher but as an administrator in the school system, has had a very good record of working with the Métis, First Nations, and Inuit communities, and from all indication the conference is going to be very successful. Might I add: all that information was available on the web.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth is this: children going to this government-sponsored event are having to pay a user fee to a defeated Tory MLA, who appears to already be generously supported by this government, to learn about aboriginal affairs. To the Premier: why is this government making schoolchildren pay \$10 each to this defeated Tory MLA to learn about Alberta's aboriginal heritage?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, twisting words.

In terms of the contract and the terms of that contract, the Minister of Education will respond.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as mentioned by the Premier, the Leader of the Official Opposition has been on the website and has taken the information and tabled it in the House. It should be noted that this particular contract also includes the rental facilities that will be required to host these two events, so there's a significant amount of upfront cost that Maskell & Associates will be assuming. I can only add what the Premier said, that this gentleman has a successful history of planning and delivering aboriginal events, including the 2005 Aboriginal Education Showcase.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, yesterday the Premier claimed that these kinds of patronage contracts would not happen on his watch. But it is happening. The same insiders are still profiting. Mr. Maskell has stated that he would happily do this work for free. It seems that there is a clear course of action here. To the Premier: will the Premier commit to immediately ending any contracts this government has with Mr. Maskell?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of what other contracts may be held or whatever the issue is. I don't know what he's talking about in terms of: I would have done this for free. Again, mixing words, bringing this forward. You know, he's chipping away there. If you took the time to call him and ask him the information, I'm sure that Mr. Maskell would've given you the full details of the

contract, and you wouldn't have to bring it up in the House and ask the minister.

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, serious concerns were raised over the contract given to Bob Maskell, former MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark. They've been discussed and dismissed as mere perception problems by the Premier. Under that contract Mr. Maskell is required to provide invoices along with reports of his actions so that the ministry and Albertans can see what they get for their patronage contract. The invoice for September 2005 is interesting. On September 30 Mr. Maskell charged 50 hours of work, 50 hours in one day. Can the Premier explain how this kind of invoice was approved?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of what paper they're holding, but full disclosure was made. All this is fully public information. If there's a question very specific to some item that was billed, bring it forward. I'll table that in the House, and we'll have that clarified.

Mr. Bonko: Well, we're not getting answers on that one. Maybe we'll try to move on.

Nothing on the invoice says that Mr. Maskell provided the ministry with any details of any associates who contributed to these hours. There's absolutely no evidence to suggest that the ministry checked up on the bills or queried the hours claimed. The invoices were just signed and the money carried, flowing to Mr. Maskell. Is this standard government policy with all contracts or just for Tory insiders?

Mr. Stelmach: There are checks and balances in terms of payments made to any individual, any corporation. Those are of course approved by the Auditor General. He reviews on an annual basis, brings forward recommendations to the government. Any time that he brings recommendations forward, we do our best to follow up to make sure that we incorporate them.

Mr. Bonko: On January 23, January 25, and February 2, 2006, Mr. Maskell had meetings with the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. Each of those meetings was billed as an entire day's work, and the taxpayers are hit with a \$600 charge, \$600 for two former colleagues to have a chat. Could the minister please show us what real, tangible value this ministry got out of these meetings?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I will not accept this information until I see it. I will check into it, and if there's any legitimacy, I will make sure I answer in the House tomorrow.

However, I would like to make mention that if the information that this hon. member raises at this time is as accurate as what the opposition leader raised about the story in the *Edmonton Sun* this morning, he didn't even read the story correctly. The former member of this Legislature, Mr. Maskell, said that he'd be happy to serve on the board for free. He didn't say that he'd be happy to pay for the facilities to host these two events. So I don't accept the information as having any factual basis at all.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our major cities simply don't have enough housing to meet growing demands.

Vacancy rates are under 1.2 per cent in many urban centres in this province. Boardwalk Rental Communities control 12 per cent of the rental units in Calgary and almost 20 per cent of Edmonton's market. The company has said that it will wait until the rent for a two-bedroom suite hits \$1,600 a month before they will consider building any new units in Calgary. To the Premier: lots of people just can't afford \$1,600 a month for their rent. Instead of just sitting around while private landlords jack up rents, will the Premier commit to take immediate action to stop rent gouging now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have taken action. One of the first things that we did, of course, was put an all-party committee to review the critical shortage of housing in the province of Alberta from a number of points of view, not only homelessness but the working poor and those families that would like to buy a single dwelling. The report has been put together. It's now before the minister. It will be coming to caucus, and we will be making announcements, appropriate announcements with respect to how as a government we can work with the private sector and other levels of government to improve this situation.

1:40

Mr. Mason: People are being evicted today, Mr. Speaker, and all the Premier can say is, you know: wait for appropriate announcements in due time.

Mr. Speaker, people across the province are struggling to find affordable housing. While the government sits on its Affordable Housing Task Force report, Albertans are paying high rents, and more and more people are at risk of losing their homes. Instead of taking this hands-off approach, telling people to wait for a report that then will take a whole bunch of time to implement, why won't the Premier commit today in this Assembly, in this democratic Assembly, that they're going to do something to stop rent gouging by big landlords like Boardwalk?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one thing I will commit to is to work positively toward increasing the number of units, working with the private sector, working with different levels of government so that we can improve the situation. We critically need more people in the province of Alberta to fill many of the vacant positions, and we're going to make sure that when they move here, there are living accommodations. These are all issues that are under discussion, and we will have a plan to accommodate the issues. Some of that will come forward in the budget, and others will come in working with municipalities in terms of better planning for the thousands of people that continually move to the province of Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, hopefully the government will see the light and take steps to ensure that the supply of housing is increased in this province both publicly and in the private sector as well, but that will take several years. In the meantime households who are paying more than 30 per cent of their income are in direct risk of living in poverty. Given the target rent of \$1,600, families that earn less than \$60,000 a year just won't be able to make ends meet. What is the Premier going to do for those families today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I sympathize, of course, with the position taken by the leader of the third party. We're very well aware of the kinds of housing pressures that there are in the province, and we're going to work toward resolving that. I agree with the hon. member that a lot of the solution will not be overnight. On the other hand, at least Albertans will see a plan that'll be put in

place, working with the co-operation of municipalities and the private sector, to increase the number of units.

Disputes about Seismic Activity

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, recently my constituency office heard from landowners in Little Bow that they're not being compensated by a contracted seismic company for exploratory work that's been done on their land. While they were advised this week that their cheques are in the mail, it's unfortunate that they have to contact a constituency office or maybe seek legal recourse in order to get these outstanding disputes resolved. I have a number of questions for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Minister, can you or your staff assist with outstanding disputes and claims from folks who are otherwise unable to understand the process of how they get some of these outstanding seismic company claims settled in a more expeditious manner?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Little Bow for that question. It's something that does come up from time to time. It's important to emphasize that access agreements with respect to seismic are strictly between landowners and seismic operators. The government of Alberta is not a party to such agreements. Obviously, Sustainable Resource Development cannot enforce an agreement to which we are not a party. Having said that, though, our staff would be happy to work with landowners that have this problem and see if we can facilitate a resolution.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When claims are outstanding for over 90 days, what other options might your staff be able to offer to landowners who are seeking quick resolve and need the money?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we can contact the seismic company and try to facilitate an agreement that way. Another alternative is contacting the Farmers' Advocate, who has some responsibility for mediating disputes between landowners and companies like this. Failing both of those, the only alternative is to hire a lawyer and go to court.

Thank you.

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, to the minister: is it possible that the Surface Rights Board might play a role in assisting these farmers and ranchers in their outstanding claims as well?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it is often thought that the Surface Rights Board might be able to help in this matter. In fact, the Surface Rights Board does not get involved in seismic exploration or agreements. The Surface Rights Board only deals with oil and gas developments after – after – the EUB has approved some sort of drilling or pipeline development. So, again, the Surface Rights Board does not involve itself in seismic exploration.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Twinning of Highway 3

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 16 in a speech to the Fort Macleod chamber of commerce the Premier had said, "I'm pleased to confirm that the two lane portions of Highway 3 west of Fort Macleod and east of Lethbridge will be twinned, with timelines still to be confirmed." However, the director of communications for Infrastructure and Transportation stated that the local residents shouldn't hold their breath for this twinning. My questions would be to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Could he clarify this mixed messaging?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I remember reading something about that. We always have said that we plan on twinning the number 3 highway, and we're going forward as fast as we can. There are going to be some passing lanes put on it this year while we're going along, and we plan on twinning it.

Ms Pastoor: Passing lanes are absolutely not good enough.

We know that this Premier understands the need for the twinning of highway 3, and I have a copy of the briefing notes that he had as the minister of infrastructure. They state and show the pressure from the locals to get the twinning done, but it also shows the promises of the previous Premier to do so. That was six years ago. As an alderman and now as an MLA I have been on this file for 10 years. We need timelines and not delays. To the same minister: when will this highway be twinned?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it is not in our current three-year plan right now, but I will say that we are engineering and working on it, and as fast as the budget allows, we will go ahead and twin that highway.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To look at an even larger picture, my knowledge of this issue is that highway 3 needs to be twinned from the Saskatchewan border to the B.C. border. Can the minister tell us just exactly what the government is doing to address the wider concern in, certainly, the larger picture?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I can say that we've hired a consultant. There's a consultant that's working on the long-term plans. I can say that we're dealing with the municipalities in the Crowsnest Pass on where they actually want the highway, if we're going to do a bypass or go through the towns. We've always said that we're wanting to improve all the highways in Alberta as fast as we possibly can, and we have a four-year plan today to do the catch-up on our backlog of maintenance and rehabilitation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

North-south Trade Corridor

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another highway question for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Several years ago this government committed to constructing a divided highway called the Canamex highway, or the north-south trade corridor, running from the U.S. border at Coutts to the British Columbia border west of Grande Prairie. Considerable progress has been made on this project. However, there are some parts that remain to be completed, the bypass around Grande Prairie, to be more specific.

Can the minister give the Assembly an anticipated completion date for the Canamex highway?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's portion of the Canamex highway, known as the north-south trade corridor, provides a vital link for movement of goods, and it supports Alberta's growing trade with the United States and Mexico. By the end of 2007 the divided highway in Alberta will be more than 90 per cent complete. The completion of this project will depend on overall provincial priorities and budgets.

Mr. Graydon: My first supplemental to the same minister. I would point out that this highway project doesn't end at Wembley, Alberta, but carries on another 80 kilometres to the Alberta/B.C. border. It's well known that the traffic count between Grande Prairie and Beaverlodge is extremely high. Can the minister update the constituents of Grande Prairie-Wapiti on what plans are in place to complete that portion of the Canamex highway?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the twinning of highway 43 west of Grande Prairie to the B.C. border is not on the department's three-year program. Construction will depend, again, on provincial priorities and budgets. But approximately 23 kilometres of highway 43 are currently twinned between Grande Prairie and Wembley. This leaves approximately 68 kilometres to be twinned from Wembley to the B.C. border.

In the meantime, the department has plans to complete by the summer of '07 the detailed design for the highway 43X bypass between the number 2 highway and 116th Street in Grande Prairie, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you. My final supplemental. Within the Whitecourt-St. Anne constituency there is an 18-kilometre section of highway 43 remaining to be twinned. When can the travelling public expect to see the section between Mayerthorpe and Sangudo completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, you'll be happy to hear that the government will twin 18 kilometres of highway 43 between Mayerthorpe and Sangudo this year. Another 20 kilometres of twinning will also be completed on highway 43 this year between Fox Creek and Valleyview. This means that by the end of this year almost 400 kilometres will be twinned between Edmonton and Grande Prairie.

The Speaker: Would any member like to rise and advocate for a few miles on my behalf? [interjections] Oh, thank you. Thank you. Lots of takers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Ground Ambulance Services

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta municipalities that deliver ground ambulance services have been waiting for two years for this government to make a decision about whether the province will actually take over ambulance services through the health regions or whether municipalities will continue to provide the services. The pressure that municipalities are under continues to intensify as population increases, staff shortages get worse, and funding from the

province remains stagnant. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is it the minister's policy that ambulance services are the responsibility of municipalities or the province?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it really doesn't matter what the minister's policy is. It's government policy that we are continuing to encourage and support municipalities in providing ambulance services while we deal with the report from the ambulance committee and look at the results from the two pilot projects to determine how to best ensure that ambulance processes form the appropriate part of the front end of the health system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. In April of 2006 a report was expected on the ambulance pilot project prepared by the member from Medicine Hat along with the chair of the Peace Country health region. It's 12 months later, 12 months since that report was due in front of us. Has the minister received the report?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Then what changes to ambulance delivery are being implemented based on this report, and when will you be making those public?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, after having received the report, being newly appointed in December and having had an opportunity to review the report in January, I met with the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. I also met with the advisory committee that had put the report together. I've had some discussions with other stakeholders in the area since that period of time. I've asked the department, and they've put out an RFP with respect to a process to get some more costing information. I will be bringing forward within the next few months a policy proposal through the government processes, and we hope to be able to deal with this issue with some finality in this budget year. In the meantime, municipalities will be funded as they have been to carry on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Spring Flooding

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the record snowpack and heavy spring runoff anticipated, my constituents are deeply concerned about potential flooding in the north, and this is exacerbated by heavy snowfall and rain over the last couple of days throughout the region. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Is the government prepared to deal with this potential flooding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say first of all that Environment is the lead on this, but I will say that the Emergency Management Alberta agency is in charge of the cross-government readiness. The government does have a plan. Also, we have run a tabletop exercise that's based on that plan, and we're monitoring the potential flooding on a continuing basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: does the government have a role in advance of flooding, or are municipalities solely responsible for preparation?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the possibility of flooding in northern Alberta is very high. Municipalities have the first-response responsibility for disasters, emergencies, and flooding. I will say that Environment has done an excellent job in monitoring the potential, keeping track of forecasts, and looking at what they see could be the potential of a flood.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister: is the minister confident, then, that municipalities at risk, such as Peace River, perhaps Fort Vermilion, Fort McMurray, are prepared to deal with flooding if and when it happens?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the Emergency Management Alberta agencies work very closely with municipalities. We feel that municipalities are as ready as they could be for flooding, and the government is there for any assistance that's necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Affordable Housing (continued)

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a member of the Affordable Housing Task Force I had the unique opportunity of listening to the presentations and the stories of Albertans about their housing experiences. What I heard convinced me that there is a housing crisis in Alberta. There is not enough housing for anyone, including low-income people, who need affordable housing, and even skilled workers who are making good money in the oil patch. They can't find enough housing. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Does the minister agree that there is a crisis, and if so, why will he not take immediate action? Why is the minister delaying so long in releasing the task force report?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, it is a priority for this government. We did bring forward the housing task force exactly for that reason: to find out the information from people across Alberta, to consult with Albertans in regard to affordable housing and in regard to homelessness. That report is in my ministry right now, and we will have some recommendations very shortly.

Dr. B. Miller: Now, the task force was given a short 45-day timeline to compile the report, which we delivered on time. Now we're told that the report won't be made public until the end of May, and that's longer than 45 days. Does the minister recognize that the longer this government drags its feet and fails to take immediate action on affordable housing, the worse the crisis will get?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I think it is so important what we do and that the direction we go in is right, and I want to commend that task force for the work that they did do. That was a very intensive report, and we are dealing with that report and looking at the implications and how we can assist affordable housing and homelessness in Alberta.

Dr. B. Miller: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is for the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. We are receiving constant reports that skilled workers, including new Canadians, come to Alberta to find work, and then they leave our province because they cannot find housing. Does the province's workforce strategy include the huge issue of housing, or are people just left on their own, in many cases having to live in tents and RVs? Where is the planning?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of planning that has gone into the affordable housing issue, especially with the folks that are involved with the ministry in terms of receiving supports, those that are not expected to work, those that are not able to work at the present time. We have had a constant liaison with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing dealing with his task force and working with our officials behind the scene. But we have also in the recent past been looking more at the impacts of growth and encouraging employers to assist us with the onerous task of finding proper housing, and most in Alberta are doing an exceptional job. I would suggest that, in large part, people who leave the province relative to work has less to do with housing and more with their comfort in the community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

2:00

Holy Cross Care Centre

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Homeless Foundation says that rising rents put low-income seniors at risk of becoming homeless. Meanwhile, the cost of a one-bedroom unit and care at the Holy Cross Manor, owned by Enterprise Universal, has recently jumped from \$1,800 a month to \$2,400 a month, a whopping increase of \$600. Despite this deplorable record of rent increases by this company the government has committed \$2.2 million for Enterprise Universal to build 130 affordable housing units at Holy Cross. My questions are to the minister of housing and community supports. Minister, can you assure this House that the proposed rents . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure where he was going with this question. Sorry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister assure this House that the proposed rents of \$495 a month for a studio apartment and \$590 a month for a one-bedroom unit in this project will become a reality and that these rent levels will be capped until the provincial housing shortage is resolved?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the criteria and eligibility for acceptance into an affordable housing project go through rigorous inspection. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but if that was the commitment, then that's the direction that it will go.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm surprised that the minister doesn't know the conditions of \$2.2 million that has been awarded to this company.

To the minister again. The recent termination by the Calgary

regional health authority of the Holy Cross long-term care contract raises serious questions about this government's willingness to blindly shove millions of dollars into the hands of private interests. The affordable housing project is now a year old and a year and a half behind schedule. Will the minister assure the House that Enterprise Universal will not receive one more cent of public money until they guarantee that they will finish their project in a reasonable amount of time and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the 1950s building in the Holy Cross unit is near completion. Just for a little bit of a correction, it is \$3.2 million, not \$2.2 million. It is going to have a hundred units that are going to be available. Now, I'm gathering that that's the one that he's talking about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Twinning of Highway 63

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past 24 hours there have been two very serious accidents on highway 63, resulting in four fatalities. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. When will this highway be twinned?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that my heart goes out to the families of those involved in yesterday's collision. Yesterday the highways were bad throughout Alberta. There was freezing rain and wind, and it was just a bad day to be travelling.

The government recognizes the importance of highway 63 as a vital link to the oil sands and the amount of heavy industrial traffic on the road. This is why we are committed to twinning highway 63. I can tell you that government has begun twinning the 240-kilometre stretch of highway between Fort McMurray and the junction of highway 55 as designs are completed and federal environmental permits are obtained.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you provide more details on the work being done on highway 63?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Work has already begun to clear the trees for the first section of the twinned highway south of Fort McMurray while engineering and planning work continues further south. This year we have tendered the first section of twinning south of Fort McMurray from highway 69 to highway 881. The cost of twinning the highway is estimated to be more than \$940 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What is your department doing to make the highway safer for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These deaths on our highways are certainly tragic. Traffic safety is critical to providing

safe and secure communities for all Albertans, and enforcement is definitely an essential element in our strategy to make our provincial highways safer. We do have sheriffs who patrol highway 63, and they work very closely with the RCMP to target aggressive and careless drivers. I can assure the hon. member that we are planning to increase the complement of both sheriffs and RCMP on highway 63 in the near future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate the hon. member from Calgary bringing up the highway 63 concern. The carnage on highway 63, referred to by Fort McMurray coroner Dr. John O'Connor as the Head-on Highway, continues. In the past 24 hours the highway has claimed four more victims. This government, led by one of many former Infrastructure and Transportation ministers, has dragged its feet on the twinning of this highway, which should have occurred 25 years ago. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: considering that highway 63 has the unenviable record of the greatest number of head-on fatalities, will the minister in a year make the twinning of highway 63 his personal priority? An end date, please.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the information this hon. member is giving is absolutely false. The stats that I have on highway 63 show it as one of the safer highways in Alberta to travel on as far as the amount of traffic there and the amount of accidents that we have.

Mr. Chase: Deaths aren't acceptable. That's the bottom line.

Again to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: given the reality of the time necessary to twin the highway, in the interim will the minister commit to providing more safe passing lanes and roadside turnouts along highway 63 until the twinning is complete?

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We are working on that right now. My department is working on that as we speak to find the most dangerous areas, that we plan on putting passing lanes on while we're working on the twinning.

Mr. Chase: To the Solicitor General. Obviously, increasing the number of highway patrol sheriffs on this road has not produced the desired results. Will the minister commit to providing more professionally trained and experienced RCMP to patrol this highway now?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very interesting analogy, and I'd sure like to see some facts to back it up because the report that we have with our sheriffs on the highway and working with the RCMP is that the RCMP certainly respect the help they're getting from our sheriffs, and our sheriffs are trained adequately to patrol our highways.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Health Care Service Wait Times

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the best health care systems in the world is found right here in our province of

Alberta, and there are many, many reasons for that accolade, including outstanding doctors, nurses, care providers and others, and several very innovative approaches that our province has ushered in in recent years as well as our attempts to create and implement even more, such as our very successful hip and knee replacement program. My questions are to the minister of health. What guarantees can the minister of health give us that waiting times for radiation therapy will be reduced at least to the same degree that we experienced with regard to waiting times for hip and knee replacements?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to meet with the federal Minister of Health, Tony Clement, yesterday to talk about the new wait times guarantee trust fund that they've set up. Alberta has of course signed an agreement, as all other provinces apparently have as well, to access that wait times guarantee process. We will get some funds from that, about \$62 million, to help fund some pilot projects so that we can in fact do for radiation oncology what we've done in bone and joint: reduce the time from the initial time that a patient presents to the time that they actually get treatment. And that's very important. That type of a guarantee, which will be in place by March 2010, will help Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Speaking of the federal contribution of \$62 million, I wonder if the minister could enlighten us as to what Alberta's contribution will be to augment that in order to further those guarantees that he's just talked about?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, one of the reasons why I as minister was reluctant to enter into a wait time guarantee project with the federal government is because Alberta is responsible for health delivery and has to pay for the recourse, and nothing has been worked out with the federal government with respect to how we pay for the recourse. After March of 2010, when we have that guarantee in place, we will of course be responsible for ensuring that any Albertan can get the treatment within that period of time. So we're working with the province of British Columbia, for example, on how we can collaborate and share patients when we can't meet the guaranteed time in our own province. But we will also be working between now and then to make sure that we can reach that time.

2:10

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think everyone knows that access is the grinding problem. Once you're in the system, it's excellent: the service, the care, everything else. I wonder if the minister has given some consideration to other areas where we could unclog the system insofar as access is concerned. We have examples we can learn from, and I think we'd be anxious to hear where else this same strategy might be applied.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this of course is the most important part of this wait times guarantee process. Alberta has wanted not just to pick a specific area and focus resources on that but to make sure that we meet clinical benchmarks right across the board. So we can take the learning from the bone and joint project that we had last year and the team approach, the process re-engineering, which made it much more effective for people to get the service on a timely basis. We will have more learning from the radiation oncology project, and we will use that learning right across the

spectrum to establish clinical benchmarks and to meet those clinical benchmarks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Internal Royalty Review

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2006 the former Minister of Energy told Albertans that the government had completed a royalty review and that everything was A-okay. In typical Conservative fashion there was no documentation or record of the review for Albertans to see. The current Minister of Sustainable Resource Development publicly stated that the internal review was never completed. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Given the confusion, mixed messages, contradicting statements, and complete lack of documentation regarding the 2006 royalty review, will the minister tell the Assembly who was correct: the former Minister of Energy, who claims that the review was completed, or the current Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who claims that it was not?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, first of all, if there's confusion here in the Legislature with respect to this issue, it resides across the way. Secondly, with respect to the review of our royalty system and the structures in the province of Alberta, it is an ongoing process. In 2006 there were, in fact, some portions of the review that were completed. There were four different pieces of the royalty structure that were altered, completed in 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Finance this time: given that the minister is overseeing the current royalty review and therefore should have detailed knowledge of the 2006 review, can the minister please tell Albertans about the process that was used in 2006, the terms of reference, and, most importantly, who took part in the review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. Minister of Energy just stated, it was a review that looked at certain elements of the royalty package. What we are going to be doing and what we are in the process of doing is a complete review on everything to do with the royalties on the oil sands, on conventional oil and gas. We're looking at the whole ball of wax, so to speak. What I will say – and I think that this is very important – is that we don't duplicate what was done. All the information that was done in the Department of Energy with their royalty review will be passed on to our Royalty Review Panel, which is an external panel, an arm's-length panel. The previous royalty review was an internal panel.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: given that the Department of Energy provides 11 oil and gas royalty adjustment programs, which in the last two years have cost \$1.5 billion in reduced royalty rates, are these programs necessary now that we're looking at high prices for oil and gas in our North American markets?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, it's quite obvious that the answer that I just gave moments ago in the Legislature does not satisfy the hon. member. He should understand that in 2006 we completed a review of some of the parts of the programs inside the royalty regime, and we removed nearly \$300 million worth of programs from industry at that point.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Medical School Selection Criteria

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent study published by the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* suggests that about 10 per cent of physicians that graduate from Canadian medical schools leave to practise elsewhere. My question for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: what criteria are used to select students for Alberta medical schools, and who comprises the committee?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the responsibility for this aspect of postsecondary education doesn't reside with the government. It resides with the postsecondary institutions themselves. It's important to note that postsecondary institutions establish their own criteria. They establish their own committees and take a broad section of the stakeholder group that would represent that. Medical faculties from across Canada also collaborate on the selection process.

Mr. Loughheed: Mr. Speaker, since commitment to practise in Alberta is not one of the selection criteria, and given that most of the cost of educating the prospective medical grads is borne by the province, is there any way to have prospective medical students enter into a service contract with health care providers?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, like other students medical students pay for approximately one-third of their education. They are responsible for significant costs while completing their residencies. Service contracts are an option that could be considered. We will look at many options. Service contracts have also proven ineffective in some areas, but we're certainly open to reviewing all aspects of the rural physician action plan and those other action plans that are currently under way.

Mr. Loughheed: I'm just wondering if the minister could elaborate further on what kinds of things he's thinking about for retaining grads.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very important issue for government, and certainly my department takes it very seriously. Recently we announced that medical residents do not have to make student loan payments or interest payments while completing their residencies, and that becomes effective April 1. Bursary funding is available through both the Alberta government and the rural physician action plan for medical students and residents who wish to train in rural communities. We are currently working through a cross-government initiative to address the health workforce challenges through Advanced Education and Technology, Health and Wellness, and Employment, Immigration and Industry. This initiative is a very large collaborative effort amongst the departments and also the stakeholders within the industry.

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

High Island Natural Area Webcams

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Protected areas should be protected, period. It seems simple, but this government doesn't seem to get it. High Island natural area in Lac La Biche is being seriously disturbed by the installation of camera towers and equipment. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Staff biologists' report on the site stated that the impact on the landscape was deemed negligible. Will this minister make this report public and tell us if any other reports were prepared on the impact to the local bird populations?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, certainly, we're using some technology that offers another way to Albertans to access protected areas. Rather than having a whole pile of people in a protected area monitoring and following bird movement, we are using technology to do that. It's all done in light of minimizing the impact that we have on those areas.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister. Local groups who were not consulted, including conservationists, naturalists, and the local birding society, are upset that this government broke its promise to go on with transparency. Is it the minister's habit to make important decisions about protected areas without public input?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, this particular project is conducted by a renowned biologist, and certainly they monitored the installation of the equipment. I need to say that all of that work was done on frozen ground to try to minimize both our plant and soil disturbance. That was accomplished and done in light of trying to minimize the impact rather than have additional impact occur.

2:20

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister. Conservationists who have seen the area believe that the contractors installing the equipment have done considerable damage to the land. Will the minister table the contract so Albertans know what penalties are in place for companies who violate the contract and how the area will be restored?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding from following this particular file that we acknowledge that there were a few willow shrubs that were broken. If the hon. member is aware, under fairly moist conditions those willow shrubs will recover very, very rapidly. Certainly, we're going to keep on top of the contract to make sure that no violations are occurring, and we'll monitor the site as well.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members that was 102 questions and answers.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Cited Documents

The Speaker: We have a little item coming out of what happened today in the Assembly, and as we evolve with the new Standing Orders, I'd just like to draw your attention to it. We have now under the Routine a provision where tablings will occur before the question period. We had a question period. A minister referred to a document. There's no provision to allow for tablings when an answer is being given, but it's our custom that when a minister refers to a document, he or she should table it.

We have three ways of dealing with this. Number one, we can ask the minister to return tomorrow and table the document. Number two, we can ask for unanimous consent, or number three, I can just

make a common-sense decision and say: will the minister table the document now? Would that be okay?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Number three. Please proceed, hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of a document that I referred to earlier today in my answer.

The Speaker: Now, in that procedural decision this does not negate the responsibility of members to table documents in tabling at the appropriate time before. This is not to get in the back door what you should be doing through the front door. Does everybody understand that?

Now, hon. leader of the third party, were you going to rise on a point of order?

Point of Order Referring to Newspaper Articles

Mr. Mason: I was going to raise a point of order, Mr. Speaker, and it had to do with the answer that the minister of learning gave to one of the hon. members in the opposition in which he read from a newspaper clipping. Under *Beauchesne's* 428(e) – and I'd like to thank you for helping me find this – it does not allow someone to inquire whether or not statements made in newspapers are true. I would submit that the converse is also the case and that comments on whether the statements made in a newspaper are true or not in an answer is covered by 428(e).

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, it's common practice, hon. members, that we don't refer to newspapers as our source of information in the Legislative Assembly. I suspect that the hon. Minister of Education, having been trained in that discipline, is having a difficult time operating outside of that discipline, where the belief is that everything that's said or printed is absolutely 100 per cent correct. We all know that that's not true, but we'll accept that that's basically the point.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your ruling, but I think it does bear saying that the hon. minister was not actually referring to the newspaper article as to content as to whether it was true or not but whether or not it was being properly quoted by the hon. Leader of the Opposition in the question. That was the important reference, that if you're going to quote a newspaper, which is perilous at best, you should at least do it accurately.

The Speaker: And all would agree with that.

head:

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall call the committee to order. I just want to remind every member that as of this week we are covered on the Internet from gavel to gavel, so be aware of that.

Bill 3 Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise again and speak to Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, with a suggestion for amendment. This is of vital interest to Albertans, and we on this side feel that the government is taking it with a lack of the urgency and seriousness that it requires.

Bill 3 does require an intensity reduction beginning in July 2007 of 12 per cent in carbon emissions over the previous three-year average. Intensity targets are really related to the amount of carbon emitted per million dollars of GDP. Under this regime it is possible to get industry, particularly the large final emitters, to reduce their emissions by significant amounts through this format of intensity reductions, but it's very clear that as a longer term response to the serious issue of absolute reductions in carbon in the atmosphere, this is not going to win the day. Indeed, calculations out of several institutes, including the Pembina Institute, suggest that we will have a 70 per cent increase in carbon in this province by 2020 if we simply follow intensity targets, as outlined in this bill, of 50 per cent intensity reduction by 2020.

Clearly, Mr. Chairman, it's time for us to take very much more seriously the responsibility Albertans have placed in our hands. This is the issue of the 21st century. We have to come to terms with limits and tighter timelines and reductions in absolute emissions. This amendment suggests following the good initial regulation that is going to reduce by 12 per cent the intensity by an additional 10 per cent reduction every two years.

In association with these carbon emissions the first amendment that I'm wanting to recommend is that we establish a tax on the excess carbon that's beyond the \$15 per tonne that this bill provides. Indeed, it clearly needs to be higher based on the world market for carbon. The European Union charges closer to \$30 a tonne, and we are at \$15. If we are wanting to send a clear message, if we're wanting real business opportunities to emerge out of the carbon market, we have to advance that.

As the amendment is being circulated, Mr. Chairman, I could go ahead and read it if you wish.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we shall refer to your amendment as amendment A5, and you may proceed. It has been circulated to everyone.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. I'm moving, then, that Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 6 in the proposed section 60 by adding the following subsection:

- (4) Where a regulation under subsection (1)(dd) states that emissions in excess of the maximum levels established under subsection (1)(d) constitute an offence, the penalties . . . shall be not less than
 - (a) \$15 per tonne, commencing in 2008,
 - (b) \$20 per tonne, commencing in 2010, and
 - (c) \$30 per tonne, commencing in 2012.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm open for further discussion.

2:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on the amendment.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's really my pleasure to rise today and participate in debate on this amendment A5, which seeks to make Bill 3 an even better piece of legislation. I'm going to briefly state my reasoning for standing in support of my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View in his moving of this amendment.

As is obvious to you, Mr. Chairman, and to all hon. members today, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View is suggesting that we bring in a tiered, or stepwise, increase into the penalty for exceeding emission targets. As he is suggesting, he is basically saying that instead of just a flat \$15 per tonne of waste, we would have an increasing penalty structure where it jumps from \$15 per tonne in 2008 to \$20 per tonne in 2010, and then ultimately to \$30 per tonne commencing in 2012.

Now, if you think about this, Mr. Chairman, what we're trying to say here is that we recognize that bringing in targets and requiring companies and corporations, emitters if you will, to adhere to those targets might take some time. Some companies might have the resources to implement new technology or to bring in those solutions immediately or in the fairly short term. Some companies might have difficulty adjusting. But ultimately if you're looking at a year from now to three years from now to five years from now, everybody should be at that same level of competence, if you will, and having the technology in place and the resources in place to do what they're told.

So while we are prepared to live with the \$15 per tonne initially, I think we are not prepared to continue to live with that same meagre level of penalty for longer periods of time after 2008. That's why in 2010 we're going to increase it to \$20, which is not really an outrageous increase, but then ultimately after 2012 it's going to be \$30 from then on. This is going to be putting us at par with other jurisdictions as the European Union, for example, which is really ahead of us by leaps and bounds. We should aspire to being a world leader in environmental stewardship.

As we talked before, Mr. Chairman, offering carrots is one way. Waving a stick is another way. This is basically signalling to companies that emit a lot of that garbage and a lot of that waste into the earth's atmosphere that we are not going to tolerate this. If, in fact, it's actually adding a little bit of a financial burden or a financial disincentive to their operations, I think they would be wise to pay attention to this. One year from now they have to implement something. Three years from now, when it starts to bite them a little more in their bottom line, they would have to be a little more compliant. Then ultimately when it goes to \$30, which is not outrageous, which is really like what the other jurisdictions are doing, they would definitely have to think twice before they continue spewing their garbage into the atmosphere without fear of, you know, having to live with repercussions or the government telling them that they cannot continue on that path.

We can use the funds that we generate from those penalties by putting them into a green fund, for example. It's sort of a health rehabilitation fund for the planet where we basically use the money to clean up and to remedy some of the damage we have done.

I was actually watching an old black and white movie the other day, Mr. Chairman. I can't remember the name, but it was fairly old, and it talked about gold prospectors in the old Wild West. One of the characters in the movie was talking to his colleagues, or his comrades . . .

An Hon. Member: Sidekicks.

Mr. Elsalhy: His sidekicks.

Actually, yes, he was sort of the leader of that group. There were three people who were looking for gold in a mountain in the old Wild West. He told them: every day we look for gold, we're injuring the mountain. That was the sentiment in the 1930s, when that movie was produced. When they left that mountain at the end of the movie because they were rich, and they were as rich as they wanted to be – they did not continue beyond what they felt was adequate; they didn't just keep going – he told them: we don't just pack up and leave; what we have to do is fix the damage or try to remedy the damage that we inflicted on that mountain. He actually used the word "injury." They injured the mountain.

Today we are injuring the planet as well through development that is faster than planned for. This is one way where we can basically remedy and apply some sort of healing or a treatment aspect to this growth that we're experiencing. Growth is fine as long as we can manage it. One way we can manage growth is by using some of those funds that we generate with this escalating, or increasing stepwise, fee structure by applying some of those funds towards healing the planet and looking after the environment and restoring the environment to as pristine as possible, as natural as possible a state that we can pass on to our children and our grandchildren.

Impact on the industry? I don't think \$30 per tonne is outrageous. As I said, they're making a lot of profit right now, Mr. Chairman, and it's time that they actually live up to their promise and step up to the plate and partner with us in government and partner with the public by showing leadership. If this is going to offer them the incentive or the enticement to do it because they're afraid for their bottom line and they're afraid for their shareholders, then I'm all for it.

I voice my support for this amendment A5, and I commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View for supporting it and sponsoring it. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to be able to rise and speak in support of the amendment sponsored by my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, which increases by a step-up factor the fines or penalties under section 60(3) in (4) and following (1)(dd).

I find this a useful way of working with the private sector here because the private sector is driven by a profit motive: entirely appropriate, a very successful way. I certainly wouldn't do anything to stand in the way of that profit motive. As a matter of fact, I think many entrepreneurs would claim that that's their inspiration and drives them to be leaner and meaner and achieve more. Good. Taking that as the standard, let's work forward from that.

We know that both money incentives and penalties or fines can be quite successful in helping the private sector adapt to public policy driven issues, and that's really what we've got here. We've got public policy that needs to be setting an agenda to reduce greenhouse emissions. That's for the betterment of the planet.

How do we work alongside the private sector? Well, this is one of the ways of doing it, through a series of graduated penalties if you want to look at it one way. The other way is incentives because, frankly, if the private sector is able to achieve the targets that are set out here, they benefit. Their competitors, if they're not able to achieve it, will be paying a fine. Those who did well in achieving these targets will definitely benefit financially, so it's an excellent inspiration for the profit motive. Essentially, it's speaking the same

language if I can couch it that way. So I'm very much in favour of what's been suggested here.

The existing bill just suggests the first target, which is the \$15 per tonne commencing in 2008.

2:40

Dr. Swann: July 2007.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry. July 2007. I stand corrected.

This spreads out the timeline a bit more. It's \$15 per tonne in 2008, \$20 in 2010, and \$30 per tonne in 2012, which sort of was the end date that we were seeking that's contemplated in this bill.

Why do we need to do that? Well, I think it's pretty clear to me as a citizen but also as a policy-maker that the public rather than the legislators are driving this issue. The citizens clearly want definitive action on climate control, on greenhouse gases. They want to see substantive measures taken by our government. In that I think the policy-makers are behind the public, which is a little unusual but happens every now and then, and this is one of the times.

Why is that? Well, I think that particularly in Alberta – and we often have the finger pointed at us by the rest of Canada, and in some cases that's unfair – when we look at the amount of industrial activity that we have in this province that contributes to greenhouse gas, we rank very high. Actually, we rank at the top. According to data that was produced by Environment Canada, based on data that was in fact filed with them, Alberta accounts for nearly 40 per cent of all climate-warming gases released in 2005. Forty per cent of everything in Canada is coming out of one province, and that's us. Of course, the next largest emitter is Ontario, and it comes in at 28 per cent, so we are substantially in the lead on that and not the kind of blue ribbon, first-prize award that I was hoping Alberta would take. In the ranking of individual industrial sites that are emitting greenhouse gases, we also rank very high because seven of the 10 biggest polluters in Canada are situated here in Alberta. The province, indeed, has five fossil fuel fired generating stations in the top 10. So we really need to take big steps here in Alberta.

I don't want to see Alberta competitively disadvantaged any more than the next person. In fact, I think that the oil and gas sector is ready to step up. I think they've been ready to step up for a long time because we're not just competing with Canada here; we're competing with the rest of the world. I'm about to paraphrase a quote here. Somebody said that there was a war being waged on carbon. I think that's true, and it could end up being waged against us in Alberta. I don't want to see that happen. I don't want to see us targeted by the rest of the world, so I want us to get out front, to take leadership on this.

This is about absolute reductions in emissions. This is not pussyfooting around. We have to be brave and take those big steps, and again I think our oil and gas sector is ready to step out. I think they are perfectly prepared to be number 1 and to lead on this. They just want to know when it starts. They want predictability in when it all comes into play by targets and timelines, and then they're ready to go. They will do it. I know they will because we're playing with the best here in this province. We're not coming out of the backfield here. We've got the top. We've got the top brains, the top innovators in the oil and gas sector right here in Alberta.

I know that we can do this. We just need to be fair to everybody so that they all know when they're going to start, and they know what they're trying to achieve, and let 'em rip. They will accomplish this. In that case, what's considered in this amendment would not even need to come into play because they will achieve it and will not be subject to any of the penalties that are contemplated in the amendment, and that is the additional stepping up of the penalties

that are being brought forward in this amendment. Of course, any of their competitors that can't keep up are going to be subject to it, and frankly that gives the ones that got out ahead a competitive advantage, and that's entirely appropriate.

I think this is a good idea. I think we can do well with it. I think that our oil and gas sector can lead in this, and I think they want to lead in it, but as public policy-makers we've got to give them that starting gate to start from and the targets to know where they're trying to get to.

Dr. Swann: Level the playing field.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. It's the proverbial level playing field.

But really what it's about is: where exactly is the starting gate, and what exactly are they shooting for? What's the end target?

So with those comments in support of amendment A5, Mr. Chairman, I will urge my colleagues in the Assembly to support the amendment. I will take my seat and allow others to also speak in favour of the amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. You'll be pleased to know that I am going to accept the advice of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre and speak in support of this motion as well. I'll keep my comments brief because a lot of the things that I was going to say have already been touched on by previous speakers, but I would like to just touch on a couple of points.

The first is that I'm long on record personally as not being a big fan of carbon trading and offsets. I have said that one of the things that I like about Bill 3, even though it's definitely not going far enough in my mind and certainly not in that of the opposition caucus, is that these penalties will stay in Alberta and help to provide Alberta solutions, and I am supportive of that aspect of Bill 3. The fact that in this particular amendment we would see those penalties rise in a reasonable fashion over a graduated period of time makes perfect sense to me, and I'm hoping that it will make perfect sense to all members of this House.

So while I support that aspect of the bill, as I suggest, I think it doesn't go near far enough. This amendment, if approved, would take us even just a little bit further, move the goalpost, as it were, just that much further, which would certainly help in terms of garnering support from the opposition for this bill, which, I'll be frank with you, Mr. Chairman, at this point in time does not have a lot of support from the opposition for primarily the reason that I've outlined; that is, it just simply does not go far enough.

Another point that I'd like to make. A number of people have referenced the fact that the \$30 per tonne that's currently charged in Europe – and this would put us on a level playing field with what's charged elsewhere – is still competitively favourable to Alberta businesses in that the dollars being contemplated to be charged as a penalty in Alberta are in Canadian dollars. The offsets or the charges that are collected in Europe and elsewhere are actually charged in American dollars. We're all aware of the fact that right now that actually would put us at somewhere around 86 or 87 per cent of what's being collected in Europe. Even though this amendment does take us in the right direction, it's still leaving Alberta businesses at somewhat of an advantage compared to businesses elsewhere. Hopefully, that will help to persuade some members opposite that this is a reasonable amendment and worthy of their support as well.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and look forward to further debate and, hopefully, a swift passage of this amendment by the members of this House. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I believe you have another amendment to bring forward.

Dr. Swann: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. We need to strengthen Bill 3. It clearly does not send the right message to industry and the public about the seriousness of the issue before us. In that regard, I've circulated amendment 2.

2:50

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A6.

Dr. Swann: Amendment A6. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

That Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 6 in the proposed section 60 by adding the following after subsection (1):

- (1.1) A regulation under subsection (1)(d) shall impose requirements that are at least as stringent as a 10% reduction [in intensity] in each of the 5 successive years following the coming into force of this section.

This is being circulated now. I'll wait just a moment until people have it in hand.

The Deputy Chair: Yes. That's correct. Give it a few moments. They're just being distributed at the present time.

Hon. member, you may proceed now.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The spirit of Bill 3 is to add a 12 per cent intensity reduction to the large final emitters in this province, and that's a very reasonable decision for year 1 of our next four years of trying to come to grips with climate change and the responsibility to absolutely reach a cap and start reducing carbon emissions.

What this amendment will do is add annual increases to that intensity target such that we'll approach some 50 per cent reduction by 2012, a much more ambitious target, to be sure, than the existing target, which was 50 per cent by 2020. But even moving this amendment would result in us achieving a target by 2012 that others have already achieved in the European Union and the United Kingdom. By allowing this cap in 2013, which the opposition is recommending as a follow-up to our four-part increase in intensity targets, we would then begin to reduce towards the targets that the European Union and the United Kingdom have already achieved; that is, by 2012 a net reduction of 30 per cent in absolute emissions.

Surely it's clear to us in this part of the world that with our advantage financially, technically, and the flexibility we have in our resource base, we have to do at least our share and try to begin to approach by 2012 what Europe is achieving by 2012. We must be able to achieve by 2020 what the rest of Europe and the developed world are achieving by 2012. This will move us in that direction substantially. Our target then must be 6 per cent below the 1990 level by 2020.

As the Stern report, the now famous report out of the U.K. by Sir Nicholas Stern, indicated, we have to start spending 1 per cent of our gross national product now per year, or we're going to be spending 20 per cent of our gross national product in 20 years with massive dislocation of people, loss of life, and loss of land.

So this, I think, tries to move us more actively, more aggressively

from a much stronger position of leadership to actually address what Albertans and Canadians have said that they want: a serious commitment to climate change and reducing our carbon emissions. One per cent of our gross domestic product in Alberta would be \$2 billion spent annually on carbon reduction technology, carbon reduction incentives in the renewables area, biofuels, all manner of energy efficiency technologies, carbon capture and storage. Two billion dollars is what the report suggested is going to be needed if we are going to seriously commit to climate change reduction. This is precisely what Albertans are calling for.

At present we spend about \$5 million a year through the Climate Change Central offices. We spend about \$350 million a year through the ME First program to retrofit and develop new energy efficiency technologies in municipalities and save a total of no more than \$500 million a year. That's one-quarter of what is deemed to be necessary. With an extra fee on the carbon emissions and with a ratcheting up of the intensity targets, we could have a larger fund to work with, and we could have a much shorter time frame to get absolute reductions in Alberta.

So in the interest of the future and the interest of being shown to be serious about our commitment to climate change, I strongly encourage your support for this amendment which will move us to still far below the levels by 2012 that the European community has achieved and some corporations have achieved, but it would show a serious commitment to absolute reductions in carbon by 2012.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it needs to be stated at the outset that I think every member in this House would consider themselves, whether they're on that side of the House or this side of the House, to be a responsible and dedicated steward of the environment.

Perhaps we have different ideas on the sides of the House; nonetheless, I think that needs to be stated up front. Now, I applaud the hon. member on his tireless dedication to this cause, but I want to point out a couple of things to him. First of all, he talks about reductions of 50 per cent in carbon by 2010. I believe those were the numbers that he was using. Mr. Chairman, it's very easy to bandy about numbers. I think that before we should be talking about those kinds of numbers, somebody had better be talking about what technology is available to achieve those kinds of goals.

Now, the hon. member brought up an interesting point: that we should be setting goals around what Europe has already achieved. That's a very interesting thought, Mr. Chairman, and I would like to point out something to the hon. member. Last week the Prime Minister of Britain, Tony Blair, announced that although their carbon emissions had risen by 3 per cent in the last year, they still felt that they were on track for meeting their Kyoto targets because, including the 3 per cent raise last year, they're currently 15 per cent below their 1990 emissions levels. By the Kyoto measurement year they only need to be 12 per cent below, so they think they're well within the range.

I want the member to consider that for a moment. At the time that Britain signed the Kyoto protocol, they were more than 15 per cent below their 1990 emissions levels, which is why they picked 1990 as a reference date. The same is true in Europe because they had already taken significant amounts of coal-fired generation offline, so they used 1990 as a reference year. They'd already met their targets, and they all gleefully signed the Kyoto protocol. None of them have talked about any technologies that would be available for major carbon reductions, with the exception of production curtailments.

Right now that's the only really serious avenue that we have available to us to meet 50 per cent reduction targets.

So if the member wants to advocate that we should shut down big sections of our economy, then I guess we could probably achieve 50 per cent. Otherwise, I think I would like to stand here and applaud the Minister of Environment for being the first one in Canada, provincially or federally, to table such legislation that has real goals, real targets, and is actually going to do something about climate change rather than blathering on about it. It's a frustrating issue. I think the Environment minister has done an excellent job.

I do not support this amendment, and I'm going to support the bill as it stands. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, you know, I appreciate the intent here of this amendment. This amendment would require a 10 per cent reduction in each of the five successive years. I'm not sure whether or not that can be accomplished, but at least it has the advantage of setting out a plan.

3:00

The difficulty that I have with the comment of the previous speaker and, in general, with the whole approach to emissions intensity is that they are only telling you half the story. The other half of the story is that there is a massive and uncontained expansion planned, particularly in the tar sands in northern Alberta, in their production. So even though you bring down emissions intensity per unit of production substantially, when you're talking about massive increases in the total output, then your overall CO₂ emissions will continue to rise and rise very dramatically. That's the problem. I think it's consciously done by the government. That's the problem with their approach: they're not talking about what's going to happen in terms of industrial development in the tar sands in this province over the next 10, 15, and 20 years.

The Premier at his very first news conference after becoming the leader of the Conservative Party – and I attended that news conference – elaborated on his philosophy quite clearly at that point, I thought, and that was that the government's role was to provide services for the economy, the things that they needed. If people needed schools or if they needed housing or if they needed labour force or whatever they needed, then they would get it from the government, but the government would not interfere with the economic development taking place in the province. The government would not interfere with the economy, and in fact the government would not touch the brake, as he put it.

You take that and then also consider the decisions at some of the closed-door meetings that the government has participated in. For example, at a meeting in Houston in January of 2006 organized by energy Canada and the United States Department of Energy and attended by senior executives from all kinds of oil companies and our own Minister of Energy at the time, the decision was made – at least as far as we know, it was the decision – that the output in the tar sands of Alberta should increase by five times, a fivefold increase in a relatively short period of time.

Take what we've got now in this province and the stresses and strains on this province today as a result of this growth, not to mention the impacts of the CO₂ production, and multiply that by five, and you will get an idea of the kind of future for Alberta that this government has apparently agreed to behind closed doors without ever talking to the people of Alberta about that, never expressing a vision for this province that is producing five times as

much oil out of the tar sands as is presently the case, five times as many plants on the go, five times as much inflation, five times as much CO₂ emissions, five times the housing shortage, five times the shortage in hospital beds, and five times the shortage in classroom spaces. That's the vision this government has for this province. It's not a vision that they're prepared to honestly share with Albertans; rather, it's a vision that they cook up behind closed doors with the American government and with big oil companies.

Mr. Chairman, given that the Alberta government is going to bend over backwards to assist the American government in its strategic goal of replacing Mideast oil without regard to the interests of the people of this province or of the environment, then that gives us a context for Bill 3. We see an aggressive attempt to reduce the emissions intensity, which is the amount of CO₂ produced per unit of energy or per unit of production, at the same time as that amount of production will be five times as high. So it really, stripped of all of its veneer, is a bill that will allow a massive increase in CO₂ output from this province. Five times as much production with a lesser intensity may mean four times as much CO₂ or, if they're really, really good, maybe three and a half times the amount of CO₂ that we're presently producing. That's what this bill is for, and that's what this bill means. That's why the Alberta New Democrats are opposing this bill. It's not an honest assessment of our future, and it doesn't deal fairly and adequately.

The suggestion that has been made on the other side, that if we implement some sort of real caps on emission or if we find a better way to do it than intensity, we're going to shut down the economy, is simply not true, Mr. Chairman. The economy is humming along. In fact, it's growing faster, perhaps, than it should. We could ensure long-term employment for all the people of Alberta, all our young people plus people from other parts of the country plus people coming from outside the country to this province, at a much lower level of development.

If the tar sands and if the energy resource of this province were developed in the interests of the people of the province as opposed to the interests of big oil companies and the United States government, we could have full employment, get caught up on our infrastructure needs, and substantially reduce the increase, at least, in absolute CO₂ production in this province. We may not be able to level it off entirely, but we could certainly do a much better job if we had a more honest approach from this government.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate that I don't accept what the hon. member opposite has said about the impact on Alberta's economy of this amendment or other amendments that have been brought forward. A more rational, staged, and paced approach to development in our province is not only entirely possible but beneficial and rational and something which we ought to be supporting.

Bill 3 is a ticket to wholesale increases in CO₂ production. It's nothing else, Mr. Chairman. It's all wrapped up in an attempt to appear green and environmentally responsible, but it is quite the opposite. It is an anti-environment bill and not one that we will support with this amendment or otherwise.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise again. Just to address the remarks of the last speaker, the hon. member pointed out twice in his talk some sort of secret deal or secret plan we have to rapidly expand oil sands development in Alberta. If the hon. member believes that, I suggest that he call Shaw Cable and get television and Internet access because there is no secret about what

Alberta's plans are for production of oil. I think it is patently naive to think that Alberta is just going to curtail their production in oil. We have over 80 per cent of North America's oil reserves right here in our province. I just think it's absolutely unreasonable.

Mr. Chairman, again, the hon. member says that he does not accept my assertion that the only technology available right now is production curtailment. If that's true, then I would point out that the hon. member needn't have suggested that we curtail production by slowing down the oil sands development. That's exactly what he's suggesting.

Mr. Chairman, Alberta is a major energy player in the world. We need to develop our resources in an environmentally responsible manner. I believe that's what this bill is attempting to do, and I'm going to support it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of quick comments in reference to amendment A6, I believe it is. First of all, I find myself agreeing with the leader of the third party, and that always causes me a certain amount of concern.

Mr. Mason: It causes me more.

3:10

Mr. R. Miller: In fact, the hon. member says that it causes him even more concern, so I'm not sure what's happening here this afternoon.

I think he made some very valid points, in particular with the frustration that he is clearly feeling, and I certainly feel, with members from the governing party when it comes to this belief that they continue to expound, that the only way to curtail emissions is, in fact, to curtail production. That is just not true. I'm sure the hon. member knows that, and I think everybody in this House knows that. If you incent industry, they will find a way.

In fact, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre in her remarks to an earlier amendment referenced the fact that industry is saying that they're ready. What they're looking for from government is some guidelines. I'm hearing that as I tour the province, too. In fact, we know that many of the larger companies are already far ahead of this government in terms of their preparation for dealing with global warming. My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View just mentioned Shell, Petro-Canada, and BP as examples of that.

It's not a question of industry not being able to come up with solutions. It's not even a question of industry resisting solutions. In many cases they're far ahead of that. It really is a question of incenting industry and making sure, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, that all industry is playing by the same rules. I think what the players in the oil patch are looking for is some assurance that when they invest extra dollars into addressing this issue, they're not going to be putting themselves at a competitive disadvantage with their industry partners.

It's very frustrating for me to listen to government members talk about the fact – and I know that yesterday it was the Member for Rocky Mountain House who was saying the same thing – that the only way that you can reduce total emissions is to reduce production. That is simply not the case at all, and I would be terribly disappointed to learn that, in fact, they do believe that because it's simply not true.

I believe that absolute reductions are achievable if we deal with this properly, and industry is saying that they are achievable if we deal with it properly. Yes, it's going to cost some money, but the

bottom line is to make sure that everybody is playing by the same rules, make sure that the competitive disadvantage isn't put in place that will harm some companies over others. Give them the reason to do what we all know is right, and they'll do it.

I certainly speak strongly in favour of this amendment. This is the sort of thing that were it in the bill, the government would most likely have the support of the opposition. These are the places where we all know that we have to go. As the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood pointed out, simply reducing intensity and not addressing overall emissions does absolutely nothing to address a situation where you could have twice as much or three times as much or five times as much production taking place and thereby three times or five times as much emissions taking place as well. So how are we any better off if we allow that to happen?

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, in reference to the comments made by the Member for Peace River about Fort McMurray, I think he tried to draw the parallel that the only way that you could control emissions out of the oil sands region would be to not allow the continued expansion and production there, and I've already addressed that argument.

The other part of that comment that sort of struck me as being odd is the realization – and the government members are hearing this, too, from the mayor of Wood Buffalo and various stakeholders up there – that the issues surrounding the growth that's taking place in the oil sands have so much more to do with things other than just simply emissions that come out of that region. I mean, we're talking about health care, we're talking about infrastructure, we're talking about housing. The whole gamut of issues that are faced by communities across this province is evident in the Wood Buffalo region and in some cases to a much greater extent than they are elsewhere in the province. So to simply tie emission targets to expansion of the oil sands projects and suggest that the only way that you can control emissions out of that area, you know, that they're directly related to the increased expansion of projects in that area, that's again missing the point. Whenever anybody talks about the Wood Buffalo region, we're talking about much more than simply emissions. We're talking about community health. We're talking about the need for some managed growth in that region. It is so much more involved than simply emissions, Mr. Chairman. So I had to get that point on the record.

I certainly support amendment A6, and I'm hoping that others will do likewise. Again, as I say, it would be a very positive step in terms of securing support from the Official Opposition.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, would like to be on the record for this amendment. I'm not, probably, all that knowledgeable about speaking about the oil industry and all of the emissions and the carbon sequestration and all of these sorts of things. To me that can become a very complex conversation. But what I can't understand is that in this day and age we are still actually arguing about this. We all know that something has to be done, and we all know that it has to be done now, the sooner the better. I also believe that industries, in particular the large industries who have already met targets in Europe, have known for years that, finally, Alberta would have the backbone to actually stand up and talk about it. Well, we are talking about it now. I just believe that these industries are ready to go, and they will never do it unless someone has the strength to stand up and say: you have to do it.

But I also believe that we cannot keep throwing out the words

“intensity targets” if we also don’t tie that into what the production is. If the production of the emissions go up, then the intensity targets have to go up. We have to have them go in parallel, but the intensity targets have to be in front of what is being produced because, otherwise, we’re always behind the eight ball.

I really believe that this is an excellent amendment that would address the fact that we have to have our intensity targets accepted now and start working on them right now. Yes, we can say that we will meet such and such a thing later down the road, but we really have to have high, high targets to aim for so that when my grandchildren are around, they actually will still be able to enjoy Alberta as I know it.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, rise to voice my support for amendment A6, which is seeking to fix a little problematic section of Bill 3, the climate change act. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View explained why we think it is feasible and why we think it is necessary to tighten, or increase, the reduction on emissions as time progresses, over a five-year period.

I was genuinely disappointed with the position of the hon. leader of the NDP opposition. I understand his frustration that this bill does not achieve the hard caps that his caucus and ours would advocate or would prefer. But I struggle with this, Mr. Chairman, because my approach would be that anything is better than nothing. It’s with this amendment that we’re trying to make this anything a little more tangible, a little more useful for cutting down emissions. So while we’d prefer to have hard caps and absolute reductions, this is sort of a compromise to tell those emitters and to tell the industry that in year 1 this is the intensity target, in year 2 this is the intensity target, and so on and so forth.

3:20

I would also repeat some of the comments made by my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford, that industry is ready. So when the hon. Member for Peace River is saying that industry is not ready and telling me what technology is available, we’re talking to the same industry. We’re talking to the same players. They’re saying that they’re willing to do it. Technology is getting cheaper. It’s getting more readily available. Their proviso is basically that it has to be applied fairly, and it has to be applied across the board. You don’t want to be picking winners and losers. If they have to do it, they all have to do it, and they all have to do it equally and at the same level.

So if it’s a question of technology, it is available, and it’s becoming more available, and it’s becoming less expensive. If it’s a question of readiness or willingness, industry is ready and willing. We just have to make it fair, make it even for all of them to implement those reductions equally and across the board. If it’s a question of benefit versus risk, preference for hard caps or absolute reductions versus intensity, again we’re just working with this government to try to make a poor piece of legislation, a piece of legislation that really achieves nothing, a little better.

From that angle I would voice my support for the amendment as sponsored by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and I actually urge others to do as well. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you wanted to speak on the bill?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, we are, I assume, out of amendments on this?

The Deputy Chair: That’s correct. We are back to the bill. Would you like to speak on the bill?

Mr. Mason: Well, I would like to speak briefly on the bill and then adjourn debate, Mr. Chairman. I understand that that’s what I’m supposed to do. Apparently, I’m misinformed.

The Deputy Chair: The chair will recognize you to speak. You can move any amendment or motion you’d like. The membership will vote whether we adjourn or not. You may proceed.

Mr. Mason: Well, then, Mr. Chairman, I will indicate once again that I have difficulty with this bill and think that it deserves more consideration in committee stage at another time, and I will move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Deputy Chair: We will proceed with the debate on Bill 3. Any other speakers?

Are you ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 16 Police Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to participate in debate on Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, 2007, at Committee of the Whole stage. First of all, I would like to thank the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, who yesterday, before adjourning debate, offered members of the opposition some answers to questions that we raised in second reading. I actually have to commend the hon. minister, who is to a large extent offering more concise and timely responses than some of his colleagues on the front bench. He is willing to work with the opposition, and that’s a very positive move.

Mr. Chairman, the Police Amendment Act as proposed is basically trying to do two things, and we covered that in second reading. The more important thing is that it basically establishes an integrated investigative unit, which is a group of individuals commissioned to investigate serious police wrongdoing. The composition of this commission or this group or this task force and the mandate and the resources given to this group to perform such investigations is really what we’re talking about here in committee.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

In the responses given by the hon. Solicitor General, he talked about the director of this investigative unit, who is going to be a civilian. In the first part of his response he mentioned that it would be a civilian lawyer. Then he went on to say that it could be a defence lawyer, a Crown attorney, or a retired judge, or perhaps any other lawyer. So I just need to seek some clarification from the hon. minister on whether, in fact, it's going to be a civilian lawyer or any of the other three because I just didn't fully understand if it's either/or or if it's going to be a civilian lawyer, period.

He also mentioned that some of the components of those investigations are going to be carried on by experts who have specific knowledge about matters such as undercover operations and wiretaps, but then he said that some of them are also going to be civilians. So I need some clarification there as well. The part about the investigative unit being chaired or being directed by a civilian appears to be a policy promise. Mr. Chairman, it is not in the act. It is not in the proposed legislation. So I would want this promise translated into one sentence, one phrase, in this proposed act.

The hon. Solicitor General also talked about the number of investigations conducted. He was responding to my request that this number of investigations should not be dependent on the budget. In other words, what I'm saying is: yes, it's good, and it's expected, and it's good practice to have a budget for this special investigative unit.

But I'm really interested in getting some information from the hon. minister with respect to statistics or studies when his department was contemplating bringing in this special investigative unit. What is the number we're looking at? You know, are we looking at five to 10 investigations a year? Are we looking at 10 to 20? Is it more than 50? I don't know. But he made a comment that in Ontario, for example, their equivalent of the special investigative unit does hundreds of investigations every year. So how many do we expect to conduct here? I know that he mentioned that there is going to be a northern Alberta team and a southern Alberta team. How many do we anticipate performing? How many investigations are we going to carry out? What is the anticipated budget for it?

3:30

Now, the minister also tried to respond to my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora with respect to the wording relevant to "serious or sensitive nature" complaints. My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora was talking about the definition and how we need it to be more solidly defined so that we don't leave it to the interpretation or the will of the minister of the day. We need sort of a set explanation of what really constitutes serious or sensitive complaints.

The minister indicated that the policy is being worked on. It's been undergoing improvement and refinement in consultation with different stakeholders. We need to know, you know, who these stakeholders are and what they are telling the minister in terms of the definition for this.

Now, Mr. Chairman, as I indicated in second reading, I am definitely leaning towards supporting Bill 16, and I based my decision on two things. One, it is something that we have asked for two years ago, in 2005. We were then debating Bill 36, which also amended the Police Act. The other thing is that it is something the public expects and is asking for. The public needs to be assured that people who enforce our laws and protect us are held to the highest degree of accountability. As I mentioned in second reading and as was reiterated by many of the colleagues from both sides of the House, it is not only the actual independence and impartiality when you are conducting an investigation into potential or alleged wrongdoing; it is also the appearance of such. So we need to send the message that wrongdoing is going to be investigated and is going to be investigated thoroughly and professionally and adequately.

Now, there is one area which was covered yesterday in the minister's comments, when he was basically responding to the Member for Edmonton-Calder. The Member for Edmonton-Calder was suggesting that former police officers should not be involved within the unit. He's approaching it from the angle that police cannot and should not investigate themselves. While I agree that we should really mitigate this risk and not have police officers investigate themselves, one workaround for this is basically to allow former police officers or even current police officers who are not affiliated with the service being investigated to participate because we need professional and expert advice, Mr. Chairman.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

My preference would have been to have civilians comprise 100 per cent of the composition of this special investigative unit, but in reality and in practical terms you can't have that. So I would urge that if we do hire a former police officer or even an active duty police officer to participate in this because we need expert advice and we need forensic interpretation and we need, you know, undercover work or wiretapping and stuff like that, as was mentioned, then they should be from a service that is not being investigated. I think that's common sense, and I think it is straightforward.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I have some ideas to strengthen this bill and to make it more amenable, so with your indulgence I would like to move an amendment at this time, and I'm going to ask our hard-working pages here to distribute the first of two.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we need to have that at the table first, please. Just a moment. We will give the pages a few moments to have them distributed. For the record, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may proceed now.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To explain to the hon. members of this House what I am trying to achieve here, what I am trying to do is amend section 3 of the proposed amendment act. Section 3, basically, as it's written adds the provision after section 46.1 to establish the investigative unit and to give it the authority to operate for the purposes of conducting an investigation. It provides the framework for this new team or this new group to operate with the full authority of a police service, basically allowing them to conduct an investigation and to look for evidence, to ask witnesses, and to do all of those things that would be integral to conducting a thorough and fair investigation.

Now, in that section 3, subsection (2) is a bit problematic. It really allows the minister to "designate a person as head of the integrated investigative unit," but it doesn't specify who this person is. As I mentioned, the hon. Solicitor General yesterday indicated that this team is going to be directed by or headed by a civilian lawyer. But, again, it was mostly a policy commitment. It's not in the act. So who chairs it is one question. Who sits on it or who makes up the team, if you will, Mr. Chairman, is my second question.

Subsection (b) also allows the appointment of "special constables as investigators under the authority of the head of the integrated investigative unit." There is a bit of a problem here as well because it does not specify that those special constables have certain criteria or certain training prerequisites for them to be able to fulfill that role and carry on those duties. Special constables receive a fair amount of training, Mr. Chairman, but my question is: are they trained and equipped to handle an investigation that is of a serious nature? You know, we're talking murder. We're talking sexual assault. We're

talking serious injury. We're talking abuse of power. We're talking corruption.

I would urge that if special constables are recruited, then maybe we should stipulate, you know, a minimum number of years for them to have been working as special constables or require them to have been at one point a member of a provincially recognized police force or to have passed or achieved the detective level of training and so on and so forth.

Amendment A1, Mr. Chairman, is now changing this subsection to say:

- (2) An integrated investigative unit established under this section shall include.

And we're not saying: shall be limited to. We're saying: "shall include."

- (a) a retired judge,
- (b) a retired or former Crown prosecutor,
- (c) a retired or former police officer, and
- (d) not fewer than 2 members of the public . . .

You have these five members.

. . . one of whom shall be designated as head of the unit.

So we're not limiting it to this. The hon. Minister of Public Security can stipulate other members of this team, and he can add to the team, but I'm saying that we have a core of five that we can build upon. That core group of five people includes a judge, a Crown prosecutor, a police officer, all of whom are former or retired, and then two members of the public.

If you ask me, Mr. Chairman, "How are we going to appoint members of the public?" I would say: it's exactly the same way as we can appoint members of a jury in the courts. Basically, we go to the tax roll, or we go to the phone book, or we go to the voters list, and we pick two people at random, just as we do for jury duty. So we have five people as the core group, and then we can add to them, depending on the circumstances and depending on recommendations by the director of law enforcement, for example, or on the recommendation from the hon. Solicitor General himself or herself.

3:40

So it's basically setting up the core group. One of those five people is going to be the head because, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, a policy commitment from the minister is not satisfactory for the purposes of this Assembly. Ministers change. Policies change. We need it in writing. We need it to be set in stone, basically, that when this team is activated or struck, they have to be comprised of this particular composition. Now, if the minister wants to bring in special constables, that's fine. We're not saying that they're not allowed to participate. But at least we have this core group of people with core expertise and credentials that we can rely on to conduct thorough and fair investigations.

Now, we also know that the head of the unit is going to be deemed to be a chief of police, to be given the authority and responsibility of a chief of police. Any person who works as an investigator in this framework is going to be treated as a police officer for the purposes of conducting an investigation under section 46.1. It basically gives the unit the authority it needs to conduct an investigation, and it gives it the tools that are required to carry on such tasks. With this authority it will be impossible to do their work if they don't have the proper training and the proper qualifications. Again, this is where we differ from the position taken by the NDP opposition. You know, you can't just have seven total civilians conducting an investigation of this nature. They need expert advice, and they need people who have the expertise.

So to recap, to summarize, what we're trying to do is have that public oversight highlighted and emphasized by having at least two members of the public at arm's length, totally independent from the

government – I would treat them like jurors in any court trial – and to add to them a retired judge, a retired or former Crown prosecutor, a retired or former police officer, and then any other persons as deemed necessary by the hon. Solicitor General of the day.

Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to unduly speak in favour of my own amendment. I invite others to participate, and I thank you for this opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I have to say that I'm really glad to see the appearance of Bill 16 and even more pleased to see the amendment that has been brought forward by the hon. member.

I'm sorry. Did that make it amendment A1? Yes. Thank you.

Bill 16 is in essence the son of Bill 36, which I debated at the time, and much of what I was trying to achieve and points I was trying to drive home at the time have been realized in Bill 16. The public really is insisting – and they are right to insist – that investigations of the police are perceived to be independent and are independent of the police themselves. This is to satisfy both sides. I saw situations where police officers had been brought under suspicion for some behaviour, and in fact they were cleared and should have been cleared, but their name was never really cleared because the public did not accept that they had been through an independent process. I felt that that was very unfair to the individuals that were involved. They can never get their name cleared.

In other situations – I think there have been a number of them that have been talked about in the House here and that were certainly well known and well discussed in the media – people were deemed not to have been at fault, and I think many people feel that the investigation was biased on their behalf and clearly unfair and that there was not independence. They just don't buy the results of the investigation.

So in moving a step closer to a really independent investigation, that's what we see in Bill 16. I always have some caution when a lot of discretion is left up to the minister to put something in place. Certainly, in this House what we usually end up with are regulations that sort of appear very briefly in the *Gazette*, and then they're gone. If you're not paying attention, you don't even see those regs go by. They're hard to find. They're not posted on the website.

Now, maybe with the policy field committees coming, there'll be better scrutiny of that, but basically it was very hard to figure out what it was that the minister was actually going to do with something or what they had done. So what we have anticipated in Bill 16 is that the minister would establish an integrated investigative unit and authorize it to act as a separate police service in conducting this investigation. It mentions that it's expecting that the minister would designate a certain person as head of the integrated investigative unit, appoint special constables as investigators, and, perhaps, subject to the terms of this authorization the head would be deemed to be the chief of police or, I suppose, act in the position that the chief of police usually would in one of these special investigative units.

I agree with my colleague that brought this amendment forward. I think this is problematic. I don't know that it would be seen by a person on the street as being sufficiently independent. It's very vague as to who would get appointed to this committee, and I'm uneasy about the term "special constable." Now, I will be honest with you, Mr. Chairman. There have been so many different gradations of police service now and new categories invented and proposed and implemented that I admit that I'm a bit lost on all of this. So I may well be corrected by my hon. colleagues opposite, but

I think a special constable doesn't actually exist as a formal position right now.

This is yet a new division of worker. What is their training? You know, where do they rank in the pay scale of things? Are you going to have somebody on this unit as a special constable who would be regarded by the police service that they're supposed to be investigating as a lower rank or a lesser trained individual or not being able to challenge the regular officer? I'm really uneasy about all of these new rankings now because, frankly, I think we had a pretty good system in place with police officers. We all knew what that meant, and we all knew the training that they got, and we all knew what kind of weapons they carried and what their responsibility to the public is and what the public's responsibility to them is.

I live in the city of Edmonton, and I honestly could not tell you what exists now. We've got these sheriffs that are in place, and I notice that they are now out on the grounds here of the Assembly, which used to be a private security system, they call them. Now we have the special sheriffs out there. I don't know if they work for a private firm or not. It's pretty confusing about what's actually going on.

That's my point, Mr. Chairman. I think we need clarity here. The public needs to know that it's a truly independent unit, that it's not subject to any bias, and that who will head it is clearly laid out. I think that's what my colleague from Edmonton-McClung has achieved with amendment A1 in suggesting that the unit would have a retired justice, a former Crown prosecutor, a former police officer, and members of the public.

3:50

I want to be clear here that when we say members of the public, this isn't a way to do through the back door what you weren't allowed to do through the front door. These are meant to be members of the public; they're not meant to be more retired police officers or more retired Crown prosecutors. They're meant to be people from the public, as my colleague mentioned, as you would choose a jury. This is a general casting amongst the citizenry to look for volunteers or compulsory volunteers who would serve on a unit like this but not to stack it. I think that it needs to be seen as being fair, impartial, and knowledgeable, because one of the points that's often raised with me when I get into discussions with my favourite people in blue . . .

Mr. R. Miller: How often does that happen?

Ms Blakeman: Well, more often than you'd think.

. . . is that they're really cautious about somebody coming in to judge them that doesn't understand the culture and the climate that they work in. I understand their point. I think that in fact has been captured by the suggestions of who would be on these committees, in that it does have a former or retired police officer, who can help the rest of that committee understand the stresses that they're under, you know, the unwritten codes that they work with, and that's appropriate. You're also going to be able to pick up some of that from a Crown prosecutor because they're going to be quite familiar with, sort of, the insider look at how the police force operates as well as would a judge.

I think it can be argued that there is a level of expertise there that, I hope, would be acceptable to members of the police forces and that they would be willing to have their case investigated by a group of people like that because there is some expertise there, there is some background knowledge there and an understanding of that police culture that is so important to them. So to my friends in blue: I did get that lesson, I understand it, and I think that that's been covered here.

You know, I had the privilege of working with an Edmonton city police officer who was elected to this House in my first term. I learned a lot from working with her. That was the former Member for Edmonton-Norwood. She really brought a lot to our caucus in being able to explain some of what it's like to work as a police officer in a metropolitan area. I remember one night there was some bill in front of us and people were wailing away. She got up and said: "You know, you've got to give us some credit. We're decent human beings trying to do a good job, and we're pretty common-sense folks. Why on earth would you think that we would go haring off shooting people?" Or whatever the accusation was that night, I honestly don't remember. But that really stuck with me, and I've tried to bring that same kind of perspective to other professions when we're talking about them in this House.

It's particularly applicable here because, again, we're talking about police officers. I think you've got to approach this believing – and I do believe – that most police officers are decent, hard-working citizens who obey and uphold the law, who are doing their very best for democracy and safe communities. And in believing that, I want them to have the best possible opportunity to have any situation that goes awry for them be able to be investigated and reported on in a way that gives them some kind of certainty that they can walk out of there knowing that their case has been reviewed and that it's now out in the public and in the media and that nobody is going to be questioning that this was an inside job and that, you know, they weren't really investigated, wink, wink, nudge, nudge. I think this would allow them some peace of mind and some certainty and allow the public some certainty in who is investigating it, how impartial they are, how knowledgeable they are, and how committed to upholding a safe and democratic society as well.

I'm pretty pleased with the way this whole thing is flowing. We've had some very challenging times in the city of Edmonton and, I think, also in some of our other major urban centres in Alberta when it comes to situations between the police and the citizens. I want to see all of these cases resolved to the best of all possible outcomes.

I'm pleased to see that the government did respond to the pressure that I was trying to bring and that many, many others obviously brought against the government to go back and reform Bill 36. Thus, we have the son of Bill 36: Bill 16. There are the baby boomers and the echo – is that how it goes? – so this would be the echo bill.

I think that amendment A1, that my colleague has brought forward, is an excellent fine-tuning of the bill itself. I would highly recommend it to my colleagues in the Chamber and urge everyone to vote in support of this amendment.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my great honour to rise and speak in support of amendment A1, introduced by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-McClung. If you see section 3, I think the Member for Edmonton-McClung is right because this is an issue of crime and lack of trust in the police department. Some people are so fearful that they feel threatened, and the public especially should be involved. Public trust is very important, and it must be maintained. That's why, I think, the Member for Edmonton-McClung is asking to add a few things. It's not limited to just four names like a retired judge, a retired or former Crown prosecutor, a retired or former police officer, not fewer than two members from the public.

I think members from the public are very important to bring the confidence of the people back. Because of recent incidents happening throughout Alberta, I think the trust which the police department had, lots of people have lost. To bring that trust back, it's very important to bring some people in and involve them in the decision-making. I think it's very important to involve those people. As I said, it's not limited to only those numbers, but as long as involving a few people helps to increase the confidence of the public, I think it's a good step. That's the reason I'm supporting this amendment A1, Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, 2007.

Otherwise, you know, I applaud this move as responding to the concerns of the public. It's a step that does not go far enough towards a truly open and accountable mechanism to deal with the serious incidents and complaints. I think, Mr. Chairman, the main problem with this bill is that the mechanism it provides to conduct independent investigation is permissible. It's not a prescriptive clause making implementing this type of investigation automatic. As the Member for Edmonton-McClung mentioned, this is problematic because, at the very least, any incident involving death should automatically trigger an independent investigation.

In other words, the wording of the legislation should read "must" do one of the following instead of "may" do one of the following. This is not meant to be critical of the ability of the police to investigate their members, but in real terms there is a conflict when a police officer investigates one of his colleagues. Failure to take these investigations out of the hands of the police themselves by not allowing police to investigate police is critical to not only showing actual independence but to preserving the appearance of impartiality and objectivity so that members of the public maintain confidence in the system. As I said before, you know, confidence in the system is very, very important, and we should address this issue seriously so that the public starts trusting this department.

4:00

If adding a few names helps to increase the confidence of the public, I think it's not a bad idea. I applaud the Member for Edmonton-McClung for introducing this amendment, and I support that. I want to make sure, you know, that in the police system there's no favouritism or prejudice. If the public members are involved or retired or former police officers are involved, at least, you know, they can't complain that their views are not heard.

So, once again, this was just a brief comment from me. I just want to say that I support this amendment A1 to Bill 16, Police Amendment Act, 2007. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to this amendment. I'd first like to commend my fellow colleague in the House from Edmonton-McClung for writing something that is so obvious and apparent. I mean, we have discussed it many times. It's been discussed in the media and in the public how critical the amendments to this bill are. Specifically, this amendment addresses a lot of the public's attention to the need to have some sort of adequate review process for police.

This lays out and brings in all of the critical elements you would need in an integrated investigative unit, Mr. Chair, and I believe that the amendment that is laid out is incredibly noble. I mean, a retired judge, a former Crown prosecutor, a retired Crown prosecutor, a retired or former police officer, and two members of the public, minimum, is exactly the combination that you need in order to do an adequate and appropriate review.

But, Mr. Chair, I can't support this amendment. Not because of

its intent – its intent is fantastic – but I'm worried that if we set up an integrated investigative unit and laid out these specific criteria that had to be followed and we couldn't find a retired judge to sit on the panel, the only way we could set up that unit is to be in contravention of our own legislation. So I hope that the intent of the minister responsible for this legislation is to follow these guidelines as best he can. But, again, I can't support this amendment because I fear that it might tie our hands, force us to be in contravention of the legislation and not have the proper integrated investigative unit set up. I do wish to emphasize one more time that I hope that the minister follows this set of guidelines and adheres to it as closely as possible in order to make sure that the investigative units will be effective.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to Bill 16, Police Amendment Act, 2007, and specifically as well to the amendment before the House, which would amend section 46.2. Police services are a very important institution. Police provide services that make our communities safe. Police are responsible for making sure that when law enforcement investigation – they do very, very important work to make all of us feel that we're safe and secure and that the laws of the province and the country are respected and that we comply with them, and when noncompliance occurs, it's the job of the police to apprehend those who break the laws and bring them before the courts for appropriate action. So police services are a very, very important part of our daily lives. Work that they do is of critical importance and valued highly by the public.

Unfortunately, the current legislation contained in the Police Act leaves lots of room for ordinary citizens, for hard-working Albertans to express concerns about the internal investigations conducted by the police when a complaint is lodged against a police officer's conduct or the conduct of the police force in a given community, town, city, or village. Conflict-of-interest issues are very much a part of the concern expressed by the public, who appreciate very much the nature of the work that police services are called upon to do. But when they err in doing their work, the processes in place, the procedures in place to investigate that conduct about which particular persons in the public may have complaints or concerns, it's the police that are responsible or called upon to do those investigations.

So police investigating themselves about misconduct of police officers or police forces is one source of concern that Albertans have. They would want to see an independent agency investigating public conduct. I think it's only fair that the police services themselves be relieved of this onerous responsibility because they're always concerned, and they're properly concerned, as we are, that the public have full confidence in the integrity of the work that the police does. When there is an error, perceived or real, or a complaint about the work and the conduct of police services or police officers, I think it's unfair to expect them to investigate themselves because it opens the possibility that the public will not have confidence in the investigation done internally by police of its own conduct.

So independence of investigation and having in place a legislatively created body or entity that has that independence to conduct these investigations about complaints about police work I think is something that's badly needed and overdue. We should as legislators enact a piece of legislation that will provide the public the assurance that we indeed are listening to their serious concerns and that we are ready to act to ensure that there is that independent body or entity that will conduct these investigations.

4:10

The pressure on the government in view of growing public perception that there is conflict of interest when some members of the police have seemed to have acted against the very serious nature of the responsibilities that they're supposed to discharge when conducting their work has become a large concern, a major concern. It's been a growing concern. Various incidents over the last few years have fuelled this concern further, so it's time to take steps in this Assembly by way of changing existing legislation, by creating a provision that will show the public that it has now reasons to restore its confidence in the way investigations are done, that they needn't worry about any conflict of interest because there will be no conflict of interest given the new legislative provisions.

The definitions and the procedures already outlined in the existing piece of legislation, the Police Act, obviously have not served to restore full confidence on the part of members of the public in some of the investigations into the alleged misconduct of police services or members of the police services that have taken place in our communities. Recent examples – I don't need to outline them – are there which justify, I think, concern on the part of the public that we need to have appropriate investigative entities independent of the police services themselves, which would create fairness for the police. They'll be relieved of this constant concern the public has about police investigating itself. They have enough challenges as it is, you know, in terms of conducting their work as police officers and police forces that they shouldn't be put in a position where they have to defend themselves all the time with respect to problems that need to be investigated and when they themselves are called upon to take the responsibility and investigate them.

So this bill, Bill 16, Police Amendment Act, I think is very short, a few pages long, and the heart of the bill addresses that concern of the public. Section 46.2 will give the minister the authority, the power to "establish an integrated investigative unit and authorize it to act as another police service for the purposes of conducting an investigation under section 46.1."

Now, Mr. Chairman, I've been trying to look around to see if the integrated investigative unit as a term – it's a new term, it seems to me – is defined anywhere in this piece of proposed legislation. I don't find it there. So the absence of a clear definition of what this proposed legislation intends this term to mean to me is a serious weakness in the proposed legislation.

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, 46.2(2) states that the minister may

- (a) designate a person as head of the integrated investigative unit, and
- (b) appoint special constables as investigators under the authority of the head of the integrated investigative unit.

Now, a very serious question that this part of the bill begs is what is going to be the composition of this integrated investigative unit, even when it's clearly defined. I think there's a need for a clear provision in the legislation to identify the composition in clear terms: its membership, who will chair it, what are the different representatives who are going to represent different segments of our communities, including the law enforcement community, the judicial community, and the regular, ordinary, hard-working Albertans as citizens, to whom the police service is expected to provide services. There's an absence of any attempt to clearly articulate the membership of such an integrated investigative unit, to have a clear definition of such a unit. The provisions in the proposed legislation I think will still leave the public unsatisfied with respect to the representation of different segments of the community which have a real stake in the success of the proposed investigative unit and their ability to conduct investigations which will not only be independent but seem to be independent of the police services themselves.

The amendment before us makes an attempt, therefore, at least to address one of the two concerns that I've expressed. It doesn't necessarily deal with the definition of the integrated investigative unit, but it does in a serious way make an attempt to outline, enumerate if you wish, the various stakeholders in the community who should be represented on it: a retired judge, a retired or former Crown prosecutor, a retired or former police officer. Here we have the judiciary because of the expertise; a Crown prosecutor, a very important part of the court processes; a retired police officer – it's very, very important that the police be represented, albeit in the form of a retired police officer – and at least two members who are ordinary and regular citizens from our community.

As to the size of this investigative unit it certainly will need to have at least five members, and out of those one of the two regular citizens will be designated as the head of the unit. I think that this is also a good thing. Albertans who are not specialists in any aspect of the judicial system, of the justice system, of the law enforcement system I think have both concerns, legitimate abilities, and capacities to serve as heads. It also in a sense removes it one step further. It really puts this unit at arm's length from any specialists. It gives regular citizens a real presence and ability to influence the proceedings of this in order that the decisions made by this integrated investigative unit are, indeed, independent and seen to be independent and that they, therefore, serve to restore both respect and confidence in our police services.

Will it be really difficult for the minister to find a retired judge to be on such a unit or a retired prosecutor or a retired or former police officer? I don't think so. I think that this is a concern, a legitimate one. I appreciate the fact that the matter of whether or not this proposal is practical is raised, but I have a feeling that it's a concern that really shouldn't be a serious obstacle. This concern does put a finger on something, but there really shouldn't be a problem in implementing this particular proposal which is contained in this amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to lend my support to this amendment before the House and hope that other members will also give it serious consideration.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to begin by saying that I do appreciate the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. As a matter of fact, recently the leader of his party made me an honorary member of the NDP caucus. I thought I would try to use that to sit in on their discussions about question period, but the leader quickly told me that that was not permitted. So I withdrew that membership very quickly.

As much as his arguments are excellent, his arguments to the amendment to Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, and as much as his arguments are convincing, I'm afraid that I'm going to have to side with the Member for Battle River-Wainwright. The Member for Battle River-Wainwright talked about some situations that I think merit further discussion. He talked about the possible impossibility of finding a retired judge, a retired or former Crown prosecutor, a retired or former police officer, and not fewer than two members of the public. Or least a difficulty. At least a difficulty.

Come on. Let's be realistic. What does the word "retired" mean? I know what it means to me. It means that you're done. It means that it's time to take it easy. It means that it's time to go out and enjoy the big world that's out there. Mr. Chairman, as much as I absolutely appreciate our retired people and wish that they would come back and help us out in this severely underserved workforce

that we have, I want to grant them that opportunity to stay retired. I want to let them be retired because that's important. I know that when I retire, I hope that people will just let me retire. Yes, they have lots of skills; they have lots of abilities.

Mr. Chairman, this amendment, I have to say, is not one that is going to be supported by the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. Again, I appreciate the comments and, certainly, the debate that has been going on, but I will cast my vote with the Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is indeed my pleasure to rise and participate in debate on amendment A1 to Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, 2007. First of all, in response to my colleague from Drayton Valley-Calmar, I'd just like to point out that his very own government has a bill on the Order Paper, Bill 28, which would extend judges holding their seats past the age of 70. It looks like rather than retiring sooner, they're actually going to be sticking around longer. So I'll be curious to see how you vote on that bill, hon. member.

Mr. Chairman, not only is it true in politics, but it's certainly true in the case of investigations where police wrongdoing is alleged that perception is reality. Police forces all across North America have certainly come to recognize this over the past several years, and civilian oversight, public oversight into police activities is a trend that clearly has a lot of . . .

Mr. Elsalhy: Traction.

Mr. R. Miller: A lot of traction, the Member for Edmonton-McClung says. It's not quite the word I was looking for, but I think that people understand.

This is definitely a movement whose time has come, and police forces across the country recognize that and are dealing with it. As my colleague from Edmonton-McClung pointed out earlier today, certainly, this is something that those of us in the Official Opposition have been calling for for some time. So we're supportive of the move in that direction.

In speaking to this particular amendment, I really, really do not understand, Mr. Chair, why anybody in this House wouldn't support this amendment. It's a rational, well-thought-out amendment. You know, I think that it would be fair to say there are times when members opposite think that the opposition brings forward amendments just for the sake of bringing forward amendments. Of course, that would never ever happen. There are always good, well-thought-out reasons behind every amendment that we bring forward, but this one might in fact be one of the best that I've ever seen.

As the Member for Battle River-Wainwright pointed out, it's exactly what you need if you're going to have some sort of public oversight. It's exactly what you need: a judge or a retired judge or a former judge. You know what? If government members have their way, we'll soon be electing judges, and there'll be a lot more former judges than there ever were before. So I don't think that we'll have a problem finding former judges. A judge obviously makes sense. A retired or former Crown prosecutor, a retired or former police officer, no fewer than two members of the public: it's almost a no-brainer. It makes so much sense. So I'm really not sure why members opposite wouldn't support this.

The other thing that has to be pointed out is that the minister still retains an awful lot of control and power over the structure of this committee even if this amendment were to pass. It says, "not fewer

than 2 members of the public." The minister has complete jurisdiction to add more than that if he sees fit. So I think that it's very well thought out.

The other thing that I would just like to point out, Mr. Chairman, is in terms of supporting this amendment. We've heard now from two members on the governing side who have indicated that they have real concerns about whether or not we could actually locate a former judge or a former prosecutor that would be willing to serve on this committee. What would be the consequences if, in fact, we weren't able to do that? Would we not be able to strike the committee? Is it their fear that we wouldn't be able to do that or that we might be breaking the government's own law if we did strike a committee that didn't have a former judge or a former prosecutor on it? Well, that's not going to happen. In this House the minister, when discussing this bill, said that he was quite prepared to go to other Canadian jurisdictions outside of Alberta to look for the appropriate experts to be named to the panel, and he said that he would even, if necessary, go abroad to find these individuals.

Now, is the Member for Battle River-Wainwright or the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar suggesting that the minister would not be able to find a retired judge somewhere in North America? The minister himself has already said that he's more than willing to look outside of the Alberta jurisdiction, whether it be in other Canadian jurisdictions or perhaps abroad, if necessary, to find these people. So there is obviously no concern whatsoever about whether or not we can find a retired judge or a retired prosecutor.

Given that revelation, Mr. Chairman, I'm sure that now the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar and the Member for Battle River-Wainwright will understand that their fears about this amendment somehow tying the government's hands are unfounded and that, in fact, it does deserve their support as well. The minister himself has said that he's willing to look outside of Alberta to find these people if necessary. Their own minister has indicated that their fears are unfounded.

I look forward to this very well thought out amendment receiving the full support of the House. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you wanted to participate in this debate too?

Dr. Pannu: Yes, sir. Mr. Chairman, thank you. I'll be brief. One oversight on my part. I wanted to assure the House that I'm not absolutely a hundred per cent satisfied with this amendment. I noticed one absence here, and that is for retired professors to also be included specifically here. At least a retired professor of law should be included in the provisions. I have some reservations about it. But in spite of that, that reservation notwithstanding, I still support the amendment.

Now, I want to just briefly also indicate to the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar and the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright that, you know, lots of people are retiring these days, including judges and police officers and prosecutors. In fact, there's a concern that there will be far too many retired folks like this around. So I don't think that there is, really, a ground for concern that the minister is going to have great difficulty finding a retired person designated in this amendment.

The last point I want to make, Mr. Chairman, is that the objective of this bill is to move towards what we have been pushing this government for a long time. I have in my hand a copy of a letter that my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Calder wrote to the then Solicitor General, dated July 11, 2006, in which he calls on the minister to bring forward a piece of legislation that will ensure civilian oversight of police services and police investigations.

4:30

So in principle it seems to be a step in the right direction but falls terribly short in terms of substance of the provision that's made here, and that is to really establish an investigative unit that does in fact qualify as a civilian unit representing, as I said, various stakeholders in the community who appropriately need to be represented on this unit.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to speak to amendment A1 that will be amending Bill 16. I feel very strongly that this is an excellent amendment and really must be carefully looked at by everyone in this House.

One of the things about police, I think, is that we all have been brought up to believe that the police are trusted without question. Certainly, I think that I was taken aback when I heard all of the stories about the RCMP because when I grew up – and perhaps I'm still naive at this age – I really believed that the Mounties were to be trusted, that they had a code of ethics, that they looked after themselves. Unfortunately, it appears that it may well not be the case. But I don't believe that we should ever allow ourselves to be in a position where we cannot trust our police. We have to be able to not only trust the police, but we have to be able to trust the process that the police use to police themselves and that we, in turn, from the outside police them.

I have spoken with some of those that are our finest in blue, and they actually have expressed to me that they do feel better by having an outside influence looking in. They felt that it cut down bias. They also felt that it cut down some of the camaraderie that people don't want to break within the ranks of the people that they work with. They felt that outside oversight and outside questions would perhaps be able to protect them when, in fact, for lack of a better word, they actually wanted to be a whistle-blower, that they could do it in forms that would protect them in a way, although that shouldn't have to happen. They should be able to feel free to be, certainly, whistle-blowers in matters that would be of such importance when it's our police that are involved. But they really did feel that if there was nothing wrong, there would be nothing to hide.

It also would help to open up the process to the public. I think it's very important, as I mentioned before, that the public feel absolutely secure in the fact that their police are honest, straightforward, and totally trustworthy.

One of the things that I think is really important is having two members of the public. The comparison to using two members of the public in terms of a jury, I think, is a very good one. People will step up, and people will do their very best, and people will bring a sense of fairness, particularly to something of this great importance. I think that juries over a number of years have proven that people that you may not think would have, perhaps, the expertise or, in fact, the interest do step up to the plate when they're actually put in a place of responsibility, when they're responsible and have power over other people.

I'm not sure that finding people to serve would possibly be any problem at all. There are many, many people out there. I also heard from one of my hon. colleagues that when you're done, you're done. However, I would like to think that when I'm done is when they've closed the box and not before. I believe that I don't stand alone, and I think there are many, many people out there that want to contribute to society for as long as they can.

One of the other reasons that I would like to see the outside investigative unit is because, in particular, I still have a problem with the sheriffs department actually reporting directly to the minister. I would have preferred that they report to a police force that was not controlled by the minister. I'm just not sure that that's the way it should be going. I understand that it is, but I'm still not comfortable with it. There really must be an oversight outside of the government, particularly for the sheriffs, and certainly outside of all the other forces.

This is a very good amendment. I would like to ask everyone to please really give some consideration on how important it is to have outside oversight.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:37 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Agnihotri	Griffiths	Pannu
Blakeman	MacDonald	Pastoor
Elsalhy	Miller, R.	Swann

Against the motion:

Abbott	Haley	Mitzel
Amery	Hancock	Morton
Backs	Hinman	Oberle
Cao	Horne	Ouellette
Cardinal	Knight	Rodney
Coutts	Lindsay	Rogers
Ducharme	Magnus	Stevens
Evans	Mar	VanderBurg
Fritz	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Graydon	Melchin	

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 29
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

4:50

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is with a heavy heart that I rise again and reparticipate in the debate on Bill 16. It should come as no surprise to you that I have another amendment to again try to make this bill even better. I will start by giving it to the hard-working page here to distribute to yourself for your attention and to other members as well.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, make sure that the original copy comes to the table first, and if you wait for a moment, we'll wait until the amendments are distributed.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yep.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, for the record we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A2.

Hon. member, you may now proceed.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I trust that most if not all of the hon. colleagues have received this amendment A2. What I'm trying to do here is basically encourage the hon. Solicitor General, the hon. Minister of Public Security, to activate this special investigations unit in a structured fashion so it's not solely left up to him or her. It would basically stipulate in the act now when and the conditions whereby this investigative unit, this team, is brought in.

As per the amendment, Mr. Chairman, basically in section 2(a), subsection (2), strikes out "may do any one or more of the following" and substitutes instead "shall do any one or more of the following." I have to really pause here for a second and tell you, Mr. Chairman, and tell the hon. members that I'm not saying which of those things under that that I am requesting or requiring the hon. minister to do. I'm not saying which of those he or she has to do, but I'm saying that he must act. Basically, any time we have serious injury or death or those sensitive or contentious allegations, then instead of saying "may," we are now saying "shall." It basically offers us the assurance that this unit is not going to be entirely up to the will of the minister or, you know, the Solicitor General of the day. Now any person occupying that position knows that he or she has to bring in this special investigative unit.

The other is adding a clause (d) after clause (c). Now it would read: "In accordance with section 46.2, direct the head of an integrated investigative unit to conduct an investigation into the incident or complaint, which may include taking over an ongoing investigation at any stage." This is similar to what's already in place. What we're trying to do here is just to replace "may" with "shall." It's a simple change, and it should really not be looked at as very controversial or contentious. What we're saying is that it should be activated all the time whenever there is a serious incident to be investigated.

Now, we don't want the impact of the bill to be left open to interpretation. The way it's worded now, Mr. Chairman, it is not mandatory for this investigative unit to be utilized in an event of a serious incident because it leaves this authority resting with the minister of the day. Discretion is warranted in some cases, but sometimes it's simpler, cleaner, and probably more beneficial for the minister to say: "You know what? Legislation requires me to do it, and I am moving ahead. I am doing it because I'm required to do it by legislation." You know, in some cases we might be leaving the hon. minister to receive criticism by certain people or certain members of the public or certain members of the media or, in fact, even the opposition: why didn't you? We don't want to leave it up to the interpretation. Then we're inviting that criticism: "Why didn't you? You should have."

The other thing is with respect to the mechanism to conduct independent investigations. Again, I have to emphasize that I'm not asking for any one of those clauses that comes after one of the following. I'm basically saying that one of those has to be implemented in all cases where serious police wrongdoing is alleged. You don't want to have a permissive component of this bill. You want it to be prescriptive. You want it to be stipulated. It's solid. It has to be adhered to all the time.

An incident involving death or serious injury or, in fact, as the minister indicated in debate yesterday, if it's corruption or some other serious or significant complaint – and also in reference to my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods. She advocated that in all of those cases this special unit is going to be activated and brought in. So converting the "may" to "shall" I think achieves that. I'm trying not to be critical of the minister because I understand how ministers want to have some discretion and some room to manoeuvre, but as I said, it's probably advantageous to all involved. All parties would probably find this favourable. It's a step in the right direction to say

that the minister has options and he or she has different choices to pick from, but I think making it prescriptive, not permissive, is the direction I would be opting for.

As such, Mr. Chairman, and not to unnecessarily prolong debate, I would invite other members to tell me whether or not they agree. I thank you for this opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour to speak to Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, 2007, and to the amendment suggested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. In these times, particularly in democratic states, people are looking for evidence that not only is the right thing being done; it is being seen to be done. Issues around conflict of interest, particularly, have to be addressed in a very open and transparent way. I think this amendment tries to take the next step beyond what the bill amendment is already doing, which is positive.

There's no question that the establishment of the integrated investigative unit and the amendment allowing for utilization of sheriffs and provincial protection officers are good changes. This amendment will simply add a degree of objectivity, of transparency, and is going to find the right balance between judgment, which may be considered political at the level of the director, and accountability to the public. I think this amendment does find that fine line and helps us as public to address the erosion of trust in some of our official bodies, including the RCMP in the recent months. There needs to be a degree of distance and objectivity and certainty about the ability to trust decisions that are being made at these levels, particularly in life and death questions around the use and abuse of power and where an unfortunate, serious injury or death has occurred.

So I would stand in support of this amendment and hope we will see some other free thinkers supporting this amendment as well. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.
5:00

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 16 and specifically to amendment A2. I appreciate the hon. members for Edmonton-McClung and Calgary-Mountain View for their desire to amend the Police Amendment Act, 2007 – and we're already going through that amendment – to make it better.

The question that I have here again is all about the trust and being able to know that we have a force out there that's trustworthy and that they're not corrupt. When you look at developing countries, if you don't have a justice system, it's very difficult for peace and prosperity to follow, so I think everybody in the House here very much understands the importance of the Police Act.

My concern is just on having an automatic default. It says in here that if there is a "death of any person that may have resulted from the actions of a police officer," it's going to have to go into this inquiry. Unfortunately, because of the job that they have to carry out, there are deaths, and not all of them need to go into an inquiry. I would have to agree with the present bill – that the minister may at his discretion if he sees there's a problem – rather than an automatic default. We would have many investigations that I feel would not be appropriate or necessary for the public at large to pay for in order to cover these things.

I appreciate the desire that we want an excellent police force. We want one that's totally trusted by the people of Alberta so that we

can feel safe in our communities and that it's not being directed by a rogue government, but I don't think that we need to go so far as the amendment. So I would be voting against the amendment that's currently on the table.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: On the bill itself. Any other speakers?
Are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 16 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 3 and Bill 16.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 3 and Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
Bill 17
Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it is my pleasure this afternoon to rise on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill and move second reading of Bill 17, the Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill is intended to clarify the law for Albertans and to avoid unnecessary litigation in two areas. The first amendment deals with the recovery of possession of land, and the second relates to cases where there is a conflict of laws between Alberta and another jurisdiction. I'll speak to each amendment separately.

Let me begin by letting members know a little bit about this

statute. Generally speaking, the Limitations Act sets out the time in which an individual may bring a claim, the objective being the timely resolution of disputes. The Limitations Act came into force on March 1, 1999, when it replaced the Limitation of Actions Act. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Law Reform Institute in their May 2003 final report No. 89 on the Limitations Act, Adverse Possession and Lasting Improvements, raised a concern as a result of the repeal of the Limitation of Actions Act. That concern was that it may be unclear as to how the limitation period regarding an owner's right for the recovery of possession of land under the Limitations Act now works.

Essentially, the current wording of the Limitations Act does not clearly set out the start point for the 10-year limitation period. This is the period in which the landowner has to take action to recover his land from another. Given that there was no intention to change the law in this area, this amendment is being brought forward to clarify the effect of the 10-year limitation period. It's also being brought forward to clarify when the 10-year period begins and the consequences of the expiry of the 10-year period. As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, these amendments were suggested in the Alberta Law Reform Institute report.

The area of the law dealing with the recovery of possession of land has been part of the law in Alberta since 1870. The law has evolved since that time, but the concept has basically not changed. Mr. Speaker, this is an area of the law that crosses property law, land titles, and limitations law. However, our amendment deals with the limitations law component.

The bill also includes an update to a reference in the Land Titles Act. That act still refers to the former Limitation of Actions Act when it should refer to the new Limitations Act, so the bill makes that change as well. In summary, Mr. Speaker, the covenant didn't intend to change the law in 1999, and the amendment is being brought forward to simply put the law back where it was. I encourage all members of the House to support this amendment.

Now, the second amendment addresses cases where there is a conflict of laws. Section 12 of the Limitations Act applies to cases where a claim is brought in an Alberta court, but because of the facts of the case the law of another jurisdiction must be used to decide the case. The wording of the section is being changed to make it clear that where the limitation period for bringing a claim in the other jurisdiction has expired, the courts in Alberta will not hear the claim. Mr. Speaker, the concern has arisen in cases where the parties are residents of Alberta, but they have a car accident in another province or state.

For example, in the Castillo case, which was heard by the Supreme Court of Canada, the parties were residents of Alberta and brought a claim in Alberta for a car accident that they had in California. Now, our limitations law allows a claim to be brought in our courts for two years from the time of the accident, but California law only allows a claim for one year after the accident. The Supreme Court applied the shorter California limitations law. Since the parties could not bring the claim in California because the one year had expired, they could not bring the claim in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, section 12 is currently being misinterpreted by some lawyers and their clients. The provision has been incorrectly interpreted to allow Alberta limitations law to override the limitations law of another jurisdiction. Therefore, I am recommending on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill that the wording of the section be changed to make it clear that where the limitation period for bringing a claim in the other jurisdiction has expired, the courts in Alberta will not hear the claim. This amendment will not change the current laws decided by the Supreme Court in the Castillo case.

5:10

As well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that in August 2005 the Uniform Law Conference of Canada, in its model legislation for limitations, recommended similar wording to the current amendment. I hope the members of this Legislature will also offer their support for this amendment.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would reiterate that both of these amendments are intended to clarify the law for Albertans with the intention of avoiding unnecessary litigation in the future. I encourage all members to join me in support of Bill 17.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to respond to the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar moving second reading on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill with respect to this Bill 17, Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, in my role as the shadow minister of Justice and to lead debate on this amendment.

First, I wish to thank the hon. Attorney General for providing me with a bill brief on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. [some applause] As signalled by the Opposition House Leader, that's a welcome turn of events, and we really, sincerely appreciate this. It makes our job easier in the opposition, and it creates this atmosphere of co-operation that we're all aspiring toward. I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, given his extensive legal expertise, was more than capable of providing that bill brief himself but chose to ask the hon. minister to do it on his behalf, which is fine. That was excellent.

The second thing I would say is that my caucus colleagues and I are likely going to lend our support to this bill, partly in answer to the prayers from the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, who urged all of us to vote in favour.

I'm hoping that it's clear to this House that my caucus colleagues and myself don't necessarily hold up legislation when there is nothing controversial or contentious in it, and we don't always just say no or oppose government ideas if they're fair and justified. It is unfortunate, however, that sometimes we feel that the opposite treatment is awarded to us when the government votes against our ideas regardless of how good they are, but we're hoping to change that; as an example, amendment A1 to Bill 16, which was defeated today, unfortunately. I'm still saddened by that fact, my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford, but we move on. We have other business to do and attend to, so here we are.

The rationale for our position, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, there are no major concerns with this amendment due to the fact that it's almost entirely based upon suggestions made by the Alberta Law Reform Institute after they conducted a thorough and fairly technical and fairly complex analysis.

Speaking of technical information, Mr. Speaker, it's really a unique experience for me now that I'm the Official Opposition critic for both Justice and Solicitor General that I have to read critically, if I may add, bills that are of an extremely technical nature. We all understand the limitation in doing that because we don't all equally understand lawyer language, but we're getting better at it, and practice makes perfect, as they say.

The portion of this bill on the conflict of laws is consistent with the Supreme Court of Canada. As referenced by the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, the Castillo case makes that clear. Obviously, the ruling of the highest court in Canada would be the precedent for decisions delivered in all lower courts, and amending provincial law to reflect this opinion is probably justified. As well, the wording is similar to the legislation proposed by the Uniform

Law Conference of Canada. So in reading those opinions, we don't think that there are any major negative impacts arising from this bill or the changes it is proposing.

I understand that some of the discrepancy or some of this difficulty that we're now trying to rectify stems from a private member's bill in 1996, which was passed in 1999 or received royal assent in 1999, and it sort of created this problem. So attending to it, you know, six or seven years later is warranted, and I don't think we are going to disapprove.

Now, I just had a question, and it's basically the layman in me speaking, Mr. Speaker. When we're talking about land and we're talking about somebody trying to recover land because a neighbour infringed on your land or occupied parts of it and so on – now, we're talking about 10 years, if I understand correctly – how are attempts to re-enter documented? How are they verified? Let's say that there are two neighbouring ranchers or farmers, and there's a dispute on sort of a section in between their two farms. Who owns it, and who doesn't? It's within this 10-year period, and there has been an attempt or more for re-entry. How do we document it? How do we verify if, in fact, an attempt was made and how successful? You know, what if the original owner is denied re-entry with whatever means available to that other owner: if force was involved or if the denial of access was of a criminal nature? Then also: what recourse is there if somebody attempts re-entry and is not successful? You know, we have many capable lawyers in the government caucus, and I think it would be appreciated if they would offer some of that clarification.

The other thing with respect to the conflict of laws is just a question with respect to: how frequently does this situation arise or exist? How many times in any given period of time does it materialize? I don't question the need to fix something that is not perfect, you know, so that's not where I'm coming from. I'm just saying that besides motor vehicle accidents or things like that, how many times and what other examples are there that warrant amending this particular legislation?

With that, Mr. Speaker, and as promised, I am going to lend my support. I really look forward to hearing some of those answers in Committee of the Whole.

I thank you for this opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 17, Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. I want to commend the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for a lucid presentation. It's exceptional clarity that he has mustered to speak to this very important change in the legislation. He may find it difficult to believe – it may ring strange to his ears – but because of the clarity and lucidity with which he made the argument, I'm going to take him at his word and extend my support for the amendments being proposed here.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung, of course, has reiterated the points made by the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar and added credibility to the arguments made by the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. Given the two exceptionally well presented sets of arguments and seeing the overwhelming consensus on this crucial piece of legislation, I find it difficult to defy what common sense tells me, which is to extend my support, so I'm happy to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think, as has been pointed out, the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar did an admirable job of explaining the reasons for these changes, but two things he didn't address in his comments, and I'm hoping that he can bring these answers forward to us at the committee stage. If the problem is as a result of legislation that was passed in 1999 – and we're now in 2007 – I am curious when these two discrepancies were first discovered and why it took this long to come forward to the House now with the amendments.

5:20

I'm going to guess that the Castillo case, which I think was in 2005, might answer the one instance but not the other, so if the hon. member would not mind, I would appreciate having that information in front of us when we go to committee.

As has been outlined previously, this is a bill that will have our support, and I'm happy to give that. Just a little clarity would be appreciated.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

Any other speakers?

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill to close debate.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank the hon. members of the opposition for their comments. Certainly, to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford: we will have a look at this 1999 versus 2007, when did the two discrepancies get discovered, and we will get back to you in Committee of the Whole. I fully trust the excellent staff that has worked on this bill as well as the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill to answer those questions with regard to the recovery of land and the conflict of laws.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move second reading and take my seat.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a second time]

Bill 18 Judicature Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move for second reading Bill 18, Judicature Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill amends the Judicature Act to empower Alberta's courts to deal more effectively with vexatious litigants. Vexatious litigants are those who engage in legal proceedings without having a legitimate claim requiring resolution. The vexatious litigant may sue in order to annoy, harass, or financially punish other people.

A vexatious litigant is someone who persistently files proceedings that have already been determined by a court, persistently files proceedings that can't succeed or that have no reasonable expectation of providing relief, persistently files proceedings for improper purposes, inappropriately uses previously raised grounds and issues in subsequent proceedings, persistently fails to pay the costs ordered by a court as a result of unsuccessful proceedings, persistently takes unsuccessful appeals from judicial decisions, or persistently engages in inappropriate courtroom behaviour.

Vexatious litigants can put a significant strain on court resources and others unnecessarily. Vexatious litigation is an abuse of the

court process that wastes the time of judges and administrative staff and prevents other legitimate claims from being dealt with.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Those at the receiving end of a vexatious litigant's lawsuit can find themselves in a very difficult situation. For example, there have been situations where a vexatious litigant launches a baseless claim for the sole purpose of harassing or impeding a person who has a legitimate claim against them. Vexatious litigants can also force others to incur unnecessary legal bills. The person with the legitimate claim must direct their lawyer to deal with the vexatious claim, which takes money and adds to the overall time required for resolving the legitimate claim.

Some common characteristics often apply to vexatious litigants. They may include opinionated and narcissistic behaviour and asking the same questions repeatedly. For some vexatious litigants losing a case may fuel feelings of injustice and lead to ongoing legal action, and some exhibit behaviour that is consistent with some types of mental illness.

When a litigant is behaving in a vexatious manner, the courts must have the power to deal with the problem in an appropriate and effective way. Since lawyers can be disciplined and in extreme cases disbarred for participating in abuse of the court process, vexatious litigants typically represent themselves in court. In June 2006 the Court of Queen's Bench suggested that Alberta Justice consider the recommendations contained in a report on how to deal with vexatious litigants. The report was authored by the Law Reform Commission of Nova Scotia.

Working with those recommendations, Alberta Justice consulted three courts, the legal profession, and nongovernment organizations in September 2006 on proposed amendments to the Judicature Act. With valuable comments and input received from the courts and other stakeholders during the consultation, Alberta Justice proposed amendments to the vexatious litigants provision in this act. The Judicature Act deals with the jurisdiction and powers of the Court of Queen's Bench and the Court of Appeal. It also deals with the administration of justice in the province, including some matters of the Provincial Court of Alberta. Amendments to this act will give these three courts more powers to deal with applications concerning vexatious litigants.

Mr. Speaker, access to justice is a fundamental right in our society. Restricting that right is a serious matter and not an issue to be taken lightly. However, vexatious litigants can pose a serious problem for Alberta's civil justice system. The amendments we are proposing take into consideration what the three Alberta courts and other stakeholders have told us through the consultation process.

Currently the Court of Queen's Bench and the Court of Appeal can make vexatious litigant orders, but the Provincial Court cannot. Vexatious litigants appear in all courts, and the most appropriate forum to hear an application is in the court where the proceedings are being heard. Amendments to this act will give the Court of Queen's Bench, the Court of Appeal, and the Provincial Court the jurisdiction to hear vexatious litigant applications. These amendments will give the three courts authority to make an order against a vexatious spokesperson or agent. This is particularly important in Provincial Court, where the majority of litigants are not represented by a lawyer.

The three courts also have the power to order that a vexatious litigant be precluded from continuing an existing proceeding. In Alberta the Attorney General's consent is required before a court can deal with an individual who may be abusing the legal process. In B.C., Ontario, Quebec, and P.E.I. the consent of the Attorney General is not required for a vexatious litigant application.

We are also proposing that the Attorney General's consent be replaced with a requirement to be given notice of vexatious litigant applications. The Attorney General would continue to have the right to appear and be heard on vexatious litigant applications. This will allow the Attorney General to intervene in cases of public interest.

We are proposing that the current provision be amended to include a nonexhaustive list of factors that the courts and others may use as a guide to determine what constitutes vexatious behaviour.

The amendments will also empower the courts to prevent an individual who has been found to be a vexatious litigant from commencing vexatious proceedings through an entity such as a corporation.

As is now the case, if the court makes an order prohibiting a vexatious litigant from commencing further proceedings, a vexatious litigant will be able to ask the court for permission to file a lawsuit if he or she has a legitimate claim. For example, if a vexatious litigant is involved in a car accident that is not their fault and the at-fault party does not voluntarily pay for the damages, the vexatious litigant should be given access to the court to pursue the claim. The amendments would require the vexatious litigant to ask permission of the court where they want to file the claim, not the court that made the vexatious litigant order against them. The court may impose conditions or terms when allowing a vexatious litigant to start a new proceeding or continue an existing one.

These amendments will allow parties to a vexatious lawsuit as well as the clerk of the court and the Attorney General to initiate a vexatious litigant application. Amendments will also allow any other person to ask the court for permission to make a vexatious litigant application.

These amendments will clarify that a single justice of the Court of Appeal may hear vexatious litigant applications, and they will also clarify that an order made by the Provincial Court is binding only on that court.

Finally, it should be noted that amendments to the Judicature Act do not take away or diminish the powers of the court to dismiss or stay a lawsuit that is an abuse of the court's process. The Judicature Amendment Act, 2007, will improve ability of the courts to respond in a more timely and effective manner when vexatious litigants are involved.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, improving the effectiveness of the courts and respect for the law have been priorities for me since I became minister in 2004. I'm pleased that this amendment will further those goals. I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, two members have indicated their intent to participate: the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. If there are others, please notify.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, one more time, I'm indeed pleased to rise and participate in debate and to respond to the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General moving second reading of Bill 18, Judicature Amendment Act, 2007, in my role as the shadow minister and to lead debate.

I forgot to thank the hon. minister when we were debating Bill 17 because before he actually shared the bill brief with me and with my researcher, we actually had an initial meeting in the very beginning when our shadow cabinet was shuffled to respond to the cabinet shuffle on the government side. I took over this portfolio as of

January 7, I believe, and shortly after the hon. minister and one of his assistants met with me and my executive assistant as well just to welcome me and to wish me luck and to offer his co-operation and his resources whenever I have questions.

I think this is the model that should be copied, and I trust that most of my colleagues in the Official Opposition are receiving the same co-operation, I hope. This is what I view as a true democracy, and I know that the minister is pleased that I am thanking him. That is the right thing to do. Certainly, since January this minister has demonstrated an awareness and an appreciation for the work of the opposition, and we're trying to reciprocate by not unnecessarily holding up legislation. He's also going for some sort of a record, I think, because bills 17, 18, 19, you know, a few of them are his. I think he is likely going to get his record this year as well.

Now, having said that, I don't think I have any major concerns with respect to this bill, but I would like to walk through it and, as my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona indicated, offer qualified and positive feedback with respect to this suggested amendment.

What does it really try to do, and what is the rationale behind it? It is a bill, Mr. Speaker, designed to enhance the ability of the courts, as was mentioned, to deal with vexatious litigants. I am in no way going to try to compete with the explanation offered by the hon. minister given his background and his excellent support staff, that is working behind the scenes to make his ideas come to fruition in this House.

However, my initial response was something like: how is this going to affect access to the courts and the ability of citizens to seek legal remedy in court? My approach is that this access to the courts is paramount. It's very important, and it should be sacred, and it should be protected so that nothing we do in this House and nothing we pass in this House would infringe on the rights of people and their right to access to the court to seek legal action. We should never tamper with this right. Having said that, I don't think this bill does that. It doesn't tamper with this right. It doesn't reduce it. However, it's something we have to be always aware of and always on the watch for.

In practical terms, as well, some people abuse this access, and they put undue strain on the resources available and cause unnecessary delays and unnecessary waste in our legal system and, Mr. Speaker, potentially harm others as well. So my approach today is one of striking a balance. On the one hand, we need to protect people's rights to have access to the courts and to legal action, but on the same level we also have to define who is a vexatious litigant. Whom do we classify as one of those, and what do we do to deal with him or her?

Section 23(2) sheds some light and offers some examples. The hon. minister went through some of those; for example, a person who is persistently bringing proceedings before the court to determine an issue that has already been determined, somebody who is persistently bringing forward, you know, applications or proceedings that cannot succeed or that have no reasonable expectation of providing relief, somebody who is bringing forward legal action for improper purposes or inappropriately using previously raised grounds and issues in subsequent proceedings, somebody who is persistently failing to pay the costs of unsuccessful proceedings — they just keep suing, but they don't really cover the fees that accompany legal action — somebody who is persistently taking unsuccessful appeals from judicial decisions or engaging in inappropriate courtroom behaviour. So that's quite exhaustive, Mr. Speaker, I would argue. I think we've all heard or learned of situations where a person might fit this description.

In that regard, yes, certain people are abusing their access right, their access privilege, and maybe we should, you know, make it less

easy for them to participate in court action like this, which basically might be wasteful, might be harmful to others, and limit them to only when it's absolutely necessary and when it's absolutely appropriate for them to have that access. So in that regard I understand where this bill is coming from.

Vexatious litigants and the proceedings they initiate are not just mild annoyances or inconveniences to the civil justice system. They are so extreme that in invoking the right to justice, they may actually undermine the rights of others, as I said. As a result, there is a need for legislation which empowers the courts to dismiss vexatious litigants but which also permits someone to seek leave to have the order lifted if and when circumstances change. So what I'm saying, really, is that, yes, courts have to have the right to dismiss vexatious litigants, but it is not a permanent prohibition on these guys. If situations change, if circumstances change, or if they can demonstrate that there is genuine need for them to come before the courts, then I think that this prohibition should be lifted. If we do it by appeal or do it by written submission or whatever the mechanism is remains to be seen. But I think that it is not something that is permanent, and it shouldn't be permanent.

While legislation which deals with vexatious litigants clearly has access to justice implications, the legislation does not constitute a denial of access. That is paramount, as I stated, Mr. Speaker. It's not also a constitutional violation. I'll bet you that some of those vexatious litigants themselves are going to look at this and say: aha, I now have an opportunity to sue based on a constitutional challenge. But I disagree, and I don't think that courts are going to think, you know, contrary to my opinion.

Basically, I have information here from my researcher who indicated that the Ontario Court of Appeal has summarized the nature of vexatious litigation as follows: it doesn't take away an individual's access and right to address; rather, it provides that if an order is made against him or her under the legislation, he or she cannot seek redress until he or she has satisfied the proper authority that the proposed legal proceedings are not an abuse of process of the court. So it is warranted, but again they can demonstrate to the court that this situation is different or unique. The court has the ability to say: yes, this time you go ahead.

5:40

So what else are we trying to cover here, Mr. Speaker? There is one section here with respect to the application: "Where on application or on its own motion, with notice to the Minister of Justice." I agree with the minister that the minister does not need to be asked to give permission every time. I think a notice to the minister is adequate, and in so doing, the court is still notifying the minister, and it's still involving the minister but indirectly because, really, to expect the minister to give permission each and every time – and these vexatious claims might be increasing in number, and they might be increasing in complexity and gravity – would place an unfair amount of pressure and increase the workload of the minister. I agree that notifying the minister is adequate, and we shouldn't really require him or her to issue that permission every time, every single time.

So to summarize, Mr. Speaker, I don't disagree with this particular amendment, and overall it is not too contentious. If I actually had one little clarification to seek, it would be the issue of the balance of power, basically, between the courts and the Minister of Justice. Action should be taken to confirm that section 23.1(3) of the Judicature Amendment Act gives the Attorney General "the right to appear and be heard" in relation to vexatious litigant orders made by a court on its own motion.

If section 23.1(3), you know, with respect to those conditions requiring the Attorney General to appear and to be heard is inter-

preted such as that the Attorney General does not have the right to appear and be heard in relation to orders made by the court on its own motion, then, the courts will be in a position to declare litigants and proceedings vexatious without the safeguard of the Attorney General appearing as needed. So that's going back to the notification component, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that it's not going to hopefully deny or prevent the Attorney General from appearing if need be.

I know that this is getting a little technical, but these things have to be raised, Mr. Speaker. So, overall, I think we're in favour. This gives the courts a tool to protect the integrity of the system and to dismiss people who are placing undue burden and undue strain on the resources. We all know how hard our legal people work and how busy they are, and sometimes they're busy doing stuff that should have been dismissed from day one.

So in that regard I don't find it too objectionable, and I am going to vote in favour of this amendment, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise in second reading and support the principles behind Bill 18, the Judicature Amendment Act, 2007, for a couple of reasons. I think most hon. members would not be surprised to hear me get up and defend an open access to the legal system, but I think I've now experienced my own small versions of people being vexatious and continually bringing back claims. Even on the level of a constituency office you start to get a real feel for how this can in fact deny access to others in the court system because if they're taking up the time, someone else is not getting their case heard or getting the assistance that they need or being able to find the justice that they are seeking.

You know, I don't know why it is. I think for some people, they just won't take no for an answer, and they just keep appealing and appealing and appealing and appealing on every different level that they can think of to do it on, and the answer is still no. They're not entitled to the remedy that they're seeking, but they keep trying. That in fact is vexatious, and it does, I think, ultimately deny that space to someone who is perfectly entitled to it.

I think that often people have a different definition of a particular word or idea in context or out of context. We sometimes have people contact us, and they say, "You know, I may be able to get something or another." You say, "Well, yes, you may be able to, but that doesn't mean you're guaranteed to be able to get it." "Well, I should be." In their minds they're entitled to it: why didn't they get it? They're going to keep coming back to you until they get it, and you're in the position of saying: "No. You're not entitled." Well, then, they just want to appeal you. I think that same sort of situation is what ends up coming into the court system.

The other part of a vexatious claim that has certainly been the experience of some of my colleagues, I think one current and a couple past, are vexatious lawsuits that are brought basically as a slap suit to try and knock someone off their game, in effect. I consider those vexatious as well. I might be stretching the legal term a little bit, but I would put it in that category.

For example, my colleague the former MLA for Edmonton-Glenora, who now holds the position as the ombudsman for the federal penitentiary system, Mr. Howard Sapers, had a slap suit, a vexatious suit brought against him when the whole issue of the Hotel de Health was happening in this Assembly. He basically had a slap suit brought against him. Again, same sort of situation. It cost him time and money to go to court and defend himself with that, and the person bringing it had the resources to be able to do it.

It never went anywhere beyond that, and I'm sure that the people

that brought the suit never had any intention of taking it beyond that. It was done specifically to cause problems, and there was no real reason to bring it before the courts. I put that example in there as well because I think it's another way of blocking up the court system to others who should be in it, using it for a system that the judiciary was not designed to deal with.

I'm pleased to hear that there was a good stakeholder consult. Frankly, what we're seeing happen here is a continuity that we're missing in many of the other departments. Some of the frustration that we felt here in the opposition with the lack of action from government and very long delays in action in certain departments is because of the complete lack of continuity and lack of activity, particularly around the leadership race. Here we've had a minister that's been in place since 2004, and all of the work that was in the pipeline has continued to progress through. We're seeing it come out now, and it's been well supported by stakeholder consultations.

I'm pleased to see that the legislation is covering all three levels of the court system because I think that's necessary. As I said, some people try and sort of keep appealing their way through all the different levels and back again if they can. I didn't want to see the Provincial Court left out of that list. I'm pleased to see them in it.

On the idea of using a list of criteria over basically a single test, I'm looking forward to seeing how that actually plays out. I suspect that this will probably work better. I think sometimes we see the courts believing that the test doesn't really fit the circumstances, so they're reluctant to apply it. But a set of criteria would, in fact, work better because it's more likely to cover the situation in front of them, so we'd be more successful in being able to control some of these.

I think good work. Well done. Happy to support it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) question and answer section is now available.

If there are none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to participate in the debate.

5:50

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 18, Judicature Amendment Act, 2007, in its second reading. To start off, I want to thank the Minister of Justice and Attorney General for his detailed introductory remarks on the bill. This is a bill that does require some legal expertise to fully grasp it, so his comments have been helpful to those of us who lack that expertise and don't have a claim to that.

Mr. Speaker, in his introductory remarks the minister did make some important comments. He acknowledged that access to the justice system and the right to have that access is a fundamental right in our democracy, and it must be protected. So any limitations that this bill will impose on people to continually return to the court system to seek judicial action are I presume taken with the greatest amount of seriousness, that considerable thought has been given to putting limits on the rights of individuals who may engage in what's deemed as vexatious litigation.

What constitutes vexatious litigation is, I think, a very important part of the bill. Subsection (2) of section 23 tries to define it, if you wish, in a manner "without limitation," it's called. There may be other circumstances under which an action that's being taken or may be contemplated to be taken by someone may be considered vexatious. The ones here, eight of them, seem to me to be pretty exhaustive.

One feature that's common among all of these eight circumstances described here is "persistently." We all need to be clear that it does not close the door to legal action the first time around. It's only when people go repeatedly back to the court to seek justice on

grounds which are outlined here as ones which will be considered vexatious. I'm pleased that there's a fairly detailed sort of statement of the circumstances or the conditions which may be deemed vexatious.

The only provision here that does not refer to persistence of the action sought by a litigant is sub (d): "inappropriately using previously raised grounds and issues in subsequent proceedings." I'm not entirely sure what inappropriately using previously raised grounds would be other than persistently going back on the same grounds. You know, what would that mean in this case? What would constitute an inappropriate use of grounds used previously? Perhaps it's a bit of ambiguity there or simply repetitiveness. I'm not sure. I just noticed this. I'm bringing it to the attention of the House, and perhaps the minister, in his wisdom, might make some comments on it later on.

With respect to some other steps that the minister has taken before drafting this bill, Mr. Speaker, he has shared with us the information with respect to consultations that he has undertaken. He undertook them I think last year with all significant stakeholders, including the Law Society of Alberta, the representatives of the courts in the province, and the Law Reform Institute, I believe. I didn't get that, so I'm not sure whether they were included in this. Since it's a piece of legislation which will limit the right to access to a degree, I want to make sure that all resources that need to be consulted have been consulted and the list of those resources that have been consulted is comprehensive to include all stakeholders who may have something to say on this very important piece of legislation.

I'm certainly comfortable with the minister's statement with respect to the range of stakeholders that have been consulted on the bill. The three levels of the courts – the Court of Appeal, the Court of Queen's Bench, as well as the Provincial Court – have been covered. I understand, and I think it's sub (6) under section 23.1, Application, that for decisions of the Court of Appeal or a justice of the Court of Queen's Bench with respect to the vexatious nature of claims, that once that decision is made, that decision will be binding on the Provincial Court, but a decision made by the Provincial Court will not be binding moving upwards, I guess, if you look at these courts arranged in a vertical hierarchy. I think I am interpreting it right. I think that makes sense.

There's a provision here, which is sub (4) of the same section, 23, which reads:

The Court may at any time on application or on its own motion, with notice to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, make an order under subsection (1) applicable to any other individual or entity specified by the Court who in the opinion of the Court is associated with the person against whom an order under subsection (1) is made.

The only exception to that, I suppose, is the legal expert representing the person. I think that in subsection (5) that exception is made clear.

This sub (4) seems to me to be a little bit problematic in that it casts a fairly wide net in terms of persons related, in the opinion of the court, who would also be barred from proceeding with vexatious litigation. The court will require a great deal of knowledge about the nature of the relationship of this other person or a person who might want to proceed with the action on behalf of or on his or her own. It requires some further study on my part. As I said, you know, I'm no expert on these matters, so we will engage in some consultation.

I take the bill quite seriously, Mr. Speaker. We will certainly give it the further thought that's due it as a piece of legislation, but in general I find the bill on the test of reasonableness a bill that will have our support in principle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Shall I call on the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to conclude the debate, or shall we just call the question?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, I just wish to thank the hon. members who commented. They commented insightfully on the bill. I call the question.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a second time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the House will reconvene tomorrow afternoon at 1. If it's possible for you to take your laptops, that would be helpful as we have a function in the Assembly tomorrow morning. It would be helpful to the pages. Other than that, see you tomorrow at 1.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 12, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the Hon. Tom Osborne, Member for St. John's South. Minister Osborne was recently appointed on January 19, 2007, as the Minister of Justice for Newfoundland and Labrador. However, he was first elected in the general election of 1996 and is very familiar with two of the members of the Assembly as a result of previous posts as minister of environment and minister of health. He did want me to acknowledge his friendship with the members for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and Sherwood Park. With the hon. Mr. Osborne in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, is his friend Don Tapper, who is also from Newfoundland. I would ask both of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a delegation of members of the Provincial Legislature of Mpumalanga, South Africa, led by Ms Nomsa Mtsweni. The delegation represents almost one-third of the entire 30-member Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature. The purpose of their visit is to learn about how our province encourages and engages the public in policy development, Alberta programs and policies related to people with disabilities, and issues affecting women and children. Alberta and Mpumalanga have enjoyed a twin province relationship since 1996. Our close ties with Mpumalanga focus on legislative co-operation, governance, and building democratic institutions.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask our honoured guests as I introduce them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: the hon. Nomsa Sanny Mtsweni, leader of the delegation; the hon. Boy Johannes Nobunga, who is also the Deputy Speaker; the hon. Mr. David Sunnyboy Mkhwanazi; the hon. Ms Refilwe Caroline Mahlobogoane; the hon. Ms Gelani Sariana Sindane; the hon. Ms Phumuzile Catherine Ngwenya; the hon. Mr. Sidney Norman Sikhosana; the hon. Ms Tapelo Dorothy Chiloane; Ms Eggy Flora Thabane; Ms Nompumelelo Millicent Sibiya. The hon. members have now risen. I'd ask the members of this Assembly to kindly accord them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through to the Assembly members 21 folks from our communications departments of the various government departments. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker – and you

probably know – that the people in my department probably qualify for danger pay. But today they're here to tour the Legislature and watch question period. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm reception from the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm interested and excited that members of my constituency have actually come in here today to observe the proceedings because they've enjoyed so much some of the media reports about all of our activities of late. May I take the opportunity to introduce Dave and Fiona Quest, Bob Preston, Rick MacDonald, John McLennon, Ingrid Piecha, Dianne Duke, Bill and Irma Chow, Allen Wells, Brian Wik, Veronica Pifko, Suzanne Taylor, and I believe that Leona and Vern Hartwell – Vern is no stranger to this Assembly – Noreen Robertson, Marcie Konkin, Maxine Kolodychuck, Ivy Walton, Rick Komarniski, Marcia Tyerman, Carol Lesniak, Joyce Perkins, Noreen Roberts, Dianne Balon, and Thomas Lo are with us. If they would please rise and we could give them a warm welcome as they observe our proceedings here today.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure if my guest has arrived yet or not, but I will take the opportunity to introduce him in any event and put it on the record. I would like to introduce a constituent of mine, a good friend who also heads up Boyden Global Executive Search, Mr. Brent Shervey. I'm not sure if he's in the gallery or not.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 21 bright students and seven teachers and parents from the Evansview school in Evansburg. Please join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and a privilege for me to stand and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly over 60 concerned citizens from this region concerned with responsible land use and protection of our water and the preservation of all we have in Alberta for future generations. I would ask them to stand as I introduce their leaders, and then I'll have them all stand at the end.

Concerned citizens of Thorhild, represented by Cori Kuzyk; concerned citizens for responsible development in heartland, Sturgeon county, Anne Brown; concerned citizens of Round Hill and Beaver county, concerned about the Sherritt project, Clayton Maurer; concerned citizens of Onoway River Valley Conservation Association, Ian Skinner, Mike Northcott; and concerned citizens of Marie Lake, Chris Goss; Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Edmonton chapter, Richard Schneider; Toxics Watch Society of Alberta, Conrad Nobert; and Council of Canadians, Lyn Gorman. Could I have all the citizens stand up and be recognized by the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Leslie Clark. Leslie has successfully completed her first year of the social work program at

Grant MacEwan College. I've had the pleasure of Leslie joining my constituency team in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview as a practicum student this year. She has worked with youth at risk for the last five years. Her passions include travelling, and she hopes to one day focus her skills towards the area of international social work. It's been wonderful having Leslie in our office. Her enthusiasm and dedication to the constituents of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview are much appreciated. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure and I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 60 students from the grade 6 classes at Kildare elementary school in my riding of Edmonton-Manning. Now, Kildare is an excellent school, well established in the community. The professionals there believe that all students should experience success and become independent learners and responsible citizens. There are excellent Mandarin programs there. It's a school that is really tremendously successful. They are accompanied today by two teachers, Ms Shih and Mr. Butlin. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: 1:10

Members' Statements

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

Tribute to the Hon. Ken Kowalski 10th Anniversary as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to rise because I have the privilege of acknowledging the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. This Saturday, April 14, 2007, will represent your 10th anniversary as Speaker of this House.

Your commitment to this province is exceptional. You have performed all of your duties with great diligence, class, and integrity, from your beginnings as a high school teacher advocating for the first French immersion program in Barrhead to serving your constituency as an elected member of this Assembly since 1979. Throughout your tenure you have had the honour of serving under four Premiers. You have held distinguished cabinet positions, served as Government House Leader and Deputy Premier. As Speaker of this House you have served as chairman of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and you have been an integral part of many other committees, of which there are too many to list here this afternoon. At least, time would not permit.

You have worked on both the national and international stages. You are one of 12 Canadian signatories to the environmental and sustainable development documents that were ultimately endorsed by the United Nations Assembly. As well, you were Alberta's signatory to the volunteer exchange agreement between the province of Alberta and Hokkaido, Japan.

Mr. Speaker, you have set a very high standard for all of us to follow, and all of the members and staff appreciate the tremendous services you have carried out in this Legislature. You have had one of Alberta's most distinguished public careers, and you have received many accolades, but there is perhaps one honour that truly represents your personal character. That is the title of honorary chief bestowed upon you by the Alexis First Nation, Wa-she-zu-Chada-oo-sheqe-na, which means, if I pronounced it properly, White Man with a Kind Heart.

On behalf of all your colleagues, friends, family, and Albertans past and present, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations again on your 10th anniversary of being our 11th Speaker. With the unanimous consent of the Assembly, I would presume, I could finish by also saying: the longest serving Speaker in our nation. [applause]

The Speaker: Well, thank you very much. That was very kind. I would be remiss, though, if I didn't draw to the attention of all members of the Assembly that the hon. Deputy Speaker violated the Standing Orders by going beyond the length. Thank you all very much for your kindness and your support.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Community Development Master Agreement

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to make a very historic announcement on the signing yesterday at the Yellowhead county office in Edson of the community development master agreement by the town of Edson, the town of Hinton, and the Yellowhead county along with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

All three municipalities are under a lot of pressure to accommodate the unprecedented economic upswing caused by the oil and gas industry as well as other industries. The extra costs are felt in the following areas: increased policing; pressure on planning and development; demand for increased infrastructure to accommodate growth, be it roads, recreation, or water and sewer; in employment; and housing gaps.

Yellowhead county has benefited from Alberta's recent growth, and the county recognized the needs for all three municipalities to fully capitalize on the opportunity offered in the strong economic climate. For that reason the Yellowhead county unanimously agreed to contribute \$500,000 unconditional grants to Edson and Hinton for five years to help with some of the issues caused by the rapid growth economy. The amount is based on the county's 2007 industrial assessment and will be adjusted up or down, based on annual review. This does not include the county's recent cost-sharing agreement now in place.

According to the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability report "development in any municipality should not unduly impact neighbouring municipalities, either financially or from a quality of life perspective." Yellowhead county subscribes to this benefit, and I know that our Municipal Affairs and Housing minister was very pleased with this agreement as it met one of his conditions in the mandate letter. Our Municipal Affairs and Housing minister stated that we're all one big community.

Please join me in congratulating Reeve Jack Williams and his Yellowhead county council, Mayor Greg Pasychny, and the town of Edson . . .

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

Harold Gibson

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today before this Assembly to remember a friend of mine and a great Albertan. On April 9, 2007, Mr. Harold Gibson of Sangudo passed away.

Mr. Gibson was an active member of the community. Through service to organizations such as the Lac Ste. Anne county rec board and the Ste. Anne Natural Gas Co-op, Mr. Gibson vastly improved the lives of those around him. During his 26-year tenure on the Ste. Anne Natural Gas Co-op and nine-year term as a member of the Federation of Alberta Gas Co-ops, Mr. Gibson lent his expertise and good sense to many projects which directly benefited the community.

Throughout his life Harold was involved in many other projects in the community. He sat on the Safety Codes Council for eight years and was a presiding officer for the gas utility operator program at NAIT for the past four years.

Harold also served as a councillor in Lac Ste. Anne county for 12 years. He spent his time serving on many committees and working diligently to strengthen the communities within the county.

I will always remember Harold for his hard work as a dedicated individual. He was meticulous, thoughtful, and caring. The loss of Harold Gibson is truly a loss for the people of Whitecourt-St. Anne and, indeed, for the people of Alberta.

A service will be held tomorrow, Friday, April 13, at 2 p.m. at the Legion hall in Sangudo. Harold will be sadly missed by the members of his family and of his community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Bob Maskell

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are few things in life I do not like. The first is tofu. No matter what I do to it and no matter how much I try to like it, I just can't.

The second thing I do not like, Mr. Speaker, are people who besmirch other honest people hoping to gain petty political mileage. This is not even to mention the people who can stand up in this House and talk about Albertans, good Albertans, who cannot reply to them face to face.

Mr. Speaker, I believe a man's name and integrity are worth more than partisan politics. That is why today I want to talk about someone who I feel is an outstanding citizen, who cannot defend himself in this House.

When I asked Mr. Bob Maskell to carry out the duties of the chair of my past department's Aboriginal Festivities Committee in 2005, he indicated that he would accept this responsibility prior to the election of 2004. When he lost his seat in the election in November, I felt that he should continue with this role as he was the best candidate to further the work needed to ensure that aboriginal Albertans would be involved in Alberta's centennial activities.

The board needed continuity in its planning. Mr. Maskell offered valuable resources as someone who had history, prior commitment, and knowledge of aboriginal people, much as the people who sometimes speak about aboriginal people don't. More importantly, he showed his ability to truly connect with the aboriginal community.

Mr. Speaker, he was also a great planner, a great organizer, and an avid educator, with 30 years' experience in education, arts, and the public sector. He has done a variety of committee work developing education and cultural ties with Alberta's partners. These are qualities we needed; therefore, he was selected for this position. He not only raised the profile of aboriginal people with nonaboriginal people. He also corrected some historical wrongs according to many aboriginal elders, and he did everything with respect and grace, something we value. I believe his involvement with the committee was a great contribution to the overwhelming involvement of many aboriginal people in the province's centennial celebrations.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say thank you to Mr. Bob Maskell.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

1:20 Environmental Sustainability

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These are exciting and dangerous times in Alberta. They bring to mind the ancient wisdom

of the Bible that without a vision, the people perish. The lack of vision, planning, and strong leadership in Alberta is coming home to roost in a growing environmental debt.

Approvals for all manner of developments have reached an all-time high in the face of a pitifully funded Department of Environment. There's also a growing public agitation based on good evidence that this government is willing to sacrifice the proverbial golden goose, our environment, for higher GDP.

Fort McMurray is the most glaring example of irresponsible development. Both its pace and scope disregard collateral damage to people in the ecosystem, threatening our collective future. When will we see cumulative impact assessment and recognition of limits in this beleaguered region? Other examples include unmonitored groundwater impacts from coal-bed methane in southern Alberta, an overstretched South Saskatchewan River basin pushing water transfers to Calgary from the Red Deer River, extensive loss of prime agricultural land in the Edmonton area, and growing threats along the eastern slopes to the water towers of the province, our lifeblood.

The implications of this unmanaged growth, particularly with the stark realities of climate change crashing down upon us, are extremely unsettling to conscious, moral Albertans. Regrettably, no climate change leadership is to be found in this government, and in denial our short-term course careens towards even greater dependence on fossil fuels. For the Alberta government the market is the unquestioned determinant of progress. If, as the Premier has stated, we cannot touch the brake, then it's time to change the government.

We believe on this side that the economy is there, rather, to support and sustain people and the environment. We understand the difference between responsible and irresponsible development. Without a land-use plan, objective science on environmental impacts, and meaningful public consultation, we cannot have genuine progress and healthy communities.

In this precarious time of short-term wealth lies the Alberta opportunity for a sustainable economy based fundamentally on environmental stewardship and human security. The Alberta Liberals have both the vision and a plan.

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

Vaisakhi 2007

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The festival of Vaisakhi is one of the most important in the Indian calendar. I want this House to know that the importance of Vaisakhi is recognized by not only the Sikhs but all Indians. It has cultural, historical, and religious significance.

Vaisakhi is culturally significant because it's the end of the winter harvest in north India and signals prosperity. Farmers are able to pay off their debts and pay for their children's education, weddings, et cetera. Folks celebrate their good fortune in festivals in every major community. Songs, good food, wine, and dance are the order of the day. Everyone gets together in their community to celebrate the fruits of their labour over the past year.

Vaisakhi, also known as Khalsa day, has the most significance for Sikhs. Akhand Path, a three-day nonstop reading of the Sikh scriptures, is held in Sikh temples in every Sikh community in the world. This was the day when the 10th prophet, guru Gobind Singh, transformed Sikhism into a militant fraternity dedicated to the path of righteousness and good to prevail over tyranny and evil.

Vaisakhi reminds us of our mission and responsibilities toward society: upholding the dignity, honour, and rights of all people. We pay tribute to our gurus and all the Sikh martyrs who laid down their

lives for the principle of Sikhism: truth, justice, equality, the fight against oppression and, of course, the evil caste system in India.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Betty Mardiros

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last month Alberta lost one of the pillars of its progressive community. On Friday, March 30, Betty Mardiros passed away at the age of 84. She was an active member of the CCF, attended the founding convention of the New Democratic Party in 1961, and was one of the founding members of the Woodsworth-Irvine Socialist Fellowship.

She and her husband, Tony, were close friends of Alberta CCF Member of Parliament Bill Irvine. She remained inspired and motivated by the original principles of the British Labour Party. Labour MP Tony Benn remained a constant inspiration for her.

I had the pleasure of knowing Betty through her involvement with the Edmonton Voters' Association. Some of my fondest times with Betty were after meetings at her home, when she'd invite some folks back to her library for a glass of red wine and a sometimes heated discussion of politics. Upstairs Betty and her husband, Tony, kept a gracious home, but down the stairs the family room was converted into a meeting room, with a table at the front and rows of chairs and posters from the British Labour Party on the walls. An old Gestetner machine for producing petitions and pamphlets was in the furnace room.

Betty was a tireless activist and a campaigner for a better world. She spent her entire life as an active participant, leader, and organizer of campaigns for peace, public medicare, women's rights, and democracy. She was a founder of Edmonton's Raging Grannies, a group well known to former Premier Klein and the members opposite. Betty left an indelible mark on our political landscape. It will not be the same without her, but her legacy will live on with the progressive groups she helped found, including organizations like the Raging Grannies, the Parkland Institute, and the Woodsworth-Irvine Socialist Fellowship.

Betty's last performance with the Grannies was at a tea at the palliative care unit of the Edmonton General hospital. She joined the group to sing one of their favourite songs, a version of *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* that included the lyrics: "Inch by inch, row by row, we want to see all grandkids grow. Day by day we'll never cease, till we have this world at peace."

Betty will be missed, but her dream of a better world will be carried forward by everyone who has been touched by her energy and her passion.

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to a question raised in the House yesterday by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the collision history on highway 63 for the past five years. The document shows that the five-year collision rates on highway 63 from south of the city limits of Fort McMurray to the junction of highway 55 are significantly lower than the provincial average, yet one accident or one death on any road is one too many.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have eight letters to table today. The first is from Sarah Leete of Cochrane to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development urging him to stop the planned clear-cutting in Sibbald Flats and west Bragg Creek area because she has witnessed the results of the degradation caused some 20 years ago and feels that selective logging is the correct action to take.

The second is from Doug McKeague, again to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, also objecting to the planned clear-cutting in Kananaskis Country and urging the minister to consider the needs and desires of the people and communities as central to policy consideration, not industrial economics.

I have a letter from John Parkin of Calgary and one from Gerry McCuaig of Calgary, who both work in the oil and gas industry. Both are disturbed about proposed clear-cutting in Kananaskis Country and say that recreational economic value is very important to the proposed clear-cutting areas.

I also have a letter from Charles Northup. He writes to register his opposition to logging in the west Bragg Creek area.

Shawn Zwierzchowski, Vanessa Vallis, and Dale D'Silva also want their concerns about proposed clear-cutting registered, specifying impacts on water quality, habitat degradation, and damage to recreation and tourism industries among other concerns.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings here today. One is a letter from two constituents of Edmonton-Manning, Rick and JoAnn Gravestock, outlining how JoAnn lost her job at a restaurant to a temporary foreign worker.

The other is from a group of Albertans asking this Legislative Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua Hunt be tried as an adult due to the nature of his crime, his past criminal history, and that he is close to 18 years of age.

Thank you.

The Clerk: Oral Question Period.

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. [interjection] Well, the rules say 1:30, question period. We'll come back to this part of the Routine after.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Poverty

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans care about each other. They recognize that we're all in this together. The Canada West Foundation last year found that 65 per cent of Albertans felt that reducing poverty should be a high government priority. The Alberta Liberals agree. Yet a report released today by the Edmonton planning council found that there are enough Edmontonians living in poverty to fill the entire cities of both Red Deer and Lethbridge combined. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that his government is out of step with the priorities of Albertans when it comes to addressing poverty?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government has listened very closely to Albertans. Our five priorities are built on what Albertans

have told us. One of the most important priorities, of course, is quality of life for all Albertans, and we're working very diligently on that priority.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's income support programs are failing. Only 30 per cent of low-income families on income support ever get out of poverty. This government's programs are a poverty trap. They are not a hand up, and they aren't even a tolerable handout. In the richest province in this country this government shows the least concern for single parents. To the Premier: what will it take for this government to finally take action and address its shockingly low levels of support for single parents and their children?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we took action in this area many years ago by increasing considerably the tax exemptions for low-income earners. I think we have the largest exemption of any province in Canada.

The other is that it's not only supporting families; it's also giving the skills and the opportunity to participate in the job opportunities available to them in this province. That's another goal of ours: to upgrade their skills so that they can feel positive about their contribution to the province.

Dr. Taft: Seventy per cent of those people never get out of poverty, Mr. Speaker.

Today's report from the Edmonton Social Planning Council shows that families with children living on social assistance today survive, if you can call it that, on government support worth half of what they received 25 years ago. This is shameful. Children don't deserve to be poor. Not one child in Alberta should live in poverty. While this government pays the contract of a defeated Tory MLA, it expects a single parent with a child to live on little more than a thousand dollars a month. To the Premier: how does this government tolerate thousands of children in Alberta living in such poverty?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible will inform the House and, obviously, the opposition in terms of the size and the number of programs we have for those requiring assistance.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's ludicrous that in a province that has a Ministry of Children's Services, that provides more for children in this country than any other place, the opposition, who know full well that we have subsidies – and if my colleague were here, relative to child benefits she would talk about it.

But I could also point out, Mr. Speaker, that in 2006-07 – and we share responsibility on health benefits for mothers and children – we spent \$637 million on program planning and delivery, employment and training, health benefits, and income supports.

Government Contracting Policies

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has dismissed the contract awarded to Bob Maskell as a problem of perception. It isn't perception at fault when Kelley Charlebois gets hundreds of thousands of dollars to chat with ministers, it isn't perception at fault when Rod Love gets similarly paid for no measurable results, and it isn't perception at fault when a minister personally interferes to find a job for a defeated Tory colleague and the contract is then back-dated two months. The problem is the culture of entitlement festering in this government. To the Premier: will the Premier

finally admit what everybody knows, that Mr. Maskell's appointment was a clear abuse of ministerial power?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I talked about privileges extended to members in this House. Clearly, this member again broke the rules yesterday by misleading this House in terms of the 50 hours' billing. That was of course explained yesterday and today, and I take exception to the constant innuendo raised by the Leader of the Opposition in this regard.

The Speaker: We have a notice of a point of order. I presume it's on the phraseology: clearly misled.

The second supplemental. The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One serious problem with these kinds of patronage contracts is that they place senior bureaucrats and civil servants in a bind. Should they speak out against this kind of ministerial request? Will they lose their jobs if they do so? Should they just give in to the minister's demands? What is a public-minded individual to do? To the Premier: will the Premier table whistle-blower legislation so that people can safely come forward when they witness wrongdoing without fear of losing their job?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have a tremendous amount of respect for the civil servants of this province. In fact, in my inaugural speech I paid tribute to them. All government members respect the excellent service provided. And besides, you know, the hon. leader at one time was employed by the government.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, there is a wider concern here. This Conservative government with this Premier at the table has a clear history of handing out taxpayers' money in questionable contracts to friends and personal supporters. Mr. Maskell's case stood out because he had named his company after himself, but who knows how many more there are out there? Albertans need answers. They need to know how many of these special-favour contracts there are. The Conservative government in Ottawa has just appointed a special investigator to look into the troubled history of government contracts with polling firms. To the Premier: will the Premier commit to a similar investigation of this government's contracting practices?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the substantial changes that this government brought forward very quickly is adding to the openness and transparency on a quarterly basis. All records of transactions will be available on the web so that every Albertan has an opportunity to see what taxpayer funds went to either companies or individuals. That will be fully public. It's the most transparent that this government has been ever in the province of Alberta, but they still fail to recognize that.

Mr. Bonko: Yesterday the Premier stated that the Auditor General has approved checks and balances regarding payments made under the government contracts. The Auditor General reported on another Tory patronage contract in 2004. He said, "The documentation did not support how the expenditure officer was able to obtain satisfaction that the disbursements were in accordance with the terms of the contract." What a surprise, yet we see the same thing again. The latest invoices do not support the claimed 50-hour days or day-long meetings, yet they were still approved. To the Premier: will he admit that while the checks and balances may be there, his government routinely ignores them for its friends?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I will admit that this government is

always looking forward, as opposed to the opposition always looking backward, and that's why we brought about the changes. Openness and transparency will continue to work. We're bringing forward additional legislation, and I hope that it's supported by the opposition. Or they may even find something else there that they'll oppose again and not support this government in passing very important legislation to deal with some of these issues.

Mr. Bonko: Kelley Charlebois, Rod Love, the community initiatives program, rule breaking for secret friends of top Tories, and now Bob Maskell. Taxpayers are getting disgusted. This government's patronage file is getting so thick that patronage will soon need its own department. Why does this government have one set of rules for its friends and one set for the rest of us, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the earlier comments, made yesterday, again say that this wasn't patronage, but of course they'll keep turning back and forth, back and forth, bringing this thing forward. I made my comments the other day. I made comments with respect to the contract to the media. We're going to be bringing forward legislation, and we're going to be looking at other ways of improving the trust and the confidence not only of government but of this institution so that we get more people interested in running for public office, not to constantly degrade each other in this facility.

1:40

Mr. Bonko: The Minister of Education stated yesterday that he didn't accept the questions that we raised as factual basis. He said that he hadn't seen the relevant documents. Well, they were from his own filing cabinets and stamped: education accounts. So I'm at a loss to know why he couldn't get his hands on them. They're probably in the drawers labelled patronage. To the Minister of Education: what value did the government get out of three \$600-a-day meetings between Mr. Maskell and the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs as approved by the minister's accounts?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I've done some extensive checking, and to the best of our knowledge we have not received any invoices from Maskell & Associates. We have not paid any invoices. So if the hon. member has some copies of some invoices, stand up and table them in the House, or quit smearing the member's name. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party. [interjections] The hon. leader of the third party has the floor.

Condominium Conversions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to policy. [interjection] You won't like it when you hear it, though, Mr. Premier.

In this out-of-control economy affordable apartments are being sold left and right for condominium conversions. Over a thousand rental units were converted to condos last year in Calgary alone. It's a similar situation in Edmonton. Apartment owners eager to cash in on condo conversion jack up rents to get tenants out in 90 days rather than give the full 180 days' notice. To the Premier: given that this housing crisis is forcing regular families out into the street, will he impose a temporary moratorium on condominium conversions?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the third party raises an important issue. This is something that we have discussed around our caucus table, and we are looking at ways, with respect to the

minister of municipal affairs, to see what we can do in this critical situation. We understand the critical shortage of housing. We know that, and we want to address that issue. If there's another question, I'll ask the minister of municipal affairs to respond.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. But Albertans can't wait for this government to figure out what it's going to do or spin-doctor its housing report. The Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing projects a shortfall of 43,000 affordable units by 2009. CMHC says that Edmonton has 5,050 fewer rental units on the market than in 1987. The crisis is real, and condo conversions are making it worse. To the Premier: will he take action to stop condo conversions today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the kind of information that the hon. leader gave means that more people are moving into their own accommodations, but there are those that can't afford to do that, and the minister has a plan to address that.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I have said in this House many times, there has been a task force that has been presented. We are looking at that task force, and we are going to reply to those very major concerns, as the member from the third party has illustrated.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, subject to the rules, the minister has now referred to a report. Will he please table it today in the House?

Mr. Speaker, there are 40,000 households in Edmonton that give over 30 per cent of their income to landlords. Contrary to what the Premier has just said, renters normally have to pay 30 per cent more for a unit that's been converted into a condominium. So, please, Mr. Premier, will you help these people who are being pushed out into the street by condo conversions and do something?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, we fully discussed the situation in Edmonton and Calgary, and there are other communities facing similar. We are going to take steps. With municipalities, of course, there are ways of handling some of these situations. But like I said, it's going to take co-operation between the province, municipalities, and the federal government to deal with the overall critical shortage of housing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Vocational Education

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is booming, our labour market is stressed, hours are excessive, trained people are in short supply, and service and productivity are suffering. The costs for all projects increase because of this. It is good that the government is working with the trades and professions to create more training. Many Alberta occupations think that they are finally being taken seriously. But we do need more training. My question is to the Minister of Education. Will the minister increase support for vocational schooling beyond the registered apprenticeship program and call on our trades for assistance?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I guess if the hon. member is referring to the

high school industrial arts and CTS programs, that is something that we have recognized as a priority in the education system. I hate to keep referring back to my standard answer, but I'm going to wait for the minister's budget next week to see how successful I was.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. A supplementary to the minister of advanced education. Building trades training schools provide vast amounts of critical training in occupations that are needed now and will be for decades. Will the minister ensure that the necessary support from government be in place for these schools to maximize opportunity for Albertans to train now and for the future?

Mr. Horner: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Regional labour market integration has worked well for the engineering profession in the Pacific Northwest. Will the minister work to ease the movement of trades and professions from and into the U.S. with a greater integrated labour market in the Pacific Northwest?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, yes, we will.

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

Physician Supply

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The sole family doctor serving the communities of Ogden and Lynnwood in my constituency is retiring. As he cannot find a doctor to take over his practice, he has to close his practice. The majority of my constituents have been his clients for 35 years, and they are very worried and upset. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. What is your plan to deal with the shortage of family doctors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is clearly a shortage of health care professionals, not just doctors. It's a more severe shortage in the health care area than in the general economy, so we do have to bring forward a plan with respect to the health workforce strategy. I'm working with the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry and the minister of advanced education on that workforce strategy. In fact, we'll be meeting with stakeholders tomorrow, I believe, to discuss the draft strategy and additional things that we can do. Specifically on the family doctors, the primary care networks have been very successful. In fact, members might have read today in the paper about a primary care network in Edmonton where you can get same-day access. That will be the way of the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the family doctor's practice is close to a seniors' residence in my constituency, the vulnerable constituents now have to travel farther, longer, and costlier to get to a doctor, if they are lucky to find one. To the same minister: what is the plan to help them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I don't have a specific answer for this specific situation, obviously, but the process that we're taking is to encourage the development of these primary care networks to make the best use of the full range of health care professionals in the context of a primary care network. We could see in that context that in the future, in the very near future health care professionals would attend at the long-term care centre or even the seniors' residence. So those are the ways that we're using the full range of health care professionals in our community, and hopefully that will be able to address this particular situation in the near future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Calgary regional health authority has established a number of community health centres in other parts of the city of Calgary, to the minister: when can Calgarians in the southeast side of the city expect such service?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge, at present there is not a plan to build a new community health centre in that region of Calgary that I'm aware of. However, the south Calgary hospital project will be proceeding very shortly. I can say that with respect to the other health care facilities in Calgary, if any member visits any one of the health care facilities in Calgary, the hospitals and clinics, they'll see construction cranes around them. So there's more capacity being built, more service available, more accessibility available to Calgarians in the very near future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

1:50

Environmental Sustainability

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Water for Life strategy and the 1999 commitment to sustainable resources and environmental management have one thing in common. Both talk about respecting the wishes of Albertans, consulting with Albertans, and enhancing environmental protection, yet these strategies continue to be ignored and the people's concerns dismissed. Look at the evidence: irresponsible oil sands development, plans for garbage dumps bigger than anything in North America, 10 upgraders in the next five years, five coal-fired plants to service these, and massive transmission lines. People are asking the obvious: Mr. Premier, is this responsible development?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the government's priorities, of course, and a huge task assigned to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development is to put together a land-use framework. It's going to be a difficult task because there are so many different uses: agricultural, oil and gas, forestry, recreational, expansion of urban communities, obviously, encroaching on good agricultural land. These are all issues that we have to deal with.

One thing that I was pleased with, notwithstanding a lot of the criticism that we receive as a government, is that Alberta itself is recognized as doing the most in terms of environment, although 43 per cent but a heck of a lot higher than any other province with respect to this area. Do we have a lot of work to do? Yes, we do, and we'll do it. And that can only be done with the good help of all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we have many

Albertans in attendance in the House, Albertans who have serious problems with the lack of a due process for these development decisions affecting their way of life, their water, their future. Residents in the industrial heartland have raised concerns about the rate and scope of development in their area, concerns about the air they breathe, the water they drink, the future of their rural way of life. Plans for up to 10 upgraders in Sturgeon and Strathcona have people asking, independently wondering: Mr. Premier, what is the plan?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is due process. I as a former municipal official, of course, lived through a number of applications for development. It rests with the municipality to deal with the application. Here are a few other things that we've done since then. With respect to the industrial heartland, I met with all of the people in 2004, discussed their issues, certainly sympathized with the change in their lives just with the number of plants being built. That's one of the reasons, then, that we put a program together where we could purchase the land from the owners.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Thorhild county the people have run up against a dead end in trying to address the massive garbage dump prepared for them, a dump bigger than any in North America despite a similar landfill just south in Ryley. Neither their own council nor this provincial government are listening to their real concerns about these projects and the impacts on their way of life, property values, and potentially their water. Can the Premier tell us what his government will do to help these concerned citizens of Thorhild county be heard?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have met with at least three families, as I recall, with respect to this particular development. I know that there is a due process in place. It is a difficult situation. I lived through it personally as the former reeve for the county of Lamont, where a company had made an application. But we have to go through the process because if not, if either the applicant or those that may be living in the county establish that due process wasn't followed, they punt it to the courts, then the courts punt it right back to the municipality to follow the due process. It's one of those issues that if we can improve on it in terms of the Municipal Government Act, we'll listen to their ideas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Winterkill of Fish Stock

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Utikuma and Winagami lakes in my constituency have always been known as the million dollar lakes for their fishery. The last time that we had any kind of winterkill, which is a devastating state of no oxygen going to the fish or to any species in the lakes, was 1989. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why did it take so long for you to make a decision to allow salvage fishing of any sort to occur in those two lakes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. Winterkill occurs naturally in Alberta lakes, particularly the more shallow lakes. It occurs when oxygen levels fall below a

certain level because of the ice. These conditions are affected, of course, by the length of the winter, by the thickness of the ice and by the snow on top of the ice. Utikuma Lake has seen winterkills before, as the hon. member indicated. Our fish biologists monitor the oxygen levels in these lakes quite carefully, and they determine if and when it becomes appropriate to allow a salvage fishery.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, so did my commercial fishermen monitor what was happening in those lakes. There were some concerns expressed to the biologist as well as to various officials, and there was no action taken. As a result there is going to be devastation amongst my commercial fishermen. Could you please tell me again, Mr. Minister: why was that recommendation by the commercial fishermen who wanted a salvage fishery earlier not followed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Of course, there are multiple stakeholders in these lakes. You have the commercial fishermen, you have aboriginal fishermen, and you also have your recreational sports fishermen. We were in communication with all of these different groups during the month of March as this situation evolved, but in the end I took the advice of our department fish biologists. I might add that in a meeting I recently had with Professor David Schindler, the water expert over at the University of Alberta, he said that our fish biologists in the government of Alberta are some of the best in Canada. I took their advice as to when it was time to allow the commercial fishery.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, there are times when we have to take the advice of those kinds of people, but we also have to take the advice of those individuals who do make a living off that specific fishery. My question is: what kind of management or policy will you bring forward to ensure that these people can also be listened to so that this kind of devastation does not occur again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, of course, as I've mentioned already, this is a naturally reoccurring phenomenon in Alberta and northern Canadian lakes, so I can't guarantee that it will never happen again. I can guarantee, though, that we will listen, obviously, to the concerns of affected stakeholders, but often the stakeholders' concerns or interests are somewhat competing and have to be balanced against one another. In the end, again, I think most members would agree that listening to the advice of our fish biologists is the best way to manage this type of situation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Steamfitter-pipefitter Red Seal Exams

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 28 the interprovincial red seal exam for the steamfitter-pipefitter trade was pulled shortly before it was to be administered, leaving a number of apprentices at loose ends. The cancellation of this exam suggests something went seriously wrong in the certification and quality control process for these much-needed tradespeople. My questions are for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Can the minister tell us why this exam was pulled?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, serious allegations were made, actually, in the Legislature during debate on Bill 7. There may have been some sale of exams was the allegation that was made, and that is very serious. We're not aware of any direct activity involving the exchange of money, but if the member has some evidence or some information to that, we'd certainly be interested in looking at it.

Mr. Tougas: Well, I didn't suggest that, Mr. Speaker. I just asked why the exam was pulled, and apparently the answer is that there are some suspicions that maybe somebody did get a hold of it ahead of time and distributed it. Can the minister comment on that? I mean, you brought it up. Is that the case? Has this been tainted or something? Is that the case?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it was recently reported both in Nova Scotia and Alberta that there may have been a compromise; therefore, the exam was pulled at that time, but it will be readministered.

Mr. Tougas: Well, the tradespeople who had planned to take this exam made considerable financial and time sacrifices to do so. They're now in limbo, waiting for months until they can write their exam. What is the minister doing to ensure that this test is administered as soon as possible and to compensate those affected?

Mr. Horner: Well, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that the members who were looking to take that exam would want to ensure that it is not compromised, and that's exactly what we're doing. Utilizing technology where we can, we will try to get this done as quickly as possible, recognizing their hardship.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:00 Softwood Lumber Trade Agreement

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Forest companies operating in Whitecourt-St. Anne are dealing with their U.S. customers under the new softwood lumber agreement. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can you tell the Assembly what's happened in the past six months since this agreement was adopted?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the good fortune yesterday morning to attend a conference at the University of Alberta School of Business that was devoted to the softwood lumber agreement and how things have evolved since its formal coming into effect six months ago. Unfortunately, the agreement has not delivered the type of predictability and access that was hoped for. Lumber prices have fallen, and so have exports. It's too early at this point to tell whether the falling number of exports is caused by the agreement itself or by the slowdown in demand in the United States. Probably it's both. But, unfortunately, the lower the price becomes, this triggers an export tax, and that's hurting our industry at this point.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next supplemental is to the same minister. I've not heard much complimentary about the softwood lumber agreement and its benefits to our

producers. Has it benefited the Alberta softwood producers and our forest industry?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated already, we're disappointed with the results so far. But this has to be put into perspective. This is the third softwood lumber agreement in the last 20 years. These issues are recurring. One thing is very clear. Our lumber industries know what they want. What they want is free trade and open access to American markets, and unfortunately this has been slow in coming. We, of course, support full, free, fair trade with the United States, and we will support our industry in trying to work towards that but under the terms of the existing agreement.

Mr. VanderBurg: My next question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What are the prospects for the softwood lumber agreement lasting more than the minimum of two years?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. minister has also indicated, certainly it's not a deal that is perfect. With the attitude of our neighbours to the south, you know, this agreement has really ended a lot of past disputes and potential future litigations, so in many ways it has been positive. In Alberta as Albertans we have an attitude that we'll always work to make it better, to improve it, to share information with our neighbours. That's what we're doing. But industry plays a key role, working with this government as partners.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's becoming increasingly difficult for people to pay their rent in this province. Constituents are calling into my office unabated, and today a pensioner, Otto Fuernsinn, came in because his rent has gone up by \$150 in the last six months. Now, this is a huge burden for anyone on a fixed income. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Again I ask this minister: what should I tell this pensioner? Is it the government's policy that I should tell this pensioner that we've got a report and we're studying it, and don't worry? Is that the government's position on this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say that presently we support the rental subsidies to the tune of 4,600 households. We also support the maintenance and operation to nearly 27,000 households in Alberta. Also, I want to say that as a result of support from the government we're building close to 3,700 complexes.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the minister brought up the subsidy program because another one of my constituents, Mrs. Arlene Henderson, found herself struggling to afford her rent after it increased by \$200 last year. She applied for and received a \$200 rent subsidy that the minister is talking about, but almost immediately her landlord, Boardwalk, raised the rent by another \$142. My question to the minister is simply this: does the minister see that without guidelines the subsidy program that's supposed to be helping these people is actually adding to the profits of corporations like Boardwalk?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that the extensive growth in Alberta is providing some challenges in housing in Alberta, and the Alberta government is trying to address those challenges. That is why we took those steps immediately after the election of the new leader to bring forward a housing task force that has reported to my ministry, which is currently looking at those recommendations and will be bringing forward responses very quickly.

Mr. Martin: So I guess when these people walk into my office with the problems that they're facing – and it's thousands of people across this province – this is what the minister is telling me: "Don't worry. Be happy. We've got a report, and we'll get around to it sometime." Mr. Speaker, the problem is now. I ask this minister: would he consider, report or no report, bringing in rent guidelines to stop this gouging?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I again suggest that the report responses will be here very quickly, and those responses will address some of the concerns that the hon. member from the third party has. I cannot tell you at this time if they're going to be positive or negative, but they will address the responses.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Northwest Anthony Henday Ring Road

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. St. Albert residents in the neighborhoods of Heritage Lakes, Grandin, and Akinsdale anxiously await this government's position on the alignment of the northwest leg of Anthony Henday Drive. The proposed route runs far too close to their homes, creating dangerous goods, noise, and child safety issues. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: will the minister listen to the St. Albert residents' concerns and feedback from the packed open house last summer and subsequent 1,916 petitions and move the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive south of the current proposal?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the government will continue to listen closely to the concerns of residents of St. Albert. Government has been in negotiation with Newman college. Should the province acquire the college site, the road can be shifted further away from the homes in south St. Albert, and this may eliminate the need for noise mitigation also. But no decisions have been made about either the alignment or the purchasing of the college at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister confirm that the government is offering fair market value to acquire the property of Newman college to enable the road to be aligned further south?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to negotiate with the archdiocese. I have not had a chance to meet with their leadership since Archbishop Collins went to Toronto, and I don't think it would be prudent to discuss the details of our negotiations in public; however, both sides are negotiating in good faith. We are making progress, and I am hopeful that we can come to an agreement that is reasonable and fair to all involved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, at the first open house last summer a subsequent open house was promised for the fall, but it still hasn't happened. When will the St. Albert residents be provided an open house to see the details of the new alignment if proposed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following the negotiations with Newman college the department plans to hold an open house in May to update the public, and we're not sure exactly when yet. But, again, no decisions have been made about either the alignment or the purchasing of the college at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Land Titles Wait Times

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former realtor I'm very aware that the land titles office plays a key role in concluding what can be a very stressful and expensive process for individuals, whether they're buying their first or their 10th home. North America's hottest real estate market, which exists right here in our province, has led to excessively long waits at Alberta's land titles office, some causing over a month's delay in closing transactions. My question is to the minister responsible for Service Alberta. Can the minister tell this House what his department is doing to remedy this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Mr. Snelgrove: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Last August in this House, when the question arose, the turnaround had reached 16 business days. By January it had reached 26. That was unacceptable to us. It was unacceptable to the business community. More importantly, it was unacceptable to the staff. Through several changes, including hiring more people, they now have the turnaround days down to 11. As Alberta knows, given the tremendous growth in the numbers of registrations, this is a tremendous tribute to the diligence and hard work of the staff at the land titles office.

Mr. Rogers: My supplemental is to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Well, if it's that simple, why has it taken his department so long to move to this step?

Mr. Snelgrove: I wish it were that simple, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, it is quite an elaborate and intensive training program that these interns go through because accuracy as well as timeliness in that department is paramount. Besides hiring more staff, they've worked evenings; they've worked Saturdays. This staff has taken the bull by the horns, I think, given that they have 5,000 a day, and in the month of March these people had over 120,000 business title transactions. So, once again, it shows you that when a department is focused and works together, they can achieve great things for Alberta and Service Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, since it's unlikely that this market is going to slow down any time soon, can the minister assure this House that these measures aren't just temporary, that they will last for the long term?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the ongoing training in the department and the priority in the personnel administration office of the Alberta government is to make sure that we have in place suitable trainees in business or experienced people coming through the ranks. So to maintain this level of excellence in all departments is truly a priority for this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Security in Schools

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week an individual broke into the Victoria school of performing arts and set fire to parts of that building. While the matter is being resolved, the fact that it occurred at all is troubling. Another troubling incident happened a few months ago with an attempted assault on a young girl in an elementary school. Schools are expected to be safe places for our children, but when that safety is threatened, it raises real concerns within the community. To the Solicitor General: has the minister worked with the Minister of Education to develop a set of best practices to follow to ensure that our schools are secure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These incidents that are happening in our public schools are certainly a concern to this government, and obviously the Minister of Education and myself have had discussions on how we can secure our schools to make sure that they are a safe environment for our children.

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Speaker, in corresponding with school administrators and educators, we have heard that additional security measures often have to take a back seat to other priorities such as programming, instruction, and maintenance. However, the safety of our children and the security of learning institutions cannot be put on the back burner. Will the Minister of Public Security commit to providing a source of dedicated funding designated only for school security such as video cameras or private security patrols, to be accessed if a school administrator decides to update their security? Basically, we're asking for a separate envelope.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, in regard to the security of our schools that is under the Minister of Education's budget. I know that this is a high priority for him, and I'm sure that any request to ensure that our children are safe in our schools will be adequately addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Guaranteeing the safety of children in our schools requires some action, and one of the easiest programs that we can strengthen is the presence of school resource officers, basically police officers working within the school. This is a fantastic program that is, unfortunately, not receiving the attention it deserves from this government. Can the minister commit to providing more funding to police services to hire more officers so that they can be deployed in our communities and within our schools as resource officers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to remind the hon. member that budgeting for policing in this province has increased by over 20 per cent this year. We will be shortly again discussing the budget for the next fiscal year, and I would certainly look for his support for an additional amount of monies to carry out the job. If the hon. Minister of Education would like to supplement, I would ask him for his comments.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member prefaced his question by saying "guaranteeing" safety in schools. We can't guarantee safety in schools; however, we are doing everything we can. But we also have to make schools accessible and friendly, and we can't have doors that have to be swiped to get in. So we're doing what we can, but it has . . .

The Speaker: And I have to continue with the question period. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Guardian Angels Security Organization

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Guardian Angels is a nonprofit group that uses unarmed volunteers to deter street crime. The Calgary Guardian Angels took their first street patrol on March 28, and reports indicate that an Edmonton chapter could hit the streets in months. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Will the Guardian Angels help or hinder crime prevention?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, that sounds like an opinion, but go forth.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll do my best to help with this opinion. First of all, safe neighbourhoods are definitely a concern, and we want to make sure that families have excellent, safe communities to work in. I want to mention that the entire community is required to be vigilant to help police reduce crime. Criminals do not like others to see them when they're committing their crimes, so we can always benefit from the involvement of community-based groups like the Guardian Angels who put more eyes and ears on the street.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question: are the Guardian Angels co-operating with police in regard to informing them of the areas they will patrol and reporting on illegal activities they come across?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again an excellent question. I want to reiterate that it is very important for the Guardian Angels to develop close relationships with the police services in the communities that they operate in. To be effective with their own protection, they are encouraged to keep police informed on not only their activities but their findings. Crime prevention is all about government, police, and the whole community working together to ensure safe communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: will the

Guardian Angels be in danger if they confront those breaking the laws?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, like any other citizens, we encourage Guardian Angels to report illegal activity to police and to be observers only. If a confrontation does occur, I understand that Guardian Angels' first approach is to try and diffuse a situation through dialogue and communication, and we encourage them to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer North.

Electricity Transmission Regulation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the government through an order in council produced their latest version of the transmission regulation to try to improve the damage that has been done by electricity deregulation. Now, my first question is to the Minister of Energy. Kellan Fluckiger is the California contractor that has been hired by this government to try to fix electricity deregulation. What role did this gentleman have in drafting this latest version of the transmission regulation issued yesterday through an order in council?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, initially I'll address the situation with respect to the transmission regulations and the assumption that some individuals make that somehow or another that part of the industry in the province of Alberta is or has been deregulated. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The fact of the matter is that transmission in the province of Alberta is now regulated, has been regulated, and will continue to be regulated into the future.

Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister thinks that transmission regulation is a car part. That's how little grasp he has of this issue.

Now, why is this government continuing to allow Kellan Fluckiger to undermine the regulatory authority of the EUB?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you that the individual across the way will have to be around an awful lot longer than I am before he understands more about car parts than I do.

However, with respect to the authority of the EUB their authority is very clearly laid out in legislation and regulation in the province of Alberta. Nothing that we are doing now, nothing that we have done with respect to transmission regulation undermines any authority that they have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Energy is right about one thing. I will never know as much about Rolls-Royces as he does.

Now, given that the Independent System Operator is accountable to no one, how much extra is this transfer of authority in this very regulation from the EUB to the Independent System Operator going to cost consumers on their already high monthly power bills? How much is this change going to cost consumers?

2:20

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would really like to address the situation with respect to Rolls-Royce. Not very many people in

this Legislature or, for that matter, in the province of Alberta would understand the tremendous role that Rolls-Royce plays with respect to the energy industry in the province of Alberta. They are a tremendous company. They provide tremendous machinery that helps us with our gas transmission systems in the province of Alberta. I might also add to that that the use of the equipment that Rolls-Royce has provided to industry over the years has decreased the cost of the industry to Albertans, and it does so on a daily basis.

The Speaker: That was 102 questions and answers today.

Tabling Returns and Reports (reversion)

The Speaker: We're back to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is from Robert W. Parker, who is actually a Calgary resident who raises a number of concerns with health care. He is unhappy about having to pay for the blood tests for prostate cancer. His health care card was cancelled, and now he cannot see a doctor, so he's very concerned about that.

The second is from Denise Wood, and this is around the sterilization issue. It's noting that she attended a gastroenterologist's office in which the scope that was to be used was being cleaned in front of her with a brush and some solution. Although she questioned the nurse and the doctor at the time, they said that that was acceptable.

The final is from Jane Edgett, who was a respiratory therapist at the Red Deer regional hospital. She has raised a number of issues connected to sterilization, hospital errors, and infection resulting directly from staffing cutbacks, and she cites a number of studies that support that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from Allan Laird, who wants to express his concern about the lack of support for school-aged kids in Alberta. As we experience the pain and problems of the boom, this is another area where we are creating the Alberta disadvantage.

The second is from Tammy Herbert. She is a single working mother of two children who has a full-time paying job. She's worried that she's going to be forced out of her home because she will no longer be able to pay the rent and utilities. The gap between the wealthy and poor is widening, and the middle class income earners are disappearing from the scale.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an *Edmonton Journal* article from February 2000. The article announced Bob Maskell's intention to seek the nomination for the Highlands by-election in 2000 for the Liberal Party of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of 10 letters I've received regarding the need to change Alberta's employment standards to protect the jobs of workers who take compassionate care leave under the federal employment insurance

plan. No one should have to choose between their job and being with their loved one in their final days. I would point out that Alberta is the only province that does not have legislation to do this. The letters are from the following people: Sarah Schmidt, Val Millions, Paula Reedyk, Rita Patterson, Sheila Axten, Deanna Gabrielson, Melanee Thomas, Lisa Lambert, Janine Marshall, and Dayna Daniels.

Thank you.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Boutilier, Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, response to Written Question 29, asked for by Dr. Swann on behalf of Mr. Bonko on April 24, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Lindsay, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, pursuant to the Gaming and Liquor Act the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, 2005-2006 annual report; pursuant to the Horse Racing Alberta Act Horse Racing Alberta 2005 annual report.

head:

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the Government House Leader please share with us the projected government business for the week commencing April 16.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There being no government business on Monday, April 16, we would go to Tuesday, April 17. Under Orders of the Day: the government motion with respect to the Standing Order changes; second reading on Bills 28, 19, and 22; Committee of the Whole on Bill 15, Bill 17, Bill 18, and Bill 22; third reading on Bills 3 and 15; and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday the 18th Committee of the Whole on Bills 28, 18, 19, 22; third reading on Bills 16, 21, 22, 17, 6, 12, and 10; and I'm going to assume a government motion that is not yet on notice with respect to populating policy field committees in the event that the government motion passes on Tuesday.

On Thursday, of course, we anticipate hearing from the Minister of Finance with respect to the budget and, of course, the government motions on supply and referral to supply before adjourning for our second constituency week.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During an exchange in question period between the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition, there were some remarks made by the Premier in which he said that we were using innuendo and that the Leader of the Official Opposition had clearly misled.

The citations I would like to go over today include 23(h), which covers allegations, (i) imputing false motives, (j) using insulting language likely to create a disturbance. In addition to that there is *Beauchesne's* 484(3), which, again, is imputing to a member unworthy motives or speaking in abusive or disrespectful terms; 486, which is speaking to the tone of the language; 490, which, again,

clearly spells out "mislead" as one of the prohibited terms under unparliamentary language; and *Marleau and Montpetit* 522, that remarks: "which question that Member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order." These were contravened with the remarks from the Premier setting out that innuendo was somehow used and that we couldn't prove what we were saying.

Mr. Speaker, I'm looking at some of the sessional papers that have been tabled around this particular issue. I look at Sessional Paper 208/2007, specifically around the 50 hours that was billed with no explanation. The Premier claimed that he had explained. I've gone through Hansard: he had not. But we have supplied copies of the invoices for Mr. Maskell in which 50 hours was billed, so I don't know how we're impugning anything. We supplied the proof of it. There's no innuendo here, sir. It was on his letterhead, and it's clearly been stamped and received. This is a sessional paper that was tabled several days ago, I believe.

Also, Sessional Paper 199/2007 outlines a number of the cheques that were made to the individual being discussed. It shows also that we could find no associates that were listed that might explain a 50-hour billing. Perhaps if there had been other people that had been working, that might have accounted for it. No, indeed, there are no associates listed in the corporate search. Again, that information was supplied, was tabled in this House, Mr. Speaker.

2:30

We have done our very best to supply and back up every statement that we have made on this. I have just gone through a few of the sessional papers that have been tabled in support of the remarks we made, so in fact we were very factual, and we supplied proof of every statement that we made in this House. So I would like to have the Premier withdraw his accusation that the Leader of the Official Opposition was misleading this House on this particular issue and to also withdraw his statement that there was innuendo because there was not. We have supplied proof of every statement that we've made regarding this particular issue.

In addition, the tone and the choice of language that was used here were clearly meant to insult and, I would argue, clearly meant to provoke debate and to disturb the decorum of the House.

I would appreciate your being able to render a decision on this point of order today. Thank you.

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

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the best the hon. member has and the Liberal opposition has is just not good enough because, clearly, although they've tabled documents in the House, the questions that have been raised have been raised with an intent to besmirch the character of an individual who formerly served.

There are certainly, clearly, very appropriate questions raised from time to time in the House, and it's not inappropriate to ask questions with respect to contracts and, indeed, to ask some specific questions, although I would have to say, Mr. Speaker, that it is bordering on inappropriate, if not inappropriate, to table a specific document and then ask a question about that specific document as though a minister or the Premier might have read every document that's in every filing cabinet in the hands of the government. That is inappropriate.

With respect to the question of innuendo and misleading, when you do file a document and then raise a specific question relative to 50 hours and do that in context of another question on another contract, there are innuendos that occur, and we've dealt with this

from time to time. The inappropriate juxtaposition of those types of questions and comments can lead to besmirching the character in this case not of a member of the House but of a former member of the House. What the opposition clearly has been trying to do is to suggest that the government is engaged in patronage in the hiring of Mr. Maskell. In a member's statement today there was a clear definition of the talents and capabilities of the member of the House. I hope that the opposition is not suggesting by their questions that a former member of the House, regardless of what party, shouldn't put their talent to work on behalf of the people of Alberta in an appropriate way, clearly having had it cleared by the Ethics Commissioner with respect to conflicts of interest.

So there was very clearly innuendo in the context of all the questions that were raised by the opposition, as, I would suggest, there is always innuendo in the questions raised by the members of the opposition. Sometimes, as today and earlier in this session, that innuendo is inappropriate. I would suggest that today that innuendo was inappropriate.

With respect to the question of misleading the House, Mr. Speaker, specifically on page 147 of *Beauchesne*, 490, there is a list of expressions. "Since 1958, it has been ruled parliamentary to use the following expressions," and one of those expressions is "misleading," as you see on page 148, halfway down. So it's not always inappropriate to use the words "misleading the House" if, in fact, you are misleading the House. I would suggest that the proof is in the pudding in this particular case.

It is not inappropriate at all for the Premier today to point out that in the manner and context in which these questions were raised with respect to various contracts, obviously the point of the opposition was to try and suggest that there was somehow inappropriate patronage going on. The point of the Premier and others is to say that just because the person is hired to use their talent in the service of Albertans, it's not patronage if a job that needs doing is done by a person who is qualified to do it.

So there has been innuendo, inappropriate in my view, on the other side. In fact, in the way in which the questions were posed, they have been misleading the House.

The Speaker: Are there others who would choose to participate?

The chair recognizes at the outset that it is Thursday and would like to read several paragraphs from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 525.

The proceedings of the House are based on a long-standing tradition of respect for the integrity of all Members. Thus, the use of offensive, provocative or threatening language in the House is strictly forbidden. Personal attacks, insults and obscene language or words are not in order. A direct charge or accusation against a Member may be made only by way of a substantive motion for which notice is required.

On page 526:

In dealing with unparliamentary language, the Speaker takes into account the tone, manner and intention of the Member speaking; the person to whom the words were directed; the degree of provocation; and, most importantly, whether or not the remarks created disorder in the Chamber. Thus, language deemed unparliamentary one day may not necessarily be deemed unparliamentary the following day. The codification of unparliamentary language has proven impractical as it is the context in which words or phrases are used that the Chair must consider when deciding whether or not they should be withdrawn. Although an expression may be found to be acceptable, the Speaker has cautioned that any language which leads to disorder in the House should not be used. Expressions which are considered unparliamentary when applied to an individual Member have not always been considered so when applied "in a generic sense" or to a party.

There's one additional paragraph on page 527 about the usage of this and the review of this by the Chamber. This refers again to the House of Commons.

In 1991, following several incidents of unparliamentary language, a government motion respecting decorum and civility was brought before the House. The motion was debated on three occasions but never came to a vote.

It seems that the members themselves sort of enjoyed at various times the give-and-take that goes on in the House and, when confronted with an opportunity to actually come down with codification of certain utilization of words, have always backed away. We have, of course, in the situation here today with respect to the word "misleading" two interpretations, both quoted correctly: the Leader of the Official Opposition saying that it is unparliamentary, the Government House Leader saying that on certain occasions it is parliamentary.

This is really a wonderful position to be in here, to stand here. So one will view all of this and take all of this in the context of it being Thursday, a warm day, the fourth day of the week. The chair does not like the utilization of words like "innuendo," "misleading," does not like provocative statements. It's cautioned the House before. The members enjoy what they do, and the members have 45 seconds to frame questions and 45 seconds to frame answers, and that gives a lot of leverage.

As I've said before on numerous occasions, we can do better. I call on everybody to try and do better. Less provocative leads to less provocation to the other side. Harmony and love bring forth the very best in us all. But do we really want to be loved is the question.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 28

Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, please.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move for second reading the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007.

The Provincial Court Act deals with matters relating to the Provincial Court of Alberta, and I might at this time indicate to the House that the amendments that I'm about to outline have the encouragement of the court, and they are supportive of all of these changes.

Bill 28, Mr. Speaker, amends the Provincial Court Act to permit a judge who is more than 70 years of age and working full-time to be appointed a part-time judge if he or she wishes. Currently the act permits part-time judges to be reappointed after age 70 but only if they started part-time service on or before their 70th birthday. Extending the option of part-time service to full-time judges over 70 years of age will benefit Albertans because more highly experienced and competent judges will be retained to continue serving Albertans on a part-time basis. Judges who want a guaranteed amount of judicial service after retirement will have this option. Furthermore, there is a financial benefit to the government with these amendments because contributions to the part-time judges' pension plan would not be required.

2:40

The amendments will also change how sittings for part-time

judges can be scheduled. The act now requires part-time judges to sit full-time for two three-month periods in each year of their term. The amendments will require part-time judges to sit for the equivalent of six months on a full-time basis in each year of their term, providing more flexibility in scheduling for the courts.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Justice and Attorney General strives to promote a fair and accessible civil and criminal justice system. The Provincial Court Amendment Act will help further this goal by retaining the knowledge and experience of judges with many years of service on the bench.

As such, I would encourage all members of the Assembly to support this good piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader, the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak in support of the principles that are set forth in Bill 28, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007. As I said yesterday, we're benefiting from having a minister stay in place for some time because the legislation that is coming forward, I know, has been through the appropriate stakeholder groups and consultations. It's being driven by an identified need, and the appropriate amount of background work has in fact happened to bring this bill before us.

It is essentially dealing with our employment or labour pool that we currently have available, and we can end up with labour shortages even on the bench, I think. So it's nice to be able to have this legislation clearing the way for individuals to be serving as part-time judges. I know that we will appreciate their continued service on the bench, and it does work out some of the slight quirks that were in the existing legislation. I think that having them serve the equivalent of six months on a full-time basis in each year of their term is a more flexible way of dealing with the scheduling of their time. As an administrator or someone who would be responsible for scheduling them, I'd say that I would certainly appreciate that flexibility. Previously what it was was serving two three-month periods, and that just can be difficult to work around when you don't have the kind of flexibility that you need.

So we are able to retain experienced judges for a longer period of time, and I think that we are going to need that as the baby boomers increasingly move towards retirement. Some of them will just retire and would not be available. We, I'm sure, can make use of those experienced people who are willing to serve on a part-time basis. It's more attractive to them because they get to do the work they love and that they're good at, frankly, but they may not wish to do it full-time, and this does allow them to continue to serve.

I note that one of the arguments is that it's cost-effective. Usually I would argue against that because I've been really disturbed by the number of choices that I've seen the government make where they dismiss a full-time paid individual and contract it out because they don't have to pay the benefits that go along with it. But in this case the benefits that would usually be paid were contributions to pensions, which, frankly, is not an issue in this case, so I'm willing to support that.

This is not a complex bill. It's really two pages long, and it's just essentially inserting two sections. I have looked at it. I have looked at the three-column document, which I appreciate receiving. It was very helpful. Given that I was able to look at the three-column document, I'm very happy to support this bill. I urge my colleagues in the Assembly to support it in second reading.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly have no objections to the bill. I take it that there is probably a need. We hear about the courts being clogged up. I would like to get, when the minister is around, a little fuller explanation about what the situation is there and why he felt a need to move to part-time at 70. Are there other things that we can do? We hear and read about it – I don't know if it's true or not – that it seems to be part of the problem again with an overheated, booming economy that the courts are very busy. So when the Minister of Justice comes back on this.

As I say, the bill probably makes sense. I don't see anything that I couldn't support, but I would like to get some idea when he has the chance, either in committee or third reading or at the end of second reading, to give us sort of an update about what is happening and why the need is there for this particular bill at this particular time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to rise and participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 28, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007. Certainly, when one looks at this – and I heard the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre – it is certainly worthy of support.

I'm pleased to see that this is the sort of amendment that the government is doing to the Provincial Court Act and that they're not following in the footsteps of their federal cousins and initiating a wholesale change to how judges or justices are selected and appointed to the courts. Certainly, all hon. members of this Assembly have been reading recently about some of the controversy around the changes that have been proposed by the federal government. I don't think these changes will increase the public's confidence in the judiciary. The judiciary, as the hon. members of this Assembly know, must be fully independent, and we must maintain and guard that independence.

This is why, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage support of this bill and remind all hon. members of this Assembly to please be mindful of the total independence of the judiciary from the legislative process.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few brief comments in response to the comments by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in an attempt, perhaps, to provide some clarity.

There are a number of ways in which you can retain the talent of people who have served Albertans as a member of the Provincial Court as they get a little older and a little bit more experienced. They can retire, in which case you lose their talent entirely. They can be appointed as supernumerary judges, in which case they could be called upon to serve from time to time as needed.

A number of years ago there was also a provision made for part-time judges. The benefit of a part-time judge over a supernumerary judge was that you could actually have the service of a part-time judge on a consistent basis over a consistent period of time and schedule it more appropriately as opposed to calling in a supernumerary judge on a periodic basis. The other benefit of a part-time judge over a supernumerary judge would be that the part-time judge would continue to keep up with professional development, if you will, and the goings-on of the court, as opposed to a supernumerary judge who really did just come in when called.

2:50

The provision of part-time service was made available at the request of the court as a very good adjunct to the ability to keep judges who had put in considerable service, who were prepared to continue to put in service, but who no longer wished to put it in on a full-time basis or had otherwise come to the end of their term, so to speak.

So that's what happened, and the amendments that are here today just enhance the ability to retain the services of qualified, competent judges who have capacity, who have ability, and whose service can continue to be provided to the courts and to Albertans but in a more structured way than, perhaps, would have been available through supernumerary status.

The Speaker: Additional members?

Shall we call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 21
Securities Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate being able to speak to Bill 21, the Securities Amendment Act, 2007, again. I also appreciate the thoughtful comments and questions from the hon. members who spoke to the bill during second reading and Committee of the Whole. Before I move third reading, I would like to use this opportunity to answer questions and clarify some of the comments.

The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford referred to comments by the Minister of Finance regarding a single securities regulator. I cannot speak for the minister, but I can respond to the hon. member's implication that a passport system would be a waste if the province one day agreed to a single regulator. Alberta has been one of the top provinces and territories that have been actively committed since 2004 to working together to improve investor protection and enhance the competitiveness of Canada's capital markets. We are doing that through the passport system and the harmonization initiative, which this legislation helps us achieve.

The first phase of the passport system was implemented in 2005 and gave participants certain exemptions when dealing with different securities jurisdictions, with the only exception of Ontario. The second phase of the passport system will significantly expand the single window of access concept of securities regulation by allowing participants to access capital markets across Canada by dealing only with the regulator in one jurisdiction.

The harmonization of securities laws produced by the passport system would be necessary even if there was agreement to move to a single regulator at some point in the future. In fact, the high degree of commitment and co-operation demonstrated by regulators and governments in developing the passport system would be needed to create a single securities regulatory structure. Accordingly, there has been nothing lost in terms of time, money, or human resources in harmonizing securities laws as part of the passport initiative.

Some of the hon. members also raised questions about the effectiveness of the Alberta Securities Commission. Although that

is not directly related to the legislation at hand, I don't want to leave these comments without a response.

The Auditor General conducted an independent review of the ASC's enforcement system in the fall of 2005 and concluded that there was no substance to allegations of illegal enforcement activities at the commission. The Auditor General's report did identify areas where improvement could strengthen the ASC's enforcement system and made 10 recommendations. The Auditor General made two recommendations to strengthen the ASC's conflict-of-interest policies. In his 2005-06 annual report the Auditor General stated that he is "satisfied that the [ASC] has responded effectively to our 2005 recommendations – out of 10 recommendations, 5 have been implemented and 5 are rated as having satisfactory progress." The Auditor General will follow up to see how the designated changes operate in practice. The Minister of Finance will also continue to monitor the Auditor General's reviews of the ASC and will respond accordingly.

I would also like to reply to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's characterization of the harmonization initiative as a race to the bottom. The provinces and territories are not lowering their standards to the lowest common denominator, as he stated. There is no race to the bottom. Provincial and territorial governments are committed to making improvements to the Canadian securities regulatory framework.

In 2004 all the provinces and territories except Ontario signed the memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. The agreement committed Alberta and other provinces and territories to harmonize and streamline securities regulation across Canada. This involved repealing significant portions of the Securities Act so that it acts as platform legislation designed to support national uniform rules implemented by the Canadian Securities Administrators. Platform legislation contains basic and general requirements which rarely change. The detailed requirements will continually evolve to meet the changing market conditions as set out in the rules. The repeals and amendments in Bill 21 will allow us to adopt a single set of enhanced requirements applicable across Canada in most key areas of securities regulation.

Again, I thank the hon. members for their comments and questions and hope that I have clarified matters for them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if I may just recap the importance of Bill 21. This legislation includes amendments to enhance the securities passport system and further harmonize and streamline Alberta's securities laws with other Canadian jurisdictions. We have also included some enhanced enforcement and housekeeping amendments. The legislation will support a new national registration rule being developed by the Canadian Securities Administrators, and that is expected to be implemented in 2008. These amendments will ensure that Alberta continues to meet its commitments under the 2004 provincial/territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation.

I urge all members to support Bill 21 as it is key in our ongoing efforts to improve securities regulation across Canada. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and speak to Bill 21, Securities Amendment Act, 2007. Bill 21 attempts to harmonize securities legislation among the provinces without abolishing the regulators. This process extends back several years, involving several meetings among provincial and federal finance ministers as well as several meetings among provincial regulators.

Canada already has 13 securities market regulators. All other major industrial countries have one central securities market enforcer such as the United States Securities and Exchange Commission, SEC. The Alberta Liberals are on the record as supporting, as a first choice, a strong and effective Alberta Securities Commission.

Having multiple securities regulators has advantages and disadvantages. The benefits of having several market regulators are, number one, local companies have faster access to public equity; number two, Alberta companies are less likely to fall by the wayside to central Canadian companies; and number three, increased local control.

On the other hand, existing in the multiregulator environment causes a number of challenges. For example, a number of companies operate in several provinces. They must deal with different rules in different jurisdictions. What works in one province might not work in another. Companies express frustrations dealing with often conflicting and confusing regulations. Moreover, others suggest that the multiregulatory environment increases fees and reduces enforcement.

3:00

Two reasons for supporting Bill 21: investor protection and business accessibility. First, Mr. Speaker, Bill 21 permits companies and stakeholders the legal means to sue public companies that issue false or misleading information. This new law will follow Ontario's lead, which has recently enacted similar legislation. Second, stakeholders – security lawyers, investors, advocates, and particularly businesses – cite that there is some value in having harmonized security legislation. Each provincial jurisdiction has different rules for security regulations. Thus, if an Alberta-based company wants to do work in another province, it must comply with cumbersome security legislation. Businesses express frustration with having to deal with the different rules in different provinces. This bill attempts to mitigate this problem.

While this bill does attempt to improve investor protection, it fails to address a number of concerns raised by the Official Opposition in regard to the Alberta Securities Commission. I have a few concerns, Mr. Speaker: the first one, rules preventing Alberta Securities Commission employees and board members from trading in companies that are being investigated; the second one, regulation prohibiting ASC employees and board members from trading in companies listed with ASC; the third one, rules restricting MLAs from nominating ASC commissioners.

Moving toward a passport system. Harmonizing legislation fails to provide a single enforcement regulator or investor advocate. We need to ensure investor protection at all stages of the harmonizing process. We are also concerned that a passport system will allow market regulators to pass the buck on enforcement files. For example, the Alberta Securities Commission may investigate a small part of an irregularity but pass another portion on to another one. According to investor advocates this pass-the-buck system risks leaving an investigation uncompleted.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, is streamlining registration requirements for companies and advisors that operate in more than one province. For example, if a company or broker operates in Alberta and British Columbia, it needs to register with the Alberta and B.C. security commissions. Before Bill 21 companies complained that this process is cumbersome and expensive. According to an investor advocate the passport system is all about streamlining registration but nothing to do with strengthening enforcement.

I have some questions to ask the hon. minister, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister table letters from stakeholders supporting this initiative? The second one: is the minister confident that this change will

positively impact companies? In terms of being registered in Alberta, how can Albertans be confident that the new registration system is going to improve the old system?

Now, I want to touch a little bit on civil liability, Mr. Speaker. According to an investor advocate up until a few years ago stakeholders couldn't sue for misrepresentation in what is called continuous disclosure. If an executive lies in a press release or annual report, shareholders can sue them. Prior to 2006 the provinces had archaic civil liability protection, say the investor advocates. Here are the key questions that need to be addressed. How restrictive is the civil liability? How difficult is it for stakeholders to prove that a company's intent was malicious? Is there a limitation on the amount that stakeholders can recoup, such as a million dollar cap?

I have some other questions, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain 41(1)(b), how the executive director will "assist in the administration of the securities or exchange contract laws of another jurisdiction"? Conversely, will other jurisdictions be interfering in Alberta? Who is going to cover the cost of these investigations? Where is the whistle-blower legislation? Alberta Auditor General recommendations: we will see that there.

Those are the few questions, Mr. Speaker. Otherwise, I have no objection. I definitely will support this bill, but if the minister has time sometime today or in a few days, I would really appreciate it if I got those answers.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't prolong the debate. I understand the need for harmonization. As I said, the member that brought it forward said that the Alberta Securities Commission has done yeoman work and didn't have any problems. Well, I beg to differ, because as I said, I worked under the Securities Commission. There were some bad decisions, bad things happening, and hopefully it has been straightened out.

I've always believed that we needed, Mr. Speaker, a national regulator, not a federal government regulator but a national regulator, because it doesn't make sense having investments with the way money flows, having, you know, 13 different jurisdictions. So I understand the purpose of this passport system, to move towards only one set of harmonized continuous disclosure requirements, but I'm not sure, then, what the need is for each one of the securities commissions. It's very hard to tell from the bill.

The other big problem, of course, is that Ontario is not a part of this, and a lot of the markets flow out of Bay Street and Toronto. So that's a major problem if we don't have all provinces participating, especially Ontario. But in saying that, okay, we're moving towards harmonization, and that's a good thing.

The member says that we're not moving to the lowest common denominator. I don't know that from this bill. How can we tell? How can we tell what the rules are going to be under the passport system? I noticed that with some of the rules that we had at the Alberta Securities Commission, as lax as they may have been, we seem to be weakening it. I still don't understand the reason for that other than, as I said, a race to the bottom. The member says that that's not the case, but we have no evidence that that is necessarily true.

3:10

So, Mr. Speaker, as I say, I'm not going to go on very long. I've made the case about this, but I really wonder what the roles are now of all the other securities commissions. In other words, where does

the Alberta Securities Commission end and where does the passport start? It's impossible to tell from that bill. I suppose that it's in the regulations or whatever. Then we could begin to judge whether this is lessening standards rather than sort of the best practices of all the provinces in moving towards harmonization.

I said before that white-collar crime has not been taken very seriously in this country, and certainly the United States is much more concerned about this. We'll have to wait and see how this works. On the one hand I'm for harmonization, but I wish we'd just have one national regulator that the provinces could agree on, have the best practices from all of the securities commissions. That would make the most sense, but we'll have to wait and see if this passport system is a step in the right direction or a weakening, really, of even individual securities commissions. I can't tell at this particular time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if there's a question or comment from hon. members.

There being none, I'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again I appreciate the opportunity to rise and participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 21. From what I can gather, Bill 21 attempts to harmonize security legislation with other provinces. It's a step in the right direction. I, too, have been reading many reports where we should have a more harmonized system of security regulation throughout the country. As this province and this economy grow, I think we have to give serious consideration to this.

I look at the Minister of Finance, and certainly I can see a change in direction from this government. The Minister of Finance has indicated that, well, maybe it is time for a national regulatory body. I think it's going to be an interesting couple of years with that discussion, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 21 also allows investors to sue public companies operating in Alberta that issue false or misleading information. Now, there are those that would say that it fails to strengthen enforcement, and that has certainly been discussed in the past couple of weeks in this Assembly. But when we look at this attempt to harmonize security legislation across the provinces without abolishing the other regulatory bodies, we have to recognize that this process extends back several years, involving several meetings between provincial and federal finance ministers. In fact, there was a former finance minister from this House who would be sitting with the federal finance minister of today. Hopefully, that in itself will lead to a serious consideration of harmonizing our security legislation with other provinces.

Now, when we look at what is in this legislation – all hon. members of this House have had a good look at that – there's something that I'm disappointed is not in this legislation. It has been brought to my attention on many occasions. I've discussed it in this House. I'm disappointed to see that there is not a more valiant attempt made to change how companies report, specifically not only to the investment dealers but to the investment community. To be specific, Mr. Speaker, with Bill 21 we need to look at how companies register their royalty payments and how these show up on either quarterly reports from respective companies or the annual report, which is filed.

Now, this is not only a problem in Alberta, but in my opinion it's a problem also in Ontario, and it certainly is a problem in New York. Let's look at the Syncrude joint venture for an example. The Syncrude joint venture has seven, eight different participants. They

each have different percentages of the project; some are significantly larger than others. But they don't all report in the same way how they pay royalties to the Minister of Energy. Not two of them are the same, and I think they should be. We can look at Petro-Canada's annual report or their quarterly financial statements. We can look at ConocoPhillips. We can look at Imperial Oil. They're all different. They all report their royalty payments in a different way.

We look at Nexen. We look at the Canadian Oil Sands Trust. Perhaps I would suggest that in the future the securities law be set up so that we have to follow the reporting procedures of Nexen and Canadian Oil Sands Trust. They tell in detail the royalties they pay, in which jurisdiction the royalties were collected, and they also explain in a percentage the royalty that has been paid specifically to this province. Now, if you look at Imperial Oil, you can't determine that. If you look at ConocoPhillips, you certainly can't determine that. Petro-Canada is halfway in-between. If I'm an investor and I'm looking at investing in these companies, that's information that I want to know.

If we were to take Bill 21 at this time and improve it, this is one thing we could do. This is not mere housekeeping. There should be a standardized reporting process for royalty payments. The EUB certainly has had a lot to say about this, and other bodies have had a lot to say about exactly how reserves are calculated and reported. If we want to have good, solid investor confidence, Mr. Speaker, we need to have a system that investors and their dealers can be confident in, and that works. I'm not going to go into the details of the changes that have been made in some of the reserves and how they've been reported by respective companies, but this is one thing that I think has been overlooked in the debate so far on Bill 21. I would urge all hon. members of this House to have another look at this because it's important.

If we look at the royalties and some of the questions that an investor may have, they could be these, for an example. If economic profits are generated, how much does the government take? How much does it take from marginal fields? How much does it take from larger, more profitable fields? If oil prices increase, what percentage goes to the government? How much incentive does the contractor have to keep costs down with these investments, now with the effective royalty rate? This could all be outlined and detailed. I have the utmost confidence that we can do this for investors. How aggressive is the system when we're talking about the effective royalty rate? What percentage of the production will the contractor be entitled to lift or be able to lift? All this data could be made available and should be made available to the investors.

3:20

If we look at some of the other jurisdictions, which may or may not have some or all of their operations registered in this province, if we look at Alaska, if we look at outfits that just operate here in Alberta, if we look at what goes on in Texas, if we look at what goes on in Wyoming, in Norway, everything is different. Everything is very different. For instance, the effective royalty rate – and an investor would certainly want to know this – is 22 per cent in Alaska, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta the effective royalty rate is 8 per cent, and that's on third-tier oil. In Texas the effective royalty rate is 24 per cent. In Wyoming it is 20 per cent. In Norway it's zero because they have a different system. The hon. Minister of Energy is absolutely right. Some people don't understand that, but certainly there is a special petroleum tax. That is one of the reasons why the Norwegians have been so successful in collecting on behalf of citizens now and in the future billions and billions of dollars. Certainly, I hope that we do the same here. Those are just some of the jurisdictions.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to give this serious consideration with Bill 21. Every energy company that's reporting in this jurisdiction should be reporting the amounts of royalties that they pay in the same manner so that investors can make up their own mind whether they want to invest in that enterprise or that corporation. But if investors are going to make up their own mind, they should have all the information available. It shouldn't be just hit and miss.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Energy under this Standing Order provision.

Mr. Knight: Yeah, Mr. Speaker. I listened, and I was very interested in the comments that the hon. member has said around the reporting and recording of royalty structures and that sort of thing with respect to investors and investor confidence. I would just ask if there could be perhaps a little more explanation with respect to how the hon. member would presume that we should proceed in Alberta with respect to this to build investor confidence.

Mr. MacDonald: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question from the hon. Minister of Energy. Earlier, before the session started in March, I was doing some research into exactly how the royalty structure works postpayout with oil sands projects in Fort McMurray. I was astonished.

First, constituents from Gold Bar come into my office, and they say: "Well, we're going to go from 1 per cent royalty payment after the capital costs are recovered to 25 per cent. When is this going to start in Fort McMurray, and when are we going to see an increase in the royalty amounts from synthetic crude oil to the province?" I thought: "That's a very good question. I should do some research into it." So I did.

I was astonished that some companies pay 12 per cent, some pay 14 per cent, some pay 18 per cent. Some companies that are operating in the oil sands areas also are operating with conventional crude oil and natural gas production in the province, and the royalty rates there are anywhere between 23 per cent and 17 per cent. So there's a really wide range of amounts payable, but the first thing that caught my attention was the public's perception that after the 1 per cent royalty rate is taken care of, these operators in the Fort McMurray region pay 25 per cent, and it's simply not true. It's 25 per cent net. Whenever all the reductions, all the holidays and incentives, are taken into account, some of these companies are paying 12 per cent.

For other companies like Imperial Oil, Petro-Canada, Conoco-Phillips whenever you look at their quarterly reports and their annual reports, you cannot determine what amount they make in payments to this province. I don't think that's fair, I don't think it's consistent, and I think we can do better.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Are there additional members who would like to participate on the bill? The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports on the debate.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a couple of comments in respect to Bill 21 Securities Amendment Act, 2007. I had quite a bit of involvement a few years ago in working with the various provinces under an earlier portfolio when the passport approach was first developed and, really, where the consensus was had. We had worked with numerous stakeholders, all

of the national organizations, all of the provinces and were working towards how we help see that our securities approach in the country can address national and international questions. We've always had the ability to deal with the smaller issuers in a provincial jurisdiction, but the interest is to help see that we would have a very efficient – and not just for the issuers but also for those investing in companies and clearly for all the enforcement aspects so that we would continue to have a high level of confidence in investing and attracting people to invest in the equities market in Canada.

There have been a lot of notions put about saying: why not a national regulator? Clearly, there are pros and cons, as was mentioned by others. There have been some substantive benefits by having the regulation of the industry on a provincial level. Our markets are very different, really. They're mostly small cap, micro cap in comparison to the U.S. markets in particular. The vast majority of companies are accessing very locally and are responding be it mining issues in B.C. versus the oil and gas industry in Alberta and a very different sector in Ontario. Yet there still are some concerns for the larger companies who access funds nationally and internationally. It was that drive that said that we've got to find a solution among all the provinces to provide some mechanisms to deal with those national and international.

There was never any support from Quebec, to start, for a national regulator. Every time everybody has ever approached and said the only utopian solution – and there is never one – was to jump to a national regulator, that meant that Quebec was never part of the solution. It also meant that we were trying to say: where can we find the common issues that are of concern to us, and what approaches might we take to resolve them? So we found a different approach through a passport model that we could get all of the various provinces supporting. Name the concern you have for enforcement – be it confidence, be it similarity of laws, all of those things – name the issues, and let's find methodologies to get them resolved. That's what the passport really was. It was not necessarily the end step but a methodology to help address these questions for national and international issuers and for investors.

We came a long way at that initial step. Ontario was also onside that, and it was only with a change of government in Ontario that they've subsequently rescinded their support. But they, too, have been quietly and very much supporting the directions and the aims, the same common aims that we all have among the provincial jurisdictions.

I'd say one of the things that's been a great strength to ensure that there is provincial say in what happens is in the response to the U.S. Sarbanes-Oxley Act that came down. The U.S. has always taken a very prescriptive, rules-based approach to this. Europe, on the other hand, has been taking a much more principle-based approach to securities regulation. When Sarbanes-Oxley came in and was purported as being the solution, the Ontario Securities Commission wished to adopt most of those regulations. It was because of Alberta and B.C. and some of the other provinces, because we also have regulatory authority, some push back, that we took it more Canadian to reflect the very different marketplaces we have here. The Sarbanes-Oxley approach: very prescriptive but doesn't necessarily ensure that they will give any better confidence in the marketplace.

3:30

I would just say in support that tremendous progress has been made to resolving the challenges among the interprovincial and international questions, the efficiencies of the market, consumer protection, the harmonization objective to ensure that all marketplaces do continue to hold a very high standard. That's the only way we'll be able to continue to attract people in the marketplace, which is the end objective.

So in that respect I'd say that this was an excellent first step in bringing together a unique approach among the jurisdictions which has been wisely constitutionally held, where the responsibility constitutionally is the provinces', with the authority given to find another uniquely Canadian approach to finding harmonization in approaches of methodology to resolve the questions that cross our borders. It is a great first step, and you'll see even Ontario coming forward with accomplishing many of the same aims, which might then lead, down the road, to other structures, be they national or others in scope. But it certainly gives us the ability to move the issues forward without getting so bogged down that there's only one regulatory structure that could solve the problem.

The Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. minister in regard to Bill 21. If we had stronger enforcement of securities laws in this province, does the minister think it would have been easier to track the activities of Enron and what they did to our electricity market between 1999 and 2003?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you may choose to respond or not.

Mr. Melchin: I'm just going to state this with respect to securities regulation. We have and always have had a very strong standard. Some might say that there have been some problems in the past, and there's always been, unfortunately, a history, in any place in any of the world, of some abuse of the rules and maybe not the right ethical standards. But we do have all of the authorities necessary to enforce, to ensure that consumer confidence is there, both in this act and before.

The Speaker: Are there additional questions or comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. The member talked about Quebec and the problems there. I hadn't thought about that, but I notice in here that it doesn't talk about them not participating in this passport system. Is that, in fact, the case, that Quebec is now on board?

Mr. Melchin: It's true. All of the provinces are signatory to this approach other than, now, Ontario. We at one stage even had Ontario, but Quebec is and has participated completely and fully with this. They, too, have the same concerns when it comes to consumer confidence, enforcement, ensuring that we have some harmonization of standards across this country. They want the same objectives. So what's a methodology that would allow us to continue to see that we have the provincial responsibility, which is ours? Our marketplaces are very different. Quebec marketplaces for their issuers are a different place, different types of structures, different types of companies, really, than most of the Alberta listers.

Just one other plug I forgot. Alberta actually has 30 per cent of the capitalization of the TSX and the Venture Exchange. We are already a very significant, prominent, and growing influence. To not lose nor choose to give away something that is very particular and unique to the Alberta marketplace and influence that we have in the financial markets, we therefore need a very strong, active voice and would not want to delegate and give that away. Quebec, for their own reasons, but they are participants.

The Speaker: Hon. members, no additional members indicated to the chair their desire to participate. Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 27
Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 27, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007.

The amendment to the emblems act would allow cabinet to add any Alberta symbol of distinction to a list of official symbols. Currently the list of official symbols includes the flag of Alberta; the wild rose, representing the floral emblem of Alberta; and the great horned owl, representing the official bird of Alberta, as noted examples.

It's important to realize that all of our province's official symbols will continue to take precedence and protocol. That will not change as they are legislated symbols. What Bill 27 proposes is to grant the authority to cabinet to officially recognize symbols of distinction through an order in council. This would allow cultural groups to obtain a symbol of distinction for a special event or to celebrate an important milestone.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This proposal will help expedite the process to approve a symbol of distinction at any time of the year without the constraints of having to go through a full and sometimes lengthy legislative process. Bill 27 would provide an efficient process to ensure that important symbols of distinction would be recognized in a timely manner.

It also highlights the amazing diversity in heritage that makes up Alberta today. It is an opportunity to recognize symbols of distinction for Alberta and those that enrich our culture. Various cultural groups in Alberta could request that symbols be added to this official list. The regulation will establish the criteria that must be met before new symbols of distinction are selected. The symbols would represent cultural groups that had contributed to Alberta's diverse society. These symbols would not duplicate or closely resemble a symbol of another cultural group. They would have to be unique to Alberta or represent our province in some way, have some history, and be made in Alberta. They must be nonreligious and nonpartisan. The symbols would not be offensive or divisive. Finally, Mr. Speaker, they would not promote hatred or racism.

This bill would represent an efficient and faster alternative to open up the process to deserving groups with symbols of recognition. By supporting Bill 27, we are recognizing and celebrating the diverse cultural influences that truly make this a unique and great province. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to discuss the importance of Bill 27.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise again and speak to Bill 27, Emblems of Alberta Amendment

Act, 2007. This bill has two objectives: first, to create a new category called an Alberta symbol of distinction, and second, that Alberta symbols of distinction will be decided in cabinet, not in the Legislature. I'm going to support this bill, but I have a few questions to ask the hon. minister.

Let me talk a little bit about rationale. The cultural group can have their symbol recognized. This Bill 27 enhances cultural diversity, but as the minister said, it has to be related to Alberta. It will reflect the province's history and its natural and diverse landscapes and its people. But this bill, Mr. Speaker, does not add a specific official symbol. It allows groups to bring forward official symbol ideas to cabinet. Cabinet makes the decision. Cabinet makes the decision, not the Legislature. This bill appears to be a new direction for debating Alberta official emblems. According to the Emblems of Alberta Act, Alberta currently has 12 official emblems. There are, I think, at this moment about 11.

3:40

Mr. Bonko: What are they?

Mr. Agnihotri: The first one is armorial bearings of Alberta, the flag of Alberta, the floral emblem of Alberta, the official grass of Alberta, the Alberta tartan, the Alberta dress tartan, the official bird of Alberta, the official stone of Alberta, the official tree of Alberta, the official colours of Alberta, the official mammal of Alberta, the official fish of Alberta. The new one, which is coming, is the Alberta symbol of distinction.

I have a question to the hon. minister. This Bill 204 is before the House, Mr. Speaker, and it's also . . .

Mr. Bonko: Twenty-seven.

Mr. Agnihotri: Yeah. I know that.

Bill 204 is before the House, and it's also trying to amend this act to officially recognize the Franco-Albertan flag. Can the minister explain this discrepancy? We could have, you know, passed one bill, served the same purpose. But I want to know from the minister why we have two different ones. Can the minister define a symbol? Maybe lots of members sitting in this House still don't know exactly about the symbol.

Also, I have a question to the minister. If he can answer this. Can the minister confirm that Alberta can have more than one official symbol? What does cabinet plan to do if two groups within one cultural group bring forward competing ideas? Who will decide? Who will be the decision-maker?

Currently all official categories for emblems are debated in the Legislature. Why does this government want to take some of the decision-making out of the Assembly? What's wrong with the current format of debating official emblem categories in the Legislature? Have any other provinces done this before? This is another question.

But, Mr. Speaker, anything that enhances diversity we definitely will support a hundred per cent.

Another thing that the hon. minister just mentioned is that it has to be made in Alberta. There are so many other symbols, maybe controversial, but some communities think it belongs to them, and they want to be recognized just like this. My question is: is the minister going to allow these symbols in the future? As he said, it's open, and we can add lots of other symbols next time. For example, the Sikhs wear the kirpan, the dagger. Some people think that this is religious, but they are saying that it's not offensive to anybody. Maybe for some people it's controversial. So what are we going to say to the community? Some other people use different types of

forks. Security-wise maybe some people disagree with those people, but they are connected with those symbols. What are we going to do? I mean, we can debate in this House, but now there's a new tradition that this government is going to decide mostly everything about the symbols behind closed doors. I mean, they will discuss everything in their caucus.

What symbols, for example, for aboriginal people? We cannot forget the contribution they have made to our society. They are great contributors so far. So I'm still confused. In the future if those communities come up with some ideas, they might be controversial. If we keep on making decisions just in your caucus, not in this House – when we make a decision, all the Assembly is answerable to the public. I think this is not right, but otherwise to the idea of enhancing the diversity in either shape, I mean, we have no objection.

I'm really supporting this bill, and I commend the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture for sponsoring this bill. Whatever questions I asked, if the members think those questions could make some complications in the future, we can discuss that at the next stage. At this moment I don't think anything is objectionable to me, and I urge all the members of this House to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bill 27, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007, is intended to add any and, I hope, many Alberta symbols of distinction to the list of official symbols. These symbols of distinction will join the ranks of our other provincial emblems, which include the armorial bearings, official colours, and our flag; the Alberta tartan and dress tartan; the wild rose, our provincial flower; the lodgepole pine, the provincial tree; petrified wood, the provincial stone; the great horned owl, which I rather like, our provincial bird; bighorn sheep, our provincial mammal; the bull trout, the provincial fish; and rough fescue, the provincial grass. Now, these emblems represent elements of Alberta that are important to us all. They are important because they're symbolic of Alberta's natural and cultural heritage.

The first emblem recognized in Alberta was the shield of arms way back in 1907. Our other emblems were added periodically throughout Alberta's first century, with the last emblem, rough fescue grass, adopted in 2003.

Bill 27 will strengthen our capacity for inclusion. It will encourage all Albertans to participate equally in the social, economic, and cultural life of the province as we head into Alberta's next century. Our actions to amend the legislation so that cultural groups can add their own symbols of distinction will go a long way to inform Albertans about the cultural diversity of our province. It will aid in the efforts to educate the public about the many unique contributions that these diverse groups have made to the province of Alberta. We're looking to immigration to fill a shortfall of skilled workers, so having a culturally rich and diverse province is a major advantage. As the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture is fond of saying, when we attract talented people to our province, we don't want them to think of Alberta as a place where they can work for a few years, make some money, and return home. We want them to stay and raise their families here. We want them to enjoy living here and to make this province, our province, home.

3:50

I'm very pleased to support this bill because it represents not only ideas that I have about what an inclusive province means; it also

builds Alberta's pride. Albertans are proud of this province and will continue to help promote the diversity that is found in our communities across the province. Bill 27 will allow elected members to grant official recognition of traditionally recognized symbols of distinction. That makes Alberta a better place to live, work, and visit.

Colleagues, please join me in supporting the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, there is a five-minute opportunity for questions and comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join in the vigorous debate on Bill 27, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007. I have a couple of questions and then an observation for the sponsoring member of the bill. I'm wondering what sort of creative controls are in place that support the intentions of this bill. In other words, if a group comes forward with an emblem, a symbol of distinction that they wish to have adopted under this legislation, who decides that it's appropriate or inappropriate, that the colours are correct? What are the criteria that are set in place that support this?

If there are going to be regulations that lay this out, could we see them, please: have them tabled in the House or sent to one of the policy committees? At this point the minister sponsoring the bill must have some idea of how this is all going to work. So how does it work? Is there anything that's deemed out of bounds or off-colour here? Who has the creative control and makes these decisions? What criteria is that based on?

The second thing is: what's being anticipated? Flags? Pins? Heraldic symbols? Buttons? What? There are no criteria being given on what's anticipated as a symbol of distinction. I mean, we're quite good in Alberta at having these gigantic symbols of distinction. You know, the pysanka and the golf club and the baseball bat and all of those huge – I don't know what to call them, Mr. Speaker – tourist attractions and symbols of particular areas or heritages: are they symbols of distinction? Is that what we're going to do, name them symbols of distinction? How does that work?

The third thing is an observation. I take it that this bill is meant in all good faith, but there is just something that kind of is niggling away in the back of my brain about this one. Making the decision exclusive to the government cabinet, that disproportionately affects the members of the opposition and, in fact, the independent members of this House from participating in that decision. It makes it the exclusive playground or the exclusive ability of cabinet – I suppose, supported by caucus – to designate this and cuts out, in effect, the rest of the members of this Assembly.

I know others have raised the question about why it is going behind closed doors to be made as a cabinet decision. I am coming at the same question from a slightly different point of view because what I can see rolling out from this is like the scenario where the lottery cheques are always given away – surprise, surprise – by members of the government caucus, never given away by a member of the opposition caucus.

Well, those groups are in our constituency. In many cases we wrote support letters, but, gosh darn it, we never get called to hand out the cheque. Well, the reason that's given is: oh, it was in the particular member's riding. Yeah. Well, this member has an awful lot of groups that are centralized in her riding, and I've never been contacted to hand out a cheque. As a matter of fact, the government has gone to great lengths to make sure that I didn't know that a group in my constituency was getting a cheque and to have other

government members come into my riding to present a cheque to a group that's in my riding.

That's what I can see happening here, that groups from a particular geographic area now get to help their local group designate their particular symbol as a symbol of distinction and get to do all of the pomp and ceremony that goes along with it, but we on the opposition don't. That is what's starting to bother me because I don't really see much changing of feathers over there. I see the same 60 people sitting there that were the group of 62, and now they're the group of 60. So I don't see a lot of changes of colours of feathers here.

What they've tended to do before is make the sort of bestowing of gifts and the bestowing of honours exclusive and done behind closed doors so that they can control it all, and they've cut out the members of the Official Opposition, the third party opposition, and the independent members of the House. That's what I see happening with this bill. So, you know, I'm happy to have symbols of distinction, but I really question why this is going behind closed doors, under the control of cabinet. I think that it's yet something else that's being done to disproportionately affect members of the opposition and independent members.

I guess what I'll close with is the question to the members of the government: would they be as happy with this legislation if and when – and I think it's if – they found themselves sitting on this side of the House after the next election? Are they going to think that this is such a great bill at that time? I'll bet you that they won't.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs wish to participate in the debate?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to be able to join this debate on Bill 27 and therein an amendment. In particular, I would like to speak to the amendment part of the bill. In its primal stage the bill would require any group in Alberta that had a desire to have any insignia formally recognized in the province to actually bring it before this Chamber sponsored by one of the members of the Legislature as a bill. Then this particular piece of legislation would require the diligence of the scrutiny of any bill, as per protocol in this Chamber.

As we all know, in this Legislature our legislative agenda as it is, without such additional bills, is rather busy. Having such requests added to the legislative agenda in the form of a bill would only detract from our ability to consider the bills that we already normally consider in due course. What would happen is that it would require a much more significant and much more thorough research and submission process for such groups that wanted special insignia to be recognized, and in many cases, as experience in most likelihood will show, it will be groups and not-for-profit agencies and other groups that don't have the resources to do so. Also, it would occupy many private members' time from their usual duties in the constituency to sponsor such bills and satisfy the request of the constituents.

Now, the amended form of this bill allows for such groups to circumvent that process – and when I say circumvent, I mean it in a very positive manner – and allow for a much more expedient recognition of such a request through an order in council. For those who perhaps may be viewing this debate, an order in council is simply a consideration of the cabinet to have it discussed and scrutinized at the cabinet table in view of very stringent criteria that are outlined in the bill itself. So it will not be a frivolous decision, but it will be a much more expedient decision.

So what benefits do we have? Well, (a) it will be much easier for

Albertans to present a request to this government to have their symbol officially recognized in the province, which will add to our heritage because we often pride ourselves in symbolism affiliated with many organizations, and (b) it will not detract from the time spent on otherwise presented bills in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this bill is an important one. It is important to not only preserve tradition but to create new tradition, to create new insignia and new symbols representing those important aspects and important groups in our society, and this bill will exactly accomplish that. Since the minister is the individual originating this bill, having an Alberta francophonie flag as the initial symbol recognized in this province perhaps would be appropriate in view of this bill and the initial sponsor of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support this bill, and I encourage all members of this Chamber to support this bill as well. Thank you.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: Is there anyone wishing to have a question or comment under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just rise to make a few comments. The comments I would have are these: I don't have a lot time or energy or desire to go along with any of these kinds of bills, which, in my opinion, tend to pick and choose certain cultures, ethnicities, or religions. The reason that I say this is that when I hearken back to some of our great-great-grandparents that homesteaded in this country and the part of the province that I come from, there were people from eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia, Hungary. There were people from Holland. There were Scots. There were Irishmen, Germans, Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, and not that many Ukrainians, colleague, but it just happened to be in that area of the province at that time.

You know, from my personal experience, my wife's grandparents had come here via Quebec from France, and when they hit the small town that they were homesteading in, they found they were the only French family. Apparently the great-grandpa turned to the family and said: "Nobody else speaks French here. That's the end of it." They made a determination at that time that they'd come to this province to merge in with other ethnicities and religions and become one, become Albertans and Canadians. I think they kept their family pride and their family history and all their unique traits of their own family to themselves.

I think of the best friend that I had as a child growing up, whose family came here from Czechoslovakia, and the only memories and relics that they have of their family history or their heritage are five pieces of crystal. There weren't any government programs to assist them to learn English as a second language. There weren't any government programs to help them assimilate. There was just something called hard work and pride in the new country.

So I think it's dangerous ground to go down because I, for one, would wonder if another ethnic group, whether it was an Irishman, whether it was somebody from Holland or somebody whose family came from Japan, in our constituency would have every bit as much right to want and expect some of these special recognitions. But they don't. They just want to be Albertans and Canadians and get on with their life.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? Seeing none, did the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross wish to participate in the debate?

Mrs. Fritz: No, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

Third Reading

(continued)

Bill 3

**Climate Change and Emissions Management
Amendment Act, 2007**

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Government House Leader want to move on behalf?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm more than pleased to move Bill 3 for third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with great interest once again to speak on Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. Certainly, we have tried to perhaps improve this bill. There's been no lack of trying on our parts. On Tuesday I brought up a number of amendments that centred around giving Bill 3 some teeth in regard to being able to take it away from this idea of intensity targets to absolute reductions in carbon dioxide emissions here in the province of Alberta because, you know, we are in the midst of a turning point, not just in the province of Alberta but around the world. We have to make these tough decisions about the way that we use energy and the way that we produce emissions from that energy.

Certainly, we are in an advantageous position in this province because, of course, we are making tremendous profits at this juncture from our nonrenewable, carbon-based energy, that we have available to us through coal and through oil and natural gas. It has provided wonderful prosperity for our province, but you have to plan ahead because (a) that is a nonrenewable resource, and (b) we are now seeing the negative effects from the carbon dioxide climate change emissions that are resultant from the hydrocarbon technology. What a great time to bridge the way that we use energy in this province and actually use some of the profits that we're making from hydrocarbon to move to a more sustainable, renewable energy system.

So Bill 3, or something like it, with the amendments that I had brought forward, would actually be a good start because, of course, if we are in fact putting hard caps on CO₂ emissions, then we will also collect revenue from that and be able to invest in renewable resources that are going to give us something to work with in the long run.

So just to remind the House, Mr. Speaker, of some of the amendments that I had brought forward, the first one, A1, was to deal with absolute reductions and not intensity reductions. The second amendment was to do with gas sequestration. I think there was some confusion about that, I believe, on the Tuesday. I'm sure there was, you know, or else I would have had it passed perhaps.

The confusion lay in the idea that we were opposing carbon capture and gas sequestration. You know, that's not the case, but certainly, we just were very concerned about investing billions and billions of taxpayers' money on essentially what is an industrial problem. The bottom line is that industry should be paying for their own problems associated with carbon dioxide. In fact, that is the

way by which you set up a system to move industry and to move our society away from using as much carbon dioxide or carbon-based emissions.

You know, the sort of money that we're talking about to build essentially an experimental pipeline is \$5 billion or more. Imagine if we invested that same money in renewables or in retrofitting people's homes to make them more efficient for heating or in public transit systems or in a whole, wide range of other things that would give us far greater return in (a) carbon dioxide reduction – right? – and (b) improving the quality of life for all Albertans. So instead of building a big pipeline and all the rest of it, we believe that, in fact, we could achieve greater reductions with alternative investments in sustainable energy production.

The third amendment that I brought forward was to do with confidentiality. You know, it's always funny how these are tagged on to so many of these major bills, that we don't get full disclosure of what is going on or where the information is coming from and what decisions are being based on. I think that the amendment that I placed on that confidentiality sections taking out the confidentiality section serves as a reminder of just how far we have to still go in this province in regard to open, transparent government because, you know, information is the essence of transparency and access to information, and of course, once again, in Bill 3 we've found evidence of quite the opposite.

4:10

The fourth amendment, that I brought forward on Tuesday, was to do with complying with the arrangements of the Kyoto accord, of which Canada is a signatory and of which most industrialized nations are as well. It's interesting because, you know, people have fought tooth and nail against the international agreement to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. One of the arguments, a completely facetious and irrelevant argument, was: oh well, countries like India and China and perhaps the United States are not signing onto this agreement, so that makes it irrelevant. Well, lo and behold. As we speak, the Chinese government is, in fact, meeting to start the groundwork for China to be part of a Kyoto-type agreement. So, it's just not true that other major nations are going to avoid this. It's inevitable. Certainly, the United States, with the regime change which is imminent, will sign onto a carbon reducing agreement as well.

Simply reminding ourselves that there is an international agreement in place of which we are signatories and then applying it to some carbon dioxide climate change emissions reduction bill that we're passing here seemed to be a no-brainer. I was very shocked and surprised to see that, in fact, there was only limited support from the New Democrat caucus, which is perhaps the progressive voice in here, which is a good thing. It's a good thing that we have some progressive voices in the Legislature in regard to climate change. I think that the population definitely appreciates it. It's a good thing to do.

With those comments then, certainly, the main issues that we have that find Bill 3 unacceptable are (a) it does nothing to achieve actual reductions. Intensity targets allow, in fact, drastic increases in overall emissions. Number two, Bill 3 demonstrates just how far out of touch we are in regard to climate change and how out of touch this Legislature seems to be with the popular opinion of the population in regard to doing something about climate change.

There was an interesting Ipsos-Reid poll that just came out today. Almost 60 per cent of Canadians, in fact, were in favour of the government taking decisive action in regard to climate change, and the same majority believed that it would not harm the economy, which is another very, very poor and sort of scaremongering

argument that we hear, but would enhance the economy of not only our province but the country.

So, you know, perhaps we should give the public more credit because, of course, this is ultimately true. If you are decreasing your reliance on carbon-based energy systems, you have plenty of opportunity to in fact increase the quality of life of the population by changing the way we use energy, changing the way that we transport ourselves, and creating a healthier environment for everybody.

Another reason that we oppose Bill 3 is that the carbon trading provisions in the bill are very limited. You have some sort of half-cooked idea of just trading in Alberta. I mean, it's very limited in scope. Certainly, one of the keys to carbon trading is to have an ability to look right across the country and even internationally and selectively to in fact trade with carbon. You know, as long as we can set up a system that can be verified, there's a multibillion dollar industry in carbon trading already going on all around us, and why would we not join that in the interest of carbon dioxide reduction?

Also, this legislation depends almost wholly on the regulations for its implementation, and this (a) makes Bill 3 subject to change without debate and, number two, adds a layer of secrecy and lack of consultation that makes this bill very, very poorly organized.

Finally, Bill 3 is not part of a comprehensive and integrated approach to combatting climate change. It's just one piece. Maybe it's just one piece of the puzzle. Obviously, until you have a realization that you can't be developing all of the tar sands projects at the same time and building, you know, this sort of gold rush mentality, then there's no way that we could ever possibly achieve carbon dioxide reduction. It's just not mathematically possible. So until we, in fact, have a moratorium on new tar sands project approval, then this whole thing is worse than a pipe dream. I would suggest that it's a way to deliberately deceive the public into thinking that we're actually doing something when we're doing quite the opposite. I find that to be the most troubling part of Bill 3. I think that there are ways by which we could salvage it, as I said, through those amendments that I had suggested.

The final thing that I would like to say about it is that at the very least let's try out this new all-party committee system that we have here and move some of the regulatory parts of Bill 3 over to those new all-party committees that we just finished painting and polishing up and are ready to go. What a great way to demonstrate that we are in fact serious about debating these things in a democratic manner and making the very best decision based on the very best data that we can get not just from inside this House but from the general population as well.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will close my comments on Bill 3 in this reading. I certainly look forward to the debate because it's certainly not over yet.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and say a few brief words about Bill 3. A few years ago there was a TV commercial, and I believe it was for Fram oil filters. The gist of the commercial was that you could save yourself a little bit of money by buying a cheaper oil filter, but in the end your savings would be wiped out by car problems eventually. The tag line of the commercial featured this mechanic, and he said: you can pay me now, or you can pay me later. I was reminded of that commercial while reading through some of the debate heard in the Legislature on Bill 3.

Now, that old commercial came to mind specifically while reading

a report about climate change, that has been cited by a number of members in this Legislature, written by Sir Nicholas Stern. The Stern report recommends that we have to start spending 1 per cent of our gross national product now per year or we're going to be spending 20 per cent of our gross national product in 20 years due to massive dislocation of people, loss of life, and loss of land.

One per cent of our gross domestic product in Alberta would be \$2 billion spent annually on carbon reduction technology, carbon reduction incentives in the renewable area, biofuels, energy efficiency technologies, carbon capture and storage. Two billion dollars is what this report suggested is going to be needed if we are going to seriously commit to climate change reduction. Presently we spend no more than \$500 million a year on climate change initiatives. If Sir Nicholas Stern is correct, that's not even close to what we should be doing.

There's no doubt at this time that climate change has become, justifiably, the single most important issue of the 21st century. Will Bill 3 address this urgent matter? Not likely. From an Alberta perspective consider what impact climate change could have in Alberta. We will see a reduction in surface water and soil moisture. Mountain and northern regions and the boreal forest will face increasing risk from wildfires, insects, decrease in soil moisture, and changes to the ecosystem. This is not alarmist rhetoric from scientists with a green agenda or the ravings of tree huggers. These worrisome predictions come directly from a government of Alberta document called Facts about Climate Change.

While we support efforts to combat climate change, Mr. Speaker, Bill 3 simply is not enough. We need real reduction in greenhouse gases. When I spoke of Bill 3 last week, I said that we absolutely had to get this bill right. Unfortunately, I don't believe this is the case. The issue is too important for half measures, but that is exactly what we have in front of us today. The government is clearly behind the times of the people of Alberta. As the saying goes: you can pay me now, or you can pay me later.

Thank you.

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) are there any comments or questions?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, Bill 3 at this stage has been given considerable debate. There have been amendments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder and the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, to just name a few. There's also the general thought that this legislation is a good start on climate change, but it's not good enough. It certainly has some things in it that, I think, are necessary. The \$15 a tonne tax charged on emissions over the cap: it's a carbon tax. Is it about time for a carbon tax? We have to do something.

Now, what we do with the money that's collected is very important. In fact, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View suggested yesterday in an amendment that if things aren't working out, well, we can go from \$15 per tonne commencing in 2008 to \$20 a tonne commencing in 2010 and \$30 per tonne commencing in 2012, and this money could go into a green fund. The number that was discussed earlier in debate, Mr. Speaker, for the amount that would be in this green fund was \$175 million. That was the anticipated amount that would be collected. When we look at the general idea of this, it's very sound. The implications of this will be felt for many years in the future; there's no doubt in my mind.

Will we use this money for CO₂ sequestration? Will we use it for research into reducing emissions from coal-fired electricity genera-

tion stations? Will we use it for transportation sector research? We could use this money for any number of things, but we have to be very careful. I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to be very careful that we do not single out one particular sector of the economy and pick on them for dramatic increases in CO₂ emissions. [interjections] This is causing some fuss, Mr. Speaker, and I will put it away before it causes any more fuss. Thank you. The previous speaker said that it was a Thursday, and he was absolutely right, a Thursday afternoon.

Getting back to Bill 3, we just can't single out one sector of the economy, and that's the energy industry. When we are talking about reducing our CO₂ emissions, we have to talk about changing our ways: how we drive, how we fly, how we purchase our goods, which goods we purchase. Should we look more closely at the way they're manufactured and how they came to this jurisdiction? There are a lot of things that can be done.

I think we better be very careful not just to pick on one sector of the economy, the energy sector, for instance, the oil sands area or electricity generation. Sure, there has been a dramatic increase in CO₂ emissions from those sectors, but as we buy more cars, as we travel faster, that is also responsible for a significant increase in CO₂ emissions. We're building more and more houses further and further away from central areas of our cities, which requires, naturally, more car use. We are not talking about using any of this money for mass transit systems in urban areas. All this is related, Mr. Speaker.

In conclusion, with Bill 3 I would urge all hon. members to devise solutions to our greenhouse gas emissions. Devise solutions, but let's not pick on one sector of the economy and one sector only.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) for questions and comments is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar if by not picking on one sector of the economy, he means that we disregard particular sectors of the economy which may be responsible for massive increases in CO₂ production. Should we apportion the responsibility according to the amount that's produced and the amount of increase that a sector produces, or should we treat low emitters the same as high emitters?

Mr. MacDonald: No, we should not treat low emitters and high emitters the same. The hon. member would clearly understand that in Bill 3 there are close to 30 per cent of the emitters that are not included at all. In fact, we talked about that at second reading. It included intensive livestock operations. It included some of the petrochemical industry. It included fertilizer plants, places where there was a different energy reaction than combustion. Those, from what I can gather from the hon. Minister of Environment, were part of that group of 30 per cent. What I mean by sectors of the economy: we have to do something with the transportation sector. We have to change how we operate there.

Ms Blakeman: High-speed rail.

Mr. MacDonald: High-speed rail is certainly a very, very good idea, and I talked about that in discussions earlier about investment in mass transit systems. If we are going to collect this carbon tax, what do we use it for? That is one of the reasons why we should consider more rail links. We should consider more mass transit. If we're going to build all these suburbs that are a 45-minute commute

from the central core of our cities, we're going to have to come up with something better. That is, hopefully, what we will do.

I don't think we should just pick on the oil sands projects or we should just pick on coal-fired baseload generating stations because we, unfortunately, need what they provide. Now, should we take this money and do research and development into better and more efficient ways they operate and not only reduce the amount of CO₂ emissions but dramatically reduce them to 1990 and below levels? We certainly should, and that's, hopefully, what will happen.

The Deputy Speaker: Others under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there others that wish to participate in the debate on Bill 3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just very briefly. I've spoken to this bill in second and in committee, and I want to go on the record again in third. I think partly what's up for debate with this bill is that this is a small step, but is that good enough? You know, can we be incremental with this? Is the glass half full or half empty? To me, this is just not good enough. The glass is half empty. I'm not willing to put my vote behind it to say, "Well, you know, it's better than nothing" or "It's a small step in the right direction." It's way too small a step in the right direction.

4:30

You know, we are so far behind what the public is telling us to do, what our own constituents are telling us to do on this, which is: "Take leadership. Make bold moves. Move this in all the directions that it needs to move." My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar was just talking about some of the other sectors that are affected and where we need to do work. We need to be developing alternative energy sources. We need to be working on conservation. We need to be working on an individual level right up to a corporate level.

This bill is not reflecting that. It is not good enough. It's too timid. It's cowardly. It doesn't show leadership. It doesn't take us far enough and fast enough on where we need to be going. The science has clearly outlined what needs to happen here and what's important, and the government is just dithering and is overly cautious and disorganized about an approach to this. It's just not good enough.

My constituents consistently list concern for the environment/greenhouse gases as one of the top three issues in my constituency. I would argue that at this point in time it's probably wrestling with health for the number one issue in my constituency. What I hear from my constituents is: "This doesn't go far enough. This is not good enough. Don't get behind it."

We don't even have to go back to the drawing board. There are an awful lot of good ideas that are out there that have been brought up in debate already. We don't have to go that far back to come up with a much, much better bill. Indeed, when you look at the amendments that were brought forward – some were brought by the ND opposition, and our environment critic, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, had two good amendments as well to try and make the bill more aggressive and more progressive. They were all defeated, so I just think there's a timidity and a disorganization in the approach to this issue by this government that I'm not willing to support.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise to speak to third reading of Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. I have addressed this bill previously in the House and indicated that the Alberta New Democrats cannot support this particular bill and outlined that, basically, the reason is that we believe that the emissions intensity approach which is enshrined in this bill is not an honest approach.

It doesn't take into account the fact that the government has indicated that unrestricted economic development which is driven by investment in tar sands is going to be allowed to continue. They're not going to step on the brake, as the Premier has said, notwithstanding the fact that we have severe problems with infrastructure, housing, shortages of new schools, lots of problems with respect to health care and emergency rooms, and not to mention all of the environmental problems, the demands on very, very limited water supplies, particularly in the southern half of the province. The list goes on and on, and this province will not be able to catch up.

But the more pressing long-term problem is the whole question of climate change, which is very real. More and more people are beginning to become alarmed by this, having seen the changes within their own lifespan. Let's not forget that climate change in the world can be a natural phenomenon, but it normally takes place over periods of time of 10,000 years or much more and usually occurs as a result of very small changes in global temperature of one or two degrees Celsius. In fact, we've seen changes within our own lifespans equivalent to that, which means that in terms of the pace of climate change the earth is now moving towards a warmer climate at a blinding rate of speed – a blinding rate of speed – compared to the natural processes that have led to ice ages and the retreat of glaciation and so on and all of those normal types of climate change.

What we're seeing is something that has changed within our own lifespan, which is just the bat of an eye in terms of geological time. So those changes, more and more people are coming to believe, will not just inconvenience us and cause economic damage but may in fact produce life-threatening situations for our children and our grandchildren. More and more people, Mr. Speaker, are concerned about the impact on human society looking forward 50, 100 years, 200 years into the future and are concerned that we will in fact not leave this earth in a habitable form for the future generations of the planet.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, absolutely refuses to take any responsibility for Alberta's contribution to climate change because if it did, it would deal with CO₂ production and other greenhouse gas production in a way that didn't allow economic development at a high rate of speed to shoot up our CO₂ emissions. For example, I want to make a couple of quotes. Toxics Watch has estimated that at a 4 per cent growth rate Alberta greenhouse gas emissions will rise by 66 to 83 per cent above 1990 levels by 2020 even if intensity is reduced by 50 per cent. The Pembina Institute estimates that at the current rate of economic growth the government's plan will allow emissions to rise by 72 per cent above 1990 levels by 2020. We can't let that happen. We owe it to the future generations of this province and of the world – our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren – to do better.

So I would like at this time to introduce an amendment to the bill. I believe the table has that, and would ask that it be distributed. Would you like me to read it now?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. We'll just give the pages a moment to have them circulated, please. Okay, hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I will move that third reading of Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management

Amendment Act, 2007, be amended by striking out the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, be not now read a third time because the proposed measures to reduce the intensity of specified gas emissions contained therein combined with rapid oil sands development will allow ongoing, dramatic increases in specified gas emissions and make it impossible to meet the requirements of the Kyoto protocol.

4:40

So, Mr. Speaker, just to briefly summarize the rationale for this, we do not believe that this House should pass Bill 3 at the present time, that it should not be given its third reading, because the intensity approach combined with rapid economic development, particularly in Alberta's tar sands, will allow total greenhouse gas emissions in this province to shoot up dramatically. In fact, they will shoot up dramatically, and they will affect the climate, and Alberta is not going to meet its responsibilities to the rest of the world if this bill is approached.

I know that other members across have views on this matter, and I would encourage them to stand up and put their opinions and positions on the record, Mr. Speaker, as we are doing.

It's quite clear that it is unacceptable from the point of view of dealing with climate change to permit increases in the range of 66 to 83 per cent above 1990 levels just by the year 2020. As I've indicated before, Mr. Speaker, the impact of that combined with the failure of the rest of the country under successive Liberal and Conservative governments as well as the failure of the United States and other countries to meet their obligations will in fact produce a disastrous world situation, which most of us will escape because we won't be here. But our children and grandchildren will be here, and they will have to face it. That is unacceptable to me as an Albertan, as a parent, and as a responsible member of this Legislature. So we need to do better.

Hopefully, if this motion is passed, the government will have an opportunity to reconsider its problem, reconsider the issue. I do not deny the complexity and the difficulty of grappling with this particular situation in the context of the economic growth in this province and of the type of economy which we have. It should not be underestimated, and we do not underestimate it, but we have to do better than this.

So, in conclusion, I would urge members to pass the reasoned amendment which the Alberta NDP caucus has put forward and have the government take another look at this situation, review the options, come back with something that's responsible that will support economic growth today but which will also take into account the environmental impacts and the effect of climate change on this planet and on the people who live on it, the animals who live on it, and take a longer term and a more responsible view of the situation. That will conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and support the reasoned amendment that's been put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. This conforms with a number of the visions that the Alberta Liberals have on record for what we see as the direction the province should be going in around climate change, around conservation, around protection of our environment, and also, you know, the consideration that we've tried to direct the Assembly towards regarding our northern cities and what the development is doing to them and some of the issues that it has created. I mean, they are wonderful cities – Grande

Prairie, Peace River, Fort McMurray – and terrific people that are living there, and they've had some pretty interesting barriers placed in front of them, additional things that they are having to cope with in their everyday personal and working lives because of the choices that are made by this government. As I say, this does fall in line with the principles that have been set forth by the Alberta Liberals, and I'm happy on our behalf to state our support for it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I appreciate my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood bringing forward this reasoned amendment. As I said in my previous comments, it's almost worse. Well, it's definitely worse to in fact put something out that might give the impression that something is being done when it's business as usual or worse, as I said, a geometric increase in carbon dioxide climate change emissions in the province of Alberta under the proposed provisions of Bill 3. So it's like when someone wants to believe that everything is okay; it's that ostrich sort of mentality. You put your head in the sand and hope for the best. This is the kind of thing that Bill 3 seems to be doing.

We not only have a responsibility in this Legislature to provide regulation and to provide laws that will protect and enhance people and the environment of our province, but we also have an obligation to lead. Leadership sometimes involves difficult decisions, and one of the more difficult decisions that we do have in front of us is how to retool and change the way that we deliver energy here in this province.

So we could come up against a potentially cataclysmic change in the climate based on our reliance on hydrocarbon energy systems, and that's the place where you have to make that fundamental change. When we're in a position to do that, it's exciting but not if we continue to think that business as usual is really the best means by which to govern its elite. And this is a very excellent case in point where, in fact, we do have to make some moderation in the way that we deliver and unfold our energy industry, and we do quite frankly have to touch the brake. There has to be a moratorium on new tar sands development in the province of Alberta, or not only will we increase our carbon dioxide climate change emissions fivefold or sixfold or sevenfold, but we'll also burn our economy out and create a less diversified, very focused on a single-industry economy that is literally eating away at all of the other systems that are in place to build a good and just society.

I'm perhaps piling so much onto Bill 3 here, but that's what it comes down to. It comes down to making a choice as to whether or not we're able to make a change from hydrocarbon-based energy delivery systems to a more sustainable approach. Now, certainly that doesn't preclude the fact that we're going to continue to use our hydrocarbon wealth and continue to use the hydrocarbons that we have available to us as nonrenewable resources in the province of Alberta. What we are saying, though, is that we have to sip those resources more judiciously instead of gulping them down in great quantities like we are doing today. You know, it's a fine thing to have nonrenewable energy resources, but of course by definition they are (a) nonrenewable and (b) are contributing to an unsustainable situation in regard to climate change carbon dioxide emissions. This reasoned amendment is very well worded and very well titled as well as a reasonable thing. It's time that we do face facts and look for ways by which we can change direction.

4:50

The whole issue about the way Bill 3 deals with carbon trading is

very flawed at best and limited. The way that it deals with offsets and with paying penalties, again, is very flawed and confused. No wonder industry doesn't appreciate this approach. It doesn't seem to have any direction in terms of long-term planning. Like, where are we going to go from \$15? Where is the plan for five years after that or five years after that? What's the direction of this whole thing? You know, business and corporations have to plan for that too because it's part of their cost of doing business.

Many progressive businesses in this province have already planned for the inevitability that carbon dioxide climate change emissions have to be dealt with and, you know, have been buying offsets for years and trying to build systems where they can be potentially reducing or diversifying their energy portfolios. It's time for this place, this fine Legislature, where the regulations come from to meet those progressive companies and corporations and, in fact, give them the long-term plan that they deserve. The public demands it, and good business practice, long-term planning demands it. Above all, coming back to my original point, the responsibilities that we have invested in us here at the provincial Legislature of Alberta to provide leadership absolutely demands it as well.

I will not stand idly by while we put something like Bill 3 forward and try to make it look like everything is okay when really it's not. As I said before, sometimes when you do something in a half-measure, you are actually being willfully deceptive to the public, and I find that somewhat objectionable.

Considering as well that we certainly are of sound mind, generally, as far as I can tell, and reasonably intelligent, then I can only presume that there is some hidden guiding hand that is actually making these decisions from behind and giving us a cloudy and confused picture. You don't have to look very much further than who gives what to whom in terms of donations from the oil and gas sector. There seems to be a direct inverse correlation between the strength of environmentalist policy and donations made to political parties by the oil and energy sector. You know, it doesn't take much to draw those two points together.

As I said before, there are lots of progressive corporations that would like to see a strong environmental policy with regard to climate change, but then everybody has to look at their bottom line, including corporations, and the bottom line is that if it's easy and if there's a way by which you can continue to pollute more and create more carbon dioxide, then of course if your business rivals are doing that, you're likely to do that as well.

Again, back here at the Legislature I think that we should hold ourselves to a higher standard and be sure that we're not being influenced unduly by oil and gas donations that are going to perhaps cloud the way by which we create legislation. I would suggest that in the absence of any logical reason, I can presume that there is a strong tainting influence of political pressure based on donations to political parties here that is influencing the construction of Bill 3. So first and probably foremost, that is the reason that I believe that this reasoned amendment, in fact, should be moving forward.

You know, it doesn't preclude that we shouldn't do anything at all. I heard someone mumbling that out there. But let's get back to the drawing table. Let's use these all-party committees that we've

now created, that have risen like a phoenix from the ashes of something less democratic, and build something strong, use those all-party committees to build a good, strong bill and a good, strong law that, in fact, assists corporations making the transition to using less hydrocarbon technology, invests in Alberta homeowners and businesses to make them more energy efficient, builds systems for public transportation, invests in renewable energy, which gives you an immediate, exponential boost in your carbon dioxide climate change emission reductions, and invests in the way by which people can actually even produce energy in their own homes.

Net metering is a tremendous success in places where the government invests in its proliferation, in places like Germany and Denmark where people are allowed to produce energy in their own homes or businesses or farms and sell it back onto the grid, right? What a fantastic way to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. People don't even necessarily have to have a means by which they can generate electricity. They could just store it in off-peak hours and then produce it back during peak hours.

There are just no limits to the ways by which we can imaginatively tackle this problem. We have the financial means by which we can tackle this problem. It's just a question of will, and, you know, when we start to look at carbon dioxide climate change emissions in bits and pieces, we realize that it is all of our responsibility.

Again, some members opposite like to talk about how we're just punishing the big corporations and the people driving their cars and heating their houses are getting away scot-free. Well, that's not true because the whole system is integrated together, and of course where the big increases are happening is not in individual domestic consumption but in the big industrial emitters. That's why we focus on them. We don't focus on the poor gentleman who lives in an older home and has trouble heating it with his gas heater but on something like TransAlta and Sundance, which is one of the second or third biggest emitters of carbon dioxide in the whole country and probably one of the largest in North America.

That's the way that you have to do it. You have to grab the bull by the horns and look it in the eye, and that's what we certainly are doing here now. We are putting this reasoned amendment forward to start building the foundation to actually create some meaningful and effective legislation in regard to climate change and emissions management.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate for this evening. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we do now adjourn until 1 p.m. on Monday, April 16.

[Motion carried; at 4:58 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, April 16, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/16

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta and its people. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I'm now going to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I would invite all to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Lorieau, for again whipping us all up with that high level of enthusiasm. One year ago we remembered what you did. Sorry that we're down to this provincial Assembly today.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have three introductions today. The first will be a number of students from Mundare. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 18 visitors from Mundare. They're, of course, accompanied today by their teacher, Andrew Yeo, and Miss Theresa Nelsen. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

My second introduction. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 61 guests from Tofield school. They are accompanied today by teacher Mr. Fred Yachimec, who, if you look at the *Hansard*, has of course been bringing students year in and year out; Mr. Gilles Daigle; student teacher Megan Tooke – I got a chance to meet her today – teacher's assistant Mrs. Glenda Metro; and parent helpers Mrs. Kathleen Perrott and Mrs. Cathy Armstrong. A tremendous group of students, a large group from Tofield. We wish them well and ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. It's a great, great way to start the week, Mr. Speaker.

My third introduction today. I'm happy to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Ed Perlik, Mrs. Helen Zahoda, and Roman and Lorraine Perlik. These special guests are the grandparents and great-aunt and great-uncle respectively of Robyn Peters, one of our hard-working pages. They have come here to watch Robyn in action in the Legislature. I've had the pleasure of knowing Ed for many years. Wonderful to have him and his family in the House, both in the gallery and, of course, on the floor. Something very interesting: Ed has said that the last time he was here, he was here with his social studies class in 1945. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 39 guests from my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Students from the Brander Gardens elementary school are here with us again, as they are every year. I've got to tell you that they did not disappoint with their questions again this year. I find grade 6 students have the best and the hardest questions, and as I say, I was not disappointed again this year by the quality of the questions that they raised.

They are accompanied today by Mme Natalie Gago-Estevés, who has been with us at least, I think, seven years in a row now for me; Miss Alissa Sept; teacher's aide Mrs. Rita Adams; student teacher Mrs. Sabrina Haque; and parent Mrs. Susan Thompson. Of special note, my special assistant Sean Yam was a student at Brander elementary school and had Mrs. Natalie Gago-Estevés as a teacher. He remembers her as being a passionate educator, and he remembers her fondly. He was very pleased to be able to be reunited today when we were taking pictures. I'd like to ask all of the students and the adult accompaniment to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a really delightful woman that it's been my great pleasure to work with over the past couple of years. Cheryl Williams is graduating now from the U of A with a bachelor of arts in the history of art, design, and visual culture. She worked in my constituency office in the summer of 2005, and then she came back to volunteer in the office through this last school year, from September of '06 through until now. She will be returning to the U of A in 2008 to pursue a master of arts in the history of Alberta mountain culture. She's really been a fun, creative, committed woman to work with. I'd like you to please join me in welcoming her. With her today is my fabulous constituency manager, Sarah Crummy. Sarah serves me and the people of Edmonton-Centre with great, good humour and compassion and efficiency. Please welcome them all.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Cyndi Deloyer, executive director of Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society. I'd like to ask Cyndi to rise and please receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three individuals on strike at the Palace Casino. They are Elaine French, Kristina Ratkovic, and Sharlene Pattison. These workers are here on day 220 of this strike, which could have been averted if there were fair labour laws in place to protect Alberta workers. Instead, they are here today to bring attention to their workplace situation after more than seven months on the picket line. Elaine French has been working in the slots department of the Palace Casino for the past three years. Sharlene Pattison is a bartender at the Palace Casino and has been there four years. Sharlene hails from B.C. and came to Edmonton

in search of work, as many people do across Canada. Kristina Ratkovic has been at the Palace Casino since 2005 and is a server. They're joined today by UFCW local 401 representative Christine McMeckan. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of the child care sector. The Alberta Child Care Network Association provides a forum for sharing information between the child care community and government. It endorses and promotes quality child care on behalf of children and families, supports early childhood training and education, and promotes public awareness and education about child care. Earlier today I announced a new 1 and a half million dollar bursary that will help child care providers attract and retain staff and help staff in preschool and out of school child care programs to continue their education.

As well as helping to support and attract staff, the bursary program will enhance the sector's capacity in dealing with operational challenges. The Alberta Child Care Network Association was a tremendous help in the development of the bursary program. The association will be responsible for developing eligibility criteria, accepting and assessing application forms, and distributing funding to successful applicants. Their great work and dedication to the child care industry is a valuable contribution to the future of Alberta's children.

I now ask the following members of the Alberta Child Care Network to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Diane McKean, Traudi Kelm, Susan Elson, Deirdre Leighton, and Dr. Sherrill Brown, and accompanying them, I see Lynn Jerchel from Children's Services. Please join me in thanking them and welcoming them.

head: 1:10

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

National Soil Conservation Week

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week, April 15 to 21, is National Soil Conservation Week. Having worked the land as a farmer myself, I'm proud to note that Albertans are leaders in conserving our land and our soil. In fact, we're the only province to have legislation specifically designed to protect this important resource. However, it's what our producers are doing in the field every single day that really demonstrates how Albertans are dedicated to conserving our soil for future generations. Our farmers and growers are using what we call beneficial management practices to combine productivity with conservation. For example, nearly two-thirds of our province's cropland is now being direct-seeded to reduce soil erosion and improve the richness of our soil, making it more fertile and moist. Soil conservation also supports rangeland and woodlot production and is important in maintaining other resources such as water, air, and wildlife habitat.

Mr. Speaker, advancing our knowledge will be key to further improvements. Fortunately, Alberta already has a comprehensive soil monitoring program. This program is unique to North America and possibly world-wide because our 45 monitoring sites fully represent the various topography of our agricultural landscape. For 10 consecutive years we've been able to track and assess changes and the cumulative effects that agriculture management has had on our soil. Additionally, this program will help examine other agricultural and soil-related activities, including the implication and impact of climate change. Furthermore, by sharing the data from

these sites with academic institutions across Canada, we're providing valuable learning opportunities for students.

Mr. Speaker, the success of our agricultural sector, food quality, and a healthy environment are all connected to soil conservation. As we recognize April 15 to 21 as National Soil Conservation Week, it's important that we also acknowledge and thank our producers for being leaders in the agricultural industry and faithful stewards of the land.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Yom ha-Shoah, Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Today marks a very important day: Holocaust Memorial Day, or Yom ha-Shoah. I invite the Legislature and all Albertans to take a moment of reflection as we remember the price the world paid as a result of the senseless and systematic persecution of 6 million people of the Jewish faith during the Second World War. In the words of Pastor Martin Niemöller:

First they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Finally, they came for me . . . but there was no one left to speak up.

Yom ha-Shoah reminds the world of the atrocities of the Holocaust as well as the massacre of millions of others during acts of genocide throughout history, Mr. Speaker. Every day we must be vigilant in our defence of human rights. I urge all Albertans to actively promote acceptance of all people and to protect the rights which uphold the way of life in this province.

Thank you.

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

Volunteerism

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. From April 15 to 21 we will be recognizing the contribution volunteers make to the welfare of our province. This year's theme is Volunteers Grow Community. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the volunteers on behalf of our caucus and, indeed, everyone in the Legislature. Alberta Liberals place a high value on volunteers' time and effort.

Volunteers donate their time in agencies that provide critical services to the residents of Alberta: youth, family, social support, recreational activities, safety, education, wellness, disease support, to name a few, and many others which contribute to the improvement of Albertans' quality of life, like arts and culture.

Many of these organizations are contracted by the government to provide essential services to the citizens of Alberta. They perform these services with repressively small budgets, spending a great deal of their human resources, paid and volunteer, on fundraising to subsidize the government funding of those very services. Few are in a financial position to react to any hardship or emergency that they may encounter.

Rising utility costs and the decreased availability of office space are huge concerns. Recruiting and retaining qualified staff without being able to offer competitive salaries is leading to higher turnover rates, which is often catastrophic for organizations that operate with few paid staff. It is critical that voluntary organizations get the financial support they need to provide the services Albertans require.

Running a voluntary-based organization is not free. These volunteers deserve our admiration and our thanks, but they also

deserve reasonable funding support for their organizations.
Thank you very much.

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

Ford World Men's Curling Championship

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to acknowledge the 2007 Ford World Men's Curling Championship that was held last week right here in Edmonton at Rexall Place and was attended by our Premier, our minister responsible for sports from Dunvegan-Central Peace, myself, and others. The success of this great event resulted because of many outstanding individuals, beginning with an extraordinary host committee that included president Jackie-Rae Greening, Bonnie Lopushinsky, Ron McGowan, Kris Sakowsky, Tracy Telford, Terry Symyrozum, Katherine Huising, our Northlands Park liaison Leanne Smoliak, and many other volunteers who worked tirelessly in preparing for these special games.

It was great to watch an international tournament that involved teams from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Scotland, Switzerland, the U.S.A., and for the first time the crowd-pleasers and heart-stealers, Korea. Congratulations go to our winning gold medallists from Ontario, skipped by Glenn Howard, to the silver medallists from Germany, skipped by Andy Kapp, and to the bronze medallists from the U.S.A., skipped by Todd Birr.

Additional thanks go out to the sponsors of the 2007 Ford World Men's Curling Championship and to the many businesses from Edmonton and elsewhere in Alberta that contributed.

Our final thanks must go out once again to the people of Edmonton and area, who demonstrated that our capital city is truly a world-class host. This championship set a world record for participation, with more than 10,000 spectators taking in last Sunday's final, thus bringing the total attendance for the nine days to a remarkable 184,970 spectators, a record for any Ford-sponsored event and a world record for a men's-only curling event.

Thank you and congratulations to all the volunteers, the sponsors, the fans, and the athletes who worked so hard to ensure the success of this international curling event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Sustainability of Social Programs

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. I understand that a majority of businesses that go under in the first two years fail not because of market or management but due to undercapitalization, and in a different realm I understand that most of the public and not-for-profit social programs that fail do so because of a lack of political will to see them through to a point of sustainability. What I want to do today, Mr. Speaker, is create an awareness of the crisis of human capital. We've kept these overlapping truths in separate compartments of our minds, and it's time to bring them together.

We have a province that excels globally in the raising of financial capital and is undercapitalized in the social and human domains. I'm referring not only to our cash investment in these areas but to the attitudes that shape our priorities. For years we have talked of people as human resources, resources we have not renewed, have allowed to burn out and be depleted. We have provided minimal support to those who chose to go into nurturing professions: teaching, nursing, caregiving, and social work. We have considered these soft career choices in comparison to those who work with

hardware, heavy equipment, and finance. At best we applaud their choices with a bland, "That's nice." At worst we put them on the chopping block for budget cuts and clawbacks.

1:20

Mr. Speaker, we need to bring undercapitalization here into balance with our overinvestment in the oil sands and construction industries, in the words of the hon. Premier, to deal with the pressures created by economic growth. We will do this not only by providing sustainable funding to these areas but by restoring a sense of responsibility for each other, the belief that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Camrose Kodiaks Hockey Team

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to congratulate the Camrose Kodiaks, the new Alberta champions of the 16-team Alberta Junior Hockey League. Last night the Kodiaks defeated the Fort Saskatchewan Traders in the sixth game of a seven-game series in front of a capacity hometown crowd at the Max McLean Arena. The 2007 championship is a nice 10-year anniversary celebration for the Kodiaks and their owners, the Camrose Sport Development Society.

In their 10-year history the Kodiaks have won four Alberta Junior Hockey League championships out of six times in the final playoff series, three B.C./Alberta Doyle Cup wins, national junior hockey silver medals in 2003 and 2005, and the Royal Bank national junior hockey championship in 2001.

The Kodiaks now advance to the Alberta/B.C. championship and if successful will represent our two provinces in the Royal Bank Canadian championship to be held in Prince George, British Columbia, in May.

Nostalgia was also in the air last night. The Kodiaks played their last game of Alberta junior league hockey in the Max McLean Arena and will move into the new 3,000-seat Camrose sport development centre next year, and the Fort Saskatchewan Traders played their last game as a Fort Saskatchewan team as they are moving to St. Albert next year. They are to be congratulated for a long history in Fort Saskatchewan and especially for their silver medals this year.

I want to congratulate the Kodiaks, the players and their coaches – Boris Rybalka, Doug Fleck, and Miles Walsh – the management and their owners, the Camrose Sport Development Society, on another very successful year. I ask all members to warmly congratulate the Kodiaks, and I wish them all the best on the road to the national championships.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, three days were mentioned already today in the Assembly: Holocaust Memorial Day, Yom ha-Shoah, yesterday; National Volunteer Week, April 15 to 21; and National Soil Conservation Week, April 15 to 21.

There are a number of other weeks and days that I'll just draw to all members' attention. April 16 to April 22 is International Astronomy Week. April 17 is World Hemophilia Day. April 17 is Equality Day in Canada. April 20 to April 22 is Global Youth Service Day. April 21 is Law Day. April 21 is also International Astronomy Day. Earth Day is April 22.

Administrative Professionals Week is April 22 to April 28 as is National Immunization Awareness Week as is National Medical Laboratory Professionals Week as is National Organ and Tissue

Donor Awareness Week. April 22 to May 24 is National Physiotherapy Month. April 23 is St. George's Day as it is World Book and Copyright Day as it is part of Global Action Week, which goes from April 23 to April 29. April 23 to April 29 is also Global Road Safety Week. April 25 is Administrative Professionals Day. April 26 is World Intellectual Property Day. April 28 is National Day of Mourning. April 29 is International Dance Day, and April 29 to May 5 is Education Week.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition of 73 names, signatures, and addresses of constituents of Drayton Valley-Calmar and area who are urging the government to introduce a bill to create a buffer zone of at least one mile from any major water body and thus prohibit approvals of confined feeding operations within this buffer zone to "protect and preserve Alberta's fresh water sources."

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to table another 78 signatures from Albertans from all over the place but particularly from Edmonton, Gibbons, and St. Albert urging the government to ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is even across the sector and to ensure that they're fairly compensated to be able to retain them, to also improve their access to professional development opportunities, and to "introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table today for the information of the Legislative Assembly three letters. As chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee I wrote on March 22, 2007, to both Ms Sheila Weatherill, president and chief executive officer of Capital health, and Mr. Jack Davis, president and chief executive officer of the Calgary health region, to attend a Public Accounts meeting to be held on Wednesday, September 12, 2007. I would like to table these two letters.

I would like to table a response that I was delighted to receive on March 29, 2007, from the Calgary regional health authority indicating acknowledgement of the letter from March 22, and it states in here that the committee can expect to see the Calgary regional health authority in September. To date we have not heard from the Capital health authority, and I anxiously await that letter.

The Speaker: Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a letter representing the Marie Lake protection society expressing grave concerns about the development in the Marie Lake area.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a report called A Crisis of Human Capital, talking about the issue of human capital in the children's services sector.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and present some letters on behalf of constituents in Edmonton-Manning calling on this Legislative Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua John Hunt be sentenced and tried as an adult "due to the nature of this crime, his past criminal history and that he is so close to the age of 18 years."

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to table the requisite number of copies of two sheets of paper submitted by Mr. Ted Klimosko, who describes himself as one of those Albertans hurt by the Alberta advantage and one who is ready to leave the province. The first document shows a purchase contract for a condo unit clearly showing him having bought the unit, that it was his basically. The second document shows that clause titled Closing and Completion Date, which states that should the seller not be able to complete the unit, they can just simply refund the money and take possession back and they can sell it to someone else. He thinks that this is not only an inconvenience, but the fact is that he lost money. He agrees that this province needs a consumer advocate.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to table the prerequisite copies of four annual reports: the report of the Alberta Association of Registered Occupational Therapists for 2005-2006, the Public Health Appeal Board for 2006, the Alberta College of Social Workers for 2006, and the College of Dental Technologists of Alberta for 2005-2006.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon, the first being a letter dated March 30 from a constituent, Azra Ahmad, a new immigrant to Canada from Bangladesh, a single parent, who discusses her difficulty in finding and maintaining affordable housing for herself and her nine-year-old son.

The second, Mr. Speaker, comes as a result of myself attending with several colleagues from this Legislature the labour appreciation night on Saturday evening at the Shaw Conference Centre at which the Jim Shewchuk award was presented. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the Shewchuk award program outlining this year's winner, Maureen Werlin, a member of the Canadian professional employees international union who has spent the previous 17 years working with the Alberta Federation of Labour and has done an awful lot, in fact an absolutely impressive amount of work with the Edmonton Epilepsy Association.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Knight, Minister of Energy, a document entitled Royalty Review 2006: List of Consultant Studies and Software.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Regional Municipal Planning and Development

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The social, environmental, and economic challenges facing Alberta's communities do not respect municipal boundaries. Take Strathcona county: a wall of new upgraders on one side, a potential 100 square mile coal strip mine on another, and the proposal for the continent's largest landfill, taking trainloads of out-of-province garbage, on another side. Yet the people of Strathcona county have little to no say in these developments because they're in different counties. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that the people of Strathcona county should have a right to be heard on the future direction of development in this region?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are processes in place when various developers are putting forward proposals for development in municipalities, and adjoining municipalities also have an opportunity to comment on applications that are made. But this is one area that we recognize as a priority for the government, and that is land-use planning, better co-operation, better communication amongst and between municipalities, and we're getting on with the job.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Edmonton provides many services for residents outside its boundaries, from transportation and recreation to social services. The city of Edmonton bears additional costs because it's the hub of this region. Edmonton's development is directly impacted by decisions of other municipalities. For example, land targeted for a hospital in Strathcona county could conflict with land that is proposed for heavy industry development in Edmonton. To the Premier: what is this government prepared to do to fix regional planning so that Edmonton and its neighbours can work together on future growth?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, when I served in two previous capacities, as minister of infrastructure and minister of transportation, I worked with the 22 municipalities in putting together long-term transportation plans. That has really moved this whole area very positively in terms of some major construction of large, very important roadways to us, to the whole area. We're continuing to work on other areas in terms of further development in the province, in the capital region, and how we can co-operate further. Although as elected officials every person has their own opinions, which they bring to the meeting, they are working in a very positive direction.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The lack of requirements for municipalities to plan on a regional basis has led to conflicts between neighbouring municipalities across the province. The Alberta Capital Region Alliance is just one example of regional planning that has broken down, leaving the future of the Edmonton region in question. To the Premier: is it still fundamentally the position of this government that regional planning is hands off, or will the Premier consider supporting a forthcoming Alberta Liberal bill that will make regional planning mandatory?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before in the House, we're a little further ahead of where the Liberals are in this particular

area. The minister responsible for municipal affairs will be coming forward with the kinds of discussions he's had with the municipal leaders finally after – what? – five years of discussion. All AUMA, AAMD and C, and the two big city mayors have agreed on the municipal sustainability report. That report is being vetted through the various processes, and there will be further information to follow.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Openness and Transparency in Government

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On what is perhaps the biggest single issue this government will face, the review of the royalty regime, this government flat out stumbles. It appointed someone with a multimillion dollar conflict of interest, a former VP of Shell Canada, to the panel. To the Premier. The head of Shell Canada has written to the Premier explaining that the current royalty framework provides Albertans with a, quote, fair return to the province's natural resources. End quote. What assurances beyond some vague oath can the Premier provide that the views of Shell Canada, which opposes any changes to royalties, are not being embedded in the panel and this government by the panel member who still has a multimillion dollar stake in that company?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the administrative portion I'll ask the minister to respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would let the Legislative Assembly know that prior to the attendance of any meeting Mr. Sam Spanglet, who sits on this committee, sold his shares, sold his stock options in Shell Canada.

Dr. Taft: Well done. Well done.

The Premier's lobbyist bill, which is a belated half-step full of loopholes, defines a lobbyist as someone paid to do their work, yet we had an individual appointed to this panel who is clearly in a conflict of interest. Will the Premier admit that there is nothing preventing this kind of incident from occurring again under the lobbying bill that he is proposing?

The Speaker: Well, the Lobbyists Act is currently before a committee of the House. All hon. members have ample opportunity to participate then as part of the debate. Perhaps the hon. leader will proceed to the third aspect of this question.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we brought forward the patronage contracts awarded to defeated Tory MLA Bob Maskell, the Premier claimed it was a problem of perception, stating that "under my leadership perception of this sort will not happen." However, the appointment of this individual to the Royalty Review Panel raises serious problems of perception. From cabinet selection to leadership fundraising to the Balzac deal to the Vegreville health crisis the Premier explains it all away by saying that it's not what it looks to be. To the Premier: does the Premier agree that these issues are serious issues of perception that should not have been allowed to develop under his government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I said last week in the House and the week before that this government has moved further than any other

government in terms of openness and transparency. When I say openness and transparency, I mean it. When the issues were raised last week in the House with respect to a contract by a previous member, an MLA, there were some questions raised, and I'll make sure that we conduct a full internal audit of the billings and make that information public.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Affordable Housing

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a crisis in Alberta right now. Many Albertans cannot afford a home. The Alberta Liberals have a basic principle when it comes to housing: everyone needs a home. Many Albertans are facing massive rental increases that are forcing them out of their homes. This is affecting seniors, low-income and middle-income earners, students, people on AISH. It's a crisis, but this government is failing to act. To the Premier: will this government immediately bring in a one-year rent increase regulation as the Alberta Liberal housing policy recommends in order to protect renters?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Premier has been recognized.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think there's a disagreement on the other side of the House in terms of whose idea it is.

All I know is that the minister responsible for housing is moving the report through the process. We will be announcing recommendations with respect to the report, asking, of course, not only the federal government and the municipalities to work closer together with the private sector, including the province of Alberta.

Dr. Taft: Well, massive rent spikes are just one symptom of the housing problems facing Albertans. In addition, condominium conversions are seriously eroding the available supply of rental units. Some landlords want to convert their apartments to condominiums with no regard for the renters who cannot afford a condominium. This practice is putting people out on the street with no place to go. Again to the Premier: will the Premier take the advice offered in the Alberta Liberal affordable housing policy and declare a two-year moratorium on condo conversions, except for those from developers who will replace lost rentals with new units?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this question was raised, of course, on a policy issue by the third party, I believe by the leader of the third party. We said that those recommendations, through the question that the hon. leader raised, will be some of the discussions that we will have around the caucus table to build the recommendations and options in terms of the very critical area with respect to housing.

Mr. Speaker, yes, there is an issue in terms of available housing. But, you know, more and more Canadians outside of Alberta insist on moving to the province because it's the only province where jobs are available, and that's why they're coming here.

1:40

Dr. Taft: One of the impediments facing renters is that even if they find a home they can afford, they do not have the financial means for the damage deposit and first month's rent. This initial cash outlay is a big impediment to the working homeless and to low-income people in search of affordable homes. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: will this government follow the lead of the

Alberta Liberal affordable housing strategy and implement a microcredit for low-income earners to cover the cost of the security deposit and first month's rent? Everybody needs a home.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to reaffirm that the housing task force has made a report, and we are looking at that report. Some of the issues are because of the growth factor that is involved in this province. Those are some of the challenges: making sure that people that move to Alberta or that people that are looking for their first home or that are able to rent have that opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Emergency Hospital Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Uncontrolled growth and this government's long history of terrible planning are creating problems across the province, from housing to long-term care to the environment, but the crisis that hits closest to home for most Albertans is our health care system. A report being considered today by Edmonton city council shows that ambulance red alerts in Edmonton were 15 times higher in February 2007 than they were just one year earlier. Just to be clear: a red alert means there are no ambulances. So if you have a heart attack or a car accident, there's no ambulance. My question is to the Premier. What is he going to do, and what is he going to tell those Edmontonians and other people in Alberta who don't have an ambulance when they need one?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health has of course taken steps in this particular area, and I'll ask him to answer.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe a red alert actually is when there's a lack of capacity at the emergency rather than a lack of ambulance to respond. But I can tell the House that I've met with both the Capital health authority and the Calgary regional health authority on the issue of emergency wait times and the wait time of ambulances at emergency, and both of those major regional health authorities are moving to put in place matters to deal with them. In the Capital region they've put in place the full-capacity protocol, which is not an answer in itself, but it's a good interim step.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister is trying to take credit for the full-capacity protocol, which was developed by the health region, when he should be taking the blame for this government's lack of planning and investment in our health care system. When will this minister accept responsibility for the ongoing crisis in our health care system as evidenced by the increased emergency room wait times and rampant red alerts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not trying to take credit for the full-capacity protocol. In fact, the credit for the full-capacity protocol goes to the emergency doctors themselves. Dr. Raj Sherman, who is head of the emergency doctors, was talking to

the health authorities and to people in government about the implementation of that. Thankfully, Capital health authority agreed early in February to start implementing it, and it's already showing promising results.

With respect to taking responsibility for the other issues in health, of course that's my job each and every day.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, maybe less talk and more action would be in order.

There has been a steady increase in the number of precious minutes paramedics spend waiting to transfer their patients. It's gone from 45 minutes a year ago to 63 minutes on average so far this year. That 18 minutes can literally be a lifetime for someone waiting for a paramedic. What action is this Premier taking to get acute care and emergency room capacity caught up after years of population growth and Conservative neglect?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of new beds coming on stream. There's a considerable amount of reinvestment in infrastructure. That's on the expenditure side. But it's about time we also looked at how we can reduce the number of visits to emergency rooms, and that is reducing the number of vehicle collisions in this province, ensuring that Albertans live a much healthier lifestyle, don't get involved in those situations – of course, these incidents come forward with people on ATVs. We just lost another young person the other day. All of these contribute to the many visits to emergency. So, yes, spend more money, but see how we can reduce the number of visits as well through more responsibility.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Cardston-Taber-Warner Constituency Issues

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Municipal governments are struggling more and more each day with the fiscal imbalance in funding and regulations, that make it costly and impractical to do what is needed. I would like to address three constituents' problems today. First, the town of Taber needs a new water treatment plant. They have applied to CAMRIF for funding. No news, though. They have tenders out that are due in May, but without funding and the approval of the government they are hooped, and there will be a delay and a likely cost for taxpayers in Taber. To the Premier: will this government commit to working with Taber to resolve the problem before the end of May?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, coming forward on Thursday, of course, will be our budget. That will outline the plan for the year in terms of infrastructure, both water and sewage treatment, critical infrastructure to municipalities. We are facing those issues in terms of capacity to find people to build all of the infrastructure that's necessary, but in this particular program that the hon. member mentioned, it's a federal/provincial program, so both levels of government have to agree on that particular project.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: They need an answer, though, to deal with the tenders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The border village of Coutts has been fenced off. This is a huge economic barrier for the town. We don't

even have a fence like this for our border between much of Canada and the U.S. Travellers are forced to walk over eight minutes versus one minute the old way and sometimes in minus 40 weather. This fence should not have been built in the first place, and now this government hides behind safety regulations and says that it's not safe for adults to cross the road in a 20-kilometre-an-hour speed zone. All they have been asking for is a crosswalk and a gate. Two more years of studies and excuses are unacceptable to the people of Coutts and their visitors. To this Premier: what is this government going to do to address this problem now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member is referring to a joint federal/provincial project on the border crossing. I know that there were some issues in terms of the planning. That was a few years ago. I remember that file a bit, but it was a safety issue. It's also an issue that we're negotiating with the federal government on because they're responsible for the border crossing, but we'll check into it and get back to the hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the crosswalk and the gate are provincial.

For the last 30 years the Snake River ranch east of Cardston has been fighting a losing battle with the St. Mary River as this government has adopted the policy that a pound of cure is better than ounce of prevention. Last fall the transportation department was finally prepared to do something about the washing out of the bridge and the road, only to be stopped by the DFO and Alberta Environment, and it continues to be a problem being bounced back and forth between federal and provincial. Will this government act now and save this road, the bridge, and the family's connection to the world before the next flood?

Mr. Stelmach: Back to the first question, Mr. Speaker. Even though part of the funding was provincial, the overall development, the planning, was both federal and provincial.

With respect to this issue this is something that we face, the Snake River, on a regular basis. There are actually two federal environmental authorities. One is the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and, of course, under navigable waters as well. So you always have to work with two authorities. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, even to replace a simple culvert on a country road – and that happened in your constituency – you know how long it took for us to get approval. We're working with the federal government to try to expedite it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Women's Shelters

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second-stage housing is essential to ensure that women and children fleeing domestic abuse have somewhere to go after the immediate crisis has passed. Despite this fact, the government has no clear funding program for second-stage housing in Alberta. Money announced for women's shelters last week is greatly needed and appreciated but will not address this particular issue. To the Minister of Children's Services: when will the government commit to providing ongoing and sustainable funding for second-stage housing across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the House that the women's shelter report was publicly released last week and is

available to everyone on the website. A couple of days ago I met for several hours with women's shelters stakeholders to go through the recommendations. I am happy to note – and I'm glad, actually, that the hon. member brought this up – that one of the recommendations is that government work with community partners to “develop affordable and transitional housing” as well as “conduct a cross jurisdictional analysis to assess the costs and effectiveness.” Clearly, second-stage housing was a huge part of our discussions and certainly something that we'll be looking at immediately.

Thank you.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Research suggests that for every crisis bed available, two to three second-stage transitional beds are needed, yet in Alberta this number is reversed. Statistics show that while there are 692 crisis beds available to those in need, there are only 297 second-stage beds. To the Minister of Children's Services: why has the government failed to address the shortage of second-stage beds in this province despite their great importance in disrupting the cycle of abuse?

Ms Tarchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd say again from our discussions last week that second-stage housing is a priority and is something that we will be looking at. I will be moving forward with stakeholders on this issue.

Mrs. Mather: In my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods and across Alberta the shortage of affordable housing is critical. It was recently reported that 75 per cent of women who returned to abusive partners after receiving services cited lack of affordable housing as the main reason, a 50 per cent increase from 2005. It is clear that affordable housing is a crucial part of any strategy to address family violence. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: when will this government take action to ensure that women and children affected by domestic violence can find the affordable housing they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we have said previously, we acknowledge the concern over affordable housing in Alberta. We are presently going through the process. I do believe that the budget is in three days.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Land-use Development Framework

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're hearing a lot these days about land and water pressures. These pressures are continuing after a number of years of increased activity on the land. We've also heard about plans for developing a land-use framework to deal with those activities. My question is to the Premier. What is the status of the land-use development framework?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the land-use development framework agreement has of course been mandated to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. The consultations have begun. This is going to be a task which is going to require a fair amount of consultation, as we heard today in the House, in terms of the differences amongst municipalities, competing interests of forestry,

agriculture, urban sprawl. We're going to work very diligently in this area because a good land-use agreement is good for the province of Alberta. There are 3.3 million people in Alberta today. What is this province going to look like with 4 million people in a number of years?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is the land-use framework intended to do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The work already done on the land-use framework has given us the vision of the framework: the principles and the desired outcomes. It's a good starting point. Going forward, this framework will develop an overarching policy structure. It will give provincial-level guidance to land-use planning and management. This framework will give us the approach that we can use to balance the competing and multiple uses that occur on both private and public lands. I believe that the framework will address a number of different issues, including regional planning. There's a certain overlap there with the minister of municipal affairs to facilitate greater co-operation and co-ordination between towns and cities. It'll address the issue of Crown lands and also private lands.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: Alberta has an extensive set of regulations already in place, so why do we need a land-use framework now?

Dr. Morton: It's true, Mr. Speaker, that our land-use management process in the past has served us well. But times have changed. We have to update it to reflect the new economic realities of Alberta. That reality is one of hypergrowth both in the economy and our population. It is putting unprecedented pressure on our lands, both public and private. You often see competing demands on the same piece of land for agriculture, forestry, oil and gas and industrial development, housing, recreation, and conservation. We have to rationalize those activities on the land. I expect that the land-use framework will ensure that the quality of life that we enjoy today will be there for generations to come.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

School Infrastructure in Calgary

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the Minister of Education sows P3 seeds across the province, schools are falling apart in Calgary. Last week the roof of Ernest Manning high school proved that it was no match for the spring thaw, and now repairs to the gym floor are at risk. Will this government commit to providing enough funding to ensure that students in this school will not have to skip basketball games, dodge buckets, or even change schools to accommodate this government's inadequate financial support? Mr. Minister, help us, please.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, last year in the budget the provincial government increased the funding for infrastructure and maintenance from \$48 million annually to \$200 million, a fourfold increase. That

allowed the Calgary board of education – and I happened to meet with the Calgary board of education on Friday – to fix some 49 roofs of schools in Calgary. We recognize that there's still more to be done, and that's why we're bringing a budget forward later this week.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ernest Manning is one of the many schools in the Calgary public system that has a roof in serious need of repair or even replacement. Marlborough school just got its students back to class a month ago, a year after it was closed due to fears that the roof could collapse. Mr. Minister, how many schools have to reach a crisis before the government provides the level of funding needed to protect Alberta's investment in our schools across the province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, appropriately so, we provide the funds to school boards, and school boards have their priorities as to what they spend their funds on. The Ernest Manning roof is due to be fixed this summer, so there will be funds for that school. It's on the list to be repaired this summer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Comments made by some of the members opposite suggest that the government is happy to blame school boards and even individual administrators for problems created by years of underfunding and neglect. The reality is that the Calgary board of education's \$466 million deferred maintenance backlog makes it very difficult to respond to emerging maintenance problems. Will this government stop giving school boards a starvation diet and start providing the money needed to keep our Alberta schools structurally sound and able to equip students to go to school?

Mr. Liepert: I'll repeat once more: we increased the funding for infrastructure and maintenance fourfold in last year's budget. We have a budget coming this week that will deal with infrastructure and maintenance.

One of the things that this government is looking at is some alternative ways of financing schools. One of those alternative ways is modernization using alternative financing, whereby the maintenance is looked after for some 25 years. Now, I know that the hon. members there don't like to look at other ways of solving problems, but this government is going to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Registries Database Access

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Police officers report to me that often those who face high insurance premiums resulting from poor driving records or impaired driving convictions purchase insurance for only one day to obtain a pink card, which then states that they are insured for a whole year. The Insurance Bureau of Canada and individual underwriters are unwilling to tie themselves into the Alberta Registries database, which would allow police officers to verify the validity of the insurance. My first question to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security: would having access to this information indeed assist our police officers on the road?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the information would be very helpful to get these lawbreakers off the road. I want to say that last year this government announced plans to develop a hundred million dollar computer system that will be accessible to all Alberta peace officers. This system will provide officers on the front line with a wide array of information that could and, hopefully, will include a driver's abstract and whether or not they are insured.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Service Alberta. Since insurance companies benefit from not submitting this information to government as bad drivers are not desirable clients for them, why wouldn't the minister compel the insurance industry to share their information with our government and help us catch uninsured drivers?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, Service Alberta looks after the registries of vehicles and the information around drivers' licences. In fact, when you get your licence plate, you're only required to present a snapshot of that day, a pink slip. In no way is Alberta Registries able to verify that is even still valid. So the Solicitor General has suggested a system that the police agencies may use, and that might be the appropriate tool, but the integrity and the security of the registry system would not be served in Alberta's best interests to be open to the insurance companies.

Mr. Lukaszuk: My last supplemental is to the Minister of Justice. How much does the province right now pay in claims annually with taxpayers' money for uninsured drivers claims?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This issue of uninsured and hit-and-run drivers has been around since the '70s and is dealt with under the motor vehicle accident claims fund. Currently there is a \$6 per registration charge for vehicles registered in the province. Annually there is something in the order of \$20 million worth of claims which are paid out. Those \$6 registrations equate to \$16 million worth of contributions to that fund, and I can tell you also that some \$6.5 million is recovered from those bad drivers because we do pursue them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Resource Development under Lake Beds

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government often talks about maintaining a healthy environment, yet as usual without independent environmental assessment the Energy and Utilities Board is left rubber-stamping every project that maximizes resource extraction. The fact that the government approved seismic testing under Marie Lake, a pristine lake in northern Alberta, clearly shows otherwise. Around the lake people are wondering why they are not getting access to government members and getting adequate information to make decisions about this development. To the Premier: does the Premier not see that development under lakes is a fundamental breach of public trust?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, either a couple of weeks ago or last week in the House this item came up, and I said that I'd be working with the minister responsible, the minister of sustainable resources, get all the information with respect to what environmental issues there are. Further, with respect to Marie Lake I know that the MLA for the area, the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, has attended all of the meetings and has brought that information forward to both ministers, so we've continued to work. To my knowledge, I didn't think that the seismic had been approved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier stop the practice of the sale of mineral rights underneath Alberta's lakes?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this question has come up a couple of times with Albertans at various events and also around our caucus table: when there are certain blocks of land that are sold, how do you carve out any body of water or river? We had a good discussion with respect to that. In terms of the sales that have been completed, there are a whole bunch of things that come forward. What if somebody buys a lease, and they do some seismic and find out that there's no oil on it, do they give it back to the province and we pay them back? Of course not.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Your ministry has stated that the planned seismic testing will not have adverse effects on the aquatic environment. Will the minister explain what experts he has consulted, and will he table reports relative to the seismic activity on the lake?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to tell this House that my ministry will not authorize any seismic testing on Marie Lake when and if we see scientific evidence that it has probable adverse effect. In addition, I can assure you that I will require scientific monitoring before, during, and after any test to see if there is any adverse effect, and I will ensure that funding will be in place from the operator to mitigate any operational effect, any adverse effect if it occurs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

St. Joseph's General Hospital

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month the minister of health told us that the incident at St. Joe's hospital in Vegreville was an isolated incident. We found that not to be true because very shortly thereafter there were problems in Lloydminster; there have been problems in Canmore, many other hospitals. He told us at the time that 80 people could be infected, at risk of contracting hepatitis or HIV. Now, we find out that that number is 3,000. My question simply to the minister: how could the minister's initial estimate of 80 people be so wrong?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't the minister's estimate that was wrong but the listening of the hon. member. What was said at the time was that it came to our attention because of the review of

cystoscopy, particularly with respect to cystoscopy with biopsies, that there were 80 people who had been identified as having had that procedure, that we were going to do a look back at all the records and determine what group of people needed to be followed up on. It's been public knowledge that we've been following up with the next highest risk after the cystoscopies and endoscopies and those sorts of tests, that tonsillectomies was the next and to broader procedures, to any procedure which involved any invasive process. That's been clearly in the public domain for some time.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, 3,000 was not the number that even came close at that particular time. My question simply to the minister is that there's a great worry among people that they are going to go into the hospital and come out sicker rather than healthier. There is a growing problem within the credibility of the hospital system. My question simply to the minister is this: does the minister not realize that by the government not dealing decisively with this issue, it is hurting – and I stress hurting – the credibility of the hospital system in Alberta?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did deal decisively with the issue. First of all, we made sure that the CSR in that particular hospital was closed and that no further sterilization processes were happening at that hospital so that it got appropriate sterilization procedures. The public health officer also closed the hospital for admissions for another incident with respect to the hospital. That process is ongoing, and we're very satisfied that the medical officer of health is supervising that process. So that happened. We also engaged immediately in a look back to see what group of people we should be involving in tests to determine whether there was any possibility – not probability, but possibility – of transferring blood-borne pathogens. That happened. A board of managers was put in place; that's in place now. So a number of very decisive steps have been taken and more to come.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that these things keep coming out, and we hear more and more and more. The point that we were saying right from the start so people have some faith in our hospital system: why do we not now call for a full public inquiry? That's what people are asking for.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the full public inquiry that the hon. member is asking for will not solve any problems. What we've got in place is a Health Quality Council review. I've asked every health authority and every health profession to review their processes across the province, and we'll be taking a look at those. We'll have their responses by the end of April, and we'll be bringing into place as a result of that process the necessary processes and procedures to make sure that Albertans have faith in their system and can have faith in their hospitals when they go into them. But there's no point in alarming Albertans unnecessarily. This situation is under control, and the process to make sure it never happens again is ongoing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Energy and Utilities Board

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our caucus made the policy decision on the recommendation of the Minister of Energy to restructure Alberta's regulatory authority of the Energy and Utilities Board into two separate boards. Most of us recall that Alberta had a Public Utilities Board and an Energy Resources Conservation Board back in the 1990s. My question is to the Minister of Energy.

Why are we taking this step, which some call a backward step, to address the needs of today?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you categorically that this is not a step backwards; anything but. This government has a plan to build a stronger Alberta. We are looking to the future, and this restructuring is part of the plan. We're managing growth pressures in the province of Alberta. The landscape has changed significantly since 1995, when the EUB was established. There has been a population increase. There has been oil and gas development increase. There has been the emergence of a very, very solid oil sands development and restructured electrical markets.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Issues such as land use, surface rights, and environmental protection are major concerns related to the oil and gas development and new electrical transmission projects. There's a growing need also for more public advocacy. Can the minister advise how this will affect the EUB's work to address public concerns?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, this province has a world-renowned regulatory system, and this change will enhance that system. We have very stringent approval processes for all energy projects, and Albertans can continue to expect those types of approvals to be made by these two boards.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what does this mean, then, to the 500-kV line application which is currently before the board, given that this process could perhaps be interrupted because of the restructuring?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a responsibility to ensure that the needs of industry and the best interests of Albertans are protected while we go through this transition. The comprehensive implementation and the transition strategy that we have ensure that all applications, not any particular one, before the board are handled appropriately and in a timely manner.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Community Facility Enhancement Program

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's community facility enhancement program grant distribution is out of order. In the year 2004-05 of the over 600 CFEP grants awarded, just 3 per cent of recipients received 25 per cent of the total CFEP funding. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: will the minister admit that CFEP grants are not being awarded on a consistent basis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, CFEP grants are awarded according to applications by our nonprofit registered societies. The CFEP is not predetermined in terms of how much individuals have. We do have maximum limits, that tend to go up to \$125,000, and we allocate those dollars on the basis of applications rather than on the basis of total dollars.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister. The Auditor General found that the minister has a great deal of flexibility with grants over \$125,000. Will the minister admit that as the size of the grant increases, the rules should be stronger, not weaker?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, all of them are evaluated on the basis of the organizations, the societies, past activities. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is right. Certainly, as our numbers increase, we do provide additional scrutiny to the applications. We do make sure that they're registered societies. They have to be accountable. They have a certain time period to report back to us as to how those dollars are spent. If they don't do that, then we actually do the follow-up to see how we can reclaim some of those dollars.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: will the minister update CFEP guidelines so that all the potential grant applicants will have an equal opportunity to apply and to receive grants?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where the member is coming from. Certainly, the member opposite is sort of alluding to the fact that we're treating different people differently. Every group and every organization has to meet the same guidelines. They fall under the same criteria. We're constantly reviewing those guidelines and criteria to keep them up to date, but we don't pick one organization over the other and have different rules for them. They are the same for everybody.

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

Minimum Wage

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The organization called Vibrant Communities Calgary in partnership with business groups and nonprofit groups launched the living wage initiative. This idea was launched in the U.S.A. over 10 years ago and established in 130 U.S. cities. The city of Calgary has adopted this initiative by working with the living wage action team. I have recently received a copy of the living wage fact sheet. The question today is to the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Is the minister aware of this living wage initiative and its recommendations to help our Albertan working poor?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm aware of the Vibrant Communities initiative. Our offices in Calgary act as a resource to the group. We're well aware of their initiatives to assist the working poor. Their predominant thrust is on the living wage. While the minimum wage is a concern of this government – and I'm exploring that – one of the things that we're trying to do is make sure that Albertans who need training get that opportunity. For the working poor and other Albertans we provide some \$300 million in our department to enhance their training opportunities as a major thrust of helping them cope with the lifestyle.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that Alberta has a law governing our employment standards and minimum wage, what is Alberta's minimum wage in comparison with those in other Canadian jurisdictions?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, to properly compare minimum wage and all the supplementary benefits provided would take some doing. On the minimum wage alone we are not ranked highly, and I do favour increasing the minimum wage but not until there's an opportunity to bring back a review, a solid review, to our government to look at the implications. We have about 97 per cent of Albertans that are covered with wages other than the minimum wage. When I'm meeting with some of the stakeholders, their theme to me is that generally speaking they're paying much more than the minimum wage even though they would previously have paid less because in our buoyant economy clearly employers are paying more.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A living wage is defined as the amount of income needed to meet the basic needs, to maintain a safe and decent standard of living, and to have some savings for needs and goals in the future. With the cost of living in Calgary the living wage is calculated to be \$12 per hour. So my question to the same minister: given that employers already pay higher than the minimum wage of \$7, do you, Minister, have any plan to look at increasing it to a level closer to the living wage?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, beyond looking at the minimum wage, to look at a living wage, you have to look at several other factors. There are many other supplementary benefits that both the federal and the provincial government provide for people who are receiving the minimum wage. You have to also look at such factors – and this is one that is cited to me by many of the people in the chambers of commerce, that young people and new workers may be restricted in the number of jobs that they could get if we increase the minimum wage and not recognize that the greater majority of people who are earning the minimum wage receive tips and other supplementary benefits on the job site. A family member earns a fraction of their total salary given the minimum . . .

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

Long-term Care

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent report from Ontario shows that antipsychotic drugs, which have serious side effects, are being used on long-term care patients who do not have psychosis or dementia. Almost two years ago Alberta's Auditor General also observed that some facilities "use chemical or physical restraints, often without adequate documentation, and in a few isolated cases, without apparent medical authorization." My questions are to the minister of health. The government of Ontario is introducing legislation to deal with the use and to curb the abuse of antipsychotic drugs. Why hasn't Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member raises a very important and interesting question and one which I'm going to be very interested in looking at because I think it's very clear not only with respect to the drugs that are being mentioned but the utilization of drugs in general that there's an overutilization of drugs among the senior population, particularly those in long-term care. We need to have a very clear and solid look at that, so I will undertake to do so and find out whether any progress has been made in that area. I am not aware specifically what decision-making process has been undertaken with respect to that in Alberta, so I will look into it.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that we can all agree that Albertans in long-term care deserve the highest level of care available, but this government is allowing seniors to fall seriously behind other provinces. In British Columbia the government has set a goal of 5,000 new long-term care beds by 2008. Why hasn't this government set any long-term goals with specific targets for increasing long-term care beds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, a very good question. I'd go back to a report that was done by a former colleague in this Legislature, the Broda report, which talked about the continuum of living situations for seniors and those who need living assistance. I think it's very important that we work not just on the long-term care beds, which is very important, but also on how we support seniors living in their own homes, how we make sure that seniors have the choices about aging in place and not leaving their spheres of influence and the comfort of their neighbourhood. So we need to look not just at goals for the long-term care, but we need to look at goals with respect to how we support seniors to age in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, the only thing we got out of the Broda report was a significant increase in what we charge residents for long-term care.

Ontario's new legislation also includes a resident bill of rights, which wasn't contemplated in the Broda report, similar to the one that was recommended by Alberta Liberals almost two years ago. Will the minister finally take advice that would improve the quality of care for seniors and legislate a resident bill of rights which would include the right to refuse medication like chemical restraints and the right to be treated with dignity and respect?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'll take advice from any Albertan who wants to give advice on how we can treat our seniors better in this province and how we can ensure that seniors are not abused. Now, the minister of seniors may wish to add to this particular area, but I can say this: this government cares very much about not only the accommodation for seniors, the health care for seniors, but how seniors get to age in place and live with respect and dignity and die with respect and dignity. So I will take advice from anyone on this area, any Albertan on this area.

The Speaker: That was 90 questions and answers today, hon. members.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been head: accepted]

Unfunded Pension Liability

Q1. Mr. Miller:
What is the total projected cost to taxpayers of the government's current schedule for paying off the unfunded liabilities of public-sector pension plans broken down by plan?

Heritage Savings Trust Fund Investments

- Q4. Mr. Miller:
What was the total value of all Alberta heritage savings trust fund investments in tobacco-based companies at the end of fiscal years 2000-2001 through 2005-2006 and for the period April 1, 2006, to March 7, 2007?

Contracted Psychiatric Services

- Q5. Mr. Martin:
For each of the fiscal years 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and for the period April 1, 2006, to March 6, 2007, what was the total value of psychiatric services contracted by regional health authorities, RHAs, broken down by RHA, and what was the total value of psychiatric services contracted by the Alberta Mental Health Board?

Contracted Clinical Psychiatric Care

- Q6. Mr. Martin:
For each of the fiscal years 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and for the period April 1, 2006, to March 6, 2007, what was the total number of psychiatrists contracted to provide clinical services for regional health authorities, RHAs, broken down by RHA, and what was the total number contracted to provide clinical services by the Alberta Mental Health Board?

Sick Leave Taken by Registered Nurses

- Q7. Mr. Martin:
For each of the fiscal years 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 how many days of sick leave were taken by registered nurses, broken down by regional health authorities?

Sick Leave Taken by Licensed Practical Nurses

- Q8. Mr. Martin:
For each of the fiscal years 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 how many days of sick leave were taken by licensed practical nurses employed by regional health authorities, RHAs, broken down by RHA?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Wednesday, April 11, it's my pleasure to move that written questions 2 and 3 be dealt with today. As per our new temporary Standing Order changes written questions that have already been accepted have been read into the record. Written questions 9, 10, and 11 will stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

Funding Applications to Assist the Disabled

- Q2. Mr. Bonko asked on behalf of Ms Pastoor that the following question be accepted.
What was the total number of funding applications and the total number of applications approved under the assistance to persons with developmental disabilities program and the assured income for the severely handicapped program in fiscal years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have circulated an amendment to Written Question 2. We'd be happy to accept the question. We're proposing an amendment that doesn't change, I would suggest, the information that's sought to be received, but we thought we'd better be clear in the wording on this.

What we're proposing is that it be amended in two places. We'd like to remove the reference to funding applications and just leave in "applications," so strike out the word "funding" but leave "applications." Well, first in that respect, applications approved to persons with developmental disabilities are not for direct funding but for support services that are funded by the department through service contracts. We'd also like to remove the word "assistance" from the title of the program as the formal name of the program is persons with developmental disabilities. It does not include "assistance to."

So the amended question would read:

What was the total number of applications and the total number of applications approved under the persons with developmental disabilities program and the assured income for the severely handicapped program in fiscal years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006?

This should still provide all of the information that is requested. It's just some wording changes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore on the amendment.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a friendly amendment, and it does still get to the crux of the question that the Member for Lethbridge-East was looking for, so we will accept that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Should I call the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore to close the debate if you wish.

Mr. Bonko: Call the question.

[Written Question 2 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Oil Sands Royalty Reductions

- Q3. Mr. MacDonald asked that the following question be accepted.
For each of the fiscal years 1997-1998 through 2005-2006 what is the total value of all reductions to Crown royalties under the following categories of allowed costs as referenced in appendix L of the Alberta oil sands royalty guidelines: bonuses paid, corporate, environmental monitoring, hosting and entertainment, municipal taxes, stock option plans?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, this written question is part of our ongoing commitment to the owners of the natural resources of this province, Albertans, to ensure that we are getting a fair share of the revenue that's generated from the oil sands projects through our royalty structure. Whenever you go through this entire royalty guideline, it is interesting to note that

whether one is paying 1 per cent royalty or paying 25 per cent royalty net, there are a lot of ways or methods or means for royalties to be reduced significantly.

Now, appendix L is a list of allowed and not allowed costs. With our written question this afternoon, again, we are centring around bonuses paid, corporate bonuses, environmental monitoring, hosting and entertainment, municipal taxes, and stock option plans.

2:30

Now, whenever we talk about the bonuses paid, the corporate bonuses paid, these bonuses are allowable costs so long as they are based on the results of an oil sands project but not allowed if they are based on the improvement in the company's stock or earnings per share. Isn't it true that the positive performance of an oil sands project would likely result in improvements in the company's stock? How exactly – and hopefully we will get the answer to this – does the government separate these two? How is the audit done? How does this audit process work? Who does it? Is it appropriate to have taxpayers – and this is a very good question, Mr. Speaker – paying corporate bonuses to individuals who may not even be Canadian citizens, let alone citizens of this province?

With environmental monitoring – this is something that I followed in the debate on Bill 3, and I don't think I heard enough of it – we have had a process in place for the last number of years where oil sands projects which used any sort of process or idea to reduce CO₂ emissions could have the costs subtracted from the royalty. I don't know, and I certainly hope the hon. Minister of Energy can explain to the House and to Albertans that this provision has already been used, that this provision has been used by ABC company, and that this is the result of the use of this provision. Now, I would really appreciate that information from the hon. minister because these costs relate to monitoring the air quality, soil, wildlife monitoring systems as well as reducing CO₂ emissions. We all realize that this is a generous royalty reduction, but Albertans need a justification for these royalty reductions, and hopefully we will get it.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder how these costs for environmental monitoring match up to some of the other costs such as the corporate bonuses. I suspect that Albertans would be very interested to know exactly where their money is being diverted. Now, the figure for this particular cost will be a reflection of the standards put in place by the EUB and Alberta Environment approval process. There was a lot said about that process in the Radke report, which hopefully we're going to get an opportunity at some point to discuss during this legislative term. Albertans are concerned about their environment, and I really think they would like to see these figures.

Now, hosting and entertainment. These costs are allowed to the extent that they are costs to the project – food, beverage, or entertainment expenditures – to the extent that they would be allowed by the Income Tax Act. In regard specifically to these hosting and entertainment costs this is very questionable, in my opinion. This is a very questionable cost to be putting on Albertans. I see a lot of room for abuse under this provision, and I would like to know, again, how these costs as they come into the Department of Energy are being audited. Is it appropriate, Mr. Speaker, to have Alberta taxpayers picking up the tab for refreshments on these project sites?

In regard to municipal taxes under this Written Question 3 these costs are allowed to the extent that they are municipal taxes and improvement fees. It is interesting to note that the royalty review is focusing not only on royalties but on taxation as well. I hope the review panel will be made aware that the municipal taxes that these project owners pay are actually in some cases partially if not all refunded to them. Now, I don't think many people in this province know that the municipal taxes which are paid by these project

owners are actually returned to them through this royalty reduction schedule or annex or appendix, as they call it. Again, I would think that this is a very, very generous regime.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that some jurisdictions in the U.S. in the lower 48 states actually allow counties or smaller jurisdictions to impose specific taxes on the resources extracted. Now, there are models for this in Texas, and the Minister of Finance in his leadership bid spoke about this or spoke about a system that certainly would allow municipalities a share, even a modest, wee share, as they say, of royalty revenue, but it would be interesting to see to what extent our government pays these companies back for the municipal taxes that they currently are paying.

Now, the stock option plans under Written Question 3, Mr. Speaker. These are allowed costs to the extent that they are directly attributable to the performance of a project and only when the costs have been incurred. They are not allowed if they are an award of stock as a bonus redeemable by a recipient. I would like to know, again, how these costs are audited. How does our provincial government here define "directly attributable"? How do you measure that? Again, is it appropriate for Albertans to be paying for these stock options? When it was brought up in question period earlier, a gentleman named Sam Spanglet, who was a member of the Royalty Review Panel, has – and I was pleased to learn that – unloaded the stock. I hope he has not unloaded it at a loss either.

Certainly, these are all questions that relate to our royalty structure on our oil sands projects. I'm not going to, in the interests of time, go through the entire appendix L, but in the course of required reading for hon. members of this House I would certainly encourage all hon. members to have a good look at this regulation and have a look at how it affects our collection of royalties and how much we do collect. It is very generous. There is information in here not only regarding corporate bonuses but also information on how we incent the export of bitumen away from this province into other jurisdictions for further upgrading. I know that we're going to be constructing upgraders in the east and north of the city of Edmonton, but we should have a look at this regulation as well and consider whether we should have as an allowed cost, Mr. Speaker, the transportation or pipeline tolls.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy to respond, to participate.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I would suggest to you that there has been much rambling that's just gone on that had very little to do with Written Question 3. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to explain why I am unable to accept Written Question 3.

The rules regarding which operating and capital costs are allowed and which are not allowed in determining Crown royalties are clear. Appendix L, which is referred to in the question, acts as a guideline providing illustrative examples of the types of costs that might be allowed. This is used to report costs by category, and for that reason details regarding individual items and costs are not available, and that is what is being requested through this question. This more detailed information is addressed through the Department of Energy's audit process, which looks at the complete extract of a company's revenues and expenses. It is at this point that these costs are checked and tested to ensure that they qualify. In fact, Mr. Speaker, on-site inspections may even be pursued to ensure that the costs qualify. If there are any ineligible costs identified during an audit process, they are disallowed, and the royalties are recalculated.

2:40

For important legal and commercial confidentiality reasons, including our obligation under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, individual audit results are not made public. To put this in perspective, Mr. Speaker, our royalty system operates similar to corporate and even, to some degree, personal income tax systems. The department obtains the equivalent of a tax return that provides overall numbers for such things as revenue, deductible costs of goods and services, eligible expenditures, and so on. These companies, much like a corporate or individual taxpayer, must retain the information related to their projects for audit purposes. Audits are then conducted to ensure that deductions made were eligible and appropriately documented.

Due to the fact that the information being sought under Written Question 3 is not available in the form requested, I request that the question be rejected.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

If not, I will call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very disappointed but not surprised that this minister would be unable to accept Written Question 3. It's just another reminder not only to this member but to all Albertans that this government is not open, that it's not transparent. It pretends it is, but whenever the general public listens to the Minister of Energy, they will certainly realize for themselves first-hand that this is not an open nor a transparent government, nor is the process for collecting these royalties. These are good questions, they're valid questions, and we need answers.

Now, the minister also neglected to tell the Assembly that if a financial audit is not done on an account in an oil sands project over a four-year time period, it can't be done. It can't be completed. He also neglected to mention the fact that the Auditor General in the past in various reports has brought up time and time again the whole issue of royalty calculation and how it works or how it does not work.

Again, I'm disappointed that we can't have any information with Written Question 3. In conclusion, I would encourage the hon. Minister of Energy to have another look, if he has not already, at the Auditor General's reports not only from this year but past years. He will see for himself that there is work to be done.

Thank you.

[Written Question 3 lost]

head:

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Wednesday, April 11, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns 1, 2, and 3 be dealt with today. There being no additional motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Internal Royalty Review

M1. Mr. MacDonald proposed that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents relating

to the government's review of royalties that concluded in 2006 as referenced by the former Minister of Energy in the *Calgary Herald* on July 15, 2006, including a list of groups, organizations, companies, or individuals consulted, and the total amount of money paid to each group, organization, company, or individual for their involvement.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, Motion for a Return 1 is quite important, and hopefully an answer will be provided by this government at this time. I think that last week, for the information of all hon. members of this Assembly, before question period on Wednesday, I did table a copy of that article. Now, the former Minister of Energy indicated that the review was completed and promised to provide documents, as I understand it, to back up his claim. Members of cabinet at the time, some members who are still in cabinet at this time, state that, well, they're not sure that the review ever happened. So someone is confused, and we need to find out who that someone is.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board states that he has an idea who is confused, and I'm not going to say that it's the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who indicated last fall that the review was dropped. This was in a *Calgary Herald* article from July 15, 2006.

An Hon. Member: That's got to be true.

Mr. MacDonald: If it's in the *Calgary Herald*, you bet it's true. I know that you have a great deal of difficulty accepting what's printed in our newspapers from time to time, but my advice to you in this case would be to accept it.

Other Tory leadership candidates, whenever they were questioned about this internal review, stated that it had been done. Now, there's definitely a conflict of information here.

Mr. Rodney: Is Enron involved?

Mr. MacDonald: Enron is not involved in this. No, hon. member, it is not, but I can assure you that before June we will get to the Enron matter in this House.

Certainly, whenever you look at not only the review and the *Calgary Herald's* comment on it, if we look at statements in this House, and if we can't accept what the *Herald* had to say – now, this is interesting. This is from question period, Mr. Speaker, on August 24, 2006. This is a question from the gentleman who is now the Minister of Energy to the former Minister of Energy on the royalty review. The hon. Minister of Energy was asking last summer if this is the conclusion to the royalty review. Of course, the Minister of Energy at that time goes on at length, and I'm glad we didn't have the 45-second rule then because this is a long response.

Certainly, I would urge members of the House to check *Hansard* from August 24, 2006, and have a look themselves. There is quite an exchange here between the Minister of Energy and the former Minister of Energy. Again, I'm not trying to overload the Minister of Energy with extra work, but I think he really needs to read this and accept Motion for a Return 1, that is on the Order Paper in my name. Now, this is not the only time this has been brought up, not only in question period but also during written questions last spring, about all the details surrounding this royalty review. We need that information. Albertans need that information, and I'm requesting the department to please provide the information as requested in Motion for a Return 1.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy is the respondent.

2:50

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm pleased to speak to Motion for a Return 1, which I'll be asking to be rejected today. [interjection] Yeah, it's an unfortunate circumstance that I find myself in. I find it quite interesting that this motion is nearly identical to written questions that were addressed in the Assembly last year. Last year. That said, I'll address the issue once again, as I did last week – last week – during question period.

Royalty reviews are part of the Department of Energy's normal ongoing business. That ongoing analysis ensures that our royalty framework strikes the right balance, providing Albertans with a fair return on our natural resources and, Mr. Speaker, maintaining a competitive system that allows our economy to prosper. As I pointed out to the hon. member last week, changes to four of our royalty programs were made as a result of work done by the Minister of Energy last year. These changes will increase royalties paid to the province by about \$300 million once they're fully implemented.

I'd also like to make it very clear that the Department of Energy does not pay individuals, groups, or organizations it consults with, as is stated in the member's motion. However, Mr. Speaker, we did contract the services of experts in the field of royalties to develop studies and reports on royalties. The member may wish to read those nine studies and reports, which are available in the department's library.

Today the Clerk tabled documents recently released in response to a freedom of information request that is relevant to this motion for a return. There are more than 500 pages of documents in each set. I encourage the hon. member to review the 500-plus pages of documents tabled today and to make a personal trip to the library so that he can review the reports and studies, as any Albertan can freely do.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the relevant and substantive information I have made available to the Legislature and to the public, I recommend that Motion for a Return 1 be rejected.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

Then shall I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That was an interesting series of reasons to reject this motion, interesting but also at the same point astonishing, and it's astonishing for the following reasons. The Conservative government didn't contradict themselves last May whenever that written question was being debated, like they did last summer over the royalty review and the royalty double-speak, as the *Calgary Herald* called it, when they all were in a crowded field wanting to be in the Premier's chair. Now, the Minister of Energy at the time, who wasn't in the race for the Premier's chair, indicated, and I quote: we looked at royalties for quite a while on a number of fronts, and we've come back in the interim and decided that we do get a fair share in Alberta. End of quote. This was on August 24, 2006. That statement seemed to cool the chorus, as they state here, from the Tory leadership contenders, most of whom, interestingly enough, last summer favoured a review.

The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development stated at that time and indicated a wish for a close examination of the 1 per cent royalty holiday for Alberta oil sands. Other leadership contenders, including Jim Dinning and Mark Norris and the eventual winner, the hon. Premier, also indicated that they would initiate a public review if they won the leadership. Well, the gentleman certainly has initiated a public review, and full credit there.

When we reject this Motion for a Return 1, this minister and this government are failing to reveal that the government received only

a 19 per cent share of oil and gas revenues in 2004 – these are the numbers that are most recently available – when its own target is between 20 and 25 per cent. The province's royalty take has actually dropped in the last number of fiscal years. I don't understand why this motion for a return would be rejected.

Now, also in August of last year a Conservative MLA and leadership hopeful at that time and now the current Minister of Sustainable Resource Development indicated – and I'm sorry if I offend the Minister of Energy; again I'm going to quote from the *Calgary Herald* – that he would reopen the issue if elected Premier, particularly the 1 per cent royalty holiday for Alberta's oil sands. The internal review wasn't even completed, he added, suggesting that it was dropped after Klein's crippling leadership review vote just this past spring, which hastened his retirement to late this year. This is a quote from the *Calgary Herald* on the 12th of July, 2006.

The minister indicated that the consultants aren't paid. Well, Wood Mackenzie was paid to do this study. They were paid in one fiscal year – and I'm recalling from Public Accounts – \$70,000. Then the next year I think it was a substantial amount, much higher than \$70,000. Their modus operandi is royalty reviews and structures across the entire oil patch. So I think the minister is really playing with words because taxpayers do pay megabucks for various reports. I would urge the minister to check out the rules and regulations that are in the Department of Energy library.

Sean Kochan from our research staff and myself went up there last summer, and I think some reporters have also been there. It's not as open and transparent as the hon. minister is telling us. We cannot have photocopies of all that information. In fact, this Global Oil and Gas: Risks and Rewards document, a report prepared for the government of Alberta by Wood Mackenzie – we were only allowed to get photocopies of parts of it.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I must draw to the attention of the Assembly Standing Order 29(3)(b), and I must now call the question.

[Motion for a Return 1 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Public/Private School Construction

M2. Mr. Flaherty proposed that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all feasibility reports, studies, proposals, cost-benefit analyses, correspondence, e-mails, and memos regarding the use of public/private partnership, P3, funding arrangements for school construction conducted from fiscal year 2002-2003 to 2005-2006 and for the period April 1, 2006, to March 7, 2007.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to speak to this request, it would be vital, I think, to the schools across this province who are being tutored or asked to consider this proposal to make sure that we have the data with which to analyze what has been done and know both sides of this question. The motion is crucial for us, and I know that the school boards in St. Albert are very interested in getting this information, if there is any available, to be able to judge how this P3 concept works and some of the issues involved.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll sit down. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's certainly not our nature to keep any information that might be helpful on this, but very little information from 2002 to 2006 or any of the years in

between would be relevant or even practical to gather. To suggest that we could collect the e-mails and all of this to bring together any kind of relevance to the current situation where we are looking at all forms of constructions costs, certainly, as the Auditor General has suggested, we should. But to take the staff and the time required to go back and bring forward what would be considered mostly irrelevant – Lord knows that we get enough help with information that we not only don't use but that also has no relevance to what we're trying to do. To accept this motion would create an amount of work that would be not in proportion to any possible benefit from it.

With that, Mr. Speaker, and for those reasons we will be rejecting Motion for a Return 2.

3:00

The Speaker: Others to participate? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, please proceed.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it a little disappointing that the President of the Treasury Board and the government itself would be unwilling or unable to provide some documentation or some proof as to their position with regard to P3s. Yes, it was noted that the Auditor General did and should say that they should explain or at least explore some of the relative benefits of P3s. The Member for St. Albert asked to quantify where the schools are and our position with regard to P3s – we asked for the information – and the government is unable to provide any. What conclusion are we and the public supposed to be left with in regard to the benefits, actual cost benefits, with regard to P3s? We have concerns with regard to the Anthony Henday and the cost overruns with regard to P3s.

Again, this is specific information that we're seeking so that school boards could be able to identify to their electorate, who in some cases have no chance of getting schools, with the carrot being dropped by developers in conjunction with the government saying: we'll give you a P3. I am of the belief that it should be the government's responsibility to provide construction for schools and to maintain the costs. All the relative information as well as monies funding the schools, upgrading them, and keeping them safe and secure: we need that information. The public needs that information. What other studies have the government undertaken to be able to provide the public, the opposition, Albertans with that sort of information to be able to justify P3s?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, in regard to Motion for a Return 2 here under the name of the hon. Member for St. Albert I'm really disappointed in the response from the President of the Treasury Board. I realize he wasn't President of the Treasury Board last summer when it had a meeting to discuss the financing of the Balzac racetrack project. Perhaps he should have been there. Being the prudent person that he is with the tax dollars, perhaps he should have been there. This was prior to the move to put some funding into that project through the estimates debate in August of last summer.

Specifically to the P3s, I would remind the hon. member that through the FOIP process we received documents that indicated that it is a routine measure now for this government to determine whether a project has any merit for a P3, including the expansion to Olds College to facilitate the development at Balzac. There is a lot of discussion on the merit of a P3. Interestingly enough, this wasn't to be a P3 project, but there are going to be ponies, ponies, ponies there at some point; there's no doubt in my mind.

I would like to remind the hon. President of the Treasury Board and all other members of this House that this motion for a return should not be rejected. It's a routine way, unfortunately, for this government to conduct their business: the P3s. The request of the hon. Member for St. Albert is not unusual or anything. It's of benefit, certainly, to Albertans, and it would be a testament to the commitment to be open and accountable and transparent . . .

Mr. Boutilier: Which we are.

Mr. MacDonald: . . . that this government is making. Unfortunately, hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, you are not. Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

Then I'll call on the hon. Member for St. Albert to close the debate.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The President of the Treasury Board used the word "irrelevant," I think he said.

An Hon. Member: How do you spell it?

Mr. Flaherty: Well, I'll ask you to spell it for him in caucus. You can do that.

In this particular aspect of this program, this business of P3s, we're talking about a new direction in this province, and for this gentleman to say that it's irrelevant for 62 school boards across this province that are looking for some leadership in terms of accountability and the direction they're going in doesn't make sense. I happened to have had the honour, sir, of serving as a civil servant, and many of our proposals had to be rational and supported. This is what you're asking: 62 school boards across this province to give us some feedback as to should they buy into this or not, and you're telling me that it's irrelevant. I'm sorry, sir. I expected more from you, and I hope to see more from you in the future.

The budget, now, is the other thing that I think is very crucial in this. When you're making this decision, you're not interested in kids. You're interested in this word "debt." You're trying to get rid of the word "debt."

Mr. Boutilier: That's not true.

Mr. Flaherty: You listen carefully. You are.

Mr. Boutilier: That is not true.

Mr. Flaherty: It is.

When you're asking school boards to take this on, you've got to look at the question of operational problems. None of you has probably been to the schools, sir. You're asking them to take a look at operational problems, and you're not even giving it a rationale. It doesn't make sense.

The other thing that seems to be avoided on this whole thing of P3s is the use of community schools. That seems to be irrelevant in this thinking that you've shown here today. You've got to show some direction on this matter. How is this whole thing going to fit into the community? Mr. President of the Treasury Board, I expect you to know more.

Now, I think the other thing that's important is the matter of agreements with municipalities. When you're looking at the question of agreements with municipalities, you're changing the structure. You have joint use. When you don't look at this issue in

terms of, again, informing school boards of your rationale for this decision, then I think that it's a sad day in Alberta for not looking at that.

The other thing that's going to happen – and maybe you could clarify this after you do some research, Mr. President. You can look at the whole question of children's safety and security. Listen carefully. If you're planning to build these things around a shopping centre with all the issues of that, then I think that you've got to look very carefully at that question.

Then the whole question, again, was the proper use of grounds and facilities and those kinds of things which usually are around a school. In your rationale for doing this, there is no evidence that you've done your homework. And you know what, sir? I am really disappointed. I can't understand how anybody could go out and ask a community school or a school district to get involved in this concept without having some of these questions answered.

I thank you.

The Speaker: The debate has concluded unless it's a point of order.

[Motion for a Return 2 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

3:10 Health Facilities Infrastructure Capital Plans

M3. Mrs. Mather moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all long-term capital plans for infrastructure related to health facilities approved in fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2005-2006 and for the period April 1, 2006, to March 7, 2007.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question was submitted to find out what sort of centralized planning exists within the department of health when it comes to health infrastructure for our entire province. We want to get a sense of the capital planning process.

Health regions submit a wish list – we know that – a wish list of projects to the department, where funding decisions and priorities are made. Rarely do we receive an explanation of why one project was selected over another, and regions are unable to plan for their future growth because the capital planning process is so unpredictable. It's a guessing game. If we had explanations, it would help regions with planning and certainly give us some confidence that there was a plan. We want to know exactly what long-term plans the ministry has for health facilities across the province.

The amendment that's suggested here is a copy of all the health authority multiyear capital plans approved by the health regions and submitted to the minister in fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2005-2006 and for the period April 1, 2006, to March 7, 2007. This amendment, I think, should not be accepted; it should be rejected, especially in light of this government's commitment to openness and transparency.

We're against the proposed changes because the amendment goes against the principle of the information that we're seeking and demonstrates that the information that the department of health should have perhaps just doesn't exist. The amendment demonstrates that while the government does not have centralized control over health infrastructure planning, they do like to centralize control of the information and ensure that no useful information is revealed.

By failing to provide a long-term capital plan, it appears that once again this government is not capable of long-term planning. We need something that gives us some confidence that there is a plan.

Albertans deserve better than this. They need something that will tell them that there is a vision and that we have a plan that will support that vision and bring it to fruition.

The Speaker: Okay. The hon. member was speaking on Motion for a Return 3. There is no amendment that has been moved yet. So, hon. Government House Leader?

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I was prepared to move a motion to amend 3 so that we could accept it, that we could make sure that the motion was in a form that we could actually provide that information on. However, I'm given to believe that the motion as amended wouldn't be acceptable by the member putting it forward, so I don't see any purpose in going through that process. So I would just suggest that we reject the motion.

The reason for rejecting the motion, Mr. Speaker, is that the motion calls for "a copy of all long-term capital plans for infrastructure related to health facilities approved in fiscal years," and the fiscal years are noted. Well, in fact, that's not the process that's used. What we were going to suggest is that we could provide the health authority multiyear plans which the health authorities approve and forward to government, but I'm given to believe from the representation made by the hon. member that that's not what they're after. They, in fact, know and understand that there are multiyear capital priorities put forward. That's not going to answer the question that they really want answered, so I would suggest that we reject this question because the question in its current format can't be answered. There is no answer to it.

In terms of the capital process, if that's what they would really like to have information on, I'd be more than happy to sit down with the critic or any other member and talk about how we do the process. There is, in fact, a capital process. There is, in fact, a capital committee. There's a committee of deputies that takes a look at all the projects that come forward and do a prioritization of the projects with respect to the need for the projects, how those projects will fit into the long-term delivery process, and then, of course, an allocation of resources to those projects in accordance with the priority that they've been given by the deputies' review and by the capital committee. So there is a process in place, but that process doesn't conform to what's being asked for here.

I have really no alternative. I could have asked for an amendment which would give the information about what plans had come forward, but that's obviously not the information that's wanted, so I would suggest that the House reject the question. If the hon. member or the person who put the motion on the agenda wants to sit down and discuss the capital process, I'd be more than happy to do it.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

Then, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to conclude the debate on Motion for a Return 3.

Mrs. Mather: Okay. Thank you. I guess I have a question for clarification. I think that the hon. member has spoken exactly about what it is we had intended with the question. But the amendment, it appears, would provide us some information, which is better than none. We would like to know how decisions are made in that capital planning process. What are the priorities? Why are some given priority over others? That was the original question. The amendment would at least provide us some information, and we feel that some information is better than none at this point.

[Motion for a Return 3 lost]

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

**Bill 204
Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan
Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007/
Loi modificative de 2007 sur les emblèmes
de l'Alberta (reconnaissance
du fait franco-albertain)**

[Debate adjourned April 2: Mr. Cao speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, with 64 minutes available for this debate, four by the hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to continue from the last debate. An emblem is a symbol, and symbolism is an important aspect of our culture. Through symbolism we communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings. A Franco-Albertan emblem is a symbol that represents a people's heritage with a long history of the formation of Alberta. It is long before the formation of our province of Alberta and our nation of Canada. Un emblème est un symbole, et le symbolisme est un aspect important de notre culture. Par le symbolisme nous communiquons des idées, des pensées, et des sentiments.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I applaud Bill 204 because I appreciate and respect what Franco-Albertans have done for our province. J'applaudis la loi 204 parce que j'apprécie et je respecte ce que les Franco-Albertains ont fait pour la province de l'Alberta. Je crois que l'emblème des Franco-Albertains devrait être identifié comme emblème officiel de l'Alberta. I believe that the Franco-Albertan emblem should be recognized as the official emblem of Alberta.

Merci, M. le Président. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and speak to Bill 204, Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007. The French community has a rich history in this province. The French community plays an important role in our province. The members of the community contribute a great deal to our province, and as Albertans we are proud to recognize their heritage. It's our opportunity to affirm our commitment to recognition of the rights, policies that services must be delivered to, and symbols that are important to Franco-Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the object of this bill is to officially recognize the Franco-Albertan flag, and the rationale: Alberta Liberals are inclusive, and the bill appears to be widely supported by Franco-Albertan communities all over Alberta. Similar legislation was passed in Ontario and Saskatchewan with broad support. We want to support the Franco-Albertan community.

3:20

I just want to ask a few questions, especially to the sponsor, the Member for Peace River, because I think most of the members sitting in this House don't know what the symbols stand for. According to the Emblems of Alberta Act, Alberta currently has 12 official emblems: the armorial bearings of Alberta, the flag of Alberta, the floral emblem of Alberta, the official grass of Alberta, the Alberta tartan, the Alberta dress tartan, the official bird of

Alberta, the official stone of Alberta, the official tree of Alberta, the official colours of Alberta, the official mammal of Alberta, and the 12th one is the official fish of Alberta.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, Ontario passed a similar piece of legislation in the year 2001. Saskatchewan passed a similar piece of legislation in 2005.

I have a few questions to ask the hon. Member for Peace River. What are the legal implications of passing this legislation? Does the government plan to fly this flag on the Legislature Building? How broad is the support for this bill within the Franco-Albertan community? Has the government been approached by any organizations opposing this bill? These are a few questions. I would really appreciate it if he could answer sometime today or maybe when we debate in the next stage.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the recognition of the flag won't be the first in this country. On June 21, 2001, Ontario adopted the Franco-Ontarian flag as one of its seven official emblems. On December 2, 2005, Saskatchewan did the same thing. So the bill is to recognize the symbol. We propose that the government adopt the bill to recognize the flag as an official emblem.

The French language has been present in Alberta for more than 200 years. The Alberta French-speaking community is the third French-speaking community in Canada outside of Quebec. French is one of the two official languages of Canada. The province of Alberta recognizes the importance of serving its citizens in French upon request when it's possible.

The Franco-Albertan flag was unveiled for the first time on March 6, 1982. From then on the Alberta French-speaking community has consistently used it as its emblem. It is therefore appropriate now to recognize it officially as the emblem of that community. "Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of [the province of] Alberta, enacts as follows": in this Act, Mr. Speaker, Alberta French-speaking community means the community of persons who have the right under subsection 23.(1) or (2) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, without regard to subsection 23.(3) of that Charter, to have their children receive their primary and secondary school instruction in the French language in Alberta.

The Franco-Albertan emblem: Mr. Speaker, I think the majority of the Franco-Albertan community supported this one, and this is a great opportunity for us to recognize it. The flag described in the schedule to this act is recognized as the emblem of Alberta's French-speaking community. This act comes into force on the date it receives royal assent.

A description of the emblem of the Alberta French-speaking community: the flag is blue, white, and red, with the white in the upper left corner and a red wild rose in the lower right corner. The wild rose, the provincial flower of Alberta, represents the province, as does the field of blue in the upper right corner, the white represents la Francophonie, and the blue and white stripes represent the waters and roads travelled throughout the province by francophone explorers and colonists. So I urge all the members of this House to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007. Je suis très fier d'ajouter ma voix pour supporter le projet de loi 204 du Membre de Rivière de la Paix. This is a very meaningful and thoughtful piece of legislation

and not just for those of us of francophone descent. My own francophone background goes back five generations here in Alberta and 11 generations in Quebec and God knows how many across the ocean. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Peace River for recognizing Alberta's French community in this way and perhaps initiating something here that will eventually lead to the appropriate recognition of every culture that makes up Alberta's mosaic.

This legislation will add the current emblem of l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta to Alberta's list of official emblems. I agree with the overall intent of this legislation as an appropriate homage for francophone Albertans past, present, and future. The francophone community in Alberta does have a special history in our province, and it's appropriate for the Assembly to give recognition to this unique heritage. The lineage of today's Franco-Albertan is intrinsically bound to this province's history.

Since the arrival of the early French-Canadian settlers in Alberta many great Franco-Albertans have lived, have contributed, and are contributing greatly to our family. People like Father Albert Lacombe are well known for their contributions. Mr. Speaker, my father was fond of talking about serving mass for Father Lacombe in Midnapore in the early 1900s. People like Dr. Rouleau: you know, before there was a Calgary, there was a Rouleauville in and around the site of the existing Catholic cathedral in Calgary. So much of the early pioneering effort in southern Alberta was made by French Canadians.

Today Alberta is fortunate to have organizations working on behalf of the Franco-Albertan community: the Francophone Secretariat, for which, of course, I need to congratulate my good friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake for all of his efforts in making that happen here in Alberta, l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, le Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, et le Centre d'accueil et d'établissement d'Edmonton. Whether it's through the promotion of French culture or ensuring access to French language resources, these organizations ensure that Alberta's policies mirror the bilingual and multicultural measures taken on at the federal level. The ability to remain true to one's cultural roots while still engaging in the activities that give a community its collective identity is what it means to be an Albertan and a Canadian.

3:30

Alberta is a most beautiful mosaic made up of dozens of cultures and languages that all contribute through their special colour and their special shade to the tiles that make up this most amazing mosaic. Mr. Speaker, I'm reminded of once admiring a beautiful painting in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. As I walked closer, I was amazed to discover that it was not a painting at all but a mosaic made up of millions of tiny marble tiles, each with their subtle coloured differences but together creating a masterpiece. Here in Alberta we have over 3 million souls, each contributing their own cultural colour and their background to the richness and beauty of our peoples.

So, Mr. Speaker, perhaps this is just the beginning. Perhaps this bill brought forward by the hon. Member for Peace River will be the beginning of a celebration of all cultures found in this great province of Alberta or, perhaps, a new process that will allow others to follow and celebrate their roots as part of this great mosaic masterpiece that we call Alberta. And I would urge all my colleagues to vote in favour of this bill.

Merci, M. le Président.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a special pleasure – and I want to underscore the word “special” – to rise and speak in favour of Bill 204, Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007.

I should explain why it gives me a very special pleasure to be speaking to this bill and speaking in strong support of this bill. Edmonton-Strathcona, the riding that I've had the pleasure and the honour of representing in this Legislature for the last 10 years, has a substantial number of residents who have this proud Franco-Albertan heritage, who are very proud of their francophone heritage and culture, and who have been, in fact, a very vibrant and expanding part of the Edmonton-Strathcona riding in this beautiful city of Edmonton.

As well, Mr. Speaker, we all know that the francophone presence in this province has always had a great deal of significance. Whether you think of the arts, the professions, businesses, rural or urban communities, francophones have played a very, very notable and significant role over the centuries. In fact, francophones were the first Europeans to come to a place which became the province of Alberta. They were the pioneers. They were here at the time when the frontiers westward were being pushed, and they played a very significant role. Over 500 communities, places, rivers, lakes, et cetera, bear francophone names as testimony to that historic presence of francophones in this province.

Over recent years within the francophone community not only have the numbers been growing, but the diversity within that growing community has also been growing and been welcomed. I have been in attendance at a variety of functions in my own constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona where this growing diversity has been represented and reflected in ever increasing ways and numbers. In my constituency there is an art gallery which presents an exhibit on a regular basis. The artistic contributions, be they in the form of paintings, weaving, pottery, sculpture – in all of these variety of forms the francophone cultural expression, artistic expression, is represented in this art gallery, and I'm a frequent visitor to their art gallery. Just last year, in fact, I think the art gallery mounted a mural which was a sort of narrative in colour of the very rich history and the contributions of the francophone community in Alberta. So Alberta's history is very difficult to conceive without recalling and celebrating the history of francophones.

Mr. Speaker, 19 years ago, in 1988, this Legislature passed an act called the Languages Act, which mandated French as a language of this Assembly. It's always important to remember our own history, and as part of that history just a year before the 1988 Languages Act, in 1987, exactly 20 years ago today, the *Edmonton Journal* had on the front page a reference to that history with a picture of then NDP MLA Leo Piquette, who rose in this House and asked a question in French.

But we were behind the times, and there was an unfortunate incident that developed from his attempt to ask a question in French. Thankfully, we all learned, and this Assembly proved very resilient and responsive to the desire expressed by Mr. Leo Piquette on the floor of this House on the part of francophones to be recognized officially in this province and for them to be able to speak and ask questions in their own language in the Assembly, which represents their history, their people as well as our people who call themselves Albertans. So 1988 was a very important year in the sense that this Assembly in a very resilient fashion responded to that desire and passed the Languages Act of '88.

This Bill 204 is a nice sort of follow-up to that in that it takes another step forward in the recognition of the francophone presence in Alberta by way of recognizing the emblem, bringing into

existence by legislation the francophone emblem, which is part of this act, displayed on page 2 of this act, Mr. Speaker.

Another interesting feature of this bill, a physical piece of evidence of the recognition that we award, is that this bill is in both languages, English and French. I'm very pleased to see that. I'm sure that my constituents are very, very pleased about the fact that we are discussing a bill in this Assembly having to do with the further recognition in the form of an emblem of the francophone presence in Alberta that is presented in both languages. What a proud day, Mr. Speaker.

I as a new Canadian – I've been here for 46 years, but I talk about being new in the sense that I adopted Canada as my country – have been extremely proud of the decision that I made, very happy about the decision, and very proud of what I've seen that decision come to mean for me and for Canadians in general. Canada has evolved enormously over the last 46 years that I've been around, Mr. Speaker, evolved in the sense of making progress forward. Many things have changed in Canada; many things have changed in Alberta. This bill is part of this ongoing evolution and change.

It's a pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to support this bill, to speak in the name of my constituents when I speak to this bill and when I support this bill. Clearly, no single piece of legislation, no single gesture, whether it's in the form of legislation or otherwise, can do all the things that need to be done in order to ensure the diversity in our midst in terms of the presence of francophones here, which, as I said, is of the longest duration of any groups who represent Alberta's population, but diversity in many other ways as sort of manifests itself. Just a month ago, I guess, there was this unfortunate incident up in the tar sands in the Fort McMurray area. A francophone worker was let go by an employer because he could not express himself clearly and fluently in English. I think that we need to develop protections for francophones, protections for them at their place of work so that they cannot be relieved of their jobs simply on the grounds that they cannot speak clearly in English.

3:40

So we need to move forward. We need to provide those protections for speakers of other languages, particularly in this case – and I'm talking about Bill 204, so I will limit myself to francophones – speakers of French. We must provide them legal protections so they cannot lose their jobs, so they cannot be forced to lose their jobs, so that jobs cannot be taken away from them because they can only express themselves clearly in their own mother tongue; that is, French, which is one of the two official languages of this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have had a chance to speak to this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just for the benefit of the young audience that has come in as part of their tour of the Legislature, we're speaking on Bill 204, Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act. What that is is giving official recognition to the history of French-speaking Albertans and what they have given the province as far as benefits and how we have all benefited as well. So it's giving official recognition to it. I know that if you don't know what's going on here, sometimes it's quite boring. I'll agree with that particular point.

I'm rising and speaking in favour of this particular bill there, Mr. Speaker. I, in fact, received calls from a number of constituents, and that's quite amazing because this sometimes is buried in the back,

being a private member's bill, and Albertans sometimes aren't aware of what's going on. But these particular people have obviously paid very close attention to what's going on with regard to this particular bill. Overwhelming support from a number of my constituents who, of course, are Franco-Albertan, and they're very, very proud of this particular legislation that's coming across. They expressed that this is long overdue, that their significant contributions to the province, like others who have contributed – like I said, it's long overdue. They're quite proud of the fact that we are in fact taking this opportunity to recognize them and their long, long history, for what they have brought to Alberta.

There have been a lot of positive things over the last several weeks when people have been debating this bill. In fact, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has added that as well.

Mr. Agnihotri: Other communities too?

Mr. Bonko: Well, yeah, we also recognize other communities as well, and this is part of that. We're trying not to leave out any community, especially this particular community that has given so much to us.

So I do speak in support of this. I don't want to go over everything that's already been said, but when the time does come to vote, I certainly will be supporting this bill. Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 204 recognizes the Franco-Albertan flag and formally acknowledges the important history of Alberta in general and, in particular, the French-speaking community in Alberta. It addresses the important role that French Canadians have played in our province. This particular emblem, the flag, has actually been used in this province since the early '80s, so it's not a strange emblem. It's not new to us. We have over 330,000 Albertans who can trace their ancestry to French descent, and specifically there are about 66,000 Albertans who are classified as francophones.

French education in Alberta is something that we can be really proud of. It's been a phenomenal success. Part of the reason for that success is the number of Franco-Albertans and French-speaking Albertans, that has been increasing significantly. But I can say that I was fortunate to be in one of the first schools in Edmonton to offer French immersion. That was at a time when it was very exciting, an exciting development, and some viewed it as very daring. Now it's accepted and expected as a positive option for students, and that's something that we can be proud of. The French culture and language are also legally recognized in Alberta, and that is a wonderful thing.

I believe that the interests of our large francophone community are represented by more than 200 regional and community organizations, and adopting this particular Franco-Albertan emblem as an official emblem will increase our awareness of the large cultural community and their contributions to this province. Today we have the opportunity to provide recognition to the francophone heritage and its importance for all of us when we look back at the history of this province.

I also would like to commend the hon. Member for Peace River for bringing this forward, and I'm happy to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise, too, to urge support from all hon. members of the Assembly for Bill 204,

the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, as proposed by the hon. Member for Peace River. Certainly, it is a worthy piece of legislation. It's about time.

It's interesting to note that as we debate this this afternoon, earlier today on the front page of one of our daily papers – and I won't mention the name of it in case the government members get riled up. That paper did a detailed story, if not today then recently, on a former member from Lac La Biche, Mr. Leo Piquette, and his unfortunate experiences when he wanted to ask a question to the minister of education at the time in French. I think he got five or six words into his question, and he was shut down. Times have changed, rightfully so, in this province, but that was a wake-up call for us all. In fact, after Mr. Piquette had been shut down, over 500 Franco-Albertans descended on the front steps of the Legislative Assembly to express their opinion and their outrage. In a democracy it is nice to see that people can express their opinion or their outrage without fear of reprisal. That's something that we should always foster in a mature democracy like the one that we live in.

With this bill it's the first time that I can recall – and I could be wrong, Mr. Speaker – in my time here that we have a piece of legislation that's written in both English and French. Certainly, we had statements by respective members in both English and French. We had the debate, I believe in 1999, on the role of Quebec in Canadian Confederation. But this is the first bill that I can recall.

When we look at the outstanding contribution of the Franco-Albertan community to the development of this province, we perhaps should look at this as a first step towards having each statute in this province translated into this country's two official languages: French and English. I think I will see that, not necessarily in my time in this Legislative Assembly but certainly in my lifetime. I think it is a project that we should consider out of respect to one of the two founding nations of this fine country that we call home, that each statute that's in the cupboard over there be translated and printed, of course, in the French language.

3:50

Now, one only has to look at the map of this province – and you see the place names, Mr. Speaker – to see the contributions that Franco-Albertans have made to the settlement and development of this province. Whether it's towns or villages or rivers or lakes, the French community has gone a long way towards the development of this province. In fact, it was barely a hundred years ago that in the city of Edmonton the language of commerce was French. Not English but French. If you wanted to make a deal or buy, sell, or trade something, French was the language that that exchange more than likely would take place in.

Certainly, this bill is a recognition of the significant contributions that have been made by the Franco-Albertan community, and it is one of the many right steps that have been taken since the unfortunate Piquette affair, as I believe it was called. Hopefully, we will see at some point in the near future an initiative to put all the statutes that are the laws of this province in both official languages of this country.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to discuss Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007. Before all hon. members is an emblem that is truly indicative of the nature of shared cultural identities in this province.

There is no doubt that the francophone community has had a huge impact on Alberta's social development. As such, Albertans are fortunate to have francophone traditions, language, and culture that add yet another vibrant thread to the marvellous tapestry that is Alberta. Like the words "coulee," "butte," "portage," and "prairie," which have become synonymous with the cultural and geographic nature of this province, it is only natural to see the fleur-de-lys and the wild rose side by side on this striking visual reminder of what it means to be an Albertan.

Alberta's francophone community has indeed added a great deal to Alberta's culture and heritage. Of this there is no doubt. By that token, I strongly advocate for every other culture significant to Alberta's heritage to have the opportunity to recognize an emblem that commemorates their place in Alberta's shared identity. In order for that to occur, however, and in order for that to be done in as meaningful a fashion as possible, I believe that we need to use another venue.

Recently the hon. Minister for Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture has brought forward Bill 27, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007. Bill 27 amends the act by adding to section 1(b) the subclause (xii), "an Alberta symbol of distinction." In the bill an Alberta symbol of distinction is anything that symbolically represents or recognizes a cultural group that has committed to Alberta's culturally diverse landscape. For this I am truly thankful. This symbol is best situated under that upcoming statute, Mr. Speaker.

What I'm about to say is in no way a slight to the Franco-Albertan community as I fully recognize that the vast contributions made by this group have shaped this province in its multitude of successes. What I'm about to say is in no way a slight, especially given that this day marks the 20th anniversary of l'affaire Piquette, the incident in which a member of this Assembly, Leo Piquette, was forced to speak English in this Assembly.

As the hon. minister is bringing forward deeper, more meaningful, and more appropriate legislation, Mr. Speaker, to address this type of issue and as I understand that motions of this type are always in order, I humbly ask the understanding of this House and the Franco-Albertan community as I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, be amended by deleting all words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 204, Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of our Franco-Albertan community and its heritage, and I ask all members to support the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll just leave a moment for the pages to circulate the amendment.

Are there others who wish to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak to the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise firstly to thank from the bottom of my heart all hon. members that participated in the debate and the tremendous support they've shown for this very important cause. This issue, the recognition of the Franco-Albertan flag, is one of great importance to me and my constituents. I have a significant francophone population in my constituency, and they're very supportive of this move. It's the recognition that's important, not the avenue by which we recognize it. I thank the hon. member for his motion. I agree with him that this is, in fact, the best

way to achieve this, through a government bill rather than private legislation, and I'm going to support the amendment.

Again I thank all hon. members for their participation and support. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is just, I guess, an exercise in futility. Why, in fact, did we even bring this bill forward if we were going to hoist it, which makes it disappear? It doesn't really defeat it. It just makes it come back in six months. I had suggested to one of my constituents that this could happen because they were concerned that they need to rally up support from other people to tell the government that they do in fact appreciate this recognition. I said that, well, the only way that this may be defeated is through a hoist or through it being defeated. By the way it was sounding with regard to all the accolades in support from all the various members, here we have a notice of amendment, and it looks like it's being hoisted.

If I can read the address of the member who did put this in, it's unfortunate. In fact, I'm disappointed, and I will not support the amendment then.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it's surprising that we would be looking at suspending this bill, as I understand it, and perhaps – not necessarily but perhaps – bringing it back as a government bill, possibly in the fall.

An Hon. Member: The bill has been tabled already.

Mr. MacDonald: It's been tabled already, the hon. member tells me.

I think this is disrespectful of the whole process of private members' bills. It certainly is legislation that I think everyone should support, but I'm not convinced that we need to wait, and I would urge all hon. members to reject this notice of amendment. Let's vote on Bill 204 as it currently stands. I think we should pass this and get on with it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against the amendment to hoist the bill; that is, at least postpone discussion on the bill if not kill the bill for another six months. My constituents will be disappointed if the Legislature went that route.

I must share with the House, Mr. Speaker, the fact that I received some correspondence over the last few weeks from constituents. For one of them I read his letter carefully three or four times on Friday, as a matter of fact, not only hoping that there will be official recognition for a Franco-Albertan flag emblem but that there'll be an opportunity for that flag to be flown on the grounds of the Legislature. In fact, he sought my advice on how to make it a reality. As his MLA I am looking forward to meeting with him once we return from the break in the proceedings of the House next week.

4:00

He and other members of the Franco-Albertan community like him will be very disappointed if this House all of a sudden, after having spent several hours on debating this private member's bill, decided to drop the idea of any further discussion and coming towards a decision on this bill in this sitting. I think the bill needs

to be dealt with in this particular sitting of the House, the spring session of the House, and not be hoisted to be debated in some other session to follow six months from now or beyond.

So, Mr. Speaker, I very strongly express my reservations about this amendment and urge the House to defeat the motion. Thank you.

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

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a Franco-Albertan and having had the opportunity of being the chair of the Francophone Secretariat, I cannot justifiably support this amendment, the reason being – and I think my comments have already been recorded in *Hansard* during second reading – that we've already recognized this flag since 1999. During Francophone Week we have the raising of the francophone flag right here in the rotunda. To me, to not go forward with this I think is a step backwards. As I indicated, I will not be supporting this amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise again and speak against the amendment to Bill 204. I also have quite a number of the francophone community living in my constituency. I think they have great hope. They are expecting this bill to pass. Lots of my constituents approached me recently, and I said: whenever this bill comes into the Legislature, I'm going to support this. This is not fair if we don't deal with this bill today. I mean, this is a ridiculous idea to just postpone for six months or whatever.

I urge all the members sitting in this Assembly to reject this amendment, deal with Bill 204, and recognize the community. They deserve it. Thank you very much.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:04 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Fritz	Mar
Ady	Griffiths	Mitzel
Brown	Herard	Oberg
Cao	Horner	Oberle
Danyluk	Jablonski	Prins
DeLong	Johnson	Rogers
Dunford	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Evans	Lougheed	Stevens
Forsyth	Lund	VanderBurg

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Flaherty	Miller, B.
Bonko	MacDonald	Pannu
Ducharme	Mather	Swann
Elsalhy		

Totals: For – 27 Against – 10

[Motion on the amendment to second reading of Bill 204 carried]

Bill 205
Environmental Protection and Enhancement
(Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Good afternoon and thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise before this Assembly today and move second reading of Bill 205, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, on behalf of the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

In Alberta we have an economy that's resource based. Our communities, particularly in rural areas of this province, rely heavily on the extraction of resources to provide jobs for their citizens. The logging and energy industries are especially vital to maintaining Alberta's economy. Together the energy and forest industries employ 144,000 Albertans and contribute over 30 per cent of the province's gross domestic product.

The importance of these industries to the current prosperities that we enjoy in Alberta simply cannot be downplayed, Mr. Speaker. In addition to this, the energy and forestry industries are an important source of revenue for the government of Alberta. These industries contribute billions of dollars each year in royalties, stumpage fees, timber damage assessments to provincial coffers. As such, I believe that we have the duty to be accountable to the industries. Of course, this can never overshadow our responsibility to be accountable to the electors of Alberta.

Bill 205 is about ensuring long-term sustainability for the energy and forest industries. It's about making sure that Alberta's prosperity continues for many generations to come and that the energy and forest industries remain significant contributors to the provincial economy. This bill is also about responsible environmental stewardship. We can have all the economic success in the world, but it will not translate into a higher quality of life for Albertans if our environment is not properly managed.

Bill 205 takes a co-operative approach to sustainability, Mr. Speaker. Specifically, this bill will ensure that stakeholders in the energy and forest industries are brought together with representatives from the government on a consistent basis to review reclamation standards for land that has been utilized in the resource extraction.

Currently there is no legislation or regulation that stipulates how often a review of the reclamation criteria must be done. This means that the reviews may happen sporadically, at inconsistent intervals. It is simply not realistic to assume that we have sound land management practices if reviews of policies are not conducted in a regular and timely fashion.

Under the provisions of this bill a review of reclamation standards will take place every five years. I believe that this is an appropriate timeline because it will allow for reclamation standards to be properly implemented. After five years stakeholders should have a good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the standards. They will then be able to voice any concerns they might have in a review process. As a government we can then react to stakeholder input to implement new criteria for reclamation.

4:20

Another advantage of the mandatory review after five years, Mr. Speaker, is that it will allow for reclamation standards to take into account current technology and processes. Technology in the area of environmental management is something that is constantly evolving. Scientists here in Alberta and around the world are continually developing new methods of maximizing the potential of our land base and preserving it for future generations to enjoy. Bill 205 will make sure that these new technologies are taken into

account by making it mandatory for the best management practices in the forest sector to be incorporated into reclamation standards. Technology is not the only thing in the world that's perpetually evolving. Economic conditions, environmental conditions, and public expectations are also in a constant state of flux. As legislators it is incumbent upon us to develop legislation that can adapt to these rapidly changing conditions.

I think that the strengths of Bill 205 are that it's, in essence, about being adaptable, responsive, and flexible. The bill's ability to adapt, as I have already alluded to, stems from the fact that it allows for re-evaluation of conditions every five years. It's about being responsible because it ensures that the views of stakeholders are taken into account, and it's about being flexible because it encourages a process of consultation and consensus rather than the government imposing conditions on industry.

I'm going to emphasize the co-operative and consultative nature of this legislation, Mr. Speaker, by taking a couple of minutes to fill this Assembly in on some of the steps that were taken in the development of this legislation. First, the member contacted the departments of Environment, Energy, and Sustainable Resource Development to learn about the current regulations that are in place, the review processes, and the future directions that each department is taking with regard to well site reclamation criteria.

Next, the member liaised with various stakeholders' groups to determine their needs. These groups included the Alberta Forest Products Association, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, and the Alberta Newsprint Company, located in Whitecourt-St. Anne. Finally, the member consulted with government departments to determine how the needs of the stakeholders might be incorporated into the way in which we review reclamation criteria in this province. This approach emphasizes an overarching intent of the legislation. The legislation aims to bring government and industry together in a co-operative and timely fashion to develop reclamation criteria. By doing this, we can ensure that the needs of Albertans are met.

Both government and industry bring a unique perspective to this issue. On one hand, industry has a great deal of insight into the standards and practices that are applicable to the industry and also specific needs of the companies operating within the industry. On the other hand, government is responsible for providing overall policy guidelines in areas surrounding environmental stewardship and land-use planning. By combining these two perspectives, the energy and forest industries can work together with government to ensure economic vitality and environmental sustainability for Albertans for many years to come.

Mr. Speaker, industry consultation is not something new to Alberta. Several government departments, including Sustainable Resource Development, Energy, and Environment, already work together with stakeholders to formulate policy. We have a host of committees in this province that work to make recommendations that will promote responsible development and resource management.

Bill 205 does call for the formation of another committee, a seven-person committee mandated to review reclamation standards for well sites. However, Bill 205 will also help to ensure that recommendations of this committee receive due consideration by the minister in a timely fashion. Specifically, the bill stipulates that the committee must report to the minister six months after commencing a review. This condition will help to give guidance to the committee members and provide clear expectations of timelines for the review process. The bill also stipulates that upon receiving the committee's recommendations, the minister must make a public response within three months. I trust that our hon. ministers always strive to do what's best for Albertans, Mr. Speaker, but with many competing priorities

that a minister must deal with, it can take time before reports are addressed. Requiring a public response by the minister within three months will ensure that these issues are addressed in a timely fashion.

Another advantage of regular consultation and review is that it allows opportunity for public input. Representing the interests of Albertans is the primary responsibility of this government, and the process of governance is greatly enhanced if the people are given a regular opportunity to have input into government policy. Recently Alberta Newsprint Company and the Alberta Forest Products Association expressed their support for the initiatives proposed by Bill 205. These companies acknowledge the importance of reviewing the regulations and supported the goal of increasing communication between the forest and energy sectors. These organizations recognize that the act's initiatives will improve the overall state of forestry in Alberta.

While the final details of the consultation process still need to be worked out through regulation, we can be assured that as with any other review process here in Alberta there will be more, ample opportunity for the public to comment. Moreover, consistent reviews could facilitate public input by bringing increased attention to the issues surrounding well site reclamation. By combining the perspectives of industry, government, and the public, we can ensure that the public policy reflects the interests of all those who have the privilege of living in this great province, Mr. Speaker.

In the spirit of co-operation and consultation, that the Member for West Yellowhead has emphasized, I believe that Bill 205 in the hands of my esteemed colleagues . . . [Mr. VanderBurg's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on Bill 205, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, a very important issue for Albertans as we go through the most rapid growth in our history. It's my understanding that this amendment refers only to green areas. If that is the case, it's inexplicable to me why we wouldn't be including other areas. If I'm wrong about that, I would be very pleased to be corrected, and maybe that can come out further in some of the discussions.

There's a clear need to review our reclamation/remediation process not only from the point of view of the science and the capacity of the various respective departments – Environment, SRD, and Energy – to review what's being done on the ground and the quality of the reclamation and remediation but also from the point of view of liability and how our growing liability as citizens of this province has not been addressed. So I acknowledge and commend the member for bringing forward this important initiative to review periodically what we're doing, where we're going, and how we're dealing with the vital responsibility of reclaiming and, ultimately, assessing the quality of the soil, whether it's oil and gas or forestry or gravel or whatever is being addressed here.

Clearly, in the interests of the long term we need to have a better plan in place for where and what we develop on these landscapes. Again, we're looking for signs that this government is going to eventually come up with a land-use framework and a land-use plan that establishes real priorities for our watershed, for our agriculture, for residential development, for industry, and so on. We're also looking for a commitment to science in the first instance before approving such projects but certainly following the completion of a project and its reclamation and remediation. There's a sense that

because of underfunding and because of other priorities, this government has not invested in independent scientific assessment both before and after these sites have been developed.

4:30

So, thirdly, we're also looking for evidence that the public has meaningful input into how we're developing, the pace we're developing, and the degree to which we are attending to the quality of equivalent land use, which is the commitment under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, to return the land to equivalent land use. There are serious questions, particularly in the oil sands area, about whether this is even a consideration any longer. So a vitally important piece of legislation.

I guess that from the point of view of having some feedback, I would say that Albertans want to know that not only is a site being reclaimed, but it's being reclaimed in a timely fashion up to a standard that is independently assessed, again. The timely fashion is one that has not been addressed in much of the legislation to date, and I'm very hopeful that with this kind of a review we would also see some attention given to what it means for a timely reclamation.

Another dimension of this is an independent assessment. By that I mean that given that Alberta Environment doesn't necessarily have the experts it needs to do all of these assessments in soil remediation, they invest the dollars and hire independent consultants that will act and speak on behalf of the public interest. We know that industry has its consultants, and we get repeated reports from industry before and after development that everything is fine. But what the public needs to know is that we have independent consultants giving us reassurances that not only is the quality of the reclamation being done, but the verification of standards has been met.

It's clear from Alberta Environment's own department that only 1 in 10 of such sites is inspected, and even of those many are not actually sampled; soil samples are not taken. So there's a tremendous amount of faith, shall I say, placed in the companies, the corporations, and their consultants that everything has been done in terms of inspection and enforcement of what are reasonable guidelines but are very suspect in terms of their enforcement because of either, again, lack of resources or lack of expertise in this department.

The other issue that has more to do with liability and I hope will also be addressed at some level with this new department would be the continuing need for an orphan fund for downstream oil and gas particularly. We have an upstream oil and gas orphan fund, and the previous Minister of Environment committed to establishing a downstream oil and gas orphan fund. It continues to languish in space as there's been no further discussion, no further commitment, no attempt to do anything but leave it to the public purse to clean up the downstream sites that have been abandoned by companies that can no longer function or that choose to walk away.

There is concern, then, about the growing public liability, whether we're talking about oil sands or refinery sites, and I think the public deserves to have this kind of review. I have to acknowledge the government for its willingness to set up all-party policy review. That is progress. Indeed, this government is taking some constructive steps towards real democratic renewal, I would say, on some of these all-party committees, and I applaud that.

This review of the legislation is an important step, one that one can only support in terms of its regular return to the Legislature for review. This is the issue for the 21st century: how we are managing our environment, how we are reclaiming our environment, and whether we indeed are committed to sustainable development as opposed to a quick return on investment, driven by a very hot market in Alberta.

So with those provisos and those concerns I'll take my seat and welcome further discussion and debate, with, I hope, a clarification on why we're simply restricting this review to the green areas and not including the white areas of this province as well on this regular review.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have the opportunity to continue debate on Bill 205, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007. I want to thank the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing this legislation forward.

Mr. Speaker, I think we all understand the importance of natural resources to our province. This year nonrenewable resource revenue will make up about \$11.6 billion of the provincial budget.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Rev. Abbott: Eleven point six billion.

The energy and forestry sector employs 143,400 people. It is a big industry, and as such there is a need to manage the impacts of natural resource development. Bill 205 will address concerns relating to well-site reclamation by putting in place clear environmental and forest management procedures. It will also allow reclamation guidelines to be reviewed every five years. Now, both elements of the bill, consistent reclamation guidelines and periodic review of regulations, are critical elements for an industry that relies on clear direction from government and strives to leave forests and natural areas in pristine condition for all Albertans to enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, it is the approach of this government to balance the competing needs arising from oil and gas exploration and forest development along with other economic and social demands. Balancing demands is part of managing the growth pressures that our province currently faces. That's why the hon. Minister of Energy is in the process of developing a comprehensive energy strategy and why the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development is completing work on a land-use framework. Bill 205 falls in the mould of these initiatives by ensuring that a more consistent process is in place to protect forests and the environment.

As it stands, Alberta's timber resources are governed by forest management agreements, or FMAs. FMAs allow forestry companies the right to grow, harvest, and remove timber. FMAs also lay out the rules and responsibilities for forestry companies in the area they will be harvesting. As FMAs capture vast areas of the province, the oil and gas development often occurs within areas covered by FMAs. This can impact the land base surrounding and leading up to oil and gas well sites. It impacts the harvest of timber and can displace topsoil.

When a well site is abandoned, the site must be reclaimed. Generally speaking, reclamation involves returning the area around the well site back to its original state. This process is laid out in a document called Reclamation Criteria for Wellsites and Associated Facilities. This document was last updated in 1995. It's pretty tough to replant 40- or 50-year old trees to make a site "original," Mr. Speaker. Now, I do not want the Assembly to believe that I view this fact in a negative light. I don't. However, this underlies the importance of relevant and current environmental and forest management procedures. Bill 205 would allow for the regular update of reclamation criteria by putting it on a timeline for review every five years.

There are a couple of reasons why this new, consistent process is of benefit to the province of Alberta. Regular reviews will assure that the most up-to-date procedures will be included as part of the environment management and reclamation process. Mr. Speaker, this is critical as changes to technology and advances in science allow for new approaches to be taken towards reclaiming sites. Alberta has significant research activities occurring both in universities and in private labs. It is important that as researchers and scientists make new discoveries pertaining to forests and natural habitat, such discoveries are reflected in our reclamation policies. Now, in regularly considering new approaches in technologies, we are assuring that industry is using or bringing to the table the most appropriate and innovative ways to preserve Alberta's natural capital.

Mr. Speaker, the reclamation policies of 1995 are not the same as the realities of 2007, nor will the realities of 2007 match the demands of 2010 or perhaps 2015 and beyond. This bill is about making sure that forestry and energy industries have a clear and consistent understanding of what is expected of them. Government should facilitate the process of ensuring that guidelines match present-day realities and expectations that Albertans hold.

4:40

While clear reclamation procedures are one aspect of the bill, another is maintaining the long-term health and productivity of the forest. Part of the challenge facing forestry companies at the moment is that when oil and gas companies are reclaiming sites, they plant perennial grasses as a way to return the site to a form of natural habitat. Now, this practice does also help to prevent erosion, and while the intent of this process is environmentally sound, the planting of such grasses does not allow for the re-establishment of the forest. This is obviously the expectation of a holder of a forest management agreement, or an FMA. However, this is not reflected in current reclamation practices, Mr. Speaker.

Perhaps through regular review of reclamation policies the forestry industry would have the opportunity to make a case for an improved approach with the energy industry towards reforestation. This is one example, but generally speaking there's a lack of opportunities for industry, regulators, and other interested parties to work towards relevant management procedures and policies.

Mr. Speaker, there is another component to maintaining healthy forests: it depends on an update of the reclamation criteria. You see, our province's timber damage assessment policy was also put in place in 1995, after consultations with relevant groups. This policy is in place to compensate the government of Alberta and FMA holders for any damages resulting to timber from industrial developments such as oil and gas drilling. As hon. members can observe, some of the challenges with both the reclamation policy and the timber damage assessment are interconnected. Again, this underlines the need for periodic review of reclamation and forest management policies.

Albertans take a significant amount of pride in the fact that our province has such bountiful resources. Albertans also recognize the importance of preserving the natural capital while natural resources are developed. It lives up to this government's commitment to manage growth pressures by facilitating improved environmental processes and allowing for continued economic prosperity.

Bill 205 will make sure that there is a consistent process in place to make sure that well-site reclamation policies are current and reflect new approaches and technologies. It will make sure that reviews happen every five years, so industry has clear direction on what the policies are, how policy will be reviewed, and when it will be implemented.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 ensures that Alberta's forests are protected for the long term. It is our fourth largest industry, and it has significant economic impact on numerous Alberta communities, including Drayton Valley. We cannot afford to wait to bring in an updated and clarified approach to forest management. This is why we must put in place consistent and clear policies to allow this industry to continue to make strong economic contributions to our province.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this bill, and I encourage all my hon. colleagues to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bonko: 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Speaker: Not on private members' bills.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak to Bill 205, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007. Bill 205 mainly has two objectives. The purpose of the bill is to add a provision under section 137 of the EPEA to deal specifically with the review of all regulations and practices for conservation and reclamation in the green area of the province. The first part defines specified land for the sole purpose of this section as being exclusively in the green area of the province.

The second purpose of the bill is to legislate the creation of a committee of seven people who will be tasked with the review of any regulation made governing the practices and criteria for conservation and reclamation of specified land, that being the green area. This committee will have several objectives, including ensuring that the regulations incorporate best forest management practices for land reclamation as well as providing reporting timelines and public disclosure requirements.

Mr. Speaker, as well, there is also the provision that the committee will report to the Legislative Assembly if it is sitting or, if it's not sitting, within 15 days of the next sitting. The impact of this bill will provide the ability under EPEA to review legislation that concerns conservation and reclamation in the green area of the province. This amendment provides the mechanism for the review of regulations and codes of practice that ensures best available practices for land in the green area to be reclaimed. The committee that would be struck would have mandated free reporting functions to the public and to the Legislative Assembly.

The outcome of this bill would be to ensure that there are some oversight and review and regulations to guide reclamation activities in the green area. The committee as appointed by the minister is mandated to review the legislation every five years to ensure best forest management practices for reclamation. This is a good amendment to make as it would force the government to incorporate best available practices into its forest management codes of practice for all operators in the green areas.

One area where perhaps this bill could be more aggressive is an amendment to section 137.1(7), that mandates that the minister must make the report public within three months after the date on which it is received. This government has a habit of receiving reports and then sitting on them for a long period of time, such as the Affordable Housing Task Force report. There can be an argument to be made that the initial draft recommendations should be made public immediately and that the government responds in a shorter time frame than three months. That way everyone could see what the initial recommendations are and compare that to the government's accepted response. This would ensure that the government is held

accountable for any negative changes to the committee's recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, I'm supporting this bill, the rationale. This act forces oversight of ministerial actions when dealing with the reclamation and conservation on green land. Any regulation the minister makes regarding that reclamation and conservation will be scrutinized and analyzed to see if they fit best forestry practices. It provides a means for reporting the findings to both the minister and the Legislative Assembly. Any step that is taken to review existing legislation to ensure that best available practices are always used in forestry management by all operators is a good step. This bill provides that type of oversight on an ongoing basis and also ensures that the findings are made public and are reported to the Legislative Assembly instead of remaining strictly in the purview of the minister. This is a step towards accountability.

Any attempt to review existing legislation to ensure that the best available practices are adhered to and are required by legislation and codes of practice is a good step. Alberta values our forests, and any step to ensure best available forest management practices to preserve this resource and develop it responsibly is a positive step. This government should have these types of committees in place to review all codes of practice and legislation that deal with reclamation activities by industry to ensure that best available practices are used. As well, similar provisions should be incorporated into EPEA to deal with oil and gas activities in the white areas of the province. This would allow for the committee to ensure that best practices are used across all sectors to reclaim land after resources have been extracted. Our land belongs to all Albertans, and thus government policy should ensure at all times that industry that operates on our land base returns the land to the state it was prior to resource extraction by using best available practices and technology.

The Member for West Yellowhead should be applauded for bringing forth this bill that aims to strengthen legislation around conservation and reclamation and especially for putting such a review in the public domain. This is a good step towards transparency and accountability. I urge all the members of the Assembly to support Bill 205. Thank you very much.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. There are just a couple of minutes left, Mr. Speaker, I believe. Who would not be for Bill 205? You know, a review is conducted every five years. Land reclamations under the act are conducted through best forestry practices. If that's what happens, who could be against it? It recommends changes to the regulations for the implementation of the best practices, the committee reports within six months of the reviews, and the minister makes a public response within six months. Well, who possibly could be against this in terms of our green areas and the reclamation areas? So, certainly, I don't think there would be any problem in this Assembly supporting Bill 205. I would be very surprised if that was the case.

But I just want to quickly say, though, Mr. Speaker, that it comes again to the pace of development, even in the green areas. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View talked about land reclamation generally. He also is correct that we hope that the people that we have on board here are actually experts and are independent when they're brought forward.

Again, I come back. The pace of development is so rapid in this province, and bills like this talk about five years after the fact, Mr. Speaker. With what's going on with the economy and how quickly

we're, you know, getting oil and gas out, how quickly the tar sands and the rest of it, even in our green areas this is going to put pressure on. Until we begin to deal with the pace of development, frankly, these things will be largely irrelevant. The bill in itself, as I say, we'll certainly support. But five years down of reclamation – the way we're going right now, what's going to be left? I venture there'll be encroachments. I can predict it. In our green areas it's already starting.

As I say, you know, if the bill goes forward, as I expect it will, and we do the right things in terms of the people that are going on the committees, that they are actual experts, certainly, we will support the bill. I just honestly say, Mr. Speaker, that we're facing all sorts of problems with the rate of development. We know that it's happening in housing. We've had this discussion with health care, education, you name it, the environment. We had the previous debate on Bill 3. It's nice to pass bills in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, even a good bill, possibly a good bill, but the rate of development.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on Bill 205, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007. It does ask or beg the question because it does specifically talk about green areas. Now, some of our green areas at this point in time are considered to be protected, but does this open up the provision or tell us that everything's available for development as long as it can be brought back with conservation and reclamation? We have some pristine areas, which were mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to cut the member off, but at 4:55 we have to switch to Motions Other than Government Motions. So the time has elapsed.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Distribution of Budget Surplus

504. Mr. Hinman moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider the advisability of investing 50 per cent of the budget surplus into the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and reimbursing the remaining 50 per cent to Albertans as a percentage of their personal income taxes and/or property taxes.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege today to rise and to speak on Motion 504 and to urge this government to take up a new direction that will benefit the people, the families, and the communities of Alberta. We really want to leap forward here, and we have a great opportunity with the surplus budgets that have been coming in and the enormous resources that we have been able to gather in the last few years.

But as we discussed in opposition on what would be the most important motion that we could bring forward, we really focused on families, we focused on communities and thought: what could the government do that would make the biggest difference in the shortest time for the long term? So we thought about it. "Well, let's treat this like our own family business. What would we do?" If you had vast amounts of nonrenewable resources coming into your

business, as we do now, you would sit down and you'd think: well, we want to pass on the family business; we want to pass this on to the next generation, to our family. But the current situation is such that if we were to continue spending and build a business that isn't economically viable without this income, that's not guaranteed, we'd put the next generation in jeopardy.

The basic purpose of this motion is to look at the next generation and what we do. So for that what we want to do is to be able to put 50 per cent of all surplus income into the heritage trust fund, and the other 50 per cent would be returned to the actual taxpayers of Alberta via a system where they'd have a refund on their personal income tax or their property tax. This would help them at that time to strengthen them and to put them in a position where they can plan and will plan for their future.

But too often human nature is that when we have a windfall, blessed with extra cash, we have the urge to go out and spend it, to take advantage, and to improve our quality of life. I'll use the example if you're running a small corporation and you happen to have a plane, you might think, "Wow. You know, we have a great income here. We could afford a Learjet and go out and purchase one," not looking at the cost and the expenses down the road and therefore put the business in jeopardy as soon as the income is reduced. It's not sustainable, and it didn't bring any real advantage to the corporation or to the province here.

Good financial planners always say that saving is a discipline and a necessary action that one should do throughout one's life, especially in the tough times. That's where you develop the discipline to put away and to, as we say here in Alberta, save for a rainy day. It's critical that we do that. As a government we should be saving a good portion of our surplus dollars, but we should also be saving a portion of our regular income.

Lessons on money management also say that when you all of a sudden have a major influx or a boost in your salary, you should keep your lifestyle the way it was when you first got the raise. Too often as soon as we get a raise or this boost in income, we run out and say: we can afford a better vehicle; we can afford a bigger house. But they always recommend that you continue your current lifestyle, continue your current programs and use some fiscal prudence in how you're going to plan and what you're going to do for the future.

So in the same regard as the province we need to look at capping our spending to that of inflation and growth and not every time we have an increase in income to just run out and say: "Well, what new program can we develop? Where can we spend some extra money?" and to have a slush fund that we can go out and quickly adapt and use.

5:00

A legacy, Mr. Speaker, is something that is not easily attained and not always done intentionally. It's where an individual, a family, or in this case a government can and will produce a legacy if, in fact, we're looking far enough into the future and thinking of those that are coming behind us. The Manning government understood the importance that fresh water had for the resources here in Alberta. He built dams and storage facilities and canals and had programs planned way back in the '50s and '60s. He wasn't thinking of that time; he was looking at the future. So even when we have tough years down in the south, maybe one or two back-to-back years, we still have been blessed with a good reserve of water that has bridged us through it.

The same is true financially. If we don't look to the future, it will be too late when all of a sudden we hit the bad years. We just have to go back a few short years, less than 20, to realize that the

spending and the boom and then the bust that we went through will happen again. History has a way of repeating itself over and over again. So we want to take that and ensure that we put it into a savings account to benefit the people.

The other part of this bill, of course, is the 50 per cent to return to the taxpayers of Alberta. This is critical. Government is just the collective wisdom of those of us that form that government. Too often, if we don't look at the big picture and we look at the selfish picture, we get ourselves into problems. Currently, we're living in a paradigm where bigger is better, more taxes are better, more spending and more programs and more handouts are the benefit of society. We're having more and more people become dependent on government handouts and thinking that they will always be there, but it isn't going to be so.

If we are to look at Canada as a whole and the importance of a strong economic country, we realize that there are 10 first ministers, a Prime Minister, and we could compare it to a team. How are we going to strengthen Canada, go forward, and have a strong team so that we can and will compete internationally and not just say, "Oh, things are fine here at home"? We do have to compete on an international basis; we're an export nation. The cost of production and those things that happen here in the country and the cost of our taxes definitely put us at a disadvantage if we're not in sync. Our closest partner to the south definitely has a more competitive tax regime than we do here, and they return the dollars to the people, which does help the entrepreneurs.

It's important, Mr. Speaker, that we need to look at the big picture. We want to be effective. We want to boost our economy. We want to make sure that it's sustainable. The question is: how are we going to do that? I go back to that we need to cap our spending. We need to realize that there is a growth factor. There is inflation, but we need to cap it. We need to reduce some of our taxes. We could lead the country, and the Prime Minister could point to Alberta and say, "Look at them: they've eliminated health care premiums," rather than pointing and saying, "This is the province that has them, and the other ones are following us." They could say, as they can now, "Look at our basic tax exemption," and they can raise it to the \$15,000. There are many areas where we can and we should lead here in to the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have left, if I could ask?

The Deputy Speaker: Three minutes.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you.

An Hon. Member: You go.

Mr. Hinman: No, I'm going to stay three more minutes.

Anyway, it's important that we take the attitude that we're going to lead here in Canada, that we're going to be the star, and that we're going to look at what is good government, what is good policy, and we're going to provide that for the people of Alberta. We don't want them to have to struggle through like we have in the last 15 years of paying off a debt, not committing to build the proper infrastructure. The way to do that is to have good fiscal management now.

I've always loved the historian Alexander Tytler and how he declared that democracy was doomed to fail and that it was due to loose fiscal policy. He said that the people will vote for the party that will promise to give them the most out of the public treasury. It doesn't do us any good to be competing or saying that we will take from one area and have the idea of divide and conquer and give to another area. It doesn't help the west when the Prime Minister does

that, and it doesn't help the province if we pit north against south or rural against urban.

What we need to do is reduce the taxes. We need to be able to have a dividend system that goes back, that allows for fiscal responsibility of local government. We need to take on the idea that we are going to save, we're going to prepare for the future, and we're going to do what's right. We're going to put the people of Alberta first and realize that we need to put our future generations first, that we won't live an exuberant lifestyle and that we won't spend and grow government for our own purposes, that we'll always look to the future. In doing that, we need to remember that we need to save – save is a critical point – that we need to return to those people that have overpaid, that when we have a surplus, Mr. Speaker, it's no different than going to the grocery store and handing them a twenty only to hear: oh, we don't give change here. We have a surplus, and we should have legislation that tells us what we're going to do with that surplus so it isn't wasted away.

I invite the members of this Legislature to make history again, a great history, a legacy, one that ensures freedom, peace, and prosperity. We must save our surplus dollars, and we must return our surplus dollars to those that have paid them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to join the debate on Motion 504, which proposes to invest 50 per cent of the budget surplus in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and reimburse the remaining 50 per cent to Albertans as a percentage of their personal income taxes and/or property taxes. Motion 504 does not provide a stable, long-term plan for Alberta's surplus funds. Alberta's surplus should be managed to benefit all Albertans now and in the future, not only those Albertans who qualify to benefit from it in years when Alberta produces a budgetary surplus.

With regard to long-term planning, Premier Stelmach has mandated the Minister of Finance to establish a financial investment and planning commission to explore options for long-term investment strategies for Alberta's nonrenewable resource revenues. The Minister of Finance has pledged to include a surplus formula in the 2007 budget. Premier Stelmach set out five priorities for the Alberta government . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, the mentioning of names is not allowed in the Assembly.

Mr. Mitzel: I apologize.

Our Premier has set out five priorities for the Alberta government, which reflect the values and priorities of Albertans. Of these five priorities three are directly related to purposeful and responsible spending. They are: to manage growth pressures, to improve Albertans' quality of life, and to build a stronger Alberta. Long-term planning for Alberta's budget surplus will help to safeguard the province against future economic shortfalls and will ensure that the priorities of this government are achieved.

With regard to the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, the fund was created to provide prudent stewardship and the greatest financial returns from nonrenewable resources for current and future generations. Over its history the fund has supported ongoing government programs and tax reductions, established endowments, and paid for capital improvements throughout the province. In 1996 the mandate of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund was reviewed. A new business plan was implemented, which included increasing long-term investments. In March 2003 a survey was conducted which

found that the majority of Albertans wanted the fund to continue to operate as it was.

With regard to the Financial Management Commission, Mr. Speaker, on July 8, 2002, the commission issued its recommendations to the government on how to make certain that Alberta remained a leader in fiscal planning by ensuring long-term fiscal sustainability. One of the key recommendations was the establishment of a sustainability fund as part of the renewed heritage fund, that would be used to stabilize volatile resource revenue. The fund could be drawn on during times of low resource revenues by transferring sufficient amounts to the general revenue fund to cover any deficiency of revenues over expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta has heard from the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and the Certified General Accountants Association of Alberta regarding sustainable management of windfall resource revenues. Their ideas support the government's current direction. The Calgary Chamber of Commerce has recommended that the provincial government commit to the principle of sustainability when identifying and assessing spending priorities. In fact, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce believes that the prudent handling of nonrenewable resource revenues will sustain the Alberta advantage and allow the province to maintain its competitive tax base and to make sustainable investments in education and research.

5:10

Albertans experience long-term benefits through spending on capital projects in budgetary surplus years. Alberta's capital account was created in 2003 as part of the new fiscal framework established to help address immediate and long-term infrastructure needs in Alberta.

The 2006 to 2009 capital plan directly supports \$13.3 billion in capital projects. Mr. Speaker, this is a 45 per cent, or \$4.1 billion, increase from the 2005 to 2008 capital plan published in Budget 2005. This degree of capital support is unmatched in the rest of Canada. Alberta's capital spending on infrastructure is three times the average of other provinces. In 2006-2007 Alberta will spend \$4.2 billion on capital projects, or about \$1,300 per person. The average per capita spending on infrastructure in other provinces has been about \$400 per person. Last year a major increase was provided for municipal infrastructure, including the five-year, \$3 billion Alberta municipal infrastructure program. In Budget 2006 major increases have been provided for the provincial highway network and health, school, and postsecondary facilities.

Mr. Speaker, giving back 50 per cent of the budget surplus funds to a portion of Albertans through personal income taxes and/or property taxes will not benefit all Albertans who currently live in this province or who will live here in the future. In its 2007 fiscal performance index, the Fraser Institute recognizes Alberta as having one of the most competitive taxation systems in the country with the lowest personal and corporate income taxes and no capital taxes. This province has a competitive taxation system because of the responsible allocation of nonrenewable resource surplus windfalls, which may not produce a budget surplus every year.

Alberta has also allocated more money to capital projects due to the current economic climate. Alberta's prosperity should be utilized to benefit everyone in the current population as well as its future population. It should be a thriving and successful province for those who are not yet born and for those who choose to move to our great province.

I cannot support Motion 504, however well-intended, and I'll ask my colleagues to not support this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get to participate in the debate on Motion 504 this afternoon. Motion 504 proposes that the government allocate half of the surplus into the heritage fund and the other half into personal or property tax cuts.

Certainly, at some point in the future I would like to think that we will have the financial ability to put 50 per cent of our surplus into the heritage savings trust fund and reduce personal income taxes and/or property taxes and/or corporate taxes. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is going to have something to say about that, but tax reduction is a very, very good thing. Now, this, of course, would occur after we eliminate health care premiums for all Albertans.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner is perhaps a visionary here with his idea that we would have 50 per cent of the budget surplus for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and a whole series of tax cuts that we could pass in this Legislative Assembly for the benefit of Albertans.

Hopefully we'll get to that some day, but in the meantime I think we should adopt as a surplus policy the policy from 2004 that the Alberta Liberal party campaigned on in the last election, the one that was so well received by so many voters. We certainly did have a plan. The voters sensed that we had a plan. They didn't know until two years later, when the Premier finally just flat out admitted it, that, no, there was no plan by the Conservatives. I think that with this motion the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner certainly realizes something that many people already knew in 2004, and that's that this government had no plan. Unfortunately, they still do not have a plan. They have five vague pillars there that they talk about, but certainly the one on openness and transparency was exposed for what it was this afternoon: a very narrow pillar that perhaps is made out of plastic that loses its strength in the sunlight and collapses. With the spring here it's not long before that pillar is going to completely collapse.

Now, our surplus plan, Mr. Speaker, called for 35 per cent of surplus money to be into the heritage fund immediately, and no one can tell me that this government has managed over the last number of years the Alberta heritage savings trust fund in a prudent and wise way. It hasn't even grown and met the demands of inflation over the years. I know that the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House is shaking his head there, but it's true. It certainly is true.

Also, we would like to see, Mr. Speaker, 35 per cent of the surplus invested in a postsecondary endowment fund. We would like to see 25 per cent in a capital account towards eliminating Alberta's infrastructure deficit, and this is a deficit that's growing and growing. Why? Because this Conservative government was operating for years without a plan. Without a blueprint you don't build anything because it costs more and more money.

Now, it is interesting to note that we would also like to have a \$500 million arts endowment fund for the humanities, social sciences, and arts. Of course, the \$500 million would be capped. It's interesting also to note that it is only now that the Progressive Conservatives are talking about a surplus policy, but it's too late. It's too late because it's costing us so much extra, and that's evident again in media reports that were issued today.

When we talk about what the Conservatives are suggesting, we have to look at some of the shortcomings in this, Mr. Speaker. First, governments can reduce the size of surpluses by increasing annual spending. Alberta has a real problem with this, and I'm going to be very anxious to see what this budget is on Thursday. I don't know if the President of the Treasury Board is going to look up from his

notes when this budget is being delivered or not. I'm sure he's going to feel guilty that the spending increases are going to be so significant, and he thought: well, we can reduce the size of government, and we could manage our dollars more efficiently. I don't know how he's going to react to this budget on Thursday, but I have a close seat here, and I'm going to be watching with interest to see what expressions he gives as this budget is outlined. Now, last year's total expenses increased 12 per cent from the year before that. In that year there was another significant increase of 11 per cent, and this outpaces the combined inflation and population growth rate.

Second, this government is famous for this spending off budget. Now, a recent report by the C.D. Howe Institute noted that Alberta had the worst record for overspending its budget, and in 10 years – in 10 years – the budget in this province has increased by over 120 per cent. We've still got a lot of potholes to fix, we've got a lot of bridges and roads and schools to build, hospitals to build, but the cost of this now.

The Alberta Liberals tabled Bill 201, Funding Alberta's Future Act. Now, our idea for long-term financial security for Alberta is the same as any prudent householder: pay yourself first. Bill 201 would have provided world-class public services, an outstanding postsecondary education system, and permanently competitive taxes. That's our fiscal policy, and Motion 504 would be an additional step at some time in the future, Mr. Speaker. I would urge the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner and all others to have a second look at the ideas coming from this particular party.

5:20

In addition to those ideas of the Alberta Liberal caucus – and the policy to invest 30 per cent off the top of any year-end surplus directly into the heritage fund is a sound and a good idea. I can't believe that members would talk about the heritage savings trust fund and not contemplate supporting that idea. If we build up the heritage fund, Albertans will be in a position to permanently enjoy the most competitive tax regime in North America. We are slipping here.

Now, the province of British Columbia has in some cases a much more competitive tax structure than we do. Again, we are still waiting for leadership and direction from this government. It's a tired government. That certainly is true. It's a tired and listless government, and it's drifting. [interjection] It certainly is. The hon. member says that it's not true. One only has to visit the city of Fort McMurray to realize how tired and drifting and listless this government really is.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to remind the hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor, and I would be happy to recognize the hon. minister at some point in the future.

I would also like to remind the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that perhaps if you address the Speaker with your comments instead of the members opposite, it would be less provocative.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Speaker. You're absolutely right. I must admit that I was provoked.

Debate Continued

Mr. MacDonald: Now, Mr. Speaker, if we had a heritage fund that was growing, growing substantially to the point where we could have over a hundred billion dollars by 2021 in that fund, that would be a great addition for this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I give the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner credit for bringing this motion forward because it's a major debate about some of the big issues, whether we agree with them or not. It seems to me that this is precisely the type of big debate we need, you know, within the province. As already mentioned, the member is talking about surplus money, 50 per cent going into the heritage trust fund and 50 per cent into what I think he would call a tax refund. I want to make sure I get the term right.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP has no great objection to putting more money at surplus times into the heritage trust fund. We've called for that before. But I want to remind people that we have different sorts of deficits that we forgot about in the mid-90s. Yes, we had the deficit in terms of the economic deficit, but then we forgot about the social deficit and the infrastructure deficit. Now we're trying to play catch-up in an overheated economy. So the problem that I have in saying 50 per cent of something in nonrenewable resources is that we have to begin to deal with – as I say, we know about affordable housing coming up. We know about green and sustainable energy, the infrastructure deficit, and all the rest of it. I think we have to look at that on a year-by-year basis because if the economy, the overheated economy, keeps going as fast as it is, I'm not sure we can play catch-up, but we have to do something. That's why taking an arbitrary number all the time on a year-by-year basis doesn't make a lot of sense. So I generally agree with the idea that where we can, we should put some money in the heritage trust fund for the future.

Now, the other particular problem. Again, I understand the purpose that the member is talking about in terms of the tax refunds, as he calls them, but I think there is a danger here, Mr. Speaker. I'm told that with the Alaska equivalent of our heritage trust fund, where they automatically gave out money to the taxpayers, now when that fund is going down, people expect to get the same amount even though the same amount of money is not coming in. So it's created a real political problem. It's almost a sense of entitlement now even though it was meant that there would be a certain percentage that would go back to the people in terms of, again, a tax refund. As the amount of money coming is going down, people are still expecting the same amount. So they see it as a permanent sort of situation, and I think we create sort of a sense of entitlement by doing that that we may not be able to keep up in the future, but people don't understand that. I worry about that. I'd rather look to more, if you like, tax reductions, especially for the working poor and the people in the lower income. I think that's what we have to be mainly concerned about.

Again, I reiterate: if we want to really give something that's permanent and sustainable, it's the tax reductions on our medicare premiums. Now, I know that the government doesn't call these taxes, but they are. They are, in fact, taxes. That would be \$900 million, a lot of money, admittedly, out of the provincial revenues, but I think we could sustain that over a long period of time. That tax would be directed to the people that most need it, getting rid of our medicare premiums, Mr. Speaker. Frankly, with the refund, contrary to what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar says, the last people that need tax relief is the corporate sector and the well-to-do in this province. They are the last people. If we do a total, if you like, tax reduction to everybody, people that don't need it are going to get it. It's like a flat tax. If we're going to do it, a flat tax helps the people at the top more than it does the people at the bottom.

I worry about this for that particular reason, Mr. Speaker. We need to look at a couple of things. We have to look at our three

deficits, and I know that they're going to be trying to grapple with this in the budget. There's also the social deficit. We know what's happening in education, health care, the rest of it with the overheated economy, picking up the pieces from the mid-90s. On the infrastructure deficit we've had much discussion. I think a lot of the budget will probably have to deal with that. That's why it seems to me that in the short run to say that you're going to always put so much into the heritage trust fund – until you've caught up with these other deficits, it doesn't make much sense because you're doing it on nonrenewable resources. We have to do this year by year.

I also think that the tax reductions that we need are the ones that are sustainable over a long period of time. As I said, I think the medicare premiums are the first that we should be doing. Admittedly, \$900 million is a lot of money, but that would be directed to people that need it. The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner mentioned raising the tax exemption. I think that probably makes some sense if it gets to more people, the working poor and then the people that can't afford housing right now with the rents rising and the rest of it. That's who we have to be concerned about, Mr. Speaker. In an overheated economy to say that we need tax reductions or tax relief for the corporate sector and the well-to-do in this society makes absolutely no sense at all. When you take a broad brush across, that's who a lot of it will go to.

So, Mr. Speaker, for that reason I again commend the member for at least bringing forward the big debate about where we should be going. I certainly understand the reasons that he's bringing forward, but I think it could create more problems than it solves in the long run.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to join the debate on Motion 504 regarding the allocation of any Alberta surpluses. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner for sharing his idea on distributing provincial surpluses. As part of an open and transparent government I certainly welcome these important debates on how to approach our fiscal situation.

Motion 504, as stated, calls for 50 per cent of the budget surplus to be deposited into the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and the remaining 50 per cent to be distributed to Albertans as a percentage of their personal income and/or property taxes. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that there are a few flaws in this rather simplistic equation. The one I'd like to mention: as proposed, I can't imagine that Albertans would stand to have their property taxes, for example, going up and down like yo-yos.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has the lowest income tax level in Canada. It might surprise this member that the majority of the province's surplus revenues are not as a result of taxes. If Alberta's surplus was related to income tax collection, the surplus would be highly predictable; therefore, it would be much easier to abide by the kind of strategy that the member is asking for in Motion 504. The fact of the matter is that Alberta's economy is strengthened by our industries and natural resources while it is supplemented by Albertans' income and property tax contributions.

Alberta's economy is driven by the oil and gas sector, and this industry works with nonrenewable resources. Because of the volatile nature of the value of this commodity prices of oil and gas fluctuate with many factors, such as global conflict, foreign markets, and of course weather patterns. Because much of Alberta's economy is stimulated by the energy sector, surpluses are also linked

to the price of our dominant exploration commodity. As has been illustrated over the years, even with strong management the surplus is and always will be unpredictable.

Mr. Speaker, because of the varying streams of resource income in the province, it would not be wise to govern by the plan that's called for in this motion. Although Motion 504 provides an arena for debate, I believe that that's pretty much where its practicality ends. I urge all members of this Assembly to think long and hard about the source and volatility of Alberta's surpluses before even contemplating support for this motion.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak to Motion 504, sponsored by the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. I appreciate that the member at least took the initiative. If we go back to 2004, there was no party that had a policy on revenue or a surplus policy. It was the Alberta Liberal Party who came up with the surplus and revenue policy.

It's very important to discuss in this House the surplus and revenue policy, which was also discussed by some members of the PC Party during the leadership contest. They indicated, you know, especially the Premier – the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development during his campaign was talking about 30 per cent of the resource revenue. Jim Dinning, a failed PC leadership contender, and those approximately 40 Tory MLAs – he mentioned that there should be, I think, 30 per cent during normal times and 50 per cent during boom times. You know, all these Tory leadership contenders started talking about surplus and revenue policies after the Alberta Liberal Party introduced their surplus policy.

Let me read this statement from the Premier's director of communication nowadays – he was a journalist before – Paul Stanway. He mentioned that the Grits are proposing boosting the heritage trust fund to \$120 billion over the next . . .

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Agnihotri: A hundred and twenty billion dollars.

Our policies I will talk on very briefly after this. He said when he was a journalist that the Grits are proposing boosting the heritage trust fund to \$120 billion over the next 15 years, so when the oil and gas money runs out, the province can use interest from the fund to replace nonrenewable energy revenue; it's simple, it's achievable, and it's likely the prescription for the future most Albertans want. This is a statement from today's Premier's director of communications. It indicates that the majority of the media and a majority of the politicians in Alberta, that includes the former Premier, indicated that the Alberta Liberal Party had a better surplus policy.

I actually commend the hon. member. At least he tried to come up with some ideas. Something is better than nothing. But our policies were commended by the media and some of the Tory top guns, including a former Premier. I think that this Motion 504, compared to whatever we had in the year 2004 election campaign, is not even close. That's the reason I can't support this motion, you know, the rationale.

The Alberta Liberal caucus has a fiscal policy. It's not like Motion 504. In addition to the Alberta Liberal caucus policy, that invests 30 per cent off the top, any year-end surplus will go directly to the heritage fund. Through building the heritage fund, Albertans will be in a position to permanently enjoy competitive taxes.

Here is how the Alberta Liberal caucus policy invests in Alberta's future. An Alberta Liberal government would immediately invest 30

per cent of annual nonrenewable resource revenue as follows: 35 per cent to the heritage fund, 35 per cent to the postsecondary endowment fund, 25 per cent to erase Alberta's infrastructure debt. Once that is accomplished, this 25 per cent will be funnelled to the heritage fund. Five per cent will go into a humanities, social sciences, arts endowment fund to an upper limit of \$500 million. Once this cap is reached, 5 per cent will be used to create an opportunity fund, a flexible saving account designed to meet whatever priorities future Albertans assign it. In addition to a 30 per cent off-the-top savings, any year-end surplus will go directly to the heritage fund.

5:40

So if the Alberta Liberal Party had this policy 15 years ago – just 15 years ago – according to the economists, according to some of the media we would have at least a savings of \$120 billion. So \$6 billion of interest would have come out of those savings, and we could have used that \$6 billion in the general revenue. If we had that plan 15 years ago, we would have the best universities in the world, the best hospitals everywhere in Alberta. Child care policies, all that, the problems that we are socially facing: we wouldn't have those problems if we had proper policies like we have.

But, unfortunately, this PC government, they never had a policy so far. Even the former Premier admitted himself that he was not expecting a boom, certainly, and they never had a policy and no plan. I think that's the reason, after spending 93 per cent of the resources, we are nowhere. We already spent 93 per cent of the resource revenue, and still if you ask anybody, they will say that we need tons of money in the infrastructure; we need money in the hospitals, education, and child care; and we need some money for the environment. If we include that money which we need, we are still in the red. We are still in the red, you know, because . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Agnihotri: My point is, Mr. Speaker, that if we are not doing good, it is because of the bad planning or without planning of this government. I'm glad at least they have started thinking about planning on the surplus and the revenue base.

Thank you.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join in the discussion of Motion 504 put forward by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. The motion urges the government to invest 50 per cent of the budget surplus into the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and distribute the remaining portion to Albertans as personal and property tax credits.

The motion does not provide enough direction and clarity for something as complex as Alberta's financial well-being. It's the government's role to wisely invest our revenue for the good of all Albertans, but this proposal fails to live up to the revenue objectives that the government is already pursuing. For example, the Alberta heritage trust fund is a valuable asset that should continue to receive sufficient funds to allow future Albertans to benefit from its fiscal potential. For over 30 years it has supported ongoing government initiatives to sustain and improve Alberta's fiscal position.

But the member's proposal neglects many of the other important funds that are administered by the province. Now, these investments include investing in education. The access to the future fund, which invests surplus revenues in endowments for innovations in the

postsecondary system, is currently standing at \$1 billion. Investing in technology. The Alberta ingenuity fund, supplemented by the Access to the Future Act, harnesses Alberta's vast research potential in everything from agriculture to nanotechnology. It operates as a trust fund and is generating income from the principal, which is currently valued at over \$700 million, and investing in health over the next three years. A total of \$2.7 billion will be provided to not only increase the assets of the heritage fund and the medical research endowment fund and the just-established Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund.

Mr. Speaker, the heritage fund is valuable, but so, too, are other investments and financial obligations. Myself, I am very much in favour of saving, and I do believe that all of the money that we spend belongs to the people of Alberta. But new Albertans, when they have been coming to Alberta since the 1800s, one of the first things that they as a community work towards are schools. The hundreds of thousands of people that are coming to Alberta need schools, and they need schools where they live, or at least somewhat close to where they live. This is a basic government responsibility, to make sure that we have the schools where we need them. This is an added pressure that comes onto a growing economy like we have here in Alberta. One of the basic responsibilities that we have as a government is to catch up on these schools for all of these people that are coming to Alberta.

The same thing for hospitals, and the same thing for roads. Just because, you know, people come, they haven't brought their roads with them. But they do bring their cars, or they get here and they find the prosperity to be able to buy the cars. To be able to get from one place to another, they've got to have sufficient roads. So it's just much too simplistic a way of looking at our responsibilities.

The motion's intent, I mean, sort of vacillates between the extremes, and it doesn't provide enough detail on the focus of the motion. So due to this simplistic approach, which ignores the government responsibilities to a growing populace, I'm afraid that I cannot support it. I believe that working within our current fiscal framework and fine-tuning Alberta's financial policy is the most appropriate approach to addressing Alberta's budget surpluses. I encourage the hon. member to await the budget to be released in coming days, which will include a formula for the management of resource revenues, among many other details.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to participate in the debate?

Does the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner wish to close debate?

Mr. Hinman: I certainly do, Mr. Speaker. I rise again to close the debate on Motion 504, and I thank the hon. members that have taken part. I guess I'll start with the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and the research people from the government that prepared the paper to speak on that. First, I must say that I'm disappointed in the fact that most people haven't read the motion closely enough to realize that this is about surplus dollars, not about budget dollars. There's a huge difference. This is about saving surplus dollars, and this is about a refund to the actual taxpayers of the province for the hard-earned money. They know how to spend it better than the government does. Always the people know better than the government how to spend it. When we take the attitude that government knows best, we're in trouble.

I was disappointed with the comment, first of all, that it is too simple. Simplicity is always the best. There's no need to make it complex. That's just to take people out of the debate.

To further look at the situation, the heritage trust fund, if it was really to be one, should be around \$200 billion, like Norway's. If we want it to be able to replace the income – that's at a 6 per cent return on investment – that's coming in from our natural resources, then that should be the goal. We should have legislation to save 10 per cent of the actual income from the resource revenue. I'm not talking about the surplus dollars.

But this government is clear in its message that it knows how to spend the money better than the people who have earned it. It's interesting how they go to other institutions and think tanks rather than the people to see what they would like to do with it.

Once again, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar talked about an open government. It's interesting that this government in its own AGM is going to limit the discussion to five resolutions. I know that there are constituents that want to bring this resolution forward. [interjections]

5:50

The Deputy Speaker: Please, hon. members.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in describing his worry about entitlement, this isn't anything more than a refund when there are surplus dollars. What the real concern is is that we have a province with so many programs that they think those programs are their entitlement rather than their benefits, so we need to look at this.

I talked to a lot of small businesses in small towns and in Calgary and Edmonton. The taxes are onerous. Many of them have to shut down and move to jurisdictions that have reduced taxes because they can't make a go of it anymore. We need to look at it. When the taxes go up for business, whether that's the grocery store or the hardware store, especially in a small town, they're only turned around to the people in that small town who come to purchase there.

Once again, this is not a complex issue; it's a simple one. This government itself had a simple legislation, that any surplus dollars that came in were to pay down the debt. Had they stuck with that

and put it into savings, we would truly be better off today, instead of frivolously spending it and following what Alexander Tytler says about the doom of democracy, that a government is bound on buying votes by providing programs from the public treasury to bring in those votes. Like I say, whether that's rural against urban or north against south, it's not in the best interest of the people to raise taxes and to spend surplus dollars frivolously.

What we need to do is focus on the family. The point of this motion was to focus on the family, to focus on the community, and that was to return the dollars to where they're generated, and that's from the people, the workers of Alberta, and also from the communities and their property taxes. By putting that money back – economists have taught for years that if you want to increase and boost the economy, you lower taxes. If you want to slow down something, for example, our driving in Alberta, you raise the gas tax. If you want to have a boost, you look at that, and you lower the taxes. Whether that's on such things as windmills or geothermal heating, there are many things that we can and should reduce the taxes on, but that's another debate for another day. I'm sure we'll have it this Thursday because we'll see an increase, not a reduction, in taxes.

Once again, I would urge all members to think a little longer, to read a little harder, and realize that this is about the people of Alberta, not the government and its ability to spend its money foolishly, those hard-earned dollars of the people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 lost]

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

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had good debate today. I think it would be appropriate to call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, April 17, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/17

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

On this afternoon, as our work in this Legislature continues, let each of us pray for those who have been taken and those who have suffered as innocent victims of violent tragedy. We resolve to comfort the families, friends, and communities who have keenly felt the loss of loved ones through acts of violence and disregard for the sanctity of that which is most precious, life. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta and the United States have a long history of close co-operation, especially in energy. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Ms Drue Pearce. She's in the Speaker's gallery along with our very good friend, of course, the consul general of the United States, Tom Huffaker. Now, I might add that Ms Pearce is a former Alaska state Senator and is now the U.S. federal co-ordinator of Alaska natural gas transportation projects. Of course, the Alaska natural gas pipeline is such an important initiative that will run through Alberta. I might add that today they will be meeting with our Premier and also met with our Minister of Energy earlier today. I'd ask them to rise in the Speaker's gallery and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a number of guests who are here with us to mark the introduction of Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, for first reading. Some of our guests are seated in the public gallery and others in the members' gallery. Of course, the Mental Health Amendment Act is going to bring in community treatment orders, the legislative side of more focus on how we help persons with mental illness in our community. I'd ask that our guests rise when I announce them and that the Assembly hold their applause until they've all been introduced.

First, we have two representatives from the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta: Dr. Irv Zemrau, president, and Ken Smith, director. We have Ms Elaine Marko. Ms Marco is a teacher at Harry Ainlay high school and a counsellor and someone who as a parent has mental health issues in her family and has been very supportive in bringing this forward. Next, we have members from the Alberta Mental Health Board: Ray Block, president and CEO; Dr. Roger Bland, executive medical director; Louise Laforce-Fertig, a member; and Sandra Harrison, the Mental Health Patient Advocate.

We also have representatives from the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health. Members and colleagues will recognize Dennis Anderson, who is the founding chair of the alliance and, of course, a former member of this Assembly, a former minister of culture, multiculturalism, and women's issues, Municipal Affairs

and Housing, consumer and corporate affairs. We also have with us Sharon Sutherland, who is the chair of the alliance; Tom Shand, the executive director of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta division; and Pierre Bérube, executive director of the Psychologists' Association of Alberta.

I'd welcome as well Dr. P.J. White, the incoming president of the Canadian Psychiatric Association and chair of psychiatry at the University of Alberta, and last but not least Fern Miller, a senior manager in Alberta Health and Wellness, public health division, who has worked very hard to help bring this legislation to fruition.

All of our guests are rising, and I'd ask you to give them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House five members of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force. These people have dedicated themselves till the end of June to travel the province to find recommendations for the Minister of Justice to make our communities safer. They are Jennifer Scheible, our youth representative; Sue Hughson, appellate counsel/Crown prosecutor; Dwight Oliver, the reeve of Clearwater county and AAMD and C representative; Jean Mah, who is from Alberta Justice – she is on our support team – and Chester Cunningham, who is a retired CEO from the native court workers. I'll ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly one Mr. Jason Clappitt. Also, with him today is a man to whom I credit most of my life's successes, a man of integrity and strength whom I strive to be like every day. That man is my dad, Keith Griffiths. I'll ask both of them to rise in the members' gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mike Butler. Mike is a 26-year-old Mill Woods resident who tragically lost his wife last week. Mike's situation raises concerns around funding for programs for persons suffering with mental illnesses and drug addiction. We wish Mike and his family the best and offer our sincere condolences through this difficult time. I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Gail Husum and Barb Billingsley. Barb and Gail are Palace Casino workers who have been on strike for the last 221 days, due at least in part to this government's failure to provide fair labour legislation for workers in this province.

Barb has been at the Palace Casino for 17 years as a pit boss and has worked within the gaming industry for nearly 30 years. Barb works alongside her daughter and son-in-law, and at one time her other daughter also worked at Palace Casino, so this strike has been very important to her and her family's livelihood.

Gail has been a Palace Casino employee for three years and works in the slots department. She went on strike to fight for equality for workers and to see a better standard in terms of wages and benefits for all employees. They are here with UFCW 401 representative Don Crisall. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a real pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a fine group in from the wonderful little village of Dewberry and representing their school, the Lakeland Country school. There are 15 students here with their parents and team leaders Mr. and Mrs. Darren Wiebe, Mr. and Mrs. Doug Loewen, and Miss Lorraine Thiessen. Also helping them on their trip to see the Legislature Building today are Mr. and Mrs. Bill Toews, Mr. and Mrs. Kevin Toews, Mr. and Mrs. Cam Braun, Mr. and Mrs. Brian Reimer, Mrs. Phyllis Loewen, and Mr. Lyle Unruh. I would ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed a pleasure to introduce 45 young individuals from St. Lucy Catholic school. They are here today to see us at work and view our fabulous Legislature Building. They are accompanied by Mr. Eriksson and Mrs. Robinson, their teachers, and two parents helpers, Mrs. Lemke and Mrs. Vetter. I would ask them to rise and accept the traditional welcome of our Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Newborn Metabolic Screening Program

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a rather new father I understand the importance of metabolic screening early on in a child's development. On April 2 Alberta's new metabolic screening program was expanded to screen for 17 different conditions in all babies born in the province. The program includes testing to detect cystic fibrosis, making Alberta the first province in Canada to include routine screening for this serious condition. While metabolic disorders are uncommon, treatment of these conditions within the first few days of life improves a child's chances for normal development.

Alberta is recognized for having an outstanding newborn screening program. Each year about 42,000 babies born in Alberta receive a newborn metabolic screening. The screening program is a perfect example of the teamwork and collaboration that operates within Alberta's health care system. The decision to expand the program was the result of a thorough review of the scientific evidence and best practices in other jurisdictions as well as input from many clinical experts, physicians, and regional health authorities.

1:10

Congratulations to all those who played a part in creating the expanded screening program and to Alberta Health and Wellness for its ongoing leadership on this initiative. I'd also like to recognize the many partners who make the screening possible each day. These people include the health authority staff who collect the samples from babies, staff in the Capital health newborn metabolic and molecular diagnostic laboratories who test and analyze the samples, as well as the many specialists and clinical staff who provide care to

the children and their families. The newborn metabolic screening program is just one way that Alberta is helping to give every child a healthy start in life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta Order of Excellence Inductees

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to recognize some outstanding Albertans who will soon be invested with the Alberta Order of Excellence. This year will see seven people added to the ranks of those who have served our province with distinction. Six of the recipients are Evelyn Buckley, Chief Victor Buffalo, Donald Laubman, Gary McPherson, Douglas Mitchell, and Patrick Nixon. I'm proud to say that the seventh, Dr. David Leonard, is one of ours; that is, he's an employee of the Alberta government.

Dr. Leonard is an archivist and historian who has helped to preserve and share the stories of our past. He currently works as a historian in the Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture department. Dr. Leonard began his career with the Provincial Archives in 1969 after completing degrees at the University of Alberta and earning a PhD from the University of Sheffield in England. After stints with other organizations Dr. Leonard returned to the government in 1981 and has never looked back. He has been busy over those years. At one point he was the provincial archivist. He has written eight books about the history of the Peace region.

If you ever have the opportunity to hear a presentation by Dr. Leonard, don't miss it. His knowledge and presentations are fascinating. With this recognition Dr. Leonard joins a very elite group of Albertans as he is only the third historian to be given this honour. Dr. Leonard's contributions will stand the test of time, as will the contributions of all the inductees.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of the House to join me in congratulating the seven Albertans who will be invested with the Alberta Order of Excellence in 2007.

Thank you.

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

Mini World Cup of Soccer

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently in the city of Edmonton a truly unique event was played out that brought together 32 nations in order to participate in and celebrate the beautiful game of soccer. This event, the Mini World Cup, was played in Edmonton's southside soccer centre from March 31 to April 14, and from the opening ceremonies to the final game there was a full house.

The unique feature of soccer is that it is truly an international game that serves to bring together cultures for the love of the game. This event showed the amazing cultural diversity that Edmonton has and how all these cultures can come together and celebrate with joy and passion their common interest: the beauty that is soccer.

The women's final saw an amazing game between Poland and Italy that ultimately was won by Poland 5 to 4 in a shootout. Our congratulations to these teams as well as to Canada for their victory over Scotland in the bronze medal game. In the men's draw the final saw Scotland prevail over Serbia 5 to 1 in a game that was played in front of a packed house, and these two teams did not disappoint. It was truly a game to remember. We would like to congratulate both teams on their gold and silver performances and India as well in winning the bronze after a thrilling 3 to 1 win over Croatia.

With this tournament we have solidified what is Edmonton and all of Alberta, a truly multicultural society that is just as proud of our traditional heritage as we are of being Canadian. Whether it's the Chileans singing songs at the top of their lungs, the Nigerians banging on drums as their team displayed explosive skill, or

Northern Ireland and their rallying cry of “No surrender,” the passion was remarkable and the comradery an example to us all of how everyone can live and play together in harmony.

Mr. Speaker, my congratulations to the Edmonton and District Soccer Association for putting on yet another amazing Mini World Cup tournament.

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

SAIT Women's and Men's Hockey Teams

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to recognize the SAIT men's and women's hockey collegiate ACAC champions for 2007. The SAIT men's hockey team defeated their northern rivals, the NAIT Ooks, to take home the ACAC crown on home ice at the SAIT arena. Both teams traded road victories in games 1 and 2 in the best of 5 ACAC finals two weekends ago, and the women's hockey team became the first Trojan squad to repeat as ACAC champions since the mid-1990s.

The men's hockey team was coached by Ken Babey, assistant coaches Jim McLean and Lyle Hamm. The players: Cale Jordison, David Simoes, Aaron Roberge, Michael Ewanchuk, Adam Knight, Marcus Wiebe, Chad Chapman, Brett Yeo, Clayton Bastura, Mike Bulawka, Blair Gray, Cam Doull, Dallas Costanzo, TJ Babey, Kyle McEwen, Kyle Gladue, Steve Stroschin, Patrick McGillicky, Tyler Milford, Jonathan Leinweber, Chad Betts, Bryn Gagnon, Darren Zurkan, Reese St. Goddard, and Jordan Ramstead.

The women players: Kierra Minto, Kristin Miyauchi, Jasmin Sutherland, Nicole Hunter, Michelle Glendinning, Tonya Faasse, Sheena Smigelski, Nicki Robinson, Chilla Fedoruk, Andy Dow, Kelsey Shmyr, Carolyn Bowen, Michela Gellert, Jaime Teichman, Amanda Gushue, and Natalie Gerstmar.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

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

Anniversary of Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty-five years ago today on April 17, 1982, the human rights of Canadians were enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and added to the Canadian Constitution. While human rights were recognized previously, notably by the universal declaration of human rights in 1948, one of the drafters being a Canadian, John Humphrey, and by the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960, the ratification of the Charter in 1982 was a significant step forward in the history of human rights.

The Charter has huge significance for provincial Legislatures, enshrining in law the protection of the rights and freedoms of every Canadian and limiting the ability of governments to pass laws or pass legislation which discriminates or infringes on human rights. The Charter provides a measuring rod, a touchstone, a baseline for human rights in Canada. It applies to all governments and protects fundamental freedoms such as freedom of conscience and religion and freedom of the press, Canada's multicultural heritage, aboriginal rights, and so on. But I believe that section 15, which covers equality rights, is the most important of all. Section 15 enshrines the right to equal treatment before and under the law and to equal benefit and protection of the law “without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability” or other grounds such as sexual orientation.

The Charter is 25 years old. It is not written in stone. As the history of human rights evolves, our interpretations will change. The reality of the conflict of rights remains a huge challenge. For

me it is abhorrent that religious groups hide behind the freedom of religion to justify the exclusion of women or gays and lesbians.

There is more work to do in raising the awareness of human rights in Canada, but I agree with Mr. Ed Broadbent, who said in the House of Commons on November 20, 1981: I would like this resolution and particularly the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to hang on the wall of every classroom in every school in every region of Canada; I believe that constitutions are fundamentally about rights, rights are fundamentally about people, and people from childhood on must be encouraged to acquire a deep understanding of their own liberties as well as an even deeper appreciation of the liberties of others.

Mr. Speaker, as an Albertan, as a Canadian I am proud to recognize the 25th anniversary of the Charter. It is a beacon of light to all countries in the world that we respect our own rights and the rights and freedoms of other people.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Native Hockey Provincials

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 1954 the Alberta native hockey provincials have brought young aboriginal boys and girls of all ages together to display their ability and to compete for the top prize. Earlier this month the 2007 Alberta provincials were held right here in Edmonton for four days, and they were exciting times. I attended as many games as I could to witness the outstanding skills and sportsmanship that these youngsters possess. Oh, my, the skills they did demonstrate on and off the ice were remarkable. There were an impressive 146 teams participating in this tournament.

Every year these native hockey provincials have grown in numbers and popularity. In fact, some of my First Nations and Métis communities were represented at this year's event. One of those communities is Gift Lake Métis settlement, some 400 kilometres north of Edmonton.

1:20

The Gift Lake peewee girls never lost a game in the round robin playoffs and, as a result, won the coveted gold medal. For your outstanding performances special congratulations to Mikayla Laderoute, Stéphanie Cunningham, Larissa Cunningham, Elisha Lamouche, Elisha Cunningham, Ashley Laderoute, Kendra Rosychuk, Hayley Laughlin, Brianna Auger, Danielle Letendre, and Jaylee Wolfe.

But, Mr. Speaker, the Gift Lake midget boys won gold against the Fort McMurray all-star team in the A division in an overtime shootout, just like the NHL. To you Kirby Halcrow, Hector Jr. Lamouche, Micheal Lamouche, Dean Nahachick, Lenny L'Hirondelle, Ira Gladue, Kelsey Lamouche, Theron Gaudette, Alden Tallman, Sheldon Johnson, Wapan Johnson, you've done us proud.

I'd ask this Assembly to help me congratulate these exceptional athletes.

head:

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 11

Telecommunications Act Repeal Act

Mr. Dunford: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce the Telecommunications Act Repeal Act.

The Telecommunications Act was proclaimed in 1988 to regulate the operation of two public organizations, Alberta Government Telephones and Edmonton Telephones. Neither of these organizations exist as corporate entities any longer.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 11 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Bill 31 Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise to introduce first reading of Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007.

Amendments to the Mental Health Act will amend the criteria for involuntary admission to designated facilities to allow earlier intervention, provide a legislative framework to implement community treatment orders in Alberta, and require that treatment recommendations be provided to patients' family doctors when patients are discharged from facilities.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will be supported by accompanying measures to enhance community-based mental health services that will help Albertans living with mental illness and their families to access early intervention services and enjoy full and productive lives.

I move first reading of Bill 31, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to request of the House that we move Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, a letter from Calgary-Varsity constituent Warren Brooke, who expresses concerns about the government's limited CO₂ intensity reductions and half-priced emission credits.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter from April 2, 2007, that I received from the EUB. This letter indicates that the hearing on the AltaLink Management's Edmonton-Calgary 500 kV line is to recommence April 16, 2007.

The second tabling I have today is a letter that I wrote on April 13, 2007, to the hon. Premier of Alberta. This is in regard to Bill 22. It

is requesting that the government caucus support an amendment to Bill 22 to mandate that the head office and principal place of business for the proposed Alberta investment corporation be the city of Edmonton, Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and table the required number of copies of just something, a little something, we found lying around collecting dust. It's called A Housing Symposium: Affordable Housing for Albertans, final report, released by Alberta Municipal Affairs, dated November 1998.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton-Beverly-Highlands.

Mr. Martin: Beverly-Clareview?

Mr. Mason: Which one of us would you like, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview first.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I think. I have two documents to table today. The first is a heartfelt letter from Trevor Allan that was sent to the Premier and the minister of municipal affairs. Mr. Allan is an Edmontonian who experienced a \$300 rent increase in just over a year. He is among the many Albertans calling for rent guidelines.

The second document I have is a notice that was recently sent to residents of the Burlington Arms apartment complex in my riding. These residents are among the thousands of Albertans who are being negatively affected by condo conversions.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document which I referred to yesterday during question period. It's an excerpt from a report to Edmonton city council's Community Services Committee. The report shows a sharp rise in ambulance wait times as well as system alerts and red alerts in the Capital health region.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to table some documents coming out of the Gambling Research Conference 2007, attended by a representative of the independent member's office.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today I am tabling with the Assembly the annual report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for the period April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006, and the financial report of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner as at March 31, 2006.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today the requisite number of copies of the answers to written questions 5,

6, 7, and 8, which were accepted yesterday in this House. Copies of those answers have been delivered to the hon. member.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Openness and Transparency in Government

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The patronage contracts this government signed with defeated Tory MLA Bob Maskell were not adequately monitored. That much is clear. Tens of thousands of dollars were paid out based on completely inadequate billing information. Yesterday the Premier promised to conduct an internal audit of the billings and to make that information public. Taxpayers and Alberta Liberals are skeptical. My question is to the Premier. The government spends millions upon millions of public dollars on contracts every year. If the internal audit body of this government is truly effective, why do departments not have the systems in place to prevent this kind of abuse, or are there two sets of rules, depending on who gets the contracts?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House I said that all of the billing that was done by the person in question will be reviewed by a system we have in place, and that's an internal audit system. What will come out of that internal audit I said would be made public. If there are other rules, guidelines that may be implemented as a result of it, maybe more checks and balances, we'll certainly work with the internal auditor and also with the Auditor General to make sure that we keep always improving the checks and balances that we have in government.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, this PC government has a very serious problem with patronage. The problem is rooted so deeply in the culture of this government that its Internal Audit Committee, the one that is supposed to provide independent, objective audit advice, continues to have, according to this government's website less than an hour ago, a PC Party vice-president sitting on the audit committee. To the Premier: can the Premier explain to Albertans why they should have any confidence whatsoever in an audit of patronage contracts when the committee overseeing the audit has a VP of the PC Party on it?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the opposition is not understanding the process in place. We're talking about an internal audit. This will be done by staff of the government of Alberta to ensure that the processes were followed, and I said that then it'll be coming forward in terms of any recommendations and also working with the Auditor General.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The international standards for professional practice of auditing require that "internal auditors should have an impartial, unbiased attitude and avoid conflicts of interest." In Ottawa internal audits are overseen by a committee with a majority of members from outside government. In Alberta, as usual, standards of accountability are shockingly and irresponsibly low. Albertans deserve a direct answer on this. To the Premier: will the Premier remove the Tory party vice-president from the Internal Audit Committee and create a truly independent, nonpartisan audit organization that meets basic professional standards?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, he's confusing the two audit committees. But, you know, when you go across the country, constantly you hear that the province of Alberta has the best set of books, the best reporting mechanism to its taxpayers, and the best controls and measures. If there is further improvement, we're again going to take a leadership role and improve on what we have already accomplished as the government of Alberta.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Industrial Development in Alberta's Heartland Area

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the city of Edmonton applied for intervenor status with the EUB in the application of a major upgrader north of Edmonton due to concerns over water and air quality. This move demonstrates just how many holes there are in this government's regional planning when they proceed full tilt on projects without pausing to examine the full impacts on health and the environment. What remains to be seen is whether the province will turn its back on Edmonton's concerns just as it did when Fort McMurray intervened in a project last summer. To the Premier: will this government respond to the city of Edmonton's concerns and conduct a full cumulative impact assessment to determine how this proposed upgrader would impact the air and water quality of residents in the region?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is a very good process in place allowing the municipalities to comment, bring forward submissions on proposed development not only in their own municipality but, of course, in adjoining municipalities. There is considerably more information with respect to this proposed development, and the Minister of Energy can answer that later.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to any development in the province of Alberta and most certainly with the ones that we're looking at in the heartland area, there will be full – there will be full – impact assessments taken into consideration at the time that the EUB has an opportunity to deal with the application.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The key word is "cumulative." Again to the Premier: will this government conduct comprehensive, independent scientific analysis of the cumulative effects on the river and air of the numerous upgraders proposed in Sturgeon and Strathcona counties?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to constantly improving the environment, securing a better environment for the next generation. It's one of the many considerations we have, not only air quality, water. You know, notwithstanding the comments from across the way, even the leader of the Green Party commented and praised the Alberta government on its leadership role in terms of protection of the environment.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's try this a different way. The proposed projects in Upgrader Alley will require a massive draw on the North Saskatchewan River. It's critical that the government ensure that the same situation that occurred in the South Saskatchewan River basin, where there's no water left for future licences, does

not occur in the Edmonton region. Water is our lifeblood, and we have to manage it carefully to support future growth. To the Premier: will the Premier assure all Albertans that the industrial activity being planned in Upgrader Alley will not jeopardize the health of the North Saskatchewan River?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again there's a considerable amount of misinformation in the preamble. The Minister of Environment will give the correct information.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make two points. First of all, applications are currently under review under both the Water Act and the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. A thorough review is taking place as we speak. My understanding is that the request under the application is for about .1 of 1 per cent of the total stream flow in the North Saskatchewan River. That being said, I have been very public in recent times talking about the need for a cumulative impact assessment and have committed to . . .

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we thought that sometime this week we might get a look at the report of the Affordable Housing Task Force, but this morning the Tory caucus debated or fought about the recommendations from the task force behind closed doors, with no one ever having seen the recommendations in the first place, and now apparently the minister says that we won't be seeing them this week. However, information has surfaced that one of the main points of contention dividing the Tory caucus is the issue of temporary regulation of rental increases. To the Premier: does the Premier accept the fact that right now, given the serious crisis in housing right across this province, his government needs to show true leadership and enact a temporary limit on rent increases?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government is showing leadership. We initiated a very thorough review of the critical shortage of housing in the province, the first time that we had, of course, all-party participation. Both parties were represented on the committee. We didn't meet this morning as a caucus. In fact, the meeting was last night. It was a long meeting. There were a number of issues discussed, and we're working towards resolution of the many recommendations that came forward in the report.

Mr. Taylor: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the first time the thing hit a bump in the road they all ran for cover.

I've been travelling. I was in Grande Prairie last week. I was in Drumheller yesterday. I've been talking to people all over this province about the fact that people cannot afford a place to live in this province, and it's placing a serious strain on them and their families. Mr. Speaker, everybody needs a home. Will this Premier call for a temporary moratorium on condominium conversions instead of just increasing the length of eviction notices if a landlord is converting a rental unit to a condo? Either way the person is still being kicked out.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, we are taking a leadership role in this whole critical area. I've heard personally from many Albertans in terms of suggestions, in terms of what government may do, again, in partnership with the federal government, with municipal governments, and, of course, with the private

sector. This is an issue related to phenomenal growth, and in spite of the many issues that we face as the province of Alberta, many, many Canadians insist on moving to this province because this is where the job creation is and their opportunity to raise their family and retire here in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And those people are going back home when they can't find a place to live. They're going back home to Saskatchewan and other provinces.

You know, all Albertans are affected by this housing crisis, and they're placing great faith in this government to actually show some leadership, which involves action, and accept the recommendations in the task force report. You know, the thing that I tabled earlier today called A Housing Symposium: Affordable Housing for Albertans was the result of a symposium to address the then pressing need for more affordable housing for families, chaired by the minister for municipal affairs nine years ago. Why should Albertans expect this Premier, this government, to act now when they were told the exact same thing nine years ago and nothing happened, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the information provided is wrong, but I'll have the minister of municipal affairs inform all Albertans what this government has done to date with respect to housing.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that our ministry and our government is moving forward on recommendations and responses to the housing task force. I want to reiterate some of the work that our ministry and the government is doing in support of shelters: \$23 million in support of the homeless, three plus . . .

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

1:40

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] It's time to protect Albertans from the fallout of this economic explosion. Rent increases are putting Albertans at risk of losing their homes . . . [interjection] I'm gonna choke that guy.

. . . and keeping other Canadians from coming here to work. There's a simple solution in the affordable task force report: one rent increase a year capped at the consumer price index plus 2 per cent. My question is to the Premier. Now that the task force report is public, at least for some people, will you quit the song and dance and bring in rent stability guidelines today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, for the record, when he said, "I'm gonna choke that guy," he wasn't pointing to me; he was pointing to someone else. So thank you for that.

With respect to the housing report, as I said, we're putting it through the process. This will be part, of course, of the budget announcement. It is important from two points of view. It's a social issue because people are looking for places to live, the homeless and the working poor, but it's also an issue for those that are trying to attract more people to the province of Alberta to fill the many job vacancies we have. Certainly, in order to attract more people to Alberta, we need more availability of housing for those coming to the province.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta New Democrats have been putting forward this idea; now the minister's task force has put forward the idea of rent review guidelines. Even the Liberal caucus is on board. Now, will the Premier do the right thing for the people of Alberta who are being kicked out of their homes because they can't afford their rent and bring in rent guidelines today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I've always said that our government caucus has opportunity for a complete dialogue and discussion of the many issues that come forward. It is going through the process. We understand the many pressures on housing. As I said before, it has a twofold purpose: one, from the social aspect and the other, to attract more people to the province of Alberta to fill the many job vacancies. We're working very hard. As I said, there'll be Thursday's budget announcements and other news to follow.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the task force on housing made the recommendations a month ago. Surely that has given the government enough time to respond. We need solutions, Mr. Premier, not delusions. That, I'm afraid, is what we're really going to see from this government. So will the Premier stand up and take clear action on behalf of renters and show that this government is actually on the side of the people and not on the side of the big landlords?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I take pride in the fact that this government is committed to improving the quality of life for all Albertans. That's an important priority for the government, and we'll keep working on that very diligently. As I said before, the report itself was an all-party committee, and I know that various members of the opposition have had that report for a considerable amount of time. This is part of the openness and transparency of the government to ensure that we involve both sides of the House in the critical discussion of issues that involve all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government has recently declared a forest health emergency because of the mountain pine beetles. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: how much did the pine beetle situation change or worsen during the last winter?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the order in council declaring a forest health emergency is a procedural requirement that's necessary in the future to access funding from the sustainability fund. Of course, in the budget that'll be tabled on Thursday I've requested core funding for these types of operations. Depending upon what our surveys show in June, if the infestation is as serious as we believe it is, then our ministry will be eligible to qualify for the additional emergency funding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: how will this emergency funding be directed against the pine beetles?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, if our estimates from last fall are accurate and the pine beetle infestation is as serious as we think it is, we're estimating that the numbers have increased from 20,000 to 30,000 infected trees up to 2 million to 3 million. If those estimates prove correct, then we have a real battle on our hands. We're preparing both our core funding and, if necessary, the emergency funding to mount operations to identify and remove infected individual trees and also infected stands.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: how is Alberta co-operating with British Columbia to ensure that we have the benefit of their experience with the pine beetle problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. British Columbia has had a great deal of experience with this problem. It's very unfortunate. They're estimating that they're going to have lost 90 per cent of their lodgepole pine by 2012, 2013. Fortunately, they're working very closely with us. We have several different consultative mechanisms. Our forestry people are working with their forestry people. We're also working with the national Forest Service and Parks Canada. I'm happy to report that at the joint B.C./Alberta cabinet meetings next month, I'll be discussing this with my B.C. counterpart.

Thank you.

Mr. Bonko: In 2005 the Alberta Liberals raised the issue of funding to deal with the mountain pine beetle with the then Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. We knew then that the money to deal with the beetle was insufficient. They failed to plan adequately to address the pine beetle for the future. Now we see the results of that failure. Alberta's front-line Canadian beetle-free forest is at threat, and emergency funding is required. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: does he accept that the government has not been proactive enough in recent years when dealing with the mountain pine beetle?

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see that the Liberals are at least talking about responsible government instead of government by the judges and the judiciary, like one of their members was talking about before. I'm sure the next thing we'll hear from that side is that the Charter of Rights protects the pine beetle.

Mr. Speaker, my predecessor twice last year requested additional funding, supplementary funding to deal with this emergency. I know that members on the other side would like to see an omnipotent government that can solve all the problems of the world. We deal with problems as they arise.

Mr. Bonko: Parks Canada has recognized the need to harness and control the pine beetle. They know that the pine beetle has two natural enemies: extreme cold and fire. We can't rely on the cold anymore, so Parks Canada has turned to the other natural source. They're using large-scale burns to rejuvenate the forests and to slow down the pine beetle. So to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: will he accept that Alberta should be using a natural approach when holding and dealing with the pine beetle?

Some Hon. Members: Firewall. Firewall.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I am very gratified to see that the members on the other side have finally understood the wisdom of the firewall. Of course, as usual, they've confused things. The firewall is to protect us from Ottawa. It is not to protect us from the pine beetle.

I would just point out what probably every schoolchild knows: responsible forestry leaves buffer zones, riparian zones, wildlife habitat; forest fires take everything. There's nothing worse for the environment, nothing worse for the forests than forest fires.

Mr. Bonko: The minister said that the government's healthy forest initiative will work to make forests healthier through selective harvesting. We don't have the luxury of decades to change our forests, Mr. Minister. How is this minister expecting this measure to take effect in time to offer real solutions for the spread of the pine beetle? Shouldn't the government have been working on this in previous years?

Dr. Morton: Again, the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, assume that governments can foresee the future. It's lucky that they're over there and not exercising the levers of power on this side. We are taking responsible action to deal with this issue as it unfolds. We're not going to hit the panic button the way the hon. member opposite is asking us to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

1:50

Oil Sands Development

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy is firing on every cylinder possible, and those cylinders are evident throughout Alberta. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that managing growth pressures in this red-hot economy is one of our government's top priorities. For example, the rapid pace of oil sands development is one very important area that must be addressed. My questions are to the President of the Treasury Board. Given the recently released Radke report, which is formally called Investing in Our Future, responding to the needs of high-growth areas, what is this minister doing in response to the 30 recommendations contained in that report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report did identify several areas where there may be gaps in the delivery of our service, whether it be health care, education, infrastructure, housing. All of those departments have had access to the report and are putting together their department's response to the plan. That should appear in our budget in the out years.

One of the recommendations, though, Mr. Speaker, was the development of an oil sands secretariat that would co-ordinate the approach to solving the problem so that we would ensure that the money that we're spending to target this high-growth area would be co-ordinated and would be well used.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, some of those high-growth areas include Edmonton, which obviously reaps a tremendous amount of economic activity as a result of what's going on, economically speaking, in Fort McMurray and, specifically, the oil sands investments there, which top about \$75 billion. So we're grateful for that. However, one of the ideas calls for an oil sands secretariat that ought to be created, and I'd like to know when that particular secretariat will be up and running. Is the minister acting on it with expediency?

Mr. Snelgrove: I think it would be fair to point out that not only Edmonton benefits from the McMurray oil sands growth, but indeed all of Canada benefits greatly from it. So it truly is the engine that's actually driving it.

The oil sands secretariat has been put together, and at this time we are searching for an individual that would head the secretariat. We are no different than any other corporate entity, Mr. Speaker. It's very difficult to find people that may be able to do the job. We're hoping to have the individual in place no later than the end of May, but at this point we are not waiting for them. The departments all are working at bringing forward their business plans and budgets to address the situation.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, my final question is simply this: what will this minister do to ensure that this secretariat, once it is up and running, results in a more timely and a more seamless approach regarding oil sands development so that the concerns of businesses and contractors and local communities can be addressed?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, to start, Mr. Speaker, I'll be going to Fort McMurray next week to meet with the local business groups and representatives and the mayor. It's also obvious in this government that it's in everyone's best interest to make sure that the development in Fort McMurray is done in a timely and orderly manner. With the Premier and this government's acceptance of the five priorities, one of which is managing growth pressure, I can assure you that the situation in Fort McMurray and the oil sands secretariat will have my fullest attention.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Grande Prairie Land Sale

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The value of a project should be assessed on a variety of legitimate categories, including economic viability, need, and growth concerns, rather than its Tory connectedness. There's no question about the value to the agricultural and manufacturing community of having a container port built at the crossroads of highways 43 and 2 in Grande Prairie county, for which land valued at over \$2 million was given to the county for just \$1. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Can the minister assure Albertans that former MLA Walter Paszkowski, who is now the land manager for the county, did not receive preferential treatment with this dollar deal?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as far as I know, we haven't given any land away to anyone other than a municipality on any dollar deals or to our own. So I would definitely have to look into that, but I would say that no one benefited because they were affiliated with the PC Party.

Mr. Chase: It's about time this minister did his homework.

The city of Grande Prairie, just a stone's throw from the four corners terminal, is bursting at its infrastructure seams, badly in need of schools, a hospital, a new highway bypass, and affordable housing. Can the city expect in the very near future to receive much-needed land from the province for a dollar?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, if we have things that the city needs and it's surplus to us, we will make a good deal with the city of Grande Prairie.

Mr. Chase: That's wonderful. Grande Prairians, start celebrating. Your minister is with you.

Does the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation have a set of guidelines, categories, requirements, or rules that a community must meet to receive land for a dollar, or is the process completely at the whim of the current minister, the third person to hold this position in a year?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we have processes for everything we do, and it is not at the whim of this minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Large Agricultural Operations near Waterways

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The proposal for a large dairy farm in the Calmar/Devon area is now before the Natural Resources Conservation Board. Many residents have objected to the farm, but it is still being considered by the NRCB. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who is responsible for the NRCB. Why doesn't the NRCB recognize that the local residents are against having an expanded farm at this location and not allow it to be developed?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the Natural Resources Conservation Board is an independent regulatory agency, which means that it operates at arm's length from the government, which precludes any sort of interference on the part of not just the minister responsible but also any member of the government. The approval process that regulates a dairy farm like this is set out under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act, which is legislation that falls under Alberta Agriculture and Food. As I understand it, there was an opportunity for people that were opposed to this proposed development to speak to the NRCB.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. There have been a number of concerns from residents about this farm causing health and environmental problems. Given that yesterday I tabled a petition asking for a one-mile buffer zone from major water courses for such proposals, will these issues be addressed through the NRCB review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am confident that those concerns will be addressed. As I mentioned already, the NRCB listens to all sides involved in these types of concerns. Water issues are addressed, and there are actual specific requirements for setbacks from water. So as this hearing unfolds, I fully expect that the proper decision will be made. But the key thing to emphasize is that the decision is made according to the rules, the criteria that are set out in the Agricultural Operation Practices Act. It's a rule-driven decision-making process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In that case, my second supplemental is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Since local residents are frequently opposed to these factory farms, is there not a need to review how the Agricultural Operation Practices Act is operating?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to making sure that the legislation is fair to communities, industry, and the environment. Alberta did an extensive review of this act, of the NRCB, and relevant regulations. Changes to the regulations went into effect as of October 1, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, this particular application is currently under review, as the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development said, and we certainly need to let due process run its course on this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Workplace Health and Safety

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 28 Albertans will gather to remember workers who have been injured or killed on the job. In 2006 124 Albertans died as a result of workplace injuries or disease, a rate of almost two and a half deaths a week. Alberta workers experience about 14 per cent of all work-related deaths in Canada, even though Alberta has only 10 per cent of the population. My questions are to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Has the minister examined why Alberta workers suffer a higher rate of work-related fatalities than would be predicted by our population?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does ask a very good question. When we come back to the House, reconvene after the week's break, we plan to have, as we have in the past, some time for recognition of the workers that we have lost. Recently our analysis of statistical information that we collect includes those occupation-related diseases that have added to the numbers of people that have been lost.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I have raised the issue not only in discussions that we've had within the department but with all of the major-sector industries, that we have met and talked about some of the programming that they are bringing forward for safety first. It is not only deaths that we are concerned about. It is injuries on the job. It is issues when the rookie worker has difficulty.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of the 124 individuals who suffered work-related deaths, 10 were under the age of 30. Workers under the age of 25 are 33 per cent more likely to be injured on the job than older workers. Even one death of a young person in the workplace is unacceptable. I think all parents in this province are concerned when their young people go north to work in the oil patch. My question is to the same minister. What specific steps has this government taken to ensure that Alberta's young workers are safe on the job?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we've actually had a number of programs. In September of last year there was a program introduced in the schools so that workers who might be into casual employment or part-time employment would have the benefit of that type of knowledge. We have added to our training programs through the various building and educating tomorrow's workforce programs, so we're doing that with employers on the job. We have very special counsellors, that make sure that these programs are being adhered to. When we talk about the initiatives this coming year, I think there

will be some very obvious changes in the way we are working on evaluating the occupational health and safety of part-time employees.

Dr. B. Miller: When questioned recently in the Legislature by the Liberal opposition about providing funding to help employers develop better safety practices for farm workers, the Premier said, "Why should we be funding common sense?" To the same minister: is it the minister's and this government's position that common sense is all that is needed to protect Alberta's workers from harm?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the interesting conversations I've had since I've been in this ministry is with Dr. Louis Hugo Francescutti, who said that many of the things that protect people are the things they learn from the time they are born until they are six years of age. In fact, the very best way to job-proof our workers is to teach them properly from the home. In many respects people would call that common sense, or common sense as tutored within the home. So, obviously, there are a variety of things, very many complex issues that can be taught right from the start at the home and later on as they are trained by employers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Affordable Housing (continued)

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that Albertans know about the recommendations in the Affordable Housing Task Force report, I guess it's time for the government to act. Hope springs eternal. We are in a crisis situation. My office is getting calls every day. We have people walking in that are very concerned. The time is now to act. I want to talk specifically about condo conversions. We notice that over 1,000 rental units were converted to condos in Calgary last year. At the same time, they're not building affordable housing. My question is to the minister. When is this government going to take off its philosophical blinders and act decisively to place an immediate temporary moratorium on conversions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that we are continuing to build affordable housing on a continuing basis and also that we do view and see the challenges of the conversion of rental units to condos. We are looking at some of the areas of the report that we need to address. We are doing that as a government.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the point that we're trying to make here is that there are thousands of people right now that are facing a lot of stress with these rental increases and condo conversions. They can't wait while you study it. They can't wait for the slow pace of the affordable housing that's going up. We need action now. My question is again to the minister. If he can't announce it today, when are we going to know when they're going to put a stop to condo conversions? Give us a time.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we are going to give the opposition and the third party and the residents of Alberta the answers when we have finished the discussion and looking at a positive direction for trying to address the growth pressures in Alberta.

Mr. Martin: The fact that you're behind closed doors having a discussion is not much solace to the thousands of people that are facing pressure, Mr. Speaker. My question to this minister is simply: doesn't he recognize that the longer they wait, the worse the crisis is? People want action right now. I again say to the minister: when are we going to get action and some movement on rent guidelines and condo conversions?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, this is a complex issue, and it cannot be solved overnight. I'm very happy that the member from the third party recognizes that we are meeting as a caucus, as a government, to try to find solutions for the growth pressures that we're having now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Litigation against Firefighters

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton and Calgary firefighters advise me that insurance companies have developed a new trend, where they or property owners under the advisement of insurance companies now sue firefighters or fire departments in cases where despite their best effort firefighters were unable to extinguish a fire or save the property. This practice insults the professionalism of our firefighters, drives them into lengthy and costly litigation, and allows insurance companies to download their costs onto taxpayers. My first question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: is the minister aware of the fact that several Alberta municipalities and fire departments are now facing litigation for several million dollars each, which simply is aimed at diminishing insurance companies' liability and results in downloading costs to taxpayers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. The ministry is aware that there are significant issues that have taken place in this regard. I want to say that our Fire Services Advisory Committee is right now at work trying to find the solutions and will make a recommendation to our ministry later this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. In Saskatchewan and Quebec their respective municipal government acts have been amended, preventing litigation where no gross negligence took place. Will the minister amend Alberta's MGA now to do the same?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, our firefighters are protected under section 535(2) of the Municipal Government Act. That is the protection of municipal employees, which paid firefighters and voluntary firefighters fall under.

Mr. Lukaszuk: In that case, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: are Alberta's volunteer fire departments protected from such litigation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, they are. They do fall under the same category, under 535(2) of the act. The voluntary and the paid firefighters are under the same legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Electricity Transmission Regulation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why is this government making the Energy and Utilities Board a docile servant of the Independent System Operator when you passed this regulation to reform the transmission system last week?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there would have to be some, again, misunderstanding with respect to the hon. member across the way. There's nothing in the new transmission regulation that makes EUB subservient to any other board or entity that operates within that system. As you know, we're also bringing in legislation to deal with a situation where the EUB will have a separation, and we'll end up with two separate boards that deal with these issues.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: why does the EUB, then, in the regulation have to explain its actions, and the Independent System Operator does not?

2:10

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would depend, I suppose, on which actions it was that we're discussing. But there is nothing in the old transmission regulation or the new transmission regulation that makes the EUB subservient in any way to the AISO.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the same minister: did you read the entire transmission regulation before you recommended it to the cabinet? Yes or no?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, yes, I did, a number of times.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Safety at Postsecondary Institutions

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members of this Assembly and people around the world are well aware that yesterday a terrible tragedy occurred at Virginia Tech. A student attending that institution shot 32 people and then turned the gun on himself. My heart goes out to our American friends, and our constituents have concerns here at home as well. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Can you please clarify what your department is doing to ensure the safety of staff and students at postsecondary campuses across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were all horrified by this incident, and our condolences go to the loved ones of the victims and, indeed, everyone affected by this senseless violence, as your prayer indicated this afternoon. I think I speak for everyone in the House when I say that it's unfathomable to imagine the grief of these parents. Our government's first priority is to ensure the safety of students. The government is committed to ensuring safe and secure

communities for all Albertans. In Alberta each postsecondary institution is responsible for the security on campus, and under the legislation they're expected to have operational measures but also, within that, security measures, and they do. They work very closely with their local police departments and, in fact, have had exercises in that regard.

Mr. Rodney: A supplemental for the same minister: I just wonder if you have any more points of clarification specifically with respect to Edmonton, Calgary, and/or smaller centres.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, both in Edmonton and Calgary the postsecondary institutions in the two large cities work very closely with the local police forces to the extent of having keys available for buildings, diagrams. The response times in Calgary through training and exercises: they have gotten that down to under four minutes for a tactical team response. I think all of the postsecondaries in the province are certainly taking a very serious relook at the plans they have in place. The important thing is that we do have plans in place, we do have security, and it is a safe and secure environment for our students to learn and thrive.

Mr. Rodney: My final question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Are there any plans, Mr. Minister, to arm members of campus security?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly have no plans to arm campus security at this point in time. Providing campus security with side arms is not a simple matter. The potential use of deadly force associated with handguns is a very complex issue with significant related implications. Campus security would require extensive firearms training, training in emergency and rapid response situations, as well as their annual recertification. I want to emphasize that police throughout our province have a strong working relationship with postsecondary institutions to ensure that our students can learn in a safe and secure environment.

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

Timberland Investment Loss

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Finance minister provided a written response to questions that I've been asking about \$7 million that were given up in supplementary supply. The money was used to address investment losses in a number of pension and endowment funds. The response states that following a \$170 million purchase of the timberland asset class, there was an \$11 million loss that occurred due to, and I quote: an inadvertent several-month delay in hedging the related exposure to the Canada/U.S. dollar exchange. My questions are for the Minister of Finance. What organizational changes were made or which controls were strengthened to ensure that this \$11 million mistake does not happen again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's actually legislation before this House at this present time, that will be

discussed later on this afternoon, that shows some of those controls. Timberland was an experience where an individual did make a mistake. It was something that cost us dollars. The fund was not hedged when it should have been hedged, and quite simply we are putting in place in Bill 22 legislative regulations to ensure that this doesn't happen again.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like somebody had a bad day at the office.

I find the minister's response interesting because in his written response he actually indicated that the bill that's before the House this afternoon, Bill 22, and this particular situation were not related. So it's an interesting response from the minister.

My question, also for the minister, is this: exactly who made the \$11 million boo-boo? Was it an individual, a fund management team, outside advisors? Who made the \$11 million mistake?

Dr. Oberg: First of all, Mr. Speaker, we should not be talking about personal issues such as what occurred with timberland. It was an individual within my department. It was someone who should have known better, in fairness. It was someone who didn't, and subsequently we as taxpayers have had to pick it up. It is something that has been a considerable issue. There's been a huge amount of discussion about this. That's one of the reasons why in AIMCO there are regulations and legislation to ensure that this doesn't happen again. We cannot have these kinds of mistakes happen again with someone who knew better.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Then the obvious question is: what reprimands or actions were taken against this individual as a response to the \$11 million mistake that was made?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been a full investigation of this particular individual. The incident has been looked at, and we are currently reviewing the recommendations. It has been fully looked at. A mistake was made, and I think we have to recognize that.

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

Climate Change Consultation

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our planet is warming at a faster pace than at any other time in recorded history. In 2002 Alberta implemented a climate change action plan for education and research. In 2007 Alberta introduced the first legislation in Canada for regulating greenhouse gas emissions. Steps are now being taken to give Albertans an opportunity to address future plans for climate change in Alberta. Last week I attended the government of Alberta's public consultation meeting on climate change in Alberta with the Minister of Environment and the MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka. The people who attended were very passionate and wanted to make sure that the government's final plan will reflect their concerns. To the Minister of Environment: can the minister assure Albertans that this is more than a paper exercise, and their opinions and concerns will be taken . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I can most definitely assure the member and her constituents that this public consultation process is taking place for very serious reasons because we are asking Albertans to provide us with important input on a go-forward basis on how we can update our climate change policy. Albertans are taking the process just as seriously as we are. We've had good representation at each of our meetings. I was in Fort McMurray last night, and I anticipate a good crowd at the meeting in Edmonton tomorrow night.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister. In Red Deer we've heard from Albertans with very diverse opinions about what they want in our new climate change plan. Does the minister anticipate that he will be able to address such a wide range of concerns in his final plan?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've indicated at every one of the meetings that I've attended that if everyone agreed with one another, this would be an exercise in futility. There would be no necessity to talk to Albertans. We expect there to be diversity brought forward, and at the end of the day I don't expect that everyone who has contributed to this report will necessarily agree with the final result. What I do hope that they will agree with is that they had an opportunity to participate in an inclusive process that recognized the diversity of their opinions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will the minister strike the balance between those who say that industries are the bad guys and need to pay versus those who are concerned that industries may leave the province if they become the focus for achieving greenhouse gas reductions?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's precisely the point. There are some who will choose to use this as some kind of a political process that will pit one against the other. Frankly, I don't buy that argument. I don't think it has to be either/or. I think we can have economic success and environmental stewardship, and that's really the outcome that I'm looking for at the end of the day from this process.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and answers.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

Amendments to Standing Orders

15. Mr. Hancock moved:

A. Be it resolved that the temporary amendments to the Standing Orders that were approved by the Assembly on March 12, 2007, be amended as follows:

1 Standing Order 3.1 is struck out, and the following is substituted:

3.1(1) The Assembly shall be called into session each year for a Spring Sitting commencing the first Monday of February, unless otherwise provided by order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and concluding the first Thursday in June.

(2) Unless otherwise ordered, the Assembly shall meet for a Fall Sitting each year commencing on the first

Monday in November and concluding on the first Thursday in December.

(3) The Assembly shall stand adjourned for a constituency week every 4th week during the Spring Sitting which, where possible, shall be aligned with school holidays or other holiday breaks, unless varied by a calendar agreed to by the House Leaders of the Government, Official Opposition and other recognized parties in consultation with Members not within a recognized party, which shall be filed with the Clerk on or before January 15 each year.

(4) If a Fall Sitting commences prior to the first Monday in November, the Assembly shall stand adjourned for a constituency week every 4th week.

(5) Nothing in this Standing Order precludes the Government from advising the Speaker that the public interest requires the Assembly to meet on a certain date, and the Speaker shall give notice that the Assembly shall meet at that time to transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that time.

(6) Nothing in this Standing Order precludes the Assembly from adjourning prior to the adjournment dates in suborders (1) and (2) if so ordered by the Assembly.

(7) Sitings may be extended beyond the adjournment dates in suborders (1) and (2) on passage of a Government Motion, which shall be decided without debate or amendment.

(8) The Government shall be called to provide the Assembly with a budget and estimates for the ensuing fiscal year on the 2nd Thursday in February unless, prior to the commencement of the Spring Sitting, the Government House Leader has provided to the Clerk notice of an alternate date, in which case the budget shall be provided to the Assembly on such date.

2 Standing Order 4 is amended

(a) by striking out suborder (2) and substituting the following:

(2) Notwithstanding suborder (1), evening sittings may be scheduled on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, or any combination thereof, upon passage of a Government Motion, which may be made on one day's notice and is subject to debate.

(b) by adding the following after suborder (2):

(2.1) Notwithstanding suborders (1), (2), (4) and (5), during the 2007 Spring Sitting, the Assembly shall meet for consideration of main estimates in Committee of Supply in the evening on the following dates and shall sit from 7 p.m. to 10:15 p.m.:

May 14 to 16, inclusive;

May 28 to 30, inclusive;

(c) in suborders (4) and (5) by striking out "7 p.m." and substituting "8 p.m.";

(d) by striking out suborder (6) and substituting the following:

(6) Notwithstanding suborders (4) and (5), on afternoons when there is an evening sitting of Committee of Supply, the Speaker or Chair, as the case may be, leaves the chair until 7 p.m.

(7) When the Committee of Supply meets during an evening sitting, the Committee shall rise and report at 10 p.m.

3 Standing Order 7 is amended by adding the following after suborder (1.1):

(1.2) If the items in the daily Routine are completed prior to 1:30 p.m., the Assembly shall proceed to Oral Question Period, and any matters outstanding shall be taken up prior to the calling of Orders of the Day.

4 Standing Order 8 is amended by adding the following after suborder (3):

(3.1) On Monday afternoon, if the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole, the Committee shall rise and report prior to 4:55 p.m.

5 Standing Order 34 is amended by striking out suborders (3) and (3.1) and substituting the following:

(3) The Government House Leader shall give the Assembly one day's notice of any Written Questions or Motions for Returns that are to be dealt with.

(3.1) On the Wednesday preceding the consideration of Written Questions and Motions for Returns, the Government House Leader may, by notice to the Clerk, indicate Written Questions and Motions for Returns that the Government will be accepting.

(3.2) The Clerk shall read the number, text and name of the sponsor of any Written Question or Motion for Returns of which notice of acceptance has been given pursuant to suborder (3.1) when this item of business is called.

6 Standing Order 53 is amended by renumbering it as Standing Order 53(1) and adding the following after suborder (1):

(2) The Government shall respond to a report of the Public Accounts Committee within 150 days of the date on which the Committee reports.

B. Be it further resolved that the following temporary amendments be made to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to give further effect to the March 7, 2007, House Leaders' Agreement:

1 Standing Order 8(7) is amended by striking out clause (c) and substituting the following:

(c) A Public Bill Other Than a Government Bill shall be called in Committee of the Whole within 8 sitting days of the day the Bill receives second reading unless the Bill has been referred to a Policy Field Committee, in which case the Bill shall be called within 8 sitting days of the day on which the Policy Field Committee reports.

2 Standing Order 32 is amended

(a) in suborder (3) by adding "Subject to suborder (3.1)," before "When a division is called";

(b) by adding the following after suborder (3):

(3.1) After the first division is called in Committee of Supply during the vote on the main estimates under Standing Order 59.04, the interval between division bells shall be reduced to one minute for any subsequent division.

3 The following is added after Standing Order 52: Policy Field Committees

52.01(1) Four Policy Field Committees, consisting of 11 Members each, shall be established to consider the following subject areas:

(a) Standing Committee on Community Services – mandate to relate to the areas of health, education, children's services, seniors, supports for the disabled, tourism, parks, recreation and culture;

- (b) Standing Committee on Government Services – mandate to relate to the areas of government services, government organization, personnel administration, expenditure management, capital planning, revenue, justice, international and intergovernmental affairs, trade, aboriginal affairs, policing and security;
- (c) Standing Committee on Managing Growth Pressures – mandate to relate to the areas of post-secondary education, technology, human resources, labour, immigration, rural development, municipal affairs, affordable housing, libraries, infrastructure and transportation;
- (d) Standing Committee on Resources and Environment – mandate to relate to the areas of energy, the environment, agriculture, sustainable resources and forestry.

(2) The Chair of a Policy Field Committee shall be a member of the Government caucus, and the Deputy Chair shall be a member of the Official Opposition.

Consideration of Bills by Policy Field Committees

52.02 A Policy Field Committee shall review any Bill referred to it.

Consideration of regulations by Policy Field Committees

52.03 A Policy Field Committee may review any regulation, amendment to a regulation or prospective regulation within its mandate in order to determine whether the attention of the Assembly should be drawn to any regulation, amendment to a regulation or prospective regulation on the grounds that it

- (a) imposes a charge on the public revenue not specifically provided for by statute;
- (b) prescribes a payment to be made by any public authority that is not specifically provided for by an Act of the Legislative Assembly;
- (c) may not be challenged in the courts;
- (d) makes unusual use of the authority provided for in the parent Act;
- (e) has an unexpected effect where the parent Act confers no express authority for that effect;
- (f) purports to have retrospective effect where the parent statute confers no express authority to have a retrospective effect;
- (g) has been insufficiently promulgated, is outside the scope of the parent Act, has not been enacted properly, or has been made without the necessary statutory authority;
- (h) is not clear in meaning;
- (i) is in any way prejudicial to the public interest.

Orders of the Assembly take priority

52.04 An order of the Assembly that a Bill, regulation or some other subject matter stands referred to a Policy Field Committee shall take priority over any other hearing or inquiry.

Referral of annual reports to Policy Field Committees

52.05(1) The annual reports of each Government department, provincial agency, Crown-controlled organization, board and commission shall be deemed to be permanently referred to a Policy Field Committee.

(2) Each Policy Field Committee may

- (a) examine each annual report referred to it and report to the Assembly whether the report is satisfactory;

- (b) consider in more detail and report to the Assembly, on each annual report it considers unsatisfactory;
- (c) investigate and report to the Assembly on any lateness in the tabling of annual reports;
- (d) report to the Assembly each year whether there are any bodies which do not table annual reports in the Assembly and which should present such reports.

Public hearings on regulations

52.06(1) A Policy Field Committee may conduct a public hearing on any Bill, regulation or prospective regulation under review.

(2) A Policy Field Committee shall be required, prior to reporting that the attention of the Assembly be drawn to any regulation or prospective regulation, to inform the Government department or authority concerned of its intention to so report.

Policy Field Committee inquiries

52.07(1) A Policy Field Committee shall inquire into, consider and report on any matter referred to it by the Assembly.

(2) A Policy Field Committee may on its own initiative, or at the request of a Minister, inquire into any matter concerned with the structure, organization, operation, efficiency or service delivery of any sector of public policy within its mandate.

(3) An Order of the Assembly that a Policy Field Committee undertake an inquiry shall take priority over any other inquiry, but a Policy Field Committee shall not inquire into any matters which are being examined by a Special Committee.

(4) All inquiries must be concluded and a substantive report presented to the Assembly no later than 6 months after the commencement of the inquiry.

(5) Funding for the purposes of undertaking an inquiry, in addition to the committee's regular allocation, is subject to the prior approval of the Members' Services Committee.

Additional powers of the Policy Field Committee

52.08 In addition to any other powers of Policy Field Committees, the Committees may examine any matter within their mandate and recommend to the Assembly on the need for legislation in that area.

Response to reports

52.09(1) The Government shall respond to a Policy Field Committee's report on any matter other than a report on a Bill within 150 days from the date on which the Policy Field Committee reports.

(2) No motion concurring in the report of a Policy Field Committee to which the Government must respond under suborder (1) shall be voted upon until that response is tabled in the Assembly.

4 The following is added after Standing Order 55:

55.01 Reports of the Officers of the Legislature shall stand referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices unless otherwise ordered.

5 The following Standing Orders are added after Standing Order 59:

Application of Standing Orders during main estimates

59.01(1) The Standing Orders of the Assembly shall be observed in the Committee of Supply's consideration of main estimates except as follows:

- (a) a Member may speak more than once;
 - (b) no Member may speak for more than 10 minutes at one time;
 - (c) Standing Order 5, concerning quorum, shall not apply until the main estimates are voted upon.
- (2) Notwithstanding suborder (1)(b), and provided that the Chair has been notified, a Minister and a private Member may combine their respective speaking times for a total of 20 minutes, with both taking and yielding the floor over the combined period.
- (3) During Committee of Supply consideration of the main estimates, officials of the Government may be admitted to the floor of the Assembly to advise the Minister whose estimates are under consideration.
- Hours of main estimates
- 59.02(1) Subject to suborder (2), the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the main estimates for not more than 75 hours.
- (2) During the 2007 Spring Sitting, the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the main estimates for approximately 60 hours, with the time for consideration concluding upon the completion of 4 rotations of the 15-hour cycle outlined in Standing Order 59.03.
- (3) Subject to the Official Opposition designations as provided for in Standing Order 59.03(2), the schedule for consideration of main estimates shall be determined by the House Leaders of the recognized parties and shall be tabled in the Assembly at least one sitting day prior to the Committee of Supply being called to consider main estimates.
- (4) If the House Leaders fail to reach an agreement, the Government House Leader shall schedule the appearances of departments for estimates consideration by the Committee of Supply.
- (5) On the first day of consideration of the main estimates by the Committee of Supply, the first member of Executive Council to speak shall move that the main estimates in their entirety be considered by the Committee.
- (6) During the consideration of the main estimates, the Committee of Supply shall meet for a minimum of 3 hours at one time unless there are no Members who wish to speak prior to the conclusion of the 3 hours.
- (7) If the Committee of Supply meets for more than 3 hours at one time, the time in excess of 3 hours shall be available to any Member who wishes to speak and is recognized by the Chair.
- (8) The time spent in Committee of Supply beyond 3 hours any afternoon shall not be included in the calculation of the time for a 15-hour cycle.
- (9) During the Committee of Supply's consideration of the main estimates, the Chair shall interrupt
- (a) at 5:45 p.m.,
 - (b) at 10 p.m. if there is an evening sitting, or
 - (c) when there are no Members who wish to speak prior to the times indicated in (a) or (b),
- and shall order the Committee to rise and report, and the Committee shall immediately rise and report progress without motion put.
- (10) Standing Order 5 does not apply to a report to the Assembly from the Committee of Supply under suborder (9).

(11) When an amendment to a department's estimates is moved in Committee of Supply, the vote on the amendment stands deferred until the date scheduled for the vote on the main estimates.

15-hour cycles, hourly allotments to caucuses

59.03(1) In this Standing Order, "cross-ministry" means the estimates of 2 or more departments to be considered by the Committee of Supply during consideration of the main estimates.

(2) The schedule for cross-ministry appearances shall be designated by the Official Opposition in consultation with the Third Party.

(3) The first 60 hours for consideration of the main estimates shall proceed through 4 rotations of a 15-hour cycle whereby

- (a) a caucus is allotted a particular block of hours during which time that caucus is entitled to designate which estimates are to be considered, and
 - (b) only the designated Minister or member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf and members of the caucus that has been allotted that time will be recognized to speak unless there are no members of that caucus who wish to speak.
- (4) The 15-hour cycle shall be allotted as follows:
- Hours 1 to 6 - Official Opposition
 - Hours 7 to 9 - Third Party
 - Hours 10 to 12 - Private Members - Government Caucus
 - Hours 13 to 15 - cross-ministry appearances with the following allotments:
 - (i) the first 2 hours shall be divided between the Official Opposition, who shall have 90 minutes, and the Third Party, who shall have 30 minutes, and
 - (ii) during the last hour any Member may speak.

(5) During each 15-hour cycle, where the members of a caucus are allotted a particular block of time and those Members no longer wish to speak, then consideration for the entire block of time scheduled for that day is deemed to have occurred and any Member may be recognized by the Chair until the Committee rises and reports.

(6) Following the completion of the 4th 15-hour cycle of estimates consideration, the schedule for the remaining hours in Committee of Supply shall be determined by the House Leaders of the recognized parties in consultation with Members of the other parties or independent Members.

Voting – main estimates

59.04(1) On the date scheduled or at the end of 75 hours of consideration, there shall be one vote on the main estimates unless

- (a) additional votes are required on amendments pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(11) prior to calling the vote on the main estimates;
- (b) on at least one day's notice a Member has provided written notification to the Chair and the Clerk of his or her desire that the estimates of a particular department be voted upon separately, in which case that department's estimates shall be voted separately and the

final vote for the main estimates shall consist of the estimates of any departments not yet voted upon.

(2) The votes under suborder (1) shall be taken without debate or amendment except as provided in Standing Order 59.02(11).

(3) The Government House Leader shall give notice of the date for the vote on the main estimates not later than the completion of the 4th 15-hour cycle of estimates.

(4) Notwithstanding suborders (1) and (3), for the 2007 Spring Sitting the vote on the main estimates may be scheduled with a minimum of one sitting day's notice to occur any time after the completion of the 4th rotation of the 15-hour cycle, unless otherwise ordered.

(5) On the date for the vote on the main estimates and prior to the vote on the main estimates, the Chair shall put the question to approve the estimates of the Legislative Assembly, as approved by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and the estimates of the Officers of the Legislature, which shall be decided without debate or amendment.

(6) At 5:45 p.m. on the date scheduled for the vote on the main estimates, if the vote has not been taken earlier, the Chair shall interrupt the proceedings, and the Committee of Supply shall commence voting and, if required, continue beyond the normal adjournment hour until all matters have been voted upon, at which time the Committee shall immediately rise and report.

Tabling of responses

59.05(1) Ministers must table answers to questions asked in Committee of Supply within 2 weeks.

(2) The vote on the main estimates under Standing Order 59.04 shall not be held until the answers have been tabled in the Assembly as required under suborder (1).

(3) Suborder (2) does not apply to questions asked in Committee of Supply within 2 weeks of the date for the vote on the main estimates.

6 The following sections of the Standing Orders shall have no force and effect for consideration of main estimates for the balance of the 26th Legislature:

- (a) 60(1);
- (b) 61(1) - (7) and (9);
- (c) 62(1) and (2);
- (d) 65(1)(b).

7 Standing Order 62(1) is struck out and the following is substituted:

62(1) In this Standing Order and Standing Order 64, "normal adjournment hour" means 6 p.m.

8 Standing Order 68 is amended by striking out suborder (2) and substituting the following:

(2) The report of a committee is the report as determined by the committee as a whole or a majority of it but shall include any dissenting or minority reports concerning the report or parts of it.

9 The following is added after Standing Order 74:

Referral of Bill to a committee after First Reading

74.1(1) Immediately after a Bill has been read a first time,

- (a) with respect to a Government Bill a member of the Executive Council
- (b) with respect to a Public Bill Other Than a Government Bill the sponsor

may move a motion, without notice, to refer the Bill to a Policy Field Committee.

(2) The Member moving the referral motion may be permitted to give a succinct explanation of the motion.

(3) Any motion made pursuant to this Standing Order shall be decided without debate or amendment, and if the motion is decided in the negative the said Bill shall be ordered for Second Reading.

(4) This Standing Order does not apply to appropriation or Private Bills.

Proceedings on Bills referred to a committee after First Reading

74.2(1) When a Bill is referred to a Policy Field Committee after First Reading, the committee may conduct public hearings on the subject matter of the Bill and report its observations, opinions and recommendations with respect to the Bill to the Assembly.

(2) Upon the concurrence of a committee report that a Bill be proceeded with, the Bill shall be placed on the Order Paper for Second Reading.

10 The following is added after Standing Order 78:

Referral of Bills to a Policy Field Committee after Second Reading

78.1(1) Immediately after a Bill has been read a second time,

- (a) with respect to a Government Bill, a member of the Executive Council
- (b) with respect to a Public Bill Other Than a Government Bill, any Member

may move a motion, without notice, to refer the Bill to a Policy Field Committee, which shall be decided without debate or amendment.

(2) This Standing Order does not apply to appropriation or Private Bills.

Public hearings after Second Reading

78.2(1) When a Bill is referred to a Policy Field Committee after Second Reading, the committee may conduct public hearings on the content of the Bill.

(2) No public hearings may be conducted under suborder (1) if the Bill has been subject to committee consideration after First Reading.

Report of Policy Field Committee on Bills

78.3(1) A Policy Field Committee to which a Bill has been referred by the Assembly after Second Reading shall be empowered to report the same with or without amendments or to report that the Bill not proceed.

(2) The report may contain a written statement of the committee's conclusions if the Bill was the subject of a public hearing.

Procedure on report from Policy Field Committee

78.4 When a Bill is reported pursuant to Standing Order 78.3, the following procedure shall apply:

- (a) any Bill reported shall be considered committed to Committee of the Whole Assembly unless otherwise ordered;
- (b) when a report recommends that the Bill not proceed, a motion to concur in that report shall be put immediately and decided without debate, and if agreed to, the Bill shall be dropped from the Order Paper but if negated, the Bill shall stand committed to the Committee of the Whole.

C. Be it further resolved that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing shall, without further motion, review and consider

- (a) the amendments to Standing Orders resulting from the March 7, 2007, House Leaders' Agreement by comparing the reforms to the practices in other Assemblies, examining whether the reforms afford open discussion of public policy where Albertans can participate and whether the reforms maximize oversight and accountability;
 - (b) the need for additional amendments or reforms to the Assembly's rules and practices to further objectives of open, public discussion of public policy, the role of the Assembly in overall government accountability and the work/life balance of Members; and
 - (c) following the 2007 Spring Sitting the operation of Standing Orders 59.01 to 59.05 and the process used for Committee of Supply in 2007, and shall report to the Assembly with its recommendations no later than February 2008 with respect to the matters in clauses (a) and (b) and no later than the conclusion of the 2007 Fall Sitting with respect to the matters in clause (c).
- D. Be it further resolved that the Policy Field Committees referenced in Part B of this motion be designated as Category A Committees for the purposes of the Members' Services Committee Allowances Order, RMSC 1992, c.M-2.
- E. And be it further resolved that
- 1 The amendments in this motion come into force on passage.
 - 2 The amendments in this motion and the amendments approved by the Assembly on March 12, 2007, as amended, shall have effect until the dissolution of the 26th Legislature.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a proud day, in my view, as I have the opportunity to rise and move Government Motion 15 as it stands on the Order Paper. Government Motion 15 provides for temporary amendments to the Standing Orders of this House. They do some significant things in terms of the way we operate our business as legislators in this province on behalf of all Albertans.

Over the course of the fall of 2006 the Progressive Conservative Party had a leadership process, and during that leadership process all of the candidates talked about how we govern and how we should govern. But the candidate who was successful and became the Premier of the province made it very clear during that campaign that he believed that it was necessary for us to revisit the Legislature and the legislative processes with a couple of objectives in mind. One of those objectives was to make sure that this was a place where Albertans would desire to participate. Albertans would be prepared to put their names forward and serve.

One of the barriers to having people choose a political life and choose to be a Member of the Legislative Assembly is the life that we lead. Many members of the public don't necessarily appreciate the long hours and the service that the members of the Legislature put in. They certainly don't appreciate, unless they have a good look at it, the way we conducted business in the past, where sometimes we would meet at 1:30 in the afternoon and adjourn at 5:30 and then meet again at 8 and go into the late hours of the evening or perhaps

the early hours of the morning and sometimes all night. That was not conducive to a good family life, that was not conducive to a good work/life balance, and certainly not conducive to recruiting Albertans, women and men who wanted to have a family life, respected their family, and actually wanted to see their spouses and their children from time to time.

So that was one of the objectives, to help address the issue of the work/life balance and the workload so that it was a place where people could come, make meaningful representation, make meaningful participation but do it without sacrificing their families to a greater extent than is absolutely necessary. That was one objective.

The other objective was to make the process of the Legislature and government more effective. We had had a process, a very good process, where private members on the government side of the House have had very good input into developing government policy, I would say more than in any other parliamentary jurisdiction that I am aware of. In other words, members on the government side could attend a standing policy committee. We've heard lots of concerns raised by members of the opposition about the standing policy committees, but they have been a very effective tool to allow private members to have more participation in developing policy, developing legislation, having input with respect to budget, et cetera, as I say, than any other place that I'm aware of in the parliamentary jurisdiction. And that was a good thing.

But what was not good about it was that it did not allow the public to see that kind of input, so a government member could have input at a caucus, input at a standing policy committee, if a member of Agenda and Priorities or the Treasury Board could have input there, but none of that was public policy being made in public. Now, that doesn't mean that process was wrong. It just means that there needed to be additional processes. That's one of the objectives that our Premier tasked me as Government House Leader to achieve in discussion of how we could renovate our processes, and that's one of the things that I'm so proud of being able to bring forward in this motion today.

We are by this motion establishing policy field committees. Now, that's not a new thing for legislators. Lots of legislators have standing committees of the House to which business can be referred. But it's been a long time, if ever, since policy field committees were a part of the Legislature of Alberta. We tabled in this House early in the session a House leaders' agreement, and I can say that we've had very good discussion with House leaders from the opposition and the third party over the course of the last three months in terms of how we can appropriately bring together this concept of Legislature committees which can bring the public into the policy process and into the legislative process.

So this government motion, which, as I say, arises from the all-party agreement that we had, establishes those policy field committees in the areas of community services, government services, managing growth pressures, and resources and the environment. With those four committees any area, any policy field would fall within the purview of one of those four committees.

The committees would have the opportunity to review a bill that was referred to it by the House, so any bill that this Legislature believes should have the opportunity for public hearings, the opportunity to hear witnesses, or the opportunity for further discussion can be referred, on motion, to a policy field committee. That policy field committee, consisting of mainly private members of the House, can then review the bill, call experts if they wish, call witnesses if they wish, or open it to a public hearing if they wish to get further input. They can recommend amendments to the House. They can recommend to the House whether or not a bill should proceed. In other words, further scrutinization and detail work on a

bill can be done with the benefit of testimony and with the benefit of expert opinion and with the benefit of hearing from the public. That's one of the advantages of a policy field committee.

The second advantage of a policy field committee is that this House can refer regulations to it. As you will know, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues will know, regulations are the purview of Executive Council. We've had discussions – and I remember the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo always used to raise the issue of the concern that he had about government bringing forward what I call framework legislation, legislation which set out the policy and direction but which left to regulation the detail. From my perspective that's a very important way of doing legislation. You can have some flexibility to adapt and to make it current on a reasonable basis, but you have the policy framework in the bill. Of course, the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo used to complain about the public not seeing lobbying made by way of regulation. Well, these policy field committees now have the ability to deal with that type of issue.

If a minister, prior to taking a regulation to Executive Council, wishes to have further input and discussion, the regulation can be tabled in the House, as has sometimes been done in the past, but now that regulation, after being tabled in the House, can be referred to a policy field committee for advice. The policy field committee can review that regulation in some detail and provide advice back to the House, and the House would then provide advice to Executive Council. The regulations still remain the purview of Executive Council.

The other opportunity is for a policy field committee to look at a regulation that's already been passed if they believe it's in the public interest to review that regulation and have a public debate on that regulation. So it's an opportunity to take those pieces of law which are passed, quite appropriately, by Executive Council under the purview of an act and have a more public discussion on them.

There's also the opportunity for policy field committees to look further into other issues. Of course, every annual report of every department and of agencies, boards, and commissions tabled in the House is automatically referred to the policy field committees, and policy field committees could on their own account consider any other area within the purview, or the field, of their committee.

By establishing the policy field committees, which we're asking the House to do today, we're really opening up the process, first of all, to give private members of the House a more effective and definitive role in engaging the public in discussion of the public's legislation, whether it be laws or whether it be regulations, and an opportunity to hear from the public and bring what they hear from the public back to this House if appropriate to do so. It's an exciting opportunity – a very exciting opportunity, I believe – and I would recommend to the House that we pass these temporary Standing Orders so that we can establish these policy field committees and really reinvigorate the legislative process in that manner.

Now, there's a second piece to the motion, and that's with respect to the Committee of Supply. Committee of Supply is a very important process in our House. The Committee of Supply is part of the budget process where the government is held accountable for the spending of the public's money. As the budget will be tabled this Thursday and then estimates referred to the Committee of Supply, it's an opportunity for in-depth scrutiny of that proposed spending. What these rules do is provide for a significant increase of the oversight by this Legislature of government's proposed spending on behalf of Albertans.

There's probably no more important role of this Legislature than oversight of the government: making sure that the government is held to account for the spending of the public's money and making

sure that in spending that public's money, it's doing so in the context of appropriate policy frameworks and appropriate outcomes that we want to achieve. So a good portion of this motion is about setting up a new Committee of Supply process which will expand the amount of time available and the ability for in-depth scrutiny by all members of the House in terms of the requested supply that's brought forward each year.

2:30

There are some other amendments which are being asked for. One of those relates, again, to not only the work/life balance of members but also to the ability of the public to understand what their government is doing, and I refer to the set times for sitting. Traditionally, of course, parliaments are called when Executive Council decides that there is business to be brought forward. That was the tradition of all parliaments. More and more, parliaments are going to fixed sitting dates. What we're proposing here is that there be a fixed sitting date where the Legislature would be called on the first Monday of every February and would sit through till the first Thursday in each June for a spring sitting.

Of course, we're expanding on the concept that was introduced previously with respect to temporary Standing Orders, the idea of having constituency weeks every fourth week so that members can go back and be in touch with their constituencies and their families and bring that new knowledge and that reinvigoration back for the processes here.

We also provide for a fixed fall sitting of the Legislature. The fall sitting would be from the first Monday in November to the first Thursday in December. Now, in either the spring or the fall sitting, of course, it should be noted that the sittings could be extended, if necessary, to complete the business or could be adjourned earlier if that was appropriate. In addition, nothing detracts from the ability of government to ask for the Legislature to be called at other times during the year. So there's flexibility but still an expectation that we would have that we would sit for a certain length of time, for certain periods of time, and the public would know when we're here.

Those amendments will assist in helping with the work/life balance, and the rest of the temporary Standing Orders which are provided for are really supplemental to that in terms of the process, the procedure by which some of the business of the House is carried on. For example, a bill could be referred to a committee either after first reading or after second reading. After first reading, presumably, the committee would talk about the principles before it came back as to whether the bill should actually go forward. If it was referred after second reading, the more in-depth hearing process and committee process could be undertaken, and amendments could be recommended. In either case the time frame for referral would be after the bill had been passed at either first or second reading and before it had been taken up at the next stage, obviously.

But probably the most important piece of this whole process, Mr. Speaker, is to recognize that the rules of the House and the procedures of the House do belong to the members of the House. The final portion of this motion, section C, specifically requests that although we adopt these as temporary Standing Orders of the House for the remainder of this Legislature, they be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing for review and consideration.

In other words, we're proposing these temporary Standing Orders as a reinvigoration of the democratic process in this province, an ability for Albertans to see more and understand more about how their government works and how their Legislature works. But it's necessary for the members to be able to grasp hold of them and make them their own by referring them to the standing committee

and asking that standing committee to have a look at not only the processes that House leaders have recommended in the House leaders' agreement and have brought forward in this motion but also to look further at what other democratic assemblies and parliaments do to see if this can be improved upon or if, after some experience with it, there are some of the rules and processes that people don't like, to be able to change them. That's a very necessary process.

So we're asking that the House adopt section C of this, to refer these immediately to the committee, to have the committee review them while we're using them and bring back their experience and their ideas by early next year. Of course, the Committee of Supply process would be needed immediately because, as I failed to mention earlier, one of the things that we're asking for is a fixed budget date, which would be the second Monday in February. That would closely adhere to some of the parliamentary best practices, which really suggest that budgets should come in prior to the beginning of the next fiscal year. So that's why we're moving it as close to the front end of the session as possible.

But the Committee of Supply process is one that is very complex. We're trying it out this spring, but we're asking the standing committee to review the process immediately after we adjourn the spring session to see whether, in fact, it's been effective and whether any changes to that might be brought back to this House even by this fall so that they could be effective for a budget process starting immediately at the beginning of next year's spring session.

Mr. Speaker, I could go into more detail – but I won't – about these Standing Orders. I would ask for the support of the House in these Standing Orders. I think this is a major step forward for our Legislature in terms of how we might both improve the way we do our business and, most importantly, improve the way that Albertans have the opportunity to participate in the legislative process which governs their province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in support of these Standing Orders. Clearly, I was one of the parties that was negotiating them, and at this point I would urge all members of the Assembly to support what we have worked out over the last three months. It feels like longer, but I think it was only three months.

I have to say that there was an openness to discuss and explore some previously forbidden procedures and processes. I appreciate that flexibility that was demonstrated by the government side, and I'm sure it is reflective of the charge that the new Premier gave to his House leader as he negotiated. I'm also mindful that the new Premier is on record as saying that he would do nothing which would enhance a Liberal or ND's chances to win a seat. So, you know, you take all of those things into consideration and do your best to move forward.

I came into this process with a few goals in mind. I wanted to help to make this Assembly, this Legislature, a more humane place in which to do business. Clearly, I also wanted to make it a place that was more attractive for women to seek out seats and to serve Alberta's citizenry through their serving as MLAs. It has not been particularly attractive in the past, and I wanted to do what I could to change that and to encourage more women to run for provincial political office. Of course, when you start to look at changes that would benefit or would make it more attractive to women, I mean, that makes it more attractive to everybody. I think it does make it more family friendly. So that was part of the package that I was looking for.

I also wanted to see more time for private members' business in the Assembly and more emphasis on private members' business and more flexibility, more likelihood that bills would get more time and attention, be passed, and become part of public policy. So there are a few small things in there that reflect that. We have one small section that notes that if we don't get in a full three hours of private members' business on Mondays, we would conclude that on Thursdays. I don't think that will often be used; nonetheless, it's there. In my opinion, it was something I worked for to make sure that we understood and honoured and had put into writing the importance and value of private members' time in this House.

I've been one of the very vocal critics of the government's very closed shop: total government control, the use of its majority as a hammer with which to beat members of the opposition in various committees and here in the House. After 10 years I can say with some authority that I've seen that used to excess. I wanted to see what I could do to encourage the government to exercise less of an iron fisted control on every single process and to not use majorities in committees as a way of just ramming through a government agenda without ever listening and honouring any of the other issues that were being brought forward by private members on any of the all-party committees.

2:40

Of course, much of my experience flows from the 10 years that I spent on the Public Accounts Committee, very frustrating work there. I think we will see a difference in the enhancements that have been brought into the Public Accounts Committee as a result of my predecessors and my work and the current chair of the Public Accounts Committee, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and others who've all worked on that.

I think that on the opportunity that the Government House Leader was talking about, the opportunity that the government private members had to participate in the standing policy committees, one of my complaints about that was that it was done, frankly, at the expense of the private members in the Legislature. By moving the decision-making process behind closed doors, it really affected the way this Legislature operated. What we had was government private members who sat in here, and some of them, I swear to you, Mr. Speaker, never participated in debate of a bill. Their reasoning at the time was that they'd already talked about it in the standing policy committees, and the work was done, and now they were just waiting for it to all be done. So it put a huge workload on the members of the Official Opposition and the third party because we did all of the work in the Legislature, or many nights it certainly felt like that.

I'm hoping that we will see more engagement from the government private members, particularly more participation in the budget debates and in the debates of legislation that's brought before the Assembly. That is my sincere wish, and I think it would make a stronger Assembly and would help us all to be more responsible and responsive to our constituencies.

We have experienced the new timelines already. I'm hearing some people happy and some people not happy. I note that there may well be a period of adjustment, or we may well decide that it doesn't work. I'm particularly noting the extra hour that was added to the day. So although the night sittings have been dispensed with, an extra hour, a half hour at the beginning and a half hour at the end, was added onto the afternoon.

Of course, that's presenting some interesting scheduling difficulties or concerns or challenges with the community. The business community and the charitable community often hold functions over the lunch hour, and at this point we need to try and get members back into the House by 1 o'clock. Many of those functions are set

up to run from sort of 11:30 or a quarter to 12 until 1:30. So we'll have to see what happens, whether the community adjusts to the House and moves its timing back a bit or whether we participate less in those occasions in the community. I hope that's not the case because I think it's an important part of what we do, and it does get members into the community, but it is one of the challenges that has already presented itself around the changes in timing.

In fact, although we have dispensed with three evening sittings, which usually average two to three hours a night, we have picked up four hours in the afternoon sittings, so we're really not down by that much time overall in the week.

I would think that as we come close to our second constituency week, those will be deemed to be quite a success. I have already experienced that I'm not as far behind as I would usually be with my constituency work after spending as many weeks as we have in the Assembly. I am able to get back and sort of catch up, which I really valued, and was able to say to people that wanted to meet with me: "Well, you don't have to wait for four or five weeks. In fact, we'll be able to get you in for a meeting, you know, by the next constituency week." It also meant that I didn't have to rush through the meetings at, you know, 20 minutes apiece, trying to get five or six people through on a Friday, but that we could spend more time with the people, as much time as they needed, and I really appreciate that. So I think that the idea of those constituency weeks interspersed with the Assembly weeks will be an innovation that we will all be very proud of and will probably hang on to. If I'm allowed to look at a crystal ball, I think that one is a good bet.

The question period changes we've also experienced a bit and I think have made for, certainly, a livelier exchange. But, also, clearly, as the Speaker is pointing out to us at the end of every series, more questions are being able to be asked and a better exchange happening, and I'm very pleased to see that. So I think that it's been quite successful.

We've now experienced the first round where written questions and motions for returns which have been accepted by the government are not in the House for debate but are read into the record by the Clerk, and I think that that is going to prove to be quite helpful.

A small thing but I'm pleased to see that I was successful in getting an agreement that there would be a government response to any recommendations brought forward by the Public Accounts Committee. Sometimes we on this side feel that when we put recommendations forward or there are reports written, they go into the government side and disappear forever. There are a number of requirements in these new Standing Orders that require the government to report back to the Assembly within a specific period of time. I'm responsible for many of those, and I'm proud of it because I think it's part of that exchange of information which is very important.

The policy field committees, as the Government House Leader mentioned, are not new. Actually, I think we're, if not the last, one of the last in Canada to engage in these more free-flowing and open-ended set-ups for discussion of substantive issues.

A couple of things I'm still trying to achieve for that. One is a venue, an avenue for either an individual from the community or an individual member from the House to get an issue on the agenda. Thus far I haven't been successful in that, and we have a situation where, essentially, it's the majority vote of the House that sends an issue to the committee or a reference from a minister that sends it to a committee. But we did get that the committee could decide to take something on itself. Admittedly, still, that would require a majority of government members on the committee to agree to it. So it still is mostly controlled by government and the agenda set by government. I was hoping that we could have opened that up a bit, but it

all depends on how the committees under the leadership of this new Premier decide to behave themselves, frankly.

I've been on committees where there was a great willingness to work together, and they've been very productive, and I've been on exactly the same committee in which that willingness was not there, and it was horrible. It was pretty much a waste of my time even being in the room because my opinions were not welcome and the time that I spent doing the research, I wasn't able to get them put out into the committee for discussion. So we'll see how this works. I'm still hopeful.

I am pleased to see that dissenting reports will now be included. I think that's very important in a democratic society and something that I worked hard for.

There could be an argument that bills that get sent to the policy field committees never come back. I don't think that's what we've done. I have hope that this could be a vigorous working committee which enhances and enriches the ideas and legislation and regulations that we've sent forward to the committee. Part of that is, again, in having the committee be reported back, that there's a necessity that the committee does report back and that there's a timeline for reporting back. The reverse side of that is that there is a requirement that the government respond to what the committee has brought forward. So that's closing the loop there, and I think we were successful in that.

2:50

One of my big arguments in the negotiations was around support staff. I'm glad I was persuasive, and I think everyone has managed to benefit from that. I'm not sorry about that. I think that's a great thing, and we should all be able to do better work with reasonable staff support for that.

The Committee of Supply. I think I'd just had it by last year's budget debate, or maybe it was sup supply. I honestly don't remember, Mr. Speaker. But at the point I realized that I was trying to debate \$6 million a minute, I'd had it. I felt that the process had reached a point of absurdity, that it was not worth continuing. We are dealing with large sums of money here. This government does have a habit of bringing in now usually two supplementary supply budgets as we go through the year. Particularly with the initial estimates, as we debated that budget, we just didn't have enough time. As a critic, even with multifaceted portfolios or very large portfolios like Health and Wellness – and I was able to get, you know, maybe 20 minutes to 40 minutes of time to be able to question a minister – it was ridiculous.

So we have a new way of going at this. I am hoping that it will be productive and that we will be able to have a much more productive exchange of information with the ministers. Relaxing decorum which allows ministerial officials onto the floor should be able to give the ministers direct support and all of us access to information that we can carry back to our respective caucuses but also to our constituents. Of course, having all of this on the record recorded by *Hansard* with the public able to come and watch us I think is very important to the democratic process.

The idea of the cross ministries is one that's very important to me. I sure hope this is going to work. I came at this because of my experience in trying to get core funding for sexual assault centres over the last couple of years. Every time I raised the issue in the House, I was told I was talking to the wrong minister. Eventually I had in fact done the round of all ministers that had suggested that I speak to a different minister, which was about four of them. It was an issue that each one recognized that they had a piece of but nobody took responsibility for. The buck didn't stop anywhere, and as a result, frankly, there was no buck. I became very frustrated with this

and thought there has to be a way for us in the budget debates to be able to talk about an issue that appears in many different ministries, but nobody is ultimately responsible for it. That's the idea behind the cross-ministry debate days in which all parties, all members of the House will get an opportunity to talk about an issue that crosses over ministries.

Let me give you an example: land use. That's a big issue in many different areas and, in fact, many different ministries in the government. But we don't get a chance to get all of those ministers together in one room and talk about that issue only as it pertains to those different ministries and possibly be able to listen and hear each other and what each minister is saying about it and have other ministers listen to each other, to approach it as a team. I know that's not the way you usually do things in an Assembly, but it's reflective of the working basis that I come from. I think that having more of a team approach to issues like that may well be very helpful, and I hope it's the way of the future. It is based on a different theory than this House has been accustomed to working on, but women have been pretty good at working together as teams and coming up with some darn good ideas, so I'm hoping I can lend that over to the rest of this House and get some good results for it. Some of the ones we're looking at are things like land use, industrial development and health impacts, vulnerable people, and the whole idea of taxation and fees.

I'm pleased to see with the vote process that I was able to convince my colleagues to allow exceptions because sometimes I found myself in a position of having to vote against an entire budget because I disagreed with what was happening in one section of it. So by allowing an exception process where you can ask that a particular vote be pulled out of the entire vote, then you're better able to express where your happiness or displeasure lies with what's been proposed by the government.

Just very briefly, I'm also glad that I was able to achieve agreement to get responses from the various ministers and their departments within two weeks of having the actual budget debate, with a nod to the previous Deputy Premier, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, who was the mistress of the two-week response. She was very good at it and also good to her word. I thought: well, if she can do it, everybody else can. In fact, that's what's going to flow from this.

There are lots of possibilities in what we've laid out here. I'm sure there are other changes that we could make to the Standing Orders that would make some people very happy, and I'm sure there are other ones that would make them less happy, but I think this is a pretty good package that we've got. I'm sure that on all three sides we would like to change a little here or we wish we hadn't gone along so far on some things, but overall I think it's a very good package. I think we can see the results of some of the work we've already done and that it is something that has enhanced this House, and I'm pleased to have been a part of the process.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Government Motion 15 for new Standing Orders for this Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not go through the whole process, I think. [interjection] Thank you. But I do want to make a couple of comments. If it takes leadership reviews to change the Legislature, maybe the government can think about doing it every year. This certainly has been a major change. The reality is that it's to all our benefit to make this Legislature work better. I have to give a lot of credit to the House leader of the opposite side and particularly to David Gillies for a lot of hard work. Frankly, we

in the opposition can ask for whatever we want and demand it, but it's not going to happen unless there's a willingness on the other side to move this along.

I think this was an example, Mr. Speaker, if I may say so – and I've said this before – where often the people see us in question period and there's sort of the give-and-take of question period and you think that all we do here in the Legislature is fight. Well, nobody enjoys that more than me, but there's more to the Legislature than that. I say that this is an important move to try to make the Legislature work better for all of us in here so that, more importantly, the people of Alberta have respect for what's happening here in the Legislature.

There are major changes that we've already talked about. The policy field committees and the Committee of Supply specifically, Mr. Speaker, will be works in progress. I don't think any of us can absolutely predict how this is going to work down the way. I'm sure there will be lots of growing pains with it because we're into a bit of the unknown here. But I do believe that the policy field committees and the way we've set up Committee of Supply makes this Legislature more important. It's certainly important for the opposition. I do believe that it's an opportunity for people on the government side to participate in a more meaningful way, too, in the policy field committees, as you see them doing in the House of Commons and others. If we're dealing sometimes with officials or other people, government members don't need to feel that they're attacking the government or the minister. They can be just as involved as anybody else in this process. At least that's what I would be hopeful would be happening.

I do think that this will be an interesting process, and I know that there's probably been some push back on the other side. I can say that for a number of my colleagues it was really hard getting them to move along with this House leaders' agreement, but I was able to persevere and bring them along, Mr. Speaker.

As I say, we all know policy field committees and the Committee of Supply. We know the changes that are going to be made. We know about the review. I think that now is the time, Mr. Speaker, to pass this motion and move ahead so that we can see how this works. As I say, it's a work in progress.

Again, I would thank the other people that worked on this with us. Hopefully, we've done something good for the Legislature and, more important, for the people of Alberta. Thank you very much.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a true privilege and a pleasure to be able to get up and finally address this supposedly all-party House leaders' agreement, in which not all members of the Legislature were allowed to participate. I signed this with some reserved support in the fact that it could come to this Legislature, and then I could finally speak on it because I do feel that there are some critical amendments that can and should be put in place here as we go forward in the future. But there are some very positive movements that this government has made, so I'm very pleased about that.

Mr. Speaker, it's obvious from the start of this that the democratic process was not fully adhered to in that they did not recognize all members in the Legislature, and I am grateful for the Speaker's work in acknowledging those who were left out. I believe that that's where much of the benefit for democracy was held, in the Speaker's office instead of the opposition leaders or the House leader, in moving forward and seeing that all members were and are included in the standing policy committees.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the field committees versus the standing policy committees that we've moved forward. I'm very pleased with the changes in question period and the reallocation of time. Forty-five seconds back and forth makes it a true question-and-answer period, that I think will be a benefit for democracy and the people of Alberta. Moving to the field committees is a positive, and I am in favour of that.

But I'm very disappointed in the decision to keep in place the old standing policy committees, thinking that they are the root and the backbone of the policies that they want to bring forward for democratic process here in the province, and that like question period, they didn't extend the time. We still kept the 50 minutes, but it was reallocated.

It would have been a benefit for the taxpayers of Alberta had they just reallocated the committee money and put that towards the field committees rather than having those old standing policy committees still in place. I think that \$1.16 million is required to be paid out to the MLAs that are sitting on those committees. Like I say, in a real House leaders' agreement I feel that the field committees or all-party committees would be to the benefit of the taxpayers in efficiency, in prudence, and in the work that would and could be done in this House.

The Committee of Supply. It's an interesting change. I definitely agree with the members that more time needs to be spent on that. We're talking, you know, a \$30 billion budget, and still the time is very short. But I have some concerns with the so-called 15-hour cycle for that committee. Once again, it seems like it's a little bit, well, not as democratic as I would like to have seen it. It just seems that perhaps much like in question period, a little bit more of a rotation in there would add to the benefit of the discussion going on.

I haven't been briefed on it, and it's always difficult to know if one really understands the language, but my understanding is that the first six hours would be solely for the Official Opposition to utilize. I think that there's a good interaction as we go through question period and it revolves through the different parties. Different questions come up. Even for myself, as a sitting MLA I have found that often, as we hear the different views from both the government and the opposition sides, it can spark something in our mind, and we can do perhaps a little better job. Rather than just having six hours of the same questions being drilled at them, perhaps if we back up and take a different angle, our eyes and our understanding might be opened up a little bit more and be of benefit to the entire House. I guess the big thing is that, like I say, being left out of the discussion was very disappointing.

I'm thrilled, though, with the constituency week. It really helps, especially for those MLAs like myself that travel a long way. I believe that will be very beneficial, but I'm very disappointed in the fact that the three House leaders all live in Edmonton, and that's the only view that I see reflected in this House leaders' agreement. There is no improvement in my quality of life if I happen to be up here extra time or for any lady who doesn't live in Edmonton, their quality of life. I ask the question: if we were having our conference in Regina or Winnipeg or somewhere else, would we want to extend it? Or because we've travelled there, would we work efficiently and hard through the day and the evening to get the work done?

I understand and I appreciate the two sides, but the majority of the MLAs were not allowed housing benefits because of the distance, the close proximity that they live in. So those 23, I believe, get to drive home at night and improve their quality of life, whereas those who live outside the Edmonton area do not drive home. What was really disappointing, though, is that when they set up the weeks to be off, they said that they would do that in alignment, possibly, with the holidays. This time when we had the time off, it was aligned for

those MLAs who actually get to go home every night to be with their families, but they also got the week off. When we came back from our week off, our children were out of school. We're back here working, so we don't even see them the whole week that they have off because we're up here. So I don't think a good view was looked at when it came to that. It was a very close, myopic view, looking solely at the benefit to the people that live here in Edmonton. I think that that should perhaps be looked at and addressed a little bit more carefully, especially, like I say, that week off, if it could be worked so that we could be back home with our families when they're out of school.

To close, again I'd like to say that my biggest disappointment and what I would like to see changed is the money that's being spent on these field committees versus the money that's spent on the standing policy committees. I think that that needs to be looked at, whether it's more field committees or something to be broken down. The House leader mentioned that they're very concerned that these backbenchers participate in the standing policy, but it's not out in the open. It's very easy for them to open up those closed doors and have some meetings in caucus and cabinet and let the public in so that they can see and the secrecy is revealed.

It's always been amazing to me how they said that those backbenchers have to have an opportunity for question period. I think that if the government really wanted to do that, they could have an hour in the morning in their caucus meeting, and if they want to have *Hansard* or to bring in the news media, whatever it is, it would be very easy to open it up and allow the debate to be made public. It's amazing to me that some of the MLAs that I've talked to have said: "Oh, no. I spoke out on that. Oh, I worked on that, but I lost the caucus vote." We never know. I won't quote some of the specific ones, but I understood that some votes were very close, and if it came to the House and was a true, open, and democratic vote, some of those things wouldn't have passed the way they did. So I would like to see the government move a little bit further in that direction.

If they really want an open and honest debate, bring it into the House, then. That's why we're here, what we're sitting for. There is no shame, no matter which party you sit in, to represent the people that elected you, whether you're for or against that bill, because the fact of the matter is that we're very diverse geographically, you know, economically, and some things just aren't for the benefit of an area, so you need to speak out. I would very much like to see those debates brought into the House. I think that we could move a long way on that. You know, some of the other agreements that didn't go through are kind of, I guess, if you want to say, still behind the back doors.

Question period is another good example. We're currently getting 99 questions a day. What that works out to in calculation is that myself as a single-MLA party should get one question every two days. The independent members should get that. That would be more equitable.

I feel we can move forward. This is a good first step, but as usual it's not a bold enough or far enough step. I hope that we'll have a more democratic process and be able to move forward. Like I say, I appreciate the movement that the government has made. I know that it can move more.

Thank you.

3:10

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise, and I'll try to be brief. I must applaud the new Premier for pushing these changes to come forward and to the Government House Leader and

David Gillies for the hard work that they've done on this. I must also thank the Government House Leader, the Speaker, and the third-party House leader for being so gracious to give some of their time on occasion to inform me as to what has been coming forward on this and to discuss with me the importance of some of the matters.

The policy field committees, I think, are a very important development in our governance. The ability to look at regulations, while we have not really been able to look at them in a meaningful way in the past, in an open and public manner is something that I think will really very much open up the process of another level of government to the Alberta public and ensure that the Legislature itself has some greater credibility to the people of Alberta.

I think that the policy field committees will also have some function in informing all members somewhat more on some of the intricacies and some of the areas in the legislation that maybe they weren't too involved with. Being an independent member, it is sometimes very interesting to look at this whole House and the operations of it a little differently because what you see sometimes is a lot of riff and debate that doesn't say too much in order to fill time on the part of the Official Opposition. Having been there, you see that so much is often said which really isn't too informative and/or informed. I think that the policy field committees will work to help members become more informed and to look at the legislation in a much more detailed manner.

The ability of private members to be more involved in this I think is a great development, and again I support this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Would there be additional members who would like to participate on this motion?

Should I call on the Government House Leader to close the debate, or should we call the question?

Mr. Hancock: Just briefly, Mr. Speaker, to say thank you to the Opposition House Leader, the third-party House leader, and to all members who participated vigorously both at caucus and other discussion opportunities as we brought forward the process to try and revise the rules. The process itself, I believe, notwithstanding the comments of the independent Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, has been a very positive one, and I would ask for the support of the House.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

head: **Statement by the Speaker**
Standing Order Amendments

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's time for my log cabin story. I arrived in this building in 1979 as an elected person, having been a deputy minister. When I arrived in this building, MLAs basically had no offices. There were 13 of us who shared room 512 in this building. The offices were so small that you could barely put a desk in them. In fact, the former member who was introduced today was a bit more portly than I am. He had a difficult time walking between the side of his desk and the wall to get to his chair.

There were no constituency office budgets. They did not exist. If you were an elected person, you came here. You had no funds for an office back home in your constituency. Previous to that, in fact, when Premier Manning was the Premier of Alberta, MLAs would line up once a year to get a cheque. Once a year you got a handshake from the Premier, and you got a cheque, and you went home.

There were no pins available to members in 1979. There was nothing. You literally had to go and grovel to a minister of the Crown if you wanted to get a pin for your constituents.

The Legislative Assembly was rather different. We smoked here. We smoked right in the building, right in here. There were very few benefits. In fact, there wasn't anything. Caucuses had no funding provision. There were no committees of the type that we have today under the standing committees of the Legislative Assembly.

Over the years that has changed. The rules have changed as well. You're now in the 101st year of the history of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I want to congratulate the three House leaders, and I want to congratulate all the members who worked on these Standing Orders changes. In my opinion, they are among the most profound changes to have been made in the 101-year history of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and I was involved in some pretty profound ones in 1993.

What you've basically done is enhance the funding operation for the various caucuses to do immaculate research work. The funding provisions have been provided for now by the all-party independent committee of the Legislative Assembly, the Members' Services Committee. The Official Opposition will get an additional \$360,000 per year. The government caucus will get an additional \$720,000 per year. The third-party caucus will get an additional \$180,000 per year, and the independents will get an additional \$90,000 each to do research associated with these new policy field standing committees. The expectation is that these funds will be spent for the support and the research associated with that. There should be quite a dramatic change in the operation of this Assembly as we go forward.

So I repeat again that this Assembly is now in its 101st year of operation, and things in the past have never, ever provided such an opportunity for members to be as involved as they are today. It truly is congratulations on a very, very momentous occasion. Without any doubt, in my view, these are the most significant changes made since 1993.

Hopefully – hopefully – experience will show that these orders can be made more than temporary although there is some governance in here by what the members have done today in terms of this motion, to basically say that there is an opportunity for certain things to happen. I certainly hope that the chairman of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing and that committee will without further motion review and consider what has been done.

There's no better opportunity for members to learn about what's happening in other jurisdictions than for members of this Assembly to accept the invitation that's been offered to them to attend the regional meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Winnipeg this summer, where representatives from every jurisdiction in Canada will meet: all of the provinces, the Senate, the federal government, and the territories. In fact, the Standing Order provisions are a major, major subject matter of the whole conference. That would save a tremendous amount of money in travel. You would meet with leaders from across the country in that particular venue. To date only two or three members have indicated their interest in wanting to do that, but I extend that invitation again.

To all of you: a letter will go from my office tomorrow to the three caucus chairs advising them of this funding provision, and the dollars will become operational tomorrow. There is a subsequent motion that is required here. This motion gives governance to committees. The next step, of course, has to be to fill the committees. To have a blank and vacant committee, the committee can't be very operational that way, so one would look forward to the spirit of co-operation in the next two days to have this done so that when one

returns, presumably on April 30 of this year, when the budget process is under way, then in fact a new venue will occur.

Again, to all of you: congratulations. This is very significant. This is very momentous. It will only work, however, if there is the spirit of co-operation. The chair has reviewed every word of this on a number of occasions and understands that there are some grey areas. There may be some interpretations that we'll have to deal with as we go along, but they'll be done in the same degree of harmony that the three House leaders have found among themselves in the last couple of months. Despite all the angst that was in the back rooms and behind closed doors, in public there's love in the air.

head: 3:20 **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 3
Climate Change and Emissions Management
Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Mason moved that the motion for third reading be amended to read that Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, be not now read a third time because the proposed measures to reduce the intensity of specified gas emissions contained therein combined with rapid oil sands development will allow ongoing, dramatic increases in specified gas emissions and make it impossible to meet the requirements of the Kyoto protocol.

[Adjourned debate April 12: Mr. Eggen]

The Speaker: We're on an amendment on Bill 3. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on the amendment.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment on Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, in which there is a reasoned amendment, as it's called, to propose measures that will allow that the bill not be read a third time.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the issue of the century, and for us on the other side of the House to support a bill that does so little to move us forward in capping and actually reducing emissions is a very difficult commitment to make in spite of the fact that one could argue that there is some progress. Indeed, after five years of battling this government to admit the science and to acknowledge the will of the people and to recognize the threat that climate change is posing, there is, indeed, as the government argues, a step to place a tax on extra emissions starting this year, which has to be seen as progress. There's a recognition on this side that that is a modicum of progress. What Canadians and what world bodies and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are calling for is substantive change in the way we address our energy and our carbon emissions.

We on this side of the House feel that we cannot support Bill 3. This amendment would allow us to in good conscience indicate to the government that there is a much stronger call across this country, across the world for leadership on this issue and that by supporting this amendment, we would not then support Bill 3 but would hopefully move the government forward to a more significant, serious commitment to capping and reducing our emissions in this province, looking at issues like offsets and carbon trading as an important addition to what needs to be done in the province: investments in renewables, real investments in energy conservation, and energy efficiency.

This is, indeed, what we would hope for, and we believe that we represent the vast majority of Canadians and Albertans in this wish. So I stand to support the amendment as put forward by the members

of the third party.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, our leader brought this in, and I will be supporting it. I think this is an important issue. This is, sort of, if you like, the big debate that we have to hold in this Legislature. It says that we want to reduce the intensity of specified gas emissions contained therein combined with rapid oil sands development. A point I want to make in dealing with that is the rate of development because it's clear that everything we debated in this session, the problems that we're facing, whether it be in housing, whether it be in health care, whether it be in education or children's services, all are an overheated economy. It seems to me that the government is in a headlong rush to rip out the tar sands as fast as they can. I know there's pressure to get into the American market. It's coming from the Americans. It's also coming from our federal government.

Mr. Speaker, as long as we continue, if you're going to talk about intensity and you keep putting on more and more huge projects, you can never catch up; CO₂ is going to keep increasing at dramatic levels. There's no way to stop it if you want to do that and if your whole economic strategy is this, even though it's creating all sorts of problems. The Alberta advantage is becoming a disadvantage for more and more and more people. At the same time, we're doing exactly the wrong thing in terms of caring for our environment. That's why over here on this side of the House we've been saying that we have to slow down this development. Nobody is really benefiting other than a few CEOs in downtown Calgary.

We've talked about rents, we've talked about health care not being able to keep up, and at the same time we're heading towards an environmental disaster with more and more CO₂ being there, Mr. Speaker. That's why we've said: "Look. For the time being let's at least slow it down, have a moratorium, figure out what kind of Alberta we want in the future, figure out what makes sense in terms of how much CO₂ we can keep putting out, see what makes sense in terms of our needed social programs."

Our infrastructure is falling behind. We can't keep up. It just doesn't make much sense anymore, both in an environmental and an economic sense. How is this progress when we are doing more to foul up the environment at the same time that more and more people are suffering with rising rents? We can't keep up to our emergency services in the hospitals. We have vacancy rates of virtually zero throughout even all small towns. We can't keep people working in the nonprofits because they can't make enough money; they can make more at Hortons. We have a labour shortage. How is this progress, I ask you, Mr. Speaker? How can we possibly say that this is good for anybody? It's certainly not good for the environment and, I would argue, certainly a disadvantage for more and more people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to us that rather than the government saying, "Well, this is really protecting the environment," it's not. It's going to lead to rapid increases in CO₂. Make no mistake about it. That's the reality. We can do better here. I could even, I suppose, maybe not agree with it, but I could understand it somewhat if I saw that this was benefiting all sorts of people, but it's not. I know that the Premier has talked about not putting his foot on the brakes, but if you're heading for a collision both in environment and with the way your services are being delivered, only a fool wouldn't put his foot on the brake. It's time to stop and take a look at this. That's why we should support this reasoned amendment.

Thank you very much.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:28 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Martin	Pannu
Eggen	Mason	Pastoor
Elsalhy	Miller, B.	Swann
MacDonald	Miller, R.	Taylor

3:40

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Haley	Mitzel
Brown	Hancock	Oberle
Calahasen	Herard	Ouellette
Cao	Hinman	Pham
DeLong	Jablonski	Renner
Ducharme	Johnson	Shariff
Dunford	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Evans	Lougheed	Stevens
Forsyth	Lukaszuk	Strang
Goudreau	Lund	VanderBurg
Graydon	Mar	Zwozdesky
Groeneveld	Marz	

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 35
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[Motion on the amendment to third reading of Bill 3 lost]

The Speaker: We're back to the debate on Bill 3.

Shall we call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on the debate on Bill 3?

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak again to Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. Just a few points that will cap my comments and the reason why we have great difficulty supporting this bill.

The international panel on climate change gave its fourth report just in the last month indicating profound changes on the planet, profound threats to habitat, to human beings, to especially coastal communities, spread of infectious diseases, drought problems, obviously a serious loss of glacial-fed streams, which can affect around the world close to a billion people who depend for their water supply on glacial runoff. It's very clearly the most serious issue that this government, the Canadian government, world governments will be facing in our generation, and frankly citizens are looking for more.

A 1991 federal government report indicated that climate change was real, that human activity was contributing significantly to it, and that urgent action was needed. Sixteen years ago we were called to action, and no governments in this country took the lead. We are all responsible, we all are accountable for the inaction of our governments.

Now we are presented with an opportunity in which we are dropping the ball again with the appearance, only the appearance, of doing something with intensity targets, timed for the next 13 years to somehow bring us to some form of reduction in which there is, in fact, a true increase in emissions, up to 70 per cent predicted, with the growth anticipated in this province. How can we in good

conscience accept a policy that will lead us to a 70 per cent increase in our emissions in 12 years? This is unconscionable.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

There's a serious mismatch between what science, what the public, and what international governance is calling for here and the response of this government. We are looking for real change. We have to move very quickly to a cap on emissions. We have to look at trading and off-setting incentives. We have to move away from the incentives that we continue to give to fossil fuels and transfer those over to renewables and to indeed energy efficiency and energy conservation initiatives.

Citizens are looking for leadership. Action needs investment, Mr. Speaker. Action needs investment. The Stern report last year presented a very credible analysis, a 700-page report, in which Sir Nicholas Stern, supported by a number of economists around the world, indicated that we can spend now or we can spend much more later. One per cent of GDP is what he suggested as a minimum investment each country has to make to start to make the significant reductions in our emissions and our impact on the environment. One per cent of GDP in Alberta would be \$2 billion a year. Two billion dollars is what the international experts are saying we need to spend now, or we will be spending \$20 billion a year mopping up the mess that climate change is going to make in terms of our food production, our flooding, our droughts, our loss of habitat, our infectious disease impact.

It's hard for us to get our heads around this, but the best experts in the world on climate and the best experts that we have access to in terms of economic sustainability are saying that 1 per cent of our GDP is needed, which is \$2 billion a year in this province. We are spending a pittance relevant to this admonition from this international body.

What would this money go to? Well, very clearly, the primary targets have to be to shift towards renewable energy forms: a much stronger investment in solar and wind and geothermal, potentially more in-stream hydro, and then potentially some hydrogen and coal gasification. Any new coal-fired plants in this province have to have the technology for cleaner coal through carbon capture and storage. That's a second area that this investment should be going into, to enable and promote research and implementation of carbon capture and storage in all new coal-fired plants as the cheapest and the quickest way to make a significant difference.

Clearly, we have to reduce subsidies. We could be doing that by transferring the natural gas rebate program into a serious commitment to energy efficiency and not subsidize fossil fuel use but shift fossil fuel use to renewables and energy efficiency. We need a more serious commitment to public transport in this province, rail and electric particularly. We need a more serious commitment to building code changes. Both housing and institutional business building codes have to change.

We can make a very dramatic difference. The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy said that we could do 40 per cent of the job of reducing our carbon emissions simply through energy efficiency and energy retrofits. That's a huge result from simply using the existing technologies and ensuring that they're used through environmental audits, energy audits on buildings, and government assistance/incentives for retrofits and the shift to renewable energy.

Mr. Speaker, I won't belabour the fact that we on this side of the House feel that there has been an abdication of responsibility in Bill 3. There has been a failure to recognize the seriousness of the investment that's needed and the seriousness of the impacts that are

coming our way. Our children are mostly going to be paying for this debt, that we are transferring to them. There has been far too much delaying, denying, and misinforming of our public. The public are now saying that it's time for change. If this government is not prepared to step up and make the significant changes that are needed, to stand up to industry and hold them accountable since industry and transportation produce 75 of our emissions in this province, then we need to change the government. More and more people are saying that in my circles.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will rest and let others enter the final debate on Bill 3.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. minister to close debate.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to spend a great deal of time talking at this stage. I would like to express my anticipated support to those members who have indicated to me that they intend to support this bill again at third reading. Contrary to what we've heard throughout the debate at both committee and third reading, this bill is legislation that will put us in front of virtually every other jurisdiction in this country. We are introducing leading-edge legislation. When this bill passes and we bring the regulations into force on July 1, we will be the only jurisdiction in all of Canada that has not only intensity targets for greenhouse gases but the compliance mechanisms to actually make them stick.

The federal government has been talking about introducing similar legislation, but at this stage, Mr. Speaker, that's all it is: talk. I understand that even if they come forward with a plan, we all know what the situation is in Ottawa, and it's unlikely that they will be in a similar position to us to actually implement a plan because they won't have the legislation to back them up.

I encourage all members to support this legislation. Let's get on with the job. Let's stop talking about doing something, and let's get on with doing something. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

head: 3:50 **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 19
Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased this afternoon to move second reading of Bill 19, the Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill proposes amendments that will modify the current appeal process of the Court of Appeal to more accurately reflect the realities of how the court is presently doing its business. The bill includes minor amendments to eight provincial statutes that affect mainly the energy and utilities sectors, and overall the amendments are designed to reduce delays and make better use of the court's time.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments are intended to respond to the concerns raised by the Court of Appeal about some unworkable time limits in specific pieces of legislation. To be specific, the current language is old fashioned and dates back to the distant past, when the court had fewer pending cases. At that time the court was able to hear all cases that were ready for argument in "the next sittings of the Court." Today this is unrealistic. Our courts are very busy, and it's become necessary to schedule appearances well in advance. It is very difficult simply to change court schedules in order to hear cases in the next court sitting.

I'd like to take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to explain specifically what these amendments are. The first amendment relates to the process for obtaining leave to appeal a board's decision. Under the current provisions an applicant must obtain leave from the Court of Appeal within 30 days after the board decision has been made. Thirty days is not always sufficient time to gather the materials required by the court to hear a leave to appeal application. The proposed change is that an application for leave to appeal must be "filed and served" within 30 days of the board's or tribunal's decision. This gives the applicant more time to obtain the materials and to file them with the court. Overall it will make better use of the parties' and the court's time by avoiding applications to adjourn while waiting to receive materials needed by the court. The provision will also give the court the power to grant additional time to file an application for leave where a judge feels it is warranted.

The second amendment allows an applicant to formally request that a board or a tribunal provide materials needed to make the leave application. Normally, Mr. Speaker, an applicant will already have the materials as they are a product of the board hearing. However, where the applicant may not have the materials, a written request can be made, and the board or tribunal must provide the materials to the applicant within 14 days. This will ensure that when the court hears the application for leave, it has the relevant evidence before it.

The third amendment clarifies that both the application for leave to appeal and, if the leave is granted, the notice of appeal are to be provided to all parties and the affected board or tribunal. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, the current wording is ambiguous in terms of who is to be served with an application for leave. It is our desire in this bill to make it absolutely clear who needs to be served.

The fourth amendment brings consistency to the time within which the particular board or tribunal must provide the court with a transcript or record of the hearing and the decision with reasons after leave has been granted. The current wording reads either "30 days" or "25 working days." The proposed wording would be 30 days for all of the affected statutes.

The fifth amendment deals with when the appeal is to be heard. The current wording reads that once the board or tribunal has filed the transcript, the record, and other documents, the Court of Appeal is to set the matter down "at the next sittings of the Court" or "as speedily as practicable." Mr. Speaker, this does not happen now simply because of the volume of appeals being heard, as I mentioned.

A new appeal cannot be set down at the next sittings of the court unless an existing appeal were to lose its scheduled date. In reality the actual practice of the court is to have legal counsel agree on a date that is suitable for them and their respective clients. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, the current statutory time limits do not reflect the realities and the practices of the court. This has resulted in time-consuming and costly applications, which are necessary in order to meet these time limits. So this is why this particular bill is necessary.

Overall, these changes will clarify the requirement for giving notice of an application for leave to appeal as well as the notice of appeal itself to affected parties and the board or tribunal. The amendments will also establish consistency in the time limits imposed for filing documents in appeals.

The proposed amendments will involve minor amendments to the following statutes: the Agricultural Operation Practices Act, the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board Act, the Electric Utilities Act, the Energy Resources Conservation Act, the Natural Resources Conservation Board Act, the Public Utilities Board Act, the Gas Utilities Act, and the Municipal Government Act.

Mr. Speaker, notice of the proposed amendments was provided to the judiciary, to the affected boards through their legal counsel, to

the Canadian Bar Association, and to the Law Society of Alberta. Stakeholders reviewed and expressed support for the proposed amendments. They also provided feedback and suggestions for additional changes. As a result, the amendments have been drafted to reflect all of the recommendations provided by the stakeholders.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the proposed changes in this bill will better reflect the current practices within the Alberta Court of Appeal as it relates to appeals from boards or tribunal decisions. They will eliminate conflicting provisions, provide greater clarity about the process, and establish consistency as to when appeals are to be heard.

I encourage all members of this House to support Bill 19. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to respond to the hon. member moving second reading of Bill 19, *Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007*. I actually have to start with a compliment to the hon. member, who I really appreciate having in this Assembly and appreciate his work ethic. He certainly works hard and is, for the most part, a fair and reasonable person to work with.

Now, the bill that we have before us, Mr. Speaker, is amending appeal procedures. I have to admit that not being a lawyer and not having a lawyer in our Official Opposition caucus poses certain challenges. But on the flip side of this, I'm also very proud of myself because I have improved. My ability to read legal bills and to read legal language and to understand through a very critical lens what the government might be trying to bring forward has improved significantly since I joined this esteemed Assembly in 2004.

Before I go into the bill itself, as a matter of procedure or course I usually read the news release, the government press release that announces to the world that the government is bringing forward a particular piece of legislation. This news release, which was dated March 20, talks about building a stronger Alberta and bringing forward legislation to establish new provincial guidelines for appeal procedures.

4:00

The hon. member, as he was introducing his bill, was talking about eight different statutes, but when I went through the bill, at least the copy I have, I only counted seven. I know that the one that seems to be the discrepancy is the Gas Utilities Act, which I couldn't at first glance find in my own copy. So unless it's embedded in a certain section that I can't see with a big, bold title, I would appreciate the hon. member alerting me to where exactly it appears in the bill.

It's not a big bill. It's about 12 pages thick, but again it's lawyer friendly, not necessarily layman friendly, and any guidance and any assistance from the hon. mover of the bill would be greatly appreciated.

So what are we trying to do? The bill is intended to bring legislation in line with current practices in the court system related to direct appeals from board or tribunals, which is something I agree with. It provides clarity and consistency with what we do now in appeal processes, which is fine. I don't disagree. The main feature is to bring in a workable time limit, something that people can adhere to and not find onerous or unrealistic in the legislation, allowing direct appeals to the Court of Appeal.

Now, the acts I counted are the Agricultural Operation Practices Act, Alberta Energy and Utilities Board Act, Electric Utilities Act, Energy Resources Conservation Act, Municipal Government Act,

Natural Resources Conservation Board Act, and number seven is the Public Utilities Board Act. I'm assuming that maybe the Gas Utilities Act would fall under that one. But, again, this was just my quick first scan of the bill, so I'm going to now maybe scrutinize it a little more. Each of those seven acts being amended involves the decisions of a regulator, a regulator such as the Energy and Utilities Board or the NRCB or the Municipal Government Board.

Those decisions can be appealed to the courts. However, in the existing legislation, as I understand it, each of these acts frequently leads to parties being unable to meet the timelines. As such, we are opening the door for, you know, adjournments or postponements to the court process because of the unworkable time limits.

In those various statutes there were no provisions for the procurement of documents that were requested by an applicant from a board.

I would pause here for a second, Mr. Speaker, and talk about those boards, which have really grown in size, mandate, and authority, if you will. They're becoming almost like government agencies by themselves. While they were initially envisioned to be sort of at arm's length, they are now so huge and their mandate is so widespread that, you know, for somebody to approach them with an appeal process and ask for documents, it's a little intimidating, and it's a little difficult for that person to procure those documents that are in question.

This is one of the reasons why we had so many delays in the process. Those boards, as they were initially set up, were under no statutory obligation to provide the materials requested in any set period of time. So I think that clarifying this and streamlining it is useful, and again I commend the drafters of this legislation for catching this and trying to rectify it.

Now, the bill is in response to concerns raised by the Chief Justice. Again, that's good because now we're listening to the people who are, like, hands on, the people who are in the field, telling us that this is something that they are struggling with, and now we as legislators are responding and reacting to that concern or that frustration.

They were unworkable time limits, which hindered or interfered with people's access to the Court of Appeal with respect to those boards or tribunals, as I mentioned. So in terms of the actual amendments in this amendment legislation, I think the first one is to set those realistic time limits at 30 days for an application for a leave to appeal to be filed. It removes the consent provision from a judge of the Court of Appeal to grant a leave to appeal.

Again, I'm really proud of myself here because three years ago that didn't make sense to me. It was all Greek. But now, you know, what a difference three years make.

The second component is to remove the obligation to actually have leave to appeal granted from a judge. Again, I look at this as improving access. Basically, what we're proposing here is to just have to provide the intent to apply for a leave to appeal, which is, I think, simpler, and it makes it easier for applicants to move forward.

The third component is to add a provision relating to a time limit of 14 days from the day on which the written request is served for the board or that tribunal that we were talking about to provide any materials requested by an applicant. That's, again, wonderful. In this day and age people are asking for quick justice, and they're asking for access to information. If we continued, you know, allowing boards or tribunals to just sit on those requests indefinitely and to waste time and to drag, justice was not being served, and it wasn't being served in a timely fashion. So that is a positive change.

The fourth component, or the fourth attempt that this bill is trying to do, is to stipulate that if leave to appeal is "granted by a judge of the Court of Appeal, the appeal must proceed in accordance with the

practice and procedure of the Court of Appeal.” It also states that “the notice of appeal must be given to the parties affected by the appeal.” I think that is, again, a favourable direction that we should be accepting because notice of appeal allows all the parties to be prepared and it creates that sort of even playing field for all parties in that particular court case.

Now, there is a bit of technical wording which I found a little challenging. It basically has to do with the transcripts and records of hearing. But what we did, again, to make sure that nothing fishy or nothing mischievous was being embedded here was we asked two or three lawyers in the field. They replied to us that they don’t see this as any concern about something that might be contentious or something that might be questionable or objectionable and definitely that they don’t see it as being a barrier in the process to appeal to the Court of Appeal.

So we trust those legal opinions, and we trust their integrity because they’re people who are, again, in the field, hands on, and they have no interest in which way this act is amended. They’re fairly impartial, and they said that they don’t see it as having any negative impact on people’s access to the courts or the ability to appeal in the Court of Appeal, so in that regard I’m not going to worry much about that component dealing with transcripts and records of hearing.

Not to consume a lot more time, Mr. Speaker, I don’t think there’s anything in Bill 19 that would raise any significant flags. Again, I commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill because he is definitely one of the hardest working in his caucus. We appreciate the fact that he shared the background information ahead of time with members of the opposition, which really makes our lives easier. It allows us to not be as suspicious or not be as critical because now we can do the research ahead of time and not be rushed to participate in debate.

With that, I invite further comments, but the Official Opposition is leaning towards supporting Bill 19, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 19 in second reading. Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, was just introduced by our colleague from Calgary-Nose Hill, and his introductory comments were helpful in describing the nature of changes that this bill proposes to accomplish by way of the amendments that are made to seven different pieces of legislation that deal with a variety of boards, tribunals, et cetera in the province.

Mr. Speaker, some of the changes that are being proposed clearly make sense in terms of the time limits, the requirement of 30 days for serving the intention to appeal and the time limit of 14 days for the boards or tribunals to respond to the request for materials for the purposes of the applicant to be able to seek leave to appeal to the Court of Appeal. So the changes in the time requirement I think make sense.

Changes in the language that, again, the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill suggested needed to be made in order to make the language more current with the times: I think those are welcome, make sense to me.

The only primary concern that I have, and still have after listening to the member and other hon. members, is the kind of materials that the applicant will be able to ask for when preparing application for leave to appeal. Mr. Speaker, the provisions in Bill 19 make a distinction between requests for materials and requests for transcripts. The distinction is made that certain materials can in fact be requested from a tribunal or a board in order to prepare a leave to

appeal, but excluded from the materials are the records of the proceedings in order to do so.

I’m somewhat puzzled by this distinction. In terms of general principles I think I would like to see a piece of legislation which doesn’t make it more difficult, doesn’t reduce the probability, if you wish, of the application for leave to appeal to succeed. It seems to me that the fact that the amendment proposed here will explicitly exclude the ability of the applicant to have access to transcripts in preparing the leave to appeal application would make it more difficult, perhaps, or reduce the likelihood of success of the application for leave to appeal. So that is, I think, my primary concern.

It is true that changes need to be made in existing pieces of legislation to achieve greater levels of efficiency, save where effort can be saved in the legal processes when applicants want to take matters before the courts. True, efficiency as a value is important. Saving resources and time and being able to do things in a timely fashion without wasteful effort having to be put in to do so is a good thing, but we have to put the principle of efficiency against the principle of the right of applicants to seek legal redress by way of appeal. In my view, this distinction that’s introduced by way of these amendments in this bill, the distinction between requests for materials which boards and tribunals would be obliged by law to provide within 30 days excepting the transcripts, would tilt the balance in favour of efficiency at the cost of the notions of justice and fairness and the rights of the applicant to exercise the right to appeal. So that remains my concern.

I have thought of introducing an amendment to rectify the problem that I see in the bill, to improve the bill. There are, as I said, you know, very positive features in the bill which I’m in support of. The only matter over which I have reservation is the exception made with respect to the access to transcripts, that the time of preparing the application to seek leave for appeal that is being legislated here will make it more difficult for the applicant, in my view, to prepare an application for leave to appeal in a way that could enhance the likelihood of the success of the application for leave to appeal.

I hope that in the ensuing debate I have an opportunity to hear a stronger defence or a clearer explanation for this bill introducing this distinction between certain materials that must be made available in order to prepare the application for leave to appeal and certain other materials, specifically the transcripts, not being made available. I think the transcripts are an important piece of the materials that the applicant will need and would like to have available to prepare an application for leave to appeal because having the transcripts available, in my view, would most likely enhance the likelihood of the application for leave to appeal to succeed. That is, perhaps, my only major concern with respect to Bill 19.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

Any other speakers?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill to close the debate?

Mr. Magnus: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

4:20

Bill 22

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act

[Adjourned debate April 4: Mr. Eggen]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise and participate in debate on this Bill 22, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act. As you know, this act is trying to establish a new provincial entity, a new provincial corporation to manage Alberta's investments. While maximizing return for the taxpayer is something that any government should be looking at, and while maximizing return on investment should be something that any Legislature supports, one has to wonder at the rationale behind this direction and this turn today compared to yesterday or this year compared to last year, for example. What changed? What brought on this policy change to move it from, you know, under the direction or under the control of the Minister of Finance to something that is outside of government, something that might be relatively at arm's length compared to the current situation?

The government is telling us that this new provincial corporation could improve net investment returns by 25 to 100 basis points. They're basically explaining, as per their press release when they announced the introduction of this bill, that every 10 basis points in net value-added would yield a return of something like \$16 million per year in net income – that is through the Alberta heritage savings trust fund – or, according to their figures, close to \$50 million per year on all the balanced investment portfolios managed by the corporation.

Two questions. Number one, why can't we do this now? Why can't the staff and employees of Alberta Finance as they are structured now offer this better return on investment? Why do we need to go outside of the Ministry of Finance to achieve this better return? The second question that comes from this statement or this observation is: why did we wait so long? If the government is claiming that this is basically following best practices in other jurisdictions – and they use the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan as one of them or the Canada pension plan as another – why did we wait so long?

Now, I'm under the impression that there has been a recent study commissioned by the government which concluded that a stand-alone organization would be, sort of, a better way to invest and to manage the investments. I have to ask the question if this decision was made based on just the one study. You know, if it's just the one study that resulted in such a profound policy change or change in direction, what did that study tell us? What was lacking, or what was not being done adequately that we had to actually resort to a measure of this magnitude?

The government is also telling us that going this way, creating this organization, is going to balance operational independence with the highest standards of transparency and accountability, yet in the same paragraph the government is telling us that "the Lieutenant Governor in Council will appoint a board of directors responsible for the oversight of the corporation." We all know that this is basically language that really means that it's the minister who's going to appoint the board. You know, lay people would probably understand that the Lieutenant Governor is in charge, but this really tells us that the minister is going to appoint people to direct the corporation. How is that granting that organization operational independence if they're still appointed by the minister in charge?

Also, the same press release is telling us that "the government will continue to set the investment policy for all government funds." So my concern here, Mr. Speaker – and I think it's a justified concern – is: are we creating a new level of bureaucracy, or are we creating something that might be not needed, something that might be redundant? Operational independence: wonderful if we can guarantee it. With operational independence there should come accountability, and there should come transparency.

If we move in that direction, and if this House agrees that this is the direction we need to go, who are they going to report to? Who

are they going to be accountable to? Will it continue to be the Minister of Finance, or will it now be the President of the Treasury Board, or will they report directly to the Assembly? We need to know. We need to know that chain of command, or that line of authority. Where does it start, and where does it end?

I honestly thought that the Ministry of Finance was doing a fairly good job. This press release and the bill itself tell us that we could do better. I'm all for doing better, but I'm just hesitant to create new departments and new agencies and to appoint people to them. It should come as no surprise to you, Mr. Speaker, that we also have issues with respect to appointments to boards and agencies and, you know, different departments and stuff like that because we have concerns with respect to patronage and redundancy and waste. We need assurances that this is not the case, at least in this particular situation.

Another thing is that today in question period there was a little confusion that arose from a particular question that my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford raised. We had heard that during supplementary supply there was an entry for \$7 million for investment loss. When we investigated, the hon. Minister of Finance told us that it was basically due to an error in hedging, if I remember the term correctly, with respect to the difference in currency exchange between the Canadian dollar and the U.S. dollar. It was an error made by an employee of Alberta Finance, and by the time they caught it, it had cost the taxpayer \$11 million.

Now, on the one hand, the hon. Minister of Finance today was saying that now this agency is going to prevent this from happening again and that part of the rationale for its inception is basically to address concerns like this. But in a written response to my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford, the minister has indicated that the rationale for converting the province's investment management operations to a provincial corporation, I quote, is not in any way related to the losses cited in the supplementary estimates. End quote.

So there is a bit of a mixed message here. Mistakes have to be avoided. Protocols and procedures have to be tightened, Mr. Speaker, and we have to ensure that it's not just one employee that is making decisions like this. There should be checks and balances and people double-checking and triple-checking before a decision is made or a decision is finalized because, honestly, as we were discussing this morning in caucus, we really sympathize with that employee.

The employee has to be accountable, and they have to be responsible for the error they made, but it's really not entirely their fault. They have supervisors, and they have bosses, and those bosses have bosses, and those bosses have a Minister of Finance that actually oversees this entire department and is entrusted to handle those investments and to make those decisions and to scrutinize those decisions on a day-to-day basis. So, yes, someone made a mistake, and they have to be dealt with, but also we have to really investigate what led to that mistake and what led to that mistake not being caught on the day it was made, a month later, or six months later, Mr. Speaker.

Now, we have raised many concerns in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, with respect to different government agencies and boards and commissions. If you remember last year, for example, there was a lot of talk about the Alberta Securities Commission. Now that we're creating this new department and now that the minister will appoint people that are going to direct it – and they would have a lot of autonomy and a lot of power – how can Albertans be confident that the issue of governance and the issue of management are going to be dealt with so we can ensure that, you know, professionalism and ethical behaviour are going to be highlighted and emphasized and that they're going to be of the utmost importance?

4:30

The next concern which I'm going to raise is with respect to their budget. We are creating a new board, and this new board is going to require staff. They're going to require letterhead and business cards, and they might be moving to a new building that, you know, you have to pay rent for and then utilities and insurance and all that stuff. With all of this in front of us and with all of this being thought about, are we also going to require them to not only co-operate with the Auditor General because everybody has to co-operate with the Auditor General, but take those new policy field committees that we're going to be establishing, Mr. Speaker, which is really a wonderful turn of events – and I welcome their incorporation into our legislative life. Will they be required to appear before the policy field committee that's in charge of finance and that's in charge of making investment decisions? I would hope that the answer is yes, and I would hope that they would not feel that we're unduly infringing on their autonomy, that what we're doing in fact is helping set that policy direction.

I am not comfortable with the fact that the minister or the government is going to continue to set the policy directions for Alberta's investments. I think it should be a function of one of those four policy field committees, and we should really invite input from all sides of the House and also from outside the House. Alberta has quite a large supply of financial advisers and people who can actually make sound decisions day in and day out. I think we should really invite that input from the public and from stakeholders and not just rely on six or seven or 10 people that are hand-picked by the minister to make those decisions. If we're worried about an \$11 million error today with all the checks and balances that we have, I am concerned that we might have larger errors materialize in the future. So the issue of governance, the issue of ethical behaviour is a big one, Mr. Speaker.

Again, back to that operational flexibility, just to assure the citizens of this great province that the corporation will not put the wishes or the views of its creator, a.k.a. the government or the cabinet, above the interests of Albertans. You know, this concern arises whenever you have a political appointment to any board or any commission, and this one in particular is going to be dealing in, I think, excess of \$70 billion. The government has investments exceeding \$70 billion, and these people have to be held accountable that they don't put the wishes or the directions of the cabinet ahead of the genuine interests of Albertans. Albertans own the investment, and if they benefit, it's them who benefit, and if something wrong happens, it's Albertans whose investments lose value. It's them who suffer.

Now, referencing other jurisdictions, you know, like the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan or the Canada pension plan is wonderful. Let's make sure, then, that our practices and our protocols and the operational manual for this new investment corporation are modelled after those other jurisdictions. So we don't just reference them; we should really learn from their experiences.

So I will take my seat, Mr. Speaker, and invite further comment. But it's something that we are going to cautiously support. I hope that the hon. minister provides us with some answers. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions? The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. I thank the hon. member for some of his insightful comments. I appreciate them as we work together, I would say, as we look at these policy field examples that he mentioned and thank him for his positive comments to the government on this initiative but also on the Legislature. It's going to be

really important to understand that good ideas, no matter from what political party, are what we want to embrace. Of course, be it whomever they come from, this government accepts good ideas. Obviously, the responsibility of the government will be to execute those ideas in terms of what we do. So I just want to say: good ideas. No one person or one group has a patent on good ideas, and that's what makes any government successful in terms of embracing those good ideas, which we will continue to do. Who knows? Maybe some day in the future there will be a ministry of good ideas.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 22, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act, in its second reading. This is obviously an important piece of legislation. It will create a new Crown corporation that will be asked to handle very large sums of public money, close to \$70 billion, being done on the assumption or with the goal of boosting the returns to investments that now are in public funds by \$500 million.

Mr. Speaker, it is an important bill because it does create a new Crown corporation. There are all kinds of questions about what kind of arm's-length relationship this corporation will have with the government. Presently much of the work that this corporation will do is done in-house in the Department of Finance. At least in theory that work currently being done in the Department of Finance is accessible to us in terms of seeking transparency and accountability of decisions.

Once you put these important decisions in the hands of a Crown corporation, you certainly free it from the possibility of political interventions in the decisions that get made with respect to these investments, which may affect financial markets or what have you. That's, I suppose, one of the underlying advantages in establishing a corporation. It frees or prevents or, if you wish, insulates it somewhat from political influence that may come from the government, from the cabinet, from the Executive Council, or from the minister in charge, the Minister of Finance or whoever.

On the other hand, it's a question of public accountability of these funds because these are funds that really in principle belong to the province of Alberta and therefore to the people of Alberta. The people of Alberta have a right to have confidence in the alternative that's being proposed, confidence both in the accountability side and the transparency side.

Mr. Speaker, of course this Crown corporation will be dealing with investments. Many Albertans may have concerns about the investment policies. Ethical investing, for example, would I think be a concern that many Albertans would have. Once you put these matters, important decisions and \$70 billion, in the hands of an arm's-length Crown corporation, what kind of access, what kind of control, what kind of influence will the residents of this province have on decisions which relate to whether or not a particular investment decision has respected the principles of ethical investing? So I have questions about what kind of accessibility, what kind of access either Albertans in general or this House on behalf of Albertans will have with respect to reviewing and asking questions about the ethical nature of the investment decisions made by such a corporation.

4:40

The related question is, of course, Mr. Speaker – we have seen that once there are investment corporations that have come into being, they make decisions which have been considered not legally appropriate, and some of the public corporations have been taken to

the court, and CEOs have been criminally charged in some cases and have faced the consequences of their actions, some cases in progress right now, as we speak, with respect to that.

The premise that this corporation, AIM, Alberta Investment Management Corporation, will deliver benefits in the form of enhanced returns on the investments is just one premise. There are other potential possibilities and difficulties that could arise, and we need to therefore proceed gingerly, to put it in an interesting way, when making a decision on the pros and cons of establishing a Crown corporation that will be responsible for investment decisions on public funds. So the accountability issue becomes very, very important, and the oversight, the ability to oversee the activities, of such a corporation by a legislative body, by a democratically elected forum such as this one, becomes an important issue.

I think our colleague from Edmonton-McClung raised the issue of whether or not the policy field committees relevant to this area will have any role in not only overseeing the activities and decisions of this corporation but, in my view, should have a central role in examining this bill. We should invite financial experts, advisers, people from the academy perhaps, regular citizens to come and give advice to this government on this very crucial piece of legislation, which is really the establishment of a Crown corporation dealing with, at the moment, \$70 billion.

Who knows? If this government did see the light and, in fact, agreed to enhance the revenues that come into the public purse from revenues generated from the exploitation of nonrenewable resources by their royalties, if the royalty rates were to increase, as I hope this review will make certain that happens, that Albertans get a higher rent on the resources that will not be there within two or three or four generations, then it won't be just \$70 billion. It may be \$200 billion or \$300 billion. We know that other jurisdictions in the world such as Norway or Alaska have used their royalty rates to in fact accumulate very large sums of money available to the citizens of those jurisdictions for investment.

So the role of this corporation could in fact be far more crucial given the possibility of the \$70 billion fund to grow into a much larger fund, hundreds of billions of dollars. Given that that possibility is open to us, whether this government will help Albertans achieve their goal is another matter, and I have very serious doubts that the government has any intention, really, of enhancing royalty rates so that Albertans in general will benefit from the historically unprecedented high rates on these resources that companies benefit from. We as Albertans are stuck with the royalty rates established when these oil prices and gas prices were one-third or one-fourth of where they are now, yet the royalty rates haven't changed.

Assuming that the royalty rate change can be made by the government of Alberta, whether this one or another government that replaces it, the role of this corporation becomes even more crucial in shaping the future possibilities for Albertans, and the decisions that this corporation will be making will therefore be of great significance to them. So I raise the question of whether or not the Minister of Finance is in fact willing to heed the advice coming from this member to refer this bill to the policy field committee that would be relevant for this particular area.

It's a very, very important bill, Mr. Speaker. I can't overemphasize the importance of this being looked at more closely. We need to give ourselves time. We need to give Albertans the opportunity to have input on giving us their advice as to the features of this bill, the contents of the bill, and what they would like to see changed or what provisions they would like to see enhanced and where they would like to see new provisions added so that their interests are fully protected and the accountability and transparency issues are well addressed.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and hope that the Minister of Finance will give me an answer in the affirmative with

respect to my suggestion that this should be the first bill that is referred to the relevant policy field committee that will come into place now that the House today voted on the motion from the Government House Leader, which will now enable us to establish those policy field committees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

Any other speakers?

The hon. Minister of Finance to close debate.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to say thank you to everyone who has debated this bill at second reading. There has been a lot of thought put into this bill. There have been a lot of issues that have been dealt with regarding this bill. Indeed, this has been something that has been contemplated for the last four to five years. It culminated in a study, which I tabled in the Legislative Assembly roughly a month ago, which showed the potential upside for moving to this type of format, for moving to this type of investment opportunity. I think it would be extremely difficult for us as a Legislative Assembly to turn our backs on the potential savings, the potential increase in income of close to \$500 million a year, which is what 100 basis points would give us.

Mr. Speaker, there have been questions raised about the administrative costs. There have been questions raised about numerous other costs, but I will say to the members in this Assembly that when I talk a hundred basis points – and I will give the range of 25 to 100 basis points – in actual fact, that is a net increase in the amount of dollars that have come forward.

Would it have been easier simply to keep all of our investments within the Department of Finance? Yes, it would be. Is that the best thing for our \$70 billion in investments? The answer is no. The study that was brought forward showed us that, and it showed us that we do need to take the next step, which OMERS, which the teachers' and the various other pension funds around the country have done.

The second point – and I would certainly hope that the members from Edmonton would adhere to this principle – is that by centring in Edmonton a Crown corporation that has \$70 billion in assets, we hope to get a spinoff financial industry in Edmonton. By having that critical mass of \$70 billion here, we really feel that that spinoff will occur.

4:50

So, Mr. Speaker, this bill has been done with a lot of thought. It's been done with a lot of consternation, but we have made a decision to move ahead with this bill because we feel that it is the best for our investments. It's the best for our pension plans, and I will add that all of our pension plans, some \$25 billion worth of pension plans, are in agreement with moving to this format, in this direction.

The last thing that I want to say is quite simply that this board will not be political appointments. This board will be put on for expertise. We cannot have political appointments, Joe's friend or anyone else's friend, put on this board to manage \$70 billion. The hon. member across the way talked about the policy field committees. Unless I'm wrong, there is no one in this Legislature who can manage \$70 billion worth of investment, and I include myself in that particular group of people. That's a huge task. It's a huge responsibility, and we need to ensure that the proper people are in place to manage our money as Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

So I anxiously look forward to the Committee of the Whole on this one.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 28
Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? Hon. Minister of Justice, are you rising for this?

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise to begin discussion this afternoon in committee on Bill 28, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007. This bill amends the Provincial Court Act to permit a judge who is more than 70 years of age and working full time to be appointed a part-time judge if he or she wishes. Currently the act permits part-time judges to be reappointed after age 70 only if they started part-time service on or before their 70th birthday. I'd like to start by thanking the members opposite and my colleague the Minister of Health and Wellness for their comments in second reading.

Today I'd like to summarize the benefits of Bill 28 and answer questions that arose in debate at second. Extending the option of part-time service to full-time judges over 70 years of age will benefit Albertans. More highly experienced and competent judges will be retained to continue serving Albertans on a part-time basis. As my colleague the Minister of Health and Wellness stated in debate, the provision for part-time service was made available at the request of the Provincial Court.

Part-time service is one way to keep judges who have put in considerable service serving on the bench. The other way is to appoint supernumerary judges, who are called upon to serve from time to time as needed. Supernumerary judges are retired judges who are paid on a per diem basis. Part-time judges sit on a consistent and scheduled basis as opposed to a supernumerary judge, who sits on a periodic basis. Other benefits of part-time service are that judges receive regular exposure to current trends and access to professional development opportunities.

As I pointed out in second reading, there is a financial benefit to the government with these amendments. On an annual basis two part-time judges sit the same number of days as a full-time judge but cost the government \$60,645 less. This is because part-time judges are already receiving their pensions, and the government is no longer required to make contributions to their pension plans.

Mr. Chairman, another benefit of Bill 28 is that it will provide the Provincial Court with more flexibility in scheduling their sittings. The act now requires part-time judges to sit full-time for two three-month periods in each year. Bill 28 will change this requirement so that part-time judges sit for the equivalent of six months on a full-time basis in each year of their term.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview requested an update about the need for this bill at this particular time. He wondered if this legislation was related to the courts being very busy as a result of a booming economy. Mr. Chairman, it is true that the courts are increasingly busy, and this is due in part to a growing population. The impetus for this legislation, however, is to help us retain experience and knowledge on the bench, which are valuable assets to Albertans at any time. I would add that these changes were initiated at the request of the Provincial Court of Alberta, and it is fully supportive of this bill.

I believe this addresses all of the questions raised in debate, and we should move forward with this bill at this time. I would ask, as a result, that all members of the Assembly support the bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's indeed a pleasure to rise and participate at this stage of debate on Bill 28, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007. If I remember correctly, this is probably my first chance to speak to it, and I thank the hon. Minister of Justice for the bill briefing ahead of time and also for his responses that he just gave to some of the comments and concerns raised in second reading.

The purpose of this bill, Mr. Chairman, is to amend the Provincial Court Act to allow judges to continue to work after they reach the age of 70. The second substantive component of this bill is to require a part-time judge to sit the equivalent of six months on a full-time basis. This is versus, maybe, the current practice of potentially serving two separate three-month periods on a full-time basis in each year of his or her term. So with respect to this second component I don't understand whether it has a different value or if it's, in fact, not the same thing. I suspect that maybe it has something to do with scheduling simplicity for the Chief Judge and the Assistant Chief Judge to assign, you know, roster duty or to schedule those part-time judges. So counting the days, really, it doesn't make a big difference whether somebody works six months or two three-month blocks. I suspect that it has to do with the scheduling, to make it easier for that Chief Judge or for the Assistant Chief Judge to stipulate who works where when.

Are we trying to keep experienced judges on the bench for a longer period? Yes, we are. Are we supportive of this direction? Yes, we are. It does two things. It actually achieves two favourable outcomes, Mr. Chairman. One, for judges who want a reduced but guaranteed amount of judicial service after retirement, it allows them to have that option, which is favourable. It also allows for a reduction in the pressure on the court. Both volume and gravity or complexity of cases are of concern, so now we're allowing an enhanced speed, if you will, with which cases are processed. I've always maintained – and many people like me – that slow justice is bad justice.

If we can accelerate processing and if we can move things quicker and restore the rights of people who have been wronged or offer them compensation or restitution or, indeed, provide them with closure for their ordeals and for their suffering, that's definitely something that is favourable and that I am in favour of. The interest of having access to justice and fairness is definitely paramount, Mr. Chairman.

5:00

Now, allowing judges to work part-time after they reach the age of 70 and extending that lifespan, if you will, is favourable, like I said. I just hope that one of the reasons why we're leaning towards this amendment is not to cut down on costs. We all know that two part-time judges might actually do the same work that one full-time judge might; however, the government is not required to contribute to their pension plans, for example. So hopefully this is not one of the reasons, you know, in terms of cost savings.

The other thing is that while we are eager to extend the working life of judges who are experienced, it shouldn't be coming at the expense of or placing younger judges at a disadvantage, interfering with, let's say, a young Crown prosecutor who is qualified and who meets all the criteria and all the requirements to be promoted or to be appointed to the bench.

So on the one hand it's great that we're creating this opportunity for retired judges to carry on their duties and to participate in the judicial process, but also we have to be cognizant of the fact that younger ones might be coming through, going up the ladder, basically, and we shouldn't be putting them at a disadvantage. It should be an accommodation of both. I think that we might be achieving this accommodation of both because we have tremendous backlogs, and we have tremendous workloads in our courts. So maybe my concern is not as warranted, or maybe I'm being too concerned.

Moving on. With respect to allowing judges to participate and to carry on their duties, remember, Mr. Chairman, when we discussed Bill 16 in this House last week. Bill 16 is the Police Amendment Act, 2007. The Alberta Liberal caucus introduced an amendment to Bill 16 which asked for the inclusion of a retired judge in the special investigative unit, the unit which was basically established to investigate serious allegations of police wrongdoing, incidents involving death or injury or situations with respect to sensitive information or situations of a sensitive nature.

Now, we asked for a retired judge to be on that integrated investigative unit, and we also asked for a retired or former Crown prosecutor, a retired or former police officer, and at least two members of the public. We were talking about members of the public that don't fit into any of those three categories: judge, Crown prosecutor, or police officer. It was unfortunately rejected by the government caucus. One of the arguments we heard is, basically, that we might be putting ourselves in a legal conundrum because we might not find a retired judge to serve on the integrated investigative unit, and if we go ahead and establish the investigative unit without a judge in it, then we might be breaking our own law.

That was an excuse which I found a little weak given that on the Order Paper we have Bill 28, which basically extends the working lifespan of judges and allows them, should they choose, to continue to practise. So that tells me, in a way, that we do have a healthy supply of judges who are around age 70 or older than 70 who are willing to continue to work even on a part-time basis. Their expertise would be critical, and we all appreciate the fact that they've been doing this for many years, and the qualifications and the experience that they have amassed are to be noted.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar indicated in the debate on Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, that we should leave judges alone to enjoy their retirement. He indicated that, in his book, his definition would be that once you're retired, you're definitely retired; you're done. I quote from *Hansard* where he said: "I want to grant them that opportunity to stay retired. I want to let them be retired because that's important. I know that when I retire, I hope that people will just let me retire. Yes, they have lots of skills; they have lots of abilities." I disagree because we have tremendous backlogs, and we have pressures on our legal system that can be addressed fairly and adequately by allowing those judges to continue to practise.

Definitely, this amendment in Bill 28 enhances that ability of the courts to retain the services of qualified and experienced judges who have both the capacity and the ability to continue to serve Albertans and the interests of justice. I emphasize, Mr. Chairman, that slow justice is bad justice. As MLAs – and I'm included, and you're included as well – we hear from constituents all the time that the wheels of justice sometimes turn slower than expected or slower than they should. Maybe this way we can accelerate, you know, the processing of court cases.

They are willing to continue to work, and we have to offer them the legislative framework with which they are allowed to continue to work. This is an enhancement over supernumerary judges, who

are called in from time to time to fill in like locums, for example, but who are unable to continue with their professional development. It provides a better way of retaining the services of judges, as opposed to the supernumerary status.

So, in essence, Mr. Chairman, we don't have any major concerns with this. I just hope that this is done in a structured way. I will definitely lend my support to any measure introduced in this House that would increase access to justice and provide a mechanism to expedite the movement of cases through our court system. As such, I encourage all members of this House to join me in voting in favour of Bill 28. I thank you for this opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise with some interest in speaking to Bill 28, Provincial Court Amendment Act, for the first time. Certainly, as my colleague just very eloquently, I thought, pointed out, this is a positive and innovative means by which we perhaps can help to expedite the swift and equitable passage of justice in our provincial courts. Considering the backlogs that we have to deal with so often in provincial courts, then perhaps this is, in fact, an innovative way to change that around.

This bill is a simple amendment to the retirement clause of the Provincial Court Act and will allow judges to continue perhaps on a part-time basis past their 70th birthday. Currently the act states that a judge approaching their 70th birthday must state in writing that the judge is willing to give up their appointment and that also a judge may be eligible for a one-year extension. Under the part-time provision of this bill judges must serve for two full terms, three months each, if they want to get the part-time status. So this bill simply puts a little subclause in there that the judges have received a one-year extension of their full-time status and then be appointed as part-time judges, making it easier for the process to unfold.

It also amends the time frame to some extent that judges must serve by loosening it, I believe, to something more like six months rather than to a three-month term. So, certainly, this just seems like a simple and useful way to continue, on a voluntary basis, of course, the wisdom and the skills that judges have developed over the course of their careers and, if they are choosing to do so, to continue to contribute to our judicial system.

5:10

Certainly, it's, I believe, also sending a positive message in regard to options that individuals in other professions might have in regard to retiring or choosing not to retire. We have a tendency in our society here recently to loosen the constraints that have been placed in previous times in regard to mandatory retirement ages. You know, I believe that this is a step forward for people's freedom of choice, and certainly it acknowledges the accumulated wisdom and capacity of long-serving professionals in all different walks of life to continue to contribute to society in a positive way and, in fact, probably contribute in a most positive way.

I have to look no further than my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona just to see, you know, how much wisdom and positive contribution an individual can continue to make long past what some people might consider to be a retirement age. In fact, the University of Alberta just recently lifted their mandatory retirement age . . .

An Hon. Member: It's about time.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Exactly. About time, indeed.

We consider the value that we like to pay lip service to towards wisdom and accumulated knowledge and to all of those things. Finally, we have an actual acknowledgement of that here with the

University of Alberta changing their retirement policy and now, potentially, with Bill 28 in regard to judges.

So, you know, this bill we certainly do support as a caucus, and we consider it to have the potential, as I said before, to alleviate the pressures from our court system. It certainly is part and parcel of other mechanisms by which we could in fact impose positive change on our court system to clear the backlog and to offer other alternatives that perhaps can serve our justice system better.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would certainly once again like to reiterate our support of Bill 28, and I would invite other members to do so as well. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 28 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 5

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 5, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. We had an exchange of information during second reading of this bill, and I had made a couple of observations. Essentially, this act is amending five pieces of legislation. For the most part, I have no trouble with what's being done here, but I was a little curious about a couple of things.

The first section, which is amending the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, removes the requirement for a practitioner to provide permission to the department to review patient records and establishes a penalty for a practitioner who refuses to give this permission. So it's no longer required, and if somebody does actively try and obstruct it, there is a penalty involved. My concern around this is: continuing to protect patient confidentiality. So I was looking for some comment on that and a clarification on how the reviews are currently conducted. I think my primary question around that is: are patients notified when their files are released to the department as a way of checking up on the physician or as a way of reviewing the physician's current practice? I know the Health Information Act well enough. I should know the answer to that, and I apologize for not having it in the top of my head, but if I could get clarification there.

I also had a bit of a concern on that same first section with the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act around the minister's ability to select members of the committee that then reviews the claims that are submitted. I note that some professions are mandated, and others are not. I think that was the reasoning that I was given as to why this change was in here. I'm always a little cautious when I see that kind of control in the hands of the minister without some sort of extra filter there. I think that what was happening was that there were certain professions that were required to be on the review panel but not others. This is removing that now to allow the minister to just select people. I think my caution there is that we should always have members of the public involved in this so that we do have an independent view that's being brought into play.

I've got no problems at all with section 2.

Section 3 was the Health Insurance Premiums Act. This was making it easier for Albertans to opt out of the health care insurance plan. Essentially, if you're going to do it now, you have to do it by a certain date, and you can only do it for a year. This is making it easier for Albertans to opt out of this. My question would be: why on earth would you be doing that? Of course, my suspicion is always that this is making it easier for people to engage in private insurance plans, which of course helps them to proliferate, and I'm not keen on that at all. But, you know, there really are not very many people that would be involved in this. Why are we spending so much time and effort trying to facilitate very few people, really very few people, who are trying to get out of our public health care system? Why would we be trying to be more consumer friendly on this issue? I guess this whole thing has always puzzled me, and I know that the media was interested in it as well. It's really taking a seemingly simple administrative change, and it's making it one of your top priorities. We haven't had that many health bills in front of us. This is one of them, and this is what's part of it, so I'm a bit curious.

The fourth section is mandatory testing and disclosure. Really, that was about capturing the definition of guardian that's contained in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. Ah, a cell phone ringing in the Assembly. How interesting. I think the hon. minister for government services is desperately trying to cover for one of his colleagues.

All right. Capturing that definition that's used in Children's Services to pertain here is fine by me.

There's a clarification in section 5, the Pharmacy and Drug Act, about the authority of Health and Wellness to adopt national drug schedules as they change over time. Of course, I hope what will come with that is the national pharmacare program. Perhaps the way is being paved for that. That would be good news.

Finally, the Public Health Act, which should bring us in line with current policy enabling the adoption of documents that change over time, don't require new regulatory amendments each time a new version of standards is produced. I think that should also help us with some of the pandemic responses that we're gearing up for.

Those were the issues that I had raised. I'm assuming that I can get some answers back in third reading, but at this point I'm happy to exhort my fellow colleagues in the Assembly to give their assent in Committee of the Whole to Bill 5.

Thanks.

5:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak for the first time on Bill 5, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, my first time, anyway. Yes, certainly, Bill 5, the scope of it covers a number of technical and administrative changes of less consequence.

However, the thing that struck me and raised my critical interest was the section that deals with the Health Insurance Premiums Act. This was, I believe, on page 5 of this bill as it's printed and section 25(9)(b). This is the part that's talking about streamlining the process by which people can step out of paying health care premiums. In the language of the bill these are called registrants. Then it's extending the time frame that they can do it from 12 months to 36 months and also makes the opt-out effective from the point of filing with the ministry.

So considering, as was just previously mentioned, that there are only a few people that actually do opt out of the Health Care Insurance Act – our count is 255 people last year – just sending the message somehow that we will make it easier for you to do so, I

don't know. It gives a negative impression in regard to the universality of our health care system, first of all, and in my estimation is telegraphing an intention somehow that perhaps some people, if they have the means to do so, should do so because more things are coming down the pipe in regard to privatization and/or making it easier for people to choose to not use universal health coverage.

So I certainly oppose this in a very fundamental way. Although it is appearing as a reasonably innocuous line item in Bill 5, certainly it does raise the ire of people who are concerned about the potential for further privatization in the health care system.

The substantive changes otherwise in this bill lie, again, in the Health Care Insurance Act and where this bill is purporting to establish a reassessment of the claim committee and also seeks to strengthen the investigative powers for the purposes of assessing health care records. We don't particularly have a problem with that.

Premiums account for only 9 cents on the dollar that we spend on health care in this province in general; in other words, 9 per cent of the total health care costs. So by stepping out of paying premiums – really, essentially it's just that 9 per cent of the total health care cost for any given unit on average – then registrants really would have to cover 100 per cent of their costs incurred during the nonpayment period, including, presumably, medically necessary treatments as defined by the Canada Health Act. So I just need clarification on that because there is some ambiguity there. The Canada Health Act outlines minimum conditions on provincial health care for the purposes of transfer payments, and dependents who choose not to opt out presumably become liable for the costs. That includes children? Again, I would like to ask about that because, of course, we have a responsibility to individuals under the age of 18 to provide medically necessary procedures. So I just would like to see how that would work together with this ability for an individual or their family to opt out of the health care system.

So although these amendments only make nonpayment of premiums immediate from filing and extend the effective time for them, it seems to be an opportune time and, in my mind, a moment to raise overall concerns with the health care structure as it stands now. For example, I would like to ask: what, if any, are the ramifications from a user standpoint of opting out of premium payments in cost/accessibility? People opting out of the premiums: are they still insured for medically necessary treatments. Right? So if you have an individual who is perhaps in an emergency situation, I mean, how can you sort of choose? Again, this goes back to the nub of the debate.

An Hon. Member: Will we deny them?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Exactly. Of course, we don't deny. We're legally bound as well to provide that treatment. So, you know, how is it that these people are somehow jumping in and jumping out? It goes back to the old debate that we've been fighting for years and, of course, we're ready to fight any time again.

As well, I would like to ask, then: do we pay for the full coverage of additional services provided by Health and Wellness? I mean, how is that going to work out? Right? According to the current wording of the act, in my mind, dependents choosing to opt out of the registrant's declaration would have to assume the responsibility of paying the premium costs. Right? So, would the registrant's children also be personally liable for the premium costs since they, of course, are dependents? I would like to see clarification on that too. Then, what measures are in place to ensure that onerous financial burdens are not placed on extended family or dependents and such? You know, the whole thing just seems a little bit half baked to me.

My feeling, then, is that, really, without some change to this section, although other parts are probably necessary and technical in nature, I would be tempted to oppose this bill on the grounds that it in fact strengthens a negative view towards public health care by (a) making it easier for people to opt out and stay out of the health care system; (b) downloading all related costs onto these individuals, misguided as they might be; (c) exempting people once they've decided not to pay the 9 cents on the dollar for necessary medical treatment; and (d) somehow downloading costs potentially onto these people's families.

Mr. Chair, cumulatively, just on that section I have some significant, I think, and well-founded concerns about this bill. As I said, certainly we have lots of opportunity to seek clarification on these questions that I'm asking. But I do want each member here today and the public as well just to identify and flag these sections of Bill 5 because, in fact, they do point to something that is potentially quite serious, in my estimation.

So thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: Any others?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 22

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get this opportunity to discuss Bill 22 in committee. Certainly, I would like to express my appreciation to the Minister of Finance for providing detailed answers not only to the questions I had in regard to Bill 22 and how it's going to affect the heritage fund. How will the Alberta Investment Management Corporation be affected by Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act? Will the Alberta Investment Management Corporation be subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act? It was great to see a response to that. It was really comforting to finally discover that Alberta Finance has consulted with the clients. Hopefully, the letters of support for Bill 22 from these respective pension plans can perhaps be tabled, if they have not already been, in the Assembly. On the role also, Mr. Chairman, of the government's chief internal auditor: what role will he have with the corporation? I'd appreciate that as well.

5:30

Now, certainly, when we're talking about the Alberta Investment Management Corporation and their work with the University of Alberta to train students who might want a career with the organization or with the industry – the hon. minister talked about that earlier this afternoon in second reading – hopefully through the School of Business at the University of Alberta this will be more than just a

work in progress. I think the entire province would benefit from that initiative.

So I would just like to be on the record. I appreciate these answers, and I appreciate the time that they came in.

The report that was tabled by the hon. minister earlier during this session – and this is from Capelle Associates. Hopefully there are more detailed studies somewhere in the department to support Bill 22. If there are, I would certainly appreciate it. They also could be tabled not only for the benefit of this member but for all members of the Assembly.

Now, Mr. Chairman, certainly with Bill 22 I have been following the debate, and I have been reading with interest a number of things that are going on. We can go back to previous annual reports from the government of Alberta. We can go back and we can see where in December of 1999 the Minister of Finance at the time, the hon. Stockwell Day, is talking about investigating a separate pension plan for Alberta and improving CPP, not only for Albertans but for all Canadians. That was one step, and then the second step was a pension plan for Alberta.

I would like to know how Bill 22 could possibly fit into any future plans the government has for an Alberta pension plan. Perhaps it hasn't been thought about, but certainly it was discussed in the leadership debate last fall, as I understand it. It's not the first time that this has come up, and my research indicates that the former Treasurer certainly had some interest in this proposal.

Now, earlier in the Assembly today, Mr. Chairman, I tabled a letter that I wrote to the Premier last Friday. I was alerting the Premier that I would be presenting an amendment to the Legislative Assembly on Bill 22, and I would like to do that at this time, please.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, make sure you forward the original copy to the table.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we have an amendment before us which is being circulated. The amendment shall be referred to as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you may proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This amendment to Bill 22 as it has been circulated would read that the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act be amended in section 2(5) by striking out "Alberta" and substituting "the City of Edmonton." This amendment would permanently place this 70 billion plus dollar corporation, and I can see the assets of the corporation growing significantly well beyond \$100 million and, hopefully, at some point in the near future even beyond \$200 million. This Crown corporation would be an ideal fit to the corporate community in this city. If this amendment was to be accepted, it would be an endorsement by this current government of this city. I would really encourage all hon. members to have a look at this amendment and give it serious consideration because we talked about this before, if this asset base were to remain in the city.

We look at the consultants' report. They talk about the difficulty there is in recruiting people to manage these funds. Well, we can start training our own. If we're confident that this asset base will remain in the city, we can work in conjunction with the university to train individuals, and hopefully they will have long professional careers, successful professional careers, managing this fund in this city.

Certainly, if we look at the Alberta Treasury Branches, it's sited in this city. This is the capital city. We need to increase the corporate base within Edmonton, and this is an ideal start. In fact,

last week the Premier made a commitment to the city of Edmonton in his speech at the Shaw Conference Centre, at his leader's dinner, and this would be the first commitment to the city, by supporting this amendment.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would cede the floor to any other hon. colleague who would like to participate in the debate on amendment A1. Again, in conclusion, this is good for the city of Edmonton, and it's also good for the province of Alberta. I would urge all hon. members to accept my amendment to permanently site the head office and principal place of business of this corporation in the city of Edmonton, the capital of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I certainly recognize the hon. member's intention, and indeed it is our intention that AIMCO be placed in Edmonton, that it be resident in Edmonton, that it spin off its financial benefits, as the hon. member talked about, in Edmonton. I would not, however, support this amendment and say that it must be in the physical constraints and physical boundaries of the city of Edmonton. I will not take away the flexibility from this corporation. It does have to be in Alberta, but it could just as easily be in Sherwood Park. It could just as easily be in St. Albert. It could just as easily be in some of the other communities around. [interjection] Not Lethbridge, unfortunately. Edmonton is the place where it will be.

I will go on record as saying that my intentions are that this corporation will be housed in Edmonton, will be centred in Edmonton, but I will not second-guess the market when it comes to where the best value is for rental space. It makes all sorts of sense to be housed in the capital community, in the capital city, Mr. Chairman, and I'll give that as my intention, but I do not want to inhibit, to allow them to make bad decisions if at some time in the future there is a need to move to Sherwood Park or a need to move to St. Albert or a need to move to Spruce Grove.

Mr. Chairman, the importance is – and we have to remember it – that this is a Legislature for all of Alberta. I have the full intent to house this in Edmonton. I think it's a good fit here. But I do not want to state in the legislation that it must be within the physical constraints of the city of Edmonton, and I would urge members not to support this amendment.

5:40

Mr. Eggen: Well, I am rising to voice my support of this amendment to Bill 22. Certainly, when we're talking about the intention of placing something into a certain place, we've had a long experience here in the city of Edmonton where you have an intention for something to stay where it is. All of the good intentions in the world certainly didn't stop the telephone company from leaving our fine city and even our fine province in very short order. You know, we can look at a whole long history of these things. I appreciate the minister's comments in regard to that we're perhaps not anticipating where we're going to be in the future, but certainly one thing that we know will be in the future is that Edmonton will remain the capital of the province of Alberta.

This is a very large fund that administers public monies for the province of Alberta. To have it connected to the city of Edmonton is not just perfectly reasonable; I think it's absolutely essential. Of course, Mr. Chair, I am supportive of Bill 22 in most ways, but I can't help but have some reservation just because of the magnitude of the money that we're dealing with here. We're talking about creating one of the largest investment funds in Canada. You know, to have that in the capital city I think is absolutely essential.

One of the big items that we've gone out of our way to stress with Bill 22 is to keep the political machinations or influence out of the

investments that we make with this fund. You know, moving the hundreds of people that might be associated with the management of this fund hither and yon at some political whim in the future, whoever the government happens to be, I think, again, would be quite a major disruption to the integrity and the security of one of the largest investment funds in the country.

I think it's not unreasonable at all, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, to just emphasize the importance of having this fund located in the capital city. We, in fact, are the capital city of this province, where it is all located. So I certainly do support the amendment, and I encourage all other members to do so as well.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Any others on the amendment? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, you wanted to speak on the amendment before us?

Mr. R. Miller: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: You may proceed.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just very briefly, the Minister of Finance has outlined his concerns and made a commitment to keep the head office and the base of the operations of the corporation in the capital region. I'm wondering if there might be some consideration, then, to amend the amendment to reflect the capital region as opposed to the city of Edmonton, and if that would be favourable to the government, perhaps we could go there. It would accomplish both the intent of amendment A1 and also the concern that the minister has expressed. I think that might be a way for us to wiggle out of this particular situation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would suggest that the answer to that is no. I will not prejudice. I'm hoping that this fund will be there a hundred years from now, 150 years from now, and that it will indeed be \$200 billion, \$300 billion, \$400 billion. It's fully our intent to have it in Edmonton. It makes all sorts of sense to have it in Edmonton. A lot of the employees are going to be centred in Edmonton, so everything is pointing to Edmonton.

I don't believe that we should inhibit in any way this corporation by saying that it must be within the physical constraints of the capital region or Edmonton in general. Is that our intent? Yes, it is. Will I shackle future governments on saying that that is their intent? No. I think each government has to stand on its own merit, and the merit of this corporation is for it to be in Edmonton.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, this government has put such a great and, I might add, wise effort into extending SuperNet across this province. The last time I checked, we had telephone access to all corners of our province. I'm wondering why the hon. member didn't suggest the great municipality of High Level in my constituency in which to locate this.

An Hon. Member: Bring money to a higher level?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. Bring money to a higher level. I mean, I cannot fathom why that municipality was not considered in this amendment.

The structure of this organization has to be around management reporting relationships. It doesn't matter what town it's located in. It's got to be located in our great province of Alberta. End of story.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:47 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Backs	Hancock	Miller, R.
Blakeman	Lukaszuk	Pastoor
Eggen	MacDonald	Zwozdesky
Elsalhy	Mather	

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Groeneveld	Mitzel
Calahasen	Haley	Oberg
Cao	Herard	Oberle
Danyluk	Hinman	Ouellette
DeLong	Horner	Pham
Ducharme	Johnson	Renner
Dunford	Lindsay	Rogers
Evans	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Forsyth	Lund	Stevens
Fritz	Mar	Strang

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 30
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the committee shall now rise and report Bill 28 and Bill 5 and will report progress on Bill 22.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 28, Bill 5. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 22. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 18, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/18

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to introduce two guests who are seated in your gallery this afternoon. The first is someone that many members in this House know quite well, Mr. Stan Woloshyn, who represented the fine constituency of Stony Plain in this Legislature from 1989 to 2004, and I for one am glad that he retired when he did. During that time he also served as government caucus whip, minister of public works, minister of community development, and minister of seniors. I also have very fond memories of sitting across the table from Mr. Woloshyn when he was president of local 10 of the ATA when I was a negotiator for the Parkland school board.

Accompanying Stan today is his grandson Tyler Hrynyk. Tyler is a very impressive young man whom I had lunch with today. He is a very skilled hockey player and springboard diver, a bright student at Lymburn school, and a future PhD in mechanical engineering. I'd ask that all members join me in giving the traditional warm welcome to our guests.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two visiting students from Yokohama, Japan. They are visiting our province for two weeks on an exchange program. They're here to see how western democracy works, so let's be on our best behaviour. They are staying at the home of Jean Easton, mother of one of our pages, and Mrs. Easton is accompanying them today. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery. The students are Takeshi Kuwahara and Makoto Otake. I ask them to please rise and accept the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you 12 grades 5/6 students from the Meadowview school, which is currently located in the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock constituency, right adjacent to the Whitecourt-St. Anne constituency. They are accompanied this afternoon by teacher Rod Manson and two parent helpers, Aaron Wesenberg and Bernice Harrison. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all members of the Assembly 19 very bright students from the Clear Water Academy, which is situated in the Calgary-Elbow riding. I understand that they're all very enthusiastic Calgary Flames fans as well. They're here today to learn about how the Legislature functions. They're accompanied by teachers Miss Janley Grant, Mr. Matt Sartorelli, and parent Mrs. Sharon Van Der Sloot. I would ask them to rise in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It does give me great pleasure as well to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 12 students and two staff from the Ehpewapahk community alternate school, also known as the Erminskine Cree nation. We have 14 visitors today, including Paul Jespersen, the teacher, and Charlene Wolfe, the teacher's assistant. I think they had a tour a little bit earlier, and we got a photo. They're sitting up in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a great pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 50 visitors from Callingwood elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung. Those guests are visiting us here today to see us in action and to observe what goes on in this very esteemed Assembly. They're joined by their teachers and group leaders, Mr. Close, Mrs. Brown, Mr. Wilcox, and Ms Cassidy, and by parent helper Mr. Owre. This is an extremely active school in the constituency, and it's always referred to as the heart of the community. Wonderful students and wonderful staff. I even attended their concert three or four weeks ago, and I was really impressed by their creativity and energy. I encourage them all to rise, please, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two individuals seated in the public gallery. They are Roseline Richardson and Cathy Hilderman. Roseline and Cathy are workers at the Palace Casino and are currently on strike. They've been on the picket line for 222 days now, due in part to this government's failure to protect workers from employers who engage in unfair labour practices.

Cathy has worked at the Palace Casino for the past eight years and works as a dealer and pit boss at the casino. Roseline has worked at the Palace Casino since 1991 and is also a dealer and pit boss. She has an extensive background in the arts and brings a tremendous amount of passion to the cause that she and her co-workers have taken on. They are joined today by UFCW local 401 representative Don Crisall.

I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if my guests are here yet, but I will go ahead and introduce to you and through you to the members for the record four guests that I have up from Banff-Cochrane today. First is Ron Casey, mayor of Canmore; Mike Western, councillor for Canmore; Don Kochan, acting chief administrative officer of the town of Canmore; and Eric McAvity, who is with the Lamphouse Centre for the Arts Society. If they are in the House, I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our members.

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure today to recognize a number of people up in the members' gallery. I would like this Assembly to recognize the volunteer board members from the Science Alberta Foundation. They are meeting with the board today. I'm sorry. I think I just stepped on somebody's toes here. Sorry, President of the Treasury Board. I met with one of the members early this morning. Maybe I will cede to the President of the Treasury Board to finish the introduction.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it just shows how important to this province the Science Alberta Foundation really is. They're recognized from north to south, east to west. We're just one big, happy, recognizable family here. I, too, had a very enjoyable breakfast with their chairman and vice-chairman. If the board is as talented and as engaging as these two, they must have a wonderful discussion. I would like to introduce them to the Assembly, starting with their chairman, Mr. Ron Kuchinka; the vice-chair, Chuck Shultz; the secretary-treasurer, Barry Travers; and their directors Paul Clark, Art Froehlich, Brad Klak, Gordon Olsen, Linda Palladino, and Sid Shugarman. Also with them is their CEO, Arlene Ponting, and their office manager, Regula Lewis. I would ask them to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, did you give notice for a ministerial statement?

Appointment of Alberta Senator

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some very, very good news for this Assembly and for the people of Alberta and perhaps especially for Mr. Bert Brown of Kathryn, Alberta. As of 10 minutes ago Mr. Bert Brown became the second-ever elected member of the Senate of Canada. Bert Brown has worked for Senate reform for over 20 years. He was a candidate in both of Alberta's Senate elections. Nobody is more deserving of this honour than Mr. Bert Brown. Senate reform is a much-needed and long overdue reform of our national institutions, and I congratulate Bert Brown and his wife, Alice, on their commitment to the good of the province of Alberta and the good of our nation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:10

Ms Blakeman: Well, we weren't given any notice on this ministerial statement from the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, but I'll join in the congratulations that were offered, and I hope that along with this comes substantial reform to the Senate. Aside from election, I think we have long been looking for a better balance of the number of seats that are available across the country plus a number of other issues that need to be changed constitutionally before we achieve true Senate reform. I'm interested to hear of Mr. Brown's appointment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. leader of the third party, in order to participate, we need unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, like the hon. Official Opposition House Leader, we did not receive notification that this would be a ministerial statement. I also note that this is not a ministerial statement within the purview of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

With respect to that, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I would congratulate Mr. Brown. However, contrary to what the minister has said, he was not elected. He received an unofficial mandate through an extra-legal procedure in the province of Alberta, and he was appointed – he was appointed – by the Prime Minister of Canada. So he has not been elected.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to maintain our position that the Senate of Canada is superfluous, a centre of patronage on the part of both the Conservative and Liberal governments that have inhabited the government in Ottawa, and it should be abolished. [some applause] I thank the hon. members for their applause on that point.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Henry Bergen

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the accomplishments of a Little Bow constituent. Mr. Henry Bergen of Coaldale embodies some of the finest qualities Albertans are known for. Henry is hard working, innovative, and has an entrepreneurial spirit and a deep respect for the land. Over the years Henry has taken these qualities and not only created a successful business; he has made significant contributions to our agricultural industry.

Born in the Ukraine, Henry's family moved to Germany after his father was killed in the Stalin era. In 1948 his family emigrated to Canada. With his roots in Alberta and experience working in horticulture at the Lethbridge Research Centre, Henry went on to study mechanical engineering at SAIT in the 1960s. Henry combined these two disciplines and began to design and manufacture seeders that are used in zero tillage farming today. For those of us with a farming background, we know that zero till helps prevent soil erosion and conserves moisture.

To this day Henry Bergen's company, GEN Manufacturing, continues to provide farmers with innovative tools that promote soil conservation. GEN Manufacturing received the industry achievement award from the American Society of Agricultural Engineers in 2001. In 1999 Henry received the technical excellence award from the Alberta Society of Engineering Technologists.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to share with you that Mr. Bergen is being recognized not only for his work in Alberta but also for having positively influenced agricultural practices across Canada. In May Henry will be one of three Albertans receiving the Order of Canada for these contributions, and I ask the members of this House and all Albertans to join me in offering Mr. Bergen sincere congratulations. I think it's especially fitting that we acknowledge his upcoming honour this particular week since this is Soil Conservation Week. Henry's achievements remind us that we're all true Albertans.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Physician Supply

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's red-hot economy has created shortages in many fields, including the medical profession. While these challenges are daunting, this province has taken many steps to attract and retain doctors to serve the health care needs of Albertans.

Alberta leads the country in increasing the number of physicians. Between 2001 and 2005 Alberta increased its supply of physicians by 20 per cent, Mr. Speaker, second only to Prince Edward Island, at 25 per cent. The province has also developed strategies to recruit and keep doctors in rural communities. Statistics show that the Alberta rural physician action plan has helped maintain the ratio of doctors to patients in rural Alberta over the past five years. The Alberta rural family medicine network provides rural family medicine training opportunities to encourage graduates to choose rural practice once their training is complete.

Earlier this year the government provided additional support to the Northern Lights health region to address the critical issues of maintaining adequate medical services to residents of Fort McMurray and other communities in the region.

Alberta has also expanded education spaces for medical students and residency spaces for international medical graduates. In September 2006 Alberta created 30 new first-year medical school spaces, bringing the total to 255 at Alberta's two medical schools. This year international medical graduates represented almost 20 per cent of all medical graduates entering residency.

Yesterday the Alberta Medical Association ratified an amending agreement with the Alberta government and the regional health authorities. Beyond fee increases the agreement addressed physician recruitment and retention issues with innovative new programs that include a benefit that will recognize physicians for the number of years that they have practised in Alberta and special funding to address extraordinary increases in practice costs.

Despite enormous pressures Alberta has found successful solutions to make this province an attractive place to live and work for physicians.

Volunteerism

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, the nonprofit voluntary sector is one of the most vital components of our society. Those who donate their time and energy without any expectations of rewards or recognition for themselves are true heroes. It is these individuals who help play a key role in enhancing our quality of life, which, as we know, is one of this government's top priorities. This week we pay tribute to these often unsung heroes by celebrating Volunteer Week. I would like to ask this Assembly for its unanimous support in recognizing April 15 to April 21 as Volunteer Week in Alberta.

Through a unique partnership between the Wild Rose Foundation and Volunteer Alberta our province has become a leader in honouring its volunteers. All across this great province events and activities are taking place to acknowledge and thank the many volunteers who play such essential roles in our communities.

This year 142 Alberta communities representing more than 1.2 million Albertans are participating in this week-long series of events. According to the 2004 national survey of nonprofit and voluntary organizations there are approximately 19,000 nonprofit and voluntary organizations in Alberta. It is estimated that the voluntary sector in our province collectively contributes approximately 214 million hours of volunteer time. This is equivalent to approximately 111,000 full-time jobs. The annual economic impact of Alberta's nonprofit voluntary sector is estimated at \$9.6 billion.

Alberta leads the way in the voluntary sector, and we can all take pride in this great accomplishment. Through the Wild Rose

Foundation this government supports Alberta's voluntary sector in many important ways. I encourage this Assembly to continue its support and dedication to volunteerism in the province. Throughout Alberta our volunteer spirit is contributing directly to the health and well-being of our citizens and communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

McClung Goes Green

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to talk about an initiative that my team and I in the constituency of Edmonton-McClung have undertaken as of one month ago. We call it McClung Goes Green. In essence, we're encouraging individuals, families, groups, and businesses to think about ways to cut down on energy waste and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

As far as we know, Mr. Speaker, we are the first and only constituency in the province of Alberta to make the decision to go green. We're hoping to reduce our constituency's environmental footprint. In so doing, people not only help reduce damage to the environment and to the planet; they can also realize some financial savings.

This stems from the realization that we can all help, and we should all get involved. It's not only industry that is to be blamed, and it's not only industry that has to come up with the solutions. We're all in this together.

1:20

The way we designed this was to have three challenge levels: poplar, shamrock, and jade. We have suggestions for what steps people can take to achieve each level, but we also allow them to come up with their own ideas and changes. A participant would start at poplar and move on to shamrock and ultimately reach jade. Poplar, or entry level, involves simple attitude and behaviour changes. Shamrock, or the intermediate level, is for people who are motivated beyond poplar and are on their way to jade, on their way to implementing physical or structural changes to their residence and/or workplace. All participants are winners and will be recognized. Once a year, however, the constituency office will be hosting an official green challenge celebration for people or groups who stand out. Their stories will be told and their achievements highlighted.

In terms of the ideas we're presenting, we group them under five general headings: natural gas, water, electricity, waste and recycling, and automobiles, all things we can control or make decisions about. I encourage members of this Assembly who may be interested in this experiment to approach me for details. Maybe we can spread this energy around and get more Albertans motivated.

Sunday, April 22, Mr. Speaker, is Earth Day. Perhaps all hon. members can start by evaluating what each of them can do individually.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Climate Change

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earth Day 2007: the science-based warnings about the fate of the earth can no longer be ignored. Alberta must take action now, yet our Conservative government, despite its claim to now believe the science, encourages uncontrolled growth and worsening carbon emissions in the coming decade. This is part of a consistent and willful ignoring of inconvenient science at least since the government of Canada report in 1991 on the risks

of irreversible climate change. We are at a tipping point on the planet if we are to avoid hundreds of millions of lives lost and uprooted from their homes, food and water shortages, and new infectious diseases.

Albertans have always been prepared to make short-term sacrifice for the future. According to the renowned Stern report, if we fail to invest 1 per cent of our GDP now, our children will inherit a failing planet. One per cent of GDP would be approximately \$2 billion annually in Alberta. The Alberta government investment so far is pitiful in comparison.

How would a Liberal government in Alberta manage this grave challenge? We would cap carbon emissions by 2012 and, with the federal government, move toward a 30 per cent real reduction by 2020. We would eliminate subsidies to fossil fuel development and give greater financial incentives to energy efficiency and clean, renewable energy – wind, solar, geothermal – while enabling carbon capture and storage technology to assist in the transition to a new, sustainable economy.

An Alberta Liberal government would establish, one, an all-party council on carbon emissions and climate change; two, strong public education programs; three, convert the natural gas rebate program to a green fund to reduce everyone's energy use; four, a province-wide composting and recycling program in every community; five, a minimum 15 per cent renewable energy for all new energy producers; six, rebates on energy efficient appliances and energy retrofits for homes, businesses, and institutions.

Alberta's opportunity as we celebrate Earth Day this weekend is for a bold new course grounded in a commitment to confront climate change, protect people's health, and create a new economy or be left behind by the world.

Dr. Bruce Naylor

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, I deeply regret to inform the House that our friend and colleague Dr. Bruce Naylor, director of the Royal Tyrrell Museum, passed away peacefully on Friday, April 6, 2007. Bruce leaves behind his wife, Judy, and two children, John and Connor.

Dr. Naylor was the driving force behind so many of the successes and accomplishments of the Royal Tyrrell Museum. We have been very fortunate to benefit from his knowledge and passion for the museum for the past 25 years.

Dr. Naylor received his PhD from the University of Alberta. A vertebrate paleontologist specializing in fossil amphibians and mammals, his accomplishments include naming a new genus and five new species of fossil salamanders. While a student at the University of Alberta he collected the jaw of a new species of primitive primate from the Paleocene of Alberta, subsequently named *Saxonella naylori*. Bruce was not only well liked and respected by staff; he was also recognized nationally and internationally for his knowledge and scholarship in paleontology.

Bruce joined the Royal Tyrrell Museum in 1982. Over the years Bruce and his team won many accolades, including recognition for their work with a gold Premier's award of excellence in 2004 for the ATCO Tyrrell Learning Centre project and two bronze awards, in 2003 for an advanced ticket management system and in 2000 for the redevelopment of the Pleistocene Gallery.

We extend our deepest sympathy to Bruce's family, friends, and co-workers. While we mourn his passing, we can celebrate his life and his accomplishments. He will live on through our memories.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table two petitions. The first one is signed by 221 Albertans mainly from the constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs, petitioning the Assembly to urge the government to "reconsider the location of the new Edmonton Remand Centre and to work with the federal government to relocate [it] closer to the Edmonton maximum security prison."

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by 89 Albertans from throughout the province but predominantly Edmonton and surrounding areas urging the government to "take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs."

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have approximately 100 signatures from a petition that reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to give oral notice of a motion to establish the standing policy field committees that we approved yesterday. I would move that be it resolved that the following members be appointed to the Assembly's four new standing committees.

- (1) Community Services: Cindy Ady, chair; Weslyn Mather, vice-chair; Dr. Raj Pannu; Jack Flaherty; Tony Abbott, Art Johnston; Thomas Lukaszuk; LeRoy Johnson; Rob Loughheed; Shiraz Shariff; and Dan Backs.
- (2) Managing Growth Pressures: Clint Dunford, chair; David Taylor, vice-chair; Ray Martin; Bruce Miller; Denis Herard; Victor Doerksen; Ray Prins; Len Webber; Gene Zwozdesky; George Rogers; and Dave Rodney.
- (3) Resources and Environment: Denis Ducharme, chair; David Swann, vice-chair; David Eggen; Rick Miller; Ty Lund; Len Mitzel; Doug Griffiths; Frank Oberle; Gord Graydon; Pearl Calahasen; and Paul Hinman.
- (4) Government Services: Harvey Cenaiko, chair; Mo Elsalhy, vice-chair; Brian Mason; Bridget Pastoor; Richard Marz; Neil Brown; David Coutts; Heather Forsyth; Alana DeLong; George VanderBurg; and Moe Amery.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) I wish to give notice that on Monday, April 30, 2007, written questions and motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 30 I wish to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move that

the ordinary business of this Assembly be adjourned in order that we may hold an emergency debate on a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the immediate and pressing risk to the health and well-being of the residents of Fort McMurray caused by the recent fire and resulting inability of the community's social, housing, and health systems to cope with the impacts of this crisis without immediate provincial support.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Impacts of Apartment Fire in Fort McMurray

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A fire yesterday left 300 people in an affordable housing complex in Fort McMurray homeless. We can all be thankful that there are no reports of serious injuries. But Fort McMurray is one of the most expensive places to live in Canada, and the vacancy rate is virtually zero. This is going to have a serious impact on those 300 people and on many others. My first question is to the Premier. How many of the 300 people made homeless by the fire yesterday in Fort McMurray are children?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of municipal affairs responsible for housing has been working very closely with the municipality, and he may answer all of the administrative questions with respect to this unbelievable fire. But thank the good Lord that everybody was safe.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that there were no major casualties or injuries, and we are very happy for that. There were 94 units that were involved with approximately 300 individuals, some of which included families. I can't give you an exact breakdown of the number of children because I don't know that according to age.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's well known that the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo region is very short of doctors. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How many doctors were on duty at the hospital at the time of the fire?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, how could he possibly expect me to know that?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The availability of medical services in a major emergency is straightforward.

There were already 400 people on the waiting list for affordable housing in Fort McMurray. Overnight there are now hundreds more in need of affordable housing. I guess to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: will the impact of this situation be that those 400 people who are already on the waiting list for affordable housing are now 300 spaces further down the list, or is there another option?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, just to address the needs of the individuals that were part of the fire, the Wood Buffalo housing authority has placed or has found temporary and permanent housing

for all of those individuals, and part of it is because they have 55 units that are coming on board at the Millennium centre, that is near completion. We also have the Parsons Creek Village, that has some units that are just about at completion, as well as the good, kind hearts of Fort McMurrans.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Fort McMurray the fire at Edgewater Court has left over 300 people wondering where they're going to live now even if there are new units coming on stream soon. They're not on stream quite yet. Of course, the people of Fort McMurray are pulling together and coming together to provide every bit of help they can, but still these days housing in Fort Mac is in critically short supply at the best of times, and for the residents of Edgewater Court these are the worst of times. This is very real, very focused, and it tests this government's ability to deal with a crisis. To the Premier. Church basements aren't adequate. Families need their own cooking facilities, their own bathrooms, some privacy. What is the Premier doing, what has he done, and what will he do right away to find suitable interim housing for these folks?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the question raised by the member is in response to, of course, the preparedness of the government in terms of disaster services. Again, I said that the minister of municipal affairs, who's also responsible for that area of responsibility, may want to answer all these administrative questions.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Part of our preparedness in the Emergency Management Alberta agency is to prepare for disasters, and the government has done that in conjunction with the municipal districts and municipalities. We need to prepare for crises or emergencies or disasters of such magnitude, and we have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the government needs to prepare. My questions have been more along the lines of whether the government was prepared and what they've done in this regard.

Is the government prepared to provide emergency financial assistance for displaced people who have had to be put in hotels? I know that there are some who had no other options. And can the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing indicate to this House whether he has an estimate of how much that will cost?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, right now I don't have an exact number of the amount of money that it'll cost, but what has happened is that the Wood Buffalo housing authority has not only moved the individuals to different housing authorities but is also supporting them in the same way that they were supporting them in the Edgewater apartment buildings.

Mr. Taylor: But, Mr. Speaker, some of them are in hotels. They're not all relocated in new housing units.

The residents of Fort McMurray have rallied around to help the people of Edgewater Court, but this event is going to put a strain on other residents of Fort McMurray, on churches, on quite possibly the food bank, on other social agencies, on the Wood Buffalo housing

agency. Will this government be providing any emergency funding for social agencies to help them deal with this crisis?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we need to understand that this is a disaster and that this is a situation where the community comes to help. Are we there to support? Yes, we are. Will they have a place to stay? Yes, they will. And we will support them the best way that we can.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent rent increase in a Calgary-Varsity apartment complex has created great desperation. This is not a time for accusations; it's a time for answers, for action. I'm appealing to the Premier for dramatic, immediate intervention. To the Premier: do you still believe that it is unnecessary to tap the brakes of Alberta's economy?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where he's going with that question, but, you know, the last time a government in this country tapped the brakes on the economy, all of us in this Assembly paid 22 per cent interest rates. Let's not forget that.

Mr. Chase: In this 297-suite apartment building many of the residents are seniors and disabled people who are on fixed incomes, including AISH. Many have lived in their homes for several years. This apartment building was sold, and there are no new rental units coming onto the market. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: what advice do you have for these individuals who are about to lose their homes?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we know, the growth pressures that have taken place on housing have been extensive at this time, and it is, I may say, a factor of growth. We are trying to deal with those issues and challenges, and the housing task force has brought forward recommendations. We are looking at those recommendations, and we're hoping to deal with some of those challenges.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are two other buildings on the same city block that used to be apartments but are now converted to condominiums. My final question is to the Premier, who should feel free to call upon any of his ministers. What immediate solutions does your government have for Albertans who are suffering as a result of this runaway economy?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, may I try and supplement some of the answers we're providing? First of all, there is certainly great concern among the ministers that share the views of many of the colleagues on the opposition side that we should be doing something, and indeed this ministry does do something. We provide income supports for low- and moderate-income people if they're evicted, if there's a natural disaster. In the months from September '06 until today we've put some 9 million dollars into supports for people who have suffered just exactly what the hon. member is referencing. We spend about a hundred million dollars supporting these folks all of the time, but for those who suffer immediate disaster, we can get involved.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Disclosure of Leadership Campaign Contributions

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. A cloud now hangs over tomorrow's budget because of this Premier's failure to ensure open and transparent government. The Finance minister has failed to disclose his campaign donations for his PC leadership bid and has broken his own deadlines for doing so.

Dr. Oberg: A question of privilege.

The Speaker: A question of privilege.

1:40

Mr. Mason: Bring it on, Mr. Speaker. Bring it on.

Worse, the minister has continued to fund raise even while preparing tomorrow's provincial budget. My question is to the Premier. Why does the Premier think it is acceptable for a Finance minister to be seeking financial donations from the very same corporations and individuals who may benefit from his budget?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, raising funds before, during, or after a campaign is part of the political process, and, you know, the two opposition parties are in the red, in more than one place, but they're also in debt. I'm sure that they're raising dollars every day trying to catch up with their deficits.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, why doesn't the Premier see that with respect to a Provincial Treasurer preparing a provincial budget, which the opposition does not do, this at least creates the perception of a potential conflict of interest?

Mr. Stelmach: That's one of the reasons this government moves very quickly in so many different areas. One, of course, is with respect to the Lobbyists Act, the first kind of legislation in this particular House, followed by the fact that on a quarterly basis – a quarterly basis – all Albertans will know what transactions are made on behalf of them, including how much the opposition leader gets paid by the month because I'm sure that people are interested in hearing what he gets paid, but all those transactions will be crossed. That's one opportunity to see who is lobbying the government and then on a quarterly basis who gets paid by government. That's, I think, the best test that you can have right here in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we want some action, not distraction.

The Premier is very able to try and get the focus on something else other than the fact that his Finance minister has not disclosed his campaign contributions, is continuing to fund raise at the very same time that he's writing tomorrow's provincial budget, and this creates an enormous cloud over the budget. Why won't the Premier get serious for a minute and address the question that's put to him?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, tomorrow there will be significant announcements in the budget. I want that member to get up in the House and to any capital announcement that's made say that there's a cloud over that announcement, whether it's a new hospital for a community that's badly needing it or going to seniors that require more help or to schools or to universities, to hospitals, to any of those. I want him to get up in the House next week and tell me where the cloud is.

The Speaker: At the conclusion of the Routine we will deal with a question of privilege with respect to this, and the hon. Minister of Finance will be given ample opportunity to present his case.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Affordable Housing (continued)

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we all know that it is a proven fact that the development of new apartment units seriously declines when a government imposes rent controls. We are, however, living in extraordinary times that call for extraordinary measures. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Will the government consider reviewing the possibility of regulating rent increases for a temporary period of two years to allow one increase in rent a year of no greater than 10 per cent of the existing rent?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say that as the Alberta government we are supporting housing and we are supporting rent supplements. We are providing over \$19 million to subsidize rents for more than 4,600 households. We are supporting with \$100 million a commitment to affordable housing, 3,700 units. We are supporting homeless shelters to the tune of \$23 million. We also have committed \$16 million for a new pilot project for an outreach program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: in these extraordinary times that call for extraordinary action, is that enough?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say to the hon. member that we are examining those exact issues in regard to the task force report. The government annually reviews the programs and the funding allocations that we have presently in making sure that we address the needs and the challenges that are involved in housing and the homeless.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Timberland Investment Loss

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's revelation that a mistake in the Ministry of Finance cost Alberta taxpayers \$11 million has left Albertans with a lot of questions. How long before this was discovered? Who discovered it? Who informed the minister's office, and when did the minister's office know? Yet the best that the minister could do yesterday was to hang out one of his employees as being personally responsible. Shame on you, Mr. Minister. This was clearly a breakdown in management and accounting systems. The buck has to stop at your desk, not at the desk of a civil servant. My question is for the minister. Why is this minister making a scapegoat out of one single employee when his department should have had the processes in place to make sure that this type of mistake never happened in the first place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, a mistake was made. The timberland asset was purchased on May 30, 2005.

Typically, what occurs when we have an investment such as that: the American currency is hedged to ensure that if the currency goes down, our money is safe. Unfortunately, the hedge was not made until September 22. During that time frame the American dollar changed significantly and caused the loss. I will say, though – and I think this is very important – on the timberland investment that since that time the rate of return has been 36 per cent, \$61 million.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, then, why did we have to put \$7 million into it last month in supplementary supply?

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister said that there's been a huge amount of discussion on this issue, but I haven't been aware of it. I'm the one asking questions. We're not getting answers. It's like trying to pull hens' teeth. Why was this \$11 million mistake not brought up in the Department of Finance annual report, in the Auditor General's annual report? It wasn't discussed in the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee when timberland was discussed. Why was it buried? Where is the openness and transparency?

Dr. Oberg: I do believe that there were supplementary estimates that were brought forward about a month ago in which this was part of it.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, Mr. Speaker, I learned this morning that the Auditor General's office had a series of meetings with department officials on this issue. There were apparently several reports made, yet none was ever made available to the public. Alberta taxpayers have been kept in the dark. My question again is for the Minister of Finance. Can the minister assure this House and all Albertans that there was not in any way, shape, or form any influence from department officials to the Auditor General's office to keep this file quiet?

Dr. Oberg: Yes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Bullying

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know from speaking with parents and children from my constituency that bullying and harassment leave scars that last a lifetime. Bullying poisons the school environment for everyone. Increasingly we have been hearing about serious incidents of bullying in our schools. Some cases get so bad for a victim that they turn to suicide as seen when a 14-year-old girl in B.C. hanged herself. Her suicide note read: if I try to get help, it will get worse; they are always looking for a new person to beat up, and they are the toughest girls. My questions are all to the Minister of Education. Would the minister consider a provincial antibullying/harassment policy with zero tolerance?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope that all of our schools in the province have a zero tolerance antibullying policy. The issue of bullying is not just one for schools; it's one for society. Students don't just learn from other students. They learn from all of us. If they see us doing things that are inappropriate, I'm afraid they're going to be doing some things that are inappropriate. So we all have a role to play.

Mrs. Forsyth: Would the minister consider a reporting mechanism so students can report bullying and harassment and ensure that it remains confidential?

Mr. Liepert: In May of 2006 we launched a toll-free, 24-hour helpline for students who were struggling with bullying to get advice, information, and support. There are crisis centre counsellors who answer this helpline. They're trained, and they provide information to any student who is suffering from the inappropriate behaviour of others. It is policy, as far as I know, that this would remain anonymous, and any student should feel comfortable contacting that line.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister enact a provincial law that prohibits bullying and harassment on school property, at school-sponsored programs or activities, on a school bus, or through the use of a computer in the school system?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess I've always believed that you can't legislate against stupidity, and to me bullying is stupid. I go back to what I referred to in my first answer. This is a greater issue than just in schools. As a society, whether it's on the streets, whether it's in hockey rinks, we should make sure that we don't tolerate any kind of behaviour such as bullying. However, if the hon. member has suggestions relative to legislation that in fact could work, I'd certainly be open to that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On August 17, 2005, Greg Stringham from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers e-mailed the Minister of Energy of that day asking him to provide comments, corrections, or changes to a document that CAPP was creating to convince Albertans that the royalty system worked great. My first question is to the Premier. Whose interest is this government standing up for? Is it CAPP, or is it the owners of the natural resources of this province, the people of the province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the responsibility of this government of course is to represent all Albertans, and that's what we're doing.

Mr. MacDonald: The government's own documents show that from 1995 through to 2003 the effective royalty rate for oil averaged 16.42 per cent and for natural gas 17.2 per cent. Now, my question again is to the Premier: given that your government has failed so badly in meeting its own goals of 20 to 25 per cent of royalties, how much money have Albertans lost due to your government's failure to collect a fair and balanced amount under the royalty program?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, my government is conducting a very independent royalty review not only of oil sands but conventional oil and gas and coal-bed methane. That information will be very public, and it'll be transparent, again trying to find the balance between Albertans that are owners of the resource and, of course, those individuals and companies that make multibillion dollar investments in this province in a very volatile marketplace.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, this hon. member was part of the last government as well. Things are bigger in Texas, including the amount collected on oil and natural gas royalties. Yesterday the Minister of Energy indicated that Texas was the best jurisdiction for Alberta to be compared to in terms of oil- and gas-producing states.

In a report prepared for Alberta Energy by Wood Mackenzie, it is suggested that Texans receive 25 per cent in royalties. My question to the Premier: why are Albertans getting so little when Texans get so much in royalties?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that hon. member was a member of the opposition at that time. So what's he saying? He didn't follow up on his duty, I suspect. [interjections]

In light, of course, of not upsetting him a bit and creating more disturbance in the House, that's the purpose of the royalty review. It will be completed by August, and all Albertans will have that information in a very transparent manner.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Health Care Funding

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A two-year agreement has been reached between the Alberta government, the Alberta Medical Association, and the regional health authorities. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Coming from a region that has faced and continues to face a chronic shortage of physicians, I'm wondering if this deal will help cure the shortage of physicians in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very hopeful that this agreement will help us with the issue of physician shortage. First of all, hopefully, members of the House will know that members of the AMA voted 91 per cent in favour of the agreement over the last two weeks. So the agreement that will now be ratified and in place signals overwhelming support by physicians to work enthusiastically with government, health regions, and all stakeholders to advance primary care reform, improve productivity and sustainability of the system. Every province is facing a shortage of physicians, so this agreement will help to build on our past success. We've attracted 250 new physicians in the past year. The retention bonuses that are available to physicians will assist us in retaining . . .

Mr. Graydon: To the same minister: how will the new clinical stabilization initiative, which is part of the agreement, help address the extraordinary expenses and increases in physician practice costs across the province? How will it help communities that have these very serious health system issues?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, a very important part of this new agreement is the clinical stabilization initiative, and that will help in two ways. First of all, it will help us to deal with specific costs in regions where higher costs have occurred such as in Grande Prairie or Fort McMurray or those areas to target resources to those specific areas. It will help with clinical practice. So those doctors who are practising in the community and have costs rising but who, because we have a single-payer system, don't have the ability to raise their fees to cover those rising costs, we can assist them in this way. It should not detract, however, from the responsibility of the AMA to rebalance their fees as well so that internal to the agreement on their side of the agenda they can make sure that those doctors facing higher costs and higher pressures get the higher increases.

Mr. Graydon: To the same minister. A goal of every member of this Assembly is to advance primary care in our province. I would ask the minister if this new agreement will help in the advancement of that primary care.

Mr. Hancock: One of the most important initiatives that's been undertaken in this province is the primary care networks. There are in excess of 19 primary care networks now serving over a million Albertans and involving 900 physicians but, most importantly, involving those 900 physicians in teams with other health care professionals to lever the full value of our health care professionals in our communities and to broaden the access and the service that's being shared. Under this new agreement there will be \$175 million set aside to assist in the establishment of more primary care networks and to expand those networks so that they involve more health care professionals acting to the full extent of their capability and expertise.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Police Funding

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday at an AUMA session, which I attended along with four other members of the Alberta Liberal caucus, the main concern discussed was crime. The mayor of St. Paul was especially concerned that in his community the crime rate was going up, yet because St. Paul's population was sitting at 5,061, his town was forced under the Police Act to bear the full policing costs. At \$900,000 per year for a town with a small budget this is a major burden. To the Solicitor General: given that St. Paul is experiencing a rapid escalation in crime, especially with crystal meth, what is the minister going to do to help St. Paul deal with this very serious problem?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows, revenues to police agencies have gone up over 20 per cent in the last two years. We've put more than 280 new officers on the street and also introduced a number of programs because it's not only just a matter of more police officers; it's a matter of those police agencies working together. I would ask the hon. member to stay tuned to the budget, and we'll see what's in store for next year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 280 new officers were the first increase since the early '90s.

Crime concerns in St. Paul are shared by other rural communities such as Westlock, Redcliff, and Morinville. They all have populations exceeding 5,000 but just barely, and they now have to pay full policing costs. Their small rise in population does not translate into any significant growth in their tax base. The mayor of St. Paul joked that he would put 61 people on a bus to another community so that he can get his police budget. Police funding should be more equitable. It doesn't make sense that a town with 5,001 has to pay; a town with 4,999 does not. What does the minister have in mind to address this funding flaw? Where does he stand on this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Police funding for communities over 5,000: when they reach that number, they're at a point where we believe that they can sustain their own police force. They have an option to conduct their own policing through an agency of their own, or they also have an opportunity to get a contract with the RCMP. When they reach 5,000, we give them the opportunity over two years to put a policy in place. I would also mention that the police funding formula works very well in the province of Alberta, but at the same time we also do review it, and we will continue to review it, to make sure it works well for all Albertans.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the government was providing enough policing, why would every mayor, reeve, and organization like the AUMA say that addressing police funding inadequacies is one of their top priorities? The AUMA would like to see the province pay the full policing costs for the first 5,000 residents in every municipality and \$35 per capita for those exceeding 5,000 in population. How can the minister say that his government takes crime seriously when every year, despite the pleas of municipal government leaders, this government fails to increase the police funding formula to address the rapid rise in criminal activity both in frequency and severity? Three years in a row they're asking for the same thing.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me say again: I already addressed the issue on police funding in regard to the AUMA and their request. We're quite familiar with that request; I have met with them. But keep in mind that there isn't only one taxpayer in the province, and the majority of work that's done in these municipalities is done for the citizens of those municipalities and should be paid for by the municipal taxpayer.

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

Affordable Housing

(continued)

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members here were asked to participate in the housing task force, and we did and were glad to do it because it would be good for all Albertans. It was extremely disappointing, though, yesterday to see the Premier, in being scrummed, say that he is outright going to reject one of the recommendations, mainly dealing with rent guidelines. We haven't even had the report made public yet. We've mentioned this: thousands of people are suffering and hurting because of gouging and rapid rent increases. My question to the Premier is simply this: will the Premier take off his ideological glasses and bring in temporary – and I stress temporary – rent guidelines so that we can get through this crisis?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that housing is an issue in the province of Alberta. We recognized that very early, and that's why we moved very quickly with the report. I do thank both parties for contributing to the report, for being members of the committee. The report is almost complete in terms of the government responses to all of the recommendations that have come forward. It will be tied, of course, to the budget. Yesterday in the

scrum I said to the media that we are going to of course release that report with all its recommendations on or around the budget delivery.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that there are a lot of other things in the report. I was there. But the point that we've been trying to make is that there are thousands of people here – and some of the MLAs, I know, from Calgary are getting these same calls. We're saying: in the short run what's going to happen to these people? If you reject immediately because of an ideology something that's so important in the short run, what can we say to these people that are facing evictions, who are one day away from being homeless? Is the answer as the Premier said yesterday: go to the government, and we'll put you up at the Super 8, the Super 8 suggestion? Is that the answer to this?

Mr. Stelmach: That's a very good question. Here's a government that's compassionate. As a government on behalf of Alberta taxpayers we actually put people that have no place to live in a hotel. Where else are you going to find the space on a very quick, ready basis? The taxpayer covers those costs. I heard across the way some of the opposition members say: well, that's too expensive. Well, it's a lot less expensive, Mr. Speaker, to pay \$100 or \$120 a day to keep a family intact in some proper living accommodations than putting them – where? In a tent?

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, what I'm trying to get to is this: as compassionate as the Premier is, if he wants to even be more compassionate to more people, to thousands of Albertans, he will recognize, you know, and allow the triumph of ideology over common sense not to prevail and say in the short run: we need rent guidelines. I come back to the minister. Let's talk about rent guidelines, not the other things that are in the report. Why is the Premier outright rejecting this publicly before the report has even come forward?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, while the report was being reviewed there were discussions with respect to rent controls. They're twisting words and saying guidelines. What are guidelines? They're rent controls. All the evidence that has come forward doesn't matter. Even from the Liberal province of Ontario there has been a monumental change in policy because they found out that with rent controls, controlling to that limit that they wanted, there was no response in terms of building additional low-income rental units in that province. We want to learn from their experience, not fall into the same trap.

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

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An issue has been presented to me by my vulnerable constituent who used to be employed but can no longer work due to severe disability. As far as I've been told, the AISH program allows for a monthly earned income of up to \$400 without any clawback, but income from other sources is deducted from the basic AISH cash benefit. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Will you consider a change in policy to make it fairer by allowing vulnerable AISH recipients to keep the first \$400 of their total income regardless of the sources?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This program, AISH, was developed to target and ensure that the needs and the resources were put to those in greatest need. When that program was developed, it was looked upon that the federal and provincial governments would work together. So it wasn't a matter of eliminating or replacing a federal government program; it was to supplement to ensure that all AISH recipients would receive a level amount of income. That's exactly what this does accomplish. So whether there are other federal programs, be it CPP or Workers' Compensation Board on the provincial side, they were meant to work together to ensure that all AISH recipients would receive . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As far as I've been told, the Alberta AISH policy states that CPP income is considered at the gross level because income tax deductions are not mandatory, and the CPP guide states that the Canada pension plan disability pension is considered taxable income. So my question is to the same minister. Given that a few dollars make a difference for our vulnerable Albertans, will you consider changing the way that we calculate incomes of the AISH recipients with CPP income at its net level?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, once again, the design – and I would say still the best design – is to ensure that our federal and provincial programs do work together, that we will act as a supplement to the federal program, not to replace one or the other. That said, two years ago we did increase the level of income that an AISH recipient could receive, up to \$400 as a single and up to \$975 for couples or single parents. That was all to acknowledge: how do we get rid of some of the barriers so that those that can work can start earning some additional funds? We will continue to work with every person – they are individuals – to help them find employment, find the opportunities that they can if they're able.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the same minister. Given that our vulnerable AISH recipients are faced with costs rising, are you considering to increase the income threshold before clawback and the basic AISH payment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a lot of work done on this question. Previous reviews looked at those recipients of AISH, their monthly payments. Some of these are budget questions, so we'll have to stay tuned to talk about those in the budget. I'd be happy to deal with that when this department's estimates come up before the House. I'd be happy to answer those questions at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

2:10

Toxin Screening

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is essential for governments to understand the impact of decisions on health and well-being of the population; however, it makes more sense to require all

major government, policy, and funding decisions to undergo an assessment to determine the impacts on health and environment before the decisions are made. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that there is no commitment to modify industrial development or government policies based on the results of the toxin screening of 30,000 people, why is this screening being done?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the screening program that's happening is actually a research program that's being done to understand the baseline in terms of the effect of environmental impact on toxicity levels, and it's being done on the 30,000 blood samples that have already been collected. So it's basically a background review, a research process that's undertaken to provide an understanding of where we are with respect to the impact of toxicity on individuals.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: will the minister assure Albertans that environmental pollutants from coal-powered plants and oil sands upgraders will be included in the list of toxins for which tests are being done? Let's make it relevant to Alberta.

Mr. Hancock: I would hope that everything we do in our department, Mr. Speaker, is relevant to Alberta.

This process that's being undertaken here is clearly a pilot study, a research study that's being undertaken to see if there's been an impact on toxicity levels. Obviously, in the approval processes that go on with respect to new industrial approval and new industrial developments, Health and Wellness will be working with other departments of government and particularly with Environment and Sustainable Resource Development to ensure that the health and wellness aspects of any future development are part of the considerations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. Again to the same minister. We still haven't seen a study protocol that would explain the design and objectives and answer many of the concerns that Albertans have like why was the decision made to analyze the results by region rather than by proximity to major industrial developments, or why are only pregnant women and children being screened rather than seniors or adults? So my question to the minister is: will the minister make the study protocol public immediately?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I will undertake to look at the protocol behind the study. Obviously, this is a study that was embarked upon before I became minister. I will look at the protocol behind it, determine what the nature of that protocol is and, if appropriate, make it public.

But I should respond to the issues that are being raised. This is a research program that was being done to take a look at toxicity levels in Albertans. It's important for us to know and understand what's happening as a result of changes to the environment from whatever cause, not just industrial causes but whatever cause. The purpose, as I've said over and over again since this came up, of using the samples of pregnant women is because for pregnant women the blood samples in prenatal care go to the provincial lab on an ordinary basis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Municipal Taxation

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has been presented by a submission report negotiated by the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability, which consisted of Mayor Bronconnier, Mayor Mandel, and the presidents of AAMD and C and AUMA. As a result of this report there are concerns in the community now that the minister may be considering some new taxation powers, particularly property transfer tax. My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: have you decided to allow municipalities new taxation authority relative to transfers of property?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say that the minister's council's report on sustainability was exactly that: it was a report by that council to my ministry. At that time there were 12 recommendations that were brought forward from the \$1.4 billion replacement of the education tax to the energy revenue, or resource taxation. But, in all, it is now before this government to look at, and there's no decision on that direction. I have to reiterate that the report asked for the government to allow municipalities to tax.

Mr. Lukaszuk: In response to that, to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: since there are many good recommendations in this report, can the minister tell us what process will take place prior to decisions being made on each individual recommendation of the report?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, there are good recommendations in that report, and as it goes through the process, the ones that are able to be acted on and that this government feels are important to be acted on will be acted on. For those that need to be consulted on, we are looking at consulting with the municipalities from after the budget through the summer and into fall.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consequently, to the same minister: as a result of this process and as a result of these recommendations, can our municipalities and particularly the capital region count on better planning processes and more stable funding for such municipalities?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, one of the major recommendations in that report was the issue of planning. I as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing feel that planning is critical for municipalities to be able to look in a positive, unified direction, to maintain sustainability, to have predictability. When we talk about regional planning, I think it is very important, but at the same time we have not made recommendations and responses to that report as of yet.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

School Transportation in Calgary

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Within the past few weeks the school bus shortage in Calgary has gone from bad to worse. The work-to-rule campaign by the city transit workers has further diminished the number of available buses, leaving parents and administrators scrambling to get kids to school on time. To the Minister of Education: what has the minister done to assist Calgary school boards to address these increased shortages?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raised the question around school bus driver shortages several weeks ago. I'd like to report that, actually, the situation has improved significantly, where the school bus companies in Calgary have actually filled a number of the vacancies, and the issue is not nearly as serious as it was several weeks ago.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's failure to build schools in new and growing communities has put tremendous strain on school boards' transportation budgets. The recent shortage of buses proves that the current situation is unsustainable. To the Minister of Education: will the minister admit that the failure to build schools in Calgary has put unsustainable pressures on the school transportation system in Calgary?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this government this year will launch several initiatives to get schools built where kids live, and we'll be looking at all kinds of arrangements to get those schools built. I agree with the hon. member. It makes no sense to be paying twice, when, first of all, students are inconvenienced because they can't go to school in their own neighbourhoods, and secondly, we're paying transportation costs. So we're going to be looking at some creative, alternative ways of getting schools built where kids live.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, Mr. Minister, would you answer this question honestly? It's from my daughter. School boards have suggested that without more government funding for transportation, higher school fees to cover the cost will be the only way to make ends meet. To the Minister of Education: is it the minister's position that parents should be made to pay for the failure of this government to plan for growth in Calgary?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member that every answer I give is honest. There is nothing dishonest about anything that I say. I would assume that every question he asks is also honest.

The hon. member has a bill before this Legislature, Bill 208, which is up for debate in about, I think, two or three weeks. I look forward to debating the issue around school fees and fundraising, and I'll answer the question in all kinds of detail in about 10 or 15 minutes, whatever I'm allowed at that time.

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

Secondary Suites

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Affordable housing is an issue of huge interest and concern across the province. I know that the minister is working so tirelessly and diligently to deal with the problem and find a solution. In some municipalities the solution includes secondary suites, also known as basement suites or granny suites. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Now that the government has introduced building and maintenance standards for secondary suites, when will these begin to be utilized as a viable housing option?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I first of all want to say that secondary suites can and should be a viable option for affordable housing. The standards that took effect on December 31, that are in place right now, are standards that meet the fire codes and the construction codes for those secondary suites.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what are the minister and his department doing to expedite the implementation of these suites, which would at least temporarily ease some of the pressures facing this province?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have had consultation with the public. We have had consultation with municipalities. We have also supported municipalities in regard to funding for secondary suites. I think it's very important to say that secondary suites can be implemented, but it has to be done with a bylaw by those municipalities.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: as a result of your contacts with the municipalities can you inform the House and Albertans as to the status of these standards and when they will be implemented?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, those standards are in place right now. I do want to say that we have been having discussions with municipalities. The municipalities need to make the choice. We have provided them with a template for those bylaws if they so desire to have secondary suites in their municipalities. If I can say, I would encourage municipalities to get involved because affordable housing is an issue and a concern in this province, and that is one direction that we can co-operate together with municipalities and with industry and with household owners to alleviate some of those affordable housing problems.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 94 questions and answers today.

Before we go to the next section of the Routine, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My guests have now arrived, and I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House three very special constituents from Banff-Cochrane. They are sitting in the members' gallery, and we have Ron Casey, mayor of Canmore; Mike Western, councillor for Canmore; and Don Kochan, acting chief administrative officer for the town of Canmore. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and members of the Assembly 13 seniors from the Sears Plus Club, and they're here to join us. The group leader is Mr. Frank McCloy, and along with him are – I hope I don't kill too many names here – Doris Hirsekorn, Mrs. Anne Kawchuk, Mrs. Ann McCloy, Mrs. Anne Kostiuik, Mrs. Emily and Mr. Walter Andruchow, Mrs. Jean Miskew, Mrs. Betty Carnegie, Mr. Frank and Mrs. Gertrude Schoblocher, Mr. Ken Bell, and Mrs. Betty Weyts. They're in the public gallery. I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Bill 2

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill aims to update the rules governing elected members of this Legislature. First and foremost, the bill lengthens the time former ministers are limited in their ability to influence government decisions or to accept certain kinds of employment. Instead of lasting for six months, the cooling-off period would apply for a year. The bill also sets out stricter guidelines around the activities former ministers can participate in during the cooling-off period. As well, it increases the fine for breaching the act during that period.

Mr. Speaker, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act also sets the framework to establish cooling-off periods for nonelected political staff and deputy ministers. There are a number of other provisions in the Conflicts of Interest Act that have been revised in this bill. These amendments were recommended by an all-party committee that reviewed the act last year.

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues who assisted in the work of that all-party committee: the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, who served as vice-chair, and the hon. members for Calgary-Bow, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Edmonton-Castle Downs, Edmonton-Glenora, Edmonton-McClung, Foothills-Rocky View, Highwood, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, Lethbridge-East, and Peace River. In addition, the Ethics Commissioner and his office were most helpful in assisting the work of the committee.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to accept Bill 2 on first reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 2 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, in response to a question raised a few weeks ago by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent by the general manager of Access Roads Edmonton, the P3 contractor for the Anthony Henday Drive southeast. The company gave me the courtesy of copying me on the letter. The letter dated April 4 is addressed to the Member for Calgary-Varsity and explains that the P3 contract has a fixed price for Anthony Henday Drive southeast. The letter clarifies that there have not been any overruns on the project, and the letter goes on to say that as a P3 project, if there were any cost . . .

The Speaker: I think this is tabling time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of documents to table today. I'm tabling an appropriate amount of copies of two letters and an attachment from April 12 from Chris Goss. Mr. Goss is very concerned about the possible seismic testing at Marie Lake. He's been expressing these concerns to the ministers of Environment

and Sustainable Resource Development. He has also attached a draft letter . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member also heard my advice to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: tablings.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Okay, thank you.

I also have a letter sent to the Premier on April 3 from Dwight and Shelley Homister, who are writing, again, about their concerns in regard to seismic testing at Marie Lake.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to table a letter with the appropriate number of copies from family members of Bill Mowbray, a 30-year police veteran in our province. His family is very concerned about how his health care was dealt with by our health care system and how the dignity of patients should be respected everywhere.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My tabling today has to do with my private member's statement earlier today, titled the McClung Goes Green campaign. I have the requisite number of copies of my newsletter, the *McClung Quarterly*, which explains the green campaign and tells people how to reduce their environmental footprint. Also, incidentally, it's available online at mcclung.ca.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today with appropriate copies. One is from Kim Troy in Edmonton, a child care provider running a day home through Southgate Medalion day home agency, expressing frustration about the state of the child care system, especially in not meeting the demands for children under two years.

The other is from Karen Burns in Grande Prairie, asking for provincial support for all children zero to 12 years, including before- and after-school care, wage enhancement, and PD funds for all workers for school-aged children too.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, a letter dated April 11, 2007, from the hon. Mr. Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, to Mr. Taylor, hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, responding to questions raised during Oral Question Period on March 21 and 22, 2007.

2:30

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll now deal with a point of privilege as raised by the hon. Minister of Finance.

Privilege

Reflections on a Member

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I initially rose under section 15(5) of our Standing Orders, which states:

A Member may always raise a question of privilege in the Assembly immediately after the words are uttered or the events occur that give rise to the question, in which case the written notice required under suborder (2) is not required.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also rising under page 81 of *Erskine May*, which states, "On the one hand, the privileges of Parliament are rights 'absolutely necessary for the due execution of its powers'." I would also bring forward *Beauchesne* 24, which states very similar to what was just stated in *Erskine May*. It states, "The privileges of Parliament are rights which are 'absolutely necessary for the due execution of its powers'."

I would also draw attention to section 69 of *Beauchesne*, which states:

The Speaker has reminded the House, "It is very important . . . to indicate that something can be inflammatory, can be disagreeable, can even be offensive, but it may not be a question of privilege unless that comment actually impinges upon the ability of Members of Parliament to do their job properly."

I would also suggest that section 64 applies, which states, "The House has occasionally taken notice of attacks on individual Members."

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that on page 52 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* it states that "any conduct which offends the authority or dignity of the House, even though no breach of any specific privilege may have been committed, is referred to as a contempt of the House."

I will follow that up with my last citation, which is the misuse of freedom of speech, page 76 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

The privilege of freedom of speech is an extremely powerful immunity and Speakers have on occasion had to caution Members about its misuse. In a ruling following a question of privilege, Speaker Fraser urged Members to take the greatest care in framing questions concerning conflict of interest guidelines. Since the question raised affected the very nature of Members' rights and immunities.

I quote again.

There are only two kinds of institutions in this land which this awesome and far-reaching privilege [of freedom of speech] extends – Parliament and the legislatures on the one hand and the courts on the other. These institutions enjoy the protection of absolute privilege because of the overriding need to ensure that the truth can be told, that any questions can be asked, and that debate can be free and uninhibited. Absolute privilege ensures that those performing their legitimate functions in these vital institutions of Government shall not be exposed to the possibility of legal action.

This is necessary in the democratic process, in the national interest.

Mr. Speaker, there were allegations made against me personally that affect my right to do my job. As Minister of Finance I will be bringing in a budget tomorrow. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood impugned my reputation and impugned my motives for bringing down a budget by stating – and unfortunately I do not have the Blues in front of me as they have not been delivered to me yet, so I am going a little bit by memory – that because there are still leadership funds to be raised, it somehow implicated the bringing down of the budget tomorrow. I think that in conjunction with all the applications that I have talked about, this does indeed constitute a question of privilege. I have been in this House 14 years. This is the first time that I've ever raised a question of privilege because it is the first time that I feel that my rights have actually been impugned.

Mr. Speaker, you yourself have ruled on numerous occasions in the last month in this House that the questions must be questions about government policy. They must not have to do with the politics of the leadership, which occurred six to eight to nine months ago. This was a definite decision by the hon. member to bring this forward today.

I was asked coming into this session the exact question that the hon. member just posed to me. My stated answer to the media at

that point in time was: the gentleman is a very nice man, kind of funny; I'll let it go.

Mr. Speaker, when he brought it into this House, I truly strongly felt that he impugned my ability to bring down a budget tomorrow by impugning my credentials, by impugning my motives and stating that I potentially could be corrupted. It's a very serious charge, and I fully understand the consequences of this charge.

Mr. Speaker, we tolerate a lot in this House. We tolerate a lot of personal attacks, but I will not have the hon. member impugn my personality and call me corrupt, although not using that exact language, in this House regardless of the rights of this House.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, are you going to participate in this point of order?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the adage that a lawyer who has himself for a client is a fool – something like that. I'm going to let the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview deal with it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview as the third-party House leader.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite amazed that one sentence has created this much controversy. The hon. Treasurer said – this is when he stood up. [interjections] Would you listen, please? This is what happened. This is the question. It says, "The Finance minister has failed to disclose his campaign donations for his PC leadership bid and has broken his own deadlines for doing so." That's in fact the case, and it's well documented. That's when he stood up.

Now, at the very minimum he may have a point of order. He certainly doesn't have a point of privilege from that. He's quoted a lot of different areas, but if he wants to go by the facts on that, it's well documented, and the minister even admitted himself outside that he's still fundraising.

We're saying that it's not about the character, that we're asking to the Premier. It's asking if this is good public policy. Most other places in Canada have leadership funds, and they control this sort of thing so that a person doesn't inadvertently have this happen. Nobody was accusing the minister of anything wrong. We're saying that as a government policy, this is wrong. Surely, the perception must be evident to even members of this government. That's what we're talking about. We're talking about government policy here.

That was the only sentence that was uttered when the member stood up and called for his point of privilege.

I would just conclude, Mr. Speaker, by saying that if we're going to look at categories, I'd say that we look at section 75. This should be the most important thing in *Beauchesne*. Section 75 states clearly, "The privilege of freedom of speech is both the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the Member of Parliament on the floor of the House and in committee."

So, Mr. Speaker, I just can't see how that one sentence that I read could create all this worry for the Treasurer, that he somehow can't do his job. Well, maybe he should have released the people that were donating to his campaign earlier on, and he would not be facing this problem. So if anybody has put himself in this bind, it is the hon. Treasurer.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others to participate? The hon. Member for Peace River.

2:40

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member quotes briefly and incompletely from the record. I'm sure that you have the Blues before you and that you'll correct that. In my mind, the hon.

Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood drew a clear line between corporations that would be donating to the hon. member's campaign and those same corporations that might be receiving favourable treatment in the budget. In so doing, I believe, first of all, he brought into question the member's ability to act impartially, and I will refer you to *Beauchesne* 66. Also, isn't that the very definition of a bribe? In making that suggestion, I would refer you to *Beauchesne* 65.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this is a very serious matter, and I beg your ruling. Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: I think it's simple timing. In this House we all know that there's a budget coming down tomorrow. For the hon. member to at this time raise the question of the Finance minister's involvement with these corporations or individuals and impugn the total budget as it's coming down is simply wrong. I don't know all the numbers that you want to quote in papers, but I know what I hear and I know what's wrong, and that was wrong.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Finance did quote *Erskine May* at page 69 talking about freedom of speech, which certainly is our privilege here in the House, but I'll also go on to page 70. It says:

Freedom of speech was important and the Crown ought not to act against a Member directly for something said in the House; but it seems to have been common ground that decorum and obedience to the Sovereign's wishes ought to be respected. Just as the House increased its ability to protect its Members from arrest and molestation, so it was frequently ready to take punitive action, without waiting for the Crown or Council, against those who overstepped the mark in debate.

And I think this member has overstepped the mark in debate.

The Speaker: This is always a very serious, serious matter, and anything that impugns the integrity of one member, when that member rises to make an argument with respect to it, should be treated with dignity and concern. I am going to review everything, and I'll report back to the House tomorrow.

In the interim should the leader of the third party or the Minister of Finance want to convey further thoughts to me on this matter, I would be pleased to receive them prior to 11 o'clock tomorrow morning.

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: Hon. Official Opposition House Leader, you're going to be making an argument on a Standing Order 30 on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition?

Impacts of Apartment Fire in Fort McMurray

Ms Blakeman: Yes, I am, and thank you very much for the opportunity to do that. Oral notice was given at the appropriate time for this Standing Order 30 during the Routine, and I believe that the Speaker is in receipt of the letter and the written notice as of 10:55 this morning.

The notice has now been distributed to everyone, but essentially we are asking for an adjournment of the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss the urgent matter of

the immediate and pressing risk to the health and well-being of the residents of Fort McMurray caused by the recent fire and resulting inability of the community's social, housing, and health systems to cope with the impacts of this crisis without immediate provincial support.

As always, Mr. Speaker, I am mindful that the arguments are on the urgency and other opportunities to discuss this particular issue. The urgency is the compromised capacity of Fort McMurray to react to this disaster and the emergency created by the fire. This is stringing from unmanaged growth for the most part, so we have several components of that urgency.

One is the housing now of 300 people. There was already a homeless list that they were trying to address of 400 people. We've now added 300 people to that. We've heard that housing is coming at some point. I can't remember the exact words that were used by the minister, but it's obviously not available today as housing is being built, but it's not open today. Coming on board and almost completed: those were the words that the minister used, so that housing is clearly not complete to have somebody move into. We have an urgency on housing 300 now homeless people. This is not a one-day problem. This community of Fort McMurray has pulled together and has addressed things over the last 24-hour period, but they don't have the capacity to sustain this, and being homeless is not a one-night deal. The immediacy of the problem and the likelihood that they could find other accommodation is slim to none. We're dealing with a place that has a vacancy rate of zero. As I said, there are units coming but not available now. So there's a housing issue.

There's a health resources issue. It's well known that this community is at capacity. It's actually short-staffed as far as nurses, doctors, and allied health professionals. They are lacking in some of the other equipment that they would like to have up there. They've been asking for additional infrastructure, et cetera. Part of your ability to deal with emergency is excess capacity to be able to absorb this, and this community does not have excess capacity.

So we've got housing, and we've got health care, and also on the health care issue are the stress and the risks on health as we look at the ability of the community to come forward with things like medication replacement for people that have been removed from their homes and weren't able to take medication with them: aids to daily living – sleep apnea machines, crutches, wheelchairs – anything else that they were not able to take with them as they vacated the premises.

In addition, we're now looking at increased risks around infection control. If we are housing groups of people together in common areas for any extended period of time, you are running a greater risk there of spreading things like colds and flu and outbreaks of other disease and possible infections.

The voluntary sector, which is the sector that we most look to for assistance in crises like this, is well beyond maximum capacity. Included in things like that, Mr. Speaker, would be mental health services, emergency accommodation, transition housing for those who are moving from addictions treatment, for example, or battered domestic disputes into transition housing – that's also been affected by this fire – donations of clothing and toiletries and furniture and bedding, animal shelters. All of those not-for-profit, volunteer-based organizations are already operating at maximum capacity. Their ability to absorb this addition is not there that I can determine. I think that is very much a part of the urgency. It does compromise safety.

There are a number of citations, Mr. Speaker. The first I go to, of course, is M and M 584 and 585, both talking about urgency and importance and requiring urgent consideration, 585 talking about the relevancy and attention and concern throughout the nation. I think we've dealt with that. This is coming out of a disaster. It's not something that is chronic. It's something that was unanticipated and could not have been anticipated or prepared for. I mean, fires happen, unfortunately. You try and prevent them, but they still happen.

We have parameters set out in *Beauchesne* 387 to 398 on emergency debates: specifically, whether there's an opportunity for debate under the rules and provisions of the House. This issue is not currently before the courts. There was a mention of new units of housing in the throne speech, but as I've said, those housing units are not immediately available in this case. There is a government bill on the Order Paper around disaster services, but it is a house-keeping act to change the statute name and set up a new delegation of power section. It's not dealing with the emergency services themselves. There is no bill that is yet to be tabled that was outlined in a presession media release by the government that we could be expecting might address this. As far as I can see, there is no private member's bill or public or private bill.

Mr. Speaker, the budget is tomorrow, but there's no prebudget indication that there be any new initiatives for Fort McMurray that could have been anticipated that would affect their capacity immediately. There are no government motions on the Order Paper, and there are no motions other than government motions that would be coming in the near future which would assist us in an emergency debate on this issue. I argue that the opportunity for debate on this issue is nonexistent. After the budget is brought forward, we have a calendar that sets out the remaining days of this session that are allocated strictly to budget debate on the estimates.

2:50

In Oral Question Period today we did raise a number of questions, but we're also admonished under 408(1)(e) that questions should "not be of a nature requiring a lengthy and detailed answer," and (f) "not raise a matter of policy too large to be dealt with as an answer to a question." Of course, with the changes in Standing Orders we're now dealing with a 45-second answer rule. So getting a level of debate and comprehensiveness is not possible with our current situation in question period. I also note in 410(7) that "brevity both in questions and answers is of great importance."

So under *Beauchesne* 389 we do have an issue that is "so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention," and I think that's particularly true for the public in Fort McMurray, Mr. Speaker. Those residents are tremendously resilient. They are creative, and they are tough, but they are already at maximum capacity. This situation is very urgent for them. They have all pulled together and come through in the business sector and volunteers and individuals, but that has an effect of one day, and we are dealing with a situation that goes beyond one day. Emergency preparedness does require some reserve capacity in staff and infrastructure, and as I've laid out, that capacity is not there.

I argue that this is an urgent situation, and we should adjourn the order of business today to provide the debate on that. Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm prepared to argue that this matter does not constitute a matter of urgent public importance as is defined under our Standing Orders. I'd like to point out to you that Standing Order 30(2) states that the Speaker shall entertain debate as he considers appropriate to determine whether the matter is "relevant to the question of urgency of debate and shall then rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order." I'm prepared to argue that this, indeed, does not meet the test of 30(2).

Mr. Speaker, the issue was raised in question period earlier today. I think the responsible minister made a very adequate response to the question that was raised in debate. I would further point out that with respect to future opportunities to discuss the matters at hand,

we'll indeed have ample opportunity in days to come as we begin a great deal of discussion and debate on various ministries' business plans and during the budget submissions.

I'd also point out, Mr. Speaker, 30(6) of our Standing Orders: "An emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly." So whether or not the discussion takes place this afternoon, the status as it pertains to the issue resulting from this fire will not be affected by any decision of this Assembly.

Finally, Standing Order 30(7)(a) talks about the fact that "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." Well, Mr. Speaker, while any kind of a fire and this one in particular is a tragic loss of property, there was no loss of life in this case. I would suggest to you that the emergency plan that the municipality has in place thus far has done a very good job of dealing with the situation. The emergent needs of putting out the fire have obviously been met, and the municipality activated its emergency management plan, as does any municipality in this province.

It's the responsibility of the minister of municipal affairs to ensure that each municipality has an adequate emergency plan to deal with incidents just like this one. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I was in Fort McMurray myself on Monday, and I was participating with the municipality in the development of their emergency management plan around the potential for flooding. It's a little bit easier to predict floods than it is fires, but at the same time I can assure you that the municipality is doing a magnificent job in their preparedness surrounding possible flooding, and I can assure you also that I am just as sure that the same degree of thought and preparedness that they've put into their flooding plan is also in place when they exercised and activated their emergency plan with respect to a fire of the magnitude such as we're dealing with here. The people are being temporarily housed, and work is under way to find permanent housing for them.

I would suggest that for all of these reasons this motion does not meet the test for a matter of urgent public debate and that we not proceed, that you rule accordingly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak against this motion of urgency. I have spoken in this House very clearly in the past in favour of improving the situation in Fort McMurray, and I have some experience with Fort McMurray. I do know that the emergency preparedness forces in place in Fort McMurray are highly professional, some of the best in the province, and certainly should not be questioned in any way in how they may have dealt with this fire. There was no loss of life. There was no loss to any of the families in terms of injury. They dealt very professionally. I know these agencies, and I know that they are very good.

I would like to add to the Deputy Government House Leader's citations in saying that in 30(7)(c) "not more than one matter may be discussed on the same motion." I believe that many matters in this application under Standing Order 30 have been raised, ranging from all sorts of things: health, mental health, addictions treatment, animal shelters. I think that this is far, far too wide-ranging of a Standing Order 30 motion to be dealt with by this House at this time.

That's all I have to say. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as I did have notice of this earlier today, I am prepared to deal with this matter under this request under Standing Order 30(2). Just a quick reminder that the request here is that an application under the Standing Order 30 is to "adjourn the

ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance.” I repeat: I did receive notice from the Leader of the Official Opposition’s office at 10:55 a.m., so the requirement under Standing Order 30(1) has been met with respect to that.

Before the question as to whether this motion should proceed, the chair must determine whether or not the motion meets the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that “the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration.” The Leader of the Official Opposition’s proposed motion is to hold an emergency debate on risks to residents of Fort McMurray “caused by the recent fire.” Both the Official Opposition House Leader and the Deputy Government House Leader quoted from *Beauchesne*, paragraphs 387 and 398, and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589. The chair has listened very attentively to all of the arguments of the members participating in the debate and appreciates the members who did provide quotations from the various standing authorities that we have.

However, when I look on page 587 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, there is one key consideration. Although the Speaker is not required to give reasons for his decision, there is one key requirement in this that I think is important. “The Speaker determines whether a matter is related to a genuine emergency which could not be brought before the House within a reasonable time by other means, such as during a Supply day.” Tomorrow the budget will come down. Very, very quickly we will be in supply and will be in supply probably for four to five to six weeks. As a result, the chair does not believe that this request meets the requirements under the standing order for an emergency debate to proceed today. The matter is a serious one – no doubt at all about that – but that is not the rationale behind the decision with respect to Standing Order 30. So the request for leave is not in order.

head: 3:00

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I’d like to call the committee to order.

Bill 22

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments in respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It’s my pleasure to rise this afternoon during committee debate on Bill 22, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act. The first order of business for myself this afternoon is to advise the Assembly of an amendment that I would like to bring forward on this act. I’ve provided the table with the original copy of the amendment, and I believe the pages are in the process of distributing it.

The Chair: We’ll just have a moment before we proceed so that the pages can distribute it to the members.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Hon. member, would you wish to proceed?

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment that I would like to move this afternoon to Bill 22 – and I believe we’ll refer to it as amendment A2. Is that correct?

The Chair: We’ll refer to this as A2, yes.

Mr. R. Miller: The amendment would amend section 17 of Bill 22 by adding the words “but the Corporation shall not make any direct investment of any funds or any portion of a fund in securities of corporations in the tobacco industry” after the words “with the regulations.”

Mr. Chairman, I think the intent of this is quite clear. Last year in this Assembly, through a tremendous effort of co-operation and collaboration and last-minute manoeuvrings between the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, we were able to convince all members of this House to support an amendment to the Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, which as much as possible this amendment mirrors. I’m hoping that the goodwill of this Assembly will also extend to broadening that amendment which was put into the cancer legacy act and thereby instruct at the will of the government and this Assembly the AIM corporation not to invest knowingly in any funds anywhere that hold tobacco companies in their portfolios.

I’m not sure that I have to spend an awful lot of time on this. I did have a conversation with the Finance minister yesterday afternoon wherein he expressed some concern, Mr. Chairman, that he didn’t think that it was the role of AIMCO to tell the various fund holders where they should be investing. Yet my response to the Finance minister – and I hope that upon 24 hours of reflection he will have shared this with his caucus – was simply that these various funds and endowments are putting an awful lot of faith and trust in AIMCO. Should Bill 22 pass, they’re putting an awful lot of faith and trust in AIMCO to manage their assets. Given that for the most part these are taxpayers’ dollars that we’re talking about, what’s really required here and what we’re asking for today is the political will of this Assembly to instruct a Crown corporation not to invest in tobacco companies whenever knowingly possible.

I think it’s well within the purview of AIMCO that should they be instructed by this Assembly not to invest in tobacco companies, we can do that. It would be written in legislation, and it would be very clear for the board and directors of AIMCO what the policy and legislation states, and they would be mandated to follow that. So I think it’s very much within our purview.

I would just like to point out that I mentioned in debate not that long ago that any number of funds around the world have ethical investing policies, including a ban on investing in tobacco companies, where I can show that those funds regularly outperform the heritage savings trust fund, for example. One example of that that I’m well familiar with is the endowment fund at Harvard, which has an ethical investment policy, including an exclusion on tobacco companies, and that fund regularly outperforms our funds here in Alberta.

Since the minister himself has indicated that the whole intent of establishing AIMCO as a Crown corporation is to improve by anywhere from 25 to 100 points the performance of the various funds in Alberta, and since it can be shown that making a move such as excluding tobacco investments from those funds doesn’t hurt but can actually be proven to help the performance of funds, I think this meshes well with the intent of the legislation as it’s proposed.

As I said, Mr. Chairman, I won’t elaborate any further. I think the amendment is pretty much self-explanatory. As I indicated, it is based as much as was possible on the wording that this House supported last year when we passed the cancer legacy act, so I’m hoping that this amendment will find the same favour of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on amendment A2.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to address the issue of this amendment and urge members not to support this amendment but not because I don't appreciate the intent of this amendment. Just as the member indicated, this House on a previous occasion, in dealing with another piece of legislation, did pass a very similar amendment, but I don't think that the comparisons made between this bill and the bill that was dealing with the establishment of the legacy fund for cancer are nearly close enough that we should be considering using that as a precedent. When you establish a fund exclusively to be used for cancer research, I think it's reasonable to argue that you should do your very best to exclude from that fund issues or investments that specifically support the tobacco industry. In this case, though, we aren't dealing with investment strategies that are exclusive to one fund, but in fact we're dealing with investment strategies that go across all of government and will deal with significantly more than that one fund.

3:10

I would suggest that if the members of this Assembly feel that there should be some kind of an investment philosophy or an investment policy that is overlaid on the directions that are given to this organization, this is a rather piecemeal way of doing it. I think that the kind of direction that the member is referring to is talking today about tobacco. There are other members in the room that might suggest: well, we also should consider whether or not these funds are environmentally damaging in someone's opinion. Others might have other suggestions. I would suggest that we get into a very ad hoc basis of passing amendments like this.

For that reason alone, I can't support dealing with this amendment. I might be convinced at some point in time down the road to deal with legislation, not in the form of an amendment but legislation that deals with the issue of whether or not public funds that are invested in the marketplace should have some kind of policy associated with them, an overarching, broad policy. That's not what's before us. That's not possible at this committee stage of this bill.

For that reason, I urge all members not to support this amendment.

The Chair: Are there others on the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to rise and speak in favour of the amendment proposed by my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and to address some of the comments made just moments ago by the hon. Minister of Environment. I understand what he's saying, that in the perfect world you would take a very, very holistic approach to this whole process and consider the universe of possible investments that might not be advisable to pursue in a fund like this. Part of me can understand his argument in terms of this being an ad hoc approach; however, this particular ad hoc approach is backed by over 40 years of research and experience that proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that tobacco was a harmful substance. It may be a legal substance, but it's a harmful substance.

The intent of this amendment, I think, is at least in part to make sure that as the government of Alberta, as representatives of the people of Alberta, we take steps to not endorse bad behaviour, to not endorse substances which are dangerous to public health, to take steps to endorse initiatives that are good for public health.

We have had issues before in regard to government investments in tobacco funds, in securities of corporations in the tobacco industry, and it doesn't set a very good example for 3.3 million Albertans, Mr. Chair. This amendment seeks to set a good example. This amendment seeks to set some boundaries around what it is that the corporations do with the people's money, because it is the people's money. I think it is a very reasonable and rational restriction on how AIMCO can invest funds. I think it's in the public interest to keep those funds out of securities of corporations in the tobacco industry.

Not only do I fully support this amendment, but given the body of scientific evidence and knowledge about the harmful effects of tobacco use in all its forms, I can't imagine why anybody in this House would vote against this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. On amendment A2 it's with great pride that I recognize that the city of Calgary is one of the first cities in Alberta – in fact, it may be the only city at this point – that has an ethical investment plan, that looks at investments that basically do no harm or are not at the expense of anyone else's well-being.

There's no doubt about the fact that not only first-hand smoking but second-hand smoking kills people. The idea that we would benefit from the profits of a substance which is killing individuals and continues to kill individuals in a province with very lax regulations, in a province where the government refuses to come up with rules for a province-wide ban, citing individual rights as an argument, and recognizes the rights of a small minority over the health concerns of the vast majority – the minister suggested that this wasn't the way to deal with ethical investments.

I would suggest that today we could make a major decision in cleaning up our investment policies, which is what Bill 22 is all about: improving our investment strategies. We could point out not only to the rest of Canada but to the world that Alberta believes not only in transparency and accountability, but it believes in integrity and ethics. This simple amendment accomplishes this end in a very compact, efficient manner.

Canada has indicated, for example, that it will not support mines. It will not manufacture mines. It recognizes that mines destroy and kill people and maim people. In a similar manner tobacco has no positive benefits other than the historical symbol that was used in trade. I don't want to put down the First Nation exchange. Tobacco was considered a special herb that was exchanged. But in that comparison of historical recognition we can burn sweetgrass at a number of ceremonies. We do not need to invest in tobacco companies.

To me – this may seem like stretching the point – it's the equivalent of investing in prostitution. Is the Alberta government serving as an unethical pimp for tobacco companies? By profiting from the revenue of tobacco, we are in fact acknowledging that any type of investment that brings money into the province is acceptable. I take issue with the idea that a drug, an addictive substance which is responsible for a tremendous number of deaths, would be sanctioned and held up as an acceptable investment in this province.

We have an opportunity to do the right thing. There are many ways of diversifying our economy. There are a number of wonderful opportunities to invest, particularly in green energy production. There are opportunities to invest in environmental reclamation. The list of investment possibilities is practically endless.

So I would urge as a very first step that members of this Legislature recognize that there is no good side to tobacco as an investment

or as a killing substance, and I would urge members opposite to join us in condemning investment in tobacco and support the amendment A2 to Bill 22. Thank you.

3:20

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to rise and speak against this amendment for some very simple reasons. The amendment simply asks us not to “make any direct investment of any funds or any portion of a fund in securities of corporations in the tobacco industry.” Speaker after speaker from the other side has raised the health reason and the ethical reason for not investing in these companies. I have to point attention to the fact that if they are going to follow the same reasoning, then people can ask: why don’t you stop investment in fast food companies, too, because trans fats kill people? Also there are many people killed in automobile accidents. Maybe we should stop investing money in the automobile industry too. Right? If you keep following that insane reasoning, eventually you get to a point that, you know, you cannot invest money into any company, and that is very, very dangerous.

On top of that, I think that the simple basic requirement for this corporation is to maximize the return of our investment of taxpayers’ money. The more strings you put on it, the more conditions you put on it, you make the job of those people who invest the money on behalf of our citizens more difficult.

Therefore, I urge all members to vote against this amendment and focus on the goal of what we are trying to do with this corporation: maximize the return on the investment of our money.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m delighted to be able to speak on this amendment, which I think everyone should really view in a very positive manner. This is the time to show leadership. This is the time to stand up and be counted as an ethical government looking after the citizens of this province and not always just worrying about the bottom line. But having said that, I can’t believe for a second that if there was a part of a portfolio – or at least this is what should happen – that was losing money, it would not be changed in a second. It would be the press of a button to be able to get rid of the part of the portfolio that handles this tobacco investment.

The other thing is that, yes, the argument appears to be that we can make money. But, believe me, the health care costs for people who are dying of lung cancer far outweigh the damage that is done. They don’t just die of a heart attack. It takes months and months and months. As an RN I have helped people towards that end, and it certainly isn’t pretty. It’s a long, drawn-out process; it’s very painful; but, more importantly if you’re only going to talk about money, it requires a great deal of money to care for people that are dying of lung cancer.

So I won’t say any more, but I would really, really like to see this government take an ethical leadership on this issue, press the button, and switch that part of the portfolio that handles tobacco into something else that would make probably even more money if they took a minute to look for it.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m pleased to rise in support of this amendment A2 to Bill 22, the Alberta Investment Management

Corporation Act. I certainly understand the arguments put forward by the Minister of Environment and the Member for Calgary-Montrose, and I don’t think that this should be the beginning of a list of matters that should be brought in to affect the investment of this very important instrument in the development of the Alberta economy.

There are other bottom lines at play here, and it’s important to note them. I think the Member for Lethbridge-East was wise in stating that the health care costs are an additional bottom line that should be looked at in this amendment, and that’s why I support it. I think it’s important to note also in this House that we at least make statements that tell the investment managers who come to work for this fund that this type of investment is taken by members of this House to be not in the interest of Alberta and Albertans.

There’s little benefit by investing in Big Tobacco in the economic development of Alberta. The tobacco industry has very little direct involvement in the agricultural industry in Alberta. It’s not grown here. It’s not developed here. It’s not processed here in any meaningful way. I think it is important that there is a precedent that was established in looking at our cancer endowment last year, that we would not be looking to invest in this type of investment in the tobacco industry.

The importance, I think, of this amendment is clear. It could be worded a little bit differently, but I think it’s clear in its intent.

I stand in support of this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to rise to speak in favour of this amendment. I think the question that we need to ask ourselves is: in being stewards for the people of Alberta and making sure that this money is well invested, do we want to make money for the people of Alberta by investing their money in companies that are responsible for the deaths of thousands of people? It’s said – and I think it’s very true – that tobacco is the only product which if used according to the instructions, if used properly according to its intent by the manufacturer, can kill you. I don’t think you can say that about other products. So in that sense it is quite different than other types of investment.

I am sure that if we asked people of Alberta this question, a clear majority of them would say, “Yes. I want to make sure that you do not invest my money in tobacco companies,” for those reasons. As a result, I think that this is a reasonable position to take. It’s a position that would be supported, in my view, by most Albertans, certainly not all but by most, and it is, finally, a responsible position to take.

So with respect to the amendment, Mr. Chairman, I want to say that we will be supporting it. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. Just very briefly, Mr. Chairman. I was interested in the statement from the Member for Calgary-Montrose. I believe he said that the idea is to maximize profit, but the question, to me, that we should ask is: at what cost? I mean, do we invest in, like, the weapons industry? Do we invest in the pornography industry? Where do we draw the line? This is a line to draw right here. It’s ethical investing. It makes perfect sense. Tobacco kills people in this country by the thousands. It’s outrageous that we should be investing in the tobacco industry. It’s common sense. It’s ethical,

and it makes perfect sense. I wish the members of this House would vote for this amendment.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford back on the debate on the bill.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Back on the main bill in committee, just a couple of points that I want to raise. Section 8 talks about employees, and it says, “the Corporation may engage employees for the purpose of carrying on the business of the Corporation and may determine their conditions of service.” Now, the Minister of Finance was kind enough to provide myself and my researcher with the so-called three-column document that the government uses in their discussions. When I look at row 11, which talks about employees, the rationale behind this particular section says:

AIMCO employees will not be subject to the Public Service Act, including position classification, salary, and vacation rules. AIMCO employees will not participate in Crown benefits. Participation in existing pension plans is to be determined.

3:30

In light of the revelations that have come forward regarding the \$11 million loss that I spoke of in question period today, it does simply cause me to question, Mr. Chairman, a number of things regarding conflict-of-interest rules and lobbyist registry rules if, in fact, the AIMCO employees would not be subject to the Public Service Act. I have to confess that I’m not infinitely familiar with the Public Service Act, but I think that that is a question that deserves to be asked: just exactly how would AIMCO employees be dealt with in terms of both the lobbyist registry and conflict-of-interest acts if they’re not part of the Public Service Act? That’s the one question I would like to get on the record.

Also, section 17 talks about the investment of the corporation’s funds. It says, again, “The Corporation may invest its funds, including reserve funds, only in accordance with the regulations.” Of course, as everybody is now well aware, we just had good debate on an amendment to that which, unfortunately, failed. But the amendment would have seen a restriction on any corporations under the umbrella of AIMCO investing in tobacco funds.

Both the Minister of Environment and the Member for Calgary-Montrose spoke in discussion to that amendment regarding section 17, and I think the Member for Calgary-Montrose actually quoted almost verbatim from the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act, which says that the objective is to maximize the investment of Albertans and the fund. As my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark just pointed out, that leaves it absolutely wide open in terms of no restrictions, no limitations.

It really does cause one to pause and wonder whether or not there would be any restriction as to what investments might be made by AIMCO, whether it might be pornographic websites, whether it might be arms companies. In fact, we know that there could very well be investments in companies that deal in arms already. So I have a real concern with section 17, and I’m really disappointed that the members of this House did not see fit to approve amendment A2 because I really think it was the right thing to do.

Mr. Chairman, section 18 talks about borrowing and guarantees. In particular, it says, “If authorized by the Minister, the Corporation may borrow money in accordance with the regulations.” I’m wondering if the minister could outline for us under what circumstances the corporation might be borrowing money. Considering

that they’re managing in excess of \$70 billion in funds, I can’t offhand imagine why the corporation would then need to borrow money with all of those assets available in their investment portfolio. I would like an explanation from the minister on that.

Then, in particular, I do have to go back to the situation regarding the \$11 million that was lost by the Finance department on the timberland asset class. I can’t help but be a little bit confused by some mixed messages that the Minister of Finance is sending, and I don’t mind saying publicly that it’s not the first time this minister has sent mixed messages. I’m confused by some of the comments that have been made.

Mr. Chairman, I first started asking questions about this \$7 million supplementary supply, and then we learned more recently that it’s actually an \$11 million loss that that \$7 million was meant to address. When I finally received a response in the way of written answers to my questions that I’ve been asking for some time, I was interested to note that the minister said in his written response that, in fact, there are clauses in Bill 22 that are designed specifically to address the situation that happened with the timberland asset class. Yet in this House during debate on supplementary estimates the minister had said that there was no correlation whatsoever between Bill 22 and what had happened with that \$7 million that was required in supplementary supply. So I’m confused by that.

In speaking to the Auditor General’s office this morning, they told me that from their point of view there would be no correlation because, in fact, the changes that were required to be made to policy would have been made in regulation already under Alberta investment management and that those regulations would just flow through to AIMCO if Bill 22 passes and we now have a corporation. So I’m really a little bit unsure. Are there actually clauses in Bill 22 that address specifically the situation that happened with AIMCO? First the minister says no. Then he says yes. The Auditor General is saying no. I look through Bill 22, and I can’t find anything in Bill 22 that specifically addresses the situation that happened with the timberland asset class.

Now, it’s possible, I’m sure, that there may be something coming in regulations, which, of course, we don’t get to see in this Legislature until after they’re passed. They don’t get debated publicly, so there’s very little in the way of public oversight. It’s possible that there may be some regulation coming after the passage of this bill that would deal specifically with what happened with the timberland asset class, but I don’t see it here. So, again, this adds to the confusion that I’m having with what happened in that particular situation and whether or not, in fact, the passage of Bill 22 and the creation of this Crown corporation will deal with that situation and help to ensure that that sort of mistake, at a very hefty cost to taxpayers, doesn’t happen again.

I found it interesting this morning – and I don’t mean to be picking on the Auditor General’s office, Mr. Chairman – that a comment was made to me by one of the staff members that this \$11 million is a very small amount in terms of the big picture, that, you know, as is made clear in the government’s press release outlining the reasons for Bill 22, we’re managing at this point in excess of \$70 billion. So the comment was made that \$11 million is a very small amount in the big picture.

Well, I challenge anybody in this House to go out to their constituents, particularly those that are having difficulty finding affordable housing, and tell them that \$11 million is a very small amount and that, you know, we shouldn’t be making such a big deal out of an \$11 million loss because of a mistake that was made and because, as I pointed out in question period today, of the really poor accounting and systems management practices in that particular department. So \$11 million, although it may be a small drop in the

bucket to this government, is a huge, huge amount to the average taxpayer. In fact, I'm willing to guess that the average taxpayer can't even really wrap their heads around how much money \$11 million is. That's how much it is. My experience in this Assembly is that people can better relate to a \$22 glass of orange juice than they can to an \$11 million loss in a pension fund.

Mr. Chairman, the fact of the matter is that this is a lot of money and deserves an awful lot of careful consideration and scrutiny by the members of this House. That is, in fact, the reason why I'm asking the questions that I am today as we debate Bill 22 in committee stage.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will look forward to other questions and comments from members of the Legislature on this bill, and I would hope that prior to dealing with this bill in third reading, we may be able to have some answers to those questions that I've raised this afternoon.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yesterday during the debate in second reading of Bill 22, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act, I covered a number of points, but one important point that I made, to my regret somewhat more briefly than I would have liked because the time ran out, was the issue of ethical investment principles when dealing particularly with public funds.

3:40

I talked about the issue of ethics in investments. There are various aspects to this, you know, the issue of investing in corporations whose products may directly do harm to individuals, to their health. The tobacco industry is one area. Corporations which either produce products or trade in products that are produced through child labour or companies that deal with jurisdictions or countries which are in a very clear and blatant violation of human rights around the world are some of the instances where the ethical concerns arise when making decisions about investing money, particularly money that's owned by democratic governments and their citizens and is at the disposal of Crown corporations, such as the one being proposed here, for investment on behalf of the people, citizens who are the real owners of those funds and capital.

This particular amendment, Mr. Chairman, does speak to that concern that I expressed about the ethical side of these investment decisions. That must always be in the minds of people who make those decisions. This bill doesn't provide for this kind of a filter, this kind of a check, this kind of an instruction to the people who'll be responsible for this Crown corporation to in fact be not only sensitive to ethical issues but to respect the principle of ethical investing and make their decisions in light of the obligation to not invest in corporations that do not respect those ethical standards and ethical principles.

So, Mr. Chairman, I am glad to rise and lend my support on behalf of the NDP caucus to this amendment which does specifically . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, are you introducing an amendment?

Dr. Pannu: No, no. I'm speaking to the amendment.

The Chair: That amendment has been dealt with. We're back debating the bill.

Dr. Pannu: Then, Mr. Chairman, with your advice I'll just speak to the bill in general, then, in its committee stage. May I?

The Chair: You can't speak to the amendment anymore because the amendment is defeated, but you can speak on the bill itself.

Dr. Pannu: Absolutely. I'm speaking to the bill, then. Thank you for your advice and correction.

I think that because it does not have a clear requirement in it that makes reference to the need for the corporation that this bill will create to respect ethical principles and bring into play ethical considerations, the bill is seriously flawed. It's a bill that leaves open the possibility that we as a province, that we as a government, with this Legislature as part of that government, will be seen as having not addressed its obligation to address the serious question of ethical investing. Making a profit at any cost: that kind of orientation is something that must be discouraged, certainly, by a Crown corporation which is being established by virtue of the legislation that we are debating here.

If this corporation is in fact to represent the real interests of Albertans, then it must commit itself to respecting human rights issues, paying due attention to those when making those investment decisions, paying due attention to and respecting the principle that child labour must not be part of the production activity or part of the goods that that corporation trades in and in which this corporation invests.

Similarly, Mr. Chair, the whole issue of our being sensitive to environmental issues now. We've stretched the definition of ethical concerns. I think one of the concerns that has an ethical, moral dimension is the activities of corporations that might do irreparable harm to the environment, particularly harm with reference to the global warming issue.

A whole flood of studies by academics, by scholars located in different parts of the world, by international bodies such as the international panel on climate change, a group of close to 2,000 top-notch scientists around the world; the Stern report, which was prepared by a well-known, famous economist who is the special adviser to the Prime Minister of Britain; over 900 pages of a book that's available in our Library, *The Economics of Climate Change*: all of these documents, all of these reports, all of these discussions and their summaries, all of the recommendations coming out of these reports made by these experts indicate to us that we need to take action. We need to take corporations on board to take this action, action directed at doing everything that we can to mitigate, to start with, and then to reduce in absolute terms the emission of greenhouse gases identified by these experts and scientists as one of the key factors which is leading to an ever-growing rate of climate change in the form of global warming.

Ethical issues, I think, must be at the heart of the debate when it comes to putting in place the legislation that will create a Crown corporation to invest the publicly owned funds in this province. So, Mr. Chairman, speaking to this bill in committee, I think it's important that we be reminded of the flaw in the bill, which has to do with the absence of any mention referencing ethical concerns and putting some ethical limits and boundaries around how such a Crown corporation should arrive at decisions for investing these funds.

Mr. Chairman, with that note on the problem with this bill, a problem having to do with the absence of any ethical concerns formally expressed in the bill with respect to the obligations of such a corporation when making decisions to invest, I close my brief remarks at this point.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on the bill.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to rise in support of Bill 22, Alberta Investment Management Corporation

Act. This act, I think, is a very prudent and far-sighted approach to changing the way that we deal with our investments here in Alberta. "Securing maximum value," as the press release says, "for Alberta's investments is a key part of Premier Ed Stelmach's plan to build a stronger Alberta." I think that if we can gain greater basis points in the full investments that we are dealing with in Alberta – and that is the future Alberta – if we were to gain . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I would like to remind you, as I reminded some members opposite yesterday, that the use of proper names, including the Premier's, is not permitted.

3:50

Mr. Backs: I'm sorry.

To gain, say, potentially 100 basis points would be \$500 million per year, and that would be an incredible gain for the citizens of Alberta.

Looking at the way the bill is structured in how it would look for excellence in investment I think is a very appropriate and far-reaching move. As we do look forward, even though the amendment on tobacco was defeated, I think that there should be some understanding and ability by the investment managers to avoid these types of investments and to avoid, in fact, any investment that would act to the detriment of Alberta or Albertans. You know, something like Osama bin Laden mountain resorts might be one they should flag as one not to look at. Something like the al Qaeda infrastructure industries might not be a good one to look at. We could maybe have some sense and sensibility in the way that those investment managers look at how they deal with the bottom line and how that deals with Alberta.

I do support this bill. I think it's a wise move forward, and I commend the government for moving on this one. Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 22, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 22 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 27

Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this Act? The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture I'm very pleased to rise this afternoon and begin discussion in Committee of the Whole on Bill 27, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007. The amendment to the emblems act will allow cabinet to add any Alberta symbol of distinction to the list of official symbols. Bill 27 proposes to grant authority to cabinet to officially recognize symbols of distinction through an order in council. This will allow cultural groups to obtain a symbol of distinction to celebrate important milestones such as the 25th anniversary, for example, of the Franco-Albertan flag.

In fact, it was kind of interesting. After the debate on that particular bill the media were all after those of us who could utter a few words in French as to why we killed the bill to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Franco-Albertan flag, which is not what we did. We voted to in fact create a bill, such as Bill 27, that essentially would make it easier for every organization, every culture in Alberta to approach its government for official recognition.

Bill 27 will provide an efficient process to ensure that important symbols of distinction that recognize the valuable contribution of Alberta's diverse population can be recognized in a timely manner. Much easier to bring something through an OC process than it is to find a private member who could either win or not win the lottery in terms of being drawn for a private member's bill. This will streamline the process for everyone so that every single individual group dealing with respect to language and culture can be duly recognized in an easier way to do things.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I trust that we'll hear good comments.

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

Mr. Chase: Merci, M. le Président. Je suis très triste, très désolé que les membres de ce gouvernement ont dévalué l'importance des contributions francophones dans l'histoire de cette province. Plusieurs députés de cette Assemblée ont raconté l'histoire excellente des francophones en Alberta, symbolisée par les noms des villes, des fleuves, et des lacs qui reconnaissent l'histoire d'un groupe qui a beaucoup contribué à la fondation de cette province. Les membres des Premières nations avec les habitants francophones et anglophones ont travaillé depuis des centaines d'années pour créer et établir l'Alberta que nous sommes fiers de partager aujourd'hui.

Les francophones ne sont pas seulement un autre groupe. Leur symbole, le drapeau, appartient à l'histoire de la formation de cette province. L'emblème francophone mérite plus d'honneur.

Just in summary, I am very sorry that members of this government have devalued the importance of French contributions in the history of this province. Several MLAs from this Assembly discussed the excellent history of francophones, French speakers, the French culture in Alberta symbolized by the names of towns, rivers, and lakes which recognize the history of a group which contributed tremendously to the foundation of this province.

Members of the First Nations together with French and English settlers worked for centuries to create, to establish the Alberta which we are now proud to share today. French speakers, the French culture is not just another group. Their symbol, their flag, belongs to the history of the formation of this province. The French emblem deserves greater respect.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to Bill 27, Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007. Let me express my deep regret at the failure of this Legislature on Monday to proceed with Bill 204, Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007. My constituents are deeply disappointed and, in fact, angry that this bill was not allowed to proceed through the Legislature on the pretext that another bill, a government bill, Bill 27, was coming up and therefore there was no need for the Legislature to pass Bill 204.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 204 was a very specific bill, a very powerfully symbolic bill in that it was designed to recognize the historic contributions made by the Franco-Albertan community as the first pioneers to this part of Canada. The bill was being debated on the

20th anniversary of a rather ugly incident in this Legislature which denied a Franco-Albertan MLA, Leo Piquette, who was a member of the NDP caucus at that time, from speaking French in this House. This happened despite the fact that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of Canada had been in place for five years before that incident happened. So I thought it was a fitting way of recognizing in this Legislature last Monday that we indeed had erred in disallowing Mr. Piquette to ask his question in French and that on that day 20 years later we were going to make a statement in the form of a piece of legislation that would make appropriate and due amends to that error that was made in this House. That wasn't done.

Now to Bill 27. Bill 27, Mr. Chairman, is a sort of framework legislation which will permit the government of Alberta, the cabinet, the Executive Council through order in council to bestow such important recognition to a variety of ethnocultural groups and other groups in our province who seek such recognition who are making important contributions to the development and growth of this province over time and now.

4:00

There's nothing wrong with that. That's a very laudable thing. As a matter of fact, I was reading through some of the remarks made on Monday, one last paragraph from a speech on Bill 204 that was made by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Egmont. Except, Mr. Chairman, perhaps this is just the beginning, speaking to Bill 204. That's how I treated it too. That's a good beginning. Perhaps this bill brought forward by the hon. Member for Peace River will be the beginning of a celebration of all cultures found in this great province of Alberta. I think that is absolutely appropriate and the right thing to do. So there is no contradiction, no problem with passing this bill in the Assembly and then moving on to creating opportunity by way of Bill 27 to permit other groups to be able to seek similar recognition by way of an emblem or other means of choice that they have at their disposal.

This bill will now make that possible for other groups, and to the extent it does that, I support it, but I have a problem with another aspect of it. It takes away from this Legislature the opportunity to both debate and through that debate recognize and express appreciation on this floor for the contributions of other groups who seek similar recognition by way of making application to the government for a recognition emblem or something.

This Legislature plays a most central role in the government of Alberta, and any bill that takes away from it the opportunity as a House, as an Assembly, to be able to express, to have the chance to express appreciation in a debate, appreciation for the contributions and the work that has been done to make this province better by ethnocultural groups or religious groups or other groups I think is a real loss of opportunity. This House should never relinquish without serious consideration its right to insist on having that opportunity to do what the Executive Council is allowed by this piece of legislation, Bill 27, to do. So that's the only part that I find objectionable about Bill 27. It robs the House of that opportunity to officially and formally express appreciation for the contributions of various groups and give a form of recognition to them.

With that said, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat. As I said, you know, I have some problems with this bill, but it is a bill that will now allow groups to seek recognition for the contributions that they make, and to that extent it's a bill worth supporting. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, I did listen very intently to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I guess I have to

say that I really do feel that he's incorrect in some of his statements because what happened is that Bill 27 has come in basically as a replacement bill for Bill 204. As much as I appreciated Bill 204 – and I know that I spoke in favour of it. I don't remember if it was here or if it was in caucus, but I did speak in favour of Bill 204. Actually, what has happened is that I absolutely support Bill 27 as a replacement bill for Bill 204.

Let me just tell you a little story, Mr. Chairman. As one who was a sponsor of Bill 209, a private member's bill for this Legislature 2007, I had a very good bill on community treatment orders. What happened was that the minister of health came in, and he actually kind of adopted that bill as Bill 31. He took it as a government bill, Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, and he did not only what I was going to do in a private member's bill, but he went above and beyond what I wanted to do as a private member. He really dug into the Mental Health Act and made it so that it suited all of the areas that needed to be kind of amended in order to implement community treatment orders, and I really think that's exactly what happened with Bill 27.

What happened here is that we had the government come in and say: "Lookit, this is a good bill. This is a bill that a private member has put forward." In this case the hon. Member for Peace River. "It's a good bill. We want to take it. We want to do not only what that bill says, but we want to do above and beyond what that bill says." Thus, we have Bill 27, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Chairman, I am very supportive of this because I think this is how democracy works. This is what it's all about. This is when a private member puts forward a bill, kind of piques the interest of government. It might be an opposition member. It might be a government member. It doesn't matter. It's a private member who piques the interest of government and says: this is something that we have been overlooking and that we need to take on as part of the government agenda.

Mr. Chairman, this is exactly what's happened with Bill 27, so I guess I want to thank the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture for recognizing the importance of Bill 204, the private member's bill put forward by the Member for Peace River, and taking this on as a government bill.

I want to just support this in Committee of the Whole wholeheartedly, and I hope that all members of this Assembly will join me in supporting and in endorsing Bill 27 in Committee of the Whole because this, in fact, is not only an encompassment of Bill 204, but it is an expansion to recognize the culture and the emblems and all the history that Alberta has to offer to all Albertans. So let's do it. Let's get on with it, and let's go forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 27, Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 27 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 19

Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any amendments, comments, or questions with regard to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, a pleasure to stand and respond to a justice bill, this time in committee, to Bill 19, Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. The purpose of Committee of the Whole, Mr. Chairman, as we all know and as some members of the public also know, is to dissect and scrutinize pieces of legislation line by line, paragraph by paragraph, and page by page. Now, today I'm not going to belabour this process because most of my remarks have been put on the record in second reading. Like I mentioned before, this appears to be a housekeeping bill, and it doesn't really warrant a lot of debate unless members from the government caucus would like to stand up and further tell us why it's such a wonderful thing. However, I just have very minor clarifications to seek from the hon. mover of the bill.

The first one is basically with respect to the application for leave to appeal, and it appears, you know, seven different times in the bill because we're dealing with seven different acts that we're amending. Usually the way I read bills is the before and after, you know, what it presently reads and what we're trying to make it say. I notice that now we're talking about 30 days. In the current language it says one month. So I was just wondering if it really makes a difference, you know, one month versus 30 days. Or is it just the hon. mover of the bill exercising his legal background and expertise and playing with us in the House? However, I don't think it's really a major thing.

4:10

It talks about the leave to appeal, and then the other one, the new one, is talking about the application for the leave to appeal. So if he can walk us through an example of, you know, somebody who learns of a decision from one of those boards or tribunals mentioned and would like to raise a concern or appeal that decision or that statement or that decision. How is he or she going to do it and what are the steps? Just walk us through an example or, you know, a case scenario of how it's done. Because, really, as a layman – and I keep admitting that I am – 30 days is one month and one month is 30 days. So I don't understand the value.

Moving on to the other section, Mr. Chairman, with respect to the written request for materials. I think that's positive because we're now saying 14 days, but again I was just reading in the old language, and it says two weeks. Maybe it's clearer. Maybe it is more reader-friendly to say 14 days, and I think it's positive, you know, because we don't want boards and tribunals to sit on a request for information or a request for materials indefinitely. So that is basically telling them that they have to do it within a prescribed period of time, which is positive.

The other question I have, again something that appears frequently in this amendment act, is about the request for the transcript. It's a little technical. I have to admit that I don't fully understand whether the transcript should be automatically released or whether it should be the court, on application or on its own motion, releasing it. Again, if the hon. sponsor of the bill can tell us an example of where that might be warranted, why it's a good decision, why it's a good move.

Then, having said that, I think I just have one last comment, Mr. Chairman, with respect to those boards and tribunals and commissions and agencies. We have a few of them, and they have grown both in size and in scope. Sometimes the public has a concern with respect to how the public is being notified of those decisions, and they're usually decisions of major consequences. They're decisions

that have implications, and they might affect people's lives and their livelihood and the fees they pay, you know, the access to services that they're granted, and so on. So it's basically a request to maybe mandate somehow that notifying the public and making the public aware of the decision, trying to inform people what the decision is and what potential implications it might have, should be standardized. It should be mandated in legislation that this is how you do it. You advertise on television, you advertise in major print media, and you do it repeatedly and you do it over a certain period of time before the effect or the decision comes in operation.

We keep hearing from people saying, "I didn't know about this," or "When did this happen?" Now we're requesting them to only file the request for appeal or their intent to appeal within 30 days. So I think that maybe in fairness we should also have a special, you know, hard, set way to inform the public of those decisions, again noting that they're usually decisions of major implication and magnitude. So just minor clarifications.

I would really appreciate the hon. sponsor giving us an example or a case scenario of how it's done and why it's better this way. I don't think I'm going to disagree with him, and I don't think I'm going to hold up this legislation. Just a point of clarification if he might.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm prepared to stand today to move Bill 19, the Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, in committee. I spoke somewhat extensively with regard to the details of the bill in second reading, so I will attempt to be brief. The bill does include some minor amendments, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung had referred to, which do affect a number of provincial statutes, eight in number, in fact. These are designed to reduce delays and to make better use of the court's time.

The amendments will reflect the current realities in the Court of Appeal that make it impractical to hear all of the cases that come before it "at the next sittings of the Court," as the legislation currently requires. Unfortunately, those types of restraints do not reflect the realities and practices of the court as the cases are scheduled many, many weeks in advance to allow materials to be distributed and for counsel to prepare. In practice the hearing date for the appeal is one agreed on by all of the counsel for the parties. So this bill will allow the court to schedule new appeals in a time frame that is appropriate for the parties involved and in consideration of other previously scheduled matters. It will also bring consistency to the statutes in terms of the time limits for filing and serving appeal documents.

Mr. Chairman, the proposed changes in the bill will better reflect the current practices within the Court of Appeal as it relates to appeals from boards and tribunals. As I mentioned earlier, the stakeholders are supportive of these amendments, and the changes already reflect their input.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung had requested some clarification on what steps would be entailed in order to have an appeal of one of these tribunals proceed. The steps essentially are that within the 30-day period after the decision by the board or tribunal there would have to be an application for leave to appeal. Then, if necessary, under the new provisions if there is an appeal granted, the appeal would proceed in the normal course with the procedure and practice of the Court of Appeal. If there is a written request for materials in the interval between the initial decision to appeal and the actual appeal, then the tribunal has to provide the materials required within 14 days on which the written request is served. Basically, that's the procedure.

I would like to respond to some specific points that the hon. members made in second reading of the bill yesterday. First of all, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung had expressed concern that he could not find the Gas Utilities Act in reference in the bill. He is correct, but there is a good reason for that. The appeal provisions, it turns out, for the Gas Utilities Act are actually contained within the body of the Public Utilities Board Act.

So based on his remarks, I'd also like to clarify for the same hon. member how the appeal process works. Permission is still required from the judge to proceed with an appeal – and this is what we call the application for leave – and when you seek permission, that is based on the principles of law that allow the court to determine if the board erred in law in making their decision. So it's not always a requisite to have all the materials or the transcript for that leave to be given. It could be something that is obvious.

Yesterday the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had also asked why there was a distinction between the materials that the applicant can request when preparing for the application for permission to appeal versus the appeal itself. The first point that I would make in that regard is that transcripts are not normally given to the court at this stage because, as I said, they're not always required. In fact, they're often not required to determine whether the court will hear an appeal. Normally the court would have a copy of the board's decision as well as the applicant's other documents. Those by themselves might explain the reason for the appeal.

4:20

Now, if permission for the appeal is granted, then and only then would the transcripts be provided with the other material to be reviewed by the court which is actually hearing the appeal. I can also assure the hon. member that there need be absolutely no concern over whether the lack of transcripts at this stage would affect the applicant's success at the actual appeal stage. Again, this is because transcripts are not required for the court to decide whether it will simply grant permission to proceed with an appeal. The grant of permission to proceed with an appeal, as I said, is based on legal criteria that are separate from what is contained in the transcript.

So I trust those comments have answered my hon. friends' queries. I would ask for your support on this bill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for his response to some of the questions that were raised yesterday in second reading of the bill. It was a serious response on his part. I do thank him for it.

I continue to have some concerns about the leave to appeal application provisions here and the fact that those leave to appeal provisions in the bill do make a distinction between the materials to which the applicant would have access and the transcript, to which it will not have access when preparing the leave to appeal application.

These boards and tribunals are quasi-judicial bodies. They have fairly extensive powers. I'm not entirely certain that the law requires all of these tribunals and boards covered by these seven pieces of legislation that are being amended by this bill to keep transcripts. In conversation with some people it has been suggested to me that not all tribunals and boards have a legal obligation to keep transcripts.

If that is the case, then the provision in this bill of not requiring these boards and tribunals to issue these transcripts in order for the

applicant to prepare the leave to appeal application causes me concern because this could further in fact send a signal to those tribunals or boards who do not keep transcripts – and I use the word “if” here: if they don't already have a practice of keeping transcripts, they will find encouragement not to have these transcripts. Given the fact that these boards are quasi-judicial boards and tribunals, I think it's important that they keep those transcripts. For that reason alone I find a problem with this bill because it would send a signal for these tribunals to continue with the practice of not having the obligation to keep the transcripts.

Mr. Chairman, my second reason for seeking some change in the bill has to do with the issue of efficiency and costs. The provision in the proposed piece of legislation, Bill 19, whereby section 26 is amended by (3.2) – I think it is here that I'm talking about. At the time of seeking leave to appeal, the transcript can be certainly requested on the motion of the judge himself or herself, or an application can be made to have this transcript made available. This back and forth with both procedures that are implicit in here in my view will prolong the number of appearances before the court, adding to inefficiency and extending the time over which the case can be concluded. So I'm also concerned from the point of view of the efficiency argument for keeping this provision in the bill, which by legislation, in fact, takes away the ability of the person preparing the application for the leave to appeal to request transcripts.

In order to be able to do this one, we have to appear before the judge in the Court of Appeal. To me that's expensive for the client's side. Every time a lawyer appears before a court on behalf of the client, it's expensive, I think more expensive, perhaps, than getting the transcript. If the issue is the concern with the cost of transcripts, I think it should be left to the counsel for the applicant or the legal representative of the party that's seeking to make an application to seek leave to appeal as to whether to undergo that cost or not. It shouldn't be by legislation. It looks to me to be too arbitrary to at the very outset deny the opportunity to the counsel or the applicant to have the ability to have the transcripts if that party deems it necessary to have them attached.

So both on grounds of efficiency and on the grounds that this might encourage, in fact, some boards and tribunals to not keep transcripts or to discontinue the practice of having transcripts because they're not required at least in part of this law, it makes it necessary for me to seek to amend the act, and for that, Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment here. The original, I think, goes to the table, and I have the copies for distribution.

The Chair: We'll allow the pages a moment to distribute them and bring the original up to the table.

Dr. Pannu: I should wait, I think.

The Chair: Yes.

We'll refer to this as amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to move that Bill 19, Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, be amended as follows: (a) in section 1(2)(d) by striking out the proposed section 27(4.2); (b) in section 2(2)(c) by striking out the proposed section 26(3.2); (c) in section 3(2)(c) by striking out the proposed section 70(3.2); (d) in section 4(2)(a) by striking out the proposed section 41(2.3); (e) in section 5(2)(a) by striking out the proposed section 688(2.2); (f) in section 6(2)(c) by striking out the proposed section 31(3.2); (g) in section 7(3) by striking out the proposed section 70(5).

4:30

Mr. Chairman, the effect if this amendment were to be voted in by the House would be to improve the bill in two respects that I've just drawn attention to: making sure that the boards and the tribunals keep the transcripts and making sure that those transcripts are available on request by the party interested in appealing the ruling of the decision of the tribunal or the board and, secondly, to improve the efficiency of the procedures through which the appeal process can be and will be conducted if this bill is passed.

Just the last point, Mr. Chairman. If this amendment were to be passed by the House, it will impact all the seven statutes proposed to be amended by Bill 19: the Agricultural Operation Practices Act, the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board Act, the Electric Utilities Act, the Energy Resources Conservation Act, the Municipal Government Act, the Natural Resources Conservation Board Act, and the Public Utilities Board Act. All these seven statutes will be impacted if this bill is amended as proposed by my amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be brief. It's something I just asked earlier of the hon. sponsor of Bill 19. He explained that the request for the transcript – whether it's made through the tribunal or the board or whether, in fact, there's an application through the court or maybe the court on its own motion asking for the transcript to be released, that circumstance doesn't really affect the processing or the outcome of the appeal process.

I'm puzzled as to the rationale as explained by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona. I'm going to reserve my decision on this amendment. At first glance I don't think it's warranted or necessary, but I'm going to trust some comment from the hon. mover of the bill because, you know, I think he actually provided that clarification earlier. As such, I am inclined to oppose it, but till I make that decision, I'm interested in hearing him one more time, explaining the issue with respect to transcripts having no effect on the outcome of the appeal case. Or the Minister of Justice if he's willing to participate.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make a couple of comments with respect to the thrust of what we're trying to accomplish here. First of all, what we want to accomplish is a common standard or common process with respect to these leave to appeal applications. The leave to appeal applications are from an administrative tribunal, which will keep a record of the proceedings before it. That record would include, perhaps, a transcript but more likely something that could be turned into a transcript. There may be a digital record, for example, of the proceedings, which could upon request be turned into a transcript. Nonetheless, there will be a record of what goes on there, including the evidence before the tribunal, the documents filed as exhibits, and so on and so forth.

Under the provisions of this amendment it's contemplated that the applicant would make a written request for the materials to the board for the purpose of the application for leave, and the applicant is not to request a transcript of the hearing unless the court believes that a transcript is absolutely necessary for the purpose of determining that the leave to appeal application will proceed. In other words, they don't want the applicant to expend the money on behalf of the leave to appeal application unless absolutely necessary.

So this is a good thing. What it essentially says is: don't spend the money on the transcript unless we the court in looking at it think that it's necessary for us to see that to determine that a leave to appeal application should be granted. So this is, if you will, a cost reducer for the typical applicant at this stage. In other words, you might make a leave to appeal application, lose, and in that particular case, if you haven't got the transcript, you're not out the considerable amount of money in many cases for the production of the transcript.

So I think that the approach that is taken here is quite rational, is beneficial for all parties included, particularly the applicant. I would remind the members of the Assembly that this particular initiative is being brought before the Assembly with the support of the court because they see it as advantageous to the administration of justice and access to justice. I do believe that the amendments as currently drafted accomplish that.

I would ask the Assembly to vote against the amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, although I know that he is well motivated in bringing this forward, and I do appreciate the opportunity to have further discussion regarding it. I think what we currently have does the trick.

Thanks.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the minister for his comments. I agree with him that the one purpose of Bill 19 is to rationalize the procedures and to bring in common standards. That's a good thing. Yesterday in my remarks on the bill, in fact, I quite clearly recognized that and supported that part of the bill. That's a good thing. I also note that the minister is making a serious attempt to make the whole system work better. There's no question in my mind that that's what the minister is trying to accomplish.

That being said, I'm still not totally persuaded that the amendment in the bill, which denies the availability of transcripts at the time of preparation of the leave to appeal application, would necessarily cut costs. If the court is the one that has to determine whether or not the transcript is needed, someone has to go to the court to hear that from the court. You increase the number of frequency of visits by the lawyer to the court by this procedure, in my view, not reduce them. Lawyers representing you in a Court of Appeal is not something that's without cost. That in itself, I think, has the potential to increase costs. It won't necessarily, but it has the potential to increase costs rather than reduce them.

4:40

As I said, if you don't legislate that ability to have access to a transcript out completely, you then leave it to the discretion of the parties seeking the leave to appeal as to whether they, he or she or it, want to attach a transcript to the leave to appeal application. To me that leaves, certainly, the possibility open that one could save costs if one so chose to or that one could spend money on getting the transcript but then have the opportunity to save money by reducing the number of appearances before the Court of Appeal because you don't have to go to the Court of Appeal to determine whether or not you would need a transcript.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 19, Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 19 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 15
Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution
Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is a very important bill, and I feel that it's a privilege to be part of this process. The highlights, as I see it, are that this amendment will change the terminology of the act from "Children Involved in Prostitution" to "Sexually Exploited Children," improve legal services to apprehended children or youth, improve privacy measures to protect apprehended children and youth, and expand access to voluntary treatment for young adults up to the age of 22. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for her efforts in the original Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act and again now with amendments to increase the potential to meet the intent of the original PCHIP.

The amendments are largely improvements, but in general I want to say that they do not deal with prevention, increasing penalties for perpetrators, or increasing services for children who are sexually abused in their homes or communities. There are ongoing concerns that PCHIP criminalizes children who are themselves the victims of a crime. I know that PCHIP has been most effective in the cases of addictions. With drugs, children are often unable to recognize or react to their situation. Pimps and other adults may use drugs to control children, and PCHIP, I know, can pull children out of that fire.

Looking first at the name change, I think it's very positive. This continues to shift public consciousness and is closer to reality. It reflects the fact that children are exploited in other realms than just the street. Previously the name implied that children can make choices of this nature. However, this new title misrepresents this bill. Inclusions of the terms "sexual abuse" and "sexual exploitation" into the text of the act is a valuable step that recognizes the reality of these children's situations; however, the title of the amended bill is misleading. The intention of this bill is not and will not be the protection of all sexually exploited children but, rather, a small subset, I would say, of sexually exploited children. Children who are exploited in their homes and their communities will not be protected by this act.

While the name change is likely well intentioned, it is not accurate. However, I believe the name change will have an impact on how the act is implemented. I understand that the previous program made clear that unless there was direct evidence of prostitution, services could not be accessed under the act. There are many children who are sexually exploited, however, who are not engaged in prostitution as we know it. So we could be helpful in cases where the victim does not think they are being sexually exploited, say a 12-year-old who just thinks that, well, dad loves them in a special way.

I think with the existing enhancement act in a case like this the child would not get secure services. The name change implies changes to the existing practice and that specific secure services might be provided in the case that I just mentioned, for a specific reason. On the other hand, I think under the old act there were specific, almost black and white criteria to work with. So with the name change I'm wondering if it could open up to some confusion.

Again, PCHIP focuses on apprehending the victim, not the offender. It has some token punishments for offenders, but the Criminal Code offers much stronger sanctions. At its core this act still apprehends and confines children who are being sexually exploited through prostitution, so there's a danger of this further criminalizing and ostracizing an already vulnerable group of individuals who should be able to access services without first being apprehended. We need to focus on those preying on children as well, but this is difficult to control since the criminal aspect, I understand, is handled federally.

My concern, other than apprehending the victim, not the offender, is also that we're not looking at preventative steps here. It is widely documented that the majority of children involved in prostitution have been previously sexually abused. This act makes services available after the situation is already very severe. Better services for children, families, and communities early on would increase the chance of successful intervention. Given that PCHIP does indeed infringe on civil liberties by imposing that secured care without charges, this could be a cause for concern. The publication ban is a real improvement; so, too, is making legal representation fall under the jurisdiction of the children's advocate much better than the legal aid approach.

I do think that anybody receiving secure services under this act should be entitled to due process; that is, a judge should determine if there is sufficient cause for secure in the first place, and second, there should be a requirement for some sort of service plan to be presented and approved by the court. Too often, I think, we take action and then we take too long to figure out what the plan should be, what the resources should be, and what steps are going to be taken in terms of the crisis that we're dealing with.

The Child and Youth Advocate roles in this amendment, again, I think are really good. I appreciate that that change has been made from the other approach with legal aid.

Now, I know that some social workers see this legislation as being about saving kids' lives, but some other workers in the system tell me that kids under PCHIP seem to run back to the street over and over again, that true success is far and few between. I think what the program tries to do is to link the youth to a job, school, work, home, and to some community integration, and it's difficult because these young people find the lure of money hard to ignore as the alternative, seemingly, is poverty for a number of years till they get on their feet. It's not surprising that the program is most effective when you just catch somebody who's starting out in prostitution as opposed to those who are more into that culture. How much better we could do if we had dedicated programs to help the sexually exploited before they turn to prostitution.

These amendments will extend services to youth beyond the age of 18 in order to provide better supports during the transition into adulthood. Services past the five days are voluntary and include such things as addictions treatment, counselling, health services, and training. Service providers have largely approved of this step, and I'm hearing good things from the community in terms of the pleasure or delight with the increase in the age range. The struggle is the same whether one is 17 or 18, but at 18 they become criminally liable. The increase in age range is good news, but I'm wondering: will they be criminally liable if they seek services?

4:50

If services and treatment that are voluntary are funded for those over 18, this is really a positive thing because we need to provide services to kids beyond 18, when there's a real benefit to a youth, and being told that we can't because of the youth's age just doesn't make sense. If we truly want rehabilitation and the youth to have a chance for positive change in their life, we can't just say: "Well, too bad. You're 18 today, so you're on your own."

I really need more clarification on that last point: increasing the age beyond 18 so that youth can continue to receive services into early adulthood. This sounds really good because often youth who reach the legal age of 18 are not emotionally or mentally mature enough to deal with many factors because of varying things that have happened in their lives. So offering support and protection to age 23 I think is a wonderful thing. But I understand that this is for individuals who have an open file with Children's Services. That's something I would really support, but I'm wondering: what if they've never had a child welfare file? Would we then apprehend legal aged people up to 23? That would be a slippery slope, I think, but good for some. So I need more explanation there as to what criteria would be followed to determine who is covered and who is not.

I'm wondering if there have been any implementation reviews of PCHIP. Does the government know if it works? I believe that there is an urban/rural difference in how this act gets used. I understand that in Calgary and Edmonton there are specific workers who work in this area and have the ongoing support and training and connections, but I believe that rural workers do not get assigned in the same manner, meaning that there's sort of a jack-of-all-trades approach. What happens in the rural areas is that unless you have a working knowledge of the act through experience, perhaps you tend not to use it and go with what you do know.

The existing act is very black and white, so unless the youth was involved in prostitution, you could not use the act, meaning that any other sexually exploited youth had to be dealt with under the standard legislation. Do we have any information on the effectiveness of this program? I also wonder who actually implements the act. I know that there are some private services that are contracted to perform some or all services under the act. In terms of results, the community approach; that is, supporting kids in their own home, I know is generally seen to be very effective. I believe Catholic Social Services has a big role providing services under the act, but I'm not sure of that. I have been told that region 6 has two workers dedicated in this area.

Another question is that I understand that this act is one of three that links apprehension with service provision. The other two are Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, PCHAD, and to some extent the Drug-endangered Children Act. However, this act differs from PCHAD in that the individual being apprehended and confined is him or herself the victim of a crime. So it's unclear how successful this program will be in terms of real numbers. There's no information in the annual report as to how many individuals have been apprehended or have received services, nor how many perpetrators have been arrested or charged.

I know that drug trade and addictions are fuelling sexual exploitation. It's hard to tell if PCHIP is driving the sex trade underground or if technology is doing it. Those who intend to perpetrate will always try to be one step ahead of us, and this shift was happening before PCHIP was ever enacted. Law may or may not have an impact, and the Internet is a new factor. Apparently, johns are getting organized and warning each other about police stings and so forth. The ICE team, the integrated child exploitation team, is another effort to curb illegal activity.

My understanding is that presently the police charge the youth. I'm wondering: is that correct? If so, I would like to suggest that maybe if we had a team approach, an assessment team similar to CART, the children at risk team, assessing to take the onus off the police, that might be a better way to go. Presently, I believe, the kids have to disclose they are prostituting where a team could assess, and the disclosure would not be required, perhaps. In most cases I can't see a young person disclosing. I think that when they take a look at where that might lead, they might be inclined not to disclose.

I'm wondering also: can parents use PCHIP? I think that it's important to take a look at the role of parents and their responsibilities and their desire to do the best for their children. That leads me to wondering if there is any arrangement that we could have between PCHIP and PCHAD. Probably not because one is Children's Services, and I believe the other one is AADAC. However, it seems to be that most working youth do have addiction issues, and maybe there should be some consideration there.

Overall, again, I want to say that it's a privilege to be involved in this process because this is so important. The sexual abuse and exploitation of children is a critical problem, and we as government and community leaders must do everything in our power to prevent abuse and to provide the supports and services needed to make sure that Alberta's children are safe and secure. So I appreciate the intent of Bill 15, and I'm happy to support these amendments. I look forward to getting some of my questions answered.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be brief because I think when I was speaking in second reading that I answered a lot of those questions that the hon. member has asked.

I want to reiterate that this particular piece of legislation and the amendments that we're bringing forward did not come from the government. When I happened to be the Minister of Children's Services, I put together a symposium about a year ago November because I thought it would be a good time to see what was happening in the act: if it was working, what we needed to do. So at that particular time we brought many, many people together in the field; that is, social workers, people who had worked on the street with these kids.

We even brought some of the kids who had been apprehended under PCHIP to this particular symposium. In fact, Mr. Chairman, we had about seven children there. We asked them if they would like to come, and they said yes, that they felt it was important for us to hear their story. When they were speaking very eloquently and telling their story in their own words with swears and everything, there was not a dry eye in the house, and every one of those children that spoke at this particular symposium – and there were girls and boys – indicated how PCHIP had saved their lives.

I can tell the hon. member that currently we have apprehended 770 children under this particular piece of legislation. I can tell you that the social workers in this province, the police in this province, and kids who have been apprehended under PCHIP like this program. In fact, Mr. Chair, it was to the point where the children were calling the police and telling them what corner they were going to be at so that their pimp didn't know – but the police knew – so that we could apprehend them and take them into a safe house.

The member talked about dealing with perpetrators. We deal with perpetrators. The Crown will go in once a charge has been laid with two charges: one under the PCHIP and one under the Criminal Code. Their hope is always to get a conviction under the Criminal Code because of the sanctions, and of course then you have a criminal record. But if they have to, they will take a conviction under the

PCHIP, and yes we've had convictions under that particular piece of legislation.

A lot of the things that the hon. member talked about were and can be services under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. I can tell you, Mr. Chairman, that that particular piece of legislation that was brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, when he did a review of the old Child Welfare Act, is a wonderful piece of legislation, being watched right across the country. In my time in the Ministry of Children's Services, I can tell you that it was one of the highlights on the successes that were seen under that particular legislation.

She also talked about due process. That due process comes from the judges. It's the judges that determine if the child is apprehended on a voluntary component or if we have to apprehend them. The judge makes that decision.

5:00

Does this legislation work? Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. It's been watched all over the world. I've fielded questions all over the world. I always believe, if a particular piece of legislation is working, in going to the people that it's affecting, and the kids have told us over and over again that it is. It was the kids that talked about extending it to 22, very similar to what the Member for Calgary-Buffalo recommended when we brought forward the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, about extending those services till 22.

The rural and urban issue. All of the workers are trained. We're well aware of the issue of child exploitation, and it's not just confined to the big cities.

I can tell you that the name change is what the kids wanted. They found that when we talked about prostitution, they were unwilling or unable to – they felt that they were being segregated, and they had asked us to change the words to sexual exploitation. That also encompasses much more than prostitution because sexual exploitation covers many, many things. While I have a great deal of love for the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, because it was my piece of legislation, and the acronym PCHIP, it was time to change it, get into the year 2007.

We're excited about this piece of legislation. The workers, the Kate Quinns of the world, are all very excited about this particular piece of legislation.

The member has asked many, many questions, and I hope I've answered most of them.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to rise and make some comments with respect to Bill 15. I wanted to say at the outset that I think that Bill 15, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2007, or PCHIP, is a good bill, and we will be supporting it. It introduces some components to the current act that greatly augment the service delivery and the effectiveness of protection for children.

It does so in three ways. It strengthens privacy regulations by ensuring that no child or guardian can be identified if they have come under the attention or care of the ministry. Previous privacy regulation would only be applicable during legal proceedings. Second, it changes the immediate point of contact for the children during detention from legal aid to child and youth advocates, who are better trained to deal with the issues that might arise from such situations, and the bill extends the age at which children can continue to receive services provided through the ministry from 18 to 22. That, I think, Mr. Chairman, is one of the strongest elements

of the bill, and I would congratulate the government for taking that step. I think it's a very positive step given that there's no cut-off point at which a child becomes an adult in reality other than arbitrary dates that are set around legalities. The extension of services represents a strong component in the recovery and protection of those children who are abused.

Mr. Chairman, I have a constituency in which prostitution, drug-related issues are a serious and ongoing concern for the community. I think that anything that can deal with this in a compassionate way and particularly by focusing on people who are just entering into this kind of lifestyle is a very positive step. I think much tougher laws are needed to deal with the kinds of situations that give rise to this. Certainly, there's a close relationship with drugs, and the community, I think, is very aware of that, and the community has taken very strong and clear positions with respect to this issue.

The whole question of pawnshops came up at a large public meeting in Alberta Avenue the other night. It was a meeting to deal with some planning proposals in the Norwood and Alberta Avenue area and the Eastwood area, and there were nearly 400 people at that meeting. A big concern was the whole question of pawnshops and the relationship of pawnshops to crime and break-and-enter crime. That, of course, is connected to drugs, and the drugs are connected to the prostitution, and all are connected to bad housing and absentee landlords.

So there's a complex mix of problems that the community is struggling to deal with, and I commend the community for the work that they have done and are doing. It's a beautiful community, Mr. Chairman. It has many beautiful older homes dating from after the First World War, has beautiful tree-lined streets. It's close to downtown, and it has a major commercial strip on 118th Avenue that has enormous potential, so this is a community that has a great deal going for it. Lots of young families are moving in, but they don't always stay because of the activities in that community relating to prostitution and relating to drugs and some of the break-and-enter criminal activity as well.

The community is very united around this question, and they need support. I think whatever we can do to strengthen the supports for people to keep them from getting involved in prostitution and also by taking stronger steps against drug houses, stronger steps against people who would exploit children and women, and even matters like traffic circulation or dealing with pawnshop licensing in the area: all of these things are part of the solution. I think that this act, this bill, can also be part of the solution for that community.

Mr. Chairman, 10 to 12 per cent of those involved in street prostitution are children, and 85 per cent of children involved in prostitution were sexually abused prior to becoming involved. What really concerned me when I started looking into this matter a bit more is that the average female gets involved at the age of 15 years; the average male – and there are a number – at 17 years. I believe that there are steps that can be taken – and this is part of the solution – to eliminate or reduce this problem for our communities.

I want to say that there's a real concern in the community about the attitude of police with respect to this issue. Many times people in the community have heard the answer from the police: they have to go somewhere. So we've seen examples of people who are homeless, for example, being picked up on Whyte Avenue and dropped off in this community, and that's not acceptable.

Mr. Chairman, if, in fact, we care about people and we put the proper supports in place, the proper programs to keep people out of prostitution, and we take a hard line on people who have been involved in supporting that trade and the drug trade in our communities, we can eliminate it, I'm convinced. I think the conventional wisdom is that you can't really eliminate it. You can only move it

around. Well, the people in my constituency have had enough, and if society and the police cannot eliminate it, then they are taking the position that it's somebody else's turn, and they're not going to put up with it anymore.

I know that there are some members, both in Edmonton and in Calgary, who have similar sorts of problems, and I want to recognize the work that's been done over the past number of years by some of those members as well.

This is something that can be dealt with. It's unacceptable that any community should have to put up with it or that children going to school would be harassed or children playing in parks and playgrounds should come across needles or condoms. That's unacceptable. I think it's a duty of all of us, Mr. Chairman, to see to it that this problem is eliminated. I would encourage all members in the Assembly to support this bill as one piece of that answer.

Thank you.

5:10

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 15, Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 15 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report bills 27, 22, 19, and 15.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 22, Bill 27, Bill 19, and Bill 15. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head:

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 28

Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and to move Bill 28, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, for third reading.

This bill, briefly, amends the Provincial Court Act to permit a judge who is more than 70 years of age and who is working full time to be appointed a part-time judge if he or she wishes. The amendments also change how sittings for part-time judges can be scheduled. I've commented at some length in second and at Committee of the Whole with respect to the detail and don't intend to do so again.

I appreciate the comments and support of members who have spoken to this particular bill, in particular the Member for Edmonton-McClung. That member raised a question about whether this bill changes the number of days a part-time judge will sit each year. He also wondered whether the bill makes scheduling easier for the Chief Judge or the assistant chief judges. Bill 28 does not change the number of days a part-time judge is required to sit in each year of his or her term. It merely changes how those days are scheduled. Currently it's two three-month blocks, and this particular amendment will allow a number of days to go into the accumulation of the total of six months. So it's really a facility change for the court. It provides more flexibility to schedule part-time judges as caseload requires.

The member also asked whether amendments to the act might interfere with the ability of younger, qualified people to be appointed to the bench. These amendments do not in any way put younger qualified people at a disadvantage. In fact, the policy that we have in place is that when two full-time judges start working part-time, that creates a vacancy for another full-time judge and so effectively gives rise to an opportunity for a younger qualified person to go to the bench.

The great benefit, actually, Mr. Speaker, in this amendment is to allow judges who are over 70 years of age to be appointed on a part-time basis and retain their experience and knowledge for our Provincial Court and for the benefit of the justice system in Alberta generally. This gives very experienced judges an opportunity to use not only their knowledge in the disposition of cases but, equally as importantly in terms of the overall court, their mentorship for the younger, less-experienced judges who are just coming on.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, I believe that those are the questions that were raised by the hon. member and by hon. members. This is a piece of legislation that is supported by the court, and I would ask members of the Assembly to support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to say a few words on Bill 28 in third reading. I thank the hon. minister for such clarity in answering the questions of my colleague from Edmonton-McClung. The effect of this bill is clear. The change will allow for experienced judges to keep working for a longer period of time, and it gives judges who are full-time the choice of a reduced workload after 70 if they so choose. Having more experienced judges in the court system for a longer period of time will only enhance the system, providing more access to justice.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and the hon. Minister of Justice commented during second reading and Committee of the Whole that this change is an improvement on the system of appointing supernumerary judges, who fill in as the need arises. With full-time judges becoming part-time judges and continuing to be of service, we will have more reliable, up-to-date, informed judicial expertise on a longer term basis. If this has the added effect of

speeding up the process of justice, then that is an obvious added benefit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. minister wish to close?

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a third time]

Bill 16 Police Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, I move third reading of Bill 16.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to the hon. minister moving third reading on behalf of the Solicitor General. We have already discussed Bill 16 at considerable length in the earlier stages of debate, second reading and Committee of the Whole. I just want to emphasize that I'm really pleased that in the province of Alberta we're finally moving towards bringing in oversight of our police and law enforcement services. We have long advocated for such an oversight mechanism to be brought in, and we're really pleased that, finally, the government is responding favourably.

During debate, Mr. Speaker, we have highlighted the fact that oversight has to be civilian oversight, public oversight. It has to be a mechanism where members of the public at large are put in charge of evaluating and investigating incidents, you know, involving serious allegations of police wrongdoing. These are not simple mistakes or little inconveniences. These are serious cases where death or injury or, indeed, corruption are brought forward, and those allegations have to be investigated thoroughly and decisively. But also to ask members of the public to be on that investigative unit is the right thing to do.

5:20

The police are entrusted to uphold the law and enforce the law, and we entrust members of the law enforcement community to protect us and to protect our interests and our rights. We expect them to be efficient, and we expect them to be effective. But, then, we also expect them to conduct their business with the utmost integrity and with the highest ethical standards. No one arm of that equation outweighs the other arm. They're both equally important: efficiency and effectiveness on the one hand, integrity and ethical behaviour on the other.

So bringing in oversight of police services is a good decision, and it's a good move. It serves two purposes. One, it basically offers the public the assurance that things are going to be investigated, you know, when there is such a serious allegation. Number two, it also, probably, sends a message to members of the law enforcement community that there are consequences, and people should be thinking twice before maybe being tempted to do something that is contrary to the law.

We brought an amendment, Mr. Speaker. Actually, we brought two, but the more important amendment that we brought in required the government to stipulate the composition of the integrated investigative unit. I particularly asked for two members of the public – true civilians, people who are independent, at arm's length,

lay people if you will – to be on that investigative unit. The government, unfortunately, decided that it wasn't worthy of their support, but the hon. Solicitor General indicated that that's a commitment of his, to have members of the public sit on the committee.

While I commend him and thank him for expressing that commitment, I still think that a verbal commitment is not adequate and is not binding. I would have much rather seen the composition or the structure of that special investigative unit and who sits on it to be embedded in legislation so it's not left up to the will or the whim of the Solicitor General of the day. I wanted it to be enshrined in legislation so it's basically something that is mandatory, and it has to be done.

As always, Mr. Speaker, members of the Official Opposition struggle with certain dilemmas. You know, we have certain questions that we ask each other: whether, in fact, anything is better than nothing, or do we vote for, like, all or nothing? In this particular case we voted in favour of Bill 16 because it really builds on something we brought forward two years ago in 2005 when we were debating Bill 36, which was also called the Police Amendment Act back then. We brought up the Ontario model, and we brought up true civilian oversight. The government had the opportunity in 2005 but declined to seize that opportunity.

Two years later we're pleased that, you know, we're seeing movement, and it's a positive movement. We're also pleased that the mandate of the integrated investigative unit is not only to investigate cases of death but also to investigate serious injury and to investigate cases of corruption or using police resources inappropriately or things like that. So that is a favourable turn of events.

The other comment, Mr. Speaker – and we've expressed this before – is that many people in the Official Opposition, including my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, have said that the way the integrated investigative unit is invoked or triggered should be, again, something that would be mandatory, would be automatic whenever an allegation of serious misconduct is brought forward. Unfortunately, again, the Solicitor General prefers to have the freedom and the room to manoeuvre, so he or she would make that decision according to what he or she deems appropriate or whether in fact it's necessary. We wanted it to be automatic, we wanted it to be in legislation, but unfortunately the government side did not see the wisdom of accepting that recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, again, it's a step forward. Anything, as we deemed in our caucus discussions, is better than nothing, and this is something that we called for, something that the public is calling for and members of the media are supportive of.

With that, I encourage all members to vote in favour of Bill 16. Who knows? Maybe two years from now we can bring it back and amend it further and make it even stronger. You know, I would like forward to such a day coming.

I'll take my seat, and I call the question.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, 2007. I'm prepared to support the bill in that it amends the act so that an integrated investigation unit can look into complaints about police behaviour and serious incidents involving police.

Mr. Speaker, we believe it's very important that there actually be civilian oversight of police actions, particularly when there are serious allegations against police. You know, we depend so much on the police in our society, and certainly in my communities the police are highly respected and valued. People absolutely depend on the police.

But from time to time there are allegations that the police abuse their authority or get off the track of being there for the community.

Robert Peel said that the police are the community and the community is the police. I believe that. I've seen community policing, in particular in Edmonton, work very effectively, not only in cracking down our criminals but removing ongoing sources of criminal activity and, in fact, bringing about changes within community that give rise to a greater sense of security, participation of the public, and so on.

So I'm a big fan of community policing. I don't think community policing in any way means that police are somehow softer on crime. In fact, what I think it means is that in many ways they confront the crime and criminal activity and factors that lead to crime more aggressively and more proactively rather than just waiting until the crime is committed and try and catch the person who did it. In my view, strong police with close ties to community is important and valuable.

There have been a number of instances in different parts of the province and particularly in Edmonton in the last number of years that have given rise to concern that not all police officers are necessarily playing by the set of rules that we've all agreed on. It's those instances that I think require us to ensure that there's a vigilant nonpolice public body that looks after the public interest when some police may have left the agreed upon path with respect to how they deal with individuals within our society.

There are a few cases. One, I think, was the question of the Overtime sting, where very significant police resources were put into what seemed to be an attempt to catch a critical journalist and the chairman of the Police Commission at the time in a drunk driving offence. Like some members opposite and others, you know, there were concerns. Some politicians were present there, and there is an ongoing inquiry. But that was very inappropriate. In my view, we still haven't got to the bottom of it. I think it would be important to have some independent ability to deal with this, and I specifically think that citizens, nonpolice civilians, need to be at the core of that.

5:30

There are other cases of abuse, large and small. There was a case where one officer repeatedly tasered a First Nations man but was related to the chief at the time and was not charged. That is something also that cries out: when police abuse helpless people. It's very rare, thank goodness. Those people need to have somebody in their corner who will protect them.

Recently some members of our staff – one gentleman was aggressively dealt with by police on Whyte Avenue, and there were some slurs involved. Those kinds of things are not as serious as cases of clear misuse of power, but they are still a matter of concern.

So I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that consistent with the principles of the police being part of the community and the community being part of the police and consistent with the goal of making sure that we have the very best police and that they work in the interests of the community and not against the rights of individuals, this is a step forward. But our party has called for a considerable period of time to make sure that there is some more comprehensive, civilian-based, democratic oversight of police activities, including the investigation of serious allegations against the police.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, of course there will always be frivolous complaints or complaints directed against the police by individuals who don't have the public interest at heart. I think we're not particularly looking to support that kind of activity in any way, but legitimate concerns of people need to be investigated properly and objectively.

Mr. Speaker, I think that that's pretty much what I wanted to say. I think that this is a small step towards the kind of oversight that we need, and I look forward to more initiatives along this line in the future. With that, I'll just indicate that we'll be supporting this bill and thank the House for their attention.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to address the Assembly regarding third reading of Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, 2007. I'll be brief given the fact that the hon. members from both the Liberals and the NDs made some very good points regarding the fact that civilian oversight is critical in today's policing world, in the 21st century, and will continue to be ever so important as we move into the future as technology expands into the day-to-day operations of police investigations.

This legislation really does provide for the evolving of the Alberta Police Act. In 2005 a major overhaul of the Police Act was brought before this Assembly and was approved. This act and the amendments that are brought before us today took months and months of work in 2006 of consulting and working in a partnership with police commissions, with the police services, to ensure that this legislation is moving forward on a positive front, looking at best practices from across Canada, internationally and the United Kingdom and, as well, throughout the United States to look at what some of those areas are where we want to ensure that public oversight is in place in investigating serious incidents.

So this legislation really does provide the minister with the opportunity to set in place an integrated investigative unit that will be able to do investigations throughout the province on any police service regarding any serious allegation.

The other component I wanted to just touch on as well. The amendment will allow the minister to direct the lock-up facilities, which include our arrest processing units in both Calgary and Edmonton and in our major centres. We have highly trained and skilled police officers working in those facilities right now, where the legislation that's being provided here will be able to provide for the transfer of those officers back to the front line and be replaced with corrections officers within the minister's department. So, again, utilizing the appropriate skills and the appropriate officers in the right locations and facilities, as the Solicitor General's department did with protecting our courts throughout the province, utilizing sheriffs versus RCMP officers, provides positive direction and provides this government with the opportunity to look at legislation to ensure that it evolves in the future and doesn't remain static.

So I support this bill and would like to call the question.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Does the hon. Deputy Government House Leader wish to close on behalf of the minister?

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

Bill 27

Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture I am pleased to move third reading of Bill 27.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is my first opportunity to be able to stand up and speak to this Bill 27. The very first thing that jumped out to me was where it says that Alberta symbols of distinction will be decided in cabinet and not the Legislature. I think that is probably an insult to all of us who have been elected to

represent everyone in this province. I see no reason why this has to be decided behind closed doors. I would like to know exactly how many ethnic representations of nationalities we have sitting in this House, that it can't be discussed here.

Having said that, I would like to speak to the bill. I think it's very important to remember that we are unique as a nation called Canada to have two founding languages and nationalities: French and English. But we must not forget that there were nations here before us, the First Nations of our country, the indigenous peoples of our lands. However, at that point they were separate nations and, to a point, remain so. They are a very important part of the mosaic of the mind of our nation.

But, Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak about my French heritage. My first Quebec ancestors on my mother's side of the family were Jean Royer and Marie Targer. He came in 1640, and they were married in 1663. Many, many hundreds of families can trace their heritage from the same group of women that my great-ancestor came from. Both of them were born in France. He was a tanner, and she was a fille du roi, a girl of the king. These young women came at the expense of the king to New France to be a part of creating this new land. We can trace her village back to France, but we can't his. They lived in L'Île-d'Orléans, near Quebec City, and to this day there are Royers living on the lot next to the original housing property. The original house is now a bed and breakfast and is still standing.

5:40

One of their great-granddaughters, Marie Giroux, lived from 1756 to 1861, which I believe started the longevity which is on that side of my family. She married Johann Théodore Besserer, an army surgeon, in 1776, and they lived in Château-Richer.

Their son, Louis-Théodore Besserer, was a notary, soldier, politician, and businessman. When he was admitted to the profession of notary, it was noted that he was a man of good counsel, an alert financier, sound and rarely at fault in his judgment, and who quickly won the confidence of his fellow citizens and built up a fine clientele. In the War of 1812 Louis was a lieutenant in the second military battalion of the Quebec City district. He was transferred to the sixth battalion and was promoted to captain. He enjoyed the confidence of the governor, Sir George Prevost, and was entrusted with a number of special civilian missions and established settlers along the portage road between Rivière-du-Loup and the Quebec and New Brunswick border. He received a land grant for his military service and settled in the Eastern Townships.

Now, this is where I can relate to my ancestor. He was a politician, as well, and he represented the county of Quebec in the House of Assembly from October 7, 1833, to March 27, 1838. Although he agreed with the 92 resolutions, he was one of the patriots of the Quebec region who were more prudent and deliberately preferred constitutional methods to rebellion. The difference between Montreal and Quebec mentality showed in their discussions, and it was clear that Louis would not follow Louis-Joseph Papineau in the Papineau rebellion.

He did escape arrest and retired to an immense estate, part of which is Bytown in Ottawa, and to this day there remains a street named after him. He donated vast lands to the bishop for the Catholic Church and the schools.

He was my grandmother Charboneau's grandfather, and she married a Jobin from Pont-Rouge, Quebec, and they came west. My grandfather was a railroad man with the CNR, and that was during the time when it was a prestige and a very high-paying job.

My mother, Florence Antoinette, was born of that union, and there the story ends. My mother, much to her French father's displeasure, married the love of her life, an Irishman named Brennan, and then

they had me. So my family started to be the multinational Canadian of modern times. I married a Dutch immigrant, and so the story continues. This is a very, very brief part of my rich French-Canadian history, and I haven't even started on the Irish side, that started at approximately the same time in Canada.

I believe it's very important to remember where we came from, but it's also important to respect all of the nationalities that make up our great country. So we should have all of our symbols to honour and in this case a symbol of the founding culture of our nation.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

Bill 22

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 22.

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

Mr. Chase: Yes. Earlier I stated my objections to the lack of an ethical investment strategy, but I definitely support Bill 22. There has been a tradition within this government of losing or abusing our savings account. Bill 22 would see that wiser investments took place. I credit former Premier Lougheed with establishing and having the wisdom to establish the heritage trust fund. Under the authority of previous ministers who are currently serving in this House, that fund has decreased in value tremendously. In one year it dropped from \$13 billion to pretty close to \$11 billion because of mismanagement. So with the aim of Bill 22 to improve the accountability and management process, Albertans in general will benefit.

I would hope that in the application of Bill 22 this government would take into account the idea that we have put forward of setting aside 30 per cent of our nonrenewable energies, oil and gas specifically, and come up with a similar situation that we have proposed whereby 35 per cent of the 30 would be saved into the heritage trust fund, which would rise to the sum of \$120 billion by 2020. I would hope that this government would see as part of its investment management the importance of setting aside 35 per cent for postsecondary promotion, the idea that we must get rid of our infrastructure deficit, which 25 per cent, according to the Liberal plan, would accomplish, and of course the importance of the 5 per cent that we have proposed for arts and culture, which would grow to an endowment fund very rapidly of \$500 million.

So the investment management act is extremely important. It's a welcome first step. The sooner we have ethics as a part of our investment, the better.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Others?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a third time]

Bill 19

Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to move Bill 19, the Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, at third reading.

We have had good debate on this bill. I've appreciated the questions from the members as well as the input and support that we continue to receive from all of the stakeholders, including the Canadian Bar Association, the Law Society of Alberta, the judiciary, and, of course, the legal counsel for all of the tribunals and boards which are affected by the legislation. I also appreciate the support of members to date, and I would ask for their further support on third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to say a few brief words – brief – about Bill 19. I'd first like to thank the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for shepherding this bill through the House. He did a very good job, as my friend from Edmonton-McClung has assured me. The Member for Edmonton-McClung tells me that there are no ticking time bombs in Bill 19. It's intended to streamline a number of processes and bring them up to date with current practices. I believe that this bill has been adequately debated in this Chamber. We've looked at it very carefully and believe it is worthy of support as it stands.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to close?

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

5:50

Bill 15
Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution
Amendment Act, 2007

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, it's with great pride that I move Bill 15, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to thank all of those people who participated in this piece of legislation and all the children in this province. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

Bill 6
Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to move third reading of Bill 6, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007, sponsored by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

I now ask for the question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've looked over Bill 6 very carefully. It appears to be just as it claims to be, which is a housekeeping bill, and we'll just let it go as is.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the excellent progress that we made this afternoon, I would like to move that we now call it 6 p.m. and adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:53 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 19, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/19

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Is the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry to introduce some visitors?

Ms Evans: I am, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce some very special guests that will also join us at the time of the budget. They are seated in your gallery. First of all, may I introduce Ambassador Karel de Beer of the Netherlands. May I also introduce Consul General Hans Driesser and our very own Allan Bleiken, who is our honorary consul general.

Ambassador de Beer is a graduate of the University of Amsterdam. He entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1976, has served in several embassies world-wide and was appointed ambassador to Canada in 2005.

Consul General Driesser received his law degree and entered the foreign service and has served in several important positions, among them being involved in foreign affairs in the Middle East.

Of course, my wonderful friend Allan Bleiken, who resides in Sherwood Park, has done many things for economic development, so he's a perfect partner for this minister.

Would the House please honour and recognize the wonderful guests we have in your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very dedicated community volunteers from the constituency of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Doug and Brenda Beagle are very active in the community and lend their talents to many worthwhile efforts. Doug is a very busy realtor in central Alberta. In addition, Brenda has a keen interest in the political process and is a volunteer board member on our local constituency association. I've known Doug and Brenda for many years. I would invite them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it is a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all of my colleagues in the Assembly two friends. The first introduction is a gentleman by the name of John Thornewell. John and I have been friends for many, many years through school and job-related, work-related. Now in later life John gets to sit and watch while we attempt to perform, and I believe that he is enjoying himself, indeed.

Along with John there's a lady, Valerie Nourish. Valerie is from Derbyshire, England, and she is a lecturer in history and heritage. Mr. Speaker, it's her first visit to Canada. She's had a long interest

in family history, and she discovered that there were English family relatives here that have settled in the Northwest Territories and another that settled in Alberta, so thanks to the Internet she made contact with John and his family. They're distant cousins.

Valerie and John are here in the gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly on behalf of my colleague for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert a group of grade 6 students from Camilla school in Rivière Qui Barre. There are 49 visitors with us today, and they're accompanied by teachers and group leaders Mike Paustian and Amanda Langford and parent helpers Mrs. Berube and Mrs. Crossley. I'd like all of our guests in the public gallery to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly some constituents of mine who have joined us in the gallery this afternoon. Hon. members, I would like to introduce David and Pat Jamieson, who are spending the afternoon with us. They'll be here for question period, and then they're also coming back to witness the budget speech.

Members may be familiar with an organization in Medicine Hat, Medalta Potteries, a historic site. David Jamieson is one of the individuals, in my opinion the major individual, who is responsible for the establishment of the Friends of Medalta and the restoration of this national historic site.

I'd ask them both to rise and receive the recognition of all members of the Assembly.

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

Mr. V anderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have guests to introduce today. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 35 students and three teachers and parents from the Rich Valley school, which is located in my constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne. Accompanying them today is a guest, Lorne Olsvik, from the council from Lac Ste. Anne county. Most of you knew Lorne in his former days as the president of the AUMA. He's here to join his favourite niece, Mackenzie, with the Rich Valley school. I'll ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly my assistant Peter Pilarski. You see, today Peter is leaving and moving on to a new and productive job with the chamber of commerce here in Edmonton. Peter is one of the most hard-working people I've ever had work with me. The chamber's gain is for sure my loss. I'd ask Peter to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly and a fond farewell and best of luck.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 15 enthusiastic students from the Kneehill Christian school. They are here today to learn about how the government deals with the many challenges of the fastest growing economy in the country. They're accompanied today by their teacher, Ms Terri Miller, along with parents Mr. and Mrs. Ron and Dolores Reimer, Mr. and Mrs. Lester and Flora Reimer, Mr. and Mrs. Andy and Bev Mandel, Mr. and Mrs. Wayne and Arlene Penner. I'd ask them to rise in the members' gallery and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been looking to see if my guests have arrived. They left at 7 this morning. I'm going to introduce them in case they may be in one of the galleries.

Mr. and Mrs. Don and Doreen Miller from Carmangay are coming up for their first time ever. Don and Doreen have farmed their whole lives. They were families of homesteaders in the area. He was also my Scout leader as a young guy. His wife came from England to nurse in Carmangay and retired a few years ago as the director of nursing, and I don't think she's regretted a day in her life that she has lived along the Little Bow River with her husband, Don, raising their three kids. I'm most pleased that they've made the trip up here. They're going to take in the budget later. I would wish that everyone here would give them a warm welcome.

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

1:10

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of workers at the Palace Casino who are currently on strike. They're here today on the 223rd day of this long and arduous strike. These are hard-working Albertans who simply want a fair and safe workplace. They're forced to be on the picket line in part due to this government's failure to protect workers' rights. They are Brian Clelland, Brenda Campbell, Elaine French, Hellen Shiloff, Barbara Billingsley, Hazel Jorgensen, Jeremy O'Haver, Menar Ibrahim, Joan Harvey, and UFCW 401 representatives Christine McMeckan and Don Crisall. I would now ask that these individuals rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and the Assembly three bright student leaders. They are members of either the incoming or the outgoing executive of the University of Alberta Students' Union.

Led by long-term student leader and president Samantha Power, the 2006-2007 executive has been one of the most effective and active student unions in a number of years. This year's students voted overwhelmingly in favour of a historic universal bus pass that will make the cost of transportation much cheaper for struggling students. Mr. Speaker, this executive ran a strong campaign for accessible and affordable education for all postsecondary students by advocating an effective tuition rollback and serious student loan reforms. Internally they were highly successful in achieving greater input into the classroom experience through projects like mid-term professor evaluations. I would like to thank the outgoing executive for their dedicated service and enlightened leadership and wish them the very best in their future endeavours.

Samantha Power is joined today by members of the incoming executive, who were elected in early March to their respective positions. My congratulations and best wishes to them. I'm sure they will be carrying on the good work of the student union as they embark on their exciting year. I will now ask that they rise as I call out their names and for members to hold their applause until each has been introduced: Samantha Power, outgoing president; Michael Janz, incoming president; Steven Dollansky, incoming vice-president external. They are now up on their feet. Please give them a warm welcome.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my honour and my pleasure to introduce my constituent Kevin Pizzey. Kevin is a teacher, a representative from the ATA, and a member of my board. Kevin is in the members' gallery. I'd like him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very dynamic woman that lives in Lethbridge. Her name is Maureen Calder. Besides being a wife and a mother, she's also chair of the Lethbridge public school district No. 51 and is a very, very strong advocate for children and their education. But, more importantly, while I'm very proud to recognize her, she has led in the co-operation movement that's gone on in Lethbridge between the public and the separate school boards: very, very good in Lethbridge.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Armenian Genocide

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Adolf Hitler said, "Who remembers the Armenian genocide?" and then proceeded to methodically exterminate the lives of over 6 million people. Every year in April we remember these innocent victims on Holocaust Memorial Day. On April 24 of every year Canada and the world recognize another genocide, the first genocide of the 20th century, the massacre of over 1 and a half million Armenian men, women, and children by the Turkish government.

Over 90 years ago my grandparents, Mariam and Paravon Kalagian, escaped the brutal massacre of the Armenian people. Ironically, it was a Turkish family that saved their lives.

While many justly condemned the horrific acts of the extermination that took place, I want to take a moment to thank the Turkish people who risked their lives to protect innocent Armenians from the brutal soldiers and their butcher battalions. My Armenian grandmother survived because of a courageous Turkish family that raised her with love and kindness after her family was murdered.

Mr. Speaker, our world survives these periods of terror because of just and kind people who have a great capacity to love one another. Today I ask everyone to remember so that we might prevent future holocausts. Should another person in history ask, "Who remembers the Armenian genocide?" we can stand up and say: we remember.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Taddes Korris, Speaker's Page

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to participate.

There are a number of young students who assist the members while they are here in the Chamber, and all should be recognized for the fantastic service they provide. Today I rise to recognize one of our Legislature pages in particular. He is the hon. Speaker's page, Taddes Korris.

Taddes is currently completing his final year of high school here in Edmonton at Archbishop MacDonald high school. Taddes does an excellent job of balancing his education with his time here in the House on Mondays and Wednesdays. This is demonstrated through his numerous accomplishments. First, he was selected as a semifinalist from over 4,000 students who applied for the Canadian merit scholarship. After being shortlisted, he was flown to Toronto, where he was presented with a \$3,000 scholarship. Shortly after receiving this honour, he was also shortlisted for the millennium scholarship. Following a successful interview, he was made a semifinalist.

Somehow, while making fantastic grades and providing superb service to officers and Members of the Legislative Assembly, he also managed to take the time to fly to New York to audition for Juilliard. Juilliard is one of the world's top-ranked schools for the performing arts. While Juilliard is a fantastic institution, this young man has been accepted into the music program at McGill University, another great postsecondary school in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, while we would like to keep Taddes here in the province, he will not be spending his summer here in Alberta as he is off to Edinburgh, Scotland, to play in the Edinburgh Festival Rehearsal Orchestra.

Please join me in congratulating Taddes Korris on all of his accomplishments. I know he will go on to do great things in life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

National Victims of Crime Awareness Week

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Next week marks the second annual National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. Whenever a high-profile crime is committed, the offender's name is the one name that people remember. The victims, on the other hand, often fade into the background, faceless and nameless. This year's theme is It's Time to Listen. Victims deserve to be heard, and above all else they must be treated with compassion and respect.

In March 2006 the Solicitor General and Public Security launched a three-year campaign to let Albertans know that there is someone they can call or programs they can access if they become a victim. Earlier this month the government of Alberta unveiled the first step-by-step guide ever developed in Canada to help victims of crime through the criminal justice system. Work is always being done to ensure that victims who qualify receive some financial benefits. The province is providing increased funds to organizations that support victims of crime. Over the past five years the number of programs supported by the victims of crime fund and the number of victims receiving financial benefits has always increased.

The government of Alberta believes that victims of crime should be heard. We will continue to develop programs and services that ensure that victims, like all Albertans, can live, work, and raise their families in safe and secure communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Baker to Vegas Challenge Cup Relay Race

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to recognize an outstanding Alberta team of law enforcement personnel who will soon be on their way to participate in the 2007 Baker to Vegas Challenge Cup Relay, also known as the Super Bowl of law enforcement competition. The 120-mile relay race, being held this weekend, begins in the eastern Mojave Desert community of Baker, California, and ends in Las Vegas, Nevada. The run itself takes about 20 hours to complete, making it the largest and most unique law enforcement race in the world, with more than 200 teams participating from around the world.

There are two teams from Canada: the central Alberta team and the Calgary team. The central Alberta team consists of 20 runners and three alternates and about a dozen support staff, including Dr. Dennis Ethier. The executive consists of team captain, Constable Scott Lowther with the Lacombe Police Service; assistant captain Special Constable Vanessa Hartung with commercial vehicle enforcement; and assistant captain Special Constable Tina Brackenbury with Red Deer county enforcement. The secretary and chief financial officer is Sheriff Bob Reich with Alberta sheriff traffic enforcement.

1:20

The purpose of this highly competitive event is to promote camaraderie, physical fitness, pride, and teamwork, which I believe has already been achieved. It was an honour for me to attend their official team send-off on April 17 in Lacombe. The members have trained for this race with enormous dedication, determination, and commitment while continuing their day-to-day work protecting our communities.

These members are role models for all of us, showing a commitment to healthier lifestyles and a firm dedication as team players. Lacombe's chief of police, Dave Lock, is pleased to have established a very strong working relationship with the Alberta sheriff service, commercial vehicle enforcement, and Alberta special constables and has commented on how encouraging the spirit of co-operation outside their day-to-day operations has been.

Our new and fit police force is making great strides in fighting crime, and the strong bonds of friendship they have established from the north to the south will only serve to strengthen working relationships. We are proud of this team. We must all work together to provide safe and secure communities.

As this is not an easy race and some teams may not finish, I believe our team will do very well. As a good central Albertan I must add that even if we can't win the whole race, at least we'll try to beat Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

First Contract Arbitration

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Palace Casino workers have been on the picket line for 223 days. That's 223 unnecessary days of lost wages and workplace acrimony. And I'm using the word "unnecessary" because this strike could have been avoided if the government had done the right thing and brought in legislation that allows for first contract arbitration.

The Palace Casino workers are only the most recent victims of this government's employer-friendly approach to labour relations. Before Palace Casino there was the Lakeside Packers strike, and before Lakeside there was the Shaw Conference Centre strike. A-Channel workers suffered through a long and fractious battle, as did

staff at the *Calgary Herald*. These were bitter disputes that divided communities and turned colleagues into enemies. It all could have been avoided if this government had done the right thing and protected workers who chose to join a union with first contract arbitration.

Without first contract arbitration there is a disincentive for employers to engage in real dialogue in negotiations with workers. By refusing to implement first contract arbitration, this government takes a de facto pro-employer position at every workplace where workers choose to organize and demand fair wages and working conditions. The lack of first contract arbitration also has a chilling effect on other workers who think that a union could help them gain a living wage or a safer workplace.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is one of only three provinces where workers aren't protected by first contract legislation. This government has given Alberta the distinction of having the most backward labour laws in the country. If collective bargaining is to work effectively, there has to be a level playing field. Surely even this government must now recognize that the labour laws in this province have to change to bring stability and fairness to the workplace.

Electricity Deregulation

Mr. MacDonald: Everyone in Alberta, outside of this Progressive Conservative government, knows that electricity deregulation has been a huge failure. We've all suffered the consequences. It's a fact.

Alberta farmers have suffered under this government's electricity deregulation experiment. While farm electricity costs in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia have increased only slightly since 2001, in Alberta they have skyrocketed as a result of electricity deregulation. Since 2000 Alberta farm electricity costs have increased by an unbelievable 38 per cent. It's a fact.

Alberta families and business owners have also paid a high price for this government's electricity deregulation experiment. On several occasions the actual posted pool price on the Alberta Electric System Operator website has reached its peak of \$999 per megawatt. Consumers are getting ripped off. It's a fact.

We have all been forced to pay a very high price for this government's electricity deregulation experiment. In the past 12 months the AESO has issued several emergency energy alerts due to a lack of available electricity. This has resulted, unfortunately, in black-outs. Despite the government's claims that deregulation has increased their capacity, the Department of Energy's annual report shows that our electricity generation capacity has actually decreased since 2003. It's a fact.

During the Progressive Conservative leadership race the Premier publicly pledged to initiate a review of the deregulation scheme to assess the degree to which consumers have benefited. I sent the Premier a letter asking him when he would unplug deregulation and save Albertans from any further economic suffering. He did not reply. It's a fact.

In the wealthiest jurisdiction in Canada with all our resources we can't even count on a reliable electricity supply. This is due to electricity deregulation. It's a fact.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Bill 32 Animal Health Act

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure on behalf of the Hon. George Groeneveld . . .

The Speaker: No, no, no.

Mr. Mitzel: . . . on behalf of the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food to rise today and request leave to introduce Bill 32, the Animal Health Act.

The Animal Health Act will repeal and replace the existing Livestock Diseases Act, which was created in 1946. This new act will allow Alberta to better prepare for the outbreak of highly contagious livestock diseases and respond to emergency disease situations quicker and more effectively to protect both animal and human health.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: My intervention was not about the member's ability to introduce a bill. It was about the usage of a certain name.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 1 CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 1, CypberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act.

The objects of the centre are to establish and operate an international centre for the co-ordination and advancement of public safety, intelligence gathering, and government response related to the problem of cybercrime such as child exploitation, financial systems fraud, threats to critical infrastructure, and intellectual property and identity theft.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 2 Crest Leadership Centre Act

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 2, the Crest Leadership Centre Act, which provides for the incorporation of the Crest Leadership Centre.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, would you like to deal with an additional motion with respect to Bill 32?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would. I'd like to move that Bill 32 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter dated April 3 of this year. This letter comes from a number of individuals and groups, including John

Cross, the Chief Mountain Group, Bagg Creek Environmental Coalition, Chinook Area Land Users Association, Pembina Institute, South Porcupine Hills Stewardship, and the Alberta Wilderness Association. They're all very concerned about the current and the future state of the eastern slopes. They strongly endorse the concept of a pause or a time out for many resource developments occurring now in the southeast slopes of Alberta.

Thanks.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Timberland Investment Loss

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are eager to see real progress on the Premier's promise of more openness and transparency from this government. Yet every time I ask questions of the Finance minister about the \$11 million loss in the timberland asset class, I come away with more questions than answers. So I figure it's time to go to the top. My questions are for the Premier. Will the Premier please tell us how the government learned about this situation, whether or not the Auditor General was called in immediately, what recommendations were made by the Auditor General, and when they were implemented?

Mr. Stelmach: The other day they were answered by the minister. If they didn't get clarity on the answers, put it down in a letter to me. I'll get it to the minister. We'll put it down in writing so they have the answers once and for all and will not keep bringing this up every day.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't really expect that the Premier would be able to give them to me today, but I will put them in a letter, and I hope to have those answers from him by next week.

Can the Premier please tell us why this situation was not reported in the Department of Finance's annual report, nor was it reported in the Auditor General's annual report?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite sure that question will also be included in the letter that the hon. member will be sending to me sometime later this week.

Mr. Elsalhy: It'll be a long letter.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. I expect it will be a long letter, and hopefully the answers will be just as long.

Yesterday the Finance minister went to great lengths in this House to explain that the timberland investment is performing very well, having generated \$61 million in revenue. My next question is for the President of the Treasury Board. If the investment is performing so terribly well, why did the President of the Treasury Board, the man who controls the purse strings in this province, approve \$7 million in supplementary spending to reimburse the various funds?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, one thing the government does and one thing we do with our Auditor General is make sure that our books are balanced, are accountable, and are open. It's kind of ironic that not one of the questions in here comes with the good investments that that department does and the hundreds of millions

of dollars that these people make for the people of Alberta. Unfortunately one employee made a mistake and lost money. That's unfortunate.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're going from \$11 million in lost funds to many, many millions of dollars in lost revenue in this province because we're not collecting enough on our royalties. On October 28, 2005, Mr. Bary Rodgers, a royalty expert from the Department of Energy, sent a e-mail updating his colleagues on the ministry's internal royalty review. This e-mail states in part, and I quote: we are not capturing our fair share at high prices. End of quote. Meanwhile, the state of Texas collects a royalty of 25 per cent on oil and gas revenue. How much should we collect in this province in royalties?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The items that are quoted by the member opposite are exactly the reason that the Premier of the province of Alberta has asked for and is today receiving information and conducting a review with respect to the royalty structure in the province of Alberta. We have tabled information in this House, public information available to all Albertans. We have nothing to hide, and the review is ongoing.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, the review has been ongoing for years, and nothing has been done.

Again to the Minister of Energy. Texans receive 25 per cent royalty for their oil and natural gas. Why do you allow Albertans to collect significantly less?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, a bit of a shotgun approach here with respect to the situation in the province of Alberta. We can pick pieces out of someone's royalty revenue from anywhere in the world, and we do. If we pick a piece out of some information that comes from the state of Texas, please let's compare apples to apples. When this royalty review is completed, it will become very clear that Albertans have been well served by the system, and they will continue to be well served by the system. I will also say that there was conclusion to four separate programs, and the royalties last year saved Albertans \$300 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A point of information. The hon. minister is the one that wanted to compare Texas to Alberta, and we fall short in that comparison because we're not getting enough in royalties.

Now, again to the same minister: why does this government insist on collecting only 10 to 15 per cent royalty on oil sands projects after initial construction costs are paid off when over in Texas they're getting 25 per cent royalty?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, there are many, many parts to a very complicated question with respect to the royalty structure. These percentages: if you pick a snapshot anywhere inside of a structure like that, you may or may not find areas where there are lower percentages and higher percentages. The thing is: the y're open,

public; the review is being done; and the royalty structure will be well explained to Albertans and will serve Albertans very well in the future.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Royal Alberta Museum Renovations

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years this government has been planning to renovate and expand the Royal Alberta Museum, but now all the hard work, imagination, creativity, and money that has been put into this project has been wasted as architects have been forced back to the drawing board. My question to the Premier: does the Premier show appreciation for arts and culture in Alberta by scrapping plans to turn the Royal Alberta Museum into a celebrated cultural symbol?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again wrong information. This government has not scrapped any plans to refurbish or build a new museum. In fact, we're working feverishly, trying to finish the planning. This is a massive, massive project. It does require great detail in the construction, so we're certainly following up on it. Any other detail in terms of the planning the minister responsible can answer.

Mr. Agnihotri: Mr. Speaker, the Premier claims that his government is open, transparent, accountable. If that is actually true, can the minister explain why senior staff working on the project were directed by this government to keep quiet about the design and delays?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we certainly have not stopped the project at all. We're trying to be responsible. We initially had committed about \$180 million to this project. Last fall we added another \$20 million to the project. We recognize that the tenders and the amounts are coming up slightly higher than \$200 million, and we've directed our people to work within the \$200 million budget. Two hundred million are significant dollars, and certainly we're just trying to be responsible and work within the budgets that we have.

Mr. Agnihotri: Well, why didn't you inform the public?

My question to the Premier again. Funding for this expansion was supposed to be a partnership with the federal government. Did the Premier request extra funding from the federal government, their own cousins, to help cover the additional costs of the expansion before cancelling it, or is this another example of this government's firewall against Ottawa?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about cousins and relatives. I'm sure that our cousins in Ottawa are still dealing with the issues, the work left by the cousins of those across the floor, so we'll be debating cousins and relatives for quite a while. But all I can assure you is that we're moving on this project. It's critical – we're into our second century as a province of Alberta; we have such a tremendous wealth of artifacts and good information – so that we give that to the next generation so that they can be equally proud of their province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

1:40 Electricity Line between Edmonton and Calgary

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week the EUB hearings into the 500-kV power line erupted in chaos. Hundreds of concerned Albertans became incensed when the EUB told them that oral objections to the 500-kilovolt line would not be accepted. It's no wonder that things got out of hand at the hearings. The lack of due process and fairness at these hearings is staggering. This is to the Minister of Energy. Will the minister stand up for landowners in this province whose democratic rights have been trampled by the AEUB's lack of regard for fair process and direct the board to rehear the application on this controversial line?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I will stand up for all Albertans. With respect to the issue regarding the transmission system in the province of Alberta, the EUB has a very tried, true, tested, and honest process to deal with these issues. This is the first time in the history of Alberta that this has happened. At some points some people do not respect other Albertans, and this is what happened here. There's been, unfortunately, a breakdown of respect at this particular set of hearings. The EUB will deal with it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's this government that doesn't show respect for Albertans.

We do not need this power line. Ordinary Albertans don't want it. It's designed for one thing and one thing only: the export of electricity to the American market. I want the minister to stand up for hard-pressed electricity ratepayers in this province and make sure that this merchant power line, intended for export of power to the United States, is paid for by those who are going to profit by it.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the NDP, this government cares for all Albertans – all Albertans. We care for the Albertans in southern Alberta, in the city of Calgary, in Red Deer, and in Grande Prairie that require a robust electrical system that will continue to provide good service to Albertans now and in the future.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, if this government cared about ordinary Albertans, it would be concentrating on developing power and transmission for Albertans and not for the American market, which is what this is all about.

I want this minister to stand up and tell the people of Alberta whether or not we're going to burn coal, have pollution, disrupt the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains in this province, and have ratepayers pay, all so that you can export electricity to the American market. Will you put a stop to it, Mr. Minister, and make sure Albertans get the power that they need?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, which one of the 15 questions would he like me to address first? With regard to supplying reliable electricity to the people of the province of Alberta – all of the people – Albertans include industrial ratepayers. They include small-business enterprises, they include the agricultural sector, they include ordinary Albertans that turn the light switches on and off day in and day out, and this government – this government – is standing very firm to supply those Albertans with a reliable electrical system that they can count on.

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

Aboriginal Training and Employment

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Aboriginal entrepreneurs are key role models for our aboriginal youth. To improve economic opportunities for all aboriginal Albertans, we must ensure that educational and financial capital and job skills are ready and available to them. Yet high school dropout rates remain high, unemployment is more than twice the rate of nonaboriginals, and aboriginals are the fastest growing sector in our population. My question is to the minister for aboriginal relations. How will the government bring down the aboriginal high school dropout rate and make sure that all aboriginals get a quality education?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member for the question because it's an important one. Aboriginals, First Nation, or Métis settlement and Métis nation: they are all part of our solution because our Premier and this government have always taken the approach that Alberta, first, other parts of Canada, second, and then international, third. And I want to reassure this House and all members of this House and the hon. member that, let's be clear: First Nations and the aboriginal apprenticeship programs we've had – I'm very proud to say the largest employer of aboriginals is Syncrude Canada, where over 25 per cent of the workforce is made up of aboriginals. That is a vision and we're looking for others to . . .

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the same minister: what will the government do to ensure that aboriginal entrepreneurial opportunities are fostered in our growing upgrader, pipeline, and oil sands sectors?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, again an important point. Through our strategic economic initiative program there have been 17 partnership agreements signed between industry and First Nations. How many, you ask? Seventeen partnerships, in fact, have been signed. This is real proof that this government has a plan, a plan that is working today and well into the future.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the same minister: what will the minister's department do to increase the way that aboriginal entrepreneurial success stories are celebrated and pushed as role models in Alberta?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, role models are important to all of us. Recently the Premier and other members were at the Chambers of Commerce resource night, recognizing aboriginal award winners that night, and I want to say how proud we all were of the young people and the women and young leaders that were involved and their entrepreneurial spirit. They are role models for all Albertans. We're following that. I've very proud of that partnership with the Alberta Chambers of Commerce and of everyone in this Assembly who did attend that night.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There seems to be some confusion regarding a supposedly Alberta government

report regarding new municipal taxation powers. To the minister of municipal affairs: could the minister please explain to this House who prepared the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability report, and what is the makeup of this council?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say that the composition of the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability includes the mayor of the city of Edmonton, the mayor of the city of Calgary, the president of the AUMA, and also the president of the AAMD and C. The report was compiled by that council, and that report was presented to us. Let me say that again. The report that was presented to the government was a report that was made up of the recommendations from this council, which represents the municipalities of Alberta and the citizens of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: what is the current status of the report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say that the government has received the report. The ministry has received the report. We are going through the government [not recorded] trying to have responses. Today we will have some recommendations in the budget.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is currently some difficulty with some of the microphones in the Assembly. [not recorded] The operator is attempting to find a solution. Okay?

Ms DeLong: Mr. Speaker, does the report provide new taxation powers for the municipalities?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, let me make this very clear. The report does not provide taxation powers. The report has requested the opportunity or tools for taxation ability. So the minister's council has asked for taxation powers from this government for this council to be able to use voluntarily with their own municipalities. This is not something that the government is bringing forward. It is from the minister's council to this government. [The sound system made a noise]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. Taylor: For those about to rock. The minister of municipal affairs looks like he might have been an AC/DC fan in the day. I was just wondering.

Federal/Provincial Relations

Mr. Taylor: Albertans don't want a political firewall around their province. The overwhelming majority of us are both proud Albertans and Canadians. Alberta Liberals share this view. The overwhelming majority of Albertans want a government that defends this province's interests within Canada constructively and practically, not based on some extreme agenda or driven by some tired ideological fetish. Alberta Liberals share this view. It's unfortunate that not

all members of the PC government do. [not recorded] To the Minister of Justice. On Tuesday the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development championed the wisdom of the firewall to protect us from Ottawa. Does the government and the minister believe such a firewall is wise?

1:50

The Speaker: Questions must come within the ministerial responsibility of a particular minister. If the minister finds such, proceed.

Mr. Boutilier: It would be my pleasure to talk about such nonsense as what the person has just talked about. We're Canadians, proud to be Canadians. But one thing is for certain: we will protect the interests of all Albertans. That's why we are clearly a province separate from every other province, because of this government's great work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of intergovernmental relations, then. As the minister knows, one of the other signatories to the infamous firewall letter that was signed some years ago by the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development is the current Prime Minister. Now, on this side of the House we already know what's so scary about Stephen Harper, but we're wondering if the minister can explain what scares the government about the Prime Minister.

Mr. Boutilier: You know, on the *Flintstones* it's called 'boulderdash,' the comments of the hon. member. Truly, our Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, who comes from Alberta, is a great Prime Minister. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we compliment the Prime Minister for selecting an elected Senator from Alberta, again showing Alberta's leadership to the rest of Canada. I'm very proud of what has happened. To the students here today, they should be very proud of the elected process that we have, coming proudly from Alberta.

Mr. Taylor: So, Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister of intergovernmental relations, then, can explain why the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development would think that we would need a firewall to protect us from Ottawa. Can the minister assure us that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who I hear chirping in the background, is aware that the PC leadership race is over and that he lost?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, that statement and that comment – that dog don't hunt. I would ask the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to talk about the important intergovernmental components of what you're speaking of.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Lobbying Government

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Northern Gateway, Living Waters, and Grande Yellowhead school boards and their staff do a great job in Whitecourt-St. Anne and the neighbouring constituencies. The board members believe that under the new legislation these volunteers will have to register as lobbyists before they're allowed to discuss education issues with elected members of this Assembly. To the Minister of Education. The board members

feel that this is unfair and want to know what you will do to rectify this situation.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the issue has recently been brought to my attention. I know that the president of the Alberta School Boards Association has also made the case known to the Premier via letter because I happened to get copied on it. Like the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne I happen to agree with the school board trustees.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's not really what I was looking for. I want to know what the Education minister is going to do to rectify this situation.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was kind of giving the member a chance to ask a couple of supplementaries. I know that before the House we currently have the lobbyists legislation. I know that as part of our open and democratic process we've established all-party committees. It would be my suggestion that this would be a good bill that we could refer to one of the all-party committees, and the Alberta school board trustees could make their case to all members.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify this before I go home next week and talk to the school boards. The minister is saying that rather than amending this legislation, the school boards should lobby the all-party committee to change the lobbyists registry. Is that right?

The Speaker: Well, hold on here, members. This bill is slated to come before committee. I cannot recall, standing here, if it's been called yet for committee. We just passed new rules this week, so let's be very careful with what we're talking about here.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I appreciate your ruling, Mr. Speaker. I'm just assuming that it's going to happen.

The Speaker: The question is: what will happen? Sorry to get involved in the debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Judicial System

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently in this House the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development stated that he believes that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms means government by the judges and the judiciary. It appears that this government member does not believe that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is here to protect all Albertans and Canadians. He probably thinks that we and the government are at the whim of the courts. To the Minister of Justice: can the minister tell us if, indeed, his government takes its direction from the courts, as his SRD colleague seems to believe?

Mr. Stevens: Well, I'm not sure that it's a matter of policy, Mr. Speaker. But I think it's fair to say that the Canadian system of justice recognizes our courts as independent, and they have a vital role to play in the justice system. The Charter of Rights is one of the fundamental pieces of legislation that is applicable in all of our courts. There is tension within society as people argue about that Charter, and the courts are a very important part of helping us move forward.

Mr. Elsalhy: That was a good answer, Mr. Speaker.

From comments heard in this House, we must ask whether this government is committed to being a part of Canada. There was a comment about the wisdom of a firewall around Alberta to protect us from Ottawa, as was previously mentioned. This is troubling and disturbing when a minister of this government takes a shot at a unified Canada and the Charter, which protects his as well as all of our rights and freedoms. To the minister of international and intergovernmental affairs: can the minister tell us in what direction his government will be taking this province? Are we pursuing an isolationist agenda that separates us from Canada and negates the protections that we're all granted under the Charter?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that letters from six years ago reflected at that time what the world was at that time. But I do know that the Minister of SRD and all of this side of the government clearly . . . [interjections] I will finish if one of the Liberal members would maybe listen to what I am saying. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, through you let me say – I'm sure I'll get more time now – that it's very important that we take an approach that we will protect the interests of Alberta as proud Canadians.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister prefers judges who think like him, so he started altering the makeup of the 12 regional judicial advisory committees, trying to turn them into bodies that will do his bidding rather than choosing the most qualified judges. It seems Mr. Harper is trying to Americanize the Canadian judicial system without any checks and balances. He wants to politicize the judiciary, showing contempt for the time-tested Canadian tradition of judicial independence. I'd find it very disturbing if a high-ranking minister of this government feels the same way. To the Minister of Justice again: can the minister tell us if his government is going to change the way members of the judiciary are appointed in this province? Is he going to follow the lead of his federal Tory cousins in Ottawa and erode . . .

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the federal government appoints within this province members of the Queen's Bench and the Court of Appeal. Our responsibility is to appoint members of the Provincial Court. I can tell the hon. member and all people listening that we have an excellent process, which is different than the federal process but an excellent process, that's been in place for a number of years now. It involves the Judicial Council. It involves the Provincial Court Nominating Committee. These bodies interview the people who have applied to become judges. There is a list of qualified people that is provided to the government through the Minister of Justice, and it's from that list that we make recommendations.

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

2:00

Secondary Suites

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Affordable housing is such an issue in Calgary and across this province. Basement suites have been a source of affordable starter housing for decades; however, regulations across the province have been severely limiting this opportunity. Can the minister advise the House what changes in regulation have been made to help alleviate this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Secondary suite standards were adopted in December of 2006, and those standards basically flowed from the MLA committee, which made recommendations to make more flexible and less onerous regulations yet to have an acceptable protection for the public. If I can use a couple of examples: the flexibility of having a single entrance into a basement suite, more flexibility for fire separation in living units, flexibility in separate heating and ventilations are achieved, flexibility in all requirements because of safety.

Mrs. Ady: For the same minister, Mr. Speaker: if basement suites provide a real opportunity to make a dent in the housing shortage, how many suites would be required to meet this need?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the regulations provide municipalities with the flexibility to address this housing shortage. I want to say that if there's anything that we can do to eliminate or decrease the waiting lists, it is going to be totally positive in nature. For an example: we have approximately 2,400 people in Edmonton that are on the waiting list; we have 2,700 people in Calgary; and we have 2,600 homeless in Edmonton, 3,400 homeless in Calgary. So if municipalities . . .

Mrs. Ady: My final questions are to the same minister. The explosive growth in the city of Calgary and other centres cries out for simple solutions like more basement suites. If these regulations are applied, how many suites would be made available, and how do we make this happen in Calgary immediately?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say that this is at the discretion of municipalities. The government of Alberta has given the opportunity for municipalities to look at their bylaws, to look at their zoning, and to look if this could be achievable. When we talk about the assistance of the government, the government has also, as I stated previously, developed a template that municipalities could use to pass these bylaws. If we get any support from municipalities, which I would very much ask municipalities to do to alleviate some of the affordable housing, it would be a benefit.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Industrial Development in the Eastern Slopes

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Rocky Mountain foothills are a network of endangered ecosystems, of which less than 2 per cent is protected from industrial use. A moratorium on new industrial activity in this area is urgently required until an integrated network of protected areas is established. Recently the state of Montana enacted a moratorium on development on the eastern slopes of their Rockies. Why can't our minister of sustainable resources do the right thing and declare a moratorium on new industrial activities in the Alberta Rocky Mountain foothills?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the minister opposite asked a question that might involve constitutional issues, and I'm tempted to go on that, but I'll restrict myself to the immediate question. I'm happy to report that we have a land-use framework process under way. The use of public lands and private lands on the

eastern slopes is exactly the focus of that. I spent the last three months meeting with all sorts of private-sector groups, environmental groups, other types of user groups, and I'm very confident that by the end of this year we'll have one of the best land-use frameworks in Canada.

Mr. Eggen: Well, I was very interested, Mr. Speaker, to read the hon. minister's leadership platform that said that he would stand firm to protect the mountain parks in the eastern slopes. Four months have passed since he became the person who could actually do something about it, and I'm asking him now: why doesn't he step up to the plate to declare a moratorium now while there's still something left to protect?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have never formed government. A hundred years ago, of course, the Liberals that used to sit in this House understood that effective government follows a certain process. This caucus works together to make decisions. I'm proud to be a member of this caucus, and what we decide together, we stick to together.

Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Well, I find that interesting, you know, because there was a moratorium that was declared 30 years ago, when a much more responsible government here in Alberta halted development while conducting a province-wide land-use hearing on the eastern slopes.

Mr. Speaker, the Rocky Mountain foothills belong to all Albertans. It's a place where we go to rest and to re-create ourselves, and we want to stop the cutting of this beautiful place into pieces. Surely, the minister must recognize the thoughtful pleas of thousands of Albertans who want to preserve our foothill region and declare a moratorium until a proper land-use structure is in place. You can do both.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it's very obvious that all the members opposite except possibly the one missing don't want to manage growth like we are. They want to stop growth. That's what this party stands for. Our land-use framework will strike an appropriate and responsible balance between economic growth, protecting the environment, and the social concerns of Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is inappropriate to call attention to the absence of any member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Health Workforce Wellness

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to a StatsCan report nurses suffer significantly higher rates of workplace injuries, stress, and chronic health conditions such as depression and high blood pressure than other workers. Registered and auxiliary nurses in Alberta had to take over 180,000 days of sick leave last year. My questions are to the minister of health. One of the obvious ways to counteract this severe staff shortage in the health region is to improve workplace conditions so fewer staff take sick leave, but in Alberta the number of sick days continues to rise. Why is this situation so out of control?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's actually a very good observation, and I'm pleased to have the opportunity to address it.

As part of looking at the workforce strategy issue, one of the areas we're looking at very closely is those exact statistics. In fact, it may interest the members of this House to know that we lose approximately 560 person-years of nursing to back injury. So one of these workforce strategies could be to purchase appropriate lift aids so that nurses and other health workers would not strain their backs in the course of doing their jobs. We note on looking at the data, for example, that we have an aging and, unfortunately, a weight-gaining population and an aging nursing workforce, which contributes to that. So we're looking very closely at these sorts of issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister. The rates of sick leave more than doubled in the Calgary health region over the last year. Why are the days of sick leave in the Calgary health region so much higher than other regions? Seventeen per cent higher than the Capital health region: why is that?

Mr. Hancock: Well, as I was indicating, Mr. Speaker, we're looking very closely to determine exactly why those situations occur and what we can do. The first place to deal with the workforce strategy is of course to value the workforce that we have, to make sure that our workplaces are safe and that they're places that people want to get up and go to work to. Addressing the specific issues of time loss due to sickness and stress is exactly the important place to start in that process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals have recommended following Saskatchewan's lead by setting up a health employer innovation fund to develop and implement creative retention programs to improve the workplace environment. It sounds like the minister is willing to support that idea and establish a fund like this as a one-year pilot project for Alberta. Is he willing to do that?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe it was last Friday when the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry together with the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology and myself sponsored a workforce summit to bring in stakeholders to discuss issues and ideas like this. We said that we were interested in all ideas that were brought forward. I'd certainly be interested in looking at that one to see how it matches with the proposals that were on the table and the other ideas that we have. It's very important that we value our workforce, that we make sure that we get the highest productivity and the best value from our workforce because that's the best place to start.

Ms Blakeman: It's not happening.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member says that it's not happening. I beg to differ. Our regional health authorities across the province have been very interested in this issue and are looking at ways in which we can deal with it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

2:10

Watershed Management

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been brought to my attention that members of the watershed planning and advisory

councils throughout Alberta are actively working to secure funding in order to accomplish their goals such as taking action to sustain and improve the health of watersheds, including rivers, in Alberta. However, they still rely on continued support from the government of Alberta in order to make this happen. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Will the government of Alberta commit to provide ongoing funding to watershed planning and advisory councils, and specifically in my area for the Battle River Watershed Alliance, to ensure that their work to protect local watersheds can continue long into the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the first things that impressed me most about Environment when I became minister was the involvement of organizations like the WPACs, the watershed planning and advisory councils, grassroots organizations that are committed to work to resolve issues, to plan together at the local level. Our department provided last year, as an example, \$1.4 million in direct grants to these councils. Those grants are used to establish watershed councils, to pay for research studies on watershed health, and to work on watershed management plans. I can assure the hon. member that we value their efforts and will continue to do so well into the future. I'd like to also add that we also provide administrative staff to all of these councils to assist them in their work.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the continued involvement and participation of all partners, including First Nations, is vital as watershed planning and advisory councils work towards a full understanding of the ecological, social, and economic needs of Alberta's watersheds. My first supplemental question is again to the Minister of Environment. In carrying out their work, are watershed planning and advisory councils permitted to conduct consultations with First Nations on behalf of the government of Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that we encourage these local advisory councils to engage all stakeholders, and that certainly does include First Nations. I think it's important that First Nations be involved in these advisory councils whenever they possibly can. But I need to point out that consultation with government is a separate process from the watershed councils. So we encourage water councils to work with First Nations and First Nations to do the same, but that does not replace the need for the government to consult with First Nations when it is appropriate to do so.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental question is to the same minister. Can the minister advise members of the House and all Albertans what role watershed planning and advisory councils such as the Battle River Watershed Alliance play in the province's Water for Life strategy?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, these councils are critical in the implementation of the Water for Life strategy. Watershed councils build partnerships within the watershed, set regional outcomes, develop watershed management plans to achieve shared outcomes. For example, I know that the Battle River Watershed Alliance in this member's constituency is working on a water management plan for their watershed and is planning to raise awareness of water issues, including water conservation and water quality. This diverse group of people is a great example of the power of committed Albertans in their own communities taking action to learn about and improve water conditions in their own watershed.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Bonko: This week the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development stated, "There's nothing worse for the environment [or] forests than forest fires." He claimed that every schoolchild knew this. Perhaps the minister needs to go back to school for that. Hamish Kimmins, who is a professor of forestry ecology at UBC, writes that fire is a natural component of the forest ecosystem and stated that the northern boreal forests owe their character and in some cases their entire existence to wildfires that frequently happen there. Parks Canada and the Canadian Forest Service agree. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Is the minister suggesting that these experts are wrong and fires are not a beneficial part of the natural forest cycle?

The Speaker: If that question can fit into government policy, proceed.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, although it does sound like another firewall question. All forestry experts know that fire does contribute to the opening of coniferous seedlings, and there's a natural reforestation process that happens that way. Of course I know that; our forest managers know that. When you have the eastern slopes in the situation they are now, with the lack of age distribution and older forest and now the pine beetle on top of that, you have the potential for forest fires on an unimaginable scope. The question is: does the hon. member opposite want to, quote, let nature take its course and let the whole thing burn, or do we have responsible logging . . .

Mr. Bonko: It's not only experts in academia who disagree with the minister on this matter. His own ministry seems to have a far better understanding than him. For example, from the FireSmart section of the SRD website we also have listed the positive impacts of forest fires as well as the Canadian wildland fire service strategy declaration signed by every single member of the provincial forestry ministry, including the previous minister. It says that using natural and prescribed fire can in fact enhance the forest's ecosystem. With his outburst the other day, the minister was not only going against science but also dismissing his ministry's knowledge.

The Speaker: Again, if it has anything to do with government policy, proceed.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to repeat the obvious: we do under certain circumstances use controlled burns to manage the forest. But I suggest that the member go down to the Crowsnest Pass and talk to the citizens that live in the Crowsnest Pass, towns like Blairmore that experienced what it was like in 2004 with the Lost Creek fire and how it almost burned those communities down. Then let him stand up in here and say: just let nature take its course and burn down those communities.

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, there's such a thing as controlled burns as well. Perhaps the member is not aware of that. Parks Canada is using fire to change the base of the forest naturally, removing old and vulnerable pine. Has the minister reconsidered his uninformed dismissal of this natural approach to tackling the pine beetle?

The Speaker: Once again, proceed if you wish.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member opposite did his homework, he would learn that, in fact, Parks Canada is working

with the officers of Sustainable Resource Development, forest management branch, on this burn on the edge of Kananaskis and Banff national park. Of course we know this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my understanding that as a result of the Calgary health region's new brain injury service model and funding policy changes, the Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured, or ARBI, will be losing their core funding from the health region. I am very concerned about this situation as the withdrawal of the core funding to ARBI will impact this unique rehabilitation program's financial stability and future. So my question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why did the Calgary health region discontinue funding to the Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary health region until last year provided about 26 per cent of ARBI's \$1 million annual budget, a little over \$400,000. As with any contract over \$100,000 in the public sector they're required on renewal to go out with a request for proposal of a public tendering process of the contract. They did that, and proposals were received, including the one from ARBI. They were reviewed by a committee, I understand, made up of brain injury clinicians and financial representatives and others, which recommended, actually, that the contract be awarded to a different entity whose proposal in their view ranked higher than that put in by ARBI. So the contract was moved to the new entity.

In September 2006 ARBI was given notice that the CHR would be giving them an additional six months of funding to mitigate the impact of the transfer and to assist with the transition, and I'm also given to understand that they offered one or two pilot projects that ARBI might participate in. The Minister of Seniors and Community . . .

The Speaker: We'll probably get it in the next answer.
The hon. member.

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, thank you for my second supplemental question. I'll go on to my third. Can the minister provide any indication of how the province will ensure the provision of adequate support services for Albertans living with brain injuries in the future?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to answer the next part of that question that was already anticipated so wisely by the Speaker. The Minister of Health and Wellness and I met with the Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured just this past Monday. They said that their contract was retendered by the Calgary health region. My department also has a contract with the same association, an \$85,000 contract to fund a community integration program. It's working very successfully with our department. We actually also have undertaken that we will work with them to see if there are other services that they might provide. This is all about

caring for those that have brain injury. We want to ensure that we have the best services available. This is an association that's done some great work, and we'll ensure that that's available.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, that's it for me.

The Speaker: Today, hon. members, we basically had 88 questions.

Tabling Returns and Reports (reversion)

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Three tablings today. The first is from a constituent, Robert Halldorson, who is very dismayed by the lack of any kind of rent guidelines or controls. He notes that he makes \$14 an hour, double the minimum wage, but he's already spending more than 30 per cent of his income on rent, and he would be joining the increasing number of homeless people if rents go to \$1,600 a month.

The second tabling is from a well-known and well-loved constituent, John Zyp, who is writing of some of his experiences in a recent hospital stay, which he describes as utter communication chaos. He describes how his file was lost, surgery dates were changed, and he wasn't notified. He was assigned a case manager who then went on vacation, et cetera. There's quite a long list of things.

The third is from Clyde Freeman from Calgary, who is writing about the anticipated changes to the Mental Health Act. The biggest concern: he believes it would be a human rights violation to involuntarily hospitalize someone who was unable to pay for psychiatric drugs and wants to ensure that people have access to treatment in their communities before we remove them from their communities to receive treatment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Do we have a long list of tablings today? We're going to have a time factor this afternoon, so let's go with brevity, please.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table today a copy of an e-mail that was sent on Monday, April 16. It is regarding the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. This e-mail is to confirm that Capital health will be pleased to meet with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on September 12 this year.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Mr. Joe Anglin, demanding greater Energy and Utilities Board accountability and democratic process in public hearings.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today from two members of the Chen family in Wedgewood urging the government to work with the city of Edmonton to ensure that the traffic noise from the Edmonton ring road near their neighbourhood

is evaluated immediately and repeated in six months and that if noise levels are found to be exceeding acceptable levels, noise attenuation and reduction measures should be implemented.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a number of Albertans asking this Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua John Hunt be tried and sentenced as an adult.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Tarchuk, Minister of Children's Services, pursuant to the Social Care Facilities Review Committee Act the Social Care Facilities Review Committee annual report 2005-2006.

head:

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to inquire of the Government House Leader if he could lay out the projected government business for the week we return, which would be commencing on Monday, April 30.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the week that we return after the constituency week, which follows today, of course, on Monday, April 30, is private members' business.

On Tuesday, May 1, under Orders of the Day government motions with respect to Committee of Supply and the Budget Address motions will be on the table, and then subsequent to that, other government business.

Now, on Wednesday and Thursday, May 2 and 3, members will be aware that under the Standing Orders we would be contemplating going into Committee of Supply. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(3) a schedule of Committee of Supply will be tabled, probably, on the Tuesday. So the day before going into Committee of Supply, the schedule will be tabled. But we anticipate that that schedule will include on Wednesday, May 2, the first of the rotation in supply. We anticipate the opposition calling the Department of Health and Wellness. On the second day we anticipate the opposition calling the Department of Energy and the Department of Children's Services. Of course, in each case, should time permit, other government business as per the Order Paper.

Privilege

Reflections on a Member

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday there was an exchange in the House which led to a question of privilege, and there was some discussion with respect to that. I'm prepared to deal with this matter today. Considerable time was spent last evening and earlier today in responding to the question.

Yesterday the Minister of Finance raised a purported question of privilege in response to statements made by the leader of the third party, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Questions of privilege are very serious matters and should arise infrequently. This is a serious matter. As it is, the chair will give it the attention it deserves.

The basis for the question of privilege is found at page 638 of *Alberta Hansard* for yesterday, April 18, 2007. In the preamble to his main question the leader of the third party alleged that the Minister of Finance "has failed to disclose his campaign donations for his PC leadership bid and has broken his own deadlines for doing so." At that point the Minister of Finance indicated that he wished to raise a question of privilege. Undeterred, the leader of the third party engaged in some unparliamentary behaviour when he said, "Bring it on, Mr. Speaker. Bring it on." This attitude does absolutely nothing but lower the respect and dignity of this Assembly.

The leader then went on in the remainder of his 45-second allotment to make another allegation against the minister when he said, "Worse, the minister has continued to fund raise even while preparing tomorrow's provincial budget." His question to the Premier was: "Why does the Premier think it is acceptable for a Finance minister to be seeking financial donations from the very same corporations and individuals who may benefit from his budget?"

Before dealing with the merits of this purported question of privilege, the chair reiterates that the Minister of Finance gave oral notice of his intention to raise a question of privilege during the question and presented his arguments later in the afternoon. Under Standing Order 15(2) written notice of a question of privilege is to be provided to the Speaker "at least 2 hours before the opening of the sitting." However, under Standing Order 15(5) a member may raise a question of privilege "immediately after the words are uttered or the events occur that give rise to the question, in which case the written notice required under suborder (2) is not required." This is what occurred yesterday. Privilege is such an important issue that any delay in raising the matter may serve to deny the request. In this case there is no doubt that the issue was raised at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Speaker's role is to determine whether the matter raised constitutes a prima facie question of privilege. In this case the chair can rely on a similar question of privilege that was raised against the same member by the then Minister of Environment and is found in *Hansard* for May 28, 2001, at pages 808, 809. It is the Speaker's role to ensure that all members are allowed the greatest latitude to express themselves in line with centuries of tradition attesting to a member's freedom of speech. The fundamental right carries a corresponding duty to act responsibly consistent with the Assembly's rules and traditions.

The general rule in issues of this nature is found in Joseph Maingot's book, *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, the second edition, at page 254, where he states, "Language spoken during a parliamentary proceeding that impugns the integrity of Members would be unparliamentary and a breach of order contrary to the Standing Orders, but not a breach of privilege." This passage was quoted by the chair in the above-noted May 28, 2001, ruling and in a November 17, 1998, ruling on a similar issue, which is found at page 1909 of *Alberta Hansard*.

In his arguments yesterday the Minister of Finance read from page 76 of the *House of Commons Practice and Procedure*, edited by Marleau and Montpetit. The passage quoted by the minister was from a May 5, 1987, ruling by former House of Commons Speaker John Fraser. As was the case in 2001, the chair examined that ruling, which is found at pages 5765 to 5766 of the *House of Commons Debates*.

2:30

In that case allegations were made against the then minister of fitness and amateur sport, the Hon. Otto Jelinek, concerning a purported conflict of interest. Speaker Fraser found that while the

allegations were serious, they did not amount to a prima facie question of privilege as the member's ability to perform his functions was not impaired.

On that point it is important to remember that despite what the minister argued yesterday, parliamentary privilege is concerned with the rights of members in their capacity as members in their parliamentary work and not in their capacity as ministers. The chair would refer members to *Maingot's* at page 224 for an elaboration of that point.

In this case the comments raised could have given rise to a legitimate point of order. The chair does not, however, believe that this is a case that falls into that very small category of comments that would impede a member in performing his or her parliamentary duties. As done in 2001, the chair would like to draw members' attention to Speaker Fraser's 1987 ruling, where he made some very good points. One is that the absolute privilege that was extended to members for what they say in the House came about in the British House of Commons "in a different age when things said within that House would probably not be heard throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom." He then said, "Today, as a consequence of television and electronic broadcasting, anything said in this place is said on the street right across this country, and that has to be borne in mind." He also reminded members "to take the greatest care" when framing questions relating to conflicts of interest.

The chair is not unmindful as to what might lie behind these questions, which is to use innuendo to create a certain atmosphere. In some respects this is part of the process of holding the government to account or just plain politics, but as the chair has commented earlier this session, it is unseemly to cast aspersions on members without any specific allegations.

Perhaps one day the leader of the third party will be able to tell his grandchildren what the phrase, "this at least creates the perception of a potential conflict of interest" means. And when doing so, he might want to explain the meaning of these words in that phrase: "at least," "the perception," "a potential," "conflict of interest." Additionally, what does "an enormous cloud over the budget" mean, especially when these words follow "is continuing to fund raise"?

Let me remind all members that all 83 members of this Assembly – and I include the chair – fund raise, whether by selling memberships in their party, accepting donations and tickets for events such as party dinners, or accepting donations in cash or in kind for election campaigns.

Further, it is all 83 members of this Assembly who participate in the debate on the budget, advocate for causes or projects during and outside of the budget process, and finally vote on and approve the budget. It is not the Minister of Finance who presents and votes on the budget by himself. In the narrowest sense – in the narrowest sense – it could be interpreted by some that none of the 83 members of this Assembly may be able to participate in the budget process and vote on the budget estimates.

It is the chair's impression that the recently passed changes to the Standing Orders represent efforts to achieve democratic reform. At the same time and almost in a parallel track this Assembly has been uncharacteristically mired in borderline allegations and innuendo that in the chair's view do nothing to elevate the role of the Assembly with the public. The chair notes that this unfortunate development appears to correspond with the 45-second time limit for asking questions. The chair hopes that the standing committee examining the Standing Orders revisions will inquire to see if there is a correlation.

To conclude, the chair finds that there is no prima facie question of privilege. However, the chair is in no way condoning the comments that were the subject of the purported question of privilege.

The chair sincerely hopes that members reflect on these matters over the constituency week. I believe that we can all do better.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Motions

Policy Field Standing Committees

18. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the following members be appointed to the Assembly's four new standing committees:

- (1) Community Services: Mrs. Ady, chair; Mrs. Mather, deputy chair; Reverend Abbott; Mr. Backs; Mr. Flaherty; Mr. Johnson; Mr. Johnston; Mr. Loughheed; Mr. Lukaszuk; Dr. Pannu; and Mr. Shariff.
- (2) Managing Growth Pressures: Mr. Dunford, chair; Mr. Taylor, deputy chair; Mr. Doerksen; Mr. Herard; Mr. Martin; Dr. B. Miller; Mr. Prins; Mr. Rodney; Mr. Rogers; Mr. Webber; and Mr. Zwozdesky.
- (3) Resources and Environment: Mr. Ducharme, chair; Dr. Swann, deputy chair; Ms. Calahasen; Mr. Eggen; Mr. Graydon; Mr. Griffiths; Mr. Hinman; Mr. Lund; Mr. R. Miller; Mr. Mitzel; and Mr. Oberle.
- (4) Government Services: Mr. Cenaiko, chair; Mr. Elsalhy, deputy chair; Mr. Amery; Dr. Brown; Mr. Coutts; Ms. DeLong; Mrs. Forsyth; Mr. Marz; Mr. Mason; Ms. Pastoor; and Mr. VanderBurg.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion. The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of Government Motion 18. It's nice to have come to this point and a step closer to establishing the policy field committees and to having them populated by a number of members of the Assembly, including members from all parties.

So I speak in support of Government Motion 18 and encourage my colleagues to support the motion as well.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 18 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we very briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a great and tireless champion of northern and rural Alberta, a constituent of the Peace River area, a councillor for Northern Sunrise county and currently vice-president of the Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. I'd ask Mrs. Carolyn Kolebaba to rise and please accept the welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a great pleasure for me to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 15 wonderful students who have come from the Northern Lakes College in High Prairie, the High Prairie campus. They are accompanied by Mrs. Chris Neidig and Dr. Kam Kamnasaran. I'd ask that they all rise – they are seated in the members' gallery – and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, just a notice of advice that due to network contractual obligations, Access television is only able to provide coverage of the Budget Address until 4 p.m. today. Coverage will continue in the webcast of the proceedings on the Assembly website at www.assembly.ab.ca.

Now, in order to prepare the House for the Budget Address by the Minister of Finance this afternoon, the House is recessed until 3:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:39 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.]

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have received certain messages from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**
(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prior to moving Government Motion 16, I wish to table the 2007-08 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2007-2008 government estimates.

In addition to these estimates, the Government Accountability Act requires that the government at the same time table the government's business plan and consolidated fiscal and capital plans. The hon. Premier will table the government's business plan, and the hon. Minister of Finance will table the consolidated fiscal and capital plans.

16. Mr. Snelgrove moved:

Be it resolved that the messages from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2007-08 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, the 2007-08 government estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion, but shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 16 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the government of Alberta strategic business plan as required under section 7 of the Government Accountability Act. The strategic business plan sets out the government's vision and long-term strategic plan. It also includes the government's three-year business plan, which outlines the goals, strategies, and measures necessary to track results over the next three years. This plan recognizes the challenges that our province faces due to unprecedented growth and our focus on achieving results for today and the future. It captures our five priorities, which are to govern with integrity and transparency, manage growth pressures, improve Albertans' quality of life, build a stronger Alberta, and provide safe and secure communities.

Also being tabled for the information of the Legislative Assembly are business plans for each ministry, which must be made public under section 13 of the same act.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving Government Motion 17, I wish to table the government's fiscal and capital plans for Budget 2007. The consolidated fiscal plan is required under section 4 of the Government Accountability Act, and the consolidated capital plan is required under section 7.1 of the same act.

Budget Address

17. Dr. Oberg moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, Clem Gerwing, a son of a homesteader, was born in Saskatchewan after World War I. He served as a fighter pilot in World War II, began farming, and started a family. He then moved his wife and children to Alberta in 1963. Five years later he bought a business that sold western boots. Today, well into his 80s, Clem is still active in the business, and his son Tim is the president. The Alberta Boot Company has grown into an award-winning enterprise that supplies boots around the world. Today I am very proud to wear a pair of Mr. Gerwing's boots for my first budget as Alberta's Finance minister. [some applause] I would do higher, but I can't.

Mr. Speaker, this is our government's budget for 2007.

Last year saw unprecedented growth in Alberta. There are 100,000 new Albertans this year, with 57,000 of them coming from elsewhere in Canada. Alberta created more than one-quarter of the new jobs in the country. Unemployment was the lowest in any Canadian province in the last 30 years. Economic growth was the highest since 1993.

Our government must be in sync with this economic climate. This rampant growth presents special challenges and opportunities. Most Albertans feel positive about the quality of life here. However, we know that some people don't feel the benefits of this boom. Many worry that the good times will end in the next few years. This is why we are preparing for the future today.

Under the Premier's direction our government and this budget are focused on five priorities: governing with integrity and transparency, managing growth pressures, improving Alberta's quality of life,

building a stronger Alberta, and providing safe and secure communities. To meet these priorities in a roaring economy, we must do two things. First, we must manage our growth in the short term, and second, we must remain fiscally responsible in the outgoing years.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Boot Company also has prepared for the future. It succeeds because it recognizes that its competition is not across the street. It's not in another city or in another province. It is, in fact, all around the world. Like the Gerwings' business, Alberta must judge our success not only against our Canadian counterparts but also our international competitors.

This budget follows that premise. We consider global as well as domestic conditions and then look ahead and move forward. We know where we've been and where we have to go. Our mission here is clear. We will manage growth in a transparent, sustainable, and compassionate manner.

Mr. Speaker, this is Alberta's 14th consecutive balanced budget. We estimate our total revenue to be \$35.3 billion. That's down from an unusually strong 2006. We forecast a surplus but a smaller one than in the last two years. We expect Alberta's oil and gas and income tax revenue to moderate. Thus our projected surplus is \$2.2 billion. This will drop to \$1.4 billion and \$925 million in the next two years.

We have the most volatile energy stream of any government in North America. Fluctuating commodity markets and other global factors cannot be controlled by any one government. Energy price forecasting is extremely difficult for everyone. For this year we are forecasting \$58 U.S. per barrel of oil, and \$6.75 Canadian per gigajoule of natural gas. Our forecasts are near the average of estimates by other organizations. Even so – even so – Mr. Speaker, our surplus may be \$2 billion to \$3 billion higher. That's why we are introducing a surplus allocation strategy. On the other hand, our surplus could be \$2 billion to \$3 billion lower than forecast.

Energy and taxes are very strong sources of government revenue. Another is investments, which this year will contribute 7 per cent of our income. Our largest source of investment revenue is the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. We will ensure that this fund keeps pace with inflation. This year we will retain \$284 million in the heritage fund's income in the fund itself.

3:40

Since 1976 the fund has generated \$30 billion in income. This money has funded Albertans' priority areas like health care, education, and infrastructure. Due to exceptionally strong equity markets our investments earned nearly 15 per cent last year. The fund's current market value is \$16.3 billion. Our forecasted annual return for the next three years is 8 per cent.

The heritage fund has taken advantage of high-quality investment opportunities at home as well as abroad. Its holdings in Alberta include \$700 million in public market investments and \$800 million in private equity. This includes infrastructure, real estate, private mortgages, and private debt. About 20 per cent of the fund's Canadian equity holdings and 30 per cent of its private investments are Alberta based. In total about 9 per cent of the assets are here in this province.

Family-run businesses like the Alberta Boot Company succeed by working hard, strengthening their assets, and focusing firmly on future growth. In that spirit we are taking steps to maximize the long-term value Albertans receive from their assets.

First, a new financial investment and planning commission will review the province's savings and investment funds. The commission will recommend ways to ensure that our savings are invested to maximize the long-term benefits for Albertans. Most of these assets will be administered by a new Crown corporation, the Alberta

Investment Management Corporation. This new body will administer – yes, Mr. Speaker – \$70 billion in government public-sector pensions and WCB funds. It will be an integral part of the financial services sector in this province.

Second, an independent panel of experts is reviewing our royalty and tax regimes. Public meetings will ensure that Albertans have their say. This open and transparent review aims to strike a balance. Albertans must receive a fair share from the development of their natural resources. Meanwhile, we must preserve an internationally competitive oil and gas system, which supports our continued prosperity. This review should be completed by this fall.

Our third step will involve a thorough review of the Employment Pension Plans Act. This act governs private-sector employee plans. We hope to attract and retain workers and ensure that Albertans are confident about their pension plans. Both employees and employers must be treated fairly, and we need to be competitive with other jurisdictions. Options are going to be presented later this year.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's tax advantage is well known and will be maintained under a Stelmach government. If we had the same tax system as other provinces, Albertans and their businesses would pay up to \$4,400 more per person every year.

We also recognize that arts and culture contribute greatly to our quality of life. These sectors add enormous economic value as well. We are encouraging more support for these and other nonprofit sectors. This government values the tremendous contribution of the voluntary and charitable sectors. Mr. Speaker, combined with the federal tax measures, Albertans will now receive a 50-cent credit for every dollar donated above \$200. The charitable donations tax credit will jump from 12 and three-quarters per cent to 21 per cent this year. This measure speaks to Albertans' shared values of self-reliance and community spirit and is the highest in Canada.

Postsecondary education is something that is important to all Albertans. To that end, we are increasing the education tax credit for postsecondary students to \$600 from \$475 monthly for full-time students. For part-time students the increase is to \$180 from \$143. Mr. Speaker, this will help them or their parents with the students' cost of living.

Along with the indexing of personal tax credits to inflation and the increase to the small-business threshold from \$400,000 to \$430,000, these changes will save Albertans \$179 million this year.

In this budget we will also parallel changes in the federal income tax. This will save Albertans an additional \$40 million. Areas affected include income splitting of seniors' pensions, the lifetime capital gains exemption for small business owners and farmers, and an accelerated capital cost allowance for generating clean energy. However, Mr. Speaker, we will not automatically parallel the federal decrease to the oil sands accelerated capital cost allowance. This question will be considered by the independent panel reviewing our energy royalty system. We'll also investigate accelerating capital cost allowances further to encourage the building of environmentally sustainable energy sources, like biofuels, in Alberta.

We will also allocate more resources to enforcing both the letter and spirit of our tax laws. We want to protect law-abiding Albertans from tactics putting our overall low taxes at risk. Certain corporate tax avoidance schemes pose such a risk. Without our intervention, Mr. Speaker, known schemes would cost Alberta \$200 million a year in lost taxes. The Ontario shuffle involving interest expenses and the Quebec truffle – yes, those are the names – involving shifting income are two examples of tax avoidance in our global economy. To address this concern, we'll add auditors, increase co-operation with other jurisdictions, as well as amend legislation.

With this budget there's one area where Alberta's tax rate will be the highest in any province, and rightly so. While Alberta's

economy has raised incomes, tobacco rates have stayed the same. The disincentive to smoke is not as strong as it once was. This is especially so for young people, who are more sensitive to price changes. That's why we are raising tobacco taxes by 16 per cent. That's \$5 on a carton of cigarettes. Our aim is to help discourage smoking. Mr. Speaker, smoking kills. This change takes effect at midnight tonight.

On the expense side our total estimated spending this year is \$33.1 billion. Included are substantial increases in both capital and operating spending. This is the price of prosperity in Alberta today.

We are responding to local needs. Our annual commitment to municipalities is \$1 billion more than three years ago. [some applause] Thanks, Neil. We are committing \$600 million per year to the municipal infrastructure program. A further \$400 million comes from the new municipal sustainability initiative. This fulfillment of a commitment by our Premier addresses pressure on local infrastructure. The new long-term funding will help municipalities manage their growth in Alberta's booming economy. Funding will ramp up to \$1.4 billion by 2010-2011. That includes incentives for joint planning initiatives and funding for affordable housing.

Another \$900 million a year goes to areas like public transit, policing, and water-related projects. Our total capital and operating support to municipalities is \$1.9 billion this year. Support to municipalities has increased more than sixfold in the last four years. Mr. Speaker, I said sixfold in the last four years.

3:50

Overall, our capital plan is \$4.9 billion higher than last year. That's up by 37 per cent and almost four times the per capita average in other provinces. Under our government's three-year capital plan we will spend about \$18.2 billion in grants and investments. The plan includes \$1.3 billion to cover escalating costs of construction on approved projects.

Mr. Speaker, northern Alberta has been under particular strain. The population growth of our northerly census areas is higher than the provincial average. We are addressing these pressures. For example, in Wood Buffalo the population jumped by almost one-quarter from 2001 to 2006. Our investments of \$396 million over three years will cover priority areas, including affordable housing, health facilities, and water and waste-water treatment systems.

We are targeting \$679 million, mostly capital spending, over three years to water and waste-water management. Our goal is to ensure a safe, secure water supply, healthy aquatic ecosystems, and a sustainable economy. We will invest in planning, monitoring, and research to improve water management. Municipal waterworks systems will be enhanced. Learning more about groundwater quantity and quality in high-risk areas is also going to be a focus.

Provincial highways, bridges, and resource roads will be improved. We will pave 2,500 kilometres of highway. Mr. Speaker, as you well know, that's almost enough to get from High Level down to Waterton park and back. Some of our projects include ring roads in Calgary and Edmonton, a highway bypass at Milk River, and a new bridge over the Smoky River west of High Prairie.

Albertans will see much-needed new health facilities. The new Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Grande Prairie will serve the growing population in that area. Also addressing health needs in the province are the Edmonton Clinic and the south Calgary health campus as well as other projects such as planning for the Medicine Hat hospital renovations.

There will be 71 new or significantly modernized school projects over the next three years. This includes building schools in Fort McMurray, Cold Lake, and other centres soon to be announced. It

also includes modernizing schools like Balwin school in Edmonton and the Ian Bazalgette junior high school in Calgary. Schools in Raymond, Hythe, St. Paul, Lacombe, and other districts and divisions will also be upgraded.

In addition, Education and Advanced Education and Technology will each receive a further \$300 million in capital spending. This will be allocated towards future projects. We'll help maintain, upgrade, and build facilities for culture, wellness, recreation, and sport. This includes \$280 million over the next two years for the new major community facilities program. This provides grants supporting community public-use facilities. The nonprofit municipal and aboriginal groups operating these facilities contribute tremendously to our quality of life.

A province-wide information technology system for police, a new remand centre in Edmonton, and the opening of the new Calgary Courts Centre are major efforts towards supporting safe and secure communities.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on to the operating side of our government expenses. We will spend an estimated \$27 billion this year, up 10 per cent from last year. This will address Alberta's combined nearly 7 per cent jump in inflation and population growth in 2006. Three-quarters of our operating spending is in four areas: health, education, advanced education and technology, and assistance to Albertans.

Alberta's health care operational spending, Mr. Speaker, is \$10.8 billion. That's up from \$4.2 billion 10 years ago, and it's the highest per capita in the nation. Today for the first time operational spending for health will consume 40 per cent of our budget. Last year Albertans received on average for health care almost \$10,000 for each baby less than one year old, almost \$2,100 for each Albertan aged 15 to 44, and \$22,500 for every senior over 85. Our spending increases support regional health authorities, physician services, and assistance with rising prescription drug costs. These increases also support services like public health labs, vaccinations, and ambulances.

This year's increase in education spending supports several efforts, Mr. Speaker. Funding for our small class size initiative is increased by nearly 22 per cent. This allows schools to retain the 2,500 teachers hired over the last three years. Our 9 per cent boost in special-needs student funding will serve 14,700 kindergarten children and 16,200 students in grades 1 to 12 with disabilities. Other spending increases support teachers' professional development, teachers' pensions, accredited private schools, early learning opportunities, and projects to improve schools, the AISI projects.

Advanced education and technology are also vital to building a stronger Alberta. As of this fall, Mr. Speaker, tuition fee increases will be limited to Alberta's inflation rate. On average this will save two-year diploma students \$1,600 and four-year undergraduate students \$3,800. Our assistance to students goes up by 37 per cent. This supports \$95 million in scholarships, bursaries, and grants, \$20 million in RESP programs, \$116 million in student loans, and \$71 million in debt relief. We're also spending \$559 million over the next three years on research, innovation, and commercializing technology. That's an increase of 16 per cent. It supports energy, agriculture, forestry, life sciences, information and communications technology, as well as the new science of nanotechnology.

We must, though, never forget the most vulnerable people in our society. Children, seniors, and Albertans in need of assistance will benefit from spending increases this year. Support for child care and intervention goes up by a combined \$37 million to \$491 million. Funding towards preventing family violence and bullying rises 11 per cent across our partnering ministries, to \$46 million. We are increasing supports to the Alberta seniors' benefits and to dental and optical programs. A 15 per cent increase to lodge assistance programs funds 250 more units. Funding to our assured income for

the severely handicapped program increases by 18 per cent, to \$644 million. Further help also goes to income support clients and to Albertans with developmental disabilities. Over the longer term we are committed to looking at imaginative and cost-efficient ways to assist an aging population. Mr. Speaker, under the Premier's leadership we will examine options in creating an Alberta pension plan. Our goal is to improve benefits available to all Albertans.

4:00

Beyond our main spending areas we're launching several other efforts in service of our government's five priorities. Each effort aims to help us manage and sustain our growth and our province. We will develop an immigration strategy to encourage more skilled workers to come to Alberta. A new workforce strategy will be developed to help retain and recruit workers and increase productivity in the agricultural industry. Funds will go towards detecting and controlling mountain pine beetle infestations in our forests. We will boost our prosecution team dedicated to family violence cases and our court services staff. Our contribution towards First Nations policing will increase. More highway sheriffs will be hired to target aggressive drivers and speeders who endanger other motorists.

Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the efforts funded by our government this year. We are addressing the pressures of growth and the price of prosperity in Alberta. Family businesses like those managed by our Alberta boot makers, the Gerwings, need value from their staff and suppliers. That means watching how much they spend and on what and when. This helps them provide the best possible products and service for their ultimate boss: their customers.

We, too, need to manage our expenses. We just can't keep raising our spending at these levels even if strong energy prices and economic growth continue. We must never return to the shortfall scenarios that plagued Alberta in the past. The facts are clear. Hiking our operating spending by 10 per cent, as we're doing this year, can't continue. If we did that, we would have a deficit, and government deficits are illegal in Alberta and will continue to be under a Stelmach government.

In the words of the mildly famous Wainwright bard: we can't get where we're going if we forget where we've been. Albertans haven't forgotten the downturn of the 1980s or the government deficits that followed. We must reduce our spending increases to match Alberta's economic growth. My colleagues and I are committed to holding that line. This requires more disciplined fiscal management. When you make a cowboy boot, you start with the absolute best pieces of leather that you can get. Our approach with this budget is similar. As we work towards managing our growth, we strive for best practices at every step.

We are starting today with four key steps. First, our Treasury Board ministry will review existing government programs. It will identify ways to achieve program goals more efficiently. It will scrutinize government spending to ensure that Albertans receive the best value for their investment. It will also better co-ordinate our planned capital and operational spending. In addition, Treasury Board will explore options towards achieving more cost certainty in capital construction.

Second, there are no plans, zero plans, for in-year increases in operating spending. Potential emergencies like wildfires, floods, and pine beetles will be addressed through our sustainability fund.

Third, we will establish a formula to govern any in-year surpluses beyond our budgeted forecasts. One-third of any budgeted surplus will go to savings and investments such as the heritage fund. The remaining two-thirds will go to capital spending, and of that two-thirds at least half will go to capital maintenance rather than new projects. It's absolutely critical to keep our capital assets in good shape.

Fourth, we will look at ways to address the unfunded liability of public-sector pension plans. This includes teachers' pension plans. One possibility for savings is refinancing the government's portion of the liability at a lower rate. Mr. Speaker, this simple step would save Albertans \$60 million a year and a total of \$1.6 billion over the term of the liability. This could be extended to the teachers' portion of that liability, saving them money as well. We will discuss other options for pension liabilities also.

In summary, this budget is about managing our growth today as well as ensuring our economic future for tomorrow. We have increased our operational and capital spending to deal with the incredible growth that we are experiencing. Mr. Speaker, this is the price of prosperity. We have also committed to an expenditure management plan and a surplus allocation formula to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are being spent wisely. Lastly, our promise to look at options for an Alberta pension plan aims to ensure prosperity and sustainability for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Boot Company has grown and succeeded in the face of competition from around the world. The Gerwings see challenges as opportunity, and as a government we understand that. As we look to the future, we recognize the great challenges before us. We see them as great opportunities. Our government will build on these opportunities to benefit all Albertans. We will do this with the utmost respect: respect for this Assembly, respect for the land, and respect for the people we are so privileged to serve.

Mr. Speaker, this is the Stelmach government's economic plan for 2007. Thank you. [applause]

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I beg leave to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the fact that we probably need a week to reflect on the messages that were delivered today, I would move that we adjourn to Monday, April 30, at 1 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 4:09 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday, April 30, at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, April 30, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/30

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, please remain standing for the singing of *O Canada* after the prayer is done. Shall we bow our heads.

On this day let each of us pray in our own way for all those who have been killed or injured in the workplace. Life is precious. When it is lost, all of us are impacted. In a moment of silent contemplation may we now allow our thoughts to remember those taken before their time, those who have suffered through tragedies, and reach out to the families, friends, neighbours, and communities most immediately impacted.

Hon. Members:

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

The Deputy Speaker: We'll continue with the moment of silence. May God provide them eternal peace. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure for me today to introduce His Excellency Smail Benamara to all members of the Assembly. He is the ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

Just as in Alberta, energy is such an important part of the Algerian economy, with over \$75 million per year being exported to Algeria from Alberta. It's my pleasure to introduce His Excellency. I'd ask our honoured guest to rise and receive the warm welcome from the members of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this House three very special guests: Mr. and Mrs. Zile Singh, accompanied by Neena Amarashi. Mr. Singh is the deputy consul general of India in Vancouver. He is moving to North Korea as an ambassador for India there. Before coming to Canada, he was the Indian consul general in Herat in Afghanistan. His previous postings were Laos, Nepal, Panama, Finland, Philippines. Neena Amarashi is owner of the IT firm Acrodex. She's from Vancouver. I would like to thank them for coming to the Legislature. They have already risen. I'd ask everybody to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly several people who are closely associated with Alberta's organ and tissue donation program. They're seated in the members' gallery to remind us all of the importance of talking to our loved ones about organ and tissue donation and the positive difference that it can make.

I would ask our guests to stand when I announce them. First, we have Erik Williams. Erik is the program educator for Capital health's Comprehensive Tissue Centre; Tracey Clare, a donor co-ordinator with Capital health's human organ procurement and exchange, or HOPE, program. We're also honoured to have with us Stephanie Ostrander. Stephanie is the wife of an organ and tissue donor. Her husband, Greg, tragically passed away in December 2003. Through many conversations with her spouse Stephanie knew that Greg wished to give the gift of life. We also have with us Beth Tchir. Beth is the mother of a cornea recipient and an active public advocate for organ and tissue donation. She has seen first-hand the difference that a donation can make to the life of a loved one. All of our guests are standing. I'd like to thank them publicly and ask the House to give them a traditional warm welcome.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 33 of the very brightest young minds in the entire province. Of course, they reside and attend school in the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, and they are from Duggan school. I'd like them to please rise along with their teachers that are accompanying them today, Mrs. Nancy Adamson Cavanaugh, Ms Bonnie Eliuk, and Mrs. Carlene Wong, and parent volunteer Mr. Greg Randall. They are in the public gallery. If they could please rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Ms Jennifer Harris. Jennifer is actually back in Calgary, which is her home turf, after studying for a PhD in speech pathology in Cambridge, England. I would ask Jennifer to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 61 wonderful students from Mary Hanley school in Edmonton-Mill Woods, who are accompanied by teachers Mr. Steve Bain, Ms Philomena Bruch, and Mrs. Lorraine Williamson and parent helpers Mrs. Cheryl Schneider and Mrs. Susan Stein. I'd like to ask the students and staff to rise and please accept the warm traditional welcome from the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly guests from the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. We have in the public gallery today seven residents from the Ottewell lodge, which is operated by the Greater Edmonton Foundation. They are accompanied by one staff member and also an individual who is gracious enough to volunteer some of her spare time at the lodge. I would now ask them to please rise. They're in the public gallery. They enjoy politics, and this is their first visit to the Legislative Assembly to observe our proceedings. Welcome.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Brent Southwell. Brent lives in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and has been a member of the plumbers' and pipefitters' local 488 for the past 25 years. Brent was seriously injured on the job and has been unable to work since. Despite his injuries Brent continues to play a role in the upcoming May Week and the Arts on the Avenue workers' art show. Prior to his injury he was a volunteer with the Folk Fest for 10 years and has worked on fundraisers for WIN House, the fund for underprivileged children, and the Youth Emergency Shelter. I would ask that he now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The next person I would like to introduce is Mr. Gil McGowan, and he is the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour. Previous to this he worked as communication staff for the Alberta Federation of Labour and played a key role in the Friends of Medicare campaigns on behalf of public health care in this province. He has been the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour for nearly two years. He's been outstanding in his role as a spokesperson for Alberta labour. He's been on the picket lines and working behind the scenes to settle labour disputes at Telus, the CBC, Finning, the Brooks strike, and the Palace Casino strike, which is ongoing. He provides dynamic, new leadership for Alberta labour. He's taken a strong initiative with respect to the safety of workers in this province. I would ask all members to please give him a warm traditional welcome.

1:10

My last introduction, Mr. Speaker, is Angeline Moellmann. Angeline Moellmann is the wife of the late Grant Moellmann, who was a member of local 720 of the ironworkers here in Edmonton. He was killed near the end of his 42-year career in a fall from a bridge that now bears his name. The city of Edmonton has commemorated his life by dedicating the bridge by the coliseum that goes over the LRT and the railways as Grant Moellmann Bridge. His wife, Angeline, has been a strong advocate for workers' safety since her husband's passing. She is always willing to speak out on issues around occupational health and safety. I would ask that she please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Nicholas Ameyaw. He's the co-ordinator consultant for the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. He has been working in this role for over 20 years and has done a fantastic job by having

sessions across the province to educate people and companies about human rights. I would like to ask Nicholas to stand and receive a warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Hazel MacLeod and Marion Eggen. Marion Eggen, I'm proud to say, is my mother, and Hazel is my aunt. Both Hazel and Marion are farm girls, originally from the Vermilion area. Hazel is now retired from her long career as a teacher in Alberta, and she is a proud grandmother with five grandchildren. I think they're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them now to rise, please, and receive this warm traditional welcome.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a delegation from the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta. They are Dr. Kathryn Andrusky, Dr. Trevor Chan, Dr. Milli Gupta, Dr. Kerri Johansson, Dr. Eldon Loh, Dr. Paul Belletrutti, Dr. Jen Williams, Dr. Lanette Prediger, Dr. Jessica Minion, Dr. Mike Kalisiak, Dr. Aisha Mirza, Dr. Hughie Fraser, Dr. Ivan Kropyvnytskyy, Dr. Martina Puchyr, and Sarah Thomas. I ask that they please rise to accept the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Darlene Werkman and Francine Willard. Darlene and Francine along with the Palace Casino strikers have been on the picket line for 234 days, thanks in part to this government's failure to put in place labour laws that are fair to working Albertans. Darlene has been a dealer at the Palace Casino for nearly 16 years and is a proud union member. Francine is a slot attendant and has been working at the Palace Casino for five and a half years. Francine originally hails from Montreal but has lived in Alberta for many years. They are joined today by UFCW local 401 representative Don Crisall. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled Dr. Gary McPherson, who will soon receive the Alberta Order of Excellence. Gary is accompanied today by Hazav Man, who is here from Israel on a 39-month working permit. I would ask that the members assembled recognize them.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you have another guest?

Mr. MacDonald: No. I've already made my introduction. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I had intended to introduce a couple of visitors. Unfortunately, they haven't arrived yet. However, I'll take advantage of the opportunity and inform the members of this Assembly that 63 years ago the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills came into this world and is celebrating his birthday, and today he's seated as the Speaker. Hon. members, please recognize the birthday.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll have to check the Standing Orders to see if mentioning the age of a member is permissible.

head:

Ministerial Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

International Day of Mourning for Workers Killed and Injured on the Job

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saturday, April 28, was National Day of Mourning for workers killed on the job. Last year 124 people in Alberta died from job-related injuries or illnesses. The previous year there were 143 who died. While there were significantly fewer deaths than in the previous year, 124 deaths are still too many. One death would be too many.

There are no excuses. Everyone – government, employers, and employees – must do a better job to ensure that Albertans can get to work in full confidence that they will return home safe at day's end. We must educate ourselves and make all Albertans more aware of creating a culture of wellness and safety. We need to help Albertans understand the importance of being our brother's keeper. We must look out for the safety of our fellow workers, providing cautions where appropriate. Finally, we should all accept responsibility to lead societal change and move to a more knowledgeable Alberta attitude about the need for a safer workplace in memory of all those we honour and whom, so sadly, we lost.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to pay tribute to all the workers who lost their lives while pursuing a better life for themselves, their families, and all Albertans. Every day tens of thousands of men and women across the province go to work simply hoping to put food on the table and to contribute to the comfort and prosperity of their families and their fellow citizens. A simple wish, one shared by the vast majority of Albertans. Yet every year too many workdays end tragically in preventable workplace accidents. Not long ago four temporary foreign workers were injured and two were killed on the job in a terrible roof collapse at the oil sands project near Fort MacKay. This dreadful accident has deprived the world of two precious human beings and left behind grieving families, friends, and co-workers.

Compounding this tragedy is the fact that these were not the first nor the last workplace fatalities in Alberta. The price of progress in this province is far too often paid by workers who are often forced by circumstance to work in unsafe environments under unsustainable pressure to do the job faster and more cheaply. With Alberta's economy growing so rapidly, we need to rededicate ourselves to workplace safety. A single life lost is too high a price to pay for a few extra dollars in the public or private purse.

We also must not forget the most vulnerable working population, especially our young people. Parents are concerned when their sons and daughters go north to work in the oil sands sector. Mr. Speaker,

one of my sons joined a crew north of Fort McMurray a few months ago, and with only two days of general safety training and no specific safety training for the job he was to do, I was more than a little concerned. I asked him if his job was dangerous. He laughed and said: Dad, the most dangerous thing I do is drive on highway 63. But that did not make me feel better because included among the 124 deaths in the workplace last year were 33 who were killed on our highways.

Many ceremonies took place last Saturday, April 28, the day of mourning. We remembered workers who died because of accidents in the workplace, also through vehicle accidents, and also those who died because of work-related diseases. The stories told by the children and the spouses of those workers left us who were there listening in tears.

1:20

This day of mourning is a time for all of us to remember and to give thanks for the talent, dedication, and simple hard work of Alberta's workers. It is also time for us to pledge our commitment to workplace safety and better working conditions for all workers, including vulnerable workers such as young people, single mothers, recent immigrants, persons with disabilities, and our aboriginal population. We need to pledge better support for injured workers and their families and the families of workers who have died on the job. Their sacrifices have made Alberta what it is today. We must honour those sacrifices by taking action ourselves, action that will reduce workplace injuries and protect the working families of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, unanimous consent is required for the third party to participate.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last year 124 workers and 20 farm workers were killed at work or as a result of their work. On April 28 Albertans took time to remember these workers and to express solidarity with the families, friends, and communities left mourning. Members of this Assembly will perhaps be acutely aware of this problem because of the recent deaths of Genbao Ge and Hongliang Liu and the injury of four of their fellow workers. Twenty-seven other workers have been killed in the workplace in the first two months of this year alone.

The labour movement and the New Democrats have stood shoulder to shoulder in fighting for policies that protect workers. Despite the carnage year after year the Alberta government has not taken meaningful action. The false dogma of voluntary compliance combined with a serious lack of inspections have contributed to the intolerable levels of injury and death on Alberta work sites. Until the provincial government adopts a zero-tolerance policy for unsafe work sites, these injuries and deaths will continue. The cost in lives and the devastating impact this has on families of killed workers is already far too high.

Mr. Speaker, this government's responsibility goes far beyond saying a few good words once a year. Safe workplaces in Alberta can be a reality. All that is needed is the political will to act.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner and the hon. Member for Edmonton-

Manning have also expressed their desire to participate, which requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head:

Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Supportive Living Project in Jasper

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to congratulate the municipality of Jasper on the sod-turning event we did on April 16, 2007. This event commemorated the development of new, affordable supportive living units comprised of 16 designated assisted living and 21 lodge units.

This was all made possible by a great partnership between three levels of government: Alberta Seniors and Community Supports with a grant of \$1,766,500, the Aspen regional health authority, Evergreen Foundation, plus the Yellowhead county, the towns of Edson, Hinton, and Grande Cache, and the municipality of Jasper. Another partnership of this project will be with the Seton hospital. Being connected to the Seton hospital, food and laundry services will be shared, and seniors will be able to age in place.

This is a project that the municipality of Jasper has specifically identified as being important to the needs of their citizens. We know that people who move into this new project will have their health and accommodation needs met, and here's the most important part: while being in their community. We all know how important it is for our neighbours to remain close to family and friends, their support network. It is important for their quality of life, and it is important for our community. That's what makes this announcement so special. Thanks to all involved.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Gary McPherson

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise and recognize Gary McPherson, one of the latest inductees to the Alberta Order of Excellence. Gary is no stranger to members of this Assembly and is a highly distinguished Albertan. He's being inducted for advancing the status of persons with disabilities and building caring communities.

There's no question that Gary has been instrumental in improving the lives of persons with disabilities in Alberta. He served as chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities for 10 years. Since 1998 he has served as the executive director of the Canadian Centre for Social Entrepreneurship in the faculty of business at the University of Alberta. In Gary's words, the centre works to combine the heart of business with the heart of the community through the creativity of the individual. This is an excellent summation of Gary's vision of the potential for our society.

Gary is called upon frequently as a speaker at conferences and public events. His life experiences allow him to speak authoritatively on issues such as health care delivery, home care, disability and sport, volunteerism, and advocacy.

He has received numerous other awards and recognitions for his work in stronger and inclusive communities. He was inducted into the Edmonton and Alberta Sports Hall of Fame for his contribution to wheelchair basketball. In 1995 the University of Alberta awarded Gary an honorary doctor of laws.

Last year Gary participated as a candidate in the Alberta Progressive Conservative leadership race, and Gary added to the debate by

highlighting quality-of-life issues and undoubtedly added to the process with his quick wit and humour.

Gary is an outstanding Albertan, and his investiture into the Alberta Order of Excellence is well deserved. Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members to join me in congratulating Dr. Gary McPherson.

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

Education Week

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 29 to May 5 is Education Week in Alberta. This is a time we traditionally take to acknowledge the contributions of our teachers, our support staff, and our volunteers to Alberta's world-class learning system. Through collaboration and partnerships Alberta's students, whether public, separate, charter, private, home-schooled, or francophone, are benefiting every day from all that our education system has to offer, including a high-quality curriculum.

On April 22 a publication titled *Students First* made its way into many Alberta homes. This publication illustrates the collaboration that exists in our education system and the positive impact it is having on our K to 12 students. This year's Education Week theme is *Innovative, Inspired: Our Future . . . Our Students!* Alberta students benefit from an education system that is progressive and engaging. It embraces new technology as a means to deliver Alberta's world-class curriculum.

All across this province students and teachers are involved in Education Week activities. I would like to direct members of this House to the Alberta Education website, www.education.gov.ab.ca, where they can read for themselves the many school activities occurring in their constituencies this week.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Albertans to celebrate Education Week from April 29 to May 5 and to recognize the teachers, support staff, volunteers, and stakeholders who are making a tremendous difference in the lives of our students.

Thank you.

The Clerk: Oral Question Period.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, we have a member's statement on this side.

The Deputy Speaker: It's 1:30. We'll get to that after question period.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I work with him as much as I can.

Emergency Health Services

Dr. Taft: Vince Motta's tragic death in 2002 was the subject of a fatality inquiry that resulted in 25 recommendations by Judge Manfred Delong on how to improve emergency services and prevent premature deaths. But four years later, after this government has ignored numerous warnings and missed many opportunities for improvements, 18-year-old Jordan Johanson died after waiting 12 hours for surgery on a ruptured appendix. My questions are to the

minister of health. In 2003 Judge Delong warned that the health system is in crisis and requires dramatic change, not incremental change, but four years later Calgarians are experiencing a record number of code burgundies and code reds as well as staff and bed shortages. Can the minister explain why so many problems continue to plague Calgary's health system?

1:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we need to focus on the fact that there's incredible growth happening. Since the Motta inquiry I can say that \$1.4 billion has been put into expanding capacity in Calgary, and that expansion is happening. There was a thorough review of the findings of the Delong inquiry, and many of the things that were suggested have been undertaken. With respect to the latest incident it's a tragic incident, and the Calgary health authority is looking very closely at what happened and what can be done to prevent that type of thing happening. But it's not fair to say that nothing has happened or that there hasn't been progress. There has been considerable progress in Calgary, and there will be considerably more progress in Calgary.

Dr. Taft: Well, that progress isn't showing up in the emergency rooms and in the hospital wards. Since 2000 the average wait time in emergency to see a doctor has increased by 45 minutes, and the number of patients who leave the emergency room without seeing a doctor is up by about 10 per cent. Given that so little progress has been made to improve health services in Calgary – and by many measures it has been getting worse, in fact, Mr. Speaker – how does this minister explain this government's failure to act on all of Judge Delong's recommendations?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, much action has been taken. Again, the capacity is being increased. There is expansion happening at virtually every health facility in Calgary. A tower is being built beside the Foothills and a new floor on the Rockyview, so it has expanded capacity. Indeed, the Health Link, where people can phone in and get advice instead of going to emergency, has done a lot to reduce the strain on emergency, but it continues to grow. More work is yet to be done.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the public isn't buying that line.

Judge Delong cautioned that unless the Calgary health region makes dramatic improvements, an independent commission should be appointed to conduct a public inquiry – a full public inquiry – into the financing and delivery of emergency health services. To the minister: is it this minister's position that Calgary's health system truly has dramatically improved over the last four years, and if not, why has this government failed to initiate that inquiry?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, all that hon. member and any other member on that side who doesn't understand this needs to do is to take a look at the dramatic increase in services that have been provided to Albertans not just in Calgary but right across the province: dramatic increase in heart surgeries and dramatic increase in MRIs and dramatic increase in services right through the piece. Now, sure, there are still issues to be addressed, and we continue to address them. Capacity issues are being addressed. But to suggest that there has been no progress is patently false.

The Deputy Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall in addressing concerns of teachers the person who is now the current Premier claimed to have "always bargained in good faith," and he said that he wouldn't "prejudice negotiations" on the teachers' pension unfunded liability "before we've even sat down at the table." Yet this Education minister's fumbling attempt to address the unfunded pension liability undercuts the collective bargaining process and deliberately prejudices negotiations. Teachers across this province are feeling used and abused by this government. To the Minister of Education: why has this minister betrayed the words and promises of his own Premier?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, in the budget announcement of last Thursday the government, on behalf of taxpayers of Alberta, initiated an offer of \$25 million that will go to new teachers in Alberta.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Liepert: Twenty-five million dollars. If the hon. member has a problem with that, then say so.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education's recent letter to the Alberta Teachers' Association regarding pensions – the one he mentions there – proves that this government's word actually cannot be trusted. Time and again the Premier promised the teachers' pension issue would not be linked to labour negotiations. For example, I quote the Premier from just four months ago. "I would never use such an emotional matter as a bargaining chip in the heat of a labour dispute." To the Minister of Education: did the Premier give this minister permission to break the Premier's promises to teachers?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there is no heat of labour negotiations. This is a good-faith offer. It starts September 1, 2007, and goes until August 31, 2008. If the hon. member is taking the position of the Alberta Teachers' Association and not of young teachers in this province, then say so.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, what's easy to say on the campaign trail is proving difficult for this Premier to deliver. The Premier promised a fair and lasting resolution to the unfunded liability in the teachers' pension plan, a problem that will cost tens of billions of dollars if it isn't addressed now. The Premier promised to separate the pension issue from salary negotiations. He promised to listen to teachers. He has broken all those promises. This government is playing politics with education over the pension issue. The Premier said that he wouldn't, but he is. To the Minister of Education: will this minister do the right thing, withdraw his misguided offer, and sit down in good faith with the teachers?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as part of that announcement we also said that we would be creating a small task force that was going to meet with interested stakeholders to find a long-term resolution to this issue. So, again, I challenge the hon. member: if he wants to deny new teachers and young teachers in this province \$25 million in benefits, then say so.

The Deputy Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Temporary Rent Regulation

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the government finally released the report from the all-party Affordable Housing Task Force along with their response to it. Having rejected 38 of the task force's 50 recommendations, the Conservatives are clearly saying: everything is just fine here. Well, everything's not just fine. Among the 38 recommendations they rejected was the one calling for temporary rent regulation to protect Alberta's tenants from rent gouging. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who can't honestly believe that the market will prevent rent gouging – the state of the market is precisely what enables it – why did he and the Premier reject temporary rent regulations today? Do you want people to lose their homes?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I need to say that in the province of Alberta in 1975 we did have rent controls. This government has learned from history that rent controls do not work. When rent controls were in place, what it did do was suffocate the addition of rental units in the province. We've also looked at different provinces in Canada, and different provinces in Canada have the same feeling that we do: rent controls do not work to adjust or to try to deal with the problems of having more rental units on the market.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not having rent controls doesn't get anything built in this province either. The government did accept the recommendation to limit rent increases to one a year, which is a good idea. But because they did it last Tuesday without also instituting temporary rent regulation, many renters woke up on Wednesday or Thursday or came home from work on Friday to find notices of massive rent hikes. Now, if the government had dotted the i's and crossed the t's – and they sat on the task force report long enough that, Lord knows, they had time – you know, this wouldn't have happened. But, no, they just blurt it out in a news conference, don't announce any retroactivity or even an immediate effective start date, bad landlords exploit the loophole, and now they're backpedaling like crazy. To the President of the Treasury Board and Minister for Service Alberta: did he not realize that this would happen?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, what we did learn on this side is that you learn from the past; you don't live in the past. You have to move forward. There is nothing that you can do in a market that will stabilize rents better than build new housing units. The answer is the balance between renter and landlord. Our legislation that will be introduced will be retroactive to April 24. I'm sure the hon. member would like it to go back to 1952.

1:40

Mr. Taylor: Actually, no, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't alive back then. Maybe the member opposite was.

Mr. Speaker, I expect that what will come from the backpedaling is that the Conservatives will try to make the one rent hike per year retroactive and then pretend that they never messed this up. But you wonder whether this is just another example of a rural cabinet that doesn't understand and doesn't really care about what city folk go through. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: will this government admit that their ideology has failed the people of

Alberta again and institute temporary rent regulations? Everybody, even renters from the city, needs a home.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that when we look at the challenges of growth pressures in Alberta, those challenges are in large centres, those challenges are in Fort McMurray, and they are also in smaller centres throughout Alberta. So when we looked at the Affordable Housing Task Force recommendations, we looked at them in the holistic sense of Alberta trying to address the growth pressures of all of Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: First third party main question. The leader of the NDP.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government promised openness and transparency, then turned around and created a bad housing policy behind closed doors. The rent policy of this government has a loophole so big you could drive a Mack truck right through it. Limiting rent increases to one per year with no limit on the size of that rent increase is an invitation to the gouging of renters in this province. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Since the minister has rejected the recommendations of his own task force for rent guidelines but will allow one increase per year, will he tell renters how big an increase in rent the government is prepared to allow a landlord to levy? Is it \$250 a month? \$500? \$1,000? \$2,000? Is there a limit, Mr. Minister?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the recommendation to limit the rent increases to one year is to add some stability to renters to give them some predictability on how often rents could be increased. I need to add, also, that this legislation that is being brought forward will, as the Minister of Service Alberta said, be brought back to the 24th of April, when the announcement was made.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. But that won't help renters. We've seen exactly how the landlords are going to respond to this little bit of bad policy by the particular rent increase for the poor woman, a senior, who got a \$400 rent hike. Now, her landlord, unfortunately, gave her a \$20 rent increase already this year, so he can't do this once you're done with your legislation. But those landlords that haven't given a rent increase this year can give an increase of \$400 or \$500 or \$600 or \$1,000, and there's nothing you're going to do to stop it. Why not?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned previously, rent controls do not work. We have had and seen the history. The hon. member from the third party knows that it doesn't work and also that we need to look to the future to make sure that the workers and the individuals that are being brought into our workforce have some place to live and have some place to rent. We do not need to curtail that growth.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, the minister is fairly new, so I'll give him a bit of break, but I'm going to fill him in a little bit. In the province of Ontario, where they've had rent guidelines for 15 years, the construction of new

rental units exceeds Alberta's dramatically. In fact, it's risen dramatically while the construction of new rental units in Alberta, where there are no guidelines, has dropped dramatically. So will the minister go back and confirm my statement and come back in the House tomorrow and take back his statement that rent guidelines don't work and implement them immediately?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, it's indeed a compliment when the hon. member from the third party suggests that I'm new. But I need to say in regard to the availability: there are more units available in Alberta every day. They may take different forms of rental units, supported units, condos, but we are dealing with the issue of having affordable housing in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The first question for the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Municipal Sustainability Initiative Funding

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some problems do take a little while to fix, but some can be done immediately. These are, unfortunately, follow-up questions to two weeks ago, when we needed some urgent action, and none has been taken. The municipal sustainability initiative funding is not working. It's a disaster for municipalities. I asked two weeks ago for the town of Taber. They have tenders out for their water treatment plant. This new funding is not going to address it. My question is to the minister of municipal affairs. Will he sit down and work out something for the town of Taber so that they can go ahead with their water treatment plant? The MSIF is not going to do it.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the municipal sustainability initiative has funding that was supported for municipalities. That funding is \$400 million.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Danyluk: Four hundred million dollars that is distributed to municipalities on a pro-rated basis of the amount of funding that their ratepayers supported to the education tax. So this funding is going back. Will it solve all problems and all big projects? Probably not. Will it help? Yes, it will.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't address their problems, and it's not even long term. They don't know whether it's one year, five years, 10 years, and there's nothing sustainable or for sure to plan on. It's not acceptable.

The next problem again goes to the town of Coutts. They had a wall put up in their town two years ago. It only took 28 years for Germany to take down their wall, but this government has failed to address it. They need to take the wall down or put the gate back in to access that town. It's economic disaster for them. They haven't reacted. The hon. Premier said that he would respond and get back to us immediately. It's been two weeks and nothing. So my question would be to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. When is this government going to address the problem in Coutts and open up a gate or take down the wall?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the minister of municipal affairs wants to respond to this one.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say: you know what happens? There's too much mayonnaise, the bologna's too thick, the bread is too dry, and of course the

milk is too warm. But the municipal sustainability initiative has a 10-year window in it, and that window will be for the addition of \$1.4 billion to municipalities. That's \$1.4 billion.

Mr. Hinman: Well, that didn't answer Coutts' problem, and I doubt that the government is going to do anything. What the cities are going to get from year to year is for one year, and it's arbitrary. It's not acceptable.

The third one to the Minister of Environment. The Snake River ranch is being cut off. B.C. is going forward, and they are addressing flood control and putting in rip-rap to control the banks before flooding out. This government needs to act. They've failed to act. Are they going to prevent the washout of the bridge and the road, or are they going to let it go by and then spend millions to try and repair it? Will they act for the Snake River ranch?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with this specific instance. It hasn't been brought to my attention. I'll be more than happy to look into it and provide the member with an appropriate answer.

The Deputy Speaker: First main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Safety of Temporary Foreign Workers

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A fatal accident that occurred at the Canadian Natural Resources Limited's Horizon oil sands project last week has raised serious questions about the safety of temporary foreign workers in this province. Currently it is not required that employers inform foreign temporary workers about their legal rights, and restrictive visas that tie workers to a single employer make it very difficult for them to speak out or to refuse unsafe work. My question is for the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Will the minister implement policies to ensure the safety of all workers, or will this incident be just one of many international embarrassments?

1:50

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, may I first say that any time we have an injury or a death on a work site is a sad and tragic day. I feel huge sorrow for the families and have sent a letter expressing to the Chinese government my sincere regrets about the deaths of both workers and the injury of the others.

I think it's unfortunate to make an automatic link relative to their placement on this job site in Alberta. We administer the law, the Employment Standards Code, in Alberta the same way no matter what Albertan, no matter what worker is working on a site. There is an investigation that's taking place. We had four investigators and a manager originally, and they are completely investigating the incident.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Internal documents from CNRL provide detailed safety requirements for the construction of tanks on-site and actually raise concerns that wind in the region could pose an additional risk to worker safety. Albertans need to know if safety requirements were followed. Can the minister tell us when the last on-site inspection of the Horizon project occurred and whether or not basic safety standards were met?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is the very reason we're doing an investigation. I can neither provide the history of the safety

inspections on that site nor on Horizon's work sites at this time. But at such time as we have a complete investigation, gathering all the facts, then we will release it. There has been misinformation provided. For example, there was a suggestion that fall protection is not mandatory for workers on this type of setting, and fall protection is one of the safety standards. So rather than give any bit of information, we'll wait until the investigation is complete and provide it in a very transparent fashion both to the government itself and also to Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The temporary foreign worker program is supposedly in place to address the labour shortage, yet letters from federal union officials show that qualified Albertan workers were available to work on the Horizon project. Local workers have the necessary safety training, professional credentials, and union representation to ensure that the work is done safely and efficiently, but the company prefers to employ temporary foreign workers, presumably to cut costs. This is just one example of how the program is being abused. To the same minister: will this government stand up and support Alberta's existing workforce or continue to promote the temporary foreign worker program, which has a growing record of safety concerns?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in this Assembly I have spoken before on the temporary foreign worker program. It is a federal government program. It is not administered by our government. However, in the labour market opinions that are done before any foreign workers are allowed into the country, there is an analysis that is completed about whether or not there's an availability of Alberta workers to do the job. We believe Albertans should be employed first. All that means is that every Albertan should have an opportunity to work. If a company is able to demonstrate that it was not able to get sufficient workers for a particular job site to do a particular task, then they are successful in receiving an opportunity to bring in temporary foreign workers.

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

Electronic Health Records

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lots of public money has been spent on the electronic health information system, but my constituents have been frustrated by having to repeat filling in forms and providing the same information for various health service providers. It seems like there is a lack of information sharing, that causes inefficient health care operation. My question today is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the state of our Alberta health information system?

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health and Wellness is currently on target with the health authorities to meet the goal of having every Albertan on an electronic health record by 2008. We currently have 17,000 health professionals from each corner of the province now registered and trained to use Alberta Netcare. Doctors, nurses, and pharmacists using Netcare in their practice say that the technology is making a real difference in terms of the quality of care that they're able to provide to their patients. Through Netcare our health care providers have health information at the point of care, when they're seeing each patient in their office, clinic,

or in a hospital. In short, we're hoping that those frustrations that the hon. member refers to will soon be over.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the case of my constituent who has been referred by her family doctor to one hospital and a specialist doctor from that hospital referred her to another specialist in another hospital – it resulted in her having to repeat medical tests and being scheduled for surgery at both hospitals. So this has not only caused worry for my constituent but also brings up the question of how our health care's precious resources were used. My question is to the same minister. When can we see something like the personal health care card so patients will not be subject to this inefficient process?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we should be seeing progress even as we speak. The Calgary health region has just brought up a new electronic front end so that tests can be ordered online. The pharmacy information network is up and running, and as I said, we have the goal of having every Albertan on an electronic health record by 2008. That should cover some 75 per cent of lab tests and diagnostics. So it won't at that stage still have everybody on it, but we'll have the level of information sharing that should resolve the type of frustration that the hon. member refers to. More timely patient information leads to better care decisions and better and safer outcomes and a more effective use of the health system, and the purpose of the electronic health record is exactly to reduce that duplication of testing and that extra use of the health care system's time.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's public spending on the health care system has surpassed \$12 billion – that's 36 per cent of every public dollar spent – a cost-efficient improvement of nearly 1 per cent means that \$120 million can be spent on new and better things. So my question is to the same minister. What are you going to do to drive the process of re-engineering our health care operation to make it economical, effective, and efficient for patients and workers?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The electronic health record will be the backbone of the re-engineering of the service delivery process. Much of it is in place. There's more work to be done to make sure that the systems work together. We've got the electronic health record, which, as I said, will be in place by 2008. We've established the physician office system programs, and the new agreement with the AMA will help us further that, so even more physicians' offices, with the ultimate goal of all of them being on the system. We have the new clinical information systems, health technology in the regional health authorities. So innovation of technology and the electronic health record and, particularly, being able to share diagnostic results, being able to share health records among service providers are absolutely critical to re-engineering the system and flattening out the increase in the costs of the health system.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Physician Supply

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government recently, finally, removed the requirement for medical students to pay interest on their student loans while pursuing their residency program. Now, we're glad they did so because we've been advocating such a move for some time. Of course, all this does is defer these payments, and what huge payments they are. This mountain of debt deters potential students and imposes additional stress on an already challenging profession. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Will the minister commit to lowering the cost of medical education in Alberta so that students and later residents do not face such a daunting mountain of debt?

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, as we are entering a huge crunch in the development of our province, we have to manage these growth pressures of this huge number of people coming into play. So it isn't one sector of the health workforce that we're going to concentrate our efforts on. We have a co-ordinated strategy that is being developed through three ministries to work on the total gamut of the health workforce strategy and all health care providers.

As it relates to physicians, obviously we have added a number of spaces to the clinical spaces. First-year physician spaces are up to 257 spaces. That's a double-digit increase. We're going to continue to do those sorts of things that help make our postsecondary education system affordable to all classes and all categories of our students and in a co-ordinated, co-operative fashion with the postsecondary institutions.

2:00

Mr. Tougas: Well, Mr. Speaker, with so much at stake we need to ensure that our medical students get the best training possible. We can achieve this goal predominantly by the hiring and retention of the very best medical educators. Without excellent teaching, our residents and our undergraduate medical students will not be able to reach their full potential. To the same minister: what, if anything, is the government doing to ensure that the best educators from around the world are coming to Alberta and staying here?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question. Contrary to, perhaps, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, who believes that I'm a rural cabinet minister with a very narrow view, we do have a very international view in our department and in our government. We are looking at bringing in instructors from all over the world. We are looking at ways and means that we might be able to actually grow those instructors here in Canada. We're looking at ways and means to incent instructors and physicians, I might add, who are going to be required in this training process, to create those spots. That's all part of the health workforce strategy that is coming forward and in some cases being implemented in different spots right now through the three ministries in government.

Mr. Tougas: Mr. Speaker, there simply aren't enough doctors in this province to go around. The situation is already serious and destined to get much worse. My final question to the Minister of Health and Wellness. The ministry's business plan calls for 148 extra postgraduate medical seats. Does the minister consider this increase to be sufficient to alleviate this critical shortage?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously we want to work very closely with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology to make sure that there are spaces available for every Albertan who wants to advance their education. But with respect to the seats that we have, there won't be sufficient seats until we've filled the full capacity that we need. That doesn't just come from expanding places in our universities and making it possible for Albertans to get educated here. It means supporting Albertans who have gone elsewhere to get their education, helping them to come back. It means helping others who want to come here find their places. So it's not a simple, single approach to making sure that we get the doctors and other health care professionals we need but a full health workforce strategy, which the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, and myself are working forward and bringing through the process and which we discussed with stakeholders on April 13 to see whether we are going in the right direction or whether we could take this further.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Organ and Tissue Donation

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week is held every year in April to recognize the importance of organ donations to improve quality of life for many Canadians. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister bring the House up to date on the state of organ and tissue transplantation in Alberta today?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a very strong organ transplant program, but there's a lot more to be done. Three hundred organ transplants were performed in our province in 2006. The University of Alberta hospital is one of the top transplant facilities in North America and performed 244 organ transplants and more than 1,300 tissue transplants last year. Statistics show that the number of Albertans who are organ donors has increased from 31 per million in 2003 to 41.6 donors per million in 2004, the highest rate in Canada and above the national average of 27.7 million. Regrettably, there are still cases where appropriate matches cannot be found in time to save lives. In 2006 40 Albertans died while awaiting transplants. There's more to be done.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. While there's been some good work going on, the wait is still very long for many individuals. Can the minister tell this House what is being done to reduce the number of Albertans waiting to receive organ transplants?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. The shortage of organs and tissues for transplant is a longstanding national issue. Over 400 Albertans are on waiting lists to receive an organ transplant, with more waiting for tissue that can restore sight, restore mobility, or improve quality of life. There are factors leading to the need for transplants that we cannot prevent, such as genetics and viruses. However, there are many factors that can be prevented, such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes,

burns, injury, alcohol and tobacco use, all of which contribute to the need for transplant. Our department is currently working on a number of health promotion activities and initiatives that focus on healthy eating and active living, which will prevent the need for an organ transplant, and we're working on funding for specialized equipment and expansion of programs so that the need to get tissue from sources outside of Alberta is decreased.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. What can Albertans do to increase their awareness and help reduce waiting lists so that more people who are ill can receive this great gift of life?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's something very simple that every Albertan can do. Eighty-one per cent of Canadians have said that they're willing to donate, but only 65 per cent of them advise their families of their wishes. Albertans need to talk to their families about their wish to donate. They should also take the time to sign the universal donor card on the back of their Alberta health care card, as I have done and, I know, everyone of you in this Assembly will have considered doing if you haven't done it already. We need to take personal responsibility very seriously and do what we can to be healthy and prevent injury. We are going to be distributing these green ribbons that I'm wearing. I'd ask members to wear them this week. We've missed organ donor week, but wear them, and have people ask you what you can do, and then tell them: be prepared to donate an organ.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy tabled this document – it's an extensive review of our royalty structure between 2005 and 2006 – in this House on April 16. After reviewing an uncensored copy of one of the reports within this tabling, it is clear that this government is too embarrassed to share the truth on our royalty rates with Albertans. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why was the chart from the Wood Mackenzie report showing that the Alberta government collects less in royalties than six oil- and gas-producing U.S. states censored from the record of this House?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. First of all, we did table the information so that all Albertans have an opportunity to read the information if they feel like they want to read it. There are pieces of information in any report that may be fundamental bits of information that are required for the government's purposes that are not allowed out in public. I'm not embarrassed about any of the information that we have provided. We'll continue to provide the information they require, and we will continue with the royalty review that's being conducted under the auspices of the Minister of Finance.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That certainly was a valiant attempt at an answer.

Again to the same minister: who in cabinet ordered this proof of the government's failure to collect a fair share of royalties to be censored from the public record? Documents were censored from the public record. Why?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, there is nothing in any of those documents that would indicate to anybody that we have not collected a fair share of royalties for Albertans.

I must also add that that was a grand attempt at a question.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, the reason why the minister and this government should be embarrassed is because through section 24 in this report you censored the fact that the province of Alberta collects significantly less in royalties than six states in the lower 48 oil- and gas-producing states. You should be ashamed of yourself. Why did you do that? Why did you censor this document?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the situation is this, and I've explained this to the gentleman opposite on other occasions, particularly just last week. You can take a snapshot of a royalty from any place in the world and compare apples to oranges. The royalty structure in the province of Alberta has served Albertans very well for many, many years, and it will continue to do so. Under this government we are building a stronger Alberta, and the royalty review will prove that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Climate Change

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. If the federal plan to reduce climate change emissions can be best characterized as a total fraud, then our much more modest Alberta plan is at least a total fraud times three. Under this government's mismanagement we will suffer climate change emissions at least 44 per cent above 1990 levels in the next three years, yet it would take a premium of just a dollar per barrel and perhaps a little backbone to achieve absolute reductions. We are living on borrowed time, and I for one refuse to visit the dreadful consequences of inaction upon our children. When will the Minister of Environment do the right thing and put in place meaningful absolute reductions to carbon emissions?

Mr. Renner: You know, Mr. Speaker, I often wonder why it is that those who have all of the answers to complex questions never have to be accountable for actually implementing them.

The plan that we have in place is a plan that makes sense. It's a plan that will create the environment so that in the medium to longer term we will in fact have absolute reductions. We don't make projections that we don't know we can keep. We make regulations and policy that we know we can implement.

2:10

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, it's perfectly reasonable to make absolute reductions if you have the political will to do so. I refuse to have you saying that. Part of the new federal clean air plan is to impose absolute reductions on noxious air pollutants such as particulates, nitrous oxide, and sulphur dioxide. Again, this government has let the pollution standards in this province slide to the point where we're facing a crisis with respiratory problems and a burden on our health care system. Are we going to sit back, then, and wait for the federal government to salvage air quality in Alberta, or are we going to let the government get ahead of the game for once and put in place provincial measures to realize absolute reductions in toxic air pollution?

Mr. Renner: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, we have a situation where someone is taking something totally out of context and not understanding what he's talking about. The fact of the matter is that in this province we have been regulating the issue regarding pollutants, NOx, and SOx well in advance of anything that the federal government ever contemplated. This legislation, quite frankly, makes more sense to Ontario than it does to Alberta. Alberta's been there, and we'll be ahead of the pack for a long time to come.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, that's just absolutely, patently not true. The federal air quality plan would allow the trading of pollution credits across this country. This is unacceptable and illogical. Particulate matter, sulphur dioxide, and smog must be dealt with where people are forced to breathe polluted air, like here. Will the Environment minister fight to ensure that we will not allow the trading of dirty air credits so Alberta industry can continue to pollute and affect the health of Albertans while we pay for the clean air in Ontario or Quebec? Are you going to allow the trading, or are we going to deal with it here?

Mr. Renner: Well, I think I answered his third question with my second answer, because I indicated to him that we are ahead of the game. We have already been dealing with NOx and SOx. We talked about how we're going to continue to deal with them, and I've also been quite public in the discussions that I've had regarding the need for us to develop a policy around cumulative impact. Mr. Speaker, that policy around cumulative impact is exactly the issue that this member is referring to.

The Deputy Speaker: It's nice to see so much energy that has evolved since the week in the constituency, but perhaps we could tone it down a bit before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Regional Municipal Planning and Development

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sturgeon county is expecting sudden industrial growth within the county partly because of an onset of upgraders and refineries, and recent reports indicate that the county itself will require some \$600 million of infrastructure just to support that growth. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: is it expected that the entire capital region now come up with that \$600 million to service that growth, which must be serviced because, otherwise, it'll detract from investment and diminish quality of life, or will this bill be footed by the province?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say that the emphasis really needs to be on planning. We need to have the municipalities working together in regard to planning. We as municipalities need to communicate and collaborate and co-operate together in what's best for the region. In the municipal sustainability fund, what does take place is that it promotes and provides municipalities with the initiative to work together towards a common goal so we don't have the duplication, so we don't have planning going into silos or individual stovepipes. So I want to say that as far as the support for the funding that is necessary, we need to look at it on a regional basis.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, I'm glad to hear that the minister is a supporter of planning. In that case, can we expect some mechanism

to be in place to support the growth and the management of growth in the region?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, I will say that the growth pressures of Alberta are a major challenge for all municipalities. That is why this government is and has looked at the 10-year sustainability plan that adds some predictability to municipalities so that they know the support that municipalities will get from this government, and right now, Mr. Speaker, it has been said many times: ramped up to \$1.4 billion per year for 10 years.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In that case, can the minister assure Edmontonians and the entire capital region that a decade from now we will not be feeling some of the growing pains that are now felt in Wood Buffalo?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, the key, as was mentioned before, is to have planning so that municipalities can work together and look towards the future to see how they can plan together for the growth pressures and the growth that's going to take place, not only in one municipality but all municipalities on how they can work together to address those growth pressures.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Major Community Facilities Program

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is more concerned about photo ops than being accountable with taxpayers' money. Although this government hasn't even figured out how to run its current grant programs, that hasn't stopped it from launching another one, the major community facilities program. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: given that the guidelines for this new program are not yet complete, will this minister inform this House if top Tories will have easier access to the money than hard-working Albertans?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, like all of our other programs that are on the Internet and people are aware as to where the money goes, this new program will be the same. We will try to be as equitable as possible to all regions. Certainly, there are dollars that have been identified for the various cities. There are dollars that have been identified for rural Alberta. We're going to try to spread those dollars around right across the province to meet the growing pressures that have been identified across the province.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: why did this government in an election year give its grant department a 66 per cent increase in funding and its Environment department only a 6 per cent increase in funding? Why?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite would be the first ones to ask us to respond to increasing pressures. Initially they were asking to spend additional monies in health. They're asking for additional money in education. Now, you know, certainly, they're concerned about the additional monies that we are putting to meet the recreational facilities, the sports facilities, the arts facilities that are desperately needed in the province of Alberta. We're

responding to those increased pressures to meet those particular needs.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: why is this minister taking so long to table the names of the 43 grant recipients that broke CIP rules? If they have the proof, if they have the information, why don't you table right now?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased that the member opposite is environmentally concerned. He's recycling some of the questions that we had a few weeks ago. I indicated that we've got many thousands of applications to go through to be able to pull out those 40 applications that he's alluding to. We are reviewing those, and we are making sure that no mistakes have been made. As I indicated in the past, we don't believe that any mistakes have been made, but we are looking at them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we did 78 questions and answers today, a little short. I attribute that to the excessive enthusiasm that we showed today.

head: 2:20

Members' Statements

(continued)

Organ and Tissue Donation

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, as we heard earlier in question period through our hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, we are paying special tribute this week to national organ donor and tissue donation. I'd like to take this opportunity to further address this very important issue as it touches many of us, our families, our friends, and our loved ones here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we do have some of the best transplant technology in the world. We have some of the most highly skilled surgeons and some of the most prestigious transplant hospitals, yet there are never enough organs. Did you know that approximately 15 out of every million Canadians are organ donors, putting us as a country in the bottom half of all the countries in the western world where transplants are performed?

Giving the gift of life is a phrase often heard when speaking about organ donation, but the full consequences of what that really means may not be heard. Organ donation is a sensitive subject for family members to discuss, Mr. Speaker. We are reluctant to acknowledge that sudden, tragic deaths occur and could possibly touch our families. If a sudden tragedy does happen, grief can be overwhelming, and the opportunity to discuss organ donation has passed.

Many donor families have shared that the act of donation helps to ease their grief. Nothing can replace the loss of a loved one, Mr. Speaker, but donation often allows family members to feel that something positive has resulted from their tragedy. Organ donation is the ultimate example of sharing one's gifts that will make the difference between life and death for someone else.

So on behalf of my colleagues I urge all Albertans to discuss organ and tissue donation with their families. But more importantly, as our hon. minister said, please sign the organ donation declaration on the back of your Alberta health care card. Don't leave your families to make that hard decision for you in a time of tragedy. Plan ahead, as your gift can save a life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Provincial Education System

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the first day of

Education Week, a time for all of us to reflect on the importance of education in our lives and how we as public servants can improve the quality of education in our province. We are very fortunate in Alberta to enjoy the talents of some of the most talented and committed teachers, administrators, and support staff in the entire world along with students of remarkable gifts and potential. Put Alberta kids into a learning environment, and you guarantee that Alberta's future prosperity and social growth will lead the world for years to come.

However, the education system in Alberta remains far from ideal. Teachers and the public face millions of dollars in debt thanks to the unfunded pension liability. Parents are paying out of pocket for more and more items that were once considered essential, threatening the education prospects of children of poor and middle-class families.

My private member's bill, the School (Restrictions on Fees and Fund-raising) Amendment Act, 2007, will alleviate some of this pressure on Alberta families. Children in Calgary are forced to wait for hours on end because there aren't enough school buses. Schools are literally falling apart because they've been forced to wait for years for maintenance. How can we expect students to learn when they're facing these very difficult obstacles?

Mr. Speaker, we could and should do much more for education in this province. We should start a publicly funded school enrichment program. We should institute a junior kindergarten program to help children learn during those very critical years. But most importantly we should treat education not as an expense to be tolerated but an investment to be celebrated.

The world we live in faces huge challenges. Challenges can only be met by the most creative and well-educated minds. Mr. Speaker, we need to invest in education today. We need to invest wisely, with a long-term vision for the future of education in this province, with stable, sustainable funding and a commitment to the principles of public education. A quality education for all now and forever: that would sure be a legacy to build for tomorrow's Alberta. It's an ambition we should measure when Education Week returns this year and every year thereafter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Provincial Budget

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget betrayal. The Premier and his new/old cabinet appointees' honeymoon ended on budget day, Thursday, April 19, 2007. On that day any hopes that Albertans had that the new government would be demonstrably more transparent, more accountable, or more responsive to the needs of Albertans were dashed. With the exception of Edmonton Mayor Mandel, the budget was roundly condemned by many former Conservative supporters for its lack of vision, for its lack of a savings plan, for its patriarchal, red-taped, strings-attached micromanagement of municipal affairs. This was a short-sighted Conservative grasshopper budget of play now, pay later rather than a provincial Liberal ant budget of planning and setting aside for future needs. It appears that the only plan this government has is to worship the market by buying a ticket on its roller-coaster ride of boom and bust.

The greatest disappointment of all for the increasing number of Albertans living a hand-to-mouth existence one paycheque away from the street was the Premier and his municipal affairs minister's rejection of the Affordable Housing Task Force's recommendations of the need to place at least a temporary inflationary cap on rents and consider slowing down the pace of condo conversions. By refusing

to implement any of the main recommendations other than meaningless tinkering which limited unscrupulous landlords to only gouging at whatever rate they wish annually as opposed to every six months, this government proved what many Albertans already knew, that besides having no plan, it is devoid of a social conscience.

Albertans want a government that is inclusive, that listens, that acts on its findings for the benefit of the many, not the profits of the few. Unfortunately, Albertans will have to wait until the next election to select a government with a conscience and a vision.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give notice of a Standing Order 42. It states:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly refer Housing First, the report of the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, and the government's response to that report to the Growth Pressures policy field committee constituted under temporary Standing Order 52.01(1)(c), with specific directions to consider and report back on the advisability of introducing temporary rent stability guidelines.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Bill 33

Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 33, the Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will allow the village of Ferintosh a safe, secure, and long-term water supply by building a regional waterline that would transfer water from the town of Bashaw.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a first time]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 33 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to table five copies of a publication titled Students First. This is filled with positive stories about our kindergarten to grade 12 education system. This publication is being distributed across the province and is a small sampling of the collaboration that exists between our education system and has a positive impact on our K to 12 students.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter signed by 224 Albertans.

The letter warns of a looming housing crisis, notes the rapid increase in rental costs, and calls for rent guidelines and rent stability.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is the entire uncensored document I referred to in question period today. It is titled Fiscal Terms Report for Alberta Energy, prepared by Wood Mackenzie, May 2, 2006. In here you can see for yourself the Texas/Alberta government take, and this was excluded under section 24 from the document that was tabled by the hon. Minister of Energy on April 16. Also, there is a chart in here on the last page of this report which was excluded under section 24 from the report that was tabled in the Assembly. Again, it's a government take, and it clearly shows that Alberta is getting a lot less in royalties than those states down south.

The second tabling I have today is an internal memorandum to the Auditor General, and it's in regard to the Public Accounts Committee authority to call witnesses. It's most interesting to read.

Thank you.

2:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I attended the 2007 Alberta film and TV award night. I'm pleased to table five copies of the program and names of those nominated for the awards. I'm sure we all can be very proud of our Alberta film and TV industry.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of notes from a Canadian Natural Resources Limited meeting from February 2006. The meeting notes include detailed safety requirements for the Horizon oil sands project.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Education, the responses to written questions 31 and 32, asked for by Mr. Chase on behalf of Mr. Flaherty on August 28, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Morton, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, return to orders of the Assembly MR 27, 28, and 29, asked for by Mr. Chase on behalf of Mr. Bonko on August 28, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Melchin, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, response to Written Question 2, asked for by Mr. Bonko on behalf of Ms Pastoor on April 16, 2007.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, the College of Chiropractors of Alberta radiation health administrative organization annual report for year ended June 30, 2006, and the attached financial statements, College of Chiropractors of Alberta, dated June 30, 2006; Alberta Veterinary Medical Association radiation protection program 2005 annual report with the attached auditor's report on the radiation protection program dated November 11, 2005; the Alberta Dental Association and College 2005 radiation health and safety program annual report, January 1, 2005, to December 31, 2005, with attached financial

statements of the Alberta Dental Association and College radiation administration program dated December 31, 2005; the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta radiation health administrative organization annual report for the period of April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006; the University of Alberta authorized radiation health administrative organization annual report, 2005-2006; the University of Calgary authorized radiation health administration organization annual report for the period April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006, with attached financial statements for the years ended March 31, 2006, and 2005; pursuant to the Alberta Economic Development Authority Act the Alberta Economic Development Authority 2005-2006 activity report; pursuant to the Northern Alberta Development Council Act the Northern Alberta Development Council annual report 2005-2006; pursuant to the Regulated Accounting Profession Act the Certified General Accountants Association of Alberta 2006 annual report; pursuant to the Veterinary Profession Act the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association annual report, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Oberg, Minister of Finance, responses to written questions 1 and 4, asked for by Mr. Miller on April 16, 2007.

Motions Under Standing Order 42

The Deputy Speaker: We have before us a motion under Standing Order 42 which we'll deal with now. I'll ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to make his arguments on the issue of urgency at this time.

Referral of Affordable Housing Task Force Report

Mr. Martin:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly refer Housing First, the report of the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, and the government's response to that report to the Managing Growth Pressures policy field committee constituted under temporary Standing Order 52.01(1)(c), with specific directions to consider and report back on the advisability of introducing temporary rent stability guidelines.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All members have a copy of this notice, so I won't repeat it. Basically, what the NDP is proposing is that the Assembly refer the report of the housing task force and the government's response to the policy field committee on managing growth pressures.

Mr. Speaker, I would note that the new Standing Order 52.07(1) states that "a Policy Field Committee shall inquire into, consider and report on any matter referred to it by the Assembly." Clearly, this motion is in keeping with the spirit of the House leaders' agreement and the Premier's desire to create all-party committees which will allow vibrant, open debate on important issues of the day.

This is urgent in two senses. The most obvious, of course, is the urgency for renters and for people seeking rental accommodations. Last week it was reported that people received several-hundred-dollar increases to their rent within hours of the housing task force report being made public. It is by sheer luck that the landlord had already imposed a much smaller increase recently, so the larger one has been delayed. However, many other renters will not be in this good position. We have had a flood of phone calls, letters, e-mails from angry and upset constituents. People are being put under significant and unnecessary stress because of the possibility of unreasonable and unaffordable rent increases. This continues to hang over their heads, Mr. Speaker.

However, the House rules require another kind of urgency; namely, that there will be no other opportunity to debate this motion. I would note that the changes being proposed by the government will

be done through regulation, which means that the discussion will once again be behind closed doors, away from *Hansard*, away from opportunities for the public to watch and even participate in the debate. There is no other opportunity to discuss the content of the report. The Committee of Supply does not seem appropriate as this is an issue of regulation and not just expenditure. Also, the new system for Committee of Supply is moving away from all-party participation.

Which brings us back, Mr. Speaker, to the policy field committees. I know that all the caucuses and even the table officers are still trying to get their heads around how these committees will work. I also note that there has not been any indication from the chairs of when these committees will begin to meet. Therefore, a motion under Standing Order 42 seems to be the only way that a private member can at this time get a highly important and urgent issue before one of the committees. There is no other provision for this to happen.

I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that this is not only a matter of some urgency but also a test of how these committees will work. The government itself has created high expectations for how important policy decisions will be made in this province. When the Standing Orders that created the policy field committees were debated, the Government House Leader went on at great length to explain how these committees would be different from the all-Conservative standing policy committees. To quote briefly from *Hansard* at page 611, the Government House Leader was speaking about a problem with the old standing policy committee structure, which was that

it did not allow the public to see that kind of input, so a government member could have input at a caucus, input at a standing policy committee, if a member of Agenda and Priorities or the Treasury Board could have input there, but none of that was public policy being made in public.

Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the test. When this Assembly created the policy field committees, was it serious about taking important issues there for debate, or did the government members imagine that the committees would be only used for easy apple pie and motherhood issues?

To conclude, then, Mr. Speaker, I hope that we can have unanimous consent to consider this motion. There's no other opportunity for us to thoroughly debate the need for substantial revisions to the government's response to the housing report, and there's no better opportunity for us to test this government's claims to integrity and openness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: 2:40

Orders of the Day

head:

Written Questions

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that written questions on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head:

Motions for Returns

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that motions for returns stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall call the committee to order.

**Bill 203
Service Dogs Act**

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

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and start the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. I'm appreciative of the support the bill has received so far in the discussion in second reading and support, I might add, from both sides of this Assembly.

I would mention a couple of things before we get into the Committee of the Whole, and these are comments that were made during second reading debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre raised concerns about the clear tests for certifying the service dogs. I'd like to point out that there are very good standards that are set out by the Assistance Dogs International group, and the Western Guide and Assistance Dog Society is currently being accredited to train service dogs. This accreditation is a five-year process where trainers must meet standards related to dog handling, dog selection, and compliance with relevant laws. Since the ADI is an internationally recognized service dog training organization, the regulations that come out of this act will reflect those ADI standards.

Now, the member was also concerned about access to employment, accommodation, and also government services and programs. There's a specific clause dealing with occupancy which parallels the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, and section 3 protects individuals from discrimination in the workplace and from service providers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview also raised some concern about the potential of individuals not having ID but actually using a service dog. Certainly, there is going to be a need to consider grandfathering of service dogs that are currently in use but don't have the specific training or the certification. So that will have to be considered and paid attention to as was done with the Blind Persons' Rights Act. Generally speaking, to preserve the integrity of this legislation and the intent of it, individuals will have to have their ID with them at all times. If they lose their ID, there'll be a temporary ID issued; not unlike if one of us loses our driver's licence, we have to end up getting a temporary driver's licence. So a temporary identification card would be issued in those cases.

Now, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner also raised concerns with respect to allergies, and with respect to guide dogs this has not been a major issue. Accommodations are being made all the time for different situations like this where there may be sensitivity to animals. There could be some additional problems if there was an amendment that did allow public institutions or employers or businesses the right to not serve persons with service dogs or guide dogs with the intent that they say that there are allergies and concerns in that regard.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East brought up the point about the need for public information and public education to promote the role of service dogs should this bill be passed by this Assembly. That's been discussed.

It's certainly something that's very important both with respect to guide dogs that are currently used and in the future if service dogs are also permitted through the passing of this act in the Assembly. So the ministry, the department, is going to have to take on the role of advising the public more and letting people know about the use of service dogs as well as reminding them about the appropriateness of guide dogs.

So, Mr. Chairman, at this point there are two amendments that I would like to move with respect to Bill 203.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we need to have the amendments at the desk and also circulated to other members. Make sure that the original is brought to the desk. Hon. members, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Strathcona, you may proceed.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now, these amendments deal with section 1 of the bill. Section 1(a) would be amended by removing the word "physical" in the definition of a disabled person. Section 1(c) will be amended by removing all the words after "regulations." With the amendment section 1(c) would read: "service dog" means a dog trained as a guide for a disabled person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations."

The first amendment reflects concerns heard in the Assembly here and also when talking with persons with disabilities. Generally speaking, the amendment clarifies who can have a service dog. We want to be sure to include all persons who have cognitive disabilities or other functional disabilities as well as people who have physical disabilities, and this will clarify that intent. Many individuals ask about the use of service dogs by persons with autism. Some time ago in talking with one individual whose son has autism and uses a service dog, he described the use and the benefit of the service dog to him. So this would help to clarify and not exclude somebody like this young fellow. He was six or seven years old, and the family appreciated the use of the service dog to protect and keep safe this young boy. This will clarify that somebody like this six- or seven-year-old would be able to have a service dog. So we would not have any restrictions that way.

The amendment also addresses concerns raised by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, who commented that 1(a) seemed to be a narrow definition. To those who may be concerned that the definition will be too broad, it's now important to note that the ability to have a service dog is contingent upon the dog being certified through an accredited process, a complicated and difficult and expensive process to go through to get the dog certified. The process of training, of course, is very lengthy, very costly, and it's going to limit the number of individuals who would pursue that route.

2:50

The second amendment strengthens the definition of "service dog." It deletes all the words after "regulations." It allows Bill 203 to be consistent with the approach in the Blind Persons Rights' Act. It simplifies the language of the act and ensures that the certificate process will be described in the regulations, and it broadens the range of people with disabilities who have access to the services and narrows the qualification criteria for the dog.

I believe that the amendment improves the intent of the legislation by giving greater clarity to the definitions of "disabled person" and "service dog" within Bill 203, and I ask for your support on these amendments.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A little bit of clarification, if you wouldn't mind. Do we not have to address each of the amendments separately and vote on them as such, or can they be dealt with in package format?

The Deputy Chair: No. As far as the chair is concerned, this is an amendment that is being dealt with as amendment A1, unless it's the desire of the Assembly to split it into two.

Mr. Chase: No, there wasn't a desire. It was strictly for clarification. In that case I'll speak to both amendments.

I very much appreciate the hon. mover of this bill strengthening what was a good bill to begin with by getting rid of any clarification concerns. Sometimes the term "disabled" has a negative connotation to it, but the reality is that the person is not able to carry on as a fully able-bodied individual would be able to do. Recognizing that, people who have disabilities that are not just of a physical nature but more of a mental nature – and I would suggest that autism fits into that category – are covered by increasing the definition. In other words, by adding this amendment, it becomes a more inclusive bill, and that's exactly what we're trying to do: include people with disabilities into our regular society with as few difficulties as possible.

When I spoke earlier of my enthusiasm and support for the bill, I also referred to a young gentleman who I believe was initially prevented from taking his service dog with him to school. If my memory serves me, this young individual was suffering from a degree of autism as well. By clarifying and further defining the notion that disability was not just limited to physical, this is a very forceful and inclusive amendment.

With regard to amendment 2, the definition of a service dog, it removes the statement reading: "or for which an identification card or other certificate has been issued under section 4." Again, when praising the bill formerly, I spoke of the confusion that a disabled student at the University of Calgary went through because of the classification of her service dog, which was basically for carrying the books based on the injuries that she had received.

Now, my belief in the second amendment is that it's broadening the qualifications of a service dog such that specific limitations are no longer applied, that dogs and their various talents are recognized, and the qualifications that are required are more of a general nature. This is the impression I got when formerly speaking to the mover of the amendment, and if that is the case, broadening the qualifications of a dog so that individuals in need are supported, then I very much support the amendment and again congratulate the hon. mover of the bill for his insightful amendments.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll be brief. I would just like to echo the comments of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity and the hon. Member for Strathcona, particularly in reference to part (a) of amendment A1 where we're taking out the word "physical." I don't think members of this Assembly need to be reminded that not all disabilities are necessarily easily observed by the human eye, whether we're talking autism or we're talking – a great example, actually. I had an impromptu visit from a young lady with a service dog in my constituency office on Friday. This lady is hearing impaired, and the dog has been trained to help her in situations. For instance, it will wake her up when the alarm clock rings in the morning. Or if the doorbell rings, he'll respond in a certain way. If the telephone rings, or if somebody else in the

household calls her by name, the dog is trained to respond in a number of different ways to inform her as to what is taking place audibly, things that she's not able to hear herself. To meet her on the street and, quite frankly, even to talk to her, Mr. Chairman – she does wear a hearing aid as well – you would not necessarily clue in to the fact that she was suffering any sort of a disability at all. Taking the word "physical" out of here I think does make this bill that much more inclusive, and that has my full support.

I just wanted to add those comments as well. Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you. Very quickly, Mr. Speaker, this is a good bill, and the amendments certainly make it better. I appreciate the fact that it would be grandfathered in because this takes time. A lot of people would not know how to go about getting identification. We know how bureaucracies sometimes work. I guess the question that I would have – I think the member alluded to if it was lost, that it hopefully could quickly be retrieved. But what does "quickly" mean in this day and age? That could be a real handicap if a person did lose it, and it takes a couple of weeks or three weeks. Pretty well, that would be it for him.

I would hope that this means that the fact that they don't necessarily have identification does not abrogate their rights under this act if it goes through. Because if there was the case where a person didn't have it, through loss or whatever, I doubt that they could get it the next day. Knowing how bureaucracies work, it could be a fair length of time if you lost it. So I would take it that it would be the case that while they're getting identification, they would still have the rights under this act. If the member would mention if that's the case. If not, do we need to do some work in that area?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Once again I'd like to thank the Member for Strathcona for bringing this forward. I really do appreciate the amendments. I think that the intention was to prohibit discriminatory practices towards individuals with disabilities or trainers who are accompanied by a service dog. There was the identification process for service dogs involved in the original act. I see that these amendments will do more for the original intention to bring greater autonomy to individuals with disabilities of any kind and facilitate their social integration by prohibiting discriminatory behaviour against anyone using or training a service dog. So I believe that this bill provides for dogs who work with humans to be able to do their job more effectively without hindrance and helps to eliminate discrimination towards people who are depending on those dogs. Our passing it puts us on a road to a more human society and one that we can be proud of. I'm happy to support it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

3:00

Mr. Lougheed: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments by the members who spoke just now to the amendment. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity brought up the student in Calgary. It's interesting that about the time we were developing this bill, that issue came forward and really helped to clarify that they can find their rights under the multiculturalism act, and they can find their rights in different ways. But this will help to clarify it and put

forward clearly that this young man wouldn't have had to spend I think it was two weeks at home before he got into school.

There were a couple of other comments. One that I would comment on as well is with respect to the ID card. I appreciate that that would be a huge problem if they didn't have the ID card and something had happened. Currently, I believe the bureaucracy is very quick to react to those circumstances. I've heard of no complaints under the Blind Persons' Rights Act about guide dogs' identification not being replaced quickly. So it's something that's a concern. I must say that there aren't a huge number of these dogs around, and the person that is in charge of the program has been able to react quickly to concerns of that nature. I believe that they would continue to be taken care of in a very quick manner.

So with that comment, I would ask that all members support this amendment and ask for the question on the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else on the bill itself? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the clarifications and responses that the hon. mover of the bill brought to each of us who expressed not necessarily reservations but were looking for confirmation. I appreciated the acknowledgement that there will be a great need for education in order for this bill to truly have its effect. My hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View frequently speaks of the need for light and heat in order for things to change, to evolve. For this Bill 203 to evolve and come into effectual practice, what is needed is light in the form of education and heat in the form of enforcement.

For the stigma associated with a disability and the stigma associated with dogs, for which many people have a natural fear, a tremendous amount of education is going to have to be provided so that the dog, like the individual who is in need, is accepted by the larger general public.

The second part of the analogy, the light and the heat analogy, is the heat. Those individuals who through ignorance of the law or lack of an inclusive nature for whatever reason have a prejudice will have to be dealt with in a firm but fair manner. We can no longer have restrictions placed on individuals entering public places or going on public transit or for that matter taking a taxi as has been the case previously, which is, I'm sure, one of the motivations for the hon. member to bring forward this great piece of legislation.

So, as I say, in order for this to be acceptable, we need to apply the light, the education, and we need to apply the heat – and that's the enforcement – to make sure that the intention of this bill is carried out in the realm of reality of public life.

Again, thank you very much to the mover of the bill.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise to join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. During second reading of this bill the Member for Strathcona received a tremendous and unprecedented amount of support from all parties. It was recognized that this sort of legislation is very much needed as it would benefit individuals with disabilities.

Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, thanks to the debate and the sharing of ideas, two amendments to definitions in Bill 203 have been introduced. These are, of course, sections 1(a) and 1(c). These amendments to definitions strengthen the Service Dogs Act by adding clarity to the proposed legislation.

During the second reading debate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre expressed concern regarding the definition of disabled persons under Bill 203. The member thought the definition was narrow. The Service Dogs Act covers individuals defined in the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act as having any degree of disability except blindness or visual impairment and who are dependent upon a service dog. Also, the amendment to the definition of disabled persons in section 1(a) further increases the spectrum of individuals who can gain from this legislation because it now clarifies that this bill is intended to include people who have cognitive disabilities and other functional disabilities as well as those who have physical disabilities.

Mr. Chairman, section 3 of the act clearly states that discriminatory practices against individuals who use service dogs are absolutely prohibited. The clarity of the legislation will help eliminate any ambiguity the public faced regarding the rights of those with service dogs.

The amendment to section 1(c) will also help Albertans understand that identification cards may only be issued to persons with qualified service dogs.

Section 3(1) states that it is prohibited to deny any person or to discriminate against any person with respect to the accommodation, services, or facilities available in any place to which the public is customarily admitted "for the reason that the person is a disabled person accompanied by a service dog." With this bill there will no longer be any sort of confusion about not allowing someone with a service dog to enter a restaurant, to rent a hotel room, to go to the dentist, to take a flight or bus, or to go to an athletic facility, for example.

Mr. Chairman, section 3(2) states that it would be absolutely restricted to deny any person or to discriminate against any person with respect to any term or condition of occupancy of any self-contained dwelling unit for the reason that the person is a disabled person accompanied by a service dog. Individuals requiring service dogs would clearly be able to rent any apartment or buy a condo which bans dogs.

With regard to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, as was previously discussed during the bill's second reading, discrimination against individuals with service dogs was prohibited, but the lack of clarity impeded the justice system. Bill 203 provides efficient mechanisms to protect individuals against discrimination committed based on their service dog. If individuals with a disability feel that they have been discriminated against because of their service dogs, they could confidently seek redress through the Service Dogs Act. A clear resolution will be made in a more expedient manner. The decision on the complaint will be made with clear guidelines and standards, and, Mr. Chairman, I believe that is a wonderful thing. As an alternate avenue individuals with grievances could also bring their complaint to the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism commission.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased with the two amendments of definitions which have been brought forth. They solidify Bill 203 because the Service Dogs Act will allow people with disabilities the right to be accompanied by an accredited service dog everywhere the general public is admitted free from discrimination. I support Bill 203, and I urge all hon. members to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by West Yellowhead.

3:10

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. Bill 203 is a step forward in the protection of persons with disabilities in Alberta, and I'm very glad to see the support that this bill appears to have from members from all sides of the Assembly.

I was also very pleased to see the amendments that the hon. Member for Strathcona has brought forward that have already been passed here today. I was already very supportive of Bill 203, but those amendments certainly improve the act, and it's very clear that any ambiguities related to persons with disabilities and identification cards have been removed. The amendments reflect the principle of allowing persons with disabilities unfettered access to public services in a manner that is free of discrimination. This is also embodied within section 3 of the act.

Public transportation is critical for many people to get to work, to go shopping, to go to stores, medical appointments, and social events. Public transportation is oftentimes more important to persons with a disability because that is often the only form of transportation they have access to. Amending section 1(a) will have the effect of broadening the number of persons with disabilities that can access public transportation with their service dogs free of discrimination.

People with disabilities in Alberta can already access many forms of transportation. Seventy-nine per cent of Albertans live in municipalities where specialized transportation is available. Fifty thousand Albertans are registered for specialized transportation. For the most part, Albertans with disabilities have the necessary services available for transportation at present, but without the protection under Bill 203 individuals with service dogs could be refused service on a transit bus, for example.

Now, I understand that both Calgary and Edmonton allow service dogs by policy, but having it in legislation I think takes away all of the issues where you might have a municipality, for example, that would not have that policy. In the case of Edmonton and Calgary service dogs are allowed as a matter of operating policy, but it would be much better to have legal protection provided by provincial laws, and that's what this bill does.

Persons with disabilities also use taxi services, and there is no guarantee that taxi companies currently would permit service dogs in their cabs. Unlike bus drivers taxi drivers refuse service dogs in their cabs because of the ID provisions for the guide dogs in the Blind Persons' Rights Act.

The impact of section 3 and the fines associated with the discrimination of users of service dogs will act as a deterrent for transportation providers who do not wish to give rides to persons with disabilities. This is a positive action as persons with disabilities have felt helpless in dealing with their situations. Fines for offences as proposed under Bill 203 will be a deterrent to the discrimination of persons with disabilities. As a result, Bill 203 will protect persons with disabilities. So with this positive piece of legislation I believe that section 3 will help persons with disabilities access transportation services free from discrimination.

I would certainly urge all members to vote in favour of the bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for West-Yellowhead, followed by Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's great to speak in committee on the Service Dogs Act as amended, extending service dogs protections similar to those that the Blind Persons' Rights Act extends to guide dogs. These are important protections for people with disabilities. While this act offers this protection to the person with the disability, it also protects the interests of the general public. Section 1(c) as amended makes it clear that the service dog is a dog that has been specifically trained as a guide for a disabled person and has the qualifications established by regulations by the responsible minister. The minister will not be starting from scratch in developing these regulations.

One organization that has already developed standards for training and conduct of service dogs is Assistance Dogs International. Part of ADI's mission is to "establish and promote standards of excellence in all areas of Assistance Dog acquisition, training and partnership." Members of ADI meet regularly to share ideas, attend seminars, and conduct business, regarding such things as educating the public about service dogs, legal rights of people with disabilities partnered with service dogs, setting standards and established guidelines, the ethics of training of these dogs, and improving the utilization and bonding of each team.

The standards set by ADI are basic guidelines that members must follow, which they are encouraged to excel in. The training standards are high. Many dogs fail training because they do not have the temperament to be good service dogs. These include stipulations that the service dog responds to basic obedience and skill tasks commanded 90 per cent of the time at the first ask in both public and home environments.

Every once in a while there is a news story about a dog attacking a person. The public need not worry about aggressive service dogs. One ethical standard that members of ADI must adhere to is the public right to expect an assistance dog to be under control at all times and that these dogs exhibit no inherent behaviour in public. Section 3(4) of the bill holds that standard, withholding protection for service dog teams if the dog is not well behaved. Service dogs are taught to remain in their handler's control at all times. Service dogs fail the training process if they bite, snap, growl, or are otherwise aggressive or if they bark inappropriately. The regulations of the service dog qualifications in section 1(c) of the act ensure that Albertans with disabilities will benefit from service dog training to the highest standard and assure all Albertans that they should feel comfortable about service dog behaviours.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to contribute to the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. Through a very positive second reading debate two amendments to the definitions within the legislation have been brought forth to strengthen the bill. The debate was characterized by two common themes among many: members sharing stories of their constituents and friends who stand to benefit from Bill 203 and also members of this Assembly agreeing that the Service Dogs Act should be supported because of the positive impact it will have on people's lives.

One of the main reasons that this act has been so successful in the House is that it seeks to enhance the quality of life of Albertans. When a member presents an opportunity to help other Albertans, we are eager to further that cause by lending support to the member. The first proposed amendment to the definition of disabled person

will further enhance the quality of life for more Albertans, and omitting the word "physical" in section 1(a) will clarify that this bill is intended to include people who have cognitive disabilities and other functional disabilities and physical disabilities.

One of many ways Bill 203 will enhance quality of life for more Albertans with a disability is by breaking down as many barriers to these individuals as possible. Mr. Chairman, unfortunately, one of these barriers is not so much based on disability but, rather, the public's miseducation about service dogs. Section 3 of the Service Dogs Act will ensure that the rights of Albertans with disabilities who require the assistance of service dogs will be protected. In the objective of increased participation the service dogs play an amazing part in many Albertans' lives. They allow individuals who have limited access to the physical world to be better able to fully participate in the life of the province.

3:20

These animals help individuals with reduced mobility to get to places which would have been tremendously difficult for them without assistance. Not only do these people have better access to various locations with service dogs, but specially trained dogs help individuals with disabilities to be more independent. As has been stated before, these types of dogs help individuals with disabilities to get on a bus, to go grocery shopping, to cross a street, and many, many more occasions and activities. So these dogs will reassure Albertans with disabilities about going out and enjoying the province's social life because they know the dogs will be able to assist them when needed.

The area of removing the barriers. I must say that while service dogs help Albertans with disabilities gain access to locations and events which other Albertans attend, they are still faced with barriers once they get there. Many Albertans don't know about service dogs. They don't realize how much these trained canines help individuals in need of assistance. Furthermore, they don't know about the rights attached to the service dogs. So by educating Albertans about service dogs, those who use them will be freer to go about their daily life without interruption. They will have more confidence. This public awareness will remove barriers which confront persons with disabilities.

So, Mr. Chairman, the amendment to the definition of service dogs proposed in section 1(c) strengthens possible public perception about service dogs. The second amendment ensures that identification cards may only be issued to persons with service dogs having the required qualifications, so this helps Albertans to know that they are safe around service dogs. This goes well with Alberta government priorities. This government is committed to improving quality of life for all Albertans, and there is no doubt that the Service Dogs Act will accomplish this goal for a segment of our society. Both amendments of definitions will further enhance all Albertans' quality of life by including more Albertans with disabilities within the scope of the legislation and giving Albertans the assurance that service dogs are highly trained canines, because the Service Dogs Act will help ameliorate the quality of life for those with disabilities.

I wholeheartedly support it by giving support to Bill 203 and urge all members of the Assembly to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The purpose of Bill 203 is to create a new act to ensure that persons with disabilities have the legal right to be accompanied by an accredited service dog in all areas open to the general public free of discrimination. The new

Service Dogs Act will complement Alberta's Blind Persons' Rights Act, which in part legally protects the rights of blind persons with guide dogs. Bill 203 will legally recognize other service dogs and extend to persons with disabilities the same protection afforded under the Blind Persons' Rights Act.

It clarifies the definition of service dog. It's a dog that is considered to be used by a person with a disability to avoid hazards or to otherwise compensate for a disability. This includes but is not limited to hearing dogs to assist the deaf or hard of hearing, mobility assistance dogs, and seizure response dogs.

If the Service Dogs Act is passed, this means that all persons with disabilities who require the use of dogs will be protected by the Service Dogs Act and the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. As such, the rights of persons with disabilities will be bolstered as the Service Dogs Act lays out the necessary recourse for individuals with a service dog in the event that they do face discrimination.

The Alberta Liberals oppose discriminatory practices toward any group and fully support increasing accessibility to Albertans with disabilities. We do require strong, effective disability accessibility legislation that would provide a greater level of independence and an enhanced quality of life. I think that today with these amendments we have made a great step in that direction, and I am pleased to support the bill.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today and join the discussion regarding Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. I'm proud that our government is moving forward with this noteworthy piece of legislation as amended. The amendments to sections 1(a) and 1(c) emphasize our continual efforts to assist those who are disabled and stress that our government appreciates the complexities of living with a disability.

An integral part of Bill 203 is that it establishes the consequences for violating the rights that are being given to a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog. Bill 203 outlines a number of fines that could be charged if sections of the act are contravened.

There have been several court decisions that have ruled in favour of people with disabilities. The courts were able to set a precedent based on the legislated rights afforded to a person with a disability. Mr. Chairman, the courts can protect the integrity of the bill, protect society, and protect persons with disabilities.

Bill 203 will provide the legislative foundation to uphold the legal rights of a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog. The amendments to sections 1(a) and (c) clarify that the act applies to persons with any disabilities and establishes the identification criteria of their service dog. This is essential in determining offences and charging fines.

Mr. Chairman, last year I attended a community function with persons with developmental disabilities, their annual banquet. The guest speaker was a lady who is on the Premier's council, who was coming down and nearly missed the event because she had called for a cab and she was waiting out there for half an hour. A lady came out of her apartment building, and they determined that the cab had actually driven up, took a look, saw the dog, and drove away. So they called another cab, and with her there she managed to make it to the event.

I think section 3 of the Service Dogs Act details the rights of a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog. I think this section of the act defines the following and is why I gave that example, Mr. Chairman. No person shall deny or discriminate

against a person with a disability and accompanying service dog who is seeking accommodation, services, or facilities which are available to the public. An individual cannot deny or discriminate against any person with a disability and their accompanying service dog when they're seeking occupancy of any self-contained dwelling unit. A person with a disability has the right to be accompanied by a service dog, and a certified dog trainer has the right to be accompanied by a dog in training. If a person contravenes section 3, they can pay a fine not exceeding \$3,000.

As detailed in section 6(2), a person can pay a fine not exceeding \$300 if they are guilty of contravening the following: how a person is issued an identification card, that the identification card is evidence that the person and the person's service dog are accredited and therefore afforded certain rights, how the person can amend or cancel the identification card, and if they purport to be a disabled person for the benefits provided by the Service Dog Act.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 203 addresses an important issue for the disabled community, and it covers all the logistics to ensure that the rights established for persons with disabilities and their accompanying dogs are respected and enforced. Bill 203 provides clear, consistent, comprehensive, and enforceable guidelines. This act establishes specific penalties, which will ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities and their accompanying service dogs will be protected.

I applaud the objectives of Bill 203 and am pleased to support the amended act. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

3:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by Red Deer-South.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will attempt to be brief. There's been an awful lot of discussion by most of the members who've spoken this afternoon about education, and I certainly agree that education is desperately required in this regard and not only for service providers in terms of dealing with service dogs, whether it be, you know, a restaurant owner or a taxi driver or a bus driver or whatever but certainly for members of the general public as well in terms of understanding the need for a service dog and the role that they play.

But there's an aspect to education that hasn't been mentioned yet. Although I'm not sure that it would have been possible to include it in the legislation, I think it's important to be recognized, so I'm going to do that right now. That is the need for everybody, once again whether it be for the service providers or members of the general public, to recognize that these service dogs are not pets but, rather, that they're working partners of the person with the disability.

There's always a temptation, I think, for many of us to approach a dog, a friendly looking dog, and say hello, give it a pet, give it some welcoming, and that is something that we should not be doing when these dogs are working. They're trained to be on the job. They're trained to be responsive to their handler, whether it be a trainer or the person with the disability, and interference like that – and I'm sure it always is very well intentioned – can throw the service dog off its intended duties.

I would just encourage all members of the public but particularly members of this Legislature, since we're responsible for passing this piece of legislation – and I'm assuming that it will pass – to do our very best in terms of helping to educate everybody, whether it be the service providers or members of the general public, that when these dogs are working, they should be left to do their job. When they're no longer working – and the handler will always inform you of the fact that they're now no longer working – my experience has been

that they're very receptive to being approached by people such as ourselves and having interaction with members of the public. But when they're working, they're on the job, and it is not wise and certainly not intended to be a part of their job to be approached and interact with members of the public. So I would just ask that all members of the House bear that in mind when we're discussing this piece of legislation with constituents, and certainly if you find yourself in a situation where a service dog is present, bear that in mind as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise in Committee of the Whole to support Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, which has been put forth by the hon. Member for Strathcona. It brings me a tremendous sense of accomplishment to see this Assembly seek to fortify the rights of individuals with disabilities.

I want to just make a couple of positive comments about the sponsor of this bill, the hon. Member for Strathcona, for bringing this forward because he acts in a very responsible and proactive manner not only on issues that he believes are very important but also because he is chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and he is to be commended for continuing to promote those issues.

I also want to pay special tribute to a constituent, Marlin Styner, who represented the 332,000-strong group of individuals during the leadership campaign, bringing many of these issues to a highlight on a daily basis and certainly at all of the forums we had to make sure that leadership candidates and all Albertans – it wasn't just for the leadership – recognized the issues that they face and some of the barriers that they have that we need to address in this Assembly, and this is just one small part of it.

So those two individuals, Mr. Chairman, I commend highly and have the utmost respect and regard for.

As per the amendment to section 1(a) I am pleased to see that individuals with a disability of any kind could potentially benefit from the use of an approved and certified service dog. In the bill the definition of a disabled person now means an individual who has any disability. The bill would prohibit discriminatory practices against an individual with any degree of disability requiring a service dog.

Section 3(1)(b) would prohibit discrimination "against any person with respect to the accommodation, services or facilities available in any place to which the public is customarily admitted." Mr. Chairman, this is a progressive measure in ensuring that Albertans with disabilities will have the access to opportunities necessary to excel in their communities. A highly specialized service dog is immensely valuable in aiding persons with disabilities in everything from successfully completing daily tasks to being productive members in our diverse society. We are promoting understanding in situations where the role of a service dog is not fully understood. We proudly champion this opportunity and must continue to look forward to opportunities like this to empower individuals with disabilities.

With the Service Dogs Act we are reaffirming our commitment to the fundamental principle that all Albertans can pursue a role in the success of this great province. I feel that this piece of legislation is proactive in the empowerment of persons with disabilities rather than a measure that is reacting to instances of discrimination. Those with service dogs have always been protected by law, but this bill will serve Alberta's disability community well and raise awareness of the opportunities that can be promoted with the use of a service dog.

I encourage all Albertans to join with me in supporting our friends with disabilities who currently have or are considering the use of a service dog. Please offer the consideration needed by both the individual and their dog. Whether this is simply interacting with the owner of a service dog on a bus or, if you are an employer, considering hiring somebody with a service dog, please show compassion and understanding.

I'm confident that the certification process and necessary regulatory measures will address any concerns associated with this bill. I'm pleased to see a bill of this nature progress through the Assembly, and by supporting Bill 203 and its amendments, the Service Dogs Act, hon. members are supporting this government in improving the quality of life for a very hard-working and deserving portion of our society regardless of their form of disability.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, hon. Member for Strathcona.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased also to rise to join the discussion of Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. The hon. Member for Strathcona has invested a lot of time in tabling this legislation, and I'm encouraged by the amount of recognition and support that it is receiving.

The amended bill clearly defines in section 1(a) and section 1(c) that persons with physical and mental disabilities will be afforded the right to be accompanied by service dogs with proper identification cards.

The purpose of Bill 203 is to provide persons with disabilities who need service dogs unrestricted access to public facilities and accommodations. The rights afforded in Bill 203 could not be achieved without an adequate mechanism for identifying a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog.

Bill 203 will be effective because the act provides specific guidelines for identification. The amendment to section 1(c) reduces ambiguity and clearly states that identification cards will be issued only to those persons with disabilities who meet the qualifications as prescribed by the regulations.

Bill 203 has three clauses under section 4 addressing identification. Section 4(1) states that the minister or a person designated by the minister in writing can issue to a disabled person and the person's service dog an identification card. Section 4(2) states that the identification card "is proof, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that the disabled person and that person's service dog identified in it are qualified for the purposes of this Act." Section 4(3) states that "any person to whom an identification card is issued under subsection (1) shall, on the request of the Minister or the person designated by the Minister, surrender the person's identification card for amendment or cancellation."

3:40

The identification card is certified proof that the person with a disability and their accompanying service dog are granted legal access to all public accommodations and facilities. The establishment of a credible identification system is crucial to the success of Bill 203, and the amendment to section 1(c) will strengthen this integral process.

There are numerous benefits to a certified identification card, and they include the verification of the legitimacy of the cardholder and their accredited service dog. It also reduces confusion regarding the rights of a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog, and it serves as a tangible and efficient mechanism for identification.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, service dogs are a necessity for many individuals who rely on them to carry out day-to-day functions. The Service Dogs Act not only establishes the rights of a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog; it provides a practical means to certify that these individuals are afforded specific rights through a proper identification system. I believe that Bill 203 as amended proposes important rights for persons with disabilities and their accompanying service dogs, and that's why I will also be offering my support to this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, did you want to speak?

Dr. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to recognize the hon. Member for Strathcona for bringing forward this bill. The purpose of the Service Dogs Act is certainly complementary to what we already have in the Blind Persons' Rights Act. As it states in the Service Dogs Act, "Nothing in this Act derogates from any right, privilege or obligation of blind persons arising from the Blind Persons' Rights Act or any other law."

Mr. Chairman, this bill certainly will ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities other than sight disabilities will be protected in public areas. Section 1(a) of the bill has been amended to define disabled person to include people who have cognitive and other functional disabilities as well as people who have physical disabilities, and this certainly broadens and strengthens Bill 203.

With regard to accessibility to public areas, Mr. Chairman, this legislation would enable persons with disabilities to be accompanied by an accredited service dog in the public areas free of discrimination. I think the word "accredited" is important there. The term "service dog" as defined in this bill in section 1(c) has been amended to clarify that an identification card would only be issued if a service dog has met the qualifications prescribed in the regulations. That would be a proof that the dog has received the necessary training to earn the title of service dog. This is, obviously, necessary because we certainly don't want situations where there are spurious claims that a dog is a service dog. This would be detrimental to those people who are genuinely in need of a service dog and have them properly trained.

Persons with disabilities who are accompanied by service dogs should be able to access in the same manner as a person not accompanied by a service dog, to enter and use accommodation and conveyances, restaurants and food services facilities, lodging places, or any other place to which the public is invited or has access. The Service Dogs Act is certainly a step towards providing that better access to the social, economic, and educational institutions available throughout our province.

People with disabilities currently have the right to access public areas free of prejudice due to the Human Rights, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism Act, and Bill 203 will certainly assist and complement that act and make it clear that service dogs are also legally able to accompany their owner into those areas free of any discrimination. Persons with disabilities will be able to be accompanied by their service dogs into public areas and will retain the assistance that they do provide during the course of their outing. They are depended upon in a number of situations, including in supporting mobility, in walking, in some instances seizure alert or response, in hearing, in rapid and repetitive movements, and many other functions. This legislation would protect the rights of owners to be accompanied into public areas by their service dogs, of course, and would also allow more reasonable accessibility.

I would like to relate a success story that was passed along to me regarding a service dog by the name of Noah. Noah is the canine partner of a woman who is disabled and who had a very severe and progressive hearing loss. Although she used powerful hearing aids and was a good lip-reader, she also had experienced some difficulties while driving, not being able to hear certain sounds, and if people came to her house to fix the furnace or whatever, they would not be able to be heard by her because she couldn't hear the doorbell. So it's an invisible type of disability.

In the case of Noah she obtained a dog that was temperament tested and intensively trained for nearly eight months. That dog was a border collie, and he worked alongside her as a certified hearing and service dog. Noah now goes to work with his owner. He goes shopping with her, lies on the floor in restaurants, and even accompanies her to the ladies' room. You never know when emergencies could be found in a home or when the fire alarm could sound, and that dog would provide some measure of security in such an instance. Also, with things like tea kettle whistles or the doorbell chime, as I said, the dog is able to assist.

A dog that works for a person with a disability, whether it is a service or guide dog, certainly has to be obedient in public. It has to be well mannered. It has to be quiet and unobtrusive. It can't be barking, loud, and aggressive. So the necessity of training for those dogs is obviously an important part of this bill.

Mr. Chairman, in closing I would say that I do support the amendments to the bill. Section 1(a) broadens the definition of people who have disabilities to include cognitive disabilities. Under section 1(c), in order to be qualified as a service dog, the dog must meet certain qualifications which will be set out in the regulations before it receives an identification card. As I said, the bill, like the Blind Persons' Rights Act, will ensure access to public areas and enable disabled people to be free from discrimination in those areas.

Mr. Chairman, it's certainly my hope that all of the members of the House would support the hon. Member for Strathcona in supporting Bill 203.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to carefully consider legislation like Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. It goes back to a little family history, where a few of my relatives could have used a bill just like this. It's an important, well-advised act that will have benefits for many Albertans with disabilities.

The amended version of section 1(a) clarifies that this bill is intended to include people who have cognitive and other functional disabilities as well as people who have physical disabilities.

3:50

One group who will benefit from the passage of this legislation is Alberta's students. Every Albertan knows about the importance of education, and we do our best to design our schools so that every person can access them. Section 3(1) of this bill is key to ensuring that persons with disabilities who benefit from the use of service dogs have access to whatever school facilities they need to complete their education. This section bans discrimination "against any person with respect to the accommodation, services or facilities available in any place to which the public is customarily admitted . . . for the reason that the person is a disabled person accompanied by a service dog." Well, no citizen should be denied access to a public place because of a disability.

When school started last September, a student in Calgary was told that he could not bring his trained service dog to class with him.

Because of the public outcry this decision was reversed. Section 3(1) means that this simply will not be an issue in the future. The focus in a school should be on learning, not on the use of a dog to assist with basic, everyday tasks. Section 3(1) formally recognizes that a service dog is one way for a person with a disability to be supported. Until now students with disabilities who have dogs assisting them have generally been fortunate that Albertans are willing to collaborate with them to allow them to learn.

Persons with disabilities have the support of current legislation and the goodwill efforts of Albertans. Because of these efforts postsecondary education is a viable choice for a growing number of Canadians with disabilities. A survey back in 1991 showed that 112,000 postsecondary students, which is 7.4 per cent of all students, have some form of disability. With the amendment to section 1(a) all of these students, not just those with physical disabilities, will benefit from protections in this bill.

Alberta's universities have done their best to assist students with disabilities, including those with guide and service dogs. The University of Alberta, for instance, encourages academically qualified persons with disabilities to seek admission to its programs. Through its specialized support and disabilities services office it provides support to students with disabilities, allowing them to successfully complete their programs. Over the years a number of students have used dogs, including a current student who uses a wheelchair with a service dog. The university welcomes dogs working in an official capacity and directly in the service of people or the university, including therapy dogs, seeing eye dogs, hearing ear dogs, and dogs working with the handicapped. There are no limitations on the use of service dogs, and the university has never heard any concerns. I know that my puppy, MacGyver, has asked on a few occasions if he could get a job just like this.

The University of Calgary also recognizes that all students are entitled to an environment of learning, research, and work that accommodates students with disabilities. The University of Calgary supports students with disabilities through its disability resource centre, not to be outdone by the University of Alberta.

Because of section 3(1) of this bill Alberta's schools and universities will be more accessible and friendly to people with disabilities who could benefit from using a trained service dog. This bill is complementary to the excellent efforts of most of our educational institutions. It clarifies the right of all students who have a disability to use a service dog in a classroom. Under Bill 203, if a student needs a trained service dog to complete their studies, it's clear that they are certainly welcome. Because of the amendment to section 1(c), it will be clear that only service dogs with the qualifications prescribed in the regulations will have an identification card.

I want to again commend the hon. member for bringing forward this bill, and I encourage all members to join us in voting for it.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others who wish to speak? Hon. Member for Strathcona, you wanted to speak?

Mr. Lougheed: I'll just make a couple of comments if I may, Mr. Chairman. The importance of education was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, and the Member for Red Deer-South also brought it up again. I'd like to comment a little bit on the education aspect because it's two-sided on this. The public needs to know about these service dogs and seeing eye dogs or guide dogs, as they're called, and know that the owners of these dogs, the people depending on them, have the right of access to taxicabs, hotels, and employment just like anybody else.

The other side was mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford quite nicely, about the challenges of distraction for the dogs when they are working. When they are working, they are to be paying attention to curbs and cars and other situations and helping the person using the dog, and it's quite commonplace for them to be distracted by somebody who comes up and pets them. We see more and more often a bib that the dog wears saying: please do not pet me; I am a working dog. It's important that people recognize that they are not to be distracted.

As was well mentioned, as soon as the collar or the handle that's used by the owner is off, those dogs are just like other dogs. They're running around, getting into mischief and whatnot, but that's okay because they're no longer a working dog. They're just like any other dog at that point in time. So we have to be careful and watch out that we do not distract those dogs.

A comment was made about the dogs being obedient and unobtrusive. I once had to go on a trip with a lady using a seeing eye dog. Of course, she boarded first, and the dog curled up underneath the seat. This was a fairly long flight, four or five hours as I recall. When the plane was unloaded, the fellow passengers were surprised to note that a working dog was there in the plane. The dog never made a sound, didn't have to go to the bathroom. You wouldn't have known that the dog was there.

When we got out into the baggage area, this dog was completely under control, and somebody's pet wasn't under control. In fact, it came up behind this dog, bit it. That was the second time that had happened. As I understand, some months earlier a similar thing had happened. The dog tended to lose attention and was distracted because of these things that had happened to it.

They have to be protected. They are expensive animals, thousands and thousands of dollars to train them. They're well trained. It takes months to do so. The owners have to work with the dog for a couple of weeks in many cases to become qualified to use the dog. These certificates are not given away lightly and easily.

It was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill that there should be no spurious claims of need of a service dog. There are strict qualifications that are required to enable someone to use a service dog. They're well-trained animals. The owners also receive extensive training and have to work with the dog to become proficient. So it's something that's important to many people. It's important that we recognize on their behalf what we can do to help them get around the community better and take part in society and enjoy the full rights of citizenship that all the rest of us enjoy as every person with a disability seeks to be in that situation.

Mr. Chairman, I thank the members who spoke in support of this bill, and I know that people with disabilities who rely on service dogs ask, along with myself, for your support of Bill 203.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 203 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

4:00

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 203.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 203. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

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

**Bill 205
Environmental Protection and Enhancement
(Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007**

[Debate adjourned April 16: Mr. Martin speaking]

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

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have been given the opportunity to join the discussion on the Environmental Protection (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, introduced by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. I commend for his attention to the land and the environment in his area. I support Bill 205 because it represents an opportunity to further the government of Alberta's commitment to land stewardship throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, as elected officials we have been entrusted with the responsibility of managing the province's public lands and resources carefully and in the best interest of Albertans. This commitment must be kept as we and future generations benefit culturally and economically from the land. We must ensure that all our resources are handled in such a way that benefits as many social, environmental, and economic aspects as possible. Accordingly, as a responsible and responsive government we must do everything within our power to ensure that every opportunity we have to protect our lands is acted on.

Bill 205 is another means of protecting Alberta's rich and diverse land resources. It seeks to ensure that we consider up-to-date environmental and forest management when dealing with well sites that are no longer in use. Mr. Speaker, I happen to have had a long career in the oil and gas industry, so I know about the wells, drilling, and production reclamation. Among other players the forest and energy industries are concerned that there are no clear directions regarding the reclamation process.

Currently, well site reclamation procedures fall under the 1995 reclamation criteria and regulations enacted in 1993. According to the criteria and regulations when reclaiming abandoned well sites, it is important that the sites be returned to roughly the same state that they were in prior to drilling. This ensures that the impact on the land is as minimal as possible. Returning the site to its original state also maximizes the land's efficiency as it will be able to grow to its fullest potential. By doing this, the environment will also be enhanced for future generations, and the land will have the opportunity to be utilized for a variety of purposes.

The long-term goal for the natural recovery of a well site is the re-establishment of diverse native ecosystems that can sustain multiple uses. The short-term goal is the establishment of compatible species that would provide erosion control to protect the soil. At times there are conflicting ideas regarding the best mode to achieve the balance between the long- and short-term goals. Bill 205 would clarify this ambiguity. While the current criteria and regulations outline how the well sites should be reclaimed and managed, these regulations and criteria are not reviewed or updated on a consistent basis. The regulation and reclamation criteria should reflect the movement and the growth of the dynamic forest and energy industries. Much has changed in these industries since 1995. They each are utilizing advanced technology.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 stipulates that the regulations and criteria be reviewed every three years. Furthermore, any review would ensure that current forest management practices are incorporated into the regulations. Consistent revision of these regulations is important to the environment as it would allow for forest practices and contemporary environmental standards to be used, ensuring that our lands receive the best due care possible. The emerging knowledge that we gain every day should be added to the regulations, and it will ensure that our forests are managed in the most efficient manner possible. The reclamation criteria and regulation would be driven by these advances in knowledge and would therefore be continuously evaluated and improved. The provisions of Bill 205 give us the confidence that all actors are applying the best practices and working together toward a common goal.

Mr. Speaker, in correspondence with values of Albertans, the government of Alberta has long been committed to the philosophy of land stewardship and responsibility. Albertans want an environment which they can gain from both culturally and economically. One way to achieve these two goals is to be as environmentally minded as possible when working with the natural resources sectors. This mentality can be witnessed with the untouched beauty of the Rocky Mountains all the way to the harmony that is created between the wheat fields and the oil wells. Bill 205 allows for coexistence between the social and mental well-being all Albertans receive from the forests and economic gains that they receive from the well sites.

Appreciating that land stewardship is an integral part of responsible government, the government of Alberta, in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, is in the process of completing a land-use framework. The government wants to make sure that the province's resources are used and managed in the best possible way to ensure a balance between Albertans' priorities. In fact, land stewardship is held in such a high regard that the government has outlined the framework as one of its techniques to manage growth pressures in Alberta.

4:10

Through this time of rapid expansion the government is committed to growing the province's economy in the most responsible fashion possible to ensure sustainability and increased quality of life for all Albertans. The framework sets forth a plan for managing the land, resources, and the natural environment. The land-use frame-

work is so important that it requires input from eight ministries to achieve its goal of responsible land use. Bill 205 complements the importance the government places on land use by calling for updated practices to ensure long-term economic stability and quality of life and the best environmental treatment of our lands.

Bill 205, Mr. Speaker, also represents a way to address the conflicts over competing use of land. The forest and the energy industries would be pleased to know that both of their interests are being served while both are able to work with the land.

Mr. Speaker, this bill provides a clear and direct vision for an integrated, sustainable land-use approach that balances economic and environmental concerns for the benefit of all Albertans. Again, Bill 205 is very insightful as it keeps in mind the cycle of land use. It appreciates the original forest before it became occupied by a prosperous oil-generating well. The bill also states that all efforts should be made to bring the forest back to its original state so communities can gain from it socially once again.

Furthermore, regular revision of the reclamation criteria and regulations will make sure all resource values are considered to find the best balance. Carefully managing land use today will protect the health of forests in Alberta and ensure that all sectors gain from responsive governing now and well into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of being one of the members of the group . . . [Mr. Cao's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 205. I want to first outline the object of the bill and why I support it. The object or purpose of the bill is to add a provision under section 137 of the EPEA to deal specifically with the review of all regulations and practices for conservation and reclamation in the green area of the province. The first part defines specified land for the sole purpose of this section as being exclusively in the green area of the province.

The second purpose of the bill is to legislate the creation of a committee of seven people who will be tasked with a review of any regulation made governing the practices and criteria for conservation and reclamation of the specified land, that being the green area. This committee will have several objectives, including ensuring that the regulations incorporate best forest management practices for land reclamation as well as providing reporting timelines and public disclosure requirements. As well, there is the provision that the committee – and this is one of the main reasons I'm supporting it – will report to the Legislative Assembly if it is sitting or, if it is not sitting, within 15 days of the next sitting. This is the type of progressive legislation that we, being opposition or enlightened members of the government, have been calling for, the type of transparency and accountability, the sharing with the public what we as government land stewards are doing with our legacy.

When I define myself, I define myself first as a grandfather; my next accomplishment is the years as a teacher, considering what the future will be for both my grandchildren and my students; and thirdly, and not necessarily of any less importance, as a spokesperson, the elected representative for Calgary-Varsity.

One of the practices that I hope this bill will accomplish is the protection, the stewardship, that the former member referred to, of land that makes up approximately 51 per cent of this province. If we do this right, which has not been the case up until now, then we leave the legacy for not only my grandchildren but for generations of children to come, and that's where we have to be focused. We have to be focused on the future.

Currently the practice that I have experienced first-hand as a former campground manager in Cataract Creek was that in terms of the order of importance, multi-use was just a term that was thrown about. The first users or abusers of the wilderness area were the potentials of the extraction groups: the oil and the gas, the open-pit mining, the various nonrenewable resource extractors. The second group that had a whack at the forest, so to speak, was the lumber companies.

The third group that seemed to have priority over humans, fish, and fowl was the free-range cattle, that seemed to be able to go through at any time unopposed because the conservation part that this bill refers to wasn't looked after. In other words, the Texas gates or the cattle guards weren't cleaned out, so the cattle could roam freely, without any interference. My experience and that of a number of campground operators in the Kananaskis, again referring to conservation, was that there was no conservation of the fences that separated the park areas from the industrial areas. In fact, these fences, what few remained, were frequently interfered with by resource extractors, a variety of lumber companies. So the thought that we would turn around what has been past practice of putting humans and recreational usage of these green areas second-last, only one step above the wildlife, the flora and the fauna of these areas – any improvement on this past practice will be very much received.

The other aspect that I see as a possibility through the conservation and preservation is the idea of reclamation, and that of course comes under the reclamation aspects of the bill, Bill 205, in brackets "Conservation and Reclamation." The provincial government spends a tremendous amount of time on resource extraction but does not spend near the amount of time on the reclamation of the land that is left after the nonrenewable resources are extracted, and those nonrenewable resources have unfortunately been extended to forests.

Because of the unsustainable practices of clear-cutting, trying to get any regrowth has been next to impossible in a number of areas. Around, for example, McLean Creek in the Kananaskis you go out into the area and the devastation is such that any kind of replanting efforts have basically failed. Similarly, across from Cataract Creek you'd be hard-pressed to find any indication of green. Although the forest was clear-cut back in bits of 2002 and 2003, there's very little evidence of regrowth. So what I hope would be accomplished through this bill is the requirement and the enforcement that the forestry companies that logged the area in the first place and were not required to log in a conservation manner, to selectively log, will at least be required within a reasonable amount of time to get back to the forest that they've destroyed and promote the regrowth of the forest.

Because this is such a large land base, 51 per cent of our province, the part of that 51 per cent that is left for, so-called, in brackets, parks and protected areas should have the highest level of protection because parks and protected areas in Alberta under provincial legislation and control make up barely 4 per cent of the total land-use area. If we can't even protect that 4 per cent, such as the Cataract Creek, the McLean Creek, the Rumsey ecological area, the Caribou Mountains wildlife provincial park, and so on, if we can't look after that 4 per cent, then what hope do we have of looking after the 51 per cent?

4:20

Last year in this Legislature we debated a bill that sort of went along with the idea of the polluter pays, but what it did was allow the person who screwed up in the resource extraction in the first place to go back in and make amends. So I'm hoping that in terms of the conservation aspects, we would require that the companies, whether they're oil and gas or they're lumber or whether they're cattle

ranchers, would be restricted in the development and the usage of the land in a much greater manner than currently is the case.

We have one outfit going in for oil, gas, coal, whatever, building a series of roads, and then on top of those roads we have the forestry companies going in, and by the time we're through, what used to be a forest now looks more like a checkerboard grid of roads. We obviously have to have the fire breaks, but what happens with the resource in terms of the seismic lines and so on, you'd be hard-pressed to find any areas of Alberta that would qualify as old-growth forest. Add to that the very real and present danger of pine beetles and what the government is proposing as almost a pre-emptive strike, and this concerns me because if we go into areas where there is no indication that pine beetles have been or are likely to come in the next number of years and we simply clear-cut, then we've got problems.

I'll look forward to Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to join the discussion on the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, put forth by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. I support Bill 205 because it gives this Assembly the opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to environmental sustainability and responsible land stewardship.

This piece of legislation supports the promotion of environmental integrity and seeks to ensure that the energy and forest industries are working together towards environmental sustainability. With Bill 205 this Assembly is bringing stakeholders to the table and ensuring that both industries are aware of their responsibilities for their respective resources and, too, the environment. While our government has affirmed its commitment to managing growth pressures, this piece of legislation effectively elaborates on this guiding principle.

By addressing the regulatory schedule of well site reclamation, Bill 205 is supplementing the development of a land-use framework. There are various perspectives to consider when discussing responsible land use. Although it is important that we continue to look out for the economic interests of Albertans with sustainable development of the energy sector, it is equally important that we continue to do a top-quality job in managing the effects that that growth has on our environment.

Bill 205 has the best interests of Alberta's environment at heart. Before thinking of our landscape as simply a supply of resources, we must recognize that our environment is an intrinsically valued asset within the cultural and social framework of this province. We recognize that our lakes, rivers, foothills, and mountains are a special part of the Alberta experience. A diverse and ecologically sound natural environment is a priority for this government and is something that our developmental policies must continuously strive to protect.

We must continue to approach our renewable and nonrenewable resources with a balanced approach. Because of Alberta's fortunate energy resource situation there is no doubt that our economy has and will continue to reap tremendous benefits. Record energy surpluses have meant billions of dollars going into the public purse, dollars that are being managed wisely for the good of all Albertans. Much like our responsibility to manage Alberta's finances as a result of a

booming energy sector, our responsibility to effectively manage the environment is equally as important.

Not only does Bill 205 legitimize environmental common sense; it protects the sustainability of Alberta's roughly 38 million hectares of forest. While this government has committed to developing a comprehensive land-use framework, a legislative measure pertaining to the reclamation of well sites will serve as an effective supplementation to this long-term strategy. Currently the regulatory framework for well site reclamation falls under the purview of criteria developed in the mid-1990s. Just as the development of well sites must adhere to strict environmental codes, it is equally important for those sites to undergo a decommissioning process that is as attentive to the state of the surrounding environment. When those well sites are no longer in use, it is important to take note of the process and question whether it is providing forestry and energy firms with appropriate and timely regulations for their closure and the subsequent reclamation of the land.

Environmental policy. Land tenure over timber resources for forestry companies on Crown land is currently established through forestry management agreements, or FMAs. When oil and gas activities are undertaken on those lands, it is up to energy firms to work with their counterparts in the timber industry to ensure that any forestry damage as a result of energy activities is compensated. While the current criteria recognize the importance of returning land to its original state, they tend to lack timely updates in terms of clear-cut specifications that are necessary in the reclamation process. Although the current reclamation process is certainly not risking damage to the environment, we must always be looking for solutions that fulfill our obligation to the well-being of the land.

Managing growth pressures. The current unpredictability of the timing of reclamation criteria review is likely exacerbated in an economic climate of tremendous growth in the natural resource sector. The intent of Bill 205 is not to impede sustainable growth but to add a proactive component in the safeguarding of our forest. To achieve a best-case scenario for all parties, we must look at all perspectives. We want to ensure that forestry operations are afforded due diligence to their timber reserves as specified in their FMA, we must also allow energy firms to have access to appropriate well sites, and above all we are most concerned with achieving a best-case and sustainable scenario for the environment. Of course, while reclamation is not an instantaneous process, we want to ensure that the immediate concerns of soil erosion and the long-term goal of full restoration are being considered by all parties. As this province moves forward with continued responsible and sustainable development of our economy, Bill 205 presents us with an excellent opportunity to tackle the challenge of managing growth pressures from an environmental angle.

We will work in partnership. The current relationship between energy firms and forest organizations fully supports a dialogue in the ongoing development of appropriate reforestation targets. There are subtleties in identifying who is in the best position to undertake land reclamation work. Bill 205 will take an important step in outlining the environmental ins and outs required in the reclamation process and identifying a time frame in which these regulations should be reviewed. It also demonstrates that this Assembly is ensuring that all of our industries are moving forward as a team within this fast-paced economy, an economy that is open to implementing new opportunities that promote appropriate land stewardship. Bill 205 ensures that our ambitions in industry are suitably met with progressive measures in environmental sustainability. Bill 205 bolsters an effective partnership and facilitates the development of our land in

conjunction with the values of all Albertans. Albertans recognize the multiple business, social, and environmental values that are attached to the land we all appreciate.

4:30

I encourage all members of this Assembly to offer their support to Bill 205. Not only does it take an important step in ensuring responsible land use, but it embraces a level of co-operation between Alberta's resource industries. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to enter into the debate on Bill 205 and express a few of my observations and comments at this stage, second reading of the bill. First of all, I want to applaud the member for introducing this bill. This member perhaps more than any other member – and I say so with the knowledge that some may take offence, but I think it's obvious to anyone who has worked with this member that he takes issues that he deals with in his constituency and gets to the bottom of the issue. Not only does he get to the bottom of the issue and understand what the issue is, but he does what most people don't do. He always takes it that one step further and not only identifies what the problem is but comes forward with solutions to that problem. So not only are we dealing with this private member's bill, but we've dealt with previous bills that have in a similar manner dealt with solutions, not just identified problems.

As others have indicated, the intent of this bill is to ensure that when well sites are being reclaimed, the necessary environmental and forest management practices are taken into consideration. But, more importantly, what the bill does is ensure that those practices are reviewed on a periodic basis to make sure that not only are they taken into account, but the practices that are put into force around that reclamation are the best available practices that meet the standard of the day. So the bill proposes to bring in a periodic review of regulations and guidelines to ensure that they remain current. It also allows us to ensure that regulations and guidelines include the best available forest and environmental management practices into the future.

A timely review of the reclamation standards with stakeholders at the table is important in a normal process for the business development in Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development staff. This is not something that we don't do on an ongoing basis, but I think that the additional safeguards of having the necessary reminders, let's say, in place to ensure that there is ongoing upgrading and perhaps greening of the program is important.

Although I support the intent of the bill, I believe its objectives are best served through other means than amendments to the act. I indicated that this is practice, but perhaps it could be reinforced in a better way than amendments to the act.

There is a multistakeholder committee, and it includes representatives from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the Alberta Forest Products Association, and the Surface Rights Federation as well as provincial government ministries. Working collaboratively, members of this group have drafted criteria to improve revegetation and reclamation on forested lands in Alberta, and the criteria set out forest management and forest ecosystem practices through either assisted or natural recovery at the time of reclamation. The new requirements for reclamation in forested areas can be supported and enforced under the existing conservation and reclamation regulation that would be managed by Sustainable Resource Development.

The work of the Reclamation Criteria Advisory Group has proceeded in a positive direction with support from stakeholders in the absence of a legislated mandate under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. As such, I would propose that the outcomes of Bill 205, which are very legitimate outcomes and need to be dealt with, are better dealt with by providing an expiry clause in the conservation and reclamation regulation. This expiry clause would ensure that the regulation remains current and is regularly reviewed to include best forest and environment practices without the necessity of an amendment to the act. Alberta Environment also remains committed to ensuring that the stakeholders are engaged in any future review of the reclamation criteria for forested areas, and they have been drafting improvements to the reclamation criteria of forested areas for some time.

So, again, I thank the member for introducing this important topic to the House. I think that the mere fact that we're having this discussion is productive. I support the intent of Bill 205, but I respectfully offer my comments for consideration by all members.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I know that I spoke on this once. I just had another pressing question, though, on this particular bill. With regard to reclamation and those orphaned wells or abandoned wells are we in fact going to still hold the parent company or the company at full cost for reclamation even if it's not really at their well site but, say, if it's two or three miles down where there was, you know, a break in the line or where it's deteriorated and then it starts to leak into the ground? We can detect where it comes into the groundwater or something, but it is part of that original line. We're talking about doing some of the testing at the well sites, but there is a line between the site and the hole. It can be miles in some cases. Is there part of this bill to take into account some of the deteriorating lines that are probably happening out there right now? Currently they wrap the lines with a yellow jacket, and it's all sealed at every particular joint, but if it isn't, is this part of that reclamation that can be accounted for underneath the provisions of this bill?

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to join in discussion on the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, introduced by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. I believe that Bill 205 will, in fact, further the government's commitment to land stewardship. We certainly have an obligation to see that all of our resources are handled in such a way that there are multiple benefits and that the environment is maintained.

Now, Bill 205 is general in nature, Mr. Speaker. It specifies that a committee would review the regulations governing conservation and reclamation in Alberta's green zone on a periodic basis. However, one of the main purposes of the bill would be to ensure that Alberta considers up-to-date environmental and forest management procedures when they are dealing with oil and gas well sites that are no longer in use. Currently well site reclamation procedures fall under the 1995 reclamation criteria and certain regulations which were enacted in 1993.

When reclaiming abandoned well sites, it's important to know that the sites should be returned to a state approximating that which was extant prior to their drilling. The long-term goal for natural recovery of a well site is obviously the re-establishment of a plant and animal

community that is consistent with the ecosystem which surrounds the site. The short-term goal is the establishment of compatible plant species that would provide erosion control to protect the soil. Those might be, for example, annual grasses such as cereal crops, but in the longer term the objective would be to introduce grasses, herbs, and woody plants into the area which are native to the area in that they would be found in the larger natural environment and which would support an animal community which would approximate that which was found before the resource was exploited.

4:40

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that the best practices have changed in the past, and they continue to evolve with respect to these matters of reclamation. For example, in years past we had well sites and pipeline routes and access roads which were seeded with fast growing species of grasses, things like crested wheat and brome grass and herbs such as tame clover. Those grasses and herbs, while they achieved rapid cover and they stopped erosion in the short term, were not native to the area, and those seedings, in fact, could have long-term consequences to the ecosystem in terms of what types of plant succession took place in the area. It was often found that those grasses, particularly species like the ones that I mentioned, brome grass and crested wheat grass, could outcompete the native species in the area, and the result would be invasion of the adjacent areas along the roadways or pipeline routes or well sites. So the resultant plant community would be disturbed, and as I said, the establishment of the intermediate and climax plant communities which were native to that area would be inhibited.

The current criteria in the regulations outlining how well sites should be reclaimed and managed are not reviewed or updated on a consistent basis, and Bill 205 stipulates that the regulations and criteria should be reviewed every five years. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that periodic revision of those regulations would be important to the environment as it would allow for the current forest practices and contemporary reclamation standards to be applied, ensuring that the lands receive the best care possible.

Now, as I mentioned, in the past there have been instances where a lot of nonnative species have been planted to prevent erosion and contain the soil. Nowadays it's possible to harvest seeds from native grasses to a far more efficient extent than it was in the past. That should be the new standard in reclaiming these sites and even in maintaining them in the initial instances when they're disturbed, for example, for a new access road.

Mr. Speaker, the provisions of Bill 205 would certainly give us an increased access to best practices and ensure that those best practices are being applied. The government also, I would note, is in collaboration with a lot of stakeholders right now in the process of working on a land-use framework, and we certainly want to make sure that that framework is of an increasing priority as we struggle to manage the growth pressures in the province of Alberta. Particularly in this time of rapid population growth and rapid pressures on our resource industries I think it's important that the government be committed to, in the most responsible fashion possible, ensuring that there is proper reclamation of these sites.

The land-use framework which, as I mentioned, is in the process of being developed right now will set forth a plan for managing the land, the resources, and the natural environment, and I would suggest that this Bill 205 is complementary to that proposed land-use framework because it does, as I said, call for updated conservation and reclamation practices to make sure that there is long-term stability of the ecosystems in the area of these resources being exploited, that it ensures that the land is treated in the best way possible.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, I think that this bill would contribute to a land-use approach that is of benefit to Albertans. The regular revision of the reclamation criteria and regulations will certainly make sure that the resources are considered in a more balanced approach and that they're kept in harmony with the natural environment that surrounds these sites.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members of the Assembly to join me in supporting Bill 205. As I said, I believe that this is an important step forward in terms of ensuring that the reclamation of resource-exploited sites is done in a much more harmonious way consistent with the land which surrounds it. It's certainly much more compatible with preserving the natural ecosystems, the natural plant and animal communities that we have in the province.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to speak to Bill 205, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, because the idea of stewardship, or living within our ecological means, is becoming more and more of a concern for the majority of Albertans. We are beginning to recognize that long-term economic prosperity depends on the wise stewardship of our ecological resources.

We all need to change the way we are doing things. Solutions, though, will only be effective if we carry them through with the energy and concern of all Alberta's citizens. Alberta can and should lead the way in helping to define the appropriate roles for individuals, communities, governments, and corporations in environmental conservation. The stewardship principle needs to be adopted in every department of the provincial government, the activities of citizens, and in business enterprise. I think that the Member for West Yellowhead should be applauded for bringing forth this bill, that aims to strengthen legislation around conservation and reclamation, and especially for putting such a review in the public domain. This is a good step towards transparency and accountability.

Our land belongs to all Albertans and future generations. Thus government policy should ensure at all times that industry that operates on our land base returns the land to the state it was in prior to resource extraction by using best available practices and technology. As well, similar provisions should be incorporated into the act to deal with oil and gas activities in the white areas of the province. This would allow for the committee to ensure that best practices are used across all sectors to reclaim land after resources have been extracted. I believe that the government should have these types of committees in place to review all codes of practice and legislation that deal with reclamation activities by industry to ensure that best available practices are always used. Albertans value our forests, and any step to ensure best available forest management practices to preserve this resource and develop it responsibly is a positive step.

I suggest that the review committee must include public and independent scientists, that we need fundamental change in the pace and scope of development in Alberta based on a plan, based on good science, and based on meaningful public consultation. However, this is an important bill and should be passed to protect current and future generations.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Stewardship of our natural environment is a task that concerns us all. Our current prosperity is

due in large part to the extraction of resources from our environment. We must protect our environment so that this prosperity may be sustained for the future. It is imperative that we do all that we can to ensure that our activities have a minimal impact on our environment. I am reminded of the ecological Hippocratic oath: first, we do no harm.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a leader in protecting the environment. We are the only province in Canada with legislation that specifically addresses conservation and reclamation of industrial developments. Land reclamation and soil quality guidelines are some of the most stringent in North America and have strict guidelines for levels of benzene, mercury, lead, and barium in our soil.

4:50

Co-operation and collaboration between government, business, and concerned stakeholder groups are very necessary. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's forests are busy places. They're accessed by more people than any other forests in Canada. We have some form of industrial activity in almost 83 per cent of our forests. The government of Alberta works with stakeholders to effectively manage this activity. Many environmentally conscious companies voluntarily collaborate with us and with each other. Alberta does not simply accept voluntary efforts. Unlike some jurisdictions, Alberta requires that reclamation certificates be issued regardless of landowner/industry agreements. Landowners cannot sign off on reclamation liability when a resource company completes their work.

Well site reclamation and forest management must be handled with the involvement of every stakeholder, Mr. Speaker. The interests of each stakeholder do not always perfectly align with the interests of others. Commitment to communication will produce an understanding that works for all concerned. Everyone can agree that it is in the best interests of all to minimize our ecological impact in the short and long terms.

The government of Alberta has a history of collaborating with industry and stakeholder groups to ensure that well sites are properly reclaimed. The Alberta orphan program is now operating as the Orphan Well Association. Since 1992 this industry-funded initiative has financed the reclamation of wells owned by companies that are unable or unwilling to do so. To date, Mr. Speaker, almost \$64 million has been spent on orphan well abandonment and reclamation work. Albertans benefit in two ways, Mr. Speaker. They are protected from any future liability for orphan wells and know that their natural environment is being well cared for.

Another successful collaboration between government and industry is the Alberta Joint Energy/Utility and Forest Industry Management Committee. Mr. Speaker, this came into existence in 1995 because of a conflict over timber damages between a forestry company and petroleum producers. Since the resolution of this conflict the committee's focus has included the standardization and simplification of interactions between oil and gas and forestry companies working in the same area.

The existence and success of this joint committee emphasize the importance of clarity and consistency in our regulations, Mr. Speaker. Every stakeholder knows their obligations and fulfills them to the same standard. There has been much frustration in the past about the oil and gas industry being held to different reclamation standards than the forestry industry. Mandating a review of the standards for well site reclamation in forested areas every five years places all stakeholders on an even footing. Both the forestry and the oil and gas industries support the principle behind this bill. The Alberta Chamber of Resources has already started an integrated land management project that is reviewing government policies to identify areas where regulations can be streamlined.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 is a direct measure by the government to improve forestry management but will have the indirect effect of encouraging private companies to work together even when government is not involved. The Al-Pac/Gulf Surmount project brought Gulf Canada Resources . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Property Taxes for Seniors

505. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Amery:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a plan with municipalities to phase out the education portion of property taxes for seniors.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not only pleased to rise on behalf of the hon. member, who unfortunately was called from the Chamber to deal with a family urgency, but also to lend my support to this particular Motion 505. This motion, as members here will know, is designed to encourage our government to work with municipalities in order to phase out the collection of the education portion of property taxes for seniors.

The Alberta seniors community has a strong and proud tradition in our province, as we all know. In fact, as Alberta's founders and as some of our earliest patrons, obviously, seniors today have experienced a great deal of change in Alberta. Under the leadership of a variety of Premiers and through economic ups and downs we have our seniors community to thank for a province that stands so firmly as an economic powerhouse and as a society that is always seeking to better itself.

Alberta's seniors continue to enrich the social fabric and foundation of our great province as our parents, as our grandparents, as our co-workers, our neighbours, and so on. Therefore, it's timely for us to look at ways to ensure that Alberta's seniors are able to make the most of their golden years. In a province that is on such a sound financial footing thanks to some very difficult choices that were made a few years back, we owe it to many of our seniors, to our elders, to look at options that will ease the sometimes difficult financial circumstances that those years can bring.

As hon. members likely know, property taxes have been a source of education funding since Alberta became a province back in 1905. Because of their ability to provide a large and stable revenue source for education, these education property taxes have suitably served to ensure that young Albertans are in a great position to lead Alberta in the same way the previous generations have so capably done. While municipalities are currently in control of their property tax structure and their assessments, the province sets its requirements for collecting property tax revenue for education in terms of amounts deposited into what's called the Alberta school foundation fund, ASFF for short. Once the province has these monies, we are then able to redistribute these funds to school boards around the province for purposes of enhancing our K to 12 education system.

Mr. Speaker, what results is that the Alberta government provides 100 per cent of education funding through the ASFF, which draws both from the education property taxes and from the general revenue fund. Interestingly enough, over time the GRF, the general revenue fund, has provided an increasingly larger and larger portion of our

K to 12 education spending needs. Now, over the past 14 years education property tax rates themselves have either been reduced or frozen and today are about 40 per cent lower – 40 per cent lower – than they were in 1993.

Now, although it's been suggested that the education portion of property taxes be abolished altogether, what is being proposed here in this particular motion is a start that has the twofold potential to help phase out this burdensome tax while also alleviating another tax burden from the shoulders of our seniors. Now, I do understand that education is a shared responsibility, that we all have a vested interest in it, that we all benefit from it as a society, that it's critical to have a stable ongoing funding source for our K to 12 education successes to flourish because far too much depends on it. I understand that. However, there also comes a time when we must look at what a burden this is on some of our seniors.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, eliminating this particular tax for seniors, I'm going to suggest, must be accompanied with a second thought, and that is a source that would see those dollars replaced from some other funding pool. We have surpluses in this province, which we're very thankful for. We have a new surplus allocation policy. We have a budget that can be set in advance. In other words, we can predetermine where and how to offset these dollars should this motion succeed and should the government choose to actually enact that decision.

5:00

Secondly, by eliminating this tax for seniors, it ought not result in some additional burden for the rest of us, so to speak, who would have to otherwise perhaps shore it up. Let's not fall into that trap or that debate either, Mr. Speaker. Why do I say this? I say this because back in the 1980s Alberta seniors as homeowners automatically had the entire provincial education portion of their property taxes paid for by the provincial government. Moreover, Alberta's senior homeowners over the age of 55, regardless of their need, their income, or their assets, were eligible for a property tax reduction benefit.

Now, as the province met fiscal challenges and underwent changes through the 1990s, Alberta's seniors were one of the groups required to work with the province to tackle the debt. I know from having door-knocked on several seniors' doors that they went along with it because there was a specific target in mind, and the target was to get rid of the structural deficit of the province of Alberta and tackle the debt. We did both. We did both. Those obstacles are now out of the way.

In 1994 the Property Tax Reduction Act was repealed upon proclamation when the Seniors Benefit Act came into force, which no longer ensured an education property tax reduction for seniors. Like the many sacrifices that they once made in growing a strong and prosperous Alberta, seniors once again sacrificed for the betterment of our current financial situation. Today with the provincial debt gone, I think it is time to rethink this levy because it is causing unnecessary financial hardships on our lower income seniors. We did it with the elimination of health care premiums for seniors, and we can do it with the gradual phasing out of this tax burden related to education property taxes for seniors.

Mr. Speaker, as our baby boomers continue to age, Alberta is experiencing a very rapid shift in terms of its senior demographic. Presently seniors make up about 10 per cent of Alberta's total population, and by 2031, some short 24 years from now, 1 in 5 Albertans will be a senior citizen. This accounts for a sector of the population that is growing at a faster rate than others in our province. Unfortunately, this distinguished group of individuals, who have

worked so hard to build this province, are amongst a demographic that must not be allowed to find themselves slipping through the cracks.

Almost all seniors do receive some income from government transfer payments. Among them, over 40 per cent of these seniors' total income is composed of government transfers, including old age security, guaranteed income supplements, and other social supports. Additionally, statistics show that seniors spend much more per person on health care while having an income that is approximately \$5,000 lower than the average income amongst Alberta's population in general.

Mr. Speaker, there are other statistics that can be added to this debate, and I'm looking forward to the comments from other members. However, before I close, I want to simply say that seniors, as we know – and I realize that it's not all seniors but seniors in the majority – for the most part are on fixed incomes with relatively few opportunities to augment or to supplement their incomes. They're fixed at the level of dollars flowing into their coffers. However, the costs they are facing in terms of housing and rent and food and other amenities and necessities such as heating costs, electricity costs, rentals, and so on are going up rather dramatically, and the burden on our seniors continues to grow.

In conclusion, we should take a look at what other provinces are doing. I note, for example, that in Manitoba education property taxes have been phased out for residential properties for 2006. Perhaps that's a start here as well. Maybe there should be a different approach taken here where, if we can't phase these out, we can start to reduce them. Perhaps eventually we can see them totally eliminated.

My final statement, Mr. Speaker, is simply to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for having brought this issue forward. It is a very significant issue in my riding of Edmonton-Mill Creek. I know that I speak on behalf of thousands of seniors when I say that, please, let's have a long and serious thought about what it is that we can do to help these seniors, but let's not do it at the expense of some other programs. Let's plan for this. Let's work with the municipalities. Let's do a sensible phase-in so that there is no short pot at the end of it for anyone.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to suggest to the hon. member across from me that with his excellent presentation and his dramatic form, it's hard to follow that.

If we can just look at the question of education property tax, which was changed, as he alluded to, in 1994. He suggested, I believe, that it was equitable for all school districts across the province. It's my suggestion that in the urban centres it's certainly not equitable in many ways, and we'll address that in the next few weeks. I think, in my humble opinion, that the manner in which we do the property tax issue right now in this province should be reviewed and studied very carefully to see if it is equitable and it is doing the job. I suggest that it's probably not.

Anyway, I think, generally speaking, our side over here suggests to you that we're happy that there's some way of eliminating the education property tax for seniors, and this proposal tries to address that, especially seniors that are often on a fixed income. As the hon member pointed out, costs are rising, and they can negatively affect a person's financial position. Reducing senior tax could provide some relief, and that's very, very important in St. Albert. The property tax for some seniors with low income is very, very hard for them to cope with.

Let's just take a look at what the province is doing right now. It seems to me that there's a seniors' rebate program. I believe it started in 2005. Seniors can apply for a rebate that offsets the increases to their education property taxes after 2004. The value of this program, as we've got it, is about \$5.7 million, possibly spending as much as \$7 million as estimated in this budget year. This program addresses one of the key arguments against making seniors pay education property taxes. The tax is calculated according to the property value and the value of the assessment of their property.

I think the question of this amendment exempting all seniors from paying the education portion of the property tax exempts seniors who are below the low-income cut-off. I'd urge the government to create a fund to pay the education portion of the property tax for seniors who cannot afford the cost. I think that's a positive thing that they're doing.

British Columbia I think has a very interesting model. B.C. has a program in place to protect seniors and people with disabilities from increases in property tax to their homes. In B.C. they have what is called the property tax deferment program. The purpose of this program is to assist qualified B.C. homeowners to pay their annual property taxes. It is a low-interest loan program. The loan must be fully repaid before the home can be transferred to a new owner or upon the death of the agreement holder. A person who is eligible for this program in British Columbia may defer their property taxes on their principle residence if they are 60 years of age or older, a surviving spouse, a person with a disability as defined by regulation. So this is an alternate program, and I think it has some merit. I don't know if the proposer of this suggested legislation has looked at this.

I think it's also important to say that seniors who have the financial stability to pay for the education requisition probably feel that they are able to pay that. I think there are certain members of our population that are seniors who have the dollars. They are saying that they are willing to pay for the providing of education funding, and there is no problem with that. To be clear, there are seniors who easily have the financial stability to pay for the education requisition. They should not be treated the same as those seniors or disabled who do not have the same financial means to support themselves or their families.

5:10

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

As an example, should a senior living in a million dollar home in the best part of town with an income annually of six figures be eligible for the same elimination or educational property tax phase-out that a senior living on a \$20,000 per year fixed income should pay? I think there has to be something done about this, and I think it's commendable that this has come forth as a way of relieving this.

This motion, while we support it in principle, should be altered to make this distinction clear. The language should be along the lines of establishing a plan with municipalities to phase out the education portion of the property tax for eligible seniors or alternately for seniors on fixed incomes below an established threshold. This would be more accurate to ensure that those who need that financial assistance receive it. As stated earlier, a senior whose bank account has a lot of zeroes behind it probably does not need the same assistance as a senior with a couple of zeroes on their bank balance. Let's make sure that we help those who really need it.

We shouldn't forget people with disabilities on fixed incomes. They should also be eligible for an elimination or reduction of their portion of the education property tax. Let's make sure that they are included for help as well.

Generally speaking, I believe we support this, Mr. Speaker, and we hope that some of the alternatives that we've talked about here will be looked at during the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon with some interest to speak on this Motion 505 dealing with the education property tax portion of people's overall property taxes. You know, this is an issue that has concerned me greatly since before I was elected because I have a high proportion of seniors in my constituency of Edmonton-Calder. This combined with a number of other initiatives and breaks that seniors had enjoyed previous to 1993 really not just created financial burden and hardship for seniors on fixed incomes but also added to this sort of idea that seniors were not being looked after somehow, that taking away the break on the education property tax part of their taxation in combination with some other benefits being lost just made seniors across the province feel as though they weren't being looked after the way that they should.

Seeing this motion coming forward, I'm sure that it's an acknowledgement of the similar observations that I've made over the last few years, that seniors are demanding – and I believe deserve to demand – that they, in fact, have some of these benefits reinstated to them in their senior years because, of course, as previous speakers have put forward, we are fixing our income somehow more stringently by the time we retire, so any break or any benefit certainly does make a bigger difference when you're not earning the same income that you might have when you were in your working years. You know, lots of seniors living healthy and proper lifestyles were seniors who enjoyed these benefits previous to 1993 and still feel betrayed somehow that this was taken away from them in the interest, as the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek suggested, to do their part to balance the budget. Of course, now here we are 13, 14 years later with these massive surpluses, and this has not been reinstated for seniors.

My suggestion is that, certainly, the spirit of this motion is good. It's a step in the right direction, but I would venture to say that all seniors deserve to have the education property tax portion of their overall property tax credited. In fact, you know, it's as though you have an extension of benefits to seniors. We want to maintain the universality of those benefits and not exclude people on some sort of a sliding scale. You know, Mr. Speaker, I've seen the sliding scale operate in many other parts of our taxation and finances of this province. It tends to get ratcheted up when there's a perception that there's money in short supply, and then nothing happens unless lots of people complain about it later on. So by maintaining the universality of the seniors exemption from property tax, I think that we would be doing everyone the best possible benefit, because nothing annoys or makes people feel embarrassed as to go back and have to reapply for things as their income might be going up or down, especially in one's senior years. So often I see seniors with that, sort of, often forgotten virtue of modesty choosing perhaps to not apply for a benefit – besides this, other benefits that we might be able to give them – because they feel that, you know, "Oh, well, I don't want to be a bother" somehow.

That's part of why we create a system of universality when it comes to pensions and with regard to health care. Universality is very, very important. So to suggest that, "Oh, well, you know, perhaps that person's saved a few more shekels, and they should just pay for it themselves," I think that considering we are talking about seniors and their portion of the education property tax that most of them have been paying for most of their adult years as homeowners, I don't see why this can't be a universal extension to all seniors here in the province of Alberta.

We're looking at quite a significant amount of money here, the sum of \$1.4 billion being collected through the education property tax system. This, in fact, accounts for 30 per cent of Education's total revenues. Currently, it seems that we're using \$400 million of this education property tax as somehow a strings-attached funding towards housing and other capital infrastructure concerns for municipalities.

You know, municipalities are requiring this money to be used at their discretion. We have to recognize the integrity of the municipal level of government without attaching these strings, and then certainly I think they have the right to collect and distribute the money through their own coffers, in fact. This whole strings-attached mechanism by which some new municipal funding has been made available here is highly problematic, and certainly we don't need it to happen through this education property tax part of the way that we tax people here in general in the province of Alberta.

This is definitely a polarizing issue I'm seeing developing between municipalities that want and require some extended sources of revenue streams. Certainly, we support the handover of the education property tax to municipalities to use as they see fit. However, considering that seniors have borne the brunt of so many growth-related problems here in the province of Alberta, phasing out the education property tax for them is very good and probably will not have a significant impact in the total amount of taxes being collected through this mechanism.

Certainly, I support the spirit of this motion but with the caveat that we believe that the exemption for seniors should be universal and not put onto a sliding scale.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak on 505. It reads: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a plan with municipalities to phase out the education portion of property taxes for seniors."

Now, it was already mentioned that seniors in some cases are some of our most vulnerable because they're on fixed incomes, and this would certainly help them out. I couldn't agree more. If we really wanted to help them out, it would be specific that if we gave them a break on their health care premiums, that would probably be the most beneficial one for all of them.

The other one is: what's to prevent someone who has a parent that's a senior from transferring them to the title of their property and, say, opt out for the next 24 years? I could have my mom go onto my property, sign on as a senior, and that would allow me to get out of the property tax for the school portion and save me about \$120,000. Then, when I turn 65, it would revert back to me, and I've skipped out on 25 years of payments for property tax for education.

Now, is that being considered as to a sleight of hand or a pocket or a loophole for this particular bill? I can see it being able to happen. Someone just has to think about it, which I already have, and the solution's right there. [interjection] That's right. It's a perfect loophole for thousands of Albertans, so maybe this isn't the one-stripe solution to fit everybody because there are definitely loopholes.

People have to become creative because money is becoming finite, and it's becoming tighter and tighter. You've always got to be one step in a municipality. Edmonton already wants to tax citizens for even selling their houses. This is one of these hare-brained ideas that Mandel has, but that's another one. This is altogether something separate. But that's got to be looked at right

there. If we want to give relief, it should be with health care because this other one has got to be a real slippery slope.

Thank you very much.

5:20

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Motion 505, a motion that's directed at eliminating education property taxes for seniors. This is an important issue, and I believe that the issue is greater than this because we need to have a review of our approach to property taxes in this province.

The reason that we have the education property tax, which is a tax paid by property owners that is directed towards the cost of K to 12 education, is that supposedly the revenue from these taxes is directed towards funding the public and separate school systems. The rationale is that all Albertans benefit from high-quality early education through an improved workforce and provincial economy and are therefore expected to contribute directly to its costs.

The province took over responsibility for the education property tax in 1994. The rationale for this shift included providing for greater equalization of educational resources, irrespective of local and economic conditions. However, that move has eroded local autonomy. Local school boards are elected officials who have very little autonomy. I think this is another area where we need to consider what we're doing with property taxes because I feel that that was a backwards move, and it's still in effect.

The elimination of seniors' property tax is an idea that sounds good at first glance. Seniors have paid their dues to society. They've got rising costs to meet, often on fixed and limited incomes. They're not going to be benefiting from the educational system themselves. Or are they? There's a maybe here that doesn't quite ring true. I'm not simply referring to seniors who go back to school, some in their 80s, to complete university degrees. Even for that select few perhaps their education tax should be written off out of deference to their lifetime contributions. But there's more than dollars and cents and cost recovery at issue here. Education is one of the ways we all participate in society and all benefit, whether we attend an educational institution or draw on the services of someone who does. Education is part of a social consensus, a consensus that is becoming more fragile.

There are other areas of our shared life that we could also divvy up according to who uses and who benefits from them. I'm thinking of health care, for instance. By the user-pay dictum the healthy need not contribute to health care costs or pay medicare premiums. By that token, seniors could be charged more since they are more likely to use the system.

How about the highways and other transportation? Why should those who don't drive pay for roads for those who do drive? Why should those who use public transport have their ride subsidized by those who don't? If we start down this slope, we're making our choices on the same kind of self-interest that Martin Niemöller described in his statement, "first they came for the Communists, but I did nothing, for I was not a Communist; then they came for the trade unionists, and I did nothing because I wasn't one of them" and so on.

Reducing our contribution to society on the basis of self-interest isn't a way to a more streamlined society. It's the beginning of the end of the sense of community and of looking out for each other, and that is a decline of civilization. These proposals for streamlining can be very seductive when they're couched in terms of a group that is deserving, such as seniors. But the consequences of this approach can be very deadly for all, including seniors, as we unravel the social fabric that we do share.

If we want to aid seniors, let's increase the benefits to them that

more than offset the tax in question. Let's not dismantle what they've helped to build up and continue to support symbolically as long as they're with us. It may look like a good idea, and I appreciate the intent, but I believe that we've got to look at universality and at the seniors who aren't property owners. Shouldn't we be helping them all? I think there are better ways to do that. I support the intent of this motion, but I really believe it doesn't do enough.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to speak to Motion 505. As many others have already remarked, no doubt this is a bill with very good, well-meaning intentions, but as most of the members on this side of the House know, when it comes to public policy, the road to hell is paved with good intentions, so we have to look at the results.

Having said that, I did want to say that this is one of those rare occasions when I do happen to agree with a number of the members on the other side here, including the members for Edmonton-Decore, Edmonton-Mill Woods, and also the Member for St. Albert. The Member for Edmonton-Decore has pointed out how a wily scoundrel could use this as a way to beat the system and shirk his public responsibility. The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has pointed out that public education or education in general is a shared responsibility. Today's seniors had their education paid for when they were youth. I see no reason why they shouldn't continue to contribute to education.

I'm particularly concerned about some of the issues of equity and fairness, both between seniors and also between seniors and young families. The Member for St. Albert pointed out that: why should a senior with a six-figure income that lives in a million dollar home have no tax treatment and a senior in a smaller owned property with a small income get the same treatment?

I'm actually even more concerned with the question of equity or fairness, the intergenerational issue. Many of us have children that are just entering the housing market, and particularly in cities like Edmonton and Calgary, where they're paying not \$200,000 but \$300,000 or \$400,000 for their first home with big mortgages, why should a young family with a big mortgage and two or three children be paying property tax when in the house next door a senior couple is not paying any tax? I think that's an equity issue as well.

I have looked at this issue before, and I agree with the hon. Member for St. Albert that British Columbia has come up with the proper solution to this, which is a property tax deferment approach. That allows a senior or senior couple, if they choose, to stay in their home, not to avoid paying their taxes but to have the taxes paid when and if they eventually sell the property. So that preserves the integrity of the tax base. It addresses the issue of intergenerational equity and also the equity between seniors at different income levels.

So for all of those reasons I would encourage all members not to support this motion. The intentions are good, no doubt, but there's a better way to achieve the same end, and I encourage all members to oppose it.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is indeed a remarkable day when the minister of sustainable resources agrees fully with the shadow minister of sustainable resources. This is probably progress.

I agree as well with the intent of the motion, but a bit of a history lesson: the education portion of property tax ceased to fulfill its intent in 1994 after the right to collect the tax was taken away from duly elected school trustees by this patriarchal provincial government. Prior to 1994 those locally elected and responsible for the education in their communities, trustees, used the property tax to have the autonomy, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods said, to control 50 per cent of their school budget. They could make the decisions that had the greatest impact at the local level, and unfortunately that right was taken away by the centralized dictates of this province.

5:30

Having said that, I also agree with the Member for Edmonton-Calder. I would rather forgive a wealthy individual if it meant that a less fortunate individual's needs were met, so I do accept the universality of the need for protecting seniors. The education of individuals is what determines our future and our well-being. I'm sure there are a number of seniors who are in that wealthy, fortunate circumstance, and they would continue to fund schools whether or not it was required. They have the wisdom to know that their future is in the hands of the up-and-coming generations, and assuring that they had the highest and best education possible would be in their own best interests.

The motion attempts to give seniors a break. I agree with the idea that after paying taxes for 40 to 45 years for a variety of things, whether it's education or income, et cetera, seniors deserve to be recognized, and those most vulnerable seniors on fixed incomes need the protection. It is in our best interest as a government to protect seniors and keep them in their homes as long as we possibly can as opposed to condemning them to long-term care, which has not been properly supervised or funded by this government and of which a number of seniors are extremely fearful.

This motion directs us to consider removing the education portion of property taxes for seniors. As our sustainable resources minister indicated, while it does have certain flaws, we can fix those flaws by adopting the B.C. model or toughening up the registering of property so that loopholes that would allow a person to change their ownership to that of their parent would not be permitted. I believe scrutiny can occur. I believe we can improve upon this, but the motion directs us in a particular direction, which suggests that seniors get a break.

As I began, I would rather see seniors on fixed incomes receive some support from this government as it finally agreed to with the removal of the health care premiums for those on fixed incomes. This, to me, would be a natural progression. If we properly invest our money today to prepare us for the future, if we show the type of fiscal responsibility as a provincial steward that a number of seniors have demonstrated, then that money will be available. Of course, our Liberal suggestion, our funding for the future, would see us setting aside the types of savings that would guarantee our provincial future and no longer require us to be dependent on nonrenewable energies or on the property tax portion that education represents but doesn't truly receive. The money, unfortunately, just goes into general revenue and gets lost. So if we're going to charge the education portion of taxes, let's give it back to the local officials, the trustees who were elected to carry out their duties, exempt seniors, and let's get on with having a savings plan that reflects the future for the entire province, that takes away this kind of dependency.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak on Motion 505, education property tax elimination for seniors, brought forward on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Motion 505 encourages our government to work with municipalities in phasing out the collection of property taxes from seniors. It's aimed to alleviate this burden on seniors 65 years of age or older by working with municipalities. We all know how exciting that can be, especially the minister responsible. Although the collection of property taxes is under the jurisdiction of municipalities, the province allocates contributions to the Alberta school foundation fund.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to look at some of the pros and cons to Motion 505 and look at a number of stats, which may really excite a number of the members in the House as I see a number of members looking very intently at what I'm about to say, including one senior, who makes up 10 per cent of Alberta's total population. It's anticipated that by 2031 20 per cent of Albertans will be seniors, including a few of us here in the House. That's a demographic that's growing at a faster rate than the rest of Alberta's entire population.

From July 2003 to June 2004 Alberta attracted the second-highest number of senior interprovincial net migrants after British Columbia. That says a lot about how attractive our province is, but it also brings other responsibilities and other problems. Since 1984, Mr. Speaker, more seniors have moved into Alberta from other parts of Canada than have moved out, and according to the 2001 census, 60 per cent of Alberta's seniors lived either in Edmonton or Calgary, a stat that surprised me. I thought we'd have more in rural Alberta. They accounted for 11 per cent of our population in Edmonton and 9 per cent in Calgary. I don't know if that says anything about the Oilers and Flames, Stampeders and the Eskimos or not.

This particular age demographic typically has an average income below the mean and is often reliant on community and financial supports. Those are simply the facts. No editorial comment here. Now, eliminating education property taxes would be measured in eliminating potential hardship for certain seniors who pay property taxes. According to the stats, seniors' average income for the year 2000 was \$26,336, which is approximately \$5,000 lower than the average income for Alberta's general population.

Just a few more stats before I move on to the next facts: approximately 7 per cent of seniors accessed provincial housing programs in 2004, including almost 15,000 seniors in self-contained, subsidized rental accommodations and 9,400 seniors in lodge and cottage programs. Certainly, Motion 505 would help those seniors dependent on government and community supports and fixed incomes. If they are physically able to do so, the ease of financial strain could allow them to stay in their homes longer, which, of course, is a very good thing and solves a lot of other problems.

Although seniors have raised their children and many are watching their grandchildren grow, many seniors have likely spent a lifetime paying education property taxes and have paid their dues, so to speak. It would help a large number of these people, who have contributed to our province for many, many years.

However, Mr. Speaker, while there are all these benefits to Motion 505, there are implications in the motion that raise certain concerns, some of which have been aired already, and here are a few more. The tax revenue collected from municipalities' property assessments are used to meet the local portion of the province's required funding. The revenues collected for distribution to local school boards may be at a loss as a result of this portion not being represented.

5:40

Motion 505 assumes that all seniors are in a lower income bracket, and accordingly there are other demographics that might benefit from the cut in property taxes as well. The decrease in funding for

the Alberta school foundation fund would continue to decrease as more and more baby boomers continue to age. Seniors continue to benefit from a well-funded education system that produces doctors, nurses, carpenters, plumbers: a myriad of people in wonderful professions that do provide services not only to them but all Alberta residents. Alternatively, the loss of funding for basic education is estimated to be \$140 million. It could also escalate into further problems in order to compensate for the loss of those funds.

So, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of Motion 505 should be weighed by its pros and cons, like any other motion, in order to fully understand the complexity of this issue. It's been mentioned that property taxation is a municipal affair, but there is room for the government of Alberta to work with municipalities to address the needs of seniors and school funding. It's an issue that, I believe, requires further discussion than what today's proceedings allow. We need to review in order to arrive at a solution that's beneficial for all parties. I'd like to thank the hon. member for opening discussion on this topic, but since I believe it can't be closed today, I believe that this motion needs to be rejected in favour of something better in, hopefully, a future time that is not too far away.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it does appear to be a historic day because there's an awful lot of agreement on both sides of the House today and on more than one issue. So that's nice to see.

Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Calgary-Lougheed indicated, this is indeed a complex discussion and one, I would argue, whose time has come. [interjections] Glad to see that everybody is now paying attention and hanging on every word.

Certainly, one of the most profound things that I noticed during the last election as I was door-knocking through the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford was the number of residents living in the homes that they built 40 years ago. So clearly, now, these are seniors who, in most cases, have had their families grow up in the community. The families have now left and started families of their own. The seniors, in some instances, may have lost a partner or a spouse, but they're struggling to hang on to their homes. Particularly for those on fixed incomes this is a real challenge.

As the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek mentioned in his introduction of this motion, while some things have been controlled and some relief has been given to seniors from the government, there are so many things that are out of their control, whether it be utilities or the cost of food, transportation, on and on. So some sort of relief in the way of education property tax, I'm sure, would be very much appreciated. We know that they get a little bit right now. I've had several seniors come and show me that the relief they get to this point is often no more than \$10 or \$15 a year. Obviously, that's not making enough of a difference for seniors in terms of trying to keep them in their homes.

So it's a debate that is very relevant, and anything we can do to help our seniors age in place as opposed to forcing them into some sort of alternative housing arrangements I would support completely. But if we're going to have that discussion and that debate, as the Member for Calgary-Lougheed suggested, it's a much bigger debate and probably requires a full review of the entire taxation system as opposed to just looking at this one particular area of it.

One of the things that springs to mind any time we talk about reducing or eliminating education property tax is the whole notion of autonomy or lack thereof that the school boards are dealing with. As we know, they've already seen a severe limit placed on their ability to raise revenues to operate. In fact, in this Assembly last

year we had a motion to completely eliminate the education property tax not just for seniors but for everybody. Again, the question arises: what does that do to the autonomy of those elected officials that have been tasked with running the education system on behalf of the local residents? Certainly, that's a part of this.

The other thing, I suppose, as a shadow minister for Finance, is that any time I look at something like this, even though in principle I support the idea of helping seniors, especially those that are on a fixed income, the question automatically becomes: how much would this cost if we were to extend this particular provision to all seniors who own homes? As the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek indicated, if there is a cost – and obviously there is – then that money has to be made up somewhere. Are we simply going to transfer that extra burden onto the rest of the homeowners? Is the provincial government going to step forward with some sort of a plan to take money from natural resource revenue and direct it to this?

The surplus policy that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek referenced in the budget that was introduced on the 19th is, I would submit, woefully inadequate in terms of saving money. If we're going to count on that surplus policy to fund the provisions that would be encompassed by this motion, Mr. Speaker, then I would submit that that's just not good enough. Although, certainly, the Liberal opposition has been calling for some time for a surplus policy, we've recognized that in this province particularly surpluses are incredibly vulnerable to political manipulation. If that's the way we're going to look at funding, the proposal that's in front of us in this motion, then I wouldn't have any degree of confidence whatsoever that the money would actually be there to fund this. I think we have to look at an entire restructuring of the tax system if we're going to in fact proceed with the ideas that are contemplated in this motion.

Now, I think the Member for St. Albert discussed the model that's used in B.C., and I heard the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development reference it as well. I think that this perhaps is a very reasonable approach to the problem, whereby we would allow seniors to defer their property taxes until such time as they're no longer in that residence. I think, Mr. Speaker, that this is maybe a model that we should look at much more carefully because it would seem to me that it accomplishes a number of things. It certainly would provide immediate relief to those seniors that find it difficult to pay their portion of the education property tax, yet at the same time it would see that the province and, in effect, all residents of the province eventually receive that tax money. It may be deferred for a number of years, but it would eventually flow through. So that's a model that certainly attracts my attention and, I would submit, something that we should perhaps look at a little more carefully.

I know as well that my colleague from St. Albert talked at length about not just seniors but others that are on a fixed income and whether or not we should in fact be extending the provisions that this motion contemplates to others that are also unable to cope with rising education property taxes and give them that same relief so that we can keep them in their residences as well.

5:50

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods I thought raised a very valid point when she was talking about if you're going to look at sort of a user-pay model and if we're going to discuss in broad terms the fact that seniors are for the most part no longer using the education system, then why should they pay for it? Then she raised examples. What about those of us who don't use the public transit system? Why should we be paying into that? You get into that whole discussion as to what is good for the society as a whole and how much commitment and responsibility do we as individual taxpayers

have to take for that, Mr. Speaker. I think, again, that what it does is illustrate that this discussion that we're having today – although there's very good reason to extend the proposals that we're talking about to seniors, I don't think you can do it without having the larger discussion in the broader context, and that is a complete review of the entire taxation system and a broader discussion as to how and why we collect taxes and where we wish to collect taxes from and so forth. There certainly isn't time during today's debate for that. In fact, I think that probably there are only a few minutes left, and we've only had a handful of speakers with the opportunity to even discuss it today.

So I'm going to take my seat and allow one more speaker to get a few words in before we run out of time today. As I say, although I certainly respect the intent of this motion and applaud the member for bringing it forward, I don't think this is really the time or the place to approve it given the lack of discussion that has taken place today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to give a few opening comments on Motion 505. I agree with it in principle. If I can just sort of talk basically on the aspect of national parks, and I'll sort of focus in on Jasper national park, the aspect there with homes. The first thing is that you have a set area where you can build, and you're only allowed to build a certain amount of homes, so of course the assessment value is way high, and then you're taxed on the school portion.

The other area that hits a lot of the seniors is the right to reside. You know, when we're looking at seniors in that area, we need them there because they're the knowledge and do a lot of our volunteer work, so it would be kind of nice to be able to give them a bit of a break.

Another reason is that you have co-operative housing in the municipality of Jasper. You've got some low-income people that are there. They buy into a co-operative unit, and of course they're not allowed to sell it for any more than they paid for it other than an inflation value, but what really gets them is the education tax because it's on assessment value.

I mean, we did some portions of this for the aspect of seniors in the year 2004, that the taxes couldn't be any higher and that they could claim for them, but I still believe that we have to look at something because I get a lot of complaints. When we go back to 1994 – and I always don't look backwards. Seniors feel that they've done their part. They don't mind paying for their grandchildren's education, but when they're paying for their great-grandchildren's education, they feel that that's a little too much.

So I just feel that we should develop a balance. I know that we're going to have to review this. I know that we've reviewed it a lot, but the big thing is with the national parks. I think there's something that has to be done there to make sure that the seniors can reside there. I mean, we've worked hard with other municipalities in West Yellowhead now, as I stated earlier today, to move forward and get some other types of housing for them.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-East to close debate on Motion 505.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am well aware that there are many seniors who can afford to pay taxes such as this particular one we are debating, and I know that from personal experience again, door-knocking in my own area. However, I am equally acutely aware that there are many who simply cannot. However, to be fair to them all, I don't see any way of really further categorizing the two groups, those who can afford versus those who cannot. Hence, I'm supporting this particular motion from that standpoint.

Just a couple of closing comments, Mr. Speaker. First of all, thank you to all the members who participated on both sides of the discussion. We should be reminded that according to the 2001 federal census, 60 per cent of Alberta's seniors lived in that year in either Edmonton or Calgary. In fact, 81 per cent of seniors overall are located in our urban areas throughout Alberta, not just in Edmonton and Calgary. According to the trends available as seniors continue to age, the numbers that live in urban areas will also increase. Now, as the seniors population in Alberta continues to climb, so too are our property values climbing. In fact, they are skyrocketing in various places. Property taxes are following suit.

Although seniors are by no means the only group facing financial challenges due to high costs of living and in maintaining their properties and so on, many of them are certainly at risk of financial hardship. We here as legislators and lawmakers are always looking for unique and relevant measures to manage growth pressures and to improve the quality of life for all Albertans, including our seniors. Here today we have an opportunity to do exactly that for a very special group of individuals, individuals who helped build this province and in so doing contributed enormously to the prosperity we enjoy today.

By eliminating this portion of property taxes for seniors through the phasing out approach referenced in the motion, our Legislative Assembly of Alberta will immediately ensure the retention of money in the pockets of seniors so they can be assisted as they address the challenges they face. Having contributed to the building of a strong Alberta and to the assurance of a bright future for our children, it would be very appropriate to say thank you to our seniors by removing the education property tax from their shoulders.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, at the same time it's equally important to first identify a predictable, sure, and stable source of replacement funding for education purposes because we wouldn't want to do anything to the detriment of the outstanding K to 12 education system that we have in this province. This is critical for the sustenance of that system. So please let's not misconstrue each other's comments in that regard, nor should we let them get in the way of supporting this motion.

My final comment, Mr. Speaker, is simply to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for having brought this motion forward to our attention. He would point out to you that individually a senior's average income was \$26,336 in the year 2000, and that is approximately \$5,000 lower than the average income for Alberta's population in general. This is a group that needs some help. Let's see if we can do that today by supporting this motion.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 lost]

The Acting Speaker: The House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, May 1, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/01

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Let us pray. O source of all wisdom, care, and understanding, bless this province of ours and its people to be the guardians of the trust given unto them. Bring forth from this Assembly guidance to benefit all those who live within its borders and outside. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly a group of 30 visitors from Holy Family school in Grimshaw. They're spending a good part of their week here in the city and, certainly, had to travel over six hours one way to get here. I don't often have school groups here, and I'm very, very proud that we've got representation from Grimshaw. They are accompanied today by teachers Miss Jennifer Anderson and Miss Kim Conquergood, by parent helpers Ms Roxanne Stinn, Mrs. Heather Hockley, Mr. Clayton Cardinal, Mr. Henry Jonk, and Mr. Chester Dodgson. They are seated in the public gallery. I would invite them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you Lorna Willert, who is one of my constituency assistants in Innisfail. Lorna has worked for me for almost seven years. She is greatly involved in the community as well as a dedicated and loyal individual who has been extremely supportive and a definite asset to my team. Lorna is joining us today in the members' gallery, and I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Royal Canadian Legion's Alberta-Northwest Territories Command takes a keen interest in promoting the values of good citizenship among young people throughout the province. The Legion is in partnership with the Legislative Assembly office in a program that reflects that good work. It's Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day program. We are very appreciative of both their financial support and their involvement for this annual event, which began last evening and will conclude later this afternoon. In your gallery, Mr. Speaker, are Mr. Don Orr, the Legion's command first vice-president, who is accompanied by his wife, Beryl Orr, and Darrel Jones, the Legion's vice-president, and his companion, Darlene Burnett. Mr. Orr and his Legion team have been instrumental in ensuring that the participants have been so well looked after. We will now invite our guests to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

My next introduction, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and to all members 59 students who are here today as partici-

pants in your MLA for a Day program. The participants have spent time with the Royal Canadian Legion, debated a resolution, spent the night at a local hotel, visited in their member's office, had lunch with them, and following question period they will receive a tour and briefing on the constituent elements of this House. The ultimate aim of the day's activities is to further develop the interest and understanding of our parliamentary system among our student guests. The students come from varying backgrounds, but one I would like to note is the granddaughter of a former executive director in the office of the former Premier Peter Lougheed. Our shadow colleagues are seated in both galleries. They are accompanied by their Legion chaperones Joan O'Reilly, Audrey Sluggett, Gordon McDonald, Wayne Donner, and Barb and Reid Morris. I would ask them as well to rise now and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 12 individuals who are concerned about the availability of support and service for children with autism and the many roadblocks to access assistance. First of all, I'd like them to rise when I finish: Gail Wilkinson from Edmonton, Yvette Ludwig from Edmonton, Mary Jo Hague from Edmonton, Christine Barringham and Eric Barringham from Edmonton, Dabby Fong from Calgary, Guy Emond from Calgary, Sherry Miller from Calgary, Kierstin Hatt from Camrose, Brian Hockin from Wetaskiwin, Amy Anderson from Edmonton, and Assad Chaudhry from Edmonton. I'd like them to rise and please accept the warm and traditional welcome from the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to introduce to you and to the Assembly six courageous Alberta landowners who are here to express their profound disappointment in the failure of our regulators to properly monitor and protect groundwater in the province. They are: from Rosebud, Fiona Lauridsen, Debbie Signer, and Jessica Ernst; from Ponoka, Shawn and Ronal Campbell; and in absentia Dale Zimmerman, who was here a year ago with complaints of gross contamination of his groundwater. Could they please stand, and we'll give them the usual welcome of the Legislature.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to have two introductions. The first person I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly is Brianne Hudson. Now, Brianne is a very good example of citizen advocacy. She and her fellow residents of the Sierra building have done a great deal of media to publicize their situation around lack of rent control, and later I'll be tabling a petition from them. I understand that Brianne is in the members' gallery. I would ask her to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is a very active group of seniors. I'm not sure if they're in the Assembly yet, but I'll put this on the record for when they do arrive. This is the Minerva Senior Studies group out of Grant MacEwan Community College in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre. We're expecting about 14 visitors. This is a really lively group. They're getting together to

study, for the most part, but I always enjoy my visits with them, and I'm looking forward to our usual tea and cake during Seniors' Week. If that group is in the galleries, would they please rise and accept our welcome.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 33 bright, inquisitive young minds from Sweet Grass school, in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. They are visiting the Legislature today to observe their MLA in action and learn a little bit about our democratic process. They're accompanied by teachers Mrs. Fiona Mark and Mr. Dean Hess. I would ask that they please now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a former page of this Assembly, Stacy Schell, who is visiting us. Having observed MLA behaviour while she was here, she's appropriately studying psychology and political science at the University of Western Ontario, and she's back to visit with us for the summer. I invite her to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Melanie Kay, Teresa Alenuik, and Richard Konkin. They're all workers on strike, entering the 235th day, at the Palace Casino here in Edmonton. We're very concerned about the state of Alberta labour laws and its impact on the Palace Casino employees. Melanie Kay has been at the Palace Casino for six and a half years and works as a slot cashier. Teresa Alenuik and Richard Konkin are both dealers at the Palace Casino and have been working there for the past seven years. Richard is also a member of the union's bargaining committee. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased and honoured to introduce four visitors today that are in the members' gallery, and I would like them to stand as I introduce them. First I'd like to introduce Laure Mwan, the Edmonton-Manning STEP student for this summer. She's originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and came to Canada in 2000, didn't know a word of English. She speaks excellent English now. She's working in my constituency office for the summer as she's a student at NAIT in office and records. I look forward to working with her.

I'd also like to introduce the STEP student for my Legislature office, Kirstyn Rau. She's originally from Daysland. Her father served on town council there for several years, implanting an interest in politics. She's in political science at Grant MacEwan and looks to go into law.

I'd also like to introduce Robin Williams, who's a legislative research assistant at my Legislature office. She's finished her first year of business at NAIT and will be returning in the fall. I look forward to working with her.

And last but not least is Catherine Obacz, their chief, my legislative liaison and chief of staff for the office of the independent member.

These women are all very independent, Mr. Speaker, and I ask this Legislature to welcome them all in its traditional warm welcome. Thank you.

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

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you two guests in the members' gallery. The first is my constituency manager from Little Bow, Lois McLeod, who might just be the longest serving constituency manager in the province now, since 1993. [interjections] I've been corrected already. Almost. The second is our new leg. assistant, that is going to be helping the MLA for Battle River-Wainwright and myself, Mr. Deva Veylan. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Climb and Run for Wilderness

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two Saturdays ago, on April 21, the Alberta Wilderness Association hosted their 16th annual climb and run for wilderness in Calgary. Over 800 intrepid runners and climbers conquered all 802 steps of the Calgary Tower. Over \$150,000 was raised in Calgary's premier Earth Day event. That's over \$150,000 in support of conservation and education programs that help protect our natural heritage.

Congratulations to individual and team members in each of the numerous categories. There were all sorts of prizes awarded, but that's not what it was about. I do want to make special mention of one truly inspirational participant. Her name, Mr. Speaker, is Phyllis Hart. She was back for her 11th tower climb, 11th year in a row. Phyllis Hart continues to inspire us all. She is 92 years young.

It was a truly festival-like atmosphere, with musicians and face painters and wildlife mascots cheering the athletes on. In addition, 25 individuals and groups showcased their work at the Wild Alberta Expo.

Speaking of wildlife, I'd like to thank the members of our team, the Lougheed Lightning, including Joe Lougheed, Duane Monea, and Kurtis Averill, who certainly kept the fun in fundraising. If you combine our efforts with those of three- and five-year-old Samantha and Kiana Averill, who climbed the tower a total of three times, and add another courtesy of our MLA for Calgary-Hays, we climbed the tower a total of 52 times.

Mr. Speaker, I trust the members of this Assembly will join me in recognizing Christyann Olson and everyone at the Alberta Wilderness Association as they work on their own and with government to ensure that we continue to strive to find the correct balance between environment and economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Alberta Film and Television Awards

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I had the pleasure of attending the 33rd annual Alberta film and television awards with numerous other colleagues as presented by the Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association, AMPIA. Film and television production in Alberta continues to skyrocket, and this annual awards

night allows us an opportunity to congratulate and to thank all of the producers, directors, writers, actors, musicians, and numerous others who work behind the scenes and are at the heart of this incredible industry.

Local productions are generating more and more attention for Alberta as well as more and more opportunities for our talented and creative artists. Given the success of the Oscar-winning blockbuster *Brokeback Mountain* and the upcoming release of Brad Pitt's *The Assassination of Jesse James* as well as the full-length feature film *Christmas in Wonderland*, that is being filmed at West Edmonton Mall as we speak, the landscapes and the spirit of Alberta are attracting major international attention as are the many economic advantages of filming right here in Alberta. We also have some of the most skilled and creative crews, producers, and performers anywhere in the world.

In support of this amazing industry, the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture attended the awards show and announced that funding for the Alberta film development program is being increased to \$18.3 million. This will help generate hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of production right here in our province. As I have said on numerous occasions, film and television production will soon become a billion dollar industry in Alberta.

Congratulations to all the nominees and award winners, including my constituent Louis Sedmak, who captured the best original musical score award, along with Van Wilmott, and also to former Premier Ralph Klein, who received the Friend of the Industry award.

Thank you, AMPIA, to your staff and volunteer board members, for another truly outstanding awards show and for continuing to promote Alberta as the place in which to film.

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

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the biggest misconceptions we have about those with autistic spectrum disorders is that they are insensitive and inhabit a world of their own. It's my understanding that, on the contrary, some are more aware of our world than we are. Many find living in our world acutely uncomfortable, even excruciating. The repetitive patterns that strike us as puzzling, irritating, and bizarre are coping mechanisms, often the only way these highly sensitive people can block the stimuli that assault their senses. Chanting, reciting, and outright withdrawal can be attempts to take control of their world to limit distractions that surround them.

Imagine someone pounding repeatedly on a hollow container near your head, shouting meaningless monosyllables at you, making a sound like fingernails scraping on a chalkboard, or flashing a strobe light on and off in the corner of your field of vision. These examples may give you a sense of the world, our world, that the autistic inhabit and their need to retreat from it.

Fifty years ago air pollution was not an issue. Fifteen years ago few believed second-hand cigarette smoke could be harmful or food preservatives were a problem for any but a few. How things have changed. These allergies were not peculiarities but an iceberg tip of a challenge we all need to take seriously. Mr. Speaker, I believe that by mid-century a host of other influences will be treated as seriously as hazardous chemicals.

For now I believe that many of the autistic children are canaries in the mine. Let us, therefore, not see them as those to be fixed or normalized or tolerated. Let us provide the supports to meet them as much as possible in their world and a willingness to shape our own world in a way that will be safer and more hospitable for all.

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

Wheelchair Curling Champions

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March of this year I stood in this House and introduced the 2007 Alberta wheelchair champions. Well, it gets better. In April, from the 5th to the 9th, they attended the national championship in Ottawa, Ontario, and I attended the opening ceremonies on behalf of our Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Speaker, although this team was at the wrong end of a 4-2 game against British Columbia, they went right to the finals. So they came up a little bit short this year. But the team of Anne Hibberd, Bridget Wilson, Jack Smart, spare Bob Johns, skip Bruno Yizek, and coach Ernie Comerford did a tremendous job this year in the first-ever nationals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

1:20

May Day

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to stand today and invite all members to join me in celebrating May Day 2007. In 1884 May 1 was chosen by the Federation of Organized Trades and Labour Unions to recognize the hard-won and well-deserved gains made by working people through the trade union movement. In fact, the entire development of progressive social programs, including the Canada pension plan, public health care, and the 40-hour workweek, has resulted from the struggle of Canada's labour movement.

Over a hundred years later the importance of unions for all working people has never been more clear. The labour movement has consistently been on the front lines in the fight to protect our public health care system, minimize environmental impact, and ensure that Alberta has a top-notch public education system.

As May Day falls so closely to the International Day of Mourning, we would be remiss if we didn't also acknowledge the very important role played by the labour movement in promoting workplace safety. The shameful shortage of health and safety inspectors in this province means that the implementation of important safety measures is left to the honour system, a system which too often allows profit to get in the way of safety. In the absence of a strong commitment on the part of the government to monitor and enforce safety regulations, trade unions play a key role in advocating for worker protection.

Alberta unions face particular challenges in their struggles for workplace fairness and dignity. Alberta has the worst labour laws in the country. As a bare minimum the government should commit to passing first contract arbitration legislation and introducing rules banning replacement workers. Such basic labour laws might have prevented, and probably would have, the acrimonious strikes at Tyson Foods, Shaw, and A-Channel. They might also help resolve the current strike at Palace Casino.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Camrose Fire Department Centennial

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two weeks ago the Camrose Fire Department reached a significant milestone as it celebrated its 100th anniversary. On Saturday, April 21, Camrose celebrated the history of its fire department through a special 100th anniversary firemen's ball. This was a time to recognize the early

beginnings of firefighters, which largely relied on local volunteers and horse-drawn pumps.

This year's anniversary has particular meaning for the Camrose Fire Department as they will be moving into a new fire hall this June. This new fire hall is the third fire hall for the city of Camrose, replacing the existing facility, which was built in 1954. The grand opening of the new fire hall is slated to be held in conjunction with Camrose's Founders Days this August. Founders Days, a week to celebrate our heritage, will also highlight Camrose's first fire chief, Frank P. Layton, and will display firefighting memorabilia during the event.

The anniversary of the Camrose Fire Department is an opportune time to recognize the importance of firefighting in our province. Firefighting is a thankless and risk-filled profession. Firefighters understand that their role in the protection of persons and property can result in the ultimate sacrifice. We are very grateful for their dedication to their role in emergency response.

Many firefighters in this province are volunteers and join fire departments in service to their community. Volunteer fire departments rely on the dedication of their members to be prepared for emergencies. The Camrose Fire Department is no different. They are a dedicated and committed force and drive the success of the department. Their accomplishments over the past 100 years are a reflection of their important service to the community.

I want to congratulate fire chief Peter Krich and the Camrose Fire Department on their 100th anniversary. I want to thank them for their outstanding work and dedication, and I wish them the best as they move into a new fire hall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present a petition asking the government to introduce legislation to suspend a graduated driver's licence if the holder of the licence is involved in a serious collision resulting in injury or death. This petition is signed by many residents of Sherwood Park and Strathcona constituencies and is the first of many which will follow.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from Unity House in northeast Edmonton saying, "We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to hold rent increases to no more than the rise in the average monthly wage until December 31, 2010."

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, did you have a petition?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, yes, I do. I'd like to table a petition with 11 signatures. The petition notes that Alberta is 1 of 3 provinces that do not provide basic protection for newly organized workers and calls on the Assembly to enact first contract legislation.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege today to table the requisite number of copies of a calendar with respect to the

appearances before Committee of Supply. I believe that all three House leaders have agreed to it. If there are any errors, I am sure I will be back tomorrow to correct same. It's been a hard-negotiated process.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table copies of a call to action distributed today by Ben Seutter, president of the Edmonton Apartment Association. The memo notes that MLAs are hearing from tenants concerned about massive rental increases and that the Edmonton Apartment Association needs to "counter that influence." The call to action also asks for a guarantee from the labour union supporters of the Member of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that people who work in the rental industry will limit their wage hikes to once every 365 days.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings today. The first is a letter from Roshika Khanna and was sent to every MLA's constituency office in Calgary. Mrs. Khanna is the program co-ordinator with the Calgary Scope Society, helping improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities. She explains that she's been unable to find a two-bedroom rental unit at around \$700 because of the lack of affordable units, the shortage of subsidized housing, and landlord attitudes towards disabled people on limited incomes for over two months.

The second is an e-mail from my constituent Trudy Hill, who works as a receptionist for the Alberta Research Council. As a unionized government of Alberta employee she is not able to pay the increasing cost of living, including a recent 45 per cent rent increase.

The third is an e-mail from another constituent, Robin Smith. When she moved to Calgary a year ago, she was only able to find an apartment that was at the top of her budget. She works full-time as a medical lab assistant in a Calgary hospital and some months ago had to take a 30 hour per week job as a customer service specialist. Now working 70 hours per week and with a sick father she can't go to visit. Her rent has been increased to \$924 plus power and parking for a 550 square . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, this is just tablings – okay? – not a speech.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Chase: Excuse me. I have two more tablings.

The Acting Speaker: Make them brief, then, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The fourth e-mail is from my constituent Ken Elmquist, who received an increase from \$765 to \$1,115 per month.

From another constituent, Candace Loken, whose rent is increased by \$400, and she's on CPP and disability, and it takes up her maximum of \$900.

The truth hurts.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of an e-mail I received from Don Gunderson regarding the Affordable Housing Task Force. He notes that despite the presentations made by people from across the province, most of the recommenda-

tions were rejected. He says that rejection of these recommendations brings into question that sincerity of other policy review panels.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: We will get back to tablings later.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Acting Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Calgary Municipal Funding

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The *Calgary Herald* today released a poll that 7 out of 10 Calgarians support Mayor Bronconnier's efforts to make sure that the Premier keeps to his promise about municipal funding. Clearly, many Calgarians believe that this government is out of touch with their concerns and issues. To the President of the Treasury Board: given the strong support for the mayor's position that no strings be attached to municipal funding, will the minister reconsider the strings attached to this government's budget allocation to the city of Calgary so that local concerns can be met locally?

1:30

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, obviously, I wasn't in the room with the Premier and the mayor. Obviously, the opposition leader wasn't. They have discussed at length what they feel is right for Alberta. Mayor Bronconnier may have his own agenda, and I would suggest that you should look very closely around you because I think the way he is posturing, it has a lot more to do with politics and a lot less to do with dealing with the citizens of Calgary.

The Acting Speaker: The first supplementary.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought the President of the Treasury Board was in charge of the treasury.

Mr. Speaker, I'm quoting from a speech delivered minutes ago by the mayor of Calgary to the Economic Development Authority there: the promise made by the Premier was not kept in this budget; for example, of the \$127 million earmarked for Calgary this year only \$42 million will actually be available, unfettered, to address the infrastructure priorities of this city, meaning Calgary. To the same minister: what reply does this government have to the mayor and to the people of Calgary?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. That's new money. The city of Calgary already gets \$272 million for infrastructure. The city of Calgary is dealt with on a very fair and equitable basis as are the rest of the cities and towns in Alberta. Is the opposition leader suggesting that we should take money from them to support the mayor's habits in Calgary? This Premier also committed to do what's right for all Albertans, and that's fair and equitable distribution of money.

The Acting Speaker: The second supplementary.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, let's continue with this. This is quoting from the mayor of Calgary earlier today. What does the budget mean for Calgary? Quote: it means that some important long-range investments may need to be delayed or cancelled. Then he goes on to say, quote: I am very disappointed to announce that in light of the province's budget we will be suspending the work on two new LRT lines indefinitely. End quote. Given that we've just confirmed these announcements from the mayor, can I ask again the

same minister: why does this government refuse to respond positively to immediate and pressing transportation needs in Calgary?

Mr. Snelgrove: Because we respond to the needs of an entire community and not the political aspirations of one. We spent \$2.2 billion on health care in Calgary, \$1.3 billion on education, \$704 million on postsecondary funding. We as this government are trying to address the issues around homelessness, the issues around affordable housing, the transportation bottlenecks, and we will do it. As Mr. Speaker has seen, the mayor of Edmonton seems quite comfortable in sitting down with the relevant ministers and addressing the issues, not creating them.

The Acting Speaker: Second Official Opposition question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay. Let's talk homelessness. He doesn't understand Calgary; maybe he understands affordable housing, though I doubt it. The crisis continues in Alberta today. The mess is getting worse. Albertans are being forced out of their homes. No matter how many denials and excuses we hear from this government, the evidence points to this government's policy failures as the main culprit. To the President of the Treasury Board: when the Treasury Board approved the money for affordable housing, did it ever cross this minister's mind that until these units were built, Albertans were going to face huge rent increases and often be forced out of their homes?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. The housing situation in Alberta did not happen overnight, and it will not be solved overnight with the twinkle of the magic wand. This government has taken the responsible action, which, indeed, is increasing the supply of units to meet demand. All of the other stuff in there is stopgaps, and it might make you feel good politically, but it doesn't work.

The Acting Speaker: First supplementary. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear. In question period yesterday this House was told, "This government has learned from history that rent controls do not work." Well, perhaps the government has not learned because the 1978 CMHC annual report released at the very time rents in this province were controlled noted that over 17,000 rental apartment units were started that year. Over 17,000. Granted, in 1978 governments also offered tax breaks to rental property developers and provided rent control for tenants. So to the same minister: will this government change its stand and do what works, or is his advice to renters to go to Campers Village to shop for their next home?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, this government looks forward to solutions, not backwards. In 1978 the government was entering into huge debt to try and satisfy some of the housing requirements. That ended up with accumulated debts of \$22 billion. We're not doing that again. It's short sighted, it's irresponsible, and it doesn't work in the long term.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, if anybody would know about short sighted, it would be this government.

We support the government's commitment to funding to create affordable housing, but solving the affordable housing crisis also

takes not only money but leadership and innovation, and it takes land. You've got to have land to build the housing on. Municipalities like Hinton and Fort McMurray need the province to release land to them right now if they're going to start constructing new housing. Will the President of the Treasury Board commit to releasing Crown land for affordable housing, and will he provide this land for affordable housing to municipalities for free or for a dollar, sir?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the government works closely with Fort McMurray. We met with the mayor last Tuesday, and we talked about how important it is to get a plan together so that we're working towards a solution. The mayor of Edmonton came to the government with an opportunity to use some of the existing lands to build affordable housing, and this government was very supportive of initiatives like that that work with us and the departments and the related agencies to get a solution to it. So there are some good ideas in getting land, making land affordable where it's necessary, but the successes have come when the mayors of large cities work with the government.

The Acting Speaker: Third Official Opposition question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Groundwater Stewardship

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Groundwater is our most precious resource, more precious even than the valuable hydrocarbons we extract from over 400,000 sites across the province. Rural landowners, unable now to drink their water, are here today demanding answers to the legitimate questions about dramatic pollution of their drinking water. They have composed a pledge for all Albertans, calling for responsible groundwater stewardship. To the Minister of Environment: why after one and a half years of investigating contaminated groundwater from Wetaskiwin to Ponoka to Rosebud do we still have no answers for these rural folks?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is exactly right. We should be and are committed to the management and stewardship of our groundwater. At the same time, I have to advise the member that there have been no conclusive opportunities for us to identify any direct links between the development of coal-bed methane and groundwater. So the research that's ongoing through monitoring of wells, through a number of initiatives that are under way is trying to arrive at the very answer to the question that this hon. member seeks.

The Acting Speaker: First supplementary.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government may need to hire some scientists to find this out.

These folks with valid health and safety concerns about massive amounts of gas in water and unknown chemicals burning their skin have been repeatedly promised by the former Premier and Environment minister rapid assessment and resolution of their problems. To the minister again: when will these good farm folks have their water restored?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Environment is doing everything that it possibly can to get to the bottom of this issue. We've drilled a number of monitoring wells. We have a program of ongoing water testing. But I also need to advise this House that in some instances we have been unable to get the co-operation of the landowner to allow us to do ongoing monitoring and testing of the well in

question. It's very difficult to get to the bottom of the issue if you don't get to the bottom of the well, let me say.

The Acting Speaker: Second supplementary. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Rosenberg forum and its subsequent report recently criticized soundly the lack of investment and science in managing Alberta's groundwater. Yesterday the Pembina Institute reported again, calling for a systematic and reliable groundwater monitoring system. The public has lost the trust in this government and its regulators in managing and monitoring our groundwater. Final to the minister: with the growing concerns about oil and gas effects on groundwater, will he do the responsible thing and call for an independent review of groundwater impacts from oil and gas activity in this province?

1:40

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, a snapshot in time does not provide the amount of information that's needed. That's why it's so important that we have ongoing monitoring that gives us accumulated information over time. That doesn't happen overnight. I can't just speed up the clock and get two years' worth of information in six months. That's part of the problem.

The other part of the problem, Mr. Speaker – in fact, it's not a problem; it's the solution – is that much of what the hon. member is referring to was part of the multistakeholder committee that was formed one year ago that the Pembina Institute referred to yesterday, and frankly we're making very, very good progress in implementing those recommendations.

The Acting Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Affordable Housing (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The rent crisis has MLAs' phones ringing off the hook. So much so that the Edmonton Apartment Association has decided to help the government set the record straight. In a memorandum, which I just tabled, from the president of the Edmonton Apartment Association it says, "In a meeting with MLA, Thomas Lukaszuk, he did say that he received about 10 calls [or] letters per day from people complaining about rising rents," and he guesses that "other MLAs are receiving similar calls." He goes on to say, "It is not the private rental industry's Constitutional responsibility to provide affordable housing for Albertans." My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Given the statement, whose responsibility is it?

The Acting Speaker: This chair is going to enforce the 45-second rule.

Any response, President of the Treasury Board?

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The responsibility to look after certain people in our society that need our help is ours, and we take that responsibility very seriously. Whether it be seniors or whether it be the infirm or mentally ill, we look after them. It's not our responsibility to house everyone who comes to Alberta looking for a better life, but there are a lot coming, as you all know. So the people that the Alberta government has responsibility for, we address. There is a temporary imbalance between the affordability and availability of suites and what the marketplace can offer, and that, unfortunately, will take some time to balance out.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, tell that to the people who are ending up on the street.

This memo goes on to say that “when people spend more than 30% of their gross monthly income on housing, then it is deemed unaffordable.” It goes on to say that in Europe and Asia and so on this is more like 50 per cent. “Consequently, our society is having these big discussions on arbitrary numbers.” It’s clear the apartment association thinks that people should pay up to 50 per cent of their income for rent. Will the government take steps to make sure that that does not become the case?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member has gathered from his press release is certainly his opinion, and he can twist it around however he wants. The fact is that there are many thousands of very responsible, respectable, and diligent landlords who have developed a very good and strong relationship with their tenants, and we don’t hear about them. Unfortunately, in any business when the opportunity arises for some to take money, they do. That’s unfortunate, but that’s a fact of the system we live in. It creates enormous wealth, but it comes with its problem. It’s what we call the price of prosperity. The responsibility for setting rental rates is the responsibility of the marketplace.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government couldn’t be more clear.

I’ll go on to condo conversions, and the memo says: “There is this mistruth floating out there that condo conversions are evil. The condo market is responding to the housing needs of Albertans. That is how the free market works.” Sounds like the minister. “If there was no need for condo’s then there wouldn’t be any conversions.” So is it the position of the government that there’s no problem with condo conversions and that regardless as to whether or not people get put out on the street, it’s the right of the people who own the buildings to convert into condominiums?

Mr. Snelgrove: Yeah, I guess I would like to make that perfectly clear. Yes, it is their right as an owner of a property to use it as they do. We are, Mr. Speaker, introducing legislation that will limit the notification time to that to make it fair. Obviously, it’s not just as easy to pack up and move to another spot whether you’re moving from a house, a condo, or an apartment. Converting a condo from a rental to an ownership doesn’t decrease the housing availability. It may move someone into what they consider an affordable housing unit and open up where they were. So it’s a negative sum game. You have ownership or rentership. It still accommodates people.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the next question, I’d like to caution the leader of the third party. You are familiar with the rule of this House that we do not mention members’ names in the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Enmax Electricity Transmission Line

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On the 19th of April Enmax Corporation announced its intention to build a 1,200-megawatt power plant, and they indicated in their press release that this new power plant would generate enough power for about two-thirds of Calgary’s requirements. My constituents in Airdrie-Chestermere have been told for the past two years that a new transmission line that will go across their land is needed to prevent problems with power shortages for Calgary. This power is not to be

used for export, yet Enmax is now boasting about being able to export power with the addition of this new proposed plant. In light of the new plant that Enmax wants to build, will the minister revisit the need for the transmission line so that my constituents can stop worrying about what will happen to their homes and land if the transmission line continues?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, what I will say is that we welcome the news from Enmax, a great asset, again, to the province of Alberta. It indicates that the robust system that we put in place with respect to the utility in Alberta is working.

With respect to the line itself, the line is still required. Whether or not Enmax out of Calgary develops 1,200 megawatts, AESO’s requirement on the 10-year plan in southern Alberta – 8,000 megawatts of electricity would be required in Alberta. So the line would still be required.

Ms Haley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I get confused when I hear that, because my constituents have been told that the power needs for Calgary are the reason for this transmission line, yet SNC-Lavalin is now building a tie-in between Great Falls, Montana, and Lethbridge. We have Enmax building a 1,200-megawatt power plant, which apparently now they can utilize for export. Why the need for the transmission line? I don’t understand.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, you know, the suggested use for this power that Enmax is going to put on, whether it’s exported or used internally, the transmission system, the heart of the system to provide reliable and consistent electricity for all Albertans, is the core and the backbone of the system in the province of Alberta. In order to allow the movement of electricity either into or out of the province of Alberta, the transmission system must be fortified. This particular piece of business in front of us with respect to a 500-kV line is necessary.

Ms Haley: Well, given that the minister indicates that it is necessary, I’m going to ask him if he can assure my constituents of two things. First, the way the system was utilized to decide that this transmission was needed: will he do a fairness review of it to ensure that my constituents were treated fairly? Also, will a second look be given at putting this transmission line underground instead of overtop on huge towers?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, technology with respect to the transmission systems globally changes on an ongoing basis. This particular line, that now is in hearings with the EUB, certainly uses technology that is current for the time. We do not have in front of us, that I’m aware of, the technology and capability to move the amount of power that we require to move over the distances that we require with buried cable at this point in time. In the future is that possible? I wouldn’t hazard a guess to say that it is or isn’t. All I can say is that this particular line is in front of the EUB as an application currently, and they will deal with it.

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

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Autism spectrum disorder is a developmental disorder that affects thousands of Albertans.

High-quality care and intensive intervention can dramatically improve the quality of life of children with autism and their families. The needs of children with autism are assessed by a multi-disciplinary team that offers recommendations and determines eligibility for services. To the Minister of Children's Services: since the expertise of each team member is essential in making these critical decisions, can the minister please tell us how their knowledge and expertise regarding autism are assessed?

1:50

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Children's Services, the MLA for Banff-Cochrane, is away today. [interjections] I'm sorry.

Certainly, I want to indicate that, you know, we as a province take autism very, very seriously, and I will pass on the comments to the minister.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. minister, you are aware of violating that rule as well.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have some serious questions, and I will continue. The multidisciplinary teams play the biggest role in deciding the level of services available to children with autism on a case-by-case basis. We've heard concerns that wait times for assessment delay access to necessary services, that team members do not always meet with the children they are supposed to assess, and that the process lacks transparency. To the Minister of Children's Services: what reviews of these multidisciplinary teams have been completed to date to ensure that the best practices are in place?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I will take the questions under advisement and pass them on to the minister.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I could ask for written responses to these questions.

I have another one for the representative of the minister. Many children with autism spectrum disorder are not receiving the care that they need to become safe, healthy, and independent adults. We have heard from stakeholders and constituents that it is common for services for children with autism to receive yearly rollbacks. This leads to a lengthy appeals process and unnecessary stress on families. Again to the representative of the Minister of Children's Services: can the minister tell us when families can expect to receive the stable funding and services they need for their children without roadblocks?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I certainly appreciate the questions, and I will ensure that the minister receives those questions. Thank you.

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

Calgary Municipal Funding (continued)

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering the phenomenal growth in Calgary, complaints have been made that recent funding announcements are proportionately inappropriate. My first question is to the minister of municipal affairs. How close does \$400 million come to meeting the actual needs of Calgarians, and does this handcuff the mayor of Calgary?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the minister of municipal affairs. This funding announcement I think is critical when we put it into the context of the overall budget of government. As you know, there was a commitment made by our Premier and by our government that over a three-year period of time \$1.4 billion that is currently used by the provincial government and is part of the requisition to municipalities on property taxes for education would be replaced with dollars from general revenue. That's exactly what has taken place . . .

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Finance. The mayor of Calgary has accused the provincial government of shortchanging the city in the budget both in terms of amounts dedicated to certain identified needs and with regard to the total dollar figure. Can the minister please put in context how Calgarians have done in this budget compared to previous years, including two years ago when \$1 billion was given to the city for infrastructure with no strings attached?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In this budget alone for the city of Calgary there is roughly 5 and a half billion dollars worth of funding. That's 5 and a half billion dollars that is going to the city of Calgary. We're seeing \$272 million simply for the \$600 million municipal infrastructure program plus a fuel tax. If the hon. member remembers, we gave 5 cents a litre to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary to be utilized for their infrastructure needs.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would say that the cities of Calgary and Edmonton and all of the province are doing extremely well. We have increased funding 600 per cent in the last four years – six times in the last four years – to municipalities.

Mr. Rodney: My final supplementary is indeed to the Minister of Finance as well. Minister of Finance, what can Calgarians look forward to specifically with respect to provincial funding for the city of Calgary in the near future?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Included in this budget is \$2.2 billion for the health region. There's \$1.3 billion for education. There's \$704 million for postsecondary education. We also have to remember that there's a ring road being built. There's a huge ring road that's being built around the city. There's a south Calgary hospital. It goes on and on and on. We're in this province together, and it's time we started looking at a partnership as opposed to a fight.

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

Continuing Care Standards

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Major cracks in the walls, water stains behind electrical panels, flooding in the basement, mould and mushroom growth in the crawl space, multiple incidents of fire, and two out of three exits that would be virtually useless in the event of an emergency evacuation. No, I'm not talking about the Legislature Annex. These are some of the ongoing problems that put the safety of staff and residents at risk at the Good Samaritan Pembina Village in Evansburg. My questions are to the minister of health. Does the minister think that it's appropriate for vulnerable seniors, many of whom require wheelchairs and walkers, to live in a building with so many hazards and risks to their health and safety?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One would hope that no senior would have to live in inappropriate housing or in any housing that would provide risk to their health or safety. As to the particular circumstances enunciated by the hon. member, I'm not sure that I can agree that those are the circumstances in place, but I'll be more than happy to have an investigation.*

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Minister, but these issues are not new. They were all identified by the Health Facilities Review Committee in 2004. There has been a follow-up report, and three years later local health and safety professionals are distressed that these problems still have not been addressed. What is the point of having a committee that can't monitor and enforce compliance?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very important to have a committee who will review health facilities across the province and make reports. It's also very important to follow up on those reports, and I certainly indicate that I will follow up on the report to determine what, in fact, has happened in that case.

The hon. member will know, as she's been shadowing me for the last four months, that health is a very big portfolio with lots of facilities. It's a big portfolio, so for her to expect me to respond to a particular report on a given day without having any advance notice of it is quite inappropriate. But I'm more than happy to look into it and see what has happened in that particular instance because we're all concerned about the quality of life of seniors in this province and their ability to live in appropriate housing.

The Acting Speaker: Second supplementary. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, the minister has had not one but two reports on this particular facility, and the Auditor General's 2005 report on seniors' care clearly stated that the Health Facilities Review Committee "[does] not inspect facilities for compliance with the Basic Standards and [does] not have enforcement mechanisms to ensure that facilities rectify non-compliance." Will the minister finally eliminate the ineffective Health Facilities Review Committee and put its \$881,000 budget toward real monitoring and enforcement?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I can advise the House that we are currently undergoing a review of governance and accountability

structures with respect to RHAs and other health authorities and with respect to every aspect of the health department. We'll include the facilities review committee and their role, mandate, and purpose. So I'll be more than happy to take the advice of the member with respect to whether there are some roles and responsibilities that could be added or other issues. I'll be more than happy to have her advice and the advice of any other members of this House as to how we can do a more effective job of ensuring that housing and health care for our seniors and for all Albertans is up to the highest quality.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Barley Research

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently met with representatives from the Alberta Barley Commission regarding Alberta Agriculture and Food's malt barley research program, which takes place at Lacombe. During this meeting I was informed that the research program was being phased out and that fewer researchers are working on barley projects. This is of concern to the many Albertans who rely on malt barley to make a living. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Is barley research at Lacombe being discontinued, and if so, why?

2:00

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Barley research at the Field Crop Development Centre in Lacombe is not being discontinued. Our current research investment is however being redirected to focus on barley and triticale for food and biofuel use. Two other organizations currently in western Canada have malt barley programs like our current research program, so we're investing in new research projects that will set Albertans apart, and we're not going to reinvent the wheel.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister. The barley sector is an important part of Alberta's agricultural industry. What other research initiatives relative to this sector are being conducted or supported by your department?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of exciting research taking place today. We've invested very heavily in genetic research to increase profit for our farmers. This research will focus on things like increasing yield and nutrition, improving water efficiency, and protecting crops from diseases and pests. Our scientists are also working on a new technology that can evaluate the attributes and the quality of a crop. This technology has the incredible potential to result in payment to grain farmers based on the quality of their crops rather than payment on the bushel or by the tonne.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. My final supplemental is to the same minister. Can the minister tell the House what else is being done to encourage and promote agricultural research in his department, and does it really benefit the producers?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker. Research is vital. For example, the Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences Alberta, also known as IFASA, brings together scientists from Agriculture and Food, the University of Alberta, the Alberta Research Council, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. They focus on research into a number of priorities: value-added meat

*See p. 770, right col., para. 6

products, managing soil nutrients and the environment, feed grain quality and supply, and, of course, our new bioenergy products.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Energy censored hundreds of pages in the royalty review documents that it tabled two weeks ago. One of the censored charts, that is available publicly in the Department of Energy's library, reveals that Alberta takes 5 per cent less than Wyoming, 6 per cent less than Colorado, 8 per cent less than Oklahoma, 10 per cent less than New Mexico, and 12 per cent less than both Louisiana and Texas. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. How many of the other censored documents also show that this government does not collect a fair share in royalties for Albertans, the owners of the resource?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the hon. member indicates what has been done by this ministry and by this government. To be open, transparent, and fair, I have tabled in the Legislature certain documents related to a previous royalty review. In those documents that were tabled here, there were some exceptions. Again, department staff working with respect to the FOIP requirements may have severed some pieces of those documents; however, what I did say was that I had the department then put all of the documents on public review in the library. That's where the information came from.

The Acting Speaker: First supplementary. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy can't get his story straight. Two weeks ago he said that Texas is the best oil- and gas-producing state to compare Alberta to when looking at royalties. When the truth was revealed, showing that Texas collects much more in royalties, the minister changed his story, saying that it isn't fair to compare Alberta to other jurisdictions. Again to the Minister of Energy: how many millions of dollars have been lost due to this government's failure to collect a fair share of royalties on behalf of Albertans? How much money have you squandered and lost?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, absolutely none. I can tell you today as I stand here that the development that's happened in the province of Alberta, the development that's happened in the country of Canada, the development that's happened that does provide tremendous asset and tremendous resource for the country, for the province, for North America, and globally would not – would not – have taken place without the foresight of this government in 1996 and 1997 to put a generic oil sands royalty system in place. This hon. member picks a piece out of Texas. If he wants to compare the royalties in Alberta with Texas, ask him to make comparisons with the deep gulf drilling.

Mr. MacDonald: I just may do that because I know what I'll find.

Again to the Minister of Energy: why did this government fail to increase royalty rates when two years ago your own officials in the Department of Energy stated, and I quote: we are not capturing our fair share at high prices. End of quote. Why didn't you increase royalties to a fair rate then?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member opposite will know that two years ago I wasn't standing here. Look ahead. Look to the future. Don't look behind you. We're working with this. We're working with the situation, and this hon. member absolutely refuses to listen. I answered a question last week which very clearly indicated that last year we changed four – count them: one, two, three, four – royalty systems, that took back \$300 million for Albertans. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Affordable Housing

(continued)

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I think you said Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Speaker, it should be clear to everybody, including members opposite, that we still have a housing crisis in this province. Landlords are taking advantage of the economy to actually gouge renters. The government has a responsibility to all Albertans. Of calls into my office, a couple of examples: Beverly McGowan, rent increased \$375 past six months, 69 years of age, wondering about how she's going to pay the rent; Pat Reddy; Patrick Quigley, rent increased \$250, rent will now take three-quarters of the income. Yesterday we asked just to even have a debate in a policy field committee. Government members turned us down. My question is to the Government House Leader. Would the Government House Leader agree that this is precisely the kind of . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, as I said, I will be enforcing the 45-second rule. I don't know if any minister wants to respond to that comment.

Second question.

Mr. Martin: Well, the minister may not want to answer it because it's a serious problem.

This is precisely what we talked about, having policy field committees dealing with real issues. My question is: why would the government not bring this to a policy field committee?

Mr. Hancock: I think that's an excellent idea, but it's one of many excellent ideas, and it should only be taken into consideration when we discuss how to move forward with additional policy discussion around the question of affordable housing. It's one of the things that a policy field committee could do, but it's one of many options that need to be taken into account by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and by the government in determining how to move to the next step on this.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's all very well and dandy. People's rents are going up. We can't even have a debate in the policy field committee: that's what we're saying. What I'm saying to this minister as the Government House Leader who believes in the policy field committees is: why wouldn't he use his authority and say: "Look, this is a real issue for real Albertans. Let's have it go back to the policy field committee"? Would he provide that leadership?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, what was inappropriate was the method by which the hon. member attempted to hijack the House yesterday by bringing a Standing Order 42 motion to try and accomplish indirectly what he can't accomplish directly. What can be done is that when policy field committees are set up, there may be an opportunity for a resolution to ask the policy field committee

to deal with that as an issue, or it may be something that the committee can deal with by itself, but it's entirely inappropriate for the hon. member to ask for the House's business to be adjourned under Standing Order 42, which is what he was trying to do. That's what he was trying to do: use an inappropriate method to raise an appropriate issue. I'm all alive to the question of how we do policy discussion in this House.

2:10

Freehold Mineral Rights

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the Minister of Energy is still all worked up, but I'd like to ask him a few more questions. Recently I received some calls from constituents who are owners of freehold mineral rights. Last month the Energy and Utilities Board upheld the application for 28 well licences for coal-bed methane on split-title lands. This ruling indicates that those parties that held the natural gas rights also held the rights to the coal-bed methane. This issue is of significant interest to freehold mineral rights owners. My questions today are to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister advise this Assembly whether this decision is legally binding?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This particular issue and the EUB's ruling with respect to the 28 is not legally binding. The EUB hearing arose on freehold mineral lands where one party was the holder of the coal rights and another party or other parties had leased the gas rights. Both claimed legal entitlement to the coal-bed methane. They're private disputes. In these particular ones the mineral title owners have legal options available to them if they wish to pursue them, and in this case the EUB has laid out a path forward.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what effect does this ruling by the EUB have on the other split-title lands located throughout our province and the mineral rights associated with them?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is an extremely complex issue because the ownership of coal-bed methane ultimately depends on the wording of some of the original mineral grants, and some of these go back many, many years. For that reason, the EUB decision, while it provides clarity with respect to the issue of entitlement on these particular leases, only deals with those specific situations, and it doesn't apply to other mineral rights.

Mr. Doerksen: Minister, you're going to be receiving petitions from these people that are affected asking the government of Alberta to take immediate steps to introduce directive, retroactive legislation applicable to both Crown and freehold lands stating that CBM is a natural gas. As minister are you prepared to bring this legislation forward?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time we don't have plans to put forward legislation to deal with the issue. Of course, I'm very aware that individuals on both sides of the issue are coming forward with respect to lobbying on behalf of their particular side of the issue. We deal with thousands of mineral grants in the province of Alberta, and it makes it extremely difficult at this point in time to implement encompassing legislation. However, we continue to

monitor the situation. We're certainly taking it very seriously, and we understand that there are many Albertans quite concerned and interested in the outcome.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Education was asked an important question about the surprise offer on the teachers' unfunded pension liability. His answers did not satisfy the Official Opposition and certainly not the Alberta teachers. The minister stated that his pension deal has nothing to do with labour negotiations, yet his letter to the ATA states that if teachers strike, the deal could be off. This will clearly bias the bargaining process. To the Minister of Education: why is the minister using the unfunded liability to control and manipulate the Alberta teachers?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that this was not a surprise offer. This was a good-faith initiative by the government which will go ahead. This good-faith initiative by government is all about recruitment and retention of the best young teachers in the business.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In April I presented a motion urging this government to immediately initiate negotiations to find a reasonable term solution to the teachers' unfunded liability situation. At that time the minister said that an agreement would be negotiated with the Alberta Teachers' Association and pledged that he would not politicize the issue. The minister now has taken the exact opposite approach. To the Minister of Education: how can the minister explain his complete flip-flop on the unfunded pension liability question?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, let's put the truth out on the table. What we have done is given a short-term, one-year, good faith initiative to ensure that our young teachers stay in the profession while we negotiate a long-term resolution with the Alberta Teachers' Association, and that will take place over the course of the next year after we have some input from the task force that will look at all of the options to ensure that we get the very best basis to get a long-term resolution.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A letter giving an ultimatum is not negotiation.

The minister previously promised in this House that a deal on the unfunded pension liability will be reached through negotiation with Alberta teachers. This has not occurred. To the Minister of Education: if the minister is confident in his plan or his process of getting this solved, why didn't he discuss this with the Alberta teachers? What are you afraid of, Mr. Minister? What are you afraid of?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the \$25 million good faith offer is not a negotiation. This is a good faith offer on the part of government, so there's nothing to negotiate. What we will negotiate is a long-term resolution. I'm not sure what part of the last answer the hon. member didn't understand, but it's the long-term resolution that we will negotiate with the ATA, and this particular offer in the budget is free money.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Land-use Framework Consultation

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of my constituents expressed interest in providing input to the land-use framework consultation. The first session will be held in West Yellowhead, in Edson, on May 14. My question is for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How much is the minister planning to encourage Albertans about this very complex topic of land use in Alberta?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to report to this House that from May 14 to 31 there'll be 17 public sessions where Albertans will have the opportunity to share their views on land use with Sustainable Resource Development and the government of Alberta. We're encouraging all Albertans to participate in this process. For those that are listening or watching today, you can find the dates and locations at www.landuse.gov.ab.ca or call toll-free at 310-4455. There'll also be ads in the newspapers advertising these meetings.

Thank you.

2:20

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What format will the sessions take, and how can the public be assured their comments will be used?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we're very anxious to hear from Albertans on this. These meetings will go from approximately 2 in the afternoon until the evening, so it's flexible to meet people's time schedules. There are two very interesting pamphlets that will be available. One is a workbook; the other explains. These can be sent in. We'll be reading these results, and they'll be fed into the final result.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. What should I tell my constituents about the media reports that the Alberta government is considering user fees for rugged trails designed for all-terrain vehicles?

Dr. Morton: Thank you for that question, hon. member. This is an opportunity to clarify earlier remarks. We have been there. Very specifically, I have been in consultation with off-road vehicle users interested in improving the quality of off-road trails and recreation in our forests. They are the ones that brought the issue of fees to improve the trails and bridges and so forth to protect the environment. But I want to clarify: this does not apply to parks. Okay, fellows? It doesn't apply to parks. This is forestry land-use areas. I would like to report that I'll be spending the May long weekend and also June 2 with various off-road vehicle groups in southern Alberta examining this issue.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the time allocated for question period has now elapsed.

Hon. members, before we proceed with Tabling Returns and Reports, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests (*reversion*)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today we have with us in the members' gallery 38 guests from the Trochu Valley high school. This is a school that is very astute in bringing the class up here every year and teaching parliamentary democracy. Unfortunately, only one of the class could come up for the MLA for a Day program, so the class did the next best thing: they all came. We have with the class of 38 their teachers Mrs. Fran Winther and Mr. Bill Cunningham. I'd ask them to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I looked up in the gallery, I also noticed another former page of the Assembly, Natalie Wilson. Natalie's mother is a teacher in Calmar. Her brother is currently a page. I see him sitting over there. I'm going to ask if Natalie would stand in the public gallery and also receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports (*continued*)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituent Jim Sexsmith, who is a senior. He is on a fixed income, no savings, dependent on oxygen. He has emphysema, living in an apartment, and can't find another place. The rent has increased this year and another 20 per cent increase coming very soon. No affordable home available for seniors, and he needs some help. I have five copies.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from the Minister of Education to the Alberta Teachers' Association regarding the teachers' unfunded pension liability.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is from a constituent, Deb Newman, who is saying: "Is there no way that we can stop this robbery? Has no one in government considered that it is time to bring back 'rent control'?"

The other one is from Velvet Martin about children with special needs. She says:

The most cost-effective way to manage government funding for children with special needs is via support of natural family involvement. Families faced with life-altering changes when a child is

born/develops severe disability are as vulnerable as the children themselves. Natural parents must be encouraged and regarded as valued, responsible care-givers.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings with the appropriate number of copies. One is notes for a statement from the independent Member for Edmonton-Manning on April 30, 2007, which was not given unanimous consent in this Assembly. It speaks to the workers' day of mourning.

Another is from Gary Hunt and the citizens' rights group operated by Victims of Violence. It speaks to a meeting this Saturday at Sacred Heart Church from 12 to 4 p.m. to build an organization for victims' and citizens' rights, to implement changes to help them.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I introduced one of my constituents, Brianne Hudson. I'd like to table a letter that she sent to me that's also got a petition attached to it that is signed by all of the tenants of the Sierra building. They write that they support the legislation that is supposed to be introduced – and we were actually expecting it today – which would limit the number of times landlords could raise the rent to once per year. They feel that there is a great need for rent control in the province and also ask that rent not be increased by more than 5 per cent per year. So on behalf of those tenants of the Sierra building – and I congratulate them on their advocacy – I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of their submission to the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, on your table there was a ribbon placed today. It's a card and a pin, Give the Gift of Life, from the Minister of Health and Wellness in recognition of National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week.

As well, hon. members, the Government House Leader had tabled the calendar for the Committee of Supply, and I believe there are some changes in it. I'm given to understand that the Government House Leader will be tabling a revised version before the end of the day. Would you like to speak to that matter?

Mr. Hancock: I just wanted to draw the House's attention to the fact that we switched, actually, May 14 and May 15. We got the departments right, but we forgot to switch the designated parties. So May 14 should be the New Democrats with the ministries of Energy and Environment, and May 15 in the evening should be the Liberals with the ministries of Infrastructure and Transportation and Employment, Immigration and Industry. We will correct that for the record.

The Acting Speaker: Very well. The record will reflect that. Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**
head: **Government Motions**
Provincial Fiscal Policies

17. Dr. Oberg moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate April 19: Ms Blakeman]

The Acting Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of all Albertans and as Leader of the Official Opposition, this extraordinary caucus of people, it's my duty and my privilege to rise and respond to the budget delivered in this Assembly two weeks ago.

The first budget of the Stelmach government represents, in our view, a colossal failure of vision. We need to start saving now to build a sustainable future for Alberta, but the government has ignored the need to save for the future. Instead, they've given us a fire alarm budget that drowns the political fires of today in a flood of nonrenewable oil sands cash while ignoring the needs of tomorrow.

When I responded to last year's budget, I said that there were a few things to like. The same holds true this year. For example, it's good to see that at long last the government is doing something to address the province's massive infrastructure debt, even if action is coming years too late. There's a little more money for AISH. There's some funding for the Water for Life strategy and a little more support for the arts. But, by and large, this is a panicky, hurry up and spend budget prompted by a growing crisis of confidence among Albertans, confidence lost because the government's abject failure to plan for the boom has led to economic chaos and declining public services.

When people are stuck for hours in emergency rooms – and just yesterday we brought a tragic example to this Assembly – when children can't get to school because there aren't enough buses to go around, when there aren't enough child care spaces or affordable housing units to serve even a fraction of Albertans seeking them out, you know that this government has a serious problem. So out comes the money hose, crank open the valve, hurry up and spend before people really start getting mad. Tragically, even the good aspects of this budget, particularly the long overdue funding for infrastructure, will have their positive impact dramatically lessened by the inflation and labour shortages that are the legacies of this very government's failure to plan. Health care is still the number one concern on Albertan's minds. Where is the planning to make health care accessible again? Construction still hasn't begun on Calgary's desperately needed new hospital. The people of Calgary shouldn't have to wait any longer to know with certainty that they are going to get their hospital.

Along with this flood of cash comes an unprecedented abandonment of responsibility. Instead of tackling issues such as affordable housing or implementing the Water for Life strategy, the provincial government forks over money, then tells our already overloaded municipal governments to go and solve the problems on their own. The government could have saved Albertans untold stress had they simply implemented the Alberta Liberal affordable housing strategy. Instead, they throw money at the problem, throw the problem at our cities, and wash their hands of the affair.

2:30

This budget was designed to win back the favour of the hundreds of thousands of disgruntled Albertans who have lost faith in a tired and visionless Tory regime. It's one of the worst examples of short-term, self-serving political manoeuvring I've seen.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta has to do better. It has to start looking past politics because the very future of our province is at stake, nothing less than that. In a time of unparalleled opportunity it's time for budgets that look ahead. Instead, the government has given us a budget designed to cover up the mistakes of the past. One day soon, unless we change the way we budget right away, our government is going to turn on that money hose and experience a shock when only a few pennies trickle out. How will the government put out its self-inflicted political fires when that happens?

Tory governments have taken huge oil and gas revenues for granted. The various oil booms have led the Tories to believe that they can spend their way out of any crisis, and this from a so-called conservative regime. So now we have an oil sands boom and a return to familiar but badly outdated patterns of thinking. When presented with a huge windfall – and oil and gas revenues are exactly that – any sensible Albertan would take some time to come up with a plan for the money. At the very least we should be asking ourselves what we want to achieve. I believe and the Alberta Liberals believe that the answer is clear: we should be building a sustainable legacy for Alberta's future so that when the oil and gas run out, tomorrow's Albertans won't be left holding the bag.

Other oil-blessed governments have developed strategies to handle nonrenewable resource revenues. In Alaska, for example, the people decided to save the oil money and pay themselves personal dividends each year. In Norway they decided to keep taxes high and participate directly in the oil industry through a huge state oil company that, Mr. Speaker, I might note is considering investing in the oil sands because it's such a bargain here. The Norwegians then have put royalties in the bank with an obsession, a total amount exceeding \$250 billion. In Dubai they launched a strategy to turn their dusty desert kingdom into a global financial retail and tourist centre for the exact reason that they knew that oil and gas revenues were nonrenewable. In Dubai it has worked, and that little kingdom is now a destination for people from around the world.

None of those strategies is exactly right for Alberta, but at least all of those jurisdictions had a strategy. They stuck with it, and today they have something to show for it. In contrast this Alberta government is spending our wealth as fast as it comes out of the ground. Over the course of the last several years the Tory government has grown more and more dependent upon nonrenewable oil and gas revenues to fund government services.

Last year the Alberta government spent about \$8,500 per person while collecting only \$6,300 in sustainable revenues. That's a sustainability gap of \$2,200 per Albertan. This government makes up the difference by spending our oil and gas revenues, and this budget that we are debating now widens the gap all the more. Now we're looking at a dangerous chasm. If we don't close the gap with sustainable funding – and this government shows no sign that it even recognizes the sustainability gap, Mr. Speaker – we're looking at deficits, cuts in services, tax hikes, or all of the above.

This government knows by now what an Alberta Liberal government would do to solve the problem. We'd take the bold step of actually saving some of Alberta's nonrenewable resource revenues for tomorrow. What a concept. This government had an opportunity to vote for an Alberta Liberal bill that would have saved 30 per cent of all nonrenewable resource revenues, savings that would have closed the sustainability gap and secured financial stability for decades to come. [interjections] I'm getting heckling from government members about doing the math. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that we have done the math. We've worked with the economists. We've worked with the business leaders. It's our plan they're endorsing, not this government's.

The legislation we introduced as our flagship bill, had it not been rejected by the government, would have reinvigorated the heritage fund so much so that in 20 years the Alberta government would earn more from heritage fund investments than from oil and gas, freeing us from the boom-and-bust cycles of resource-based economies. Endowments for the arts and postsecondary education would have given Alberta truly world-class universities and colleges and a booming arts scene with stable, sustainable, dependable funding at last.

Am I driven by this issue, Mr. Speaker? Do I bring it up at every opportunity? You bet I do. I'm driven by the idea of saving these

once-in-a-lifetime revenues because I know how vital those savings are to our future. Without a plan for saving these precious revenues, this Tory budget is a failure. When it comes right down to it, well-planned, visionary budgets help Albertans.

To those who say that Alberta cannot afford to build the heritage fund and long-term endowments, we say that Alberta cannot afford not to do so. With a clear vision of what we want our oil and gas revenues to achieve, we can create a world-class postsecondary institution, we can fund a school nutrition program so that no child in the province goes hungry, we can provide substantial and sustainable support for the arts, we can help Albertans with disabilities with regular increases for things like autism programs and AISH, and we can make sure that Albertans never again have to put up with a lack of affordable housing, schools, or health care. Where are the long-term, sustainable, regular increases to front-line staff for people with developmental disabilities? Where is the sustainable funding for long-term care beds and staff?

Saving a portion of our nonrenewable resource revenues is one key to a sustainable future. A second is education. You can't go wrong when you invest in education. For example, when students slip behind in math or reading in the elementary grades, we want them to get the boost they need. Educators today can predict with almost perfect accuracy the specific children who will drop out of high school by checking to see if a student in grades 3 or 4 is below their grade level in reading and arithmetic. So let's have a budget that invests in the programs that will help those kids achieve their full potential.

Or imagine a future in which our universities rank alongside Cambridge and Harvard and Berkeley, where NAIT and SAIT rank with MIT, where people come from around the world for the privilege of studying at Alberta's colleges and universities and trade schools. Long after our oil and gas has lost its value, education will carry Alberta forward. [interjections] The Minister of Energy is heckling away. He's suggesting that oil and gas will last a thousand years. Is that right, Mr. Minister? Apparently not.

Our postsecondary endowments and our commitment to primary education will when we form government ensure that a solid education system will always be there to serve Albertans. In the meantime in this budget school boards will have to settle for a paltry 3 per cent increase that doesn't even cover inflation. Mr. Speaker, you can be sure that the Alberta Liberals are not looking forward to the labour unrest that this short-sighted budget is almost guaranteed to foster.

Good budgets are crucial to Albertans who need a little help. We'd like to see support for AISH recipients increased at the same rate as MLA salaries. We'd like to see a provincial school nutrition program funded so that children don't have to go to school hungry. It is shameful, Mr. Speaker, that the only province in this country that doesn't provide school nutrition funding is Alberta. And we'd like to see the elimination of Canada's most unfair tax: the Alberta health care premiums. [interjections] Again I'm getting heckling about doing the math. Mr. Speaker, I'll put my math skills against the minister of agriculture any day of the week.

2:40

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, when the Minister of Finance tabled his budget, he was given the opportunity and latitude to speak and to finish his comments. Please allow the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition to bring his remarks to this Assembly.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'd like to see the elimination of Canada's most unfair tax, the Alberta health care premiums. This is a regressive tax that hurts everyone, its only purpose to serve

Conservative ideology. Get rid of it and help thousands of Alberta families get that much closer to making ends meet. These are manageable commitments that have big benefits.

The third key to a bright future is caring for the environment. This year's fire alarm budget missed the biggest fire of all: the threat of climate change and pollution to our land, air, and water. The budget barely acknowledged the need to respond to climate change despite the growing need for a comprehensive plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

An Alberta Liberal government would immediately implement a climate change strategy including actions such as substantial funding for carbon capture and sequestration, for clean technology research, and for a building retrofit program to help Albertans pay for energy-efficient upgrades to their homes, yet there's no increase in this budget for Alberta Environment this year at a time when we need real government leadership on climate change. Alberta is the front line in the battle against global warming, but this budget leaves Albertans fighting without ammunition.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is at a crossroads. If we continue as we have in the past, we will stumble into the future one ad hoc budget after another until one day we realize that we've let our astonishing opportunity pass us by. Or we can seize the moment. We can wake up to that opportunity and build a future of unparalleled success with budgets that close the sustainability gap and save for the future.

I'd like to quote Charles Darwin. "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." Mr. Speaker, this is a government that willfully ignores change, and by doing so, it is jeopardizing Alberta's future. Tomorrow's historians may well look back upon this budget and say: this is when Alberta finally lost its chance to build a sustainable future. This is when the Conservatives failed to take advantage of their last opportunity to adapt to a changing world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a pleasure to rise and speak to the budget for 2007 of the provincial government and the first budget tabled by the cabinet appointed by the new Premier of our province. This budget focuses very much on repairing the damage that has been done over the last 10 or more years by the Conservative government by its failure to invest in Alberta's infrastructure, and that is not only the new infrastructure that is needed for growth but also that which is necessary to repair and maintain the infrastructure which we have.

Mr. Speaker, when the former Premier, Ralph Klein, came to office, he came with a vow to eliminate Alberta's debt, which was at that time \$23 billion. Much of what has been done in terms of paying down that debt has been done at the expense of investment in our infrastructure. In fact, when you add up the numbers, you will find that the debt that this province now owes in infrastructure which needs to be repaired or replaced or new infrastructure which is required to meet the growth of this province is very close to that figure. In other words, Mr. Speaker, what the government has done is create a shell game with Albertans. They have taken a financial debt and converted it into a debt on the infrastructure which is of a similar magnitude. So the debt is not gone at all. It has not been paid off by this government as this government has claimed has been done. Rather, it's simply been put into unmet costs for infrastructure. So we have an enormous debt remaining, and that debt is in our roads. It's in our hospitals. It's in our bridges. It's in our schools. But it is still a debt that future generations of this province will have to pay.

To give the government a little bit of credit, Mr. Speaker, they have attempted in this budget to begin to address that, so we've seen a dramatic increase in funding for infrastructure. But they've waited too late because now with the economy booming, with such demand for construction projects in the tar sands and other parts of the economy, the inflation rate has eaten up much of the spending that the government has allocated towards this infrastructure. So instead of buying new bridges or schools or hospitals at a rate that the government could afford, we're now expending perhaps 50 per cent more in order to obtain those things.

The problem as we see it, Mr. Speaker, is that the ordinary people of this province have been forgotten in this budget and in this rush to rectify past mistakes. Working and middle-class families have been ignored. They have been left behind by this government. Albertans with low incomes in particular will see their cost of living increase because of essential program funding in the budget which doesn't even keep pace with Alberta's soaring inflation rate. Rents are increasing and will continue to rise while the government turns its back on rent review and rent increase guidelines. Utility costs are rising as a result of the province's failed experiment with deregulation.

Mr. Speaker, inflation is eating up the gains of Alberta families in this period of economic growth. The last time inflation in Alberta was as high as it is today was in 1991. Alberta's inflation is almost double the next highest in the country. Municipalities like the city of Edmonton have said that they expect inflation on their construction costs to reach 25 or 30 per cent this year.

The government's general budgeting practices have not changed. The Premier and the Minister of Finance have adopted their predecessor's practice of underestimating revenues and lowballing oil and gas prices. In his budget speech the Finance minister trumpeted a new plan for how to allocate surpluses. The NDP opposition expects him to keep this promise and will monitor the government closely. The surplus allocation warrants discussion. It's a clear indication that the Tories are planning for unplanned surpluses to continue, so the risk that government shuffles this money into slush funds also continues.

Mr. Speaker, the budget fails to see the needs of its most vulnerable citizens as a priority. The Edmonton Social Planning Council points out that increases to vulnerable Albertans who depend on income supports are going up by only 5 per cent and in some cases not at all. AISH monthly benefits increased by 5 per cent to \$1,050 effective April 1. This year's increase should allow AISH recipients living in subsidized accommodation to just keep pace with inflation, but those not living in subsidized accommodation will fall even further behind.

The modest \$18 million increase to Alberta seniors' benefits this year will likely be used to cover the growing number of seniors eligible for the benefit. A 14.7 per cent increase has gone into funding for seniors' lodges, which will allow for the addition of 250 more lodge units.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, there's not enough funding for child care in this budget, not nearly enough to cover the gap created by the cancellation of the child care and early childhood learning agreement by the federal Conservative government. So the extra funding will not meet the needs. It will not go very far in helping create more child care spaces, which are desperately needed as waiting lists for spaces grow across the province. Nor is there relief in this budget for parents who have found a place for their child or children but struggle to continue to cover the cost of care. The NDP opposition supports affordable child care supported by public funding, which

gives families a real chance to choose the option that is right for them. We can give parents who are forced to stay at home the option of entering the workforce and give their children a head start on learning.

The budget falls short as well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to education. After accounting for inflation, per student funding will actually be lower this year than last. Without proper funding for teachers and classroom supplies children will be held back from their full potential. Across the province school boards have requested 172 new and replacement schools. The government has accepted 81 but has budgeted for fewer than half of them this year. Program funding, on the other hand, only received an increase of 5.5 per cent over last year. That's exactly the rate of inflation, so it really isn't an increase at all.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta School Boards Association points out that other sectors like the health regions were given more substantial increases, in the realm of 10 per cent, and this does not address upcoming teacher negotiations. They have criticized a shift towards prescribed funding and away from general funding, which the school boards can allocate as they see fit.

Of particular concern, Mr. Speaker, is that the government is holding out private partnerships as a panacea for building new schools. This method has failed. When a private company takes on a project to build a new school or a courthouse or a road, they borrow money to build the project. They borrow it at a higher rate than that available to the government, and they expect the government to pay back every penny that they have borrowed to build a project, to cover all of their costs plus a profit. So, fundamentally, it's an unescapable fact that P3s will always cost more than the traditional financing of government to build public projects. Not only that but the chances of shoddy workmanship, shortcuts, and other deficiencies exist as a very real concern.

Mr. Speaker, the government's approach to the rental crisis that we're now facing reminds me of someone whistling past the graveyard. There is tremendous upset in this province, right from one end of the province to the other, with respect to the costs of rent that people are being faced with, the gouging that is taking place. The government by slapping on a one rent increase per year rule has not dealt with the issue at all. It is seriously underestimating the seriousness of some of the rent increases that individuals are faced with. Any landlord that has not yet given a rent increase is eligible to increase the rent for any or all of his or her tenants as much as he wants.

We are seeing and we're hearing every day about rent increases of \$400, \$500 that people are being asked to pay, yet the government does nothing. It's pretty clear to me that many members opposite are feeling the heat from their constituents, particularly those that come from larger urban centres. You have to ask the question whether or not this new government has enough understanding of urban issues and the issues that face families that live in big cities in order to meet the needs of those people. I don't think that they do.

There are currently 9,000 households on waiting lists for all forms of affordable housing in Alberta. The task force on housing calculated that for 12,000 units to be built over the next five years, a cost of \$480 million per year for the next five years would be required. However, the government has said that it will build 11,200 units yet has promised only \$96 million in enhanced capital support and \$100 million in block funding to municipalities to address housing priorities in their community. Clearly, even though the government has put all of its stock in getting new housing on the market as an alternative to any sort of rent limitations, they have not provided the funding. They have not backed up their promise with real funding. Mr. Speaker, that underlines this government's

approach from start to finish: big promises, very small delivery. That has become a real feature of this government.

On health care the program spending is increased by 12.2 per cent, and the authorities are receiving a 9.5 increase in new funding, but these are just band-aid solutions. Mr. Speaker, ambulance funding has remained static. Health regions are desperate for help when it comes to wait times in emergency rooms, and the failure to address the need for more funding for ambulances means the government is only adding to this problem. The municipality of Wood Buffalo is receiving an increase of \$140 million, but that is not sufficient to meet the needs of this municipality. Eliminating health care premiums was a promise that the minister made in his campaign for the leadership of the Conservative party. Eliminating this premium would have put money directly in the pockets of working and middle-class Albertan family, but once again the government chose not to do so.

Mr. Speaker, just in closing, I want to say that regular Alberta families are still struggling in this economy to make ends meet. The budget is inflationary. The government's whole economic approach is inflationary. The massive capital spending is a response to years and years of neglect on the part of this province, and they are making lives more difficult for working and middle-class families. Rents are soaring. Entry-level housing has all but vanished. Utility costs continue to rise faster than the national average. Child care spaces are rare and expensive. The average Albertan family is approaching a tipping point where the cost of living negates the many benefits we enjoy in our province.

That's why the NDP has called on the government to reach out and help working families, to deliver a budget that strikes a balance between necessary infrastructure development and support for regular people and their families. Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the Finance minister have chosen to focus on bricks and mortar. Both of them are former infrastructure ministers, so they bear a great deal of responsibility for the mess that we're in today, but in their rush to repair and build the schools, roads, and hospitals that are so badly needed, they have forgotten the needs of ordinary people. This government has forgotten the needs of ordinary people. Working families, middle-class families have not been adequately supported by this government and by this budget.

The government has a blind spot when it comes to the people that they were elected to represent. They are more concerned about helping and assisting the development of oil sands, not for the interests of the people of this province but for the American market and to serve the interests of the United States energy strategy. It's time that they refocus their attention on the people that elected them, the people of this province who built this province. It's time that this government provided meaningful support to working and middle-class families in this province, Mr. Speaker, but this government is running out of time.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Oh, yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I'm just wondering if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood would give us some cost estimate of some of the proposals that he's made in his speech. He talked about, of course, eliminating health care premiums, a billion dollars, and talked about investing several billion dollars in infrastructure. I'm just wondering if he could be a little more specific in those numbers and some of the other programs that he's talked about. If he could just let us know some of the cost that he's talking about and where he proposes to get that money, that would be great.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to respond to the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar and just indicate that the budget, in our view, places far too much emphasis on getting out of the mess that the government itself has created.

3:00

Let us not forget that the government itself has talked about eliminating health care premiums. To listen to the Conservative leadership hopefuls in their debates, you would think you were having a convention of the Alberta Liberal party. You know, they wanted to spend money on all kinds of different projects and give tax cuts at the same time. But let's be clear, Mr. Speaker, that in fact it was a number of leadership contenders for the Conservative Party that promised the elimination of health care premiums. Not perhaps the individual that the hon. member supported – I understand that he was the lone caucus member supporting the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who I'm sure didn't promise that – but there were so many Conservative leadership contenders . . .

The Acting Speaker: This is supposed to be brief comments and questions. Any others? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's interesting that the hon. member has chosen to dodge the question, one of the very things that he accuses us of during question period. I'm going to ask him once again, please. Could you please tell us the cost of your proposals in your speech?

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, it's a question of priorities. I know that the hon. member is very concerned about the cost, so he might be interested to know that there has been over \$100 million allocated by this government in budgets to the support of the horse-racing industry in the last few years. That's a number that he might be very interested in because, of course, in the NDP we're far more interested in reallocating money like that to actually help people who are, for example, on disability, seniors who are in inadequate or unsafe care.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There are lots of priorities for that money other than the rich horsemen and -women that, of course, support the Conservative Party and receive tremendous subsidization from the taxpayers, the ordinary people that that hon. member represents who pay their hard-earned money in taxes and then it gets spent on rich ranchers, to help them, I guess.

Mr. Speaker, those are the people that the Alberta New Democrats represent. They need to know that when they work hard and that money gets taken off their cheque every week by this provincial government, it's put toward some real priorities that make a difference for working families. There's not enough child care in this province. Rents are going through the roof. Utilities are too high. You know, when is the government going to wake up and start dealing with real priorities instead of taking taxpayers' money to subsidize rich horse breeders and the horse-racing industry? I'm sorry, but a New Democratic Party government would not have those kinds of wrong-headed priorities that seem to be supported by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on Standing Order 29(2)(a)? If not, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege to rise and to address the budget that we received approximately two weeks ago. I rise to speak to that budget, and I must say that many true conservatives are very disappointed in that budget, as I am. This budget is not fiscally good for the family or for the communities that we live in. It has presented a hardship to them.

This budget is a feeble effort or perhaps a desperate attempt to buy back votes that this government has lost. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that those votes didn't leave to go to the Liberal Party. They didn't go and vote for them. They're trying now to fight and to see who can spend the most money, and that's a blatant problem with democracy where they're trying to buy votes out of the public purse.

Mr. Speaker, the price of poor planning is what this budget is about. I would say that that is the true P3 of this Tory government: the price of poor planning. To make matters worse, they feel that the only way they can retain loyalty is to increase the conditions upon which that money that they're giving out is met. It's been universal with every municipal leader that I've talked to that they say that the new conditions for this municipal funding are unacceptable. To the previous minister of municipal affairs, who travelled around and spoke with the different mayors and reeves, that was the number one message that they sent to him, that we need unconditional funding, and that has not been met.

Just to go over a few of the problems, I guess. We have a Tory government here that is bragging that they're spending six times more than other jurisdictions. This sounds like two princes that are out partying on the town to see who has the most money and the biggest budget to blow. The really sad thing, Mr. Speaker, on this is the fact that the town doesn't have the capacity to absorb that money, and we can use it specifically in the infrastructure position there. There are billions and billions of dollars that are being handed out and said: spend it now, spend it on this area, and do it before this time limit.

It puts us in a position that we can't accomplish it. To give a simple analogy, we could say that perhaps there is the capacity – and I know that this government knows the capacity – of 2,000 kilometres of paving to do a year, yet they hand the money out to these municipal governments and say: here, do 3,000. Then, when they put it up for tender, those people know that they can't all meet those tenders, so inflation goes up, and it's a direct result of the supply/demand shortage. Inflation is going rampant in the problem, and we're not getting good value for our dollar.

The Alberta Alliance has been proposing and will continue to propose that this funding must go to the municipalities and allow them to have a capital savings plan and say: "You use it when it's in your best interest. Perhaps, you're in an emergency situation, and you need to spend it now. You decide. But if you know you have the money in the bank, maybe you can go through some operating improvements, move it out three years for when you need to do that complete retrofit." But because the conditions are such that they have to spend it now and they don't have capital savings accounts, we're putting ourselves in a terrible situation. Inflation continues to go up, and we're getting less for the dollars that were spent. This is not in the interest of the families and the communities they live in, Mr. Speaker.

This government is very much addicted to spending. I want to quote the Finance minister. He says, "We must never return to the shortfall scenarios that plagued Alberta in the past." We all realize and know how critical that is, yet we've raised the stakes. We've raised the spending because they also quote that we live in the most

volatile of provinces to gauge what our income is. I always appreciate that they want to lowball the price of oil so that we are on the safe side. That's good fiscal planning. It's prudent. It's what we should do. But when we continue to raise the spending to that income and say, "Well, we still have some breathing room here," it isn't sustainable. We can't go on.

The last three budgets have all been: this is one-time spending. That's what the addict says when they go out. They're addicted to the oil and gas revenue. They're addicted to the gambling revenue. How many times have we listened to this government declare that we live in a volatile revenue province? Yet our budget is the largest ever, and our surplus is the smallest in the last three years. Yes, we have eliminated the balance at the bank, which is a great move. They've talked many times about the importance of not having to spend the interest money. That's to our benefit, yet we run out.

There have been many times that many people have spoken of a minimum 10-year infrastructure plan, Mr. Speaker. What they need to do – and the problem with this new municipal funding is that they say: this is going to be a 10-year program. I've talked to different municipal leaders, and the problem is that there is no formula, there is no way of calculating. Is Calgary going to get \$1.4 million for this project for the next 10 years? Is Taber going to get \$600,000 for the next years? Is Fort McMurray going to get this much for the next 10 years? The answer is: we don't know, they don't know, and the government won't tell us. You can't plan 10 years . . .

Mr. Elsalhy: Because they don't know.

Mr. Hinman: Well, they don't want to commit. It's very easy to say: well, I'll wait and spend where I want to.

But, Mr. Speaker, if we want value for our money, if we want the road construction crews, if we want the housing crews, if we want all those to be there, we need to have a 10-year plan that says: this is what we're going to do. It can be conservative, it can be fiscally responsible, but we absolutely need to make sure that it's long term. If this plan is 10 years, each year you renew that so it's still 10 years and not run to the end with people wondering: well, now how is it going to be adjusted? We just don't know. It isn't good enough.

We need the long-term planning, and we need the formula so they know what it is that they're going to get and not wonder: well, is Taber going to get this money for the next 10 years, or is it two years and then they're going to change one of the requirements and we fall out of favour and then we can't pay for our waste water treatment plant? They don't know if they can borrow or go ahead, and then we get in the worse situation of things falling apart.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, I just want to go back for a minute. I'm very proud to put on the green ribbon today. What disturbs me, though, is that it says on here: "this is an opportunity to acknowledge the shortage of organs and tissues for transplantation." I don't know that there is a shortage. What there is is a lack of knowledge of people to realize the importance of using our resources wisely. I signed the back of my health care card many years ago. I've talked to my family. They all know that. That was looking forward. We can't have the intent and then after we die our family looking at that and wondering: oh, what do we do?

This is the same problem. I don't think that we have a shortage of money. What we have is a shortage of forethought to say: this is what we need to do responsibly. In 2003 the infrastructure money was drastically cut, and those construction companies that were addressing that, they sold their equipment; they left the province because of the huge cut. Now we've got this huge demand, and the cost has gone through the roof. We need a long, steady slope to

know that this is what the government is going to spend over the next 10 years. More important, they need those projects mapped out so that they can look, and they will bid accordingly and say, "Well, gosh, we should get this equipment; we should look at that and start to expand," because they know what's there. The further we can see down the future, Mr. Speaker, the better we are.

Mr. Speaker, another area that I want to address is the fact that this government is continuing to grow at an unprecedented rate. The Official Opposition has mentioned it, the third opposition, and the Alliance will mention it again. We need to eliminate the health care premiums. This is an ideal time. It's the proper time for proper tax reform. There will never be a better time, I believe, than the present time to look at and realize that now we can and, I guess, should clarify, reduce, simplify the taxes. One of the great things that we've done is that we've gone to a flat tax here in the province. That's a benefit to the people in the province. It's a great example to the rest of the country. Why, though, do we still have health care premiums? It isn't a good tax. It's government regulation. It's government bureaucracy. What we can do is reduce the size of government plus reduce our taxes: two things, easy to do. We need to accomplish that.

We also need to realize that there's a shortage of labour, Mr. Speaker, out there in our province. True prosperity is often measured by the number of people working in private versus those civil servants. The ratios continue to be skewed and not in our favour for prosperity. We need to be looking at a program of attrition and realizing that as we start to cut down now, to give incentives for people to get out into the private sector and take those jobs would be a benefit for us.

Mr. Speaker, now is the time to reclaim provincial responsibility and jurisdictions. Federal programs have not and will not work for western Canada. They're skewed to the east. We understand why they do that, so why should we continue to sign on to these programs, everything from equalization to immigration to the Canada pension plan? Now is the time to give notice and to give proper understanding to the people of Alberta that we can and will do better by running provincial programs. We don't need to be part of the federal ones.

We definitely need to minimize the size of government. I'll repeat it: our economic strength depends on the number of people engaged in productive work against the number of civil servants.

Mr. Speaker, there are many areas that we can and should be addressing in our budget that we have failed to. I want to speak for a minute on those that are the less privileged in the province. We have set the example. Our basic tax exemption is almost \$15,000. But the fact of the matter is that with our heated economy people still can't make ends meet. There's no reason why we don't raise our basic tax exemption to \$20,000.

We need to enhance our education system. We're talking about those that are having trouble with academics, and those are the ones that we're losing the most. We need to take the career and technology training back to where it has been in history, and that's to a younger age. Young men and women are very engaged and active in wanting to learn and to try and explore new things. There's no reason why we don't have industrial arts in grade 7 going through grade 12 and letting these kids try things because the neat thing is that the human being has the capacity, Mr. Speaker, to be both – what would I say? – technologically capable as well as academic. Yet we're dividing it and saying, "Well, you can't do those things," when a well-rounded individual and to get into the arts and the music and have all of those career opportunities available in a curriculum in their school would benefit Albertans more than anything else.

We have to reach out, especially to those less privileged, and let them realize that they have other talents. They might not excel with the books, with the studying, but maybe they're a great artist. Maybe they're a great welder. Maybe they, you know, understand electricity. We need to let them have those opportunities and excel and come and be part of the great workforce.

Mr. Speaker, health care is another huge issue that we're definitely struggling with, and we need to have choice here in the province. This is supposed to be the free world. Why would we have someone that I talked to – this is recently – who flew to England, spent \$66,000 to get two Birmingham hips, and we lose that money? I think we can bring them into this country.

Our former Premier: one of the great things he was concerned about was the money that was leaving the province to go gambling, so he brought gambling to the province. We have money leaving to go buy health care and the things that they need when we should be allowing that to be set up here. It doesn't attack the public system; it benefits it, and we need to allow that to come in. We need to change our attitude and have the funding following the patients. It would increase the productivity of the different doctors. I've talked to many specialists. They're limited in how much they're allowed to do. Thus, we have the waiting lines.

Perhaps the most innovative thing that we've done in the past was how we tackled the oil sands, Mr. Speaker. How we did that was with tax incentives and concessions that made something economically viable because we removed the burden of government and the taxes that are there. What we need to do is look at that with health care. We need to look at it with education. We really need to look at it with charitable organizations. They've taken a step in the right direction, but what we really need to do is to look at and take charitable donations like we do an RRSP. We've converted to RRSPs because the government can't finance our retirement funding. We can't finance all of the social programs we need, so we need a tax deduction to give to those charitable organizations, whether it's art for teenage recovery or whatever. We need to have those.

Mr. Speaker, there are many areas. I see that I'm running out of time, so in conclusion I just want to say that we need a government that is fiscally responsible, one that has the discipline to save in good times and tough times, to live within our means.

Alberta needs to take leadership with tax reform. We need to put in place strong incentives to save and invest, lead by example, Mr. Speaker. We need to have a major shift or reform in taxes. We need to put our house in order and then go to the federal government and urge them with all of our power and persuasion to have tax reform that will really, truly help our families and our communities. We're overtaxed. We can't make ends meet, and we need to have tax concessions. We need to have that funding going to our communities in unconditional funding so they can and they will meet the needs and not have central government with central planning that has the strings attached. It's not in our best interest.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, a question and comment period is available under Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner could enlighten us a little bit, in view of his views on the necessity for good fiscal planning and discipline in spending, what particular departments he would suggest are exceeding the amount of money that they ought to be receiving.

Also, in regard to his advocacy of a 10-year plan instead of a three-year business plan, as is presently contemplated, I believe it's

a great idea in theory, but does he know what the prices of oil and gas are going to be in five or eight or 10 years down the road? Does he know how many people are going to be immigrating into our province five or eight or 10 years down the road? And if the hon. member was going to lowball the figures on the prices of oil and gas, would he advocate that we postpone any of the necessary infrastructure and capital spending that we have to do and perhaps postpone the fire hall that he needs in his riding of Cardston-Taber-Warner or some other capital projects that are direly needed by Alberta in view of the rapid economic growth and the rapid increase in our population, over 100,000 people in the past year? So what would he suggest in response to those issues?

3:20

Mr. Hinman: I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for asking those. They're all valid and excellent questions. I guess that my first response would be: if we think that government is the solution to our problems, we're wrong. Government is usually the problem, and we need to find outside solutions.

To start with, there's no reason why you can't put your priorities in order. If you're running any business, you know the lifespan of that equipment. We know the lifespan of the roads. We know the bridges, and with good economic budgeting we'll say: this is how much we need and should go forward on. But the important thing that I guess I would want to stress – and yes, we don't know our oil and gas revenues, and that's why I go back. Human nature is and the universe is that we fill any void.

It's important to realize that just because we have the money doesn't mean that we have to spend it. Especially to put that on, to say: "You know what? You have to spend this today." It might be 11 o'clock at night. So rather than wait for the morning to go buy your groceries at a good store, you've got to go to 7-Eleven. That's the condition that this government has put in. It's too late in the day. It's way too long. It's on the weekend, yet here's the money, and you have to have it before it's over, and it needs to be long term. It hasn't been there. I don't see it changing to be there in the future. So that's a detriment, and we don't get good value for our money.

The construction crews. I've talked to many of them, and their attitude is: we're going to put a bid in to pay for our equipment in this one project because we don't know when the next one's coming down the road. That's very poor planning on our part.

Probably the most important thing, though, let's talk social services: we spend a lot of money, but it's not effective money. If we were to take the same attitude that we do with our RRSPs, realizing, "You know what? We don't have the ability to meet the cost of these people that are retiring, so what we'll do is we'll let them take their money – we won't tax them on it – and save for themselves," that's been a huge incentive, and Canadians have grasped onto that and grabbed it.

Think what would happen if we took that same incentive and said: "You know what? Down in Taber they have a youth centre. They have a women's shelter. They have those things," and if we were to say, "You know what? If you donate directly to a charitable organization or service group in your community, we'll take that off your income. Instead of \$55,000, if you donate \$5,000 to them, it's only going to be \$50,000." We would probably quadruple – some people say tenfold – the bang for our buck if we gave it personally directly to a charitable organization because one of the neat things is that, first, they're very fiscally responsible. The other, more important thing is: most of the people that are running those are true volunteers that are giving of their time. We could address the social issues in a huge way.

If we were to take industry and tell them – and let's take the same thing with the health care. Ten billion dollars a year we spend on

health care, and we say that we don't have the money to buy the equipment or the facilities. How are we going to do that? If we were to take the same attitude with health care and say: "You know what, doctors and specialists? If you want to take, let's say, up to 20 per cent of your income and purchase equipment with it, we will not tax you on that. You can buy it first." That money, then, would go directly to that, and it would spur the economy, and it would get things going.

Ask another question. I'd love to finish answering.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon in response to the budget speech that was delivered in this Assembly on the 19th of April. This afternoon the Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition delivered a rather eloquent speech in terms of the response. [interjections] I'm glad the members opposite enjoyed the speech from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition leader as much as I did.

Mr. Speaker, I'm here to more or less bat cleanup for the Leader of the Official Opposition. He touched on a number of very important broad points, and I would like to just go back to some of those and talk about some of the specifics that we feel are lacking in the document that was presented to the House by the Finance minister.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview referred to the fact that there is no serious commitment to savings in this budget, and that causes a great deal of concern. Indeed, there's been a fair amount of discussion about that this afternoon. I suppose we have to credit the Finance minister a little bit. There is a surplus savings component to the budget. Although it's four years behind the Official Opposition and our surplus plan, that we rolled out in advance of the 2004 election, it is there, and I suppose it's better than nothing. But it is really only a very small baby step in terms of where we really have to take this province.

One of the reasons why the Official Opposition converted our surplus policy into a resource revenue savings policy is because of the clear indication from this government over a period of years that surpluses are subject to political manoeuvring and machination. So there was a recognition on our side that in order to protect Albertans, who, as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar always says, own the resource, in order to protect us as citizens of this province from political manoeuvring, it's important to amend that surplus policy into a savings policy so that regardless of the whim of the government of the day the commitment to savings will remain strong and will accomplish all of the things that the Leader of the Official Opposition outlined in his speech earlier.

Obviously, we're very, very disappointed in that, and I guess my only hope is in knowing that over the last 12 years this government has underestimated surpluses to the tune of some \$30 billion, an average of about \$3 billion a year. There is maybe some hope that, you know, their underestimation will be at least as drastic this year and that there may actually be some money surplus to the budget that would go into the heritage savings trust fund, but I suppose we'll have to wait and see.

I'm incredibly distressed over the fact that this Finance minister has yet to put an end to the practice of raping the profits realized by the heritage savings trust fund and dumping those into general revenue. I've been saying for nearly three years now that this is a practice that has to end. In a time of incredible economic boom, when we're realizing profits beyond anybody's wildest dream, the fact that we continue to take net revenue out of the heritage savings

trust fund and put it into general revenue is unacceptable. Everywhere I go across this province, people tell me that. This government has to hear that message, so it's being repeated by myself today.

The other thing that causes me a great deal of concern is that despite the fact that they trumpet that the fund has finally been inflation-proofed, their own budget documents reveal that, in fact, the fund is not inflation-proofed. The only commitment to inflation-proofing the heritage savings trust fund is if, in fact, we realize the approximate \$2 billion budgeted surplus, but if for some reason something should happen where we don't realize the budgeted surplus, we don't even inflation-proof the heritage savings trust fund. So what is that all about?

Ms Haley: Yes we do.

Mr. R. Miller: No, we do not. Read the documents. The Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is telling me that we do, but in fact she's wrong. The documents are quite clear that we only inflation-proof the heritage savings trust fund if, in fact, we meet that budget surplus. If I'm wrong, I would ask the hon. member to show me where I'm wrong because I would feel much better if, in fact, I am wrong, but I don't believe I am.

Mr. Speaker, it's been discussed, in fact during question period today, the total failure by this government to address the unfunded teachers' pension liability. Despite a one-line commitment in the budget document there's no firm commitment in money other than the \$25 million slap in the face that teachers have received with a very drastic warning as to the fact that they'd better, you know, play nice in the sandbox or else the minister is going to pull that money away from them too. All we've really done here is (a) pit experienced teachers against new teachers. I've heard this from teachers across the province over the last couple of weeks. It's the old divide and conquer tactics that we've seen from this government so many times. It continues today. Even though the chairs have been rearranged on the front bench and we have some different faces, the tactics are the same as they always have been.

3:30

Once again, Mr. Speaker, we've managed to put the school boards in the crosshairs between the government and the teachers of this province. I've heard from many school board trustees and administrators over the last couple of weeks who are incredibly concerned about the fact that they've only been given a 3.3 per cent increase in their budget despite the fact that everybody knows that inflation is running at approximately 5 per cent in this province, so automatically they're faced with making cuts before they even sit down to begin their budgeting process. And, as I say, now they're in the unenviable situation of having a whole bunch of teachers very, very angry at the way that they're being treated by this government when it comes to the unfunded liability. They're the ones that are going to have to deal with that when it comes to the negotiations in the fall.

This is an incredible lack of vision in my mind. In fact, I had floated the idea in this Assembly some time ago that with all of the money that we have in short-term savings right now, whether it be in the capital account or in the sustainability account, and with the obvious overheated construction industry, it might be time to take some of that money – I don't know how much – and, if the minister wanted to make a real show of good faith to the teachers, apply that against the unfunded liability right now. That's a good deal for teachers. It would make them all happy, not just some of them.

It would be a good deal for Alberta taxpayers. If we want to talk about fiscal responsibility, let's do something today to address the

billions and billions of dollars that this is going to cost Alberta taxpayers over the next 53 years. You know, that's a no-brainer. I'm really, frankly, quite disappointed that this government didn't see their way to make that commitment.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately there's no real commitment in this budget to public transit systems. Today's announcement of the cancellation and indefinite hold on the expansion of the light rail transit system in Calgary is just one example of that. A number of speakers have mentioned the fact that the large urban centres in this province need that money to come to them unfettered so that they can make the decisions as to how best to use it, and that, as we know, did not happen.

There's been no firm commitment, at least not in the budget documents, to a high-speed rail connection between Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary. I applaud the minister responsible for his announcement last week, when we learned that some land has been purchased in downtown Calgary for a possible future station for a high-speed train. The minister knows that this is a project that I'm passionate about, and I think it's time that we at the very least made a firm commitment to acquiring right-of-way not just in the two major centres of Edmonton and Calgary but, certainly, a greenfield right-of-way between Edmonton and Calgary to secure the land for future high-speed transit. As I say, I applaud the minister for making that step, but it doesn't appear as a firm commitment in the budget, and we really need that. We need to know that we're going to take firm, positive action to secure that right-of-way and soon, before it gets chewed up by the incredible growth and expansion that's taking place.

Although Alberta's population may not warrant it today, this is a system such that some day I could envision, you know, maybe 50 years down the road, this train going to Fort McMurray. It could go to Grande Prairie and the Peace region. It could go to Medicine Hat and down to Lethbridge. I mean, this is the way of the future. We're talking incredible benefits in terms of the environment, in terms of the health care system, in terms of infrastructure, and it goes on and on and on. I would strongly encourage all members to have a serious look at the Van Horne Institute report from 2005, if they're not familiar with it, to see just what the benefits of a high-speed train are.

Something else has caused me a great deal of concern out of this budget. Again, a little bit of a nod to the government, and then I'll express my disappointment. For the first time in the years that I've been in this Legislature, there is no move to increase the \$5.3 billion restriction on the use of nonrenewable resource revenue in the budget, so it's capped at \$5.3 billion. You'll remember, Mr. Speaker, that when I first came into this Assembly, it was at \$3.5 billion. So in two and a half years we've nearly doubled the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that the government uses, but at least this year it didn't go up. However, there is a notation in the budget documents that I did not see before, and I'm going to quote directly from page 12 of the fiscal framework, where it says that "an average of over \$2 billion a year in non-renewable resource revenue will be allocated to the Capital Account to fund capital projects in each of the next three years." So despite the fact that there is a nice bubble on that page that says there's no change to the \$5.3 billion limit on the use of resource revenue, there's this other little notation in small print that talks about, oh, by the way, we are actually allowed to use another \$2 billion. So instead of \$5.3 billion it is, in fact, \$7.3 billion, and I think that's an important note that people should be aware of.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to comment on the fact that there has been no commitment by this government – clearly no commitment by this government – to tie budget increases either for

this year or for future years to the rate of growth in population and/or the rate of growth in inflation, and this is something that is represented in the Official Opposition's document, which I think most members would be familiar with now, entitled *Funding Alberta's Future*. Several advocacy groups, most of the chambers of commerce that I'm aware of, certainly the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, all of whom would be considered to be to the right of the political spectrum in terms of their fiscal policy, at least: all of these groups have agreed with the Official Opposition in terms of calling for the need to tie budget increases to inflation and population growth, and this is something that is in our policy.

Something that I think is important to note is that whenever policy discussion takes place in our caucus, any policy changes that are approved by our caucus must fall within that framework, must fall within that template. So although I hear a lot of members opposite talking about, you know, "you guys are never happy," and "all you want is to spend more money," they should be aware of the fact that we don't approve any policies unless they can fall within those guidelines. That's something that we do as a Liberal opposition, something that this so-called Conservative government does not do, and I think it's an important notation.

We're certainly not the only ones who've noticed that they don't do it. As I say, many business and taxpayers' rights groups as well as average citizens on the street have noticed this. I think the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner pointed out in his comments that year after year we hear the government saying: "This is a one-time thing. Don't expect it next year." Then we get to the next year's budget, and they do it again. Then we get to the next year's budget, and they do it again, even more.

This year we see record spending from the government, and they've managed to upset almost everybody. It's almost inconceivable that you could spend 17 per cent more than you did last year, and everybody is mad at you. It just shows how clearly out of touch they are with what the people of this province are expecting from their government. It shows how clearly out of touch they are when they announce spending like that, and they're not making anybody happy.

Ms Blakeman: There are no new ideas there.

Mr. R. Miller: My colleague from Edmonton-Centre is saying that there are no new ideas there, and I think, really, that is sort of the crux of the matter. We've got a government that has announced record spending, but there is no real vision for the future. As the Official Opposition Leader described it, it's a reactionary budget. They're racing around trying to put out political fires, but there's no grand plan for the future of this province, and that's what people are really looking for. They've heard over the last two years the same as I've heard. That's why they had a leadership race and chose a new leader. Their own membership was telling them: we need a plan.

What we've seen here now is a government that's been in place for six months, prepared their first budget, and once again – and no surprise to this member – there's no plan. There's no real big-picture vision for the future, and that is a shame.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a couple of inquiries for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. He

advocated more spending for cities for transportation, more money for acquiring right-of-way for the high-speed rail between Calgary and Edmonton, and he's advocated more money for the unfunded liability for the teachers' pension plan, yet he is espousing a program which purports to tie the increases in spending to the sum of the inflation and population increase, as I understood it.

3:40

I wonder if he could enlighten us as to what substantial cuts he would make to the budget as announced? What spending programs as announced in this budget would he cut in order to come within those guidelines yet add the additional spending that he has got, given the fact that we were at approximately a 10 per cent increase in the operating funding in this budget? If you include capital infrastructure, it's somewhat higher, around 17 per cent, I believe.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to address some of those questions. First of all, the real thing with municipalities – and the member has heard it from his own mayor today and over the previous number of days – is a need to give them that money without tying strings to it. Live up to the promises that were made by the Premier during the election campaign. Live up to the promises that were made by the Premier during prebudget consultations with the cities. That's all that we're asking. That's all that the municipalities are asking.

In terms of the unfunded liability I mentioned this large pot of money that's sitting in the sustainability account, which wasn't really dealt with by the government in terms of how they're going to use that. My fear, quite frankly, is that it's sitting there as an election slush fund and that we may see all sorts of announcements coming over the next year as we move closer to an election.

As far as the high-speed transit we've discussed this in this Legislature. Last year there was a motion from the Official Opposition which, I'll point out, was turned down by the government. All we asked in that motion was that the government consider building a high-speed electric transit line between Edmonton and Calgary. There were all sorts of reasons why they wouldn't support it, but the one thing they did support during that debate – and you can go back and check *Hansard* . . . [interjections] If the hon. members across would just listen to me for one second, the one thing that they did support, that every speaker supported was the idea of securing the right-of-way. In the Van Horne report in 2005 it was only \$47 million. Now, I would suggest to the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill that that is less money than we spend on horse racing in a year. It's less money than we'll give to the horse-racing industry.

So, you know, it's a matter of priorities. Quite frankly, that's really what it comes down to. What do you want to do? Do you want to move people, or do you want to build racetracks? You know, it's very simple. The money is there. It's really a question of how you decide to use it.

The last question is really one of sustainability, Mr. Speaker. You know, the hon. Leader of the Opposition talked this afternoon about the sustainability gap. We know that last year nonrenewable resource revenues supported this government to the tune of about \$2,300 per man, woman, and child. That cannot continue. This year, with the budget that we've seen from them, we know that that sustainability gap is going to be even bigger. What that means is that the money that we're taking in from sustainable, renewable resources, whether it be gambling or whether it be income taxes or whether it be service fees or transfers from the federal government, is not keeping up to government spending. Every year we're using

more and more oil and gas revenues to maintain this government. That's not sustainable. That's what these guys have to wake up to.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, and this is probably the most important thing to note, the reasons why these guys say they can't do it – “We're in danger of going into deficits” or “What if oil goes to \$4 a barrel?”, all of the things that the Premier has trotted out – are exactly the reasons why we have to adopt the plan for funding Alberta's future. Those are exactly the reasons. If you don't do that today, you guys are going to be in one heck of a mess a year or two down the road. Everybody can see it coming. It's a train wreck waiting to happen. I just can't believe that you guys turn blind eyes to it.

I mean, you cannot continue to do this. The minister in his own press release says: don't expect this next year; we have to find a way to control this. Well, you're right. You have to find a way to control it, and we gave you the answer. The answer is: start saving today. Don't say: maybe we'll save one-third of it if there's extra money at the end of the year. Say: no, we're going to tighten our belts; we're going to take a third of all of that revenue right now and put it in the bank. That's how you do it.

If you do that every year, year after year, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill would find that – you know what? – by the year 2020 you've actually got more money coming in from your heritage savings trust fund than you do for oil and gas, and the next thing you know, you're not dependent on oil and gas anymore. That's what it's all about.

The Deputy Speaker: The time for Standing Order 29(2)(a) has elapsed.

I recognize the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise today and just speak a little bit in general about the budget. I wanted to make sure that I was living in the same Alberta as the members across the way because after listening for over an hour now, I feel like there's nothing good anywhere in this province, yet I happen to know that that can't possibly be true. I, too, have constituents, almost 60,000 of them, more than the average constituency in the province. People are moving into my constituency. They're moving out from Calgary. They're moving down from Edmonton. They're moving in from other provinces. They're moving in from around the world, and they're really happy to be here. So I have to wonder why there's happiness there when, apparently, there's not much in other parts of the province.

Ms Blakeman: It's all you, Carol.

Ms Haley: It is all me, you know. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the things that are in the budget. For example, Mr. Speaker, operating spending is increasing by 10 per cent. That is in large part because of the inflation rate and the population growth of 3 per cent, which outstrips every other province in Canada by at least two-thirds. Our inflation is higher here. Problematic. I believe it's a temporary issue, but it is something that we're all going to have to deal with. You would have needed a 7 per cent increase in operating spending just to break even, before the organizations that we fund have to do cutbacks. They were given an additional amount of 3 per cent to try and deal with their own cost pressures.

We all know that everybody is coming up for renegotiation of contracts, whether it's teachers or nurses. The doctors have just

completed theirs. The health science workers will be working on new contracts this year as well. We hope that with the increases that we gave people, they would be able to manage not only the wage increase pressures this year but also the inflation that's occurring even today as we speak.

Health and Wellness is something that does concern me. It went up by 10.1 per cent, to \$10.8 billion, yet it doesn't seem to be enough. I do believe that it's time to take a very close look at Health and Wellness spending to determine: is the money being allocated in the right way by the regional health authorities? Are we allocating it to them in the proper way? Should more money be going to long-term care or wellness rather than acute care? I think that those are really important questions.

I think the electronic health record, which everybody agrees is an important and necessary step – I also happen to believe that it's slightly problematic in what it costs. I hope that we get a billion dollars' worth of services out of it in short order because that's probably what we've spent to date. It isn't complete yet, Mr. Speaker, and I worry about that. I think everybody should be concerned if that's the appropriate place for us to be allocating money, even though we all know intuitively that it's an important addition to the health care system.

Advanced Education and Technology grew by over 10 per cent, to \$2.3 billion this year, also a very large increase but in part because of the capital plan that has been adding spaces to these institutions. If you're going to add spaces to these institutions, you also have to pay the additional costs for more students to be able to go there. So, you know, we can complain about the rise being more than inflation plus population, but we also have to look at the realities of the situation.

Education went up by 5.5 per cent. We are spending more per capita as well as per student than any place in Canada on education.

I would hope that inside all of that spending that the teachers and the pension issue can also be dealt with. We are part signatories to an agreement with the Alberta Teachers' Association that was brought through this Legislature in 1992 which gave two-thirds of the unfunded pension liability responsibility to the province of Alberta, that is taxpayers, not just government – don't forget that government is just the people – and one-third of that responsibility to the teachers. So when that agreement was ratified – ratified – by the teachers, it was also ratified in this House. There is an existing commitment on both sides, so if any changes are going to be done to that, I would sincerely hope that it be done through a negotiated process because as a taxpayer I'm not necessarily willing to take on that extra one-third problem of \$2.2 billion that somehow I would have to owe money on. I don't accept that. So I think that that's a bigger issue, Mr. Speaker, and one that needs to be talked about more fully.

The capital plan, which everybody knows is huge – there have been many comments made on it already. We can try and address inside there what the issues are that we're spending that money on. We can start on some of the things that have been done.

We have completed the southwest leg of Edmonton's Anthony Henday road, which was just completed in 2006. I know, judging by the people who are using it, that they appreciate very much the less congestion for the traffic here in Edmonton.

In Calgary we're still working on the northeast leg of the Stoney Trail ring road. Part of that will be just bordering my constituency, Mr. Speaker, around the northeast edge of the city of Calgary, and I know that we're all looking forward to 2009, when that part opens up, because we've been living with a traffic nightmare for the last five or six years. But, then, we've had higher growth rates down

south, more consistent than had been occurring in the Edmonton area prior to this last couple of years.

3:50

We negotiated Alberta's second public/private partnership on construction for that, and I do have to say that the one that was negotiated for Edmonton worked very well, Mr. Speaker. We were able to book a solid price. The project came in on budget, which is one of the only ones in the capital plan that has done that. Also, before it was actually due, it was completed.

We've also been able to twin several segments of the north-south trade corridor, which are very important to the exports because our province is an exporting province.

We implemented the Alberta municipal infrastructure program, providing \$3 billion of financial assistance, and that was before we'd been working on this \$1.4 billion, which over the next three years will see an additional \$1.4 billion going to municipalities.

I am sorry that the mayor of Calgary feels that somehow there's something wrong in his world, but Calgary has benefited from the original \$3 billion plan by a billion dollars. That's a billion dollars that Saskatoon or Regina or any city in Manitoba or Ontario or Quebec hasn't seen anything like, neither has British Columbia. So to have him say that he's had to put projects on hold I find ironic because he's already had the benefit of not only getting the GST back from the federal government, he's also got 5 cents per litre of every litre of gasoline sold in the city of Calgary. He's got a billion dollars over five years from the original program plus additional money from the new program that's just being implemented now. So if he doesn't want to build them, I think that there are probably reasons other than, wow, somebody attached a string to something, but I guess that's his call.

We paved 918 kilometres of provincial highways in 2006 and opened a state-of-the-art level 3 biocontaminant lab, putting Alberta on the cutting edge of animal disease detection and research. We opened the new Alberta Children's hospital. Very few provinces can say anything like that. We completed the National Institute for Nanotechnology at the University of Alberta.

We commenced construction on the University of Alberta Centennial Centre for Interdisciplinary Science, selected a site for the new \$308 million Edmonton Remand Centre, funded the University of Calgary's Child Development Centre, ongoing redevelopment of hospitals in Lethbridge, Rimbey, Edson, Barrhead, Viking, and High Prairie, committed to upgrade the greenhouse facilities for a crop diversification centre in Brooks, opened 15 new schools, purchased 130 new steel-framed modular classrooms, and provided \$413 million for the acquisition of medical and diagnostic equipment.

You know, it's not all doom and gloom here. Somewhere in all of that there must have been something that made someone happy.

The increase for community facilities included one-time funding of \$280 million over two years for the new major community facilities program to provide grants supporting community public-use facilities like skating rinks, swimming pools, curling rinks, things that people in Alberta totally enjoy and use on a massive basis. I know that my communities will be very happy to hear that that program is available.

We have an expansion and a renewal of the Royal Alberta Museum, funding to a maximum of \$69 million to help the Canada Olympic Development Association on their renewal project, grants totalling \$80 million to the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, Northlands here in Edmonton, the Pengrowth Saddledome, Rexall Place, MacMahon Stadium, and Commonwealth Stadium. So somebody in Edmonton and Calgary must be kind of happy about that, I'm hoping.

Ongoing funding for maintenance and upgrades to provincial parks, museums, and historical sites, which is something that Albertans truly love and use. So maybe a little bit of happiness there.

I also wanted to mention that here in Alberta there were over 57,000 net migrants into our province from other provinces, so they must see something worth coming for. We created over 86,000 jobs in the province last year. Our housing starts – and this one is interesting because while everybody complains about it, there were over 48,962 housing starts in the province of Alberta last year. That is not just a record for Alberta but a record in Canada. The nearest province to us, Ontario, which has, I believe, three times our population, maybe four, had 52,000 housing starts. That gives you an indication that the construction industry is working here. People are building houses to live in, to rent out. It's not just government building, you know, some houses. This is real. I'm sure half of them are being built in my riding.

Mr. Knight: Do we build unreal houses?

Ms Haley: Well, we could, maybe.

Retail sales in Alberta last year increased by 16.2 per cent. That's more than double the national increase of 6.4 per cent. So that's when it starts to get interesting for me. How can that happen in a province where apparently so many people are so incredibly devastated? I'm not understating the fact that there are people having difficulty with a paradigm shift that's occurring in Alberta on the value of housing and on rental prices. It isn't something that we've gone through for about 25 years, but we went through this in the late '70s and early '80s.

When housing and rent controls were brought in, they weren't just brought into Alberta. Pierre Elliott Trudeau was the Prime Minister of Canada. He ran an election, as I recall, based on no to rent and price controls and then immediately brought them in as soon as he got elected. That was a Liberal government, I think, Mr. Speaker. Anyway, the point is that for several years everything was frozen and absolutely nothing got built during that period of time. In order to finally get more construction going on, even the federal government had to admit that they had to start pulling back on that. So it is problematic. It is a market push.

I feel bad for the people that are caught in it. I, too, have sons. One of them is a renter; the other is just trying to buy a house. They, too, are dealing with these realities. I have an aging mother, who also has her own issues on a financial level. But there is a seniors' benefit package that does help my mom, and I'm her daughter, and if she needs help, I will help her too. So there is a family component to all of this. When a member of our family is having difficulty, maybe it's time for the rest of the family to step up a little bit too, not just government. The family unit is also a part of our mix in this province.

We have the lowest combined provincial and municipal tax burden amongst all the provinces. We are only at 57.5 per cent of the average. That means that we pay 43 per cent less in combined taxes here in Alberta than other provinces. So that, too, must help some of the people in our province that are on our lower level.

There are so many things I wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, and I understand that my time is almost up, but I wanted to mention the inflation-proofing of the heritage savings trust fund that the hon. member across the way brought up. Inside the Fiscal Responsibility Act is an indication that when the debt was paid off, we must in fact immediately start inflation-proofing the heritage savings trust fund. That is the law, and we are doing it. We did it the first year when the debt was officially announced as being paid off, even though

money was set aside for the continued paydown of that debt. It was officially at that point considered paid off by our government. We have been inflation-proofing, and we will continue to do so.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's my Alberta. I think it's just a marvellous place to live. While we've got some issues, all of us, in dealing with inflation or the cost of construction projects going up, we will deal with it. We're Albertans, you know. That's what we do. I just want to say thank God I live here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Anybody? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do thank the hon. member for the enlightening discourse on the budget. I wonder whether she could perhaps elaborate on some of those other good-news statistics that are coming out of Alberta in view of the budget?

Ms Haley: I'd be happy to, Mr. Speaker. I think the most important thing is to note how incredibly productive Albertans are. We have the highest level of participation in the workforce of any province in Canada by a long way, not just a little way. We also have the most productive workforce in Canada. Our gross domestic product participation is about \$20,000 higher than the next closest province, which is also, again, phenomenal.

We have the lowest tax rates in Canada, the highest disposable spending, the highest weekly wages anywhere in the country. We also have, in my opinion – and somebody I'm sure will disagree with me – I believe, the best other programs for children's services, for our seniors. We have tried very hard to ensure that our seniors' benefit package goes to those people who truly need it, and that includes things like if your furnace goes out. Some of our more fragile seniors can apply to the government and get at least two-thirds if not a full cost recovery on a furnace or another addition, a piece for their house that helps keep them in their homes. So there is a reason that we have a net migration into our province of seniors from other provinces. It is because we do have good programs here. Our drug program is second to none. I think that you could go on and on, and I appreciate the opportunity to just add a little bit more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would appear that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere wasn't listening the day that I gave my response to the throne speech because the day that I gave my response to the throne speech I was quite careful to point out that government members seem to have on rose-coloured glasses: everything is just fine, and it's the greatest place in the world to live. And members from the ND tend to find nothing right with the way things are going, and everything is a problem. It's the Liberal opposition that is realistic. We don't have on rose-coloured glasses, but neither do we wear blinders to the reality that our constituents are dealing with day to day.

My question for the hon. member would be this. I have an entire apartment complex, about 80 to 100 units, about 200 individuals that were given eviction notices on Sunday. I'm meeting with them later this week. My challenge to you is: would you come with me and meet with those people and tell them what your government is going to do to help them find a place to live on August 31 when they no longer have a place to live? Are they supposed to move in with their

families, all 200 of them? Is that their families' responsibility? I'm telling you that it's time that this government did something today, not talk about what we're going to do over the next two years but today, to help those people that have been told they have to be out of their houses, and there's no place to go in this city. We're talking about .3 per cent vacancy. What are they supposed to do? I want you to come with me and tell them. My question for you is: will you come with me and tell them what your government is going to do to help them find a place to live on August 31? That's my question.

Ms Haley: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's a really interesting problem that he's got. He is the MLA for that area, and I expect him to take the information from municipal affairs and invite somebody from municipal affairs because we've just brought in a package to try and assist people. Can I help with their eviction notices? Probably not. What I can tell you is this. In my constituency we have issues too. One of them is that we're building houses so fast. There are so many people moving in. Perhaps you could understand that on the other side we need more construction, not less of it, and that by bringing in things like a rent control program, you limit the number of houses that people will build. Some of my landlords are upset too. They're wondering why they bother renting out houses at all. Their costs have gone up: their insurance costs, their utility costs, their construction costs. If they need to do renovations, those costs have gone up as well. They see this as a marketplace situation.

While I understand that it is stressful for some families – I really do – I don't think you should minimize my point, hon. member. As a mother and a daughter, when my family is in trouble, I am there for them. That was my point, and I don't think that you should make fun of that by implying that somehow nobody should help their own family. There are 200 families, and I feel badly for them, but I am also confident that they will have assistance in finding places to live. Like I said, Mr. Speaker, over 48,000 . . .

Mr. R. Miller: That's like the Energy minister saying that we should all put on a jacket and turn down the heat.

Ms Haley: Talk to the hand. It's the only thing listening to you.

Over 48,000 housing starts in Alberta last year. I am confident that we will probably exceed that this year.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on the debate.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. I'm pleased and honoured to rise in this House of democracy today to speak to the new budget for our great province of Alberta. It is interesting to rise and reply to this budget as one of the first speakers after the leaders of the various opposition parties. Now, the previous opposition speakers today deem it to be in their interest to expend all efforts to criticize every move and every innovation of the government. But sitting here, being an independent changes one's point of view. I like the view for now.

Why oppose for the sake of opposing? Why not give praise where praise is due? Why not work positively for the sake of one's constituents, for the sake of Albertans? Why not just do the right thing? Why not say the truth when one thinks something is good? And good ladies and gentlemen, members of this Assembly, I see this as a good budget.

Now, spending will never be enough for anyone in the area of their interest, and spending will always be too much when they are paying their taxes, and spending will never be fair when someone somewhere gets attention that they think should or could be coming their way. We must be careful about spending. Ten per cent is a lot.

The increases are necessary to deal with growth pressures. God knows I have been among the first to call for spending in certain areas, but we must be prudent in planning for growth, for next year, for what's going to be happening, for all the people that are coming, and for what we have to build.

The oil price – and I've talked to a number of economists on this – the bitumen price, and the natural gas price assumptions may be too high. Next year's surplus may not be so rosy. The level of increases are a good investment for today, but that level of increase cannot be sustained. We remember the '80s. We remember the '90s. You know, the Official Opposition are talking about spending on everything and anything, and from what I've seen in terms of any sort of balancing of the books or anything, they'd spend Alberta into the ground. But revenues should be good this year. We are in a boom in Alberta. There will be surpluses. In this budget significant surplus monies have been prudently targeted at maintenance and replacement requirements. This is a sound investment for government.

I'm very impressed by the tax initiatives, even though many Albertans, I daresay, especially the blue-collar folks and independent businesses, would like more tax breaks. I'll give special note to the charitable donations tax credit. This innovation is one that I've been supporting for some time. Now, it will go a long way to alleviating the increasing stress that many of our good works organizations are feeling. It will provide more coin to the areas where front-line people want resources to go. Remember that these agencies are often the ones that provide the best value and targeting for the helping dollar.

I also must note the fairness of annual indexing of income tax in this budget and how it prevents inflation creep of taxes. This is only fair and shows a commitment to honesty by this government. I do think that the small business tax threshold of \$430,000 is still far too low and should go far beyond what was announced in this budget. These smaller businesses have much higher risk yet give tremendously in Alberta and are truly the future of our economy.

Now I will relate a little illustrative story. One day while his son was away at school, a father decided to try an experiment. He went into the boy's room and placed on his desk three objects: a Bible, a \$20 bill, and a bottle of rye whisky. Then the old preacher said to himself: "I'll just hide behind the door, and when my son comes home from school this afternoon, I'll see which of these three things he picks up. If he picks up the Bible, he'll be a preacher like me, and what a blessing that would be. If he picks up the \$20, he's going to be a businessman, and that would be okay too. But if he picks up the bottle, he's going to be a drunkard, and, Lord, what a shame that would be." The old man was anxious as he heard his son come into the house just a-whistling. The boy threw his books on the bed, turned to leave, and spotted the objects on the table. Curious, he walked over to look at them. After a second he picked up the Bible and placed it under his arm. Dad started to beam. Then he picked up the \$20 bill, stuffed it in his pocket, uncorked the bottle, and took a big swig. "Lord, have mercy," the old man whispered. "He's going to be a politician."

It's a good budget, but I guess what I'm trying to say is that nobody in this Assembly should take themselves too seriously in thinking that government and government spending can make all things good and solve all things bad. We're all politicians. Most want to do good, and the budget is just a setting of priorities within a fiscal framework.

Highways are a priority. Please, fix highway 63 quickly. I drove it both ways to Fort McMurray last weekend, and I hope the construction is not too slow. Get the routes to the heartland upgraders ready. If you waste time, you waste everybody's time and

stress the economy. It is a proper role of government to move quickly on these projects to save lives, to move goods and services efficiently, and to just save travel time and frustration.

4:10

Municipal infrastructure support is key. Don't be afraid to attach a few strings to make sure that it isn't all spent on pet projects. Don't be afraid to ensure that it's spent wisely. Community facilities monies of \$819 million will be incredibly welcomed by communities. I've already seen the happy, indeed joyful anticipation of planned better community public-use facilities in northeast Edmonton. What better way to promote wellness, create communities, and cut gang violence than getting people into these wholesome activities. The biker bars will hate you guys across the way here in government. You're just doing too much good with this one. And, yes, the new Edmonton Remand Centre is important; just don't put it in the northeast. Thanks for that one.

Health spending is up substantially. We must reduce the waiting times. Let's continue to innovate delivery methods such as the hip replacement program and other similar efforts now in implementation. These projects work, provide better service, and save money to the system and to the economy in the long run. Train physicians here. Increase rural training. Train nurses here. Look closely at the Saskatchewan success of training rural aboriginal women as practical nurses to alleviate the shortages in hospitals and long-term care.

The increase to Education in the budget, again, exceeds inflation. The education of our children determines our future. It starts with early childhood education, and our government cannot forget those at risk of being lost at an early age. We must refocus how we approach vocational education. There are far fewer kids learning skills on the farm anymore. There are far too many latchkey and condo kids learning no practical skills at all. Many have no idea what to do when they start a job, how to chip in and work as a team. It's no wonder that they drop out, wander the streets, and learn other team skills.

It is time to settle the teachers' pension question. This is a liability that goes back far too long and will stretch into the future. The \$157 million towards unfunded liabilities is a beginning, but it is time to ready the next budget to fix this once and for all.

The money spent for school capital projects is key. New areas require new schools. Many schools in my neighbourhood of northeast Edmonton are bursting at the seams. Some had enrollments this year 50 per cent higher than expected in their projections for September. Northeast Edmonton residents need new schools. I understand that there are pressures on school boards in trying to move forward in these difficult construction times.

Advanced education, innovation, and research are key to our future economy. We must commercialize research and find venture capital to do so. We must look for more diverse ways to deliver apprenticeship training. We must better utilize the strengths of the building trades' training of our trades. The real idea of apprenticeship is to have trades training trades. It always has been.

A 37 per cent increase in student assistance is considerable, but I continue to think that we can invest further. I don't think it makes sense to charge apprentice fees at all, and tuition should not be a barrier to learning, to advancing oneself at the same time one is foregoing income. Money spent on students is an investment in the future for all Albertans.

Affordable housing initiatives are crucial in a boom-stressed economy. The waiting list for subsidized housing for those on limited incomes must be reduced. We must never forget the contribution of seniors and understand how so many are stressed because of rising pressures on fixed incomes. The measures in the

budget are a beginning. Encouraging home ownership is still a best option. We should expand measures to encourage self-help and group-help organizations for home ownership like Habitat for Humanity.

Public safety and crime remain the most talked about items when I go door to door. I was at the opening of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force yesterday, and I look forward to the results of their work. Seniors are afraid to go out. Parents will not allow their children to walk to school. If we are looking at emissions control from vehicles, it would do wonders to lessen the lineups of parents picking up their kids in their cars because they fear for their kids' safety.

There must be continued pressure on the federal government and the justice system. I hear time and again: if you do the crime, you should do the time. You can't solve all of society's problems by being nice to people, especially if they are predators. The same holds true for the youth criminal justice system. There must be consequences for those who do not care about the rights of others. The majority of offenders should not go scot-free because it is the nice thing to do or because we feel sorry that their parents didn't do them right. We must make it possible for our streets to be living streets free of fear.

There are many, many more things I would love to raise today, but there are more debates to come. I do appreciate the measures in this budget that look to build our sense of community in Alberta. We need hockey; we need soccer and ballet and kung fu and karate for the kids. We need places where we can gather. We need to be able to walk in the streets without fear.

I am pleased to support this budget, Mr. Speaker. Albertans I talk to like many, many of the measures. I commend the government in its growth initiatives and its sense of balance. Alberta supports this budget. It is in touch with its needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I guess that I'd just like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning for such an excellent speech. It's become obvious now why the Liberals kicked him out of their caucus. Obviously, this member is a straight shooter. He is a thinker. I guess perhaps that the Leader of the Opposition doesn't like free thinkers in his caucus.

I guess that what I will say is simply this. Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) it allows time for comments by members, and my comment is: you've given us some great ideas, and thank you, member, very, very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to respond?

Mr. Backs: I appreciate the words from the member, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 31 Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007.

The three key objectives of Bill 31 are, number one, to amend the involuntary admission criteria to allow earlier interventions; number two, implement community treatment orders; and, number three, require physicians to provide treatment recommendations to patients' family physicians when patients are discharged.

Mr. Speaker, the first key amendment will revise the involuntary admission criteria. The current Mental Health Act allows for the apprehension, examination, and involuntary admission of persons who are, one, "suffering from mental disorder"; two, are unwilling to be admitted voluntarily; and, three, are "in a condition presenting or likely to present a danger to [self] or others." The courts in Alberta have interpreted the last criterion to mean imminent physical danger. Family members of individuals with mental illness express concerns about this situation. They are also concerned that their loved ones often do not receive the treatment they need until they reach the point of being a danger to themselves or others.

In response to these concerns the admission criteria have been amended to say "likely to cause harm to the person or others" so that earlier intervention is permitted. The criteria have also been amended to include the concept of "substantial mental or physical deterioration" on the part of the patient, which again permits earlier intervention. Mr. Speaker, this is very, very important. This is something that, certainly, my constituents have been asking for, and in talking to other MLAs, many constituents across Alberta are asking for changes to the Mental Health Act that will allow earlier intervention.

Mr. Speaker, the second set of key amendments will allow community treatment orders, or CTOs. Some individuals with serious mental disorders are caught in what we call the revolving-door syndrome. They are admitted to hospital when they meet the criteria for involuntary admission, but then they're subsequently discharged when they're stabilized and no longer meet those criteria. After discharge they cease treatment in the community and are again readmitted when they meet the criteria again. So that's the revolving door.

Community treatment orders will assist revolving-door patients and provide an additional treatment option that is less restrictive than remaining as an involuntary patient in a facility. Community treatment orders will be issued by two physicians, one of whom must be a psychiatrist, and describe the treatment and care that is to be provided in the patient's community. The orders will identify the practitioners who will provide these services. The community treatment order will also identify the person responsible for the supervision of the order, and community treatment orders will expire after six months unless they are amended, renewed, or cancelled.

4:20

Now, although community treatment orders are primarily consent based, it is important to ensure that in situations where public safety is a concern, an individual may be required to be subject to a community treatment order if the individual is to continue to live in the community, thus the name.

In order to ensure the protection of individuals' rights, community treatment orders may be appealed to a mental health review panel as well as further appeal to the courts. So this bill also includes provisions to address situations where individuals are not complying with the treatment and care required under community treatment orders. If anyone has reason to believe that a person may not be complying with a community treatment order, or a CTO, that person may bring information before a court. If appropriate, the court could

then issue a warrant for apprehension that would require the person to be re-examined to see if the individual should continue on a CTO, whether the community treatment order should be cancelled, or whether involuntary admission is required. Similarly, if a physician has reason to believe that a person may not be complying with their CTO, the physician may issue an order which permits apprehension and re-examination.

Mr. Speaker, finally, there is one last amendment that will require a mental health facility to provide a patient's discharge summary and further treatment recommendations to the patient's family physician, if known, when the patient is discharged. There's a similar provision that applies when a community treatment order expires.

The availability of adequate community-based mental health services is an important component of the success of CTOs. With a network of over 85 community mental health clinics across the province, a provincial mental health plan and regional mental health plans that promote community options, and investment in enhanced community services through the mental health innovation fund, I believe that Alberta is well positioned to support the implementation of CTOs.

The Mental Health Amendment Act will have resource and cost implications for the ministry and regional health authorities, but government will seek to keep these at a minimum. In fact, it is anticipated that the cost savings resulting from earlier intervention and reduced readmissions will actually mitigate the implementation costs of the amendments.

This bill will be supported by accompanying measures to enhance community-based mental health services that will help Albertans living with mental illness and their families to access early intervention services and to enjoy full and productive lives.

Mr. Speaker, let me just say again that I'm very honoured to be able to bring this bill forward. It was originally going to be a private member's bill put forward by myself in this session. It was going to be Bill 209. I want to thank Parliamentary Counsel Shannon Dean, who did a lot of work on that bill and really brought it to the stage that we're looking at right now. I also want to thank the minister of health and the previous minister of health for agreeing to bring this forward as a government bill and, again, for giving me the honour and opportunity to carry this bill.

In conclusion, I ask support of the House for Bill 31, and I move second reading of Bill 31. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak during the debate on Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. This I think is probably, at least in my constituency, the most controversial bill that will be up in this 2007 legislative agenda. It has generated a great deal of debate in my constituency and, I know, in many other constituencies. I think that debate is a good thing. I am actually quite encouraged to see the amount of lively interaction that the ideas that are encompassed in this bill have generated. I have to say that the debate has also gone on in the Liberal caucus. There has certainly been strong support for the bill. There has also been strong non-support, and these views are all very strongly held. I think it's given us all in the Official Opposition caucus a great opportunity for enhanced communication with our constituents.

So given all of the above I have recommended to our caucus that we have a free vote on this government bill. Usually you would have the whip on in the Official Opposition responding to a government bill, but as the shadow minister I recommended a free vote to allow the MLAs to best represent their own constituents and

allow all voices to be heard. My caucus has concurred with that. So I guess that henceforth I'm not speaking as the shadow minister for Health and Wellness but as the MLA for Edmonton-Centre.

I think that the integral base starting point of agreement for me on this bill is, I believe, that we can all agree that if there was enough support offered to individuals and organizations, instruments like CTOs would not be needed, and that is the world that I continue to work for. I have communicated at length and spoken and met with individuals from the Edmonton and Calgary chapters of the provincial organization of the Schizophrenia Society and a number of others, and we have all agreed on that point. We've also all agreed that the process of deinstitutionalization was never completed in this province, and frankly I think it can be argued that it was never completed in a number of places. We took people out of the institutions. We said that we were going to offer them supports in the community, and we never completed that journey or that continuum of support.

So what do I see today in my constituency and others that contact me from outside of my constituency? I see the mentally ill struggling to find safe, appropriate housing. I see them struggling with economic security to be able to feed and clothe and appropriately purchase medicine and other holistic health and wellness articles for themselves. I see them struggle with meaningful activity so they can contribute to society and give their lives dignity. I think that many of these individuals need access to services in their community. They need access to psychiatric services. They need access to mental health workers. They need access to home care, and they need access to health and wellness programs. These things are not there for them, and although they seek and although they try, those things are not there for them. That contributes to the situation that some of them find themselves in, and I'll come back to that.

I see these constituents struggling with the lack of all of these things, and they are often vulnerable as a result of that. They are in many cases not well physically. They may not be well clothed. They may not be able to engage in a great deal of personal hygiene, and I see that they are often bullied, assaulted, robbed, frightened, and threatened on the street. So the stereotype of, you know, the crazy, mentally ill guy who threatens people on the street, that's a complete myth. The person who is most likely to be assaulted, to be robbed, to be threatened is actually someone who has a mental illness because in all likelihood they're not well, and they're a sitting duck for somebody that wants to pick on them.

I find the situation that the families of people with a mental illness are in to be really desperate. The families tell me: "I want to look after my loved one. I want to support them, but I can't bring that person into my household. I have a young child. I live in a studio apartment." There are a number of reasons why family members may not be able to help as they would like to, and they feel abandoned. They feel that the government never supplied the support services that were necessary to assist people with mental illness to live, you know, full and meaningful lives in the community. They've cut resources.

4:30

When all the chips are down and the police have been called because somebody is talking to themselves in the mall, the family ends up being called, "Come and do something about this guy," and I underline "do something." They feel helpless. They feel abandoned. They feel desperate. They need help. Now, some of them clearly feel that CTOs will give them that help, but I disagree. I don't think this bill will give them the help that they're looking for. It won't give a person with a mental illness the resources and support that they're looking for.

I believe with every fibre in my body that any suggestion to curb or narrow or curtail someone's human or civil rights should never be done unless there is an absolutely ironclad, proven result. I cannot find that result in the implementation of CTOs, and I have looked. I've looked at outcomes in programs that have been running in the U.S. over long periods of time and short periods of time. I've looked at various other provinces that have had them in place, some of them for as little as a year and some of them for longer than that. I have not been convinced by what I've seen.

Interestingly, where the studies come back and say, "Yes, here's an example of where a CTO was successful," it's always in combination with what they call aggressive or assertive community treatment, and what would that be, Mr. Speaker? Well, goodness, that's exactly what I started out talking about. It's about appropriate and safe housing. It's about economic security. It's about enough food to eat. It's about enough medical attention for them. So, really, we didn't need the CTOs. We needed those supports, and they're not there.

This legislation will not create one more dollar on your AISH benefit. It will not give one more housing unit. It does not give one more support. It does not give one more treatment bed in a psychiatric facility, in a hospital, or in one of our psychiatric institutions. It does not give us any more programming in support of mental illness. It does none of those things.

What I believe it does do is it violates the autonomy of the individual. It takes away their choice. It takes away their ability to define themselves and to make choices about their lives. The argument I hear back is: well, they're not in their right mind; they're incapacitated. Okay, fine. I can understand that at a certain point, if someone's incapacitated, we may need to step in. But I would argue that you need to have something in place that allows that person, when they are in their right mind, to make those decisions about their own care.

We are moving towards a medical model that is about the right to refuse treatment. It is about that ability of people to say: no, I don't want that. So if we really want to implement something like this, we must put in place things like personal directives so that when someone is well and understanding what their circumstances are, they can make a personal directive about what they would wish done to them and with them when they are incapacitated, and that gives them some control and some choice over their own life, which I argue is the base of human dignity. If we will not allow people that kind of autonomy and choice over their lives, then I don't think we're being a very fair or a very just society.

What I find gets put in place with a CTO is a perpetual parole. They're never finished. Even for someone who robs a store and gets convicted and serves their time, once they serve their time, they're done. If they get out early on parole, once they've served their parole, they're done. It's over. This is never done. What's contemplated in this legislation is that it can be reviewed and perpetuated forever. They just keep going back under the provisions of this legislation and getting it renewed again and again and again and again and again and again, ad infinitum. There's never an end to it. It can be renewed forever or until a person dies. So that scimitar hangs over you forever. Once you've had a CTO on you, you never get out from underneath it. They can just keep reinstating it. To me that's wrong. If we treat people in our justice and penal systems with more rights than we treat the mentally ill, there is something very, very wrong with the system, and I object to that. Clearly, I object to it.

I said earlier that CTOs violate a move towards the right to refuse medical treatment. The other directions that we're clearly going that are supported by a number of innovations in health care and in wellness and prevention across the world are things like evidence-

based decision-making. Well, we're not getting evidence-based decision-making with this bill and with the suggestion of CTOs. I can find a few suggestions of some studies that have been done in the States where it might have made some difference, but they really couldn't prove it. Well, that is not evidence-based decision-making. I argue that you cannot take away someone's civil rights unless you are absolutely stone cold sure that it's going to have a positive result, and I don't see that happening here.

The other thing is that we're moving towards least invasive procedure, and I would argue that CTOs are the most invasive. There are other, lesser versions of this that have been adopted in some of the other provinces. I'm going to say Saskatchewan and B.C., and I might be wrong, but some of them have, basically, community support orders, which are a less invasive version of community treatment orders than what is anticipated here.

So I want to talk about, specifically, what the legislation is doing here. Specifically, this legislation is changing the definition. It is removing our long-held belief that we leave people alone until they are an immediate danger to themselves or to others, and at that point there's an intervention. I understand the argument from the families that say: we need to be able to cope with a deterioration, which signals a longer period of time. So this legislation is removing the idea of immediacy, and it is drawing it out into a much longer time period, a much more drawn-out situation.

This legislation does not distinguish between types of mental illness, so someone who is clinically depressed, which is likely to happen to many, many people, or someone who is bipolar is treated no differently than someone who is schizophrenic or psychotic. There's no difference whatsoever. There's no definition in here that distinguishes between the kind of mental illness that somebody is dealing with and the duration that they have been under treatment or have been diagnosed with that particular mental illness.

Think carefully, my friends, very, very carefully, about putting this one through. We know from the mental health experts and advocates that we work with in the community that mental illness affects at least 20 per cent of the population, 1 in 5. They're now saying, actually, folks, that it's closer to 1 in 3 people. There are 83 members of this Assembly. We have to acknowledge that mental illness is part of our society. Now, I'm going to go back and remind you all here that this legislation makes no distinction whatsoever about what kind of mental illness would be eligible to be locked up under a CTO. I think you need to think a bit more carefully about that one. Nothing in this bill addresses the root causes of what has brought a person to a point of deterioration where you would need that kind of aggressive intervention.

A couple of other things I'd like to refute the sponsoring member on. He said: well, there are two doctors that are needed, there's a great appeal process in place, and it's all hunky-dory. Actually, read the whole bill. It says: two doctors, one of whom must be a psychiatrist. But if you read a little further along, it actually says that, well, if you don't have a psychiatrist, a regular doc will do as long as it's checked somewhere down the road by a psychiatrist. So don't tell me that this needs a psychiatrist to put this in place. It clearly doesn't. For places like Grande Prairie, which now has no psychiatrist left – and I think Fort McMurray was cruising close to that – you could have two doctors committing people to these CTOs. And, my friends, what if there are no treatment beds available in that location? It can still happen. Read the rest of the bill.

So, one, the orders can be renewed over and over and over again and ad infinitum. There's no end to it. You can have two doctors certifying this as long as it's checked somewhere down the road by a psychiatrist. Well, you've already been locked up, so it's a bit late for that.

I was reassured when I was given a briefing about this that they couldn't put a community treatment order in place if there was no place to actually apprehend and commit the person. Well, I'm not finding that in the bill, actually, so if you want to highlight it and send it over to me, I'd be happy to see it.

4:40

I've already talked about that the orders can be reviewed and reinstated to infinity.

So the changing of the test here, I think, from "present a danger" to "likely to cause harm" – and that's the language that we're using here – is very problematic.

One of the things that this bill does not encourage is that it doesn't do anything to improve medication. Why do so many people get in trouble, where they're in that situation where somebody would want to be committing them or where they'd be considered in a deteriorating situation or maybe just imminently a danger to themselves and others? A lot of it is because the meds are terrible. These are meds that make people feel sick. They have huge side effects, and we've had very little improvement in them in many, many decades. People get on the meds, they get straightened out, and the first thing they do is try and get off those meds because they make them feel so sick. The side effects are so enormous. So where is the pressure from us as a government to say to the big pharma: "Get a better medication. This would help us. Work on better medication rather than this medication that people want to get off"? With their very lives at stake, the first thing they want to do is get off the medication. Well, pressure the big pharma to get a better medication happening.

Some of the things that my constituents have brought forward to me that they have suggested would be helpful are enhanced legal services to protect the civil and legal rights of people with mental illness, one point of entry for all psychiatric services, case managers for each consumer or patient who will ensure that their needs are met and thereby help to reduce the deterioration, daily contact with someone such as an outreach worker, more psychiatrists, increased access to home care – there's a thought – funding to hire more mental health workers, provision of affordable, safe housing, housing with graduated supports, a stronger response to stigma and discrimination – for example, the same as is called for in the Kirby report – and the institution of advanced directives.

Again I say that without strong evidence of effectiveness, legislators have a responsibility to avoid making changes that would restrict the basic right of persons to make decisions for themselves.

I'll end with a quote. This is from Cathy, who is a community health nurse and co-ordinator of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee.

I've been a community health nurse for twenty years – for the last twelve as a street nurse, working with people who are homeless. I know I will never . . . use CTOs. The Mental Health Act functions adequately to protect people who become very ill. Yet it is no substitute for the care and support some people need on an ongoing basis and that includes competent and caring community based mental health care, decent housing, mental and emotional health supports and enough money to live on. These are the building blocks for dignity for people with mental health problems.

And, I would argue, meaningful activities in their lives that give their lives dignity and meaning. I've never met someone who had a mental illness or who was homeless that said: yeah, I just want to sack out all day long. All of them want to do something that contributes to society, and they want to have dignity.

So I argue that this bill should not be supported. I disagree with the principle that is in this bill. I look forward to listening to the debate of others, but I would say for the reasons that I have spelled out in the time that I've had that this is not a bill that ultimately will help those who have mental illness in our society. We need to

understand that this is an increasing issue. One out of every 3 people in our society will deal with a mental health issue at some point in their life, and locking them up under a CTO is not the answer.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 31, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. It's a very important bill. I've spent a fair bit of time looking through it, and as I was reflecting on what this bill really means, what came to mind was an earlier piece of legislation passed in this Legislature a long time ago, in the 1920s, the Alberta sterilization act.

Mr. Speaker, when we debate these pieces of legislation that have ramifications for the liberties and civil rights of Albertans, albeit they are couched in a language of providing medical services for people in need, we are treading on very, very dangerous territory. We need to be extremely careful in relying exclusively on medical science, scientific advice because experience and history have told us that science, including the medical sciences, is an imperfect tool. They're always in need of change, modification. They do change. Treatments change. Theories of illnesses change. The kind of appropriate treatments that are needed, obviously, change and follow. In the meantime, if we are not aware of the fallibility of these services and the science underlying them, we can create serious harm by passing legislation that doesn't pay attention to other issues that need to be addressed along with the medical basis of the argument that calls for the legislation.

The sterilization act passed in this Legislature, as I said, in the late '20s did fundamental harm, very serious harm to lots of Albertans. It violated their fundamental rights, Charter rights. The people who were hurt irreversibly by sterilization decisions and actions that were taken, the people who were the recipients of them, had to go all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada to make two points: first, to have the point established that their fundamental rights had been violated by this piece of legislation, and secondly, to seek restitution for the harm that was done to them by the state.

Mr. Speaker, we also need to make reference to other places in recent history where mental illness has been used as an instrument to repress dissent in those societies. We have to be very careful that as a Legislature, as part of a structure of a state that's democratic, that's respectful of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that Canadians are entitled to, we learn from those instances in history, whether it's a state that has used mental illness as a tool of repression against people who disagree and express dissent with the repressive policies of that state or whether it's simply because the science which was used in order to sort of engage in social engineering, as this Legislature did in 1928, proved to be wrong, inaccurate, unreliable, proven totally deficient by later research and so on and so forth.

When we know that these things have happened, including what happened in this Legislature, things that have therefore done irreparable harm to individuals and citizens living in this province and elsewhere, I think we need to be careful. So this bill, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, needs to be scrutinized in light of those lessons that we must necessarily draw from in our own experience in this province and experiences in other places.

The Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, before us, Bill 31, essentially makes one major change in the existing piece of legislation. It introduces another form of dealing with people who are deemed to be mentally ill.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, I must remind the House that medicalization of aberrant behaviour associated with mental illness is a continuing

theme. It's certainly in the interest of people who sell medications, who manufacture medications to of course create a greater demand for their products. I was reading a review article in the *New York Review of Books* just two days ago, where there was an interesting debate. This article, this piece of writing engages in a serious debate on the variety of ways in which illnesses get defined and the medications for them get discovered, prepared, manufactured. Then the marketing campaigns start to legitimize illnesses and the diagnoses of them, and then the demand for the medications needed to deal with that disorder is of course expanded.

There are all kinds of reasons why I think it's important for us to be very careful. The issue of overmedication, the issue of defining what's a mental disorder and what kind of behaviour is considered a mental disorder are contested and contestable questions. There are no black-and-white answers to these questions. Therefore, all the more reason why we should be approaching this piece of legislation with extreme care.

This bill, as I said, makes one major change in the existing piece of legislation. It makes a provision for community treatment orders in addition to the so-called formal patient status that is a part of the existing piece of legislation, which committed people to a mental treatment facility and didn't provide for anything else.

Another bit of background to this: when we came to the realization in the '80s that institutionalization was not the answer, all of a sudden deinstitutionalization began to be debated. In fact, it became a more attractive alternative for all kinds of reasons. Scientific evidence provided some good reasons why people shouldn't be committed to mental institutions: they become sicker as they go into mental institutions and get isolated from mainstream society. Deinstitutionalization was seen as an attractive alternative to the failing set of policies that led to incarceration indefinitely into mental health facilities and hospitals, but deinstitutionalization got hijacked by the stronger desire in the '90s to cut back government services in order to meet the demands of paying down the debt, reducing the deficit.

So a variety of reasons, all very different from each other and not necessarily in agreement on the ultimate goals, interacted with each other to justify very quick and rapid deinstitutionalization. Over the last 10, 15 years we have seen lots of Albertans on the streets of our towns and communities and neighbourhoods who, in fact, were let go from the hospitals without appropriate support being provided in the communities.

Deinstitutionalization, if undertaken properly, implemented appropriately, would have required first putting in place appropriate support systems, treatment systems, community organizations that would help people who have been let go from the mental hospitals to be able to reintegrate back into the mainstream with the appropriate supports available to them. That was not the case, unfortunately, so we had on our hands over the last 10 years a growing mental health crisis.

I remember meeting with mental health advocates about five, six years ago, and one of their primary concerns was that they were the ones who had been in fact advocating deinstitutionalization, yet the form in which deinstitutionalization was introduced and offered to them led to making the problems related to mental health services graver than they were before deinstitutionalization. So CTOs are now a response to, in my view, the wrong-headed way in which deinstitutionalization was implemented.

Community treatment orders: sure, they are issued for only six months at a time as provided for in this piece of legislation, but they can be renewed ad infinitum every six months. On the advice of a psychiatrist or a physician you can have another six months' renewal, so renewal after renewal after renewal. That raises quest-

ions about the civil rights and the legal rights of people who suffer from mental illness and are put on these CTOs. Now, CTOs look like it's a voluntary decision; it's a consent-based decision. Mr. Speaker, let's not kid ourselves. CTOs are in fact quite restrictive of the civil rights and the legal rights of these people.

Of course, Bill 31 makes provision for appealing CTOs, community treatment orders, even going to the Court of Appeal to be heard if one who is subject to a CTO is unhappy with the issuance of that order, but there's no provision in this bill as to who is going to pay for this if there's a legal recourse available to people who are mentally ill. Because they are mentally ill, most of them either cannot work or work in jobs that barely provide them a living wage. How are they going to be able to seek this opportunity of the right to appeal? How can they exercise it? It cannot be exercised.

Unless we have a provision in this bill that allows for some sort of legal aid, legal resources made available to people who are subject to CTOs, the provision here for appeal and the right to go to the next level, to the Court of Appeal, I think is an empty promise. It's a promise that cannot be implemented. I think there needs to be a guarantee here in this bill that CTOs, when issued, if they are subject to appeal, that appeal procedures and the costs involved in pursuing that course of action would be made available to these patients based on the knowledge that these people themselves are not in an economic position and situation where they themselves can pay if they exercise the right to appeal.

Mr. Speaker, it's a bill that needs very careful attention by all of us. I think one member speaking before me drew attention to the fact that at least 20 per cent of us seem to be, in some form or another, mentally unwell. I'm not sure about that. I'm skeptical about these numbers, these percentages. These are obviously based on an existing knowledge base, but an existing knowledge base drawn from the science of psychiatry and whatever have you is always something that's to be taken with a grain of salt.

The last point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, to conclude, is that a bill such as this, which will restrict the civil rights and freedoms of Albertans, must also be one which comes for a review after four or five years. Even if this piece of legislation passes the Legislature, I think that there should be a legislative provision that it will have to come back to the Legislature for a thorough review at the end of five years so that we then know how CTOs work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) we have a question/comment period available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Little Bow on the debate.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to put a couple of my own comments on the record and throw them out for discussion. I heard an awful lot about sterilization. I've heard an awful lot about legal rights and freedoms of individuals that might suffer from mental duress. It's my opinion and my understanding of history that this is a moot point, comparing this to sterilization. From the information that I have, sterilization was done, true, and it was discontinued in the early 1970s. It was done at the time as probably one of the very few good ways of addressing an issue. That technology has changed substantially since that time.

5:00

It's also my understanding that in this province people who underwent sterilization were not just put into a room and sterilized. It was after family and parental consent and awareness and acknowledgement were given. I can't say that for certain, but I am fairly intimate for the past 37 years with somebody who worked in that field. That was the impression that I was left with, after many of the

nurses trained in Ponoka who were there at the time of the last of the sterilization. So I think it's a red herring to throw this sterilization issue into the debate on this particular bill.

Secondly, legal rights and freedoms. Yes, that's a very real concern, but I think it has to also be balanced against the public good and the safety of the health care provider. I know that many people – the numbers 1 out of 4, 1 out of 3 have been thrown out at the end of the previous speaker's comments – might be affected by some form of mental illness. I guess if we look around, that means that anywhere from 20 to 27 of us in this Assembly either don't know what we're talking about or have some reason to maybe wonder if we're all there. That's just meant as a lighthearted note because if that's the case, we shouldn't even be debating the bill.

On the other hand, you know, the support services. Three of us that are currently in this Assembly did a mental health review back in the middle '90s. At that time – and, again, I'm going off memory – approximately 40 per cent of the mental health facility beds at Ponoka, Oliver, Claresholm, and Raymond had already been changed to such an extent that 40 per cent of the patients at that time had been put out into the community. Now, there were two trains of thought, it seemed to me. There were those who thought that there was no place in society for any mental health facility at all, and everyone in any kind of a mental institution should be put out into the community. There were those who said that some of those people could be moved out into communities, but there were some who, because of the length of time they'd been in, their age, the inability to have any family connection who was willing to help take care of them, needed to be under 24-hour supervision because of the severity of their mental illness.

Now, as I recall, our mental health task force also recommended that should people be put into the community, depending on their illness it would require anywhere from three to five core essential support services, which the second speaker actually talked about. I would say that in the rush to take a lot of people out of mental health facilities and put them into communities, those same people that advocated no institutions were the first not to remember that there was going to be a very great need for some very core 24-hour essential services, which weren't promised by the government, which weren't delivered by the government. But some people wanted everyone out into the communities.

Now, that brings me to the point of the CTOs. Some of those very same people might very well have ended up on AISH. I've seen examples and heard of far more where people that are suffering from a mental illness, who happen to be on AISH, are now out of money by a certain time of the month. They're feeling pretty good because they've been on medication, which one speaker says that they do great harm to you, but there are some medications which make the patients actually feel quite well, to the point that they feel so good they don't think they have to take medication anymore. Then all of a sudden they go about-face. They get either a little bit edgy, violent, or out of money, and they end up doing a circle back through psychiatry again.

Now, to me that's counterproductive. If at the same time there's a volunteer unit available and the people feel that they're good enough that they don't have to be there but some health care provider, whether it's a doctor or a nurse, can see that they have the potential to do harm to themselves, to others, to staff, and want that person to be maintained in a facility to be monitored and to get them back onto a regime of treatment, why isn't that CTO a good tool to have? The police can already be called, but why should they have to be mental health workers on top of all the other things that they have to do out in the public?

I'm just throwing a few comments out on the floor, Mr. Speaker. I'm not speaking as a professional by any stretch, but I have heard

a lot of comments over the years. I've been on the psych unit a few times, visiting with a lot of staff. I'd suggest that before we focus all on patient rights and legal rights and civil rights, we also give consideration to the public, to the health care providers that are trying to help these folks, and to look at the good, positive parts of another tool that would enable, yes, just a doctor. Don't forget that in some of the volunteer units psychiatrists are not available at beck and call. They have to be called in, and sometimes it's of such urgency that the staff and a medical doctor need to make the determination of what treatment is provided.

With that, I'll sit down and take my place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order (29)(2)(a) is available. Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on Standing Order (29)(2)(a)?

Mr. Elsalhy: No. On the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: On the debate.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and contribute to this discussion on Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, as introduced and moved by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. I will try not to repeat some of the arguments from both sides of the House with respect to the support of or the rejection of this idea of community treatment orders.

As indicated by my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Centre, the Official Opposition House Leader, we have agreed in the Alberta Liberal caucus to treat this as a free vote because it is quite an important issue that should not be approached, you know, from a partisan standpoint. This is an issue that basically talks about people.

Many different people in the community have approached members from both sides of the House with respect to this issue, and they're split. They're divided. Some people are adamant in the protection of individual rights, patient rights. Some people are equally passionate about the need for better psychiatric supports for individuals who have mental illness. Both sides of the issue are equally vocal, and they both present a very solid case. They're both strong believers in what they stand for, and they are lobbying members of this Assembly to side with them, to basically accept their approach and their side of the story because they feel that they're right and they want us to support them in their quest for or against.

So, yes, we have to approach this, you know, as individuals, and we should really think about individuals who feel either way. It's an issue of balance, and like everything we do here, Mr. Speaker, we are attempting to arrive at a balance. Be it financial decisions, be it societal decisions, be it health care decisions, we are trying to achieve a balance that is sometimes elusive or difficult to achieve. You can't be a hundred per cent right. You're bound to please some, but you're also bound to displease some. As such, this is a difficult decision for myself, and I bet that it's a difficult decision for you, for every member of this House. How do we vote with respect to this bill? Do we support it, do we support it with amendments, or do we reject it outright?

5:10

We definitely need to look at this balance that we're trying to arrive at. Patients have rights. Individuals have rights, of course, to refuse treatment. This is granted to them in the Charter, for example. But there is also the expectation that society at large looks

after the interests of those who might at times not be able to make those decisions for themselves.

Now, stakeholders in the community and people from the medical profession are also split on this issue, Mr. Speaker. Jurisdictions in Canada and elsewhere are split. Some people accept this idea and embrace it. Some people denounce it. They say: no, it's not the right way. And there are jurisdictions and professionals who are everywhere in between. So we have from the one extreme to the other, and then we have people at different stages in that window.

If we look for advice from, you know, people who are on the ground, front line, hands on, we get some hesitancy or skepticism on the part of the Alberta Mental Health Board, for example, and also some hesitancy or skepticism from the Canadian Mental Health Association.

If I remember correctly, a physician in the capital region here, Dr. P.J. White, of the Canadian Mental Health Association – he's also the Capital health regional clinical program director – sounded or registered some hesitancy because he feels that supports within the community, supports that basically are allocated towards comprehensive systems of community-based initiatives are definitely the preferred way. They're a positive alternative to community treatment orders. His approach was that we may not need community treatment orders if adequate supports are available on the ground in the community, but they're not. So this is the one side of the debate.

On the other side of the debate you get an organization like the Schizophrenia Society, which advocates the establishment or the enactment of some type of community treatment order. Now, is any one organization more credible or should it be listened to more attentively than the other? No. They're both equally credible, and we should really consider very seriously where we stand with respect to this. Professionals are split, governments elsewhere are split, and we should not rush to any conclusion in this House, Mr. Speaker.

Now, as a layman I think that until the individual turns 18, he or she is looked at as a minor, and his or her legal guardian can make decisions of this magnitude for him or her. Once a person reaches 18 and exceeds that age, then the question becomes more complex, as we all know.

When a person is over 18, Mr. Speaker, cases should be evaluated individually. We should not have a one-size-fits-all approach to community treatment orders. They should be evaluated individually, especially when a treatment order involves in most cases the person being locked up or incarcerated. It's not like we're forcing them to take their medication, but they're sleeping in their own bed every night. They're likely going to be separated from their family and from the surroundings that they're accustomed to and comfortable in, and they're taken someplace where they are actually forced to take their medication and monitored, and they're probably subjected to lab tests to make sure that, you know, adequate levels of that medication are in their system and so on. As such, I have some questions, very briefly.

This bill is attempting to expand the category of people that are captured under this definition, who are eligible for community treatment orders, from the current definition, which is a person who presents "a danger to . . . others," to what is proposed, which is a person who is "likely to cause harm . . . or to suffer substantial mental or physical deterioration or serious physical impairment."

Now, I would be more comfortable – and there is not going to be any debate in this House – if it's a person who is posing a threat to others, somebody who is creating a danger for others, for society, for his own family, for people or property. Fine, they need to be dealt with, and this is provided for in the current act. Expanding this: I need to hear from the hon. sponsor of the bill or from other members who are in favour. Why are we expanding it, and why are we trying

to cast a bigger net to catch more people under this definition? As a matter of fact, anybody who is likely to cause harm or who is likely to suffer substantial mental or physical deterioration should be a candidate for a program that is currently existing, should be a candidate for the government to say: "You know what? We have a treatment bed for you in the west end of Edmonton. We have another one in Leduc. We have another one in Drayton Valley." That should be available right now. The stricter definition of somebody who is posing a threat to others should be, you know, the extreme. It shouldn't be the norm. We should look at community treatment orders as a last measure, not as a catch-all approach, Mr. Speaker. So that was my first question.

My second question is: do we have any statistics or do we have any studies that tell us how prevalent, you know, these situations are? How badly do we need community treatment orders? Why aren't the current systems adequate? Why aren't they functioning? If they're missing or if they're not adequate, why are they not fully funded, for example? Or what can we do to enhance the mental care landscape in this province, Mr. Speaker? I need statistics. I need studies that actually indicate why this is such a wonderful move and why now, also studies with respect to the effectiveness of community treatment orders.

Again, I mentioned that people are divided and even members of the medical community are divided as to how effective community treatment orders are. So I need to be convinced. If they are effective, how effective? What can we do to use the CTOs as part of a bigger picture approach? You know, medicating an individual, Mr. Speaker, is only one part of that therapy continuum, of that big picture.

I should know a thing or two about drug therapy because I'm a pharmacist by profession. However, from the first day in the first year of pharmacy school they teach you that medications are not the one solution. They're not the only solution. It's part of a bigger picture, and it's a picture, Mr. Speaker, that, quite honestly, involves the patient himself. The patient is part of that triangle of care or square of care. A triangle has three sides. There is the patient, there is the physician – in this case it would be a psychiatrist – and there's also the pharmacist. With a square you can add a nurse practitioner, now that we are relying on more nurses and more nurse practitioners in our system, partly because we don't have enough psychiatrists and enough physicians in the system. Community care could be interpreted as one of those fourth arms. Anyway, I just wanted to put it on the record that drug therapy is not the only solution. It's part of a bigger picture approach.

I know that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre talked about better drugs. To briefly contradict my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona, it's not the people who provide the drugs – pharmacists are not to blame here. Some drug companies are better in doing R and D, in doing research to come up with better medications or better drug therapies. Some are not as progressive and are not as forward thinking as others. But pharmacists for the most part work with the medications that are available to them. So more times than none we tell people that drug therapy should be the last resort. When people come into my drugstore, I tell them: let's look for ways where we can actually make you avoid taking the medication if we can. Medications are chemicals that are used in special circumstances. They shouldn't be given out willy-nilly, if you will.

Mr. Speaker, I know that when this bill was introduced for first reading, the hon. minister of health was interviewed. He was approached by the media, asking him what he thinks of this bill and where he stands on it. I know that he actually said – and I'm not quoting, but I know that he referenced his preference – that treatment in the community should really translate into a better quality of life for Albertans. Albertans with mental health issues are still

citizens, and they still have rights, and they still have expectations that should be met. So the minister indicated that it really should reflect in a better quality of life.

5:20

It's my interpretation as a layman, again, that community treatment orders should not be a punishment. They should not be a restraint for people just because, you know, at one point there was a chemical imbalance in their brain and they misbehaved. We can argue about the definition of misbehaviour. Mental illness is no different from diabetes, Mr. Speaker. Diabetes is a chemical illness where the body is unable to burn off sugar, for example. Mental illness is also a chemical instability in the brain, and these patients are not aggressive by nature. They don't enjoy being aggressive. They actually have the same feelings as everyone else. It's just unfortunate that their chemical imbalance happened in their brain, that it didn't happen in their liver or kidneys or their appendix or, you know, their pancreas.

I was enlightened by the comment that quality of life should be a big thing that is central to this discussion. The minister also indicated that while community treatment orders are an important tool that will, you know, likely encourage compliance with medication and prescribed treatment, they should also be a measure of last resort. I am really happy that the minister shares this philosophy, that it shouldn't be the norm; it should be an exception. He indicated that one of his priorities now that he's the minister of health would be to ensure the availability of the support services that are required for mental health patients in the communities to lead full, independent, and productive lives.

I genuinely hope, Mr. Speaker, that this will translate into action, that words would now be reflected in government policy. And it's government policy that I'm hoping would create more treatment beds in the community, government policy that would help recruit and retrain more qualified psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses in the community. It might be government policy that would work with drug companies, for example, to encourage better medications, medications of the future, that have fewer side effects and that are not as detrimental to somebody.

With your permission I will carry on at a later time. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) a five-minute comment and question period is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. This bill highlights removing the requirement for a physician to prove that an individual is dangerous in order to be hospitalized, creates community treatment orders that require patients to stay on medication and follow medical advice in order to prevent hospitalization. If patients don't comply, police officers are able to apprehend them and bring them back to the hospital for up to 30 days. These community treatment orders, CTOs, refer to a legal process whereby certain people designated as mentally ill may be forced to comply with the physician's ordered treatment plans while living outside hospital. Those who do not comply may be returned to hospital for psychiatric assessment and possible admission.

Mr. Speaker, I'm still not sure. This is a very difficult decision for me to make because this bill is, you know, so controversial. It's very hard for me to make a decision at this moment. I will listen to some other speakers, but at this moment I just want to comment on a few more things.

Adequate supports, like I said, must be established within communities for both the mentally ill and their families. A system that offers voluntary preventative services within the community and puts the individual at the centre of the decision-making process is the most effective way of dealing with mental illness.

While improvements to the current system are needed, there are cases both for and against the proposed community treatment orders. This is a complex issue and has its supporters and opponents. While CTOs are intended to provide a more structured approach to treatment, there is a legal and ethical dilemma of potentially violating a patient's rights as well as the inconsistency with today's medical philosophy around the right to refuse treatment, evidence-based decision-making, and the use of the least invasive alternative. This issue, Mr. Speaker, has been the subject of healthy debate within our caucus, and the health critic has recommended a free vote, where each member will vote based on their own opinions and the wishes of their constituents.

The Schizophrenia Society of Alberta has been advocating for Alberta to adopt community treatment orders and has recently launched a campaign targeting MLAs. The health minister fully supports CTOs and believes that they are an important tool for families dealing with mental illness. Other jurisdictions, including Ontario, B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, 41 American states, New Zealand, and Australia, have some form of legislated compulsory community treatment. Some jurisdictions, like New Brunswick, have considered and rejected legislating CTOs, choosing to concentrate on developing community services and supports instead.

I have a few questions, Mr. Speaker. The first one I'll start with: why was the decision made to expand the category of people who are eligible for community treatment orders from a person who presents a danger to others to a person who is "likely to cause harm . . . or to suffer substantial mental or physical deterioration or serious physical impairment"? Why not limit it to schizophrenia or psychiatric illness? Who made the decision to include serious physical impairment? Is Alberta using the same criteria as other provinces?

What studies were used to determine the effectiveness of CTOs over other forms of treatment? What additional community supports and services are going to be put in place to ensure that CTOs have a chance at being effective? What is the government doing to make better drugs with fewer side effects available so people with mental illness aren't so inclined to resist them? How does this government imagine CTOs working in rural communities where there are shortages of mental health staff, including psychiatrists? In other jurisdictions physicians are required to demonstrate that the treatment plan proposed is the least restrictive alternative. Why was that excluded from the legislation?

CTOs are a useful tool to help families of individuals with mental illness access early intervention and, hopefully, prevent deterioration. Some mental health professionals compare severe mental illness with Alzheimer's disease, which also affects the ability to reason. They feel that they have the responsibility to care for patients who may not understand the importance of treatment or are unable to care for themselves. Involuntary hospitalization is the last option, not the first. It's only used when a community treatment order is not complied with.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, you know, I'm still not sure whether I'm going to support this bill or not. I would move that we adjourn the debate. [interjections] You want to speak? Okay. Sorry.

I'm still not sure. I would like to listen to some other speakers for some valuable points.

Thank you.

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: You're not adjourning debate, so Standing

Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone that wants to rise for a five-minute period of questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've listened with great interest to the debate this afternoon on Bill 31. I heard from members from all over the province in regard to the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. Certainly, it has been one of the more interesting discussions in this session that I have had the opportunity to listen to from all hon. members. I appreciate the opinions that were expressed.

Now, I have heard from constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar on this matter going back to January of 2007. I've had e-mails. I've had personal visits to the constituency. I've had letters from families who are directly affected by a mental illness. Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the whole issue of mental illness, the effect that it has on the family or on the community is significant. This legislation, although not perfect, I think merits support.

Certainly, we have people from the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta who have been advocating for Alberta to adopt the community treatment orders, and I know that they have had discussions with several members of this House. When you look at how some of these individuals who are unfortunately stricken with schizophrenia or any other mental illness have to deal with their illness, it's sad. It's deplorable. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is absolutely right when she talks about the need to look after and to support and to guide members of our community who have a mental illness.

But this, in my view, is a measure of last resort. When I talk to constituents from Edmonton-Gold Bar and their families, they are anxious to see this legislation proceed because, not in all cases but certainly in some cases, it will help the families. It will help those who are affected by the illness and those who are very worried about their personal safety. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly encourage all members of this House to reflect on this bill. Although it may not be perfect, it certainly is worthy of support. I don't think it will jeopardize anyone's rights.

The hon. member earlier talked about rights. Well, property owners, individuals in the community, they, too, have rights, and he's absolutely correct. There is an unfortunate occurrence in many communities in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar where one individual with Tourette's at early hours of the morning and the late hours of the evening is going up and down the street and in the back alleys. It's through no fault of their own, but they have uncontrollable verbal outbursts, and this individual certainly needs help. Whether this community treatment order system will help that individual remains to be seen, but the hon. member is absolutely right that other people also are directly affected by those actions, and hopefully this will help.

In conclusion, again, the visitors from the constituency to our office have indicated that they would prefer this bill to become law. We have to listen to the constituents, and in this case I will certainly be supporting Bill 31 because constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar have requested that they would like to see this bill become law.

Thank you.

I would also like to adjourn debate, please, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 32 Animal Health Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and move second reading of Bill 32, the Animal Health Act.

I want to thank the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for introducing this bill on my behalf. The Animal Health Act is enabling legislation, Mr. Speaker, that would replace the existing Livestock Diseases Act and regulations, which were created in 1946 to reduce the impact of disease on Alberta's livestock.

Mr. Speaker, I don't have to tell anyone in this House how much things have changed in the last 61 years. New technology, new farming practices, new food products have given a new face to the world of agriculture, and new animal diseases have come right along with the changes as well.

Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons Alberta has been able to achieve such economic success is our ability to adjust and adapt to the world around us. This new act keeps this tradition by allowing us to better accommodate progressive new initiatives with respect to animal health. These include our responses to BSE and avian influenza and our agreement with the federal government on foreign animal disease emergency supports.

The current Livestock Disease Act and regulation does not allow us to react to today's animal health emergencies, Mr. Speaker, or to meet today's animal production and marketing needs. This proposed act will allow Alberta to better prepare for an outbreak of a highly contagious livestock disease and respond to emergency situations quicker and more effectively to protect both animal and human health.

According to the World Health Organization, about 75 per cent of the new diseases that have affected humans over the past 10 years have been caused by pathogens that come from an animal or products of animal origin. Many of these diseases have the potential to spread many ways over long distances and to become global problems. That's why now more than ever we need to be prepared for any outbreak of animal disease in Alberta.

This legislation allows us to react quicker and more effectively to a highly contagious disease. Mr. Speaker, this gives us the ability to minimize economic impacts, maintain global market access, and reduce costs to industry and government, and it will minimize the impact on animal and human health.

Animal diseases cost money, Mr. Speaker. Everyone in the province knows just how devastating the outbreak of BSE was to our cattle industry. Billions of dollars in sales were lost, and the government committed over a billion more for industry recovery. What many people don't realize is that BSE is actually a very slow-moving disease. A faster moving disease, such as foot-and-mouth or bird flu, would be far more devastating to our industry here in Alberta.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, we have to be prepared. Bill 32, the Animal Health Act, helps us to do just that. Under the new act the chief provincial veterinarian would have greater authority to take action and quarantine facilities in order to limit the spread and outbreak of a reportable disease. A reportable disease is a disease listed under the regulations that farmers must report. When an outbreak occurs, our chief provincial vet can act immediately to control the spread of disease while pinpointing the exact origin of the outbreak.

In the case of a severe outbreak this act allows for the Minister of Agriculture and Food to establish a broad disease control zone, which will provide for more actions to be taken to control the outbreak. Previously this was done through a cabinet order, which could delay the reaction time needed to properly control a disease outbreak. Any delays in the first few days or even hours of a disease

outbreak can have a damaging long-term effect on our livestock industry. Mr. Speaker, we have seen enough devastation to our industry from livestock disease. It is the intention of this act to help prevent us going through any more.

Mr. Speaker, another major goal of this new legislation is to expand the definition of disease to include those that aren't caused by organisms or viruses or bacteria. Under the current legislation if there was cannibalism in pigs, for instance, or when cows have eaten toxic substances such as lead, we did not have the authority to keep these animals out of the animal or human food system. We did manage to keep them out, but we didn't have the legal authority to do so. This act will give us this authority and allow us to work with industry to remove infected animals earlier in the disease process. This will help us to avoid situations where animal or human health is compromised.

The new Animal Health Act also addresses issues related to compensation following the outbreak of an animal disease. Mr. Speaker, we want Alberta's ranchers to be doing everything they can to increase animal health and food safety on their farms. While we agree that fair compensation should be given in the event of a disease outbreak, the public should not be subsidizing producers for poor safety and animal health practices. This act allows the minister to authorize compensation for animals destroyed or for the cost of destruction, disposal, cleaning, and disinfecting. To be eligible, conditions would include compliance with the act and effective biosecurity measures. The manner and amount of payment will be set out later in the regulations.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most important lessons we learned from BSE is to be prepared so we can properly respond to an outbreak. Having the right information in the hands of the right people at the right time can mean the difference between keeping trade borders open and having trade grind to a halt.

This act helps us to get information in the hands of the right people. It allows us to gain better access to records of the numbers and locations of animals through an enhanced traceability system. This will allow us to ensure that we can complement the federal system in a way that makes sense for Alberta. We want to do our part to contribute to a truly national traceability system with industry, federal, and provincial elements. This new legislation will allow us to do just that. In order to play our role in this partnership, we will need further consultation with industry to make a system that works for everyone involved. One of the key steps in doing this is initiating a premises identification system. This is one of the three pillars of the national food traceability system and will allow us to better prepare for and respond to emergency outbreaks.

The other two pillars are animal or product identification and animal or product movement. Enhancing our all-around traceability system will be key in maintaining our current trade markets, opening new markets, and ensuring the quality and safety of our food products. Our ability to trace our food products from the dinner plate to the barn or corral is no longer a luxury, Mr. Speaker. It is a necessity in order to maintain our current market access and to expand on it.

This act will define what farm animal records are to be created, maintained, and made available to the provincial vet in the event of a reportable disease. Mr. Speaker, farmers may have concerns about the access to this information, and I would like to assure them that Alberta Agriculture and Food respects the intent of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. But we have taken added measures to ensure that this information is protected appropriately and used only when necessary to protect public and animal health.

We now know how important it is to have timely, accurate, and full information. If we can't quickly pinpoint where an outbreak started, it can cost the industry and the government millions if indeed not billions of dollars through the lost access to markets and expensive compensation programs.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Groeneveld: Yes, billions of dollars.

This act helps to safeguard us against this occurring again.

This act also outlines the different levels of authority for enforcement, including giving inspectors the authority to examine records to trace movement of affected and potentially affected animals and animal products as part of disease control measures, giving the minister the authority to seize and destroy livestock that are a threat to public and animal health, allowing the chief provincial veterinarian to order the destruction of animals with a reportable disease, allowing the chief provincial veterinarian to order the destruction of a vehicle, material, or equipment that cannot be cleaned or disinfected adequately, providing authority to the minister to compensate owners for animals or property ordered destroyed, authorizing the chief provincial veterinarian to search vehicles transporting animals without a warrant to see if a reportable disease is present, and authorizing the minister to prohibit the possession of imported animals that may carry or have been exposed to a specific reportable disease.

This is a major piece of legislation, and we know that it is going to have a substantial effect on the ranchers and farmers in our province. Therefore, we made sure we did substantial consultation with industry before bringing this bill forward. In fact, Mr. Speaker, a review of the current act has been under way for several years in preparation for this bill in the Legislature, and during this time we've worked closely with key provincial commodity groups, animal health stakeholders, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Sustainable Resource Development, and Alberta Health and Wellness. This legislation reflects the range of input we received during these consultations, and since this is enabling legislation, we will continue to work with stakeholders during the regulation process to address the other concerns. We have developed a process to consult with industry stakeholders during the development of regulations, including a planned multistakeholder meeting in mid-June of 2007.

Mr. Speaker, life on the farm is changing, now maybe more than ever before. Farms are businesses and need to be run as such, and we need to reflect this change in our legislation. We need to meet ever-increasing demands for food safety and to continue to stay competitive in a global market. Both of these goals rely on our ability to protect and ensure animal and human health and our ability to demonstrate that we have proper traceability systems in place working effectively.

Many of our provincial counterparts have already updated their animal health legislation. The federal government has also passed a detailed legislation on this matter. Mr. Speaker, I feel that this legislation will put Alberta at the forefront again with regard to our legislation, and that is why I am certainly encouraging all members of this House to give their full support to Bill 32.

Thank you.

5:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 32, the Animal Health Act, certainly repeals and replaces the Livestock Diseases

Act, updates the definition of reportable diseases, and as the hon. minister indicated, empowers the chief provincial veterinarian to issue quarantine orders, establish surveillance zones and control zones to contain a reportable disease.

The hon. minister also mentioned the new restrictions around the sale and the possession of animals with specific reportable diseases. He gave a brief history of the proposed Animal Health Act and the repeal and the replacement of the Livestock Diseases Act that was created after the Second World War, and the department has provided us on this side of the House with a brief outlining the key provisions of the Animal Health Act. We appreciate that and would like to be on the record of expressing our gratitude to the hon. minister for that.

This legislation is, in my view, a major piece of legislation, and it warrants a detailed examination in the House at this time. I have some questions that hopefully we can get answered through the course of debate. My first question for the minister in regard to Bill 32 would be – and I just heard him give a brief outline of the stakeholders that have been consulted – what does the Privacy Commissioner think of the provision in this legislation? For example, the Animal Health Act will have paramountcy over section 17(2)(b) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which deals with the release of information related to public health and safety, and section 17(2)(b) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act deals with the disclosure harmful to personal privacy. Has the commissioner been consulted in regard to this? If he has, what did he say in regard to this particular provision? I don't know if that is necessary, and that is one of the reasons why I certainly at this time would be cautious of this legislation.

Now, the hon. minister talked about the avian flu, and I believe he's absolutely right. Alberta is located on a major flyway for migratory birds in the spring and again in the fall, and I would like to know if that 10-kilometre zone is considered adequate at this time. I want to get my questions on the record here if you don't mind, Mr. Speaker.

Now, in the definitions in this act under section 1(b) we're including a lot of animals there and "any other animal prescribed in the regulations." Are bees going to be prescribed in the regulations? Now, hopefully, it's not something that's going to be a big issue here in this province, but there has been a significant decline in the number of colonies of bees in the lower 48 states and in some parts of British Columbia and in some parts of Ontario. As I understand it, there has been a significant winterkill. There are still discussions and debates as to how this occurred, but the bees are responsible for the harvest and the size of the harvest. There's a direct relationship there. Since I don't see any definition here under "animal" – I've had a look – is it proposed that they be in the regulations? This is, I think, significant.

Hopefully, we're not going to have the problems in Alberta. Some newspapers are reporting that we do, but hopefully we're not. How does the beekeeping industry fit into this legislation under the Animal Health Act, and have they been consulted about this? Unfortunately, we have a habit of overlooking the importance of bees to the agricultural sector.

Now, we can go through this legislation, Mr. Speaker, but overall I think the government is working hard to improve this specific piece of legislation. But I'm very cautious about the override here for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. As the Minister of Energy knows full well, I have every reason to be cautious because the minister, you know, is dealing with barrels over there, but in his case he's dealing with barrels of whiteout, not oil, because he's whiting out so much of the information that should be

provided in routine disclosures. So not only is he the Minister of Energy; he's the minister of whiteout, and he uses a lot of it. I just want to make sure that this provision to override section 17(2)(b) is justified. I cannot see the need for this in this legislation. Perhaps there's a valid reason that the minister can explain.

Mr. Speaker, getting back to other provisions of this bill, the main impact, as the hon. minister has stated, is to provide a more detailed, updated statute to deal with animal health issues as they arise in Alberta. I believe that the bill will facilitate a more effective and efficient process for dealing with animal health emergencies. At this time I would support it with caution, but certainly I'm going to have a look at the answers as they're provided. Again, it is noted that this bill does not appear to be controversial or contentious, but we have to be very, very careful about giving this act an override on the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. I still don't understand why we need this.

Now, the minister talked earlier about animal health issues and

how they have gained national and international attention over the last several years. Most notably for Alberta farmers has been the unfortunate discovery of BSE in their cattle herds. The discovery of BSE in Canadian cattle has led to severe trade restrictions that have had an enormous detrimental economic impact on the beef industry. It is recovering, but it is quite slow. You know, the packing industry has been concentrated in the hands of two outfits, and I don't think that that's in our long-term best interests.

Other animal health issues that continue to garner national and international attention include anthrax and chronic wasting disease. I think we can add to that the whole issue of the winterkill of the bees south of the border.

The Deputy Speaker: The Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, May 2, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/02

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all of our people. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a very special guest seated in your gallery, someone that is well known to many Albertans and has dropped by for a visit to do some business at the Legislature, meeting with various individuals: of course, none other than Mr. Mark Norris. I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a special privilege for me today as the Minister of Energy to welcome to Alberta my Yemeni counterpart, the Minister of Oil and Minerals, as well as Yemen's ambassador to Canada and several senior Yemeni oil officials seated in your gallery. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly His Excellency Khalid Mahfoudh Abdullah Bahah, Minister of Oil and Minerals, Republic of Yemen; His Excellency Dr. Abdulla Nasher, ambassador of Yemen to Canada; and Mr. Nader Ahmed Al-Saidi, honorary consul of the Republic of Yemen. Joining our guests today are members of the Yemeni government as well as senior officials from Nexen Inc. The ties between Alberta and Yemen are important to us, and we thank the Yemeni delegation for coming to our province to further build on our relationship. I would ask them to rise, as they have done, and I would ask all members to join me and give them a warm welcome to our Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I have such a wonderful opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature two very special guests from Lamont, Alberta, of course constituents of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. Seated in the members' gallery are Colleen Lopushinsky, who's had the pleasure of serving as a 4-H leader. Colleen was in the Andrew 4-H. Accompanying her today is her daughter Brittney, who's taken a very active interest in politics, both local and provincial, and spent some time with me today in the office. I would ask both of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great

pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 18 grade 6 students from beautiful downtown Blackie, Alberta. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Margaret Speelman and Ms Lindsay Smith. Also, the parents that are with them today are Mrs. Shannon Wells, Mr. Larry Usselman, Ms Karri Egli, Mrs. Michaelleen Smith, Mrs. Tracey Matthews, and Mr. Curtis Hall. Also along is a person special to me, my daughter-in-law Pam Groeneveld, who happens to have my grandson Harley in this class. I'd ask them to please stand and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you friends of mine who are formerly from Edmonton and now live in Manhattan Beach, California, and are here visiting their respective mothers in the fine city of Edmonton. I'd ask Dick and Jean McClure to stand and be recognized by the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two guests. The first is Kei Inamura. Kei is a Rotary exchange student from Japan being hosted by my Rotary Club out in Stony Plain. These student exchanges promote cultural awareness and present numerous learning opportunities for the participants. Kei has been a joy to have in our community. She is here today to observe our Legislature in action. Kei is accompanied by Bill Forbes, a fellow Rotarian. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a good friend of mine from a long time back, Mr. Jim Visser from Horse Hill, which is in northeast Edmonton. A retired potato farmer and an artist, he's a member of the Legacy Lands Conservation Society, which is active in forming a land trust in the greater Edmonton area. The city of Edmonton is a partner in this along with the Edmonton Community Foundation and a number of other environmentally focused groups. This trust will be officially launched later this year. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly for the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright 25 young kids that are here today from the Blessed Sacrament school in his riding. They've been on a tour with teachers and parent helpers looking at the Legislative Assembly and an opportunity to see us in action this afternoon. I'd like to introduce teachers Mrs. Michelle Folk and Mrs. Tracey Campbell and parent helpers Mrs. Mardy Charlebois, Mrs. Laverne Phillips, Mr. and Mrs. Dean Martineau, Mrs. Lisa Marchand, Mr. Harold Malcolm, and Mr. Konrad Heier. I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am really honoured today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special organization from Edmonton-Centre. Seated in the public gallery today we have 25 members of the Edmonton Vietnamese and Chinese Seniors Mutual Assistance Society. This is an extremely valuable organization in my community. They do great work, and I've been very honoured to be a guest at a number of their functions. With them today are Ms Lan Kwok and their president, Thuy Quoc Du. I would ask them all to please rise, and would you all join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly a group visiting from high school Austin O'Brien in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. It is one of two excellent high schools that we have in our constituency, and we're very proud of the work that this group does. This delegation is led by Maria Lucas and Bruna Kriegel. I would now ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. They're in the public gallery.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two brand new parents. The first one is Craig Miller, my brother-in-law, and his lovely wife, Keltie. They're here today with their first born, Baden Thor Miller, who was born April 18, 2007. Baden's an early riser as he came into this world at 6:29. I would like them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Richard MacKay, executive director, and Tara Erickson, team leader of Mira Facilitation Center, a community-based agency providing services to individuals with developmental disabilities. Mira, which is the name of the first pulsating star discovered in 1662, meaning the wonderful or the amazing one, uses five major components – educational, vocational, recreational, socialization, and independence – to assist clients and promote independence and involvement within the community.

Richard and Tara are joined today by Sean Mapstone, Patricia Levesques, Jose and Ines Silva, Pauline Boni, Donna Goryniuk, Cathy MacKay, Tracy Stanfield, Sara Levee, Sarah Lamb, Lana Cote, Blair Cote, Kelly Grant, Perry Stebner, Brandon Stadd, Amber Koehler, Janine Donovan, parents Jan Stanfield and Whitney Laycock, and staff members Marsha Taphorn, Cassie Kepke, Alina Matthews, Hayley Halvorson, Tina Froese, and Krista Mitton. I commend them all, and I invite them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two guests seated in the public gallery. They are Hazel Jorgensen and

Sylvia Craig. Both Hazel and Sylvia are Palace Casino workers who are on day 236 of their strike due in part to this government's unwillingness to protect basic worker rights by improving their weak labour legislation. Hazel Jorgensen has been working at the Palace Casino for two and a half years as a slot attendant. Hazel originally hails from Newfoundland and came to Alberta to be with her sons in June of 2004. Sylvia joined the Palace Casino as a slot attendant a few months before the workers went on strike. She lived in Chilliwack, B.C., for 30 years but moved to Edmonton to be closer to her daughter and son-in-law and her two lovely grandchildren. They are joined today by UFCW 401 representative Don Crisall. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Gerry Brin. Gerry is a constituent of mine in Edmonton-Calder and has been an active and diligent member of our community for the past two decades. Gerry has been representing the residents of Dunvegan and Wellington since 1989. He was instrumental in saving taxpayer dollars in 1991 when CN attempted to load off toxic liabilities onto the city of Edmonton. He's also a member of the Cyclists Advisory Committee, representing north Edmonton for the past decade. I would now ask him to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My guests have not yet arrived, but I'll introduce them to you and through you to this Assembly. It's a great honour to have the students from Magrath high school travel here. They've travelled a long ways, and the early start, I guess, wasn't recalculated in time. I know their one teacher, Brad Sabey. I'm not sure who else is here with them because they haven't arrived yet. I would ask the Assembly to please give them the traditional warm welcome when they do get here.

Thank you.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a couple visiting Edmonton to attend the Premier's prayer breakfast. They are members of the Claresholm chamber of commerce, but much more important they are my constituents from Valley Ridge. In the members' gallery if Rod and Joan Dyrholm would please rise, I'd ask the Assembly to welcome them.

The Speaker: Are there others? Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to our esteemed colleagues Rory Koopmans, who is here for the 28th time. He must be a bit of a beggar for punishment. His postscript: always a gentleman.

Secondly, I'd like to introduce Wade Izzard, who is a very active Liberal both provincially and federally. He sits on the Edmonton-Riverview Liberal Constituency Association. So thank you, gentlemen, for coming.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Calgary Catholic Immigration Society

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had the great pleasure of attending the world tour in a day at the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society office in Calgary. Twenty-five years ago the CCIS was incorporated as a nonprofit charitable organization. The CCIS history, however, stretches back to the 1960s when a group of dedicated volunteers helped refugees and newcomers settle in Calgary. CCIS believes in settlement and integration as a process that involves newcomers and the entire community and offers a wide variety of specialized services and programs that are designed to aid and enhance the integration process of newcomers to our society.

With the help and support of the community the CCIS has become the largest immigrant-serving organization in southern Alberta. With 150 full- and part-time staff speaking over 50 languages, supported by 800 volunteers, the CCIS offers more than 60 diverse programs serving more than 8,000 immigrants annually.

Mr. Speaker, the amazing part is the help from volunteers. Last year 793 volunteers contributed over 40,000 volunteer hours. That's equivalent to over \$700,000. The federal government contribution to the budget of CCIS is 31 per cent, the province's is 37 per cent, the city's is 6 per cent, and 25 per cent is from donor and private sources.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize the CCIS, a great service to Alberta, to Calgary.

Thank you.

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

Caregivers for the Developmentally Disabled

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My guests today in the gallery are listening. These are the people who care for the less fortunate, our fellow Albertans. They care for persons with developmental disabilities. Creating close bonds with those that they are responsible for is imperative for good care and trust. It is established by consistently having the same team of workers, but there is a 50 to 60 per cent turnover in front-line staff. These clients are all over 18 and require help to stay independent or 24-hour care just to stay alive. It is labour intensive. It is hard work mentally and physically. These caregivers deserve salaries that at least match fast-food joints and keep up with inflation.

Price of prosperity: what does that mean? Does it mean that there's no such thing as a free lunch? This province is prosperous, but we have lost our moral compass, our ethical behaviour, and the ability to do what is right. Is it right that it's the vulnerable, not just persons with developmental disabilities but those on AISH, those on fixed incomes, those that can't afford their rent, those who go to school hungry, those who sit in crumbling schools, and those who die before their time and those who are homeless that are paying the price of prosperity?

Business has become the new religion for Alberta. We adore at the altar of money, but the question is: does business have a conscience? Does it have a moral compass, ethics, and integrity? Dig deep for this answer, and you be the judge.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

St. George's Day

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in recognition of St. George's Day, which occurred on April 23. St. George is the patron saint of England. His emblem is a red cross on a white background, and it is portrayed as the flag of England and also as

part of the British flag and is prominently displayed on our own provincial crest and our provincial flag.

Beyond the legend of St. George upon his horse slaying a dragon to save a princess is the real St. George. He's believed to have been born to Christian parents in Cappadocia in present-day Turkey in the third century. He became a Roman soldier who served in England. He was imprisoned and tortured for protesting the emperor's persecution of Christians. He stayed true to his beliefs and was beheaded at Lydda in Palestine on April 23, 303 AD. The story of his life and death spread rapidly, and he became a symbol of bravery in defence of the defenceless.

In 1222 the Council of Oxford declared April 23 to be St. George's Day. In 1415 St. George was acknowledged by becoming the official patron saint of England. St. George is also the patron saint of soldiers and of farmers and fieldworkers.

St. George embodies the very essence of bravery in servitude to others, and I would like to acknowledge St. George's Day for our friends in England, for all Albertans of English ancestry, and for all of those who represent the spirit of St. George himself.

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

1:20

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today as chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission to highlight some of the addiction issues and trends in Alberta. AADAC has a long history of providing addiction services across Alberta either directly or through funding programs and services offered by other agencies. Services are located in 51 communities throughout the province. There is also a toll-free helpline providing access to information and referrals.

Our efforts in the Alberta drug strategy are bearing fruit, with expanded services for youth and many examples of successful collaboration among stakeholders to address addiction issues at the community level. Albertans have improved access to addiction services, including assessment and outpatient counselling, day treatment, detoxification, short- and long-term residential treatment, and overnight shelter. We are making progress, Mr. Speaker, but continually face new challenges.

As Alberta's population grows so does the need for addiction programs and services. It is estimated that about 1 per cent of Albertans over age 15 are drug dependent, and about 3.5 per cent are alcohol dependent. Last year AADAC provided treatment to more than 35,000 Albertans, an increase of nearly 11 per cent over the previous year, and served an additional 150,000 Albertans through its information and prevention services.

Alberta has one of the youngest populations in Canada, and the use of alcohol and other drugs tends to be the highest among youth and young adults. Alcohol is a growing concern, especially the increasing rate of drinking among junior high and high school youth and the rate of heavy, frequent drinking among young adults.

Much of Alberta's recent growth is due to immigration from other parts of Canada and the world. Isolation from family, friends, and other community supports can increase the risk for a variety of health and addiction issues. Language and other cultural barriers can make it difficult to access information or connect with appropriate services. It's important that newcomers be aware of available services like AADAC.

As our population continues to grow, Mr. Speaker, the demand for addiction programs and services increases. It's now more important than ever to reaffirm Alberta's investment.

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

Caregivers for the Developmentally Disabled

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Persons with developmental disabilities need care workers in order to preserve the dignity they deserve as members of the human race. These caregivers are represented here today. They represent staff from all over this province who cannot live on the salaries they receive.

There is a huge discrepancy between government unionized salaries and those paid by contractors, whether they're for-profit, not-for-profit, or faith based. They are asking for equality within the system. This equality will go a long way, Mr. Speaker, to ensuring that there are people willing to stay in the field, continuing to educate themselves, and to recruiting more staff for the ever-increasing number of cases they handle.

The need is there despite the government's attempts to raise the criteria for admission for care in order to keep the case numbers down. There can be a very difficult transition period from the caseworker for the person under 18, when the education system picks up some of the care, and when they turn 18 and change to PDD for full care.

There are 9,200 adult PDD clients and a budget of \$509 million, Mr. Speaker. For that amount of money what are the outcomes? Is this is not time for a review? What is the percentage of these dollars for front-line staff, the ones who are the advocates for their clients?

This situation cannot be stressed enough. Last year a 40 per cent staff turnover rate was reported by the Alberta Council of Disability Services. With an average wage of \$13.76 per hour the lack of resources available to retain qualified staff is having enormous repercussions throughout the industry. Low wages are resulting in an inability to maintain staff and services, with some providers being forced to close on weekends, leaving those they assist with nowhere to go.

Those workers and staff need to be consulted and asked how things could be improved or what true changes need to be made. They have the knowledge of their clients and their needs, and they're the ones on the ground making things happen.

This government talks about the price of prosperity. This is a price members on this side of the House are not prepared and not willing to ask individuals with disabilities or those who support them to pay. It's not fair, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Groundwater Storage

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Where there is water, there is the life. It is the first resource we look for when we are moving to or settling in a new place. I live in what is called the Palliser Triangle, a region designated by John Palliser as uninhabitable. Innovation and hard work have proved him wrong.

As a long-time Scouter I do believe it is our duty to use our resources wisely. Our climate is changing, and where we received snow before, now it often comes as rain. If we fail to adapt to this change, our future choices and opportunities will be limited. I listened to a wise First Nation elder from my area say: we must look at everything from a view of and for seven generations. Now, that is long-term planning. I am only a fifth-generation Albertan.

Mr. Speaker, security is critical to quality of life. Water is part of our economic security, our environmental security, and certainly our

food security. We must protect and store and use our water wisely. We have recently placed moratoriums on the Bow River basin, a wake-up call.

In order to secure our future, we must store our water. We need reservoirs and dams to help mitigate high flows and enhance low-flow periods. We have the water resources. The question is: how will we develop and use them? Failure to build the infrastructure now to save our runoff could end up costing us more than failing to save our surplus dollars in the heritage trust fund. To help avoid future crises, we need to learn from the past, which will enable us to live better in the future. To paraphrase Dave Hill from the Alberta Irrigation Projects Association, if we are going to build the west we want, then we need to include water in the choices we make now. Proper planning and storing of our water will give us choices for building the west we want, which will end up a lot better than the west we get if we do nothing. We all want to build a better Alberta. Capturing and storing our water is critical for a secure future.

An old proverb is that the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago; the next best time is today. The best time to build a reservoir was 20 years ago; the next best time is today.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise again to table some more petitions, this time 1,814 signatures from concerned Albertans throughout the province urging the government to:

1. Ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector, regardless of whether [they're] employed by government or by community-based or private providers;
2. Ensure these employees are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive with other sectors . . . [for] the valuable and crucial service they [deliver];
3. Improve employees' access to professional development opportunities . . .
4. Introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise to give a petition of some Albertans. They're calling on the government to "hold rent increases to no more than the rise in the average monthly wage until December 31, 2010."

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to reread exactly what's been read by my colleague because I think it's very important that everyone hear these words. I'm presenting a petition signed by 144 people to:

1. Ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector, regardless of whether these workers are employed by government or by community-based or private providers;
2. Ensure these employees are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive with other sectors . . .
3. Improve employees' access to professional development opportunities (training and upgrading); and
4. Introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) to advise the House that we will be accepting written questions 10 and 11, and I give notice that on Monday, May 7, 2007, Written Question 9 will be dealt with. The balance of written questions appearing on the Order Paper will stand and retain their places. Motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper will stand and retain their places.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Nuclear Power

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to nuclear power in Alberta, this government has in past years opposed the idea. However, since some well-connected Tory supporters signed an exclusive agreement with Atomic Energy of Canada Limited to commercialize CANDU reactors in the oil industry, this government appears to suddenly have a glow for the nuclear industry. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier tell us if he or any of his cabinet ministers have met with supporters of nuclear power in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: No, I haven't. I don't know about my ministers. I was in Toronto for two days at the Premier meetings, but certainly I haven't met with anybody.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whether the Premier is aware or not, officials from his government have met with investors who want to develop nuclear power in Alberta, investors, I might add, who would make a lot of money from these plants but who wouldn't live anywhere near them. Even more, this government is supporting and funding groups that seem to be pushing the nuclear option for this province. Again to the Premier: why hasn't this government consulted with the people who will actually live near these potential power plants in places like Whitecourt, Cold Lake, Fort McMurray, and Peace River to see what they think?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday this question was raised to me by the media while I was in Toronto, and I said that when it comes to the whole question of whether we will pursue nuclear power in this province, we will have a full dialogue with Albertans, looking at establishing the process. We'll dialogue with them and look at some of the issues obviously tied to this particular proposal that may be coming forward. But, you know, I just came back from Toronto, and one of the Liberal Premiers is just motoring full speed ahead, building a nuclear power plant in his province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The EUB has never held a hearing on a nuclear energy plant in Alberta. It makes one wonder what regulatory expertise this government or any of its agencies actually has to assess nuclear power plants, and it makes one wonder how much it's going to cost the taxpayers of Alberta for this government to develop that expertise. My question is to the Minister

of Energy. Given that the EUB would be responsible for assessing and approving a nuclear power plant application, how many nuclear power plant experts does the EUB have on staff, if any?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, as the hon. member opposite very well knows, there has never been an application, and there is no application in the province of Alberta at this particular point in time. I might add that the application that will come forward at some point in time, if one does come forward, I would presume will firstly be directed to the federal level. It would be their responsibility in the first place. There is some shared responsibility with respect to the regulatory authority around nuclear. We are investigating that and will continue to work with that, and as I've said many times, I would not close my eyes to any form of alternate energy in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As just about everybody in here knows, Alberta is on the brink of a water crisis. A billion dollar project at Balzac has nearly ground to a halt because of water shortages, and there are many indicators that water shortages are a real threat in northern Alberta too. Nuclear power plants use vast amounts of water. Individual CANDU plants in Ontario use many times the entire water consumption of the city of Toronto. To the Minister of Environment: where does the development of nuclear power plants fit into the province's Water for Life strategy?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question with respect to nuclear power and the Water for Life strategy is speculative at best. I can tell the member that at this point in time nuclear power is not part of the Water for Life strategy. It was not contemplated. If circumstances are to change, if applications are to come forward, then perhaps we'll have to consider that exact question: where does nuclear power fit into the Water for Life strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are serious, serious concerns about security around the transportation, use, storage, and disposal of nuclear materials. There is now concern around the world that nuclear plants are targets for terrorist groups. Alberta is already on various watch lists as a potential target for terror activities. I don't want to become a bigger target. To the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security: given that his department is responsible for the security of Albertans, has his department done anything to assess the security issues related to nuclear power plants in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a little tough to answer a question based on speculation, but this ministry is looking at all issues of public security that could affect Albertans today and in the future. It is in good hands and will continue to be so.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the greatest concerns with nuclear power is the storage of radioactive waste.

Atomic Energy of Canada has yet to obtain an environmentally and publicly accepted location for a permanent reactor waste vault anywhere in this country. To the Minister of Energy: given that his department would need to approve any nuclear power plants in Alberta, what sites, if any, are suited to either temporary or permanent storage of radioactive waste in Alberta?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that in the nuclear industry in Canada Atomic Energy Canada Limited and the federal government of Canada have the authority to deal with the spent fuel issue. However, I must point out again that the Liberals across the way are living in the past. If you just happen to take an opportunity to cast your eye around and take a look at what's happening with the nuclear industry around the world, nuclear energy experts are already saying that within a decade spent fuel storage depots of today will become fuel sources of tomorrow.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Affordable Housing

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a member of the Affordable Housing Task Force I heard story after story of despair and hopelessness. There is a housing crisis in Alberta, and the way to respond to a crisis is with immediate action. Instead, we have confusion. The reality is that the market is more volatile than it was before. Renters are scared to come home in case they get eviction notices or massive rent hikes. Landlords are unclear as to what the rules are. Even real estate agents are not sure what's going on. My first question is to the Premier. The government had enough time to come up with a clear plan. Can the Premier provide an explanation as to why this file was so badly handled?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the government has identified this issue with respect to housing. As I said many times in this House before, it's on three different levels: those dealing with homelessness, which many municipalities are facing; of course, low-income rental units; and families wanting to buy individual family units for themselves. We have addressed a lot of the issues in the budget. We're working with municipalities to ensure that we find a solution to this particular issue. But, again, we continue to have tens of thousands of people from outside Alberta coming to Alberta because, really, this is where they can fulfill their dreams. It's the only job opportunity they have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Affordable Housing Task Force recommended a \$7 million fund to prevent Albertans from entering into the stream of near homeless or homeless, but the government has twisted the task force's recommendation, applying it to workers moving to Alberta who require assistance in finding a home. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Our intention was to provide money for Albertans for damage deposits, first month's rent, and emergency rent shortfalls. Why did your government distort our recommendations?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, this government has not distorted the recommendations. Au contraire. In the last several months we have provided additional supports for people who do face eviction. We have helped people on low income if they needed extra shelter allowance, and there have been a considerable number of dollars spent there. It's my understanding that we will continue to do that.

This \$7 million will help us with even further opportunities to help the people on low incomes. It would be wrong to make people that are facing crises today feel that we don't provide supports. We do and will continue to do so.

Dr. B. Miller: We need a homeless and eviction prevention fund to help Albertans in a crisis situation right now. People living on social assistance and low-income families are falling further behind. The Edmonton Social Planning Council in a recent report stated that income support allowances are now worth less than half of the amount received in 1980, and the budget offers only a 3 and a half per cent increase. To the same minister. There is money for new workers coming to Alberta, but our own people fall deeper and deeper into poverty. Is this the price of prosperity?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have provided income support increases this year and previously. I think that if the hon. member looks further, he'll see that it isn't 3 and a half but, rather, a 5 per cent increase. There was a 5 per cent increase last year. We also have additional supplementary benefits. Our supplementary benefits in this province for people who are on low-income supports are bigger than they are in any other of the provinces.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

1:40 Ministerial Appearances before Committees

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this Premier's commitment to democratic renewal in this province is all talk and no action. In our democracy elected officials are supposed to be responsible to the public, and ministers are supposed to be accountable to the Assembly for their expenditure of taxpayers' hard-earned money. One of the ways that ministers are held accountable to the public for the funds that their ministries spend is through the Public Accounts Committee, yet at the Public Accounts meeting this morning the Minister of Education skipped out and sent his unelected deputy instead. My question is to the Premier. Why did you allow the Minister of Education to take a pass on his responsibilities?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, by my interpretation of the rules – and I stand to be corrected because I don't follow all the rules of every committee and am not knowledgeable of all the rules of a committee – I believe that Public Accounts has the option of sending in senior officials to reply to the questions. Remember that Public Accounts covers all those expenditures from a year before, and this minister was just appointed this time around and sent his officials to take all of the questions on the prior year's spending.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's answer indicates that he does not understand the principle of elected ministers being accountable, elected people being accountable. That is the very essence of our system of responsible governance. I guess that my question is to the Premier. Is the Premier saying that it's the committee that said that the minister couldn't be there? My understanding is that he just sent a fax saying that he wasn't going to show up, and he was going to send his deputy.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I find it rather, well, unfair for the hon. member to say that I don't understand the responsibility of serving in public office. I've had the opportunity to serve both as a municipal official and as a member elected for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville to the Legislative Assembly for many years, served in different ministerial capacities, and now as Premier. I can assure

you that I do accept responsibility for decisions made. I don't need to have someone sitting in opposition tell me what my responsibility is.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the Premier needs to hear some of this stuff whether he thinks so or not.

He talks a lot about accountability, but this Conservative government is the same Conservative government of yesteryear. Can the Premier tell the House why, when the New Democrats designated a day for budget estimates, we were told that the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology wasn't going to be there because he was going to be in China?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, these are really weird questions. Ministers do have responsibilities, those responsibilities within their ministries to pursue markets, in this particular case in advanced education. They can travel to those jurisdictions that seem necessary to build further relationships and ensure that in this province we look at broadening our tax base, looking towards new revenue streams so we're not always dependent on oil and gas. That's part of the overall vision of this government. It's not just today, but it's 10, 20, 30 years down the road. That member can never see that far. I can tell you that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Fishery Management at Pigeon Lake

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. As the minister knows, on April 24 a large public meeting was held in my constituency regarding fish populations in Pigeon Lake. It was particularly about concerns about a lack of whitefish. A large majority of the 300 to 400 attendees felt that the management of the lake was out of balance. What can the minister tell us about decisions regarding fisheries management for this lake?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd first like to begin by thanking the 350 or 400 Albertans who came to the Sustainable Resource Development open house to discuss the fishery in Pigeon Lake in Thorsby on April 24. Our officials were there to listen. We heard the message loud and clear. Are there as many whitefish in Pigeon Lake today as there were 10 or 15 years ago? No, and the whitefishing is not as good. But why is that? The walleye population went extinct in Pigeon Lake in the 1960s, so in 30 years there was no competition. We reintroduced walleye in the 1990s. Our goal is to establish a balanced fishery.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents disagree, but if the minister is saying that walleye populations are still too low, then why are we allowing a walleye harvest on Pigeon Lake this season?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very good question and with a good-news answer. Our restocking of the walleye has succeeded to the point where we can introduce a limited walleye

catch, so Pigeon Lake has been chosen along with several other lakes, Wolf Lake and Lake Newell, where Albertans can fish for walleye. I encourage all Albertans: starting on May 4 you can call up and get a special walleye tag to go out and catch a few walleye and take them home to eat.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Okay. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: with all of this focus on walleye, what is being done by your department to meet the needs of those who want to fish for whitefish at Pigeon Lake?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I want the hon. member to know that my staff is working day and night to keep the peace between the friends of the walleye and the friends of the whitefish, and the key to this, of course, as I said before, is balance. I want the friends of the whitefish to know that we've heard their message. We'll keep that balance. I particularly want to thank the Pigeon Lake anglers' association for bringing the whitefish into our office in February. I had the occasion to eat some of that smoked whitefish last week. It's the best smoked whitefish in Canada, and I want to make sure it's there in years to come.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Support for the Developmentally Disabled

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Life is becoming more difficult for people with disabilities. Government funding for programs like PDD and AISH isn't sufficient to meet basic needs or to keep up with the cost of living. People with disabilities are struggling to cover the increasing costs of shelter, food, clothing, and the costs associated with living with a disability. In fact, they experience twice the level of poverty as those without disabilities. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: why does the price of prosperity for this government include leaving Alberta's most vulnerable groups behind?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there is a tremendous amount of concern for those with disabilities and a lot of support that continues to be provided on an ongoing basis to see that those with disabilities can be provided the services they need. This government in response to some of the issues has seen about a 90 per cent increase in its funding since 1999 just in this, to acknowledge that this is an area where there is a tremendous amount of need, where those with those vulnerabilities and disabilities do require the help. It's in that regard that the budget has followed to support this group.

Ms Pastoor: To the same minister. The rate of inflation now in Alberta is 5.5 per cent, and MLAs got a raise of 4.9. But PDD only receives a 3.5 per cent increase. How does the minister expect service providers to maintain existing services, keep up with increasing caseloads, and pay staff fair wages on what amounts to a budget cut?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, it's correct that in this year's budget there's a 3.5 per cent increase to persons with developmental disabilities boards, but on top of that last March, two months ago, we also reallocated within the department an equivalent amount that would go to the boards. So that would be a one-time payment to them of another 3 and a half per cent really to address the staff kind of labour issues.

Ms Pastoor: And it was very appreciated, but it wasn't sustainable.

An increase in funding that fails to cover inflation and the increasing number of PDD clients is in effect a funding cut. Is this funding cut part of a long-term plan by this government to scale back supports for Albertans with disabilities?

1:50

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, quite the contrary. We have taken a lot of measures by this government to ensure that the funding has well surpassed any inflationary measure and growth of the PDD caseload. Like I said, since 1999 there's been a 90 per cent increase to this department, a very substantial – higher than really any of the other forms of investments in any other departments. It is an acknowledgement that these people are in great need, and we are working hard with service providers so that we can see that the services are there for when they're needed.

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

Climate Change Public Consultation

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 18 in Edmonton I was pleased to attend and speak at the Minister of Environment's public consultation on climate change called Meeting the Challenge. It was very well attended, and many interesting comments and ideas were expressed surrounding what all of us want: clean air, clean water, clean land, and so on. But in order to ensure that these critical needs are met, leadership on environmental issues is needed at all levels of government. My questions are for the Minister of Environment. What are you doing to toughen up our environmental standards, and will you be creating stronger regulations and stiffer penalties for violations in order to protect our environment?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the meeting to which the member refers was one of 10 such meetings held throughout the province. The purpose of those meetings was really to engage in discussion with Albertans on a go-forward plan with respect to climate change and the environment. If I can say in a short summary, what we heard at those meetings is that Albertans take the environment and take the issue of climate change very seriously, and they expect their government to do the same. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker and the hon. member, that that is just the case.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you for that.

I wonder what this minister is prepared to do within his own ministry to ensure that more environmental education occurs in our province – and I mean for all age groups – and to ensure that more attention is paid to the prevention side of this issue.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that was one of the issues that we discussed at those meetings. It was, again, solid feedback from Albertans that this is an area where they're desperately seeking more information, more education, more knowledge on matters of the environment: how can I, as an individual Albertan, contribute my piece to this environmental plan? So we are looking at intensifying the way we deliver education now, primarily through schools, but we will be over the coming months and years intensifying that opportunity to educate Albertans on these very important issues.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, my constituents and others will be very interested to pursue that further because we know that Alberta has never been afraid to be innovative. We were first to develop an

action plan for climate change, first to pass climate change specific legislation, and first to pass legislation that requires industry to cut their emissions. Will Alberta be first again to step up our commitment for additional research in this important area and to provide true scientific-based leadership in areas such as absolute versus intensity-based caps?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of intensity versus absolute caps is pivotal to this whole discussion on climate change. In our view, intensity is a means to the end. You need to start somewhere. Absolute is the end target. If anyone thinks that they can get to the end without going through the means to get to the end, they're kidding themselves. That's exactly what this government is attempting to do. By investing in the necessary technology and research, we will develop the means through intensity reductions to achieve in the long term real absolute reductions in CO₂ emissions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Support for Child Care

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The number one priority for Children's Services is supposedly child care, yet in the past year this government failed to spend \$30 million of the funding allocated for this crucial service. This is the second year in a row that the budget has been underspent by a wide margin, despite the critical shortage of spaces in this province that forces working parents to scramble to make daily care arrangements, accept underemployment, or drop out of the workforce altogether. This failure is shocking. To the Minister of Children's Services: how can you explain to struggling Albertan parents the department's failure to allocate all of its resources for child care in the budget last year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, this is my number one priority. My number one priority in this year's budget is to ensure that parents have access to quality and affordable child care. If I could just quickly kind of explain a little bit about the budget process. It was in the middle of '05-06 that we implemented and agreed to the five-point plan. For the budget year of '06-07 we again approved the five-point plan. We did what we always do during budgeting: we estimated what we thought the cost of the five-point plan would be. What we can't tell is how people will access the five-point plan and how many people will access the five-point plan. There is very . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday a Children's Services spokesperson suggested that because of lower than expected costs in some programs the department sat on the \$30 million, because they needed to consult with child care advocates before spending the entire amount budgeted, while the department completed a comprehensive consultation involving parents, staff, and child care advocates eight months ago and also engaged in consultation with child care advocates leading up to the new Child Care Licensing Act. To the Minister of Children's Services: can the minister please tell us how much more consultation is required before this department will finally use all of its available resources for child care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I could just continue. I was saying that we don't know how many people will access the plan and how they're going to access the plan. We have various levels of government support, depending on whether people choose daycare or family homes or kin care or whether they stay at home and they want to access nursery schools. The good thing about the five-point plan is that we support choice and flexibility. What I can tell you is that last year we made an estimate. Going into the end of the year, we knew exactly how much the five-point plan was. Going into this next budgeting process, I took what it cost us, and I asked for more money so that not only could we approve the five-point plan again but move forward on enhancing the five-point plan. So, in fact, we are spending more money this year than what we spent last year.

Mrs. Mather: Since the department cannot seem to find a way to make use of the entire child care budget, will the minister consider adopting initiatives like improving access to out-of-school care, providing funding for municipalities to create spaces, or increasing funding for operating costs, all of which are in the Alberta Liberal child care plan but have not been a priority for this government?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, if I could, we had an added complication last year as well. I think what the hon. member is suggesting is that last year at some point during the fiscal year we should have maybe made some kind of adjustment to the budget. I think that that would not have been a prudent move. At the same time we also had the federal government pull out of their funding. So I think it was responsible what we did: get to the end of the year, find out what the plan is costing us, and then move forward on enhancements. That's what we've done.

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

Agricultural Income Stabilization Program

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian agricultural income stabilization program is a program that is administered independently in Alberta by the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation of Alberta. Yesterday the federal Auditor General in her report stated that CAIS is overly complex, lacks transparency, and she found that the federal administration has conflicts of interest among employees and focuses too much on overpayments. These are issues that have been brought forward by my constituents in Livingstone-Macleod. My question to the Minister of Agriculture and Food: are the issues in regard to the federal CAIS program also true in Alberta, and if so, what have you done to rectify the situation here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta certainly agrees that the program is complex and lacks transparency, as I've said in the past in this Legislature. In fact, we have been pressing our federal and provincial counterparts for changes. As the member says, I want it to be clear that Alberta has a separate administration to CAIS. We take a different and transparent approach unique to Alberta: a system on the web that lets producers track their claims as they move through the system, field analysts across the province who can meet with producers in person, complete package on

individual claim results including information on all changes, and advance phone calls on significant changes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what assurance can you give to Albertans that a clear conflict of interest policy that protects both producers and stakeholders exists in the program in Alberta?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AFSC takes this issue very seriously. They've always had a clear conflict-of-interest policy. Before Alberta handed out a single application, we ensured that the rules were very clear. For example, CAIS staff are not allowed to complete the forms for producers. They need to discuss up front if relatives or close friends are using the program.

Mr. Speaker, this is the first federal audit. Indeed, our Auditor General has looked at our administration every year since the program was started. We continue to refine it. The AFSC is very proactive in doing it right in the first place.

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, last spring many in my farm and ranch community had occasion to get letters from the CAIS program about overpayments, and there was a concern that the people operating the program were neglecting the underpayments to farmers as well. So my question to the minister is: do you ensure that Alberta's program will in the main focus on overpayments while neglecting underpayments? That is a criticism that the federal program has. What are you doing to rectify that situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, the AFSC is committed to ensuring that the right payments go to the right people. We follow a very clear verification strategy. Staff make adjustments, both positive and negative, to ensure that the strategy is followed. All claims, including those that don't initially look eligible, are reviewed and tested to ensure that there are no material errors. Alberta takes pride in the transparency and integrity of all of its programming.

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

Calgary Municipal Funding

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgarians are tired of being taken for granted by the Conservative government of Alberta, and if the Member for Calgary-Lougheed thought he was winning any friends in Calgary with those softball questions he lobbed to the Finance minister yesterday, he's sadly mistaken. In 2006 Calgary accounted for 60 per cent of the jobs created in this province. That is unprecedented growth, and it is straining both infrastructure and services. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: given the growth projections of Calgary and the importance of rapid transit to the quality of life and the quality of the environment, is he prepared to accept the cancellation of construction on Calgary's west LRT line?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all I need to say that the planning and decision-making for the municipality of the city of

Calgary is done by the city of Calgary. The Alberta government supports municipalities such as Calgary with their ventures with the Alberta municipal infrastructure program of \$600 million per year. It also supports municipalities with the municipal sustainability initiative, of which the city of Calgary got \$127 million.

Mr. Taylor: Ah, Mr. Speaker, piffle. This government refuses to take responsibility for its actions or inactions. If the budget numbers didn't add up or if the government couldn't figure out what to prioritize, they should admit it. The simple fact is that the government didn't deliver, and now cities around the province are changing or even shelving plans. Money they were told would have no strings has strings attached. In my world actions have consequences. Apparently in their world they like to think that they don't. Will the minister step up to the plate, apologize, and admit that municipal infrastructure plans were cancelled because he didn't deliver on his municipal sustainability initiative promise?

Mr. Danyluk: First of all, Mr. Speaker, this is all new money that is given to municipalities. I'd ask the Minister of Finance to supplement.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, it's really time that the Liberal opposition – in their plan that was put out on September 11, 2006, they had a 2 per cent increase in funding, which would not even fund the south Calgary hospital. It would not fund the cost escalation to run every budget around Alberta. That's what the Liberal opposition brought out.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Finance, then: will the minister admit that as neglected as health, education, and postsecondary education in Calgary were on his watch in infrastructure, the \$4.2 billion he referenced yesterday that will be spent on those things in Calgary this year has, in fact, nothing to do with Calgary's municipal infrastructure?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I am so glad that the opposition party has finally asked me a question about this. On September 11, 2006, these gentlemen, this party, put out that they would spend \$590 million more this year than was budgeted last year. This government put out an extra 3 and a half billion dollars on top of that. All question period they've been talking about the cost of inflation. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East said: 5 and a half per cent; anything less than 5 and a half per cent is a cut. Their plan came out and said: 2 per cent spending. That is one-third of the cost of inflation, one-third of the costs of the people that are coming out here. It's time they came clean.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Affordable Housing (continued)

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday in this House the minister said: "There is nothing that you can do in a market that will stabilize rents better than to build new housing units." In the short term there isn't the capacity to build the affordable housing that is needed. In fact, a report to Edmonton city council dated April 24 says, "The home building industry is working at full capacity" and "it is clear that the need for affordable housing is increasing while the capacity to address affordable housing needs is diminish-

ing." My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Why does the minister not see that in the short run, temporarily, we need rent stability while you build the affordable housing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Rent controls would only slow down any sort of building to increase the capacity of rental units. We also talk in our budget about rent supplements. We talk about secondary suites, that we need to have on the market to address the immediate concerns. So we look at a balanced approach, and I suggest again to the member of the third party that we need to look at a balanced approach for affordable housing and the homeless.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the balanced approach that you're giving is money for the gougers, and let the renters take the hind leg. That's what's happening. My question – you said that it would temporarily stop. In Ontario, where they've had rent guidelines for 15 years, they've had an 88 per cent increase in apartment units. In Alberta we had a 53 per cent decline. How does the minister justify those figures?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, mentioning Ontario, in Ontario since 1991 there have been rent controls, but any buildings that have been built since 1991 do not have rent controls because rent controls don't work. You need to have a balance. We have given the municipalities the authority to look at their affordable housing needs and for them to make the decision on what is better for their municipality.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's precisely the balance that Ontario has made. Of course the new units don't have rent guidelines on them. That's what we're asking for now. So why don't you do exactly the same thing? We'll build the units and also protect renters at the same time.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we have very many people that are coming from Ontario here. We need to look at a balanced approach for affordable housing for individuals that come from other provinces to Alberta to address the growth pressures. We need to invest in the individuals that are coming here and the Albertans that are here. What I want to say is that when we look at it in that balance segment, affordable housing affects all individuals that need housing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:10

Arts Funding

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot of support for the arts in my constituency, and constituents often ask me about the grant programs available to fund the arts. Many local groups do fundraising, and the arts community generates much of its own funds to support its activities. Other groups and individuals expect government to bear more or most of the cost. My first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. What is the portion of government support for the arts in relation to total revenues generated?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I want to say that the arts are extremely important to all Albertans, and they form a very, very important and integral part of our day-to-day living. Last year our government provided more than \$20 million in grants to over 1,300 artists and arts organizations through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. This year the Alberta arts community will benefit from an additional 4 and a half million dollars, a 20 per cent increase over last year's budget, raising the foundation's budget to more than \$27 million. In 2004 this generated about \$153 million in economic activity in the area.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the first supplementary is to the same minister. Certain jurisdictions or provinces require arts groups to match funding prior to the approval of a government arts grant. What is your department's expectation of the arts community to match government grants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, again, thank you. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts generally requires that the organizations should have financial support from their communities. The grant amounts are based on the level of revenue generated by these organizations within the community they serve. When we talk about individual artists, we do not expect them to provide any matching funds, but the organizations themselves must.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister. Research reports quoted in the media recently indicated that individual Albertans support the arts at the rate of \$971 per capita for events such as live theatre and concerts. This shows that Albertans highly value cultural opportunities. How do you expect that the Community Spirit Program MLA Committee might address personal contributions to cultural activities?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the member is right that Albertans do value and participate in various cultural activities, and Albertans support a variety of causes and organizations, including faith, sport, recreation, arts, and cultural activities. The MLA committee that we announced recently is looking at ways to use tax credits to encourage an increase in private donations. Cultural contributions are one of the areas the committee will be looking into. Already, through our budget here in 2007 Alberta's tax credits, for instance, for total charitable donations above \$200 have been increased by more than 60 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for West-Yellowhead.

Affordable Housing (continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is May 2, 2007, weeks after the Affordable Housing Task Force turned in their report, weeks even since the government caucus gutted it because it didn't fit their ideology. Despite the Premier's many statements about the importance of an affordable housing strategy tenants in my Calgary-Varsity constituency are now counting the days until they are evicted. Seniors and disabled people continue to suffer the stress of having their basic human need for food and shelter threatened. My first question is to the Premier, who I requested to remain in the House. What words of advice does he have for my constituents?

The Speaker: Well, I'm going to call on the minister to respond, but that was a no-no.

Mr. Chase: Well, he turned down my request.

Speaker's Ruling **Referring to the Absence of a Member**

The Speaker: No. No. You know, hon. member, sometimes people have reasons not to be here. It's one of the long-standing rules. Well, I can look at the chair and say: where is the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark? Where is the member for somewhere else? That's not correct, and that's not appropriate, and that's why we don't deal with that.

The hon. minister.

Affordable Housing (continued)

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We will forward the question and have a written response to the member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry replied to my previous questions on this matter stating that the new eviction and homeless prevention fund was in place to solve these problems, but the picture on this fund is completely confusing. One ministerial spokesman says that it's up and running. Another says that we're just going to have to wait for a few months. Time to set the record straight. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: what specifically are the eligibility requirements for the \$7 million eviction and homeless prevention fund? Please tell me about the benefits and where Albertans can find this information.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, in a previous response this afternoon I indicated that since November last year we have given emergency shelter funding to the amount of \$9 million for people who need income support. This government currently, a base from last year, gives \$100 million in support of shelter allowances to low-income Albertans, over and above that \$9 million last year for emergencies, over and above that again, with the recent budget approval, \$7 million. We will, working with our partners in Municipal Affairs and Housing, determine how there are cracks, if any, in the funding arrangement so that we can assure that Albertans in need do not go unheard.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The lack of transparency and accountability is completely unacceptable to Albertans. People in my constituency and in many others across this province are desperate. They need answers, and they need action right now. Websites are of no use to people who can't afford basic food, clothing, and housing. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: when will clear and consistent eligibility requirements or benefit levels be made available to the public, and how will you transfer that information to people who can't afford a paper, can't afford a computer? How are you going to get that information to people on the streets or who are about to be on the streets?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we in the House all know, two weeks ago we announced our budget. Last week we also rolled out the new housing responses to the housing task force, trying to address the needs and the recommendations that were made by that housing task force. We are now dealing with how we are going to make sure that we most effectively – most effectively – address the needs of those individuals and how that access can happen in the most efficient way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a recent announcement about declaring a forest health emergency due to the mountain pine beetle, a very high number of trees are likely going to be killed. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How much capacity does the Alberta forest product industry have to manage the timber killed by mountain pine beetle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My department is working with the forestry industry to assess this capacity. Last year our forestry industry processed approximately 25 million cubic metres of wood for all commercial purposes. We're estimating that that capacity could be up to as high as 30 to 35 million cubic metres of wood per year, so we do have some room to absorb the additional wood that is anticipated.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What plans does Alberta have to maximize the value received from harvesting beetle-killed trees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The pine beetle invasion puts at risk \$23 billion – \$23 billion – of wood in this province, so we're doing everything we can to manage that risk. Of course, the most effective way to manage that risk is through an aggressive policy of meeting the pine beetle and stopping it from coming into the province, and I'm happy to note that the week that we were away, Canada's leading pine beetle expert, Dr. Allan Carroll, with the Canadian Forest Service, centred in Victoria, visited this city and told Albertans that this aggressive response is the most appropriate way to stop the pine beetle spread into the province.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. How will Alberta deal with more wood mass generated from harvesting more trees from salvaging operations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do anticipate there will be more low-quality wood as a result of the beetle if it does spread, so we're working with British Columbia to see what they've done. They're doing some new and innovative things. Also, SRD is

working with Alberta Energy and Advanced Education to look at opportunities for biofuels and biomass, but in fact our forestry industry already has products that can use this. I'm referring to these types of pellet samples that are produced by some of our forestry companies now. These wood pellets are exported to Europe, where they're mixed with coal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and get greenhouse gas credits, so there's opportunity there already for our forestry industry.

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday during the question period there was an exchange between the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Today the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness would like to supplement an answer, which will provide for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to ask an additional question.

The hon. minister.

Good Samaritan Pembina Village

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Member for Edmonton-Centre raised questions with respect to the safety of staff and residents at risk at the Good Samaritan Pembina Village in Evansburg. I wanted to supplement my answer to make sure, first of all, that I had indicated that I would inquire – and I did – and secondly, to indicate that there is not a problem with the safety of staff or residents. The public should be aware of that because, with all due respect, the way the question was framed yesterday left some allegations in place which would cause a great deal of concern.

The Pembina Village is operated by the Good Samaritan Society. The facility provides 40 long-term care beds and 30 units as supportive living under the department's lodge program, which is the responsibility of the Evergreen Foundation. First of all, the facility was built in 2003, so it's a relatively new facility. The Health Facilities Review Committee, as was mentioned yesterday, completed the first routine visit in 2004. There was a list of deficiencies, mainly around construction type matters that needed to be carried out, and the Good Samaritan Society immediately created a work plan and set to work in consultation with Capital health to address those concerns. The Health Facilities Review Committee carried out a return visit in 2006, as was mentioned yesterday.*

The Speaker: I think, hon. minister, that even though this is supplementary, we probably should still abide by the 45-second rule. Otherwise, it's getting in the back door instead of going in the front door.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much for the response from the minister. I'm pleased to see that he feels that most of the concerns that were raised in the 2004 Health Facilities Review Committee have been addressed.

Could I ask a double-ended question? Is he aware if the custodian hours have been increased to the point where it's an appropriate amount of time to actually clear the walkways and evacuation routes? As well, what exactly caused the fires that took place there?

An Hon. Member: They weren't fires.

Ms Blakeman: If you can expand on that, then, because I understood that they were electrical, and then I saw a report that they weren't, but it didn't tell what it was. So, please, expand on that.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

*[See p. 729, left col., para. 4]

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As may happen in any circumstance, there was a problem in a light fixture, and there was a problem with a clothes dryer. Both of those have been dealt with. There was no significant damage in either case. But I want it to be perfectly clear: there were some water problems; the Good Samaritan Society has dealt with those issues and is monitoring to make sure that they don't happen again. There's no risk of health and safety apparent from those issues. I didn't want to leave the impression, that was left yesterday, that this was an unsafe facility for the residents or for the people working there. The issue with respect to the fire door was a matter of snow clearing. That's been taken care of, and they're aware of the issue.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Service Alberta.

Bill 34

Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will help to stabilize our province's rental market, thereby contributing to the management of pressures we are experiencing due to growth.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere I would like to table documents that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford asked for yesterday when he stated that the inflation-proofing of the heritage savings trust fund only occurs if that budget surplus is met. I have the requisite number of copies.

The Speaker: Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre first, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today, both from constituents: the first from Darleen Ferguson, who writes that she experienced a \$260 increase in rent. She's on a fixed income, and she feels very threatened that she would have to leave her apartment.

The second is a long history of a sequence of events from Nadine Smith-Breton. But, essentially, they feel tricked by their landlord, who would only allow a six-month lease but neglected to tell them that condo conversions were happening. So they're out with no recourse.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from Sherri Humphrys, a teacher in Edmonton, expressing two concerns. "The first is the level of allocation for education in this province. To have a budget come out where the allocation is less than the current rate of inflation is very telling about the current government's value of education." Her second concern is "the government's lack of

accountability for the unfunded liability issue. To say that a resolution will be achieved and then send a threatening letter to the union with absolutely unacceptable suggestions is insulting."

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had the pleasure last evening of attending the excellence in teaching awards program celebrating the district finalists for the Edmonton public schools, at which 37 Edmonton public teachers were celebrated. I have the pleasure now to table the requisite number of copies of the program from that event.

Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from a constituent who lives with eight other people at the Easter Seals McQueen Residence. This is a home for physically disabled adults. They're very worried because they've lost staff, and they have trouble finding replacement staff. They're very worried that their home will be closed down, and that would be a great tragedy.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings on behalf of 297 residents of Calgary-Varsity who are going to be without lodging. The first is a letter that I sent to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry asking questions such as: "can you please advise what assistance is available, what the qualification criteria are and how they apply" and so on?

I'm pleased to report as my second tabling that the minister responded to me promptly as requested. Unfortunately, the information she provided has been compromised of late by conflicting statements.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence I have five tablings today. The first is a letter from Alina Matthews, who was here earlier today and got introduced. She's a 20-year-old rehabilitation practitioner. She has her diploma from Grant MacEwan, and she's working on a university degree from Calgary in community rehabilitation. She highlights the crisis in her field, and she is asking for some serious change to make it an appealing field for people to work in.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is also from a person who was here today, Marsha Taphorn. Her biggest concern is staff turnover. She's commenting on working "long and stressful days for a wage that is not reflective of the work that is performed."

The third tabling, Mr. Speaker, is from two parents, Joe and Ines Silva. Again, they got mentioned this afternoon. They're talking about the excellent work provided by the staff at the centre that they have their son at, but workers readily leave because of better paying jobs elsewhere.

The fourth tabling is from Leah Priest. She's been involved in the disability service for over 13 years. But she comments on the low wages being the reason for many qualified and competent employees leaving the sector and not returning.

The fifth one is from Sonia Richardson, which also highlights the crisis in the health care service industry and comments on the fact

that it's mostly the wages and gives an example where clients become withdrawn and experience negative behaviour because of the staff turnover in their field.

Thank you.

2:30

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling appropriate copies of a letter that I received from Glenn Cook, a constituent in Edmonton-Calder. Within hours of the government rejecting the rent stability guidelines, his rent and everyone's in his building went up by \$500 per month. I also have a letter signed by seven senior citizens, and their rent all went up by \$115 at the same time.

Thanks.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the correct number of copies of a letter from Christina Sanders. Christina has written about a problem that has arisen a number of times and my constituency has dealt with, and that's the problem of servicemen's sons and daughters born at bases overseas where they cannot get their citizenship. Because of the number of servicemen and their families that live in the north end, we tend to get a lot of these cases.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is in my capacity as chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I would like to table today the agenda from the meeting that occurred this morning, Wednesday, May 2, 2007. This agenda was circulated to all hon. members of the committee on Monday, and included in this, under item 4 on the agenda, it stated clearly that we were meeting with Mr. Keray Henke, Deputy Minister of Education. When this agenda was approved, there were no questions. It was approved unanimously by all members present, and I think that in light of the question that was asked earlier today by the hon. leader of the third party, this is very important. This document was circulated, and everyone had an opportunity to have a look at it. No one raised any questions.

Now, my second tabling is a comparison of selected oil resource taxation regimes, and it's prepared by Petroleum Economics Limited of both Calgary and London. It is dated February 2000, and it is a comparison of royalty regimes, comparing Alberta to Venezuela, Alberta to Norway, and Alberta to Alaska north slope oil.

Thank you.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Boutilier, Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, pursuant to the Metis Settlements Act the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal 2005 and 2006 annual reports.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, before calling Orders of the Day, yesterday and today several members alluded to certain days or months. Today being the second day of May, I thought that I would just make sure everybody is aware of all the special days and weeks

in the month of May so that my office is not inundated with letters and phone calls saying: why are some recognized and others not recognized?

May is Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month, Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month, MedicAlert Awareness Month, Foot Health Awareness Month, Huntington Disease Awareness Month, Speech and Hearing Awareness Month, Hepatitis Awareness Month, Museum Month, National Leave a Legacy Month, Motorcycle and Bicycle Safety Awareness Month, Asian Heritage Month, Red Shield Appeal Month, Child Find's Green Ribbon of Hope Campaign month, Light the Way Home campaign.

From April 1 to May 31 we have been in Girl Guides Sandwich Cookie Weeks. April 22 to May 24 is National Physiotherapy Month. April 29 to May 5 is Education Week.

May 1 was World Asthma Day. This week, May 1 to May 7, is National Summer Safety Week as it is Spinal Health Week as it is Allergy Awareness Week, and May 1 to May 8 is Naturopathic Medicine Week.

May 3 is World Press Freedom Day. That's tomorrow. May 5 is International Day of the Midwife. May 5 is also Alberta Search and Rescue Day. May 6 is the International No Diet Day as is May 6 the Annual Hike for Hospice Palliative Care day.

May 6 to May 12 is National Emergency Preparedness Week as it is International Compost Awareness Week as it is North American Occupational Safety and Health Week.

May 7 to May 13 is Mental Health Week as it is Respect for Law Week as it is National Hospice Palliative Care Week as it is National Nursing Week as it is Drinking Water Week.

May 8 is World Red Cross Day. May 10 is World Health Organization Move for Health Day as it is World Lupus Day. May 11 to 13 are Multiple Sclerosis Carnation Campaign days. May 12 is Canada Health Day as it is International Nurses Day as it is Fibromyalgia Awareness Day as it is Raise the Flag Day.

May 13, of course, is Mother's Day as it is also the Optimist Day of Non-Violence. May 13 to May 19 is National Police Week. May 13 to May 20 is Alberta Crime Prevention Week. May 14 to 20 is National Mining Week. May 15 is International Day of Families. May 15 and 16 are Provincial Skills Competition: Trades days in Alberta. May 17 is World Information Society Day. May 18 is International Museums Day.

May 19 to 25 is Safe Boating Week. May 20 to 26 is Inter-generational Week. May 21 is Victoria Day. May 21 is also the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. May 21 to 27 is Emergency Medical Services Awareness Week. May 22 is International Day for Biological Diversity. May 22 to 25 is part of Aboriginal Awareness Week. May 25 is National Missing Children's Day.

May 25 to 31 is Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories. May 27 is World Partnership Walk. May 28 to June 3 is National Sun Awareness Week. May 29 is International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, and May 31 is World No-Tobacco Day.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. Before I recognize the hon. minister, I would just like to take a brief moment to review some of the new Standing Orders that we're operating on as of today for the benefit of all the members here and for the benefit at home of the viewing public over the Internet.

The first one. "A Member may speak more than once," and "no Member may speak for more than 10 minutes." However, a member and a minister may combine their speaking times for a total of 20 minutes, providing they notify the chair first, and I just ask you to do that each time.

Quorum does not apply today – that's something new – until the estimates are voted upon.

Officials "may be admitted to the floor of the Assembly to advise the Minister whose estimates are under consideration." I would ask the minister to introduce those members of his staff before he starts.

On the first day of consideration of the estimates the first member of the Executive Council to speak shall move the main estimates in their entirety.

During the consideration of the main estimates, the Committee of Supply shall meet for a minimum of 3 hours at one time unless there are no Members who wish to speak prior to the conclusion of the 3 hours . . .

If the Committee of Supply meets for more than 3 hours at one time, the time in excess of 3 hours shall be available to any Member who wishes to speak and is recognized by the Chair . . .

During each 15-hour cycle, where the members of a caucus are allotted a particular block of time and those Members no longer wish to speak, then consideration for the entire block of time . . . is deemed to have occurred and any Member may be recognized by the Chair until the Committee rises and reports.

Standing Order 5 regarding the quorum "does not apply to a report to the Assembly from the Committee of Supply," and "when an amendment to a department's estimates is moved in Committee of Supply, the vote on the amendment stands deferred until the date scheduled for the vote on the main estimates."

So, with that, I would invite the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to move the estimates in their entirety and introduce his staff.

head: 2:40

Main Estimates 2007-08

Health and Wellness

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is indeed a privilege to be the first up with respect to our new Committee of Supply structure and hopefully plow the first ground, so to speak, with this, I think, exciting opportunity to really delve into the estimates and to be held accountable for the spending that we hope to be able to engage in on behalf of Albertans.

So as the first order of business, of course, according to the Standing Orders it's my privilege to move the 2007-08 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, as well as the 2007-2008 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates for the same period.

Mr. Chairman, it is a new procedure with us. Public Accounts previously had met in the Chamber with officials on the floor, but it's been some time since we've had the opportunity to engage in public accounts in this way. Joining me today are my deputy minister, Paddy Meade; assistant deputy minister of corporate operations, Ray Gilmour; executive director and senior financial officer, Peter Hegholz; my executive assistant, Fred Horne; and communications director, Michael Shields. We are also joined by other staff in the members' gallery: Annette Trimbee, the assistant deputy minister for strategic directions; Richard Butler, assistant deputy minister of health workforce; Janet Skinner, assistant deputy minister of program service; Linda Miller, assistant deputy minister in information and strategic services; Neil MacDonald, executive director of population health strategies; Jason Cobb, acting director of ministry relations in the deputy minister's office; and Martin Chamberlain, who is our corporate legal counsel.

So suffice to say, Mr. Chairman, I hope that I have all the talent and ability necessary to be able to answer any of the questions that may be raised in Committee of Supply today. But, of course, cognizant of the rules and because I would do it anyway, we would be happy to provide written responses to any questions that aren't dealt with verbally on the record within the two-week time frame that is provided for in the new rules.

I want to start, first of all, by saying a public thank you on the record to the department officials who are here today with us and whom I've just introduced. I've had a very short period of time to work in this department, but I can say that my experience in the Department of Health and Wellness, as my experience in various other departments that I've served, is that we are truly blessed with the quality of senior civil servant that we have and, I would say, the quality of the civil service that we have serving Albertans. The Department of Health and Wellness is certainly blessed to have a wealth of talent and ability, and I'm privileged to be able to work with these people. Having said that, I'm sure that they'll make sure now that I get good answers very quickly to all the questions.

The 2007 to 2010 business plan for the Ministry of Health and Wellness identifies three core business and six corresponding goals. The core businesses are to advocate and educate for healthy living, to provide quality health and wellness services, and to lead and participate in continuous improvement in the health system. Our overarching business plan goals are that Albertans make choices for healthier lifestyles, that Albertans' health is protected, that access to health services are improved, to have a contemporary health workforce, that health service outcomes are improved, and to ensure health service efficiency, effectiveness, innovation, and productivity. Our vision is for Albertans to be healthy and to live, work, and play in a healthy environment. Our mission is to "provide leadership and work collaboratively with partners to help Albertans be healthy." The government of Alberta has identified five priorities, and the Ministry of Health and Wellness directly supports the achievement of the provincial priority to improve Albertans' quality of life.

The Health and Wellness ministry is also making a significant contribution to the government priority of managing growth pressures by providing funding to respond to the recommendations from the Oil Sands Ministerial Strategy Committee on impacts of development in the oil sand communities and, of course, the stellar work that's happening on the workforce strategy.

Our business plan identifies opportunities and challenges over the next three years. These include health system sustainability, addressing workforce shortages, controlling the rising costs of prescription drugs, promoting disease and injury prevention, improving access to health services, improving governance and accountability, and taking advantage of innovation, research, and technical opportunities to increase Alberta's productivity and global competitiveness.

After reviewing these challenges, the ministry has identified four priorities in addition to the important ongoing core activities that the Health and Wellness ministry undertakes. These are implementing health care productivity reforms and sustainability initiatives; implementing a new pharmaceutical strategy to improve management of drug expenditures and ensure access to sustainable government drug coverage; strengthening public health services that promote wellness, prevent injury and disease, and provide preparedness for public health emergencies; and implementing a comprehensive workforce strategy to secure and retain health professionals. The 2007-08 budget for Alberta Health and Wellness will help us to address these challenges and achieve our goals and priorities.

Mr. Chairman, our ministry's budget this year reflects a \$1.3 billion, or 12.2 per cent, increase over the previous year. The

ministry's budget is now \$12 billion. In two years the Health and Wellness ministry budget is expected to exceed \$12.8 billion, an increase of almost 20 per cent from the 2006-2007 forecast. Operating grants for health authorities will increase by \$574 million, or an average of 9.5 per cent, to \$6.6 billion. No regional health authorities will receive less than a 6 per cent increase in the 2007-2008 year.

It's important for Members of the Legislative Assembly to know how funds are being allocated to the health regions. The funding allocation model is based primarily on population and ensures that funding follows the person. No matter where a person is receiving service, the region providing the service receives the funding necessary to deliver that service. This is very important in a dynamic province such as Alberta. Health regions also have different costs for delivering service as a result of a variety of factors, such as the remote population in rural regions. The funding allocation model recognizes these differential costs in determining an equitable allocation to each region. Quite simply, the funding model calculates a per capita funding amount which varies by region to reflect the variances in age, gender, socioeconomic status, health characteristics, delivery costs, and other factors.

There is \$291 million being allocated to regional health authorities through their base funding for mental health services in 2007-08. This is an increase of \$23 million, or 8.5 per cent.

The Northern Lights health region will receive the highest operating increase this year, at 81.5 per cent. This increase includes the special provision of \$58 million for the operation of new community clinics in Fort McMurray and to provide the same allowances for health staff that are currently provided to provincial employees in that region. The money will assist Northern Lights health region in providing health services to a transient population in a high-growth area.

Capital health is receiving almost \$2.3 billion in operating funding this year, which is a 9 per cent, or \$190 million, increase. In addition, the capital plan includes approximately \$780 million over the next three years to continue with previously approved capital projects in the capital region.

The Calgary health region is receiving almost \$2.2 billion in operating funding this year, which is a 9.3 per cent, or \$187, million increase. The operating increase reflects the pressures the health region is facing from population growth. The capital plan also includes \$835 million over the next three years to continue with previously approved capital projects in the Calgary health region.

Funding totalling \$8 million will go to Peace Country health to assist with the extraordinary costs of staff recruitment and retention.

This year's budget for the Cancer Board is \$277 million, an increase of \$21.5 million, or 8.5 per cent. Funding to the Alberta Mental Health Board is \$58 million this year, an increase of \$4.6 million, or 8.6 per cent.

2:50

The budget for physicians' services in 2007-08 rises to \$2.4 billion. The increase includes the cost of the trilateral master agreement between the Alberta Medical Association, regional health authorities, and the Ministry of Health and Wellness for physician services. As part of the agreement \$38 million has been set aside for a clinical stabilization initiative this year. The initiative will be used as a recruitment and retention initiative to support communities facing unique health delivery needs and to address extraordinary increases in physician practice costs, such as rising office rents.

There will be \$47 million from the master agreement for a new retention benefit, which will recognize physicians for the number of years that they have practised. The physician office system program has been allocated \$34 million this year to assist physicians in

converting their offices to electronic environments. The increase for physician services also includes an additional \$25 million to address growth in the existing academic alternate relationship plans and new academic ARPs. These are compensation models that address the multiple roles of academic physicians in teaching, research, and clinical services.

Mr. Chairman, to turn briefly to capital expenditures, over the next three years Alberta Health and Wellness is spending more than \$2.6 billion in health facilities infrastructure and project cost escalation. This includes funding for more than 30 previously approved health projects and \$221 million for increased cost escalation on previously approved projects.

You're looking at me like I'm running out of time. I am. Okay.

The new capital projects this year are in Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, \$250 million being allocated over three years to build a new acute-care facility in Grande Prairie. Northern Lights will receive \$26.4 million for housing units for health care providers, a helipad at Northern Lights regional health centre, and new community clinics, all responding to the rapid growth and the oil sands development report.

Mr. Chairman, I'll leave it there, and I'm sure that I'll have an opportunity to give more of the good news in the course of the afternoon.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will notify you at this time, and I did in writing as well, that I will take this opportunity in the first exchange between the minister and I to have a 20-minute total back-and-forth exchange with smaller rotations of time between the two of us. So thank you for that.

Thank you very much to the minister for his opening remarks. Welcome to the staff that join us on the floor. I gather that there is an entire fan team up in the gallery of another 15 people, so welcome to all of you as well.

I thank the minister for his commitment to the two-week response for written questions. That is a new innovation in the new Standing Orders, which I have fondly called the McClellan innovation because the previous minister of health and Member for Drumheller-Stettler was very good about giving written responses within two weeks.

I'll also note that the minister and I meet again during one of the new cross-ministry exchanges later this month on health impacts and development, so I will not be raising any of those issues during the exchange today.

Just to let everybody know, the topics I'm looking to go over today include health workforce, rural physician action plan, international medical graduates, mental health, ambulances, regionalization, pharmaceuticals, health care premiums, midwifery, tobacco reduction, social determinants of health, PARA, which is the medical residents, and electronic health records. Of course, I'm also joined here today – and they will be spelling me off – by my colleague from Lethbridge-East, who will be questioning the minister on long-term care, and also by my colleague from Calgary-Currie, who will be bringing forward specific issues around Calgary.

First is health workforce. I note on page 25 of the ministry business plans that it reveals a "comprehensive workforce strategy to secure and retain health professionals," but just above that on page 25 it notes, "Strategies that will be the focus for the government over the next 12 months are highlighted with a checkmark." Then that very first section under Managing Growth Pressures, which is about a comprehensive workforce strategy to secure and retain health professionals, is not checked. So it is not identified as

a focus for the government over the next 12 months. Of course, the obvious question is: why is that?

We've certainly seen the number of code reds and code burgundies increase. Intensive care and other units at hospitals throughout Alberta have been closed because of staff shortages. The shortage of health workers in all sectors – the allied health professionals, doctors, and nurses – has been a major obstacle contributing to lengthy wait times. From my side, addressing this shortage and developing a comprehensive health workforce plan is the first step in the Alberta Liberal wait time strategy, so I am really baffled as to why this was not identified as a focus for the government.

I notice that the next thing on the page is under Improve Albertans' Quality of Life. "Implement health care productivity reforms and sustainability" is check-marked, but, you know, we were promised a health workforce strategy by the previous minister. The first time I asked about it was April of '06. I was promised it in May of '06 and then in September, and then it all sort of dribbled away.

Mr. Hancock: Just so I can get the right references, you referenced page 25, but my business plan isn't that long, so I'm trying to find the page you're referring to.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry. Business plans, page 25.

Mr. Hancock: Oh, you're in the government business plan, perhaps?

Ms Blakeman: Oh, yes. Sorry. The government stuff is earlier, and the health stuff is later.

Mr. Hancock: Okay.

Ms Blakeman: I'm just going to lay something else on the table while you're checking that. I note that the Department of Employment, Immigration and Industry is receiving \$30 million to implement health workforce plan strategies to help address these pressures by "supporting recruitment, retention and repatriation." That's out of a government press release on April 19, 2007. I'm assuming that this is part of a health workforce plan, but we have never seen the health workforce plan. Much promised; never delivered. So when are we going to see the plan, and can the minister tell us why it's been on hold for so long?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, thank you for allowing me to reference myself to your comments. You were looking at the government business plan, and the question is a very good one. The comprehensive workforce strategy doesn't have a check mark, and the second line of the paragraph above indicates that "strategies that will be the focus for the government over the next 12 months are highlighted with a checkmark."

Clearly, a comprehensive workforce strategy should have a check mark on it because one of the four mandates that the Premier gave this minister when he was appointed is to develop a comprehensive workforce strategy. I can't explain the lack of a check mark, but I can assure you that my marching orders and my report card will be based on achieving a portion of that mandate on a timely basis. What interests the boss fascinates me.

It's extremely important for us as we move forward to deal with the workforce issues. I mean, we could dump out workforce strategies. That's not to say that nothing has happened on developing and recruiting a new workforce, but what we are trying to accomplish is a comprehensive workforce strategy that deals with retention, deals with recruitment, deals with repatriation. The

concept of the workforce strategy that it is in development. It's not that it's on hold; it's in development. On April 13 we had a summit with a number of stakeholder groups to test run some of the concepts that had been put forward in a workforce strategy and got some excellent feedback from them. We're waiting for the report – I should have had it yesterday, I think, or today – from that summit to say: "Are we on the right track? Did we get it right, or are there some adjustments we need to make?" We need to put a policy framework around it.

3:00

Clearly, there are a number of things – and the hon. member questioned me about a number of those things in the House the other day – with respect to valuing our existing workforce, making sure that we look at the issues around health status and workplace safety so that we don't have 593 person-years of nursing lost to back strain, so that we reduce the stress level so that we have more productivity but also so that we expand the scopes of practice and the functional practice of health care professionals and technologists so that they can truly use all of their capabilities and expertise in their job, hopefully making their jobs a lot more interesting, making it a lot more exciting to come to work and actually being more productive. So there are a number of issues around workforce strategy.

It's not just as simple as saying that we need more. Of course we need more, and we'll also be recruiting. So we're recruiting internal to Alberta in terms of building capacity in the advanced education system to train more health care professionals as well as recruiting internationally to those places who have extra. Obviously, we don't want to be going out stealing other people's health care professionals when they need them as well, but there are places in the world where we can get extra people. That in itself is a very critical element because the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry needs to work with the federal government to achieve the ability to actually bring them in more quickly than we've had the capability of doing in the past in getting the applications processed and that sort of thing. So there are a number of intricate strategies involved in the workforce strategy.

The hon. member will see it, I trust, very, very soon because we're at sort of the final stages of bringing it through development. We'll take it through our policy process very quickly, and I hope to have it available for public consumption and comment quickly after that.

The \$30 million that the hon. member mentioned is in EII's budget as seed money for this strategy. It was put in EII's budget because we have three ministries doing co-ordinated work on the workforce strategy: Advanced Education and Technology, Health and Wellness, and Employment, Immigration and Industry. Employment, Immigration and Industry has overall responsibility for workforce strategy, so it was felt appropriate to put the money there, but the three ministries will work on where the money should be applied with respect to the strategies that are coming forward.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, the minister can understand my caution – may I say skepticism – because I faced a similar minister a year ago and was told to expect the health workforce strategy imminently. Actually, there was a date made.

So I hear that the work has gone on. I fear that time was lost, as we saw in many departments, because everything sort of came to a halt when the leadership race was on because nobody knew quite what to do. But I'm still not getting an exact date from the minister. "Soon," I hear him say. "Soon" isn't the time I was looking for, but maybe I can coax something a bit more definite out of him.

He's touched on some of the issues that I'm going to ask specific questions on. I'm looking for a bit more detail on how the ministry

of health is collaborating with the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Industry and Advanced Education to recruit and train health professionals. Everybody says that that's going to happen, that it is happening. But exactly what are the details on how that's being laid out? For example, what targets have been set for recruiting new health professionals? What targets have been set for training health professionals within Alberta? How were these targets set or arrived at? Has this minister of health provided the minister of advanced education with a detailed list of how many health professionals we need to educate, train, and certify in different areas? Again, we're dealing with physicians, and even inside that there are different kinds of physicians, obviously, registered nurses, allied health professionals, LPNs, et cetera. All of those questions are applicable for both new professionals and for international medical graduates.

So those are some of the specifics that I'm looking for about that collaboration. I'll let the minister answer that.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, the questions are important ones because they help frame a very important piece of this discussion. While the hon. member may be skeptical when I say this, it's not about the numbers. If you start with the numbers, you end up having arguments over what numbers there are.

What we really need to do is to start looking at the workforce of the future in health. If we're going to focus on wellness, if we're going to focus on health status, if we're going to change the methodology of delivery to better team approaches and primary care networks and other ways of using teams of medical professionals to assist Albertans to be responsible for their own health, then setting specific targets for a specific health care professional specialty or subspecialty becomes counterproductive. We can argue about whether we need 1,100 new doctors or 1,200 new doctors or 1,500 new doctors or 400 new doctors. We agree that we need new doctors. What I really would like to see is for doctors to work more productively by working with other health care professionals and shift in the atmosphere from being acute care specialists to being people who assist with wellness.

So part and parcel of the whole strategy concept is that we have to change the way we think as health care professionals. I don't want to pick on doctors; there may be other areas in the system. But we need to change the way we think. So if it was just a workforce plan that was built around specific numbers, then we would spend more time, as has been spent in the past, arguing about how many. We know that we need more doctors and particularly family practitioners, so we need to work on strategies relative to increasing the number of physicians that go into the family practice area and general practice area. We know that we need more nurses, but we also know that we need more personal care attendants. So we need more in every area, and we're going to go out and recruit.

That work hasn't stopped because we're developing a strategy. There have been co-ordinated missions, for example, to Britain. Health authorities have gone together, and the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry has recently been. So that work is ongoing. We didn't sort of park everything while we were writing a strategy. There are certain things that needed to be done, and they're obvious. They're ongoing, and they're going to be done.

We are working very collaboratively on developing the workforce strategy so that we're working with, for example, Advanced Education and Technology not just in terms of how many more spaces in nursing programs and where but in terms of what can Advanced Education and Technology do with respect to bridging programs so that medical professionals from other areas who might need some supplementary courses can get those and not, as they've

experienced in the past, go back to the very beginning and start again, which we know isn't really possible. So looking at other ways that Advanced Education can work with the colleges and universities to do the credentialing that's necessary in terms of getting foreign-trained professionals licensed for the job by helping to evaluate what their talents are and what the gaps, if any, are that need to be filled in. So working with Employment, Immigration and Industry on the co-ordination of recruitments so that we can have common recruiting missions to, perhaps, Britain where there currently is an excess of health care professionals or to other areas of the world where there are identified populations which may want to be here.

That's important, but another piece of the work with Employment, Immigration and Industry, of course, is to work with the federal government to make sure that we can bring in those that we need both in terms of identifying their appropriate credentials but also using the provincial nominee program or other methodologies to be able to get them in because one of the big problems right now is that there are lots of people who want to come, but there's lag time in terms of getting them in.

We're also working to use part 5 designations, for example, to allow health care professionals to come in and practise, but there need to be ways for them to then expand beyond their part 5 designation into a full scope of practice. So there are a number of different ways in which the three departments can work very well together on not only developing the strategy but implementing the pieces of the strategy sometimes each within our own department and sometimes on a collaborative basis.

Ms Blakeman: I agree, and I agree with the policy direction that the minister is outlining because I think that is where we need to go. It isn't necessarily about more people. It's about how we use the time. I mean, doctors are trained to do very, very specific things. Again, to choose doctors, not to pick on them but as an example, they're trained to do very specific things, but we now have them filling out forms and doling out advice and all kinds of other things that may not be part of their job exactly, but they're doing it. If we can have them work more as part of a team with other health professionals, basically if you can save 20 per cent of their time when it doesn't require a doctor to be doing it, you've in essence created 20 per cent more doctors right there. So it isn't necessarily about the people.

I spent 10 years on Public Accounts, and that's all about measurement and accountability. So if you are not looking at setting specific targets of numbers with this sort of longer term policy that you've got happening, how are you going to measure success? Or how do you measure incremental movement if you're not using hard numbers on things? So I'll leave that with you.

3:10

I just want to get in the piece as well about world recruitment and retention of health workers, which you've sort of touched on. I'm curious. I note that on page 202 of the estimates book, under 2.0.7, the rural physician action plan has had no increase in funding, yet that's one of the areas that we're seeing really in need of particular attention. I'm wondering why that choice was made: to not increase the budget for that rural physician action plan.

The second question I have there is with the clinical stabilization initiative. Is that part of the negotiation that happened with the AMA? Is that the fund that's covering the office rent and things? It's 2.0.5 on page 202, clinical stabilization initiative. I think that's about the AMA negotiation, but I just wanted to clarify that.

I'm also wondering if the minister has had discussions with the minister of advanced education about allocating specific spots for

medical students with a rural background because one of the things we do know is that if somebody coming from a rural background trains in medicine, they are far more likely to go back to the rural area to practise. Has the minister looked at designating spaces or setting them aside or allocating them in some way for students that are coming out of rural areas in the hope that they will go back to those areas when they graduate?

The final piece of that is: what incentives are being put in place to encourage medical students to choose family medicine as a specialty, which is the other place where we really need people to be choosing it, the rural family physicians and the whole sector of family physicians. [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] Well, there we go. That's our first exchange.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. I understand, hon. member, that you wish to exercise the 20-minute option?

Ms Pastoor: Yes, I do.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister and his staff for attending and being here. I thank the minister for the answers that I've heard so far because I appreciate getting a lot of the background that goes with it. Having said that, I sort of feel a little bit naked as I stand here because I don't have any staff, so I'll wing it on my own.

One thing before I get started. I will be going on to long-term care, but I would like to just follow up on something that has just been raised in terms of family physicians and what I feel to be the really important recognition of how important family physicians are because we really need someone to help connect the dots between the specialists. I'll use an example. You can go to a dentist. He may do some work on, say, your upper teeth, and it could well affect your sinuses and your eyes, but that's not going to come up until later. So you need that person that you can go to that connects the dots between all the specialists because the specialists do this and this and this, but they don't connect the dots in between.

So having said that little piece, I'd like to go on to the long-term care, and I'll start off with my mantra that I've used for the last two and a half years. I really believe that we need provincial definitions and standards that are enforceable for anyone in care regardless of where they live or who delivers the care. On page 6 of the government's strategic business plan it explains that an updated plan to expand long-term care and improve standards of care will be brought forward by Alberta Seniors and Community Supports. Now, I realize that that is not this ministry, but there really is a crossover. Since they have deregulated long-term care, there is a crossover that often becomes confusing.

On page 186 of the Alberta health business plan strategy 3.1 involves the development of a comprehensive continuing care services model in collaboration with the minister of seniors. What I need, which fits into my mantra, is: do we have a provincial definition of what is long-term care versus continuing care? I believe that you probably mean the same thing, but it's very, very confusing when not everyone is speaking off the same page. Long-term care in the old days almost included anyone because there wasn't other housing available. Now there is any number of housing that actually is defined in different regions, so it does become confusing.

I would like to perhaps stop there because I really need to know that we are talking about the same thing. What is long-term care, and what is continuing care?

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to

quickly deal with the questions that were left from the Member for Edmonton-Centre. With respect to the rural physician action plan program she's right: there wasn't an increase in the budget. We're still working on the take-up with respect to that plan, but also in the workforce strategy there'll be a more definitive approach to recruitment. Absolutely correct that we need to try and recruit rural students into all the health care professions so that they will be comfortable going back into their own communities, and I certainly agree with the sentiments that were set out there.

The clinical stabilization fund is part of the master agreement between the three, and it is intended as a fund which will allow us to work in the high-need areas and the high-risk areas. For example, a family practitioner has costs going up faster than another practitioner's because of the costs of their clinics, which other specialists might not have. Or a region might have a higher cost, have a difficulty attracting a doctor. So the clinical stabilization program – and we're working out with the AMA the rules around it – is intended to be able to be applied to address those sorts of issues.

Allocation of particular spots with respect to medical schools is something that I believe was implemented already. I'll have to go back and just double-check on that piece, but I think there was the set-aside of some certain spots. Again, now it's a question of take-up time frame.

With respect to the family doctors I couldn't agree more that the concept working forward in terms of helping Albertans with their personal health status and helping Albertans be responsible for their health requires access to a medical team, and the family physician is going to be core to that team. Not necessarily everything a person needs to do will have to go to the family physician, but with the benefit of the electronic health record the family physician should be able to have access to any information with respect to any tests that have been done, any diagnostics, all the critical information in addition to what they have of the person's personal health record in that doctor's office. But it's not moving away from the family doctor. In fact, if we do this right and if we get a complete buy-in on the need to do it, the family doctor actually should be able to do exactly what the hon. member expressed rather than having to touch absolutely everyone and not be able to do the job.

I've had a family doctor that I've talked with a number of times who has expressed to me a frustration with actually being a cruise specialist, booking cruises on specialists as opposed to actually that co-ordinating role that you describe. So I wanted to emphasize that.

Going on to the long-term care issue, we're working with the Department of Seniors and Community Supports. It's in the department of seniors mandate to go forward in that area. But from my perspective, whether you talk about long-term care or continuing care, we need to be talking about that continuum of assistance that is needed, again, to help Albertans be healthy in the community. The choice of housing, whether a person is someone who needs assistance staying in their own home or choosing some other living accommodation right up to what used to be called extended care centres is a continuum of housing choice to which we need to then apply the health assistance that's necessary to allow and encourage that person to stay in that housing choice.

3:20

That's obviously something that our department is going to have to work collaboratively with the seniors department on to make sure that we can work in that kind of environment. Whether it's housing with a health supplement or health with a housing supplement, we need to have the concept that this is a continuing care process. It's about the quality of life of the individual that's involved and where they can most appropriately be supported so that they can make

choices with respect to their lifestyle and they can be independent as long as possible because that's good for health status.

So for long-term care there's been the funding increase there. We'll increase staff hours of care. A lot of work has been done on modern standards, and we're working with both the public and the not-for-profit and the private industry with respect to implementation of those standards, making sure that the qualifications are brought up but being reasonable about the implementation of that and also expanding home care and community care.

You're right: we need to get common language. But in my view it should be common language which doesn't distinguish between what's continuing care and long-term care, language which understands that we're talking about individual human beings with a quality of life. We should be supporting them in a manner so that they can be as independent as possible as long as possible because that's going to improve their health status. So it's not about long-term care, lodge care, assisted living, designated assisted living; it's about the individual and what support they need to be able to have the quality of life that they should have.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you to the minister for that. I do agree, but I think I would like to see that for anybody that is in care, we use the term "continuing care," and then long-term care would be a part of that that would fall underneath it. Really, anyone in long-term care truly needs the medical side of things first whereas in continuing care it's often the housing that's considered first and then the supplemental care that would go along with that.

One of the other things you did touch on is the standards. One of my concerns right from the very start has been that real enforcement is something that doesn't really exist in Alberta at the moment. It's a deficiency that was identified by the Auditor General and the MLA task force, and certainly it's had widespread support of the public, particularly the public that has had no recourse when they're upset. I understand that they are trying to set up what they call residents' councils, but they're still not strong enough. When would the minister introduce legislation as recommended by the Auditor General and the MLA task force that outlines standards monitoring and enforcement and very clear lines of accountability in continuing care? Again, when I say continuing care, I mean that whole spectrum regardless of what it is or where you live.

I believe that it's very, very important that we have a provincial standard that can then be enforced at the provincial level. I, of course, would have preferred, because I brought the bill forward, that it would have been someone that didn't necessarily respond to the minister but would have responded to the House, which would have given it that little extra arm's length. Many people – and I heard it on the task force – are truly afraid to come forward because they fear the repercussions that will happen either to their institution, or they won't get funding, or it will happen to their loved one that they're trying to protect. So could we be looking forward to some kind of legislation and enforcement with teeth?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, it would be very unfortunate if people were in fear of things which were pretty basic with respect to getting their care. I'm a very strong believer in appropriate residents' committees, if you will, which involve patients and their families being involved, being able to deal with some of the issues. Obviously, as an MLA I've had a lot of opportunity to deal with people who have concerns, and what they need is a resident-based committee which has the ability to raise and deal with concerns at the first instance because a lot of them can be dealt with there. Most

operators that I've had occasion to come into contact with, whether they're public, private, or not for profit, do care about the quality of care that they're giving, and they want to resolve the concerns. So first and foremost is to make sure that those types of committees are up and operating.

We're working with the Auditor General with respect to the enforcement standards in terms of rolling out the implementation of that, and of course enforcement has got to be part of it, but it has to be done right. I've had a number of meetings now with seniors' advocacy groups, including yesterday with the Alberta Council on Aging, to talk about a number of issues that they have going forward, and I'm committed to working with the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports to make sure that we get the right framework in place both to encourage more places for people who need places but also to make sure that we have the right kind of standards and the right ability to enforce those standards.

You know, setting up more legislative officers to report directly to the House is not necessarily the answer, but there does need to be a place where people can go without apprehension. In each of the regional health authorities, of course, they have ombudsmen now for that purpose, and we need to see if that's working because that process might be a better process than a legislative officer, that is a bit more remote. But the concept of making sure that there's a place where people can have their concern heard without fear of any repercussion is an important one and, certainly, one that I'll keep at the forefront.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. I'm glad to hear that that's at least starting. I'd like to be able to see in six months because we do know that there are examples out there that have to be looked at. I'd like to see how they're handled through the Ombudsman's office, which you suggested; however, I'm not sure that he got extra money to handle these sorts of complaints.

Certainly, the Health Facilities Review Committee has done some good work. I'm very aware of the people on the committee, and in fact when I was practising my profession, I had an incident where I had to actually work with them. They do good work, but they really are toothless. They can only make recommendations, with no backup.

So I have a question here. I'm going to ask it, but it's a little bit iffy. Would you finally eliminate the Health Facilities Review Committee? If you do, the only reason that I would want it eliminated is because it has no authority. If you did eliminate it, what would you replace it with? I think it has to be replaced with something of the same magnitude because the people that go in, at least from my experience, have a very fair chance of going through exactly the incidents that happen.

Certainly, there were a couple of unfortunate incidents just within our society that have happened in the last little while, the death in the PDD home and the unfortunate murder in the Alzheimer's unit. This is where it almost becomes a very, very intimate inquiry. It would be like a public inquiry. You go step-by-step. However, they just don't have any teeth. So I would like, I think, a comment on that. If you think that you might eliminate it, what would you replace it with? If you don't eliminate it, can you give it some authority?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've got to look quickly to make sure the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek isn't in the

House before I comment on potentially eliminating the committee that he chairs.

I did answer some questions yesterday, I guess, with respect to the Health Facilities Review Committee and its role with respect to the Pembina Village situation, and I think that situation can outline where it is effective. That committee did a report in 2004 on Pembina Village. The health authority and the operator responded to that and had an action plan, and then a review report was done following that. To say that it's toothless – maybe it doesn't have a hammer; it can't shoot anybody. But the fact that it does a report and that those reports can be public is a very strong incentive. The Capital health authority, for example in this case, now has an audit every year on those facilities, follows up on those reports, and those reports are a useful tool for them in terms of looking at the provision of care. That's very important.

3:30

Now, having said that, we are talking with all health authorities about governance and accountability. I am talking with health authorities about the provincial framework in which they operate as part of the health team in the province. Part of that is the accountabilities that they have directly to the ministry and a whole role of assurance that the provincial government has with respect to quality of care. That's not just with respect to acute care; that's with respect to long-term care, the full continuum of care. We're talking to the health authorities about that role.

As part of the review I would anticipate that we will look at the role and mandate of the Health Facilities Review Committee and make sure that it has the right mandate to do the proper audits and the right skills to do the proper audits of health facilities and then fits into a follow-up role, whether it has teeth and whether those reports are public reports, whether the responses of those reports are required to be public so that there is an accountability mechanism that's there. That's clearly what we're talking about right now in terms of the governance roles. It hasn't got the Health Facilities Review Committee, so if they read *Hansard*, they'll be a little bit surprised, probably. But that's clearly where we're going with respect to all of the health authorities with respect to the role of assurance that they need to measure up to, that they need to be accountable for in public. There are some interesting discussions that might come out of that with respect to what types of things ought to be reported and be posted, whether on a website or otherwise, and then how we can measure against those.

I say the word "measure." I did miss the measurement question that was asked earlier, so I'll just quickly tack it on to say that one of my banes in the whole process of accountability and business plans has been this proclivity to measure ourselves by what we counted yesterday. I'm a big believer that you have to have measurables that are not just the countables, but you need quantitative as well as qualitative measurements. So as we go forward, it would be my hope that we could bring that into the process.

The Chair: Hon. member, the time has elapsed.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I'm pleased to start my second round of 20 minutes with the Minister of Health and Wellness.

The Chair: Do you wish to go 20 minutes more?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, please.

I think what I'll do is just start out by repeating the questions that

I ended with. Oh, you've answered them. All right. I'll check the *Hansard*.

The next piece I wanted to talk about – and this is kind of, I think, the second- last piece of health workforce planning – is around international medical graduates. This is a source of real frustration for me because I represent a really ethnically diverse community, and I have a number of people fitting that stereotype of not only, you know, doctors trained in other countries who are driving cabs but also nurses who've been trained in other countries who are cleaning toilets. It's just so frustrating, and I'm sure it is to the minister as well.

One of the things that I have been told is that we may have a system that has unnecessary red tape in trying to get people through. I think we are all trying to achieve a level of safety in credentials, but I'm wondering: have we gone back on this system? Are we really requiring just what we need, or have we managed to add a bunch of flounces and frills and extra buttons and bows to this that are just making it difficult for people to qualify or to get them into that stream that we need to get them into to get whatever upgrading they need and then get them on the floors?

We the Alberta Liberals believe that international medical graduates are an immediate solution to physician shortages. I am really uncomfortable with the idea of stealing doctors from other countries or even from other provinces, but there is an existing pool of international medical graduates already in Alberta, and they would like to contribute.

So is it possible to increase the number of residencies available for international graduates? I know that the number has increased substantially from when I was with the Medical Council of Canada, which was 10, 12 years ago. Based on what I was told, I think during a meeting with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the number is certainly higher, but I'm thinking it could be higher still.

I think this is one of the policies that the minister was talking about last fall during the leadership race. He's now in the position of Minister of Health and Wellness. Has he followed through and put some more – I don't want to say fast-tracking because that sounds like we're skipping a step, but I think we do want to make sure that we're only requiring what we need to require. Could he comment on that?

The Alberta Liberals also support the establishment of an international medical graduate co-ordinator. This is an individual, usually, or sometimes a small office. It exists in Saskatchewan if you're looking for a model to compare with. They offer free courses and advice to international medical graduates to help them prepare for medical licensing exams. I would like to see the minister commit to this initiative as a one-year pilot project. It essentially seeks out those international medical graduates and helps them to understand what courses would be required and where they could get them from.

My last point on this is: we've got to understand that these people are working. They've come here. They've got their families here. They're not sitting around waiting for this to happen. They've all got jobs, and they're working, so to expect them to give up whatever income they have and go back to university for four years or two years is an impossibility.

Why can we not offer some of these upgrading courses either online or some combination of online and in person to correspond with shift work? Offer them at nights. Offer them on the weekends. But why do we have this just incredibly narrow idea that it's Monday to Friday, 9 to 5? We need these people. We could get them online faster. Why are we not working with them in a more creative way than simply saying: "No, here's how you have to fit these requirements. You've got to go Monday to Friday, 9 to 5"? You know, it doesn't work.

So I'll let you respond to me about the IMGs, and then we can keep going.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is a very important area for Alberta, not only because we've got a strong group of Albertans who could make a stronger contribution and want to, to the benefit of their community and growth of their community, but because we need their talent. They have more to offer, and they want to offer it. Significant progress has been made. There are now, I believe, 48 positions for international medical graduates, so that's up very significantly from the zero that would have been in place when the hon. member was on the medical council she referred to. This is significant improvement.

We could benefit from more residency positions and, in fact, bring more people in in a number of different ways or use the talents that are here in a number of different ways if we can resolve some of the issues with respect to the placements that they need for residencies, the prefectures and the mentors that they need to assist to do the residency programs. So we're working on that side of the strategy as well.

One of the things that I started to do when I was the minister of advanced education – and we're continuing to work on that now – is what I call the pathway. Not every medical graduate or health care professional graduate from wherever they might have graduated wherever in the world comes with the same credentials, so you need to be able to do a prior learning assessment and credential assessment and then be able to create the pathway. Those individuals have to be able to see how they get to their destination from where they are. Then we have to make sure, as I referred to earlier with my work with advanced education, that they have the bridging programs that are necessary to allow them to move down that pathway to the destination.

So the first critical issue is: can they actually achieve the destination? If they can't, they should be told that, and we should have the opportunity for alternate destinations. So if you've trained someplace in the medical profession but you're not going to be a doctor here, could you apply your training and your expertise in some other medical field; as a physician's assistant, for example?

3:40

So that's one of the pieces. But it's clear that we need to do a better job of the prior learning assessment and then the pathway and the bridging programs to make it possible to achieve those goals. I can tell the hon. member that I've met with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and other colleges, and I'm going to be meeting again very quickly as soon as we set it up with them. I've also met with the deans of medical schools on this specific issue of how we make sure that there's an objective process to credential, that we know what the issues are – you know, identify deficiencies if there are deficiencies – and then have programs in place to overcome those deficiencies on a reasonable basis. That's critical to IMGs.

We can be quick to say that we have unnecessary barriers to success, but one example – and I don't know this for certain, so it's considered an anecdotal concept – is that family physicians in England may not have the obstetrics and gynecology piece, so to come here as an international medical graduate in a family practice in a rural setting, for example, there might be a course that's needed. But you're absolutely right. That course could be done, perhaps, online. The methodology of delivery has to be adapted so that we have the value of the person practising while they're upgrading

whatever the deficiencies might be. We can do that under some of the designations we have. Under the part 5 designation, for example, we could have somebody come in and practise, and then we could do the upgrade piece while they're practising.

So those are part and parcel of what we're talking about in the workforce strategy. But, again, we're not waiting for the strategy to come out before we start on it. I started meetings in that area already.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Before I forget, Mr. Minister, I know that the issue of electronic health records is going to come up with the next speaker. I think Linda Miller, who handles that section for you, is upstairs, so if there was an opportunity to bring her to the floor for this. I just want to give you a bit of warning that that one is coming in 10 minutes, so she can take her time getting down here, but just so that she is handy for the questions that are coming.

International medical graduates. I agree that there are a number of parts to this. One is the credentialing. But, you know, we've had a foreign qualifications branch here in Alberta for a long time. I was working with it in '89, '90, '91. We have to either resource this appropriately or get better at it. It seems to take us forever to figure out what the qualifications mean from any given university. Somehow there are much more improvements in the systems that we could be doing there. How many times do you have to go back and examine somebody graduating from the university of – let me make it up – Timbuktu? We've just got to get faster at this. Whatever is necessary.

So it's the credentialing, it's the training, it's the testing, and then it's the residencies. That's another piece of this where we need co-operation. My understanding is also that we're short of some of the senior doctors who would usually take that mentorship position and train those residents as they move through that system. I know that generally what's happened in the past is that there are X number of residency positions, which is one or two more than the number of graduates you're expecting to get out of the given teaching institution. I know that we've been trying to increase beyond that to account for international medical graduates who could be around in the pool, but I'm still told that the residency spots are limited as well, and we need to look to that.

That was the last piece on that. But thank you for the information. I'm glad to hear it's working ahead. It's just frustrating.

The next piece I want to talk about is working conditions and retention. I think that this is especially apparent to us in rural areas, and we've really seen that, for example, with special cases like Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie, where the ability to actually retain the health care professional once you get them into a particular institution is increasingly challenging. I think that's around, you know, stable, predictable funding and long-term planning, but it's also around working conditions and lack of professional leadership, flexible scheduling, recognition for expertise and experience, and if I may add, child care spaces. We have a lot of health care professionals who are women who have primary care duties for children who are extremely frustrated because they would like to work and cannot get child care. I cannot see why we are not putting child care spaces into every health facility that we have and, certainly, any new ones that we're building. We've got to be able to get ahead of this one.

So the Alberta Liberals have talked about a health employer innovation fund to support employers to develop and implement creative retention programs. We would suggest that the money would be available to either employees or health provider groups or unions to develop and implement ideas on improving the work

environment or workplace practices or community involvement or quality of care. Of course, I would love for the minister to commit to that idea and establish that fund, but can he talk a bit more about working conditions?

I'll just briefly refer back to the stats that I was using and the questions that I did ask the minister previously, which really frighten me. Those were the ones where we had the number of – and this is a report actually tabled from the ministry itself – days of sick leave taken by registered nurses in regional health authorities between 2001 and 2006. When we look at the '05-06 year for Capital health, for example, 47,152 days of sick leave; Chinook, 7,183 days of sick leave; Peace Country, 5,592 days of sick leave. Again, it's the same example as with the doctors. If we could just get the nurses healthy and staying on the job, we wouldn't need to find so many nurses. So can the minister talk about what he's doing specifically to address workplace conditions and whether he would be willing to look at a health employer innovation fund?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. With respect to working conditions, obviously working conditions are a very important part of the retention strategy. They have to be. The best place to get a worker is the worker you already have and make sure that they have the opportunity to have not only an interesting job when they go to work so that they can be excited about going to work but that the workplace is safe and productive. So that's got to be a critical piece of what we do: to take a look and encourage our RHAs to take a look at why they have the work time loss that they have and what we can do about it.

Now, obviously, the industry is a very labour-intensive industry, so people are going to be sick. Those that are in hospitals operate in an environment that has a lot of viruses and diseases, so it's not surprising if somebody might catch a few. I mean, it's like teachers that go back to school in September. They catch colds. You know, that's the nature of it.

But that's not to make light of the fact that we do need to make sure that it's part of the workforce strategy and it's part of what we do going forward. We take a look at what people are doing, whether their skills are being maximized, and therefore they have the excitement about going to work, as well as the safety of the workplace, so they're not straining their backs lifting patients, that they have the right supports and technologies so that they're not being ineffective in terms of the worker doing things that they shouldn't be doing or that someone else could be doing.

When I was first being admitted to the bar, Mr. Justice Côté, as he is now but who then was an instructor, used to say that you should put a sign on your desk saying: does it take an LL.B. to do this? Well, that's the approach we need to be looking at the workforce. Are we operating at our maximum level of effectiveness and making sure that if it doesn't require your skills to do a job, then somebody else should be able to do it, and you should use your skills to do the next job.

That's a little bit off your question, but I think it's a very important part of it because being healthy and going to work every day is not just about sickness; it's about wanting to get up and go in to work every day, being motivated to do it, and that comes from having an interesting work site, where your skills are valued and where the work you do is valued. That's the start of it.

3:50

The next piece is to make sure that it's healthy and that we're using the technology, we're using what we need to assist people so

that they don't strain their backs. Then looking at the issues around, probably – I'm guessing, but I would think stress is probably the next indicator of job loss. Part of that is about making sure we have enough people, so that's going out and doing recruiting so we have more people because a lot of the issues around health are about people who feel overworked and overburdened and the stress from that. It's a very real stress, but it's also a wearing out that puts people in a position where they're vulnerable to illness. So there are a lot of factors that go into that, but you're absolutely right: those are important ones to address.

The team approach going forward, I think, is going to be very important to that, to make sure that we have workforce teams to help reduce the workplace stress.

The child care is an important one. I am surprised that employers would even need an innovation fund to assist them in understanding that if you want people to come to work, you have to identify the barriers to success and deal with them. I think that that is happening.

But that's, certainly, again, part of the overall strategies that we have to look at to make sure that we can get – particularly in rural areas, if we want to use the talent that's available in a lot of rural communities to its fullest extent, you have to make sure that the educational opportunities are there so that somebody who could be a nurse can get the course from Grant MacEwan College but in their own community online or from Northern Lakes College or whatever. So making sure that the educational opportunities are there and making sure that the other barriers are dealt with.

Child care is obviously one of those. Two of our RHAs, I'm advised, are looking at options with respect to child care initiatives in their facilities. But that's something that is part and parcel of the discussion and has to be looked at broadly. That's not something that I would suggest should be institutionalized; it's something that any good employer ought to be looking at and saying: if I need to maximize the value of the people I have, what are the barriers to success in my particular area? They're educational. They're child care. They're technology. There may be other barriers that should be looked at.

Ms Blakeman: I appreciate all of that, but it's not happening, and that's why I'm suggesting an employer/employee health innovation fund, because what I was seeing was them going: yeah, yeah, we could use, you know, a child care facility here.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. I understand that you want to exercise the 20 minute option as well?

Mr. Taylor: Yes, please. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to join in the debate on the Health and Wellness department budget today. My focus is going to be specifically on Calgary and the Calgary health region and some questions around that. We have, of course, a huge issue in Calgary in that we had a health care system that was, I think, before this current spurt of high growth in Calgary broke out, if not inadequate at that time, certainly we could see that it was becoming inadequate to serving the size of the population in Calgary at that point.

The population served by the CHR has grown by over 300,000 in the last 15 years. There's a projection that another 300,000 people will move into the Calgary health region in the next 10 years. The population, of course, is continuing to age on the one end, but we also have this unique to Calgary condition of a baby boom on the other end because so many of the people that Calgary attracts are of child-bearing age because it is a great place to move to, build a career, raise a family, that sort of thing. But it means an awful lot of people. It means an awful lot of babies. Birth rates are on the rise:

20 per cent more babies born in Calgary in 2005-2006 than there were in 1995-96.

So we have impact at both ends of the age scale, and it's producing a major increase in demand for health services. In short, we have too few beds, we have too few doctors, we have too few nurses, we have too few of most other health care workers in the system, and the growth demands on that are going to be just incredible over the next little while. So I would like to talk about some of these things specifically, and I would like to start just with the notion of the bed shortage.

Now, in Calgary, if you go down there, you see an incredible amount of hospital construction. The Rockyview is being expanded. The Peter Lougheed is being expanded, I think nearly doubled in size. There's a significant rebuild going on at the Foothills. There's the new Sheldon Chumir downtown urgent care centre. There is also, of course, the new south health campus, which is scheduled to start building one of these days. I think the plan, as far as the CHR is hoping, is that they'll start site excavation this summer, and they want to have the pilings in in fall, provided that they get all the money that they need to build sort of phase 1 of the south health campus.

I wonder if the minister can tell me a little bit, first of all, about the construction plans, about the funding for that construction. In the case of the expansions to the Rockyview, the Lougheed, the rebuild at the Foothills we're seeing a pretty major impact from inflation cost escalation in the construction business. The construction costs are going up, and they're going up at a rate greater than the funding for escalation that the province estimated back in 2005 and added to the project funding. So what is being done about that, first of all?

Secondly, in terms of the south health campus, is all the funding in place to build that hospital? If not, what part is, and what part still needs to go into place? Is the minister aware that the Calgary health region is looking at this project, the south health campus, as quite a long-term project now, where they'll actually start out with phase 1 at sort of 60 per cent capacity, they're hoping, in a complete shell and then add about 100 beds a year for a number of years after that?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it's important to recognize, first of all, that every place in Alberta is growing – Calgary is certainly growing – and that's creating pressures. Part and parcel of where we need to go is how we are doing things differently in the future. It's not a matter of just doing more of the same because that's not only not going to be sustainable, but it's not the best health practices, in my view. We need to be empowering more of the primary care networks to work proactively in terms of health status in the community, all of which is to say that if we do this right, we don't need to continue to build the acute care capacity at the pace that would have been required on the old model. That's not to say that we don't need to continue to build acute care capacity.

I've had recent meetings with the Calgary health authority, and they're on track for their target. I believe it was 1.9 or 1.92 beds per 1,000. They're not there right now, but they're on track to reach that goal early and to be able to sustain that goal with the south Calgary hospital coming on.

Right now, for example, the Calgary Rockyview general hospital redevelopment will add 104 beds. The Peter Lougheed will add 110. The Foothills will add 104. There is considerable additional capacity coming on, and that's going to help them reach that target, particularly with the first phase of the south Calgary hospital coming on.

The south Calgary health campus was always going to be a phased project. It's important that part of their planning is to overbuild the first phase to make it easier to add the extra pieces without the construction that you see in some of the other phases as well. The project was approved in April 2005. The land is in place. You know all the details because you probably followed the public presentations that were made to the board. The reality is that there was \$500 million, more or less, at the concept stage committed to the project. As we know, with projects there's a change between the concept and when you start to get the hard numbers. There's been about \$105 million in escalation added, so the project is at about \$657 million. Again, as you know, the public projections that the board has been talking about are in the \$1.1 billion to \$1.2 billion range already, and that will probably change.

The government is committed to the south Calgary health campus. That's a necessary part of not only the acute care build but the change in service delivery model because it's going to have a huge increase in the capacity for ambulatory care and those sorts of areas. So that's a project that's on track. They're moving ahead with it. We will have to work with them and continue to work with them with respect to how we implement that project and how it gets financed over the period of time, but nobody is backing away from building the south Calgary campus and building it on a timely basis.

4:00

There are a lot of other capital projects in Calgary, about \$1.5 billion of projects in terms of medical centres and other centres not only in Calgary proper but in the Calgary health region to help with the really important project of changing the delivery model so that we can actually do health status as opposed to continuing always with the acute care. Not to say that we don't need the acute-care beds. We do need the acute-care beds, and that's on track.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Minister. You're absolutely right. I mean, on one hand, if we were to continue to build out like the plans call for right now, you know, indefinitely into the future, that's not sustainable. On the other hand, a lot of this building needs to take place now in order to change the model of health care delivery in the Calgary health region so that it is sustainable going forward. Of course, a couple of other things that are needed are people to staff all these new facilities – and I'll come back to that in a second – and some new systems.

With that, I'd like to go to the electronic health records for a second, if I can. I truly don't understand this. The amount of money that's required to bring on the Calgary health region's electronic health records is really an astounding figure. It's almost \$400 million over the next four years, I guess. You know, I'm not much of a computer geek either. I'm kind of a Luddite when it comes to all those IT things. So it's a sweet mystery of life to me. I don't know how close to Bill Gates the minister is, but maybe he knows more about it than I do.

I'm interested in this because it's pretty obvious that within the Calgary health region this is to be a comprehensive system where there is, you know, one patient, one record sort of thing. No matter where you interact with the system, once it's up and running, they can access your health records, that sort of thing. That's a good thing.

Of course, at some point Calgarians will get sick when they're visiting Edmonton and Edmontonians will get sick when they're visiting Lethbridge and people from Lethbridge will get sick when they're in Fort McMurray, that kind of thing. So I'm interested in

the province-wide system if I can just move away from an exclusive Calgary focus for a second. My understanding is that the Calgary health region is sort of doing a piece of the Alberta-wide health records, Capital health is doing another piece, and then I think there's a third piece. The question basically is: what piece of the Alberta-wide project on electronic health records is Calgary health region doing, and how are they doing at it internally?

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. First of all, on the cost side, building an electronic health record is not a low-cost operation. It involves not only the cost of developing the technology but the cost of ever-greening it, the cost of encouraging people to adapt to it and to adopt it. So there are a number of pieces in different pockets. Again, in the trilateral agreement we have the physician office system program, which is to encourage physicians' offices to hook up because, as you mentioned, the electronic health record, to be complete, needs to have all the data that's necessary to be consistently shared on one accessible mechanism. So adding on the physicians is an important front piece.

There are three developments in the province. The Calgary regional health authority has been developing their health records, the Capital region has been developing their health records, and one called RSHIP is doing the other seven regions together, all of them working, hopefully, with respect to consistent standards so that the data collected is collected in a consistent way. The Capital health authority is currently tasked with building the portal so that you'll have access to all the health records wherever you are. The concept is that the data will be available whether you're in Edmonton, Calgary, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge.

You'll have access to pharmacy information. PIN was, I think, the first one up. It went up quite a while ago. It's not quite real time yet, but hopefully it will be real time soon. Right now it's batched and uploaded. So the pharmacy piece, the diagnostic imaging and other imaging pieces, the lab tests: all of that will be part of an electronic health record accessible anywhere in the province through the hub-and-portal approach. They built on existing systems because of the cost of starting afresh and doing a common system right across the province, which was one of the first questions I asked when I got into the portfolio. I gather it was easier, better, more efficient, and better for change management and encouraging people to adopt if you started from where they were and built out.

Calgary has got some front-end pieces. It's very interesting. I was down doing a tour not that long ago, and they were demonstrating some of the bedside order mechanisms and charting mechanisms that they have that are Calgary-specific but which probably wouldn't be used in some of the RHAs that are part of the RSHIP model, at least not at the front end of it, but they would be used in a quaternary care, high-technology centre in Calgary or in Edmonton.

So it is a costly process. We're making sure that the money is effectively invested. We're making sure that there's a quality standard being maintained so that while they're developing three records, they will talk to each other, that they'll be integrated and integratable. We have a provincial governance structure to ensure that.

The Acting Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. We'll move on to the staffing area if we can. I'm looking at the projections – and these are the Calgary

health region's own projections – of the number of bodies they're going to need for workforce renewal over the next 10 years. It is truly staggering. In the next 10 years, inclusive of all contract providers and continuing care, Calgary Lab Services, and Carewest, the region will need approximately 37,000 staff and 3,300 physicians to meet growth and replacement needs. They're short 1,000 nurses today. They estimate that they will need 10,000 RNs and LPNs over the next 10 years; 7,800 health care assistants, personal care assistants, and nursing attendants; 9,500 support staff; 500 physios; 750 medical laboratory technologists. They'll need 1,300 primary care physicians and 2,200 specialists.

You know, the postsecondary education system just is not up to the task of turning out those kinds of numbers in any way, really. In fact, the estimate here, I think, is that the University of Calgary has approximately 100 fewer health care training programs and training positions compared to the University of Alberta. The gap between Calgary and Edmonton is met by expenditure from the CHR's operating budgets to employ bedside physicians and hospitalists rather than expenditure from the government grant for these trainees. So that's coming out of the CHR's budget directly, and that's an additional stress that Capital health, perhaps, doesn't face. There's no pharmacy program, no rehab or MR technology programs, so that increases their recruitment costs and all the rest of that. There needs to be a major commitment by the province of Alberta to support the Calgary health care education alliance so that they can gear up to meet these kinds of goals.

Now, I don't expect that over the space of 10 years, with the kinds of numbers of staff we're talking about here, we can ramp up, you know, the system to an extent that we can provide absolutely everybody Calgary needs, but we've got to make some movement in that area. I think it's safe to say that if Calgary has these kinds of needs, Capital health can't be too far behind, and while Calgary and Capital health are obviously more sophisticated, more technologically driven, more specialized health care regions than what you find in the other seven, the other seven are going to have some pretty significant staffing challenges, I think, going forward as well.

I wonder if the minister could talk specifically about the gap between the number of people needed in Calgary and the number of people that postsecondary medical and health education facilities in the Calgary area are capable of churning out, what can be done about that, and what the government is prepared to commit to.

4:10

Mr. Hancock: Well, I think what the hon. member is getting into, Madam Chair, is the numbers game that I was saying I'm reluctant to engage in. We know we need more health care professionals, and we're certainly ramping up on all fronts in terms of the educational processes. I mean, with the medical schools, I think Calgary was at 80 and the U of A was at 105 or 110 or something when I first got involved in this. They're now both up at 135. So a lot of those things have been addressed in terms of building capacity. A lot more has to be addressed. It's not just adding more seats. It's making sure you have the educators in place. So there's a lot to that strategy in terms of making sure that our advanced education system can make sure that there are opportunities for every Albertan who wants to get an education in the right place, and of course now my particular concern has shifted from the overall goal to the health goal in that area.

It's not just, with all due respect, about Calgary. You know, just as we had on the medical school match with the interns that were being talked about before, the idea that the number of graduates versus the number of residencies was matched right across the country, a graduate from a medical school in Calgary doesn't

necessarily stay in Calgary. They go to wherever they get the specialty match or the residency match that they want and that wants them. So while we need to build the educational capacity – and we're adding spaces; we're doing all sorts of wonderful things in that area – it's a broader issue. It's not just a Calgary issue.

We're working with the health authorities and with the ministry of employment and immigration, for example, in terms of how we can recruit globally on a collaborative basis rather than on a competitive basis so that they don't use resources competing with each other. It doesn't make any sense for somebody to pay a hiring bonus in one health authority only to take somebody from another health authority and then have them ramp up and play that kind of ratcheting game. We've got to bring this together on a collaborative approach. Calgary has got to be part of that team. We'll work together to both educate Albertans for the jobs that we need and ramp up the educational opportunities, making sure we have the new educators in place that are needed to do that, making sure that the spaces are in place, and then looking at other qualified talent in the province and how we can upgrade that.

I mean, one of the biggest pressures is not going to be the nursing and the doctors in the future. It's the personal care aides. It's the people at the entry level of the system who are the care attendants who are going to be difficult to get because we want them to have certain skills, but their pay level doesn't recognize the fact that they can cross the street and work for a fast-food outlet at a higher pay level. So those are the areas where the real issues are going to be in terms of being able to recruit people. Quite frankly, where we're going to be able to bring in, I think, others without worrying about whether we're depleting the health resources of another country or another jurisdiction is to bring in some of the entry-level people.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I'm sure the Member for Calgary-Currie is looking forward to his next at bat. In the meantime if I can just pick up where I was leaving off, and if we can hang on to Ms Miller. Thank you.

We were talking about working conditions. If I can just argue a little bit with the minister, who didn't necessarily see why we'd need an innovation fund, that surely employers would just see what needed to be done and do it. But, in fact, that's not happening.

At one of the places I was in in Grande Prairie, they indicated that they were sort of double- and triple-shifting their nurses, and then they said: you know, there are nurses that are here that would love to come in and work that shift, but they can't because they can't get anybody to deliver child care especially on shift. To me it would only make sense, as the minister says, to offer the child care spaces in the hospital that could cope with the shift work, but it's not happening.

So I still want the minister to consider the idea of this innovation fund because I think often hospital administrators go: I can't possibly consider, you know, putting however many dollars, \$50,000, into redoing a space to meet the requirements for child care space when I have so many other draws on what we need to spend money on in this particular facility. An innovation fund might be able to help them consider that.

I'm going to move on a little bit. We know that high school is where a lot of young people make up their minds about what they're going to do, what their career choice might be. Again, we have a Liberal policy about developing a provincial strategy aimed at increasing awareness of health care as a viable career amongst those high school kids. I mean, sometimes you see these trade fairs – and some schools are very organized about it – and they recruit and bring

all kinds of people in. But I think that this is another piece of that workforce puzzle, to direct some energy towards presenting health care as a viable and interesting choice for high school students, so I'd be interested in the minister's feedback on that.

Now, I also note that on page 181 of the Health and Wellness business plan, right at the top of the page there, it's talking about workforce, and it says, "The challenge of workforce shortages is compounded by the fact that the average age of health care providers is increasing and many are nearing retirement age." So I'm wondering if the ministry has any particular plans, specific plans, that are in place or that are going to be put in place within the next period of time that would be addressing attrition rates?

Do you want to answer those, and then I'll move on to electronic health records? Okay.

Mr. Hancock: Madam Chairman, the whole issue of doing things in the workplace – really, you need to be flexible. I don't disagree that it would probably be helpful if there was a fund in place that people could draw on, but the fact of the matter is that it doesn't take a brilliant executive to look at the overtime budget and find \$50,000 to put in place a child care space. So what we need to be doing is working with health authorities and other employers to think about how they deal with their issues.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

It's not all a question of more money. I mean, yes, there's a role for incentivizing that, but we need to look at the overtime, for example, being paid and say: are there other resources and, if so, you know, how do we do it? I'm going to say something that might get me in trouble here, but not all of this can be dealt with at the bargaining table. With health care workers we've got to be talking about workplace in a broader context so that we can make sure that a health care professional can use the full scope of their practice and deal with that. That would enable, I think, if we looked at it in a broader context, some of these workplaces to really look at the things that will enable that to happen. Then we can talk about how we resource if there needs to be some resources to do it.

I would argue, without knowing anything about it, that the cost of putting together a child care space in a health care facility is not the barrier to success. Surely, another \$50,000, or whatever it would cost to put that in, is not the thing that's keeping somebody from doing it. So that's part and parcel of the discussion we need to be having and saying to people: you've got to be thinking about your workforce and the people who are around you now that could be employed in your workforce. What are their barriers to coming in? What's going to bring your workforce in on a daily basis? What's going to make it possible for you to recruit the talent that's in your neighbourhood? Because that's the best source of people. That shouldn't require us to provide a lot of incentives, but I'm happy to work on the incentive side if that is what's needed. I would argue that that's not a huge cost. That's just thinking about who you're working with and what the barriers are.

We do work on the high school side. We work with Careers: The Next Generation. So we're working at making sure that health information and health care professions are part of the package that people have. I can tell you from the advanced education side that the student ambassadors that went in with the tools that they had are working on that.

You know, the easy answer always is: well, let's put more information into the high schools. I'd be happy to work with Education in terms of how we can make sure that more information is available, but it's not really about information because most of the

high school students that I'm aware of have access to much more information than anybody ever had. I mean, I know that my own daughter, who has just finished her first year of university, coming out of high school, could access the information, had the access to it. What's really needed is how you use all this information to define what a pathway might be. So those might be questions you may want to ask the Minister of Education with respect to how we use the information, not how we get them more.

4:20

Keeping older workers, a retention of the workforce as people are aging, and attrition: part of that, again, is about how we keep the job exciting, about making it challenging for people so that they'll want to continue on. I think that in a number of workforces where they see people with early retirement, that's part of the problem, part of the issue.

The other one is, again, equipment. I mean, we've got aging workforce and an older and heavier patient population. That's leading to the back strain issue. Again, I keep going back to that, but it seems to me to be almost a no-brainer that when you have those sorts of mixes, you can really make it easier for people to go to work if you provide them with the right tools, those sorts of issues. So retention is about making people want to come to work, about making sure that they're compensated fairly.

For most people it's not the money package. It's about the excitement and the challenge of the job, that as health care professionals and technologists they can actually do the work that they want to do and see the results that they want to see and be part of the health care field and be successful. But we need to provide them with the tools to do that. So I think for the retention strategy it's not just about a big pay packet; it's about making it exciting, making sure that they can use their full scope, making sure that they interact with the health care teams so that they can actually achieve outcomes that they can see and feel and touch and go home at night saying: I did something useful.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I agree that that's a good long-term goal. I'm a little concerned about how we get from where we are to there, especially given the problems that we're having with attrition and workforce retention and recruitment. I mean, we need sort of six-month goals, one-year goals, three-year goals, five-year goals. What I'm hearing you say – and I agree with the principle of it – you know, good three- to five-year goals, but how do we get there from here?

I want to talk about electronic health records briefly. You gave a bit of an explanation to my colleague, but I'm looking for an update of where we are. This is one of the key pieces in the government platform. I'm happy to hear from the individual staff person or through the minister, whichever he wants. But this is touted as a key piece of how we're going to address some of those health care pressures. So where are we with this?

When I was involved with the Health Information Act review – and, you know, I think that's got to be three years ago – there were a couple of major pieces that were left undecided because there was supposed to be an additional or a second Health Information Act review committee, which was never called. So some of those very large issues are still floating around out there. Are we looking at a follow-up committee here, and if so, when? What is the actual status of where we are? Because at the time it seemed like we were really leading, that we were at the forefront of that whole pan-Canadian strategy. I don't know what happened, if we stumbled or just got quiet, but it all seemed to kind of drop off the radar screen for a while. So I started to think, uh-oh, problems. I'd like to know where we are with that.

I'd also like to know if we're still looking at electronic health records that are essentially hospital based. It's the results of what happens to you in the hospital: admission, the various tests that you've had, what the diagnosis was, lab results, et cetera. Is it going to include family practice medical records? Different from electronic health records, but now we're talking medical records. When would that come online? Will lab tests or tests ordered by a family physician or a family clinic also be part of that electronic health record or electronic medical record? Finally, what about specialists' records? Do they get pulled into the mix too? I think people have got it in their heads that it's everything, and my understanding of it was that it's actually segmented and that we shouldn't be expecting that everything is in fact online.

So if I could get an update on that, and then we should have time for one more exchange. That would be great.

Mr. Hancock: Well, on the segmented records, clearly, there was a concern about the question of medical records versus health records. I think that's been overcome. We'll have an electronic health record. Obviously, doctors will have more information on their file in their office about their patients than will need to go on a common health record, actually, because a specialist doesn't need to know all the personal information that a person might share with their doctor. That would be one of the concerns that doctors had with respect to the medical health records. But AMA is on the governance committee, and I think we've overcome that issue and have a common sense of what information needs to be available on a common electronic record.

By 2008 we're fairly confident that 100 per cent of lab will be on, that 75 per cent of diagnostic imaging will be on, that 100 per cent of drugs dispensed will be on, and that 25,000 providers will be on. We hope to move doctors – what are we at? – 67 per cent of doctors' offices are on now. With the new targets we should be able to get up to about 80 per cent this year. So we're on a good track to be able to say that all Albertans will have a viable electronic health record by 2008, that that health record will have virtually all of the data that is needed for any of their health care providers to be able to deal with them on a consistent basis regardless of where they access the system. It won't have all their personal data that they might want to share with their own doctor with respect to some things that should not be on the broad electronic health record.

The Health Information Act will be reviewed. We're aiming at the spring of 2008 for the review of that.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, I'm so looking forward to it.

I think what I'm going to do is follow up with some specific written questions on this issue. I know that there have been some concerns expressed recently about: are we going to achieve that in a safe way? I think there continue to be issues around the security of people's personal information, but what I'll do is follow up with written questions on that.

What I would like to do at this point is start on some issues around mental health. I thank Ms Miller very much for coming down to give us some up-to-date information on that. On mental health the minister has introduced legislation on community treatment orders, which is creating a situation where individuals with mental illness would end up with basically a court order to follow a treatment plan or face involuntary hospitalization. I argue that even supporters of CTOs agree that they will only be successful if there are increased community supports available. What available supports within the community are going to be added? What additional support can we expect? In addition to that, what steps are involved in integrating these mental health services into the overall health care system in the

province? That's partly to do with that we've had mental health segregated; we've had it added into this; we've put it under regional health authorities. It has kind of bounced around the province. So where is the integration of that?

If you look at the estimates on page 203, line 5.0.12, mental health innovation fund, I'm wondering what best practices, what reports, what standards the RHAs are using to develop local initiatives with the funding from this mental health innovation fund. I'm assuming that you already have some idea of how they're going to use that, so what's being contemplated there?

How will the success of these initiatives be measured to ensure that they actually are improving services for the mentally ill? I'll tell you that my greatest fear is that that legislation passes and we don't get anything more, that we don't get another treatment bed, no new beds in the psych wards, no new beds in community treatment and support, no new enhancement for the not-for-profit agencies that offer community supports, that they don't get anymore money. I just think that that would be the worst of all possible worlds.

Beyond the three years of this \$25 million mental health innovation fund what other plans are in place for long-term funding of mental health? Is there funding for preventative mental health services such as counselling and for the development of community networks? What additional supports is the minister allocating for these not-for-profit groups who provide services and supports directly to Albertans with a mental illness?

I'll let you answer those, and then I'll shift gears slightly.

4:30

Mr. Hancock: I think those are very important questions, Mr. Chairman, relative to the CTOs because, obviously, CTOs are a very important tool to be able to assist people who have mental health issues and make sure that they're dealt with on a timely basis as opposed to waiting for them to crash, not only hurting their quality of life and impacting their families but using a lot of the acute care budget in health authorities with respect to then getting them back into commission. So part of the resourcing, obviously, is already in place if this can be used appropriately, because by interceding earlier, you'll be able to save those resources that are being eaten up now. Aside from that, there's an additional \$290,679,546 going into the mental health funding allocated to the health authorities for mental health purposes – and that's being allocated across the regional health authorities – and an 8.6 per cent increase, I believe it is, to the Mental Health Board.

Mental health is an area that needs more focus. Obviously, that started in the past with the Mental Health Board's policy plan and then last fall with the announcement of the children's mental health strategy. The \$75 million innovation fund, which was there over three years – I will resist the temptation to comment on being asked what an innovation fund is going to be used for because the purpose of an innovation fund is to encourage innovation, which means new ideas. Clearly, we need to engage the community in the whole area. I mean, we need assertive treatment availability in the communities, and some of the resources that are going out will have to be used for that to support the process.

I've already started the process of engaging the mental health alliance, the Canadian Mental Health Association Alberta branch, and others to help monitor and comment on the implementation and provide advice as we go along as to how we're doing with respect to achieving availability of resources in the community. So we're going to set up a process as we go through this not only to bring in the community treatment orders but to make sure that the health authorities know that they need to have a delivery model in place to back it up and that we will be not only using our own assessment but

talking to the community advocacy groups to make sure that we have a good understanding of how we're impacting the individuals in the community.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. I don't think I'm very happy with what I'm hearing because I'm not hearing that the supports and resourcing that I was hoping would go – I mean, there's a certain amount of money that's extra here, but how is it specifically being allocated to those not-for-profits?

The Chair: Your time has elapsed.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a number of questions, and I think that rather than do a whole bunch of preamble, I'm just going to throw out some comments and some questions. Some of them relate to things that I've already heard, and some are my own.

Back to the health records. I have a concern that the company that would be in charge – and I am totally computer and IT illiterate – the company that will be doing the service, or server, could well be the same company that is also an insurance company. I would be concerned about my personal health records being shared with an insurance company. I realize that they all say that everything is private, but, you know, I'm from Missouri. You've got to show me because there are just too many little accidents that happen. Then in relation to that, too, what would the minister's feeling be about the personal choice of people to opt out of that plan, opting out of mental health records, not having your records in the big pot?

Ms Blakeman: The electronic health record?

Ms Pastoor: The electronic health record.

As for the new emphasis on the dollars for mental illness, it's certainly more than welcome, probably way behind the time. Where I have a concern is: what is mental illness? I think that we have a true DMS for what a mental illness is, but then my question would be: what about drug-induced mental damage, which is often not reversible? Is that a mental illness? How many mental illness dollars that would actually be used for someone with a true, diagnosed mental illness – how would those dollars go around that? Would that person perhaps be put under the health care?

Another concern that I have, back to assisted living and designated assisted living, et cetera, is that often these places do not have highly trained staff. They have what we call now health care workers, who kind of do everything. My concern is that when someone falls, they might hit their head. Maybe not everybody does, but if you hit your head and cut your head, you really bleed abnormal amounts. It looks usually a lot worse than it is, but there aren't people trained to do either a medical diagnosis or to actually be able to do that work on their own, and ultimately they end up calling 911. It's a huge, huge use or misuse of what I feel to be an ambulance service, whereas if there was somebody on-site at all times that actually had that extra medical training – and of course I'm referring to an RN, LPNs perhaps, but I don't think they have enough experience yet – who could actually handle that sort of stuff.

If that person had fallen and broken their hip, that could be diagnosed by someone who is a medically trained person, an RN, but they would be able to phone the doc and say: "Okay. I've got a broken hip here. I need an order for morphine or whatever just to keep them comfortable." Then the ambulance could come as a

transfer, not as an ambulance service. You get six guys walking in. They've got their cardiac machines. They've got two or three guys that want to practise. So they come in and just do the whole assessment of this poor little person that only has a broken hip when we know exactly what they need. So I think in terms of the dollars that, in my mind, are being wasted because we do not have the legislation that would say, or however you would do it, that a medically trained person has to be on-site 24 hours a day. I think that it would save us a lot of money on the ambulance side of things.

He's making notes. I'll just throw a whole pile out.

The other one is the appropriate assessments. Again I'm going back to my mantra about wanting it straight across the province in terms of definitions and in terms of assessments. I'll just use a quick story. I had a constituent who wanted to bring his parents from Calgary to Lethbridge. The mother was extreme Alzheimer's and, basically, was bedridden. The father was in a wheelchair. They both had been assessed as long-term care, but when they came to Lethbridge, Lethbridge refused to assess them as long-term care because their definitions were different. They were going to end up in assisted living, at which point he really believed that they were not going to get the assistance that they required, and he had to leave them there. He was an only child, so it really was very difficult as a result of the assessment process. I believe those assessments should be equal across the province. I think it's imperative that families be involved in the assessments and that they're not being done by third parties.

There we go. That was five.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

4:40

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not medically trained or an RN, so I'm not even going to begin to attempt to address the question of whether mental illness is a true diagnosis or a drug-induced mental condition. That I'm going to leave to the professionals. The bottom line is that we need to have the quality of care and the quality of treatment available regardless of what the issue is.

Also, it points to one of the things that we really need to address; that is, to prevent damage. So when you talk about drug induced, I would rather get to the front end and try and reduce the number of people who are impacted by drugs. Well, I mean, you have to do both. Obviously, part of the problem – and your colleague from Edmonton-Centre sort of raised this – is that it's great to have long-term goals, but what are we doing now? The problem in the system is that we tend to do more of the what are we doing now and not enough of the long-term goals. If we don't know where we're going, we certainly are not going to get there with the immediacy issue. So I think it's important to start with the long-term goals, and then, yes, we need to know what we're doing to get along the line.

All I would say about the question of true mental illness or drug-induced mental illness: there's not a lot of difference to me. You know, we need to be able to provide the services that are necessary to make sure that they have the quality of life that they can have and that they get the medical interventions that they need to have so that they're not a danger to anyone else and they're not a danger to themselves.

With respect to assessment for long-term care that's a very important issue. We have a long-term assessment tool which is supposed to be utilized across the province, and we're rolling out definitions across the province. Hopefully, that type of situation will be a thing of the past. We should be able to do these assessments on a consistent basis across the province. Families would be involved in that assessment in terms of developing the care plan for the

individual patient, but it should be able to be done on a consistent basis and used consistently not only across the province but even within the same region.

The question of whether you have a health care professional on-site as opposed to calling 911. I would hope that when we get into the whole governance issues and the issues of quality of care and assurance and those sorts of issues, one of those things that we would be asking health care boards and service providers is to use appropriate determinations with respect to the best use of resources. Clearly, it's a question of what makes the most sense.

In some cases, depending on the number of people you have and the number of potential for incidents, it would obviously make sense to have a level of health care professional, whether it's an emergency medical responder or an RN or a doctor, depending on the acuity level of the people in care at that particular place. That's not a decision, again, that you can or should make, in my view, on a rule-based process but, rather, empowering people to make the right kinds of decisions for the acuity levels of the people that they're serving and to make those decisions based on the most effective model.

Now, the problem is that sometimes those decisions get skewed by who pays. So that's the piece that we have to really deal with: to get people making the right decisions for the people they are serving regardless of the question of who pays. I mean, obviously, if you call an ambulance, it's somebody else who's taking care of the cost, and that's what skews the decision-making sometimes.

On the IT side it's my understanding – and this has got to be critical – that security of information is extremely important. People have to have the assurance that their personal information is being cared for. But the fact of the matter is that there is a lot of personal information on servers and in the IT area now. So the standards are important. The contracts have to be strong. There has to be clearly defined criteria with respect to security. All of the security contracts, as I understand, are reviewed by the Privacy Commissioner to make sure that we adhere to that and the strict confidentiality rules. I mean, these are not small contracts. They're not going to leak the information across a boundary for a short-term economic interest with the penalties and the recourse that we have. In my view, we've got to get past this fear we have of putting out our information because it's so much more important to be able to have access to the information when it's needed.

A person cannot opt out of the electronic health record, but they can ask that their data be masked so that only certain people have access to it. Now, I'll be corrected if I'm wrong here, but what that means is that if I want to, I could say: well, you can put my data there, but if I show up in emergency and you call up my record, it may have a flag that says that you have to actually call my doctor to get access. Now, whether you want to do that or not I guess would be your own personal decision, but what we need to do is to make sure that people have a sense of the value of sharing the information so that they can have access.

We have situations, and I have personal situations, where you have an episode and you present in one place, and they do tests and they do all sorts of things. They determine things are fine and they stabilize you and then you get out, but you're supposed to go see your doctor another day and the information never arrives. You duplicate all the stuff and you go to emergency for another 11 hours. You go through all that, and when you're 90 years old, that's not a really good thing. So let's get over the fear of who's going to look at our information, and let's get the information we need on the system so we can actually provide the quality of care on a timely basis to the people that need it.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Just a couple of more things. I would really suggest that you look up the number of times that ambulances actually do attend at either assisted living or designated assisted living or whatever. I think they may be enlightening for you.

Just a final thing. Again it's because of this deregulation of long-term care. Is the minister of health thinking of handing over the responsibility of long-term care – and again it would have to be that whole continuing care package – to the minister of seniors? That then becomes this whole big kettle of worms. A lot of the people in continuing care are seniors, but some of them are 42-year-old people with MS. It really is so unclear.

I'll just use one quick example. We've got grandma sitting in the room. She may have had a stroke, so with a little bit of help from the people in her assisted living, they get her up. They get her dressed, they get her down to the dining room, and they put the food in front of her. At this point she's under Housing. She's had a right-sided stroke. She's a right-handed person, and she can't feed herself. Who's going to feed her? That now becomes care. So it's a very, very, very fine line and it gets all blurred and then it tends to go: "Well, that's not my job. That's not my job. That's not my job." Then they end up not being fed. So I'm wondering if there isn't some way of amalgamating that all under the minister of seniors.

Mr. Hancock: Well, that happens to be one of my favourite topics. I have over the years been consistently frustrated by this whole question of: is it housing or is it health? I think, really, we have to actually focus on: is it people? Take a look at the individuals involved and the continuum of care that's needed, right from living independently to being able to live independently in your own home with some type of modest assistance that you might need, or maybe not so modest assistance you might need if you can still live independently in your own home, to the old extended care model where you need such health assistance that you're virtually in hospital. But it's not acute care; it's long-term care. We really need to look at that. Now, I don't care whether that happens in Health or in Seniors. Personally, I think that we should look at the housing component and then add the health component, but that's just a personal belief.

As soon as I trotted that out there, I had a lot of people come back and say: no, it should be the other way around. I don't really care. What we need to do between the minister of seniors and myself and our staffs is sit down and take a look at how we do the continuum of care to make sure that the home care, the lodge care, the seniors' care – I mean, it really doesn't make any sense that people have to move to the care level as opposed to having the care level move to them except in specific circumstances. That's when you get to the really long-term support where you're not really leaving your bed or where the acuity level is so high that the health stuff is really more important to your living than the other issues of quality of life. That's what we need to get to.

You know, the question of whether it's in a health silo or a senior silo is not the important issue. The important issue is: how do we get to the place where we can deliver the right level of service to the right person and give them as much independence and quality of life as they possibly can have, consistent with the ability of the public system to support them?

4:50

The Chair: The hon. member?

Ms Pastoor: Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I was talking about mental illness, and I listened carefully to what the minister said in response to my colleague. I guess what I'm seeing is that there is quite a bit of money that's gone in here, but I cannot determine from what the minister is telling me as to what the money is being used for.

There's money in this innovation fund. There's money that went last year to this children's mental health fund which carries on. There's extra money to the regional health authorities. There's extra money to the Mental Health Board. What's it being used for specifically? You know, we need the specifics of how this is being used, but I also want to know: what is it? Who monitors it, and how do they monitor it? Who enforces what is supposed to be happening, whatever these outcomes are, and how is that enforced?

There's a lot of money here, and there is an accountability factor that needs to be in play. I understand what the minister is saying about long-term goals and short-term implementation. Still, there's a lot of money in this budget, and, specific to mental health, exactly where is it expected to go? What are the details of the program? You might want to give this to me in writing, and that's fine. Where's the money expected to go? You don't just come up with figures off the top of your head. You must have some idea of what this money was going to get spent on, so what was it going to get spent on? How is the monitoring of those programs going to take place, and how is any enforcement or review and adjustment process going to play out?

I also want to go back and pick up on something that you said in response to my colleague from Lethbridge-East around electronic health records. I have to disagree with you. I don't think it's just about: everybody has got to get over this fear. Those fears are real, and there are still problems in the system that have not particularly been addressed, particularly around the accuracy of information. I think that in some cases, what I've seen from studies, the inaccuracy rate can be as high as 40 per cent. Well, that's serious. Yeah, it's high, but that can fall into play, and this is not an easy system to get through when you try and find out what your personal health information is and try and adjust it. Frankly, you usually only try and get at that stuff if there's a problem.

You know, I have no reason to go and check my electronic health records at this point or to ask for any kind of health record. Nothing wrong. I don't see the problem. Why would I ask? Now, you know, if my mom falls, I'm going to want to know what went on there, and that's when I start to try and get the information, and there's a certain amount of reluctance that goes along with that. I understand why, but usually you're only trying to access that information when there's a problem.

Now, I will say that the Health Information Act has a better balance between capturing that information and using it and allowing it to be used and the individual's right to get at it and correct it and also to be notified and to be asked consent. But there are also huge issues about, for example, blanket consent and implied consent that come along with this, and the more we see the interaction between big pharma and marketing, the whole idea that your personal health information would be used for marketing, the more problems it presents for us.

So, you know, I'd like to be able to say: yeah, that's great; I can dismiss these concerns. But I can't dismiss these concerns. I think there still are issues there that we need to be addressing, and again I'm looking for more specifics.

The last thing I want to pick up on from my colleague's comments is around Capital long-term care projects. Now, in my constituency we do have the Polish – I'm sorry; I don't know the name, but it's being done in conjunction with Caritas on a piece of land that's by

the Prince of Wales armoury, in between that and the Polish Hall on about 106th Street and probably 107th or 108th Avenue.

I'm wondering if I can get an update on three facilities. One is: what's happening with the Polish long-term care aging in place facility? How much money is committed? Over what period of time? When are we expecting it to open? What kind of commitment has the government got into it?

Also, the General hospital. I'm being told there are plans afoot there over the next period of time – and, again, what period of time? – to redo that and turn more of it into a long-term care facility. We have some specialized units in that facility. We have the Ming Ai, for example, which is Chinese, and all of the staff there speak either Cantonese or Mandarin. It's decorated in that way. The food that's served is culturally appropriate, et cetera. I'm wondering if any more of those special wings are planned for that facility.

Finally, I've been working with one of the Jewish communities, the local synagogue, about a piece of land they have behind the synagogue on Jasper and 120th or so. They're looking to – I think they've actually purchased an apartment building – renovate it for an aging in place facility for seniors. Is there capital money that we could be accessing for that facility as well? Now, that one at this point is still a twinkle in somebody's eye, but we certainly want to move in that direction, so how can they be accessing funds to assist them with doing this?

I'll let you answer those, that series. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to the last issue we'll get back to you in writing with respect to some of the specifics on the specific facilities. Some of it actually will fall into Seniors. For example, that last project would probably be a seniors' project as opposed to a long-term care facility. Those are some of the issues we were talking about before in terms of how those projects are funded, but I think it's probably better to deal with that in writing.

The Edmonton General continuing care centre. There's a project in place there to replace 94 beds and to provide an additional 26 beds, but I can get more detail to you on that.

With respect to the electronic health record we should be under no illusion that our paper records are better than our electronic records. In fact, the accuracy of the paper records is sometimes worse than the electronic records and not as available.

Ms Blakeman: It's one version. An electronic version is infinite.

Mr. Hancock: No, there's only one version. Any place that you happen to access the system will have a version. It won't necessarily all be compatible. It won't be available. The complete array of information that a health care provider might need to provide proper health care when you arrive in an ambulance will not be there. I don't want to sound cavalier, but an improvement of the quality of data is an important project, but there are five sort of criteria, five factors that need to be matched before our data can be entered into an electronic health record. I don't know if you've read any health records or not, but the electronic version is a lot more legible, so even interpreting it is a lot easier and better in lots of circumstances.

Being able to monitor some of that information so a health care provider being able to look at the information – there are a whole lot of advantages to the electronic health record that far outweigh the potential fear that a person might have about either the accuracy of their data or the loss of their data. That's the piece that we really have to come to terms with. A lot of work is being done. Obviously, security of data is important, but we continue to raise the fear

that we're going to lose the data to somebody, that somebody is going to use it to market the product, that sort of thing. That's not the purpose of collecting the data, and that's not the use it's going to be used for. That's not to say that we shouldn't extract nonidentifiable data to do appropriate research and to help us improve our health outcomes. Again, that's one of the reasons why it is important to have a good electronic health record, so that we can get the right kind of data so we can do improvements. All you have to do is look at what Capital health is doing with respect to diabetes to see the benefit of that.

Mental health funding, the mental health funding that goes to the RHAs; for example, the \$291 million that I was talking about. They use that for their forensic, for acute care beds, for treatment moves to community, outpatient, links with the schools. There are a lot of different areas. That will be set out in their health service plans, and we will be able to monitor it through their health service plans, and obviously we will be able to work with them in terms of their priorities.

5:00

I certainly think – well, I know – that as we go forward with the community treatment orders, we're going to be working with the RHAs with respect to their assertive community treatment programs and other programs that are necessary to enhance the service delivery in the community. So we will be auditing back on those service plans to make sure that they're doing it but also having input into what they're doing with the resources in the community.

We know what money is being allocated to each authority with respect to mental health, and we have the expectation and, in fact, the requirement that it be used in those areas. But we have regional health authorities because each community has some difference in terms of the types of service and the level of service in those areas.

Ms Blakeman: On page 186 of the business plan under strategy 3.2 it talks about:

Support the community-based implementation of the Provincial Mental Health Plan and new patient activity reporting requirements in partnership with the Alberta Mental Health Board, regional health authorities and other stakeholders.

\New patient activity reporting requirements and the community-based implementation of this health plan: could you give us some details on exactly what you're expecting that is, please? Then I'd like to go on to regionalization. I'll let you answer that.

Mr. Hancock: Why don't you go on to regionalization? When I get an answer to that, I'll either add it or I'll give it to you.

Ms Blakeman: On page 190 of the business plan, 6.9, it indicates that the minister is going to assess the efficiency of regional health authority operations. I would welcome that because part of my question is that we've never gone back and said: "Okay. We did these regional health authorities. Do they work? Was this actually a great idea? Did it save us any money? Did it deliver health care services better to more people, more efficiently? Did it result in better health care for people?" We've never gone back and checked that, and that's now in place for a good 10 years. I'm hoping that it is what I think it is: that the regional health authorities will be reviewed to see whether they have been more efficient and effective in improving health care delivery than what we had before. When can we expect a report out of that? What's the timeline that's involved with this? What are the resources that are being allocated to this?

Mr. Hancock: That is a work in progress, Mr. Chairman. First of all, my mandate letter specifies that we need to make effective and

efficient use of the health care resources. Obviously, when you've got a \$12 billion budget and growing, people are concerned about at what point it becomes unsustainable, if it hasn't already. As I said to the health board chairs at an early meeting, if we expect to be able to go back to the public to request more resources – and we will because we have growing populations; we have aging populations; we've got new technologies; we've got new drugs – to have the moral authority to ask for more, we have to go back and say that we are using the resources we have in the most effective and efficient manner.

We're engaged in a process right from the very top. First of all, board governance. Do we have the right skills and abilities on our boards? Do we have the talents? And this meets some of the objectives that the Auditor General has been raising relative to boards. As you know, there's a review of governance of boards, agencies, and commissions. Well, we're doing our own parallel one. We'll obviously dovetail with what they're doing, but I started right in January talking to boards about the need for us to do board assessments, the need for us to evaluate our skills and abilities and know whether we have the right mix of talent necessary to run operations of that magnitude.

So we're looking at board governance, but we're also looking at the accountability frameworks around it. As you know, there's a roll-up of health authority financial statements into the provincial financial statement. Well, in order to do that, you have to make sure that you're accounting on a consistent basis. You need to be auditable on a consistent basis. The expectation that the Auditor General will be the auditor for health authorities is there, and of course most – I think seven of the nine – have the Auditor General as their auditor.

You know, looking at best practices, that is a process. I've met with them a couple of times. For example, the minister will be meeting with the board chairs on a consistent basis, quarterly, to provide a governance structure for the system to make sure that the RHAs operate within a system. Competition is a wonderful thing, but collaboration, particularly where resources can be shared, is also a wonderful thing. So where we're doing health status issues or chronic care management or those areas, we need to be working more collaboratively.

This is an ongoing process but a very, very, high priority in terms of how we do. There have been some efficiency assessments that have been done in the health regions, and we're in the middle of that process. We're working with the health authorities as part of that governance model to talk about how they do best practices with respect to procurement and building a common procurement model. Of course, even the pharmaceutical strategy will come into that with respect to how we make best use of the resources on that side.

Again, I hate to keep saying it, but it's not so simple as saying, "We're going to do it, and then we're going to report on it, and it'll be done" because there are so many aspects to it. But the bottom line is that the overarching governance structure, both provincially and with respect to health authorities, is being examined and reinvented in consultation with the Auditor General and what his expectations are with respect to how we ought to be able to report and be accountable and what skill mixes we need for our boards, making sure that we're doing that, making sure that we have succession plans and renewal processes in place, and then making sure we have processes in place in terms of how we can work together to make the most effective use of the resources in terms of procurement, in terms of drugs particularly. That's sort of the overarching structure.

I'd be happy to give you periodic updates as we go along with it, but I don't have an answer for you to specifically say: here's the

specific task that's being done, and here's the report you'll get, and it'll be done by June. Life doesn't work that way for me.

The Mental Health Board has a budget of \$58 million now. They're, of course, the policy framework, so best practices, research, forensic program, those sorts of areas. Each of the health authorities, as I mentioned earlier, have specific budgets which they deal with in their service plans, and we can certainly give you more detailed information on that if you request it.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, please. I'll officially request that.

One of my other issues – and this has been in the media quite a bit; it's around regionalization – is the fact that so much got devolved off to those regions, and we end up with what I've called a checkerboarding. The minister himself has referred to, you know, different capacities and different regional health authorities.

I think the sterilization unit issue that was in St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville really for me brought to the fore the issue of a lack of monitoring and enforcement that comes centrally. It comes out of the Department of Health and Wellness. We did have that inspection branch in place, and it was dismantled. I don't see that it really appears in full force in the regional health authority. Is the minister planning a review of that particular episode? Would the minister commit to an independent review? Will he consider reinstituting a centralized monitoring and enforcement module or branch or section out of the central ministry? I think that continues to be a huge issue. There will be more episodes that come up for the minister in the future, and they're going to relate directly to a lack of an effective monitoring and enforcement mechanism province-wide. It has got to come centrally. You can't do this piecemeal. It just doesn't work.

Comments?

Mr. Hancock: Well, for me, form follows function, whether it's a piece in the provincial health department or how you actually do it is something that you develop after you determine what needs to be done. I think we'll have some learning from the St. Joe's situation. We've asked each of the health authorities to do a review of their infectious disease control, but I've made it very clear that I consider assurance to be one of the most important roles of government. That's a provincial government role, and we've got to work with our health authorities to make sure that they operate within a provincial framework and provincial standards.

5:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We will continue on with a few more questions. Let's talk about function because one of the problems in Calgary, of course, is the difficulty with which the system functions given that it's under an almost constant – well, they used to call them code burgundies, but they changed the name to status burgundies. There's a bit of, I think, irony in that because it implies that we've gone from an acute problem to a chronic problem now. We've changed it from a code designation to a status designation.

The minister may or may not know that I had the opportunity, for lack of a better word, to go into the Rockyview hospital in February and have my gall bladder out. For reasons that really are nobody's business but my own, they had to do it the old-fashioned way. Laparoscopic wouldn't work, as it doesn't in about, I think, 5 per cent of cases, that sort of thing, when you're having your gall bladder out. So that means that if you see me going like this, my scar is itching. It meant a stay in the hospital of about just a little under 48 hours, I think. In the entire time that I was there – it

actually was a little more than 48 hours because it was over a three-day period – the status burgundy at the Rockyview started, you know, at 7 or 7:30 in the morning, and it typically went until 5 or 5:30 in the afternoon. So it has become the status quo, really.

Ms Blakeman: It's normal.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, it's normal, and it shouldn't be normal. You know, the abnormal has become normal.

The system is looking at a 97 per cent or higher bed occupancy rate, and it's often above 100 per cent. Not to get back into the numbers game because I know the minister doesn't really like to go there and get that specific, but certainly there's a huge capacity and functioning issue which the Calgary health region is aggressively trying to address, some of it through capital construction, but some of it through some fairly innovative, imaginative programming. I wonder if the minister can tell us a little bit about projects that are ongoing to try and reduce the backup and the wait times in emergency facilities. Again, I'm asking specifically about the Calgary health region, but I think there's some application province-wide wherever you have, you know, long wait times and the lineups getting into emerg. So if the minister would, please.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One of the urban myths of health, of course, is this tyranny: the anecdote. Everybody is an expert in health care because they've all been there or a friend has been there or somebody else has been there. Health care and education seem to be the two places that everybody is an expert at, and everybody has got an easy fix. The reality is, of course, that nobody has got that expertise and there is no easy fix. There's usually an explanation about any given incident, but you have to actually know the real details of the incident.

No, I don't want to know more about that. I'm glad you're fixed. I'm glad you're back. But the procedure you just talked about is a good example of the change because, you know, it wasn't ten years ago that you would have had to stay for probably five days in hospital for that kind of procedure, and now you're 48 hours.

We're doing a lot more things. I used to serve on the University of Alberta hospital board, and the difference between then and now in terms of the quantity of services that are being provided is exponential. People don't really appreciate how good a system we have. They didn't used to do hip surgery on anybody 70 years of age or older, and now they're doing hip surgery on 90-year-olds. We're doing some phenomenal things. We've got to keep that in sight when we talk about all the pressures on the system. There's a lot more happening, but that doesn't mean we don't need to deal with the system problems as well.

Emergencies have been identified as one of the problem areas. People don't like to wait in emergency for a long time. We need to be doing a number of things. Calgary has actually been innovative in some of those areas. Some of the people who present at emergency, for example, who might not need the full services of the emergency department can be seen separately now and streamed off. I've been promoting a concept that the emergency doctors themselves asked for, that Dr. Raj Sherman, who is the head of the emergency doctors, was talking to us last year about. Finally, I think it took a meeting of myself with each of the health authorities, in Calgary and in Capital, to say: you've got to talk to this guy and see if we can't implement some of that. The full-capacity protocol shouldn't be brought in as a long-term solution but certainly can help move people through emergency.

One of the problems is that you get people coming into emer-

gency, and then they're determined that they need to be admitted to the hospital, but they haven't got a place to go. The focus of emergency is on the front door; it's not on the hallway, where the people are waiting. So the ability to move them into the hospital and into the care areas and free up emergency so that the doctors there can actually see the patients who are waiting: those are the sorts of initiatives that need to be taken.

The longer term, obviously, has to do with building more bed capacity, and that's in construction, as you acknowledge, at each of the facilities in Calgary now with more facilities coming on stream and the south Calgary hospital moving past the planning stage and into the development stage. So work is being done on the long-term capacity issues, some of it more immediate than others, work is being done on clinics out in the community so that the people who don't need to be in emergency aren't there, and work is being done in terms of the people who present in emergency moving through that and into the things. Calgary, as I understand it, is moving very quickly and will be announcing some changes to the ER strategy imminently to deal with their ER capacity.

Lots is being done. There are more people presenting. There are more services being provided. There's good care happening. There's more work to be done.

Mr. Taylor: I want to thank the minister for that answer because that does get to one of the issues that I did want to get on the table as far as our discussion and debate here was concerned, that health regions are in fact being very innovative and very imaginative and very creative around dealing with the capacity issues that they have. They need ongoing support, and certainly at \$12 billion we're seeing a significant amount of support across the system. They need ongoing support from the provincial Department of Health and Wellness, and they need a commitment from the province to get them beyond this constant, you know, running to stay in place situation that they're in.

I want to ask the minister whether the department has a cancer plan for Calgary. When can Calgarians expect an announcement about expanding cancer facilities, cancer services? You know, the Capital health region benefits by having in-patient cancer care. I know that the minister is sensitive to my bringing up comparisons between Calgary and Edmonton. I suspect that he's probably a dyed-in-the-wool Oilers fan, but I'll forgive him for that.

This is necessary to do because Capital health does have in-patient cancer care provided and funded by the Cancer Board at the Cross Cancer Institute. There is not a similar facility or by any means an identical facility in Calgary. There's a lack of appropriate infrastructure within the CHR, which results in Calgarians not being adequately served.

Cancer is cancer whether you get it in Edmonton or Calgary or anywhere else in the province, although you may very well be referred to Edmonton or Calgary for treatment for that. I think that there needs to be an equitable, egalitarian approach to treatment. I would hate to think that my prognosis was worse if I came down with cancer simply because I'm a Calgarian than it would have been if I came down with cancer in the greater Edmonton area.

Mr. Hancock: Let me be very clear off the top. There's no evidence that I'm aware of that the care in Calgary is less effective than the care in Edmonton or any other part of the province. If the hon. member has any evidence of that, I'd like to see it because, you know, people do get good care and equitable care in this province.

Now, with respect to the cancer plan itself I met recently with the Cancer Board and the Calgary health authority together, representatives of those two, to talk specifically about the need for a service delivery plan in Calgary and to look specifically at what type of

infrastructure is needed around it. Obviously, the Cancer Board has been advocating for a facility located on the west campus of the University of Calgary so that they can be collocated with the university for the purposes of good research and research outcomes. As the member will know, there's been an announcement of some colorectal screening programs at the University of Calgary which could be part of that, and of course the Calgary health authority is interested in their part of the cancer service delivery program.

5:20

What I've asked them to do is to spend the next 60 days to work together to talk about what the best delivery model is and challenge the Cancer Board to look at how future delivery should be modulated. You know, what are we going to be doing out closer to home for people so that they don't have to come to Edmonton and Calgary for treatment?

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Chairman, I'm having a hard time hearing the minister with the background conversation that's going on.

The Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has the floor, and it's difficult to listen with the background noise. Could we keep the conversations down?

Hon. minister, please proceed.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. So there's radiation delivery, there is chemotherapy delivery, there's surgery: all component parts in the delivery mechanism. One thing that everybody agrees on is that the Tom Baker centre is not sufficient. The question is: what's the next best model, and should it be at the west campus or should it be part of the south Calgary health facility? That I've asked the two to come together on and talk in terms of some future delivery plan. Obviously, the capital request for a large facility in Calgary that would collocate both the research and service delivery for the Cancer Board is very high on the priority list. But before we move it up to the funding position, we need to have that understanding that they've got their heads together, and they've got the service delivery plan which will be the best service delivery plan going forward for Calgarians and others in the Calgary region and, for that matter, southern Alberta.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Is there any similar plan for mental health services in Calgary? Because, again, the same sort of discrepancy exists with facilities here in Edmonton that don't exist in Calgary.

Mr. Hancock: The new funding model that was put in place with respect to mental health has put more resources into Calgary with respect to mental health than previously were there. Obviously, there's a skewing of the system a little bit by the historical fact that Alberta Hospital Edmonton is in the Capital region and the facility in Ponoka is in, I believe, the David Thompson region. There was a move a couple of years ago to add a forensic facility in Calgary at the old Bow River Correctional Centre.

Mental health funding is now being distributed on a population base. Of course, that's slightly different than the Cancer Board situation because the Mental Health Board is now just into the policy framework and research, and the whole service delivery is in the health region. Calgary health region is getting a good share of the mental health package that was there because they do have more to build in terms of the secure forensic facility and mental health beds.

Mr. Taylor: Really only one other area that I want to explore, and I'll even apologize for doing this because again I'm going to make a comparison between Calgary and the Capital region.

An Hon. Member: Don't apologize.

Mr. Taylor: Well, I'm apologizing, hon. member, because I know that the minister doesn't like it when I go there. I mean, there's a fundamental rivalry at work here and all that, but there's a funding inequity. You know, when you boil it down on a per capita basis, Calgary health's funding is about \$380 less per capita than Capital health's funding. Over time, over the total population that can make a difference. I know that there has been a classic argument that the population that Capital health serves is older and sicker and socioeconomically not as well off. Those factors certainly do make a difference, but the population of the city of Calgary and the Calgary health region is growing at a rapid rate, as you know.

When you break down key operating statistics from '05-06, Calgary health region is required to provide more home care hours of service, provide more MRIs, and provide more CT scans. It does a little less than Capital health on hospital admissions and discharges. On emergency department visits there's quite a significant difference there in that Capital health sees quite a few more emergent patients than Calgary health does. In-patient beds, including mental health, again, there was a 400-bed advantage in '05-06, if you will – and we're obviously in the process of addressing this in Calgary – in terms of available beds in the Capital health region, although Capital health is just about as capable of filling up all its beds as Calgary health is.

There is an inequity there. I think it does need to be addressed. I think that on a population basis an individual Calgarian should be funded to the same level for their health care as an individual Edmontonian is. I would just like to hear the minister talk to us about what he's going to do about that, defend the status quo if he can, you know, explain to us how we're going to get to where we need to go in the city and health region of Calgary.

Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Chairman, that's just about like saying that Calgary and Edmonton had equal opportunities last year and this year to get into the playoffs, and the Oilers, of course, made the most of that and went all the way and only lost in the last game, and the Flames just bowed out early. That's about as relevant a comparison as the comparison you just did on the funding side.

Calgarians per capita are funded on the same basis as Edmontonians per capita. There's a whole book and lots of people – lots of people – that calculate the numbers. There are 136 demographic groups, and they do it based on actuals. They take the numbers of the costs that are involved. If you're a child of a certain age, a male or a female, aged population: all of those are important to building the funding model. A child in Calgary gets funded at the same level as a child in Edmonton. An old person in Calgary gets funded at the same level as an old person in Edmonton. A person on social assistance in Calgary gets funded at the same level as a person on social assistance in Edmonton. So if you take the per capita funding model, they're funded equally per capita. They just have different demographics, and that's just a reality of life.

Now, that's not the whole story, of course. If you take a look at the model, Calgary gets \$1.76 million on the population funding model and Capital gets \$1.65 million on the per capita model, on the population formula. But then take a look at the import/export. Calgary has \$56,373,400 of import and Capital region has

\$192,215,175 of import because the Capital health region serves the whole north, and the Calgary health region doesn't have that same obligation.

You know, there are a whole lot of things that go into these formulas in terms of the population funding model. I can assure you that the population is funded on the same basis regardless of where you are. There are adjustment factors, of course, the adjustment of the targeted funding, the mental health funding. In fact, Calgary gets \$9.2 million in targeted funding, whereas the Capital region only gets \$7.9 million in targeted funding. That's the stuff that you're talking about in terms of the province-wide service deliveries and those sorts of issues.

You can go and count a couple of things and say that it's not happening. The fact of the matter is that funding formulas right across the continent are complex, and they require a high level of staff to figure them out, but there is a global funding model. There is a mechanism for doing it on a fair and equitable basis so that Albertans have access to the same quality care on a timely basis without regard to ability to pay, that we hold so dear. Calgary is not being left out, shortchanged, or in any way diminished because somebody has a preference for Edmonton versus Calgary. It's not about parochialism. It's about how we take the dollars that we have, make sure they're allocated on a fair basis to the people of the province and to the RHAs which provide the service delivery model.

If you want to, have a look at the funding model and then come back. I've offered to share it with some of my colleagues who've raised these questions, and I'd be happy to have you, you know, go crazy, have a look at it. It's done fairly.

5:30

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. In the last 10 minutes I'm just going to barrel through. I have a number of issues that we didn't get to, so I'm going to put them on the record and ask the minister to respond in writing.

I'm going to start with ambulance services. Now, a little historical vignette that I'm sure that the minister is familiar with, but in March 2005, one month before the Alberta municipalities were to hand over responsibility for ambulance service to the health regions, the ministry reversed its decision and put the plans to transfer services on hold indefinitely. So confusion, frustration, uncertainty, instability for the municipalities, and many municipalities had to consider plans to either increase taxes or cut services to adjust to this. The ministry is re-evaluating whether to proceed with the transfer when the pilot projects are complete in Palliser and Peace Country health regions. My questions to the minister are: when will the decision be made? When will the municipalities be informed so they know when they can move forward with a regional planning tool? When will the rest of us know?

As well on ambulances, I note that on page 202 of the estimates line 3.0.5 shows that the funding for municipal ambulance services remains exactly the same as it has for the previous three years. Can the minister explain why the decision was made not to increase funding to ambulances in any way, shape, or form? I would argue that this has not been a satisfactory circumstance, and I expected to see some adjustment in funding. So why no adjustment in funding at all? Does that mean nothing is going to happen? What's the deal here?

I would also like to know what the status is of the pilot projects in Palliser and Peace Country. What stakeholders have been consulted? Are the municipalities that are involved here involved in the

decision-making process? You know, have you received feedback, positive or negative, from the municipalities about the management of the pilot projects? And, of course, the obvious question of: when will we hear?

I note that the Health Sciences Association of Alberta is expressing a great deal of frustration that the municipal ambulance program has been frozen at \$55 million. I think this is going to result in recruitment and retention problems for us in that area as well.

I'm going to move on to pharmaceuticals. Page 26 of the government of Alberta strategic business plan and also page 181 of the Health and Wellness business plan show that implementing a new pharmaceutical strategy is a priority over the next three years. My question is: is the government co-ordinating with the federal government? Is the government co-ordinating with other provinces? Is the government co-ordinating with the medical profession to test and evaluate new drugs? Please give me the details on how this is working. I mean, clearly you're anticipating something. What is it you're anticipating?

The Alberta Liberals have long talked about a national purchasing program for pharmaceuticals. Is the ministry co-operating with the federal government and other provinces to establish a national purchasing program for bulk buying of drugs and more consistent coverage across the provinces?

I'd also like information about whether there was, in fact, a deal that will be implemented or has been implemented between all the provinces that nobody would implement payment of a new drug until everybody agreed to do it so that they could quit being played off against one another, which happens fairly frequently. I know that there was a deal that was being talked about there. Did that deal happen? If so, when is it being implemented?

A couple of specific questions about drugs. Where is the province on the HPV vaccine? A controversial subject. I certainly have some strong views on this, but I don't have time to express them. I'm wondering what kind of a program the government is anticipating. Are you going to go there or not? I'll get that from you in writing as well.

Avastin is another drug that was ineligible for coverage, and we've heard from a number of people that this was a real financial burden. Is that going to receive coverage?

Just moving on to another topic: neuropathic pain. I've had some correspondence with people who suffer from this, and they're wondering what can be done to help people like them. They certainly believe that it impacts their quality of life, and they can't get coverage for treatments of that particular issue, painful symptoms, et cetera. What's being done around that?

Health care premiums. The Alberta Liberals have been on the record for many, many years saying that eliminating health care premiums would be a tax benefit that benefits every single person in Alberta. It certainly benefits the working poor. It benefits small businesses because they wouldn't have to cover that additional cost of paying a share of the health care premium. I think it would benefit large-sector public employers, colleges, universities, provincial agencies that are also paying a portion of the health care premium. It did not disappear in this budget. I'm hoping to see some kind of announcement from the minister, or let's hear what his policy decision is on this. Is he in favour of the health care premiums, is he going to keep them in place, or is he looking for a way to move away from that?

I would argue that, you know, this is not a dedicated source of funding for health care. It goes straight into general revenue, so let's not pretend that this is directly connected to provision of health care services in the province. It's not. The money goes into general revenue. It's really a tax by any name. I think that if we cut those

premiums, you could save all the money that it costs for you to administer the program and chase it down.

I just don't think Albertans should be paying premiums. Frankly, if the governments in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and Quebec and the Northwest Territories and other places can do without health care premiums, I think Alberta can too. It's time to go there. Time to go there, I encourage the minister.

As always I will raise the issue of midwifery. Numerous studies support the cost-effectiveness of midwifery services. It relieves pressure on hospital staff and facilities. I've been trying to get the province to cover midwifery services under health care since 1989 or '90 now. I'm not giving up. I'm going to raise it every year, and I'm going to stay elected until I get it. So, you know, there's an incentive for you, a big incentive for you. Come on, you can do it.

A full course of midwifery care costs between \$2,500 and \$3,000, and a normal delivery in a hospital is tagging in at about \$4,100 now. It makes sense. It fits into the idea of full scope of practice. It's the right thing to do. It's a team approach. Let's get on it.

There have been all kinds of squeamish little hesitations in the past, and I'm just losing my patience for this. There should be a funding model in which consumer costs for midwifery care are covered under the Alberta health care insurance plan. I'd like to know what the reasons are for not covering it if you're going to insist on going there. It's been recommended by the Health Disciplines Board. It was recommended by the Advisory Council on Women's Issues when I was the executive director there. We are losing our midwives to other provinces for training and to practise. They really need to work with the department of advanced ed for a bachelor of midwifery program at the University of Alberta. When will the ministry look at doing that? How does midwifery fit in, or would it be included in the health workforce strategy that the minister has talked about?

I want to talk again about tobacco reduction. I would like to ask the minister and get him on the record: when will he introduce legislation to ban power walls? That's particularly important to younger Albertans. They've really gotten onto that. They understand it. It's their issue. It's a way to connect with them, and certainly it's been a way that I've connected with some of the students in my constituency. I've had them here doing rallies. We've had them introduced in the House. We've talked about their work on the BLAST teams during the cancer legacy act debates.

We need to do this. We need a province-wide ban on smoking in public places, and we need to ban power walls. The minister has just got to take leadership and go there. I suspect that the minister is already there, and for whatever reason some of his colleagues are not coming along. You guys have got to get on this one. You just look bad. You look really bad, and there's no good reason for you not to be doing this. All the facts are in favour of this. So ban power walls. Ban smoking in all public places, a province-wide smoking ban in public places.

Thank you very much.

5:40

The Chair: Does the hon. minister wish to respond?

Mr. Hancock: Well, I'd be happy to respond on some of those. I can tell the hon. member that I, in fact, have a tobacco-reduction strategy which is working its way through the process. We'll see what we see as a result of the process. I certainly have made no bones about the fact that I think that a minister whose job it is to advocate wellness has got to deal with the elephant in the room, so I'm certainly working on that process.

I hadn't anticipated an awful lot of time because the member had

indicated that these were going to be quick-fire, and we'd write them down, so give me a topic.

Ms Blakeman: Midwifery.

Mr. Hancock: Midwifery. Midwifery is part of the workforce strategy. We need to deal with midwifery in the process, but as the hon. member will know and understand, it's not simply about a matter of public funding. It's about where they fit into the system and how they're accepted by the other members of the health care team, how we make it part of the continuum and deal with the issues that people have with respect to when it's a normal birth and when it requires something extra. That's part of the whole change in the workforce strategy, but midwifery is clearly a part of that workforce change as we go forward. It's got to be, just as physicians' assistants and nurse respirologists and all of those who can be helpful and use their talent in an appropriate way within the system.

Do we have more time? Give me another topic.

Ms Blakeman: Neuropathic pain.

Mr. Hancock: Neuropathic pain. Come on. An easier one than that.

Ms Blakeman: Avastin.

Mr. Hancock: Avastin is a very interesting question. One of the things we need to deal with with respect to drugs is the difference between faint hope or no hope and real hope. I moved very quickly to ask the Cancer Board to work with me on getting Oxaliplatin, for example, covered. We've done that because Oxaliplatin actually adds value in the cancer treatment process. But Avastin is a drug which, I'm given to understand, doesn't add very much value to the system. In fact, there are better treatments and there are better processes.

We've got to really come to grips with this and be honest with patients about what is real hope and what is false hope and be prepared to stand up on those. It's not a matter of funding every drug that comes along; it's a matter of looking at what the drug protocols are that actually make a real difference to somebody and funding those appropriately so the people have access to the drugs that they need that provide real hope.

I would love to get into that discussion about Avastin because we're getting cards and letters from all sorts of people. But when you talk to the people at the Cancer Board, they can give you a very clear and quick synopsis about what the difference is between what we did with Oxaliplatin and what we're not doing with Avastin.

Ms Blakeman: My colleague wants to know about Gardasil.

Mr. Hancock: About which?

Ms Blakeman: HPV.

Mr. Hancock: The federal government came out with an HPV strategy. I think they put \$300 million into it over three years, so our share, presumably, would be about \$30 million over three years. That probably won't pay for all of the vaccine, but we're clearly in a process of defining what the appropriate vaccination model should be, what cohort of people should be vaccinated, so we're working on that strategy now.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, but pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(a) the Committee

of Supply shall now rise and report progress. I would ask the minister to have his staff vacate the Assembly.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the Department of Health and Wellness relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 2
Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007**

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. As I indicated when the bill was introduced, the Conflicts of Interest Act governs all of the members of the Legislative Assembly. It sets out rules that MLAs must follow to avoid conflicts of interest between their private affairs and the performance of their public duties. There are rules about taking part in Assembly debates, accepting gifts, contracting with the government, and taking outside employment. There are also rules that set out what an MLA must disclose and report to the office of the Ethics Commissioner.

An all-party committee reviewed the Conflicts of Interest Act after seeking and receiving public input, and it came up with a number of recommendations to make the legislation better. Bill 2 reflects the committee's recommendations and is another example of the Premier's commitment to govern with integrity and transparency.

Mr. Speaker, there are several key amendments that I would like to address in more detail. First, the amendments relating to former ministers. The Conflicts of Interest Act right now limits what a minister can do once he or she leaves office. Currently the limits last for six months from the day the minister leaves office, and the amendments proposed in this bill lengthen that cooling-off period to one year. A cooling-off period helps to avoid the perception that a minister has used his or her final days in office to obtain the favour of future or would-be employers. Postemployment restrictions, including noncompetition clauses or confidentiality clauses, are common for senior management in the private sector. Now, the appropriate length of a cooling-off period for former ministers is a question of judgment.

Rev. Abbott: Did you move it for second reading?

Dr. Brown: Can I do that at the end?

Mr. Stevens: Yes, you may, as long as you do it.

Dr. Brown: I will.

The right of a former minister to obtain gainful employment after leaving elected office and the desirability of encouraging interchange between the public and the private sector and the need to encourage qualified and successful men and women to public service: all of these mitigate for shorter cooling-off periods. On the other hand, the reality or perception that former ministers or policy officials may use inside information or close contacts to improperly benefit themselves or their employers or clients mitigates for longer postemployment restrictions. Extending the cooling-off period to one year strikes an appropriate balance. It corresponds to a full budgetary cycle, so there is a decline in the usefulness of information after that period. It will help make sure that former ministers aren't seen as having an unfair advantage over others in influencing government decision-making.

5:50

It's worth noting that one of the all-party committee's key recommendations, the establishment of the Lobbyists Act, is already proceeding through the House as a bill. The Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act also addresses this issue of lobbying as it relates to the activities of former ministers. The government recognizes that the influence held by a former minister may extend beyond the scope of his or her former department. To address this, Bill 2 prohibits a former minister from lobbying any government department or agency on behalf of a third party in relation to a government contract. Former ministers will not be able to make representations for another person with respect to a contract or benefit from any part of the government or public agency. The bill makes this restriction on lobbying for third parties broadly applicable. It does not justify or apply to those departments or agencies that the former minister was directly involved with.

The bill also calls for maximum penalties for breaches of the cooling-off rules to be raised from \$20,000 to \$50,000. In addition to expanding the restrictions for former ministers, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act introduces cooling-off periods for former political staff as well. Bill 2 proposes a six-month cooling-off period for the Premier's chief of staff, deputy chief of staff, and the head of the Premier's southern Alberta office as well as all executive assistants to ministers. Cooling-off rules for these officials will be similar to those governing former ministers.

Further, the bill amends the Public Service Act to include a six-month cooling-off period for deputy ministers. Specific restrictions for former deputy ministers will be set out in regulations under the Public Service Act. It's very important to know that the bill leaves the door open for government to impose cooling-off periods on other public officials if it is appropriate to do so. Of all of the changes proposed in this act, these new cooling-off provisions were the most difficult and sensitive to deal with. I think that all members can appreciate, as the committee did, that a fine balance is certainly required here. Certain senior public officials gain considerable knowledge and make important contacts during their tenure with the government. Imposing a cooling-off period on those individuals will help ensure that they do not have and are not perceived to have special access to provincial decision-makers. While it is important to have cooling-off periods for certain public officials, we didn't want to make the time period so onerous that it would have a negative effect on the government's ability to attract quality people to the public service. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 2 strikes that balance.

The bill also tightens up the rules regarding what an MLA may and may not do. It prohibits an MLA from using confidential government information for the purpose of improperly furthering the private interest of any other person. It also ensures that no MLA can

use his or her position to improperly further the interests of any person, whether that person is the MLA's husband, wife, brother, child, best friend, or neighbour. I want to be clear on this point. These changes will not prevent MLAs from conducting their normal duties, which are to help their constituents and those beyond their constituency boundaries and to promote the public interest. The new rules simply prevent the MLA from using the powers of his office to benefit someone else inappropriately.

The Conflicts of Interest Act strictly limits what gifts an MLA may accept. The general rule is that an MLA cannot accept gifts that are connected with the performance of his or her public duty. The exception to this rule is that an MLA may accept gifts associated with social protocol; for example, accepting a token of appreciation for speaking at an event or a conference or a symposium. The limit for these kinds of gifts will be raised to \$400 to reflect modern realities and to bring it in line with the limits in place in other Canadian jurisdictions. It's worth noting that the limit hasn't been raised in more than 15 years.

The bill also clarifies that an MLA may accept nonmonetary items such as a ticket to a charitable or political function. This change recognizes that it is part of each MLA's public duty to attend local political and charitable events.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this bill clarifies that MLAs are prohibited from accepting flights on private aircraft unless they're performing their duties as MLAs. There may be times when such flights are necessary. For example, if there's an emergency situation, there may be an urgent need to return to the province, or there may be a need to conduct an air tour of a disaster area. MLAs must inform the Ethics Commissioner within a week of taking such a flight and the reason they did so. The Ethics Commissioner will also include information about these flights in his public disclosure statement.

Mr. Speaker, in that vein there are some updates in the Conflicts

of Interest Amendment Act, 2007, regarding public disclosure statements to the Ethics Commissioner. It requires MLAs to disclose if they're involved in personal litigation or if they are subject to maintenance enforcement orders. Disclosure of this information will help ensure that the Ethics Commissioner is fully informed of liabilities and potential liabilities of the MLA which might create a conflict of interest.

The act will be updated to allow someone who suffers a financial loss as a direct result of an MLA's breach of the act to seek compensation from the MLA personally. Any time the Ethics Commissioner concludes that there has been a violation of the act, the report outlining the breach must be debated in the Legislative Assembly. We want to ensure that the report is actually dealt with by the House and that there is free and open discussion of the report and the facts that led up to it. This ensures that the government is transparent in its decision-making processes.

Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude by saying that these amendments will improve the conflicts of interest legislation. They will ensure that Alberta's elected representatives and other senior staff continue to demonstrate openness and accountability in their dealings.

At this time I would move second reading of Bill 2, and I would make a motion to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, May 3, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome a group of Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation fellows who are sitting in your gallery. They are participants in a nine-month international fellowship program based in Ottawa and are visiting us today as part of a tour of western Canada. Sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency, the fellowship program is a collaboration between the office of the Auditor General of Canada, the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, and the Auditor General of Quebec. The program is designed to expand knowledge and understanding of public sector accounting and auditing as practised in Canada.

They are – and I'd ask them to rise as I introduce them – Mrs. Laurentine Ngwu, of Cameroon; Mr. Sikoro Keita, of Mali; Mr. George Haule, of Tanzania – [Remarks in Swahili] That's Swahili: "welcome in Alberta" – Ms Sirikanchana Karikanchana, of Thailand. They are accompanied today by their hosts, Ms Caroline Jorgensen, manager for international business at the CCAF in Ottawa, and Ms Lori Trudgeon, communications co-ordinator with the office of the Auditor General of Alberta. They're all standing now, and I'd request the hon. members of this Assembly to accord them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all of the hon. members in this Assembly the most important person in my life, my supporter and partner for nearly 24 years. I'm sure that the nicest thing that can be said about me is that I'm married to her. I'd ask my wife, Debbie, to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, today I have two schools, students and teachers and parent helpers, to introduce to you. The first one, of course, is from Gift Lake, Alberta. It's a small community about 350 kilometres north of here. We've got 22 students, and they're all sitting in the public gallery. Their teacher, Mrs. Audrey Anderson, is with them but also Ms Joyce Laderoute, Mrs. Doreen Laderoute, and Mr. Howard Shaw. These are grade 5 students. I'd ask that they stand to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

I'm not exactly sure whether or not my other group is in here, but I'd like to introduce them and maybe do the honour again if they're not in here. They're grade 4 students from Peerless Lake school, and that's a long way away from here. They were fantastic students when I met with them earlier. They've been here a few days, and they're trying to make sure that they know how this system works. It is very rare that Peerless Lake students come, Mr. Speaker, from

that far away, and I'd like to ask the members of this Legislature to please welcome them with opening arms and a very warm welcome. Please stand.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Lougheed 30 students of the grade 9 band class at the Glenmore Christian Academy in southwest Calgary. I must say that I visited the school and a fine one it is. These grade 9 band students are made up of a group of kids who've played instruments for some four years now, and a number of them play in the worship band, which is a group of musicians who sing and perform at school chapels. They are accompanied today by their band director, Dan Bartholomew-Poyser, and also Erin Emro and parent Lindsay Forbes. I would ask them to rise and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek your indulgence and permission to make my introduction in a foreign language today, the Arabic language.

The Speaker: That will be afforded to the hon. member. The hon. member consulted with my office, and all members should have on their desk a copy of the translation of the introduction, so please proceed.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I have provided a translation to all hon. members of the Legislature. [Remarks in Arabic]

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two guests from Lebanon, Mr. Joseph Alhachen, a poet and an author – he has spent 60 years of his life promoting poetry and culture – and Mr. Adel Khadaj, who has spent more than 35 years in the same business. Accompanying them, Mr. Ziad Abultaif from Edmonton. They are all seated in the public gallery, and I ask them to rise and receive the truly warm welcome of the Assembly. [As submitted]

Mr. Speaker, my guests are seated in the public gallery. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Edric Bogosoff and Maryann Nery. Edric and Maryann are Palace Casino workers entering the 237th day on the picket line. It's unacceptable that these dedicated workers have been forced on strike, due in part to this government's failure to protect Alberta workers with fair and decent labour legislation. Edric has been at the Palace Casino since late 2002 and works as a dealer. Maryann has worked at the Palace Casino for the past four years in many different positions. They're joined today by UFCW local 401 representative Don Crisall. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to rise and to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a fine group of students and their teachers that are here from Glenwood,

Alberta, over 500 kilometres away. They rose early to arrive here. I'd like to introduce Mr. Kelly Thomas, the principal of the school, his wife, Kathy, and teacher Ken Selk. They very much want their students to be part and to see what goes on this House, so I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, you have an introduction?

Mr. Backs: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased and honoured to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly 18 members that have come here from the Unity Centre in northeast Edmonton. The Unity Centre is a great resource for many individuals in northeast Edmonton and provides all sorts of things, from clothes, transport, furniture in a used sense, and all the rest of it. I'd ask them to all rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Liberation of Holland

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saturday, May 5, is the 62nd anniversary of National Liberation Day in Holland. That is the day that hostilities finally ended after nearly five years of occupation by enemy forces during World War II. Southern Holland was liberated in the fall of 1944, but the thrust by the Allied troops stalled in September in Arnhem.

Throughout the winter battles were fought in unbelievable conditions in southern Holland. Canadian troops helped to clear Dutch approaches to the Belgian port of Antwerp in late 1944. By mid-March of 1945 more Canadian troops arrived from Italy and pushed through the eastern part of Holland, liberating Groningen, the home city of my father-in-law. That was on April 13. By April 15 they had fought their way to Leeuwarden, the home city of my mother-in-law. It took a few more weeks, until May 4, to work their way around the IJsselmeer and totally free the western part of Holland, including Rotterdam and Amsterdam, which was near to where my mother lived at the time.

1:10

The Dutch people welcomed the Canadians enthusiastically after a long and harsh winter. It was after the end of the war, when troops were still around and people were free again and getting their lives back in order, that the Canadian soldiers and the Dutch people forged long-lasting bonds of friendship that last to this day. It was also during this time that my father, who came from Canada as a soldier with the Dutch army, met my mother and took her as a war bride. They celebrated their 60th anniversary this past Monday. So, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all the Dutch people I will again say thank you to the brave Canadian soldiers who volunteered and fought so courageously many years ago to liberate Holland.

Thank you.

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

Geothermal Power

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oil sands production and upgrading use energy to produce oil products. Natural gas cogen plants have been preferred but have come under criticism because

gas is clean, expensive energy that should be used elsewhere. Some like nuclear; many are skeptical. What will happen when these nuclear plants are tired and rundown in 50 years? Where will the hazardous spent fuel be stored?

Remember Chernobyl. The Alberta Ukrainian community stepped to the forefront to help the victims of the Chernobyl meltdown. There was a moving and graphic remembrance at City Hall in Edmonton last year. I don't think anyone who left the candlelight procession supporting nuclear power will support it for anywhere in Alberta.

Sustainable renewable energy sources must be our focus. It is time to revisit hydroelectric generation. The potential for oil sands use of hydro from in-line generators in the Slave River rapids is tremendous, and it is close by. Hydro is clean power. It is simple gravity flow: no carbon emissions, no sulphur emissions, no burning. What about hydrodams? These can be a source of clean power if properly prepared: no carbon emissions, no sulphur emissions, no burning, good for recreation, good for tourism, and good for water retention and management.

What about geothermal? The earth we stand on is just a crust over a superheated molten mass. What a source of untapped energy. Even the use of near-surface geothermal sources can do the job. We must pursue this source. Godspeed to the geopower consortium in testing the granite layer 500 feet below the oil sands.

What about looking for chemistry for new processes? What about the hydrogen fuel injection process? What about new engineering processes? These alternatives just touch on a few. We do have alternatives to nuclear. We do have clean alternatives. Let's go hydro. Let's go geothermal. Let us find other ways. We must think of future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Multiple Sclerosis Carnation Campaign

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about finding a cure and enhancing quality of life for those living with multiple sclerosis in Alberta. Alberta Health and Wellness, in partnership with the MS Society, would like to remind Albertans that May is Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month. Multiple sclerosis is a disease that randomly attacks the central nervous system, affecting the control people have over all parts of their bodies. We do not know yet what causes MS, but we do know that it is a disease that is affecting an estimated 55,000 to 75,000 Canadians. The MS Society estimates, based on current prevalence rates, that approximately a thousand new cases of MS are diagnosed each year, which means three more people are diagnosed with MS every day in Canada. These numbers are startling, and that's why it's so important to support MS Awareness Month.

Here in Alberta we have one of the highest rates of MS per population in the world, with approximately 10,000 diagnosed cases. Women are diagnosed with the disease three times more frequently than men. These are two startling facts that serve as motivation to those who work to find a cure for the disease.

Besides funding MS research, the MS Society provides services for people who have MS, family members, caregivers, and health care professionals. These services are delivered through the network of divisions and chapters across Canada. Throughout the month of May there are several opportunities for Albertans to support the cause. Volunteers from around the province are taking part in a variety of fundraising events, like the MS Carnation Campaign, Super Cities Walk for MS, and Rona's Keys to a Cure fundraiser, which most Alberta communities host.

I encourage you to get involved and help find a cure today. For information on the MS Society of Canada and their activities visit www.mssociety.ca.

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

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month the Minister of Education announced his unilateral decision to tie \$25 million of funding for the Alberta teachers' pension liability to a demand for labour peace in the province. This is a provocative scheme which is divisive and an insult to educators across the province.

The province has long neglected the unfunded liability and should act immediately to solve the problem. However, in a meeting yesterday with the president of the ATA the minister rejected the teachers' request for immediate negotiations, choosing instead to stumble down the path to another task force. Given that the government accepted a mere seven of the Affordable Housing Task Force recommendations, there is little reason for teachers to see a task force as anything more than a stall tactic and no substitute for immediate negotiations.

To put this issue into context as well, I note that school boards received a 3.6 per cent increase to their budget. Such a small amount will stretch school boards' ability to hire new staff and abide by provincial class size regulations. This will also put them in a very difficult position when it comes to teacher negotiations.

The minister's proposal is a clear attempt to pit teachers with lengthy years of service against more junior colleagues. Playing politics with teachers' salaries and teachers' pensions is a recipe for a division and ill will, and it's hardly a reasonable way to run the education system. During the bid for the Conservative leadership the Premier promised that the issue of pension liability would be resolved separately from negotiations over salaries or working conditions.

On behalf of the NDP opposition I join with the Alberta Teachers' Association in calling for the minister to do the right thing: rescind the provocative demand that teachers give up the right to strike in exchange for another task force. All teachers deserve to be treated fairly and with respect.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Archbishop Richard Smith

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to the installation of Edmonton's eighth bishop at St. Joseph's Basilica on May 1, 2007. Led by the papal nuncio, Archbishop Luigi Ventura, the two-millennia-old ceremony formally inducted Archbishop Richard Smith, who will replace Archbishop Thomas Collins. Archbishop Smith is known as a multilingual person who has a unique brand of American Sign Language playfully known as RSL, or Richard's Sign Language. He is one of the two youngest Catholic bishops in Canada along with another archbishop, David Motiuk.

Archbishop Smith's journey has led him from his home in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Pembroke, Ontario, and now Edmonton, where he serves as archbishop. He has come to meet the new challenges of being archbishop to Edmonton's Catholic community, a community invaluable to many Albertans. With its 330,000 members and dozens of churches the Edmonton Catholic community is steeped with a sacred tradition that gives hope and inspiration to its members during times of happiness and struggle. He has been an

active member of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops as well as being the national spiritual adviser to the Catholic Women's League of Canada. Also, Archbishop Smith has been a member of the English Sector Commission for Christian Education since 2003.

The important role he has played within the Catholic community has not been overlooked. I am grateful to be able to speak about such an important man. I would ask everyone to join me in honouring Archbishop Richard Smith.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Political Party Trust Accounts

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1977 changes were made to the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, requiring a distinct reporting of trusts and funds maintained by each registered political party. Since 1977 an annual letter from any registered political party maintaining such a trust was to be submitted to Elections Alberta, detailing any transfers of funds to or from such trusts and the party. While most political parties closed or dissolved their funds early on, the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta chose to maintain theirs.

This fund, which has often been referred to as the foundation fund or the legislative trust account, has recently become a sort of controversy. From 1978 to 1986 the individual acting as the budget director for the PC Association consistently reported annually, as the law requires, all transactions involving the foundation fund, both deposits and withdrawals. However, beginning in 1987, this practice of providing a distinct account of these transactions inexplicably came to an end. Large sums of money may have been deposited into or taken out of this fund; however, nobody in the PC Association has the ability or willingness to provide the required documentation. How much money was in the foundation fund when it started? How much money is in the fund today? And in nonelection years what are the monies from the fund used for?

1:20

Since we're now talking about openness and transparency in this House, will the PC Association be required to resume reporting how much money goes into or out of this foundation fund? Don't tell me it's still being reported because the Tories are basically pooling the funds together with transfers from registered parties, constituency associations, and candidates in one catch-all category. The details remain hidden. Here is one place the Conservatives can start to demonstrate openness and transparency. Those who have nothing to hide, hide nothing.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and to present a petition. Really this is just an add-on to the petition that I presented a couple of weeks ago urging the government to "immediately introduce a bill to create a buffer zone of at least one mile distance from any major water body, such as a river, lake or creek," et cetera. So I would like to table this at this time.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll table that petition in our next sitting.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased and honoured to rise to present a petition. It's from members of the Unity Centre, the volunteers there. It says, "We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to hold rent increases to no more than the rise in the average monthly wage until December 31, 2010."

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 210 Gaming Planning Act

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce private member's Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act.

The purpose of Bill 210 is to initiate a comprehensive review of the multibillion dollar gaming industry in Alberta. Bill 210 would establish an all-party committee that would examine all aspects of the gaming industry in Alberta from the distribution of revenue and the role of volunteers to the social impact of gambling on the citizens of Alberta and its impact on the economy.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of a letter from one of my constituents, Alexis Sokol. Alexis is a single-income earner who is now facing a \$200 per month rental increase. Alexis notes that this will have undue stress and hardship on her daily life.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table this afternoon on behalf of Nicole Régis, a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar, a letter that I received from her on February 23, 2007. This is in regard to the current state of the teachers' unfunded liability.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituent Derinda Wood, who is concerned about rent increases. Her rent increased three times in eight months already, totalling \$400. There is no cap on rent increases. People are afraid of being homeless. She said that "homeless shelters are overflowing with families that work but can not afford housing." She is urging this government to help.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a letter in response to Alan Shopland, the general manager of Access Roads, the P3 company responsible for the Anthony Henday,

whose letter to me was previously tabled by the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, claiming that Alberta taxpayers aren't responsible for a \$34.7 million cost overrun.

My second tabling is page 103 from Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation's annual report 2005-2006, which clearly shows that the P3 cost overrun debt is to be borne by Alberta taxpayers.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today, and I beg your indulgence. The first is in relation to an absolutely spectacular event that myself and several members of this Legislature attended last night: the celebration of the arts put on by students from Catholic schools, over 600 students and 120 parents and staff and teachers involved. It was just an amazing evening. I'm pleased to table for the permanent records of the province the program from that evening.

As well, almost as spectacular was the annual general meeting of Edmonton Airports this morning, where they showed a multimillion-dollar profit for the past year and a tremendous, in fact phenomenal increase in terms of the number of aircraft movements and growth at the airport.

Then, Mr. Speaker, in response to a comment, actually, from the Finance minister yesterday in which he referenced the Official Opposition's Funding Alberta's Future document but failed to follow parliamentary procedure and table the said document that he was referencing, I'm happy to share with all Albertans the document Funding Alberta's Future and note that the growth in expenditures in this document is tied to not only the population increase but also the growth in inflation.

Mr. Speaker, then I'm also going to also table background documents which the Finance minister also had in his hands yesterday: the spreadsheets showing the described growth, the PowerPoint presentation that is used to make that presentation, as well as a *Calgary Herald* newspaper article from April 20, wherein Scott Hennig, the Alberta representative for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, outlined an approximate 7 per cent increase in spending under the Alberta Liberal opposition Funding Alberta's Future plan.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a series of just four tablings with the requisite copies. One is a letter from Craig Dunn, president of WellDunn Consulting, who is involved in the geothermal research and the consortium involving Shell Canada. It speaks to the importance of geothermal in the oil sands.

Another is an article by Esme Friesen published in *New Technology* in 2002 about the importance of geothermal technology and potential for the oil sands.

Another is an article by Tyler Hamilton of the *Toronto Star* dated February 10. It's about geothermal in the oil sands.

Another is by Ron Chalmers, from the *Edmonton Journal*. It's an article about geothermal in the oil sands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would request that the Government House Leader share with us the

projected government business for the week commencing the 7th of May.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Next week, of course, on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday under government business we'll be in Committee of Supply all three afternoons.

On Tuesday we anticipate the Committee of Supply will have Municipal Affairs and Housing and Health and Wellness. If time remains thereafter, we will deal with bills 2, 31, 32, 33, and 34.

On Wednesday afternoon in Committee of Supply Treasury Board, Finance, Health and Wellness, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Solicitor General and Public Security would be before the committee, and the same bills would be available for discussion if there was time remaining after the Committee of Supply had completed its business.

On Thursday, May 10, there would be a cross-ministry opportunity in Committee of Supply with Children's Services, Seniors and Community Supports, and Education, and again the same bills available for discussion if there was time remaining after Committee of Supply.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Affordable Housing

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The situation with affordable housing in Alberta is getting worse every day. The government's strategy is not working. For example, today in Edmonton-Rutherford constituency the residents of Yellowbird House received notice of a \$500 rent increase. One of the residents of Yellowbird House is an 80-year-old woman who is clearly in distress because of this, and I'm sure we can all understand why. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. What does this minister, who is, after all, responsible for housing, have to say to this elderly woman and the other residents of Yellowbird House?

1:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is not an easy solution when you're looking at affordable housing. As the Leader of the Opposition knows, we did have a task force in place, that engaged the Official Opposition and also engaged the third party, to discuss that exact focus. When we talk about affordable housing, we need to make sure that there are affordable houses on the market, that affordable units are on the market.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe the residents of Yellowbird House should all move to the country and then run for office because out-of-town MLAs, including virtually almost every minister of this government, receive \$1,750 a month in temporary residence allowance. That allowance has increased \$450 a month in two years. How can this minister sit there and tell the residents of Yellowbird House and renters across Alberta that there is nothing this government can do when he himself receives a rapidly rising accommodation allowance?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the housing allowance that MLAs receive is not a housing allowance of this government; it is an allowance of this House. Secondly, our government has added \$285 million of new funding – \$285 million – to try to address the affordable housing and the homeless challenges that we have in Alberta due to the growth pressures.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's plan to deal with the issue of affordable housing in Alberta is clearly flawed, partly because they ignored their own task force. The Alberta Liberal housing plan calls for affordable housing allowances that stay with low-income renters, not with the unit. Portable rent supplements give renters flexibility in a tight market. If it's okay for MLAs to have affordable housing allowances, then it should be okay for other Albertans. To the same minister: will this minister help Albertans and follow the lead of the Alberta Liberals and implement affordable housing allowances and rent supplements that stay with the renter?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, specifically, I referred to \$285 million in new money: \$100 million from the municipal sustainability housing program, \$96 million in enhanced capital to increase affordable housing units, a \$13 million increase in homeless support, a \$3 million increase for provincial homeless initiatives, \$14.3 million increase from the rental supplement and special purpose housing, \$45 million allocated to Wood Buffalo, \$7 million to the new homeless and eviction fund, \$2.5 million to the Alberta transitional housing.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's housing market is completely distorted, and as a result people are losing their homes. While many landlords do act responsibly, others are using the government's decision not to implement a temporary rent cap to issue rent increases sometimes of hundreds of dollars a month. Thousands of people are getting hurt, sometimes drastically hurt. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: what is this minister going to do to help the tenants of Yellowbird House and other renters in the same position before they are booted out of their homes?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I defer to the President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, if the people have not received a rent increase in the last year at that apartment, they may be subject to this rent increase. If they have previous to April 24, then under the legislation that we've introduced, the rent increase will not be allowed.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. This issue, Mr. Speaker, goes beyond political ideology. It goes beyond right- or left-wing views of market intervention. The heart of this issue is that Albertans need help right now because they are losing their homes, and everybody needs a home. The government's decision to ignore the recommendations

of its task force and refuse rent caps shows how divided this government caucus is on this issue. To the minister of housing: will the minister urge his Premier to put the issue of temporary rent caps to a free vote of this Legislature?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, this government is not ignoring the focus of the task force. We need a balanced approach to providing housing. What happened is that we did not look at one specific item but at a balanced approach to providing housing, which is secondary suites, which is supporting rent supplement, which is supporting new initiatives for building housing; \$285 million of new money to do exactly that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The same minister in this government has made the claim repeatedly that rent caps discourage construction of new apartment units, but the evidence is that that isn't necessarily so. Can this minister explain how it is that putting reasonable rent increase caps for one year on existing properties discourages the construction of new rental properties? How is that? Explain it.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, one thing that we do know is that the opposition is extremely generous with other people's money. They like to talk about a housing report and why we wouldn't accept all the recommendations in the housing report. One of the recommendations was to build houses out of straw; one of them was to convert container units into houses. If we were to accept all of the recommendations, I can assure you that the people coming to Alberta would probably have questions about the mentality of that entire report. We've approached this on a very balanced and responsible position.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 211 is an emergency referral service operated in Edmonton by the Support Network. It identifies trends in service delivery gaps by tracking the number and nature of calls for which the hotline was unable to provide an adequate referral. Overwhelmingly, these unmet needs were affordable housing. My question is to the minister of municipal affairs. Desperate Albertans cannot wait two months, two weeks, or even two days for shelter. Can the minister please tell us what options are available for people who desperately need housing today?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, this government has identified the challenges that Albertans have in affordable housing and homelessness. There has been a budget that has addressed those concerns, but we implemented the task force, that was asked to report in 45 days. We responded to those recommendations in 35 days, addressing the concerns and the challenges, and \$285 million does address those concerns to the best ability that we can.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The 211 report also identified two specific areas where service shortfalls can be devastating. It has noted an increased number of calls from people who are seeking transitional housing as they move from detox to addictions treatment and also from women and children moving from emergency to

second-stage shelters. Without affordable housing options these individuals may be unable to escape these dangerous and unhealthy situations. Again to the minister of municipal affairs: why are these groups who are struggling to find transitional housing not a priority for this government?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, could I please respond to the hon. member's question? Last year employment and immigration provided \$100 million for housing and shelter benefits for eligible Albertans with low incomes. This includes over \$10 million for emergency benefits for short-term accommodation, utility arrears, damage deposits, additional housing support for families. If there are people today, if Albertans today are faced with dire circumstances, we are the ones that manage emergency funding for those individuals. We manage second-stage housing, supports for people coming from shelters . . .

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The minister should read the 211 reports.

Mr. Speaker, sadly, these problems extend to all corners of this province. We've also heard from a single mother of three in Lethbridge who has sought refuge in a women's shelter and now requires transitional housing. She has the money for rent, a damage deposit, and moving costs and is still unable to find permanent housing. Is the minister of municipal affairs prepared to tell this mother who is fighting for a fresh start that she must pay the price of prosperity?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, when we look at the minister's sustainability and we look at the initiative, we have directed I believe it's – let me add the two – \$196 million to municipalities for municipalities to address those concerns. Also, what happened is that we have taken funding and we have delivered the funding to different municipalities for them to make the choice of what they believe is important in their areas.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's not my intent to engage in a one-upmanship game with the Leader of the Official Opposition, but I have a couple of rent increases for people in my constituency of \$1,000, that they've just received – \$1,000. Doreen Fiddler is a 74-year-old widow who's lived in the same apartment for 20 years without any problems. She's received a rent increase. Her rent is going from \$595 a month to \$1,595 a month. There's another one in the same building and some others that have received some smaller increases. My question to the minister. I don't want to hear about all the money you're spending to build housing two years from now because right now she needs some help. Are you going to do something to make sure that people like this woman, this senior, don't have to pay increases of that magnitude? I'm asking the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we established a homeless and eviction fund to look after just such a person. Any one of those 59 centres that are in place in Alberta can help provide to people who face dire straits this kind of support. The hon. members opposite would try to portray this government as an uncaring government. We are the government that has a program, that has been administering a

program over the last several years to support people in dire circumstances.

I would invite the hon. member opposite to provide me the names or the phone numbers. We will certainly check and see whether the 211 group has some addresses, and we will follow up to make sure they get connected.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, that program such as it is, even if it's as advertised, doesn't kick in for two months. We tried to reach Mrs. Fiddler this afternoon. She's out looking for a new apartment, so we couldn't reach her. This new rent, Mr. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, exceeds her entire pension cheque. Now, if she's lucky, they've already tried to raise her rent once in the last 12 months, and we're researching that. But if not, then she's going to have to pay it or move, and next year she'll be faced with this. If you stop it this year, she'll be faced with it next year. You need to do something, Mr. Minister. Please, stand up and tell people what you're going to do. It's not just an emergency fund. There are thousands . . .

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, if an individual receives a rent increase, that rent increase cannot be brought into effect for three months. Also, when we looked at the challenges of individuals as brought forward by the hon. members from across, if they qualify for a rent supplement, if that is the situation, that is why we're here as well, to help support. If there are individual situations of need, those are also things that we will look at. Please bring us those names, and we will look at the individual cases.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the government's program such as it is simply isn't working for thousands and thousands of Albertans. I'll just read from this rent notice.

We feel it's necessary to adjust rents to this new level in order to provide you the best service possible.

The rental adjustment is also due to the general rising of operating expenses such as maintenance, repairs, utilities and property taxes [and new carpets and linoleum].

All for triple the rent. To the minister: is it not the case that the people who are paying the price of prosperity are precisely the people who are not prosperous in this province?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it is impossible for anyone, regardless of what party or what affiliation, to magically make this problem go away. It simply can't happen. But when we take into the marketplace and we become very generous with other people's investment dollars, it leads us down a road that you cannot come back from. If we want to follow the policies of failed governments where spending increases and interest increases follow, our housing situation will be far more disastrous than being fair to the landlord and the tenant. It is unreasonable for you to suggest that all landlords in Alberta are irresponsible, that all landlords are out to gouge. There may be isolated cases . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: To all the schoolchildren in the Assembly: this is not normal. This is Thursday before a long weekend. I apologize on behalf of all my colleagues in the Assembly.

Now, hon. leader of the third party, you will have copies made of your document, and I'll ask you to table them at the conclusion of the question period.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Hydroelectric Power

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Extracting bitumen from oil sands requires large amounts of energy. Many argue that firing electrical cogens with clean-burning expensive natural gas is not sensible, nor is it sustainable. All of the Mackenzie gas pipeline production could be used up for oil sands needs. Other sources of energy may make more sense. Hydroelectric power could be the cleanest of all: no emissions, no sulphur gases, no heavy metals, no mess. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What is the potential for energy generation, and what measures are our Alberta government taking to develop clean hydro from the Slave River rapids?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly the potential of Slave River has been known for a number of years. Initially – I believe it would have been back in perhaps the mid-70s or early '80s – the Slave River was first looked at by government in Alberta and certainly by industry in Alberta. With respect to the potential it appears that there are about 1,800 megawatts of power that could be available on the Slave River in northeastern Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. A supplemental to the same minister. Use of geothermal energy systems may provide alternatives for energy needs in further production of bitumen. How is the government encouraging research in the use of alternatives such as geothermal to provide energy needs for oil sands production?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, what we're doing to encourage alternatives – there's a very broad slate of research and development projects through Alberta Energy Research Institute and others. We have a number of programs, some with respect to gasification, clean coal technologies, the production of hydrogen and syngas from coal, and opportunities like that abound in the province of Alberta. Our mandate to provide a strategy that will include all of the above energy sources is ongoing in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. A supplemental to the same minister. Many Albertans in the pipeline industry are concerned that the construction of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline is not going to happen. What can the minister tell Albertans in the pipeline construction industry about what Alberta is doing to move this project along or if they will see some work in this project in the near future?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, with respect to the Mackenzie Valley pipeline the member opposite is obviously aware that that particular project is not in the province of Alberta, so we as a government or the province of Alberta as a province have no jurisdiction with respect to the Mackenzie Valley pipeline. However, we're very aware that the proponent continues, and as recently as yesterday one of the major proponents has indicated that they will continue to work to find ways to bring that project to fruition.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

1:50 Peace Officer Roles and Responsibilities

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December 2005 this government released recommendations following a review of the special constable program to clarify the roles and responsibilities of peace officers. Peace officers are a valuable part of Alberta's law enforcement network. These recommendations resulted in the Peace Officer Act, which came into effect May 1. Unfortunately, there still seems to be some confusion as to what peace officers, in particular traffic sheriffs, can and cannot do to support the excellent work of the RCMP when it comes to improving safety on Alberta's roads and highways. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can he explain why traffic sheriffs are not permitted to exceed the speed limit with their lights and sirens on while responding to emergency situations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Traffic sheriffs under their mandate can only perform limited functions at an emergency scene. Sheriffs' vehicles rushing down the highway with their lights and sirens on pose a risk to the public, and therefore they do not have that authority under the new Peace Officer Act. It's important that emergency situations be attended by the appropriate authorities with the appropriate equipment and training.

Mr. Johnston: To the same minister: was this issue put on the table during consultations that occurred prior to the new act being put in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, this issue was discussed at length during the review process. The Peace Officer Act was developed through extensive consultations with stakeholders and research from across Canada and around the world. As you know, we consulted with Albertans, municipalities, law enforcement agencies, and many others to ensure that the act enhanced the delivery of enforcement opportunities in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Johnston: My last question to the same minister: will he agree to future discussions on the act to ensure that peace officers are fully able to support the ongoing work of police in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, as with any legislation we always have the ability to make changes if upon review they feel it is needed. The peace officers are and will continue to be a valued part of Alberta's law enforcement network, which is among the strongest in Canada. The enforcement duties that peace officers perform go a long way to help reduce the pressure on police while delivering high-quality service to the public, and I am confident that the Peace Officer Act provides the legislative framework for them to contribute fully to ensuring that Albertans live in safe and secure communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Education Funding

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent budget proved that this government is not committed to adequately funding Alberta's education system. At a time when inflation is over 5 per cent, the government allocated a mere 3 per cent increase in operational grants to school boards and only a 3.2 per cent increase for operations and maintenance. Alberta's school system is already stretched thin, and this small increase will have a negative effect on education in Alberta. To the Minister of Education: in a time of rapid inflation how can the minister defend a budget that sets Alberta's education system back instead of moving it forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Well, it's typical, Mr. Speaker. The opposition is always looking on the negative side of things. This government spends almost \$6 billion now on education in Alberta, the highest per capita of anywhere in Canada. I'd hardly call that moving backwards.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, I think he should get out and talk to the trustees.

The education business plan states that Alberta's goal is to have the best K to 12 education system in the world, but with this budget the government has shown total disregard for the goal. Without adequate funding school boards will be forced to increase school fees, cut programs, and reduce supports for students. This is very unacceptable to trustees and students and parents. To the Minister of Education: how long will this government force school boards to do more with less?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member gets worked up over not very much. As I said earlier in my remarks, we spend more on education in Alberta than any other province in Canada. I'd be happy to debate the line-by-line expenditures with the hon. member when my estimates come up. We don't quite have the best education system in the world. We're striving. We're almost there, and we're going to get there.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, Mr. Minister, that's very noble.

Currently 30 school districts are in a deficit position in this province. Get out and find out about that. This summer 80 per cent of the school districts will be in contract negotiations, yet this budget gives school boards no room to negotiate reasonable contracts with teachers. This is a short-sighted budget that will have a negative effect on teachers and school boards and students, and we'll be back here in August dealing with it. To the minister: is the minister prepared to take responsibility for any strikes that occur as a result of the government's failure to provide reasonable funding for education in this province? What are you doing about it, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I challenge the hon. member to table in this House documents that show me that 30 school boards are in a deficit position. It's not true. [interjections]

The Speaker: No, no, no.

An Hon. Member: It's Thursday.

The Speaker: To the hon. member who reminded me that it is Thursday: it's more than that; it's also a full moon.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Secondary Suites

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Secondary suites provide a way for families to care for extended family members while still preserving their personal, individual living spaces. Secondary suites provide a way for young people to buy their first home made more affordable by rental income. But, most important, secondary suites provide affordable housing. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: are there provisions or requirements for secondary suites in the recent affordable housing funding announced for municipalities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I need to say that the housing response very much deals with municipalities having the choice of doing what's best in their areas. Secondary suites are an immediate measure. They are an economical way to deal and to have more units that are presentable. I very much want to encourage communities to get involved and to look at secondary suites as an answer because it is an immediate answer, and as we heard today from the members opposite, it is an immediate and important issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. To encourage secondary suites provincially, the Alberta government has pared back regulations for secondary suites to only those affecting the safety. What are Alberta municipalities doing to accommodate secondary suites in their communities?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very encouraged by the municipalities that are taking the lead and that are changing their zoning bylaws to incorporate secondary suites into their municipalities. It is essential, I believe, to have secondary suites, especially when we're in a high-growth area. Zoning is a critical component to having safe and affordable housing. Municipal Affairs has a template that municipalities can use in order to have that accomplished.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If municipalities choose to allow secondary suites, how many suites could become available immediately for affordable housing?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, that very much depends on, first of all, the municipalities and their acceptance of the zoning. It also depends on communities and their embracement to have secondary suites in their areas. I can say that we have 2,300 people that are on the waiting list for affordable housing in Edmonton. We have 2,600 in Calgary. There are 9,000 in Alberta presently. I want to say that municipalities are now planning for the future to have secondary suites.

To answer your question: how many? It's endless. We need co-operation between municipalities, between communities, and I think with the provincial government, who has helped in the financial aspect.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. [interjections] Lethbridge-East, do you want to get in first? Did you want to get in first, hon. member?

Ms Pastoor: No.

The Speaker: There seemed to be a lot of movement there. I wanted to . . . [interjections] Well, it's your time in the question period. It's okay. It's going by.

You're sure, hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, that you're ready to go?

Mr. Agnihotri: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. Proceed.

2:00 Community Initiatives Program

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Applewood broke the rules, CIP broke the rules, CFEP broke the rules, and the other initiative programs do not even have the rules. Shame. Now the government has launched another program, the major community facilities program. My question to the President of the Treasury Board: why should Alberta taxpayers now trust this government with the new \$280 million grant program?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's not just the CIP and the CFEP grants. The government takes very seriously its responsibility to be accountable to the taxpayers of Alberta. The CIP and the CIP grant process have done tremendous good across Alberta, and the opportunity for us to give more money back to Albertans through the major grant to help with major facilities is one that we feel very honoured to be able to do on behalf of the people of Alberta. I can assure you that the Auditor General and our department will be watching very carefully that the money is spent appropriately and accounted for.

Mr. Agnihotri: I'm talking about the breaking of the rules. I'm talking about accountability, transparency. I'm talking about the trust which this government has lost. My question to the same minister. This government is more concerned about its friends than hard-working Albertans. Does health get a 66 per cent increase in funding? No. Education? No. Environment? No. So why did this department in an election year increase its budget 66 per cent? Why?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, I don't know for sure.

Mr. Speaker, this party just went through a very exciting if not difficult leadership process. You know what Albertans said to us? We've got a gentleman that's now our leader that has a history of honesty and integrity. This government that's under our new Premier will govern with integrity and transparency and openness, and you'll see it.

Mr. Agnihotri: Well, if that's actually true, why don't you answer my question properly every time?

Anyway, my question to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. This minister has had a full month . . .

Mr. Bonko: How long?

Mr. Agnihotri: A full month.

. . . to find the names of 43 recipients of grants that broke CIP rules. Alberta taxpayers are starting to smell a cover-up. Minister,

for God's sake, please stop making excuses and be accountable. What are you trying to hide? Why don't you disclose those names? Taxpayers want you to disclose the names now.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to a Deity

The Speaker: There are some members who will take strong exception to the phrase "for God's sake." [interjections] No, no, no. I want to make that comment. There may be some histrionics that go on from time to time; there are also some phrases that we use with some degree of respect in this House.

Community Initiatives Program (continued)

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, certainly, on the 40 applications that the hon. member is talking about, our staff, as I indicated before, are trying to extract all of those 40 applications. Our initial, preliminary observation is that there were absolutely no rules that were broken. You know, we're going through the over 2,000 applications to try to locate those 40, and that material should be available fairly soon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

But before I recognize them, hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, remember that this is question period, not answer period.

Support for Exhibitions and Fairs

Mr. Doerksen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do hope I get an answer to my question today.

Growth of the central Alberta corridor and the Red Deer area is putting pressure on services and facilities in this region. One of the facilities facing these growth pressures is Westerner Park. Westerner Park is the third-largest agricultural society and trade exhibition facility in our province. The two larger facilities, Northlands Park and the Calgary Stampede, are receiving significant funding through the new budget to address their growth pressures. However, Westerner Park and other regional fairs and exhibitions did not receive additional funding this year. Mr. Speaker, my first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. What is the formula used to calculate operating grants for fairs and exhibitions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank goodness for the calming influence of agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, each agriculture society receives a yearly base grant. The 286 small societies funded by Agriculture and Food get \$17,500 each. Based on their operations, they may get a second grant. The total available to these societies is \$8.7 million. The seven regions, which include the Westerner, each receive \$280,000. Edmonton and Calgary, who host the internationally recognized Capital EX and Stampede, get \$10 million. The regionals, the two major . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. We'll probably have an opportunity in the supplementary.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, to the minister. The city of Red Deer is growing faster than other major urban centres in Alberta and serves a trading population in excess of 250,000. The Westerner's operating grant, in a rough calculation, amounts to just over \$3 per capita, compared to Northlands and the Calgary Exhibition and

Stampede of more than \$10 per capita. My first supplemental question to the same minister: what plan does he have to make these operating grants more equitable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the two major cities are funded through Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. All these societies play an important role in building our local and international ag profile, especially in our rural communities. So we certainly are currently working with the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies to wrap up a review of the funding formula for the 286 smaller societies. There are a number of issues that must be resolved, including budget considerations and timing of any potential funding issues. I can reassure the people here that my priority is going to be to see that the 286 smaller ag societies are dealt with first, before we get to the rest.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Are exhibitions and fairs eligible for the major community facilities grants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The major community facilities program will make funding available to support municipalities, not-for-profit organizations, aboriginal communities with eligible projects that are identified as a priority by their community. The \$140 million program, to be allocated each year for two years, was created to address the requirements of larger capital projects, such as major community sports or recreational facilities, the cultural centres, or family and community wellness facilities. This would also include the agricultural facilities that the hon. member is talking about and facilities that are operated by major exhibitions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Affordability of Postsecondary Education

Dr. Pannu: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, less than half of all Alberta families believe postsecondary education is within their means. In just three months over 30,000 students who thought a postsecondary education was within their means will get a nasty surprise when they see apartment rents going up by anywhere between \$250 a month to \$1,000 a month. Since they will be new tenants, there is no limit on landlords' ability to raise rental rates. Why has the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing failed to recognize that without temporary rent guidelines thousands of students will not be able to afford a place to live this fall?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want say that I have met with CAUS, and they have brought forward, you know, recommendations that this department is looking at. This is definitely an area where secondary suites can help out the challenge. I'm going to refer to the minister to supplement.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. CAUS made some recommendations to us prior to the budgetary process this year, which

included things like raising the living allowance under the student finance situation, which we did. In fact, we raised it double digit, which is the first ever double-digit cost-of-living increase in the province's history.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The double-digit increase that the minister references for student living allowances won't make up for the astronomical rent that students will have to start paying as they start their new school year in September. This increase that he references will only mean increased student debt and increased financial distress for them. Why will the minister of advanced education not recognize that the government's failure to introduce temporary rent controls will drive postsecondary students into deeper debt and poverty? What happened to the affordability promise that this government made to students?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the CAUS recommendations to us included a number of different things under the affordability framework. One was to create new spaces at the universities, and that was their number one priority. Another one was to lower student debt and tuition. But underneath the affordability framework it isn't all debt. Probably half of the assistance that we give to students over a four-year period is actually bursaries and other grants for their postsecondary education. It's not all student debt that this government provides. In fact, under our remission program most of the Alberta portion of the debt is remitted back to the student if they're students in need.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we're improving the rules. We got rid of the archaic car rule, if you will, among a number of other things that we're working with . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister seems to be oblivious to the scale of the housing problem for students. The University of Alberta and the University of Calgary can only house 12 per cent of their student population, which leaves over 30,000 students to find housing in a market that's failing renters. Calgary's 2000 vacancy rate was .5 per cent, and Edmonton's was 1.2 per cent, and the situation is getting worse. What does the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology propose for those students who won't be able to find affordable accommodation: a room at Super 8, a tent pitched in the quad?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we are working to manage the growth pressures in this province, and that includes the student residences. We have a diverse range of learners. It's not factual, quite frankly, to suggest that every student that's going to university is requiring accommodation of some sort. Many students are in the 29-year-old range, are working or attending part time. Some may be living at home. Secondary suites are certainly an immediate option that we're encouraging municipalities to work with. [interjections] The hon. members might be interested in the answer, given the question period.

In Alberta there are additional residency capacities at private university colleges, the Augustana facility of the University of Alberta. Grant MacEwan is opening up, and we are working with the . . .

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

Regional Municipal Planning

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Conservatives were asleep at the switch when it came to preparing for growth, and that mistake is costing Albertans billions. They also eliminated the major mechanism for regional planning, a move which has made managing growth much more difficult. One of the remaining tools for regional co-operation is regional service commissions. Greater collaboration on the delivery of services is essential if we want to maintain a high quality of life and keep taxes low. To the minister of municipal affairs. Additional layers of governance require additional accountability measures. Is the minister considering any amendments to the Municipal Government Act to strengthen accountability and transparency requirements for regional service commissions, or is he satisfied they're adequate?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the budget that this government released has very much focused, especially in municipal sustainability, on the aspect of planning, of collaboration, of working together, of looking at municipalities, addressing their needs of autonomy, looking at the minister's sustainability report that came out, trying to address some of those needs that they have asked for and the recommendations that they have asked for and this government is trying to address and will bring responses for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was a wonderful answer. Unfortunately, it had nothing to do with what I'm asking about: regional service commissions. Not only are regional service commissions established by this cabinet, but many commissions also receive substantial provincial grants, sometimes as much as a million dollars in a single year, to support their efforts in regional service delivery. Yet the act allows commissions to operate without bylaws on the administration of the commission. What systems or checks and balances does the minister have in place to ensure that commission funds, which are ultimately taxpayer funds, are used strictly for legitimate commission business?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I need to say that we have worked with municipalities. We have worked with mayors and councils in trying to address the concerns that they have. We need to work together. Municipalities need that autonomy. I believe that we are going in the right direction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Municipal Government Act provides regional service commissions with natural person powers, which give them wide latitude to act unless specifically prohibited from doing so. Yet commissions are established by provincial orders in council by this government with very specific mandates and for specific functions. To the same minister: can the minister assure the Assembly that he could and would intervene to ensure that misused funds are returned so that the interests of the municipal shareholders are protected?

Mr. Danyluk: First of all, I want to try to answer the first part of the question. In the first part of the question I'm not sure if the hon. member opposite is asking the government to restrain or constrain the authority that municipalities or that mayors or that reeves have. I mean, we don't work that way. I guess that we're trying to provide

support as best we can to municipalities, as has been depicted in the budget.

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

Bee Colony Collapse Disorder

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The processed and nonprocessed honey industry in Alberta is dealing with difficulty with healthy bees this year. Alberta Agriculture and Food has traditionally assisted this important industry, providing apiculturists and technologists to deal with bee colonies. With the threat of colony collapse disorder in Alberta it could destroy an industry that provides 40 per cent of Alberta's honey. My first question to the Minister of Agriculture and Food: will the minister commit to more technical help and expert advice to help beekeepers remain in production this summer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly are concerned about this issue, no doubt. My department is now hiring two additional inspectors to assist our provincial apiculturist and his staff. They will examine and collect samples from bee colonies which have had a higher than normal overwintering kill this spring. These losses are not showing the same symptoms that link to the colony collapse disorder, better known as CCD. Symptoms of CCD have not yet been detected in Alberta, but they certainly are seen in the U.S. Our provincial expert recently met with a U.S. working group on this issue and has the knowledge and the skills needed to identify CCD.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the minister for that response. But in order to maintain and to grow this important industry in Alberta and in my constituency of Livingstone-Macleod, will the minister commit to preparing preliminary work for prevention purposes to control pests that may affect the industry in the future?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, we already have a pest monitoring system designed for early detection of pests of economic importance. Staff in my department are also developing a comprehensive surveillance network specific for crop pests in Alberta. Our information is available to farmers and industry on a timely basis. In many cases this allows them to make a quick decision to control these pests long before losses occur. Our provincial apiculturist and inspectors are working with the beekeeping industry, and appropriate steps certainly will be taken.

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, then can the minister advise if colony collapse disorder will have any potential health risks related to processed honey when consumers find it on the store shelves?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the U.S. experience hasn't shown any link to the health issues to date. Again, I want to stress that CCD has not been found in Alberta at this time. We are and we will continue monitoring closely for any signs or symptoms related to this disorder. If CCD is found in our province

and poses a health threat to Albertans, appropriate steps will be taken.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 78 questions and answers today.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona or Edmonton-Calder, have you a document that your leader was to leave with you to table at the conclusion of question period?

Mr. Eggen: I will endeavour to find that document. Yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize. My guests actually found it too much to take for their cardiac health. They actually left the House. I will introduce them when they return, if they return.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday I went and I brought hon. members up to date with a number of events that are occurring in the month of May. There were several that I neglected to mention. One is very significant today. The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, you are in the Chamber, and that's very commendable. This is the day of his 32nd wedding anniversary. He has a very young bride, he says.

Members might also be interested in knowing that on Tuesday, May 22, 2007, there will be a provincial election in Manitoba. On Monday, May 28, 2007, there will be a provincial election in Prince Edward Island.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

head: **Main Estimates 2007-08**

Energy

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chair, do we have five minutes to set up? I understood that we were going to have a few minutes to set up.

The Chair: Okay. We will allow for some time for the minister and his staff to come in while I'm going over some of the rules. Is that acceptable?

Mr. Knight: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: I went over this yesterday, but this is a different department today, so I'll go over some of the new Standing Orders that we're operating under as this is the first week for these new Standing Orders. No member can speak for more than 10 minutes. "A minister and a private Member may combine their respective speaking times for a total of 20 minutes," provided they notify the chair in advance. I would also ask the minister if that would be acceptable to the minister at the time. Quorum does not apply until

the estimates are voted on. Officials “may be admitted to the floor of the Assembly to advise the Minister whose estimates are under consideration.” I would ask the minister to introduce those officials at the time.

On the first day of consideration of the main estimates the first member of the Executive Council to speak shall move the main estimates in their entirety. That was done yesterday.

During the consideration of the main estimates, the Committee of Supply shall meet for a minimum of 3 hours at one time unless there are no [other] Members who wish to speak prior to the conclusion of the 3 hours.

If the Committee of Supply meets for more than 3 hours . . . the time in excess of 3 hours shall be available to any Member who wishes to speak and is recognized by the Chair . . .

During each 15-hour cycle, where the members of a caucus are allotted a particular block of time and those Members no longer wish to speak, then consideration for the entire block of time . . . is deemed to have occurred and any Member may be recognized by the Chair until the Committee rises and reports . . .

When an amendment to a department's estimates is moved in Committee of Supply, the vote on the amendment stands deferred until the date scheduled for the vote on the main estimates.

I'd like to also remind all ministers that as they are getting prepared to bring their officials in – and this is for the record and for all future days in Committee of Supply . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Point of order, Mr. Chairman, please.

The Chair: So noted. I'll just finish my comments.

. . . that as soon as the Mace is taken off the table, the minister shall have his staff ready to come into the room and set up.

You had a point of order, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar?

Point of Order Clarification

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. It's more of a point of information than a point of order. I'm asking for your guidance and clarification. In this schedule that was presented and circulated in the House the other day and is also printed in the Order Paper, when do the Alberta Alliance and the independent member get an opportunity to participate in the budget estimates? I can't find it here, and if you could guide me, I'd be grateful.

Thanks.

The Chair: As I pointed out earlier, when the member was busy in the House, occupied with something else, any time more than the three hours, once the three hours have been taken up, any member can speak. Also, there are days on the schedule, if you would look at the cross-ministry days on the schedule – and I hope all members have had some of the schedules – that other members can speak.

So if you have a question specifically, any member can deal with it afterwards with me, and I'll go over it with them.

Now, is the hon. Minister of Energy ready to start with your introductory remarks?

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a bit early for us, I guess. We haven't had an opportunity to have the staff in yet. What I'd like to do, if it's all right, is begin my remarks. I believe I have 10 minutes for remarks, so I'd like to begin my remarks at this point. So, Mr. Chairman, I will begin.

Certainly, Albertans do enjoy prosperity and a high quality of life. I believe that that is thanks in large part to our energy resources. These resources belong to all Albertans, and I'm pleased to be here

today to discuss the Ministry of Energy's plan and the budget to further build on these abundant energy resources.

2:30

Energy revenue accounts for over one-third of the government's total revenue and is roughly equal to the amount received from all tax sources. These revenues will continue to help fund priority programs that benefit all Albertans such as health care, education, and social programs.

In order to build a stronger Alberta, it is vital that we invest in the Ministry of Energy in order to build on our strengths. Given the high level of activity that's taking place, we also need to invest in people, systems, and infrastructure to sustain responsible development and collect revenue from our energy industry.

You will see that our strategic priorities now reflect the three priorities the Premier gave me to address: to develop a comprehensive energy strategy that will guide future development of both renewable and nonrenewable resources and the conservation of energy, to develop a value-added strategy linked with the energy strategy, and to ensure the continuing effective operation of our electricity system to meet the needs of Albertans.

The Ministry of Energy's business plan has also been expanded to include responsibilities for renewable energy development and for energy conservation and efficiency. We are also now responsible for biofuels development in Alberta. Mr. Chairman, that's an area that was previously under the jurisdiction, of course, of Alberta Agriculture and Food. Our plan also includes work to support cross-ministry initiatives, including the land-use framework and the royalty review. These changes have been incorporated in our new business plan and are also reflected in our budget.

Operating spending for the Ministry of Energy for 2007-08 is \$300 million, a \$73 million, or 32.2 per cent, increase over the 2006-07 forecast. Of this approximately \$300 million, two-thirds is allocated to the Department of Energy, and the other one-third goes to the Energy and Utilities Board. The increase in funding for the ministry is due to our expanded responsibilities and the priorities outlined in my mandate letter. Spending for the Department of Energy for '07-08 is more than \$200 million, an increase of \$68 million from the forecasted spending of \$132 million for '06-07.

Funding increases in '07-08 include the following. Biofuel initiatives received an increase in spending to \$41 million, up from \$5 million in the '06-07 forecast. This funding will be invested in bioenergy development projects and initiatives, including biofuel commercialization and marketing, infrastructure development, and producer credits. A credit will be introduced for ethanol, biodiesel, or other biofuels in Alberta. This program is estimated to cost \$128 million over the next three years and will replace the fuel tax exemption.

Another focus of the Ministry of Energy is energy and environmental research. The energy innovation fund initiatives will receive \$18 million in new funding to be invested in research, advanced technology, and other projects focused on energy supply and protection of the environment. This fund will provide a total of \$142 million in '07-08 and '08-09, allocated across several departments, for activities such as clean-coal technology pilot projects, groundwater mapping, reclamation research, biofuel development, and biodiversity monitoring.

Mr. Chairman, \$3.5 million has been allocated for the development of an integrated energy strategy, and an additional \$500,000 is being spent to develop a value-added strategy to ensure the continuing effective operation of our electricity system. We're also working to develop a comprehensive energy strategy to guide the use and responsible development of both renewable and nonrenewable

energy sources. This will include enhancing value-added opportunities, energy conservation, and development of the oil sands.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

All of the increased activity in Alberta's energy industry creates more pressures on the Energy and Utilities Board. Spending for the Energy and Utilities Board has increased from the amount forecast in '06-07, from \$149 million to \$159 million. Of this \$159 million 57 per cent of the funding comes from industry and 43 per cent from the ministry. This increase is funded partially by a \$5 million increase in the industry levy. It will be used to promote regulatory compliance and address pressures related to the development of new and unconventional energy resources, including the oil sands. An increase in ministry funding to the EUB of nearly \$5 million to deal with these pressures has been added to the forecast expenses for this coming year.

The EUB has experienced a dramatic increase in applications and in the complexity of those applications, especially those relating to oil sands projects. To give a couple of examples, there have been more well applications, licences, and oil sands projects to review and approve, more agreements to issue and maintain, and more wells and facilities to inspect. I will introduce legislation later this spring, Mr. Chairman, to restructure the EUB. I can discuss this more in detail following my remarks if there are questions.

External factors beyond Alberta's control have a major effect on revenue. Global events, changes in economic conditions, and even weather can significantly affect Alberta's forecasted resource revenue. Resource revenue budget sensitivities change from year to year as they are based on price, production, and a number of other factors. Sensitivities taken into account for Budget '07 are that a dollar change in the price of oil spread over one fiscal year equates to about \$139 million, 10 cents difference in the price of natural gas equals \$98 million, and a 1 cent variance in the exchange rate is equal to about a \$123 million change in revenue.

The Department of Energy benchmarks its oil forecasts with those of a number of private-sector analysts, and the rapid rise in energy prices in recent years was, Mr. Chairman, unexpected. Energy analysts surveyed have indicated that oil and natural gas prices will decline in the following two years. Budget 2007 assumes that natural gas prices '06-07 would average \$6.75 per gigajoule, and oil prices would average \$58 U.S. a barrel for west Texas intermediate.

Budget '07 also estimates that nonrenewable resource revenue would decline over the next three years. Revenue is forecast to decline from \$11.7 billion in '06-07 to \$7.8 billion in '09-10. This decline reflects more than just energy pricing. It reflects expected lower production levels, lower land licence and lease sales, increased production and processing costs, and an increased share of oil royalties paid on bitumen rather than on conventional or synthetic crude.

Alberta's royalty regime is a competitive, comprehensive collection of programs that apply to a wide range of oil, gas, and minerals. Together with Alberta's tax policies our overall royalty regime has been successful in attracting unprecedented investment, ensuring good jobs for Albertans, and bringing record resource revenues of more than \$14 billion to the provincial treasury in '05-06. Amendments were made to four royalty programs last year, and we eliminated the royalty tax credit program on January 1.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, the time allocation has now elapsed. Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, can you just advise the

chair as to how you would like us to proceed with regard to timing? Would you like us to deal with a 20-minute chunk, going back and forth, or 10 minutes for you and then 10 minutes response time?

Mr. MacDonald: The hon. minister indicated 10 minutes. If we could have 10 minutes.

That's what you would prefer, sir?

Mr. Knight: That's fine.

The Deputy Chair: Ten and 10?

Mr. MacDonald: Sure.

The Deputy Chair: We'll proceed with that. Go ahead.

2:40

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It certainly is with interest that I participate in the budget estimates this afternoon on the Department of Energy. It was with interest that I listened to the opening remarks from the hon. minister. I for one and, I'm certain, the minister don't forget and overlook the importance of this ministry to the balance sheet of the entire province. Sometimes people don't realize that it's this department that collects the royalties that the hon. President of the Treasury Board just loves to count, but it's true. And it is surprising to me: I'm delighted to see this royalty review finally take place, but in reality I think it belongs in the Department of Energy, not in the Department of Finance.

Certainly, when I look at this volume that the minister tabled in the Assembly on April 16 regarding the royalty review that was conducted in the period of time between 2005 and 2006, it is an interesting read. I certainly don't mean to have the only copy that was in the library, but the library saw that there was a great deal of interest in this royalty review, and I understand they have photocopied this document.

The partial disclosure. We talked earlier, Mr. Chairman, about a barrel of oil in this department, but all of us know that when we look at the exemptions that have been whited out in this tabling, the department must be using whiteout by the barrel there because there are a lot of sections that are exempted from public view that I'm certain would be of interest.

When we talk about the reduction in royalties, the hon. minister is correct. The Auditor General for a number of years had suggested that the Alberta royalty tax credit should be eliminated. There didn't seem to be a valid purpose for this tax credit anymore. It's been staged out over time, and it is correct that there has been a small reduction in the royalty holiday programs or incentives or whatever we want to call them. But when you look at the Auditor General's current report, we will see that the amount of revenue that we have exempted from royalties has actually doubled from two years ago to the year ending March 31, 2006. In other words, two years ago there was a \$500 million pool of cash that was not collected. It was a royalty holiday. That has almost doubled, and I think that in the Auditor General's report, if we were to look, we would see that that is in the range of \$950 million. So we're giving away more royalty holidays, not less.

We've also started the ethane program, and that is interesting in itself. We're giving a significant royalty reduction in ethane. I think it's in the range of – and I could stand corrected – about \$154 million annually. Over a five-year period that would be a lot of money. All this is going on at the same time our former Minister of Energy is involved in a political posting in Washington and is indicating to those elected U.S. officials that this government is out

of the business of subsidies and they're not involved in it. I would have the direct quote here, but I have misplaced that document. I meant to table it this afternoon.

When we say that we have eliminated royalty holiday programs, the hon. minister is correct, but there is the rest of the story. We have implemented a program for ethane for petrochemical users, and when you look at the total amount that we're giving in royalty holidays to the energy industry, it has increased in the last two fiscal years from half a billion dollars to almost a billion dollars. I would advise the hon. minister of that information, and I'm certain that he would be aware of this.

We could go through the fiscal plan, and we could see the importance of this ministry to our bottom line. I talked about this before, and the hon. minister is absolutely correct. When we look at what the future holds, where we're going, and we see the decline in conventional crude oil production, and we see the decline in natural gas production – hopefully, that may be reversed with CO₂ sequestration – in the short term we have to be very cautious about our spending because we're not increasing the royalty take on synthetic crude oil.

The hon. minister is absolutely right when he talks about Syncrude and Suncor having the legislated option, the one-time-only option to go from a synthetic crude oil royalty rate to a rate on bitumen, which is significantly less. They've got the one-time right to do that in orders in council that were passed in 1996. I was hoping to get to that in question period at some point, but now may be a good time to discuss why we need that. Those orders in council were passed in '96, and I think the 10 years is coming up – maybe it was '98. I know that the former Premier signed the orders in council. Anyway, Suncor and Syncrude have this option.

Suncor also gets a considerable amount on an annual basis, which they can use to subtract from their royalty amounts, as I recall. I would like to know why at this time this is even necessary. Those were signed deals, and I understand that we have to stick to them, but why they would need to go back to a bitumen royalty is a question that I would be very anxious for the minister to answer in light of the fact that one-third of all our revenues in this province are coming from his department.

The royalty regime up there in the tar sands. In fact, Mr. Chairman, I was looking at the tabling that was presented, and I saw so many other reports that were referenced, including this one I tabled yesterday, *Comparison of Selected Oil Resource Taxation Regimes*. In here it states – and this was printed in 2000 – that perhaps it would be advantageous if the department had a look, five years into the oil sands regime, at how this program was working and whether it should be continued, improved, or changed or whatever. To my knowledge that has not been done, and I'd like to know why it hasn't been done. It's clear that postpayout with so many of these oil sands projects – and the one that I'm going to be specific with is the Syncrude joint venture – the royalty rate is not near 25 per cent. In fact, I can back that statement up with a report from Mr. Mansell and his colleague, that were part of a think tank or an economic research group associated with the University of Calgary. Our energy researcher Sean Kochan's numbers indicate that with the Syncrude joint venture partners that disclosed their royalty payments, that's the ballpark: between 10 and 16 per cent.

So I think that we have to have another look at this and ensure that we're collecting an adequate amount on synthetic crude oil production in royalty to meet our fiscal requirements. When we consider that over the last 10 years the budget for this government has gone from roughly \$14 billion to now, as we discuss this budget, Mr. Chairman, \$33 billion, we need a lot of sources of revenue if this sort of government spending is to continue in this manner. Hope-

fully, it's not, but certainly when we look at what was prepared by Petroleum Economics Limited, it's of interest . . .

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the allocated time has run out.

Hon. minister, would you like to respond?

2:50

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, it's going to be a pleasure for me to respond. I think that the open debate that we'll have here with respect to our estimates should turn out very productive on both sides of the floor.

Before we go any further, if I may, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to introduce to you the members of the staff that are here with me. I have the deputy minister with me, Dan McFadyen. Douglas Borland, John Giesbrecht, Barry Rodgers, and Mike Ekelund from the department join us today to assist. There isn't, of course, an answer lodged in my head for every question that people will have with respect to our budget, so there'll be an opportunity here for us, I think, to get the questions answered that members will bring up and want responses to.

With respect to royalty review, again, Mr. Chairman, the royalty review itself that's being conducted now wasn't what the member opposite was alluding to. It talked more about the documents that we've tabled and, certainly, documents that the member has tabled with respect to royalty review. It is crucial to the ongoing budgets and revenues of the province totally and, most certainly, very crucial to us in the Department of Energy.

The ARTC was certainly one royalty review that we have done. We had another one with respect to re-entries. That was perceived to have run its useful life. There were others around tight gas and different programs, of course, and there are a number of programs that continue to be reviewed within the department.

There was mention that the Auditor General has interest in what we're doing there, and again that is as it should be. As you know, the energy industry in the province of Alberta is responsible for about a hundred billion dollars worth of the GDP. The GDP in the province is, you know, give or take, \$200 billion, about a hundred billion of that related to the energy industry directly. So it's crucial that the Auditor General should be interested, and most certainly we work with him, and we will continue to do that.

There was mention made, and I can answer, I hope, the question that the member raised with respect to ethane extraction. The ethane extraction project is one that we've worked on with industry and, certainly, the department since about June 2005. We're coming down to the implementation, I think, shortly. Probably within another maybe 90 days or that kind of a time frame we would have a program in place.

The ethane extraction project is part and parcel of the integrated energy strategy that we have and our value maximization. Again, I think it's important for the members to understand that we're moving a bit forward here with respect to value-added. We really feel that the best fit for Albertans with respect to this resource that belongs to Albertans, of course, is value maximization. Value-adding is a little bit nebulous because it doesn't really tell you what you're going to do or what the range or what the scope is, but value maximization is part and parcel of the ethane extraction project, Mr. Chairman.

What will happen there is that we will be able to assist industries that take an opportunity to add incremental ethane to the petrochemical business in the province of Alberta. So it must – and I will express this again – it must be utilized in the province of Alberta to increase the outcomes from the petrochemical industry and then that program be tied back to the royalty structure so that producers have

an opportunity to be involved in this major business for the province of Alberta. As you know, the petrochemical industry in Alberta is the largest in Canada, and we look very much forward to opportunities to continue supporting the industry and having it grow and be a major part of Alberta's future with respect to energy.

Some mention of the Washington office. Most certainly, Mr. Chairman, I won't get into that. Not particularly relative to my budget discussions. However, I do have to say that we've had very, very good communications from that office into our markets in the United States, our investment community south of the border. I think that up to this point in time most people would agree that that has been a very positive and productive choice of office, and certainly the individual that's there now is, we think, doing a very good job for the people of Alberta.

There was mention a number of times, Mr. Chairman, about holidays. Holidays in the energy business. Holidays and holidays. Royalty holidays. I have to tell you that in the energy industry there are no holidays. We work everyday, 24/7, for the people of Alberta. We don't take holidays. There are no holidays in the energy business, and we will continue to do that.

There were also suggestions made that there is a bit of a play going on here between conventional oil and conventional gas and the fact that it's on a decline. I can remember the first time I was in that business, probably about the mid-1970s sometime, and it was deemed to be on a very, very serious decline at that point in time. I have to say that there was a bit of decline in conventional gas, I think, in the '06-07 era. With the drilling programs that we've had in place recently, we have pretty much kept pace.

Certainly, over time we know that these are finite resources. So will we see declines on the conventional, if you call the old gas and that conventional? Yes, indeed, we'll see that. Serious considerations with respect to making up those revenue dollars? Absolutely. We do have a plan in place to do that, Mr. Chairman. We have replacements with deep tight gas. We have replacements, of course, on the gas side in CBM. I think that, you know, when we look ahead in Alberta, on the oil sand part there's going to be a tremendous opportunity for increased production, more involvement by Albertans, Canadians, and certainly investors from around the world.

The other thing that I should point out is that we are standing on another Alberta. Our conventional resources are something less than 40 per cent produced. We have left in place conventional pools somewhere in the magnitude of 65 to 70 per cent of the resource that was there. Mr. Chairman, as I've indicated in my opening remarks, the technology that we're working with in the province of Alberta will continue to let us have an opportunity to bring those numbers from 70 per cent left behind to 65 to 60, down and down and down, and over the years we would hope that those resources – we know where they are, we know the quality, we know how to handle them, and we certainly think that there's a tremendous opportunity to retrieve a lot more of that resource.

There was mention made of the Crown agreements with respect to two of the major oil sands operators currently. The bitumen royalty option most certainly is in place. The member opposite has asked me: why was it done? I would suggest to you that in 1996 the whole climate, both globally and in North America, was certainly different than it is today. In 1997 there were some adjustments made with respect to the regime and the initial agreements. There were contracts put in place that would allow for a bitumen royalty option for these two players. Why was it done? I believe, actually, that if you looked at it in the context of 1996 or 1997 and you looked forward at what they would have thought would have been the prices that oil would be delivered for in the future, in a 10-year span, and gave them an opportunity, perhaps, out from that to make adjust-

ments, in those days, in those terms it was very likely a valid consideration.

3:00

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. When we're talking about those orders in council from 1996 that gave these one-time options for this change from the synthetic crude oil to the bitumen royalty rate, I think it was \$158 million that Suncor could subtract annually, if my memory is serving me correctly. I don't have the order in council with me. I think that was the amount on an annual basis that they could use. If you could clarify as to why that was necessary, I would be grateful.

I would also like to remind at this time the hon. minister that the royalties paid on synthetic crude oil are so much higher than that on bitumen. I know that you and your department officials have worked very hard on that HUTF report. I would like to see every effort made to increase the amount of bitumen upgrading in this province.

The minister is absolutely right whenever he's talking about the potential for further development. In fact, maybe we could put an upgrader out in Vermilion or somewhere like that, where a lot of that heavy oil is, at some point in the future because there is certainly a considerable amount of energy stored in those bitumen deposits that are located under or partially under the constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster. We could keep the President of the Treasury Board very busy there until his fingers are sore counting the royalty money.

Now, this is a very interesting subject, and we're going to probably run out of time before we get an opportunity to discuss all of the issues in this department and the entire budget, but I would like to get some comments from the minister on some questions in regard to electricity deregulation. Every year now I look in the sort of brag book at the back of the fiscal plan on the economic outlook and everything, and I used to see in here, when I was first elected, a comparative cost on electricity, electricity prices in various places in the country. I don't see that now, and I know what the reason is. It's that this department is embarrassed that the cost of electricity has gotten so high with deregulation that they no longer put the chart in here comparing our low-cost electricity to other jurisdictions. Sometimes you can find a lot in this budget by what you don't see and what you don't read, and that is an example of that.

One of the most controversial government policies developed in the last generation in this province certainly would have been electricity deregulation. I know that the hon. minister was in charge on behalf of the government of the latest version of the Electric Utilities Act whenever it was discussed and debated in this Assembly. We have a look at everything that has occurred. We have high prices. We have less service, certainly. We have more add-ons on the bill. Has the minister considered reversing the decision by the former Minister of Energy, who made this decision and overruled the EUB? The EUB wanted to have a roughly 50-50 share of the costs for expanded or upgraded transmission lines shared between the consumers of the electricity and the generators. The Minister of Energy overruled this decision by the EUB and dumped all the costs onto the bills of already frustrated consumers.

Will the government, will this department consider now overruling the ambassador, or whatever you want to call him, in Washington? You don't even have to tell him. Just do it. Don't phone him. Don't ask him for advice. Just overrule that decision that was articulated in Banff overruling the EUB and make the generators pay half the cost. We've seen these costs escalate.

Now, we've got that 500 kV line between Genesee and Langdon, and it's certainly a controversial project, to say the least. But when

we look at that line and when we look at the first needs assessment that was done, the costs for that were roughly \$277 million, and there was a plus or minus in there, I think, of 30 per cent for cost overruns. The AESO website, I believe, is where I saw that. Now costs have almost in two years doubled that. You know, we're going to get the usual excuses of materials and labour and costs of that nature increasing dramatically and that's the reason for the doubling of the prices. But wages haven't doubled. Galvanized steel for those big towers, I don't think that has doubled. So I would be very anxious to see some sort of accounting of this because consumers are going to be handed the bill. AltaLink, of course, is going to be guaranteed a return on their money. They're not the losers in this.

There was a question in the Assembly in regard to Enmax and their proposed – I think eventually it's going to be a 1,200 megawatt modern, natural gas fired generating station right at the edge of the Calgary load. I think that's a good idea: to bring the energy to the generating station and then turn that energy, whether it's natural gas or coal, into electricity at the edge of the load. The demand for the electrical load in Calgary is significant. In fact, it was so significant that I see that the AESO last year put Calgary's internal load right on the current supply and demand page of their website. They've since removed it. I don't know why. I was often going to phone them and say: what about Edmonton? But I thought: well, I wouldn't. It's not there anymore.

When we look at the electricity system and we look at how we need to expand and modernize our transmission lines, I'm curious. As we allow the AESO to have more power, and I'm saying the regulatory ability – we're giving them more power – we're taking power away from the EUB. This order in council from April 11, 2007, would be the document that I would reference because, in my opinion and in the opinion of others that I've consulted, there is a transfer of regulatory authority or power from the EUB to the ISO here. There has been some concern in the past about legal ramifications when we give the EUB 180 days, I believe it is, to make a regulatory decision. There was concern that this would lead to a number of lawsuits.

Now, with the landowners and with all the folks that are going before the EUB in one form or another in Red Deer, is the minister and is the department concerned that the passing of this regulation, this regulation to change the transmission system, this Order in Council 173/2007, recommended by the Minister of Energy under the Electric Utilities Act, section 142 – the date I have on this is April 11, 2007 – will jeopardize the whole regulatory process for that entire kV line? Essentially, the rules have changed halfway through the game. The landowners were certainly looking at issues, and the rules have changed with this transmission regulation.

Thanks.

3:10

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your allocated time has now elapsed.

Hon. minister, would you like to respond?

Mr. Knight: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I certainly do. I've got to go back a little bit. You know, the member is asking a number of questions, of course, that require, I think, a bit of an expanded answer, so I want to go back.

There was some suggestion on comparisons of royalty and that kind of thing. I think it might be useful for us just to indicate that when you make an economic rent comparison with Alberta and these other jurisdictions that a number of people keep bringing up – Norway being one of them, Alaska, perhaps Venezuela, and others – if you look at the total share that this resource returns to the people

of the province of Alberta compared to Norway, you need to take into account our tax structure, royalty system, bid bonus system, and so on. Well, on the tax side Alberta receives more in the economic rent than do the folks in Norway or Alaska or Venezuela if you consider all of the things involved in the economic rent.

To go back and talk a bit about the bitumen royalty option, and we will get a number for the member, in 1996 what was the expected differential if you moved from SCO to bitumen? I don't have that number with me. Somebody here very well may, but if we don't have it for you here immediately, we'll get it to the member opposite in due course.

Bitumen upgrading capacity: very interesting and certainly very timely. As you know, we've been mandated by the Premier to provide value-added opportunities for Albertans. Of course, when we look at bitumen, most people immediately think that the number one thing you can do with respect to value add is to upgrade. That's not necessarily the only thing to do with bitumen, but it is one of the options and a very important one. So I'll just let the member know that I can give you some numbers that are going to be relatively close. They're not pinpointed, but they're close.

Currently in 2006 we've got about a 680,000-barrel capacity to upgrade bitumen in the province now. Under construction, as we speak, an additional 323,000 barrels a day. That would bring us to, rounds numbers, pretty much a million barrels a day. That's under construction. Announced bitumen upgraders in the province of Alberta: an additional 806,000 barrels a day, and those are the ones that are tied to corporations that are producing bitumen, transporting bitumen, and upgrading bitumen, all considering doing these things inside the province of Alberta. So we do those numbers roughly, and of course we know that some of these things, you know, economics being what they are, may not all proceed. If they did, we're at about 1.8 million barrels just with those. Then, besides that, there are two merchant upgraders, one under construction and one that's been announced, that add an additional hundred thousand barrels a day. So, Mr. Chairman, we're up to about 1.9 million barrels a day of bitumen that can be upgraded in the province of Alberta, given that the information that we have today would come to fruition.

So if we look ahead, between now and I'm going to say 2020 – we're talking about 15 years, so that's probably not out too far – the total capacity to produce bitumen, you know, probably industry experts would indicate that we may be someplace in the neighbourhood of 3 and a half million barrels. We may. If we can upgrade 2 million or 2 and a half million barrels of that and then have a blend of that project, some synbit, some bitumen with diluent, a variety of products that we can put into the export market for consumers in North America and, perhaps, even places around the world, I would suggest that that might be, indeed, value maximization for Albertans.

We have comparison charts, and indeed I would suggest that if we've left it out of the documents that the member opposite is looking at, we can certainly provide some comparisons for him. We certainly do have charts that will compare the cost of electricity in the province of Alberta with other places across the country. Certainly, other than places that are very heavily weighted towards rather low cost and, I might say, to some degree a bit aging and perhaps a little underrated now these days, it appears in certain circumstances, hydro in other parts of Canada, if you compare us with anything other than that, Mr. Chairman, we do very, very well.

In fact, in Regina, I mean, the recent things that we have here, you know, about 83 cents a meg; New Brunswick, 83. If we go to Calgary, it's 85 cents, but if you go to Edmonton, it's only 80 cents. You know, not bad, if you look at us relative to anywhere else in the country. Charlottetown, P.E.I. – and you and I both know a little bit about Charlottetown, P.E.I. – guess what they're doing over there?

Mr. Chairman, 94 and a half cents. We should be arguing for those folks a little bit; they're suffering. Alberta is in middle of the pack.

Transmission costs shared with generators and consumers. Mr. Chairman, let's be very clear on this particular issue. The member opposite knows this well. It's a point that he can make, leading people to misunderstand what happens. With respect to the cost of generating electricity, transmitting electricity, distributing electricity, and retailing electricity, it's borne by whom? The consumers of electricity. Now, isn't that odd. So if we take the cost of transmission, put 50 per cent of it in the hands of the generator, and then in the old system we allowed that generator to take that cost and put it into the mix that they had before they were actually bidding their power on the open marketplace, then the regulator would allow them to take that cost, mark up their cost of managing it, and put it into the cost of generation. Lo and behold, who pays? The same person.

What we did in this province, again: opened up the system, made it transparent, let people see what it is that they're actually paying for. When you pay for your electricity, on your bill it says that you're paying for electricity, Mr. Chairman. You're not paying for the transportation of it. You're not paying to distribute it. You're not paying to retail it. You're paying to generate the electricity and purchase that power.

The cost with respect to transmission: how are these costs managed? Of course, again, the member knows very well that the transmission system in the province of Alberta is completely regulated, absolutely and totally regulated, as it was before any of this started. The restructuring did not change the regulation areas with respect to transmission. Transmission, basically, is monopolistic by its nature, so it requires fairly stringent regulation, and of course we've continued to do that.

Enmax's 1,200-megawatt generator – good news for Alberta; good news for Albertans, generally speaking – however, has nothing at all to do with the transmission system and the fact that the transmission system in the province of Alberta is going to require over periods of time upgrading. It's certainly a robust system that has for the most part served Albertans very well. We're sure that it will continue to do so. Enmax's 1,200 megawatts, Mr. Chairman, will fit very nicely into the 8,000 megawatts that we're going to require over the next 10 or so years.

So is it a piece of the answer to the situation that we're faced with in Alberta? Absolutely. Does it have anything to do with our transmission system in the province? I would suggest not. There are certainly advantages when somebody like Enmax or any other entity that would want to get into the generating business puts something like 1,200 megawatts into the system in the province. It will certainly help to balance the grid. It helps to decrease line losses not only in the region that it's in but most certainly throughout the transmission system across the province.

So we're looking at that very positively but not in the light that people want to . . .

3:20

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, the allocated time has now lapsed.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. minister did a very eloquent job of trying to defend electricity deregulation, but consumers certainly know that their power bills have more than doubled since this scheme was forced on them late in the year 2000. If our electricity distribution system is so robust, as he maintains, why is it always breaking down? There are lights flickering on and off all the time now, and it's not nearly as robust.

To the hon. minister: with all due respect, there has been no long-term planning of our electricity system. No one would risk their money because they didn't know what the rules would be, and as a result of this we are now trying to force on unwilling landowners a 500 kV line because we need the power. We need the transmission system to be upgraded before we can construct the baseload generation station at Keephills. The landowners are riled up.

This gets back to my further questions on this order in council. This change in the transmission regulation that has recently occurred: how is this going to be enforced, and how is this not going to invite legal action by landowners? As the regulatory process proceeded, the government changed the transmission regulation. Again, significant powers have been given to the ISO. They have been taken away from the EUB. The EUB is a docile servant of the ISO. Talking about administrative costs, in the last couple of annual reports that I looked at, I saw a significant increase in the administrative costs of the ISO. There doesn't seem to be anybody – maybe the hon. minister is going to keep his eye on them. There was concern in the legal community about having this quick turnaround time at the EUB in regard to these matters. Now the EUB in this document is obligated, as I understand it, if they're going to be longer than 180 days, to give an explanation. In the controversy that is surrounding that 500 kV line, we have a lot of upset landowners and ratepayers here. Is changing this regulation in the middle of the process not going to lead to a flood of legal action?

Now, Mr. Chairman, I said this before. Every day we hear from Albertans who are just sick and tired of the high electricity costs that this government has allowed to happen due to the deregulation experiment. This is the same government that forced a deregulated system on Alberta consumers, and they have seen absolutely no benefit to it at all. Now, can the minister tell us why he still supports deregulation when Alberta consumers want it unplugged? I do notice that in this regulation that we passed, for some of the recovery of must-run costs we're on essentially the same system that we unplugged because the compensation for these outfits "must be no greater than an amount that would result in the recovery of fixed, operating and maintenance costs, including a reasonable rate of return." Now, I'll be darned. That wasn't good enough with the old system, but now we have it for must-run costs.

You know, this government again indicates that, oh, they don't pick winners and losers. This is a question that has never been answered. I have never received an answer from the department. I brought this up in previous budget debates, and I have never received an answer to this. This question would be: why are you going to charge a tax on coal-fired units on a per megawatt basis? The generating unit owner's contribution is section 29 of this new transmission regulation. In 29(2) we're talking about upgrading the transmission facilities and a charge of \$10,000 per megawatt. This is nothing more than a tax on further development out here. Now, other people would disagree with me, but it's nothing more than a tax on baseload coal-fired generation, in my mind. If I could have an answer for that from this hon. minister, I would be very grateful because I didn't get it from the previous minister. They promised at that point that they would.

I've got to go back here for a minute and correct the comparison between Alberta and Norway. This is a document – and I would urge all hon. members to have a look at this, Mr. Chairman. This is prepared by Petroleum Economics Limited. A well-known, well-recognized expert – and I got this information from the Internet – has prepared this with his consulting firm. He lists on the website Alberta Energy as one of his clients. His comparison of oil resource taxation regimes – he's got four of them in here. Alberta versus Norway: he's including a lot of things like bonuses, operating costs,

taxation, you name it. Here's what he has to say, and this is for Alberta light. Alberta light is crude oil quality. The taxation percentage is 42 per cent. In Norway it is 48 per cent. And the producer's percentage is the reverse of that, of course: in Alberta it's 58 per cent, and in Norway it's 52 per cent.

He also does the same thing for a comparison between Alberta and Alaska, Alberta heavy and Alaska north slope oil. The taxation percentage in Alaska is 55 per cent; in Alberta it is 47 per cent. Of course, the Alberta producer's percentage is 53 per cent, and for Alaska north slope oil it is 45 per cent. He does the same thing with Venezuela. The taxation rate between Alberta and Venezuela: Alberta is 41 per cent; the Venezuelans are 56 per cent. The reverse would be the producer's take in that. So, you know, we have to be careful whenever we compare Alberta to Norway or Alberta to Alaska. We have to be very careful about that. This is a document that was prepared, and it was referenced in this tabling in a comparable study of Alberta to Norway. In fact, one of your department officials probably wrote the e-mail that I had the privilege of reading. I just had to get that on the record because there are two different views of who pays more, Norway or this province.

Now, getting back to electricity deregulation, why does the government continue along this path of electricity deregulation when it's clear that it's not working? To the minister – again, I offered this to the previous minister – take our plan. You took our stabilization fund plan. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, you took her child care plan, and you ran with that. Feel free to take our electricity deregulation plan as well. I don't understand why you continue to spend money trying to make deregulation work. I would suggest that you should just pull the plug, admit that it was a mistake, and return to a regulated system.

3:30

Now, a constituent of mine brought an issue to my office that I think also warrants further explanation from this government. He pointed out that each month he receives his natural gas bill from Direct Energy regulated services, which includes an enclosure that is promoting Direct Energy essential services. This constituent of mine – oh, we're going to get to this later.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Again, I would suggest to the member opposite that it's going along reasonably well. We seem to be able to get some exchange going back and forth. However, I did notice that you found my reference note a bit humorous. So we might be able to at some point in time get back to the budget, and that's – you know, the discussion is fine.

So the AESO. Two or three times now there have been suggestions made that in the T-reg or in other adjustments that we've made with respect to restructuring, we've taken away power from the EUB. Nothing – nothing – that we've done in any of those regulations takes any authority away from the EUB.

What you will see there, Mr. Chairman, is that for the EUB there's a deference in the regulation to the AESO's technical and engineering expertise with respect to these issues about needs. So what they're saying, basically, is that we have hired at AESO some of the best technical and engineering expertise that's available. So why would the EUB question them with respect to that unless there's something that appears to be very, very offside, either with respect to the issue around the technical or engineering aspects or perhaps the public interest? So those are the only areas where we're talking about a deference that EUB should give to AESO.

Again, discussions abound. I agree with the member opposite about this business of restructuring the electrical industry in the province of Alberta. Mr. Chairman, I'll repeat this to the member opposite however many times I need to. In the province of Alberta previous to the time we started this, today, or in the future, there will be nothing in this system that is deregulated. It's all regulated.

The only thing we've done differently is we've taken one piece as a vertically integrated system of generating, transmission, distribution, retail: all stacked up there in a nice little stack. No one could figure out who charged who for what because it was all buried inside. We've taken that thing and taken the blocks and laid them out nice and neat. Here they are: regulation here, regulation here, regulation here, regulation over here. However, we've said to the generators: you're doing a piece of business in the open market; you bid into the pool. That's all we've done: restructured the system, not deregulated anything.

There was a suggestion that somehow or another we've added a tax to coal-fired generation. There has always been an access fee. This is nothing more than the access fee. If you're going to generate electricity and you're on a huge scale – a huge scale – 400 megawatts, 500, 800. We don't know. Somebody will come up, I'm sure, with a proposal at some point in time for 1,100 megawatts or 1,200; Enmax maybe. They want to put it in the grid? What's going to happen to the grid? Who should pay? Here's the grid sitting there. It's happy enough doing what it does, and all of a sudden somebody comes along and says: I want to put this thousand megawatts right here. So somebody is responsible to pay for the costs that are going to be incurred for that connection and adjustments that need to be made in that grid that's affecting every other Albertan.

So you have to have a consistent message here. On the one hand you're telling me that generators – right? – should pay for transmission. When we say that there is a piece of transmission that we do believe they should pay for, you say: take that away; they shouldn't pay for that. So all I'm saying to you, hon. member, is that what we've done here isn't anything different than we've done for an awful long time, and that is that the generators would be required to pay a fee because it does affect the rest of the system and the transmission system, generally speaking, serving all Albertans. I think that it's only fair in those cases that generators that are going to tie in with major pieces of load are required to support that system.

Comparisons with Norway. You know, I think that we'll be comparing Norway probably forever. Interestingly enough, we'll get a lot closer to comparisons with Norway because they're here now. They're interested. They realize that what they were doing in certain parts of the world aren't the only places they can do business, and most certainly they're interested in doing business here.

I mean, there are reports and reports and reports. Here's one. This is the one you quoted from prior there, Comparison of Selected Oil Resource Taxation Regimes. There's lots and lots of this stuff. What they're talking about: comparisons made in selected tax regimes. This is what you're talking about; there's a difference here: Alberta's gap narrows significantly when taxation is compared to field price less supply cost. In fact, Alberta and Norway are quite comparable given the accuracy of this assessment.

We can pick pieces – and we've had this discussion. You can take a little snippet from Texas and a piece from here and there and say: we don't do well because these guys over here on this point here are doing better. Yes. And in some circumstances they're doing worse. So, you know, I think that on balance these folks are telling us that Alberta and Norway are quite comparable.

There were questions with respect to transmission regulation. Again, we can't have this thing both ways. We stand accused – not

guilty, accused – of deregulating. Well, could be some truth in some of that in places. We've moved regulations, changed them. We may have. But, you know, we set a system in place, brought in a new Electric Utilities Act, worked on that in 2001-02, and brought it in in 2003. I think it cleared through the Legislature in 2003. Most certainly, when we talked about it when the bill was discussed and so on, I would suggest that there had been some reference to the regulation with respect to that legislation.

We know that when you do something like that and bring in a piece of legislation that's relatively encompassing with respect to something as important as electric utility in the province of Alberta, there would at some point in time be adjustments required. So, Mr. Chairman, what I'd suggest to you is that the regulations that we tabled and moved forward – you know, in the province of Alberta it's a normal course of business and very good business, by the way.

3:40

With respect to any of the hearings or projects that are in the process or coming forward, the relative parts of the new transmission regulation will have, I would suggest, very little, minimal, or no cost attached. However, an important piece that I think that we should point out in those new regulations – there's a lovely little piece in there, and it's a very short little piece in there, and it has to do with landowners, and it has to do with their compensation. Again, you've suggested that we've taken away the EUB powers. Well, we're not taking away EUB powers. [Mr. Knight's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, you will get your opportunity again.

The hon. member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I must say at this time that the hon. minister's officials in the Department of Energy are much quieter than his colleagues in the House during question period. I don't know if anyone has told them or not, but we can have coffee and other refreshments in here if they find it a little dull.

Certainly, one comparison that I would urge the minister and his officials to look at – and it's been overlooked in the debate over CO₂ sequestration – is the fact that in Norway since 1996 offshore there has been a significant amount of experimentation and development of CO₂ sequestration. That information has to be made available to Albertans, that this project has been going on there for the best part of 11 years, and it seems to be working. There seems to be a great deal of skepticism here over CO₂ sequestration. If we're going to make another comparison about Norway, let's also get that in there.

Before I get to the role of this department in Direct Energy, I'm sorry, but with all due respect, I can't agree with you in regard to the interpretation that the EUB is somehow not affected, and there's not any more regulatory power going to the ISO because if you look at section 5(1) of this regulation and what the board has to do here, all the board rules under section 129(1) of the act must be consistent with the standards and rules under section 5 that the ISO makes under this regulation. I don't know how the hon. minister can say that the EUB is not the loser in this.

We're continuing to facilitate exports, we're continuing to talk about exports of electricity, and we're continuing to expect consumers to foot the cost of these transmission lines. None of this makes sense, and if we look further in this regulation, we will see where the board must not require the ISO to make any statement with respect to the prudence of a transmission facility organization or an electrical distribution system in incurring a cost under another section of this regulation.

So my question would be: if what the hon. minister had stated is true, why is the ISO not responsible for their actions when further on in this regulation the board has to explain its actions in regard to a hearing conducted within a 180-day period or after that 180-day period? In my opinion, again, this makes the board a docile servant of the ISO, and I think it should be the other way around.

Now, getting to my constituent. I understand that the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne is involved in some sort of regulatory process to streamline the entire process. My constituent – and this is in regard to an enclosure that is promoting Direct Energy essential services – points out that the cost of the postage is paid by the consumer, yet Direct Energy essential services is allowed to market itself to consumers for free since the consumer is paying for the postage. So the question that arises is: why are consumers who are paying for a regulated gas service forced to pay the postage for a deregulated company to promote its services? Why has Direct Energy essential services been allowed to have Alberta consumers pay for its marketing campaign?

Now, I do have some questions at this time on the business plan. On page 132 under the heading Challenges: Electricity Generation and Transmission Capacity it states, "Installed generating capacity will need to increase in order to keep pace with Alberta's growing demand for electricity." Again, why does this government continually boast about the increased generation capacity that deregulation has brought to Albertans when clearly that is not the case? If deregulation is so great, as the minister claims, why has it failed to produce sufficient generation or lower our electricity prices? How can this government continue to defend deregulation after all these years when there have been zero benefits for Alberta consumers? Can the minister tell us why deregulation has failed to provide adequate generation capacity as was proven time and again over the past years – we talked about it earlier – whenever Albertans were forced to deal with blackouts.

On page 132 of the business plan also under the heading Challenges: Electricity Generation and Transmission Capacity it states, "Timely regulatory approval will be critical to ensuring adequate future transmission capacity." The 500 kV line hearings are a good example of how the department has failed miserably in regulating this process to date. Landowners in this province deserve better than what this government is providing in terms of a regulatory process. Landowners have no confidence whatsoever in this system.

Now, here it is my view that the department is stating that it is critical that we have timely approval for these projects. If the budget of the EUB is only increased modestly and the workload of the EUB is that they have to work like Trojans over there, all this while the retired EUB chairman has stated that the EUB is suffering from exhaustion, how is this going to work? What is the government's logic here with this budget? Are you just going to run these approvals and rubber stamp them despite the concerns of the landowners? I think the EUB needs help because we're giving them more and more work, more and more files, if I can use that term. I know that people are recruiting their staff, and that's a problem for them. I think we have really failed the landowners of central Alberta and what is affectionately called the western corridor in this whole regulatory process. I don't think that we should be in any way speeding up this regulatory process.

There's also the issue with Mr. Kellan Fluckiger, a contractor that was hired. The last time that I looked on the website of the department, that individual was still employed by the department. He comes from Gray Davis's office in California. The whole issue of conflict of interest and how all this works with the department and the fact that it has been brought to our attention and I believe it's also been brought to the attention of the EUB hearing that this

individual's spouse works for AltaLink – how does all this work? Is it because I'm a contractor to the department that conflict-of-interest rules don't apply? I think that if we had clear standards on all of this, there wouldn't be the lack of confidence that has been expressed by so many landowners in this hearing process to date regarding this 500 kV line.

3:50

Now, on page 139 of the business plan, performance measure 5.a, Power Generation, margin between supply and peak demand for the last actual year, 2005, was 17 per cent. Can the minister explain how we have a 17 per cent margin, yet we continue to experience energy emergency alerts from the Alberta Electric System Operator indicating that we are approaching another blackout? Why can't we keep the lights on in Alberta if we have all this surplus generation? Will the minister finally admit that the reason is because it is not profitable for the industry to keep a healthy surplus available and running in the case of a lightning strike or some other circumstance? Therefore, when such things happen, Albertans lose their power.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the chair is able to recognize you again if you'd like to speak.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I appreciate that.

The Deputy Chair: You may proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Once again this is an example that deregulation only benefits the pocketbooks of power producers and not Alberta consumers. The minister can talk about his vertical tower all he wants, but the pile of cash at the top of that belongs to the producers, and it's coming from the pockets of the consumers. I still can't understand, Mr. Chairman, when this government will finally recognize that it should be serving the interests of Albertans, the power consumers, and not the rascals like Enron.

I did have the opportunity the other evening to watch *The Smartest Guys in the Room*. I was urged to do that by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. It was on PBS, commercial-free, and it was certainly an interesting movie to watch. It was well past 1 o'clock before it was over. It was quite odd because so many of the people that were involved in that movie were also involved with promoting electricity deregulation in this province.

Now, regarding page 138 of the business plan goal 5 states, "Maintain a competitive market framework that provides Albertans with competitively priced and reliable electricity and natural gas." Can the minister tell us how much the price of electricity has risen since deregulation was forced on Albertans compared to the increase or decrease in other jurisdictions? He did a comparison earlier, but I'm sorry; I also did a comparison on electricity farm prices. When you compare the four western Canadian provinces, understanding that they all have different systems of generating electricity, regardless of input costs our costs here in this province are significantly higher than the costs in Manitoba, in Saskatchewan, or in British Columbia. And it's deregulation. Electricity deregulation has caused that.

Why is it the goal of the government to provide competitively priced electricity and natural gas and not the cheapest, most reliable electricity and natural gas? Can the minister please tell us why the new transmission regulation, again, removes accountability from the ISO? I don't agree with the ISO being allowed to determine and approve costs. I don't think this is accountable, and I don't understand why this is going on. It's quite different.

Now, Mr. Chairman, the Auditor General's report. We had a look at that briefly. Hopefully we're going to get to that again, but I want to go back, if you don't mind, please, to royalties and the royalty structure. It's great to see the experts from the department here with the minister today. I think this is a real step forward in the democratic process. I'm glad they're not here during question period, but I'm glad they're here now.

We hear from Albertans frequently, and a lot of the hon. members of this House who were in the race for the Conservative Party leadership also heard people say that they feel as though we're not getting the right amount in royalty. If the Royalty Review Panel recommends changes to the royalty regime, how much of the budget resources that we're discussing this afternoon are set aside for administering these changes?

Albertans feel as though their government has not been open with them. They're suspicious. Even the royalty review documents that were tabled in this House – and we talked about that earlier – are censored significantly. Will any of this year's budgeted money be utilized for reaching out and sharing the information with the resource owners, Albertans. We fight for documents and get quoted ridiculously high prices when this information should all be public to begin with.

Again to the minister: how are you going to improve on your department's openness in terms of royalty information? I would really like the entire contents of this royalty review, you know, instead of just selected pieces of it. Will the minister dedicate any funds to increasing the government's openness in relation to how royalties are collected and how they're calculated, how the whole process is audited?

Now, getting to the process of auditing, the Auditor General again makes recommendations in his 2005-06 report, page 76, recommendation 27. The Auditor General again recommended that the department "complete its risk assessment and evaluate the assurance obtained from the Petroleum Registry System and the Department's controls over well and production data." Have you addressed this recommendation since it is repeated by the Auditor General? How many dollars or how much money have you dedicated to meeting this particular recommendation? Can the minister please tell us if we have lost royalty revenues due to the department's failure to be quicker in addressing this concern?

With that, I don't know if I'm going to have time when I get to the royalty review. You know, we get 10 minutes over there, and I don't think that's enough. The minister lifts his eyes. Yeah, 10 minutes is not very long. The research I've been doing indicates that all the lower 48 states, the ones that are mentioned in here, use the Henry hub price to calculate their royalties. We're very vague about how we collect our royalties here, whether it's the Alberta gas reference price or the reference price, whatever it is. There are some very quiet, if I can use that term, Mr. Chairman, references in the annual report and in the budget about how our royalties are collected. But I really think we should be going to the Henry hub, the spot price.

The American jurisdictions that are discussed in this report are on the Henry hub price, and if we look at the government take in this uncensored version of this Wood Mackenzie report, we will see that there's a significant difference between the government take. Texas is at the top of the list, followed by Louisiana. Alberta is at the bottom of the list. If we were to charge our royalties for natural gas – and I should have been clear, Mr. Chairman – on the Henry hub spot price, I think there would be a significant difference in the amount of royalty we collect in natural gas.

Now, I have had the privilege of having some research provided to me. This research is quite interesting because between the year 1990 and the year 2004 – and this is using EUB production figures

– again, we got a good idea of the amount of natural gas that was produced. We know from natural gas the Henry hub price. We know that that's a different price that's used for the calculations than what we're currently using. We know the total value of their production, which is \$266 billion, and we know that the royalties that have been collected from the hon. minister's own department over the years, starting in 1990 through to 2004, amount to \$41 billion. But if you look at industry revenues and if you look at royalties received, we have received about 15.7 per cent in royalties from our natural gas. If we were to do that in a pie chart, it would be significantly less than what the department is indicating in its annual reports. In fact, what the department is indicating in its annual reports is significantly less again than what is in the documents that had been tabled in the House on the 16th of April. I would like an explanation of that.

4:00

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It may have been noticed by some people and most surely noticed by my hon. colleague opposite that I had to go for coffee somewhere around the Enron part, I think it was. There's just no point, you know. But, yeah, the coffee is good. To get down to answer some of the questions that are relative to what we're talking about, I am prepared to certainly engage in that, and I think that that part can be constructive.

Mr. Chairman, questions around CO₂ sequestration. Most certainly, you know, there are areas globally, Norway being one of them, I understand, but also places in the Middle East and would you believe as close as Red Deer – yeah, we're doing it. We're doing it as close as Red Deer. You know what? Just to show you that this province and this government are extremely interested in and attuned to our situation with respect to greenhouse gas emissions and where we need to go, we have joined with the federal government on a carbon capture and storage task force, and we will explore in depth. We have a blue-ribbon panel of people that are currently looking at that situation and will continue to do that and come up with a report.

I think that if you see what the United Nations climate change panel has published – and I believe, actually, that there's some more documentation that they're releasing, maybe even this week or early next week, with respect to this issue. But carbon capture and sequestration is one of the three things that they suggest that we should do. So we're there, and we'll continue to work with that.

Suggestions made about the royalty structure and the royalty review support and, you know, what are we doing with respect to that, and getting back to our budget where dollars are involved. Mr. Chairman, \$750,000 in this budget is going to support the royalty review. We have \$500,000 looking at the royalty volume reviews, and they're shared between our department and EUB. So, most certainly, you know, we're stepping up to the plate here. We're taking this thing seriously. We're very confident that this review at the end of the day will support a much stronger Alberta as we move ahead.

As far as the business of collecting royalties and the suggestions that somehow or another some jurisdictions have a better way to base a price on which they would collect the royalties, I suggest that with the gas royalties in the United States, it's a net-back to the well. The net-backs to the wells, same thing we do in Alberta. So, Mr. Chairman, I think the answer to that is relatively straightforward. There is not in the overarching part of that business really much of a difference. We use actual sales prices, and I believe that most U.S. states would do the same.

I'm kind of going from the more recent to the more historic

questions here, but back to AESO again. You know, the member has alluded a few times to the fact that the EUB is getting the short end of the stick, that AESO is getting stronger and the EUB has got less responsibility or at least we've taken some of their mandate away. I don't think that I could at all agree with that. Certainly, in the regulations that are being discussed here, there are a number of issues that very clearly will affect both of those bodies. But AESO has been directed, Mr. Chairman, to establish an open, transparent process with respect to its budgeting and its guidelines and that sort of thing.

In the system that we had set up originally, they had to have their budget cleared by EUB, but it won't be too long down the road, Mr. Chairman, that we'll be moving ahead. We'll bring legislation to the floor of the Legislature with respect to separating the EUB, and I think that these regulations and other things that we're going to do with respect to that legislation on this issue will be much stronger when we come out of it. But, most certainly, AESO under the auspices of what we see as the new Alberta utilities commission will play an important role, continue to, but I think the utilities commission, nevertheless, will be mandated and have the task of being the regulator for the province of Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to that, I would suggest to the hon. member that we're not taking anything away from them, and you can see in our budget numbers, as I'd alluded to in my opening comments, that we're very much interested in additional support for all of the regulators in the province of Alberta. The hon. member has indicated that, you know, the applications coming forward to EUB presently have increased and dramatically. I agree with that, and our support for the EUB I think has also increased. I would suggest that it might not be as dramatic as some of us may have liked, but it's dramatic. On a percentage scale, you know, we're moving ahead. We realize that it's going to take some additional people to continue to handle the volumes of business that Alberta is going to generate now and in the future, so we're certainly supporting that, and that shows in the budget.

From the notes that I've written here, I think I've addressed most of the hon. member's questions with the exception of the one that had to do with a number around that 1996-97 time that had to do with the bitumen royalty option, and we will attempt to isolate that number and provide it for the member on a go-forward basis, most certainly.

I think that attached to that piece of business as well, it would certainly be interesting for all members of the Legislature and most certainly for Albertans, generally speaking, to pay particular attention to these issues that are going to come forward in the royalty review, an absolutely open and public information delivery and gathering system and opportunities for education for Albertans with respect to that issue.

4:10

The bitumen royalty option is one part, and most certainly we're going to work very diligently with respect to that. Also, attached to that there are other issues around bitumen valuation and what this product is actually worth, and we'll continue to work with that. As the member has stated, in certain jurisdictions, certain circumstances they may pick a price here or there. It could be that it's more advantageous to one party or it disadvantages another party. But, you know, we'll continue to work diligently along with the Minister of Finance with respect to that review that's ongoing.

The challenges that are in our business plan, page 132, some questions that the member had relative to the challenges. I don't know that there were specific questions as such with respect to that. However, I think that most of those comments . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, the time allocated has now lapsed.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, just to advise you that there are about seven minutes left in the two hours that we have. If you'd like to use the full seven minutes, that's your choice, or if you wanted the minister to comment – I'm just advising you that there are seven minutes left before we move to Children's Services, and then we'll come back, and the minister could be questioned thereafter again by any other member.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Well, I would appreciate a clarification because my records indicate that we got officially started here at 2:30. There were a number of station stops involved, leading up to 2:30 before we actually got . . .

The Deputy Chair: The committee was called to order at 2:20. Yes, there was a delay in the set-up process.

Mr. MacDonald: So why is that?

The Deputy Chair: Well, the committee was called to order, and that's the time the clock starts ticking. What should have happened and will happen from here on in subsequent events is that members of the opposition will be called right away if the minister is not ready to speak.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. We will do our best.

Now, certainly the minister is giving some information in regard to royalty rates in other jurisdictions and stuff. At this time, Mr. Chairman, I would like to point out that – and this is in information that was tabled again on the 16th of April. This is an e-mail from department officials, and it's regarding U.S. royalties and bonuses. I'm surprised and delighted to see that the hon. minister, before he became Energy minister – you know, I realize from reading press releases that he was always going about representing the department at various functions in different places. I'm pleased to learn that the hon. minister participated in some of the meetings around Ken Edwards and that company in Dallas, Texas, in regard to the oil and gas royalty regulations that were studied by the department. So I'm pleased to see that you were involved in all of that, and I certainly hope that you realize that Texas is a good comparison with Alberta, as you suggested in the media.

I was going to bring this up in question period, and I thought I'd just do it this afternoon. According to this information that's been provided to the House, you were involved in the studies, and I'm really glad to see that. In this budget year are there any discussions to change how landowners are compensated for surface rights? I would be delighted to hear from the minister in regard to that.

I'd also be very anxious to hear about the royalty recommendations that have been made in the Auditor General's report, because he certainly makes more than one. On page 78 the Auditor General notes that the department "developed a new oil sands project approval process to incorporate risk into the assessment of project applications." The AG states that "the Department plans to start using this new process before March 31, 2007." Can the hon. minister confirm that this process is, in fact, now being used, and has the absence of this process in the past had any effect on Crown royalties? I know that when we're not collecting Texas rates on our royalties, in the last six years we're out over \$16 billion.

Now, in the time I have, Mr. Chairman, I would really like to talk a little bit about biofuels because of the budget increase, the line item increase in biofuels. I think we should have a good debate on biofuels in this Assembly. The Minister of Agriculture and Food

made some interesting comments regarding biofuels recently. Perhaps the Minister of Energy could address the concerns of his colleague here.

The minister of agriculture told the Camrose bureau, and I quote: if there's a dollar to be made, it doesn't take long for the big boys to come in and make it pretty tough for the primary producers. End of quote. I guess the minister is concerned that the biofuel industry in Alberta will not benefit primary producers but, instead, the larger corporations. Does the Minister of Energy agree with his colleague in light of the increase in this budget year for biofuels? Is the government targeting smaller primary producers with the biofuels initiatives, and if so, how will the government prevent the minister of agriculture's belief from coming true?

The minister of agriculture also states that the big boys, the Cargills and the Tysons of the world, are meeting with the government and looking to set up shop in Alberta. Is this the government's biofuel push? Is this coming from these big corporations? The minister of agriculture appears to be suggesting that the big boys are leaning on this government to push the biofuels initiatives. If that's the case, I wonder how the small primary producers will benefit from this initiative. Can the minister tell the Assembly if he's been approached by, quote, these big boys, end quote, as his colleague has suggested? The biofuels industry has a future, but we have to be very careful how it develops. I think the Minister of Agriculture and Food may be onto something. I think those comments that were made publicly are very, very interesting indeed.

You know, significant subsidies are going to go into this industry. Regardless of what you read, whether it's in the *New York Times* or the *Edmonton Journal* or even the *Calgary Herald*, there is lots of interest in this. Some of the farmers that I talk to see this as a way of increasing their farm-gate income. How is all of this going to work? It's not two years ago that the second-last Minister of Energy – and I said this earlier in debate – was talking about how in Alberta we're never subsidizing anyone, that we're out of the business of being in business. This was before some U.S. government committee. So how is all of this going to work?

Now, Mr. Chairman, the department is requesting \$41 million for the biofuels initiatives. That's a 720 per cent increase from the 2006-07 forecasts. I think these are very important questions, and I'm very disappointed that the time has run out. I would like to thank the minister.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, just to remind you once again that for the next hour we'll be dealing with the estimates for the Department of Children's Services, following which any member who wishes to participate will be able to do so. Minister, if you need to respond, at 5:20 we will be back where we may be able to deal with your department as well as Children's Services at the same time, and that would go on until 5:45 if need be.

Hon. Minister of Children's Services, you may now proceed. Please introduce your staff to the Assembly.

Children's Services

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to introduce the ministry staff here with me today. Sitting in the House, we have the deputy minister, Maria David-Evans; assistant deputy minister of community strategies and support, Niki Wosnack; and senior financial officer, Shehnaz Hutchinson. Sitting in the members' gallery are the assistant deputy minister of ministry support services, Gord Johnston; assistant deputy minister of program quality and standards, Mark Hattori; director of the prevention of family violence and bullying, Sheryl Fricke; director of family support for

children with disabilities, Karen Ferguson; senior manager of budget and analysis, Darren Baptista; acting CEO for the central Alberta child and family services authority, Norman Welch; and my executive assistant, Neris Havelock.

These are just a few of the thousands of dedicated staff who work in our ministry, regional authorities, and contracted agencies across the province. Over the last couple of months I've had the opportunity to meet with many of these individuals, and I am impressed with their incredible commitment to improving the lives of children, youth, and families across this province. It truly is their passion and tremendous hard work each and every day that makes our ministry the success that it is.

In 2007-08 we're investing a total of \$972 million towards children, youth, and families in Alberta. It's a budget that will allow us to address the priorities Premier Stelmach set out for our ministry: ensuring parents have access to quality, affordable child care options, continuing to implement the prevention of family violence and bullying initiative, and focusing on improving outcomes for children in care or in need of specialized services, including aboriginal children and children with disabilities.

Today I'd like to highlight some of this year's budget with you. We're investing \$134 million in child care, \$36 million towards the prevention of family violence and bullying, \$4 million to begin implementing a 10-year cross-ministry strategic plan to reduce the impact of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, \$357 million for child intervention services, \$144 million for foster care, and \$102 million to support children with disabilities and their families.

Since becoming minister, I've made it a priority to try to get a really good understanding of the issues. I've met with parents, child care operators, and other stakeholders in the industry. We've heard interesting ideas on how to enhance the five-point plan. In this year's budget we invest an additional \$16 million to recruit and retain staff, create more spaces, and make child care more affordable. We now have \$7 million for wage top-ups in March to help address challenges with staff recruitment and retention in the child care sector. We'll be providing a 5.6 per cent increase in child care subsidy for eligible low- and middle-income Alberta families. We will also invest \$2 million to cover the start-up costs of creating more child care spaces across the province.

Alberta's child care budget has more than doubled since 2005-06, with our total funding this year being \$134 million, and our investments are making a difference. We have more families accessing subsidies. Wage top-ups and professional development grants are helping operators recruit and retain qualified staff, and more child care programs are demonstrating excellence by achieving accreditation.

Family violence and bullying have devastating consequences. Alberta leads the country in taking action through the prevention of family violence and bullying initiative. I've had an opportunity to visit women's shelters, where I have seen first-hand the tremendous difference that the front-line staff make in the lives of those affected by family violence and bullying. With a budget of \$36.2 million this year, an increase of \$2.6 million, we'll build on awareness and education campaigns, improve services available to people affected by family violence, and enhance community initiatives. Across the nine partnering ministries of this initiative, funding is increasing by nearly \$5 million, meaning the total joint spending will exceed \$46 million.

Alberta will continue to lead the way, providing services to families before they reach a crisis, decreasing the likelihood of child protection services being needed in the future. In 2007-08 funding for child intervention services will increase by \$21 million, for a total of \$357 million. The increase will ease the pressure of a

growing population and support the implementation of a new service delivery model that builds on best practices already in place and improves the way we work with families by connecting them with community resources and focusing more on assessment. The new model is currently being used in 13 pilot sites and will be implemented across the province.

The family support for children with disabilities program provides information and services to help families care for their children with disabilities, services like respite care and aide support as well as assisting with some of the extraordinary costs of raising a child with a disability. Funding for this well-respected program will increase by \$7 million this year, for a total of \$102 million, to meet the growing demand for services and enhanced services in rural areas.

Funding for the fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives will increase this year by \$4 million, for a total of \$10 million. We'll use the funding boost to begin implementing a 10-year cross-ministry strategic plan to reduce the impact of FASD, a leading cause of birth defects resulting in lifelong disabilities. This initiative, led by Children's Services, is a collaboration with nine other government ministries. The new funding will result in better co-ordination of services in three areas – prevention, diagnosis, and assessment and supports for Albertans living with FASD – through virtual service centres throughout the province.

Family and community support services is a very successful partnership between the province, municipalities, and Métis settlements. This year funding to FCSS will increase by \$2.9 million to help these programs respond to population and economic growth and continue to provide services to children and families based on local needs and priorities. This brings total funding for FCSS to \$71.2 million.

With an increase of \$7 million in 2007-08, funding for foster care totals \$144 million. The increase will be used to enhance foster parent training and support for Albertans who open their homes to children in care. We will also work closely with the Alberta Foster Parent Association to recruit more foster parents. The more we have, the better we are able to match children with foster families who best meet their needs. We will take action to find permanent homes for children in care sooner by streamlining adoption processes.

Child and family service authorities will receive \$706 million in 2007-08, 73 per cent of our total budget. With this money they'll continue delivering programs and services to children and families in 10 regions throughout the province.

I appreciate the opportunity to tell you what we're doing at Children's Services. I believe and have witnessed first-hand that the staff at our ministry are doing incredible work, serving children and youth, and are helping build strong families and communities. Making a difference starts with investing in children and families, who we believe are the building blocks of this province.

At this point I'd like to ask the MLA for Calgary-Hays, chair of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee, to provide a quick update, followed by the MLA for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, chair of the Youth Secretariat, to also provide an update. Afterwards I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have related to the Children's Services budget.

Thank you for your time.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, just for clarification for the chair, would you like to take the 10 minutes as you speak and then have the minister respond, or do you want to take a 20-minute chunk and go back and forth?

Mrs. Mather: I think we're going to go with the 10-minute block.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Fair enough.

Mrs. Mather: But I would like to hear from the other two that were going to assist the minister first. Is that all right?

The Deputy Chair: No. It's Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Okay. Thank you.

Thank you for the opening remarks. I want to welcome the staff that are here to help us as we review the budget, a very important budget, that's before us. I'd like to ask now that if there are any unanswered questions, we could have a response, perhaps, within the two weeks. Thank you.

There's nothing more important, in my mind, than Children's Services. I would like to address a number of topics today, and if there's more time, I've got some miscellaneous questions later. The topics I'm going to look at are child care, foster care, child intervention services, family violence, family and community support services, child and youth sexual exploitation, youth addiction, services for children with disabilities, and the Child and Youth Advocate. As I say, hopefully there will be time for some other miscellaneous questions.

First of all, I appreciate the intent of this budget and the fact that a number of the areas that are of grave concern have been addressed. Sixteen million has been added to child care, for a total budget of \$134 million, and that's a 6.1 per cent increase. I understand that this is the department's first priority, linked to improving Albertans' quality of life, and that spending is dedicated to increasing access to affordable, quality child care. This is something that I feel passionate about.

4:30

Now, had the federal child care plan continued, the federal funding alone would have been about \$152 million this year. Given that that revenue is lost from the termination of the federal deal, does the government feel confident that it can still accomplish its goal to increase the number of spaces in Alberta? If so, what strategies are going to be used to make that happen?

We've received numerous letters from Albertans who are unable to find the child care that they need. This is all over the province. How many spaces does the government hope to create, given the current spending, and in what time period?

I do believe that child care is at a crisis in the province, and we need to address the needs there for many reasons. If we have adequate quality child care, affordable child care, we're going to have families who have greater peace of mind, which is only going to contribute to our work productivity as they go to work and have peace of mind about where their children are. Happier families are going to make happier communities.

The Children's Services business plan notes that many families are moving to rural communities to escape the high housing costs, but they lose access to key services. Certainly, one of those key services, one of the basic essentials, is becoming child care. What funding is going to be available to increase the accessibility of services like child care in rural communities? As I visited numerous places over the province, I have to admit that I was rather naive about the need in rural communities, but it is very great. We have more and more people in the rural areas who need to work and who are requiring some good care for their children while they're at work.

We've also heard from numerous stakeholders that recruiting and retaining child care staff is one of the biggest barriers to space creation in Alberta. We know that if we create spaces, which we

desperately need, they're of no value if we do not have the trained staff to work in those spaces. How much of the budget will be dedicated to addressing the child care workforce issue?

I was really pleased to see that the money was announced for a child care bursary program to help with the costs of postsecondary education, a measure that was included in the Alberta Liberal child care policy, because I think it's a wise and prudent move. Again, I'd like to see a breakdown of how that's going to work. I think the figure is \$400,000, is it? Could you just give me some clarity on that?

The business plan shows that the government hopes to more than double the number of child care centres and day homes that are accredited by next year. Doubling these facilities is a wonderful idea. It's an essential idea. But what is this government going to do to help with sustaining those facilities? What kind of funding is going to be there to help them maintain their existence? I'm wondering, for example, about operating allowances, something that used to be there in the early '90s. Have you considered that, and if you haven't, why not?

Another question. We recently talked about the Child Care Licensing Act. How much of the funding that you're talking about in this budget will actually go towards implementing that act? How does that break down?

Now, we have a number of letters. I get them daily from individuals all over this province who are very concerned, upset about the lack of out-of-school care before school and after school. I'm wondering: what plans does the government have regarding funding out-of-school care and for school-age children? I have a number of questions on that, but I'll just ask you this one: have you looked at the out-of-school care funding, especially now that the provincial government has taken over inspections through licensing that was previously done by the city of Edmonton and other municipalities? What is the implication going to be for out-of-school care and for the funding that you've set aside?

I'll go to foster care now because that's also a huge issue. It's just as crucial as the child care I've just been talking about. The funding has increased by \$7 million, for a total of \$144 million. That's a 5 per cent increase. I see that additional funding is earmarked for enhanced training, support for foster parents, and recruitment of foster parents. This is very positive, but we've heard from social services staff that there just aren't enough families to accommodate the number of children in need of safe care. We know about hotel rooms being used, and I know that that's always a very last resort and that you do the best you can to make sure that those children are safe.

Strategy 2.5 suggests that the government will work to improve recruitment, training, and supports for foster families. I salute that statement. It's very positive. It's desperately needed. But when will the strategy be implemented? How many new foster families need to be recruited to meet the demands that we have right now?

We've heard from Alberta foster families that the government does not offer enough support to foster families who are struggling to assist children who often have extensive needs. Now, I'm not talking about financial support here; I'm talking about support workers so that when they've got a child that's out of control and they're at their wit's end, they could call and could actually get a response and some help immediately, not a week or 10 days later.

Strategy 2.5 suggests that the government will work to improve recruitment, training, and supports for foster families as is in your business plan. What new training and supports will be available to foster parents?

The 2001-2004 Children's Services business plan noted that the shortage of foster families has overburdened foster parents and

challenges quality placements. If this knowledge was available six years ago, I'm wondering: why didn't the government act decisively to alleviate the shortage?

Following the death of a foster child in January it was revealed that the practice of overloading, placing more children with a family than should be eligible to care for, is increasing. How common is this practice, and what supports are in place to ensure that foster parents do not become overloaded?

We have heard that foster children are sometimes being housed in hotels to wait until a foster family is available. I know that this is true in Edmonton and in Calgary. Will this additional funding be adequate to address this reality?

In talking about recruitment of foster parents, I'm wondering what you're doing to make that happen. I haven't seen anything that would suggest an advertising program or any kind of information coming out that would maybe alert people that there is a need and that there is assistance in becoming foster families. Of course, when I say foster families, I want to emphasize that it's not just the parents; it's the biological children that are involved in those decisions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. First of all, I want to say to the hon. member that I admire your passion. I think we both have the same passion, and your interest and help in child care is applaudable.

You asked some questions about whether or not we think that we can meet our goals with this amount of money. What I can tell you – and I know that I've said it in the past – is that in the last several months I've spent a fair amount of time with our stakeholder groups. They have identified a number of good ideas. Our number one issue is space creation, and the best way to create the space is by finding, attracting, and retaining staff. I think that the announcements over the last couple of weeks will be exceptionally helpful. The one announcement that we had, attracting skilled child care workers back into the field, has the potential of creating 1,500 new spaces. Most of our announcements over the last couple of weeks really are focusing on attracting or retaining, and when you think of the fact that every time you can attract one person back to the child care industry, that represents space for six children.

4:40

When you asked about what this means for rural communities, I think a few things. I think that when we look at the new Child Care Licensing Act, one thing that it will have the capability of doing is looking at different ways of delivering programs, innovative ways. I know that we had talked about combinations of family day homes, and we know from our experience going into the five-point plan that family day homes have been very popular in the rural areas, so that reason alone.

The other thing that I've found out just talking to stakeholders is that the difference between rural and urban is that in the rural areas quite often they have facilities. It's not so much a facility shortage that they have when they have a shortage of child care; it's staffing. So the bulk of our announcements have been targeted to attracting and retaining staff. I see that as a real benefit to rural Alberta.

The other thing that we've talked about lots in the past year and part of the five-point plan is kin care, hugely popular in Alberta. And, of course, our plans are to carry on with that program.

The out-of-school. I know that I have talked to you before about this. We do know that the province licenses both zero to six and six to 12. We have the policy mandate to provide zero-to-six services. Historically, we have funded family and community support

services. If they deem that out-of-school programming is a local need, then they can go ahead and provide that service.

Having said all of that, you know that we're towards the end of wrapping up an FCSS review which clearly has indicated that FCSS programs are identifying gaps in this particular area across the province. We don't have all FCSSs delivering the programs. Not all of them are offering subsidies. I've also mentioned before in the House that we are close to releasing that report. I have made a commitment that I plan on taking a leadership role in working with all of the stakeholders to find some workable solutions there because I do know that they are experiencing the very same pressures that we've seen in the zero to six, mostly with respect to attracting staff and retaining staff.

As far as foster care, we are always looking for foster care. We know that the more foster families we have, the better able we'll be to match children and to meet their needs. I can tell you that this year we'll be spending \$350,000 on a campaign to increase foster parents. As well as that, we always recruit through the CFSA association.

I think I'll go back to you for more questions. If I've missed anything, I'll either get it after the next round or, for sure, make sure I follow up.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. One of the things I'd like to ask is: when will we be able to see that FCSS review? Is that available to us? We need that information.

Going on to child intervention services, the funding has been increased by \$21 million, for a total of \$357 million, which is a 6.1 per cent increase. I know that the new service delivery model is being piloted in 13 champion sites, I think they're called, and then implemented across the province.

The business plan shows that there is a far higher rate of hospitalization as a result of injury or death for aboriginal children in care than nonaboriginal children in care, and I'm wondering: will there be any initiatives in the coming year to address this imbalance and improve safety for aboriginal children? That's one of the things that I noticed when I was doing the comparisons here.

Strategy 3.1 is directed at the casework practice model, that it requires more time to administrate. Is the minister confident that it can be implemented given the current staff shortages we face in the social services? I am very concerned that we're going to be asking social workers to do more work. We're putting more demands on them. We're not taking anything away. That is a critical issue.

We've heard from union reps that unreasonable workloads are causing experienced staff members to leave, and not enough new people are entering the field. This is making it nearly impossible for remaining staff to keep up. How will the government attract the necessary staff to this profession to ensure that Alberta's families receive the services that they need?

A recent report by the Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families shows that the number one reason given for leaving a position is inadequate salary and compensation. The second reason is that there is no belief that the government will work to rectify the current situation. How will the government take action to restore the faith of these public servants?

In the same report 67 per cent of respondents stated that they were concerned about their ability to deliver contracted services. Does this budget include enough support to ensure that agencies will be able to recruit and retain the staff they need to operate effectively?

Going on to family violence. Funding for prevention of family violence and bullying increased by \$2.55 million. I want to say that

I'm very proud of this initiative and the results that I've seen across this province. Alberta has some of the highest rates of family violence in Canada, and it is critical that we address this issue. The business plan shows that while there was a reasonable increase to funding for prevention of family violence and bullying this year, there will be very small increases in the three years that follow. Does the minister believe that these increases are enough to turn around Alberta's dismal rate of family violence?

Statistics from the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters show that nearly 20 per cent of shelter bed capacity is unfunded by the provincial government. Why won't the government fund that one-fifth of the provincial shelter beds? Why are we not funding them all? Thirteen thousand women were turned away from women's shelters last year due to a lack of space. Does the current budget offer enough funding to fill that gap?

There is a critical shortage of second-stage shelter beds across the province. We've talked about this in the House before. Research suggests that for every crisis bed available, two to three second-stage transitional beds are needed, and Alberta is nowhere near meeting this suggested ratio. How much of the funding in this budget will be dedicated to addressing the shortage of second-stage housing?

The business plan shows that over one-fifth, 23.8 per cent, of children who experience child maltreatment will experience another incident within 12 months. What is the government doing to reduce that number? Is it possible that the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act has partially contributed to the increase in repeat offences against children? Have you given any thought to that?

How much funding is the department directing toward preventative services, such as counselling for those convicted of spousal abuse? Again, then, I would talk about the workload for social workers. I don't believe that they can deal with preventative educational roles the way they would like to because they are just dealing with the emergent things and trying to keep on top of them. We need to look at the complex roles that they have and how we can better support them, and that's through more social workers, more support workers.

Looking at family and community support services, FCSS is receiving an additional \$3 million, for a total of \$71.2 million, a 4.3 per cent increase. I really am disappointed to see that FCSS is not receiving a more substantial increase this year. FCSS is a crucial organization that helps to improve Alberta's social infrastructure. A more significant financial commitment from this government would help to improve the already incredible preventive social service network that FCSS supports and contributes to in this province.

4:50

Strategy 1.6 involves implementing the recommendations of the FCSS program review. As I said, we haven't seen that review. It's not released. Why has it not been made available? Was the information in that review taken into consideration when this budget was created? We have heard that FCSS is increasingly taking on additional tasks to address shortages of critical social services, especially in rural communities. Does the government have any concrete plans to either improve access to government-operated public services or, at least, provide enough funding to FCSS to manage these additional programs?

Child and youth sexual exploitation. Funding for protection of children from sexual exploitation has increased to a total of \$6.2 million. That's a .05 per cent increase. I'm wondering how many children and youth are apprehended or receive services through PCHIP annually. How many children and youth who are apprehended through PCHIP voluntarily agree to receive services following their apprehension? It's been reported that PCHIP may

have in some cases driven prostitution underground, making it difficult for individuals providing services to sexually exploited youth to provide the help that is needed. Has the department heard about these concerns, and has anything been done to address them? Research shows that most children who are involved in prostitution have experienced previous sexual abuse. What steps is the department taking to address sexual abuse experienced by children who are not involved in prostitution?

Youth addiction. The crystal meth task force recommended that 300 additional beds be made available for addictions, detox, and treatment. Will this budget do anything to increase the number of beds that are available to youth for these purposes? Representatives from the group called PEP, parents empowering parents, have expressed concerns that families are not involved enough in the process when children are apprehended through PCHAD. What are we doing about that? They've also told us that there are problems for those living in remote communities who would like to access services. There is seemingly no transportation option dedicated to transporting children apprehended through PCHAD. This can put a strain on the other community resources not designed for this purpose. Does the department have any plans or strategies in mind to deal with this issue? Then we know that prevention is a critical part of the equation when it comes to youth addiction. What strategies will the government implement this year to prevent youth addiction?

Services for children with disabilities. We know that they've received a \$6.7 million increase. We have heard that there is a critical shortage of professionals to deal with, for example, autism in this province. Is this the case? How severe are those shortages? What are we going to do about them? I'm concerned about the multidisciplinary teams. Not all members have the experience needed to diagnose and prescribe the necessary support for autistic children. What reviews has the minister done regarding these multidisciplinary teams to ensure that they are making the best decisions in the cases that they review? I'm also concerned about the potential of conflict of interest with some of those panels on the multidisciplinary teams.

The Child and Youth Advocate is receiving a \$1 million budget increase. I'm pleased to see that because of the workload that we're changing now with PCHIP regarding the apprehension of youth being directed to legal representation from the Child and Youth Advocate.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. I'll take that last comment as a compliment and work backwards. That's great. Those are an awful lot of good questions, so I'll see how many I can get to here. As far as the FCSS report, best guess is that within a couple of weeks you'll have a copy. Why it took long is that it had to go through a government approval process, plus there are recommendations attached for discussion. But I expect in a couple of weeks.

The casework practice model: I just wanted to make a comment about that. You're right. We've got 13 champion test sites going on right now. They were additionally resourced as we were testing out that model. I think I wrote you recently that we're hoping we'll learn from that model and, hopefully, implement it across the province over the next 18 months, and it will be resourced properly as we implement it. The other thing, too, is that this budget does include, if I'm not mistaken – and we'll get that information to you – about 80 new front-line workers. We can get that breakdown. So the budget does come with some staffing complements there.

You made some comments about the agency staffing. Without a doubt, I know that they're facing some staffing issues. It's one of

the reasons why, in the last couple of weeks, we had added a couple million dollars to make it a total of \$20 million over the last two years to help them deal with some attraction and retaining staff costs.

Another thing I wanted to let you know. I think you were referring to a survey that a provincial organization had put out, and I have called the Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families to meet with that organization and go through some of the stats that you had referred to and just learn more about their issues. That meeting is taking place in the next couple of weeks.

The bullying initiative. I agree with you. I think that that's just a fabulous initiative. I think we're sitting fairly well here. When you look at a lot of the awareness, the strategy, a lot of it is technology. The websites are set up. The part that I'm really excited about is how popular they are. I guess the first thing I'd say is that preventing bullying is still a commitment of this government, and certainly I see it continuing to be. When we take a look at our team heroes website, the bully-free website, the bully-free helpline, we are now into millions of hits. Hugely successful. So I appreciate those comments, and we'll monitor that one, but I think that we've given some fairly significant increases there.

I appreciate your comments on the women's shelters, and I appreciate your interest. I, too, have a real soft spot for the incredible work that they do rebuilding Albertans' lives. Similar to how I approached child care, I went through the same exercise with women's shelters. I met with the provincial organizations, tried as quickly as possible to grasp what their top issues are. I have had little think tanks with them. You know, just a couple of weeks ago we gave them \$700,000 to help address child care needs, \$250,000 for five rural shelters, so that was a real help to the complement of women's shelters, money to help support the front-line workers, and then an increase retroactive to last year.

We have finished with the women's shelters review. We sat down with the advisory committee that worked on it and went through each of the recommendations one by one, got confirmation of which ones should be the priorities moving forward. You're right about the second stage. That was highlighted as one that we want to take a more serious look at. The only other thing I can say is that in the next week I will be rolling out a little bit more of what we're doing in this particular area. That information isn't here but will be out in the next week. So I just appreciate your comments. I think this is a very important area for us. The other thing, too, for the women's shelters is the bursary. I know that they really appreciated that. We put in place a \$400,000 bursary for their staff.

I liked your comments about FCSS. I mean, personally, I think it's probably the best example of a successful partnership that exists in this province, bar none. You also got back to the report there. The report will be, like I mentioned, coming out in two weeks.

I just wanted to go back. You had mentioned a comment – and this one always gets a little bit troubling – about people coming in and out of the system. This is always kind of difficult when you're dealing with, you know, the public that sees certain stories in the paper and sees that some families seem to re-emerge and just wonders: what does that mean about someone's judgment? What does it mean about anything?

5:00

What I would say about that is, first of all, to reiterate that our number one mandate is to protect children. I take that absolutely dead seriously, and I know that the individuals in Children's Services do. We also take the privacy of children seriously, and I think we have to. You know, these kids are coming out of some pretty horrible situations, and we don't want to make anything worse for them.

Then I think the next important statement to say is that every single report of abuse or neglect is investigated, always investigated. If a family is willing to make changes, we work with them. We put plans in place, we put on conditions, we put in compliance measures, all of that stuff, because we know that the best place for kids, if the family will make positive changes, is going to be with their families. So you go through that whole process. What you never have with this job are any guarantees. Somebody could have complied with all of the changes, made positive changes for their families, but there are no guarantees a couple of years down the road. You know, something else happens.

What I have seen just in my short period of time here is that I think what we have are dedicated staff every step of the way. They are the front-line workers. They are making decisions on a daily basis in the best interests of children, based on the best information that they have at the time. I'll just say that when you look at this whole area, I've got nothing but utmost respect for what they do. I would just say, you know, that in terms of the budget, we'll make sure that we do what we can to support that whole area.

PCHIP is one I wanted to mention. I know that we've seen some media coverage that PCHIP has driven it underground. I would say that there are a number of factors. It's not going to be PCHIP. There are a number of factors that have driven child exploitation underground. It's the use of technology. We know that this isn't just something here. It's something right across North America. On the other hand, we know that the act is working because the number of children that we have helped is over 770. We'll get you the more detailed answers that you had asked for, but we've helped 770, and the feedback has been very positive. We've also had an increased number of youth that are receiving the voluntary services. I know that you were supportive of the amendments to the act and understand the reasons for changing the name there. It's important to note that PCHIP applies to all instances of sexual exploitation through prostitution regardless of where it's happening.

So I think the issue that we have to deal with is not so much about the effectiveness of the legislation. We have to focus on the education and the training so that our staff, our stakeholders, and even our parents understand that sexual exploitation is changing. We need the public's help. This is what we are intending to do in our business plan. We need the public's help in identifying kids at risk. We need to get information out there and signs to watch for. We're making that information available on our website. Lastly, we're continuing to train our staff and stakeholders in recognizing and intervening with sexually exploited youth.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. I wanted to just talk about the training for PCHIP. I believe that that is crucial, and I'm glad to see that you're looking at more training of social workers, I'd assume, for PCHIP. My understanding is that in some of the rural areas they do not have that training. You know, that's something that's obviously very important.

When I read the business plan, the goals, the vision statement, I realize that the fruition of this plan requires a healthy organization in order to meet peak efficiency. You know, there's lots of data and research these days on change fatigue, and it is evident to me that Children's Services has been suffering to some extent from this phenomenon. It's well documented that change fatigue occurs when there are too many changes. I hear it from everybody I talk to in Children's Services, that they just want to do their job, that they

would like this issue addressed. I'm wondering what plans are in place to limit the effect of change fatigue in Children's Services as a whole. Many staff are wondering, "What's coming next?" as opposed to, "Can I just do my job and care about this child or this client?" So I want to bring that to your attention.

Governments should always be endeavouring to improve services to constituents and the people that they serve. Since 1994 Children's Services has been in continual change with untold dollars being expended on many of these changes. I'm wondering: do you have any evidence to show that these changes have actually resulted in improvements? Have the expenditures of huge amounts of money to make the changes resulted in improvements? What has been the cost, and what has been the benefit, and does the community reflect that? How do you know?

I think that new legislation comes each time with great promise to front-line workers, but the end result has been that there hasn't been an adequate budget to fully implement the improvements. The front line has always been expected to do more with less. I'm glad to hear the minister say that you are looking at the hiring of I believe it was 80 new social workers. You know, it's really difficult because it's such a complex job. Social issues are complicated, and there's no clear-cut book or manual telling us how to fix problems.

So I want to question how the budget over the last number of years has been expended and what actually goes directly to the children and families who need the help. How much is going to organizing and reorganizing and to administration, and what was the evaluative criteria used to make the decisions that have been made? You know, given the levels of family violence, the increased drug use by youth, and the dysfunctional state of many families, we need more front-line workers and support workers and appropriate resources if we are to meet the safety standards that will protect children and families. You are absolutely right. Protection of our children and families is the number one priority along with privacy, as you mentioned.

I'd like to mention the concern about the high turnover of staff due to stress and workload issues. I know that the Children's Services mandate is very complex, and it's very difficult to inventory the tasks expected of a front-line worker, but this has huge implications on how the front-line workers do their job, what kinds of resources they access, which is often dependent on the experience of the worker or the supervisor involved. This also means, I'm learning, that you can have a family with the same issue be treated vastly different depending on where they live in Alberta and what, I guess I'd say, the financial picture is of the particular region that they're in, where they're living. This means that the same family might get counselling in one region but not in another.

I've already mentioned youth being placed in hotels, and I know that that's a priority concern for you too.

The other thing that I've learned in my discussions is the instability with contracted services and the impact that has on outcomes for children and families, because these contracted services have often been retendered or cancelled or reassessed as a means to save money. I think regions that maybe have been coming under deficit might play around with these contracts to save money, which, obviously, has an impact on the outcomes. We don't have information disclosure on the nature of these contracts, and I'm wondering: what is the criteria for tendering and then reassessing, et cetera? I think that's an issue that needs to be looked at.

5:10

I believe that there's no true understanding or commitment to provide the resources required to implement the new casework model. I'm hopeful that we're going to learn a lot from these

champion sites and that what will happen is what you said, that you will judge from that experience what the needs are and provide the adequate resources so that the other areas will benefit from that experience of the champion sites.

The other concern I have is the hesitation by regions sometimes to fill vacancies until after a fiscal year as a way to balance the books. I'm hearing about this. That has an obvious impact on children and families.

Here's another one. I don't see a discernable difference on the front line related to cross-ministry initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for children and families, particularly services to children with mental health issues. I believe that we need to do a lot more work there with cross-ministry training and sharing of resources than we do now. I think sometimes the problem is: who's going to pay for this service? But for the family that's in distress, that has the need, being shunted from pillar to post is not helpful. I think it probably just escalates the problems.

Because of the workload I think that we're losing out in terms of the community development or prevention work that many social workers would like to do. Again, I'm glad to hear that you're looking at more front-line workers.

The FSCD program I believe has been overworked and is operating in crisis mode. It seems to me that often they're in the position to provide the funds for families with children with disabilities, but there are no services for them to purchase with the financial support provided. Again this goes to the issue of setting targets and that targets not be the driver of how decisions get made concerning how and what kinds of services are delivered to children and families.

An area that, again, I want to bring attention to within the response system with children and families is the co-ordination of services. I think the current enhancement provisions encourage improved co-ordination of services, but I think huge efficiencies and improvements to response can be made simply by ensuring that all the agencies funded by the provincial government are working together, are monitored regarding these goals, are evaluated, and then appropriate adjustments made. We have many government-funded agencies, programs, and nonprofits whose reason for being is to support children and families, and wouldn't it be wonderful if we could be sure that they're all working co-operatively together, that there's good liaison and understanding of the roles and how they can work together? I'm hearing that before 1994 front-line staff and managers felt encouraged to bring forward systems issues for ongoing review and improvements.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Great. Thanks. I just wanted to make a couple of comments. I'll take note of your comments about PCHIP training and take a look at that in rural Alberta.

Some of your questions regarding historical organizational change I don't have much information on. I can say that in my own observation, not just in this period as minister but previously, watching past ministers, this is a department that always represents change but I think for a very good reason. When you make the comment, you know, "Tell us: how does change benefit us?" I think there are lots. The ones that come to mind right away to me are things like the Alberta response model, the case practice model, the enhance act, that whole focus to offer supports to families before they reach crisis. We're seeing such great outcomes from that. I know that with the case practice model on the 13 sites I've heard great feedback from staff, and I'm hoping in the next couple of months, actually, to have an opportunity – they'll have been in place

a couple of months more – to get some concrete examples. But it's pretty positive out there.

All of our strategic plans. When you take a look at the FASD initiative or family violence and bullying, they're recognized across the country as some of the best. So I'm actually quite proud of many of these cross-ministry initiatives that we have. Now being in this position for a couple of months, I've had the opportunity to talk to other ministers. They use Alberta as an example all the time clear across this country. It's a great way to get a perspective from somewhere else, but it's been very enlightening and, actually, kind of rewarding to have all of these other provinces coming here to learn from our programs. So I would just make that comment on this ever-changing environment that we have.

The other comments that you made about staffing agencies: again, I'll be meeting with that organization, and I can use that as valuable information.

I just want to talk about FSCD for a minute. I took from your comments that our programs are based on targets. I would like to say that they're actually based on assessment and not on targets, and anything that I've heard or been part of, that's exactly how it does operate. I want for the record just to make a couple of comments about the program. We are looking at a 7 per cent increase. We think that should accommodate the rate of growth that we'll see in this program. But one of the value statements I want to say: we all know that raising a child with a disability can be very challenging, and I'm so proud to be in a province where we believe that these families need and deserve our support.

Again, it's one of those areas that I hear right across the country, that people use this program as an example. They talk about it being one that has a wide range of services, multidisciplinary approach, as well as we're the only jurisdiction to recognize the needs of children within legislation. But the thing that I hear most often is that our program is not based on labelling but based on assessment. It's based on needs, family strengths, family engagement.

So if you want to continue.

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

Mrs. Mather: How much time?

The Chair: There are still two minutes, so you have another 10 minutes if you wish right now.

Mrs. Mather: Okay. Yes. Boy, you've answered some of my questions really well, and I appreciate that. I've sort of got stuff all over the place here right now. One of the things I'd like to talk about is the housing issue, just to bring it to attention that I'm certainly aware that there are families with children that are unable to find affordable housing right now. Along with the transitional housing and second-stage issue, I'm very concerned about that. I'm wondering if the department has any statistics on this. Is there any way that this department can help with that issue? It's a very great one.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Another thing that I hope I can just mention briefly is worker safety. I talked about this at one time during question period. It seems to me that sometimes social workers are expected to go into homes alone, with limited access to information, perhaps, that sometimes turns out to be that the parents have assaulted police before or, worse, that there might be firearms present. Police don't go into homes unless there is more than one of them. I am con-

cerned about that. Where is the responsibility in terms of, you know, worker safety and protection? I think the workers who work for contracted agencies across this province may be even more at risk, as they often provide more direct service and act in a bigger vacuum of information. So that's one of the other things that I'd like to bring to your attention.

5:20

I know that the Alberta response model has been touted as having many positive aspects and that it's actually, apparently, helped in reducing caseloads. That's a positive outcome, perhaps, for saving budget, but I'm wondering: what is the measure for safety, for well-being, for permanence of our children, youth, and families? Of course, those should be the measures that we would be most concerned about, not the reduction of caseloads. Children's Services manuals speak to the importance of safety and well-being, but I'm wondering: are we enabling the staff to actually pursue this in many cases? I think that in order to meet deadlines, sometimes front-line workers are feeling pressured to return children to environments that may not be as safe as they would like.

So, again, I think this all has to do with the front-line complexity of tasks and the need for more resources to support them so that we don't have superficial involvement. I believe, like you've said, that every individual that chooses this career, it's a calling for them. They want to do their best for the children, and sometimes I believe there is distress because they go home at night thinking: "I didn't do enough. I couldn't. I didn't have enough time. I didn't get to that file that I should have." So I can't emphasize enough that I am hearing over and over again of the need to provide adequate resources and supports for our front-line workers.

I feel committed to trying to improve our response to all of these vulnerable children and their families. I don't believe that it's necessary to dump huge amounts of money, perhaps. It's more a matter of maintaining the focus on the needs of our vulnerable children and families and being clear about what outcomes are important and evaluating all of the programs that deliver services to meet those outcomes. Then we make adjustments to these programs and monitor whether they deliver and make the regular adjustments as necessary.

There are many positives within Children's Services. I think we do have a lot to be proud of. The thing is that when you're better, you're expected to keep being better. I want to see that happen. I'm delighted to hear that you're looking carefully at the champion sites and that that will be a learning experience that will result in the basis for decisions in providing adequate resources for continued good success.

I'll leave it at that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. Just a couple of comments. Talking about the kind of indicators that we would need to show that the work or the enhancement is going in the right direction, I think two important results are that 22 per cent of our kids do not need protection services – that's dropped dramatically – and 82 per cent that receive intervention services do not need protection services within a year. So the numbers are quite dramatic, and one of the reasons why the federal government was so interested in coming in and duplicating both the Alberta response model and activating for fully implementing or complying with the enhancement act on our reserves was because of these kinds of figures. Pretty dramatic.

The comment about affordable housing: we don't, outside of offering emergent housing when someone is in a risky situation

or their safety is at risk, particularly with children. Outside of that, we don't.

In some ways I think that we are heavily involved from a whole different angle. When I think about this department, one of the things I'm most pleased about is that it's a pretty significant department in terms of budget. You've got close to a billion dollars. The part that's really exciting: half of it is going into protection services and the other half you had mentioned at the start, all of that really exciting prevention. I'm glad that we as a province value making sure that we have the supports for those that need it but, equally as important, place value on preventing those kinds of circumstances.

The affordable housing issue ties into a much broader issue, which is the booming economy. An added concern, and one that we can pay attention to, is the growth in this province and all of these newcomers. What are they bringing with them? You know, we hear quite often what they're not bringing with them in terms of hospitals, schools, and all of that stuff. What I pay attention to is what are they not bringing? They're not bringing family members, and they're not bringing a social system.

I see that one of the best things we can do on the preventative side of this portfolio is really trying to connect these new Albertans as quickly as possible with their new communities. I see that we are doing that in a number of ways. It starts with the FCSS funding. It starts with parent link centres so they can connect with other parents, get information. I'm very proud of all of our websites, the helplines that we have. There's just no end to the things, and to me they are equally as important as anything else that we do. A little unrelated to affordable housing; however, if you connect them to the communities, you can connect them to the supports, you connect them to the information. It all leads to helping in the other area.

I think that was the last question. Like I said, if we've missed anything, we will get more information to you.

Energy Children's Services

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and to ask a few questions of the Minister of Finance. I imagine it will just be written down and responded to in writing.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, today we are dealing with Energy and Children's Services.

Mr. Hinman: Energy. Thank you. I'm looking at the finances, but it is on Energy. So thank you. To start off, though, Mr. Chairman, this income that Albertans enjoy because of our energy here is astounding, and we need to probably be the most careful with where our biggest focus is. I've always had the lesson that if you were to drop a whole bunch of money – and we used to have thousand dollar bills here in the country – you'd go after the big ones first; you wouldn't worry about the dollar bills. With that thought in mind, I'm trying to look at the big picture, realizing you only have a few minutes and limited in the questions that we can ask.

I want to start and address the problem with the surface rights versus the mineral rights that's going on in the province and to ask the minister: with the EUB the previous Minister of Energy discussed and felt that it was a viable concern to have surface rights people that were actually part of the EUB, that would have a fairer reflection on some of the decisions that are made there. What happens, Mr. Chairman, is that too often because only one side of

the industry is there, there isn't the co-operation that could and should be there.

I'll give an example. You might have three different mineral rights owners in a given area in a plot that's been up. They've each got their own wells, and they've been successful. Rather than having the EUB saying, "Look, come up with a scheme or a plan that's going to be beneficial to this area," they say, "Well, you have a right to export."

A person with the surface rights often has to contend with two or three pipelines crossing his land. It's something that I feel like we need to move ahead in this century and realize that we should do a better job of managing how we collect or develop new areas as we go in there, rather than just going with the old status quo, that while you're first in, you build your pipeline, someone else builds one, and we don't get the big picture. We really need to address that.

5:30

Everyone seems to think that we don't have enough money for anything. I'm definitely short on staff for doing the research, so I'll ask a few questions that might have simple answers. But Albertans ask me these questions, so it'd be great to have the answers.

Quite often when it comes to natural gas, we see them putting up compressors and sucking the natural gas out when it's from a common pool. The question that I have is: if they're running those compressors and sucking out the gas, that there's a royalty for Albertans, are they being charged for running those compressors, or do they get to run that at Albertans' expense for their profit? I think we really need to address that.

It goes with the same question that I'm not clear yet with Fort McMurray and the amount of gas that's being used there to extract the bitumen. Do we get our royalty on all of that gas that's being burned, or is there some sort of incentive or privilege that they get in order to burn that gas to extract the bitumen? So very concerned on that aspect and how it works.

We get a lot of wells that are drilled down in the south, but they're not viable for putting in a pipeline to extract that gas because of the cost of a pipeline. There are a few things that people have asked me about: could we not put in compressor stations, use that gas to compress it, be able to utilize it in the farming or agricultural industry or other areas, and have it reasonably priced? We're not using the cost of the gas to compress it, which is prohibitive on the current market.

Another question is: could it be used locally and change our situation? For example, if it's in a remote area that isn't viable to tie in with a pipeline, could we look at doing such things as setting up greenhouses and trying to, I guess, be more self-sufficient here in the province and grow more vegetables and other things that we could in a greenhouse environment if, in fact, we have these large, vast amounts of gas reserves, yet they're not economically viable enough to put in pipelines? Could we not look at ways of being able to allow utilizing the full product and value-add to it in the way of, whether it's greenhouses or perhaps, like I say, compressing it and allowing it to be used on farm equipment or whatever else is in those areas?

Another question that is often brought up by the surface rights people is if there shouldn't be some sort of situation where when mineral rights are coming up, the surface rights people should be contacted and let them know that this bid is coming up. Quite often they want to protect their home quarter or maybe their home section, and if they actually knew that that was coming up, they might put that bid in and not have to go through all of the fight and the struggle to protect their home land, which they feel is important. When the royalties often go very cheap and speculative, they could afford that,

but they often don't know, and they don't have the time to be watching for when that happens.

To go a step further on these mineral rights and the auctions that we have on them, this government continues to talk about value-added and saying that it's an important aspect of the development in here. There was a report that came out – I believe it was by the Pembina Institute – that questioned the vast amount of land that's being put up when we don't have the capacity to develop it. The next question is: should we maybe be holding some of this back in reserve to develop it when we have better technology or put it up for bid on the fact that there's a moratorium on the old technology? But if you can be innovative – whether that's biological, maybe it's nuclear that's going to be the answer, or some other new technique for extracting the bitumen – at that point then we'd allow it to go forward.

It's interesting to me that the government talks about putting this land up and that it needs to be available. Yet in the Fort McMurray area they won't put the land up, which they own, for people to buy to build houses on and have created a shortage there in the boom, but they put all of this other land out for oil sands to an already overheated economy. We don't have enough workers to build and develop, yet they put it out there. So many people ask me that and question: do we have our priorities right in doing that?

Another question is that often in sustainable resources when they put up forestry for auction, there's a condition that it must be developed locally. So I'd ask the question: should this be a condition on further oil sands, that it has to be developed locally? I'd like to know the where we're at with the line 4 extension that's going to connect Fort McMurray all the way down to Texas, if that's a go-ahead or, because they say that they're going to value-add, if maybe the brakes are putting on there.

Like I say, most importantly, if in fact they're going to put up, how many acres are going up in the future that have not been leased out yet or that are going to be renewed? If we can't put a contract on there or a condition on those contracts that they need to develop it locally – it seems like an excellent idea. I don't think that we need to try and sell it all in the next 10 or 15 years. If we could extend this development out to the benefit of Albertans and to, I believe, the corporations as well as, to do it maybe at a steady and constant rate instead of just the mad rush that we're currently involved in.

Going over to electricity, some other areas that I often have people ask me questions on are net metering. People want to be innovative, want to use green technology, perhaps put up a windmill, yet it's prohibitive. It just seems like if we really want to move forward, we should be looking at that a great deal. One of the areas that perhaps we have the greatest potential – and it's been brought up several times today – is hydroelectricity. Should we be looking at building those dams to be able to store our water but then be able to let it go through and develop the electricity that we need throughout the province? It's something that, I guess, I'd like to know what the minister's long-term goal is on that and if they're really seriously looking at hydroelectricity and the value that it would add to the province.

The question with windmills: there's the debate on whether there's a cap or not. I think if he could clarify the conditions: you know, are windmills allowed to come on stream, or do they have to have the offset to be able to power up the grid when the wind stops? It seems to be a concern. There's one area, truly conservative values, when it comes to wind power, and I think we could be a little bit more liberal perhaps on that.

The Deputy Chair: Would any other members like to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do have some questions that I wasn't able to finish during the allotted time. A few are related to the children's advocate. In other provinces the children's advocate role has been expanded, and it includes monitoring and offering constructive suggestions regarding how the system can be more accommodating to children and youth. I'm wondering if our Children's Services minister has any thoughts about a similar expanded role that I believe could improve the child welfare system in Alberta. Are there any plans to expand the role of Alberta's advocate?

The 2005-2006 Child and Youth Advocate annual report has not yet been released, and I would like to know what has caused that delay and when the report will be issued.

Finally, just a couple of miscellaneous questions. The minister's office is receiving a budget increase of \$85 million. That's a 28 per cent increase from last year's budget. I'm wondering: what is the cause of this increase, and how will the increase improve services to children?

The deputy minister's office has received a big budget increase this year. Funding was increased by \$190 million, a 49 per cent increase. What is the cause of this increase, and how will this increase improve services to children, which is the mandate, which is the most important consideration for this department?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, we have about four or five minutes, I guess, if you would like to participate still.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. I didn't think I was going to get a chance, so I've got to get my thoughts back in here now, where I left off. We were talking a little bit about electricity and the need for net metering. I'm wondering if the Minister of Energy or this government has been looking at having a policy. They realized, you know, 15, 20 years ago that in order to develop the oil sands, there was a necessity to put in some good incentives.

5:40

Many Albertans that I talked to would really love to see incentives – they'd have to be of a different nature because there isn't royalty on them – for such things as windmill or geothermal, solar or the different types of biogas. It just seems like it would be a huge benefit if Albertans could actually in some way raise the capital in a way much like they do for the mineral exploration, with flow-through shares or something like that, where people could write off that capital to be put into green programs and not be taxed. I'm wondering if the minister has addressed or looked at any of those options in trying to kick-start, perhaps, more green energy here in the province. It would be of great value if we were to change our current way of thinking, that's just solely around oil and gas, and look at the good incentives that are there, look to see what ways we can enhance it for other areas of energy, whatever they might be, that we find are environmentally friendly.

As I was speaking earlier, the government continues to talk about value maximization. The biggest concern that Albertans are sharing with me is how fast we are developing these things. So once again I would ask: could we perhaps slow it down or put conditions on these different developments, that they're to be done in an environmental way or an innovative way so that we're going to get better value out of it? The big concern is how much we are shipping out of the province versus developing it here. It would be a huge benefit if we were to do that.

There's quite a bit of interest in the biogas industry. I know that we had one company come in here looking at cellulose. I'm

wondering if they're looking at putting in some better incentives again so that they could fully upgrade or looking at capital expenses to get these plants up, that would be to the benefit of all Albertans.

The other thing, too, is that with the electricity there's a lot of talk about being able to bury the lines and the expense of doing that. Are those areas where perhaps we could have some innovation and tax incentives that would allow corporations to bury them? It's a huge problem with the corridors.

Are they going to do something and be proactive finally, after all of the fighting that's going on with these different power lines, to get up some power corridors that people know are there? They're planned out 20 years in the future, and you're not buying a nice little piece of property or have been there a long time only to find out that there's going to be a hearing because some corporation wants to put a line through your property. The people that I talked to in rural Alberta really, really want to have some long-range planning and know what the plans are to meet the needs of these power lines that they say need to go in. Like I say, is it something that we could look at putting in some tax incentives to bring the technology to bury these power lines? I've seen some very interesting numbers on DC power and the ability that we have to transmit it over long distances now.

I'll let the minister answer those. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, but pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(a) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Energy and Children's Services relating to the 2007-08 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Hon. members, before I recognize the President of the Treasury Board, may we briefly revert to Tabling Returns and Reports?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**
(*reversion*)

The Acting Speaker: Apparently, there was a matter earlier in the day when the Speaker asked the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to table some material, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods would like to table on his behalf. Is that agreeable?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table a letter

from Doreen Fiddler, who is a resident of Emily Manor in Edmonton, Alberta. She is being told that the rent for her suite in Emily Manor is to increase by \$1,000.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 34
Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

Bill 34 is an omnibus bill that amends the Residential Tenancies Act and the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act in order to respond to the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force. Both acts are being amended to provide regulation-making authority to modify the notice period set out in part 1 of the acts, allow a provision in the act to be stipulated as an offence, allow a regulation to come into force retroactively, allow regulation of any other matter considered necessary to carry out the intent of the acts.

The Residential Tenancies Act is being amended to expand the regulation-making authority to regulate the frequency of rent increases for fixed-term tenancies, allow the regulation to clarify that the amount of time referred to is from the start of the tenancy or the last rent increase, whichever is later, make it an offence for landlords who do not comply with the notice period for condominium conversions, with a fine of up to \$5,000 per unit.

The Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act is being amended to provide regulation-making authority to modify the frequency of rent increases for periodic tenancies set out in the act and regulate the frequency of rent increases for fixed-term tenancies and make it an offence not to comply with the notice period for condominium conversions or conversions for other land uses, with a fine up to \$5,000 per unit.

The above amendments will modify the offence provisions of both acts and enable the government to deal with the rent stabilization and condominium conversions as set out by the Affordable Housing Task Force.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 33
Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh
Water Authorization Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address a serious situation in rural Alberta. I'll be moving the second reading of Bill 33.

For many years the village of Ferintosh has been suffering with water quality issues and from severe water supply shortages in the summer months. Currently their water is obtained entirely from aquifers in the Middle Horseshoe Canyon, a formation which is in the Ferintosh area of predominantly coal and sandstone beds. However, these wells haven't been able to supply the village's needs. As a temporary measure they have been forced to truck treated water in from the town of Bashaw. Obviously, trucking water is not a feasible or long-term solution. That's why Ferintosh has applied for an interbasin transfer of this treated water.

Mr. Speaker, by allowing this interbasin transfer from Bashaw, that currently provides Ferintosh with treated, trucked-in water, the water needs of both communities will still be adequately met. Because both communities are drawing water from the same geological formation and the transferred water will be treated water, there's little risk of significant environmental impacts. In fact, the only reason this transfer requires a special act is because these two municipalities are in two different river basins, even though in reality this transfer is taking groundwater from the same geological formation, the Middle Horseshoe Canyon formation. Given the stringent nature of our Water Act, interbasin transfers, even if the water is coming from the same geological formation, require special approval from the Legislature.

Interbasin transfers also require thorough scientific studies and public consultation prior to being brought to this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, Ferintosh has done all of that. Their best solution is what we see before us in Bill 33. Without this transfer Ferintosh will run out of water and potentially slowly dry up. I urge all members to support Bill 33.

5:50

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise to participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 33, the Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act. I listened with a great deal of interest to the hon. member when he introduced this bill this afternoon, and certainly it's not the first time in the recent memory of this House that we've had a similar piece of legislation. In fact, I think we've had two pieces of legislation previous to this where we were requesting an interbasin transfer of water.

Certainly, it is interesting whenever we talk about the Horseshoe Canyon and the aquifer and the fact that there doesn't appear to be sufficient water anymore, the fact that one of these areas had water trucked in. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it's not going to be the last time that we're going to have to deal with a matter such as this. We've gone through this in the past with the whole argument of an interbasin transfer. Whenever we look at the development of coal-bed methane and we're proceeding along with the development – I think if it was well managed, it would be one thing, but we seem to be proceeding along at what some would say is a reckless pace of development. Hopefully, in the course of the debate on Bill 33 we will determine if the drilling into the Horseshoe Canyon of any coal-bed methane wells has had an effect on the water supply not only for the village of Ferintosh but also the town of Bashaw.

There are significant water transfers already happening in central Alberta. I know there are others that are planned. There is a grand plan for an area to the east of Bashaw. I don't know how that will work. Water and water transfers is a contentious issue. How contentious is it, Mr. Speaker? Well, we look at the Balzac situation, and certainly we have the promoters of the Balzac development. They're looking at Drumheller as a source of water, or they were. Originally it was from Calgary. They were within a half a kilometre, I think, of a line of potable water going from Calgary north to Airdrie, or half a kilometre away.

They could not get that water. I don't know what happened. That's an issue between the government and the city of Calgary. One of the solutions was to go east to Drumheller and pump and pipe the water back to the racetrack in Balzac, and it's at consider-

able expense. This government has already spent close to \$8 million supporting that project. It's been discussed at great length in question period, and I think it will be discussed at even greater length. I understand the project is in freeze-frame mode right now. It's not going ahead until the whole issue is resolved.

That is one example of how contentious water or the source of water can be. Certainly, the former Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, as I recall, sponsored a similar bill, and it was for potable water for different municipal districts. Now, will any of this water be used for purposes other than what is stated in the bill?

Again, to the hon. member who is sponsoring this bill, am I safe in assuming that none of the water that will be involved in this transfer will be used for enhanced oil recovery, that none of it will be used for agricultural purposes such as racetracks? I did not know that these thoroughbred racehorses were that thirsty, but certainly it's in the hundreds of thousands of cubic metres annually that will be needed to satisfy the needs of the shopping centre and the racetrack and the horses that are going to run on the track. Specifically to this bill, can we be guaranteed that this water is for the routine purposes of the village and the town and that none of it will be used for intensive livestock operations or enhanced oil recovery? If I could have those questions answered in due course of the debate, I would be very, very grateful.

Now, also, when we look at this and we look at the amount of water that's to be transferred between the South Saskatchewan River basin and the North Saskatchewan River basin, an amount not to exceed 55.8 cubic decametres annually, how much currently is being used? What's the rate of consumption in both Bashaw and Ferintosh right now? What's the water consumption now in decametres on an annual basis? Is this adequate, or is this more than double their needs?

We talked a little earlier about the number of cubic metres that are needed in Balzac. I don't know whether I'll see it or not, but sometimes I think I'm going to be able to go to that racetrack in Balzac. There'll be an interchange off highway 2. I can guarantee that. I'll be able to cruise down there south on highway 2 and just make a turn and go on an overpass and I'll be in Balzac. Highway 2, or the Queen Elizabeth highway, will be crowded, Mr. Speaker, with Albertans who are going to enjoy the latest race. It'll be called the Balzac boogie, and there'll be thoroughbreds from all over the world coming for the big purse at the Balzac boogie, and win or lose those thoroughbreds will be guaranteed a bucket of water. I don't think a glass would satisfy them. After they go around that track once or twice, it's going to be a bucket or two of water to satisfy them, and people will note with interest the history of that water and its source.

Now, it's possible that it could come at some point from the Bow River. I don't know. It possibly could come from the Red Deer River. It's hard to say. But when we think of that and we think of the issues around the water . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the clock is striking 6, and before I call for adjournment, I just want to remind everyone that this weekend there's going to be a model parliament being held in this Assembly. So, please, everyone, remove your laptops and any paperwork on top of your desk.

Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. on Monday.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 7, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/07

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of the Legislature. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I'd now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. I invite all of you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly and to all Albertans a group of people who have been involved and remain involved in the Pacific Northwest Economic Region. They are visiting our Legislature and visiting Alberta to find out more about this great province, the things that we do in it, and how we can fit into a regional system from Alaska right down to Oregon and over into Idaho and Montana, which is really important.

To encourage that kind of dialogue, we have with the delegation today the Hon. John van Dongen, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations for the province of British Columbia and a PNWER vice-president. Next is George Eskridge, a Representative from Idaho state and also a vice-president of PNWER. Next is Jeff Morris, a Washington state Representative and a PNWER past president. We also have Glenn Anderson, a Representative from Washington state and also a PNWER past president. We have with us Peter Lloyd, consul general, Canadian consulate general of Seattle. Because it's a private/public partnership, Mr. Speaker, we have Neil Windsor of APEGGA, the PNWER private-sector chair for Alberta and no stranger to this House. We have Matt Morrison, the executive director of PNWER. Joining Matt today from his office is Brandon Hardenbrook, deputy director of PNWER. And we have our own director of U.S. relations from the Alberta government, Mr. David Kettles.

Now that they have all risen, I would ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and indeed your gallery is full today. It's my pleasure to introduce a delegation in your gallery from the Ukraine. Leading the delegation is Dr. Vasyl Kremen. Dr. Kremen is the president of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine and is the former Minister of Education and Science. Joining him is Dr. Vitaly Bondar, the director of the Institute of Special Pedagogy, and Dr. Viktor Andrushchenko, the rector of Dragomanov National Pedagogical University. With the delegation also is Dr. Roman Petryshyn, the director of the Ukrainian Resource and Development Centre at Grant MacEwan College here in Alberta. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, what a thrill it is to rise and introduce members from my school, the school that I see when I look out on the backyard in the morning and cast my eyes over to Glen Allan. Today we have 20 students, as I say, members of Glen Allan school. They're accompanied by Scott Miller; Krystle O'Dell, education assistant; and two parent helpers, Rien Visscher and John Sirovyak. I'd ask that they please stand and that we give them the warm welcome they so richly deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This week is National Nursing Week, and we'll have a member's statement a little later to recognize that. But I want to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three representatives of the Alberta nursing community, seated today in the members' gallery and here to recognize National Nursing Week and to salute the vital role that nurses play in our health care system. First is Margaret Hadley, president-elect of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta; Ruth Wold, president of the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta; and Barbara Lowe, executive director of the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta. Together these three individuals represent the largest professional sector of our health care workforce.

National Nursing Week is a special time to recognize the indispensable knowledge and compassionate care we trust and depend on from members of our nursing profession. I'd like all members of the House, first of all, to thank a nurse this week and, secondly, to give a warm welcome to our guests in recognition of National Nursing Week.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 11 students from the Kikino elementary school, dedicated students who are committed to education. The Kikino settlement is located just south of Lac La Biche. With them as teachers/group leaders are Miss Laurie Thompson, Mr. Wade Coutney, and Mr. Karl Merritt. If I could ask those students and teachers to stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students from Meadowlark school in my constituency. They're accompanied by their teachers, Ms Cindy Awid and Ms Lu Zhang. I hope they'll find today's question period if not educational, at least entertaining. It's always a pleasure to see

young people in the Assembly, so I'd like to thank these students for joining us today. There are quite a number of parent helpers with them, including Mrs. Lori Jeske, Mrs. Mary-Anne Anderson, Mrs. Julia Wong, Mrs. Jael Chum, Mr. Stephen Tsang, Mrs. Tanya Jiang, and Mrs. Fiona Chung. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm reception of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

1:10

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Karly Kayll and Catherine Darker. Both Karly and Catherine are Palace Casino workers, on their 241st day of strike due in part to this government's failure to protect Alberta workers by creating fair and inclusive labour legislation. Karly has been at the Palace Casino since 1998 and has worked with the slots department the entire time. She was a member of the former Palace Casino staff association's executive board, which preceded the UFCW. She's a member of the bargaining committee of the union. Catherine has worked for the Palace Casino for seven years as a dealer. Catherine was active within the former staff association and also served as a shop steward. They are joined today by Don Crisall, UFCW local 401 representative. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

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

National Nursing Week

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health and wellness services are supports that Albertans cannot live without. Within Alberta's large health care system each individual fulfills an important function. Thanks to everyone's collaboration, our province is blessed with a superior health and wellness system. Within that system nurses play an incredible and crucial role. They work everywhere: in hospitals, clinics, and communities. Nurses give us wise advice, take care of us when we are unwell, and most of all save countless lives.

This week Canada and the global community are celebrating Nursing Week. During this time we reflect on the importance nurses play in our lives. As in most health and wellness systems, nurses in Alberta comprise the largest professional group in the workforce. There are approximately 38,000 dedicated nurses within our province.

The slogan of this year's Nursing Week is Think You Know Nursing? Take a Closer Look. This statement calls on all Canadians to really think about the role nurses play in our lives. It's probably safe to say: they do it all. The fact is that registered nurses play a critical role in providing and improving clinical care, leading advocacy, and advancing technological innovation.

The work of Alberta's nurses is very important to this province. That is why the government of Alberta is committed to implementing a comprehensive health workforce strategy to secure and retain health professionals, including nurses.

The future of our province depends on our health and well-being as individuals, families, and communities. Our health determines the quality of life we enjoy. Nurses play a vital role in enhancing the wellness of Albertans and helping Albertans realize a healthy future. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all the members of this Assembly I wish to thank them for the work that they do in our health system.

Thank you.

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

Building Safety Week

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize that May 6 to 12, 2007, is Building Safety Week and to talk about the vital role that well-built homes and buildings play in providing safe and secure communities. In Alberta this week is supported by the partnership of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Alberta Building Officials Association. The theme of Building Safety Week 2007, Building Smarter . . . for Disasters and Everyday Life, reflects the importance of inspectors and building officials in creating safe places for people to live, work, and play.

Mr. Speaker, the regulation of building construction can be traced back more than 4,000 years. Codes and practices are always evolving, keeping pace with new technologies, materials, and practices. Whether in our homes, offices, schools, or factories we trust in the safety of our buildings. This trust is built on the expert development and administration of safety regulations essential to protecting the public from fire, structural collapse, and other unsafe conditions.

In Alberta, Mr. Speaker, provincially certified safety code officers interpret safety regulations and promote safe building in their communities. The Alberta Building Officials Association is a not-for-profit organization that promotes the importance of safety in the building environment. I commend Alberta's building professionals for their efforts to promote safety in our province.

Thank you.

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

Alberta Liberal Affordable Housing Policy

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across the province thousands of Albertans face homelessness thanks to skyrocketing rents. Landlords are confused, tenants are afraid, and this government's ham-handed policies are quickly transforming a crisis into a catastrophe.

There is a better way. Last year, before this crisis became front-page news, the Alberta Liberal caucus made a promise to Albertans. We promised to come up with workable solutions to meet the affordable housing shortage head-on. We kept that promise and presented a policy that will create 10,000 units of affordable housing in Alberta within five years, protecting tenants from unmanageable rent increases while respecting the rights and needs of landlords. Like the government we would limit rent increases to once per year, but to protect renters from the huge increases this policy has encouraged, an Alberta Liberal government would also institute a temporary, one-year rent cap measure limiting increases within that year to 10 per cent.

To put that in perspective, the \$500 monthly increase many Albertans face today would become a much more manageable \$50 increase. This will lower the risk of Albertans losing their homes while giving builders time to create additional affordable housing units.

When vacancy rates fall below a certain threshold, we would implement a two-year moratorium on condominium conversions, unless of course the developer wanting the conversion agrees to replace any rental units lost with new affordable rental properties.

Rather than just creating subsidized housing, we would connect supplements to the renter rather than the unit. This gives low-income Albertans seeking a home far greater freedom and flexibility.

In other words, the Alberta Liberals would resolve this crisis and create a sustainable affordable housing market. Everyone needs a home, Mr. Speaker. Let's protect Albertans from losing theirs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Augustana Campus Library Groundbreaking

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Monday a historic event occurred at the University of Alberta Augustana campus in my constituency. A groundbreaking ceremony took place on the campus for its new library and campus forum. This groundbreaking was a result of years of hard work and dedication of the Augustana community.

Driven by a desire to seek a strong and vibrant future for Augustana University College, the University of Alberta, the government of Alberta, and Augustana University College engaged in negotiations over three years ago. These negotiations resulted in the historic merger of two truly outstanding postsecondary institutions with long histories in our province.

A groundbreaking of a library has sentimental meaning for Augustana. There have been numerous attempts to raise the funds to construct a new library. These attempts were unsuccessful. With Augustana's entry into the University of Alberta family the hopes and dreams of a new library are now a reality.

The groundbreaking ceremony was also an opportunity for the Augustana campus, University of Alberta to showcase its success over the past year. Hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and community members were in attendance. I was pleased to participate in the groundbreaking ceremonies with a number of dignitaries, including the U of A president, Indira Samarasekera; the dean of the Augustana campus, Roger Epp; the U of A board chairman, Brian Heidecker; Camrose mayor, Clarence Mastel; and county of Camrose reeve, Jack Lyle.

President Samarasekera remarked that Augustana is a valuable addition to the University of Alberta and that they are engaged in a wholehearted partnership. Dean Epp stated that the groundbreaking demonstrates in a tangible manner Augustana's growth.

Camrose has moved from being a college town to a university city thanks to the presence of the University of Alberta campus. With the construction of the new library Augustana will grow and educate thousands of new students in a rural setting in the years to come.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to ask each and every Albertan a simple but important question: are you prepared? Are you prepared for a real emergency? If flooding forces you from your home, if wildfires are raging nearby, or if a severe winter storm shuts down roads, schools, and businesses, are you prepared?

Mr. Speaker, this week, May 6 to 12, is Emergency Preparedness Week. If a disaster or emergency affected your family, could you look after your basic needs for 72 hours? Emergencies and disasters can happen anywhere at any time.

The first step to protect you and your family is to know the risks. The second step is to make a plan. Having a plan helps you and your family know what to do in case of an emergency. The final step is to assemble a 72-hour kit to cover your basic needs in case of an emergency or disaster. Your kit should include basic equipment like food, water, a small flashlight and batteries, a crank- or battery-operated radio, and a can opener.

During Emergency Preparedness Week, Mr. Speaker, all Albertans, particularly those living or working near industrial areas, should also be aware of the shelter-in-place protocols. Shelter in place is a process of staying indoors in an attempt to lessen the

effects of an emergency such as the release of a hazardous material into the air. Some of the steps involved in shelter in place include going indoors, closing doors and windows, turning off air circulation sources, picking a room to shelter in away from windows and doors, if possible, and staying in place until it's safe to leave.

Mr. Speaker, being prepared for disasters and emergencies is important, and I would ask all Albertans to take the time during Emergency Preparedness Week to make sure that they are ready. For more information on how you can be ready, visit the Municipal Affairs and Housing website.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:20

Midwifery Services

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday, May 5, was the annual celebration of midwifery day. A family event was planned for the steps of the Legislature, and a number of hardy souls came out once again to encourage the government to cover midwifery services under health care. After almost 18 years of lobbying this government, I'm growing a bit weary watching this opportunity slip by us. Numerous studies have shown that midwifery services are the most cost-effective. They reduce pressure on hospitals, staff, and infrastructure.

In 1990 the Advisory Council on Women's Issues, whom I was privileged to serve as executive director, recommended to the government that midwifery services be covered under health care. A number of other agencies, including government ones, followed suit over the years. Midwives fit perfectly with the primary care model and with the prevention and wellness strategy: everything the government says it supports, but year after year the only thing that changes is the government's excuse. "There are safety concerns": well, that was long ago disproved. "You need a pilot project": we've now had several different ones. "You need doctors to show leadership": no, we need the government to show leadership. "The issue needs more study": sorry, boys, the facts are in on this one. I thought perhaps it was because all the health ministers I'd lobbied had been men and maybe they didn't get it, but then we had a female minister and still no coverage.

So here we are: another minister, another May 5, another attempt by this member to encourage the government to do the right thing. For healthier babes, healthier moms, healthier family birth experiences, and a cost savings, please, cover midwifery services under Alberta health care.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have a petition signed by 80 Albertans from Red Deer, Sylvan Lake, Lacombe, St. Albert, Edmonton, Beaumont, Millet, Sherwood Park, Nisku, and other communities that states:

We, the undersigned . . . [ask] the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to introduce legislation that will ensure the following:

1. where a person who holds a graduated driver's licence is operating a motor vehicle that is involved in a collision resulting in serious injury or death, that person's licence shall be suspended immediately and notification shall be provided to the Alberta Transportation Safety Board; and
2. the Board shall immediately conduct a review of the incident to determine whether the person's licence should be reinstated, and if so, under what conditions.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm rising to table 32 signatures on a petition urging the government of Alberta to complete, as soon as possible, the overpasses and interchanges at the locations where the Anthony Henday Drive (Edmonton Ring Road) intersects Lessard Road, Callingwood Road . . . and Cameron Heights Drive.

I urge the minister to pay attention to this one.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to table five copies of the summary of school jurisdictions' statement of operations and changes in financial position.

The Speaker: I think, hon. member, we are not at that point in the Routine yet. I'll call you later. We're in petitions right now.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of a motion to be brought forward tomorrow pursuant to Standing Order 4(2):

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly convene at 8 p.m. for night sittings on Tuesday, May 8, and Wednesday, May 9, 2007.

Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, has some urgency to it, and we may need to find a time to deal with that in the House.

I can assure you and the members of the House, though, that I have committed to working with the House leader of the Official Opposition and the House leader of the third party to find a way to deal with this in an appropriate manner, but I had to bring oral notice forward today to preserve the opportunity to deal with it tomorrow. I've been made aware that, for example, the Liberal Party has a leader's dinner tomorrow night, so tomorrow night may not be the most appropriate time, but we will work together and bring a solution back to the House for tomorrow, in the meantime preserving the opportunity by bringing this notice of motion forward.

Thanks.

The Speaker: And this motion will be debatable.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Bill 35

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce two bills today, the first being Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of this bill is to reflect the changes in the budget and to harmonize with some changes in the federal budget.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 35 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Bill 36

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007.

This is again reflecting proposals in the budget and some harmonization with the federal budget.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 36 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Bill 37

Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance I request leave to introduce Bill 37, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007.

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a first time]

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

Bill 38

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 38 be moved to Government Bills and Orders on the Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Affordable Housing

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberal caucus believes that everyone needs a home. The Premier and his party don't. Albertans believe in fairness, compassion, and in a government that protects their interest, protects the public interest. The Premier and his party apparently do not. The Premier says rent increases of \$1,000 a month are un-Albertan, but his action or, rather, his inaction tells a different story. To the Premier: if rent gouging of this magnitude is un-Albertan, why is the Premier refusing to stop it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government is compassionate, it is caring, and that is why in this budget alone: \$285 million for housing initiatives, millions more to support families, seniors, anyone that requires some assistance in housing. Those are all in the budget that's before debate in this House. I feel that we've come a long way. That \$285 million is to increase the number of housing spaces available in this province given the number of people that continually come to this province to seek their fortune.

Dr. Taft: Again I ask the Premier: if rent gouging of the magnitude of \$1,000 a month is un-Albertan, why is this Premier refusing to stop it?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think I answered in the first question what we are doing to curtail this situation in the province of Alberta. We need more spaces, and what we're bringing forward is a very good plan in terms of increasing the number of spaces. We don't want to diminish the number of spaces available for people in this province; we want to increase the number of spaces.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This issue is not just about policy; it's about people, real people. One group of people who are struggling with this issue are the families of the brave men and women fighting for peace and justice in Afghanistan. I was at the base this weekend, and I heard their concerns about the cost of housing. These are families who worry every day about losing their loved ones. They should not have to worry also about losing their homes. To the Premier: how can the Premier claim that he is looking after the interests of Albertans when military families in Edmonton are in danger of losing their homes? He has a choice, and he's letting it happen.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said, this government is a government for all Albertans, all families, all members. As I said before, we're increasing the number of units in the province of Alberta. In this particular case, to the men and women that serve overseas, you know, our thoughts are with them, especially during this period of time. But to isolate and start picking one group over another is in itself un-Albertan.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Financial Support for Renters

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government likes to pick out all kinds of particular groups. Government support, for example, for farmers demonstrates that the free market alone is incapable of protecting people from unacceptable hardships. Just ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who received \$93,000 in support payments from this government last year to help with the struggles he faced as a farmer. But when it comes to renters, the Premier and this minister say that people facing huge increases should not be protected. To the Premier: how can this Premier refuse to protect renters when they are facing such unacceptable hardships?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the Leader of the Opposition shows how little he knows about agriculture in this province and the programs available. There is something called Alberta crop insurance, where farmers have to pay premiums to the program.

Obviously, they either haven't heard about it or haven't spent enough time in rural Alberta to really study the situation.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. I think the Premier probably knows that we're talking about the CAIS program. When farmers face a tough time because of bad markets, they get support from this government through the CAIS program, and that's fair enough. The Premier himself got \$8,100 from this program last year. But renters need protection, too, when markets are bad in housing. To the Premier: why does the Premier refuse to accept that renters need temporary rent caps to protect them from rent gouging because of the bad market in housing?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, question period isn't where we try and give the hon. leader all of the education when it comes to the CAIS program. It's closely tied to crop insurance, and I hope he understands that it's just not simply having a cheque received from both the federal and provincial levels. It's tied to a series of criteria to support agriculture in, of course, difficult times.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listen, the Alberta Liberals support the principles behind the CAIS program as does this government. As we've seen, both the Premier and his minister enjoy protection from market forces through CAIS, but the same Premier and minister flatly refuse to offer protection to renters in crisis, saying that they don't need temporary rent caps. Again to the Premier: can the Premier explain why Alberta renters are left to fend for themselves when he is not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the information is incorrect, and the minister responsible will identify to the House where we support renters.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have a homeless and eviction prevention fund which will help us deal with all of those issues when people come forward and identify that they've had a cost imposed on them. There are 59 centres in Alberta where people can go and explain their situation, identify what their needs are, and then we can make individual responses to them. They can call the support centre at 1-866-644-5135 if they want more information on getting that support.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Support for Low-income Albertans

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday, as we heard, the Premier suggested that he thought 100 per cent increases in rents might be un-Albertan. The Premier is right about that but wrong about the size of the problem. Uncontrolled growth of housing costs in Alberta affects everyone and has led to the creation of an expanding class of working poor. In fact, 1 in 5 Edmonton households are unable to afford basic necessities, and many are one paycheque away from being homeless. To the Premier: do you think that it is Albertan for families that are working harder and harder and are falling further and further behind?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all Albertans are working very hard.

In fact, we've seen tremendous economic growth in this province. It's a province leading the nation not only in all statistics but in employment as well. We have the lowest unemployment, I believe, in history, if not close to history, and the average working income of Albertans is higher than anywhere else in Canada. There are people, of course, that do need help occasionally, and that's why we're there as a government to assist them in those programs.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, lone parent families are among the hardest hit by skyrocketing housing costs. Children and lone parent families are actually worse off than they were a decade ago. It is inconceivable that in Alberta, one of the richest provinces in Canada, 1 in 8 children still lives in poverty and that this rate really is higher than the national average. To the Premier: do you think it is Albertan that these children not receive the same opportunities, not get a good head start in their life as children in other provinces?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our social programs in this province lead the nation in support for all Albertans. We'll continue to do that. That's why there's been such a huge investment in the social fabric of this province in this budget. Given the kinds of comments across the way, I'm sure that the opposition will be supporting this government in the increases we see in our budget supporting families.

Dr. B. Miller: The lack of affordable housing in Alberta reflects the inability of this government to plan for the boom. Now they're refusing to take meaningful remedial action. If temporary rent regulation is an anathema to this government, the only thing left is to help working people on the income side. To the Premier: will this government at least commit here today to make work pay by increasing the minimum wage? How about increasing it to \$10 an hour?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a good question, and it's something that we may as an Assembly want to give careful consideration to, and we may even have an opportunity to do that soon.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Temporary Rent Regulation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This weekend's Tory convention confirmed what many Albertans already knew, that Tories and the Tory government don't give a darn about renters. It's now clear that this government considers rent guidelines dead despite the fact that vulnerable Alberta renters are facing economic eviction and are ending up on the street. My question is to the Premier. Why has this government turned its back on renters? Why doesn't this Premier care about people who are losing their homes?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this weekend, as the member has mentioned, there were well over 1,400 people attending our annual general meeting. It was a meeting that discussed so many different issues. These are delegates that care about their province. They care about their fellow Albertans, and that's one reason why they turned out in such great numbers to share their thoughts, their ideas with our government caucus members and to bring those ideas forward for further policy evaluation and discussion. I feel proud of the participation that we have.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Fourteen hundred people, all of whom have homes.

The power of wealthy landlords and developers was very apparent this weekend at that Tory convention, which firmly rejected rent protection for renters. While the Premier temporarily lost his nerve on the issue, the Tory delegates were very clear: no rent guidelines. My question to the Premier: will the Premier admit what most Albertans already know, that his government cares about landlords and not about renters who are losing their homes?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, my advice to the leader of the third party is to be careful when you challenge me in terms of whether I have nerve or not.

We listen very closely to all Albertans, and we're going to incorporate what Albertans tell us in terms of policy for what's best for the future of this province. What's best for the future of this province is to increase the number of housing units. In fact, I am proud of the direction we've taken. For 3.3 million people in the province of Alberta we've created over 51,800 starts. In Ontario with 12 million they only saw 56,000 starts. Look at other provinces: Quebec, 8 million people, only 48,000 housing starts. So we are getting the job done.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, vulnerable Albertans are not being helped by this government. It's fine to have 1,400 well-heeled Tories make decisions that will benefit landlords, but there are people who are losing their homes because they're being gouged by landlords. This government has refused to take action. Their only answer is: wait until we get some more basement suites; wait a few years until we build some more apartments and some public housing, and everything will be okay. Does the Premier really expect people to wait on the street for two years while his housing gets built?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, coupled with the \$285 million in housing, encouraging more housing starts – and, again, there will be further participation by the federal government and by municipal governments as well – we, of course, have a program in place to support renters, people that may be evicted as a result of rental increases. Again, the minister did give that information to the House, but if you so wish, she can give it again.

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

Municipal Sustainability Initiative Funding

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past three weeks I've been trying to deal with three specific constituency problems that have been ongoing for over three years, and there seems to be very little movement. The conditional funding that has come out to the municipalities is not helping. It's crippling them, and it's affecting the families in those communities as well. My question and the dilemma is that this government always is upset when the federal government puts conditions on the spending but doesn't seem to follow the same on their own. Will this government stop being hypocrites and crippling our municipalities and eliminate the conditions on the additional funding that they're to receive?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before the budget was released, there was extensive consultation with municipalities, also the minister's council, in a discussion to have co-operation, to have regional planning, which is very necessary. If we look at when the hon. member talks about conditions, the conditions are to plan together. A core part of the budget is to plan, a community plan for the initiative.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, they're out of touch, and the previous housing minister knows it. They went around that they are supposed to have unconditional funding. Because Edmonton might need a parka doesn't mean that Calgary or southern Alberta needs one. It's not working.

At the AUMA regional meeting the ag minister responded to the mayors down there saying that he wasn't aware of it. I wonder if he took that to the Premier. To the Premier: will you make a commitment to send the appropriate ministers to Taber to enable them to address their waste-water treatment plant? The funding is not addressing it.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is a difficult one. There is no jurisdiction in Canada that has put as much money on the table as this government to assist municipalities: currently \$600 million a year for infrastructure for municipalities, add another \$400 million this year. That's a billion dollars to support municipalities in this province. There is no other jurisdiction in Canada that's doing that much, so certainly we would be able to work out any issues in terms of getting that money out to municipalities and getting the best value for it. So if it's in water, if it's in infrastructure, or if it's in social housing, tell us. We'll be there, we'll listen to you, and we'll make those programs work.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, over 50 per cent of the money going to the MD of Taber and the town of Taber will not be able to be used because of the conditions attached to it. They're short millions. It's not going to account for what they need.

There are other problems that they continue to pass off in different jurisdictions. We have a provincial bridge and we have a road that's going to get washed out, and we have a fence at Coutts that they have continued to fail to address. Will the Premier address these issues? They are simple and can be addressed, unlike some of the bigger issues that take time. It's been three years, and they haven't been addressed. Will the Premier commit to addressing these two specific problems?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we addressed a big problem in Taber the other day. We announced support for 105 new assisted-living spaces in Taber. That's going to go a long way in supporting our seniors in that community. Over and above the billion dollars that's in both infrastructure and municipal affairs, there are millions of dollars in other programs, especially for water and sewer rehab. So there's a whole bunch more money available other than just what was indicated by the hon. member.

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

Temporary Rent Regulation (continued)

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lack of leadership by this government has many of my constituents in Edmonton-Ellerslie feeling that they will lose their home. Seniors, artists, immigrants,

single families, and people on fixed income are struggling to pay increasing rents. One of my constituents has received three rent increases in eight months totalling \$400. She's afraid of becoming part of the growing number of the working homeless in the province. To the Premier: what advice does the Premier have for this particular woman, who is one paycheque away from being homeless?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, as the minister responsible indicated, there are a number of dollars available to support people in difficult circumstances. Again, I'll repeat: \$285 million available for affordable housing. We're looking at other strategies in terms of increasing the number of units. If again we have to repeat how to get in contact with the right ministry to support people under difficult conditions, we'll do that.

Mr. Agnihotri: Mr. Premier, the taxpayers want to see you decisive. They want to see action. My question is to the Premier again. Another constituent in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie is being hit with a 54 per cent increase in rent. He wants answers from this government. How are hard-working Albertans supposed to maintain a home with rent escalation like this?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as well, I believe that the House leader introduced a special motion to accelerate, of course, discussion and debate on a bill that we have before the House. This in part is in keeping with the strategy of keeping these rent increases down.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again. It is un-Albertan for this government to disregard the basic needs of Albertans. When will the Premier do what's right and implement the one-time, temporary rent increase protection for tenants to reduce the risk of people losing their home?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we don't want anybody to lose their home. That's why we're moving quickly on providing more dollars for growing the number of affordable housing units in the province of Alberta. As well, we are supporting families in need, seniors, and young families. We have the programs in place, and we'll continue to watch how the number of units increases in this province of Alberta. Really, the only way of dealing with the critical housing shortage is getting more units started and built so that families can move in.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

1:50 Disclosure of Leadership Campaign Contributions

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few months some of my constituents in Red Deer-North have asked me about disclosure of leadership financing, that is legislated in other provinces. Over this past weekend some direction was offered about how all parties should conduct themselves when selecting a new leader. I have one question, and it's to the Premier. How quickly will the government bring forward legislation governing financial contribution and disclosure rules for party leadership elections?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe that what came forward was legislation to cover all parties. If there are some parties across the way that see an immediate urgency to deal with this situation because they anticipate some leadership changes, then we'll listen to

them very carefully, and we'll put it on the agenda as quickly as possible for consideration in this House.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Temporary Rent Regulation

(continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, sadly, the term GDP in Alberta has taken on a whole new meaning. It appears it now stands for government's disposable people. I'd like to raise the cases of several of my constituents struggling with their housing. Trudy Hill is a resident renter in my constituency. She works for the Alberta Research Council, a government employee working hard to improve this province, yet because of the Tories' blind faith in a completely distorted free market, she's facing a 45 per cent rent increase. To the Premier: does Mrs. Hill have to just hold on, to keep on paying the price of prosperity?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the responsibility of the opposition and the third party is to identify concerns that come to them as MLAs, yet the member opposite has not come to my office with those individual cases. He stands up and grandstands in this House in order to try and get the media. But does he care about his constituents? No. He has not come to our office. There is responsibility in this House for leadership, and his responsibility...

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Your room is going to get awfully full with the thousands of constituents that are being ripped off by your government.

My constituents accept that the growth pressures in Alberta and in Calgary mean that life will get a little tougher, that prices will rise, and that money will get tighter, but what they are actually experiencing is well beyond that reasonable assumption. What Candace Loken, another constituent, is actually experiencing is a \$400 a month rent increase while on \$700 a month disability. She's going to have to move even while suffering chronic back pain. How does this fit with the Premier's pledge to improve Albertans' quality of life? How has Mrs. Loken's life improved?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, if the hon. member opposite instead of putting those letters under his desk would forward them to us, we could deal with them because we do have the programs. We are compassionate for the situations that individuals are in, and if they were passed on to us, we could deal with them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A third constituent, Diane Shelley, is seeing her rent go up \$425, nearly 60 per cent. She is a senior on a fixed income. She's going to have \$200 a month to live on. She certainly isn't happy with the Alberta advantage. There's the evidence. These certainly aren't isolated incidents. Across my constituency, across the province excessive rent increases are punishing Albertans. Will the Premier finally accept that we already are facing a failed marketplace and follow the lead of the Alberta Liberals and his own Affordable Housing Task Force and institute temporary rent controls?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, allow me one more time, please, to address the issue the hon. member is raising. Any day of the week when people are faced with low income, when they are faced with eviction, when they are faced with homelessness, when they are faced with tragic circumstances like a rent increase they can't afford, the Alberta government delivers. Since November we helped them with \$9 million worth of emergencies, just in the past few months. We spent a hundred million dollars over the last year in the budget helping low-income Albertans with shelter and other supports, whether they were going to school, were receiving training and needed supports, whether they had difficulties because of the marketplace, whether they had difficulties because of a lack of job opportunities. Mr. Speaker, we have programs in place, and further programs...

The Speaker: I think we have to move on now.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Pacific Northwest Labour Mobility

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The participating jurisdictions of the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, like Alberta, have all been dealing with a shortage of workers. While we in Alberta work diligently to solve our workforce problems, our PNWER partners and the federal government have strategies to tackle this common problem. My questions today are to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Your policy is to have a strong workforce in Alberta. What can you do to collaborate with the northwest economic region and the federal government to participate in breaking down barriers to labour mobility between our jurisdictions?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think it's well known that the hon. member who presented the question had a key role in helping us with the TILMA agreement in supporting trade and labour mobility. But beyond that, PNWER delegates here today are hoping that we will support their steering committee on the issues of workforce shortage in the western regions, and we will. We will have representation, as will the minister of labour in British Columbia. Colin Hansen has already indicated support. We will examine the roles of various private stakeholders, organizations like APEGGA, who can help us with labour mobility by looking at certification and following through...

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Discussions at the annual PNWER summits for years have raised the awareness of these issues, and this particular problem goes beyond many borders. Those barriers need to be reviewed on a regular basis, and they have been reviewed on a regular basis as well. Can the minister advise this House and Albertans of any successes that have been happening in the past that would lead to future successes?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the engineers and the engineering technologists are two groups where there have been some successes. We have been working with many other groups where we are seeing the removal of barriers in place, in fact the absence of barriers. We've been working with associations to make sure that they are continuing.

Further, Mr. Speaker, together with British Columbia we plan to look at an office to look at foreign credentialing in a different way so that we are confident that the people that do want to come into the

country can work more collaboratively with either province in securing employment. PNWER also with other jurisdictions is helping us become more aware of labour shortages and labour possibilities throughout the region.

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, the last question to the minister is: what strategies can she suggest for the future in terms of taking the workforce and what might work in one jurisdiction and having the workforce remain in that jurisdiction to help with manufacturing of component parts that could be of benefit to Alberta and to our industries here?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, one excellent example which fits very well with our new and burgeoning aerospace industry in Medicine Hat is the example of Boeing in Seattle, Washington, who have decentralised the building of component parts so that, in fact, in Everett, Washington, there are other parts being built. We can do that as well. Our manufacturing and exporter forum, which saw many groups come out of Ontario, was another example of our finding opportunities for our oil sands industry to receive building from other places and then incorporate it within industry locally. So I think that for this Pacific Northwest we can look at other jurisdictions to help us fill the gaps.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:00

Off-reserve Housing

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans know all too well how the government dropped the Affordable Housing Task Force suggestion on temporary rent controls, but the task force also recommended affordable off-reserve housing for aboriginals. With the federal government putting in cash, the task force said that the provincial government should match it, but the government said no. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the federal government the only one willing to put in and step up to help the people with this important issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Quite contrary to the comment, this government has acted very responsibly in dealing with First Nation people, Métis people relative to this. We're continuing to work with them, and the important partnership in terms of finding housing is something that is continuing on. I might add that the recommendations in the task force are very positive in terms of the work that has been done and is being done in helping Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the budget release on affordable housing spending the front page shows \$16 million this year for spending for off-reserve housing. Only when you look through the report do you realize that the release flat out rejected the recommendations the task force suggested. The \$16 million is all coming from the federal government, the federal government only. So why does this government still try and pass this money off as their own? Why aren't they doing anything for aboriginals on off-reserve housing?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I won't have to remind the hon.

member regarding the federal responsibility as well as provincial responsibility, but what I can remind members of this House and the hon. member is this: that the relationship we have with aboriginal peoples and Métis people in this province is second to none. In fact, it has been commented that we have a gold standard that other provinces could follow relative to the leadership in dealing with aboriginal people in this province.

Mr. Bonko: Another vulnerable group in society ignored by this government, another group whose housing challenges don't fit with the Tory ideology, and another group that must pay for the price of prosperity, it looks like. What does the minister say to aboriginals who need this off-reserve housing funding: just wait for the federal money because we don't care about it?

Mr. Boutilier: Quite to the contrary, not at all. In fact, rather than the Liberal ideology, we're out there being proactive, thinking ahead rather than looking behind saying: what's all wrong in the last hundred years? We have a positive approach. I might add also that the minister of housing, heading up the task force, even had some very clear examples of how we're working forward in a positive way.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the \$285 million, not like the member opposite would like to have it, has no boundaries or distinctions. The \$285 million is for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Temporary Rent Regulation

(continued)

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier seemed surprised Friday when he was told that Edmonton isn't the only place where there's rent gouging. Obviously, he's not reading the Calgary papers. Calgary renter Norman Burke received a notice of a \$1,000 rent increase last August. Margaret Bain, a widow in Calgary, saw her \$700 per month rent go up to \$1,445 last November. The gouging has been going on a long time in Calgary, and it's getting worse in Edmonton. My question is to the minister of municipal affairs. How could the Premier and this government not know about the rent gouging that's been going on in Calgary for almost a year?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we have 100,000 people who have moved into Alberta in the last year. We need to have more units on the market. We cannot chase away landlords into other provinces. That is not the solution. If individuals have concerns or challenges, I would ask also the member from the third party to please send us those concerns, and we will look at them and deal with them.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, where are these poor little landlords going to flee to? They have rent controls almost everywhere except Alberta, and they're building affordable housing.

My question. Is the minister saying that this is the government policy, that the minister is going to sit down and talk one-on-one with all the landlords and say: please don't raise the rents? Is this the new government philosophy? Is this their strategy, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, this minister has said that he needs to understand the situation from the side of the landlords that are gouging, that have had extreme rentals, and that is why I need to sit

down with those individuals and see their reasoning. We need to see the holistic side.

Mr. Martin: The holistic side? You've got to be kidding. The nature of the beast is this: that landlords are out there to make a profit, Mr. Speaker, and they're going to make as big a profit as they can. They're not philanthropic social organizations. My question to the minister is simply this: when is the minister going to get off this rigid ideology brought forward by well-heeled Tories and bring in some sort of rent stability so that people aren't being gouged?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we're moving towards bringing in a form of rent stability a little later this week when we talk about the renewal of the landlord and tenancies acts. I can assure you that the MLAs that represent Calgary not only represent the housing issues. They also represent the infrastructure issues and the other cultural issues that come with the tremendous growth that we've been faced with. So there is not a void of information in this caucus from Calgary, but there may be a slight void in the third party.

Nuclear Power

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, even in a southern rural riding like Little Bow nuclear power is often questioned and talked about as an alternate energy source that might generate steam and produce electricity for the province's oil sands. For some other Albertans it also raises issues about public safety. My questions today are to the Minister of Energy. I understand that much of the regulatory system is controlled by the federal government, but with that being said, I would like the minister to assure me and some of the constituents that any potential approval might take into account some of the concerns that some Albertans have around nuclear power.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, Canada is recognized around the world as an area that has a regulatory system that's renowned for nuclear energy. Certainly, Canadian equipment is used globally, and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission addresses the health, safety, environmental, and national security issues associated with nuclear projects in Canada. There are specific approvals required in licensing phases all the way through the process . . .

The Speaker: Perhaps we'll get to that in the supplementary.
The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: does the federal government have clear direction over many of these controls, or does Alberta have an opportunity for input in some of the decisions that are being made?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, as I was about to say, the government will provide leadership on this issue, and most certainly the province of Alberta or any other provincial jurisdiction has a role to play. What's been stated by our leader and hon. Premier of the province of Alberta: we will go out and hear from Albertans with respect to the issue before any nuclear projects would be constructed in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How has the minister

actually addressed the concerns about the environment, the safety, the public safety, when it comes to input from Albertans?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, they're all important issues. The issues that the member brings up are very important issues to Albertans and most certainly to this government. What will have to happen is that once there is a proposal that comes forward to the government, we will certainly address all of those issues. Under the auspices, again, of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, we'll have a role to play with respect to the licensing and permitting, and we'll be sure that Albertans are included in those discussions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Affordable Housing in Calgary

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Blind faith in the market continues to blind this government to the profound human suffering associated with the boom in this province, particularly in Calgary. One thing is clear: the government's members are not in touch with the desperate plight of average and low-income Albertans, or it does not believe their stories. The Premier last week was quoted as saying that he was not aware of anyone getting a \$1,000 increase. Such reports and worse have been in the press for over a year. To the Member for Calgary-West: what have you Calgary MLAs been doing to inform the Premier about these problems?

2:10

The Speaker: Well, we're going to deal with a question to a minister of the Crown. This is question period, and the member will respond as a minister of the Crown.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I was going to inform the hon. member about completing Education Week last week and what I was doing as Minister of Education, but if that's not appropriate, then I'll wait for the next question.

The Speaker: That would have been appropriate, but we'll go to the next question.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of my constituents, Lynn Moran, from the Renfrew community saw a 100 per cent increase in her rent last week, from \$425 to \$850 a month plus utilities. Now she's spending half of her income on rent. Laura Snowball, another resident of my constituency, saw her rent go from \$1,300 to \$2,000 this month. To the minister of municipal affairs: why is this government ignoring Calgarians?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we are not ignoring Calgarians. We are not ignoring Albertans. We have put forward \$285 million of new money to support affordable housing and the homeless. We are trying to encourage developers. We are trying to encourage municipalities to change zoning bylaws so that we can have more units available for Albertans. Again, I would very much encourage the member opposite to bring forward those concerns to ourselves, also through a toll-free number to Service Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that the current plan is not going to relieve this problem for months or years if at all. When will this government put citizens' basic human rights ahead of ideology?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we're already putting the issues of Albertans in front on the agenda. Repeatedly I have given answers to questions about the capacity of this government to follow through with the programs we are currently administering and ones that under this homeless and eviction fund we'll continue to administer. We will have monies. The description of the case where a woman has spent half of her money on housing is exactly the kind of case that this ministry deals with and that this ministry will follow through with.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility Agreement

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta/B.C. trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, otherwise known as TILMA, is Canada's most comprehensive internal trade agreement. However, despite overwhelming positive response to this agreement its no-obstacles clause has recently come under fire from some critics. My first question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Will the no-obstacles clause prevent governments from regulating in the public interest; for example, by not allowing zoning bylaws or building height restrictions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One thing is for certain: TILMA, which every other province and territory in Canada is watching, is a model for the rest of Canada to follow. Not only is it a model for the rest of Canada to follow; it's true that maybe even the Liberals and the New Democrats might be able to follow it. Furthermore, I might add that this will not only strengthen but enhance the excellent job that municipalities are doing in serving the same taxpayers, that elect both us and them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the fact that during his recent visit to Edmonton the ambassador of the European Union to Canada was praising TILMA and saying that this is probably one of the best interjurisdictional agreements in the world, can the minister respond to those who contend that under TILMA governments will have to remove any rule or regulation that businesses think restricts their ability to do business?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, this is clearly about barrier busting, about bureaucratic busting, about eliminating red tape, about eliminating the duplication among governments. We're taking down the barrier, and do you know why we're doing it? To help the people of Alberta and British Columbia, 7.7 million Albertans and British Columbians. And how can anyone or any political party argue with something that will help voters?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you for that answer, Mr. Speaker.

What does the same minister say to those who claim that under TILMA business will be able to sue government repeatedly for regulations that they feel interfere with their ability to do whatever they want?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, if someone wants to sue anyone, get in line. I mean, that's fine, and it keeps a particular profession very happy.

That being the case, I might add simply this. Let me use a quote, and I will table this. "We look forward to continuing to work with our counterparts in [British Columbia] to facilitate labour mobility between the two provinces," says Mary-Anne Robinson, the executive director of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta. Need I say more in terms of the labour mobility that is helping Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister will be given an opportunity very momentarily to table such a source.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Temporary Rent Regulation (continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many seniors on a fixed income who are still willing and able to live in their own community, but their options are limited because of skyrocketing rental prices. There are seniors throughout the province who are forced to use their entire pension cheque to pay their rent. Jim Sexsmith, for example, is a senior from Edmonton on a fixed pension and cannot afford the 20 per cent rent increase in his building, which is the second increase in one year. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: what advice does the minister have for seniors whose income or government supports are not keeping up with the cost of living?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I think we've said many times before that if there are individuals, I would very much ask the members opposite to please pass that information on to us. If there are concerns of tenants and landlords who have questions about the rights that they have, they should call Service Alberta on a toll-free number, 1-877-427-4088. Also, my colleague the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry has reiterated numerous times that if there are such individuals, we will look after it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really not making up these stories.

This government has two categories for Albertans: those who benefit from the Alberta advantage and those whose circumstances are simply considered the price of prosperity. Why is the minister letting ideology get in the way of protecting seniors from double- or triple-digit percentage increases in their rent?

Mr. Danyluk: I'll let the minister of seniors respond, please.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta seniors' benefit has been designed specifically to be targeted towards the lowest income seniors. In fact, we have one of the most aggressive policies in exempting health care premiums. We also have caps so that there is no increase at all in their education property taxes. The Alberta seniors' benefit does provide a substantial benefit to the lowest. We really are trying to organize so that the programs for seniors are targeted to those with the greatest of needs, and we will continue to see that our programs match just that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. My question will go to the minister of seniors this

time. Seniors at the Holy Cross Manor in Calgary, an assisted-living facility, have faced rent increases of up to 40 per cent. Housing options for these seniors are limited given that many have limited mobility and require specially designed apartments. Does the minister still believe that these vulnerable Albertans don't deserve any special protections over and above what I have just heard over the last three-quarters of an hour?

2:20

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we have acted and will continue to act in conjunction with many of the initiatives that will be going forward. Seniors are also those that can apply for the affordability assistance under the rental supplements that are there, and so be it in this case for any individual. Many times they have not even applied for the programs that do exist. So we, too, would be anxious and willing to work with those specific individuals and seniors as their needs come forward.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 86 questions and answers today.

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Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table in reference to question period this afternoon quotes on the excellent labour mobility deal between Alberta and British Columbia.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two celebratory tablings today. The first is the requisite number of copies of last Friday's program from Masala Journey, which kicked off the month-long series of ImaginAsian cultural celebration events, which include Alberta's First Nations artists and performers. One of the first celebratory events was the annual Sikh parade and celebrations that took place this past Saturday in both Calgary and Edmonton.

My second tabling is the Volunteer Quick Reference Guide for the 40th annual pathway and river cleanup that took place on Sunday. Constituents from Calgary-Mountain View, Calgary-Currie, and Calgary-Varsity were among the hundreds of volunteers. I'm proud to note that included in the 20-plus Calgary-Varsity volunteers were four generations of the Chase family.

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

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table a document for the leader of the NDP today. It's a copy of a letter from Margaret Stone, who at 75 years old has been informed that the owner of her apartment building is planning a condo conversion. She notes that at her age and on a fixed income she would not likely qualify for a loan.

The Speaker: Did the hon. member have a tabling of his own?

Mr. Martin: Yes, I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a letter sent to the Premier by 69-year-old Beverley McGowan, who is one of my constituents. In the past year Beverley's rent has increased by over \$400, and she'll have to find a new place to live by the end of the month.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased and proud today to rise in this great democratic Assembly of Alberta as an independent and conservative member to present two sets of tablings. One is the program of the Northgate Choralaires' premiere performance of their taste of Broadway. Under the talented leadership and musical genius of director Sandi Ollenberger this premier seniors' choir performed to a sold-out audience of well over 500 souls. It was held at the incomparable Northgate Lions seniors' centre, and the performance received a long standing ovation at the finale. Thank you, Choralaires.

The second tabling is a program from the Yellow Ribbon Gala Benefit Dinner and Silent Auction held at the officers' mess at the base in support of the Edmonton Garrison family resource centre. This is an important charity that I urge all Albertans to support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon, and it is a submission made by the government of Alberta to the U.S. House Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality. This submission is titled Alberta's Dramatic Crude Oil Growth in an Environment of Conventional Crude Oil Decline, and it is dated December 7, 2005. This submission was made by our patronage appointee in Washington, a former member of this House, Murray D. Smith.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and table five copies of the Summary of School Jurisdictions Statement of Operations and Changes in Financial Position from the 2005-06 Alberta Education report. On Thursday the Minister of Education challenged me to produce the document showing that 30 of Alberta's school boards are in a deficit position. This document from the current annual report of his own ministry clearly demonstrates this.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituent Deane Purves, who is concerned about the temporary rent relief and the life of all renting citizens. He's surprised at the greed of landlords, and he's stunned to hear lots of stories about vulnerable people in Alberta. He's urging this government to recognize the rent situation in Edmonton, Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Over the noon hour I had the pleasure of attending the 2007 Celebrate Mental Health Awards sponsored by the Canadian Mental Health Association. I was glad to see several of my colleagues from the Alberta Legislature there, and I am pleased to table the program from that event today. As executive director Bill Hofmeyer noted, isn't it wonderful that we refer to these as the mental health awards and not the mental illness awards?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a set of seven letters addressed to the Premier and his government. These letters were composed on the steps of this very Legislature on April 18 of this year when we had the vigil ceremony remembering and celebrating the life of Stephanie Butler, whose murder was not only tragic but preventable. They're asking for certain changes to police procedures and to look at ways to improve safety and security in our neighbourhoods and communities.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a letter with the requisite five copies on behalf of Kim Laing, who's a certified firefighter and EMT and chair of the Southern Alberta Vehicle Restraint Coalition, who feels that the present legislation restricts the sheriffs' activities that could be invaluable in helping with roadside accidents by controlling traffic and securing the scene, freeing first responders' time to do their job of saving lives.

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Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, pursuant to the Architects Act the Alberta Association of Architects annual report 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Hancock, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Physical Therapy Profession Act the College of Physical Therapists of Alberta 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 annual reports; pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Combined Laboratory and X-Ray Technologists 2006 annual report and the Alberta College of Medical Diagnostic & Therapeutic Technologists 2006 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call Orders of the Day, these comments are essentially addressed to the three House leaders. Last week there was very, very minor discussion with me with respect to the possibility of opposition officials being on the floor during the estimates. I've heard nothing further since that time. If this matter is to be dealt with, we have to find a process dealing with this prior to going into committee tomorrow. So I would encourage the three of you somehow to provide either written advice, written request, or something because there will have to be guidelines associated with this as well.

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Orders of the Day

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Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Supportive Housing

Q10. Dr. Pannu:

How many supportive living facilities, including assisted living facilities, lodges, enhanced lodges, seniors' complexes, and group homes, and related number of beds were operating in Alberta for each of the fiscal years 2001-02 to 2005-06 and for April 1, 2006, to March 19, 2007, broken down by regional health authority and by whether the

facility is owned/operated publicly, privately, or on a voluntary basis?

Canadian Wheat Board Barley Plebiscite

Q11. Mr. Eggen:

What is the total number of barley producers whose information was sent to the accounting firm KPMG for the purpose of assembling the list of eligible voters for the 2007 barley plebiscite of the Canadian Wheat Board?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to notice given last week I move that the remaining written questions on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 9.

[Motion carried]

Long-term Care Facilities

Q9. Mr. Eggen asked on behalf of Dr. Pannu that the following question be accepted.

How many long-term care facilities and beds were operating in Alberta on December 31 for the years 2001 to 2006 inclusive broken down by regional health authority and whether the facility is owned/operated publicly, privately, or on a voluntary basis, an example of which appears on page 19 of the report of the Auditor General on Seniors Care and Programs 2005?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased on behalf of government to accept this motion if we could have the consent of the House to an amendment. The amendment is really technical to make sure that the information we give aligns appropriately. So I would move that Written Question 9 be amended as follows: (a) by striking out "December 31" and substituting "March 31" so as to align with the fiscal year reporting year; (b) by adding "and service providers" after "whether the facility"; (c) by striking out "is" after "facility" and substituting "are"; and (d) by striking out "an example of which appears on page 19 of the Report of the Auditor General on Seniors Care and Programs 2005." The written question would then read as follows if amended:

How many long-term care facilities and beds were operating in Alberta on March 31 for the years 2001 to 2006 inclusive broken down by regional health authority and whether the facility and service providers are owned/operated publicly, privately, or on a voluntary basis?

Now, Mr. Speaker, the reason for the amendment, as I indicated, is simply so that we can provide the information in the manner in which we have it, i.e. by year-end, and to clearly indicate that the information isn't broken down with respect to whether a facility is owned publicly and operated privately. So the information would be provided based on whether the service provider is public, private, or not for profit. I understand that that is the type of information that the hon. member requesting this wants to have. So just to make sure that we're not agreeing to something that we can't actually provide, we bring forward the amendment to put it in place.

The reason for removing the reference to the Auditor General's report is that the Auditor General's report actually does report on the same information but on a different basis. So that there's no

confusion as to the form in which the information would be provided, that piece would be removed. If the member bringing forward the motion is agreeable, we'd be happy to provide the information in the format that we can easily do.

The Speaker: We're on the amendment now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We certainly appreciate the attention to detail that this amendment suggests, and we thereby also certainly support the amendment as written.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to close debate.

Mr. Eggen: Just very, very briefly. This is very pertinent and useful information, that all members would be certainly welcome to use. We appreciate the amendment that actually clarifies and strengthens the original written question.

[Written Question 9 as amended carried]

head:

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to notice given last week I move that motions for returns stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head:

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

Bill 203 Service Dogs Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona. We have a 60-minute time rule.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today and move third reading for the debate of Bill 203, Service Dogs Act.

I appreciate the support of members on both sides of this Assembly thus far, and I hope that we will be able to see this bill pass at the conclusion of third reading today. The co-operation of all members demonstrates their commitment to quality of life for persons with disabilities. This is an issue which deals with the fundamental issue of ensuring that every Albertan can fully participate in the life of this province.

Throughout the debate we've heard many stories about potential benefit of service dogs, and those stories echo what I have heard from persons with disabilities while this bill was being debated. A number of people contacted me over the past couple of months to express their support, and there are a number of Albertans who believe that a service dog will help them or a loved one to improve their abilities, independence, and also personal safety.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

People expressed their frustrations with the complaint process under the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, and I hope that Bill 203 remedies this concern that they've expressed. I believe that many individuals will be happy about the implementation of the bill. In the future there may even be questions about uses of other service animals, but this issue will need to be considered at that time if it's found that other animals could serve appropriate and useful roles. However, that's not the issue here at hand today.

Amendments were made in Committee of the Whole, and I appreciate those who brought forward comments with respect to those amendments and who encouraged those amendments to go forward. Following those amendments, I believe that Bill 203 will serve to broaden the participation of Albertans with disabilities into the life of this province. It's an important priority for the government. It's by developing policies that reflect the varied needs of persons with disabilities that we will improve the quality of life for Albertans.

Bill 203 will also lay out the ground rules for those Albertans who currently have service dogs and wish to seek identification for their dog. This act makes it clear that only certified dogs will receive identification. If at the present time there are service dogs that are fully trained, once this act comes into force, persons with disabilities will be able to receive an identification card for their dog.

Changes to the definition of disabled person which was in the act recognized that different forms of disability could be supported through the use of service dogs. One hon. member correctly noted that there are invisible disabilities that may not be noticeable but nonetheless require support. This change will also guarantee individuals with autism, for example, the opportunity to have a service dog. This may prevent those individuals from doing such things as bolting, running away from their supervisor or their parent and running in front of cars, for example, and perhaps help to control repetitive types of behaviour.

The amendment will also support those who need memory aid dogs. These dogs are trained to assist individuals with cognitive impairments, perhaps like brain injury or Alzheimer's. The dogs will memorize the often-travelled routes such as off to work or to home, and they can also detect unsafe situations such as a stove burner left on.

There was concern expressed by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview regarding what would occur if an individual were to lose their identification card. I want to assure the hon. member that we'll take those concerns into consideration when the regulations are developed. Currently there is a process. It's about a two-day turnaround if a guide dog's identification tags are lost. We will attempt to even improve on that rapid turnaround, but the department is to be commended for that quick turnaround in cases where certification and identification tags are lost.

On the topic of developing regulations, I want to briefly mention that the proclamation date on the bill is January 1, 2009. This should be a sufficient period to bring regulations into place that will balance the needs of service dog owners and the need to maintain public confidence in that certification process. It provides about 18 months from now for the stakeholders to communicate to Albertans the uses of service dogs and the treatment for service dogs and the rights available to the owners of those service dogs. I expect that the government will take an important role in this communication process and will seek help from the community to move that forward.

The importance of educating the public about service dogs was very clear at second reading and also the committee debates. The need to educate the general public and increase awareness is crucial. If that does not happen, there will be difficulties in gaining public

acceptance of service dogs. There'll also be challenges with public understanding around the access and legal rights of an individual to be accompanied by that service dog. Individuals with service dogs have stated that there's a general lack of understanding about service dogs, and that further underlines the need for more education. That said, Mr. Speaker, I believe that Albertans are understanding of the varied needs of persons with disabilities, but by being informed, they will be able to understand better the role of service dogs and will be accepting of the rights accorded to those individuals who use service dogs.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, I'm optimistic that the provisions of Bill 203 can be implemented in a manner that will benefit the users of service dogs and also the general public. There's a very good model in place through the Blind Persons' Rights Act with regard to identification cards used by blind persons for their guide dogs, and I think this model can be adopted by the Service Dogs Act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, before I close, I would like to recognize the staff support that I have received from the Department of Seniors and Community Supports. Certainly, the full support of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports has been important. In addition, Reagan McCullough, the assistant deputy minister, disability supports division; Susan Bieganeck, Barbara Adamson, and Joann Blais through legislative services; Laurel Wierstra, the program development person for the people with disability initiative; Mark Nicoll, through the office of disability issues; and also Diane Bergeron, who works with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

I'm very pleased to have sponsored this bill, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. This is a good piece of legislation which will enable Albertans with disabilities to participate fully in the social, economic, and cultural life of this province, making this province a more inclusive place to live, something that each and every member of this Assembly feels is important and wishes to support, I believe.

I thank all members for their support. I would ask that you continue in your support and see this bill through to the end of third reading and into legislation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 203, Service Dogs Act. This bill prohibits discriminatory practices towards individuals with disabilities and trainers who are accompanied by a service dog, establishes an identification process for service dogs, and creates fines for offenders of the act. I commend the Member for Strathcona for introducing this bill. I'm definitely supporting this bill.

Some shops, restaurants, and other businesses sometimes object to assistance dogs being brought onto the premises. This bill, particularly, is intended to bring greater autonomy to individuals with physical disabilities and to facilitate their social integration by prohibiting discriminatory behaviour against anyone using or training a service dog. Service dogs are trained to assist people who have a wide variety of mobility impairment and other hidden disabilities such as seizures, psychiatric disorders, life-threatening medical problems, or chronic pain. These dogs provide services to disabled individuals, helping them function with a greater self-sufficiency, prevent injuries, and summon help in a crisis.

A 2001 Stats Canada survey, the most recent available, Mr. Speaker, indicated that over half of Canadians with disabilities

require service devices to help manage their disabilities and make their life easier. Service dogs can be one of those critical aids. Over half of adults with disabilities who require aids are working-age adults, while seniors make up a large proportion of individuals requiring service aids.

Alberta Liberals oppose discriminatory practices towards any group and fully support increasing accessibility to Albertans with disabilities. Every Albertan should have the ability to work, learn, and play to their fullest potential in our province. The Alberta Liberals fully support strong, effective disability accessibility legislation that would provide a greater level of independence, of enhanced quality of life.

The penalties for violating the act seem quite low. Section 1 in this bill, Mr. Speaker, provides definitions required to interpret the act. This act applies to individuals with physical disabilities excluding blindness or visual impairment who would require a service dog, which is good. Service dogs are required to have an identification card, and section 2 of this act does not have authority over the Blind Persons' Rights Act.

Section 3 defines the types of behaviour considered discriminatory and subject to the fines. Anyone who provides services, goods, facilities, or accommodations to the public cannot refuse to provide their services to a disabled person simply because the person is accompanied by a service dog. It clarifies that the act does not entitle a disabled person or a certified dog trainer to any right beyond being accommodated by a service dog. This act, Mr. Speaker, only applies if the disabled person and the dog trainer control the behaviour of the service dog.

Section 4, Mr. Speaker, outlines the requirement for a disabled person to obtain an identification card for the service dog as proof that the service dog qualifies under this act.

This bill allows the minister to make regulations outlining the qualifications for service dogs, establishes a fine of up to \$3,000 for individuals who exhibit discriminatory behaviour, establishes a fine of up to \$300 for individuals who pretend to be disabled in order to benefit from the act, and also amends the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to include service dogs. This bill also, in section 8, repeals chapter 7, the Blind Persons' Rights Amendment Act. This bill comes into force on January 1, 2009, as the hon. Member for Strathcona just said, which is quite sufficient time.

I urge all the members of this House to support this bill. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests (*reversion*)

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to have in the public gallery three individuals with whom I've spoken from time to time, some of them more often than others, and several times during the development of this bill they've had input. I believe they'll also be available to help in the development of the regulations as we move forward over the next 18 months. They're up in the gallery, as I've said, and I'd like the members present to acknowledge these three folks: first of all, Larry Pempeit, who is the director of community development for CPA – and he's seated in the middle of the three gentlemen on the end there – and also Tom Craig and Edgar Jackson. I appreciate their input and their support and their help.

They're active members of the community, and I thank you for your contributions to the community. I'd ask all members to please acknowledge them with a warm welcome.

head: 2:50 **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading**

**Bill 203
Service Dogs Act
(continued)**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Marz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise in full support of this excellent piece of legislation brought forward by my colleague the hon. Member for Strathcona. Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, prohibits discrimination towards a person with a disability who is accompanied by a qualified service dog that has an identification card issued by the minister.

This act offers new protections to service dog teams in addition to those afforded under the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. This act reflects the values of Albertans. It says that it is recognized in Alberta as a fundamental principle and as a matter of public policy that all persons are equal in: dignity, rights and responsibilities without regard to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income or family status.

These values guide the laws and policies of this province. Albertans can file complaints with the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission if they feel they've been discriminated against.

The Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act currently protects individuals with a disability who rely on a guide dog for assistance in addition to the protection of the Blind Persons' Rights Act. Bill 203 adds reliance on a service dog to the definition of a physical disability in the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, offering additional protection to a person with a service dog. In Alberta employers, landlords, tenants, and service providers are expected to make reasonable efforts to accommodate individuals with disabilities unless it would cause undue hardship. Well-trained service dogs are discreet and can be easily accommodated. They do not cause hardship.

The HRCMA employs the preferred method of restorative justice rather than punitive justice. It's important that punitive antidiscrimination legislation does not lead to the weakening of human rights legislation. However, punitive measures are appropriate sometimes when there is discrimination against a person with a disability using a service dog. Bill 203 defines two offences: treating a person with a service dog any differently than any other member of the public and failing to return a service dog identification card issued by the minister or claiming to be a disabled person to obtain benefits that this act offers. Enacting these offences serves the purpose of articulating a shared social value that is essential to the social order: that there should not be discrimination against a person with a disability.

This bill enshrines in law what is already accepted by society as basic etiquette and morally proper. Protecting the basic human rights of people with disabilities is simply the right thing to do. This value is of sufficient importance that it justifies the involvement of the police, Crown prosecutors, and other resources required to enforce this act. The use of punitive measures to punish persons who discriminate against persons with disabilities is not new. The offences and fines defined in the Service Dogs Act parallel those set out for the use of guide dogs in the Blind Persons' Rights Act.

The Service Dogs Act is complementary to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act and the Blind Persons' Rights Act. This bill is an excellent piece of legislation. I'd be happy to join my colleagues to vote in favour of this act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take great pleasure in having the opportunity to speak to Bill 203 here this afternoon. I didn't actually have a chance thus far to have my two cents' worth in regard to Bill 203, and certainly I was looking forward to the opportunity.

I noted that the hon. Member for Strathcona mentioned quite a number of interested parties who assisted him with the drafting of this bill, one of them being a person that I, in fact, consulted with as well, Diane Bergeron, who is a resident of Edmonton-Calder. Her main concerns that were expressed and brought forward to me seem to be well addressed in Bill 203 to the extent that satisfied both of us.

Her main concern was that persons with visual disabilities fought long and hard to have their service dogs welcome and legally protected to serve them in all parts of our society, so by moving to extend that franchise to other persons, her first and main concern, which reflected persons with visual impairment across this province, was that, you know, the standard of training and obedience by the dogs would in fact be maintained. Of course, even now we don't see an entirely full acceptance of service dogs in our society. Perhaps we can protect persons legally, but I only have to think back as far as the problems associated with taxis still. Diane and others could attest to this, that there's this ongoing problem with getting service dogs accepted by the taxi industry, at least by individuals.

So my point is, Mr. Speaker, that while the persons with visual impairment fought long and hard for this and they're welcoming to extend that franchise to people with other requirements for service dogs, they just want to make sure that the integrity of the system, especially in regard to dog obedience and training, is maintained. I think that that's something that we will watch for, Ms Bergeron and myself and hundreds of others out there undoubtedly, to ensure that this is enshrined in the regulations. I'm glad to see and to hear that this bill is due to be proclaimed in 2009, so that gives us lots of opportunity to ensure that these concerns are in fact met.

So, again, working with the blind persons' amendment act, it is important that this Bill 203 synchronizes with those provisions, and I seem to think that it does to the best of my analysis. The whole notion of Bill 203 that I like the most is that it's extending the capacity of using service dogs to assist persons with disabilities in the broadest possible way, still hopefully maintaining a certain standard of training. You know, this is always important. Any time that we have some measure of equality being entered into our society through legislation, this is something to celebrate, and once we acknowledge the extent to which people can benefit through the acquisition and use of service dogs to our society, I think it's just one small step closer to a sense of social justice and equality to which we all should aspire.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to join in on third reading of the Service Dogs Act, Bill 203, as brought forward by my hon. colleague from Strathcona. I have read through

the bill, and I'm pleased to add my support to it. I do that because I know from having worked in this area for a number of years how critically important this issue is and how much anticipation there is that we will resolve some significant issues with the introduction, passage, and ultimately assent to this particular bill. Bill 203, as we've heard, will in fact create a new act to help ensure that persons with disabilities have the legal right to be accompanied by an accredited service dog in all areas that are normally open to the general public and that they will be able to do so free of discrimination.

This particular bill contains some important provisions that relate to the certification process of a service dog and to the use of ID cards, identification cards, to prove that the particular person with a disability has, in fact, the legal right to be accompanied by a particular service dog into a particular public place. That having been said, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 was amended under section 1(c) to now read: "service dog" means a dog trained as a guide for a disabled person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations."

So what does this amendment do, and what does this all mean? Well, first of all, this particular amendment clarifies the regulations. Secondly, it also clarifies the certification process regarding service dogs. Thirdly, it clarifies the identification that is to be used and issued to a person with a disability who is dependent upon his or her service dog.

3:00

I should add, Mr. Speaker, that the amendment also strengthens the definition of a service dog. Succinctly put, Bill 203 will be consistent with the approach that we took a few years ago with the Blind Persons' Rights Act. I recall, having the authority as minister responsible for that act at the time, being deeply involved in discussions with the CNIB. Bill McKeown, Ellie Shuster, of course Diane Bergeron, and a number of others who were very passionate about this brought forward very important points that we could then crystallize into a properly constructed bill, and I think the hon. Member for Strathcona has done precisely the same thing here. That similar process of public input has been observed, and I congratulate him for it.

The net result will be an act that has simplified language, that helps to ensure that the certification process will be described in the regulations in a way that's understandable by all and ensure that it broadens the range of people with disabilities who will be able to access public places while at the same time narrowing the qualification criteria for the particular dogs.

A few comments about service dog training are warranted because I know that during the committee stage of debate on this bill some concerns were raised regarding the tests and the testing procedures for certification of these service dogs. One concern, for example, was the ability to have a service dog, that particular point being contingent upon the dog being certified through a formally accredited process, a complicated and difficult process, I should stress, that would have to be gone through. On the matter of the training process it's also one that is contemplated to be rather lengthy and will be going to limit the number of individuals who would pursue this route. I would only say that there's always a danger of making things a little too complicated and too onerous, but the intention is that it be thorough. That's what is being strived for here.

Another concern that was raised was with respect to having good standards, and I want to just emphasize that good standards will be those set out by the Assistance Dogs International, or ADI, group. The Western Guide and Assistance Dog Society is currently being accredited to train service dogs. It's a five-year process, as we know, where trainers must meet certain standards related to dog

handling, to dog selection, and to compliance with relevant laws. Now, since the ADI is an internationally recognized service for training dogs, as an organization I mean, the regulations that come out of this act will reflect those that are similar to the ADI standards.

Another important concern that was raised was with respect to the potential of individuals not having ID but actually using a service dog, and of course there will be a need to consider how to grandfather in service dogs that are currently in use but don't have the specific training or the certification. I know that's a significant concern, and that will be ironed out.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, there's the issue of penalties. Yes, there will be penalties in place for those who pass off an untrained or uncertified dog as a service dog or, at least, attempt to do so.

I want to come back quickly to the issue of ID cards. This is at the heart of the success for this particular bill, in my view. The ID that persons with disabilities will be issued will provide service dog owners with a card that specifically recognizes their dog as having completed the necessary training to be the service dog we're talking about here. Service dogs will be trained. They will be tested on how to handle the responsibility of accompanying their handlers into various situations and various environments, and they will only earn the title of service dog, certified service dog, if certain standards are met.

Now, once all of that has been done and accomplished, the ID card will provide proof that service dogs have been carefully trained to accompany their owners onto buses, into stores, into washrooms, and into other public areas such as those. Having this card will prove that a service dog is required, and it will allow the owner to produce the ID when questioned about his or her service dog. That ID process will protect Albertans from being disrupted by uncertified dogs. We should also note that dog owners who do not have certified dogs will not be subject to the same accessibility as persons with disabilities who do possess the government-issued ID card.

So in wrapping up my comments here, Mr. Speaker, under the Blind Persons' Rights Act blind persons are able to apply to the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports for a specific identification that displays their picture and the government of Alberta official symbol. A similar process will be allowed here. The ID card for persons with disabilities who are accompanied by a service dog will also be issued by the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports, and it will likely include some of the same elements, in this particular case a picture of the service dog, a picture of the owner, and of course some accredited official government of Alberta symbol.

In conclusion, I will just say that providing access to all public places to persons with disabilities along with their accredited and trained service dogs will allow the owners to continue to receive the necessary supports provided by their service dog throughout their daily lives, whether it is in their own home or in a public place. It's good, it's fair, and it's the right thing to do. The owners will be able to produce their identification cards in instances where their access perhaps might be questioned, which will provide confidence to others and particularly to the person with disabilities that their service dog cannot be denied the right to accompany them into those public places. Providing proof that a service dog has been appropriately trained will also give peace of mind to the individual requesting the proof of an ID card.

So I applaud the direction of Bill 203. I again congratulate the hon. Member for Strathcona and the community that requires this specific service through these accredited service dogs for working together and bringing this issue into our Legislature.

With that, I am pleased to add my support, and I thank you for the gesture of time, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've previously indicated both in second reading and in Committee of the Whole my support for Bill 203 and my support for the Member for Strathcona. A question has arisen in my mind today, and it's probably the discussions that we've had with regard to inflation and affordable housing. Within the context of Bill 203 is there any provision for government subsidies to support owners of service dogs? The Member for Strathcona has noted how expensive the training and receiving the qualifications for the dogs is, and then of course there's the daily maintenance, the feeding of the dogs, the shots, and the vet bills that are all part of being a responsible pet owner.

The onset of a disability can be both very traumatic and very expensive. I detailed the circumstances of the young lady at the University of Calgary who I worked with who had the doubly disastrous circumstance of first being rear-ended by a truck and then suffering an industrial accident, which damaged both her spine, initially, and then her hand and required the use of a dog. She's had great difficulties getting subsidies for rent, subsidies to recognize her disability. It's thanks to the compassion of her landlord that rents her the basement suite — she also does limited maintenance responsibilities and obviously keeps an eye out on the house — that she's able to live in the community and able to access the University of Calgary.

I spoke in second reading again of my support. I recognized in Committee of the Whole my appreciation for the Member for Strathcona's amendments, thus strengthening his bill. If there is any time remaining, I would appreciate the member's response, clarification, or push towards providing government subsidies for the individuals who need the support of their service dogs, to make sure those service dogs are in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by West Yellowhead.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise for third reading in support of Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, put forth by the hon. Member for Strathcona. I'm pleased that he has seen his way to guide this legislation through the House in a most expeditious manner. This is truly a progressive piece of legislation that aims to improve the quality of life for Albertans with disabilities, particularly those who choose to utilize the talents of highly specialized and certified service dogs.

3:10

During the course of discussion on Bill 203 this Assembly has heard a number of touching stories describing individuals with disabilities who have enjoyed an enhanced quality of life as a result of using service dogs. Service dogs have helped their owners to be valuable contributors to the workforce and to society as a whole and, I might add, perhaps equally importantly, to enhance their confidence, their safety, and their enjoyment of life. Albertans with disabilities are certainly a resilient community, Mr. Speaker, and have proven that when coping with serious problems like epilepsy or paralysis or dealing with visual, hearing, or speech challenges, there are solutions that can aid them in becoming all that they can be in the workforce, in their communities, and certainly in their personal lives.

Mr. Speaker, employers sometimes are reluctant to employ anyone with a disability because of concerns that they may be an

increased health or safety hazard either to themselves or to their fellow workers on the job. I would suggest that this bill bolsters members of the Alberta disabled community who already have a service dog and also have viable skills that they can offer to the workforce. By empowering these individuals with a service dog, we are certainly assisting them to maximize their potential and, hopefully, to improve their quality of life.

The employment rate of people with disabilities in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, I know has risen from 49.4 per cent in 1999 to 54.4 per cent in 2004. This is certainly progress, but there is still much work to be done. It is to be hoped that this bill will help us to improve on those numbers for the mutual benefit of our disabled community and our workforce.

Of course, there will be the necessity of making accommodation to those with disabilities when it's necessary. In reality, we already have accommodations that are required when hiring individuals with various detriments, and service dogs or disabilities should be no different. They are not great accommodations that are required. They should be seen as a small part of encouraging inclusion in the workforce. Job accommodations are, as I said, not usually intrusive. They can be as simple as rearrangement of equipment or flexible scheduling, and it's apparent that supporting any individual with a service dog is just as manageable as other accommodations.

What is very positive about this bill and its amendments is that it will allow and help the empowerment of people with disabilities by assisting them to more fully utilize their skills and their abilities.

I'm pleased to offer my support to the hon. Member for Strathcona. He has facilitated action on a very important bill for a special segment of our society, and I encourage the support of all members of the House for this bill on third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise today and join in the discussion on Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, in third reading. Bill 203 will legally recognize other service dogs and extend to persons with disabilities the same protection afforded under the Blind Persons' Rights Act.

There has been significant discussion about service dogs. These animals are very important and mean a great deal to those whom they assist. A dog is considered a service dog if the animal is used by a person with a disability to avoid hazards or otherwise compensate for disabilities. The dog must be well behaved and under control. Business owners and other representatives of public accommodations have the right to exclude any dog that displays aggressive behaviour or is out of control. They may also exclude any dog whose behaviour disrupts the provision of goods and services such as a barking dog in a movie theatre.

These service dogs are not pets. They are to act as well-trained assistants to those who need their special abilities. They gain this special status through extensive training. The training for guide dogs is defined in the Blind Persons' Rights Act. For a dog to become a guide dog, a definition in the Blind Persons' Rights Act, they have to be trained by a registered member of Assistance Dogs International.

In response to a formal public review process, the Alberta government introduced Bill 4, the Blind Persons' Rights Amendment Act, 2004, on February 18, 2004. According to section 6 of the act an identification card is "proof, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that the blind person and that person's guide dog identified in it are qualified for the purposes of this Act." The well-trained

dogs are guaranteed the right to be able to assist their owners by accompanying them to various locations.

The Blind Persons' Rights Act is only relative to guide dogs that assist people with vision impairment. Guide dogs for vision impairment are well known and quite commonly accepted within our society, providing such assistance as obstacle avoidance, signal changes in elevators, and locating objects on command. The Blind Persons' Rights Act excludes mentioning the service dog, and that assists individuals with other disabilities, such as people who are suffering from limited mobility.

There is much more that service dogs can provide to those suffering from disabilities other than from vision impairment. The role that service dogs play for those in need of assistance varies from the role of guide dogs. It is important to understand these variances in order to see just how helpful service dogs are to people with disabilities. People suffering from hearing disabilities are able to use service dogs to alert those in need of a sound inside the home, such as a doorbell or a knock on the front door, or away from the home, such as a vehicle honking.

Service dogs are able to help those with mobility issues as well in accomplishing a number of different tasks. Some of these tasks include basic tasks that accomplish such actions as fetching a wheelchair or bringing in groceries, pawing or nose-nudging, basic tasks such as closing or opening drawers and removing shoes and socks, bracing based tasks such as steadying their partner while getting out of a bathtub.

While there are many tasks available for service dogs to assist those who suffer from mobility issues, there are dogs trained to handle other cases of impairment. A service dog can learn a number of different tasks to help medical crises. They include bringing medication to ailing persons, bringing the phone to reach the proper assistance, calling 911 or the crisis line on the K-9 rescue phone, and carrying pertinent medical information for their partner.

Treatments related to psychiatric assistance for sufferers with aspects of psychiatric disabilities are numerous. For example, the service dog could provide assistance for people to cope with medical side effects, such as balancing them. Also, they can help those suffering sudden waves of terror, chest pains, respiratory distress caused by severe pain attacks by fetching antidote medication to alleviate the symptoms.

Service dogs play an integral role for many people who might otherwise be hindered in their day-to-day living. Bill 203 will ensure that people with disabilities will be allowed unrestricted access to public places in the use of a service dog. The bill will allow all Albertans who rely on service dogs to have the opportunity to participate fully in the social, economic, and cultural life of our province. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona for introducing the Service Dogs Act, and I would like to give my support to Bill 203.

Thank you.

3:20

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to stand up and address Bill 203 in third reading as I did speak to it in second reading. I was hoping there would be more amendments to come forward. For that reason, I am standing up to speak against this bill in its current state, and I'll explain a few reasons why. The idea is an excellent idea. The necessity is there to protect those people with service dogs, but the importance of human rights has been mentioned and read in a long list by the hon.

Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, that listed off those rights that we need to engage and protect the good citizens of the province here, which I agree with. But the problem under law is that whenever you start to make a list, it's never inclusive. It's exclusive. That's who I want to address this afternoon: a couple of groups that have become excluded.

The purpose of good legislation, which I don't feel this is – people got up and said: it's excellent legislation; it's good legislation; the necessity is there. But good legislation is where we actually protect our freedoms, not take them away, and we protect those who can't protect themselves. There are two areas that we fail to protect: a smaller minority group than those, and perhaps it's a larger group. I don't know the statistics on it. But there is this fear of dogs, cynophobia. If someone – perhaps their child has even been killed by a dog attack or they've lost one or they've had one personally themselves – has a severe fear, cynophobia, there's no protection here for those types of individuals who may be running a business, who may be a friend of a person who runs a business. They might have a sign up there for no dogs for very good reasons.

The other thing that's not on the list is equality for those people with allergies. We have section 4 that talks, "This section does not apply if the disabled person does not control the behaviour of the service dog," which is an excellent point that makes this better legislation. But there's no exception for those groups of individuals that have a fear of dogs or have allergies to dogs. Somehow I feel that that needs to be balanced and taken into view on this. I would encourage the good Member for Strathcona – I spoke to it, and I was hoping that he would bring that forward in an amendment. I guess I should've spoken to him a little more on the side.

But because of those two items that are being missed on this, I really feel that we need to reconsider and look at this. A more excellent way or a more tolerable society is one that is educated and one that is knowledgeable and understands the situation. That's one area where we definitely want to go. We want Albertans to be more educated and understand the value of service dogs, the huge improvement in quality of life that an individual can achieve because of the use of a service dog, that we still want to protect those who can't protect themselves. This legislation missed that important aspect.

So, for that reason, I can't support it in its current state, but I hope that some amendments come forward, if not at this time then at a time in the future, that will protect those people who need protecting from the use of service dogs in whatever circumstance that may be. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others? Hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, did you want to speak?

Mr. Rogers: Sure.

The Acting Speaker: You're recognized.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to contribute to third reading debate of Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. I'm happy to see this private member's bill receive so much support and that it's reached this point. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona for his hard work on this bill. Because of his arduous efforts, tenacity, many individuals across Alberta will have an enhanced quality of life brought about by a clarification and solidification of their rights.

Mr. Speaker, the Service Dogs Act aims to solidify the rights of individuals with disabilities to be accompanied by a certified service dog in all areas open to the public without facing any discrimination.

This is a clear and noble goal which I fully support. The current situation, of course, is that the rights of individuals with service dogs are not as clear as they should be. Because of the lack of clarity regarding their rights, disabled individuals with service dogs have been wrongfully denied service or access to areas where they should've been allowed to go. Bill 203 will go a long ways to rectifying this situation.

Mr. Speaker, with any sort of new legislation it is of utmost importance to properly inform citizens and stakeholders of changes that may affect them. They must know and be comfortable with the new laws in order to abide by them. In order for the Service Dogs Act to have a smooth transition phase and a positive reaction by the public, all individuals affected by the act will have to be educated on this new legislation. It will be up to the department, nonprofit organizations, and support groups to get the word out and clearly inform the public about the rights of individuals who utilize service dogs.

Mr. Speaker, while this is a very straightforward act, its successful implementation will depend on strong communications with stakeholders and the public. I would like to briefly go through a few of the issues which still need to be thoroughly communicated.

It is important to know what a service dog is. People must be informed that service dogs, like guide dogs, are not regular pets, and therefore they cannot be treated as common dogs. They shouldn't be petted. Service dogs have specific functions and, depending on who they're assisting, will have specific qualifications, which they will have worked very hard to master during their training. Because of the wide range of persons with disabilities included within the scope of this act, these dogs will be trained to meet all kinds of special needs. Some will assist individuals with mobility, seizure detection, access, autism, and so on.

Service dogs have a job, Mr. Speaker. That job is to assist individuals with disabilities. As with individuals who are on the job, they do not have time to socialize and play. There is a time for play but not when a service dog is assisting a person with disability.

Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and the department to inform individuals about appropriate behaviour around service dogs. A lot of hard work and money goes into the proper training of a service dog. Therefore, it will be imperative to treat a service dog as it is meant to be treated.

Mr. Speaker, if Albertans can appreciate exactly what service dogs are used for, they will be understanding and more than willing to accommodate individuals with service dogs. At the current time most people are not aware of the myriad of things service dogs can be used for and how they positively impact the lives of individuals with disabilities.

It's also important for Albertans to know who is legally able to have a service dog and how to identify them. An identification card for a service dog and the individual using it will demonstrate to the public who is legally allowed to use the dog, but first they must be able to recognize this identification. Once identification is made, Mr. Speaker, rights cannot and will not be challenged.

Third, we want the quality of life of all Albertans to be enhanced with Bill 203. This being the case, it is important that everyone be educated as to the kind of thorough training service dogs have before they can be certified. For those who are perhaps a little uncomfortable with dogs, it would be extremely reassuring to know that in order for a service dog to become certified, it would have gone through an intensive training process to meet very high standards set by the Assistance Dogs International group. Mr. Speaker, Albertans will know that when they see the proper identification on a service dog, they can be assured that dog is fully trained according to regulation and is not – I repeat not – a threat to their security.

Also, Mr. Speaker, there is currently some level of confusion about where individuals with service dogs are legally able to go. Stakeholders will have to be aware that persons with disabilities accompanied by service dogs are able and fully entitled to go wherever all Albertans go, no questions asked. As soon as this is widely known, a large barrier will be removed for people with disabilities who use service dogs. I think that this is what we are all trying to achieve.

Finally, but not . . .

3:30

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but the time allocated for debate has now run out.

The hon. Member for Strathcona to close debate.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been good to hear of the support forthcoming from members. A couple of questions were raised, and I think during previous debate and when we talked in committee, a few of these things came up and were commented on.

Mr. Speaker, in general and in conclusion, the intent of Bill 203 to provide protection for persons who use service dogs parallels the Blind Persons' Rights Act. Under that act some of these challenges have been apparent, and they have been dealt with in community and through the work of the department. The department is to be commended for doing things like helping out in situations where the person that has a dog had some extraordinary costs associated – and the odd time that does happen – and they were supported in those circumstances.

On accommodation for other persons who have problems with dogs, I found the owners of seeing eye dogs, guide dogs, to be very good at working with people they come across. If there are legitimate issues, they're always very accommodating as well because these people know what it's like not to be accommodated. Unfortunately, they have suffered many acts of discrimination as simple, from the rest of our perspective, as maybe not even having access to a cab when they want it. For us that's not a problem; there's another one that we can hail in a moment or two. But for persons with disabilities that's a real challenge.

So, Mr. Speaker, I thank those members who have spoken in support of the bill, and on behalf of the three gentlemen I introduced earlier – Larry and Tom and Edgar – and other members of the community whom they're here today representing, I would ask all members to support Bill 203, Service Dogs Act.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a third time]

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

**Bill 205
Environmental Protection and Enhancement
(Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007**

[Debate adjourned April 30: Mr. Rogers speaking]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to pick up where we left off at the end of the last debate. I was referring at that time to the Al-Pac/Gulf Surmont project, which brought Gulf Canada Resources and Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries together in developing natural resources.

These companies, Mr. Speaker, agreed to share access roads, salvage the timber cut for the petroleum operation, and time their reclamation efforts to have maximum effect so as to have minimum impact on the land. This co-operation reduced both costs and ecological impacts. A 47 per cent savings in roads and \$3 million in total integrated services were saved by the combined actions of these two companies.

Mr. Speaker, the need to preserve our forests is greater when most scientists agree that man-made carbon dioxide is contributing to global warming. Our forests are natural sponges for reducing carbon dioxide. Oil and gas companies are working to develop technologies that reduce the amount and duration of their carbon dioxide output.

Our forests have a deep spiritual significance to the aboriginal peoples. Any effort to preserve forests should draw on the traditional culture and vast knowledge of our aboriginal communities. Bill 205 could go a long way in helping the aboriginal voice be heard when reclamation regulations are made.

Mr. Speaker, many Albertans enjoy activities in our forests: walking, biking, hunting, and camping, just to name a few. Having commercial activity in our forests helps to make them more accessible to all Albertans. I would encourage all members to vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm also very pleased to contribute to the debate on Bill 205, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Act, 2007, sponsored by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. This government has committed in many ways to strengthening Alberta's communities. We hope to make our communities more prosperous, more safe, and more vibrant. We want to ensure that our communities are the best place in the world to live.

I want to discuss the impact that Bill 205 would have on Alberta's communities. First of all, a strong community requires a sound environment, a prosperous economy, and co-operation between businesses, families, and all levels of government. I support Bill 205 because I believe that it will strengthen Alberta's communities by helping to ensure an appropriate environmental and economic policy. I'm encouraged to see the co-operation between various stakeholders and government that has gone into this bill.

It is not possible to sustain a high quality of life without a healthy environment. We must implement prudent policy today so that the environment in Alberta will remain pristine for many generations to come. The government is developing an enhanced strategy for air and water, a land-use framework, and a comprehensive strategy for Alberta's energy and forestry resources.

Section 2(2) in Bill 205 will ensure that the committee appointed by the minister will review the regulations pertaining to the practices and criteria for conservation and reclamation of these lands as specified in the act. This way we will be enabled to continually pursue the use of best practices to protect and enhance lands that have been used and are being reclaimed. As our energy industry matures, there are more and more wells that dry up or are shut down and need to be reclaimed and from time to time a well is drilled that has no commercial value or viability or is dry, so this is a fairly common occurrence.

Taken together, these initiatives will ensure the responsible stewardship of our province's environment. Mandating that well site reclamation standards are reviewed at regular intervals will ensure that the latest technologies and standards are taken into consideration. We are making tremendous strides in technology which

allows us to manage resources more prudently and minimize the impact that resource extraction has on the environment. Timely implementation of these advances will be invaluable in the efforts to maintain and enhance our environment. By protecting the environment, we can ensure that our communities remain healthy and vibrant places to live.

The energy and forestry industries employ tens of thousands of Albertans and contribute billions of dollars annually in taxes and royalties to the provincial treasury and support countless community projects. Creating a climate in which these important industries can succeed will ensure that our communities remain strong. Bill 205 will help to foster a climate of success by providing a forum where the energy and forestry industries can work together with government.

A reclamation review committee which meets consistently will provide both of these sectors with the opportunity to work together and to plan strategies in an integrated manner. Our communities thrive because of our co-operative spirit. Bill 205 continues with this great tradition of co-operation. The regular reviews will allow industry stakeholders to come together with government and the public to make decisions for the benefit of all Albertans. Each sector and individual brings their own unique perspective to this process. The review process will balance these perspectives.

So I want to strongly encourage my colleagues to consider supporting Bill 205. I believe that legislating regular reviews of well site reclamation will have a positive impact on our communities and, indeed, our province as a whole.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, did you want to participate in the debate?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, sir.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I welcome the opportunity to speak briefly on Bill 205. I find it interesting in several ways. Certainly, just because the scope of this bill is reasonably limited, I have no trouble supporting the bill, but on some of the details regarding this conservation and reclamation bill, potentially an act, I just perhaps require some clarification. You know, under the current Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and through conservation and reclamation regulations as they stand, any lands that have been excavated and mined have to be reclaimed and returned to their original environmental conditions anyway. So the regulations' main mandate: reclamation on a wide range of mining activities and forestry and ensuring that environmental contaminants are also removed.

3:40

This bill, in my mind – and perhaps I require some clarification here – seems to mandate that land reclamations done in areas specially designated as green areas in Alberta have to be overseen by a committee, I guess, that will review these special reclamations every five years. Reclamations under the act are conducted through what's considered to be best forestry practices, recommending changes to the regulations for the implementation of best practices, that the committee reports in a timely manner, and so forth. Certainly, you know, with that specific provision, these designated green areas getting some more timely attention in regard to land reclamation, I can't not support that, but I'm looking to see what limits these green areas and how we determine which areas are

actually requiring or getting this special attention. That's kind of some further explanation I wouldn't mind from the hon. member who has brought this forward.

You know, this is providing an additional level of oversight, which is good, for land reclamations. My only concern and, perhaps, suggestion would be that this committee should be as much as possible staffed with independent expertise that can objectively assess the progress being made in regard to land reclamation here in the province. So this is part of, I guess, potentially a larger land-use strategy, that we need so desperately in this province.

We have to look no further than the enormous excavations and tailing ponds that exist in northeast Alberta in regard to the tar sands to just see how important it is that we move forward with a land-use strategy that looks at all parts of the province and not just certain designated green areas because, of course, who's to say that one part of the province is less deserving of a proper regulation oversight to land reclamation than another. If we in fact do determine winners and losers – some areas get special attention, and others are left to the whims of industry – then certainly we can know exactly what would happen to a place that is not receiving equal protection. We're left with a legacy of, undoubtedly, one of the world's largest excavation sites in northeast Alberta with the world's largest tailings ponds that haven't been reclaimed to any degree whatsoever.

So I just would hope that the attention that is being afforded by Bill 205, which I support wholeheartedly, might also extend to other industrial areas in our province that are sadly requiring reclamation in a timely and more thorough manner.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 205 the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007. I've got to commend the Member for West Yellowhead for bringing this forward. It's a thoughtful piece of legislation, something that makes us look at our obligations and responsibilities as members not only of society but also of this House.

Bill 205 will amend section 137 of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act to ensure that when well sites are being reclaimed, proper environmental and forest management procedures are considered. Effective management of Alberta's forests is vital to ensuring that our province's natural areas continue to prosper for future generations, and that's an important component that we must keep in mind as we go forward with this bill.

When a well site is no longer active, it is essential to properly address surface reclamation issues and any subsurface contamination that may arise. This is not a small concern given that there are more than 33,000 well sites in Alberta that are no longer in production and awaiting reclamation certificates, 162,000 active well sites that will ultimately require reclamation certificates at some point in the future, and there are approximately 15,000 new wells drilled every year.

Proper reclamation procedures will improve the health of Alberta's ecosystem and have a profound environmental impact on Albertans' lives. A young, actively growing forest functions as a carbon sink, removing more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than it releases through respiration and decay. Maintaining the health of Alberta's 38 million hectares of forest is therefore beneficial from a climate change perspective.

Forests are also an essential component of the water cycle. Forests ensure that Alberta has clean water in sufficient quantities for aquatic habitat, safe drinking water for its people, and recreational opportunities for families. The vegetation in forests can

absorb up to one-quarter of the total rainfall, which is then returned to the atmosphere through evaporation. The remainder of this water will filter into the soil to recharge the underground aquifers, rivers, streams, wetlands, and lakes during dry periods. In Alberta clean, abundant water flows from the forests of the Rocky Mountains to agricultural, municipal, industrial, residential, and recreational users.

Healthy forests offer a major economic benefit as well. With 21 million hectares of productive forest lands, forestry in Alberta is the third-largest industry. Over \$616 million in forest products is produced here every single year, about 5 per cent of the annual value of manufacturing shipments. Many Albertans, especially those in rural communities, rely on the forests for their livelihoods, and other Albertans also benefit from tourism to our forests. In my constituency of Livingstone-Macleod the forests of the Crowsnest Pass region draw people seeking one of the best wildlife watching and fishing areas in Canada. Enjoying the fresh mountain air at a campsite or on a hiking trail is an experience not soon forgotten by individuals, by couples, or by families. That is why it is essential that we keep our forests in pristine condition.

Alberta's forests are a renewable resource that will keep growing as long as sustainable stewardship practices are followed. Allowing Albertans to continue to enjoy the environment and the economic benefits that our forests offer will require an adequate forest management plan that includes the very best well site reclamation procedures.

Bill 205 will ensure that our stewardship practices are reviewed and renewed on a regular basis. There must be an effective exit strategy for well sites that are no longer in production. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to support Bill 205.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007. I also wish to thank the Member for West Yellowhead for bringing forward this opportunity to highlight the issue of well site reclamation.

Oil and gas activity is a driving force in our economy in terms of jobs, revenue, and great opportunity. However, petroleum is not our only natural resource. In addition to the wealth underneath Alberta, the surface of our province is covered by vast tracts of timber, lush grasslands, and fertile cropland. These are vital resources to our continued prosperity, and their responsible management is essential to our future economic and social well-being.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, the intent of Bill 205 is proposing to ensure the consideration of proper environmental and forest management procedures in the reclamation of well sites. Bill 205 attempts to improve environmental stewardship and resource management practices. Any measure designed to improve the interaction between human activity and nature and further protect the natural beauty of Alberta while encouraging responsible resource development is a good step to take.

Despite the fact that the proposals Bill 205 sets forth are desirable, I am concerned with the timing of its introduction. The Alberta government has always been committed to environmental stewardship and the responsible development of our resources. A major part of this commitment is the consideration of measures which will inspire better conservation practices and facilitate a positive relationship between the oil and gas industry and our province's natural environment. Such measures must be implemented after careful consideration of their expected impact.

Likewise, they must also be carefully reviewed after implementation to ensure that they have achieved their objectives. The rules that govern energy companies when reclaiming a well site were established between 1993 and 1995. Since then, a great deal has changed. Oil and gas activity has increased, even in areas of pristine wilderness. Reclamation of these well sites is a grave responsibility, not to be taken lightly. A complete restoration of the land to its former state is essential to preserving the environment and protecting other natural resources. The passage of more than a decade necessitates a change to the way this reclamation is regulated and carried out. There have been issues and concerns expressed from all sides regarding acceptable reclamation practices, and there is confusion as to what constitutes acceptable reclamation.

On the surface Bill 205 could facilitate necessary change. This is if we consider its proposals independently of what is already being undertaken. The departments of Energy and Environment are currently developing regulations concerning the implementation of improved well site reclamation processes.

Pros of the bill: positive environmental effects and positive economic effects. Cons of the bill: negatively impacts the development of the new regulations because the provisions of the bill are necessarily at cross-purposes with the new regulations. Developing new regulations takes a great deal of time, careful study, and consideration. One of the concerns is that this bill would legislate a review of regulations and reclamation every five years. It raises these questions: is this enough time to evaluate the effects that changes to existing practices may have? Might it hinder current redevelopment of regulations?

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development is in the process of developing a new industry directive to bring about revised reclamation standards for reforestation. This is excellent news as the issue of reforestation is one that is currently the subject of much discussion and even confusion at times amongst those in the oil and forest industries. I believe there is room to move forward in this area and a need to strengthen our existing regulatory framework to better facilitate the process of development and reclamation. The reviews mentioned will be concluded soon. No doubt the strengthened regulations and guidelines will be in place when necessary in the near future.

The impending changes have been conducted by prolonged and careful stakeholder consultation. Representatives from industry have worked with the government to reach realistic best practices acceptable to all parties concerned. Mr. Speaker, this has been a lengthy process and is nearing conclusion. We will soon see positive change in the way reclamation is conducted in Alberta. Careful evaluation of the effects of a new regulatory framework will result in a positive evolution of policies re natural resource development. As mentioned, the Department of Environment is currently moving forward with several initiatives that will address the objectives of Bill 205.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 205, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following: “Bill 205, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this is a hoist amendment. If members wish to participate, it's debatable.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm opposing this amendment. We have a new sort of institution in place, and that's an all-party policy committee. Rather than just simply pulling this and bringing it back six months from now, I supported the government member in proclaiming this particular Bill 205, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007. By putting it to committee instead of pulling it, the discussions could go on, the refinements could be made, and the shortcomings could be addressed.

I would much rather see this discussion taking place now because the necessity of reclamation is absolutely paramount, and putting it off another six months delays what has basically been put off by this government for years on end. The number of unclaimed wells – sorry; orphaned wells is the term I should be using – continues to grow while at the opposite end approvals for new drilling and exploration exponentially grow. There is no balance. What this Bill 205 attempted to do was provide some of that balance that is currently missing. Therefore, I would strongly speak against the hoisting of this bill and say: let's give the newly formed committees a chance to do their work, and let democracy take place.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to add my voice. I supported the bill in the first place and feel very strongly that it's a positive step in calling for review, and indeed it would be a very good first opportunity for our all-party committee to examine the issues and go forward.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead to close debate.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I'd like to close debate with these following comments on Bill 205, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007. First of all, I'd like to thank the hon. Minister of Environment for taking a look at this act and saying that he's going to move forward right away in his department to bring it forward. I'd also like to thank the members from the AFPA and also from CAPP for sitting down with us and working this out as we started. I'd also like to thank all members that spoke on this bill to move it this far.

At this time I'd call for the question. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, as I indicated, this is a hoist amendment, and for those who are interested in reading more about it, I'd refer you to *Beauchesne* 668 and *Marleau and Montpetit*, pages 636 and 637. There's interesting reading therein.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:59 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady
Backs

Groeneveld
Haley

Oberle
Ouellette

Brown	Herard	Prins
Cao	Horner	Renner
Cardinal	Jablonski	Rodney
Coutts	Johnston	Rogers
Danyluk	Magnus	Shariff
Doerksen	Mar	Snelgrove
Ducharme	Marz	Strang
Fritz	McFarland	VanderBurg
Griffiths	Morton	Zwozdesky

4:10

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Flaherty	Pastoor
Chase	Mason	Swann
Eggen	Mather	Tougas
Elsalhy	Miller, B.	

Totals: For – 33 Against – 11

[Motion on amendment carried]

Bill 207

Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a combined sense of urgency, challenge, anticipation, and foreboding that I introduce Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act, for second reading.

“Urgency” because the need for accountability is great, and the need for accessibility is acute, “challenge” because a year’s consultation across the province has convinced me there is consensus among Albertans to proceed, “anticipation” because I believe the objectives set out in this initiative are achievable, and “foreboding” as I remain to be convinced that the current government is committed to making child care a priority in the midst of other needs and pressures of growth.

I have spent time with my colleagues opposite in the House, the past and current ministers of Children’s Services. I appreciate them as fellow members and have no doubt of their personal compassion, nor of their intent to better the lot of children in this province. Yet I wonder if a government that hitches its wagon so tightly to the star of economic growth can imagine the cost of these blinkers to the youngest, most promising, and vulnerable among us.

I have said in this Assembly on more than one occasion that I believe children’s well-being is too important to become a football across the floor or a turf war between levels of government. I said in my Calgary town hall meeting a few weeks ago that I would rather be discussing these issues in a circle than across the imaginary two-sword length of bygone political battles. Our children are a sacred responsibility that links us all as human beings.

Two years ago I worked with my colleagues on all sides of the House on a bill to deal with a major threat to Alberta children and youth: crystal meth addiction. The results of that collaboration were gratifying. Bill 202 was passed unanimously into law.

Now it is my opportunity to initiate another private member’s bill for Alberta’s children. This is more ambitious than Bill 202, for this one involves targets and increased government transparency and accountability. Because no concrete government action has been undertaken in this vital area, I have chosen to take an initiative myself. I ask my colleagues on the government side to look at this not as a partisan strategy but as a statement in support of a very real need by Alberta’s children. Bill 207 has two distinct goals: to

increase the number of high-quality child care spaces available across Alberta and to increase the level of government transparency and accountability regarding child care in Alberta.

Child care in Alberta, I would say, can be divided into three separate periods as follows. The 1970s to the early 1990s. During this period the Alberta government began to fund child care at rates beyond any other province in Canada, leading to rapid space creation, 200 per cent growth between 1977 and ’87. While some of this funding went towards nonprofit and municipally run child care, much of it went to for-profit child care as well as institutions such as day homes.

In the 1980s and early 1990s Alberta was the only province in Canada that had a vacancy rate in its formal care system, and care was generally affordable. Despite these successes provincial policy was criticized strongly due to inadequate monitoring, inconsistent approaches to service delivery, poor quality, and the perception that the provincial government valued profit-making more than the health and safety of children.

From the mid-1990s to 2004 is another period. By the mid-1990s the government’s approach to social programs had shifted towards neoconservatism, which emphasized retreat of the government from social issues and greater responsibility placed on individuals. During this period funding of spaces was cut, with more focus placed on subsidies. As a result, the number of spaces available declined rapidly, drastically, particularly those in nonprofit and municipal centres. While this shift has been justified through neoconservative rhetoric of empowerment and reducing dependence on government, in reality the drop in spaces has had a definite impact on child care in Alberta. Alberta is now the only province in which spaces have actually declined since the early 1990s. Many rural communities are without any formal child care and wait lists for care are growing all over this province.

The year 2005 until now is another period to look at. Recently child care in Alberta has shifted due to negotiations with the government of Canada relating to federal funding for child care. The province reached an agreement in principle with the federals on July 7, 2005, that would have seen the transfer of between \$93 million and \$153 million annually for child care provision. While the provincial government retained the right to support private care and stay-at-home parents, they did agree to follow QUAD principles, a departure from the previous lack of cohesive vision. The 2007-2008 budget has provided some increases to child care, but they are not as significant as what would have been there had the federal plan stayed in place.

Bill 207 has as its purpose the increase in accessibility and the accountability for “universal, affordable and high quality child care.”

The definitions. This section lays out the terms used in the act. The minister is defined under the Government Organization Act, and child care spaces are defined as “spaces available in licensed day care centres, approved family day homes and licensed out-of-school care centres.”

Ten-year action plan. This section instructs the minister to develop a 10-year action plan that should reasonably result in enough available child care spaces for not less than 30 per cent of children 12 years of age or younger. The bill does not specify what should be included in the plan but does require that it must be completed and made available to the public within 90 days of the coming into force of this act. This time period will allow a reasonable amount of time for government consultation and strategizing.

Ministerial review. At the end of the 10-year period the minister must conduct a review of the level of access to child care spaces that has been achieved in relation to the legislated target of 30 per cent access. At this time the minister will decide whether or not further

government initiative is required. This review must be completed and made public no later than March 31, 2018.

This act will also require annual reporting of progress towards the target of 30 per cent access in the department's annual report. The act also requires that the government provide information on how many spaces are available based on age and type of setting as well as indicators of the affordability, quality, and accessibility of spaces. The bill also requires that the amount expended by the government on child care be reported. This information must be broken down by the child and family services regions so that the information about equality of access across the province is available.

4:20

Six, the public documents. This section clarifies what actions the minister can take to make documents public. If the Assembly is sitting, a document must be tabled, and if not, the document must be distributed to all members of the House and made available to the general public.

Before I go on, I would like to thank all of the stakeholders that we have consulted. Many individuals and associations throughout the province have contributed, and their feedback has been useful and helpful, and their co-operation and time has been generous for us.

The current situation in this province is that Alberta has regulated child care spaces for about 10 per cent of our children. Only Newfoundland and Saskatchewan have fewer. Quebec and Yukon can accommodate about 30 per cent of their children. Alberta is the only province where the number of daycare spaces dropped significantly between 1992 and 2004. During that same period the number of spaces country-wide more than doubled. In 2004 Alberta had Canada's lowest percentage of women with preschool children in the workforce. Many Alberta mothers simply can't return to work due to lack of child care options. If our participation had kept pace with Alberta, Alberta's economy would have 17,000 much-needed additional workers. If even half of these people decided to work, it would be hugely beneficial.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act, 2007. The intent of this bill is to increase the accessibility of child care by establishing a 10-year target for the creation of new child care spaces in Alberta and requiring that there be enough child care spaces for at least 30 per cent of Albertans who are 12 years old or younger at the end of that prescribed time period.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 would also require the Minister of Children's Services to report in the department's annual report on the growing progress made on meeting the placement target over the course of that 10-year time frame and calls on the same minister to conduct a final review of the level of access to child care spaces in the province after this 10-year span.

I'd just like to refer the House to Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act, and what Bill 4 was intended to do. This act seeks to provide the framework needed to increase access to innovative quality child care programs and also ensures that the enforcement mechanisms are in place to protect children and give them the best start in life. Mr. Speaker, this shifts the licensing focus from the facility to the program and makes better use of spaces to increase the access to child care and promotes programs which respond to a child's specific needs. The bill also gives government the ability to create new licensing categories to promote innovation in child care and

parental choice in the matter. Bill 4 is based on two years of consultation with parents, child care operators, and other interested Albertans. Bill 4 builds on our government's commitment to continue to support and create quality child care programs that meet the needs of today's families.

Mr. Speaker, I believe there are a number of overlaps between Bill 207 and Bill 4. Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act of 2007 thoroughly covers what Bill 207 proposes. Bill 4 proposes to increase child care accessibility by allowing the creation of new licensing categories. Operators will soon be able to make better use of existing spaces. Parents will be able to choose programs which suit their needs and lifestyles. The government must ensure that child care programs are safe and of the highest quality. Bill 4 provides for more effective monitoring to ensure that operators comply with the act.

Bill 207 calls for various reports on the progress of meeting the proposed child care space availability targets. The bill's focus on annual reporting is redundant since the government reports on the progress of child care through the annual reporting and business planning processes. Mr. Speaker, increased monitoring provides a more accurate picture of the level of care that is being offered within the increased spaces rather than simply reporting on the progress of increasing the availability.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for her continued advocacy for superior child care in Alberta. However, I assure her that this government is taking the appropriate steps to ensure that our children are receiving the best care by allowing parents flexibility while choosing which child care system works best for them and by ensuring that the highest standards of care are always upheld. Ensuring that parents have access to quality, affordable child care options is part of the Premier's plan to improve the quality of life for all Albertans. Due to the similar goals and provisions in Bill 4 and Bill 207, I cannot lend my support to the latter bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the continued debate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To begin with, I just want to say that this is not a case of either/or, Bill 207 or Bill 4. This is a complementary situation in which the well-being of children is being addressed. We don't want to get into a circumstance of he said/she said when it comes to providing care for children.

I'm coming from the point of view, first off, of labelling myself in my most significant role as that of a grandfather. I am the proud grandfather of Kiran, who is three years old, and Rohan, who will be soon five months old. We are fortunate in that my daughter and her husband live in Calgary, and that gives us the opportunity to be a part of the children's growth and growing up.

In fact, so that my daughter could work in the second year of my first grandson's life, my wife provided the opportunity of daily care for my grandson, Kiran. That took stress off my daughter so that she could concentrate on her job, and it gave great delight and enjoyment for my wife to watch Kiran go through the various developmental stages. Of course, I'm prejudiced, but I think that he's a brilliant young man and that my wife and my daughter contributed, with my son-in-law and my son-in-law's parents and the extended family, to that brilliance.

But what I'm pointing out is that we were in that fortunate situation whereby we had the funding in place and where my daughter had opportunities for care other than that which she could provide at home. Again, my daughter and her husband's circum-

stance is such that if they wanted at this point to go after various daycare options, they have the money so that they could look into those programs. I know, for example, that my grandson Kiran will be participating in a preschool program in September. The family is looking forward to the socialization that that program will offer, but of course, you know, as grandparents and parents we always have reservations about the out-of-sight care. However, it's because we have that fortunate circumstance.

Now, with my second grandson, Rohan, being at a tender young age, the attachment to my daughter is out of love and out of necessity. Therefore, the possibility of daycare is not something that we would consider at this time. Again, it's not an economic decision because we have the financial support to provide a series of options. My daughter, Christina, when she was growing up and in high school and also through years of university, supported her tuition and her own individual pursuits by working in a series of daycare programs caring for children from age, you know, basically, weeks to older children, and that, no doubt, helped her in her preparations for motherhood. But, again, the point I'm making is that our family had the economic well-being to be able to make a series of choices.

4:30

My understanding and the reason for my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods putting forth Bill 207, Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act, is to recognize the fact that for the majority of parents who desire or require the necessity of working outside of the home based on our booming economy, this would provide them with an increased number of spaces to take on that pursuit that they either absolutely need for financial reasons or for personal achievement reasons. Again, I want to stress that it's not an either/or circumstance, that both of these bills, 207 and 4, can work hand in hand to achieve the best for our children.

My understanding is that Alberta provides, basically, or there is a provision for about 10 per cent of the daycare spaces that are being sought. When we have an economy that is literally out of control and needs individuals, rather than working on bringing more temporary individuals into this province and increasing the pressures on affordable housing and government support, we need to recognize the qualifications of a number thoroughly trained, dedicated, and empower these individuals who are from Alberta to be able to make the choices they need in order to find daycare that not only provides a service of guarding the child but also looks at their developmental stages and takes into account the need to provide education.

Now, the government, to its credit, and the new children's minister have recognized that there is a desperate need for retaining staff. I appreciate very much that she put forward the idea of a one-time \$5,000 incentive to attract daycare workers to remain at their position, basically to come back to the position that they had to abandon because of poor wages but to stay at that position for two years. This is a very good recommendation, but it addresses an ad hoc circumstance. It is a great idea, but it's a one-time great idea. What Bill 207 does is reach into the future for 10 years and sets out a plan, a vision, that would achieve a 30 per cent increase in the number of daycare facilities.

I had the good fortune, along with members of my Calgary caucus from Calgary-Currie and from Calgary-Mountain View, of attending two years ago one of the first public forums that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods held in my Calgary-Varsity constituency at the Banff Trail community centre. At that particular meeting there were over 45 individuals in attendance, and they came from varied child care backgrounds. Some were single dads. Some were single moms. Some were representatives of stay-at-home parents for the rights of stay-at-home parents. We had individuals from

preschool, after school. We had private. We had public. But the underlying sentiment that was expressed by all, the one that stopped the divide and conquer, that stopped the debate, was the fact that we need to place children first, and that's what Bill 207 attempts to do: put children first.

Rather than saying, "Well, I like Bill 4; it's more comprehensive in my opinion," somebody from the government side might say, "than Bill 207," well, let's consider the possibility of working with both Bill 207 and Bill 4, and if there are difficulties amongst the government members, or if they see something that needs tinkering or changing, literally, let's not throw out the child with the bill. Come forward in discussions through amending processes to deal, to strengthen whatever shortcomings that you may perceive in this bill.

I also had the opportunity quite recently to again have a public forum on child care at which the hon. shadow minister for child care from Edmonton-Mill Woods had another very good turnout and discussion with parents. This was the follow-up to the meeting the year before.

Thank you. I look forward to further discussions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 207 proposes to establish targets for the creation of child care spaces. Specifically, the bill wants sufficient spaces for not less than 30 per cent of children who are 12 years of age or younger by the end of a 10-year period. The intent of this bill is honourable, and I appreciate the desire of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to ensure that children are properly cared for. The difference between the hon. member and myself is in how we believe child care should be delivered.

Mr. Speaker, child care can take many forms. Some of those forms are institutionalized care, parental care, care provided by a relative or neighbour, and regulated day homes. Every option has its positives and negatives. Parents can choose what is the most appropriate option for their situation. That is why I'm not supportive of a bill that proposes to mandate the creation of sufficient child care spaces. By mandating the number of child care spaces, we risk building another social program that would incur great cost to the public purse with dubious results. The only province that offers child care spaces to 30 per cent of its children is Quebec, which has an expensive publicly financed daycare program.

This bill reflects the typical Liberal way of handling the provisions of government services. The mindset has the government providing all the services all the time with no regard to the impact on the public purse and no regard to the outcomes. Liberals seem to doubt the ability of parents and their communities to find ground-level solutions and methods to providing child care. Liberals reject the potential for both private and not-for-profit companies to provide child care.

The government's role is to tread gently in the parenting of children. Government must protect children and assist parents in the nurturing of their children. There's no question that this government has a clear track record in the protection of children. The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act seeks to protect the safety and well-being of children, increases involvement of parents and children in family decision-making, and increases collaboration within the community to support the growth of children. This act allows for intervention when it is clear that a parent cannot adequately protect a child or if the well-being of a child is at risk.

Another support is family and community support services, FCSS. FCSS is a joint partnership between the province and municipalities. FCSS programs are preventative in nature and enhance well-being among individuals, families, and communities. FCSS programs reflect local needs and challenges.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to protecting children, the government has provided resources to parents to support their child care options. These resources allow parents to make choices about the type of care they want for their children. It also supports the type of care they choose. Every choice has financial implications. The support provided by the government may be the difference in having one parent stay at home while the other works.

4:40

Alberta's five-point child care investment plan reflects the wants and needs of parents. It supports low- and middle-income families and stay-at-home parents. It allows families with children with disabilities to access specialized care. It provides parents with information, resources, and early intervention opportunities.

The kin child care program allows low-income families to pay relatives to care for their children. The program provides \$300 per month. It provides alternatives to low-income families with limited options for child care, such as those in rural areas or with nontraditional work hours.

Further support is provided to parents by the federal government. Families with children under six years of age receive \$100 a month per child through a universal child care benefit. Parents can use the benefit to choose the child care options that suit them best.

Mr. Speaker, I prefer that the government support the choices of parents rather than force parents to accept the choices of government. Building up a child care system could lead to the creation of a new bureaucracy to set and monitor targets. Building up child care spaces through a government program can lead to great cost to taxpayers without justification of the need or demand. Allowing different options to take shape respects the ability of parents. It also allows communities and the private sector to develop alternatives in a cost-efficient manner.

Parents have a primary role in the provision of child care. Government's role is to support parental choice. Bill 207 does not respect that balance, and I cannot support that bill as a result.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 207. I want to indicate that I'll be supporting this bill, and I want to respond, in particular, in just a few minutes to the comments of some of the government members about the creation of bureaucracies and the state dictating to parents what they can and cannot do. In fact, what this government has allowed to occur through its daycare policy over many years in this province is a significant drop in the number of spaces in child care in this province, which will not be addressed, in my view, by Bill 4.

I have to ask the question, Mr. Speaker, why it is that in a booming economy, as we have in this province, where there is a serious labour shortage, the participation of women with young children in the economy is very, very low. It is not from their choice. The hon. member suggests that this is a choice of families and that the government is allowing the choice. It is quite the opposite. The government is taking away choice from women and families about their participation because there are insufficient child

care spaces for women who wish to participate in the workforce. This may fit with the traditional family views of many members opposite, but it is not necessarily a universal view of the role of women in today's economy, and I would submit that a modern, progressive, and significant group of people and families in this province disagrees with that view.

So, Mr. Speaker, quite clearly, the government's approach forces women to stay out of the workforce because they can't find child care. And why is it that in the conditions we find ourselves in, with a booming economy and a demand for labour, we are bringing in thousands of temporary foreign workers to fill jobs that Albertans could be providing? It all comes down to the question of who is served by the economic policy of this government, and it is not the people of this province. If they really wanted to address the labour shortage in this province, if they really wanted Albertans who want to work to be able to work, they would make sure that there were sufficient child care spaces in place in order to do that.

Mr. Speaker, before I sit down, I just want to indicate that the difference between Bill 4 and this private member's bill is the whole question of accountability and reporting. The minister would be required in this bill to report back to the Assembly on the number of child care spaces and progress that was made, and that is something, I think, that the government is afraid of. The government does not want to be accountable, not to the House and certainly not to the people of this province. Their economic policies are disadvantaging many, many thousands of Alberta families. This is just one instance of the kind of negative policies that the government is pursuing.

I would urge all hon. members to support Bill 207. I think it is a step forward and, certainly, considerably more progressive in its approach than the approach that the government has taken so far and will in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, then Red Deer-North, then Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 207, Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act, in support of this complement, I would say, to Bill 4 that the government has put forward. There isn't an exclusiveness about either bill, and they both could add significantly to quality and access to child care in this province. Many organizations have advocated for child care targets and greater accountability on this issue. It's been on and off the front burner for a decade and a half, and it's clear that it's a priority for Albertans. If it's a priority, we need to measure it, and if it's a priority, we need to show accountability on an annual if not a biannual basis to show that we are moving seriously toward making child care affordable and accessible and quality for Albertans.

Targets have been developed in many jurisdictions, including the European Commission Childcare Network, and while they don't guarantee the creation of more spaces, they do offer guidelines and timelines, which obviously gives us all more security about where we're moving in this province on these priorities. Clearly, in the boom time this has become an urgent priority. It's not only affecting the quality of child care in the early years, under 12 years of age, which has been deficient, it's also affecting the attraction of individuals into the field and their retention. It's affecting their ability to sustain themselves as workers and as young families. This is almost as urgent, Mr. Speaker, as getting clear targets and timelines in place for affordable housing itself.

This bill would increase by 30 per cent access for children under the age of 12, which is a significant increase in children between six

and 12, a 30 per cent increase in access over a 10-year period, with an annual review. The bill would increase transparency by requiring this reporting and looking specifically at the type of supports, the costs, and the locations, whether those are more accessible or not as a result of where we're building and the age group that's being covered. It would encourage creation, again, in following the four principles of quality, universality, accessibility, and a developmental focus.

As most Albertans in need of child care know, our spaces have actually declined in the last 15 years. There's a serious need to move forward on this priority. I and most of my colleagues on this side of the House will be supporting it strongly and hope that the other side will see this as a complement to their good bill, also, to move forward on this issue.

The bill does not dictate how the government will achieve the targeted spaces. It will give the government some flexibility as well as some accountability, which, again, Albertans are asking for in these difficult times. We need to also increase the workforce learning opportunities and strengthen our communities at a time when the stresses and strains on communities are significantly increased. We can do better through a more accountable and targeted approach.

I think those summarize my major points. I'll take my seat and appreciate the rest of the debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

4:50

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to join the discussion on Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act. I also wish to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for her dedication to children and families and for furthering discussion on this topic as I feel this is a subject worthy of attention. Our children are Alberta's most precious resource, and it remains a priority of this government to maximize the well-being of our young people with quality child care when needed and early intervention programs if needed so that they may realize their full potential.

Part of this obligation means ensuring that families have appropriate access to high-quality and affordable child care services. The government also understands that no two Alberta families are exactly alike. Each has its own circumstances and needs, and parents must be able to choose the child care that is best for them. Devising a formula for appropriate child care is not something that will be achieved with one simple policy measure.

Mr. Speaker, expanding the availability of child care spaces is an admirable goal, but I'm concerned about a 10-year deadline for creating a specified number of new child care spaces. As hon. members of the Assembly know, Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act, was recently tabled in this House. It addresses the desire for additional child care spaces found in Bill 207, and Bill 4 provides the ways and means for this to happen.

We all know that it takes a whole village to raise a child. Both the provincial and federal governments are engaged in a variety of measures to ensure that Alberta's parents have access to the child care options that suit them best. The government of Alberta has invested approximately \$13.5 million annually to address the issue of recruiting and retaining qualified staff to work in daycare centres and family day homes. From the federal government, for families that choose other methods of child care, some stay-at-home parents qualify for a subsidy of up to \$100 per month for each preschool-aged child who is participating in an early education program.

Mr. Speaker, since the Member for Calgary-Varsity took the time to very proudly talk about his two grandchildren, I'd also like to talk about my grandchildren. My oldest granddaughter lives with her single mom, who also attends university. Although it would be our greatest wish to be able to stay home and help look after our granddaughter, it wasn't possible, so we had to have daycare. We used the day home system. We found it to be an excellent system. My daughter was subsidized for the care of her daughter, and we actually felt that she couldn't have gotten any better care in anyone else's hands. We developed new friends, and it was a wonderful experience.

My other two grandchildren are fortunate to be able to have mom stay home most of the time, but she does have to work part-time and was not able to get any subsidy to help her with her child care, which is \$50 an hour for two children. For four hours of care she's paying \$200 a week, which is very expensive, so to have the subsidy that comes from the federal government, which is \$100 a month for each preschool child, is very helpful for her as well. So my grandchildren have been able to use both of the subsidies, from the provincial and federal governments, for very good child care that they receive from qualified daycare homes and from a caregiver who is not part of the system.

In previous years Albertans told us of their priorities for child care, and this government has responded. Albertans have indicated to us that they want assistance for low- and middle-income families in accessing affordable child care, support for stay-at-home parents, such as my other two grandchildren, assistance for families with children with disabilities, improved quality of child care through support of enhanced training for child care professionals, and more information resources and early intervention opportunities available to parents.

While increasing spaces and improving access are key initiatives being undertaken by the government, we are always seeking to not only improve . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business is now concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

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

Made-in-Alberta Energy Policy

506. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to adopt a made-in-Alberta energy policy to be developed through public consultation and debate in the Legislative Assembly and founded on the economic and energy interests of Alberta and Canada rather than those of the United States.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If I may speak to this motion, I would just like to indicate, in the first instance, that I would think the value of this motion would be self-evident to all members of the Assembly. Of course, the question arises: why, then, would the motion be necessary? The motion is necessary because this is precisely what the Alberta government is not doing. They are developing an energy policy not through public consultation and not through debate in the Legislative Assembly and not founded on the economic and energy interests of Alberta and Canada but, rather, on those of the United States.

Mr. Speaker, this government is conducting the development of

the energy policy of this province in large part through private consultations and discussions behind closed doors with representatives of the federal government and the Energy department of the United States and with large American and other foreign oil companies. The public debate of our energy policy has been moved out of the Legislature and into the boardrooms of Houston, Washington, and other American cities.

The new royalty regime was introduced in 1997 to encourage tar sands development in Fort McMurray, and the goal was to maximize resource extraction. Alberta went from collecting \$2.20 on every barrel of oil in 1996 to collecting 8 cents per barrel in 2001. By 2004 that royalty regime had turned Canada into the largest exporter of oil to the United States. Alberta collected \$9.8 billion in resource revenues, but most of the value went to the bottom lines of the big oil companies. Still the government felt the need to encourage more development. In 2005 they aggressively began lobbying business and political decision-makers in Texas, Washington, and even Beijing. The question of the development and the vision that the government has for our energy policy is not something that is well understood by most Albertans, and I believe that that is a deliberate decision of the provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, we have done a number of things: eliminating most environmental regulations in the Fort McMurray area, bringing in a labour policy that discourages the use of unionized Alberta workers and supports temporary foreign workers, a policy that collects for most tar sands extractions 1 cent on the dollar of the value, a policy that encourages, in fact, the export of unprocessed bitumen, creating construction and other processing jobs in the United States.

Mr. Speaker, in Houston there was an oil sands expert group workshop, and I have some documents here with respect to that meeting. It's quite clear to me that despite the claims made by our current Premier and other Conservative leadership contenders during the Conservative leadership race, they did not favour the export of unprocessed bitumen to the United States. In fact, the Premier went so far as to call it scraping off the topsoil. It is pretty clear that this was a decision that had previously been made and had been made while the Premier was, as far as I can tell from the dates, the minister of intergovernmental affairs for this province, and he must very likely have been aware of this as, certainly, the government was. This particular document talks about the need for expanding pipelines and building new pipelines not only for processed crude but also for unprocessed bitumen.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, the government, through the security and prosperity partnership of North America agreement, which was signed by President Bush, Prime Minister Martin at the time, President Fox of Mexico, in which Alberta participated, certainly indicates that the strategy of expanding tar sands production for export to the United States, including a dramatic increase in the export of unprocessed bitumen, has been a done deal for well over a year.

This question has not been discussed in the Legislative Assembly. I think that the whole question of where we're going as a province has not been settled openly and through democratic discussion by the people of Alberta and their elected representatives but, rather, behind closed doors in Washington, in Houston, and in other places. This government has participated in that, and the consequences are something that the people of this province have to pick up.

The housing shortage is a direct outcome of this government's policies. It's clear that they worked very hard to set in place a framework that reduces labour costs, reduces environmental costs, and encourages the rapid exploitation of our natural resources, without doing any planning for the consequences. The shortages of

schools that we face, the lineups for emergency rooms and for ambulances, and the weaknesses in our provincial infrastructure are all things that are consequences which the government prefers to call the price of prosperity. Mr. Speaker, it's pretty clear that the government's use of that term contains considerable irony, and I want to indicate that it is, in fact, the people of Alberta, particularly middle-class families and working families, that are paying the price of prosperity. It is not the prosperous who are paying the price of prosperity in this province.

Recently the mayor of Red Deer talked about the disappearance of the middle class. This is certainly something that is a part of the government's economic development policy. Mr. Speaker, to put it in a nutshell, the provincial government has entered into agreements that affect profoundly the very future of this province, that set targets for growth industrially and eventually for population and for the export of our raw materials, yet they have not put in place plans to help the people of this province cope with that growth. It's wrong. It's wrong that this government should decide the future of this province without including the people of Alberta, who have to live here, in those discussions, yet that's exactly what they've done.

Just another example, Mr. Speaker, is the whole question of TILMA and the discussion that's taken place around that with British Columbia. Whereas the British Columbia government introduced legislation that would deal with the whole question of TILMA and allowed some democratic debate around that, this provincial government has chosen not to do so. There was a bill introduced earlier today in the House that talks about allowing penalties to be levied, I guess, for the violation of TILMA. I'm sure that the real impact of that will be felt soon.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for your time, for your patience. I urge all members to support the motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to Motion 506 as proposed by the hon. member. I'm probably going to surprise a few people here by suggesting that I actually agree with parts of this motion; namely, the first part, that says, "urge the government to adopt a made-in-Alberta energy policy to be developed through public consultation." I think that's fantastic. I think that's great. In fact, the first part of the motion is exactly what we're doing with the royalty review in the province of Alberta: public consultations. That's the entire point.

I think it's critical for this province to do public consultations to ensure that something that is a key revenue generator for the province of Alberta and that supplies so many services to Albertans in general be reviewed regularly to ensure that Albertans get value for their dollar, Mr. Speaker. In fact, they do produce significant benefits. Last fiscal year the province received \$11 billion in revenue from the energy industry. That's one-third of the total revenues collected by this province. This year it'll be \$10.3 billion, a slight decline but still a significant factor in providing Albertans with benefits in general.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

One-quarter of Alberta's GDP, Mr. Speaker, is provided by the energy industry. That amounts to \$81.3 billion in exports. It's very important to note that that's exports. It's not something just generated here in Alberta. The reason why we have so many benefits is because so much of the energy industry's products are

exported around the world. One out of every six jobs in this province is directly tied to the energy industry. It's critical and, obviously, one of the foundations that this province was built on.

Mr. Speaker, that's not the only benefit. This province has the potential to sustain incredible economic growth because of its reserves. Over 175 billion barrels in proven reserve in the oil sands and 1.6 billion barrels of conventional oil still exist in the ground. Over 41 trillion – that's trillion – cubic feet of remaining established marketable gas reserves still exist in this province in the ground. Coal reserves are estimated at approximately 34 billion tonnes. Now, that's incredible reserves in this province. But they're all in the ground, and those reserves have absolutely zero value when they're still in the ground.

Mr. Speaker, there's an incredibly important principle that I think this motion fails to consider, and that's the principle of macroeconomics. Jurisdictions recognize that they cannot produce all the goods they require. If the resource or goods are in abundance, the jurisdiction will sustain their supply and market excess production on the market for profit. As a result, because in Alberta we don't produce everything we need, Alberta imports a number of products and services. Such transactions by our province benefit our other economies and allow Albertans to specialize in areas of strategic importance; for instance, the energy industry.

In 2005 alone, Mr. Speaker, Alberta imported \$53 billion worth of international products and services. These included things like cars and trucks. In fact, \$6.8 billion worth of vehicles were imported into this province in 2003, \$6.6 billion worth of machinery and equipment were imported into this province in 2003, and electronics and communication equipment amounted to \$5.2 billion. Very critical.

Now, I regret the second half of this motion – and I'm not even going to repeat it – mostly because it suggests that the energy interests of the U.S. are what we base our energy policies on. Mr. Speaker, that's a very regrettable assumption. If the member across the way who suggests this motion had any experience or understanding in the business community, he would know that a business does not exist without clients. You have to take care of your clients. But if you don't take care of the business, you have nothing left to market. That's the relationship, especially when Alberta is so dependent on exporting goods and services, particularly related to energy and gas.

We have to export those products. It helps our economy. We also have to import a lot of products. I would love to see what this hon. member across the way would do if he just raised the taxes incredibly, the royalty structure, thereby driving away the investment in the oil and gas industry. I wonder what we would have left in our economy to import those products, Mr. Speaker. Business means looking after your business and your clients. Trade secures Alberta's prosperity.

5:10

Motion 506 suggests that Alberta engage in a confrontational trade relationship with the U.S., a reliable, stable customer of our energy products. Mr. Speaker, the changing trade relationship on energy can impact other industries, such as agriculture and forestry. In fact, many people, I recall, during the BSE crisis suggested that we just turn off the taps for oil and gas in order to make the United States pay attention to us. We import so many goods. The U.S. is such a critical trading partner. By turning off the oil and gas to get the U.S.'s attention, Alberta would fair far worse than the U.S. by the reduction in oil and gas.

An Hon. Member: It's like cutting off your nose to spite your face.

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah. It's kind of like cutting off your nose to spite your face. That's correct.

Mr. Speaker, it's not simple factors like turning off the oil and gas or raising the royalty structure without considering the factor about where the market is. Quite frankly, I hear it compared all the time that Finland and Norway and Sweden and countries all over the world collect more in royalty revenue than Alberta does. Those countries have immediate access to a huge economy in Europe. Our immediate access is to the huge economy in the U.S. They also have larger reserves that have bigger pools while we have smaller conventional pools that require much more work and much more drilling. One size does not fit all. The same policy that works in one country does not necessarily work in another country.

Mr. Speaker, the second half of this motion, suggesting that Alberta is basing its energy policy on what the U.S. wants, is just not true. It has to be based on what's good for Albertans, but it also has to factor in what the United States needs, just as I mentioned before. Without considering that, the U.S. might go somewhere else, and then who are we left to sell our products to? We'd be a broke business. The second half of this motion is just typical of a New Democrat attitude that suggests that you tax it when it's profitable; if it's still profitable, tax it some more; if it suddenly becomes unprofitable, then subsidize it. I'm afraid that that circumstance is what we would wind up with.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members, though the intent of the first half of this motion is noble, to realize that we are moving with the royalty review, which will make sure that Albertans get the full benefit they can out of the reserve without chasing away all of the business and investment and killing the entire industry. I encourage them as vehemently as possible to oppose this motion, that's narrow and myopic in its view.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the Minister of Energy.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get an opportunity to rise and participate in the discussion on Motion 506 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Certainly, when we look at the energy industry and the energy policy, it's not that we never had a made-in-Alberta energy policy in the past. Previous Progressive Conservative governments fought to ensure that we had a made-in-Alberta energy policy, and it worked out quite well for us economically. I don't understand why people would become so anxious to so quickly criticize or ridicule the hon. member for proposing a made-in-Alberta energy policy to be developed through public consultation and debate in the Legislative Assembly. It's about time that we look after the interests of Albertans first. In my view, we haven't been doing that in the recent regime of the Tory dynasty, the Progressive Conservative party's 37-year-old dynasty.

Now, if we look at the royalty review and we look at the current royalty structure, the hon. Minister of Energy knows very well, because he was involved in the discussions in the comparison with Texas, that we are not getting enough in royalties, whether it's on coal-bed methane, whether it's on conventional oil and gas, whether it's on oil sands production. It's simply a royalty regime that was made when prices were much lower, and they're a lot higher now.

I would also remind hon. members of this Assembly that the state of Montana, our neighbours to the south, introduced legislation to increase the royalty on oil and gas on school lands by close to 20 per cent, and the oil and gas industry did not abandon that state. In fact,

the number of leases that are being developed since that royalty increase was implemented has increased significantly.

I would also like at this time to remind hon. members of a quote from the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, who stated that, you know, there's "zero value" in the ground. That's not true because if we develop our carbon resources in stages, the value of that will increase dramatically. Crude oil is worth 70-some dollars Canadian a barrel right now. Eight years ago it was probably worth \$27 a barrel. It increases in value. We don't have to pump it all out of the ground at one time because hopefully it's going to increase in value, and there's still going to be a demand for that oil.

So to have this attitude that it has zero value in the ground – I would beg to differ. On the contrary, the longer we leave some of it in the ground, the more valuable it will become. Hopefully, after we negotiate a competitive royalty rate, even if we collect only the amount that the government targets themselves to collect, that would be appropriate, but we're not doing that. This government is failing, failing dismally, the owners of the resources, Albertans themselves.

There are other things in this whole energy debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood talked about the whole issue around the temporary foreign workers and how that benefits this province. Well, I don't know how it does. Certainly, those temporary foreign workers in many cases are being exploited. They are being cheated in their wages. They're driving down the wage rates in this province, and they are eroding working conditions for all Albertans because there's no enforcement.

Unfortunately, many of these temporary foreign workers – and there are now over 24,700 of them in the province – are being exploited in some cases. I have three files here that I just got over the weekend, and it's really disappointing. These people were recruited from jobs elsewhere. They got here. I am very sad to say and I'm ashamed as a Canadian that when these individuals came here, the work that they were supposed to do for the person who was recruiting them, the employer on the visa – there was no work for them. They paid megabucks to some unscrupulous middle person or recruiter, and they got here. They paid their own way here.

An Hon. Member: They must belong to the Liberal Party.

Mr. MacDonald: No. The hon. minister may make light of this and say that they were members of the Liberal Party and that they were refused work, but that is so far from the truth. They had faith in this system. The system didn't work, and now they can't find any work, and they're intimidated. They think that they're going to be picked up and deported out of this country. It's not a laughing matter, Mr. Speaker. It's not a laughing matter at all.

This government and the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry have a lot of answering to do because this program is simply not working. If the made-in-Alberta energy policy is to drive down wages, then we have to make sure through the temporary foreign worker program that we pay heed to the hon. minister's motion.

5:20

Now, temporary foreign workers: how far is this going to go? Well, I learned that we are now going to set up – and this is going to jeopardize the entire steel fabrication industry in this province – one of the largest steel fabrication plants in Canada in Tofield. There's a plan afoot to start a plant that will have 286,000 covered square feet of shop space. Where is the workforce for this outfit going to come from? It's not going to come from Ryley. It's not going to come from Tofield. It's not going to come from Fort Saskatchewan. It's not going to come from Camrose. It's going to come from

Malaysia, Indonesia, China, the United Arab Emirates, Italy, Australia: in fact, the total manpower requirements of this place, 2,600 and some odd workers. If this outfit gets a labour market opinion, it will mobilize its world-wide manpower resources to accommodate the shortages in Alberta, the shortages that are real or perceived. That's where the workforce is going to come from. It's not going to come from Camrose. It's not going to come from Fort Saskatchewan. It's not going to come from Edmonton. It's not going to come from Quebec, Ontario. It's going to come from these foreign countries.

Now, how does that benefit Alberta? In the past whenever we talked about Syncrude and Suncor, when we had a Better Buy Alberta program, which this Conservative government promoted at one time, parts of the work that was generated with the development of Syncrude and Suncor had to be done locally here but not anymore. We've moved away from that, and the local steel fabrication industry, whether it's in Airdrie or whether it's in the south of Edmonton, cannot compete when you've got smaller parts being fitted in yards in Malaysia and in China and being sent over here, and then they're assembled here for shipment to the oil sands projects.

Workers there are getting a dollar, maybe if they're lucky \$2 a day. There are no occupational health and safety rules for them to follow. They're running around with sandals on – with sandals on – in steel fabrication shops. They don't even have steel-toed workboots. And we're allowing that? We're allowing these sorts of laws to undermine our steel fabrication industry, which has been so vital.

If we look at the last budget and we look at the exports from this province, we will see that there was a significant amount of money coming from steel fabrication and steel-fabricated products. How is this industry to maintain itself whenever it has this unfair competition to deal with? The Chinese people openly talk about our high cost of labour . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for bringing this motion forward but only – only – because I'm always pleased whenever I get an opportunity to discuss energy and its vital importance to the province of Alberta.

The motion itself has something to do with a made-in-Alberta energy policy. Most certainly, I would suggest that we've exported oil from the province of Alberta since 1947. For 60 years the province of Alberta has had a made-in-Alberta energy policy. It has served Albertans very well, and as we continue, it will continue to serve Albertans very well.

Mr. Speaker, this also provides me with an opportunity to educate members and particularly the members opposite, although most of them aren't really that interested in being educated about energy anyway because they don't really see it as being all that important to them or to their constituents or, I suppose, to Albertans or Canadians. But I've got to say that the education piece of this is absolutely required by our members and the general public.

Energy is the future of this province, and we need to do a better job, I need to do a better job, and my colleagues here with me on this side of the bench will do a better job of educating Albertans and particularly the members across the way with respect to this. It's one part of a multifaceted approach, Mr. Speaker, that I see as part of the mandate given to me by the Premier. We have a number of strategies that fit Alberta and the made-in-Alberta energy policy, and

these strategies, that have been put in place by previous governments, will be better knit together by this government as we move ahead. There has been a lot of work done on the Alberta energy strategy. We'll continue to do that.

Our integrated energy strategy, Mr. Speaker, includes the areas that we've had some discussion about. The member opposite talked about situations where there's so much work going on, the need to import steel products, and things like that. I don't know what it's necessarily focusing on in this particular motion, but certainly that part of Alberta's future will form the base. Hydrocarbons will certainly form the base of our energy future. However, the integrated energy strategy, the made-in-Alberta strategy, will include a much broader use of and acceptance of things like renewables, alternative energy forms, biofuels, bioenergy generation. We have, certainly, an awful lot of very, very good opportunities for many Albertans and, I would suggest, for a number of people from this province, from other provinces in Canada, and perhaps from other places globally with respect to being involved in this.

Mr. Speaker, it troubles me just a little bit – just a little bit, not a lot – that the hon. member across the way would go out of his way, particularly out of his way, in his motion to malign one of Canada's and one of Alberta's very good partners and friends that we have been able to openly do business with for many, many years. I know that this member has never been a decision-maker in government and never been an administrator, but I can tell him without hesitation . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. minister, the member is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Mason: Yes. He's using language that is calculated to incite disorder and so on. Mr. Speaker, in actual fact, I have been a decision-maker in government. I served on Edmonton city council for 11 and a half years, and I made decisions with respect to telephone companies, airports, power companies, transit, all kinds of decisions, long before this person was ever invited into cabinet and made any government decision in his life.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, in order for the chair to consider anything as a point of order, at least we need a citation. Since there was no citation, I hope that this is just a point of clarification.

Hon. minister, you may proceed.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and certainly I'll just continue. I can say to the member without hesitation that each and every time I make a decision, I try to do it with honour, with integrity, and with the interest of Albertans at heart. I don't claim for a moment that I or perhaps other people inside government get it right a hundred per cent of the time, but please don't doubt that what we do here in this Assembly and in my responsibilities as a minister of the Crown of Alberta, I do for Alberta and not for any foreign entity.

Perhaps the hon. member could realize that it's in the interests of Alberta to form a strong working relationship with the United States so that we can form continental approaches to continental problems we face. Perhaps the hon. member would realize that it just might make sense for Alberta to sell energy products to the world's largest economy. Perhaps the hon. member could recognize that his anti-American bias is blinding him to one of the many opportunities presenting itself for Alberta, and as a result his actions could hurt this province.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, I'll cite a CERI report. There is a CERI report on the Internet, and in that report the indications are very, very clear that the energy policies of the province of Alberta, particularly with respect to oil sands, have been tremendously successful and benefited Albertans, Canadians, people in North America, and other folks globally.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest that it's time for the member across the way to get into the 21st century and realize that it's in the interest of Alberta to open itself to the world, and that includes the United States. We have so much to offer. As the world looks for energy, Alberta will be ready with our products, our innovation, and our talent. We will be in Asia. We will be in Europe. We will be in any other continent across the globe, but our policies will not and cannot exclude one particular country. It's time the hon. member dropped his bias against the United States and realized that we have nothing to fear when Alberta competes with the rest of the world. Nothing to fear.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The hon. Minister of Energy basically stood up and tried to wrap himself in as many flags as possible and tried to condemn the efforts of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who was not talking anti-American biases; he was talking pro-Albertan. That's the nature of Motion 506: to get the best for Albertans, now and into the future, that we can have.

I thank the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for bringing forward Motion 506 because what he has done is he has brought the discussion into this Legislature, into an open and accountable circumstance where a record is being kept which can then be shared with Albertans across the province. The last discussion on royalties by the former Ministry of Energy didn't get very far. In fact, there was no written evidence that such a royalty investigation ever took place. It was a little bit along the lines of the Kelley Charlebois reports: high pay and no results.

Now, our latest royalty review was highly compromised to begin with because of former oil company executives being placed on it rather than having representation from average Albertans, who don't tend to benefit from the participation in the forum and don't bias the royalty review in the first place. This royalty review that is currently going on reminds me of the last insurance review, in which there weren't any average Albertans. There weren't any members of the public whatsoever. It was a behind-closed-doors circumstance, full of insurance salesmen and brokers and no other Alberta stakeholders, so the end result was rather guaranteed before the commission took place. I appreciate the fact that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood provided us an opportunity to discuss Motion 506, to air it out and to consider the possibilities.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar indicated how much of our oil and gas support industry jobs and economy are being lost to foreign countries. Now, I'd like to have good trade relations with a variety of countries, including the United States, our nearest and dearest neighbour, but I have visions of what's going to happen when this upgrader comes down the Athabasca River. Let me give you sort of a vision, a circumstance of what it could very much end up. It could be a repeat on a grand scale of what happened in Pine Creek coulee in Stavely. In Pine Creek coulee in Stavely the government refused to provide the money initially to provide a liner for the reservoir in Pine Creek coulee. So what happened was that

the leeching from the Pine Creek coulee, because it wasn't constructed properly in the first place, ended up ruining the wells of all the surrounding farms.

Now, there was an absolute monument to stupidity in the Pine Creek coulee at Stavely. Somebody had the bright idea to put playground equipment in the Pine Creek coulee. What you saw was a submerged teeter-totter, only partially submerged. What you saw was three-quarters of the swing set that was supposed to be totally underground. What you saw was a slide that looked like it would be kind of fun if you could get to it, but the water there sort of came up halfway. The reason that happened is that by the end of the summer you could probably walk across what little water was left and participate in this playground, which was intended to be totally submerged and for divers' benefit and amusement.

Well, can you imagine what monument to stupidity will occur if we have this enormous steel upgrader stuck on a barge in the middle of the Athabasca River because of the planning process of getting several kilotonnes of equipment down the Athabasca River, which is continuously being drawn upon by the various bitumen plants that are happening up in the Fort McMurray area? I hope that in large neon lights and letters we will have, "This is the result of government planning" attached to that large piece of built upgrader instead of having it built here and parceled in pieces and adding to our economy. So that large visual stuck in my mind.

But what I would like to talk about, too, is what Motion 506 causes us to discuss. What it says is that we aren't getting the benefit from our resources. We're not getting the benefit of the offshoot of our resources. We are gung-ho to send a whole lot of our raw bitumen down the pipeline to Chicago, to Houston, where it will no doubt benefit our neighbours. You know, I want our neighbours to prosper as well but not at our expense.

I'm extremely concerned. You know, in one case this government says: "TILMA, TILMA. Wow, wow, wow. Let's go for TILMA. Let's have an agreement with B.C. Let's get rid of our trade barriers" and so on. Well, here's a thought. I'm just going to add another thing that we ship down to Chicago. We ship down our gas in a primarily raw state, and when it gets down there, they separate it. They take out the butane. They take out the methane. They take out the propane. And guess what? All these byproducts of the raw gas that we ship down to Chicago are worth considerably more than the raw product. So not only are we giving them our raw product, but we're giving them all the benefits of streaming off these other gases. It's a great concern for me that we're losing these values.

What we have failed to discuss in this House is the notion of balance. How can you balance the need to process the raw bitumen here in Alberta? How many upgraders is the right amount? What environmental precautions will we take so that if an upgrader such as the 10 that are being proposed – how can we, for the residents of the surrounding areas, be sure that the noise levels, the emissions levels, the draw on the water resources are not going to be overwhelming? I believe that through technology we could achieve a degree of balance, and through regional planning we could probably come to some kind of amicable resolution.

5:40

Here's the western Canada concept. Why are we so all fired up about building pipelines to take our raw products, bitumen or gas, down to the States? Why don't we have lateral pipelines? Why not let Saskatchewan and Manitoba be a part of our success? Saskatchewan has already got a couple of bitumen processors there. Why do we have to always send it south? Let's have a provincial western Canada consideration. Why not keep our products in Canada and support Saskatchewan and support Manitoba but in a balanced

process? We determine how much goes down the pipeline. All the provinces stand to potentially benefit from our sharing of our resources.

An Hon. Member: Do you want to send our cows there too, Harry?

Mr. Chase: By all means. Horned or otherwise.

You know, when the young and talented member – I'll take nothing away from the young and talented member – talked about the idea of exporting our values and so on, suggesting that this was a war on the United States, and what would they do if international companies pulled out? [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Motion 506, presented by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. The hon. Premier has responded to the concerns of Albertans regarding the royalty regime by establishing an expert panel that will determine if Albertans are getting their fair share from resource revenues. Under the direction of the hon. Minister of Finance a royalty review committee was established in February. The review will focus on all aspects of the royalty system, including royalties from oil sands, conventional oil and gas, and coal-bed methane. This independent panel consists of individuals who are experts in academia, economics, accounting, energy research, and the resource industry.

Just to remind members, the objectives of the committee are to ensure that Albertans are receiving an appropriate and fair share from energy development through royalties, taxes, and fees. The committee will examine the royalties and formulate conclusions that will suggest an appropriate and, again, fair balance for investment and contributions. Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta has gained significant – and I stress "significant" – economic benefits from energy development. The government of Alberta received over \$11 billion in nonrenewable resource revenues in the last fiscal year alone.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this government is taking a proactive stance by initiating a comprehensive review that will assess the royalty system. The complexities of the royalty system are immense, and the committee will offer Albertans an objective analysis of their findings. I think we should wait for their review and see how that turns out to the benefit of all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and participate in Motion 506, the made-in-Alberta energy policy. I'm supporting this motion in principle only. This motion, I think, assumes only three things: one, the current energy policies of this province are not in the public interest; two, the public energy policies of this province are not developed through public consultation; and third, the current energy policies of this province are focused on serving the needs of the United States of America.

Mr. Speaker, we are not talking here about anti-America. We are talking about how we can serve the best interests of Alberta. Electricity deregulation has not benefited Alberta consumers in any identifiable way. Alberta families and business owners have paid a high price for this government's electricity deregulation experiment. On several occasions the actual posted pool price on the Electric

System Operator's website has reached its peak of \$999 per megawatt.

While electricity providers are making enormous profits, Alberta consumers are paying a huge price for a flawed policy. Since 2000 Alberta farm electricity costs have increased by an unbelievable 38 per cent due to deregulation, while in other jurisdictions such as Manitoba, Saskatchewan, B.C., the increase has been in single digits. In the past 12 months the Alberta Electric System Operator has issued several emergency energy alerts due to a lack of available power. This has resulted in blackouts. Despite the government's claim that deregulation has increased our capacity, the Department of Energy's annual report shows that our electricity generation capacity has actually decreased since the year 2003.

The royalty regime in Alberta has failed to collect a fair share of revenue for the resource owners. Over the past few years, Mr. Speaker, the royalty regime has created record-breaking profit for oil and gas companies. Meanwhile, the Crown revenue share, the percentage of royalty collected on behalf of the resource owners, has failed to meet the government's own modest target of 20 to 25 per cent.

The government has until very recently refused to conduct an open public royalty review. The validity of the 2007 royalty review is questionable given the review panel's close ties to oil and gas companies and its general lack of balance. The government's own document shows that Albertans have not received a fair share over the past few years. The government of Alberta is encouraging oil sands project owners to upgrade bitumen in other jurisdictions, in the U.S., costing Albertans value-added opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, this government's electricity policy does not serve Albertans. Nobody chooses to buy electricity. It's a necessity. The Alberta Liberal caucus has a low-cost power for Alberta plan that would serve the hard-working citizens of this province very well. This government's electricity deregulation experiment has cost Alberta consumers billions of dollars. With the Alberta Liberal's low-cost power for Alberta plan electricity rates would be based on the actual cost of production.

The government's royalty regime has cost Albertans billions of dollars in lost revenue. The government has failed to collect a fair share for the citizens of this province. The government aims to collect up to 25 per cent in Crown revenue shares. Over the past two years, Mr. Speaker, the government has failed miserably in meeting this goal, costing us billions in lost revenue. Texas collects 25 per cent for their resources, and so, too, should Alberta. This government has failed to implement an effective royalty regime.

By encouraging oil sands project owners to export bitumen for upgrading in the U.S., the government is exporting well-paying jobs, jobs that should go to the citizens of this province. The jobs that are created through value-added operations are the kind that people can count on for 20 to 25 years. Mr. Speaker, this government has failed to secure these jobs for the citizens of this province.

Once again I just want to add that this government should admit that electricity deregulation is a total failure.

Thank you.

5:50

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to join the debate on Motion 506 regarding Alberta's energy policy. The hon. member's motion calls for a made-in-Alberta energy policy. I can assure him that this government has a made-in-Alberta energy policy to build a stronger Alberta.

Part of a successful energy policy entails finding a balance

between economic development and the environment. The hon. Minister of Environment has been mandated by the hon. Premier to update Alberta's climate change plan. This plan is truly made in Alberta because the government is seeking Albertans' input on this issue. Albertans will have a voice on climate change through a series of community workshops, which are currently being held throughout the province, and questionnaires for those who are unable to take part in the workshops. Mr. Speaker, seeking input from Albertans is important because it's their environment, their resources, and their quality of life.

Alberta was the first province to introduce climate change legislation in 2002 and the first to require large industrial facilities to report their greenhouse gas emissions. With Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, that's currently before the Assembly, Alberta was the first province in the country to introduce legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions intensity from large industry.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 3 is a tangible product of the hon. Premier's priority to manage growth pressures in our province. This government's action on climate change demonstrates to the rest of the world that as a global community we can achieve economic growth while being good stewards of the environment. In order to encourage companies to reduce their emissions intensity, the government has provided options such as making operating improvements, buying an Alberta-based offset to apply against their emission total, and contributing to a new government fund that will invest in technology to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the province.

The Alberta government's action to ensure the sustained health of our environment is one step towards achieving a truly made-in-Alberta energy plan. I urge all hon. members to consider the steps that are currently being taken to construct a suitable energy plan for our province before they vote on Motion 506. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to close debate.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to close debate on this motion. I want to begin by responding to some of the comments that have been made by a couple of the members, the Member for Battle River-Wainwright and also the Minister of Energy, who have attempted to portray this motion as anti-American simply by virtue of the fact that it asks for a made-in-Alberta energy policy. At the same time, speaking from the other side of their mouths, they do claim that we already have a made-in-Alberta energy policy, Mr. Speaker. But it is not anti-American. There's nothing anti-American about asking for a made-in-Alberta policy or a fair share of the value of our natural resources, and in fact previous Conservative Premiers of this province have done exactly that.

I disagreed with Premier Lougheed on some things, but I'll say one thing: he stood up for this province, and he stood up at times against the oil industry, something that this government has never had the guts to do. The minister talks about a continental solution to continental problems and thereby has exposed himself for what he is, which is a continentalist. Mr. Speaker, Canada does not have a shortage of energy. The United States does. That's an American problem, not a continental one.

There were also some attempts to suggest that criticizing the present policy means driving away the energy business from this province and, effectively, killing the golden goose. Mr. Speaker, nothing could be farther from the truth. The current royalty regime in this province was made at a time when oil was running at about \$10 a barrel. Now it's well past \$50, and we know in the long run

that it's going nowhere but up. The United States and other consumers of energy are not going to shut down the oil and gas industry in this province if we ask for a fair share, and the government is simply engaging in fearmongering in suggesting that rather than deal with the real issues.

Mr. Speaker, the records from the oil sands expert workshop in Houston in January of 2006 show that Alberta participated in the organization of that conference in which considerable discussion about increasing the export of unprocessed bitumen to the United States took place. The government knew that. Presumably, the minister of intergovernmental affairs at the time, the current Premier, knew about that when he was promising Albertans that he would do away with the export of unprocessed bitumen. Examples of the kind of policy of not extracting full value from our resources and massively exporting them to the American market can be seen in the Celanese plant, which is currently undergoing closure just outside the city of Edmonton. That's an example of the loss of good jobs that comes about.

Our royalties are far less than the value of our resources, Mr. Speaker, and the royalty review that the government has set up is nothing but a sham. There were comments made about all the experts on there. No comments were made about the conflicts of interest that were well established in that particular body and the

lack of public consultation and any meaningful input by the province. In fact, I'm surprised that the hon. members would raise that because it's a clear example of what I'm talking about; that is, Albertans being frozen out of the fundamental decisions that affect the future of their lives and their province.

Mr. Speaker, this government is selling out Alberta on its natural resources. Whether it's bitumen or natural gas or crude, this government is selling out not only the people of this province but future generations of this province, and the kind of quality of life that our children and grandchildren are going to enjoy will be significantly reduced as a result of this government selling out the interests of the people and giving away our resources for far less than they're actually worth. This government will go down in history as the government that sold out the province of Alberta.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 lost]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, from my vantage point the clock is just about to strike 6, so I would say that we stand adjourned until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 8, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/08

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members two officers of the Lord Strathcona's Horse. In 2006 Colonel John Roderick's exceptional service was recognized with his honorary appointment as Colonel of the Regiment, Lord Strathcona's Horse. Colonel Roderick, who resides in Kingston, Ontario, is joined today by Captain Chris Hunt, the regimental captain. Our visitors, Mr. Speaker, are in your gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly but also to accept on behalf of all of the Lord Strathcona's Horse the thanks of all the members of this House for their loyal and faithful service to the province and our nation.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 38 special visitors from the Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert constituency. The visitors today are from the Sturgeon Heights school, a group of very bright young people who are the future of our province. They are seated in the members' gallery and are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Lorna MacKay and Mr. Darryl Propp as well as parent helpers Mr. Paches and Mrs. Sarafinchan. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you three guests. First of all, a friend of mine who worked in this building a number of years ago and is back observing question period today, Charlene Adam. I'd also like to introduce my constituency office person who absolutely solves all of the problems of my constituents, Jaime Sorenson, and a young fellow who many of us know, Patrick Rea, who has been involved in youth politics since I think shortly after birth. I would ask them all to stand and receive a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly

a group of students and the co-ordinator representing an organization called caring for our Battle River watershed. All reps are from Camrose, which relies, of course, on the Battle River for its water supply. Seated in the members' gallery today are the project co-ordinator, Maurice Samm, and three award winners: Mark Wrubleski, Liz Solverson, and Jason Bratrud. A little later I will speak more about their activities in a member's statement; however, at this time I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two of my constituents. The first one is Anita Bocking. She is here with concerns about affordable rent. More than half of her income is going towards rent. The other one is Peter Tyleman. Peter is looking for more support from the government to stabilize those rental increases. I'd like them both to please now rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly a group visiting from the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. This group is the Capilano seniors active group. They are led today by Mrs. Nettie Holmstrom. This group is a keen observer of provincial government affairs. They have a noted interest in the budget, and I look forward on occasion to meeting with them and discussing important provincial issues. They're in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several constituents of Edmonton-Centre who've come today to express their concerns about the lack of a temporary cap on rent increases and other measures needed to improve housing. Some of these constituents are on AISH. Some are on fixed incomes. Some work. All of them but one have had significant rent increases, and each one of them is hoping that the government will take some positive action. I would ask Brianne Hudson, Rita Wegner Home, Joy Mukarage and Winie, Alyssa Hudson, Nicole Pfiefer, and Vanja Krslak, who I think are all in the members' gallery, to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, my guest hasn't arrived yet. He's working his way through, but he won't be able to stay long.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Dr. Taft: Well, it's a very special moment for him, and I'd like him to be here when I introduce him. So perhaps in a couple of minutes. Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it is my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you a constituent of Edmonton-Rutherford. Her name is Marilyn Sjulstad, and she's here this afternoon to hear her question asked of the Premier regarding the rental increase crisis. I would ask her to please give us a wave – she's in the members' gallery – and ask all members to give her the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three of my constituents in Edmonton-McClung who are all here to voice concerns about the current housing crisis in Alberta and to hopefully see some of their questions answered by the Premier and the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Even though they're here to pressure this government into taking some action to assist and protect tenants, I still encourage all members from both sides of the House to grant them the traditional warm welcome that is known to this House. I ask Deloris Austin, James Arnott, and Marilyn Caskey to please rise and receive the welcome I mentioned.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my constituent Mr. James Sexsmith. James is a veteran of World War II, and he's active in federal and provincial politics. He advocates for underprivileged and low-income people. He's extremely reliable to his friends. I want to thank him for coming to the Leg. He's here to voice his concern on rent relief. He's seated in the members' gallery. I request him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly board members and staff of the council. The council met earlier this morning with the northern MLAs, followed by a board meeting. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they stand as I introduce them: newly elected vice-chair Carmen Ewing from Girouxville, Michael Ouellette from Grande Prairie, Harvey Yoder from Lac La Biche, Williard Strebchuk from Whitecourt, and newly appointed members Iris Callioux from Peace River, Dave Kirschner from Fort McMurray, and Joe Layton from Bonnyville. Also present is retiring member Mike Mihaly of High Level, who has served for the past four years. Thank you, Mike, for all the great work in support of northern Alberta. Also with them are staff members Jennifer Bisley, business officer from the Peace River office; Jan Mazurik, executive assistant; and Dan Dibbelt, executive director. I'd like all members to please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome.

1:10

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two constituents of mine from Edmonton-Meadowlark, Jenny Donohue

and Iris Grover, both of whom are renters who are extremely concerned about the rapid and often unwarranted escalation of rents in Edmonton. They are seated in the members' gallery, I believe, and I ask that they please stand or wave and accept the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Doreen Fiddler. Doreen is one of the many Albertans who has received notice of a dramatic increase in rent, in her case from \$595 per month to \$1,595 per month, an incredible \$1,000 increase in one notice. She is currently searching for a new home. Doreen was born in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, and came to Alberta in 1970 to be closer to her family. She's a single mother who raised six boys and one girl all on her own. She is now the proud grandmother of 15 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. She is accompanied by Robert Ross, an antipoverty activist in our community. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly three guests seated in the public gallery. They are Menar Ibrahim, Jeremy O'Haver, and Richard Konkin. Menar, Jeremy, and Richard are Palace Casino workers entering their 242nd day on strike as they fight for better working conditions. It is unfortunate that this government has abdicated its responsibility in protecting Alberta workers when they face an unfair employer like the Palace Casino. Jeremy has worked at the Palace Casino for 13 years as a dealer and a pit boss. Menar started working at the Palace Casino in 2004 as a head cashier. Richard Konkin has been a dealer at the Palace Casino for the past eight years. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a very active member in my constituency. His name is Giancarlo Grande, and he is here with his building manager. Giancarlo suffers from a debilitating disease called ankylosing spondylitis, and as a result he is on AISH. His current housing situation is very precarious as he relies on the kindness of his building manager, who has to date been able to shield him from rent increases imposed on other tenants in his building, but I can tell you Giancarlo Grande is very concerned about his future. He is seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask him to wave and receive the warm welcome of all members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know and all members of the Assembly know, every year we're visited by a group of outstanding young Albertans as part of an ongoing program called the Forum for Young Albertans. A number of MLAs and staff have been involved in interacting with these young people. Every one of them is destined – I'm sure you'll agree with me – to become a leader of tomorrow. It's my pleasure on

behalf of the Premier to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly a number of these outstanding young people who have joined us in our galleries this afternoon. There is a group that was here at 1 o'clock. There'll be another group that comes in after they leave at 1:30. There simply are not enough seats in the galleries to accommodate all of them. Nevertheless, I would ask those that are with us in both the public and the members' galleries at this time to stand and be recognized by all members of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Lucy Alfaro. Lucy is a graduate of medical school from her home country of El Salvador. She is now practising homeopathic medicine here in Edmonton. Lucy is a very strong human rights and environmental activist. She's seated in the public gallery, and I would ask her now please to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Caring for the Battle River Watershed

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 14 I had the pleasure to attend the caring for our watersheds Battle River awards presentation. This program encourages students and the community to think about global environmental issues at the local level. It is modelled on the Caring for the Kenai project that is currently operating in Alaska.

This awards presentation recognized students who submitted proposals to answer the question: what can I do, create, invent, or improve to better care for the Battle River watershed? Some 60 students developed 22 proposals in response to the question. After an initial round of judging, three finalists at the university level and 12 finalists at the grade 8 to 12 level were invited to make public presentations.

This project was made possible by the support of Agrium Inc., the Battle River Community Foundation, the Battle River Watershed Alliance, the University of Alberta Augustana campus, the Battle River school boards, Caring for the Kenai, and the city of Camrose. Successful proposals were awarded with significant cash prizes. A total of \$6,000 was awarded to individuals, and \$10,000 was awarded to winning schools. These awards will support students and schools in pursuing concrete environmental actions, as laid out in their proposals.

I want to congratulate Mark Wrubleski from the Charlie Killam school for winning in the high school category. His winning project proposed using a solar, wind, or electric power pump to aerate bodies of water to maintain the health and vibrancy of our watershed. I also want to congratulate Chantel Bromley and James Phillips from the University of Alberta Augustana campus for receiving first place in the university category. This project proposed the creation of a wetland on the creek that flows through the Augustana campus. This contest would not have been possible without the help of project co-ordinator Maurice Samm, who is here in the members' gallery with three of the project winners. His work in preserving watersheds is commendable, and the success of this initial contest will undoubtedly encourage other communities to host similar contests.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Television Production in Hardisty

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, Alberta filmmakers and their industry partners abroad have long been familiar with the spectacular locations, cost advantages, and top-notch crews and services associated with choosing Alberta as a film production destination. It's my pleasure to be able to rise today and recognize a powerful and thought-provoking Alberta Film endeavour that will be taking place in the town of Hardisty in my constituency of Battle River-Wainwright.

In continuing with Alberta's rich history in film production, Paperny Films, a Vancouver-based television production company, has received support from the CBC to film a documentary called *The Week the Women Left*. On the heels of a similar and immensely popular program in the U.K. this highly informative and touching documentary will highlight and follow families and a community that have been left without women for a period of one week, from June 2 to 9.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also proud to announce that since I live in the community of Hardisty with my wife and son, I will be participating in this endeavour as well. I know that without my wife, even if it's just for a week, I will be lost. I have always said that I may win the bread in our family with my job, but she has three full-time jobs in looking after me, my son, and the house and is the hardest working person, like so many other women I know.

In preparation for the upcoming creation of the documentary, the town of Hardisty has worked very hard to be chosen out of so many communities across the west and are now busy working, setting the stage to ensure that all conditions are right to tell this powerful story. Town Mayor Anita Miller and all of the council, town administrator Tony Kulbisky, and hundreds of citizens at large, like Shawn and Ashley Gaetzman, deserve a lot of credit.

This event will bring the men in the community together as they work on a project for the community while the women are away. The event will bring the women together as they holiday at some beautiful resort here in Alberta. The project will do the community good and, I believe, lay the foundation of strong bonds that will drive Hardisty's assured success in the years to come. But mostly it will be a chance for both men and women in the community to appreciate what each other does not just in the home but in business. Good luck to them all.

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

Temporary Rent Regulation

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent days many of us have read of seniors facing increases of up to 50 per cent from landlords eager to hike rents before the crisis forces the government to intervene. They are encouraged by a party that's had a long and comfortable relationship with landlords and a Premier who states that he sees no need to put a brake on the market. With our economy under strain on many fronts Albertans find it hard to understand, as I do, how a handful of owners interested only in private profit have chosen to exact the maximum from fellow citizens irrespective of social cost and callous to human need.

1:20

If this situation is not addressed, the consequences will be far reaching. It will signal that gouging is acceptable and that there is no economic law beyond the law of the jungle. It will send a message that the good life in Alberta is limited to those who have it made already. It will confirm to those already living on the edge that the only limits are what they can get away with and that crime

has two levels: those who work the streets, and those who work the system.

This is not an example we want to set or an advantage Albertans are proud of. A government that permits this conduct is neither progressive nor conservative. It lacks the foresight to oversee an expanding future or the social values that guided us in the past.

Henry Ford and Conrad Black both saw the need for measures to curb excesses of the market not out of sentimentality but realism. They recognized that a society in which some cannot participate costs producers as well as consumers and is not a stable society.

The word "repentance" did not originally have to do with religion. Metanoia meant to see the big picture and to change accordingly. That is the kind of vision and adjustment we need in Alberta before the greed of some consumes us all.

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

Mental Health Week

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. May 7 to 13 has been proclaimed national Mental Health Week in Canada. Mental health is a crucial component of our overall health and is an essential resource for living. It influences how we feel, how we perceive, how we think, communicate, and understand. Without good mental health people are not able to reach their full potential or play an active role in society.

Mental health issues are wide ranging, from enhancing our emotional well-being and treating and preventing severe mental illness to the prevention of suicide. The government of Alberta has played a role and will continue to play a role in ensuring the delivery of mental health services in this province. Strengthening treatment of mental illness in the community supports Premier Stelmach's plan to improve Albertans' quality of life.

Mental illness has a profound impact on our society. It affects individuals of all ages, all cultures, and all educational and income levels. Mr. Speaker, in Canada mental illness affects 1 in 5 people and strikes early in life, with the highest prevalence in youth ages 15 to 24. A million Canadians live with a severe or persistent mental illness. In addition, approximately 8 per cent of adults will experience major depression at some point in their lives. Almost one-half of those who feel they have suffered from depression or anxiety have never gone to see a doctor about this problem. Stigma or discrimination attached to mental illness presents a serious barrier in today's society.

But the good news, Mr. Speaker, is that mental illness can be treated. The Alberta government is committed to advancing mental health in the province. It's part of the focus on overall wellness, to promote and improve individual and community health.

The Alberta Mental Health Board advances mental health in Alberta through a number of initiatives, including advocacy, policy advice, working with the regional health authorities and stakeholders. In raising awareness of Mental Health Week, the Alberta Mental Health Board in co-operation with several partners published an online book at amhb.ab.ca.

Thank you.

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

Temporary Rent Regulation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Every day, as this government scrambles to justify an uncaring and uncompassionate response to Alberta's housing crisis, it becomes increasingly clear

that this government just doesn't care about working Albertans.

The government claims that it is taking a balanced, holistic approach to the problem. Yesterday the minister said that he needs to understand the situation from the side of the landlords that are gouging. If this government wants to understand the impact that the failure of our rental market is having, the minister doesn't need to turn to the landlords for insight. He needs to ask people like Doreen Fiddler, a senior in my riding who received a rental notice for \$1,000 and is now looking for a new place to live. He needs to stop taking direction from megalandlords like Boardwalk and start listening to the thousands of Albertans from across the province who have told him very clearly that they want temporary rent increase protection.

The Premier had an opportunity to show leadership on this issue. The Affordable Housing Task Force did some excellent work and made some very good recommendations. But the Premier dropped the ball. His failure to protect tenants was confirmed when a meeting of 1,400 well-heeled Conservative Party members voted against compassion by voting against temporary rent controls.

The housing crisis is a mess, there's no question. I hope the Premier is up to the job of fixing it, but so far we haven't been given much reason for optimism.

There is no excuse for this government to be caught off guard by this crisis. Calgarians have been getting hit with \$1,000 and even \$2,000 rent increases for the better part of a year. Last summer the NDP was already telling the government that it needed to act quickly to implement temporary rent guidelines and create a ministry of housing to deal with this complex issue. The government's failure to act has seriously hurt families across the province.

The Speaker: I'm afraid I must now proceed to the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Nuclear Power

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Times have changed. Nuclear energy is a non greenhouse gas emitting power source that can effectively replace fossil fuels and satisfy Canada's growing demand for energy. Nuclear power plants are a practical option for producing clean, cost-effective, reliable, and safe baseload power in the Alberta oil sands.

Nuclear energy is affordable. According to the Canadian Energy Research Institute nuclear is one of the most cost-effective energy sources available. At less than 5 cents per kilowatt hour nuclear energy is competitive with coal and natural gas yet has the benefit of not emitting greenhouse gases.

Given that seven CANDU reactors built in South Korea, China, and Romania over the past 15 years have been completed on time and on budget, as was the most recent Pickering unit refurbishment, it's clear that nuclear power plants are highly reliable and cost-effective.

Nuclear energy is safe. In 1979 a partial reactor core meltdown at Three Mile Island frightened people. At the time no one noticed that Three Mile Island was a success story. The concrete containment structure prevented radiation from escaping into the environment. There was no injury or death among the public or nuclear workers. This was the only serious accident in the history of nuclear energy in the west, Mr. Speaker.

Spent nuclear fuel is not waste. Recycling spent fuel, which contains 95 per cent of its original energy, will greatly reduce the need for treatment and disposal.

Nuclear power plants are not vulnerable to terrorist attack. The 1.5-metre thick reinforced concrete containment vessel protects contents from the outside as well as from the inside. Even if a

jumbo jet did crash into a reactor and breach the containment, the reactor would not explode, Mr. Speaker.

Nuclear weapons are no longer inextricably linked to the nuclear power plants. Centrifuge technology now allows nations to produce weapons-grade plutonium without first . . .

The Speaker: I'd like to thank the hon. member.

head:

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee advises that its consideration of the following private bill will be deferred to June 5, 2007: Bill Pr. 1, CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act.

The committee recommends that the following private bill not proceed: Bill Pr. 2, Crest Leadership Centre Act.

Mr. Speaker, I request the concurrence of the Assembly in this recommendation.

The Speaker: All hon. members in favour of the report, please say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Those opposed, please say no.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Speaker: It's carried.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Temporary Rent Regulation

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The record of this government is just filled with double standards. Yesterday we saw that intervening to help those hurt by failed agricultural markets is good; intervening to help renters keep their homes is bad. This government appears ready, even eager to intervene in markets just before elections or to paper over their own mistakes, but they will not stand up for renters. It's a double standard. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why his government has spent billions of public dollars over the years on the natural gas rebate program to protect people from a failed energy market but refuses to provide real protection for renters in a failed housing market?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I informed the House that we have put in place \$285 million over three years for affordable housing. We're following up with any renter, any person that would be displaced by either rent increases or any other issue. We don't want to see families on the street, and that's why our Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry has considerable dollars, millions of dollars, in her budget to take care of those individuals. As per the natural gas market it's the North American market, and we've been living with it for the last – I don't know – probably 15 years at least.

1:30

Dr. Taft: Well, we could live with a little better rent protection as well, Mr. Premier.

There are certain services that Albertans simply need, and government has a role to play to ensure that those services are available, but with this government there's a double standard. Can the Premier explain why this government requires automobile insurance companies to get provincial approval before raising auto insurance premiums but refuses to put in place temporary protection against rent gouging by landlords? Why the double standard?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, car insurance is something that's mandatory. You can't drive a car unless you have car insurance.

With respect to housing there are many different areas of housing that this plan of ours covers. There's homelessness, those that perhaps because of medical conditions or whatever are living in tents or whatever. We want to make sure that we have money in place to give to municipalities to support them. Then there are the working poor. We're doing whatever we can through the various programs we have to look after them. Also with respect to those looking to buy single dwellings, we want to put more land up for sale.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, where is the moral leadership? Where is the moral leadership?

This government's claim that they won't impose a temporary rent regulation because the market forces will fix everything rings hollow. There is yet another double standard. To the Premier: can the Premier explain why regulated utility providers are required to apply to the EUB for rate increases, to quote the government website, "to ensure that customers receive safe and reliable service at just and reasonable rates," but this government refuses to provide renters with even temporary protection so they can keep their homes?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if the leader doesn't support transmission operators going to the AEUB, tell us that. If he wants us to change the law, then tell us because I'm not quite sure what you're trying to get at here. You're mixing apples with oranges and with grapes, quite frankly.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister responsible for housing asked the opposition to forward to him any concerns from Albertans who are at risk of losing their homes due to unaffordable rent increases. Today we have 23 people sitting in the public gallery who would very much like to make their concerns known to this minister. For each of these people there are hundreds of others, perhaps thousands of others, who are living in fear of the next rent increase due to this government's refusal to develop a real solution to this problem. To the minister of housing: will the minister follow up on his words to hear the concerns of Albertans who are experiencing unaffordable rent increases, and will he meet with these 23 people?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, yes.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry read out a phone number in

this House for Albertans to call if “they’ve had a cost imposed on them” and need support. Well, what callers encounter when they dial this number is nothing less than a runaround, nothing that will help them today. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: can the minister confirm that the number she read out in the Legislature yesterday and invited people in distress to call offers no, none, immediate support for tenants facing unaffordable rent increases?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, if the number has given people that impression, that is something that we have to correct. We have in fact offered that people can contact any number of the 59 Alberta Works offices to speak with somebody, to talk to them about their issues. We’re looking at those renters that are in danger of or at risk of eviction, and we would hope to hear from them. I will be doing a check almost immediately, I am sure, with that question. We’ll find out just exactly why they are receiving that kind of information if, in fact, that’s the case. We want to get this right, and we will be working until it is right.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Surely the minister knows her own programs are not set up in the way that she described.

To the Premier. This government continues to imply that stories of Albertans who are placed at risk of losing their homes are isolated. Well, they are far from isolated. The constituencies of the Official Opposition and, no doubt, many of the government MLAs have been flooded with calls from concerned residents every day. Will the Premier admit that this government’s refusal to help out the countless tenants at risk of losing their homes is un-Albertan and implement a temporary rent regulation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we’ve debated this considerably. There’s a bill coming before the House over the next couple of days, I believe. So there’ll be ample time to debate and take positions in terms of the opposition position on it and, of course, the government position, and one of the privileges is to be able to get together in this Legislative Assembly and debate the merits of the bill that’s coming forward.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everybody needs a home, and Alberta Liberals know that the affordable housing crisis is too important to get bogged down in ideology. Real-world problems affecting real people need practical solutions. Ideological responses make real-world, real people problems worse. To the Premier: given the massive, punishing rent hikes my constituents have faced and continue to face and since we’ve already established that temporary rent regulations could not make a rental vacancy situation this bad any worse, would the Premier share with this House what possible reason he could have other than enslavement to Conservative ideology for refusing to bring in temporary rent regulations?

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, Mr. Speaker, no matter how they try to twist the words and try and get everybody upset here, we’ve made a good decision in terms of increasing the number of housing units. In fact, for 3.3 million people in this province we by far have the largest increase, no matter how you measure it, per capita, however you want to do it, close to 52,000. So that means that every time a person moves from a rental unit into a single dwelling, they free up

more space in the rental units. This is one area that we’re going to continually pursue with municipalities and, as well, with the federal government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, one of the most disturbing elements of the affordable housing crisis is the Conservatives’ repeated allegation that they’re listening to Albertans. Clearly, they’re not listening to Calgarians, and Calgarians are getting that message loud and clear. But whether it’s Calgary or Edmonton or Grande Prairie or Hinton or any one of a dozen other cities and towns, how can the Premier justify taking temporary rent regulations out of the solution mix when renters so desperately need short-term protection to bridge the gap until we can create a supply of affordable housing?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again wrong information. As a candidate for the leadership I recognized the issue of the critical shortage of housing. As tens of thousands of people move into this province, they need a place to live. That’s why we’ve focused on this priority of increasing the number of units in the province and also working with the municipalities to co-operate with each other to free up more developed land for more housing and looking at other creative solutions within the municipalities that will increase the number of living spaces in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Taylor: And in the meantime, Mr. Speaker, constituents like this one, one of my constituents, Candace Loken, a well-educated 59-year-old injured worker, continue to suffer. She gets by on disability payments of \$700 a month, which she supplements by using her savings and dipping into her RSPs. Her rent is about to increase by 30 per cent. How can the Premier say that his government has even begun to deal with the affordable housing crisis when Ms Loken has to choose between paying the rent and getting therapy for her pain? How many units of affordable housing has his plan brought on stream since April 24 if it’s so good? Where’s the Alberta advantage for Ms Loken?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, for the situation that the member just introduced, those are the kind of people that we’re reaching out to to ensure that we can support them during this period of the housing shortage. I know that our minister will check with the hon. member to get the name and check into that particular situation.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Megalandlord Boardwalk corporation’s 2006 annual report is quite revealing. It indicates a target rent of \$1,604 a month before investing in new rental units. Boardwalk sees an opportunity, as the report observes, that “demand for rental accommodation also remains high as affordability for home purchase continues to decline and prospective first time home-owners are increasingly priced out of the market.” In other words, they have a captive market, and they’re going to jack up rents to take advantage of it. My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier support what Boardwalk is doing, and if not, what is he going to do to stop it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the company that the hon. leader of the third party is bringing forward is a housing and apartment complex holding company. Take it up with the company. If you want to

check in terms of what their audited financial statements are, you can talk to them. There are many people in the province of Alberta, many builders, many landlords, that are providing housing. There are so many not-for-profit organizations that we're supporting in this province. He brings up one company there. I don't know what he's trying to attempt to do here in the House. Is he saying that they're doing something improper? I haven't heard him say that.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I can't believe that answer from the Premier, what little of it I actually understood. I heard him say that I should take it up with the company if they're planning to jack up rents because of this government's failed policy. Mr. Premier, what is that if not an absolute abdication of your responsibility as Premier of this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Again it's an absolute twist on words. You didn't mention that they're going to be jacking up rents right across all the units they own by \$1,600 a month. You know, it's one thing to ask a question, but it's another thing to start twisting these things to try and embarrass a company or any other developer in this province. They constantly do that here, and they're wondering why people back off building more units? It's because of people like that.

Mr. Mason: There are some of us in this House that are at least trying to do our job.

Now, this report goes on to say, "In 2007, we expect our Alberta assets to continue to shine, remaining the main engine of our Trust's growth." In other words, they're expecting rents to continue to climb in this province, and they're going to make a big, fat profit from it. Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Premier why he didn't see this coming. I'll quote from the report again. "Our market fundamentals are based on simple supply and demand forces which are fairly easily predicted." Why didn't the government predict this?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the success of government policies in the early '90s in terms of paying off the debt and putting in place a very predictable, sustainable investment climate in this province has attracted tens of thousands of new Albertans to this province, over 500,000, if not closer to 600,000, coming to the province of Alberta. They're coming from other provinces. They're coming from other parts of the country. And do you know why? Because they can find a job here. They can actually raise their family and lead to retirement. There's something that was said to me the other day. Alberta is the only province where a grandfather and parents and their children can stay in the same province. Children don't have to leave to seek their fortune someplace else. They stay right here.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party will table the appropriate copies of the appropriate document at tablings.

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

Deerfoot Trail Improvements

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that Calgary is a major contributor to Alberta's strength. Given that it has had a big population increase, many large construction projects everywhere, and heavy traffic congestion every day, some of my constituents have asked me what our government does for Calgary. For example, they experience traffic problems on Deerfoot Trail, and they want to know if our government is spending enough to solve the problem of the Deerfoot Trail. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Can you, hon. minister, tell my

constituents what your department is doing to deal with the Deerfoot Trail situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're constantly reviewing the situation on the Deerfoot and always working to make improvements on the Deerfoot. Since taking over the road in 2000, we've spent over \$200 million on improvements to the Deerfoot. We've extended the road to the south, built new interchanges, and removed stop lights to improve traffic flow. To address the high volume of traffic on Deerfoot, we're investing hundreds of millions of dollars in the northeast and northwest sections of the ring road, and both of these projects are under construction as we speak.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very good that the province embarked on construction of the costly ring road around Calgary and took over the costly maintenance of Deerfoot Trail, and 5 cents of the 9 cents per litre fuel tax in Calgary is for Calgary. Certainly, it lightens the tax burden for Calgarians. But given that traffic safety is a vital issue, my supplemental question is to the same minister. What are you doing to improve the safety of the Deerfoot Trail?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of projects to increase efficiency and safety on the Deerfoot Trail. We're improving the Peigan Trail interchange to make getting on and off Deerfoot a lot safer. We're adding extra lanes and doing improvements in the Beddington Trail area and to the interchange to make this part safer. We're looking at major changes to the intersection with Glenmore Trail in conjunction with city projects to make this part of the Deerfoot function much safer. Finally, we've installed a new post and cable barrier system to the north end of Deerfoot Trail to prevent vehicles from crossing the meridian.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that our government spent lots of taxpayers' dollars on the cable barrier along the centre of the Deerfoot Trail. My question is to the same minister. What evidence is there that this safety device is working?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the new barriers got their first test last week. While I'm not overly encouraged to hear that this first test happened so quickly, I'm very pleased that the new barrier system performed as expected. It prevented a vehicle from crossing the median and crashing into oncoming traffic. Injuries to all those involved and damage to vehicles was minimal compared to what usually happens in head-on collisions and at highway speeds like they travel on the Deerfoot. So this new system has performed well, and I'm confident that we may be using it in a lot more areas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Temporary Rent Regulation (continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's version of managing growth is to add locomotives to the runaway train of the economy. Rents have been increasing in my constituency of

Edmonton-Centre for over a year now, but not one new rental unit has been built to capitalize on this situation. What we have is a complete failure of the rental marketplace. My questions are to the minister of housing. The minister plans to meet with landlords who are gouging their tenants, but I'd like to know what definition the government is using to decide how much of an increase constitutes gouging. Twenty per cent? Fifty per cent? Two hundred per cent? What is it?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that in Alberta in the postsecondary education segment alone Alberta is responding with over a thousand student units.

The members opposite talk about ideologies, and I just want to talk about facts. The key is to create a greater supply of units available that will reduce the market pressure that we are facing. Putting regulations and controls that will reduce this incentive to build new supply will hurt exactly the people that the members opposite are trying to help. [interjections]

The Speaker: I recognize one hon. member to ask a question. I recognize somebody to respond. Then all I hear are catcalls. If I recognize you to ask a question, let's have the courtesy of hearing the answer.

The hon. member.

1:50

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I still want a definition of gouging.

To the same minister. Joy is a new mom living with her five-month-old baby in Edmonton-Centre, but even with a subsidy 70 per cent of her income is used to pay the rent. Joy recently became a Canadian citizen but is struggling to make ends meet. How does the minister expect to draw people from other provinces and countries to live and work in Alberta when they may face the same situation as Joy?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what rent supplements are about. Rent supplements are about trying to provide affordable housing for individuals that are in need, for individuals that need support. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, if the opposition does not want to hear the answer, then that's okay.

The Speaker: Go on, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister. This once-a-year limit on increases without the rest of the incentives to create housing and provide supports is penalizing the few good landlords I have who were raising rents by reasonable amounts over time. Why did the government cherry-pick through the package of recommendations from the task force rather than implementing a comprehensive plan that would actually work?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, on one hand the member of the opposition wants to provide incentives. On the other hand, the member of the opposition wants to present controls. You cannot have both. If you want to have an increase of rentals, you cannot have regulations that will suffocate growth.

We as a government are dealing with the issues of individuals that have challenges in paying for rent. Mr. Speaker, \$285 million of new money.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

School Board Deficits

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Education. It is a fact that in Alberta we spend more on education per capita than any other province in Canada, yet I'm concerned when I read that almost half our school boards may be in a deficit position. Now, the minister has said that there were no deficits. The opposition says that over 30 boards show deficits. Who's right? If there are deficits, can the minister explain to this House why school boards are running a deficit when our allocation is the highest in the country?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question because while some 30 school boards, as has been mentioned in this House, are currently running an annual deficit, with the exception of two boards we have accumulated surpluses with those school boards that total about \$220 million. The only way that you can access that accumulated surplus is if you run an annual deficit. So to say that the school boards are in a debt position is sort of like you, Mr. Speaker, being a hundred dollars overdrawn in your chequing account and having a thousand dollars in your savings account and saying that you're in debt.

Rev. Abbott: Well, that clears things up a little bit, Mr. Speaker. But to the same minister. Several school boards in my constituency have expressed concern to me that the 3 per cent grant in this year's budget will not meet the demands in their district. Can the minister help me in explaining to my school boards how they can get by on 3 per cent?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we did increase operating grants by 3 per cent over last year. What hasn't been mentioned is the substantial increases that have gone into English as a Second Language programs, early childhood services for mild and moderate disabilities, career and technology funding that has increased substantially, not to mention the \$25 million good-faith initiative for recruitment of teachers. So overall our increase, including the in-year funding of last year, is over 5 per cent, and if you take the budget documents that were tabled in this House last year and the exact same budget documents tabled this year, the increase in education spending is almost 10 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very eye-opening. My final supplementary to the same minister. More than 50 school districts in the province are facing salary negotiations with the teachers' union this fall, and again several school districts have expressed concern to me that we may be facing a number of strikes as students head back to school in September. Can the minister tell this House what he plans to do about the situation?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the reason some of the school boards are expressing concerns to the member is because of some of the irresponsible comments that are being made out there by those who are predicting doom and gloom in the labour negotiations before they even start. So I'm confident. I don't believe the majority of teachers in this province want to go on strike, so I would suggest: let's allow the local school boards and the local ATAs to negotiate. Unlike some of the opposition members I'm confident that we're going to have a situation where . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Rental Increases

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week my constituency office received 300 copies – 300 copies – of a land-use framework publication from Sustainable Resource Development. This is a worthwhile exercise which the Official Opposition has been calling for for some time. However, housing affordability is by far the number one issue in Edmonton-Rutherford right now. Landlords are confused about their responsibilities, tenants are panicking, yet when my staff asked for only 50 copies of the task force report on housing, we were informed by Municipal Affairs that we could only have five because of printing costs. That's simply not enough to meet the demand. My question is for the Premier. What immediate steps are you taking to alleviate the confusion and chaos that your government has created by mishandling its response to the task force recommendations? Can we get some more copies of the report?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, there's absolutely no question that there is confusion being sown by some people in this House. There's absolutely no question. The intention of this government has been very clear from the start. We will help the people that we are obligated to help, the people that need our help. We have responded in a very responsible manner to the report, and I can assure the hon. member that we will personally send over as many copies as he would like to his office should he bring it the attention of our office.

Mr. R. Miller: We already asked, and they said no. I will table the document later, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Marilyn Sjulstad is in the public gallery today. She is on AISH, a widow on a fixed income. Her survivor income is deducted from her AISH funds dollar for dollar. Her apartment rent has increased \$230 in the last nine months, and she fully expects that there will be another substantial increase soon. She's asked for and received the subsidized housing application forms from Capital Housing; however, she's worried because friends have told her that she has too much money in the bank, and her car is too new to receive the subsidy. Marilyn has written a question for the Premier, and it is this: what is your government going to do about the outrageous rent increases that people are dealing with?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we are bringing forward legislation – I'm sure we're going to debate it this week – about putting stability into the number of rent increases that anyone is subject to. If the lady has already received a rent increase this year, then she won't be worried about another increase for at least a year, which does give her an opportunity and every Albertan a chance to plan their response to the particular situation they're in.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, Janis Stewart writes the following: living on a fixed income in a modest Edmonton apartment building in the vicinity of her terminally ill parent, having chronic illness, and confronting negligible accommodation options, she has been penalized with two rent increases in the past six months that make a total of more than 20 per cent. Her question for the Premier: will the hon. Premier reconsider his decision, which directly contributes to expanding the divide between the advantaged and disadvantaged Albertans, and impose a ceiling to allowable rent increases?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's kind of strange that we're being accused of living in our political ideology that doesn't allow us to see their political ideology. The biggest difference is that ours works, and their's doesn't. We have history on our side.

We've got the simple facts that this government isn't ready to say to people: we're going to take what's yours without compensation. We're going to try and deal with those, and we'll be happy to. Like the hon. minister said yesterday, don't just bring it up here and grandstand and thump the desk. Bring the name forward, and let the different ministers responsible help the people when they need help instead of keeping the information on their desk until they can stand here and try and show Albertans that they really care when, in fact, obviously, the way they treat the people and grandstand is irresponsible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Crown Prosecutors

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent media story suggested a concern about the high workload and low level of experience of Alberta's Crown prosecutors. My questions are all for the Minister of Justice. Can the minister tell me if there is cause for concern?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the outset let me say that, in fact, our Crown prosecutors are under significant pressure. We would like our average level of experience to be greater than it is, but let's put it in context. Alberta Justice is the largest law firm in the province. We have about 400 lawyers, 250 of whom are Crown prosecutors, and like all businesses in the province, we are fighting with the market to attract and retain good candidates. At this point in time, however, all of our Crown prosecutors are professionals, and the average experience level is 11 years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you tell us why the workload of Crown prosecutors in Alberta is so high?

Mr. Stevens: In 2004, when I became the Minister of Justice, the Crown prosecutors had the second highest level of workload in the country. The number of files has increased since that point in time. The complexity of the files has increased as a result of organized crime, as a result of Internet crime, as a result of economic crime, and also as a result of increased Charter defences. But what we are doing is addressing that. Over the last two years we've increased the number of prosecutors by 25, and we also have in this year's budget an additional 10. I can tell you also, Mr. Speaker, that we are in the process of taking a look at our pay schedule and benefits with respect to the Crown.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: can the minister tell us if this issue is placing the administration of justice in Alberta at risk?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I'm aware of absolutely no significant cases which have been impacted as a result of this particular matter. In fact, the Crown continues to have a very good success rate with respect to the prosecution, and there have

been a number of significant cases in recent history where we have been successful, which have been on the front pages of our newspapers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Temporary Rent Regulation

(continued)

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government continues to defend what most Albertans see as a failure to address the affordable housing crisis. Simply throwing lots of money at a problem will not fix it. There needs to be a plan, and integral to that plan are solutions to short-term rent gouging that our constituents are faced with. Delores Austin has seen her rent increase by over \$200 a year. Renate Van Dorsser is looking at a \$300 increase. The list goes on and on, from seniors to students to families just trying to get by. They want answers, and they're watching. To the Premier: why is the government not helping decent, hard-working Albertans keep their homes in this out-of-control market by implementing temporary rent guidelines limiting the percentage that rents can go up by? Why? And what exactly is this \$285 million that the government keeps talking about? How is going to be split up, and what exactly is it going to pay for?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

An Hon. Member: Great question.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and it is a good question. The \$285 million is new money: \$100 million for the new municipal sustainability housing program – this is all increases, by the way – \$96 million in enhanced capital to increase affordable housing units, a \$13 million increase for homeless support, a \$3 million increase for provincial homeless initiative, a \$14.3 million increase for rent supplement programs, a \$4.3 million increase for housing providers and special-purpose housing, \$45 million allocated to Wood Buffalo in response to the Radke report, \$7 million to the new homeless and eviction fund, \$2.5 million for the new Alberta transition housing initiative, and . . .

The Speaker: And we'll go on.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 15, 2006, this Premier issued a so-called mandate letter to his new Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing outlining priorities and setting out the Premier's expectations of his new housing minister and his conduct. In terms of the housing crisis the letter included only one directive: to establish a housing task force to develop a plan to increase the availability of affordable housing. That was it. Obviously, the Premier feels that this has been accomplished, even if most Albertans feel differently and even though the minister came up with a plan that ignored over half of the recommendations of his own task force. To the Premier: are you satisfied with your housing minister's performance on this issue? Are you comfortable defending his and your entire government's way of handling this file in general and this housing crisis in particular? Are you comfortable with his performance?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I

need to say that, yes, in the mandate letter one of the mandates was to establish a housing task force. The mandate letter does not suggest that we should establish a housing task force and do nothing about it. The focus of the government with the \$285 million did exactly that. We took the housing task force and looked at the primary recommendations, and we have addressed them. So if the member opposite would look at the housing task force, look at what the primary recommendations were . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thirty-eight of the 52 recommendations, Mr. Speaker, were ignored. Thirty-eight.

No matter what we hear on the government side, there is no denying that thousands of Albertans feel that this government has failed them, people like Pat and James Arnott and Marilyn Caskey from Edmonton-McClung, who are in the gallery today. One sentence in the housing minister's mandate letter reads: "We need to be out from behind our desks, listening to what is truly important to Albertans." Well, we all know that the Premier listened to the Tory party faithful at the convention on the weekend when they rejected calls to protect renters. Given the massive Public Affairs Bureau, which answers to the Premier, will the Premier now try to listen to Albertans at large, who may not necessarily share the views of his party or caucus, and instruct the Public Affairs Bureau to immediately seek Albertans' public opinion on this issue, ask if temporary rent guidelines should be brought in, and ask whether the public approves of how you guys handled this situation?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we just had a large gathering of our party members. They overwhelmingly said: "We respect what happened. We know that short-term solutions aren't the answer to this, that increasing capacity of all kinds of housing is really the only financially and morally responsible solution to what we face."

You know, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre said what a terrible thing it was that rents were going up in downtown Edmonton. Compared to the cities around the world, to have a vibrant and active and expanding downtown centre is a good thing. Most of them have been abandoned. Alberta has created an opportunity for many cities to expand and to have their downtowns vibrant. I, unfortunately, live in her riding.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Homeless and Eviction Fund

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we heard the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry tell the House that the homeless and eviction fund will help people facing eviction because of huge rent increases. Well, we took the minister's advice and called 1-866-644-5135 about this fund, and we were told – I actually would like to play the recording, but I know I wouldn't get away with it. The minister would like to know. Let me quote. This is the answer given with that phone number: currently there is no way to access anything yet; they're working on it, and that's about all I can tell you. We asked when the fund would be ready and were told: unfortunately, they don't give us a time frame. Now, my question to the minister is simply this: why would the minister mislead thousands of renters facing eviction by promising funds that weren't there?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, clearly, I also indicated that if people had

difficulty, they could go to any of 59 offices or call any of 59 offices in Alberta and speak to them. We've been working on the guidelines with our ministry of municipal affairs and also our own ministry. We're on the threshold of announcing exactly how they would apply.

Let's take a look at the other fund we have in place. Mr. Speaker, for those that are low-income, when I spoke in this House about a hundred million dollars that is available to provide housing assistance, there is already a program in place. The fund that is going to be established is for those that are . . .

The Speaker: I have to call on the hon. member now. Hon. member, please.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the government's own phone number that this minister quoted. There are thousands of Albertans facing a crisis. When they make a call and something like this happens, how can the government have any credibility? How can this minister have any credibility when she stands up in this House and says to phone this number and that's the type of message that they get?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, a previous questioner highlighted the same issue, and I have been asking our staff to immediately look into why that answer was given. What I can say to Albertans is that we hope that by at least Friday everybody will have an understanding of what the criteria are and know how it will be administered. The one point that I want to make quite clearly is that for those that are actually low-income, there is a fund that is well understood. This new fund on homeless and eviction is a fund that we have to be very clear is not intended to trespass onto the other particular fund. We will make it very clear how that fund will be expended this week.

2:10

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the minister said that she didn't know. So this government is totally incompetent. They can't even plan their own eviction fund. When they stand up in the House and tell people to call, that's the type of message that they give. This eviction fund is something that came from the task force, but it was part of having rent guidelines in place. All this eviction fund is going to be is a supplement for landlords. Would the minister acknowledge that?

Ms Evans: No, I will not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Highway 13

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday, April 20, about 80 people showed up for a meeting in the little town of Rosalind. Those concerned citizens were there to find out about the timelines for fixing the atrocious conditions of highway 13 from Killam to Legacy Junction outside of Camrose. That major provincial artery is hardly passable in the rain because of the ruts worn in the road, and most ambulances avoid the road altogether when possible because it's rough enough to endanger the health of sensitive patients being transported to Camrose. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: when will this road be fixed to the standards of a major provincial artery?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for his question because this is a very, very serious issue. My department is very aware of the problems with highway 13. We are in the process of purchasing the right-of-way right now to do the eventual widening and reconstruction of the road. While this project is not in our current year's plan right now, we are taking the initial steps towards improving the program right away.

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, it was brought to my attention by a staff member of the department that the minister confirmed to the county of Camrose that there could be done a rut fill and thin lift overlay as a temporary solution to make the road tolerable and passable until such time as the necessary re-engineering and development of the road could be completed. My constituents would like to know: when can this important rut fill and thin lift overlay be completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, our plan is to try to get the rut fill done for sure this year and the thin overlay if possible. If not, it will be on our priority list for next year. In the meantime, as soon as the weather permits, our maintenance contractor is going to be out there doing whatever he can to get the ruts out of the road now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister assure me and my constituents that performing the temporary measure of a rut fill and thin lift overlay will not delay the major construction work of widening the road and rebuilding the base, that is so desperately needed to bring the road up to its proper status as a major provincial transportation artery?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the rut fill is actually the first phase of the construction. It will not delay the eventual widening and reconstruction. The fill and overlay are meant to give motorists a better road surface until we can get the major project done, and it will have no effect on the timing of getting the major project done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

Temporary Rent Regulation (continued)

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Jim Sexsmith is an 80-year-old veteran seated in the members' gallery who is still very active in my constituency. He's always advocating for the underdog. If he feels that there's an injustice, he always complains about it. He writes letters, e-mails, makes phone calls to try to sort things out. Now that his rent has increased 20 per cent, he's advocating for this government to do something. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: what does the minister have to say to Jim, who is afraid that he will have nowhere to live?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has responded to the housing task force and the recommendations that were made by that housing task force. [interjections] I hear some comments from members opposite. There were, of course, some recommendations that weren't accepted. Those recommendations were not accepted because they were already being done. I want to say that we do have in place the support for those individuals.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister. Jim has lived in the same apartment for 19 years, but he cannot afford to pay an extra \$125 per

month and cannot find an affordable housing option with an elevator to accommodate his disability. How does the government's policy help Jim today?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not know Jim's individual situation, but as I have said in this House before, we do have a program of rent supplement to try to address those concerns. So I ask that Jim contact either my office or 422-0122, which is the rent supplement program, and we would very much try to deal with his concerns.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister again: can the minister tell Jim how this government's policies will relieve the stress, uncertainty, and burden of moving for seniors and people with disabilities?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would love to be able to help him to the best of my ability. If he will contact our office, I would be very happy to try to deal with his challenges.

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

Drug Treatment Courts

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Illegal drugs and alcohol addiction not only affect public safety, but they place a significant economic burden on all segments of society. Drug-related crime cannot be reduced without first addressing underlying addictions. By emphasizing treatment rather than incarceration, drug treatment courts can significantly reduce the tremendous burden of substance abuse and its related health/socioeconomic costs on society. A pilot drug treatment court was launched in Edmonton in March 2005, and the pilot was a success and resulted in cost savings. My first question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. How does this minister propose that judges in this province will actually decide who needs access to drug treatment as a provision of incarceration, and will a professional needs assessment take place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, solutions to substance abuse are very complex, and one of the promising areas that we're working on are these pilot drug courts, particularly the one in Edmonton. The situation is that those who get into the program basically have an alternative to incarceration. If the treatment is completed, those who complete the program end up with a criminal record but do not serve jail time. The people who are selected for this particular program are carefully screened. First of all, they must apply. The files are reviewed by federal and provincial prosecutors to see if the offenders do in fact qualify. The eligibility criteria for participation include that the crime committed was not violent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Drug treatment courts have the potential to facilitate timely treatment responses to individuals with substance abuse problems. Research tells us that drug courts have experienced varied success in terms of long-term outcomes for participants and that there is also limited information available on the cost-effectiveness of this intervention. Again to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: from this minister's experience what have the major issues across the country been with respect to drug

treatment courts, and are these issues being addressed adequately in Alberta?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, basically the question is whether or not they're effective. I think that the important information I need to get before you and the members of the House is the eligibility with respect to the matter. First of all, those who get into the program are ones where the crime committed was not violent, did not involve children, and the offender is not associated with a gang. In addition, an addiction assessment must be completed before the application is approved, and the assessment determines that if the crime was motivated by addiction, it could be prevented in the future if that addiction is not present.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Solutions to substance abuse are complex and need to include promising alternatives such as drug treatment courts. However, experience in the field of drug treatment is a primary focus here. Historically AADAC has provided treatment to individuals referred through the regular court system and now provides specialized addictions treatment to those identified through the Edmonton drug treatment court. Could the Minister of Justice and Attorney General please expand on the role an agency such as AADAC or other organizations would have in the preliminary development of a drug treatment court and in implementation?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta we have the benefit of AADAC, which has experience in excess of 50 years. In other jurisdictions the communities, in fact, establish a specific program for these courts. Here in Alberta we get to use AADAC and the services that they have. That obviously enhances the effective nature of this. There's no doubt that the use of existing community facilities in courts like drug courts or other specialty courts is absolutely essential in those courts being effective.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 84 questions and answers today.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am actually continuing to table some signatures from all over the province – today it's 419 – calling on the government to

take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Thank you.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. leader of the third party, you have a tabling?

Mr. Mason: I do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I would like to table excerpts from the 2006 annual report of Boardwalk Real Estate Investment Trust. The report trumpets the opportunity for rental increases because of Alberta's distorted housing market.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from Giancarlo Grande of Edmonton. He is writing because he's concerned about rental increases. "For myself the rising rents are causing me great amounts of stress because I live off of AISH."

The second letter is from Linton Delainey. He's sending two letters, one to the Premier and one to Edmonton Mayor Mandel, indicating the urgent need for a province-wide regional governance plan as outlined in the report from the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of the proposal to build a huge 2,800 square foot fab shop in Tofield – this is going to employ over 2,000 temporary foreign workers – and its project profile. I would urge all hon. members to have a look at this.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of correspondence between the constituency office of Edmonton-Rutherford and the office of the manager of the secretariat of the Affordable Housing Task Force, Municipal Affairs and Housing, where Edmonton-Rutherford asked for 50 copies of the housing task force report, and we were told that we could only have five. I look forward to the reversal of that decision.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a single tabling today, which is a letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing responding to the defamatory comments he made to me in this House yesterday. In the letter I reference the attachment of Sessional Paper 331/2007, a letter I wrote to both the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry and to him on April 24, '07, on behalf of my Calgary-Varsity constituents, seeking financial information.

Mr. Speaker, I will continue to forcefully advocate for my constituents . . .

The Speaker: Okay. That's fine.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually have several tablings. The first one is the Canadian Housing Observer report on average rents for two-bedroom apartments for the period '92 to 2005, detailing the Canadian average province by province and for the major metropolitan areas.

The second one is two pages from Rental Market Report: Alberta Highlights, released in December 2006 by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The first one talks about the vacancy rates by apartment type or bedroom type in Alberta's major centres in 2005 and 2006. Then the second one shows the average rental cost, again in the major centres and again by bedroom type, in '05 and '06.

The third one is a letter from Edmonton-McClung constituent Delores Austin, who is here today, talking about rental costs being out of reach for most of the working public and certainly for low-income families on assistance.

My fourth one is another letter from another constituent, Marilyn Caskey, who is here again today, addressed to the minister of municipal affairs and asking: what are people supposed to do in the meantime while waiting for new affordable housing units to be built?

The fifth tabling is a letter from another constituent, Roberta Baert, calling for help from the Premier for people on fixed incomes such as seniors – and she is one herself – indicating that without a percentage cap on allowable rent increases . . .

The Speaker: Let's just table and move on, okay?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Elsalhy: I have two more.

The Speaker: Well, fine. I'm recognizing now the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. I'll come back to you later if you've got some more.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and table two sets of documents. One is a project description of the South Meager geothermal project from Western GeoPower Corp., which could in the near future provide power to 80,000 households in western Canada.

The second is Technologies & Applications in geothermal from Natural Resources Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table five copies today of a document which outlines the accumulated operating surplus of Alberta school boards as of August 31, 2006.

I also want to table five copies of a letter to Mr. Frank Bruseker, the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the response to Written Question 11.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you indeed, Mr. Speaker. I have my two last ones. A handwritten letter from constituent James Arnott blames the government for creating this overheated housing market and refusing to do anything to assist renters. He questions why the Tories are so reluctant to impose rent controls.

The last one is another handwritten letter, from Pat Arnott, questioning: how many people does the term "Alberta boom" apply to? She calls it "a gold rush to poverty." She actually highlights how her rent has increased and the limited income that she is on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister challenged the opposition to share these letters and stories. Mr. Minister, consider yourself served.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

The Speaker: I'm going to remind hon. members again that when it comes to tablings, this is one of the few jurisdictions anywhere that uses the British parliamentary model that allows tablings of

documents other than officially, statutorily required documents. We have to be very careful with this privilege that we have in here. It's meant to table and not to editorialize or give a statement with respect to it. The members have an opportunity in the Routine called Members' Statements. If they want to refer to letters that they've tabled in Members' Statements, that's perfectly fine under that two-minute thing, but here it deals with tablings, and brevity would be very much appreciated.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, pursuant to the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta annual report 2006.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Motions

The Clerk: Government Motion 19, the hon. Mr. Hancock.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe we have agreement in the House that the motion that ought to be put today was slightly different than the one I gave notice of motion on. So with the pleasure of the Speaker, I'd like to test that theory by suggesting that the motion should read:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the Legislative Assembly convene at 7 p.m. for hours 10 to 12 of Committee of Supply on Tuesday, May 8, and that the ministries called for consideration will now be Treasury Board, Health and Wellness, and Municipal Affairs and Housing; and at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, May 9, 2007, for government business; and that hours 13 to 15 of Committee of Supply, scheduled for the afternoon of Thursday, May 10, 2007, be rescheduled to the afternoon of May 16, 2007; and that a revised Committee of Supply schedule be tabled forthwith.

2:30

With the unanimous consent of the House to deal with that, it has the effect of accomplishing what we've discussed, which is to have Committee of Supply this evening be what was intended for tomorrow afternoon, which leaves free tomorrow afternoon and tomorrow evening to debate Bill 34 in second reading and committee and Thursday in the afternoon to hopefully complete committee and perhaps third reading of Bill 34. The Committee of Supply which was previously scheduled for Thursday afternoon would then be held on Wednesday, May 16. There's an afternoon there which will need to be scheduled, and that would be the subject of refiling the schedule for Committee of Supply.

With the consent of the House we'll proceed on that motion. Failing that, I will move the government motion in the order that we gave notice and move an amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair has to assume that there has been some discussion among the House leaders with respect to this matter. So the question that the hon. Government House Leader has: oral notice was given yesterday, and then the Order Paper today has a motion. Now the hon. Government House Leader is amending that motion with the request that we have unanimous consent so that we can go forward, but we also have a debatable motion that hon. members might have an option to debate. On the assumption – on the assumption – that there's agreement in the government caucus,

agreement in the opposition caucus, agreement in the third party caucus, and agreement from the other two members, the chair could ask for unanimous consent now, but if it isn't given . . .

Mr. Hancock: Then, Mr. Speaker, I'd propose to move forward with the motion at hand.

The Speaker: Well, this is a risky business, if the chair is to call the question for unanimous consent. This matter, by the way, has not been circulated to all members. I assume that all members have seen this. Have all members seen this? Okay. On the assumption that all members have seen this motion of the hon. Government House Leader, is there unanimous consent to move to approve Government Motion 19 as amended?

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Then, Government House Leader.

Evening Sitings on May 8 and 9

19. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the Legislative Assembly convene at 8 p.m. for night sittings on Tuesday, May 8, and Wednesday, May 9, 2007.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion. Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, do you want to participate?

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I would like to propose an amendment to the motion, and I have a written copies of the amendment if I could ask one of the pages to circulate them if necessary.

The Speaker: Yes. We'll need that. You can read it into the record as it's being circulated to all members.

Mr. Renner: I move that Government Motion 19 be amended as follows:

- (a) by striking out "8 p.m. for night sittings on Tuesday, May 8," and substituting "7 p.m. for hours 10 to 12 of Committee of Supply on Tuesday, May 8, and that the ministries called for consideration will now be Treasury Board, Health and Wellness, and Municipal Affairs and Housing;"
- (b) by striking out "and Wednesday, May 9, 2007," and substituting "convene at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, May 9, 2007, for government business";
- (c) by adding the following after "government business":
"; that hours 13 to 15 of Committee of Supply, scheduled for the afternoon of Thursday, May 10, 2007, be rescheduled to the afternoon of May 16, 2007; and that a revised Committee of Supply schedule be tabled forthwith."

The Speaker: We will await the circulation of this amendment before proceeding so that all members will know exactly what it is.

Well, hon. members, we have an amendment to a motion, and it's a debatable amendment. Is there anyone who would like to participate in the debate on the amendment?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it was interesting, I thought, that the agreement that had been reached between the three official parties in the House was not agreed to by the House, which requires unanimous consent. I think it's important to say that all members of this House are important and need to be consulted when arrangements are made.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I do want to indicate just a concern at how quickly we have reverted to the old ways of doing things and having debates into the evening. I know that we had agreed as an interim measure to have evening sittings to help deal with the question of the estimates, and we agreed to that and certainly would honour that.

I do believe, Mr. Speaker, that the question of Bill 34 is something that needs a little bit of comment. This is a very, very important bill. It's very critical at this point. It's a very hot public issue now, and I certainly think that it's a matter of considerable urgency for many Albertans who are caught in a very difficult time. It is my view that that bill ought to be debated thoroughly and with full opportunity from all members of the House to participate and for amendments to come forward and receive due consideration. I think it's less than desirable to be having a debate on that bill late into the evenings, when the people who are affected by it are asleep in their beds, presuming that they have beds.

I will not oppose the motion, but I do want to indicate that I think it's very important that we recognize that this bill needs full debate in the light of day and under the scrutiny of the public, and I object to any suggestion that it should be dealt with in very late sittings.

We apparently had got past that and had made decisions that it would not be needed. If the government had been on top of this issue and was well organized, I don't think that it would have been necessary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair has before himself an amendment. There's nothing in here about any bill, so relevancy in this discussion is also important. We're dealing with the amendment.

Would anybody else like to participate in this amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Now, should we call the question on the motion as amended?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: No one wishes to participate, then? Okay.

[Government Motion 19 as amended carried unanimously]

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

Before I call on the hon. minister of municipal affairs to start, I just want to clarify for all the members: I'm circulating Committee of Supply rules for the opposition parties for members on the floor. I'll read it into the record, and you'll be getting a copy.

It's my understanding that the House leaders have reached an agreement, or at least there's no opposition by members of the government, to have opposition caucus staff members on the floor of the Chamber during consideration of departmental estimates. As a result, I'd like to outline the rules which will govern the admission of caucus staff to the floor of the Assembly during Committee of Supply.

Only ongoing staff employed on behalf of a caucus by the

Legislative Assembly Office will be provided with this privilege. I sincerely hope that we will not be asked to interpret the understanding of this last statement. Opposition staff may advise and sit next to or behind the opposition critics; however, they may not speak on the member's behalf or participate in the debate nor respond in any way to the words being spoken in debate.

Officials must meet the accepted dress standard for access to the Chamber. Use of cellular phones is prohibited, but officials may use laptop computers or PDAs in support of their members. Access to the Internet or Legislative Assembly intranet will not be provided. Any official occupying the chair of a member who wishes to address the committee must yield the seat immediately to that member. Each caucus must provide on one day's notice in writing the names and job titles of the officials to be admitted to the Assembly floor to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, with a copy to the Sergeant-at-Arms.

This matter is being dealt with as an administrative interpretation by the Speaker as there is no provision in the Standing Orders to allow participation by opposition officials in the employ of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta on the floor of the Assembly. Standing Order 59.01(3) provides admission to the floor solely for officials of the government. Should a member raise a point of order or a point of privilege with respect to this interpretation, it is probable that the ruling would be in favour of the point raised, and Official Opposition officials would be unable to be on the floor. Needless to say, this procedural matter would be best accommodated by an additional clause in the Standing Orders which would permit such.

So that's basically it. If there are any questions on that, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, Mr. Chair. Are you suggesting, then, that we can't bring our staff in today, that we have to have 24 hours' notice, so we can't start this until tomorrow?

The Chair: If you have a list of the staff that would be brought on, that would be fine.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thanks. So I can, in fact, have a list for today, give it to you, and then away we go.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Mr. Chairman, just one small nit-picking detail, but there actually isn't a House leaders' agreement. I just simply indicated that if the opposition wishes to request, I wouldn't object.

The Chair: Yes, I did point that out. I said that at least there was no opposition from the Government House Leader that I was aware of.

Mr. Hancock: Also, I might indicate, Mr. Chairman, that as a result of this afternoon's question period, at which time there were a number of people in the galleries and members of the opposition asking questions and asking if the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing would meet with them and he'd said that he would, apparently 30 of them have shown up in his office. So I've indicated to the members opposite that we'll have to reverse the order of appearance today. The Minister of Health and Wellness will go first, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will go second.

The Chair: All right. Then if that's all right, I will recognize the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

head: **Main Estimates 2007-08**

Health and Wellness

Mr. Hancock: I made opening remarks on the record the other day, and I'm sure that the hon. members have had an opportunity to peruse them, so rather than take more time, I'll just avail myself of any questions that they might have to ask.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I start the discussion today with Health, I would say to the House leader that, you know, we planned for one thing and we got another. The minister should have known that he has a responsibility here. So, I mean, it just seems like disorganization. Now we have to scramble in our times. I hope that the message is very clear to the government that this is not the way to do business.

Mr. Chairman, to switch gears and go to health, I want to talk about . . .

Mr. Hancock: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are you rising on a point of order?

Point of Order

Order of Business

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Chairman, if the opposition wants to insist on the order – I mean, they're the ones who asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to meet with the 30 people. If the member wants to insist on proceeding in the previous order, I'll have someone go down to the minister's office and indicate that the opposition would rather that he not meet with the people he sent down there and that he should get up here as early as possible. I'm entirely at his disposal.

Mr. Martin: It was not us that asked for the meeting, Mr. Chairman. It was the other opposition party.

The Chair: Please, hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Okay. We're here. We're ready to go. So let's move on. The point's been made.

The Chair: Could you direct your comments through the chair, please.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. Sorry. Are we ready, Mr. Chair, to go now?

The Chair: Are you ready to proceed on Health and Wellness?

Mr. Martin: Yes, I am.

The Chair: Okay. Then proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Martin: Okay. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to move into sort of staffing, to begin with. There's a myriad of issues, obviously, that we're facing in an overheated economy. We talk about housing, health care, education, but certainly the overheated economy is

creating pressures, to put it bluntly, in terms of health care. There's no doubt about that. We were supposed to have had a framework for the health workforce plan that's been promised to us for a long time, Mr. Chairman, and I'm now told that it's off somewhere down the line.

2:50

The reason I bring this up is because it ties into the questions that the minister – and thanks for getting back on these written questions. When we asked about the sick leave taken by registered nurses and LPNs, there were some very startling figures there, as the minister is well aware, especially, I noticed, in Calgary: almost double. I would suggest that the problem that we're facing in the health field is that it's sort of overstressed, overworked, and can't keep up. In Calgary we're dealing with code burgundies. It's the same situation in Edmonton, and we know what's happening in other places.

I'm not sure that there's an easy answer to this particular dilemma, but the task force, the health workforce plan, was to give us some suggestions about that. I think that, probably, it doesn't look very good. Now, I know that the minister will say: it's not just here in Alberta; I was just at a conference, and we have a problem with the health workers right across the country, perhaps in the world. Well, I don't know how we're going to deal with this. We had the cuts in the mid-90s. We were catching up there, and now we've got the influx of population that we've talked about. It's a very dangerous situation.

You know, we had the example today. The Cross Cancer Institute responded and I think in a meaningful way to the problems that they faced. Whether that was overwork or not, I guess that one could speculate on the human error there. But the short question that I have is: when can we expect the health workforce plan to come forward? It's been vague in question period before.

The other thing that I would like to ask flowing from that has to do with the announcement of the nursing spaces. A lot of the hype that went on with the two ministers was on how many more nursing spaces were being created in postsecondary education, and I know that it involved both the minister of advanced ed and this minister, but when we looked at it and had some people check into it, the announcement really created only 76 new spaces in the next little while. Now, I'm glad that there are 76 more spaces, but when we talk about the problems that we're facing, that is not going to do it. Now, I'm not sure that there's an easy answer to this question. There probably isn't, but it's a serious one in our health care system.

Now, the minister has dealt with the doctors. I was at the news conference. There were \$8,000 bonuses to stay and that sort of thing. It seems that that's what they felt was needed to deal with doctors. Even then they say that there probably won't be enough. As he knows, they're having trouble getting people into family practice, and that's a very dangerous situation too.

So there are a myriad of problems dealing with staffing, Mr. Chairman. I would like to come back to the workforce and see where that is so we can take a look at it and see how serious the problem is and ask the minister: when is that report due, and more importantly, what are we going to do about a very serious situation with the health workers right across the area? There are a number of other things that we'll go into, but I think that the workforce – here's the quote I wanted, Mr. Chairman. When the minister of advanced education and the health minister talked about 467 spaces, that will actually lead to only 77 new graduates in four years because a lot of it was degree granting and the rest of it. So it seems to me that, again, it's good that we're going to have 77 new spaces, but it's not going to be nearly enough to deal with the job. So maybe we can start there, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hancock: In fact, Mr. Chairman, that is a very good place to start because it is one of the essential issues with respect to Health and Wellness as we move forward, particularly recognizing that it's not just about acute care, although acute care is extremely important. It's about making sure that we have the health care professionals available in the community to assist Albertans who have taken responsibility for their health and their health status. So working towards making better use is the first piece of the workforce strategy.

The member will be pleased to know that I'm meeting with my colleagues the Minister of Employment, Industry and Immigration and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology tomorrow morning on the finalization of the workforce strategy which we're bringing forward. So it is imminent that the workforce strategy will be forwarded. We published a version of it on the 13th of April when we met with stakeholders and discussed that, and we've taken the opportunity to revise it, to put more context around it as was asked for. We're meeting again, as I say, tomorrow to see if it's in a final form to take forward through a government process and then bring out as the actual workforce strategy and action plan. But it's a very good place to start.

Again, I want to emphasize primary care. Making best use of the health care professionals we have is the best place to start. The hon. member mentioned overstress and overwork and not being able to keep up. Those are very important elements. Some of it is about supply, about having more people, no question about that, and I'll get to that, but part of it is about working smarter, about having the right tools and the right technologies available so people can be as productive as possible and the right teams together so that they can use the talents that they have most productively. One of the key elements in that is the primary care networks where teams of not just doctors but doctors, nurses, dietitians, physiotherapists, pharmacists, and other health care professionals can work together and work in a team effort to deal with some of those issues that come from stress. But there's no question that in certain areas – emergencies would be a classic example – there undoubtedly is stress because of the workload that's there.

So it's not just the rebalancing of effort, although that's a very important part. It's not just addressing the workplace needs to make sure that there's a safe workplace so that we can get the best value for the people that are there and make it possible for them to be excited about getting up and going to work every day rather than feeling stressed about it. That's very important. The retention piece is important. Actually, across the workforce, for example, the retention rate of physicians in rural communities is currently 94 per cent over three years and 91 per cent over five years. So something is working in that respect. Some of the things that we're doing are being very successful.

We have I believe the number was an increase of 245 physicians last year. Other jurisdictions are very envious of the fact that we were able to attract new physicians to the province. Now, is it enough? Not yet, so we're still working at that. The retention bonuses that we talked about with respect to doctors are a very important part of keeping older doctors, people who have been serving for a longer period of time, in the workforce until we can bring in the supplementary resources, the new people.

Since 2000 Alberta Advanced Education has increased health program spaces by more than 4,500 spaces. The hon. member references a number of 76 with respect to nursing. I think that maybe he's overlooking the value of some of the newer type of programs. For example, the University of Alberta – and he may wish to ask the minister of advanced education about this – with the spaces awarded to them, will be offering an after-degree program

where actually you can bring nurses on more quickly if you start with somebody who already has a degree. Then it's basically a two-year program to get the after-degree program, which will allow them to get into nursing more quickly. So it expands the spaces there.

We're moving towards recruitment. You know, I'm always concerned about the idea that you're recruiting somebody else's health care professionals because they need them too, but to the extent that Alberta is an attractive place for people, and they want to come here, we should make it easier for them to move through the credentialing process and get them into practising their profession as quickly as they can. So we're working as part of the workforce strategy to deal with the question of credentialing, of professional credentials, to make sure that that's handled more effectively than it is now. For example, on physicians we're using, at least it seems to me, more part 5 exemptions so that you attract somebody in so they can begin to practise and then get the balance of their credentials in place.

So the workforce strategy is about retaining our existing workforce, making sure that they are as productive as possible, using the full extent of their training and expertise. We're adding different modalities of health delivery like Telehealth, for example, so we can use older nurses who might have otherwise retired. Nursing used to be a young person's profession. Now older people are in the profession, but we can use some of those people in a better way, on telehealth for example, so that they can provide advice in that manner. That's proved a very effective way of dealing with certain elements of health service delivery. The Capital Health Link, for example, has proved very effective at reducing some of the increased demand on emergencies.

3:00

So you can take some of the talents that we have that otherwise would have been lost to us and keep them in the process in a productive way. They feel valued, they are valued in the process, and they're adding service to Albertans by changing the way we practise, by using technology better, by addressing those workforce issues, the very workforce issues you're talking about, which are the stress and strain issues, which lose us valuable people because of sickness or strain or stress. It's the retention of our existing workforce. It's making it possible for our existing workforce health care professionals and technologists to practise to the full extent of their capability and expertise.

So I don't argue about how many doctors we need, for example. Some people would say that we need 1,500; some people say that we need 1,100. I know that we need more doctors, but we don't need as many as some people think because there are other ways of using health care professionals better.

That means we also have to be conscious of the people who help, and one of the areas that the hon. member didn't mention is personal care aides. That's an area, quite frankly, where we really need to do some work about recruiting people who can come and fill in the caring and on the line working with people with personal care. That's a critical element.

So that comes to the third piece, recruiting; the first being retention, growing our own the second. We have to go abroad and recruit people to come to Alberta to fill some of those jobs that are not going to be filled in any other way. We have to be careful and do it in a moral and effective way. We're not stealing other people's professionals that they need. But in areas where there is a surplus – for example, in Britain, apparently, there are 10 applications for every physician position – well, we should go and let them know, and we have gone to let them know, that there are opportunities here. In other parts of the world where there are people who are surplus to

their needs, we should be letting them know the opportunity that's here. That's what we are doing, and that's what we plan to continue to do.

We do need to recruit people who are not at the professional level yet. Hopefully, with the new agreements with the federal government with respect to immigration we'll be able to make opportunities available for people who want to come and provide the care needs in our primary care centres, in our long-term care centres, or even personal attendants. One of the concerns in an economy like we have: as the wage levels go up, we have to deal with the question of paying a fair wage, obviously, but we also have to make sure that we can recruit people into those areas and make sure that they have the proper competencies.

So the workforce strategy is a multirange of strategies relative to promoting the opportunity for health care professionals to have a good opportunity to use their skills to their maximum, to feel valued in the workplace, and to support them with the proper technologies and support that they need so that they do want to get up and come to work every day, about providing spaces so that our Alberta students can get the credentials they need to participate fully in that workforce, and about bringing more people to the workforce in Alberta where appropriate.

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, I have had a request by the ND opposition to have a staff member, a research assistant, allowed on the floor of the Assembly. It requires one day's notice according to the Speaker's ruling that I had just passed out, but because it was just passed out, there was no opportunity for one day's notice. So I'm going to ask for unanimous consent to allow it for today. If there are any in opposition, say so now.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Seeing none, I would allow your researcher to be on the floor.

I would just also point out Standing Order 59.01(1)(b): every member has a chance to speak for no more than 10 minutes. However, I sensed some eagerness on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to want to get involved in the discussion before the minister's time was up. You may combine your times for back-and-forth discussion, provided you both agree to combine your times for 20 minutes, but you have to notify the chair to do so.

So I would recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you. We'll see where it goes, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to follow up on the staffing because I think it is a serious problem. When I look at the figures – and I take it they're right because they came from your department in a written question – we show that Calgary nurses took over 55,000 sick days; Edmonton nurses, over 47,000; and LPNs, over 12,000. When I look at the Calgary situation, where it's almost double, I think we have a problem.

The minister talks about – and I agree. I'm not disagreeing with almost everything that the minister said about moving towards primary care. The community clinics were experimented with by Saskatchewan in Prince Albert and places like that many years ago, and they've had a lot of experience. I think it's the way to go, absolutely the right way to go.

I was at a conference on Thursday and Friday in Regina, and there were people talking about phase 2 of medicare, obviously people

like Roy Romanow and Stephen Lewis, Allen Blakeney, Shirley Douglas, people that have a vested interest about it. [interjection] Yeah, well, they'd know a lot more about it than you sitting back there. That's for sure.

Mr. Dunford: I don't think so. I was born in it. I've been in it all my life.

Mr. Martin: Were you? I thought you were hatched over there.

Mr. Dunford: Swift Current health region.

Mr. Martin: Well, I'll talk to the minister. He gets a little excited, that guy back there.

They had the nurses' federation and people working in the health care field there. The point that they were making – it's not just an Alberta phenomenon, obviously – is that even talking about moving to primary care and community clinics would probably require more people rather than less, outside of the doctors, you know, so it's not going to be a quick fix. I agree with the approach. It absolutely makes the most sense, the most possible sense, but I just say that it's still going to be very difficult to get the number of people to provide it. If there are doctors and they have extra people in Breton, fine, or wherever we can get them, but all provinces are going to be faced with each other.

I know that it's becoming a bit of a disadvantage here when we talk about housing for nurses and people like nurses and teachers and other health professionals. When they can't afford to buy a house here, that's not exactly going to be something that sells. I know that in Saskatchewan they've had some success at bringing people in because of the housing prices. So it's a difficulty that we have to deal with that has to do with the pace of development, Mr. Chairman.

I want to also look at another part of the workforce that, I take it, we're going to be talking about, and it's the other part of the questions. Again, I thank the minister for giving us this information.

Mental health – and that was also brought up at this conference – is a growing problem. The minister has alluded to it. He knows it. When I look at the amount of work we want to do – and we have a bill. I'll get the number of the bill: Bill 31. It's one thing to get people into treatment, but we have to have the people there to treat them. When I look at the 17 regional health authorities in Alberta, which amalgamated into eight larger regions, the important thing here is the number of psychiatrists: 318 for the province. Peace River has one psychiatrist available. Now, I know there are other people that can deal with some of these things, but we do need the psychiatrists overseeing it. So I guess I'm asking a little more about the framework, what the minister sees happening in the mental health area, Mr. Chairman.

3:10

I want to come back and suggest with the primary care, that the minister talked about – and I'd take it even further than what we were thinking about with primary care. I think that the minister has alluded to community clinics, health care professionals working together, other health care professionals, whether they're psychiatrists or whether they're social workers or whatever, that they work together in community clinics. Does the minister actually believe that that would take less staff or more? Is that part of the framework? Are we looking at community clinics dealing with that situation?

The last thing I would like to get from the minister – and I know I couldn't quite understand. It's gone to the policy committee. I

don't know what that means. I mean, we're not behind the framework because then I think that we can sit down, take a look at it, know exactly what the department is saying is going to happen. I take it that they're trying to be futuristic looking at it, where they're going to get these people, all the discussions that we're having here. The minister can appreciate that we've been a little impatient because we've been expecting this report for a fair length of time, and now it's going through some process. Can he at least allude to some of the things that we might be looking at and try to give us – I'm not holding him to an exact day – some idea so we might deal with this? I think this is the most crucial thing: our health workers.

Mr. Chairman, the other thing we were told at this conference: that they're also facing a huge problem. The LPNs said this: we can't do it all. The people that work in the cafeterias and clean the places and the rest of it provide a crucial role, and they're having trouble recruiting them too because, again, they can make more money; you know, the Tim Hortons syndrome. So the whole approach of dealing with our staff has to include those people too. They're very important partners in dealing with the whole health care approach.

I want to get some more specifics because, Mr. Chairman, it's a serious situation. The minister knows it. I recognize, as he said, that not everything has to do with acute care, but that's where people's lives right now are at risk. We've got to move to prevention. We've got to move to, you know, nutritionists. We've got to do all those things. But what people see right now is the emergency wards, where it's a life and death situation. It is serious, and I think that's part of what we're seeing in Calgary and Edmonton, with health professionals facing stress, pressure, till the body just gives out.

I think that we have to have some idea, a little more than what the minister said, about all these situations, so I'd like him to comment on those areas. Then I'll probably turn it over to somebody else.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, some very good comments there. Obviously, in terms of providing the acute-care services that are needed: a doctor can't operate if the operating room hasn't been cleaned. You know, you can't operate a health care facility, a hospital for example, if there aren't people who do the cleaning, who keep up the cafeteria, who provide the food service and that sort of thing. So it's not just the health care professionals, as the hon. member points out. It's the full team of people that are necessary to deliver the service appropriately, and that's true right across the board. We're conscious of that, that we need to make sure.

I mean, one of the concerns you have in an economy like this where employment is high, unemployment is low, the participation rate is as high as anywhere, higher than anywhere: the source of people to do the jobs that are needed to be done becomes difficult. There's no easy answer, so the answer has to be a combination of paying appropriate wages, attracting people who will come to take entry-level jobs, in essence, with the hope of doing better.

We have that history. We have history in times that I can remember, several cycles through our history where we've had people from other countries who came with their hopes and dreams and wanted to earn some money, send some money back to their family in the country that they came from with the hope of eventually bringing their family, and they did. Some are very good citizens of our community now, and they've helped to build our community. We're going to have to engage a number of different ways to make sure not just that we get the health care professionals but right across the board the people that we need to support this economy and this

community. That's one of the reasons why the workforce strategy became not just something that happened in health but something that the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry led as well. She's actively in the broader workforce strategy helping to provide the opportunity for us to recruit the broad cross-section of people that need to support the whole framework and infrastructure, not just in health but otherwise. So I would agree that we need to focus on that.

In terms of the primary care side and does it use more people, that remains to be seen, but what it does use is the talents that people have in a better way. It does in fact make it possible for more people to devote their talents to the health status of the community. We have people who leave the profession because they, quite frankly, get bored or get tired or want a change. If we can rebalance the workforce so that we're allowing people to work to the full extent of their knowledge, capability, and expertise, we can retain more of those people in the health workforce.

Now, that might cause a problem for someone else who wants them in their workforce, but in fact we can retain more people by making it possible for them to do more. We see that already. We see nurses who have retired and then become parish nurses and work for a church congregation that wants to have someone to visit the members of their congregation. That is good for health status in their community. There are many other ways I could demonstrate that health care professionals who might otherwise be lost to us in the workforce will stay and participate and help enhance health status. We also over time will have the opportunity, if not to reduce the demand, perhaps to flatten out the demand curve a little bit by providing that kind of support so the people can actually be healthier.

On the mental health side it was mentioned that there's no question that there are issues with respect to specialties in the medical profession. One of them is the psychiatric speciality. Jurisdictions are working hard to attract psychiatrists. You mentioned Peace Country health. They've been working to attract people to replace those that have moved. We're also seeing, of course – and this talks to what I've spoken about before in terms of using health professionals to the full extent of their capability – an increase now in the concept of psychiatric nursing. We didn't hear of that for a long time with a lot of emphasis, but now that's coming back, where people are seeing that they actually could be providing a good support for the psychiatric and mental health area from psychiatric nursing.

The trilateral agreement that we've just signed with the AMA and the health boards will help us to target resources into areas where we need to recruit or retain some of those specialties, and I think mental health might be one of those areas, although I don't want to prejudge how that gets applied. But areas of clinical practice where costs have gone up, which makes it difficult for people to continue to practise because, of course, they can't raise the prices – you know, family practice, psychiatric clinics, those sorts of areas – may well be supported by the trilateral agreement.

RHAs this year are receiving approximately \$291 million in the mental health area. The Mental Health Board has \$58 million and the innovation fund \$25 million. We've put an emphasis over the past year on mental health. The mental health framework that came out was a good place to start. The children's mental health framework was published in September; the aboriginal mental health framework, later on in the fall. I think it was in December. Personally, I believe that that's an area that we need to put some emphasis and support into, and I've been emphasizing that.

We've brought forward Bill 31, as the hon. member indicated, with respect to the community treatment orders, but it's not my

expectation that community treatment orders will stand by themselves. The regional health authorities will have to engage assertive community treatment to make sure that people have the community supports that they need. That's not going to be easy. None of this is easy. But focusing the resources to help people in that area, because if we can assist people early in the process so that they don't deteriorate to the state where they need to be hospitalized, in itself will save us some resources in the system, which can then be applied to more community treatment.

So there is work to be done in the mental health area both in terms of attracting and keeping the health care professionals but also in terms of allocating the resources that we now have to make sure that the funding is used in an appropriate way, to make sure that the community treatment is there, first of all, of course, to improve the quality of life for the people that are involved and the health status of the people involved but also to reduce the stress and strain on the acute-care side.

3:20

There's a lot of stuff in there, but I think the primary piece to come back to – the hon. member was talking about the workforce strategy. It comes back to, as he himself said: there's no easy answer to it. We've got a strong economy, and that makes it difficult to recruit and keep the people who are in the support staff area: the personal care aides and attendants, the people who do the work to make sure that you can open the facilities in the morning, who keep them clean and keep them in a position to be able to deliver the health care services. We've got to work on that. We've got to get more of those people, and we've got to be able to find a pay structure that pays them fairly. We need to continue to recruit the professionals that we need and to retain the ones we have and to value the ones we have so that they can provide their best value.

I'm not as concerned as the hon. member might be that going to primary care is going to increase the numbers that we need. Actually, in my view, it will rebalance it, and we'll get more productivity out of the existing members. That's not being disrespectful to the existing members. The demonstration of that is the bone and joint project, where they clearly demonstrated that by working in a team effort and making more effective use of the team resources and supplementing them with nonhealth resources where health resources were not needed, they could actually do more bone and joint surgery than before, reduce the waiting times, and patients could have access to the service much more quickly with the same coterie of health care professionals, the same group of people. So we've demonstrated that we can get more value out of it and be more effective in the service delivery already. I think we can see much more of that happening.

The key to this whole thing over the long term is health status, making sure that we have in place the supports for people to take responsibility for their own health so that we reduce the increase in demand for health services. That comes back to every Albertan being part of it, every Albertan being part of the health team, and making sure that they're doing what they can to keep their health status so that we can have the acute-care facility and the health care professionals that we need for our parents or our children when we need them.

The Chair: Hon. leader of the ND opposition, I can't recognize you unless you take your seat.

Mr. Mason: Oh, I have to be in my own chair?

The Chair: Now I can recognize the hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Sorry about that.

I wanted to begin by asking some fairly general or some fairly philosophical questions about the government's view of health care and maybe give the minister an opportunity to provide a little bit of framework for where he's coming from as he approaches this ministry and how the government approaches it. I want to deal a little bit with the whole question of private versus public health care. I'd appreciate the minister's views on the new government's approach to health care philosophically.

We had, of course, many discussions and debates in the House with the previous government on its approach to health care, and these sort of came to a culmination in the debates over the third way. There was, of course, a province-wide debate, and there were many debates in the Assembly, and it was a matter of very broad public concern. I understand, based on my following of statements that have been made by the new government and by the minister, that the general approach to private delivery of health care is not a priority for the government. I'd like to know in a little bit more detail the government's philosophical approach to health care and to health care reform and to managing health care costs. Health care costs are an important consideration for all of us and for the public as a whole, and I'm going to come back to that.

There were a couple of elements in the third way that gave a considerable concern, that I understood were taken off the table by the previous minister of health. They had to do with doctors operating in both the public and the private systems and the extension of private delivery of health care services in our province. I'd like to know where the minister sits on that, what the government's policy is, what the government's vision is for health care.

It's interesting, Mr. Chairman, that there's been a real sustained push not just in Alberta but across the country to try and increase the proportion of health care that is delivered privately. In my view, there are many companies that are interested in this because they are in the private health care delivery business, whether it's an insurance company, a private clinic or hospital supported by investors, or drug companies that have pushed different governments and different political parties across the country to move in this direction.

What has impressed me and encouraged me is just the absolute resistance of the Canadian public, including the Alberta public, to that direction. When governments have moved in that direction, the public has pushed back, and they have not been worn down by repeated attempts to introduce greater private delivery in one form or another. So I am modestly encouraged from what I've heard so far, but I do invite the minister to talk a little bit about that whole thing.

The second thing that I'd really like to raise, Mr. Chairman, is directly related, and it's a subject that I'm quite interested in, and that is innovation within the public system. We certainly do not want to see a public system that stagnates, that simply requires more and more taxpayers' money to deliver the same level of service. So looking for innovation within the public system is, in my view, what will save and what can save the public system and make it responsive and meaningful and give increasingly better service.

I want to give the department, particularly, and the health regions quite a bit of credit on this. I think that Alberta has been fairly innovative at the department level and at the health region level. Certainly, the wait time registry has been a particularly good example of how reorganizing the resources and sharing the resources within the public system can substantially reduce wait times and can save considerable costs.

Another one that I'm interested in and would like the minister to talk a little bit about is the whole development of urgent care within

the province and what the plans are generally and what the success has been and what is anticipated once that component is more fully developed. Diverting people from crowded and expensive emergency wards is a valuable direction, and I certainly think it decentralizes the system a little bit and brings it more into the community. So I'd be very interested in knowing the government's plans and results thus far moving in that direction.

The minister touched in his earlier comments on another approach that can reduce costs and more efficiently use resources, and that is making sure that the right professionals are doing the jobs and that you're not necessarily putting more expensive professionals such as physicians regularly doing jobs that can be done by someone with perhaps not less training but different training. So that's something that I'd really like to hear about.

3:30

The last thing I want to ask the minister about is the whole question of drug costs. Mr. Chairman, the cost of pharmaceuticals in this country is one of the main driving forces of health care costs for the public system. The Conference Board of Canada in 2004 identified drug costs as the fastest growing component of Canadian health care during the last 25 years, and nothing has changed in the last two or three years since that time. Payments for prescription medication account for about 80 per cent of all drug spending in Canada, representing an estimated \$14.6 billion as of 2006. Our health system hasn't been immune either. Twenty years ago spending on drugs represented only 8 per cent of health spending, but in 2005 Alberta spent \$1.6 billion on prescription drugs, an expenditure that now represents 11 and a half per cent of total health expenditure for that year.

The Alberta NDP opposition put forward a couple of years ago a proposal for a pharmaceutical savings agency, and that would be a government body that would co-ordinate the purchase of pharmaceuticals for the entire health system in the province and would engage in negotiations with drug companies to reduce costs through the bulk purchasing of pharmaceuticals for the whole health system. We already use a significant portion of generic drugs, but there's an awful lot more that can be done.

I should just indicate, Mr. Chairman, that in New Zealand this approach is used, and it's called Pharmac, the Pharmaceutical Management Agency. It was established in 1993. New Zealand has about the same population as the province of Alberta, and since 1993 their pharmaceutical expenditures have only risen by about 3 per cent per year compared to the OECD average of 14 per cent and Alberta's average over the same period of 10 per cent. Some have argued that New Zealand saved \$624 million on its drug subsidies in one year alone. That comes from the Conference Board of Canada report *Challenging Health Care System Sustainability*.

We were told at various times by the Minister of Health at that time that this was a good idea. [Mr. Mason's speaking time expired]

The Chair: I recognize the hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are a number of good topics there to deal with. Let's start with the government's philosophy. I think it's fair to say that this government and certainly this minister espouse the concept that every Albertan should have access to quality care on a timely basis without regard to ability to pay. That's the fundamental piece of the health care system, and it's important going forward. There has been a lot of discussion about delivery. In fact, the whole of last year there was a lot of consultation about delivery, and there was a publication, *The Way Forward*, I think it was called, with respect to delivery.

A lot of that discussion was more emotional, more heat than light, really. There wasn't a lot of value that came out in terms of how we actually deal with the issues, so I've focused instead on starting where I like to start, and that is: how do we deal with the long-term sustainability issue rather than how do we deal with the day-to-day requirements? We need to deal with the day-to-day requirements, but it's important to know where you're going, and the long term is that regardless of how you calculate or how you cut it, we're doing more things for more people now than ever before with new techniques and new technologies and new drugs.

We're doing hip surgery on 90-year-olds that you never used to do on 50-year-olds. We have MRIs. When I was first elected, I don't think there were more than four MRIs in the province, and that's only 10 years. Now we're doing thousands and thousands of scans per year. So we're doing exponentially more things for more people, for a broader pool of patients than ever had access to the system before. As I say, the heart surgeries and the hip surgeries and the things that are being done for older people who wouldn't have had access to it before are incredible, and we should recognize that we actually have an exceptional health system that does a lot of things for a lot of people.

The question about delivery is not so important as how we sustain the health system long term so that we can continue to do that, so that we can continue to expand the capacity of the system to keep people healthier longer and to improve their quality of life, and that has to come back fundamentally to the question of health status. How do we make sure that we are healthy people living in healthy communities? If all of us need intervention from the acute-care system on a multiple basis over the course of our lifetime and as we age in an increasing amount, we're not going to be able to sustain that level of service. So we need to have fewer people who need the system.

My focus as minister of health, first and foremost, is on wellness, on talking with Albertans about how we can each take responsibility for our health and our health status. Sure, there will be things that we can't avoid. There is sickness and disease and parts wear out and all sorts of things happen, but we can do more, and we need to focus on that end of it first. So rather than talking specifically about the delivery and whether it's public or private, let's talk about how we make the system sustainable over the long term by making sure that Albertans take responsibility for health status, that we're as healthy as we possibly can be so that we can have the acute-care system that we want and need for our parents when they need it, for our kids when they need it, and if necessary for ourselves when we need it. That's the real focus I want to take.

Will there be private delivery? Well, of course we have private delivery. We have physicians and all sorts of other service providers who work for fees. They run businesses. Profit isn't a dirty word in our world. But the reality of the situation we're in now, as we've just spent the last number of minutes talking about, is that we have a workforce shortage. There's no sense really, in my view, talking about whether you have a private clinic set up. First of all, you have to talk about: where are the nurses and the support staff and the other people who are going to have to function in it to come from?

I'm not going to spend an awful lot of time over the next 18 months or two years or however long I have the privilege of serving in this capacity talking about public versus private delivery when the priority for me is getting Albertans to focus on health status and working on things like the workforce strategy. How do we get the healthcare professionals that we need to work in the workforce that we have? You know, if there's a better way to deliver a service, sure, we can talk about that and talk about whether it makes sense or not. I think Albertans are alive to the fact that they want the service.

It's not that big a deal who provides it. But the focus is not there. That's not where I'm going. I'm going on health status, and I'm going on the long-term sustainable health status of Albertans rather than focusing so much time and energy on whether it's public or private delivery.

That piece, I hope, gives the hon. member an idea of the philosophy that I'm bringing to the job at least and that I think the government has at this point in time. In fact, as exhibited by my mandate letter, the Premier, when he asked me to take on this responsibility and gave me the opportunity to do so, really asked that I deal with things like a comprehensive workforce strategy as one of the four identifiable priorities dealing with a comprehensive work strategy, not just for now but for over the next 10 years, and a pharmaceutical strategy.

The hon. member mentioned drug costs. Drug costs are very important. Yes, they are one of the driving costs. Technology and drugs are two things that have really driven the costs of providing service. But in both of those we have to look at what I call the value equation. If a new drug comes on, what is it doing in terms of promoting quality of life, and what is it doing in terms of reducing other costs in the system? You know, is it adding value? I think you can support new drugs coming on even at a huge cost if, in fact, they provide an identifiable improvement in quality of life for the patient or an identifiable reduction in cost to the system by keeping the patient out of using other services because they're taking that drug. So it's not simply a matter of the drug costs, but it's about: what value do they add?

Having said that, the second piece of my mandate is implementing a new pharmaceutical strategy, and that has to be about how we acquire the drugs, whether we do it alone or whether we work with other provinces and can get them to work with us in terms of making arrangements with the pharmaceutical companies to make sure that we get the best price not just for government-purchased drugs but for Albertans. It means: how do we deal with catastrophic coverage, making sure that Albertans have access to the appropriate drugs, the high-cost drugs, notwithstanding ability to pay? It means: what do we do with respect to the orphan drugs, the situations like Hunter syndrome, where there is a drug that could help? It's in its way through the system, but even if it does get through the system, it's not going to make it onto the formulary for general coverage. It's truly an orphan drug, and we have to have a way of making appropriate decisions on appropriate circumstances so that we're giving access to those drugs where they provide real hope and not false hope.

3:40

I find it ironic that the hon. member would refer us to New Zealand, for example. I remember a few years ago when people were talking about the fiscal reforms that were going on and the New Zealand model. I think that perhaps even the hon. member was roundly trouncing New Zealand's fiscal model as being a bad place to look for an example. So that's sort of ironic.

Mr. Mason: It shows that we're not dogmatic.

Mr. Hancock: Let the record show that the hon. member said that it shows that he's not dogmatic and that there were chuckles from more than one member in the House.

So the question of drugs, an absolutely important question. It's part of the mandate. We need to make progress on that area, and we'll be dealing with that and hopefully bringing forward a pharmaceutical strategy relatively quickly.

Innovation in the public system is obviously very important, and

I already mentioned one of the improvements. But one of the cost drivers is new technology and new innovation. So we've got so many more things that are happening that we're doing.

One of the most important innovations is the electronic health record. When the electronic health record is fully complete – and by next year most Albertans will have an electronic health record – it'll have, I think, 75 per cent of their drugs, 100 per cent of their labs, 75 per cent of their diagnostics, and those sorts of numbers. So we're getting close to the point where a person can say that no matter where they present themselves to the system in Alberta, the health care provider who deals with them will have access to appropriate information with respect to their diagnostics, the drugs that they're on, and their health condition so that they can appropriately deal with them, whether they arrive by way of emergency or trauma or for some other reason. That kind of innovation has to continue to go ahead. We have to continue to be a leader in that area, and we're doing that.

We're looking at other ways of innovation. [Mr. Hancock's speaking time expired] I'll have to come back to it.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I hadn't quite got to the end of my questions either, so I'll pick it up again. When we were raising the question of Alberta essentially establishing its own pharmaceutical savings agency for the bulk purchase of drugs for our health care system, we were told, again by the previous minister, that they were working on this nationally. We did a little bit of research at the time – and perhaps there's more current information than I have on this – and it was our understanding that they had agreed amongst the provinces that some national approach was desirable. But upon closer scrutiny we discovered that, in fact, there was nothing more than an agreement to do a bit of research into the issue and that no substantive progress had been made or was even being contemplated. So one of the things that I would like to know is: what is the status of the negotiations, the national negotiations, the interprovincial negotiations, for the establishment of such a body?

Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate that I do believe that there are very substantial savings that can be realized by this approach, and they do not come at the cost of taxpayers. They come at the cost of large pharmaceutical companies, which are, of course, among the most profitable sector in the entire world. The prices that we're being charged, particularly given the framework of patent protection that they receive in Canada, means that they earn very, very significant profits indeed, and that comes at the price of very, very expensive drugs. Too high, in my view.

We're not talking about a regulatory approach or regulating the prices. We're talking about developing some market power so that we can negotiate in the marketplace a lower cost for Alberta taxpayers. I think that's a very important thing to do, and I think it's something that the government ought to do. We ought not to be paying more to those pharmaceutical corporations for the drugs that they're providing our system than we have to. I think the government has an obligation to get the best possible price for those drugs. The best way to do that, in my view, is to do bulk purchasing on behalf of the entire health care system in our province and using, of course, lower cost drugs and generic drugs wherever that might be possible.

I know that the minister didn't really get to the question of the urgent care centres. I know that there's an urgent care centre being constructed in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, at the Cromdale school site, and while that has been the subject of

some controversy in terms of the process used by Capital health for the siting of it, I think it is, overall, a very beneficial facility that will directly relieve pressure on the Royal Alexandra hospital emergency room. I wonder if the minister in his answer can deal with that. Also, the question of nurse practitioners, in particular, or the greater use of nurses in the delivery of our health care system would be something he might want to expand upon.

He's touched a little bit on work to assist people with foreign credentials to be certified within the health system. I think there needs to be an acceleration there. The use of midwives is another area, I think, that we could make some considerable progress on. Mr. Chairman, my view is that if we innovate within the public system and work hard at improving it and improving its delivery and increasing its efficiency, it will remain the most cost-effective means of delivering health care services.

I appreciate the minister's focus on prevention and on wellness as a means of reducing the costs of our health care system, but it still remains that there is a substantial amount of hard health care service delivery that is going to have to continue to occur in this province, and it's going to have to grow. It's not just growing in terms of becoming more capital intensive through technology and drugs, but it is becoming more extensive as the population of the province grows.

3:50

So the question remains – and it's an important question – about the government's approach to the delivery of those services and whether or not the government sees that occurring within a public system, using innovation, using efficiency but keeping it public, or whether or not the government sees the creation, for example, of privately owned hospitals as, I guess, the most serious example and whether or not the minister accepts the evidence that seems to be fairly pervasive that that approach is more expensive than developing the public health care system.

My time is not up, Mr. Chairman, but my questions are, so I'll take my seat. I just want to end with a little rejoinder on the New Zealand comment that the minister made. I assure him that the approach that was taken here came well after Sir Roger Douglas had left office. As the minister should know, politics is not static in any country or in any party, for that matter, and in fact it is, I think, a very progressive approach.

Contrary to what the minister or some members opposite may feel, we do not necessarily think that the public purse is the measure of first resort. We think that if you can save money and if you can avoid paying too much when you're procuring your services and your goods in government, you have an obligation to do so. You also have an obligation to provide the most efficient and effective and innovative means of providing public services. If government does that and that's part of the culture of the government and part of the values of the government, the role for privatization is substantially reduced, which is part of our philosophical approach, I think it's fair to say.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member is continuing to want to get me into this whole public/private debate, and I've already said that I'm not going to go there. I'm not interested in getting into philosophical debates about what the most effective delivery model is. We've got both long-term strategies with respect to health status that need to be focused on – and I'm going to focus on those – and short-term strategies with respect to

current situations which I've been tasked with by our Premier: to implement a workforce strategy; to implement a new pharmaceutical strategy; to implement health care productivity and reforms and long-term sustainability initiatives; to strengthen public health services that promote wellness, injury and disease prevention, and provide preparedness for public health emergencies. That's a fairly significant and comprehensive list of tasks, so to engage with the hon. member in some philosophical debate about public or private delivery is not on at this point in time.

The hon. member did raise some questions about the use of health care professionals and nurse practitioners, and he mentioned midwives. That's at the root of the whole question of finding the right health care professionals to do the right jobs in the right places. When I was articling as a law student and had a course from now Justice of the Court of Appeal Côté, one of the things he said to us is that you should put a sign on your desk that says: does it take an LL.B. to do this? Of course, when I considered that, there wasn't much left for me to do. But what we should be doing is saying: with the credentials that I have, am I making the most effective use of the abilities that I have?

We should be looking to midwives to help with the health care system in the areas that they're appropriately trained to help and to nurse practitioners to supplement and to physician assistants, perhaps. There are a number of physician assistants coming out of the military now, where they've been used for years, and looking for a place in the general community. They could play a fairly effective role. In fact, there could be a role for internationally trained medical graduates who may not have the competencies necessary to get professional credentials here, but they may be able to still serve in the health system at another level, and that could be at a physician assistant's level. There's a role for respiratory nurses.

There are a number of ways in which we can enhance the role of health care professionals to make it interesting for them to continue to work in the field. There can be a laddering, if you will. You could even see a day when people could come into the system as a personal care aide, progress through an LPN process, perhaps into a nursing assistant or a registered nurse and then into the specialty area of psychiatric nursing and those sorts of issues. So, yes, there's room for a multitude of health care professionals and technologists in the system, to make more extensive use of them.

The hon. member indicates, and he's quite right, that we're not going to have the acute-care system decline in service. The best we can hope for, probably, over time is to flatten out the exponential growth by health status. So we should make sure we focus on health status so that we can deal with that side of the equation and try to flatten out that curve. But we are going to need more of the health system, and that means that we need to make the most effective use of the resources that we have in the system.

With respect to the national drug strategy that the hon. member mentioned, I'm given to understand that at one time there was a national drug strategy on the table being discussed by federal/provincial ministers. That did not progress. I'm given to believe that the federal government backed away from the discussion. In any event, there may be some more interest now. We're seeing signs in some particular areas of an intention to co-operate. But we can't wait. We have to move forward.

I've been tasked with bringing forward a pharmaceutical strategy. I'm going to do that. We're going to try to work with our neighbouring provinces and with others to see if we can bring together a larger group, but we need to move forward. We are doing that in some areas. For example, with some of the oncology drugs we're able to do that now. So with respect to the national drug strategy, if there's interest across the country, then we'll be happy to be at the

table. We'll work to try to encourage as much co-operation across the country as we can. But we need to move forward on it.

Just briefly on the area of urgent care. Urgent and emergency care are very important. Urgent care centres, obviously, can have the benefit of making access easier for people and, actually, focusing the access in a more appropriate way. For example, you could see in an urgent care centre, perhaps, if there was a large population of older people there, more of a focus on geriatric care. If you had any experience with it, as I have, going to emergency with an 80- or 90-year-old is not always the best place to be because often you're not there in an acute trauma situation, and therefore you don't get served first in the triage process, nor do you necessarily have health care professionals who are used to dealing with frailty. So if you can develop an urgent care centre which has the health care team of people there who, perhaps, have a better handle on geriatric care, you can actually provide better service on a more timely basis.

We do have some good things happening on the emergency side. I've spoken with the head of the emergency doctors in the province, someone whom I've had a lot of conversations with both before and after becoming Minister of Health and Wellness. I've taken the opportunity to take the suggestions that the emergency doctors brought forward with respect to the full-capacity protocol and have spoken with both the Capital health authority and the Calgary health authority.

Capital has moved ahead at four of their sites with the full-capacity protocol, which is not a long-term solution but is a very beneficial process to add because part of the problem that they have is that emergency actually focuses on the door, as they should, the people coming in with an emergency. Their focus is to deal with that emergency. Once they've admitted people or determined that they need to be admitted to the hospital, that's not their focus anymore. So the people who have been admitted but are still occupying beds in emergency, arguably, are not receiving the type of care that they should be receiving, the caring side. With the full-capacity protocol the concept is to move them upstairs into the wards.

Experience in other parts of North America, in New York and in St. Paul's in Vancouver, is that 30 per cent of the people who moved up to the wards had a bed by the time the elevator door opened. In other words, the process actually improved just by virtue of moving the patient. Now, we can't count on that for everything, obviously. But another 40 per cent, I think is the right number, of the people were in beds within four hours. So moving to that capacity to allow emergency doctors to focus where they should be focused and other health care professionals in emergency to focus on the front door, the people coming in with an emergency, as opposed to being bound up by the people who they've already seen and who are waiting for someone to provide the next level of care is a very good step forward. Also, movement to, as I say, build urgent care centres and the Health Link, so telehealth, so that those who don't need to be there can get the advice that they need elsewhere is a good move.

4:00

We still have to deal with capacity issues, and we still have to deal with the number of beds and keep up with the growth and those sorts of issues, but we're working at dealing with the issues from an immediate perspective and then also working on the long-term perspective to make sure that we have the right capacities in the system to deal with the flow-through of people in the system. We're working with others across western Canada in that regard with respect to acute care to make sure that we have both the excellence in acute care and the relief valve, if you will, in appropriate circumstances where we need help.

There was a lot of talk in January about newborns in Calgary having to go to Montana or B.C. or other places. Well, at times there's a spike, and you don't have the local capacity. Thank goodness we can make arrangements with our neighbours to help us with capacity needs when we need it, and of course we help them when they need it. So there are a number of things that we can work on in the system to deal with that.

Obviously, development of the primary care networks and urgent care centres is a critical part of making sure that for the vast majority of people who need access to urgent care, they can get it on a timely basis, leaving emergency available to those people who really need the emergency care, the trauma care. That's part and parcel of the system we're developing.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and make a few observations on the budget for 2007-2008 related to the Department of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Chairman, perhaps I should quickly note that the current minister and I were elected the same year, 1997 I guess, to this Assembly. We've been around for 10 and a half years. He has had responsibility for a variety of departments and portfolios, held portfolios, and this is the toughest one in which to survive. I do wish him well on this one. I also want to thank the staff of the department who are here today to assist the minister to answer some questions that he's receiving from us. It's much appreciated.

The last point I wanted to make in respect of having been around, he and I, for roughly 10 and a half years is that during those 10 and a half years I'm hearing a lot about this government's intention to seek the privatization route to make our health care sustainable. The minister doesn't want to go there, he says now, because it's a purely philosophical question. I just want to note that it's been more than a philosophical question for this government. It has been, in fact, part of its policy. The minister doesn't want to speak about now because the Premier's mandate doesn't call for it. It's something that makes me wonder whether or not the privatization plans have been abandoned altogether because they have been discredited by experience and the record in various places. Or is it just a tactical shift until the next election, and then we are going to see the rhetoric of privatization come back?

So the minister might want to dissociate himself completely from – this is an opportunity for him to go – the privatization route because it's a discredited path. It certainly will not lead to increased sustainability of the system. We need to find other means of doing it, and there are other means available to us. All we need to do is to have a spirit of co-operation and perhaps the political will to get there.

That said, Mr. Chairman, I want to quickly move on, in the limited time that I have, to make some comments on the long-term care front. It's a growing area of our health care system that this minister is responsible for. We have currently close to 330,000 seniors over the age of 65, with approximately 153,000 over the age of 75. I must say, with some regret or with some anticipation, that in less than a year I'll be joining the ranks of the 153,000 who are over 75 and, hopefully, healthy. I would like to ask the minister because of his focus on wellness and on health status and on prevention: what specific strategies and plans are built into this budget to focus on keeping seniors healthy in this province so that they don't have to seek and receive the medical care that he says is increasingly becoming expensive?

I agree with him. It's expensive, and there's no reason. The quality of life is very much impacted by illness, so if you can keep

people healthy, it will save money. But it also improves quality of life, so it's a win-win situation in many ways. Maybe he would like to comment on the implementation of his wellness and health status, sort of focus with respect to seniors and the long-term care area.

Mr. Chairman, there are close to 21,000 people living in approximately 400 supported living facilities across the province: lodges, enhanced lodges, designated assisted living group homes, adult family living and family care homes. Similarly, there are 14,500 or so people living in approximately 200 long-term care facilities. Now, the problem of standards in these facilities affecting so many seniors in the province was raised a couple of years ago by the Auditor General in his review of seniors' care programs in his 2005 report. The Auditor General's review drew attention to the lack of maintenance of standards of care and the lack of capacity within the health care system and the department itself to enforce those mechanisms and monitor compliance with those standards.

There is some reference here in the budget to increased capacity for compliance with standards. The introduction of standards has just kicked in, I understand. They come into effect this month. I want the minister to perhaps comment on how the increase in the capacity to monitor and ensure compliance with these standards is being offered by way of the budget that's before us.

The failure of oversight and lack of compliance, Mr. Chairman, have had quite tragic results. We have been told that the Health Facilities Review Committee did an examination of the Bethany long-term care centre in 2005 and recommended that Alzheimer's patients be given private rooms. If such a recommendation had in fact been implemented, it may have prevented a recent death at that facility. Could the minister confirm that this occurrence has in fact happened and if there's a report on it and whether he can share that report on this incident at Bethany Care with us today?

Could the minister tell us also the mechanism by which inspection reports are made available to both residents and their families, and, of course, the general public, including this House, and will they be made available now that we are beginning to focus on improving the system in a variety of respects and the new standards are being put in place?

The longer term wait times are another issue, Mr. Chairman, that I want to ask the minister a few questions about. Goal 3 in the performance measures is about improved access to health services, which includes targets for wait lists for continuing care. My question is: currently how long are people waiting for placement? We know the number of people waiting for it, but what's the maximum time of wait, and what's the minimum? What's the average waiting time for placement?

I also notice that in one of the tables, long-term care placement, the number of people waiting has come down over the years, which is good news, if I read this table right. I wonder: is it because of the expansion of spaces at most places now, spaces in long-term care? Is that what explains the decline in the numbers waiting in an acute-care hospital, the number of urgent cases waiting in the community? It's that table that I'm talking about. In general, the wait times are an issue that we are hearing a great deal about. The minister might want to comment on that as to the budgetary response to this problem.

4:10

The privatization issue for long-term care is alive and well, Mr. Chairman, although the minister says that he doesn't want to go there. The problem this year at the Holy Cross hospital illustrates potential problems with privatization in long-term care services. Indeed, the problems at that facility illustrate the devastating impact of creating privatization in continuing care. The profit mode in

long-term care leads to the same problem that it does in any other kind of health care service: higher costs and lower quality. That's, at least, what the Auditor General's study showed us.

Private operators do have a vested interest in keeping down the costs of providing service through cutting back on labour and on the quality of services in order to maximize profits for the shareholders, and I don't blame these private investors. That's what they are there for: to respond to their stakeholders' expectations to maximize their returns on their investments. But our responsibility as public officials is to ensure the quality of care and the enforcement of standards to make sure that the proper care is available.

The other concern, the question that's really a growing concern around the province, is the conversion of long-term care facilities to assisted living centres, which translates into shifting the costs of servicing the care onto residents.

Maybe I'll stop here and let the minister respond.

The Chair: The time has elapsed for this order of business on Health and Wellness. Perhaps the minister would want to respond in writing to some of the questions, or if there's time at the end of the debate on Municipal Affairs and Housing, there may be time for some further questions on that.

Now I'll recognize the hon. Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased . . .

The Chair: You have a point of order, hon. member?

Point of Order Committee Proceedings

Mr. Mason: It was our understanding that the allocation of the time between the two ministries was up to the NDP caucus, and it certainly would be our preference that the Minister of Health and Wellness finish his response.

The Chair: Well, I'm here at your pleasure, but it was my understanding that there was an hour and a half allocated for Health and Wellness and an hour and a half allocated for . . .

Mr. Martin: We haven't had that though. We were short. We were behind time when we started.

Mr. Mason: Because of the confusion about what's going on.

The Chair: Well, the time starts when the committee is called to order. If there are any points of order that are raised and clarifications regarding that, that comes off the time. There's not extra time allocated for that.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Chairman, for the convenience of the third party I would be very glad to sit down and let the hon. minister of health finish his presentation.

The Chair: If that's your pleasure, I'll allow the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to continue.

Mr. Hancock: Just for the record, we tried to put an allocation so that people would have an idea of when they had to appear, but I would agree with the leader of the third party. This afternoon is the NDs' afternoon, and they get to choose their time allocation. We want to make sure that people are ready when they're supposed to be

called, and we've worked with them to try and make sure that that happened. But there wasn't any intention on the tabling to cement a time of an hour and a half or that sort of thing.

Mr. Martin: I think the minister over there needs a break.

Mr. Hancock: And he's had a good afternoon already, I understand.

The Chair: The chair would appreciate some notification in the future of what the various parties are intending to do, but go ahead, hon. minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hancock: So there are a number of questions that I'll respond to. With respect to the incident that the hon. member referred to at the Bethany, very clearly there'll be a fatality inquiry. That's the appropriate place. There's no value to me speculating on that. There'll be a fatality inquiry, and there'll be a report, and that will be thoroughly investigated. I'm sure that the Bethany centre is already looking at the issues arising from it, but I won't comment further on it until that inquiry has been held.

With respect to long-term care wait times if we have information that's more definitive, I'm certainly happy to get there, but my understanding is that wait times have come down, that sometimes people are waiting because they want their choice of facility, but most people are able to be placed within a reasonable period of time in long-term care.

When you talk about privatization, of course, that absolutely neglects the fact that there's been a history in this province of public long-term care, private long-term care, and nongovernmental organizations, or not-for-profit long-term care. It has been a good mix. It has been there. There are very excellent private providers who are concerned about the quality of life of the residents of their facilities, and the profit motive doesn't take any of the concept of caring away necessarily. So the suggestion that because there's a profit involved, one can't care for the people and make sure there's a quality of life is not accurate. Just to put that out.

There was an incident with respect to the Holy Cross in Calgary. I think that was dealt with by the regional health authority, which happens to be not only a provider of long-term care but a regulator with respect to quality of care and standards and the payer. So when they perceived that there was a safety element that wasn't being taken care of in terms of the service and in terms of the safety codes, they worked with the provider. When they weren't satisfied with the result, they cancelled the contract, and that suggests, I guess, that the system works.

I'm not going to get into the details because there are discussions between them and the provider, but the bottom line is that there are standards. We put in place standards. We're going to make sure that service providers, whether they're public, private, or not for profit, get their people up to those standards and within a reasonable period of time. Obviously, we have to work with them in this environment when it's difficult to get people, but to make sure that those standards are achieved and are adhered to is absolutely important for us.

The first role of government, in my view, is quality assurance. That's our job. The second role is to make sure that there's effective use of the public resources, the most effective and efficient use of the public resources. Where that can be done more effectively using private services as opposed to public services, I would suggest that the hon. member adhere to what his leader said and not be dogmatic about it but look for the best bang for the buck, so to

speak, the best care that you can get, the best quality of care that you can get for the dollar.

That's where we're going to be going. I'm not going to adhere to any philosophical issue on whether it's antiprofit or proprofit. That's not the driver of it. The question is: how can we get the best quality of care, how can we get the best access to care on a timely basis without regard to the ability to pay, whether it's in the acute system, or how can we ensure that seniors have the care that they need in the system? When we talk about the care that they need, quite frankly, I'll be working with the minister of seniors and others in government to make sure that we have that continuum of care so that seniors can be healthy in their own home for as long as possible.

The hon. member indicates that he will soon be joining the over-75 club, and I'm sad to hear that he's not intending to run in the next election because the best way that a person can be healthy is to be active, to be mentally and physically active. One might argue as to whether sitting in here is mentally or physically active, but I would argue that it is. So I only hope that he'll find some other way to keep himself mentally and physically active because that's going to be the way that he best improves and keeps his health care up.

We need to be working at ways we can ensure that people can make the quality of life choice, the living choice that they want to make and then support it with the appropriate health care support that they need to have so that they can stay as healthy as possible as long as possible and then die quickly.

The Chair: Hon. member, do you wish to continue?

Dr. Pannu: No, Mr. Chairman. I'm done. Thank you.

The Chair: Now do you wish to go to Municipal Affairs and Housing?

4:20

Mr. Mason: Please. We thought he should have a brief rest.

The Chair: I'll call on the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Municipal Affairs and Housing

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present an overview of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the 2007-2008 spending estimates as well as the 2007-2010 ministry business plan. Before I start, Mr. Chairman, I would like to do some introductions of individuals that are here today. As the members of the third party will appreciate, the work that our ministry was saddled with in the last three months has been overwhelming, and I especially want to thank my staff because they have worked so diligently.

With my hand on my heart I really want to thank them and introduce them: first of all, my deputy minister, Shelley Ewart-Johnson, who is beside me and has been my right-hand person all the time; Brian Quickfall, the assistant deputy minister of local government services. Also, I would like to introduce Robin Wigston, the assistant deputy minister of the housing division. We also have Ivan Moore, in the gallery, who is the assistant deputy minister of the public safety division. We also have Peter Crerar, who is the assistant deputy minister of corporate strategic services. It's an honour for me to introduce Tracy Balash, the director of communications. I'd like to again, as I've said, thank all of the individuals, all of the staff, who have worked so hard back in the office and back in the department, because their help is very, very much appreciated.

[Mr. Cardinal in the chair]

I'll start my presentation by providing an overview of our 2007-2010 business plan. This will illustrate the basis for our spending estimates. This year's business plan has changed dramatically to include the introduction of housing and libraries and volunteer services. We've identified six opportunities and challenges that have affected our business plan. To achieve this, we are helping to ensure the long-term stability of municipalities through appropriate legislation, capacity building, initiatives, and financial support. We are working with municipalities to provide advisory, dispute resolution, and financial supports. The key to this is enhancing the relationship between the provincial government, municipalities, and municipal organizations. The ministry will continue to work with municipal partners to identify ways to enhance these relationships through various mechanisms such as the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability.

One of the challenges we face has to do with unprecedented economic growth. With growth intensifying in many areas of the province, municipalities are in some cases struggling to address this issue. We've heard from our stakeholders that they want us to work with them to address broad planning and co-ordination issues. This will help us in both maximizing opportunities and minimizing disputes. Tied into this is the challenge of municipal sustainability and predictability. While some municipalities are growing, others are facing economic and demographic decline. Municipal Affairs and Housing needs to work with other ministries to help these primarily small urban and rural municipalities to deliver their needed services within the constraints of their revenue sources.

Mr. Chairman, another challenge deals with Affordable Housing Task Force recommendations. We are implementing approved recommendations from the task force to increase the availability of affordable housing. To do this, we are providing housing support to Albertans who have difficulty meeting their housing needs. We are also encouraging municipalities, private, and nonprofit housing sectors to develop sustainable housing initiatives that meet identified community needs through approved capital funding.

The provincial emergency management system continues to be challenged by evolving risks. These could include health emergencies like the pandemic influenza or the potentially hazardous activities of high-risk industries. Communities across Alberta are also facing a challenge in sustaining volunteer fire services. There is an increasing need to support these communities by providing increased technical assistance and education programs that help prevent fires and emergency incidences. It is also a challenge for municipalities to manage the risks associated with the escalated rate of building and development required to support the high level of growth in this province.

In addition to everything else that we are doing, I have three areas I would like to quickly mention. Our community services community development facilitators work with all communities in your constituencies to deal with community issues such as family violence, drug strategies, Water for Life initiatives, and crime prevention. Mr. Chairman, they support many of our provincial public input processes that result in community activities.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Alberta not-for-profit volunteer sector initiative will create a policy framework for us as a government to work with community organizations and volunteers in the province that are supporting so many vital initiatives that impact Albertans' quality of life. This is essential as these organizations face many issues that are placing

them at risk. Alberta's public libraries are truly something to brag about, as they are an example of a public service that serves all Albertans and contributes to our success as a province.

In terms of our core businesses we are setting our sights on the following goals: a responsive, co-operative, and well-managed local government sector; financially sustainable and accountable municipalities; a well-managed and efficient assessment and property tax system in which stakeholders have confidence; a Municipal Government Board that administers appeals and issues timely and impartial decisions of high quality; an accessible public library service and effectively supported communities and voluntary sectors; low-income Albertans having access to a range of housing options and effectively managed housing programs that are focused on those most in need; a comprehensive system of safety codes and standards that provides an appropriate level of public safety; an effective emergency management system; and implementing the approved recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force report.

4:30

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that, and I appreciate the comments of the minister very much. I want to compliment the minister. He's had a rather difficult two or three weeks, and he has retained an even keel and a good sense of humour throughout. He's wrong. But he's got a sense of humour, and it was certainly appreciated.

I just want to talk in my first 10 minutes about the nonhousing element of the department of municipal affairs. I'm sure that the minister is aware that like many other members of this Assembly I come from municipal government and served as a city councillor with Edmonton for 11 and a half years. So I have a strong affinity to the issues of municipal government and a strong affinity to municipal government. I happen to believe that of all of the orders of government in this country it's the one that is closest to the citizens, and it provides the most value for money. It certainly is, in my view, an efficient order of government, providing a wide range of services, including social services, housing, utilities, public services like police and housing and recreation as well as cultural programs and does so, I think, by and large, extremely well and without, I might add, ever running a deficit, which, as the minister knows, is simply not allowed.

So municipal government I think has an excellent track record in our province and is in many respects an ideal delivery mechanism for programs that may fall within the jurisdiction of the other two orders of government. I think municipal governments generally look at that in a fairly positive way. The problem is, of course, that they often get these responsibilities pushed onto them without consultation and often without adequate funding. We've seen numerous examples of that over the years, whether it comes to child care or housing or any number of programs that the provincial government in the past or even federally sometimes push onto municipal governments. I think there's a greater role for municipal government in our province in helping us meet our challenges. But it is essential that municipal governments be fully consulted about any such programs from the ground up and that they receive full funding for any programs that they are expected to deliver. With respect to housing I will come back to that question. In terms of the financing of municipal governments I think that's an important question.

These are not so much questions for the minister but just a broad take that I have on this issue. When I was first elected to the Legislature in 2000, I attended a chamber of commerce luncheon,

and the guest speaker was then the municipal affairs minister, Steve West. He promised at that time to vacate over a period of time the provincial portion of the property tax to municipalities by freezing the take; that is, the total number of dollars that the province takes for provincial property tax. That promise was then broken by the subsequent Minister of Finance, who said that they would freeze the mill rate. Of course, as the assessment grew both in value and extent, the take of the province from the provincial portion of property tax grew fairly substantially as well. So it wasn't quite the same thing. If you freeze the total number of dollars taken from provincial property tax, then the mill rate tends to fall as assessment grows, and it gives room to municipalities. That was one of the first broken promises that I observed with respect to that.

I think it is necessary but not sufficient for the province eventually to get out of the property tax altogether and leave the room entirely for municipalities. That would be my view. Obviously, that's quite a bit of money, and it needs to take a careful and patient approach, but I do think that position is valid.

I also believe, Mr. Chairman, that the municipalities deserve an additional source of funds that is based on the general tax revenue of the province, and particularly that is the income tax, and that is nonrenewable resource revenues. So our approach is to take a fixed amount and put it in legislation so that it isn't a matter of being fiddled with in each provincial budget but that there's a formula that's negotiated and agreed upon between the province and municipalities so that they have the financial resources they need to do their job.

I don't support one of the ideas that's currently being floated of giving municipalities a grab bag of little taxes that they can impose at will. I think that off-loads the responsibility to the municipalities to make individual decisions. It creates a patchwork of municipal financing, and it really doesn't address the question that municipalities are providing a very significant portion of public services in this province, and they do not have access to the main sources of revenue in this province. So I think that when voters see all of the different taxes that have been proposed for municipalities to impose, they're not going to be very happy. I think a greater share of existing government revenue is a more rational and more sustainable way to go.

I wanted to talk a little bit about regional planning as well, Mr. Chairman, because I think this is a really serious issue that has emerged in this province. If we look at the examples of some municipalities south of the border, we can see very, very serious consequences of not dealing well with municipal planning issues, and particularly intermunicipal planning issues.

I served on the Edmonton Regional Planning Commission and its executive committee at the time that the aforementioned Steve West decided to wrap up the affairs of the municipal planning commissions in this province. It was a difficult challenge. You know, the municipal planning commissions may not have been perfect or ideal, but they dealt with something that was very important and provided an important service, and that is to keep the land use appropriate for urban municipalities separate from the land use that is appropriate for rural municipalities and to make sure that everybody had a share in decision-making with respect to planning in a given region and that that share took into account, to a degree, differences in population.

Since that time the bilateral intermunicipal planning approach I think has failed. We don't have to look much farther than the proposals of the county of Strathcona to develop new industrial sites as well as new urban sites on its land on the boundary of Edmonton. That same problem has been replicated in a number of urban and rural centres around the province. When having discussions as I've

had with mayors in places like Grande Prairie and in Red Deer and so on, it's pretty clear that they as well as people in the AUMA have a great deal of concern about the strategies being employed by what are ostensibly rural municipalities to ring cities and ring towns with urban development so that all future development takes place in the rural municipality.

4:40

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to compliment the leader of the third party. The reason that I want to compliment him, even though I do not always agree with his philosophies, is that it is indeed very refreshing to have an individual that does understand the challenges of municipalities and that we are able to converse, I believe, with understanding. With that, I'm not sure the hon. member knows that I am giving him a compliment, but I want to thank him for that.

One of the comments that he made is: the most value for their money. Mr. Chairman, the hon. member is absolutely right. Local municipalities and the work that they do in their communities are very critical. Their involvement with the communities and at the grassroots, involving the libraries, volunteerism, and really what are the concerns of the individuals, I think is paramount.

I believe that you were talking about the ideal delivery for a program, the discussion of how the delivery took place with this government. It is the delivery of programs. It is the delivery for which municipalities need to have that autonomy, and they have asked for that autonomy.

Now, I guess that I need to talk about it from two different sides, municipalities under the auspices of Municipal Affairs. You know, if municipalities ask for autonomy, then with autonomy needs to come taxation because it is their choice. But I think that when we look in the past and we look at supporting municipalities, then there need to be some guidelines, and I think we need to be on the side of autonomy with support.

Mr. Chairman, there were comments that we do not need to push things on municipalities. I want to say that it is important that municipalities plan locally and plan regionally. I do not want to go back to the planning commissions because I don't believe that they truly worked, but we need to look at co-operation. We need to look at municipalities working together, to making sure that we can eliminate the duplication where duplication only is, let's say, a root of identity. We can have identity within our own municipalities and co-operate on services, co-operate on infrastructure, co-operate maybe even with administration.

The hon. leader of the third party also talked about full consultation. Through the minister's council we did have consultation. There was representation from both mayors of the large cities. There was representation from the AAMD and C, representation from the AUMA, and, Mr. Chairman, they do represent their own and separate interests. We also had meetings with the associations and individual municipalities, and they told us that we need to work together, that we need a regional plan but also that we need support.

Mr. Chairman, municipalities, as the hon. member has said, deserve an additional source of funding. This budget is providing that. This budget has provided \$400 million of additional support that will be ramped up after three years to \$1.4 billion.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Danyluk: One point four billion dollars. That does allow for some predictability, it does allow for some sustainability, and it does

allow for municipalities to be able to work together because they do have some additional capital to try to address some of those very important needs.

I was a little bit concerned when you talked about vacating the property tax. Well, as you spoke, then I realized that you talked about the vacating of the education tax or the education portion of property taxes. When we look at the needs of municipalities, I think a very good solution is that the property tax is still there because, you know, we have individuals, and we do have a responsibility to education. The municipal sustainability initiative provides that balance and takes that education tax or thereabouts, and it's going to be reverted to municipalities.

You made a comment about not supporting grab bags. You know, some municipalities would love the supporting of the grab bag, if I understand it, just to have, you know, a little bit of support here and a little bit of support there. I don't want to call it a system, but let me say to you that we definitely need to have a program that supports municipalities. Do we need to work on the present program that we have? Yes, we need to work on it a little bit because we still need to have the initiative for municipalities to work together. We need to address the needs of municipalities that have very high growth areas. We need to look at municipalities that don't have the equalized assessment yet have the population. We need to look at municipalities who are suffering because, through no fault their own, of not having development. I think that this municipal sustainability fund is going to address those needs. I see it happening, and I see it as very, very positive.

Last, Mr. Chairman, is the discussion of land use, the comparison between the urban and the rural, and looking at two distinct areas and what their role should be. Well, there are different identities in rural and urban areas, but at the same time I believe that the land-use framework that is going to come forward is going to identify individuality yet look at the province as a whole because land use is such an important issue for this province.

So for the next session I'll sit down until you have more questions, if that's all right.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much to the minister for those answers – they were certainly very helpful – and as well for the unusual compliment, which didn't surprise me as much as some members of his side, who I don't think all necessarily agreed with the minister on that point.

4:50

I want to sort of pick up where I left off and where the minister left off, and that's on the whole question of regional planning. I don't necessarily think that regional planning commissions were the ultimate answer, but we do need some comprehensive regional planning to solve intermunicipal land-use issues. You know, that can't be solved, in my view, by a series of bilateral negotiations and agreements between municipalities.

I just want to indicate to the minister that I think the problem needs a very direct solution, and it may well be solved by being negotiated, by the rural and the urban municipalities talking to each other, but I think that you need a set of principles to guide the discussion. I think the basic principle that I've talked about with municipal officials is that urban development should take place in urban areas and that rural development should take place in rural areas, and if urban development begins to develop in a rural area contiguous to an urban municipality, then that development needs to become part of the urban municipality.

We don't think that annexation is a dirty word. In fact, I think we need to go back to a policy that has some clear guidelines and says that if there's a whole bunch of high-density housing going into an area or a major commercial development that is contiguous to a city or a town, then that city or town should have the right – and it should be supported – to annex that particular piece so that the urban municipality remains urban.

I also think that rural municipalities have a role. Of course, there's agricultural development, and some of that is fairly industrial in nature. There's also the question of heavy industry, and it may well be that heavy industry is not always appropriate to be located right in or next to very seriously populated areas. So I think that there's an exception there, a special case that needs to be developed.

The minister must be aware of the G7 – now, I guess, it's the G8 – the group of counties that are following a systematic plan, an organized plan to ring urban municipalities with urban style developments so that all further development, then, must take place within their boundaries, and all of the tax revenue thereby flows to those. That should be stopped. We're really clear on this. The minister, I think, needs to take a really clear and a principled stand on this question.

I want to talk a little bit about regional government. I think that where there is a group or a cluster of urban municipalities in close proximity that are incorporated as urban municipalities, then there is a role for some form of regional government. That's different than a single urban municipality with perhaps several rural neighbours where there are unincorporated hamlets and so on involved. In that case I think I would take a rather different approach. I think this needs to be tackled, Mr. Minister. I think that this is an issue that really needs some attention. So negotiation: yes. Municipalities working with each other: yes. But there have to be some principles involved.

I think that another principle is the preservation of agricultural land and good recreational areas in our province. I think that's a role for municipalities: to support agriculture and to support agricultural land and to preserve recreational areas and natural areas. I think that's an important role as well for rural municipalities.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to just switch a little bit to housing and just deal with that issue. I start by expressing appreciation to the minister for his taking the step shortly after assuming office of establishing a committee that was fairly broadly based to look at the housing issue in this province, to look at affordable housing, and for including representatives of the two official opposition parties on that committee. I think that was a good step. It was in many respects a breath of fresh air, and we had quite a bit of hope for it.

I also want to thank the committee, which I think worked very hard under some fairly strict timelines that the minister imposed, met with hundreds of Albertans, travelled around the province, and, I think, developed a very good rapport. At that point there was, I guess, not quite the follow-through that we had hoped for.

I think that in terms of the process, it went off the rails a little bit when the report was not released publicly and the government made its decision about the report's recommendations while the public was unaware of the contents of the report. I think that's backwards, Mr. Chairman. I think that it's important that if we're going to have real public discussion and democracy in this province, if we're really going to democratize the political process in this province, then you let the public debate go on. You listen to it, and then you make your decision, not before. I think that had the government done that, they may have avoided some of the political difficulties that they're now finding themselves in.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to make the general point, which we have made before, that building new housing and providing

affordable housing opportunities for Albertans is a high priority. We recognize that the government sees that as a high priority, and we also recognize that it's ultimately the answer to the high rents that people are facing. It's a supply and demand issue. There's an insufficiency of supply. But the supply just doesn't appear because there's a demand. There are long lead times. There are many other factors that are preventing an appropriate supply from coming on quickly. And the government has admitted that it may be two years at minimum, perhaps quite a bit longer, before the supply issue is resolved.

The question then is: what do you do about the people who are being hit by unfair rents? You don't just call them names. You don't just say, "You're being un-Albertan" and all of that because that doesn't do anything. What really needs to happen is some protection for renters in the province. I don't know if there's a different way, if we can call it something else. We didn't want to call it rent controls because we didn't think the government would like that. We'd call it rent guidelines, you know, to try to soften the language a little bit. Maybe we can change the language a bit more. I don't know what you want to call it. Maybe we could just call it free enterprise in housing. [interjection] Then I think the minister of sustainable development might actually support it. But you do need to do something.

You need to resolve this question for people on a temporary basis, and that's all we've ever said: that these need to be in place on a temporary basis and that they shouldn't apply to new units. The argument has been made, of course, that if you put rent controls or guidelines or whatever on new units, then people won't build them. So we're saying: don't. Put it on the existing supply of rental accommodation. Then that should have no particular impact on new investment.

The fact of the matter remains that there is very little investment in rental accommodation now in Alberta without rent guidelines. So what's going to change if we bring rent guidelines in? In Ontario, where they have rent guidelines, there is substantially more investment in new rental units than there is here in Alberta. It doesn't follow that just because you have rent guidelines in place, somehow it affects the investment. I think there are a lot of other reasons why it's not happening in Alberta, but I encourage the minister to relook at that particular issue.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm not exactly sure what the hon. member said: that it can be solved by regional planning. I'm sorry. We need regional planning, and I agree with you on that. And he says that it can be solved by bilateral solutions.

An Hon. Member: Cannot be solved.

5:00

Mr. Danyluk: Cannot be solved. Okay. Well, then, that makes more sense. I didn't hear the "not" part. So I think we do need to talk together, and, I mean, we do need to have basic principles. You're right. You talked about: the urbans should have their place and the rurals should have their place, and their developments should take place in their own kind of areas. Right? You know, in actuality, that philosophy, that utopian philosophy, is right, except when we progress through the evolution of our province. Our urban areas are expanding. Regardless if we expand straight up, we are going to also expand in a horizontal fashion. So when we look at that, some of the boundaries – and we talk about annexation – need to be expanded.

Now, the question that arises to me is that I don't have a problem with that development. Being a farmer, my heart is for the preservation of land because it very much bothers me when we abuse land because we just can't make it again, at least not with the technology that we do have. But where I do have some difficulty – and I will admit it to you – is that the development part doesn't bother me as much in adjoining municipalities except when one municipality takes advantage of the opportunity of another.

Let me give you an example where you have a municipality, and they may be an urban municipality – and I'm only using this as an example – that is expanding in growth, and a municipality beside that municipality that is growing, but they snuggle right up to the first municipality and lower the mill rate and try to encourage development just outside. So they're really taking advantage of the large centre yet not having to have the commitment of the services, the community support, that is necessary. I think that part of what we're doing is trying to narrow that gap, that co-operation. I've always had the premise that we are one community and we really need to work as one community.

Should we have independence? Well, you know, I need to reflect back to my constituency when I talk about education. In my hometown of St. Paul and area we have a regional division education board. We have the public and the private in one board, and we work together. There is no other board like that in Alberta. There is none in Canada. There is really none in the Commonwealth. It makes sense for the people to work together. But the identity is at the site-based level, at the school. So if I relate that to municipalities, I would suggest to you that I think we can maintain independence but instill co-operation. I think we are doing that.

Regional government is important. There are opportunities. We need to, as I've said many times, communicate, collaborate, and co-operate. We go to the same hockey games. We shop at the same stores. We go to the same churches. Yet we want to build silos when we are involved in municipal politics. We need to narrow those gaps. We don't need to have so many stovepipes in one house. Working together, working regionally, I think, is a fundamental focus for where this government is going.

Mr. Chairman, let me refer to the housing issues or the housing task force. I agree with you that we must applaud those individuals who worked on that task force. I very much recognize the member who sat on that task force and all of the other individuals – we have the member opposite, member of the third party – who really came to the challenge and committed their time, their energy for 45 days. You did listen to the focus of the task force.

The task force recommended eight immediate recommendations, and we accepted all but one from the first grouping. I highlight that we committed \$96 million in 2007-2008, also adding the \$100 million for the municipal sustainability fund. We created three new initiatives: the homeless eviction and prevention fund, the transition housing initiative, the direct-to-tenant rent supplement programs. We increased funding for existing programs for the homeless shelters. We made changes to the tenant notices to bring short-term stability to a very much, as we know, heated market.

The task force recommended five short-term recommendations, and at this time the government accepted one, referred another one, and did not accept the recommendations like affordable land and moving towards a block funding because they are already being worked on in a department.

I want to say that the task force recommended an additional 33 long-term recommendations which involved more than just addressing a mandate of the task force to seek solutions but the creation of accessible and affordable housing. These either had been accepted in part, and there were nine of them, or referred to the interdepart-

mental assistant deputy ministers' committee – I believe we have nine ministries involved – and there were 11 of them. Thirteen were not accepted.

I want to say to the leader of the third party that we took this seriously. We took the recommendations seriously. In this House in question period and numerous other times this government gets criticized for looking in the short term or not looking in the long term when it comes to rent controls. Mr. Chairman, we do need to look in the long term and address the concerns in the short term. In the long term we need to have a continual building of units in Alberta. Last year we had a hundred thousand people come to this province. They need housing. They came to this province without doctors. [Mr. Danyluk's speaking time expired] I'll try to answer the rest of it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

5:10

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's appropriate that we continue the housing discussion, as we will. Again I will say that working with the task force, they were good people, and I know that the minister was serious about it. I would just echo what the leader said, though. I think the mistake is that it came to the Tory caucus ahead of being out there for debate.

Now, admittedly, there are some good things that the minister has talked about. Some of the recommendations they accepted, and we recognize that. The minister in question period talked about the \$285 million. Yes, I mean, the problem, though, is that as much as it sounds, when it comes to the other things, that amount of money may not be enough, with the overheated economy. We're always playing catch-up.

What we found as we travelled across the province was that the demand was so heavy. I mean, we heard from a lot of people. Yes, \$285 million goes some way, and some of the things that the government has talked about are good. The point that I'd like to stress to the minister, though, is that we saw this as a package, short-term and long-term. The problem is when you begin to look at it without the short term, and that's why we talked about temporary rent guidelines. It wasn't reinventing the wheel. They've had it in Alberta. It's because you just can't keep up. They can't build that housing fast enough.

We did talk about incentives – and we'll come to that – to get developers to build housing. We talked about that a lot. We talked about even trying to get people, first-time home buyers, into the market. But in the short run that would take time, and as the minister knows, today there are thousands of people out there that are feeling the stress of what's happening now. Yeah, it's okay to say that we can only do it once a year, but that may mean, as we're finding out, that some landlords – not all, but some – are just raising it faster than they would ordinarily, so it doesn't solve the problem.

You see, if you put the guidelines in on a temporary basis, as they do in other places, and say to the people, "We'll give you incentives. Build some markets. Put some affordable housing out there," I would suggest then that eventually we won't need the guidelines, as I like to call them, or rent stability, or whatever. But in the short run, I mean, what do we do with all these people that are paying 50, 60, 70 per cent of their income? Mr. Minister, I don't think you can have an office big enough to keep dealing with it in that way. I don't envy the minister, you know, trying to deal with this without the policy guidelines that are there.

That's all we were saying. In fact, the committee put two years on it. Hopefully, some of that affordable housing that you were talking

about will be coming onto the market then so that perhaps we wouldn't need them. But I honestly don't know what you do in the short run with all the people that are suffering at this particular time. It's not an easy problem, and I do have some sympathy for the minister because I know his heart's in the right place. I don't think of him as a person that doesn't care. I honestly don't. What we're talking about here is policy, and that's what I think has been missed, a big part of that task force.

I want to say that the other problem without the guidelines, I believe, is the volatility. We've found that that's been a bit of a disaster with the planning, as we now know today because it's not ready yet, even though it was said here yesterday that it was. They took the rent supplement program and increased it to basically what we had said to do, but if you don't have the guidelines, where's that money going to end up? You know, with no guidelines, rent increases carrying on all the time, that money may well end up in the pockets of the people that don't need it, the landlords.

That's why you need to put all these things together as a package, Mr. Chairman. That's the point that we were trying to make. The only other thing – I want to go through the report to some degree, but we won't have time, obviously, to go through all of it. The funding: good; \$35 million for temporary emergency homeless shelter spaces. We heard that loud and clear, and I'm glad that the minister is bringing that forward.

One of the things that we heard a lot – and I think the Member for Edmonton-Glenora would agree with me on this – is that that's important: we need the shelters for the homeless and the rest of it, and we probably can't build them fast enough right now. But, boy, did we get an earful about the Alberta transitional housing initiative. We put \$2.5 million there, but I don't think that's going to come close to dealing with it. The advocates kept saying: look, it's like a revolving door; we get people in shelters, and then we don't have enough to keep them. We're sort of talking that period of time, one to two years, to get them off addictions or whatever we do, to get established. They said that was just as important as the actual shelter allowance.

I think we could have trumped that up a bit, Mr. Chairman, because we have a growing problem, both with addictions, with homeless people. I think that's something that in that end of it, if we top that up a little more, you could have some real impact there with what you've done, and I'd like you to perhaps take a look at that in that whole area, you know, in the short run, dealing with that end of the spectrum.

As the committee, as the minister is well aware, we were trying to deal with the spectrum, right from homeless through to transitional housing, right to where we sought to help the first-time home buyers. We saw the spectrum. I think there is some good work at that end of it. I think that if we looked at the transitional housing, my recollection – and the minister can correct me – of what we talked about, \$12 million rings in my mind, and I haven't had a chance to go back, but that that may have some of the impact that we want at that end. So maybe that's something that we could take a look at, and that would deal with that end of it.

Mr. Chairman, I want to start to go through, though, some of it. We probably won't have time, and I'd like to get my colleagues in, but I want to talk about a couple of recommendations that were turned down, because there were a lot of them. One was the planning in the long term. Well, let's say it was short term and long term: establish an Alberta housing plan and establish an Alberta housing secretariat. The reason that we said that is not because we didn't want the minister to have a job, but what we heard right across the way was that we are in a crisis. We heard that everywhere. It is a crisis. Housing is in crisis. We wanted to bring that

forward. In the Lougheed government they established a ministry of housing and established what they wanted to do as a result of that. That's the point that we wanted with this secretariat. I know that the minister is saying that there is some discussion among the various groups that have to deal with housing. But just as an example today, with the minister of employment standing up about a number, and obviously the minister thought that that number was doing something, and they didn't have it.

That's why we were saying that. We are in such a crisis, that a secretariat who had access to the minister – I mean, with municipal affairs, all the other things you do are pretty important, as we've just had that discussion with the leader, that you've got a lot on the platter there. But in the short run at least, if not a housing ministry, like they've had in the past, that's why we're advocating a secretariat that would come out with a housing plan down the way, a 10-year plan or whatever. I think we still need that.

It's nice that there's \$285 million going forward, but I think the minister recognizes that in an overheated economy – and we're not prepared to put the brakes on – this is going to be, even with the \$285 million, an ongoing situation. So that's why we wanted it. I was sort of curious, I guess, why we would reject that, even if it was done through the present ministry, why that was rejected. All we're just saying is that this puts an emphasis that something important is occurring.

Thank you.

5:20

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me start off by discussing the long term and the short term. I know that the hon. leader of the third party has said that he knows what the answer is going to be. So I will speak directly – I'm trying to answer your question, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: I'll listen in my office.

Mr. Danyluk: You're going to listen in your office. That sounds very good.

Mr. Chairman, in comment to the long term, it is critical that we keep the movement of development, encourage the movement of development of new units. We cannot totally emphasize the short-term solutions without looking at the long term. This government has very much recognized the short term.

The hon. member mentioned the \$285 million, so I will respond to the \$285 million. One hundred million for new municipal sustainability housing. Mr. Chairman, this funding plus \$96 million in enhanced capital to increase affordable housing units is funding that is going to municipalities. Municipalities in high-growth areas are the best to understand their needs. Municipalities can spend this funding in the way that they see fit, that best addresses the needs in their communities, whether it is the building of new units, the renovation of buildings, getting involved in secondary suites, which is more immediate, whether it is rent supplements. Rent supplements have been in place. There has been an additional amount of funds put into rent supplements that does not support the landlord: \$9 million goes directly to individuals.

Mr. Chairman, \$13 million increase for homeless support, \$3 million increase for the provincial homeless initiative, \$14 million increase in the rent supplement program, \$4.3 million increase in support to housing providers and special purpose housing, \$45 million to affordable housing in Wood Buffalo, \$7 million for a new homeless and eviction fund initiative, and \$2.5 million for the

Alberta transition housing initiative. These are incentives and initiatives that came forward from the housing task force. On comments from the member of the third party, "Is this enough; is \$285 million enough?" I'm not sure what enough is.

I want to compliment our caucus for recognizing that there is a need, that there need to be solutions. Mr. Chairman, I need to say that solutions that need to be looked at need to be balanced. We cannot only look at the long term. We cannot only look at the short term. The predictability of this province would be a lot easier if we said: okay, from today on there will be no more people coming to this province; none of our children will be looking for housing. What happens is we will cut off any sort of housing increases. It wouldn't be very hard to solve it that way. But we have a continuing influx into Alberta. We have our children who are working, and they are getting involved in the marketplace for new units. At the same time, some of those individuals provide opportunities for others when they build a new home, when they start and maybe move into a new condominium. I guess what I'm trying to say is that we do need to have a balance.

I want to speak just for a moment about the \$2.5 million for the new transitional housing initiative. The government clearly heard that building units without having services attached is an issue. This program will assist people in transition to move into more stable accommodations once they are ready. Through the task force recommendation of \$12 million – they base this on new units built for five years – we approved \$2.5 million, a complement of units that will be created this year. There is also \$16 million in new transitional supports to seven major municipalities. That started on April 1, 2007. It's \$8 million per year. It's over a two-year program. Mr. Chairman, I stress to you again that it is very necessary to have that balanced approach.

We had a meeting today. This government does listen. The members opposite had individuals come to this House. We met with those individuals. First of all, we had a presentation by those individuals, which included press and members opposite, and then this government had a meeting with those individuals to discuss their direct concerns. Mr. Chairman, it was a very good meeting. We discussed the challenges and the hardships that individuals had, what was happening in their community. We talked about solutions, and I believe that, maybe with the exception of one individual, we understood each other's challenges. We had staff who stayed and met with those individuals one on one because that is what is so important. We need to look at the immediate concerns that individuals have. We cannot forget about one segment of our population. This government, this caucus has looked at a balanced approach and a package deal.

Mr. Chairman, when we talk about doing it fast – and I'm taking their comments – that if they talk about a housing secretariat, that housing secretariat would be another form, I believe, of government. We have in place a ministry that very much understands the issues, the issues that were brought forward by the task force, a ministry that is working hard to deal with the issues.

5:30

The Chair: We'll come back to that after we recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak this time on Municipal Affairs and Housing. Obviously, we're all engulfed in this issue. Housing is an emergency situation right across the province, and certainly in my own constituency of Edmonton-Calder I'm receiving literally dozens of calls every single day from people that are in a tight spot, so to speak, with rents going

up or eviction notices being served. So I've been reflecting on this a great deal because it comes down to the most fundamental thing that people require to survive and to put all the other elements of their lives together, and that is to have a roof over their head. If you don't have that, you're less able to continue with your education, your health is likely to suffer, the family unit is likely to be fractured in some way, and a myriad of other physical and psychological problems. So it comes down to the most central thing that we are meant to protect here as the provincial Legislature and legislators.

So much is being said about spending so much money, but really in my mind and I think in the public's mind this is a regulatory issue. It's not a question of spending hundreds of millions of dollars. It's taking the official duty that we have here to make regulations to protect people from being gouged in their rents. Mr. Chair, it's a regulatory issue, and we don't have to talk about throwing in hundreds of millions of dollars. Certainly, we do when we are looking at building affordable housing in the long term, but we can't expect those units to be in place for weeks or months or even years, I would venture to say, considering how difficult it is to build something in this province, with the tremendous economy that we have.

What we are faced with now is to put a regulation in place to ensure that people aren't getting gouged and that we're not having this huge transfer of money away from the working people of this province, the middle class of this province, the young families of this province, transferring that money out of their pockets and into the landlord system and the landlord and rental companies that are currently enjoying the situation. That's what it's all about, Mr. Chair. It's not about spending hundreds or millions of dollars. I'm tired of hearing these numbers being bandied about. Certainly, it's fine and dandy, and that's what we're doing, but it is a regulatory issue that will save people money, and that is the distinction that everybody who's getting gouged knows, but we're slow to understand it here in this Chamber, at least on the other side.

You know, again, rental companies want to have some idea about what's coming down the tube, as well, and the confusion that we're creating at this juncture is even making people gouge worse because they don't know if something is going to come down. As a result, the rents go up even further and faster and in a more erratic sort of way. That's what we're facing here now, and we're just throwing gasoline on the crisis by dilly-dallying about and not taking decisive action, the responsibility of this House, to provide regulation and direction for the most essential service and industry that all citizens require in this province.

Moving along with that, you know, as we spoke about earlier today in the House, the rental companies know that they have a huge sector of the population over a barrel. They are the people who have been less able or unable to afford a mortgage because, let's say, in Edmonton houses have doubled in the last year or so. So they are stuck having to rent a little bit more. They want to buy a place, but then they're lined up in the crosshairs of rental companies, who can then gouge them even more. So they get stuck in that spinning cycle.

You know, Mr. Chair, if we don't deal with this now, we're going to have a whole generation of young people who are unable to buy their own homes, unable to buy their own condominiums, and less able to start their own families. Really, that's the foundation, the structure by which we move on and we create a responsible society. Landownership is a fundamental building block to building a stable society. People have ownership, they take responsibility, and they have the stability to have a family and to start their own family.

When I look at young people out there, at my own family, I'm just absolutely sick to see that we're not seizing hold of this situation and

putting it back on course. We have the opportunity to do that, certainly. We're not outside of the ability to deal with the situation. We can't flounder around like we have been. We can in fact put in reasonable rent guidelines, stabilize the situation, and focus back on making it possible for these young people to buy their first bit of property, a condominium or a small home or something like that, through some sort of mortgage assistance program.

You know, this same Alberta government – well, it's not really the same because I certainly saw much more responsibility in administrations past – foresaw the requirement of giving some assistance to people who are seeking their first mortgage and putting in place a mechanism by which they can have affordable loans to do that. Quite frankly, you know, this goes past and over ideological grounds right across the whole spectrum because the bottom line is to have a stable population, a stable population who has an investment in the future. Quite frankly, this isn't just talking about people's rents and rent guidelines, rent controls, or whatever. We're talking about the future of this province and where people are going to live.

So I really wanted to say my piece on that. I find it quite offensive that we're wasting the time that's available to us to deal with an emergency situation. I appreciate that the minister is stuck between a rock and a hard place, but if there's anything I can do to move that rock along, to give it a push, just give me a ring, and I would be glad to put my shoulder to it. You know what? This is not something that you have to face alone. I know that there are other members across the way that would like to see some rent guidelines in place too. At the very least, electorally, you know, it's going to be a bit of a tight spot whenever that election comes.

An Hon. Member: That's for sure.

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely. You know, you face the music if you don't, right? There are lots of renters that are going to suddenly start voting, and then see what happens.

I wanted to speak about that, but I also have some other issues that are very important, I think, to this budget coming up. You know, as I've come to realize, really the best value for investment for public monies is running it through municipalities. Municipalities have a degree of efficiency that usually delivers the greatest amount of goods for the most reasonable price. What I'm encouraging, whatever initiative we put forward here for housing and for municipalities in general, is that we consult with municipalities in the most interactive way possible.

I have a very good example of an initiative that took place in the city of Edmonton, actually in Edmonton-Calder, in regard to providing affordable housing. The Ascot Garden complex in the Wellington community in my area is just in the process of probably being rebuilt. It was affordable housing and affordable housing units, so it's a difficult situation, of course, because we're trying to protect those units and then also develop the area, create densification. It's all good. So what the city of Edmonton did was go in and buy a percentage of those places before they were even built, thus ensuring that those are going to be affordable housing units for assisted living and suchlike.

This is just an example of a way by which we can look at a local initiative and perhaps apply it to a broader circumstance and encourage municipalities to do this throughout the province: have a certain percentage of any new building that is earmarked for affordable housing or have that developer pay the equivalent into a fund that will build affordable housing in some appropriate place.

I was down in Calgary a couple of weeks ago. They had a housing and homelessness conference down at the Stampede grounds, and that's like ground zero for, you know, a transition from

what used to be quite a lot of affordable housing, albeit not such great affordable housing, to a sort of condo, high-rise phenomenon that's taking place around the Stampede grounds. What a great place to impose such an idea, where in fact each of those units being built as new condos could have a percentage that goes to affordable housing either in that development or somewhere close by. Lots of development is taking place. Lots of building is taking place, and we want to make sure that that continues for the whole spectrum of the population.

Municipalities are at the forefront with being able to deal with homelessness as well. Certainly, we have some new funding in regard to the homeless initiative, and we should work as closely as possible. I would like to encourage the municipalities having a hand in a number of initiatives that we see in both Edmonton and Calgary and in Red Deer as well to ensure that that money is being spent in the most efficient way possible.

Another area of concern that I have in regard to . . . [Mr. Eggen's speaking time expired]

5:40

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I need to address a couple of issues. The hon. member talks about the future of Alberta, then feels sick about what's happening because of rent guidelines and the stability situation. I want to inform the hon. member that you cannot turn on rent guidelines or rent controls for a year or for two years and then expect private enterprise to come back in and build. What happens is that as soon as you turn on those rent controls, it adds stability. There is no initiative or incentive to build, and it doesn't turn on the day that you turn off rent controls because those entrepreneurs need stability for investment. That adds to the situation. So you won't have building for four or five years or longer. They need to have confidence in the investment and in the government.

I'm working a little backwards on some of the comments that were made. The hon. member talked about the appropriate place to build, and, you know, he has the direction of the appropriate place. Well, Mr. Chairman, there are so many people who also have the focus of where it's appropriate to have housing, that it should occur in their areas. It's not quite the solution that it looks to be.

Mr. Chairman, how much time?

The Clerk: Two minutes.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Chairman, I need to speak about rent supplements. This government's policy is that individuals should not pay more than 30 per cent of their salaries for housing. Now, the individuals that get support are those who are most in need. We have a set amount of money, so when we look at the criteria and the challenges that people come to us with, the individuals that most need the support get the support most. I heard the other day a member of the opposition, I believe, say that there was an individual who had been waiting for three years to get affordable housing. Well, that could very well be true, but there were probably a lot of individuals that needed it more than the person that was waiting. I mean, we need to look at the individuals that need it most.

Mr. Chairman, the other one is when we have discussions about gouging by landlords. Your interpretation of gouging could be a lot different than the interpretation they have. Landlords are not all enjoying the situation. They have higher maintenance costs. I talked to one landlord that can't get a painter, can't get a plumber in. Maintenance is a problem. Repairs are a problem.

The Chair: I hate to interrupt the hon. minister, but pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(a) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Health and Wellness relating to the 2007-08 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I would like to advise that earlier this afternoon while the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was speaking, perhaps it wasn't the Standing Orders that were breached, but accepted practice in this Assembly was breached – and I didn't want to intervene at the time – when an hon. member walked casually through the centre of the Assembly, which isn't normally accepted practice. I would like to perhaps point out to all members that Standing Orders 13(4), (5), and (6) and *Beauchesne's* 458(1) might make interesting reading for that hon. member and all hon. members in the future. I know that the rules are a little more relaxed during committee, but I think we still have to maintain a certain level of decorum in the House.

With that, I would recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be sure and check out that reading list over the supper break.

Given the hour and given the fact that we've made good progress today, I would like to move that we call it 6 o'clock and that pursuant to Government Motion 19 we reconvene at 7 p.m. in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; at 5:49 p.m. the Assembly adjourned until 7 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 8, 2007**

7:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/08

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will call the committee to order. The committee has before it today estimates for the departments of Health and Wellness, Treasury Board, and Municipal Affairs and Housing. We're going to deal with one department at a time. We'll start with Treasury Board.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

head: **Main Estimates 2007-08**

Treasury Board

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, good evening, Mr. Chairman. Welcome. I am certainly pleased and honoured to represent the department of Treasury Board with the 2007 to 2008 estimates. I would like to introduce some of the folks that are here tonight to pass me secret notes to answer the provocative if not some stimulating questions that I'm sure are to arise: my deputy minister, Brian Manning; Mike Wevers, the distinguished-looking fellow, just a little more distinguished; Aaron Neumeyer; Lori Cresey; and our communications guy probably thought better of attending and is not present.

The Treasury Board was created to provide a co-ordinated and disciplined approach to managing government spending. It's also responsible for leading government's capital planning process, providing advice and analysis on planning, construction costs, capital spending. During this time of phenomenal growth in Alberta, this is a challenge to say the least. As a new ministry and a new government part of our job is to explore new ways of doing things, particularly in the face of rising construction costs and limited resources. This includes identifying, analyzing alternative approaches to delivering capital projects. The work of the Treasury Board is carried out under the umbrella of the Premier's five priorities, with particular focus on governing with integrity and transparency and managing growth pressures.

The ministry also has a supportive role from a financial and accountability perspective in all of the government priorities. The Premier also gave me three areas of focus in my mandate letter that stemmed from his five priorities. These are to establish a Treasury Board secretariat to provide a co-ordinated and disciplined approach to managing government spending and capital planning, to develop a long-term strategic capital plan, and to explore alternative financing for capital projects.

To achieve my mandate and the goals set out in our business plan, we need adequate government investment in our ministry. Before I share some of the highlights of our estimates for 2007-08, I will talk briefly about our business plan and specifically about the five goals we've set out.

Our first goal is to ensure a co-ordinated and disciplined approach to government spending. This means ensuring that the Treasury Board committee, cabinet, and policy committees are provided information/advice to effectively manage government expenditures and capital planning. This also means ensuring that government's plan for managing growth is sustainable. To achieve this, we will lead a review of the government programs to identify opportunities for more effective spending.

Our second goal is to develop a strategic capital plan to address capital requirements associated with Alberta's economic growth.

Besides allocating funding to help meet Alberta's capital needs, our responsibilities also entail evaluating and prioritizing of these needs as part of a long-term plan. We're talking about a more strategic approach to capital planning than there has been in the past. This includes assessing the impact of approved capital projects on future ministry operating programs.

As part of our strategy to strengthen capital planning we have set up the alternative capital financing office, a new body committed to pursuing new ways to undertake capital projects. Governments will only consider alternative approaches to buildings like P3s where it makes sense from a taxpayer's perspective. Saving from an alternative approach could include fixed prices for construction, fixed completion dates, shorter times to build, long-term warranties on work, and guaranteed maintenance over the length of the contract. The northeast Calgary ring road is an example of how to use the alternative approach and how we can save taxpayers' dollars. In this case we'll save around \$350 million.

Our third goal is to ensure a co-ordinated and disciplined approach to managing government accountability. We do this through the office of the Controller, which is responsible for government accounting standards and financial management policies. We also inform Albertans about how government is addressing its responsibilities through open and accountable financial management and performance reporting such as the government's annual report.

Goal 4 is to provide objective, risk-based audit services that improve government programs and services. This involves providing auditing services, advice, and assistance to other ministries as they develop risk management processes in accounting and financial management policies.

Our fifth and final goal is managing growth and development in the oil sands area. We are establishing the Oil Sands Sustainable Development Secretariat in response to recommendations of the Radke report on addressing critical growth pressures brought on by the rapid pace of oil sands development. The secretariat will co-ordinate and approve planning, communications, and service delivery to the oil sands region. It will collaborate with ministries, industry, communities, and stakeholders to find a common approach to address the impacts of the oil sands development.

All five of these goals will help us manage growth in the province while setting the stage for Alberta's continued prosperity. The Treasury Board ministry has been structured to help us accomplish these goals.

In regard to estimates the ministry is made up of eight business areas. I'll go through these areas now and will present the ministry's estimates for the 2007-2008 fiscal year. The overall amount to be voted is for expense and equipment/inventory purchases. The ministry's estimate totals \$19,240,000. Of the overall estimate \$1,633,000 is for the ministry support services. This includes the office of the deputy minister, strategic financial services, and communications. Ministry support services has nine FTEs.

Secretariat of Treasury Board. The secretariat of Treasury Board is responsible for co-ordinating agendas, documents, decisions, requests for support, and advice to the Treasury Board committee. In conjunction with Executive Council the secretariat also reports to and provides information and advice to cabinet and cabinet policy committee. The secretariat has five FTEs, and the estimate required to support it is \$868,000.

Oil Sands Sustainable Development Secretariat. As I mentioned earlier, the Oil Sands Sustainable Development Secretariat emerged in response to recommendations in the Radke report. The secretariat will support the expanded role and mandate of the Oil Sands Ministerial Strategy Committee, which is addressing the many pressures arising out of the massive growth in the oil sands area.

The Oil Sands Sustainable Development Secretariat has seven FTEs. Its share of the ministry's overall estimate is \$1,100,000.

Corporate internal audit services. Corporate internal audit services supports government priorities to be governed with integrity and transparency. This body conducts internal audits on a risk-prioritized basis to ministries across government. It improves other ministries' operations and fiscal management by identifying and recommending improvements to ministries' risk management control and governance process. Our ministry's estimate for corporate internal audit services, with 25 FTEs, is \$4,932,000.

Office of the Controller. As I mentioned previously, the office of the Controller is responsible for government accounting standards and financial management policies. It supports the third goal of our business plan, ensuring a co-ordinated and disciplined approach to the management of government accountability. The office of the Controller has 24 FTEs, and the ministry's estimate for this business area is \$3,057,000.

Spending management and planning plays a lead role in providing a co-ordinated and disciplined approach to the management of government spending, the first goal in our business plan. With 28 FTEs this is the primary contact with ministries for all program budgeting and spending issues, and it reviews programs across government to find ways ministries can more effectively spend money and still achieve their objectives. The ministry's estimate for this area is \$3,600,000.

Strategic capital planning has three distinct responsibilities that support our ministry's mandate to develop a long-term strategic capital plan. This area co-ordinates development of both the five-year and long-term capital plan. It ensures that government takes a disciplined approach to managing and controlling capital spending, and it develops common parameters for demographic and economic change. This is essential if we're going to develop strategies for long-term program delivery to meet the ministry's capital needs. Strategic capital planning has 11 FTEs. The ministry's estimate for this area is \$2,239,000.

We have established the alternative capital financing office, which I mentioned earlier is a body to support our second business plan goal, to develop a strategic capital plan. The alternative capital financing office is a new body. Its role is to assess opportunities within the overall capital plan for managing capital projects by using alternative financing models. As part of its work the office will work with partners from other jurisdictions that have already developed alternative financing methods, tapping into their expertise and implementing P3s here in Alberta. The alternative capital financing office has six FTEs, and its share of the ministry's overall estimates is \$1,711,000. [Mr. Snelgrove's speaking time expired]

Well, I look forward to any questions you might have.

7:10

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, just so that you have clarity on what will happen today, we have a total of three hours allocated, and we are going to deal with ministries sequentially. There is no time limit. We have up to three hours in total. We are going to start with the Treasury Board, and once we're done with them, we'll proceed with Municipal Affairs and Housing and then Health and Wellness.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you. I do appreciate the comments that the minister has made. I want to talk on two issues, the first one on the alternate capital financing office identifying and analyzing options for financing capital projects and negotiating P3s where feasible. In Whitecourt the Northern Gateway school division has recommended a modernization of our high school. I know that in

our capital discussions to date, we've discussed opportunities for P3s in new capital projects. Has the minister considered or has there been a discussion around P3s with modernization programs, and if not, why not? I think that modernization programs, too, could form good opportunities for P3s, and there may be some opportunities for savings and long-term maintenance of our buildings. I know that some of the modernization programs are \$5 million, \$10 million programs for their schools.

The second one is goal 5, managing growth and development in the oil sands area. I know that in the spring we had some discussion with regard to developing an Oil Sands Sustainable Development Secretariat, and I just wanted to know what the progress was on that appointment and if the minister has some ideas how that's going to develop and when it's going to develop?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: You bet. Thank you. The situation with regard to the P3s around modernization. Treasury Board would be very, very happy to sit down with the Minister of Education, were he to come forward through the department, and say: we've identified these projects, and we would like your department's help in assessing whether there is an opportunity for a P3 or not. We're still maintaining, the government maintains that the different departments, Education for example, have their allocations of capital dollars, so it's up to them to prioritize which projects would need to be done.

I think there would be a tremendous opportunity because, in fact, many of the schools we're dealing with now in Alberta are of the same vintage, same age, all just about have the same roof or electrical that may need replacing. There probably is an opportunity under the cost certainty part of our thing to say: look, you can do this school in Edson, the same kind of a thing in Whitecourt, and maybe one in Hinton. There may be a tremendous savings in mobilizing these people, and also their becoming familiar with what's required on the project. So I think there is an opportunity, and we would do that if it were identified from the Minister of Education as their priority for their capital.

The oil sands secretariat. We had an extremely good meeting with Mayor Blake a few weeks ago – two weeks ago, I think, now – and it was very reassuring to see Mayor Blake and some of her council and administration say: our biggest problem, quite frankly, is planning. We are in such a tough area here that someone who gets good at that is hired away by either the large oil companies or the other commercial planners, and they lose them, so they're very, very short-staffed. I think the number she used was, in fact, that the city was short over 140 municipal employees.

I know that my colleagues in Municipal Affairs and Infrastructure and Transportation would be happy to sit down with the group from Fort McMurray, look at what their needs are in relation to bringing together a full and comprehensive plan around the issues in Fort McMurray and then be able to communicate back to the people of Fort McMurray: we've finally got a plan that we can understand. It certainly will be Fort McMurray's plan, just with our assistance in developing it. We are interviewing for the ADM position in the oil sands secretariat. But even without filling the spot, we have been working with all of the ministries that were identified in the Radke report and what they will be doing to help alleviate the issues specific to that area.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before you begin speaking, if you can just advise me whether you want to take your time going

back and forth with questions and answers. Then we can allocate 20 minutes' time between yourself and a minister.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to be able to ask the minister a few questions, particularly about his core businesses and his goals and strategies. I'm going to begin with your core business 1. Under 1.3 you say that you're going to "lead a review of ministry programs to identify opportunities for more effective spending to achieve program objectives." I'm wondering if you can expand on that, Minister, and give me some indication of when that's going to start and what you see yourself being able to achieve in that review. I know that caucus will be working on it with you, but I know that you must have some goals that you are hoping to come out the other end with.

Your core business 2: the ministry of Treasury Board is responsible for developing the government's long-term strategic capital plan to address their needs related to growth and assist in managing inflation. I know that inside the capital plan inflation is running, you know, out of control, so I'm wondering if you see anything that you can do that would help to alleviate some of that inflationary pressure, whether by extending the length of the capital plan, or do you have some other ideas that might be able to work in there?

Minister, I know that we're trying to address some of the deferred maintenance through the surplus account, but I would also like to know: if that doesn't work out, how do you plan on dealing with that issue? Is it going to become part of the capital plan on a longer term basis?

The other issue that I have with the capital plan. I would like to know, through the review that you're doing of the capital plan, if you're looking at tying it into the operating budget a little more carefully than perhaps it has been in the past so that we understand more accurately the impact that it will have on our operating budget in the next three, five, seven, or 10 years as that capital plan comes on stream.

In your third core business you talk about the annual performance report, audited financial statements, and other supplementary financial information. My question on this is on outcome measurement. Minister, could we have your views on whether or not it's possible to look at more outcome-based performance measures so that we know inside our programs, when we're spending \$10 billion or \$11 billion on health care, for example, if there any outcomes where we can actually say that we have achieved something or accomplished something or that we know we're making headway on pretty much anything?

Number 4 is on the control and governance systems while maintaining the independence required by standards of the Institute of Internal Auditors. This is an interesting one to me because I'm convinced that inside this enormous budget of ours there is some overlap and some duplication between some of the departments. I know that one of the things that Service Alberta has tried to do over the years is to try and eliminate some of that by combining under one umbrella the ability to do some of the purchasing. I'm wondering if during the time that you've been minister, you've had any opportunity at all to try and determine if there is an issue there, and if so, what do you see us being able to do about it under your ministry?

Under your fifth goal, managing growth and development in the oil sands, I wanted to make a comment that's a sidebar to this. I truly appreciate the Radke report and what it has pointed out for the Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Peace River areas, that are tied, in some ways to lesser degrees, to the oil sands. I also come from an area that has had unbelievable growth. So when you're looking at

that, I'm wondering if you're looking at the other parts of the province where we've also sustained very rapid growth or are having trouble keeping up with things like getting schools built, you know, as fast. In my riding, for example, we're having right now between 5,000 and 6,000 people a year move into our riding. They're spread out between Langdon, Chestermere, and Airdrie mostly, although Rocky View municipal district is also growing just on a population basis.

7:20

So when you're looking at the rapid growth for the north, I'm wondering if you've also tied it into the capital plan and looked at reprioritizing some of the projects that we have to perhaps mirror a little closer where some of the growth areas are. I understand that there are 28 communities in the province that are experiencing high growth. I know that it's not just in my area. They're all stressing out pretty good too. While I recognize that the money that will be going to municipal affairs will help alleviate some of those problems, is there a tie-back into our capital plan and our operating plan so that we can ensure that money is being spent wisely and in the right places?

My last comment, Minister, is this. When we talk about, you know, reviewing programs to ensure that everything is sort of matched up and co-ordinated to make sure that we reduce duplication and issues like that, I want to point out something. When I was going through the budget, I couldn't help but wonder, after listening to question period again today, about how we're not doing anything for anybody ever and that the world as we know it is ending. So I decided that I would do a little review of my own, and I came up with some interesting numbers. For example, in child care, which incorporates family support for children with disabilities, family and community support services, prevention of family violence, et cetera, et cetera, we're spending \$971,605,000. Under Employment, Immigration and Industry, where we're dealing with income supports, for example, about \$644 million of that department is going to help people who need assistance. Municipal affairs under housing services is spending \$309,104,000, and then including capital grants to local municipalities and things is another \$415 million.

Seniors and Community Supports is \$1,764,000, and that includes everything from seniors' services, disability supports, PDD, community service programs, which includes things like seniors' lodge assistance, senior citizen unique homes, supports to providers of seniors' housing, and affordable housing as well. Infrastructure and Transportation are supplying \$1.2 billion in support to municipalities, which has got to help people keep taxes a little bit lower in some of the cities, and we have the natural gas rebates of \$477,300,000.

When you do sort of a rough estimate of that portion of our budget, which is directly going to help people who are a little bit less fortunate or need a little additional help, we're very close to \$6 billion in those numbers alone out of our budget, or roughly \$1,500 for every man, woman, and child in the province. So I'm wondering if you're satisfied. Are we spending these monies in the correct way, or should we, in fact, get rid of most of these programs and just come in with an income support program where we don't have to, you know, deal with all of everybody's personal issues on a day-to-day basis? Maybe we could do more with a lot less. I would just love your opinion on any or all of those things, Minister.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: I've got notes now, I'll tell you. I feel like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek here. I'll try and keep this kind

of along the order of the questions, although some of them fit back and forth together.

About cost review and the timelines around it and how I'd like to see it happen. One of the things that I think we need to do – and we're going to be holding a caucus retreat in June. That will give us an opportunity to reflect a little bit on the budget debate here, but I think it will give us an opportunity to kind of set the goal posts out there. I'd like to call it Alberta 20/20, perfect vision. So we'll know where we expect government to be, and it will be very helpful in determining priorities that we face right now if we know what we want this to look like down the road.

Then, with that in mind, as you review the different departments – we have right now a deputy minister's council that is working internally to identify areas that they can work on and to try and come up with some kind of a template that we can hold all government departments to so that you're not dealing with them from different pressures. I think the hon. member would know that you can go through a committee review where you may have people that are not supportive of one department or another, so we need to make sure that we have a consistent approach to looking at: are the departments achieving the goals that are set out for them?

I would expect that in most of this review there is a lot of information that could come internally, and towards the end of summer, September, October, early into the budgeting process, we will be able to have a thorough look at these departments and their relationships with each other, which is critical to: does this fit in this department? Should it go here? We had some major changes in the makeup of our cabinet, and I don't know if that's done yet. We want to have that flexibility to ask all the questions about how it will shake out.

Then controlling costs. One of the things that is so critical for us to do is develop a relationship with our municipal partners around how we're going to deliver goods and stuff in their communities, even as little as saying about competing for contractors in specific areas. I've used this example before: if we're only producing enough paving oil to pave 2,000 kilometres of road, then we ought not tender 2,200. We need to get that information to caucus so that they can make that decision, realizing that if you tender even one kilometre more road than you have the ability to pave, it drives all the costs up. Granted, the Alberta government spends a large amount of money on infrastructure, but we are a very small part of the total Alberta picture that's spent on infrastructure when you include business and the municipalities. So we need to be in sync with our municipal partners, whether it's building resource roads in the rural areas or overpass embankments. That's critical to us, knowing what capacity they have to have.

The capacity is not just limited to road building or paving. We need to try and build capacity into the building industry. Some of the things that we think will help are by packaging up schools, for example, and being able to build schools that are very similar in design. You may be able to go into an area and say: "We've got, you know, five or six schools that are very similar. Does that make it easier for you to bid as a contractor?" I can't tell you if you're better off to do 30 schools and get the big guys, or whether you're able to go with five and develop small contractors into relationships where they may turn into big contractors and increase capacity, or whether we have to look out of the province and out of the country, in fact, to bring contractors into some of the bigger projects by packaging, whether it be a university expansion or a hospital expansion. We need to be able to look at it without committing to things that we don't want to do. That's just about like touching a fan. You might be really close. So we have to be careful because it's taxpayers' dollars, and we'll look after them.

There's a huge opportunity, I think, if we're fortunate enough this year to have unallocated surpluses. We've determined, as was said in the throne speech, that one-third would go to savings and investment and that two-thirds would go into deferred maintenance or replacement capital or things that we have been able to identify that we need to address and possibly create a fund.

The Auditor General has suggested to us quite clearly that we should be addressing the fact that we know that if we build a hospital now, in so many years – maybe it's 10 years – you need to start upgrading. Maybe it's next year. At 20 years, 30 years, and 50 years what are your known costs going to be? If you pave a highway this year, if you build a highway – and the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation is expert at saying: given typical wear patterns, in 15 years you need to do this – that money needs to start to be identified earlier in the process so that we don't box ourselves into a deferred maintenance shortage or a backlog. The Auditor General's other request of us, too, is to ensure that when you're making the decisions as caucus how many schools you're going to build, you have all of this information available to you to know that you've made that decision on good grounds.

I've asked the chair of the capital planning committee to also produce for us maps that will show very clearly. It's easy to have a binder full of all the highway projects in Alberta – and there is an enormous number – but I think that if you can see the plan that says that this backbone of Alberta needs to be completed and these feeder ribs to the skeleton need to be done and here's why – if we just listed off the numbers of secondaries or highways, most Albertans wouldn't know where they are or what their relationship to the infrastructure plan is. So in being able to bring these all together, we can actually look and see the progress we're making on building the plan and having a real plan and not just a list of projects that'll come together. The maps are coming. I think I want them bigger than they were.

7:30

One more co-ordinated thing that the government I think will see not only huge dollar savings in but operational efficiencies is the IT co-ordination. Our deputy in government services has been working with IT on very, very good initiatives that the hon. minister of restructuring and efficiencies was before, and we are bringing all government departments onto a common server. We have a very good plan in the works that will show how this system is going to benefit and how it's going to work and what departments may need extra capacity at what level and the relationship to all the rest of government. This will also be the same for the radio communications system that we need, which will work for the RCMP, for Environment, Sustainable Resources, and the municipalities.

But it's really important that before we start down this line, we know what the plan is and what it means to every single department, and then we can bring the book of projects that build the plan. I'm being very careful in that everyone will be able to see: here's the plan, okay? Here are the existing costs, and here are the savings from this plan, and here's how we support going down the road if this thing becomes a priority for it.

When we talk with the Auditor General, my emphasis to him is that this needs to be run far more like a corporate identity than a whole bunch of different corporate structures competing for the same goal. We have to focus on branding Alberta by doing it. I know that it's difficult, but we also need to remove the artificial barriers that some of our departments have put with each other. By making them develop that plan together, I think they'll start to see that this is the approach we want to take, and if we're going to get the projects we need, we have to have that plan clearly laid out.

From that, talk about purchasing. Very, very interesting. I think we can look quite differently at how we purchase a lot of smaller items. We have been given presentations where people can show that we can go out of our system, online, buy what we need. These systems are so fast and so can give us the competitive price of the day, what we've paid before, what it is. Try to start to buy far more strategically and make the paperwork around the purchasing far easier. If you have ever attended a conference on behalf of two ministries and used the wrong credit card, you'd know what I'm talking about with us making it difficult.

From going to common purchasing, without getting into health care but just going into the Service Alberta purchasing and our Treasury Board – we spend around \$900 million in government on items less than \$10,000 – we estimate between 10 and 17 per cent savings.

The Deputy Chair: Any others for the Treasury Board? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Before I recognize you, I just want to reclarify because somebody sent me a note. When we finish with the Treasury Board, we will proceed with the minister of municipal affairs and then the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Chair. It's a pleasure to stand here today. As with my colleagues, whether or not I ask more questions will be whether or not I get the answers to the ones I ask the first time. Most of them are fairly small, and a couple are points of clarification.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, just a second. There seems to be a buzzing sound, and it appears like somebody may have a Black-Berry that's ringing silently, which is being picked up by the sound system. Please look on your table.

Mr. Griffiths: It's coming from outside.

The Deputy Chair: It's coming from outside? Okay.

Well, hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, you may proceed.

Mr. Griffiths: I'll do the best I can. Thank you, Chair.

I'm sort of going to start at the back and work my way forward. Some of the questions I had were under core business 5, managing growth and development in the oil sands areas. I was mostly curious if the intent of the entire plan is to develop a work plan and work with other ministries and industry and communities. I'm wondering what the complete nature of that plan is, whether it's just a land-use development and infrastructure development for housing and for water and waste water or if it will include some components of workforce development. I've argued many times that one of the greatest challenges we're going to have and that the one item I actually believe will hold back development in Alberta and may impact our economy is whether or not we attract the qualified skilled workforce that's necessary. So I'm wondering exactly how large that component is.

On core business 4 I was very pleased to see that one of the challenges the department is undertaking is in evaluating and improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and economy of their programs and services. It tied into another business plan component of the departments. I'm wondering if it's going to deal with regulations. I know that it's probably not the purview of the Treasury Board; it might be more of Service Alberta. But when you're evaluating and improving the effectiveness and efficiency

and economy of programs and services, regulations are going to be a critical component. So I'm wondering if it is more related to the purview of another department, if you're going to ensure that the regulations are part of that review.

There are two sections that both relate to performance measures: under goal 1, 1.5, reviewing business plan standards to establish submission requirements for ministries, and then 3.4, participating in the development and introduction of measures to benchmark improvements in the quality of life for all Albertans. Those benchmarks for 3.4 are very critical, and performance measures are in general.

Indeed, in Public Accounts I've argued endlessly and repeatedly that there are three types of performance measures that can be used. The first is satisfaction type surveys that just show whether clients are happy. The second is output measures that just show volume. Quite frankly, I mean, it would be like evaluating how many students graduate from high school. That's an output. But the real performance measures, if you're assisting other departments in improving their measurements and establishing measurements for quality of life, are the outcomes. That's not whether we have, you know, 95 per cent of our students graduating from high school but whether or not they're getting jobs after, that it's a meaningful education that makes them employable in the workforce. So I'm curious about the development of the benchmarks for measuring the quality of life for Albertans and how you're going to assist other ministries by reviewing their business plans and establishing submission requirements for ministries.

Two more questions. One of the government's priorities is to ensure that the spending associated with the government's plan for managing growth is sustainable. I think that's a key goal and performance measure of this department. In this budget we have quite a remarkable increase in spending, and I'm wondering what sorts of protocols you followed to establish whether or not this is a sustainable level of growth and how long it's going to carry on. Assuming it is one thing, or saying it is another thing, but how exactly did you define whether or not it is a sustainable rate of growth?

The final question I had: since this department is about managing the spending and managing performance measures and helping other ministries become more effective, I'm wondering if there is some component that's missing from this business plan that deals with managing expectations. It's not necessarily even the public's but the ministries' expectations of what they're going to be able to do year in and year out, not necessarily assuming that they're always going to get a 7 or 8 or 10 per cent increase but being realistic and accounting and factoring for the population growth plus inflation.

That should do it for now. Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Yeah. There are some extremely interesting questions there. I want to go right to the quality of life stuff because I think that's absolutely essential. He makes very good points about surveys and understanding things that we can measure. I do agree that unless you can measure it, it's probably not that important. But we can measure quality of life, and I would clearly like to see the government keeping an eye on sound financial management but changing our measurement to outcomes. I know that I think we live in trepidation of the Auditor General coming in and finding out that we didn't spend what we thought we did, but to me and to the people that I represent, what we spent is very important, how we got our results back from it. What did it mean? Did we educate a whole bunch of buggy makers that are the best buggy makers in the world a hundred years after we quit using horses?

7:40

I think caucus would say that we do need that balance in there that says that these quality of life issues are going to be held up to ministerial departments on an ongoing basis. I think it's been quite easy in government to design a project, approve it through the former SPCs, now through CPCs, through caucus, through our department, and then we kind of let it go without continually monitoring and making the department respond back to us that they are in fact achieving the goals. Unfortunately, one of the only tools we have is money. But I think we'll be ready to say, "If you're not achieving those goals or if what you're doing isn't relevant, then money becomes the tool we measure your support from government at."

The regulatory review does work under Service Alberta, but it works for every department and, therefore, does have a large effect on our program delivery because in many ways when you have a government that deals with all aspects of life, you are bound to run into contradictory policy. The minister of municipal affairs was to point out that we have to change some of the regulations around secondary suites. We have a huge issue around housing. That's one of the fastest solutions to increasing capacity for shelters. So we need to make sure that the policy from whichever department, probably his too – you know, that we're not getting in each other's way. We need to make sure that not only policy is co-ordinated, that unnecessary regulation that business tells us needs to be reviewed – and we have an excellent regulatory review member now doing a great job of ensuring that they're well vetted. The regulatory review, the policy co-ordination: all of these things need to come together for us to do what we're doing.

As the hon. member pointed out clearly, growing government at 10 per cent is not sustainable unless the economy and all of our incomes far exceed 10 per cent, and that's probably not practical. We are setting targets out early in the year in our budget that we expect that 4 per cent growth is more realistic in government, and we're going to work very diligently through the summer to try and achieve the goals we've set out in our three-year financial plan. Also, it may mean that we need to reallocate within budgets to address the priorities that the Premier and this government have set out.

As we do all of the things that the hon. member said, benchmarking what we want to achieve but understanding where we want to be, making sure we co-ordinate our departments – this is a huge job, and the Treasury Board will try and co-ordinate with all of our CPC chairs, our other ministers, and in fact all of caucus, who the Premier has clearly said will have the say in how we govern.

How do we measure up around the world? Recently our performance measuring document that we use was recognized by New Zealand as leading in the world. So, I mean, in all honesty our internal auditors, our auditing system, the way that we manage government in an accountability thing is really continually and continuously recognized by the Auditor General as being certainly the best he knows, the best in Canada. I would suggest that just because we know of the situation down the road, we probably are one of the top in the world for being able to identify and clearly account for the money that we spend.

The oil sands approach very clearly will be one of co-ordination in virtually all aspects. It's actually a very good template for us to look at every high growth area and to identify how important it is that the guy building the bridge is also the one building the road to the bridge and to identify where the growth areas are and that the communities and the neighborhoods and the subdivisions have schools in the plan that will be there when the kids are there.

It's really difficult to keep up all over Alberta. The oil sands did recognize Cold Lake, Bonnyville, and some of Peace Country, but the co-ordination will probably be one of the critical steps of the oil sands secretariat. I think we can safely say that the proposed development around the Fort Saskatchewan and Redwater areas should be something we've learned from the Radke report about what not to do. So let's get out ahead of this and set out our infrastructure and identify the stress it will have on the surrounding communities so that we don't get into the same mistake again.

The Deputy Chair: Any others for the Treasury Board? Seeing none, we shall proceed with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. President of the Treasury Board, your staff can leave now if they so choose.

Hon. minister, would you please introduce your staff present in the Assembly?

Municipal Affairs and Housing

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is indeed an honour for me to introduce my staff. They have done so much work not only in order to make this presentation and have the budget in place but also all the great work that they have done in the last three months.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to introduce my deputy minister, Shelley Ewart-Johnson, who is sitting with me on my right. I'd also like to introduce Robin Wigston, who is the assistant deputy minister of housing, immediately on my left, and Brian Quickfall, the assistant deputy minister of local government services. At this time I would also like to introduce Peter Crerar, the assistant deputy minister, strategic corporate services, who is in the gallery. I see that Ivan Moore, who is the assistant deputy minister of the public safety division, has just stepped out for a moment. Also, I would like to thank the staff that are back at the offices of the ministry that have also done so much work.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. I'm going to take a little bit different approach this year with the minister's budget. I recall not long ago when I served 15 years as councillor and mayor for the town of Whitecourt. My comments last week to my mayors in Whitecourt-St. Anne were that I wish I was the mayor of Whitecourt at this time with the support that they get from this ministry and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation.

I want to highlight to the minister, because the minister probably doesn't hear this, from my mayors from Alberta Beach to Yellowstone a thank you for the \$14,675,000 in this budget that he and his staff have assigned just in this last couple of weeks to our municipalities. This is for the municipal sustainability initiative, the Alberta municipal infrastructure program, the new deals for cities, the street improvement program, and the rural transportation grant.

I'm going to list them off because my mayors and councils, you know, I meet with on a very regular basis, and a lot of our time we talk about funding from the province. Alberta Beach, \$281,201; Birch Cove, \$27,656; Castle Island, \$25,281; Lac Ste. Anne county, \$2.6 million; Mayerthorpe, \$597,000; Nakamun Park, \$37,000; Onoway, \$359,000; Ross Haven, \$63,000; Sandy Beach, \$91,000; Sangudo, \$175,000; Silver Sands, \$66,000; South View, \$47,000; Sunrise Beach, \$53,000; Sunset Point, \$85,000; Val Quentin, \$69,000; West Cove, \$58,000; Whitecourt, \$2.9 million; Woodlands

county, \$1.7 million; Yellowhead county, \$5.2 million; Yellowstone, \$53,000. Minister, thank you.

7:50

When I do have problems – and once in a while, you know, there are problems where a community doesn't feel that they've gotten their fair share – I call Robin, and he resolves the problem for me, and he makes it much easier for me to go back home on the weekends and face the mayor and the community and the radio stations and the Whitecourt paper and my other nine papers that I write articles for each and every week.

I want to thank the minister and the staff once again. I appreciate taking up the time of the Legislature tonight on behalf of my constituents to thank him for a job well done.

Thank you.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, I'd very much like to respond to the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. It is indeed a pleasure to hear those kind words. I want to say that it has also been very gratifying to hear many communities that have talked about the support for this funding going to their municipalities. There's no doubt that there have been some questions about how that distribution was to take place.

I want to quote individuals that came from Canmore and Banff. I had meetings with the mayors of those communities and that area, and they were so supportive also of how this funding will help. I can talk about communities in different parts of the province that have looked and said: you know, we needed a little push, and this push is going to be very instrumental in making our co-operation and regional planning work much better.

Mr. Chairman, that little part, if that's what that does to help communities discuss, maybe eliminate some duplication, then I want to say that, you know, we have succeeded. Are the solutions perfect? No. We are going to work with municipalities, with associations, making sure that we try to get to a stage that municipalities that are in hardship are supported; that for municipalities that have unique situations, whether they be municipalities that are in the tourist industry or in the tourist areas, their challenges are recognized; making sure that some of the challenges that municipalities that are beside large centres have are also recognized; and, yes, also the large municipalities such as Edmonton and Calgary, making sure that some of the focuses that they have can be recognized.

I again stress to you, Mr. Chairman, that we will continue to work having two major focuses, one focus still being that we need to communicate, collaborate, and co-operate regionally, and the second one being that we need to support municipalities so that they can have autonomy yet have sustainability and predictability of funding.

It is very nice to know that I've had many MLAs from both sides of the House give me compliments on the hard work that my staff have done. I appreciate the acknowledgement because they very much have worked very hard and are very dedicated. I know that they had no idea when this ministry started that we would be on the roller coaster, maybe, that we have been, but I compliment them. I also compliment the MLAs for being patient because it is a learning curve for all of us.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few perhaps more comments than questions but in the end, I guess, a question about the direction that we're going. Under your core businesses and goals, Minister, one of the things that you talk about in goal 2 is

to contribute to the financial sustainability of local governments, which are responsible and accountable to their citizens. I guess my question is this: when the provincial government is funding so many things inside municipalities, do the lines not become a bit blurred as to who's funding what and who's accountable or responsible for what?

I come back to, I guess, an issue that I know I've raised before, but it's something that I feel quite strongly about, and that is making sure that the taxpayers know who to hold accountable for what they're paying. When I look at the funding for municipalities, we're connecting with them in various places. In ambulance funding we didn't take it all over, but we're funding a portion of it. In library funding we top up some of the things that they pay for. FCSS is in another department, I know, but that type of thing where there's an interconnection between us and the municipality. I've often wondered why it is that if we're going to disconnect ourselves from this \$1.4 billion, you know, even if it is just for the 10 years, why we do not disentangle some of the issues that people would find on their tax forms as a municipal tax base; for example, where they would know who to call on which issue.

The recognition, for example, on the ring roads around Edmonton and Calgary. These are not traditionally a provincial responsibility. Urban transportation was the responsibility of the urban municipality, yet we've stepped into that and are spending billions of dollars. Now, I know that they do not have the financial resources to pay for that, and I'm glad that we're doing it. I think it's absolutely essential, but it's once again where we've crossed over lines between what municipalities fund and what we should be funding.

That brings me to affordable housing. Even inside the various departments of the government of Alberta affordable housing, social housing, rent supplements, and things are crossed over between various ministries, and it's very hard to just actually have an accurate handle on what we fund, whether it's the minister responsible for EII or seniors coming back into yours, there's a difficulty, I think.

I guess I have to relate it back to the questions that are asked in question period when the accusation is that we're not doing enough for people or that we should get rid of natural gas rebates or various things so that we can put more money into affordable housing. Is that indeed the direction that we should be going? Should we be looking at every dollar that's spent by this government to help people stay in their homes or to bring their rent down to a sustainable level, various things like that? Minister, is there a way that we could be doing it more efficiently, more effectively so that we can track exactly what we're doing or whether or not it's making any difference?

Years ago there were rent controls in Alberta. They were proven not to work, but there was also, Minister, a tax credit for renters. I'm wondering if that's something that you've looked at in the affordable housing area. Is there a way that we can help people even with a bit of a tax reduction, that would be more effective than some of the things that we're doing?

When you're looking at the affordable housing issue, how do you prioritize which programs you will fund? Do you think that the federal government will be doing another assistance like the Canada/Alberta infrastructure program, where money could be allocated into affordable housing so that we could perhaps leverage some of these dollars out a little bit more than we have been?

8:00

I think that probably the key one for me is that I don't believe that the government should in fact be building houses. We went down this road with the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation for

years. We helped people get into houses with almost zero down or maybe 2 or 3 per cent down, but at the end of the day when the economy crashed in the '80s, cities like Airdrie, which was just maybe 16,000 people at that time, ended up with 500 empty houses on our streets all owned by Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation. It took years for that surplus of houses to be used up, for the people who had stayed there, if they could even sell the house, to try and get back up to what they owed on their mortgage for it.

When government does something, there is an equal and opposite reaction. I'm hopeful that whatever steps we take trying to assist people today, we take the time to look at what the potential reactions are. To unwind ourselves from the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation, I believe the price tag was about \$3.5 billion. That was an additional loss to the taxpayers of the province. So I urge in anything that we do to be careful, that we look at the programs that we're delivering, such as seniors' housing, the lodges, and those types of things, to ensure that if we're putting in resources, we're putting resources into the right places for that.

So with that, Mr. Minister, thank you very much for the opportunity to just raise a few of my concerns, and I'd appreciate your input. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much. I would like to say that, you know, the role of government is very much a balancing act. It is: where and how do we support individuals? Where do we get involved, you know, in supporting individuals and to what extent?

When we talked about the support in funding so many things and where the lines are, I want to say that I feel that some of the questions you have are pertinent in the way that we are having communication with municipalities, with the associations, and we have also talked to those individuals. We are having consultation between now and September because I really believe that with autonomy from municipality comes responsibility. There's no doubt that we cannot continue on a patch system. I think you are absolutely right. Not only do the citizens need to have the right to know who is responsible, but municipalities need to know who is responsible.

An interesting comment, and I sort of relay it to the minister of health. Individual municipalities are asking us: where are you going with ambulances? They're at the point of saying: you know, we really don't care if you go to Health or you go to Municipal Affairs or their responsibility; just tell us because sitting in limbo is not working.

The other point that I'd like to make is on the comments that you made about libraries. We have met with the library association. We have gone to the library conference. I have asked them to look at where they feel they need to be and that we have a direction because we cannot go on, for predictability purposes especially and the sustainability of libraries – every year they look at a patch system and say, "Well, we need to go in this direction, and we need to try to address these issues," and then the next year it's something else. So I've asked them a little bit differently.

I've asked them: if you had a utopian world, at the end in that utopian world, in 25 or 50 years, where do you want to be? So when we figure out where libraries should be, then let's work our way in that direction. Maybe libraries should completely be under the auspices of municipalities, or maybe FCSS should be under municipalities. But I think that we need to know where we're going, and municipalities need to know where they're going. We need to find some focus and direction. So municipalities have, no question, especially when they're doing budgets, to wait for us to figure out

what kind of money and support we're giving in order to support them. So you can't ask municipalities to have predictability and regional planning if we don't do it ourselves. So I think that we need to do it ourselves. And very good points in that direction.

When you talk about ring roads and sometimes crossing the lines, there's no doubt that municipalities are having a challenge, and the Alberta municipal infrastructure program was to assist those municipalities, but you know, because they continue to have challenges, we continue to support. I think the focus that we're having, especially the focus that we should have at the end of three years – and I say that at the end of three years there should be some definite funding, whether it be infrastructure or whether it be the services that they provide, trying to break that dependency and giving autonomy.

You mentioned affordable housing, that it's very hard to get an accurate handle and difficult to make choices. You know, it is difficult to make choices. It is difficult to make the choices because we really need to look at the challenge in a global sense or a long-term sense. What could we achieve? We need to continue to have housing being built. You're absolutely right. We try to stay completely out of owning houses. I don't think we should get into housing.

I think that in conjunction with private enterprise we should be supporting communities, supporting municipalities and working with them to try to achieve some of the major needs that they have in their area. When I talk about the major needs in their area, I truly believe that a municipality probably knows better than anybody else. Is it our responsibility alone? No. It is a provincial responsibility to provide support. The federal government provides support. But it's very much the responsibility of municipalities to identify how those needs can be best addressed.

So some of the funding that we have given to municipalities very much addresses those areas. It addresses the area from the aspect that the municipalities that are in a very high growth area and have the criteria of having their growth rates over 2.59 per cent and their vacancy rate at, just to be clear, 1.7 per cent and the average cost of a two-bedroom suite at \$620 – if municipalities meet those criteria, then they are what we consider a high growth area, and they will receive funding to support housing in their community. What does that need to look like? Well, I mean, we encourage them for immediate support to use rent supplements. It's a policy of this government that if you need affordable housing, you should not pay more than 30 per cent of your wage. I think that's fairly reasonable.

So when we look at that, the President of the Treasury Board stated earlier that secondary suites are one of the quickest ways that we can provide units. I think that is a low or a small investment to provide somebody with accessibility to some stability of residency. So that, I think, works. But at the same time, we still need to look at the long term. We need to support private enterprise or municipalities in their long-term planning to make sure that we do have units that are available.

8:10

We are in a circumstance where last year – and maybe it was an extraordinary year because it was one of the highest – 100,000 people came to Alberta. Now, that was an extreme. They didn't come with doctors, and they didn't come with teachers, and they didn't come with accommodations. They came looking for a job, and they needed accommodation. So somehow we need to support that accommodation. We also have our children that are in the workforce that are needing accommodation.

Now, the province is growing, and this year it may not be to that extent. Maybe it will only be 50,000 people. Still, 50,000 people

that need residences is a very difficult problem, so we need to look in the long term, and at the same time we very much need to look at support. You know, your comments that we have different ministries that are supporting different areas and we don't have enough communication or . . . [Mr. Danyluk's speaking time expired] Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a number of questions for the minister. First of all, I'll just start by asking a couple of questions about the municipal sustainability initiative, which, as I understand it, is a commitment over four years of \$1.4 billion to the municipalities and \$400 million starting in this coming year. I wonder if the minister could advise me how the allocation was made between the municipalities which are receiving those funds. As I understand it, the amount of \$1.4 billion was predicated upon being an approximation of what the provincial portion of the municipal property taxes were, the education component of property taxes. I wonder whether he could advise how that was allocated between the municipalities. Was it done on the basis of population, or was it done on the basis of how those taxes were collected in the various municipalities?

Also with respect to that same fund, I wonder whether he could advise about the constraints that were put on the spending of those funds. I can certainly understand that some of the municipalities are somewhat concerned about the fact that they are having what they call strings attached to the funds which are provided to them. I think the minister has referred to them as boxes rather than strings. But why are those constraints being placed upon what the municipalities can and can't do with the money?

I can certainly understand allocating responsibilities and perhaps changing those responsibilities and having the municipalities assume certain responsibilities which the provincial government is handling right now, but rather than dividing those responsibilities, we seem to have exerted some measure of control over an elected body of government, which admittedly is subsidiary to the provincial government.

Secondly, I'd like some feedback on the issue of the rent stability. I can understand from the minister's responses in the question period that as a general matter of policy he is not in favour of rent controls. I would certainly freely admit that it's certainly not a cure-all, and it's probably not good policy in the long run, but we are dealing with a situation where there's an imbalance in the free market, and the free market has in a sense not responded in the present situation. Because of the fact that there's less than a 1 per cent vacancy rate, there's not a balance between the buyers and the sellers. It's a seller's market, and this is not something that is being cured by building new houses because those people that are caught in this imbalance are individuals that are at the low end of the housing spectrum. They're people that are living in basement suites, in walk-up suites, in older apartment blocks, and although in the vast majority of cases landlords are giving moderate increases, some of them are being faced with very inordinate rent increases.

I wonder whether the minister could assist me in understanding, given the fact that rent stability guidelines are not in the offing, how this relief that he has proposed in the budget would work. As I understand it, there's some \$11 million or some figure in that neighbourhood allocated for helping people who are in need of immediate assistance to keep them in their homes. I wonder if he could advise how much of that money is planned to be spent, how it would be administered, how you would determine who would qualify for such assistance, and how much an individual would be

able to access through that program. In other words, how would that program work to assist people who are really being forced to leave their homes because of inordinate rent increases?

[Ms Haley in the chair]

The third area: I wondered whether or not the minister had had an opportunity to talk to municipalities about the issue of development permits. I'm thinking of development permits particularly in the area of things like trailer courts and whatnot. I've noticed that in proximity to the city of Calgary the trailer courts in Balzac and Strathmore and west of the city of Calgary are filled year-round with people. They're seeking accommodations wherever they can get them in the case of camper trucks or motorhomes or trailers, portable housing, and it would seem to me that there is some room there for some immediate response by facilitating or at least encouraging the municipalities to facilitate some perhaps temporary development permits to allow some portable housing to be put up in these areas and increasing that capacity.

I'll leave the minister with those inquiries.

The Acting Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm not going to exactly go in the order, if you don't mind, of answering the questions you asked because I think I need to just change a little bit of the direction. The first answer that I want to give you is how the decision was made as far as the municipal sustainability initiative. Well, we looked at population. There's no doubt that we have challenges with population. We have individual communities who have higher populations but no equalized assessment. If we distributed the funding on a population basis as we did the Alberta municipal infrastructure program and, you know, had a base, I don't think we would be solving anything because all we would be doing is adding money and adding dependency on the government.

8:20

We looked at exactly what the Premier had talked about. The Premier said that we have \$1.4 billion that is collected for education taxes. We will give that back to municipalities for them to gain some sustainability and predictability. It was decided by this government that the \$1.4 billion would be in place after year 3. Just as a matter of point, after year 3 the Alberta municipal infrastructure program would be ended. We are ramping up \$400 million the first year, the amount paid in education, pro-rated. So about \$400 million the first year, \$500 million the second, \$600 million the third, and \$1.4 billion. I'd like to explain to the hon. member that this program is committed for 10 years. That does provide, I believe, some sustainability and predictability.

Madam Chair, I'd also like to talk about the distribution. As I mentioned before, the distribution is very focused, very focused in two avenues: sustainability, predictability. The second one is the aspect of not only regional planning but investigating and looking at different ways that municipalities could work together. What's very important for those municipalities to work together is to have some communication.

I think that what I should read, first of all, is the criteria, which I think is very interesting for those individuals that are critics about the strings on the program. We talk about the core capital. It's divided up into different areas: the first one, core capital. When you look at the core capital, it says: consulted on or jointly planned.

Now, that means that municipalities can do what they want with 80 per cent of that core funding, but with 20 per cent they need to

talk to their neighbour. Why do they need to talk to their neighbour? So that we don't get duplication of waterlines, so that we don't get duplication of roads, so that when we have one municipality having one idea and one having another, that these roads meet, which I think is very important. So if you show us that you have consulted and communicated with your adjoining municipality, that's the only criteria. Is it a condition? Yes, it's a condition. But it's a condition to say that you better have talked for 20 per cent with your neighbour. You know, it doesn't need to be on the outside of a city. It is something that is necessary for that community.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We have done the same with the community capital. The co-ordination incentives are a little bit different. That is really the only one that has strict criteria, which is only \$50 million out of the \$400 million, strict criteria for planned and funded. I say again: planned and funded. That is where municipalities need to plan and talk and co-operate together.

We have taken \$100 million, and we have given it to municipalities, as I stated earlier, the ones that have the challenges of the highest growth pressures. We have delivered that funding by population. You asked the question: why didn't we do everything by population, or how was it done? Well, the reason that we didn't do everything by population, I will say, is that there has been so much discrepancy between so many municipalities about the latest census. We used some of our figures, we used some of the census figures, trying to come up with the most accurate figures that we could. But \$100 million was taken from the \$400 million for affordable housing. I would like to inform the member that we also added funding to municipalities to support the housing, the \$100 million. We added another \$96 million for the municipalities to have the autonomy of choice in deciding what and how they should distribute that funding.

As I said before, should it be, first of all, by rent supplements, rent stability? The general policy that we talk about needs to work. The cure is not the building of new homes. Really, if we say, "Well, you know, we have a cure; we need to build new homes," you know, the building of homes does support the affordable housing because there are individuals that move from rentals and build homes. This has to be something that's balanced.

I'm sorry; my notes are probably too short. It says: how would relief work in the new legislation? Okay. Let me say how it would work. The relief would work in two real ways. If we talk about rentals, I would suggest to you that if you have a rent that cannot be increased more than once a year, even though there is some concern, it does provide some stability. But more so, there are a number of individuals that are very concerned about their rentals being transferred into condominiums. We have extended that to a year as well. There needs to be a year's notice so that individuals have an opportunity to look for other places.

Mr. Chair, when we talk about the rental support, remember that there are different areas and different ways that this rent support happens. With the funding that municipalities get, they can use it. Employment, Immigration and Industry deals with rent support as well. They look at supporting individuals in need. When we look at the \$7 million that was put into the eviction fund, this supports individuals in need.

I think I'm running out of time. You asked me the question about development.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I guess a couple points I'd like to bring up. If I could ask the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to turn to page 261 of the government estimates for 2007-08. I'm curious and I would like to know why, under line 7.3.1, the Canada/Alberta affordable housing agreement, in previous years we had \$44 million, and this year we have none. I know that in municipalities like the town of Hinton, the town of Grande Cache we had partners that were going to move forward to obtain some of this money. I was told that there was still some money left over, so I'm sort of curious why you're not showing any for our present year, 2007-08. I guess what I'm looking at is that in one of the municipalities, like the town of Hinton, they are obtaining the land to move forward so that they can integrate affordable housing as well as condos and everything else so they have a mix of homes, so we can make sure that we keep it going that way.

I guess another one that we sort of need help on is in the municipality of Jasper. What we have now is that we have some co-operative housing. If somebody wants to buy one of these homes, they can buy them, and they just pay a set price. When they go to move out, they pay that set price, plus they pay a small increment for interest over the time that they've had it.

8:30

But the big thing that's working to their disadvantage is our assessment value. When you look at the assessment value of homes in Jasper national park, as you realize, we can't keep building homes there every day; we just have a certain small footprint. Therefore, their school taxes are very, very high. So I'm just wondering what we can sort of do in that scenario because it really hampers the aspect. As you realize, a lot of the people that work in this area are in the hospitality industry, so we've got to try and make it a little more affordable for them.

I guess one of my other questions is with the off-the-reserve aboriginal housing. I can see that we have moved up to \$16,142,000 for this year, and I would like to really thank you very much for, number one, moving into the Grande Cache area, where we have co-ops and enterprises of the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation. It has certainly helped us in that area for the simple reason that we can upgrade some of the homes with mobile homes for these people. They are contributing into society. They're working in the mines and the mills in the area. So I hope we can keep that program going for a while so that we can make sure that we move things forward there.

Then one other aspect that I was wondering about is where you've got the rent supplement. I mean, when I look at this, last year our actual was \$14,150,000. This year we're moving it up to \$24,317,000. I'm just wondering: what factor did you use to move that up to meet the present demand that we have?

On the other aspect of lodges and that – and I know that's really not too much in your area – I guess the one thing I look at is that we're talking about who should be in Housing and who isn't and that. With the Evergreen foundation, just to give you an insight there, with the town of Grande Cache just a year and a half ago we built a 30-unit there. Now we're moving into the municipality of Jasper and going to build some designated assisted living there and some lodge units, but this is putting stress on the municipalities because they work it on a per capita rating so that they have to pay for the aspects of the construction. Any operational deficit they also have to feed in that.

What I'm looking at is if there is some way that we can sort of work on these different aspects for these communities. I realize that you say: number one, they have to meet all these factors with a

certain amount of rent for a two-bedroom home, vacancy rate, and a number of other factors. But, you know, these communities are the same as any other booming community. It's booming in their light. So I'm just wondering how we're going to move forward on that.

With the town of Edson we have more land, and I'm just thinking that we should drill down farther when we're talking to this. You know, some of these municipalities have got some good land. We should work on partnering with the municipalities, with the government of Alberta, and with contractors so that we can bring down the price so it makes it feasible for these contractors to go and build an apartment block or townhouses and still make it feasible for people in the low-income bracket to be able to afford to build these houses.

I really look at the aspect of a co-operative type of scenario because I think that really works well. When the people buy it, they can move in, and then they have to keep it up to a standard so that we make sure that we keep it that way.

With those few questions, I'll take my seat and look for some answers.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I can say to the hon. member that the \$44 million federal program that he was talking about did end. The money and the funding of that program were used up. We did have \$176 million of old money, that was budgeted previously and that was used as well, which we budgeted again, plus \$96 million. So that, I hope, answers that question.

But I need to say to the hon. member that when we talk about the challenges of – and I'll use his term – the hospitality communities, Mr. Chairman, I understand those challenges very much. In fact, I had meetings with Canmore and Banff and Jasper and . . .

Mr. Strang: You were in Jasper, and you never invited me?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, I'm just kind of surprised that you weren't there, but I think that you were busy. There were other ministers and MLAs that were there. I'm not exactly sure why you weren't, and I want to apologize.

I will say at the same time that what did take place is that I previously met with the mayors of Canmore and Banff. I think the best analogy that was used was that they have a town of 10,000 people, and at any one given time, especially in the summertime, they could have 40,000 or 50,000 people. So in those communities they need to have the infrastructure, the capacity of the infrastructure, the sewer lines and the waterlines and the roads, to accommodate those 50,000 people. Yet what does take place in our distribution of funds – and some of them are per capita – is that that per capita is very much unfair as far as support goes.

So I'd like to inform the hon. member that what has taken place is that we have made that commitment that we are relooking at those needs. To the group that came to see myself along with the minister of infrastructure – and I'm trying to remember who all was there – I made the commitment that we will look at their challenges and try to address them. Like I said before, this municipal sustainability initiative needs to be tweaked because that is how we make a better program.

Mr. Chairman, if I could talk a little bit about the \$16 million that is being funded for aboriginal housing, in the housing task force it was asked if this government would match that funding. Well, what happened is that we didn't per se match it with \$16 million. I believe that we matched it with a lot more money because we – I and our ministry – believe that we shouldn't segregate anyone from our community as far as support, so any individual, whether they be

aboriginal or whoever they may be, should have accessibility to affordable housing. We didn't want to make that criterion. The federal government made that criterion for transferring funds to us. We accepted that funding, we accepted that criterion, but our funding doesn't have that criterion. It is for anyone that is in need.

I need to mention as well the rent supplement. You asked the question about the \$14 million in '05-06. Well, we had the \$14 million. We added \$19 million plus \$24 million plus \$14 million. I believe that right now, hon. member, we're at \$38.3 million for rent supplement. You know, that's gone up by, I would suggest to you, three times. But not only that, hon. member, we have also told municipalities that are in very high growth areas that they could use some of their funding for immediate concerns that would be rent supplement, so it also is there for support.

8:40

Mr. Chair, the final comments in regard to partnering with the municipalities and the provincial government and contractors and industry and the need to co-operate. I want to say that that is exactly where we are going and need to go. We need to co-operate with industry. We need to co-operate with municipalities. Municipalities because they know where their challenges and needs are. Industry because industry, in order to survive, needs to be able to have housing. If we can support industry and municipalities and the private enterprise to make affordable housing for individuals that need housing, I think we're winning, and I think that's very critical.

Mr. Chairman, when we speak about co-operation, as I said before, the housing aspect and the minister's sustainability initiative very much revolve around the communication between our government, the federal government, the municipalities, industry, and private enterprise. We as individuals, we as municipalities cannot step away from the responsibility. We cannot step away and say that it is not our problem or not our concern.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere made a comment as she talked about the role of government. Well, I think that as we look at municipalities and look at housing, the role of government is to provide sustainability for municipalities. It is also to provide predictability. But we need to make sure that we not completely eliminate, because we'll never do that, but that we decrease the duplication, that we plan together, and that we remember that we if are an urban and a rural municipality, an urban and a rural community, we can have that identity at the localized level at the same time that we really are one community.

I said this afternoon, Mr. Chairman, that we go to the same churches, we watch the same hockey games, we shop at the same stores, yet at the municipal level we sometimes want to build silos or want to build stovepipes in the same house. We are one community, and we need to work together. I think there are so many success stories that are happening and that can happen. We need to take that same philosophy into housing because we need to work together. I think that we have great opportunities to support each other as Albertans.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I would like to thank you for the strong commitment that you and your ministry have made to enhancing the sustainability of municipal government in Alberta. Particularly in these times of explosive growth in our communities, I would like to commend you on your response in the report to the minister's council.

As a former mayor and president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and, Mr. Chairman, someone who has spent a lot of

time in this building prior to being elected as an MLA, pressing the point on these very issues, I have to say that I'm a little disappointed with some of the criticism that has been lobbed against you and this government at a time when, I would submit, support for municipalities has never been greater.

I wonder if you can elaborate further on your goals for some of the recent new funding announced for municipalities and how you see these funds meeting the growth pressures that the municipal leaders themselves have communicated to us. I would say that it relates because in your estimates on page 246, under Local Government Services, you're showing a significant increase – certainly this isn't relative to the millions of dollars that we're committing under some of the other initiatives – going from \$106,000,000 last year to \$415,000,000 this year, and I'm wondering if you might elaborate on those two points, Mr. Minister.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm sorry; I'm still trying to find the page. What was the page?

Mr. Rogers: Page 246.

Mr. Danyluk: Let me answer your first question about the roles and how they are going to meet the growth pressures. This will be the quick answer: \$1.4 billion added to municipalities helps to alleviate the growth pressures. I mean, \$1.4 billion is a lot of money. That's the short answer.

The long answer, of course, is that when we look at trying to alleviate growth pressures, it's very necessary that we look at working together and the communication, making sure that we don't have duplication. Those are little things.

The second one is the working together, the working and planning together to make sure that we put ice arenas in strategic places, whether they be in an urban or rural community, to make sure that both communities utilize them, whether it be big or small communities. It's making sure that we share in libraries and that their serviceability is accessible to urbans and rurals or to different communities. It is making sure that when we look at support for our communities and some of their operating costs, we look at community initiatives that are sustainable. Mr. Chairman, in short, it very much means that we have to talk to each other, and that communication alone means and goes a long way to the solutions of meeting those growth pressures.

Now, I can go into what I said before, and I guess I kind of don't want to do too much duplication. But when we look at growth pressures for housing and providing municipalities with support, I look at Calgary at \$77 million and I look at Edmonton at \$45 million and those individual communities deciding how they can address the growth pressures in housing and how they can get private enterprise involved and how they can get industry involved and how they may want to be involved to address the growth pressures in housing and how they could work together when we support the homeless, when we support the transitional housing. It all adds up, and it is all a balanced solution. When we look at the MSI and we talk about the core capital funding – you know, they can do whatever they feel is right with their 80 per cent of funding.

8:50

But for 20 per cent really the minimum that they have to do is talk to each other and say to the adjoining municipality: we are building a road here, and the reason we're building a road here is because we

need to have access to your community. The rural community will say: "Well, that's great idea. We're going to build a road that's going to join here. You know what? We can save ourselves some money." This has happened in communities, where one community builds an access road out of their community, and it's here, and the other one builds an access road into their community which is supposed to join, and it's not joining. Why? Only because they're not speaking with each other. So that is the main issue.

The community capital is just to make sure that when community projects are planned, we understand what the community is. We have a situation in some municipalities – and I want to use a smaller municipality, and maybe what I should do is use my municipality of Lac La Biche, which has just voted for amalgamation, and it made sense. We have a town that has 2,700 people. It's basically locked by approximately 3,000 people from the county that are five miles away from the town or against the town, and they're separate municipalities. There are maybe 2,000 people that are in the surrounding area of the county. That makes sense for those communities to get together, talk about structures, talk about facilities, talk about how they can work together for the betterment of one community.

Finally, page 246, where it talks about local government services. I'm not sure exactly what the question was.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, do you just want to clarify what your question was?

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to clarify. My question was just relative to the significant growth in that line item from one year to the other, going from \$106 million to \$415 million. I'm wondering if you might share with us some of the assistance that might be provided to municipalities out of that local government services budget?

Mr. Danyluk: Okay. It is completely the municipal sustainability initiative. There was 100 and some million dollars there. Basically, \$300 million was added plus some fluctuation. That's where that funding is. If you want me to go into greater detail, I would be glad to, but I think that's all right.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a few questions about the business plan and some general questions that I hope the minister is able to respond to. One of them was kindly asked by the previous member, so I won't have to go over it.

Strategic business plan 2, financially sustainable and accountable municipalities, specifically strategy 2.1, to assist the local government sector to meet the financial reporting and accountability requirements contained in the legislation and regulations. Now, I'm curious because I've had many calls from municipalities within my constituency, and a lot of them are concerned – I can't remember the terminology they used – with the obligations that they're going to have to meet in three years. Will they have to now account for all of the inventory and depreciate it and put money away against the depreciation?

I know that most of the municipalities are concerned because they're not quite sure what the implications are. They're concerned because right now they're already taxed – stressed would probably be the more appropriate word – to meet many of their obligations for infrastructure for their communities, and they're worried that if they

have to bank money to offset depreciation of assets, that will even further limit their ability to provide the services that are necessary in their community. So I'm wondering if the minister can comment on how the municipalities will address that and what your department can specifically do to help municipalities address that.

Now, some of the general questions I had. I wonder if the minister has considered or addressed, because I didn't see anything specific in the business plan, encouraging municipalities, specifically large cities, to develop more smart growth plans – developing more LRT systems, bus systems, better transportation systems – encouraging cities and even smaller centres that will eventually reach the same situation to grow up rather than grow out.

We all well know that it costs about the same amount of money to dig a trench to put water and sewer in the ground. All that really varies is the size of the pipe that needs to be put in there. If you build a city street that only houses 80 people, the cost of putting that infrastructure in is going to be a lot higher per capita than if you had 800 people living on the same block and needed larger water and sewer and structural infrastructure. So I'm wondering if there's something that the minister's department is going to be working on in this year and through this business plan to help cities develop more of a smart growth plan.

I know that the minister's department has made recommendations and addressed the housing situation, but from what I've seen, quite a bit of that mostly addresses the high-growth areas and the desperate need for housing. There are a lot of smaller communities in rural Alberta that face another unique challenge, and that's just having any available housing, not just affordable housing. There are communities, one in particular in my constituency, Edgerton, although the same applies to Chauvin and Castor and Coronation and Consort and Heisler – if they do attract some young family to move into that community, oftentimes there's no place for that family to live, and they have to wait a year for a house to be built. If there was something within the Affordable Housing Task Force or something the minister could do to help address the transitional housing for those small communities so that a young family that moves in would have . . .

Do you want me to stop and then get back up and ask more questions?

Mr. Danyluk: No, no. I just want to make sure that I have enough time to answer you.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay.

. . . some transitional housing. The community could access some funds to build a house so that if a young family came in, they could move into it and rent it perhaps from the municipality for a year until their house got built. I mean, again, one of the challenges that a lot of small communities face is: where are the families supposed to live even if there is a job available for them in that small community?

I know that there was some discussion about intermunicipal governance and planning and that it's part of the business plan. I didn't see anything about incentives and encouraging municipalities to work together, but we know that there are going to be a lot of challenges coming up between small towns or medium-sized towns and counties and MDs. The challenge I find, particularly in my constituency – and I'm sure it's a common plight around rural Alberta – is that a lot of the rural municipalities, the MDs and the counties, actually are doing fairly well with cash. Because they have the linear assessments, they have a lot more tax revenue coming in. In fact, one of the municipalities in this province, I heard, was almost about to rebate the entire tax portion that was paid for the year because they didn't need the money while many of the small

towns we have are feeling a real crunch. I know that the minister understands this. They don't have a lot of flexibility and extra room in order to provide services.

So now we're starting to see some disputes between municipalities where a lot of the county people are utilizing the services and rec facilities that are in the town, but many communities feel that they don't provide the same proportionate off-set in pay in order to make sure that service can be provided. I think we're going to find this year that we're going to have more and more disputes, and I'm wondering if there is something for incentives to encourage municipalities to work together or disincentives to encourage them not to work independently and ignore each other. Intermunicipal governance planning and management works but only if the municipalities have some sort of inclination that they'll start off on the right foot.

Another comment that I wanted to make was that I worry about the municipal sustainability proposal. I honestly believe in my heart that every single Albertan in this province is taxed enough by municipal, provincial, and federal governments, and it's not a question of whether or not municipalities have or should have greater access to taxing authorities but whether or not the tax dollars that are collected are utilized appropriately and distributed appropriately between the three levels of government to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to provide services. So I'm wondering if you can comment on that.

9:00

Finally, I've said this to the previous minister, and I've said it in Public Accounts when I served as the vice-chair: I believe performance measures are critical to make sure that a department runs effectively. You can have satisfaction surveys, and, I mean, most departments do it. It's an easy measure to use satisfaction surveys. How many clients are happy? I even see in your business plan that there are some outcome measures: you know, how many have gone through the program, or how many have qualified, or what's the output?

But I'm wondering about the outcome. Quite frankly, I would love to see within this business plan an outcome measure of how communities are doing so that we can show or evaluate whether or not the rural development strategy is working or our municipal sustainability plan is working, to show that communities are actually improving, that they're becoming greener, that they're growing up, that their infrastructure costs per capita are going down, that they're attracting more businesses, that the housing costs are going down. Those sorts of outcome measures, minister, are incredibly important, and I'd like to hear your comments on improving the performance measures in your department.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. If I can, I'm going to go a little bit, maybe, backwards. We very much have looked at the performance measures. I think that is very important because, you know, I mean, to write performance measures into our plans, into our visions, into our mission statements, we do need to have outcomes. We need to have the guidance. Have we succeeded? Are we putting funding in the right areas? Are the individuals or municipalities that we have supported being successful? So, you know, we've looked at it. We've said that we're changing. We've changed some. We're going to change others. That's an excellent point, and I really thank you for bringing it up.

The second-last comment that you talked about, that everyone is

taxed enough. You know what? You're absolutely right. I heard the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner just pounding the desk when: everyone is taxed enough. But you know, at question period I heard him over and over asking the minister of municipal affairs how we can support his constituency. Mr. Chairman, the situation is that the demands are what guide what taxation is. Are we taxed enough? Yes, we are, but it all is relative to what we as individuals, not necessarily as municipalities but as individuals, want. We put the demands on our politicians, and our politicians, as we know around this table, try to do the best job we can in that support.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to address the tangible capital assets, and that is, without a doubt, a challenge. We follow the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. They set forward the guidelines, and I believe we have three years. Is that right? Three or four years? [interjection] Till 2009 to conform to Canadian standards. So our ministry has put a half a million dollars in support for municipalities. We have had and are having seminars, and we've had meetings on how we can help municipalities not only understand but support each other because at the end of the day somehow we have to have some unity, some standardization.

Trying to figure out how we are going to assess, really assess, pipe underground, linear potential of gravel pits: this is not an easy task. I don't believe that each municipality needs to reinvent the wheel. We need to do some co-ordination because if we try to reinvent the wheel in regard to how we're going to deal with the issue, then we're going to have 360 different assessments. I think we need to co-operate together.

You know, your discussion about the development of growth plans. I want to make a couple of comments. This is very much in conjunction with the work also of land use. We need to work with the land-use – what is it? – framework. And we need to look at how we can save our soil. We need to look at how – it's communication again, you know, where there's this discussion. We have situations in municipalities where we have municipalities that want to develop land, want to develop or have developments where they have two-acre and three-acre and four-acre parcels, and we're just spreading out.

You know, sometimes we boast of having the biggest land mass municipality in Canada. I don't really think that's something we should be very proud of. I think, you know, we need to work at how we can create better densities. We've come from the five units per acre. We've increased it to seven, eight, nine. There are even some examples in Calgary that did a great job in looking at 11 units per acre. We need to look at that density, and we need to increase that density. So I would again say: a very good point.

The housing comment for small municipalities that have that ability to attract but really have no ability to start the project. Well, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to inform the hon. member that we have looked at that, and we have put money aside. We have put \$68 million aside for those such projects for small municipalities to be able to apply for so that they would be able to address those needs. I'm not exactly sure how successful, but we know from our previous experience that municipalities find innovative ways, and those municipalities have those concerns. So I hope that that is addressed.

Okay. One question you asked is about the municipalities that are having difficulties, the small municipalities that we talk about in rural Alberta where we have an urban municipality and a rural municipality, and the urban municipality has facilities that they use and the rurals use. What happens is: 60 per cent of the utilization takes place by the urban and 40 from outside, and they have maybe a million dollars' deficit in operating, and the rural community gives them just a little bit of support. Mr. Chairman, in our co-operation

that's something that we need to address, and those are some of the things that we're very much trying to address.

I know in the core capital it's for them to talk about where they're going, but – you know what? – if we get them at the table, maybe some of them will say: "You know what? We need to work together on this community initiative, and let us support that community, and let's get together." You know, we've had some great stories where municipalities have told me that 20-some municipalities got together, and they said: "You know what? We're going to pool all our community capital, and we're going to put it to a cause with a committee." What a great idea. Getting together and looking at what's necessary for the community.

As for the discrepancy for small communities as well, there was \$12 million that was taken out of the municipalities' sustainability fund, that was put aside, that was used for addressing the small communities, the communities that have mill rates of 30-some or have mill rates that – I mean, we have some municipalities that have an equalized assessment mill rate of three. We have some that have one of 30-some and 20-some. So we've used that funding. For those individuals we have taken that funding away from – I won't say taken away. That's not the right saying. We've taken \$12 million and set it aside and given it to municipalities that are struggling.

9:10

Is it enough? We're not sure. Are we working towards a more complete focus? Yes, we are, because we're meeting with municipalities and associations and the minister's council to try to address those needs.

I hope that that answers some of the questions that you had, and thank you very much for them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any others?

Hon. members, we will now proceed with Health and Wellness.

Health and Wellness

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm sure that colleagues have heard my introductory remarks, and if they weren't able to be present for them, they must have read them in the *Hansard*. I'm happy to open myself to any questions that people might have.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have a few questions for the hon. minister. I'd like to begin by talking about physician services. In this year's budget estimates the price is \$2.4 billion. It's \$400 million more this year. I'm wondering if the minister could enlighten us as to what it will be next year. What type of an impact does he see it having on the nurses' negotiations, that will be beginning right away?

I'd also like to know if he could tell me how many doctors we actually have now. How many are moving here from other parts of Canada or the United States? Are doctors actually returning from the U.S.? We did lose quite a few for a period of time. I'm wondering what our balancing numbers are like now, minister.

I'd also like to know how many medical students we have and how many of our Alberta students are taking their medical training outside of our country because they couldn't get into medical school here. What are we doing to facilitate their ability to come back?

I wanted to mention that in Australia, apparently, they nationalized physician services in such a way that the criteria for doctors are

the same throughout their country as opposed to different provinces being able to have separate physician councils that determine who gets a licence and whether or not they've met the criteria. I'm wondering if you have been working at all with the federal minister and other ministers across Canada to smooth that process out so that doctors that are fully trained and returning here from other countries could fit into our medical system with a little bit more ease.

I want to talk about the regional health authorities. Their mental health and cancer are now at \$6.6 billion dollars, which is \$600 million more than last year. I'd like to know if the minister can tell me if we've made any headway at all in outcome measurement with regard to the health care system. Specifically, minister: what do they do with the money? I ask this because in the years that I was on the board for the Calgary General hospital, the Alberta health care association, and the Canadian Hospital Association, we had a system, particularly here in Alberta, where in order to comply with an acute-care funding formula, health care facilities had to report to the department of health on a monthly basis the procedures that they had performed. When all of that data was accumulated at the end of the year, it would determine what the health care funding for that particular facility would be the following year.

I know it wasn't a perfect system. But at that time, I believe, it was possible for the minister of health to be aware of how many appendicitis cases had been dealt with throughout the province, how many hip or knee surgeries had been done, just general information so you would know, kind of, where we're at inside the health care system as far as funding goes, what it would cost on a per-unit basis. Does it cost the same amount in Calgary to do a hip replacement as it does in Edmonton, for example? I'm wondering if you have that type of data. If not, will you be making any attempt to try and accumulate that kind of data so that when we're putting an increase into health care, we have a very clear understanding of where it's going and what the people of the province could expect to get out of that?

You know, at that time we were spending about \$4 billion on health care. This year's budget, including the infrastructure needs, is around \$12 billion. I'm not sure that the system is serving the needs any better today than they were 12 years ago or 14 years ago. So I'd like your views on that and how we're going to improve the system, Minister.

I also wanted to ask you if you could give us an update on the cancer prevention fund. I know that we set aside money, a \$500 million fund, on the basis that we would be able to help the research group with \$25 million a year, that they were to match. I've not heard anything since, Minister, so if you could give us an indication of whether that organization is now kind of up and running. If they're raising money, are they able to match? What are they doing with those funds?

Long-term care. I wanted to talk about that for just a moment to say that during my time as an MLA long-term care, at least some long-term care organizations, have grown more uncomfortable with their relationship with regional health authorities. They feel that their needs are perhaps a little easily overlooked in light of acute-care funding needs, that perhaps they would be better served if they could be pulled out from underneath the regional health authority. I'd like to know if you've heard that, and if you have, what is your response to that? Is it possible to do something like that, or is that just completely out of the question? Is it something that truly needs to be reviewed with an eye to making sure that their needs are being met as well?

My last question – and you won't be shocked or amazed when you hear this – is about electronic health records and only to say this. Of the last three years, in 2005 we spent \$243 million; in 2006 \$147

million; in 2007 \$102 million. I'm wondering if the minister is prepared to comment on the implementation of that, on how it's coming. What are the regional health authorities spending on electronic health care records? While I'm confident that it is the right direction to go, Minister, I just want to know if we can honestly as a government say that we know where all that money is being allocated. Is it doing what it was intended to do? What was it intended to do? Can any of that great technology that's being implemented be used to get you and the government and the people of the province a little better information on the number of services that are actually being done on a timely basis so that it's not three-year-old data or four-year-old data but something far more recent so that we know where the money is going?

On health care premiums, Minister, I just wanted to ask this question. Have you given any thought at all to replacing the premium with moving it onto, for example, an income tax form so that it's perhaps a more meaningful way of people relating to the health care system as opposed to the premium? I am not suggesting for one second that health care should be in anybody's mind free, because it isn't. It's the most expensive thing we do. In the last 10 years it's gone from 27 per cent of our budget to close to 40 per cent of our budget, and there's no end in sight on that type of an increase.

It's overwhelming other program areas, so there needs to be, in my mind, a tie-back to a health care premium or a health care item on an income tax form that helps people to understand the magnitude of the cost. Tie it to – I don't know – 10 per cent of the total health care cost or tie it to physician fees, but tie it to something meaningful so that people would understand what it is they're actually paying for, a way to help them understand what they're getting in return for that payment.

So any comments you have I'd be glad to hear, Minister. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Some tough questions. On physician services to start with, the physician services budget for this year is \$2.4 billion, precisely \$2,431,139,000, and that would go up to \$2,477,611,000 next year and to \$2,525,013,000 the year after, so it increases. Of course, the hon. member will know that we've just signed the latest reopener agreement, and as a result of signing that agreement, there are a number of pieces that are in that compensation package. Two billion, seventy-eight million of that compensation package relates to physician fees. That is an increase from \$1,768,300,000 last year, or a 17.6 per cent increase, and that really not only encompasses the 4 and a half per cent increase in fees in each year over two years but also incorporates the volume increase. That's the direct physician fee area. That's the old model, and that's the model we're trying to move away from in so many areas; for example, with primary care networks and alternative payment plans and those sorts of things. But we're still in that model for the bulk of service delivery.

Of course, then we have in that global number about \$80 million for on-call services to enhance the fees that are paid so that doctors actually will provide the on-call that's necessary.

9:20

Thirty-four million dollars for the physician office system program. This is one of the pieces that would tie into your last question with respect to electronic health records. This is the place where some of the costs of electronic health records are buried. What that program provides is some support to encourage physicians with the transition to an electronic office and attachment to the

electronic health record. You know, they may be going along merrily with a paper-based system and say: "Why do I want to change? It's going to cost me money." So built into the trilateral agreement and now continued is the physician office assistance program, where we hope to be able to get 100 per cent of physicians' offices online with the electronic health record within a reasonable period of time. We've actually had fairly decent success. About 60 per cent are on. This is not a program that should be a forever program. It's a program which should fall off once the conversion has been there because it really is about the conversion, not about maintaining the office costs of doctors forever.

Primary care: \$92 million. That's helping us with the conversion from the fee-for-service to a primary care model and eventually in some cases to rostering, moving that way.

Clinical stabilization is another interesting piece of the package at \$38 million. The purpose of the clinical stabilization was to recognize that doctors get a fee for service, and they don't have the opportunity to increase their fees, so the only way they can increase their revenue is by seeing more patients. Of course, if we're really talking about primary care, we want them to see their patients longer, not see more patients. If you're talking about family physicians, whether it's in downtown Calgary or other places, costs have gone up, and we're losing family physicians, particularly losing them from areas where they can't sustain the costs. The clinical stabilization program is intended to be directed to help support doctors in primary care primarily although there could be other specialties where we need specific support.

Then, of course, the academic alternate relationship plan and the rural physician action plan encompass the balance of that budget, but I thought it was useful to sort of outline that total. As I said, it totals \$2.43 billion this year and will rise over the course of the next two years.

The impact on nursing. I would think it should be very clear to everyone that there's a very significant difference between the doctors' budget and the nurses' budget, and that's not because doctors are more important than nurses. That's because they get paid differently. Nurses are by and large on a union-negotiated agreement, a collective agreement, and they're employed. That's a very significant payment process than the business operation of doctors on a fee-for-service basis. So if you're looking at an apples-to-apples comparison, the increase in physicians' fees of 4 and a half per cent year over year is really the measure one should look at. Then even looking at that, you have to look at physicians who are dealing with escalating costs of utilities, escalating costs of rent, escalating costs of office operation that they have to take care of within the context of their 4 and a half per cent increase.

From my perspective, that's the comparison. I wouldn't want to go too much further into it because negotiations are under way with nurses and other health care professionals. But for anyone to say, "Well, the doctors got a 17.6 per cent increase in their budget, and therefore nurses should get a 17.6 per cent increase in their budget," they would be missing the point that there are a lot of other things built into that in terms of how we're changing the nature of the relationship, changing the nature of the payment structure, supporting some otherwise uneconomic situations to encourage doctors to stay in either a resource community or in an area where their costs have gone up dramatically and those sorts of issues.

How many doctors do we have? I don't know the answer to that off the top of my head. We talk about being 1,100 short, and I should have the number. We have now, I think, 135 spaces in each of the U of A and the U of C to train more doctors, 255 spaces at Alberta's two medical schools now for doctors, a total of 4,500 spaces for health care programs across the province. There has been

a significant ramping up of that. We've expanded them by more than 4,500 spaces since 2000, so there's been a significant increase.

There are still not enough spaces, as the hon. member mentioned, to admit all the qualified Alberta students who would like to be doctors. I don't have a way of quantifying the number, but we do have a number of doctors, and Advanced Education might be able to get that number for us based on who we support in student loan programs to study abroad. I know that in my own constituency I could identify at least 10 people who are abroad taking medicine. Not only are they going abroad to take medicine, not being able to do it here, at a much more significant cost to themselves, but the tragedy of it is that we don't have a good way of getting them back home.

First of all, once you graduate in a foreign medical school, I would say that perhaps not enough homework is done in the first place to determine whether it's a good school that they're going to, whether their credentials will be recognized back home. We have some work to do to make sure that there's easy access to that kind of information for students who do go abroad. Secondly, we need the residency program in place so that they can come back and get a residency here because if they take their residency in some other jurisdiction, the chances are that they'll stay and practise in that jurisdiction. We know that people who have been educated and get their residencies here stay here.

So that's one of the challenges that we have to try and meet in the workforce strategy that's coming forward. We expanded the spaces for international medical graduates to, I think, 48 residency spaces in the last year, and that was a good start. That has taken us outside the mix of the Canadian residency matching program because we've offered 48 specific spots for international medical graduates. That's a place where we have stepped up, but there's more to do. That's one of the places where we can actually get some of the people that we need. If we can expand the residencies and the mentoring programs and those areas, we can get some of the people we need rather more quickly than even by ramping up the training programs.

We also have to work with the colleges. I'm in the process of establishing a meeting with the colleges. I've met with the College of Physicians and Surgeons' executive director and president. I've also met with the deans of medicine to talk about getting together. We're going to bring them together to talk about how we can do a better job of recognizing credentials, of creating pathways and providing professional credentials to foreign medical graduates, and of getting rid of the barriers because it seems like every time we knock down one barrier, another one appears. We haven't quite overcome that. So I've made the commitment – and I have the commitment from them – to sit down and actually deal with those. [Mr. Hancock's speaking time expired]

I'll have to deal with the rest of your questions in a moment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few areas that I would like to address with the hon. minister. I do apologize if it seems somewhat disjointed. I was expecting that this portion of the Committee of Supply would be taking place tomorrow afternoon, so my notes aren't as organized as they would have been had it proceeded at its original time.

I would like to ask the hon. minister about some of the issues relating to Calgary's health care funding. I believe that the budget for 2006-2007 amounted to a 7.5 per cent increase over last year's base funding although when one considers the in-year operational allocation, it was 9.3 per cent, I think, that the figure worked out to be. The question that I would start with is related to the global

population-based funding formula, which, as I understand it, allocates funding based on the population demographics, which reflect things like age and gender and socioeconomic criteria. I gather that it is based on some empirical data. What I would like to know from the minister is what empirical data that is based on, how current that data is, whether or not we could have some access to the basis for that data, and whether or not the data is based on the actual intake costs to the health care system of each of those representative demographic components or populations.

9:30

As an example of the effect of this global population-based funding formula, as I understand it, it's not fully implemented and there are what I would call some fudge factors, which are one-time adjustments and growth provisions. If that global funding formula were properly and fully applied, it would result in the Calgary health region receiving an amount of a hundred million dollars or more compared to, as I said, what it actually receives.

My understanding based on the information that I've been given by the Calgary health region is that the average age of residents, in fact, is nearly identical, yet the Calgary health region in the year 2004-2005 reached a population of 1.2 million, and it received, as I said, a hundred million dollars less than the Capital health region with a population of a million. I understand also that this disparity in the per capita funding between Calgary and the Capital health region is actually increasing and that in the past year the Capital health region funding has gone up to \$1,310 per capita while Calgary's has only gone up to \$1,187. So the disparity seems to be increasing.

The second issue that I would like to raise with the minister is the issue of long-term care. As I understand it, Calgary health region is expecting the demographics to require approximately 125 additional care beds per year in order to meet the needs of its expanding seniors demographic. This current lack of adequate long-term care capacity in the city of Calgary is one of the contributors to the significant problems that that region is facing in terms of its flow through from the emergency departments because they don't have the capacity in long-term care, a result of which more people are getting shuffled off into the emergency departments when they needn't be.

The third issue that I would like to raise is the issue of cancer care in the Calgary region. The minister is certainly aware that the Tom Baker cancer centre in Calgary is not in any way an equivalent facility to the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton. It's not a complete hospital. The Baker centre has no beds to treat patients who require hospital admission; rather, it uses up capacity in the Foothills medical centre. Ultimately, there is a requirement for an additional cancer care facility, whether that be as a stand-alone facility or expanding the capacity at Foothills. I wonder whether the minister could elaborate on what plans his department has with respect to providing that additional needed cancer care capacity in the city; also whether or not he could comment on the necessity to avoid duplication of staff and services in the event that it is decided to support two separate facilities.

Another issue of concern in the city of Calgary is mental health funding. I've mentioned this to the minister on prior occasions. The Calgary health region traditionally receives only 20 per cent of mental health funding. That's meant to serve over 35 per cent of the provincial population. My understanding is that the mental health facilities which are located in Edmonton and Ponoka are funded through mental health funding which is allocated outside of the population-based funding formula. This would allow both Capital health and the David Thompson health region to direct fewer funds to support mental health services than Calgary and the other health

regions that are required to use in-patient beds and other resources for their mental health services. It's my understanding that only a small number of the patients from the Calgary area are cared for in the two facilities that I mentioned.

The Claresholm facility is part of the Calgary health region, but it is a very small facility, and it's by no means appropriate in many instances to expect patients from the city of Calgary to travel down to Claresholm to receive their care. The growing focus of moving from institutional to community care is certainly not supported by the present funding model. As I said, there is considerable inequity in the funding at the present time. In the 2006-2007 budget, as I understand it, the Calgary health region is receiving \$58.1 million for mental health funding, and Capital health, by comparison, is receiving \$105 million.

Another issue which has been brought to my attention is the lack of surgical infrastructure in Calgary in the face of rapidly increasing waiting lists for surgery. In 2002 there were just over 15,000 patients waiting for surgery in Calgary. This had grown in 2006 to almost 21,000 patients waiting for surgeries. The Calgary health region has indicated that their ability to recruit surgeons is constrained by the fact that they don't have enough operating room space to offer them access to in order to decrease the waiting times for people waiting for surgical care. My understanding is that there are some new surgical facilities that are presently planned as part of the Foothills hospital expansion, but it's also my understanding that of the 24 operating rooms which are going to be shelled out within that structure, only eight of those would be completed.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again some very good questions.

I do have a couple of questions that were left from the last member that I could just touch on very quickly and briefly. RHA outcome measurements are very important. One of the things that the member will be aware of is that one of the first priorities that I've dealt with is from sitting down with the boards and talking about accountability and board governance. We're putting in place structures with respect to the board governance, but one of the next pieces is: how do we make sure that we're operating in the context of a system, and what accountability measures, what reporting measures need to be in place?

I've met with the Auditor General as well to make sure that we have some consistency in terms of our expectations with respect to reporting. I believe that that's very important, that there be reporting on outcomes and outcome measurements and that we have a consistent reporting framework so that we can do those comparisons across the province, look for where the best practices are and where the benchmarks are, and then have performance expectations with respect to meeting those benchmarks.

9:40

The cancer legacy fund provides for about \$25 million a year. There's initially some good things; for example, a recently announced colorectal screening program. Those sorts of things will help us to reduce the incidence of cancer or catch things early and be able to deal with reducing the drain on the health care system and, of course, the devastation to quality of life that happens when we don't deal with it. So cancer research is very important, how we avoid cancers is very important, but catching it early is extremely important. I think that's one of the key focuses that we could learn from there.

Long-term care. I've had some preliminary discussions with the

Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. I think it's very important that we identify a way of dealing with both the housing component and the health component that go into the continuum of care, whether a person is in their own home and needing home care or through whatever form of assisted living that they have until they get into what we would normally call long-term care or extended care. I think it's very important.

We have had concerns from providers that talk about the unfairness of having to compete against the same people that are regulating them and paying them. They're concerns with respect to whether they're being dealt with fairly in their budget. I think that's a fair topic for discussion, and I think we need to look at how we do that.

As I say, I raised some angst early in the system, with people now saying: are you going to move long-term care out of the health authorities? My response has been that we need to have a discussion about where long-term care should be but, more importantly, about how we do the continuum of care and how we pay for the health support to seniors in their choice of living accommodation or lifestyle to support the quality of life. We know that health status is improved if people can be as independent as possible as long as possible. That's a discussion we need to have. It comes right out of the Broda report. It's something that we've struggled with but that I think we need to grasp.

The electronic health record is, in my view, one of the most important innovations and backbones with respect to change in the system, but you're right: we need to know where the money is going and that we're getting good value for our money. I, for one, having been watching this for a number of years, was surprised to come into the portfolio and discover that we were developing three health records: a Capital one, a Calgary one, and RSHIP for the rural areas. I'm somewhat comforted, after looking into it, that each of them is building a system which will encourage participation and use from the people in their regions and that a portal and a hub are being built which connects them to make sure that it will be a seamless provincial health record, but I think that's something that we need to be on top of.

I'm very concerned about the cost. Particularly, some of the rural health authorities that are involved in RSHIP are reporting pressures on their budget as a result of the electronic health record expenditures. We need to be monitoring that and making sure that we're not getting ahead of ourselves. Yes, we want to have all Albertans on the health record by 2008, and we're on track to have pharmacies and labs and diagnostics on those records in substantial amounts and, as I mentioned, doctors' offices tied in. That's very important, but we have to have very clear control of the standards to make sure that they're all building on a compatible platform and that they're adding things that are necessary.

Now, you can see that they've gone a lot further in some of the areas like the Calgary regional health authority than you might need to do in some of the rural health authorities. For example, the bedside package that they've added to their model which they've developed and which works, from what I've seen, very effectively, would be an exotic add-on for many of the RSHIP people. So there are differences in terms of what's being spent on it.

That, I hope, deals with the others. If I've missed some, I'll come back to them.

Now, with respect to the questions from Calgary-Nose Hill on the global funding formula. There's actually a book, which I will send to the hon. member, which outlines how the funding formula is applied. I've promised to deliver that. I haven't done that yet, but I'll get that to you. It does indeed show the way the per capita rates are calculated, the population process. In region 3, for example,

with the 2007-2008 projected population of 1,274,796 people, the net per capita rate, rounded, is \$1,319. In region 6, which is the Capital region, with 1,070,650 people projected, the per capita rate is, indeed, \$1,476. So there is, in fact, a difference of somewhat in excess of a hundred dollars per capita, if you just look at the per capita rate. The reality, as the hon. member acknowledged, is that the methodology is based on a per capita for patients at different ages and stages, so to speak.

The calculation of capitation funding rates assigns health care expenditures to individual demographic groups. The first thing they do is collect the comprehensive RHA patient activity data, and then they calculate a cost per demographic group. Data coverage of regional health services is relatively comprehensive, but there are a few areas of gaps that they have. The acute in-patient care numbers, the acute ambulatory care numbers, the long-term care numbers, the home care numbers, the community lab numbers, the Health Link numbers: all of that data is calculated and then extrapolated into demographic groups. Relative weight costs are added to patient activities to determine expenditure and relative resource weights attached to each of the activity records.

Then the acute hospital in-patient care, acute ambulatory care: they all have a weighted formula attached to them. Then you take it and apply it, scaling it to the pool on the budget size. This isn't actually a funding formula. It's an allocation formula. In other words, you could take all of the costs and put them against the demographics and drive a number, and that number could be higher than we budget. If so, it has to be scaled to the budget. So it's an allocation of the budget dollars.

Then you take the funding formula and you take a look at a number of different categories of people: under one year of age, one to four years of age, five to nine years of age, 10 to 14 years of age, et cetera, male or female; so the whole categorization. Then you look at so-called regular funding, the premium support funding; that is, who is being supported? Who has premium support in the Alberta health care insurance premium plan? Aboriginal: there's a weighted average there because of the higher incidence and utilization of the system. Those who are on income support. So that drives out to approximately 90 different categories of funding that go into the model. Then you apply the capitation rates to each region's projected population, and that drives out the funding formula portion of the budget.

Now, that's one portion of the budget. On that side the Calgary regional health authority would have received \$1,763,008,571, and Capital \$1,654,157,390. Then you apply the import/export ratios. So each of those health authorities serve broader populations than just their own. The reality is that the Capital health authority serves all of northern Alberta for some services and further into the territories. But for the Alberta people that they serve . . . [Mr. Hancock's speaking time expired] Aw, gee, I had so much more to say.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Two points that I want to talk about: dialysis and health care cards. You know, Whitecourt-St. Anne is presently being served by two great health regions, Capital health care and Aspen, and there will be a new opportunity for improved dialysis for the citizens of the constituency. You know, so many of our community members have been travelling at times three days a week. I know the ones that I talk to on a pretty regular basis travel Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from the western region of the constituency to Edmonton, and these are folks that, you know, aren't in great health. It's quite a job, three

times a week travelling back and forth on winter roads, icy roads, to get their four or five hours three times a week hooked on the dialysis machine.

The new opportunity we will have with this new mobile unit, that will be operating three days a week in my constituency and two days a week in West Yellowhead, will provide great access to our citizens. I think that this project will only provide an opportunity for us to learn more about doing things on a mobile basis, and I encourage the minister to follow very closely that progress on the portable dialysis so that he may use that model in other jurisdictions where, other MLAs tell me, similar problems occur.

9:50

The second issue is the health care cards. I'm wondering if you have worked with the Minister of Service Alberta to provide a better model, a more efficient model of delivering health care cards to Albertans. If people come to my constituency, if they move from Meadow Lake to Whitecourt to work in the pulp mill, the first thing they do is register their car, and they get new licence plates. They get a new driver's licence and new identification cards, but they can't get a health care card at their local registry office. I just don't know why we can't do that one-window approach and service all Albertans through a model that's worked very well.

I know that we're running close to the time. Firstly, I'd like to thank you and your folks for providing the insight to have the portable dialysis machine for my constituents. But I would like to know if you've worked collaboratively with the Minister of Service Alberta to streamline the health care card system.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, first of all, for the comments with respect to dialysis. I think that the mobile dialysis units are going to be a great boon to people because travelling to have dialysis every second day is just not a great way to have a quality of life. So the new mobile unit that will serve Whitecourt and the Edson-Hinton area I think will be exceptionally good, and I hope that there will be an opportunity to provide that kind of service to other areas. Certainly, we've been dealing with the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake with respect to people in his area that have need for dialysis and how we can provide that in that area, and the Capital health authority has been doing their best to try and make that work. Mobile dialysis seems to me to make a lot of sense.

The health card. I think we need to look as we go forward at the whole issue of having a health card. Quite frankly, some years ago when the new driver's licence came in, I looked at the opportunities to perhaps have a smart card or one card that would serve all purposes in terms of identification. I still think there could be opportunities in that area, although I have to admit that that hasn't been at the top of my agenda yet in this ministry.

So I hope that deals with some of those concerns.

If I may, I'd like to go back to Calgary-Nose Hill and some of the concerns raised there with respect to the funding formula. I just would indicate on the import/export side that the Calgary health authority gained \$56,373,000 on import; the Capital health authority, \$192,000,000 on import. So that's one of the areas where there's a significant difference between the services provided by the two health regions to people outside their health regions and the compensation they get for that.

Now, there is a factor called a cost adjustment factor. There are lots of technical things that go into the cost adjustment factor. Calgary gets an additional \$41.7 million on that, and Capital gets

\$56 million on that, so a slight difference on the cost adjustment side. Again, in the urban centres the cost adjustment factor is primarily due to the cost of the teaching hospitals.

The mental health funding was raised. We have put in place a new mental health funding formula that's population based this year. So some of the anomalies of the past would be accommodated as a result of the new mental health population-based funding formula. Now, it's not totally there yet because we did have to put in place a no-loss provision. So both Capital and Calgary have contributed to the no-loss provision in a significant amount, Calgary quite significantly more than Capital. Calgary contributed \$11.9 million to the no-loss provision, whereas Capital contributed \$1.8 million to the no-loss provision.

As the hon. member noted and from earlier discussions that we had, one of the reasons for that difference otherwise in mental health funding is due to major facilities, particularly the Centennial, or the Ponoka hospital as it used to be known, and the Alberta Hospital Edmonton. Those are not facilities which just serve the local population. Those serve a much broader population, a forensic unit in Edmonton, for example. But we have moved to do the mental health funding on a more population-based manner. Then there's targeted funding, et cetera. So I hope that gives a better insight, but I will provide the hon. member with the booklet because it is instructional reading.

In terms of long-term care one of our objectives, obviously, is to expand long-term care capacity so that we can make sure that acute-care beds are used for acute-care purposes, and that's nothing new. That has been, again, since the Broda report. Expansion of the capacity in the long-term care system has been a really important part of how we deal with some of the other urgencies that we have at the front end.

On cancer care the hon. member might be pleased to know that I met recently with both the Calgary regional health authority and Cancer Board representatives in a joint meeting to talk about exactly that issue of how we do cancer care delivery in the Calgary health region and southern Alberta, and I've asked them to work together to come back with a delivery model that each of them can see their role in and what we need to cite in a southern Alberta context. One of the models the member will know and the one that the Cancer Board is promoting is the development of a new cancer facility on the west campus at the University of Calgary so that it has the research capacities and the tie-in to the university research capabilities. That's what needs to be determined as to whether that's the appropriate site and configuration and size and those sorts of issues. If we build that, it'll be a major facility. So we need to know that we're building the cancer care of the future, not the cancer care of the past.

The surgery issue was also raised, and it's an important one. What I can say is that there are number of major construction projects happening in the Calgary health facilities. Significant capital dollars have been provided to build those, and we'll be continuing to work with them to ensure that they can use those facilities to the fullest capacity. Obviously, there are issues with respect to capital dollars and how they're allocated. The new south Calgary hospital will help them with their bed capacity as well as their surgical and ambulatory care capacity that they need.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, you have about one minute.

Mr. Hinman: Excellent. I'll ask one or two questions then. I guess that my first one would be the accreditation of foreign doctors. I see nothing new in there. I'm wondering if the minister is looking at

putting forward indemnification for teaching facilities in the province so that they can and will accredit foreign doctors. My understanding – and correct me if I'm wrong – is that currently if they were to accredit a foreign doctor, there is no indemnification and they're putting their facility at risk, whereas they are indemnified with the ones that they've trained themselves.

Also, looking at supplementing specialists who take the time to teach or help accredit foreign doctors, are you looking at putting any compensation in there for those members that have come over and want to do that? Yet the specialists say: well, I'm not going to take time out when it costs me a lot of money.

Again, we've had a lot of talk on health care cards. I think it's important. My question is: what are we doing to reduce the amount of fraud with health care cards?

I'd also like to ask the question that, again, premiums have not been eliminated. I'm very disappointed. I appreciate the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere bringing up the question of changing it. If, in fact, we need to raise the revenue, perhaps we should relate it to our provincial premium.

User fees for adults . . .

10:00

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, but pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(b) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Treasury Board, Health and Wellness, and Municipal Affairs and Housing relating to the 2007-08 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that the House adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before I call for a vote on that motion, I just want to remind members that tomorrow morning there will be people in the Assembly. I believe that the Speaker is hosting a group here, so everyone is advised to make sure that the laptops and any other things that they have on their tables are locked or put in the drawers.

[Motion carried; at 10:02 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, May 9, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/09

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When you arrived today, Mr. Speaker, you probably noticed that someone had placed a carnation on your desk as well as on the desk of each and every hon. member. These carnations are courtesy of the Alberta division of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. It is a symbol of support for those Albertans who live with multiple sclerosis every day. I stand to recognize that May is MS Awareness Month and invite each of you to show your support by wearing the carnation. I would particularly like to recognize the hon. Premier and his wife, who served as honorary MS Super Cities Walk co-chairs.

We are pleased, Mr. Speaker, to have some representatives with us from the MS Society today. I would ask them to stand as I call their names and at the end be recognized by the Assembly. Yves Savoie, the national president of the MS Society of Canada; Neil Pierce, the president of the MS Society of Canada, Alberta division; Garry Wheeler, the vice-president of the MS Society of Canada, Alberta division; Judy Gordon, well known to this Assembly, a former member; my good friend Joan Ozirny, a board member of the Alberta division; Darrel Gregory, the director of communications, MS Society of Canada, Alberta division; Adeline Blumer, director, client services, MS Society of Canada, Alberta division; Scott Rattray, director, client services, MS Society of Canada, Edmonton chapter; Michelle Kristinson, director of government relations, MS Society of Canada. On behalf of all of us thank you so much for what you do, and welcome to the Alberta Assembly.

The Speaker: President of the Treasury Board, do you have a second introduction?

Mr. Snelgrove: Yes, I do and thank you. Mr. Speaker, I have a group here from the School of Hope. The School of Hope is literally centred all over Alberta, but its head office is in Vermilion. What a terrific name for a school, for surely it is the hope of all of us that we can learn and develop a life we want. Their teacher today is Mrs. Linda Jacejko. Some of the parent helpers are Mrs. Nancy Perozok, Mrs. Christine Hogan, Mrs. Benita Straughan, Mrs. Hilde Price, Mrs. Ruth Glombick, and Mrs. Harvena Chiacchia, and Mr. Silver Chiacchia. Would they please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members

of this Assembly a group of 18 visitors from Bonanza school. You know, this is my lucky week, I believe, or two weeks. This is my second group that I get to introduce and in such a short while. Bonanza school is only a few miles away from Dawson Creek in our neighbouring province, B.C., and certainly they've travelled and spent many, many hours on the road to be with us today. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Randy Carlstad, and parent helpers Mr. Hal Keith, Mrs. Joann Eneyedy, Mrs. Bridget Fedorovich. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two folks from EmployAbilities, an organization which helps persons with disabilities find work in our community. Seated in the public gallery is the president of the board of EmployAbilities, Mr. John Ough, and the executive director, Iris Saunders. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent, Charmaine Rose. Charmaine is also going to experience a rent increase at the end of her lease in August. She lives with her cat, and she will sacrifice whatever she has to in order to stay where they are, but she does feel that it will affect her food budget and her basic necessities. So, Charmaine, if you would please rise and allow us to welcome you to the Alberta Assembly.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce a constituent today. Her name is Tracey Culley. She and her husband moved to Alberta from Ontario about seven months ago to seek better opportunities for themselves, but they have not been able to find housing. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Ms Tracey Culley and ask that she stand and receive the warm traditional welcome.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a group of people from the Edmonton-Glenora constituency – Della Kerfoot, Bernadette Thomas, Cora Davis, William Crowley, Mary Ladouceur, Paul Neville, Douglas Klein, Mark Fife, Viola Ellard, Pat Ellard, Sherri Rivest, Ken Armstrong, Braden O'Neill,* Chris Swaren, and John Wodak – and Murray Soroka of the Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre. They're all here to meet with the minister of housing about unaffordable rent increases. They expect to meet with the minister after question period, and I would like to have them all stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and introduce to you and through you a constituent, Dianne Raymer, who is a single lady – and I'm not sure if that's an offer for those of us in the crowd who may be single or not – living alone. She's concerned that the next rental increase

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

will be the one that forces her out of her current housing situation. She as well is here to hear discussion on the issue of rent controls and hopefully have the opportunity to meet with the minister this afternoon.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House Mr. Eric Lindstrom, a constituent in Edmonton-McClung. Mr. Lindstrom is one of many concerned Albertans who do not understand and cannot believe the housing crisis we're facing in this province. He's here to make sure that his concerns and suggestions are listened to and considered. I, too, suspect that he may even later try to have a word with the housing minister as some of the honourable guests today are trying to do. I invite Eric to please stand, and I call on all members of this House to give him the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of constituents of mine who are here to tour the Leg., some for the very first time and some haven't been since Manning was the Premier. I'd like them to rise when I give their names: Mr. John Bizuk, Pauline Bizuk, Garry Larsen, Anne Peterson, Joe Stepa, Lorna Symic, Beebee Chang, Rema Halabi, and Crystal Grunling. Please give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to this Legislature a very dear family friend from Lethbridge who is sitting in the public gallery. Gordon Koppang is a graduate from the University of Lethbridge. He has cerebral palsy and is on AISH. He does not have any family. Gordon is courageous and a fighter. He's a leader in his church, studies, and writes poetry. He gets to the YMCA to work out to fight to keep himself as mobile as possible. He practises preventive health behaviour just as this government has said he should. His rent went up, but so did his luck. He has finally been accepted into Lethbridge Housing after waiting three years. He will live in 350 square feet. Please, would we welcome him to this House. I would ask him to rise.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mike Woolridge and Dorian Deresh. Dorian and Mike are Palace Casino workers entering the 243rd day on the picket line due in part to this government's inability to protect Alberta workers through the creation of fair and comprehensive labour legislation. Mike is a floor attendant and has been there since 2006. Mike hails from Gander, Newfoundland, and has a long history in community activism. He's been a volunteer firefighter and a first aid instructor. Dorian has been working at the Palace Casino since August of 2001. He works as a custodial staff member in maintenance. They're both accompanied by UFCW 401 representative Don Crisall. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

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

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly one of Canada's youngest top-40 entrepreneurs – he was given this award yesterday in Toronto – as well as being a University of Calgary alumnus who just received the award for alumnus of the decade. I'd like to introduce to you Ravinder Minhas, president of Mountain Crest Brewing Company. I'd ask him to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a second group to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today. Joining us in the members' gallery are six members of the Personal Support & Development Network. They are Mr. Joel Heidebrecht, Mr. Core Charrette, Mr. Edward Leslie, Ms Grace Jacobs, Mr. Harley Cardinal, and Ms Jillian Glasser. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a constituent from Edmonton-Meadowlark. Majorie Wolf has recently received a rent increase of \$350 a month. She's on a fixed income and is concerned about how she will make ends meet if rents continue to rise. I ask her to please rise and accept the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Youth Secretariat

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Youth Secretariat it is my pleasure to share with you and this House the important work being done by the Youth Secretariat, which is housed within Alberta Children's Services, youth strategies branch.

Formed in 1999, the Youth Secretariat aims, engages, and empowers youth to provide feedback and advice on proposed strategies, recommendations, and findings on issues related to youth. Most recently, Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Youth Secretariat I've had the opportunity to work with the staff of the youth strategies branch on the provincial Youth Advisory Panel, which meets bimonthly. The Youth Advisory Panel, as many of you know, was established to provide ongoing youth perspective on all work done by the Youth Secretariat. What you might not know is that with the creation of this panel, Alberta is the only province to provide youth with a unique opportunity and the privilege to be involved in a formal way in advising government.

Mr. Speaker, youth strategies is hosting the Uniting for Children and Youth Forum at Northlands from May 10 to 11 of this week. Service providers, parents, youth, and experts will join together to share their expertise. As chair I will be moderating a youth panel, and this panel will provide delegates with the opportunity to hear amazing stories of struggle, resiliency, and success.

Mr. Speaker, the secretariat will be recruiting new panel members

this summer. I would encourage all members who know of exceptional youth between 16 and 22 who may be interested in contributing to this vital work to contact me or Mr. David French of youth strategies in the Ministry of Children's Services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Employment for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Louheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you all know, Alberta's booming economy has resulted in a labour shortage in almost all fields of endeavour. I know that employers, business associations, our government, and others are working hard to fill the gaps that exist. However, there is one labour pool of skill, talent, and desire right here in Alberta that remains undervalued and underutilized. I'm talking about persons with disabilities.

The most recent statistics we have show that in 2001 52 per cent of persons with disabilities in Alberta were working compared to 79 per cent of persons without disabilities. This means that up to tens of thousands of Albertans might be working if given the right opportunity and support. I know from speaking to people across the province that there has not been much change since 2001, not enough change to be sure. The gap remains. For the most part, it exists because employers lack an appreciation of what persons with disabilities can do. There is also some resistance to provide suitable accommodation in the workplace. For the most part, these barriers exist because of a lack of education and understanding. For example, most employers do not know that 80 per cent of job-related accommodation for persons with disabilities costs less than \$500.

Many organizations are working to improve career and employment support for persons with disabilities, including Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry. One community organization that I would like to recognize is EmployAbilities, an Edmonton-based, nonprofit organization who launched a television awareness campaign in March. The ads generated a lot of interest and do an effective job of helping to tear down walls that prevent persons with disabilities from getting and keeping jobs.

At a time when Alberta is desperate for workers, it's in our best interest to accommodate all Albertans who want to work.

Thank you.

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

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in 1998, from June 15 to 18, a housing symposium was held in Edmonton to address the pressing need for more affordable housing for families, senior citizens, and Albertans with special needs. That was nine years ago. We should have seen this affordable housing crisis coming. For reasons unknown to me we didn't. Had we seen it coming and had we acted on it nine years ago or five years ago or even three years ago, we would probably not have to be talking about what has been the main topic of conversation in this House and across this province for the last several days: rent controls, rent guidelines, temporary rent regulations. Call them what you will.

Rent regulations, protection for renters from outrageous rent increases, are, in our view on this side of the House, now probably inevitable if we are going to allow people to keep the roofs they have over their heads now while we set about the long process of building more roofs over people's heads. But they are only one piece of the puzzle, and that really needs to be stressed, Mr. Speaker, because whether it's rent regulations or any other single solution to the

affordable housing crisis, we need not, we must not get hung up on that solution as the one and only solution.

What we need to do is come at this with a whole basket of solutions, tackle this simultaneously on a number of different fronts – short term, medium term, long term, and sustainable – otherwise, we're just going to be pouring more money down the drain, and at the end of five years we won't be any further ahead. But key to this is the province demonstrating a firm and consistent and continuous commitment, something this government has not done yet and which I urge them to get their heads around doing, a continuous commitment to solve the affordable housing crisis until it is solved because, Mr. Speaker, everybody needs a home.

Thank you.

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

Stavely Indoor Professional Rodeo

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While some Alberta communities search for new and innovative ways of promoting economic development or events, the people of Stavely and district have spent the last 50 years perfecting an exciting event reflecting their heritage. The first professional indoor rodeo in Canada was held in Stavely, Alberta, over 50 years ago, and this last Sunday myself; the Minister of Agriculture and Food, the MLA for Highwood; and the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, the MLA for Sherwood Park, who proudly calls Stavely home, attended the event.

The Stavely Indoor Pro Rodeo evolved by the collective vision of three original families from this famous ranching district. The Schlosler, Cochlan, and Streeter families began the event, and today descendants of those families still volunteer their time to make the event a roaring success.

Kim Cochlan chairs the pro rodeo committee, and Greg Schlosler, a former two-time Canadian pro rodeo champion, still runs the infield. They are guided by the very active Stavely agricultural society led by Kelly Hall. With up to 50 seasoned volunteers the community event goes off like clockwork. Arena announcer Les McIntyre, Dennis the rodeo clown, the professional cowboys and cowgirls doing their events keep the audience of 1,700 people riveted to their seats with excitement and humour.

Congratulations must go to the entire community of Stavely and district, the Stavely agricultural society, and the event sponsors for over 50 years of community spirit. When it comes to defining the words volunteerism, dedication, innovation, pride, and fun, it can be summed up by the phrase: Stavely annual pro rodeo, first weekend of May 2008. Come and enjoy the heritage and the tradition.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

1:20

Esquao Awards for Aboriginal Women

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday, May 3, thousands of aboriginal Albertans came together to celebrate Alberta's aboriginal women's achievements at the Esquao awards held in Edmonton. These awards are the brainchild of Muriel Stanley Venne, president of IAAW, who believed that aboriginal women needed to be recognized for their contributions to society. I was privileged to attend this gala and be the co-master of ceremonies with Andy Popko, vice-president aboriginal relations, EnCana. I'd like to thank the many colleagues from all parties of this House who attended.

Twenty exceptional aboriginal women who have made notable achievements in the categories of science and technology, leader-

ship, justice, health and medicine, community involvement, culture, education, business, social services and advocacy were recognized. These tremendous women have demonstrated the value of having a tenacious work ethic and an ambition for success. In their many capacities they have provided indelible leadership for their communities and this province. They have served as exceptional role models for all those who struggle to overcome societal adversities.

These aboriginal women are part of a broader vision for their communities, a vision that promotes tolerance, inclusion, dignity, and respect. They have faced their challenges with pride, intelligence, and confidence, ultimately leading them to excel beyond their own expectations. Their respective successes represent a positive future, especially for young aboriginal people who look to these women for guidance and to be directed by their strength and perseverance. As an aboriginal woman, Mr. Speaker, I am proud that we are recognized in the matrilineal and matriarchal society that's being revived in our aboriginal communities.

Congratulations to the many women: Mary Kappo, Lena Bumstead, Doreen Lameman, Barbara Courtorielle, Betty Bastien, Ruby Lacombe, Claudette Rain, Margaret Cardinal, Sokaymoh Frederick, Alma Desjarlais, Marion LaRat, Claudia Simpson, Pauline Thompson, Doris Courtorille, Lucille Cook, Doreen Cardinal, Susan Cardinal Lamouche, Leigh Ann Houle, Michelle Morin, Laverne Arcand, Laura McLaughlin, and to the circle of honour recipient, Audrey Poitras. Your innovative spirits have had and will have momentous impacts on our community.

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

Official Gemstone of Lethbridge: Ammolite

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a proud time for me to represent my constituency of Lethbridge-East because recently Lethbridge became part of a rare minority of cities by naming its official gemstone, ammolite. The people of Lethbridge are already proud of their city's unique plant and wildlife, and now they have added the fossil ammolite to be the allure of Lethbridge.

Ammolite was first discovered in southern Alberta in the early 1970s and given its official gemstone status in 1981. It is formed from ammonites, an ancient marine fossil. Although ammonites are found around the globe, it is only in southern Alberta that this deposit produces the gemstone ammolite. Ammolite is mined by Korite International in the St. Mary River, just south of Lethbridge, and coveted around the world. The gemstone is multicoloured, having a complete spectrum of colours in its purest form.

This beautiful rarity will no doubt gain Lethbridge and Alberta greater recognition throughout the world for its natural wonders. I would like to congratulate the city of Lethbridge on its adoption of ammolite into its culture, and I would like to thank Lethbridge city council for the unanimous decision which will bring attention and praise to an already well-deserving city.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am continuing with the tabling of petitions from concerned Albertans throughout the province, this time 469 signatures. The petitions reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents . . . hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the [government] to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and

those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Thank you.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) to advise the House that we will be accepting written questions 12, 13, and 14.

I further give notice that on Monday, May 14, 2007, motions for returns 5 and 6 will be dealt with. Motion for Return 4 will stand and retain its place on the Order Paper. There being no additional written questions appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an article from the *Calgary Herald*. It has an amazing resemblance to a speech the other day in the House.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of an e-mail that I received from my constituent Charlynn Cox, who is concerned about proposed changes to the tenants and landlord act. Her townhouse is changing ownership. She had a rent increase in March of this year. Now she's afraid of becoming homeless if new owners bring in a new tenant at a higher rent.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today on behalf of Calgarians Wayne Llewellyn and Robert Gagne, who between them have over 50 years of property assessment expertise. They are concerned about sections of Bill 26 which take the appeal process out of legislation and hide it in ministerial discretionary regulations.

The first tabling is entitled Standard on Assessment Appeal, which was approved in 2001 by the International Association of Assessing Officers.

My second tabling is entitled Report and Recommendations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs on Equalized Assessment in Alberta.

My third tabling is entitled Getting It Right, an investigation into the transparency of the property assessment process and the integrity and efficiency of decision-making.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. The first one is a letter received April 26 from a constituent, Eric Lindstrom, who's here today, detailing his many concerns with respect to the current housing affordability crisis and offering suggestions for possible solutions. Eric mentions rent control, rent allowances, designated housing, and the government still playing a role to help people.

The second one is another Edmonton-McClung constituent, 87-year-old Mrs. Mary Swain. She urges the Premier to rethink his opposition to rent controls and says that she understands why he may not want to call an election right now because many unhappy people will likely not support his party. Her rent is going up to \$774 for a one-bedroom apartment, and she can't afford it.

The third, Mr. Speaker, the last one, is again from Mary Swain, a copy of the your rent is past due, submit payment now notice which her landlord uses to notify tenants that they're late paying. She says the bright red notice is customarily placed on people's mailboxes. She finds it offensive, and it's meant to be an embarrassment, not a means to collect payment.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the appropriate amount of copies of a letter sent to the Minister of Service Alberta from Margaret Linklater from Lacombe. She's appalled by the minister's response to rent controls and feels ashamed.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table today. The first is from a constituent of Edmonton-Mill Woods, Glenda Murphy, explaining in detail a major concern regarding the proposed seismic testing slated to happen this summer on Marie Lake in the Cold Lake region.

The second letter is from Maxine and Arnold Jol of Spruce Grove. It's a strong request for support for children with special needs by not cutting funding to those children who receive specialized services through the family supports for children with disabilities and the multidisciplinary review board.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's a letter that I received from the hon. Minister of Finance dated March 15, 2007, and it's regarding the Government Fees and Charges Review Act.

Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Rent Supplement Programs

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week we've raised concerns about double standards in public policy when it comes to affordable housing. Well, here's another one. Out-of-town MLAs receive \$1,750 a month in accommodation allowance to cover the costs of housing in Edmonton, and that allowance has risen \$450 a month in just the past two years. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier understand the anger of Albertans when they see that he and almost all of his ministers receive \$1,750 a month in accommodation allowance but are offering nothing close to that to Albertans who are facing a rental crisis? Why the double standard?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, time and time again I got up in this House and I said: examining all the evidence that's been given to

this government caucus, rent controls are not a magic bullet, simply said.

Dr. Taft: Well, I imagine people noticed that that was complete avoidance of my question.

The Premier and his ministers keep saying that Albertans facing unaffordable rent hikes should be patient and should wait for the situation to resolve itself. It's easy, of course, for the Premier to say when he gets \$1,750 a month in taxpayer-funded accommodation allowance, but it's not so easy for the many Albertans facing huge rent increases. Again to the Premier: does the Premier think it's fair that out-of-town MLAs receive \$1,750 a month in accommodation allowance but don't provide anything like the same benefits to Albertans facing a rental crisis?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. leader is talking about rent controls. Again I have to repeat: rent controls will only make the situation worse. We will have less housing in the marketplace by following that kind of policy that they're trying to push forward in this House.

Dr. Taft: Well, this March 19, just this spring, the Premier indicated in this Assembly that he would be willing to debate me "any time, anywhere" on the water transfer from the Red Deer River to Balzac. I'm happy to take the Premier up on his offer. Maybe we can undertake that debate during the Drumheller-Stettler by-election. Now I'd like to return the challenge to the Premier. Will the Premier agree to a public debate on the affordable housing crisis?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the few leadership candidates that recognized that housing was an issue. We made it a priority for this government, and there will be significant debate tonight and tomorrow with respect to how we deal with the critical issue.

Mr. Speaker, in the first three months of this year over 11,000 people came to Alberta. That's significant. Where did they come from? Net migration from other provinces: the province that lost the most was Ontario. Guess what the label of that government is? And you know what? They have rent controls in place.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. [some applause]

Dr. Taft: Thank you. I appreciate that, everybody.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, though the affordable housing crisis has been building for a long, long time, this government seems to have been caught off guard. Now it seems to be making up policy on the fly. I guess it's their tradition. It has promised millions in programs and even handed out phone numbers for the public to call, but nothing concrete seems to be in place. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: what is the income cut-off level for people to qualify for the recently announced rental supplement program?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the hon. member that this government and our Premier do take very seriously those in need. In fact, yesterday we had 25 people that came to this Legislature. We met with those individuals. Of the 25 people, seven individuals stayed to talk to our staff about eligibility for support, and I'm happy to say that four did qualify.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People working full time at \$15

an hour earn a gross income of about \$2,400 a month. After paying taxes, health care premiums, food, transportation, and other expenses, not much is left when they face a big rent increase. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: what happens to the many, many working poor who are above the income cut-off but are still facing huge rent increases?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that whole area of what we do for people who are in dire circumstances comes to my ministry. We have several examples of issues that we have dealt with in a very positive way, dealing with them on an individual basis. Let me talk to you about the couple in their 50s who relocated from British Columbia. He came here because he had a disability. He wanted support. The wife couldn't work because she had to stay home and look after him. The rent was \$800 a month, and they were in arrears by one month. We issued immediately a thousand dollars in emergency funds with the director's approval, income support for May, job search support for the wife arranged by our department, found a job, made a placement, and found them a place to live.

Dr. Taft: Well, we can play that game, too, now.

Mr. Speaker, a poll in today's *Calgary Herald* indicated that 85 per cent of respondents are not confident that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing can deal with landlords who impose excessive rent increases. Albertans want answers and details on government programs, not just vague assurances. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: can the minister give eligibility details for the housing crisis programs? For example, do people have to sell their cars? Do they have to drain all their savings? Do they have to be destitute?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, once again, that is entirely within my purview. A man came to us. He felt that he might have to sell his truck in order to pay for his rent. We can bridge that program. We can make sure that he keeps his truck, which he needs for the job. We also provided him support so he wouldn't be evicted.

Mr. Speaker, I have several cases of things that we deal with on a day-to-day basis, and I would be very pleased to table them.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, thank you. The worth of a society can be judged by the way it treats its most vulnerable people. This is advice that Alberta's Conservative government needs to take to heart. Cora Davis and William Crowley are two constituents of mine seated in the public gallery today. Both rely on meagre AISH payments to make ends meet. Recently Cora and William each received a \$300 rent increase. Both Cora and William believe that their landlord is gouging them because there's no way someone on AISH can afford an extra \$3,600 a year. To the minister of municipal affairs: since you have adopted as your strategy meeting with gouging landlords, will you meet with Cora and William today and also meet with their landlord?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to defer to the minister of seniors.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, this government has acted quite progressively over the past years about increasing the monthly rate, acknowledging very much the part that the stakeholders have worked for some time about: how do you help those on AISH, the assured income for the severely handicapped? It's in response to

that that we have seen over the last three years substantial increases even to those payments, about \$200 a month. With respect to other benefits they might receive, they also qualify, in response, to all the other supports and assistance that are available through all of our departments.

Dr. B. Miller: Bernadette Thomas is also an AISH recipient on a fixed income of \$1,000 a month. She just received notice that her apartment building is being converted to condos, and she has to begin to search for a new apartment. After completing a difficult application process with Capital Region Housing, she has discovered that no landlords will accept her because they feel she is too high a risk. One landlord flat out told her that he doesn't believe this government will increase her benefit levels to keep up with rent increases. So to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: will you go on public record today and assure AISH recipients and landlords that AISH benefits will keep up with the increasing rents?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, one beautiful thing about our government is that we don't put labels on people and differentiate on the basis of what they've got in terms of a medical condition. If they are low income, if they face eviction, if they are pressured because of various things, including a medical condition – I have a medical condition here that I could cite: severe pain, lower back problems, carpal tunnel syndrome in both wrists, arthritis in his right shoulder, arterial blood clot in his left knee, and migraine headaches – we find these people placements. We look after them, whether they're on AISH, whether they are people like myself who might be down on their luck. We look after everybody.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, Bernadette's problems do not end here. Ms Thomas also suffers from fibromyalgia, which is a painful and debilitating disease. The intensity of Bernadette's symptoms are affected by her environment. For example, Bernadette must carefully choose an apartment with the right conditions. Bernadette is just one example of thousands of people in our province who have special needs. It's not only affordable housing; it's appropriate housing that is their concern. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: can he assure people like Bernadette – and Bernadette is up here in the public gallery – that she can find appropriate housing given her needs? Who is helping her?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, those with severe handicaps: we do a lot to continue to work with them individually. If they wish, there's an AISH phone hotline where they can apply for AISH. We do work with individuals. Everyone has a unique circumstance. It's in that way that we will continue to treat them.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Rental Starts

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the government certainly appears to have circled the wagons today. Nevertheless, I have with me today a copy of the Boardwalk Rental Communities 2006 annual report, appropriately entitled Opportunity Knocks. It indicates in this particular report that "rental starts have fallen, particularly in Edmonton, which will contribute to a further tightening of the market through 2007 as demand exceeds supply." In their quarterly statement they say that the revenue is up about 11

per cent in Edmonton, 17 per cent in Calgary, and 16.3 in the rest of Alberta. To the Premier: what justifies the rent increases that are producing this increase in revenue for this megalandlord?

Mr. Snelgrove: This is a very, very typical approach to dream up what is in the intent – the simple fact is that Boardwalk is a very responsible landlord. Their policy is to increase the rent a maximum of \$75 twice a year. They also have an opportunity to assist the tenants who are facing challenges. It is really unfortunate that the leader of the third party wants to stand here and malign a company which in many, many cases is working very hard to maintain a good relationship with their tenants. So to bring in the allegations that they're unscrupulous landlords – and there are, but they're not Boardwalk.

The Speaker: We're dealing with questions of government policy here, not with policies of individual companies. So let's try and put this in the context in which question period is meant to be.

The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, listening to the President of the Treasury Board, it's clearly government policy to defend landlords and not tenants. It's pretty clear to me from reading the annual report that they expect rents to continue to rise. In fact, they state clearly here that they won't build any more units until rents for a two-bedroom apartment reach \$1,600 a month. I want to ask the Premier: is it government policy to allow that to happen?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, of 210,000 – 210,000 – housing starts in Canada more than 51,000, close to 52,000 were here in the province of Alberta, more than 25 per cent in a province of only 3.3 million people. So obviously the policy is working.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier would like us to believe that the increase that's taking place in housing is coming here in Alberta, but it's not. Again from the report it says: "Rental starts have fallen" in Alberta, which does not have rent guidelines, "particularly in Edmonton, which will contribute to a further tightening of the market through 2007 as demand exceeds supply."

So rental starts have fallen, Mr. Premier, unlike Ontario, where they're rising dramatically, and it has rent guidelines. When will you be honest with the people of Alberta and tell them the truth; that rent guidelines do not interfere with the market; they just protect tenants?

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, the leader of the third party is not very aware of the actual policy in Ontario, and we can debate that at a different time. [interjections] Oh, because you're wrong, and before you get your information, don't let me embarrass you in the House with wrong information.

However, Mr. Speaker, one thing we should remember is that as people move out from rental units into housing, you know, houses that they purchase on their own, it frees up more rental units in this province. So it's finding the balance. It's not only building low-income rental units in the province of Alberta; it's individual housing and looking also for housing for seniors and those that require that little additional care from the government that's very compassionate and caring about Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West-Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Forest Sustainability

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week at an annual general meeting a major paper product company denounced the forest practices in Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Do you agree with the charges that the Alberta boreal forests face destruction from logging?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely not. I do not agree with that opinion at all. In fact, rather than being destroyed, Alberta's forests are being renewed and strengthened by harvesting. I want this House to know and all Albertans to know that for every tree that's cut in this province, four new ones are planted every year, and it's the replanted forests, the new forests, that bring the age balance that protects us against the real threats to our forest, which are pine beetle infestation and forest fire.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What is your response to the protesters' calls for sustainable forests in Alberta for the long-term benefit of communities, industry, and forest product customers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I certainly agree with that statement that sustainable forest management is the best thing not just for the companies but for communities and the forest, and that's why in this province we require sustainable practice by law. As I said before, for every tree that's cut, four new ones are planted. Forestry companies are required to plan over a hundred-year period. If that's not sustainability, I don't know what is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. How do you respond to the criticism that the Alberta government must set aside more protected areas in the forest for the benefit of wild species and their habitat?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Protected areas are an important part of conserving our wildlife, and that's why Alberta is a leader in Canada in doing this. Thanks to Special Places 2000 12 per cent of this province is protected in various ways. But simply adding more protected areas is not the solution. The solution is a balanced land use. Albertans want balance between recreation, economic development, and environmental goods. That's why we have a land-use framework that I announced last week.

Thank you.

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

Rent Supplement Programs (continued)

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dramatic increases in the

cost of housing mean that parents must work harder or children must learn to go without. While Alberta's housing crisis affects everyone, some people are more vulnerable than others. Lone-parent families may find themselves in a vicious cycle because a parent needs to work extra shifts in order to afford rising housing costs but cannot afford the child care that's available if they can even find it. To the Premier: what steps is your government taking to meet this increased demand from shift workers and lone parents who need to work longer hours to pay their rent?

Ms Evans: I could cite another Edmonton scenario. A mother of three left an abusive situation in Saskatchewan. She stayed the maximum 21 days in the shelter but still had no housing. She was provided hotel accommodation through income support for a couple of weeks until she found housing. One she found was over the core shelter rate of \$524 by \$446, so she got a damage deposit of \$524, and while she was able to pay the additional damage deposit, we have the Canada child tax benefit, who also provided her funding for the additional cost for the rent. This is another example of how we would face that situation.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This housing crisis has already pushed many families to the breaking point. A quick phone call to the Capital Region Housing Corporation confirms that the wait-list for social housing in Edmonton is already over 24 months and contains more than 2,500 individuals and families. When we asked what families should do while they are waiting, we learned that most have no option but to tough it out. To the Premier: how can you ensure that children in these families will not be forced to go without proper nutrition, school supplies, or adequate care while their families tough it out for 24 months or more?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I do care. I think this caucus cares. I think that we have illustrated that not only by the supports we've provided families for children with disabilities. There is no place in Canada that provides children as many supports as we do in this province. Our supplementary benefits for children lead the country. The family that has problems with housing, if they have problems providing for their children, their dental work, their eye exams, school books, anything, they simply have to come to one of our 59 centres, and we will look after them on an individual basis. We'll assess their needs, and we'll follow up, linking them in with the programs that best serve them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituent Tracey Culley is seated in the gallery today. She suffers from MS and is confined to a wheelchair. She and her husband moved to Alberta about one year ago. Although her husband quickly found a great job, they are still unable to find anywhere to live. The fact that Tracey requires affordable and accessible housing makes finding a home even more difficult. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The woefully inadequate provisions of the residential mobility access program mean that Tracey is on her own to find housing that she can afford and then make it accessible. Is there anything you can tell her today that will alleviate her feelings of hopelessness and despair?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that today in room

512 we have my staff there and available for anybody that is here in case they have some questions in regard to qualifying for support. I would also like to say that we will have somebody on the fourth floor outside of the entrance to the gallery in case those individuals are not exactly sure where 512 is, to assist them. This is a concern for all of us in this House, and we need to work together to solve it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Employment for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Recent public service announcements have highlighted Alberta's untapped resource and attracted considerable positive interest from Albertans with disabilities and employers. Can the minister tell us how her ministry is going to use this heightened awareness to help more Albertans living with disabilities move into the labour market and to get jobs?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we are very pleased with many employers that are stepping up to the plate and providing opportunities for people with disabilities to receive jobs. I have heard of people working in retail industries that previously would never have had that opportunity. We have industry liaison specialists in the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Industry who work directly with employers and try and link people who need jobs with willing employers to help them not only in receiving an opportunity to work but in adapting work conditions in a way that's suitable for them and work to retain those people in those positions for as long as possible. We have contracts throughout the province to enable people with disabilities to work.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, my second question, also to the same minister. There are many barriers to employment that face persons with disabilities. These include things like employer attitudes and perceptions, workplace accommodation, and also transportation. What is the minister doing to reduce those barriers to employment for persons with disabilities?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we've spent nine and a half million dollars. We provide that this year for disability-related employment supports to help Albertans overcome barriers. We pay for things like ramps to access the work site, computers to help people communicate. We adjust their keyboards in a way that's appropriate. We provide tutors and sign language interpreters. There are many programs that we provide to assist employers in making sure that the workplace is safe and a comfortable place for people with disabilities.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, my last question. To the minister responsible for the personnel administration office: what is the government of Alberta doing to show employer leadership for employment for persons with disabilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I need to say that precious few people in this Assembly have done more than the hon. Member for Strathcona to promote awareness for people with disabilities in Alberta, so it truly is my honour to respond to that question.

The provincial government generally hires on merit. We use a competitive process to select the most suitable candidate for

positions that are available based on education and skills. We provide an equal and fair opportunity to everyone who has applied for a job with the Alberta public service, but to ensure that the disabled have the opportunity, we've come up with several policy things. The job website has links to information resources that are intended for people with disabilities who are pursuing employment. We also text size our job website ads, and they can be enlarged.

The Speaker: I think we have to move on now.
The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that if people will read *Hansard*, I, too, have stood up many, many times and worked for people with developmental disabilities.

Temporary Rent Regulation

Ms Pastoor: Gordon Koppang has come to Edmonton today to show his support for a temporary cap on rent increases. Gordon is on AISH and was spending 40 per cent of his income on accommodations. After being on a wait-list for three years, he has finally found an affordable place to live. To the minister of housing. Gordon has come all this way to advocate for himself and all other Albertans on fixed incomes who are truly struggling to pay their rent. Why is the government forcing people like Gordon to advocate for something as simple as an affordable and appropriate place to live in this province that is so rich?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that this Premier and this government very much are concerned about individuals that have trying situations, especially in housing. The member made mention that this individual has travelled all this way. I again would like to say that we very much would invite him to come up to room 512 to talk to our staff. It's two floors above where we're at right now. Our staff will meet the individuals and take them to 512.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. The development of affordable rental units is not keeping up with the demand. There are 400 people on a waiting list for affordable housing in Lethbridge alone. What suggestions does the minister have for these Albertans who need a home now? They can't wait for two years for the new units.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, there was \$195 million allocated to municipalities for those municipalities to look at the needs of their municipality, the needs that they feel are the most critical. They can use that money in rent supplements. They can use it in secondary suites. They can use it in building new units. But also, I want to share that our government is providing \$33 million for a rent supplement program at this time and an addition of \$14.3 million, which should add, you know, approximately 2,000 units.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, millions and millions and millions of dollars. What I really want to know are the numbers of units and the numbers of people that have been helped. Why did the government choose to ignore many recommendations made to the Affordable Housing Task Force when they visited Lethbridge, recommendations that would help prevent a housing crisis in southern Alberta?

2:00

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a good question because the rental supplement helps between, I believe, 4,500 and 5,000 people. If the hon. member had heard what I just said, the additional funding – and I know the numbers don't mean anything, but they do provide support for additional rent supplements. In this case I did say in the last answer that we predict it'll help approximately 2,000 additional units.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Land Agents

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. A recent court case in Vegreville highlighted some concerns about the Land Agents Licensing Act, particularly regarding people who charge a fee for negotiating land access on behalf of landowners. Given that a judge ruled that this law should be changed, what is the government doing to address the courts' and rural Alberta's concerns over this legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me review some of the recent events that have made this an issue. The Land Agents Licensing Act requires a person to hold a land agent's licence when negotiating on behalf of a company or when charging a fee for advising a landowner in negotiation. When a person does not charge a fee for giving advice, then in fact a land agent licence is not needed. I know that several Albertans have expressed a concern about issues with this certain part of legislation, and I know that the hon. member is referencing a recent court case that was appealed. While this matter is before the courts, I will not discuss the particulars of that case but just simply say that we await the appeal decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I only have one supplemental, so I want to use it to ask the minister a clear and pointed question. Will you be amending legislation to allow landowners to choose who they want to represent them?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, nothing will be done with this legislation until the appeal has been completed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Temporary Rent Regulation (continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The role of a government is to facilitate the conditions that create opportunities for citizens and communities to prosper. The opportunities for low-income Albertans, people on AISH, and seniors to have a safe, affordable rental home are being stifled by this government's failure to protect renters from being gouged. My questions are to the minister of housing. A senior living in Edmonton-Centre will no longer be able to retire as planned because of a \$265 a month rent increase that she's facing, and Mary Ladouceur from Edmonton-Glenora, who is here today, faces a similar situation. Mr. Minister, does the price of prosperity

for Alberta mean seniors having to work well past the age of retirement so that they can afford a place to live?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, once again, what I'm hearing is a hardship case where somebody is really concerned, and I think we all share the concern of somebody who may be pressured and may not be able to be comfortable. Let me talk about a mother with three children, staying at the Sheriff King Home in Calgary as a result of leaving an abusive relationship. She found rental accommodation, and her rent was \$1,290 a month. She was obviously not able to accommodate that, but with help from our department of a thousand dollars as a start-up allowance and an additional amount of \$300, we were able to help her. I have consulted with the directors through our staff. We have many examples of this kind of case where we can and will help.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the minister of housing. My constituent Jennifer, whose rent increased by \$245 a month, or 44 per cent, in the last year, now has to work two jobs to pay for a modest one-bedroom apartment. Does the minister discount her situation as the price of prosperity?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, once again, we look after people who have issues with affordability problems that relate to their lives, like the single, 52-year-old gentleman with a deteriorating eye condition that had rendered him legally blind. As a journeyman carpenter he had to take time off work to undergo lens replacement and eye surgery. His postoperative prognosis was very good, and he fully expected to return to work. Obviously, the cases they compare and want to listen to are their own. They're not interested in these other people. I can't believe it. I'm interested in all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the minister of housing. Many of my constituents who are on AISH are being forced to spend most of their income on rent, leaving little left for food, clothing, transportation, and costs associated with having a disability. Charmaine, who is here today, is facing a \$300 rent increase. Will the minister of housing finally admit that a temporary cap on rent increases is essential to ensure that Alberta's most vulnerable people can find a place to live?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, a request for giving some affordable accommodation should come to me, not a request about how to deal with capping or anything else. When people are in need, when people are in crisis, this government and the previous ministry of human resources and employment have a track record of support of almost \$100 million to provide housing supports for over 55,000 Albertans, and above that, we provide supports for 20,000 learners. So we provide supports for people in crisis, and we will continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Homeless and Eviction Prevention Fund

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has taken a couple of good ideas from the Affordable Housing Task Force, including increasing the rent supplement program and establishing

a homeless and evictions fund, but as usual their rigid ideology gets in the way of doing the complete job. It's clear that without rent stability or guidelines that money is going to end up in the pockets of the landlords. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Doesn't this minister see that these taxpayer-paid programs will end up in the pockets of the landlords rather than helping the people they're supposed to help?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon and tonight we're going to debate just that: a stability program, Bill 34, to stabilize the rents here in Alberta. I look forward to the debate.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm asking about a debate here in this House right now, talking about where that money is going to end up. It's taxpayers' money. My question, again, is to the minister, whoever the minister is over there. They seem to be having trouble deciding who's up and who's down. Would one of them answer the question: what is to say that without guidelines that money will not end up in the pockets of the landlords?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it shouldn't come as a glaring surprise to them that all rent ends up in the hands of landlords. That's how the deal works.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's interesting. The minister has just said, and I quote. I asked the question – the taxpayer money for subsidies, rent evictions, and the rest of it – and the minister said that it's going to end up in the pockets of the landlords. Thank you for that answer.

My question simply is this then. Will he now admit and say that again, exactly the same thing, that this money is going to end up in the pockets of landlords? Say it again.

Mr. Snelgrove: We use many programs to support individuals that are in different circumstances in Alberta. Some of them are direct subsidies to landlords. Some of them are programs that support the individual. Some of them have different things, people with developmental disabilities and AISH people. There are a multitude of programs that we use very effectively to try and help that person achieve a life they can be proud of and live with dignity and respect. That's what this government is all about.

The Speaker: In less than 10 minutes from now I'm going to say, "Orders of the Day," and we're going to start a debate on Bill 34, which will last until at least 6 o'clock this evening. I look forward to a full, enthusiastic House of participants.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:10

Liquid Strychnine

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers are very concerned with the federal government restrictions on liquid strychnine to control Richardson's ground squirrels, which cause \$200 million in damage to crops each year, not to mention the many injuries also caused to livestock. My question is to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food. How much longer will this product be available to farmers in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government Pest Management Regulatory Agency did a three-year study on the

effects of strychnine on the environment. As a result of this study the federal government decided to deregister strychnine for pest control after 2008. The government of Alberta did however argue on behalf of the Alberta farmers that strychnine be maintained for pest control.

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that the premix version is only available in that premix form and it doesn't have a very long shelf life, what other products are going to be available in Alberta in the near future to control this pest?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal agency has registered a product known as Phostoxin, and we're working with the government of Saskatchewan to test this product and check out its effectiveness and its safety for the environment and for the user. Information on biological control measures can be found on Alberta Agriculture's website.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. minister again. Many would argue that these alternate products aren't nearly as effective as liquid strychnine. Is there anything Alberta can do within our jurisdiction here to ensure that strychnine will be available in the future in this province?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is: no, we can't. But we certainly can put Alberta's concerns forward. This is, of course, a federally regulated product. We will continue to work with other governments and with the industry to look for a safe and effective replacement for control of the ground squirrel population because this is, indeed, a burrowing problem.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Temporary Rent Regulation (continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday in response to the minister of municipal affairs' utterly false claim that I wasn't concerned about my constituents, I predicted that the minister's office would become very full given this government's despicable treatment of vulnerable Alberta renters. Yesterday following the question period his room couldn't accommodate the number of concerned individuals. To the minister of municipal affairs: did you get their message?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, there were 25 individuals that were in this House that were encouraged by the members of the opposition to come, and I thank the opposition. I thank the opposition for having those individuals come to our office. We did find better accommodation. There were individuals that were in wheelchairs. I mean, if the hon. member wanted them to try and fit into the small offices that we have, I'm sorry; I don't understand that. We moved on to a bigger office. We tried to accommodate their needs and at the same time addressed the ones that had particular concerns.

Mr. Chase: The question was: did you get their message? Obviously not. You didn't get mine.

Fred Bisschop is a constituent of mine. His rent is increasing by

50 per cent on June 1. He's on AISH and can't afford it. He can't make it up here to meet the minister, and as we heard yesterday, the helpline of the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry is completely inadequate. So I'm raising his case for him. Without rent controls he'll be either forced out of his home or the government will have to pay a direct subsidy, hundreds of dollars a month, to his landlord because this government won't do the sensible thing and temporarily control rent increases. Why does Mr. Bishop have to face this dilemma?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, may I respond to the issue of the telephone? Yesterday it wasn't working properly. It was hard to find. But the phone line, number one, as of noon today is indicating to people how to get through on the homeless and eviction policy. So may I just say that they can get through, they can be heard, and we would be anxious to speak to them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I hope their phones haven't been disconnected as they wait to be moved out.

There are many more vulnerable constituents here, Mr. Speaker. They all want action on rent control from this government. Today I heard the story of a family forced to leave Calgary and move to Saskatchewan because their rent increase was so great. The government claims that everyone wants to come to Alberta to work. Well, it's too bad they can't stay. To the minister of municipal affairs: what does he have to say to those many residents of this province who, like that family, can't afford to pay the price of prosperity?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we need to have a balance when we look at housing. Rent controls do not work. For those individuals who are renting now, if we end up in a rent control situation, there will be units that will be turned over to condos. There will be no building that will take place, and it'll be a worse situation.

Mr. Speaker, I need to add a couple of points. The opposition is asking questions and talking about four ministers. Yes, we do have four ministers. There was a housing task force that made recommendations, that directed recommendations . . .

The Speaker: I'm afraid we're going to have to move on to the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Endangered Species

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Media reports continue to raise concerns about the potential impacts of climate change. My constituency is like many others across Alberta where in recent years we saw the effects of a severe drought. Wetlands are just one example of important habitats for waterfowl and so many living things. Indeed, Alberta is renowned for its prairie wetlands across the continent, and they are an important part of our rural economy for hunting, fishing, and tourism. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What system does SRD have to identify how climate change may affect plant and animal species in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for that question. Wetlands and waterfowl are dear to my heart. In fact, I had some for supper the

other night. I also flew over central Alberta the other day, and I've never seen our potholes more full of water. I think it's going to be a great year for our waterfowl.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, was a hunter at one time.

My first supplemental question is to the same minister. What process does SRD have in place to identify species that may become at risk of extinction?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sustainable Resource Development has a number of programs that monitor this. Every five years we publish a report on the general status of Alberta wild species. Our latest one was published in January of this year, 2007, and it's available on the SRD website now. We also have an endangered species committee, chaired by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, who advises me on this.

Also, I'm happy to report that this is the first year that we're launching our biodiversity monitoring program. It's been in the works for the last couple of years: \$4.2 million. It'll be the first year. It'll give us the baseline data. This program is the best in Canada, possibly the best in the world . . .

The Speaker: I think I'm going to have to recognize the hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: My final question: what programs does SRD have in place to reduce the risk of extinction of species in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My department's biologists work with the many stakeholders to monitor these situations. Again, we work closely with the hon. member's Endangered Species Conservation Committee. We also have recovery programs that are advised by recovery teams. We take this issue very seriously, as indicated by our biodiversity monitoring program, which, as I said, is not only the best in Canada, the best in North America but almost certainly the best in . . .

Some Hon. Members: The universe.

Dr. Morton: Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Cited Documents

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move on, the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry during the exchange this afternoon indicated that she'd be prepared to table something. I have to note that if this is a briefing note to the minister, something from her own department, there's no onus for her to table such things. If it's an official document, that's different.

2:20

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, they are various pages with anecdotal references, not identified by the name of the individual but from my department, that cite the circumstances in various parts of Alberta relative to people who have found themselves at risk.

The Speaker: All I'm saying is that there's no need to table such. If the minister chooses to, then the minister needs five copies. Is she prepared to do it now? I'll provide that opportunity.

Ms Evans: Could I give the copies to be copied? And then we will so do.

The Speaker: Why don't we bring it back tomorrow, and we'll table it that way. Then we'll just deal with it that way.

Ms Evans: Perfect. Thank you.

head: Orders of the Day head: Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 34 Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate May 3: Mr. Snelgrove]

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we get to have a discussion about an opportunity to put rent stability into the marketplace and ensure that renters and people who are in a condo that may be subject to conversion have appropriate opportunity to look for lodging elsewhere should it make their lodging either unaffordable or certainly out of their price.

One of the petitions that was tabled today identified the fact that Albertans are looking for stability in the rental market. By limiting to once a year rent increases, it will give an opportunity for people to do that. Mr. Speaker, while the vast majority of landlords are caring and have developed a very good relationship with their tenants, of course there are some that have taken the opportunity of an overheated economy to put rents past where they should be.

There is no simple solution. Certainly, rent controls in the short term might feel good, but they cap an industry that is not responsible to be the one that looks out for people that need help. The people that need help will access other avenues of funding through the government. At this point, Mr. Speaker, we want to have a good, healthy discussion about the requirement of a year to notify for major renovations, condo conversions, rent increases, and we'll help stabilize the rental market. I look forward to the debate.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Taylor: Excuse me?

The Speaker: He was up before you were, sir.

Mr. Mason: I would like to take this opportunity to respond to and debate Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. Mr. Speaker, there are elements of the act that we would have to say are positive. The difficulty, though, is that we have got a bill before us that does not deal with the issues that were laid before the task force on affordable housing. That particular report was in fact put together on the basis that hundreds of Albertans from all over the province came forward and talked to the task force about the issues that they faced in terms of their housing.

Mr. Speaker, rent controls as a broad category were mentioned more than almost any other single issue when this task force heard from Albertans. Now, you have to ask the question: what's the point

of creating a task force and sending it out to listen to Albertans about what they need from the government if you're not going to listen to it? Then what happened is that when the task force report was prepared, it was not distributed to members of the task force. It was not made public. It went behind closed doors in an archaic Tory decision-making process that hasn't changed.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just touch on the democratic reform approach of this government because they've made a great deal out of it. They talk an awful lot about how they're going to change the way things are done, and they have changed some things. They have changed some things in terms of how this House does business, and not all of those things are bad. In fact, I think there are some very good reforms that have come out of that, but they don't get the basic question of democracy. They've ruled too long to fully understand how a government that wants to actually be open and accountable and actually be open and democratic operates.

Now, it seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that the first thing that should have happened was that the report should have been released, and there should have been a public discussion and a public debate about the report, and the government should have listened to that debate before it made up its mind. Instead, they chose to have the decision-making behind closed doors and to make their decisions before the public even knew what the recommendations from the report were. As a result, I think they made the wrong decision. I think they made the decision based on ideology and the interests of landlords rather than the people that the task force listened to, so they find themselves in quite a mess today. Well, I can tell you that when it comes to committee stage of this bill, we will be providing some amendments that will help the government out of its mess, and all they have to do is accept the amendment to bring in rent guidelines.

Mr. Speaker, the committee recommended to the government a position that landlords should be able to increase rents by the consumer price index plus 2 per cent. That would be, you know, around 7 per cent in perhaps a year, and of course if there were exceptional expenses, the landlords could actually get approval to raise the rents to cover those exceptional expenses. That's a reasonable approach while new housing is under construction.

But the government talks about the lack of construction, or they talk about how rent guidelines would impact rental construction when, in fact, rental construction in Alberta is going down. There are no rent guidelines now, and rents are soaring, yet we are seeing less rental housing being built than in Ontario or other places. If the government is going to commit some funds to building affordable housing, that's not a bad thing, Mr. Speaker. I don't think it's enough, but it's not a bad thing that they do that. But the government has admitted – the government has admitted – that it's going to take at least two years and in many cases three or four years before that housing starts to come online, and that will restore some equilibrium in the market. Until that time, they have left the renters of this province hanging out to dry. So they've created a real problem for themselves, but more particularly they've created a great problem for the very large numbers of Albertans who rent.

I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that not all Albertans who rent necessarily fall in the vulnerable category. There are a great many families, seniors, young people that rent, and even though they have full-time jobs and in some cases very good jobs, they're not in a position to afford the kind of rental increases that have been going on.

So we will be presenting, Mr. Speaker, an amendment to this bill to introduce the concept of rent guidelines, and I would urge the government to give it some serious consideration because I think they've made a very serious mistake both for people who rent in this province and, as well, for their own political futures.

Mr. Speaker, just to move on a little bit, I think that we need to deal as well with the whole question of condo conversions, which the bill does. This is a serious problem. In the last year Calgary lost 946 rental units to condo conversions, and Edmonton lost 533.

The new rules limiting landlords to one rent increase per year have not been clearly explained or publicized, and in lots of cases constituents are getting unlawful increases, but they don't know it. Mr. Speaker, I want to just deal with the whole question of the one rent increase per year, which the government has touted as being something that would protect tenants. There are a few cases where that's actually been the case, where someone has been fortunate enough to have received in the last few months a very small rental increase and then got hit with the big one. Well, the big one is not eliminated, but it is postponed. It is deferred until a year has gone by, and when the year has gone by, they can expect that that rent increase is going to be waiting for them. That's something that the government has not dealt with. So it's an ineffective means of dealing with rent increases. It doesn't deal with it.

2:30

The government says that rent guidelines don't work, but Ontario, Mr. Speaker, has had rent increase guidelines for about 15 years. Investment in new apartments has increased by 88 per cent since 2000. That's 2,045 new rental starts in 2000 and 3,848 new rental starts in 2006. Alberta with no rent increase guidelines has seen a drop in new rental starts by 52 per cent. So the argument that rent guidelines don't work doesn't work.

Mr. Speaker, we have made it clear that rent guidelines should be a temporary measure until market stability can be restored. We don't see them as a permanent solution in any way but a temporary measure to protect tenants until equilibrium in the market has been reached and re-established. We also don't want them to apply to new units, and if they don't apply to new units, then it really is a curious question as to how they can prevent the construction of new units because they don't apply to them. That's an approach, I think, that is reasonable. It's not a doctrinaire approach. It's practical. It deals with the problems that people are facing.

Mr. Speaker, it's important that the government realizes that this is a major crisis not just affecting vulnerable Albertans but thousands upon thousands of people who are middle class, families, seniors, students, all kinds of Albertans that are all being impacted by this, and they are watching and waiting to see what the government is going to do. If this bill passes in its current form, those people are going to be left hanging, and they're going to be waiting for answers for a very long time. So this is perhaps an opportunity for the government to get itself out of the hole that it's dug for itself and do something that makes a lot more sense. There is gouging that's going on, and I personally find it hard to accept the Premier's answer that he's going to send the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing down to talk to these individual landlords and that's somehow going to solve the problem.

In fact, the whole approach the government took today in question period on this issue was to talk about a handful of individual cases. They're not dealing with it as a policy issue. They're not dealing with it as an issue that affects thousands upon thousands of Albertans, but they can't help them all individually.

I want to deal with the whole question of the emergency fund that the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry keeps talking about. Mr. Speaker, there's a particular fund to help very serious cases. The question that arises in my mind is why we need to use taxpayers' money to help individuals who get in that position when, in fact, they get in that position because of bad government policy. The government could introduce a policy that protects tenants, that

protects renters in this province, that wouldn't cost the taxpayers a dime.

I hear the President of the Treasury Board calling it stealing from the landlords, simply, and he has a unique perspective on this problem, Mr. Speaker. It is, indeed, the perspective of the landlord and the owner and not the perspective of the people who have to find a place to live that they can afford. We're happy to provide that perspective in this House. I happen to think that that's the perspective of the vast majority of Albertans.

The people of Alberta, the tenants of Alberta need some protection in this situation. The government has worked very hard to eliminate environmental regulations and taxes that corporations might pay in order to bring about the kind of economic growth that we have seen in this province. I happen to think that most of the credit goes to high world oil prices; nevertheless, they have done very little, precious little to plan for the impacts of that growth on the people of this province. They call it the price of prosperity, Mr. Speaker, but it's very clear that the prosperous are not bearing the cost. It is the poor, the middle class, and the working families of this province that are paying the price of prosperity. This government has set it up that way, and they don't want it any other way, quite frankly.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to conclude by saying that this bill as it now stands will not meet the needs of tenants in this province, it will not meet the needs of the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who live in rental accommodations, it will not stem the increase in homelessness that we're seeing in this province, and it doesn't really meet the needs. So as it stands, it's not a bill that we're prepared to support, notwithstanding the fact that it has some positive steps. It needs to go much further because without the rent guideline portion, this bill will not constitute a comprehensive and effective housing strategy for this province. It's too bad that the interests of the landlords and the ideology of right-wing conservatism have trumped common sense and the interests of the majority of the people in this province. I think it's a sad day.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. And I will follow a rotation here for the remainder of the duration of this afternoon. If there's any other member from the government side that wants to participate, then I'll call them. After the Member for Calgary-Currie I'll call on the hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and join the debate on Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. This, of course, is not a bill that could by itself solve the affordable housing crisis. That should be recognized by all parties, and that wasn't the intention. The intention of this bill was obviously to address a certain part of it. As the shadow minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing for the Alberta Liberals I certainly couldn't object to that because we have said all along that one of the three key things that the province must do in order to solve this imminently solvable affordable housing crisis in Alberta is to change legislation that creates roadblocks for people who have good ideas and otherwise the wherewithal and the ability and the resources to get to work on solving the affordable housing crisis.

In principle this is, I suppose, as good a place to start as any, but you've got to do more than start. When you start, you've got to do it in a comprehensive, well-thought-out approach, and I'm afraid this doesn't even come close to meeting the mark. What this bill does is that it will modify the notice periods and make that amendment retroactive to April 24 of this year and allow for regulation-making

authority on any other matter deemed necessary to carry out the act. So the main amendments are to regulate the frequency of rent increases for tenancies to once a year, provide clarification around the start date for the time referred to for rent increases, and make it an offence not to comply with the condo conversions notice period, which again is a one-year notice. That doesn't go far enough. That doesn't go nearly far enough.

In fact, what we have seen happen since April 24 is that landlords, some of whom are unscrupulous, some of whom are taking advantage of a giant loophole, and others of whom are good landlords – because there are many, many good landlords in the province of Alberta. That shouldn't be in dispute. But they're terribly confused and concerned and worried by the way in which the government has introduced this concept and introduced this legislation, so they're saying: well, gosh, if I only get one rent increase a year, given the way my costs are going up and given the market conditions that exist, I better make it a good one. So tenants are seeing their rents skyrocket.

2:40

You know, we talked in our affordable housing policy – because everybody needs a home – about need to enhance tenant protection, and we said that our plan would limit rent increases to one per year. So it's a Liberal idea that we're talking about here. We also said that we would do two other things in terms of enhancing tenant protection. We said that our plan would establish a vacancy rate trigger that when implemented would place a two-year moratorium on conversions of rental properties to condominiums, and we put an exception in there: except for those developers who agree to replace any rental units that they want to convert to condos, that would be lost due to condo conversions, with new rental properties. In other words, if you've got a 50-unit rental building that, you know, you can make a really good business plan for turning into a condo, build us another 50 units of new rental accommodation and we'll let you do it, despite the moratorium that exists otherwise.

And *ploy 3* was this: we would institute a one-time, one-year-long temporary rent regulation that limits rent increases within that period to a maximum of 10 per cent. This would lessen the risk of tenants losing their homes while giving communities and builders time to create additional affordable housing spaces. Mr. Speaker, what happens when you institute a package of tenant protection is that tenants are protected. What happens when you only introduce one piece of that package is that you can't put the rest of the puzzle together, and tenants are hurt. So this bill, in fact, will do and already has done the precise opposite of what it's allegedly intended to do, which is to offer some protection to tenants.

As for the condo conversions, you know, a one-year notice period is certainly twice as good as a six-month notice period, which is what we have under legislation currently. But we've been talking in my office to some real estate types who wanted us to know that with a one-year notice period on condo conversions and a clause that says that rents can't go up during that period, here's a loophole that would-be condo converters will exploit.

You buy a building, and as soon as you possibly can after the deal closes, you simply raise those rents because there's no cap on rental increases. You raise those rents as high as you can to something that you know the tenants couldn't possibly afford. Then you just wait until the building is empty. Once it's empty, you apply for titling through the city, because titling for condo units is done through the municipality, not through the province. It slows the conversions, yes, but there is still that loophole that makes it profitable in neighborhoods where prices will continue to rise. I don't think anybody, not even the minister of health, who seems to be in an

incredibly skeptical, cranky mood this afternoon, nobody seems to think that the price of housing in the province of Alberta is going to go down any time soon.

You know, the government, even the minister of health, who continues to chirp away like one of those returning finches from winter – I have one living in a tree just outside my rental unit here in Edmonton. [interjections] Blah, blah, blah. Nobody wants to throw things drastically out of balance, at least I don't think. I haven't talked to the members of the third party – maybe they do – but I don't think anybody in this House wants to throw things wildly out of balance. Several people in government talk about the need for balance. The housing minister talks about the need for balance. We talk about the need for balance. We agree that there is a need for balance. We think it's absolutely key.

Our policy is about balance. It's about balancing the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords. It's about providing stability and certainty for renters but also allowing landlords and owners to increase their rents enough to offset increased costs that they may be facing. Our policy is about balance. Our temporary rent regulation measure set at 10 per cent, which many tenants would argue is too high and many landlords would argue is too low, may indeed balance the pain somewhat by causing a little bit of pain for renters and a little bit of pain for landlords over the short term, but it is designed simply to provide protection for renters while they need it, while we're working on creating a supply of affordable housing. I think that on that point the government and even the minister of health and the minister of blah, blah, blah, whoever said that, would agree with me.

An Hon. Member: Who said that?

Mr. Taylor: Well, I said it originally, but that was back in question period. As usual, the members opposite have copied me but only partly.

You know, I think that the members opposite would agree that the ultimate solution is to create a sustainable supply of affordable housing at a bunch of different levels, but I think what we need to do here in this House is acknowledge that it is going to take some time to do that. In the interim, between now and then, it is vital that the renters who have a roof over their heads today, many of whom are in imminent jeopardy of losing that, be allowed to stay in place and not lose their homes until we can create an additional stock, an additional supply, of affordable housing. That's what temporary rent regulations will do.

Temporary rent regulations do not apply to new rental units that are constructed. I mean, you know, when we talk about building affordable rental accommodation, that involves a different set of circumstances, different set of regulations, different set of incentives across a number of different platforms than rent control. That's an issue for other legislation and other initiatives, no question about it. Bill 34 doesn't seek to address that. But while we're working on creating that supply of affordable housing, it is vital that we protect renters who have a place to live now. We don't want the affordable housing crisis to get worse. We don't want more people to become homeless.

We cannot use the argument that if we bring in temporary rent regulations, no construction of rental accommodation will occur. First of all, it won't apply to new construction of new rental units. Second of all, it won't last, under the Liberal plan, long enough to affect construction, to discourage construction. It's a temporary measure. Third, no housing construction of rental accommodation, affordable or market priced, is going on in the province of Alberta today in Edmonton or Calgary, none to speak of, nothing significant.

Back in 1978 when this province had rent control – and granted, the government also at that time offered tax breaks to rental property developers – the CMHC's annual report noted that over 17,000 rental apartment units were started in the province of Alberta that year. Seventeen thousand with rent controls in 1978. Near zero without rental controls 30 years later, you know.

So, I mean, the minister of health continues to sing like a canary, chirp away, asking: what were mortgage rates at the time? I believe he said: what were conditions at the time? Well, of course, conditions were somewhat different because conditions are always different. The problem, though, Mr. Speaker, remains the same. The imperative for this House is to address the problem in an intelligent, sustainable, worthwhile way, which, of course, the President of the Treasury Board doesn't get whatsoever, you know. This bill falls so far short of the mark that without serious amendments there's no possible way that we could support it. No possible way whatsoever.

2:50

You know, in my private member's statement at the beginning of today's sitting I noted that it was nine years ago that there was a report done on the affordable housing problem in Alberta then, after a housing symposium held in Edmonton. Nine years ago. The government at that time could have and – if it had been a different government not so ideologically wedded to its one-trick pony act of getting us, you know, out of debt and doing nothing else, paying off the mortgage while the roof continued to leak – should have done something about it then. It didn't. It could have done something. It could have seen this problem coming five years ago. It didn't. It could have seen this problem coming three years ago. It didn't. Had the government acted sooner, we would not need to be talking about rent control. We would not need to be talking about limiting the number of rent increases. We would not be needing to talk about moratoriums on condo conversion. Because with nudges at the right place at the right time the market, which has served Albertans well most of the time, would have continued to work. But they didn't do that.

Now, I could stand here – I think I've got about a minute left of debating time – and bash the government for that. But that's not the point of this exercise. The point of this exercise is to take a very serious crisis that we have on our hands and get the job of solving it right, get on with the job of swinging hammers and digging basements and building basement suites and granny flats and changing legislation so that cities and towns can use inclusionary zoning as a way to require affordable housing and using density bonuses as a way to incent builders to build affordable housing, and get on with the job of fixing it. But in the meantime, Bill 34 does not protect those renters who have a roof over their heads today, and many of them, Mr. Speaker, will lose their homes in the time it will take to create some affordable housing.

I thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, the question and answer segment. Hon. minister, do you wish to address a question to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie?

Then there being none, we'll call on the hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, and I'll ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview or Calgary-Varsity to be on standby.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that everyone in this Assembly is committed to the ultimate value of this. If you can, imagine this: someday, a single mom or a senior citizen

or a middle-aged family with a couple of kids they're raising are renting a place because they don't have, you know, the capability of owning a place but they are renting. But imagine this: when one of those landlords who have been gouging – and, by the way, there are very good landlords, but there are some that truly are gouging. Imagine this: the actual tenant could pick up and say: "Sorry. I don't like your rent. I'm going across the street, and I'm going to rent this place, which is better quality at a lower price." The reason that actually that person will be able to do that is because we have more supply to choose from in a competitive marketplace.

So ultimately that is our hope. That's why this government has put more land on the market, specifically in my own constituency, where more land means more builders, and more builders mean, in fact, more supply, and more supply means greater competition, and greater competition means a competitive market, that, I think it's fair to say, we do not have today.

I want to share with you what has in the past two and a half years – as much as we're having this debate today, I might say that this rate stability guideline is a very important step in the right direction. It's also important to acknowledge, which has been acknowledged by the opposition, that the principle of what we are trying to achieve, all of us, is helping those who don't own, in fact, an asset, a home, but they actually are in a situation of renting.

Tenant protection is critical in this important bill. Let me just give you an example. History is a wonderful teacher. Twenty-five years ago when the oil sands companies were being built, companies like Syncrude Canada, like Suncor, in fact, demonstrated quite clearly that they have a role and a responsibility in the issue of housing as well. I've made this comment quite public, that it's not just about the government. We all have a role to play. The reason I say that is this: 25 years ago as much as these companies were in the oil business, they were also in the housing business. Syncrude Canada had Northward Developments, where they built thousands of homes. In fact, Suncor, Great Canadian Oil Sands, called Athabasca Realty, built thousands of homes in helping our community. They did it because they saw it as their corporate social responsibility.

What has happened in the last two or three years? Let me give you the example. We have newer players of oil sands companies who come into my community of Fort McMurray and haven't built one home. Do you know what they have done? They've decided in their wisdom to grant living-out allowances of \$3,000 to \$4,000 a month. None of that amount of money that has been granted to employees in the oil sands, in fact, has ever built a home. What they have done, ultimately, has turned the market absolutely upside down in terms of what was taking place. So they give someone \$2,000 or \$3,000, and how do you think the market would have responded? I want to say when I hear of the \$150 today, which I still empathize with, that in my community two and half years ago rents had gone up by over \$500, \$600, \$700, \$800 based on this extra money that was floating around in the marketplace.

In an unprecedented move as the only cabinet minister in the history of Alberta to present at the Energy and Utilities Board at the time, I talked about corporate social responsibility. I said to them that they have a responsibility in a mature housing market. Just like the private sector has a responsibility, so does industry, and so does government. In fact, back 25 years ago the government had what was referred to as AMHC, Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and at that time they were there because we had a young community of 8,000 that could never have ever kept up with what was happening in the private sector. That's why industry was involved. So, really, it isn't about ideology. It was then about doing what was right to help grow the oil sands in a way that could provide housing in a responsible manner.

Twenty-five years ago, I might also add, there were 1,500 people living in tent farms at the Lions Park in Fort McMurray. Fortunately, we will never be at that crisis that we had seen 25 years ago in terms of where we are today because we are collectively working together.

I'm also encouraged by this: the chancellor of the University of Alberta had made a comment that industry has a responsibility, and they demonstrated at the time where they backstopped, and they mitigated some of the risk. So if you have now, 25 years later, a mature market that is building homes – an unprecedented number in Fort McMurray – and rental accommodations, and you add to that some backstopping of the risk by the oil industry, that can play a role in helping as well because they have a responsibility, combined with this rent stability guideline.

I believe that what this government is doing is the appropriate, responsible action in ultimately having everyone play a role in getting more rental units on the market so that single mom or that senior citizen or that middle-aged family can say to those who want to gouge: "Sorry. I'm leaving your rental accommodation because I'm going across the street to a competitor who's offering it for \$300 less than what you're doing."

Now, ultimately the market will work with this type of ingredient of everyone coming together. That's what this stability guideline is intending to do to help towards that end and achieve that vision that I have in terms of people enjoying this quality of life, and specifically in my community where, in fact, as much as we're talking about it today, it's been taking place for the last two and a half years. Wherever it's happening, it's unacceptable. This guideline that wasn't there two and a half years ago, I'm pleased to say, is there today because we have a plan, and ultimately that plan will work, and it will assist people who are renting in the private market.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Is this under the question segment, Calgary-Varsity?

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To the member from Wood Buffalo, who is in an area that is probably suffering the most extreme of circumstances. The member pointed out that oil companies and their northern allowances are allowing at least oil workers to be able to afford the Fort McMurray high rents. Does the member think that this is a good move, or does it cause problems for his community?

Mr. Boutilier: Let me very specific. As I made the comment at the Energy and Utilities Board, it is not acceptable, and this is the private discussion I've had with CEOs. I have indicated that Northward Developments, which was a subsidiary of Syncrude, and Athabasca Realty, which was a subsidiary of Great Canadian Oil Sands: that was a proper, responsible approach they took many, many years ago because they were ultimately building, and the ultimate solution to this is about greater supply. We all have a responsibility, but just putting more money in the market does not in any way help, in fact, in putting more supply in the market. It just turns the market upside down.

The Speaker: Additional question, hon. member?

3:00

Mr. Chase: Yes, if I may. Thank you. Thank you for that clarification. I would suggest that what the government is doing by subsidizing landlords who are gouging vulnerable individuals is the equivalent of what these oil companies do by increasing northern allowances. The money goes to the unscrupulous landlord as opposed to

helping out the individual, and it's the taxpayer in this case that's funding that extra allowance. Is that a reasonable comparison, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Boutilier: I guess what's really important – because as you know, we want to have nurses in our community of a hundred thousand people, and we require what we refer to as essential workers. So the government has taken the appropriate action in the short term, and this is only for a year or two, where, in fact, nurses are receiving \$1,040. I want to thank the minister of health, who, in fact, came up and made that announcement, where he indicated that they will of course be helped. Really, that was intended to help retain professionals in health care services and others, because they were leaving to go to bigger cities where rents were, believe it or not, less than what they were in my community. So I thought that the minister of health took the appropriate action. I want to say that the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, the action the government took, in fact, of enticing them to retain and stay in our community was helpful.

Now, we're presently with the President of the Treasury Board, working closely with the Radke report, where \$400 million are going into our community. A part of that is being recognized. We have over 900 teachers. We are trying to work with them so they stay in our community because the 20-some schools we have require teachers, who are renting to be able to stay because of the youthful population of our teachers. They're very young, and the majority of them are renting, and we're trying to help them as well.

This is in the short term. It's my hope in the long term that our entire province will continue to be competitive so one community doesn't steal another professional from another community, which, in fact, has taken place in my community.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, and I appreciate the clarifications from the hon. minister. The minister talked about the need for stability and that these increases, which are much appreciated and are much necessary to achieve the stability in the community – he's hoping that they're of a short-term nature. Obviously, we hope, regardless of our political affiliation, that we can bring long-term stability. The minister also used the word "ultimately," as in: ultimately the market will solve the problem. I know that this is asking you to foresee the future, but do you see a time coming in the next two to three years where stability will take place? Could you provide a vision for that ultimately?

Mr. Boutilier: I think it's a very good question, and I think, obviously, you're talking about a community that perhaps is the epicentre of what's taking place, even though it's taking place, as I mention in my submission to the EUB, in many other areas, be it northwest or up in the Peace Country and other areas as well. If I could give you the best example of that: the oil sands were projected to have \$20 billion of investment over 25 years. I might add that our former Premier, when the comment was made about a plan, his comment, clearly, was this: no plan could ever keep up with the unprecedented growth that was happening.

The Speaker: I'm afraid that we've now exhausted that section of our agenda.

So I'll now call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, to be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, to be followed by the hon. Minister of Public Security and the Solicitor General and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. First off, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to compliment you on your tolerance today for allowing questions that hovered around Bill 34. As a Liberal caucus we attempted to very carefully word our questions such that they would be allowed to be asked and discussed and answered in the House, and I appreciate your tolerance today for allowing those discussions to take place.

Calgary-Varsity is quite a diverse community. I have some rather expensive real estate in the Calgary Varsity Estates part. I also have throughout my areas a number of very rundown duplexes and fourplexes, and I'm sure that a considerable number of the basement suites in my area are of the illegal nature.

Nevertheless, people are desperate, and as a result they'll put up with some questionable environments just so that they can survive. I had one constituent who raised such a ruckus about the terrible state of his landlord's failure to renovate or provide any support for the leaking into the basement. It was just a very, very sad circumstance, but because the individual had a very weak physical system, he stayed within this area so that he could access the health provided from the Calgary Foothills hospital. However, when things became so bad and his landlord doubled his rent without providing any kind of renovation or any reason for doing so, the individual applied to the government, and the government came through for this particular individual. Rather than have him continue to be a burr under their saddle or a thorn in their side, it was worth \$21,000 for the Alberta government to move this individual and his belongings, which were not very many, to the province of Ontario, where he was able to set up and begin his life again.

In the Calgary-Varsity constituency there are a terrific number of tall apartment buildings and very tall condominiums. An apartment building that is just around the corner from my constituency office – I brought up the story of the residents of the 298 units, who were facing a variety of rent increases, all of which approximated 50 per cent plus. These people had a series of difficulties in the sense that some of the stories I brought up were individuals on AISH. I brought up stories of fixed incomes.

Today I talked about an individual, a wonderful man. He's a giant of a fellow. His name is Fred Bishop, and Fred Bishop's rent will increase by 50 per cent on June 1. That rent that he'll be paying – he'll be asked to pay over a thousand dollars, and of course you realize that AISH is approximately \$1,050 – is for a 550 square foot apartment. Fred doesn't have a whole lot of options. Fred has a very severe heart condition, high blood pressure. Despite his difficulties he remains a very cheerful individual, and Fred, when he can, when his health permits, will come into the constituency and provide a voice for those 298 individuals in that complex.

It was Fred who first came to my office and reported the unfortunate suicide of an individual living in that complex. The individual had a series of instability incidents prior to this time, but it was the increase in rent that was indicated in the note that was left that, unfortunately, caused this individual to take a very drastic action. The following week Fred came back to the office and recounted the story of another individual who in that same building had committed suicide.

These are desperate times, and we need to have long-term and short-term solutions. Bill 34 does go a way in terms of addressing long-term situations. It provides \$285 million worth of affordable housing stimulation. I think, however, that we're all aware of how long it takes to get a home up, particularly with our building and builder shortages. The concerns that are brought up by my hon. colleagues from the NDP and my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie I want to echo, and that is that there is no provision in Bill 34 for the here and now.

3:10

My colleagues from Calgary-Currie and from Calgary-Mountain View and I last spring all participated in the homeless count in Calgary. We found that in the period of two years homelessness had risen by 40 per cent. My belief is that if we went back to the 2004 statistics and we carried out that same homeless count this spring, I would guess that the increase in homeless population is probably approaching 60 per cent. Now, to put that into terms, I believe it was approximately 3,600 individuals that were counted on that particular night. That doesn't include the number of young people who are doing what is called couch surfing, where they go to one friend's house and the parents put them up for a couple of nights, and then they go on to another person's if they have the good fortune to have that family connection.

Besides the vulnerable seniors, the people on fixed incomes, AISH, the individuals who are requiring support because of cognitive disabilities, live in homes that are not subsidized to the extent they should be. I talked to one individual. Because she has two dependent adults living in her home, the government in its wisdom suggested: "Well, it's one roof, two people. We'll just halve the amount of your allowance because it's a single roof."

So the types of individuals who are experiencing stress are growing in Calgary-Varsity. I'm sure that my area isn't a whole lot different than everybody else's, at least who are in a municipal circumstance, and it's the municipalities where people are initially drawn to to, hopefully, make their fortune. Unfortunately, that's not happening.

Another group in my constituency that is having a really rough time of it – and the same could be said for Calgary-Mountain View and Calgary-Currie because we're all postsecondary bedroom communities – is the number of students who are trying to pay their tuition, go to university or go to SAIT or the Alberta College of Art and Design or, in the downtown area, Bow Valley.

They're doing their best. They want to get out there. They want to participate in the Alberta economy. They want to contribute. But what's happening is that their whole educational experience is being stretched out because they cannot take on a full course load. They cannot afford the cost of the full tuition. They cannot afford the time that it takes to go through a complete course load because they have to work at least one to two and, in some cases, three – I've talked to a number of students – a series of jobs. So they're trying to juggle their studies. They're trying to juggle paying the rent.

The increase in demand at the University of Calgary's food bank is tremendous. The unfortunate state of affairs is that it's not just the students. There are members of the university staff. And I found this very hard to believe, but I was assured that this was the case, that there are even professors who, on occasion, have to resort to going to the food bank.

Our economy is so out of whack and our balance is so much missing that the need for an interim measure is absolutely essential. This is where Bill 34 fails us. Bill 34 does not consider the need for a temporary – and I emphasize "temporary" because that's what our deputy shadow minister for municipal affairs suggested. [interjection] Well, our deputy leader, our shadow minister for municipal affairs, just in case there was confusion as to how I was labelling the MLA for Calgary-Currie. What he pointed out and our Liberal proposal is for one year, enshrined in legislation with a sunset clause, that would see a capping of rent at the 10 per cent mark. Interestingly enough, the housing task force came up with a very similar recommendation. I think it was inflation plus 2 per cent.

All these suggestions have been out there about some sort of a reasonable cap. We don't expect landlords to be philanthropic. You know, we're realistic. Some landlords do everything they can at

their own personal expense to shield renters from experiencing large increases. Yesterday there was an individual, a landlord, who came to speak to the minister, and that landlord had done everything he could to shield the individual from rent increases. In some cases it was at the expense of the other tenants, but they agreed that keeping this person with a disability within their complex was important. So there was kind of a family attitude: the whole family suffers so that the individual who is most vulnerable can be supported.

I do not understand why not, other than for purely ideological reasons, the notion of a temporary rent control, one that has a sunset clause of a year, which could then be discussed further if our economic imbalance continues. It could be reinstituted, or we could change the percentage. What it would do is keep people in their homes. As soon as we take a person out of their home and put them on the street or institutionalize them, the cost of that individual rises threefold. So there's an economic argument as well as sort of an ethical argument for keeping people looked after. There's an ethical argument for making sure that they have clothes on their back and that they have food in their stomach. It's economic; it's ethical. I, again, fail to understand why this government does not see that need.

Now, on the other side of things: the instability for landlords. They don't know what the rules of the game are either because the education/information portion of Bill 34 has not been clearly communicated. We've heard through the papers, and I'm sure individuals have had the threats that there will be class-action suits for the intervention . . .

The Speaker: I must now advise that we're into Standing Order 29(2)(a), if there are questions for the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

There being none, then I will call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. If there's a government member who would like to participate, kindly notify me.

3:20

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on this piece of legislation, that deals with a very, very important and serious problem in the province, a problem that has been growing for several years. The investors in rental accommodations have known about it. The government should have known about it. We on this side of the House, certainly, have been hearing about it for a long time. All the arguments in the House that have been going on during question period over the last couple of weeks and the excellent work that was done by the all-party committee on housing, the housing task force, all revealed that the problem is really of crisis proportions, and something immediate needs to be done as well as planning for the longer future in trying to address the problem of the shortage of affordable housing.

Now, this bill, Mr. Speaker, is about the transition period, but over the next two years what do we do while we wait for the supply of affordable housing units to increase, to strike a new equilibrium between supply and demand in the housing market? One thing that's been known and should in fact be underlined is the fact that the market in the case of housing supply in this province has failed. We are dealing with a failed market situation. To therefore entirely again argue in favour of reliance on market forces to correct the situation is clearly the wrong way to go. I think the task force report recognized the weakness of this market argument, that the market automatically, given time, will fix the problem. In fact, the task force report recommendations call for short-term intervention, intervention in terms of controlling rents, putting some cap on those rents.

This bill seems to very, very minimally pay attention to the very first step that the task force on housing recommends. For example, the introduction of a two-year rent stability guideline is one of the recommendations that it made. The first bullet under that heading says: "would stipulate rental rate increases once annually." The second bullet: "be in place for a two-year period only." That's important, Mr. Speaker, because much of this criticism of us, of our position that some cap should be put on, is somehow based on the assumption that this will be there forever. We are following the task force's recommendation, a recommendation made by the all-party committee, that two years is what we have in mind here. The rent control or the cap on the rent increases is not forever. The third bullet says, "keep rental rate increases within a guideline of [consumer price index] plus 2%," which translates, according to the report here, to about 7 and a half percentage points, so a 7 and a half per cent increase.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, if this was done and the bill was about that, that would really provide both stability and predictability in the market over a short period of time, stability to renters. With this open-ended, no cap increase once a year proposal that's part of this bill, renters will get whatever increase they get this year. It could be 20 per cent, 50 per cent, 100 per cent. They don't know what the rent increase will be next year. It could be another whopping increase, thus creating a great deal of uncertainty in their own household budgets.

We know that in Canada if a family spends more than a maximum of 30 per cent on housing, then it hurts the family's ability to provide other necessities that families need. With this bill there's absolutely no way for a family to be even mildly certain that 12 months from now their family budget won't be thrown into another crisis because this bill fails to put any cap on the rent increase that they should expect. It's impossible for them to plan their family budgets from year to year. So that's one of the serious problems with this.

With the failure of the government to recognize that, in fact, the problem that we face today is the result of market failure and therefore to argue that they want to protect the market forces to correct the situation seems to be a very false and faulty argument, Mr. Speaker.

The leader of our caucus made the point of the undemocratic nature of the debate, the controlled nature of how this report has been dealt with. First of all, the task force was asked to go to the people of Alberta, hold public hearings, but then the government receives the report and doesn't release it so that the public in general can participate in understanding what the recommendations are or whether or not there is general support for it or how that set of recommendations can be supported.

Mr. Speaker, there are close to anywhere between 35 and 45 per cent of Albertans who rent accommodations in the various communities across this province. Only a small number of them will be able to take advantage of the so-called protection against rent increases because it's income-contingent. The vast majority of the renters are, in fact, young, middle-class, working families trying to earn enough income, waiting for a few years, making some savings so that they can buy their first family house. Now, these are the people who will not be protected by any of the measures that the government has taken. They will not be protected from exorbitant rent increases by way of this bill. This bill will fail to either protect any certainty or predictability for the large majority of the renters in this province, and it will not bring any modicum of stability to the market forces.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the second part of this bill is about condo-

minium conversions and giving one year's notice. My fear is that this bill will in fact expedite the rate at which rental properties are converted into condominiums in order to avoid the one-year limitation. What that will do is put more people at risk of losing their homes while those conversions are taking place.

Mr. Speaker, this is a flawed bill. I think it can be fixed to some extent. We'll make every effort on behalf of our caucus, the NDP caucus, to bring forward amendments to address some of the difficulties and problems that we see in this bill, but as it stands, it will not solve the problem. It will only exacerbate the difficulties that currently confront a very large number of Albertans who are renters and help very few, if any, only because the government has now put in place a way of subsidizing the so-called renters. I submit that that actually should be called subsidization of landlords. Many of them seem to be engaged in studying the market very carefully, know that there's a serious market disequilibrium, and are ready to take advantage of that.

I don't blame them because they're in the business of maximizing the returns on their investment, but the government has a responsibility to protect the public interest. It has a responsibility to protect the interests of middle-class families first, before it protects the interests of a few investors who may be disgruntled if any cap is introduced on a temporary basis in order to stabilize the market situation in this province with respect to housing and bring equilibrium back to that market.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency, certainly, Edmonton-Strathcona, thousands of students return every year for an eight-month period to go to their postsecondary institution of choice. There are many NAIT students who live in my constituency as renters. There are a very large number of University of Alberta students who live there as renters. They are the ones who are going to be terribly badly hit come August when they return to school here. These are students who, in fact, come from outside of urban centres. These are rural students who will be coming here. When they find that the rental accommodation for them has really become extremely expensive, that the rent increases are in the range of 50 to 100 per cent if they're lucky to get an accommodation close to the university, in that area, they'll find that the government policies have failed to protect the very large number of young, vulnerable students who come from the rural areas and small towns into big cities like Calgary and Edmonton as they pursue their education. Their ability to pay for these increased costs of their education will have to be borne by them through borrowing more money from student financing and other sources. This will only increase their debt levels and create more serious problems for them as they move through the education system.

3:30

This bill will hurt a very, very large number of people, including very young, industrious, earnest postsecondary students, who are, in fact, the future of this province. So I don't know whom this bill is really designed to help: very few people, in my view, if any.

Mr. Speaker, another advantage of the rent cap — and we can always argue about the scale of it, whether it should be 7 and a half per cent or 10 per cent or whatever, although I think that in its wisdom the task force made the right recommendation, that the increase be in fact capped at around 7 and half per cent for the next two years as a temporary capping. If we did that, I think this will dampen speculation among people who buy and sell rental property and, in fact, bring more tranquility and more stability to the housing market, rather than the other thing. The impact of this is going to be perverse, as a matter of fact. It's going to increase speculation. It's going to increase pressure on the prices and the cost of purchasing

and then renting that property. That will further jack up the rental rates.

Mr. Speaker, a point has been made, and I think the NDP caucus had drawn the attention of this House to the fact, that a company like Boardwalk – and I don't make this an accusatory reference; I'm not accusing them of speculating. This is something normal. I think it's normal corporate behaviour that a corporation would take advantage of the market situation to the best of their ability. Now, Boardwalk says, in fact, that with the skyrocketing increase in the prices of new houses, there'll be more demand added to the existing very high demand for rental properties. More and more young families won't be able to purchase their first house because the prices of new houses have skyrocketed. So they predict that there'll be a pool of people in Alberta, without making any projections for the increases coming in from outside, who'll be looking for rental accommodation, and it will increase and increase quite rapidly. They see it as a good opportunity, therefore, with respect to the prospect of their investors earning an even enhanced and larger return on their investment.

The Premier, on the other hand, keeps drawing attention to the 52,000 housing units that are under construction. Well, who's going to buy them? Boardwalk is saying that many young Alberta families, middle-class families, won't be able to buy these houses. They will therefore add to the demand and create an even more serious disequilibrium in the relation between the supply and demand situation. Therefore, the market left to itself, as this bill does, in my view, will not address the problem of hot prices in affordable housing in this province in the short run, and it remains to be seen whether it will do anything to encourage investment in this area in the long run, Mr. Speaker.

So with that, I want to just reiterate the position that my caucus and I have taken on this bill. We are concerned that the bill fails in addressing the problems that need to be addressed in the short run. It fails because it refuses to introduce caps on the rental increases on an ongoing basis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Snelgrove: I have a question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board under section 29(2)(a).

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. Just a question on how many more units the hon. member thinks we might need to bring into balance the supply and demand. From April 1 to May 5 the call centre that's strictly dedicated to tenancy issues received, according to your numbers of 35 or 40 per cent renting – and I'm just going to use a million renters, which would be the bottom end of your estimate. Less than one-tenth of 1 per cent of renters called that number to talk about rent increases, and that number is 906 calls.

Now, I'm not saying that these people aren't in dire straits. We've seen those examples. But what increase in housing numbers does the hon. member think we need to achieve an equilibrium that would put the supply and demand back on an equal footing?

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for the question. The information about the government plans to address the crisis that the all-party task force has drawn attention to is just beginning to get out. Just wait for a few more weeks and the number

of calls that you will receive, which you want to use as an indicator of the scale of the crisis, I think will become clear to you. Don't rely on your number. We called some of these numbers ourselves over the last few days, and they don't provide any information to people who call. So that discourages more people. News that gets out that these numbers really don't provide any information. Perhaps that discourages a lot more people. They say: well, what's the point of calling if there's no information to be had at those numbers?

So, Mr. Speaker, I say to the minister that it is his responsibility to listen to the work done by the task force and the task force's own words. This is an all-party committee. There are Conservatives on it. There are NDP on it. There are Liberals on it. It has listened to hundreds and hundreds of Albertans, and based on that, they are the ones who say that there is a serious housing crisis in this province. The minister seemed to suggest from the way he asked me the question that he thinks there's no real housing crisis. There are only about a thousand people that he needs to deal with. That would be very disappointing if that's the understanding of the minister.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others under 29(2)(a)?

Then I'll call on the hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, due to our booming economy, where we have 100,000 new residents coming to our province every year, yes, we do have a rental unit shortage. This shortage creates a unique challenge, and I would encourage all members to support Bill 34 because it addresses this challenge in a very positive manner. Limiting rent increases to one per year will assist many families with budgeting by providing certainty over a 12-month period and will also reduce the number of increases they will be facing.

The one-year notice period for converting apartments to condos also provides renters with time to seek other accommodation if that option does become a necessity. The members opposite have also expressed concern about rental facilities being converted into condos, Mr. Speaker. Landlords exercise this option for financial reasons, and rent controls would only speed up this process of these conversions. Government intervention in the marketplace will have a negative impact on rental housing investment and make the problem of availability worse than it is today.

Mr. Speaker, this government has programs in place to help renters who are in need, and they will be helped. Bill 34 will also help, and I encourage all hon. members to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to rise under 29(2)(a)?

If not, I recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to debate on what is obviously a timely and important bill and one that's going to get a lot of attention in the next few days, on an issue that's already getting a lot of attention.

I need to start just by expressing how widespread my experience of this concern is in travelling around the province over the last couple of years. The reason I want to do this is because I'm just surprised that this government seems to have been caught off guard by what's going on here. I'm going to give you a handful of examples. Last Calgary Stampede I was at a major barbecue and was approached by a young lawyer at the time who said, "You know, Kevin, everybody in my building was just given a huge rent increase." And he said: "I can afford it because I'm a lawyer in a big firm, but there are all kinds of people in my building who cannot. You folks in the Legislature have to do something about these rental hikes."

3:40

Obviously, Fort McMurray comes to mind almost immediately for everybody talking about affordable housing issues. I'm sure there are many of us here who have been up there. You meet with the school board. You meet with the police. You meet with the college. You meet with all kinds of people there who aren't directly in the oil industry, and virtually the first thing that comes to mind are concerns around affordable housing, to the point where, if memory serves me right, the RCMP and the school board are sharing and constructing a facility to house new recruits coming to Fort McMurray, and on and on it goes. Of course, the situation there hopefully will improve over the next few years, but it took a real step backwards a few weeks ago with the big fire.

Hinton and Edson both are struggling terribly with housing problems, to the point where services in those cities are having difficulty recruiting staff. I heard a detailed account in Hinton many, many, many months ago about efforts to recruit a physiotherapist there from out of province, who loved the idea of living in Hinton close to the mountains, the outdoors, all of that sort of thing, but the cheapest rental accommodation, I think, that could be found in the whole town was something like \$1,800 a month. Well, the person chose not to come because of that. Likewise, in Edson there are those kinds of challenges as well.

Last summer, I was touring around the north, Athabasca. Big challenges in Athabasca. They're in the shadow of Fort McMurray now in the oil sands development, and people are living in Athabasca and putting their families there and working in the oil sands. You know, I remember being interviewed by the radio reporter in Athabasca. He was living in a hotel at the expense of his employer because there was no place for him to rent.

Slave Lake. I pulled into Slave Lake, just went mainstreering, talked to people in the cafeteria at breakfast time at the hotel, and they spoke about starter houses in Slave Lake being \$300,000 and \$400,000.

Lac La Biche. Same kind of thing, huge spike in housing costs causing real challenges for renters.

Red Deer. Red Deer has been booming. Red Deer, actually, to their great credit, like Medicine Hat, has taken real leadership on affordable housing issues and on homelessness, and I think Red Deer has a target of zero homelessness within several years.

Medicine Hat has an outstanding program and, I think, may be a model for other parts of the province on how to provide affordable housing. But, again, they're finding it's a real challenge.

Drumheller, of all places. You know, you'd never think of affordable housing and rental accommodation as a challenge in Drumheller, but it is.

Of course, as severe as anywhere is Grande Prairie, where we had a town hall meeting perhaps two months ago now. The only topic people wanted to talk about was housing, and we almost literally had people in tears as they told stories about problems trying to find any kind of rental accommodation, of people living weeks and even months at a time in the cab of a pickup truck because there was nowhere else for them to live.

Of course, we have the situation in Edmonton which is I think being particularly forcefully played out in the Assembly this week, where we have dozens of people a day coming to meet with the minister to address these issues.

This is a widespread problem – north, south, east, west, big city, mid city, small city – and it has been building for a long time. So I have to confess real surprise and disappointment that we haven't seen action sooner and much broader and more effective action than we've seen from this government so far.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I'm holding in my hands right now a

comprehensive policy developed by the Official Opposition on exactly this issue that's been out for months. Where has this government been on this issue? Aren't they getting the phone calls? Aren't they hearing the concerns of the residents of Alberta on this issue? We sure are, and we've done something about it. I could take the time to just read our whole policy into the record, but I won't, and I'm sure that's to the relief of the minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Grandstand: that's what you've done. You haven't helped.

Dr. Taft: The minister is suggesting that we're grandstanding and that we haven't helped. Well, perhaps I should read our whole policy into *Hansard*.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, takes a small step in the right direction. But the problem I find with the government's approach is that it's trying to take half a step when it should be taking a full step. I think this can be attributed to this government's failure to understand some basic dynamics of marketplaces. You need in these circumstances to wade in boldly and comprehensively and address the imbalance on both sides of the marketplace.

When you do half a job, which this bill does, you actually create instability for landlords. You create confusion for landlords, and they do the predictable thing in many cases, certainly not in all – there are all kinds of great landlords in this province, but many of them are doing the predictable thing and saying: "Well, gee, we don't know what the government is going to do. It looks like they're limiting us to one increase a year. Who knows what'll follow on that, so we're going to go for the max." That's what we're seeing playing out, and the victims in that are the renters.

Governments intervene all the time in marketplaces, Mr. Speaker. This government intervenes all the time in marketplaces. We brought out some examples in the last few days on regulated requirements on utility companies, regulated approval on auto insurance, on subsidies for natural gas prices. Many, many times this government intervenes in the marketplace, and governments across the country intervene to manage markets, to manage the economy itself. I mean, it's considered a basic responsibility of a government at a national level, for example, to manage an economy through raising or lowering interest rates, through controlling the monetary supply, through controlling its spending, stimulating or pulling back on the economy by controlling spending. This is what a government does. For this particular Alberta Conservative government to be saying that governments shouldn't do that, that governments shouldn't intervene makes no sense.

An Hon. Member: Hypocritical.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. It's a double standard, as we've been saying over and over.

Mr. Speaker, my view on market forces is that in the right circumstances market forces are exactly the way to go. They're exactly the way to go. Markets can be creative. They can be efficient. They are dynamic. They're incredibly productive. We achieve things through market forces that no other society in history has achieved. So if circumstances are right, let people be free. Let producers produce and consumers consume and negotiate and create and invent and so on.

But when market forces aren't right, you don't just back away. You step in. That's a government's basic responsibility. There are all kinds of examples where market forces don't work, well-known standard procedures, standard theory in economics: market failure. Markets can go wrong for lots of reasons. What we have here in the

case of the housing market is a market that's out of balance because the demand has far exceeded the supply, so government needs to intervene. I think we would all agree – even the minister here and the Treasury Board president would agree, I hope – that the long-term solution to this problem is more supply. We have to bring on more supply of housing. We have to stimulate that, and we are in our housing policy proposing a range of ways of doing that: changes to zoning so that we can bring on secondary suites, incentives to builders, all kinds of other options that we could see.

3:50

I think that we could learn from the past as well. There was a time when Canada had some of the best housing programs on the planet, and they worked well. There's still lots of housing built in Alberta that dates back to the 50s and 60s, when these programs were in place. They brought on supply, thousands and thousands of units, through, for example, low mortgages for developers in return for constructing affordable housing. But that takes years. All of those solutions take years, and people are getting huge rent increases today. So we can't just sit on the sidelines, or at least the Alberta Liberals can't in any good conscience, and just let seniors on fixed incomes or students or single parents trying to get going be casualties of bad government policy in a failed marketplace.

So that's why, Mr. Speaker, we have brought forward a proposal for a temporary rent cap. Stabilize rents, and look after the people that are going to be victims of an imbalanced market until the market can be corrected. It's reasonable economics, it's by no means unprecedented, and despite the unrelenting claims of the Premier and other members of his cabinet there are examples where rent controls have worked perfectly well to protect people. Bringing in rent caps on existing rental units is not a huge discouragement to new rental units being constructed, for example.

So, Mr. Speaker, this bill fails. It fails for not going far enough. It fails for not doing what needs to be done, which is to protect renters from unlimited rent increases. It fails for a lack of vision. It fails for a lack, in our view, of an understanding of the humanity of the housing crisis, and it fails, in our view, for a lack of understanding of basic economic forces.

Now, I know that I'll get debated on that, disputed on that, but all you need to do is go out and listen to the people, go out and take the phone calls to your constituency office, not just from the landlords but from the renters. Put yourself in their shoes. Remember what it's like to live without an accommodation allowance. Imagine what it would be like to live on your CPP and face a \$300 a month rent increase and have nowhere else to go because there is nowhere else available.

This comes down to a compassionate view, to an understanding that government isn't just about the law of the jungle. We don't want a province in which it's strictly the survival of the fittest and the rest fall to the side. We need to bring everybody along. Everybody, Mr. Speaker, needs a home, and the Alberta Liberals understand that. We accept that as a basic principle. We'll do whatever we can to bring the government along to understand that same view.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Snelgrove: Would the rent controls cover both existing and new units if you were to impose them? Would they cover existing relationships between the landlord and tenants, or would they also cover all new contracts?

Dr. Taft: Good question. A great question, and a serious one. I appreciate that. We've worked this through. Our rent caps would apply to existing units, and it would be limited, as we make very clear in our policy, to 365 days. At the end of that, as the Member for Calgary-Varsity said, we could review it.

We agree with the government, I'm sure, that the solution here is to get more supply on board. The problem is that in the couple of years that that's going to take, there are just too many people falling to the wayside. So for those people who are in their homes now, renting, we propose a 10 per cent cap on rent increases per year.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Just to follow up, if that's the case, what would stop the landlord from simply evicting their tenants and then saying: "It's a new deal. My rent goes up"?

Dr. Taft: Well, we thought through these angles. These are all good questions, absolutely. Part of our policy, actually, is very similar to what's in this bill, but our concern is that taking a half-step, like this bill does, isn't sufficient. So, for example, in our policy we would prohibit apartment buildings being converted to condominiums unless the owner agreed to build an equivalent number of rental facilities, rental units. For each action, there is a reaction. That's the dynamic of the marketplace, and we need to think through each of those. Our belief is that this situation can be managed with a comprehensive policy that steers us through to a point where there is a surge of supply, and that'll address the problem. So there we have it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others under 29(2)(a)?

If not, on the bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to this bill today in this House of Assembly. You know, there are some interesting flows in the economy that we've seen in the last little while. We've seen shortages of this type in Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie and from time to time in other centres when they have boomed. The CMHC statistics have shown that, really, Edmonton, for example, only showed up in statistics as coming – for example, in 2005 it was at 4.5 per cent in terms of vacancy rates for private structures with three or more apartments, but it fell by October 2006 to about 1.3 per cent. Calgary was at a bad vacancy rate before that, close to 1.7 per cent, but then fell to 0.3 per cent, so a very, very difficult vacancy rate. Much of these vacancy rates have been exacerbated and made worse in the last year and in the last six months.

It's clear from many economists that in the perfect sense – and other speakers have talked to this – rent control as a long-term policy does not work. That is why, for example, the NDP government in Saskatchewan in 1992, I think it was, killed rent control. That's why the Alberta government killed the rent control that it had at one point in time. The nature of rent control in a market economy is that it does inhibit new construction. It does contribute to the deterioration of existing housing. It does reduce property tax revenues. It does increase administration costs substantially. It does reduce consumer mobility. It does increase consumer entry costs.

It has social implications that are problematic. The social costs of rent control fall mostly on the poor. They have a drop in the quality of existing rental housing. There's a marked decline in the numbers of housing units available to poor families. It creates substantial disadvantages to poor families in finding new housing because there begins to be a preferential treatment by landlords of those who can

find housing and sometimes in other ways. It goes to families. It goes to whatever.

We've seen these things in New York City for a while. I had some experience with trying to get my sister a place there some years back. They've had rent controls there for many years. In New York City, for example, a study of rent control found that rent-controlled households with incomes greater than \$75,000 received nearly twice the average subsidy of rent-controlled houses with incomes below \$10,000. So there are some really odd anomalies that come into place when we're looking at trying to help disadvantaged families. It promotes, like I said, housing discrimination. It brings about problems in the construction of units. There are alternatives. I think the government has looked at measures other than this bill as alternatives to creating much additional supply.

4:00

I'll table that document on the high cost of rent control in the Legislature tomorrow. I'll also table the document on how rent control killed affordable housing in Winnipeg. I'll also table the rental market report from CMHC. By the way, CMHC will be coming out with a report in June looking at the local market, as I understand.

Nonetheless, the importance of looking at the marketplace and how our market here is not a perfect market right now really brings about a need to — I put out a press release yesterday saying that there needs to be some rent stabilization in the short term if we're to look at the fact that our market . . . [interjections] I've been getting lots of heckling here from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. He was heckling, Mr. Speaker, even introductions the other day and even tablings. You know, it's amazing that this would happen.

But I think that what we have to do in terms of looking at the whole rental market is look at areas. There is certainly not the reality of the need for stabilization of the rental market in — for example, one of my researchers from Daysland says that there is no need to stabilize the market in Daysland, and there's no need to stabilize the market in Fort Assiniboine. But we do see the potential for some increasing real difficulties in the Edmonton market and certainly in the metro Edmonton market as we see the upgraders coming in and the influx of new people increasing in the next year, two years, and three years. We'll have the need for tens of thousands of new people even over and above what we have right now, and we're going to see a greater destabilization of that rental market.

Maybe it's not rentals that we have to look at. You know, what happens is that you have to look at vacancy rates in a larger area. The vacancy rate should be the key to looking at when a market is not working correctly. Something like 2 per cent, 1 and a half per cent and below, that sort of a market range is where we should be looking to monitor rent and to try and increase the supply and have effective ways of really increasing the supply in the short term.

What McMurray had to do when they had this real shortage of supply was look at loosening the whole situation with secondary suites. Well, I was up in McMurray a couple of weeks ago, and the McMurray council had to pass a bylaw saying that there could be only two people staying as boarders in houses because there was no parking in the streets in some of the lower income areas. You're having five and six and seven people staying in trailers. You're having lower end condominiums with five and six and seven people, and there's no place to park on the streets. You get other problems when you try to look at those as the only solutions.

The need to look at the supply side is the key. Having worked in construction a lot in the past, you know, the best short-term solution — sometimes it's not nice, and nobody wants it in their town but maybe nearby — is that you've got to have some camps for the

people that are coming in from outside. You've got to have some ways to deal with housing for people that aren't going to have housing. These are the ones that are coming in and, as the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo said, are able to pay because their employer is giving them living allowances of \$3,000 and \$4,000 a month. They will take away any apartment and outbid anybody, and they'll do that just to have it for the week. They won't even have it for the weekends. They might only be there for two weeks of the month. And that's what has happened in Fort McMurray.

We have to look at targeting existing programs not with a broad brush yet but just those areas that really need it. The government was right in responding to the Radke report and doing that for Fort McMurray. There may be a need to really look seriously at doing something for the Edmonton and area market in the near future, to look at what will be happening with the heartland upgraders and other things that are being built in our area. Certainly, Grande Prairie is having similar pressures.

The people that really do have the worst problems with this are those on fixed incomes, those on AISH, those that cannot move easily. Those are the ones that I've seen, that have come to me. We've done a survey of a high-end apartment building in my riding, and we've done a survey of some low-end ones, and the ones in the high end didn't really respond much. They didn't really care that much. They didn't really make all that many complaints. Many of them said that they're going to be moving and buying a house, even though it costs a lot of money, because they're doing well in a boom-time economy.

But the ones that are on AISH, the ones that are on low incomes, the seniors that don't have much of a pension: those types of folks are the ones that are having the problem. Those are the ones that are coming here today. They're a smaller part but a very significant part of our population and ones that we cannot forget. Something in this whole package needs to address more some of the things that the minister of employment and immigration spoke of doing. I don't know if they really do the whole thing for most of those people. Many of them have come to my constituency. It is a problem in the cities.

We should look at other ways to ensure that the pressures on the market are kept to be less on our students, as was talked about by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. But, you know, it's a funny thing. I believe it was last year that the Grant MacEwan students' residence wasn't even fully taken up by Grant MacEwan students, and they had to open it up to students from NAIT and other areas. They were renting other accommodations because they wanted to. Well, there will be pressure, I think, as these prices rise and as we see the market go forward, to see that they have some additional accommodation open to them. We might be opening other sorts of things to them in order to take care of that pressure on the market.

It's bodies coming in from outside, it's people seeking accommodation, it's people seeking new accommodation that are exactly the problem. The monies that have been put forward will bring things in the next two to three or four years. But as the city said, here in Edmonton it may be difficult to find the 2,500 spots to build. It will be difficult to affect that market. We do not have a perfect market, and we do not have in that housing construction sector — not in all sectors but in the housing construction sector it's very difficult to find qualified people that will do that in a timely and experienced basis in terms of the trades that are necessary. So we're not going to get those people in those units built in that time. We're going to have an imperfect market because of an imperfect labour market right now.

Nonetheless, rent control does not work in the long term, and it does not work well even often in the short term, but there should be

some area caps in order to do that. I'm not sure if one year goes far enough. I support the bill, but there may be a need for some real supply-side factors to be looked at in other ways and in the short term.

There may be a need to look at enhanced home ownership, which I think is the best solution in the long term, to look at some of the projects that have been done in other areas such as some of the high-rises that have been built in co-operation with organizations like Habitat for Humanity, that bring about home ownership, that bring about pride in people's homes because they do in fact own them, because they do in fact have a stake in them, and because they do in fact know that they will be there for many years to come. I think home ownership is what many people in Alberta are very happy with, with the prices going up, because they've got equity that's increasing. Those are, in fact, the majority of people in Alberta. But it does pull those that are in situations that are not the best into a difficult quandary right now because they do in many instances have the problem that they may be losing their home. Many have come to my constituency. They are out there.

That's all I have to say. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to rise with a comment or a question under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, on debate I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 34. I'd just like to say that that was a very good speech that the Member for Edmonton-Manning just gave although I'm fearful that his application to join the government caucus might be in the shredder as we speak because he's just spoken out against the caucus that he wishes to join in terms of favouring some sort of rent stabilization.

Mr. Speaker, I have several comments that I'd like to make this afternoon. The first would be to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the hon. President of the Treasury Board for taking the time yesterday and then again today having their staff meet with the residents that came down to the Legislature to have their specific questions asked and their concerns heard.

I have always said that when I'm a minister – and I'm quite confident that I will be someday – I will always meet with Albertans that are here to have their concerns heard. I believe that that is a big part of the responsibility of any minister. I congratulate these two ministers for having done so yesterday, as I did congratulate the current Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry when she met as the health minister with people that were here to complain about the third way. It's important that they do so.

However, there is always a proviso, and there is here too. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing accused us today of grandstanding because we wanted the media in the room. We didn't see, in the case of a government who claims to be open and accountable, why the media shouldn't be there to hear these individual residents when they're telling their stories. The other day he accused us of grandstanding when we brought these people into the House. So I'm not sure what he wants. First he doesn't believe the stories, so we bring them in the House; then we're grandstanding. Then they meet with the media, and that's grandstanding. So I'm not sure what he wants, but I do commend him for at least having taken the time to meet with them.

Mr. Speaker, I would submit that, unfortunately, in some cases the ministers just don't get it. They're out of touch with what's really happening in this province. As an example, the Minister of Employ-

ment, Immigration and Industry this afternoon came out, in response to opposition parties bringing in real-life cases into the Assembly, and cited some cases without naming any names. So I'm assuming they're real-life cases. She cited some cases of stories where her department has helped Albertans that desperately needed some assistance. Good on her. I would expect that she would have those instances and many more to share with this Assembly. In fact, I would suggest that if the minister didn't have those success stories, she wouldn't have been doing her job. This is what the department is there to do, and I fully expect that there would be many hundreds, if not thousands, of cases that she could cite where the system has worked.

The whole point is that there are still many, many instances where it's not working. You can't just talk about where it works. We have to look at where the problems are and make sure that Bill 34, for example, addresses where the problems are. As we've heard this afternoon from several speakers, there's not a lot of confidence on this side of the House that Bill 34 is going to address the specific problems that we've been hearing about day after day this week in the Legislature.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Mr. Speaker, continues to trot out the \$285 million in additional funding. Believe me, the people that are desperate, the people that were up in the committee room this afternoon meeting with his staff are thankful for that. There's no question. But it's not about the dollar figure. It could be \$485 million. It could be \$685 million. If it doesn't help the people that need help today, the numbers really are meaningless, and I think the minister referenced that in his response to one of the questions this afternoon. It's really about the people, and I think everybody in this Assembly understands that. I hope we do. If we don't, then we're here for the wrong reasons. It's about those individual instances, and one person – one person – that is forced out of their home because of this out-of-control market is one too many. So it's not about the \$285 million. I appreciate that initiative, as do others, but that's not what it's about. It's about the people.

Mr. Speaker, I would submit to you that from the moment that the Affordable Housing Task Force made their presentation to the minister, this government has dropped the ball, has bungled this entire file. I really and truly believe that. The first problem, as has been outlined by our shadow minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing, as has been outlined by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who sat on the task force, is that when the housing task force made those recommendations to the minister, it was meant to be a package. Included in that package were temporary rent guidelines, yes, but there were 50 recommendations in that package. It was felt by the members of that task force, including the chair of the task force who comes from the government side, that those recommendations had to be adopted as a package, that that is how they would be most effective in addressing the crisis situation that we're experiencing in this province right now.

That didn't happen. As we know, they adopted 12 out of 50 recommendations; 38, or 76 per cent, of the recommendations of their own task force were left on the sidelines. It's just not good enough in terms of taking a comprehensive package and addressing this situation.

Next, we had the government's response to the task force recommendations trotted out a couple of weeks ago, and it created even more chaos in the market, as we saw. Clearly, landlords did not understand what the rules were that they were working under. They didn't understand what their responsibilities were to their tenants under the proposed regulations. That's why we saw dramatic rental increases, condo conversions, major renovations all being announced within hours or days of the legislation being announced

in a press release and of the government's response to the task force recommendations coming out. Clearly, landlords did not fully understand the implications of this press release of the government's response to the task force recommendations.

It's not entirely the landlords' fault. They're left wondering: what the heck are the rules? They feel – and I have heard from many of them, and I'm sure the government members have and the ministers have heard from many landlords as well – as if the rules were changed in the middle of the game. That's a very difficult situation for a landlord to be in. I'm not a landlord currently, but I have been a commercial landlord in the past, and I know that you like to know what rules you're operating under. Whether it's accurate or not, Mr. Minister, they do feel as if the rules were changed in the middle of the game, as if the rug was pulled out from underneath them. So that is a real problem for landlords.

Now tenants, I don't have to tell you, are panicking. Across this province tenants are panicking with these most recent announcements.

An Hon. Member: You're scaring them.

Mr. R. Miller: No, I don't believe we're scaring them. Somebody across the way says that we're scaring them. They're scared. The government has scared them. Their landlords, in some cases, in a few cases – I'm going to talk about the greedy few in a minute. In some cases the greedy few have certainly put the scare into their tenants. I don't believe it's at all accurate, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that the opposition is scaring people. The opposition is doing its job as an opposition, which is bringing to light the issue, making sure that the government is aware of what's happening.

As far as I can recall in the last several days, we have yet to hear a member from the governing side ask a question on rent controls. That's astounding to me. They have, I think, 20 members or 19 members from the city of Calgary. Nobody's asked a question on rent controls. We've got instances of \$1,000 rent increases in Calgary, and not one member from this government has asked a question on rent controls.

4:20

We've got three members of the Alberta Legislature that represent Edmonton ridings. No questions about rent controls. Is it just that the Albertans that are experiencing dramatic rent increases happen to live in opposition members' ridings, and if they're lucky enough to live in a riding that's represented by a government member, they don't have that happening? I don't think so, Mr. Speaker, but certainly their side is not getting up and representing their constituents.

The minister the other day accused one of our members, the Member for Calgary-Varsity, of not representing his constituents. I haven't heard a lot of representation coming from the government members of their constituents that are facing dramatic rent increases.

The other point I'd like to make. Mr. Speaker, you'll know that the Official Opposition has sponsored a petition urging the government to look at a series of measures, some of which are included in Bill 34 and others which are not, to address this situation, and I have found, personally, going around asking people to sign this petition, that there are people who are afraid to put their name on a petition urging the government to take action. Why? Because, as you know, if they sign a petition, their name does become part of the public record, and they are fearful that they will face repercussions. This is absolutely accurate. I find it astounding that members across the way don't believe that this is true, but I have had people tell me flat out that they are afraid to put their name to a petition because they

are afraid of facing repercussions from their landlord if they do so. That is a fact.

I think it's frightful that in our province today there is that much fear in people, that they are so desperate to hang on to whatever housing they've got now that they dare not sign a petition asking their government to take action on this crisis because they're fearful that they might lose their home. That's how bad it's gotten, Mr. Speaker.

I mentioned the greedy few. Perhaps the biggest single problem with Bill 34 is that it does absolutely nothing – and I have yet to hear any solution offered by the government – to address the situation of the few greedy landlords who are gouging. I shouldn't say that there's been nothing. There was some intimation that perhaps the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing would speak to them. Now, I don't know if that means he's going to put on his dark sunglasses and carry a baseball bat and speak to them or if he's going to call them into his office and have tea and crumpets. I don't know. What I do know is that it's not in legislation, and it's not going to change the fact that some landlords are gouging.

It's been suggested – and I believe it's true – that some landlords are taking advantage of the fact that they know that this government is going to have to step in and address the situations of the 75- and 80-year-old grandmothers that are getting 100 per cent and 200 per cent and 300 per cent rent increases. They know that they're going to have to address that situation, so some of these landlords, I'm guessing, are actually thinking that they're going to get away with that increase because somebody's going to have to step in and make sure that that grandmother doesn't lose her home, and it's probably going to be the taxpayers. So I have no doubt in my mind that there are a few, a greedy few, that are taking advantage of that.

There's been nothing said by this government yet other than for, as I said, a talking from the minister to say how Bill 34 is going to stop that from happening. Sure, Bill 34 contemplates some time periods and extending some time periods. That doesn't mean – as an example, a \$1,000 rent increase – that that person isn't going to get a \$1,000 rent increase down the road. I've got some specific examples that I would like to cite. I hope I have time, Mr. Speaker, to cite some specific examples.

There's nothing in this bill that will deal with that, and if the answer isn't rent controls, Mr. Minister, okay, fine. But then please tell us: what is the answer? What are we going to do to make sure that people don't gouge their tenants? There's been nothing said yet that's going to protect people from that.

Now, one of the solutions that the government continues to trot out is: "We're going to let the market prevail. We believe in a free-market system. We must let the market prevail." Well, I'm here to submit to you that I believe the market will prevail. It always does. Anybody who studies economies knows that markets prevail. That's what they do, no question.

The problem is, Mr. Speaker: how long will it take? What happens to those that are most vulnerable while you're waiting for the market to prevail? How many people in this province are you going to allow to be hurt while we wait for this market that is out of control to correct itself? How badly are you going to let them get hurt while we wait for this market to correct itself? The other thing we all know, because many of us have experienced it in the early '80s, is that when you allow a market that's out of control to correct itself . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a). Does anyone wish to speak? The hon. member for Edmonton-Decore.

An Hon. Member: Oh, this could be good.

Mr. Bonko: Stand by.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member alluded to specific examples, but he did not cite them, so I would like him to give those specific examples.

The Deputy Speaker: Before I allow that, I have another member that has a question. Then, at this time he can respond.

Mr. Snelgrove: Two briefly. One, the hon. member suggested that we were changing the rules in the middle of the game by putting in . . .

Mr. R. Miller: I suggested that landlords feel like it.

Mr. Snelgrove: That's right, and they might. So my question would be: what on earth, then, would rent controls be if they weren't changing the rules in the middle of the game? Two, he suggested that they only accepted a certain number of regulations or recommendations of the report. Could he tell us how many of the recommendations were rejected because they were either already done or in progress?

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to respond to both?

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I suggested was that many of the landlords who have contacted me have suggested that they feel as if this government changed the rules in the middle of the game. I never said that that was the case. I said that they feel as if that's what happened. I do believe that when you read the government press release, it was not clear in pointing out to landlords that the one increase per year in rent was retroactive to 12 months prior to April 24, 2007. That, I believe, is quite evident from what we saw in the hours and days following the government's press release where many landlords who had already given an increase in the last 12 months were dumping big increases on their tenants. Clearly, they didn't understand that they were not allowed to do that. That was not made clear in the government's press release.

I've asked several times in this House: what are you guys doing now to make sure that these people who are confused – and there's chaos out there. It continues today. I continue to get examples in my office today of landlords that do not fully understand the rules.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, then let's get it passed.

Mr. R. Miller: Absolutely. The minister suggests that we should get it passed, and it is our intention to pass that bill today. The bill absolutely does . . .

An Hon. Member: Thank you. I totally agree.

Mr. R. Miller: Okay. Well, we might not get it done today, but certainly our intention is not to hold up the bill, Mr. Minister, if that's your point.

Mr. Speaker, there were other questions, and I would like to answer them.

Mr. Bonko: Do you want me to re-ask the question?

Mr. R. Miller: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Did you want to respond to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore's question, or do you want him to ask it again?

Mr. Bonko: Under 29(2)(a) did you want me to ask the question again?

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Bonko: The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was going to quote specific examples within his constituency. He has not done that yet.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you. I'll try to be really brief because I'm sure I don't have much time. I had a gentleman in my office on Monday afternoon, Mr. Speaker, Mr. David Scott. His 93-year-old mother is living in an independent-living building. She does have some savings – and I asked this question the other day – but her rent is exactly 100 per cent of the income that she has from her savings. One hundred per cent of every penny that this lady is making is being used to pay her rent. So the question that David wanted to know is: what assistance is there for renters? The government always says, you know, if it's more than 30 per cent of your income, then there's some sort of assistance. There are all sorts of examples of people like this who have assets, so as a result of that they've got income from their assets. In this lady's case the rent is taking up 100 per cent of her income.

I had a lady in the public gallery today, Dianne Raymer, who had a \$100 increase in December, so under this legislation, when it's passed, her next increase will be in December of this year. She believes the next increase will be the one she can no longer absorb. She's on a fixed income. She has, you know, issues that are facing her. What income she does have certainly doesn't keep up to increases in rent and hikes in gas and food and car insurance and so forth. She believes that the next one will be the one that puts her out.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, a dramatic example that I first raised in this Legislature last Thursday: a gentleman who lives in Yellowbird House. His name is Mohamed Deria. He was given a notice on the 30th of April that his rent would increase from \$710 to \$1,195, an increase of 68 per cent. Now, we know that when this legislation passes, that will actually be deferred two months. Instead of August 1, now it will be October 1 because he signed his lease in October. So there's two months' protection there for him, but at that point his rent will jump 68 per cent. My question to the minister is simply: what is gouging? Is it 68 per cent? Is it a thousand dollars? Where do we draw the line and say: that's gouging?

The Deputy Speaker: Back on the debate, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a great deal of interest to speak on Bill 34 here this afternoon. You know, this bill certainly has an interesting sort of framework. It does move towards some of the things that need to be done in regard to this housing crisis that we're seeing here in the province of Alberta right now, but it stops short of having the clincher, the argument that would actually make accommodation more affordable and make the rest of the framework function as it's described here in Bill 34 as well.

Of course, having to limit increases to rents to once a year and forcing landlords to give one year's notice before condo conversions are fine steps that we do need to take here in the province, but if you don't have a limitation to rein in the out-of-control rent increases that are taking place, then these two provisions actually function to make rental accommodation even more expensive and to make condo conversions even more of a distortion and a liability to the people who are living in rental accommodations or trying to buy condo accommodations.

Without the rent guidelines to put things back onto the rails, these two provisions as they stand alone here in Bill 34 are actually serving to exacerbate the problem. Unfortunately, we were expecting something more. Perhaps during the course of the afternoon and evening we certainly have the opportunity to create more and to perhaps put this thing back on track. I know that there are people who are sympathetic toward some temporary rent guidelines on all sides of this House, and certainly the vast majority of Albertans are onside with the idea. So, you know, perhaps lightning will strike or a miracle will rain down, cooler heads will prevail, and in fact we can during the course of this afternoon and evening come to some resolution or to some compromise solution on this. But as it stands, as a piece of legislation on its own it's not functioning, it's nonfunctional, and as I said before, it in fact would exacerbate the problem, Mr. Speaker.

You know, it's interesting. When we had that all-party housing task force, the recommendation that came out from all quarters, all different parts of the province and certainly ran to agreement in a very interesting group that was the composition of the Affordable Housing Task Force was that, you know, the rent increase guidelines should be temporary so that the housing market can in fact stabilize. I think that's probably the most reasonable thing we could possibly come up with if we were trying to solve something on a microlevel. But here on a macrolevel suddenly different elements of ideology or sort of, I would say, entrenched special interests are a big factor in distorting this argument, entrenched special interests for people to have that default right to change the rents or their rental rates as they wish.

You know, that's not unreasonable, I suppose, as a parlor game argument to make, but we're talking about tens of thousands of people that are in a crisis situation across the province here with undue rental increases or having that undue rental increase hanging over their heads, made worse, probably, by this being entrenched into law. Then you'll see a whole wave of these rental increases. Then I think we have to go beyond that and look at realities and come to a compromise solution that works in the best interests of everybody. Certainly, if we're putting in some moderate rent guidelines, let's say the consumer price index plus 2 per cent – this is what the Alberta New Democrats are suggesting and, I think, pretty much what the Affordable Housing Task Force recommended as well. Is that correct?

Dr. Pannu: Exactly.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. The member right here has first-hand knowledge. Very good.

You know, that's not to say that that's the only increase you can have. Certainly, in looking at rent guidelines around different parts of the country or around the world, you can make special application to exceed that amount. Let's say that you need to put in new elevators or the roof blows off or what have you. You can make application for that increase, and probably the tenants understand that since they actually use the building as well, and away you go.

So it's not as though we're putting people in an untenable

situation in regard to running their businesses. Certainly, that's the last thing you would want because, of course, you want the rental market to keep on its merry way. You know, it's interesting. This is probably, I find, the most annoying part of this argument that we've been having over the past days and weeks here: that rent controls or rent guidelines or whatever will stifle the market from building new units. That's just simply not true. We can look for examples around the world where not just a city grows up but a whole society starts to move into, you know, sort of the industrialized, urbanized culture.

Then, of course, people are moving into the cities. You have cities of more than a million. It's much more the rule than the exception in a modern western industrialized country that you have some rent guidelines because people need to live in the densified urban centre. You can't just force people out and have a city of millionaires or billionaires. You have to have all of the other service industries that make a city function, and they have to be living in reasonable proximity to where they're working. That makes for a good mix of urban centre and for a healthy community, and it's just a reality as well.

You know, to say that rent guidelines are like the sky falling and that the Earth will stop turning – I mean, it's just utter nonsense. I defy anybody to show me examples of how rent controls over a period of time have in fact stifled the building of rental accommodations. I can look no further than just outside the door here to see that rental accommodations have not been built here in the city of Edmonton or in the city of Calgary over the last 10 or 15 or 20 years to keep up to the population increase at all, with no rent controls. In fact, who's to say, but I would venture to say that after the last boom, which I did see function as well, that we had here in this city and across this province, lots of rental accommodation was built.

I get this feeling that somebody has talked and said: "Look, let's not do that again. This time when it does increase, we can all rise up, and hopefully the government won't have the backbone to put in rent guidelines, and we can all make a lot of money." That's what's happening now.

You know, we look at this information that we saw from Boardwalk here and lots of other rental companies. Certainly, we don't begrudge them the right to make money for their shareholders and to increase their market share and their value and all of those things, but we are the people who have to provide the regulation side over a long period of time. They are in fact looking for us to provide that regulation side. They know that that regulation side is going to come down, so you see this explosion of rental increases.

You know, with Boardwalk saying, "We can move up to 50 per cent of the income of our average renter, and we can move our rents up to \$1,600 a month" and all of these things, sure, that's what they see because they see that opportunity. The door is left open, so to speak. It's our job to make sure that people are not getting gouged, that we can function on all levels of the economy here in this province and not just have it functioning for the fortunate few who can profit from this distorted situation. For a good, balanced society everyone has a right to have a roof over their heads, to have a safe and secure place to live, and this current situation is putting thousands of people in jeopardy of not having that basic right. So as members of this provincial Legislature I think it's incumbent upon us as a responsibility to ensure that we stabilize the situation.

I mean, we're not going to put on draconian measures. You know, we might have to, mind you, if we don't start dealing with this properly. But we can certainly simply put in reasonable guidelines: CPI, the consumer price index, plus 2 per cent. It's like 7.5 per cent a year. If people want to make application to exceed that, certainly they're welcome to do so. It's not like we're setting up something

that's going to destroy the rental market. The rental market is not functioning here anyway. Let's try something different. Maybe people will start to build when they see a long-term, stable situation being put in place by a responsible government here in the provincial Legislature. We can do that here this afternoon.

4:40

You know, there are lots of examples I have here. Ontario has had some rental increase guidelines for the last 15 years or so – certainly, we don't necessarily need to have it for 15 years – but investment in new apartments in the province of Ontario increased by 88 per cent since the year 2000. Alberta, with no rental increase guidelines, has seen a drop in new rentals by 52 per cent. I mean, what more do you possibly want in terms of statistics proving that anything can happen?

Certainly, you can have a decrease with rent controls, too, I suppose, but we're going to put in other provisions to make sure that that doesn't happen. We can encourage builders to build new rental units. We can encourage new families to buy condos and to buy their own homes because that is a basic foundation that we believe in, I think, on all sides of this House: that people are not just entitled to a place to live but that it increases the stability of the society to allow people to get that first mortgage and make an investment into the ownership market. So there's just a whole basket of possibilities that we could work with here, but we need to stabilize the rental situation in this province, and we owe it to each of our constituents that are in a tight spot at this juncture.

The other part of Bill 34 that I don't hear a lot of people talking about is this condo conversion issue. In 2006 a thousand rental units were converted to condos in Calgary and in Edmonton a similar number, we found, last year. When a rental unit is converted into a condo and then rented out again, which is often the case because people are buying these as equity investments – right? – the average increase in rent is 30 per cent or more because of people trying to recover their costs. So without rent increase guidelines, without limiting the percentage, in other words, by which the landlords can raise the rent in an annual increase, the status quo or worse will prevail, Mr. Speaker. Unscrupulous landlords will use the annual rental increase to gouge renters, and we'll continue to see increases that are unaffordable for the renters that are there.

The logic of this bill is that if it does not include limits on the rate at which the landlord can increase their rents, a one-year notice period on condo conversions with a prohibition on rent increases in the period is in line with the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force and, in fact, Mr. Speaker, is in line with probably trying to stabilize the situation somehow.

This housing crisis is a symptom, Mr. Speaker, of an overheated economy and the inability or the lack of stomach, I suppose, on the part of the government to make some moderations to that overheated economy. People are starting to see this as a housing issue, but then it also becomes a development issue. It becomes a development issue and an industrialization issue. We all want the very best. We want to use the resources that we have at our disposal to serve the population in the best way possible and in the most equitable way possible, I would say, as well and with basic responsibilities in regard to social justice and in regard to the environment.

This is just symptomatic, Mr. Speaker, of the larger problem of dealing with the pace of development in this province. I know that people don't want to touch the brake and away we go and let's see, a no-tomorrow sort of attitude, but when you're living with that no-tomorrow sort of attitude, you start to see pieces fall off. This is one of the biggest pieces that I've seen fall off in this time that I've been in the Legislature, and it's the one that really does make me realize

that we have to in fact have some moderation on the pace of growth in this province of Alberta because this will only be one thing.

The next thing we'll see is inflation, rampant inflation for people to try to pay for these rents, people having to get second jobs. You'll have an increase – already we see it, but just wait – in prices on consumer goods like food and on fuel and a whole range of other things. What you end up with, Mr. Speaker, is runaway inflation, and nobody wants that. It doesn't help anybody. It only creates the spiral that will turn a boom into a bust, and, you know, I don't think any of us wants to see that. We want to see proper, maintained rates of growth over a long period of time, and that's exactly the opposite direction that we're going here right now. This is a symptom of a spiral in the pace of development. It's hurting thousands of people across the province. Bill 34 starts out so great. You know, it's like buying that book that you read about, that you've been hoping for and looking forward to, and then, boom, it finishes four chapters before it should have done. The part where you have to have rent guidelines, CPI plus 2 per cent: the Alberta New Democrats support that, the Affordable Housing Task Force supports that, and I would say, Mr. Speaker, that the majority of the population of Alberta supports that too.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Just a brief question. The hon. member is obviously comfortable with reaching into the landlords' pockets and rolling back their rents and taking the money from them. If it were shown clearly that one of the biggest impediments to affordable housing was the cost of the tradesmen that are building these units, would the hon. member also support going back to the trades and saying: you're going to have to roll back your salaries to help us look after the housing problem?

Mr. Eggen: Well, no. I thank you for that. I appreciate it. I've actually heard this argument before as well. You know, it's not a question of us reaching in and rolling back the landlords' money but, rather, simply looking for a compromise place where we can stabilize the price. Okay? When you're building new units, all of the problems associated with building in this province are going to be there when we try to build new affordable housing units too. I'm under no illusions. I mean, it's great that we have that new money for affordable housing, but we all know how much longer than we think a project is going to take it actually does take in this overheated economy. Right? So when you're talking about the new units coming online and the cost of those things, that adds to the urgency of the whole situation.

So, you know, you're not taking money from the landlords when you're doing this, certainly. You're just moderating the whole thing so that you can in fact create an atmosphere where you can build new units. A big part of the cost of doing business is the labour associated with building these new housing units. That's part of what we're going to have to swallow too.

I understand what you're saying, but they're two separate things following on a parallel track.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you that it's a lot more fun asking questions than answering. It really is.

You would support price control. What conditions would it take for you to support wage control?

Mr. Eggen: Well, certainly when you've got wage and price control

going on, I mean, that's the worst possible scenario. The last time we saw that, you know, it was an unfortunate thing. When you're putting in a price guideline on one specific commodity, it's a whole different ball game than the wage and price controls that the Liberals brought in back in the late '70s, I believe. Right? That was detrimental to everybody. I would never want to see that.

When you're putting a price guideline on a single commodity, that's a whole different game. Okay? When somebody wants to build some new places or you're expanding or you're doing renovations or whatever, we're not writing this in stone. We're not saying: "Oh, okay. Sorry. You can't fix the roof. You can't put another 50 units on the back or what have you because you're only allowed the 7.5." Under rent guidelines you can apply for an exception, and it's not such a big deal. Right? I mean, you're making people in poverty apply, have to beg and say: please, sir, we can't afford our rents. I mean, there's nothing wrong with making a simple application on the landlord's side. If they want to increase the rent a little bit or increase their rent beyond the guidelines to pay for trade costs or whatever, that's not a problem.

So we're not advocating a broad-based control over the economy. I mean, nobody wants that. A single commodity, which happens to be the most important commodity that people need, which is a house over your head – stabilize the situation. Let's move on from there. Everybody is happy.

Mr. Snelgrove: This is just so much fun.

Under any conditions we're only going to look after this one control, rental housing. Good deal. Would the hon. member consider ever putting controls on the energy sector?

4:50

Mr. Eggen: Well, I mean, it seems a bit vague. You have a market that deals with the energy sector, right, in the broadest possible way. We have the application process, the EUB, a very finely tuned system, which could use a little bit of help – but that's okay – which moderates the energy sector, and we have a royalty regime and a rate that also has an effect on the energy sector, plus the myriad of other taxes, including gasoline tax and whatnot, that we put on. I mean, all of those things are in place. I think they're all fine mechanisms by which we help to deliver energy at the affordable price and money for the province. That's what you do.

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today in second reading of Bill 34. I just want to say a few things that I haven't had the opportunity to say before because of the fact that nobody's ever asked me. What I say that nobody's ever asked me, I'm referring to the media and the fact that ever since this report has been distributed out to the government and released, I've never been asked by the media any questions at all whatsoever.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, it's been a pleasure to work with you on this task force along with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, along with all the other 14 task members. They were wonderful people, hard-working people, and they truly wanted to do something good with this report. Again I just want to go back to the fact that I have never been asked, and I wonder why. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview stole all the thunder, so I'm here today now to take some of that back.

I first want to say that, yes, I chaired this committee, the Affordable Housing Task Force committee. Yes, I did. I chaired it, and again I want to say that the members on this committee were wonderful people to work with, but we had some differences of opinion. We had some different thoughts, a lot of debate, a lot of

arguments on certain recommendations. A number of people didn't agree with some recommendations. Others did. It came down to a vote around the table.

When we travelled around the province, Mr. Speaker, we heard from a lot of people, a lot of people from Hinton to Lethbridge, Medicine Hat to Elk Point, and a lot of these individuals that we met with suggested that rent control is the way to go. We heard from people on AISH, seniors on fixed incomes, and low-income individuals. A number of them indicated that rent controls were the way to go.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we did hear from a lot of individuals, a lot of organizations who thought otherwise, who thought rent control was not the way to go. Land developers indicated to us that if there was any type of rent control in place, basically that would halt all further development. I know that the opposition members will say to me: well, there is no development right now, so what difference is this going to make? I would say that, yes, there is no development right now, and there hasn't been for a while, but I think that the government has to provide other incentives for land developers to build low and affordable housing units.

Rent control is not the answer, Mr. Speaker. History indicates this, and this was something that I did produce during our task force consultations. But, again, we had the vote on the recommendations, and of course the hon. member from across the way and other individuals on the task force who thought the same way were in the majority. So that's why it made it into the recommendations of the report.

Now, I continually hear, and I have heard throughout the past few weeks since the report was released, from the opposition that this is what the task force indicated, that this is what they said, that this is what we've got to do. That's true; that's what it said in the report, Mr. Speaker, but again it was not the majority of the task force members, and I just wanted to make that clear to you.

An Hon. Member: It was the majority.

Mr. Webber: It was the majority. Yes. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. It was the majority. That's why it made it into the report.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased with Bill 34 and the amendments that are going through with this bill. There was certainly a lot of talk about condo conversions and the moratorium on condo conversions for a year also with the task force. That was another area that we had difficulty with. When I say "we," I mean myself as the chair. But I can live with that. I can live with what our government is putting forth in Bill 34 on the condo conversions along with the rent stability guideline of one increase per year. I, again, struggle with that myself, but I can live with it.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to say that I support Bill 34 and the amendments to it. Thank you. [some applause]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on the debate.

Mr. Martin: You're going to give me a standing ovation, too, are you? Mr. Speaker, the only time that I can remember getting an ovation is when I came in and walked in for the first time. I never had that experience in the Legislature, and probably you'll never get it again.

An Hon. Member: You've got to retire sometime.

Mr. Martin: It's like Ed Broadbent said: there's nothing so popular as a socialist that's retiring.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make a few comments about Bill 34. I want to first of all say to the chairman of the task force: it was a pleasure to work with you. He was a great chairman. He allowed everybody to have their say. We couldn't have asked a person to do a better job as the chairman of that task force. I also want to say, as the hon. member from Foothills did say, that the task force was dedicated. They worked hard, and there was a lot of discussion.

We were all over the province. I want to come to what I think we all agree we heard across the province: the fact that we're in a crisis situation. We heard that right from Grande Prairie to Fort McMurray to Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, everywhere we went. I was surprised, frankly, that the problems were as severe as they were in southern Alberta. We hear about northern Alberta all the time, but when we went down there, we saw the same sorts of problems, and there was a crisis.

We were told in Medicine Hat, for example, Mr. Speaker, that eventually the population of Alberta – the mayor said that the economic development department told them that in the next number of years the population was going to be double, 6 million people. Now, I don't know how we'll ever keep up with that pace if that's the case. Now, that's just speculation, admittedly, but we know the amount of people coming into the province. I would suggest that Calgary has different figures than even the 100,000. They say 97,000 people came into Calgary last year. So I don't know. There's a lot of people coming in.

The point I want to make and stress is that it is a crisis situation. It's not only true in housing. It's true in health care. It's true in education. It's true everywhere. But it's the government's economic strategy that's saying: okay, we're not going to put the foot on the brakes; therefore, we're going to move ahead. So for at least the foreseeable future we're going to be facing these same sorts of problems. That's what the task force heard.

Now, admittedly, last summer I was advocating rent guidelines when we started to hear the stories out of Calgary that in the short run we need them. I understand the market, having worked in the private sector for a number of years. The market works well when there is a market, but when there is not a market, it doesn't work very well. That's the point. The point is, Mr. Speaker, that we heard from people.

5:00

Sure, the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills is right. Boardwalk came and quoted Milton Friedman and a bunch of supply-side economists, and that was supposed to impress us. The Calgary Apartment Association came and said that they didn't want rent controls. Well, if I was them, I probably wouldn't want them either. But the vast majority of people came to the public hearings, and they said: "Look. We're in an emergency situation. Something has to be done." This is not new, what we're hearing here in the Legislature just in the last couple weeks. We were hearing this right across the province. I think it started in Fort McMurray, and certainly, now, Calgary and Edmonton, it's the same sort of thing. People are under stress. They're worried.

I want to say to the hon. President of the Treasury Board, who is sponsoring the bill: it's not only the people that are the most vulnerable, the people on fixed incomes. There are growing numbers of people that are what I would call the working class or middle class or whatever that are also very worried because they see the possibility that they're not going to be able to afford to buy a house, yet there's no control on how fast the rents are going to rise for them. So it's not just the most vulnerable. That's bad enough, but there's a growing situation out there, and I'll come back to that.

Now, I want to say that I told the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, and I did tell the minister of municipal affairs: do the right thing. It will be easier for you people if you do the right thing. Ultimately, I accept that the government has to make decisions. I don't think they've made the right ones here, but I understand that they're the government, that for every task force that goes out, they don't necessarily have to accept every recommendation. That goes without saying. But what I said to them both at the time – and I think the Member for Calgary-Foothills probably would agree with me – was: "Get this out. Then you guys can at least debate it. It's out there. You can go and talk to your caucus or whatever, but make sure it's out there in the public so that there is that debate." That's what people wanted. There were a lot of expectations on this committee. I think the members opposite would agree with that.

The advantage to that is that it would be out there. People could debate it. They could talk about it. It could come back to the government, and they could make some decisions then. But when it put it behind closed doors, it looks like – and I believe this to be the case – it was so that we could put our political spin on it in case we didn't like some of the recommendations. Well, it didn't work. You know, there are certain key things that people look at. There are a lot of things in the report that are good that have to deal with the other end of it, that people haven't talked about. We knew that there would be certain things that they'd look at.

Now, I want to be fair. The minister talked about it. It was not unanimous to support rent guidelines. I don't think it's any secret that I was pushing it, but I want to say to the member that I wish more government members had been with this. I don't think the majority of the people that started off on that task force would have been for rent guidelines. I'm absolutely sure of that. In fact, I know that one of the members said: "Look. Philosophically, I'm against this, but we were told that we had to go out and listen and to make recommendations from what we heard." He said, "I can't ignore what thousands of people were telling me, that we need temporary rent guidelines." And again I stress temporary because in an ideal market we don't need it. That's where it started.

Yes, it was not unanimous, but it was a big majority that voted for it on that committee. I recollect – and I think I'm right – that it was 10 to five of the 15 people that were there. It was after a thorough debate, you can rest assured. I honestly don't believe at the start of that that it would have been that way, so that was after listening. It's too bad that more of the government members weren't there with us to listen to what was going on.

That's what was somewhat disappointing. I knew that the government would have some difficulty with the ideology. I jokingly call it Adam Smith here, but the reality is that we asked for temporary guidelines. Now, the argument always is – you know, everybody else has alluded to this – that it'll hurt investment. We won't get rental units on. Well, how could it get any worse? But at least we'd be protecting some people that are there from unscrupulous rent increases.

The other argument we hear is that you never get rid of it. Well, the experience that we had back in the first boom is that they did get rid of it. They had it there for a while, and they did get rid of it. As you recall, you may have read in the paper that Councillor Cavanagh was the one that took the rent controls out at that time because they weren't needed. He said that it was easy, very easy. But he also said that now we need them temporarily again. So this idea that you can never get rid of them just doesn't fly in Alberta history. This is not New York City. This is Alberta. Those people that believe that the market can solve everything should have some faith that when the market is there, we can get rid of these things in this province. That's the reality. We can.

This is precisely the CPI plus 2 once a year. That's what is already happening in British Columbia. You know, that's a reasonable profit. You're guaranteed that you can go out and do that every year, CPI plus 2. The point is that rather than a strict control, because I understand that there could be, you know, all sorts of circumstances, labour if you like or whatever, where there costs have just ramped up, they can apply to the board for whatever reason, and that often is passed on. We've talked to them. So they're not just stuck there if they've had extra costs that are driving up the problems, but at least there's some semblance. That, to me, is a pretty good profit, and that's the security. Now, we called for two years. Whether that would be enough time or not, that was a reasonable compromise. We said temporary and the two years, Mr. Speaker.

Now, there's a carrot and the stick here too. If you look at the other parts of the task force, we tried to look at how we get more rental units onto the market. Clearly, if you look at it, we were talking about some tax incentives, if you like, to bring the markets on. Remember, it's been stated before that in B.C. or Ontario new units aren't under controls. It's only the units that are already built, so that's a bogus sort of argument. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that they can move ahead and build the units, and they won't be under controls. But we have to look at other things. There's no doubt.

A couple of issues that I would like to deal with. Number one, inclusionary zoning. This is working in many parts of the world. There are some examples in Toronto and Montreal, all sorts of examples. Inclusionary zoning says: look, if you're in to build in a subdivision, then you have to put a little bit into rental units so that we don't ghettoize people, and we have it there. You get tax breaks to do that. If you're prepared to do that, we'll give you a good tax break, and that will help your bottom line. I notice the recommendation was that we'll look at it down the way, but that's an important issue. So there's the carrot and the stick there, too, to bring units on.

The other thing we suggested – I was surprised that the government didn't accept this one because there was some experience with mortgage relief for people in the previous boom. We suggested, as the minister would be aware, \$100 million for mortgage subsidies, and that would stimulate the market to get people in. Clearly, they both tie together. We were looking at the continuum, you know, from the homeless right through to young people especially, trying to get into home buying, and it's become very, very difficult to do that. Some sort of mortgage help would get them out of rental units and into their own homes, whether it be condos or whatever, and that would free up some space for the rental units again, creating a little better market. I thought that was one that the government would actually accept. I was surprised when they didn't. I think that that would have had a very stimulating impact in terms of getting some of the units on board.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, last night I was at a function in my own riding. The city of Edmonton is trying, as the government is aware, an innovative project with the school boards and the government and the city to try to get first-time home buyers into some of the vacant school areas that have not been used. In my community – and I'm very proud of them – the Homesteader community said: "We don't like the way that it was brought at us. We didn't know about it. We want to be involved. We'll do it, but we want to be involved." So the meeting was there with Mayor Mandel and the councillors, and I attended.

One of the stories that came forward was from a couple. They were both young working professionals. He said: you know, I'm really excited about this project because the city of Edmonton is going to, as the minister is well aware . . . [Mr. Martin's speaking time expired] Sorry. I'll come back another time.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) does anyone wish to add any questions or comments? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. I would very much like the last hon. member to perhaps elaborate on that last point that he was making.

Mr. Martin: I love this. I feel like I'm a minister here.

Thank you. I'd be glad to. This is a young couple, both professionals. All this person was saying is: "I'm excited about this project. How do I get into it?" The mortgage subsidy was going to bring it down to where he might be able to qualify. He says: "Without this I have no chance of owning a condo, a house, anything. I've been looking around. I make a good salary. I tell you honestly that if I can't do this, I have to look to Saskatchewan or somewhere else."

The point that the mayor said at the time is that that's exactly the people we can't afford to lose, that whole group of teachers, nurses, in that area. I think that that's another important part of this affordable housing. That's why I was surprised that we didn't look at that end of it with the mortgage subsidies for five years or whatever, which it is with Edmonton. There are controls on that. So I think that would've been some help with the rental units too.

Thank you for that chance, hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, back on the debate. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to speak to Bill 34, Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. We have had much discussion throughout this past week particularly as this crisis has come to a head. All of us care deeply about this amendment. Many of us have friends and family members who have been affected by the explosive growth in the province.

I would have to begin by making some general comments about the changes in the province and how they reflect failure on a couple of levels. The housing crisis is a symptom of failure of the market, on the one hand, to protect people and on another level the failure of government to balance growth, to manage growth in the province, looking at the economy in the context of a sustainable environment and social support systems.

I guess the key operating phrase is sustainability. When we talk about sustainability, what indicators are we using to establish whether we are making decisions that are not compromising the future, that are ensuring that infrastructure is in place to deal with growth as it's happening, that we attend to the social supports that people need, and indeed that we have comprehensive, cumulative environmental assessments to know what we're getting into and make judicious decisions to limit growth where it is appropriate?

It's very clear that the role of governance is more than simply opening up the market to do what it does best, which is to produce and to develop. Governance involves the hard work of analysis, looking at trends, looking at prices, looking at options, looking at the scope and pace of how we want this province to develop, and this has not been done. It has been absolute failure and negligence, I would argue, in terms of a tremendous resource-based economy that has only been going one way in the past decade.

There's a need, then, for a larger plan, for good science, and for a recognition that the public interest should determine how and how fast we develop, not the market, and a plea for a longer term vision, a longer term plan, and a recognition, especially now with climate change crashing in on us, that we have to balance the market with

more sustainability indicators around social, infrastructure, and environmental values.

I acknowledge many good parts of the bill and some changes that have already been made that will over time bring about some remediation of a very unfortunate situation, where so many people, especially disadvantaged people but even middle-class people and, certainly, seniors on fixed income, are in a serious emotional as well as economic crisis as the result of unpredictable and unsustainable rent changes and, in fact, rent gouging.

That seems to be the key issue that we're dealing with in a market that's gone awry. It's puzzling a bit to me that the government doesn't mind intervening in some ways in the market, including limiting to a once per year rent increase and limiting development of condo-ization and rent increases associated with a plan to condo-ize, yet they have difficulty making a decision on a similar intervention, which would be a rent cap, and in the short term allowing people to have more security and establish a better balance in our housing and human needs market.

This is a fundamental human need, and when we allow the market to threaten that fundamental human need, we pay hugely in terms of mental health, indeed, physical health issues resulting secondarily from that, social problems. What we fail to do as government then ends up being dumped into the health care system, where I have seen lots of evidence that these kinds of situations are extremely bad for individual and family and community health. So it's a bit puzzling to me why this one issue, capping rent, has created such a furor on the opposite side since other interventions are seen to be reasonable.

The Liberal plan from January 2006 indicated that secondary suites and the promotion of secondary suites would be another key short-term assistance measure. We would also limit rent increases to once per year, but we would add the cap in the short term, that we've talked about so often here, preventing gouging and increasing people's security.

We also talk in our plan about land trusts and ensuring that some public land is set aside each year in a long-term plan to ensure that there is availability for affordable housing. That's something that I haven't seen discussed or seen in the plan under Bill 34.

We would also ensure that the allowances that we're giving to people struggling with affordability would go to the renter rather than to the unit, and that seems to be an area where we're missing some opportunities here.

Another element of our plan is microcredit, where we would provide interest-free loans with a time limit to enable people to do more in terms of home ownership and independence. We would also strengthen the student loan and housing aspect of this crunch, that's hit students as well in a very serious way, that adds tremendously to students who are struggling with classes and independence and all kinds of adjustments in the postsecondary state.

I was puzzled to see the rejection of a housing plan for the province. I'm not sure why this government didn't adopt that recommendation. It seemed like a very reasonable longer term solution. We'd be interested to hear a discussion about why that was not felt to be an appropriate decision for this government and why we would not be indexing funding based on inflation. We do a lot of things on the basis of cost-of-living increases, including our own salaries. Why would we not include an aspect of indexing funding on the basis of inflation for affordable housing as well?

5:20

I haven't heard much discussion of the revisions needed in the Municipal Government Act to allow for more flexible zoning. That seems to me to be another part of the mix, the complex of actions that would help, both in the short term and in the long term, to really turn this situation around.

As the shadow minister on Environment I would also express some dissatisfaction with the rejection of green construction as being part and parcel of new construction. We are saving money in the future with energy costs if we invest now in green construction, more environmentally sustainable and tight buildings.

Another issue for me is the brownfield sites that continue to persist in the province. It's cheap land. If it's reclaimed and remediated, it could be available for affordable housing. Why are we leaving that year after year and decade after decade when this land could be extremely valuable and useful and cheaper than the average land for affordable housing?

Another area that was recommended by the task force, a client-focused service model, was rejected. Again, this doesn't reflect a government that sees a priority in individuals and families and their particularly unique needs in terms of housing. I'm puzzled as to why one would reject that kind of positive policy that focuses on individual needs and family needs. The goal of governance fundamentally is to create healthier, more sustainable communities. Surely we have to look, then, at balancing the market with the interests of individuals, families, and communities.

With those comments, I'll take my seat, and I look forward to further debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to rise under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like the hon. member to perhaps elaborate on what he would consider green buildings and how that would actually fit in to how we would look at Alberta in the future.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you for that question. Indeed, climate change has changed everything about the way we have to live our lives and govern this province. We now can no longer sustain the kind of focus on fossil fuels and the squandering of our resources, whether it's water or the use of fossil fuels, to individually drive our way around to various venues and keep lights on and fail to insulate properly.

There are some wonderful examples around the planet of sustainable housing, green housing, that would ensure tight buildings, that would ensure more energy-efficient use, that would have automatic monitors within buildings that turn lights off and on and that adjust the temperature when people are in and out of the building, that would ensure an appropriate mix of renewable energy: solar, microwind, even geothermal, and even the biofuels that will in some ways incent more of our farm community with products that will not only benefit the economy but also benefit the climate change issues that we must be so cognizant of and attending to.

Green buildings and the LEED system have increasingly been adopted by progressive companies, by individuals. Government can play a leading role in moving these forward. Part of our technology fund should be fronting the costs of some of this remarkable energy saving and renewable energy as part of the standard package of building, whether it's new buildings or new housing. There should be a standard package that includes at least gold, if not platinum, LEED environmental design and construction, minimizing our environmental footprint. These are just awaiting government leadership, policies that set a standard for ensuring that we are being responsible stewards, we are thinking about our global responsibility, and whether it's affordable housing or standard housing, we are taking seriously our commitment as a government to provide leadership on climate change issues and reducing carbon in our day-to-day living.

Thank you for the question.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Mason: I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View about what would constitute, in his view, a reasonable size of a rent increase in light of current conditions and whether or not he thinks that the current legislation will accomplish that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A reasonable rent increase I think is an important question for us to discuss. A cost-of-living increase plus something for profit seems to be a reasonable way to think about it. Obviously, people who are going into the business of rental accommodation have to get something to keep themselves going, and surely we have to address the cost-of-living increases.

We gave ourselves a 5 per cent increase this year. Why wouldn't we use that as a basis and add something reasonable for profit, at the same time confronting extraordinary increases that are simply usurious and corrupt, in many ways abusing the market, using the market in ways that will damage our social fabric? Perhaps a 10 per cent maximum one year to the next would be a starting point. I'm interested to hear what others on all sides of the House think is a reasonable rent increase.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just very curious from what we heard in the House today whether the hon. member thinks that the out-of-town rent allowance is unreasonable.

The Deputy Speaker: The time for Standing Order 29(2)(a) has elapsed.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the debate.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is obviously a crisis in this province. The market system is a great system to work by. It's something that has built our country, it's built the North American economy, and it's certainly something that we live by in the western world. Part of it is wonderful because it creates huge creativity in the people that are involved in it. Part of that creativity is based on the fact that there is so much competition: we have to look at a better way to build a mousetrap.

The object to make the market system work well, of course, is supply and demand, but that supply and demand really has to be balanced. What I'm looking at right now, I don't see balance. This is what we in this House are supposed to be doing. We are supposed to be governing. We are supposed to be creating rules that will keep that field level that people play on in the market system so that everyone basically has a good chance not only to compete but also to be able to reap the benefits. What kind of a society do we have if we cannot look after the ones that are the most vulnerable in our society?

So that is our job. It is our job to make the rules. It is our job to protect the rules that would ensure that we live in a civil society. I fear that I see some of these going by the wayside. I fear that we're ending up in a society that really is not very civil. It's certainly the survival of the fittest, and the fittest appear to be getting to be a much smaller segment of this population and certainly of the population of Alberta.

5:30

Seniors have worked all of their lives. They have done. They

have played by the rules that the governments have established over these many years. They've paid for their homes. They've educated their children. They have paid their taxes. But, more importantly, what a lot of these seniors have done is put away dollars for their retirement, and now they're finding that over the time not only has inflation eaten up what they thought would be their retirement, but some of the rules have changed so much that they are now at a disadvantage, and it had nothing – nothing – to do with their not playing by the rules.

One of the things that, of course, has affected them is tax assessments, the way the market value changed. Yes, they could sell their homes for a tremendous amount of money, but where are they going to move? It's going to cost them just as much to replace it. One of the things that can't help them stay in their homes is the increase in taxes. They had no idea the taxes would be going up that high, and they simply can't afford it and look to move. They've got nowhere to move.

Many seniors have not had the advantage of working for a company that's had a pension plan, or in fact they didn't work for a union, or in fact they often worked from paycheck to paycheck and still managed to put some money away. But it's not helping them now. People are saying: well, you should have put more money away. That's not fair with what we are trying to download onto our seniors. They did do their best, and there are many people out there that have done their very best. It's not their fault that they didn't work for a company that had a pension plan or that they didn't belong to the union so that they have the advantages of some of the others.

One of the things that I'm concerned about that has been part of the discussion is that I'm not sure I have ever heard a clear definition for the word "gouging," and I believe that the hon. member previous to me perhaps touched on that. What could be considered a fair profit? Of course businesses have to have a fair profit – that's what their mandate is – but what's fair? What's fair in a civil society? And is that where gouging comes in? Anything over and above what would be considered fair: is that gouging? I haven't heard the definition.

Also, we would need a clear definition of what is low income. Some people have very low incomes at this point in time, but because over the last number of years they've saved their money, they actually have assets that are worth money, and that's often held against them, which I think is most unfair.

One of the other solutions that we've talked about is secondary suites, and I think that they're a wonderful idea. I certainly know many people who already have secondary suites. They're rental accommodations. More people are looking to put in secondary suites. I would suspect that because there is no real control, the majority of these are what we would consider illegal suites. They have to have a legal egress, and certainly fire prevention is one of the big criteria. We've been talking about relaxing those rules, and I think it's a wonderful idea.

However, I'm not sure that it's going to create secondary suites that will actually appear in the newspaper. If you have a home with a secondary suite that is illegal, more often than not because you don't have the 220 wiring – you can't really find out if it is a secondary suite. Rather than use a stove, they'll use hotplates and microwaves and toaster ovens. People are getting money, so to speak, under the table, probably not declaring it in their income. So I'm not altogether sure that a lot of these secondary suites will ever surface in terms of actually being able to accommodate people looking for help in that area.

If the rules that were brought in would then help owners with

secondary suites, I think it's a very good idea. However, I've asked a couple of people about secondary suites in their neighbourhood. Now, the average cost of their home was \$400,000. I can assure you that they said: not in my neighbourhood. And I said: "Why not? You've got a monster house here. I know somebody that has a rental unit that's probably the size of your bathroom, so why wouldn't you have a secondary suite?" I think we would certainly run into a lot of the not in my backyard sort of stuff.

Mr. Rodney: NIMBY.

Ms Pastoor: NIMBY. Thank you very much to my hon. knowledgeable colleague that is sitting beside me in this House.

An Hon. Member: On which side?

Ms Pastoor: Well, isn't that amazing? He's on my right side.

Mr. Rodney: Quite far to the right.

Ms Pastoor: Quite far to the right, so he said. I'm not sure he's as far right as he thinks he is, but never mind.

I really think that secondary suites could be an amazing answer because certainly they are the answer for many, many students. In fact, I didn't have a secondary suite, but I did have boarders. It was my pleasure to have some baseball players stay with me. They were baseball players for the Prairie Baseball Academy, which is a very prominent academy in Lethbridge. One of the things that I learned by having young baseball players in my home was that I had no idea that there were that many teenage girls in Lethbridge. They all showed up on my doorstep. Believe it or not, these young men actually appreciated the fact that I kept those girls away. The house was really to study in and live in. [interjections] Believe it or not, I really do not look as good as Susan Sarandon in *Bull Durham*, so none of that stuff happened.

Besides secondary suites, actually the suggestion that had come from the other side was that families do take in other family members. I remember that years ago in Lethbridge granny suites were the big thing that we actually talked about in terms of zoning. I think it is a wonderful idea because there are many, many lonely people out there who would love to just be able to live in proximity to their family but not necessarily be a part of it when what they do with their lives is so different.

So there are any number of really creative things that can happen out there. I think it takes the will of the government to come up with some good legislation, and I believe it's our duty to come up with legislation for this housing crisis. But I think one of the things that we have to admit out loud is that there is a crisis. It is going into catastrophic atmosphere.

Rent control: I don't like that word. But I think that if you sit down and talk to some of these landlords that I've spoken to, they actually are in favour of something that is fair. The real estate agents that I've spoken to are saying: just tell me what it is. Even the real estate market is in chaos out there because they don't know what to do. If this bill passes, it will go back to April 24. They're saying: "You know what? We almost don't care. Just tell us. Just make the rules." We have to stand up and be counted. That's what we're getting paid for.

I think that I will stop there, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

5:40

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My colleague from Lethbridge-East talked a lot in her speech about secondary suites. We know, of course, that secondary suites are a potential solution or at least a part of the solution to the current housing crisis. However, one of the concerns that I have – and I've had others express it to me as well – is that there are currently an awful lot of secondary suites that are operating illegally. My concern is that there may not be as much potential for secondary suites as is suggested by the government because, in fact, a lot of those are already operating. We just don't know about it. They're not legitimate, as it were, right now. So my question for my colleague would be whether or not she has the same concern, that we won't realize as many secondary suites as the government is suggesting we will because, in fact, a lot of those are already operating. We just don't know about them.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I agree totally that secondary suites can be a really good solution, but I also think there are a lot of things that have to be ironed out ahead of time. As I think I mentioned before, I really feel that a lot of the secondary suites that are illegal will have to have some kind of an incentive to be able to come forward so that the owner of the illegal, soon to be legal, secondary suite is not penalized by losing the money that they actually were getting from those secondary suites to begin with. I'm not sure how we can handle that in its entirety, but I think it's something that has to be looked at in terms of a problem with secondary suites.

Secondary suites also could really be considered in any of the new buildings that we have. We absolutely have to build. There is no question in this province that we must create more units for living. So when developers come forward, perhaps there should be an incentive for them to build a duplex that would lend itself to a secondary suite. Even fourplexes could also lend themselves to secondary suites if they were more like townhouses, up and down. Even townhouses could be secondary suites with some very creative architecturally designed units.

I think that's something else to look at. When we build these new units, perhaps create an incentive to the creative designer and architect that would create buildings that lend themselves to secondary suites, and when the secondary suite is not needed anymore, when the supply catches up with the demand, then they could be turned very easily back into one-family homes.

Thank you for that.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Yes. I just have further questions about secondary suites. It's my opinion that most Albertans are law-abiding citizens and that they would very much hesitate before building and before, you know, developing a secondary suite within their building when it's against the law. So I think that the number of suites that would become available if we were just to allow it, if we were to make sure that that opportunity was available to them, is actually higher than what we're thinking.

Ms Pastoor: Well, thank you for that. There was just a little bit of Pollyanna in there, I'm afraid. For many years I've actually done census, and let me assure you that when you do census, you find more illegal suites and more stuff that – I'm not going to go on to

that one. I've probably only got a minute. I've got great stories, but never mind. When you do census, you really do find where all of these illegal suites are, and you also find out how many places really have boarders.

I agree with the hon. member that we can look at the new developments, but if these are developed as new, then the secondary suite would automatically be recognized, and it wouldn't be illegal.

The Deputy Speaker: Back on the debate, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Normally I'd be kind of pleased to be able to speak to something like this, but this is probably one of the tougher subjects that we're debating here within the House. It's up there with the third way, or the alleged third way that was supposed to come. This is a particular thing. It doesn't matter what side of the debate you're on. There are no winners. There are no losers here. It's a tough one, and that's just the bottom line.

I recognize that if I was an apartment owner or if I was a developer, the bottom line is that I'm in a business to make money. I recognize that. I'm not in it to give out charity. That's the bottom line. But not all of them are like that, have a cut and dried attitude.

I think that if we were going to have a real impact with this Bill 34, we would have to sit down and talk with them as, apparently, the task force did. But put in a sunset clause: two years maximum. Two years does fly by quickly. It may not seem like it. You know what? Say that the sunset clause will hold you into the rent regulation. Call it a cap, whatever you want to call it. Two years. It's a short period. The boom is not going to end in two years. After that time the sunset clause is done. You can put in the rent increases. But that'll allow at least time for the \$285 million to try and catch up to the market. But I'll get back to that amount.

I think the \$285 million is going to be short from the amount that we'd like to see. We were hoping for I think it was a number of about 10,000 units. But if you even look at the cost of building a high school, and we're talking about trying to put in living quarters for people, we're going to have to do some juggling of some numbers because the economy is on fire. The cost has gone up. You're not going to be able to make 10,000 units for \$285 million. I don't see it. I mean, I don't know what kind of conditions we're hoping these people to be able to live in, but they've got to be reasonable conditions here.

But getting back to the sunset clause, I think that if you put it to the owners in that sort of context, that it's guaranteed that it's going to be short lived, that it's a two-year period, then you can let them decide after that whether they want to, you know, put in 100 per cent increases, 700, 500. We're hearing all the stories right now. Right now this bill is saying: one year. Don't put anything in for one year. But it doesn't regulate as to how much that increase can be. So, really, it's still open, and there's no protection for the renters whatsoever. They know that they can't have anything for one year. Well, you know what? For some it's coming up right away, or it's month to month.

The bottom line is that this bill does not provide anything that they were hoping for. If they did put any sort of a cap or a 10 per cent guideline on here, that's again going into the regulations or into the caps. The committee was supporting it, but that's what the government and their members during the convention have said: "Absolutely no way. We don't want anything like that. Let the market prevail." So it's not going to meet the needs of the renters.

I've got a unique area, an old area which is at least, you know, 50, 60 years old, and I've got it stretched right to the new area, which is

newly developing. New lots are still springing up, and houses are still breaking ground. There's a big disparity between the haves and the have-nots. In the old areas of Killarney or Glengarry you have basementless homes, and at one point they were going for \$90,000. It's basementless. It's just about a thousand square feet, if that. But now, you know, with the market switching the way it has, to be able purchase, that same place has gone up to \$200,000 to \$250,000. It's not worth it, but that's what supply and demand is getting for it. At the other end of the spectrum you've got \$700,000 to a million dollars for some places.

Caught in the middle are the renters. I've got a lot of rental properties along, like, the north end, up into Castle Downs, up towards Manning. The whole north end. There are a lot of rental properties scattered. I hear people, and I see them. They come into my office, and the stories are heart wrenching, absolutely heart wrenching. You've got seniors there that are on a fixed income. Whether they're on disability, whether they're on their pension, whether they're on AISH, they're on a fixed income. They look, you know, below the cupboard underneath the plumbing, and there's a hole in the wall. They can talk to the other neighbour and exchange horror stories as to what the rent is going to be.

I'm hearing these particular incidents. They're now getting the increase, and it's going to be at \$1,050. They said: "There's no way that I can make \$1,050 on my income. What am I supposed to do?" There's a temporary rate regulation going in. It doesn't matter. There's \$7 million for interim funding for people being evicted. That's for two months. In the meantime it may take two, three, four months to be able to find something that's affordable.

Even seniors. They're the newest group that's going to be going out there, leaving their homes, trying to find something that they don't have any maintenance on. Those have got a two- and three-year waiting list on them, so I'm thinking that I've almost got to put my name in right now if I'm going to be able to find something at seniors'. I mean, there might be hope for something for the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, but, you know, right now I've got a long way to wait before something's available for myself.

5:50

An Hon. Member: Are you going to take that, Ray?

Mr. Bonko: I'm thinking about you. You're always asking: am I thinking about you? I'm thinking about you.

Mr. Martin: I appreciate that.

Mr. Bonko: Again, you've got some buildings — my son just recently moved: \$700 and it's a small bachelor suite. It provides power, water, and utilities, but it's \$700. It's not very fancy, but it's a roof over his head. He's excited about that particular point. But the building right behind him suddenly now went up for sale, and they're converting them to condos. Now, that particular thing could happen to him, and he is nowhere near the position to be able to buy at \$154,000 for the starter to \$164,000 to \$174,000. Those are the increments.

Well, you mean this to be beneficial to the people that are in there right now, but people are going to buy those, and they're going to turn around. They've got to cover the mortgage. They're going to have to ask at least \$1,000 when other people there probably aren't paying \$1,000. They're going to have to ask at least \$1,000, and then you pay condo fees on top of it. So when the whole thing rounds out, you're going to be at least at \$1,400 to \$1,500 for the same place you maybe were paying \$800 for.

So this begs the question: at what point does this bill serve to

protect anybody? The condo conversions can still happen. You're still going to be saddled with an unmanageable debt: 50 per cent of a person's income, 60 per cent, 70 per cent. It's just not reasonable. I mean, we're wanting people to have a quality of life. For the longest time the catchphrase here was, you know, the Alberta advantage: "Come to the advantage. Have the advantage. Share, eat, breathe, live, work it. It's going to be here for you."

An Hon. Member: Now it's the price of prosperity.

Mr. Bonko: Well, yeah. They call it the price of prosperity, but now we're hearing that this is a disadvantage. The military: we're hearing the stories. A lot of people are perhaps getting posted here or are potentially going to get posted in Alberta. They don't want to. You know, I'm not trying to plague on that one, but it's an example that we have. People that are serving afar and abroad don't want to come to Alberta. I'm hearing stories that people are going to hand in their resignations if, in fact, they have to come here because there is just nothing affordable. Myself, if I was forced to buy something right now, I couldn't buy the same home I'm living in right now, not at, you know, almost \$500,000, half a million dollars. I couldn't do that. It's just unthinkable.

Then when you have the development that's going to take place in the northeast section of the city, in the neighbouring areas like Fort Saskatchewan, you're going to have that upgrader alley. That's going to further impact the north, northeast, north-central areas. They're going to add at least another \$100,000, \$200,000 because of just the proximity to all that work. You're going to have people coming over and just buying it right now because they want a place to live.

Getting to something that we could do right now – you need to change it to have instant suites right now – is change the Municipal Government Act to allow a little bit of regulation-changing for the basement suites. We were just talking about that. I mean, basement suites go on right now. People are talking about it: "Oh, all Albertans are honest. They wouldn't do that." I think some people are of the opinion: "Oh, it's on my property. It's on my land. It's my business. Mind your own." A lot of people are like that too: "What takes place on my side of the fence shouldn't concern you. If I'm subletting my place or I'm supplementing my mortgage, that's my problem. It shouldn't bother you."

In some cases – and I know it happens – they're purchasing a \$300,000, \$400,000, \$500,000 home, and you have two and three families in there. That's the way they're making it. Is that called sublet? You're subletting to your family. You know, you can say absolutely not, but they're taking up the space, and they're all pitching in to make that mortgage. That mortgage is \$2,500, \$3,000. Now, with a two-income person they might be able to do that. For how long? That's the big question. But when you get three and four families doing that in there, they're able to make it. That's considered, I would say, the same thing as a basement suite. Is it legal?

An Hon. Member: Is it safe?

Mr. Bonko: Well, is it safe as well? But, I mean, they're making it, and they're not complaining. They've got a roof over their head. That's the whole thing. So if we were going to do something like this, we could have brought in a complementary one under the Municipal Government Act to allow the municipalities to have this easement here. They said: well, they have the ability right now. I don't know. There need to be some changes here. Everything may not be exactly up to code: I'm not going to go put another \$25,000 into my place to cut in a separate entrance, to install another furnace,

to install any more windows. That's the whole thing. People won't do that.

So are we saying, you know: live in there, and take your chance? Well, people right now are taking their chances. Some of the positions that people are in aren't great. I know people that are renting storage units. I shouldn't say that I know them; I hear stories. That's right: storage units. They're inside. They're out of the elements. They're heated. They have running water. They're very, very small. But you know what? For \$300 or \$400 they've got a roof over their head. These are the people that are the working poor. It may not be pretty, but it's working for them right now at this time.

Mr. R. Miller: But it's not a home.

Mr. Bonko: No, it's not a home. But you know what? A roof over your head is not a home. A shed is not a home. People in a tent city, that they had up on the Fort Road only a few months ago: they endured the entire winter, and it was a bloody awful one. There was a lot of snow, colder than we've been used to. They were out there, and they endured it.

An Hon. Member: Tell them about south Edmonton.

Mr. Bonko: Well, in south Edmonton, I know, just outside of Freedom Ford there's a guy living in his van right on the street. Just to the west of it there's a guy living in his tent. Now, the owner is very kind, and he's not calling on it. But he does feel sympathetic to the people that are out there right now. This is going to be a growing, growing concern.

You've got a little park there. It's Rainbow Valley park in Edmonton. As soon as it's ready to open, you're going to have the people camping in the river valley as well as that park. Is that acceptable? I don't think so. That's not a long-term solution. Not at all. I mean, this is just Edmonton. I haven't even brought the whole thing with the rest of the province. You know, you've got McMurray. You've got Grande Prairie. You've got everywhere else in a province that does have its hot spots, but the bottom line is that this bill in the short term isn't going to fix that particular problem.

We need a long-term, viable solution or at least to be able to have the market catch up. The \$285 million is in no way going to be able to accommodate the needs that we have coming in here. We have people flooding in here on a monthly basis, thousands and thousands of people, and we're expected to take care of them as well as the people here in Alberta a long time. We had yesterday the Sexsmith man, who is a veteran that was up talking to the minister of the treasury as well as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. That's a story. How do you tell that man, "I understand. I have a roof over my head, but – you know what? – I understand"?

There are people who have disabilities. They definitely need unique housing situations. They need to have elevators. They need to have that ability to get up and down. Other people with cerebral palsy or MS are here. They are not able to make the stairs. They need something that is perhaps one storey, but they've got to have the affordable housing. They've got to have something that's got the elevators or the ability to deal with the people who are on disability. You're going to have more and more of those people because they're not working on a regular basis, and a lot of these people don't have the ability to supplement their income because it's clawed back.

If we had something, perhaps, in there so that they would be able to earn a little bit more, but that money would go into an account. How do you control that? I'm not sure, but you've got to be able to give a little bit of flexibility here for these people who definitely

need it. Right now under this bill it isn't there, and that's exactly why I couldn't support it. It doesn't work. It's not going to work. It's just a government exercise. They've gone through the task force, and this is their way of coming up with a solution that's going to be able to balance the needs. But it does not balance it. In fact, it's going to continue to worsen. The compound situation is out there, and it's not getting any better.

We had people from Rwanda here yesterday. We have new immigrants coming in all the time, and they're caught in the opportunity here that's the price of prosperity. Well, you know what? That's unfortunate, but if that's the answer we're giving to the people, that's the answer given. Yeah. The economy is on fire. There's good, and there's bad. You don't often hear about all the good stories because – you know what? – that's what the newspaper doesn't report on. They only report: if it bleeds, it reads.

You know, I used to be with a newspaper for a long time, and that's exactly it. You don't want to hear about all the great stories because that doesn't sell. It's the heart-wrenching stories of the woman who gets \$1,000 increase who's standing out there and can't

afford it. Those are the ones . . . [interjections] and I recognize that. Those are the ones that they're continuing to highlight and sensationalize. In a way it is sensationalism, but it's reality.

An Hon. Member: They're real people.

Mr. Bonko: They're real people, and those are the ones that are getting the real attention right now. I had Peter Tyleman, who came in yesterday. He's a veteran. He's 55. He figured that he'd have the Freedom 55. He's lived in the Lake District for a number of years, and he was thinking that he'd be able to retire. Well, now that place that he's in is going to be in condo conversions.

The Deputy Speaker: The Assembly stands adjourned until 8 p.m. I'd just like to remind all members who have guests with the Forum for Young Albertans to join them for supper at the Leg. cafeteria.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 9, 2007**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/09

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 34

Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

[Debate adjourned May 9: Mr. Bonko speaking]

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

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to be able to stand up and address the Legislature this evening on Bill 34.

The thing that I really want to address more than anything tonight, Mr. Speaker, is more the philosophy of it. We've debated lots of different probabilities, and the one that I guess we're rehashing over and over again is to put in this temporary cap. I need to speak against this cap. I know that the amendments are going to come forward to do it, and there's been lots of debate on it. The reason why – and that disturbs me the most – is that it's always easy to say that we're going to put in a temporary cap, but once it's in place, you've set the precedent, and when the precedent has been set, that is an ongoing problem that you live with for the next 20 years. And we're never going to know when the government is going to waiver again at the pressure.

But the real question is that after one year or two years, as those are the two numbers that are most prevalent out there, we could be in a real dilemma because we still might not have enough housing. Then what do we do? The people counted on the cap the first time, and now the pendulum has swung further. It's going to be a bigger watershed moment, and more people are going to be hurt. As painful as it is, I still would argue and go along with the Premier in the fact that our problem is that Alberta is the place that people want to be. People are moving here by the thousands, and that's causing the dilemma on where we put up the houses.

So the first thing, like I said, that I really want to stress the most is that we don't consider a cap because once we've done that, we've set the precedent. The waivers go through the investment market, and it's just not in the best interest of Alberta in the long term, and it's certainly not in the best interest of renters, who we are wanting to help and protect here.

I wanted to go over a few of the other comments. In going back, you know, what is the real problem, and why are we faced with this shortage? As I mentioned, to me it's the Alberta opportunity. People are coming here from all over the country, all over the world, wanting to be here. I had asked the questions for those people who want caps. Well, then, why don't we just cap the number of people that can come to Alberta and say that we won't recognize anybody else to come here? We understand that that goes against our Constitution, and there have been limits put on in the current time.

Mr. Martin: Firewall.

Mr. Hinman: I don't see him. He's missing.

I also want to address the extra suite, the granny suite, the grandfather suite, and what are we going to do there? There have been many ideas, and I was disappointed to hear that Fort McMurray has passed legislation saying: only so many people in a unit.

The problem that we're really dealing with in many of the communities is the extra vehicles that come in. Edmonton has already done that in different residential areas because we do have a lot of extra suites because of the university, and it's a simple way to address it by putting parking permits on those different streets. You could allow two permits if the street room is there per house, and people know when they go in there that that's all that there's going to be. There is no car parking spot unless they're going to park on their own lot.

So I would really like to see the rules and regulations eliminated on whether you call them secondary suites or on the number of people that live in the house. I find it very ironic that a family with 10 kids is allowed to set up house and live there, yet if 10 university students wanted to go in there, are we going to pass legislation that prohibits them from sitting in there?

Again, government rules, government regulations are upsetting the market and magnifying the problem. So I would encourage the government to continue looking at that and urging municipalities to eliminate this desire to take census and to put quotas, put caps, put numbers on those areas.

The other thing that I'd like to mention and speak a little bit about is the fact that what we need, in the evaluation that I've done, is higher density population and that if we were to take the approach as the provincial government and tell some of these municipalities that if you were to allow these condos, these high-rise apartments to come in, we would actually pay the property tax for the first five years, perhaps, on a structure. Maybe if the communities would waive just the incentive and, say, the first five years of any high-rise apartments or sixplexes or what have you, the investment people would jump in to take that opportunity. Just like they did with the oil sands when they realized that they could use their capital to have a long-term project, they'd jump in there. But what we really want to do is to kick-start the housing economy and to have some way that the initiative is there.

Another area that we've been looking at – and it's interesting to talk to people – is the urban sprawl and to see the way that it continues to go out further and further. Maybe we should be looking at a tax, that the further you are from the centre and the more congested the roads are becoming, maybe that's where the higher taxes should be. I'm a firm believer that in these new subdivisions that are going up, the full cost should be paid by those subdivisions because as that cost goes up, all of a sudden you look at it and you realize that the costs are much more economical.

The good Member for Battle River-Wainwright talked about the cost of putting a trench in, you know. It's static, yet the size of the pipe is a nominal amount, and it's very easy for us to service in different areas of the city where we have the capacity to increase the density. We should be looking at that and helping municipalities and encouraging them to do whatever they can to get the higher density population.

It's the same if we're to have the different bus routes or the rapid transit, whatever we're going to have in our different communities, to realize that we can set up and want to have a good system where people can move back and forth. There's an incredible amount of work that's been done in North America on sustainable communities and seeing that there's the business section there, that the schools are there. They're subcommunities, yet they're a community unto their own. Those are other areas where we should and could be looking at giving the proper tax benefits to set up a sustainable community that's going to actually enhance the quality of life for our families and those that are in it.

Again, I want to talk about the sunset clauses that are being mentioned so many times. I think there's appropriation for sunset

clauses. For example, if we're going to give a concession for five years on the property tax, that should be a five-year sunset clause, and every year we should look at it and re-evaluate it and say: well, is this something that we only want for five more years? But the notice is there, and the builders know that it's five years, and when you quit, they know that time frame. But to just be able to put these clauses in, you know, this week, not next week, and not knowing the sustainability, sunset clauses are very important, especially if we're going to give tax concessions so that people will decide to put their money into an investment and know that it's there.

The other area that a lot of people have talked about is the actual benefit that if these people want to put up a low-cost housing, we should really evaluate how we are going to tax those areas. It is all about economics. We can't think we're going to tax an area, much like our basic tax exemption – we understand that those people can't make ends meet. So if the municipalities could somehow look at having those basic tax exemptions on those areas, and perhaps again maybe the provincial government needs to put some incentives in place to get them to do it. But there are many innovative ways that we could and should be looking at in order to enhance our housing. The last thing we want to do is to put in more rules, more regulations, more caps, and to put that through the investment community, especially in homes, to say: "You know, it's just not worth it. We don't know what these guys are going to do." That's the part that we want to avoid the most.

I guess my last and final point that I want to make is that I've known several individuals that have moved to different communities. I know of two that went up to Grande Prairie on January 2, 2003. They went up there with a pickup truck and a camper on the back, in minus 40 weather, and they survived two months, and they brag about it. It's one of those achievements now in their lives. Much like the settlers who came to this country a hundred years ago, they didn't come in here expecting the government to give them a house. Many of them dug into the riverbank, only to be flooded out the next spring, to move up a little bit higher.

But the people that are moving here to Alberta understand that this is an opportunity. They don't always think it's going to be an easy one, but we need that free enterprise, that entrepreneurial spirit, that desire to survive where you can't survive, as in the Palliser Triangle. The challenge was out that this is not habitable, yet we achieved it. [interjection] That's the Palliser Triangle.

8:10

We can and we will survive, but government's job is to realize that we're civilized. With Fort McMurray I felt when I went up there two years ago that if the government was to open up 1,280 acres like they did in the early days and say: "You know, there are five-acre plots here. Come up; set up, whether it's your tent, camper, what have you" – they don't expect anything other than a place to put their piece of property on and protect it.

Then our job is to make sure that we have the policing, that there isn't any looting, that there isn't any pillaging. We can keep it civilized. It's a matter of having the proper policing authorities to be there, and people can set up and know that they're there, and we'll get out of this.

Once again, caps are not the right way to go. It's going to be interesting as the evening goes on. We'll see how the amendments come forward and what happens. I appreciate the time, and I'll let the next member get up and share their two bits' worth.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Shall I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill for a question?

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm curious. When the hon. member was doing his debate, he put out a number of different suggestions, one of which was to charge the outer suburbs in the cities more taxes than the inner cities. I'm just kind of curious if he's going on the record and stating that, in fact, he doesn't believe in market value assessment. I'm wondering how he plans on justifying the extra taxes when, indeed, those new suburbs don't come equipped with fire halls, police stations, schools, or even hospitals, and he expects them to pay more. I'm really wondering where his reasoning is coming from.

Mr. Hinman: That's an excellent question, and I'm happy to expound on that a little bit. When I say increasing the taxes, that of course would be for full services. We have a lot of bedroom communities, and with the continued contention, especially here in the capital, on who's paying for what infrastructure, I'm a firm believer in pay-as-you-go.

If they want to set up and they're a long ways and we have to change our pipeline from a six-inch to a 12-inch and it's going to cost us \$3 million to put that pipeline out there, I don't believe that the old citizens should have to cover that cost of that new area. If that's the cost of development, then the full pay should be there. [interjection] Oh, I'll get to it. You asked several questions there, hon. member. So if you have the full cost involved, then all of a sudden it looks like – you know what? – it's cheaper for us to develop high-rise apartments here, and you don't have the urban sprawl.

Market value assessment. You asked on that. It's something we're still doing a lot of research on. If I was to point a finger today on what I've found so far, I think that's inflationary. I think that it's caused some of the problems, and we'd be far better off if we'd not gone to that, but we'll continue going down that. That's what we're debating tonight, market value assessment, but I'm not a fan of that. I hope that answered your questions.

The Speaker: Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General, do you want to participate in the question portion? Proceed.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to thank the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner for his insight into the Conservative approach to addressing the rental unit shortage. I thank him for supporting Bill 34. But I got the impression that his philosophy kind of changed a little bit there when he spoke about new subdivisions and giving property tax breaks for up to five years on a new subdivision. I just wondered if he could maybe comment on that. It seemed like a different view on that type of situation.

Mr. Hinman: I appreciate the question, and, yes, it's always hard. Sometimes we're not as clear as we want in our words. No, what I was looking at: it's the same as the oil sands. We wouldn't have the development we have today if we didn't give those tax concessions to become economically viable for those companies to come in. It's the same with high-rise apartments and those things. If we were to look at it in the inner core and areas where we want them and say that we're going to waive the property tax for five years, it will actually be a windfall situation, just as we are with the oil sands. The revenue that's going to continue to come in, because those facilities are there and they've got their capital paid off, will be a benefit. It would be the same with high-rise apartments, that after five years we would leapfrog ahead, and it would be a benefit to the community.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated hearing part of the speech of the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. I listened with interest to his discourse on the role that government might play. I wonder if he sees a role for government beyond merely the prevention of looting and plundering.

Mr. Hinman: Well, the reason I brought that up, hon. member, is because many people are afraid to move into these new areas because that policing isn't there. The reason why we come together and form government is for safety and security. I believe that's the first role of government, to ensure that pillaging and plundering doesn't go on.

Gouging isn't part of that. It's the free market, you know, that other people will come in. I think that we can actually address the gouging. If we didn't have market value assessment but actually had purchase price assessment, that if, in fact, a condo owner wanted to raise that, and once it was raised, immediately that was the new purchase price, all of a sudden their property value assessment would go through the roof. They would consider that. But when you have market value assessment, someone can raise it up there, yet it's distributed amongst the other ones, so he gets that advantage. But immediately if he changes rent from \$500 to \$2,500, a fivefold increase, that new purchase price or rental price would reflect in his property tax, and it would be a disincentive to say: oh, maybe I better rethink this.

The Speaker: Well, alas, we've now expired that segment of our agenda.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 34, Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. The object of Bill 34 is to amend the Residential Tenancies Act and the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act. The main substantive amendments are to modify the notice period set out in the acts to allow for only one rent increase per year. The bill applies to both periodic, month-to-month, and fixed-term tenancies. Three months' notice will still be required before increasing rent on periodic tenancies.

This bill doesn't say anything about rent control. This bill doesn't say anything about the cap. One year's notice must be provided before ending a periodic tenancy for the purpose of converting a rental unit to a condominium or undertaking major renovations to a rental unit. No rent increases will be allowed during that one-year period. The notice for converting a mobile home site to a condominium unit or for other uses continues to be one year. The changes are retroactive to April 24, 2007, and there is a punitive clause also included to apply a \$5,000 fine per tenant for any landlord that violates the legislation.

While these amendments make changes limiting the terms for rent increases to one . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, sorry. Please sit down. We're in second reading of the bill, dealing with principles of the bill. We have no amendments before the House. The chair is having a difficult time following the debate. There are no amendments before the House.

Mr. Agnihotri: Okay. That's fine.

Mr. Speaker, my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie is a diverse riding: lots of immigrants, seniors, people living on fixed incomes, low-income people, artists. They all are facing a very serious problem. This bill does not provide any comfort for them.

Basic economics, Mr. Speaker, in this bill, you know, is the law

of demand and supply. It's very simple economics. When we have less supply, the higher the rent, the higher the prices of houses. If we have more supply, low prices of houses and less rent. A long-term solution for this critical issue is that we need more supply. Most people agree that short-term relief is needed, and the sooner the better.

8:20

Many of the landlords, Mr. Speaker, are good people. They are very co-operative, very reasonable. We are not against them, but when I talk to some of the people, they are saying openly that they oppose this bill because it's not protecting the majority of the tenants if this bill passes. You know, the condition of the apartments, their properties, will deteriorate very soon if this bill continues. Some people are taking advantage of the hot market, and they charge too much rent. This is not good news.

First of all, I want to talk about the all-party task force. The government established a task force, and out of 50 recommendations they only accepted 38. Most of them they ignored. I just want to say that if we ignore the majority of the recommendations of the task force, we spent lots of money and time on the task force. Some members were part of the task force, and they spent a lot of time. You know, if they don't implement all the recommendations, it's a waste of time, a waste of money, hard-earned taxpayers' money.

I think the more time we take, the situation will deteriorate and the problems on this issue will rise. I think the government should right away consider temporary measures. I mean, I'm not saying, exactly, that it's because of the party on the other side, their ideology. Maybe personally I believe that free enterprise should flourish in our province. But sometimes when the situation is worse, it keeps on getting worse because of the lack of policies from the present government.

Another thing I want to mention in this policy, Mr. Speaker, is subsidized homes. You know, I've been all over, especially in Europe. Every year all the civic, provincial, and the federal governments have a plan. They build some subsidized homes for the low-income people. I don't see that planning here in Alberta, even though we are one of the richest provinces.

Actually, last year two women came to my constituency office. One of them was a widow, and the other was permanently disabled. They were crying. Their children had kicked them out. I tried to reach Capital Region Housing, and they told me, frankly, you know, that the waiting list there is two and a half years and they can't help. In that situation I don't know if the children kicked their parents out. Relatives sometimes can't afford to help them. I mean, for a short time, maybe a week, two weeks, they can help, but if it's more than a month, it's very difficult for them. The waiting time in my constituency is about two and a half years now. This is not acceptable to my constituents, and it's not acceptable to average people in Alberta. We should do something about this.

I think that the civic government as well as the provincial and the federal governments, all three forms of government, should sit down and plan accordingly for the future, 10 years, 15 years, and they should build some subsidized homes. This is very important. I mean, even though we build some houses here, affordable homes, it's not going to solve the problem for the long term. I'm sure that the way the economy is going in Alberta, we'll need more and more homes in the future, and we should be prepared right now. This is the time for proper planning, and if we make the planning right now – I know that we are late already, very late. This government could have planned about three years ago and had at least 1,000, 1,500 houses already built by this time. Now people are suffering because of the lack of the government's long-term policies on housing.

Mr. Speaker, another thing I want to mention. There are lots of people in Alberta – not only in Alberta, maybe all over Canada – ready to help in the construction of new homes for needy people, for people who don't have that much income. They are good people, and they are always ready. I'm proud to say that in Canada we have 3 million people volunteering.

Rev. Abbott: Three point three million.

Mr. Agnihotri: Sorry, 3.3 million. Maybe 3.5 million now because a hundred thousand people already arrived in Alberta. The population is increasing, so are the volunteers in Canada. We all should be proud of that. They are ready to help those people. Good people want to come forward. In this Bill 34 I don't see anything like that, how we can use their expertise. Some are tradespeople, some can help financially. It doesn't talk about this in this bill. They are ready to help. How can we approach them? You know, this is something we should consider very seriously and bring them forward. They are ready to help. What they need is just the right approach.

Mr. Speaker, another thing I want to mention. Every time we ask the question to the minister concerned, he says that we have \$285 million dollars. The way the trend is going, more and more people are becoming homeless. Maybe that \$285 million is not enough. We should be ready for that. I ask the government to make a note in case that money runs out. We should plan right now because it's very important. Lots of people are in a really critical situation.

Mr. Speaker, I think some points in Bill 34 are good. I mean, I commend. But what I find is that this bill is still not doing what needs to be done. In this bill there's still not a vision, not a good understanding. Economically, especially, there's a lack of a few things. That's one of the reasons I'm not going to support this bill, especially the conversion of buildings into condos. Like everybody is saying, one year's notice should be given to the tenants when they convert the buildings into condos, but it's really hard for the tenants even if it's one year because life is so busy. You know, it's not hard to find suitable accommodation at this time of the year, especially for people who are disabled, who are earning less money, who are less fortunate, people on AISH, PDD. We should definitely have some programs. Some money should be allocated for them to make sure, you know, that they can live their life happily. If we can't do something for them, who else can? We are the best province in Canada. We can afford that. So this is the time.

8:30

If we had a proper vision, if we had had a proper policy about 10, 15 years ago, we wouldn't have problems like this. Some people agree with me. You know, even the former Premier admitted before he left: we never had a policy on surplus revenue. They were not expecting a boom like this. This is not a good sign for a province like ours.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you have a question?

Mr. Chase: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker, of my colleague. I would like to get a sense of Edmonton-Ellerslie. I mentioned in second reading this afternoon that Calgary-Varsity was an established area with a number of apartments, fourplexes, duplexes, single-family homes. In Calgary-Varsity there have not been any affordable housing or new apartment complexes built. I'm just wondering: given the boom, in Edmonton-Ellerslie have you seen any kind of affordable

housing projects, any new apartments being built that persons at the lower end of the scale could afford?

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, do you wish to participate?

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for asking me the question. No, we don't have any development going on for affordable homes. Actually, lots of people are calling me and sending me e-mails. You know, most of the time their questions are about – I think the majority of the MLAs sitting here don't know the full details of the plan. People are asking me: "On which sites are they building the housing? How big will the affordable housing be? How much of an initial deposit will we make? If we make the initial deposit, maybe the government will give us a loan or something." We don't know anything. Sometimes I feel helpless answering my constituents. The government is talking about affordable homes, and the majority of the members don't have the answers. This is what I have to say.

Mr. Speaker, if you allow me, I want to mention that a rent cap is also disturbing news for my constituents. They are saying that if they require a one-year notice for moving from one place, the landlord has the right to increase the rent, and there's no cap. The cap is a big problem for them. I mean, the landlord can increase the rent maybe 100 per cent, 200 per cent. Nobody is sure, and they are worried, and we should look at that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't help but notice that the hon. member seems to be saying "um" a lot, and it almost seems like it's some kind of a Liberal filibuster here. This is very important legislation that we're trying to get through to help people who are in the rental market.

In the beginning of his speech the hon. Liberal backbencher mentioned that there were landlords that were in favour of rent controls. I'm wondering, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Liberal backbencher could just table some of those documents from landlords who are in favour of rent controls or if he could maybe elaborate and be specific on some of those people because I'm really having doubts that he has some factual information there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie can respond if he chooses to.

Mr. Agnihotri: Yes, definitely. You know, I will ask the people I talked to, the stakeholders, to give me in writing what they believe. Then I definitely will table those letters here.

One thing more I want to tell the hon. member. Maybe the PC government has backbenchers; we don't. We don't. We are more aggressive, and we have more opportunity to speak here than 99 per cent of the PC MLAs sitting on the backbenches or the front benches.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, and I appreciate the opportunity to ask a question of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. He was talking about the former Premier's admission that there wasn't really a plan with respect to how to accommodate the growth in the province. As we know, this has caused a great deal of chaos and

suffering in the province. I was just wondering if the hon. member would care to elaborate on that.

The Speaker: I'm sure the hon. member would. Unfortunately, time has left us.

I'm prepared to do some rotation in here, but do I see another member? Then we're going to go to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I speak in second reading. It gives me an opportunity to reflect on the significance of this bill in light of the issue of rental housing in Alberta. If this Bill 34, Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, is meant to respond to the government task force report on affordable housing, which is entitled Housing First, it's weak. I mean, it only responds to one item among the task force recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, you know, before we even began our work as a task force, we collected information, statistics about the situation of housing in Alberta, and of course we depended on members of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing to provide many of the statistics. The statistics were quite startling. Alberta had a 10.4 per cent increase in total population since 2001, double the national average, and many people have referred to that.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So many people are coming to Alberta, which puts a lot of pressure on our housing situation. The strong economy has helped spur migration to the province, which contributes to a rental vacancy rate of about .9 per cent, the lowest in a generation. With so many people coming looking for jobs, it's too much for the limited inventory of housing that we have.

You know, I don't understand how the different programs jibe with each other. The Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry is apparently communicating with the federal government to establish a new agreement in terms of getting more immigrants to come to Alberta because there are so many jobs. Yet we don't have the housing, and there's no integration, and there's no overall systematic plan.

According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation the two highest rent increases in Canada last year were in Calgary and Edmonton: in Calgary 19.5 per cent and in Edmonton 9.9 per cent, well above the national average increase of 2.4 per cent. So rent increases are just overwhelming.

We hear so many stories from people. I'm sure all of our constituency offices throughout Alberta have been receiving e-mails and phone calls and people coming into our office to complain about the tremendous increase in rents. It's very sad to hear a lot of the stories. There was a group here today who were in the public gallery. They met afterwards with some members of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and they went around the table and shared their stories. It's just very upsetting to hear such heart-rending stories of suffering.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, actually, you know, we talk about the homeless, and there are plenty of homeless people in Edmonton and Calgary and Fort McMurray and other places, but there's a new category that's emerging. We should call it the nearly homeless: those who are one rent increase away from not being able to afford to stay in their apartment. Suddenly there's a new category: the near homeless. I think we should have a response on the part of the government that's going to be much greater in dealing with the crisis than what we have here in this bill.

Now, just to go on. A recent Royal Bank of Canada report indicated that home prices rose 50 to 60 per cent in Calgary last year and close to 40 per cent in Edmonton. Actually, in Edmonton it was almost 50 per cent last year, and in the first few months of this year, 2007, it's up another 16 per cent. There are just so many pressures on housing. People just can't afford rents. They don't have enough money to save to buy any homes, and homes have gone up so far in price. What can they possibly do?

I think that as a task force we were very much concerned about people moving through the housing continuum from emergency housing to transitional housing to social housing to affordable housing, but what we're seeing too much of in Alberta is a reverse flow, that people are going the other way. They can't afford the high increase in rents, so they are the nearly homeless. They are one rent increase away from losing their apartments, and where are they going to go?

Mr. Speaker, with those statistics, which were quite startling, the task force then went on the road to listen to people all through Alberta. We heard the same stories everywhere. Relevant to this bill in terms of the issue of rent increases, we heard the same stories whether we went to Fort McMurray or Hinton or Elk Point or Medicine Hat or Calgary, Lethbridge, Edmonton. We heard the same story over and over again, that people don't have enough income to be able to handle the huge increases in rent. Low-income families, people receiving social assistance: it's quite tragic that people just don't have enough money to be able to handle the huge rents.

Having heard all the stories, then we're faced with: well, what should we do? What would be a proper, sensible solution, response to this crisis that we're experiencing in Alberta? We wanted to take a systematic approach, looking at all aspects, not just one, looking at the whole housing continuum and looking at all the possible solutions and putting it all together in an integrated way and saying: "Okay. If the government is serious about dealing with the crisis, then they should respond to all the recommendations that we've made."

Now, the government has responded to some of them and has put a considerable amount of money into things like emergency shelters, and they keep talking about \$285 million for affordable housing. That actually is only half of what we asked for. We wanted \$480 million for affordable housing over the next few years because to build 10,000, 11,000, 12,000 units at approximately \$200,000 a unit, we need a lot more money than the government is deciding to put into it.

But when we come to the specific issue of rents, we thought that there should be a mixture of sticks and carrots. There should be regulations that would be put into effect to kind of manage the rental situation but also carrots, incentives, especially to encourage the building of more affordable housing, more rental accommodation. I thought that our proposal was something that was quite reasonable. Not just insisting that landlords not be able to increase their rent for a year: that was only one part of what we wanted to suggest. We called it rent stability guidelines. One aspect is controlling how often rent increases should be made, but we also included a cap, a guideline that would keep the increases to a certain level; namely, the level we suggested in the task force was CPI plus 2 per cent.

Also, we would allow owners to apply for an increase over the annual guidelines to recover actual costs; for example, if a landlord had special needs in terms of repairing buildings. A lot of our rental accommodation is in bad shape, and landlords need to catch up, so that might be something where an increase over the cap would be allowed to allow that to happen. I think what we need in Alberta is

a whole way of managing this through some sort of board that landlords could appeal to to ask for a waiver of the cap in their specific cases. We have those kinds of regulative boards in other sectors of our economy. Why not this sector?

It's not a question of intervening or not intervening in the economy. It's a question of how we manage the economy. I think that what the task force recommended was a nice package, so it's a puzzle to me that the government responds by only taking one specific item out of the package of recommendations that were made and makes that into a government bill. I think it's going to cause all kinds of problems because without some sort of cap on the amount that a landlord can raise the rent, what's going to happen a year from now? So there's no raising of rents for one year. Then after a year they're free to raise the rent as far as they can. Well, we're going to have a huge crisis a year from now, and a lot of people are just not going to be able to manage. Again, it's going to stimulate a reverse flow of people going the wrong way on the housing continuum.

Mr. Speaker, we want people to move towards independence and self-reliance. You know, some people choose to stay in apartments their whole life, and that is their choice. Many others, especially young families, would love to move out of apartments into being able to buy homes, but if the rent increases go up the way they've been going up, and even if we delay it one year and they skyrocket next year, young families will just not be able to have the extra money to come up with the down payment so that they can move into market housing. So we're not encouraging people to move towards the self-reliance, the independence that we want them to have.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very disappointed that we don't have more of a solution, a broader array of sticks and carrots that are offered to deal with this huge housing crisis in Alberta. It's disappointing, you know, having done all this work for 45 days. The task force really worked hard to come up with solutions that they thought would really work given the Alberta context.

Mr. Speaker, that's all I have to say right now in second reading. I hope to return and say a few more words when we get into committee. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I assume that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity is rising under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Chase: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

8:50

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I very much appreciate the work of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora on that task force and my NDP colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. They gave up much more than just 45 days away from their families, being on the road. I appreciate that.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora pointed out the effect of bringing more people into an already overheated economy. I wondered if you could elaborate on what you see as the social and economic impacts of not addressing the affordable housing crisis that is occurring now.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in terms of social development what could be more important than having a home? Really, when we look at what the negative effects might be, you know, when people don't have a place that they can call home, then

there are all kinds of problems that develop from that, especially homelessness and people getting into trouble. Actually, it will cost the economy and all the services huge amounts of money if this housing issue is not dealt with. I mean, there have been studies in the States of homeless people, who were a tremendous burden on the system. It costs the system millions of dollars in terms of dealing with crime, dealing with all the support services, the health, the hospitalization, and so on. Having a policy that's going to make it possible for everybody in the province to have a home is certainly important for social development in this province.

I think we've got it all out of kilter. We go full speed ahead in terms of economic development, and social development falls behind, so we deal with a housing crisis. Somehow we have to develop policies that are integrated together so that, you know, it's not just making money from the tar sands and so on. It's also support for people so that our people are able to grow and to have a home and are able to develop.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm very well aware that prior to the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora being elected, he was a United Church minister. An analogy that's frequently used in ministerial practices is the idea of a good shepherd. Do you believe the government has a role as the symbolic shepherd, steward, or protector of the people? How do you see the government's role and responsibility?

Dr. B. Miller: You know, I think the problem with this government, Mr. Speaker, is that the ideological approach of this government is that everybody is an individual, that they should fend for themselves. Well, that doesn't work in a province where we have these kinds of huge rent increases and so on. The government has a social responsibility. In terms of the image of shepherding, that could be appropriate in terms of identifying the sense of social responsibility. Surely the government has to be concerned about the common good. You never hear that term very much, but surely housing is an issue of the common good. There has to be a greater response, I think, to the crisis that we have in the province than just this patchwork approach, which is doing a little here, a little there. We need a systematic, integrated approach to dealing with a crisis of this magnitude.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Right. I'd ask if he'd contemplate apologizing for suggesting that we're not shepherds on this side because we truly are shepherds. The suggestion that we just look out for individuals and don't care for the greater good really is simply not true. Consequently, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. member to withdraw his comments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we'll have to wait for that answer another time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is quite an evening we're having here, and I'm really pleased to be participating in this debate. This is one of the most animated nights I've actually attended in this House, and I think it's bound to get even livelier.

Bill 34, Mr. Speaker, is dealing with one important issue, that

every Albertan is thinking about. We're talking about residential tenancies. Bill 34 is called the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. And for one reason: people are concerned about the housing crisis that is going on in this province. I would argue that it is one of the most serious crises that has besieged and beleaguered this wonderful province. It is quite serious, to the extent that an announcement was made to try to deal with it, and then within two weeks a bill was tabled to try to deal with it.

Now, how serious is the issue of affordable housing or lack thereof? It is quite serious. People are talking to government MLAs, they're talking to opposition MLAs about the need for, one, affordable housing to be brought in, new affordable housing units to be built, and two, which is more important in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, protecting those who are already renting, those who are already tenants, allowing them to maintain their places of residence and, hopefully, protecting them from joining those who are on the street, those who are homeless.

I have argued in this House and outside, Mr. Speaker, that those who are at risk of becoming homeless outnumber those who are already on the street by a factor of at least 10 to 1. In Edmonton, for example, when they counted the homeless two or three months ago, they counted about, if I remember correctly, 2,500 or 2,600 people. I would argue that in this scorching hot housing market with the rents going up the way they are, 26,000 people in Edmonton are on the verge of joining those who are already on the street. So dealing with homelessness is important, but what's more important, in my opinion, is dealing with those who are just one paycheque away or one assistance cheque away from becoming homeless.

It is really fascinating in question period, for example, when members from the opposition ask questions pertaining to housing. We direct our questions to the cabinet, and some of the backbenchers, as has been referred to private members in this House, heckle and say little things across the way that they're not hearing the same concerns as the opposition is. I would say that perhaps some of them are speaking the truth. Maybe they're not hearing these concerns because, in my opinion, it tends to be a big cities' issue, and we know how heavy the current cabinet is on rural representation. So maybe they're telling the truth. Maybe they're not hearing these concerns in their rural constituencies. But I bet you that every MLA in Edmonton, Calgary, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and some of the other major centres are hearing these concerns. Lethbridge is no exception. I would say that Red Deer definitely is hearing them. We need to deal with this issue.

Now, how do we deal with this issue? How do we be fair to landlords and also to tenants? It's an issue of fairness, and I think Bill 34 does not really address this angle of fairness. Bill 34 is intended to appear to be attending to the problem. Bill 34 is designed in such a way that it actually gives the impression that the government is coming to the side or to the aid or to the rescue of renters because this is an overheated market, like I said, and the government is trying to assure people that the government is on their side.

What is Bill 34 doing? It is amending two or three minor things in the residential tenancy statutes. One is the period of notice, basically how frequently a landlord can raise rent in any given period of time, and number two, fines for breaches of those acts. That's great. Actually, I like the direction. However, I have questions that I think deserve consideration and deserve answers.

9:00

In 1998 there was a housing symposium in this province, and that was excellent because they probably had a similar situation back then, I would argue, not with the same magnitude, not with the same

gravity, but they came together, and they said: okay, let's study ways to increase supply and, you know, maintain the affordability element for those who are renters. The symposium had recommendations, as any symposium sponsored by this government does.

In 1999 the then minister of housing, who is currently the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, promised members in this House and promised members in the media that there was going to be something loosely called the apartment development board. The minister back then promised that this board would be comprised of landlords, developers, members or representatives from the provincial government, representatives from the municipal government, and also consumers; in brackets, you would say, tenants. So you would have a fair representation from all these sectors coming together to say: what is the issue at hand, how do we deal with it, and where do we go from here?

My question is: what happened to that idea? Where is that board, if in fact it actually did get established? What work came out of that board, and why hasn't that work been looked at or given attention to? I don't think the board ever saw the light of day. I think it was just luck that the government's, you know, concern during that time either went away or something happened that it didn't warrant further consideration. Now we're suffering from this lack of action six or seven years ago.

My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie briefly talked about the lack of a plan, the lack of a vision. I would probably supplement that by saying that notwithstanding the fact that any new money for housing is appreciated and, I would argue, is sometimes long overdue, simply throwing money at problems doesn't necessarily fix them. As a matter of fact, sometimes throwing money at certain problems adds to the inflationary element and makes things worse.

The other questions that I had, Mr. Speaker, have to do with what assistance is available for people who are currently renting, tenants who are already living in units. Some of them have occupied these units for decades and now risk being thrown out either because their unit is being turned into a condo or because their landlord is nervously jacking the rent so high that these people can no longer afford them. I would tell you that most of these people that we're talking about are either seniors on a fixed income or they're pensioners. They're probably, you know, even students on or near campuses in this province. We're looking at people who are on social assistance, disabled people, and on and on. So these are people who don't see their incomes really grow or increase by that much from year to year.

With a vacancy rate that is this low, if someone were to be forced to leave the apartment that he or she has occupied for so long, where do we expect them to go? There's nowhere to go. Also, the government keeps boasting about, you know, programs to assist renters, programs for subsidized housing, programs to deal with homelessness. Well, that's fine. What is the wait time? When somebody puts his or her name on that registry, the housing registry or whatever you call it, how long does it take? In question period today we heard that sometimes it takes 24 months, sometimes even longer. That's two years, Mr. Speaker. If somebody's kicked out today, where do they go in the interim?

How much is the subsidy given? Is the subsidy enough? You know, when somebody's rent goes up from \$800 to \$1,600, are we giving them \$800 in subsidy? The answer is no.

I also would like to ask: how many new rental units were added or built, say, over the last two decades? I would bet you, Mr. Speaker, that the number is very low. So the argument from the government that if we interfere in the market, if we intervene and dictate what private business does, it's going to kill all new development of affordable housing – I find that hard to swallow because

there hasn't been a lot of affordable housing units built over the last two decades, with no government interference, with no controls. So the argument doesn't stand.

When the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing promised to speak to landlords and to try to talk to them or negotiate with them or reach an agreement with them about what they should and shouldn't be doing, what is his and his government's definition of gouging? I would like to know what constitutes gouging in his book, that these would be the landlords that he would be talking firmly to.

Also, in his opinion, in his book and this government's book, what is an allowable percentage of increase? Would 10 per cent a year be allowed? Would 20 per cent be allowed? Is it okay for 30 per cent? Is it fine for 40 per cent or more? We need to know what they consider fair and what they consider reasonable.

The other thing I would like to ask, Mr. Speaker, is: shouldn't this be the time that we also talk about renters and tenants having minimum standards in the quality of their units, of their space that they live in? How big should this space be? I mean, should somebody be confined in a space that is 50 metres square, or should somebody be allowed to, you know, have three people living in a bachelor suite? What do we consider adequate? What do we consider appropriate, healthy, and, to be honest, humane? What do we consider for Albertans who are renting?

Now, I have some statistics which I tabled, Mr. Speaker, in this House. The statistics are meant to shed some light on the crisis for those members who are not aware of the gravity of this situation. One of the tablings I made was with respect to the Canadian Housing Observer report on the average rent for two-bedroom apartments, just a statistic to give you an indication, for the period '92 to '05 – that's about 13 years, so it's quite telling – detailing the Canadian average, province by province, and then the major metropolitan areas. Of note, of course, is the fact that between '92 and '05 the figure for Alberta rose from an average of \$553 to \$765, which represents an aggregate increase – that's year after year – of 38 per cent. Now, some people today are getting 40 per cent in six months.

So if average rents rose by 38 per cent over 13 years, and now people are getting 40, 50, and 60 per cent in six months, that's telling you something, and that's totally unfair. I'll use the simple Excel sheet, which I also tabled, demonstrating that the highest jump from year to year over this period was 7.43 per cent, and the average change over 13 years was 2.57 per cent. So you take the highest, 7.43, and you take the average over 13 years, 2.57. So when the Alberta Liberals recommended a 10 per cent temporary rent increase regulation to protect renters, we were not being unfair to the landlords.

The other thing I tabled, Mr. Speaker, is the Rental Market Report: Alberta Highlights released in December '06 by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The first page I tabled showed, again, vacancy rates for the two years 2005 and 2006, and the numbers show a clear decline in vacancy across the province, which dropped from an average of 3.1 per cent to .9 per cent in just one year. That is nine units out of a thousand. So when we tell people, "Okay, fine, leave the unit that has been yours for so many years because you can't afford it anymore; we wish you luck finding another one," that's a joke. Only, these people are not laughing.

The second page from that report showed that the average rental costs in the major centres in this province rose again from '05 to '06, about a 12 per cent increase, from \$694 to \$781. So clearly a sign of an overheated market.

Now, we talked about balance, trying to achieve balance between landlords and their expectations, which are fair, to make a buck, to

be profitable, to be sustainable so they can actually have a reason to maintain the property that they own and to allow people to use it as residential units. Not all landlords are bad, and not all landlords are greedy. The majority of them are reasonable, and they're fair. Few, Mr. Speaker, go above and beyond what's considered reasonable and fair, and these are the ones that legislation such as this and other things that we should be looking at in this House should be targeting.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I thought about this issue together with my caucus colleagues as far back as July and August of last year. You know how private members' bills and motions have to be submitted way in advance, even before the fall session of the prior year. So we came up with ideas that we presented, and we thought, you know, that when the time came, this government was going to be receptive because all we should care about here is the people of this province, and the housing issue should not be dealt with from a partisan point of view. So one of the things we did was come up with the idea for a consumer advocate. If you remember, Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 was defeated, unfortunately.

9:10

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is this: do you think that renters have a greater sense of stability, are better able to provide a long-term plan for themselves and for their families by knowing that their rent can only be increased once a year, regardless of what that increase is?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the answer, to be very brief, is no. People need the assurance and the guarantee and the security of knowing, you know, how much their income is going to rise by, if in fact it does, and also knowing how their expenses are going to increase over time. It's called a budget. People need to budget.

I'm actually blessed to be owning my home, and I'm really, really blessed to have actually bought my home in 1998, when the market was fair. The market was reasonable. The market was behaving, if you want. What we're suffering from now and what we're experiencing is something that is totally out of control. It is an overheated bubble that is bound to burst some time. We know that in this province we have suffered from a depression after there was, you know, a big boom and then the boom disappeared. It got frittered away. Luckily, I didn't experience this myself, but people told me how their mortgage interest rate was, like, 18 per cent or more. I hope this never happens, but who knows? History sometimes has a tendency to repeat itself.

I think people need the assurance that, yes, once a year you're going to see a notice for a rent increase, but they also need to be assured that, you know, it's not going to be 200 per cent or 250 per cent of what you're currently paying just because someone who's moving into this province from a different province or a different part of the world who's coming to work in our tar sands can afford it. They need to be assured that, okay, if it goes up, it might go up as much as inflation. Or if this landlord needs to do major renovations and stuff, this landlord might actually appear before a certain board or a certain agency, like our pilot project for the residential tenancy dispute resolution board, and say: "You know what? I can't customarily agree to a 10 per cent increase. I'm changing my boiler," or "I'm actually adding a security system or something, and I need to raise the rent by 15 per cent." The dispute resolution board

might actually have the ability and the mandate to say: "You know what? That is fair." There has to be a mechanism to accommodate those renters who might be adversely affected.

People need the guarantees and the assurances, like we do. Every Albertan budgets. I mean, theoretically, most of them do. They know how much revenue is coming in from, you know, their salaries or their wages or assistance from the government or their pension cheques, and so on. They also know how much they pay for food. They know how much they pay for utilities, and they know how much they pay for their accommodation.

So the answer to the hon. member is no. Just telling them it is only going up once a year and not telling them by how much it might be going up is totally unacceptable, and it's not fair to these people who really struggle now in this market that we're living with. Again, when members of the cabinet say: "Okay. People are moving here, and everybody's employed, and everybody's finding a home," what they're not realizing is that people are displacing people who are already here. They're taking their jobs, and they're taking their houses, their places of residence. So I think that careful consideration should be awarded. Protecting consumers should be a priority of this government.

I mentioned that Bill 202 got defeated, and I also highlight Motion 513, which is in my name, again calling for one rent increase per year. I would be very interested to see if members from this government vote against it because that's exactly what they're doing in this Bill 34, Mr. Speaker. So that will make an interesting discussion: how they vote on that one. Again, only limiting it to once a year is a half-measure. Also telling landlords, "This is what we expect you to be doing" is the other half that's missing from this picture.

Like I say, Mr. Speaker, it's an issue of balance. We need to be arriving at this balance, not taking sides. Allowing landlords to raise rents with no maximum and no limit is not fair, and if we allow them to, as this government seems to be advocating, then maybe we should do a mandatory code of practice.

Currently government services, or Service Alberta, has a voluntary code of practice for landlords. I think: okay. If we allow them to have their say and raise rents indefinitely and with no maximums, we should force them to have a mandatory code of practice, where these landlords are looked after when they ask for a light to be changed, when they ask for a toilet to be unplugged, when they ask for all these things to be done, for their front door to be fixed, and, you know, for the people peeing in the elevators to be dealt with. We have to have a mandatory code of practice.

The Deputy Speaker: Back on the debate, the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The affordable housing issue has caused a great deal of stress for my constituents in St. Albert, particularly seniors and people just starting out. Let me just tell you why that is. It's because properties that have been used for other purposes, recreational properties surrounding seniors developments there, are now being impinged upon or possibly being taken over for affordable housing. This has caused the seniors in my constituency a great deal of stress. I think it's reflective of maybe — excuse the expression — the age they're in but also the things that they were promised when they bought their houses and their condominiums, their townhouses: that they wouldn't be subject to this problem of affordable housing around them.

So it's probably a lack of planning due to a lack of land development. I think this is a serious situation which we have to recognize. People have been made promises, and their word to keep these

properties around their developments has been changed, and it's very stressful for them. Now, I think what's happening — and I have to give the government some credit here — in St. Albert is we have recently received new lands in the Badger area. I think this is very important for us because this will help us develop, hopefully, a proper plan when we do a municipality in terms of developing part of a municipality and developing proper affordable housing.

I think the thing that I'm getting at this evening is that when we do things like affordable housing, it's important that we have good regional planning, the acquisition of proper lands, and that we plan for affordable housing so that the people that are going to be using it fit into the community and are accepted as part of the community. I think that sometimes when we do these things after the fact, it affects our seniors, especially, again, in St. Albert.

I haven't mentioned people starting out. Our affordable housing for seniors and people starting out is not easily accessible in St. Albert and very difficult. It's a very difficult issue. So I just thought I'd point that out, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for letting me speak on this.

I want to just say one other thing, Mr. Speaker, if I can. I must pass an accolade to the minister of municipal affairs. This afternoon I was going home, and I was thinking how well he handled the issue in the House today. I think that's not an easy thing to deal with with all this stress on. I think all of us want to see affordable housing for the good people of Alberta and to do the best we can for them. I want to commend him because today was a difficult and trying time for him, and I thought he handled it very well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Snelgrove: I listened very carefully, but what I think I heard the hon. member say was: solve the affordable housing problem but not in my backyard; keep all these people away from our community or where our seniors are. I find that quite remarkable for someone who shows a great deal of compassion. Could he clarify that?

Mr. Flaherty: Yeah. Maybe I was so nervous that I probably did say that. I'll have to check the *Hansard*. What I was trying to say, clearly, to the House was that in St. Albert we have seniors' housing. When they bought this housing, they were promised that the land, the parks around would not be touched, that it would be that way forever, you know, when they bought the land. Now what's happening: they're worried that affordable housing is going to come in and take that land that was not going to be touched. It does affect their thinking. They feel that the promises have been broken. That's the thing they're worried about.

Now, I don't know if I'm clarifying that for you or not. I'm not suggesting that they're not concerned about other people, but I'm saying that they're concerned that when they bought, the parklands around them were going to be like that for their lifetime, and now it's possibly not going to be that way. That's what I was saying.

Thank you.

9:20

The Deputy Speaker: I have four more that wish to participate under this standing order: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. minister of intergovernmental affairs, followed by the hon. leader of the NDs.

We have Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all are talking about

apartment owners, rent gouging. What about all natural gas companies? They are gouging prices more than 50 per cent, so what measures is this government going to make?

Another question I want to ask. The Alberta government subsidized for higher gas bills, and also I think that in the '80s they helped the banks to give some percentages of, you know, mortgage compensation. Why can't they help the renters now?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question would be to pose this question. The comment relative to seniors – and I appreciate the comments he made about the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I think that certainly shows his balance in terms of this approach. But he did mention in terms of what people were promised in their neighbourhood, based probably on other municipal governments at the time. Clearly, it was without question probably a zoning issue that he's making reference to. Even with that in mind and in the changing world that we live in, I pose this question. You know, if in fact today there is land in his community or any community that ultimately could be allocated for affordable housing, which is so very important, even if residents that vote for you or anyone is saying, "Well, no, we don't want it here," would he accept the fact that maybe they would have to suck it up and that it would go there because of helping the greater need of people who are less fortunate in having a place to live?

Mr. Flaherty: Well, if you're asking that question, I think it's a matter of – and I don't want to pick on the realty companies. But I think that's probably where the promises were made when they bought the property. I think you're absolutely right. I think it's a question of education and being able to accept other people and the way they live. I think that's what we have to do. But it's very hard to go to seniors that have invested this amount of money in these homes and tell them that because it's such an emotional issue. I think we have a matter of education to do here, and, yeah, I think we have to suck it up.

It reminds me, quite frankly, if I may be honest, of when I was working as a regional director in Peace River. I could not believe it, but when we were asked to put a group home in Peace River, we found that it created such a furor that we had to move the home down the road, about 30 miles west – I think it was Fairview College – and that's where we put the home. There was such a rebellion about putting it in the town of Peace River and the community we wanted it to go in.

Mr. Boutilier: Is there a supplemental on the point?

The Deputy Speaker: No. I have another member, but the time has run out.

Are there others that wish to participate in the debate?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:26 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Dunford	Melchin
Backs	Goudreau	Oberle
Boutilier	Groeneveld	Ouellette
Brown	Jablonski	Rodney
Calahasen	Johnson	Rogers
Cao	Johnston	Shariff
Cardinal	Liepert	Snelgrove
Cenaiko	Lindsay	Stevens
Coutts	Lund	VanderBurg
DeLong	Magnus	Zwozdesky
Ducharme		

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Miller, B.
Blakeman	Flaherty	Pannu
Chase	Martin	Pastoor
Eggen	Mason	Swann

Totals: For – 31 Against – 12

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

Bill 34 Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Before I ask for any comments or questions or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill, I've been advised by the Official Opposition and the government that shorter bells would be in order and agreeable. Is that agreeable? It requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent denied]

9:40

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, what a treat to be here to continue the debate on Bill 34, changes to the Residential Tenancies Act and the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act. I guess what I would like to say is that this is a bill that talks about stability in rent increases. It talks about getting kind of a standard approach or a longer approach that would identify or connect us with our neighbours, British Columbia and Saskatchewan and others. That's asked for here. I think that's a reasonable thing.

If someone's in a condo and someone wants to move them out, it can take a year to find another place. Giving them notice that they're going to move out with no rent increase certainly gives them an opportunity to start to shop around for where they would want to live, or someone that's going to be subject to major renovations also has a year with no rent increase to deal with. In fact, Mr. Chairman, most people deal on a yearly basis with their income adjustments. So holding the landlord to the same kind of fair assessment – once a year is a reasonable time to identify what their costs might be.

Mr. Chairman, there's nobody in this House that either likes or justifies extreme rent increases. There's nobody in this House that

doesn't want to see all Albertans have the opportunity for affordable housing. There's nobody in this House that doesn't hope that their kids and their grandchildren have an opportunity to buy a home or a condo or a mobile home if they choose or to rent if they're coming in to school.

You know, we are promoting in this government how important it is to further your education, but I think everyone in this House would agree that there's not a lot of point in sending students to Edmonton to take courses if they don't have a place to stay. So it is a very, very complex problem that will require a lot of co-ordinated effort from all the departments, including agencies like universities, technical schools, and colleges that are going to have to admit that if we're going to take in these students, we may be required to have a place for them to live.

We may have to revisit how we approach major developments in our areas, be it close to major centres or Fort McMurray, that will say if you're going to come in and require a workforce of 5,000 or 6,000 or 7,000 people, you might be required to provide housing. Like the hon. Member for Fort-McMurray-Wood Buffalo has said, they used to do that.

In my community of Lloydminster when Husky Oil Ltd. came in to build the upgrader, they sat down and built residences that they were able to use for their staff while they built the upgrader, and then they turned them over to Lakeland College as residences. It was a very successful, be it ahead of its time, public/private partnership.

When we say that this bill isn't the answer to all of the ills that are facing people out in the workforce now and all the people that are looking for housing stability, this is one component of it. You can try and make it more than that, but that's not what this bill is about. This bill is about rent stability that says: "Give it a year like our neighbours in B.C., like our neighbours across the country. A year's notice to increase your rent is fair."

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I might be accused of being right wing occasionally, and I might be accused of being heartless or whatever. Actually, one person that probably doesn't know me at all even accused me this last weekend of being lovable. I can't believe it myself.

The fact is that I can understand why a year is fair to either evict somebody from their mobile home site or from their condo or to give them a rent increase. That's a practical, common-sense approach to putting stability into the marketplace. Yes, there is an opportunity at the end of that time to raise rents to what might be far past what that person has, but there is a fundamental difference in many ways that we look at things. One of them that we have here is a respect for your right to own and use your property.

I know that you can blame our ideological differences and say: "It doesn't matter that that's the landlord's money invested. We feel so strongly about these people without homes that we're going to take money that you built into a system, that you built into an investment." We're going to say: no, you can't do that. But, you know, when the stock market was going great and people were making 22 and 23 per cent returns, like some of you might have done in your RRSPs, nobody got up and said: boy, that's too much; the government ought to step in and take that back. That was the market at work, and you made a good decision to invest.

Some of the landlords have made a very good decision to invest in houses. I lived through the '80s. I saw what happened to a lot of landlords who invested then, who lost everything because government spending and other forces drove interest rates far past their ability to ever, ever pay for that lodging, and they lost it. The

government never went and saved them. We said: you took a risk, you invested in that sector of the business community, and now you have to live with it. Some of them made good decisions. But by far and away, most landlords are conscientious, diligent providers of lodging for their tenants, and they truly care about them.

What we're saying in this bill is: let's put stability into those increases; let's put stability into the notices around condo conversions. Slowing down condo conversions is a stopgap. It's still lodging. These condos that are being converted are not empty. The only answer – and you know it; I know that you know it – is to increase the supply of units. That's the answer. No matter what you think, with a magic waving wand or whatever magic dust you want to wave, we can't magically create all these units overnight. We have to work with every single opportunity we've got to support the people that are looking for it with every program this government has. The Premier has made it an absolute number one priority, and that's what we're doing.

In Bill 34 we're simply saying: doesn't it make sense to take a year, put on notice? Let's keep it consistent, and then we will work very carefully. You know, we've heard so much from the opposition about how nothing has happened, yet if you were to look into the affordable housing strategy, the RASL program, starting in 2005 – and the hon. member from Lethbridge would surely know – two of the projects were in there: 2,103 units starting in 2005.

So the suggestion that this just fell on this government, that we're just reacting, is simply wrong, and I know that you know that. It's a lot easier to make the headlines in question period, but the fact is that it's going on; it's happening. Many of these projects that started in 2005 and 2006 are opening this spring. Now, that was Albertans' money that we were fortunate enough to be able to redirect into affordable housing all over this province in recognition of what was going to come.

Ms Blakeman: Tell the truth. It came from the feds.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, strangely enough, on this side of the House we do. It certainly isn't catching, I can tell you that.

The fact is that this bill merely puts rent stability into the program. It's one of the tools, certainly not the only tool. But we can sit here, and the longer you want to debate, you need to know that you can keep it here till the middle of July. You're the ones that talk about uncertainty in the marketplace. Yes, there is. And if they listen to some of your questions, I can understand why. The fact is that this makes it very clear: give your notice, and then you have a year. It's as simple as that. You can make it out to be whatever you want, but that's what the bill is.

I look forward to the debate, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, the problem that the hon. member is talking about is stability. I suppose that's the right word to use. We want stability in the marketplace. But the hon. member admits that this is only one component. What are the other components? There's not a complete package here. We need to have a complete package to be able to handle something as serious as this issue and not just the one component.

That was the intention of our task force on housing, to suggest that there should be a package of components, ideas, tools that can be used. I mean, if you're going to intervene in the marketplace, you are intervening by having this particular bill. The one year; that's an intervention. Is it the right kind of intervention? Shouldn't there be more in terms of regulation of the whole rental sector?

Mr. Chairman, I would like to make an amendment to this bill, especially to focus on the need for a guideline in terms of the rent increases.

9:50

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, do you have the amendments with you, or are they at the table?

Dr. B. Miller: They're at the table.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We will make sure that they are circulated. We'll just wait for a moment while the pages circulate them, please.

In the meantime may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Chair: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a great pleasure for me tonight to introduce two of our colleagues from Saskatchewan. They had a dinner in Edmonton for their leader, Mr. Brad Wall, and they've come down to watch how we work here in Alberta. It's very nice for me because I share Lloydminster with an MLA from the Saskatchewan Party. He's a wonderful man. The two that are here tonight are Mr. Ken Krawetz and Mr. Don McMorris. I would ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Bill 34 Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (continued)

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, you may proceed.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move that Bill 34, Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 1(4)(b) by adding the following after the proposed subsection (8). This would be subsection (9).

No increase in rent payable under a residential tenancy agreement shall be greater than the rate of inflation as measured by the All-items Consumer Price Index for Alberta published by Statistics Canada for the immediately preceding year, plus 2%, for the period April 24, 2007 to April 23, 2009.

Mr. Chairman, this amendment is exactly what the government task force on housing recommended. It was a part of their suggestion about a rent stability guideline, which the government has chosen not to pay any attention to. I think that it's very serious that we have some sort of cap. This is similar to what is present in B.C. The cost of living is around 5.5 per cent, so plus 2 per cent is around 7.5 per cent. Surely many landlords would find this acceptable, that they can put up rent increases, then, once a year with a cap of CPI plus 2 per cent.

People often say that, you know, if you have this kind of rental guideline, it's interfering too much in the marketplace and it doesn't encourage new rental accommodation to be built. Actually, CMHC, Canada Mortgage and Housing, did a study some years ago about the effects of what they called rent controls. In fact, they studied this over a couple of decades, and their conclusion was that there's no convincing evidence that rent regulations as they've existed in various provinces in Canada from the '70s through the '80s and into

the '90s had significant effects on the construction of rental units. It didn't have any effect on the market in terms of rental units being built or in terms of rent increases and so on.

But it did have an effect on the people who are the most vulnerable. Where rent controls, rent guidelines, as we're calling them now, are in place, it's a protection of the renter. It's a protection of people who are on a limited income, people who are on social assistance, low-income workers, people who are vulnerable, especially single- or lone-parent families. One-quarter of families in Canada are lone-parent families, so that means that there's only one wage earner in the family. They can't possibly absorb the tremendous increases in rents that we have.

We owe it to this huge population in Alberta to protect the renter. Now, this doesn't have anything to do with the supply. It won't have any implication for the supply, and CMHC has pointed that out, that wherever these kinds of guidelines were in place, it didn't affect the building of new accommodation one way or the other. People still continue to build rental accommodations, and that will happen in Alberta too.

Mr. Chairman, I think this is the best thing. This really strengthens the bill because the missing component is exactly what we suggested in our task force. I mean, we thought long and hard about this because it's a serious thing when you start to establish regulations with respect to any kind of economic sector, so we debated it back and forth. We had people on our task force who were close to the housing industry, and we had people who represented people in the inner city of Edmonton and other places. We had an array of representation on our task force. We talked long and hard about this, about whether we should have such guidelines or not, but we all agreed. Because of what we heard everywhere we went in the province, we responded to the plight of the renters, who were losing their homes right now. That's why we need something like this in the bill to strengthen the bill, to make it possible for people to stay in their homes, especially those who are the near homeless, who are just one rent increase from losing their apartment. There's a tremendous worry about what's going to happen to those people. So I think this is the kind of thing that would really strengthen this bill.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the debate on this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. President of the Treasury Board, did you want to respond?

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to speak on I believe it's part of amendment A1. It has become clear that the government's response to the affordable housing crisis has failed to address a critical issue. What are renters supposed to do in the short term until more affordable housing units come on stream? The only way to protect Alberta renters from rent gouging in this out-of-control housing market is to introduce temporary rent regulations limiting the amount that rents can be increased. It's the government's responsibility to listen to Albertans and respond to help them. This is especially true when the market fails to provide stability as is the case today. Albertans have spoken clearly on this matter. They desperately need short-term protection, as my colleague has just commented on. It is the government's duty to address these concerns even if the solution falls outside their political ideology. It is important to act in the best interests of the citizens, not in the best interests of the political party's ideology.

The rationale that the market will solve the crisis in time does nothing to help people now, Mr. Chair. The market does work effectively most of the time, but there are extraordinary times, like

now in Alberta, times like we have in this province, when the market is so destabilized that it cannot provide the stability people need to keep their homes. There is no disputing that the extreme growth pressures in Alberta have distorted the market to such a degree that the government needs to intervene in the short run to create artificial stability until market conditions improve. When that happens, rent regulations will disappear. These are temporary measures and will end on a defined date in the prescribed period of time. This is the most balanced approach that the government can take to solve the crisis.

10:00

Perhaps the clearest explanation of why temporary rent regulations are needed is found in the government's own Affordable Housing Task Force report. To quote the report directly:

The decision to recommend this protective measure was a very difficult one for this task force. There was clear concern among many members about the impact of rent guidelines on overall new rental supply, and on rental rates once guidelines are removed in two years. At the same time, the task force was confronted everywhere with the plight of renters who were losing their homes right now.

Right as we speak.

These people have few other affordable housing options in today's overheated [economy]. The task force understood that keeping people in their current homes wherever possible is essential while dealing with the urgent situation Alberta is facing.

The report clearly articulates why temporary rent regulations are needed. Albertans, thousands of Albertans everywhere and from all walks of life, need them, most importantly of all, because everybody needs a home. That is why the Alberta Liberal caucus is introducing amendments to introduce temporary rent regulations. We believe that the government must respond when the citizens they represent demand action. We urge all members to please listen to the desperate cries of Albertans for help and amend Bill 34.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise to speak to the amendment by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. He is moving that Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 1(4)(b) by adding the following after the proposed subsection (8):

- (9) No increase in rent payable under a residential tenancy agreement shall be greater than the rate of inflation as measured by the All-items Consumer Price Index for Alberta published by Statistics Canada for the immediately preceding year, plus 2%, for the period April 24, 2007 to April 23, 2009.

Mr. Chairman, I want to indicate that I certainly support this amendment. I think it's a very good one and, in fact, has formed the core of the debate that we've seen over the last several weeks in this province as it is based on the Affordable Housing Task Force recommendation. I just want to indicate that it was pretty clear that that task force heard from hundreds and hundreds of Albertans and that this was one of the major issues that they addressed as they travelled around the province and that the kinds of things that they heard were not just limited to a couple of centres but, in fact, were expressed by Albertans in all corners of the province.

The government, of course, took that report and made decisions about which recommendations they would support and which ones they would reject behind closed doors, in secret, hidden away from Albertans who were not privy to the contents of the report and could not join in the debate. So the government chose deliberately to exclude Albertans from the debate until after the decision was made.

Mr. Chairman, that is unacceptable as far as I'm concerned, certainly from any government that claims to be reforming democracy and becoming more open and more transparent and more accountable. It is really unacceptable and, frankly, quite disturbing that a government would continue to operate in that way while attempting to convince Albertans that they had really changed their spots. Well, I don't think this government has changed its spots at all. You know, it's pretty hard for a leopard to change its spots or a skunk to change its stripes. I don't know, but there is a certain smell about this particular approach that is fairly pungent.

I want to say in response to the President of the Treasury Board, who argued that this brings rent stability, that I would argue that without an amendment like this there is no real stability. In fact, you're replacing a series of significant but smaller increases over a period of time with gigantic, single jumps. How that increases the stability, Mr. Chairman, is beyond me. In fact, it sounds even a little less stable because people go along for a year and then they just hit the wall.

The minister indicated that a year is enough time to make a move. The question is: where do people move to, and why should they have to move in the first place? Mr. Chairman, there's always mobility in terms of housing, and mobility is higher among people who rent than people who own, obviously. Nevertheless, it is clearly the case that people should not have to be moving all the time, even if they've got a year's notice, because landlords are charging rents that are unfair and unaffordable and particularly so when there is no alternative housing at an affordable rate that people can move to. So you've got a year to look for housing that doesn't exist, and that is not doing the job for the renters of Alberta. That's why we don't support this bill. It doesn't really give stability. It is, in our view, an example of false advertising.

Now, I indicated, Mr. Chairman, that we would be supporting this particular amendment. It is similar to an amendment that we talked about this afternoon, that we'll be introducing later if this amendment should tragically be struck down by the tyrannical majority opposite. I want to indicate that it is very similar to the task force report recommendation. It's also compatible with NDP policy with respect to this issue.

Mr. Chairman, there is a slight deviation, however, from the Alberta Liberal policy, and I'll just read that. It says that an Alberta Liberal government would enact temporary rent regulations. The Alberta Liberal housing policy, *Because Everybody Needs a Home*, which was released in January, calls for a "one-time, one year long temporary rent regulation measure that limits rent increases within that period to a maximum of 10%." So the Liberal policy is a 10 per cent increase with a limit only of one time, one year. This particular amendment from our Liberal colleagues talks about a consumer price index for Alberta plus 2 per cent. That's based on the task force report, and of course that's also based on the Alberta NDP policy.

So, Mr. Chairman, how can we not support this amendment, which clearly reflects our policy with respect to this? We've always felt, quite frankly, that this is fair. This is fair. It allows an increase for the landlord. It allows an increase of not just the increase in the consumer price index, but 2 per cent on top of that because we are, in fact, generous and well-balanced and not dogmatic, unlike the members opposite. We know that costs go up. We know that there is a good market for landlords.

We also – and I want to make this clear – actually think that this kind of approach makes a lot of sense, frankly, because we do believe that the majority of landlords are well-meaning people. There are many people around Alberta who are small landlords, Mr. Chairman, who maybe have a basement suite or a small duplex or

something like that that they rent out. These are people just trying to make their mortgage payments. These are not big, evil people that are out to screw tenants, but in the kind of market the government has created there's going to be substantial upward pressure on rents across the board.

10:10

Nor do we think that people like Boardwalk are actually evil, Mr. Chairman. We heard that response from the opposite side a little bit earlier today in response to some of our questions. You know, how can you pick on poor Boardwalk? Well, we don't pick on Boardwalk. We simply quote from their annual report because they're reporting to their shareholders in an honest and straightforward way. What they say, to paraphrase, is that people can no longer afford houses and that they can't break into the housing market, so they're forced to rent, and it's increasing the demand for rental accommodation. There's a shortage; therefore, there's a higher market value associated with the rental accommodations. Like good free enterprisers they understand supply and demand. They know that there's a shortage of supply, that there's an extra amount of demand, so the price of the commodity, in this case rental accommodation, rises very dramatically. And that's fine. We have no problem with that.

We also accept what the government has said, that the only real solution in the long run is to increase the supply of housing. The government has taken some very modest steps to do so, and to the extent that they're prepared to do that, Mr. Chairman, we have supported them, and we will support them, but we know that it's going to take more than the government is prepared to do at this time to actually meet the needs of the people for a supply of housing. But until that housing is built, it is not going to affect the market. The government has said itself that the minimum period of time is two years. We've asked this question over and over again: what do people do in the intervening two to four years before the additional housing comes on the market? What are they supposed to do?

The government claims to have a balanced policy, but the only answer they've got for those people is that if they get evicted, then there's this fund that they can apply for. Well, why should they be applying to the taxpayers for relief from rent increases that shouldn't happen in the first place? Why is this government subsidizing the landlords by letting them charge whatever they want and then saying, "Well, if you get kicked out, you know, if the inevitable happens, and you've got no place to live, we've got a whole bunch of taxpayers' money that we're prepared to provide to you"?

Mr. Chairman, I don't really think that that's the approach that the people of this province want because it involves the use of their hard-earned tax dollars to support the landlords who, in many cases, are charging, of course, what the market will bear, but because of the government's mismanagement of the economy and the lack of planning that's taken place, there's a severe shortage of housing, and I consider that a mismanagement of the economy.

I know that the hon. President of the Treasury Board thinks that as long as everything is booming, how can you say that we've mismanaged the economy? I didn't hear him say that, but at this point I can almost read his mind, Mr. Chairman, and I just got a psychic flash from him that that's exactly what he was thinking. And you know what? It is mismanagement. It is mismanagement.

You can pull all the stops out to get as much economic growth as you want, particularly when you've got a commodity in large amounts that the world needs and is desperately short of. Then, of course, you can have very rapid economic development. If you take away most of the environmental regulations, if you take away a lot of the regulations around rights of working people in the province

and if you take away any real burden of royalties and you cut their taxes as well, it's pretty obvious that the economy is going to roar to life, and that's no great accomplishment under the present circumstances. What they didn't do was take into account the effect that this rapid economic growth was going to have on the people of this province. They did not prepare the infrastructure. They did not make sure that new schools would be in place, that there were enough hospitals, that there were enough ambulances, that there were enough trained personnel. They did not make sure that we will have enough water to support the economic growth that's taken place, and they certainly didn't take any steps to make sure that there would be enough housing. So of course, Mr. Chairman, we find ourselves in the current situation where people are losing their homes, ending up on the street, and the government is very proud of its economic record because they don't think that those things are part of economic development or economic growth.

Well, Mr. Chairman, we on this side certainly disagree with them. The Alberta New Democrats believe in economic growth and economic development, but it needs to be balanced, and it needs to take into account the human needs of people and the needs of communities. They need infrastructure, and they need access to health care and education, and they need roads that aren't going to break their axles when they drive down them. I have a couple of bones to pick with whoever is the infrastructure minister at the moment about the state of the roads in this province. It's not just in Edmonton. It is getting very bad because the government, of course, has neglected our infrastructure so badly.

But I want to come back, Mr. Chairman, to the whole question of housing and to this particular amendment. It certainly seems to me that a reasonable increase for landlords is fair. This amendment would set out a fair increase that would be available to all landlords. I certainly think that the intent here is, well, that if there are extraordinary expenses that are required by a landlord as a result of renovations or necessary changes to a building code or fire code or something like that, that are extra costs, there needs to be a mechanism where they could come forward and justify those costs in order to get a rent increase beyond this approved. We would support that as well.

Mr. Chairman, you know, I just want to conclude by saying that we have always argued that rent guidelines should be a temporary measure and should be put in place only as long as they're necessary to bring on a sufficient supply of new housing so that the market again reaches an equilibrium point. We have also made it very clear from the beginning that we do not believe that these guidelines should apply to new housing units that may be being built now or built in the future so that they don't provide any disincentive to developers or landlords for the development of badly needed new housing. But I certainly think that with those limitations on rent guidelines the government's arguments against them really lack validity. They keep repeating that rent guidelines don't work almost as a mantra, almost as if they just can clutch a religious artifact closely to their breasts and really, truly believe and chant that that's true no matter what the facts show.

Mr. Chairman, there are cases where rent controls have had a negative impact, and there are also cases where rent guidelines have worked very well and have provided protection for tenants while not interfering in new investment for rental housing. We don't have to look very far to find examples of that. In particular, we know that in Ontario, which has had rent guidelines for some time, the number of starts on new rental units has risen quite dramatically. Between 2000 and 2006 it's risen 88 per cent, whereas in the same period in Alberta, which has no rent guidelines, it's dropped 52 per cent, Mr. Chairman. These are facts. The government can look them up. I

see that some of the ministers opposite are looking at a computer, and I'm assuming that they are googling statistics in order to confirm what I'm telling the House. Sometimes I can't read the minister's mind as well as at other times.

10:20

Nevertheless, those facts are out there. There is a track record that can be checked. If you go across the country, British Columbia has rent guidelines. Manitoba has them but, interestingly, only in Winnipeg, Mr. Chairman, because they're not needed elsewhere, and if you don't need them, why would you bring them in? And then Ontario. So they are far more common than people would think, and, you know, they are not toxic. They may be un-Conservative, but there are many Conservatives in this country that are realists. Unfortunately, they are not in the majority in the government caucus. I think that there are some there, and I would certainly hope that those members that are realists would support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister for International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On this amendment, I find it interesting in the discussion tonight that the leader of the New Democratic Party indicated that they support economic growth. I find that, of course, very, very shocking based on the fact that ultimately, they really have wanted to shut down the oil sands sweet blend in terms of what they're producing.

So I need to be absolutely very clear. If you support economic growth, you don't want people in Fort McMurray being without jobs producing energy for the entire country and, for that matter, part of America as well. I think it's really important for the oil sands capital of the world that ultimately – I recall, having had the honour of serving as its mayor, in fact, during economic growth. Before that we actually had a bridge to nowhere. We overplanned, the province, and spent \$50 million on a bridge to nowhere, and now it's a bridge to over \$80 billion of economic growth.

The province, in fact, at the time built a hospital of five floors, and two of them were empty. They sat there, and the government was criticized for overplanning. We actually built, as the mayor, a city water treatment plant for 85,000 people. There were only 35,000 of us paying for that, and we were criticized for overbuilding. Furthermore, we built and paved roads with fire hydrants and street lamps where we used to teach our kids how to drive, but there were no homes there. We overbuilt our infrastructure. This, believe it or not, was only eight and a half years ago. So there's economic growth.

And you know what we had? We actually had landlords that used to give three months' free rent on furnished apartments for \$400. At a time when their mortgages were \$1,000, they were collecting rents of \$400. So on the amendment one question I would ask: would it be appropriate, then, to suggest that during those times when there is no economic growth, there is a role in terms of that balance, in terms of the fact that they're paying a mortgage of \$1,000 and only collecting \$400? What should we be doing? It appears that in those times everyone is silent about that, yet we still want to attract more supply to get more housing on the market.

I know that as a mayor and an alderman back then – in fact, the hon. member at the time was an alderman himself and did a very good job with the city of Edmonton – we were saying: how do we move to get more supply in the market? In fact, I believe there is a comment about geniuses seldom differ. But at the same time – what is the comment about fools? What is the term? Well, I think the term is that basically we can either all agree or maybe all disagree.

Really, if we think about that balance today on this amendment, Mr. Chairman. I think it's important that we take an approach that is balanced, that is practical, and that can serve, ultimately, what we both want, and that is getting more supply on the market, providing certainty to help those families, be it seniors or middle-aged or young people, to ensure that they have a way to earn a good living and are able to live in a proper accommodation. Going back 25 years, we had tent farms of a thousand in Fort McMurray. I'm very pleased to say that we don't have that today because of the reinvestment of over \$400 million.

Striking that right balance is something that I believe – I take him at his word when the hon. member says: we support economic growth. I just want to let you know that in the future we are going to have a variety of economic opportunities in the oil sands. We're actually supplying energy to Ontario and to other provinces. Ultimately, if we're going to continue to do that and provide great jobs to Albertans and to the new Albertans that come here, we need to continue to provide them homes. But we don't want another bridge to nowhere. We don't want another hospital with two empty floors and another water treatment plant almost, like, 50 per cent underutilized because we overbuilt.

This government not only overbuilt; we planned ahead. We had a very good plan that not even the market could keep up with, and I give you the best example of that in housing. There were homes in Abasand in Fort McMurray, in my city, that were selling for \$30,000 and renting. You know what? If the market was so smart in all of this – and here I am as a Conservative saying: the market could never have imagined what was taking place. The government certainly had to plan, which we did, but no one could have imagined that fact that \$30,000 homes then are now selling for over \$300,000, that people are buying and renting because the market will bear it.

So even when private businesses suggest that, you know, well, the government could not keep up with the plan, you're right. They couldn't. But I also want to say: nor could the market, based on the unanticipated incredible growth that is taking place in this province.

I admire the hon. member when he says: we support economic growth. I can assure you that that is what's happening in this province based on the excellent principles of this government.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Blakeman: I know that my colleague really wants to get up and rebut him, and I'm sure he'll get an opportunity.

Mr. Mason: I will. We have all night.

Ms Blakeman: That's true. We have quite a bit of time ahead of us.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise and speak in favour of the amendment that was brought forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, which is seeking to amend section 1(4)(b), essentially bringing into play another of the recommendations that was brought forward as part of the task force. Essentially, this is supporting a critical component that would make this bill workable and would start to move towards creating stability in the housing market.

What we have now is instability. I would argue that the single component in this bill of a notice period has, in fact, created great instability in the market, even chaos, and certainly we're seeing that from the individuals who have come down to the Assembly. Some of them have met with the minister of housing. Clearly, from the stories that are pouring into our offices, that's what has been the result of what the government has done.

I think the situation goes much further back, Mr. Chairman, because I am seeing two ongoing deficiencies from this government. One is a lack of planning, and with that is a lack of research, a lack of monitoring, a lack of forward planning and thinking by the government about where we're going, what we can expect to see out in front of us. What are the statistics telling us? What are the demographics going to be? Really, the largest collectors of that kind of information are the governments that we have in this country. They're the only ones that are capable of amassing that data and interpreting it and then using it and using the analysis to plan how we are going to provide government programs and services to the people. This government has failed to do that and particularly around this issue.

10:30

Now we have government members standing up in complete shock and amazement at how we managed to get to this point in time. I say back to them: "Well, you shouldn't be shocked and amazed. You're the government. You're the one that had your finger on all the possible studies and plans and analysis. You should've seen this one coming." Boardwalk saw it coming. It's in their annual report. They were able to tell in their annual report exactly what was anticipated for growth in the market, what the vacancy rate was likely to be, how far they could push the rents. They certainly have done that analysis. Now I'm hearing that the government didn't, that they're surprised and shocked and amazed that we got to this point in time. That, to me, is much more telling about the condition that this government is in than almost anything else that they've said or done.

The second major ongoing deficiency that I see from this government is a lack of forward-thinking ideas. What is your idea about housing? What is your plan for the future? Do you have a vision, like the Alberta Liberals do, that says that everybody needs a home? It doesn't seem like it. Do you have a plan or a vision that says that you want to see, you know, X number of units established in the rental market? A certain percentage of people would be in the rental market; a certain percentage would own their own homes. This would require X number of units to be built on both sides of this by a certain period of time, adding on X number of units for each year in the future as our population reaches different amounts.

I don't see that. What I see is that the government doesn't have any ideas. They put together a task force. They rush it through 45 days of consultation and research. The task force comes forward with ideas, and then the government doesn't take the ideas. They cherry-pick one idea off dozens of recommendations that were brought forward by that task force.

Just a quick look at what was put forward under the immediate situation, the eight immediate measures to tackle the shortage.

One, we'll establish a homeless and eviction prevention fund. Well, I think the government is going to do that but not right away. Every day they get up in this session and try to make the public think that this plan is in place. They actually read out a phone number. When people phone it, they're told: "I'm sorry; this actually won't be in service for two months. This program doesn't exist. Call us back in two months." Well, that's darn cold comfort to people that have been given a rental increase of several hundred dollars and have to be out in a month. That fund is clearly not going to help them. It won't be established in time to help them.

Two, stabilize volatility for renters. Under that is, first, introduce two-year rent stability guidelines. Well, that's where we're getting part of this. We're getting a notice period, but we're not getting a rent cap. That's why supporting this motion, which essentially puts in place a rent cap, is so important because it ties it to what is likely

to happen as we move forward. Second, use capital grants to stimulate rental construction. Well, absolutely nothing said about that. We get all kinds of numbers – millions of this, gazillions of that – thrown at us in question period, not tied to anything specific. Once again this government is basically abdicating responsibility for involvement in building new rental units or in building affordable housing. Third, introduce new guidelines for condo conversions. Well, we're getting part of that in this but not the rest of it.

I mean, those are two points out of eight from what was recommended by this task force.

Three, there are things like increased funding for temporary emergency shelter spaces. Under that, shelter allowances and the Alberta homeless initiative.

Four, establish and fund an Alberta transitional housing initiative. Now, that's one I've asked questions about in the House because a number of the people that I work with and that I continue to represent are people that are really trying to improve their lives. They are women and children who have experienced domestic violence, who have gone to an emergency shelter. They're trying not to go back home into that situation. They're trying to move into transitional housing. Do they have transitional housing? Can they access it in this province? No, they cannot. So they end up going back into the same situation, and that costs us money. As taxpayers all, that situation costs us money. It costs us in lost productivity. It costs us in health care. It costs us in long-term effect on the children in those families. It's an enormous cost.

I have this government across from me that goes: oh, we're tough Conservatives; we're fiscal managers. No, you're not. You waste money all the time, and you waste it because you don't pay attention to stuff like this. Instead of investing in transitional housing for places like WINGS and the work that the Lurana Shelter does and WIN House and the WIN House transitional housing, no, they're not going to bother with that because, heck, you know, they'll save the money. Well, it's very short-sighted thinking.

Five, increase Alberta's rent supplement program allocation.

Six, enhance capital to leverage a maximum supply of housing: stimulus for transitional, supportive, and affordable rental housing; home ownership support over five years; aboriginal housing trust.

Seven, enable greater flexibility in the use of capital grants.

Eight, ensure quick release of suitable Crown lands, surplus provincial lands, and surplus school sites.

So there are their eight points for an immediate situation, of which we're getting two. We're getting a notice period on condo conversions and a notice period on rent increases. The rest? Well, it's coming, but it's not in this legislation. It's not part of what we're looking at here.

You know, again, this situation should have been no surprise to this government. The Alberta Liberals saw it. We saw it last summer. We went and held a town hall in the fall. As a result of that, we did a draft of a housing policy. We circulated it over a period of time. We came back and did a final version of that and released it on the 15th of January. So that housing policy has been out there for four months now, yet the government here is surprised that we're in this situation.

I guess my question is: did the government know this information and ignore it, or did the government not even see it coming? I would argue that either of those scenarios is a pretty frightening thought around a government that's supposed to be managing growth because, clearly, they're not. We have unmanaged growth, and we have no planning.

Government ideas for the future? We don't know. You know, we have the task force, and as I said, they've ignored most of the work that was done, which was carefully thought out with a series of

interlocking incentives and punishments where those incentives didn't work. So it was meant to be an interlocking package, and the government has essentially cherry-picked through it.

I mean, what was the government thinking? That they would announce a one-year moratorium without the rent cap that goes with it? What did you think was going to happen? How could you not foresee that landlords would turn around and go: "Oh, my goodness. I can only do one rent increase a year. Let me slam through a \$500 a month increase or a \$400 a month increase or a \$265 a month increase"? What did you think was going to happen? Did you honestly think they were just going to say: "Right. I'll just stick to that \$35 increase, and I'll only do one a year"? Of course not. They were going to go for the maximum amount of money that they could, knowing that they were now limited to a one-year period.

What were you people thinking? Of course that was all going to fall into place, and it did, and now you're all surprised at the consequences. What kind of planners and managers are you? Pretty bad, in my opinion. What it has done is it has caught out some of our good landlords who were trying to do small, incremental increases that people could manage, and it has enabled the gouging landlords. That's what has been the result of this government's planning system. Wow. Not very impressive.

10:40

I asked in question period: what is the government's definition of gouging? Now, we've got the minister of housing, that's willing to meet with these landlords, you know, having created the situation where landlords could gouge. Because there's no rent cap, they can put in any amount of an increase that they wish. Well, then they're shocked and appalled when there's a \$1,000 increase, a \$500 increase: goodness, that's gouging. Yeah. Well, what percentage of increase is gouging? At what point are you going to meet with people? At what point aren't you? How do you plan on doing this? Are you just going to talk quietly to them in a back room somehow, to every one of them? Wow. I would have thought that as a cabinet minister you would have had other things to do, like plan and market analyze, but clearly that wasn't happening. So I guess that did free up the time for you to meet with individually every gouging landlord in Alberta.

I want to talk about the theory of the marketplace, this argument that the marketplace manages itself, that invisible hand that looks after it all. We do not have a functioning rental marketplace in Alberta at this point. We absolutely do not. That invisible hand has failed completely. The marketplace has failed to regulate itself. The marketplace is supposed to be about supply and demand. What we have now is a situation where people are going: absolutely; we're not going to put any more supply on here because we get to keep raising our rents as long as the supply is really tight. So that marketplace that you all keep depending on so much is absolutely not working. Go and talk to the dean of business at the university, that you so love to quote, because he'll say that that marketplace is not functioning. We don't have a real marketplace in play at this time. It's not functioning. It's a complete breakdown of that marketplace. It's a complete failure of that marketplace.

What we have are extraordinary circumstances, and extraordinary circumstances require action from government, and this is where we really have the ostrich response to the situation. Instead of looking at the work that was done by the task force and implementing that comprehensive package, we have: well, we'll do the one-year notice period. Then we have the resulting gouging landlords, that are such a problem in some places. I think that with those extraordinary circumstances, this government has allowed a larger social problem to start to create itself. When you have a wealthy province like this,

where you have working people that are homeless and on the street, you've created a much larger social crisis.

Now, I was very interested to hear a number of times the government say: this is not a crisis; quit calling this a crisis. Really? Well, your own Affordable Housing Task Force right in the executive summary, the second paragraph down, says, "Alberta's housing shortage is a 'crisis'." Right there. Your own task force. I'm assuming that it's still your own task force. You commissioned it; it had your name on it. You were supposed to take their recommendations. Are you now saying that it's not your task force? They're calling it a crisis. How can you say, "No, no, it's not a crisis"? When you're creating a situation – I mean, never mind talking about the vulnerable in our society. Never mind talking about people that are on assistance, that are on AISH, that are low income, that are vulnerable, that have a disability or something. Never mind talking about them. We're talking about working people who are homeless because they cannot afford rental accommodation. We've created a much larger problem.

Let's talk about those economic implications. When we start looking at the issue of what homelessness causes, now we start to move into the social determinants of health. As the shadow minister for Health and Wellness this is something that I've looked at a lot. If we're trying to contain the costs in our health care system or if we're trying to create a healthier population, housing is key. Every time you look at the social determinants of health, no matter which ones you use – and they have been developing over the years. You know, when they first started, I think the WHO had five of them, and there are 11 or 15 now, depending on whose definition you're actually going to use. I mean, the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion identifies the prerequisites for health as "peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable eco-system, sustainable resources, social justice and equity." That's the World Health Organization, 1986.

Health Canada outlines various determinants of health. Again, they are social determinants of income and social status, social support networks, education, employment or working conditions, physical and social environments, biology and genetic endowment, personal health practices and coping skills, healthy child development, health services, gender, and culture. Health Canada, 1998.

A more common list that you get now is aboriginal status, early life, education, employment or working conditions, food security, health care services, housing – there it is again – income and its distribution, social safety net, social exclusion, and employment security.

So housing turns up on every single one of those lists. Without housing that system starts to break down, and you start to create poor health. You start to create the situations that keep a population in poor health. So it all starts to intermingle. When you've got a crisis in housing, you're starting to create a crisis in other places. We shouldn't be in that position. We're a wealthy province. We've all kinds of opportunity here. This is a great place. We've got all kinds of stuff that works and should work. So how could we possibly have a government that is knowingly creating a crisis in housing, which then starts a domino effect and creates crises in other areas? How could a good manager, a good steward of all of that magnificence, all of that wealth, all of that luck and opportunity that we have here – how could they mismanage that so badly?

If we really are serious about trying to get a handle on this immediate problem that is in front of us, that we should have seen coming – some of us did see it coming. This government didn't. So the government didn't see it coming. They got behind on this. We've now got a situation where rents are skyrocketing, where the supply is very narrow, and the best the government can do is give a

one-year notice period and a notice period on condo conversions. But without that accompanying rent cap, this will not help. We've got to have the rent cap in place with it as well as all the other things that were outlined by the task force.

So I am speaking very much in favour of amendment A1, that was moved by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. We have to have that in place. It also acknowledges that the work of the task force was meaningful, that it was worth while everybody investing in that, that it was worth while the Liberal caucus losing the services of one of our members for 45 days and beyond because I think they then invested time in writing the report. You know, we all contributed to that, believing that it was going to lead to something useful. I think the disappointment in not having that become a useful exercise has been very frustrating.

So I urge my colleagues to please support A1.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on Bill 34 in its debate in committee and specifically on the first amendment that's under debate, amendment A1. In speaking to this amendment, it's important to go back a bit and reflect on the comments that were made by the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Service Alberta. He claimed that this bill deserves our support because it will bring what he called rent stability.

I've thought hard about this claim and whether or not this bill will in fact deliver on what the President of the Treasury Board called stability. During the debate this afternoon on second reading of the bill I tried to dissect that claim, draw attention to the false nature of that claim, and I've had some more time to think about it. I think that if this bill does anything, Mr. Chairman, it will in fact for sure destabilize family finances and budgets for tens of thousands of families in this province who have to rent a place to provide a home for themselves. It will be the one sure, statutorily guaranteed source of destabilization of family finances.

10:50

Why do I say that, Mr. Chairman? Because this bill, if passed unamended, will give legal authority to landlords to increase the rent, albeit once a year, to any level that they want or that they can get away with. It could be 10 per cent. It could be 50 per cent. It could be 100 per cent. It could be more. There's no ceiling whatsoever under any circumstances anticipated by law in this bill. Because it doesn't anticipate any limit whatsoever to the increases in rent that can be introduced by landlords, this bill, in fact, is a rent increase deregulation bill. It deregulates.

There is even social pressure, because of community expectations, on landlord behaviour with respect to how much rent increase is a reasonable rent increase. This bill will legally in fact take the sting out of those informal community-based expectations that landlords very often have to keep in mind when they are sending notices for rent increases. So this bill gives the legal authority, frees the landlord entirely from any consideration of the community expectation with respect to what is a reasonable increase in rent.

So to claim that this bill, in fact, will bring stability and sanity and fairness to the housing rental market is a joke, Mr. Chairman. This really is a bill that should be retitled, in my view, and maybe if the opportunity permits, I'll bring in an amendment tomorrow for a change in the title of the bill. It should be called a rent increase deregulation bill. That's exactly what it is. So the minister, I hope, will allow this opportunity by extending the debate in the committee on this reading to tomorrow so that I can get such an amendment ready and introduce it in the House to make that point.

Mr. Chairman, one other concern that has been expressed very briefly by one speaker before has to do with how this bill will in fact inadvertently, perhaps, in an unanticipated manner, set in motion a whole train of other developments, including upward pressure on wages. If wages increase by 4 per cent, 3 per cent, 5 per cent a year, 6 per cent a year, in that range, but rents go up by 20 to 30 per cent, imagine what that will do to family budgets. Our middle-class families will have no protection whatsoever from the funding schemes that the government says it's bringing in to protect some most vulnerable families from unreasonable rent increases. Most of the families will not have that protection available to them. This will drive them, first, to cut back on their other necessities.

Housing is only one of the necessities in the family budget. There are many others, from food to clothing to recreation to education to health and whatnot. This will generate pressures at the level of wage negotiations in this province, which will set off inflationary forces and bring them into action. Whether someone works as a nurse or a teacher or a sessional lecturer at a college or an accounting assistant or whatever, these are people who are already having fairly tight budgets to live with, to deal with. You add more costs to their housing side of the budget and you generate pressures on them to ask for more in the form of wages, take-home pay, in order to pay for the increased budget.

The government may be playing with fire here by introducing this kind of legislation, which will in fact increase pressures on family budgets, force a large proportion, a very large number of families in this province to have to seek additional income in order to pay for all the bills. The costs are going up everywhere, but a disproportionate increase in costs to part of the budget that not only constitutes close to 30 per cent of those budgets anyway – imagine, if you increase that part of the cost by 50 per cent or 30 per cent, what it does to the rest. So this is an invitation for unleashing inflationary pressures in the economy, in the wages and salaries that people will necessarily think that they need in order to meet these increasing costs.

Mr. Chairman, there was a reference made here in this House, I think, either in response to a question asked in question period or perhaps in the earlier stages when debate on this bill began. Someone on the government side of the House said: what's so sacrosanct about saying that the housing costs as part of the family budget shouldn't be more than 30 per cent? He said: why shouldn't it be 50 per cent? If that's something that the government believes is desirable, then they should say so. The experience of the last 30 to 40 years in this country has shown that when family budgets are set so that more than 30 per cent has to be paid just for housing costs, those families are unable to meet other basic needs. That hurts both children and adults and their ability to live well and grow well.

So 50 per cent of the family budget just to pay for housing I hope is something that the government will not promote as an idea that is worth considering. If it does, then it should say so so that Albertans know what the underlying assumptions are when they deregulate rent increases, as is the case with respect to this bill and the way it does it.

A couple of other comments, Mr. Chairman. The whole notion that markets will take care of everything is something that I think needs some reminders. Only in the economists' textbooks are markets perfect, that they seek and achieve some sort of a balance or equilibrium. In the real world markets are more often than not imperfect markets.

11:00

We have learned from experience over the last 200 years that real markets are not perfect. Sometimes they can be so imperfect that they can bring disaster to visit on all of us. Economies can be

destroyed. We learned that during the Great Depression of the last century. As we learned something from it, we brought, in fact, some strong regulatory legislation, which remains in place to this day. Empty trust legislation is designed precisely to provide that social regulation that markets need; otherwise, they spin into chaos, lead to booms and busts and depressions, and millions of people suffer from that. People in the Canadian prairies know better than anyone else what depressions can do. So markets are not perfect tools; they're imperfect. That's why they require social intervention, social regulation, social monitoring.

Antitrust laws. Is anyone around this House willing to say that we don't need antitrust laws? No. We learned this. We accept this as something natural, as something necessary. Yet when it comes to dealing with the housing crisis that we have before us, we are saying: "Well, just relax. Give us two years. The markets will take care of everything." They won't. They have not. If that were the case, why would we not have education exposed entirely to markets? Why would we not have health totally exposed to markets? Why would we not have policing put at the mercy of the markets? Why would we not do the same thing with firefighters? Why would we not do that with public health? There are so many areas in modern life, in modern societies, where we accept and, in fact, think it's unwise and inappropriate to leave those social services and social programs to the markets. Markets do not deliver. Markets fail in those areas.

Mr. Chairman, housing falls somewhat into that category of services. As we have seen, if you leave it to the market when there is no government attention paid to housing, housing for people who can't afford to buy into this very hot market, government neglect in this area over the last 15, 20 years has led to the present crisis. It's not just hordes of, you know, Newfoundlanders and Ontarians invading our province that has caused this. The problem has been there for years. It has become worse now. It's the neglect. It's the total reliance, blind faith on the fact that the markets do the trick that have caused the problem that we are here dealing with as we debate this bill and other measures that need to be taken to ensure that Alberta families are not let out on the street because they cannot pay the exorbitant rents that have been increasing for some years now, and have now, of course, picked up speed.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

So, Mr. Chairman, markets are tools. Like any tool you have to be careful how you use it. You have to learn to use it better and improve the tool, not just let it be and see it as something that corrects itself or regulates itself. Markets do not. They're self-regulating only in an imaginary, abstract model that an economist has. The real markets are somewhat different and sometimes very, very different from that.

The last point, Mr. Chairman. I just want to briefly use the minister of intergovernmental affairs' intervention, that the NDP caucus members do not recognize that economic growth is necessary. That's a falsehood. That's a travesty of what social democrats stand for. That's such a gross oversimplification that I hope the minister was just joking and having fun by presenting himself as someone who doesn't know or fully understand. The minister has a good economic background, good economic training. He went to Harvard to get his degree in accounting, so I'm sure he knows better. I hope that he will not so exaggerate what he says here so that what he says becomes comical and laughable. That's what it is when you say that New Democrats and NDP members of the House do not support economic growth.

Economic growth and income distribution are both very, very

important. We see now the 200-some million dollars being allocated to help the very needy, the vulnerable. That is income distribution. That is a way of taking social action on the part of people who need help, to provide them help, and that certainly is what I would put in the category of income distribution.

When you have growth, growth doesn't necessarily translate itself into household prosperity for everybody. That's why we need governments. That's why we need social programs. Social programs are a way of indirect distribution of income, where people don't have to buy education, where people don't have to buy health for their families, but they get this because all of us say that these are necessities in a civilized society, they are necessities in a modern society, and we are all willing to pay the progressive taxes in order to generate enough revenues, if necessary, to pay for these services for everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to rise to speak to amendment A1 for the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. I must speak against this amendment. I believe that it's poor economics. In trying to tie rent increases to the rate of inflation, you really must be very, very careful. It is absolutely the wrong trigger if one is to look at any sort of way to deal with rents and rent increases.

It also has a very difficult period with the two-year period, and it locks it in for all of Alberta if it were to pass. And who knows what will happen, especially if we're looking at some of the forecasts, which say that we could have reduced oil prices in a year and some problems in terms of surpluses and all the rest of it? All of a sudden we'd be in great difficulty in trying to increase stocks, especially for the poor. Mr. Chairman, it is clear that these types of inflation-triggered rent increase controls decrease housing stocks for the poor, and it's probably the last thing that we want to see in this system. It's far too broad a brush.

Not all sectors of our economy boom at the same time. We can look at what happened the last few years after 9/11 and what happened to tourism in Alberta. It went down, and then there was difficulty in some of the towns that depended on tourism. All geographic areas just do not boom at the same time. All sectors of the economy do not boom at the same time. We've got to be very careful about this type of a measure.

You know, the wording in this is very difficult. It may apply to any rental unit in a complex even if somebody is renting it to a new tenant. It doesn't seem to be absolutely clear on that factor. Realistically, any new development should be free from any rent controls, and this is a rent control measure. It's far too broad a brush. I must speak against it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

11:10

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's absolutely amazing to me that the President of the Treasury Board could suggest that stability can be found by picking a number. It doesn't matter what that number is, but once a year whatever that number is, when it rolls around, that's going to provide stability.

I speak in favour of amendment A1 to Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, that was put forward by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora because what it does is provide

a specific number. People know what that number is. There's nothing to guess about. Contrast that specific number of inflation plus 2 per cent with the keeper of the provincial purse's idea of accounting: "Pick a number, any number. Roll the dice. Whatever the dice shows, that's the amount of rent you pay." Luck of the draw. Russian roulette. Fortune cookie philosophy.

There is no stability unless you set aside a particular number. It just absolutely amazes me: guess, landlords, what you can increase your rents by? Renters: break your piggy banks or hold on to them because one year from now we're going to do it to you again. You know, bend over and kiss your fortunes goodbye.

The government seems to be caught up with imaginary numbers, whatever they may be. A number that they should pay attention to is that at noon today the *Calgary Sun* poll showed that 95.3 per cent of the individuals who took time to answer that poll were opposed to the Premier's housing policy.

The situation we're in right now, the idea of opportunism versus opportunity, a lack of stability, reminds me of post civil war America. The opportunists at that time were called carpetbaggers. They came in and took advantage of the fact that there wasn't stability in the marketplace. In a lot of the southern States the infrastructure was gone. When the north came through, basically, a lot of the old houses and the towns were torched. So these carpetbaggers from the north came down and took advantage of the situation: they charged, and they pillaged, and they plundered, and they got whatever they could. That is the role the government is playing right now. It's playing the role of the carpetbagger: no concern for renters, no concern for constituents, no defining, no laws, no expectations for landlords, just go for it.

What is happening in the apartments in Calgary-Varsity, the particular apartment where 298 individuals and suites are affected, is that with the government's lack of regulation there's no such thing as a one-year contract for renters anymore. It's been reduced to six months at best so that the landlords can participate in market speculation, and at any time within the end of that six-month period they can start to convert to condominiums, whatever they like. But any sense of stability for those people is absolutely gone.

Sharing cases in this House on Monday, I was accused of grandstanding. It was suggested that I hid my constituents' letters under my desk. These were the false claims, the charges that the minister of unsustainable and unaffordable housing made. Well, I see my role as being the spokesperson for my constituents, the advocate providing their words to this House. So that's what I'm going to do.

Dear Mr. Chase,

I am [a] tenant of the Varsity Square Apartments on 4515 Varsity Dr. NW. I am greatly concerned with the rental increase, of approximately 45%, in our building as well as in the City of Calgary. I am a Receptionist working for Alberta Research Council located in the University Research Park. As a Government, AUPE union employee, I do not have a monthly income to handle the increasing cost of living in Alberta. My question to you and other members of Parliament is, "What about the working poor?" Albertans do not share in the wealth that is being generated in the Province and it's about time that changed.

Trudy Hill concludes:

I look forward to your reply on this matter.

Of course, I replied very quickly. That letter came into the office e-mail on April 25.

The Chair: Hon. member, are you speaking on the amendment?

Mr. Chase: Yes. If you'd like, I'll keep referring to amendment A1.

The Chair: I'm having a hard time finding your comments relevant to the amendment. One further comment: reference to members in the House as dishonourable members is not parliamentary.

Mr. Chase: I don't recall saying dishonourable. I said the minister of unsustainable and unaffordable housing. And if that's offensive . . .

What A1 does is talk about stability; it talks about percentages. And that's what I'm talking about: stability and predictable percentages. What my constituents have noted is that there is no predictability. That's what A1 tries to address. I will try again with another example.

Dear Mr. Chase,

I received last night a printed invitation to let you know of particular concerns that any of us who are renting in Varsity Square Apartments. Although I am only 59, I am on a fixed income and have chronic pain. I am living on CPP disability (700 per month) RRSPs and my savings. I am also paying for treatment of my chronic pain, as I wish to re-enter the workforce. My rent will increase on July 1 by \$400 per month. I have to find a place which rents out at no more than \$900.00 per month. This is very difficult to find in the City of Calgary at the present time.

It's these comments from my constituents that cause me to support amendment A1 because what A1 does is provide the type of stability that renters need. They need to know, as this amendment suggests, that whatever the inflation is – and they can't deal with the inflation, but they'll know that whatever the inflation is, given that time period, no more than 2 per cent beyond that inflation will be added to their rent increase. What it does is allow individuals to budget.

Candace goes on to say:

I could move and have my rent go up after considerable expense moving. The building I might choose may go condo.

There's no provision, although the housing task force suggested that there should be a provision, to limit condo-ization.

Without rent controls and a moratorium on the conversion of rental units into condos, I will most probably find myself in this situation in a year. I know that you have been pushing for this in the legislature already.

What my constituent is recognizing is what amendment A1 is suggesting. She's looking for predictability. She's looking for a regulatory process that can guarantee her stability. She notes that one year from now, if there's no regulation, any amount of increase wherever she goes can take place because there are no limits, there are no expectations.

11:20

I'll share information from another individual. This individual also lives in that same apartment complex where a lot of the concerns have come. Of course, there are 298 suites, so it's not surprising that there are a number of concerns. This person begins: "I live at 4515 Varsity Dr. N.W." I'll not mention the apartment number.

An Hon. Member: You might as well. You said everything else.

Mr. Chase: Well, it was indicated that I might as well give the person's apartment number. I want to contrast the specific names that I have been given permission to express in this House to the creative fantasies that we saw earlier during question period, where people who had no first name, no last name, no city reference were mentioned as examples of how the government was looking after people. Creative stories, to say the least. And I don't hold it against the minister. When she was supplied this information, she probably believed that the stories that she had received were accurate, and she probably didn't have time to go and check the accuracy of those

documents. What I'm doing is what my constituents have asked me to do, and my constituents, by asking for specific percentages, are showing their support for this amendment.

So I'll continue.

I live at 4515 Varsity Dr. N.W. . . . and have just spoken with Mr. Fred Bishop who was on CBC Newsworld Sunday discussing his rent increase at said apartment and was advised to contact you regarding my 45 per cent increase in rent. I received my rental renewal March 01 for an increase in rent effective June 01. My rent, including underground parking, is going from \$765.00 per month to \$1115.00 per month and only with a six month lease.

I brought up the need for having a fixed increase in amendment A1 as the Member for Edmonton-Glenora proposed. That's what this man who's on a fixed income is looking for. He needs the stability of a fixed percentage.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

He goes on:

I am perhaps fortunate that I am still young enough to get another job in order to cover the additional cost; however, I believe that the whole plan here is to convert this complex to condos which means I will have to move eventually.

So this poor man is getting hit, first, with a 45 per cent increase. He only has the instability of a six-month contract, and over him rests the possibility of another increase at the end of the following year or a condo conversion because he has no stability. This government has not provided him with any stability.

When I received my notice of increase I did write [the Premier]. His response was less than satisfactory. He advised me that his government believes that rent controls don't work and that they prevent new apartments from being built. I replied to him last weekend and expressed my thought that without rent controls over the last ten years that very few, if any new apartment buildings have been built in Calgary and that if one takes into account condo conversions that the number of rental apartments has probably decreased.

And that is the evidence. That is why amendment A1 is so important. It provides specifics.

. . . a fact the CBC confirmed Sunday in the program I was watching which stated that over the last year the number of rental units had dropped over 2 per cent.

I have also heard a very disturbing story regarding an elderly senior in my building who committed suicide as a direct result of these rent increases.

This type of behaviour by a landlord is totally unacceptable. It is just another example of the abject greed which has become so pervasive in our society today.

[interjection] I find nothing amusing from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo about an individual having committed suicide. These aren't stories I'm making up.

Mr. Cenaiko: What's the name? Give us the name, then.

Mr. Chase: Name the individual who committed suicide?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, please, through the chair.

Mr. Chase: May I continue?

The Deputy Chair: Through the chair.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. Another letter, this one from Diane Shelley.

Dear Premier,

I feel I must voice my opinion regarding the current rental

increases. Why do landlords have the power and freedom to increase our rents by \$300-\$400 per month?

Well, I can answer her right now: because the government permits it. That is what we're trying to address in amendment A1.

It's a disgusting abuse of tenants in the name of greed!

At present, I am paying \$725 per month for a 500 square foot so called 1-bedroom apartment in the NW . . .

And it's the same address: 4515 Varsity Drive.

. . . and have signed a 6 month lease. One year leases are no longer available here. When my lease expires in April, I have been advised my rent will increase to \$1050.00 per month for another 6 month lease, or \$1090.00 per month on a month to month basis!

So here's where the speculation comes in. That is why amendment A1 is absolutely necessary.

Diane goes on to say:

Needless to say, I must try to find cheaper accommodations which is sure to be a challenge, since all the landlords in this city seem to be in the same money grab mode.

Now, I would disagree that all landlords are in that position, but the frustration she is experiencing I can appreciate.

I am 64 years old, and on a fixed income. At the new rental rate, that would leave me with approximately \$200 per month to live on. Does this seem fair? I know there are many many other people out there faced with the same dilemma.

As our premier, please, please put some controls in place, bring down rents and stop these uncaring landlords from gouging us!

I hope that the laughter from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is not at the expense of my constituent.

Mr. Cenaiko: No, it's not.

Mr. Chase: Okay. I appreciate that qualification. I am pleased to hear that.

The next letter I received was sent to me on April 27. It comes from a lady by the name of Roshika Khanna. It says:

Dear MLAs.

My name is Roshika Khanna, and I am a Program Coordinator for Calgary Scope Society. Calgary Scope Society has been committed to improving lives for persons with developmental disabilities in Calgary and area for over 23 years. This letter is in regards to the growing concerns of finding affordable housing for our clients. In my efforts to find a two bedroom place for a client that we support, in the past two months I have encountered many obstacles.

- Due to limited income our clients are unable to afford most of the places for rent in the Calgary area.
- The waiting lists for Calgary Housing Company and subsidized housings run up to anywhere from 4 months to 2 years.
- The moment the landlords learn about our clients' mental/physical disabilities their applications get rejected without any valid reasons.

Unfortunately, in Bill 34 there is nothing that recognizes the degrees of vulnerability of individuals.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to be able to get up and speak on this amendment A1, that basically is wanting to impose an interest cap, or to have it indexed to CPI plus 2 per cent. I want to stand up and speak against this. I feel that it's very important to do so.

11:30

What's very interesting tonight, Mr. Chair, is that there's nothing more exciting to a coach or to a teacher or to a friend than when you're trying to enlighten someone and have them discover a better way. It was kind of interesting. My hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning was able to speak before . . .

Mr. Elsalhy: You said: my hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Well, as you are as well, hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: But not yours.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. Well, our hon. members here.

Anyways, as he was saying that he was going to get up and speak, he leaned forward and said to me: I'm speaking against it. He had this glitter in his eye and a smile on his mouth. He caught the vision, Mr. Chair, of the fact that, you know, we don't live in a perfect world. The market isn't perfect. He understands that.

Often it's argued that, you know, competition is a ruthless and cruel process. One can argue that, but the fact of the matter is that government and government intervention is far more ruthless. It's far more damaging, and it hurts the economy to a greater extent. What we're talking about here in this great government of ours in Canada and from reading from the constitutional act – it says that we set laws that are justified in a free and democratic society. This is the root of freedom. Freedom doesn't come at no price. One has to pay the price for freedom.

6. (1) Every citizen of Canada has the right to enter, remain in and leave Canada.

(2) Every citizen of Canada and every person who has the status of permanent resident of Canada has the right

(a) to move to and take up residence in any province.

In any province. And that includes Alberta.

When government wants to intervene and say, "We're going to impose a cap here, or we're going to restrict interest on this end," as soon as government steps in and interrupts the free market, it just ends up in a catastrophe.

We're in a very sad situation. We're struggling right now with a shortage of housing. But the fact of the matter is that there are far too many other Canadians and other people in the world that look at this as the bastion of freedom, the land of opportunity, and they're flocking here by the thousands. There's no government that's going to be able to say: "You know what? We've got 11,000 people moving here in the next three months. We've got to get out and build the houses so they have a place to be here."

I spoke earlier that those first settlers that came to this province didn't come here with the thought that government was going to build and provide houses for them so that they could come here and move forward in their economic dream of what they're going to achieve.

Once again, if we were to pass this amendment and look at putting a cap on what they could charge, the increase on the rent, eventually we would hit a greater waterfall that would cause more damage, and we'd have to ask the question: well, do we continue to step in? At what point would we ever try and step out? As I've said, history has shown us many times that when government steps in and thinks that it knows the market better or some leader thinks that he can lay a better path to say that this is the way to go, we end up losing. We can just look around the rest of world at those countries where they want and where they do control the market. They control the housing. They control the jobs. They tell people where they can and where they can't come from. If we were to pass this amendment, we would again be moving into that area of government intervention, where we have no business to be.

There's no question that we're in a problem, and I want to go back to, you know, what we should be doing. One of the problems that I see: as government intervenes more and more in these areas and wants to control our lives, we as citizens look to the government and say, "You know what? It's not my personal responsibility to look after people anymore."

The one hon. member talked about a progressive tax, that this is good, that if we have a progressive tax, then we can meet the social needs of our people. A1 is a progressive tax that's going to cost us more. It will turn the industry against wanting to come in and put up housing because this is a fairly high-risk venture, to put up a bunch of buildings to want to sell or to want to rent and to think, you know: what's going to be the next restriction that the government comes in with? Once again, this is the precedent that we've set, that is to say that we're going to intervene if the market gets too extreme.

Who is ever going to be the government or the people in government that can set down a number and say, "Well, this year it's 7 per cent"? I realize that this is to the consumer price index and want to say that, but it takes a lot more than: this year, you know, what are we going to be, 5 per cent, 7 per cent? No one's going to go and want to develop housing knowing that that's the rate of return. It just isn't going to stimulate the market. The unfortunate part of human nature is that the two greatest driving forces are fear and greed.

Mr. Mason: What about sex?

Mr. Hinman: I'm talking about the market right now, Brian.

Anyways, with that in mind, we see the shortage of the housing and where it's going. People are already sitting there saying: well, what can I do to get in and to capitalize on this shortage of supply? We'll reach an answer far quicker if we don't interfere than if we start continuing to tinker with the market and say: "Oh, we've got to jump in here. We've got to jump in there." I appreciate the good intentions, though. We all want to make it better. That's why most of us are here, I believe. Unfortunately, we know what road is often paved with good intentions.

We need to look at those unintentional consequences of government stepping in and saying: government knows best. The biggest thing is that government is the people, and the people are the market, and the government is no wiser, usually less wise, than those people that have the freedom to choose: "I'm going to invest. I'm not going to invest. The government's stepping in." There are just too many places in the world where we see government intervention in the market, in the economy, and those governments and those economies are not progressive. They don't go forward, and the quality of life for those individuals is not great. I still would challenge anybody who says that there is a place that's better where the government is stepping in.

As I read earlier, you have the freedom to enter and the freedom to leave, not only the province but the country. Go there, and make one of those places better that thinks the economy can be controlled by government, because it doesn't happen. So I speak against the amendment A1, that it isn't in favour, and it won't be a benefit to those renters that are struggling now.

I look forward to listening to further debate on this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Elsalhy: Aah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. [interjections] Yeah, it's a sigh of frustration. It's not a sigh of relief.

I'm standing here to support my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, who moved amendment A1 to Bill 34. I have to commend him for coming up with this amendment to a bill that was very carefully drafted, Mr. Chairman. We heard some comments earlier tonight from the government side talking about geniuses. I really have to say that in my two and a half years in this Assembly this is one of the most creative pieces of legislation that I've seen in this

House. Its creativity is basically in such a way that it doesn't contain anything, and it also doesn't allow a lot of room to manoeuvre with respect to amendments and things like this. It's meant to give the public a false impression of stability, which is the term I keep hearing in this House, and it also portrays a false image of a government that is basically rescuing tenants or renters or coming to their aid.

What the amendment is trying to do, Mr. Chairman, as you've heard seven or eight times tonight, is basically bring in that stability which is missing in this bill, which really achieves nothing. When you say, "You guys," to those landlords who, I've mentioned, are a few – it's a small group of landlords. Not all of them are greedy. Not all of them are bad. But to those ones who are: you cannot raise rent more than once a year. So we're talking about the frequency.

11:40

Amendment A1 is talking about the magnitude of that increase. It's basically calling for an allowable rent increase which is matching inflation as dictated or determined by the consumer price index and then adding 2 per cent to offer that cushion because sometimes the costs incurred by landlords might slightly exceed inflation. And when you have inflation, Mr. Chairman, that is at about 5 and a half to 6 per cent now and you add 2 per cent, that's an 8 per cent increase.

Tell me: which industry, you know, legitimate and legal industry, gets an 8 per cent increase every year? Some of them actually do, but they do it by negotiation. They negotiate with the government because they're basically paid by the government. We have many different examples where certain sectors and certain professions are regulated by the government, and they receive money based on negotiations and contracts. This should be no different. Landlords are offering an essential service, and essential services have to be treated as such. Housing is not a luxury. It is a necessity, and everybody needs a home.

Now, am I surprised that there seems to be an ideological divide between members from the opposition and then members from the government? No. I'm not at all surprised. Even with the member from the Alliance Party, I'm happy that sometimes we agree, and we have areas where we have common ground; for example, democratic renewal and things like this. But today I'm also not surprised that he's standing in support of the government and in opposition to amendment A1 because, again, that's what he believes, and that's what his party believes, and this is what the Progressive Conservatives believe: that nothing needs to be done, the market should not be interfered with, and that the market fixes itself. It looks after itself. It can rectify or correct, given time, and let's step back and watch it at work. This is where I disagree, and this is where my hon. colleagues on the opposition side totally disagree.

Now, one of the reasons why we have this ideological divide is because the government and now, as determined, the member from the Alliance Party think that whenever you interfere, something bad happens. There is usually an adverse outcome. There is usually a negative result. But I would like to remind members from this government and, actually, colleagues from all sides that this very government – and it's not new; this is a government that has been here for 36 years – does interfere.

An Hon. Member: Thirty-six?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, 36 years. And they do occasionally interfere when certain situations warrant such an intervention by any government.

You know, Mr. Chairman, people elect governments to look after

them. They elect governments to represent them and to protect their interests. So any government anywhere on this earth has a role to play, and whether this role is big, whether it's small, how much, and how frequently are to be determined. And now is a crisis. This is the time that any government should really sprint to its feet and do something to help the people.

Now, I have examples where this government has found it necessary and justified to step in, to come to people's aid, to be on people's side. Take, for example, the regulated rate option. When we as citizens of this province woke up one day and we were told that deregulation is coming and there is nothing that we can say or do to stop it, the government found it necessary to bring in some sort of mechanism or measure to protect those people who did not really fully buy into the brand, the ideology that deregulation is great and it's the best thing since sliced bread.

So the government stepped in, and it allowed those customers who did not want to go with the deregulated structure to stay on the regulated rate option. When the regulated rate option was slated to expire, Mr. Chairman, myself and many members of my caucus asked for the extension of the regulated rate option, and I also have to highlight the effort by my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar on this front. Former Premier Klein agreed. He said: "You know what? I think the regulated rate option should be extended." I felt very grateful that day because here is a Premier who not frequently enough but at least occasionally listens to the people and agrees with what the people said.

Take the government stepping in and regulating the maximum cap on soft tissue injury claims. Why didn't they leave the market to operate the way it pleased? Well, they came in, and they said: "You know what? Four thousand dollars is your cap, and this is it." Now, whether we agree or disagree with this decision in particular, at least they came in and said: "This is what we think is fair. This is what we think should be done." It's an example of a government that is basically stepping in and regulating. So the word "regulation" is not that evil. It's not that bad. It is done. It's the very same government. We're not talking about governments in different provinces or jurisdictions. It's the same one.

Take the NRCB, for example. Mr. Chairman, if you own or if you want to start a feedlot or a livestock operation, you go to who? The NRCB. And what do you do? You ask for permission whether to start a feedlot or a livestock operation or to expand an existing one. Now, isn't that a form of regulation? Governments have a role to play, and this government plays that role when it finds it necessary and when it's pleasing.

In late 2001, early 2002 there was a lot of uneasiness and there was a lot of concern with respect to the high-pressure sales tactics and other unfair practices by travel clubs in this province. So what did the government do? The government surveyed Albertans. They asked Albertans what they thought, and Albertans overwhelmingly told the government that they were not happy with the way travel clubs were operating. How did the government respond? The government regulated travel clubs in this province on May 17, 2002. Isn't that an example of a government stepping in?

Now, you learn two lessons from this, Mr. Chairman. You learn that the government actually played a role, and then you also learn that at that time the government decided to listen to the people. They surveyed the people. I keep maintaining that the Public Affairs Bureau should be a two-way communications device. It should be there to ask Albertans what they think, not only during election years and not only to ask them, you know, how they like the government and why the government is so wonderful. They should be there to ask Albertans what they think.

This issue, this particular concern, the housing concern, the

housing issue, the crisis, should be one that is a survey or a poll that goes to every Albertan in this province. Ask them what they think. I know my honourable colleague from Calgary-Varsity was commenting on a survey that he came across, and it indicated that 95 per cent of those polled disagree with the government's position. They don't approve of the government's direction on this particular issue. Now, 95 per cent is a significant sum, and it actually signals a growing opposition to where the government is coming from on this particular issue, notwithstanding that, you know, in the Tory convention the members there indicated their support for that position. Albertans at large, people all over the province should be surveyed. Let's see what they tell us.

Take another example, Mr. Chairman. In the mid-1990s the provincial government of the day increased its commitment to West Edmonton Mall from \$75 million to \$440 million. Even the Premier at that time had no difficulty signalling to at least two of his ministers to come up with what was called an Alberta solution to the West Edmonton Mall's financial woes. He had no difficulty interfering in the market. If we come to the support of a commercial enterprise, a private business, and say, "You know what? You do wonderful work. We want to support you, and we want to come to your aid," then we should at least grant the same treatment and offer the same courtesy to citizens, to individuals, who might not have that level of support otherwise.

Mr. Chairman, here's another example. In October 2003 the Premier at the time, Premier Klein, told Albertans that he was frustrated with the auto insurance situation and the skyrocketing premiums. Against division in his own caucus, he implemented a one-year freeze on premiums. Now, the Premier said, you know, that in his opinion it did not either raise or lower premiums. What it did was just freeze them for a year for that situation to be evaluated. He wanted to sort out that issue and he wanted time to do it and he didn't want people breathing down his neck saying: do something; do something. So he froze it for a year.

11:50

Now, we're not asking to freeze rents, Mr. Chairman. We're asking to allow rents to increase, but reasonably, and amendment A1 does just that. It basically follows the recommendations from the task force, the task force which was all-party and which toured all corners of the province and listened to people from industry, from tenants, from advocacy groups, from financial institutions. It did a lot of work, and it did a lot of good work. We need to implement all the recommendations or the bulk of the recommendations, not just select one or two aspects and leave everything out. It should be a package. The task force was entrusted to hear the stories and to come up with solutions. We should really adopt and embrace what the task force came up with. This was one of the recommendations in that report.

It really follows what a province like B.C. does, you know, when they have rent guidelines. The only difference, Mr. Chairman, is that this amendment is asking for a temporary rent guideline to allow the market to catch up, to allow it to equilibrate, to settle, you know, for new units to be added. We need to wait, and people cannot wait. They have nowhere to go. This basically offers that stability in the interim, till that new supply comes on board, comes on the market. So it is not indefinite. It is not forever. Again, to be fair to the landlords, we're not just talking inflation. We're talking inflation plus a little differential, plus a little margin on top, which is in this case 2 per cent.

Now, how else can we be fair to the landlords? Let's say that a landlord, really, justifiably wants to raise the rent over inflation plus 2 per cent. Well, if you remember the deliberations on Bill 202, Mr.

Chairman, the Consumer Advocate Act, which I brought to the House and which was unfortunately defeated by the government, we wanted an advocate to adjudicate these requests, to basically reconcile the two positions and to say: you know, we anticipate that the average allowable, predictable percentage increase is this. But let's say that a landlord can prove that this particular landlord needs to raise the rent by 20 per cent. Well, there should be a mechanism where this particular landlord appears before a designated board, and I would suggest the residential tenancy dispute resolution board, which is in its pilot year here in Edmonton. We should extend it to cover the entire province, and it should be mandated to reconcile these things, to adjudicate these things. [interjection] You don't want that board? Fine.

There is a tendency by this government to put things in regulations. Name a board that is existing or start a new one that just sits there and approves rental rate increases that are exceeding the allowed average. We're only doing this during the period when we have this particular rent regulation. After the sunset, after the end of that particular regulation period, fine, you can switch off that board and say: "You know what? You guys do what you want." By then, hopefully, the market would have settled and would have equilibrated.

You know, you should allow good landlords who have incurred a lot of expenses to raise rents, again fairly, and if they want to exceed what is agreed to or what is deemed to be appropriate or fair, then fine, we should give them the mechanism. If you ask me, Mr. Chairman, the reason why we didn't do it with this amendment is quite simple. I go back to my first comment. This bill is very carefully drafted to not allow us to do this. We wanted to put this mechanism in place. Take this as well: we wanted to allow a landlord, by agreement with the tenant – they both agree that this particular unit should be turned into a condo – to waive the notice period. Let's just say, "Okay, I agree; I want to buy it today," and the landlord says, "I agree, and the price is fair." Let them do it as long as it's done by agreement. But, again, there was no place in this bill to allow us to embed this provision.

We're not being unfair, and we're not taking sides. What we're saying is: allow landlords a fair and reasonable increase and allow them to recoup their expenses and to recover some of the costs that they incurred but also look after individuals who otherwise cannot fend for themselves, especially now with the low vacancy rate and no place for them to go and with subsidies and assistance from the government that take forever for someone to actually move up the pile and for their name to be, you know, on the top of the pile for them to be processed. Then, even as such, those subsidies are really small when you take into consideration the frenzy, the madness that is happening in our housing market.

I hope I still have time, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to talk about something that the government has on its website. It's called the core needs income thresholds, or they actually call it CNIT. The core needs income thresholds assist in distinguishing households requiring social housing assistance. Today, when we had the guests in the gallery and then we went to room 512, hoping to meet with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, his assistant told us that unfortunately he had a prior engagement and he couldn't make it to that meeting, but the staff there were trying their best to help those people who were there.

One of the records that they showed us was the CNIT. It talks about, you know, that households with annual incomes equal to or less than that figure are said to have insufficient income to afford the ongoing costs of suitable and adequate rental units in their area. I want to underline suitable and adequate because if you ask someone

to live wherever just because that's what they can afford, that's not being fair to them. I would call it un-Albertan.

Now, taking CNIT in 2006, for example, it covers all the municipalities in Alberta. I heard the comments from the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. Obviously, he's not hearing the concerns that we are on this side of the House. Take this, Mr. Chairman: in Cardston the value is \$18,500 for a one-bedroom unit. I'm not going to talk about two-bedroom units or three-bedroom units or four-plus. I'll just take the smallest one because that will be the most affordable, and we'll use that to extrapolate. So in Cardston it's \$18,500. In Taber it's \$18,500. You have a range. Take a place like Bow Island: still \$18,500.

Now take Edmonton. Edmonton is \$24,500. So if you have equal to or less than 24.5 grand a year, for a one-bedroom unit, you're deemed to be worthy of assistance. How many people qualify? How many people meet that requirement? I want an answer to this question. Take Calgary, for example. Calgary: \$27,500. Okay, so you divide that by 12. That's the monthly income that anybody should have to afford even a meagre one-bedroom unit. How many people fit that description? Now take Fort McMurray. You'll find that it's very interesting, Mr. Chairman, at \$47,500. So anybody who wants to even afford one bedroom in Fort McMurray needs to make at least 47 grand.

How many people are below this level? How many people have to work two jobs or three jobs or the husband and wife both working to actually at least afford a one-bedroom unit? These questions need to be answered, Mr. Chairman, and this government is not giving us the answers.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Amendment A1 is precisely the same amendment, as mentioned, that we've had as a party policy for a long time, plus the fact that the task force brought it forward. I want to lay out, again, why we need to put this as part of the package here today. The government's economic strategy has created an overheated economy. That's why we're facing the problems that we are. It's their economic strategy that wants to do this. They're the ones that are saying: let's get in there; get the oil and gas out to the American market as fast as we can; get the oil sands out as fast as we can; everything full steam ahead; don't put the foot on the brakes.

We disagree that that's what we should be doing, but we can't control that. If you do that, Mr. Chairman, then you have to provide the proper backup for it. Housing is just one example. We've talked about health care, education, infrastructure. You name it. We're falling behind. We can't keep up. I would suggest that even though the \$285 million is a lot of money, when we looked at it in the task force, that probably wouldn't even be enough money to keep up. That's the reality of what we're facing. I just want to put it in perspective because this is from the government's own paper from Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry. On the side it says, "Alberta Advantage." Well, what we and I think even the hon. members across are talking about here is that for a lot of people it's becoming a big, big Alberta disadvantage.

12:00

Now, Mr. Chairman, let's just take a look at this. Economic Outlook for Alberta, Spring Update, from Employment, Immigration and Industry, "Alberta's Economy – in a League of its Own."

An Hon. Member: Mr. Chairman, this is not relevant.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Chairman, this is very relevant because what they're saying – I'll come to housing here, and you'll see how relevant it is. Just pay attention. Stay tuned. You will learn something. I guarantee it.

Mr. Snelgrove: Not from you.

Mr. Martin: It's from your own government paper. Surely, you'll learn something from there. [interjection] Well, okay. Listen to what they have to say.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, once again, please, I know it's getting late in the evening, but if you were to make your comments through the chair, that would truly help.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Chairman, I'd love to make comments through you.

It says here:

- "Alberta is booming and this is certainly not a temporary phenomenon but a more permanent structural change in the economy" – Conference Board of Canada . . .
- Alberta had real GDP growth of 6.8%.

They say that the outlook for 2007 is still going to be strong, 4.0, but "this growth is not sustainable," and,

- Downside risks include labour shortages, and increasing construction and housing costs.

They talk a little more about housing specifically, and I won't read the whole report. I know that the minister would love me to do that, but time is of the essence here, so I want to move it along, Mr. Chairman. The Alberta housing: it says, "Economic pressures to persist," and this is looking ahead into the next year.

- Rapid growth in energy investment, especially in the oil sands, is creating growth pressures . . .
- Housing shortage is driving up costs of owning and renting a house.

Alberta's housing crunch. It goes on in this chapter:

- In February, province-wide MLS resale prices were 34% higher than a year [ago] . . .
- New housing prices rose 38% in Calgary and 42% in Edmonton.

Now, here's the key.

- . . . The (rental) vacancy rate . . . declined from 3.1 per cent in October 2005 to 0.9 per cent in October 2006 . . . the lowest vacancy rate for the province on record.
- . . . Since the start of 2005, housing affordability across the province has been eroding at an aggressive pace.

Now, through the chair to the hon. member: you see my point? This is going to get worse before it gets better. Admittedly, we had 109,000 people roll in, they say, but every indication is that this is going to go on because of the economic policies that this government is following, Mr. Chairman.

So what do we do in the short run? Being a member of the task force, we tried to take a global look at it, Mr. Chairman, and we tried to fit the package together. As I said earlier on, most people on that committee didn't start off thinking that we needed, you know, rent guidelines or rent stability, but they came to that realization. Many of them said that when we finally had the debate because they didn't see any alternative when they started to listen to people and listen to the crisis across the province. And this would indicate that it's going to get worse.

That's why this talks about, you know, CPI plus 2 per cent, which they have in British Columbia. But as they do in B.C., I would take it that if there are extenuating costs – and we talked about this – landlords can apply to pass that along, whether it's utilities or whatever. This is not a real market right now. This is a market out

of control. I believe that even Adam Smith would have trouble with this one, Mr. Chairman. So I don't see what the hang-up is so much about in a temporary way putting some sort of guidelines, knowing these economic forecasts coming from the government.

What are we going to do? Just let more people be homeless? Or are we just going to say to young people: "Forget about ever owning a house. Don't worry about it because we believe in the market. Just let it do whatever it wants."

Surely, even this government must understand that there are times when an uncontrolled market doesn't work. They will still make a lot of profit, Mr. Chairman. They've had guidelines for 15 years in Ontario. They're building more rental units than we are without them. And that should be the proof of the pudding, but it doesn't seem to get across to this group that there is another way to do it. Again, it seems to be the triumph of ideology over common sense.

One of the things, Mr. Chairman, to tie it into why we need the guidelines is because this is impacting everything. As the rents go up, housing prices go up. We've talked about the people at the other end of the spectrum, the most vulnerable people in society, and we know what's happening to them. There's enough evidence here, and we've seen it in the Legislature, but it's also impacting a lot of what we might call the young professional middle class.

When I was with Mayor Mandel in my own riding, I alluded to this. Edmonton is trying a very innovative project with first-time homebuyers. The city is taking out second mortgages to try to keep these people here in Edmonton because some of them are talking about moving to Saskatchewan, where they can afford a house. How can that be an economic advantage? We're going to need these people in the future, Mr. Chairman.

So we're getting caught in two ways. Less and less people can afford to buy a house, and the rents are going up. So they're sort of caught in a double bind. And that's true of the middle class right now. It's true of young professionals. It's true of a lot of people here, Mr. Chairman. I can't see why the government has to be so hidebound about this particular issue. I know that there are some people in the caucus – they've told me, and it's been reported publicly that some of them say that there's a need for this. I wish they'd stand up and speak here tonight. They know who they are that talked about it. Now's the opportunity to say what your constituents are saying and what you've said publicly. This is the time to vote on it.

An Hon. Member: Not me.

Mr. Martin: Well, I have no hope for you, so don't worry about it. But that's the point. We have to do what's right. [interjections] I've known you for a long time. I didn't have hope for you from the start, and I was right. I'm sure we can go back to who you used to work for. I doubt that he would stand up here and say that this is good enough, to just let the market go. The first time that the boom came, they at least had a social conscience and did bring in rent controls and did bring in mortgage subsidies, did do a lot of things that helped people. They did.

Mr. Liepert: Interest rates were 20 per cent. Are you going to wait for 20 per cent again?

Mr. Martin: Yeah. Well, what do you want to do? Does it matter, if you're out on the street, how you got there? Does it really matter? If you can't afford a house, does it really matter what the interest rates were? The ultimate thing is the same. I would argue that he would stand up here today, Mr. Chairman, and he would say that we have to do something, that an uncontrolled market just doesn't work

in this situation. He's talked about the rate of growth as being unsustainable, so I'm just saying that we should do the right thing.

The other argument about guidelines is so far out of kilter, the idea that if we bring in guidelines and rent stability, we're not going to build the units. Well, how can it be any worse? We're not building rental units now.

An Hon. Member: It can always get worse, Ray.

Mr. Martin: It couldn't get any worse. They're not building them.

The point is that in Ontario, where they have guidelines, they're building them. Now, what should that tell us? Get off the ideology, and start to do what's right for people. And I know that some of the members over there feel that way.

The point that we make is that rent controls – you know, they say that we can't take them off. Well, we did in Alberta. This is not New York. We did get rid of them before in Alberta when we didn't need them. I said earlier on today, and I repeat it for some people that weren't here, that Councillor Cavanagh was the one that got the job of bringing the end to controls at the time, but he also said that we need them now again. So it's not impossible. Well, he's a Conservative. He got the job because he was a Conservative, so it wouldn't have been anybody else.

Mr. Chairman, as long as we're in a situation with a market that's totally out of control, unfair, and there isn't the competition there, I just don't understand why we can't do this on a temporary basis and do what's right for thousands of Albertans.

12:10

We talked about the other part of the report: building the units. Now, the member asked about how many units. Probably, you can't keep up. That's the sad fact. Even though it's admittedly a lot of money and some of it will do some good, as long as we continue with the type of growth that they're talking about here, that probably still won't do the job. We were talking in the task force about 12,000 units in the next few years to try and catch up. That probably won't be enough. So I don't know. In the meantime we have to try to put more on the market. No doubt about that.

We talked in the report – and I hope this isn't going to be done. I think some of the members have talked about inclusionary zoning, tax incentives to do that. All those sorts of things are important, but in the short run you can't get away from the package. The crucial thing is that the rent guidelines have to be there in the short run. I just for the life of me cannot understand – I really cannot understand – this ideology that would make even George Bush blush, I'm sure, Mr. Chairman, this ideology that we can't do anything to help people, that there's somehow a market here when there isn't a market here. I mean, it's just unbelievable.

The government says, "Well, you come and see us." Telephone calls don't even work, and the eviction fund isn't there. You know, it shows you how disorganized they are. Even the things they brought in, people can't access them. That's somewhere in the future, and there are people suffering now, and I stress that it's not only the most vulnerable. That's sad enough, and that's a very sad story. We've heard many of them here. But it's impacting the ordinary people.

I was at a meeting yesterday, Mr. Chairman, and people came up to me: "We have a house, yes, but we're worried about our sons and daughters. They don't. How are they ever going to have a house? And the rents are going up. What are we going to do?" There was anger there, palpable anger. I think the government underestimates this issue, underestimates it totally. They think that they've voted Conservative all their life, and that somehow no matter what they do

– they can do whatever they want; the people can suffer – they’re still going to vote for them. Well, they’re going to find that there’s going to be a wake-up call very soon. From what I’m reading – and I’ve been around this game for a long time – this is an issue that really rings home with people, not just the most vulnerable. A lot of people have sons and daughters trying to get in the market.

To take bits and pieces, to cherry-pick a report – you know, a key thing we had to do was a continuum along the way from the homeless right through to the first-time homebuyers – and say that, well, we can’t do rent guidelines, as I said earlier on, Mr. Chairman, I thought that at least this government would look at helping first-time homebuyers with mortgage subsidies for five years, like we did in the past, like the city of Edmonton is trying to do on a pilot project. But they couldn’t even go that way. When they did the secretariat, they said it’s such a crisis. That’s what we heard from Albertans on the task force: a crisis. That word “crisis” came up time and time and time again. And that’s why we’d suggested the secretariat pull all these things together from a package. The government says that, well, they’re doing all this consulting among each other. Well, nobody out in the public knows anything about it. If they’re consulting so well with the eviction fund, they’d get up in the House and say: call 1-800, and there will an eviction fund, and we can deal with you there. When you phone, it’s busy, or secondly, they say: “Well, gee. We don’t know.”

Mr. MacDonald: Perhaps we could try at this hour of the night.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. That’s right. We had it on the line. If we could have used it, we would have. “Well, I don’t know what’s going on. I guess I’ll get around to it,” and they stand up in the House. That shows you how disorganized it is. Is that the amount of consultation that’s going on over there with that group? When you’re in question period, you don’t know who to ask. There are four of them popping up and down like yo-yos, Mr. Chairman. [interjection] Oh, we woke up the House leader. I’m glad. You know, I thought you were falling asleep there. Then I know the hon. member is going to give me a standing ovation after his colleague.

Mr. Chairman, I want to come back to say: this is your document. This is what they are predicting. It’s going to get worse before it gets better. Why can’t you take off those philosophical blinders and do what’s right for the majority of the people of this province? Why can’t they do that? I don’t know. I can’t believe that they don’t care about what’s happening to people. Maybe that’s the case. But I do believe that somebody taught them Adam Smith in grade 6, and they think that that’s where they have to go for the rest of their lives without dealing with the real issues.

The former Conservative government, the first generation of Conservatives in the boom, had a vision. Maybe it’s just that they’ve been around too long. I suggest that in the first boom they didn’t do everything perfectly, but at least they tried to help people deal with that boom, unlike this bunch. Unlike this bunch, Mr. Chairman. They sit there and say: well, let the market work. They’re going to build all these rental units. No evidence of it. In fact, we have evidence that they’re not going to till the prices go up.

They say: well, that’s just the way the market works. Well, that’s small comfort – small comfort, Mr. Chairman – to people who are struggling, the most vulnerable, the middle class, young people, older people. Then we’ll have students coming back in a little while facing the same sorts of problems. That’s why this shouldn’t have taken much.

There’s a conservative government in British Columbia called Liberal, and they can live with this. They seem to be our TILMA buddies. You know, if they think it’s okay and we think they’re

okay to be in TILMA and it’s working for them, why couldn’t we be able to take a look at it? Again I stress that it’s not like these people aren’t going to make money. That’s a pretty good profit when you make the consumer price index plus 2, but if you have extenuating costs, you can apply to the board and pass it on; i.e., utilities, those sorts of things.

I’m waiting for my standing ovation.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Agnihotri: Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’m pleased to rise to speak in support of the amendment moved by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Glenora that Bill 34, Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 1(4)(b) by adding the following under the proposed subsection (8):

(9) No increase in rent payable under a residential tenancy agreement shall be greater than the rate of inflation as measured by the All-items Consumer Price Index for Alberta published by Statistics Canada for the immediately preceding year, plus 2%, for the period April 24, 2007 to April 23, 2009.

Mr. Chairman, the Alberta Liberal Party always believes in fairness and sustainability in the market. I mean, if we are fair to both investors and tenants, then we can make progress. That’s why fairness in the market is very important, and this is what we are trying to do. With Bill 34, if we pass that bill as is, I don’t think it will be fair to both of them. You know, some investors are gouging on the rent, and this is not the right thing to do. We must have some sort of temporary relief immediately, which is missing in this Bill 34.

12:20

As I said before, Mr. Chairman, this amendment is very important for vulnerable people. Especially in my riding, you know, they are facing a serious problem. Yes, the leader from the third party is right. The Alberta Liberal Party believes that 10 per cent is reasonable in a year for temporary relief to catch the market and for sustainability in the market. This amendment is recommended by the task force. It was one of the 50 or so recommendations made by the task force. I think that if all members in this House agree on this, it will be something that at least will help some of the tenants who are desperately looking for some help from the elected officials, from the government.

Mr. Chairman, Alberta needs short-term protection on this issue. It’s very important because who knows when 1,100 apartments or houses – you know, affordable homes – are going to be built? In the meantime, we need protection for those people. This is very important to give them a break on this issue. Albertans have spoken very clearly on this matter, so it’s time for the government to act and act very fast. Otherwise, we already know that the social deficit between rich and poor is increasing, and if you don’t act fast, then the gap between rich and poor will increase so fast that it will be hard for us to catch up that gap. So we should address this issue very seriously, I think the sooner the better.

Most of you have already seen some of my constituents yesterday. The picture of one of my constituents was on the front page of the *Edmonton Journal*. He is 80 years old, and he has a medical problem. He was so worried after he met with the minister concerned and the President of the Treasury Board, and I saw him crying. He said, you know, that he never wanted to go and see them. This was the first time that he came to the Leg., and somehow he felt like he was begging to the government. He said that this is a thing he never wanted that way, but he has no other options. Nobody in his family was there to help him. So he came over there, and after

the meeting he told me that he really appreciated that the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing spent some time with him and some other people. They really appreciated their time. He said to me just to convey my message, and I'm just telling them, after meeting with the minister, that people who are in need always appreciate it. I think the minister has listened to their stories. It's really helped them, at least for the time being.

Mr. Chairman, those people are facing hardship, and it's the responsibility of the government to do something and to do something sooner than later. Otherwise, this situation will deteriorate, you know, in the coming time. It has become very clear that the government response to the affordable housing crisis has failed to address the critical issue. So what are the renters supposed to do in the short term until more houses are built? It's a big issue for vulnerable people, and it will be very hard for them to survive in a year or two years' time. There's no certainty at all. Nobody can say that the 1,100-some affordable homes are going to be built and, if they are going to be built, where they are going to be built. Nobody knows what size the houses or the apartments are, whether those apartments or affordable homes will suit their requirements. Those are lots of questions in their minds.

Another thing that I already mentioned: the initial deposit. Nobody knows if they even get a chance to have an affordable home somewhere and how they will get it. Will the government give them a loan or something to pay the initial deposit? Who are the builders building the houses? I mean, some people still believe that some big builders will get a chance to build those big projects, and they are the people who are making money. There are so many things in the air. I told them that I can't answer, you know, because I'm not certain who is going to build the houses and how big the houses are, which area they're going to build the houses in. This is not certain. This is not a clear picture so far. If we listen to at least the recommendations of the task force, that would be the right step at this moment, but it's still not clear.

Those people, for the time being, are facing rent gouging by some of the investors, not by all but some of them. Some of them are playing some games with the tenants. Especially sometimes they change the ownership. When they change the ownership, the tenants expect another year's notice, you know, according to the old rules because we haven't passed the legislation. Sometimes they get only three months' notice, and within three months, if they find a new place, they have to pay even double the rent. It's a very, very difficult situation for those vulnerable people. Even the people who can still afford it, when their rent is doubled or more than doubled, it hurts them. I'm sure that the majority of, you know, the members sitting in this House understand. As I said, it's the government's responsibility to listen to Albertans and to respond and to help.

12:30

Once again I would say that they have failed to provide sustainability because of uncertainty. The government only cares about their political ideology at this stage, I think, rather than the interests of Albertans. So under the circumstances it's very important that we should set aside the principle or ideology that we believe in and try to help those people who elected us. They put trust in us, and our priority should be to listen to them. You know, our priority should be: how can we help those in need? I mean, they need us now, and we should find ways of how we can help them as soon as possible.

Mr. Chairman, the Alberta Liberal Party has introduced this amendment for temporary rent control. I want to add one more thing because this issue is huge not only in Edmonton but all over Alberta,

especially in Calgary. I mean, I read some articles in the *Calgary Herald* and the *Calgary Sun*, and they are facing the same problem. Recently some journalists are blaming the government, that maybe they are leaning more towards Edmonton. I don't believe that. The problem is there too.

So if the problem is all over Alberta, then we should set aside our ideology and listen to them and solve this problem as soon as possible. It's very important under the circumstances. I urge this government to listen to their conscience, to listen to their constituents, all Albertans, not only Edmontonians or rural Albertans, I should say. Listen to them because at this moment they need our help at a moment that cries for help. I request all members to vote to support this amendment. A vote against this amendment would allow Albertans to lose their homes. The decision is all in your hands.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate an opportunity to speak to amendment A1 to Bill 34. As I was speaking about earlier this afternoon, I consider something that resembles amendment A1 to be the missing piece that makes Bill 34 an effective piece of legislation and the piece that's missing that would in fact protect people during that one-year period that the rest of Bill 34 aspires to set up.

You know, it's very fine and dandy for Bill 34 to exist as it is, covering at least two major issues in terms of condo conversions and in regard to rental increases trying to create some sense of regularity for the thousands of renters in the province of Alberta. But without this amendment Bill 34 is rendered quite useless. So I'm glad to speak in favour of this amendment. It certainly is a reflection of the recommendations from the affordable housing commission.

We're seeing developments almost by the hour in regard to this issue. It's a good thing we're all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed here this evening to deal with them as they come in because I'm just noting as late as a quarter to 10 this evening a number of members of that affordable housing commission, besides the ones that sit in the House here today, the outside ones, now starting to speak out. It's being reported at 10 o'clock this evening that a number of them are speaking out in favour of the essence of this very amendment that we are dealing with here tonight.

So that's great. It gives us a sense of purpose here this evening. It's a reflection of public will to see this through to create some stability in the rental market with temporary regulations that will serve to create some consistency and a sense of something that renters can hang their hat on and not feel that imminent possibility of having to move or look for another place.

You know, quite often this debate has been characterizing a sector of the population that's sort of on the edge, where they don't have a dollar to spare and they're going to end up out on the street. Really, there are thousands of different permutations and declinations of that same thing happening with people that are not going to be forced out onto the street, but they're going to have to try to find another place because when you get your rent jacked up by even 15 or 20 per cent, most people don't have it in their personal monthly budget to accommodate that. Remember, we multiply that by 12 and all of the other inflationary pressures that people are experiencing here in the province of Alberta at this time. We have one of the higher inflation rates, probably, on the continent at this point. So combine all of these together for the average working person, and you create an unstable situation.

I would venture to say, Mr. Chair, that A1 is not just a sound piece

of policy to help augment Bill 34; it's a sound piece of addition to policy in our arsenal to help stabilize a large sector of our population so that they don't have to move or live with that uncertainty of having to move and dance around and think about how to balance their budgets every month. So as we are all invested here with the authority to create regulation, certainly this is not an unreasonable thing that the public would expect from this very Legislature.

Let's try to look at it that way. It doesn't have to cross over into the land of innuendo and ideology and back and forth but rather a reasonable compromise. I'm sure that we can find it somewhere in our hearts to find a reasonable compromise here to impose some sense of regulation for a finite period of time and ease the uncertainty of thousands and thousands of Albertans. They can wake up in the morning and find that we have come to our senses here and have imposed some temporary regulations, as A1 suggests, using the consumer price index, which gives you a healthy increase in your budget, certainly, plus 2 per cent.

12:40

Let's not forget, as well, that we can certainly have a mechanism by which people can apply for an additional increase in rent in any situation, given extenuating circumstances that the physical plant might require, the apartment, or other things like that. Certainly that's the way we've seen temporary rent guidelines operate in the past, and those applications are processed in due course of time and are accepted. It's not a big deal. Right? If someone needs a new elevator or a new boiler or a roof, these are parts of doing business. The cost of doing business certainly has increased in regard to providing rental accommodation, and we should recognize that. That's not a big deal.

The rest of this, though, the rather stubborn refusal to put in some small temporary regulations, to me speaks of something larger and at the same time something slightly illogical. If we are going on and on – and we have done so over these past few weeks – about unscrupulous increases and gouging and all the rest of it, then certainly none of us will stand behind that. But the implicit message behind not putting in temporary regulations is that, in fact, we do stand behind that, and we do condone that as some sort of freedom of property.

I would venture to say that if we follow that argument a bit further, Mr. Chair, you know, we're not imposing on people's freedoms to suggest that there has to be a fair price for a certain commodity, in this case housing. Instead, we are freeing the people who otherwise are being cornered into a rent trap that has been slowly set over time here in the province by a singular lack of development of new rental properties over the last decade; two, an unbelievable, unprecedented increase in the value of property across the province . . . [interjection] Yes, indeed. Wait for my number three, please. I'm trying to educate you there, Mr. Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Number three, you have so many more people moving into the province. So you've created a situation where people want that property. People want to buy a condominium, lots of people do, or they want to buy a home, perhaps those starting a family and whatnot. But then there's a whole sector of the population where that possibility has been entirely removed and entirely removed in the last 24 months or so, which is quite unbelievable, quite astounding, I would venture to say.

I don't have to think back too far to when my family and myself were just thinking about entering into the home market and whatnot. You're evaluating that equation. You're saying: "Okay. I'm paying this much for rent, but then of course I can put some equity into a home, and perhaps that will work for me." But if that rent is so

astronomically jacked up during that period of time when you're making that decision, then at the same time the cost of any potential properties go up through the roof, those two equations quite literally work together to create that rent trap that so many thousands of people are finding themselves in here today.

I for one believe that as part of our responsibility to the stability of society we should create a mechanism by which (a) people can have affordable month-to-month rent but also (b) are able to perhaps have some assistance to make that first foothold into a mortgage where they can invest in property and, in fact, create some equity for themselves as well.

So to move back to the immediate problem at hand, then, certainly if I take this Bill 34, which is a fine piece of introductory information perhaps, and simply insert A1 onto the back part, which is needed, that is the first stepping stone to solving both of those problems that I've just suggested, Mr. Chair. You know, it's an issue that a lot of people are following, perhaps not exactly as we are, that's unfolding here this evening. They're certainly going to wake up in the morning and say: "Okay. Well, what do you have for us? What do you have for us and how can we provide some peace of mind so that we can move forward on this issue?" That's not what we're doing now. We're not moving forward. If Bill 34 stands in half, like some members are suggesting here this evening, then all we're doing is creating this licence to have instability for the next year coming around.

You know, I'm not one to try to assist with the planning of other political parties, but if we have this happen in the 365 days and you get all your retroactive whatnot that you try to do here, which I highly doubt by the way because the very first thing that these large rental companies are going to do is sue. They're going to say: "You can't retroactively do this back to April 24, la-di-da-di-da. What on earth are you doing?" We'll end up in litigation for one thing, I would suggest, which is hardly the best place to spend public money.

This is also going to create a situation 365 days from now with our calendars. It's going to put us to next spring when people are going to be hit again with these massive rental increases and more instability and whatnot. I don't really think that that's the best political thing to do.

Once again, I'm not giving out free unsolicited advice to other political parties, but really this thing is not going to go away. This is not like where you can just go with natural gas and say: oh, well, we'll give everybody more money, and they can pay their natural gas bills next winter when it gets cold. You know, turn on that subsidy, and away we go.

We're talking about qualitative and quantitatively much larger economic forces here, a much larger sum of money, and if we're going to go to subsidies, we're going to be talking about hundreds of millions of dollars of public money being thrown into some half-baked plan to subsidize rents that are flipping up and down like, you know, so many flags in the wind. That's certainly not a good use of public money, and the subsequent instability, I'm sure, is not going to cause people to be deactivated from the political process. I think quite the opposite. Again, you're creating quite a volatile situation.

You know, we're social democrats, and we believe in very certain guiding principles that are very important to all of us as a society. Personally, I'm quite conservative in regard to not having unstable situations being imposed upon the public where they don't know what is going to happen the next week, the next month. That's what you're doing over there. You guys are creating a situation where people don't know what on earth is going to happen from month to month, and that is not good conservative policy, conservative in a personal sense, and that extends into the larger sense.

Once again, unsolicited advice: if you want to go with the name,

if you want to talk the talk, you have got to walk the walk. Right? Make sure that you're creating long-term stability so that people know what's going to happen next and they can plan based on that. That works on a micropersonal level and a macroeconomic level as well.

So here I am with amendment A1, and certainly I think we have more in our arsenal to help to move this forward. Once again, I ask: all people know in the back of their minds that they're facing a big problem amongst our constituents, right? This extends not just to urban areas but also, you know, smaller centres as well wherever there's rental accommodation. This is not going to go away.

By simply accepting some small compromise in the spirit of democracy – and if you flap your wings like that, you're not going to fly there, Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, no matter how hard you try – then certainly thousands of people are going to be happy.

It's not as though rental agencies and rental companies – I mean, they make corporate decisions, or you make individual business decisions. They know that some sort of regulation is going to have to come into force because, you know, things are working out, and they like to have stability in their rental accommodations as well. You get some nice tenants in a place, and away you go. You develop a relationship, and to have people being forced around and moving here and there and everywhere all the time, that's not good for the management side of rental accommodation either. So certainly we can help to be more responsible in that regard too and create a long-term stabilizing situation here for a year or so, and let's see what happens after that. Really, I don't think that's an unreasonable thing to think about.

12:50

You know, when I look at the larger forces that have brought us to this point, where I have Bill 34 in my hand and amendment A1 in my other hand here, we're going to have to face that this is a symptomatic problem of a much larger issue that we're going to have to face here sooner or later. Once again, looking at using basic principles of social democracy – right? – and that personal sense of conservatism, I like to see things stable, certainly, and everybody does.

Let's see what some of the reasons are that we're facing this at this point in time. We have to say it – and certainly it's becoming abundantly obvious – that we have an overheated economy that's creating all sorts of economic distortions, of which this is one. Until we face up to that fact – I mean, it's not so hard to inflame the economy somehow if you suddenly just take out certain elements. You let everybody go gangbusters on a commodity that has strategic importance for North America right now, and you try to remove as many regulations as possible. You know, it's just like throwing all the conditions for a great flame-up of a bonfire, and that's what seems to be happening to our economy now.

But as you concentrate so much economic activity into a single industry and you bring in so many people and you bring in so many requirements for that population in regard to infrastructure and education and health care and housing, you have a recipe for disaster. You know, it's not like this hasn't happened in different places in the world at different times. It's not as though we can't learn from the very same things that have happened in other parts of the world, where a single commodity has inflamed the marketplace and people have rushed in from all over the world and everything gets distorted and it all goes up in a big puff of smoke eventually.

Personally, I've made a point of deciding to live in this place and put down roots and have a family here. I refuse to let that happen. You know, this housing thing with distorted rent prices is symptomatic of a larger problem that I don't want to visit on my children or

the young people that are around us here today. I have a personal sense of responsibility that tells me that a sense of stability, a sense of moderation in all things, and above all a sense of decency, that each person is entitled to a roof over their head, a sense of equality, a real piece of the economic pie that we have here, and above all a sense of social justice so that we're not starting with smaller problems here that will simply bulge out and create much more serious problems in the not too distant future.

Mr. Chair, I certainly am excited and invigorated to see that Bill 34 is being strengthened by this first amendment, and I would encourage all members to consider supporting it because, you know, I think we have a responsibility to put these things in place. It's not as though we're breaking the bank with it. Right?

You know, this whole notion of prying money out of the landlords' hands by putting in some small regulation is absolutely patently false because the money is from the renter in the first place, right? This whole notion that the landlord is going to get all the money eventually, I mean, that's somehow quite a dark view of things. When we heard that this afternoon, I almost fell out of my chair with shock and horror. This idea that the landlord gets all the money there, and they're going to get it all eventually anyway, well, maybe we can let it sort of trickle through so that this inevitability doesn't happen all at once and, in fact, will come over time, and eventually, maybe, if you want to get it all, you can pry the last few pennies out of my cold hands.

Mr. Chair, I was delighted to watch through the tender light of dawn here the first amendment, A1, slip through and find support amongst my colleagues on both sides of the House. Let's do the right thing. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's with interest that I participate in the debate this evening on amendment A1 to Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. Certainly, when we look at this whole crisis that has been created because this government has no plan, no plan whatsoever, this is a consequence: a rental market that is totally out of control.

Now, where it's completely out of total control is in the municipality of Wood Buffalo, and it has been under this government's watch where not only tenants but landlords have also had other costs to deal with. One of the costs that our office receives constant complaints on is the cost of electricity.

An Hon. Member: Enron.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, the high cost of electricity brought on by the electricity deregulation plan was designed by Enron and adopted by this government.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

Mr. Snelgrove: And that's why the rents are so high.

Mr. MacDonald: That's one of the problems that renters have and one of the problems that landlords have. But we do know that landlords such as Boardwalk had their electricity prices stabilized. Their costs were stabilized.

Now, Mr. Chairman, if there's one reason and one reason only why this government should adopt this amendment, it's because of history. The recent history of this Assembly is that not once but twice this government put a cap on electricity prices because of another plan and another scheme that was devised and adopted by

this government that didn't work, and that's electricity deregulation. Before the 2001 election, in the fall of 2000, there was a crisis with electricity. We capped the price of that, and then we gave out big-time subsidies to consumers to hide the level of incompetency of this government.

Mr. Boutilier: You mean the natural gas rebate?

Mr. MacDonald: No, hon. member, I don't mean the natural gas rebate. I mean the caps on electricity prices.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, through the chair, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I apologize, Mr. Chairman.

So when we look at this amendment and we look at the good intentions of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, let's have a look at the past history of this government. The government had no qualms, no problem with caps. So in my view and the view of many others there shouldn't be a problem with this amendment. This amendment reads, hon. members:

No increase in rent payable under a residential tenancy agreement shall be greater than the rate of inflation as measured by the All-items Consumer Price Index for Alberta published by Statistics Canada for the immediately preceding year, plus 2%, for the period April 24, 2007 to April 23, 2009.

The hon. member should be commended for this amendment.

Now, the hon. Member for Wood Buffalo . . .

Mr. Boutilier: Fort McMurray.

Mr. MacDonald: Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. You'll have to excuse me at this hour.

But I would remind all hon. members before they vote on amendment A1 to have a look at the convention resolutions from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, their 96th annual conference in 2002. I'm sure the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was in attendance.

Mr. Boutilier: I was the minister of municipal affairs.

Mr. MacDonald: The minister of municipal affairs at this time.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, through the chair.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, Mr. Chairman, absolutely. Now, here's what the municipal district of Wood Buffalo wanted to do for rent stabilization, and this is why we should support the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora in his resolution. The Wood Buffalo community had this to say: the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, like other municipalities in the province, is experiencing a lack of affordable rental accommodation for its residents. Rents have increased 42 per cent since 1999 in our municipality and continue to rise. We have experienced accelerated residential developments in single-family dwellings, duplexes, and condominiums. In addition, existing rental accommodations are converting to condominium and all-adult accommodation.

1:00

There has been a minimal development of rental accommodations. Throughout Alberta there has been a 10 per cent decline in affordable residential development, coupled with a 10.3 per cent increase in population. Our region has experienced a 38 per cent increase in population since 1997.

Now, this is in 2002. Did this government, Mr. Chairman, do anything between 2002 and the current housing crisis?

An Hon. Member: No, but the . . .

Mr. MacDonald: No. The hon. member is absolutely right. They did not do a thing.

This is, again, from resolution A(2)(1) from 2002. This is the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. They want something done. Five years later, nothing. Now, if I could proceed, Mr. Chairman. For every job in the oil sands industry there are three jobs created in the service sector. Due to the high rents in Fort McMurray our service industry is experiencing shortages in staff and high turn-overs. Residents cannot afford the rent when their wage is minimum.

A ministerial advisory committee review, chaired by Mr. Thomas B. MacLachlan, conducted in 1991, indicates that rent control has benefits such as protecting the poor, stopping inflation, preventing arbitrary eviction, and preventing rent gouging. The Residential Tenancies Act, the RTA, which governs landlords' and tenants' rights inclusive of rent increases, is a legislation that was up for review in 2001. To date, Alberta government services has not initiated public forums or consultations with respect to the review of the Residential Tenancies Act.

Now, that's the background from the municipal district of Wood Buffalo. They resolve, Mr. Chairman, that the Residential Tenancies Act be changed to reflect the following, and this is why, hon. members, we must support amendment A1 this evening on Bill 34: rent may be only increased once per year for monthly periodic tenancies with at least three tenancy months' notice, and rent may be only increased on the basis of the annual cost of living, as determined by Statistics Canada, plus 1 per cent.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is talking about 2 per cent, Mr. Chairman, but this is a resolution that was before the AUMA in 2002. This is a very respected, progressive organization with the best interests of Albertans in mind. This resolution alone, five years ago on rent stabilization, is reason enough for this front bench to finally realize that there was no plan. They were given ideas. They were given lots of good, sound ideas on this side of the House. They were given lots of good, sound ideas.

The stabilization fund is one, hon. President of the Treasury Board, and you know it. You have \$7.5 billion to spend now as a result of the prudent fiscal ideas coming from this side of the House. I can't imagine – I wasn't there – but there must have been quite an arm wrestle between yourself and the Minister of Finance on what to do with the \$7.5 billion. I'm sure that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation was the referee in that. I'm sure that he was, and I know who he was hoping would win too.

But anyway, I'm getting off, and I apologize. The Residential Tenancies Act should have been changed in 2002 to reflect what was proposed by the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. It wasn't. But we have a second chance here with amendment A1 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Many of the hon. members in this House this evening didn't have the good fortune of the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to attend the conference that was held in the fall of 2002 in Calgary, but there is still hope. That's why I would urge all hon. members to give serious consideration to the amendment as proposed. If it was good enough for the AUMA in 2002 to be in the resolution book, surely, five years later, after this crisis has escalated . . .

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Snelgrove: I think you're right. So let's have a vote.

Mr. MacDonald: We should have a vote, yes. We will have a vote. There are other resolutions in this booklet that also support the hon. member's amendment A1. Certainly, when we look at our own compensation packages, we are protected from inflation. Tenants should be. Now, landlords, they may have a different idea. I have a brother who was a landlord, and he has certainly had his experiences with bad tenants. I've cleaned out his place on occasion with him after a tenant has skipped town, and it's not pretty, to say the least. It certainly isn't. I have a lot of sympathy for landlords, but landlords are like tenants: there are good and bad ones, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Boutilier: So you have sympathy for landlords.

Mr. MacDonald: I certainly do for good landlords. But in light of this government and its inaction and its lack of due diligence and lack of good planning over the last five years when resolutions like this should have been adopted and were not by this government, we need on a temporary basis the measures that are proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

We had a look at Fort McMurray. Let's have a look at Red Deer.

An Hon. Member: Okay. Are you going to go around the whole province, Hughie?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I hope to get to Rocky Mountain House too because the good citizens of Rocky Mountain House also had some good ideas.

Now, Mr. Chairman, regarding amendment A1, the residential tenancy agreement, let's consider what Red Deer had to say, again at the AUMA convention in Calgary in the fall of 2002. They indicate that this is their definition of affordable housing: the definition of affordable housing used by people working in the field is housing that is generally accessible to most people with low income. The present homelessness and transitional housing programs initiated by the federal and provincial governments address the emergency situations which people with low or no income are facing in most cities and many towns. One could understand why a government would begin with programs to assist the persons in most dire circumstances; however, the final year of three years of homelessness funding has begun and work now needs to begin on the continuum of housing and supports for the long term.

This is in 2002. This is the city of Red Deer. The approach must be on two fronts: the affordable housing stock must be increased at the same time as the financial resources which people have to pay for that housing is increased.

1:10

Now, this amendment A1 would certainly apply to the second front, Mr. Chairman. Many groups, including many groups that the hon. member heard when he was on the housing task force, have advocated for supplementing the shelter rates for people receiving supports for independence and assured income for the severely handicapped. The difference between the shelter rate for an individual receiving SFI, \$168, and this is in 2002, and the rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Red Deer, for example, \$548 in June of 2001, means that the person will always be in an emergency situation because more than their income will be spent on any shelter that they can find.

There's a gentleman that lives in my neighbourhood that's on AISH. He got an increase in the budget, 50 bucks a month. He got

a \$400 a month increase in his basement suite. There went the modest increase and a lot more, and this gentleman is not in a position where he can pick up a little bit of extra cash by working part-time.

In order to support the affordable housing initiative that was initiated by the city of Red Deer, they went on to say here, Mr. Chairman, that the income of individuals and families who are not in receipt of social program funding for shelter needs to be increased. The average salary for a female in Alberta in 1996 according to Stats Canada was \$28,000. That's 2,300-plus dollars a month. For a male, \$42,000 or \$3,500 a month. Obviously, many people were below the average.

Mr. Chairman, in the discussion in the debate on this whole bill and the discussion during question period, I sit quietly, and I listen, and I hear the pledge of over \$200 million. I think it's in total \$285 million that is going to be set aside. What amounts are being set aside for people in this income bracket? There is a modest initiative for SFI and for AISH people, but how do you tell these people? Do you tell them when they come home from work and they have a \$400 or \$500 rent increase slipped under the door, maybe they should work more overtime or get a second job? Is that the answer, hon. minister of the Treasury Board? [interjection] It happens all the time, unfortunately. [interjection] Well, it's going to be heat and light and rent. It certainly will. People are going to have to make a choice because it's getting unaffordable. The hon. minister knows that, and I think he's just poking tease at me and trying to provoke me.

Now, the city of Red Deer is quoting Linda McQuaig. I'm sure the hon. members across the way read her books with interest. Linda McQuaig, the keynote speaker at the year 2002's Canadian housing and renewal congress held in Ottawa, reported that the top earning group in Canada has experienced a 16 per cent increase in earnings whereas the bottom earning group has experienced a reduction by 3 per cent. As this gap widens, market rents and owned housing become out of reach for a significant portion of Alberta and Canadian citizens. In 1968 the government of the day declared that all Canadians deserved adequate housing whether they can afford it or not. These are the comments and the background that are provided by the city of Red Deer.

The city of Red Deer through the AUMA is asking that it be resolved that the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association requests that the government of Alberta provide new funding combined with the government of Canada for affordable housing and that the funds be approved and programs be developed to produce affordable housing for households with low income. That's one. That's one thing, and it has been neglected. It has been neglected by this government.

Further, they say: let it be resolved that the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association requests the government of Alberta to work with the private sector. [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

Mr. Boutilier: Well, I sense this Assembly needs a bit of energy, so I will take the appropriate time to do that. I want to first of all say that I appreciate the comments and the history from the AUMA dating back five years, but that's five years ago. In fact, the members of that council were not re-elected based on some of the advocates that they have put forward. So I think it's an important footnote. But isn't it true that your relative, the landlord, also said that rent controls don't work?

Mr. MacDonald: Point of order, please, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on a point of order.

**Point of Order
Imputing Motives**

Mr. MacDonald: I'm rising under 23(i) and (j). I'm asking the hon. member to retract that. I did not say that, and it was not implied, and I want him to withdraw that comment, please.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chairman, my comment was this: isn't it true that your relative had said that he did not support rent controls as a landlord? That was my question that I posed to him rhetorically in what I had said. So I've posed that just like many other landlords have posed, saying that rent controls do not work.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm sorry. I cannot accept that. I know clearly what the hon. member stated, and that is not what I said in my remarks. It's not what I said in my speech, and I'm asking him, Mr. Chairman, to withdraw.

Mr. Boutilier: I did not say . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, you had your opportunity to speak.

Hon. minister, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar feels that you made a statement that implied he had said certain words. I don't have access to the Blues, and I know that it's quite late in the evening, early morning now.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr Chairman, if the hon. member thought I said that's something he said, I did not say what he had said. Just to make that perfectly clear. I hope that clarifies this to the . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, sit down.

Hon. members, I do not have access to the Blues, so I cannot kind of go back and forth, but certainly the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar indicates that he did not say what the minister is alleging to have been said. We are all hon. members in this Assembly. We all trust each other, you know, that when you say that you did not say that thing or you did not mean to say that thing, we have to be respectful of that. So it would certainly help if the minister would just retract those remarks and then proceed with whatever else he has to say.

Mr. Boutilier: I am sorry that he misunderstood what I had said that he did not think that I had said. Having said that, I would like to move on with what I am saying.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Debate Continued

Mr. Boutilier: Now, getting back to the more important point that rent controls do not work, Mr. Chairman. I can see that the hon. member is shaking his head, and I can hear that he is agreeing with me in terms of what he is saying, and I appreciate that, to the hon. member and through the chair.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, as we go forward, I think that what is really the fundamental principle of this – and the amendment I cannot agree with – is that we want more supply. I'm quite certain that the hon. member would agree that if he thought for one moment that dollars would not go towards building more units and more supply for renters to help our citizens and our voters, he would never want to have a rent imposition that would be a detraction to in fact

creating more supply. Because the ultimate solution, as the honorary chair of Habitat for Humanity, is each of us being out on roofs building, in fact, more supply.

In fact, if we were to take all this energy in here today and in the last couple of weeks, we could have perhaps gone out and added to supply and truly helped our citizens that vote for us, in terms of getting more units on in the marketplace. So let us not lose sight of, not the political rhetoric that goes on, ultimately: what are we doing to increase and help supply? So any time you talk about rent control, you're sending uncertainty. You're sending messages saying: we believe that we should be able to control.

1:20

I have to ask you this, hon. member. What about when you were going back to those years when the landlord was in actual fact at the time paying and collecting rent of \$500 and their actual mortgage on their rental property was a thousand dollars. I didn't hear the Liberals back then say: by the way, we want to step in and help those who are helping renters. My question is: is that what you would be suggesting in your amendment? Maybe your amendment is actually only half of what it should be.

In order to be consistent and balanced in what you're saying, I said that I suggest to you that at a time when renters were paying \$500 and people who owned the rental property were paying mortgages of a thousand, what about the gap then? I didn't hear the Liberals say anything or add any amendments at that time, and ultimately if we are to be adding a balanced debate in terms of this important issue, we want more supply so that renters can someday, I envision, stand up and say: "I'm sorry. I'm not renting from you with your \$300 rent increase. I'm going across the street, and I'm going to be in another competitive market where my rent is actually going to be lower." That is the ideal situation for me, and how do we get that? By getting more, more, more supply on the market. Your amendment will not do that. It will slow that down so that there's even a slower supply of units, and ultimately you're hurting those who are renting today.

I say to you that your amendment is as much a noble attempt at rhetoric, but ultimately you know and I know and even some Liberals know – I'm quite certain in my own mind that you're over there saying that rent controls don't work. In fact, I'm certain. Think about that some time. You know that they don't work. So ultimately supply will be hurt. Why would any political party of any political stripe want to hurt having more supply to help renters on this market?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise. I wanted to respond to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. I don't think he's the minister of affairs; I think he's the minister of relations. I just wanted to indicate to the minister that when he says that he's shocked that the Alberta NDP is in favour of economic growth, you know, he's really misread us and we're deeply hurt. I want to indicate to him . . .

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chairman, I stand and apologize if the hon. leader of the third party is deeply hurt about anything I have said.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has the floor.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. You know, what the Alberta New Democrats favour is balanced long-term growth which provides full employment for all Albertans and, indeed, for Canadians who want to come here and make a life or just want to come here and work for a while, and we believe that this can be accomplished in a much better way than what's happening now. You see, unlike the government we don't feel that we're responsible to provide employment for the whole world, and certainly housing is a very important part of this, and I am going to come to it.

The whole question of a more rational pace to the economy of this province and particularly for the development of the tar sands makes a great deal of sense from a lot of perspectives. Not only do we preserve the resources for Albertans and Canadians and develop a good strong export market to the United States and other countries, but we have a chance by going a little bit slower to catch up with our infrastructure, which even with the record spending of this government we're not going to be able to keep pace with if things keep going. We make sure that we can protect the environment, and we make sure that we can provide housing for people. You see, I was going to get to the housing.

When we talk about housing, we need to talk about supply, but we also need to talk about demand. The present course of this government is going to multiply and compound all of the problems we have in all sorts of areas, including housing, because it's a reckless approach to the economic development. So if we have a little bit more of a rational pace, then we preserve our resources for longer and make sure that they're around for future generations and that we don't just leave the next generation a giant hole where northern Alberta used to be and a multibillion dollar environmental liability where the tar sands used to be. But that's where the government's going.

So dealing with the housing question, I urge all hon. members, including the minister, to support this approach. We think the government could have done a lot in the past in different places if it had played a little bit more of a role in balancing supply and demand and making sure that housing was brought online or, for that matter, that land was brought on in a timely fashion. The government owns a lot of land. The government owns a lot of land in the hon. minister's community, yet it has some of the highest housing prices in the entire province, indeed the entire country, which could have been alleviated if the government had brought that land forward to the municipality in a timely fashion, as in some years ago. It may be that the municipality overplanned when the minister was the mayor. But, you know, overplanning, underplanning: it's all not very good planning.

We think we could do better, so we certainly think that the people of Alberta deserve the opportunity to hear from us and from other parties without, you know, just trying to distort our position when it's presented to the public and to create a caricature of the position that we take or a caricature of the position that other parties take. That's all very important to us.

So, Mr. Chairman, just to conclude, I would urge all hon. members to support this amendment from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora as it closely conforms with NDP policy and, therefore, would be highly beneficial for the people of Alberta as a result. We certainly support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My pleasure to rise this morning and speak to amendment A1 on Bill 34. This amendment, as the hon. leader of the third party pointed out, is not

only similar to NDP policy but, in fact, exactly reflects the policy that was promoted and recommended by the housing task force. I think that's the most important thing for the NDP members to understand. I know that they mentioned earlier that this is not exactly in line with the Alberta Official Opposition policy, and I will acknowledge that that is in fact the case, but we felt as a caucus that our first amendment would most appropriately be in line with that of the task force because of the good work that they had done and recognizing that the task force brought together members of all three parties in this House as well as a number of people from social agencies that deal directly with this issue. So it's not in any way denigrating the Official Opposition's policy but, rather, a recognition of the good work that the task force did and, in fact, supporting their position and understanding, as we've pointed out many times over the last several days, that the task force recommendations, in order to be fully effective, at least in the minds of those who served on the task force, have to be adopted as a package and that you can't just cherry-pick here and there, you know, individual pieces to make them work.

1:30

The minister earlier today challenged me to identify exactly how many of the 50 recommendations were already either adopted or taking place or being worked on by the government and said that that's why they weren't in fact adopted by the government when they made their response to the recommendations. I would challenge the minister. If that is their position, then, quite frankly, Mr. Minister, I really don't understand why you wouldn't have just adopted them anyway. If you're already doing those things or if you're working on them already, why wouldn't you just adopt them?

I mean, right now – and I'm sure many members opposite would admit that – this has become a public relations disaster for this government. The chaos that they have created in the marketplace with the mishandling of this file over the last several weeks has created a public relations disaster for this government. We've seen that quite clearly in the extraordinary response that they've made over the last two days to the individuals that have come down to this Legislature to have their concerns heard.

There's no question that this government is now in full damage control mode trying to somehow – somehow – extricate themselves from this mess that they've created. Quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure that they're capable of doing it. I don't know what they're going to do because they've backed themselves into a corner on this one. They know they're on the wrong side of the issue, and there really is no good way out for them at this point.

You know, love him or hate him, one thing that you could always say about former Premier Klein was that he knew when to back up the truck. He knew when to acknowledge that his government had made a mistake. He knew when to admit that the people had spoken and that his government was wrong. Clearly, that is the situation this government finds themselves in now, but unlike the situation when, as an example, they wouldn't allow the sterilization victims to sue, this government has not recognized yet how badly they've misjudged the public sentiment on this particular issue.

Mr. Chairman, I submit to you that for whatever reason this government is out of touch with the views of the so-called severely normal Albertans, the Marthas and Henrys that they've touted for so many years now as being the gauge, the moral compass of this government. They've lost it. [interjection] They are so out of touch – to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar – that, as I say, they're taking extraordinary measures this week to try to deal with the public relations disaster that they've created, even to the point where this afternoon I understand that a memo was issued reacting

rather violently to the inclusion of the media in a meeting with those constituents that were here today. I find that quite interesting given that they tout time and time again the openness and accountability of the new administration. Yet all of a sudden the openness aspect of that certainly seems to be in jeopardy.

Mr. MacDonald: Did they close the doors on some of them?

Mr. R. Miller: They not only closed the doors, but they had asked the media to leave the meeting. Then they were apparently upset when the constituents – the constituents – that were here to have their concerns heard expressed that they would like the media to be present. In fact, the media was then invited back in, and they were quite upset about that. So I think, as I say, this pokes a bit of a hole into the claim about openness.

Mr. Chairman, as I was listening to others debate this amendment this evening, I was also checking a number of news websites, and it's interesting that today, finally, a number of members of the task force are starting to speak out. I'm not sure exactly why those members have been relatively quiet since the release of the report on April 24.

Mr. Elsalhy: It's called the fear factor.

Mr. R. Miller: Somebody beside me suggested that it might be the fear factor, and that is a real thing in this province. We know that for a fact. I encounter it almost daily in my role as the shadow minister for Finance and Service Alberta, so that might well be it.

As an example, there's a quote attributed to Michael Farris, who is the executive director of E4C, formerly the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation. Mr. Farris says directly: it disturbs me that at this point the province does not have the same appreciation of how critical this is. So as I suggested a minute or two ago, clearly this government is now out of touch with those severely normal Albertans that they always considered to be their moral compass.

Another member of the task force, Mr. Chairman, Mary Ann Eckstrom, a councillor from the county of Grande Prairie who I met with when we were up there a month or two ago, says: there is a problem with not having rent controls when you have gouging going on.

I said earlier today in debate, and I'll ask the question again. If rent controls are not the answer – and that is clearly this government's point, their position tonight. I see the Solicitor General nodding his head. If it is their belief that rent controls are not the answer to the gouging, then what is?

Mr. Lindsay: Bill 34.

Mr. R. Miller: Bill 34, Mr. Minister, does not address the gouging, and you know that that is a fact. The Solicitor General has indicated that Bill 34 will address the gouging, but there is absolutely nothing in Bill 34 that addresses the situation of gouging. Absolutely nothing. You know, there have been some intimations that perhaps the Housing minister may chat – may chat – with the landlords. I'm not sure just exactly what that means. I have a vision of what that might mean, but I'm not sure what it means.

As I say, there's nothing in this bill that addresses the gouging, and the gouging is happening. In fact, the government is taking a lot of heat over the gouging, and whether you like it or not – and I will concede that there are an awful lot of great landlords in this province that may be impacted by temporary rent guidelines – the bottom line is that this amendment would address the gouging. Nothing the government has offered up so far addresses the gouging. Nothing.

Nothing, Mr. Solicitor General. There's nothing that you folks have said that addresses the gouging, and that is the number one issue that people are facing right now. Somebody is asking: how much is gouging? I cited an example earlier today.

Mrs. Jablonski: How much gouging is going on?

Mr. R. Miller: Does it matter? Mr. Chairman, the Member for Red Deer-North is saying, "How much gouging is going on?" as if to somehow indicate that some is okay but that more might not be okay and that if it reaches a certain amount, then it's totally unacceptable, and the government will have to step in. Is any gouging okay? Is that what you're suggesting?

We had an example the other day that was raised by the leader of the third party where a grandmother – and this was verifiable; she was in the gallery yesterday – 75 years old was given a \$1,000 a month increase. The Premier acknowledged at the PC convention last weekend that that is un-Albertan. Okay? I don't think there's anybody in this room tonight who wouldn't agree that giving a grandmother a nearly triple rent increase is gouging. Of course it is. We all understand that. That's gouging.

So now we know that the line has been drawn at \$1,000 on a \$600 per month rent, that that is gouging. So the question, then, is to the Member for Red Deer-North. Her question to me was: how much is happening? Well, if that was the only case in the province, is that okay? How many of those examples do you need? We know there are more. There have been verified instances of \$1,000 a month and more increases taking place in Calgary. How many do you need before it becomes a problem for this government?

1:40

I cited an example earlier today – and since you bring it up, I'd like to mention it again – of a gentleman who lives in Yellowbird suites. He's taking English as a Second Language and raising three children, working a part-time job as he's doing all of this, trying to make a life for himself and his family in a new country. His rent went from \$710 – it went up \$485 – to \$1,195, I believe. I'm just going to get the exact numbers here. Yes, from \$710 to \$1,195, so this is an increase of 68 per cent. Now, in my mind, that's gouging. I don't know if that is gouging in the mind of the government or not.

Ms Blakeman: It doesn't matter. They're not going to do anything.

Mr. R. Miller: As the Member for Edmonton-Centre has suggested, it doesn't matter because you're not going to do anything.

In fact, the leader of the third party pointed out a minute ago that despite the fact that the 75-year-old grandmother is getting a \$1,000 rent increase, you're not going to do anything about that either. Sure, the Premier has acknowledged that it's un-Albertan, but there's no legislation to deal with it. There's nothing in Bill 34, despite what the Solicitor General says, to deal with the gouging that's taking place. Until this government offers up something else that will deal with it, you're going to keep seeing amendments like this, and we'll stand here all night and all day tomorrow if we have to debating it because you have to do something to address those particular instances.

As far as I'm concerned and as far as this caucus is concerned, one instance of that is too many. One instance is too many. You have to find a way to deal with those, and until you do that, I'm willing to spend as long as it takes to stand here and debate amendments to protect those people. I put the challenge out to the government again: if rent controls are not the answer, please tell us what is. You have not given us anything yet, and I'm still waiting. I will wait, and I will wait, and I will wait.

Now, since I mentioned the instance of Mr. Deria, I'd just like to point out some of the specifics around this. To the minister of municipal affairs, who challenged us the other day to bring him real examples: he's going to be sorry he ever spoke those words. Mr. Deria is one example of 300 at the same school that he's attending. His instructors are telling me that every day their students are coming to them with stories like Mr. Deria's, so this is not one instance. You're going to have people streaming through here day after day, week after week, month after month, as long as this House sits, with these examples until you come up with legislation to deal with the gouging. I hope that the Member for Red Deer-North is going to begin a tally and keep track because it's not one example, unfortunately. It's not two or three. There are going to be many, many, many examples of this.

We know that if Bill 34 passes, it doesn't deal with the gouging. Sure, it will limit increases to once per year, and those are retroactive, 12 months prior to April 24. So that means, as an example, that if somebody had an increase last October 1, they'll get an increase this October 1, and there's absolutely nothing that this government is doing to control how much that increase will be.

Mr. Elsalhy: Even that is not in the bill itself.

Mr. R. Miller: This is a really good point that I've been meaning to bring up. I'm not sure if anybody has mentioned it yet, but the Member for Edmonton-McClung mentions it now, so I'm going to put it on the record. There is nothing in this bill that specifies the timelines despite the fact that the government has trumpeted the fact that this legislation is going to protect people by giving them only one rent increase per year and a year's notice for condo-ization or major renovations. There is nothing in this legislation that specifies those timelines. It's all in the regulations.

My Lord, I shouldn't have to go here again, but here we go again talking about how often this government puts important stuff in regulations that can be changed in backrooms with cabinet ministers only: no public debate, no public scrutiny, no public consultation. So here we go again with the government promising relief to renters, promising them a year between rent increases, promising them a year's notice for condo-ization or major renovations that might see them evicted, yet it's not in the legislation. There's absolutely no guarantee that this government wouldn't come back three months from now or six months from now with an order in council and change the rules all over again, and what people thought was going to protect them for a period of time is suddenly gone, without any public consultation, without any public debate, and without any public scrutiny. I will say it again. I've said it before. Every member across the way should be ashamed for doing that. If this legislation is so important in the government's mind and it's going to go so far towards protecting tenants, then let's do it right and put the numbers in black and white tonight in front of people so that they can see that you're good for your word. It's not even here in printing for them. They have to trust that this Premier and his ministers are going to do what they say they do in the backrooms away from the public eye, and that is just not good enough. With a government that claims to be open and accountable, they're continuing to do most of the work in regulation.

Now, Mr. Chairman, one of the arguments in the past for doing this has been that the House doesn't sit often enough, and there may be a need to change, and they have to be able to react quickly. Well, with the new House sitting rules we know exactly when the House is going to be sitting next year, in the year 2008. We know for sure that there's a guaranteed fall sitting. I would submit to you that

there is absolutely no reason for this government to use that excuse ever again.

Mr. Lougheed: The Committee of the Whole will still be going on then.

Mr. R. Miller: The Member for Strathcona suggested that this Committee of the Whole may still be meeting at that point, and do you know what? Unless we can talk some sense into the government, he might just be right.

I said I was going to outline some of the specifics surrounding Mr. Deria's case, and I would like to do that now. Mr. Deria came to Canada in 1990, lived in Ontario until the year 2006. Right now he's on a monthly rental agreement since October of last year. The good news for Mr. Deria is that this increase notice that he was given to be effective August 1 – well, actually, when this legislation passes, this increase will be deferred to October 1. So he'll buy two months before his rent goes up 68 per cent. I'm sure that provides a modicum of relief to him but obviously not near enough.

A new property owner purchased the unit last fall, and as I say, once the deal went through, immediately the rent from \$710 to \$1,195. I had mentioned earlier that he's a married man with three young kids nine, eight, and four years old. He's attending the Metro Continuing Education English language institute, taking English as a Second Language, in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, Mr. Chairman.

I think I had mentioned before that there are currently about 300 students that these two instructors that I'm speaking to are dealing with. They say to me that most of the students are on learner benefits while they're taking their ESL training. Many have come to their instructors to let them know about the substantial rent increases that they're dealing with. The instructors indicate that a rental increase makes a huge difference in their ability to pay their bills and has a huge impact on their family lives, as one can only imagine if you look at a case like Mohamed's, where he's raising three young children, trying to work a part-time job and go to school and suddenly a 68 per cent rent increase, Mr. Chairman. Again, nothing in this legislation will address his problem.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the vote on amendment A1?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Chairman, I was standing. You probably weren't able to see me.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the chair has already called the question, so I'll proceed. We are still in committee, and you'll be able to speak to the bill.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:50 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Agnihotri
Blakeman

Elsalhy
MacDonald

Miller, B.
Miller, R.

Chase Eggen	Martin Mason	Pastoor Tougas
Against the motion:		
Abbott	Dunford	Lougheed
Ady	Goudreau	Lund
Brown	Groeneveld	Melchin
Calahasen	Hancock	Oberle
Cao	Hinman	Ouellette
Cardinal	Jablonski	Renner
Cenaiko	Johnson	Rodney
Coutts	Johnston	Snelgrove
DeLong	Liepert	Stevens
Ducharme	Lindsay	Zwozdesky
Totals:	For – 12	Against – 30

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I know that individuals who are experiencing sleepless nights and have been listening in to our debate tonight on A1 and amendments are rather anxious to hear where the story ended, so I will continue with the need for stability.

I left off with Roshika Khanna, who is the program co-ordinator for the Calgary Scope Society. She had indicated the difficulties that people with disabilities had in finding places. She noted:

It has been a very discouraging experience speaking with a lot of landlords who fail to see that our clients are respected members of our society, who deserve a fair chance to all opportunities. I am hoping that this letter may help increase some awareness in the challenges that our agency and other agencies like ours face. With your position and authority it is evident that our voices may be heard and changes might occur.

I will assure Ms Khanna that her voice was heard tonight.

We are in desperate need of a change in attitudes and perspectives to provide equal opportunities.

Another constituent, by the name of Donna Logan, wrote to me.

As a Calgarian, I am truly concerned about the increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in our city. According to the 2006 Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness conducted by the City of Calgary on May 10th, 2006 . . .

And, of course, that's the homeless count that I was able to take part in along with the members for Calgary-Currie and Calgary-Mountain View.

. . . there are currently 3,646 people living on our streets and in shelters. This is an increase of 32 per cent in two years. This number does not include those people that are staying with friends and family,

as I pointed out during second reading of Bill 34.

I urge the Albertan Government to take a leadership role in addressing homelessness and poverty in Alberta. Specifically, I urge the Alberta Government to review and address the following provincial policies to ensure that they support Albertans in not only moving out of poverty and homelessness but that also help to prevent people from entering these situations in the first place.

And, of course, that's what Bill 34 fails to address. It fails to keep people from ending in a homeless circumstance because the subsidies are very specific and they're very limited. While they keep a roof over the individual's head, they very much line the pockets of the landlords at taxpayers' expense.

As Mrs. Logan said, these are the areas that she would like to see improvements in:

- Policies around Child Care and available Child Care Subsidies

- Availability, accessibility, and affordability of housing
- The Child Welfare Act
- Social Assistance and Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH)
- Minimum Wage.

She concludes:

Having a home is a right in Canada, not a privilege. I urge the Alberta Government, at all levels, to ensure all Albertans have access to this right.

My next communication is from Rob Lerouge, and his concerns go right back to early March. He has a number of wonderful ideas, only a few of which I'll share with you.

To address the housing crisis Alberta is in the midst of, there are many external/exogenous issues that need to be tackled concurrently. The housing crisis does not exist in isolation but is related to the lack of social infrastructure and program cuts made during the last 10 years that have not been replenished. This issue cannot be addressed in isolation but in conjunction with many programs that are under severe pressure from the exploding population.

Why are huge fiscal surpluses of \$7B being reported when there is absolutely no spending on building subsidized housing in the budget?

Keep in mind that he wrote this letter in March. Bill 34 does indicate that there will be \$281 million available, and eventually houses will be built.

Regardless of the surplus amount, I am very disappointed this government has not budgeted any funding for the construction of new housing for those unable to afford. Leaving the supply of housing to market forces does not work when many jobs remaining open do not pay a living wage. Unless if low or free cost housing is provided for those willing to take low wage jobs, there will still be a labour shortage. Much of the problem is rooted in this province's right-wing attitude of supporting the rich with tax breaks and bashing the poor arbitrarily for being lazy (which is totally false). Yet supporting the have-not population will have greater benefits by easing the burden off of health care, schools, and social services. Face it, if money is not spent on providing housing for those lacking, it will have to be spent on health care, justice, policing, social services, even at school when these people incur problems attributed to being homeless. The homeless are more likely to become sick, be less healthy than average, be addicted, lack skills and education (perhaps from not being able to afford schooling or college), and suffer irreversible effects of unemployment. In fact, someone who has been homeless long term often lacks social and presentation skills and the longer they lack these the harder it will be to educate them up to standard. Being socially isolated has very damaging effects that are irreversible in the long term if not corrected.

Also, this province is too caught up in decision making that is rules/laws based as well as too financially based. It has become cliché that "we cannot go overbudget or cannot borrow" for projects. Homelessness cannot wait for the sun to shine and does not disappear during booms nor busts. Too many so-called task forces during the last ten years have failed to address the problem, especially since they are behind closed doors. It is time to walk the talk and practice what you preach. Enough studies, let's take action, such as following your own task force recommendations in their entirety rather than piecemeal.

Even if a project goes 100% overbudget, it is not a failure compared to the many successes it potentially has.

2:10

Witness the southeast hospital in Calgary that this provincial government has delayed.

This province cannot measure success solely by budgetary means. It needs to measure success by qualitative measures such as skill generation, crime decreases, health ratings among low-income citizens, education credentials acquired, etc.

Yet the province will need to spend a lot more on social programs for the have-nots and quit giving big business and the rich huge tax breaks on the backs of the middle class. Since no rent controls exist, why are the rich developers not building more rental units given the demand.

And this is what Bill 34 fails to address. If they haven't built them in the past when there were no restrictions, what makes you think that they will continue to do so when they can gouge individuals in the current existing facilities without having any requirement to build new? The gouging continues with the government's blessing.

How high do rents need to increase before landlords will build again? If market forces should dictate the supply of rental housing, why does the province not step up to providing sufficient rent subsidies to low-income people. Alberta has a tendency to arbitrarily choose which goods and services should be unregulated and yet related programs (for subsidized housing) are restricted in terms of the number of recipients or the funding amounts which fail to match the free-market rental rates.

Mr. Lerouge obviously had great passion. This is his conclusion.

In closing, solving the housing crisis will take more than building new homes. Many social and infrastructure programs need a lot of catch-up funding and reinstated regular funding. The cliché of meeting the bottom line needs to be reformed and the measuring of success to be done differently. What this province needs is balance to prevent extremes from emerging and enact laws that facilitate moderation and balance to keep all facets of this province in check. The government has an obligation to run this province to be fair to everyone and to help the underprivileged.

This is an individual who has a home, who is not experiencing a rent increase but has a social conscience, and he is calling upon the government to try and find one. That, unfortunately, is something that this government lacks: any kind of recognition of the needs of the wider mass of Albertans, singling in on only the needs of the landlords.

This back-and-forth, ping-pong we were being accused of earlier: well, when there were low rental rates, why weren't we helping the landlords out at that time? Now that rent is rising through the roof and there are so very few accommodations, is the answer just to let it happen? Does the government not have any stewardship role? Does the government not provide the balance that is necessary to help individuals, especially the most vulnerable?

It absolutely amazes me that individuals such as the MLA for Calgary-Fort, whose constituency brought forward the idea of rent controls for discussion at last week's Conservative convention, would stand up in this House, going against what his constituents brought forward. I give him credit for at least bringing the concerns of his constituents to the convention, but when it comes to standing up for them here in this House, it doesn't happen.

I have somewhat greater expectations for more recently elected members to this House, who have not been caught up in the dogma that has been a part of the last, basically, 36 years of Conservative rule. I suppose that I'm being ungenerous in going back 36 years because during the times of Peter Lougheed and during the times of Mr. Getty there was a recognition that in times of crisis some government intervention was necessary. They, I suppose, to a degree were the progressive part of Progressive Conservatives.

We have a number of newly elected individuals that came along in 2004 with myself who should not be so weighted down by past ideology. It concerns me that they for whatever reason, fear of retribution from their colleagues or potential sanctions from the whip, refuse to stand up on behalf of their constituents. I find it hard to believe that the other MLAs in Calgary have not heard from their constituents about concerns over rent control. I would suggest that when they return to their Calgary offices tomorrow night, they will probably find that they have received a tremendous amount of

correspondence on the subject of rent controls, and I'm hoping that they'll table those correspondences in this House and that they will stand up for their constituents, especially those who are suffering the no-limit, once-a-year rent increases. I would be very pleased to hear from these members from Calgary, whom I've challenged to say that they haven't heard these concerns from their constituents, that in fact no e-mails, no letters, no phone calls have been received. I challenge them to stand up and refute my concerns.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. [some applause] Thank you. At least it's a start. We'll work on it, and maybe we'll get it right.

Mr. Chairman, I want to come back to talking about the need for rent guidelines and the fact that we don't have them here. The government is suggesting that it's the supply side and we have to get more housing on the markets. Nobody disagrees with that. What we're talking about is in the short run, till that happens. Obviously, they rejected a perfectly logical amendment a while ago, CPI plus 2 per cent. They say that this would somehow stifle development.

Let's look at the supply side. Part of the task force's job, Mr. Chairman, was to take a look at all aspects of it, including, if you like, how we get more rental units on the market. If they say that they can't put in rent guidelines and they've got to work on the supply side, well, let's just take a look at some of the measures that they turned down to deal with the supply side. As mentioned many times, the task force tried to present this as a package, you know, that the guidelines were there on a temporary basis for two years, CPI plus 2. We've had that discussion. We also said that there had to be the other side of it to try to bring more units on. The fact is that we don't have rental units being built. Well, according to the government this should be happening now because we don't have rent controls or guidelines or whatever you want to call it, rent stability.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I look at some of the recommendations that were made. First of all, just to do with the supply side: the new Alberta home ownership assistance program. In the task force we saw the other end of it, that if we get more young people, especially first-time home buyers, buying houses, that would open up rental units. It was done in the past, and it worked very well. But government does not accept this recommendation. The creation of more rental units is a better way to address housing issues. Well, they're not doing it. It's not happening. So they reject that, and they say that creating more rental units is a better way to do it. It's not happening. So there is one recommendation they didn't look at.

2:20

The other, going back, is recommendation 3: move to block funding in allocating capital dollars. The government accepts that block funding will be made available to high-growth, high-need municipalities through the municipal sustainability housing fund, but the government does not accept the recommendation to index funding based on inflationary pressures. Well, in an overheated economy inflation is a reality. How are you going to build anything – the hospital in south Calgary is a good example of that – if you don't cover inflation? That just seems to be self-evident. How are you going to increase the supply if you're not prepared to do that, Mr. Chairman?

Moving along, here's another one: develop flexible incentives to stimulate supply-side responses. Well, I would have thought that

they would have loved that, that even that term they might have accepted. But, no, the government does not accept this recommendation. The Municipal Government Act allows municipalities to use innovative financing methods to address redevelopment. Well, municipalities don't have the money to do it. That's the whole point. So there's the supply side that they could have accepted to get more units on. They refused it, Mr. Chairman.

Improve efficiencies and reduce duplication among government and non-profits. Well, they're going to refer that. That was a tough one. They referred this recommendation. Well, I would have thought that that would be self-evident, Mr. Chairman.

Improve government responsiveness to specific timelines: the government does not accept the proposed timelines and agrees to improved government responsiveness. So they're not even going to worry about timelines, Mr. Chairman. They're not even going to worry about that. So how is that going to help put on more housing.

Now, here's a key point, though, that we're talking about. Under better integration of planning and policy we said: "Adopt a consistent definition of 'affordable housing' for policy and program development." Well, the government accepts that a consistent definition of affordable housing is required but does not accept the task force definition. Well, pretty well all across North America the common definition, Mr. Chairman, is: no more than 30 per cent of your income should go towards accommodation. Now, the government says that they reject that, but they don't say what else. So we're not going to accept what everybody else in North America talks about. We're going to set some figure. But they can't even do it. Well, what is it then? Is it 40 per cent? Is it 50 per cent? Is it 60 per cent? Okay. I know why they don't want to do it: because it's embarrassing because when they start to look at the rent subsidy program, with the amount of people spending more than 30 per cent of their income, we're looking at a pile of cash. There's no doubt about that. But that's the reality of the economy that we're in right now, Mr. Chairman.

Another one: develop an inventory of underutilized or unused public infrastructure for affordable housing opportunities. Well, you know, there's a way. Right? There's a bunch of underutilized and unused public infrastructure sitting around the province. I would have thought that that would have been an easy one. But no. Listen to this. The government does not accept this recommendation as there are existing mechanisms in place to identify and disperse land to eligible stakeholders. Well, what are they doing? Where is it, Mr. Chairman? We had examples all over this province where this was not happening. So, you know, that would be another way to get rental units on quickly, but they rejected that particular recommendation.

Now, the other one is inclusionary zoning under the ongoing supply and improved access to affordable housing. One that has to come that everybody's talking about and that they're talking about, and I know that in both Edmonton and Calgary they are for sure, is for the municipalities: release available surplus land for affordable housing, five- to ten-year regional housing planning, proactively acquire land, and get on with it. That was the recommendation.

Well, the government's tough-minded approach to show that they were listening was: we will refer these recommendations to the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability. Well, time is of the essence, Mr. Chairman. Time is of the essence. We're trying to say that we need to bring out a lot of housing quickly – right? – to get the market back in order. That seems to be the government thing, but now they're going to refer this recommendation to a bureaucracy.

So all the things that they talk about in the task force, when we tried to look at the other end, Mr. Chairman, they just didn't bother

doing the right thing. So we don't have guidelines, yet we have no urgency to bring on more rental units. How can things not get worse than they are right now? They will. If you really believe that it's only the free market and that you can't interfere with it, then surely there's an obligation to get on with building the units, to build that up.

So what is the choice for people, Mr. Chairman? What is the choice? Even if we did get on with some of these things to bring the rental units on, it's going to take at least a couple or three or four years. But by the time they refer it to all the bureaucracies, it would probably take 15 years before they got on with it.

So in the short run what do the people do as the rents skyrocket? No big urgency to get more rental units out, not enough money, inflation going rampant. So what do we do for the vulnerable that we've talked about and, as we say, for the middle income? Now, Mr. Chairman, as I say, at the very minimum, then, if you're going to dither around and not build the units, you have to provide some protection. I said it before, and I'll say it again: this is not a real market. In market economies there should be some competition. There isn't competition with this. You can set your own standards, and too bad; let the devil have the hind leg. That's what this is all about.

So, Mr. Chairman, it boggles me that they talk about bringing on units, they talk about no need for rent guidelines at this particular time, yet nothing's going to happen in the short run.

I go back, Mr. Chairman, to their own documents again, and I just want to repeat the one from Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry talking about the Alberta advantage. Well, this is very good reading. They say on housing affordability: "Since the start of 2005, housing affordability across the province has been eroding at an aggressive pace." Now, with all the things that they've rejected here, how can it get better? Surely, even this ideological hidebound government should see that we need something temporarily in terms of what's happening with the housing market.

Always willing to help, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to bring forward another amendment. You know, frankly, with Bill 34 the once a year makes it even worse because people get gouged faster than they were before. So I'd like to bring in an amendment. You have it there at the front, Mr. Chairman; you have copies of it. I'll read it. It's under the name of the leader of the NDP, Brian Mason.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we just want to make sure that it's the right amendment that we're dealing with.

Mr. Martin: I'll read it.

The Deputy Chair: Oh. Okay.

Mr. Martin: It says: Mr. Mason to move that Bill 34, Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, be amended . . .

Some Hon. Members: It's the wrong one.

Mr. Martin: No, it isn't. It's the only one we have here. [interjections] Let me finish. That Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 1(4)(b) by adding the following after the proposed subsection (8):

(9) A landlord shall not increase the rent payable under a residential tenancy agreement by an amount greater than the percentage increase in the Alberta Consumer Price Index published by Statistics Canada for the previous calendar year plus 2%.

2:30

Now, we're giving the government a change here. Maybe, Mr.

Chairman, they were worried that two years was not the right amount. They might've wanted five years. Maybe it was the two years that bothered them. But even at this stage we'd be willing to negotiate one year. Anything would be better. Maybe they were saying, "Well, we were being too timid," and they actually wanted it for five years or 15 years like in Ontario. We'll allow the government to put their own number on it and figure out the date that they would like to bring in CPI plus 2.

I would hope that we could have a good debate on this particular bill. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A2. While the amendment appears very similar to the one that we just dealt with, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is correct that the previous one had specific timelines; this one does not.

Does anybody wish to participate in the debate on amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on amendment A2, which is the one that my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview just brought forward in the name of our leader and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Certainly, this gives us an opportunity to speak once again on the importance of setting up a reasonable range of increase that can take place in Alberta in regard to rental increases. I guess it has the distinction as well of providing the flexibility to either work within as narrow a parameter as to extend. So the language of this amendment is differentiated from the last one in that it does give us a little more flexibility in being able to use this as a tool, longer or shorter, depending on the circumstances that we're confronted with in the rental market here in the province of Alberta.

There's a volatile situation out there at this point with the rental market, and I guess the New Democratic caucus recognizes the importance of alleviating the concerns of the landlords in that we're not putting in rent controls over a necessarily longer period of time, but it's something that's subject to dealing with the circumstances as they present themselves. Certainly, in the immediate past here in Alberta and across other jurisdictions rent controls and guidelines have been brought in and then just as reasonably been brought out.

I had the opportunity to speak to the former mayor of Edmonton, Mr. Terry Cavanagh, and he had the distinction of presiding over the phasing out of rent controls as they were placed here in the province of Alberta probably some 30 years ago. He said that the benefit of bringing in a reasonable amount of regulation and then phasing it out again in a reasonable and timely fashion actually helped to build more rental accommodation across the city of Edmonton and across the province of Alberta but also fostered lots of goodwill between the various developers and apartment owners and the population, which was experiencing a parallel although somehow smaller economic and population boom than we are now experiencing here in 2007. The point is that working with regulations in a timely fashion, in fact, does create the stability that we need to meet the needs of renters and to meet the needs of landlords as well.

One difference that I certainly recognize from the last economic boom in the mid-1970s into the early '80s here in the province is that there was certainly more accommodation to build rental accommodation than there is here now with the second boom, 30-some years later. So I think it's important for us to recognize the differences that occurred from that period of time to now and try to learn from them somehow. Certainly, one of the differences was that there was a lot more sense of optimism on the part of people who would build rental accommodation and lots more entrepreneurs, I think, entering

into building rental accommodation on a smaller scale. You got a lot more people just building a walk-up here and there and some encouragement from the provincial government to do so.

You know, it makes a huge difference that from the provincial side 30 years ago there was a sense that people were going to be looked after both on the rental side and on the landlord side so that people felt as though they could make that financial risk to actually build those accommodations. That's what we're asking for here now in 2007, to put in place an arrangement that is stable using the structure of Bill 34 augmented by amendment A2. Really, I think we're creating a nice starting point for renters to feel some sense of stability but landlords and entrepreneurs to have some sense of stability as well, to know what to expect and to build around those things.

You know, if you are making a return on your investment that is ranging between 7 and, say, 10 or 12 per cent, that's not a bad investment. You know that the economy in the province of Alberta, with a little bit more stewardship and a little more care on the part of the provincial government, is in fact going to continue to provide a growing population in any given city you decide to build rental accommodations in, coupled with a nice stable number in real terms of between 7 and 10 per cent, not to mention the increase in value of that property as a piece of equity in the first place, which is bound to continue to increase considering the development of industrial upgraders here in the city of Edmonton. Those two together, by any stretch of the imagination, make a pretty sound investment in regard to building new rental accommodation or any accommodation here in general. That's what we're trying to do here. The sense of stability certainly works well on the landlord side as well, as I had mentioned previously, with having stable tenants and also providing accommodation for not just families and working people but for students as well.

Let's not forget that this whole housing crisis is only going to be inflamed when we have a turnover of the new school year in all of the cities that have major postsecondary educational institutions across the province, when suddenly there's not only a shortage but the affordability question for postsecondary students will loom over the horizon and rear its ugly head and just seek to compound the crisis that we're now facing.

So we're putting amendment A2 into place with the flexibility of not having a fixed time on it. It could be shorter or it could be longer. We're not presuming anything. It gives us that flexibility, and quite frankly I think that when Albertans wake up tomorrow morning, which is coming sooner than we think, and they see that we have in fact combined Bill 34 with amendment A2, we'll have created a circumstance that people can not only just live with but also will create some stability for a long-term future for rental accommodation in the province of Alberta.

2:40

You know, there's been a lot of speculation about doing something in regard to this or not doing something. I think we all have to try to buck up a little bit here and not just entrench ourselves in the positions that we've created over the last hours and days but, rather, look for some degree of flexibility. Certainly, on our part we are I think demonstrating a great deal of flexibility here with amendment A2 because it can function for as short or as long as the government might choose to do. So it's not as though we're putting in some great five-year plan here that will lock us into rent guidelines for a long period of time. Things can turn around on a dime and turn around quickly, and away we go. We can make adjustments to this amendment and feel comfortable in doing so.

You know, I was so happy when we did have this Affordable

Housing Task Force report that finally came out, really addressing this situation in a very practical way, looking at the population and how it's growing so quickly, looking at some of the crisis stories that came to the task force's attention as they travelled around Alberta. I was very, very encouraged as well to see the machinations of the debate that the task force had into building their plan and coming to a majority situation – right? – coming to a majority decision to in fact support this idea of CPI plus 2 per cent. I know that that was an educational experience for the members that were involved in the task force because I know that lots of people had preconceptions about the negative potential ramifications of having rent guidelines in place, but then during the course of the 45 days they came to realize that in fact this was a positive thing to bring forward, supporting it as part of a package.

That's the key message that I would like to leave this fine Assembly with, that Bill 34 must work in consort with an amendment like A2 here; otherwise, the two of them are dysfunctional on their own. If you put them together, then it becomes a harmonious one-two sort of legislative punch that will serve renters, add stability and some reassurance to landlords and to rental companies, and ultimately stabilize the population and give people a place to live and some hope for the future.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

With that, Mr. Chair, I offer my encouragement to all members to in fact support amendment A2. Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wasn't going to speak on this, but after listening to the rhetoric, I felt compelled to speak to this one. This one is even actually worse than the one that we've already defeated. Let me point out some of the flaws in it. First of all, I don't know what the 2 per cent is. It's 2 per cent of what? If it's 2 per cent of the Alberta consumer price index as published by Statistics Canada, then of course that's a minuscule amount and really doesn't amount to anything. Let me explain why I believe we're going in the wrong direction with these if we would pass this kind of thing. It's no question that as soon as government interferes with the private sector this way, you just completely blow out any kind of stability or any confidence that the government is not going to continue to meddle.

Now, let's look at this. Let's look at this. With the way that the province has got pockets that are hot and pockets that are not suffering the same and not getting the same kind of increases in the past, if you were to put in something like this that applies across the province – look at what's happening. Just take, for example, the taxation. In the city of Edmonton I understand that our taxes are going to be going up about 5 per cent this year. The mayor apparently today said something about next year being 7, 8, 10 per cent. Well, just compare that with the consumer price index plus the 2 per cent of whatever that is 2 per cent of, and add those together.

But there's another big factor in here that you've got to also consider. We've gone to a system on the taxation side of assessing on market value. Well, when you get into the hot areas, the attrition on the property is increasing your actual tax bill considerably more than the percentage increase in the mill rate. So I can see cases where a landlord with a rental accommodation, that we're wanting more of – and that's where our problem is; we don't have enough of it – in fact could be losing money.

Just think about it. If you put this in now and there has been one of the landlords that hasn't been gouging, if we determine what that

is, when they've made the raise, they can't do it again this year. If they made a moderate raise that is reasonable, then we plant this on top of it and stop him next time from recouping what probably is his added cost, why on earth would anybody invest in more housing? Why would they do it? Go build a condominium, and you'll make a lot more money on it.

This nonsense about affordable housing: I wish somebody could explain to me what that means. I have never been able to understand it because affordable housing in Rocky is an entirely different thing than an affordable house in Edmonton. Or move up to Fort McMurray. Compare the numbers. What's affordable housing in any one of those places? We keep on talking, but I don't know what that means.

Mr. Chairman, I think that if we want to have an even worse problem a year from now, just adopt this kind of nonsense.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I rise in support of amendment A2. It's substantially similar to the one that was brought forward by my colleague, and I'm willing to support it based on that.

I was interested to hear once again the argument from the government that somehow they're creating stability when clearly what we have right now is a state of chaos, and that was entirely created by the government's choices in how this was not managed. I'm always interested in where they choose to interfere in the marketplace and where they choose to not interfere in the marketplace.

Mr. MacDonald: Electricity. Insurance.

Ms Blakeman: Exactly. We've had them interfere all over the place: muddy little government handprints in electricity deregulation and in regulating that marketplace, not to the benefit of the citizens of Alberta, I can tell you, because, boy, are we paying substantially higher electricity rates than we were 10 years ago. Yikes. They happily got muddy little paw prints all over automobile insurance. There are the applications through to the EUB. What are some of the other marketplaces that they get into here and interfere with all the time? Those are a couple of them.

Mr. Elsalhy: Travel clubs.

Ms Blakeman: Travel clubs.

Mr. MacDonald: Road construction with their P3s.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, the P3s. Yeah, that's another way that they get into interfering with all kinds of things. Yet when we really need them to help to modify a market place on a temporary basis – now, you've never heard any of us say that these should be brought in and left in forever. That's never come out of the Liberal caucus. We've always talked about temporary, and we've even put timelines, dates on what we were proposing. You know, the only ones that just have this run forever and ever in this state of chaos seems to be the government.

2:50

The other thing that I find really interesting about what the government has been talking about with this . . . [interjection] I can see that the Minister of Health and Wellness is really eager to get in on this discussion. I look forward to his contribution to the debate.

I find it really interesting that the government doesn't seem to understand the difference between affordable housing – in other words, ownership of a home or of a condominium in some way – and rental housing. They seem to flip back and forth between the two as though it was the same thing, and it's not. It clearly is not. Trying to create a rental marketplace or to help that come into existence and find some stability is entirely different than telling us that you're creating housing that people can purchase. Some renters are going to be able to move into a purchase market, and some never will. You will always need some kind of rental accommodation, and they're not the same thing.

While I realize that government members, you know, with all the extra committees they're on and all the extra pay they make – I understand that most of those folks or all of you can afford to buy condominiums. Actually, you'll probably make a pretty fair deal. By the time you leave public office and sell your condo, you've made a good amount of money here, but most of the other people that we're talking to these days are in a rental market, and they're never going to make it into a home ownership or a condo market.

I find it really interesting that the government doesn't seem to distinguish between those two marketplaces, and it's important because the people that we've had coming into these galleries, that we've been introducing – we've been asking questions on behalf of them – are in a rental marketplace, and that's where the problem is right now.

Yes, we also have a problem with enough units everywhere, and I've talked about transitional housing units. We've talked about emergency accommodation units. Yeah, there are problems in those housing markets as well. But there is a difference between how many rental units are going to be available and how many ownership units are going to be available.

You know, in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre – I've told this House – I started to get letters about significant increases in rental costs more than a year ago, and there has been not one new rental unit that has been built in Edmonton-Centre over the last year. Yet according to what the Conservatives keep saying, that was an optimum marketplace for that to be happening. Because the supply was very low, we should have had lots of people running to try and build new rental accommodation. It never happened, not one unit.

Mr. Hancock: Look at all the rental accommodation that was made available when renters moved into their new houses because of the low mortgage rates.

Ms Blakeman: A good strategy, not connected to reality in Alberta.

We keep being told: oh, that rental marketplace will work if you just stay out of it, you know; they'll build more units. Well, they didn't. That situation has been in place in Edmonton-Centre for more than a year, and nothing has been built.

When I look at who, for the most part, owns those rental units in there, they are not developers. They didn't build the accommodation that they own and manage now, and they probably will not ever build it. They are in a different business entirely. They just own these buildings. They buy them already built. Most of the housing stock in my constituency is pre-1970. The guys that are making the money off those rental increases right now have never built an apartment building. Never. They just bought it as it was, and they bought it, in all likelihood, in the last 10 or 15 years, and they're just making money on it. So don't tell me that there are developers out there who would, but for interference, be building rental accommodation. It's simply not true, and it has not played out in my constituency at all, and I've got a lot of apartments.

Out of all the people that I have now, there are 500 single-family

units left in my constituency. Five hundred. Everybody else lives in high-rise or apartment rental accommodation or condominiums or in a townhouse situation. That's the kind of marketplace that we have for housing in Edmonton-Centre. So all of this mythology around how this will work has simply not played out in Edmonton-Centre.

You may be able to show me examples – and I invite you to show me examples – of other places in Edmonton where there have been new rental units built in response to this incredible lack of supply, but what we're really seeing play out is what we see in the annual report from Boardwalk, which is saying: "This is great. Very low supply. We're going to make money hand over fist. Let's keep going. We won't build any new units. We'll just keep, you know, raising the rent on what we've got because it's a very limited supply, and it's a supply and demand market. We're going to make more money." So what I keep hearing from the Conservatives about how this is all supposed to work is simply not happening.

I'm more than happy to support the amendment that's been brought forward as amendment A2 because what we need to see here has got to go forward with a two-pronged approach to this. It's got to be about a notification period, that it can't be increased more than once in a 12-month period. Frankly, this has got to have an end date on it, and with that must go a rental cap because otherwise you end up with exactly what we've got right now, which is chaos and instability and no end in sight for when there would be some kind of stability come back into this.

So that's what I would like to see. That's certainly what my constituents want and need to see. I think it's irresponsible of this government to keep talking about a nonexistent marketplace. It's completely dysfunctional. What you've got are extraordinary circumstances. The public looks to the government to take action in cases of extraordinary circumstances. What are we getting from this government? "Oh, well, gee. No idea. Um, um. Let's have a task force and then not pay attention to what they say and put one thing in place that really creates chaos in the system" because they won't put the second thing in place that goes along with it. You know, I was always skeptical about Conservative money management, marketplace philosophy, but, boy, I've seen nothing but dumb ideas play out over the last couple of years flowing from that stuff.

I recommend that we support this amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, I'm a forester, and I spent a lot of my life counting trees, so maybe I'm just simple or something. I don't know, but at some level this seems like you can reduce it to a fairly simple argument. We have a short-term problem, and we have a long-term problem. I think that, very obviously, everybody would agree that the long-term problem is that somehow we have to get more housing units built or chase some people away. Nobody has mentioned that as a possible solution, so probably we need to build some housing.

I think we also all agree that we have a short-term situation here, which is the reason we're standing here tonight. It's the reason that the government initiated a task force that the Premier mandated in his letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. We have to do something. We have a task force, our government has responded to that task force, and here we are tonight standing and debating this.

Keeping in mind that we have a long-term problem and we have to bring some housing on the market, does anybody in this House think that it would be a good idea in solving the short-term problem to absolutely kill the construction of new units? I kind of find it hard

to believe that anybody would say that that would be a good solution. Surely, you know, if you were sitting here with some money to invest and the government tonight were to send you a signal that – guess what? – your rent is controlled and you're not going to be able to increase it by more than the inflation index and confiscate your property, is anybody over there willing to invest their money in an apartment complex? I don't think so. While we're trying to solve this short-term problem, we have to figure out how we're going to get the long-term problem moving, which is incenting people to build apartments, not disincenting them.

Ms Pastoor: Just what you're waiting for.

Mr. Oberle: The point of that comment is lost on me entirely, Mr. Chairman. I'm not sure what is meant by that comment.

We've got to work in parallel here. We have to solve a short-term situation while solving a long-term situation. The long-term situation, again, is to put housing on the market.

3:00

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has pointed out that nobody is building apartments in her constituency. I would point out that that's not true across Alberta. Peace River just brought on a new 70-unit apartment building – that translated to the population of Edmonton would translate into thousands of apartments – quite a big building for a town the size of Peace River. There are other communities across Alberta that are building apartments. I don't know Edmonton-Centre, and I'll allow that the member is correct in that, but again I'll point out that it's not across Alberta.

But if nobody is building apartment units in Edmonton-Centre, then maybe somebody should ask themselves why that is, and I'm just betting it's not because they don't have rent controls. I'm betting that if we put rent controls on, nobody's going to wake up tomorrow and say: darn it all; I'm going to build an apartment. It's not going to happen. It's a disincentive. It's most certainly not an incentive to build apartments. We need to figure out what it's going to take to bring units into the market in the long term. In the short term, in the crisis that we have, I think the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the minister of seniors have outlined over a hundred million dollars of aid available to people that find themselves in crisis. That's what we have to be focusing on right here. Let's not get the long term wrong by focusing on the short term. That's cutting off your nose to spite your face.

That's all I have to say, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise to speak against amendment A2 as moved by the leader of the third party, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, that Bill 34, Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 1(4)(b) by adding the following after the proposed subsection (8):

(9) A landlord shall not increase the rent payable under a residential tenancy agreement by an amount greater than the percentage increase in the Alberta Consumer Price Index published by Statistics Canada for the previous calendar year plus 2%.

Mr. Chairman, as I said before, the Alberta Liberal Party believes in fairness, sustainability in the market, but I also said that we believe in temporary relief control, not a long-term solution. A long-term solution – I agree with the hon. member – is to build affordable homes. Some owners are no doubt gouging renters. It's not right, but we must have some temporary relief control, which is missing in this bill although it's important. We believe in temporary relief

control, but a time limit is missing in this amendment A2. The amendment may be helpful only to the tenants but not to the investors.

We want to keep investors in Alberta. That's why we support short-term relief programs, but the long-term solution is more affordable houses in Alberta. This is my point of view, but still, you know, the major flaw with Bill 34 is the failure to introduce any kind of rent regulation. There should be some sort of relief, but we don't want an amendment like this one without any particular time limit, which would discourage some investors in Alberta. As mentioned above, there's nothing in the bill to protect renters from massive rent increases while they wait for the market to stabilize, which could take two years to see the first evidence of new units.

What is needed and where this bill fails is to introduce renter protection measures in the short term. We cannot support a bill that has such a fundamental flaw. The evidence overwhelmingly is that Alberta renters, mostly in the cities, are being subjected to unreasonable rental increases due to a destabilized market. This is not a new problem. There have been many instances of rental increases that are simply rent gouging for over a year. The failure of the government is to not recognize that sometimes in rare instances the market does not work. In those instances temporary measures must be taken to protect citizens in the short term.

Bill 34 fails to provide a temporary rent regulation to protect Albertans; thus, it cannot be supported. The only way to support this bill is if they amend it to include, I again repeat, a temporary rent regulation, not the one mentioned in amendment A2. We will be introducing amendments to Bill 34 to accomplish just that.

The two options available are what the Alberta Liberal's policy advocated, a one-year, one-time temporary rent regulation that limits the rent increases within that period to a maximum of 10 per cent. The second option would be to implement the recommendation of the Affordable Housing Task Force that called for a two-year rent regulation that would keep rental rates within the guidelines of the CPI plus 2 per cent. The task force also recommended a mechanism to allow owners to apply for an increase over the annual guideline to recover actual costs.

The bill fails to provide protection for renters in the short term. This is critical to any plan to address the affordable housing crisis. Without this measure this bill fails Albertans. The entire substance of the bill is in the regulations. Once again the government is hiding behind regulations, making authority that allows the minister discretion to change these amendments at will. This does not provide stability for anyone if the rules can be changed behind closed doors at the discretion of the minister. If the government was confident in its amendments, it should have clearly put the substance of them embedded in the legislation. If changes were being contemplated at any time, a bill would have to be introduced in the House and opened for debate and scrutiny – this is what a government with nothing to hide does – something this government has failed to do here.

I again say that we support a temporary rent regulation only. If we amend that one, I'll be more happy and I will support that bill if we make the right amendment on that.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any members? We have the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, my pleasure to rise this morning to participate in debate on this . . .

Mr. R. Miller: Actually, it's still last night officially.

Mr. Elsalhy: Officially it's still last night, but it is 10 after 3 in the morning of Thursday.

Mr. R. Miller: Except it's Wednesday.

3:10

Mr. Elsalhy: Yeah, except it's recorded in *Hansard* as Wednesday. Nevertheless, it's indeed a pleasure.

We have an amendment before us, amendment A2, Mr. Chairman, which, as is every member from the Alberta Liberal caucus, I am going to urge all members of this House to not support, and I'll tell you why. In amendment A1 we were asking for temporary intervention, a temporary measure to bring some degree of stability to the housing market, which, as we argued time and time again, is extremely inflated and is inexplicably scorching hot. The amendment before us from the NDP caucus is basically calling for a permanent or an indefinite rent increase cap. It basically calls for a cap that is here forever, here to stay. It's calculated by adding the Alberta consumer price index, the inflation figure from year to year, and then adding 2 per cent on top, very similar to what we recommended in amendment A1. The only difference, as I mentioned, is that this is indefinite. This is forever. We are totally opposed to having a permanent rent cap in this province, and this is something that the members of the Alberta Liberal caucus have been quite clear on in our own internal discussions and in our printed policy that we're sharing with Albertans.

Now, the reason why we are opposed is because we feel that temporary rent measures are fair to both landlords and tenants. When we bring in a permanent cap, then it's not fair to landlords and, to a degree, also not fair to those tenants because some of the arguments that we've heard in this House earlier, Mr. Chairman, will come true. So we're not in favour of a permanent cap on rental increases. We only advocated what the task force on housing advocated, and that is to bring in a short-term, temporary rent cap, not even a freeze. We're basically allowing rents to increase but only for a very short period of time, two years, Mr. Chairman, to allow the market to equilibrate and to settle.

So, in my opinion, amendment A2 is extreme. It should come as no surprise to you, Mr. Chairman, that the Alberta Liberal position is halfway between the extreme request from the NDP caucus to have the market permanently controlled, and then the other extreme is you have the PC caucus, where, actually, no control is advocated, and they want to leave the market to decide for itself. So we're basically advocating a position of balance, a position of sort of holding the middle ground and fairness to both landlords and tenants as indicated by my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Now, I want to go back, Mr. Chairman, and use this opportunity to highlight other areas where this very government, the same government – they refer to themselves as the new government, but they're not – intervened or stepped in and regulated or came to the aid of certain sectors or industries in this province. They do it all the time, but they do it selectively. My argument is that tenants should be really looked at as one of those groups of people that receive support and assistance from this government.

I'm going to first of all talk about a little excerpt from *Hansard*. The former minister from Drumheller-Stettler said in *Hansard* on May 16, 2001, in estimates:

Our agricultural community is faced with some very serious difficulties related to input costs and world prices for products and the potential for weather problems, and that's a subject that we could probably spend the whole next hour just discussing. Hence, highlighted in this budget is assistance for the agricultural industry.

She goes on to say:

This budget contains programs to assist the industry with rising input costs and other items.

Then further down she says:

That's an increase of \$255.5 million when compared to the last year's budget. Of course, the largest budget increase appears in the farm income support allocation.

So this government didn't leave the market to decide for itself. They actually stepped in and supported our farmers, who were having difficulty making ends meet. The farmers were having a tough year, and the government had no problem and showed no hesitation stepping in to support them.

Another example, again from *Hansard*, March 6, 2002. The then minister of gaming, who is now the hon. Minister of Justice, was moving Bill 16, the Racing Corporation Amendment Act, 2002. I quote from *Hansard*. "Mr. Speaker, horse racing has a long and colourful history in Alberta. Bill 16 is intended to assist the industry and Alberta's agricultural community in their efforts to revitalize this proud tradition." So, again, they deemed it to be a worthy cause to warrant attention and support, and they stepped in and helped the horse racing industry.

Again, less than a year later, on April 9, 2003, Mr. Chairman, the same minister, the minister of gaming then, indicated in *Hansard*, "The line item relative to horse racing is a commitment that this government made to Horse Racing Alberta in 2001, so it's a fulfillment of an obligation that we have to that particular industry." He mentioned that the commitment that was made "was to assist the industry through racing entertainment centres that were connected with racetracks throughout the province." Again, they deemed it important to look favourably on an industry that was struggling, and they came to its aid. They stepped in and supported an industry. They didn't leave the market to decide for itself. If that industry was destined to fail, they didn't allow that to happen. They stepped in.

This government interferes all the time. They have no hesitancy. They have no trouble coming to the aid of certain select groups and also selectively leaving other groups behind.

Another example. Mr. Chairman, I can go on and on about examples of how this government at times finds it necessary to do this. On May 11, 2004, the deputy Premier back then was responding to a question from my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. He was asking her about BSE compensation payments. I'm quoting from *Hansard* again.

What I can tell him, again, is that I am proud of the beef industry in this province, who designed the programs to assist the industry.

Now, this is important.

I will remind the hon. member that the people who designed all programs were some 65 individuals from small and large packers, from small and large feedlots, from the five organizations that represent the total beef industry in this province, including the retail industry and, at times, the people who convey these animals. Mr. Speaker, this was truly an industry/government partnership, and it was successful.

What they did here is that they brought in some people from the industry, and they said: "How can we be of service today? What would you guys like?" The people came up with BSE subsidy programs, which the government automatically rubber-stamped and said: "Fine. We're going to give it to you." Then a minister of the Crown stood up and defended that decision and said how wonderful it was and how successful it was, how great it was. I don't dispute that the farmers needed assistance because of the BSE crisis. But the fact is: why is this industry any more important than another sector of society, renters? Let's count how many people are captured under that definition of a tenant, or a renter, and let's see if they need assistance just like any of those industries and sectors.

Mr. Chairman, like I say, you have to be fair to both landlords and tenants. In my opinion and in my caucus's opinion to be fair is to bring in a temporary, short-term with a clear sunset clause, a clear expiry date, measure to allow the market to settle, to rest, to deflate if you want. If we're talking about inflation, the opposite would be a deflation, something to bring it back to normal. Having it for two years like we suggested or, in fact, as the NDP highlighted, our printed policy of 10 per cent for one year allows some of that supply that we're asking for to be brought in.

3:20

I have to again disagree with the government that temporary rent regulations dissuade or disintices people to build new units. You know what? We haven't had a lot of new units built over the last two decades. So that argument is not particularly strong, Mr. Chairman.

Now, another example which I found quite interesting, selectively making decisions and arbitrarily picking winners and losers. In 2002 the Tory caucus of the day selectively banned controlled hunting of elk on private property, but guess what? They did not control any hunting of bison, wild boar, or game birds, for example. Now, wasn't that a form of regulation? They chose elk, and they said that this was not allowed, but they left everything else. Wasn't that interference with private business? Wasn't that interference with property rights?

The government claimed that it listened to Albertans, who in a survey conducted that year, in 2002 – and the minister of agriculture is probably aware of that survey; he probably has it in his archive – overwhelmingly opposed so-called pen hunting. Okay, fine. What it shows here is that this government occasionally listens to the people of this province, and they occasionally poll them and survey them, and they ask them what they think.

Why not go to the public and ask them what they think on the issue of rent regulation? Why take that decision, you know, behind closed doors and not listen to, one, the people of this province and, two, the task force that was entrusted to solicit that kind of feedback. The task force was fair, and it was well structured. They had representation from all three parties in this House, and they also had experts from the community and the industry and economists and people like this. They heard the pros and the cons. They heard the for and the against.

Why not listen to the people? Why not listen to the experts? Why not listen to some of their own MLAs in their own caucus, who advocate some sort of rent regulation. Again, I find it quite puzzling that they have no difficulty indicating their support for some measure to bring back stability to the market. They say it, you know, in the media, for example, but in this House they remain quiet. As a matter of fact, when an amendment is being discussed, they just vote in unison and en masse. I find this quite puzzling, and I find it disturbing that what they say outside of the House is different from what they do and say inside the Chamber.

So this government interferes in the market, and I actually have about eight or nine other examples, which I'm going to hopefully bring to your attention for your interest, Mr. Chairman. I know that you're quite interested in this. You've been a member of this government for quite a while. There's a ton of stuff in *Hansard* here that we should be referring to from time to time because history has lessons for us to learn, and sometimes it has a tendency to repeat itself, but then sometimes these lessons are forgotten. We have to remind ourselves, the new members who came in 2004 and some of the old members, too, because sometimes their memory fails them, that this is what this government has always done.

A government is elected to protect people and to serve people, and

if the government says, "We're not interfering in this, we're not doing this, we have nothing to do, and there's no reason for us to butt in," then why do we need them? Why do we need this government? Let business run the province. They can all retire and get their severance packages and transitional allowances, and let's get it over with.

Mr. Chairman, I am going to take my seat. I voiced my unhappiness with this amendment, and I want to again emphasize that it's an issue of balance, holding that middle ground between an extreme like the NDP and an extreme like the PC government.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I feel compelled to get up and to speak against amendment A2. There have been some interesting new twists to the discussion that's going on, and I guess that I feel, like I say, obliged to get up and to counter some of those thoughts and to hopefully continue the deductive reasoning on why we should not be looking at putting a limit on the increase that's in line with the Alberta consumer price index plus 2 per cent with no time limit or anything else.

As has been said earlier, this is, perhaps, even a poorer amendment than the last one. What has amazed me in the discussion is the concern that there haven't been any new apartment buildings being built, but there are condos being built. Quite often it's talked about and been referred to that 7 to 10 per cent is a good return and a sound investment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has often referred to and told me about his years in the investment business, and he understands it well, so I would recommend that perhaps the third opposition party should go out and start raising the money so that they can get the investment. It's a sound investment, according to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. Go out and get those 93,000-plus votes. I'm not sure about the Liberals, whether they've decided that this is a sound investment or another one. It's amazing to me that people talk about sound investments, yet they're unable to raise the money.

The hon. Member for – I want to say Peace River.

An Hon. Member: Peace River.

Mr. Hinman: Just Peace River, that's all? Such a nice, short, beautiful title. Some of us have three handles, and we've got to look after them.

He brought it down to a simple equation, which is what it's about, that we need more housing. How do we get it? You will never get it if you start putting caps on, start putting in interference.

I want to refer to a story that I remember reading during Hurricane Katrina. An entrepreneur loaded up his truck with generators and drove for, I think, 36 or 40 hours to get there to sell those. When the first ones arrived, there was a great need for it, and there were people with money. He was charging, I believe it was, sums like \$3,000 per generator. People came running up that couldn't afford it, started complaining and saying: "This is gouging. This is un-American. We shouldn't allow this." They actually confiscated the generators and took them out so that they couldn't even be used there. The other people had thought: "This is great. We're going to go there because of the shortage." Yes, when you first arrive in these crisis situations, things really are out of whack, and everybody agrees that it's out of whack. By stepping in and having the law use the heavy hand and say, "Well, this is too much," stopped the flow of generators, and then none arrived. Everybody says: well, where are they going to put it where it's legal for me to take something and sell?

The fact of the matter is that we have a huge influx of people wanting to come to this province. They're coming here because they think it is a better opportunity for them. I go back to the same argument that I brought up earlier on the other amendments. If this government wants to control, we've got to go against our own constitution, which is the freedom of mobility to come here, and say: don't come here. We could change all this. There is a price for freedom. The market does swing back and forth, but we don't want to make that pendulum swing further and magnify the crisis.

So once again I've got to speak against this amendment. Realize that it isn't in the interest of those that are suffering the most, which we need to think of the hardest. We want building to go forward.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung went on for a long time about all of the past assistance that was given to industry, so I'd ask the hon. member: are we going to give assistance to the builders? There's a difference between industry and consumers, and we have to look at that. I don't agree with the assistance. I believe that the market squeeze is going to continue to push building. We've been building at an unprecedented rate. You can read in every city that the building permits are up; they're up; they're up. The building is going on. There's a problem with a shortage of land and the zoning and those types of things that should be expedited and moved forward quicker, but to put a simple cap on the increase on the rent payable will not solve the problem. Therefore, I need to speak against amendment A2.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3:30

The Acting Chair: Well, thank you, hon. member.

We now have the hon. leader of the ND opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to speak in favour of amendment A2, which will put in place restrictions on the amount of rent increase a landlord can implement. It can be no greater than the percentage increase in the Alberta consumer price index published by Stats Canada for the previous calendar year plus 2 per cent.

I want to begin by addressing the comments of the Member for Edmonton-McClung, to which I took great exception. The Alberta New Democrats have been clear from the outset that this particular approach would be one that is of a temporary nature, and the Liberals know that. In fact, I want to indicate that in the last Liberal amendment, which we supported, it was pretty clear that it mirrored the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force and also the policy of our party and caucus, and that included the time limitation.

It also, Mr. Chairman, had other aspects that were not contained immediately within the wording of that particular amendment. For example, we have also called, as has the task force, for a mechanism to allow landlords that have extraordinary expenses to be able to apply for an increase beyond the 2 per cent above the CPI. That was not included in the Liberal amendment. It was not included, but they stated that in their debate.

Similarly, we have always intended that the rent caps should be of a temporary nature. The government has indicated that it will be a minimum of two years before some of the housing that they have planned will come onto the market, but it may well be more than that. So for the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to attack our motion because it doesn't include specific timelines is equivalent to someone attacking their motion because it doesn't provide a mechanism for extraordinary rent increases.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say that I appreciated the support of the

hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on this amendment. It's unfortunate that some of her colleagues went out of their way to try and break what unity there was around the whole question of opposition to the government's bill and the lack of rent guidelines. I take exception to the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. The actual Liberal policy bears very little relationship to the motion that they put forward, and I'll just read the section from the Liberal website. It says: "Our plan also limits rent increases to once per year. We will institute a one-time, one year long, temporary rent regulation measure that limits rent increases within that period to a maximum of 10%."

Mr. Chairman, we know that it's going to take more than one year before new housing comes on the market. If the Liberal policy, then, is to limit it to one year, then in the second year nothing will have changed. In fact, the situation likely will have worsened. So there is a serious deficiency in the official Liberal policy, which quite clearly also is very different from the motion that was put forward originally by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. I appreciated his motion. I supported it, and I believe that it is the right approach.

Our amendment is somewhat less extensive, but it is almost exactly the same, so for some members on the Official Opposition side to turn around and attack our position for being extreme is completely invalid and unacceptable as far as I'm concerned. Mr. Chairman, their motion may be fair, but that motion by Edmonton-Glenora doesn't represent the Liberal policy position, so I would hope that they would put forward an amendment here that corresponds to the policy on their website.

Having said that, I think that we've made considerable progress working together with respect to this issue, and we need to focus our attention on the government.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to come back to the annual report of the Boardwalk Real Estate Investment Trust.

Mr. MacDonald: How much of the market do they control?

Mr. Mason: They control a considerable portion of the market. Of course, they don't brag about that in their annual report to their shareholders. It's interesting. [interjections] And what is the percentage in Calgary? And what is the percentage in Edmonton? I'm not sure. We'll have to check. We'll have to check the hon. Justice minister's figures on that.

Here's what they say, though, Mr. Chairman. In the three months leading up to December 31, 2006, their revenue in Calgary went up 16.9 per cent; their operating expenses went down 6 per cent. In Edmonton their revenue went up 10.9 per cent; their operating expenses went down 4.2 per cent. In the rest of Alberta their revenue went up 16.3. Their operating expenses in the rest of Alberta went down 5.3 per cent. So the argument that some members of the government have put forward that, in fact, the reason for these rent increases is to cover additional costs is simply not true. Their costs are actually going down according to their own quarterly financial report.

Now, there are certain things, you know, things that are under the government's control, that are actually rising, but I just want to indicate that their report, appropriately entitled Opportunity Knocks, has some very revealing information about the future for this province and something that I wish the government had done some forecasting on. They go on to say – and this is in the absence of any rent guidelines – that "rental starts have fallen, particularly in Edmonton, which will contribute to a further tightening of the market through 2007 as demand exceeds supply." What does that mean, Mr. Chairman? What it means is that rents are going to continue to rise. The kind of trend that we've seen now, this upward

trend in rents that is causing so much trouble, is going to worsen as we move through the year 2007.

So more people are going to be affected than have been so far. What does the government offer for those people? Well, they may offer a delay in the rent increases, if they do as they have indicated they will, and that is to pass a regulation that requires a year's notice for rent increase. I'm sure the landlords will be lobbying them like crazy to stop that once this legislation is passed, if it is. But eventually that year will be up, and people will have to pay up or move out, and that's unacceptable.

3:40

The report goes on to say that "demand for rental accommodation also remains high as affordability for home purchase continues to decline and prospective first time home-owners are increasingly priced out of the market." This gets us into a whole secondary issue relating to housing, Mr. Chairman, and that's the fact that young families can't afford to buy houses in Alberta anymore. According to Boardwalk – and they should know – those people have been priced out of the housing market and are forced to rent, and they're forced to rent in a tightening rental market with increasing rents and no protection from a government that lacks compassion.

Mr. Chairman, government member after government member has suggested that if there is some sort of rental cap, it's going to prevent the construction of new units, but we've said over and over and over again that, in fact, no cap should apply to new units that are being constructed. Of course, they have no logical explanation for why rent caps would in any way interfere with the investment in new apartment units, so their basic argument against rent caps simply has no validity.

Of course, this is borne out in other places where rent caps are in place and there is considerably more investment in new rental units and development of new rental units than there is in Alberta where it's declining. All of the statistics show that it's declining. There is an increase in condo construction, Mr. Chairman, but not in rental units. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is quite right: there are almost no new rental units that are being constructed. Her constituency is the centre of . . .

An Hon. Member: The universe.

Mr. Mason: Well, I know. Please don't encourage her, hon. member. I think she probably represents more MLAs than anyone else.

It's the centre of the rental market in Edmonton, and there are similar constituencies in Calgary. Those people are all faced with dramatic rent increases, and there is not a lot of new rental accommodation that's being constructed in those places. That, I think, is proof that the government policy is failing. I mean, it would be just as logical to argue that the lack of rent guidelines is preventing the construction of new rental units as it is to argue that even talking about rent guidelines is somehow preventing investment or would impede investment in new units to which the rent guidelines don't apply. So, Mr. Chairman, the logic on the other side is really, really quite lacking.

I want to say as well, Mr. Chairman, that the very large rent increases have not abated. They are continuing to flow into my constituency office, and I'm sure that they are flowing into others as well. We have another fairly dramatic rental increase which we want to address tomorrow.

Mr. R. Miller: Today.

Mr. Mason: Whether it's today or tomorrow or whenever it is according to the rules of this House.

There continue to be some very, very dramatic rent increases against people who are completely unable to pay, that are unjustified by any standard much less even by market forces. They are so extreme. The problem is that the government has never defined it. The Premier talks about certain types of rent increases as being un-Albertan and threatens to send in his housing minister to have a little chat with the apartment owners and the landlords that are doing that, but he won't back it up with any legal action, which he should do. Mr. Chairman, he should put his legislation where his mouth is. In other words, if it's un-Albertan, if it's not right, then he has an obligation to back that up with legislation and not just talk.

That's been the basic problem of this government since it got elected. It talks about being open and accountable. It's not. It talks about being compassionate and caring about people. It's not. It talks about housing being a number one priority. You'd never know it. Mr. Chairman, if housing is their number one priority and this is how they deal with it, we are in a lot of trouble because you can just imagine how their third, fourth, and fifth priorities are going to be handled. Obviously, they're having a lot of trouble coping with this issue.

Mr. Chairman, it comes back to, you know, a real lack of understanding of the whole idea, the whole nature of democratic and open government, which is another one of their claims or their promises. They got it a little bit, I would say, when they decided to strike a task force, even put some opposition people on it, even put on people from nonprofit organizations that are working in the field, and so on, and had them go out and talk to Albertans. That part was good. But then when the report came back, they reverted to their old ways and took that report behind closed doors where they made the decision without the benefit of public input or discussion. The result, of course, is that they made the wrong decision. They made a bad decision, and they seem to be almost deliberately digging themselves into a deeper hole with every step they take.

The government doesn't look very good on this issue at all. I'm really curious about how they're going to get out of it. If Boardwalk is right and the rental market is going to tighten further, that means that rents are going to go up more, and more people are going to be forced out of their homes. Even if they put in place the regulation for a year, then when that year is up, people are going to be faced with very large rental increases. Why doesn't the government just admit that it made a mistake, admit that it has no plan to help renters, and admit that they have to change course and put something in place that actually will do the job?

Our amendment, Mr. Chairman, will do that. Our amendment will limit the rental increases that landlords can charge and allow them actually to make an increase beyond inflation. They will actually be able to raise their rents by more than the inflationary increase, but it will provide protection for tenants. So we think it's balanced.

We also think that it should be temporary. Notwithstanding what some other hon. members have said about the motion, it's very clear that the intent is temporary. But we don't know how long they will stay. The task force recommended two years. The Liberal policy book says one year. I don't think that's enough. Certainly, I haven't heard anyone in this Assembly say that they would object to taking these rent guidelines off if equilibrium was restored to the housing market and some stability to rents had been achieved. If that happens, you know, we will make the motion. I will pledge this to the House: we'll make the motion.

3:50

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member, for your comments.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, just a couple of short comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has just spent the last 15 minutes criticizing our logic: we don't get it, we don't understand, we're not compassionate. While certainly we have to allow that we're talking about differences in philosophy here, you know, I don't think it's fair to malign our intent here. I will certainly allow that the intent on the other side of the House is to solve a problem here. The intention is to address people that are in need and to solve the housing crisis.

The difference is in philosophy, and I don't think it's useful to wade into a debate which is essentially: "Did not; did too. My dad is bigger than your dad." It's really not all that productive. We should be talking about the problem. But having descended to that level, just allow me to point out for a minute the flaw in the logic over here.

First of all, the hon. member is arguing for temporary rent controls when the amendment says no such thing. I might point out. So whether it's one year or two years over on the Liberal side, it's no years or how many years on the NDP side. So there's a flaw in the logic. The amendment says no such thing. It's open-ended rent control.

Now, the hon. member pointed out that the third party here has argued that, you know, obviously, there should be no rent controls on new construction, interestingly thereby conceding that rent controls on new construction will eliminate new construction, which is the argument we're making. So I guess the next logical question would be: how many landlords does that hon. member know would build a building for that first month's rent from that first renter, and that's their profit? I strongly suspect that with the next renter it won't be new construction anymore. It's old construction the day after somebody moves into it. If that's not the case, then maybe the hon. member could explain to this House under what logic it would be that some landlords are going to be able to increase their rents, and others aren't. That doesn't make any logic either.

Mr. Chairman, it's not just a simple blanket solution. The member has already conceded that. Again, it's a long-term problem of getting housing on the market, and it's a short-term problem of being compassionate.

The approach over there: Swiss cheese has fewer holes in it and, frankly, smells better.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Now I'd call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. If there was the opportunity to clearly indicate what the NDP amendment A2 would like to state, in other words, if it were possible to provide such a thing as a friendly amendment, which I realize it's not, the intention would indicate: plus 2 per cent until the market stabilizes. I believe that's the intent of the amendment, and I would have no problem supporting that intent. Possibly, if we continue on, and if this day becomes a 36-hour day, we could get that amendment to be considered.

However, to talk about Bill 34 and comment a little bit further about what the MLA for Peace River has recommended and to provide an analogy. The House here is burning down, but Bill 34 says that we're going to provide \$280 million to rebuild it. I would like to think that we'd have some immediate money, and somebody would go out and get a fire extinguisher. That's what we're talking about when we talk about temporary rent controls, sunset-claused rent controls.

It's not an either/or circumstance. Yes, you need to promote housing in the long term, but you need a series of what I'm calling

co-ordinated solutions in order for that to happen. You need to have immediate stabilization, and I think the Member for Peace River recognized that fact through the subsidies. I don't think the Member for Peace River would want those subsidies to go on ad infinitum. There would be a defined period, and that's where we kind of agree.

At the same time, where the disagreement comes in: is it more expensive – and I believe it is for the taxpayer – to subsidize the landlord's profits rather than to subsidize the individual so that they could move and so that the money followed them from place to place? As opposed to putting the money into the landlord's pocket, if we put the money with the tenant so that they could do whatever limited shopping there was an availability for, I think that would improve things. As it is, we're not encouraging any long-term construction if landlords can do rather well at the moment without any new construction just by simply raising the rent to such a point where they're making their profit. There's no maintenance, no renovation, no refurbishing going on; it's strictly a profit.

Now, for the government, in terms of a series of co-ordinated solutions, one of the obvious things is to provide land. You've heard me in this House talk about the dollar deals and the lack of co-ordination or the lack of rules for dollar deals. This is a place where the province could through a variety of organizations, such as donating land to the Calgary Land Trust, that's recognized as a reputable organization that works in co-ordination with groups like Habitat for Humanity – the government could provide land at a reduced price to a builder who guarantees to bring online a series of affordable housing, whether it's in already established districts or whether it's in outlying districts. Of course, part of that affordable housing, because we don't want to extend our footprint, would be in the form of apartments, some would be in a series of row housing, and so on. There would be a degree of variety to it.

I know that we've heard presentations from a builder in Medicine Hat who basically does things with premoulded concrete and is able to reduce the price of affordable housing considerably. So the government, if they want to speed up the process, could do so by incenting the private industry, which does things in a rather efficient manner, to get these houses up and running and with some kind of a leasing agreement whereby, you know, the residents at some point in their mortgage payments will get to own the actual housing.

Back in Calgary in the '70s we had such a thing as co-op housing, and that worked well for those individuals that were interested in it. Part of the co-op housing had common rooms. What happened was that you got a variety of ages of people who supported each other, from retired seniors to young families. It seemed to be an initiative that could potentially have value in a market that seems to have no limits, at least a market the government is not willing to stabilize even for the moment.

I believe what we need to be looking at are not either/ors but a whole series: stabilize, build long-term, provide the supports for the individuals who are in that housing not just in terms of cash incentives, but in some cases it's providing counselling so that they can stay in the house, providing the affordable health care, and look at an entire package that will provide the stability that is currently lacking. To a degree we have to put out the fires of raging inflation, and the only way we can do that is by a temporary measure.

4:00

We encourage long-term building through wise investment. It's not an either/or, but right now Bill 34 does not address the here and now. It looks down the road, and unless we address what is a crisis at this time, that crisis is only going to get worse. We cannot keep going to the taxpayer to fund the landlord.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I think we have the hon. Member for Peace River wishing to enter the debate.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, based on the comment just made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, I'm starting to wonder if I've misunderstood this entire problem. If I heard the hon. member right and, as well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, now that I think about it, I'm starting to wonder if members opposite view this problem as the government, the public sector, is going to build this housing, is going to solve this long-term crisis, that we the government are going to build all this housing to meet this housing crunch, lower vacancy rates, all those things. I don't think that's what the government is thinking, and therein maybe lies the conflict that we're in tonight.

If that's the case, these hon. members here have seen the budget. It's under debate right now. They understand the pressures that we're in in Alberta, not just housing but across the board. So in suggesting such a thing, maybe they should also consider which schools, hospitals, roads, bridges we should start cancelling so that the government can do this.

Mr. Chase: We have the money to do it all.

Mr. Oberle: I see. Well, now the division is clear to me. Now it's clear to me.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, a lot of time has passed since I've had an opportunity to speak on Bill 34. Considering that we're on amendment A2, proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I would be willing to support this amendment. But before I give an explanation as to why – since the last time I had an opportunity to speak in this House, the Minister of Justice has finished reading the red book and has now gone on to *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. I'm sure that the author of that – I can't see from here – wouldn't be Mr. Dinning.

Now, the hon. Member for Peace River spoke several times, and I really appreciate that. It's an interesting exchange to listen to. He talked about short-term problems and long-term problems with this issue. He's absolutely right. The short-term problem, in reality, is that this government has not had a plan to deal with this matter for the last five years, and the long-term problem is the fact that this government has been in power for 36 years and for the last 20 years has been operating under this divine right to govern attitude, which has led to this major housing crisis to start with.

Now, the hon. Member for Peace River also suggested that we have a look at the budget. Well, I would encourage members, while they are deciding whether or not they're going to vote on this amendment A2, to have a look at the budget and have a look at the dismal failure of this government. I would refer the hon. Member for Peace River first to page 122 of the fiscal plan for 2005, the budget for 2005. The year that we're dealing with specifically here is the data from 2004. It's quite interesting, and it's quite telling. It tells not only this hon. member but it should tell this House and Albertans, clearly, how this government has failed.

Mr. Chairman, if we look at housing affordability – and this is for the year 2004 – it is home ownership costs as a per cent of pretax household income. These home ownership costs include mortgage

payments, utilities, and property taxes. The source of this data is the Royal Bank of Canada. Housing affordability in 2004 in Alberta is the best among the provinces as home ownership costs take up only 25.5 per cent of a typical pretax household income. "More balanced housing market conditions, record-low borrowing rates and good household income gains contributed to Alberta's solid housing affordability in 2004." Alberta, with that 25.5 per cent of typical pretax household income, is the lowest in the comparisons that have been issued in this budget document. Atlantic Canada is next, followed by Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, Ontario, and of course B.C. has the highest home ownership costs as a per cent of pretax household income.

If we go ahead to this year's budget document like the hon. Member for Peace River suggested, we get a different story. We get a totally different story, and we get the truth about the inaction from this government. I can understand why the government has tweaked this a little bit. This is on page 125 of the fiscal plan for the budget of this year. I can understand their embarrassment. Housing affordability in 2006, quarter 4, home ownership costs as a per cent of pretax household income: this government knows that it's gone up dramatically, from 25.5 per cent of pretax household income to over 37 per cent. That's an increase of 12 per cent to make a home affordable. Again, the home ownership costs include mortgage payments, utilities, and property taxes. The source of this data again is the Royal Bank of Canada.

In here the government states, "Despite Alberta's hot housing market, housing affordability in Alberta remains competitive among the provinces and regions." It does not. We have gone from the lowest in the country to the second highest. Only British Columbia's affordability index is higher. We have gone from the lowest to the highest in three years. This is in your own budget documents.

There certainly are indicators that would lead one to believe that the former Premier was absolutely right when he candidly admitted that we had no plan. When you have a close look at the budget documents and you compare them to previous years, it's not working out. If homes are less affordable for individuals, of course, more individuals are going to be in the renters' market. That's why Bill 34 needs to be improved, and this amendment A2 is an improvement. It certainly is an improvement. This government intervenes in markets all the time, but in this case, for whatever reason, they won't, and it is unfortunate.

The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House talked about a definition of affordable housing. Again, I would remind him, Mr. Chairman, before he decides which way he's going to vote on this amendment A2, to have a look at the definition of affordable housing that was provided to the AUMA at the 2002 convention.

4:10

We can also look at the 2001 convention, Mr. Chairman. It's interesting to note that the town of Rocky Mountain House had a resolution in 2001 at the 95th annual conference of the AUMA in Edmonton, from November 14 through 17. They had a resolution on homelessness and affordable housing. This is what they suggested: Be it resolved that the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association requests the government of Canada and the government of Alberta to commit financial support, similar to the funding program provided to seven cities in Alberta, to smaller municipalities to begin to address these communities' homelessness and affordable housing needs.

Now, the town of Rocky Mountain House was suggesting in 2001 that the government get involved in this. Of course, the government has to get involved. Everyone but this front bench seems to realize, Mr. Chairman, that the government has to get involved in initiatives

to provide affordable housing in some circumstances. They have to build it.

I can assure the hon. Member for Peace River: if the government builds it, the tenants will come. There are long, long waiting lists for affordable housing initiatives. I would encourage the hon. member to have a look at that and to consider the Out in the Cold. This is a count of homeless persons in the city of Edmonton. There are many people that are homeless in the city of Edmonton. In fact, daily through the neighbourhood that I reside in, at about 10 to 8 this gentleman travels through. He's a middle-aged man. I think he's off to work somewhere. He's on a bicycle, and he's got a bedroll on a nice basket on the back. My neighbour pointed this gentleman out to me, and he said: look; there goes the man with his Stelmach suite, off to work again. That's what my neighbour referred to this situation as. It is quite unfortunate.

Have a look at the Out in the Cold, a count of homeless persons in Edmonton. This was conducted last fall. I had an opportunity to participate in this homeless count as did the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora was involved in it as was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. I'm sure that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview was there, too, with his clipboard and his pencil. I admire their commitment and their support to get this job done. It's done every second year. This is one reason alone why the government should get involved and do the right thing and finance and organize some initiatives for the homeless people affordable housing.

In fact, I would remind the hon. Member for Peace River that the taxpayers commit on an annual basis over \$2 million in property taxes to the federal building. Now, the federal building is vacant. It's been proposed to be used any number of times for affordable housing. If this government had common sense, it would turn around and renovate that building. We're already paying megabucks in taxes on it on an annual basis. If you look at what the tax bill was over the last 10 years, we could have had the asbestos removed and had it converted. We're converting buildings around Edmonton-Centre all the time for housing. Why not this one? Why not turn it into homes for many people? It's close to transit. It's in the centre of the city. Many people want to live in the centre of the city. But, no, no, this government won't do it. It's asleep, this government.

Whenever you think of the tax bill every year – and I had the opportunity to go to city hall and look it up. Mr. Chairman, I can't remember precisely, but last year the assessment was well over \$2 million. I can't find the line item in the public accounts, but I don't think it's there because of how public accounts is presented.

We need to have a look at this. Out in the Cold: this was the seventh count of the homeless. It found over 2,600 homeless persons in the city of Edmonton, and this is last October. Of these, over 1,700, 1,774 to be exact, were absolutely homeless. Those are individuals having no housing alternative. Eight hundred and forty-four were sheltered homeless; in other words, living in emergency accommodations.

The Homeless Count Committee organized the count – and this is why the government has to step up to the plate here – and the major findings were:

- There has been a substantial increase in the number of homeless in Edmonton. There was an overall increase of more than 19% in the total homeless counted. The number of absolute homeless increased the most substantially (approximately 22%) and the number of sheltered homeless increased by approximately 14%.
- In terms of gender, 70% or 1,820 of the homeless were observed to be male and 23%, or 608 were female. Of the

remaining 7% (190), 151 were children and caregivers in families whose gender was not observed. The gender of the remaining 39 was not recorded or was unknown. The relative proportion of the number of men to women is comparable to the 2004 count results, however in total there was an increase of 523 [men] and 100 [women].

- There was a significant increase in the number of turnaways in 2006.

And the hon. Member from Edmonton-Centre has talked about this in question period a number of times.

Approximately 2.4 times as many individuals were turned away in 2006 than in 2004 . . . In addition, the number discharged with no home to return to increased to 113 over the previous count of 54. Turnaways are not included in the homeless tally.

- There was a significant reduction in the number of families enumerated in 2006 over 2004 . . . This is attributable to improvements in the survey forms, which clarified the definition of dependants, caregivers, and their housing status.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

This is unacceptable. There are a number of reasons why this is going on. We have to look at the categories of total homeless, single homeless, family status, homeless in families, homeless by observed age, and you can see where there is a significant increase. Before we dismiss amendment A2, let's consider the plight of some of these individuals. Those between age 31 and 54 were the predominant age group, or 56 per cent of all the people identified. The next largest was the 17 to 30 age group, at 678 individuals, or 26 per cent. Of those up to 16 years of age 79 of 194 were sheltered with a caregiver. For those 17 years of age more were in absolute homelessness than sheltered, over 1,600 compared to over 700. Now, that's significant.

4:20

Whenever we have a look at the number of shelters operating and the shelter-by-shelter numbers and the registered and the turnaways, we recognize that we do have a problem. If you look at the shelters, you've got the Herb Jamieson, the Elizabeth House, the George Spady, the Urban Manor, the Lurana, the protective safe house, the CSS safe house, inner city youth housing, the Youth Emergency Shelter, the Seniors' Safe House, emergency hotels. These are on an as-needed basis, and they are provided, thankfully, by Alberta human resources and employment. There's no set number of spaces. That's under EII now. It has changed.

Whenever one looks at this homeless count for the city, it is shocking. Mr. Chairman, it is a reflection of the work that we need to do. It's not happening as quickly as we would like. The caregivers and the staff at these facilities can give a very valid, rational explanation as to why we need more housing. I would urge the hon. members from across the way to visit more of these centres. I think that if they were to visit more of these centres and perhaps participate in the homeless count as well, as some of them I'm sure have, they would be more supportive of amendment A2 here. When you look at whether individuals are single or whether they're in a family unit or whether they're a one-parent family with children, we've got to do better, and we've got to have government support to do it.

Thank you.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, I'll start just by briefly pointing out to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that he's not going to find the line item for the taxes that we pay on the federal building in our budget because if he has ever delved deeply into a municipal budget, he would know that the government doesn't pay property taxes. We

pay grants to municipalities in lieu of tax, so there is no line item for taxes in our budget.

It is remarkable here tonight that this problem becomes simpler by the minute in that if, as we propose – and, you know, I certainly don't dispute the statistics of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Clearly, there's a problem here. He said: if we build it, they will come. They're already here. That's why we're here tonight. We have a housing shortage and a housing crisis in effect in this province right now. That's why we're here tonight. So I'm not going to dispute his figures.

But the problem has just become simpler by the minute in that now it's apparent that both opposition parties believe that the government is going to do this. We're going to build all the housing.

An Hon. Member: No. No one said that.

Mr. Oberle: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity said exactly that.

I don't dispute for a second that the government has a role to play in seniors' housing, for example, in affordable housing. If anybody has been following the budgets for the last three years, we've spent hundreds of millions of dollars in that area. I don't dispute that the government has a role to play, but the government cannot do it all, in my estimation. Now, the opposition parties believe that they can, or at least a couple of members over there, a few members. Maybe we have a division within that caucus, then, if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar doesn't agree with that viewpoint.

Really, why wouldn't we have rent controls? We don't need to be the slightest bit worried about what message we send to the private sector out there because we're really not expecting them to do anything, are we? So why wouldn't we have rent controls? We're not concerned about the signals we send out there because the government's going to build it all anyway. I would ask the question: "Hey, why don't we go farther? Why don't we put controls on the sale prices of houses? Why don't we drive the housing price way down just by a stroke of a pen, by legislation?" Then we can get all these newcomers into houses. We get them paying taxes. Everything's wonderful, and by that time everybody will be working for the government anyway.

This hon. member is suggesting that we can do all that without cancelling schools, roads, bridges, hospitals. We can do all that, and might I point out that they're going to save 30 per cent while they're at it. My goodness, what a wonderful little world we live in, Mr. Chairman. It absolutely boggles the mind. There are trade-offs involved in government, and you can't do everything for everybody.

Now, if you want to talk about how compassionate this government is or isn't in addressing the things that government needs to be responsible for, have at 'er. Let's have that discussion. But there is no way the government can do it all, and it's irresponsible to suggest it.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'll recognize Lethbridge-East, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and we'll see who else wants to respond then.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a couple of comments that I'd like to make, and I'd sort of like to put myself as the developer or the apartment owner or the manager. In other words, I'm on the side of private business. Now, I'm thinking to myself: "I know that there is a tremendous demand out there, and I know that there isn't enough supply. I know that I am going to get fantastic rents." Why would I not sit on that? Why would I not wait for the demand situation to become so bad that I will get marvellous incentives from

the government to build more units? I could win either way as the private businessman, and that probably is okay because that's what business is all about.

However, I think that I've heard that the government can't do it all, nor do I think they should. What I think the government should do is to make sure that there is a level playing field for all these people that are in business who will wait until the time is right so that they will make money when they develop more units. Business will not go into something unless it can make money.

One of the examples that I would use against the argument of buildings won't happen is Wal-Mart. I remember having a little go-around with Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart said in the backrooms and tried to threaten that if they couldn't get their way at such a latitude and such a longitude where they had decided that they were going to go, they might move to the county. It's garbage. Once Wal-Mart decides that they are going to go into a certain place, that's where they're going to go. You have to have people that are strong enough to say to the Wal-Mart: "If that's where you want to go, we know that you're going to make tons of money, but you're going to pay your way there. Why should the taxpayers have paid for that?"

That's my argument on this as well. As long as the rules are created on a level playing field, business will look after itself. If there's money to be made, they'll be there. If there isn't money to be made, then why should the taxpayers pay for that? Certainly, the government should help towards, as has been mentioned, seniors' housing and affordable housing, but there isn't a great deal of money to be made in that until later on, down the road.

Real estate developers of today, especially the younger ones that are becoming involved in the industry, are no different than everyone else in society today. They're looking for instant gratification. That's not how the real estate market works. You have to have years and you have to have time to let the market forces play themselves out and to let the supply and demand balance out. It takes time. You cannot have instant gratification unless, of course, you're gouging.

Again, I have never exactly heard that definition for gouging. Which percentage is it above, and what would you use as a benchmark? I believe that with a formula using a benchmark, if you wanted to use CPI or if you wanted to use gross national product, whichever benchmark you used as long as everyone was using the same benchmark, you could then negotiate for the interests that would be above that, and everybody then is playing on a level playing field until the supply gets caught up again.

4:30

One of the things that I think would create a tremendous amount of houses on the market is if, God forbid, the interest rate would go up 3 per cent. There would be a lot of houses out on the market because people would be priced out of the market. Many people are going from paycheque to paycheque. They may be mortgage rich, but certainly they're cash poor. That certainly is not something I would want to see, but it could happen with an increase in interest rates.

One of the other things that I was going to mention, I thought was a little bit discouraging about the task force. There were many people – I believe 15 – who put in many, many man-hours and certainly the goodwill and effort that was put into that task force, not to mention the dollars that it cost to have these people go all across the province, plus the staff that had to put together the report. I think it would be very discouraging to work that hard, put forward that many recommendations, and certainly have that many rejected. It's almost as if the plan for the government had been pretty much laid out long before the task force went out to do its work.

The other part of it was that it took a while to get it out. I don't know why that would be because I really feel that probably a lot of this was in the can before the task force went out.

One of the other comments that I think I heard made was something about: why would you accept 38 recommendations when, in fact, you were already working on them? Well, I would like to know how I am supposed to know what you're doing. The way the task force report was laid out, if that's any indication, it came from behind closed doors. It was rolled out. Interestingly, I wasn't even given the courtesy of receiving a copy of the report, which I found probably insulting. [interjections] It probably was. It probably was. But if this bill has been laid out the way the task force was, it comes from secret places, and I don't think that that's a good way that it should come. How could I possibly know what you're doing with those 38 recommendations if it's all secret? [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has the floor. Hon. Government House Leader, if you want to participate, the chair will recognize you, but currently it's the Member for Lethbridge-East who has the floor.

Mr. R. Miller: She's almost done.

Ms Pastoor: How do you know?

I received two lovely boxes from the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, which I think were very valuable. In fact, it is part of the land-use strategy from the government side and a workbook to go with it, which I think were very valuable. I have suggested to groups that I have met with that it should also include our land-use framework because, to go off topic a bit, I don't believe that the land-use framework should be a partisan issue. If we don't get it right, the next 50 years will be very, very difficult for our children to be living in. However, having said that, in receiving the five boxes of these wonderful books, I just assumed that I would receive the task force report on housing automatically. Silly me. [A snore was heard] I know that everyone isn't snoring because I just heard some laughter.

One of the other things that I found rather interesting today was that I attempted to meet with people who had come to the gallery to share stories about some of the difficulties that they're having in their rental situations. Because I'm trying to be open and transparent, I thought: for sure, why would we not have the press and the media, who would be most interested in having these people share their stories with them? These people were more than delighted to do that. However, I seem to have upset the communications department, of which I have no idea how many there are, so tomorrow might be quite an interesting little conversation about who exactly sort of runs things. Now, do the MLAs actually have precedence over public employees? I'm not sure. I will try to find out the answer to that question. I would think that that discussion could probably almost be as interesting as this one about housing.

So I will sit down.

Mr. Elsalhy: The minister of health is going to speak after this.

Ms Pastoor: Oh, he is? How wonderful. I'm sure we're looking for some eloquence at 20 to 5 in the morning.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning. It's

interesting. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who stepped out, unfortunately, spoke quite eloquently . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you know the rules of the House.

Mr. Lindsay: I retract that remark, Mr. Chairman.

He spoke quite eloquently, actually, about the number of homeless there are in the city of Edmonton and talked about the government stepping up to the plate. I just want to remind the hon. member that Bill 34 is a home run, so we've already been to the plate and around the bases. Interestingly, he also talked about the homeless and not enough housing, yet rent controls will in all likelihood stymie more construction.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East spoke, I believe, about profits and gouging and talked about Wal-Mart, yet I remember reading an article recently which indicated that Wal-Mart saves the average Canadian family between \$1,200 and \$2,400 a year. So it would appear to me that the free-enterprise market does indeed work, Mr. Chairman.

I want to say that considering that free enterprise works, we certainly don't need short-sighted and short-term rent controls. All they're going to do is stymie more growth, Mr. Chairman.

With that, I'll sit down.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was going to sit back and have the vote, but the Member for Peace River has caused me to stand up. Now, the member seems to have sort of this minimalist view of government. That's all right if you have an economic strategy that goes along with that, but we have this overheated economy, created by this government, that's causing the problems that we're facing. To say, then, that you can just walk away and say, "Well, that's just the way it is, and maybe we'll do a little bit here for seniors housing or this or that, a little bit; that's all the government can do," that's a cop-out in terms of responsibility. It's the government here that's setting the economic strategy. It's the economic strategy of this government not to put the brakes on – that's very clear – to move ahead as fast as they can with the oil sands, with moving oil and gas, getting into the American market as fast as they can, forgetting about the environment and the rest of it.

4:40

When you do that in a boom economy – we should know this – you have to plan ahead. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said, former Premier Klein admitted that he didn't have a plan. Well, if you're going to move ahead this fast, you can't do it on the cheap. The social and physical infrastructure has to be there. Remember that back in the mid-90s we did all the cuts. All we did was move the economic deficit to an infrastructure and social deficit. That's all we did. Then we create this boom, and we've got more problems, so we can't keep up.

We have a responsibility here. You know, the hon. Member for Peace River says: well, governments can't do it all. No, they can't, but as I've said, rent guidelines on a temporary basis don't cost the government money. It gives us a little bit of time to try to work on the supply side. [interjection] Well, they're not building rental units here now, so how can you lose? That's the point. I wonder what it takes to get to these guys that they're not building it now. How can it stop the building of rental units when they're not doing it? It at least keeps some people in the housing market right now. It keeps them in their home now. They might not be there. There might be

more out on the streets after that because how many other people can take \$1,000, \$400, \$500, \$600?

So that's the responsibility of government. You're creating the boom because of the economic strategy, because we happen to have oil and gas here. You can't just walk away and say: "Well, too bad. It doesn't fit into our free-market philosophy. That's all we can do. Maybe we can spend a little bit on, you know, housing here and there and everywhere else." You can't do that. It just doesn't work. The problem is going to get worse, as I mentioned from the government's own documents.

Now, the other things we talked about in the housing task force – and I've gone through it, Mr. Chairman. They've rejected all the other private-sector initiatives in terms of giving tax incentives to build affordable housing. That doesn't cost money. You can do that. You can do inclusionary zoning and build affordable housing. Other places are doing it around the world. It doesn't take a genius to figure that out. We've got to do something, but that's going to take time. Even if we did that – and the government rejected that, or they're studying it. They rejected almost all of the supply side things to put on more with the carrot and stick approach. They rejected most of those.

So tell me, please: how are we going to deal with this when every indication says that it's going to get worse? Sure, the government can't solve it all, but the government could slow down the pace of development. Even the mayor of Fort McMurray and others have asked for that, but they're not going to do that, so we're going to keep having these problems. One hundred and nine thousand people, although there's some debate about that – in Calgary they said that they had 97,000 last year. But it's a lot of people, period. That's going to continue. From every indication we have, it's going to continue.

So what is the responsibility of government here? Is it just to say: "Well, too bad, middle-income people, that you may never own a home. Young people, students, too bad that the rent has gone up. Too bad. Nothing we can do about it. It's not our responsibility. Too bad, seniors on fixed incomes. Not our fault. Nothing we can do about it?" Well, Mr. Chairman, what is the responsibility of government in all of this, then? What is their responsibility?

Mr. Mason: Stopping pillaging and looting.

Mr. Martin: That's right. Stopping pillaging and looting, yes, Mr. Chairman.

You know, it's the economic policies of this government that's creating this. You can't then expect to do it on the cheap. Infrastructure falling apart, you know, the health care system overcrowded, people not having houses: it's all real out there for people. As we said, Mr. Chairman, the so-called Alberta advantage that they talk about is becoming for a lot of people a huge disadvantage. The Member for Peace River seems to say, "Well, we've just got a minimalist thing here in government. There's nothing, really, that we can do."

Well, I think that's a cop-out. I think that there are things we can do, as I said, moneywise: rent guidelines for a period of time to get those markets on. Tell us how you're going to get all this building in then. They're building condos because they can make a quick turnover in that, and we're converting to condos, but we're not building rental units. So how are we going to get that done? How are we going to get it done? Without controls or rent guidelines or rent stability, they're not doing it now. Why are they going to start doing it when they haven't been doing it?

So tell us what the answer is. Do we just say to thousands of people, "Too bad. It's not our fault. Let the devil have the hind leg.

Move over, and just enjoy the Alberta advantage, you know, as you're sleeping on the street"? Is that what we're really saying? We can surely do better than that. We have a responsibility to do better than that. And if you want minimalist government, then don't accelerate the pedals so much that it's creating the problems that it has. That's the responsibility of government. If you're going to do it, you have a responsibility to deal with the social and physical infrastructure, and you have a responsibility to a lot of hard-working Albertans, for whom this is, as I said, becoming a huge disadvantage.

So we have to do something here. Surely, we're elected in this Legislature to do more than just say: "Well, things are great for some people. Too bad." Surely we're elected to do more than that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Snelgrove: This is getting just more interesting as we go. You know, it's really strange. My dad used to say to us when we were at home and the kids were around him: if you're not a socialist before you're 30, then you have no heart, and if you're still after 30, there's something wrong with your head. I passed 30 a while ago.

If you listen to the opposition, all the ills of the world are in Bill 34. We've got to take a bill that allows us to limit rent controls to once a year, and now we've got to start fixing Wal-Mart and all of the things that have ever happened. It's incredible. I can tell you why most ND governments couldn't solve a road map problem: because they can't see what we're doing.

Of all you've talked about, what relates to Bill 34? No one has ever said that it was the only answer to our housing problems. It has never been suggested on this side that that miraculously would cure it all. We've said that that's one piece of the puzzle that will help put stability to the rental. That's what we said. All of a sudden: da-do, da-do, da-do, da-do comes out of there, and the whole world, the whole Alberta economy rests on Bill 34. You'd think that if we were going to wreck the world, we'd get a bigger bill. We'd at least make it thicker and with fancy language. All we're trying to get you to understand simply is: this is one tool. This is what we're going to do. We consider, apparently, all types . . .

Mr. Martin: What are you going to do?

Mr. Snelgrove: We listen to you come up with the most cockamamie things that I've ever heard of. It's entertainment, but it's not productive. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: I would love to recognize all. I'll begin with Lethbridge-East, and then Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I just had a couple of things that I wanted to add to my remarks from before. What I can see happening here is that it's Albertans that are ending up on the streets and ending up in these difficult positions. It's seniors that built the province that are ending up in the difficult positions of trying to find affordable housing – never mind affordable, any kind of housing – because these people are being replaced with those thousands and thousands of people that are coming into the province that the other side is always talking about. You're right. They are coming in, and they are taking the apartments that these Albertans, who probably have built this province, are being basically forced out of. So the people that are coming into our province are willing to go into huge debts just so that they can have housing. They're dreaming of all the riches that they're going to make by coming to Alberta. So the point is that it's Albertans that are being displaced.

I also have one question. If an owner has a unit and raises the rent

for the one time that they're allowed to do in that year, if that unit is sold and it is now a different owner, what prevents that new owner from raising the rent again? Does this rule apply to the unit or to the tenant? So that would be a question that I'd like answered.

4:50

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I can't, I'm afraid, provide that answer.

But I did want to respond to the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster and also the Member for Peace River. You know, I think it's important that we realize that the New Democrat opposition, contrary to the position of the hon. Member for Peace River, has never said that we expect the government to build all of the housing. Certainly, we know that the government expects a significant amount of the housing to be built by municipalities and has provided money to municipalities for that purpose. We believe in a mix of housing. We think that the private sector has to contribute, but there's also a role for government to provide low-income housing, co-operative housing, municipal housing, housing for special needs. There's a wide range of ways that that housing can be delivered, and certainly the private sector has to play a role.

I want to just indicate to the Member for Peace River – you know, he said that he had a revelation about the opposition wanting government to build all of the housing, and, you know, that made things make a little more sense. I just had a similar epiphany. I just had a moment that I realized what the government is probably doing. The government doesn't want rent controls because they want the price of housing to rise, the rents to rise in the province to what Boardwalk says they want to see before they're prepared to build more housing, which is \$1,600 a month for a two-bedroom. If I'm wrong, correct me. But it really seems to me that if the government is expecting the private sector to build all the housing, and the private sector wants \$1,600 a door, then the government policy makes sense. Suddenly it makes sense because if they're single minded in their determination that the landlords are going to be able to make money in this short market, and the landlords are demanding \$1,600 a door for a two-bedroom apartment, then what the government is doing makes absolute sense to me. It makes sense to me from that point of view.

If you want the landlords to have \$1,600 a month for a two-bedroom unit and you think that that's going to make them build new apartment housing because that's what Boardwalk is saying, then it makes perfect sense to not have any sort of rent regulations. Then, you know, we can all pay. All the renters in this province can pay through the nose in order that the government can make their system work. [interjections] I see that the hon. President of the Treasury Board seems to be – I don't know if he's agreeing with me or, you know, at this point would like to take a vote.

I suspect that we might be a little closer to the truth than I thought. I thought there was no rationale for the government, but this one seems to make sense, that they do want housing built by the private sector, and the only way they think that will happen is if the rents keep getting jacked up. Otherwise, Mr. Chairman, it just doesn't make much sense.

I just want to indicate that we've had lots of debate. I actually want to say, Mr. Chairman, that I do appreciate that several members of the side opposite actually got up and engaged in debate, and it's too bad that we have to go so long before that actually happens. Actually, I find that it's a little bit useful, from my point of view and understanding, what the government is doing.

Mr. Snelgrove: As opposed to what you're doing.

Mr. Mason: Well, it's too bad that there's not the same open-mindedness on the other side. They've just made up their mind about what's going to happen.

So you know, Mr. Chairman, things haven't really changed all that much in terms of the approach of the government and the attitude of the government. They like to talk a lot about how we have a new game in town, that they're going to listen, going to care, and so on, but it's the same story. It's the same story.

I remember we went all night in this Assembly – oh, I think it was probably four or five years ago – and a very similar pattern exhibited itself, you know: the sort of disdain on the part of some members for actually having discussion. Some of them get kind of stirred up and get up and let off a little bit of steam, but they're not really listening. I think it's sad. Don't you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar?

Mr. MacDonald: It's sad and disappointing.

Mr. Mason: It's sad and disappointing. We're all sad and disappointed on this side, Mr. Chairman. This whole evening has been a roller coaster of emotion for all of us as we've tried to come to grips. [interjection] Well, that kind of sums up a lot of attitude, doesn't it, Mr. Chairman?

It's sad that you can't go into a capitalist world and make a go of it. You know, it really exemplifies an attitude, which is also an attitude that seems to be aimed at tenants in our province: it's sad that you can't go out and make it; it's sad that you can't, you know, pull yourself up by your bootstraps and invest in your own apartment building, because if you did that, you would have shown that you can make it in the brave new Alberta. But I think that most Albertans rise above that. Most Albertans believe that regardless of what walk of life you come from, you have the right to basic shelter. You have the right to a job. You have the right to those things. People have the right to work. [interjections]

5:00

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I just want to remind everyone. We are currently dealing with amendment A2. I know that it is 5 in the morning, and it's been a long, long, evening. It's already morning now. I understand that, but we're dealing with amendment A2.

You may proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will resist the attempts of the Government House Leader to pull me off topic.

I will get back to A2 and just indicate to members opposite that it would certainly make a great deal of sense from our point of view, from our perspective to amend this legislation, to amend it so that it's very clear what kind of rental increase is permitted to landlords. It gives certainty. It gives certainty in the market to landlords, which is something that they want, you know, in private business. They want certainty. This would certainly give them certainty, and they would be allowed to increase their rent and exceed the consumer price index by 2 per cent. Of course, Mr. Chairman, as we've said many times, we see this as a temporary measure, and we see it as not applying to housing that is under construction. So it shouldn't be a disincentive.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate, just to come back to what's at stake here, that there are tenants, in some cases seniors and in some cases people who are vulnerable but, in fact, many, many thousands of Albertans who are middle-class people, working people, families that are faced with rent increases that they cannot

afford, and the government has yet to say what they're going to do about that. They've said that they want to increase the supply of housing. That's good. We agree with that. We think that's important. But they've also admitted that it's going to be a long time, years in fact, before some of that housing starts to come on the market and have an impact on the market. They haven't provided answers for those people, and there are a lot of them. There are a lot of them. There are thousands, I would say hundreds of thousands of people who live in rental accommodation in this province that are going to be affected. This is a big, big problem, and it won't be compensated for by the fund that the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry – I wish we could go back to single department titles.

Mr. MacDonald: It's the department of temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Mason: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar says: the minister of temporary foreign workers.

Anyway, that particular minister has talked about her emergency fund. She has talked about the emergency fund that she has available, Mr. Chairman, and that she's going to help people. The problem is that when you create a mass problem that affects hundreds of thousands of Albertans by bad policy, you can't fix it by individual approaches, on an individual basis, no matter how compassionate the minister would like to be. You know, no matter . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: As I indicated, hon. Government House Leader, I'd be very happy to recognize you next, but currently the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has the floor. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, please, through the chair. That would really help.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to say, through the chair, how can you do it? How can you create a problem by bad policy on the part of government that affects hundreds of thousands of people and then solve those problems on an individual basis by the minister dishing out money from a fund or another minister inviting people into his office?

You know, this is not the right approach. What it is, Mr. Chairman, is window dressing. It's window dressing. It is setting up programs that the government can say are there to help people, but in fact if they really wanted to help the people in the first place, they would create a policy that didn't disadvantage so many people in this province. That's exactly what the government should do. That's exactly what this amendment is calling on the government to do: solve the basic problem. Don't create a terrible situation for many, many people and then try to convince the public that you'll be able to solve their problems on a one-on-one, face-to-face basis. That's exactly the government's approach, and that particular minister has had that approach before in other portfolios, when she's been dealing with people in the health care system and children's services and so on.

You know, I don't think people should buy that approach. It's not a really straightforward approach. It's not something that I think is entirely – well, I think it's a bit disingenuous, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman. It's disingenuous to say: "We may have a bad policy. We may underfund children's services, or we may allow massive rent increases, but, you know, if we hurt people, they can come forward on an individual basis, and we'll hand out some taxpayers' money to fix the problem" instead of really fixing the problem at its root.

You know, I just want to indicate to the House that I really do

think that the amendment to Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, is the right approach because it fixes the bigger problem. It fixes the problem at its source. It's not a band-aid approach. It just makes a lot of sense for a lot of people. Of course, it doesn't make sense for people who are landlords that are charging in excess of rent that is affordable. I just don't know why the government is so keen to protect the landlords of the province at the expense of the tenants. I mean, they've made a choice here. There's a choice to be made. You have to stand up and be counted sooner or later, and in this particular case the government has chosen to stand with big companies like Boardwalk and other large landlords.

The particular one that is causing a great deal of difficulty in my constituency, which is Alliance Realty Management, is responsible for some of the most outrageous rental increases that we have seen, \$1,000 or more, Mr. Chairman, to people who are low income or people who are not able to work, a massive tripling of rents. This is the kind of thing that's going on, and it has been enabled by this government's policy. In fact, it's been encouraged by the policy because the government has announced that they are going to limit rent increases to one per year. So what exactly did they think was going to happen?

Ms Blakeman: That was exactly my argument about 12 hours ago.

Mr. Mason: Yes. I recollect it now. You know, I think it's a good argument because you've got the landlords – and we've read it. We've read it from annual reports that rental companies know that the market is going to tighten further. Rents are going to go up even more. So the government, God bless them, stand up and say: "Well, you know what? We're thinking we'll probably just only let you increase your rent once a year." What do their accountants think? Well, you know, if you want to maximize your cash flow, you'd probably better get in a big, fat rent increase right away, so they do.

5:10

Now, you know, there's a saying: beware of unforeseen consequences. That applies very directly to this government. They figured: "Well, you know, we can't bring in rent increases because it's very un-Conservative, not un-Albertan but un-Conservative. It's a very un-Conservative thing to do, so we're not going to do that. We will let them increase the rents, but we'll look like we're doing something, so we'll just limit it to once a year and require them to give a longer notice." What do they think is going to happen? The companies are still going to try and obtain the maximum rental increase that they can, and the government has left them a loophole that you could drive a Boeing 747 through or fly it through. They're taking advantage of it, and the government is acting like, oh, they're surprised, and the Premier calls them un-Albertan and so on. What did he expect them to do? It's not un-Albertan to be a smart businessperson.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm propelled to my feet after listening very intently for several hours to the debate. You know, sometimes you just wonder what province these people who have chatted before me are from. I don't understand when anyone in this House stands in opposition to something that is intended to improve a situation. Clearly, this Bill 34 is an attempt to do that, and here we are, listening to a bunch of folks on the opposition side standing and doing the usual thing – grandstanding and filibustering and so on – and trying to make it sound like there's some sinister

motive behind this particular bill. Nothing could be further from the truth, and the surprising thing is that they all know it. Every single one of them knows it. These are intelligent people. They know it. I think they do. But, you know, the shell game ought to come to an end soon, and I'm sure it will.

We recognize that there are people who are experiencing some difficulties, and that's why we have some of the best social programs anywhere in Canada. We've travelled across this country, and we've seen those. I'll tell you: from the years that I spent helping people in the PDD programs, for example, the parents of those children who are now adults will tell you that some of the reasons that they came to Alberta are exactly those I've just enunciated. We do have the best programs. We've built them, and the people are coming. And that's not just economic programs; those are social programs.

We have the lowest taxes anywhere in the country. We have the best health care system anywhere in the country, the best education bar none, one of the best if not the best postsecondary systems anywhere, the highest quality of life, and here we are trying to maintain that because we've suddenly experienced an unpredictable influx of people from all over the country, from all over the world. Why? Why have they done that? They've come here because of these incredibly successful programs, because there's a government here that does care, that does listen, and reacts and responds responsibly, not just with quick, short-term fixes but with sensible programs that do help in the long run.

Yes, there's a little bit of short-term pain out there that some people are experiencing. We're aware of that, but there is a longer term gain to be built and to be experienced if we go about this properly, and I think we're doing that. It's a difficult situation, and it's awkward on both sides. There are some awkwardnesses for certain tenants, not all but some, and there are awkwardnesses as well for certain landlords, some but not all, and we've heard from them. We've heard from them. This happens to be a time when some landlords have procrastinated in the renovations, perhaps, that they were wanting to do. Perhaps they wanted to replace – I don't know – a boiler system or a roof or the windows or whatever, and they didn't do the increases to rental rates over the last few years. They waited. Now that the economy is a little stronger, they're playing some catch-up. So I have some sympathy for the landlords. I have equal sympathy for the people who are the renters, who suddenly are being faced with some sharp increases. In most cases the landlords are doing their best to explain that.

However, what has happened in the last little while, Mr. Chairman, is that we as a government have introduced some very significant new initiatives to help out. There will be, for example, situations where a landlord and a renter can't get their act together or are disputing with one another or whatever the case might be. There will be a capacity built into the new system that allows for a landlord/tenant dispute officer, an independent person, to come in. This is a new thing, and it needs a little bit of time, perhaps. I'm not immune to the fact that anything that's being tried that's new might take a little bit of time.

You know, I look at this amendment that's before us, and I fail to see how this is going to do anything but bring in some type of price-fixing, which we don't do. We don't interfere with what Safeway or Sobeys or whoever charges for food, and those are necessities. We don't interfere with what Shell or Esso or Mohawk or whoever wants to charge or have to charge to recover some of their costs. We stay out of that, and we're doing our best to stay out of this as well.

For those people who are experiencing trouble – and I recognize that this amendment was intended to help fix and address that – there are all kinds of new initiatives that have just been introduced: 285

million brand new dollars over and above, whatever it is, the billion or more in all the different programs that assist. This includes the establishment of the new municipal sustainability housing fund. That's going to pump \$100 million per year over the next three years to address part of this situation. There's a \$14.3 million increase for the rent supplement program, which will bring the total funding for that one particular envelope up to \$33 million a year.

It doesn't end there, Mr. Chair. There's the establishment of a brand new \$7 million homeless and eviction prevention fund. There's \$96 million more to create partnerships between all levels of government and nonprofit groups and the private sector, who will help create 11,000 – let me say that again in case they didn't hear it – 11,000 brand new housing units over the next couple of years. Of course, there's the establishment of the province-wide residential tenancies dispute resolution service, which I mentioned just a little bit earlier.

You know, one of the greatest disservices that we could do to the situation that we face is if we were to get involved to the point where we were interfering and creating disincentives for the people who are most able to help solve this problem, and those people are the private investors, the builders, the construction folks, the developers, and so on. We need to make sure that we stay very stable with our economic policies and our social policies so as to attract more of them into the business of building some of these units. That's the only way this will happen. No government anywhere is ever going to be able to build enough of these so-called affordable housing units without creating a total collapse. If you want proof of that, go visit the former Soviet Union, and you'll see exactly what I'm talking about. That's exactly what I hear so many people on the opposite side try to allude to. We don't want to get involved in that.

You know, we're accused of either not participating in a debate or not giving information or not giving answers. I listen to question period every day. There are more answers than enough being given. There are even more dollars being given. There are new programs being given. There is all kinds of good information being given. I listen to some of the criticisms from members opposite, and with due respect, some are blowing and some are sucking. Some are trying to blow and suck at the same time. We understand how the game works, but the danger is when they don't know that they're blowing and sucking at the same time. That's what part of that danger is.

5:20

I want to just conclude my comments by saying that there are some issues that need to be ironed out. Some of them have to do with mandatory higher rates when vacancy rates are high. We know what the business cycle – well, at least those who know business know what the business cycle is all about. We know that there's going to be an ebb and a flow to this, that there are going to be high points and low points. I fail to see how this particular amendment will address some of those points. There are issues with respect to no guarantees for owners that taxes will not be increased, except in Alberta, where we have said that the only direction taxes are going is down, and we've stuck to that. There are no guarantees for owners that utility costs might not increase. There have been some tough times out there on both sides of this equation. We just need to work our way through this, and that's what we're attempting to do.

It just absolutely baffles me that we would have to sit and listen now for – what is it? – 15, 16 hours of in many cases some serious stories but in other cases a certain amount of piffle with respect to a very serious issue that we have some solutions to. I think members opposite know that and ought move on with this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise this morning and speak to amendment A2. You know, it's not often in this Legislature that I agree with the leader of the third party, but he certainly made a comment a little while ago that I agree with, that one good thing about being here as long as we have this sit-in is that it does occasionally cause members opposite to get involved in debate. That is a good thing because so often, unfortunately, the arrogance that has set in with this government causes them to believe that as long as they've had the discussion in their caucus room, there's no real reason for them to get on the record in this Legislature. They do a disservice to all Albertans when they behave in that manner because all Albertans deserve to know their thoughts on these issues, where they stand on these issues. This is a really, really important issue.

It was really good to have the President of the Treasury Board stand up a few minutes ago and share his thoughts on this issue because, otherwise, Albertans would have no idea where he's coming from on this. So here we are. Now it's almost 5:30 in the morning, and it took that long to engage them. But it did happen, and that's good. We had the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek, and he spoke very passionately about what he believes in. You know, I don't agree with him, but at least he's on the record, and that's good.

There are several MLAs in this House that have been here throughout the evening that have yet to speak, and I'm disappointed in that. I think if you were to look on this side, if not all of us, almost every single one on the opposition side has spoken this evening and some of us many times. But there are a lot of members on the government side that have yet to tell their constituents where they are on this issue. So the fact that amendment A2, Mr. Chairman, has caused some debate and sparked some ministers and some backbenchers on the government side to get up at 5:30 in the morning and finally share with Albertans their views on this very important issue is a good thing.

Now, I'm going to reiterate a challenge that I made several hours ago in response to the comments from the President of the Treasury Board. He referred to Bill 34 as being not the solution to the rental crisis that is taking place in this province right now but a single piece that will help to address the situation. I agree. There is some good stuff in this bill that will help to address the situation. Ultimately this bill will pass, and ultimately it will take some positive steps towards addressing what has become a very serious situation in this province and, as I said earlier, a very serious public relations problem for this government. My challenge to the President of the Treasury Board is for him to stand up now and tell us which piece of the puzzle addresses the gouging that we are seeing currently. Please do that. You know what? This debate would be over a whole lot faster if the President of the Treasury Board would do as I ask: stand up and tell us, tell the people of Alberta which piece of the puzzle is going to address the gouging.

Mr. Snelgrove: That's a good, fair question because I think that, ultimately, it is one of the problems you have, that there may not be a legislative ability to say that this is gouging and that that is not. I think we've all agreed that it would be difficult to say that \$900 is not; \$1,000 is. The particular circumstance would have to be judged to really know. I mean, honestly, if you're in a basement suite where you're only paying \$400 and somebody goes to \$650, that might be gouging for what it is. You can't tell. [interjections] Well, just hang tough. Work with me. I like to get up just about this time in the morning. It's when I do my best work.

There is an opportunity for us to work and develop the land-

lord/tenant dispute mechanism, which in the future could be the tool we use to address that situation. Unless you have an opportunity for both the landlord and the tenant to sit down in some kind of a forum like that so that each individual circumstance can be addressed, it won't work. You will never, I don't believe, address it by putting it in a legislative framework because you know how complete all the legislation has to be in its frame, in its form, in our leg. review to address all of the issues. With all due respect, hon. member, this bill was never intended to solve all the problems. It was to put stability into rent increases per year and into condos. So that goes on a separate stream.

Over here in government we will work. We are expanding the tenancy dispute program. I'm meeting with the board next week or as soon as we can – at their convenience, not mine – to sit down and get a handle around: is there an opportunity to work with the industry and with the tenant associations to develop some kind of a framework that might work? Then we'll deal with it. But it is not going to happen in this legislation because it won't work in a tight, legislative form. One year is pretty easy to define. One rent increase a year is legally easy to define here. That's what's in this bill. That's what we're debating. The landlord/tenant stuff is not in here. You're trying to debate it as if it were.

Mr. R. Miller: The one year isn't in here either.

Mr. Snelgrove: That's exactly my point, and it's taken this long for you to realize it. We are debating this bill, not the solutions to the landlord dispute. How can you put it into a bill when you haven't sat down with the groups to even know if it's possible? You are trying to take all of the solutions and wrap them up under the context of Bill 34, and that's just not possible. You've already said: "Nothing can be done. Have to do it in Bill 34." We have said consistently that this is one piece of the puzzle. Quite honestly, this bill should have gone through, and I think most renters out there would have said: "Okay, we got that much. We got that ratcheted down. Now at least we know for a year."

This government has evolved for 36 years, and we have worked through problems. Albertans have worked through problems. It's you guys that are putting up the roadblocks around this, not us.

Mr. R. Miller: There's no roadblock.

Mr. Snelgrove: I'd say that it might not be a roadblock, but you've got a pretty big bump.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you very much. This has just been a fascinating piece of political theatre. It's been a lot of fun to watch. For the first time ever it's actually been fun to be in here.

Mr. Snelgrove: You don't know if it's a tragedy or a comedy.

Mr. Tougas: No. Well, that's a good question.

The real tragedy is what's happening to a lot of people in Alberta, and this is what I'm hoping to hear from anybody opposite. When somebody comes to me, like the lady I had here the other day, with a \$350 a month rent increase: what do I tell her? Can anybody over there tell me? What do I tell this woman? There's no answer there. Three hundred and fifty bucks for kind of a rundown place. Is she supposed to move? Is she just supposed to give it up? Is she supposed to pay for it? She's never had a rent increase remotely like that in all the years she's lived there. I don't know what to tell these

people. Can somebody please tell me: what's the solution? What do I tell this person? Anything, really. There's this homeless and eviction prevention fund or something like that. Is she supposed to apply to that? It's not established. You know, I understand all this long term and the business about: okay; we don't want to deter people from building and all these kinds of things. That's fine. I understand it all. But you try to explain it to someone who has got a massive rent increase and doesn't know what to do. What good does it do? It does nothing. I mean, I don't know what to tell these people. I've had a lot of people come into my office with this problem, and I just go: I'm sorry; I don't know what to do for you. Anybody? Suggestions?

5:30

An Hon. Member: We have programs.

Mr. Tougas: Programs? What if they don't qualify for the program? What if they just fall underneath it? What's the criteria? Where is it, you know? A lot of these people will certainly not fall under the criteria. And why should they have to do that? Why do they have to go on what's basically a form of welfare or something? I mean, they're proud people. They've never had to do that before, and now all of a sudden it's: well, you have to go there and get money from the government just to survive. That's insulting to a lot of people.

I'm glad to hear, finally, some explanation from the President of the Treasury Board about gouging. I'll have to read it in *Hansard* to figure it out.

Ms Blakeman: A thousand is; \$900 isn't.

Mr. Tougas: Well, apparently. I don't know what it is. That's another good question. We really have to have that answered.

But please, if anybody – not just: oh, apply for this, apply for that. It doesn't work for people. I mean, they're hurting, and they want to know what to do. I'm open to suggestions, please.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The President of the Treasury Board has admitted that Bill 34 doesn't contain all the answers. He's also admitted that Bill 34 doesn't even include in the wording the one-year timeline. My question to the President of the Treasury Board is: what's the point of proposing something imperfect in the meantime? How does that help the individuals whose rents have been raised at this moment? What's your solution for the interim?

Mr. Snelgrove: The bill will be retroactive to the day the government announced it, April 24, and you know that. The bill is a bill to change the regulation-making authority. You know that. That's in the bill, if you've read the bill. Nothing – nothing – will go back before that and set back these people's rents. Nothing. We have programs for people that qualify to help them if they're in that circumstance.

But for a government to do that, you are saying that it's within the purview of this government to go into someone's private business and arbitrarily take out what they believe to be their right to charge for their product without compensation. That's what you're saying, and we just don't believe it. It might not be all the wonderful gold dust you put on it, but if you've read the bill, you will know that it is a bill to enable the regulation-making authority of the minister to set the date of increases in rents. That's it. That's all the bill is.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I'm going to speak on amendment A2. Now, certainly, I have listened with a great deal of interest to the hon. members from all sides of the House. We're talking about: we don't have the authority or the interest or the ideology to interfere; we're going to let the market solve this problem. The hon. Member for Peace River talked earlier about his involvement with the forest industry and how we can't get involved in any solutions to provide housing for those who cannot provide for themselves.

[Mr. Lund in the chair]

My question in this debate would be – and we're talking about the \$285 million. Well, it's less than 10 years ago since this government relaxed a loan, just wrote it off, of over \$200 million to a major player in the forest industry, Millar Western.

Mr. Snelgrove: You said that you were going to deal with the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: I am going to deal with the amendment, but we've got to clarify a few things first and correct them on the record, hon. minister.

If you look at the budget, you see the loans and advances that are made here on a routine basis to the Agricultural Financial Services Act, Student Financial Assistance Act, the Ridley Grain company, Vencap, Farm Credit Stability Act. Alberta Housing Act gets \$20 million.

Mr. Snelgrove: So you were fibbing. You're really not going to deal with the amendment. You were just teasing us.

Mr. MacDonald: No.

We look at this and we see how conflicted this government is. You see them say one thing in debate, and when you look at their record, there's another thing on paper. That's why we have to give this amendment or a similar amendment a chance. What we have forgotten about here is the people that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark talks about. The people are confused. They're scared. They don't know which way to turn. Everyone needs an affordable, safe, and secure home. I realize that the whole housing structure has gotten out of hand because of this government's lack of attention, but it has to be fixed. This bill has to be fixed, and amendment A2 is at least a start – it's at least a start – because people need some kind of protection.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We can talk about anyone in any neighbourhood in this city. They can look out across the street from their two-storey house, and they can see homeless people. They can see people living there under the mature spruce trees. That's not part of the Alberta that anyone wants, but the reality is that's what's going on. Working people, hard-working Albertans, seniors, students, those who are on government programs, whether it be AISH or whether it be SFI, are affected by this. I don't think we get that. If you were only to come to our constituency office, I think you would understand that. I thought last night it was understood. I watched the news, but I don't think the message is getting through, and that is unfortunate.

This amendment A2 is certainly a step. I have other issues with this bill, but at this time I have nothing further to say on amendment

A2, but I certainly have a lot to say on certain sections of this bill as we proceed through committee. I'm hopefully going to get an opportunity to get the statute from the cupboard and just have a look at this Regulations Act and see how this is going to work in the interests of renters.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I promise to be brief. I wanted to thank the hon. president of the Treasury for his willingness to investigate means to empower the residential tenancy dispute resolution board or some other board or agency that the government deems appropriate to referee those disputes between landlords and tenants. As it stands now, the dispute resolution mechanism in Edmonton, at least, as a pilot project is limited in its capacity and its scope. So I'm hoping that after this one-year test period finishes, then the government might really evaluate ways to offer the mandate and the tools for the employees of the dispute resolution board to do more than what they are currently asked or mandated to do.

Now, my question to the hon. president of the Treasury. Would he find it a suitable compromise, something that he might be willing to at least investigate, if we bring in a temporary rent cap – we're not saying to freeze it, but we're allowing it to increase by a limited amount, let's say 10 per cent or inflation plus a percentage – and then we allow the residential tenancy dispute board to adjudicate or to handle requests from landlords for amounts that exceed that percentage? Would that be an allowable middle ground? Would that be a compromise that he's willing to at least study?

What I'm saying is: in those circumstances a landlord can appear before the board or whatever else the agency is determined to be and justify and provide evidence as to why he or she needs a bigger increase, and then the board can study the case or evaluate it. Then they say yes to this particular landlord because of a certain maintenance or a certain cost that he or she is incurring. Doing this, would that be a suitable compromise where the president of the Treasury and his cabinet colleagues would be willing to, you know, be a little more flexible?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

5:40

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, I wouldn't want to impose or to put a parameter around what the landlord tenancy board and the tenant representatives might want to look at, so it's really irresponsible for me to even suggest that 10 per cent plus the cost of living or 50 per cent or 1 per cent. If we're going to approach this situation with an open mind and be able to sit down with the ownership groups and with the tenancy groups, you can't tell them what they're going to decide before they sit down. I'm not telling you that's a bad situation, but certainly I'm not going to ask them to come in when I've already decided what they might recommend to us as an appropriate route. It's just that simple.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Snelgrove: Is it on the amendment, Hugh?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, it is, and it's about the comments of the hon. Minister of Service Alberta and the Treasury Board. Is the hon. minister confident that this bill as it's currently written, and with this section that is allowing the bill to come into force on April 24, 2007, as the hon. minister had stated earlier, would survive a legal challenge? I understand that there are landlords that are not satisfied

with this date of April 24, 2007. When this bill was drafted, was that taken into consideration? Is the minister confident it will survive a legal challenge? That's my question at this time, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: This bill went to the review, and it's handled by people that are far more able to deal with legal issues than myself, so I put my faith in the good judgment of our staff.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A2?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:43 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Martin	Miller, B.
Eggen	Mason	Pastoor
MacDonald		

Against the motion:

Ady	DeLong	Lindsay
Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Lougheed
Brown	Groeneveld	Lund
Calahasen	Hancock	Melchin
Cao	Hinman	Miller, R.
Cardinal	Jablonski	Oberle
Cenaiko	Johnson	Snelgrove
Chase	Johnston	Stevens
Coutts	Liepert	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 27
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think we have the solution. It's the answer. It's been in our Liberal statement on housing long before the task force. It's our solution in terms of a way to handle the problems we've had today. I think this will be the answer, and it's the next amendment that I would like to make.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A3.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has been fixated on our website, the Liberal caucus website, and has referred to the Liberal policy many times. I don't look up the Liberal caucus website very often, not as often as the hon. member. I don't know why. I guess they're always constantly checking to try and figure out how to keep up with our wonderful policies.

You know, we tried to promote the task force's recommendation of the CPI plus 2 per cent, which failed. If you look at CPI plus 2

per cent – and the CPI is about 5.5 per cent – that's about 7.5 per cent. Now, this amendment suggests that it should be 10 per cent. So I move that Bill 34, Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 1(4)(b) by adding the following after the proposed subsection (8):

(9) No increase in rent payable under a residential tenancy agreement shall be greater than 10% for the period April 24, 2007 to April 23, 2008.

This is, obviously, a temporary measure to help get through this year. It's at 10 per cent. That's about the average of rent increases in Alberta. So this is obviously a solution in terms of preventing gouging. That's our real concern and the concern of those people that have come to us. It's not increases around 10 per cent that are really serious; it's the big increases.

I had one person from Baywood apartments here in Edmonton, where his rent went from \$650 to \$950. Now, that kind of increase is just overwhelming. If we just leave it up to market forces – the market is not working. It's not working, so we need to have some kind of cap like this. This, of course, is a lot more generous than the one that was proposed before, and I'm sure that lots of landlords would be in agreement with this kind of measure. I think this is the right way to go.

6:00

I'll just maybe make more reference to the wonderful Alberta Liberal housing policy which was put together some months ago, actually at the end of last fall. It has a number of sections; first of all, creating affordable housing, so a lot of suggestions about supply, supply side. But the most important section for dealing with what we've been hearing from all kinds of people that have come to us is the section that's called Protecting Renters. In this section, along with lots of suggestions like portable housing allowances and rent supplements and microcredit for low-income renters, is a section called Enhance Tenant Protection. There we suggest that we will institute a one-time, one-year-long temporary rent regulation measure that limits rent increases within that period to a maximum of 10 per cent. This will lessen the risk of tenants losing their homes while giving communities and builders time to create additional affordable housing spaces. It seems to me that that makes sense.

You know, the problem is that when we in the task force looked at this whole issue, we called it a housing-first philosophy. First, have people be able to stay in their own homes. Housing first. Then you wrap appropriate services around them so that they can move through the continuum. But with the huge rent increases and the gouging that are occurring, people are not moving forward; they're moving backwards. That's where there is, I think, tremendous concern on the part of everybody. The unaffordable rent increases especially that lead to paying much more than 30 per cent of your monthly income – sometimes 50 per cent, sometimes even higher – mean that people are not moving forward; they're moving backwards. That's a tragedy. A cap like this enables I think keeping the gouging, the huge rent increases down so people can stay in their homes, and they're not one rent increase away from being near homeless.

Mr. Chairman, that's all that I would have to say right at this point, and I invite others to participate.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to point out that I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora said it before, and I know for sure the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East said it sometime right around midnight, I believe it was, if I remember correctly. The question of gouging and the inability to define that

term: what exactly is gouging? What's an outrageous amount of rent increase?

Mr. Chase: Now we've defined it: anything over 10 per cent.

Mr. Oberle: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity just plucked one out of the air, but nonetheless a couple of people on that side have said: how do you define gouging? I wonder how it is that we can't define what gouging is, but apparently we can easily define what an acceptable rent increase is.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora just said that he's sure that most landlords would be accepting of this, and I would kind of have to question that one as well. Where's the polling data on that? I'm getting letters in my office too. Most of them are from landlords.

Mr. Chase: Yeah, and they're form letters.

Mr. Oberle: No, they're not, actually, member. They are not.

Mr. Chase: They are in my constituency.

Mr. Oberle: Well, good for you.

Anyway, a couple of points. One is that you can't define gouging, but it's easy to define an acceptable rent increase for some strange reason, the second one being that I fail to see where you're getting the data that would suggest most landlords would agree because I don't think that's true.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to rise and speak in support of amendment A3. As my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora has already said, this amendment reflects the policy that we had developed through the Alberta Liberal housing policy.

My most specific concern right now is: how do we get our constituents through this current situation, and how do we in the best way possible with the largest number of landlords possible bring them along with us? Clearly, we don't want to have an all-out war happening here. People need a place to live. There's an opportunity for people to make money if they have spaces to rent. How can we make the best out of the current situation that we have? It's not a good situation. I think even members opposite would admit that what we have currently is not a good situation. It doesn't look good on anybody when, you know, a 74-year-old grandmother is getting a \$1,000 hit as an increase in her rent per month. That doesn't help anyone.

I brought forward all kinds of examples of people where – and the rents in the older housing stock that I have in Edmonton-Centre have been lower. I have hundreds of three-floor walk-up apartments, sort of four apartments on each one. There's usually a dozen to 15 apartments in the little block building. They're not particularly energy efficient, they're not particularly attractive, they're a reasonable size, but they're old housing stock; let's not kid ourselves. It's old plumbing. It's old wiring and everything else. They were built, some of them, just after the war and some of them up to about 1970.

Those people who were paying rents of sort of between \$400 and \$600 or \$700 are looking at their rents increasing by, most of them, in the \$300 range and sometimes \$265, \$235, \$275. Most of the ones I've seen have been in that range. So they're going up by 50 to

almost 100 per cent of what they're paying. This is a stretch for people. I've talked about people taking extra jobs to try and cover their rent so they can stay where they are. I've talked about the hardship of people who, you know, have a beloved pet, and if they are forced to move, the likelihood they could find a place where they could take the pet along with them is a difficulty.

So how do we get through the situation we have in front of us? What's a better possibility for us to work with? I think that's included in what this amendment is putting in front of us. We did go back and look at what rental increases had been on average over a long period of time. What we found was that the increases tended to be in the sort of 4 to 6 per cent range if you averaged them out over an extended period of time. I think we looked over 38 years or something, so we were looking over a very long-term period. Our thinking at the time as we developed this was: okay, if we looked at that 4 to 6 per cent and we took into consideration that there was a difficult housing market, a special housing market, an inflationary housing market, however you want to term it, could we satisfy some sector of the landlords with a 10 per cent increase? Would that be enough to keep them working along with us, to make enough money on their investment?

Again, my situation may well be different from everybody else's because we're not looking at landlords that are trying to recoup enormous recent building costs. This is old housing stock. At the most what we would have is major renovations that have happened. But, frankly, in a lot of those cases where they were looking at major renovations, they were also looking to condo-ize, to turn it into condos. So that actually ended up in a different kind of situation.

I can live with the 10 per cent. I think it's the best solution that I've seen to try and be reasonable to people looking at rent increases. I think it's a better solution to have a period of time involved, which is clearly laid out in this amendment. It's only one year. We may have to look at a second year, but I'm very reluctant to start out by saying that two years is going to be appropriate. I sure don't want to leave it open ended, and I don't want to see it be three years or five years because I think you're in trouble then. It's very hard to remove a rent cap when you've had it in place for three or five years.

6:10

So I'm more comfortable in supporting this amendment, where you're trying to work something that is certainly reasonable for a lot of the landlords that I've worked with for the kinds of increases they're expecting if they are trying to recoup from problems with electrical rates going up, some modest repairs and maintenance, that have gone along in trying to keep buildings in a reasonable state of repair and not overburden people that for the most part are paying a fairly reasonable or even a low to moderate range of housing possibilities.

I have some very good small landlords that own one building and look after a small number of units and have tried to do the best they can with those tenants. Certainly, I have no reason to want to try and penalize them. I've heard from two of them who were very upset with the choices that the government had made because they had been going along incrementally raising the rent. It wasn't even 10 per cent, you know, in the sort of \$35 range. It was more like in the 5 to 6 per cent range that they were raising once every eight months or so. They really feel that they got stuck because they had planned to go along on that kind of increment, and now they're looking at a much longer period of time than they anticipated. They're, you know, very angry, those folks that I've talked to.

I've also had a number of anonymous phone calls left on our answering machine in which they didn't identify themselves and a couple of form letters. Frankly, if the landlord is not going to tell me

that they are actually the landlord functioning in my constituency and they won't identify themselves, then unfortunately I'm going to have to discount them. I wish that I didn't have to do that, but if they won't identify what they have to do with my constituency, I don't know what I'm supposed to do with that information. They've got to tell me who they are and sign the letters, or it's not very helpful to me. At least give me, you know, an address of the building that they own even if they themselves are not living in the constituency.

I'm trying to work with those landlords that are running reasonable operations, that are trying to offer a reasonable product at a reasonable price and not get caught as a small businessperson. I understand that. I'm more concerned at the situation that I have been seeing in Edmonton Centre for more than a year, and that is where people are paying extraordinary rent increases, and it's truly putting them in hardship. These are people – and you've heard me talk about them in question period – on AISH, seniors, students, working low-income people. Those are the people that are mostly affected by rent, who really feel affected by these rent increases.

Having said all that, that's why I'm willing to support, and I'm actually looking forward to supporting amendment A3 with what's being proposed here. I think it's going to help the people in my constituency both on the tenant side and on the landlord side.

Thanks for the opportunity to stand and speak in favour of that amendment.

Mr. Snelgrove: Very briefly, the problem that I don't see the solution to in this thing – and I do appreciate that it is a brief amendment, so it's very easy for the chairman to keep us on topic because this is very clear – is that if a landlord is not going to make his ends meet with a 10 per cent increase, he's just going to evict the people that are there. There's nothing to address that. So if it's \$500 a month rent, you're going to allow only 10 per cent. If the landlord needs \$80 a month more to break even, we've taken that out of the opportunity. We've evicted this person because we picked 10 per cent as the arbitrary number.

Granted, in the huge bunch of landlord/tenant relationships it wouldn't have any effect for many of them. But the ones that are in that would simply evict the people, put the rent to whatever level they wanted, and start again. So the unintended consequences of having to deal with an issue somewhat in isolation from all of the other parameters makes it really difficult to consider supporting this because, in fact, I think you'd end up with far more people evicted and create tremendous amounts of stress and uncertainty just so landlords have to use a backdoor method to raise rents rather than be up front. I think that this probably isn't the solution that we're looking for here.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I take the point that the minister is raising, but this is where we have the impasse because, frankly, you don't want any kind of a parameter or a definition put on this, and when we challenge you to put any kind of a definition on something like gouging, you're unable to do that. So somewhere this has got to meet in the middle because we are not serving our populations here. There has to be a way right now – right now – for us to come up with some sort of notice period and to come up with some sort of . . . [A ringing sound was heard] We'll just wait for that cell phone to get answered.

An Hon. Member: An alarm clock.

Ms Blakeman: I'm so sorry: an alarm clock. Well, I guess that at a quarter after 6 that would be appropriate.

You know, we're not serving our constituents here, whether those constituents are landlords or whether they're tenants, and frankly the people that I'm most worried about on this side of the equation are the tenants. But to say, "Well, we won't put any kind of a limit on the amount of money of the rent increases that they would be getting for fear that they would be evicted" and to therefore open the door to the kinds of rent increases that we've been experiencing in this Assembly for the past week and that I've been experiencing in my constituency for the past year is equally unacceptable to me. There has to be some way that we are going to figure out how to meet in the middle. It's got to be a term of notice period, and it's got to be some kind of rent cap because one thing does not work without the other, and we've got a situation that is not helping people in Alberta right now.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. What we attempted to do in a very simple, clarified circumstance, which I'm pleased that the President of the Treasury Board noted, was define a percentage, and above that percentage we'd consider it gouging. Now, the President of the Treasury Board suggested that landlords would simply evict people and force a raise, but my understanding is that if this legislation is in place, that would be illegal. That's the point we're trying to make. What we're trying to do is create stability. We're trying to create predictability both for the landlord and for the tenant. We're recognizing that inflation is running, I believe, right now around 6 per cent. So we're leaving a margin of profit for the landlord but not an extreme hardship for the tenant although there will be a number of tenants who are on fixed incomes like AISH, like seniors' pensions, and so on that are still going to need some form of government subsidy to get the difference between the current rate and a 10 per cent increase for them.

This is the most simple, reasonable declaration that we could possibly come up with. What it does is provide the definition that Bill 34 lacks. Bill 34 says: any increase is acceptable providing that it's done once a year. We're saying: the only increase that is acceptable for this experimental time period, defined as April 24, 2007, through April 23, 2008, its sunset clause, is a limited percentage. It's definable. It's predictable. It's a stable alternative. We're putting ourselves out on a limb, but we're defining the length of that limb and the amount of weight you can put on the limb whereas the government is saying: go for it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

6:20

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It would be hard to support this amendment. I could perhaps live with the 10 per cent although I think we know what works in other parts of the country, the CPI plus 2, but that's obviously not there.

I'd point out that with the other boards where they have the rent guidelines, it's not a hard and fast control. I'm sure that the President of the Treasury Board is aware of that because we checked with them. They can pass them on if there are extraordinary increases in municipal taxes and charges in utilities. They can apply to pass that on. If they have capital expenditures such as roof replacement, they can pass that on. Operating costs related to security services: they can pass that on. Perhaps if you had the guidelines, that would be something, then, that the — what did we

call it? — landlord tenancy dispute act mechanism could be involved in.

Again, the problem that I have, mainly, with this amendment is that we all recognize that we have to put more supply out there, and I think we can all agree on that in the House. How we do it is a combination of ways, but one year is not going to do it because there's at least a two-year lead. Everybody told us that in the housing task force, that it would be at the minimum two years to have significant impact in terms of supply. So I would say that with one year we wouldn't even be there, and then if all of a sudden we pull it off with that sunset, it could make it worse. It could absolutely make it worse.

So my problem is not so much with the 10. By the time they pass that on — I don't know. The problem is the one year. If you see that there is, frankly, a need for guidelines — obviously we on this side do; obviously the other side doesn't — then we have to at least do it for the two-year period because the two years is a minimum, the absolute minimum time that it would actually take to bring some housing on. So with one year, regardless of what we do with CPI at 2 or 10, I would suggest that at the end of that, with the sunset of April 23, we wouldn't have any more supply on at that particular time. If we pull it off, I think that then the rents will even rise higher in that second period. The 10 per cent would be temporary help for people, but the following year, if you pull it off with the sunset, it would be even worse. I think that for that reason, Mr. Chairman, at least from this side, we could not support it.

I just want to stress — and I'll be short here. I might lose my voice here eventually. [interjections] I thought that would get a good reaction, Mr. Chairman.

You know, again, in an ideal world we don't need them. I think we all agree on that. But the fact that Ontario has had it for 15 years — and I'm not suggesting that. The stats just came out. We got them from Canada Mortgage and Housing. They have investment in new rental units: 3,848 new starts from 2,045 in 2000. That's an 88 per cent increase. We've had condo increases in the market when we see that expanding. It's condos; it's not rental units. In contrast, Alberta, with no rent increase guidelines, has seen a drop in new rentals by 52 per cent. Now, mind you, condo starts in Alberta have jumped from 6,214 in 2000 to 10,210 in 2005. That's about a 40 per cent increase. So, you know, that's fine. I have no problems with that, but that's still not building rental units for the people . . .

Mr. Snelgrove: They could be rental condos.

Mr. Martin: Yeah, but they're not building the rental units for the people that we're talking about. That's the point.

As the minister is well aware, the prices of condos have shot up like everything else, so there's a growing group that can't even begin to hope to buy or to own condos, and I talked about that group earlier on. You know, then we have the condo conversions. I know we're trying to deal with it here. It's interesting that when condos are put over and then rented out, there's a 30 per cent increase in condo conversions right away. Now, hopefully what we're doing in that part of the bill will have some impact on that, at least for a year.

But the point that I'd make, Mr. Chairman, is that without some sort of protection in this temporary, crazy market that we're in — and I would suggest that it has to be longer than one year because I think that one year would make it worse for the second year.

With the task force it was a compromise. We talked about two years, and that seems to be the minimum time we were told that it will take to bring significant building into the market. So for that reason, Mr. Chairman, we would not support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I, too, would like to echo my colleague's reservations about this particular amendment, albeit somewhat reluctantly on my part because, you know, I still hang on to some slim hope that we can enter this long evening, that we've all invested a fair bit of time on, in the spirit of negotiation. So if I was to see someone biting onto some point where we could define what is a reasonable or unreasonable increase – and I think that comes down to the crux of what we've been trying to talk about here. We've cajoled and joked and bantered and yelled a little bit, yet the government, which, of course, has the majority, is unwilling to say what is unreasonable. Until we can define that, I think that we're just dancing around this issue. As I've said before, Bill 34 provides a framework that only goes to the initial problem that's occurred here and is not resolving the problem.

You know, there are just so many thousands of people that are asking and hoping that we do come up with something that resembles a solution, defining what is a reasonable or unreasonable increase in somebody's rent. So, you know, in the spirit of that, certainly if I saw some signs of life opposite with any of these amendments – and this one has its problems certainly.

I can see, for example, that without the provision of the cost of living, the CPI provision – of course, we're not entirely sure where that inflationary number is going to go here in Alberta during the course of this next calendar year because we have this unprecedented growth that is creating inflation in some regions of the province, which, I would suggest, approaches over 6 and a half per cent. So that would cut into the functioning of this amendment, you know, to allow a provision for a reasonable return for the landlord, and that would be a problem, I think, that we would have to fix on this.

Of course, let's remember as well – and we've said this again – that we've put in a mechanism within the statutes or the regulations of this bill and through the landlord and tenants act, I suppose, too, that would in fact allow for someone to bring forward a reasonable case why rents should exceed whatever guideline we eventually come to. I truly believe, although we seem to have hit sort of a roadblock now, that eventually we are going to be doing this. We are going to be putting a guideline in place, and of course whatever that guideline happens to be, whatever that number emerges to be, there will be a provision for extenuating circumstances.

So, you know, if a landlord deems it necessary to exceed the guideline, then that's fine too. This is not something we're putting in that's going to change the course of the relationship between landlords and tenants in any fundamental way. How the market is supposed to work is that you come to an agreement that is reasonable to both parties. I mean, that's how the deal usually works, and that does not apply just to rent but to all sorts of contractual agreements.

6:30

The situation that we have now, Mr. Chair, is that the tenants are at a decided disadvantage in making an agreement to which both parties can truly agree. It's more like you need that thing so bad – that is, a roof over your head – that, of course, you are kind of forced into perhaps an unreasonable increase for the sake of having that roof over your head for yourself and your family. So that's the distortion that I'm sure most people in this room do recognize. You don't want to force people into contractual agreements that put undue stress and strain on one's budget and perhaps create distortions and problems in other areas that you're obliged to pay for to make ends meet. Your food and your fuel and education or even

health concerns: all of these things have to perhaps be looked at a second time if your budget is suddenly hit with a giant rental increase.

So that's what we're dealing with. It's a very practical concern. It's not as though we are trying to impose the will of some foreign or alien ideology on the province of Alberta. I think that the voice of reason should prevail; that is, that we make sure that everybody has a roof over their head in some reasonable way that's affordable to the income that they have. You know, most people are working very hard in this province to enjoy the fruits of their labour, and we should presume that and encourage that to continue to be the case.

Specific to this amendment that we've had here, I do have some problems with the cost-of-living index not being built into it and the short duration of its mandate. As I said before, if you're doing a little bit of fishing and you haven't caught anything all day and you get a nibble, then perhaps, you know, that's a good thing. So if I saw any sign of life from opposite, I would be certainly interested in reconsidering my reservations that I have about this particular amendment. Is it A4, or is it A5? I can't remember.

Mr. Chase: A3.

Mr. Eggen: Amendment A3, there you go.

Giving it some concern, but certainly as I say, if we saw signs of life from opposite, we would be willing to take a look. Thanks so much, Mr. Chair, and I look forward to the continuation of the debate on this fine morning.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The government's current Bill 34 legislation rolls the timing of the placement of the bill back to April 24. Today is May 10.

Mr. R. Miller: Actually, it's May 9 still.

Mr. Chase: Oh, well, according to the transcript it's May 9 in this fantasy warp that we're currently in.

What we're trying to accomplish with this one-year sunset clause – another phrase we could use is trial run – is to protect people for that year, get the start-up of the affordable housing going with a variety of different forms of subsidies, incentives, philanthropic contributions. There is a whole variety of things that lead to housing taking place.

The intention of the Liberal amendment was that on April 24 in the Legislature – the timeline ran out on April 23 – we review: has this worked? We debate it in the House: was this a good suggestion? Did it accomplish the goals? Was there a significant number of new houses built, et cetera, et cetera? And if necessary, through the legislative, democratic debate process we could set the next time frame. I would suggest, as the very first amendment noted, that possibly at that point we'd go for another year, but what we wouldn't do is guarantee that there would be some form of rent manipulation into the distant future. We'd deal with it one year at a time, but in so doing, we'd provide stability and predictability for, as I indicated before, the landlord and for the renter. It would give us a chance to test out what is somewhat hypothetical and theoretical. But we would apply a number, and that's the difference between this amendment and Bill 34. Bill 34 simply says that any number is acceptable as long as that increase is just once a year. Here we define it. We experiment with it. We have a mechanism where we can bring it in again the following year if it worked or amend it, change it. But we've got a template, and that's what A3 is trying to provide.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of amendment A3, moved by my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, that Bill 34, Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 1(4)(b), by adding the following after the proposed subsection (8):

(9) No increase in rent payable under a residential tenancy agreement shall be greater than 10% for the period April 24, 2007 to April 23, 2008.

It's one year's time.

Mr. Chairman, one of the options that must be discussed in this debate, in any debate on affordable housing is the issue of rent control until an adequate supply of affordable housing is built to increase supply and lower demand. The Alberta housing market is currently experiencing a massive boom due to population increase, wage increases, and the exploding oil sector. The result of this is that the demand for housing is skyrocketing, but the supply cannot keep up. This is having an effect on the rental market as less rental units are being built and existing rental units are being converted to high-end condominiums. The reality is that there is more money to be made selling houses and condos than there is in renting or being a landlord of a rental property.

In Calgary, Mr. Chairman, the rental vacancy rate as of February 2006, according to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, was 1.6 per cent, well below the average across Canada of 2.7 per cent. Edmonton was at approximately 4.5 per cent. This rate has fallen since then and appears to be heading towards a zero vacancy rate. This situation is primarily affecting the two major metropolitan areas, Calgary and Edmonton.

There is a precedent. That was undertaken by the government in the 1970s to deal with almost the exact same situation. A temporary period of rent control was initiated in order to implement temporary measures to deal with the extremely low vacancy rates. The Temporary Rent Regulation Measures Act was introduced in the Legislature on December 10, 1975, by the minister of consumer and corporate affairs. This was in response to the anti-inflation program instituted by the federal government in Bill C-73, effective October 14, '75.

This program, Mr. Chairman, made the following reference to the rents: the provincial governments are being asked to undertake responsibility for implementing a program of rent control based upon the following principle, that increases up to a certain percentage would be permissible, that increasing above this percentage must be justified on the basis of increased costs, that new structures where rents have not yet been established would be exempt from control for at least five years after the completion of the building in the event that rent controls should be in effect for that length of time; this is to ensure an adequate incentive for the construction of new rental accommodation.

6:40

The provincial Temporary Rent Regulation Measures Act was brought in in response to this. The provincial government concluded that so long as incomes are controlled under the federal bill, then rental increases must be controlled and that while acknowledging that the free market system had served Alberta well in the case of rental units, it would be very difficult for the market system to effectively control rents until there was an excess supply of rental accommodation. The TRRM Act, Temporary Rent Regulation Measures Act, was temporary, was retroactive to a certain date, would cover the unit and not the tenant, and would exclude new construction. The rent control would be limited to approximately 18

months unless subsequent conditions warranted an extension. Mr. Chairman, a temporary rent control initiative could be implemented for a defined period of time until the rental market supply catches up to the demand.

As I said before, you know, we've always believed in a balanced approach, and 10 per cent is a very reasonable amount for both parties, landlords and tenants. It's very reasonable. That's the reason that we support this amendment.

Thank you very much, sir.

The Deputy Chair: Hon members, just before I recognize the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, I just want to acknowledge and recognize everyone who has been up all night long and has worked very, very hard and stayed awake. We are going to continue working until the business is finished. I thank you so very much, every one of you.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Once again I feel compelled to stand and speak to amendment A3. There's no question in my mind of the sincerity of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora in his desire to come up with what they want to say is a compromise in order to try and solve the shortage of rental units here in the province. I feel that we're trying to – what would I say? – get over this bump in the road when in fact we want to say that there is no bump in the road, and the crevice is perhaps greater than we can leap. But the question that's been brought up, you know, is: define "gouging" or define "fair." I think that therein lies the problem. You can't define either one of those in a free and democratic society because everybody has a different idea of what is fair and what is gouging.

I can't help but go back to the debate earlier this year about the gouging of bank machines in what they are charging for people to use them. It's a totally free option to go to a bank machine that isn't part of your group and to pay an exorbitant price of \$2 or \$3 or \$5 to pull out a \$20 bill, yet that person wants to complain about being gouged and wants to put in restrictions to stop that. It's the same as a person who seems to think there's no problem, though, to go and pay \$5 for a cup of coffee when he might be able to make it at home for 50 cents. For some reason they have their freedom to go and choose and to buy that cup of coffee. With rent we're definitely not talking about those options. It's a much more critical issue for someone who's living in those rental units and being faced with these huge increases, but it goes back to the basic question: is it or is it not government's responsibility to intervene and to put in parameters on what is fair and what is gouging?

So I really have to speak strongly against this again in that we're breaching the principle of what is the responsibility of government and the supposedly divine wisdom that we as a collective whole seem to be able to receive all of a sudden because we're legislators over the common person out there, who's counting on us to bring forth responsible and good and equitable laws for each individual.

In my younger years and perhaps having a foul mouth and my mother saying what was and wasn't acceptable, you know, that you need to be clean at all times and not use such language – she would set what was and wasn't acceptable. But I always wanted to debate and argue about things, you know: "Well, this is just a little bit. It's okay to do this. Maybe it's okay to cheat a little bit on your homework or something else." My mother was always: "No. It's black and white. You do what's right, or you don't." So she had a demonstration one time when we came home. She made very good brownies, and everybody wanted to come home and always eat them. The one time when we came home, she said: "Well, you

know, the cat jumped up and made a little deposit in here, but I cooked it up anyways. It tastes very good, and you can't tell that there's any contaminant or anything wrong with this, so go ahead and eat it." Then she says: "I made two batches because I knew that some of you would be finicky and others not, but now I can't remember which batch it is." That set of brownies stayed on the counter the whole week because nobody wanted to touch it. It's the same with this situation. Once we step in there, there is no coming back. We've disturbed the market. The question always is: is or is not the government going to come in? At what point are they going to come in?

I talked earlier about the gouging incidents with the generators going to an emergency situation. I absolutely and I think everybody absolutely understands the importance and the struggle that people are having in trying to stay in their homes, but to try and define what is going to be fair and what is not going to be fair is not going to be accomplished. We need to accept the fact that it isn't government's responsibility to step in and put parameters on the rental units and say that this is the right amount. I mean, we have all kinds of exceptions when something happens, where the rental units can go up, but what if they're in a situation just like the common problem with energy, that could spike through the roof and go beyond the 10 per cent? We just seem to be the dog chasing the tail here when trying to come up with these parameters when the fact of the matter is that we shouldn't be setting any parameters because as soon as we've done that, we've crossed the line on what is ethical and what isn't ethical for government to do.

So I need to vote against this amendment A3 in that it is not in the best interest for the long term. Yes, short term it has the possibility to interrupt the market and to give some stability for a year, but short term is not going to address it. It's going to be short-term gain, long-term pain, and nobody wants more pain than we already have. That's what this will do in all likelihood: magnify the problem and come back to haunt us. Like I say, once you've stepped in and become the referee, become the judge, when do you step back? People are now expecting it, saying: "Oh, it's going to be regulated. We don't need to worry about it anymore." Those regulations will continue to haunt our economy, haunt the people, haunt the investors who want to go forward and start doing something. The fact of the matter is that we're like the individual that's a hundred pounds overweight, been smoking for 20 years. We're on the doctor's table there and saying: make me better tomorrow.

6:50

This is not a quick fix. There is no such thing as a quick fix. I have to ask the question: if the government is all knowledgeable and somehow has this collective wisdom to be able to figure it out, and let's say we need 11,000 new units put up for rental – I don't know. If we want to use \$150,000 a rental, it's going to cost \$1.61 billion. If it's \$200,000 a unit, it's going to cost us \$2.2 billion. So do we go to the people of Alberta and say that we're going to step in, that we're going to fix this problem to ensure that the people that don't have a place to stay have a guaranteed rental unit, and raise our taxes from a flat tax of 10 per cent to 12 or 13 per cent and then say that things are well and fine? It sends up the flag: keep coming to Alberta. We're going to keep taxing the people, and we'll build the homes, and we'll get back to the position that many members have referred to earlier.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

The best example, though, is Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and the home problem there. The economy can turn around, and we're

caught on the wrong side, and then how do we go back to the taxpayers and say, "Well, you know, we've built all these homes. I don't know why people don't want to be here"? Taxes are no longer an advantage to be in the province. We have to work longer hours to do all these things. The bottom line is that we don't have a right to go to the people and tax them because collectively we think that we can solve the housing problems, build a whole bunch of units and have a place for these people to go with a guaranteed rental price.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll sit down and let the discussion continue on this. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's again a pleasure to have the opportunity to try to convince hon. members of this Assembly to take another look at rent stabilization in this form. Certainly, whenever you follow the business of this province in the last few weeks, you can see where there's a need. I think the hon. member has brought forward a very good amendment again. This would limit rent increases to 10 per cent for a period of one year, and of course, as he articulated, it's part of the Official Opposition's comprehensive housing platform.

We've been discussing for quite a few hours now the reasons why we got into this dilemma, this crisis. Certainly, we will have time to discuss that even further, I hope, but when we look at stabilizing rent increases, dramatic increases, through this amendment, Mr. Chairman, I think one of the options that must be discussed in any debate on affordable housing is the issue of how rent controls could work.

Now, in this case rent controls would help until an adequate supply of affordable housing is built to increase supply and lower demand. Earlier we saw in the comparison between 2004 and 2006 just how unaffordable housing has become for Albertans. This is in the budget documents from the government. You only have to look from the fiscal plan that was tabled with the budget to the fiscal plan of 2005 for the 2004 year to clearly see that we have gone from the jurisdiction with the most affordable housing to the one that's right next to British Columbia, that has the highest costs in the land. So when those costs are that high and people can no longer afford to purchase a home, of course they're going to be in the rental market, and this increases the demand.

Now, if we were to adopt this proposed amendment, it would give us time, and that's what we need. Alberta's housing market, as we all know, is currently experiencing a massive boom due to population increases as a result of a very active energy sector. The result of this is that the demand for housing is increasing dramatically, but the supply at this time is not keeping up. Whenever you look at the rental market, as less rental units are being built and existing rental units are being converted to high-end condominiums, we have a significant problem. This was apparently not forecast or foreseen by anyone on the government side. Certainly, our Member for Calgary-Currie was very active in the last number of months, almost for a calendar year, Mr. Chairman, in developing our affordable housing policy for Alberta. And if I had known when we were having discussions last summer that this spring we would see people with \$200 and \$300 and \$400 and \$500 rent increases, I would have urged the government to sit down with the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, take his ideas, and run with them because I'm confident that they're better suited to our needs right now than this bill. Again, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is to be commended and thanked for bringing forward this amendment to Bill 34.

Now, the reality, Mr. Chairman, is that there is more money to be made selling houses and condos than there is in renting or being a

landlord of a rental property. Currently in Calgary the rental vacancy rate – and this is as of February of last year – according to CMHC, was 1.6 per cent, well below the average across Canada, which was 2.7 per cent. Edmonton was slightly different. But this rate has fallen since, and we're virtually at a zero vacancy rate. This situation is primarily affecting the two major metropolitan areas of Calgary and Edmonton.

There was an undertaking by the government in the 1970s to deal with almost the exact same situation. A temporary period of rent controls was initiated in order to implement temporary measures to deal with the extremely low vacancy rate. It was done then, and this amendment would go a long way towards doing that now. The introduction of these rent controls through the Temporary Rent Regulation Measures Act – this act was introduced, it is interesting to note, in the Legislature on December 10, 1975, by the minister of consumer and corporate affairs. This was in response to the anti-inflation program initiated by the federal government in Bill C-73, effective October 14, 1975.

Now, it is interesting that this is the same Progressive Conservative government, the same one who this evening or tonight or this morning told us that ideologically they're opposed to any sort of rent control or any program to stabilize the dramatic rent increases, that it can't be done; it can't be done. But their fathers and their mothers, if I could say, in the Conservative party did the exact same thing. They did it, and it is interesting to note that the provincial governments are being asked to undertake responsibility for implementing a program of rent control based on the following ideas.

7:00

Increases up to a certain percentage would be permissible. This is certainly in effect in amendment A3. Increases above this percentage must be justified on the basis of increased costs. Perhaps this is where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has reluctance to support this amendment, but hopefully I can persuade him to change his mind.

New structures or rents that have not yet been established would be exempt from control for at least five years after completion of the building in the event that rent controls should be in effect at that length of time. I don't think we would need rent controls for five years. I certainly hope not. This was done to ensure an adequate incentive for construction for new rental accommodation. We talked about that earlier this evening.

The government at the time, the same Progressive Conservative Party, brought this act in in response to a rental crisis. Now, the provincial government then concluded that so long as incomes are controlled under the federal bill, then rental increases must also be controlled. While acknowledging that the free market system had served the province well in the case of rental units, it would be very difficult for the market system to effectively control rents until there was an excess supply of rental accommodation. The act was temporary. It was retroactive to a certain date. It would cover the unit and not the tenant and would exclude new construction. The rent control would be limited to 18 months unless subsequent conditions warranted an extension.

A temporary rent control initiative could be implemented for a defined period of time until the rental market supply catches up with demand. This is exactly what is being proposed in A3. This is certainly, Mr. Chairman, along the same lines as what was done in 1975. There are some differences. But I think as we discuss this bill line by line, detail by detail, section by section in committee, all hon. members will see that what is being proposed to change Bill 34, not only with this amendment but with others that have been drafted, would be along the same lines as what was implemented in 1975.

I talked earlier about the work that the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has done in response to the growing crisis in affordable housing. It's affordable housing not only for clients of SFI or AISH but also for hardworking Alberta families who are, unfortunately, at the end of some months coming home and seeing that dreaded slip of paper under their door where their apartment rent is going up. The apartment rents, unfortunately, are going up more than wages or take-home pay.

Now, I realize that this government was sort of paralyzed due to the leadership race, but through the good work of the Member for Calgary-Currie and others in the caucus the Alberta Official Opposition caucus promised and delivered an affordable housing policy. While the government here was choosing a new leader, we were choosing an affordable housing policy. The guiding principles of our policy are based on the fact that every Albertan needs a home. An effective government uses the legislative tools and financial resources at its disposal to make it easier for builders and communities to create affordable housing and, again, for Albertans to find a home. Good solutions balance the rights and responsibilities of renters and landlords, encourage home ownership, and empower municipalities.

I will remind you of the fellow who peddles through my neighbourhood about this time of the day on his bicycle with his bedroll on the back frame, strapped on there with a bungee cord. We've got to stop that. Whenever people in the neighbourhood see him going by, they refer to it as a Stelmach suite. We've got to work very hard.

Mr. Snelgrove: I think we outlawed bungee cords, didn't we?

Mr. MacDonald: No. Usually, if you keep your eye open, hon. minister of the Treasury Board, you can find bungee cords along the road, but you're probably driving too fast to get stopped in time to get it.

Now, our housing strategy would create 10,000 units of affordable housing in five years. It would ensure that Albertans who need it have access to safe and affordable housing, and we would protect tenants from rent gouging while respecting landlords. I think this is the intent of amendment A3. We have to make home ownership more affordable for Albertans.

We need to change Bill 34. I know the government has worked fast. I know they realize now that they never did have a plan for the last five years, and Bill 34 is a poor excuse for a plan. This amendment is essentially, Mr. Chairman, instituting a one-time, one-year-long temporary rent regulation that would limit rent increases to a maximum 10 per cent. I believe this is a balanced approach that provides stability certainly for renters, but it also allows landlords and owners to increase rents in order to offset any increased costs they may be facing. We've all got to realize that landlords have taxes to pay. They have maintenance to do. Some of them have clear title on their properties. Others would have mortgages to pay, of course. Our policy, in my view, and this amendment is about balance.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Now, certainly we know that after the government selected a new leader, we received through the mail ourselves on our side of the House the mandate letters that the Premier sent to all his new ministers. For the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the mandate letter on the housing file was to establish this housing task force to develop a plan to increase the availability of affordable housing. Well, I made a presentation to that task force, and in that presentation I was hoping that the government would free up a lot of

the land that they have. Some of this land they deem to be surplus. This land, particularly around the ring roads in Edmonton and Calgary, was purchased 25, 28 years ago and is now deemed surplus. Some of this land could be used for affordable housing initiatives.

In Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie the same thing would apply. It's interesting to note that there was one initiative at Four Mile Corner in the county of Grande Prairie No. 1 where a considerable parcel of land was sold for a dollar. A dollar. But in the city of Grande Prairie the government didn't sell the city a parcel of land for a dollar. No, they sold it to them for significantly more. It was a smaller parcel, but on a per-acre basis I think it was around \$80,000. I could stand corrected.

Fort McMurray also has a housing crisis. This is why I thought, Mr. Chairman, that we would be generous with the organizations that are willing to build affordable housing units. The *Alberta Gazette* indicates that the government is very generous with some individuals and corporations in regards to land. In the last session we had significant discussion around some of the dollar deals and some of the land that exchanged hands around the ring roads, prime development land that was sold for very little money. The taxpayers purchased this land, as I said, sometimes 20, 25, 27 years previously for millions of dollars.

7:10

So I went to the housing task force. I sat patiently waiting my turn, and I was listening to people from all over the city, all over northern Alberta, making presentations and doing a very good job of it. They were making passionate, eloquent presentations to the task force as to why we need at this time significant investment in affordable housing.

Now, when you look at Fort McMurray and what has happened over that period of time, how would the citizens of Fort McMurray feel this morning about having the knowledge that they could count, in the next calendar year essentially, that rental increases would be capped at 10 per cent? We can see just from the Report of the Auditor General on Alberta Social Housing Corporation – Land Sales Systems, of October 2005, that this government was essentially asleep at the switch. This crisis that we're facing now is in direct response to inaction and a lack of a plan.

In the summary here at the front, Mr. Chairman, the Alberta Social Housing Corporation could not demonstrate that it met its objectives for four of nine land sales. The public offer process was used for six of nine sales. There was no independent review and challenge of sales. There were also questions, and I'm quoting here: "The public has questioned whether there was interference by the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo in one land sale."

Now, there are a lot of issues to be discussed here.

The Chair: Sorry. Your time has elapsed, hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm disappointed in that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm really, really excited about rising to speak to the amendment. We are on the third one, are we, Mr. Chairman? Okay. Yes, that's great. I'm glad that we're at A3. You know, I do want to indicate that I really have enjoyed the debate so far and have learned a great deal both from members on this side and, indeed, from the side opposite as well.

Mr. Chairman, the whole question that we have before us really

is: what temporary or bridging measures can we take to protect tenants until some stability is restored in the market? That's the basic question that we have before us. The government has put forward a bill, Bill 34, which they claim will provide rent stability. By stability what they mean is that there will be a long period of time, a long notice period for rent increases that may be desired by a landlord and, in fact, a limit on the number per year, which is one per year. I just want to indicate that, you know, to call that stability is not right because it's not really providing the kind of stability that people need. What people need is not a timing of massive increases but actually some moderation of massive increases, and that will give people some stability.

What the government is really proposing is simply a time to move. That's what it amounts to, Mr. Chairman. That's what this government is offering renters in this province: time to move, no protection from rent increases at all. You simply are given enough warning that, hopefully, you can pack up your belongings and find another place to live.

The real question, though, that the government hasn't dealt with is: where do they go? Where do they go? If they're raising rents in constituencies in parts of Edmonton or Calgary where rents have been low, then there's not any place for those people to go because there are no low rents left. They take the area of low rents and they raise them quite a bit higher, and of course the places that have moderate and high rents are seeing rent increases as well, so there's nothing left for the people. They essentially are being evicted except they get a year's warning. That's the flaw. That's really the flaw in the government's approach, and that's why it doesn't amount to real protection or real stability for renters.

As I've indicated earlier, Mr. Chairman, the rental companies are quite aware of the opportunity that they have before them thanks largely to this government. It's not an accident that the Boardwalk Real Estate Investment Trust annual report is called Opportunity Knocks. Opportunity is certainly knocking for Boardwalk and, similarly, for other large housing and rental trust companies and corporations as well. It's interesting that when the people of Boardwalk are talking to their tenants, they are clearly saying that it is possible to predict fairly accurately what the market is going to do and how it's going to affect rents and, therefore, the revenues.

Here's what they say about that, Mr. Chairman: "Unlike the volatile energy market our industry's driving forces are relatively calculable and consistent." You would have to assume that if they're calculable and consistent for this company, they are calculable and consistent for the government and its Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, whatever the department was before it was rearranged, which should have been able to predict this. Obviously, the government has the resources and should have been able to predict this, and it ought to form part of the government's planning. But I forgot that the former Premier, Mr. Klein, indicated on his way out that there wasn't any planning, so I just misspoke on that point.

If you look at the Boardwalk report, they go on to say, "As demand fundamentals continue to be strong and supply stays relatively low, Boardwalk remains well positioned for the future." They also say, "Our market fundamentals are based on simple supply and demand forces which are fairly easily predicted." What they go on to say is that "rental starts have fallen, particular in Edmonton, which will contribute to a further tightening of the market through 2007 as demand exceeds supply." Mr. Chairman, clearly the rental market is going to tighten, and rents are going to continue to rise in this province for a long time before they fall.

Now, the amendment that has been put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora says that "no increase in rent

payable under a residential tenancy agreement shall be greater than 10% for the period April 24, 2007 to April 23, 2008.” In other words, the proposal here is consistent with the information that I did find on the Liberal website, which is to permit a 10 per cent increase in a period of one year and to limit the restriction on rental increases to one year. It’s a one-time only according to the website, not to be repeated. It’s not per year; it’s just that one year. Then it lapses, and you go back to the market. That’s certainly what the website says. What I understand this to say is between April 24, ’07, and April 23, ’08, so a one-year period, and then it lapses.

7:20

Now, I don’t have so much of a problem with 10 per cent. Our proposal was CPI plus 2 per cent, and I think that that would be in the range of 6 or 7 per cent, somewhere in there. So this allows a bit bigger rental increase than the NDP’s proposal or the housing task force’s proposal. I won’t make a big deal about what’s a slightly larger increase for landlords than we had in mind. The difficulty I have with this, Mr. Chairman, really, is the one year because the government has said that it’s going to take at least two years to bring on new housing. If we freeze it for a year and then unfreeze it – I shouldn’t say freeze. If we freeze it plus 10 per cent or only allow a 10 per cent increase over a period of one year and then remove it, we won’t yet have the new housing on the market, and that, I think, is a flaw in the proposal.

So we’ll be returning to a dysfunctional market. We’ll be returning to a market in which demand far exceeds supply, and I think that that’s the difficulty with this. I don’t think that there’s a fundamental problem with the intent here. It’s clearly an attempt, I think, to try and force the government to put forward some more meaningful legislation and actually tackle the issues that are facing our tenants today and the challenges facing renters.

Let’s not forget, Mr. Chairman, that the government has not defined gouging. I have to assume that that’s because they don’t want to define gouging. If they actually defined it and they nailed it down, then they’d have to do something about it. So the Premier would like to talk about gouging as an abstract concept – it’s bad; it’s un-Albertan – but he won’t define it because if he did, there would be no excuse for not dealing with it in legislation and prohibiting the practice. The government doesn’t want to do that. They’ve made it perfectly clear that as far as they’re concerned, when it comes to gouging, they’re only prepared to talk about it. They’re not prepared to do anything about it because if they were, they’d pass this amendment, or they would have passed one of the other previous amendments. They’re clearly not prepared to do that.

Mr. Chairman, we have to say that in this entire debate one of the things that we’ve heard clearly all night long despite the Premier’s words about sending the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing down to talk to the bad landlords – in fact, they don’t really want to deal with gouging. They’re going to permit it to take place as a policy. That’s the policy of this government: gouging is okay from landlords. It’s similar to the position of the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, who believes that government’s role is primarily to prevent pillaging and looting but that gouging is okay.

Mr. Martin: Plundering.

Mr. Mason: Plundering, not pillaging. I apologize to the hon. member.

So that’s also the position of the government in a nutshell, isn’t it? It is. Their position in a nutshell is simply to say: you know, gouging is all right; plundering, maybe not. That’s not good enough. That doesn’t meet the needs of people in this province. It’s not just

a handful of people. There may be a handful of really extreme cases, and there are lots of people that are seriously disadvantaged and vulnerable that are put in this position. But let’s not also forget that there are hundreds of thousands of renters. There are middle-class working families, there are seniors, and there are students.

I haven’t heard one thing yet in this whole debate – well, I have heard it in the debate but not from the government – about what they’re going to do when the students arrive in September. They’re already facing rent increases, and when they arrive at postsecondary institutions this September looking for a place to live so that they can go to school, there’s going to be a profound crisis that the government hasn’t even talked about yet. I want to just indicate to them that that’s something they should starting thinking about right now because if they don’t, they’re going to have an even bigger mess on their hands. People are going to be forced to interrupt their education because of the lack of foresight on the part of the government.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate with respect to this particular amendment that I appreciate its intent. I think it would be a step forward with respect to what the government has proposed. But because of the one year, I don’t think we can support it because I think that when the year is up, the new housing won’t be built. As a result, it’s not going to fit the bill as far as we’re concerned, but we appreciate the amendment, and we appreciate the spirit in which it is given. Clearly, some attempt to improve on this government’s dismal approach to the rental crisis has to be applauded by all Albertans.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:29 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Pastoor
Blakeman	Miller, B.	Swann
Chase	Miller, R.	Tougas

7:40

Against the motion:

Ady	Evans	Martin
Brown	Groeneveld	Mason
Cao	Hancock	Melchin
Cardinal	Hinman	Mitzel
Cenaiko	Jablonski	Prins
Coutts	Johnston	Snelgrove
DeLong	Liepert	Stevens
Doerksen	Lindsay	Webber
Eggen	Lougheed	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 27
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[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Are there any other comments, questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I, too, have an amendment, that is at the table. If we could get it distributed.

The Chair: We will call this amendment A4. Does everyone have their copy?

Okay. You may proceed, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will recognize the pages that have been with us for most of the night and the security people that have spelled us off, who have been pressed into duty delivering all of the various amendments we've dealt with over this night.

The amendment that I am proposing here is essentially the same thing in two different sections. What I'm looking to do is raise the fines portion in both sections: in 1(5)(b), increasing it from \$5,000 to \$10,000. That is the section that's dealing with condo conversions. The second is section 2(5)(a), which is essentially the section around the mobile homes, where their land would be sold for development, so a very similar situation.

This section of the Residential Tenancies Act is to deal with notice, particularly for the condominium conversions. Its intention is to provide a mechanism that is punitive in nature. It's meant to be a warning. It's meant to be a punishment for not conforming with the legislation, that requires a one-year notification period when you take a rental unit and convert it to a condominium or if you undertake a major renovation. People are being evicted from a rental accommodation to make way for either a major renovation but in most cases for a condo conversion. It just struck me when I looked at this in the bill that \$5,000 was really not a very high amount of money, especially when we're dealing with the number of condo conversions that we're experiencing, I would argue, in most of the urban areas these days but also the amounts of money that are involved. I dug up a couple of figures. According to the Calgary Real Estate Board in August of '06 a condo was selling in Calgary for the average price of about \$275,500. In March of 2007, so not even a year later, the average price, again in Calgary, was \$301,777, so a significant increase in even less than a year. I think that if we went back and looked now, there would probably be another difference, even in the five or six weeks that have passed. So this figure is clearly going to increase.

It just struck me that what we were dealing with here for a number of landlords is essentially the cost of doing business. Five thousand dollars tacked onto a condo conversion unit, you know, doesn't seem like too much, and frankly it's probably going to get passed along to the purchaser. It would just get rolled into the price, so it really wasn't much of a deterrent or a punishment for someone who was not taking those notification periods seriously. I thought: well, if we're going to make it more than just the cost of doing business, which I think the \$5,000 amount is, let's make it serious. Let's try and make it more punitive. I find that if you go too far, if you made it \$20,000 a unit or \$100,000 a unit, you have real problems with the courts, with the test for the courts to impose that high a punishment. The courts are very particular, and you find out that the test is too high to be met, and you end up with the punishments not being levied by the courts. I wanted to make sure that this was effective, so I thought that by doubling it, from \$5,000 to \$10,000, you'd nail it. You would actually make it more of a deterrent and less of a cost of doing business, so that's why I've brought forward the amendment that I have.

I think, you know, that if you looked at a number of the apartment buildings that I've got, for example – they are 10 floors, with 10 units on a floor – you're dealing with 100 units there. If you start talking \$10,000 a unit, now you're talking a million dollars if you decide to, you know, stiff people on that notification period. I think that's far more significant, then, and that would eat enough into a profit margin that it would make it worth their while to comply, and that's what I was seeking.

So a pretty straightforward amendment. I hope I can get the support of the government to accept that and to put it in. I think it's fair but firm, and I look forward to support from the Assembly in passing amendment A4.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can agree with the hon. member. I think the fact is that some of the condo values far exceed what the \$5,000 penalty might be, and I think that to truly send a message that is fair but firm, I could support this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I, too, would like to rise and speak to this amendment. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has been studious in her review of this. I would agree with the \$5,000 that they could recoup almost immediately.

I guess the one thing that I would like to see, though – too often the victim never gets compensation. I don't know if the courts would allow it, but there should almost be that \$10,000 compensation to the victim of the removal. So often it just seems to go into general funds.

Anyway, I too am in favour of this. I would like to see it a little bit higher, but I would trust her judgment. Perhaps the courts wouldn't tolerate that, but it definitely would send a better signal, and I'm pleased to support this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's good to rise on this Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, amendment. I also stand in support of this amendment. Clearly, we want to send a message to those that would subvert a system that's creating vulnerabilities and stresses and breakdown for people and give them an opportunity to hold accountable those that would try to not only undermine the good laws of the province but also do so in a way that would harm the individuals. So I stand in support of this amendment.

7:50

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased that this amendment has been brought forward. I think the fact that the government after all these long hours of debate has finally seen a glimmer of light is something that encourages me. You know, perhaps the sun shining through the windows up there has served to enlighten. I want to indicate that I appreciate the fact that the motion has been made and that the government has indicated that they're going to support it. I also indicate that we, also, will support this amendment.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A4?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A4 carried]

The Chair: Are there other amendments, comments, or questions pertaining to this? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I know that at the table there is a final amendment from the Liberals under the name of my colleague from Edmonton-McClung. I would like to move that amendment on his behalf at this time and have it distributed, please.

The Chair: We will refer to this amendment as amendment A5. We're just going to wait a moment for the pages to distribute the amendment.

It appears that everyone has a copy. You may proceed, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung feels very strongly about this, and I know that he'll be eager to speak to it. Essentially, the reason behind this amendment is to amend section 1(4) by striking out clause (a) and substituting the following: that in subsection (4) we strike out "since the last increase in rent" and substitute "which shall not be less than 1 year." The point is that this actually embeds what we understand to be the objective into the bill itself. What we've heard is that the government's intention is to have that notice period be one year, but that's actually not stated in the bill. It appears as a regulation, which allows the minister that's designated as responsible for the act under the Government Organization Act to in fact implement that regulation. But it actually does not appear in the bill, which struck us as a bit odd because that's what the point of this bill was: to get that one-year notification period enshrined. In fact, it doesn't actually appear in the bill.

So we thought we would bring it forward and see if we could actually get it written into the bill. This is part of my ongoing point about the difference between writing it in the bill and putting everything into regulation. As I often kid my fellow House leader, this is sort of the Gary Dickson memorial clause because he often raised the point that policy changes should be in legislation and that if they're not in legislation, the regulation should be brought to the floor to be debated by the Legislative Assembly.

That's the situation we have here. This is a policy change from the government. The government says that it wants to see a change in the period of the notification. It is responding to the pressures that we're all experiencing. We have supported the government in that all the way along, but this government does have a propensity to write what I call shell legislation, which essentially creates a situation where everything is about: and the minister can make regulations about. Then there's a long list of what they can make regulations about. That's the situation we have here. We don't actually have the purpose of this bill and the reason that we all got into this and, frankly, the reason we've all spent so much time together in the last 12 hours talking about this bill. It, in fact, does not appear in the legislation.

I think that particularly because we've spent so much time talking about the purpose of the legislation, we feel that it's appropriate to actually write it in. It would then require that the legislation come back before the Assembly if the government were to decide to change that period of time or to renew it in any way, shape, or form. I can understand that the government won't agree to do that because they like the flexibility that they get to be able to change things through an order in council. They can do it at their own time. They can do it without further debate and without a lot of discussion and colour commentary from members of the opposition. But I would think that given the point of this bill it would be helpful to find it in there.

The Speaker has often heard me talk about how difficult it is for members of the public to be able to track what we're doing when it's

not written in the bill, and we are really quite good about getting our legislation really accessible on the website at www.assembly.ab.ca. It's easy to hit that button for bills and motions, print it off, read it online but much, much more difficult to find the regulations. You've got to really know what you're doing. You've got to be regularly checking the *Gazette* or tracking the orders in council as they come out to be able to follow what the government is doing. So it's not easy to find it. It's not easy to watch the timing. It's a lot of effort from the individuals. I think that with this affecting so many people – basically, it affects everybody that rents – it needs to be much more accessible, and I find that accessibility is through the legislation, not through regulations.

I note that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung is ready to speak to this, and I will certainly cede the floor to him. It's his motion, and I know he has some pretty strong feelings about it, but I'm delighted to have had the opportunity to introduce it on his behalf and to urge everyone to please support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, the background noise is getting such that it's very difficult to hear the person that has the floor. I recognize that there's a shift change going on, but if we could keep the background noise down, I would appreciate it.

8:00

Mr. Snelgrove: I feel myself strangely overwhelmed because, in fact, what you're intending to do is what we would've intended to do in regulations, which is standard with other provinces. So, Mr. Chairman, the only downside might be that you would have to go back to the act to change if you were to go shorter. My expectation is that a year is a reasonable amount. I would just say this: I could also accept this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is indeed a very fruitful and happy day for myself and members from my caucus. It is not frequently that we introduce motions in this House and the government generously or graciously agrees. I'm indeed thrilled and excited to hear this from the hon. minister, and hopefully, you know, this will be the start of great things to come in this House. [interjection] Yes. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark is talking that this might signal a beautiful friendship that will emerge in this House between members from this side of the House and members from that side of the House.

I want to thank, first of all, Mr. Chairman, my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre for her assistance, for introducing this amendment A5, and I'm really pleased that the hon. Minister of Service Alberta has agreed to accept it and has signalled his members on this side of the House that they would as well. I thank you for this opportunity. This way we can guarantee at least some degree of, you know, protection for those tenants that we're all trying to protect, Mr. Chairman, and I thank you for that.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. All this love is getting to be too much for me. I want the mean old Treasurer back. Just too much love there.

I'm not going to get carried away that this changes the bill in any dramatic way, but at least it's clear. We will certainly support it, but the bill is still not what we want, Mr. Chairman. In fact, one year,

I said in the past, could make it worse in the short run because people could get the big increase for one year instead of over a period of time. But at least it's clear in the act, and we certainly will support it for that reason.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A5 carried]

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. You know, when the government starts accepting amendments, it sort of confuses our map. We feel like migratory birds that are going east instead of south.

Perhaps just to restore a note of normalcy to these proceedings, I have another amendment, Mr. Chairman, and I'll ask a page to distribute this.

The Chair: We'll wait a moment to have the amendment distributed to the members.

All the members have copies, so you may proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would move that Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 2(4) by adding the following after the proposed subsection (7):

(8) A landlord shall not increase the rent payable under a residential tenancy agreement by an amount greater than the percentage increase in the Alberta Consumer Price Index published by Statistics Canada for the previous calendar year plus 2%.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate that this has similar wording to a previous amendment that we moved today, today in the legislative sense.

The Chair: It's amending a different section.

Mr. Mason: But it amends a different section.

I just want to indicate to members that we believe that this comes to the basic question that we've been debating all night long, which is that there is no protection for tenants from massive rent increases. There is protection in Bill 34 in terms of giving them some notice. We consider that to be completely inadequate to deal with the present rental crisis, and we are proposing here that guidelines be established similar to the guidelines that were proposed by the Affordable Housing Task Force and something that the NDP opposition has been pushing for nearly a year, and that is that there is a limit on the percentage of increase, guidelines for landlords that allow them an increase of the Alberta consumer price index plus 2 per cent, which we believe is reasonable and which we believe that most tenants can manage.

It's quite unlike the massive rent increases that have been coming forward to MLAs in the last several months of \$500, \$750, or \$1,000 or in some cases even more. We'll be talking later today in question period about a massive rent increase that was received by one of the constituents of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. These kinds of things seem to be creating a considerable problem.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate that what the government has done has not addressed the rental crisis in the short run. They are taking steps to increase the supply of rental units, and that is a good thing. It may not be enough, but at least it's a step in the right direction. What they have not done is provide rent stability for tenants in the period of time that it will take for the new construction to take place, which the government itself has estimated at a minimum of two years.

8:10

What the government has proposed to do, which is require a year's notice of a rent increase and limit it to one per year, will not adequately address this issue. It will simply give individuals who receive a very large rent increase a year to find a new place to live. But the question once again, Mr. Chairman, is: where will they go? As rents are being driven up in lower rent areas in parts of Edmonton and other centres, including Calgary, those people are being forced out of their accommodation, but there's no new accommodation being built. The government says that if we do this, it will prevent new rental accommodation from being built, but the fact remains that there is no rental accommodation that is currently being built in Alberta or none to speak of. Also, what we're proposing will not affect new rental units, so it is not a disincentive to the construction of new rental units.

It's very important, as far as we're concerned in the NDP opposition, that in fact some real protection for tenants be provided. We think this is a temporary measure. It only applies to new housing, and it's a responsible approach to a very serious problem for hundreds of thousands of Alberta families. It's not just a handful of people. It's middle-class and working families with children that live in rental accommodation in this province. It's seniors. It's students. It's a whole range of Albertans, a whole cross-section, a very, very large number of people.

As I've said earlier in the debate, which has gone on for many hours now, Mr. Chairman, the rental companies themselves in their annual reports to their shareholders are predicting a further tightening of the rental market in Edmonton and other centres in Alberta, which means that rents are going to continue to rise, yet the government continues to put its head in the sand and reject proposals that would protect those hundreds of thousands of Albertans who live in rental accommodation.

Mr. Chairman, there's absolutely no reason, in our view, for the government to reject this amendment. This amendment would provide modest protection for tenants on an interim basis. We are prepared to negotiate with the government or to accept any kind of time limit that they suggest. We think two years is a minimum that this should be in place because that's the time that they've given us for the construction of new housing that may affect the rental market. So a minimum of two years would be our preference, but we're prepared to be flexible. The important thing is that there have to be some guidelines to protect tenants in this province. If there are no guidelines, then the gouging is going to continue.

It's unfortunate, Mr. Chairman, that the Premier has talked about gouging as being un-Albertan, but he hasn't backed up his words with action. This gives the government a chance to back up the Premier's words with action. If rent gouging is un-Albertan, then it's the responsibility of the government to step in and provide legal means to stop it. Simply sending the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to have a little chat with a landlord is not a serious approach worthy of a serious government, and it's not a policy that's going to work or is going to be taken seriously by landlords or by tenants. It's not an approach, I think, that really shows that the government is serious about helping renters. If they are serious about helping renters, they'll pass this amendment. They'll set some reasonable time limits. This has always been intended to be temporary protection for tenants, and it's always been intended only to apply to existing units and not to new construction, so it should not in any way interfere with the construction of new units, which, as I've indicated, is not actually occurring right now in Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, I really want to appeal to the government that this is a chance to take some real action that's going to affect and protect hundreds of thousands of Albertans, families right from one end of

the province to the other. Please, I would ask the minister to accept this amendment. This is an opportunity for all of us to do the right thing: to provide protection for tenants and at the same time ensure that new units come on and ensure that landlords get a fair and reasonable return on their investment but prevent them from taking advantage of an extremely tight rental market.

So, Mr. Chairman, those are my comments with respect to this amendment, and I would certainly hope that the government will accept this amendment. Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: I guess that this would be official notification: the group hug has been cancelled, just so you know. Mr. Chairman, for all those that, unfortunately, weren't able to listen to the 12 hours of debate about this, the by-product of this simply means people are evicted. They don't negotiate a rent; they're evicted so the landlord can bring in a new tenant at whatever rate she wants. So instead of helping – and I truly believe that they think they're going to, and good on them – the simple fact is that this would simply put people in the streets. It's better to be under some financial stress than under a dumpster.

So, Mr. Chairman, I couldn't accept this.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Chair. I find that unfortunate although not unexpected.

Certainly, this is a similar set of numbers that we've been putting forward here over the last few hours or so, but you know we didn't just pull these numbers out of the air. It is, in fact, the reasoned and reasonable deliberation of the affordable housing commission that came up with this number of CPI plus 2 per cent. So considering how the CPI portion of this is a flexible number, because it is a reflection of the inflation rate within the province of Alberta, of which we are seeing quite unprecedented high inflation rates coming in for this fiscal year, you've got that covered off already. That inflation rate, in fact, is a reflection of the increased costs that a landlord might incur as a result of the usual running of a building plus meeting probably a good portion of the inflationary costs associated with maintenance and increased labour and what have you. That number goes up and down with the cost of doing business in Alberta, so to speak.

Remember that we're talking about a temporary measure here. It's not as though we're putting something in stone that will be shackled about us forever, but rather it's a stabilizing number due to extraordinary circumstances of unprecedented increases in rental agreements that we've seen here this year, probably, I would say, unprecedented in modern times in this province.

So for the sake of providing stability for the hundreds of thousands of renters that live in the province of Alberta – many of these people have just come within the last few years to the province, so we're extending a welcome that we do in fact want them stay – let's not forget other factors of unprecedented growth which have caused us trouble, not the least of which is a labour shortage. So, certainly, we have to stabilize the labour population that's just come in to live in these rental accommodations and make sure they can stay and feel welcome to be staying as well. It's a way to do that.

It's also a way by which we can provide relief and some sense of stability for families, working families that are undergoing a lot of rental increase stress at this point. It provides stability for seniors, who are a very high proportion of our rental population. Remember that we're not just talking about people who are renting an apartment or walk-up or what have you but also people who are entering into

the full stream of care, seniors' facilities that are popping up all over the province, Mr. Chair, and, in fact, are providing an important service. People are choosing to go from owning a home for a good portion of their lives back into the rental game at the later stage of their life, and we don't want to unduly destabilize those retirement plans for seniors across the province. This is just a way to extend a measure of security, a measure of regulation, and, above all, a measure of assistance to these people.

8:20

You know, it doesn't cost the government. So often when we debate, we run into a problem with the willingness to pay for a certain program or what have you, but this is a classic case of using the Legislature as it should be used, which is as a regulatory body that simply goes in and puts a bottom line onto something so that a certain sector of the economy or the population can function better. We're not taking public money and shovelling it out the door. We are just putting a stabilizing regulation into place, which is perfectly reasonable. In fact, that's what we get elected to do here. That's why they built this building in the first place, and that's why they sent the 83 of us to sit in these chairs: to provide regulation. It's not such a big deal. It's a good thing to do.

This whole concept that I've heard at various times during the evening about: oh well, you're taking money out of the hands of landlords. That's absolutely, patently ridiculous. What we are doing is flowing the rental monies through the system in a more judicious way and in a more reasonable way, and as time goes on, of course, that money will just keep on moving.

It's a question of whether you want to get a fast rate of return off something and perhaps burn out the whole system – it's like driving your car at maximum speed for short period of time: you have a great time, but then it's a goner – or if you are looking for the long gain, the long investment, where you have a stabilized population, you have a stabilized set of renters in a given building, and you are providing a good, reasonable rate of return for your investment over a longer period of time.

I can't help but think of this as a larger analogy which, in my mind, is a problem, by which we are not managing the economy properly. It's the same kind of deal. Let's try to get as much as we possibly can in the shortest period of time, and damn the torpedoes, so to speak. Or are we going to perhaps set up a structure by which we can enjoy the fruits of the economy over a longer period of time and, in fact, have a more equitable distribution of the wealth and the profit that is subsequent to that?

Somehow I think we have a parallel thing going on here, Mr. Chair, where the rental economy in this province is red hot, and people are suffering as a result. It's a reflection of a red-hot economy in general in which not everyone is getting the fair shake that they deserve.

Those two things, looking at them together, at the very least we've put in really three – I wish there were more – sets of amendments that carry these very reasonable figures of the Alberta consumer price index, which otherwise is inflation – there's your up and down – plus 2 per cent. Let's not forget that certainly we would have a provision for a landlord to make an appeal under extenuating circumstances to exceed that. That's not a big deal. That's a normal part of having temporary rent regulations in place.

Mr. Chair, it's been a wonderful experience running this through. We're not finished yet by any means. Bill 34 and all of its potential, I guess, we still have a chance to salvage. We've seen a couple of amendments accepted. I think that this one is just the ripe one, the cherry on the cake, the *pièce de résistance*, the apex of the evening and the following morning here.

Mr. Elsalhy: It's the highlight.

Mr. Eggen: A highlight, as well.

Certainly, it's not just me and the members of this Legislature that would walk away happy, but hundreds of thousands of Albertans will get some degree of justice as a result of this amendment going through in concert with the rest of Bill 34 to provide a measure of stability to the rental market in Alberta.

Thanks.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to be able to rather lately join the discussion with respect to Bill 34. Mr. Chairman, I have to encourage my colleagues and all members of the House to not vote in favour of this amendment. We've been accused from across the way that this government has its head stuck in the sand. I would suggest that on this particular issue there may be some individuals in this Assembly that could have their heads stuck someplace else.

Mr. Chairman, indications that there are hundreds of thousands – hundreds of thousands – of Albertans that are suffering at the hands of unscrupulous landlords: I can't understand how that can be. I represent a city that's one of – and there are number in the province of Alberta – the fastest growing communities in Canada. With respect to rent control I have had one communication to my constituency office – one; one communication to my constituency office with respect to rent control – and I would submit that we have dealt with the issue. That particular gentleman happens to be a supporter of the opposition, which is fine; we understand that. But one communication. The other e-mails that come, the bulk e-mails, all come from the city of Edmonton and some from the city of Calgary.

And another thing, the suggestion that there is no rental accommodation being built in the province of Alberta: Mr. Chairman, that is just not true. There's rental accommodation being built as we speak in a number of places in the northwest and, most certainly, in Grande Prairie.

To suggest that this government is doing nothing to help Albertans that have a situation where rent is outstripping their ability to pay: again, we've had a number of programs that I'm sure over the course of the last number of hours here have been discussed at length. But I might add, again, that this government has a rent supplement program in place, delivered through Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing. Mr. Chairman, it will provide assistance to households in need, households that require affordable housing. They can access this assistance in eligible rental projects: \$24.3 million assisting 4,600. These are real numbers. These aren't pie in the sky: hundreds of thousands of Albertans. These are real numbers. These are real people that this government is assisting, 4,600 households.

An additional rent supplement funding \$9 million provided from local management bodies directly to tenants. The accusation that this government does nothing for tenants and everything for landlords: again, Mr. Chairman, patently not correct. Nine million dollars directly to local management bodies to tenants.

Homelessness and eviction prevention. For whatever reason, the hon. members across the way feel that this is not a program that helps Albertans. I really can't understand that. The criteria that are listed: eligibility criteria to receive emergency housing assistance. They talk about the hundreds of thousands of people with an emergency; there's an emergency housing assistance program. These are the eligibility criteria, Mr. Chairman: a person facing eviction or having significant rental arrears, an Albertan requiring

assistance to establish a residence, or a person that has limited resources.

Mr. Chairman, there are more programs that we can stand here and discuss ad nauseam. This particular amendment does nothing to resolve this issue. We're working to resolve this issue. I'm encouraging my colleagues to not support this amendment.

Thank you.

8:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise to speak on this particular piece, the amendment. I was listening with great anticipation as the Minister of Energy was speaking and was not in support but was in opposition towards this particular amendment. We as an opposition were up into Grande Prairie and the greater area, and I heard from more than one person, so perhaps he has to put his ears a little bit closer to the ground. He did point out that it was a person who supported the opposition. It really doesn't matter. That's being partisan. It doesn't matter. I was elected to represent all of my constituents, and I would hope that the member does as well.

This is not partisan. This affects everybody. It affects the rich. It affects the poor. It affects people who don't vote and people who do vote. That's not the point of it. The point is that everyone needs to have representation, and I made sure that when I took the oath, I would do that.

I do support this. I said yesterday, when I was speaking with regard to the original bill with no amendments on it, that I'm not really in favour of rental caps, rental regulations, but in this particular case it's an extenuating circumstance of the economy. People need guaranteed protection. This particular amendment is putting in a sunset clause, exactly what I was speaking about last night. It has a definitive term as to when it's going to shut down, and things will continue.

Last night I said that two years go by rather quickly. We've been here, it seems like, more than two years, those that have been on the night shift. But like I said, it does go by rather quickly. Then people can find new accommodations. They can move. They've got two years to be able to get their lives in order to be able to make up their minds or go back to the quiet town that they came from down east, Ontario; it doesn't matter. They've got two years to figure it out. They know that they're in it, and they know that the regulations will come off and that it's open market once again.

I know, like I said yesterday, that there are good landlords, and there are those that are taking full advantage of the opportunity right now. They said: "You know what? We've had an awful long time that we haven't had the ability to raise the rents and bring it up to accordance with everywhere else." But, quite frankly, I think that in some cases they're taking more than advantage of it. What they're trying to do is to let the market bear the brunt.

More people are coming in because of the economy. They know that they're going to have the ability to pay because, perhaps, more than 50 per cent of the people are within the oil and gas industry, and they may have that flexibility. Some get offset through their employers – they have the ability to have top-up with accommodations – but a lot don't. We're talking about those that are on fixed, those that are on AISH, those that are on welfare, families, single income, single parents. Those are the ones that don't have the ability to make this choice. If they had the choice, they'd have probably bought years ago.

I do support this particular piece with the consumer price index as well as the 2 per cent in the amendment here. I think it's fair. I

think it's reasonable. It's not a perfect solution, but in the meantime it does provide that protection, something that the original bill does absolutely nothing for. One year with no increase. Well, again, when they do get that increase, it could be 100, 110 per cent. So they can completely double. This at least provides some modest protection for the renters.

As I said, I do see no reason why this couldn't go. We've already accepted one. This would be at least a palatable one for all. I mean, go back to the associations, those that are lobbying on the government side. Tell them. Say: "You know what? It's not a perfect thing, but give us two years. Give it the sunset clause." After the two years, as we discussed yesterday, it'll go down. We'll shut it down after that. That's a different story. But in the meantime give us the two years.

We've never had this type of economy. Even back in the '80s I don't think things were this hot, when we were doing it at 18 and 22 per cent mortgage rates and people were losing their houses. The economy was doing very well, but all of a sudden it just dropped right out. Right now this is different than that point right there. The point is that we've got an influx: too many people, not enough accommodations. We're hoping to build the accommodations, as we said yesterday, for 10,000 people with the \$285 million, but that won't come anywhere close to providing the upper limit to what you're trying to find here. We continue to get more and more migration in from other provinces, so that need could easily increase to 20,000 or 30,000. I don't know. But if we're going to start with a modest number, say the 10,000, we're not going to meet it. We're not going to meet it whatsoever.

As I mentioned yesterday, even the cost of high schools or bridge construction, something that we all know about, has gone up considerably, and we're not able to in fact recognize how much because the government has put in a bump for it. They said: "You know what? We recognize that things are expensive, so we're going to add a little bit of inflationary cost with regard to tenders." So we have that flexibility. Municipalities have that flexibility to anticipate the out-of-reasonable costs, the unforeseen costs.

Look at the cost of concrete, how much it has gone up. I mean, everything is requiring concrete, so we're going to add an extra 25 per cent. If I was a contractor and I knew that I had ability to cushion my bid by an extra 25 per cent, you know I'd go for that. Why not? It's easy money. The government has pretty much said: I've got the money here.

An Hon. Member: That's un-Albertan.

Mr. Bonko: You know what? There are a lot of un-Albertan people, Tony. [interjections] Sorry about that. There could be a lot of Tonys here today.

Mr. Boutilier: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Chairman, I retract the particular piece. I recognize that I shouldn't single out people like the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Like I said, like the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar said, we have a lot of guys out there that may not be on the up and up. There are a lot of guys out there that may not be as true to form. There are people that are going to take advantage of it. That's just human nature. Absolutely. You know, I call it the Robinson Crusoe theory. It's every man for himself sometimes because they all want to get ahead. They all want to be able to make their money and then get out. Everyone is looking for that magic opportunity to be able to sit on a beach or buy their condo in Cancun or something, and right

now is the opportunity to do it. But it shouldn't be on the backs of renters. That's the unfortunate way and the unscrupulous way.

Mr. Chairman, those are some of the comments, but I do look forward to hearing more and taking part further with the debate, and I'm sure the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo does as well.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to speak on the amendment to Bill 34 proposed by the leader of the third party. I think it is rent control dressed up in another way. The bottom line that we look at is that in Alberta today we have a booming market. Our economy is red hot, and there are more and more people coming to the province.

This is a very easy target for the opposition to focus on. They can always say that it is the fault of the government, and somehow the government has to take more action on this thing. There is no doubt that more action is being taken to deal with the shortage of housing. It is a demand and supply issue. Like a big man trying to cover himself with a small blanket, if you dump more money into it trying to have a short-term fix, all we do is squeeze somebody out of the current housing market. If we help somebody on this side, then somebody on the other side will be in that position. The best way to solve this issue is to increase the supply of housing in Alberta. However, we have another problem compounded on top of that. We are near full employment these days in Alberta.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

For us to be able to attract more workers to build more housing units is not a simple solution even though, as you know, we have pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into addressing this. There are short-term and there are long-term solutions to this issue, but rent control is not the answer because all rent control will do is send a very chilling signal out there to potential investors who can build more housing units in Alberta, and that will only make the problem worse. Today the vacancy rate in Calgary and Edmonton is around 1 per cent. That's almost zero per cent. That is why the rent has increased substantially. If you have people out there who need these units and you try to control the market by stopping people from raising the rent, you don't solve it. The shortage of housing is still there.

8:40

For the short-term solution I think that we have to look at two ways. One is to increase the number of living spaces quickly by allowing investors, manufacturing companies, and renters to bring in additional mobile homes. That will help increase the number of housing units available on the market. Secondly, we look at the regulations to deal with the secondary suites, basement suites, to allow people to rent out their basements so that we can instantly increase the number of housing units available on the market.

In the long run we have to work with the private sector and the municipal governments to bring in more incentives so that people can build more housing units. We have to address the shortage of labour because today in Calgary in a poor neighbourhood an average housing price for a new home is as high as \$500,000 or \$600,000. It is certainly not affordable. We have to somehow bring the cost of building down by allowing more labour to come into the market, and that is one of the reasons why the opposition is in a very interesting position. On one hand they attack any incentive from the govern-

ment to bring in additional workers through the temporary foreign workers program, for example, and on the other hand they are blaming us for not coming up with solutions to address affordable housing and the shortage of housing situation.

In the long run the only way we can deal with this thing is to bring in more workers, more new sources of workers, to help build more housing units. If we can address the supply and demand question, if we can bring up the supply to the point where it can meet the demand of the people of Alberta, then we can get the rental and the housing prices to a reasonable level. To do grandstanding and to parade one victim a day doesn't do anything to address the real issues that we are facing today, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Nice to see a change of shift there, a smiling chairman in charge.

I rise to speak in support of the amendment before the House introduced by the leader of the NDP opposition just a moment ago, which calls for putting some restraint on rent increases for residential rental property temporarily over the next two years. The rate of increase that is suggested here would seem to be most reasonable, and in fact the rate that's suggested here, the CPI plus 2 per cent, is flexible in that from year to year CPI could change. Any change in the CPI would certainly lead to increase in the permissible rate of increase in the rents that the landlords can charge their tenants.

What I want to emphasize is the following. I just heard the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, I think, arguing that this amendment will stop the landlords from increasing rents. Quite the contrary, Mr. Chairman. This amendment is not about stopping rent increases. It is about moderating rent increases, and that's something that needs to be borne in mind. Not only will it moderate rent increases; it will moderate these rent increases only for a certain period of time. This amendment is not about putting this change in stone so that it can stay there forever. It's only two years that we are calling for.

So, Mr. Chairman, I think that this is a most reasonable way of dealing with a very difficult problem. It's an amendment which is very fair towards tenants, and it's equally fair towards landlords. What we need is a certain moderation in the rate of rent increases in the province. We need to bring some sanity to the residential rental market, and this amendment will go some way in providing that moderation.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, the Affordable Housing Task Force listened to hundreds and hundreds of Albertans, visited dozens of communities, listened to individuals affected by exorbitant rent increases, listened to volunteer organizations that are trying to help those who are either already on the street or face the threat of being on the street very soon. So there is a strong voice there in our provincial community that is expressed in the recommendation made by this task force, which represented all sides of this House. The recommendation related to rent increases is precisely the one that this amendment proposes now, and I hope that the House will approve this. That is the voice of our provincial community leaders. That is the voice expressed, I think, genuinely by the Affordable Housing Task Force. That's one side.

There is the other voice, and we recognize this, and that's the voice of landlords, who want no controls, no capping, no moderation in the rate at which they can increase the rents for their tenants. We all know the problems that this creates for families, for people who

already are in Alberta, people who are coming to Alberta, people who we want to come to Alberta in light of the fact that we face a very serious labour shortage. We hear this around this House all the time.

I want to share with you, Mr. Chairman, an anecdote. My wife had befriended a lady from the Philippines, who came here four years ago as a nanny and served in that capacity for three years while she went to school to upgrade her nursing qualifications. For about eight or nine months, since she got her landed immigrant status and fulfilled the requirements that are associated with coming here as a nanny, she is now working as a nurse in a seniors' residential complex. She came to visit us just two or three days ago. She's leaving for the Philippines to fetch her family, that's she been away from for four years. I happened to be home when she came in and wished her a good journey back home to bring her family back. I asked her: "What about housing? We've been hearing a great deal about this." She said, "Look, after four years of work I've been able to afford to have now a one-bedroom apartment for myself." She pays about \$670 or \$680 for it. I said, "What's your family size?" She said, "I've got two kids and a husband to bring." I said, "Are you going to be able to have reasonable accommodation for four of you?" She said, "Absolutely not." That one-bedroom apartment is all that she can afford, and she's worried that the rent even on that one-bedroom, modest, and inadequate accommodation for the whole family will be increased while she's away. She worrying how she's going to take care of the family when she comes back and where she's going to find the money to pay for it.

Now, that's one instance which illustrates the problem of people who are already here, who have worked very hard to improve their lives, who contribute to the communities here by way of the services that they are providing, services that we so badly need, services which have to be provided only by people that we invite to come in from outside. So that's only one small example of a much larger problem that you're dealing with.

8:50

Now, if the House in its wisdom does in fact consider this amendment seriously and decides, given its flexible character, given that this amendment is in fact a very flexible formula, that it responds to the fluctuations in the CPI rate increase plus adds another 2 per cent to make sure the landlords are compensated in a reasonable fashion while, at the same time, there's a predictability to the rate of increase in rents the tenants will face over the next two years while the problem in the market in housing remains so volatile — once we have gone over this very volatile period with these measures, that will moderate rate increases and compensate fairly the landlords, on one hand, and provide fair protection for tenants, on the other, I think we will be in a good position to lift these regulations and allow the market then to operate as it should. Hopefully, there will be a healthy equilibrium between demand and supply so that the rate increases won't be running out of control.

So, Mr. Chairman, I said that there is that clear voice that Albertans as a community have expressed through the recommendation made by the Affordable Housing Task Force. The other voice is the voice of landlords. They have obviously lobbied. My constituency office has received lots of e-mails, bulk e-mails from landlords urging us not to bring in rent controls because the sky is going to fall if you bring in some sort of moderating legislation with respect to rents. That, to me, makes no sense at all. I think that's fearmongering. That's trying to create panic among the public in general that if any attempt is made by this Legislature to bring in some modification to existing legislation to moderate rent increases, that's going to simply discourage completely and push the investors

out of this province. I think that's nonsense, Mr. Chairman. It simply is not going to happen.

So if I'm being lobbied with such intensity, I'm sure that the government side of the House has been lobbied as well and lobbied, it seems at this moment, rather successfully and effectively. When I heard the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Service Alberta over the last 12 hours and over the last two weeks as we've been going back and forth in this House during the question period and debate on this matter, he seems to have been totally swayed by the arguments made by lobbyists on behalf of landlords.

It's too bad that we don't have the lobbyist legislation in place already so that Albertans would know to what extent lobbyists on behalf of landlords, in fact, have been lobbying. That information, hopefully, would be on record if that bill was passed. That bill is on the Order Paper, but it's not passed. It's nowhere near passing yet. So we do not know how many, what associations, what lobbyists on behalf of landlords have been lobbying the government side and how and why they've been so successful in persuading the government that it shouldn't take any action and that any action that it does take be in the form of deregulating any controls on rents.

So, Mr. Chairman, I submit to you and to the House, respectfully, that it should give very serious consideration to the most reasonable amendment that's before it and vote in favour of it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Before I recognize the next speaker, I just want to point out that it's not accepted practice in this Assembly for members to occupy the space between the table and the bar. I mentioned this the other day, and hopefully I don't have to mention it again.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It will not come as a surprise that I'm going to support the amendment. I'd like to go back and talk about what this debate is all about. We had a task force that was set up to go out and listen to Albertans. That was the purpose of it. We all did that, including the hon. member there, and we were told to listen and come back with recommendations.

One of the things that we heard the most – I think it was the second most brought up item, and I think the member would agree with me on that – was that there needed to be some sort of rent stability because people were hurting. It was a crisis. I said at the time and I believe it to be true that many people on that committee didn't start off thinking that you needed rent guidelines, but after they listened to the people of Alberta, Mr. Chairman, they felt that they had to bring through this recommendation. There seemed to be no other alternative because it was clear that there was a crisis going on out there. That was so clear to us, so clear.

You know, there are some good things that have come forward, but the \$285 million I don't think is going to cut it. All we were saying here is: give a temporary time for rents for people to have some stability in their lives. We've talked in this Chamber many times about the vulnerable, but there are more and more people that are falling in and having difficulty paying their rents, with rising rents.

Now, I think part of the problem, Mr. Chairman, has to do with what the task force called for: adopt a consistent definition of affordable housing for policy and program development. We've had this discussion many times. People say: "Well, what's affordable housing? What is need? What is gouging? What's all the rest of it?" But, you know, then the government says that they accept that a consistent definition of affordable housing is required but does not accept the task force's definition. Well, it's not the task force definition. This is a common definition across Canada and, as far as

I know, in the United States, where they say that no more than 30 per cent of your income should be taken up by accommodation.

I believe the government's problem is that they know that with rising rents and people not being able to afford that, that's becoming thousands more people out there, and that's why they don't want to accept that particular guideline. Well, if you think it should be, as I said before, 40 per cent or 50 per cent, say it, but at least let's have a definition. We can't begin to deal with this problem. I would suggest here that the real definition is 30 per cent on this, Mr. Chairman. But the problem, I think, is that the government sees that there are thousands of people that are going to fall below that. So is it 35 per cent? What is it, then? We're certainly getting a lot of calls. I'm surprised if people say that they're not getting calls because we certainly are in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary.

Mr. Chairman, I don't understand. The government recognizes that it's going to take time to deal with the supply side, and we all agree that there needs to be more supply. We've talked about incentives to builders to build affordable housing, inclusionary zoning, all the rest of the things, but the government is not moving there. So let's say we start now. If we're building more supply – and we talked in the task force about needing 12,000 units. Well, we're not starting, and things are going to get worse before they get better. The point of the guidelines is to say, "Okay, let's do the other things to increase the supply," but we're not doing it.

As I said before, Mr. Chairman, this will get worse before it gets better even if we start with the \$285 million and start doing some things with the lead time.

9:00

I want to bring back again what they're saying from the government, from the ministers here, from Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry. They're saying that in the next year Alberta's economy is going to continue to be hot. They say: downside risks include labour shortages, and increasing construction and housing costs. They talk about the housing area. Again, I want to keep stressing this. They talk about the Alberta housing crunch. They say: housing shortage is driving up costs of owning and renting a house. Well, that's self-evident.

Then they talk about the MLS listing: resale prices were 34% higher than a year ago; new housing prices rose 38% in Calgary and 42% in Edmonton. They say: the rental vacancy rate declined from 3.1 per cent in October 2005 to 0.9 per cent in October 2006, the lowest vacancy rate for the province on record. It's a historic low. Then they say: since the start of 2005 housing affordability across the province has been eroding at an aggressive pace. Now, there's the reality. It's bad enough now, but they're predicting that it's going to get worse with the economy.

So what do we do? What do we do, then, if we reject rent guidelines? There's no market there, particularly. That's what the government's own document is saying, that there's no real market there. So what do we do with the renters, with the most vulnerable people that could be out on the streets? We've had lots of discussion there. Mr. Chairman, again I want to stress that there are a lot of working people that ordinarily would be looking to buy their first house. We rejected help there too.

So what are we going to do? I still haven't got an answer from this government about what we're going to do. Somehow the market hasn't been there. We've pointed out, again, that Alberta has had a big increase in condo development. Condo starts have gone up big time, a 40 per cent increase, but Alberta with no rent increase guidelines has seen a drop in new rentals by 52 per cent. The argument was that people will build. You know, the old saying is: don't bring rent controls, and they will come and build. Well, Mr. Chairman, they're not doing it.

What do we do? What are we going to say to thousands of people there? Just suck it up and spend 50, 60, 70 per cent of your income on accommodation; tough it out; this is so-called free-enterprise government. Is that what we're going to say? What are we going to say to the homeless? You're out there; too bad; that's just the way it is.

You know, if the government could say to me that there is something that will happen in this next year that will stop the bleeding and the anxiety for thousands of people in this province, I'm prepared to listen. But we haven't heard anything other than that the magic marketplace is somehow going to solve this. Well, the point is: there is no market there. It's distorted. It's out of kilter. Even their own documents are talking about that, Mr. Chairman.

For the life of me I can't understand this hidebound reason not to do what's right for people, Mr. Chairman. I mean, what's the alternative? Again, I keep asking people: what's the alternative? What is the alternative? I'd again say that there is one last chance here, I would think, to at least do the right thing: consumer price index plus 2 per cent. Remember that that also gives them the right, if there are costs like utility bills, maintenance, all the rest, to pass it on. So it's not a hard and fast control. Let's move on and do it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This particular amendment that's before the House right now, as has been acknowledged by the third party, is very similar to an amendment that was defeated earlier in the evening or the morning or however we describe this marathon session that we're in. The reason it was defeated at that time – at least, as far as I'm concerned, the reason that members from this side of the House voted against it – was because it didn't have a timeline. As has been articulated by many members in the Official Opposition over the last many hours, we do believe that this particular crisis in the market demands temporary – and I underline the word “temporary” – rent guidelines.

The amendment that we have in front of us right now does not have a limit, so unless we can have the House agree to a subamendment that would establish a timeline, this amendment would once again not receive our support. With the help of Parliamentary Counsel and staff back at the Annex building, I've now placed before the table and would ask that we distribute a subamendment to all members present. This subamendment would amend the amendment before the House.

I'm not sure if I should now wait for that to be passed out or if I should describe it first.

The Chair: We'll have the pages distribute copies to all the members. We will refer to this amendment as subamendment A1.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chair. For clarification, did you wish me to wait until the subamendment is completely distributed?

The Chair: Yes, we'll wait. Just give the pages a moment to distribute.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you.

The Chair: You may proceed, hon. member. I believe everyone has a copy.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll just read it into the record if I could. Subamendment A1 would amend amendment A6 by adding “for a period of 18 months, or until the rental market

stabilizes” after the words “plus 2%” that exist in the current amendment before the House.

Now, as I indicated, Mr. Chairman, the amendment as it was before the House, without any sort of a time limit, would not meet the favour of the Official Opposition. We've had some discussion over the past many hours about a 12-month time limit and we've had discussion about a 24-month time limit under various scenarios that have been contemplated in a number of other amendments. So this, I think, is a nice middle ground. We've seen some good work during this debate in terms of finding a middle ground with the government and making what was a good bill, but not a really strong bill, a little bit stronger. I would like to take this opportunity to thank members of the government for seeing their way to agree to two amendments so far because it does move things along in the right direction. We're proud to have been a part of that and certainly pleased that the government saw fit to work with us on those amendments. I'm hopeful that we might see some similar co-operation on subamendment A1.

9:10

Now, I've had the opportunity over the last several hours to articulate a number of times the reasons why I believe that some form of rent stabilization guidelines are required. The President of the Treasury Board rose at some point in the early hours of the morning, and for the first time since we really began discussing this crisis in the House this spring, he gave an answer to my question of what is gouging and what steps the government will take to address the gouging issue, which is really, I think, what this entire debate has been all about. The President of the Treasury Board did respond to that, and I appreciate that. It's unfortunate that, you know, we had to sit through the night and into the wee hours of the morning and into the sunlight before we actually had somebody from the government side respond to that question, but that was probably the most important question, so I'm glad that we went there.

Now, unfortunately, I don't think it's good enough yet. He talked about taking this to the landlord and tenant dispute panel. As the shadow minister for Service Alberta I continue to hear stories about that panel not working the way that it is intended to work. It's a pilot project at the moment. It's not even across the province. It's in the Edmonton area only. The feedback that I'm hearing from people who have been involved with the panel is that it's not accomplishing what it was set out to accomplish. Despite the fact that the minister has said that there will be discussions with that panel and with landlords' and tenants' representatives to try to come up with some way to address the question of gouging, we're not there yet. We need these answers, and we need these answers soon because as many members, specifically the leader of the third party, have outlined earlier in debate, these horror stories are coming at us daily. Literally every day there's another one coming into the office, another phone call, another e-mail.

I referenced the Metro – I'm not sure if I can recall the name of the college that my constituent is attending.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, it's Metro. It's in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. R. Miller: Yes. It is a college in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. There are approximately 300 ESL students attending there right now, and these students are bringing their concerns about the lack of some sort of rental guidelines to their instructors on a daily basis. I know that we've had several dozen visitors in this Assembly over the last few days expressing their concerns to the minister and to the minister's staff about the lack of

rental guidelines in Bill 34. I know that those numbers are not going to wane. I know that this is going to continue and continue and continue on a daily and weekly and monthly basis until some effort is made to address this situation. We're not there yet. We're moving in the right direction, but we're not there yet, Mr. Chair.

Subamendment A1 is another attempt to find some middle ground that the government members might be comfortable with and that landlords could live with and that tenants would certainly appreciate in terms of providing them the protection and the stability that they need and deserve in order to accomplish the goal of the Official Opposition and, I believe, all members of this House, and that is to make sure that everybody has a home.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the availability of new affordable housing in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford because we've talked a lot over the last many hours about whether or not there's any new housing being built in Edmonton-Centre, as an example, or whether or not Edmonton-Glenora is seeing new rental accommodation or whether or not Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is seeing any new rental accommodation. When I look at the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, I cannot say for a fact, but in my recollection I cannot think of any new rental accommodation that's been built in the two and a half years that I've been the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford.

There is, as many people will be familiar with, a major complex of housing being built on the old Heritage Mall shopping centre site: Century Park. This complex, when it's completed, Mr. Chairman, will accommodate somewhere between 8,000 and 9,000 residents. One of the things they've talked about is availability of housing. We know that with the influx of new residents into Alberta, this is a crucial issue, and indeed this developer is going to provide between 8,000 and 9,000 residents with housing over the next several years. That's a good thing.

There is, however, as there usually is, a catch, Mr. Chairman. The first sale of units in that particular complex took place sometime before Christmas, and they sold \$86 million worth of real estate in about four hours. They had people camped out, standing in line. It was probably a record in terms of local real estate sales. The smallest single unit, under a thousand square feet, sold for \$375,000, and the prices went up to, if I remember right, somewhere around \$900,000 for a 2,000 square foot unit. Now, you know it's a wonderful compliment to the developers that they had that much interest in this development. There are, obviously, many new residents of Edmonton-Rutherford in the next year or two when that first building is complete that are going to have lovely homes, but this is not affordable housing in any way, shape, or form.

That is the only instance of new housing that I can think of in the time that I've been the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. Clearly, it does nothing to address the issues that we're discussing in this debate here. I'm not suggesting for one second that rent guidelines are going to provide new housing. I'm not suggesting for one second that rent guidelines are going to be the solution to the problem, although as we had the discussion earlier today, I do believe that as a temporary measure they can be a part of the solution. They can be one piece of the puzzle.

Yes, I've also received the mass e-mails that the Energy minister was referring to a few minutes ago when he was debating, and by far the majority of those mass e-mails that I'm getting are, in fact, from landlords, the same ones that he's getting, because they outline right in the header of the e-mail that they've been sent to all MLAs. So there's no question that the landlords have a powerful lobby under way right now to all MLAs to address their concerns, and they do have some legitimate concerns. We've discussed that in here.

Clearly, it's not all landlords that are gouging. In fact, I'm sure

it's only a very few that are gouging, but once again it is happening. There is gouging taking place, and this Assembly must do something to protect those that are most vulnerable from those landlords that are taking advantage of this situation. We can't allow anybody to be taken advantage of in that way, whether it's the 80-year-old grandmother that was in the gallery the other day or the young mother from Rwanda with a baby child or my gentleman, Mr. Deria, from Yellowbird suites. My colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie indicates that he's got many like that as well. So we can't allow anybody to be taken advantage of in that way. As the Premier himself said last Friday evening, that is un-Albertan.

It's incumbent upon all of us to find a way to make sure that we protect those people, and I do believe that subamendment A1 to amendment A6 would accomplish that. I think it's fair to landlords. We've discussed previously the fact that by allowing them a market-basket measure plus 2 per cent, there is certainly an opportunity for landlords to keep up with inflation in the short term, in the temporary period that this covers, as well as giving them a cushion of 2 per cent. I think that by having a period of 18 months or – and this is key, I think, to this subamendment – until the rental market stabilizes, perhaps in six months or eight months or 10 months or 12 months if the market has stabilized, we can remove this temporary guideline sooner rather than later. Perhaps, Mr. Chair, it might be longer than 18 months, and we may have to leave that in place. I'm not sure exactly what the answer is.

That's the point of this: that we don't necessarily have to have all of the answers, Mr. Chairman. We can provide the government with some flexibility to respond to market conditions. If, in fact, we could do some of the things that have been discussed in this House and some of the things that are reflected in the housing task force and some of the things that are reflected in the Official Opposition's document entitled *Because Everybody Needs a Home*, then perhaps we can open up some secondary suites sooner. Perhaps we can give the municipalities the versatility to mandate that a certain percentage of affordable housing be provided in every new development. If we can do some of those things, maybe we can get some of this affordable housing on-stream, online a little quicker than in the five years that we seem to talk about most of the time. If in fact, Mr. Chairman, that happens, then we can remove the temporary guidelines sooner than anticipated as well.

9:20

So this subamendment would in fact provide the Legislature and the government with the flexibility to respond to market conditions, and I think that goes a long way towards addressing some of the concerns that the government members have expressed this morning.

I think that with that, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to allow other members to comment on subamendment A1. As I suggested earlier, I do believe this strikes a middle ground that accommodates the needs and requirements of tenants, landlords, and this Assembly in terms of the flexibility required to respond to market conditions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. I mean, obviously we've had this debate most of the night, but it would be really difficult. We've mentioned to the hon. members that we intend to bring in the board with the landlord and tenant people, and we want to work to have some kind of a constructive dialogue between the groups and bring that together. I don't think that you want to deal with someone and tell them in good faith that we want to sit down and talk about this

but: oh, by the way, we've just taken away your ability to use your property how you want for the next 18 months. You can't have it both ways. If you want them at the table to come to some understanding – because there is no legislated way to deal with them. So you simply can't have it both ways. If you want them to deal in a reasonable manner, then we also have to be reasonable back with them.

I'm suggesting that we've had the debate on the rent controls all night long. We don't accept the way they look at it. It's just that simple.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to indicate that the Alberta NDP opposition is going to support this subamendment, and I just want to indicate that it fits very well and completes the motion or the amendment that I made earlier this morning. Again, we come to the basic question before us: that there is no protection and no stability for tenants in this province. Renters in this province are faced with a very, very difficult situation. Hundreds of thousands of Alberta families are faced with rent increases that they may not be able to afford, and this government has rejected every attempt to provide some protection and some real stability for them.

I think it's unconscionable that the government is failing tenants. It is favouring landlords. Instead of setting direction, the minister is talking about: "You know, we can't set direction in this province. We can't pass legislation, or the landlords just simply won't talk to us and won't co-operate." Well, I hate to think that that's the situation, but if it's so, then it really indicates that the government is just not prepared to provide the leadership that's necessary on this issue.

Mr. Chairman, what we've seen here is, I think, an attempt by this government to ram through legislation dealing with rents in this province that does not support renters, does not give them the protection they need, and to do that under cover of darkness through the night. In fact, I think the opposition by working together has co-operated in stopping that so that we now have the final debate on the amendments to this legislation taking place in the light of day, when there are people around to witness the actual position of the government.

I want to just indicate that the subamendment, which would enforce rent guidelines for a period of 18 months or until the rental market stabilizes, is a good one, and it's very supportive of what we're trying to do here, which is to limit rent increases to one per year and to be no greater than the Alberta consumer price index published by Statistics Canada for the previous calendar year plus 2 per cent. That's a reasonable rate of return, Mr. Chairman.

I would urge all hon. members to support the subamendment and then support the amendment so that we can give this legislation real teeth to protect real people, real renters in this province, who've been abandoned by this government.

Thank you.

The Chair: I wasn't wanting to interrupt the member, but the noise level is getting high in here, and it's difficult for the chair to hear. So if we could keep the background noise down, I would appreciate it.

We have the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would certainly like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for his subamendment and for his tenacious interest in this very important topic. I would also like to sincerely thank all the members who have given so much of their time to this discussion and the debate and particularly the members that have sat through most of the night and a lot of those members that are still here. I had the privilege of going home and getting a few hours of shut-eye, but I do want to commend all the members for their hard work through the night on debating this rather important issue.

Mr. Chairman, I also want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for recognizing a good bill. It's good to hear someone from the other side recognize that, even though we may not agree on how to get to the end of this debate and the solution that we're looking for. I think we're all in here with the same intentions. We have the same attitude: to make the best effort that we can on behalf of our constituents and recognize that we have a situation that does require some serious attention.

Mr. Chairman, I have to say that a few unscrupulous landlords gouging their tenants is appalling, and I repeat: it is appalling. But this does not constitute a crisis. I have to say that I look forward to the efforts through the Minister of Service Alberta and the Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board taking a very serious look at the situation and, I would hope, bringing swift action – swift action – to bear on these rather unsavoury individuals or companies.

Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that this subamendment at best, although well-intentioned, would add a level of ambiguity to the situation, and I have to say that I'm at a loss to even imagine what terms or what learned body would determine when the rental market is stable. I believe that this will be a matter of opinion for a number of individuals in terms of determining what is stable. I mean, what I consider stable, what the members opposite and many others consider stable, I would suggest to you, is something that's going to be open to a lot of interpretation. So the whole point of this subamendment that talks about "or until the rental market stabilizes" – I think we could discuss that for many nights on end in this Chamber and many other parts of this province.

Mr. Chairman, I have to say that I cannot support the subamendment, and I would encourage all reasonable members to defeat the amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of subamendment A1 to amendment A6. You know, as I said before, we believe in fairness and sustainability in the market. This amendment definitely will help with rent gouging. We still believe that we should do something temporarily for the tenants as well as for the investors because we want to keep the investors in Alberta. If we don't give them the fair share, they will move somewhere else. So I think this amendment is very fair, especially timewise. Before, we tried, you know, a one-year time. Now it's 18 months, which is very reasonable, and it will definitely help investors as well as tenants. We support the short-term relief program. This is temporary, and it will definitely help the market to stabilize.

Thank you very much. I support the amendment.

9:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to add my congrat-

ulations to all of those who were here throughout the night and who are still here this morning.

You know, in the 13 and a half or almost 14 years that I've been representing Calgary-Egmont, my constituents have never supported legislation that intrudes on the free market, especially when the marketplace may not have exhausted all of the means available to it, but I really hear from my constituents when they perceive that politicians are creating problems where no problems exist.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, come on. Give us a break.

Mr. Herard: The hon. member across the way thinks I'm referring to this issue. There have been a number of issues in 13 and a half years, hon. member.

What we're debating here today are measures to control rents, rent increases, and issues around notice for condo conversions and penalties for failing to act within the act. That's clearly rent control no matter how you slice it.

I believe that there is strength in numbers, and we've seen condominium associations, for example, you know, work in a reasonable fashion with landowners and so on to get the issues that they have resolved. I think also that renter associations could do the same.

I heard the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity in the wee hours of the morning, as I sometimes get up in the wee hours of the morning, read letter after letter of complaint from his constituents from one particular building. I believe that if the 280 tenants in that building – I think it was 280 that he referred to – were to act with one public voice, the landlord may well be persuaded to change his mind.

On a lighter note, most of us probably have had a chuckle or two in the past from the David Letterman top 10, but I doubt that offending landlords would find much humour in being on the top 10 gougers list day after day, week after week, especially if the beneficial owner of the property were named instead of just the management companies that manage these things.

Here we are tinkering around with amendments and subamendments, tinkering around with the marketplace. I don't believe this is about affordable housing. I believe it's about income support, and we have programs to provide a hand up to those who need it. We've got programs to ensure that people don't get evicted. But when does a hand up become a handout and an entitlement? Where do you draw the line?

Mr. Chairman, I think that we'd be much better off working with tenant associations, working with landlords to see if there wouldn't be a way for them to allocate part of their inventory to low-income housing, being assured that government has a program to top up the income of those who need it. That's what this government has been doing for years and years and years, and now all of a sudden there's a major crisis. We have the programs to help those who need help.

Mr. Chairman, I can't support that amendment.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, it breaks my heart to hear that the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont is not supporting this subamendment, but I kind of thought that he wouldn't in the first place since he prefaced his remarks with such a great vat of sort of ideological claptrap. I certainly expected him not to do that.

What we've been debating here all night is a way to define exactly how much is it before somebody is being gouged. You know, at the end of the day the only people that have actually come up with numbers are over on this side. You have to define what is too much before you can put any of these other things in place. Otherwise, you can have all the good intentions in the world, but if the barn

door is still open to allow somebody to make an increase in someone's rent that is beyond what they can afford, then the whole system breaks down. It's no longer a contractual arrangement between individuals on a reasonable sort of agreement, but it's someone who has to fall into this rental trap that's been created and has no choice in the matter because the increase in the real estate prices across this province coupled with the increase in the rental rates that people have been forced to pay has created a trap into which thousands of people are either falling or going to fall. Quite frankly, Mr. Chair, we have to be able to stabilize that situation. We're not talking about setting up something that's going to be here in perpetuity. It's a way to stabilize the situation for this immediate circumstance that we find ourselves in.

The subamendment that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford brought forward to us here is just a nice way to cap it off. It's a nice way to add those figures in there that have come from the rental review commission, the numbers that have been placed in regard to using the cost-of-living increase plus 2 per cent plus a provision to increase even more if that's what needs to happen. There's just a whole range of ways to be flexible with the approach that we've been bringing forward here this last evening and into the morning. That's what people are looking for when we walk out of here today. They're looking for a way to stabilize their rents so that they can have the security and confidence to know that they can stay in their homes this next month, that they're not going to have to break the bank and overhaul their monthly budget. How many people have \$100, \$200, \$300, \$1,000 extra in their monthly budget to cover these things? That's the sort of emergency approach that we're trying to put together here, Mr. Chair, and this is the key to it. Otherwise, quite frankly, Bill 34 without some temporary regulation in place is not worth the paper that it's printed on, and that's an unfortunate thing.

We've spent a lot of time on this, but I think that at least we've come to crystalize the situation. We've heard from people who we haven't heard from before. I've quite frankly heard some appalling exaggeration and ideology from the other side. The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky went way, way out of his way to deliberately slam and misrepresent the reasoned arguments that we've been putting forward here all evening. I would expect that if he bothered to listen, he would show some remorse in that regard. I just can't stand it when people start making things up, putting words in people's mouths, and resorting to blunt-fisted ideology as opposed to talking about some reasonable thing. [interjections] Yeah, right. Okay. Well, you know, I'm just trying to catch his attention. I'll send him a note later; that's for sure. I'll visit him in Grande Prairie. I'm sure he'll see me there.

Anyway, I certainly appreciate the assistance that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford gave us to give us this last chance to do this.

You know, at the heart of this issue, Mr. Chair, I have a very serious concern about how this circumstance is a transfer of wealth from the working people, from the middle class, to the very few people who are in a position to be able to take advantage of this situation right here, right now. You know, the job of this Legislature is to provide regulation to somehow even out those circumstances. When it happens that there's such a huge shift to such a distortion in any given market, our job is to create some measure of regulation, some measure of moderation, and that's what the people of Alberta are looking to this Legislature to see come true right here and right now. There's no opportunity for appeal here right now. It's very arbitrary, it's very undemocratic, and, I would say, very blunt fisted as well.

9:40

So without some measure of regulation on a temporary basis in Bill 34 certainly the whole thing is going to go down in flames, and we're going to end up having to do this again. Dollars to doughnuts I guarantee some measure of regulation will have to come into the market, and it's a shame that we can't do that here today instead of later on down the road.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like to close my comments. It's been, actually, quite an interesting time and lots of fun for those of you who've been here from yesterday to today. Regardless of the differences in opinions that we might have in regard to this bill, I've certainly enjoyed the debate, and I look forward to continuing on with Bill 34 here this afternoon.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I anticipate that we're nearing the end of this debate this morning, but I also have a sense that there may yet be a division or two. So I'm going to ask under Standing Order 32(3) if we might have unanimous consent to shorten the bells to two minutes and thereby expedite this whole exercise.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll keep my comments relatively brief. Again, congratulations in respect to everybody who's been here through the night. There's still a lot of energy in this room. I could tell everybody here that there are not a lot of people out there who appreciate the kinds of demands that members of all parties are under, even though some of us are yawning, and the energy that goes into these kinds of debates.

Specifically to the amendment that's under discussion right now. You know, I would put forward that this is a gesture of balance between two extremes here, which is no rent caps at all versus permanent rent caps. What we're proposing here is bringing in some mechanisms to stabilize rents but with a time limit on them. It seems to me that this is kind of an olive branch, almost, to both sides of this debate to say: okay, well, we can take some steps, but they aren't forever. I would ask that the spirit of this gesture be respected and that it be accepted, in fact, as a way to work our way through this challenge both legislatively and in the marketplace, that there is a need for some regulation or control on the marketplace at the moment, but it's not a forever kind of thing. I think the spirit and intent and effect of this particular amendment is reasonable. It brings balance. It puts a time constraint on regulation, which should make it somewhat more palatable to landlords, but it does at the same time protect tenants from short-term surges in their rental accommodation.

So in the spirit of conciliation, in the spirit of respect for all sides of this debate I think that this amendment is well worth supporting, and I would hope that other people on all sides of this debate would agree with me.

Thank you. That's my full comment on this, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to the subamendment moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to the amendment before the House by the leader of the

NDP opposition. The effect of the subamendment, Mr. Chairman, is to make clear, make it absolutely clear, that the amendment before the House is only for a period of 18 months. The amendment's effect will be that the rents will be moderated, using the formula CPI plus 2 per cent, for 18 months. I think this specification is an attempt to clarify that the period for which this very moderate constraint that's put on the ability of landlords to increase rents is temporary, that it's only for 18 months, and that this Legislature will certainly have the opportunity, ability, power to revisit the issue if necessary at that time, depending upon how the housing situation evolves during that period.

Mr. Chairman, the subamendment and the amendment which it attempts to amend are really an attempt to provide a predictable situation for hundreds of thousands of Albertans who have no option but to rent accommodation for their families to live. It is important that the voices of hard-working, regular Albertans be heard in this Assembly and respected in this Assembly. I'm grateful to the Affordable Housing Task Force for showing that sensitivity, for showing that respect for the concerns of these hundreds of thousands of Albertans who are exposed to this unpredictable, volatile rental housing situation.

The task force did not discourage landlords to come before it. On the contrary, I'm sure it kept its doors wide open to give opportunity to landlords to come before it in a public forum to make their case. I don't know how many of them chose to avail that opportunity, but the task force's job was to receive submissions, receive presentations, and encourage landlords and tenants and other concerned citizens to come before it to express their views and to give advice to the task force, so I'm assuming that the recommendations of the task force reflect a balanced view of both the tenants and concerned citizens on the one side and landlords on the other. If the landlords chose not to avail this opportunity, a democratic forum at which to present their views, to have their say, then too bad. They missed an opportunity that was given to every Albertan to come to an open, democratic forum for discussion, debate, and for offering input.

Mr. Chairman, I think it's important for this Legislature, for the Assembly, to not lose sight of the fact that the task force did its work. It did its work in good faith. It provided opportunities to all Albertans. It had an open-door policy, and as a result of the deliberations through that open-door, democratic forum that it provided to Albertans, it received I think most valuable input, and that input is then reflected in its recommendations.

9:50

One of those recommendations says precisely this: at this particular moment in time when the residential rental market is out of control, there is need for some regulation. There's a need to provide some direction. There's a need for the House to recognize its responsibility. There's a need for this government to step up to the plate and say: "Yes, we have heard you, Albertans. We did provide you with an open forum. This is how democracy works. This House is a democratic House, and we're going to listen to what you had to say."

Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased that this task force was an all-party task force, that this task force wasn't a partisan group that advocated on behalf of landlords or that intended to advocate on behalf of just tenants. It was a task force, an all-party task force, and it gave due consideration, I'm certain, to all views that came before it. Out of that serious and due consideration it gave to those submissions and to that advice followed the recommendations that are before us. One of those recommendations is the amendment before the House, put forward by the leader of the NDP opposition, which is under discussion.

Mr. Chairman, it's time that we listened to the advice of the task force. It's time that we respected the views that were canvassed and put together in the form of the recommendations by the task force to this House. I urge all members to support the subamendment, and then we can forward the amendment before the House, which is very consequential. If we approve it, I think we'd bring stability, we'd bring relief immediately to tens of thousands of Albertans. This House will be able to offer assurance that we are concerned, that we are a caring house of democracy, that we listen to the voices of regular, ordinary Albertans in the tens of thousands.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Before I recognize the next speaker, hon. members, after almost 14 hours of debate on this bill, it's good to see so much enthusiasm still in the room. It's also good to see that one of our members has chosen to take in the debate on the day of celebrating his birthday. I would just like to extend happy birthday wishes to the Premier.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Chairman, this will be the shortest speech I've made of the night. [interjections] I knew you'd appreciate that.

Mr. Chairman, I want to come back and just ask the question to the government, plain and simple: with the overheated economy, the predictions for housing in the future, in the next year, what are Albertans to do without the rent guidelines? What do we do with the people? Even if you build the houses now, it will take two, five years. It's bad enough now. According to their own records the housing crunch will be worse. It's a simple question: what do we do without guidelines? What is the alternative? I don't know what their alternative is in the short run. I have no idea how they're going to handle this. That's the big question that thousands of Albertans want to know.

I will just conclude by saying that, and we will see. Without the guidelines, Mr. Chairman, I predict that this issue is not going to go away. This issue is not going to go away. Eventually it will come home to roost with this government when there are more people out there that have lost their homes, more people who can't get into affordable housing, and they'll be asking: why? Why didn't you do something here today?

Mr. Chairman, we haven't got an answer. After all this debate, all this night, we still haven't got an answer, what their alternative is, because there is no alternative other than blind faith in the markets. Even the members admit that it's two to five years down the way. I don't know what's going to happen to people, and I wish we could have gotten an answer about that, but obviously there is no answer, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others on subamendment A1?

Mr. Snelgrove: They've got answers, Mr. Chairman. They just don't get the answers they'd like. That's the difference.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on subamendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:58 a.m.]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Agnihotri	Martin	Miller, R.
Bonko	Mason	Pannu
Eggen	Mather	Swann
Flaherty	Miller, B.	Tougas
MacDonald		

Against the motion:

Abbott	Graydon	Ouellette
Amery	Haley	Pham
Backs	Hancock	Prins
Boutilier	Herard	Renner
Brown	Knight	Rogers
Doerksen	Lukaszuk	Snelgrove
Evans	Magnus	Stelmach
Fritz	Mar	Webber

Totals:	For – 13	Against – 24
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[Motion on subamendment A1 lost]

10:00

The Chair: Now on amendment A6. Does anyone else wish to participate? Are you ready for the question on amendment A6?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that amendment A6 was lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:03 a.m.]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonko	Martin	Pannu
Eggen	Mason	Pastoor
Flaherty	Mather	Swann
MacDonald	Miller, B.	

Against the motion:

Abbott	Graydon	Mitzel
Agnihotri	Haley	Ouellette
Amery	Hancock	Pham
Backs	Herard	Prins
Boutilier	Knight	Renner
Brown	Lukaszuk	Rogers
Danyluk	Magnus	Snelgrove
Doerksen	Mar	Stelmach
Evans	Miller, R.	Webber
Fritz		

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 28
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[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 34, Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the clauses of Bill 34 as amended were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:07 a.m.]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbot	Graydon	Pham
Amery	Haley	Prins
Backs	Hancock	Renner
Boutilier	Herard	Rogers
Brown	Knight	Snelgrove
Danyluk	Magnus	Stelmach
Doerksen	Mar	Tarchuk
Evans	Mitzel	Webber
Fritz	Ouellette	

10:10

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Martin	Pannu
Bonko	Mason	Pastoor
Eggen	Mather	Swann
Flaherty	Miller, B.	Tougas
MacDonald	Miller, R.	

Totals:	For – 26	Against – 14
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[The clauses of Bill 34 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've been having so much fun that I almost hesitate to ask. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 34.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 34. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in agreement, say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Those opposed, say no. So ordered.

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

Bill 2 Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate May 2: Dr. Brown]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege, I think, to rise and speak in second reading on Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. It's an important piece of legislation, and along with Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, it represents the government's response to the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, of which I was a member. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for his leadership on the review committee and his work in crafting Bill 2. This bill has many specific parts responding to the many recommendations of the review committee, recommendations which have the intention of strengthening the act. I think we need to wait until we move through Committee of the Whole to deal with all the different recommendations and all the sections in the bill, so my remarks are fairly general in second reading.

[The Speaker in the chair]

This bill is the next step in a long, evolving history, which began in 1989 when a panel was commissioned to investigate conflict-of-interest rules. The panel's report, known as the Wachowich report, led to the legislating of the Conflicts of Interest Act and the establishment of the office of the Ethics Commissioner in 1991. Another report was published in 1996, known as the Tupper report. It recommended that the Conflicts of Interest Act be reviewed every five years. This was an important decision because all of the basic values and concepts that we hold to be important change. Our interpretations of them change. Even concepts like public interest and private interest, those concepts, our understanding of them changes through the years. I, for one, am not a fan of the idea of absolute values. I think values reflect the culture. Political culture has changed through time. The expectations of the public also change and evolve through time. So what was tolerated 50 years ago is not tolerated today.

A good example is the behaviour of a famous cabinet minister in the Mackenzie King government during the early 1940s who was responsible for Finance. It was not unusual for him to leave a cabinet meeting and immediately phone his stockbroker with insider tips. That may have been tolerated in the early '40s, but it certainly is not tolerated today.

The principles underlying the conflict of interest rules are "impartiality" and "integrity". Both those words, important words, are used in the preamble of the Conflicts of Interest Act. The words "public confidence" and "trust" are also mentioned in the preamble. Really, that is the main reason why amendments of Bill 2 are so important: public confidence and trust. I mean, public confidence has really been undermined in recent years in all political jurisdictions across Canada, and we're no exception. On any list of professional people, politicians are toward the bottom of the list. So it behooves us as a community of politicians, as legislators, to work hard at tightening the rules, improving the conflict of interest rules. If we don't do that, then we don't deserve the public confidence.

In today's world governments continually intervene in all areas of life through regulations and taxes and so on. We've been having a

discussion of that for the last 14 hours, about the pros and cons of intervening in the economy. Governments do intervene, so it's important that we have legislation to deal with our own involvement as politicians in the general economic interests of all citizens. We are some of those citizens, so there are bound to be overlapping interests. In most cases there is an unavoidable kind of representative interest because as legislators we share the general interests of the wider population.

In many points in Bill 2 there is a recognition that we "come from a spectrum of occupations" and "participate actively in the community." In fact, these are words that are going to be added to the preamble of this bill, and this is a positive good, a recognition that as legislators we are active in the community and we share the same interests as all of our constituents and all Albertans. The Conflicts of Interest Act is not in any way intended to prevent us from being involved in our constituency and representing the interests of our constituents and of all Albertans. That is our job, to represent Albertans. But when interests or assets or liabilities or financial interests or family business interests affect the independence of the legislator, there must be clear rules.

The usual methods of controlling conflicts of interest are, first of all, disclosure, and we do that through the Ethics Commissioner's office; avoidance, by divesting ourselves of interests that might impair our judgment; and withdrawal, refraining from acting or being involved in matters in which we have a personal financial interest.

Bill 2 tightens various aspects of the conflict of interest rules. For example, Bill 2 tightens the rule prohibiting a member from using his or her office to influence a decision of the Crown to improperly advance not just their own interests but anyone's private interest, and I think that's very good.

10:20

Bill 2 extends the cooling-off period for former ministers from six months to 12 months. There are provisions concerning the limit on gifts – it's going to be \$400, not \$200 – and provisions in respect to disclosure. When a minister has violated the act and has profited from the violation and another person has suffered a monetary loss, then there are provisions for restitution.

There are areas that still need attention, I think, but maybe that will come in the future, when we review it next time. I personally would have preferred to see a positive code of ethics included in the Conflicts of Interest Act as the House of Commons has it, but I lost that one in the review committee. I didn't get very far with it at all. I think there's a need to distinguish a real conflict of interest, where a person has knowledge of a private economic interest that is sufficient to influence the exercise of their public duties, and an apparent conflict of interest, where there is a reasonable apprehension that a reasonably well-informed person could properly have that a conflict of interest exists. So I think it's important to distinguish between real conflicts of interest and apparent conflicts of interest. I don't think Bill 2 deals with that.

To properly evaluate the provisions of Bill 2 – and there are lots of them – I recommend that members of the House read the final report, a very good report, May 2006, of the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee. This will be our guide to see how Bill 2 stacks up in responding to all of the recommendations.

I look forward to watching how this bill moves through second reading and through Committee of the Whole. Perhaps it can still be strengthened even more. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to you. It's good to see you back here in the House early in the morning.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and make brief comments on Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007, that's going through second reading. First, some general observations. Conflict of interest as it relates to the activities of public officials, publicly elected representatives in a democracy as well as people who work closely with cabinet members and others, is very important. It's important for us to make sure that we respect the trust that our electors place in us, that we respect the trust that society as a whole places in the democratic integrity of our institutions. We also need to be cognizant of the fact that there is some degree of a crisis of confidence and trust in elected officials. There is a great deal of cynicism about the way our business is conducted in our democratic Assemblies and parliaments. There is a sense of apathy and indifference that grows out of this cynicism.

So there is, I think, a need for us to recognize that we need to do a whole lot of things to restore confidence in the work, very important work, very important responsibilities that we as elected members of this Assembly and Assemblies like this across the country undertake to perform on behalf of and in the name of our constituents. We need to make sure that we put in place conditions, pieces of legislation, codes of conduct, expectations with respect to our daily behaviour inside and outside the House that will restore the confidence of our electors in our work, in our own integrity, and in the general integrity and the respect for the democratic decision-making and democratic institutions that represent a very rich history of democratic reform and evolution over more than a century in this country and beyond. So this bill, which will update and strengthen existing legislation related to conflicts of interest, is in that sense a welcome step.

We undertake to take a very close look, give it very serious scrutiny clause by clause, item by item, to make sure that the intentions that the select special committee on conflicts of interest of this Legislature explicitly embodied in their report of May 2006 are in fact translated into legal and legislative language and are true to the spirit of those recommendations made.

Mr. Speaker, on a personal note, when I first got elected and came to the Assembly, in the spring of 1997, the Tupper report was all around us. There was a debate in the Assembly. The then Ethics Commissioner, Bob Clark, took a very close look at the Tupper report and made some recommendations of his own, asking the Assembly to make legislative changes. So I am certainly quite familiar with the attempts that have been made in this Legislature by many of the members of the Legislature and officers of the Legislature to move in the direction in which this bill seems to be taking some steps.

Incidentally, I ran into Allan Tupper, the author of the so-called Tupper report, just the other day. He was in my constituency at a drugstore buying something, and so was I. He asked me how things are going, whether we made some progress on the report, and if so, in what form. I told him that the Assembly now has before it a bill that is dealing with strengthening our conflict of interest legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I must confess that I haven't taken a very close look at the contents of this bill as yet, but we'll have that opportunity as the bill moves into the committee stage for debate. We will certainly take a very close look and give it the scrutiny that it deserves, and where we think it's necessary, strengthen the conflicts of interest guidelines to make sure that the bill serves both to enhance the integrity of the work that we do and prevent us as legislators from erring in ways in our conduct and behaviour that will cast a dark shadow over the Assembly, as such.

Transparency, integrity, and avoidance of conflicts of interest are very, very important concerns of mine, and I know that they're shared by all members of this Assembly. Hopefully, this bill will serve to strengthen our ability to ensure and give assurance to Albertans that we are taking appropriate steps that will lead to avoidance of conflicts of interest on the part of members of this Assembly, the members of Executive Council, and some public officials who work very closely with the Premier or, perhaps, cabinet members.

I'll close, Mr. Speaker, by saying that I looked at the list of former political staff members that's included in the bill: chief of staff, office of the Premier; deputy chief of staff, office of the Premier; director, office of the Premier, southern Alberta; executive assistant to a minister as defined in Order in Council 192/98. This list may or may not be exhaustive. I certainly am going to take a close look at it and see if there's a need to in fact expand this list.

The second concern that I had, that emerged from a very quick look at the bill, is the cooling-off period that this bill allows for former political staff members, which I think remains at six months, whereas for the members of Executive Council it's extended to one year. I have asked myself: why is it not appropriate to have the cooling-off period for the former political staff members the same as for the members of Executive Council? But these are matters that will come up for, I'm sure, good discussion and debate in the House as we move to the committee stage.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I close my remarks. Thank you.

10:30

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions.

Additional speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and speak in support of this bill. Before that, I'd like to thank the mover and the Minister of Justice for providing very good briefing on this bill and doing some great work on it.

This is a very important piece of legislation that speaks to some questions that I've raised in the Legislature in past sessions, and I expect that this will provide some greater support from Albertans and ensure that our democracy works better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill to close the debate or call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

Bill 33 Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act

[Debate adjourned May 3: Mr. MacDonald speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to Bill 33, an important bill, clearly, for the people of Ferintosh, central Alberta. A dry area, increasingly so.

I want to say that the overriding issue in our decision-making consciousness continues to be a concern about climate change. Here is another example, the third example I'm aware of in the last four

years where we're making an interbasin transfer and coming to the Legislature to discuss this because we are concerned about any interbasin transfer, as we should be, and moving water from north to south. From all appearances this is going to be an annual event here, if not more often, to look at increasing drought conditions, water shortages, and problems with water sustainability and water management in the province. I think more and more people in Alberta are anxious to see a long-term vision and a plan for water management in the province, something that addresses what is going to be an increasingly urgent and frightening aspect of life on the prairies, especially in south and east Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this transfer is an acknowledgement of the failure of water management planning again in the province and a recognition that we don't have a land-use framework in place. We haven't, especially now, got a framework in place that will allow us to set priorities for development to ensure that we are, wherever possible, moving people to water, industry to water rather than water to people, to ensure that we are using the best of science to assess the capacity of water systems, and a long-term management plan that will ensure the best and highest use for water, that's the lifeblood of the province.

A third dimension needed is a serious public consultation about how we will develop this province: at what pace, at what scope, and how particularly this is going to impact our water supplies for the future. We have to establish priority uses, and we have to place limits on growth. This is not something this government wants to hear, that we have to place limits on growth, but in my background in medical practice anything that doesn't stop growing is malignant, and anything that doesn't recognize limits is going to face crisis and disaster in many respects.

It's clear that this community has no capacity to deal with its own water needs. It's in a particular location where even the groundwater has diminished in both quality and quantity. It's incumbent upon the Department of Environment to find out more about what is happening to our groundwater, with increasing shortages of groundwater across the province and, by all scientific accounts, increasing problems of shortage of surface water with glacial loss over the next couple of decades. Water management in a sustainable way, limits to growth, conservation measures, storage measures: we have to explore the gamut of issues before lurching to the crisis management which is represented by a water transfer from north to south.

I think it's impossible to consider rejecting this because these people are in real need. But it's also impossible not to comment on the lack of planning and the lack of sustainable thinking about our water management in this province. This is only going to get worse. We are going to be facing this increasingly and without recognizing the risks associated with interbasin transfer, not the least of which is the biological transfer of organisms and ecosystems that were never in that water basin from one basin to another, with predators and unexpected and unpredictable consequences that we cannot predict and that will potentially have devastating consequences for certain biota in a unique ecosystem, which each river system represents.

There's also a huge cost to this, not only the capital cost of piping and pumping the water but a cost in terms of whenever we move water from another system: increasing vigilance, risks of contamination, and potential for serious health consequences. We have to begin to look more seriously at demand management rather than simply reacting with supply wherever it's needed.

I note with some concern that there's no discussion in this bill of putting limits on growth in Ferintosh. It's as if whatever they want to do they will continue to do, and we will continue to supply water inevitably. If they fall short, then we will bring our technology to play, and we will provide whatever they need. This doesn't reflect

a government that is thoughtful about the future, that is thinking about limits, that is looking at long-term consequences of continuing to pump water from north to south as we fall short in these different regions.

Mr. Speaker, those are my concerns, those are my comments, and those are the comments of increasing numbers of environmental experts and water experts in the province. We are going to be transferring water from the South Saskatchewan, ultimately, to the North Saskatchewan River and without a lot of thought about what in the land-use framework is going to change, what science we are going to apply to some of these decisions, how we are incorporating climate change realities into the future, and what we are looking at in terms of requiring some limits to growth in this trend towards repeated interbasin transfers.

In all honesty, there's a clear need in this community. We will be supporting this bill but with great and serious reservations about the unwillingness to look at the longer term and plan for a very serious water shortage in our near future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

If not, then who shall I recognize? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

10:40

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View did raise some very, very important points that are not considered within the overall piece of the bill with regard to the Ferintosh interbasin transfer. I'm hesitant to support the bill but probably would because I know that people's overall health and standard of living depend on being able to get the water. I recognize the need for the village of Ferintosh and, as I said, hesitantly support the bill, but I'm concerned with the practice, as the other colleague was, of interbasin transfer. It doesn't make sense to continue to grow and expand knowing that you don't have the very need of water to support that.

I mean, I would be more comfortable with this bill if it did have some sort of limitation with regard to expansion. We have that in some of our national park areas such as Jasper and/or Banff, where they've put a moratorium on growth just from the fact of trying to keep the pristine area intact and the integrity of it, but here in this particular case it's almost similar to that of Balzac and the proposed building of the horse-racing piece. You know, you don't have an immediate source of water, but you're still wanting to have growth there.

It doesn't make sense to bring the water to the people. You

should be doing it the other way around, bringing the people to the water and establishing towns and municipalities based on that instead of the other way around. The guiding principle that, you know, we bring the water to the people: people truck in water all the time. That's obviously what we're trying to get away from. They need a steady and guaranteed source here, but for how long if they're going to continue to grow? It's like providing a bailout for people with regard to a bank loan, and they go out and spend it on renovations again. They haven't learned anything.

I just wanted to get some of the specifics about it. The government has not handled water issues in the past and present very well. Our knowledge of how much we need and where it's located is still not there. We need to do a much greater job of mapping as well of our surface water and our groundwater to be able to sustain our economy because a lot of the industry depends on water. As well, our people depend on water.

So I just wanted to get in those particular pieces. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Then I'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise in support of this bill. It's an important bill to provide infrastructure for the people of the Ferintosh area. This issue was actually raised in my constituency by some constituency activists in the community who have relatives in the area. It's very important, they said, that this move forward quickly. I must commend the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for the diligent work he did in informing all interested parties about all the various factors of the issue. He answered all of my questions about trucking, about the volumes, about any potential right-of-way issues, local support, and other issues.

With that, I must say that I support this, and I move adjournment, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Wednesday having been a very productive day, I would move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. on Thursday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:45 a.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 10, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/10

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for our abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce a former colleague and a special guest who's seated in your gallery this afternoon. Mr. Drew Hutton served as the MLA for the Edmonton-Glenora constituency in the 25th Legislature. I'd ask that he please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through to all members of the Assembly the hon. Mr. Ken Cheveldayoff, MLA for Saskatoon Silver Springs, who's seated in your gallery today. Mr. Cheveldayoff was elected to the Saskatchewan Legislature in November of 2003 and has been one of the hardest working men in the business ever since. He's the opposition critic for Finance, deputy critic for postsecondary education, a member of the Public Accounts Committee, and has served as deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Human Services. He was educated at Carleton in Ottawa, the U of S, Newport University in southern California, earning several degrees, including his master's.

Mr. Speaker, you may be pleased to know that Mr. Cheveldayoff was a parliamentary page in the House of Commons and has won the prestigious Queen Elizabeth II scholarship for excellence in parliamentary studies. Ken has served as senior business adviser with Western Economic Diversification and has built a solid reputation both as an entrepreneur and as a humanitarian.

The last thing I'll mention about Ken today is perhaps the most important. He has a wonderful wife named Trish and two super children, Carter and Paige.

Now, with a resume like that, Mr. Speaker, I believe Mr. Cheveldayoff would make a great addition to our caucus, but if his Saskatchewan Party has the right kind of luck in the next election, I believe Ken Cheveldayoff will be Saskatchewan's next Finance minister.

If Ken will please rise, please accept the best wishes of all in our Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 23-plus members of the Alberta College and Technical Institute Students' Executive Council, or ACTISEC.

ACTISEC represents student associations from 14 colleges and technical institutes in Alberta, more than 200,000 students province-wide. The students with us today come from all regions of the province and represent Lakeland College, Mount Royal College, Grande Prairie Regional College, Lethbridge College, Medicine Hat College, Keyano College, SAIT, and NAIT. They're in Edmonton this week to attend an ACTISEC conference for newly elected student leaders, and I look forward to meeting with them later today. I would point out that included are the chair, Jon Hoffman; vice-chair, Jonathan Hill; executive council Jeremy Duenk, John Blomme, Carrie Creaser. I believe they are in the members' and public galleries, and I would invite the students to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again this year it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of students from Crestwood elementary school in my constituency. This school I think probably holds the record for the most miles travelled to and from the Legislature because to the best of my knowledge they have been making an annual trek from Medicine Hat to Edmonton for in excess of 20 years. This year is no exception. If I could, I would like to introduce three groups of students who have joined us in the members' gallery along with teachers and parents: Mr. David George, who's the principal, Mrs. Van Maarion, Mrs. Karen Irwin, Mrs. Maria Thompson, Mr. Gary Ziel, Mrs. Wendy Smid, Mrs. Kathy Western, and Mr. Wade Lawson, also parents Mrs. Jennifer Martin, Mrs. Tracy Lawson, Mrs. Nicole Petersen, Mrs. Sharon Pudwell, Mrs. Tracy Klein, and Mrs. Denise Yates. I'd ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today and acknowledge the presence of 30 students from Madonna school. It's an exemplary community school, a Catholic school in Sherwood Park. Teacher Ray Rudanec and assistant teacher Nicole Gallo accompany them. I wonder if the students would now please rise, and we will give them a warm acknowledgement and welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly three guests: Maureen Geres, my executive assistant, who does a tremendous job in my ministry, and her sister and brother-in-law, Julie Geres-Brydie and Jim Brydie, who have come from the Lake District in England to visit family in Alberta, and they're also taking the opportunity to visit our Legislature. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Dr. Glen Roberts, director of health programs for the Conference Board of Canada, visiting us here today from Ottawa.

Under Dr. Roberts' direction the Conference Board has completed several landmark reports since 2004 that have significantly informed health policy direction in Alberta, indeed across Canada. These include Understanding Health Care Cost Drivers and Escalators; Challenging Health Care System Sustainability: Understanding Health System Performance of Leading Countries; and Healthy Provinces, Healthy Canadians: A Provincial Benchmarking Report.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to note that the last time Dr. Roberts was a guest in this House, in 2004, he was here, in fact, because one of my predecessors, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, wished to acknowledge Dr. Roberts' outstanding research on health system sustainability and the importance of public and community health and wellness.

Dr. Roberts is accompanied today by my executive assistant, Mr. Fred Horne, who himself is no slouch in health policy, having in excess, I think, of 20 years in the health policy field and also, it might be interesting to note, a candidate in the last provincial election on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party.

An Hon. Member: Did he win?

An Hon. Member: Next time.

Mr. Hancock: He will, indeed. But, in the meantime, the public of Alberta is having the benefit of his wealth of experience.

I'd ask, Mr. Speaker, that all members of the House acknowledge Dr. Roberts and Fred Horne and say thank you for their contributions to public health. If they would rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through to members of the Assembly representatives from Parents Empowering Parents, an outstanding group that works to support communities through work with families dealing with addicted youth. We have today Audrey Bjornstad-Holliday, Tina Dow, Lori Jones, Dawn Fannin, and Maralyn Benay. I'd ask that they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is certainly my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you my executive assistant, who is here from Lethbridge, a young lady who also served a former member of this House, Dick Johnston, and also served her MP in Ottawa. I'm delighted to ask her to stand. Yes, her name is Bridget, and yes, she is my daughter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Jessica Fox and Shawn McKinlay along with their beautiful three-month-old daughter, Angelique. Jessica and Shawn recently moved to Alberta to seek a better life but were stunned to receive a \$1,200 a month rent increase for a one-bedroom basement apartment here in Edmonton. Jessica and Shawn are in danger of losing their home because of this massive rent increase. Because of Shawn's inability to work due to an injury, Jessica has had to take on two jobs to support their young family. They're currently looking for a new

place to live. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Gerry Hryschuk and Paul Buckler. Gerry and Paul are Palace Casino workers on their 244th day of strike due to this government's failure to protect Alberta workers with better and more fair labour legislation.

Gerry has been at the Palace Casino for seven years as a dealer. He came to the casino for a career change from industrial sales. In his spare time Gerry is active with various charities and nonprofit organizations. At the moment he's working hard to ensure that his son, who is in culinary college in New York City, and his daughter, who is studying arts at the U of A, get everything that they need to complete their education.

Paul has worked at the casino since only four months prior to the strike commencing. Paul is very active in the Ukrainian Catholic church as a lector. He helps his priest with the services each Sunday and serves the faithful. Paul is a very active and effective voice for his and his co-worker's cause within the gaming industry.

They are joined by UFCW local 401 representative Don Crisall. They are in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the 2007 recipients of the human services worker award. Each year this award recognizes two Children's Services employees who have made significant and positive impacts on the lives of Alberta's children, youth, and families. These front-line workers are some of the most dedicated, talented, and caring people in our province, and children, youth, and families depend on their outstanding service and support every day.

I'd like to ask the following recipients and their guests to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Marlene Proctor of Fort McMurray, Carrie McGillivray of High Prairie, and their guests, Harry Andrews, Carrie's husband; Judy Delorme, nominator and casework supervisor; Janet Fizzell, acting CEO of region 10; Heather Edelman, nominator and supervisor/manager; Ron Benson, CEO of region 9; and Irene Milton, Children's Services human resources manager. Please join me in welcoming them today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members would want me to introduce and congratulate the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane and the hon. Minister of Children's Services. Twenty-nine-and-a-half years ago, she entered the world. Happy birthday.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Project neuroArm Surgical Robot

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 17, 2007, the Calgary health region together with the U of C unveiled the world's first MRI-compatible surgical robot for brain surgery. The need for improved precision and dexterity and stamina in surgery inspired a

talented team led by Dr. Garnette Sutherland to embark on this life-changing project. This six-year, \$30 million project called Project neuroArm is the most advanced MRI-compatible robot available to date.

As Project neuroArm is now out of its lengthy design and testing stage and into manufacture, delivery can be expected within the next 20 months, after which neuroArm will rapidly incorporate into surgery. Once incorporated, neuroArm will revolutionize neurosurgery and other branches of operative medicine by liberating them from the constraints of the human hand while significantly improving the way brain surgery and other microsurgery is performed all over the world.

Once in full operation the surgical robot will deliver less invasive and more accurate brain surgery and will afford the ability to shift surgery from the organic to the cellular level. Using neuroArm's image guidance system, surgeons will be able to practice virtual operations before the actual procedure, resulting in fewer mistakes in real operations. The use of this new technology will strongly impact our society by decreasing postsurgical morbidity, illness, or complications. Patients will experience higher survival rates and reduced recovery times and shorter hospital stays as a result of the new surgery method.

It's important to acknowledge Dr. Garnette Sutherland's team for the lead on this neuroArm. Their undeniable dedication created a milestone in medical technology. As an Albertan I wish to congratulate the successful completion of neuroArm and recognize all those individuals whose efforts and dedication contributed to making this project a reality.

So, Mr. Speaker, if you ever need brain surgery, you might want to ask for the Sutherland neuroArm. Thank you very much.

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

Parents Empowering Parents

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the closing of the First Session of our 26th Legislature the then Minister of Education made this comment on the all-party co-operation to pass Bill 202.

I've been in this House for 12 or 13 years, Mr. Speaker, and I've yet to see such tremendous co-operation. [If] it were so on so many other important pieces of legislation we do in this House, we could change the image of democracy as we know it in this entire country.

Today I pay tribute to the citizens' group that launched that initiative and is still working to address issues of addiction. Parents Empowering Parents is, first, a self-help group. It's not a band of experts with solutions, not a crusade to change society. It is there for those who are bewildered and anguished, who have no one to turn to but others who have shared the same experience.

Second, PEP is an educational group. I use this word in its original sense of drawing out what is there. PEP draws out experiences and strengths from its members, resources they didn't know they had. PEP is persevering. Its members don't just work office hours, don't keep public and PEP lives separate, don't quit when things get tough. They believe in a cause and they live it, which makes them powerful.

Margaret Mead said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Mr. Speaker, Parents Empowering Parents contributed to the initiative of Bill 202 and through it to renewing our democracy. I commend this organization to my fellow members, and I'm proud to say that PEP now has a chapter in Edmonton-Mill Woods.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Jeff Toews

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express this Assembly's support to the Toews family, the majority of whom live in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti. I'm sure members of the Assembly are aware of the tragedy that occurred to Jeff Toews as he vacationed with family and friends in Mexico earlier this week. While the details are still under investigation, the fact remains that a very upstanding, hard-working, and very highly respected constituent met a terrible fate while on this vacation.

I know that our Ministry of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations has been in touch with the federal government and the RCMP, encouraging them to seek answers to some of the outstanding questions surrounding this tragedy.

On behalf of the constituents of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky I offer our condolences and support to the Toews family.

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

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every spring thousands of Albertans come together to fight multiple sclerosis, a serious, life-threatening disease with painful symptoms. There is no cure, but Albertans are working to change that. I am proud to say that many of those Albertans live in my constituency, including Donna Romanuk. She is the Edmontonian who has organized hundreds of people to form the Munnky Krunchers, Canada's top fundraising team.

Together the Munnky Krunchers have raised tens of thousands of dollars to fight MS, bringing us closer to a cure as well as helping pay for services and equipment that improve the quality of life of those people suffering from MS, Mr. Speaker.

Donna herself is currently fighting her own case of MS, and despite how devastated she was by the diagnosis, she refuses to give up. She is a truly inspirational human being. She reminds us of how privileged we all are to enjoy our time on Earth. When I met her in person, I felt compelled to sign up for the Munnky Krunchers myself. I will do my best to help the team fund a cure for MS, Mr. Speaker.

Donna's story reminds us all that our constituents, the citizens of Alberta, are the most powerful force for good in this province. Their hard work, compassion, and goodwill are leading us forward to a better tomorrow.

Thank you.

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

1:20 Southesk Collection of Aboriginal Artifacts

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week marked the coming home of rare aboriginal artifacts that are on display at the Royal Alberta Museum. After nearly 150 years Albertans now have the opportunity to view the Southesk collection, one of the world's most significant collections of northern plains ethnological artifacts, in a new feature exhibition entitled *Stories from the Southesk Collection: A 150-year Journey*. The Southesk collection represents a vital part of the story of our First Nations and Métis people and of Alberta and western Canada.

The First Nations and Métis artifacts had been collected in 1859 and 1860 by James Carnegie, the 9th Earl of Southesk, during a trip

to western Canada. The collection had been kept in the family's castle in Scotland for 147 years before being offered for sale in May 2006 at Sotheby's auction house in New York. With support from First Nations and Métis representatives the Royal Alberta Museum was the successful bidder for 33 of the 43 objects at the auction, for a total price of \$1.1 million Canadian. This would not have been possible without the financial support of the federal government and the Alberta government. Without this support we would have lost an important part of Alberta and western Canadian history.

Among the artifacts purchased by the museum were a Blackfoot dress made of mountain sheep skin, a rare finger-woven Métis sash, a beaded Plains Cree pad saddle, and the earl's journal. The acquisition of these artifacts will enhance the history galleries of the Royal Alberta Museum and provide research opportunities for scholars and students throughout North America. For Albertans young and old the Southesk exhibit represents a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the story of Alberta and our aboriginal culture.

Mr. Speaker, the Royal Alberta Museum should be commended for its initiative and determination to acquire these artifacts and bring them back to Alberta. Like many of the museum's past feature exhibits, *Stories from the Southesk Collection* continues the proud tradition of presenting us with a story that talks about our past and helps shape our future.

Mr. Speaker, it is fitting to conclude my statement by saying: welcome home, Southesk.

Thank you.

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

Community Policing

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that rapid growth in population without the proper infrastructure and services can pose serious challenges to building and maintaining safe communities. Alberta's police services struggle to keep up with the pressures of our rapidly growing province.

To cope with new challenges, Albertans need creative solutions to guarantee that our communities are safe. However, under this government the property and violent crime rates in the province remain above national levels. Tellingly, Alberta continues to have the lowest number of police officers per capita west of P.E.I.

Community policing is an effective and creative strategy for preventing and solving crime, but this has been systematically neglected by our government. Community policing involves developing closer interaction between the police and the local communities to properly deal with such problems as prostitution, drug trafficking, and gang violence. We must provide municipalities with the legal and financial means for both expanding and promoting good police practices as well as for hiring significantly more neighbourhood/community officers over the next few years. This requires increased provincial budgetary support for municipalities and improved enforcement measures.

Furthermore, Alberta's police services must reflect the diversity of our communities to improve their interaction with the citizens on the local level and to build lasting, trusting relationships. Police officers should work proactively with neighbourhood associations, aboriginal organizations, and other groups.

We also need to enhance crime prevention programs to better tackle the root causes of crime. Such programs must include cracking down on slum housing, pawnshops, and triple-X video stores and enforcing tougher measures to prevent alcohol and drug

abuse. Providing affordable housing and a living minimum wage are very much needed as part of the crime prevention strategy. Youth at risk must be supported and encouraged to actively participate in the life of the community.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, we can all agree that Alberta communities should have all the proper conditions to develop their potential.

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My voice is going. [interjections] I'll get it back; don't worry.

I'm tabling the text of a speech given by Mary Ladouceur at an affordable housing protest held just outside the Legislature last week. She notes that Alberta's economy does not help poor people and that her hard-earned savings shouldn't be given to greedy landlords.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from Bruce Magyar of Edmonton about the process that children with autism are funded by or how the government determines how much money each child receives to pay for professional consultants to come and help the children learn enough skills that they can be a part of their community.

The second is from Natalie Weller of Beaumont, an e-mail with an article from the Halifax *Daily News* regarding the child care crisis and the need to retain high-quality, trained early childhood educators.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon, and that's a letter dated May 7, 2007, that I received from the hon. Minister of Energy. This is in regard to Sessional Paper 250/2007 regarding the royalty rates and the comparative take between Texas and Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today intended to improve the transparency and accountability of Bill 26, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007. The title of the tabling, originating from Alberta Municipal Affairs, is Detailed Assessment Audit Manual.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one is the city of Edmonton brochure titled *Mother Nature is Looking After Me!* The message which follows this label reads, "But you can help if you find wildlife orphaned, injured or in distress." I was given this wonderful brochure when I attended the trade show at the John Janzen Nature Centre last Sunday. A good read and very useful.

The second one is another brochure from that trade show. This one is produced by the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton. Their phone number is 914-4118, and they offer unique referral,

nanny, transport, and education services. Again, very worthy of attention.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings, and these are ones I mentioned in debates last night. One is the Rental Market Report from CMHC, which shows a 4.5 per cent apartment vacancy for Edmonton in 2005. One is an article, How Rent Control Killed Affordable Housing in Winnipeg, and the other is The High Cost of Rent Control, which shows how rent control limits housing for the poor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr. Melchin, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, response to Written Question 10, asked for by Dr. Pannu on May 7, 2007.

head:

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Could I ask the Government House Leader to please share with us the projected government business for the following week?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday evening from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. under Committee of Supply Energy and Environment would be called, and the ND caucus would be the presenting caucus.

On Tuesday, May 15, after Orders of the Day in the afternoon Committee of Supply with Municipal Affairs and Housing and Seniors and Community Supports, and the Liberal caucus will be presenting. In the evening Infrastructure and Transportation; Employment, Immigration and Industry, with the Liberal caucus presenting. In the afternoon, time permitting, possible government business could be Government Motion 20, Government Motion 21, and bills 31, 32, and 33.

On Wednesday, May 16, under Orders of the Day in the afternoon a cross-ministry initiative presenting the ministries of Children's Services, Seniors and Community Supports, and Education, and of course all caucuses participate. In the evening it's actually a Health cross-ministry, and it's Energy, Environment, and Health. Again, in the afternoon, time permitting after Committee of Supply, second readings of bills 31, 32, 33, and, time permitting, potentially government referral motions.

Thursday, May 17, in the afternoon in Committee of Supply Education and Agriculture and Food, and it would be the Liberal caucus participating; and again government business as per the Order Paper, should time permit, Government Motion 22 and bills 31, 32, and 33.

1:30

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, Motion 19, which was assented to by the Assembly on May 8, included the following words: "and that a revised Committee of Supply schedule be tabled forthwith." Has that been accommodated now in your report?

Mr. Hancock: The report does indicate the changes that were made with the exception of the portion of supply that was moved from the 16th, which will, as I understand it, be presented on I think it's Monday the 4th, but that hasn't been nailed down yet, and I'll let the House know as soon as that is.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Temporary Rent Regulation

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and his government want to claim that the affordable housing crisis is, quote, the price of prosperity. Well, it's not. It's the price of the failure to plan, and the price is too high for too many Albertans. Angela Grainer, for example, is a single parent making a moderate living, an average salary of over \$43,000 a year. On July 1 her rent will increase from about \$800 a month to \$1,200 a month. To the Premier. After Angela pays for just the basics, she'll be \$40 in the hole every month and in danger of losing her home. Can the Premier explain why this government refuses to put in place temporary rent regulations to help people like Angela?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we debated the bill all night and to early this morning. The bill was lifted from committee and now is in third reading, and this bill will go a long way in protecting Albertans also with almost – well, more than a quarter of a billion dollars invested in affordable housing in this province. That's a substantial amount. We want to move forward to build more units so that we can accommodate more Albertans in decent accommodations.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. But those efforts aren't going to help people like Angela and the thousands like her. The Premier should know that Angela and those others won't qualify for the assistance under this government's very flawed housing policy, and indeed the much more efficient thing to do is to bring in regulations. To the Premier. The Premier pledged that his government will help "anyone that requires some assistance in housing." Will the Premier now commit to revisiting his plan and finding a way to help people like Angela, people who are working hard but who are getting left behind?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of programs in place to assist Albertans. One, of course, is the emergency shelter benefit program, the other is the rental supplement program, and the third the homelessness and eviction prevention fund. For specific details any minister can answer those in question period later.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and his government have attempted to dismiss this crisis as isolated incidents, something that can be fixed by the minister of housing having a chat with the landlords, and no doubt he's going to be having a lot of those chats.

Mr. Stelmach: Might be having a chat with you, then.

Dr. Taft: Is that a threat, Mr. Premier?

The Speaker: Whoa. Through the chair, please, everybody.

Dr. Taft: To the Premier. Will the Premier finally admit that this housing crisis is a widespread problem, a genuine crisis affecting thousands of average Albertans that his government's policies will not help?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I've mentioned this in the House numerous times. During the leadership campaign I recognized that this was a priority for government. It is a priority for government. We put money into affordable housing. We also have millions of dollars in protection for Albertans. We'll continue to work. We do have compassion and care for Albertans. And you know, Mr. Speaker, continually – continually – every month, new people come to Alberta from other provinces, other countries because there is some hope that they have a job here and they can continue with their life here in the greatest province there is to live in, Alberta.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Rent Supplement Programs

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier and his cabinet have stumbled in trying to respond to the affordable housing crisis, and everybody in the province can see that. Programs have been announced without clear rules, and before they're ready to be implemented, phone numbers have been offered that provide no help. They admit that rent gouging is happening but offer no policy to stop it. I think Albertans would like to know who's in charge, that somebody – anybody – over there is in charge. To the minister of municipal affairs, and I want an answer from this minister, who is responsible, not someone assigned to come to his defence: can he tell us what the eligibility criteria area? What are the eligibility criteria for the rent supplement program administered by his ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would assure you that I don't need anybody to come to my defence, but I want to explain to you – and I think that has been tried many times – that if we do have individuals that are in emergency need, that is under the jurisdiction of Employment, Immigration and Industry. If individuals have concerns or challenges with the rent supplement, it is under the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. If you want to talk about the support that we are giving to municipalities, working with municipalities . . .

The Speaker: And we'll probably be able to get to that more later. The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat my question. I believe that the rent supplement program is under this minister. My question was this: can this minister tell the Assembly the eligibility criteria for the rent supplement program administered by his ministry? What are the criteria? Who qualifies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The criteria for rent supplement and the policy of this government is that individuals should not pay over 30 per cent of their salary – 30 per cent of their salary – for housing.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then, just in the spirit of making some progress here, does that mean that all Albertans who pay 30 per cent or more of their salary for housing should be contacting you for assistance?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about affordable housing, and this affordable housing and rent supplement deals with individuals in need. If the hon. member of the opposition wants to rent a facility and he wants to rent and pay let us use an artificial figure of \$50,000 a year, we are not going to support him. This is affordable housing for people in need.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Temporary Rent Regulation

(continued)

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before and during the debate on affordable housing this government maintained that they could not interfere in the market, that the market looks after itself. Well, not true, at least not all the time. When Alberta faced the BSE crisis, the government immediately stepped in with many programs and subsidies to protect farmers from losing their farms and homes. In July 2005 the six-point BSE recovery plan was brought in to rescue the struggling beef industry. They even set up a 1-800 stress line to counsel farmers in distress. Farmers were not left to fend for themselves. Can the Premier explain why his government acted so decisively to aid farmers in a crisis but refused to help Alberta renters living in big cities by bringing in temporary rent regulations? Why the double standard?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the member isn't listening to the answers. I just listed a number of programs, including more than a quarter of a billion dollars for affordable housing, millions more in terms of protection for Albertans. And I'm going to make it very clear that what the hon. member is talking about was something as a result of a health issue in animals between trading partners. It was a major issue at that particular time. This issue in terms of housing, more people moving to Alberta: that's why we're putting, as I said, more than a quarter of a billion dollars into housing and protecting Albertans with a variety of programs.

1:40

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Speaker, I think some of the divide here is that many rural members of this Premier's cabinet aren't hearing these stories and cries for help in their constituencies, so I'm going to give them an example that they understand. In 2002 the government took over the function of regulating confined feeding operations. Now the NRCB controls and regulates livestock operations and feedlot sites. Isn't this an example where this government interferes in the market and private business? If you want to establish a new site or expand an existing one, you go to the NRCB. To the Premier: why not have the same approach for those few landlords wanting to jack rents over and above an allowed, accepted provincial average? They can appeal to exceed the cap if they can justify why. Tell me and the renters why this is any different.

Mr. Stelmach: This is another example of a member who sat here for some period of time, knows nothing about, obviously, the role of the NRCB. But you know, Mr. Speaker, the more I listened over the last few weeks, this must be the new Liberal way: pitting Albertans against Albertans. That's all they know. That's all they know.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October of 2003 former Premier Klein told Albertans he was frustrated with the auto insurance situation and the skyrocketing premiums, and for that he implemented a one-year freeze on premiums. He said to reporters, quote, it doesn't lower or higher insurance rates. It just says everything is on hold until we sort this thing out. End quote. To the Premier: your former boss reacted to a public outcry over auto insurance gouging and sided with the people. He was also admired for backing down when found wrong. Will you be as decisive as he was in those instances and ensure fairness in the marketplace? This time we're asking for a cap on rent hikes, a temporary cap, not a freeze, and it is not too late for an about-face. Will you or will you not?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, first of all, not everyone across the way there is asking for rent controls because, obviously, there were noticeable absences when it came to the final vote. The issue is completely different. However, we are being decisive. We are being decisive, because . . . [interjections] Oh, boy. What a reaction. That really gets them going. I guess you must have had a little bit of a lack of sleep last night. A little bit of lack of sleep, and you sure get irritated.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we are decisive as a government. That's why we put over a quarter of a billion dollars into affordable housing and millions more into supportive programs to support Albertans in need. We are caring, and we're compassionate. We'll continue to be so.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know what? I'm proud to say that every single member of the NDP caucus was present for every single vote, and no other party can say that. No other party can say that.

Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government has turned its back on Alberta's renters. The Conservatives would rather side with the landlords than with the hard-working renters of this province. Here's another example where the Conservative government's lack of compassion is hurting Albertans. We have Jessica Fox, Shawn McKinlay, and their three-month-old daughter, Angelique, in the gallery. They've been hit with a \$1,200-a-month increase, from \$495 to \$1,695 for a one-bedroom basement apartment. This is their first rent increase since last year. Why has the Premier turned his back on these people?

The Speaker: And the Premier is going to have a chance to respond.

Mr. Stelmach: Yes. Mr. Speaker, once again, the government is not turning our back on any Albertan. That's why we have a number of programs. If this is an issue with this very specific person, the minister has heard the individual's name. We have staff in place to look after that. It's one-stop shopping, one phone call, and three departments – EII, also municipal affairs and Treasury Board, Service Alberta – will look after Albertans in need.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, while this may be an extreme case, there are hundreds of thousands of renters in this province, most of whom are seeing significant increases in their rent. The government's programs will not help all those Albertans, and the Premier knows it. This is not a case of just a series of one-offs where you help people individually. You've got to fix the problem, Mr. Premier. Why won't you bring in rent guidelines?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, because evidence time and time again no matter what jurisdiction you study, whether it's in those provinces that have been governed by a socialist government, a Liberal government, has proven now that rent controls have not worked. They've actually decreased the number of spaces available for rent and also put such tight controls that no new housing was built. We don't want to get in that situation. That's why we're putting money up front, working with the municipalities, working with the federal government, and looking after Albertans.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, Jessica and Shawn may be forced to return home to Nova Scotia or Ontario, where they come from, because they can't find affordable housing here in this province. This government prides itself on attracting people from all over Canada, but in fact people are leaving this province in greater numbers than ever before. That is because this government does not care. There are more people leaving the province than ever before because they can't find a place to live because this government doesn't care. My question is to the Premier. Why doesn't he care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this Premier cares. This government cares. We care about all Albertans. In fact, we care about all Canadians. In fact, because of the tremendous economic growth in the province of Alberta other provinces share in about \$40 billion worth of goods and services. All this economy spreads across all of Canada, and if you pull the economic growth out of Alberta today, most of the other provinces will see their economies almost flat. So Alberta does care. It does share with other provinces. It does contribute to equalization. To make a ridiculous statement like that is absolutely not true. In fact, we just contributed handsomely again this year to the equalization fund. Where are you getting all your information from?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Steel Fabrication Plant in Tofield

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Temporary foreign contractors and owners hire their own temporary foreign workers. They do not look to Albertans first to employ or to train. We have Alberta laws, but these companies don't always follow them. Now we have KNM looking to bring in temporary foreign workers. They say they can't find 2,500 skilled workers in the Tofield area. Go figure what that labour market opinion will be. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. What has your department done to ensure that Albertans are hired first, Canadians second, and foreign temps after at the Tofield site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me state that before temporary foreign workers are allowed to come to Canada, a business must prove – must prove – that there's no Albertan or Canadian available for that job. Because this is a federal program, the employer must prove to the federal government through a forum on a labour market opinion that no Albertan or Canadian is available, and that's a serious process. Through our labour force strategy, Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce, we have a multi-pronged approach to help ensure that Albertans have an adequate supply of labour: first of all, getting Albertans educated; second, giving the employers information; third, keeping workers in the job longer; and finally. . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how will the government ensure that Alberta contractors who hire Alberta trades, technicians, and engineers have a real chance at bidding and winning the construction work at KNM?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it is not the role of the provincial government to ensure that one company successfully outbids another company. It is our role to provide an environment where businesses can thrive and to attract investment to our province. It is a priority for this government to give Albertans the job first and Canadians second. All Albertans considered first; Canadians second. Ultimately, the market will decide who wins the opportunity to successfully be engaged in the projects.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Thousands of Albertans work for the 17 large vessel manufacturers in our province. These employers include some of our best trainers of trades apprentices, both union and nonunion. The Tofield temps will distort our industries' competitiveness in Alberta and will result in the training of fewer Albertans. What will the government do to ensure that the Tofield development does not undermine Alberta's industry?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's been very useful to have the hon. member's question because clearly we can keep a watchful eye on the kinds of things that will happen in Tofield, particularly relative to this industry. Our government's role is to make sure that the province remains globally competitive. This involves training opportunities for workers and attracting business investment in the province.

Mr. Speaker, our labour market strategy, in fact, includes actions to increase apprenticeship here in Alberta, and many of these RAP programs are highly acclaimed by the leaders in postsecondary. Our Budget 2007 gives a \$15 million boost to apprenticeship.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

1:50 School Construction and Renovation

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I was able to attend one of four grand openings of brand new schools in the city of Calgary, the Chapparral elementary school. It was a delight to be able to see children performing with violins, song, and dance and to talk to parents that were thrilled to have a school in the heart of their community. But not all communities have that, and they are looking for their school. So my questions are to the Minister of Education. Can the minister please share with this Assembly what plans he has to allow schools to be built in these new communities?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there is some tremendous good news in the area of new schools being opened in this province. In the current school year, which I guess is winding down very quickly, we will have either opened or will be opening some 16 new schools throughout the province, and about an equal number will be on stream in this next school year. However, saying that, we also recognize that there's still, despite putting about \$1.3 billion into school construction over the next three years, a very large amount of infrastructure and modernization required. So I'll await the supplemental question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. We're hearing a lot about alternative financing. Some call it P3s. Can the minister describe to this Assembly what the advantages are if we go down this road?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have some \$3 billion worth of need throughout the province for new schools and for modernization, and although \$100 million was put into our budget in this current year for additional school infrastructure, it will come nowhere near to meeting that need. So we have to look at a whole variety of ways of getting schools in areas where students live and learn. We're just in the process of looking at that now, and I'm open to all suggestions by all members of this House.

Mrs. Ady: My final supplemental to the same minister: that's good news, Mr. Speaker, but parents want to know when. They want to know when this can come to be. They want to know if it'll be there when their kids go to kindergarten or university. Can the minister share when this could be?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think that is a very valid concern. In talking to parents that are waiting for a new school, basically what they're saying is: we recognize that it can't all happen at once, but at least lay out a plan for us so that even if it's in the year 2010, we know that we'll be getting our school at that time. I think you're aware that there is a small committee of cabinet, chaired by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, and we're looking at all capital projects in the province. Hopefully, in the near future we'll have some good news to announce.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Youth Addictions Treatment Programs

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recognizing the stress and isolation many parents face in dealing with children who have substance abuse problems, a group of parents in Sherwood Park got together and formed a support group known as Parents Empowering Parents, or PEP. They are here with us today to raise some of the concerns they have with treatment for children addicted to drugs in this province. My first question is to the Minister of Children's Services. PEP has identified several problems for families in remote communities who would like access to services. There are few rural treatment beds and no service dedicated to transporting children apprehended under PCHAD. What is the minister doing to address these service gaps?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that you've raised this issue. There's also the bill that the hon. Member for Red Deer-North put forward and was implemented last year. As well, I'd like to thank the Parents Empowering Parents for supporting that bill because I know that they were a huge part of garnering support to get it passed in the Legislature. I will say that my understanding is that that program has been very successful. It was only implemented last summer. I understand that 350 children and youth have gone through that program with their families. Fifty per cent of them have voluntarily moved on to treatment, which is unbelievable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. Parents involved with PEP have expressed concern over the shortage of drug treatment beds in Alberta. They point to both a lack of facilities for youth and adult patient waiting lists of over two months long. Drug addictions require immediate action. Forcing families and people in need of treatment to wait for prolonged periods is simply unacceptable. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what is your department doing to implement the recommendation of the Task Force on Crystal Meth that 300 additional beds be made available for detox and substance abuse treatment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. After the Task Force on Crystal Meth was presented, a cross-ministry committee was set up of deputies from a number of departments who were affected, I think the Solicitor General, Health and Wellness, Children's Services, I think Municipal Affairs and Housing. The cross-ministry deputies committee looked at the task force report, looked at what we were doing, and looked at what needed to be done not just with crystal meth but for youth addictions. They've brought back a report to me as the lead ministry. I'm currently reviewing that report and shortly will be forwarding it to government for further discussion as to what needs to be included in business plans and where we go from here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. PEP has identified several problems associated with access to effective treatment for different groups. In particular they're concerned about the need for increased resources for young adults in the 18 to 25 age group. The burden drug addiction places on addicts and their families is just as severe whether the individual is 16, 17, 18, or 19. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will your ministry agree to provide targeted treatment programs for young adults aged 18 to 25 in order to create a transition period between services aimed at youth and those designed for adults?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with the concept that we need to have in place addiction treatment and the transition programming, but I will ask the hon. member to be just a little bit more patient. I am working thoroughly through the youth addictions report that the deputies have prepared. They've done some very good work, and it's on my desk now – in fact, I think it might even be in my briefcase with me here today – to read thoroughly and to see how we can fit it into our current business plan with the current budgeting and what things might need to be brought forward within another business plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Skilled Workforce Training Programs

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to the continued economic activity within Alberta, there is a growing need for skilled workers, and this is expected to continue for the next 10 years. Of course, this occurs in a myriad of areas and sectors. Would the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology please outline his

strategy to address this high demand to ensure that Albertans get a chance at any job availability?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Addressing Alberta's labour force challenges is going to require a partnership and collaboration amongst not only the postsecondaries but with industry, with the associations, with all of those groups working together as part of the overall plan to manage the growth pressures that we have. We want solutions that ensure things like apprenticeship training and the industry and the system, that we're meeting those needs, so we're working on a long-term labour force strategy with industry, with the postsecondaries. We're adding more apprenticeship training spaces and recognizing prior learning experience where it's possible. We're offering a wider variety of delivery models in terms of either in-class training or distance learning or bringing the job site to the student or those sorts of things. We're doing as much as we can.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's fine and dandy, but some of the apprentices are unable to even attend apprenticeship technical training because there are no spots available at institutions to accommodate them. So what is it that you're going to be doing to address this very problem?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're already starting to address it, and in a very big way I might add, larger than any other jurisdiction probably in North America. We recently, in this budget, added 3,000 new apprenticeship spots, and this House may recall that a couple of months prior to that, we added an additional 3,600 apprenticeship training spots to the system. No doubt there are probably some apprentices out there who are looking at where they can go to get their spot. As part of Campus Alberta and the roles and responsibilities mandate we want to make it easier for students to find the spot. We want to make it easier for employers to work with the students to get them into the apprenticeship training program, and we will continue to add capacity, add space, and add instruction to make it affordable and accessible for all students.

Ms Calahasen: We have a rapidly growing aboriginal population, and these Albertans are currently underutilized. I would like to ask the minister: what kind of training programs have you got available to make sure that these available Albertans are going to be able to take advantage of the Alberta advantage?

Mr. Horner: Well, Advanced Education and Technology, Mr. Speaker, provides a number of programs and services that are specific to aboriginal Albertans. We are encouraging more aboriginal Albertans to pursue their postsecondary learning. The ministry supports a number of programs targeted at aboriginal learners and leaders in career opportunities, like the practical nursing program at NorQuest. We also have transitional training programs that are focused on those. There are now more than 1,200 aboriginal apprentices in Alberta. That's an increase of more than 400 per cent since 2002, when the province only had 238. We also administer several bursaries for aboriginal learners. We have the Alberta aboriginal apprenticeship program, which links aboriginal apprentices with employers. All part of building a stronger Alberta.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Steel Fabrication Plant in Tofield

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was mentioned earlier, KNM, a global manufacturer of steel process equipment, is setting up shop in Tofield. Tofield, as we all know, is in the Premier's riding, but unfortunately the constituents from the Premier's riding will not have first crack at the jobs that are going to be created. The process equipment is eventually going to find its way from China and Malaysia all the way up to Fort McMurray, but it's going to stop in Tofield for final assembly. My first question is to the minister of exploitation, immigration and industry. Why is the Alberta government allowing this proposal to mobilize . . .

The Speaker: Whoa. Please. There is no such minister known as the minister of exploitation. Perhaps the hon. member would like to rephrase that.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I forgot. Employment. The minister of employment and immigration.

Why is the Alberta government allowing this proposal to mobilize over 2,000 temporary foreign workers without first forcing KNM and their affiliates to hire workers in Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, previously the hon. colleague from Edmonton-Manning asked the question, and I gave the response. Perhaps I can abbreviate question period by referring the hon. member to the response previously given.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. I'll start with a quote. This is from the Malaysian *Star*.

It said while the cost of labour in Canada was expensive, the group was likely to leverage on its plants in China and Malaysia for prefabrication works before shipping them to Canada for final assembly.

My question: how can Alberta-based steel fabricating shops compete with this operation, which relies on low wages and substandard working conditions in China and Malaysia? How is our local fabricating industry to compete?

Ms Evans: We have a global economy. There are many things that are built offshore. There are many other countries that participate in the Alberta advantage every day by either engineering or creating products that are used. The development of Syncrude and Suncor is attracting people from Ontario. Businesses from out of Canada, as well, are competing on many jobs. Mr. Speaker, it's the global economy we live in. That's totally to be expected.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. The executive of this outfit, KNM, admits that wages are cheaper in China and Malaysia and that they're higher in Canada. He's taking advantage of it at the expense of our local steel industries, and you're allowing it to happen. My question again to the same minister: why is this government selling out the steel fabrication industry here in Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in my previous answer I replied that this is a federal program, the temporary foreign worker program. The program on the labour market opinions and the issues around labour market opinions are things where there has to be an illustration, before workers are actually brought over, that there are no Alberta

workers available to do the job. I look forward to discovering more about the company's plans. Maybe there'll be a further response to be given later, but I'm not clear why this hon. member continues to pursue this line of questioning.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Regional Municipal Planning and Development

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his state of the city address Mayor Mandel stated: "The inability of Edmonton and its regional partners to pull together is our biggest challenge. Working in silos is not just silly. It's destructive. One region of 1 million people should not have 23 answers to every question." To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: in response to rumours that the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability's report has now been shelved, to those who claim that a report which advocates for regional co-operation and planning and sharing of revenues and expenses has no support from this government, what say you?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. No, there is no truth to that rumour at all, about this government shelving the minister's council on sustainability. Last Tuesday, I believe, when CPC was scheduled to deal with the minister's council report, I was summoned to Committee of Supply at the same time, and I asked if we could just pull that part of the agenda, that report. I have asked the chairman of the CPC for rescheduling.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mayor Mandel further stated that the Premier has been definitive on this issue. He promised that government would deal with these issues once and for all. This issue demands that a decision be made and made to stick. To the same minister: following years of studies and several reports later, will Albertans and particularly Edmontonians have a definitive response from your ministry to the report and on the matters of regional co-operation?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, there have been numerous reports that have been presented. There have been numerous reports and analyzations that have been done by the city of Edmonton and also by the surrounding area. There was also a report that was presented to us by the minister's council on sustainability. We have taken that report. We are moving it through the process. It is critical that if a report of such comprehension has come to this government, we need to do it right. To rush it through would not be the right focus.

Mr. Lukaszuk: I agree: we need to do it right, and we need to do it right now.

To the same minister: can I then assure Edmontonians that anticipated growth in the capital region will result in equitable sharing of the benefits and burdens that come along with such sudden growth?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are working together with the municipalities. At present we are arranging a meeting with the surrounding municipalities, 23 municipalities. I very much believe that we need to work with the municipalities as a provincial government, and our position, as shown by the budget, stands true.

We need to have regional planning. We need to work together. We need to have communication, collaboration, and co-operation.

Thank you.

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

Assistance for Student Housing

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By failing to introduce rent stability guidelines, this government has turned its back on tens of thousands of tenants and, in so doing, created a new indirect tax on postsecondary students. This new Tory tax will hit rural students particularly hard. Many students come from rural areas to go to universities, colleges, and technical institutes in our cities and regional centres, and they'll be hit hard by the huge rental costs that await them. Will the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing explain to this House why there is nothing, absolutely nothing, in the government's response to the Affordable Housing Task Force report to protect tens of thousands of students from being gouged by landlords?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the recommendations that we received from the housing task force and those responses very much included individuals that have challenges in housing. I have had discussions with . . . Is it CASS?

Mr. Horner: CAUS.

Mr. Danyluk: CAUS. Sorry. Abbreviations.

. . . CAUS talking about the possibility on how we can improve student housing.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, the minister clearly is out of touch with the realities that students face in this province. It will now cost students even more to pursue postsecondary education in Alberta. The 14 per cent increase in living allowance for students, which is, in fact, an increase to student loan limits, will not help except to increase their debt. Will the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology explain to this House what he has to offer to students to help to offset their skyrocketing housing costs besides a higher debt burden?

2:10

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the affordability of living accommodation is one piece of the affordability piece in the overall student financial picture, if you will. I am also a parent of two individuals who are attending our fine postsecondary institutions this fall, one of which . . .

Mr. Martin: You've got lots of money.

Mr. Horner: No, I don't have lots of money, hon. member. I wish I had lots of money.

To get to the answer that you're looking for, the point is that the cost of living increase that we put into the student finance program is not just loans because as the hon. member well knows, a good part of our student financial system is bursaries, is grants. The federal component is all loans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is in the grip of a serious affordable housing crisis. There's no doubt about it. Postsecondary students will be among its many victims as they return to school this fall. Students will have to take on extra debt

thanks to this new Tory tax which effectively allows landlords to gouge students. To the President of the Treasury Board: is the government going to pick up all the additional rental costs for all affected postsecondary students, and if not, why does it not care?

Mr. Snelgrove: You know, Mr. Speaker, as someone who has a son attending an institution right now to try and make a better life here in Alberta, I understand very well about the investment in the future. I find it somewhat frustrating that if a student is spending his own money on his education, somehow that's a bad debt, but when government does it, it's an investment in the future. Well, I'm very proud of the fact that my son has chosen to work in time and invest in his future. He understands that there's a cost to education. There's a cost to all we do, but he looks at his as a true investment in his future. Alberta is providing probably the most opportunistic area in the world to receive great instruction with a great future, and then they can really invest in their future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Elbow River Watershed

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend a group of very concerned residents of Calgary area and Bragg Creek will be fighting to protect the Elbow River and pristine eastern region of Kananaskis park from logging. They will be tagging trees with the words Save Kananaskis: It's Worth It written on tags made from a slice of fallen trees. This is an area that is vital as a watershed, as a water source for Calgary and other communities east, a habitat to threatened species, a recreation area for thousands of Calgarians. It's an area that should be left natural. To the environment minister: given that 28 per cent of the area will be clear-cut over the years, will the minister provide assurances that the water quality will not be adversely affected?

Mr. Renner: Well, first of all, let me say, Mr. Speaker, that it's nice to actually get a chance to answer a question. I thought we'd forgotten about the environment for a little while. Let me just say that this particular issue is primarily the responsibility of the minister responsible for Sustainable Resource Development. However, like so many other issues, there is overlap between his ministry and mine, and I can assure the hon. member that any impact on long-term sustainability of our water supply is very much at stake and a concern to this minister. I will assure this member that we'll be working hand in hand in ensuring that what needs to be done from the sustainable side does not adversely impact the environment side.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, at a time when moratoriums are affecting all of the southern rivers for water licensing, five years after the implementation of Water for Life why is there still no comprehensive plan for the watershed of the Elbow River?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, such a plan that the member refers to actually does exist. That plan has to do with the implementation of WPACs, the watershed public advisory councils. That plan has to do with the ability for us to study the capacity for storage along that river basin to invest in the necessary infrastructure to increase the storage capacity of that basin. At the end of the day the plan is very much contingent upon us dealing with the allocation of licences in a basin that is fully allocated at this point in time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of climate change and the threat to growing water quality and quantity problems in the area, jurisdictions such as Vancouver and New York have bought back the watersheds to protect in perpetuity the water for those regions. Will the minister consider buying back this vital watershed?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a significant difference between the two jurisdictions that the member refers to and this one. The biggest one is that in most cases we already own significant portions of the watershed. Our watershed is primarily the Rocky Mountain basin, and most of that already is Crown land. So I would suggest to the hon. member that it's probably not necessary.

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

Rent Supplement Programs (continued)

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last few weeks, day in and day out the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has been telling us about the \$285 million allocated for affordable housing projects in the province. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. How much money out of that \$285 million is going to help seniors facing rent increases and when?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member that the \$285 million is new money that has been added to our budget. We have \$143 million that has been allocated to municipalities for them to make a choice in what the needs are in their communities. It is up to them to decide how much of the \$143 million should be used in the direction or the focus of seniors. Also, there's an allocation of \$68 million on a per project basis for other municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. How much money out of that \$285 million is going to help AISH recipients facing rent increases and when?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess I could give the same answer for the second question because the municipalities do have that option to decide what they feel the most important needs are in their communities.

But I would ask the minister of seniors if he'd care to supplement.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we work very closely with respect to these funds being available to all Albertans: seniors, AISH recipients. This certainly would be accessible to every one of them. They are equally applicable as with anybody else. But we do work closely with those on AISH and seniors to provide subsidized housing for both of them, actually.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister:

how much money out of that \$285 million is going to help homeless people in Calgary, Edmonton, and around the province and when?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have increased our assistance to the homeless to \$35 million this year. The provincial homeless initiative increased to \$6 million. The Alberta transitional housing initiative received 2 and a half million dollars, the homeless and eviction fund, that has been discussed, \$7 million. The rental program that caps rents at 30 per cent increased to \$33 million. All of these programs and funding have increased to continue to have a positive impact.

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

Tourism Industry

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tourism is a sustainable industry that does not receive enough attention from this government. This government needs to start thinking about the long-term prosperity of this province and take advantage of the opportunities to diversify the economy and support communities. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Members of the tourism industry are concerned that there is no way for them to provide criticism or input to improve tourism in Alberta. Is this what the minister considers governing with integrity and transparency?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We value tourism, and certainly we want to have that particular industry grow. I need to say that the tourism industry in the province of Alberta ranks about number 4 at this stage in terms of economic activity for the province. The industry has had all sorts of opportunities to participate. Certainly, my office is always open. In my past activities I have met with a number of service providers. We also have our strategic marketing council, that administers and makes recommendations to me on the tourism side.

Mr. Agnihotri: I don't know why the stakeholders are not happy.

My question to the same minister: what changes has the minister made in the last six months to ensure that all voices are being heard?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I've spent the last four, five months actually meeting with a lot of industry representatives. My door has always been open. Certainly, I've talked to industry representatives. We have our Strategic Marketing Tourism Council that we work with. We've got some staff that are appointed. I work very, very closely with Travel Alberta to ensure that our tourism industry is growing and expanding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: the Leitch report identifies gaps in the accountability in the current tourism framework and recommends options to close those gaps. This report has not been released yet. Will this minister make this report public immediately?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, certainly we're always reviewing the governance structure of Travel Alberta. You know, we are review-

ing various options as to how we can best improve the tourism industry in the province of Alberta, and we will keep on reviewing those and making adaptations and changes as we see fit.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 84 questions and answers today.

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Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 34

Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's a tremendous pleasure to move third reading of Bill 34.

We had quite an exciting and stimulating conversation that, obviously, lasted far past its usefulness. However, that's part of our democratic process. We look forward to probably a more concise and focused debate at third reading, and we would like to proceed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon. I think it's afternoon although I must admit that the way I feel right now, I'm not exactly sure what time of day or night it is.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, third reading is meant to discuss the effects that the bill will have when passed. I have some members across telling me that this is the perfect bill and that it's going to solve a lot of problems, and I have other members on my left telling me that it's not going to have any effect. I don't think that either one is the case.

Clearly, there are some measures in Bill 34 that are going to go some way towards addressing some of the situations that we've heard described in this Assembly over the last several days, go some way towards addressing some of the challenges and troubles faced by some of the visitors to our galleries over the last several days, and that's good. I hope that, in fact, the bill does accomplish some of the goals as outlined by the minister.

There is, as I suggested, a crisis in affordable housing in this province right now, and there is, as I suggested, a crisis in the public relations management of this issue for the government right now. So not only is it important for the government that this bill accomplish some of what it set out to do, but clearly and far more important is that it accomplish some of what it is intended to do for the renters of this province and particularly for those that are most vulnerable.

As I had suggested there would be, we had examples in the galleries again today of gouging. I don't know how you could describe it as anything but that. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and to the President of the Treasury Board: if the example that was introduced in the public gallery today is not gouging – we talked a lot last night about what is gouging. I would submit to you that the example that we had up here today is gouging. There's no question about that. There's no black and white. There's no disputing whatsoever that an example such as what we heard today is gouging. I think that it is important to note that even though this legislation is going to pass this afternoon because the government has a big majority and it will go through, this legislation is not – and I repeat and I underline “not” – going to address the example that we had in the public gallery this afternoon.

If we're going to talk about the impact that the bill is going to

have in third reading, let's also talk about the impact that it will not have. It will not address the situation that we had here today, and that is a major problem.

I heard the President of the Treasury Board speaking in a scrum when the marathon sitting, which started yesterday afternoon at 1 o'clock, ended this morning. I heard the minister in a scrum saying that he's going to sit down with the landlord and tenant dispute board and discuss with representatives from the landlords and discuss with representatives from tenants some sort of a mechanism whereby the landlords would police themselves and whereby they would agree to self-regulation so that these examples that we saw again in this Legislature today will not happen.

I'm going to submit to you right now, Mr. Speaker, that I don't believe that that will be good enough. I appreciate where the minister is coming from. Frankly, I hope he's right, but I don't believe that what he suggested to the media this morning is actually going to happen. I talked the other day about the greedy few landlords that are out there that are going to take full advantage of this marketplace, of the fact that there is no legislation that prevents them from doing so, and I don't think that a little bit of peer pressure is going to change that. I hope he's right, but I'm fearful that he is not right. I suppose only time will tell, and you can bet that we'll be lifting a page from the government's playbook where they always talk about how they're monitoring.

Well, I guarantee you that this member on behalf of all Albertans will be monitoring very carefully the few greedy landlords who have been imposing these dramatic and, as the Premier said last Friday prior to the Conservative convention, un-Albertan increases on their tenants. That, I can assure you, is something that I will be doing and that I know my colleagues in the Official Opposition will be doing on behalf of all Albertans. To those members that are in the gallery this afternoon and to all of those who've been down here all this week helping us bring the attention of this most serious crisis to the ministers of the government and to their staff, that is my commitment to you, and you can hold me to it.

Mr. Speaker, the government has talked a lot in the last few days about the need to create additional units, and there's absolutely no question that that is desperately required. Again, I would submit to you that this legislation is not going to create additional units. It does certainly provide some additional protection to renters in terms of notification periods for eviction notices in the case of condonation or major renovations. It provides additional time periods for notification in the instance of rent increases, and those are good things. We all know that those are part of what the housing task force recommended.

Clearly, as the minister himself described in the wee hours of the morning, those are pieces of the puzzle, and I'm hopeful that they will go some ways towards addressing the situation. They're not going to accomplish everything that's needed. On behalf of the Official Opposition and even, Mr. Speaker, I would submit to you, on behalf of some members of the government who have spoken previously yet did not allow that to carry through to debate in this Legislature over the last 24 hours and did not allow it to carry through to the standing votes, the many standing votes that we had on the various amendments, that clearly there are members in the government caucus that are hearing the same concerns from their constituents, and some have even expressed either publicly or privately over the last week or two their acknowledgement that temporary rental guidelines are necessary in this out-of-control marketplace.

2:30

I appreciate that they've shared that with us either privately or in some cases publicly, but I am disappointed that that didn't carry

through to putting themselves on the record during the last 24 hours while we debated this bill, and I'm disappointed that that didn't carry through to standing up and having themselves counted when it came to a recorded vote in this Legislature, because I think it's important for those members to show their constituents that, in fact, they're standing up for them and for what they've heard in their constituency offices.

I know that this government is ideologically committed to anything but any sort of rent controls or rental guidelines, and I can appreciate that. There's been a lot of talk over the last 24 hours about that philosophical difference between that side of the House and this side of the House. But, Mr. Speaker, you're one to always remind us that we are all, first and foremost, here to represent our constituents. You always remind us that we choose to align ourselves with a political affiliation but that it is really the constituents that put us here and that our first and primary responsibility is to represent those people.

I have to tell you that I cannot imagine doing anything but supporting temporary rent guidelines based on what I have heard in my constituency office, and I'm going to guess that at least those members that represent large urban constituencies have all heard the same things that I've heard. This is not a problem that's specific to Edmonton-Rutherford by any means, and it's certainly not a problem that's specific to Edmonton-Centre or Edmonton-Mill Woods. This is a problem that is rampant throughout Calgary. We know the horror stories that we've heard from Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, areas in Red Deer. I see now the Energy minister, Mr. Speaker, is giving me a little waggle of his finger, suggesting that perhaps it's not true in Grande Prairie, but I've been in Grande Prairie.

Ms Blakeman: He's had one call.

Mr. R. Miller: He's had one call. Well, I can tell the minister that the gentleman that I spoke to that's living out of the back of his pickup truck doesn't have access to a telephone or the Internet, and he probably doesn't even know where the minister's office is.

Mr. Knight: He's probably making \$150,000 a year.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, you know what? If he is making \$150,000 a year, and he can't find a place to live – he can't find affordable housing – that just exactly illustrates the problem that we've been discussing in this House over the last couple of days.

You know, whether you're talking about Lethbridge – and I know that there are certainly some instances of this happening in Lethbridge, not to the same extent, perhaps, that we see in Calgary and Edmonton and Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, but certainly it's there too. There are instances in communities across this province.

This afternoon in question period we had the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar discussing a steel manufacturing plant that's going to go out in the community of Tofield, and there are going to be about 2,000 workers suddenly living out there. Mr. Speaker, I know Tofield quite well. There's not accommodation anywhere near capable of housing 2,000 workers in the area of Tofield. So I'm not sure where that's going to put that community in terms of their housing situation, but I'm going to guess that there will be a housing affordability crisis in the Tofield area as well, if there isn't already.

For us to sort of stick our heads in the sand and somehow think that all is good because 55,000 new residents are coming to this province every year, we're missing the point. In fact, I think the reality is – and actually the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs spoke to it quite well yesterday when he dis-

cussed the fact that a lot of the larger oil sands companies used to provide company housing, and now instead of that they provide living-out allowances. He discussed how that has had a major impact on the housing shortage in Fort McMurray and these sorts of things we're seeing across the province.

The Energy minister would well know that in Grande Prairie, as an example, there are oil companies that are buying up apartment blocks. Now, to their credit they're not just en masse evicting the residents, but what they are doing, Mr. Speaker, is as residents move out, they're moving their workers in. This is certainly reducing the availability of housing to the average worker that's looking for affordable housing in Grande Prairie.

We heard that the health authority, for instance, in Grande Prairie is buying up houses and offering those houses as incentives to doctors and nurses to come to the Grande Prairie region. Again, you know, this is symptomatic of a situation where . . .

Mr. Knight: Solutions. We have solutions.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, the Energy minister seems to think that that's a solution, Mr. Speaker, but I'm going to suggest to you that it's not. It does certainly address the concern of helping to bring in qualified professionals, whether it be doctors or nurses or x-ray techs or whatever, which Grande Prairie needs desperately at this point. They don't have a psychiatrist, so clearly there's some demand for this. But what it is also doing, when you have the health region buying up housing, is that it's taking those markets – I mean, let's be honest, Mr. Speaker, the average single wage earner probably can't compete with the health authority in terms of affordability, so it's driving up the price. There's no way that an individual would have the same resources that the health authority would to purchase housing. So it's all part of this out-of-control market where we see prices being artificially inflated, and this Bill 34 is not going to address that situation.

I talked about Edmonton-Rutherford, where we've got a development going in at the old Heritage Mall site. In excess of 8,000 residents are going to be moving into there. You know, this is a wonderful initiative, although there was some controversy about the height of some of the buildings, but overall it's an urban village. Instead of going out in urban sprawl, we're going up, and there's going to be an LRT station right on-site. I think this is probably a very good model for the future. But, Mr. Speaker, this is not affordable housing. These units start at \$375,000 and run up to \$900,000, and this is in a lower to middle-income community, \$375,000 starting prices. Clearly, people that are having trouble finding affordable housing are not going to be looking at that as an option.

There are times, I've said before – and I think it's worth repeating in third reading of Bill 34 – when the market does not work. Despite ideology and despite the fact that this government insists on, you know, the Premier's own words – full steam ahead; we don't want to interfere with any investment; let the market go where it will; it will correct itself – I said in debate that it will correct itself. Markets always do. We understand that. In a free-market economy the market will always correct itself. That's what markets do, Mr. Speaker.

The challenge for this government is: while you're waiting for the market to correct itself, how many people are you going to allow to be hurt, and how badly are you going to allow them to be hurt? That's the challenge for this government and any government that is faced with a situation like this, where the free market is out of control. How many people are you going to allow to be hurt, and how badly are you going to allow them to be hurt? How long are you going to wait for the market to correct itself? We understand –

and many of us in this Assembly have lived through it – that if you let a market that's out of control correct itself, it will peak. I'm not sure how far we are from that peak right now, but I sense that we're not that terribly far. It will peak, and it will peak higher than it should, and then it will come crashing down.

I don't want to be a fearmonger, but I am concerned. When I look at what's happening in this province right now and the lack of management of the growth and the runaway market that we have, there's potential for a major downturn. These peaks and valleys that we talk about often in the Official Opposition and the sustainability gap that we talk about in terms of the government spending last year – \$2,200 more per man, woman, and child than we realize in sustainable revenues, and that number is growing every year, Mr. Speaker – we're setting ourselves up for an ever bigger fall.

You know, the one situation that that might address when it happens is the housing affordability question. But does anybody want to go back to 1983, when you had people walking away from their homes for a dollar? I certainly don't. I lived through that, as did many members of this Assembly. That's not where I want to go again, and I don't think anybody in here does. Yet that's what happens when you allow the market to run amuck the way it is right now and then you allow it to correct itself, which it inevitably will do.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, Bill 34, as has been described many times, cherry-picked a few recommendations from the housing task force, and it will go some modicum towards addressing a few of the problems that were faced, but it certainly is not going to solve the problem. The government has admitted that it's not going to solve the problem. In fact, the biggest problem with this bill and the reason why the Official Opposition does not support it is that it does not address the biggest single problem that's facing this government right now, and that is the issue of the few greedy landlords who are taking full advantage of the situation that the market is in right now. They're taking full advantage of the fact that they know that this government is on the wrong side of this issue with the public and that they have no choice but to step in and provide assistance to the tenants that are being unduly harmed by the few greedy landlords, so they're gouging.

As I've said many times over the last 24 hours, that is the primary problem right now that the government has yet to address, and as I said at the beginning of my comments this afternoon, there is nothing in this bill that addresses that. I for one do not have confidence, as the minister apparently does, that landlords will self-regulate themselves and that suddenly these problems of gouging that we've seen and heard over the last couple of days are going to disappear.

In fact, I do believe that as people reach the end of the 12-month period during which they cannot have a rent increase, knowing that that increase can be as high as any landlord can get away with, there will be those few greedy landlords who are going to take full advantage of that, and we're going to continue to see on a daily or perhaps weekly basis thousand dollar increases like we saw again today.

The government's problems in terms of the public relations exercise are going to continue. Those are not going to go away, because there's no legislation to stop them. The government has said this and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing said this, that there will always be those that will take advantage of it. It's human nature. If you allow people to do that, there will be those that will take advantage of it regardless of peer pressure, regardless of self-regulation from their fellow landlords. So, ultimately, the government has to decide. You know, the minister rhetorically

asked the question back: "What is gouging? Is it a thousand dollars?"

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Is the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition going to participate? If so, I'll recognize him after the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Dr. Taft: Sure. That would be great.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been a long time since I've had the opportunity to speak to Bill 34. I need my Bill 34 fix here. I mean, after the debates that we've had, what more can we say? But we will say it.

I guess the frustration for me, Mr. Speaker, is having been on the task force and having heard what people were saying. I see that the minister of municipal affairs is here today. We travelled across the province listening to people. Some of the recommendations we have accepted; others we didn't. But, clearly, what we heard time and time again everywhere, through the Internet, through all the public hearings, was that people were feeling afraid about the rent increases and feeling that something had to be done because the horror stories were starting. They were starting last summer. They were starting last summer in Calgary, as I recollect. That's when we decided that we needed to call for rent guidelines, 4 plus 2, because of those stories. Then pretty soon we heard it right across the province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing is that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is correct. I can't understand why people say that they're not getting calls about this. What is it about our constituency offices in the opposition that we are getting all these calls? We're getting call after call after call after call: 10, 15, 20, every day. So, yeah, tie the two things together. I tie the two things together.

First of all, from what we heard on the task force and what we're hearing in our constituency offices, we say that we have a crisis. Mr. Speaker, the government's response is: well, we've increased the rental subsidy, and we have the eviction fund, and that's going to solve all the problems. Well, hopefully that will help some people that are the most vulnerable, but it's not just those people. I explained that there are renters all over – young people, professionals – worried about it because at the other end the housing prices are going beyond them. They can't buy a house and get out of the rental market because the housing prices are making that impossible, and at the same time their rents are skyrocketing.

You know, I understand the reason that people don't want any rent stabilization, Mr. Speaker, but if there's a market there, you don't need it. I've said this before, and I've got to keep stressing it: there is no market there. I think that even the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has heard the same calls that we have and knows that there's no market there. You can say that the subsidy program will help some people, and we can call them about the eviction fund, but the eviction fund is not ready to go. But that's just a small group of the people that are struggling right now. It's some people that are making even more money. They wouldn't be really at the bottom end, but they can't keep up with the rents.

You know, Bill 34 is saying: well, we can only do it once a year. They did pick that up from the task force. But that may just possibly make it worse. I think that's what we saw today, the \$1,200 one, because they're going to try to get it all at once rather than twice a year. So it may indirectly – I don't think the government means this – make it worse. It may make it worse because they bring in the big lump sum right away rather than twice, if that's what they figured

they were going to get, the \$1,200 today. Regardless of that, it still doesn't solve the problem.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know the government, and we're not going to change their minds here. Hopefully, enough people will keep complaining. The politics will become more difficult. They'll start to get the calls, and they'll continue to get them, and maybe eventually it will force them into doing the right thing, or they can pay a political price for it. Either way, I guess that's okay from the government's perspective, but unfortunately a lot of people are going to be hurt in the meantime. So we in the opposition are going to keep fighting this particular issue. I don't see any way around it.

I asked the government, Mr. Speaker, many times last night: what is the alternative? They always went back to the rent subsidies and the eviction fund, that aren't set up yet. But the reality in this overheated economy – and I quoted that even the government's own documents indicate that this is going to continue and that housing is going to be a major problem into the next year.

So when all is said and done, hopefully the \$285 million will help and is going into some of the things that we on the task force asked about. But ultimately, if the rents keep going up in big chunks, like what we heard today, what are the options for people? What do we do? Now, individually they can maybe go to the minister and hope that they can get some help, or they can move out of the province. But is that what we want? You know, how many people do we want out there that are one rent away from being homeless? How many other people do we want to hurt?

One of the things that we really suggested – Mr. Speaker, you will recall the boom before. I mentioned that I thought this is one that the government would look at, you know, to try to stimulate the market: the mortgage subsidy. That did work well. As you're well aware, in Edmonton-Norwood it almost lost me the election the first time I got elected, when it was brought in, because it was such a popular program. But it did get some people into the market, and that would create rental units. So we have to look at the supply side, no doubt about it, and we need to give tax incentives for rental housing, no doubt about that. But even if we do all these things, it will take – and the government acknowledges this, at least the officials that we dealt with in the task force – a minimum two years, probably longer, to bring that sort of housing on board because it's just not being built.

2:50

Again, I stress that I just don't know what we do with all sorts of people that are facing this problem, Mr. Speaker. We're not going to win this debate. That's pretty clear. The majority is over there. [interjection] Well, I don't think that the leopard will change his spots from afternoon to evening. Maybe I'm wrong; one can only hope. But it seems that the ideology is that we can't interfere with the market. Well, that's assuming that there is a market to begin with, and that's the point: there isn't. There is not a market.

So what do we do? I asked the government many times last night and this morning: what do we do, then, with all these people that are going to be facing these problems? They can't all go to the eviction fund and get money, and many of them won't qualify for the rental subsidy because that comes down to another problem. The minister today said: what's the standard for people that need affordable housing; you know, trying to define that?

One of the things we said in the report is that there had better be a definition, and the government said: yeah, we accept that there has to be a definition. But they reject what we had said in the affordable housing report, which is interesting because we said 30 per cent. That's what the minister said today. That's sort of a standard measuring block throughout North America, that people should be spending no more than 30 per cent of their income on their accommodation.

You know, I understand the government's dilemma because I know now that if they opened that up to over 30 per cent, there would be a lot more than \$33 million in terms of people qualifying. Therein lies the dilemma. But if they can't do the 30 per cent, then what is it? They've agreed that there has to be a definition. Is it 40 per cent, 50 per cent, 60 per cent of your income? What is it, then, Mr. Speaker? We have to grapple with that. Otherwise, the subsidy program doesn't mean anything.

Mr. Speaker, I fear that in the short run in the next two years there's going to be a lot of misery out there: a lot of stress, a lot of anger, a lot of frustration. It's already there. It will get worse, if we believe the government's projections on the economy coming up, because they say that housing is going to be a bigger problem.

Some of the housing will come on, hopefully, but when we talk to municipal affairs to really deal with the housing problem, we'd need 12,000 new rental units. Twelve thousand. Right now it would probably be more. There would be different ways of doing it. Certainly, the government, I recognize, can't do all of the public housing, but we have to have the carrot and the stick with tax incentives, with zoning, higher density, and all sorts of things. My point, Mr. Speaker, is that all those things will take time, and many people don't have the time. That's the hard reality.

So I say, Mr. Speaker, that that's why we don't think this bill really solves it. They took a couple of half measures without doing what they really needed to do, and that's unfortunate. That's unfortunate for a lot of people in this province. But hope springs eternal. Maybe the leopard can't change its spots in a day, but if enough people complain and listen and enough calls are made, maybe, just maybe, the leopard can change its spots in a month or two months or three months. Time will tell. We in the opposition will certainly do our job to bring the issues here to the Legislature, where they belong.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, you wish to participate?

Mr. Eggen: With the standing order.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Eggen: I would just like to ask the hon. member. There's one area that we have not pursued, and I believe that it's very much parallel with solving the larger housing problem, and that is providing mortgage assistance. You mentioned that the Affordable Housing Task Force explored this to some degree. How do you see that unfolding? Similar to the program that was around 15 years ago or so?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe some hon. members were there. [interjections] Yes, we know some hon. members were there. I remember the Premier of the day, Premier Lougheed, announcing it in the '82 election. As I said, I thought I had a fairly good ride in Edmonton-Norwood. I could see after that program was announced that I was lucky to squeak through by 84 votes. But it did work. It did work after the mortgage program came in. It was a mortgage subsidy. It was an attempt to get young people into their first time to buy homes. Of course, that springs it open: if we get them into home ownership, that's good. The more home ownership we have, the better it is, frankly, whether it be condos or townhouses

or houses or whatever. It had a major impact, I think, and it did get some people into homes that wouldn't have been there.

Now, we in the task force said that we were looking at the spectrum – you know, from the homeless right up to that sort of level – of how to get people into home ownership. I honestly thought that this was one the government would buy. We said: okay, let's take a hundred million and put it into mortgage subsidies to precisely get sort of our young professionals. That's a bit of a problem right now: professionals, nurses and other people, technicians – you name it – people that are making a relatively good salary. But with the housing prices going up, they can't afford to buy. I've talked to a number of people there, that this would have got some people into the market. A hundred million, we think, would have been a good investment by the government, and it's not a giveaway. Obviously, it's a second mortgage, and they would get it back. So I was, frankly, a little bit surprised that the government didn't take that one up. That's one I thought they would.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others? There were a couple of others, in fairness. Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you had a question?

Mr. Cernaiko: Not a question.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, do you have a question, sir?

Mr. Herard: I just want to ask the hon. member from the other side: with respect to mortgage assistance what is the interest rate difference between those days and today?

Mr. Martin: No doubt that was a time of very high interest rates. The impact was the same, though, because the people couldn't afford to buy the houses because of the high interest rate. They now can't afford to buy the houses because of the high cost of an overheated economy. I can tell you precisely that in Edmonton right now the provincial government is involved with the school boards. They're looking at school sites. I was at a meeting, and the city of Edmonton is going to go, precisely, into mortgage subsidy to keep some of the young people here. So they certainly see the need. The bottom line is: people can't afford houses and home ownership. We want to get them into it. So that's the bottom line.

The Speaker: Additional questions?

Then we're going to proceed with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak in third reading of Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, and to have the opportunity to be on record with some thoughts here.

This bill is an omnibus bill that amends the Residential Tenancies Act and the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act. The purpose is to respond to the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force. The main amendments are to regulate the frequency of rent increases for fixed-term tenancies to once a year, to provide clarification around the start date for the time referred to for rent increases, and to make it an offence to not comply with the condo conversions notice period, which is a one-year notice.

3:00

This means that amendments are to modify the notice period set out in the acts to allow for one rent increase per year. This will apply to both periodic, month-to-month, and fixed-term tenancies.

Three months' notice will still be required before increasing rent on periodic tenancies. One year's notice must be provided before ending a periodic tenancy for the purpose of converting a rental unit to a condominium or to undertake major renovations to a rental unit. No rent increases will be allowed during that one-year period. The notice for converting a mobile home site to a condominium unit or for other uses continues to be one year. These changes are retroactive to April 24, 2007. There's also a punitive clause included to apply a fine per tenant for any landlord that violates the legislation.

The major flaw with Bill 34 as I talk to my constituents is the failure to introduce any kind of rent regulation, either permanent or temporary. There is nothing in this bill to protect renters from massive rent increases while they wait for the market to stabilize, which could take two years to see the first evidence of new units. What is needed and where this bill fails is to introduce renter protection measures in the short term. I cannot support a bill with this fundamental flaw. The evidence is overwhelming to me as I speak to my constituents and other people in Alberta that Alberta renters mostly in the cities are being subjected to unreasonable rental increases due to a destabilized market.

We know that this is not a new problem. There have been many instances of rental increases that are simply rent gouging for over a year. I do believe that it's just a handful, a very small group of individuals that are taking advantage of the instability and actually gouging. Unfortunately, it gives all landlords a stigma of being unfair and unreasonable and unkind. However, it is the failure of the government to not recognize that sometimes, in rare instances, the market just does not work. In these instances, we need temporary measures taken to protect citizens in the short term.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The only way I could really support this bill because of the effect of it is to include a temporary rent regulation. This bill fails to provide protection for renters. This is critical to any plan to address the affordable housing crisis. I just think that this bill fails Albertans.

The other concern I have is that the entire substance of the bill is in the regulations. It seems to me that once again the government is hiding behind . . . [interjection] Yes. I'm going to get there. Thanks.

Once again there are regulations here that we can hide behind, making authority that allows the minister discretion that I think is undemocratic. It doesn't provide stability for anyone if the rules can be changed at a whim. If we're confident that these amendments are good, then they should be debated in the Legislature. I believe that a bill should have to be introduced in the House and open for debate and scrutiny if it's really to protect Albertans.

So to me it's clear that the government's response to the affordable housing crisis has failed to address the critical issue. What are my renters supposed to do in the short term until more affordable housing units come on stream? I had a guest here yesterday who has been looking for appropriate housing for seven months. They came from Ontario, got a really good job but no place to live. They're moving from place to place. People will put them up for a period of time, and then they have to move again. This instability is causing a lot of distress as the lady has medical issues.

I think it's the government's responsibility to listen to Albertans and respond to help them. We've heard numerous examples this week. It's especially true when the market fails to provide stability, as is the case today. I think Albertans are speaking clearly on this matter. They desperately need short-term protection, and it is this government's duty to address those concerns even if the solution falls outside of what the ideology would be.

I look at the Affordable Housing Task Force's own report.

The decision to recommend these protective measures was a very difficult one for this task force. There was clear concern among many members about the impact of rent guidelines on overall new rental supply, and on rental rates once guidelines are removed in two years. At the same time, the task force was confronted everywhere with the plight of renters who were losing their homes right now. These people have few other affordable housing options in today's overheated market. The task force understood that keeping people in their current homes wherever possible is essential while dealing with the urgent situation Alberta is facing.

The report clearly articulates why temporary rent regulations are needed. Albertans, thousands of Albertans everywhere and from all walks of life need it, most importantly of all because everybody needs a home.

I'm proud that the Alberta Liberals proposed four amendments to Bill 34. Two amendments regarding temporary rent regulations did not go through. Two others were passed this morning. One amendment, A5, writes into the legislation a once-per-year limit on rent increases. The other, A4, doubles the fines to \$10,000 for landlords who violate the rules on condo conversions. So now we have the limit on rent increases set out in the legislation, and it provides some clarification. This has been a good, democratic process. It's about standing up for Albertans who are living in fear of losing their homes because of unaffordable rent increases.

That is why the Alberta Liberal caucus has introduced amendments. We've tried to have the voices of our constituents heard, and we believe that governments must respond when the citizens they represent demand action. The price is too high if we do not. Albertans will continue to suffer, and the government responsible cannot let that happen.

I hear over and over, this week especially, about people coming to Alberta and facing housing problems, and I have those people in my own constituency. At the same time there are many long-time Albertans, long-time taxpayers who have worked hard, who have built this province, who have sacrificed, and who have wanted to have a home here that they could feel stable with, that they could feel comfortable with and have some assurance that they were safe. Bill 34 does not do that for them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I just wanted to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods about the frequency and the amplification of these calls that are coming into your constituency office because, you know, some people are saying that they have not received one single call about the housing issue. Not that I think that I'm incredulous to that possibility, but I'm just wondering, maybe, if I just have such a different constituency. Do you get a lot of calls on this housing thing?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. My office is overwhelmed with the calls. I have, actually, extra staff in right now because the calls are nonstop. We have hundreds – hundreds – of names on petitions, and we are holding a town hall on the 17th to give these people another opportunity to voice their desperation.

The Deputy Speaker: Others?

The chair now recognizes the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the debate.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to speak to this bill in third reading. I listened with a great deal of intensity last night and over the evening and into the early hours this morning. There was a lot of discussion, a lot of compassion and empathy shown in this House by all members of this Assembly. I represent an inner-city riding in the largest city in Alberta and one of the largest cities in Canada and have to deal with the issues that we're debating and bringing forward to the Assembly with new legislation that is there that will be protecting Albertans.

3:10

I want to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, issues that we've discussed. Even looking in the 2007 budget and business plan issues related to seniors: that seniors in need have access to financial assistance, Albertans with severe and permanent disability have access to financial assistance, seniors and persons with disabilities have appropriate access and finances to living, and health and related disability supports and services enhance independence and well-being. This is just out of the seniors. I mean, I could go through this budget ministry by ministry.

It does show that this government has in the past and will continue in the future to assist those individuals throughout the province, and there are areas in Alberta right now that are more affected than other areas. This government has addressed these issues in the past five, 10, 15 years, but in the last three weeks this government, this Premier's government, has provided a quarter of a billion dollars – a quarter of a billion dollars – of new money that is going to assist in all of these programs, whether they're for seniors, for individuals that are on low income, for individuals that need that financial support. No other province with a population of 3.1 million people has got that kind of assistance. No other province in this country provides that kind of funding support of approximately \$10,000 per Albertan for services in this province. No other province.

Now, I wanted to stress another point, Mr. Speaker, that there are solutions being worked on as well. I'm sure the opposition is well aware of the work that's being done here in Edmonton with homelessness. As well, in Calgary I'm honoured to sit on the Calgary Committee To End Homelessness, which is chaired by Steve Snyder, the president and CEO of TransAlta. Its membership includes individuals such as Rick George, the president and CEO from Suncor; Tim Hearn, the president and CEO of Imperial Oil; Mayor Bronconnier; Bishop Henry; Steve Allan of the Stampede board; Ken King of the Calgary Flames; Hal Walker, president and CEO of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce; Dr. Kabir Jivraj; Jack Davis, CEO of the Calgary health region; and a number of other very important people from the city of Calgary that have made a commitment to Calgarians and to Albertans to develop the template to end homelessness, not to manage homelessness but to end homelessness in the province of Alberta but especially specifically in the city of Calgary.

This committee has met. It has developed five subcommittees that meet on a regular basis: the prevention subcommittee, a housing subcommittee, a services subcommittee, an implementation subcommittee, and a communication and outreach subcommittee.

The work has been done, and it was actually announced in January, with the final report being drafted in December of this year and going to be available to the public and reported to the public in January of 2008. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this is one of the most energetic and exciting committees I have ever had the opportunity to sit on, with these types of individuals that have placed their names and their organization names on the line to say that we will end homelessness in this city and in this province within 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, the issue related to individuals that are in dire need of affordable housing, those individuals that have addictions issues

and require treatment and detoxification, those individuals that are moving into Alberta that don't have a place to live, those individuals that may have been down on their luck and that don't have a damage deposit and can't meet the next month's rent: these solutions are being worked on right now. I'm not sure if the hon. members – no one from Calgary has mentioned this. Now, whether they don't read the paper, whether they're not sure of what's going on in Calgary, I can tell you that there's a huge community commitment from all the major stakeholders in the Calgary area to provide solutions regarding all of these areas.

So when we're going to be looking at individuals that have these special needs, we're going to be looking at, one, their medical assessment and their medical health, their dental assessment and dental health. We're going to be assessing them to determine what their mental health issues are, how their addictions issues may be related, and then look at being able to provide an advocacy component to it so that we can address the issues of that individual by not just plopping him into a residence, saying: here you go; live a good life. It will be to ensure that this individual will have the proper care, that he can learn life skills, that he can get employment training, that he can get a bank account. A lot of these people – and I have 2,500 homeless in my riding – don't even have a bank account.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of solutions that are being worked on, but none of the opposition members want to talk about solutions other than fixed rent controls. That's it. They just want rent controls but forget about assisting them with detoxification, about assisting them with treatment, about assisting them regarding mental health issues. I never heard that last night. In fact, I heard the Member for Calgary-Varsity say that one of his constituents committed suicide because their rent went up. I was astounded to hear that. Why wasn't he there to assist any of those individuals in his riding? That's his job. He's the MLA. The question is: what do you do as an MLA, and what are you responsible for as an MLA? You get out and you talk to your city housing component. You talk to the apartment association. You find the contacts. That's your job as an MLA. You don't put them off to government, saying, "The government's got to find you a home."

I can guarantee you this, Mr. Speaker. Any of these ministers that are responsible for any of these projects: their doors are open. Any MLA, not just the government MLAs but any MLA, whether it's from the NDs or the Liberals, can go and see a minister with a client if they want to. They can set up an appointment like any of us can, and I can guarantee you that that minister will be there to listen and will be there to help them with any issue that they have. So I'm saying that as an MLA I was elected to represent my constituency, which is a lot different than other suburban MLAs. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has the floor.

Mr. Cenaiko: I'm suggesting that there are a lot of MLAs, and from what I heard over the evening . . .

Mr. R. Miller: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: What's your citation?

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. R. Miller: Standing Orders 23 (h), (i), and (j), Mr. Speaker. Quite clearly, this member in his comments about my colleague –

you can sit down now – from Calgary-Varsity is trying to incite disruption in this Assembly. He has clearly suggested that my colleague from Calgary-Varsity is not doing his job as an MLA in representing his constituents. He clearly illustrated with his comments that he does not understand issues surrounding suicide. I would expect that as a former police officer he should know better, and I would ask him to withdraw his remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: On the point of order.

Mr. Cenaiko: I would like to remind the member that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Is this on the point of order?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, obviously, there are no solutions to what the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity was talking about last night. He didn't provide solutions. He provided issues related to why people are going homeless but no solutions to what, in fact, he did for any of those constituents. Not one solution was provided last night, from what I heard, and so far today.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the point of order? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I'm pretty surprised because the member that stood up on the point of order has misinterpreted and misquoted our Standing Orders. He said that 23(h), (i) and (j) concern riling up the House, and certainly they do not. In fact, (h) talks about making allegations against another member, which this member did not point out. It also talks about imputing false or unavowed motives, which he did not cite. It also talks about using abusive or insulting language, which he did not cite. So there is no point of order here.

As a matter of fact, what the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was doing is the exact same thing that every single member from that side of the House has been doing for the last 20 hours, and that is trying to point out some of the issues that need to be fixed and that this bill is attempting to fix. There's obviously no point of order here.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: Well, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar almost took the words out of my mouth. There has been back and forth over the course of the last number of hours on this particular bill, this arguing back and forth of who works harder than the other. I'm sure that all MLAs work their very hardest on behalf of all their constituents. Those types of arguments aren't productive on either side of the House. I would say that if everyone spoke through the floor and waited their turn to get up and speak, we would have a lot less disruption in the House. So in my mind there's no point of order.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, I'll try not to incite the opposition.

Debate Continued

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, what I would want to say, though, is that we do have a responsibility as elected officials. We have a responsibility to our constituents. Whether they have homes, whether they don't have homes, whether they have addictions, whether they have mental health issues, or whether they're seniors, our responsibility is to assist them in any way. When they walk through the door of our office, when they give us a phone call, that's our job to assist them. Whether we assist them through Calgary

Housing, for example, and assist them in trying to find a home, whether we assist them by looking at the Calgary Apartment Association because we've made contacts there: that's part of our job, to assist individuals doing this. Whether they need to increase their employment skills by knowing where they have to go and who to contact in the community, who they should be meeting and talking with to get that employment training: these are issues and real solutions that we as MLAs, as all elected MLAs are responsible for.

I want to move on, though, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, ministers' doors as well are always open. They're always open, whether it's one of my constituents or whether it's a constituent from Edmonton or from Ponoka or from Vermilion or from Edmonton-Mill Woods. The doors of the ministers' offices are always open, and they're there to assist. If these ministers can provide them with a contact number for an individual to be assisted in any way, that's their responsibility when they take that oath to be a minister of the Crown.

Now, I wanted to move on, Mr. Speaker, and just let you know of some of the things that we're doing in Calgary regarding the Calgary community and homelessness. For example, a subcommittee on implementation is looking to develop a business plan, a specific action plan to avoid simple platitudes, to ensure that plans are integrated based on solid information and economic analysis.

Encouraging favourable collaborative approaches regarding all of the agencies. There are thousands – thousands – of not-for-profit organizations that receive provincial funding every year. What we're doing in Calgary is getting those groups together. In fact, tomorrow I'm going to be announcing in Calgary that a number of agencies that work with individuals that are addicted to drugs and alcohol and gambling are going to get together, and they're going to now, when they're assessing individuals, have that ability to say: which would be the best facility to assess this individual and provide treatment? So these things are happening in Calgary. I'm not sure about Edmonton, but I can tell you that this is what we're looking at in Calgary.

The Calgary Committee to End Homelessness is looking at a housing trust that individuals can actually flow money into, that they can have wills and estates go into a foundation that will be there for the long term, that funding could be provided through the homeless foundation. They're looking at issues related to secondary suites and working with the city of Calgary regarding issues related to secondary suites. They're looking at a management information system so that we can track individuals so that we know what individuals need wherever they are in the community, whether they were homeless to begin with, whether they had addictions issues, a way that we can track them so that we know what we've done to assist them and/or what the next step is for them as they move to becoming healthier in our society.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many. This is a huge community that we're working on. We're looking at, as I mentioned, the case management approach, case managers that are accountable not just for issues related to housing but, as well, issues related to health through the Calgary health region, developing an integrated database that will be able to compile this information and share that information with all of these individuals, and assessing the inventory and service needs on a level of the demand of these services.

There are hundreds of not-for-profit organizations out there providing services. It's the issue of bringing them together and integrating them so that we can provide the best service to individuals. It's about looking at those agencies becoming the advocates for individuals by taking them and finding them an apartment to live in, providing the damage deposit for that individual, providing the first

month's rent for that individual. And if they damage the apartment, then that agency will be responsible, possibly, for fixing up and/or paying for the damage that may have occurred in that building. But the issue is that there needs to be someone as an advocate for the individual as they go through the process of cleansing themselves to become healthier and/or ensuring that the mental health issues that they have are being dealt with.

Mr. Speaker, we've worked on drafting the communications plan that's going to be required because, again, this is going to be a huge plan that is going to focus on all three levels of government: federal, provincial, and municipal. As well, the private sector is going to be involved because they want to be involved in the Calgary community and in the surrounding areas because they want to give back to society. So these are some of the things.

I won't go on for much longer other than I did want to say that even though we were debating one small piece of legislation over the last number of hours, there are other things happening throughout Alberta. There are other organizations that are working on solutions. They're not all debated in this Assembly because there are individuals that are volunteering their time to work with not-for-profit organizations because they have a social responsibility. We all have a social responsibility because we all are compassionate, and we're all empathetic regarding those issues related to those less fortunate.

So I just want to end, Mr. Speaker, by saying that this legislation is the first step. I don't think anyone heard the President of the Treasury Board say that we're not going to do anything else. I think you heard the President of the Treasury Board say that this is the first step, that this is what we're going to do regarding this. But there are a number of other areas that each of the ministries is working on, and those programs are in place.

As well, again, a quarter of a billion dollars of new funding: no other province in this country or, I think, any state in the United States of America has ever seen this kind of funding go into affordable housing.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Does anyone wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Yes. I really appreciate the comments from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo regarding the roles and responsibilities of MLAs and the comprehensive list of services that he's run through that are available for constituents. I am a new MLA. I'm learning. I have lots to learn yet, I suppose, but I believe I'm working very hard for my constituents. I'd like you to tell me what it is that you think other MLAs may not be doing from that list of services that you've suggested.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, that's a good question. I think the issue is that it might be a little different for those that live in Edmonton versus those that live in other parts of the province. My assistant, of course, takes part in all of the training that's provided by the LAO, which I think is tremendous and a tremendous opportunity for them to learn regarding what's available from government.

But it's not just government programs that are available to our constituents. There are a number of programs out there that are provided by a number of organizations, whether it's the Red Cross or whether it's Samaritans, whether it's, you know, a number of the seniors' facilities that may be in your community. So it's the issue of not just yourself but, as well, your staff that you have in your office are there to assist you because you can't be there all the time. They're there more than you are, and they probably know your constituents better than you do. It's your responsibility as the MLA

to ensure that they have looked at all the services out there, whether they're government, whether they're federal government, and/or whether they're municipal, and/or whether they're not for profit.

It's, again, building that contact list that you have out there to ensure: can we assist them with this issue or this issue or this one? Who's the contact person that could be reached here or here? Who are the contact persons in the ministries' offices that are going to be essential to finding out and/or providing you with the assistance that you may need? Each of the ministries have, you know, those contact people that we may need. Whether it's issues related to mental health or issues related to the Calgary regional health authority, they have a government relations person there that's willing to help you. I'm sure that Capital health has the same. They're there to help you regarding issues related to mental health, so we can be there to assist them and ensure that services are provided, whether it's issues related to seniors' supportive housing, seniors' programs regarding benefits, dental benefits, or housing, some housing benefits. There are contact numbers out there. Those are the things that I learned, and I've only been here six years. But those are critical if you want to ensure that you're providing service.

3:30

This isn't about getting re-elected, although I think some MLAs think that's what it's about. It's about an opportunity to serve the community. By serving the community, you're going to be using those social agencies all around you to be able to provide the best services for your constituents.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw first and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to ask the hon. member: I know that he has been involved with the committee in Calgary with some of the best minds in Calgary looking at some of these issues and talked a lot about the social agencies and trying to network and make those more available, but has your group or committee discussed at all the idea of rent controls, and what thinking have they come out with if you've discussed this issue?

Mr. Cenaiko: The topic of rent controls has come up, but there's been no discussion regarding it. The issue is that we're looking for some quick wins, obviously, and to be able to pick that low-hanging fruit in the next few months or so. But this committee's goal is to end homelessness, so it's long-term, sustainable solutions. With funding that is coming now from the province, obviously this is going to be assisting us. Obviously, we have to work with the federal government because they have a responsibility as well, and the municipal government as well is in place. So it's issues related to long-term solutions. But as well there are opportunities to increase capacity within the city. There are opportunities to increase treatment and detoxification for those individuals.

Seventy per cent of the 2,500 homeless that I have are addicted to drugs or alcohol, 70 per cent. Of those same 2,500 approximately 40 per cent of them are involved in criminal activity because of the fact that they have an addiction to drugs or alcohol. So they are active in the community. As Chief Boyd from the Edmonton Police Service – if we could in fact stop the cycle of criminal activity, if we could stop the cycle of the addictions of alcohol and drug abuse, you could actually reduce your crime rate in your community by 40 per cent. That's huge. Now, you have to remember, too, that only 6 per cent of the criminal population is creating 94 per cent of the crime in your community. So it's again targeting those 6 per cent.

There are a number of strategies that have to be worked on in the

future. Again, it ties in with long-term goals and long-term vision, but as well this is about ending homelessness, not about managing it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to try and zero in on some comments on Bill 34. First of all, I think the government across the way is to be commended on setting up the process to hear Albertans about housing across the province in the nine locations. And the results that were achieved is the report on housing. But I think one of the things that the government has to recognize: in setting up the task force to do this, they created, I believe, an expectation on the part of Albertans. The expectation, of course, is to meet with people across the province and listen carefully to their suggestions.

Then, of course, there is an expectation on behalf of the people that are participating that many of their suggestions are going to be implemented. I think that's probably one of the things that's caused this whole matter of housing to be such a contentious issue because, you see, when you listen to people and they make suggestions and then you have recommendations and only 12 of them are implemented, people are wondering if they've been jeopardized and their time has been wasted.

I think it looks at the whole question – I'm kind of a Frasier. My wife and I watch Frasier a lot. And when I was listening to the debate across the way from Calgary, I was thinking of Dr. Frasier Crane's favourite comment: are you listening? And, you know, I remember the old days of the Social Credit, which I was part of and was honoured to serve Mr. Ray Speaker. We use to send out task forces to listen to the people of Alberta. I was very blessed with Ray. He really believed you had to listen carefully. If you set an expectation on the part of people, listen carefully, and make sure that you have got the content that they're talking about, and then take some risks and implement the suggestions.

I think what I'm saying: when you create a democratic environment in which you get people to talk about their interests and needs, I think then it sets up an expectation. If people are not being listened to and not listened carefully to, I think they get very, very upset, and they tend to be turned off. So, anyway, I'm just suggesting that's something that you may want to look at in terms of processing some of the information that you're getting in across the province.

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order? Please take your seat. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Herard: It's more a point of clarification. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member's conversation because I probably could have done the same thing to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but it seems to me that third reading is about what's contained between the front page of this document and the back page of this document. It's not about consultation processes. It's not about all sorts of programs that we might have in the city of Calgary. It's about the bill that we have in front of us, not the bill we could have had or should have had.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you calling a point of order?

Mr. Herard: Yes. I want clarification as to whether or not, Mr. Speaker, you go by those rules.

The Deputy Speaker: What's your citation on your point of order?

An Hon. Member: Beauchesne 489, Denis.

Mr. Herard: Yeah. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the point of order?

An Hon. Member: He didn't give a citation.

The Deputy Speaker: I didn't quite hear exactly what the hon. member was saying except for, was it relevance?

An Hon. Member: There wasn't one. No point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, hon. members, as I listened to this debate for the hours that I was in here through second reading and committee and now third reading, I guess relevance could have been called pretty much on every speaker, as could Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j), as was previously raised. If the Assembly wants zero tolerance and has these Standing Orders and the rules administered to that level, this Speaker could very happily do that. However, the tradition of the House was to allow for some flexibility, and unless things get difficult, that has been tolerated. So I don't believe there's a point of order in this case under the traditional sense of the way we've been operating in this Assembly.

I would ask the member to continue on with his speech.

Debate Continued

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try and continue and try and be a little more specific in terms of housing now. I'm trying to sum this up with about five points based on the discussion I've heard somewhat this afternoon and last night. There is currently across the province an imbalance of supply and demand when it comes to the question of housing.

The second point I'd like to make: the best solution is to increase supply. However, we recognize that that will take time. In the interim, there's an issue with how people are going to be accommodated with housing needs across the province. I think that's the big question: how are people going to be accommodated? So that's a major. The MLA for Calgary-Buffalo talked about some of these ways people are going to be looked after. I think that's what the tension issue is. People are unsure, it seems to me, of where they're going to go, how they're going to fit. I'm encouraged by the fact that we are going to have something for them.

The third point I'd like to make in terms of trying to sum up what I've been hearing over the last year: in the interim many people, as I've just said, are getting squeezed, particularly the low-income, the disabled, people on fixed incomes, and the working poor.

3:40

I had a situation in St. Albert. This is a lady with two children out of wedlock. She's an aboriginal lady, lovely lady, and she really wanted to get back in the work stream by going to MacEwan and taking a year's program in hotel management, I believe it was. The Salvation Army presently, I believe, is helping her live in her accommodation. I'm hoping, with what I've heard, just talking about this question of housing again and getting the right accommodation for her that with one of these new programs – and I've asked my constituency manager to get the information because she's worked with her and get back to her to see if she can fit into one of these areas and get back on that program. It's a little more compli-

cated than I've let on today, but I'm encouraged that some people are going to be helped. That's what I'm trying to say.

I think one of the things that has really come clean to me across this issue is that there seems to have not been in the past a plan. No plan. There now is an indication that there is planning. Unfortunately, because there hasn't been a plan, people are getting hurt, and I think that's difficult.

The fourth thing that I want to make in terms of my position was that I supported temporary rent caps, and I was hoping we could get a time limit on that.

The other issue I must talk about is the question of landlords. I have received a lot of feedback from my constituency on the landlord issue, and I want to say this very clearly: I think there are a lot of wonderful, good landlords. I found that out when I was the regional director in social services. We have a lot of good landlords, and I think they have been blacklisted by some of the discussions that we've had in the House. I don't think it's their fault. I will even go out and say that the majority of our landlords are good people, private enterprisers, good people trying to make a dollar. I even know of some that have talked to me on the phone that have said that they have reduced the increase they could have had in order to accommodate people that are in low-income situations. So I think the landlords maybe have taken a little bit of a kick on this one.

I'm really saying, too, that it isn't the fault of the renters. I think the problem lies solely presently with the government. I'm not being overnegative, and I'm encouraged that they're going to do something about it. I think that's fine. I think that we've failed to create affordable housing, and the problems that we see are a result of a strong economy. I'm, hopefully, going to see some changes in the near future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there anyone who wishes to add a comment or a question on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for this opportunity to speak on Bill 34 in third reading. The House has had a rather detailed debate over this very important piece of legislation over the last 24 hours, and that's for the good. I think it's important. That's what this House is about. That's what the House should be about: to engage each other, to challenge each other with respect to the pros and cons of a piece of legislation that's before it.

I have a question before I proceed further. I don't want to forget this. Maybe the President of the Treasury Board will have the answer for me on that. The question is a kind of afterthought or reflecting on, now, the consequences that will follow from this bill and how it will be implemented, what kind of regulations will be developed to ensure that its very limited objectives can indeed be achieved through its careful implementation through the development of regulations.

The question that I have specifically, Mr. Speaker, for the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Service Alberta is whether the requirement that there can only be one annual increase in rent applies to a building, a site, a suite, or whether it applies to the owner or the landlord. Lots of rental property is being flipped back and forth, unfortunately, and that's causing the prices to go up and not reflecting necessarily the substantive value of the property. It's the rental increases that encourage people to engage in this. They simply hike their rents up, show a higher cash flow, and then put the property back on the market for someone else to take care of it.

Therefore, I think that when it comes to Bill 34 and what kind of

constraints it generates for rent increases only once a year, there's no clear answer to my question in the text of the bill itself. Will there be specific attention paid in the writing up and drawing up of the regulations to clarify that the one increase a year applies to specific sites or suites and not to the owner? The reason I raise this question is that the penalties seem to apply to the owner who at the time of the rent may be not in compliance. That owner, however, could change through sale or purchase. I have no answer that I can find anywhere in the bill which tells me who will be held responsible, who will be responsible to pay those fines. So that's the question.

That's just a specific question that I find is a loophole, you know, in the writing of the legislation. Even if you take the legislation seriously and say that it will be of assistance and help to lots of Albertans, which I don't think it will be, but that's a different issue, within the parameters of the bill I think there are some questions that need to be addressed. I'm sure that the minister will pay attention to those. I would like to hear from him either here or later, sooner rather than later.

So to go on from there, Mr. Speaker, much has been said on this bill from this side of the House, from the NDP caucus side, which draws attention to how disappointing the bill has been with respect to what the task force recommendations hoped such a bill would achieve in moderating the rate of increase in rents, which a very large number of Albertans face under current market conditions. The President of the Treasury Board the other day in conversation with me during the debate acknowledged that there are at least a million people, 1 million Albertans out of 3.1 or 3.2 million, who live in rental residences and accommodations.

Certainly, these are rough estimates. I hope that the government and this minister and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will pay more attention to that so that we have a more firm grip on the number of Albertans who in fact are in the rental market as tenants or potential tenants. My suspicion is that the numbers would be anywhere from a million to about 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 million Albertans that will be affected by it.

3:50

This bill and the provisions in it and the associated programs which help renters through subsidies or through protection against eviction will help only a very small proportion of this total number of renters. Most of the renters fall above the income level that would be qualifying for subsidies. These are middle-class, middle-income Albertans, most of them young, most of them former students who have just entered the labour market as accountants, as teachers, as nurses, as town planners, what have you. These are the people who are coasting, as it were, for the next few years. They are renting whilst trying to save in order to buy their first house. They will not be assisted through this rent subsidy program that you have because it's income contingent.

There was an interesting letter today by a single mother who is looking after a child and has a job that pays \$44,000. She gives exact figures, and her take-home pay, including everything, you know, including all kinds of child benefits and so on and so forth, is about \$2,300 a month. Then she gives a list of the different items in her budget and how she is finding it extremely difficult and, in fact, now is unable to go to sleep, saying: "What can I do? How is this Bill 34 and its provisions going to help me." She says, "It's not going to help me."

So it is these people who would fall just a little above the cut-off line for qualifying to get this subsidy that this minister and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing have drawn attention repeatedly to as a way of seeking some help and protection against this intolerable situation. These people are the ones who are really going to be hurt, who don't qualify for the subsidy. Their ability to

save is going to be undermined seriously by the rate increases that they face. Their hope to buy a house down the line is going to evaporate in conjunction with the necessity for them to pay rents, which can become intolerably high for them. They have no recourse, no appeal, no review as provided in this bill to seek a redress to their concern that their rent increase is unreasonable, that it's exorbitant, that it's gouging.

Given that there's no redress, no opportunity to appeal, this very large number of middle-class Albertans, mostly young but not just young, are being thrown into, I think, a very difficult situation, and they are likely, in my view, to find themselves being deprived because of the weaknesses of this bill from being able to build a financial capacity to have enough money to put as a down payment to be able to buy their first home. So, Mr. Speaker, that's the problem with this piece of legislation.

The second point that I want to make in this third reading about the bill is the provisions that it has for condominiumization. I've been around in this city for a very long time. I know of investors who buy a property – and this has been going on since the mid-70s. I have known people from that time who tried to benefit from it. They're investors, but they don't create real value. They don't create any real commodity or add value to something that they have when they buy a rental property, apply for condominiumization, very quickly turn that property into condominium property, and then sell to people who want to own their first house.

During this process the value of the property shoots up. As purchasers they benefit from that rise in value through the conversion to condominiumization, without having created added, recognizable, substantive value that adds to the GDP or the wealth of the community in general – we call it in terms of GDP provincial wealth – but is essentially speculative activity, not benefiting either tenants or potential owners.

So this flipping activity, as sometimes it's called in the housing market, a quick purchase and then trying to flip it over to another person who wants to buy quickly and then sell again or convert it into condominiums, is not going to be discouraged by this bill. It is that kind of activity that doesn't really create any real value, a new commodity or new article from which as investors, as entrepreneurs they would have the right to benefit and is what is also contributing to the escalation of rents and the problems of affordability, whether you are a tenant and therefore renting or whether you are someone who hopes to become an owner sooner rather than later by hopefully being able to save while you're renting a property. It's a chain of events here, a succession of decisions that people make on either side of the line, which will not by virtue of this bill becoming law necessarily help alleviate the pressures related to very rapid escalation in the cost of purchasing a house or in the cost of renting a house.

Mr. Speaker, the third point I want to make is that it exposes lots of people who are income earners to feel that simply buying a house, having a decent rental property even, a residence, is getting out of reach, and that leads to frustration. That leads to hopelessness. One particular group that I fear I will be dealing with fairly soon, in the next two months, is the very large number of postsecondary students who flock to our universities, colleges, institutes, and so on, in big cities as well as in regional centres, such as Grande Prairie or Red Deer or Medicine Hat or Lethbridge – you name it – Fort McMurray. These students are going to find themselves in a very difficult situation because there is no cap, there are no limits within which rents can be raised by landlords. Already most students, these students particularly who had to move away from their towns and villages and farms to come to these big cities, bear this disproportionate . . .

Mr. Speaker, I think I'm out of time. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, any comments or questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Leader of the Opposition I think I'm entitled to 90 minutes on this? Thank you very much. [interjection] A good sense of humour, Harvey. Thank you.

I've always felt that the point of debate in third reading is to talk to the effects of a bill that's making its way through the Legislature, and I think that's well worth considering here because the effects of this bill are going to be felt for months and, I would say, years to come very acutely by some people. I worry about what happens over the next several months as all the people that are getting these large notices of rent increases have to make their decisions, because this bill will not have the protection that they would have if there was a rent cap in place or that they would have in a normally balanced market. I think most of us in this room will agree that a normal, healthy market needs a minimum of regulation. I guess that where we disagree is that when a market is totally out of balance, as it is right now, it is the place of government to step in.

4:00

So what are the effects going to be over the next several months? Well, I think it will depend on different sectors. For seniors you may see some moving away from the province to take up with family in other provinces where they can afford to live or, you know, moving back to live with their children within Alberta. For students – in particular, I'm sensitive to the plight of postsecondary students because the University of Alberta is in my constituency – I think you're going to find, come August and September, a real sense of panic among students as they realize that the cost of postsecondary education, which is already daunting, is just going to become some hundreds of dollars a month more costly. That may well discourage some students from actually seeking postsecondary education, or else it'll drive others to take a second or a third job while they are attending university or college or technical school and as a result get less out of that learning experience and perhaps even fail or get discouraged. So students, I think, will see things played out.

Young professionals or young middle-income earners – and I'm thinking of teachers, nurses, physiotherapists, firefighters, police officers, all those kinds of people – I know already are really struggling to find places to live, are in fact leaving the province or are not coming to this province because of the cost of housing and, again, because of this bill's failure to provide the protection that's needed.

I think we're going to see a lot of human casualties here.

Mr. Danyluk: Eleven thousand in three months.

Dr. Taft: I'm getting comments from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

So over the next several months I think we'll see this issue escalate, and barring a really sharp downturn in the market, I think that escalation could continue for a couple of years. One of the frightening things, for us in the Liberal caucus at least, is that the number of rental units being constructed is not showing signs of any surge. In fact, it's tailing off. The number of rental units in the market is tailing off. So instead of a solution looming on the horizon, it's going to be six or eight months until all these units are opened up. There is no solution at all. In fact, the solution may be receding into the sunset. So I need to emphasize that there are going to be human casualties over the next several months.

There's also, in my view, going to be a real hit to the economy.

I mean, we think we have a labour shortage now. It's only going to get worse because people moving to Alberta from other provinces aren't going to have a place to live. Even if they could find a place, they wouldn't be able to afford it. I know this is happening because I hear these accounts every week as I travel around the province and speak to businesses who want to bring in, say, chefs for restaurants, staff for restaurants, for example. A big challenge. Reporters for media outlets coming in from other provinces: a big challenge. Health workers, of course, construction workers, all of those kinds of positions are going to be more difficult to fill than ever because the people who would come here to fill them and take the job can't find a place they can afford to live, unfortunately, again, another negative side effect of this bill.

I also think that an unanticipated economic problem that this bill will create is to increase economic instability in Alberta. What we're seeing now is a dramatic spike in the cost of housing. Dramatic spikes are typically followed by dramatic collapses. We've lived through that in Alberta. Just about any resource-based or commodity-based economy in the world faces that, and because this policy does not dampen the spike, it's going to mean that the risk of a dramatic fall is that much more great, and therefore the risk of instability for the economy is increased.

I also think that an unintended effect of this policy will actually be greater cost to the taxpayer. We're already seeing, as the minister so frequently reminds us – what is it? – \$285 million or something in additional taxpayer funding over the next two years, I believe, if I've got the figures correct. But I don't think that'll be the end of it. I think that once this crisis really, really starts to peak, starting in the fall, the public demand for more subsidies and more spending will grow and will be irresistible, particularly as we head into the red zone before a general election. So I could well see this government pouring tens and tens and tens of millions of additional dollars into this issue when simple good regulation would in fact allow the same problem to be corrected without a lot of expenditure. So I think this is going to be costly to the taxpayer.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, there's the social cost to the cities, the big cities, Edmonton and Calgary, and the mid-size cities, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, that carry the lion's share of the problem for homelessness and affordable housing. As those problems increase, as homelessness itself increases, and as the number of people who can't afford housing increases, well, the cities are going to have to bear the burden.

I think we will see an even greater number of people out on the sidewalks, living in the parks. In fact, I heard a term yesterday, and I might as well put it on the record here. This is not something we created ourselves, but it was in reference to a homeless person walking through the streets carrying a sleeping bag just before 8 o'clock yesterday morning. In fact, it's a regular occurrence for this particular person. He's living somewhere in a park or river valley, and just before 8 every morning, when he would get chased out, he rolls up his sleeping bag and walks through a particular neighbourhood. One of the people who has watched this turned to one of our caucus members yesterday and said: have you seen that homeless fellow go by every morning just before 8 carrying his Stelmach suite on his back? I think that term might begin to get some currency here. I'm not using it in an inappropriate way.

We're going to see a lot more people living that way, and the burden of that's going to be on the cities. As I walk down Stephen Avenue in Calgary or as I walk down Whyte Avenue or Jasper Avenue in Edmonton or as I go to Grande Prairie or other places, the number of homeless people is shocking. Who has to pick that up? The cities. So this is going to be yet one more strain between this government and the municipal governments.

Ultimately, I think the highest cost and the most tragic cost will be

visited on families and children. When I'm in Grande Prairie and I have people in tears speaking to me about families living in trailers, not proper trailers in trailer parks but little holiday trailers, trying to make it through the winter or families living in the crew cabs of pickup trucks and, you know, lucky if they get a shower every few days, I know that this problem is out of control, and that is occurring. I ask myself: what's happening to those families? Is it any surprise that those families split up? Is it any surprise that those kids don't do well in school, kids who move several times through one school year because their families can't find a home? Where are those kids going to be in six or eight or 10 or 20 years, Mr. Speaker? Everybody needs a home. We owe it to families, we owe it to children, we owe it to every citizen of this province to take whatever steps we need to take to make sure that they have an affordable home. This bill, in my view, fails utterly in that respect.

So what will be the effects of this bill, Mr. Speaker? I think the effects of this bill will be a series of problems: short-term problems, economic problems, higher costs for taxpayers, problems for municipalities, and ultimately and, I think, most severely and tragically a series of problems for families and children.

4:10

I'm disappointed in this bill. I'm disappointed in this government. There was middle ground that could have been taken. We don't have to get into rent caps for all time. The Alberta Liberals put forward a position: one year, 365 days, 10 per cent. Not even a rent freeze. A 10 per cent rent cap. And it goes nowhere. I find that's a telling sign of a government that has lost heart, is failing to look voters in the eye, is failing to sit down with the people who've turned up here in the dozens in the last few days and listen to those stories and take those stories to heart. I think this is a government, as I said, that's lost its heart and is well on the way to losing its soul. It's a sad comment on what has been a proud political dynasty for so long, Mr. Speaker.

With those comments, I think my message is clear, and you can tell where we're going to be voting on Bill 34. We'll be voting against it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Questions or comments?

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Speaker's Ruling

Referring to a Member by Name

The Deputy Speaker: Just before the hon. member starts, a member's name was raised by two different members in this House in unique ways, and we don't allow members to be referred to by their proper names. It was used on both sides of the House this afternoon. I just caution members that it's best to edit those out of your speeches and be on the safe side.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the debate.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be very brief because I know that I was here all night, and many of the people here have certainly shared our thoughts with each other during the night. But I'm really delighted that my colleagues from Rocky Mountain House and Stony Plain are going to actually be able to hear me now.

There are a couple of questions that I would have liked to have

had answered. The minister has said that he is considering 30 per cent of income to evaluate who would be eligible for help with the housing part of it. That's fine, but clearly he's not going to worry about 30 per cent of, as he mentioned, say, \$100,000. What I wasn't clear on is: exactly what is the cut-off? Where are they going to create the criteria and then look at the 30 per cent?

Another question that I would have liked to have had answered was: does the year criterion go with the unit, or does it go with the tenant? For instance, if a landlord raises the rent on a tenant in January and the unit is sold in February, it now has a new owner. Is that new owner then allowed to raise the rent one more time? Who is protected? Is it the unit that's protected for the year, or is it the tenant that is protected for the year? I never really had a clear answer on that.

The market system works very, very well. It's very creative because it's competitive, but I think it has to be balanced to work, and I think that we've all agreed in this House that the major problem we have is supply. Is it the government's job to create incentives to ensure that we have those units being built? It's probably half and half because I don't believe for a second that if a developer would be able to build something and make money, it wouldn't be built now.

Perhaps the government has to be able to put in rules that would be an incentive for private developers to certainly go into what would be considered either transitional housing or affordable housing. I've heard that we don't want to interfere in the market, and I basically agree with that, but I do believe that it's the government's job to make the rules that level the playing field so that everyone is on the same competitive basis.

This bill has helped with the timeline and certainly the enforcement mechanisms, but I don't believe that it truly protects against immoral rent raises. For that reason, I will not be able to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any questions or comments?

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

Mr. Hancock: A point of procedure. Would the chair believe it was appropriate to ask for a shortening of the time for the bells? I don't believe many of our colleagues would be concerned about it, but I'm a little reluctant to even ask because we have no way of letting them know that the bells will be shortened to one minute.

The Deputy Speaker: I can put the question to the House before we take the vote. It has to be unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:18 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

The Deputy Speaker: Just for clarification, members, the one minute is the time between the first bell and the second bell.

For the motion:

Abbott	Ducharme	Lindsay
Ady	Evans	Lund
Amery	Goudreau	Melchin
Calahasen	Hancock	Ouellette

Cao	Herard	Pham
Cardinal	Horner	Prins
Cenaiko	Jablonski	Snelgrove
Danyluk	Johnson	Tarchuk
DeLong	Johnston	Webber
Doerksen	Knight	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Eggen	Miller, R.	Pastoor
Flaherty	Pannu	Taft

Totals: For – 30 Against – 6

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 31
Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate May 1: Mr. MacDonald]

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak on Bill 31? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking on the Mental Health Amendment Act, the members from my constituency point of view would support this act. We believe it will create an improvement in the current systems that is needed.

There are cases both for and against the proposed community treatment orders. This is a complex issue that has supports and opponents. While CTOs are intended to provide a more structured approach to treatment, there is a legal and ethical dilemma of potentially violating a patient's rights as well as inconsistency with today's medical philosophy around the right to refuse treatment and evidence-based decision-making on the use of the least invasive alternative. But as a whole, from the perspective of my constituency, there are more that support than are against this particular act. Therefore, with some of the reservations that have already been expressed about the bill, I will be supporting it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to close debate? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar

Rev. Abbott: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been some great comments, and during Committee of the Whole we look forward to answering some of the questions that have come up. I would just like to thank all of those who participated in the debate on Bill 31, and I move second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a second time]

Bill 32
Animal Health Act

[Debate adjourned May 1: Mr. MacDonald speaking]

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a couple of

questions that I would like to ask on this bill. I'm a very strong believer in definitions so that we're all talking off the same page and singing out of the same songbook, so to speak. The definitions of a reportable disease and notifiable disease seem to be open ended to me, and I'm not exactly sure that I understand the total difference in those. How frequently do new reportable or new notifiable diseases arise? Over the past decade how many of either one of these has emerged as a concern? I would leave anything like BSE aside, which was certainly an anomaly.

Another question that I have that would raise a flag for me as a professional health care worker. Section 6(3) states that "the chief provincial veterinarian may appoint individuals who are not registered veterinarians as inspectors." I would suspect that that is a very solid piece of knowledge that everyone should have, certainly to be an inspector, when they have such great responsibilities and significant authority under this bill. So I just wondered if the minister could perhaps quickly elaborate on that issue. I think it's a very important one. Perhaps they'll be using vet techs; however, I'm not sure that I think that that's a high enough level with the authority that they carry.

They speak of control zones. It would prevent the importation or movement of animals into Alberta from neighbouring jurisdictions, and they would have the authority in neighbouring jurisdictions be present. So they're talking about animals moving from control zone to control zone. How would this process really unfold? I think my main question on that one would be: what effect will TILMA have on animals that are coming from B.C.? Do we have higher standards or lower standards, and which standard would be looked at in terms of TILMA being assessed against that question?

The last one. I believe that when we're speaking of the appeal board, it really should be somebody who is not directly affected by the decision that is being made. I think that anyone who has listened to me talk about continuing care, long-term care, et cetera – I really believe that independent, outside eyes are the ones that actually see in a clearer, unbiased way exactly what is going on. Perhaps someone could record those questions, and I could get the written answers. I see the House leader nodding.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

4:30

Mr. Prins: I was just going to say that I had a big long speech that I could read on this. I'm going to refrain from doing that now, but we can answer in writing to those questions.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have had a robust week of democracy in this Chamber, and I think that we all deserve the opportunity to call it 6 o'clock. I would so move that we adjourn until Monday the 14th at 1 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 4:31 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 14, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I'm now going to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I'd like all to join in in the singing of our anthem in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 21 bright students seated in the members' gallery from Fort Saskatchewan Christian school. Today they are here with their teachers, Stacey Paulsen and Mrs. Karen Maslanko, and parent helpers Mrs. Renee Goodbrand and Mrs. Caroline Bartz. Fort Saskatchewan Christian is one of the many exceptional schools in my riding, and it is wonderful to see these eager young students in our Legislature learning about how government works.

Before I'd ask them to rise, I'd also, Mr. Speaker, like to share with you that Ms Stacey Paulsen, who is, of course, one of the teachers I introduced, is marrying a young lad that's well known to our caucus, our caucus director, Mr. Michael Simpson, this Sunday.

With that, we extend to you sincere congratulations and ask all of the students and teachers and helpers to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly on behalf of the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security students and teachers from the SCOPE home-school in the Stony Plain constituency. Accompanying the students today are teachers and parent helpers Rosemary Lee, Jenny Stone, and Christine Clements. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a visiting class from Springbank, Alberta, in the

district of Foothills-Rocky View. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Scott Sharun, Mr. Dickson Morris, and Ms Tammy Hodgson. Please join me in welcoming them to the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Wetaskiwin-Camrose I'd like to introduce to you and through you a group of students and adults from the Gwynne school, which is in the Wetaskiwin-Camrose riding. There are 25 students and their teachers, Mrs. Char Fraser, Mrs. Kathryn Weremey, and Ms Lisa Roasting, and parent helpers Carol Senz and Terri Pawloske. I'd ask these people to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two parents of children who are autistic, Kierstin Hatt and Eleanor Mui. I would ask that they please rise for the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House an outstanding artist who lives in my constituency – in fact, she lives with me in our home – my wife of 37 years, Rhea Jansen, and her sister who's visiting from Ottawa, Bertha Lesage. I invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Nikolai Lubchenko and Don Durocher. Nikolai and Don are Palace Casino workers entering their 248th day on the picket line due in part to this government's failure to protect Alberta workers from unfair employers.

Nikolai was born in Ukraine and came to Canada in 1992. Before coming to Canada, he worked in the research institute in Kiev. He's been working at the Palace Casino since 1999 as a dealer. Nikolai is very involved in the Latin dance community and enjoys getting out with the music and ballroom dancing every opportunity he can get.

Don Durocher has been a worker at the Palace Casino since 1992, shortly after its opening, and has been in the casino industry for over 20 years. Don, a pit boss for 10 years, served in the former Palace Casino Staff Association as president prior to the merger with UFCW. When he's not working, Don loves to sing and dance. He runs a karaoke show out of Calmar every weekend, and people come from miles around to participate in his show. In addition to his singing talents, he has a great enthusiasm for dance as well, and he was formerly a dance instructor.

They're joined by UFCW local 401 representative Don Crisall, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, did you have an introduction? Please proceed.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure and honour today to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this great Alberta House of democracy Sonia Donaldson. Now, Sonia is the president of ACTRA Edmonton. She's the owner-operator of her own small business, ProSound Productions. She's a Big Sister mentor with Ben Calf Robe school, a tremendous Edmontonian and Albertan. Sonia, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to other members of the Assembly Mr. Will Broome. Will has a passion for politics, having recently been active in the provincial PC leadership. Before that, he was special assistant to Lee Richardson, MP, Calgary Centre. These days Will focuses his efforts as a public relations consultant in Calgary. He recently joined the Calgary-Glenmore board of directors, and I look forward to working with him. Will is here today in the members' gallery. I would ask for him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Cities of the Future Awards for Edmonton

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to congratulate the city of Edmonton for winning three North American cities of the future awards. The awards were presented by an independent index published by *Foreign Direct Investment* magazine out of the United Kingdom. The publication listed Edmonton as having the best economic potential of any large North American city between a population of 500,000 and 2 million people.

The strong economic potential combined with a growing infrastructure, high standard of living, cost-effectiveness, and good human resources gave Edmonton the number 4 spot. They also determined that Edmonton is in the top five large cities with the best development and investment promotion. The independent panel of nine judges used seven selection factors in making their decision that included 108 cities with more than 60 criteria used to determine the potential of each city to attract business prospects.

With the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation promoting the city, Edmonton has the distinction of being the only Canadian city to appear on the top-10 large cities list. All of *Foreign Direct Investment's* 2007 North American cities of the future awards will be displayed in the magazine's April/May issue. I would like everyone to join me in congratulating those who made it possible, including our provincial government, for Edmonton to become a city of the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

1:10 Municipal Safety Award for Slave Lake

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I liked Maya Angelou's statement when she said how important it is to recognize and celebrate our heroes and 'sheroes.' Today I want to identify a few heroes and 'sheroes' from the beautiful constituency of Lesser Slave Lake.

At a time of tremendous growth and industrial activity safety is of utmost importance to the continued quality of life of all Albertans.

The town of Slave Lake has worked and is working hard at being proactive in keeping its residents in the town secure. So it is with great pleasure that I congratulate the town of Slave Lake for being honoured by the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing for its outstanding safety practices on May 4, 2007, in Banff. Her Worship Karina Pillay-Kinnee, the mayor of Slave Lake, on behalf of the town of Slave Lake accepted the municipal safety award.

Receiving the award is a special honour because it signifies remarkable performance and dedication to safety. Gaining this recognition is no easy task. The municipal safety award is presented annually to municipalities which have reached a five-year accreditation milestone in providing safety code services under the Safety Codes Act. The town of Slave Lake marked its 10-year accreditation anniversary in 2006 and is now being formally recognized. This is a very impressive track record.

I am proud to recognize this important milestone for the 'sheroes' and heroes – Mayor Karina Pillay-Kinnee; councillors Elaine Carmichael, Valerie Tradewell, Laura Ross, George Snider, Rob Irwin, Doug Bolan, and the staff from the town of Slave Lake – and their dedication to ensuring that the safety of its residents is upheld. Keep up the great leadership.

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

Team Canada World Hockey Champions

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Sunday Canada's men's hockey team did something no team has done since 1937, going 9-0 to win the world hockey championship in Moscow. Alberta's contribution to this championship team was substantial, from star players to role players to behind the scenes. On the roster were Chris Mason from Red Deer, Cam Ward from Sherwood Park, Mike Commodore from Fort Saskatchewan, Jason Chimera from Edmonton, Dion Phaneuf from Edmonton, and an unsung hero of any team, equipment manager Robin McDonald from Didsbury.

Certainly, no Albertan contributed more under trying circumstances than Shane Doan from Halkirk. Doan was the target of a scurrilous attempt at defamation by federal politicians who alleged that Doan uttered anti-French slurs during an NHL game in 2005. The fact that Doan was cleared by the NHL of uttering the slurs and is widely regarded as an upstanding citizen did not deter self-aggrandizing, publicity-seeking federal politicians from dragging his name through the mud to elevate themselves.

No federal party covered themselves in glory in this rush to judgment, not the federal Liberals who joined in the charade, not the federal New Democrats who expressed their usual knee-jerk outrage, not the federal Conservatives who sat back and allowed this sorry spectacle to be played out. Of course, the leaders of this crew were the Bloc Québécois, the merry band of hypocrites who accept their fat federal government paycheques while trying to destroy the federal system that feeds them. Is it any wonder, Mr. Speaker, that Canadians hold their politicians in such low regard?

While his name was being sullied for the benefit of cheap headlines, Doan went about his work captaining Team Canada. Happily, Shane Doan gets the last laugh. The ultimate revenge for Doan is the gold medal that he will have in his possession long after the Ottawa politicians who tried to score points at his expense are gone from the scene.

On behalf of the Alberta Liberal caucus congratulations to Chris Mason, Cam Ward, Mike Commodore, Jason Chimera, Dion Phaneuf, Robin McDonald, Shane Doan, and all members of Team Canada for their world championship victory. You did yourselves and all Canadians proud even if some politicians in Ottawa did not.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Excellence in Teaching Award for Don Steenwinkel

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to recognize the recipients of the 2007 excellence in teaching awards. For almost 20 years the excellence in teaching awards have recognized the innovative and outstanding teaching that takes place every day across our province. Since its inception in 1989 over 400 teachers have received an excellence in teaching award, and an astounding 7,900 teachers have been nominated. I had the pleasure of attending the awards ceremony on Saturday evening, when the recipients were honoured, and I'm proud to say that one of those recipients is from my constituency.

Don Steenwinkel is presently teaching instrumental music, choral music, and musical theatre at the Leduc composite high school. Don was honoured for his ability to encourage students to be the best that they can be. Over the past 12 years under Don's leadership the music program has doubled, Mr. Speaker, and he has set up a recording studio where students can record their own music. I can personally attest to his qualities as all three of my children have been members of his band. In the words of his students: there is no substitute for the wisdom passed on by Mr. S. and no comparison for the passion with which he teaches.

Don reflects the passion and the commitment of great teachers all across our province. Alberta's teachers do more than instill knowledge and information; they breathe life into the curriculum to ensure that students succeed. Every day Alberta teachers motivate our youth to achieve their individual dreams, dreams which become the foundation of Alberta's future.

The excellence in teaching awards are a wonderful way to say thank you so much. It is an acknowledgement from the teacher's local school, community, and the province that they are held in high esteem for their valued contribution to the lives of their students.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this government and all Albertans I would like to say congratulations to all those teachers who have been recognized through this year's excellence in teaching awards program and to say to them all: thank you.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. The Canada/Alberta agreement signed by this government last week intends to facilitate the entry of foreign immigrant workers even though there is massive evidence that such programs have been abused by some employers in order to keep wages artificially low and to undermine Canadian workers.

While there are thousands of Albertan union members waiting for a well-paid job, this government focuses on bringing cheaper workers for short periods of time. Most temporary workers come in on six-month to one-year visas. They often face language barriers, a lack of proper preparation, and have no access to a social support system. They are very vulnerable because they do not know their rights and do not have access to agencies that can help them when employers might mistreat them. Additionally, they have no mobility, as other Canadians might, since they depend on their employers to stay in the country.

By enhancing a policy of temporary workers, the government prevents many Albertans from receiving skills training and from having access to the jobs that our economy is generating. At the same time, this policy is creating an underclass of workers who live in precarious situations and who are not well protected. This is another example of the lack of long-term planning that characterizes

this government. A larger workforce requires more houses, more schools, and more hospitals. Temporary workers live thousands of miles away from their families and are not provided with education or proper living conditions. If there is a labour deficit, it should be solved by promoting higher wages, proper housing, better training, and long-term immigration.

If these workers are good enough to work here, they should also be good enough to stay here as residents of the country, to enjoy the complete protection of federal and provincial laws, to join unions and defend their rights, and to fully develop as part of this community. A policy that pits immigrant workers against Albertans might be made in Alberta, but it is not in the public interest.

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

Team Canada World Hockey Champions

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without political comment I rise today to recognize the 2007 men's world hockey champions, Team Canada. En route to the gold medal Team Canada defeated Germany, Norway, Belarus, Czech Republic, Sweden, Slovakia, and – to the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, if she's here – the United States of America, Switzerland, and finally, Finland. This team was led by general manager Steve Yzerman, coach Andy Murray, and captained by Albertan Shane Doan.

Mr. Speaker, not only a gold medal, but we also have on the world team the most valuable player, Rick Nash, and a two-time gold medal winner from Winnipeg, Jonathan Toews. He played also in the juniors this year, winning the gold.

This is Canada's third gold medal in five years, and this year, 2007, we won the men's gold, women's gold, and the juniors' gold.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition with 93 signatures. The petition calls for province-wide inspections and enforcement of health facilities and urges the government to "immediately establish a public inquiry into the failure of the health . . . system to protect the safety of patients in its care and to provide recommendations to correct the situation."

1:20

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 35 people asking that remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities be standardized across the sector, regardless of whether the workers are employed by government or by community-based or private providers, that they are fairly compensated and that they remain competitive with other sectors to reflect the valuable and crucial service they provide, that they have professional development opportunities, and that province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards are introduced.

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Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair is tabling with the Assembly the report by the Ethics Commissioner into allegations involving hon. members – and I will mention their names because that is title of the text – Ed Stelmach, Premier; David Hancock, Minister of Health and Wellness; and Lyle Oberg, Minister of Finance. The

report is dated May 11, 2007, and this report was distributed to all members earlier today.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to table five copies of the program that was part of the excellence in teaching awards on Saturday evening. I would suggest that members take a look at the program because it outlines the 27 recipients and some of the great stories of teaching in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three today. I'm pleased to table responses to the questions raised during the debate of Bill 32, the Animal Health Act.

As well, I am tabling four annual reports for the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council for the years 2003 to 2007 and also the annual report of the Farmers' Advocate of Alberta for the year ended March 31, 2007. This report also includes details for the farm implement compensation fund for the year ended December 31, 2006.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have copies of a rent increase notice that the leader of the third party referenced in his questions Thursday. The notice was given to Jessica Fox and is dated a week after the government announced that it closed the door on rent guidelines. The increase is for \$1,200, bringing the total rent for the young family to \$1,695.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling two sets of documents. One is an article about ACTRA: ACTRA has taken a lead role in just about every major cultural issue concerning performing arts in Canada.

Another is a letter from Betty Ganert in my constituency about the difficulties in staffing home care in our province and the great problems she has had in gaining consistent home care for her husband, Ernie, who has MS.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table today. The first one is from Anna Cooper of Red Deer, in which she is expressing concern that her nephew is going to have his specialized services, funded by Children's Services' family supports for children with disabilities, cut up to 75 per cent "because he failed to demonstrate enough growth to justify the level of service he had." She says that this error needs to be corrected.

The second letter is from Stephen Renaud of Edmonton, and it is concerning a disturbing matter where he believes that the quality of support for our most vulnerable citizens, those with developmental disabilities, needs to receive far more attention.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is the program of *Isabella's Renaissance*, a wonderful both historic and comedic theatrical treatment of the Italian Renaissance by grades 8 and 9 students of the Calgary Arts Academy, which my

wife and I had the pleasure to attend last month at the Vertigo Theatre in Calgary.

My second tabling highlights another in the enjoyable May-long series of ImaginAsian events. String Fever combined the individual talents of Aarti Shankar, Mei Han, Amir Amiri, and Pham Duc Thanh with the multitalents of the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra this past Friday, May 11, at the Jack Singer.

My third tabling is the Saturday, May 12, program of a marvellous Meals on Wheels dinner and fundraiser with a 1950s theme entitled Cuisine & Concours d'Élégance. Meals on Wheels is celebrating its 42nd year of serving a variety of special Calgarians, from seniors who are able to live independently through the supports provided, to high-needs elementary schools and daily bag lunches for the working poor. Meals on Wheels has raised almost 6 and a half million dollars for their much-needed new facility.

My final tabling is the tag from the tag-a-tree event which began at noon hour in Bragg Creek this past Saturday, May 12, to raise awareness that the clear-cutting in the Kananaskis scheduled to begin next month would have a much more devastating effect on the watershed, the flora and the fauna, and the recreation and tourism than the pine beetle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a letter from Kierstin Hatt and Brian Small of Camrose, Kimberly and Brian Hockin of Wetaskiwin, Jody and Tomi Heiskanen of Red Deer, and Eleanor and Andy Mui of Edmonton. These are parents of children with autism. Their letter is to the Minister of Children's Services, presenting evidence of ministry failures to follow regulations and existing procedures within the FSCD program, as adult children with autism are denied treatment that they need and to which they are entitled under the FSCD Act. This also results in enormous additional burden to the families, to say nothing of the waste of ministry resources . . .

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the required five copies of my letter and receipt regarding my donation to the Interfaith Food Bank as per my pledge in the Assembly on April 2. This pledge constitutes half of my indexed pay raise. The Interfaith Food Bank assists 1,400 people every month. I believe that I am making a point in public, not grandstanding.

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Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Calgary Municipal Funding

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has decided to treat the city of Calgary and their duly elected local representatives as children of the province by micromanaging municipal funding. Of course, this is not what the Premier promised during the leadership campaign. The fact is that municipal governments are closest to the people and know what needs to be done in their communities. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us why his government does not trust Calgary city council to make the right decisions?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I just want to point out the fact that this Premier does keep his promises. In fact, during the

election campaign I talked about a \$1.4 billion fund to go to municipalities. This, of course, is to be based roughly on the amount of money that is paid towards education through property tax. We also fully understood and understand as our caucus that municipalities are facing pressures on a daily basis, just like we are in government, in terms of growth, more people moving into the province. We want to work in partnership with all municipalities to find a way we can distribute these funds and be accountable at the same time.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing met with the mayor of Calgary to discuss municipal funding. The minister apparently promised the mayor that he would take to his caucus a proposal to define Calgary as a special municipality and allocate municipal funding on a population model. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: is this minister prepared to grant Calgary the special status that they have proposed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I invited the mayor of Calgary to meet with me if he so desired. The mayor of Calgary accepted that invitation. We had numerous discussions centralizing around funding. I had at that time told the mayor that I would bring his requests and some of his challenges and basically report about the meeting that we did have to caucus, which I did.

Dr. Taft: Okay, Mr. Speaker. Well, a major consideration in the debate over special status for the city of Calgary is of course: what about the city of Edmonton? The city of Edmonton also faces unique challenges and, therefore, would deserve the same consideration as a special municipality. To the Premier: is the Premier prepared to give the city of Edmonton the same consideration as Calgary?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again I think the hon. member has a few so-called facts mixed up. There are many municipalities that are looking at what is the most equitable way of allocating funds from the \$1.4 billion. He's saying that the city of Calgary is talking about population base. Actually, that's not true. All I know from previous history, and Alberta history at least, is that there was one special municipality – and that still holds – and I believe it's the county of Strathcona that participates both in the AUMA and the AAMD and C. But this is an issue of the best way to try to allocate the \$1.4 billion.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Temporary Rent Regulation

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government doesn't want to be seen to be flip-flopping on the need for temporary rent regulations, so they're tying themselves in knots, creating among other things a new landlord/tenant body that will attempt, rather feebly I am sure, to do what rent regulations could have done simply and effectively. To the Premier: can the Premier explain specifically how the mandate of the new landlord/tenant body announced by the President of the Treasury Board is supposed to mesh with the existing residential tenancies advisory committee and with the

existing tenancy dispute resolution mechanism? It's quite a dog's breakfast, isn't it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think that the only person that was in knots last Thursday was the Leader of the Opposition.

Quite frankly, the ministers are being proactive, looking at different ways of bringing in landlords and seeing how we can work through this particular situation. For the second question the minister responsible will respond.

Dr. Taft: Which minister would that be?

Instead of establishing temporary rent regulations for existing buildings, this government is proposing to shame landlords through a public website. Responsible, competent governments set policy and enforce it. They don't attempt to punish behaviour that they continue on the other hand to defend as perfectly legal. To the Premier: can the Premier tell us what legislative authority the rent fairness standards will have and whether it's appropriate to publicly expose or shame landlords for doing what this government maintains is perfectly legal?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the advisory board was created back in 2003, so unless there are ministerial powers that I didn't know about, that they could think that's right, they've been there offering positive suggestions to the government for years. They are actually proactive in trying to come up with solutions that work, rather than simply hiding behind the fact that unless we have rent control, nothing will work. These are a group of dedicated Albertans who have asked to sit down and talk about how they can best work together to solve the problem we're facing, not into grandstanding with different individuals here.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among those dedicated Albertans are a number of housing experts in particular communities, including, for example, places like Red Deer, who have already commented that the government's new scheme would not be effective in their communities. To the Premier: what is the Premier prepared to do to prevent rent gouging in the communities where the proposed mechanisms clearly won't work even as admitted by the members the Treasury president just referred to?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, to suggest that this new body or that we have come up with new schemes is simply irresponsible. We have asked to sit down with them, and they have asked to sit with us and look at if collectively we can come up with some solutions to these problems. So to prejudge or presuppose what they might suggest to us is simply reading their own press releases and coming to the conclusion of what might happen. I think it's laudable that this group is willing to come forward and actually work to help some of these people who need our help in the difficult times that we all face, not this kind of help that they're offering.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Media Access to Premier's Office

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Accounts have surfaced recently of the Premier's office attempting to muzzle and intimidate members of the provincial media on their coverage of the affordable housing crisis. For example, one reporter from a major news organization was denied access to an interview with this Premier due to the

critical budget coverage that was deemed, quote: a betrayal to the government. My question to the Premier: is it the Premier's policy to award favourable reporting with access and to freeze out those who point out that this government continues to stumble?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I would think that reporting in the newspapers and in the television media would be fair and recognize, of course, at some point the good strengths of our government and maybe even look at those areas where we need improvement. So I don't know what the leader is getting at here.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, thousands of Albertans rely on the provincial media as their source of information on affordable housing. These Albertans would surely be concerned to know the facts: that there have been widespread reports of the Premier's office intimidating reporters over critical coverage on the government's handling of this crisis. Will the Premier admit that in refusing media access because reporters may criticize this government's performance, he is breaking his promise of governing with integrity and transparency?

Mr. Stelmach: You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's ever a Legislative Assembly that the media – and the media is watching over there; they're watching these questions here – is going to the Leader of the Opposition to say that the media has been treated unfairly. So I suppose that you're supporting a hundred per cent what the media has been saying. Guess what? The answer will be yes. I can hear it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. I'm glad we can get the Premier in giggles. The fact is, if the media can't report on the unfavourable record of this government, there won't be much left for them to report on.

Given the Premier's giggles on this question, to the Premier: does this mean that the Premier has his communication staff implementing a policy on muzzling reporters that he knows nothing about?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's well known that as Premier I have numerous media availabilities. Most of the time here in the House, the media availability, the two opposition leaders are there. I answer the questions that are given to me. I do media scrums. We interviewed, in fact, over the weekend. Last week I don't know how many times, so I don't know what the leader is getting at. If there is a specific concern, you know, you've got the protection of the House. Bring the name forward of this so-called media person. Don't hide it. You want to be open and transparent? Just tell me: who are you talking about? It might be based all the way back in those secret deals that you were supposed to give us about – what? – three months ago.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Federal/Provincial Fiscal Relations

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Alberta Premiers have established a long tradition of standing up to Ottawa to protect Alberta's oil and gas resources. [interjections] Wait for it. From the days of Peter Lougheed Albertans could count on a vigorous defence of Alberta's economic golden goose. Not anymore, Mr. Speaker, not anymore. The current Premier has been standing by while Ottawa has been helping itself to our birthright, first by cutting capital costs allowance and then by a carbon tax on Alberta resources. Not a peep of protest from you, Mr. Premier. Why not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, his caucus are the ones that are supporting capital costs allowance because they want to slow down the growth. We've been talking about it the last three months in this House. Make up your mind: do you want it to go or to reduce?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. A very serious matter, Mr. Speaker. There's a long tradition in this province of Premiers standing up to Ottawa. This Premier has failed to do it. Perhaps it's because of his federal cousins being in the shop, but his finance minister made a statement last week to Bay Street who used the federal cash grab as an excuse for potentially not raising our royalties. Is that a deliberate policy on the part of this government to let the federal government help themselves so that we don't have to raise royalties ourselves?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in the last five months we've accomplished a number of things with the federal government. The first time in a long, long time being recognized as Canadians, meaning that equal per capita funding, finally, for all of the social transfers. That's phenomenal. That's phenomenal.

Last week we signed an immigration agreement with the federal government. It's only the second time in history. The first one was to Quebec a number of years ago, the second one here in the province of Alberta. That is outstanding, and that just shows the kind of co-operation.

With respect to the issues tied with transfers of wealth in this province, Mr. Speaker, we took a very firm stand in this Assembly. We said that any transfers for greenhouse credits will stay in Alberta to be invested in the province of Alberta. Period.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we need no evidence that this government is very cosy with their cousins in Ottawa.

Current royalty rates were set in the day of \$15 a barrel of oil. Now it's \$60 and going up. We're still collecting only 1 cent on the dollar for most tar sands production, Mr. Speaker. The rest goes to big oil or to the federal government. To the Premier: why doesn't he stand up for Albertans? Why is he selling us out?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, some of the information that the hon. member has given is not true. With respect to the 1 per cent there are different stages in terms of royalty paid to the province. However, what we are doing is thoroughly reviewing the royalty regime, both for oil sands, conventional oil and gas, and also coal-bed methane. That information will be presented to the public sometime towards the end of August. All Albertans will have a look at the information and determine if we're getting a fair return.

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

Municipal Funding

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many families and communities are having a difficult time making ends meet, and the direction and the policy of this government are making it tougher. Premier Klein always said that the only way taxes are going in Alberta is down, though his actions were many times different. This

government continues to increase family taxes each year through market value assessment on unrealized gain on their property. To add insult to injury, this government is now through conditional funding forcing municipalities to consider new taxes to sustain their communities. My question is to the Premier. Albertans want to know this government's policy on taxes. Which direction are they going to go: up or down?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as evidenced in this budget, taxes are going down, and the Minister of Finance may give further detail to that.

Mr. Hinman: Well, we're talking real taxes, not the numbers.

Mr. Speaker, conditional funding policy is affecting more than just the municipality of Calgary. Municipal leaders were anxiously awaiting additional funding from municipal sustainability initiatives, only to be bitterly disappointed to find that this government had been misleading them all along, thinking that this was unconditional funding. My question again to the Premier: did the government use conditional funding for municipalities because they know the needs of communities better than local elected people, or does this government just think municipal leaders are incompetent?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, sometimes it's really difficult to find a way of allocating new money to municipalities. We recognize that there are so many differences amongst municipalities based on assessment levels, based on needs, based on kilometres of roads, and some of the social issues in various municipalities. We're looking at addressing those, but at the end of the day the money is being transferred from the global taxpayer to the municipalities. As the Legislature we have to be accountable. We are looking at what we can put in place, in agreement, so that when the money is transferred to municipalities, we can be accountable to this House.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, they're addressing local needs and missing out the rest of the province.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation gave our Premier's leadership campaign a generous D plus, the lowest mark given to our leadership candidates. Now with the budget and the talk of implementing new municipal taxes, an F for failure will be more in order. This budget and the Premier's policy on conditional funding is an attack on our families and their communities. This is a blatant case of he who has the gold makes the rules. Again to the Premier: will you do the right thing for our families and our communities and renounce the new taxes being discussed with municipalities and remove the conditional funding to municipalities?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, just for the purpose of those people watching and listening, the municipal sustainability initiative, the report, is the report given to us by municipalities. The municipalities collectively, AUMA, AAMD and C, and the two city mayors have a number of proposals. I believe five of their recommendations are to look at ways of us giving the municipalities the power to tax certain things. It's not coming from the government. It's in our hands today to fully discuss. The minister responsible for municipal affairs will take that back to municipalities to have a look at and again chat with municipalities. But in light of the fact that we're giving new funding, a lot of those tax powers may not be necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Capital Region Municipal Planning

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All my questions are to the Premier. The city of Edmonton and its regional partners are smack in the middle of the unprecedented growth pressures Alberta is facing. The sheer scope of all the development has the potential to cause major problems across many sectors if planned wrong. What is obvious is a need to plan for future growth potential in the capital region in a co-ordinated manner. The capital region tried but failed, and the province has been silent. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us why the government refuses to establish a regional planning mechanism for high-growth areas that has the authority to make binding decisions?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the government through the ministers responsible, but especially the minister of municipal affairs, has been meeting with the municipalities. I can assure you that ACRA, the Alberta Capital Region Alliance, has shown great leadership in years past in terms of sharing all of the ideas and thoughts on how to get the best value for the infrastructure. That's one of the reasons why the city of Edmonton and the communities around saw the Anthony Henday expedited, the number of bridges that were built. This all came as a result of co-operation amongst all of the municipalities, that they should be congratulated for.

Mr. Bonko: The current planning system that serves a million residents of the capital region allows discussions to be made in isolation, with 23 approaches to every question that only adds mass confusion. Apparently, the provincial government believes that this is the way to plan. A new report by the Northeast Capital Industrial Association states that the position that the city of Edmonton is pushing for for mandatory regional planning is wrong. The report advocates voluntary co-operation in the regional planning, but the mayor says, you know: "It just isn't working. The municipalities have tried, and it's just not working." So to the Premier: can the Premier tell us if he agrees with the report of the Northeast Capital Industrial Association and if he refuses to support the city of Edmonton's call for regional mandatory planning? Who are you backing, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in this particular area of unprecedented growth, especially in the areas around the industrial heartland, we're going to require not only planning in terms of the province sitting down with all of the municipalities but also intermunicipal because there are issues tied to roads, bridges, as well as where the new housing initiatives will occur. I'm confident that the municipalities are working towards this goal. Of course, it will be further expedited by the minister of municipal affairs, who is getting all of the municipalities together. He'll be present to put something down on paper, a direction we can take over the next few months.

Mr. Bonko: There's no disputing the mounting evidence that the long-term future potential of the capital region is jeopardized by the lack of regional co-ordination. The government's own Radke report, the Percy report, and the 50-year-old McNally royal commission all call for regional co-ordination. Public opinion states that 89 per cent of the capital residents want more regional co-operation, yet when regional planning for the capital region gets to Executive Council for discussion, it disappears. Someone doesn't want the discussion to take place. Will the Premier inform us who in his government is blocking regional planning for the capital region?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, you can see how they try to sit on both sides of the fence in terms of the opposition. First of all, they're arguing the fact that we shouldn't have any accountability for the dollars that are going to municipalities in terms of regional co-ordination, regional planning. That's a no-no. We shouldn't be going that. Yet, on the other hand, they flip-flop the other way and say: well, you should do something. Well, we are. We're putting money on the table, creating incentives for municipalities to get together and do long-range planning. What better plan than that can you put together? It's a great incentive.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Electric System Operator Review

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that it's been announced that the Market Surveillance Administrator is reviewing the practices of the Alberta Electric System Operator. My questions today are for the Minister of Energy. Can he inform this House exactly what this review is about?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's the AESO's responsibility to provide safe, reliable, and economic planning and operation of our electricity system. Part of this involves a purchase of ancillary, or backup, power services, which act as an insurance policy at all times to ensure system reliability. As part of the AESO's ongoing review of practices, certain activities related to the transactions were identified as unsuitable and were immediately stopped. As the body established to ensure fairness and open competition in the market, I look forward to the MSA's findings in this matter.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can he inform this House as to what steps he has taken to address this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once this issue was brought to my attention, I asked the department to consult with the AESO and ensure that appropriate steps were being taken. Since then AESO has conducted an internal review of all their purchase practices and introduced new training processes. The AESO also forwarded this matter to the Market Surveillance Administrator for review. The MSA has legislated authority to investigate and take appropriate action into matters such as this. The system and its checks and balances have worked as they should.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the same minister. I know that my constituents will be wondering how this affected them. Can the minister inform us: are consumers affected by these practices?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I've been assured by the AESO that there is absolutely no evidence that would indicate that consumers were affected in any way. There's also no evidence of any personal impropriety or personal gain by AESO's employees or that of AESO itself, since it's a not-for-profit group. In the spirit of openness and accountability, it's important to allow the MSA to conduct its independent and external review, the results of which will be made public. Appropriate responses have been taken to date, and any additional steps recommended by the MSA will be addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Support for Families with Autistic Children

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Autism spectrum disorder places a substantial burden on families with children affected by it. In Alberta these families have been pushed to the breaking point by the process in place for assessing the eligibility of autistic children for specialized treatment. Every single year parents must travel often far distances to prove that their children are indeed deserving of treatment. Local multidisciplinary team processes are family-centred and meet the requirements of the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act. To the Minister of Children's Services: will your department ensure that families can engage in the multidisciplinary team, MDT, process with professionals in their own communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I want to say is that we understand in Children's Services that raising a child with a disability can be very challenging. I'm really proud to be part of a government that believes that these families deserve our support and our help. I'd also like to point out that the Alberta family support for children with disabilities program is unique in Canada, and in my short time here I've heard that from people right across this country. So just to start with those comments.

With respect to the eligibility process regarding autism, I will get back to you with more information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have heard several complaints from families that are seeking funding for relationship development interventions. They're very concerned because department regulations are not being followed, and they feel they have been forced into unnecessary and expensive appeal processes. To the Minister of Children's Services: if your department has agreed to fund RDI for one child, why is it later forcing some parents into painful appeal processes to demonstrate that RDI meets FSCD regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding with respect to autism is that the multidisciplinary teams provide expertise. They try to determine a child's needs in order to provide the level required. So I do know that we are looking at different delivery of services for the spectrum of autism. Once again, I will get you more information on the eligibility process and get more details for you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I emphasize the need for local input. Two parents have made the trip to Edmonton again today to seek a fair resolution for their particular situations. Their children cannot go without needed treatment any longer. These parents have brought with them substantial documentation of instances where ministry staff have failed to follow department regulations and procedures. To the Minister of Children's Services: the concerns of these parents are reflective of larger problems with the way this department treats people and families with autistic children. Will you agree to meet with these parents today and to hear first-hand how abusive the MDT appeal process can be?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will say is if you could please ask those individuals to forward the documentation to me, I will take a look at it as well as follow up and get that information I told you earlier.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When demand outstrips the supply costs and prices rise, government needs to help the increase of supply to dampen the rising costs and prices. With the tremendous growth in Calgary and everywhere in Alberta the demand for human resources has outstripped the supply. Given that last Friday, May 11, in Calgary our Premier and our Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry signed an Alberta/Canada immigration agreement, my question today is to the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Minister, what does this agreement mean, and how does it affect Alberta businesses?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it was a great pleasure to have the Member for Calgary-Fort and the Member for Calgary-Lougheed in attendance while we signed the agreement. It will put the right person with the right skills and the right supports in place. We have labour shortages in Alberta. That is acknowledged. This agreement, a made-in-Alberta solution, expands our efforts during the provincial nominee program and gives us an opportunity to do more consultative work with the federal government in marketing, in other points where people might be considering Alberta. It adds resources. It puts in place additional supports for integrated settlement services that will be unique to Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you. It's great news for businesses.

To the same minister: what does this agreement mean to the employees? How does it ensure priority employment to our local Albertans and our work safety standards?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, before foreign workers can be retained for employment in Alberta, it's necessary for the company or the corporation in question to illustrate that they are not able to fill that job with an Albertan. That is the first part of the labour market opinion.

The temporary foreign worker, Mr. Speaker, is also subject to the same capacities, the same rules and regulations that are applied to

everybody else in terms of occupational health and safety and has the same rights and privileges. It gives an opportunity for that foreign worker to fill a much-needed position, especially where we have situations which haven't been filled by other people here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you. That's great.

To the same minister: given that the Canada/Alberta immigration agreement has been signed, when can employers expect its implementation and the processes for them to follow?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there is certainly going to be more interest in the provincial nominee program. As an example, that program will give an opportunity over the next 15 to 18 months to increase significantly the numbers of academic and skilled workers. The federal government has agreed to contact anybody that has indicated a desire to work as a physician, as a nurse, as a pharmacist, or as a physiotherapist. They will contact them by letter, find out if they're interested in being in receipt of a job opportunity, and with that particular pilot project it will give us an opportunity to encourage more people. Provincial nominee numbers will go up. We will be continuing to work on the annex to the agreement on the temporary foreign workers side so that employers will be abundantly clear on all of the things they must do to make it comfortable.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:00 Safety of Temporary Foreign Workers

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. News reports over this weekend confirmed that yet another tank has collapsed at the Canadian Natural Resources Horizon oil sands project. Fortunately, no one was injured this time, but the collapse of two tanks in such a short period of time suggests that safety standards are being ignored. Unions on the site have confirmed these fears, and there's reason to believe that yet a third tank is on the verge of collapse. The Horizon site must be shut down until the Chinese contractor building the tanks adheres to Alberta safety standards. My questions are to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Surely there's enough evidence to indicate that workers' safety on the Horizon site is at risk. Will you act quickly to protect Alberta's workers and halt construction on this site?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, in actual fact, there is a stop-work order on this site. The investigative team has been there. Occupational Health and Safety has hired an engineering company to consult about whether or not the previous terrible and tragic accident was the result of one factor or another, either environmental or engineering standards. They'll look at the full gamut. Very fortunately, there was nobody on the site when the tank collapsed on the weekend. So we already have a stop-work order, and at this present time until we are satisfied and the inspectors are satisfied that safety is prevalent, that it's been addressed, we will not open...

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, this contractor, actually, is slated to build between 10 and 12 more of these huge tanks. Without

intervention on the part of the government this contractor can continue to build the remaining tanks with the same design, construction principles, materials, and work crews. So to the same minister: will you shut down this construction site until we can prove that no more workers will be injured by faulty design?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm rather confused because I did just say that there is no work going on on that site, and until we know exactly why there's been a problem, then I don't think that we will be reinstituting work. So we have to find out that information before anything starts again. I think we're doing exactly what the hon. member is asking.

Dr. B. Miller: What about the other 10 or 12 tanks in the future?

Anyway, the situation at the Horizon site, which last month saw the deaths of two temporary foreign workers, raises all sorts of questions about the provincial program to bring temporary foreign workers here. More recently I have heard from other workers in this program who have been subjected to abuse by their employers and recruiting firms. Many workers come here to Edmonton only to discover that the jobs that were promised no longer exist. To the same minister: given that the temporary foreign worker program forms a very large part of your ministry's made-in-Alberta immigration strategy, how can you refuse to take responsibility for the treatment of these vulnerable workers, who are in our province at your request? Why is it that the Alberta Federation of Labour sets up an advocacy office, and your government . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, people who come under the temporary foreign worker program come because there's not a worker from Alberta to work there. They've already exhausted that supply. The company, in actual fact, applies to the federal government. A labour market opinion is done.

Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned about the safety of all workers. Whether they're temporary foreign workers or permanent Alberta residents, if they're working on a job site, we're vitally concerned. We are no less concerned about people who come as temporary workers than absolutely anybody else.

Mr. Speaker, we look forward to getting further reports. The hon. member has alleged that this program opens the doors for people to be poorly treated. May I please state . . .

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

Affordable Housing Solutions

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Conservative government's housing policy shows a total lack of compassion for renters. It's disorganized, and it's leading to chaos, and that sums up a good day for this government and its housing policy. In the wee hours of Thursday morning the Minister of Service Alberta concocted some sort of toothless tribunal rather than come up with good policies that stop the abuse of renters in the first place. My question is to that minister. How will this rent review panel, dreamed up by the minister when he was asleep, stop renters from being gouged?

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, probably if I had enough time here to think up a bunch of goofy suggestions, I

could put them in a book and sell them. Oh, but that's been done. Sorry.

Mr. Speaker, this advisory board was created in 2003. They're a group of people involved in both sectors of the industry that are willing to come forward and help the government and all the departments of the government come up with real solutions to real problems involving real people, not some hypothetical namby-pamby that the NDs think will be the solution. It's really simple. We are proactive. We are looking for innovation, and we are looking for industry involvement.

Mr. Martin: I feel hurt being called namby-pamby – namby-pamby – and all these quotes from the minister. That's what you're going to send out, I take it, Mr. Minister.

The bottom line is that we should have got through over many hours to this minister that renters are being hurt now, that they are being gouged, and that this particular tribunal has no teeth at all. So my question is to the minister. How is it going to work to protect renters from being gouged? Tell us how?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I feel that it's somewhat like an old Johnny Carson show here, where they know the answer before we put the question. We've got opposition members that accuse ministers, that haven't even set up a program yet, of giving it to top Tories. We've got the NDs telling us what this board is going to do before we've ever even met with them. We're going to sit down with them and ask them what they can offer. Is it your point that we shouldn't meet with these groups, that it doesn't matter what they say?

Mr. Martin: Mr. Minister, it should have even crossed over into this side of the bench that we have been offering alternatives. There's a simple one that we've tried to get through to this minister. Rent guidelines work in other provinces. What you could do with the board is that if they had extra costs, whether it be utilities or maintenance or security or whatever, have them come to the board and ask to pass it on then. This is my question to the minister: why won't the minister do the commonsense thing and do that instead of this namby-pamby thing that he's doing?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to quote, and I'll table this document when we're done, from the *Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*. "Economists are virtually unanimous," now, only 98 per cent of them, ". . . that rent controls are destructive." It's all backed up. It simply doesn't work. You can live in the past and pretend. The fact is that in the short term it might make you feel good, but in the long run it just takes longer to create the spaces that we need to put these people in. So please try to come up with something new or, maybe, meet with the group that actually knows what they're talking about, like I'm going to do this afternoon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Calgary Municipal Funding (continued)

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing met this morning with the mayor of the city of Calgary. The mayor has expressed concerns in recent weeks over conditions attached to the funding under the municipal sustainability initiative. To the minister: have the conditions been altered or removed so that Calgary can get on with its life?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The conditions as stated by the hon. member have remained in place for this year. In our discussions about the conditions and their focuses I believe that the Calgary mayor understands better the flexibility that can take place. I have committed to the mayor to write not only to him but the rest of the municipalities throughout Alberta to maybe better describe some of the possibilities of the flexibility and to clarify the guidelines that are in question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the economy remains strong, the city of Calgary may grow by another 300,000 people over the next 10 years, so it's very critical that the government commit to a long-term funding arrangement that will allow the city of Calgary to plan around priority infrastructure projects in anticipation of this growth. To the same minister: what long-term funding commitments can the government give the mayor?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in our Committee of Supply we have been discussing the budget. This year – I believe that adds sustainability to the budget – we have presented \$400 million for the sustainability of municipalities. Next year it'll be at \$500 million. The year after that it will be at \$600 million. I've always said that that formula is for this year. We are going to consult with municipalities, with the association, with the minister's council and look at how that money should be distributed to municipalities, having their input, making sure that the flexibility addresses the needs of sustainability and predictability.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I understand it, the engineering of the west leg of the LRT is substantially complete. The mayor has said that Calgary cannot proceed because of the perceived strings to the municipal sustainability initiative. Did your meeting this morning clear up, remove any barriers to this project moving forward in the city of Calgary?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I recognize the need not only by Calgary but by other municipalities for stability and predictability. Also, we need to look at accountability. Our discussions this morning very much revolved around the city of Calgary having some assurance that there will be funding in the future. It would not be, if I can say, responsible of myself if I tried to predict from year four to year 10, but I can say that in the three-year plan we do have money, as I stated before, and at that time we're asking the chair of the Calgary caucus to meet with the Calgary council to discuss some of those . . .

The Speaker: And we'll hear from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Long-term Care Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Accessible home care programs are needed to ensure that seniors can remain in their homes and communities while getting the quality care that they need. It has been estimated that in 10 years 15 per cent of Alberta's population will be seniors. My question is to the minister of health. In the 2003 first ministers' health accord Alberta agreed to make home care a

priority initiative in our province. Years later home care is understaffed, underfunded, and underrecognized as an essential part of the health care field. Does the failure to follow through on the goals of the Canadian health accord represent yet just another promise?

Mr. Hancock: Well, no, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member would know, because she's been part of the process, that there's been a considerable review of standards of care and the provision of long-term care in the province and that the government has moved to implement the standards of care and to ensure that there's training and accreditation for workers in the area. Yes, we still have a lot of work to do in terms of being able to attract the workers that we need, but that's not exclusive to the health field or the long-term care field. That's an issue right across the province, and we've been working very closely with the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry on that issue. But this is very much a high priority.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that answer. Again we're into this business of continuing care, long-term care, et cetera. What has the minister done to improve home care and really prove that home care is a priority for this government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, I've met with, I think, most of the organizations active in the province – organizations representing seniors, organizations representing the home care association, the long-term care association, and others – to make sure that I was fully up to speed with respect to the various perspectives of all of them, and I'll be working carefully with the health authorities and with the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports as we go forward to make sure that we have that continuum of care that's necessary so that seniors can choose where they live and have the necessary health support to do so.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that answer. I'm delighted that you're speaking with the health authorities, and hopefully they were all at the same table to hear the same message.

My next question would be to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. An estimated 90 per cent of home care is provided by nonprofessionals, creating immense physical and emotional pressures for families. Professional home care services would relieve this burden and assist people in need of care to remain in their homes instead of being confined to hospitals, yet the level of support given to home care by the government doesn't suggest that this important service is a priority.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the member, having worked on the continuing care standards, would and should re-emphasize that home care is one of the very, I think, long-term opportunities that we ought to continue to support and pursue. Those types of options that we have from Alberta Aids to Daily Living are part of the pieces to the puzzle. Also, working with health and ensuring that the staffing and support services could be there in their own homes is an outstanding direction that we want to continue to pursue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Community Initiatives Program

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of the volunteers and nonprofit organizations in my constituency are very concerned by

the criticisms of unmatched grants to the community initiatives program. Some of these organizations would not be able to carry out the good work they do in our community if they're required to match the funding required through the grants. They simply can't raise enough funding for all their projects. When the Medicine Hat Volunteerism in Action Association needed funding for worthy projects, they were able to get support through your CIP program. My first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Can the minister provide these groups with some assurance that nonmatching grants will still be considered for community projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member highlights an excellent example of one of the very important community projects that received nonmatching funding through the community initiatives program. My department has just completed a review of all the projects that received grants valued at more than \$10,000 without matching funds. I can say that all of the projects involve good community initiatives, dedicated volunteers, and eligible nonprofit organizations. In several cases the CIP funding made it possible for these organizations to get through temporary setbacks and get back on a solid foundation. I believe that these grants should continue to be available to support worthy community projects even if...

The Speaker: We'll ask the hon. member to continue.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Did your review of the grants turn up projects that shouldn't have received funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to that question is no. No rules were broken. The guidelines were followed in every case. The organizations were eligible to apply for funding. Their applications met the requirements, and they made a good case for the funding they received for their community projects. To this end I will be tabling the existing guidelines for the CIP programs and a summary of the projects that were approved for unmatched funding over \$10,000.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the same minister. Can the minister tell this House what he's doing to improve communications and transparency around lottery funding programs so that everyone – everyone – will have the same understanding of these guidelines?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated before, the information regarding grant recipients and the funding they receive is already available on the Alberta lottery fund website. The guidelines I'm tabling today reflect the requirements and process for the review and approval of grants.

Moving forward, our department plans to certainly increase our communications about lottery grants and recipients to the public and the Legislature on a more regular basis. We are also consulting with the Auditor General on the guidelines as a matter of course, and we'll continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 84 questions and answers today.

We have one unfinished matter of business. Hon. President of the Treasury Board, you have sufficient copies of the document that you wish to table to wrap that up today?

Mr. Snelgrove: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I do: five copies from the *Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

FOIP Requests

- Q12. Mr. R. Miller:
For each of the fiscal years 2001-2002 through 2005-2006 what percentage of requests for information under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act were met within 30 days of the initial request?

Resource Rebate Program

- Q13. Mr. R. Miller:
As of April 11, 2007, what is the total cost of efforts to recover cheques that were sent to people who did not qualify for the Alberta 2005 resource rebate program?

Resource Rebate Program

- Q14. Mr. R. Miller:
What was the total cost associated with administering the Alberta 2005 resource rebate program?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the balance of questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: 2:20 **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Wednesday, May 9, motions for returns 5 and 6 will be dealt with today. The remaining motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper will stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

Mountain Pine Beetle

- M5. Mr. Bonko proposed that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents, including studies, reports, and environmental or economical impact assessments, relating to the effects of the presence of mountain pine beetles in Alberta forests from fiscal years 2002-2003 through 2006-2007.

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am rejecting Motion for a Return 5, concerning documentation relating to the mountain pine beetle. The difficulty is that the request was for all documents – all documents – over a four-year period relating to the effects of the presence of mountain pine beetle in Alberta forests since 2002. The request is simply too broad, as there are numerous documents, studies, reports related to the presence of mountain pine beetle in our forests. We can only provide those documents that are available to us.

I appreciate that many Albertans seek more information about mountain pine beetle and our action plan, and I share their interest in making this information public, but it only makes sense to provide documents that were used in my department to shape our mountain pine beetle plan. Fourteen public documents and studies available to Sustainable Resource Development were referenced and billed in our action plan. I will table a list of those 14 public documents in the Legislature with details about where they can be accessed. That list will be tabled tomorrow.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, then, to close debate?

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not surprising. I'm a little disappointed, considering it has been declared a state of emergency. If the minister felt that the piece of information I was looking for was a little bit too broad, perhaps he could have made an amendment allowing myself and Albertans to have some more pertinent information, then.

[Motion for a Return 5 lost]

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

Foster Parent Campaign

M6. Mrs. Mather proposed that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a detailed breakdown of all expenses relating to advertising and promotional campaigns encouraging Albertans to become foster parents in each of the fiscal years 2002-2003 through 2006-2007.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Foster care in Alberta is under significant pressure on a number of different fronts. Lack of adequate funding for social workers negatively affects recruitment and retention and puts additional strain on the staff monitoring and assisting foster homes. The shortage of available foster families leads to overloading and hotel stays, puts additional strain on a system that is already stretched. This is an unsustainable solution that makes it more and more difficult to protect Alberta's most vulnerable citizens. We are hearing about cases where foster children are either being placed in families that are overloaded or being housed in a hotel while waiting for a foster family who can take them in. This is a clear sign that the system as it stands is unsustainable.

In the past year 19 children have suffered an injury that resulted in hospitalization or death while receiving protective services, and the percentage of aboriginal children in care who suffered injury resulting in hospitalization or death has doubled. One death is too many. There's a clear need for immediate action to protect Alberta's children. I'm sure that most foster families in the province are doing great work, but we need to have consistent monitoring and better support for foster parents to ensure the safety of children in care. If

the government can't accomplish this, even more children will slip through the cracks, and this is unacceptable.

We need to encourage fostering by families. The fostering process can be very upsetting for the child, and being suddenly moved from home to home can cause emotional trauma for the children we are trying to protect. We should have policies in place to ensure that the transition to a new home is as smooth as possible. This also includes addressing the critical shortage of foster homes that we have.

The recent budget included an increase of \$7 million for foster care, which is earmarked for training and recruitment of foster families. This funding is desperately needed, and I'm really happy to see that increase, but the number of foster families in Alberta is decreasing in the capital region and across the province. There were about 850 families in the Edmonton area last year, but the total dropped by 12 per cent to around 750 families this year, and the downward trend has existed for the past five years.

The Children's Services' business plan 2001-2005 shows that the shortage of foster families has been identified and recognized by this government for years. It's crucial that we have a plan to do everything that we possibly can to encourage more families to become foster families. This motion is to look at what we have actually done in terms of advertising and promotion so that we can make a decision to do even better so that more families will feel that they do have the support they need if they take this important step.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Motion for a Return 6. First, I'd like to thank the member for her concern about foster homes in our province, and I can assure her that I share this very same concern in this area. Recruiting new foster parents and caregivers for children in government care is an integral part of our business at Children's Services. In fact, it's built into so many of our larger initiatives.

At Children's Services foster parent recruitment is a collaborative effort between the department, our child and family services authorities, delegated First Nation agencies, the Alberta Foster Parent Association, 24 regional foster parent associations, and a number of contracted agencies. All these agencies are required to recruit foster parents as part of their contracts and work tirelessly to ensure that children in government care have a safe, family-based setting where they can go in times of need.

We do not track foster care recruitment, including promotional campaign material, separately, on its own budget item, because it's considered an integral program activity as opposed to a stand-alone activity. Therefore, determining a figure for total dedicated expenditures for foster parent recruitment is not possible given the collaborative and the integrated nature of recruitment activities across Alberta.

Although figures for foster parent recruitment expenditures for the requested time periods are unavailable, I can inform the Assembly that this year we'll be investing \$650,000 in addition to our regular contracts to recruit more foster parents and aboriginal caregivers for children in government care.

Given that accurate figures for foster parent recruitment expenditures in the requested time periods are unavailable, I recommend that Motion for a Return 6 be rejected.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to close the debate.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We often talk of family as a pillar of society, and so it is, but families the way we usually use

the term are simply biological bonds, and looking out for one's clan or next of kin can be seen simply as a matter of self-interest. Those who foster take kinship to another level of inclusiveness, that is the bedrock of civilization, another way of relating to each other: to take on care for community.

The Speech from the Throne set the quality of life as one of the government's objectives for Alberta. That is a welcome balance to the preoccupation with economic development that has driven public policy for the past decade. A nurturing quality is one of the things that is needed to make a physical house a home. This is found not primarily in putting up big facilities and funding programs and having more agencies but in the simple gifts of life that we offer each other.

We hear a lot of praise of family values in Alberta. Often these words are spoken by those who fear for their own families and feel that they'll be adversely affected by someone else's choices. We hear much in support of children and their right to security, love, and a good start in life. Words can be inspirational, but they're not enough.

2:30

I know the challenges of adoption. I respect those who face these challenges not just once but in succession with different children. Foster care goes beyond providing the basic necessities of life. The word "foster" is usually used as an adjective. It is also a verb, a word that describes an action or a state of being. To foster is to encourage qualities, to nurture our humanity, to offer the gifts of life that we all deserve simply by being alive.

So when we look at what we're doing in Alberta, I'm glad to hear that it is a priority and that we're looking at ways that we can encourage more parents to foster. I think this is such a huge issue that I can't stress enough, so I'm going to use some words that were written by a foster child, a 16-year-old girl. She began:

Happy are those children that have railroads in the hall
Painting in the kitchen and stories when they're small.

And she ends:

Sometimes kids are fortunate, and people can be found
To foster them and care for them and always be around
All these people ever ask is just a chance to share
With all the kids who need it, their Castles in the Air.

So I urge our Children's Services ministry to do all that is possible to promote that fostering and support fostering once we do have foster families in place.

[Motion for a Return 6 lost]

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

**Bill 207
Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act**

[Debate adjourned May 7: Mrs. Jablonski speaking]

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to once again join the discussion on Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act, 2007. Once again, I also wish to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for furthering discussion on this topic as I feel that this is a subject most worthy of attention. Our children are Alberta's most precious resource, and it remains a priority of this government to address the well-being of our young people.

While increasing spaces and improving access are key initiatives being undertaken by the government, we are always seeking to not only improve quantity in terms of child care spaces but also to improve the quality of the spaces that are provided. As the first piece of legislation in Alberta to focus entirely on child care, Bill 4 aims to create new licensing categories that will generate more options for parents, especially in rural areas. It will provide for more effective monitoring to ensure that operators are in compliance with the act, and it will reward excellence by allowing child care operators to obtain a multiyear licence. By reducing the time and effort child care operators spend on paperwork, this government will enable those operators to put more effort into providing quality child care.

With Bill 4 this government is following through on a commitment to Albertans. We recognize that part of managing growth pressures means addressing the well-being of our children. While I support the spirit of Bill 207, I feel that it is not necessary to enact this legislation as its legitimate concerns are already being addressed by new government legislation in Bill 4.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that child care is a critical issue in Alberta, and we need to see dramatic action to remedy the years of neglect, particularly in space and funding. The new funding is less than the increase that we would have liked to have seen when the federal government agreement on child care was in place, but we are pleased to see that there are no cuts to child care and that funding has gone up.

I was at an annual general meeting of a daycare in St. Albert. One of the things expressed by the people there was a need for a longer term type of funding to give them the feeling that they can plan and do their staffing and attract more people into utilizing their service. Another issue that is particularly important in St. Albert is the question of affordable child care spaces. For example, in the particular child care that I was at about three weeks ago, there are no spaces available in the fall, and this is of particular concern to me.

In the past Alberta was a leader in terms of child care, and now we seem to be losing our leading kind of role that we played. Considering the wealth of the province, there is no excuse, I think, for the government's failure to show leadership in this very, very important issue. I remember that at one time they showed tremendous leadership. In fact, I think Minister Hyndman was one of the initial ones that initiated child care in the province, if I'm not mistaken, but I may be wrong on that. But I know his wife and himself were very, very interested in child care across the province.

Families should be free to make the best choices for their children, be that having one or both parents stay home, leaving children in the care of relatives, or placing children in safe, regulated care. But if there is no child care space available, many families are forced to make bad decisions for their children. I would again urge the Minister of Children's Services to look at a process of education for parents. I think that's a very, very important thing to do so that when they are looking for child care spaces, they can do it with some idea of what things to look for. I think this would be very, very important to do that.

Again, I'm concerned with the lack of space and the lack of good choices made by parents for children's services in this way. I'll leave it at that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon caught my eye. The hon. member has already participated. He can't do it again.

Mr. Rogers: To speak?

The Speaker: Yes. You can't speak twice.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and join the debate on Bill 207, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I want to say at the very outset that I support the bill. The issue of child care is of critical importance in this day and age. Everyone pays lip service to the importance of early childhood care and development, particularly for children who come from underprivileged families and groups, who need very special care very early on in order for them to prepare themselves for schooling and adult life following that. Success at school, success as responsible citizens and as part of the society depends very much on the experience the children have early on, and developmental experience, in particular, is very, very important. So I cannot overemphasize the importance of child care, its availability, affordability, quality: all of these are concerns that are, I think, now shared across political lines and partisan lines.

The point is: what do we do about this? I know that the government, under the new minister's leadership, is beginning to pay more attention to it than has been the case for years. Bill 4, that was discussed in this House some time ago, certainly will help move us in the direction of improving the quality of care and the availability of care to some extent. Mr. Speaker, what we need to do is to measure our success through some sort of an ongoing mechanism which allows for accountability, which allows us to monitor – in fact, obliges us to monitor – issues of accessibility, affordability, availability, and quality.

That's what I think Bill 207 is about. It calls for the government to prepare a 10-year plan and the minister who has the responsibility to monitor on a yearly basis every year starting, say, in 2008 to 2017 progress made to move towards a set target of making the spaces available. Bill 207 proposes that the number of spaces available by the end of this period should approach 30 per cent of all the children up to the age of 12. Now, one can certainly debate whether it should be 30 per cent or 35 per cent or 32 per cent, but certainly I think there is merit in identifying a target such as the one that's identified in this bill and then start working on achieving that set target and seeing how much progress we've made from one year to the next over the next 10 years.

2:40

Progress reports, as the bill proposes, should be made available to this Legislature on an annual basis when the House is in session. When it's not in session, Mr. Speaker, through your office that report can be distributed to all members even when they're not meeting at that time in this Chamber under this roof. Then at the end of the 10 years the bill proposes to have a full evaluation done with respect to the stages of daycare and child care – reference is made here to daycare facilities in particular in the bill – and have an overall report card prepared with respect to the performance of the government. I mean, that's a good way of ensuring that there will be some accountability and also with respect to accessibility, affordability, quality, and availability of care.

We do want to make sure that every child who needs this service gets it. Parents of young children who want to work and are

desperately looking for child care spaces that they can put their trust in in terms of the quality of care provided there and their ability to afford to send their children there should have these places accessible and available to them, but there is no such thing at the moment. There is a very severe shortage of daycare spaces in the province. Parents have to wait for years sometimes to get their child placed in a daycare facility, and the costs are exorbitant. In many cases most parents can't afford them. The quality of care remains still a big challenge that we have to pay attention to. In addition, of course, refocusing child care on the developmental needs of children when they're very young is an issue on which we are just barely beginning to make a start and progress.

So, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I think that Bill 207 does not overlap anything that's offered by Bill 4. It deserves the support of the House, and I'm certainly very pleased to express my support for this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I'm going to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and then the Minister of Agriculture and Food and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora and then Edmonton-Meadowlark.

I have another piece of paper here which lists some certain speakers. It comes from Executive Council office, but it lists speakers for the Liberals. I've been using the sheet that was provided to me by the Official Opposition House Leader, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak in support of Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act. There have been a number of good points made over the last few minutes today and the debate that took place last Monday.

I do have a few thoughts that I would like to add to it, but before I do that, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to echo the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods when she was referring to foster care and the need for foster care. In a way, it is relevant to child care as well. I grew up in a family that had a number of foster children go through our home. I think the total number was 16 if I remember correctly. I'd like to credit the person that I am today to a large extent to having had the experience of having children from many different cultures and backgrounds go through our home. I think the comments that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods made were most appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 207, as has been outlined, aims to increase the number of child care spaces for children under the age of 12 to 30 per cent; that is, to make that a target, to have 30 per cent of children under the age of 12 have spaces available to them and to accomplish that over a 10-year period. I think one of the things that has to be stressed – and others may have made the point already, but I think it's really important that we keep this in mind – is that while this bill speaks specifically to child care spaces and accessibility and accountability for those spaces, it really is timely in terms of the debate that's taking place right now in this province regarding labour shortage and also, I suppose, has a connection to the current housing situation and the debate that took place in this Assembly last week regarding affordable housing. One of the things – and I'm sure I don't have to tell members opposite this – is that all of these issues are tied together and very much interrelated as a result of the unprecedented economic boom that we're experiencing and, I would submit, the lack of planning on the part of this government to somehow control that growth.

What we've seen is skyrocketing rental rates as we discussed and had individual examples of in the galleries last week. We've seen a dramatic shortage of not just skilled but unskilled labour in the province, and we've seen a dramatic decrease in the availability of child care spaces. All of these sort of feed on each other, and you end up in this vicious cycle where, you know, one causes the other to be worse, and that causes the other to be worse, and it just keeps exacerbating the situation. So I think the need to pass Bill 207 and set some firm targets in terms of how many spaces would be available is very, very timely not just because of the current shortage in child care spaces but also particularly as it relates to labour in this province.

One of the things we know for sure is that for particularly, I suppose one would say, two-parent families where the stay-at-home parent is considering entering the workforce, a primary consideration always is child care and (a) of course would be whether or not reasonable child care is available and then (b) whether or not it's at a price that can justify to the parents both of them going to work. If, in fact, the child care isn't available or if the cost to access that child care is such that it just doesn't make it economically feasible for both parents to work, then you have removed a potential worker from the workforce. These, as I've suggested, may be unskilled workers, or they may well be professionals that, you know, we desperately need and aren't fully accessing. So I think that that is a very important thing for all members to note when they're considering whether or not to support this bill.

The bill, Mr. Speaker, talks about increasing the transparency in terms of annual reporting about the type, cost, and location of the spaces that would be created. Boy, is this ever a timely thing to note given the report out of Ottawa this week regarding the lack of accountability for the federal child care dollars that have been passed on down to the provinces. I understand that Alberta is one of the provinces that the federal ministry is having difficulty getting access to information on. So, clearly, anything that we can do that improves the accountability and the reporting of dollars that are being spent on child care is something that we know for sure the federal Auditor General would like to see, and I'm going to guess that the provincial Auditor General would be fully supportive as well.

I think, Mr. Speaker, the other thing that has to be noted in discussions with the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who is proposing this bill, is that this is the first part of a broader strategy to address child care initiatives. I know that she has spoken to me personally about the need to develop a comprehensive plan that would work in conjunction with this bill to support parents who choose to stay at home and look after their children. She has assured me that that is the next part of the plan that she's working on.

You know, for myself as a parent who chose to make the sacrifice to keep one wage earner at home and look after the children while they were young, I know what a big sacrifice that is, and I recognize how important a contribution that is. I don't think that we as a government do enough to accommodate those parents who make that difficult decision. So I look forward to working with the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods as she moves forward to the next step of this process. I think that that's really important as well.

2:50

I clearly support this bill and the measures that are outlined in it in terms of making more spaces available and making the reporting of those initiatives to build those spaces more accountable and more transparent for members of the taxpaying public to access. Certainly, as I said, having a target of making spaces available for 30 per cent of those children I think is wonderful.

One of the things that I would like to point out, when I talk about how all these issues tie in, is a specific case that I was made aware of on Friday. I had a young mom and father come into my constituency office with concerns about their child care. They have a young child that's in preschool and another child who is in an after school care program. The mom is going to school, trying to further her education so that she can get back into the workforce as a nurse, if I recall correctly, and they've just been hit with two rather large increases for their child care expenses for both the preschooler and the older child, who is in after school care.

Now, because the mom is in school and taking some upgrading courses, this family is receiving a supplement, but fees for the preschooler, as an example, Mr. Speaker, went up from approximately \$500 to approximately \$800, and the supplement is only going to cover \$27 of that. So in one fell swoop the family is facing an increase of nearly \$300 in their monthly expenses. That's dramatic on its own, but in light of the conversation we had in this Assembly last week on out-of-control rent increases, I can only imagine the difficulties that this family would face if they should happen to be hit with a large rental increase any time in the near future. You know, they're trying to absorb a large increase in child care expenses, and if you top that off with a large increase in rental expenses and gasoline, which, as we all know, is now \$1.12 or \$1.13 a litre, it just goes on and on.

Mr. Speaker, as the former Premier was once very fond of saying, there is only one taxpayer. Well, I would submit to you that that one taxpayer is finding it very difficult to keep up with cost-of-living increases in this province right now. You've got families like this one that was in my office on Friday absorbing, in this case, a rather large increase in child care. I'm not necessarily suggesting that it's gouging, but from \$500 to \$800 is a 60 per cent increase, and that's going to be very difficult for that family to deal with.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act, which proposes to establish a 10-year target for the creation of new child care spaces for no less than 30 per cent of the children under age 12 in Alberta. Bill 207 fails to identify the need or cost of providing child care to 30 per cent of Alberta's children. There is no evidence to support this target.

Work is under way by Children's Services to identify the supply and demand for spaces so that we can determine Alberta's need for child care spaces from now until the year 2016. According to what we heard from Alberta's consultation on the creation of child spaces, completed in September 2006, parents want more child care choices. Respondents in this consultation noted that creating spaces within a regulated child care system will not meet the needs of many children and their families. They felt that the government should provide parents with the funding they need to access child care programs of their choice.

Mr. Speaker, the government is improving the quality of child care services for children using three key objectives: regulating and monitoring the quality of child care services for families in Alberta and ensuring that children's safety and development needs are met, subsidizing the cost of child care for families in need or in circumstances where parental participation in the workforce must be sustained, and introducing child care standards of excellence and linkages to accredited child care options.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 4 enables the creation of new licensing categories, one being a new group of family daycare for seven to 10 children in approved private homes. Operators will also be able to make better use of their spaces. Spaces for school-aged children that would have previously sat empty during school hours can be used for preschool children.

In 2007 the Alberta government is investing close to \$16 million towards creating more child care spaces, attracting and retaining qualified staff, and making child care more affordable for low- and middle-income parents who want to work or, indeed, go to school.

Two million dollars will be put towards a new space creation innovation fund that will help cover the start-up costs of creating more child care spaces across the province. Children's Services will begin accepting space creation innovation fund proposals for one-time start-up grants of up to \$1,500 for each new child care space from people interested in starting up new child care programs or expanding existing spaces.

As of August 2006 there were 69,267 child care spaces in Alberta. Of these, 59,269 were located in licensed facilities, and 9,998 child care spaces were available in agency-approved family day homes. Between October 2005 and September 2006 332 additional child care spaces were created.

To promote excellence in child care settings, Alberta Children's Services is supporting high-quality child care through the accreditation of child care programs. Accreditation is a voluntary process that objectively assesses child care programs that meet child care standards of excellence. Alberta Children's Services contracts with the Alberta Association for the Accreditation Of Early Learning and Care Services to evaluate, assess, and approve child care programs for accreditation. Accreditation provides daycare centres and family day home agencies with assistance in the recruitment and retention of trained and qualified staff through grant funding, and 168 programs have been accredited with another 353 working towards the same goal.

Qualified staff, Mr. Speaker, are essential to maintaining existing child care spaces and creating new ones. Most operators determine the availability of space by the availability of staff. The Alberta government has recently invested an additional 13 and a half million dollars to address staff recruitment and retention. This helps address a serious issue for day homes, daycare centres, contracted agencies, and women's shelters. This funding is also available for Alberta operators to maintain the availability of 29,000 child care spaces. This year \$2 million will be invested to increase staff support funding for child care professionals working in preaccredited and accredited child care programs retroactive to January 1, 2007.

The government is already providing additional funding for child care and has proposed Bill 4 to give Alberta parents more child care options.

I do not support Bill 207 as it does not explain the need or cost of increasing child care spaces to 30 per cent of Alberta's child population, and I would ask my colleagues not to support this bill as we have Bill 4 in the wings, in waiting. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to stand and speak in second reading on Bill 207, Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act. I thank my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods for crafting this bill. As it says in the bill, "The purpose of this Act is to increase accessibility to, and govern-

ment accountability for, universal, affordable and high quality child care." All those words are very important words – accessibility, accountability, universal, affordable, and high quality – in establishing criteria for looking at child care in this province. The goal of this bill is to make sure that we provide "sufficient child care spaces for not less than 30% of the children in Alberta who are 12 years of age or younger."

Well, Canada lags behind other countries, especially if you look at the OECD countries, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Those countries that comprise OECD are convinced that care and education are inseparable. In most countries of the European Union, for example, children by the age of three are a part of the universal public education system, and in many cases two-year-olds are also included. I quote from an OECD document: "The trend in all countries is toward full coverage of the three- to six-year-old age group, aiming to give all children at least two years of free publicly-funded provision before beginning compulsory schooling."

Mr. Speaker, other countries offer a child care guarantee to their citizens. Why? Because most people in the field know that early childhood education ensures very positive developmental outcomes. If we invest money in our youngest children, then there are tremendous dividends down the road. An OECD report entitled *Starting Strong* states:

Research shows that participation in quality, centre-based [early childhood education and care] programmes can have important and immediate short-term impacts on the cognitive and socio-emotional development of disadvantaged children.

Policy-makers in Canada and especially in Alberta seem to be deaf to the evidence-based research. If they read that research, they would be determined to have just the best possible system for child care that we can possibly have in Alberta. The typical Conservative approach of giving money to parents in the name of equality of opportunity pales in comparison to the universal, affordable, high-quality approach which we have in European countries, which is all about equality of results, not just equality of opportunity but equality of results.

This bill, Bill 207, is geared to results, to outcomes. It proposes that there be a 10-year action plan that will increase child care spaces in this province. In order to achieve the results we need, there should be an annual review conducted by the minister which should focus on the availability of child care spaces, on the affordability of child care spaces, and on indicators of quality and indicators of accessibility. Mr. Speaker, providing child care spaces is not simply a question of just spaces. People are not interested in just custodial care, in a kind of superbabysitting. They want quality care. I mean, we're talking about our youngest children.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This is what the QUAD child care principles are about. In November 2004 ministers from federal, provincial, and territorial governments with the exception of Quebec agreed on four principles to guide the development of a national system of early childhood care. QUAD stands for quality, universally inclusive, accessible child care with a developmental focus. Those are just terrific criteria and principles that would undergird a child care philosophy and program in this country.

European countries, including the United Kingdom, have been developing child care strategies focused on quality, so I really stress that. Quality is what we need. There must be a system in place, as this bill is suggesting, where we monitor the quality, that we look forward to what the outcomes, what the results might be if we focus

on quality. Research identifies three characteristics of quality for child care: low child-to-adult ratios, highly educated staff with specialized training, and the availability of adequate facilities and equipment.

I had the chance to visit a facility some time ago, and I was distressed when I heard from teachers, from caregivers that because of low wages and the inability to keep staff, the child-to-adult ratio keeps going up. I think it's quite a shame that in our rich province we don't have enough money to support – well, of course, we do have the money to support, but we're not channelling that money into providing high-quality child care.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other points I could add in terms of quality. The bill does a good job in outlining the indicators of quality: training requirements, staff qualifications, staff remuneration, and so on.

I think this bill is very important, and I want to see it continue. I think it might be an appropriate time for me now to suggest that we should amend this bill in second reading and refer it to a committee, so I would like to do that now. I have the notice of amendment here, and I'm ready to distribute it.

The Deputy Speaker: If you would hand them to the pages and then just give us a moment until we get them distributed.

Dr. B. Miller: Right. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there someone wishing to rise on a point?

Mr. Chase: No, just to the amendment when we have the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member on the amendment.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that Bill 207, Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill stand referred to the Standing Committee on Community Services in accordance with temporary Standing Order 74.2.

Mr. Speaker, I think members of the opposition were quite elated to be able to move ahead with these field committees that are now established under our Standing Orders. There are four policy field committees. The first one listed in the Standing Orders under 52.01 is the Standing Committee on Community Services, which has the mandate "to relate to the areas of health, education, children's services, seniors, supports for the disabled, tourism, parks, recreation and culture." So this is the appropriate committee to refer a bill like this since this committee deals with children's services.

3:10

You know, I've had two very good experiences of being on all-party committees. One was the select review committee that looked at the conflict of interest legislation. There was representation by all parties on that committee, and I thought that our work was very good and is proceeding through the Legislature now. I was also appointed to the Affordable Housing Task Force, and as an all-party committee that was very successful also in promoting the recommendations and doing analysis and suggesting excellent recommendations for the government to act on.

I think this bill is very worthy of further discussion, and it seems to me that it's appropriate to refer it. I notice that in the Order Paper there's a resolution to refer Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, to a field committee. A government bill is being referred. Why not a private member's bill? I mean, it seems appropriate that we would be able to refer this particular bill for further consideration by this commit-

tee. That's my rationale for making this amendment. I look forward to the discussion on this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, support the amendment. We have put forward the idea that through all-party participation in the policy field committees, there will be a greater coherence, a greater transparency, a greater accountability. The mover of the bill, from Edmonton-Mill Woods, is extremely dedicated and concerned about the well-being of children in the province of Alberta. She has heard from other representatives of the government that have questions with regard to Bill 4 and the proposed bill.

What we are proposing is that the whole committee put their collective wisdom to the task of coming up with the best possible outcome, which is what this bill attempts to provide. The amount of time that we would spend in committee as a whole compared to the collective wisdom that could be brought to it in the standing committee, upon which there is representation from all committees, would provide a sort of a litmus test, a sort of a situation whereby we could judge not only the value of the bill but also the value of the committee and the exercise. Can we have the transparency, can we have the accountability, the camaraderie, the colleagues working together that the standing committees now open to all parties hope to accomplish?

Therefore, I would strongly recommend that all members of this House support the amendment and support the idea of a thorough examination of the bill and that whatever changes are necessary be recommended at that time. Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the idea of all-party committees, as everyone in this House knows, is relatively new. As one of the members has already indicated, there is on the Order Paper a provision that Bill 1 will be referred to the committee for detailed study. The Lobbyists Act, being referred to the all-party committee, is one that has broad implications. This particular act, Mr. Speaker – and I happen to have a fair bit of experience in this field – is one that has very narrow connotations to it. In addition to that, the Minister of Children's Services has dealt with a number of issues that this bill would propose to deal with, and I don't believe that all-party committee study would enhance in any way this particular act. I would suggest that the House not approve the amendment at this time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I have to respond to the Minister of Education and his comments about Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, being so much more broad than this bill, which deals with child care accessibility and accountability. I'm going to suggest that there might be an awful lot more families that deal with child care issues than there would be lobbyists, even with this government, that's been in power for so long. So I'm not sure it can be interpreted as not being broad enough. I think this bill probably impacts almost every working family in the province.

But having said that, really, the issue is whether or not this particular Bill 207 is one that would be suitable to refer to the standing committee. I think there are a number of reasons why this

is a good candidate to be referred but in particular in response to the comments made earlier this afternoon by the Minister of Agriculture and Food. He raised the question as to the costing of this bill. I think that's the perfect reason and the perfect opportunity to refer this bill so that that can be explored.

I'm happy to inform the agriculture minister that in fact this bill has been fully costed as part of the Liberal policy. He should know that any policy proposals that we bring forward in this Legislature have been fully costed and all fit within our funding Alberta's future plan, as this bill does. The reason that it's not in here – and he's been in the House long enough that he should know this – is that private members' bills cannot compel the government to spend money. We cannot introduce money bills in this Legislature. That's the reason that there's no reference in this bill to dollar figures, Mr. Minister, but it has been fully costed.

I'm pleased to tell you that over the first three years of the program the costing is about \$30 million. Now, that's a relatively small amount in terms of the overall budget that the government has just proposed, so I'm sure that it wouldn't be too hard for the government to come up with \$30 million over the next three years to fund this bill were it to be passed. But as I suggest, this is a really good opportunity, I think, to explore the work that the Official Opposition has done in terms of costing this bill and making sure that it fits within our funding Alberta's future plan. If the minister is so interested in learning how those numbers were reached and exactly what the cost to the taxpayer would be, then I'm assuming that he'll be glad to lend his support to this amendment and refer the bill to the standing committee. We can have that discussion there because, as I've already pointed out, under the rules of this House we were not allowed to include the costs in the bill.

So that would be my submission, Mr. Speaker. I think also, as was pointed out by my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, just in the spirit of opening up democracy in this province and greater co-operation between both sides of the House, that this is an excellent opportunity to have a government bill sent to the standing committee and to have an opposition bill sent to a standing committee. Let's show how we can work together in making bills from both sides of the House better. That would be my hope, that the government will see the logic in doing that, and I look forward to further debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this amendment. However, I would encourage all of my colleagues to vote against this amendment. I really do think that this is a little bit premature, trying to refer this to the policy field committees. The policy field committees are just being set up, and they do have a lot of very important work to do with regard to government bills. In fact, I know that there are actually a lot of groups lining up in order to appear before these policy field committees. Certainly, with regard to some of the bills, like Bill 1 and Bill 2, that I think we've already referred to the policy field committees – and I know that there are other bills that are going to be referred to policy field committees that are again government bills. I think we really need to spend our time majoring on the majors, focusing on the things that, you know, the Alberta citizens would like us to focus on.

Mr. Speaker, I think that Bill 207 is a very worthy bill. It's a good bill, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing it

forward. But I think that the time to debate this bill is right here and right now. We have a certain amount of time that's allotted for private members' business here on the floor of the House. I know that this bill has been before the House for several weeks, was introduced several weeks back, and now we have time to debate it. Certainly, all of the members here have had time to look at the bill, to read it over.

3:20

I have the bill right in my hands here, and it's a great bill. It's about three pages long, and it certainly focuses on about 20 to 30 per cent of the ministry's objectives. As a private member's bill goes, it's a good bill, but, like I said, I really do believe, Mr. Speaker, that the majority of this bill can be debated and taken care of right here on the floor of the Legislature. I think that to try to refer this to a policy field committee will only delay the passage or the defeat of this bill, and I think we would like to deal with this bill on an immediate, expedient basis.

Like I said, there are some good things here. The bill is very clear. The members can certainly read this bill and understand where the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is coming from. She's given some good debate on the bill already in, you know, the beginning comments on second reading. I would encourage the members to listen to those comments and to vote accordingly in accordance with their conscience and what they've heard their constituents say.

Mr. Speaker, I would speak against this amendment because I don't believe that it's necessary to refer this on to the policy field committee's time and to delay the voting or the proceedings on Bill 207.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I look at this notice of amendment to move that Bill 207, Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act, go to the Standing Committee on Community Services, I think about the history of amendments and motions. Often, some amendments have been made to refer because they were attempts to sidestep. It was said of William Lyon MacKenzie King that when steering around a controversial issue, the height of his ambition was to pile a special committee on a royal commission to let Parliament decide later.

This is not an amendment to do that. Some amendments to refer are attempts to avoid an otherwise inevitable outcome, to buy time rather than face certain defeat. This is an amendment for more time but not an attempt to stave off or defer one outcome as much as to allow another to take shape.

Bill 207 needs time to be considered, to be discussed, to develop a consensus and support from all sides of the House, and to pass. The process by which it is accepted is as important as the provisions of the bill itself, and it is for this reason that I support this amendment.

Standards and spaces for child care is an important issue for us all. It is not a Liberal issue or a Conservative issue, an Alliance or a New Democratic Party issue. It goes with the turf of being parents and grandparents, uncles and aunts, Albertans and human beings.

What is proposed in Bill 207 is not a motherhood issue, one of those polite affirmations we can sandwich between the weightier matters of budget and ballooning growth. It is an issue and an area that if we can effect change here, many other things would change as well, and for the better.

Alberta leads the country as a debt-free province. It leads the continent as an energy producer. It leads the developed world in the achievement levels of many of our students and educational institutions. If Alberta were to lead as a child-friendly society, a quality and a distinction that must involve many policy sectors and most of our citizens, the impact of that leadership would be truly lasting.

This is a matter for municipalities, for the province, and for our country. That is why I support this amendment for consideration of this bill in committee: to allow its importance to dawn on us and its possibilities to move us into action. That is an achievement well worth waiting for.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just speak as my hon. colleague from Drayton Valley-Calmar has regarding the advisability of sending this Bill 207 to one of the policy field committees that have been set up. I would agree with him that it's probably not the type of bill that would be profitable to send there because I think that there are some broad issues of philosophy and policy in there. There are obviously very divergent views. So if we're going to spin our wheels and send this off to a committee, I'm not sure how much further we would be ahead. It's a fairly simple bill. It's black and white, and I think that it would be prudent for the House to discuss it fully today, to have a vote up and down on it, and not to send it to one of these policy field committees.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't believe what I've been hearing. Probably it's my old age.

Mr. Johnston: Agreed.

Mr. Flaherty: Shut up. You know, for the sake of our kids and our families I think day care and child care is so important, and I think we have to open the doors. I think this would be a wonderful thing to take on by the task force because we'd get the public involved – the people, the parents – that are most directly affected by this. There's no disrespect to the good work of my colleague – she's done some wonderful work – but I think she's laid the foundation to do something like that.

There are a number of things that I think could be looked at in terms of the questions of spacing, funding, inspection, and choices that parents make. So I think to enhance the quality of child care services in this province, we should open the doors and ask the parents and ask the community at large what they think about this bill and what they are thinking of child care. I guess I will go back to my comments during, I guess it was, Bill 34. What is the government going to use these committees for? Are they not going to open the doors to listen to people about some of their concerns? I can't think of a more important issue right here than the sake of our kids and our families, to look at them and see if we're doing a perfect job. We've laid the foundation. Why not take it out and see what the public thinks and then make it even better than what it is now?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to speak to the amendment and to oppose the amendment for many of the same

reasons that have already been identified. I need to point out that Bill 207, while it has the best of intention, is very, very specific, and the bill itself is confined to the creation of this 10-year plan and then the annual reporting requirements. I would suggest that that is not as difficult as one might think to deal with in this House. We do have a good deal of time that's allocated to deal with the Bill at second reading. Should the bill receive the support of the members in the House at second reading, it would go on to Committee of the Whole.

The kinds of bills that I envision turning over to the policy field committees are those kinds of bills that will generate a broader discussion than what is very specific in this bill. I would suggest that there very well may be some appropriate ways that the minister may bring forward and suggest that the field committee look at various policies related to child care, and that would be very appropriate for the committee to do. But I believe that if we were to send this bill to committee, we would really be handcuffing that committee, and we would be restricting the kinds of discussions that they would have, and at the end of the day all they can do is come back to this House, refer the bill back to this House, perhaps with one or two amendments attached. But, frankly, we would still be dealing with a very, very restricted part of the overall issue of child care.

I'll give you an example, Mr. Speaker. As Minister of Environment I'm working right as we speak with officials in my department to bring forward to the relevant field committee a review of the regulations respecting beverage container recycling. It's a very broad issue. The regulations are about to come to the point where they need to be renewed, so I think it's appropriate that we deal with that at one of the field committees so that they can hear from all of the various components that are involved. They can hear from recycling associations; they can hear from the consumer; they can hear from the manufacturers: get all of that general context and then provide some advice to the government on what our future regulations should look like, whether we should simply re-engage what's already there or we should bring some new ideas to the train.

3:30

The same kind of concept maybe could apply within Children's Services, but it needs to be very broad in its context. I have concern that by referring Bill 207 to the committee, we will be far too restrictive on the kinds of issues that the committee can deal with, and for that reason I encourage all members not to support this amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened with interest to the Deputy House Leader's explanation, and I would say that, of course, the policy field committees are a work in progress. We're not sure at least on this side of the House how they will be used, when they will be used. I think that to begin with, it would seem appropriate that a bill like Bill 207 could be directed from the opposition – we talked about transparency – to be looked at. Now, it seems to me that just because that one particular bill is sent to the policy field committee, it does not rule out taking a broader look at issues in Children's Services. I don't see that there has to be an either/or sort of situation. If all of a sudden you had sent Bill 207, that's specific, to be looked at, that does not stop the policy field committee from reviewing other areas in terms of Children's Services.

Just as the minister was talking about, you know, he's got some ideas about how a policy field committee might operate with

recycling. Fine, but there might be some other views, too, that the policy field committee would want to do. I think it would be appropriate from the Legislature, not always just flowing from the minister and things. It might be very valuable to look at, but the idea of a policy field committee is that the opposition would have some say in the types of things that were coming forward. That's why we have all-party committees.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that from time to time we should from the Legislature say that this is something we want to look at. Maybe it's not something the minister particularly wants to look at, but the policy field committees should not just be under the purview, if you like, of the minister. I think the left hand and the right hand sometimes can give you two different things, so I don't think it rules out.

Let me say, Mr. Minister, from the example that you used, that somebody wanted to look at CO₂ proposals that had come forward. Why couldn't the policy field committees look at both areas? You know, maybe they need two or three more or four or five more meetings, but that's the purpose of policy field committees. To say that we reject this Bill 207 going to a policy field committee because it's not broad enough, that we couldn't look at other things: of course we can.

So I would say, Mr. Speaker, that because it is a work in progress, we should allow some of these things to come forward from the Assembly if in the spirit of openness and transparency we really want these policy field committees to work. Otherwise, the policy field committees will be just things that the ministers want, and we have to deal with it. Then the vote will come, and the Conservative members will vote one way and the opposition the other, and we won't have accomplished much. I don't think that's the purpose of them.

So I would say to the government and the members of the governing side that if we really want these things to work, we should be a little more open in terms of how they come to the policy field committee. It seems to me that Bill 207 is a bill that could have some good work done at those policy field committees. So let's not say that it's either/or, that there's only one thing that these committees can deal with. They can deal with a lot more than that, and I think the Legislature should be directing somewhat the things that they want to speak about.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 207 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: Back on the bill.

Dr. B. Miller: I think I have a couple of minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: No. Your time has elapsed, Edmonton-Glenora.

The next person I have on the list is the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act. I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing this act to the Assembly. I have some concerns with the prescriptive nature of Bill 207. It only supports specified types of child care: licensed daycare centres, approved family day homes, and licensed out-of-school care centres. It states how many child care positions should be available in Alberta.

As children are the most cherished parts of parents' lives, selecting the right child care option is an extremely personal

decision. Child care providers are trusted with helping to raise, educate, and care for our kin. Different parents seek different qualities in care providers. Parents can care for their children in the manner in which they see fit. Albertans have many different lifestyles. Some live in remote areas of the province, work irregular hours, are single parents, or have special needs. Because of this variety no one child care type is right for all Albertans.

The government recognizes the personal nature of child care. This recognition has led to Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act. The bill allows Albertans to get the special service they need from child care by allowing for greater program choice and flexibility. Bill 4 provides parents with options. However, there are still more parents who prefer to use alternate means to raise their children. The Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act unevenly supports one type of child care. Albertans actually have more child care options which should be addressed. For example, this bill does not acknowledge the possibility of hiring a nanny to watch children in their own homes.

While Bill 207 is very well intentioned, it is at the same time very prescriptive. It goes as far as stating a specified target of placements to achieve. Bill 207 calls for the creation of enough child care spaces for 30 per cent of Alberta's children aged 12 years or less. There is no evidence indicating that there is a need for this many child care spots in Alberta. There could be enough demand to fill the spaces called for today, but what about tomorrow? Supply versus demand.

It will be difficult for a province facing a labour shortage to ensure that sufficient employees are available to accommodate the child care positions this act calls for. As it now stands, we are working hard on staff attraction to encourage people to promote child care as a profession of choice to meet today's child care needs.

Albertans should be free to take care of and raise their children the way they see fit. That can be at home with a dad or mom, at another family member's home, through an employee's workplace program, or in a licensed child care facility. While consulting with Albertans, the government found that creating spaces within the regular child care system will not meet the needs of many families. They felt that we should be providing funding to access the child care program they choose.

We need to ensure that parents have access to affordable and high-quality child care. The way to achieve this is not by prescribing the number of child care spaces. I urge the members of this Assembly to contemplate the type of message this bill sends to Albertans and how it could affect their child care choices.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act. First, I would just like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing this bill forward. I've had the pleasure of knowing the hon. member for the last two and a half years, and I can tell you that she is the most dedicated MLA I know. She works long, hard hours and is doing an outstanding job in this position, and I thank her for all the work she's done on behalf of Alberta children and families.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 has two clear, straightforward goals: increase the number of quality child care spaces available to Albertans and increase the level of governmental transparency and

accountability regarding child care in Alberta. I don't think that anyone can argue that Alberta doesn't need more high-quality, affordable child care spaces. As much as it would be nice to believe that we can go back to the days when mom stayed at home and tended to the child rearing while dad went to work, for an increasing number of Albertans that is simply not realistic. In a province where house prices are doubling and rents are going through the roof, even those who want to have one parent stay home are finding that it is truly an impossible dream.

Bill 207 would give the government a clear and obtainable target of achieving 30 per cent access for children 12 years of age and under over the next decade. Right now we only have child care spaces for about 10 per cent of children, so clearly we have a long way to go. By requiring the reporting of where spaces are being created and what type of space is created, the bill will enhance the quality, universality, accessibility, and developmental focus of child care in Alberta. It is important to note that this bill does not tell the government how to achieve the target number of spaces – this gives the government lots of room for out-of-the-box thinking in regard to the issue – and it doesn't tie the government to any particular spending amount. It gives the government a goal that it must reach within a reasonable time frame.

Bill 207 seeks to address the quite surprising numbers regarding child care in Alberta. In Canada's richest province regulated child care spaces are available to only about 10 per cent of our children. Only Newfoundland and Saskatchewan fare worse. Even more surprising is the fact that the number of daycare spaces in Alberta has actually dropped from 1992 to 2004. The situation has become so dire that some parents are putting their children's names on wait-lists even before they're born. Wait-lists now stretch for years.

The lack of child care spaces in Alberta is not just a social issue but an economic one. The unavailability of child care spaces is robbing the Alberta economy of thousands of people, both men and women, who could be lending their expertise in a red-hot employment market but instead are denied their opportunity to participate in Alberta's booming economy, that is crying out for workers.

Mr. Speaker, that's all I have to say. I'm fully supportive of this measure. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to commend the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for introducing Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act. Everyone here can agree that Alberta's children deserve the very best care. Bill 207 is intended to increase accessibility to child care through legislated space creation and requires the minister to report annually on child care availability, affordability, quality, accessibility, and expenditures. It is quite similar in intent to the government's Bill 4, which will increase accessibility to child care by allowing the establishment of innovative child care programs and by allowing child care operators to make better use of their child care spaces.

Beyond the actions of Bill 4 the government has recently brought down a budget that includes significant support for child care. These measures are sure to improve the quality of life of young Albertans and parents with families. Child care is receiving significantly more funding to help address growth pressures, like a lack of affordable child care spaces in growing communities and the difficulty of attracting and retaining staff members to work with children.

In 2007-08 Children's Services will invest \$972 million in Alberta's children, youth, families, and communities. This is a 7 and a half per cent increase from the 2006-07 forecast. A hundred and

thirty-four million dollars of this funding will go to expanding access to quality, affordable child care options. This is an increase of \$16 million, almost 14 per cent, in addition to the 51 per cent increase provided in '06-07. Five point six million dollars will improve subsidies for parents and help child care programs cover the costs of processing these subsidies. Two million dollars will go to a space creation innovation fund to help cover the costs of creating more child care spaces.

Children's Services' very first strategic priority for 2007-10 is to ensure that parents have access to quality and affordable child care options. Children's Services is going to continue to implement the five-point child care investment plan that was developed in response to consultations with Alberta's families in 2005. The government does not need to develop another 10-year plan to increase child care spaces, as Bill 207 proposes, because we already have a plan that we are implementing.

Two of the points of this investment plan are important to this debate: firstly, helping low- and middle-income families access affordable child care and, also, improving the quality of child care and increasing wages and training opportunities for child care professionals. Since this plan was introduced in October 2005, 30 per cent more families are accessing child care subsidies, and staff wage top-ups have increased by 40 per cent. The government is offering \$400,000 to fund incentives to encourage people to re-enter the child care workforce and promote child care as a profession of choice. We're offering 1 and a half million dollars in a new Children's Services child care bursary, which offsets the cost for education for leaders and aspiring leaders working in child care.

Bill 207 would require annual reporting, which would be redundant because the ministry already reports its progress in child care. For example, it already reports annually on the number of child care programs that have received provincial accreditation. This voluntary process sets standards of excellence, promoting each child's early growth and development, which improves outcomes for children, families, and staff in Alberta's communities. Under the 2007-10 strategic plan the ministry has set a goal that in 2007-08 42 per cent of licensed day care centres and contracted family day home agencies will receive accreditation. In '05-06 only 16 and a half per cent of these facilities were accredited. The ministry has set a target for nearly two-thirds of these facilities to be accredited in 2009-10.

Mr. Speaker, the first years of a child's life . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of the private member's bill to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to close debate on Bill 207.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have studied carefully the comments made in debate by colleagues on all sides of the House, and I've considered their various opinions. I want to thank you all for your consideration of this bill. While I shall defend the turf that goes with Bill 207, it is my preference to deal with the overarching and more enduring issue of Alberta's children, for that is where this discussion began.

I'd like to turn to the points being made in opposing this bill. Here again, it appears to me that there are two issues, not to be confused with the two positions from which the criticism is coming. The first is the allegation of overlap, that Bill 207 is unnecessary because it duplicates the provisions of the government's own Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act. The second is the argument of

ideology, that this reflects a Liberal mindset of intervention at the expense of freedom of choice. Before I deal with each of these in turn, I point out that they cannot both be true at the same time.

If in fact Bill 207 duplicates Bill 4 in its provisions, as the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon suggested, then there cannot be between the two bills the great gulf of status versus free enterprise philosophy that the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays has found. If there is a great philosophical gap between the two positions, then the opposition to Bill 207, by which I mean the government, cannot claim that it says the same thing as their own Bill 4.

The well-being of our children is a human issue that concerns us all, and therefore even the differing strategies we may pursue to achieve it are ultimately compatible as we seek the greatest good for the greatest number. Freedom of choice, which we all support, cannot exist without choices. The mandated child care spaces which Bill 207 provides are one of those choices and a necessary one for those who do not have access to the extended-family, in-house option that others have. This situation applies to many new Albertans who do not have other nonworking family here in sufficient numbers to provide the option that more long-standing Albertans may enjoy. So to mandate spaces, as Bill 207 does, is not to intervene in people's private lives but to create a level playing field in offering an option to more Albertans that only some Albertans have at present.

3:50

For fellow members who still believe that there's something sacred in an ideological stance here, I point to our history. The founding government of Sir John A. Macdonald was a liberal Conservative one: liberal in its generosity and intentions; conservative in its upholding of timeless values. People saw no contradiction in that. Let us leave the ideological debates to the annals of history, where they belong, and turn to face present realities together.

I'd like to devote the rest of my comments to reply to what I consider the greater challenge: the argument of overlap, that Bill 207 duplicates the government's own child care initiative and is therefore unnecessary. I do not believe that this is true. Bill 207 is intended to safeguard access to child care for those who need it and do not have access to it through other channels.

Even if this were provided under the government's Bill 4, adoption of Bill 207, which is designed to strengthen the aspect of available spaces, makes the message clearer, broader, and stronger. Adding standards for the number of child care spaces no more duplicates monitoring of programs than measuring height duplicates measuring weight. They are two complementary aspects to give us information about a whole.

What are we building for Alberta's children? What we are building for Alberta's children is bigger than any one party, person, or point of view. As long as it does not conflict with pieces of the structure put in place by others, additions that support and enhance a larger picture should be allowed and encouraged. So I put forward this measure not simply to score points for my own party and not to make any other party look bad. I do so because it addresses the needs of Alberta children.

I'm going to assume that the government will not surprise us and will simply vote this bill down. If it takes this course of action and votes the bill down, my next question will be a simple: why? If it's because the government intends to bring in something better of its own, I will await its action and applaud if it is due. If it claims that it's rejecting the bill because the timing is not right, I ask: how much longer? How many more incidents? How many deaths will it take until we learn that too many people have died, to quote Bob Dylan, while we continue to blow in the wind? What will it take before the

government is prepared to act? This is not an issue that is going to go away. It is not an issue that is going to get any better, any clearer, any more evident by leaving it.

[Motion for second reading of Bill 207 lost]

Bill 208 **School (Restrictions on Fees and Fundraising)** **Amendment Act, 2007**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The purpose of this bill is to eliminate school fees and fundraising for all curricular activities. The Department of Education will be ultimately responsible for ensuring that public education is funded adequately following this change. Fundraising will not be allowed for educational materials but is allowed for extracurricular activities, including clubs, school sports, and extracurricular trips.

Eliminating school fees will divert responsibility for school fees from parents back to the provincial government where they belong. Eliminating school fees would also ensure that quality of education is not determined by the wealth and willingness of parents to pay. The impact of this change will be determined by the willingness of government to replace this lost resource revenue with government funding. The bill requires that the ministry report to the Legislature with a strategy to ensure that school programming and instruction will not be negatively affected by the reduction of school fees. To ensure that students and school boards are not negatively affected by the loss of revenue, the Minister of Education must make a report to the Legislature detailing how the department will ensure that restricting school fees will not negatively affect the quality of education.

Article 26 of the United Nations' declaration of human rights states that "everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages." School fees can create a financial burden for families and for low-income families, in particular in Edmonton. Through its own documents the department is saying that 20 per cent of kids and families are in the poverty domain. Higher school fees for some curricular activities, including things like band and class field trips, can be prohibitive for some students, leading to a situation in which the students obtain different educational experiences based on their financial resources.

The refusal to introduce a cap on fees and fundraising or to provide a province-wide guideline on these activities leads to confusion and vast differences from school board to school board. Currently students enrolled in public school face different school fees based on where they live and what school board their school is in. This creates inequality in the level of financial contribution parents are expected to provide for their children's schooling based simply on the place of residence.

School fees are charged to make up for budgetary shortfalls in the education system. In Alberta there is no cap on school fees, and the provincial government has refused to take any action on this issue. Currently fees can be charged for supplies and materials provided for the student's personal use or consumption. This includes things like workbooks, locker rentals, art supplies, and calculators.

School fees and fundraising activities are generally determined by local school boards through consultation with school councils and the ministry, and they have been trending upwards in the past few years. School boards have traditionally been protective of the right to raise funds. This is likely a result of continual financial pressure of being asked to do a lot with inadequate government funding.

If this initiative is going to succeed, the government will have to step up and provide the funding necessary to have a high-quality and equitable education system across Alberta. School fees can present an unreasonable economic burden on low-income families. School fees and fundraising allow governments to pass on the costs of delivering public services to parents and communities. Higher fees attached to specialized programs can affect who can and cannot attend or take part based on family income. Educational opportunities may differ from region to region based on the relative wealth and willingness of parents to pay.

School fees and fundraising put school boards and staff in the position of having to raise money to pay for public services. This takes time and energy away from educating and administering. In fact, we have a principal in St. Albert that has given up her position because of the time spent on other things rather than education.

Currently the School Act allows school boards to charge fees to cover the cost of instructional supplies and materials. Tuition fees are not allowed. In 2005 the Alberta School Boards Association released a report showing that while income from school fees remained relatively stable from 2000 to 2003, around \$31 million, they began increasing thereafter and reached \$40 million in 2005. This amounts to an average fee of \$70 per student each year. There is currently no cap on what school boards can charge in terms of fees. This means that students in one jurisdiction can pay fees that are entirely different from students in another. Furthermore, there's no unified policy on how to address parents who are unable to pay. Recently there was some controversy in Alberta when a school board directed a file to collection agents.

The government has firmly supported the right of school boards to raise funds through school fees but has also refused to provide adequate funding to school boards. Fully covering the amount of funding gained through school fees would represent only .78 per cent of the current education budget.

The Alberta Learning Commission made the following recommendations regarding school fees. Recommendation 95:

Set province-wide policies on school fees that would:

- Prohibit fees to cover the costs of basic education items
- Detail what charges can be levied and set maximum caps on school fees
- Allow reasonable fees for extra-curricular activities.

Following these recommendations, the government pledged to define and set province-wide policy on what is considered basic and what are considered extras in relation to fees. This has not been done, and we're still waiting.

Provincial comparisons. The government of Newfoundland and Labrador increased the education budget to cover the revenue previously gained through school fees. The province decided to take this step to reduce regional inequity, reduce confusion, and ease the financial burden of parents with school-age children. The situation in British Columbia is quite different from that of Newfoundland because the change to school fees came about as a result of a legal challenge rather than a change in government policy.

4:00

In Alberta a situation could not happen because the School Act gives the school boards the right for instructional materials. The preamble lays out that children should have access to the same basic level of education regardless of their income or region of residence and that the government is ultimately responsible for funding public education. That's the layout of the bill, Mr. Speaker.

Section 49.1 is amended to clearly prohibit school boards from charging school fees or fundraising to pay for any programs or supplies required to complete recognized courses in the public education system. Section 49.1(2) of the bill allows school boards

to charge fees or fund raise for extracurricular activities. Sections 49.1(3) and (4) provide protocol and a timeline for schools to repay funds that were raised for purposes that contravene the act.

Section 60(2)(j) is repealed. Section 60(2)(j) previously allowed boards to "charge a parent of a student fees with respect to instructional supplies or materials." This is now disallowed.

Section 147.1 is added. This section will ensure that the revenue lost from school fees will not negatively affect the quality of education in Alberta. Following the passage of these amendments, school boards will submit a report to the Department of Education detailing the effects of lost revenue from school fees. The minister is then required to develop an action plan to ensure that revenue lost does not negatively affect the quality of education in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I'll stop there. I have some other things here. We'll open it for further discussion.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It does give me, actually, great pleasure to speak today because it gives me a chance to correct some of the misinformation that this member and his colleagues have been spreading far and wide across the land. As with many Liberal proposals this one on the surface seems maybe okay, but if you start to peel back the layers of the onion, it is fraught with lots of problems.

First, let me talk a bit about charging of fees and about the fact that the hon. member says that public education should be free. Well, we happen to believe on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, that nothing in life is free, and certainly education and health care are not free. They're public and accessible to all, but they're not free.

Let me give you an example of why that should be. Let's take the example of textbooks. Now, let's assume for a moment that we are charging fees, which is really a rental of textbooks, and if all of a sudden school boards didn't charge those fees, what incentive would there be for students to bring back those textbooks to be used again and again? What incentive would there be for students to simply not bother remembering where they happened to leave their textbook? Because it was free. So, Mr. Speaker, I think one of the reasons that we have fees is to ensure that there's some accountability in the system.

But I think what I'd like to spend a little bit more time on is the whole area around comments that this particular member and his colleagues happen to be making consistently, words like inadequate funding for education, underfunding for education, starvation diet for education. If those were the words that actually described our education system in this province, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the following questions: why do school boards across this province have combined accumulated surpluses of some \$220 million, why do we have the highest paid teachers in Canada, and why are our student achievement results ranking among the highest in the world? That is hardly underfunding education.

So then we get to the \$70 million that fees and fundraising actually contribute to education. I hear a lot from these guys over here about the Liberal plan. Well, let me say, Mr. Speaker: what they want is they want us to take away the ability for school boards to raise fees and fund raise. So that's another \$70 million that we need to spend on education.

I just heard a few minutes ago in the debate on the last bill that the government should be spending about that much money again on child care spaces. That's not to forget about the constant request for

full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten. Then the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has the audacity to say that the government should write a cheque out of the heritage fund for \$2 billion to cover the unfunded pension liability of teachers. Then, finally, there's the Member for Calgary-Varsity, who never wants to look at any alternative methods for funding school construction. He wants us to write a cheque for \$3 billion. Where is this money going to come from, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Groeneveld: And we're going to put 30 per cent in the heritage fund.

Mr. Liepert: Yes. As my hon. colleague says, before we do all of that – spend more money on health care; spend more money on seniors' programs; spend more money on this, roads, high-speed rail – first, we're going to put 30 per cent in the heritage fund. Now, talk about booga-booga economics. Blowing and sucking at the same time. There is one way to accomplish what they say: raise taxes, bring in a sales tax, and go into debt. We are not going to do that, Mr. Speaker, so take your pick. If you like the Liberal plan – I've just laid it out for you – vote for it.

However, I think the real issue with this bill is where decision-making should be made. Should it be made at the local level, or should it be made here in Edmonton by 83 elected people and a number of people working in the Department of Education? I happen to agree that it should be at the local level, Mr. Speaker. What the current situation allows is for school boards to make decisions that apply at the local level. I don't want the Member for Red Deer-North to come to the Minister of Education and say: "You know what? A school in my constituency has a band, and they want to go to a competition, but because the Liberals wouldn't allow us to raise funds, Mr. Minister, would you approve some money so that my band can go to a competition?" I don't want to do that. I want the school board to make that decision.

So to quickly wrap up, Mr. Speaker, I would like to encourage all members of this House to not support this bill for three reasons. Number one, school board associations are currently reviewing this issue, and they are going to come forward with some recommendations soon. Let's let them do the job that they were asked to do. Secondly, this is bad legislation based on bad policy, and third, the system we have in place actually works because we let local people make the decision.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Mather: Oh, boy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, support local autonomy, and that is true local autonomy where school boards would actually get the funds that they need so that they can make the decisions at the local level. At a time of year when all of us are looking forward to spring, schools across Alberta are planning for fall. Principals are being appointed, staffing levels and enrolment projections for next year are being analyzed, and school fees are no doubt being looked at so that schools can make up the difference between what they receive from the province and what they need to operate their programs so that all children can learn.

School boards across this province have the goal of educating all young Albertans. I see it in the mission statements of every board and school that I visit, yet boards and schools continue to have to dip into that often shallow well of parents' pockets. There seems to be a commonly accepted feeling that parents can, quote, pay for the extras, and this has been sold to the public as anything that is an

enhancement to the basic programs that schools offer. What are the extras? How are schools to know who can pay and who cannot pay?

What are some of these fees used to pay for? Textbook upkeep or deposit fees are requested by many schools to pay for the worn or destroyed texts. Schools ask for field trip money to teach through experience. Student activity fees are often requested to promote school community and positive interaction. Some schools even request parents to buy and pay for Kleenex. The list goes on and on depending on the school one attends.

Are these items really an enhancement? Is it an enhancement to ask that textbooks be provided in a reasonable condition without having to pay? Is it an enhancement to provide hands-on experience in different settings that will help children learn? Is it an enhancement to have children learn to build a healthy school community and fun activities? Finally, is it an enhancement to have a ready supply of Kleenex in the classroom?

4:10

Should children from low-income families have to take money away from their food, rent, or transportation to pay for school fees? Should schools that sympathize with these families be forced to absorb the costs of these fees from their regular budgets and forgo maintenance, professional development, or school supplies such as Kleenex? Should teachers be told that their budget for sick time is dwindling because of paying for programs and that teachers need to limit time off when ill? Principals are being asked to make tough decisions to pay for the essentials to run a comprehensive program that seeks to educate all children while trying to enhance the educational and life experiences of our children.

If we are to support the mission of our schools to educate all children equally and not penalize all school budgets that try to support low-income families, we have to look at how to support parents in their difficult job and schools that are trying to teach our kids curriculum but give them the life experiences that teach them to be strong citizens and contributors to the future of our great province. We often tend to overlook this latter point of building strong citizens in favour of strong test results on provincial achievement tests. It is almost as if we feel that achievement results exclusively translate into a strong community. There's no question that students' achievement is important and contributes to citizens who can innovate, invent, and become productive citizens; in other words, contribute to our economy and quality of life.

But our economy is only one important piece of what it takes to build a strong human being that is able to interact positively with others, be a good spouse, care for their children, serve the community, and be productive economically. By providing many of the extras, we are building our children into strong human beings, and surely this will have positive impacts for all of us.

How many of the members here today can think of instances where they learned many of the great lessons of life from our experiences outside of the classroom? Most of us will say that these experiences changed our lives fundamentally. It might have been an experience that led to an interest in public service or an interest in law or teaching or health care or the environment or engineering. I believe we all recognize the need to build our children in a variety of ways and even more so in the increasingly complex world we live in. As the role of the family has changed over the last generation or more, our schools have taken on many of the responsibilities that the family had in the past. Whether we support this notion or not, schools are taking on many of the roles of the family. For many of our children the school is the family.

This bill calls for the end of school fees for all children and families in Alberta. If we are to truly leave no child behind, as our

cousins to the south are fond of saying, we need to provide the opportunities for success to all of our students, and this means that principals should not have to take money from necessary programs in order to subsidize families that cannot afford to pay. In a Chamber such as this, where all of us speak of the future with great hope for what we can achieve, we need to take the lead and eliminate an obstacle in reaching this future. We can leave no greater legacy.

As schools now plan for September, many parents wonder whether they will get the money to give their child what all the others have while others dread having to pull out their wallets yet again to pay for things we should all be able to count as valued. If it is important enough to be happening in our schools, it should be important enough to be funded appropriately. By passing this bill calling for an end to school fees, I believe the government can lead us to a healthier education system and stronger communities.

This September holds the opportunity for families to see the new face of an education system that values the actual needs of children and the experiences that will provide for a healthier and stronger Alberta. Is it the case or is it not the case that every student of every economic status has the right to a quality public education free of charge in Alberta? If this is the case, then we must ask why it is not in fact happening in public schools throughout the province. If school fees are needed in order for schools to meet the cost of providing basic services and supplies to students and replace used or abused texts and equipment, then the gap between what is being funded and what needs to be funded must be bridged, not through the levy of extra fees or through the vehicle of fundraising but by the implementation of adequate funding for all provincial public schools.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege today to be able to rise and speak to Bill 208, and I'd like to thank the hon. Member for St. Albert for bringing forward this bill. I think he's put his finger on a very important subject area, and it's one that I'm glad to contribute to the debate on.

As I look at the preamble of the bill, it says, "Whereas every person has the right to public education." I don't think there is a member in this Assembly that does not believe that. I mean, I've always felt very blessed to live in a country that valued education and had public education accessible. Last week I was meeting with somebody in my church congregation as they described to me living in a country where that was not available and how blessed they felt to be able to come to a country where they did not have to worry about that for their children. So sometimes I think we lose track of what a great privilege and how happy we are that in this country we believe in it, that we know that it's the right thing to do.

But as I look at the bill, I see it as having two different issues. The first is fundraising, and the second is school fees. In the bill the member says that it would restrict a school operating by a board from raising funds for extracurricular activities offered by the school, or if you go to 49.1(1):

No school operated by a board shall charge a student or a student's parent or otherwise raise funds for services or supplies required by courses of study or education programs prescribed, authorized or approved by the Minister under [certain sections].

Now, I was a parent council chair and involved in parent council for many years, and I know as I visit with my parent councils today that if I was to say to them tomorrow that I was supporting this bill, I would probably get some push back from my constituents. They, fundamentally, as parents have organized under the rules that we've

placed, and they have told me on many occasions that they participate because they want to, that it is their choice, that there are things that they would like to provide for their children above and beyond what is provided by a public education system.

I look at things like, for example, school band programs. There are very, very well-organized parent groups that help support school band programs, send kids on band trips. My own children – I have four of them – participated for many years in a school band program that I helped fund raise for. I also know that there are other things that they provide.

Now, I often hear people say, "Well, we have to fund raise for textbooks," and I've heard many superintendents of school boards tell me and assure me that parents do not have to fund raise for textbooks, that those funds are provided. Often that is used as, I call it, the red herring of the educational debate. I would say to you that when I was in the parent council chair position, we did not fund raise for textbooks. Now, sometimes school curriculums changed, and it did create pressure because there were all new textbooks required. But, generally speaking, we never raised for textbooks.

That being said, I would say to you also that the entire world is changing in the textbook world. I mean, I hear teachers tell me now that they don't want one textbook. They want a chapter from one textbook and a chapter from another. The technology is starting to allow them to make and create innovative programs for their students.

So the old debate about whether we're fund raising for textbooks I think is a red herring. But I will say this to you. I know that the parents that I represent would resent my coming in and making laws that prevent them from raising money or choosing to raise money on behalf of their children for extras. They would. I know that they would. I know that they would push back. It's one of the reasons that I have a bit of an issue with this bill.

The other is this idea that fees haven't existed. I remember carrying boxes of kleenex to school. I remember carrying school supplies to school. In fact, I remember the day that I graduated from high school and going across the platform and opening up my diploma, and it said: you owe \$10.35, and you will not receive your diploma until that fee is taken care of. So I had to go and ransom my diploma for \$10.35 in order to get it.

So fees are not new. They have existed over time. This suggestion that suddenly they're curtailing education or that there's some new piece because we're not funding properly I would suggest to you is not true. They have been around for a long time. When it comes to school fees, I would like to spend just a moment and talk about that.

4:20

As I said before, I think of education as the right investment and a good investment. For my four sons I had a variety of learners. Some needed more help than others. Some needed more supports than others. I could find lots of ways to support my boys educationally and in other areas of their life, but at some point there was an income line there that I had to live with, so we made choices as we do in everything that we do. The hon. Education minister talked about the funding that we do provide: a lot of funding. I think we decided that it was some 32 per cent of the provincial budget that is spent in this area.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Are school fees fair, or are they not fair? Under the act we give school boards the right to charge fees for supplies and materials. I think that if I were listening to my constituency, they would say to

me that sometimes they think school boards go too far with fees. What they want from us as government is a more clear definition of what a fee should be and what it shouldn't be. I think I have some sympathy for them in that area, that it should be very much a clear direction from us as government as to what is and isn't a fee.

Could we do some better work around the definition? Yes. I do believe that we can and that sometimes, as parents show me the extent to which school fees have gone up today, they do have an argument, particularly when they have multiple children.

While I agree that there should be fees – and as the minister said earlier, things that are free are often not valued – and I do think that it does prepare and make people participate, I think a clearer definition would be one good aspect to this bill and one that I would love to see the minister take a longer look at. But at this point in time I can't support the bill because I don't believe my constituents would want me directing them about fundraising in their world.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Strathcona, then Edmonton-Decore, then Peace River.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in favour of Bill 208, but to begin with, I want to refute some of the allegations that have been brought against the provincial Liberal Party in general and Liberals in particular.

The hon. Minister of Education talked about Liberals and the clichéd phrases of tax-and-spend Liberals. Then he went on to say – and it was sort of echoed by one of his members – that if you don't pay for something, you don't value it. These are the standard sort of Fraser Institute responses, but the statement that I found the most amusing is the one: we let local people make the decisions.

Nothing could be farther from the truth than that statement. All you have to do is go back to 1994, when this government in its wisdom decided to take away the ability of the board to raise half of their operating budget through the education portion of the property tax. At that point, any individual discretion, any autonomy that boards had was taken away by this centralist government, which does not like to be interfered with in their day-to-day process by the federal government in Ottawa but has no problems reaching in, tying strings around, micromanaging every part of, whether it's the school boards' or the city councils', budgetary decisions.

It is the equivalent of a spider web. Every allotment that is provided comes with so many restrictions that the word "autonomy" is absolutely lost for local school boards. That's a shame because they're the local individuals whose decisions should carry the greatest amount of weight, but unfortunately they have to go cap in hand to this minister for any types of funding decisions.

Now, public education also involves separate education because the Catholic boards are part of the public board. Bishop Henry has made a very strong statement – and he had some difficulty with some of his parishioners, and some trustees initially took offence, but I think those offences and fences have been mended – when he said that he was against schools having to go out and take part in casino fundraisers or even the former traditional Catholic form of fundraising, which was the local church bingo. Bishop Henry spoke very strongly on this issue that it is the province's responsibility to fund education and that parents should be at home assisting their children or attending mass, as the case may be, but not attending casinos and other fundraisers to pay for the basics of education.

I agree very strongly with the bishop. If ever there was a tilting of the playing field, it's only those parents who are in well-to-do districts who have the time available because of their economic well-being to donate their time to attend casinos where the schools

prosper. In those socioeconomic areas where the parents are forced by this government's minimum wage policy to have two or three jobs, they don't have the luxury of going and carrying chips or looking at the VLT and slot revenue that is funding education. This is a sad circumstance.

Now, the phoniness of the education portion of the property tax remains. The government collects this tax in the name of education. Does it go to education? No. It disappears into general revenue. So, please, hon. Minister of Education, don't ever talk about tax-and-spend Liberals. It's the phony tax and underspend Conservatives that delight in punishing people, including seniors, with property tax. Now, some of the seniors on fixed incomes get a break in that their increases don't show up on their tax bill, but they are still being taxed.

The other difference between members of the Liberal Party – and I believe I can speak somewhat for the ND Party, although they're very capable of speaking for themselves – is the idea that education is an investment. The money we put into education produces at least a threefold return.

Now, I would like to think that I know something about education, having spent the better part of my life, 34 years, as a teacher, and it was the lack of support for education that forced me to become more involved in the politics of education, first within the Alberta Teachers' Association, where I served as a member of the economic policy committee, the teacher welfare committee, from 1988 to 1998. I have worked with a variety of trustees, including the group that formerly was a member of the SPEAK group, support public education, act for kids. I worked with a number of individuals on that campaign because I saw that they had the best interests of not only their parents but their children in place.

Now, this government that claims to be concerned about the well-being of education represents – we've got 20 representatives in Calgary, the area where we're short 40 schools. We've got 40 districts without schools. We've got kids who spend a hundred thousand kilometres on buses. So this government is quite willing to spend money on gasoline. It'll spend money on buses, whether they be the city buses that are involved in a transit strike potentially now or whether they spend the money on the yellow buses. But when it comes to spending money at the school level, they have other concerns.

4:30

When I taught at F.E. Osborne – and I also, like the member across the way, was a member of our parent council for a number of years – we did a variety of fundraisers. We sold the entertainment books. My leadership kids as part of an environmental and economic circumstance recycled. What we found out was that with the exception of – and I'm not including the money that goes towards teachers' salaries, which is a large portion of the budget, but for everything else the money that the government provided for the basic operations, the day-to-day operations for the school accounted for only one-third of our total budget. When we looked at what parents contributed either to the cafeteria, to the junk food machines, to the casinos, any of the external fundraisings that parents were involved in, that accounted for two-thirds of the operational budget of the school. Out of that extra fundraising, out of that extra basic operations . . .

An Hon. Member: Table the numbers.

Mr. Chase: I'd be glad to. Thank you.

Out of those basic operations parents did the majority of the work. Parents got tired, whether they were Catholic or public parents, of

trotting off to the casinos, but they wanted the best for their kids, and they understood that the government wasn't providing it. So they felt, morally and ethically, that they had to go out and achieve the best education results for their kids.

Now, since the early 2000s I have attended meetings with a group called Parents for Public Education. Dennis Locking is the chair of that group. His group has been extremely opposed to parents having to pay school fees. He sees this as another tax on parents that are already paying, as are all other property owners, the education portion . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

Thank you. I look forward to Committee of the Whole.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, then Peace River, then Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In listening to the Member for Calgary-Varsity and recognizing that some of my experiences are somewhat similar to his, having been involved with the economic policy committees and negotiating on behalf of the local teachers, I'm somewhat astounded how we have such diverse conclusions from similar experiences. We will differ quite greatly on this.

Mr. Speaker, probably no one likes fundraising less than I do. I have always been reluctant to be engaged in that activity although, certainly, when people do come along and they've got something that they're fundraising for, I'm always happy to participate in that, but not from the other side, not to be out fundraising and seeking to raise funds. So on the surface it might be quite simple to say: let the government pay for everything, and we'll do away with that fundraising.

I'd like to start at the back end of this bill where it talks about reporting on the impact of restriction on fees and fundraising. I notice in that part that the fundraising is quite absent from the reporting mechanism, and I'd like to talk briefly about the fallacy of the time spent fundraising, trying to put together a few dollars to support some school activity.

Oftentimes I hear about administration and staff in schools spending huge amounts of time fundraising. One hon. member just mentioned a minute ago that some vice-principal quit because of the time spent on things other than education. What a travesty: administration and staff out there fundraising for a few dollars when they could better spend that time teaching a class, reducing the time spent – wasted, I would say – fundraising. Rather, put it into the staffing component, reduce the costs that way, and contribute that money to whatever this other project is that would be of value to the school. It's a false economy to go and spend that time fundraising – and I will use the term “wasting” judiciously – wasting time fundraising when it could be better spent doing other things.

Certainly, fundraising is important for all sorts of things that people want to spend money on: to take off on a band trip or field trips of some sort or going here, going there. There are all sorts of things that kids are involved in that are very, very beneficial to them, so in many cases they fund raise to make the costs to the individuals less. In many other cases those are just paid for. If it's not in the school setting, people are paying for it all the time, whether it's minor hockey or whatever else, and nobody goes to the government with a request that those be funded.

It disturbs me a little bit that there's an absence in the bill about reporting on the impact of fundraising. I would also suggest that if there was reporting on this, it would be very difficult to get that information. Several years ago there was a great deal of hue and cry in this Assembly, and the Minister of Education at the time was

asked: how come in Elk Island public schools the average fundraising was – and it was a huge number, like, maybe in the order of \$400 or \$500 per student. I had just left the school system at that time, and \$400 or \$500 seemed like an awful lot for every student, including the elementary.

Well, when I investigated further, I found out that the numbers that were being reported included things like cafeteria receipts, graduation fees, any money that came into the school system that was to pay for things like that. It was all wrapped together and inappropriately reported. It was a very negative attempt to tag the government with some kind of an underfunding scheme that the parents were paying several hundreds of dollars for each student to compensate for.

I agree with the Minister of Education when he talks about the claims being made about how badly underfunded education is. You know, for years we heard from the opposition and other folks that chronic underfunding – that was the watchword for years: chronic underfunding of education – yet we're the highest funded, our teachers are the highest paid, and we have the best results. This term gets repeated over and over again perhaps in an attempt to have people believe that. So I think it's lacking that we don't have in this bill: report on fees and fundraising. I would like to see that cost-benefit analysis of how much time is spent – and I used the term before: wasted – on fundraising when, in fact, that time could be better spent doing something else.

I think, too, that I agree with one of the members who talked about: “What if there was no more fundraising allowed? What if there was a blanket statement made that you will not fund raise for any school activity?” What would the parents feel about that when they would be unable to fund raise for all sorts of other things that might be happening?

I'd like to look next at the restrictions on fees and fundraising. That's part 3 in this bill. I've underlined here the word “required.” They can't raise funds for services or supplies required by courses “prescribed, authorized or approved.” A great many courses – and let's take some examples like the locally approved courses, the 25s and 35s. Those locally approved courses in many cases are completely outside of the offerings of other schools. So they offer these courses, and students in many cases will pay extra for them because they're some special course. Maybe it's phys ed 35, and they're going to do some special phys ed programs.

How about those hockey schools that are offered these days? We've even got some baseball schools. I think one of them is in southern Alberta. I forget the community that hosts it. What happens with those kinds of courses? Will there be no extra fees for promoting and sponsoring in a school system that particular course?

4:40

Now, to some extent what happens here in this definition where it says “required,” I think, is that largely this refers to what might be supplied by the school board. There are all sorts of things required for courses, from pens and paper to the textbooks themselves and to other things that might be required. What if a student has decided to take one of the shop courses and they have all sorts of wood that's required to make their projects? Who pays for the wood? Who's going to take care of that? School boards have assigned for those courses some extra fees, and they have to be paid for by somebody.

It was mentioned a little while ago this inaccurate statement about budgetary shortfalls and the estimate of the inadequate funding. At one point it was mentioned that it would be .78 per cent. I don't know whether that was of operating or total expenditures for the school board, all the school boards, but I think that that would require a little bit more investigation. I'd be really interested to see how much it would amount to.

In fact, it's not like this is going to come from – who knows where? It's going to have to be acquired from someplace. There was talk about property taxes a minute ago. What would be the impact on school property taxes to supply this extra shortfall? Somebody is going to have to pay for it. It's like it was going to be supplied by the government and would just come along at no cost to anybody.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are many parts to this bill where there are many questions I would have. Extracurricular activities: there's nothing restricting a school operated by a board from raising funds for extracurricular activities offered by the school. But in the first part it talks about the "prescribed, authorized or approved" courses. What about those courses offered by dance schools, where they get a credit-equivalent unit? There's some payment to those schools for courses offered in what would be definitely an extracurricular context. You're outside of the school system, yet this funding comes from . . .

The Speaker: I'm afraid we'll have to move on. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River, then Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've been listening, and there have been some interesting viewpoints on both sides of the House. The member was just speaking here with regard to band and sports schools. Well, having been with Edmonton public schools and a trustee for many years, approving some alternative programs because those are natural drawing cards to a variety of people as well as broadening the educational base, those specific programs – and we had hockey, and there were other sports ones – wouldn't have been considered as extracurricular activities because that was part of the ongoing, I guess, recruitment or activity that that person wanted to excel at, such as skiing.

They adjusted their school year to coincide with that activity so it wasn't prohibitive. If they were going to excel or perhaps go on to become Olympians or baseball players professionally as well as football or hockey, the school made those arrangements so they could fit it in as well as time for practice. So that wasn't really considered extracurricular; it was part of their educational experience, part of their out-of-school aspirations and dreams. So it wouldn't have been, you know, a part of this particular bill. It wouldn't have had an extra fee associated with it. They knew that the equipment and all the other services with it were just part of the program that they were trying to take, that they subscribed to, that they signed up for. So that was above and different.

With regard to band, well the band in itself – my son was at Wellington, and that school was known as being phenomenal fundraisers for the band. Again, that was part of the program that the people went into. That wouldn't have been extracurricular. They could still fund raise for that particular type of program. That's not what this bill is intending. It's not saying that you can't fund raise for the band. You can still fund raise for the band because that was a concern with the member across. In some of the cases the instruments cost thousands of dollars. They have textbook rentals as well – and I'll get on to that one – but for the band, they did it for offsetting some of the costs. Because of constant usage, you have to repair them, and they break down. So that wouldn't have been considered as part of this bill as a fee but perhaps as a user fee, which would be, I think, not subject to this bill.

We talk about doing fundraisers, period. Some of the times when the schools or parents were doing fundraising, they'd be raising for library books, not textbooks but library books, to be a complement to the overall experience of school as well as raising for computers,

and they would do the big casinos. That would be considered essential services that would be supplied by the school, but somehow the parents always added and topped up because they knew full well that the schools wouldn't be able to provide \$75,000 for a library of computers or to have another computer classroom.

One of these black holes that the schools continually fund raise for is computers. The technology changes so rapidly from year to year that the things are obsolete in a couple of years or the ongoing upkeep and maintenance of it. So that's what some of the parents are constantly and currently fundraising for.

When I was on the board – it must have been about four or five years ago – the now Minister of the Environment, I think, was charged with the task of determining what were school fees, and I thought that he had done a great job on that. But we are at the same thing about the question of fundraising. This is something that a lot of parents have angst about. I can't say that any of them are particularly supportive of, you know, going out there and doing it, be it the chocolates if they still do that occasionally, which I know they do, or the Mundare sausage, or it's going and doing bingo and casino nights. It is getting out of hand in some cases because you're also then doing the sports for the community as well, so some parents are at your door for three different events. But the point is: let's try and make sure that we know what fees are considered for textbooks or for essential rentals and what are just user fees.

When the kids go into junior high and high school, they end up paying fees for textbook rentals, the replacement costs. The school does the original purchase of the books. Say they're \$85 to \$115. They have a shelf life of so many years, but as the kids use them, they pay a textbook rental fee, and providing they give the book back in good repair, they get their fee back. [interjection] That's exactly it. So I'm not against that because that's fair and that's right. The kids know that, and the parents know that. That's altogether different than what this bill is trying to propose. [interjection] Well, again, all these varying opinions on this. We'll read it. We can read a book and come up with 15 different conclusions of it. It all depends on how you read the thing. But in this particular piece I don't see it as being prohibitive against that.

It's prohibitive against the basics, for parents using it to raise funds for essentials that the schools should be providing, such as, as I said earlier, the library fees and/or for computers. It shouldn't be included. Band is different because that is an extracurricular activity which you support such as outdoor education when they go on canoe trips. That would be fine as well because they know that that's an added experience for the kids overall, you know, in high schools where they do that. That would be separate, and that's not included within this bill, not included. So that would still be allowed, as far as I know.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot to still contemplate in this. I would support this bill, but it maybe could use some tweaking or some amendments from both sides to have it completely palatable. I think the intent of it, reducing the burden on Alberta families as well as the fees, would certainly be appreciated by all families here in Alberta and, I know, those within the Legislature who do have kids as well that are experiencing it. So I would urge, you know, both sides of the House to be receptive and at least hear and be mindful of what some of the members are trying to propose for this because it isn't all bad. Some of it is actually quite good.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just rise briefly partially in support of the Minister of Education and his comments on Liberals

and Liberal philosophy and maybe on a couple of members opposite. I do agree that you can't do it all. The members have argued: we're going to do all of this plus we're going to save 30 per cent. The other night in the housing debate a few members in the ND caucus as well as the Member for Calgary-Varsity argued: yes, we can do all of that; we can supply all of the housing, and we'll still save 30 per cent. At some point, you know, you have to understand that there are trade-offs in governance because the taxpayer is not an endless funder of all the things that we might like to do in this Legislature. So we have to keep that in mind.

With regard to Bill 208 I support the minister in that I don't think this should be supported. The hon. Member for Strathcona pointed out that basic education is already covered, and the minister himself pointed out that we have quite possibly one of the best education systems in the world. We do.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, when I was young, I had a principal in school that I used to visit occasionally, and he said that probably the best thing you could do for the education system would be to bulldoze a school every five years. The reason for that, he said, was that upon bulldozing it, we should force parents to participate in the reconstruction of the school. In his experience the most successful schools and the most successful school programs were those which had a very strong component of parent involvement, some ownership. The minister, I believe, pointed out that if you give it for free, there's no valuing or no ownership in that and no incentive to partake or make it better.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods spoke long and eloquently about her beliefs on this bill. Certainly, it's not for me to question her passion on the issue of children and child care and education. She's devoted hours to the topic. However, she debated not whether we should be allowing fundraising activities for schools but what the school curriculum should be. She talked about citizenship and values, a very large broadening of the definition of basic education, as I understand it, in this province. Maybe that's a debate worth having. It's not a debate worth having while we're discussing a bill on whether we should be raising funds. That's not a backdoor way to talk about changing the whole education system.

I believe we have a good system in place, Mr. Speaker, and I support the minister. I believe we should defeat the bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting that the government members are talking about local autonomy. Having been a school board member, I remember when we practised some local autonomy, as did the Member for Edmonton-Decore. After the provincial government got involved in terms of arbitration with the teachers' strikes, in fact, we waited for some help, and then when we went public with that debate, we were told: oh, we must be wasting all our money, that we needed to be audited, that obviously we weren't responsible enough. So it's all right to say that it's for local autonomy. It's local autonomy to do all the least desirable things that the government wants us to do. That's what local autonomy means to this government.

This debate has been going on for a long time about what is essential. You know, in terms of what is extra, the bill very clearly says that fundraising for extracurricular activities can be allowed. I read that very clearly. But, Mr. Speaker, we have not come to grips – and we've been trying to do it for four or five years – with what is essential in terms of the school programs. We still haven't come to that definition, and until we do that, we're going to have this particular debate.

Are computers in this day and age part of the program? Some would argue yes; some would argue no. A lot of the fundraising that I saw going on as a public school trustee had to do with computers in the schools. The schools and school councils felt that they were an absolute necessity to bring in.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, but the time limit for consideration of this business has now escaped us.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

High-speed Rail System

507. Dr. Taft moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately begin assembling land and/or negotiating rights-of-way for a high-speed electric rail line between Edmonton and Calgary with additional stops as warranted.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview in his capacity as the Leader of the Official Opposition has a speaking time limit of 20 minutes.

Dr. Taft: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

This is a very timely motion, in my view, Mr. Speaker, for a whole range of reasons. It is one that every member of this Assembly will be at least generally familiar with: the idea of building a high-speed rail link between Calgary and Edmonton quite possibly with a stop in or near Red Deer and other stops along the way, which could include the Edmonton International Airport and the Calgary International Airport. So you could get on a train in downtown Calgary, have one stop at the Calgary airport, one stop in Red Deer, one stop at the Edmonton International airport, and one stop downtown.

Indeed, I believe there's already provincial land available for such a terminal in Edmonton very close to the Legislature, just across 109th Street, which would be handy indeed. I also understand that the minister of infrastructure has recently overseen the purchase of land in central Calgary, in downtown Calgary, for an equivalent potential terminus there. That is, in my view, a step in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, the whole point of this motion is to keep that process moving because even as we speak, given the rapid development of land in the Edmonton-Calgary corridor we are losing easy and inexpensive access to the necessary rights-of-way for a high-speed rail link. Businesses are expanding on lands which would be right on the right-of-way. Subdivisions are expanding on land which would be right on the right-of-way, other infrastructures coming and overlapping that right-of-way. Every time that happens, it makes it just that much more difficult and that much more expensive to fulfill the dream of a high-speed rail link between Calgary and Edmonton.

In fact, something for us all to keep in mind is that it's common for the greatest expense in constructing rail links not to be the railway itself and not to be the cars and the engines or the stations or anything else. It's common for the most expensive portion of these projects to be actually just expropriating or purchasing the rights-of-way for the line to be built. So this motion is intended for the government to get on quickly with assembling the land or negotiating the rights-of-way for that rail line so that that can be undertaken before the opportunity gets too expensive.

Now, I'm sure that every member of this Assembly has carefully read this motion. I can see various ministers smiling at the idea, but they will have noted that this actually would not commit the government to constructing or financing the railway itself. This is

a more prudent motion than that. We're simply saying: let's keep this option open; let's assemble the land and the rights-of-way now so that whether we choose to proceed with a high-speed rail link next year or in 10 years or in 25 years, the option will be there for us. That's why I think this is an important motion for all members of this Assembly to support.

The question is, I think: what vision of Alberta does this motion support? Certainly, it's how the opposition – I might say visionary opposition – foresees the future of Alberta. We see a future in this province where the big cities are linked, where all Albertans are linked, or at least many Albertans are linked through a rail system. We see a future in which there's an integrated transportation plan for this province that works at many, many levels. It works right from the level of local neighbourhoods where there might be public transit stops or smaller arterial roads feeding into larger systems like rail transit, LRT, or C-Train in Calgary, which would in turn feed into something like a high-speed rail link. Those would also have to, in our vision ought to, interlink with airports, with truck terminals, with roadways, a fully integrated transportation system. This, Mr. Speaker, could be the absolute jewel in the crown of that transportation system, but the only way we can achieve that jewel, the only way we can make it shine in all its glory would be to begin now by setting aside the rights-of-way and negotiating the land.

5:00

You know, Mr. Speaker, the possibilities from this project are genuinely exciting. There's every possibility that, for example, a student at the University of Calgary could take the C-Train there down to the terminus of the high-speed rail link, zip up to Edmonton; could leave right after breakfast and be in downtown Edmonton, here, observing the proceedings of the Legislature, for example, to write a paper for a political science course – all right; I'm getting thumbs-up from various members here – and be back at home before supper.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Or I think I could imagine an engineering technology student from NAIT working on a specific project that actually requires collaboration with a lab at SAIT and those people being able to zip back and forth on a high-speed rail link in a way that is safe and that is efficient and that is environmentally very friendly.

A couple of months ago there was a very exciting ballet program in Calgary featuring the music of Joni Mitchell. There's no reason in the world that people from Edmonton couldn't, with a high-speed rail link, zip down in an hour and a half, take in the ballet, and be back at home before midnight.

Once that high-speed rail link is established, I can imagine a kind of liftoff occurring for this province, in which the spinoffs, the synergies, the cultural enrichment, the intellectual energy in this province just goes to a higher level. I think that's the kind of future we need to look to for this province because if we just stay with the same old plans that we've had for the last many decades, we're going to end up in the same old places. So in a general sense a vision for this province with a fully integrated transportation plan featuring, among other things, a high-speed rail link.

Now, I realize that there are serious economic questions to address with a high-speed rail link, and I don't want to rush into this. It may be that it's not initially feasible. There are people who say it is, and there are people who say it isn't. I've frankly found myself wondering: if we have the rights-of-way secure, do we have to go immediately to a high-speed rail link, or could we just have any old passenger rail link? I mean, why is it impossible to get from Calgary to Edmonton by train?

Mr. R. Miller: Well, you can do it, but you have to go to Vancouver.

Dr. Taft: Without going through Vancouver. It just doesn't make any sense. It used to be that there were Dayliners; there was rail service.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the traffic on highway 2 and the wear and tear on highway 2 is huge. It seems to me just basic logic that we need to be looking at passenger rail service between these two cities.

The current rail system poses a lot of problems. It was constructed many, many decades ago. It runs right through the middle of all kinds of small towns. There are a tremendous number of level crossings. There are huge safety issues. All of us who remember the old days of the Dayliner and what seemed like a crash a month will remember that. So that would not be acceptable, but there have got to be other ways of doing it. There are cities around the world that are linked by train.

One of the reasons, of course, that people are going to train use more and more is the environmental concerns about heavy use of the automobile. [some applause] That's getting stirring applause from the Assembly. Many of us will be alert to the fact that the climate change issue is beginning to overtake many, many other issues, and I think we're only beginning to feel the impact of that. While it's often said in here that burning coal and exploiting the oil sands generate all kinds of greenhouse gases, as they do, so does transportation, Mr. Speaker. The transportation sector is one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gases and, therefore, to climate change. As climate change accelerates, we're going to see greater and greater pressure to get away from gasoline-powered and diesel-powered cars and trucks, and the obvious choice is to train.

You will notice, in fact, in this motion that we specify "high-speed electric rail line," and there's a reason for that. In our view, an electric high-speed rail line has the greatest potential to have the least environmental impact. We can imagine at some point electric generation through various means. It could be clean power. Maybe it could be nuclear power in the dreams of the Tories. It could be something else. But electrical generation doesn't produce greenhouse gas emissions and therefore a high-speed train from Calgary to Edmonton that has absolutely minimal environmental impact and carries thousands of passengers a day.

So I think the environmental issues here are going to ultimately force – force – this project to go ahead. We're going to see the price of gasoline and diesel get higher and higher, the price of the carbon generated from those fuels get higher and higher, and at some point people will absolutely insist on a rail link between the two cities. So let's get on today with acquiring the rights-of-way to establish that link.

We also need to compare the cost of the railway with the cost of maintaining and expanding highway 2. Many of us here will drive highway 2 many times a month, sometimes several times a week. All of us will know that many stretches of highway 2 are in poor states of repair. I should be, perhaps, more correct in my term and call it the Queen Elizabeth II motorway, the QE II. Anyway, it's got many names. We all know it as the road from Calgary to Edmonton.

It needs expansion. The traffic loads are enormous. It needs major repair. All of that is going to cost a tremendous amount of money. Adding an additional lane in both directions to that highway would cost hundreds of millions of dollars or perhaps more. I mean, we can't even get highway 63 to Fort McMurray twinned. I can only imagine the cost and delays in expanding highway 2 between Edmonton and Calgary. So if we're going to put money into that, maybe we should instead consider putting some kind of support into

an improved rail link for passengers between Edmonton and Calgary. I could go on at length on this.

There are two competing bids for this project, Mr. Speaker. There is one which is, I believe, being advocated by one of the major railways – I don't need to name which one – which would use the current rail line between the two major cities. As I indicated a few moments ago, there are a lot of concerns with that. That line runs right through places like Ponoka and Wetaskiwin and Hobbema and many, many other centres. That's okay, perhaps, for freight traffic, but if you're getting high-speed passenger traffic, it raises a lot of concerns. It's also a less straight route, and if we want to have the potential for a true high-speed rail link, we want to have as few curves as possible on this line.

There is a competing proposal, which would see a brand new line constructed with only a very, very small number of curves in the entire length of the line. It would bypass or avoid, I think, virtually every town between the two cities, except those where there were scheduled stops, so that would be in some ways a better option.

5:10

The question is coming up, and it's a very important question: what cost? I will be forthright here and say that the costs I've seen from the backers of either proposal don't convince me that they're right on top of this one. We all know how much the costs for construction are escalating. There's no reason to think that costs for railway construction won't be escalating as well. So we do need to be very careful for the cost. But I can tell you that the quickest way for us to secure the cost of this in the long run is to get on today with this motion, with securing the rights-of-way for the high-speed rail link.

So, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to some animated debate on this motion, and I look forward to an open vote on this. It'd be fun and good for democracy to have a free vote on this motion, given that it is a motion. It's not binding on the government; it simply urges a general action upon the government. So I will do my best to respond to questions, and I will be paying close attention to any comments that any members of this Assembly might have.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened attentively to the Member for Edmonton-Riverview's comments. He preceded his comments by saying that his vision for the future and the Liberal Party's vision for the future on this particular topic, on the topic of a high-speed train, is 20/20.

Well, I hate to tell the member that his vision may be 20/20, but he needs to turn around because he's looking back. If he checks the records carefully, this issue has been debated in this House not that long ago. As a result of the debate in 2004 the Van Horne Institute performed a feasibility study on the issue of a high-speed train. That was in 2004; this is 2007. Van Horne indeed indicated that perhaps such a mode of transportation would be feasible, but there would be a great deal of taxpayers' money involved if this government was to proceed with this particular project.

A prudent thing to do any time spending government dollars on a project of this scale would be to find out, one, if Albertans would actually use such a mode of transportation between Edmonton and Calgary. The second one: why not find out how much they would pay to use such a mode of transportation and which technology is best for this project? As we all probably will agree around here,

there are many different variations of high-speed trains that could be implemented. [interjections] It is great that the members for Edmonton-Rutherford and Edmonton-Decore are so enthusiastic about it, but maybe if they just listened, they may learn something.

Before acting on this particular project, it would be reasonable to consult on this study. After debating the high-speed train in 2006 in this Assembly, the Assembly decided that this government was not in a position to fund this mode of transportation exclusively, and that is the reason why then Motion 501 failed. Well, the objections to Motion 501 have not changed since that time, and just to refresh the members' memories, some of the objections included the source of funding for a high-speed rail – no answers have been found yet – which train and rail type should be used, how long it would take the train to travel between the two centres and how many stops should there be in between, how Albertans living close to the line would be affected, how much a ticket would cost, and Albertans' desire for this type of transportation. Those questions have not been, to date, answered conclusively. Hence, perhaps the motion is premature at this time, as 501 was in 2006.

Notwithstanding this, it is important to stress that this government has not set aside the idea of a high-speed train, because I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. A train between Edmonton and Calgary would open up many possibilities. First of all, on a world scale a population of 3.2 million people: we are hardly a medium-sized city in Asia or Europe. Now, with a high-speed train, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview indicated, a student could actually live in Calgary and attend NAIT or vice versa. We would become more of a centralized market and have more of a combined economic power on a world scale. However, the results of the market assessment are not yet in, and we are awaiting the results.

Notwithstanding this, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview has indicated, this government has been taking steps in securing land, and the most recent acquisitions were the ones in Calgary. The rights-of-way are being protected, as we speak, throughout the corridor between Edmonton and Calgary. More problematic issues arise in Calgary, I understand, than they do in Edmonton as we do have some corridors that have been vacated by other rail lines that would make it possible for us to proceed.

So is there work being done? Definitely there is work being done. Rights-of-way are being secured. There is a feasibility study in progress of which we will receive results in the short, forthcoming future. We are consulting with Albertans to find out what mode of transportation they will be using, how they will be using it, where the stops should be, and how many of them should be in between here and there. Hence, Mr. Speaker, reading the motion as stated right now, one would conclude that nothing is being done because it urges government to commence work on this project where the work is more than in progress. We're in the midst of studying this particular issue.

What I will do, Mr. Speaker, is table an amendment to the member's motion, and the amendment shall say:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue assembling land and negotiating rights-of-way for a high-speed rail line between Edmonton and Calgary with additional stops as warranted.

I will table the appropriate number.

Mr. Speaker, indeed, I am glad that the Liberal opposition is on the side of this government and will support this government in continuing its work to study and acquire rights-of-way if, indeed, this train system becomes a feasible and desirable project.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll just distribute the amendment, and if you want to, you can use the remainder of your time to speak to the

amendment. Hon. member, did you wish to continue to speak on the amendment?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, as circulated, the main variations in my amendment will include that we will be striking out “immediately begin” and substituting it with “continue”. Also, we will be striking out “/or”, section (b), and striking out “electric” because we do not have conclusive studies at this point whether, indeed, this source of energy and this source of propulsion is the most appropriate one. But, indeed, I am glad to hear that the opposition will be supporting the continuing work on this topic.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the amendment.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the spirit of collaboration and because I think it's an important project and I wouldn't claim to have all the answers, I think I can live with this as an amendment. My most specific concern is that the word “electric” has been struck out because I think that in the long term that is, as far as we know, the preferable way to go for reasons I outlined earlier. But if it's a matter of getting this motion passed, then I'm happy to accept this amendment because I think it's at least generally in the same spirit as what we were proposing. So there we go. I'll accept the amendment.

Thank you.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on the amendment, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. Well, it doesn't matter much to me whether it's the amendment or we talk about the particular motion. Mr. Speaker, I think that in principle we agree that the high-speed rail link between Calgary and Edmonton probably down the way at some point makes some sense. I know that this debate has been going on for at least for 30 years that I can recall, so it's ongoing. When is the right time? Who knows.

I would like to say, though, that we should take it in a broader perspective. The member talked about an integrated plan, and I agree with that. I think that's where we should start as a province-wide plan. We've got a huge infrastructure deficit right now, and if we're trying to build all the schools that we need and all the hospitals, some of them that are blowing up, and the roads that are falling apart all over the province, we need to deal with that too. It has to be put in some sort of priority.

The other thing that we need to do – and I think the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the Leader of the Opposition, was alluding to this. Our transportation in this country and generally in this province doesn't make any sense at all. We could learn from what Europe does, for example. Everything works together. That's why I say that we need a little broader approach than this. We should say: “How are we going to get people from Medicine Hat to Calgary and Edmonton? How are we going to get people from Grande Prairie, from Fort McMurray, certainly from other smaller towns? How do we work all this in an integrated way?” I think, then, the high-speed rail becomes part of that.

The problem that I see is that we have to again get all modes of transportation working together. It makes no sense at all environmentally or economically to have airplanes that fly between Calgary and Edmonton. They get up; they come down. And flying between

Lethbridge and Calgary, for example, makes no economic or environmental sense in this day and age. Airplanes should be there for longer distances, trains for mid-length distances.

This is where the rail link between Calgary and Edmonton makes sense. But it should also make sense from other parts of the province, whether it's a high-speed rail link or not. We probably need rail links between a number of places. Then buses co-ordinating their times, getting in there at the same times from the rural areas. This is what they do in Europe. They move millions of people very quickly because all of these things work together. Of course, this would take probably a federal approach for it to work, but we could begin to do some of these things in Alberta.

The member talked about environmentally, and we are buying up some land, I suppose. What that cost would be tomorrow in terms of supplying land is another thing. But I think we need to broaden the approach with transportation and look at right across the province and put it in perspective with dealing with the infrastructure deficit that we have. What priorities do we maintain?

Now, I know that we don't have to make a decision, but I guess we are if we're buying up land. At some point down the way we're going to do that. In principle I have no particular problem with that, but I think the problem is broader than just the rail link between Calgary and Edmonton. It's how a province grows immensely in population. There's some speculation that we could be 6 million people if we go the way we're going, if we don't put the foot on the brakes. Six million people. The economic development department has said publicly to people that they expect 6 million people here in a very short period of time, you know, 2 million in the Edmonton area, 2 million in the Calgary area, 2 million in the rest of the province. We need to begin to do some long-range planning about infrastructure, about transportation and see how the rail link fits into all of it, Mr. Speaker.

As I say, in principle I have no particular problem with the motion as read, but I really do say that we have to take it in a broader context than just the rail link. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The debate on Motion 507 involves contemplating a whole new way of connecting the province of Alberta, and I'm very pleased to speak to the amendment. A high-speed rail connection between Edmonton and Calgary is something this government has been exploring for a very long time, and I appreciate that the opposition recognizes this. As we speak, the demand for such a project is being determined, and I'm eagerly awaiting the results of the market assessment study. The government has been proactive in taking the steps necessary to ensure what land is required for a high-speed rail system in the event that such a project is agreed upon.

Mr. Speaker, I'm convinced that a high-speed rail connection between Calgary and Edmonton would bring many benefits to our economy and to the environment and to the quality of life of all Albertans. Having travelled on high-speed rail on a number of continents for personal and professional reasons, I'm convinced that this is an idea that's long overdue. A high-speed rail connection between Alberta's two largest economic centres could help the flow of commerce driving Alberta, facilitate tourism, leisure and business travel, and be a reliable and expedient way to travel, especially if the trains were to go directly into the two city centres.

This sort of communal travel could be environmentally friendly. Fewer vehicles would be used, and high-speed rail represents an alternative to using one's own vehicle. The train also has the potential to alleviate traffic pressures on the QE II by lowering

maintenance costs, presenting an alternative to expanding the highway, and decreasing accidents on the highway. Depending on the type of service provided by this mode of transportation, Albertans in rural areas also could be presented with a choice of easily commuting to the larger cities to work.

In a report to Mr. David A. Martin, chair of the Alberta Value-Added and Technology Commercialization Task Force, which is dated April 16, 2007, there are a number of quotations I would like to bring to the attention of the House. Firstly, they mentioned that “Edmonton firstly, and Calgary secondly, were the first two cities in North America that built and operated Light Rail Transit systems.” Interesting that it’s Alberta that Americans came to when they were looking to learn how to build and run an LRT system. We were ahead of the curve, and we need to stay there.

They go on to mention five important points. One is that Calgary and Edmonton are less than 300 kilometres apart, and that’s the ideal distance for an HSR service anywhere. The second point is that the combined population of these two greater Alberta metropolitan areas is over 2 million people. That’s a watershed mark for successful HSR service. Number 3, successful high-speed rail service requires a dedicated roadbed. Number 4, successful HSR service is designed for the markets it intends to serve. And there are many, many different economic benefits.

They actually refer to an editorial from the *Calgary Herald* which reads:

Some may question the economic feasibility of building a high-speed rail that links Calgary, Red Deer and Edmonton, but the real cost is in doing nothing. Alberta is growing at a record pace and can no longer afford to sit back and watch this train pass it by. Linking the three cities by high-speed rail would create a massive economic unit that would put the corridor on the world map.

However – and I think that our Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar may agree – while there are many possible benefits to this sort of project, there are some issues that have to be kept in mind when determining the feasibility of the project. The Alberta government is leading by example by analyzing the situation before starting any large projects. Of course, cost is a huge mitigating factor. Capital costs are extremely high, and they are not known for certain. In our ever-expanding economy it’s hard to determine the exact cost of any large project of this sort. We’ve seen estimates anywhere from \$2 billion to \$8 billion, depending on which type of technology is used. We are all very, very well aware of the labour and material costs that are rising every day, as are real estate prices. But I will remind members that it could easily be argued that these prices will only increase, so now, indeed, is the time to do this.

Mr. Speaker, it’s worthy to note that while Europe and Japan have electrical systems – and I’ve ridden on them – they are subsidized. As has been mentioned, the Van Horne study showed that such an endeavour would not be viable without government funding. The role of government must be made clear before any action is taken. We have to be very clear on that. For high-speed rail to be viable in Alberta, the cost of a ticket, in the minds of the consumer, I’m sure, would have to be less expensive than a bus ticket or a flight or a tank of gas in order for people to see the link as an attractive alternative.

5:30

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the idea of a high-speed rail link between Edmonton and Calgary is an interesting and exciting idea. The technology for this kind of travel is expanding every day. Some members may be aware that last month a French high-speed train broke the world record for conventional trains, reaching speeds of 574 kilometres an hour. It wouldn’t take long to get anywhere in the province. That being said, I’d like to further the idea of having a high-speed rail link between Calgary and Edmonton, but I’d like it

to go further than that, of course to Red Deer, with a stop there, but other destinations. With time I’d like to see a high-speed rail link to Fort McMurray, Medicine Hat, and Lethbridge as well as Grande Prairie and Banff, just to name a few. Those are future plans.

In the meantime, I’m glad that Infrastructure and Transportation is studying the possibility of creating a high-speed rail link while it’s acquiring land in case it’s needed for the future. It’s very prudent. It’s very proactive. So I believe that the current government action is all that is currently required.

I look forward to seeing and hearing further debate by other members. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise and contribute to the Motion 507 debate this afternoon. I’d just like to point out to the Member for Calgary-Lougheed that we currently subsidize high-speed horses in this province to a rather extensive dollar figure.

Mr. Speaker, I would applaud the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for bringing forward this amendment, which looks like it has the support of the government. My concern, like that of my leader, is in taking out the word “electric.” Let me tell you why taking out the word “electric” causes me some concern. The reason why “electric” was included in Motion 501, which was debated in this House last year, and the reason why it was included in Motion 507 this year is because by using the word “electric,” for all intents and purposes you remove the so-called brownfield option; that is, the idea of following the current right-of-way with the CPR line, which, as the Leader of the Official Opposition pointed out, runs through a number of communities like Ponoka and Hobbema and Crossfield and Carstairs.

Not only does that put a high-speed train running through built-up residential areas and brings in all sorts of concerns, whether it might be noise or people violating the security fence and that sort of thing, but the other thing that it does for sure, Mr. Speaker, is it negates the possibility of keeping that line as straight as possible. In fact, we understand that as soon as you start adding curves and hills, then the speeds have to come down. When the speeds go down, the travel time goes up, and when the travel time goes up, the ridership goes down.

If you read the Van Horne Institute report, it’s built on attracting sufficient ridership to make it feasible. As soon as the travel time goes up, then the ridership goes down, and then we have a problem. So it’s important that we manage to keep the travel time down as much as possible, and that is the reason why “electric” was in the motion last year and appears in the motion again this year.

Now, I’m pleased to see that the government is willing to move forward on this motion with some amendments. One of the things that I noted when I was reviewing the debate from last year, is that two of the ministers of the day spoke out strongly in favour of land acquisition, and I’ll just quote very quickly from *Hansard*. The then minister of economic development, the Member for Lethbridge-West, said:

I do agree with the minister and others that have spoken in terms of making sure that we have the rights-of-way protected. In some cases we’ll have to go out and gain ownership of those rights-of-way, and I think that we should of course do that.

Then later on in the debate – or perhaps it was earlier in the debate – the Finance minister said in response to a previous speaker:

The hon. member does choose a good time to bring this up because the other point that we have to consider very strongly is protecting the right-of-way into downtown Calgary and into downtown Edmonton before it gets bought up.

Clearly, there's been support from the government in the past on this initiative, and it looks like we'll have it again if this amendment is successful in passing.

Now, I would like to point out that in the Van Horne Institute report, for a greenfield right-of-way – that is, the straight line that would accommodate high-speed electric or perhaps even maglev if somebody wanted to spend that much money – the total cost for land acquisition in 2005 dollars was \$47.8 million.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. R. Miller: Forty-seven point eight million dollars only. In terms of the amount of money that flows through this treasury, clearly that's easily feasible and, in fact, less money – less money, Mr. Speaker – than is currently used to subsidize high-speed horses. So I think that even with the little bit of inflationary pressure that undoubtedly has taken place since Van Horne released that report, it's still very doable.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about the number of developments that are taking place already that are interfering with the greenfield option. I had a call not that long ago from the Red Deer airport authority indicating that on a farm just outside of their property, directly in line with where the high-speed train would have gone, a local resident just built a \$2 million home. That sort of thing is going to continue to happen the longer we wait in terms of making this land acquisition, so it really is important that we do this and do this as soon as possible. I think the comments that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed made were bang on when he referenced a report that said: it's not how much it's going to cost us but how much it's going to cost us if we don't do it. That is a very valid point.

Also, there's been some reference this afternoon to the economic output. I've read a number of reports that show that both Edmonton and Calgary in terms of North American economic output right now rank somewhere in the low to mid-50s in terms of their GDP, yet when you put Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, and that power corridor together in one economic unit, as a high-speed rail system would do, it actually moves us up to number 16 or 17 North America wide. I'm sure that even when you look at major cities across Europe, that would rank us very favourably. So there are good arguments for doing that.

Another thing that I think is important to note is a softening in the position by the Edmonton airport authority over the last couple of years. With some new management and new direction at Edmonton airports there isn't the vehement opposition to the inclusion of a station on Edmonton airports' property at the international, as there once was. At their annual general meeting just two weeks ago the question was raised. Their concern is that they don't necessarily see this as something that's imminent, but they did indicate that they have spoken with the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, and they'd like to keep those communication lines open. They are very interested at this point in being part of whatever might eventually take place.

I would certainly urge the government and, in particular, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, as he's continuing to look at possible land acquisition, to please dialogue as much as possible with Edmonton airports. Certainly, although there was a time that they were not at all supportive of high-speed rail, with it becoming more evident that this is an idea whose time is coming sooner rather than later, I think there's a realization on their part that they would rather be a part of whatever does take place than be bypassed by it. So I would certainly implore the government and the minister to keep them involved, however possible, with that.

Mr. Speaker, there is, unfortunately, so little time when we do private members' motions to debate this, so since we've had a couple of speakers already speak in favour of the amendment, what I'm going to do at this point is ask if we can put the question on the amendment and return to the debate on the motion, if that's all right.

5:40

The Deputy Speaker: I have other speakers that have indicated their desire. Is the Assembly in favour of the amendment being put now? This would require unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: On the debate on the motion as amended, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'd like to support the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, who has realized that the light at the end of the tunnel is indeed a high-speed train, which he wants to get on board.

This is a case of all-party wisdom. This isn't a Liberal idea or an NDP idea or a Conservative idea. It's an idea whose time has come, as the Member for Calgary-Lougheed recognized. For once we can be ahead of the game. There was a time back in the late '70s when in Fort McMurray there were actually sewer lines and roads before there were houses. We're in the midst of a boom that we want to continue, and the high-speed rail will provide us with that economic connective opportunity. I do again reference the wisdom of the Member for Calgary-Lougheed in saying that this is not just a north-south potential. I'd like to add the east-west link.

While I'm not as well travelled as the member, I did have an opportunity this past fall to ride on the jet train or the speed train in France, which I took with my wife, first west to the Loire Valley and then back through Paris and down to Aix-en-Provence, and it was a wonderful ride. This was an electric train that approached speeds of 300 kilometres an hour. While I regret the fact that the electric part has been taken out of the amendment, I think that upon looking at all the studies, that electric option will probably be brought back. The diesel option is not environmentally sound. The magnetic option is considerably more expensive than the electric. So I think we'll get back eventually to the electric notion.

I've spent considerable time with Peter Wallis from the Van Horne Institute, which is located at the University of Calgary. Peter is also a member of the Calgary Airport Authority. I've heard him explain the values of the various systems. I've also heard from the independent group, that has a different approach to financing. They also have a different route, which basically parallels highway 2, the cost of which was previously listed at approximately \$46 million, and I think those were 2005-2006 figures.

This train basically has us join the rest of the world in terms of realizing the economic support and potential. One of the beliefs that I have about this train is that under no circumstance should it share any part of the line with freight trains. The accidents that have occurred, such as in the States with Amtrak and so on, have occurred when passenger rail and freight were on the same line. I would envision a there-and-back circumstance so that the trains could be passing each other, so a double electric line would be my preference.

I'm very pleased that this House has the vision of getting ahead of the game instead of playing what we've been doing for the last 14 years, and that's been catch-up. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to join my colleagues in speaking in favour of the motion as amended. I believe that the economic feasibility of this line right now may not be there, but there will be a time in the not-too-distant future when the economics will certainly justify such a line. That may be in 10 years, it may be in 20 years, it could be in 60 years, but if we can look at some of the lessons from geographic development in places like Europe and Great Britain, I think we can learn something from that. The population of Great Britain only 200 years ago, at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, was about 11 million. It's now close to 70 million on the island of Great Britain.

I think that if we look at the population of Alberta, in the 1901 census the entire population of Alberta and Saskatchewan combined was approximately 159,000, and here we are now in the province of Alberta with a population of somewhere around 3 million. So if we care to extrapolate into the future, I don't think it takes much imagination to imagine a time when this population density in the corridor of Calgary-Edmonton would certainly justify a high-speed rail line. Therefore, I think it is prudent for us to proceed with accumulating the necessary land that we need in the future.

Again looking back to some of the examples in Europe, when the channel tunnel was implemented between France and Great Britain, there was a great deal of consternation, a great deal of difficulty in establishing that high-speed line across the densely populated countryside of Kent into the city of London. Of course, the longer we wait and the more that development and density build up, whether it be industrial or farms or residential, the harder it's going to be to accumulate the necessary land and the more expensive as well.

So I would just conclude by saying that I am very much in favour of this. I think it's a very forward-looking motion, and I would encourage all my colleagues to support it.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to speak to the motion as amended. The original motion asked us to start, but of course, as we discussed, we started many years ago. The amendment says to continue, which is great, and we appreciate the Liberal support for our foresight.

Motion 507. This motion is laudable. Albertans wish to have environmentally prudent transport options and less congestion on our highways. Persons travelling between Calgary and Edmonton would certainly appreciate another affordable and reliable transit option. The ridership and therefore profitability of a high-speed rail line is still uncertain and therefore demands further study. A market assessment study is currently under way and should be completed in July.

Alberta can consider the feasibility of this system by also looking to the operation of high-speed trains in other countries. France, Germany, and Japan have convenient, reliable, and comfortable high-speed rail systems between their major cities. These systems succeed only because of their population densities and their dense intercity rail networks. These densities make the use of public transit a viable option for an entire trip. While Alberta does not yet have these sorts of densities, growth will possibly produce them in the future. By assembling land and rights-of-way now, Alberta will be able to construct a high-speed rail line when it is viable.

Without dense intercity transit options people want to have their vehicle when travelling in a city. This makes them more likely to drive for the entire trip. Further investment in light rail transit in Edmonton and Calgary may be needed before a high-speed rail link is built. Investing in light rail transit will help make a high-speed rail line a success.

Recent studies have indicated that there may currently be enough demand for a Calgary to Edmonton high-speed rail line. However, experience elsewhere indicates that forecasting demand for a nonexisting rail service is often difficult. Populations, employment, incomes, and economic linkage between cities are hard to predict. Costs of using other types of transportation, like airline fares and gas prices, are also difficult to forecast. An expensive undertaking like a rail link requires reasonable certainty that there is enough demand to justify the investment.

Traffic on the Queen Elizabeth II highway has increased dramatically in recent years. The construction of a high-speed rail link is one way to reduce this congestion and its environmental effects. If congestion or bad weather conditions on the Queen Elizabeth II highway are a significant concern to travellers, there are already mass transit options in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor. Both Greyhound and Red Arrow offer daily limited stops and express bus services. Airline service is available for those who require faster transit. However, Albertans may appreciate another transit option.

The government's potential role in the high-speed rail link is yet to be determined. The current policy is that the rail should be a private-sector initiative, but that does not absolutely rule out government participation. A high-speed rail link is a nice idea whose time may not yet have come, but we should be prepared for the future. This motion encourages the government to continue to be forward thinking and innovative in preparing for the time when this link is clearly feasible. I encourage all members to vote in favour of this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you. We might as well all get on the official record as on-board. Right? It is – are you going to stand, Mr. Speaker, and tell me that I'm out of time?

The Deputy Speaker: Have you spoken on this motion before?

Mr. Bonko: I have not.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Proceed.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you for allowing me to continue.

I think it is a good opportunity here for us to be able to acquire the necessary land. We're not talking about actually building the high-speed rail, but we're talking about the acquisition of the land, which is very important to be able to have the rail. One day, 10 years from now maybe at the latest, we would be able to have that thing, but it'll take a lot of time to be able to construct it. But first and foremost, what the motion talks about is acquiring the land, and apparently we're already doing that. It would be great to have detailed updates as to how successful or unsuccessful or what sort of obstacles we're facing currently because, as we say, as land becomes more and more valuable, as the population increases, as Alberta's opportunity continues to expand, that's the number one concern.

So I'm glad that we are so far meeting very little opposition with regard to this. It looks like everyone is in support. I again would like to lend my support to this as well. I know that we are going to run out of time here quickly, so I just wanted to get on record as saying that I do support the motion, acquiring the land. Let's see where the residents of Alberta go from there with regard to their support for actually supporting the rail. So far, I would encourage all members to support the motion.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others?

Then I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to close debate.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Boy, it's a privilege to participate in a debate in this Assembly where lots of good ideas come up. It's all in the spirit of co-operation, and I thank all members for participating: Edmonton-Castle Downs for bringing forward an amendment that passed without a whisper of objection, the members for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Calgary-Lougheed, Edmonton-Rutherford, Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-Nose Hill, Calgary-Hays, and Edmonton-Decore.

I do notice that all those members who participated were from either Edmonton or Calgary, and I hope that doesn't indicate that this project is seen as strictly serving the two big cities because I think that it would be a great boon to the whole province, Red Deer most notably. If there was a stop in Red Deer, it could benefit very directly.

But as some of the ideas that have come out have been described, this could be the beginning of a very long-term rail network that connected Medicine Hat and Lethbridge and Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray and Banff or Jasper. It could be the beginning of an entire long-term transformation in transportation in this province. So it would have been great, if we had more time, to hear from members from outside the two big cities, but we don't have more time.

Some of the points that were brought up. We all agree that this is about looking at the future. This is about having a plan, having a vision and taking the province in that direction, and if we take the right steps now, we can move to that future much more smoothly and much more economically than if we just go willy-nilly and let

the chips fall as they may. So it's great to see a spirit of planning and looking to the future in here.

I agree with the Member from Edmonton-Decore that it would be useful once in a while for the government, perhaps the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation if he's the one overseeing the acquisitions of the land or acquisition of the rights-of-way, to give some updates, or maybe if his officials are following this debate, they would from time to time provide the Assembly with updates on how those acquisitions are going.

There are, of course, lots of ways to structure this. One model is as we do with roads, which is that the public pays for the roads, and the users of the roads pay, of course, taxes, and they cover the costs of their own vehicles. Maybe, therefore, there should be public support for the infrastructure and a private-sector operator. Maybe it's all public. Maybe it's all private. I have no idea. There are lots of options. We don't have to sort those out any time soon. But we do need to continue purchasing the land and the rights-of-way for this to ever even be a possibility.

So, Mr. Speaker, I close by thanking all members for the good-spirited and well-intentioned discussion here. I look forward to the possibility of this motion passing with the full support of the Assembly. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 as amended carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that we call it 6 p.m. and that when we reconvene at 7 p.m., we do so in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, May 14, 2007

7:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/14

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: We'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2007-08**

Energy

[Mr. Knight introduced the following departmental support staff: Mr. McFadyen, deputy minister; Mr. Borland, director, financial services; Ms. Denman, associate executive director, electricity division; and Mr. Rodgers, business unit leader, gas development]

Mr. Knight: They're accompanying me, and we will, certainly, I think, Mr. Chairman, have an opportunity to have some very good debate tonight. We had, of course, one opportunity earlier with respect to our main supplements, and we're looking forward to, again, you know, a good debate and to bring forward some of the issues with respect to Energy's budget.

So with that, I think, Mr. Chairman, we would proceed.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, good evening and thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise with great interest in regard to the Energy budget because, of course, the ministry really is a significant driver of our budget here in this province. It is generating a very large single portion of our expenditures, so it's absolutely incumbent for all of us to ensure that that budget is functioning in the most efficient way possible. Rather than on an expenditure side we're looking at more of a revenue side in regard to Energy. The New Democrat opposition is very concerned and watches with a close eye what developments do take place in the Energy budget because this is the money that provides us with the ability to supply public health care and education and infrastructure and just a whole range of important public institutions.

I would like to focus this evening just, first of all, on the royalty rates because we are discussing royalty rates at this juncture now, and of course there is a review of the royalty rate system. I think it's important because the public has an interest in where our royalty rates go, but for the average Albertan it seems a bit complicated. But, you know, with a little bit of understanding and clarification here this evening I think that we'll actually be able to shed some light on the royalty structure and, hopefully, have a more informed public, with this very important debate, as I said, providing a good portion of our expenditures.

My understanding is that back in 1996 a new generic royalty system was brought about that affects the production agreements in common terms. This did not affect previous agreements that were grandfathered into the current structure. Oil companies do not have to pay more than the 1 per cent royalty on recovered oil until they have recovered all of their capital costs, usually in six or seven years. This, of course, is in regard to the tar sands. After full cost recovery the royalty rate jumps to 25 per cent. The provincial government instituted the 1 per cent royalty rate in the 1990s, when oil prices were below \$20 a barrel. It is viewed as an incentive for companies to invest and to develop the oil sands. Previous to this reform the royalties were at the 30 per cent mark.

So, you know, my first question that I would like to ask the

ministry, please, is: where do we want to see these royalty rates going? It's the view of the Alberta New Democrats that the royalty structure has lagged behind, first of all, the windfall profits that energy companies have been enjoying over these past few years. Also, the royalty rate has in fact been out of step with the production of energy because, of course, we're shifting our focus from conventional crude sources to the tar sands.

In doing so, it seems anyway that there's some loss of expenditures in our royalties. In fact, it seems like our share of the royalty rates has actually gone down in these past couple of years. So I would like to ask for some clarification as to why specifically that has taken place and why we have not taken measures, you know, in the last three or four years to correct that. Of course, even if you made a modest adjustment to royalty rates to reflect the windfall profits that energy companies are enjoying now, I think we would see a significant increase in our revenues from royalties.

A calculation that the New Democrat caucus developed based on a very modest increase that increased along with the price of crude oil and decreased if the price went down: we estimate that with a modest adjustment we would be realizing an increase of at least \$3 million per day for royalty revenue coming into the province. So, you know, if people got wind of this or started to think about it in terms of daily expenditures, \$3 million per day, Mr. Chair, is quite a significant loss. In fact, I think we developed those numbers almost three years ago now, so that would be probably significantly higher.

So that's my first focus of questions, in regard to royalties and building a structure that would ensure that, in fact, we are going to realize an appropriate level of monies from our royalty structure.

The second question that I would like to ask and invite comment on is in regard to bitumen. You know, the bitumen, of course, is a product that is partially refined from the tar sands process yet not entirely refined. It's certainly refined to the point where it can travel. The Alberta New Democrats, again, have a very serious problem with the export of bitumen out of the province of Alberta because we believe – and I think that our understanding is becoming more widely shared by Albertans – that this is a nonrenewable resource that is mined here in the province at considerable cost. We believe – and others believe as well – that it should be refined here in the province as well so that we take advantage of all of the secondary jobs that come downstream from the processing of bitumen into a more finished product, even up to the point of different lubricants or gasoline in the petrochemical industry.

You know, we had some great foresight, I believe, in regard to the natural gas industry here in this province more than 40 or 50 years ago, when the natural gas was here and plentiful and affordable, and the government encouraged industrial development of that natural gas to break it down into the fertilizer and plastics industries that we see in Fort Saskatchewan. So here we are probably 50 years later with a similar opportunity, but if we start to set up the mechanism by which bitumen is exported out of the province, then, in fact, that is a lost opportunity. It's a loss of high-paying jobs, and it's a loss of revenue because, of course, when you make a value-added product, you can charge more money for it and increase your revenues once again.

You know, in concert with this, then, I would like to just emphasize and seek comment from the minister again on just how we are going to control the rate of development in this province if we are moving at such a breakneck speed to mine and process and export as much bitumen as we possibly can here in the province of Alberta right now. In fact, wouldn't it be more logical and perhaps reasonable to put a self-limiting factor into place, where we only mine as much bitumen as we can process with upgraders into a higher grade

finished product? This would be a natural limiting process that certainly wouldn't limit the economy because, of course, you're building a diversified secondary industry base based on upgrading and refining of bitumen and all the jobs that are associated with that, but then also you are perhaps putting a small limiting factor on how much of the raw bitumen is extracted at any given time. You mine it here, you refine it here, and you do that within the confines of the labour realities in the province, the infrastructure realities in the province, the environmental realities within the province, especially concerning water. Of course, there is a tremendous demand in both the extraction of bitumen and the refining and upgrading of bitumen into different oil products for using fresh water that's involved in those processes.

This is perhaps a nice sense of symmetry about the whole system. We're not just distorting the economy, digging these vast holes, and processing the bitumen to a very minimum amount to just be able to ship it down the line to refineries in the United States; rather, it's sort of more of a unified unit, we could say, where Alberta is enjoying all of the benefits that can be had from this wonderful natural resource that we have.

So I invite comment from the minister. Thanks.

7:10

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I certainly want to thank the member opposite for very constructive questions with respect to issues that our department faces and deals with on a daily basis. You know, the issue of the day, without a doubt – and I think the member brought it forward on a very constructive basis – is the idea around the royalties and the relative importance of this business, the energy industry, with respect to the province of Alberta.

I would support his comments by saying that the province of Alberta has a GDP somewhere in the neighbourhood now of \$200 billion a year. Mr. Chairman, about 50 per cent of that, somewhere between \$95 billion and \$100 billion, is relative to the energy industry. So the member opposite is absolutely right that this is a very critical piece of business with respect to how Alberta develops in the future, and the decisions that we make today relative to that industry are extremely important.

Mr. Chairman, the royalty system: again, the member is correct. He goes back and talks about the generic system that was put in place in '96/97. The question that he had is: where are royalties going? I think that in order for me to answer that question directly, I'll have to qualify that the present royalty review is being conducted. The Ministry of Finance is the lead with respect to the royalty review, so where royalties are going will depend upon how Albertans respond to the review. We will take into consideration the outcome of the review. Most certainly, this government is going to be very responsive to Albertans with respect to that issue. That will be addressed at a point in time when some indication comes to us with respect to the completion of the review.

Certainly, there are issues around the whole royalty system. Again, the member indicated the 1 per cent and 25 per cent after payout and a certain number of years, you know, that it takes these people to reach payout. The average now is about five years. The system responds quite well to most economic circumstances. We have a situation now where there are rising costs and considerations like that that need to be taken into consideration. Part and parcel of this revenue stream is the land sales that we have in the province that are rather unique to our industry and, again, our tax structure with respect to this industry.

So the royalty review: you know, I've been asked this a number of times, and really, Mr. Chairman, what I would suggest is that it's

not going to be my opinion. It's not going to be the opinion of the government that determines where royalties will go. As the member said: where are royalties going to go? We will be very consistent, I think, in respect to this review. We've been consistent all along and said that it will be open, it will be transparent, and at the end of the day we will listen to what Albertans and particularly what the panel have to say with respect to their report.

There was a question, Mr. Chairman, with respect to the business of bitumen, the mining of bitumen. Again, I think that it's fair to make some comments relative to bitumen because the resource base in bitumen in the province of Alberta is a world-class resource. A large portion of the bitumen production that takes place today is most certainly mining.

But, Mr. Chairman, as we move ahead with these projects, of course the member opposite knows very well that mining is actually the smaller end of that piece of business that will be conducted in the province over the next long number of years, I would suggest decades. Certainly, the in situ recovery of this resource is at least as important a piece of business and probably in the outgoing years would be a more important piece of this business than the mining is although, again, it's understandable that the mining today is relatively upmarket with respect to its visual context and that sort of thing. People have more of an opportunity, I think, to relate to the mining activity than they would do with in situ, which is, really, closer to what we would do with, you know, recovery of other resources.

There are kind of two questions here, I think, and I'll give a couple of answers. One was with respect to the natural gas, and I believe that was actually a question inside of this question. But on the idea that bitumen upgrading should be in some way directly connected to whatever bitumen production there is so that we would not produce more bitumen than we were able to either upgrade or refine in the province of Alberta, I would have to suggest, Mr. Chairman, that although it may have some attraction to certain individuals in Alberta, the idea really can't hold water, quite simply.

I think, again, the member would probably know that we produce about 1.1 million barrels, something in that neighbourhood, today: 700,000 barrels of it are upgraded; 400,000 barrels a day of this bitumen leave the province of Alberta as a bitumen product that's either diluted or it could be synbit, which is a mixture of synthetic oil and bitumen or bitumen and some kind of a diluent. That is a major piece of our business in the province of Alberta. If we were to go out today and say, "Well, you can't ship it; if we can't refine it, you can't produce it," we would shut down 400,000 barrels of production from the province of Alberta. I'm afraid that I would not be able to support us doing that.

I think also that it might be worth while to point out here – and perhaps we can discuss this a little bit more. Mr. Chairman, I think that if we're going to get value maximization in the province for these resources, we have to provide a basket of products that we can supply to clients in Alberta, in Canada, in North America, and certainly beyond our borders and internationally. So the whole concept around the proper balance with respect to developing these resources is also value maximization, and that means developing a whole basket of products that would take us into the integrated energy strategy, from bitumen to synthetic oil to synbit to bitumen that's got diluent, to the idea that bitumen upgrading refinery off-gases would end up in the petrochemical industry, and these again would produce value maximization and additional products for the province of Alberta to ship to Albertans and North Americans.

7:20

Certainly, some of our products, of course, as you know, Mr.

Chairman, already reach international markets. The idea that natural gas is being expended at a rate that is not sustainable with respect to what's happening in the oil sands industry: again, I would suggest that when you look at the conventional natural gas, conventional methane resources in the province of Alberta, these resources, like any hydrocarbon resource, I think, globally are finite. But there isn't really anybody that I know – I mean, there are all kinds of people that have theories about how long and at what rate you can produce for how long and that type of thing. The comments are well received, and we're aware . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, the time allocated has elapsed.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the minister's comments. You know, this is a very critical issue that I just want to touch on very briefly, this bitumen export, because people understand that it's a nonrenewable resource, and so many people have a job that's associated with the oil and gas industry.

It's not a question of an either/or. I mean, certainly the scale to which we have exports already is clear, and I'm not advocating that you just shut off the tap. That's certainly not realistic, nor would it be practical. But you set in motion a mechanism by which you increase the percentage that does stay here, and you look twice at whether you need to approve five or six or seven new big projects up in the tar sands to continue that process because what we've set in place is the mechanism by which export is becoming the norm.

You know, this will only be exacerbated by the continuous approval of new projects once again, a tripling or a quadrupling of tar sands production in the near future. So we're suggesting that we just change the course, the trend, not shut off the tap of bitumen exports but change the way in which we approach this. I think the basic idea of mining it here, refining it here, be that in situ or the actual mining, resonates with the public, not just for insignificant reasons. They know that that is their product. They own that product. We want to make sure we get the maximum value for it.

My second set of questions and focus will move to electricity then, please, if possible. I've been watching the unfolding of the development of our electricity grids and production very closely over these past few years because, of course, we are in the midst of rebuilding or redefining how our electricity system is going to function here in this province. Indeed, the choices we make now are what we're going to be stuck with for the next 20, 30, or 40 years in regard to electricity production. I think it really is an important point to take a step back and decide on a course of action that is sustainable and that is going to be in keeping with the changing conditions of our province: increased population and the like. Certainly, again, the New Democrats are not advocating somehow reducing people's electricity consumption overall in the population but, rather, looking for a different way by which we produce electricity and deliver electricity too.

My first question, then, is one that we've discussed before, and I'm hoping that the public are going to hear something good here very quickly. When are we going to take off the wind cap on electricity, and how are we going to help facilitate the wind industry to produce sustainable electricity? This is something that we recognize. I'm not sure exactly why the decision was made to put a cap on the wind production. Certainly, most of the arguments were quite spurious, I would suggest. We know that there is a tremendous amount of investment interest in wind production in the province of Alberta and investors waiting to make that move. But, you know, we all know that investment capital doesn't stick around forever, and the wind is pretty much around in different parts of the

world. It doesn't just blow in Alberta. It's so important to seize this opportunity while there is interest and not scare them away with the cap. I know that we are going to in fact change or remove that cap for wind production, and I think everyone is waiting with bated breath to know exactly when.

My next question is in regard to other sustainable energy production, and remember that we're talking about a basket of electricity production here. Certainly, we're not suggesting that we can just supplant coal production in one fell swoop and move on to sustainable solar panels or what have you all at once but, rather, that we set in motion the process to let those sustainable resource developments produce a better percentage of the electricity.

I've been following with great interest what's happened in Ontario recently and what they've been doing in Germany for quite a long time, and that is having a variable price on different forms of electricity according to how it's produced and how clean it is. This is the logical next step for the concept that we've been battling around, which is net metering, right? Certainly, we're all waiting, again, with expectancy to see when the net metering regulations will be in place. What you really want is the ability for people to produce that electricity on a local level and get the price that makes it profitable.

I wondered why, when I visited Germany several years ago, in the whole village that we were staying in with my wife's family, almost everybody had solar panels. I thought: oh, isn't that great? But then I only realized recently why that is so. Solar electricity has a different price than electricity produced from hydro or nuclear, and it's a higher price. So it becomes more valuable to produce that solar energy, and people can make money off it.

That's the way, so often, the world turns. It's not such a bad thing, really, to have that self-interest built into the production of microelectricity and make it worth people's while so that you're not just saying: oh, well, I can't put in solar panels or geothermal or wind because the electricity is only worth, whatever, 6 cents or so. If you make a variable pricing, where the wind is that much more and the solar is that much more, then suddenly people will look twice at these things.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful legacy for us to look across our great cities here in Alberta and see solar panels on people's roofs not because they're just feeling morally conscious about this but are actually making money from producing this electricity and because we've set up a way to strengthen our electricity grid in the widest possible way, not just saying, "Well, we need to build more coal plants" but because we have literally thousands of electricity producers here and there and everywhere helping to strengthen the grid.

So this is, I think, a fascinating thing that we have to look at here in Alberta: opening the door through net metering, which I was so happy to see the minister making some positive overtures about. This is the logical step to make net metering actually work. The Alberta New Democrats fought very hard, of course, for net metering, and we're happy for that, and we're welcome to take it to that next level, where people will actually be able to take advantage of it.

My next question – sorry to have so many here in such close succession – is talking about building and strengthening the grid. You know, one of the most important things about electricity production is that you want to produce the electricity as close to where it's consumed as possible because, of course, you have line loss of electricity. The further away the production is happening, I think people are removed from where the electricity comes from as well. Even just here in Edmonton – 40 or 50 kilometres away is where we produce so much of the electricity – ask the average

person, and they have no idea where the electricity comes from. Having better education, a closer connection to your power, I think, increases people's education and consciousness about it.

So I'm asking: do we really need to build so many big long-distance lines like the 500 kV line between Wabamun and Calgary when we could potentially have the capacity to produce electricity more locally in southern Alberta? Certainly, the city of Calgary and southern Alberta are growing tremendously. I was just overwhelmed, as I always am, when I was in Calgary this past weekend to see the growth in the economy. It's all quite wonderful. You know, why would we have to burn coal all the way up here in Wabamun to ship that electricity all the way down to Calgary? It doesn't seem like the most efficient way to serve the needs of southern Albertans.

7:30

Of course, we've been working with the residents and people who have been raising concerns about the 500 kV line. You know, I just really wonder if we actually needed that 500 kV line or if it was really excessive. So the next logical question is that if we did increase that line so much, to a 500 kV line, what percentage of that kV line is designed to in fact export electricity as a merchant line? Considering that the tie-line to Montana is being put in place, then are we looking at electricity production here in Alberta to export electricity to the United States? Certainly, that doesn't seem like an efficient use of our natural resources. Of course, burning coal here in Alberta to produce electricity to ship to the United States just doesn't seem to be a logical use of our resources.

You know, the whole issue about building these lines as well: people have a big concern in my constituency and across the province about who's going to pay for them.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, good comments and good questions. The member kind of started his second round of questioning with respect to bitumen exports. I suggest that perhaps I should open that comment with a little history here. The province of Alberta has exported oil since 1947, 60 years that the province has exported oil, and all kinds of other products followed along after that. Certainly, it is not a new business. We are producing in the neighbourhood of 2 million barrels a day currently, and we export about 1.1 million barrels internationally. About half a million barrels a day, I believe, is consumed in other areas of Canada, and of course the remainder is domestic with respect to Alberta.

So, Mr. Chairman, as we move ahead with the development of this resource, certainly I think it's only fair to say that the oil sands are one more piece of Alberta's continuing success story with respect to the hydrocarbon industry. When we start to look at things like carbonate plays and deep, tight gas, the possibility of coal-bed methane playing a role – and again there were some suggestions about natural gas. I sort of ran off the end there, didn't quite make the end of my statement. We've got about 40 tcf of conventionals in the province of Alberta that has been delineated at this point, but certainly the geological survey would suggest that there could be as much as 500 tcf of methane in coal in the province of Alberta. So as we move ahead and develop some of these resources in a very environmentally sustainable manner, these pieces, again, as I suggested earlier, will begin to fit together pretty well.

[Mr. Prins in the chair]

Mr. Chairman – and a new Mr. Chairman, I might add – getting

into the questions with respect to electricity, the grid, the generation, the restructuring, and so on, the member indicated that we would not want to make decisions that we are stuck with in the future. Again, you know, I would have to agree with that. We don't, and we won't. Most certainly, the restructuring and the new Electric Utilities Act, that came in in 2003, offer many advantages with respect to not being stuck because areas in that legislation, like any legislation most certainly, can be brought forward and altered to meet the requirements as we move ahead.

The restructuring. I would suggest that when we go back and take a look at where we were prerestructuring and where we are today, the province of Alberta itself has changed very dramatically. Certainly, I would suggest that although people see increases in the cost of their energy, I wouldn't argue with that. It's true. You know, I would again say that in any of these discussions leading up to where we are today and leading up to my responsibility now with respect to this issue, there was no point at which I would have suggested that we could somehow make the price of energy go down. It's a reality.

What we have done with the restructuring is indicate to Albertans that this system is pay-as-you-go. We will not leave energy debts for future generations to pay. So the cost of your energy is open; it's shown to you. If you consume it, you pay for it. Again, you know, there can be all kinds of discussions around whether that is or isn't proper social policy, but I'm suggesting to you that this government believes that we should not leave these kinds of bills behind for future generations to pay.

The question came up: when does the wind cap come off? Again, a very good question. In fact, what this government has done – through the Alberta Energy Research Institute the wind industry has put together a committee to study the wind resource in the province of Alberta. So we're going to study this for a year. When we're finished, we'll know where the wind blows and when, 24/7, 365 days, and we'll figure out what the proper balance is and how much of this wind energy can sustainably and reliably be added to the grid.

The only reason that the cap is there now is quite simply that we have to be responsible to all consumers and to all users of electricity in the province. It would not be, in our estimation, responsible at this point in time to lift the cap when we don't know what effect that would have on the grid. You know, give or take 10 per cent, at the moment we use just under 9,000 megs a day. The cap is at 900 megawatts, and by the way, we're not close to that. We're somewhere around half of that capability actually being generated now. But this government is looking forward to in a year's time and a bit, when we have an opportunity to get the information from this study, moving that cap.

Would we remove the cap and throw it wide open? I would suggest to the member again that that may not be the most responsible way for us to deal with this situation. However, we do see that wind energy has a very important role to play, and we will maximize wind energy with respect to electrical generation in the province over a very short space of time.

Mr. Chairman, there was a question on sustainable electricity. Again, a good question, a positive question. What I can tell you is that on the biofuel and biogenerating side these things are right now in one of the programs that we have. They're connected together. We have a \$239 million program that's come forward this year. We've actually given out the first amounts of money with respect to that initiative for biofuel and biogeneration. So on the biogeneration side there's 6 cents a kilowatt hour available for people that get into the production of bioelectricity.

I might also say that we're working with the regulations. We'll have regulations with respect to microgeneration and the business of

– you know, we’re considering net metering, but net metering is really only applicable when you get to a certain scale. Net metering for people with two or three solar panels or one of the small homeowner’s wind generators is not really a very viable solution. So what we’re looking at there is net billing so that you would build or run your meter one way or the other, and at the end of a month you would be billed for the net that you took off the grid, if that’s the case.

7:40

I might also say that a number of years ago the province was very proactive with respect to the generation of bioelectricity and renewable wind energy. The province contracted for renewables in wind and, certainly, biomass generation in Grande Prairie. As a matter of fact, the biogenerator that’s operating now in the city of Grande Prairie – it’s about a 20-megawatt facility – would not be there today if it weren’t for the fact that the Alberta government through Alberta Infrastructure made a long-term commitment and purchased electricity from that biogenerator.

It gave them the opportunity then to go to their financiers and say: “Gentlemen, this is what we have. We have the government of Alberta; the province is behind us. They’ve contracted this power.” We’re continuing to work with that industry in that way and in others. We have programs in place and, certainly, solid contracts in place to support that industry.

There was a question on distributed generation and whether or not the 500 kVa line that is in front of the EUB, proposed to be constructed between basically Edmonton and Calgary . . . [Mr. Knight’s speaking time expired]

The Acting Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. It’s a pleasure to rise and address the Minister of Energy with respect to his estimates. I want to pick up a little bit where my colleague from Edmonton-Calder – well, not where he left off but where he went with respect to the whole question of tar sands development and the issue of bitumen. I know that the minister would prefer oil sands. That’s a nice, sanitized-sounding word that’s been carefully chosen by the industry to replace the original term that was more commonly used: the tar sands. So you say tomato and we say tomato. They mean the same thing, but it does have a little different connotation.

Now, with respect to that, I wanted to follow up with the minister on a comment that he made in the first round of questions, and I wrote this down. He said: it is not the government that will determine where royalties will go. I would appreciate it if the minister would elaborate a little bit on that statement. If not the government, who? Perhaps he was referring to the committee that’s looking at royalty structures right now in the province, but I certainly assumed that they’re going to be giving a report to the government, much like the housing task force did, and that the government will make some choices and some decisions with respect to that report. But if not the government, then who?

Now, the minister also indicated that we have about 700,000 barrels per day of oil sands production – did I get that number correct? – and 400,000 a day which is not upgraded. Are those approximately the numbers? I just want to make sure. The plans to increase the amount of unprocessed bitumen that’s exported out of the province: I was looking at some information about the Alberta Clipper project, which initially would increase the export by 450,000 barrels a day and, eventually, up to 800,000 barrels a day of bitumen exported to the United States, as well as the Keystone project, which will increase the amount by 430,000 so that’s about 1,000,230

barrels a day increase on top of the current 400,000, so basically four times as much by my calculation.

So the question is: is there an upside limit that the government is prepared to enforce with respect to the amount of unprocessed bitumen that can be exported from the province? Are they prepared to take steps with respect to either of those two projects or future projects to limit the export of unprocessed bitumen from our province?

The minister also indicated that we need to provide a basket of products to maximize our value from the resources of the province. My question with respect to this is: how does including a steadily increasing proportion of unprocessed bitumen within that basket increase or maximize the value on our resources? I think that statement needs some explanation. It certainly seems to me just as a layperson intuitive that if you maximize the value-added in your natural resource, you will increase or maximize the value to Albertans of the resource. So those are some of the questions I had with respect to that.

The minister also indicated that he didn’t want to leave any bills unpaid. I think he was making that reference in connection with the energy prices paid by consumers in the province if I’m not mistaken. There is another issue of bills unpaid, and that has to do with the environmental liability left by these projects and whether or not the government monitors those things, calculates them, tracks them, and what the formula is for allocating the costs for environmental liabilities as a result of oil and gas exploration and tar sands development as well as coal-bed methane. So I would be very interested in knowing just how the government keeps track of environmental liabilities, clean-up costs and so on, and how great those are.

I believe it was in last year’s Auditor General’s annual report, Mr. Chairman, that indicated that the environmental liability for cleaning up conventional oil and gas exploration environmental liabilities was about \$2 billion, and that, in fact, there were no plans in place to fund that. I would like to know how that’s handled.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about natural gas. This is, perhaps, one of the most valuable resources that we have as a province. It certainly produces the greatest proportion of royalty revenues for the provincial government. One of the things I was surprised to learn when I first was elected to the Chamber and started looking into some of these things is that we get the lion’s share of our nonrenewable royalty revenue from natural gas, not from oil. So it’s very significant.

I also remember seeing a few years ago some lists of the proven reserves with respect to natural gas. I’d be interested in knowing how the government policy with respect to allowing export of gas or development of gas relative to proven reserves is calculated and whether or not that’s changed in the last decade or so. The recollection that I have is that we are running down our proven reserves of natural gas very, very severely. I would like to know what the minister’s view is of that and how that relates to the export of natural gas from the province and how much of our natural gas and at what rate it’s being shipped south and how long we will as a province have supplies of natural gas available to the people of this province.

I would also like to know the minister’s view with respect to the continuing use of natural gas in production of crude from the tar sands projects. I know that a recent document I’ve seen relating to a conference in Houston about the future of Alberta talked about getting off natural gas. Kicking the habit of natural gas I think was the title of a section of the report. I’d like to know what the government plans with respect to that and what some of the issues that they’re struggling with might be.

7:50

I'd also like to know from the minister what his view is of the viability of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline, where that is, and when and if that pipeline or the other pipeline is built, the impact that that's going to have on natural gas and supply of natural gas in this province.

Another point that I'd like to ask about is the extraction of the volatiles from natural gas. I know that under the Lougheed and Getty governments there was a requirement that the various chemicals that were useful for a petrochemical industry had to be stripped out and that only the methane gas would be shipped for export south. That's been changed. I wonder what's behind that and why the government made that change and if they would be prepared to consider changing it back again so we could promote a petrochemical industry in this province.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I guess I'll go a little bit quicker because I want to make sure that I catch up to the questions that I didn't quite finish with the previous speaker. Most certainly, the thing that I want to get to is the idea around whether or not the transmission system in the province of Alberta needs to be fortified and whether or not the fortification of that is or isn't good for Albertans, generally speaking. I would suggest that we, in fact, do a lot of distributed generation in the province of Alberta. However, some of our major generating facilities are not, not dissimilar to many other places globally, as handy to the load as we might like them to be. So, most certainly, a transmission system is, in fact, not only desirable but critical for us.

The city of Calgary's Enmax Corporation have indicated recently that they're talking about distributed generation in southern Alberta, about 1,200 megawatts of capacity. They came out with a statement, a news release, one day last week – I can't remember; I think it might've been Tuesday last week – that indicated their full support for the grid strengthening, the 500 kV line, and the fact that whether or not there was distributed generation in Calgary, that strengthening was absolutely necessary.

Mr. Chairman, Montana Alberta Tie, the MATL, is not part of any discussion around providing electricity for Calgary or southern Alberta or, for that matter, really, the situation with respect to internal power in the province of Alberta other than that we know that we are very, very weak with respect to tie-lines into and out of the province of Alberta. We believe that MATL, which is, by the way, a merchant line, would be very advantageous to Albertans because of the fact that it can provide us with a higher degree of reliability in our system.

The questions that came. I'll try to get through all of these. Hopefully, the member opposite will bring some of them back if I don't get them all. One sentence had about four questions in it. I didn't catch all of them.

How does bitumen export maximize value? He keyed on to that, and I'm glad that he repeated: maximize value. In fact, other than the statements that have been made around value-added, which are good statements, it's a bit of a catchphrase that we in the Department of Energy feel now doesn't really cover what it is that we want to say. What we want to say is that these resources for Albertans will have a maximum value for the people of the province of Alberta.

How does exporting bitumen fit into that picture? Well, indeed, it fits in very well, Mr. Chairman, because one thing that is difficult to do with bitumen the way the system has evolved is to actually get good valuation for bitumen. So if can get merchant purchase in bitumen exports, that gives us a much better ability to set a base as to what valuation we can place on bitumen and, of course, as the

member very well knows, this is crucial to us with respect to our royalty system and collecting the revenues that the owners of this resource deserve. So, most certainly, that's one of the areas.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The other thing is if you have an ability to supply a range of products to customers rather than saying: the only thing that we would give you is something like syncrude or something like transportation fuel. It's not too hard for us today in Alberta to imagine what would happen with respect to the bitumen production if you have a situation where you're going to say: any bitumen that's mine in Alberta will be upgraded and refined in Alberta. We've heard these statements, and they're good statements. The only thing is that bitumen or any upgraded product that might come from that, like kerosene, jet B fuel, transportation diesel fuel, are all marketable. They're all good products. They're all good commodities.

But like every other commodity – for instance, I can just use barley or wheat as an example. If the province of Alberta is knee deep in wheat and you can't move it, what's wheat worth? To us, nothing. If we were standing knee deep in bitumen – and good Lord help us because we'd need some fairly tall rubber boots. Bitumen valuation and the fact that this product can find markets and those markets help us maximize the value of this particular resource for Albertans, the ability to supply markets with a variety of products: those are the reasons that bitumen export helps maximize the value.

Mr. Chairman, there were suggestions that the environmental liability in the province of Alberta is large and growing. Again, I think that to the greatest degree possible environmental liability is part of the consideration with respect to approvals, and no approvals are given for any projects to move ahead in the province of Alberta without proper environmental assessment and environmental approvals.

Lease remediation. I believe that that was perhaps where the member was headed. I don't know if it's a question with respect to oil sands per se, but lease remediation in the province of Alberta has been, you know, successful to date. We have of course got leases in the province that become homeless for one reason or another, and there is an orphan well program that we have in the province to address the situation with respect to leases that need remediation and there isn't a responsible party at the other end. So, in fact, the province isn't on the hook for this. We collect from industry and put this money aside in an orphan well program to do those types of remediation.

Certainly, with respect to natural gas: why do we export natural gas, and we're definitely running out of natural gas, and all of that. Again, those discussions take place daily. Daily you hear people on both sides of the issue: "We're running out of gas. There'll be no more gas. Pretty soon methane's done." Well, I think I can let the member opposite know that methane, which is the basis of the natural gas we're dealing with, Mr. Chairman, is arguably one of the most common compounds on this planet. There's no shortage of methane. The unfortunate part for us, I suppose, in certain places where consumption of methane is high: the methane isn't where we want it, and it's not necessarily in the form we'd like to have it in. There's no shortage of methane. As I indicated, just from our coal-bed methane alone, there is – not our numbers – geological survey indicating probably 500 tcf of methane in coal in the province of Alberta. So, certainly, not a shortage.

8:00

Gasifying coal. We've got literally hundreds and hundreds of years of coal available, and gasification of coal is another way that

we can bolster the methane production in the province of Alberta if that's required.

The member very correctly brought me up short with respect to a comment that I made, that the government won't determine where royalties go. My statement should have been – and I will stand corrected. This department is what I was expressing, that our department doesn't determine where royalties will go. My colleague is absolutely right. With this situation with respect to royalties this government has a responsibility with respect to the royalty structure in the province. What I intended to indicate was that the Department of Energy and this minister would not direct where royalties will go.

I think that we've covered most of the issues.

Mr. Chairman, the amount of upgrading certainly that takes place in the province of Alberta or generally speaking, I would suggest, in North America is dependent to a degree on refining capacity. Of course, refineries are constructed specific to their supply, to their feedstock, and to a degree there is some requirement for us to attempt to match those refinery feedstock variabilities.

The Hydrocarbon Upgrading Task Force, Mr. Chairman, provides a forum for government and industry stakeholders . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, your time allocation has now elapsed. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that we're covering a lot of ground in fairly short time frames. If the minister doesn't get to anything and wishes to, you know, provide us an answer later in writing, that's perfectly all right as well.

I want to just go back and deal with a couple of things. The question of the export of bitumen and the dramatic increases in the export that are in the works, that are planned: is the government going to develop a very clear policy with respect to this issue and how decisions will be made in the future and instructing the AEUB or its successor bodies with respect to the amount or the percentage or the value of unprocessed bitumen that can be exported? The question that I would have – and I know that the minister in a previous response talked about it not being advisable to just, you know, cut off the 400,000 barrels per day that are being exported now, but could we not set a cap? Could we not say that this is the maximum that we're going to allow and deal with it in that way?

Certainly, the argument that we need to find a way to determine the price of unprocessed bitumen is an interesting one, but I really question why we would be making decisions to permit a quadrupling of the export of raw bitumen to the United States from our province simply in search of a price. That doesn't make sense to me, Mr. Chairman, but what does make sense to me is that we're having limits on the ability to process it here and we're in a rush or the Americans particularly are in a rush to maximize the amount of oil that they receive from Alberta and they don't mind building some industrial infrastructure and creating some jobs in the process. The question I have is whether or not that's in Alberta's interests or just in the interests of the United States market. I think that's enough on bitumen.

I do want to come back to natural gas a little bit because I didn't feel I got a very precise answer on the whole question of proven reserves. I assume that the department has a method of calculating reserves and pays quite close attention to that, so I would be interested in knowing what the department's approach is to that and what their numbers show in terms of the proven reserves of natural gas. The minister didn't have time, obviously, to deal with the stripping of the volatiles from the natural gas and that policy and whether or not that policy is under consideration again or the use of

natural gas in the production of synthetic crude oil in the tar sands. Also, I had asked about the viability of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline and how that would affect our industry.

I just want to touch very briefly on nuclear power. My colleague from Edmonton-Calder may wish to raise this some more, but the question of nuclear power has come up, and I would like to know if the government has any programs or plans in place to support nuclear power in the tar sands or elsewhere, whether or not it's received any specific proposals from any proponents of nuclear power and just generally what the minister's view is with respect to the problems and the benefits of nuclear power.

I want to talk a little bit about district energy, which is an issue that I had something to do with in my previous life as a city councillor with the city of Edmonton. District energy, of course, is the use of waste heat in order to supply heat energy to urban developments, primarily urban, and it's most commonly used in northern European cities. Entire major cities in northern Europe are heated through the use of district energy. There's also an alternate form, which is district cooling, where sources of cold water, generally, are available. They provide air conditioning to major downtown centres in many cities in the world. This approach is environmentally very beneficial. It makes maximum use of our available energy sources, and in certain cases it's very cost-effective. The technology in Europe is quite advanced with respect to this. I would just ask if there are any district energy programs under consideration or if the department has really looked at this.

I know that NRCan has a program to promote district energy. They actually organized tours of municipal officials and some provincial officials to northern European countries to tour their facilities. There's a wide range, from small biomass-type situations right up to major developments that heat and cool major cities like Stockholm or Copenhagen or Helsinki. I just would encourage the minister to take a look at this because I think it would help us meet some of our obligations with respect to greenhouse gases as well as make effective use of our existing sources of energy.

I think, Mr. Chairman, that covers the points that I want to make, and I would be happy to turn my remaining minutes, however few they may be, over to the minister, if that's allowed under the rules, so that he can answer all the questions in full. Thank you.

8:10

Mr. Knight: The member opposite is so accommodating – it just makes me feel warm all over – with respect to the energy business.

I'm going to get to every one of the questions, I think, this time, Mr. Chairman, but I'm going to start a bit at the back and kind of move to the front of the questions. The situation around district energy and district heat, most certainly we're very aware. This government has been working with the city of Grande Prairie for about three years. They have, as I had indicated, a biomass-generating facility in Grande Prairie that produces about 20 megawatts of power. Along with that, they produce enough residual heat to provide heat for probably eight or 10 of the major buildings in the city of Grande Prairie. This government being proactive and working with the city of Grande Prairie and with other people in the district heat industry has changed the Natural Gas Price Protection Act so that it will allow for district heat offsets, for that heat to be offset the same amount that rebates would be under a situation where they would have burned natural gas for the same amount of heat produced. So, indeed, we're working with proponents with respect to that. The city of Calgary also is working on a district heating system, and again we will be interested in working with them with respect to that issue.

The nuclear power question is a big question. Most certainly, I've

said this many times and will repeat it here again tonight: we as a government are not a proponent for nor a detractor from any energy proposal that may come forward. There have been proponents with respect to the nuclear issue, looking a number of years now, I believe, but most certainly it came to my attention about a month ago. I've met, not dissimilar to meetings that I might have had with any of the other industry players, all the way from service companies to the majors, Mr. Chairman. If they ask for a meeting, if they want us to listen to their proposals, I'm open to doing that. I have listened to one particular proponent of a nuclear proposal, and I would presume there are more. This government will not get involved in any nuclear facilities in the province of Alberta until there have been open discussions with the constituents and the residents of the province of Alberta. So we're not in the business of doing anything at the moment. We watch and listen, and if people want to come and speak to me about the issue, I am open to those discussions.

Natural gas reserves came up again. Most certainly, one of the things that I'd like to point out to the member is that – and he'll remember this. Prior to the Alliance line being constructed in Alberta – and we got an awful lot of flak over some parts of that particular situation because we were exporting gas and exporting jobs from the province, and again, you know, it's a commodity – and having us connected to the areas in the Midwest, where that commodity was useful, we were standing knee deep in natural gas in the province of Alberta. I can tell the member quite honestly – I was in that business in the middle of that, and it wasn't pretty. It was very, very difficult. If you want to check the records – well, I'd suggest even six months prior to the Alliance line coming on stream and six months to a year later – and then calculate the difference in the price of that commodity and the royalty that Albertans received in the meantime, that piece of business, quite honestly, Mr. Chairman, was a huge win for Albertans. It provided, probably, as the member has stated, the largest portion of revenue from royalties for Albertans certainly in the ensuing years from the time the Alliance was put on because it made the whole commodity from Alberta sensitive to a commodity price internationally. It restructured our whole pricing arrangement and, by doing that, restructured the amount of royalties that Albertans receive.

Alberta's basin still has a lot of life. We've got reserve additions that come on continuously. They're price sensitive, and when you get prices in that \$4, \$5, \$6 range, we don't see a lot of additions. When the price of natural gas rises to the \$7 or \$8 range, people get more interested. Most certainly, drilling increases, and we get an increased amount of reserve additions. The last couple of years we've sustained our reserve base. New additions and depletions are pretty much balanced, and that includes our conventional reserves and CBM.

We're back to where we started from, hon. member, with a little bit of a discussion again at the end here with respect to bitumen and bitumen exports and a suggestion that there's nothing planned here and that, you know, we should at the very least perhaps cap the amount of bitumen exports. Again, I think that for this government that is probably not an option that we would entertain.

We certainly understand that there are many plans by industry players with respect to the movement of product. A pipeline, you know, can move more than a single product. So on the connection with respect to pipelines and somebody coming along and saying: "We'd like to build a pipeline to move 180,000 barrels a day. We'd like to build one that can move 320,000. These people would like to build one that can move 400,000 barrels a day," those are projects that people are bringing forward. I would suggest that, to my knowledge, they're not approved. Those projects aren't approved today; they're in process. Most certainly, we will be very diligent

and vigilant with respect to the owners of the resource that would move in any form in those pipelines.

To suggest, I think, that this piece of business, again, may not be good for Albertans, I've got to just go back to the situation that I discussed with respect to the gas pipelines, dissimilar in many ways but similar in some ways. We have just come forward with an incremental ethane extraction program so that with the value of the natural gas liquids that are in the system, generally speaking, in the province of Alberta, not in any one particular piece of pipe or another but in the system, we can find a way to work with the petrochemical industry, with suppliers, with producers, and arrive at a situation where we can maximize the value of those natural gas liquids for Albertans. I find it very exciting. I think that we'll be able to move ahead.

Of course, as the member knows, the petrochemical industry in the province of Alberta is the largest in Canada. Certainly, in our integrated energy strategy, in the way we see these pieces fit together as we move ahead, we're certainly keen on maintaining that, and we're confident that not only will we maintain, but we will continue to build on that.

On the idea of a cap on exports I think that with all due respect to the member, it would be my opinion that it is not well founded because you have a situation where there may be times when certain customers that we would have for our product would be able to receive more and sometimes less of a particular mix or blend of a product. When you start trying to put artificial caps in the way and you begin to tinker with the natural market that develops around these types of products, I think that in most cases what you see happening is restriction and restrictive practices, and you end up creating situations where our players are disadvantaged in the marketplace. Therefore, at the end of the day Albertans are disadvantaged with respect to the maximum value that we can garner for them with respect to any of these resources.

I think, Mr. Chairman, I got to the questions that we had. I want to just add that the hydrocarbon upgrading demonstration program that we're doing . . . [Mr. Knight's speaking time expired]

8:20

The Deputy Chair: Are we done with Energy? Would you like to move on?

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Maybe what I'll do is just ask five minutes of questions, and then we'll bring it around.

Well, you know, it's interesting what the minister is suggesting here, Mr. Chair, because we have a situation now with natural gas and potentially with bitumen where, yes, you let full-steam rolling of that product across the border for export – and certainly we're not opposed to exporting per se – but this full steam ahead approach creates a number of problems: (a) you're not getting that value-added back here, (b) you are creating an expectation in the market, especially south of the border, and (c) there are provisions in NAFTA which will actually compel you to continue to produce and export at that level.

So once you lock yourself into that model, aren't you creating a situation where we are going to lose that value-added component? Aren't you in fact not getting the maximum value for that raw material because you're letting it go without having that value-added processing stamped onto it? That makes it more valuable. I think that's a question we need to answer and answer very quickly because, of course, once we set in motion that level of bitumen export, aren't we going to be compelled to continue to do so under the provisions of NAFTA and under the provisions of creating that market direction? So that's, I think, a big question we need to ask ourselves here this evening and otherwise.

You know, like I said before as well, this is the revenue that drives so much of our budget here, so we can't play games with it. This whole notion that we'll take some time and we'll dilly-dally about with this royalty review: maybe we need to in fact not increase the royalties because of the provisions that the federal government are putting in in terms of tougher environmental standards. I'm sincerely hoping – and I think all Albertans are – that we will keep that extra value through royalties here in the province instead. By not doing anything, taking action or delaying, is the federal government not in fact moving in on that same revenue with great speed and disadvantaging Albertans potentially?

There seems to be a lack of co-ordination here. People can see where the golden goose is. We're not going to let them kill the golden goose by any means, but are we going to sell off portions thereof through the federal government's initiatives and not keep the money here at home through moving quickly on the royalties? You're always going to get complaints about royalty rates being changed. Certainly, the industry is not going to greet it with open arms, but they also know that this change is imminent. So isn't it better to move quickly and prudently on the royalty rates so that we get their maximum value?

There are two questions there. Number one, by setting in motion this massive increase in export of bitumen and natural gas to the United States, aren't we endangering our revenue stream and locking ourselves into an untenable situation in regard to NAFTA?

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, we've got about five minutes here to kind of conclude. What I'd like to do first of all is get something on the record here that I had intended to do to answer this member's question and, certainly, the leader's question as well, and that is that we have a hydrocarbon upgrading demonstration program going forward in the province of Alberta. We're going to invest a hundred million dollars in demonstrating new technologies that help our energy system to more efficiently convert energy resources to value-added products while minimizing environmental impact. So I think that what I'm suggesting here is pretty much what the members opposite have indicated they would like to see, and that is that we will find ways to continue to increase the amount of value maximization and the refining and upgrading of these products in the province.

With respect to the royalty system, again, to just go back to that, the member opposite has indicated that we're kind of doing this little review and that it's nice and comfortable and that we're dilly-dallying. I'm going to try to address that situation by indicating, Mr. Chairman, that this thing was engaged in January this year, and we're looking for a report to come forward in the August/September time frame.

Mr. Chairman, you know that this is not a slow process. We're not dilly-dallying. These folks have gone out, and they're taking a very concerted effort to come up with the answers. They've already gone through three, I believe, of the public consultations with respect to this issue, receiving very good input, and certainly we look forward to those results.

The situation around us kind of sitting on our hands and moaning and groaning while the feds move in: most certainly, again, the only way that, I would suggest, there's anything anywhere close to the feds moving in would have to do with the most recent situation around carbon taxes and that kind of thing. I'd like to just point out to the member that we were first in this business, and there's no doubt about that. The federal structure mirrors a lot of what Alberta

has already done. We do have some concerns and are addressing concerns with them on a continuing basis with respect to how they're implementing their program, and we will continue to fight for Albertans with respect to that.

I'd like to say that there's co-operation there as well. We have a carbon capture and storage panel, a blue-ribbon panel, that NRCan and the Department of Energy in Alberta are jointly sponsoring. Our deputy minister sits on that panel, and we're certainly, again, moving forward with respect to the issue. We really believe that this is a way forward for absolute reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the province of Alberta. Mr. Chairman, we believe in this, and we are having good co-operation with the federal government with respect to that issue, and we hope to continue to do that.

Although I wouldn't argue that the feds are interested, I'd suggest to you that every province and certainly the countries in North America and globally are very interested in what's happening in the province of Alberta. We have leading-edge technology, we have the expertise, and we have the people power and the knowledge in the province of Alberta. That, coupled with our resources, makes this an absolute powerhouse in the energy industry globally. Mr. Chairman, this department is going to continue to support our government with respect to the development of these resources in an environmentally sustainable manner that's in the best interests of all Albertans.

Mr. Mason: One final question, Mr. Chairman, before we leave the Department of Energy. There's been some talk about restructuring the administration of the electrical system in our province, and I would like the minister to maybe outline those changes and the reasons behind them and whether or not the government is considering changing its position with respect to electricity deregulation in this province.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. There are a number of questions in the question, but the answer to the first one, on the restructuring of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, is quite short: yes, we are. We're going to restructure it.

The reasons for it. Certainly, when you look at the numbers of applications that have come forward with respect to the energy side, not the electricity side but the energy side, it has, I would suggest, gotten to the point where although the EUB is managing on a timely basis to deal with all of these issues, I believe there's a requirement now for the old ERCB to come back, the Energy Resources Conservation Board, and there will be more of a focus from that group of people on those energy projects that we are faced with. As the member knows, there are many of them. It's certainly very, very important to the province of Alberta.

8:30

But on the other side of the issue, Mr. Chairman, we intend to put in an Alberta utilities commission. As you know, in 2003 we brought in a new Electric Utilities Act, and it continued the restructuring of the electrical industry in the province of Alberta. I believe that we now need an Alberta utilities commission that looks at those utilities, and it's external or not directly connected to what was the EUB. Folding those two regulatory entities together at one point in time may have seemed like the best fit for Albertans. It's my opinion that now is the time for a new fit, and the new fit would give the proper consideration to the utilities in Alberta. So this is not only the utilities with respect to electricity, but of course the natural gas utilities in the province of Alberta would also be housed there.

As the member knows, under the new structure in the Electric Utilities Act we've got the AESO, Alberta Electric System Operator; we have the MSA, the market surveillance administrator; we have the Utilities Consumer Advocate; and we have the Balancing Pool. What we want to do, Mr. Chairman, is have a focus on the electrical industry in the province of Alberta from the point of view of a regulator that's focused on that piece of business for Albertans. All of the things that we've talked about tonight, all of the development, all of the fact that we'd like to upgrade, we'd like to do more petrochemical: all of those issues cannot move an inch without electricity. It's extremely important for all of us, and I believe that it's important enough that it should have its own stand-alone regulator.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, are you finished with Energy?

Hon. Minister of Energy, thank you and your staff for your presence here today.

Environment

Mr. Renner: I was going to introduce my staff, so as soon as they get here, we'll introduce them. They're on their way in.

The Deputy Chair: Well, Mr. Minister, we don't stop the clock for that purpose, so if your staff are not here, you can proceed unless somebody is directing them, or we can proceed with one . . .

Mr. Renner: Well, they're here. Is 30 seconds a big deal to you? It's not a big deal to me.

Mr. Eggen: No. We're all friends in the morning. We're here to help you.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to be here tonight to speak about Alberta Environment's business plan and budget. I will be accompanied by a number of members of my staff. I would like to take some time to introduce the executive team that works with me. Joining me very shortly will be deputy minister Peter Watson. Peter provides leadership and support to a team of about 800 that we have in Alberta Environment and oversees the department's daily operations.

I'm also joined by Alberta Environment's four assistant deputy ministers and the director of finance and administration. Bev Yee is the assistant deputy minister of environmental stewardship. Bev has the responsibility for environmental strategies, environmental relations, conservation and education and outreach programs. For example, Bev is leading the update of Alberta's climate change plan and is partnering with her colleagues to develop and pilot Alberta's cumulative effects regulatory framework.

John Knapp provides leadership for our environmental assurance division. He joined Alberta Environment in 2005 through an executive mobility program. Interestingly enough, he came to us from Agriculture, and many members, I'm sure, will remember John for the work that he did in Alberta Agriculture. In Environment, however, he has the responsibility for drinking water, environmental policy, environmental monitoring and evaluation, as well as information management branches.

Jay Nagendran is the assistant deputy minister for our newly formed oil sands environmental management, and he has responsibility for oil sands strategic policy and innovation and oil sands operations.

Jim Ellis is the assistant deputy minister for the environmental

management division. Jim is responsible for the Alberta Environment support and emergency response team, our water management operations, and regional integration in Environment's three regions.

Finally, Mike Dalrymple is the director of finance and administration. Mike provides leadership to Alberta Environment's finance, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, administrative services branches.

I want to just say that since I've had the pleasure of being in this ministry, I've come to appreciate the expertise that each of these individuals brings to Environment, and I can assure all members that each and every one of them is very professional. But, more importantly, they're very much devoted to their responsibilities as stewards of the environment, and the passion that they bring to the job, I'm sure all members have noticed, is passed on to the minister. I'm pleased to say that much of the passion and knowledge that I have is as a result of the excellent relationship and briefings I have from the various folks that are now seated around me.

Alberta Environment received an increase of \$9.8 million in this fiscal year, bringing the total for the year to \$164 million. This budget will help to ensure that Alberta is an environmental leader, able to respond to increasingly complex environmental challenges and risks.

Alberta Environment staff work every day to safeguard public and environmental health, promote environmental stewardship, and enhance our regulatory systems and infrastructure. I'm confident that Alberta Environment's budget is well resourced and will meet our environmental priorities. This year we will add approximately 38 new FTEs to our staffing, of which 30 are committed to the oil sands environmental unit. This brings us to a total of about 842.

We will use the increased budget dollars to support the development and implementation of the Premier's priorities for Alberta's environment. For example, the lion's share of the increase, some \$7 million, will help us to manage growth pressures related to cumulative environmental effects and the development of the oil sands.

I've already introduced assistant deputy minister of oil sands environmental management Jay Nagendran. Jay is overseeing the development and operations of a new division within the department. Alberta Environment created the oil sands environmental management division in February to help us effectively manage the unprecedented growth in this area. One of the division's priorities is to respond to the recommendations of the Oil Sands Ministerial Strategy Committee on environmental impacts and development in oil sands communities.

Another priority of this division will be to effectively manage the cumulative environmental impacts of oil sands development and upgrading in our province. Alberta Environment recognizes that we need to look at the whole region to develop an environmental management approach that protects the air, land, water, and biodiversity of our province. In fact, developing a new environment and resource management regulatory framework to enable sustainable development is one of the initiatives outlined in my mandate letter from the Premier. This initiative is under way, and Alberta Environment will pilot some elements of this new approach with the development in the industrial heartland area.

In addition, \$1 million this year will support another of the Premier's priority initiatives, renewal of Alberta's Water for Life strategy. Alberta will use the funding for groundwater mapping, a key part of the renewal. We've committed \$12 million in new funding for groundwater inventory work over the next three years. This includes initiatives to assess coal-bed methane groundwater impacts, conduct a provincial groundwater risk assessment, complete basin groundwater mapping, evaluate and upgrade groundwater monitoring and data. Later this year the Alberta Water Council will

consult with Albertans on updating the Water for Life strategy. All Albertans have a stake in the Water for Life strategy, and its review will include opportunities that involve all stakeholders. This review will include an evaluation of current activities identified by the strategy as well as discussions of what additional activities may be required in the future. In the meantime Alberta Environment is committed to moving forward with the actions identified in the strategy in order to ensure that Albertans continue to enjoy a sustainable quality and supply of water.

8:40

My department is also moving forward with updating Alberta's climate change plan. We've recently completed climate change public consultations in 10 Alberta communities, and we received input from more than 2,000 Albertans. We are beginning stakeholder consultations and intend to have a draft plan developed by the fall of 2007. We have budgeted \$3.6 million for climate change in the coming year. We believe this is enough to implement our current policy commitments.

Not all environment-related spending comes from Alberta Environment. Some examples that are located within other budgets: Infrastructure and Transportation is spending \$422 million in capital grants to support municipal water supply and treatment and wastewater treatment and disposal; Advanced Education and Technology has dedicated \$25 million to research to enhance water management; Health and Wellness and Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture are allotting \$13 million to expand water testing monitoring and emergency response support.

In addition to those that I've already mentioned, Alberta Environment has many other initiatives under way, including three partnership actions and an internal action plan to support staff. Alberta Environment recognizes the benefits of working closely with our partners, and this year we're partnering with the Clean Air Strategic Alliance to develop comprehensive air quality strategy. Clean Air Strategic Alliance is a well-recognized multistakeholder partnership which recommends strategies to assess and improve air quality in Alberta.

We'll continue to work with Sustainable Resource Development and Energy on our vision of being the best natural resource and environment managers in the world. To do this, we're taking a new approach to our work. We're working together to achieve agreed upon natural resource and environmental outcomes.

We're also working with Sustainable Resource Development and other government ministries and Albertans to develop a long-term land-use framework. The land-use framework will help to address a wide range of land management issues identified in consultation with Albertans. It's also one of the Premier's priorities under managing growth pressures.

One of our department's top internal priorities is to provide the support needed to enhance staff capability. Part of this initiative includes implementing the ministry's workplace culture, learning and development, and succession management frameworks.

For the first time in history the environment is topping Canadian lists of priorities. It's also one of Alberta's top priorities, and, Mr. Chairman, it's my priority. Alberta Environment is committed to working with all Albertans to protect our land, our air, our water, and our biodiversity now and into the future.

Members, I ask for your support for Alberta Environment's 2007-2008 budget and business plan so that we can continue to enhance environmental protection, environmental stewardship, and the quality of life in Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, on a personal note I want to say that I'm here tonight at considerable personal hardship. I won't say that I'm here

under duress, but I am experiencing some latent anxieties because as we speak, my Medicine Hat Tigers are on the TV playing the Vancouver Giants, and I hope everyone will keep in mind that . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, the time allocated has now lapsed. We wish the team well, though.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Certainly, I will keep in mind that the hon. minister has some latent anxiety already. I won't necessarily do anything to alleviate that, but I wish the Medicine Hat team all the best as well.

I'm very happy to work with the Environment budget here for this year. It's with considerable interest that I take a look at the budget because, of course, I've been watching this. This is the third one that I've seen come through, and each time my biggest concern is that this ministry is underfunded in relative and absolute terms. Once again with this budget I'm asking why, in fact, the ministry only received a \$9.8 million increase, which is, I believe, only about a 5 per cent increase from last year, when the scope and the responsibility that the ministry has has increased many more times than that. Certainly, 5 per cent doesn't even meet the rate of inflation. You know, you consider all of the responsibilities this ministry has in regard to managing our water systems and overseeing all of these new projects that are taking place. I know that the workers in the ministry are very dedicated and work very hard, but there are simply not enough of them. The workers in the various areas of this Ministry of Environment simply can't reach the places to which they need to go to look, to be responsible, and to execute the policy that the ministry has.

I'm seeing this as a significant problem because, you know, we can come up with the best-laid plans in the world here and in the ministry. Indeed, we do have some very good policy in regard to the Water for Life strategy, say, and some aspects of Climate Change Central. But all of those things are so seriously undermined by a lack of funding to put in place monitoring capacity that I fear that the ministry has once again been hamstrung by an insignificant budget increase and an overall budget that doesn't allow it to do its job.

I think that at this juncture the environment in general needs stronger stewardship and more of a policing element to the ministry where we're directly watching and making sure that we're providing a third-party monitoring of what's going on in the environment, but it's just not there. We're not able to do it. You can have the best intentions in the world, and if you don't have the capacity to be there, then it's just not going to happen. So I'm very concerned about that, and we're seeing the ramifications of this all over the ministry and its responsibilities.

An interesting place that I would like to ask about specifically in regard to this is this oil sands management initiative that the ministry is initiating. What I'm seeing and hearing from the environment industry is that, you know, there's a shortage of people that you can get to focus on this oil sands initiative. So, in fact, some of the corporations are offering to pick up some of the pieces, to do the research for them and to do the monitoring and the job that the ministry was to be responsible for.

Again, this is a trend that I'm very concerned about, and I'd like the minister to tell us about what the policy is here in regard to self-regulation. If you allow it to self-regulate to such a great degree, eventually we lose track of the whole thing in the first place. If we're putting in a new oil sands/tar sands management section here to focus on the tar sands area, but then we say, "Well, we can't really do it ourselves," and we just get the companies to do it, then you

lose a degree of credibility. I suppose people will take a second look at that and say: well, how reliable is that information and that data if we're only allowing the industry to regulate itself?

A good example of that, I think, is in regard to the downstream flow issue on the Athabasca river below the big tar sand projects. You know, what we're getting is a lot of confusion about that information. What is the minimum flow that should and could ensure to retain the ecosystem of the Athabasca river? Are we meeting those expectations? What are the implications of leakage and seepage from the massive tailings ponds that have been there for 30 years and the whole bit? What's been there at present has been a self-regulating system that obviously has not satisfied the requirements of that ecosystem, and it's not just the natural areas that you are endangering but, of course, all of the populations that live downstream from these massive tar sand projects.

So my basic first round of questioning is this: the integrity of the ministry is certainly there and a lot of the policies that we have, but would not the minister agree that again, for at least the third year in a row, we've been chronically underfunding this ministry? That has to undermine the capacity of the ministry to actually do its job, that it's mandated to do. I guess that I would like to help the minister in regard to lobbying to increase that budget and to supplement the staffing. If we have a special tar sand initiative, perhaps we can look for special funding for that to ensure that we do in fact put in ministry officials that are not working for the oil sands companies but are working for the ministry to actually execute that initiative. I think that Albertans would expect no less in regard to that and in regard to executing other initiatives that the ministry is responsible for.

8:50

You know, another area, just briefly, that is in the same situation is water – right? – being able to do the water testing and monitoring throughout the province. We've put in some very stringent initiatives, putting the moratorium on the southern rivers and whatnot, but we just simply don't have a way to measure and to regulate to see that it's being executed. All right? So if we have a moratorium on new water licensing and we're trying to set up a system to conserve the water, I mean, isn't that the very best time to put extra monies into the ministry to have people on the field to actually execute that plan? If it's all just on paper, then it's all fine and dandy, but we have to ensure that there is compliance, and the compliance has to be protected through the work of the ministry and the workers in the ministry.

So those are my first sets of questions. Hopefully, in the spirit of having more of a dialogue, I'll sit down and allow the minister to reply. Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I guess that I'm dismayed but not surprised at the tone of the member's remarks. I think the Member for Edmonton-Caldor knows very well that this jurisdiction is a leader among provincial jurisdictions when it comes to ensuring that the environment is adequately monitored and regulated. It is dismaying to have someone stand up – and he's not the first one that's done it. It happens repeatedly, not only here but outside this House, by people who simply don't take the time to understand exactly what it is that we do, to make statements that are based upon fallacious assumptions.

You know, the fact of the matter is that it doesn't take hundreds of millions of dollars to do a good job of developing policy. It takes a significant amount of intelligent people who have the necessary

expertise, who have the support of their minister, and who have the support of this executive team that you see in front of you, who develop the tools that we use to ensure that we are in fact doing our job as stewards of the environment, ensuring that the issues that the member makes reference to don't in fact exist.

I want to point out that, for example, the member talks about the chronic underfunding that this department has and then talked about water. Well, this year alone we have an additional \$4 million that is allocated to groundwater: groundwater mapping and research related to groundwater. In my books, in anyone's books, \$4 million is a lot of money. It buys a lot of expertise. It buys a lot of people, and it buys a lot of work. So I take great exception for anyone to say that we don't have sufficient dollars in our budget to do the job that we need to do.

The oil sands management unit, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, will eventually consist of about 38 people. Bringing those people into this unit will accomplish a number of things. Obviously, one of the most obvious is that those people will be fully immersed on a day-to-day basis in issues related to the oil sands, so they will develop the expertise that's specific to that particular case to a much greater extent than we've been able to do in the past. Because the development of oil sands policy, the ongoing compliance mechanisms, the necessary quality assurance programs that we have in place for the oil sands tended to be housed within other divisions in the department, people would be working on oil sands for two or three months, and then they would be moved and work on something else for the balance of the time. By bringing everyone together, by consolidating this unit in one, the people that are working in that area will concentrate almost exclusively on development of issues for the oil sands.

I want to talk about this statement that industry is picking up where the department leaves off. You know, nothing could be further from the truth. I was up in Fort McMurray myself not more than about two months ago. I met with a number of our staff, and I also met with a number of people that are involved with the Wood Buffalo Environmental Association, WBEA. That's one thing that I am learning in this department: acronyms are everywhere, and until you learn them, it seems like they're speaking Latin all around you.

The other thing that I've learned is that if you want to do a good job of protecting the environment, you can't have a policeman on every corner. So when we talk about safe neighbourhoods, what do we talk about? We talked about safe communities, community-based policing, Neighbourhood Watch, all of those kinds of programs. If we're talking about public safety, everyone says: "Government should be promoting this kind of a program. It's an excellent program. You can't have a policeman on every corner."

Well, hon. member, I'm here to tell you that the same thing applies to the environment. The best way to ensure that you have compliance with environmental legislation is not by going out and hiring more policemen, because you'll never have enough policemen on every corner. It's by involving the community and ensuring that we have community buy-in so that everyone in the community knows what the environmental standards are, knows what their responsibilities are as an individual, and knows how they can participate.

That's where we get – whether it be an airshed organization like WBEA or we get WPACs for watershed, or in this case we're actually going to be combining the two, air and water, into one organization – a community-based organization. Yes, industry is involved in it. Industry should be involved in it. They're part of the community, but so are the NGOs; so are the First Nations; so is the man on the street that has to live in this environment and is interested enough to participate in these kinds of organizations.

Yes, they're volunteers, but they're not acting in isolation. They're supported, I think, very well by support staff from Alberta Environment. They have funding that comes through to them internally through our department and through the industry, who by the very nature of the fact that they're there, there is expectation that we place on them to say: "You should be contributing to this. You should be part of this monitoring, an ongoing process."

So it comes down to this: Alberta Environment's job is to set the standards, to develop policy, to give us the tools so that we can ensure that we're protecting the environment. We do have a compliance component as any organization should have. We do from time to time some spot checks, some audits, to make sure that the systems that we've put in place are working. But we feel that it is a much better use of our resources to be developing policy, to be developing forward-looking policy so that we can continue to have leading-edge policy when it comes to managing the environment. Put our emphasis there, and then have a process in place where we've got the community watch; we've got people that are in place knowing what the expectations are, having our people from a compliance perspective deal with (a) complaints – and we follow up on virtually every complaint – and (b) spot checks. If we see things through either complaints or through spot checks that are not consistent with the policy, not consistent with the standards that we've set, then we are prepared to and we have not hesitated to come down very heavily and very severely on those that choose to blatantly ignore the standards, pollute and contribute to the environmental degradation that we absolutely do not put up with.

9:00

So, hon. member, I guess the bottom line is that I am not going to accept the fact that because in some people's opinion we should have had a larger increase, then therefore we're incapable of doing a job of protecting the environment. I think it's quite the contrary. We have \$160 million-plus to devote to protecting the environment, and \$160 million is plenty of money in anyone's books. It's not how much money we have; it's how we use those resources in the most effective way so that we know and are confident at the end of the day that we have fulfilled our obligations, our commitments to society and to the environment to ensure that the standards that we set are, in fact, the standards that are kept.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll save the debates about CO₂ intensities and absolute reductions for my colleagues, but I want to go into a couple of areas, one that potentially impacts my constituency. I want to talk just generally about reclamation and the problems that are out there from the past, i.e. service stations or other areas. I haven't had time to look tonight, but the Auditor General has talked about this, that there's a severe cost out there, and I think we might agree on this, that the polluters should pay. But how you go back and do that is another situation, of course. I would be interested in the cost and the scope of the problem that the minister sees out there with some of these places that have been left. You know, the ones that are most common are service stations.

The one that I want to talk about is the banned Domtar plant in northeast Edmonton, which impacts my constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and certainly one of my community leagues, Homesteader, has some concerns about this. I know that there's been some contact with the ministry, and I know that they sort of said, "Well, it's up to what the city wants to do," and the city is looking perhaps at some zoning that would allow I think play-

grounds or some sort of situation in there, obviously not housing. But many people have said that they're not even sure about that, that this could have leaked into all sorts of places. Now, I don't know if this is the case or not, Mr. Chairman, but I know that there's a lot of concern in the community, and this could be a bigger issue.

I guess I'd want to know – and if the minister doesn't know about it, I would say that if he can't answer it here today, because he may not be aware of the situation, certainly a written reply would be okay in the future. But I do want to get some feedback about what the Environment ministry says about this particular site. Is there any possible danger? What could be put there without some sort of danger? How are we working with the city? My residents say: "Well, this is all well and dandy. We've heard about safe sites before." Then all of a sudden they find out something down the way, you know, that just wasn't appropriate and shouldn't have been there. I mean, I guess I question why Domtar isn't picking this up and cleaning it up themselves. I know that they've been sold, but it seems to me that they did a lot of business there over a long of years, and the polluters should have paid. I wonder why they haven't been asked to go back in there and do a more thorough cleaning up so that it's not left with the government here or the city to deal with that. So if the minister is not updated on this – I don't expect that with every little problem he is – that's fine. I wouldn't mind a written reply about it after.

The third – and I'll give the minister an opportunity to comment; it's something that I think he would like to comment about because he was mentioning it in debate today – is the recycling industry. I believe, if I'm not wrong, that we've seen sort of a dropping off in the number of people that are recycling, and that's created some concern about why that's happening. I believe the minister talked today – and I'll allow him to expand on it a little bit here – about the possibility of this going to a policy field committee or something to look at what is happening in the whole recycling industry. So I certainly would be interested to hear his thoughts on that and see what he says and if that is possibly going to a policy field committee.

So, Mr. Chairman, those are just a couple of very specific issues that I wanted to bring up today, broadly talking about reclamation but specifically about Domtar. Then maybe the minister can talk about some of the concerns he has about what's happening with the recycling industry. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me talk a little bit on the reclamation of the downstream sites: retail sites, service stations, that kind of thing. The role of Environment is twofold. First of all, our expectation, as the hon. member mentioned, is to ensure that the polluter pays. So where there is a clearly identifiable polluter, then we're doing two things. We're monitoring the situation to ensure that the contamination that is within the site is not moving, is not spreading onto adjoining pieces of property and also that the owner of the site has got an ongoing management plan so that over time they are in fact remediating and cleaning up the site.

There is work to be done on this whole issue of reclamation and remediation. Let me be honest; the way we have the existing legislation does not have a whole lot of incentive in place to encourage the owner of a former service station site that's got contamination due to leaking petroleum tanks or something – while I think it's valid and it's good and it's proper that we have the philosophy that the polluter pays, our legislation now says that not only does the polluter pay now but the polluter continues to pay in perpetuity. So when someone cleans up a site today and we issue a

reclamation certificate, if 20 years down the road technology changes, the state of the art changes, and we find that there still is contamination on that site, the original polluter could still be held liable. So people are looking at it and saying: look, if we're going to be perpetually held liable for this, if we can never sell this piece of property and we can never actually take this potential liability of our books, why should we bother?

So I think that is an area where we have a lot of work to do. There is and we in fact are working on a process whereby we can issue a reclamation certificate and, barring huge exceptional circumstances, reasonably be able to say to the owner of that land: yes, you have cleaned that up to the satisfaction of government, and that obligation of polluter pay has been fulfilled. It's not as easy as it might sound, and we don't necessarily want to have a massive transfer of liability from the private sector to the public sector, but it's an area that I think, until we resolve that problem, we're constantly going to be dealing with these kinds of issues.

9:10

When I was minister of municipal affairs, we often ran into situations where we would have a small town in rural Alberta where all four corners on main street, right in the middle of downtown, are now vacant, and the reason that they're vacant is because they're owned by giant oil companies that used to retail gasoline on those sites, and it's cheaper for them to continue to pay the property taxes every year, to do minimum maintenance on that property than it is for them to do the reclamation. Even if they did the reclamation, there's no guarantee that they would be held blameless should something else turn up at a later point in time. So it's an area that we have work to do on.

That being said, we're making some really good progress. The areas that we're making some really good progress on are some of the sites that were held by independents, that were held in the hands of municipalities. As the hon. member knows, also in my former ministry of municipal affairs, there is the petroleum tank program that has recently been funded to allow for some further work to be done to deal with the small-property owners that have potential to have significant problems. They're not able to sell their property because they can't get financing. Banks won't issue a mortgage on property until they've got a reclamation certificate in their hands. So we are making some very good progress in that manner.

I want to talk just slightly about the Domtar site. I do have some information about this site. Again, it's similar to what I've been talking about with respect to a service station. Only this is on a much larger scale. Our priority with a site like this is to ensure that the highest risk areas are dealt with so that if there is obvious contamination that is posing a significant risk to neighbours, that area is dealt with first. I'm advised that all of those high-risk areas on that site have now been dealt with. The rest of the site is being risk managed, which means that the owner of the site has to supply Alberta Environment with their risk management plan so that it shows over time that they are continuing an ongoing program that is going to reduce the amount of contamination on the land. Most importantly, we are satisfied that none of the contamination that's on-site is migrating off the land.

What has to happen now is that combined with the city and the owner, there need to be some decisions made on: what is the future use of that land going to be? Depending upon what the future use of that land is, Environment will then have to become involved and set various levels of decontamination for the land. If, for example, the land is going to be converted into a parking lot, paved over in a parking lot, and a caveat put on the title that it can never be developed, then basically what we would be concerned with is that any

contamination is stabilized, that it's not moving and it's not going to migrate and it's not going to cause any problem to groundwater or adjoining land and it's not going to be posing a risk to anyone. If, on the other hand, someone decides that they should build a school there and children are going to be on-site every day and playing and rolling around in the dirt on the playground, then obviously the level of decontamination is going to be significantly higher. So we'll work in conjunction with the municipality to ensure that the designated use of that land is compatible with the degree to which the decontamination is taking place.

A good example of that is a project – and I don't know how familiar the member is; it happened a few years ago – in Lynnwood Ridge in Calgary. That was an ongoing process where what happened was that there was inappropriate use of an industrial site that we are now still in the process of cleaning up after the fact. We don't want to allow ourselves to get into a situation like that again, so we're not going to approve any development on that site until we know what it is and what the degree is to which the decontamination plan has been put into effect.

It works with, really, a three-way communication: the owner of the land, the municipality and their long-range plans, and Alberta Environment. I think it's probably a pretty good system when we allow it to work and everybody uses a little bit of common sense. It would be pointless to say that this has to be in pristine condition if it is in fact going to be paved over for a parking lot. On the other hand, there may be cases where it makes a whole lot of sense that for various reasons it does need to be returned substantially.

Finally, let's spend just a little bit of time talking about recycling. The member is absolutely right – oh, Vancouver 2, Medicine Hat 2, seven minutes left in the game. Thank you very much. It could be into overtime.

The recycling is troublesome.

Does somebody else want to talk? Then I'll get back to you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, the time allocated has now run out.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate the comments so far of the hon. minister, still Minister of Environment.

I'm just wondering how the team is doing. I don't know if your officials are keeping you apprised of the score.

Anyway, I wanted to talk a little bit about the government's climate change act, which was previously known as Bill 3. As the minister knows, we fundamentally disagree with the intensity approach which is contained in that bill. I would like to sort of deal with it in terms of the recent federal initiatives that were announced with respect to climate change and to greenhouse gas emissions nationally.

Now, the federal plan also begins initially with an intensity approach, but within a few years the plan shifts towards absolute caps. This has not been part of the approach that has been expressed in what we've seen from the provincial government. So it seems to me that there is a period of harmony for a number of years while the federal government deals with intensity targets but then a shift to hard caps, not part of the policy that we at least have heard this government express. Yet there was a certain amount of comment which we observed in the media and otherwise about the two approaches being somewhat in harmony. I guess my question for the minister is: what impact does this federal plan have on Alberta's long-term approach to greenhouse gas emissions, and what does it do to the climate change act, or Bill 3?

It seems to me that there's at least an argument that could be made that the federal plan renders Alberta's act almost a dead letter and, in fact, renders it almost irrelevant. I'd like to know the minister's view on how the federal plan and the provincial legislation interact with each other and what validity into the future the climate change act actually has, given the federal move in this area. If you could focus on the jurisdictions of the two orders of government with respect to this issue and which one takes precedence, I would be most interested in hearing that in a little detail.

9:20

Then it gives rise to the question of whether or not the provincial government envisages moving toward some hard cap at some point into the future. If not, then how much absolute emission does the government think Alberta will be producing, you know, in 10 years or 20 years?

The other questions that I have have to do with the federal government's carbon tax and how that fits in with the government's plan to have emissions-based intensity trading within the province and whether or not that also has been rendered essentially null as a result of the federal action. I just wanted to deal with that at this point in terms of emissions.

I want to talk a little bit about water and the supply of fresh water. I wonder if the department has looked at the state of the glaciers that feed the major rivers in Alberta, including the North Saskatchewan and the South Saskatchewan river systems, and when the melting or degradation of those glaciers is going to significantly impact the supply of fresh water in our rivers and what impact that's going to have: whether or not, in fact, there's some long-term planning. Has the department looked at those glaciers and what the supply of water is going to be when those glaciers become essentially degraded? Are they following the melting back of glaciers and the impact on the rivers and the supply of fresh water in Alberta?

I'd also like to know in terms of the rapid growth that the province is experiencing – and particularly the city of Calgary, I think, in this case is one that I'd like to focus on – how sustainable the current population or projected populations of that city and I guess southern Alberta as well as a whole are, given a reduced supply of fresh water in the future and what steps the government is going to take to limit growth or to manage the insufficiency of fresh water into the future. So the whole question, Mr. Chairman, of the rapid growth in Calgary and southern Alberta versus the potential decline in the amount of fresh water that's available.

Also, of course, there is the agreement with Saskatchewan that we provide them with 50 per cent of the fresh water that we receive, whether or not that particular agreement with Saskatchewan is being adhered to and whether or not the department believes that we will be able to meet that obligation to the province of Saskatchewan given the rates of growth that are taking place in the province. If not, well, then there's the broader question of the government's policy relative to growth in general, which is not this minister's specific responsibility but which we would, you know, certainly be raising with the Premier and with other ministers, perhaps at one of the cross-ministry sessions.

There's also the question of the availability of fresh water to support development in the Athabasca tar sands. There has been a lot of discussion in the last couple of years about the supply of water in the Athabasca River and how that river is going to be impacted by continued growth of industrial development in the tar sands around Fort McMurray, whether or not some severe damage to that river is going to take place, whether or not the government is prepared to accept that, what analysis they have done, what studies they have done to estimate the impact on the Athabasca River and other water

bodies in that area of the ongoing development of the tar sands, and whether or not the plans for the economic development and the Department of Energy for continued rapid growth and not touching the brake, as the Premier puts it, letting the market decide, whether or not those approaches and the projections arising from that have been married to projections of freshwater supply and the wildlife habitat that exists there.

I want to ask also, Mr. Chairman, if I can about the quality of water in the lakes, particularly in central Alberta. There has been a certain amount of discussion around that, a certain amount of concern that has been expressed in some studies and in the media and so on about the quality of the water in those lakes: Pigeon Lake, Gull Lake, Sylvan Lake, and a number of other lakes in central Alberta. I'd like the minister perhaps to give us some indication of where we stand there.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just an update: the game is in overtime, in intermission as we speak. So maybe we'll answer a whole lot of questions really fast, and then we can watch the overtime. I don't think we'll make it.

The leader of the third party talked on climate change and water, so let me have my comments around the same two issues. The federal plan is really in many ways a reflection of the provincial plan, and when the member asks what impact the federal plan has on the provincial policy with respect to CO₂, we see it to some extent as being complementary. There's a significant difference between the federal plan and the provincial policy, and that is that at this point the federal plan is just that: it's a plan. It's not due to take effect until three years from now.

The provincial plan comes into effect three months from now, the 1st of July. We will have had a significant amount of practical, hands-on experience in dealing with what are substantially the same mechanisms that the federal government is dealing with. In fact, the federal government has been quite straightforward in saying that they plan to harmonize and work with provincial jurisdictions wherever possible. So we believe that what we accomplish over the next three years can very much feed into and complement the federal plan.

There's a great deal of detail. These kinds of situations are never black and white. It's never as simple as it might seem. A lot of the disagreements over interpretation that we anticipate over the next couple of years will have been resolved, and I think that by that time the federal government will realize that rather than having to fight the same old battles over and over, they may learn from the experiences of those same battles fought in Alberta.

9:30

The issue to keep in mind with the federal plan – and the member points it out, and I've heard it pointed out before – is that the federal plan contemplates caps, absolute caps. Well, in fact, it doesn't. It talks about targets that are caps, but it doesn't talk about absolute caps. It very deftly, however you want to put it, goes from intensity-based targets that are industrial in nature, and then flows through very nicely, almost without having taken a breath, into absolute targets that are economy-wide in nature. All of a sudden now we're including vehicle exhaust and building heating and everything else. While it's relatively simple to deal with the technicalities around intensity-based targets for industrial emitters, it's not nearly so simple to start to make promises around fulfilling commitments to absolute targets for vehicle emissions and everything else. The best that we can do is to set some targets.

Alberta has never said that we were not going to achieve some absolute targets. We've just said that it'll be done on the basis of investment in the necessary science and technology so that at some point in time we will have the ability to do a better job of managing our CO₂ emissions than what we're doing right now. That's why we believe that by bringing our mechanism into play in July of this year, we're going to get a significant head start on the rest of the country when it comes to having the necessary expertise to deal with the science.

Where we differ, quite frankly, with the federal government is that I think the federal government is being a little overly optimistic when they expect some pretty massive organizations to turn things around as rapidly as they seem to think they're going to be turned around. Yes, there are wonderful opportunities, and we believe that there are huge opportunities for carbon capture and sequestration, but it doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen in a one- or a two-year window. It happens in probably a 10-year window, where you begin the process, you have the opportunity for the capture to be incorporated into the design plans, and at the same time you're dealing with the transportation of CO₂ and how you are going to be moving CO₂. All of these things have to happen in the proper sequence.

I'm concerned that the federal government may be abandoning investment in the technology far sooner than would be prudent and far sooner than will allow industry to make the necessary changes. What the federal government is proposing that the province is not proposing is to move into emissions trading and those of kinds of instruments to a much greater degree than the province is. The province believes that we should be dealing with our problems here in Alberta, not simply paying, as the member calls it, a carbon tax so that we can merrily go on polluting and not deal with the situation that we have here.

Let's make it very clear: the intensity-based targets that we have in Alberta are designed to create the opportunity for absolute reductions. In fact, if you're one of the operators anywhere in Alberta right now that's subject to the legislation, it is, in reality, an absolute target. It's not intensity based. You cannot avoid the compliance mechanisms by simply turning down the tap. We've already established what your base is, and we expect you to be more efficient in producing whatever it is that you produce with respect to CO₂. What makes it intensity based as opposed to absolute is that we're not putting up a sign at the border and saying: anyone who wishes to work in Alberta need not apply because we've closed the door to all future development. We're not prepared to do that. We never will do that because we don't believe that that's the role of government.

That is a good segue and leads me into the discussion around water because the member was making similar kinds of statements around water. A typical NDP way of looking at the world is: "We won't manage our resources. We'll simply manage the business. We'll just determine how many businesses we can have in this province, and then when there's enough, we'll just send the rest of them away." We, on the other hand, feel that it is our job and our responsibility to manage the resources wisely and to set the outcomes.

So when we look at water basins, for example, like we did in the Athabasca – we've determined what are the in-stream flow needs of the Athabasca River, and we've determined what is the maximum that we are going to allow industrial development to impact on those in-stream flow needs. At this point the amount of water that is actually being used is minuscule. Less than 2 per cent is allocated. The difficulty is that the water doesn't necessarily flow at a uniform rate 12 months of the year, so we have periods of the year when

there are massive amounts of water such that you wouldn't even notice that there's been any withdrawal, and then in other parts of the year, particularly in the winter, the flow is significantly diminished. So we have to set the maximums at different levels depending upon the flow rates, and that's what we've done through the IFN.

The same thing applies in southern Alberta. We've now closed off the South Saskatchewan River basin to further allocations on the Oldman and the Bow, but that doesn't mean that there can be no more development on the Oldman and the Bow. It means that we have to do a lot better job of using the water that's already there. There's plenty of water there. It's just a matter of ensuring that we use it wisely, ensuring that we conserve water wherever we can, that we recycle water wherever we can, and that's how we're going to continue.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I'm happy to raise some more questions with the minister. I think that, you know, in a rather partisan way he misrepresented the intent of the questions around water. The questions were: what impact will a shortage of water in the South Saskatchewan basin in particular have on urban growth, and what impact will industrial development in the Fort McMurray area around the Athabasca tar sands have on the Athabasca River? It's not, as the minister tried to suggest, an attempt on our part to say that you need to control the businesses. I said nothing of that sort whatsoever, so I didn't appreciate that very much.

I don't think that the minister actually answered the question: what kind of limitations on growth? Let's take Calgary. Let's take the South Saskatchewan River basin and the Bow River in particular. What impacts on the growth that's projected for that city is the shortage of fresh water going to have? Not trying to control any businesses or anything. That's a serious question. It's a very important question because Calgary is growing very, very rapidly, and at some point a shortage of fresh water is going to act as a brake on that development. I'd like to know what this minister and what this department has planned for that situation. The same with the impact of continuing development in the tar sands and the Athabasca River. I'd like to know about that as well as the impacts of the melting of glaciers at the headwaters of a number of Alberta rivers and whether or not the government is planning for that and what they're planning for that.

I want to talk a little bit about carbon sequestration, Mr. Chairman. I would like to know what studies the government has with respect to the viability of this approach, where in Alberta this approach is being considered, what developments in technology need to be achieved before this technology is viable, what capital costs the government has in mind for developing this system, including spending a considerable amount of federal money, potentially, on a pipeline for the transportation of CO₂, where that project is at, and how the government plans to spend that money.

9:40

Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate that there are many depleted or partially depleted oil fields in this province. The use of CO₂ in order to replace fresh water as a means of getting the final 10 per cent or so of the oil from these fields is probably a very good idea, mostly because we'd no longer have to consume fresh water, which is then permanently lost. I believe the province of Alberta has about 100,000 holes drilled in it. I could be way out, but that number seems to stick in my head as a ballpark figure. The question then is:

if you're going to push CO₂ under the ground into these fields, and there are thousands of holes in a given field that have been drilled, and all of the subsurface strata has all been punctured, how are you going to keep the CO₂ down?

Now, just in case I get reprimanded here by the minister, I understand that CO₂ is heavier than air and won't float up into the atmosphere like it was helium. But I also think that if you want to store substantial quantities of CO₂ underground, you're going to have to put it under some pressure. If that's the case, it will come back up through a strata that, in this province, I think is more akin to a pincushion than anything else. So it strikes me, Mr. Chairman, that if they're going to use this approach, which is, in my opinion, quite untried, they're going to have to do a lot of work to make sure that specific sites are valid or are going to work. You just can't start pumping this stuff into some of these major underground formations and expect it to stay permanently down.

So the real questions are whether or not this is a valid approach, whether it really is workable, whether it's economic, what the costs are. I'd like to know the state of the government's research on some of this. Are there some specific areas where this can be done today? What percentage of the subsurface fields are suitable for this? Have they looked at that?

Those are real questions, Mr. Chairman, that I think need to be answered before we put all our eggs into the basket of what is essentially landfilling CO₂. This is the approach that the government thinks is going to save them and allow ongoing increases in development in the Athabasca tar sands and other industrial development in this province. These is the magic bean that is going to save the government's industrial strategy, so they're putting an awful lot into it. They're postponing any significant action on reducing CO₂ production in the hope that one day this particular approach is going to become viable.

So I'm very interested in just how real it is and what steps the government is taking to make sure that it is going to be a viable strategy for dealing with CO₂ emissions and how much that's going to cost and whether they know if it's going to be reliable and when it's going to be significantly available.

Mr. Chairman, those are my questions. There are some, as I mentioned, that the minister didn't get to last time, about glaciers melting and so on, so I would be happy to give him the remaining few minutes that I have of my time added to his 10 minutes so that he can do that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that given the fact that we're following the rules to a T tonight, it would be best if you stood up and said "30 seconds" and then sat down again, and then it'll be my turn again.

The issue regarding water and glacial status is one that is certainly under consideration. You don't have to be a scientist to be able to see that there are receding glaciers. How long the water will continue to flow from those glaciers: we're going to have to learn that over time. I don't know that anyone at this point in time can give any more than an educated guess on what is the actual issue with respect to the actual numbers involved with glacial melt. It's dependent upon the temperature, the climate over the next few years, and it's also dependent upon the degree to which global warming and climate change progress. Both of those are variables that are very hard to predict.

What can be predicted with relative certainty far enough into the future is that the amount of water that comes from glacial melt is

going to be diminished, and that's why it's absolutely imperative that we begin now to plan for how we're going to have water storage mechanisms in place. The net amount of water may not change that much over time. It's just that it's going to come in different forms. It's going to come in the form of rain, and it's going to come in the form of snow. So when we get the tremendous amount of flush in the spring, if we don't manage to keep some of it behind, then we're going to be just simply sending it off either to the Arctic or to Hudson Bay, which then leads me to the questions that you brought up earlier with respect to our commitments to our neighbours to the east.

We have a very firm commitment that 50 per cent of the water flow from Alberta goes through to Saskatchewan. We've never even come close to that 50 per cent except for one year, 2001, which was the driest year that we've had, and in that year it was 59 per cent. Most years it's well over 75 per cent and, in fact, even more; it's over 80 per cent. So it's simply not an issue.

What is an issue, though, is how we manage that water so that it continues to flow all season long. Much of that flow goes through in the spring. So if we can capture some of that water in the spring, have off-stream storage facilities of one kind or another, it will allow us to release it over time and keep that water flow constant for the downstream users.

I talked briefly about the in-stream flow need and the Athabasca River. How we're dealing with that river is by setting the maximum that can be withdrawn by industry. That same philosophy will apply again in the south. So, again, to answer the question that the member had – how is the shortage of water going to affect the growth of Calgary? – it's not my question to answer. I'm not the one that's going to be making the decisions on whether there's going to be economic growth. I'm the one that's responsible for managing the water. I'm going to be saying: "This is how much water is available. You're going to have to learn to live with this much water."

As an example, the average water consumption in Calgary, I'm told, is about 400 litres per person per day, which is probably double what many other North American and European cities have. So if you want to talk about economic development, we could double the economic development if we only conserved water to the same extent that everyone is already doing everywhere else.

9:50

There are ample opportunities for us to do a better job of managing the resource. To suggest that we're going to restrict economic development because of a shortage of water is simply not true. What we are going to do is manage the water better. We're going to put the priority on managing the health of the stream, and we're going to do everything that we can to facilitate the water users sharing that water, using it two and three times over so that the municipal wastewater from one becomes the feedstock for another. An industry that needs water for cooling, for example, can use municipal wastewater. They don't need to have a separate licence to take water out of the river. There are opportunities for irrigation to use municipal wastewater. There are all kinds of opportunities for us to recycle and reuse the water, and we don't have to even reinvent the wheel. They're being used the world over in other places. So that's the role and the leadership position that Alberta Environment needs to take.

On carbon sequestration the question was: where are we going to have carbon sequestration? Alberta is unique geologically in much of North America in that we do have the geologic formations that are conducive to storage of CO₂. Those do not exist in other places, nor do they exist in all places in Alberta. The formations that are

conductive to carbon sequestration are dotted all around Alberta, but there is some work being done right now in central Alberta, some pilot projects and some smaller projects that Glencoe Resources in the Red Deer area is currently working on. We're also participating in a pilot project in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, that's perfecting the issue of carbon sequestration.

AERI is working, as is Alberta Environment, on devising – one of the things we have to do in policy development is understand the regulatory regime around carbon storage. The member asked: "We've got a whole bunch of holes in all of these various wells from former wells. How are we going to ensure that we've sealed it?" Well, we do have a regime in place that says that when a well is abandoned, it has to be sealed off. Again, we're going to have to be sure that we follow up, that those kinds of things continue to take place, that wells that are currently in use are sealed, and we will have to have a plan in place to ensure that all of the abandoned wells in a particular formation have been appropriately sealed so that we don't have risk of contamination.

The costs that are associated with it are some of the questions that will be answered by the committee that is currently looking at this whole issue. They're looking at economic viability; they're looking at costs. Those kinds of answers we will have shortly.

What development needs to take place? We need to perfect at this point a couple of things. We need to perfect the capture. There is technology in place now to capture CO₂. That technology only applies for capturing CO₂ that is a consequence of a chemical reaction. So it happens inside a steel container. When you talk about gasification of coal, for example, one of the results of that is that you get pure CO₂ that's already captured in a vessel, and we don't have to worry about capturing it. We then just have to go: now that we've got it, what do we do with it?

There's another aspect of CO₂ sequestration that we have a lot of work to do on, and that's: how do we capture the stuff that's coming out of a stack? How do we capture CO₂ that's a result of combustion, that's being created by heat? That's the area where most of the research will have to be committed to the sequestration side.

On the storage side the member has pointed out one of the issues. The other issue is: what is the most economical way and the best way to move it? As the member points out, it's heavy stuff. It's a lot heavier than natural gas, for example, and to put it into a pipeline requires a significant amount of horsepower to keep it moving down that pipeline. There's probably going to have to be some additional work done on that.

All that being said, the technology exists today. It's not science fiction. It exists in pilot plants in North America, in Africa, and in Canada. What we have to do is learn how to scale it up to commercial size, and we have to learn how to do it in an economically viable way because there's no point in storing CO₂ if the cost of storing the CO₂ is higher than what the returns are that you can get from creating it in the first place.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, we have about two minutes.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I'm just jumping in quickly. Perhaps I can get an answer in writing for a couple of questions here, and then away we go.

I had a question in regard to air monitoring. There are new federal standards that are coming on in regard to nitrous oxide, sulphur dioxide, and particulates. I wanted to ask how the ministry was going to deal with these and try to get ahead of those as they come online. It's certainly going to be an ambitious target though something well worth pursuing.

The second thing that I wanted to just ask about quickly is if the ministry is looking at: what's the threshold for the North Saskatchewan River vis-à-vis water extraction? We have a lot of upgraders being planned for the North Saskatchewan, so has the ministry done some projections as to how many upgraders and plants they can approve so that the North Saskatchewan still can be maintained as an ecosystem and to meet our obligations to the downstream flow to Saskatchewan?

Then the third one. I just wanted to get back to the budget itself. I wasn't trying to be fallacious, as the minister tried to describe me as being. Rather, I would say that perhaps a more appropriate word would be "felicitous" because in fact I'm making a well-reasoned argument. The numbers don't lie, right? I mean, we go from year to year. We've only had an increase in the budget of 5.2 per cent, which maybe meets the rate of inflation but probably not. Regardless of what the intention of the ministry is, if you're not funding it from year to year to expand or to even meet the rate of inflation, then does that not constitute really maybe a lack of commitment to the environment from the government in general? I know that the minister must be, at least secretly, disappointed that he didn't get more money from his budget.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you still have about 30 seconds if you want to.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, I'm sorry. I was just getting down to get my pen.

An Hon. Member: You were not.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, I was. Here, I've found it.

I guess, you know, that it's a question of priority in relation to other ministries too. Let's say, for example, that the grant budget went up by 66 per cent this year, and this one only went up by 5.2 per cent. That is indicative of priority, I think . . .

10:00

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, but pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(b) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Energy and Environment relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the House now stand adjourned until 1 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 10:03 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, May 15, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a few of Alberta's greatest assets. Joining us today from St. Marguerite Catholic school in Innisfail we have 25 grade 6 students, and accompanying them are their teachers, Andrea Woods, Sister Marie Clarkin, as well as parent volunteers Sue Haddow and Mrs. Tammy Orom. I am pleased that they could make their way up to Edmonton today on such a beautiful day for travelling. They're joining us in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to all stand, and we'll give them their warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce seven of the best employees that this government has in this Department of Seniors and Community Supports. We're delighted that through the public service orientation they have time to come and visit and see the proceedings of the Legislature and acquaint themselves with this part of the public policy. I'd have them stand as I read their names: Heather King, Lee Ann Kucheraway, Cathy Wood, Kara Boucher, Christine Jimenez, Sharon Presisnuk, and Janette Spilak. If we could all give them a warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure today that I introduce to you and through you nine students from l'école Desrochers school in Jasper. These nine students came by train yesterday. They're with their teacher, Roxane Thomas, and parent helper Diane Hayes. At this time I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In May it's wonderful to see women that are braving the elements with beautiful hats. Today we are graced in the public gallery with the presence of the Rose Buds Red Hat chapter of Sherwood Park. Queen Lorraine is here with several other guests, Lorraine MacDonald and the Rose Buds of Sherwood Park. If they would rise, please, we'd give them all a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly this afternoon Mr. Sean Schaffer. Sean will be working in my constituency office this summer. He has a passion for politics and government, and that's reflected in the fact that he is enrolled in the bachelor of applied policy studies program at Mount Royal College in Calgary. In his free time he is a youth vice-president of the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for Foothills-Rocky View. Sean is here in the members' gallery. I would ask Sean to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ms Audrey Luft, chair of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts; Mr. Robert Sirman, director of the Canada Council for the Arts; and Mr. Amir Alibhai, Canada Council for the Arts board member. This morning Ms Luft, Mr. Sirman, and Mr. Alibhai announced the new partnership that will result in tremendous benefits for Alberta's arts community. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Canada Council for the Arts are joining forces to form the Alberta creative development initiative, which will provide \$6 million in grants to Alberta artists and arts organizations over the next three years.

The Speaker: That sounds like a ministerial statement. How about we go with the introduction.

Mr. Goudreau: I'd like to thank Ms Luft, Mr. Sirman, and Mr. Alibhai for their continued efforts in support of the arts and will now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 67 great kids from my constituency of Edmonton-Decore. They hail from the school of St. John Bosco elementary, a brand new school in the area, and it's already full. In fact, they're already needing more spaces. I'd like the kids to rise with their teachers as well: Denise Adolf, Mr. Paul McNeely, and Miss Donna Rankin. They're also accompanied by a parent helper, Mrs. Linda Doan. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two new members of the executive of the University of Alberta Students' Union. Michael Janz, a history major, is the new president of the University of Alberta Students' Union, and Steve Dollansky, a science student, is the new vice-president external. Mr. Dollansky is also the vice-chair of the Council of Alberta University Students. They are accompanied by Don Iveson, advocacy director for the students' union. I ask that they all now please rise and accept the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two very special people who are joining us today, two individuals who are truly representative of this House. One is my nephew Steve Mather, and the other is the Premier's niece Bonnie Stelmach. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I had the pleasure on behalf of the Premier to host a couple of very special individuals, who are in your gallery, and that is Governor Jan Zahradnik and Governor Jiri Sulc, who are visiting Alberta from the Czech Republic. They are also accompanied by Jerry Jelinek, the honorary consul of the Czech Republic; Lenka Vostra, a director; Karel Hofman, chairman of the Czech Business Association; and Marian Ivan Liska, vice-president of the Czech and Slovak Association.

Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to host these governors at a luncheon earlier today. They will be visiting our province to sign a co-operation agreement with two Alberta cities. Governor Sulc will be signing an agreement between his region and the city of Calgary for co-operation in the area of petrochemicals, and Governor Zahradnik will sign an agricultural co-operation agreement between his region and the city of Lethbridge.

I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure, sir, to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Burn Johnston. Burn is a young man who's travelled here from Calgary to watch today's proceedings. I had the opportunity to host him at lunch today to talk about public service, and it wouldn't surprise me if some day Burn were on this floor sitting as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. I'd ask that he please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Trina French and Tina Moore. Trina and Tina are Palace Casino workers on their 249th day of strike due to the failure of the government to protect Alberta workers through fair labour legislation. Trina French was born and raised in Edmonton and has worked at the Palace Casino for six years as a dealer. Tina started at the casino on her birthday in 2000 and has been a dealer during her time there. In addition to being a full-time mom and a full-time dealer at the casino, she helps organize community sporting events that her children are involved in. She has two children who are 23 and 17 years old. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Medicine Hat Tigers

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today and recognize and congratulate a team from my constituency who has shown great heart, spirit, and perseverance.

In a pulse-pounding game 7 of the WHL championship the Medicine Hat Tigers scored in double overtime to emerge victorious. They defeated the Vancouver Giants 3-2 on Monday night in their hometown of Medicine Hat. The overtime hero was Brennan Bosch, who scored the final goal just seven minutes and 16 seconds into the second overtime period of the game.

1:10

Mr. Speaker, I'm a great fan of the Tigers, and I would argue that there's no other team in the province with stronger supporters. The people of Medicine Hat have a devout passion for Tigers hockey, and many wouldn't dream of missing a single game. The team has a proud history that includes two Memorial Cup championships and alumni such as Lanny McDonald, Trevor Linden, and Kelly Hrudey. I have no doubt that they will continue to build on this history as they head for Vancouver this Friday to play in the Memorial Cup. At this tournament they will once again meet up with the Vancouver Giants as well as the Ontario Plymouth Whalers and the Quebec Lewiston Maineiacs.

I'd like to wish the Medicine Hat Tigers best of luck in the 2007 Memorial Cup tournament. This team has great owners, coaches, and players, and I'm proud that they call Medicine Hat home. When it comes to hockey, southeast Alberta is most certainly not the forgotten corner. This group has made Medicine Hat and the region proud as well as the entire province of Alberta. Congratulations again to the Tigers on their big win, and good luck to them in their battle for the Memorial Cup.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Hobbema Cadet Corps

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had the opportunity to speak to the Assembly on a number of occasions about the Hobbema Cadet Corps. This innovative program involves nearly a thousand children in the Hobbema community. Supported by the Hobbema RCMP detachment, the cadet program helps kids to engage in positive activities. It builds the self-esteem of these young people and gives them opportunities to be with their friends in a safe and welcoming environment.

Recently the Hobbema community gathered to view a documentary about the cadet program called *Shades of Blue*. Filmed by Toronto filmmaker Susan Poizner, the documentary is intended to be a tool against gang violence in First Nations communities. The film takes a look at the outstanding success of the program. Tracing its growth from a few members to the well over 900 that it has today, the documentary captures how this community is actively working to provide a constructive activity for youth. To spread the message of success of the Hobbema Cadet Corps, 1,000 copies of the documentary film will be sent to schools across Canada. Hopefully, other communities struggling with drug abuse and gang activity could use Hobbema's example and develop similar programs to give their own youth an opportunity at a successful future.

Mr. Speaker, I speak for all members of my constituency in saying that we feel great pride about this very successful program. This is good news that should be shared to counter the negative impressions that are left because of drug abuse and gang activity. The Hobbema Cadet Corps has been very effective in filling the vacuum created by illicit activities.

In closing, I want to recognize cadet instructor RCMP Constable Richard Huculiak and to thank him for the great work that he and other leaders are doing with the Hobbema cadets.

Thank you.

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

**Excellence in Teaching Awards
for Edmonton-Rutherford Teachers**

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday evening 23 Alberta teachers were honoured with the 2007 excellence in teaching awards. I am proud to inform you that there were seven finalists this year from schools in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. Nominated were Ms Denise Pridmore from Richard Secord school, Mr. Theron Lund from Harry Ainlay high school, Ms Iris Frankiw from Greenfield school, Mr. Timothy Cusack from Louis St. Laurent, and Mrs. Simone Desilets, Ms Melissa Spennath, and Ms Sarah Federation, all from l'école St. Stanislaus.

The cream of this crop, Ms Sarah Federation, was chosen from among 33,000 colleagues to receive this prestigious award. Sarah's contributions include the development of a new and innovative approach to teaching literacy skills to English-speaking students enrolled in a French immersion program. The nomination package presented on her behalf tells a story of a professional who is adored by her students, parents, and colleagues alike.

An excerpt from the nomination reads:

Albert Einstein once said that "it is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge." In all that we have seen, heard, and experienced from the beginning of this school year, we as parents of students in Ms Sarah's class echo these bold words and use the essence of this quote to highlight our own experiences and those of our children in support of an educator who has invested herself in the art of her teaching.

Sarah's principal, Carmen Stuart, says, "Sarah has a profound understanding of children, socially, academically, emotionally, spiritually. She loves children, and that shows."

Mr. Speaker, the kids at l'école St. Stanislaus are blessed to have Sarah Federation for a teacher, and the residents of Edmonton-Rutherford are proud to have her serving in our community.

Thank you.

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

Sheriff Highway Patrol

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2005 466 Albertans lost their lives on our province's highways. This is a tragic and unacceptable number. Last fall the government of Alberta strengthened its commitment to traffic enforcement in the province with the creation of a sheriff highway patrol. This program complements enforcement efforts by the RCMP and allows them to focus on more serious crime issues in the communities they serve. Budget 2007 provides \$7.5 million for 42 additional sheriffs, and today the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security announced that 20 of those sheriffs will be on the road in time for this May long weekend.

We now have 60 sheriffs patrolling our highways, targeting aggressive drivers and speeders to help reduce collisions and fatalities. They have handed out almost 25,000 tickets and have helped take more than 50 impaired drivers off our roads since September. Sheriffs have also worked closely with law enforcement agencies in their regions on joint enforcement programs. For example, a four-day joint-forces operation with the RCMP in April netted more than 1,000 speeders on the Queen Elizabeth II highway. Just this past weekend sheriffs pulled over a vehicle near Grande Prairie for speeding. They noticed open liquor, and a search of the vehicle resulted in the RCMP laying drug charges against the driver.

I want to commend the sheriffs for the work they're doing to provide safe and secure communities. I'd also like to remind

Albertans to take the time to drive safely this long weekend and to make sure everyone arrives alive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Telus Cup Midget Hockey Championship

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year the best midget triple A minor hockey teams in Canada come together to play in the national championship, the Telus Cup. Every year hundreds of volunteers offer their time and expertise to plan and execute the best championship ever. This year for the first time the tournament was held in Red Deer, Alberta. Tournament organizers, including more than 200 volunteers, worked hard for two years to make the Telus Cup a great success. Players, coaches, parents, volunteers, referees, hockey fans, and sponsors gathered for one whole week to watch the best midget hockey in Canada and broke attendance records with standing-room-only crowds.

The fast, tough, and aggressive Red Deer Optimist midget triple A hockey team had a near perfect record. The only loss they suffered during the tournament was to the Prince Albert Mintos, who set a record by winning back-to-back national championships. The Red Deer Optimist lost to the Prince Albert Mintos in the gold medal game in double overtime with a score of 3 to 2.

Thank you to all the sponsors, Red Deer Minor Hockey, Hockey Canada, the 2007 Telus Cup steering committee, the coaches, the parents, and the many volunteers who helped to make this year's Telus Cup a huge success. Congratulations to the outstanding Red Deer Optimist midget triple A players – goaltenders Adam Gingras and the tournament MVP, Marc Boulanger, Darren Windle, Jeff Einhorn, Casey Mitchell, Kaare Odegard, Trevor Bauer, Colin Archer, Kyle Maas, Elliot Marion, Corey Campbell, Jordan Hale, Matt Fraser, Landon Hiebert, Erik Slemple, Cass Mappin, John Digness, Chase Schaber, Kyle Reynolds, Dallas Goodrunning, Bowen Fraser – to head coach Brent Fudge, assistant coaches Jason Nevins, Tanner Murray, and Wynne Dempster, to their trainers, Peter and Crystal Swales, and to their team manager, Gord Yake. Thank you all for making Red Deer and Alberta proud.

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

All-night Debate on Bill 34

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rent reliability. From 8 p.m. on Wednesday, May 9, until almost 11 a.m., Thursday, May 10, representatives of all parties wrestled with Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. While deeply divided on the issue of rent controls, we all recognized the urgent need for affordable rental accommodations. It was frequently noted throughout debate by members of all parties that Bill 34 was only a part of the answer, a first step rather than a final solution.

Members of the Liberal and New Democratic parties called upon the government to intervene by introducing amendments proposing temporary rent caps to halt a wave of unjustifiable rent increases. Our Conservative counterparts were asked to define what they perceived as gouging but instead held fast to their sincere belief that the market would eventually sort itself out. Regardless of our party stripe we believe that the vast majority of landlords and tenants are honourable individuals. Where our views diverge is on how we would address the crisis of rent spikes anywhere from 45 per cent to 400 per cent.

The first amendment, that was proposed by the Liberal MLA for Edmonton-Glenora, was to restrict rent increases to the CPI plus 2

per cent over a two-year period, thus providing a breath of calm in which affordable rental accommodation could be brought online. While unanimously accepted by both the Liberal and NDP representatives, it was resoundingly rejected by Conservatives, the member of the Alliance, and the independent.

Two important amendments proposed by our Liberal MLAs for Edmonton-Centre and Edmonton-McClung which required the one-year single increase to be put into legislation rather than regulation and a doubling of the fine from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for landlords who contravene the condo conversion section of the act were accepted late Thursday morning. Unfortunately, renters continue to be left hanging in the wind by this government, which courts the unscrupulous few at the expense of the vulnerable many.

head: 1:20

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition sponsored by the Alberta Social Credit Party. It has 2,498 signatures. The petition calls for the Assembly to urge the government to "introduce legislation to eliminate health care premiums for all Albertans."

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition with 66 signatures on it. The petition calls for province-wide inspections and enforcement at health facilities and reads: "urge the government to immediately establish a public inquiry into the failure of the health care system to protect the safety of patients."

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today arising out of questions raised in Committee of Supply. I'd like to table responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a list of documents and studies requested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore concerning my department's mountain pine beetle action plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings this afternoon. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a news release: Alberta artists set to benefit from the new \$6 million partnership. It provides further details regarding the new Alberta creative development initiative.

The other tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of the guidelines for the community initiatives program, which were approved in 2004,

and five copies of information regarding unmatched grants in excess of \$10,000 which were used to help nonprofit community groups provide valuable services to Albertans across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies from a woman constituent of Bragg Creek, Lucy Curtis, who expresses concerns about the logging plans for the Kananaskis.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table today. The first is from Neil and Maureen Bleakney, who live in Fort McMurray. They are worried about the cost of housing, particularly because high rents are hurting seniors.

The second is from Jacques Francois Boulet. Mr. Boulet and his family recently moved to Alberta but are now planning to move away after being given notice that their apartment is going to be converted to a condominium, and they see no possibility of securing affordable housing.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a document describing the organization GOPAC. That's the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption. It is now into its third year. It is chaired by John Williams, a Member of Parliament from Alberta, and it has membership now in over 90 countries.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five letter tablings today outlining the infrastructure priorities of five school districts. The first is from the Wolf Creek school division No. 72 indicating the need for school facilities in the town of Ponoka over the next 25 years as well as the modernization of Iron Ridge elementary campus in the town of Blackfalds and modernization of Rimbey junior/senior . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member. Three ministers provided tablings today where they could have gone on for a long period of time. Let's just table and move on, please.

Mr. Chase: Okay. My second tabling is from the Calgary Girls' school, looking for support for a 600-student middle school.

My third is from the Calgary board of education, and it represents the needs for Coventry middle school, Northwest senior high, and Piitoayis family school.

The fourth letter comes from the Edmonton Catholic schools looking for major modernization of Archbishop MacDonald, Archbishop O'Leary, and the construction of an elementary/junior high school in Windermere.

The final letter is from the Edmonton public school district, which requires 16 new construction projects. The three highest priorities: Palisades elementary, Burnewood/Meadows junior high, and Terwillegar Heights elementary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Hancock, Government House Leader, final copy dated May 15, 2007, spring calendar, Committee of Supply.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Affordable Housing

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's response to the affordable housing crisis raises serious questions about its competence. At a time when Albertans desperately need clear direction and a solid plan, we get confusion and disarray. The Premier has lost control of this file. Questions posed to one minister get answered by another. At least three different ministers have programs, funds, websites, or committees at various stages of development. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell Albertans why the government's response to the affordable housing crisis is so confused?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our response to the housing issue in the province of Alberta is very clear. It starts with a huge capital investment: \$285 million for affordable housing. It's followed up with legislation that was passed in the House. There are also rent supplement programs in place and also a safety net in place for those families that cannot find accommodation. That safety net, quite frankly, accommodates families of different sizes to ensure that we can find appropriate accommodation for them in the location of their choice.

Dr. Taft: Well, despite the Premier's assurances the confusion continues to grow. First, the Minister of Service Alberta announces a rent review panel, chaired by the Member for Calgary-Foothills, to establish a code of conduct and a public website to shame landlords who gouge tenants. Now it appears that he's backtracking and just looking to sit down with an existing committee to discuss solutions. To the Premier: is his government proceeding or is it backtracking on these flawed plans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the government is moving forward on any initiatives with respect to housing. This issue came up during the leadership campaign in the province of Alberta, and it's multifold. It's not only homelessness but also low-income rental units and families wanting to buy single dwellings. There are, of course, issues in all those categories. We're meeting with various authorities to make sure that we continue in our plan and build the number of units that we require to house all Albertans.

Dr. Taft: Well, this government's actions show that it's completely out of touch with the will of Albertans. A poll released just this morning indicates that a huge majority of Edmontonians and Calgarians, including 78 per cent of homeowners, not renters but homeowners, support government limits on rent increases, something this government has opposed. To the Premier: how does this government so blatantly ignore the wishes of an overwhelming majority of Albertans on so fundamental an issue?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, clearly, affordable housing is an issue for all Albertans. As I said earlier, we have a four-point plan. We're

proceeding on that plan, and of course most important is to provide as many housing units as possible in the province of Alberta. We've discussed this a number of times in this House. We are proceeding with a plan, and we will see more construction, more starts in the province of Alberta to help accommodate Alberta families.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

1:30

Capital Region Municipal Planning

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course, this government is out of touch with the public on all kinds of issues. A public opinion poll on managing growth in the Edmonton region revealed that 89 per cent of people across the whole region believe there should be more regional co-operation in the capital region. However, this government once again is not providing leadership on this issue. To the Premier: why is the Premier so out of touch on another important issue affecting so many Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we are working with all municipalities in the province of Alberta towards better co-ordination of planning. There is a focus, of course, in the capital region because of the huge growth. Many of the plans that are announced or will be announced shortly are in Sturgeon and the county of Strathcona, but they will impact all the municipalities in the area. That's why we're meeting to find out exactly the kind of infrastructure that's required, also the kind of follow-up on various social issues that may result from more people moving into the area and the various impacts on individual municipalities. That's the path we're taking, and we're going to keep those discussions going and build a plan for the capital region.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Keeping the discussions going is not working.

Yesterday in this Assembly the Premier said he was, quote, confident that municipalities in the capital region are working effectively together, but I know from going to ACRA meetings and from talking to Edmonton city council that they're barely talking to each other. Clearly the municipalities are in chronic conflict. To the Premier: how does the Premier justify his confidence that mandatory regional planning is not needed for the Edmonton region?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned in the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce speech I delivered a few weeks ago that we are going to work with municipalities to build a consensus on a plan that will roll out well into the future a lot of the major questions with respect to infrastructure, with respect to some of the social needs of the various municipalities. I did indicate at that time that it's not my wish to use a big stick because I have tremendous confidence in the elected municipal officials, but if after a period of time we cannot reach agreement, then we will have to step in. There is a huge risk here of a significant loss of investment if we don't have a very predictable, stable regulatory planning regime in place.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is right, at least, in saying that there is a huge risk here if there isn't strong regional planning. The Member for Sherwood Park is known, in fact, to oppose the interests of Edmonton in having strong regional planning.

My question is to the Premier. Given that so much of the proposed development in the capital region is in his own backyard, is he also opposed to mandatory regional planning?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. leader doesn't know where I live. I live south of Andrew and not in the northeast industrial heartland. Anyway, with respect to this whole issue of further development, we are privileged in the province of Alberta because through very good planning on behalf of the province in previous years most of the synergy of all of the plants that will be built, especially petrochemical plants, will be built in one industrial area, which will reduce the amount of footprint across the province of Alberta environmentally. Here's a conveyance of pipeline. We'll have additional transportation lines, rail lines built in that area. Now we have to take the next step and see how having so many workers in one area affects neighbouring municipalities, and we are doing that.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Rural School Closures

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Schools are crucial to the health of communities everywhere, and this is especially true in rural areas. Last week we heard from the Minister of Education that this government is committed to keeping schools in places where people live and learn. Recent news of four potential school closures in the rural area of east Wheatland demonstrates that this government is not practicing what it preaches. People in Rockyford are very worried that their K to 9 school will close. To the Minister of Education: the village of Rockyford was promised last year by the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks that under no circumstances would they lose their K to 9 school. Will you confirm that this promise is still valid, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I've not been informed by the Golden Hills school division of any plans to close that particular school.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Understandably, town officials were caught completely off guard by the announcement of this possible school closure. With the assumption that their K to 9 school would not be in jeopardy, the village of Rockyford has begun work on a 40-house subdivision to help grow their community. Town officials fear that no one will move to Rockyford now if they have to put their children on a bus for over two hours each day. To the Minister of Education: can you explain the rationale this department has for looking at closing these schools, especially in the cases where school closures threaten the survival of these rural communities in Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member continues to spread untruths, how does he expect that people are going to move to those communities? There is no plan that I'm aware of to close the particular school.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I was just cleared by confessional.

Really, what this comes down to is the survival of Rockyford and other villages in the area that are threatened by school closures.

Alberta's rural development strategy, *A Place to Grow*, identifies schools as the heart of rural communities. Allowing four schools to close will deprive communities of any hope for long-term vitality. This is not acceptable, Mr. Minister.

The Speaker: If there was a question there, proceed.

Mr. Flaherty: To the Minister of Education. [interjections] Excuse me; I was getting nervous.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I've already recognized the minister.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I will anxiously await the 2007-2008 capital plan of the Golden Hills school division.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, you wish to raise a point of order at the conclusion of the Routine with respect to comments made earlier by the Leader of the Official Opposition, is that correct?

Ms Evans: At the end of the Routine I will.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Temporary Rent Regulation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A new Ipsos-Reid poll provides more proof, if any was needed, that this Tory government is out of touch with Albertans. More than 90 per cent of renters and 70 per cent of homeowners polled say that rent guidelines are needed to protect renters. But not this PC government. Rent increases of \$1,000 a month or more are just fine with Alberta's government for the gougers. My question is to the Premier. Is it the Premier's position that the vast majority of Albertans are wrong and only the government knows what's best for them, or is he setting up a nanny state for landlords?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as a response to previous questions in the House with respect to housing, housing is, of course, a major concern for all Albertans. It's reflected in our government priorities. We made this a priority very early in terms of the five priorities of government. As I said before, we're progressing with a huge investment, more than a quarter of a billion dollars for affordable housing followed up with legislation, and we have two safety net programs in place, both rent supplement and also a safety net for families to make sure that we can find accommodation for them.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this government's answers fall very short of meeting the needs of renters who are being gouged on a regular basis. It's all talk, no action. The Minister of Service Alberta cooked up a new plan for a rent review board at 4 a.m., and I don't know if he was just having, you know, a bit of an hallucination. Maybe the Premier can tell us the status of the rent review panel that the minister cooked up and put a member of the backbench, who didn't know anything about it, on. Who's making policy, Mr. Premier? Certainly not the government.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, regardless of the kind of rhetoric before the questions, this is a major concern for us, and we are working. I mean, when we talk about comments made with respect to I think he said small talk or whatever it was, \$285 million is not small. It's a huge investment. That's going to put a lot of affordable units on the marketplace. We're working with municipalities to deal

with the issue of homelessness. I've met with a number of the executive directors. They're very pleased with the plan in terms of funds going to deal with the critical issue. Again, we're working with the municipalities to free up more land for development. They are clearly moving in the right direction.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We certainly hear otherwise from renters in this province. There are hundreds of thousands of families that are not being served by the government's constant talk.

Yesterday the Minister of Service Alberta tabled an excerpt from the *Concise Encyclopedia of Economics* entitled Rent Control, written by Walter Block. We checked his website, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting. He describes himself as a libertarian/anarchocapitalist philosopher. You know, I just want to indicate that while the Alberta NDP opposition listens to the people, this government is listening to libertarian/anarchocapitalists, something that might just well describe this government's policy so far. My question is to the Premier. Is the policy being set by the people of this province in the interests of the people of this province . . .

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what those anarcho things are, but I know that ignorance is bliss.

Let's put some of the quotes in here from the document tabled yesterday.

. . . Swedish Labour Party's welfare state, on the "left." Myrdal [a socialist] stated, "Rent control has in certain Western countries constituted, maybe, the worst example of poor planning by governments lacking courage and vision."

This is another socialist economist from Sweden, Assar Lindbeck: In [most] cases rent control appears to be the most efficient technique presently known to destroy a city – except for bombing.

Mr. Speaker, that is not the author. Those are quotes from other economists who have actually studied what they're doing and have an idea of what they're talking about, completely contradictory to the question.

Rail Transport of Grain

Mr. Graydon: Some of these performances are hard to follow, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents are voicing concerns over rail service levels to smaller grain companies in Alberta. They are finding that reduced levels of service provided by CN Rail are adding extra burdens and costs to these small grain operators. My questions are to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food. Can the minister tell us what impact lower rail service levels are having on Alberta farmers, particularly in the north?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important issue for farmers and grain shippers across western Canada and especially those dependent on CN services in northern Alberta. Low service levels and a lack of rail capacity from CN are preventing Alberta's smaller shippers from moving their grain to market in a timely and orderly fashion. This is creating added costs and making challenges to many grain farmers in northern Alberta and across western Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you. To the same minister: can the minister tell us what specifically the Alberta government is doing to improve service levels to these farmers?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, my department has been working very hard on the issue for several months now, and we commissioned a study of rail service problems and sent it to the federal government. I've also written a joint letter to other prairie ag ministers and to federal agriculture minister Chuck Strahl asking for a full review of this issue.

Just last month, Mr. Speaker, I wrote to the Canadian Transportation Agency making it clear that the current railcar shipment is not acceptable for smaller shippers. I asked the agency to use its powers to re-establish a competitive balance for shippers and a reliable and effective car allocation system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you. A second supplemental to the same minister: can the minister tell us when small shippers may see an increase to rail service in those areas?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, the situation has gotten so bad that the farmer groups across western Canada have put their support behind Great Northern Grain, also known as GNG. Last month GNG launched a major complaint to the Canadian Transportation Agency against CN Rail. While CN continues to oppose the Alberta government's participation in this matter, for the protection of our farmers we have put forward a plea of supporting GNG in this case. The Canadian Transportation Agency must rule on this complaint by July. If the response from this complaint is inadequate, I most certainly will be having further discussions with the federal government and the Canadian Transportation Agency.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Heavy Oil Upgrading Capacity

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2002 the Department of Energy received a report on heavy oil production in Alberta. This report recommends that the EUB and the Alberta government revisit this issue. The lost profits and the lost opportunities are simply too large to ignore. This report gathered dust in the Legislature Library while this government hibernated for an additional five years. My first question is to the Premier. Is it the policy of this government to create a shortage of upgrading capacity in Alberta to force down the price of heavy crude paid to local producers and make the upgrading facilities located in the U.S.A. even more profitable?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, well, 65 per cent of bitumen that's mined in the province today is upgraded. We want to move further, to add to that, and that's part, of course, of the discussions that are going on and looking at the royalty review as well. There are ways of encouraging more value-added because the products coming out of the value-added can be used in synergy with other petrochemical industries. So this is one way of further diversifying Alberta's economy rather than just concentrating on the sale of raw bitumen or natural gas. We look forward to adding to this industry with further value-added.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: why, then, does the report made for the Department of Energy estimate that the total value lost to Alberta is well over a billion dollars per year because of a shortage of upgrading capacity?

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. MacDonald: A billion dollars a year.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to this particular issue on upgrading, as I said, about 65 per cent – we want to move those numbers further. There's also the issue, of course, of how we do this in a way that the synergy of the industry will come together, also of course moving finished product out of this province to markets in North America. I'm looking forward to the final report coming from the royalty review because it will have in detail a lot of this information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Let's talk about the other 35 per cent of that bitumen, which is exported. Given that at least 380,000 barrels of bitumen are upgraded outside the province each day, how many jobs and how much revenue is being exported down the pipeline daily because of this government's five-year hibernation and their continued inaction?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, just in this session you can see the contradiction from both sides of that bench there. On one hand, they want us to stop immediately. They said: put the brakes on all development; no more development in the province of Alberta. On the other hand, in the very same session the other side is saying: oh, but you have to keep upgrading more. So where are these concerns from the opposition with respect to responsible environmental planning in the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: Hon. leader of the third party, I gather you rose on a point of order?

Mr. Mason: Yes, I did, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We'll deal with it later.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Logging in Kananaskis Country

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe all Albertans may agree on the following statement, that Kananaskis Country has always been a jewel in Alberta's crown. For decades now K Country has been a multi-use zone that allows for a wide variety of recreational and industrial activity, but recently opponents of forest management in K Country have accused the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development of not caring about their concerns about the area, particularly when it comes to watershed impacts that they say occur from logging. My question is to that minister. Can he please clarify his position on logging and water quality in K Country?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the Assembly that protecting water quality and water quantity is a priority requirement for all forestry operations in this province. The

hydrological assessments that have been done in the Bragg Creek watershed indicate that timber harvesting has had no appreciable effect on the water quality in that area. I'm happy to report that during constituency week, on April 27, I had the opportunity to spend half a day in Kananaskis inspecting some of the reforested cut blocks, and I can confirm that the integrity of the watershed was well protected by that reforesting effort.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Logging opponents also say that he doesn't care that natural habitat for wildlife will be, quote, wiped out by harvesting. What is the hon. minister's answer to that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I assure the Assembly that I do care. In fact, I'm sometimes criticized for caring too much about wildlife habitat.

1:50

An Hon. Member: No way.

Dr. Morton: Yes.

I want you to know that the Department of Sustainable Resource Development is pursuing initiatives under the land-use framework that are intended to protect habitat on both public and private lands. We're looking forward to doing more of that in the coming year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: what's his position on the website statement that he's, quote, not impressed by the public's concern about the impact of harvesting on recreation in the region?

The Speaker: Look, I hope that you'll deal with government policy questions, not personal innuendo. Go ahead.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's well known that I do value recreation. In fact, I've hiked and camped and skied and fished in Kananaskis Country for the last 25 years with my family, and that's why I'm personally committed to protecting K Country against pine beetles and the attendant risk of forest fire.

We require the replanting of four new trees for every one that is cut. This is a responsible approach, a balanced approach in protecting the integrity of the forest and also the long-term use for all Albertans of Kananaskis Country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Community Initiatives Program

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. CIP guidelines state very clearly that up to \$10,000 will be considered on a nonmatching basis. Not over \$10,000. Up to \$10,000. Documents tabled in this Assembly show that rule 7 was broken 43 times, totalling over \$2 million. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. How dare you say that rules were not broken 43 times?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, certainly there were no rules broken, as I indicated. The rules indicate as well that the minister has a fair

amount of discretion to deal with the applications. We need to recognize that we probably approved during the time frame in question over 6,000 applications through the CIP process, and 43 were where we showed a lot of sympathy to groups and organizations that really needed a lot of help.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. A month ago the minister admitted that he broke the rules. Why does the minister have rules if he doesn't follow them?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, again I need to maybe quote a few of them. One of them was support to the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association. Another was the Centennial High Parents' Society. There was the Alano Club. Those are all groups that are doing a tremendous amount of work and needed some support. They could not provide matching funds, and we decided that they were sufficient and doing good enough work to be able to get those additional funds.

Mr. Agnihotri: Well, you were paying five times more than they deserved anyway.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans support the CIP program, but all groups should have the same opportunity to apply for the funds. Why should Alberta taxpayers trust this government with their money if the minister picks favourites?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, again I must re-emphasize that we use a lot of flexibility in this. I want to talk about the Grand Cache Transition House. This one was a group of ladies that needed a garage to conceal the location of abused women's vehicles so these individuals would not be followed. They needed this money very, very rapidly. They did not have any matching funds. We showed some sympathy to them and provided them. I can go on and identify a lot more in there, but I don't think I need to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Groundwater Quality

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Groundwater is the only source of potable water for many people in rural Alberta. Some of these people have concerns about the availability of water for themselves. Because of the various types of geological subsurface formations throughout the province, the water that is found in their aquifers may have vastly differing quantities and qualities. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Do we have a good understanding of the current state of groundwater in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that the answer to the question is yes. Generally speaking, we do have a good understanding. That being said, there's still much more that we can learn. That's why over the past five years we've spent \$8 million on ground mapping and research. In the estimates that I had under discussion before the House last night, we committed to an additional \$12 million for further research in groundwater mapping over the next three years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From time to time when people drilled wells in rural Alberta they would encounter methane gas. To the same minister: could you explain why methane gas is so commonly found in water wells in rural Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right. It is quite a common occurrence to find methane gas in water. Some of that is because the gas itself is sharing space with the water, and as you reduce the pressure in the water source, you release the gas. Depending upon how rapidly you draw down the water in any particular aquifer, you can actually create a small gas well, and that's what happens in some cases. It's not uncommon at all.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question: what can rural water well users do to maintain their water wells to ensure good water quality?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of things that people need to do. One is to ensure that they do not draw down the water too rapidly if they find themselves into an aquifer that contains gas. More importantly, much of the gas issue comes as a result of bacteria that can develop in a well, and it's absolutely imperative that an ongoing maintenance of bleaching, chlorination, happens on a regular basis, at least once a year. I would encourage anyone who has a privately operated well to contact experts in the field and find out how they can properly maintain that well.

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

Confined Feeding Operations

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are on confined feeding operations, the first to the minister of agriculture. In September the government changed the regulations governing confined feeding operations in this province. The distance those operations must be from their neighbours is governed by the minimum distance separation. The government dramatically weakened that restriction. The only neighbours considered now are residences. That means that schools, community centres, and churches would be exempt from that minimum distance separation, and confined feeding operations can move in. To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: what possible benefit does this change have for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NRCB is totally in control of this. The right to farm is under my purview, and of course the other one is under SRD. The setbacks have been established, and they're certainly adhered to. They're checked out by the NRCB, and they absolutely make the recommendations on the approvals.

Dr. Swann: That was no answer at all, Mr. Speaker.

Also in the regulatory changes, slipped in without debate, is a weakening of groundwater protection. Formerly all groundwater needed to be protected from animal waste with liners. Now this condition only applies to usable groundwater. The Rosenberg report

on water commissioned by this government states very clearly that the province does not know enough about nor does it adequately protect groundwater in this province. This government doesn't know what groundwater is usable and what isn't. To the Environment minister: why are we weakening protection for groundwater under confined feeding operations?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with the specific regulations that the member is referring to. With respect to usable groundwater I think there's a logical explanation, and it's not confined feeding operations. It's, in fact, the deep well disposal of materials that is done on a standard basis. That is something that I think makes perfectly good sense. In that case, the groundwater in question is saline and is not usable water, and that's an explanation as to why such a regulation would exist.

2:00

The Speaker: There was a third point of order being recognized. We'll deal with that at the end of the session.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Cuff report in 2005 describes the poor functioning of the Natural Resources Conservation Board, that it doesn't offer a fair or effective forum for resolving conflicts between industry and concerned residents. There is a widespread perception that when big business wants it, the government provides it, and regular Albertans pay the price. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: what is the minister doing to increase Albertans' confidence in the NRCB and its processes around CFOs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very familiar with the Cuff report, and I'm happy to report that my ministry has undertaken a review and a reform of the Natural Resources Conservation Board. We've separated its adjudicatory and administrative functions. I'm very confident that the decisions that come out of this reformed board will meet the mandate, which is to make balanced decisions in the public interest about the economic, social, and environmental good of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Disclosure of Leadership Campaign Contributions

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ethics Commissioner Hamilton's investigation into the Premier's leadership campaign fundraising says, "Political campaign contributions are often viewed . . . as potential conflicts of interest and even [political] corruption." He adds that questions about the political donations invariably reflect "a desire to know who is contributing and what the contributors may expect in return." Why won't the Premier admit that disclosing campaign contributions is crucial – absolutely crucial – to governing with transparency and accountability and put in place new rules to address this very real concern that the public has about transparency and integrity?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, there's absolutely no question that this Premier is committed to governing with integrity and transparency and has shown that. He has also moved to bring forward conflict-of-interest guidelines around campaign contributions for leadership

racers. I think he's made it perfectly clear that, quite likely, you'll be going through one before us, so we look forward to your input on just how those campaign contributions could be used.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, we are not getting clear answers from this government. The federal Ethics Commissioner was quoted in this report, saying that "without disclosure of all contributions . . . there may be concerns that the Minister had undeclared future obligations to those who contributed to his or her campaign." That's exactly the concern we have raised in this House before. Again to the Premier. The federal government, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan all have disclosure rules for leadership campaign contributions. Why don't we? Don't Albertans deserve the same respect?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we are bringing forward legislation that will address campaign contributions to the leaderships. The issue is certainly not as urgent for this party as it would be for yours, so we look forward to pressure from you to speed up this legislation in order that your leadership campaigns can be addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, thank you. My last question to the Premier. The Premier says that for he and his government the top priority is to govern with integrity and transparency, but the legislation to guarantee it is missing. The Ethics Commissioner's investigation into the Premier's fundraising notes that our province lacks basic laws to ensure integrity and transparency in leadership campaign fundraising. Again to the Premier: given the public desire for the disclosure of contributions to political leadership campaigns, why doesn't the Premier strike an all-party committee to deliberate and report to this House in the fall?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the Ethics Commissioner also said that all of the leadership people dealt with themselves in ethical manners, and none of them breached the things. Then he suggested that maybe we should develop guidelines around leadership campaign contributions. We agree, and we will work through the legislative process to ensure that you have full input so that your near-future leadership aspirations can be addressed under a legislative framework.

Speaker's Ruling Decision of the Ethics Commissioner

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair tabled the report yesterday. The chair wants to make it very, very clear that the reputation of no member has been challenged, I understand, in the questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. The Ethics Commissioner's report made it very clear that no member violated any principle that's in existence in the province of Alberta and recommended no sanction whatsoever, so there's no innuendo here at all possible on any hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Northeast Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Wednesday at McDougall Centre in Calgary the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation and MLAs from northeast Calgary met with about 30 representatives of community groups and business owners who were concerned about the plans for the northeast Calgary ring road. It was a very good meeting, and I would like to thank the minister for

listening to people's concerns. My question today is to the minister. Many of the people are worried about approaches to the intersection at 16th Avenue and 68th Street, which could significantly limit access in and out of northeast Calgary. What are you going to do to address this problem, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the first thing I'd like to do is thank the hon. member for the question and all of the MLAs from the northeast quadrant of Calgary that's being affected by the ring road for getting all of the community leaders together at that meeting. They do have a real concern, and I heard some excellent information that night. We are working on the engineering of the off-ramps, but remember one thing: this government's biggest priority is to make sure that all the people driving those roads in Calgary are safe. We are working with the city of Calgary on trying to address what we can do at that intersection.

Mr. Pham: Before directing my supplemental question to the same minister, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross for setting up this important meeting.

Mr. Minister, people who live along this new ring road are very concerned about the traffic noise from the freeway because it is very close to their homes. What can you do to ensure that a proper berm is constructed and that it does not destroy the natural beauty of the area?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I understand their concerns very clearly. The residents of that area have spent many years looking after having a beautiful backyard, a beautiful area that backs onto the ring road, and we are planning the best that we can to put berms where they're needed. They mentioned that they didn't really like the concrete attenuation walls. We do have a policy on vegetation, and we're going to put in those berms and work the vegetation and keep the existing beauty of their backyards to the best that we can. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I keep hearing a funny noise from the opposition side, and I can assure you that it is one of the most important issues facing residents in northeast Calgary. I have never seen a meeting with more than 30 community leaders having the same concern about this topic.

I would like to ask the minister. They have a concern about access to the ring road, especially the business owners along 84th Street and the residents of Chateau Estates. What is your ministry going to do to address these concerns, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I have to reiterate how important safety is. This is going to be a freeway. We have to be very, very cautious about adding extra interchanges. We can already see, with the main freeway through Calgary, that the amount of interchanges there have created great congestion every day at rush hour. I understand that these people want to make sure they have access for their customers. We want to make sure that we address safety and that we don't back cars up into the freeway. Again, we are working with the city of Calgary on addressing some of these issues, and we're going to do what we can. The ring road is proceeding, as you know. The contract has been let. The work is being done. We're working on what we can to address these issues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

2:10

Spring Grizzly Bear Hunt

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In 2006 the government finally suspended the spring grizzly bear hunt. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development stated that further study was needed. Well, there has been a year that has gone by, and we're wondering about the DNA census study with regard to the population and the recovery team. One of the members from the recovery team was quoted that the figures are actually being kept secret from Albertans. They do not show the healthy population of the grizzly bears. So my questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How many grizzly bears are there between highways 1 and 3, where the census was taken?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member might have seen yesterday that our grizzly bear research program is going forward. There was a good story about the model forest with the bear that had the GPS and the camera around his collar so we can see not only where the bear goes but what he's doing. The grizzly bear study project goes ahead. We declared a three-year moratorium. We're at the beginning of year 2, and we'll make our decisions about the grizzly hunt when all the results are in, based on good science.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's wilderness is our province's greatest attribute. All too often the government puts exploration of our natural resources before preservation. Will the minister continue to put a moratorium on the spring grizzly bear hunt until we're certain that we have a viable, sustainable population? More than one with a camera.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had listened carefully, he would have heard me say that at the end of the three years, when we have all the scientific data in and we know what the grizzly bear population is across the province, we'll make our decision.

Thank you.

An Hon. Member: Stick to the script.

Mr. Bonko: That's right. I will stick to the script.

The inaction of the government is unacceptable. Without the protection of endangered status, grizzly bears and grizzly bear habitat will get choked by development, and their existence gets more and more serious each and every day. What more information from his own ministry would it take for the minister to actively and decisively declare the grizzly bear as an endangered species?

Dr. Morton: Like almost every other subject, Mr. Speaker, the hon. members on the other side always hit the panic button and want to make a decision before all the facts and figures are in. We'll wait until the end of the three-year study and make a decision then.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Good Samaritan Pembina Village

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The unsubstantiated claims made by the Official Opposition that work and safety conditions at the Good Samaritan Pembina Village continuing care

facility in Evansburg are not adequate for the patients or staff have gravely upset and concerned my constituents in Whitecourt-St. Anne. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister explain what the opposition's allegations are and provide a more accurate account of the situation at the Pembina Village?

The Speaker: Well, it's not the minister who is responsible to explain something on behalf of another one, but there was a second part of the question, so perhaps the minister would want to deal with that.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important, not to explain the opposition's claims but to explain how wrong they were in those claims and how it has seriously affected the citizens who are resident at the Pembina Village. There were serious accusations about the health status and the quality of care, and that created a great deal of concern among residents. They had a residents' meeting May 3 this year and were very concerned about the allegations that were raised. It's important to say that the issues that were the substance of the concerns that were raised were construction issues which have long since been dealt with. Long since been dealt with. The quality of care is not in any way affected by them, and the safety of the residents is secure.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again to the same minister. The minister said that these issues have been dealt with. I want to know how and when these issues were dealt with if they were issues at all.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Health Facilities Review Committee went through that facility fairly early on. They made a report. They met with the Good Samaritan Society and the Capital health authority, who own and operate the facilities, and the report was done in February of 2004. Any of the issues arising out of the construction of that building, which was constructed in 2003, were dealt with, as I understand it, on a very immediate basis. There have been facility reviews since then, and any issues that arose from the initial construction have been dealt with. So I've taken the opportunity to write a letter to the Member for Edmonton-Centre, who raised those concerns in the House, giving her a chronology of the issues, which she would have known if she'd asked about it earlier and not scared people, and I've asked her to apologize to the residents of that facility.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. [interjections] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has the floor. Okay. For the third time, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has the floor.

Federal Child Care Funding

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Governing with openness and transparency means absolutely nothing if governments refuse to be held accountable. This week the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada published a list of five errant provinces that have failed to report on how they spent federal child care money. The list includes Alberta. To the Minister of Children's Services: can you tell us how Alberta spent its federal child care funding last year and the year before?

Ms Tarchuk: The first thing I would say is that we were never required by the federal government to actually report back to them

on the child care dollars. Having said that, I'd like to make the point that we are accountable to our public, and our dollars are annually reported in both our business plan and our annual report.

Mrs. Mather: First we hear that last year this department failed to spend over \$30 million of its budget even while facing a shortage of badly needed spaces, and now we learn about this issue. It seem that there are major financial management issues that need to be addressed in the Department of Children's Services. To the Minister of Children's Services: can you explain why Alberta failed to file not only its report from last year but also its report from 2004-2005?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I think I already answered that. We do not have a responsibility to report back to the federal government. We certainly are accountable and have a responsibility to be accountable to Albertans, and we do do that on an annual basis.

Mrs. Mather: This year the federal government has promised to give \$25 million new dollars to Alberta in order to help create new child care spaces, yet the main estimates for the Department of Children's Services indicate that the budget increase for child care this year will only be \$16 million. To the Minister of Children's Services: what accounts for this discrepancy, and how can the minister assure us that all federal dollars targeted to child care will indeed be spent there?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That answer is very simple. We have not heard back from the federal government as to confirmation on the amount of money as well as any conditions attached to it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 88 questions and answers, and today is day 31.

There has been a trend recently, though, hon. members. There are a lot of questions having to do with personal opinions, which is really not the main purview of the question period. And it's hardly likely a minister would really know exactly how many grizzly bear are located within this quadrant and that quadrant and that quadrant. That's why we have this mechanism called Written Questions and Motions for Returns.

But today we're going to have a very interesting afternoon now because we have three points of order to deal with. I haven't had one or two of those for the last couple of days, so this should prove entertaining as well as informative and very, very serious. So the first one, the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Ms Evans: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Today in a preamble to a question to our hon. Premier the Leader of the Opposition, in my view, breached Standing Orders, section 23(h), makes an allegation against another member, and (i), imputing false or unavowed motives to another member.

The reference to me representing Sherwood Park, describing me as opposed to regional co-operation is not only false, but I think it's typical of the kind of innuendo, Mr. Speaker, that you deplore. My record as minister of municipal affairs is one in which I brought in a co-operative model as well as introduced all-member votes for the Anthony Henday and introduced the Hyndman report to this Legislature. Through my tenure as an MLA as well as my recent

funding of Edmonton Economic Development, this false allegation, which has been ascribed from a couple of periodicals, is one which I intend to challenge. So I would submit that the hon. member opposite should withdraw that reference.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is how the exact wording will turn up in the Blues: the Member for Sherwood Park is known to oppose the interests of Edmonton in having a stronger regional planning mechanism.

2:20

The Speaker: Well, before the hon. member goes on, I'll give the hon. member the actual quote.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Thank you.

The Speaker: I quote: "The Member for Sherwood Park is known in fact to oppose the interests of Edmonton in having strong regional planning."

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Sherwood Park has cited for the point of order – I'll take them apart one at a time – 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives." There is no mention of any motive whatsoever in the sentence in question, so I cannot imagine that there's any basis for a point of order on imputing motives. I never imputed any motive at all.

As to 23(h), making allegations against another member, Mr. Speaker, I made that statement on the basis of not only printed media reports, which I'm sure the member is aware of, but also on the basis of conversations among a number of members of various councils in surrounding areas around Edmonton with our team. So that was why I made that basis. I think the member's position or attitude towards strong regional planning mechanisms for Edmonton is fairly clear.

However, Mr. Speaker, in the interests of moving along the business of the Assembly, I will withdraw those comments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Normally that would suffice. Hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, are you satisfied?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in fact, I will accept that, but I would still say that in the statements that have been iterated in the withdrawal, it would appear that the hon. member gets his facts about me from other unidentified sources. It leaves a shadow, but I will accept.

The Speaker: The chair will thank the hon. minister for raising the point, will thank the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for withdrawing the comment, and will just provide a caution once again that hon. members in this Assembly are members of integrity. Hon. members should talk to an hon. member to find out exactly what the hon. member has said, stands for, or what their position is, and we should not govern ourselves or be led by what's reported in the media or in personal statements in third-party sources that can never be tracked down. This is a place of honour. Let's deal with it on that basis. So thank you for that one.

Point 2, the leader of the third party on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am raising a point of order under Standing Orders 23(h) and (i), making an

allegation against another member and imputing false or unavowed motives to another member. The Premier in question period was responding to a question, and he indicated that the parties on the opposition side had different positions and clearly indicated that our party, the Alberta NDP opposition, claimed that we would stop all development. I wrote that down. I'm sure you have a more accurate accounting.

Our position has been very clear, and it is on the record in *Hansard*. The Premier knows that the position of the Alberta New Democrats is not to stop all development but to call instead for a temporary moratorium on new approvals for tar sands production until such time as a rational strategy for the development of those assets of our province can be developed. We've indicated on several occasions that that would be of a fairly short duration of one or two years and would only apply to new approvals. It would have no significant impact on Alberta's economy, as existing approved projects will continue apace, and it will take many years before those are concluded. So the Premier is imputing false motives to our caucus, which I believe he knows not to be correct.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in order to have, I guess, a hearing, one has to have a basis for having a hearing. So let me quote from the Blues exactly what was said by the leader of the government.

Mr. Speaker, you know, just in this session you can see the contradiction on both sides of that bench there. On one side they want us to stop immediately. They said: put the brakes on all development; no more development in the province of Alberta. On the other hand, in the very same session the other side is saying: oh, but you have to keep upgrading more. So where are these concerns from the opposition coming from with respect to responsible environmental planning in the province of Alberta?

No member is mentioned, no caucus is mentioned, and the rules very clearly state under 23 that you'd have to have allegations or motives against another member. Parties are fair game, but that wasn't even mentioned in here. So that's not a point of order.

We're moving forward now to the purported third one.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the exchange this afternoon in question period the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View made a comment relative to the Rosenberg forum, which I had the honour of attending in Banff, Alberta. The province of Alberta was the first province in Canada to ever host an international forum, with 14 countries from all over the world, because Alberta specializes in water.

An Hon. Member: Citation.

Mr. Boutilier: The citation is exactly the citation that the hon. member meant, hopefully with greater success, 23(i), but I might also add 484(3).

In that, I believe that it's critically important that Alberta was selected to host this international forum. I attended the forum, the panel discussion, and at no time in my recollection did I ever, ever hear anyone from the Rosenberg forum say that Alberta was terrible when it came to water management.

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, once again we have to start off with a basis if we're going to continue it. The chair, unfortunately, does not see a basis, hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. In looking at the quote in here, I'll just quote part of it.

The Rosenberg report on water commissioned by this government states very clearly that the province does not know enough about, nor does it adequately protect groundwater in this province. This government doesn't know what groundwater is usable and what isn't. To the Environment minister: why are we weakening protections for groundwater under confined feeding operations?

An hon. member may disagree with part of the statement, but that would afford the hon. Minister of Environment to respond if the hon. Minister of Environment chose to respond, and the hon. Minister of Environment did.

Secondly, hon. members may all go and attend and hear the same speech and walk away with different interpretations of what was said. If there are disagreements, misunderstandings between members with respect to policy, that does not constitute the basis for a point of order. So we're going to say: eliminate that one.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

Continuation of Statutory Enactments

20. Mr. Groeneveld moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly approve the continuation of the following enactments:

- (a) section 33 of the Agricultural Societies Act,
- (b) section 2 of the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act,
- (c) sections 3 and 36 of the Rural Electrification Loan Act,
- (d) section 2 of the Rural Electrification Long-term Financing Act, and
- (e) sections 32 and 33 of the Rural Utilities Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to move Government Motion 20. I'm going to speed through this pretty speedily in the interest of time because I know that we have a tight schedule. The purpose of this motion is to continue the following five statutes: the Agricultural Societies Act, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act, the Rural Electrification Loan Act, the Rural Electrification Long-term Financing Act, and the Rural Utilities Act. The intent of this statutory agreement is to allow the debate in the Legislature whether the statutes should be continued or repealed. I'm seeking the support of all hon. members to continue these statutes.

I will briefly overview these associated government investments in loans and loan guarantees and why the statutes should continue. The Agricultural Societies Act provides for the issuance of government guarantees to local societies offering activities such as an agriculture exhibition. The principal amounts guaranteed under the act are capped at \$50 million in total. Mr. Speaker, guarantees have not been used to agriculture societies under this act for more than 15 years. Alberta's financial investment is a small fraction of the maximum amount allowed. Currently there is only one loan guarantee issued under the act that is still in effect. That loan guarantee is reported to Alberta Finance annually. Continuance of the legislation is needed to maintain this loan guarantee.

2:30

Loans and loan guarantees issued under the Rural Utilities Act, the Rural Electrification Loan Act, and the Rural Electrification Long-term Financing Act support the installation of rural gas and farm electric utility services. Loan and loan guarantees have not been issued to rural utility associations in more than eight years. However, continuance of the legislation is needed to maintain outstanding loans and loan guarantees.

Specifically, the Rural Utilities Act provides for the issuance of government guarantees for loans issued by financial institutes in support of the construction of natural gas services by rural gas co-ops. Loan guarantees were last issued in 1998. Outstanding loans have approximately two years remaining on the repayment schedules. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's investment is secure. These loans are backed by a lien on the property.

Regarding the Rural Electrification Loan Act and the Rural Electrification Long-term Financing Act, these statutes provide for lending to rural electrification associations or to the individuals for the construction of farm electric utility services. Loans were last issued in 1997. At that time a decision was made by the government to discontinue loans and loan guarantees under this legislation. Outstanding loans have 15 years or more remaining on their loan repayment schedules.

The fifth and final statute, and probably the most important one, listed in motion 20 is the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act. Mr. Speaker, this statute is particularly important and, like the other four, wholly worthy of our full support. This government, along with Albertans, values the contribution of the livestock industry to our economy and our way of life in this province. The Feeder Associations Guarantee Act is important to the strength of the livestock industry through the issuance of government guarantees.

The livestock industry has seen both good and trying times since this program came to be in 1936. For more than 70 years this program has supported livestock producers and the growth of the feeding sector in Alberta. I am seeking the full support of all hon. members to continue this valuable program for our livestock industry. The government loan guarantee is provided to financial institutions that lend money to local feeder associations. Title to the livestock remains securely with the local feeder association, not the individual, Mr. Speaker, but animals are fed, managed, and marketed by the individual feeder association's members, who receive the net profits at the time of sale.

The loan guarantee program has provided many farmers the opportunity to diversify their farm operation and add value to farm-grown feeds. Features of the program have made commercial lenders willing to finance cattle at less than prime interest rates. Approximately 20 to 25 per cent of the annual calf crop is currently fed under this program. The program is community based. There are presently 59 feeder associations in Alberta, representing approximately 6,500 members who benefit from its continuance.

The total amount of loan guarantees issued under the program is approaching the cap of \$55 million. The government guarantee is a fraction of the total amount of credit issued by the commercial lenders to the local feeder associations. The government guarantee has been called on only a handful of times over the program's 70 years of operation. This has been a sound program, Mr. Speaker, as the members of the feeder associations have received total benefits of \$6.29 billion in livestock finance over the 70-year history. This program makes a significant contribution to achieving the government's goal of supporting industry competitiveness and growth by enabling farmers' better access to capital.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to highlight the benefits of these five continuing statutes. I look forward to the debate.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to bring forward some questions that I was asked by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to bring forward as part of this

debate. I have been able to look over some notes that I think were provided by the minister's department, and I thank him for that, and my colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar thanks him for those notes. Just a few questions that did come up.

My concerns are alleviated with the continuations of section 33 of the Agricultural Societies Act and section 2 of the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act, but there are some sections in the Rural Electrification Loan Act, the Rural Electrification Long-term Financing Act, and the Rural Utilities Act that I have some questions about.

The Rural Electrification Loan Act: what is the total amount of the payments that were made out of the general revenue fund under section 3, and who still holds these loans? I did hear the minister say that the loans were amortized over a considerable period of time, and really the point of allowing the continuation of these enactments is to allow those loans to in fact run themselves out. I understand that, but I am interested in having that particular question answered on Government Motion 20(c).

Also under section (c): under section 36 how many loans are outstanding under this section, and were all of those loans interest free? "Notwithstanding Part 1, loans not bearing interest may be made to associations or persons in accordance with requirements of this Part." So were these loans, in fact, interest free?

With 20(d), the Rural Electrification Long-term Financing Act, section 2: who has applied for and received loans under this section?

Finally, under section (e), sections 32 and 33 of the Rural Utilities Act. Under section 33: how much has been guaranteed and to whom? Could you provide a list of any guaranteed sums that have not been repaid? Under section 34: a question about why section 34 was not included in the continuation agreement that is contemplated by Government Motion 20. It's not included in this, but I'm wondering on behalf of my colleague why that was.

Essentially, we have clauses in all of these statutes that require that every fifth calendar year, if during that period the subsection has not been repealed and a government bill hasn't been introduced that has the effect of repealing it, we must have a motion before us on the floor that continues it. It makes sense that it's being continued for the purposes of allowing these organizations and/or individuals to pay out the loans, but I know that my colleague had those questions. Perhaps if you could supply some additional information in writing, that might satisfy my colleague.

I appreciate the opportunity to have been able to raise those concerns on his behalf. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. If I recognize the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food, that closes the debate. Is any other hon. member wishing to participate?

Shall I recognize the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Minister, close the debate.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for asking those questions on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Of course, I don't have a lot of those minute answers. I know that they're all available. I certainly will respond to those written questions to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. So I'd like to close the debate and see if we can move on with the motion.

[Government Motion 20 carried]

head: 2:40

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order. The committee has before it estimates for the departments of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Seniors and Community Supports. As per the agreements the first two hours will be allocated to Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the last one hour will be allocated to Seniors and Community Supports. Today is also the Official Opposition day.

Hon. members, before I recognize the minister, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce a former member of this House. Dr. Lorne Taylor was the MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat from 1993 to 2004. Besides the numerous committees he sat on, he was also the minister of innovation and science and later the Minister of Environment. He's also the father of Alberta's Water for Life strategy. He's accompanied today by Ms Laurie Beverley, the vice-president of the Alberta Mental Health Board, and they are attending meetings with various ministers today at this Legislature. I'd ask them both to rise and ask my colleagues to join with me to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, Dr. Taylor was a colourful character in this Assembly. I recall that whenever I was chairing these committees, it was tough keeping him under control, but it's nice to see you here today. Welcome.

head:

Main Estimates 2007-08

Municipal Affairs and Housing

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to begin.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I want to acknowledge that this House has gotten much quieter since the individual – and I will just leave it as individual – from the south is no longer here. Anyway, it's good to see him back.

Mr. Chairman, I am very pleased to be here to present an overview of the Municipal Affairs and Housing 2007-08 spending estimates as well as the '07-10 ministry business plan.

Before we begin, Mr. Chairman, I'd very much like to introduce my departmental staff: first of all, the deputy minister, Shelley Ewart-Johnson, who is beside me; Brian Quickfall, the assistant deputy minister of local government services. We have Robin Wigston, the assistant deputy minister of the housing division; in the members' gallery we have Ivan Moore, the assistant deputy minister of the public safety division; and we have also Peter Crerar, who is the assistant deputy minister of corporate strategic services.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to thank all of my staff, that have worked very hard in the last few months not only in the preparation of this budget but for all of the work that they have done because it has been very busy around our ministry.

I'll start off my presentation, Mr. Chairman, by providing an overview of the '07-10 business plan. This will illustrate the basis

for our spending estimates. This year's business plan has changed dramatically to include the introduction of housing and libraries and volunteerism. We have identified six opportunities and challenges that have affected our business plan.

Mr. Chairman, the first is our relationship with our municipal partners to promote well-managed local governments. To achieve this, we are helping to ensure the long-term stability, predictability of municipalities through appropriate legislation, capacity-building initiatives, and financial support. We are working with the municipalities to provide advisory services, dispute resolution, and financial support. The key to this is enhancing the relationship between the provincial government, municipalities, and municipal organizations. The ministry will continue its work with municipal partners to identify ways to enhance these relationships through various mechanisms such as the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability.

One of the challenges we face, Mr. Chairman, is to do with unprecedented growth. With the growth intensifying, in many areas of the province municipalities are in some cases struggling to address this issue. We've heard from our stakeholders that they want us to work with – with – them to address broad-based planning and co-ordination issues. This will help us in both maximizing opportunities and minimizing disputes.

Tied into this is the challenge of municipal sustainability. While some municipalities are growing, others are facing economic and dramatic decline. Municipal Affairs and Housing needs to work with other ministries to help these primarily small urban and rural municipalities to deliver their needed services within the constraints of their revenue resources.

Mr. Chairman, affordable housing is a challenge. Maybe I should say it in this way: affordable housing is a challenge that all Albertans feel. To deal with the housing task force recommendation, we're implementing the approved recommendations from the housing task force to increase the availability of affordable housing. To do this, we are providing housing support to Albertans who have difficulty meeting their housing needs. We're also encouraging the municipalities, private and nonprofit housing sectors to develop sustainable housing initiatives that meet identified community needs through the approval of capital funding.

The provincial emergency management system continues to be challenged by evoked risks. These could include health emergencies like the influenza pandemic or potentially hazardous activities by high-risk industries.

Mr. Chairman, communities across Alberta are facing a challenge in sustaining volunteer fire services. There is an increasing need to support these communities by providing increased technological assistance and educational programs that help prevent fires and emergency incidences. It is also a challenge for municipalities to manage the risks associated with the escalated rate of building and development required to support this high level of growth in the province.

In addition to everything else that we are doing, I have three areas I would like to quickly mention. Our community services community development facilitators work with all communities in your constituencies to deal with community issues such as family violence, drug strategies, Water for Life initiatives, and crime prevention. They support many of our provincial public input processes that result in community activities.

The Alberta not-for-profit voluntary sector initiative will create a policy framework for us as government to work with community organizations and volunteers in a province that is supporting so many vital initiatives that impact Alberta's quality of life. This is essential as these organizations face many issues that are placing them at risk.

Alberta's public libraries are truly something to brag about as they are an example of a public service that serves all Albertans and contributes to our success as a province.

2:50

Mr. Chairman, in terms of core businesses we are setting our sights on the following goals: a responsive, co-operative, and well-managed local government sector, financially sustainable and accountable municipalities, a well-managed and efficient assessment and property tax system in which stakeholders have confidence, a municipal government board that administers appeals and issues timely and impartial decisions of high quality, an accessible public library service and effectively supported communities and voluntary sectors, lower income Albertans to have access to a range of housing options and effectively managed housing programs that are focused on those most in need, a comprehensive system of safety codes and standards that provides an appropriate level of public safety, an effective emergency management system, and implementing the approved recommendations of the Alberta housing task force report.

We will achieve this with unprecedented financial commitments that will lead to the development of new affordable housing that will strengthen communities, a comprehensive safety system that will provide an appropriate level of public safety, an effective emergency management system, and effective fire and emergency services that will reduce fire deaths and injuries.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to the Municipal Affairs and Housing budget debate. I want to begin also by acknowledging that my colleague the Member for Calgary-Currie is not able to be with us because of illness in his family; otherwise, he would be the lead person to begin this budget discussion.

It was a great privilege for me personally to be on the task force on affordable housing. I think it's one of the most rewarding things that I have been involved in throughout my career, and it was quite astounding. I want to acknowledge and thank the minister for taking the initiative to set up the task force, and I also want to acknowledge the help from members of the Municipal Affairs and Housing staff: the deputy minister, Shelley Ewart-Johnson, and the assistant deputy minister, Robin Wigston. I'd also like to acknowledge Don Squire from housing services. I think that Don is a walking computer. Every question that I could think of in terms of wanting more statistics, he was able to provide. Also, I want to acknowledge the help of Phil Goodman, the special adviser, who was just tremendous.

I'm really proud of this report. I think it's a fantastic report. It was a bit of a shame that the report was released on the same day that the government released its response, so in a way the task force couldn't have its day in the sun, so to speak, where we could just focus on the tremendous contribution that this report makes, apart from the government's response. I wish that it had happened like a press conference, where the members of the task force could have talked about their experience and about the report. It was excellent work. But as I went to the press conference where the government's response was given, I was handed the task force report. That's the first time I had seen it, the day when the government gave its response, so that wasn't very good.

It was a tremendous opportunity because what we heard in terms of stories from people throughout the province and also the statistics all added up to the fact that there is a huge crisis in affordable housing in this province.

I wanted to say first of all that I acknowledge that the government's response is meaningful because, obviously, you're commit-

ting a great deal of money to affordable housing: \$285 million in new funding, all of which in general is expected to lead to the development of 11,000 affordable units of housing over five years. At the same time, our task force actually recommended that in order to produce 12,000 affordable housing units over five years, it would cost \$480 million. So your commitment is about half of what we came up with, and we were just going by the statistics that the department provided. We were thinking that at about \$200,000 a unit, 12,000 units, over five years we're going to need about \$2.4 billion. I mean, it's a huge, huge challenge that we face in Alberta. By committing just half the amount of money that the task force recommended, I think we're going to see a crisis year after year until we catch up. The housing inventory is way behind, and we have a lot of catching up to do.

There are a lot of positives in the government's response, and I wanted to just mention a few. The new \$7 million homeless and eviction prevention fund was one of our recommendations. The task force wanted this for damage deposits, first month's rents, emerging rent shortfalls, and so on to keep people from losing their homes. I noticed that this has been recommended to go to Employment, Immigration and Industry, but I don't like what I'm hearing from that department, that maybe this fund is going to be used for skilled workers coming to Alberta to get some money before they find a place to live. That's not what we intended, but, anyway, that's another department.

I appreciate the fact that there's increased funding of \$35 million per year for transitional housing and homeless shelter spaces, the doubling of funding for the provincial homeless initiative to \$6 million per year, and the increase of rent supplement programs to \$33 million. That is fantastic, all of those things.

You also accepted the recommendation of the task force on the establishment of the Alberta transitional housing initiative of \$2.5 million in funding to go to support services for residents in transitional housing. Well, the task force asked for \$12 million annually. Now, this raises a question because the task force philosophy in writing the report was: housing first. The idea was that when we look at the continuum of housing, first we need to have people in homes all along the continuum whether we're talking about shelters or transitional housing or social housing or subsidized housing or affordable housing. But if people are going to be unable to move along that continuum, they have to be wrapped around with appropriate services.

Now, what I'm receiving in terms of feedback from people who are working with agencies in the inner city and so on – and there was one person on our task force who represented that kind of element – is that they're saying that they feel let down because there doesn't appear to be enough of a commitment for those wraparound services. I was just wondering, Mr. Minister, if the department agrees with our housing first philosophy that we communicated in our task force report.

Well, just moving on in terms of looking at the budget for housing services, \$810 million, from the government estimates on page 261. That's point 7. It's very hard. You almost need a map somehow to figure out where all the money is coming from and where it's going. I mean, I understand from discussions with staff when we were working on the task force that the Canada/Alberta affordable housing agreement is finished, the \$44 million. Now we have something called the affordable housing trust, which I understand is about \$81 million. This is from the federal government over three years, which I understand is split between Municipal Affairs and Housing and Seniors and Community Supports. But it's hard to figure out whether that money is actually being matched by the province. I mean, I assume that it is because when you look at the amount of money – for example, the press release names the \$100

million that's going to municipalities, the municipal sustainability housing grant, also the \$96 million for enhanced capital support, and the \$45 million for Fort McMurray. It seems to me that that's a lot more than just matching that \$81 million over three years that the federal government provided.

3:00

I really appreciated Mr. Wigston's PowerPoint presentation at the task force. I think I need another PowerPoint presentation to figure out just what the programs are and how much money is in each of the programs and how that reflects in the budget. For example, I didn't appreciate the fact that in the press release the headline was, "Government responds to task force report with \$285 million in new funding," but listed on there is the off-reserve aboriginal housing program's budget of \$16 million, and I know from discussions that that \$16 million is from the federal government, \$16 million over three years, so that's not new money. I know that one member of our task force, because he's part of the Métis community in Alberta, really pleaded for that \$16 million to be matched. I raised that in the House and during question period. It doesn't appear that that's going to be the case. It is a bit misleading to list it there as if it's new funding. It's not.

There are lots of other issues. The rent stabilization thing: I mean, we have 110 pages in *Hansard* from the all-night session of debate about rent stabilization. The task force presented a package of suggestions about rent stabilization, both rent guidelines, on the one hand, and incentives, on the other, what the task force called sticks and carrots. The government's response was to take one item – namely, that landlords are not allowed to raise rents for a whole year – but didn't accept all of the other elements in that package. Well, I'm not going to get into that debate because there's plenty of material to look at. [Dr. Miller's speaking time expired]

Maybe I can come back in a few minutes and raise a couple more questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I need to start out, first of all, by thanking our hon. colleague opposite for sitting on the task force. I know that it was a job, basically a task, that we asked the task force to accomplish in 45 days. You went to nine communities. You had different individuals from all different walks of the housing world, and you came up with a report, recommendations. For that I want to thank you so much. You made mention of Phil Goodman and Don Squire, who also basically spent a month and a half on the road, and I want to thank them as well because they did work very hard in trying to assist the task force in the best way that they could.

Mr. Chairman, the task force did take 45 days. The hon. member opposite talked about, you know, the responses to the recommendations and, I would gather, having some public input or having some public viewing or some public debate. This government did recognize some of the urgencies of the housing issue, of affordable housing, of homelessness, recognized the urgencies of some of the recommendations that were brought forward by the task force, and we did respond in 35 days. We did acknowledge, as you have as well, that there were needs and there were challenges, and we responded with \$285 million.

You made mention at the end of your presentation of the \$285 million. You talked about the \$15 million matching for aboriginal, and you also made mention of the \$16 million for the homeless. Mr. Chairman, that was talked about in the news release, but that was not part of the \$285 million. The \$285 million was new money. Also, I do need to clarify the aboriginal component and the matching of

the aboriginal component. I felt that it was not the right focus to match aboriginal funding. I felt that we should match that \$15 million with all of the funding that we did because I don't see a differentiation between Albertans for this, for housing. Albertans should be equal, so if you want to look at it, we matched approximately \$196 million with the \$15 million. So that's where the matching took place.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to talk about the \$480 million out of the task force report that asked for 12,000 units. We felt that the amounts used, \$200,000 a unit, was high and that we could effectively and efficiently achieve very close to the same levels, probably, as you mentioned, with half of the money. We have predicted that we can reach 11,500 units with approximately \$200 million. How is that being achieved? I mean, we need to look at different avenues. We need to look at some short-term goals. We need to look at secondary suites. We need to look at units that can be immediately put on the availability list quicker than building units. I'm not saying that that is not important, but I think our focus was trying to address immediate needs as well. As the hon. member has said many times in this House, we need to look at some immediate challenges as well as looking at some of the long-range views.

The hon. member also talked about the money that has been transferred to EII, the \$7 million for the eviction and homeless prevention. There is no doubt that that funding is on an emergency basis. We need to make sure that those individuals who need support get that support. The \$7 million for the homeless and eviction fund is a fund that's going to help Albertans who are renting and have the potential of losing their homes because of a rent increase. We worked very hard with Employment, Immigration and Industry to get this program in place so people can apply by the end of the month. We currently have, you know, housing staff in an office in Edmonton and Calgary for those individuals who feel that they have some challenges in being able to pay rent or in having access to a place to live.

Mr. Chairman, \$2.5 million in transitional – and a comment was made that the housing task force had asked for \$12 million. The housing task force, as I understand it, had asked for \$12 million over five years, not for each year. We had proposed \$2.5 million, and we are looking at ramping that up by \$2.5 million for the next two years. I mean, next year would be at \$5 million, the year after that would be at 7 and a half million dollars. I think we're very close. In fact, we're trying to address the needs just a little quicker.

3:10

I'm trying to deal with your questions. You started to have discussions about rent controls. I know that's the Department of Service Alberta. Mr. Chairman, I very much recognize and Albertans have shown that they believe that housing is a concern. We've talked about the poll during question period that happened by your hon. leader. This government recognizes that housing is a concern. It's not a black-and-white issue. We need to deal with some of the challenges in the short term, and we need to look at the long-term solution as well. This government has chosen and tried to make sure that we have some longevity in the focus of trying to make units available for people who need them.

What have we done? We have I believe tried to protect, tried to provide some sustainability to renters. Is it perfect? Of course not. Is it going to work for everybody? It may not. But for those who are really having a challenge, we will go on.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. With regard to providing predictability and stability for renters, the government's actions have provided none of the stability that renters are requiring. Suggesting

that rents will only increase once a year but that increases can have no limit, reasonable or unreasonable, provides no predictability, and it provides no stability. I'm not going to go into the specifics of the stress felt in my community because I've dealt with that. That's on the record.

What seems to be missing in this Conservative caucus's understanding is the reality faced by individuals who primarily, when they're seeking jobs and seeking the Alberta opportunity, end up in the cities. I'm not at all suggesting that because an individual comes from a rural community, they're not intelligent, that they don't have a big heart, that they don't care. I know that a number of members from the government have previously served as trustees. They've served as councillors. I'm sure that they've got a very good handle on their rural circumstance, but they don't seem to have any understanding of the magnitude of the homelessness that is occurring in the cities of Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, and Fort McMurray, or they would take some sort of intermediate action. This \$11 million eviction fund, I believe, is going to be eaten up so rapidly that the government will then be going back to the taxpayers and out-of-budget requesting that more money be put into this fund.

Of course, this fund, while it has a degree of hope and intermediate intervention on behalf of people who are finding their chesterfields out on the front sidewalk, doesn't address the problem over a four-month, a six-month period. It doesn't begin to address the problem of a series of homes, whether they're approaching the 12,000 number of new homes that are supposedly going to be affordable.

There is a gap between the people that will be helped by the immediate eviction fund and the people who are at that lower end of the economic scale but are working. Quite often it's both the husband and the wife that are working and maybe some of the children to contribute to the family's well-being, but they won't qualify for that \$11 million.

I also realize that we have to live within our means, and the government does provide subsidized housing for the people who are in the worst financial circumstance, providing they qualify. But those individuals who are going to be out of their suites or out of their houses that they're renting but earn over the poverty amount are not going to have anything to compensate them because they're above the poverty category.

The government, by putting on temporary financial band-aids which for a moment stop the flow of blood and stress, is only acting for that particular moment, and the long-term approach is not happening. So my prediction is that approximately 70 per cent of the individuals who are experiencing these rent increases will not get the support that is necessary because their financial circumstance will not be subject to them receiving the support.

I started earlier to talk about living within our means. There are a number of people who are willing to spend all kinds of money and, you know, have lawn chairs in their living room so that they can have a piece of property. It's not financially responsible for them to undertake that kind of mortgage expense while not being able to provide food and clothing for their children. I'm not suggesting that the government intervene on their behalf, but there are a number of people who are renters who are just at the coping end of things, who are spending well over 30 per cent of their budget on a legitimate attempt to have a roof over their heads, and this will not help them because they won't qualify.

There seems to be a long-term vision, \$285 million, that will hopefully bring a series of homes on within a two-year period, but the short-term vision is lacking. We're heading into the summer, and it won't be as severely felt as what happened this past winter in a variety of the larger cities, where the government was slow to react in terms of providing shelter for homeless individuals.

3:20

We're reversing the trend that we're trying for. We want to have people supplying the Alberta boom and having worthwhile jobs and a secure circumstance in Alberta, but it's not just members from Calgary-Varsity that I've heard are packing up and heading back to where they came from. This past Friday, for example, I was door-knocking in a part of Calgary-Varsity that has a number of low-rental areas, but their rents are escalating dramatically. I spoke with people from Manitoba. I spoke to people who had recently moved from B.C. Basically, their suitcases are still by the doors because of the instability that this government has provided. They have come in search of a better wage, but what they're finding is that their wage is rapidly being eaten up by rent increases.

In part of the area where I door-knock, there's subsidized housing where the government, true to its word, covers anything above the 30 per cent of the rent for these individuals. I've never been to a Third World refugee camp, with tents and barbed wire and the flies and so on, but what I have seen in portions of Calgary-Varsity is a housing unit that is becoming decrepit, that has not been painted, that has not been maintained. Yes, these people are grateful that the government provides a roof over their heads. But we're talking Alberta. We're talking an area that has the highest per capita income, if you divided it among the individuals, within North America, yet these people are not living in that kind of a circumstance.

Yesterday Mayor Bronconnier on behalf of a million Calgarians came up to Edmonton at the request – and I appreciate the request – of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and he laid out his case. There has been literal and rhetorical head-butting going on, but the mayor came forward. He was looking for a commitment as are the citizens of Calgary and other cities throughout the province.

Now, when the Premier first talked about the matching of the educational portion of the property tax, that gave Mayor Bronconnier and mayors of municipalities throughout Alberta a degree of hope. Mayor Bronconnier, previous to his visits up here, did a series of forums around the districts in Calgary where he got first-hand input from a number of individuals concerned about the lack of infrastructure, the state of roads, how Calgarians were going to pay the bills, and the increases. So on behalf of those Calgarians, who the mayor . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

I'll come again.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to say that I take a little bit of offence to a couple of comments that the hon. member opposite made. First is the abilities of individuals in rural Alberta to be able to make decisions on housing for urban Alberta. I want to stress to you that housing is something that has commonality to everybody in Alberta. We in rural Alberta also live in a house. We also communicate. We also have most of the technologies that you may have in urban Alberta. I also would suggest to you that when your comment came forward about not having the experience or knowledge, well, myself in particular, I would suggest, born in Calgary: the only rental experience I had was in an urban setting. When we talk about issues, we can talk about philosophies, we can talk about ideologies, we can talk about focus, but I have never stood in front of this House to say: you don't have the knowledge. I would never stoop to that level, hon. member.

Mr. Chairman, rural circumstances of housing are very similar to urban. When the hon. member talked about stability for renters, that is exactly what this government has looked at. We need to look at stability. We need to look at predictability so that there is the

availability of rental units. If there were – and I want to say again that we don't get up in the morning and say, "Well, okay, let's just have rent controls" without thinking about the impact that it has on Albertans.

Let's talk about what impact this government believes could happen. If you have rent controls and you lose the confidence of builders, then there are two things that take place. Those individuals will not invest to increase the units. Secondly, what happens is that the individuals that may have units may find more stability in converting their units to condos. Yes, we gave some stability. But, in essence, that instability could incite individuals to the conversion of condos. So what does it do? It really provides fewer rental units. What have we done? We have taken the individuals in need and have provided them with a rental supplement.

Now, you have made the comment in your comments about the ability of rural members to make the right decision. Mr. Chairman, that is precisely why we have transferred support to municipalities, and in the situation of Calgary \$63 million: to look at and address the needs of their municipality. You know what? You are right. There is no way, sitting in this House, sitting in my community that I understand the situations of Calgary better than Calgary does. That's why we gave the money to municipalities: for them to make that choice, for them to isolate what they feel are the most pressing needs and how they can deal with affordable housing and also homeless even though there is the homeless funding on the side.

Mr. Chairman, those municipalities have the availability, the accessibility to be able to decide whether they should allocate funding towards rent supplement or whether they feel that they could use secondary suites, which would be an answer. I would suggest to you that secondary suites is a big solution, especially for university students or for seniors. The other is that if they believe that there are units that need to be built, that need to be erected because of a declining need, they have that ability, and they have our support.

3:30

Mr. Chairman, the \$7 million fund, as stated by the hon. member, would be a short-term approach. We need to have a balanced approach. For lack of a better term – and I know that this isn't the right term – let me say that we need to have a flow-through approach. There should be a seamless transition for an individual going from an emergency situation to a rent supplement situation. I would hope that that transition could continue on to an individual having rent that he could pay and then maybe moving on to a condo.

You also made mention about the effects – and I'm trying to understand – on Albertans as a whole. The programs that we have brought forward of affordable housing are for people in need. This program is not for people that make \$70,000, \$80,000, even if they are paying 40 per cent. This program is for individuals in need. Two hundred and eighty-five millions dollars, as stated by the hon. member that was on the task force: it's good, but is it enough? We're trying to address the issues as best we can and have a very balanced approach.

But we do have a basket of options. Two hundred and eighty-five million dollars: \$100 million for the new municipal sustainability housing program, \$95 million dollars in enhanced capital to increase affordable housing units, \$45 million for affordable housing in Fort McMurray, a \$13 million increase for the provincial homeless support, a \$3 million increase for the provincial homeless initiative, \$14.3 million for the increase in the rent supplement program – and that's only the ones that the province administers; that does not include the funds that were given to municipalities for them to decide – \$4.3 million in support for housing providers and special purposes housing, \$7 million for the homeless and eviction fund,

which you had mentioned, \$2.5 million this year for the transitional housing, and I would say: only increases in rent once per year, and one year's notice for condo conversions.

Mr. Chairman, we are trying to provide some stability. Is it enough? I don't know if it will ever be enough.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. There are two issues I would like to address with the minister today as part of the supply budget discussion on the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The first is around regional planning and growth management, and the second, if I have time to get to it, is disaster planning.

We are certainly experiencing an issue in the Edmonton area right now around regional planning and growth management. This has been a'coming for a long, long time, I think you could argue decades, because I remember some discussions about this from when I was a girl. I'll make no apologies for being an Edmonton booster. It's the city where I was born, where I grew up. All my schooling is from here. I went to the university here. I'm proud of this city, and I'm going to stick up for it.

At the same time, I'm a legislator, and I recognize that we have to make choices that build, wherever possible, a stronger Alberta. Sometimes that's by concentrating in a particular area, and sometimes that's by taking a step back and going: we have to build and take a much broader brush; we have to work on strengthening and building capacity across the province. But this strikes me as an issue that needs government attention, and it just has not been there. We've seen a little bit of fiddling, a little bit of tinkering; meanwhile, Rome burns or is getting close to it.

The Alberta Capital Regional Alliance was what essentially was permitted under the MGA because the MGA is not prescriptive; it's permissive. What we got from that permissiveness under the MGA is the Alberta Capital Regional Alliance, which is essentially a voluntary coming together of the region – I think it's 23 municipalities – to try and work out some kind of arrangements. It hasn't worked. Voluntary often doesn't work. As much as I love the voluntary sector, I find that their lessons often don't translate well into other sectors, and here's a good example of it because this unlegislated set-up with the alliance just didn't work. It seems to have just spun apart now.

We need something else that's in place. I think that there's a funding model that is an issue as well, particularly to this region. I think many in Edmonton feel that Edmonton is paying for the infrastructure that is used by a million people in the region. We're in a situation where we're where people live, and we have the costs. We carry the costs for what those people who live here need, and those people service an area that has a different access to funding.

If I look at what the reports that have been done recently are telling us, I can't find one that's telling us to do something else, actually. They're all telling us that we must get a regional planning group that works. The government has to take leadership on this and put it into place, or we run the risk of losing development dollars that we should be getting in the Edmonton region.

Some people call it Upgrader Alley. Fine. Not a very attractive term, but we are looking at having significant industrial growth in the area around Edmonton. There is money that comes with that but also money that has to be spent for that, and if we have those industrial developers looking at us, going, "These guys can't provide us roads to get the workers to us. They can't provide the workers. They can't provide the people that help the workers or deliver the services for the workers," it's a problem, and we lose that business. I think Edmonton is the greatest, and I think it should continue to be

the greatest. I don't want to see it caught up in a lack of leadership from the government, and that's where I bring this back to you.

We definitely need a growth management plan. Now, there were a couple of different reports that were done. There was the Hemson report and the Percy report, and then there was another one. If you like history, there was the McNally royal commission from 50 years ago, that said that regional co-operation was necessary to deal with future growth issues. Boy, did they have it right on. Even the Radke report, which again is a recent one, indicated that lack of regional planning in the capital region was going to cause problems in terms of infrastructure, transportation, environmental considerations, particularly around water use by the upgraders and lack of knowledge around our groundwater quantity, and the government's lack of involvement in regional planning could have serious implications here for the future of the capital region. That's a report that was commissioned by the government, so it's about leadership.

Questions that are going to flow from that, then, are: why is the funding under the municipal sustainability initiative being offered with so many strings attached? Does the minister believe that municipalities are incapable of knowing what their communities need and acting responsibly with that money? What I'm trying to get at here is: according to the Constitution the municipalities have to respond back to or are created by or are put in place in many cases by the provincial government, and from the provincial government come the legislative structures and the funding bodies.

So we've got the provincial government funding with strings attached, and then when we look at the structural requirements that are put in place, they're missing. Why has the government not put any meaningful mechanisms in place to mandate regional planning? Are there any considerations in place to amend the MGA to incorporate a regional planning structure? Is there anything coming within the next six months, within the next year, within the next 18 months or two years?

3:40

Part of the municipal sustainability initiative is the conditional operating grants, and these funds are supposed to be contingent upon land-use planning projects, that would facilitate intermunicipal co-operation, so delivering services jointly, et cetera.

Now, it seems to me that the government is trying to use this as a fiscal incentive to get some municipalities to work together. Can you tell me what's going to happen to this funding if the Alberta Capital Region Alliance cannot reach any mutual agreements? Will this funding be forfeit? Will the funding be offered to a majority of the municipalities if they come to agreement? What are the criteria? At what point do they get the money, and who gets it? If 20 agree but three don't, will the 20 get a piece of this money, but the three won't, or they'll all get a reduction? How will that money be worked out? Will anybody be able to access the \$40 million because a few municipalities won't come in on it? Is it an all-or-nothing deal or partial, and if it's partial, what are the criteria around that partial?

Those are the specific questions and concerns that I wanted to raise around the regional planning. I really think there is leadership that is needed, whether it's a change in the MGA, whether it's specific kinds of funding incentives. But so far we have a big nothing, and I think that's not good enough for this region. It's not good enough for Edmonton. It's not good enough for the capital region. I think the capital region itself is largely a creation of this government, and it's not serving us well at this point. Either the government has to step in and do something, which is what I think should happen, or step away.

I want to talk about disaster planning now. The government's core business 4 says, "Leading and managing the provincial emergency management system and making communities safer."

This appears on page 244 of the business plan. Under this, specifically, goal 8 states, "Continually enhance an emergency management system that enables prevention and mitigation of, preparation for, response to, and recovery from major emergencies." But when I look at page 261 of the estimates under this same line item, Emergency Management Alberta, this year's budget is actually down. It's a decrease from what we saw in the previous budget. If you actually look at last year's budget forecast, it was at \$14.8 million. We're now getting \$9.9 million.

Thanks for the opportunity to raise some of those issues.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Chairman, I need to start my comments by answering and suggesting that \$400 million this year, \$500 million next year, \$600 million the third year of our three-year plan is not a big nothing. That is the statement that you had made.

Mr. Chairman, I also want to say that the hon. member talked about wanting to see planning and that the government should get involved and in the same breath suggesting that the government should not get involved in planning or incentives, and she called it strings to municipalities.

We heard over and over again from municipalities that there needed to be planning. When you are dealing with – I don't want to say municipalities. When you're dealing with people, when you're dealing with kids, you don't take out the bat or the axe and beat them into submission. Mr. Chairman, you give them an opportunity to communicate, to collaborate, to co-operate, initiatives to have discussions on how they can work together. We have built silos in this province since the regional planning commissions, and I think they have gone too far the other way. I think we have municipalities that have looked at autonomy without communication or planning.

We have duplication, number one, that this province, even though it is a very wealthy province, cannot afford. We have areas where municipalities have an opportunity to work together but don't. If you look at the municipal sustainability incentive, it does exactly that. If you look at core capital and you look at community capital, they say two things: consult or jointly plan. Consulted or jointly planned. What does that mean? It means talk. It means get together. It means have a plan on what you may be doing. I don't think those are big strings to ask for when you're supporting municipalities with new money, \$400 million.

I agree very much that we need to plan, that we need to look. In fact, my mandate letters talk about regional planning. They also talk about the minister's council on sustainability, and my mandate letter discusses regional planning or dispute resolutions. You know, dispute resolutions would not be necessary if we did the planning. Mr. Chairman, the hon. member specifically isolated Edmonton and her support and her community. In the surrounding areas and Edmonton there are 23 municipalities. We need to work together; they need to work together.

What are we doing? We are providing them some opportunity, first of all, to work together. We are having meetings with those municipalities. We are looking and asking where they want to go. If you heard the answer of the Premier as late as today and if you could check *Hansard*, the Premier said that we need to provide some sort of support or initiative, and if it doesn't work, then I guess we need to have the hammer, and that's exactly what we will do.

Mr. Chairman, you cannot look at these municipal sustainability initiatives as strings. There are some conditions for the focus and direction of support. The major focus is planning. The major focus is working together.

3:50

On the comment about getting involved, I think we are involved. On the further comment of saying that legislation could be necessary, we have a minister's council on sustainability. That minister's

council gave us 12 recommendations. Some of those recommendations will need legislation. Mr. Chairman, we are going through, at this time, the government processes, looking at those recommendations and looking at responses. With that, I want to say that we are going to consult with municipalities because I do not believe the right direction is to implement what I think the solution should be, but I do believe that we need to work together with municipalities on finding a solution on how they can work together with our support.

When you look at municipalities that work together, there are so many opportunities. There was mention made on one of the previous questions that the request was made by ourselves for a meeting with His Worship the mayor of Calgary. There was no request to meet, Mr. Chairman. There was an offer to meet. I didn't say to the mayor or to anybody else: you will come and meet with me. If you have any questions about the funding, my door is open, and that is exactly what happened.

The definition of head-butting. Mr. Chairman, the mayor supports his community. He needs to support his community in the best way he knows how. Our government also needs to support municipalities, not only one municipality but, as mentioned by the hon. member, other municipalities as well. We need to support all municipalities in Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, the municipal sustainability initiative was designed for two purposes, sustainability and predictability, and the other one being that we have some planning for communication, collaboration, and co-operation. That is the essence of the funding. That is the focus of this ministry and the focus of this government.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I wanted to speak on the financial sustainability towards the municipalities, but the minister said a word that usually sets me off, so I would like to address that first. Of course, the word was seniors. Mr. Minister, with all due respect, secondary suites, as I certainly know them and have been exposed to them, are primarily in basements. I do not want mama in the basement. She can't go up and down the stairs. It's dangerous for a fire. The other thing is that seniors are prone to depression, and living in a dark basement is not where it's at. If you're talking about a granny suite that happens to have decent light and is probably on ground level, I'm with you all the way. I do believe that secondary suites, particularly for students, or even just a boarding situation is the answer to that. But even the thought of seniors being in a basement is sort of a trigger point for me.

Having said that, on page 239 of the business plan, strategic priority 5, you say that it's a priority to bring forth a response to the recommendations from the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability on the roles and responsibilities and new long-term funding arrangements. The operative term, I believe, is "long-term" and not over a three-year period of time. The government's had this report for some time, but as far as I know, we have not had access to that or seen exactly what's going on in that. Could the minister provide some clarity as to what's happening and how this may roll out over many, many years to come?

The other thing is: can the minister provide any indication as to what revenue-generating instruments the government is looking at in terms of increasing the dollars to the municipalities, and could he give an indication of some possible tax tools? Now, I know that there are a couple of things that have been mentioned to be able to give that power back to the municipalities. The property tax transfer tax is one of them. Certainly, anyone I've spoken to is more than opposed to that.

Now, the minister's council is the mayor of Calgary, the mayor of Edmonton, the head of AUMA, and the head of AAMD and C, but

many of the people that I've spoken to in mid-sized towns, cities, and certainly in some of the smaller cities are not even aware that some of those conversations have gone on. I do believe that there's a great discrepancy out there over who actually supports giving extra tax responsibilities to the municipalities.

As a former municipal alderperson I'm not sure that that is the proper way to do things. I think what would be proper is that if the dollars that had been taken away in the first place by the provincial government would be restored, that would help a lot because a lot of the infrastructure responsibilities plus the social responsibilities that are truly the mandate of the provincial government have been downloaded to the municipalities. The responsibility is there. Neither the authority nor the dollars to do anything with them are there. They have had to change mill rates accordingly, and it's because the provincial government cut back those funds to begin with.

I agree with the minister in terms of sitting down at the same table and talking things through. I also agree that I think the province has become very siloed, particularly in terms of the health care boards. But by giving dollars to municipalities with strings attached, you're still not recognizing municipal governments as a true level of government. You're still going along on the Municipal Government Act, which is still legal and in force, as if municipal governments are the children of the province.

I believe that that would have to change. Certainly, the Liberal caucus would look at a constitutional amendment to enshrine in the Alberta Act that municipal governments are a legal level of government. This also is a conversation that has been going on at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities level, certainly for as long as I've been around, and it's probably 11 years. I think it's something that warrants deep consideration because municipal governments truly are the front line and can understand.

Sitting down with the provincial government I think is a good idea, but one of the places where the municipalities should be allowed to sit down – and again I'm not altogether sure that it should be the minister's council – is at the budget table in some fashion. When municipalities need a budget, they should be able to tie into the provincial budget by being able to say what their budget needs are, and then it could be adjusted accordingly. I believe that's where good input could be given. In strategy 1.4 at least you're talking about sitting down and talking to municipalities, but where does the equal part come in?

4:00

The Canada West Foundation in the 2004 report *Sustaining Prosperity Together* wanted the creation of the Alberta infrastructure council to drive the commitment to eliminate the massive municipal infrastructure deficit. That deficit didn't happen overnight as we all know. We're talking about the last 12 to 13 years. Again, it was because the dollars were not coming from the provincial government. We the Liberals believe it's a strong mechanism to work with the municipalities directly on infrastructure needs.

You were talking about regionalization. To a certain point I think that some groups are working together. Certainly, the economic development portion is working in terms of regionalization, and it appears to be fairly functional. They have goals, and they are getting closer to them. What do you envision when you talk about bringing municipalities to the same table?

I don't believe that the province should ever give money to the municipalities with strings attached – that promise of no strings, actually, had been made by the Premier – because it isn't fair. They're the ones that know how to deal with it. I come from a rural area where people, I think, perhaps get along in a different manner because there aren't as many of us. We don't have that same

problem that you have in Edmonton as you're trying to bring everybody together. Anyway, I just think it's very important that there are no strings attached.

Again, I believe that I've said this about treating municipalities as the children of the province. Those days really have gone by, and I haven't seen an attitudinal change with this particular Premier. I think that democracy is not well served when each level of government doesn't have its own freedom to do what it sees best for the people that it's responsible for and who they answer to.

One other concern that I might have is how municipal powers would be directed under TILMA. If the provincial government gave dollars to the municipalities to do A and TILMA came along in terms of investments and said, "No, you can't do it," how does the government protect those dollars that they've given to municipalities if they give it to them with strings? How does the provincial government protect that mandate, that they've given it to use it for such and such a thing, if TILMA is against it?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me, first of all, clarify that when I spoke of seniors and I talked about secondary suites, I never at any time mentioned basement suites. Secondary suites can mean a suite that could be located on the bottom floor; it could be located on the main floor. It is a suite that is accessible for rent, that an individual can rent out. I mean, you can twist it however you want, but a secondary suite is a secondary suite. So don't make those changes. Seniors can also create some revenue and, I would say, the opportunity for companionship with students by offering up secondary suites.

Mr. Chairman, the report that was identified was the minister's council on sustainability, and there were twelve recommendations. If I can make reference to the hon. member that had the questions, this is the recommendation – and maybe I need to make it very clear that this report was the recommendations of the four individuals that the hon. member had mentioned to the government. That report you have availability to. You said: I haven't seen it. Well, it's been available, I believe, since the end of March. It's available on the website. It's available in hard copy. Let me read to you – you mentioned the municipal revenue sources. This comes from the report.

The Government of Alberta should enact enabling legislation to authorize municipalities, at their discretion, to levy and collect additional own-source revenues as a means of strengthening municipal capacity to address ongoing operational sustainability and better respond to growth pressures. The specific additional own-source revenues recommended are:

- a. Amusement Tax;
- b. Tourism Tax;
- c. Property Transfer Tax;
- d. Vehicle Registration Tax;
- e. Expanded Scope for Development Levies in Support of Directly Related Local Services; and
- f. Limited Split Mill Rates within the Non-Residential Property Class.

This is what they have asked for. This is not what the government has said.

Ms Pastoor: What four people asked for. Four.

Mr. Danyluk: This is not four people.

Ms Pastoor: Yes, it is.

Mr. Danyluk: Hon. member, these are representations of cities and representations of associations.

Ms Pastoor: That's not what they're telling me.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, it would really help us if you spoke through the chair.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Chairman, I would be very glad to do that, and I thank you for that suggestion.

I would also suggest that in any group there are presidents. There are chairmen, as you have very eloquently pointed out, so I will speak through you to the whole body, no different than speaking through the president of the AAMD and C to his body or the AUMA to that body.

I can also say that the hon. member had talked about members not having access. Well, I happened to be at the AAMD and C convention when the recommendations were released. This was passed out to all of the members. I attended two AUMA regional meetings. There was, by the way, at the one in Red Deer a member from the opposition at that meeting, which discussed the recommendations from the minister's council. Mr. Chairman, they are aware.

The hon. member opposite also talked about downloading and that funding should be provided to municipalities based on what they need and put into the budget. Mr. Chairman, we have continuing consultation with the municipalities, a \$3 billion support, \$600 million a year: the Alberta municipal infrastructure program, \$776 million to municipalities for support; \$400 million on the municipal sustainability initiative. That does not include the amount that is put in for other infrastructure supports.

4:10

Mr. Chairman, if we took the city – and I'm not sure exactly which city would be used, but let's take Calgary, for instance, in '07-08: \$5.2 billion in support. I'm not sure what the hon. member would like and how much they would like to see. All of Alberta has a challenge with the growth pressures. We are trying to as a government support those municipalities the best that we can.

The hon. member also made comments about not having the legislation. Mr. Chairman, the Municipal Government Act is available, I'm sure, from the Library, and it is good bedtime reading for all of us. It does very specifically point out some of the focuses, some of the authorities that the municipalities and also the provincial government have. The budget needs to be worked on together, and that is what we've done.

We've talked about strings. [interjection] Very good. The hon. member, you know, says elastics. That's absolutely right. The phrase "strings" came from Calgary. [interjection] The Calgary mayor. I'm very sorry.

It is not any kind of strings. It provides opportunity for funding with some conditions. What are those conditions? Those conditions are to ask municipalities to get together and talk about some of their projects and how they can work together, how they can plan together, maybe, with the opportunity of collaboration or co-operation. Mr. Chairman, our budget in municipal affairs very much talks about the sustainability of municipalities, giving them predictability for the future so that they can plan, so that they can work towards the future in a sustainable manner. We need to work with municipalities. We need to work together as we are.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'd like to pick up where I left off, which was with some questions on disaster planning. I had just

outlined for the minister that the budget allocation for this year is down from what it was last year and significantly down from the year-end forecast for the '06-07 year, which had a year-end forecast of \$14.8 million. The budget for '07-08 is \$9.9 million. Can the minister tell us how the government would feel they are enhancing their ability to respond to disasters when there's a decrease in the funding?

Along with that, can the government explain why they are downloading the responsibility for disaster planning onto the local authorities without providing adequate support to go along with that to make sure that the municipalities have the resources needed to develop and maintain effective emergency plans?

I'd also like to know what funds are being allocated to allow municipalities to adopt the recommendations of the Environmental Protection Commission. Now, this was a critical report that the government commissioned in response to the Wabamun disaster, and I would like an update or status report on where the government is on implementing these recommendations.

What steps is the minister taking to implement a provincial 911 system? How is the minister expecting municipalities and others to build an emergency management framework and to train people to respond effectively when there is so little money allocated for training? Perhaps he's got a different way of looking at this, but I would be interested in what's happening there because I think emergency and disaster planning and response are going to come into play and be very important when we look at things like pandemic response, which we are expecting within the next one to three years. It's particularly important around business resumption, around public service recovery for, for example, utilities, waste treatment, sewage, you know, repairing and getting all of those systems up and working again, delivery of local governments, plus all the other disaster service training that's going along. I'm interested in how this is all going to happen with a corresponding cut in the budget.

I'm going to go on to some specific issues around inner-city housing. Now, I'll briefly outline this by saying that we have sort of three levels of housing. One is the emergency shelters, also called a mat program, which are really dealing with people between one and three weeks. That area of funding and policy also covers battered women's shelters and detox facilities. Then we have transitional, which is usually between three weeks and three months, and that, of course, is covering some transitional housing, again for battered women and their children – battered spouses in some cases, I suppose – but also for people segueing between detox and treatment programs for drug and alcohol use. Then we're looking at sort of a third stage transitional, which is beyond that to a year.

I noticed in the responses to the task force on homelessness and housing on page 6 of 12, recommendation 3: increase funding for temporary emergency homeless shelter spaces. The government does say that it will allocate \$35 million per year for transitional housing and homeless supports, and \$30 million would go toward operating costs for 25 emergency shelters throughout the province, that this is an expansion of the program. I'd like to know if this money was in the budget last year, and if so, how was it allocated? If it is new money, where did the money come from, and is the money matched? Is it corresponding with any federal housing homelessness programs? I'm wondering if there's any attempt here to leverage money out of the rest of the community.

Recommendation 4 is on establishing and funding an Alberta transitional housing initiative. It does say, "Government will establish the Alberta Transitional Housing Initiative and provide \$2.5 million in funding for support services for residents in transitional housing." When would this program be operational? Is the \$2.5 million expected to be start-up money, or is it expected to be

annual operating money? What is the performance measurement that would be put in place to be able to judge whether this was a successful use of money?

Is the government planning on developing a partnership with organizations working in the community? For example, I think it's called the champion centre, which was operational in Lethbridge, and I think they might have also been working in Medicine Hat, very good group, providing concentrated support services for hard-to-house. Two point five million dollars is not a lot of money for transitional housing initiatives, so I'm wondering exactly how the government thinks this is going to be successful and whether it's looking at the same amount of money in the future or adding to it.

I'm also looking at recommendation 5, the Alberta rent supplement program allocation, and note that the government will increase funding for the rent supplement program to \$33 million, with an expectation that this would assist up to 2,000 households per year. Could the minister please provide us with the exact criteria of eligibility or qualification for getting people into these programs? Is it income tested? Is it asset tested? This is an existing program. My understanding is that it's for either unwaged or very low wage.

4:20

But I also note that out of this money, the \$33 million, \$1 million is going to be directed to Fort McMurray to assist essential workers – included in that are nurses, police officers, teachers, et cetera – with a rent supplement program to allow them to obtain affordable housing. What are the criteria under that million dollars? How do you qualify for it? Where do you apply for it? How much money is available to each individual? Is it asset tested? Is it income tested? Will it be based on a monthly allocation, a monthly rental cheque they would somehow get from the government? Is it applied directly to a landlord? Is it based on the space, or is it based on the individual? If you could answer those questions, that would be helpful.

I'd like to go to page 10 of 12 of the task force report, under strengthening the nonprofit sector. I would like to know why the government is not accepting the recommendation to stabilize and enhance operating funding for community-based nonprofit groups. The government says in its response: "Government does not accept this recommendation. Government follows a three-year planning and budgeting process." So perhaps the minister could explain exactly how that comment answers the task force recommendation to stabilize and enhance operating funds for community-based NGO groups. You're saying that because you've got a three-year program, you can't work with nonprofits to stabilize them? It's very fuzzy thinking. I'd like to know what the minister had exactly in place.

What we are seeing in the NGO sector is a hollowing out of their capacity to deal with anything new or unusual. Because the government is consistently funded on a line item funding without any ability to build capacity in the organizations, they're hollowed out. They have no additional capacity to deal with new things.

I'm also interested in the explanation of why the government did not accept the recommendation to provide a guide or facilitator in the public service to assist smaller communities and not-for-profits.

I'd also like to know the reasoning behind why the government did not accept the recommendation to "create a non-profit service provider to encourage regional alignment, minimize duplication and create synergies for similar non-profit groups." The government says, "Strong support networks already exist." Could I have a listing, please, of the support networks that the minister feels are filling this criteria, that they would not have to give any additional support to the not-for-profit sector? Could you give me a list, please, of all of the organizations that the minister believes are fulfilling this? I would be eager to share that with the organizations

and support networks that the minister thinks are already doing this. The ones that I'm talking to are saying that they don't have the additional capacity to step out and to help the government with anything else beyond what they're already doing on a voluntary basis or a charitable basis or through a contract position with the government.

I believe my time is almost over, so I will take my seat again. I look forward to a very thorough explanation to my questions. If the minister is not able to provide them verbally, I would expect to receive them within two weeks in writing. I thank you for the opportunity to ask the questions of the minister.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I don't think we need to put anything in writing. We'd be glad to answer all the questions right now.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, I need to refer the hon. member to page 261. Page 261 very specifically talks about the question that she has on a decrease in the budget. This government does not plan for disasters in such a way that we say that we pay for disasters. If she could refer to page 261, line 4.1.2, disaster recovery, that funding there was money that was spent on disaster recovery that was not budgeted for.

In fact, we added \$1.7 million to the budget. The addition of that funding is in actuality to deal with an emergency management body or agency. I can say that at present we have hired a director for that management body, emergency management. That, by the way, is one of the recommendations that came from the report. His name is Dave Hodgins, and we're very happy to have him on board. I want to make it very clear to the hon. member opposite that the funding that is being allocated in that direction is very much going to answer some of the questions that she had, to deal with municipalities. We need to deal with search and rescue; we need to deal with fire departments; we need to deal with the fire commission and for them to work together with our provincial ministries to make sure that we have a one-window approach.

Mr. Chairman, we've also had discussions with our federal counterparts, in discussion on mitigation, in discussion on a national alert system, in essence preparing our citizens in case a disaster happens, saying: no, the funding is not less; the funding is more. Maybe I should mention just a little bit on the mitigation aspect. We are looking at the province and looking at some of the areas that have experienced flooding and looking at how the federal government and ourselves could work together in trying to mitigate that possibility of flooding happening.

Let me also go to housing. The hon. member divided the housing into three categories: the one to three weeks and who was included in that category, the three weeks to the three months, and also maybe the long term. You talked about the \$2.5 million, which is a new program, the transition program. Are we expecting that funding to increase? I mean, I would hope that it does. Is \$2.5 million, you know, enough money? It's a new program. We need to get it started. We need to get it going. We put \$2.5 million in that program. We just can't throw money into a program and hope that it works. Our focus and our direction are to continually increase that program and assess what the needs and demands are going to be.

You talked about what the criteria were for some of the homeless programs, and is it income tested or needs tested?

Ms Blakeman: Asset tested.

Mr. Danyluk: Asset tested. Well, you know what happens, Mr. Chairman: the homeless usually don't have money, and that's, I

guess, acid tested. I mean, they don't have anything, so you tell me where you're supposed to go with this.

You talk about the rent supplement: yes, it is income tested. Hopefully, that can provide that answer. When I say, with the homeless, to have asset tested, is if an individual has assets, they usually won't qualify for the criteria that's necessary for the homeless.

4:30

Mr. Chairman, we provide \$143 million for housing through management bodies throughout the province, through municipalities. We provide them with financial support on an annual basis. We also provide legislation through the Alberta Housing Act, and we provide support services directly from our staff in the housing division. The hon. member talked about fuzzy thinking, and I am not sure exactly what that meant, but we provide funding to municipalities. Municipalities are the best judge of where and how funding should be allocated in their areas. Those municipalities have asked for that autonomy, and we have granted that autonomy because they know best as to where funding should go.

Mr. Chairman, we have supported the homeless support, increased the shelter support to \$35 million, up from \$23.1 million. We have increased the homeless initiative to \$6 million, up from \$3 million. The funding will enable the department to extend the initiative to additional municipalities and increase funding to seven identified communities currently receiving through this initiative. Now, the program is delivered through community-based operators. We have also allocated \$68 million through the municipal sustainability housing initiative, that gives the opportunity for municipalities that have needs in their communities, for them to apply on an individual basis or a project basis for funding from our department.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that we have taken a very balanced approach, from emergency to housing. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I have exhausted the list that was provided to me. If there are no further speakers, we could go on to Seniors.

Okay. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'd just like to wrap up a little bit. First off, I neglected to say that I thank the task force for the work that they did. I was privileged to sit on a task force, and I realize just how much work is involved in that. Travelling around the province and making sure that all of your concerns are heard by that task force and actually reported out is really a lot of work, so I do thank them for that.

Just one other thing too. Again, I would like to go back to something that the minister and I have been talking about. I would respectfully ask this minister to please check the numbers of secondary suites that are below ground. Now, the unfortunate part is that I would suspect that a lot of these suites that are below ground, or even suites above ground, really – a huge portion of those are illegal. I'm not sure how you're going to identify them, but I would appreciate him trying to look up those numbers.

The minister has also talked about millions, billions, and what sounds like a gazillion dollars that are being thrown at many of the problems that have come forward. Again, I think that we have to go back to the principles of democracy and, in fact, that the elected people make the proper decisions at their level. Some of the business of having strings attached really boils down to the golden rule, and it's: he who has the gold makes the rules. I'm not sure that that really is the best way to govern a province.

I'm going to repeat this. I really do believe that it's true that there has been created a massive municipal infrastructure debt through

huge cuts in transfer payments over a number of years. The government of the day attempted to put the provincial government on the backs of the cities and towns by cutting those transfer payments. If those transfer payments were put back to what they were, restored, I think municipalities would have a much better crack at it.

One of the other things is that the funding comes tied to priorities downloaded from the province, such as Water for Life and affordable housing. I'd like to sort of speak to the Water for Life initiative. I would like to see more dollars from the department of advanced education put into that because this is a huge issue, and the universities and certainly Lethbridge College are addressing that. That comes under education, so I'd like to see some dollars go into that.

Affordable housing. I think that under Bill 34 we have pretty much gone around the merry-go-round on that one, but the problem remains that there is a crisis. The crisis is now. There is no inventory for people to move into. The other big concern that has been mentioned is, in fact: where are temporary foreign workers going to live? My understanding is that we'll be getting 2,500 in the Tofield area. Where are they going to live? More importantly, who are they going to displace if the company can afford to buy the condos and put these people in? Who are they displacing? Are they displacing Albertans?

The other thing that certainly the Liberals would do – and I've spoken about it before. I think there should be a separate ministry or certainly a separate deputy minister in charge of housing. Moving housing from Seniors to Municipal Affairs I believe was the right thing to do. In fact, I think that your deputy minister and I were at a conference together at the Delta hotel, I think it was, when that conversation came up, and I'm glad to see that it's happened.

The other thing that I see that I think has to be addressed in a much more aggressive fashion, really, is emergency funding. It isn't just flooding. Who knows what our emergencies might be? We hear nothing but pandemics, and certainly when we had the BSE crisis, it showed just how important it is that we are ready to move, and right away. If anyone has read the book on the SARS crisis, they will realize that actually it was very poorly handled and partly because they weren't prepared.

One of the other things is that we have an increase in population, which is no surprise to anyone in this House or to actually anybody in this province when you speak to them. One of the things that immigrants use – and there are huge statistics to back this up – are libraries. There aren't any extra monies to cover what libraries are really struggling with throughout this province, not just in the big cities but certainly in the smaller centres, where many immigrants are coming to to begin their lives. Some of them certainly migrate into cities, but a lot of them are coming to smaller communities, where they've either been church sponsored or sponsored by local social groups or, in fact, just sponsored by other families or the families that have come ahead of them. They are using libraries. The libraries are strung right to the end, and this is part of helping immigrants integrate into our society.

4:40

Libraries need money. But like everything else libraries need staff, and staff has to be highly trained in libraries. Throwing money at problems in this province I don't think is always the answer. I would like to see some reviews of where this money is being spent. As I said, we're talking about million, billions, gazillions, but where is it really being spent? We have to go back and see, and I would like to see that libraries would be at least be part of that conversation. Where is the money going? Does it actually filter down, again, to those front lines?

Some of the other emergency services don't have to be huge that would be large enough to attract the federal . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the time allocated for the estimates of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing has now lapsed; however, the minister is requesting, if he receives your consent, that he would take about a couple of minutes at the most to respond to the last questions that were presented. Is that agreeable?

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We will then request the minister to provide them in writing.

We will now proceed with the Department of Seniors and Community Supports. The hon. minister.

Seniors and Community Supports

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We're delighted to be here this afternoon to talk about the estimates for the Department of Seniors and Community Supports, the best department in the government with some of the best, finest employees among any of the departments, none excepted. So all those other ministers around here, take a good look at the fine quality of personnel. That's true, actually. I must admit that I've been very impressed with the quality of people that do work in our public service in all of our departments and this one not to be excepted.

I'll introduce Tim Wiles, our deputy minister. I've got Reagan McCullough right beside me, our assistant deputy minister, disability supports division. Chi Loo is the assistant deputy minister, seniors services division. We've got, let's see, Susan McCulloch, the senior financial officer of corporate finance. Then we have Bruce West, director, supportive living/long-term care development branch, community support programs in strategic planning division, and then Jim Menzies, executive director of finance and IT services. I might also mention that in the members' gallery there is Pam Livingston from my office and also Janice, who's our communications director for the department of seniors.

Oh, yes. Last but not least and certainly one of the greatest inputs and support of this is the chairman of our Seniors Advisory Council, the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, who does an outstanding, superb job. Could I say that one more time? The Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne is just a tremendous advocate on behalf of seniors and their issues, and it's enjoyable working with him specifically.

An Hon. Member: How good is he? How can you relate?

Mr. Melchin: He is really good, and if you want to know how good he is, then we can put that on record. Did I mention the Member from Whitecourt-St. Anne?

Seriously though, this department really provides some outstanding services and supports for seniors and those with disabilities. It has actually been very insightful for me to have this opportunity of working with our group of people, going around those with various disabilities, really, the work that we're trying to do to see that they have equality in access and participation and the ability to be part of our communities, one that our department very much supports in direction. We know of the seniors' great contributions to this province, making it the place that we have, the structures and institutions that we support. We thank them so very much for their ongoing contribution to making this province an ongoing great place to live and work and raise a family, all of the things which are priorities of not just this government but clearly of Albertans.

The department itself, the estimates that we have before us, has a program expense of almost \$1.8 billion. This is a 7.8 per cent increase since last year's budget and, actually, just under a 10 per cent, 9.8 per cent, increase since the 2006-07 forecast, once again a substantial increase responding to the needs of a group of individuals where there are substantial needs that we're trying to address and ensure that we can help all of these people to seek the degree of independence and strength and ability which they can achieve.

I might just touch on a few of the services that are included in this department. I'll be happy to answer any questions as we go through as well. The first area is the estimate for the seniors' services division, \$389 million. It includes a number of programs that we are well familiar with. For example, 40 per cent of seniors, 142,000 seniors out of 358,000, received monthly assistance through the Alberta seniors' benefits program. Now, they might receive varying amounts depending upon their income. It's an income-tested program, but it has responded to trying to ensure that there's financial assistance to those in the greatest of need, and it was really designed for that purpose. In that respect it encompasses \$275 million of the \$389 million. The large percentage of our seniors' programs are about providing financial assistance based on an income test.

We also have an education property tax assistance program. That has been in for a few years now. Any increases in the education property taxes will be covered so that seniors are no longer subject to any escalating challenges to being able to stay in their own home, trying to facilitate that they can live in place and the education property tax not being one of the barriers. This was put in so that they would be relieved of that.

The other area of seniors, the dental and optical assistance program. These are things very much in response to being able to live in place and receive the health benefits required. In fact, many of the seniors do receive further supports, among them Blue Cross and also the waiver of Alberta health care premiums, to ensure that they do receive the health benefits that they might need.

The other one of the main areas of our department, the disability supports, has a budget of \$751 million. Encompassed in this group would be the AISH program, one of the largest, most significant portions of this budget, that provides assistance to 36,000, this year estimated to grow to, likely, 38,900 individuals that might qualify for assistance under the assured income for the severely handicapped.

This has been increased, as has been previously announced, from \$1,000 to \$1,050, which represents the substantial portion of the increase in the budget. That was in relation to some work that's been done for some time, looking at and working with those on AISH over the last three years. There's been continued support for increasing that amount. It was \$850 just a little over two years ago. This is the third year in a row where there's been an increase, and it's really an acknowledgement of just that, that they might be able to keep pace with the rising cost of living.

In addition to the monthly financial payment of the \$1,050 a month, there's the health-related assistance to address issues with respect to all the health benefits for those that are on AISH. So it's a very comprehensive health benefit program: premium-free Alberta health care, prescription drugs, eyewear, dental care, emergency ambulance services, essential diabetic supplies for AISH clients, their spouses, and dependents. That would take up about \$162 million of the supports.

4:50

The Alberta Aids to Daily Living budget has increased another \$2 million to \$86 million. That's really to supply aids not just to those

on AISH but to Albertans to assist in their daily living. Another program, the brain injury initiative, helps about 2,500 Albertans that have acquired brain injuries, and that budget has been increased to about \$14 million this year. A third area of community support programs is strategic planning. This budget estimate of \$604 million includes such areas as public guardian services and protection for persons in care, supportive living and long-term care, and other seniors' housing programs. Finally but very significantly, the persons with developmental disabilities program itself.

There are a number of increases in all of these areas, both to the public guardian and the protection for persons in care, but the one of most significance of this department is the program for persons with developmental disabilities. This budget is \$526 million this year, up over \$18 million from last year. It provides supports for about 9,100 individuals with developmental disabilities. A very substantial resource, and it has increased about 90 per cent in funding since 1999. There has been a very large, rapid growth in funding to accommodate the needs of a group of people who have very substantial disabilities, some of them multiple disabilities, and we acknowledged the challenges and pressures.

We'll be delighted to answer the questions as they come forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I neglected to perhaps clarify how we're going to do that, and I can't remember. Was that 10 minutes, 10-10, or do you want to do 20-20?

Mr. Melchin: As you wish.

The Deputy Chair: Just advise the chair, and we will do it.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. Let's do 10-10, then, if that's okay.

Mr. Melchin: Sure.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Sorry. I should have had this arranged ahead of time. I did for the last one, though.

I want to certainly thank the minister for coming in and having all his staff. Maybe he'd like to loan me a couple.

I'd like to start with the continuing care part of it. One thing that I would like to get right off the bat is the definitions. I know that this is something that we've gone around the merry-go-round not only within Seniors but certainly within Health because there is so much overlap. So I think that we are aware that when we speak of some of these things, there are overlaps between those two departments.

When I speak about continuing care, I will go back to my mantra that I've used for two and a half years, which is that I'm speaking about anyone that's in care, that I want provincial standards that are enforceable. I don't care where they live, and I don't care who delivers the care. So it's anyone that's in care. It could be from the brain-injured 18-year-old to the 42-year-old mother with MS or the 95-year-old that is living in what is long-term care. Long-term care, in my mind, comes under continuing care, and it really is what we would recognize as the old nursing home that then became deregulated into sort of the two different departments.

I know that the government has said that they want to increase long-term care beds. I'm not sure what long-term care they're talking about. Are they talking about continuing care or long-term care? Long-term care, again, is not necessarily defined in each region as meaning the same thing. I can certainly speak to the

Chinook region because that's where I worked. It really is saying that it's someone that needs 24-hour RN assessment. I agree with that.

However, I think that where the problem may lie is in the actual assessment, how people are assessed to go into wherever they are. These assessment tools, called InteRAI, which I'm sure you're all familiar with, after a fashion, although it really falls under Health, can be used to say: this is the care you need; therefore, this is where you'll live. Families are often not involved in that process, and I'm not sure that that is a fair process. Where it overlaps into Seniors is that then they go into the housing that Seniors is responsible for. So it's pretty complex.

On page 26 of the government's strategic business plan, it explains an updated plan to expand long-term care and improve standards of care that would be brought forward: "Government will work with stakeholders to promote seamless health and accommodation services for seniors and persons with disabilities, through an updated plan." I wondered if I could have, perhaps, a little bit more clarification on that. Again, back to the overlap, how closely is the minister of seniors working with the minister of health to develop this plan? What strategies are being considered? How many employees are working on the plan? How much money is the strategy receiving? When do we think that that strategy may be finalized and implemented? Would those strategies fold in under the standards that are now being rolled out in terms of housing? There are some standards being rolled out for the care side of it, but that's another issue.

Also, what was mentioned was introducing training plans for operators. I'm not sure that I'm clear what that means. What's involved with the training plans for operators? The operators on the housing side really end up with the housing, which would include everyday living sorts of things. Sometimes it includes the physical help to the person, and other times it just includes the physical environment that they live in. The cost for the training: is it covered by the government, or is it covered by the operators? Would that be mandatory? Who would be creating the criteria for that or the curriculum?

I would assume that one of the things is the safety, the fact that the building would be built to accommodate equipment. When I say that, I of course worked in an old building and worked in a new building, and the lifts and the equipment that we use now are so much bigger than they used to be. The doorways for sure have to be bigger. The doorways to the rooms have to be bigger, and the doorways to the bathrooms have to be bigger. It's those sorts of things that are safety factors.

On page 281 of the estimates, line 4.1.5, it shows that there's a 165 per cent increase, \$4.8 million, to supportive living and long-term care. What I always hear from the government is all the millions and billions and gazillions of dollars, and it doesn't really mean anything to me. I really want to know what the end outcome is: what is that going to give me for those dollars? The other thing that I'm very interested in – I think I spoke to the minister ahead – is that this is one 'schwack' of dough that we are putting out there. Before we put out even more, I would like to see some really in-depth reviewing of where this money is going because I really don't see it getting down to the front lines, where I think it's necessary.

What is the breakdown of the funding for long-term care compared to assisted and supportive living? Again, here we go into definitions. In the Chinook region, of course, we have designated assisted living, which does have that little extra level of care that would be provided by the Health side of it. The breakdown of this money: is it the breakdown in how many people we're serving or how many units are involved with these dollars?

Has the minister of health handed over responsibility for long-term care to the minister of seniors? It would be passed over as a complete package. It would be very difficult to do, but I think it might be a good thing to look at. Then again, are we talking about only seniors in long-term care, or are we talking about seniors in continuing care, that could well have Down's syndrome? Down's syndrome people are living much, much longer. One of the things that they've found out lately is that as Down's syndrome people age, certainly beyond the ages of 45 and 50, more often than not they end up with severe Alzheimer's. So they end up being very, very high care, not necessarily needing nursing care other than for the assessments but certainly require a lot of personal care, personal direction, and as far as I'm concerned, they need a lot of love. We need time to love people.

5:00

Real enforcement, in my mind, is something that doesn't exist in Alberta. It's a deficiency that was identified by the Auditor General and the MLA task force, and improvements have widespread support of the public. There's a huge fear factor out there in some of the public that I speak to and have spoken to. They actually are afraid to come forward and complain because (a) they're not treated with respect when they do it or else they have some kind of confrontation, and they're thrown out of the institution of where their loved one is. Then we get the police involved, and it just deteriorates from there. We need strong, strong support for people when they come forward and that they're not afraid, that their concerns are addressed. Having said that, I do realize that it's very difficult for people to put loved ones into long-term care, and sometimes their expectations are way beyond what possibly can be delivered because the staffing component isn't there.

When might the minister support the introduction of legislation as recommended by the Auditor General and the MLA task force that outlines standards, monitoring and enforcement, and clear lines of accountability in continuing care?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In response to the questions from the Member from Lethbridge-East, there were a lot of detailed questions that have come up, many of which we are going to have to respond to in writing later. There were a lot of questions about various quantifications of beds and people and the like, so we will respond to those in due course.

I would say this, though, with respect to the continuing care issue that – and you've been involved with the standards that have been set – as of April 1 we have implemented a number of standards for ongoing care, and this fits into both facilities and for the care itself. There was some discussion about the enforcement of those standards, and I would concur with that. If you're going to set some benchmark in standards, you need to ensure that there is a compliance and enforcement of that. That's the only way you can gain some confidence in any system. Be it for you or I or our parents or anyone else involved, you need to ensure that there is an enforcement and compliance to the standards that is met.

A lot of work has gone into it, as you're well aware yourself having participated, Member for Lethbridge-East, a very good contribution on those standards that should be implemented not just for long-term care but for all facilities. I'd say from the feedback we have from the service providers that those have been well received. A lot of work has been done to implement them. They've just come into effect as of April 1.

This first year is going to be an interesting one. We're just trying to make sure that we get around through the year to ensuring that

people are both educated and up to date and work with them on the compliance questions. I think part of our work this year is to ensure that we do just that, that we do get around to all the facilities, monitor the progress that they've made, certainly give them all the accolades we can for compliance, and/or if deficiencies are there that some plan of action is met so that we can ensure compliance of all facilities. Then the enforcement will come for those that choose not to comply or are faulty in those standards. Thus far I'd say that overwhelmingly it's a very good response to that standard of care.

That said, when you mentioned if it has been transferred from health to the department of seniors, this still remains a shared responsibility. It is work that I'd suggest we'll forever have to work on, whether long-term care becomes fully in one or the other. There's probably no perfect or utopian solution to whether it should be entirely in one department or the other or be a shared responsibility. I know from our own department that while you have many of the issues of housing and seniors, one of the greater challenges, really, is the care component if it's really a health delivery portion of it. Those are the things that people have responded to more than just, you know, the standard of the facility though we have to ensure that they meet the specifications and door widths, and you mentioned some of those kinds of accessibility questions.

Therefore, I'd say that there certainly is an understanding of the need for both sides of it, whether it could meet specifically under the jurisdiction of one department. We have had a number of meetings already in that regard. Both the minister of health and myself have met as well as our department and officials. Whether it ever gets to a resolution – it should rely on one – it's too early to prejudge though it is something you can't choose to just ignore. There needs to be a tremendous amount of facilitation and ongoing co-operation so that we don't miss who's ultimately responsible for the various tasks. But I would tell you that there is a high level of support for ensuring that for seniors and those in long-term care facilities as well as any form of supportive living facility, whether it's long-term care or various supportive living care, that both the health and facility issues would be attended to.

I concur with your thought about it really doesn't matter what facility they're in; the standards ought to apply uniformly. I guess that's a question we'll have to think through in the rollout of all the facilities. If there's a standard of facility that's requisite, maybe if it's long-term care because of a health issue, they may require some specialized equipment and/or a structure or facility to accommodate that, but other than that, most of them should be pretty common as to an expectation regardless of whether it's a lodge or supportive living or any other form of housing.

You mentioned also about outcomes. And you're right: we get into talking in hundreds of millions of dollars that are spent, and it becomes difficult to translate that. I, too, would focus in on what the right outcomes are that we ought to address. I support that thought. That's the real challenge. The ongoing struggle, I guess, is making sure we've defined the right outcomes and the benchmarks. How do we then report against them, and how do we ensure that we are making progress against that? We'd be welcome to any suggestions and thoughts as to those that could be improved or those that might be added. I think an emphasis on all of our budgets has to continue to be driven towards outcome. These are individuals. What is it that we would want for you or me or our parents or anybody else that's in any form of care or under the supervision of anyone else? There is a standard of outcome that we would demand.

The other ones. I wasn't clear on one of your questions upfront. I know that you were addressing primarily long-term care. We have a range of facilities, everything from living in your own home all the way through supportive living like our residential living: the lodges, assisted living, and the enhanced assisted living, through to the long-

term care facilities. Those are far more defined by level of health need. In fact, that is more the definition. It's really a health issue defining the requisite need of attendant health care that would then designate them to the need of a higher level of care with an option.

I would say that, uniformly, people are looking more and more to support that direction. How do we help facilitate people living in their own home, living in their own facilities for as long as possible for a variety of reasons? It's what most people prefer: to live in surroundings that they know and understand and feel comfortable and have some confidence with. How do we integrate the health to support the people living in place and in home as long as we can and then even more integration amongst some of these other facilities?

5:10

I must admit that one of the confusions I've had is going through and looking at: what makes this a facility? We have some different ones called unique homes. What makes it a lodge? What makes it assisted living? You go into some complexes that are integrated, and they have them all. The only thing that I could really define as being different wasn't so much the building structure most of the time. Sometimes, but mostly it's not the building facility; it is the level of health care that's a requisite for that person in that setting.

If that's the case, there's much that I think we could do in moving towards: regardless of where they are, how does a person live in a place longer in whatever description of a facility that that might mean? There's going to have to be a lot more collaboration with Health and with the regional health authorities as to following the provision of health services to where they are versus just moving a person from place to place to place. I think, though, that a laudable goal and direction that I would fully support, not just me but from what we've heard from various stakeholders: much more thinking of the facilities that we support, of the integration of that from the outset. How do you prepare for that facility being able to support maybe a range of services?

That said, we'll respond to the more detailed questions you have in writing because some of them are very specific in nature. I'd be happy to entertain some more questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. As the minister may or may not be aware, I have a very high percentage of seniors in my constituency. I know that there are some centres in Alberta, like Lethbridge and Camrose, for example, who are at 15 per cent or even higher than that. My constituency is also at about that level. By far most of the seniors in my constituency are independent. We have one long-term care facility, and that's the General hospital, which is now climbing towards 400 beds, I think, if I've got my memory right. Overall my people live independently and are trying to stay that way.

I have a couple of specific questions for the minister. He referred to the denture program when he was doing his opening comments. We're finding that that is not working as well for our people, but perhaps I've missed something. So could he, please, explain how that denture program works and how it's an improvement? I'll tell you where it's failing for us. Dentures are expensive. You're looking at, you know, sort of \$3,000 to \$6,000 for a set many times, especially for people who have additional complications. Of course, many folks of that age do. They're dealing with some kind of chronic ailment as well, which complicates matters.

It used to be that they could get assistance through the special needs program for dentures, but then the special needs program was changed to specifically exclude assistance for dentures, and they're somehow supposed to get it through some other program. We've

been struggling with this. Now, I know that people need to get permission in advance, and they need to have this all filled out in advance. Yes, yes, all of that. But I'm more concerned that what we're seeing is increasing numbers of seniors who are not being successful in getting dentures because they actually can't find the funding anymore. The new program that's in place actually is not as helpful as the old program was. I'm happy to find out that I'm wrong and that the new program, in fact, is an improvement. So, please, tell me exactly how this program works and how people that need dentures, that are quite expensive, would be able to access assistance to do this.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

I'm going to move on to a new category. I really have a wonderful constituency because I also have a lot of people on AISH supports. Of course, they're living downtown because they want to be close to both the community supports but also agency service support for what they need. So I always get questions. I understand that there was another AISH review done somehow, behind closed doors or some MLA committee. What we would like to know is: when is the next increase scheduled for AISH? If the ministry does not have a scheduled time for an increase in AISH, why not?

I would like to know, as well, what government policy it is that will not consider an indexing of AISH for any kind of annual review. Whether that's a COLA or rate of inflation or the Alberta weekly wage index, I really don't care. The MLAs' salaries are linked to the Alberta weekly wage index. I don't care which one it's hooked to, but I'd like to know what government policy it is that is precluding the indexing of AISH to anything on an annual review basis. If there is no policy, then why isn't the government indexing AISH every year?

I'd like to turn now to the business plans for budget 2007. I'm particularly concerned about what's happening in the long-term care workforce. It's interesting because I was talking to some folks in health sciences today, and they're really concerned about a lack of staffing. They mentioned – and they're not the first ones – in particular, care facilities for seniors. If you move away from what we're calling a long-term care facility now, which is one in which there's a medical portion assigned to it, and start talking about supportive living and designated living and enhanced living and all the other versions that we seem to hear about, in fact you are dealing with staff who do not have any medical training, for the most part. Then we really are competing to get staff into those facilities. We're competing against Tim Hortons and other groups like that.

I note that under Significant Opportunities and Challenges appearing on pages 251 and 252, you identify as opportunity and challenge number 2, work opportunities, that we have an

increasingly tight labour market . . . resulting in difficulties attracting and retaining skilled workers, particularly in the health and human services sectors. At the same time, high employment rates encourage options to retain mature workers, such as flexible work arrangements and pension programs.

But what we're hearing is that, you know, hourly wage people don't get pension programs. So even if they are a mature worker, it's not enticing them to stay when they could go across the street and work for McDonald's for 15 bucks an hour or Starbucks and get a share of the corporation. In here you're seeing it as, I suppose, an opportunity when I quote you as saying: "There are increased opportunities for underemployed groups, such as persons with disabilities, to participate in the labour market."

I also note that you get quite specific in item 7 under the same category, entitled Changing Environment for Caregivers. You're noting there that "fewer paid caregivers results in increased pressure

on unpaid caregivers,” which, of course, are family members for the most part, occasionally friends. There is “reduced quality of life, increased financial burden, and economic loss from increased absenteeism and stress-related health impacts.” Of course, our guardians and parents are aging, themselves, and will die, and we will lose that volunteer, unpaid workforce very quickly.

So I would like to know: what are the detailed health workforce, care workforce plans that the ministry has? Are you working with the Minister of Advanced Education for spaces in postsecondary institutions for personal care attendants? Are you looking at any kind of standardization for employment criteria in these designated, supported, enhanced living arrangements? What is going to happen here? Clearly it’s going to be a challenge to get people in here and pay them. What is the ministry doing specifically to attract, train, and retain a workforce in these spaces for our seniors?

In addition, what programs is the ministry looking to either create or enhance with existing programs that offer respite to families? I mean, there are a few programs, like changes, for example, where we’re dealing with Alzheimer’s and dementia in patients. You can take them in for the day, and that offers some respite to family members who are caring for them. But we need a whole bunch more of these, and we’re going to need them pretty quick, and I’m not seeing the ramp-up in activity out of your department that would tell me that there is significant activity happening there to deal with the opportunities and challenges that you’re looking at.

5:20

I note as well under challenges and opportunities in item 3, the rising cost of living, where you are noting that many of your clients “have relatively low or fixed incomes.” I’m wondering how the minister relates the government’s refusal to put on a rent cap into this particular opportunity in that issue that you’ve identified here as a challenge. In many cases, low income or not qualifying for rent subsidies in any way, they’re just hooped. Why are you not an advocate for a rent cap, particularly given item 3 there, rising cost of living?

I’d also draw your attention to number 6, shift to community-based supports, which notes that increasingly people are coming out of facility care to community-based care or home after shorter hospital stays, and their care needs have to be met in the community. Now, this shift is requiring Albertans to “absorb a significant portion of the costs of equipment, supplies, drugs, transportation and other items that would have previously been covered by facilities or through the acute care system.” It’s another download onto the individual. How is the ministry expecting the vulnerable people that they deal with – and I would specifically note people on AISH, PDD, and seniors – to recoup these costs? So question 1: are you expecting those vulnerable people to take over these costs? Question 2: if you’re not, where is the corresponding increase in programs and financing in your department that you are going to cover these costs for these individuals?

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Okay. Thank you. We’ll attempt to get through a number of those. If we miss some of the questions, we’ll be happy to supplement them in writing as well.

I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioning that her constituency has a high number of seniors, mostly independent. I think that’s an outstanding statement to make, actually. That’s a good sign if there are a high number of seniors independent. One of the challenges we have is a demographic planning commission as one of the mandate letters in helping not necessarily this generation

of seniors but even future seniors to plan for the time they retire. We live longer. It’s going to be an enormous challenge, really. How do you make sure that you have the resources necessary and the ability to retire and maybe get rid of some of those barriers if people want to continue to work? But I congratulate her for having a lot of independent seniors in her area.

The dental program that’s mentioned: I just want to mention dentures. There was a change, I guess, in the Blue Cross coverage plan that was put in for a dental program, but that just broadened the coverage. Dentures are included, so they do qualify for dentures. There’s a cap, though, that says the maximum benefit is \$5,000 every five years.

With some of the service providers, there’s a fee schedule that’s identified with most of the dental programs, and that’s pretty typical of most insurance coverages, to have a fee guide. Some dentists charge more than others. It’s five years in particular, but the dentures were a program really responding to the fact – I’d say a very good step forward with the five years kind of a question. I’d be happy to have that in discussions with our Blue Cross people when we’re looking at the plans: what are the best priorities for positioning the funds available for a plan? I’m certainly willing to take that under advisement as we look at and review these kinds of plans. All I can say is that to date that’s what it is. There is coverage for a variety of basic services. It includes X-ray, polishing, scaling, extraction, root canals, and procedures related to gum disease and dentures.

As I’ve mentioned, actually with a number of seniors’ programs there’s much that we can do. The challenge gets into, I would say, in many respects prioritizing that which we should do and targeting which seniors might be best targeted. It’s hard to accomplish meeting the demands of an ever-growing number of seniors that are going to come and accommodate doing everything.

So I’d say that the budget has been increased and will continue to be increased over the years. That would be the support and direction still of this department. So it gets into priorities, really, of selecting. Out of all the things that we can do, where would you best position the funds that we should? I think that’s part of the discussion that needs to happen among the groups. Yes, there’s opportunity to change and improve benefits, but it’s not that easy to increase and improve benefits for all the range of things, of everything that could possibly be asked. To me that would be kind of coming back and working with the seniors groups: where would they see is their best and most urgent need?

The next area was with respect to AISH. As you know, in the last three years there has been an increase in each of those years for the monthly payment of AISH. There’s a question with respect to indexing and tying it to index. I’d say that it is and has been the commitment in each of the budgets that we have done. That’s one of the significant areas for looking to increase on an annual basis. That’s what we have been doing, and that’s the direction we’ve certainly been following.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

As to tying to, like we do as MLAs, an index or something, that is the ongoing work that I guess we’ll have to assess as to if that’s the best way or not, but certainly I don’t mind that we have those types of considerations and thinking through what’s best. It is and has been the direction of the government that we’ve been increasing it over the last three years. The requirement was for us to do an ongoing review. That was one of the recommendations that came, to say that we would have a biennial review.

Therefore, it does get into that we will be continually reviewing. This isn’t something that will be looked at and then put away for a

long time in the future. It is a matter that we will review every year, every budget. Really, that's a commitment we make. Every year when we put out a budget, we will be considering this as a high-priority issue, with regard to those that are on AISH. I fully support that that would be the expectation, don't have any difference of opinion on that. Therefore, we will look towards that area.

One of the things that I would say that we're also trying to do – and you get into a lot of the opportunities and challenges. Maybe I'll segue a little bit into this. As I've gone around and we've met with many of the service providers and those under the various programs or the various range of disabilities – be it PDD or AISH, it doesn't matter; they may not even qualify for one of our programs because there are many people with disabilities beyond those that qualify for AISH – as I hear the feedback, they want to be included. They want to have the opportunity to be included, barrier-free access being one, those kinds of things, accessibility being one, but also the opportunity to be included to the extent that they can in those things that we do: having work and being able to contribute.

One of the things we did identify as a priority we wanted to work on was: there are 36,000 people on AISH, and it's a growing number. I really do worry. These are individuals for whom the best way that we could help to work with them is to help them reach the maximum amount of independence that they could possibly attain themselves. In some ways I think reframing it from thinking about this as a permanency – now, for some it might be temporary; it might be forever. I don't mean to say that some will get there, but having the hope and the aspiration that everyone can attain and achieve more regardless of the level of their disability and the hope that they could rise to whatever extent they can.

Work is one of the greatest values that we all have by which we sustain our lives and from which I've heard and really been inspired by many success stories. That's what we're really trying to encourage one by one. This isn't about massive numbers of 36,000 going to 38,000. But how do we help that one person get to a measure of greater independence that they possibly can rise to and the hope that this isn't something that we will put into a dependency category? We might sustain the life, but I really do worry at times about how to help them sustain their strength as an individual of abilities.

5:30

In fact, I've been really encouraged by some of the service providers thinking about not focusing in on their disabilities – and I'm glad that we don't focus in on all of our weaknesses – but focusing in on the abilities that they have, the talents, and the interests, and it's in that way that I think some great things are being transformed. I'd just say that because of the low unemployment one of our great opportunities is to start getting people, employers, and all of us to rethink about those with disabilities and how to engage them and have them part of our community rather than abandoning them into a life of dependency. It's in that that we will work as individuals. These are unique, and they'll have their unique circumstances, and we're going to work very hard and very proactively on assisting them to earn.

Part of the AISH program that we don't focus on at times is that we improved the exemptions a little while ago up to \$400 before there's any cutting back of any AISH. We want to ensure that we get flexible in helping those individuals when they think about the opportunity for work, and that's going to be very uniquely positioned. They will have different strengths and different capabilities to offer, but we need to engage, I think, more of society, employers, and everybody alike to look at how we can better integrate those with disabilities into our communities.

So it's as an opportunity that I view it. Is it a challenge? An enormous challenge but we want to look very proactively at that.

Those are really the solutions. They all want and all of us want an opportunity to contribute, to explore and develop our talents to the extent we can, and have that ability to provide the income and sustain our own life to the extent one could.

That said, underpinning all of that will be the programs there to support them, and they'll still be there. They aren't being taken away other than to help the system go forward.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. About two and a half years ago when we were elected, I can remember that my House leader would say to me, "I need you to talk for 10 minutes," and I would absolutely panic. However, 10 minutes is nothing now, so I'm going to try to go really fast. It'll sort of be a shotgun approach on some of this stuff. [some applause] Thank you. I know that you're just waiting for everything I have to say.

Just a couple of comments about dentures. Good dental care for seniors is probably one of the most important things that can be done because it affects their eating habits. Certainly, people have been known to quit eating or just go on liquid diets because their mouth has not received the care that it needs.

You spoke about the demographic planning commission. What would the cost of that commission be, and what exactly are your measurements? What are you looking for out of this commission? Other provinces like B.C. have set specific, measurable targets to increase the number of long-term care beds by 5,000 by 2008. What targets have been set in Alberta, and is the minister of seniors collaborating with the minister of health to set those targets? Again, we're down to the definitions of long-term care because, in my mind, we don't have enough of what I consider to be long-term care because they're being pushed out.

The Liberals are certainly concerned about the deregulation and the unbundling of health support and housing services, but we all understand how we're going around the circle on that one. Changes by this government over the years have redefined the complex health care needs of the seriously compromised, high-risk, ill people as housing. It goes back to: how are people being assessed? Should they be assessed for care first or housing first? Again, the chicken and the egg. But often they are assessed for housing with basic health care services that go with them.

Given that the ministry appears to support that shift towards supportive living, what steps are being taken to prevent the trend of having more and more costs of those long-term care services shifted onto residents and their families when, in actual fact, long-term care services are often medical and are being delivered by people who truly aren't trained? I'm thinking about tube feeds, people that are on trachs. Yes, once you've learned those skills, you're right. But you still have to have those assessment skills, and again you're looking at the proper handling and sterilization of those pieces of equipment that you use, particularly in invasive services.

I'd like to switch over to PDD. There are approximately 9,200 adult Albertans with developmental disabilities, and it's obvious that it's essential for these people to have quality supports. As you have said yourself, we're trying to get them to live and be able to perform to their very highest ability in terms of their independence. But it appears that this is an awful lot of money for a small number of people, and according to the disabilities community, funding isn't adequate. So, to me, there's a huge disconnect between these numbers and that particular question.

Are there ways to ensure that this money is being spent in the right places like front-line staff? The question that I would ask is: how is this money being spent? I'd like to look at it line by line because the money goes from the province to the health authorities to the PDD

boards to the contract operators, and then it finally gets down to the front line. So I think that a total review of how these dollars are being spent is in order.

When the PDD board was restructured, \$11 million was turned back into the department, but that \$11 million, I think, came back out in the last go-round. It was \$11.3 million that was put back into PDD. When that board was eliminated, could not some of that money or that staffing also have been eliminated? How was it distributed through the rest of the department? Has the minister reviewed the effectiveness or the benefits of these reforms? I realize that it's probably just a little under a year, but I'm wondering just what measurements are being used in terms of that evaluation? Have these changes really improved service delivery? Have the changes resulted in any cost savings?

The increase was 3.5 per cent, but of course we know that inflation is higher than that at 5 per cent. Would this small increase accommodate the caseload growth and the agency staff retention pressures? The caseload growth, I think, is a question that has to be looked at very closely because some of the criteria that have been put out lately actually stop people from being put into the system that perhaps should be.

One of the things we were talking about was people meeting their highest level. Some of the complaints that I've had are that before, when there were PDD supports for people, often they helped people go to Special Olympics, and now that's been cut back. So that's one less program that people can access that really does help them keep up their physical mobility. In terms of PDD people moving forward, we certainly have different levels of cognitive abilities, and again a program that I think has been hit is the one where there is help for going to college or university. I have a young man in Lethbridge who would not have gotten through college and become a taxpaying member of society had he not had that continual help to get him through what he was trying to do.

Service providers have been eliminating day programs, and I think that's part of where the one-to-ones come in. When they don't have that one-to-one and they go into larger programs, that's not a bad thing, providing the same level of cognition is put with the same groups. I think sometimes where that comes out wrong at the other end is in group homes. It's so difficult to place people in group homes where the levels are exactly the same. One care worker may be able to look after three people if they have almost the same level of care that's needed or the same cognition, but if you've got three people with high needs all of which are different, it's very difficult for just one person to be able to look after them. That's where, again, of course, staffing comes in.

5:40

I think that you probably have seen that report A Human Resource Crisis in the Disability Services Field – I'm sure that it has been given to you – where they're actually identifying a crisis. I think we're almost at catastrophic crisis now because people really are being left by the side of the road. As I know that you're more than aware, staffing has fallen down. In fact, our college doesn't even offer the program anymore.

So, again, we should be looking at the department of advanced education. What they can they offer? How can they offer it? Should they perhaps be looking at the same thing as the health care workers, where, in fact, they can learn on the job. I think it's Bow Valley College. I'm sorry; I can't remember the name, but there

actually are distance learning programs where people can learn on the job, and perhaps that would be a help towards getting more people into working. It's not an easy job, and you really have to have the heart for it. You cannot go into this kind of field only for a paycheque. It just doesn't work, and it certainly puts anybody at a disadvantage.

I know that you're aware of the inequality of wages for government positions and community positions, which I think is something that certainly has to be addressed.

What is the minister doing to ensure that these qualified, experienced staff remain in the sector, and how are you recruiting staff?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, you have just about one minute left.

Mr. Melchin: Dentures are good. Demographic planning commission: we're working on it. PDD: there are 9,200 adults. I agree that there's an enormous challenge here and disconnect in my mind, too, about the amount of money versus the numbers of people being served. As you actually are aware, today we even have some meetings with kind of some brainstorming sessions. We're starting to take a look with some service creative people: how do we improve this? It's one that should help address in the end that dollars can get down even to those that are providing the service. The most important benchmark to me is the person, those 9,200 people with PDD. It's all about them, and it's less about supporting all of our structures. So, to that end, that'll be part of the outcomes that we have.

How much time do I have? Very limited.

Caseload growth . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, but pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(a) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Seniors and Community Supports relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we do now adjourn until 7 p.m., at which time we reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:47 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, May 15, 2007

7:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/15

head:

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. The item for discussion tonight is the estimates of the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. The members may have staff on the government side, provided a list is given. I don't have a list or a day's notice that was required for the opposition. Does the hon. member have an explanation?

Mr. Chase: The information was walked over on Monday to the appropriate departments. Why it hasn't been received, I have no idea. When I spoke with the Sergeant-at-Arms, he suggested that he would very much like to receive a copy of the notification. I would be very pleased to provide you with that notification. But if it puts you in a position of compromise, I can go it alone. I would prefer not to, but I am prepared to do so.

The Chair: The first day the notice came out requiring one day's notice, I allowed unanimous consent because there was no opportunity for a day's notice, and from that point on it was intimated that a day's notice would be required. But I'm here to serve the Assembly.

If I could recognize the hon. Member for Peace River. Did you want to speak on this issue?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, not to interfere with the rules of the House and your ruling on this matter, but the government party certainly has no objection and no idea what happened to the notice. We're not going to object to the presence of a researcher.

The Chair: Well, with that, I will allow for unanimous consent of the Assembly. Are there any opposed to the hon. member having his staff member there? Hearing none, when the opportunity arises for you to speak, would you introduce the member.

head:

Main Estimates 2007-08

Infrastructure and Transportation

The Chair: I will now introduce the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Before I begin, I'd like to introduce members of Infrastructure and Transportation's executive management committee and senior officials present. To my left I have Jay Ramotar, my deputy minister. To my right I have Winnie Yiu-Young, executive director of finance. Next to her I have Rob Penny, the assistant deputy minister of policy and corporate services. Up in the balcony I have Steve Callahan, executive director representing transportation safety services. Maybe you could wave so they'll know who you are. I have Larry James, executive director representing the department's properties division, and I have Barry Day, the assistant deputy minister of capital projects. And everybody knows my assistant, Warren Chandler.

Alberta has one of the best transportation networks in North America, and our province also has one of the strongest economies in Canada. The link between transportation and economic prosperity

is clear. It is also clear that the ability to move people and goods safely and efficiently is vital to our prosperity. Roads and infrastructure play a critical role in the success of our province and Albertans' quality of life.

Alberta has experienced phenomenal growth over the last few years. Since 2001 more than half a million people have moved here, and since 2002 more than 300,000 vehicles have been added to our roads and highways. This has put significant additional pressure on transportation routes and accelerated the wear and tear on our roadways. As the province grows, so do the challenges faced by the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

The state of Alberta's core infrastructure and our roads and highways has become a high-priority issue for this department and for this government. Building and maintaining roads is directly related to the Alberta government's priorities of managing growth pressures and providing safe communities.

The Alberta government recognizes the important roles that infrastructure and transportation play in the success of our province. It demonstrated its support with unprecedented funding for infrastructure in last year's three-year capital plan and again in this year's plan. The estimates I am presenting today are closely tied with the capital plan. Thanks to ongoing support from the government, the ministry continues to undertake a number of programs and projects in '07-08. I'd like to share some of these with you as I present the ministry's estimates for the '07-08 fiscal year.

This year the ministry's estimates to be voted will be approximately \$3.2 billion for expense and equipment/inventory purchases, a nearly 16 per cent increase from the '06-07 forecast. Of the \$3.2 billion, \$372 million is for noncash items such as amortization, nominal sum disposals, and consumption of inventories.

When the noncash is excluded, the ministry has a \$2.8 billion spending target for programs. This includes more than \$421 million, primarily for highway rehabilitation and maintenance. Approximately \$297 million will go towards provincial highway maintenance and systems and \$124 million into highway rehabilitation. Nearly \$41 million will go into transportation safety services. This funding supports vehicle and driver safety programs, monitoring of the commercial carrier industry, and a number of traffic safety initiatives, including implementation of the new traffic safety plan, which is one of Infrastructure and Transportation's three mandates.

The traffic safety plan is designed to reduce deaths and injuries on provincial highways. It outlines key initiatives to help prevent collisions, build safer roads, enforce traffic laws, and better educate Albertans about traffic safety. Some key aspects of the framework being developed for the plan include a focus on community traffic safety, co-ordinated enforcement, legislation based on best practices, and an emphasis on the safest engineering practices. More than \$1 million will go towards the Transportation Safety Board.

A key element of the ministry's program expense is capital support to municipal infrastructure. More than \$1.2 billion in grants will be provided to Alberta municipalities in '07-08. These grants will allow municipalities to target funding at infrastructure pressures that they deem to be priorities. Using these funds, local governments can direct funding at projects, including roads, bridges, public transit, water and waste water, and emergency services.

One of the notable programs under municipal support is the Water for Life strategy, which provides cost-shared grants to eligible municipalities to assist in the construction of high-priority municipal water supply and treatment and waste-water treatment and disposal works. Over the next three years the ministry will provide \$422 million for the Water for Life strategy, of which \$103 million is specifically for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. A hundred and fifty-nine point three million dollars was approved in

the '07-08 budget, \$35 million of that, again, for Wood Buffalo; \$174 million was approved in the '08-09 budget, another \$34 million for Wood Buffalo; \$88.3 million was approved in '09-10, another \$34 million for Wood Buffalo.

Also included in the ministry's voted expense category is \$360 million for government operations. This funding enables the ministry to maintain the day-to-day operations and maintenance of government-owned properties as well as leases, the Swan Hills Treatment Centre, and capital and accommodation projects.

In addition, funding for natural gas rebates in '07-08 is budgeted at \$477.3 million, a \$114 million increase from the '06-07 forecast. This reflects the projected increase in natural gas prices.

The ministry's capital investment budget will be nearly \$1.5 billion in '07-08, an increase of \$549 million over the '06-07 forecast.

Approximately \$201 million will help fund several major projects such as the Royal Alberta Museum's renovation and expansion, the first phase of the construction of Edmonton's new remand centre, and the Brooks crop research greenhouse. Notably, Infrastructure and Transportation will invest in provincial highway systems and the strategic economic corridors: \$626 million is allocated for the strategic economic corridor investment initiative, including the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads and the north-south trade corridor.

7:10

At this time I'd like to take a minute to clear up any possible misunderstanding about the cost of construction on Anthony Henday Drive southeast. The '05-06 provincial budget provided \$83.3 million for this P3 ring road, but the Infrastructure and Transportation annual report for that period shows an expenditure of \$118 million. The additional \$34.7 million recognizes the actual amount of work completed by the end of March of '06. The \$34.7 million does not represent a cost overrun as the cost of this project was fixed. This amount will be reduced from future budgets to stay within the project cost.

Continuing with program expenses, more than \$385 million will be used for provincial highway systems. To clarify the funding for provincial highway systems, it includes buildings and enhancing provincial highways and bridges so that we can continue to meet the transportation needs of Albertans and others who drive through our province. For example, this funding will accelerate the construction of the highway 4 bypass by Milk River, the interchange on the Trans-Canada at highway 1 and highway 9 near Strathmore, and the new bridge on highway 49 over the Smoky River west of High Prairie. The funding will also help build projects such as the highway 2 north Innisfail interchange upgrade, the highway 2 median widening from Crossfield to Acme road interchange, and the twinning of highway 779 in Stony Plain.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: I'd just remind all members that the time allotment for this item is an hour and a half. If a person is occupying the floor at the time, I'll allow them to finish their time, but that will take time off the next item of discussion because we do rise and report at 10 tonight.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I know all about time off for bad behaviour, having been a teacher for 34 years.

I'd like to begin by introducing my esteemed assistant, Sam Lyon. I want to thank the minister and the deputy ministers and the array of assistants both on the floor and in the gallery for being here to answer questions, and I look forward to those questions being answered.

I also want to indicate – and I apologize, Minister, for not remembering your assistant's name – that I did appreciate the phone call clarifying the \$34.7 billion. He explained to me that it wasn't a cost overrun, as you've indicated tonight. It was, rather, a requirement of the Auditor General to list it in that format. We had a brief discussion: is this the best way to do it? But that's the way you've been asked to do it, you did it, you've clarified it, and I appreciate it.

What I would like to do tonight is give you a sampling of some of the communities who have indicated their infrastructure concerns to me, and if you could sort of provide me with an update: "Yes, that's in the works," "No, that hasn't been approved," or "We've got a 2008 schedule for beginning construction" and so on.

One of the qualifications I would appreciate right off the bat – you know, at the end of my first 10-minute segment – is what your Department of Infrastructure and Transportation believes to be our current infrastructure/transportation deficit and how you calculate it. We all know the province's history. We know the cutbacks of 1994. When the Premier announced that the debt was paid in full, we had a different opinion: that a large part of that debt, rather than being addressed, was basically downloaded in the form of an infrastructure deficit. It's something that the municipalities are struggling to overcome. But when I sent out letters to all the municipalities and to the school boards – and just while I mention that, a bit of clarification. Something that I had been pushing for and the Liberal opposition had been pushing for was the return of the responsibility for infrastructure and transportation at least to the ministries of Education and Health. I think that for the most part that's been accomplished. A question that I would have is: is there any sort of chain of approval whereby the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation has to sort of cosign the cheque, or are the ministries of Education and Health and Wellness able to operate independently? Our feeling was – and obviously the government recognized the wisdom – that in order for the departments of Education and Health to have any degree of independence and get on with their projects, they needed to have control of their infrastructure budget, and I believe that that's the case.

When I sent out the letters to the various municipalities, the overriding concern, the most common concern that I received was water management, whether that was water treatment or whether that was water being supplied by pipeline or by sewer. There was a concern that the infrastructure, whether it was a small summer village or whether it was a large municipality, was experiencing difficulties with old water systems that were requiring upgrading. I know that, for example, the cost of upgrading another filtering system in Calgary doubled over the time period because of inflation and the fact that we'd been waiting for the funding to come in.

Anyway, I'll start with some specifics, and as I say, if in the response you could tell me if it's been addressed or where we're at and at what stage. Sorry; one more little bit of delay. There were a number of municipalities who were reluctant to give me permission to table their information, and therefore the examples that I'm using have given me that permission. It's very important that that be realized because I would not be bringing forth their cases should I not have had their permission or should I not have had direct discussions with the mayors or councillors involved.

Municipality of Jasper. Their top three infrastructure priorities were upgrades to the municipal water supply systems, development of new water wells and treatment; number two, modifications and related energy efficiency upgrades to the community's recreation centre – they note that the facility is almost 30 years old, is in need of modifications and modernization – road and street infrastructure improvements, sewer collection, water distribution, utilities repair, and upgrades to meet design capacity.

The municipal district of Lesser Slave River. Their priorities were funding to cope with resource traffic on municipal district managed roads that is not only sufficient but allows for the municipal district to engineer projects, to receive funding for the engineering so that projects can be staged and let to tender at opportune times; i.e., remove the requirement to fund the whole project over a limited period of time. Secondly, ensure funding for water and waste-water facilities and a collection and distribution line. Number three, ensure provincial regulations regarding vehicle heights; give consideration to the fact that haulers eventually leave the provincial highways to travel on local roads built in a different era. Heavy vehicles and increased heavy vehicle volume led to the deterioration of roadbeds and shortened life cycle of roads. This begets cost to the local ratepayer. Their fourth priority was to include driver education in the Alberta high school curriculum, which sort of falls under the recommendations of the McDermid report for improving driver safety.

The second most commonly referenced concern of municipalities after waste-water treatment was the deterioration of roads from heavy equipment that was travelling to and from oil and gas sites or, in the case of Fort McMurray, up to the oil sands. It was felt that there should be some form of charging or recognition of these vehicles, which were not from the local municipality but were travelling through, whether it's through Drayton Valley or Trochu or Three Hills or any other district, that the wear and tear should be recognized and supported.

7:20

The village of Longview. Their priorities are – and they provided me with several charts, but I brought it down to five – off-site levy assessment, a water treatment study to produce a capital plan, maintenance of sanitary manholes, sanitary flow testing and video inspection, waste-water treatment plan evaluation.

Now, I had a great meeting with the mayor of Norris Beach summer village on Pigeon Lake, and he opened my eyes to a series of problems that summer villages such as his face. I believe that there are either 10 or 12 summer villages around Pigeon Lake. They have rather unique problems. Their small population means that they don't have a large tax base, but what happens is that the way the province funds the summer communities is that they only recognize those that are there year-round. So while every single individual who has a property on the lake is taxed and contributes and pays into the coffers, the only ones that get recognized in the grant program are those that are there on a permanent basis. Because of the small pockets of population, they sort of get treated in a one-off manner rather than taking into account the entire population. If that entire population were taken into account, then the support for waterlines being hooked into the sewage programs instead of having their local . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

Mr. Ouellette: I might have to jump around a little bit here before I remember which part you went to. I think I'd like to start off, then, by maybe addressing the Water for Life strategy portion: how important water is to this government and how important we all believe clean water for everyone is. I mean, I'll go to an old statement. I don't know who actually said this statement: whiskey is for drinking, and water is for fighting over. I'm sure you've heard that many, many times.

I will say that to address water amongst all these priorities that you were talking about with all the different municipalities, we have what we call the Alberta municipal water/waste-water partnership, and in that it provides cost-shared grants to eligible municipalities under 45,000 population to assist in the construction of high-priority

municipal water supply and treatment and waste-water treatment projects. This program ensures that Albertans have access to safe water supplies and environmentally acceptable waste-water treatment. I will tell you that the program that we have and the amount of money we have in our budget is way oversubscribed, as you would know, a lot. Again, it goes to our very, very hot economy, to how strong our full economy is in Alberta and the amount of people moving in here.

All the municipalities are reaching that. Are we almost at our limit of what the waste-water system we have now can handle? Is our treatment centre enough? As a government we definitely do say that regional systems are a great way to go. Whether or not we can afford to fund them all or help them fund them, it may take a little time, and we do have to, like all the rest of our programs, prioritize them and see who needs the help the most. We try to help as many people as we possibly can. If summer villages developed a regional strategy for supply of water and treatment of waste water, Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation would certainly be willing to work with them and help them. We try to help all of our municipalities with everything, whether it's engineering on their roads, planning all sorts of different things. We try to supply people from our ministry to help them with that.

It took a while to get us on the same page on: why did the Auditor General make us show this extra \$34 million? I'm really glad that you've understood that now. Maybe you'll realize how good a deal P3s really are, especially in times like we're going through in Alberta right now with this high escalation of costs and stuff. We're saving hundreds of millions of dollars because we're guaranteed that there are no prices rising. For the one that we just started in Calgary, the northeast ring road, it would be unbelievable a couple more years down the road how much more money it would cost, and we're protected at that one price, that it can't cost us any more.

You also were asking about capital maintenance and replacement requirements on our roads, what kind of deficit we had. Our capital maintenance and replacement requirements are a maintenance activity that was not performed when it should have been or was scheduled to be and was put off or delayed.

For the purpose of reporting capital maintenance and replacement requirements, is the cost of restoring a facility to its current use or its as-built condition? Infrastructure currently has a capital maintenance and replacement requirement backlog of \$1.6 billion for roads and \$87 million for buildings, for a total of approximately \$1.7 billion. It's rapidly increasing each year. To give you an example, we've only been doing about 350 to 400 kilometres of rehabilitation a year on highways, and we should be doing about 1,500 for the amount of kilometres of road that we have out there. Now, there are a couple reasons for that. One is cost, and another is capacity. We've been having meetings with most of the road builders and contractors and stuff around the province, that say that they're working on increasing their capacity. Cost: as a government we've put more money into the budget, and we do lots of planning within this department.

What you've got in front of you is our current three-year plan. We also have an internal five-year and 10-year and 20-year out plan. I'm working on a four-year plan right now to catch up on this backlog. In this three-year current budget plan we've got 2,500 kilometres of rehab in there, and we believe that we're going to be increasing that over the next couple of years.

I hope I've answered all of the questions that you've come with so far. I'm willing to carry on.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate that you've answered a portion of my questions. So far you've come up with a figure that I believe was approximately \$1.7 billion. The former Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation's figure, in terms of the overall infrastructure and transportation deficit, was \$7 billion, and that was last year. So we may not exactly be talking about the total budget. I know that you referred quite a bit to roads, and maybe what you were referring to dealt directly with roads.

As for converting my enthusiasm for P3s, I would like to think I'm not ideologically bound, but if these roads had been repaired, if these buildings had been maintained, then the costs we are currently talking about in the form of P3 savings would never have had to have been realized.

7:30

There has been a neglect since '94 of infrastructure and transportation, and the magic bullet of P3 is not going to resolve all that problem. The biggest part of the P3 equation, that gets left out in discussion, is the fact that we have no idea over the next 30 years, which is the average time for a P3 project, what the interest rates are going to look like. Those interest rates aren't fixed. While we're paying off bits and pieces of the principal, the interest continues to accumulate. It is my belief that the increase in interest rates reduces whatever savings may be initially provided.

With P3s there's also the ownership question. At what point does the project revert to the public owner and become a liability as well as an asset? There's a lot of discussion about P3 schools, et cetera, but I know that that's not your area. It's unfortunate that 30 years from now we'll have that answer, and neither of us is likely to be around in this House. Therefore, the responsibility for those decisions that were made at that time will not fall upon our shoulders. Somehow I'd like to see that accountability extended.

Back to the discussions with Bruce Fowlie. What he noted – and you approached the answer somewhat – was that the community paid out \$25,000 seed money trying to get the government to recognize the true combined population if you took in all the summer villages. They felt that if they approached it as a collective, if that were permitted, then they would be able to apply for a \$75,000 cost for the grant implementation, which I gather is the maximum for an exploration grant.

One of the difficulties – and this has to do with the regional planning, and I came across this difficulty in Red Deer county versus the city of Red Deer – is that sometimes the regional co-operation isn't the greatest. This is something that we hope the government will take a leadership role in. For example, when I was talking to the municipal district of Red Deer, I said: "Well, why don't you get your water from the city of Red Deer? Why aren't you hooked up by a system of pipes? Why isn't your waste water dealt with and treated?" It seemed like there were a whole series of small water treatment plants as opposed to a large line, that I felt would have been more effective. But we run into this.

In some cases it's regional pride. You know, say the town of Bragg Creek wants money spent on their water treatment plan. It's maybe not necessarily the way they politically want to go: ship it to Cochrane or Cochrane, in turn, ship it to Calgary. But it seemed to me that it would make sense to have the infrastructure through pipelines with a processing facility both for water treatment and for the waste treatment. I mean, I don't want to take away from individual municipalities' decision-making, but it seemed to me that at some point with government support and funding and sort of chairing some of these regional committees, not dictating but chairing, some of these bits-and-pieces solutions could be dealt with.

To go further on Norris Beach – and I know it's a small area, but

we've got a lot of small villages and towns that are very important in Alberta and are struggling to survive: the development of a regional infrastructure plan for the purpose of orderly planning around the lake that will serve the needs of residents and the public and acknowledge the environmental challenges, septic tanks versus a collective waste-water treatment system, such a plan emanating from a regional study would consider existing and planned development, public access to the lake, roads, emergency services, and all environmental considerations.

We all know that in the winter probably the population of these villages drops to, you know, one-tenth of what it is during the summer when people come down from Edmonton and so on to enjoy them. It's kind of like what happens in Fort McMurray when everybody comes to town and the hospital is needed and the various facilities. Another concern that they had was road maintenance and upgrading within the municipality to handle the increased traffic resulting from increased development activities. In the village of Sangudo, again, the waste-water distribution system came up as well as upgrades to the village reservoir.

From the city of St. Albert a concern that the Member for St. Albert has brought up: the west regional roadway currently under construction on the west side of St. Albert, the north leg of the Anthony Henday Drive and its currently planned alignment proximity to some neighbourhoods in south St. Albert, a freeway which they consider is too close to residential areas. General infrastructure maintenance and expansion are ongoing needs.

Now, when the minister indicated that he was trying to answer my questions, I don't know whether in your information you can give me anything about the Jasper municipality or Lesser Slave Lake or Longview or Norris Beach or Sangudo village. If that's not possible tonight, it would be wonderful to receive that information, sort of a progress report, so that both you and I could get back to these individuals who have expressed their priorities.

The town of Taber. Again, waste water comes up there as number one, a new waste-water treatment facility, phase 1 at a cost of \$10 million, in 10 years phase 2 at an additional cost of \$18 million, and that's funded in 2006 dollars. The northwest storm waterline comes in at – again this is a 2006 figure – \$2.7 million. A 57th street connector connecting downtown to highway 3 over the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks: \$2.5 million has been paid to CPR to relocate their spur lines, \$2 million for road construction.

The city of Edmonton. I'm going beyond their three priorities because of the large population. They've noted a \$3,068,000 total for unfunded projects. Oh, pardon me. That's in the billions, I gather, rather than in the millions: \$3,068,000,000. Sorry. I misread. Based on the approved 2000 budget summary for the city of Edmonton, unfunded elements of the plan, total cost of over – oh, pardon me. I'm making a mistake. I've got a series of millions and billions here in place. It says \$3,068,000. Excuse me for my confusion there. Of this 54 per cent relates . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

Mr. Ouellette: Well, hon. member, I've got to clear the air here a little bit. You're jumping all over the place. I don't know how anybody can follow any questions you're asking. I answered all of your questions before, but I will say that it took 13 letters and five phone calls and how many times in the House to get you to understand what the Auditor General was talking about in \$34 million. So maybe I will have to reanswer all these questions 12 times.

I want to say that you're really talking specifics here about separate municipalities. We have grant programs that every municipality can apply for on every single issue you talked about tonight, and that's what we're doing with just about all these

municipalities. When you talk about summer villages at Pigeon Lake, yes, there have been a number of programs there, and different people have taken the lead to partner with them. I'll give you an example of one. Wetaskiwin took the lead for a study along the south shore at Pigeon Lake, but the project fell apart because the summer village residents did not want anything that may allow more growth. They didn't want their little paradise to be shared with anybody. They said: we'll cancel this project.

7:40

We have grants available that they can apply for. One of them is the AMIP program. The program provides financial assistance to municipalities to develop capital municipal infrastructure to maintain and enhance economic, social, and cultural opportunity and well-being while protecting and improving the quality of our environment upon which people and economies in Alberta depend. Funding under this program supports the development, enhancement, and rehabilitation of core capital infrastructure projects such as municipal roads, bridges, public transit vehicles and facilities, water and waste-water systems and facilities, storm drainage systems and facilities, emergency service vehicles and facilities, and infrastructure management system software. Included in the list of eligible projects are design and engineering services, construction and rehabilitation, vehicle purchase, and land acquisition. In addition, the program may include barrier-free transportation initiatives to improve accessibility for seniors and persons with disabilities.

Where the core capital infrastructure needs have been addressed, the available funds may also include other capital projects such as cultural and recreational facilities, community environmental and energy systems and facilities, solid waste management systems and facilities, municipal buildings, and other municipal infrastructure.

We were talking about P3s and having to worry about 30 years. That's another one that you're very, very, very misunderstanding. It's completely warrantied for 30 years. The only place that any cost can differ on the full price of that ring road for 30 years is that in our contract they can tie the annual maintenance fee just to the rate of inflation. There's no such thing as interest rates. There's no such thing as anything like that that could increase the cost of that road. We get the road back after 30 years in the same shape – we can do an engineered study on it. It has to meet the same engineering criteria after 30 years as it did the day it was built. They're responsible for all of that maintenance. That's when I say that it's such a good deal, especially in times of cost escalations like today.

Yes, you could say that our total maintenance and replacement requirements across government are more than the \$1.7 billion. The \$1.7 billion is our department: \$1.6 billion of that on roads and \$87 million on buildings. As of March 31, '07, our total capital maintenance and replacement requirements across government will be \$5.8 billion. I'll go a little further. The backlog of capital maintenance and replacement requirements is expected to exceed \$12 billion by 2012, but we're talking replacement cost of buildings here. We're talking buildings here that are 75, 85, 95 years old, some maybe less, and they never ever were built or designed for that period of time. So that's also the cost if we replaced all that square footage.

When we talk about roads, you can see by the great economy we have in Alberta the increased amount of truck traffic and heavy traffic and traffic that's beat up our roads a lot quicker than we had expected them to from our original design requirements with less traffic count on them.

Did I catch all of them yet? No. There's one more here, I see: the St. Albert bypass. We have been working with the city all the way along. We've been doing the functional design and study with them. They're going to look at building the road, and as long as they build

that bypass road to our government specifications so that when we need to do the complete bypass or take it over, if it's to our specifications, we can do that, and we can actually pay them out for the money they've spent on that road because it would become a provincial numbered highway.

We want to help every municipality that's under pressure, but like anything else, there's only a certain size of pot of money. We want to stretch those dollars as far as we can. That's why we ask all of our partners to help us with different ideas. How can we streamline our designs, our engineering? Can we make P3s work better to stretch our dollars further to help taxpayers? But I will guarantee you, hon. member, that we will always do that due diligence. If a P3 doesn't make sense and doesn't work better for the taxpayer of Alberta, we wouldn't go there. That's the thing that I speak about to our officials all the time, that they do the proper due diligence. They have the degrees in the fields that they work in, they wear the engineering rings on their fingers, and I'm just there to make sure and try to help them manage that we look after taxpayers' dollars properly.

Are there any other ones that I've missed? I think I've caught all the questions from this round, hon. member. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. If I accused the minister of hyperbole, it would be the equivalent of the pot calling the kettle black, so I won't make that accusation. But I will note that it wasn't 12 phone calls, Mr. Minister, and an equivalent number of letters.

Mr. Ouellette: I was being a little sarcastic.

Mr. Chase: Oh, I see. Okay. I appreciate the qualifications.

Going back to Edmonton and trying to speed up because I want to raise a number of concerns beyond the priorities given to me. Roads: \$1.3 billion in funding is currently underfunded; an additional \$683 million is needed for public transit projects; \$68 million is needed for drainage system changes. The section on project management and construction, including emergency response facilities and public works buildings rehabilitation notes: \$322 million in unfunded projects; \$120 million is requested for police buildings and equipment. Currently the most urgent needs have been met by expanding the city's debt. Tax-supported debt reaches \$50 billion under this budget.

Similar story in Calgary. Based on the approved 2007-2008 capital budget, \$2.8 billion in additional capital projects have been identified as needed but are unable to be funded within the 2007-2011 capital plan. This unfunded list forms what the corporate infrastructure status report has noted as a \$5.4 billion infrastructure funding gap over the next 10 years. A hundred and forty-two million dollars in properties and buildings. Basic maintenance and construction in Calgary's parks is unfunded by \$153 million. Unfunded recreation expenses total \$213 million. Expansion and maintenance of Calgary's public transit system needs another \$440 million.

While \$93.5 million in needed projects will be funded over the next five years, an additional \$110 million will go unfunded. Major transportation infrastructure will go unfunded to the tune of \$9,898,000,000. Equipment, critical computer infrastructure, and service locations are in need of over \$317 million over the next five years. The 2007 unfunded capital projects totalled \$297.8 million. By 2011 the total unfunded liability of the city of Calgary will be \$2.8 billion. This is why our municipal minister and our mayor are doing quite a bit of travelling, both in the air and on our roads.

7:50

In 2005 the mayor, Melissa Blake, from Wood Buffalo came down in the spring and called upon the government to recognize the extraordinary needs of the Wood Buffalo-Fort McMurray area, and it was a \$1.2 billion request. The amount the minister has mentioned comes nowhere near that \$1.2 billion. Because there was such a delay and such an underfunding, in the spring of 2006 Mayor Blake came back with a joint proposal with the surrounding area, a need for \$2 billion.

So I'll let the minister and his associates do the math, but you'll find that whether it's the city of Calgary, whether it's the city of Edmonton, the city of Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, there are billions of dollars of infrastructure and maintenance required. In the city of Calgary, for example, just the public part of the school board is approaching a half billion dollars in deferred maintenance, and that isn't even dealing with the 40 schools that have been requested.

Anyway, progressing. The Radke report raised a number of large issues. Many haven't been dealt with in this budget. This was the government's own report done by a former ADM, yet they have only partially dealt with its concerns. I'll address issue 23 of the recommendations, transportation infrastructure in the RMWB: the need for four major interchanges in the urban service area, even over the twinning of highway 63 south. The east Athabasca corridor road should be fully funded by industry, which is an interesting suggestion. It is primarily a corridor road that industry uses. It calls into question: what is the provincial infrastructure transportation responsibility, and what is the responsibility of the private sector? A lot of discussion there. The need for completion dates on AI and T projects so that the municipality knows what's going on and can co-ordinate.

Issue 29, the industrial heartland: what planning has taken place? The report states that I and T "has not participated directly in planning the roadway system in the industrial heartland and has no money budgeted in its current three-year capital plan for financial support of extraordinary requirements for road construction." It doesn't seem that this capital plan is any better.

What's going on with these recommendations? What's been done? As far as we can tell from the budget documents, this is what the ministry is doing: twinning highway 63 south. We agree with this, but it would be nice to see the minister explain why they're ignoring the recommendation by Radke to put this on hold. Now, you can't have it both ways. Highway 63 has been a major concern that we have brought out as a Liberal caucus since the late '80s. Possibly the minister could give us an update as to how many kilometres of highway 63 have now been twinned, say in the 2005-2006 year, and where we'll be in terms of kilometres accomplished in twinning by the end of this season. That would be nice to know.

The bridge is listed in the capital projects but only as a proposed project. Can the minister clarify what is going on? The interchanges are not on board yet at all. What's the plan? When? Who pays? Municipality, the province, the feds?

No word on the east Athabasca corridor road. The EUB report 2007 to 2013 has suggested that the Alberta government should be taking a lead role in co-ordinating this. Radke thinks it should be fully funded by industry. Can the minister sort out this difference?

No word on Upgrader Alley and planning there.

The list of questions appears almost endless, but to cut down to the core of the problem, what is the government doing to make sure they aren't lacking any plan for this development as they were lacking one for Wood Buffalo? We know the possibility of 10 upgraders. What's the plan?

We need clarification on all this. The health care concerns raised

in Radke were dealt with straight away. Why the delay on infrastructure and transportation?

We also need more accurate costing: part 6 of recommendations from page 144.

Alternative financing, otherwise known as P3s: a little bit more detail. There's an increase of \$53.6 million on last year, 36 per cent. What is this for? Is it just the northeast ring road, or are there other project increases? What is the government spending on through alternative financing? What kinds of alternative financing are going on? We've heard about P3s. I'd be interested in other creative mathematics.

In the business plan, page 207, alternatively financed projects dropped from the \$202 million this coming year to just \$5 million in the year following. They then increase slightly to \$31.9 million after that. Why the decrease? Aren't these commitments that have to be paid? Isn't the whole point of a P3 to spread out payments over the years, not fluctuate? What is the province's P3 debt? How much is the province on the hook for over the next 20, 30, or, if any projects have been extended, out to 40 years?

The capital plan, page 85, suggests a figure of \$513 million for the two ring roads. Is this the total cost other than what you mentioned as an interest increase based on the maintenance only? I would love to have that written down, that the only fluctuation in interest is in maintenance; it's not over principal.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, hon. member. I've got to start out again. You were all on city grants again. You were all on somebody else's total infrastructure package or planning or deficits. I don't know where you want to go with that because it is not an actual responsibility of Infrastructure and Transportation or the provincial government.

The provincial government is doing everything they can to help Edmonton and Calgary and any other municipalities with their own plans, but those are their plans that you were talking about, how they're short for their different projects that you were naming. I can't remember them off the top of my head because I was just listening to you, saying: every time we've addressed this, we say what our responsibility is and all the different grants they can apply for from us, but that really is their responsibility. We try to help them with that, and in a short period of time of the last five years or so we probably went from – and I'm doing a little bit of guesstimating here – around \$400 million to municipalities to today: this year going to be \$2 billion going out to municipalities. If we could do more, we would do more.

But what you were actually addressing here or trying to say was that our problem was city planning. Yes. I agree. They're suffering the huge growth of the province the same way as we are. Hopefully, we can work together and come to some solutions to address all those facts.

You were talking quite a lot about highway 63. We do not have highway 63 on hold. I don't know where you got that from, but highway 63 is not on hold. We're going to probably spend – maybe somewhere in these notes I have the exact figure – well over \$500 million in the next three years just on roads in the Fort McMurray area. We're right now in the process of building a five-lane bridge across the river in Fort McMurray to the tune of about \$150 million. We're working on the interchanges you're talking about. We've just tendered from Fort McMurray south to 881, twinning that section this year. You wanted to know how many miles were twinned. I don't know those miles exactly, but we're twinned from, oh gosh, the other side – I don't know if we could call it the Syncrude plant or Mildred Lake area or somewhere – back to Fort McMurray. We've already spent \$200 million over the past few years. Funding

approved in the current '06 to '09 capital plan totals \$548 million, reflecting all the growing infrastructure needs.

8:00

Rapid economic activity in the Fort McMurray region has increased the movement of goods, equipment, and people to the region. This work has included repaving 55 kilometres on highway 63 at locations between Fort McMurray and south of Mariana Lake to preserve the existing highway, including grading of the Stony Mountain truck staging area as well as clearing 60 kilometres on highway 63 in preparation for future twinning.

Within Fort McMurray 13 kilometres of paving was completed, including five intersection improvements, construction of an innovative alternative lane south of McEwan bridge to reduce congestion, and installation of high mast lighting to improve visibility. North of Fort McMurray 17 kilometres of grading was completed for the future twinning between Suncor and north of Mildred Lake. On highway 881, 70 kilometres of base paving and 102 kilometres of final paving was completed to allow a continuous paved surface between Lac La Biche and highway 63.

The current capital plan for a \$543 million investment is to complete additional improvements in the area, including base paving to complete the twinning, again, to Suncor, repaving northbound and southbound lanes within Fort McMurray between Hospital Street and the Athabasca River bridge, commencement of construction of a new Athabasca River bridge, repaving the grade widening on highway 63 south of Fort McMurray to south of highway 69, twinning of highway 63 from south of highway 69 to south of highway 881, grade widening on highway 881 from east of highway 63 to Gregoire Lake park, and base paving of the Stony Mountain truck staging area.

Longer range plans include twinning south on highway 63 all the way down to highway 55, completion of a staging area north of highway 881, and construction of an interchange at Thickwood Boulevard in Fort McMurray. It goes on and on and on and on. We aren't forgetting about any of our responsibilities there. The main thing is that we're trying to get as much done as we possibly can for the dollars we can afford to put in it at the time or for the capacity that we have.

Alternatively financed projects: a \$53.6 million increase is primarily due to the commencement of construction on the Stoney Trail northeast ring road in Calgary. There was a \$120 million increase in statutory funding for the commencement of the Stoney Trail northeast ring road, offset by a decrease in funding for the Anthony Henday southeast ring road as this project will be completed in October '07. Statutory programs are not voted by the Legislative Assembly. The projects are set up to recognize the liability but do not require a cash payment during this fiscal year. When a cash disbursement is required, the Legislative Assembly will vote on such an appropriation.

Under the P3 model a private consortium will design, construct, finance, operate, and maintain the asset for a period of 30 years. Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation will make payments over 30 years instead of paying for the project as it is built, the old, traditional way. The government will have accumulated a \$513 million capital lease liability related to these projects when they are all completed, and that consists of the capital costs only for the Anthony Henday southeast ring road, which was about \$356 million, and the Calgary northeast Stoney Trail ring road, which was about \$156.9 million.

There was something else about ring roads that you were asking me. No, I think I got it all now, right? We're jumping around here a bit, but I think I've covered them all. Are we missing anything?

I think we probably have covered all of that for this little session. I don't know if there was more. I'm just trying to think if there was more that you asked about on the Radke report. There was very little about that.

Oh, you were asking about industrial heartland. Highway 21 is part of the industrial heartland. We're twinning that right now. All of that stuff comes into effect. I've met with the chamber in Fort Saskatchewan. We've talked with Sturgeon county and Strathcona county. They're going ahead, working on plans. The actual St. Albert road that you were talking about is part of the industrial heartland. So, yes, it's very high on our radar screen. We're very concerned here. We want to make sure that we're out front of this, that we don't have another Fort McMurray on our hands.

There is an industrial heartland working group. The other morning I was actually in Fort Saskatchewan speaking to the chamber, and I was mentioning: "I'm a little worried. We've got to get this." The fellow stood up and said: "Hey, hey, hey, back off here. We're way ahead of the game on the planning." That is so great when private industry steps up to the plate for that.

Another thing you were asking about, now that I'm thinking of it, was another road. The east Athabasca road is not a provincial road. Just in secondary roads alone we have 16,000-some kilometres. As we're doing a review, looking at all these roads – and I've got to be very careful how I say this because I don't want to scare the municipalities and say that . . . [Mr. Ouellette's speaking time expired]

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. One area, minister, that you haven't addressed yet – and I'll look forward to your answers – is where we're at with Upgrader Alley in terms of planning dollars laid out.

The other answer that I would be pleased to receive is that P3s assume the government is going to cover the cost over a 30-year period. If everything were to stay in a boom mode, that wouldn't be a consideration. But what happens if we make promises at this point which we can't finance 30 years down the road? If alternative energy sources become more attractive, there's a concern over pollution that we haven't been able to potentially sequester. The environmental damage is such that our one-trick pony of natural resources that provides us with the majority of our money is no longer there. How will we pay for those bills? How is that built in? That's a concern I have.

Also, the way P3s are recorded. It says that P3s are recorded as capital leases, but there's no entry for capital leases in the estimates or business plan. So where is the figure for '07-08? This may be part of the Auditor General's requirements, and maybe you've got it in different wording. I'm quite willing to hear how it's being explained.

Sustainability. I started talking about the Liberal plan, which according to our number crunching suggests that by 2020 we'd have set aside \$120 billion so that there wouldn't be the dependency that we currently have on nonrenewable energies. There seems to be no similar savings account in the provincial government plan. The government has no long-term guarantees for infrastructure spending. There's no savings fund to back it up. With the Alberta Liberals' plan for the future we would eliminate the infrastructure debt, drawing on an increased royalty scheme partly but also setting aside 30 per cent of all revenue from nonrenewable energy to address these costs so that we wouldn't get a nasty surprise 15, 20, or 30 years down the road.

The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development copied our plan and would have put 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource

revenue into a savings plan. The Minister of Finance wanted 20 per cent put away. Jim Dinning, endorsed by over half the Tory caucus, said he'd put at least 30 per cent into savings and possibly as much as 50 per cent. How are we going to back up our infrastructure projects? Without a substantial savings plan the province has no chance of maintaining an acceptable level of funding for infrastructure. Why hasn't the government done anything about securing our future so that when these payments come through on our P3s, we would be able to actually pay them off?

8:10

Highway quality. How is this living up to keeping Albertans safe? In the business plan, page 201, we see measure 1(b), showing that the government is aiming at 21 per cent of provincial highways, over 1 in 5 kilometres of road, being in poor condition by the years 2009-10. Also in the estimates line 3.0.2 shows that spending on provincial highway rehabilitation is going down by 13 per cent even before the 10 to 25 per cent construction inflation. At the same time, goal 2 of the business plan is to provide a safe, secure, and reliable provincial transportation network.

The Premier and all the ministers keep touting the pledge to keep Albertans safe. There's a disconnect here. How can the minister justify letting the province's roads deteriorate so badly? Isn't this a result of the massive underfundings in the 1990s that's coming back to haunt us and the consequence of a complete lack of planning? Could the minister please provide the most recent vehicle fatality rates in Alberta? Does the minister expect that with twice as many roads in poor condition in just three years' time, the rate of accidents will increase?

Construction inflation. The business plan says that inflation in the construction industry is running at 10 to 25 per cent. If it's as bad as the top end of that, then we're looking as much at the I and T budget shrinking in real terms. This is, of course, just the result of the government's failure to plan and the deferral of massive infrastructure debts from the cuts in the 1990s. The minister talked about a figure of \$12 billion, which I consider to be extreme lowballing. The Premier was at the table when these cuts happened. Now Albertans see ever-increasing amounts of their tax dollars going in to catch up. An acknowledgement of the impacts of the failure would be appreciated. How do the ministry's long-term highway maintenance contracts with private firms address the inflation? Are they proofed against it? If not, the 27 per cent increase in the maintenance budget suddenly becomes pretty paltry, potentially really only 2 per cent as inflation cuts into it.

Local management. Stop micromanaging funds. Get government out of local projects. The reaction of Mayor Bronckhorst is just one example of how this government's interference causes problems. Why did the Premier make promises of no-strings-attached accountability for municipal infrastructure and then turn around and hand out less than expected and direct where it could be spent? I refer to the dispute of the province treating the city of Calgary as some recalcitrant child who is unable to manage his accounting. The minister, when I listed a long list of debts and projects, said that those are all problems of the city, that the province has no responsibility to address those public infrastructure needs.

These aren't luxuries. These are requirements: water treatment plants, roads, LRT. What will the government do about providing the real funding needed to build light rail transit in Calgary? Albertans are already so reliant on cars. Do we want to make them more so? I hope not. The government needs to take the lead on sustainable transportation in this province.

Transportation safety business plan goal number 3, page 202. It's interesting to compare this with last year's business plan. Last year

the performance measures for seat belt usage were as follows: the last actual measure from 2003-04 was 84.9 per cent of drivers, though the target for this year just past was 88 per cent. Now look at this year's. The last actual measure has gone down to 82.9 per cent. We're already meant to have reached what we're now only expecting in three years, so it seems that the expectations of this government are going down rather than up. One of the things that we as Liberals and myself over the last three years as the shadow minister have called for is the full implementation of the McDermid report, that takes into account safety measures such as seat belts. Of course, we've put forward the notion of getting rid of handheld cellphones, which, fortunately, a number of companies have done voluntarily.

Would the minister please explain why ever fewer Albertans are using their vehicles without wearing a seat belt? Why is the ministry weakening its target so dramatically? Isn't this evidence of a failure of the government to make our roads safer? Why isn't the minister being more aggressive on and I would say implementing and funding the McDermid report? It addresses so many of these safety concerns.

Percentage of drivers in fatality collisions who have consumed alcohol. Again comparing last year's data with this year's, the last actual figure came out of the 2004-05 year, 19.1 per cent. This year's target is 19 per cent. If you keep lowering your expectations, you'll probably meet your target. This year the last actual is 19.2 per cent, '05-06. The target for '07-08 is 18.9 per cent. Again, it seems like the government achievement tests. If the kids don't make the grade, we lower the expectation rather than raising the training. The target for '08-09: 18.7 per cent. For '09-10 it's a decreasing target of 18.5.

Why didn't things drop over the past year? Given that there has been no improvement from last year to this year, if anything a slight worsening, what is it that makes the minister think he can lower the rate of drinking drivers and fatal accidents? What new tactics will the ministry be using? I can partially answer that. There are going to be more sheriffs out on the roads, and I appreciate that there's going to greater policing, although I'd rather have RCMP if given the choice.

Percentage of drivers in injury collisions who had consumed alcohol. The actual figure has gone up from last year too.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Chairman and hon. member, I have to say that from what you're reading somewhere, you got all your information backwards again. I'm going to read it to you if you understand. When we were talking seat belt usage, combined percentage of urban and rural seat belt usage in Alberta, the last actual result for the Alberta percentage was 82.9 per cent. The national rate for the same period was 90.5. So, yes, we're 8 per cent lower than the national average, but we went way up, especially in rural Alberta, from where we were before.

You were saying that with our target we were targeting less. It says right here that the ministry's target is to reach compliance rates of 95 per cent by 2010 in compliance with Canada's national target. The higher the percentage the better the performance. Can I say it a little slower? The higher the percentage the better the performance.

Then we go to the drinking and driving casualty collisions. Measures indicate the percentage of vehicle operators in casualty collisions, injuries and fatalities, who were judged to have consumed alcohol before the collision. Data is taken from the Alberta collision information system. The lower the percentage the better the performance. So we're going from 19, asking for 18.5. The lower

the percentage the better the performance. Do you understand that now, that we actually are shooting for better targets than where we are?

You were asking about provincial highway rehabilitation, an \$18.9 million decrease primarily due to work required to be done in '06-07 to accommodate highway rehabilitation in resource development regions in the northern Alberta transportation corridor. Provincial highway rehabilitation allows highway pavement and bridges to be restored to their original condition at the most cost-effective time to avoid irreparable deterioration. Timely rehabilitation results in substantive cost savings in the long term. The reason for the decrease: the '07-08 estimate actually had already increased \$57.1 million compared to the '06-07 budget, so it ended up a \$57.1 million increase. You can take \$18 million off that, but it was actually increased from our '06-07 budget. That reflects that adjustment.

8:20

I think you were asking about our percentages for the physical condition of provincial highways. Our percentage in '05-06 in good condition was 63 per cent. Our target in '07-08 is actually 57 per cent. That is one where we're actually going down. We realize that we're not keeping up to our target of getting all of our roads up to the 80 per cent range. Percentage in fair condition is 24.1 per cent. Our target for '07-08 is going to be 26 per cent. Our percentage in poor condition was 12.9 per cent in '05-06, and we know that's going to jump to about 17 per cent this year.

I'd just like to comment a little bit. You were talking about, you know, the Liberal idea of doing things. With all due respect here, I just almost hate to tell you this because I know that it may not be the most politically correct thing, but I honestly believe that if your philosophies were in place in this province, our poor economy would be at its knees in a very short period of time because of the philosophies of not understanding that you have to work with everybody in this province. You can't just say: "You know what? I'd fix all that stuff tomorrow by charging more royalties or doing this or doing that."

We do have some pretty good relationships with some of the industry where they come out and actually spend a lot of their dollars on our roads. If we go to them at times and say, "You know, we have a safety factor here; we need this intersection done; your industry, your business has created this extra traffic," they actually step up to the plate and put the millions and millions of dollars on the table for us to fix the intersection. You can't always try to tax people into fixing your problem because if you do that, all of a sudden you don't make things very good for any small business to survive in an economy. I just wanted to preach a little.

Ms Pastoor: I didn't hear increased taxes.

Mr. Ouellette: No. I heard increased royalties, and you can't just jump and do that, and you can do it.

Another thing that you were getting at: not putting money away and doing that for things. I guess what you asked is: how do we make sure that we still have the money 30 years out if the economy changes or whatever? That's where the planning of this government has done very well by having a sustainability fund and a capital fund. We have \$7.7 billion in our sustainability fund as of March 31, '07. So you can say percentages that you'd put away in the heritage fund. These are all part of the heritage fund, and it's money being put away in a sustainability fund for that time when different revenues drop. We can carry on with holding our budget because we have a sustainability fund. We also have a capital account for

capital spending on all the capital projects that are in line, and that capital fund is at \$6.1 billion, hon. member.

Overall, as you can see, as often as you seem to think, "Where's your planning and where's your planning?" tonight we've actually talked a lot about planning. We've talked about all the different plans we have within our own ministry. We've also talked about our sustainability fund, which has been a plan that we've been working on for a long time out to make sure that we can sustain the budgets that we actually put out there to look after all of our great citizens of Alberta.

Traffic safety is a very high priority of this department and this government. It was actually mandated by Premier Stelmach, mandated to me in a letter. We are working on a traffic safety plan, and we are going to implement . . .

The Chair: You can't mention members' names in the House.

Mr. Ouellette: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. Just our Premier.

We're working on a traffic safety plan. We're going to be bringing different things forward. We're looking at a number of different things, and cellphones is one of them that we're also looking at. It doesn't mean that it'll come forward. We want to make sure that the studies are proper. We just don't want to jump on the handwagon because it's the popular thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chair's Ruling Committee of Supply Procedure

The Chair: It's been indicated by the opposition that because of the time there's a desire to move on to Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Before I recognize the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, I'd like to read two letters from the Speaker, and I'll just read a paragraph from each one.

The first one, dated April 30, 2007: "Each Minister must provide, in writing, the names of the officials to be admitted to the Assembly floor to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly with a copy to the Sergeant-at-Arms."

The next letter, dated May 8, 2007: "Each caucus must provide on one day's notice, in writing, the names and job titles of the officials to be admitted to the Assembly floor to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly with a copy to the Sergeant-at-Arms."

I did receive a copy from the minister of employment and immigration of the staff she wishes to be admitted to the floor, but I did not get the one day's notice, so I would require unanimous consent of the Assembly as we did earlier tonight for the opposition.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: Hon. minister, you may invite your staff in and introduce them, and you may proceed with your comments.

Employment, Immigration and Industry

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, and thank you to all the members for your support of the staff of Employment, Immigration and Industry that are with us this evening. If I may, to my immediate left is Rick Sloan, who is the assistant deputy minister in charge of the area which is principally involving the economic development file from the previous economic development ministry. To my immediate right is acting deputy minister Alex Stewart, and Alex has fulfilled the role of acting as an assistant to the deputy minister and a senior officer in Employment, Immigration and Industry. Beyond

is Shelley Engstrom, who is one of the senior staff members in corporate services looking after the area of budget and finance.

8:30

We are very pleased to represent this ministry here this evening, recognizing that this ministry and its business plan are a collaboration of six ministries which have been formed into one unit that comprises some of the most exciting parts of our governance structure, from the people that are employed in Alberta, from the people that we have defined as the working poor, to the industries that provide jobs and opportunities for Albertans to engage in commerce.

We believe that Alberta is in a fortunate position. Our unemployment rate is the lowest in Canada. Our employment rate is the highest. We have \$169 billion worth of projects on the books.

One of the challenges we face is to manage our growth to build a stronger Alberta. In order to do this, we need to invest in our workforce, and that is why Employment, Immigration and Industry is allocating some \$300 million to support employment in Alberta in areas like skills training, English as an additional language, and academic upgrading. We're also working to ensure that members of underrepresented labour-force groups have access to the labour market, groups like First Nations and Métis, immigrants, people with disabilities, youth, and older workers.

Besides investing over \$6 million in specific aboriginal training programs, an aboriginal workforce action plan is being developed in partnership with Alberta's First Nations and Métis organizations. Government also provides funding to some schools on reserves so that aboriginal people can take academic and occupationally focused training.

Increased spending on immigration will also help address, not solve, the province's labour shortage. We're increasing immigration funding by \$9 million to a total of almost \$68 million. Alberta has 10 per cent of Canada's population but only about 7.4 per cent of the immigrant population. Our target this year is to work towards an increase to at least 10 per cent of Canada's immigration. We want to increase that to 10 per cent, or about 24,000 people. This additional immigration funding will expand the number of nominees under the provincial nominee program to 2,500 in 2007-08, 5,000 in 2008-09, and 8,000 in '09-10. It will also provide international marketing in credentials recognition and up to 500 additional spaces for English as an additional language and bridging programs.

Mr. Chairman, the new funding supports the made-in-Alberta immigration strategy that was announced last week. We're also putting together, in co-operation with the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, a health workforce plan, an action strategy that will help us address labour-force issues within the health care sector.

Our department is helping industry develop strategies in areas like tourism, hospitality, construction, energy, and manufacturing to address specific labour-force concerns. The strategies are being developed by Alberta's leaders in business, industry, and unions, including Syncrude, the Alberta Chamber of Resources, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Merit Contractors, and the Alberta Building Trades Council.

Alberta's long-term prosperity hinges on the province's success in securing a position as a globally competitive economy where innovation and knowledge are applied to add value to our traditional commodity sectors. To that end, our department is investing an additional \$2.5 million to develop policy and deliver programs with industry to address the developing high-performance environments component of the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy. This includes initiatives to raise awareness of productivity

issues among industry, the addition and expansion of existing industry development programs, and the lean enterprise assessment program.

Employment, Immigration and Industry is expanding funding by an additional \$900,000 to enhance rural development capacity and programming activities with partners and stakeholders and provide additional resources for initiatives for projects to support focused strategies and leadership.

You will also see that the department has gained 72 full-time equivalent positions. Mr. Chairman, I'm quite proud to say that the Alberta Federation of Labour has actually sent an unprecedented thing, which is a letter of congratulations and thank you for the increased staffing that will help us support Alberta's labour market.

The positions help us with occupational health and safety assessments and employment strategies. Twenty-two positions are supporting immigration in areas like the provincial nominee program, researching and developing immigration policy and marketing Alberta to the world. Thirteen are focused on occupational health and safety, among them five new investigators who will be responsible for increased compliance and enforcement. Nineteen positions, including 10 investigators, are addressing employment standards compliance. Seven are addressing workplace relationships, meaning things like labour mobility, foreign credential recognition, and the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement. Eleven positions are getting the province's new office of statistics and information up and running. Mr. Chairman, this office will help us with the management of our labour negotiations by providing a comprehensive tool for all ministries to use to gather statistics that are relevant and determine trends.

Albertans receiving income support are going to see a 5 per cent increase in their benefits starting this July. This will enhance Alberta's approach to giving people a hand up and not a hand out. We're helping people find new opportunities to enter and be successful in the workforce by ensuring that they get the training and support they need.

Just before I conclude, I'd like to address a question that one of the hon. members gave relative to temporary foreign workers. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was asked today: what happens when temporary foreign workers come? Where will they be housed? Well, they will not be able to qualify for the homeless and eviction fund. It is very clear by the documentation that is in place for the temporary foreign worker that low-skilled and semiskilled workers will have to be provided for by the company that brings them over. They will have to do that planning.

Beyond that, we have the minister's affordability task force that is working on housing strategies. We have municipalities engaged in housing strategies currently, and we have a number of different groups. I think that by the time you see the next upgrader built, when Total sites its new upgrader 15 to 18 months from now, the first phase, you will see that there will be sufficient housing in place for the construction workers that will be availing themselves of that opportunity. I wanted to just cite that before we were prepared to answer any questions. I invite those questions from the members opposite.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. minister for her presentation. A lot of statistics I didn't catch, but I can read about them in *Hansard*.

I was pleasantly surprised to get a report from the department called Economic Outlook for Alberta: Spring Update, which is kind

of in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. I don't recall receiving this before. I don't know whether that has always gone to all members of the Legislature, but I find it amazingly helpful in giving us a kind of snapshot view of the economy.

Some of the things you've already mentioned, Madam Minister: GDP growth of 6.8 per cent in 2006, more than double the national rate; Alberta's population, of course, increased 109,000 in 2006; 86,300 new jobs created in 2006; bankruptcies at an all-time low; \$11.6 billion spent on oil sands projects in 2006, projected to rise to more \$16 billion this year.

Then this presentation talks about the downsides and that this growth is not sustainable, which is an interesting comment considering that one of the goals of the department is sustainable economic growth. There are all kinds of problems in terms of sustainability: the housing shortages, rental vacancy declining from 3 per cent to .9 per cent. House prices are way up, 50 per cent increase last year in Edmonton, and are continuing to rise. The consumer price index was 5.5 per cent, so I'm not all that impressed by the 5 per cent increase to core funding for income supports. Labour shortages are acute, and that's a particularly challenging aspect for this department. Over 8,600 experienced engineers and technicians are required each year for the next 10 years. There are so many issues there.

8:40

Of course, Mr. Chairman, there are other ways to measure economic growth. GDP measures money changing hands, and Alberta certainly has grown in terms of GDP over the years. But economic growth is only one way of measuring growth. The downside of economic growth indicates that in terms of quality of life there are other indicators to look at. I particularly appreciate Mark Anielski's work with the Pembina Institute, where he's developed the idea of a system of genuine progress indicators, which examines trends in the area of quality of life. In looking at the trends that he has studied, crime in Alberta has increased considerably, the divorce rate has increased considerably, substance abuse has increased, poverty has increased. It'll be interesting for the department to consider actually publishing a genuine progress outlook for Alberta as well as an economic outlook for Alberta, which leads me to look more closely at the employment section in the estimates.

That's the biggest proportion of the Employment, Immigration and Industry budget: \$644 million. The estimates are on page 112. It's interesting that this whole section is entitled employment and not social services. You know, whatever happened to the ministry of social services? It seems to me that when I was beginning to get really active in my efforts at fighting against poverty back in the early 90s, when there were lots of cuts, there was a ministry of social services then. It seems to me that social development, which is really what this section is about, and economic development should be seen as one, yet it appears that social development has kind of been subsumed under economic development.

Now, I understand that that's typical of Conservative governments in recent years, which try to connect social assistance with workforce strategies. Sometimes it's called workfare or work first or, in the case of Alberta, Alberta Works, with the goal of reducing social assistance caseloads and increasing workforce participation. But for this movement to happen, there need to be adequate programs in place and services to enable people to move.

Now, I have the same problem with this department as I have with Municipal Affairs and Housing. When you're looking at housing, it's really important to have sufficient programs in place to move people along the continuum of housing from emergency housing to

transitional housing, subsidized housing to affordable housing. In the case of social assistance programs the programs have to be sufficient to move people along off the social assistance into the work world. In other words, there has to be an adequate, quote, welfare mix. I think that's the term that's used so much now in the writings that I've been reading: an adequate welfare mix.

So I want to talk a little bit about this welfare mix. One part of this welfare mix that's really important is, of course, health benefits. I commend the department for the emphasis on the health benefits. So along with the Canada child tax credit and along with things like Alberta family employment tax credit, I guess, which is administered through the Finance department, there is the issue of health benefits and the continuation of health benefits, which follows a person when they move from social assistance into the work world. That's commendable. I mean, it has been one of the problems in the past, I think, that people often fell back into welfare and social assistance because getting into the work world and making so little money, maybe \$8, \$9, \$10 an hour, they didn't have the benefits like health benefits.

This is a program that's been in place for a while, but I think it's commendable that health benefits like prescription drugs, eye exams, glasses, dental care, emergency ambulance services, essential diabetic supplies, et cetera, actually follow the person when they leave social assistance and move into the work world. I'm not sure how long those health benefits last. I mean, it would be good if they lasted a couple of years, at least, while people are getting themselves on their feet.

Now, that raises an interesting issue because one of the suggestions that came up in the Affordable Housing Task Force is: why couldn't there be a comparable thing for housing? In other words, in the social assistance program the income support program is broken up like the core program and the core shelter. Take a single person, a single adult; the core essential is \$234. Then there's core shelter, which is divided up into living with relatives, social housing, and private housing. I don't understand that at all, I mean, why you would have three categories under core shelter. It seems to me that one would be sufficient. I'd like to have an explanation as to why there are three categories. Living with relatives for a single person, \$100; social housing, \$120; private housing, \$168: all of which are really low. I don't know how anybody can live with those numbers.

But it seems to me that if a person is moving from social assistance into the work world, it'd be great if they could take that core shelter benefit with them. I mean, there has to be some supplement in the area of income. If we're not going to have rent controls, we've got to have a greater emphasis on the income side, some sort of wage supplement or core shelter benefit. It would be great to have something like that. That would help people manage this terrible housing market, where the rents are going way up.

For example, there is something in B.C. and New Brunswick, apparently, called the self-sufficiency project, which actually provided wage supplements to single parents up to three years after they left social assistance. Actually, that kind of program would cost the government no more because people would be moving off social assistance and beginning to pay income tax. That would be a way of promoting the person moving away from social assistance into the work world, helping people move out of poverty and towards independence and self-reliance, which surely is what the program of income supports is all about.

I'd like to look closer at the core benefits program and the numbers here. You know, I'm struck time and time again by such low numbers. The Edmonton Social Planning Council has issued a report recently. I'll come back to that.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. May I just say that the focus that the hon. member has given, first of all, by starting out with appreciation to our department for the production of statistical evidence to support MLAs is very much appreciated. I have appreciated the initiatives to gather the members of the opposition's perspective on things like our office of statistics and information. Those kinds of things help us.

Well, thank you for focusing on the employment program. This employment program is built with the premise that the best social program is in fact having a job. Much of the initiative here is to not only provide supports for people who are not expected to work but for those that are expected to work or that are temporarily unable to work and those that want to work but want to be retrained in some other position. Much of the theory behind linking both the employment and the industry was to in fact do exactly what the hon. member suggested; that is, to link the employment opportunities, the trainer, the person that's counselling people to get employment with the part of our ministry and our government initiative that deals with ministry and the employer. So I think that that in itself in this new structure gives us a chance to tie those ends together.

The question about whether or not we have adequate programs to do that. One of the things that I think is really clear is that we have not only provided assessment services in 59 various Alberta Works offices but counselling for people who may need to have an opportunity to find out what they're best suited for. We look at the opportunity to tailor a program to the needs of the individual, so if they need more skills training, training in writing resumés, and job placement, if they have a disability, if they need only part-time employment because they're planning to go back to school, if they are a learner and they are going to school and they are living with family but can't quite make ends meet, we have programs that provide core shelter supports for people, for individuals, that tailor the expectation of what they would receive based on whether they are expected to work or are working, people who are not expected to work, or people who are temporarily unable to work because they're learners.

8:50

I'm glad that the hon. member opposite recognized the benefit of having a health benefit program available for people so that they have an incentive to continue to earn more dollars and their health care supports stay with them. Those health care supports bridge their income from barely adequate to making sure, at least, that they themselves as adults or their children have health care support that assures us that on dental, on glasses, on things that they may need to sustain their health, they are adequately looked after. That is a good part of how we help people as they engage back in the workforce and need extra supports.

In terms of the income supports for learners we make sure that the rate of increase, which will take effect August 2007, will help them with the increased demands that we have on the learner living allowance, so dollars there are going to help them with that opportunity. What the hon. member was obviously talking about in places like New Brunswick and other places is covered by the rent supplement program that's part of municipal affairs, so if they only need some additional supports for their rent to make sure that they can manage on the dollars they receive, that program is also available.

When you look at our homeless and eviction prevention fund, the fund has the stream of dealing with the \$7 million for people who are in dire emergencies, who need shelter support, who might need damage deposits, who might need utilities paid for, who might be faced with eviction, so we can provide some assistance. If we

determine that in the short term rent supplement is adequate or in the longer term a more permanent arrangement for rent supplement can be provided, there's an opportunity for us to help them navigate into that part of our support services, and our department has been bridging with Municipal Affairs and Housing to make sure that those supports are provided.

All and all, with this housing, with the supports for people, it is targeted at people that do have the needs who have not been recent immigrants. But if we have people that are new Albertans that have no place to go that have been looking for shelter, there's extensive work done through our offices to try and make them comfortable by linking them with other program supports that may be available.

I look forward to continuing to answer questions of the hon. members opposite. I do thank you for these questions on the employment side. I should state at the outset here for all of you that will be questioning our budget this evening that if there are things in our review of the Blues that have not been responded to, well, we'll certainly try and fill those gaps. But as nearly as I can identify, the question about the adequacy of the programs: it seems to be working well because we've noted that even since the conversation about housing supports has been presented in this House, we have very few people coming to the offices soliciting program support, activities, or program responses. We are doing our best with those, but it hasn't been a huge encumbrance because there haven't been many people asking.

With that, I will sit again and look forward to further questions.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you very much, hon. minister. Rent supplements are one aspect of enabling people to move off of social assistance into the work world. I notice that one of the government's responses to the task force also identified the possibility of actually putting money into the hands of renters apart from rent supplement. Rent supplement is when the cheque goes to the landlord. But I think what I was after is some sort of housing component or housing support system that would put money into the hands of people on social assistance and then continue with them as they move into the work world. When we went around the province, we heard from people that actually putting more money into people's pockets gives people who are living in poverty more choices, and I would think that for a government that's stressing all the time the importance of choice, that would be something to investigate. Anyway, I just wanted to look at some of the numbers in the income supports a little further.

Public Interest Alberta issued a report just recently which I found quite fascinating in which they surveyed Albertans about what the real needs of Albertans are. What do we need to have a living wage in Alberta? They came up with some interesting statistics. It just gives one example, and this is an example of a single parent with three children. If you add up the basic costs – food, housing, transportation, utilities – it's about \$2,000 a month. Household costs – clothing, furnishing, housekeeping, recreation – \$643 a month. Cost of services – child care, primary education, et cetera – \$1,000 a month. Long-term expenses, \$517. It comes to \$4,635.

If you look at the social assistance – and it doesn't matter what program you look at, whether it's those who are expected to work or those not expected to work or learners – the numbers are quite low. For example, for a single parent with two children before August 1 the core program was \$1,391, and there's a 5 per cent increase, \$70. After August 1, \$1,461 plus the national child benefit supplement of \$306 is \$1,767. Well, hon. minister, that's less than half of what Public Interest Alberta came up with. So I'm not really impressed by a 5 per cent increase.

What does it cover? Does a 5 per cent increase cover all these

programs? It's very difficult to tell from the budget because some items appear to go up; some appear to go down. For example, for people expected to work or are working, it appears to go down whereas for people not expected to work, it goes up.

I have a document here which gives an idea of the average monthly caseload. For example, not expected to work is about 11,400 households representing 17,600 people, including 5,200 children, and for temporarily unable to work the caseload is 6,600 households, and so on. This is from an Employment, Immigration and Industry release.

It's very difficult for me, and I have to do some thinking. Perhaps the minister could provide me with some help in understanding how the caseloads have gone through the last couple of years because, I guess, there's a 5 per cent increase in the budget. But if the caseloads go down, the numbers would come out differently. So I'm not quite sure. It's a bit hard to figure out. I was wondering: is there a new category here? The 5 per cent increase is for not expected to work and temporarily unable to work. Are those the same? Is temporarily unable to work the same as expected to work, or is that a different category? We have a new category now. We have not expected to work, temporarily unable to work, expected to work, and learners. Or are expected to work and temporarily unable to work the same? I don't know.

I have problems with using all of these categories and identifying people in terms of work. I know that the hon. minister would disagree with me on this, but I guess if I draw on my theological background as a preacher, I was always preaching that human beings are made in the image of God, and they have inherent dignity regardless of whether they work or not. You know, when you talk to somebody, you immediately say: "What do you do? What do you do for a living?" We almost assume that a person doesn't have value unless they contribute something to the economy, but I think that's a terrible mistake. People who are actually unable to work are unique individual human beings. So I think that putting them in a category like "temporarily unable to work," "unable to work," or "not expected to work" is a kind of slur. It's an undignified way of referring to a group of people. I don't like that kind of stereotyping.

9:00

Anyway, another issue that I would like to draw your attention to is one that I'm sure is dear to the hon. minister's heart. I mentioned as an example a single parent. I mean, one-quarter of the families in Canada are single parents. I was surprised not to find very much emphasis in this budget on women's issues. Isn't women's issues an Employment, Immigration and Industry responsibility? Where is it in the budget? I can only assume that maybe there's somebody who works in the minister's office who has responsibility for women's issues, but that doesn't seem to me to be adequate.

For example, there's an interesting program that I read about in Ontario. On March 27 of this year the McGuinty government in Ontario announced that more than \$1.2 million will help low-income women develop new skills. It's a program called WIST, women in skilled trades program: instruction in welding, carpentry, landscaping, construction. This is actually in addition to \$2.7 million over two years that was already there to provide training and information technology for low-income women. I think that's marvellous.

Maybe I've overlooked something, hon. minister, but it seems to me that if we are going to encourage – and you did mention that the workforce has to look at people who have special needs, aboriginal people and people living in poverty and the disabled. Certainly, we need to have more women in our workforce, especially women who have lived in poverty and especially lone parents, women who really struggle and need to be educated to learn a skill so they can contrib-

ute to the Alberta economy. So I was looking for something like that, and I didn't see that very much money is put into that, but perhaps I've misunderstood the budget.

Well, I think I better not go onto something next because I want to get into another topic altogether. So, Mr. Chairman, can I ask the minister for a response at this point?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Dr. B. Miller: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you so much because I was just sitting on the edge of my chair wanting to get up and respond. I just have to say this: as a woman I have found it very objectionable that frequently governments, including the federal government, will list the disadvantaged this way: disabilities, aboriginal, Métis, Inuit, women. You know, like, I really take exception to that. There are a lot of men that have disabilities as well. When I was doing the round-table on family violence and bullying, men frequently reminded me of that.

So I'd like to disabuse the suggestion right off the bat that women aren't in this budget. Under 2.1.2, on program delivery and support, the person that liaises with the status of women federal programming initiative is housed. But throughout our government this government gives more support to women in various programs than any other government on a per capita basis in Canada. May I remind this audience that Children's Services was struck so that women and children and families that needed supports were getting that kind of tailored support.

The supports for families with the family supports for children with disabilities; the welfare act for the enhancement of child delivery service that the Minister of Children's Services will speak to; in our budget 2.1.3, child support services, over \$5 million, \$5.313 million: all of those things are areas where we are able to provide support to people that are living on low incomes, principally women.

In many respects the other areas in this budget include that support for women who are seeking new skills, training. If you go and look at programs we support, like the Changing Together support services that we provide many project dollars to, there are 3,000 immigrant women that come into that program, many children as well, and they get support from dollars within the budgets here. So a great deal of the supported benefits are provided here for women.

Now, I'm going to logistically draw something to the attention of people here. When we categorize by department budgets for very specific programming – the hon. member has said it's been confusing because we are giving less in some categories and more in others. We had found that we had fewer academic people that were expected to work as a category because we found them jobs. It was those that were not expected to work that rose. You couldn't categorize them as people expected to stay home, people expected to stay home part-time only, and learners. You have to find a way of categorizing that they are expected to provide some opportunity for work. And they do want that opportunity for work. Many of them are so thrilled to get a job for the very first time. We found that with this ministry Alberta Works has been so successful at that that we have a reduced demand for people in that category because they are getting opportunities to work.

So, simply put, if you're a learner and you need a hand up while you're going back to school, we provide that, and we provide that kind of support. But if you're a person that doesn't have the

opportunity to go back, that you can never go to work again, we also support people in that category with income supports, supplementary health benefits, additional kinds of supports in other categories of financial support.

If you stack what's given in many areas, including to those people that don't pay health premiums, those people that are paying a lower tax rate, and certain categories, if you did a full analysis of what they are given in terms of supports, what their cost of living is – admittedly, in the last few months with the significant growth there are some places where people could be expected to pay more, and that's where we step in.

We don't give them a continual support. But, for example, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North looked at her paper on the weekend and saw that we gave \$6,700 to relocate a family to Prince Edward Island. Now, that was because they needed the support. They had family there. They had a job there. They had an opportunity to provide better services for their children there.

In the long term this government looks to what is best for the people that are in question. One month you might get \$1,000 for support, a damage deposit, your utilities paid, your rent arrears paid, and three months later you could be coming back and asking for more. You're not able to manage your costs, you need that extra support, and there is significant flexibility built in the capacity of the counsellors to provide that, especially on this homeless protection fund. The staff have all acknowledged that it's important to make sure that people aren't living with the mental pressure of not having that support, so there is significant latitude in them making those kinds of decisions so that people don't have core shelter problems.

Admittedly, if you look exclusively at the rates for the single parent with three children, you don't see much money in that category, but there are other areas in which we provide them supports. It's part of this budget, and it's part of the Children's Services' budget in some cases. People have particular disabilities or situations where they require supports: taking apprenticeship, self-employment, training, workforce training for First Nations, any of the agriculture skills service programming, occupational training programming.

I want to close with just one wonderful story. We had a 57-year-old that was laid off, a woman that was no longer able to work at her chosen career. We gave her retraining. We gave her an opportunity to learn about occupational health and safety. Today she's running her own business. She is a successful businesswoman, retrained after 57 years of age, and five years later is a successful breadwinner and highly successful because of contracts that she's been able to get in southern Alberta with a variety of companies. That's the kind of thing that we target, giving people that dignity in the workplace, providing them technical supports when they need it, bridging for them so that they can have that extra capacity they need.

9:10

I have to tell you that I've been so proud to meet the staff that we have in the offices. They really are geared to providing more for people.

The real question is: what happened to the department of social services? The member posed that earlier. The department of social services is now two departments plus an opportunity to learn more about the workplace. We have that rolled into this Department of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

If you added up what's spent in Children's Services and Employment, Immigration and Industry on the poor, the disadvantaged, the disabled, the aboriginal person, there will not be another government that will even closely approximate what we are providing. I haven't

even touched on the area of education and some of the other programming.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Well, thank you, hon. minister. But I need to be convinced still. For example, compared to other provinces, social assistance for a lone parent with one child – this is in 2001 – placed Alberta 10th; I mean, last among the provinces. The assistance was only 51 per cent of the LICO cut-off. That's the low-income cut-off amount. You're arguing that it's better today. I hope so. Your pride in this social assistance program I hope is true. We'll have to look at the comparative statistics and see where that comes out.

Now, you mentioned that there are things covered by Children's Services and other departments. I don't know how you deal with the silo of a problem there. Child care is with Children's Services. Family employment tax credits with Finance. Housing is with Seniors and Community Supports or Municipal Affairs and Housing. Their health benefits are with Employment, Immigration and Industry. I really don't know how you can develop a holistic kind of comprehensive approach with just the right mix of welfare, which actually can save the government money down the road because, you know, if we have the right kind of programs that provide the kinds of supports that families need, then they can get on their feet faster.

I'm thinking of a really, really great program called families first, which is based on the research that Gina Brown did at McMaster University, which proved that supports for recreation, for example, for single-parent families save the government a lot of money down the road in terms of, you know, dependence on the health system and the criminal justice system and so on because kids are involved with sports and recreation and so on.

You mentioned the importance of the workers. I think they have a great responsibility. I commend them. I think they have to look at not just what people are entitled to, but they have to look at people holistically and really understand their needs so that we can sort of bridge the gap between the real needs that families have and the supports that they need.

I want to move on to a completely different topic; that is, the labour standards and workplace safety, which is another section in the estimates. I want to just begin by referring to a press release from the department recently about the provincial occupational fatality rate being lowest in more than a decade. I think that it's laudable that last year saw fewer workplace deaths, disabling injuries, and lost time claims in Alberta. There were 124 occupational fatalities in 2006 compared to 143 in 2005, including 33 motor vehicle incidents, and you know that's still high. The hon. minister is quoted in this press release as saying that even one workplace death is one too many, and I agree. So I'm encouraged by the commitment of the department to deal with this.

In the business plan there is mention about the provincial lost time claim rate, that for 2006 was 2.3 per 100 person-years, and that's down from 2.41 in 2005. But in terms of the goal of the department, it's to even get it down further, and I was wondering what it will take to get us to a better rate.

You mentioned in the beginning, hon. minister, about the inspectors, the additional hiring of inspectors to examine workplaces, and it was too quick for me. I started to write down how many new inspectors there would be doing different duties, and there's an increase in the budget of about \$7 million, from \$29 million to \$36 million. That's commendable if there are more inspectors. You mentioned that the AFL had sent a congratulatory letter.

I think we are really concerned that there be adequate safety inspectors in Alberta. There was an announcement recently about one particular oil field service company being sentenced for workers' injuries, and that's interesting. I don't know how often that occurs and whether we have enough safety inspectors to actually provide the evidence so that that kind of prosecution can take place. I hope that that's going to happen in the future, that more employers are held accountable.

Now, I'd just like to say a word about the fact that 33 out of the 124 deaths were from motor vehicle accidents. In last year's budget I raised the whole issue of safety on the highways because there was the McDermid report in June 2004, which states that 3,875 people died on Alberta roads between 1992 and 2002 and that traffic crashes take six times more lives than homicides. The response to the McDermid report: I'm not convinced that it's adequate.

I know this department is not involved directly. It's the Solicitor General, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation – I heard the hon. minister talking about their response to the McDermid report a little while ago – and the Minister of Justice. But because so many of these motor vehicle accidents happen while people are engaged in work – and, I mean, so much work is done in the province with the use of our vehicles, whether you're talking about truckers or talking about workers moving from sites in northern Alberta and the oil sands down to Fort Saskatchewan. Surely, there must be an involvement in terms of cross-ministry efforts to respond to the McDermid report. I know that there is something called the traffic safety plan. I don't know whether this department is involved with that or not.

While we're on this topic of labour standards and workplace safety, a very important aspect of the budget in regard to workplace safety is the area of employment standards. Employment standards are very, very important in protecting the physical and financial well-being of Albertan workers. Job security is an important part of a worker's quality of life.

In announcing the employment standards review in 2005, the department of human resources noted that the employment standards code was last reviewed in 1988, and since then technological advances, globalization, and changes to family and workplace demographics have altered Alberta's workplaces. As a part of the employment standards review there was lots of involvement: 50 labour, employer, and social advocacy associations. Five thousand and five hundred individual Albertans contributed to this review through the public consultation process.

Clearly, this is a very important issue to the health of Alberta's workforce, but my question to the minister is: where is the employment standards review? Is the review process complete? When can we expect to see the report? Are there recommendations that should be implemented? Is there something that's blocking this report from being publicized? I think lots of people throughout Alberta who contributed to the review process would like to know where that report is at.

9:20

A couple of other items that I'd like to raise that I think are really important. I think Alberta is the only province in Canada that doesn't have a compassionate care provision in the employment standards. I was wondering if there was any intention on the part of the department to investigate compassionate care because, you know, in terms of our work responsibilities we often have to take time off to care for people, and all of us have had to care for elderly relatives, especially those who are terminally ill. To not have a compassionate care provision seems to be an oversight.

Another area that I'd like to see more investigated is working

alone regulations. I know that there is a regulation under employment standards for working alone. But it's interesting. I came across some reference to the development of legislation in B.C. They call it Grant's law, which focuses on gas station workers, named after a fellow named Grant De Patie, who was killed trying to prevent a gas-and-dash robbery. On that . . .

The Chair: Unfortunately, time has elapsed.

It's time for the hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Well, thank you very much. Perhaps I should just take a moment and comment about the interest the hon. member has expressed in safety and keeping people safe and looking at this whole area of workplace health and safety and the dollars we're expending and how we're expending it there.

I'll talk a little bit, first of all, about the area of the safety culture and the programs that the hon. member is asking about. I know that a good part of what was initiated last fall was a program to help what they describe as the rookie worker, the student in school that might be engaged in the workforce for the very first time. School programming in junior high and high school is beginning to build on the principles of safety that students are taught, hopefully, from the time they're born and build on what they need to know when they go into the workplace for the first time.

When I spoke with Dr. Louis Hugo Francescutti, he said that the best time to start training somebody to be safe in the workplace or safe anywhere in society is from the time they were born, to teach everything from turning the porridge pot in so that they won't reach up and grab it, and that the various things that a parent does in teaching a child are probably the most significant things that can happen to children in their growing years. We've also discovered that the rookie at any job needs to be taught. The first six months of almost any endeavour are sometimes the most hazardous because people don't know what they don't know, and they need a lot of mentoring and training to make sure that they're looking after things well.

So a good part of our employment standard positions – we've actually got 19 employment standard positions, including 10 investigators, in this budget to address compliance and education issues. They're the most excited team. I met with some of them in Calgary when I first got this ministry, and they're the most excited people to go out and engage people in meaningful dialogue about how to make the workplace safer.

What I feel that this budget is trying to do is really engage the workplace today in safety practices. I've spoken to Exxon Mobil. It's a fascinating boardroom. Their biggest and only sign in their boardroom is: nobody gets hurt. Their first agenda item every Monday is safety: what are the accident rates? It's been very heartening to talk to the major industries about what they're doing. We have to build on that, and that's what our thrust is.

To be perfectly candid, my department would very much have liked to see us able to table an employment standards review in this session, but we have, I think, a little bit more work to do on some facets of it. It's something that they have been doing their due diligence on over the last four years to try and make sure that it's ready for consumption in the House. I'd have to say that they have shown significant initiative around the employment standards review, but I think that in this legislative session we've got a pretty full plate.

Looking at other areas that the hon. member has cited, like motor vehicle accidents, like things contained in the McDermid report, there may be an opportunity for us to engage in a full debate on that at some future date. Clearly, the design of highways, the design of

communities to prevent motor vehicle accidents is something that our transportation officials are looking at. When I speak to people like Ian Reid of Finning, he reminds me of the importance that he places on no use of cell phones in vehicles. Schlumberger has also moved to that policy. Many of the larger industrial providers that our friend Mr. Sloan talks to every day have those kinds of safety practices in order so that they are doing their part to make sure they reduce accidents. The RCMP are working with the Solicitor General on programs. They illustrate at county and community fairs the impact of accidents when people aren't driving at safe speed limits and aren't buckled up. So I think there are a number of programs that are hoping to address the motor vehicle accident initiative.

What I feel best about, if one can feel good about bad statistics, is that with the increased number of jobs this past year, we actually have a reduced number of people that met their death as a result of an activity, an incident at the workplace or associated with illnesses and disease affiliated with the workplace. So we are reducing that.

However, one thing the hon. member might like to know is that besides the lost time claimed, we are looking at a new statistic that was introduced by my predecessor relative to the modified time claim, which really shows the people that have been placed back in the workplace even though they have an injury. They don't do the same job, but we're adding those stats. I believe that that's going to give us a clearer picture. The net result and the reason why we keep reducing the numbers – while we would hope we have no more deaths, it may be unrealistic to get to that level in one year, but we keep setting the bar for fewer deaths so that people keep sensitive to the fact that ideally we would have no deaths in the workplace.

One program that Shell Canada provided for me was a very exciting and almost heart-rending program, where they took pictures at a sour gas plant of all the employees' children, and they posted them around the sour gas plant along with slogans saying: Daddy, come home today; Mom, I'm looking forward to seeing you after school. These big, blow-up pictures of the children are there to remind parents to get home safely. We are promoting this.

I had a meeting with a former senior officer from one of the major Edmonton-based industries the other day who spoke to me about something he believed would be an incentive, and that was that if there's a death in the workplace, the person that's responsible for that plant should know that they are released from their employment. Now, I'm not proposing we go that far at this time, but I am seriously looking at all of those things that can be incentives to better performance, which is my preferred route to the disincentives.

You'll see a track record in this government of higher fines for people that fail to report incidents, especially emissions and those sorts of things at the industrial level. I remember probably about 13 years ago an unprecedented judgment to an industry who had failed to report emissions that breached standards. I think you'll see today less and less tolerance for an unsafe culture. Our Premier would probably say that it was un-Albertan.

One other point on compassionate care. We recognize that the federal government has introduced compassionate care although it is not currently part of our employment standards. People with some of the small businesses have reminded me that if we did introduce compassionate care in the same manner in which it's been introduced federally, it may well be a burden that's too big for the small business owner to keep and retain a position for someone if they were away time and time again and with the extended family. They've noted that. But we'll look at that when we come back with any further legislative template on the employment standards.

With that, I'll sit and wait for more questions.

9:30

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Yes. Thank you. I just have one more item to add to this area of workplace safety. Working with high-voltage power lines is an extremely dangerous job. Recently an EPCOR worker died as his crew was working to replace a wooden power pole. The issue I want to bring to the minister's attention is not the safety of workers because there are safety rules and lots of education in place for linemen working with high-voltage power lines. What about the safety of nonworkers, of ordinary citizens who may find themselves close to fallen power lines? Trained linemen can deal with live wires, but what about children and youth?

A retired systems operator in a control centre has explained to me that it is the common practice to re-energize a line – this is called a reclose – without knowing what caused the outage to happen. By reclosing the line without complete information about the nature of the fault condition, non utility workers and ordinary citizens might unwittingly be exposed to the possibility of injury or electrocution.

Now, I have the benefit of reading a paper that's produced by a member of your department, Ray Cislo. I think it's a really important, well-written discussion paper on this question. It's called *Manually Reclosing Electrical Breakers Following an Outage: Safety Implications for Non-utility Workers*. A question was asked about this in 1988 by Mr. Tannas, who asked the minister of labour about this very issue, but that's a long time ago. What has been done about this issue since 1988? Is it the policy of the department to accept the reclosing issue as an acceptable risk? I guess that's the issue. If that's the case, why should our provincial standards be lower than other jurisdictions?

Now, this is a very complicated issue, and I think that some companies, like Enmax, are dealing with it through more advanced technology. Still, it's of great concern on the part of a retired systems operator who had the responsibility of reclosing the line and felt the responsibility very deeply that somebody could be injured. Even if it was a balloon that hit the power lines and somehow the balloon was still connected to the power lines when the reclosing took place, then I don't know what would happen. I think it's a serious issue. Anyway, it would be nice to hear a reply about that. I was going to ask it in question period, but I never got the question out.

I want to move on now to immigration. The minister has signed an immigration policy with the federal government as part of a made-in-Alberta immigration strategy. I don't have many details about this agreement. I assume that it's to deal with the provincial nominee program, which the hon. minister mentioned in her introduction. There is an increase in budget to deal with the provincial nominee program. Manitoba's program brought about 6,600 skilled immigrants to Manitoba last year. Alberta is way, way down. I think the hon. minister mentioned some goals, that you expect to bring under the provincial nominee program many more immigrants, in the thousands, in future years. This, I think, is a really important part of the workforce strategy for Alberta. You know, this is completely separate from the temporary foreign workers, which we may want to talk about next. It's really important for Alberta to have an immigration policy that brings people here in such a way that they can stay here in Alberta and contribute to our workforce.

Now, the typical problems of immigration in Canada do occur here in Alberta. I mean, for one thing, it still remains to be the case that the proportion of immigrants living in poverty is much higher than for a native-born Canadian. You know, it's amazing how many

years after immigrant families come to Canada that they still are not finding a way to be a part of the workforce the way they want to. I mean, I think the statistics from your own department indicate that 52 per cent of immigrants who have come to Alberta were not able to find a job in their intended occupation. There's something that doesn't fit here. If we're intending to get skilled workers to come to Alberta to be a part of our workforce and we're desperate for workers, how is it that so many people come here and don't find the job that they really want?

I can think of one particular temporary foreign worker who responded to an ad in Mexico to come to a farm in southern Alberta because they wanted somebody with veterinary experience, and he had a master's degree in veterinary science. When he got here, he didn't do anything of the sort in the area of veterinary work. He worked as a mechanic. He even drove a truck on the highway, and he didn't have a licence. He has since gone back to Mexico. It's a problem. It's really a black mark on our immigration program when things like that happen.

The retention of immigrants is a huge issue. Between 25 and 30 per cent of immigrants abandon this province after living here for a couple of years, compared to only 10 per cent in B.C. I've asked that question in the House to the hon. minister about this, and the response has been: "Well, they didn't fit into the community. They had problems with adjusting to the community." Really, when you look at the housing issue, surely that's a big part of it, that they can't get into the workforce right away. There's a time where they're really struggling. They're struggling to pay for housing, and they give up, and they go somewhere else in Canada. I think that's a huge issue.

You know, I'm happy that in the budget there is lots of money for programs that would support, for example, the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, settlement services, enhanced language training, and so on. That's really important although I noticed that that money hasn't gone up.

There's more money for the provincial nominee program and international marketing. I'm not sure what that is. Is that a desk in every embassy in the world to attract workers? I'm not sure what that is.

There's more money for attracting immigrants to this province, but what about money to cover settlement services? I mean, one of the problems of retaining immigrants is to recognize their foreign credentials. Now, it's a problem not unique to Alberta but across Canada that immigrants have too often been underemployed or unemployed because the credentials they bring are not recognized, so it's important that we have adequate mechanisms in place to ensure that recognition takes place. We need the government to work more closely with professional associations to somehow speed up the process of recognition.

I mean, the statistics: one-third of immigrants never worked at a job that was related to their professional skills. One-third. Two-thirds of immigrants had to take over one or two unskilled jobs to support their families. That is not acceptable. We need to speed up the process somehow of recognizing credentials. I don't know whether the minister can shed some light on that.

I think that's all I want to say right at the moment. I'd like to raise the issue of temporary foreign workers in the next round. Thank you.

9:40

Ms Evans: Well, I'm just delighted to have an opportunity to respond on the immigration program because, quite frankly, this is an exciting initiative. In fact, when I first came into government 10 years ago, I would never have dreamed that we would have an actual

profiling of immigration in a ministry at the provincial level because of the capacity the federal government brings to still examining the immigration file from the standpoint of the safety, security, and health of the individual coming forward.

Under direction from our Premier it's very clear to me that the first people that we bring to bear to the job market are Albertans. That includes aboriginal, both on and off reserve, and Canadians next. So very, very clear in my mind in this mandate for this minister is to make sure that we do as much as possible to provide Albertans an opportunity for working.

Now, the increased incentive to move forward on the immigration file is really because of what we perceive is the shortage of labour in a variety of positions, and previously they may have been predominantly in the skilled or academic area. When we look at the larger construction projects, the building of an upgrader that might take up to 4,000 individuals, it's very clear that we need to take a look at what our capacity is for labour mobility; hence, our B.C./Alberta TILMA agreement that gives us some options. Then we have to look at a number of other things. It's a very interesting process because there's no way you can address immigration in a simple yes or no.

For example, foreign credential recognition is an important part of what one does and the labour intensity that's involved in making sure that people have the capacity to engage in the jobs to which they have ascribed. A good part of what we are doing is working with the professional regulatory organizations – APEGGA, the chartered accountants, other professional groups – to make sure that the credentials that people bring to bear on these jobs are credentials that they can accept. One of the areas that's been most difficult, as the hon. member knows, is with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the qualifications of some 10,000 physicians in England that we would like to attract and bring over here. They might be missing obstetrics, so we have to figure out ways to bridge that so that they can become accredited here. There's significant work with the credentials for professional licensure.

For the skilled trades Alberta apprenticeship and industry training, AIT, is the only regulator of the trades. These assessments allow tradespeople to challenge the exam within 180 days of arrival in Alberta. These are things that we take very seriously. They must pass those examinations. If I get any complaints, it's frequently that people miss the exam by a small margin. We have to make sure that employers work at educating tradesmen, and that's another area of our engagement here.

Finally, the employers themselves. Given that approximately 15 per cent of the trades and professions are regulated and 85 per cent are unregulated, employers are responsible for recognizing the qualifications required on the job and their prior work experience in giving them those options for learning.

We've also placed in this budget another \$500,000 for work on international credential recognition. We're up to \$1.7 million. We have significant programs, bridging programs that enable people to get engaged. It's very interesting that many of the nonprofit organizations in some of the communities also help with their own bridging programs, so they can initiate the capacity of someone to get involved in the workplace, and they're doing magnificent things.

I would invite the hon. member to join his colleagues from Calgary someday who have gone to the wonderful activities there where they honour and recognize and provide awards to those people that have done so well. You can see the real efforts that have been made by the community in helping in the bridging programs. I do mention Calgary because 60 per cent of the immigrants that come to Alberta currently are residing in Calgary, and in that heated economy people would say: well, can they survive? They're not

only surviving; they are absolutely glowing. I have to cite Lina, who is an incredible example of an Italian woman who started a small business, and it's mushroomed so that she literally employs immigrants from all over the world. So it's exciting to see what's happening here.

Our whole immigration program will expand on the foreign credential recognition, expand the numbers of provincial nominees from six years ago, 128, to about 2,500 provincial nominees this year, which will enable us to get chosen specialized trades, skilled trades, and professionals to help us build the capacity. In effect, it allows us to bypass the queue with those people that are particularly qualified. To the hon. member opposite: I think it's exciting that the federal government has agreed to write back to those people who have applied to be in the health care professions – doctors, physiotherapists, nurses, and pharmacists – and say: you wanted to come to Alberta for this purpose; here's your opportunity. We hope to get 2,500. We hope to tap in on international students so that we can really build that part this year.

The temporary foreign worker program is harder to respond to because it's contingent on, as I've mentioned before, the employer identifying the need, citing that need, going through the labour market opinions, getting that endorsement from the federal government in consultation with us, and then moving forward on the numbers that would be required.

I think that what I find most exciting is that this made-in-Alberta immigration program has been the result of workers that I have accompanying me, that are seated with me and also upstairs: Susan Williams, Ellen Hambrook. I see Mark Asbell up there and Neil Irvine, people who have brought together pieces of other ministries and have just gathered all of this immigration up and totally embraced the opportunity. I'd like to pay special credit to about 12 people that Rick Sloan has had working with him on the immigration agreement, which took an unprecedented 28 days to negotiate with the federal government and is a better agreement by far than the Ontario agreement because it doesn't cap the number of dollars that we are going to achieve for support of this immigration file.

The feds, for their part, have doubled up the amount of money on the integrated settlement services, and we believe that the pilot project on health, the additional co-operation and the partnership between Canada and Alberta, will bear fruit. There is a disputes clause, and in five years the government can review the capacity of this agreement to serve the needs of Albertans. Essentially, I think what we have is the groundwork for some very positive results.

Now, one more point to the hon. member. I would really ask the hon. member to provide me a copy of that interesting study that he cited at the beginning of his remarks relative to injuries that might be unintended consequences of being involved in the workplace, and I see, Mr. Chairman, that there's an indication that he may be willing to provide that. I look forward to it. Our staff are expressing great enthusiasm to have a look at it and see if there's any part of that that we can use in a measure of helping us with any of our safety issues. They are striving for the healthiest, safest workplace possible, so I look forward to receiving a copy of that at the appropriate time.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to participate in this discussion on the budget for Employment, Immigration and Industry this evening. Certainly, I would like to state on the record at this time to the hon. minister that there are some very diligent, compassionate, and kind citizens working in her department. Specifically, I had the opportunity to

meet some of them in the employment standards office recently, in the last six weeks, and they are a fine reflection of the entire civil service. Hopefully, someone is not going to come by and hire them away for more money than what she is paying them, because they're worth every dollar that the province pays to them. They do their best under what I consider to be difficult circumstances.

9:50

Now, the minister just talked, you know, about our made-in-Alberta immigration program. I don't have the same confidence that the minister has in this program or her promotion of this program because I'm seeing first-hand through our constituency office the horror show which is this temporary foreign worker program. I have a number of questions, Mr. Chairman, in regard to that.

First, before I get to my questions, I would like to explain to the hon. minister that she cannot pawn this off on the federal government and say that this is a problem with the government because I have a document here that is from the Alberta government, from a department of the Alberta government, that is a letter indicating the qualification of a prospective temporary foreign worker before he comes into the country, before he even pays his \$10,000 fee to the broker that is skinning him of his hard-earned money before he comes here. This is one reason why this government can't distance itself from the failures of this program, because this is an assessment of the workers' qualifications before they're allowed to come into the country.

I will read part of this. From your date of arrival in Alberta you will have 180 days to write the exams and obtain your Alberta certification. If you are unsuccessful with the exams to gain certification, you will no longer be able to work in this trade in the province of Alberta. The individual that's listed in this letter is an individual who holds a compulsory trade certificate. We are allowing all these individuals into this country and giving them 180 days to qualify for a red seal.

Now, we had a brief discussion on this, an interesting discussion, last week in Public Accounts. I would urge the hon. minister and her staff to read the responses that came from Advanced Education there because they are in contradiction to what is stated in this letter. Not only is this letter dated and signed by government officials from this province, but also it is used as a supporting document by the broker. All this is happening before the individuals get into this country.

Mr. Chairman, the questions that would also apply in this case are: what happens to these temporary foreign workers when the company who has the labour market opinion – the company is operating in Alberta and is listed on the visa as the employer – fails to provide the jobs listed? I have an example here of six if not seven welders, and we're always complaining that there are not enough welders in this province. These people paid megabucks to some unscrupulous broker to get to this country. They pay their own way here, and when they get here with these temporary foreign worker visas, there are no jobs. They're told at the same time by an agent of the broker in this country that they have to do what they say. These workers are being intimidated, they're being bullied, and it's wrong. It's not Canadian. It's un-Albertan, as the Premier would say. It's totally wrong. This program is out of control. Now, what happens to these temporary foreign workers? If you could explain this to me, I would be very grateful.

Also, Mr. Chairman, is this visa, which places so many restrictions on these temporary foreign workers for their employment in Alberta, a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights? Do you have a legal opinion supporting that these visas here, which limit and restrict what the temporary foreign workers can do, are not a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights?

What is the department doing to stop the agencies from charging these enormous fees to arrange these temporary foreign workers' visas, these fees and the promises that these people are making? I'm pleading with the minister and the department to get some sort of controls on these so-called agents.

If a temporary foreign worker has a six-month job opportunity to weld in this province, why are they only being issued four-month visas? If we've got 180 days to test them, they can work for four months, and their visa is going to expire. They're going to be long gone before any of the welds that they do are possibly X-rayed. There's something wrong with this program.

I can't understand why we're continuing with an immigration policy when we can't handle what we're already doing. We cannot blame it all on the feds. Some of it is certainly their fault but not all of it. And there's the whole issue of security. It takes people in this province longer to get a passport than it does some of these workers from different places in the world to get a temporary foreign worker visa. How exactly does that work?

Now, in the time I have left, Mr. Chairman, I would also like to ask if the department at this time is considering doing any work to study the possibility of giving WCB coverage to construction workers for cancers that are related to their workplace activities. I'm very grateful that the firefighters have WCB coverage now for some work-related cancers. Is the government studying the cancer rate particularly for welders and for boilermakers who do vessel entry and other tradesmen who are in direct contact with catalysts and other parts of the industrial processes? When can they expect to be covered for work-related cancers? Is the department doing anything to document that?

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I have one more question. I would urge the hon. minister at some point to visit an English as a Second Language class with me. I'd be delighted to make the arrangements, and she could come and meet some of these new Canadians first-hand. I'm sure she has met many. I don't think we're paying them enough to take their English as a Second Language courses on a monthly basis. I think we need to increase that rate to reflect what

it costs to rent an apartment, what it costs to feed and clothe their families, and I really would again ask the department and the minister to have a second look at this as their immigration policy. Let's support family immigration from all over the world, and let's quit this corporate 21st century slavery that's going on in the form of these temporary foreign workers.

Thank you.

10:00

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(c) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Infrastructure and Transportation and Employment, Immigration and Industry relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:03 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 16, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/16

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and of our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Her Excellency Elena Stefoi, ambassador of Romania. It was my pleasure to host the ambassador at lunch earlier today and to welcome her to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, in 2006 Alberta's exports to Romania totalled more than \$10 million, mostly in agrifood products, pork, peat moss, and animal feed. Immigration from Romania to Alberta is increasing, with skilled workers accounting for the vast majority of new arrivals to our province.

I would ask that our honoured guest please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly some students from the Rosedale Christian school in Crooked Creek, a very prestigious and important small school in my riding. There are seven youths and six adults accompanying them in a group. They're here today to tour the Legislature and to observe the functioning of the Legislative Assembly. They're in the members' gallery. I would ask them all to rise, please, and I'd ask my colleagues to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you members of my staff. This is indeed a privilege because my staff have been deep in the hollows of the ministry working very hard lately and have come out today for second reading of Bill 26. I would like to introduce Bill Nugent and Steve Murphy of the legal services branch; Ron Cust, the director of the legislative projects branch; Steve White, the executive director of the assessment services branch. If I could ask this Assembly to give them the recognition that they so much deserve.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce two very hard-working administrative assistants

within the transportation and civil engineering division of my ministry. Mona Koch and Jennifer Tate are joining us this afternoon in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, it's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three people who work for a very important organization in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Jerry Roantree is the volunteer co-ordinator of the St. Albert Help Society and is the president of the Alberta Association of Meals on Wheels Services, which represents more than 30 Meals on Wheels organizations in this province. With her today is Liz Tondou, who is the executive director of Meals on Wheels in Edmonton, in my constituency. Jim Draginda is the manager of marketing and fund development for Meals on Wheels and until last November was our outreach caseworker in Edmonton-Centre, and we miss him. The three of them are standing. I would ask you all to please give them a warm welcome.

Second, I'm really delighted to introduce to you Melody Cesar. Melody is going into her second year at the University of Alberta. She is studying psychology and political science, but what she really wants to do is go on and take a master's in speech pathology. She is already speaking four languages, she's working on her fifth, and she would like to put that particular talent of hers to good use in helping people in the speech pathology field. She's with the Edmonton-Centre constituency office for the summer as our STEP student. I would ask Melody to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege today to introduce to you and to the Assembly three members of the Marie Lake Air and Water Society and concerned citizens: Don Savard, Helen Parfitt, and Chris Goss. They're here because they want to raise concerns about Marie Lake and the fact that they're not getting answers to their questions and concerns from SRD.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two members of the staff at the Palace Casino. Roxanne Draudson and Sheri Panas are both employees of the casino, and they have been on strike now for 250 days, due in part to the government's failure to provide fair and balanced labour legislation in our province. I would ask that they both please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Camrose Kodiaks Hockey Team

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I attended the welcome home reception as the Camrose Kodiaks returned from the Royal Bank Cup, the national junior A hockey championships. Hundreds of billets and fans gathered to celebrate another outstanding season for the Kodiaks. After a division-leading season the

Kodiaks won the Alberta Junior Hockey League championships and went on to win the Alberta/B.C. Doyle Cup. This gave the opportunity for the Kodiaks to represent Camrose, Alberta, and British Columbia at the Royal Bank Cup.

Unfortunately, this was not Camrose's year at the national championships. The Kodiaks lost the semifinals to the host Prince George Spruce Kings in a record-breaking fifth overtime period. Despite the loss, the Camrose Kodiaks still took the opportunity last night to recognize their successes this season. A highlight of the evening was when team captain Brady Cook spoke about each of his teammates and the outstanding contributions each made to the overall success of the team.

The Kodiaks have developed a very successful junior hockey program. This June the team will honour all teams and players at a 10-year reunion celebration. In their short history the team has won the Alberta Junior Hockey League championship four times, the Doyle Cup four times, national champions in 2001, and were national silver medallists in 2003 and 2005. Part of that success is based on the team's ability to recruit high-quality players from across Alberta. This year's Kodiak roster had players from such places as Strathmore, St. Albert, Calgary, Edmonton, Cochrane, Ponoka, Sherwood Park, Spruce Grove, Rosalind, Hardisty, Viking, Daysland, and New Norway.

I want to salute head coach Boris Rybalka and assistant coaches Doug Fleck and Miles Walsh for another outstanding season. The team is also dependent on the strong support of their owners, the Camrose Sport Development Society, chaired by Barry Fossen. The Sport Development Society's purpose is to promote sport and recreation in the Camrose region. Congratulations for 10 years of the Camrose Kodiaks in my constituency and best wishes for continuing success.

Thank you.

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

Edmonton Meals on Wheels

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I introduced Jerry, Liz, and Jim from Edmonton Meals on Wheels, and now I would like to celebrate their organization. Since delivering their first meals in 1969, Meals on Wheels' dedicated volunteers have delivered thousands of meals to seniors and housebound individuals in the Edmonton community. Every day 400 to 500 meals are made and delivered which promote health and well-being for their clients. The organization continues to develop new menus and programs to serve the increasing diversity of dietary requirements and the diversity of the clients.

The Meals on Wheels program ensures that the clients can maintain independent lifestyles. Eighty-seven per cent of the people they serve are over the age of 70, and 82 per cent are living alone. People choose from monthly menus, and the service can accommodate diabetic, no-rice, no-pork, and no-fish diets as well as offering texture-modified meals, which some people require. The choice given to clients helps meet the needs of the growing population of seniors and others in our community.

1:10

The greatest strengths of the Edmonton Meals on Wheels program are seen in the dedicated volunteers, who give of their time to help provide nutritious, balanced meals to those in need. Volunteers are asked to dedicate three hours per week to the organization, and in return the volunteers have the rewarding experience of making a difference in their community. In many instances a volunteer may

be the only contact an individual has with others during the day. Volunteers come from all sectors of society: from high school and postsecondary students to parents and preschool kids to the retired and semiretired. In 2006 421 volunteers gave over 62,000 hours of their time to work in the kitchen, deliver meals, or help in administration. The service of these fabulous individuals is essential to the Meals on Wheels program. People receive not only meals from Meals on Wheels but also companionship and community.

Please join with me in recognizing the valuable and generous work done by the Edmonton Meals on Wheels programs and other Meals on Wheels programs in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Agrivalue Processing Business Incubator

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I had the privilege of attending the grand opening of Alberta's new Agrivalue Processing Business Incubator in the city of Leduc. This is a \$20 million investment in our agricultural sector. The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food officially opened the incubator, and I had the chance to join him on a tour and even sampled some of the very delicious new products being developed at this facility. And I must say that I was truly impressed.

Mr. Speaker, this facility is state of the art and is Canada's first-ever incubator dedicated to supporting entrepreneurs and businesses in the food processing industry. Totalling some 74,000 square feet, it provides up to eight businesses with a private, fully serviced suite which they lease to grow their businesses in prior to launching out on their own premises. Staff from Agriculture and Food also work hand in hand with incubator clients to provide technical, marketing, and business support, service that goes above and beyond what is offered by other facilities.

Mr. Speaker, the incubator is also about encouraging and enhancing a value-added culture in our agriculture industry, something that is highly valued by our government. This centre will help get businesses and their new products and technologies ready for the marketplace. It would also bring new Alberta-grown and -produced products to grocery stores across the province and around the world.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate all the partners involved in the creation and operation of the incubator. It is a truly unique Alberta innovation that promotes our value-added industry and our province's can-do attitude. We should all be proud of this great facility.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Royalty Program

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers recently indicated that 33 of the 65 oil sands projects approved had reached the 25 per cent royalty payout phase. The list of projects that have reached this phase is not made public due to the provisions of the Mines and Minerals Act.

Financial statements from various oil sands projects do provide some information on the royalty status of some projects. The Canadian Oil Sands Trust 2006 fourth-quarter report reveals that their operation at the Syncrude joint venture shifted to the 25 per cent royalty payout phase in the second quarter of 2006. Canadian Oil Sands Trust ownership in Syncrude is 36 per cent. Crown royalties in 2006 amounted to 16 per cent in the third quarter and 13 per cent in the fourth quarter.

Nexen oil sands partnership owns a 7.23 per cent participating interest in the Syncrude joint venture. During the third quarter of 2006 Nexen paid a royalty of 11 per cent on its Syncrude production compared to a royalty rate of 23 per cent on its other Canadian oil production. Both Canadian Oil Sands Trust and Nexen are paying a lot less than the government-targeted range since their projects have achieved payout status.

These companies are following the rules made by this government. It is the government that is failing Albertans, who own the resource, when it does not collect a fair share in royalties. Albertans know that the royalty rate for oil sands projects after payout is far too generous when oil is selling at over \$70 Canadian per barrel. Albertans tell us that they are very frustrated that they don't get a break at the gas pump, but producers get a deep discount on royalties from a resource that Albertans themselves own.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Provincial Taxation

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Personal income tax and sales tax were introduced in Canada in 1917 as a temporary measure. Our current GST was introduced in 1991 in order to eliminate the deficit in federal budgets. We could go back through history and review all the different taxes government has imposed on their citizens – or should I say subjects? – and the dividing of nations and regions that has occurred, such taxes as the salt tax in India during Gandhi's passive resistance revolution, the Boston Tea Party, and here in Canada Papineau and his colleagues arrived at the House of Assembly dressed in homespun suits to boycott tariffs on imported English fabric. Might I say that the further the government is from the people, the more insatiable its appetite is for increased tax revenue?

We now have surplus budgets both federally and provincially, yet our local governments do not have sufficient funding to sustain their communities and are dependent on arbitrary provincial and federal grants to function. This is not in the best interest of our communities. It is time to turn the tide on taxation and put one in place, a revenue-sharing formula that municipalities can count on, one that is not arbitrary to the whims of government. A good start would be to return unconditionally 10 per cent of the personal and corporate tax to the municipalities where it was collected from. We could also return 10 per cent of other taxes on tourism, vehicle registration, and fuel, to start the list.

The report presented by the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability is a case of desperation on their part. Their request for new taxes is a direct attack on our families and communities and is the result of this government's faulty micromanagement and arbitrary grants. Municipalities have very limited ability for long-term planning or savings needed for capital expenditures. Taber's waste-water treatment plant is just one example.

Our formulas must change and their conditions. Mr. Speaker, new taxes are wrong and should not be added to the burden of families in our communities.

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

Police Week

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day police across this province put their lives on the line to ensure that Albertans can live, work, and raise their families in a safe and secure community. These brave men and women face dangers and challenges few of us

ever encounter, and they do so with courage, dedication, and professionalism. The security and safety they provide is the backbone of our society and allows us to live freely with dignity and comfort.

Police Week, which runs from May 13 to 20, is a unique opportunity to recognize and thank police officers for the outstanding work they do to ensure that our streets and neighbourhoods are safe and secure. This special week also serves to remind Albertans of their own role in helping police do their work, and I encourage every Albertan to take a moment to think of how they can better support the work of police in their community. In fact, there are few better deterrents to crime than a strong community working in partnership with a dedicated police service.

Mr. Speaker, the work being done by police officers deserves our respect and support. During Police Week and every other week of the year all Albertans take great comfort in knowing that they can count on our police to keep them and their families safe. I am pleased to take this opportunity to thank police officers throughout Alberta for their dedication and commitment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm continuing with the tabling of petitions dealing with the people who work with people with disabilities. This one today is from 262 Albertans from all over the province, and the petition is urging the government to make sure (1) that the pay is standardized across the sector regardless of where those employees are employed, (2) that they're fairly compensated and that the pay reflects the appreciation for their valuable service, (3) that we grant them access to professional development opportunities, and (4) that there has to be some province-wide service and outcome-focused level-of-care standards.

Thank you.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) I wish to advise the Assembly that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places. I give notice that on Monday, May 28, 2007, Motion for a Return 4 will be dealt with. Additional motions for returns will stand and retain their places on the Order Paper.

head: 1:20

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a summary of the infrastructure and transportation priorities of the municipality of Jasper, the municipal district of Lesser Slave River, the village of Longview, the summer village of Norris Beach, the village of Sangudo, the town of Taber, the cities of St. Albert, Edmonton, and Calgary, which were either ignored, devalued, or dismissed during last night's budget debate.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising this afternoon to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from

a constituent, Tina Voss, who is writing with her concerns about the sign language interpreters program at Lakeland College in Sherwood Park and the fact that it has not been funded for this year. She doesn't want to have to go to B.C. to take that course.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's a letter dated May 15, 2007, from myself as chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly, and it is regarding the appearance of deputy ministers before the Public Accounts Committee.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table today. One is from Susan Said, who is talking about the wage increases for daycare staff being "welcome news. However, let's not forget the many child care staff that work with children in the before and after school programs".

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to give two sets of tablings. One, a letter from Nicole Fedorak, the literacy intervention teacher at St. Philip Catholic elementary school, talking about the importance of the reading recovery program.

The second is the Workplace Respect Hand Book, which I got today from the Construction Owners Association of Alberta convention, which is meeting.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling of a letter from Lori Mekechuk, who is an Edmonton-Mill Woods resident. "Income Support allows me \$545 to pay for rent and utilities. I am renting a condo from a private owner at \$800 per month and pay for all utilities. I have received a rent increase notice of \$400 per month." I'm asking you all to put yourselves in her place. Please, do something to help the situation.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Dr. Oberg, Minister of Finance, responses to Written Question 13 and Written Question 14 asked for by Mr. Miller on May 14, 2007.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Affordable Housing

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The lack of affordable housing in Alberta is a big problem, and obviously every indication is that it's going to get worse. The CMHC predicts that vacancy rates, which are already dangerously low, will continue to fall and rents will continue to rise through this year and through next year as well. It predicts that few – few – of those new housing starts will be for

renters. My question is to the Premier. The Premier has boasted in here repeatedly about the number of new housing starts, implying that somehow supply is already catching up to demand. Could the Premier tell us how many of the new housing starts he describes are likely to be rental units?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this question that the hon. leader is asking today came up in a scrum yesterday with one of the reporters. Again, I repeated our four-point plan: \$285 million going into affordable housing. It's followed up with legislation. There are also two safety nets there, for both rental subsidies and also for families, those that may not have a place to live. We're there to support those families to find appropriate accommodation, and we'll continue to do so.

Dr. Taft: The Premier is missing the point here. It's about rental units. That's where the crisis is. The government appoints a housing task force in February in a big rush. They hear from it in March. They ignore it in April. They stumble and fumble in May. Now they've assigned yet another committee to give them some more ideas in June. Who knows when actual decisions will be made on those ideas? My question again is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us when this government's plan for affordable housing will be finalized, and when will it begin to reduce the pressures at that most intense point on the rental market?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, last week and again this week, quoting from Statistics Canada: of the 210,000 housing starts more than 25 per cent of those housing starts were in Alberta, with a population of 3.4 million. That is an unbelievable accomplishment for the province of Alberta. That's the kind of direction we have to keep going: building more housing units to take the pressure off those that are renting. Move into individual; free up space. That's the way it's done.

Dr. Taft: Sometimes it's like talking to a brick wall, Mr. Speaker.

The latest idea to be floated by the Premier, incentives to encourage developers to bring on new rental – rental – units, was proposed in the Alberta Liberal policy months ago, and I'm glad he's finally got around to reading it. He is certainly welcome to borrow more ideas, if he likes, from our policy.

Mr. Mason: And guess where they got theirs.

Dr. Taft: My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us: when will this decision be made, and when will the new tax measures be implemented?

Mr. Stelmach: I think, Mr. Speaker, we've got a disagreement in the House as to whose housing policy I read. The NDs feel that it was in their policy first.

All I can say is that we're taking a new leadership role as a government. We're looking at different issues, and in fact during the campaign I talked about looking at some incentives because time and time again mayors and city councillors and those in the building construction industry came forward in terms of issues tied to taxes. Some of that has come forward. We're going to look at it, and maybe there's an opportunity to work here with the federal government to change some of those policies.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Free Vote on Temporary Rent Regulation

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Unlike the health minister a number of Conservative members of this government from Calgary aren't ready to dismiss the views of the overwhelming majority of their constituents who support temporary limits on rent increases. In fact, a number of the members opposite are joining with the Alberta Liberals and calling for this decision to be revisited. I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, it's nice to see. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier commit in the name of openness and accountability to bring a temporary rent increase cap back before this Assembly for a free vote?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, we have a plan in place in terms of affordable housing. All evidence that was brought to this House shows that the kind of plan that the Liberals brought forward would actually work in reverse. It would decrease the number of units built in the province of Alberta, actually exacerbate the problem even further, so we're not going to follow that path. Other provinces with a Liberal administration have, and guess what? They have actually decreased the number of homes and put people in an even more difficult position. So why would we want to follow something that hasn't worked?

Dr. Taft: The Premier claims he allowed a free vote on Bill 34, including the Alberta Liberal amendments that would have put in place a temporary cap on rent increases, but Tory MLAs who have publicly supported the idea did their duty and they toed the party line. My question again is to this Premier, who claims to want accountability and openness. Will he bring this issue back to this Assembly and allow a full free vote?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that one thing I don't do is kick people out of my own caucus for speaking their mind.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're welcome to have him, Mr. Premier.

The suggestion that every member of this Assembly felt truly free to represent the interests of their constituents on the issue of temporary rent caps simply is not credible. Can the Premier explain to this Assembly why he's dodging this issue and why he will not allow a free vote of his own government on this?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, putting \$285 million into affordable housing is not dodging an issue. It is a major, major contribution to the capital plan of the province of Alberta and will assist families in this province. Certainly, nobody is dodging any issue. This is the best plan available here for Albertans, and we're going to see a number of units built in the province of Alberta. I am confident it's going to work, our government is confident, and we'll see progress made in this particular area.

1:30

Municipal Planning

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, given their general approach to things, the fact that the confusion around the funding to Calgary continues to grow is no surprise. Now the minister of municipal affairs is flip-flopping on the position his government took one day, just one day, after meeting with the mayor of Calgary. One day he says that he will listen to Calgary's proposals, and the very next day he says that those proposals are off the table. It didn't take long for this Tory caucus to dismiss the city of Calgary. My question is to the Premier.

Can the Premier clear up the confusion that his government has created once and for all? What is the position of this government on unconditional sustainable funding to the city of Calgary?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed that some people appear to want to divide Albertans and divide this great province, to pit one group of Albertans against the other. My responsibility as Premier of this province is to keep Alberta together as a province, to build for the future, to secure it. That's my responsibility and the responsibility of government. We will keep working with all municipalities so that we can find equitable funding for municipalities as they change and accommodate the massive growth that we're experiencing in this province. That's my strength, and I'll continue to work with all municipalities, not follow the leadership of the opposition to start dividing this province. That's not the Alberta way.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the same confusion that Calgary is facing is also facing the city of Edmonton and the capital region. The Premier stated yesterday that there is need for a stable planning regime for the capital region to protect investment, but he won't do what he says. He's not bringing in any solutions. Will the Premier clear up these mixed messages? Will he bring in mandatory regional planning for the Edmonton capital region?

Mr. Stelmach: First they're talking about unconditional grants, and then the next question is about doing something mandatory, you know, to make it a law. Make up your mind. What do you want to do?

I will take a leadership role, and this government will take a leadership role in the capital region, and we will work together with all municipalities to build a good long-term plan for development. It is unbelievable the kind of opportunities we have, and we need to have a good long-term plan for the future. We will get there. We will have one with co-operation, not using some big stick like he wants to use.

Dr. Taft: Well, things are falling apart, Mr. Premier. Things are falling apart on your side.

Regional planning in high-growth areas is critical right now to manage the challenges municipalities are facing. We need to ensure as a province that communities remain sustainable in the future, that environmental concerns are addressed in planning, that Albertans continue to enjoy a high quality of life. We need to plan for the future. To the Premier: does the Premier believe that the province has a duty to show leadership in the direction Alberta's future takes, or does this responsibility, in his view, rest entirely with the municipalities?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have taken a leadership role. In fact, there is no jurisdiction in Canada that has put as much money on the table, \$1.4 billion, for municipalities. This is going to be sustainable. It's going to be predictable. It's going to allow municipalities to plan for the future. Like I said, with \$1.4 billion you would expect that we can find that co-operation between the government and all municipalities. Municipalities have different levels of assessment, different growth pressures, and we're going to work with everybody. The \$1.4 billion that's in the budget for municipalities is going to go a long way in building this long-term plan.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Affordable Housing
(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Instead of action to protect renters from being gouged today, the Premier's been telling us about the hundreds of millions of dollars he'll spend on housing to make up for years of Conservative neglect. While the Premier keeps reciting this mantra about all the new money he's spending, he conveniently forgets the fact that it takes between two and five years to build new units, during which renters are at the mercy of a broken market. My question is to the Premier. What will he do to help renters who are being hit with huge increases during the next two to five years?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in the preamble the leader of the third party seemed to indicate that—what?—11,000 people coming to the province in the first quarter of this year have chosen the wrong province to move to because there is no opportunity. There is no greater opportunity in the country of Canada than right here in the province of Alberta. We're working not only with new people moving in but with those Albertans that are here seeking their future, and we're going to continue to build on the plan that we have for affordable housing. Of course with respect to leadership, once the plan is put in place, we stick to it. We work with municipalities and the federal government to deal with this critical issue. We identified it many months ago, and we're working on it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, thousands of people are moving to this province in search of a better life, and many of them—many of them—are finding their dreams broken because they can't find housing that they can afford. Why is this Premier and this government failing to make sure that the opportunity is there for the people who want to come to this province? Why is this Premier following a hands-off policy that just breaks the dreams of thousands of people who would like to come to this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the reason that thousands of other Canadians— and this is 11,000 that migrated just from the other provinces to Alberta, not from other countries. The 11,000 people are here because there is opportunity. There is opportunity to raise their family, grow their family, retire here. Most importantly, there are jobs available here. If you look across Canada today, Alberta has had tremendous growth. We'll continue on our economic plan. That's what's attracting people to Alberta; it's jobs. They can't find jobs in their home province, so they're coming here. That's why they're here.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, a million Albertans live in rental accommodation, and the Premier's refusal to institute temporary rent guidelines and instead rely on programs that fund people who are short of money is going to force middle-class families onto the welfare roll. The fact is that instead of stopping the gougers, you would rather supplement them with tax dollars and force families into queuing up for government handouts. It's the Premier's vision that proud, working middle-class families should line up hat in hand

asking this government for cash so they can pay their landlord. Why?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government is caring and compassionate, and that's why we have in our budget built-in programs to support families that may on a temporary basis be displaced in finding accommodation when they move here to the province of Alberta. We'll continue with those programs in our budget because it is important to support those families that are seeking accommodation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Seniors' Housing Authorities

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently seniors' housing authorities are not authorized by the province to borrow from the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, and as a result municipalities are requested to borrow money on their behalf in order to access low-cost loan rates. This puts a burden on municipalities' borrowing limits, and many of them are near or at their limits already due to the growth pressures. My first question is to the Minister of Finance. Why are seniors' housing authorities not allowed to become shareholders in the Alberta Capital Finance Authority so they can access those low rates?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, through to the hon. member, what has happened up until this time is that the loans through the ACFA have been made to municipalities. Municipalities have then turned around and made the loan to the particular seniors' housing authority. That tends to be the practice today. The seniors' housing authorities are not shareholders in the ACFA.

Mr. Marz: Will the minister consider amending the Alberta Capital Finance Authority Act so that seniors' housing authorities are allowed to borrow directly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again through to the hon. member, I think that's a great idea, and it's certainly something that we'll take into consideration and take a look at. Because of the huge growth that is occurring in the province of Alberta, we're seeing some municipalities that are reaching their limit, and we also know that there needs to be a significant amount of seniors' housing. So this may well be an area where we can simply save the taxpayer some money by not paying as much in interest costs.

Mr. Marz: My last question to the same minister: could the minister indicate when these changes may take place?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously we are currently in budget deliberations at this point in time, so we cannot do it at this particular point, but I certainly will ask my departmental staff to take a very close look at this and determine whether or not we can. I think that this is a good alternative for seniors' housing, and it's something that we can take a look at from my department to help with this critical issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

1:40 Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, on April 2 this Assembly unanimously passed Motion 503, urging the government to immediately initiate negotiations on options for a reasonable, long-term solution to the teachers' unfunded pension liability issue, yet six weeks later there's been no offer to sit down with teachers and begin the negotiations. My question is for the Premier. Is it now the policy of the Premier and his government to ignore the wishes of this Assembly by refusing to take action on Motion 503?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, within the next couple of days we'll be announcing the next steps in getting this issue off the ground. I will also be speaking to the Alberta Teachers' Association on Saturday, making the same announcement.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Six weeks later all that has been done so far is for the Education minister to send an incendiary letter to teachers designed to divide and conquer – and believe me, it has done that – a tactic well known to this government, and an offer made to teachers to sit at the table on yet another task force. We know what happens to task force reports in this province. They collect dust for 45 days, and then the government rejects 75 per cent of the recommendations. My question is for the Premier again. How can Alberta teachers and Alberta taxpayers, for that matter, have any confidence in this flawed process?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we have said is that we have committed to a long-term resolution to this issue. I have said consistently from day one that it won't happen quickly. It'll be fair, it'll be well thought out, and it will be in the best interests of both teachers and taxpayers.

There's no intent on this side of the House to do what that hon. member says. It's questions like his that are dividing and conquering.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, obviously, Mr. Speaker, he's not been speaking to teachers or the ATA, because that's exactly how they feel.

Mr. Speaker, the most recent letter from the Education minister reiterates the need to provide value to both Alberta teachers and taxpayers. My question is for the President of the Treasury Board. Will he admit that it's a fiscally responsible thing to do to pay down this unfunded liability now, when we have money available to do so, thereby saving taxpayers tens of billions of dollars in future payments?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the Premier committed very early in his leadership campaign to address the issue of the unfunded teachers' pension liability, and he has the Minister of Education on track to have a responsible discussion about it. If the hon. member opposite thinks it's responsible for us to just cut a cheque for \$6 billion or \$7 billion and take that money from funding health care or funding education just to satisfy his urgency instead of taking some time, getting it right, getting in place a long-term, stable funding relationship with the teachers' union, that we support, then he's simply off base with financial reality.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Recruiting Foreign Workers

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current labour shortage in Alberta has a significant impact on the manufacturing companies in my constituency and elsewhere in Alberta. It affects their ability to compete globally. A major company told me that they have been working closely with federal and provincial agencies to mitigate the labour shortages, but the results are slow. These challenges continue to impact their market share. They continue to recruit locally and internationally, but the results have been much less effective than expected. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. What measures is your department taking to assist Alberta companies in this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new immigration agreement solidifies much of our partnership with the federal government. Our work with the local businesses, the businesses that are situated here in Alberta, identifies that there's very aggressive planning going in place for accommodating what we believe will be some 109,000 workers short in the next 10 years. On the international front we're working so that collectively with the federal government we develop a web portal to illustrate overseas what the requirements are and make sure that we have the opportunities clearly identified in other languages for people to know what they need in their credentialing. That with the PNP program will go a long way to addressing the issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the same hon. minister. In Alberta we have employment standards. In other government-controlled countries the export of human resources is sponsored and run by the government authorities. What measure do you use to ensure that the foreign workers from those countries are fairly treated and equitably compensated by their exporters?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in the manner in which the question is posed, it would sound like we're looking at what we can do with other foreign governments. We don't have any control over foreign governments. What they do when they encourage workers to come here would be to make them available to companies that would look at locating here in Alberta. We don't force any regulation on foreign governments; however, we do make it clear that our government insists that these contracts be duly constituted, that those employers act under the terms of the Fair Trading Act here in Alberta, that it is a requirement that the employee does not have to pay to become part of this, and so on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the same minister. Dealing with foreign countries is not easy. I have heard of fraud and illegal recruitment activity in the name of Albertan and Canadian needs for workers, such as setting up a fictitious recruitment service in another country to milk victims or offering to pay Albertan employers here to recruit particular individuals. Given that illegal and fraudulent activities in Canada are prosecuted by Canadian laws, what do you do, Minister, to prevent this from happening in other countries? It damages the high reputation of Alberta and Canada.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, all employment agencies, all contracting firms must be licensed in Alberta. As I say, while we have no control over what happens overseas, those people that bring in workers here in Alberta must hold a valid licence. If workers have a perception or if people have accusations that people do not have those kinds of licensures, if in fact we get those kinds of reports, that is why in this year's budget we have some 72 additional workers identified to work on everything from employment standards to occupational health and safety. We are pleased to investigate and find out just exactly what the circumstances are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Infrastructure Maintenance

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This May long weekend officially launches the summer recreational season. Thousands of Albertans will be travelling the highways and secondary roads in vehicles crammed to the ceiling or pulling trailers full of recreational equipment. Their greatest challenge won't be finding a camping spot; rather, it will be navigating Alberta's appalling roads. The recently released Infrastructure and Transportation business plan shows that the government intends for this province to have over 20 per cent of its highways deteriorate to a poorer condition within three years, with another 26 per cent only in fair condition. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: why is this minister accepting this deterioration in the province's infrastructure?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as we've been saying all along, we aren't accepting whatever. That's a true fact that we have way, way more traffic than we've had for years. Our roads are deteriorating. We've upped our budget. We've got \$18.3 billion in the capital plan budget over the next three years. We've only been rehabilitating about 400 kilometres a year. We're now going to do, in our business plan that we have right now, 2,500 kilometres over the next year. We've got two problems in Alberta. One is cost, and the other is capacity, and we're working on fixing both of those.

Mr. Chase: For too long this Tory government has casually neglected this province's infrastructure. The state of the roads is just one more example of this attitude. Albertans are now paying the price for the Tories' failure for over a decade to fund what was necessary for Albertans' well-being. Does the current minister accept that our decrepit infrastructure is a direct result of his government's past cuts?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it's really interesting to hear them talk gloom and doom all the time, and the sky is falling. If you look at our past 10-year history, we've built an economy that's the envy of the world. In building that economy, that's why we have all the people wanting to come to this province.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Rising rents and rotten roads will be this short-term government's legacy. In his mandate letter from the Premier the minister was given the priority to "provide safe and secure communities." His homework assignment is repeated on every single government of Alberta press release. Government-sanctioned deterioration of provincial highways to over 1 in every 5 kilometres may well save the government money in the short term,

but it risks Albertans' lives. Why is the minister acting in direct contravention of his mandate to provide safe and secure communities?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, safety is one of the biggest mandates of this government. We take safety very, very seriously, and that's why we're working on a traffic safety plan that we're going to be releasing shortly. I myself really am concerned about safety on the roads, and I believe that we will increase that and make our roads safer as time goes by.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Municipal Taxation

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation recently released a study that indicates that Alberta families would pay about \$900 more a year in taxes if the province adopts the revenue-generating recommendations in the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability report. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Where in the government process are these proposals, and when can we expect this huge tax increase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I need to reiterate that those are recommendations of the minister's council. The minister's council recommendations have come to this government. We are in the process of going through the responses. We will then consult with municipalities about those responses, and hopefully we will have a final recommendation or a final response sometime late in the summer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: would these proposed taxes be uniform, set levies that are in effect in all municipalities across Alberta, or will they create rich and poor councils?

The Speaker: A bit of a hypothesis there.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, I'm going to try, Mr. Speaker. I want to say to you that they are the choices of municipalities. As recommendation 9 states, individual municipalities can by option decide whether to utilize those taxes or not. So it is not a tax by this government; it is an option for municipalities to use a particular tax.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, for your records questions 5 and 6 are to the same minister. Will property taxes be reduced accordingly, or should Alberta families expect an increase in their overall tax bill?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the choice of municipalities. Also, I want to say that the specifically named taxes were the amusement tax, tourism tax, property transfer tax, vehicle registration tax, split mill rate tax, and on and on. I want to say to you that it is the choice. If I read the recommendation right, it gives the opportunity – and I'll use the amusement tax – for a municipality to

have a tax on a ticket when they're building a venue such as a coliseum. That way it is more of a user-pay tax.*

Resource Development in Marie Lake Area

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, the development pace in Alberta is reaching unprecedented levels. In the Cold Lake region most of the land has already been subject to development, and the mineral rights have already been sold off. In the midst of all this development one shining jewel does stand out, that is Marie Lake. This pristine body of water remains virtually untouched, but if this government has its way, it'll become subject to intense seismic activity and potentially damaging underground oil sands recovery wells. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why is this minister allowing intrusive, damaging seismic testing to occur that could have adverse effects on the aquatic life in the lake as well as, not to mention, danger to people who reside on the lake?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course, we haven't allowed any of this damage to take place that the hon. member alleges. He has to understand that the seismic stage of exploration is completely different from the exploration stage, two different processes, two different sets of hearings. But I'm happy to report that on April 19 we met with a group representing the Marie Lake cottage holders and interest holders. We discussed their concerns. We've subsequently met with the seismic company, and they're revising their plans to ensure that any testing that takes place is done in a safe and secure fashion.

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, residents of Marie Lake have questions, but they're not getting answers from this government, so we'll try for them. Section 40 of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act requires an environmental impact assessment "to predict the environmental, social, economic and cultural consequences of a proposed activity and to assess plans to mitigate any adverse impacts resulting from the proposed activity." To the Minister of Environment: can the minister tell us if the required company is conducting seismic testing to fulfill the requirements of the EPA, and if not, why not?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, quite simply because at this point the project has not proceeded to the point that an EPA is required. The Minister of SRD has responded that the responsibility for the decision on seismic falls within his legislation. Should the company decide to proceed with the development of the project itself, then they will be required to conduct the environmental appeal hearing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over and over again people of Alberta have told us that they're not happy with the direction that this government is going. On affordable housing the government ignores people. On regional planning the government ignores people. Now we'll see if the government ignores the people of Marie Lake. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: section 54 of the Public Lands Act states that no one may do anything on public lands that affects watershed capacity or causes injury to any lake or body of water. We have been told that the minister has the evidence. Will the minister put an end to any proposed activity under or around Marie Lake?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I could just repeat what I said to the first answer. We're consulting with the residents of Marie Lake. We're working with the seismic company. There's been seismic done on any number of lakes previously in Alberta with no adverse effect. But I'll repeat what I said last month: before any seismic takes place there, I'll ensure that there'll be base monitoring ahead of time, monitoring during any seismic, post-seismic monitoring, and if there's any damage done, the company responsible will pay for all mitigation.

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

Prescription Drug Coverage

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Institute for Health Information figures released yesterday show that annual prescription drug costs for an Alberta family of four are nearly \$3,000, of which the health care system paid barely 40 per cent. Alberta's drug spending is the third highest in Canada, and most of these rapidly escalating expenses are being off-loaded to families suffering illness. To the Premier: how can this government stand by and let Alberta families bear the brunt of these out-of-control drug costs?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, as Acting Minister of Health and Wellness I will take the question under due consideration, and I'm sure the minister will respond when he comes back.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is again to the Premier. I think the Premier would be interested to know that statistics show that countries which cover the most drugs in the public system generally have the lowest drug costs. Here is just one example. In Belgium 77 per cent of all the drugs are paid for by the public system, but the cost of drugs for a family of four in Belgium is about \$1,200 lower than in Alberta. To the Premier: the NDP pharmaceutical savings plan could achieve real savings for Alberta families, but the government is ignoring these proposals and that fact and paying more. Why?

Ms Evans: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I'll be pleased to take this under consideration. I know that there's a very comprehensive pharmaceutical strategy that this government has been following, and I know that the minister would be pleased to respond in greater detail.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would be good to see that strategy released.

Alberta public spending on drugs rose by 30 per cent over the last two years, years 2005 and 2006. Two years ago the NDP proposed an Alberta pharmaceutical savings agency to deal with these costs through bulk purchasing and other innovations. The health minister then praised the idea and said that elements of what was proposed were very appropriate. To the Premier: given this province's record as one of the biggest spenders on drugs, can you explain why the government has failed to do anything to bring down these costs of drugs?

2:00

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I would just respond in this fashion. I think there were incredibly parallel suggestions both from the Health and Wellness ministry at the time as well as from the third Alberta party, and I'm quite confident that when the pharmaceutical strategy is presented or when the minister comes back, the good ideas from this member of the opposition will be presented.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Incentives for Property Developers

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation announced that the vacancy rate for the city of Edmonton will drop to a 30-year low of .7 per cent this year because of the strong demand from newcomers and a shortage of new units entering the market. My questions are to the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Service Alberta. What incentives are available for new apartments to be built, and will the government consider implementing new incentives for developers to increase the numbers of rental units?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that when the Conference Board of Canada identified that they were going to even get more shortages in housing, some would want to implement rent control that would obviously make the problem much worse. Probably one of the greatest incentives we've done as a province is make sure that people know that when they come and invest in Alberta, they'll be treated fairly, and there will be no arbitrary grabbing of the value of their property. One of the things, rather than even new incentives, when I met with the advisory board was that some of the taxation policies that are in place now are counter-productive to rental properties, whether it be municipal taxation levels or federal ability to depreciate and reinvest. So we have to work with our partners.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My next question is to the Minister of Finance. Will the government consider implementing tax incentives for builders of new apartment buildings or for owners of existing apartment buildings?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, certainly, there are some issues when it comes to taxation for rental property owners. If we were to do, for example, what the United States does: when a rental property owner sells a rental property, as long as they purchase another one within 180 days, they pay no federal sales tax on the new property. So there are certainly things that we can do. We need to do it in conjunction with both the municipality, especially when it comes to their property taxes on multifamily dwellings, and when it comes to the federal government, on the capital gains side as well as to our rental side. So we certainly will take a look. I'm not making the hon. member any promises in this question, but it's certainly something that we're open to at any time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My last question is to the minister of municipal affairs. What incentives is the government providing to encourage the development of affordable housing in general in the province?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the first incentive is providing \$211 million to municipalities for them to have the decision-making on how they believe housing should be built in their areas, also the encouragement of having secondary suites coming on to the market to increase units. In the last two years with \$100 million this government has initiated 3,700 units to be built or in the process of being built.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Teachers' Salary Negotiations

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Minister of Education has made it clear that his overall strategy in salary negotiations is to ensure that Alberta teachers will be bullied into paying the price of prosperity. Last year inflation in Alberta was 5.5, and earnings in the private sector grew to 4.3, yet the operational funding for school boards increased by only 3 per cent. This amounts to an effective budget cut. In a year when over 80 per cent of Alberta teachers will be renewing their contracts, the Minister of Education clearly expects teachers to swallow a pay cut. To the Minister of Education I have one simple question. Do you feel that teachers deserve wage increases that match those in the private sector and keep up with the cost of living in Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the facts are this. We spent \$5.6 billion on education this year in our budget, 95 per cent of which flows to school boards. That's a 5.2 per cent increase over last year. School boards have an accumulated surplus of some \$220 million. So between a 5.2 per cent increase and \$220 million there is plenty of room to negotiate reasonable contracts.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a letter written last month, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing informed municipalities that the province would be increasing its take of the municipal property tax by 5.5 per cent. The minister explained that this proportion will keep up with the real growth in this province. To the Minister of Education: why does your department take into account actual inflation only sometimes, sir, like when its own revenues are at stake, but not where operational funding or teachers' salaries are concerned?

Mr. Liepert: Let me repeat. Our budget went up 5.2 per cent. We have a \$220 million accumulated surplus with school boards. There is plenty of room to negotiate reasonable contracts between school districts and local ATAs.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, last week in his exchange with the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar the Minister of Education implied that salary negotiations will go smoothly because many school boards have accumulated surpluses that put them in good financial position to negotiate. To the Minister of Education: do you expect school boards like the Battle River region, which had an accumulated operating surplus of \$8.5 million last year, to use this money to fund teachers' salary increases? Is that what you're saying, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat what I've said on at least three or four occasions in this House. It is up to the local school boards to negotiate with the local ATA. I would just simply say that we've had several settlements in the last two months that were retroactive for the year we just came through where teachers at the local level settled for roughly 3 per cent. So the hon. member can do what he likes in terms of trying to inflame the negotiation process that's about to get under way. I have a great deal of confidence in the school boards and the ATA locals that they will come to agreements.

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

Bear Encounters

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With the long weekend finally approaching, Albertans will be enjoying recreational activities throughout the province. I've heard concerns, though, about the threat that bears pose to hikers and campers. Friends of Isabelle Dube, who was killed by a bear by Canmore in 2005, have created a website to warn hikers of the location of bears and are urging the government to create a better bear warning system for hikers and bikers. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Does the government have any plans to implement such a warning system?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow for that question and use this opportunity to extend our condolences to the husband, family, and friends of Ms Dube. Her tragic death reminds us of the dangers inherent in bear/human encounters in the backcountry, but that's why our government has a series of policies designed precisely to keep our hikers, bikers, and campers safe when they're in bear country.

Ms DeLong: My first supplemental to the same minister: does the government plan to put up a website that would allow the public to post bear sightings, as requested by this group?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I won't say no now, but we're going to proceed with caution on that idea. We're concerned that a website might give a false sense of security to some people that there are no bears in the area. It's well known that bears can travel long distances in a short period of time, so there's a lack of reliability. Also, there's a curiosity factor. If there was a website, say, and there's a bear over here, there's the possibility that teenagers or tourists or maybe even the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore will run up there to try to count the bears. So we're going to proceed with caution.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. To the same minister: then are there any other precautions that the government is taking to protect campers and hikers?

2:10

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, yes. The government, as I said, has a spectrum of programs designed to promote safety. Our BearSmart program emphasizes education for hikers, campers, and tourists, how to avoid bear encounters. We also in known areas of human activity remove the berry bushes that attract the bears. We also have these new Karelian dogs, that are very popular around the province, that

chase the bears off. If there's a dead animal around that's a known source of food for a bear, we put up signs and close the trail. Finally, as a matter of last resort relocation is a possibility for a problem bear.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Provincial Olympic Co-ordinator

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Responding to the Bob Maskell scandal the Premier stated: "I can assure you that under my leadership perception of this sort will not happen." The perception of Mark Norris's potential appointment as an Olympic ambassador is very bad given Mr. Norris's support of the Premier in his leadership bid. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Has the minister consulted the Premier on Mr. Norris's potential appointment in light of the Premier's assurances in this House just last month?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly at this stage the question that the hon. member is asking is pure speculation. However, I need to say that in response to the invitation from Premier Campbell our Premier requested that my ministry lead the development of an accord with the organization committee for the Olympics to be set for 2010, and we're looking at that aspect.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: who else is being considered for this position: former athletes, people who are actively involved in amateur sports, anyone other than top Tories?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, we truly believe that Albertans need to be engaged in the spirit of the Olympics. We believe that there's a role for enhanced tourist opportunities amongst the western provinces. We also believe that there is a lot to be done in the recreational areas and that the cultural opportunities are there. We're trying to devise systems whereby we can encourage all Albertans to take advantage of that.

Mr. Agnihotri: So that means Mr. Norris is going to receive a gold medal, right?

Mr. Speaker, now that the Premier has awarded all of his supporters in the leadership campaign with prime appointments, will this government begin to reward people based on ability rather than political favours?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the co-ordinator's or ambassador's role is only one of the initiatives that is being considered at this time, and there has been absolutely no decision at this date as to who might be leading those initiatives for the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, so far that has been 90 questions.

Does the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing wish to supplement an answer?

Mr. Danyluk: Yes.

The Speaker: Well, if so, then the hon. member to whom the answer is being supplemented has an opportunity to raise an additional question.

Mr. Danyluk: Not a problem.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar?

Rev. Abbott: Agreed.

The Speaker: Then please proceed with your supplement.

Municipal Taxation (continued)

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make sure that there was clarity in one of my answers, that answer being in regard to the approval process of the minister's council report. That minister's council report is before this government, and there has been no approval of the taxation that has been requested or that has been recommended by the minister's council.*

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, you have the opportunity for a supplemental if you choose.

Rev. Abbott: Well, I'm just wondering, Mr. Speaker, then, I guess, if the minister could be a little more specific in his timelines and if he has allowed municipalities to give further input on this proposal.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, this process is in front of the government right now. Once this process takes place and we look at some responses, I will take it back to municipalities and to the minister's council and hopefully have a final recommendation by the end of summer.

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Government Bills and Orders **Second Reading**

Bill 26

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise today and move second reading of Bill 26.

The Municipal Government Act authorizes the operations of the municipal authorities and therefore affects the vast majority of Albertans. To improve the act, government is proposing some amendments for discussion and approval by the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 26, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007, will alter the legislation in a number of ways. I'll take a bit of time to explain what the amendments actually are intended to do. The proposed amendments involve the ability of a minister to make guidelines concerning the standards and procedures for assessment of property, the financial cost to municipalities incurring compensation claims relating to the effects of public works projects, and minor housekeeping for a name change to Infrastructure and Transportation.

I will now provide you with more detail on each of these amendments individually. An amendment to section 322 is needed to confirm and clarify the minister's authority to set the standards and procedures contained in the minister's guidelines for preparing annual property assessments. This is a procedural amendment to incorporate the substance of the minister's guidelines regulation AR 246/2006 in the act.

This has been done as a response to technical legal challenges made to the Municipal Government Board and the courts about the

validity of the minister's guidelines. The guidelines set out instructions, procedures, and validate standards for annual assessment that have been in use since 1995. The guidelines are often updated to respond to the changing economic conditions. This flexibility is needed to ensure timely updates and communication to municipal assessors. As a result, this proposed amendment exempts the guidelines from being filed under the Regulations Act. In order to confirm the validity of all existing minister's guidelines, the amendment includes a retroactive provision.

Lastly, the amendment includes a requirement that a notice of establishment of guidelines be published in the *Alberta Gazette*. This includes information about where copies of the guidelines are available for review. The current practice is to publish the guidelines through the Queen's Printer and make them available on the government's website.

Overall, the proposed amendments protect the public interest by ensuring that municipalities have a stable and predictable property assessment base to raise municipal revenues, continuing to defend current provincial assessment policies, including the validity of the property taxes levied under these policies and procedures, and ensuring that relevant documents are available and easily found.

In addition, an amendment to section 534 is needed to provide protection to municipalities. More often, municipalities are faced with compensation claims in relation to the effects of public works projects. This is of particular significance to those municipalities experiencing rapid growth. Concerns have been raised that compensation claims are becoming unduly costly and that the scope of such claims is at times going beyond what was intended. The proposals clarify and in some cases limit the circumstances under which a claim can be made. Specifically, a requirement that there is a permanent reduction to the market value of land is now emphasized. As well, the use of the clarification term "abuts" rather than "adjacent" is proposed in relation to the geographic circumstance under which compensation may be considered.

2:20

Also, to ensure procedural fairness, the amendment provides that the municipalities publish a notice of completion of the public works in a local paper as well as issuing such notices to every affected landowner. This is in concert with the requirement that landowners submit the claim for compensation within 60 days. Instructions are given regarding the resolution of claims which could not be agreed upon between parties. This involves an option of binding arbitration, an appeal to the Court of Appeal for a decision of the Land Compensation Board.

Lastly, these amendments provide authority for the minister to make regulations respecting the practice and procedures before the Land Compensation Board. As well, a scope of the order of costs is included in the amendments.

Overall, these amendments will assist in protecting the municipality against an award of compensation that may be excessive and may impact the construction of public works. The ministry has met with officials from the city of Edmonton on several occasions since the summer of 2006 regarding acceptable amendments. A minor matter of the name change from Infrastructure to Infrastructure and Transportation is also included in this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to emphasize that the proposals have been developed in consultation with Alberta's representatives of local governments through the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability and targeted stakeholders affected by the public works projects. The overall result is that municipal authorities will be better able to continue providing the high quality of service that Albertans have come to expect. The bill is part of the government's

responsiveness to the needs of Alberta municipalities and clarifies certain property assessment provisions and defines the scope of compensation claims related to public works projects.

I ask the consideration of this House to give approval to Bill 26, and I would ask to adjourn discussion. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. While the members are bringing in their staff, I'd just like to go over some of the rules. We're still breaking new ground on some of our new Standing Orders, and this is the first day of cross-ministry where more than one party gets to ask questions during the course of the debate. So what we will do is there will be 10 minutes of questions, followed by 10 minutes of answers by a minister. If more than one minister wants to answer or supplement a question, they have to do so within that 10-minute time frame. They won't each get 10 minutes before we go back to the members wanting to ask a question.

I also have a request from the Official Opposition asking if they could start off with questions instead of a statement from the ministries. Is that correct?

Ms Pastoor: Yes, it is.

The Chair: Would you like to just briefly speak to it?

Ms Pastoor: In consultation with the minister we've decided that we'll try it with him first but that on another one perhaps we could switch it. So I'm fine.

While I'm standing, could I have a request? We're going to divide our 10 minutes into five. Can you time us for five?

The Chair: We could do that.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Most appreciated.

The Chair: So five for one speaker and five for another? Is that what you're saying?

Ms Pastoor: Yeah, from our side.

The Chair: Is everyone in agreement with that?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

If there are any changes that either side would like during the course of the days to come as we go through this, if you could discuss between the House leaders prior to coming in, it would be helpful.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you for the request, and I'm sure the House leaders will be consulting. This is an historic opportunity, and we were hoping that this particular exchange in the cross-ministries would have perhaps less of the adversarial nature that one often finds in the regular ministry budget debates. It was meant to be much more of a collaborative effort in investigating how the

ministries are working together on issues that cross over more than one ministry. So off we launch on our experiment, and thank you very much for your wise advice and oversight of this particular experiment.

The Chair: It is also a bit confusing if the minister is going to start with 10 minutes, the first 10 minutes for the government side. Which minister would like to proceed first? The hon. minister of seniors? I'll recognize the hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Could I ask a question? Actually, since this is new as well in format, if we have to speak from our own chairs, given that we've got three ministries and you have a lot of staff – we just coincidentally all happen to be right in the same spot, so functionally it doesn't work quite as well. I appreciate what that means, and we'll live around it.

The Chair: According to the Standing Orders a member can only be recognized from his seat. It would require unanimous consent to waive the Standing Orders in this instance. We can't do it in committee.

Mr. Melchin: You can't do it committee?

The Chair: We can't waive the Standing Orders in committee. The staff can sit wherever there's an empty seat. I recognize the situation with the particular ministries all being close together, but we'll have to do the best we can do. There are seats in the back.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on this point.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you. For clarification from the table officers: would it have been possible for us, prior to coming into committee, to request unanimous consent to do it when we were in committee, to have members not be required to be at their seat? In other words, could we have prearranged it? We don't need an answer now. Perhaps you can send it to me in writing once you have it, but just for future encounters it might be helpful to know.

Thank you.

The Chair: We'll get a clarification on that.

In the meantime, if we could start. I'm going to recognize the hon. minister of seniors.

Mr. Melchin: I'd like to further clarify that all of our ministers are close in communication and in work, so whether we are physically close in seats or in our objectives, it's all the same to us. We're delighted to have many of the staff from all of our departments here because we're a very unified, close-knit group anyway. This will work for us, and we will accommodate.

Children's Services

Education

Seniors and Community Supports

Mr. Melchin: Good afternoon to everybody. This being our first cross-ministry in Committee of Supply, I'm going to speak on behalf of my colleagues the Minister of Education and the Minister of Children's Services for opening remarks. To see if we can condense, though, we will use the time and respond to our own individual questions.

2:30

The topic today, vulnerable Albertans, certainly is one of critical importance to all of our ministries represented here today. While the

specific issues that we work to address may be different for our various departments, there are vital links between the programs that we offer, and we certainly have very common commitments to helping Albertans on this topic in particular. Certainly, I would say that there's a strong connection between today's topic and one of Premier Stelmach's priorities of improving Albertans' quality of life.

I'll begin with the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports, whose focus is on providing assistance and protection to vulnerable Albertans. Our budget this year of about \$1.8 billion is just under a 10 per cent increase from last year's forecast. Two core businesses: providing targeted financial assistance to seniors and people with disabilities and, secondly, planning, providing, and co-ordinating supports and services to help seniors and people with disabilities that live in the community.

In this year's budget we received funding to address the pressures of our growing and aging population and to take steps to improve programs to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of Albertans they serve. One example is the increase to the AISH program, in particular the inflation-proofing of the \$50 increase to \$1,050 being one of the acknowledgments of that that we've done over the last three years.

We're carrying forward about \$10 million from last year to develop pilot projects in providing services to help clients work. We've increased our investment in persons with developmental disabilities programs, and this will help us address the workforce issues that are facing this sector. Funding has been provided to assist with agency staff recruitment, retention, and remuneration pressures. That being said, with our economy and challenges, creative innovations go beyond just money, and we are looking very much towards some creative ideas to provide services given that there's been a 90 per cent increase in the funding of PDD since 1999 while caseloads only grew about 20 per cent in that same period.

The ministry is committed to providing vulnerable Albertans with quality programs and services, and we are looking and will continue to look for ways to serve them better.

I'll introduce now those of my department that are here: Tim Wiles, deputy minister; Dave Arsenault, assistant deputy minister for community support programs and strategic planning division; Reegan McCullough, assistant deputy minister, disability supports division; Chi Loo, assistant deputy minister, seniors services division; Susan McCulloch, senior financial officer, corporate finance. I'll let the other ministers in due course introduce their staff when they have a chance to respond, in light of the time.

On behalf of the Minister of Children's Services I'd like now to briefly touch just on a few of the many ways that Children's Services is protecting and assisting a very important group of vulnerable Albertans: our children. Children's Services' program expense this year is \$972 million, an increase of \$68 million, or 7 and a half per cent. This includes \$750 million for child intervention services, which helps some of Alberta's most vulnerable children. The ministry's work includes both preventative services, that help families before they reach a crisis, and protection services, when a family is unable or unwilling to provide a child with a safe environment.

Everyone here today knows that government ministries must work together to ensure that children and other vulnerable people get the help they need. That is why there is an increasing emphasis on cross-ministry work. For example, child and family services authorities work closely with Seniors and Community Supports to help youth who are turning 18 transition to services available through persons with developmental disabilities or AISH.

Here in Edmonton the joint action committee for children brings staff from school boards, health authorities, and the Edmonton

CFSA together to find ways to improve service delivery. There is a policy in place to ensure that complex cases are reviewed and kids who are struggling in school get the extra help that they need. In Red Deer the health authority, the school district, and CFSA came together to deliver an integrated program for children who are struggling because of emotional, behavioural, or psychological problems. It only makes sense that the efforts of various ministries are co-ordinated to achieve the best results for the child, the family, and the taxpayer.

A similar philosophy is at work when it comes to the government's action to prevent bullying and family violence, decrease the number of aboriginal youth who take their own lives, and reduce the impact of fetal alcohol syndrome disorder. Those are just a few examples where several ministries are working together to help children, youth, and families. I'll allow the minister to introduce her staff at the appropriate time.

On behalf of the Ministry of Education Children's Services works closely with their ministry to help the needs of youth as they transition into adulthood. They also work closely with the Ministry of Education, speaking of the Ministry of Children's Services, another key player providing assistance to vulnerable Albertans.

Just touching on a few programs of Alberta Education, Alberta Education through its leadership and work with stakeholders provides all students enrolled in our kindergarten to grade 12 education system with a high-quality education. It is about ensuring that students are prepared for the next stages of their lives no matter what their abilities are. School jurisdictions receive funding through a flexible funding framework, which allows for local decision-making in the best interests of their children and students.

Alberta Education's budget for the fiscal year 2007-08 includes many examples of these supports for students. For example, funding for the student health initiative will increase from \$41.7 million to \$44.2 million, an increase of 2 and a half million dollars, or 6 per cent. As well, the department provides funding for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students to assist boards in providing programs and services for aboriginal students and children. These are just two of the many examples of supports in place for our children and students.

With those comments we look forward to entertaining any of the questions you might have as applicable to our various ministries. Thank you.

The Chair: Before recognizing the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, I do have a clarification on the request to have the ministers change seats. The cameras that are recording us and broadcasting through the Internet are programmed to the individual minister's seat, so the request cannot be accommodated.

With that, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Heaven forbid we'd miss our TV time.

Thank you very much for those opening remarks and for getting in under your 10-minute time frame. My interest, I believe, is probably more on the process side, and I think that's what I'll be talking to today, as I think some of my other colleagues will as well, which is sort of less confrontational, just the process of how we can make this a little bit better. I do subscribe to the KISS concept, but I spell it with only one S: keep it simple. I've noticed in my constituency office, of course, when people come in and they have a problem that appears to be simple to begin with, by the time they've dealt with two or three ministries, it becomes very, very convoluted. So I believe that's what we are here to discuss in some fashion today.

The government provides disability support programs for people with disabilities up to age 18 – I believe the minister has already

alluded to this – but more often these supports are provided through Children's Services and Education for schools, teacher, and students. But at 18 the programs and the services for the people with disabilities become fragmented and often unco-ordinated. People must navigate through different departments and organizations to receive information, advice, and support for employment or training, postsecondary support, housing, income support, and medical support among many other things. It's compounded by the fact that there are often gaps in these services. What I have noticed with some of my experience is that the information that comes from the different ministries doesn't always jibe, so that's even more confusing.

The second transition point where Albertans with disabilities often encounter difficulties occurs at age 65, when people with disabilities must transition between provincial support programs like AISH and the federal programs like the Canada pension plan disability pension. This fragmentation of delivery often results in program and policy inconsistencies, wide variations in services and supports, unnecessary bureaucracy and expense, and the lack of co-ordination across the programs' regions and the organizations.

On pages 8 and 29 of the government's strategic business plan one of the strategies to improve quality of life is to improve supports and services for persons with disabilities through better co-ordination and integration. So to the minister of seniors: has caucus or cabinet discussed how to streamline services to Albertans with disabilities to ensure that they have easy access to required supports so that they have the opportunity to be fully participating citizens?

2:40

Questions to the same minister. Albertans with disabilities struggle to find their way through a maze of services. What action has the government taken over the past six months to address the differences, and has the government considered consolidating disability services for children, adults, and seniors under one department? Alternatively, has the government considered implementing navigators of some sort to help people with disabilities and their families navigate the many different community agencies and government departments to access the services that they need?

One of the things I might point out is that the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry has said that her department has hired extra people not only to help the investigation part of it but to help people through their services. So it has been done in at least one ministry.

The Alberta Brain Injury Network uses connected service co-ordinators to assist Albertans with brain injuries and their families to access supports from various programs and community resources. Is this something that the minister might consider for adults with physical and developmental disabilities?

To the Minister of Education: in what specific ways has the minister been co-ordinating with the Minister of Children's Services to ensure that supports for children with disabilities are sufficient and appropriate? Has the minister met with any disability groups or parent groups to receive feedback on the success of current disability support programs for the schools, the teachers, and the students? I believe that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods has brought up autism over the last week. It's a huge issue in this particular area.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for the second five minutes.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. I just think that it's essential for us not to see children's needs in isolation, so I'm very pleased

with this process today where we can see the ministries not as being separate but looking at common interests.

I do want to focus on autism now. Family support for children with disabilities received a \$6.7 million budget increase for total funding of \$101.8 million, which is a 6.5 per cent increase. That's from estimates, page 64, line 2.0.2. This will not be sufficient to meet the needs of children with disabilities in this province. In particular, I have strong reason to believe that this government has actively underestimated the level of need for services from children with disabilities by categorically denying access to services. The experiences of children with autistic spectrum disorder highlight this pattern, and I have been speaking about it recently in the House.

Autism spectrum disorder is a developmental disorder that affects thousands of Albertans. High-quality, specialized services and intensive intervention can dramatically improve the quality of life of children with autism and their families. Really, we're talking about the difference between a child with autism becoming an independent adult and someone who will remain in institutions for the rest of their life.

Children's Services uses multidisciplinary teams to assess children with autism for eligibility for government services. This process seems to be fraught with problems, and parents consistently complain about involvement in the process, that there seems to be random decision-making, neglect of regulations, and no consistency that they can see. To the Minister of Children's Services: how much funding for specialized services is requested by parents with autistic children each year, and what per cent is actually granted? Then I'm wondering: how much of the funding for FSCD actually reaches families, and how much is spent on administration? How much funding is spent on costs associated with the appeal at the MDT process rather than actual purchase of services? It seems to me that the MDT process has become very convoluted and confusing for families. I'm wondering: what is it costing us, and are we really getting the value that we want?

Ms Blakeman: Speak out the acronyms.

Mrs. Mather: Multidisciplinary teams?

Several parents have explained to me how each year they're forced to enter a costly and prolonged battle to appeal the decision of the multidisciplinary teams. Will the Minister of Children's Services consider creating an advocate or ombudsman for parents who have children with autism and feel that they have been treated unfairly by the system? To the Minister of Children's Services: what is the value in forcing children with autism to prove each year that they deserve access to services? We know that this is lifelong, almost a sentence, yet these families have to go back each year hat in hand and say: my child deserves these services. Will they ever enjoy stable, predictable funding?

To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: what specialized services are provided to adults with autism? Do you distinguish between people with autism and other developmental diseases? Are there any special funds dedicated to adults with autism?

To the Minister of Children's Services: I have been inundated with concerns from parents of children with autism over the multidisciplinary team process, the regulations that are being ignored, and an overall lack of transparency in information available for parents desperate to know what is going on. Will you commit part of your budget or discretionary spending to undertaking a review that identifies and corrects problems related to the fairness of this process? I think it not only has to be seen to be fair or perceived to be fair; it must indeed be fair. We have many questions indicating that perhaps it's not at this time.

The Chair: Does the hon. Minister of Education wish to respond?

Mr. Liepert: I'll try and respond to some of the questions relative to education, and then I believe the other two ministers would supplement. Before I do that, I'd like to ensure that I introduce to the House my deputy minister, Keray Henke. I have no other officials in the House.

I want to try and come back to a couple of the questions that were raised earlier relative to meeting with the disability groups. One of the things that I have attempted to do in travelling the province and meeting with school boards and parent councils is: some of those parents have children with various disabilities, and we've spent a fair bit of time discussing, in many cases, their own particular issue but also a broader issue. It is a very difficult situation. There's a parent with a child that has severe disabilities. I guess we have to determine from our standpoint what appropriate funding is. We fund for a child somewhere in the range of \$16,000 per year for severe disabilities. Is it enough? I've heard from parents that it's not enough.

I've heard from other parents, however, that were very thankful for our programs. In fact, I was at a function just a week or so ago where a parent came up to me and said that he and many others have relocated to Alberta because of our special-needs programs in education. So it really does vary across the province.

There were questions relative to co-ordination. It could always be better. I think one of the departments that's not here today is health, and that is clearly one of those, I think, the fourth department, that co-ordination has to take place with. Relative to what's called PUF funding, when our funding expires or is used to the maximum, family and community services then kicks in to take on some of that funding. So that is one of the ways that we have the interdepartmental cross-ministry work.

I think that might cover it just for now. I'll turn it over to the Minister of Children's Services to answer a couple of questions, and I'll see if there were some that I missed.

2:50

Ms Tarchuk: Actually, I'll make a few comments regarding the first set of questions that were asked about co-ordination mostly between Education and Children's Services. Just so you know, with our family supports for children with disabilities, which we know, and it has been mentioned that that's a zero to 18 age group programming, we do start transition talks at the age of 16, sometimes younger. Those discussions engage parents in the transition planning. The worker and the family discuss future needs of the youth and services that might be available if needed, and that would include public guardianship, income support such as AISH, and PDD services for those who meet eligibility criteria.

Another important point that's worth mentioning is that we are currently planning a cross-ministry protocol to make transition planning across the province consistent. It will help ensure better youth transitioning to adulthood. And Children's Services will be working with PDD as part of the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports to promote co-ordination based on the protocol.

Just a couple of other points that I'd like to highlight. One is the disability link phone. We continue to operate a toll-free telephone line in Alberta. It's available to families anywhere to obtain information about disability services and what is available in their geographic area.

Actually, the last point on those transitional questions would be just to let you know that Children's Services, Education, Seniors and Community Supports, and Health and Wellness have developed a joint brochure, which will soon be released, if I'm not mistaken, I

think in the next couple of months. That will provide for Albertans all the services that are funded by the government of Alberta for preschool children and special needs.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you. As with all of these, if we miss something, we'll endeavour to follow that up in writing.

I want to introduce, actually, two other individuals that I didn't have in my speaking notes: Jim Menzies, executive director, finance and IT services, who is here on behalf of Dave Arsenault; and Bruce West, director of supportive living, long-term care development branch.

With respect to programs once you're 18, a child turning 18 and having the support services that you need, we do have a transition protocol that's been developed in working with childhood to adult. There have been a number of departments that have helped develop this: Children's Services; International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations; Advanced Education and Technology; Education; Solicitor General and Public Security; Employment, Immigration and Industry; Health and Wellness; and Alberta Mental Health Board.

The transition protocol is basically a guide to help youths and their parents get the information they need when they need it so they can make the best decisions possible. Families can use the protocol to learn how to access supports and services available after youths and disabled turn 18 and throughout their lives. The protocol addresses all areas of transition to adulthood, including – and I think it's important to note the supports and services available after the age of 18 – education, employment programs and opportunities, living arrangements, community life, financial independence, relationships, social and leisure, health care, and medical management. So it's very extensive. Whether it's been fully known and available: I guess that will be the ongoing challenge, to make sure that all of the children are aware as they're becoming an adult of this protocol precisely for that reason, because there are multiple programs that affect and impact the lives of adults. How would they become better educated and facilitated? That is the design and direction of that protocol: to help them.

With respect to seniors, on the other hand, and the transition from an adult to an older adult, we do work with the AISH clients starting at about six months before they turn 65. That's more to help them identify the benefit structures that are available through the seniors' programs. Those seniors' programs are not specifically designed for a program such as autism per se. They are programs that would be generally available to seniors, so they would be eligible for the seniors' benefit or a special-needs assistant or dental and optical. They can access Alberta Aids to Daily Living. And that would be part of our working with those AISH clients before they become a senior so that they'd be aware of the range of programs and services that are available to seniors.

As to the federal programs, I'm not a hundred per cent certain how to answer that. I guess we can follow that up. There are a range of federal programs as well, and making people aware of those – because that's part of our seniors' benefit that is very closely tied into the assistance of the federal programs. I imagine that linkages are there; if not, we'll follow up otherwise.

A couple of other areas. I thought we should talk about fragmentation of programs. It is true that persons with development disabilities have a range of programs that are available, so there's some degree of, I guess, fragmentation because there is such a range. Yet one point I would mention is that the design has been to make programs fit more the needs of the person rather than to have a uniform program. That requires a range of service providers.

You have, obviously, your intake people to help address that. You've got a different availability of service providers in each region, so you're taking advantage of the programs that are available and the expertise that would be available locally, sometimes of the family supports. Really, you tailor those to fit more, making sure that individuals' needs are met, and that will cause some fragmentation. It causes some problems, but it offers an enormous amount of benefit too. That doesn't mean you get the program right, and that's the ongoing challenge, I guess: assessing the need. But we do hear just that, because there is a whole range of programs that are provided, and I think it's a good question as to how, then, do you assess that you've appropriately met and . . . [Mr. Melchin's speaking time expired]

We'll follow up with the rest of the others.

The Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. I'll be talking about the supports for children with disabilities. Both the ministries of Education and Children's Services have some responsibility to ensure that children with special needs have the support necessary to be healthy and successful. Goal 1 of the Ministry of Education is to ensure high-quality learning opportunities for all by ensuring that children and youth at risk have their needs addressed through effective programs and supports. Strategy 1.3 of the Ministry of Children's Services is to enhance cross-sector capacity to respond to the needs of children and youth with special and complex needs and their families by improving coordination and access to services and supports.

As children get older, the services available to them and the department that administers them changes. Some parents of children with disabilities feel that they are shuffled from ministry to ministry and are somewhat confused about the services that are delivered. They are really never sure of who's responsible for what, so let me just pose two or three questions. Will the government make available information about services for children with disabilities from a single and easily accessible source? That's one question that I have.

The second question is: will the government take concrete steps to ensure that parental involvement is encouraged in services and programming for children with disabilities? Will the departments of Education and Children's Services make a concrete effort to work together to ensure that the division of responsibilities for children with disabilities does not result in confusion or inability to receive services?

School boards receive funding for supports for children with special needs based on how they are coded, which can lead to some students' being overlooked. Actually, tomorrow I have a recommendation I'll bring up in the budget for Education on that. That seems to be supported by something I received from a pool of superintendents this afternoon. Now I forget where I am, so let's just try and pose this question: has the government done any comprehensive reviews to ensure that school boards are confident that student needs are met through this system?

3:00

One of the programs that I really believe has received a lot of support and a lot of parents are very supportive of is program unit funding. I'm talking about Education now, but if you can help me, I think Children's Services is involved, and Health is involved in that as well. Maybe I'm wrong. Anyway, what I'm saying is that it's very specialized support for children with severe disabilities up to the age of 5, but after that the funding is no longer available. I

think this program is so successful that – and I've got this from one of the superintendents in the region of the province where I live. I live, by the way, in the St. Albert constituency.

I was going to bring this tomorrow, but I think it fits here. He was saying to me in this brief paper that he gave that program unit funding was not extended – and this is in this year's budget; I want to make sure that I'm saying it for this year – to at least grade 3. The programming for special needs children, therefore, cannot be sustained beyond kindergarten, and a learning disability is magnified as a child progresses through grades 1 to 12.

I was talking to him this morning, and he was suggesting that to me. I don't know if you have the data about this with these children that are exposed to PUF, but there's about 20 to 25 per cent of the school population that starts in grade 1 that misses PUF, doesn't get exposed to it. He's asking clearly in his suggestion to me – and I've talked about this, I think, with the deputy at times – that PUF be extended to grade 3. Again, I think it's so essential that kids get a good start. I think even the minister believes that.

And you talk to people at the University of Alberta. They're doing some key research. I don't want to use names because they would be upset with me. It might cut their government grant off. But I think there is something to this. I think that a lot of kids that are not screened properly at grade 1 – we miss them – don't start school well. I think there's something we could do there, and I think that down the line it would cut off a lot of these kids that are turning away from school and not doing well later on in school. I think there's a whole challenge there.

So I'm really trying to say to you people that PUF to me is a good program, and I'm trying to urge you to expand it. Take a look at those achievement tests and bury them, and use that for children that start in grades 1 to 3, and do some remedial work with them. I think you'd receive so much praise that people would vote for you again probably. Who knows?

Anyway, now, the next thing I'm going to talk about is supports for children abusing drugs, and this is one . . .

Ms Blakeman: You're over.

Mr. Flaherty: I'm over? I'm dead?

Ms Blakeman: You're over. You're triumphant.

Mr. Flaherty: I'm triumphantly shot down.

Ms Blakeman: You are triumphant.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you very much. God bless. Even my own colleagues are turning against me. I was just getting started.

The Chair: Edmonton-Mill Woods for the remainder of the time.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. I want to support what my colleague from St. Albert is saying about the need for early intervention and the wonderful success of the PUF programming and that it really, truly does need to be extended because if we can help children at the earlier years in learning to make good decisions, positive decisions, and in feeling competent and that they actually can achieve, we might not have so many making poor decisions, such as abusing drugs, and that's what I would like to focus on now.

Many children who are using drugs seem to fall through the cracks in the system. Unfortunately, the cracks do go beyond Children's Services and Education, health through AADAC, and Justice because they all have a role to play in keeping children safe, healthy,

and drug free. Page 16 of the government's strategic business plan indicates that a focus over the next three years is to support the healthy development of children and youth by developing "collaborative health, social and learning programs and services that ensure children and youth will be well cared for, safe, healthy and successful at learning."

To the Minister of Children's Services: how has the minister been collaborating with the ministers of Education and Health to support healthy, drug-free children? I'm wondering what strategies the minister has developed in consultation with the ministers of Education and Health to implement drug education and prevention programs among Alberta's youth. Are we looking at an expansion of the concept of the DARE program there, which starts in elementary? I'm hearing from parents that they need a DARE program to help them understand their drug-addicted children or to help prevent their children making those bad decisions by recognizing the symptoms ahead of time.

Page 29 of the government strategic business plan outlines Children's Services goal to

continue to build collaborative partnerships on initiatives such as Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Integrated Crime Reduction Strategy and the Community Spirit Program . . . and engage in collaborative decision-making as it relates to providing better outcomes for children, youth and families.

This is really admirable. I'm wondering, to the Minister of Children's Services: which stakeholders, interest groups, or agencies does the minister plan to collaborate with in order to meet this goal, and has the minister considered the link between family violence and bullying and drug use among children?

The Children's Services business plan notes that over a lifetime each individual with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder "will need about \$1 million to \$1.5 million in special care and support services" involving the justice, health, and education systems, to name a few. Again to the Minister of Children's Services: what collaborative initiatives is the minister currently working on with the minister of health to prevent or address FASD? I think I should include the Minister of Education there. Has the minister been working with the minister of health to determine how many youth drug treatment beds are truly required?

To the Minister of Education: has the minister considered making drug counselling and education services in schools more widely available? Of course, for that to happen, we would have to have more school counsellors. I'm talking about trained school counsellors, individuals who have got the university training required to assist with some very difficult and complex issues. Does the minister believe that counselling services currently available in schools are sufficient? What role does the minister see himself having in the effort to reduce drug use among youth? More co-ordination is required between the school system and social agencies when it comes to youth drug use. What steps is the minister taking to improve the relationship between schools and social agencies? What kind of continuum can we have there in terms of services? Can we have these people talking with each other?

The Edmonton Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation notes that the average age of someone pulled into prostitution is 14 and also attributes the increased number of prostitutes to the availability of cheap crystal meth.

The Chair: Does the hon. Minister of Children's Services wish to respond?

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you. First of all, I will commit to making sure that we have full answers to all of your questions, but I'm going to back up and talk a little bit about FSCD and also autism.

But, first, I actually need to introduce who's with me today on the floor. We have Gord Johnston, ADM; Deputy Minister Maria David-Evans; and Niki Wosnack, ADM. Up in the gallery we have Mark Hattori, acting ADM; Neris Havelock, executive assistant; and Sheryl Fricke, ADM. Thank you.

Okay. Just a couple of comments. To go back to the FSCD, I just want to refer to a couple of things that I think will be of interest to our members. First of all, I said a couple of days ago that I think that we're very lucky to live in a province that feels strongly that families that are dealing with and living with children with challenges deserve our support. Without a doubt, our FSCD program is one of the best in Canada. We hear that quite often. We have a number of other provinces that are interested and on an ongoing basis take an interest in what we're doing here. I don't know that any other program offers the wide range of services that we do, and the hon. member was right that this year we looked at just under a 7 per cent increase, raising that budget to \$102 million.

All of the services that are under FSCD are based on each child's individual assessed needs. The program offers referral, co-ordination supports, respite, aide services, counselling, extraordinary child care, assistance with costs of medical appointment supports, health-related supports, and the list goes on and on. I know that at one point you had asked: when will there be consistency? I guess the simple answer to that is: we continually assess the children that access that program because we want to deliver exactly what their needs are. That is an ongoing service.

I thought that this is quite telling, actually two things telling. Eighty-seven per cent of the families surveyed in 2006 have said that the problem has had a real positive impact on their family, and that's quite a positive result, for sure. The other thing that's interesting is that prior to 2004 – okay, all of our decisions that are made under that program you do have the ability to appeal – there were close to 200 appeals. In 2004-05 there were 115 appeals. In 2005-06 there were 35 appeals. In '06-07 the number of appeals decreased to 22. So I guess I'd also say that that is something worth noting.

3:10

I also want to just refer quickly to the MDTs that you referred to, the multidisciplinary teams. To ensure that children with severe disabilities receive the most appropriate supports and services, an MDT assessment is required. They involve a review of the information provided by the child's family, service providers involved with the child, as well as the medical and assessment information that is available from various professionals in the field. It's important to note that the MDT does not diagnose the child but makes recommendations about the type and the level of specialized services.

I know that you asked some very detailed questions, and we'll get to that in terms of the costs of that. What I can tell you is: I do know that we will be enhancing the number of MD teams, multidisciplinary teams, to help with both workloads and consistency.

Then, if I can just switch over, I'm glad that you brought up the FASD. You know, we know that FASD is a long-term disability that is totally, totally preventable. I know that you're aware that in this year's budget we have \$4 million to start the 10-year fetal alcohol syndrome strategy, and you've raised some good questions about that. The details on the strategy we probably will be rolling out in about a month and a half. So some of that will answer your specific questions. But I can tell you that the plan is focusing on enhancing and developing programs in seven areas: awareness and prevention, assessment and diagnosis, supports for individuals and caregivers, training and education, strategic planning, research and evaluation, and stakeholder engagement. Again, as soon as we have the details, I will share that with you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Education to supplement?

Mr. Liepert: Yeah. I'll make a couple of comments. The member for St. Albert talked about coding. I guess that one of the things that has always sort of bothered me in this portfolio is the fact that we have to code kids. Somehow, there just has to be a better way of doing it. I don't have the answer, but I do think there has to be a better way of doing it. One of the things we are doing this year is a comprehensive review of the entire coding system. Hopefully we can come up with something that might be a little more appealing, and any suggestions the hon. members have would be welcome.

A lot was mentioned about PUF funding and about extending it through to grade 3. I don't dispute what the hon. member says. I guess it really comes down to a question of funding and how much you can apply in any one year. But it should be noted that many of the students who are on PUF funding up to grade 1, some \$23,000 per year, then qualify for the \$16,000 special-needs allocation on top of the per student grant. So when you add the two together, it's very similar to the PUF funding. It's just delivered in a different way.

The one thing that we are also attempting to do in conjunction with Alberta Health and Wellness is to ensure that we – we've got a couple of pilot projects under way relative to more comprehensive screening. Again, it's a word that has some connotations that may cause some concern. We haven't necessarily come up with a better word yet. We want to ensure that the children and their needs are identified at a very early age and then are treated accordingly.

Just a couple of comments relative to school counselling to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. We have to remember that it's not the Department of Education that delivers the education to students; it's really the school boards around the province. There are varying needs by school boards based sometimes on geography, sometimes on just demographics of the school. I know that a fair number of them have moved towards counselling and drug counselors. I mean, I've been to schools where there is full-time policing with a dog in the school. I would like to ensure that it's the school boards at the local level making the decision literally on a per-school basis relative to those needs.

I think that answers the questions that were asked.

The Chair: Are there no other responses from the government side? Then I'll recognize the hon. Member for St. Albert again.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to compliment the minister on looking at the coding system. I have that as one of the issues from the superintendents, and I think that he's right on. Unfortunately, I don't think I have many answers for him, but it's a difficult one. It might be something that we could talk about privately because I think you're right on with that.

The next part. Both the Department of Education and the Ministry of Children's Services have stated goals of keeping children safe and from harm. Strategy 1.7 of the Ministry of Education is to "continue to foster a safe and caring school environment through . . . effective behavioural supports" and strategy. I would just like to comment on that. I think of the minister once in a while in my prayers. I've reluctantly not brought up the question about security in question period because I think it's an explosive issue, and I haven't wanted to bring it in the House in that sense.

I think the whole question there of safe and caring schools is a very, very important thing. What I worry about – and maybe it's because I have grandchildren, and I know you take it seriously, Mr. Minister – is that I don't know what is enough. I don't know what the boundaries are on that. I hope I'm not being negative here, but it concerns me as a human being. Some of the things I see when I

visit schools sometimes even frighten me a bit. That's the whole bully syndrome. We get into a number of things there. I know you're sensitive to that, and I hope I never bring it up in an inappropriate place, but I hope that you're thinking of this. Maybe there's something we can do. Maybe it's a question of education. I don't know the answer there, sir.

The Ministry of Children's Services is to strengthen the provision of strategic leadership to cross-ministry work that supports children and youth in becoming caring, contributing, and self-reliant citizens. That brings me to a question here. Will the departments of Education and Children's Services work together to ensure that school boards have adequate funding to provide counselling services in schools? I think the minister has already touched on that this afternoon.

Strategy 3.4 of the Ministry of Education's business plan is to "collaborate with other government ministries, stakeholders, regional authorities and the community on initiatives to support children and youth." My question is: what partnerships has the ministry developed to create programming or curriculum in Alberta schools to prevent and address drug addiction? I go to the ceremonies in St. Albert in my constituency on the DARE program. I think it's extended now. Maybe the deputy could help bring me up to date. I think the DARE program is extended further into junior high, into grade 8 I think, this year. Certainly, in St. Albert it has.

I think it is a marvellous program, and from what I see, it's doing some wonderful things. I think there's a lot more you can do, but we are supplementing a lot of things the family used to do. The time that I spent with my father in the Shuswap Lakes and building an old rustic boathouse and learning that the Indian chief could come over and help us do that: I don't know where that happens anymore. There are some issues there. Maybe I'm beginning to sound like a priest here. I'd better get off that.

3:20

The other thing I would say to you is about the whole question of phys ed. My background: at one time I was a phys ed person. Again, believe it or not, I thought the half hour of phys ed in schools was excellent. I think it was a great idea. I think it was the way it was handled that was the bad idea. I would ask you, in terms of this question of children's health, if there is some way we are measuring in our schools what's happening with that program. Is it doing the job with our kids? I just had this knee surgery last year, and the doctor certainly told me about my body. He told me this . . .

Ms Pastoor: One minute, Jack.

Mr. Flaherty: One minute? I'm getting kicked off.

Well, I just want to look at this whole thing, but phys ed, to me, I hope somebody can measure. We have – and I'll bring it up maybe someday to the minister – a nutrition problem, an obesity problem in our schools and in our society, and I think it's a very serious one. I think prevention, working at the end that you're in, sir, especially the elementary school and junior high, could cut down a lot of our costs at the other end.

I'll leave it at that. I'm being told again by my own colleagues to sit down. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Five minutes isn't long, so I'm going to try and do a whole bunch of questions. One left over for the Minister of Children's Services is: what supports are available through Children's Services to children with disabilities who are

being home-schooled? An example that I would have out of my own constituency is a woman who is capable of working with her autistic child, and there's a special – what's the word? It's not treatment, but there's a special criterion. There's a special way of working with children. I'm sorry. It has initials, and I've forgotten. But her suggestion is that rather than keep the child in a school where they weren't receiving that extra training that had been done from zero to six, now when they're in the school, they lose it. She would prefer that that money from the school be given to her, and she can use those dollars in her own home to use that special training.

The other thing that I was going to go on was family violence. It's a huge issue in this province. This province has the highest rate of family violence and spousal homicide. It really is a devastating social problem. I realize that the funding has been increased, but I think we need to have a better evaluation to find out if this really is having meaningful impacts on the rates of family violence and the experience of survivors. I've had the opportunity to raise general concerns elsewhere, so the purpose of this debate, again I'd like to repeat, is to focus on the cross-ministry aspect of these concerns.

To the Minister of Children's Services: what is the government doing to help disabled women who are the victims of abuse or violence perpetrated by family members? This sometimes goes into the public guardian side of things as well. It's the same as in elder abuse. Often it is the family, and it is such a tricky problem to work with. Sometimes it's almost impossible that we can help, yet we can see it happening in front of our eyes. It's really quite devastating.

Although goal 6 of the seniors' business plan, page 259, outlines a commitment to safeguarding people with disabilities from abuse, the only performance measure linked to the goal is the percentage of dependent adult private guardianship. I've just spoken to that, and I'm not sure what department that would come out of, but there has to be some kind of support and counselling with that family to perhaps break that cycle. If not, then we have to get these people out of harm's way.

To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Often forms are severely underreported, and disabled women face heightened barriers when attempting to help themselves. How will your ministry have any idea whether or not the efforts are working? That's sort of a redundant question, but I think you can see where I'm going.

Elder women, as I've mentioned before, are very vulnerable to violence and abuse. The Canadian Panel on Violence against Women estimates that 1 in 10 elder persons are victims of abuse, and two-thirds of these are women. Nonetheless, the government has made inadequate provisions for seniors' shelters. Only two seniors' shelters serve the entire province of Alberta, and the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters reports that they are underfunded and short on space. Because of my past profession I have witnessed this elder abuse on older women, and it's just mind boggling.

To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: do you have plans to increase the provision of shelter services to seniors who are victims of elder abuse? We need a co-ordinated response.

To the Minister of Children's Services: can you describe what efforts are being made at the assistant deputy minister level or higher to create a similar mechanism with the authority for long-term planning in Alberta to co-ordinate within these departments towards violence against women and seniors and the shelters and supports that they would need?

We often speak about prevention, and it's important to provide at least some measure of respite and protection to survivors of abuse. However, it's not going to end the abuse against women. So far we've only witnessed the symbols and not the cause. The root causes against women often stem from gender inequality.

Mr. Liepert: I'll try to answer a few of the questions right off the top. The Member for St. Albert raised the issue around security. It's always a delicate balance because at the end of the day we want our schools to be friendly places. We don't want schools where you literally have to swipe to get in and out of every door that you enter. I know that some of the schools that I've toured this year have locked-door policies while classes are going on. It really, I think, again comes down to an individual school board decision. There are, obviously, some parts of cities and some parts of the province that school boards determine are less or more safe than others. But one of the things I would not like to see our schools become is not a friendly place to enter.

There was a question regarding the curriculum. We do have several initiatives that relate to curriculum. One that I can think of is with AADAC. We've got a program through AADAC that is part of the curriculum. There's probably more that could be done there, but that's one that comes to mind.

The hon. member mentions something that I think is very important, and that's the whole idea of: where does school start and society end? We just simply live in a different world today than when those of us who are sitting in this Assembly went to school. It would be a goal of mine at some future point that every student that so chose had the ability to have an outside mentor. I'm not sure at what age that might start. You know, the reality of it is today that we have an awful lot of our children in school who are from one-parent families. I think that an outside mentor in some of these circumstances would go a long way to not only assisting that student through the school years but helping that student think about the after-school years, where their careers might go. So that's something that we intend to work hard on in the next period of time.

The hon. member mentioned phys ed. It's probably too soon to do any kind of real assessment on where we're at with our phys ed initiatives. I guess the thing that I always sort of question around phys ed is: you know, there sure was no gymnasium when I went to school. We were kicked outside to play something that we called speed ball in the snow. You tackled each other and whatever you did, and you stayed warm, and none of us were obese, I don't think. Somebody said to me the other day that probably one of the real ways to deal with obesity is that the school bus should drop kids off three blocks from school and let them walk.

3:30

One thing that I did find very interesting last week when I was in Leduc in the Black Gold school division: they actually have an obesity intervention program, and they have had some 300 students go through the obesity intervention program. Let me rephrase that. A school official will determine that it is in the best interests of the child to have a discussion with the parents relative to that child's physical fitness. They have a tremendous physical fitness facility over the gymnasium, and they've won international awards for it. It's sad that we have to have our schools do that, but I believe that's, unfortunately, part of the society we live in today.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. Again, I'll get back with lots more information, but I'll make a few comments about family violence. You know, without a doubt we know that this has devastating consequences for our province and Albertans. We also know that it is true that we have the highest reported rate across Canada. I'm glad to say, though, that we are also known to be taking the most amount of action on this particular issue.

Just a couple of areas where we are taking action and I think we're making great headway is in our legislation. We added "stalking" to

the definition of family violence, and we also made some changes regarding households when it came to that issue that you referred to, abuse of the elderly. We also have some very successful awareness campaigns and education initiatives. Our information lines, our help lines, and the websites have had unbelievable access, the number of hits. I think that that's just fabulous for this province. As well, the community initiatives and the local projects that we have going.

[Mr. VanderBurg in the chair]

Just to highlight some of the changes and the announcements regarding women's shelter. We have a budget of just about \$36 million. I think that overall, with partnering departments, it's about \$46 million. The women's shelter is a large part of what we do, and we are, I think, at around \$22 million of funding. Last week we were able to make some announcements regarding safe visitation sites. It's a huge part of keeping children safe, related to family violence issues. Very well received. We already have five sites. That's going to allow, I think, another five sites across the province.

The other initiative that was received very positively was \$500,000 of core funding to our sexual assault centres. That brings that core funding up to \$1.5 million.

The community initiatives have been received so well that we bumped that up from \$3 million to \$4.9 million, and again that was well received. That initiative funds projects like HomeFront in Calgary. A lot of these are community-based programs, so they'll deal with local issues and what is a priority in their areas.

The other initiative that was quite good – and I think this is more than women's shelters. It deals with our child care workers. It deals with thousands of people that are delivering services to children and families across the province. It has to do with how we value the work that they do, and part of that is paying attention to how these people are living and what they're getting paid. With women's shelters in February we announced a 3 per cent increase that was retroactive to April 1, 2006. Last week we announced another 3.5 per cent, and that was retroactive to April 1, 2007.

The other great initiative is the bursaries that have been announced. Very well received, whether they be the women's shelter bursary – we gave \$400,000 to put towards skilled training for some of their leadership staff. As well, we gave a \$100,000 grant to the Council of Women's Shelters so that they could work with colleges and look at online training for staff: another very positive move.

What I can tell you is that we are absolutely committed to moving forward on the family violence initiative. We have moved forward in a number of areas, and I will get back to you with some detailed information on that. I very much appreciate your raising that as an issue.

The Acting Chair: The minister of seniors.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In response to family violence – and I won't go through all the things – we do participate in a cross-ministry initiative led by Children's Services to certainly address the critical issue of family violence. We do work on raising awareness with all of the stakeholders. It's very essential. You mentioned that we do support funding at this stage for only two seniors' safe houses, the Kerby Rotary House in Calgary and the Edmonton Seniors Safe House. Our budget in this ongoing year doesn't call for additional funding for more houses, so I can't say that there are additional houses being contemplated at this stage, though addressing it for education and enforcement, I would say, is essential.

As you're aware, there are new standards in supportive living that require staff in facilities to be trained in preventing abuse and reporting abuse, standards that you and the Member for Lethbridge-East worked very diligently on to ensure that these things are brought to awareness and that there is far more training and education of staff and people that are working among the elderly or otherwise.

The Acting Chair: We'll hear from the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. You know, it's unfortunate that many people still see publicly funded child care and early education as unfriendly to families, as state meddling in the nurseries of the nation. The history of early childhood education shows us something quite different. I go back to Maria Montessori, who founded schools for children whose families were challenged in providing the basics, and Friedrich Froebel, the founder of kindergarten, who recognized that poverty could be emotional. He developed a children's garden where education, care, and a constructive approach to life went hand in hand. Before and after school care is an essential service for many families to help provide that children's garden, if you like, of education and care.

Out of school care refers to services that promote the social development of children and their families and includes support services for young school-aged children. Services are provided before and after school and during lunch. A joint study undertaken by the cities of Calgary and Edmonton identified out of school care as a major contributor to the quality of life for children, parents, the community, and society in general. If families know that their children are safe before and after school when they go to work, it gives them peace of mind. They're probably more productive at work. They're happier families, which leads to happier communities and happier cities.

The provincial government does not directly fund out of school care. Instead, this crucial service is operated and funded by FCSS. FCSS is a crucial organization for family and community support services. It helps to improve Alberta's social infrastructure. This infrastructure is instrumental in preventing social problems from growing in scope. Funding for FCSS is truly an investment in social health and quality of life in Alberta. FCSS received an additional \$3 million for a total of \$71.2 million, a 4.3 per cent increase. That's from the estimates, page 64.

Out of school care is only one of the essential services provided by FCSS. As the population and income gap in this province grow, FCSS will certainly require extra resources. How can you justify increasing their budget by less than the rate of inflation? After reading the report mentioned above, I was struck by the difference out of school care makes to the parents, children, and teachers involved with this program. This social investment would certainly be beneficial to all families with parents that work outside of the home. To the Minister of Children's Services: how many people are currently enrolled in out of school care programs, and how many open spaces are available? What is the eligibility for these programs? The most recent annual report from FCSS notes a growing concern over the lack of funding and programming available in rural areas. How many out of school care spaces are available to children in rural areas?

To the Minister of Education: have you considered implementing a permanent policy body that could co-ordinate between the Department of Education and Children's Services on the issues of early childhood development programs such as out of school care, school nutrition, and junior kindergarten?

3:40

I'm pleased to see that the government is beginning to realize the importance of using incentives to attract and retain child care workers. Especially, I'm glad that we're including retention there because we must value the people we already have.

I'm afraid the size and scope of the \$7.4 million Children's Services budget contained in this year's budget will not be enough. Not long ago I received a letter from Natasha Michaud, who was the director of an out of school care program in Edmonton. Natasha was very distressed by the current staffing situation in out of school care. To the Minister of Children's Services: will you extend the recently announced initiatives aimed at retaining staff in the child care sector to workers in the out of school care program? I think their work is just as valuable. They work just as hard; they care just as much. They provide a service to children – for that children's guardian I mentioned earlier – to families, and to our communities. They deserve the recognition, the regard of being a profession that really matters.

I think that's my time.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for being so objective in letting me stand here. I'm going to touch on a few things that I want to try and clean up. One of the areas looks at the Minister of Education, and maybe he can share some thoughts with me on this. I'd be very interested in hearing his thoughts because I do believe he believes in prevention.

The mandate from the Premier includes improving early learning opportunities for young children, and the Ministry of Children's Services' first goal is to ensure that children have a healthy start in the first six years. I think I've addressed that from the one to three thing, but the question on kindergarten is very important because, you see, a recent survey showed that 85 per cent of Albertans would support fully funded full-day and junior kindergarten programs. Well, the question is: will the government commit to looking at this, and will the government commit the funding necessary for the additional infrastructure program and staffing needed to implement these programs?

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

It was interesting, and I'm reluctant to – I'm not reluctant, I'll talk about it, but I don't have enough detail about this. I'm going to just throw this out to the minister because it's in Calgary, and I know he may follow up on it, and that's encouraging. One of the school boards, the Catholic board in Calgary, in the budget – they have a mandate there. I understand that there are 42 high-risk kindergarten classes that they get funding for. But what they got upset about – and I think maybe the minister's already been asked about this – was that they felt that there was a shift in their mandate to go into ESL, the children.

Now, maybe they have perception problems, and they feel someone's picking on them. The point is that they felt that this was done without consultation. They have 42 high-risk classes that they say are drawing a \$1.8 to \$2 million deficit, and they're wondering why that was not looked at in the budget. If they go into the ESL part of the program, that seems to be suggested in the budget – I think it was \$7 million, but I may be out on my figure, so don't hold me to it. They're wondering why that happened. The implication here for that board is that if they've got to get into that area, they don't have the transportation or the infrastructure to handle that ESL program. So I'm just raising it with the minister. He might want to check. I'm just wondering.

We're talking about the very important part of kids starting school, and there are some wonderful programs across the province. I can think of my grandchildren in Okotoks. There is just a very, very wonderful program. One of the things I want to commend again: because of your funding my grandson's problem with hand/eye co-ordination in his writing was picked up. He's still not doing great at writing; he writes like me. But he's improving, and that's the key thing, and that's very, very important.

Now, one of the things that we talked about earlier was counselling, and I know a little bit about counselling. It was interesting last year. We have a thing in my constituency that I brag about: Java with Jack. It's being set up again this summer.

What happened to me. I went to some of the smart schools in St. Albert. It's scaring me what's going to happen. They're all dominated by women that are highly academic, successful. These are women with 80 to 90 per cent in their magic six academic subjects, and they're saying: "Mr. Flaherty, we didn't get any help with our career choices. They ship you to the computer and that. We don't have anyone to talk to about that."

What I get concerned about is two aspects: career, because my background's in that area, and old Dr. Zeal.* Some of you know Dr. Zeal. I used to think he was a Chicago gangster, but he was smart. He talked about the importance of career counselling not only for the academic student but for the career-educated student, especially those career students that are going out into the world of work when they're only in grade 11. They get intimidated by these foremen and bosses and all that. There's no one in the school – the teachers are so busy; the principal is so busy – to help those kids, and I have talked to many parents about that. You know, when you think of kids today and adolescence, boy, what they're going through in their personal development let alone their own careers is unbelievable.

The Chair: Does the hon. Minister for Children's Services wish to respond?

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. I'd like to just go back to some of the comments on FCSS, and that kind of leads into the out of school child care. First of all, I agree with you, hon. member. I think that FCSS programs are probably the best example of partnerships that we have in this province. We have, you know, just thousands of locally driven preventative programs that have been developed and implemented, and I think that their services are top notch.

I know that I've referred to this before. The FCSS report has been completed. Just in the last couple of days I sat down with the provincial organization of the FCSS and went through the results of the report and some of the recommendations in it. It will be public in the next several days, and then it'll be public what the recommendations are. I can tell you that the association received them quite well, and some of how we roll out the budget for FCSS will be based on that report.

With respect to the out of school – and it's no secret – I have mentioned over the last couple of months that in that report probably one of the largest issues identified was some of the gaps with respect to out of school programs. What exists in the province and makes it not an easy solution to deal with quickly is the fact that while we license zero to six programs and six to 12, we do not have the mandate to provide services for child care in the six to age 12 group. How we do fund that is through our funding through FCSS, and then areas locally determine if that is a program that they want to deliver and then do that if they so choose. Right now we have, I do believe, 44 child care programs that are operating across the province in out of school care. What I have told the association – and I know that I've told the House before – is that I will work with the stakeholders

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

involved in that sector and take a look at some workable solutions in that area.

Just with respect to some of the comments, you know, thank you for the compliments regarding some of the changes to zero to six. I think they have been well received, and I do think that they will be successful in ultimately creating space, which is one of the goals that we have this year. With respect to making some of those changes, applying them to out of school care, again because of the lack of mandate, not possible. I should mention that we did extend the bursaries to out of school care. We did have the capabilities of doing that, so that will be available to the staff that are working in out of school right now.

I think that's all I wanted to say.

3:50

Mr. Liepert: I didn't get a lot of questions out of the hon. Member for St. Albert. I got a lot of passion, and I got some suggestions. But the couple of questions in there I'll try and answer. The member talked in many ways about the same sorts of things that I've been talking about, and that is the involvement of the business community not to privatize our public schools but to ensure that our students that are coming out of high school have some guidance and some assistance on what they might want to seek as a career.

I was told this morning that if there is one thing that we are falling behind on globally, it is that we are still graduating students with high academic skills, but they're not quite as competitive as they need to be internationally. We're now competing with countries that have a long history of having to be competitive to survive. I think a more collaborative effort with the outside world can make our students start to become more competitive. We have the genesis of that to some degree in what is called Careers: the Next Generation. Many of you would know Eric Newell, who has got a fine reputation not only in the business community but in the education community in this province, and he's very much promoting this concept. So I think we're heading down that path. There's lots more to be done. I would certainly agree.

The hon. member raised the issue with Calgary Catholic board, and I will look into what he's referencing. I believe that what he's referencing, though, is full-day kindergarten for children that are in need and at risk, that Calgary Catholic, like many other school boards, has implemented. There is debate whether full-day kindergarten is a benefit. I must say that in my meetings with school boards around the province it's split. Many school boards believe that the funding method that we have today whereby school boards have the choice to pick and choose where they might want to have full-day kindergarten versus blanket full-day kindergarten – we've got many school districts who have actually implemented pilot projects of full-day kindergarten.

I think this is something that I'd like to take a year or two to assess, see how it's working. As the hon. member would know, the recommendation of the Learning Commission relative to full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten was taken to our caucus and was not approved, and while we may have had a change in leadership, it's still the same caucus. So it would not be my intent to go back to caucus with that proposal.

Just very briefly, there was a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods relative to co-ordination of ECS services, and we, in fact, do have a cross-ministry committee of deputies dealing with the co-ordination of ECS services. But there's no question. Like any of these cross-ministry initiatives I'm sure there are improvements that can be made to the delivery of services, especially to young children who have some sort of mild or moderate learning difficulty because in many cases they aren't identified early enough. So that's ongoing work.

The Chair: No one else wish to supplement?

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'll just wrap up. I'll do some questions that actually came from my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, and I'll go quickly.

Education, review of coding. Who is doing it? Please include special ed teachers. Often curriculum development does not include the teachers that actually teach the subject.

Counsellors. We need them in every school to keep students and families working with the agencies, and a reasonable level of local autonomy would be in the detection of allowing elected bodies to be accountable and responsive to all of the community needs at the local level.

Brochures for preschool special needs are good, but adults also need something to help them know which service providers really are available. I believe that we've heard that there's work towards that end.

I'll just wrap up and say thank you very much to the ministers and certainly their staff and thank you to my colleagues. I believe that we got what I believed we were aiming for, which was a true exchange of information and ideas of how we can actually all better serve the Albertans that we're all responsible for. So I thank all of the departments, and I know that we'll each go and speak with our people that we've worked with to do a debriefing on how we can make this process better. But I for one am very pleased with the process and the way it has gone. I'm hoping the other side will feel the same.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others on the opposition side? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. I just want to say that this has been a very useful process and thank you all for your attention and your work to help Alberta's children.

I do want to mention one thing that has always bothered me. My background is a school administrator, and the last years were in high school. High schools get about \$18,000 for a special-needs aide, a full-time aide. The cost to the school is \$38,000, so the other \$20,000 comes from operating costs; in other words, the general population is paying for that need. I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't have aides. They're absolutely invaluable. They do wonderful work. But I think that we need to recognize that there is a financial cost there that's not being adequately funded.

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: I'll just make a couple of quick comments. I appreciate the kind words from the Member for Lethbridge-East. I do think it has been a good exchange. I don't think there's anyone sitting in this House today that doesn't want to have the best for our young people who have challenges. The question is ensuring that you identify them early enough and have the proper processes in place, that parents don't get frustrated trying to access the services.

There were a couple of comments made I believe on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie relative to more counsellors in schools and involving special-ed teachers in the development of the curriculum. I'll take those under advisement.

Relative to the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods I agree that twice as much money would probably give us twice as much benefit. The question really comes down to how much can you afford to spend on education versus how much can you afford to spend on health care and seniors. I think we're always

trying to get that balance, and it's not an easy balance. We all for our particular departments try and identify the needs. It would be nice if we could get more money for certain things, but I think the reality of it is you come up with what you feel is fair and make the best that we can. At the end of the day I would feel comfortable stacking up our programs when it comes to special needs with any in the country.

I would conclude on that.

The Chair: One minute left. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. The previous comments from Lethbridge-East were mine, not Edmonton-Ellerslie.

We are doing a wonderful job in this province. I have no doubt of that. But I think it's incumbent upon us always to strive for excellence for the day when we don't have poverty concerns interfering with education, for the day when everybody feels safe and secure, and I think we've got a distance to go.

Thank you.

4:00

The Chair: Half a minute left if the minister wants to respond.

The time is elapsed for the Liberal opposition. The next half hour is dedicated to the ND opposition. I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A pleasure to rise and join the debate on the estimates for several ministries here: the ministry responsible for seniors, the ministry responsible for children's services, family services; and the Ministry of Education. I want to express my appreciation for the presence of all the ministers here and their respective staff.

Mr. Chairman, given that in this rotation the NDP caucus has only 30 minutes available to it, it's best, therefore, for me to perhaps confine my observations and questions to one ministry, and that ministry of choice for me will be the Children's Services ministry. The Minister of Education perhaps can relax for a little while.

The second observation, Mr. Chairman, that I want to make is that the rotation structure that the House leaders have agreed to – the first hour and a half are for the Liberal opposition, then a half hour for the NDP in this rotation, and so on – does create some difficult situations. I may be asking questions that may already have been asked several times, and I wouldn't want to be doing that. I'm trying, hopefully, to be innovative and see if I can ask some questions that may have been overlooked or not asked because of time constraints or whatever. But it's inevitable that there will be some repetition, so I hope they'll be understanding of that. I'm not just trying to waste the time of the House or of the ministers here with my observations.

I want to start, therefore, with the budget for Children's Services, especially for child care, that has included an increase of 5.6 per cent, I guess, in the subsidies that qualifying families will receive as a result of this budget. The incomes to qualify are indicated by the minister in one of the communications – I'll see if I can find this – but there are, certainly, ranges, between 35,000-some dollars to about 38,000-some dollars depending upon whether it's a single-parent family or a two-parent family with one child or two children and so on and so forth. But the range is between there.

Now, the first question that occurred to me has to do with many of these families. Even for these families the adequacy of a 5.6 per cent increase in light of the fact that many of these families that will be qualifying for subsidy will also be families that are renting their housing accommodation and knowing the rise in rents – and this

House has been engaged in the scale of this increase in rental costs to families – I wonder if the 5.6 per cent increase in the subsidies will compensate for the 10 to 20 to 25 to 30 per cent increase in rental costs for the same families. So that's a question that I think needs addressing. Just focusing on the increases to subsidies without addressing the context in which this increase is taking place would not be very productive. I think we really have to be serious about asking whether or not this increase that's built into this budget for increasing the subsidies for parents who qualify – this is a very important question that needs to be addressed, and I hope that the minister will respond to it in some detail.

The second related question, of course, is the cut-off, you know, the qualifying incomes. What happens to that given the changed circumstances in which all kinds of costs for families are going up? Particularly, the rental portion of the family budgets is going to be really hit hard and is going to increase exponentially over the year for which this budget is being proposed and the year following. At least for the next two years we can expect massive increases in the rental costs to all families. So the second question, then, has to do with these income cut-offs or the income level thresholds and the ceilings that are presently in place which would allow certain families to qualify for subsidies and others not.

Is the minister in a position to make some comments on whether or not there's a need, in fact, given the changed circumstances with respect to rental costs in particular, not just that these income levels that have been in place need a revision? Is the minister willing to look at that? If so, what kind of impact will that have on the proposed budget? If more monies are needed, where are they going to come from? Are they going to be shifted within the budget, or how is the minister proposing to deal with that?

Another question, if I may move on, has to do with the prevention of family violence and bullying item in the budget, program expenses. It's increased by 7.6 per cent. First of all, I know that combining this or collapsing these two categories, prevention of family violence and bullying, which takes place I would think not only in the family context but outside, perhaps in the schoolyard mostly, out in the street or in the communities in general – I find it not terribly helpful. I'm seized of the importance of the relative scarcity and shortage of funding for women's shelters, for example, for victims of family violence who have to leave home and seek shelter somewhere else.

In order for us to be able to assess the adequacy of funds available and budgeted here for prevention of family violence and protection of those who become victims of it, I think we need to break down these two categories into separate subitems so that the question then is: what percentage of these 36 million and some dollars or what dollars out of this are allocated for bullying? The minister might want to also comment on whether or not bullying is an activity which takes place also within the family context and not just outside in the schoolyard or wherever. What dollars are for prevention of family violence? You know, the two categories. I think that's the next question that I had here.

This is a question, I'm afraid, that has been asked perhaps, but I'm going to repeat this, and just ignore it if it's answered. I'll see it in the *Hansard*. Protecting children from sexual exploitation. In this House over the years there has been a great deal of concern about children's sexual exploitation. We have been of course told again and again by a variety of ministers that this is a serious problem. It's a growing problem in our cities and towns, and it needs very special attention. I notice here that the budget allocation for this particular program is hardly changed from last year, maybe \$3,000 more,

whereas if you look at inflation, look at the increase in wage costs for people who are supposed to provide this care, it simply will be inadequate. This budget, to me, seems to be cut back.

I'll stop here and let the minister answer these questions.

4:10

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. Once again, regardless of whether the questions have been raised before or not, I'll make sure that you get the answers to these questions if I don't get to cover everything.

To talk about the child care budget, you're right. The cut-offs and the ranges have not changed, but if I can just kind of backtrack and give you a little bit of the reason for that. As soon as I was appointed minister – and this was identified as a priority – I spent an awful lot of time with stakeholders, that being operators of child care, parents. The number one issue – well, there are actually a few, but we had to make sure that we would create affordable, quality child care spaces and make them accessible. It didn't take long and too much time with stakeholders to realize that when we're talking about space creation, what we really had to talk about was the attraction and retention of staff. When we talked to people across the province, there were a lot of areas where facilities are not a problem. We have all kinds of people coming to the plate in terms of offering space. It really came down to making sure that we had the staff. The child care centres just could not operate without staff, and we knew that child care staff were leaving their positions.

The reason I say all of that. What we've moved forward on really is based on what stakeholders had to say. Without a doubt, they all said that the five-point plan was a very good basis, and it really was the foundation to work from. We had way more families accessing subsidies. The wage top-ups were working and kind of slowed down the number of staff leaving the sector. The whole kin child care was very well received and is very well received and particularly offered new choices in rural Alberta. The number of accredited programs have significantly increased, and in terms of being interested in providing quality, that's been a very successful initiative. So the number one concern really was taking a look at the number of ways that we could impact the attraction and retaining of staff.

Now, making it affordable for parents was a concern as well, but I would suggest that the recommendations were just really to take a look at the cost-of-living index and adjust it to that level. We didn't play around with that much more than that. I think that the end result with the kinds of, you know, additional wage top-ups, the bursaries for child care workers, the increased professional development, the attracting staff back, the northern allowance – with all of that I think we will see improvements sooner than later, and we'll actually achieve the additional capacity that we're looking for.

In terms of the cost of bullying I'll get that detailed information for you, in terms of what it is we spend on bullying out of the family violence budget. Just to make a few comments on that. I had mentioned this earlier. Bullying continues to be a priority for the government, and we will continue to focus on that initiative this year. I think it's more important now than ever to make sure that we focus on raising awareness of the impact of bullying, identifying what it is that we can do to stop that behaviour, and really encouraging a change in societal attitudes because we know that the whole dimension of bullying has changed quite dramatically. What I had mentioned earlier is the number of hits – the success of our info lines, the helplines, and the websites has been absolutely phenomenal. We have a real appetite out there for information, and I think it's incumbent on us to continue on with that initiative.

There was one other thing: sexual exploitation. Again, I'll get the details for you. You were talking about the lack of the same level of

increase in that particular area. Some of it had to do with what the budget had in terms of setting up some of the Internet and websites as well as some of the advertising, one-time costs, but I'll get back to you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the minister for trying to address on her feet some of the questions that require, I guess, more investigation and information than would be available to anyone in her position at this point.

I want to compliment the minister for the work that she's been doing on behalf of families and children in her responsibility for this particular portfolio. She's been working hard, and I have no reason to question her intention to continue to move forward with positive changes and expansion of delivery of services and improving the quality of the services that are delivered to needy families and children. I commend her for her commitment and dedication to our families and children.

Children, of course, are very, very vulnerable members of our communities, in our families and outside. The most vulnerable of all children, Mr. Chairman, it's sad to have to observe, are the children of First Nations communities and children who come from First Nations families. I wonder if the minister would be able to shed some light on the number of First Nations children in the care of the government. Is there some sort of pattern over the last few years, or what's happening to this picture? Is it improving? Is it persistent and resistant to any attempts to change it for the better?

I raise this question because at the national level this question was raised earlier, I think on Monday or Tuesday, and it has generated some debate. A great deal of concern has been expressed by the First Nations national leaders with respect to the very, very high overrepresentation preponderant – not just preponderance but huge overrepresentation – of First Nations children in care. I know this matter concerns all of us a great deal. We know that those who work in the field have found and have been confronted with frustrations year after year after year in making a dent in the problem. But I think that in order for us at the provincial level to develop an effective response to this problem, a response that will in fact make some difference, we have to be quite well informed about numbers among children in care. What's the total number of children in care? Of that, what's the number of First Nations children in care?

Similarly, children on the street, who need protection from sexual exploitation. We know, I think, perhaps the numbers overall, but what's the percentage and in absolute terms the number of First Nations children on the street who are in need of protection and/or are receiving the support and protection of this department or other related departments who may share this responsibility?

4:20

Mr. Chairman, the minister made, I think, a very interesting observation that when she took over this portfolio, she found out as she was consulting with stakeholders – and perhaps the department staff knew before that – that given the wage levels and in spite of the five-point program that was introduced by the government I think a year and a half ago – it wasn't last year; the year before, I think – which in fact seemed to have identified the problem of recruitment and retention of people who provide services and care in child care centres, the problem was the low wage levels, no opportunity to improve on their educational qualifications, to upgrade their skills. So the five-point program, I think, was intended in part to respond to that difficulty, that there may be lots of buildings and physical facilities available, but there simply weren't people able to provide

these services, child care workers who could be recruited at the low wages and benefits that are associated with the work that they were doing.

Now, last year I think there was \$30 million in underspending. The province did have a golden opportunity because we did receive about \$69 million from the federal government the year before to be able to step into that huge gap and respond effectively. But because timely action wasn't taken, I think \$30 million remained unspent. Those potential child care spaces, in terms of physical space that could have been made available and offered to families in need, simply couldn't be accomplished because there were no people that could be recruited. Staff wasn't available to provide those services in those potential spaces.

It's regrettable that a great opportunity was lost and that \$30 million was unspent. In fact, I've been asking myself: why is it that that money remained unspent? Now I can understand it. I think it was in part because you simply couldn't use that money at the existing rates of pay and wages to attract more people back. In fact, this area of child care has been losing people to other areas in the economy. So the net gain was a result of not having taken these additional funds that came from the federal government and putting them in place so that child care workers could find doing this work not only attractive in terms of their occupational commitments and interests, but also find that it pays wages that they can live on, that they can expect to get a living wage out of providing this very, very important service, child care, to young children who need it very badly.

The other question related to this, of course, is how that money that came from the federal government was spent. Probably the question has been asked. I understand that Alberta up to this point has not sent a report to the federal government with respect to the expenditure of those funds. A report was expected. Some provinces have submitted such reports. Alberta is one of those five or six provinces that still to this point has not, and the question is: why? You talk about accountability. You talk about transparency about public funds. Whether these funds come from the federal level, they are taxpayers' funds, and whether they are our own provincial general revenue funds, they have to be accounted for.

One way of accounting for those funds is to prepare a report and make it available to at least those agencies or institutions that in the first place made those funds available. We have an accounting to give for \$69 million that came down from federal government, which we could have used. In fact, we failed to use the budgeted amount of \$147 million – was it? – in the child care area for 2005-2006. Of that, lots of money came from the federal government.

I remember asking questions of the former Minister of Children's Services to address this issue, and she said that she would. In the meantime, things have changed. So I'm asking again: is it the case with the five-point plan that although its conceptualization as a sort of framework was there, the resources weren't put at the disposal of the minister and the departmental staff for them to proceed with it, implement it immediately so that we could have spent this money to provide quality services in terms of child care to families who have to wait and can't get in?

So that's the question that I hope the minister . . . [Dr. Pannu's speaking time expired]

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you. Just to start with the aboriginal children in care. In terms of the numbers that you had asked for, this is a hugely important area to us because we know that aboriginal children make up 8 per cent of the child population in Alberta, but

they are 58 per cent of the children in care. Out of the 8,805 children that we have in care, 5,178 are aboriginal. I know that this is a concern not just for us; it's a big concern to elders and leaders in communities across Alberta and across the rest of the country.

Just a little bit of information about our approach to aboriginal services in this province. We are committed to looking at improvements in that area. We do want to reverse those numbers. I know that when we put the enhancement act in place a couple years ago, it was incumbent on us and put in the legislation that we consider and consult with aboriginal people on the care for their children, also to pay attention to the cultural needs. As you know, we've got the delegated First Nations agencies. We have 18 of them in the province. On all of our family and child service authorities one of the co-chairs is aboriginal as well as some of the members on each one. Through our legislation and agreements that we have with the DFNAs, we have to recognize the importance of the culture, and we do involve elders and extended family in working together to improve outcomes for the children.

Some interesting stats here: there's been a real focus on trying to place aboriginal children in their own communities and, if they're unable to go back to their families, to place them with extended families. As of December 2006 we have over a thousand aboriginal children that have been placed through the kinship care program, so that's been very popular. Now, immediate family members are also encouraged, if it suits their family situation, to become foster parents as well.

I think that probably the most important announcement in the last couple of weeks that we've been part of as a government is the historical INAC announcement that was made April 27. This really will fundamentally change the way that child and family services are delivered on reserve. You're probably aware that the federal government has committed I think it was just over \$15 million to provide early intervention services on reserve, and that's something that we've been advocating with our aboriginal partners for the federal government to do for a number of years. In this announcement the federal government chose Alberta as being the first province to launch the funding because of the Alberta response model and are encouraging that that be a model that should be looked at across the country. You know, that was great recognition of the really good work that's been done in this province in that area. Thanks again to our staff for the commitment that they have and just the real desire to see if we can reverse the kind of stats that we have in this particular area.

With respect to child care, you had mentioned the reporting. With the federal funding in the first couple of years, the five-year funding that ended up getting cancelled going into the third year, there was never a requirement for us to report. So the articles that you're referring to, saying that Alberta was one of the . . .

4:30

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. minister, but the time is now open for all members of the Assembly to participate. I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased and honoured to rise in my first time up in supply. In doing so, I'm pleased to recognize a research assistant who is with me here today, Kirstyn Rau, from the fine central Alberta community of Daysland.

I'll begin with Children's Services, an area of huge concern to many Albertans. Indeed, this morning and yesterday I was at the Construction Owners Association of Alberta conference. There were something like a thousand different representative leaders in the construction industry there earlier today, and they were discuss-

ing many of the ways to try and ensure that we have adequate numbers of qualified and skilled people available for industry in our province, especially in construction of the upgraders and construction of the oil sands plants and things like that.

It came to mind what I've come to know in northeast Edmonton. I've seen the rate of participation in the workforce of women going down. Many women that I have met say that they are staying at home with their children in order to provide their child care. We do have a baby boom going on. We do have a lot of workers – tradesmen, engineers, technicians – in north Edmonton working extended work schedules, 24 and 4 quite often, or 24 days on and 4 days off, and finding that the spouse cannot find adequate daycare, so they're staying at home.

One of the big things this morning at the Construction Owners conference – and there were people from all over the industry, representatives from all facets, not just the owners that were there – was that there are not enough women working in construction. We're not bringing enough women into construction. The daycare issue is one of the key factors in causing the problem in bringing people that could be trained and maybe are already trained into the industry. That was one of the main topics, how to bring women into the industry, this morning at the Construction Owners conference.

My question on this matter is: how do we address this if there's not affordable access to daycare in place, and what is the ministry looking to do to try and ensure that there is child care available for those women who would like to participate in the workforce, especially in some of the nontraditional areas for women?

Just a note. I really appreciate and I've had many comments about the work of the minister, that she's been very conscientious in trying to create quality child care spaces and make them affordable. There are a lot of good comments I've heard about how she's bringing forward the five-point plan, trying to bring forward the various aspects and make them work, the various allowances to achieve additional capacity in our system. I think it's important, very much so, to commend you on that work.

A couple of other issues are certainly the family and spousal violence issue. Alberta does come out as the second highest in Canada. I haven't been able to review all the *Hansard* debates on this issue and what has been said already, but I would just like to know what new initiative the government is looking at to really curb spousal violence. I've seen the press release on May 9, and that was welcome news. But I'm interested to see what the new community programs are in the \$1.9 million and what that might be, coming forward.

An additional area of interest, of course, is the bullying area. It was mentioned earlier in the questioning by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona while I was here, an area of great concern, understanding that 1 in 10 children is reported to have bullied others in our province and even 25 per cent in grade 4, every 25 minutes in the classroom, an area of tremendous concern. I tabled a report about bullying in the workplace by adults, and maybe training them not to do it is one way to stop kids from learning how to do it. What other initiatives might we be looking for?

Just to ask the chair a question, can I stop now and wait for the answers, or do I have to finish my 10 minutes?

The Chair: You have four minutes left. If the minister responds, that time is deemed to have expired, and then I could recognize you again, but I do have someone else on the list.

Mr. Backs: Okay. So I should finish my next four minutes.

I'll go quickly to seniors. I see that the minister is not here, but I'll maybe ask for written responses to my questions. Seniors was

one of the reasons that I originally ran in the last election, to try and address a number of issues on seniors, seniors' care, and some of the issues that revolve around seniors' care.

The Auditor General's report very much came forward with some of the shortcomings that we noticed a few years ago. You know, one of the things in the 2005 report of the Auditor General stated that only 69 per cent of the standards related to care were met by the facilities examined and that many standards are outdated and must be monitored closely. How is the department improving reliance on these standards and ensuring that these standards are met?

There's added stress because of labour shortages. We've had quite a bit of discussion on the need and how we improve the numbers of people coming in. Has the government looked to ensure that standards are being met in terms of the number of hours being provided for long-term care facilities?

Has the government moved to determine and compare and ensure that rental rates are available and affordable for seniors on limited and fixed incomes?

You know, one of the areas of training that is important in terms of providing care is, of course, those caregivers. One of the areas that I've mentioned in other debates in the Legislature in the last month has been the efforts brought forward by the government of Saskatchewan to train aboriginal on-reserve women to help with many facets of long-term care, be it attendants, be it home-care attendants, be it those who train as practical nurses, and others in the health care professions. They've had some great success in actually bringing forward a number of people into the field who have moved to the cities and have settled in and become very important and contributing, viable parts of the community.

As we look to Edmonton becoming the largest aboriginal city in Canada within a very few short years and looking to the unemployment rate that we do see in our many northern communities, many of which don't have much economic opportunity, I just would like to hear from the ministry as to what they will be coming forward with or if they have been examining that option that Saskatchewan has been so successful with, according to the reports that I've been given.

The AISH reforms. Of course, the \$50 is welcome, and the fact that it is reviewed every two years is welcome. I have quite a number of AISH recipients in my constituency, and they keep on asking me the question: I'm afraid of losing my place because of rent. How will the ministry ensure that rent does not take up most of the AISH recipients' income, and how can they quickly access all the programs available so that they ensure that they do not lose their homes? It's a real and severe fear for many of them.

4:40

We look to seniors. You know, it's a demographic where in 2006 only 10.6 per cent – and that's actually a lot right now – of the population were seniors. That will rise to over a fifth of the population: 21.4 per cent in 2031. We have 142,000 people on the Alberta's seniors' benefit. What is the ministry's forecast in the next 20 years for the use of that benefit?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. Okay. You've asked a lot of questions there, so I'll do what I can and get back. Some of them have been raised earlier, so maybe I'll briefly address those, but we'll follow up with more information.

I think I'll start with the bullying because I referred to a little bit of it, but I haven't had to get into that too much. The strategy. We

were just as committed this year as we have been. We're into the third year. When you take a look at the initiatives, what the implementation this year will include is continuing to support communities to address bullying. Of the 225 community incentive fund projects funded in the first two years, 89, or 40 per cent of them, were related to bullying. So you can see that it's of high interest to our communities.

Implementing a youth leadership initiative, which includes a provincial youth bullying committee who provide advice and leadership. Training and tools have been developed to support youth to be leaders in preventing bullying in their communities. We have supported six taking action on bullying parent link sites, which are designed to help parents and schools identify bullying and give kids the skills to address it. I've mentioned a few times today how successful those programs have been.

We're also funding the roots of empathy project in Alberta. That is a community-based antiviolence program that is working to build empathy in grade 1 students. We're also working with Employment, Immigration and Industry in implementation of the seeds of empathy program, which will support immigrant families with young children, ages three to five, attending child care programs. We are in the third year of a three-year public awareness and education campaign focused on educating children, youth, and adults in prevention and safe methods of intervention.

I'll just hop over to child care. I'm not sure if you missed some of the earlier conversation, but first of all thanks for your compliments. There has been a lot of time and energy spent on this particular area. Just to kind of recapture the last couple of months, coming into this position, we knew that we had a severe shortage of spaces in the province. We spent a fair amount of time with stakeholders, finding out what was working well and their ideas on what could be done to improve and increase, particularly, the number of spaces.

Very clear right from the start that what was working well was the five-point plan, all aspects of it, whether it was the wage top-ups or the kin care accreditation in terms of improving quality in our child care. The subsidies uptake was higher than the last couple of years. It proved to be the right foundation to move forward on. I was really pleased to go through the business planning process and even at that time get commitment, without any confirmation on whether we would get any federal funding, on not only approving the five-point plan but also enhancing it. So that is what we have focused most of our recent initiatives on.

I just wanted to speak in terms of the numbers. We're also conducting a space survey this spring, so we'll have a clear idea by the time we get into the summer just what the landscape is like in terms of spaces across the province and what our needs are. So that'll be very, very helpful information.

As far as your questions, I'll make sure that the Seniors' minister does get those questions and responds to you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A couple of themes that I want to build upon. First, on Children's Services: to provide safe and secure communities. I want to know from the minister and the staff what they're doing to help the providers that do such good work for your department remain in their jobs with such competitive a workforce? I'm hearing over and over from staff in government that, you know, we're at risk of losing our good people to other industries that will pay them more and will recognize their efforts in not such a constrained work environment. It's very hard for young rising stars that work for your department to get recognized because of the constraints within our labour system. I'd really like to see us

be able to both financially recognize and promote these young stars within your department.

The second issue that I want to talk to you about – and it's the one that I get the most calls about regarding your department – is foster care and the children in protection of foster care. Are you getting enough foster families to take care of the children in need? Again, the hot economy has people thinking about how they manage their own jobs and their own lives and how they can get some time off, and I'm concerned that we're not attracting the quality of families and of homes. I'd like to hear your comments on that.

The other issue that I have, and again building on a stronger Alberta, goes to education. I hear from so many parents that children, the young men and women of our future workforce, are not being prepared properly when they leave grade 12 for the real world here in Alberta. Many of these young teenagers would like to get into the trades earlier. Through their CTS programs in school they'd like to get the recognition for, you know, maybe a first-year welder or a first-year electrician, just to name a few. I mean, there are all kinds of good trades we could promote within our high schools. But parents are really concerned that we're not getting that young workforce ready, and many of them I've hired.

When I got elected in 2001, it was the first time I had a paycheque that my wife didn't sign. We always hired lots of young people and built them into great young workers, but today more and more I'm seeing a problem. When I go to a store and the bill is \$15.25 and I hand them a \$20 bill and a quarter, they're looking at me with a funny expression. These are pretty simple math skills.

You know, the great educators that we have working for us, I think they did a fair job on a difficult student when they dealt with me, and I think they did an even better job with our sons. But today it seems like the teacher has so many other issues to deal with in the classroom, and I'm wondering if that's part of the problem, but I'd like to hear from you.

I would like to go back to Provide Safe and Secure Communities. I'd like to talk to the minister of seniors on what he's prepared to do in his budget, in his business plan, with elder abuse. I'm not talking the elder abuse when someone has a black eye or a broken bone. We can deal with that. It's the financial seniors' abuse that probably 90 per cent of our seniors have to deal with. For many reasons older people are at increased risk. They have something that the crooks and the scam artists want. They have property, they have money, and they're vulnerable. So, you know, I'd really like to know from the minister of seniors in his business plan what he's doing to get that message out. We can have all the laws, and we can have all the lawmakers and enforcers do a number of things, but I think we really need to deal with this and be up front with seniors that they're vulnerable and that they need to be aware that people are after their property and their wealth.

I've seen so many times when a new person comes into a senior's life and family members kind of think: "Oh, this is great. Fred from across the street is paying attention to mom and dad." But before you know it, mom and dad are being duped out of their hard-earned savings or jewellery or many, many other things. So I'm really concerned that we need to get that message out. We need to get the message out early.

4:50

Another thing. I wonder what the minister of seniors is doing when it comes to reverse mortgages? I'm hearing a lot of people talk about reverse mortgages on television and how great of a thing it is. Well, it's great because nobody is really talking about the end, when you have to move out of your home or when a person passes away. Who's going to pay that reverse mortgage, and who's going

to pay all those fees that are loaded on the back end of that reverse mortgage? Who's there to protect the family at that time? I think, again, we need to be aware that there are some serious issues, and it's not always what you see on TV or read in the paper with regard to elder abuse.

I'll sit down and listen to the ministers talk about the issues I've raised.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Chair. Well, I'll try and address some of the comments that were made by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne relative to Education, and there were some other questions that the minister of seniors will handle as well as the Minister of Children's Services.

I guess that I'm a bit taken back with the comments that the member made relative to his encounter with the individual who couldn't calculate \$15.25 from the \$20 bill because consistently our math performance in international testing is among the best in the world, second or third right now in the world. My comment would probably be that our math majors aren't working in the convenience store, so the particular individual that the hon. member happened to be dealing with was probably one of those 10 or 15 per cent of the students who are dropping out of high school that we want to try and keep in high school. I wouldn't want the hon. member to think that somehow our math skills that are being taught by our teaching staff these days are any less or any more inferior than they used to be.

There was another comment made relative to ensuring that our students are ready for the workforce. There's no question that over the past number of years, for whatever reason, we've fallen behind in our ability to provide career and technology study, probably more the physical part of the courses. I think it was a case that equipment has become so expensive. We have to look at different ways of being able to offer those kinds of courses to students, especially in the larger centres. I think it has to be more a co-operative effort between the postsecondary trade schools. I think about Edmonton or Calgary, where maybe we don't necessarily have to have all of the industrial arts components in the high schools. Maybe we can have a much bigger, better facility at the technical and trade schools and have high schools collaboratively work with those trade schools.

The one other final comment I would make before I turn it over to my colleagues is that I mentioned in the House earlier – I'm not sure if the member was in the House at that time or not – that I think the one thing that has been brought to my attention that we have to be diligent about is that our high school graduates and postsecondary graduates need to really have a greater competitive edge than they used to have when they graduated out of high school because they're competing in a global environment where we are competing against countries that have been competitive for hundreds of years. So I think that's something that we have to work on with the business community to promote within our schools.

I think that addresses the issues around education.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services to supplement.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. Just to get back to some of the questions on foster care. It's a good question because we all know how important the work of foster parents is. Just so the member knows, we have in this year's budget increased the funding by \$7 million, and that was to help train and support foster parents. That brings the total budget to \$144 million. Now, we are actively recruiting families. We do know that the more homes that we have, the better able we are to match children with foster parents who best meet their

needs. In fact, this year we're dedicating \$650,000 to recruit more foster parents. As well, we work with the Foster Parent Association to determine on an ongoing basis how we can support what it is that they do, and I do have a meeting with them I think in two weeks to go through that.

Two pieces of information that are kind of interesting. As of December 2006 there were approximately 2,500 foster homes in the province; we have 665 kinship care homes in Alberta, and that's when the guardian is an extended family member. In terms of ratios we have approximately 1.9 foster children per foster home in Alberta, and in comparison provinces like Saskatchewan or Ontario both have a ratio of 2.4 children.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you. In response to the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, first off, one of the things we ensured that did happen so we can raise awareness – and I thank the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne for some of the work he's been doing as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council, specifically on this issue. Some of the information being brought back – and I think these are the kinds of initiatives we need to continue support. Sometimes getting around and seeing what other jurisdictions do and learn from a lot of experience – we don't always have to reinvent everything here. We find a lot of good solutions being practised around the world. I know a conference that he was recently at talked very much about this, and he supplied a report to us on some of the things that we might more proactively do, much of it education related.

You talked about financial abuse being one of the largest single areas of abuse inflicted. Things like social insurance numbers being kept confidential and not in your wallets and working with the federal government on identity theft and making sure those things aren't so readily available are very good proactive ideas. We will follow up and I think work more proactively about educating, making awareness far more understandable of the types of abuse that could happen, and making people better prepared to handle their lives and avoid these pitfalls. One thing I'd like to mention is that we are sponsoring a conference in June on elder abuse. It's promoting the second annual international Elder Abuse Awareness Day. This is on June 15. So there will be more things that will come out, and those are just some of the venues that we could use.

With respect to reverse mortgages there are a number of, obviously, financial instruments that are put out, and I can't really necessarily comment on whether some of them are good, bad, or indifferent, though there are always risks in attendant issues in education that people aren't aware of, like you said: some of the back-end costs that get deferred and what that might mean. I think that's part of what we have to make sure people are fully aware of, the options that are there to take care of their financial situation, especially for seniors, how they could be taken advantage of and making sure of full disclosure. So we'll be happy to follow up with that kind of thought and ongoing education awareness for seniors.

The Chair: I just want to remind all members that the member and the ministers may combine their total speaking time of 20 minutes and just go back and forth – you don't have to speak for 10 minutes – if it's agreeable to all. If that's the case, please advise the chair in advance.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

5:00

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think your suggestion is welcomed. I'm very happy to in fact have that flexibility so that we

are not stuck with this 10-minute framework. You know, we can go back and forth.

I will pick up where I left off, Mr. Chairman. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. I had a question which didn't get addressed. I'll reiterate it so that the minister can either respond to it now or do it perhaps later. My sense is that it's one that probably she could answer here with the help of the staff who are present. It deals with the sexual exploitation of children. The one simple question I have is: how many children over the last year or two have been served by the protection of children involved in prostitution programs? Just the simple numbers. The ministry reports that 10 to 12 per cent of those involved in street prostitution are children. You know the percentages, obviously. We don't know the numbers on which these percentages are based. What would be the total number of children involved in street prostitution, and of that number how many are children of aboriginal ancestry or background? So that's just one question that was not addressed, although I had asked part of it before.

I have been looking, Mr. Chairman, at the budget numbers here. It seems that under program expenses – I think it's on page 64 of the government estimates, general revenue fund, lottery fund. The item number is 3.0.1, child intervention services. I look back at the other document, the ministry's business plan, and I'm unable to get an idea where this money goes, to which services. It's almost one-third of the program budget of the department, yet I cannot find any details on how this money is spent. It's a very large amount. I looked at the business plan, and unless I'm missing something there, there's no direct reference to this child intervention services. There is \$355,451,000 dedicated to it in the budget, yet there is scant information, as far as I could look for it, that's available. I think we need some fairly detailed address to this question of: where is this money spent? What programs, what activities, and what facilities and services are funded through this particular budget?

I'll sit down and see if the minister wants to address that.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. I'll start with the PCHIP. The information that I have – and I will follow up and get that in more detail – is that the number of children that we have helped to date has been over 770 and that the feedback surrounding that has been very positive and that an increased number of those youth are receiving voluntary services. So it appears to be working well. I understand that most of it is street prostitution, but in terms of the specific numbers I'll see if I can get that.

However, having said that the bulk of that will be street prostitution, we know that the use of technology has decreased traditional prostitution. I'd just make the comment that a lot of time is going to be spent on educating and training staff and stakeholders and the public to recognize that sexual exploitation is changing because we will need the public's help in identifying the kids that are at risk. We'll need to know what signs to watch for, and we're also making that information available on the website.

I wanted just to follow up what I started to say to you earlier with respect to the federal accountability. When we got that funding in the first two years of the five-year program – and then it was cancelled – there was not a requirement for us to file any papers or be accountable to the federal government. Who we were accountable to and followed up with that accountability is to Albertans. With respect to what happens in the future, I don't know what it is we're getting, don't know what conditions will be tied. But that news coverage was wrong in the last couple of days. We did not have a requirement to account to the federal government.

With respect to child intervention services you're right; it is a huge part of our budget. I will follow up and get a breakdown for you, but what we're talking about is purchasing all kinds of services for children, whether it be their group care counselling, secure treatments – our contracted agency is quite a hefty contract – mental health, family aides as well as our in-home supports. I will get that detailed information back to you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise again. I'd like to focus at this point on Education and, actually, just mainly on a couple of points. One of those has been touched on somewhat by the minister, and that is the collaborative work of trade schools and high schools. I think that's a very important area to explore. I've spoken with a number of the traditional trades and with both union and non-union, people throughout the industry, and there's quite an array in the construction industry. This is one area that's been focused on a lot. Quite an array of companies that work in that industry.

Traditionally, the housing industry has been almost totally non-union, and people from that industry in the past have funnelled into the industrial sector, which in some ways has been much, much more union and has been much more highly paid. There has been co-operation in bringing people up through the different non-union aspects. In years gone by it seems to have gone off. There's a thought that maybe we should be looking at more of that co-operation to end some of these wars that have gone on in the last generation.

I know that in speaking to a number of the building trades, which I know very well, many of them are willing to train apprentices, be they coming into a union or a non-union environment at the end of their apprenticeship. Some of the trades are very well equipped to start them at a very early age and to, you know, look at more European models for training and to look at ways of bringing kids forward that are being lost. It concerns me that we do have these high dropout rates still. It concerns me that we somehow don't value hand knowledge, hand intelligence, hand-to-eye co-ordination, the ability of many people to bring forward their skills and intelligence through different ways than those which we often value academically.

I've talked to, you know, a number of the people in the school boards and all the rest of them, and they've always said: the focus has got to remain academic; the focus has got to remain on funneling kids to the higher levels. But is it actually a higher level to say that university is higher? Maybe they're equal in different levels of intelligence that we're looking at that are in human beings that can provide for very fulfilling and good lives if they are to go into a technical field, if they're going into a trades field. Many of the trades are now very technical. I remember dealing in trying to get certain benefits for heavy duty mechanics. Tools of the trade now are not just wrenches, not just hand tools, but laptops, computer programs, and other such things. These are integral to looking at how to do a diagnostic on a dozer. It's very real.

5:10

Some of the trades have even have gotten together. I know that local 496 of the plumbers and pipefitters in Calgary – I think they got together something like 200 contractors and offered to purchase a facility, if need be, to go ahead with training people in their field, that has a huge shortage, not after high school but before high school and even maybe as low as grade 9. Maybe that makes sense. Maybe that makes sense to keep a lot of kids in school and to look forward

to training people in our labour shortage. Certainly, they've done so in some special cases with aboriginals, have brought in aboriginals to help them train in that area to try and bring forward their skills, some that have not even completed high school but just grade 9 or grade 8.

Another area I'd like to touch on is one that was brought forward to me by some individuals who were concerned that this program has been cut. It's the reading recovery program. I've heard such laudable comments on this program that I thought I'd better raise this particular one. It's a short-term individual literacy intervention program for grade 1 students, six years of age, who appear to be at risk in their learning of reading and writing. It consists of daily 30-minute, one-on-one lessons, and these lessons supplement regular classroom instruction. But the reading recovery is a data-driven thing. It takes explicit, individualized planning and decision-making instruction and continues until the child has reached the average range of the grade 1 class. Once a child's program is discontinued, another child gets into the program.

The research that I've seen clearly indicates that if struggling readers and writers are left without individual special help even for a few weeks, it will be much harder to unlearn inefficient ways of responding to print. In addition, such children who find it difficult to respond to classroom literacy instruction will fall even further behind their average-performing peers.

Now, literacy is so important. I participate in reading week. I think this last year I was in the Edmonton public schools' and separate schools' reading week and spoke to something like 1,870 children and really take the idea of reading and literacy and all the rest of it very, very, very much as an important thing. I wonder if the minister could respond if this could ever be reinstituted or if it's being looked at to have some greater emphasis on this particular area because it does hit on a very, very clear area.

Just two broad areas of questioning. One is the one on the vocational schooling and what we might be able to do to take some innovative ways to bring forward training and that. The other is on the innovative program, the reading recovery program.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman, I'm not exactly familiar with the specific program that the hon. member refers to relative to the reading program. However, what I would suggest is that it is probably a particular program that a specific jurisdiction has decided to change direction on. I'll take it away and see if there's something that we could find for the hon. member. Again, one of the real strengths of our education system in Alberta is the fact that we do offer within various jurisdictions a wide variety and a lot of choice when it comes to specific programming and alternative programming. So we'll take a look at that and see if there's anything that I can add further.

The member commented a fair bit around the trades and the ability to ensure that students who may not necessarily be high academic achievers are recognized just as much as contributors to society going forward as those who are high academic achievers. I couldn't agree with him more. I think our challenge is to probably broaden the kinds of trades and skills that we offer in our post-secondary schools but also starting in our high school system.

I had the opportunity, the pleasure, actually, yesterday – and it's concluding today: the provincial skills competition, which is taking place at Northlands. To see the interaction between our post-secondary colleges and the high schools in terms of our skills competition is something that is quite eye opening. What is really interesting is that not all trades are heavy industrial. I mean, you've got everything from confectionery to trades around service in a restaurant. We need to look at how we can start to strengthen the

area of the service industry, to put more opportunities to have people trained better to enter the service industry and make it a career. Many people do make it a career, but it's training on the job, if you might, rather than any kind of a specific course that might be offered. So that's an area that we have to probably expand on.

I think there's another area that came to mind. I know that there's been a lot of comment and discussion around how much money we allow the horse-racing industry in this province to put back into that industry. There are, I'm told, some 8,000 employees who work in the equine industry who, probably, if it weren't for that industry, may very well not have a career. That's maybe another area where we should be looking at how we can encourage and have programming that would apply to industries such as that. So I think there are lots of opportunities to expand what we already offer. We offer very good high school CTS programming, but it can always be better, for sure.

I thank the hon. member for his comments.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. Again, going back to the Minister of Education on three issues that I hear many, many times, over and over in my constituency. The home-schooling supports and the transportation busing agreement allocations: sometimes the home-schooling and the busing allocations go hand in hand. You know, we really celebrated with one of our school boards when we got our bus times down to two hours for students. In many of my 28 communities with 28 mayors and 28 councils and three schools boards, that all do great jobs for the community of Whitecourt-St. Anne, I hear this issue about the transportation funding and the cookie-cutter type of approach that our boards have to use. They're concerned that, you know, the one formula doesn't work for all. I'm just wondering if you're going to have an opportunity to review that funding formula so some of our schools can access the busing grants that they need to service the constituents of Whitecourt-St. Anne.

As well, some years ago there was a study by the school building review committee, done by Jon Lord, Member for Calgary-Currie. In that there were some good suggestions that our government, the ministry of infrastructure and your ministry, could do. I thought it was quite a unique approach of having four or five schools predesigned, pre-engineered, not with koi ponds and not with waterfalls and not with big glass mirrors, just some good, functional schools that we could move around in our province for communities in need. I think it could save us a lot of infrastructure dollars. I'm wondering what you're doing to promote that type of an idea just to try to stretch our dollar, get it into some more places and be a little more cost effective.

5:20

Again, I'd like to hear from the minister on the home-school supports and what he's doing with the home-schooling association and the many home-schoolers that sometimes are forced to try to bring education to their young families. You know, like I talked about, we celebrated the two-hour bus rides from two hours and 20 minutes. Still, if you have a kindergarten child or a grade 1 or grade 2 child, that's a long bus ride in the morning and then back at night, so some of those parents were really forced to teach their children through home-schooling and did a very admirable job, I must say, too. I'd like to hear from the minister on those comments.

Mr. Liepert: I'll try and address all three issues. Specifically with respect to home-schooling, I'm assuming that the hon. member is referring to the funding that's provided for home-schooling cur-

rently. There is a debate whether home-schooling should be funded at a higher level than it is today. I think there's also a debate whether private-school funding should be at a higher level than it is today. Those are all good debates that we want to take a serious look at over the next 12 months and see if our funding formula that exists today is still the right one for the year 2007-08 and beyond. I would just say that the whole area of funding, whether it's the funding framework that exists today or a different model, is something that I have committed to taking a look at, and I would include home-schooling in that.

Relative to busing, I've certainly met with school boards, and busing continually comes up. There are a couple of issues. One is the declining enrolment, so buses have to travel farther to pick up the same number of children. The other one, of course, is increased costs of such things as fuel prices. Now, we do have in place a fuel price contingency fund, which in this particular year is 15 and a half million dollars, for school boards. There's no question that busing continues to be an issue for school boards. Again, I would hope that that would be part of that overall look at funding.

I think the bigger issue around busing is really the amount of time that especially very young children are spending on school buses in some of our less populated and continually decreasing populated parts of the province. I would envision that there will be a day in the not-too-distant future when there will be areas of the province where children will actually go to school for only two days a week, maybe three days a week, because their bus ride will simply be an hour and a half or two hours one way.

That's where technology will come in for those other two or three days of the week. Students will have the opportunity to learn online. We simply are going to have to look at some of these alternative options because we have schools in remote areas of the province that have fewer than 20 students. It doesn't necessarily become a matter of dollars and cents; it becomes a matter of: can you attract teachers to those particular areas to provide the kind of education instruction that these students deserve?

I guess the third question that the hon. member asked was relative to a standard architectural design concept for new schools, and I think that has a lot of merit. One of the things that our new capital committee is going to be looking at, and there was a hundred million dollars put into the Department of Education budget this year specifically to sort of kick-start that initiative, is that we do take – and I don't know what the number will be – five, 10, 15, 20 schools that are actually the same design and locate them in the areas of need around the province. It seems to me that we've been spending way too much time and dollars on reinventing every school design. There are lots of school boards and parent groups that have ideas about what they would like their school to look like, but at the end of the day I don't think that we can afford to have that option much longer. There are some very good basic designs out there that function very well. So that's something that our new capital committee will clearly be looking at over the next few months.

I believe that answers the questions that were posed by the hon. member.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few questions I would like to ask the Minister of Education. My questions will focus on three areas. The first one is ESL and ESL funding. Year after year I have seen that we recognize the need to have ESL teaching in school, and we have committed quite a bit of money in this area, but up to now I haven't seen a formal, standardized ESL program incorporated into the Alberta curriculum. This makes it

very difficult to compare and to see whether a student has achieved a certain level of English proficiency or not, and it also makes the job of the teachers a lot more difficult.

When a student is taking ESL courses, whether he takes them in Calgary or Edmonton, I expect that student should learn the same thing and should have the same set of skills that he's expected to acquire after he completes the course. Right now that is not the case. Even in the same school a student who takes ESL in two different classes can learn in a totally different way. I think it's about time that we move forward to standardize the ESL curriculums and make sure that they are considered as part of the formal curriculum. Credits should also be given to the students. That way it can help the student to complete their high school diploma within the time frame that they're expected to.

This ESL program can also be linked to the dropout rate. I know that there are quite a few ESL students that cannot complete high school within three or four years, and therefore they have to drop out. If you can look at a way to help bring them along and make sure that their ESL courses are recognized as part of their education, then that may help.

The second area I want to focus on is the achievement tests. The achievement tests were designed to be a kind of measurement of how well our students are doing in the system. In reality more and more schools are now adopting a very interesting policy. They ask the students who are not doing so well in school to skip these tests. The children who are not doing so well do not have a chance to participate. Therefore, I wonder whether the test results truly reflect the academic level of our students or not. I want the minister's comments in that area.

The third area I want to focus on is the technology in our schools. Our society has moved a lot in this area. The way many of us work today is totally different than the way we used to work, you know, 15 years ago because of computers, because of the Internet, but the way students are being taught in school hasn't changed that much. The level of technology introduced in school depends on the amount of money that the parents council can raise and depends on whether or not they have a good teacher in the school who knows the technology. There is absolutely no standard as to what level of technology proficiency the students are required to achieve in school. We should have standardized programs for computer skills. Especially, the students should be taught how to use the Internet to do research on their own. The traditional way of teaching, of making people memorize things, may not be the best way to move forward in the future. I think that it's very important for the student to learn how to do research on their own, how to learn on their own, to be an independent learner. That will be a lot more useful for the student in the future.

5:30

I would like to see the technology funding become a stand-alone item. With the evergreen plan, you're in for every school board in the province, and they should have technology plans that are practical, that can be useful and can be implemented right away.

Also, the Minister of Education should have the program reviewed and agreed to by the minister of advanced education because the teachers, those who are going to teach the students, should have the level of knowledge that is required for them to do these things.

Mr. Chairman, those are my comments, and I'll wait for the minister's reply.

Mr. Liepert: I'll try and address the three issues that were raised by the hon. member. I'll work backwards.

Relative to technology, we do have a standardized curriculum on technology, and we have standardized assessments. There is a fair

bit of discrepancy from school board to school board as to what is being taught, but the member makes a good point. I think, quite honestly, we're in the early stages of our technology development in our schools and exactly what it can accomplish.

We just launched within the last couple of months a pilot project. We committed \$4 million to this pilot project. We've got a number of schools in the province that each student in that particular class is being provided with a laptop, and they will be learning almost exclusively through the laptop method rather than textbook method. We'll see how that pilot project evolves and see where that leads us on technology.

I take the hon. member's comments relative to student achievement testing as good information. I'm not quite sure that I agree with him on all of his comments, but I will take it as information.

We continue to put significantly more money into ESL. We've increased the number of years that you're eligible to qualify for ESL funding from five to seven years, and it's our view that at the end of seven years every student taking ESL should be proficient in English as a second language.

One of the focuses that we tried to emphasize in our budget this year was the early ESL programs, especially for those who have mild and moderate learning disorders, because what we're faced with in our province today is not just an ESL issue but an issue that also in some cases is literally a social skills issue. Some of our new Canadians, some of our children are coming from situations where they've, frankly, never even learned the basics of life because they may have been born and have lived their entire life in a refugee camp. So those particular children need more than just ESL education. They need basic social skills plus the ESL. I think that even in ESL there's a lot of learning that's going on because our country, our province is changing so much, and the numbers of children that are taking advantage of our ESL programs continually evolve and change.

I thank the hon. member for his comments.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have some further questions of the Minister of Education. I was very concerned in looking at some of the research in the '04-05 report that said that 57 per cent was the transition rate from high school to postsecondary within just a few years. There's very much a degree of concern that that is so high.

I was also very interested in the minister's talk about other trades that may be trained to come in other than those in construction and such or those that are traditionally focused on as being shortages in our economy.

In Edmonton one of the most important industries is actually the equine industry, and a lot of people don't know that. The people who participate in jumping, the people who participate in many of the shows and stuff with horses, the horse racing, and other areas are important areas for our economy in Edmonton and are very important in terms of employment in northeast Edmonton, especially in my area. There are a number of different areas that people do train up in. Horse dentistry was the subject of a major Supreme Court challenge here just in the last few years.

I was at a meeting just outside of my constituency. My constituency of Edmonton-Manning is the largest rural riding in the city of Edmonton, by the way, and there are quite a number of agricultural endeavours. There are a fair number of horses, or there are a fair number of people that do take part in the equine-oriented types of practices. My constituency assistant, one of the part-time ones, is actually into show jumping, and she's on the student council of a

high school in my area. But horse dentistry, farriers, shearers, animal masseuses, groomers, veterinary assistants, different types of people who work in dressage and all the rest of it: these are actually important areas of training that would do well to come in at the grade levels in the schools. My question, I guess, again, in terms of types of learning other than academic is if these could be looked at, at least in the towns and such.

The various areas of social skills that the minister touched on. In my constituency of Edmonton-Manning there's a new thing in the last couple of years, a new organization called City Farm. It trains in short-term stints urban children with an understanding of agricultural skills that allow them to grow a crop for a little bit of time or to groom an animal or to do more than just be in a petting zoo. It's actually a very interesting and, I think, important addition to our urban landscape and the ability of kids in urban areas to learn about our agricultural practices and heritage.

That's just another aspect of that particular area that, you know, I'd like to mention, Mr. Minister, to see if you had any comments. Some of that is in Employment, Immigration and Industry, certainly, but training in it would also do well to begin at an earlier age.

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Well, just a quick comment. The member talked at the very beginning about our 57 per cent transition rate. I want to make sure that it's understood that that is the transition within four years from an Alberta high school to an Alberta postsecondary institution. So if someone decides to go to university in western Ontario, they are not included in that transition. I recognize that it's not a very accurate way of tracking our students, but the problem is that if somebody goes on a scholarship to the United States, we have no ability to track them. Our numbers that are, sort of – I wouldn't say that they're hard data, but when we do some backtracking on individuals from between the age of 24 and 35 who have taken some sort of postsecondary training, whether it be maybe even correspondence or gone to postsecondary institutions outside the province, it's actually closer to 80 per cent. You can always play with numbers however you want to play with them, but that number around our transition is not one that we should be using in a consistent way.

5:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be as quick as I can. I think there are only a few minutes left. My questions would be to the Minister of Children's Services. I wanted to continue a little bit on what I had started before about violence. Violence against women is widely regarded as an effort by men to control women and children. One of the goals, goal 1 of the Children's Services: I believe that will ultimately fail if it's not accompanied by efforts to advance gender equality. Part of my comments are based on the fact that Bill Clinton, Bill Gates, and Stephen Lewis have all said quite unequivocally that unless women are empowered, they will never be able to beat the AIDS scourge in Africa.

So a couple of my questions would be: whatever happened to the status of women department? My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Manning has pointed out that the trades are now saying that they want more women to be involved. I think that to get women more involved, I would like to see, perhaps, the status of women or some portion thereof to get women back because, as I said, it is important in terms of the gender equality.

The other thing is – this would be to the Minister of Education – would you consider adding gender/women's studies content to Alberta high school curriculum? I'm sure that my answer will be, "It would be up for debate," but I'd like to see that debate take place.

The Chair: Hon. members, I will now invite the officials to leave the Assembly so the committee can rise and report progress. I will allow the minister a moment while that's taking place to answer if she so wishes.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: No. I was just going to say that I know that we have another minister that's very interested in answering that part of that last question. I just wanted to point out that some of what the hon. member here was talking about had to do with the availability of child care spaces. I outlined the number of initiatives, good work that we're doing in that area.

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(a) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Children's Services, Seniors and Community Supports, and Education relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head:

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 33

Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act

[Adjourned debate May 9: Mr. Backs]

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise again to speak to the Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act. Again, I must commend the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for all the work he did in providing information to me on a number of the questions regarding this bill prior to speaking to it in the House. It's a very important bill for the village of Ferintosh. It's their water. It's their future. It's their ability to do so many things. You know, Alberta has invested in the infrastructure of the town. The people have invested in their businesses, their homes, and their farms. It is very important to understand that in having water come to them from nearby areas – this is actually an interbasin transfer from south to north – these are good things in Alberta. I'm not so sure that I would be all in favour of transferring water down to California or something like that, but within Alberta we have these established infrastructures that are very important to maintain and towns that will be there for a long, long time. I've heard some people say that we should be moving people to water and depopulating certain areas of Alberta. I must say that I don't agree with that.

I am very pleased to support this bill, and I commend the member for bringing it forward. I ask that all members of this Assembly support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments if there are any.

Seeing none, anyone else wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make some brief comments on Bill 33, Water Authorization Act. This bill clearly will authorize the transfer of water from the South Saskatchewan River basin to the North Saskatchewan River basin to supply water from the town of Bashaw to the village of Ferintosh.

Currently, of course, we know that the reason the bill is required is that the transfer of water between major river basins has to be authorized while an act is to ensure that there is stability both environmentally and in terms of water availability. So this bill will authorize such transfer but limits it, clearly, to a certain amount at this point in time, 55.8 cubic decimetres, from the town of Bashaw to the village of Ferintosh because of a shortage of groundwater, and there are no other reasonable sources of water. Now, according to the village administrator Ferintosh needs some more water for economic growth and development specifically stemming from the sale of vacation property. So there's new, expanded economic activity envisaged in the area; hence the village administrator sees the need of additional water.

It is true that the village, in fact, currently trucks in water for the use of the very small population that the village has: about 200 people. The water diversion will represent a huge sort of injection to the life of the small community; there is no doubt.

In August 2006, Mr. Speaker, a Stantec report on the Ferintosh water supply recommended that water be transported from Bashaw since the groundwater supply was insufficient at Ferintosh. The surface water from the nearby lake, Beaver Lake, was undrinkable due to bacteriological contamination from the farming industry. The best thing to do was, of course, therefore, to pipe in water from Bashaw. However, the study also noted that the drinking water was not safe at Bashaw either and that it had not determined whether there was enough water at Bashaw to supply the village in any case. Additionally, Camrose county wants also to make an application for an interbasin transfer once the water supply is approved for Ferintosh.

5:50

From this cluster of information five issues arise: (a) larger industrial farming-related health problems regarding the safety of Beaver Lake, (b) the lack of safe groundwater at Bashaw, (c) the lack of environmental assessment regarding groundwater supply in the province, (d) interbasin water transfer from a river basin where new licences are prohibited due to groundwater conservation issues, and (e) a hidden water expansion agenda from Ferintosh to other areas that will sidestep environmental concerns.

Mr. Speaker, although the Ferintosh residents would appreciate water that comes there directly rather than having to have water trucked in – it must be expensive – it raises some issues. The bill is problematic, I'm arguing, for the following reasons. New licences are currently not being issued for the South Saskatchewan River basin because of groundwater availability concerns, but the bill seems not to address this fact properly and would authorize water transfers anyway. So this raises some concern.

Furthermore, the groundwater availability at Bashaw has not been established. The availability study should be done before money is allocated and water transported. The safety of the Bashaw water supply is a serious concern both for Bashaw and Ferintosh residents and should be looked into immediately. The bill, although well intended, does have serious ramifications which need to be addressed before this House authorizes this interbasin transfer as requested by our Bashaw and Ferintosh communities.

The interbasin transfer and prohibitions on it in our existing legislation are there for good environmental reasons. There is a need for us to be extremely cautious about opening this door which, I think for good reasons, was shut by the existing statutes and legislation given acknowledged and recognized environmental concerns. Once you establish a statutory precedent to now begin to allow interbasin transfers, all of those considerations, all of those concerns that were addressed in the existing statutes will have to be overlooked.

I don't think a case has been made, Mr. Speaker, at this point that will convince me that those considerations which were valid some years ago when that bill was before the House and was passed are no longer relevant or operational. Longer term environmental considerations must be taken into account, particularly in light of the fact that there is a very, very rapid economic growth under way in the province. Water resources are an extremely important asset that we have not only because some very crucial industries increasingly depend on their use – and I refer here to the tar sands project and how much water the production of each barrel of oil from that source uses to produce that one barrel – but also because water is, as we all know, the very basic fundamental condition for life. Quality of life is one of the key objectives of the new administration, as I understand it.

Mr. Speaker, imagine the next generation or generations beyond having to confront the problem of not having enough water for use

for the daily needs of regular living that we all have. Water is the source of life. Water is absolutely necessary in order for us to have sustainable communities, sustainable living conditions. Sustainability of life, in short, depends upon the sustainable availability of potable and good water.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I think it is of the utmost importance that we in this Legislature take all the time and care that this issue requires and give thorough consideration to interbasin transfer requests and the legislation that will permit that sort of transfer to happen. I think we need to involve water resources experts. We have them around Alberta. At the local University of Alberta we have outstanding scientists who can provide advice as to the advisability of interbasin transfers, specifically the transfer of water requested as in this piece of legislation before the House.

If it were simply a limited issue of two communities and servicing their existing needs for water, it would be one thing, but it appears, Mr. Speaker, that that is not what the requirements of the area are going to be. The whole area seems to have ambitious plans for further economic development and growth, and that will require . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The Assembly stands adjourned until 7 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 16, 2007**

7:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/16

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2007-08**

The Deputy Chair: As we conducted ourselves this afternoon, which was a precedent, with the new system that we have, the first 10 minutes were allocated to the opposition members, and they could share the 10 minutes among themselves, followed by 10 minutes for ministers to respond to the questions that were raised, and that would go back and forth. As you know, with the understanding that we have, the first hour and a half will be between the members of the Liberal caucus and the ministers responsible. The following half hour will be allocated to the members of the New Democratic caucus, and following that one hour is allocated to any other member that wishes to participate.

We shall begin with the first hour and a half by calling upon the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to take this opportunity, while people were settling into their places, to express my appreciation for everyone's willingness to embark upon this experiment. We had the first version of it this afternoon, and it went pretty well. I did want to underline that from the Liberal caucus we are approaching this in an attempt to have it be less adversarial than you might sometimes find in a budget debate and, indeed, more collaborative and collegial. We really are trying to explore the best possibilities for those issues that cross over more than one ministry.

You will find that the issues that we've chosen – and we did circulate to the government ministry staff the subjects that we were hoping to deal with today. Essentially, that's industrial development and health impacts in the northern oil sands area, development and health impacts in what we're calling Upgrader Alley, and then a sort of miscellaneous category in which there were a number of issues.

We look forward to this. We really are seeking information from the government on possible collaboration on ways that across the ministries, particularly around health impacts, we're able to monitor and evaluate. Once again, I express my appreciation to the ministers for the willingness to try this – having seen this afternoon, I already have a few ideas about how I would change it – but also to the staff who join us on the floor tonight for coming along for the ride with us. We appreciate it.

As the chairman has outlined, we will work in 10-minute segments from our side, sharing the 10 minutes among the three of us, and we ask that you be willing to do the same thing so that we can have a back-and-forth exchange.

With that, I will take my seat. Was there an arrangement for them to start, or may we begin?

The Deputy Chair: Well, maybe what we can do is we can have the ministers just introduce their staff and then allow the Member for Edmonton-Centre to take the first 10 minutes. Hon. ministers, would you like to just introduce your staff for the record?

We'll begin with the Minister of Energy. Would you like to introduce your staff for the record?

Energy Environment Health and Wellness

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With me this evening to engage in this discussion with members of the opposition I have Mike Ekelund, the assistant deputy minister of oil development; Anne Denman, associate executive director, electricity division; and Doug Borland, director of financial services for the Department of Energy.

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Joining us once again – I guess that they must have enjoyed themselves so much last time – my deputy minister, Peter Watson, and assistant deputy ministers John Knapp and Bev Yee. We have a new face that has joined us this evening, that I think will be very helpful to the discussion at hand, and that's Kem Singh, who is the approvals manager for the northern region in Alberta Environment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have with me today, of course, the never-failing – she told me to say that – deputy minister, Paddy Meade; our executive director of public health surveillance and environmental health, Alex MacKenzie; and my assistant Sean Yam.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I'm the first person chosen to speak on our side. Mostly I'm concentrating on the first category that we outlined for you, which is development and health impacts in the northern area, obviously focusing around the oil sands. We're all aware that the Fort McMurray region has experienced rapid growth in the past decade, obviously flowing from the government of Alberta's economic development and energy policies. We certainly have experienced unprecedented investment and growth there.

My question is: how is the government of Alberta prepared for this continued growth in that particular area? In other words, how could Albertans feel confident that their health would not be jeopardized as a result of this growth? Can you help us understand why the government chooses to drive the growth at the rate that it's currently at? Why is that choice being made? Why does it need to be at the rate of growth that it's at? It certainly is very high, and I think a lot of the issues that we see flowing are as a result of that, so maybe you could help us understand your choices there.

I think we have a number of independent studies and reports that have looked at continued growth up into 2020, and I'm referencing particularly Strategy West's assessment that if all the oil sands projects are built and meet their start-up dates, we would have the bitumen production moving from, it looks like, over a million barrels per day to over six million barrels per day by 2020. This is increasing oil sands production by 463 per cent over a 15-year period.

What will the environmental and health impacts be for such a dramatic increase in production there? How does the government know about the heavy development over a long period of time and what its impact will be on people? Specifically, what studies or reports or analysis has the government done to this point that would help them understand that or plan for that? I'm also wondering if any additional analyses have been commissioned or are in the works.

Can you tell me or give me some detail about what you're expecting there?

I'm also interested in what indicators the government is choosing to use to monitor health impacts. What are those indicators that you are using to monitor? From the studies that you've already done, assuming that you've done studies, have there been any adverse health effects that have been identified, and what are they?

The environmental impacts. I'm just going to quote, if you'll allow me, from the Radke report on page 22.

While the benefits are enormous, the impact on the environment is undeniable. The key issues relate to the amount of surface and ground water used in the extraction process, the overall impact on the quality of surface and ground water, levels of greenhouse gas and other air emissions, land disturbance and the size of the footprint on the land base, land reclamation, and impacts on wildlife and endangered species.

I'm wondering what the government knows about these impacts on the areas of health and well-being. What environmental indicators is the government using from any of these three departments we're looking at tonight? Which of those is being monitored or all of them together? Or how are you doing the analysis?

I'm interested in knowing whether we're taking long-term action to ensure that we don't impact our health and well-being negatively, so it would be helpful to know which ministry is taking responsibility for conducting cumulative assessments to measure the long-term impact on health.

I was interested to hear that there is an environmental health person working in the Department of Health and Wellness, but for my purposes I'm wondering which ministry takes the lead on this. Is that minister able to tell us how the health of Alberta's population is being considered when deciding on the pace of development?

Can the ministers, all of you as a team or individually, provide a list, preferably in writing, of all of the government-commissioned reports within the last 10 years relating to health impacts of industrial development in northern Alberta? That's sort of a repeat of the question I started with, but I'm getting quite specific now.

7:10

On a slightly different topic I note that Dr. John O'Connor, a physician in the Northern Lights health region, has raised concerns about the high amounts of arsenic that have gone into the water, and a higher than average rate of rare cancer, which is his firm belief. Now, the results of an Alberta Health study found that Dr. O'Connor's claims were untrue or unfounded, and the minister of health is on record about that, but I also note that the government study was criticized as incomplete. I'm wondering what is the status of studies that are being conducted currently by the department of health or any other department in the Fort Chipewyan area.

I also note that when we look specifically at aboriginal health, a number of toxins have been released or found in water bodies like Lake Athabasca. These are relied on heavily by aboriginal populations. Is the government of the opinion that the water sources in northern Alberta are safe? Could you provide me with whatever backup documentation has you believe that?

I'm going to move on and talk more generally about the health and the general population in northern Alberta, particularly in the Northern Lights health region. I think we can all agree that the dramatically increased population in that area has had a major impact on health care delivery in that region. The northern health region health professional shortage has resulted, some would feel, in a lower quality of care for patients or, certainly, for more restricted care in that they've had to close some areas of the hospital, so there are wait times in emergency rooms to see physicians and for surgical procedures. I think health professionals are a bit frustrated. The

population growth has also had implications for the entire community when it comes to STD rates, communicable diseases, nutrition, and the availability of emergency services.

That's sort of to set up this next section. In the Radke report recommendation number 10 was that

a substantial increase in manpower (FTE's) should be provided to Alberta Environment and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to focus on cumulative effects, [environmental impact assessments], research, policy development, monitoring and enforcement in the oil sands areas. Some new resources should also go to Alberta Health and Wellness to support the [environmental impact assessment] process.

That's from the Radke report on page 133.

My question is: how much money and resources are going to go towards environmental health impact assessments? Is this a function of the Department of Environment or the department of health? If it's a joint project, which minister is taking the lead on that?

Again, could I get a list of the research projects that are being conducted by or for the government pertaining to cumulative effects of oil sands development in northern Alberta? I'm wondering if ministers are conducting studies about future health and environment impact as the development increases in intensity. We know what we're dealing with today. What happens when that intensifies by severalfold? What are we dealing with there? Is the government aiming for some plans towards that?

I'm particularly interested in what indicators the government is monitoring for long-term, low-dose effect and if anybody has looked at what the occupational injury rate is or an injury rate from working, essentially, in that area. Is it increasing commensurate with the rate of growth overall? That is actually a question, if we had the minister of EII, that we could have pulled her in on. I'm wondering, in addition: what work has the government done in monitoring and evaluating data on any connection between growth and increasing rates of domestic violence, drug use, alcohol use, and suicide rates?

That's the end of my first 10 minutes that just went by in a flash. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. ministers, we have 10 minutes, and it's up to you three how you would like to take the 10 minutes. We'll begin with the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will start on some of the issues relating to the health side, but we've plenty of time – well, not plenty of time but have most of the time, I hope, for Environment because a number of the questions fall in the Environment area. Then a couple relating to the pace of development might well fall to Energy.

First of all, we did have the Radke report to talk about the impact on the northern oil sands area, particularly the Fort McMurray area. That report was responded to at the end of February with some substantial additional resources, particularly on the health side, which allowed us to deal with some of the more immediate issues relative to building capacity, the community clinics which will be needed, and some of the other issues with respect to retention of staff. Some of the issues around wait times, for example in emergency, have actually ameliorated somewhat as a result of the additional resources that have been applied.

We're working very closely with the health authority. In fact, we've provided the health authority with some management assistance to assist them through the transition process going forward because there were issues with respect to their ability to retain even the management staff that was necessary to do long-term planning and implementation relative to workforce strategies and

growth. So we have been working very closely with the Northern Lights health region in that area, provided them, as I say, with additional assistance to improve their capacity to be able to deal with these issues as well as the resources to be able to deal with these issues.

Alberta Health and Wellness leads a review process which includes health assessment, but we work, obviously, with Environment in that area.* That process includes cumulative impacts of development. We're working co-operatively with Environment in that area. Environment deals with the water quality issues, and I'll leave those comments to my colleague.

With respect to STDs and communicable disease rates, as I've indicated in the House and publicly, we are concerned about the increase in STDs – and by that I'm not referring to short-term disability – not just in the Fort McMurray area. It's not isolated to the Fort McMurray area; it's actually spread across the province. While the nature of the mobile population in that area is a concern from a health issue in terms of behaviour, drug use, STDs, and other areas, and increases the use of portions of the health system, that's something that's probably true in most resource towns. That's an area that the health authority there certainly has to be prepared to deal with and that we need to deal with.

There were questions relative to Dr. O'Connor and the allegations that there was a higher rate of cancers in the Fort Chip area. We've done a review of the area. An examination of the cancer registry data does show that the rates of cholangiocarcinoma, leukemia, lymphoma, and other cancers are not elevated in residents of Fort Chip. Data related to other health conditions was examined by Health and Wellness. The prevalence of Graves' disease, rheumatoid arthritis, and congenital anomalies were not elevated in Fort Chip. The treated prevalence of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease was lower among residents of Fort Chip. The population being treated for lupus appears to be elevated for both Fort Chip and the Northern Lights health region compared to the rest of Alberta, but there's no difference in the data rates between 1995 and 2005.

The long and short of it is that the doctor has not provided his evidence to us that there is an increased rate despite being requested to do so. There is no good reason to withhold that data because cancer is supposed to be reported, so that data should have been available if it was there. The concentrations of arsenic, for example, in moose meat are the same in Wood Buffalo as in Yukon, and the long-term, low-dose analysis of sulphur dioxide and hydrogen sulphide exposure are under review at the present time.

I think I'll leave some time for my colleagues. You gave us a full raft of questions in the 10 minutes, which can't possibly be answered in 10 minutes, so I'll leave a little bit of time for Environment.

7:20

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Minister of Environment, you have about four minutes and 47 seconds.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's evident that it's easier to ask questions in 10 minutes than to answer them. I will do my very best to deal with at least some of the issues that were raised, and I'll do so by talking about some of the studies.

The member asked what kind of studies have been completed. I think it's important that we do talk about the fact that air quality monitoring, for example, has been ongoing in the Fort McMurray area since the 1970s. We have extensive monitoring that continues to be carried on by an excellent organization that we fund, WBEA, Wood Buffalo Environmental Association. This association is an excellent organization. It's a community-based organization that

does air monitoring throughout the Wood Buffalo region. The results of that monitoring are available. I believe they even have a website, and the public is able to access that website and find out the extent of the monitoring.

We have a very extensive study that was done in the '90s, the northern river basins study. That included the Peace River, the Athabasca River, the Slave River, and Athabasca Lake. It deals with the issue of possible contaminants in the river. That study, which was a very extensive study, did not find evidence of industrial contaminants other than some evidence of nutrient loading as a result of some of the effluent from pulp mills and also evidence of nutrient loading as a result of agricultural activity in the region. In both of those cases work is ongoing as we speak to reduce and mitigate the issues surrounding those two operations.

Often mentioned and talked about is the fact that there are these tailings ponds that are associated with oil sands projects. People are always questioning whether or not those ponds are in fact leaking or if there is anyone checking to see. There are wells that are located around all of the tailings ponds that are monitored on a very regular basis by Alberta Environment. The dikes themselves that surround the tailings ponds are regulated and treated under exactly the same regulations as major dam structures, so the engineering that's associated with them has to be monitored on a regular basis. There are reporting requirements the same as there would be for an earthen dam on a river somewhere else in the province. From that aspect we have a very high level of confidence that we are not exposing the ecosystem and the watershed to any risk of contamination due to the chemicals that are contained within the tailings ponds.

There's also an interesting aspect to WBEA, the Wood Buffalo Environmental Association. They have been doing work on ambient air quality and water quality, and they also have an ongoing program that monitors human exposure by actually having volunteers wear equipment and monitor what individuals are exposed to on a regular basis. From that perspective I think we've got a pretty good handle on the overall situation with respect to the air and water quality in the region.

I don't think I have enough time, but I do want and, please, give me the opportunity to get into a discussion on how we see ourselves dealing with environmental regulation in the oil sands on a go-forward basis and from a cumulative impact. Some of the work that we've got, as the member knows – in the mandate letter that I had, one of the mandates was to develop cumulative impact, and I would be more than pleased to discuss it later on in the evening.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Minister of Energy, I'm sorry we couldn't get to you, but through the evening there'll be many opportunities for you to put your remarks on the record.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm sure I'll survive.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to make a very quick correction.

The Deputy Chair: Yes, hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: I misspoke. Environment leads the environmental impact assessment. Health leads the human health portion of it. I just wanted to be clear on that.*

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to congratulate the

*See right col., para. 10

*See left col., para.2

government, too, for this initiative. It's cross-ministry. It's trying to look at the bigger picture and includes at least three ministries in this case for what is, clearly, an important integration that's needed in our understanding of where we're going and how we're getting there and what some of the impacts are. I hope we can count on some written responses where we're unable to have the time to hear oral responses.

I guess one of the first questions that I would ask is whether you folks meet periodically or whether this effort tonight has stimulated you to start discussing some issues that you haven't before discussed and planned together on. Is there an opportunity to do more of that in your busy schedules? It's clearly an important dimension of governance now as we're dealing with multifactorial issues and complicated social, economic, environmental impacts.

I wanted to ask also for clarification about the health impact assessment that you mentioned and the environmental impact assessment and the cumulative impact assessment. We seem to throw around these terms a lot. At least part of what we need to be clear about is that when we're talking about a cumulative impact assessment, which I understand the Environment minister has talked about repeatedly since coming into his position, what we're talking about is a look at the total load on a river system, for example, existing and planned, and how that relates to the capacity of that bioregion to sustain over time those impacts. In other words, are we living beyond the environmental capacity of a particular bioregion?

There are other ways of thinking about cumulative impact assessment, and I think that maybe the minister of health might have been referring to ongoing impacts over many, many years and the cumulative impact on people. When I'm using the term and I think when the Environment minister is using the term, we're calling for – and I think he also has been calling for – a better assessment of the total impact of human activities on a bioregion and anticipating into the future what new developments will occur and will overstretch either the watershed or the airshed or the human capacity to deal with those impacts. So when I ask the health minister, which I want to do, “What indicators are you using for health impact assessment and over what period of time?” I want to ask that in the context of clarifying that that's not what I was referring to by cumulative impact assessment.

One thing that I've raised in the past is: when are we going to have health authorities that are capable of doing independent health impact assessments? At the present time it appears that most health impact assessments are done by the industry through consultants, and we haven't developed the capacity in health regions to do that.

On the other hand, where do we have the capacity to do cumulative impact assessment within the Environment department? This is a specialized area of study that clearly needs expertise and a serious commitment of dollars and time to do a good assessment of what that bioregion is capable of handling in terms of human beings and roads and activities of all kinds: industrial, agricultural, whatever it is that that whole bioregion is expected to cope with over the next 30, 40, 50 years.

Having just touched on those issues that arose from the discussion, I wanted to just take a step back and ask whether the ministries have talked at all about the idea of genuine progress indicators and whether in terms of thinking about sustainability we actually are developing some dialogue about what genuine progress would look like. The Pembina Institute, for example, has a series of 50 or so indicators that would tell us in fact: while our economic progress may be going like this, what is our quality of life doing? In some cases it may be going down. In some cases it may be flat. In some cases it may be going up. On issues, for example, like those that my colleague from Edmonton-Centre raised, STD rates and poverty

rates and low birth rates and issues that have more to do with affordable housing and the arts, some of the social determinants of health: in other words, are we getting anywhere closer to looking at the total picture of our development in the province, or are we just going to continue to look at GDP and somehow throw in some indicators around health status or social indicators? Can we integrate those in some way and decide on at least a two- to three-year basis: is our genuine progress increasing, or are we actually declining in some areas that we need to be examining?

7:30

Well, to get to the specific areas around Upgrader Alley, which I was going to spend some time on, as you're well aware, there are a lot of people concerned about the pace and scope of development there and emissions: oxides of nitrogen and sulphur, volatile organics, particulates, ammonia, and fluoride, interestingly enough, from the Agrium plant, with high levels depositing on vegetables and some folks being requested not to eat their vegetables, not to grow vegetables. There are some real health concerns there, and I don't know that we're dealing effectively with these people, who are increasingly looking for answers and not necessarily getting them.

Assuming that we are committed to doing cumulative impact assessments, the Upgrader Alley is a prime candidate for cumulative impact assessment. What is that watershed capable of handling in terms of human activity and water withdrawals and emissions into water and airshed emissions? People are seriously wondering, as I am, how we're measuring that. How will we decide when we've reached the limit of that particular bioregion?

Have you already established a baseline health status for people in that area that are downwind, particularly from the upgraders, so that we can over time make some assessment about whether their health status is improving or worsening? Are there some key indicators that you'll be monitoring over time in the Upgrader Alley area so that, again, we can say to people with some confidence not just that the health risk assessment was fine but: “Here are the indicators we've been measuring. This is why we think we're doing this in a sensible, appropriate pace and scope. We are going to act on aberrations to those indicators. We're going to stop things or change things if we see any indication that things are going badly.”

Alberta Environment reports indicate that there are intermittent exceedances of SO₂, benzene, and fluoride. What are we doing about those to communicate with people that we know what these are doing and that we know of some of the health effects and that they should not expect that any more frequently because we're getting a handle on some of those intermittent exceedances that happen to all industries at times? I think that fundamentally people are saying: what is the health impact that we've been experiencing now, and what can we expect in the future, and how can we have confidence in these ministries that were actually monitoring the things that we care about as people in this region?

Have you considered issues like climate change in some of these assessments? There are indications that we are up against a very serious set of impacts around air quality and also now around warming, which is going to affect water significantly according to the experts. We've already lost significant amounts of surface water. Groundwater is dropping in a number of areas in central Alberta. We don't fully understand that, but we have to plan for worst-case scenarios or at least precautionary approaches to development as a result of understanding that climate change is a very serious issue affecting mostly Alberta, I would say, of all the 10 provinces. We are likely to have the most serious impacts. How are we factoring that into our development, the appropriate pace and scale of development?

Finally, I'd like to say just a few words about reclamation issues generally in the area and the concerns that many of us have that there's been a lack of accountability of industry to get onto reclamation, to ensure that we know what it is we're looking for in a reclamation and remediation site, that we have independent assessment of that rather than simply taking the word of consultants hired by the industry, and that we do more auditing to assess whether we are getting what we think we're getting from some of these contaminated sites.

Again, it's a potpourri of questions and comments, but I hope they'll be useful to guiding our discussions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. ministers, who would like to go first? The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll pick up where I left off in talking about cumulative impact because I think it's key as we go forward.

Traditionally, Environment departments of one kind or another have dealt with the regulation of development in a very prescriptive manner, where we go on a project-by-project basis. For example, we do deal with cumulative development today, but we only consider in an EIA the existing development and the announced or confirmed, planned development.

I think we need to go further than that, and we intend to go further than that. The way you go further than that is not by trying to develop the perfect plan and prescribe the perfect plan for what development is going to occur where and how much emission is going to be from this and this and this. We want to kind of turn the whole thing upside down, where we have a serious discussion and more than just discussion – based on science, based on sound science, based on hearing from all of the relevant stakeholders – about what is the acceptable level of impact that mankind through industrial development and human activities can have on the environment without creating a situation where our quality of life is not what we feel is acceptable.

I'm not saying that that's going to be a simple matter, but I believe that we can do it. Once we've done that, then that becomes our basis for regulations, and we don't have to be so prescriptive as to say: you have to do this, this, and this. We simply say: "Where's your application? Fine. How is that application going to fit into what's already here, what's already planned, and still live within the guidelines that we've established? If you can show us how you're going to do it, be my guest. If you can't, then we're going to have a difficult time dealing with this."

Where some have said that the government needs to be putting on the brakes and stopping development, no, we don't believe that that's our role. We believe we have a very legitimate role to protect the environment. We have a very legitimate role to determine: what is the maximum impact that we're going to have? But it's not up to us to decide which projects should go ahead, which should not go ahead. That should be based on the proponents of the projects and how they can use their technology, their innovative capability to fit in within that predetermined level of impact.

That's where we see this going. Frankly, we will be making some detailed announcements shortly, but I don't think it comes as any great secret if I put on the record tonight that the Industrial Heartland, as we prefer to refer to it rather than Upgrader Alley, is one of the areas where we see an opportunity to truly pilot the concept, to understand in a relatively confined area how we can deal with issues around airshed quality, issues surrounding water, limitations of water, water quality, what the development can have, and some of the other quality-of-life issues that have been referred to.

How we bring all of that together under one umbrella, I think, is something that we can all get very excited about. I'm not going to get into any more detail tonight because we're, frankly, in the formative stage now, but we have made a commitment that that's a direction that we want to go, and once we've got enough detail in place, we will be coming forward with more detail on the issue.

Let me just talk very, very briefly about reclamation. The member talked about climate change, and we're not going to resolve any differences that we have on the strategy that we've chosen to deal with climate change. I don't think that either the member or myself are in disagreement over the seriousness of climate change. We are in a disagreement over what the strategy is that we should be taking as a government and as a province to deal with climate change.

7:40

That being said, we believe that we are taking this very, very seriously, and we do so by dealing with existing industry, talking about the reductions in CO₂ emissions from existing industry, and then we also say: well, we acknowledge that there will be new players coming onto the scene. Those new players, yes, will be producing CO₂. They don't get a free ride. They're expected to use the absolute latest and best technology, BATEA, and they also will be expected to continue to green their technology and their equipment by having reductions over time as well.

We believe that we have set the agenda for that industrial growth to come not at the expense of the environment but in conjunction with sound environmental policy. I've also said many, many times that by investing in the technology surrounding CO₂ and greenhouse gas emissions, we want to reach a stage where we have management of CO₂, not necessarily elimination of the production of CO₂ but the elimination of the release of that CO₂ into the atmosphere.

With that, I think I'll turn some time over to the health minister.

Mr. Hancock: I think my colleague has dealt with most of the environmental impact side of this. A couple of things I want to specifically deal with. On the question of whether we meet periodically, you should be aware that there is a cross-ministry approach to this. In fact, there's a deputy ministers Sustainable Development Co-ordinating Council. There's an assistant deputy ministers committee on environmental management, and there's an environmental impact assessment leadership team. Health plays a strong role in all of those with respect to the health impact side of any of those assessments. In fact, we also play on the climate change team.

There is co-operation and collaboration between ministries, and of course our public health area and environmental health is a fairly strong and growing area of concern for us because we do need to do more on the quality-of-life side and the impact on quality of life and those measures. We make sure now or look now at quantifying the effects to make sure that there aren't any unacceptable health risks, but we need to do more on the quality-of-life analysis.

With respect to the RHAs' ability to do health impact assessments, we actually are of the view that that should be reserved to government to do it cross-ministry rather than do it on a stand-alone basis with a health authority. We're looking, as you are probably undoubtedly aware, at how to enhance our ability to really deal with the public health aspects and assurance area, that's so important not just to that region but to the whole province. We're currently working on a program in that area. But specifically relative to the RHAs' capability of doing those, we believe that it does fall within the government's purview to do the quality assurance role, whether it be water or air or health impact assessment, and that's something that's best done cross-ministry.

Mr. Renner: If I have a little bit of time left, I'd like to just talk a little bit about the monitoring that's going on with respect to the Industrial Heartland because we've got two excellent organizations on the ground right here in the capital region. On the air side, the Fort Air Partnership, similar to WBEA, that we talked about in the Fort McMurray area, is a community-based organization that does an excellent job working on air monitoring.

This format of having each of the opposition parties bring forward questions at different times is a little confusing because I answered the question of the NDP, and then all of a sudden I realized: well, you haven't heard the answer.

I think that it's very important that we continue to have this community-based monitoring. The analogy that I used the other night was that it's very similar to a Neighbourhood Watch program. If we want to ensure that we're having an impact on reducing crime in a neighbourhood, we enlist Neighbourhood Watch. Yes, we still have police, we still have the enforcement side of things, but police can't be everywhere all the time, nor can we get the buy-in from the neighbourhood that this is important and that we should be there. That's why I've become very much a believer in these community-based organizations from a watershed and airshed perspective.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's with interest that I participate in the cross-ministry debate or discussion this evening. I was looking through the Auditor General's report for the department of health, and I don't know if I'm going to have an opportunity to get my questions on the record in regard to that or not, but I would like to start off with coal-bed methane. Now, currently there are over 6,000 coal-bed methane wells that have been drilled, with predictions stating that there could be over 50,000 wells drilled in the next decade. While the future economic potential of coal-bed methane to Alberta is significant – I think we have a bright future – the economic considerations cannot and should not outweigh the potential negative effects to water quality that are a potential danger in coal-bed methane drilling.

The day before yesterday I had an opportunity of appearing before the royalty review. I can assure the hon. Minister of Energy that many of his officials were there, and they seemed diligent. They were working hard. They were about, as they say. But I certainly think that we should, first off, have a royalty rate that is similar to what our neighbours to the south have. In fact, when we suggest that there's a royalty rate of 12 and a half per cent for coal-bed methane production, it's even less than what our neighbours to the south are collecting in royalties. The current low productivity well allowance is simply a giveaway. It's a massive incentive to develop the industry, in my opinion.

Certainly, we should have an immediate increase in the royalties. I know that freeholders have shown me the contracts that they have signed with land agents for the development of coal-bed methane underneath their properties, and the freeholders are negotiating anywhere between 15 and 17 per cent. So for the Crown to settle for next to nothing, I think, is – well, if this was a military operation, I think neglect of duty would be the charge.

With coal-bed methane, now, not only are the royalties an issue, but what happens when the wells are drilled? Also, with coal-bed methane drilling in some cases to increase production there is a process called fracturing. Hydraulic fracturing is a common technique used to stimulate the production of oil and natural gas. I'm not going to bore the minister and his officials with details on fracturing. They know fully well how it works and why. But can the minister tell us if his department has conducted an independent

scientific review of the adverse effects that coal-bed methane drilling can have on human and/or animal health? Also, can the minister please tell us what potential long-term effects exposure to heavily contaminated water due to methane migration can have on human health? What effects can this have on animal health as well? What will be the potential impacts to water quality, both surface and ground, if coal-bed methane drilling increases to the estimated 50,000 wells that are to be potentially drilled in the next decade?

The EPEA, section 40, mandates that the government must conduct studies to predict what the adverse environmental effects of a proposed activity will be. Can the minister tell us, if you can do this, what studies have been conducted to determine the environmental and human health impacts that increased coal-bed methane activity could have, and what steps are being taken to ensure that this does not happen?

7:50

Now, we've all heard of the individual cases. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has talked passionately about this. He has brought individual cases forward. But the high methane content present in Dale Zimmerman's water and Jessica Ernst's water poses a risk of explosion if subjected to flame or spark. It's completely unacceptable that people's lives are at risk due to the actions of industry. Now, I know we're going to hear this story – at least, I hope we don't hear this story – well, it's naturally occurring in some wells, and it's just something that we have to live with. Certainly, there would be incidents like this, but I think that in these two cases that explanation just doesn't have any validity.

What will the effects of exposure to contaminant water be? Already we have seen residents' burns, skin irritations, and irritated and burning eyes. There are serious implications of exposure to water with extremely high methane content as well as other toxic chemicals. These need to be addressed immediately, before coal-bed methane development continues.

Now, risks to animal health. We hear this from farmers almost on a weekly basis. We get a call or two to the office. Dale Zimmerman has reported that his livestock refuse to drink the contaminated water. However, when they are forced to drink this water, they become sick and bloated. I don't know how they could be forced to do that. I don't know how that works, but maybe we can get an explanation from Mr. Zimmerman on that one, not the minister.

There are no assurances that when his cows give birth, the calves will be healthy. What are the implications to livestock as well as to their offspring from exposure to contaminated water? Will they be healthy, or will they have serious complications ranging from deformities to being stillborn? These are questions that cannot be answered by industry and by government, and these must be answered before coal-bed methane drilling is allowed to expand as rapidly as it is.

In fact, we're debating a bill here in the Assembly on an interbasin water transfer to Bashaw and also the village of Ferintosh. It was just before Christmas, about 10 days before Christmas, that I had an opportunity – and I see that some of the Environment officials who are joining us in the Assembly tonight were present at the very same meeting west of Rimbey. This was an oil company from Calgary who wanted to use water from the aquifer that Rimbey uses. The town of Rimbey has a licence for, or I believe they consume, 1,600 cubic metres of water a day from this aquifer, and this oil outfit wanted to take about the same amount, 1,600 cubic metres a day, for enhanced oil recovery. The farmers are, as I'm sure are the officials who are joining us tonight, well aware and will certainly back me up that the farmers and the landowners that were present at that meeting were very concerned about this proposal, very concerned indeed.

If anything, the bill that we are discussing on Bashaw and Ferintosh should tell us that we can't keep coming back every session with an application for an interbasin transfer. I think that if the citizens of Rimbey or the farmers west of Rimbey who were present at this meeting before Christmas were here this evening, they would tell us that we have to change our practices, that water is such a precious element, not a commodity but an element of life, that we should use it wisely and very, very carefully.

With the fracturing fluids, while this government maintains that a primary nitrogen water-based fluid is used for injection in shallow fracturing operations by industry, there remain questions about whether other toxic fluids are used to increase pressures. Now, there are concerns that these are highly toxic fluids. Will they contaminate aquifers if present in only trace amounts? Again, we have evidence in Dale Zimmerman's gas analysis that there is ethane and pentane present in his water.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. ministers, who would like to go first? The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's certainly a pleasure to join the discussions here this evening with respect to the main estimates and budget for the Department of Energy. Some way or another I'd really like to connect my comments to Energy's budget, but it might be a bit difficult considering the questions that I need to answer.

Initially, I think, the hon. member asked about coal-bed methane and health effects with respect to coal-bed methane. I would suggest that over the last number of years there have been some extensive studies done with respect to health, both human health and certainly animal health with respect to animals living in the vicinity of natural gas production facilities. I could indicate to the hon. member that there were no adverse effects found with respect to the studies.

Coal-bed methane: of course, the suggestion that there could be as many as 50,000 wells drilled in the province of Alberta. Again, I would have to indicate to the members that although that's a number – and perhaps at some point in the future we might reach a number like that – the exploration activity with respect to coal-bed methane in the last couple of years in the province of Alberta has declined dramatically, in fact. I'd also like to indicate that out of the wells that have been drilled in the province of Alberta to date, about 90 per cent of them are in the Horseshoe Canyon, and it's dry. There is no dewatering necessary with respect to those particular wells.

In the area a little bit northwest of Edmonton, where there are some production wells in coal-bed methane in the Mannville, in fact, the dewatering process and the handling and treatment of the brackish water – and I might also suggest that this particular water, Mr. Chairman, is about twice as salty as sea water. I know that there have been indications here on the floor previously that no water is unusable, and I would agree with that. What happens in this particular case is that this brackish water is returned to underground saline reservoirs, so it's going back to the ocean, where it probably originally came from.

The suggestion that royalty rates for coal-bed methane are not suitable and the assumption that the reason that the royalty rates are low is because of the low productivity section that is evident in our royalty system. I think, again, there is a variation of royalty rates in the province of Alberta depending on the history of the wells in question, the time that they were drilled and brought into production, and also their capability to produce. So rate of production certainly is taken into consideration. I would suggest that royalty rates need to reflect the economic rent that's available, and that's why there is a section in the royalty regime that deals with productivity.

8:00

Certainly, Mr. Chairman, for some of the wells that we have in Alberta I would suggest that this 12 and a half or 15 per cent royalty rate may be too high to allow for economic production of some low-productivity wells. On the other hand, when you look at high-productivity wells, of which we have a number as well, that rate may be and is in certain circumstances too low. The idea that somehow or another you can make a comparison and pick a number from a freehold contract and try to compare that to the royalty system in the province, the member's attempt at making some comparison there, is a difficult one simply because the 15 to 17 per cent that the freehold owner would negotiate with a company that they were going to get involved to work on production on their freehold land is a profit-share and bears little resemblance to Alberta's royalty rate.

One of the reasons that these companies can go and get involved in freehold operations and still manage to do very well and pay the freehold mineral owner 15 to 17 per cent or whatever number it might be is simply – there are a number, but one of the reasons is that there's no bonus bid been paid on that real estate. If you look at a normal coal-bed methane well where there's been a purchase made with respect to a bonus bid to do the exploration in the first place, I'd suggest to you that trying to take 15 to 17 per cent off the top after the fact would probably make those particular pieces of business not economic.

The majority of the remaining questions, Mr. Chairman, had to do with water and the management of water and the assessment and ongoing monitoring of the water resources, and for those questions I believe that I would defer to the Minister of Environment. That's more likely in his purview.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Minister of Environment, you have two minutes and 48 seconds.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I want to talk very briefly about this whole issue of monitoring of wells and following up on investigations with some interesting statistics. The member mentioned that about 6,000 coal-bed methane wells have been drilled. I'm not sure if that's an accurate figure, but it sounds reasonable to me. To date we have received 95 complaints. We have investigated each and every one of them. Seventy-six of those files have now been closed, and the reason that they're closed is because there was found to be no connection between coal-bed methane and the issue that the complainant was dealing with. In most cases the issue came down to an issue of well maintenance, and we talked about that in question period the other day. It is critical that the owner of a well on a regular basis shock that well with chlorine bleach and chlorine and do so in an appropriate manner. We encourage, again, all owners of wells to consult an expert and find out exactly how that should be done on an ongoing basis. So that leaves 19 files that are still open, and for many of those we anticipate, once we get further information and further results from some of the monitoring that is ongoing, that we may be able to resolve those issues as well.

Let me talk, for example, about the case that the member brought forward for Mr. Zimmerman, who claimed that there were problems with the water from his well and it was causing health problems with his cattle. As a part of that investigation we solicited veterinary experts. We had two different veterinarians who participated in the investigation, and they were able to find no connection, no reason to believe that there was any link whatsoever between the health of the animals and the water that was in the well that they had tested.

The other thing I want to bring to the attention of all members is

that with respect to groundwater that's allocated to the oil and gas industry, only about 7 per cent of all groundwater applications are for oil and gas. The balance are for everything else.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I just want to inform all of the officials that are present here today that should you wish your glass to be replenished with water or require any coffee, please just raise your hand, and one of the pages will come and help you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I neglected to thank all the staff that are here tonight, especially my old colleagues from health. Nice to see you again.

The Fort Chip issue was raised and then the cancer review. I guess there's a problem with small numbers. There's a problem with which cancers we focused on. I think that more and more people are asking for a more comprehensive look at what's been happening at Fort Chip. With very small numbers it's impossible to make conclusions that there is or there is not a significant impact in terms of cancer rates up there. I would encourage you to look at a broader scope of indicators and a health impact assessment. It was mentioned that arsenic, for example, in meat is significantly elevated but that it's elevated elsewhere. Well, that doesn't make it any more safe to eat arsenic-contaminated meat. What are we doing about establishing a clear understanding of where arsenic is going in our wild meats?

[Mr. Prins in the chair]

The Minister of Environment indicated that cumulative impact assessment is an ongoing commitment. I guess I would have to ask if it's enough of a commitment to slow development until you have the cumulative impact assessment done. If you say that you're committed to setting limits on development based on a cumulative impact assessment, when are we going to see an indication that you will actually withhold approval until you get the results of your cumulative impact assessment? It's no good to say that you're working on it and that you're continuing to look at cumulative impact assessment as a tool and then continuing to approve every application that comes through the EUB. This is not leadership, and this is not what Albertans are looking for. You're losing the confidence of a lot of Albertans with this continued discussion of cumulative impact without any effects on our approval rates.

When we talk about the need to monitor air emissions in the Industrial Heartland, if you will, it is clear that you were monitoring 20 emissions, but there are 200 emissions coming out of the stacks of the Industrial Heartland. People don't feel confident that we're necessarily monitoring the significant toxins. Indeed, they want to see signs that we know exactly why we're not monitoring some things and why we are monitoring other indicators.

More and more people have been raising concerns about the EUB process and the lack of transparency, the lack of accountability, the lack of real meaningful public involvement in some of these processes and the restrictions of who's got standing and who doesn't have standing at these hearings, especially on public lands, where nobody has standing. This clearly undermines the credibility of an organization that continues to approve 98 to 99 per cent of all applications that it receives.

I think there's a serious need from a public credibility point of view to look at the way this organization functions and the way it seems to represent industry interests, but it doesn't represent the long-term public interest. Increasingly, people are getting agitated

about this, and we're hearing more and more and seeing more and more evidence that they're not going to accept this for much longer.

Coal-bed methane the Minister of Environment talked about and indicated that the vast majority have not been able to conclude any impacts from resource development. I guess I would have to ask if isotope testing was done in all those cases. Without isotope testing it's impossible, again, to say whether there is or there isn't evidence of industry impact. It's not good enough to say that we found methane and that there's some bacteria and therefore the cause is bacteria. People are also getting very tired of being told that they don't maintain their wells very well, when they've had dramatic increases in gas and they've had dramatic changes in volume since oil companies have moved into town.

8:10

There's a huge credibility gap coming here, and unless we see an independent assessment of some of these results that you're giving us, Mr. Minister, again we're going to see a tremendous erosion of confidence in what we're doing here as government.

The Zimmerman issue is a key one. This man has lost 12 animals in the last year. We don't know anything about the postmortems of those because he couldn't afford to do the postmortems. He's also had a delay of 18 days in the delivery of his calves. That's the first time in 30 years that he's been calving that he's had a delay of 18 days in his calving. We know from the WISSA study that delays in conception are associated with H₂S and other hydrocarbon emissions. Could there not be a connection between this man's delayed conception, delayed delivery, and emissions from some of these that are now, presumably, being consumed in the water in this case of these animals?

There are a lot of issues that are unclear and unaddressed as far as we on this side are concerned and the public are concerned. There's an increasing credibility gap between what our government departments are telling us, what our regulators are telling us, and what people are experiencing on the ground in terms of their air and their water and their health issues. I think we have to take a serious look at these issues.

I would again ask to hear some indication of what health indicators you are using to monitor and establish health impacts over time in the Industrial Alley in the Fort McMurray area, in the Rosebud area, where there's clear evidence from independent testing that hydrocarbons have migrated from deep resource wells into five individuals' water wells. Those are the only ones that we've done some independent testing on. However, you have not found that. This is interesting, and again it raises serious questions about why we're not getting the whole picture and who do we believe and are we just fearmongering? [interjection] I don't believe we are. Are we reflecting what this government has been in denial about? That's the question, and increasingly people are raising it with us, and it's very difficult to stand up and defend some of what's been going on: neglect, in some cases, of our groundwater. Only starting baseline testing a year ago. How does that reflect confidence in how we're monitoring our most vital resource, groundwater? That's only one aspect of what we're dealing with here.

I didn't want to provoke unnecessarily the issues here, but I do want to say that these are the issues that I'm dealing with on a day-to-day basis, all in the context of climate change and increasing anxiety, that we're not taking leadership on the most vital issue on the planet today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I'll just take a

minute to address a couple of the situations, particularly the one around the fact that there's migration of methane to potable water. That's absolutely true. It's been true for I don't know how many years but certainly thousands of years.

The wells around my grandfather's farm in the area between Hythe and Beaverlodge, that part of the world, you could light every one of them, I think. I know that you certainly could light his. They used to have these little situations there. It was interesting, actually. When we were young there, in the wintertime, particularly at times in the spring and fall when the snow wasn't really deep, at night you'd see these odd little flickers of flame that would burn for no particular reason. Nobody lit them. They're just there. Methane. Natural escape of methane.

On the Peace River, north of the town of Peace River – so we're talking about downstream from the town of Peace River. At a place called Tar Island – well, actually, the natural gas leakage in the river is not quite at Tar Island, but it's close. There's a situation there, and I've been there and actually done it: lit the gas that's leaking out of the middle of the Peace River – right? – and made a flare that would certainly be, I'd suggest, a little dramatic in a room like this, cover three quarters of it at least. It's there. Natural methane in potable water is absolutely nothing new.

To suggest that the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board is for some reason a second-rate organization: I really take exception to that. I would suggest to you that for all the years that the ERCB, the PUB, and then, joined together, the EUB have served Albertans, they have done an exemplary job. I would suggest to the member opposite that there are a number of countries around the world that continue to come to Alberta to see how we make this system work.

Further to that, I would suggest to you that there have been stresses, strain, increased numbers of applications for these members, the very good, by the way, people serving the public of the province of Alberta. Numbers of applications are increasing to the point where it gets a little difficult for them to manage. They have done a very good job of it. I intend to restructure the EUB into an energy resources conservation board and an Alberta utilities commission so that these two pieces of business – because they're a bit confused at this time in the public's eye. There are different cultures and different reasons for a public utility commission to exist and a resources conservation regulatory authority to exist. We'll clarify that. If that's part of the problem, we're going to resolve that. It won't be all that long, and we'll have some discussions on the floor of this Legislature with respect to that issue.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you. Either of the other ministers?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. One of the questions that was asked was: can we do a more comprehensive study with respect to the cancer rates in Fort Chip? I guess I'll have to answer as I've answered a number of times: you can't get any more comprehensive than a hundred per cent. They've looked at every case, and the information is there. A review of the death registrations indicated 161 deaths of Fort Chip residents for the years 1983 to 2005, an average of seven deaths per year, a range of one to 13 deaths per year. The most common causes of death were heart disease, at 24.7 per cent. For the province of Alberta heart disease accounted for 25 per cent, so that's basically on the provincial average.

All cancers, 20.3 per cent. All cancers for the province, 28.6 per cent, well below the provincial average. With respect to poisoning, injury and poisoning, 16.5 per cent. Now, there's an issue we've got to get a handle on. And respiratory disease, 11.4 per cent. Given the rate of diabetes, hypertension, renal failure, injury and poisoning

mortality, a focus on reducing the risk factors for those events would lead to improvement of the overall health status of that community.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I mean, there is cancer in that community; there's cancer across the province. We want to deal with it. We've put \$500 million into a legacy fund to deliver \$25 million out so that we can do colorectal screening, we can do prescreening on cancers, and we can fight the causes of cancer right across the province. But there's no indication from the examination that was done of a hundred per cent of the cases that cancer is higher there than anywhere else.

The doctor who has been claiming that despite being required by law to give evidence of that has not done so. So I would be very interested if he has evidence or if there is any evidence that suggests otherwise because we've had a very comprehensive look at this, and all the indications that we have indicate that that's not the case. There are issues that can be dealt with in that community like there are in every community. When you look at the higher rates for some areas in that community, those are the things that we really need to be focusing on to find out what's causing those.

Now, with respect to the question of arsenic the member didn't quote me, but he misinterpreted what I said, because I didn't say that there were higher incidents of arsenic in moose meat. I said that the incidence of arsenic in moose meat was the same in Wood Buffalo as in Yukon, which was a test thing. The other test was east of Edmonton, and it was the same, relatively, as east of Edmonton. The analysis of arsenic that was done, the independent investigation that Alberta Health and Wellness did, engaged experts to assist with the investigation in collaboration with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and local aboriginal communities. The report found that there was no difference in arsenic concentrations in moose and in cattail root in the Wood Buffalo region as compared to the reference samples from Yukon and from east of Edmonton.

8:20

That was the report that was released to the community March 28 at a town hall meeting. It included evaluating the methodology that Suncor used to generate the predicted arsenic-related health risk that caused the issue to become a public concern, reviewed the arsenic exposure limits, evaluated the predicted health risk using alternate methodologies, and collected samples of moose, deer, and cattail root to establish existing arsenic levels. So let's be clear. I didn't say that there were elevated arsenic levels; I said that they were comparable to the reference samples. That was the information that was made available. The study did not indicate a higher degree of concern with respect to arsenic in that area.

Now, with respect to the role of Health and Wellness in monitoring the health of Albertans one of the ways that we do that fairly comprehensively is through enhanced disease and syndromic surveillance; i.e., lab data for unusual sets of symptoms and syndromes, including a connection with the poison and drug information service data. So we're surveilling the data to see if there are any unusual spikes, any unusual indicators on that side as well as the other health indication surveillance has done.

The Deputy Chair: We still have about a minute and 20 seconds. Any minister?

Mr. Renner: I'd like to in that short period of time address this question of cumulative impact and the question that the member asked: if we're going to do cumulative impact, why don't we just stop everything right now until we get it done? Well, the answer to

that is very simple: because we're not in a crisis right now. We're recognizing that we need to do adequate planning, but we have done, as I said, all of this monitoring. As of today the ambient air quality in the oil sands area, for example, is very good. The acid disposition is below thresholds already established. Water quality is good, and we've set caps on water withdrawal from the river.

We don't need to put some kind of a moratorium in place. We don't need to stop everything while we figure out this cumulative impact. We can do them in parallel. And if there are one or two more applications that are approved in that process, it's not going to have a significant effect on the overall. As I indicated, once we've got this cumulative impact process under way, then the approval procedure goes upside down. Approvals depend upon: how do you live within our restrictions?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you have five minutes.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I'm grateful to get a second at bat here. Lots of stuff to cover in this. I'd like to loop back, if I might, and pick up some additional questions around the – I'm sorry; I'm looking for the term that we all agreed on – Industrial Heartland issue. I'm noting that in the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act division 1, section 40, is around the environmental assessment process. It lays out, you know, supporting the goals of environmental protection; integrating environmental protection and economic decisions at an early stage of planning; predicting environmental, social, economic, and cultural consequences of a proposed activity and assessing plans to mitigate adverse impacts; et cetera. I'm sure you're very familiar with this section.

I'm wondering if the government is able to tell me from any ministry whether section 40(c) has been followed and whether there have been any studies that were done to predict environmental, social, and cultural consequences of adverse impacts resulting from the addition of the upgraders that have already been approved or are likely to be approved for this Industrial Heartland.

I'm also wondering about whether there's any evidence that adding these additional upgraders to a fairly intense industrial area already would not have negative impacts on water quality and quantity. Have there been any modelling scenarios that have been conducted utilizing past and present data on water quality and water flow and future projected statistical data to give an idea of how much water will be consumed under these additional 10 upgraders? What treatment capacity would be needed to guarantee safe drinking water? The obvious question to follow that: is that waste treatment or water treatment capacity online? Is it being planned along with the rest of this?

You know, one of the problems we've identified is that we don't know how much groundwater we've got. I'm sorry. Is that right?

Dr. Swann: Mapping it.

Ms Blakeman: Mapping it. Is there a baseline estimate of how much groundwater is actually in the area? Has anybody done this? Energy or Environment or Health or anybody?

I'm also looking for any kind of statistical or scientific analysis to determine the relationship between groundwater and surface water in this area and if these studies have been completed prior to allowing these developments. And, I suppose, if not, why not?

I also note under the Public Health Act, section 3.3 sub 4 – and I'm coming in halfway through here – that denying a development permit for the project on the grounds there is likely to be an unacceptable negative impact on the water supply of nearby

landowners. I'm wondering if the minister is satisfied – or have indeed the requirements been met? – that the approval of these upgraders can satisfy the requirements under the Public Health Act in that particular section and if there's been any involvement from the minister of health with the Minister of Environment in order to meet these prescribed requirements under this particular section.

Part of it is that if these water requirements couldn't be met, would the approval still go ahead on the assumption that it would catch up? Part of what I'm hearing tonight is that there would be no hesitation step, no slowing of any development here if it looked like there might be a problem or if there was a signalling of it. Am I reading this right, then? If there was a negative impact that was identified, would the upgraders continue to proceed at the pace that they wished to proceed at? I think that's what I was hearing the Environment minister say in a different context. I'm checking it for this one in particular.

I'm not going to have enough time. I'm going to try and come back later and talk about the Turner Valley gas plant site, which involves Environment and Health.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the hour and a half allocated for the Liberal caucus has now lapsed. The next half-hour is allocated between the ND caucus and the ministers, and the ND caucus is indicating to me that he would prefer to go in chunks of five minutes, back and forth, if that is okay with all three of you. That's agreeable.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. You know, due to the time constraint I'm certainly going to move rather quickly. I presume that we have an agreement to get some answers in writing if we don't have the time to do it otherwise.

I'm glad to see Energy, Environment, and Health brought together here. There's a certain synergy of value that we have to assess that perhaps we're not doing in the fullness of time, measuring all of the cumulative impacts, perhaps, where a given energy megaproject might have a long-term impact on health, or an environmental initiative that we put in place might have some constraints on our energy program. Working together like this, at least in principle, we certainly do have some potential.

I'm going to use a framework of water and cumulative impacts, living conditions and health, and then some energy initiatives for my questions. I'm going to start with water. In the Athabasca River tar sands companies are currently allowed to continue withdrawing water even when the river levels are dangerously low. The municipality of Wood Buffalo states that Alberta Environment has not had the opportunity or the resources to undertake a review to determine whether there is sufficient available water to support all of the projects. This extends as well to the North Saskatchewan upgraders that we are seeing being proposed along with other initiatives downstream here from Edmonton. I would like to ask: why has the province granted licences for projects that together could in fact endanger the North Saskatchewan River flow?

8:30

Alberta Environment spokesperson Lisa Grotkowski, in fact, said that the department has taken a general look at the river and is confident that it could supply all the upgraders, but how can a general look, so to speak, replace a cumulative assessment actually seeing how much water is required? As well, in relation to that, then I would like to ask: why is it that the province has not prioritized the assessment of the combined impact of all of the mining operations

on the Athabasca River side as well? These are cumulative impact assessment questions in regard to water flow. Of course, we see that the water flow of these rivers is not to be banked on. You know, we have changes in the flows and have over the last 20 years seen significant decreases in those average flows for those two rivers, so I'm very concerned about that.

As well, then, talking about, I guess, cumulative impacts, in 1999 the province recognized the environmental management frameworks, and we sort of saw this evolve to the Cumulative Environmental Management Association, or CEMA, from 2000. This is a network that is meant to look at the cumulative impacts. This was targeted for completion in 2002 but has not been released. However, the pace of projects in the interim still has not slowed down.

In Alberta we've seen that when protected areas are established after subsurface rights are granted, options for protection are actually constrained because the existing mineral rights trump the protected land designation. I would like to ask: why cannot the reverse be true and, in fact, the protected portion of that equation be trumping the mineral rights?

You know, we've had more than, in my assessment, 3,224 oil sands leases that have been issued to date, and the operations are affecting almost 50,000 square kilometres. I'd like to ask: does the government plan to have an environmental management framework before or after projects for the exploitation of the rest of the tar sands region are granted? This is a very important consideration. In relation to that, will the framework modify the actual 10-year regime to ensure that decisions include a cumulative environmental assessment of the region?

As well, just as sort of one of my own personal questions in regard to this, has the government considered putting aside equivalent tracts of land that would be protected in perpetuity to somehow counter the permanent destruction that is incurred at any given tar sands mining site? We've not seen much success at all with reclamation, so perhaps a protection equivalency program could seek to mitigate some of the destruction that we're seeing in the northern boreal forest.

The provincial land use . . . [Mr. Eggen's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have to say at the outset that I'm disappointed in the questions that have come forward because if I'm not mistaken – and I stand to be corrected – at least half of the questions that the hon. member brought forward were exactly the same questions that he asked two nights ago standing in this very place, particularly with respect to the Athabasca River. I talked about the water withdrawal from the Athabasca River. Like I say, I stand to be corrected, but I think I answered those questions. However, I'll do it one more time.

The issue on the Athabasca River is one that we have dealt with in the form of the IFN, the in-stream flow needs. We did a scientific analysis of the river, and we determined that there are three different and distinct rates of flow that the river is historically at. At high flow there are huge amounts of water, and there is relatively little impact from water withdrawals. At a middle stage, the yellow stage, we've designated that one as green. We have the yellow stage, where there's a little less flow, where we've reduced the amount of water that can be withdrawn. I think the most important is that at the red stage, which is primarily at winter when the river is frozen over, that's the lowest stream flow, and that's the point that we have indicated that there is a maximum of eight cubic metres per second that can be withdrawn. That amounts to about 5 per cent of low flow. It's an insignificant amount related to high flow, but it's 5 per

cent of the low flow, which is, frankly, well within the range of error for even determining the flow.

It is, in our estimation, the most restrictive, protective covenant on any river system in North America. That same kind of analysis will take place on the North Saskatchewan River, so when we begin to deal with the cumulative impact, the planning that I've been referring to earlier with respect to the Industrial Heartland, we will have that same kind of scientific analysis on the North Saskatchewan, and we'll have that same determination on what is the maximum withdrawal that can be taken from the river at any given time and not affect the ecosystem.

I want to make this abundantly clear to all members, to the last two members that have talked about licensing and permitting for upgrader plants in the Industrial Heartland: no licences have been issued. No applications have been received. We haven't done all of the analysis that the member refers to for determining whether or not there is available water, whether or not there is this, this, and this because we haven't even received an application to know what we can base that upon.

I did indicate, however, that it is the intent for us to use this as a pilot project, to look at cumulative impact to determine what is the maximum amount of impact that would not significantly impair the quality of life, impair the quality of the ecosystem, the health of the ecosystem, the quality of the airshed, all of those things. At the end of the day, when it comes time to deal with the applications, which in all likelihood will be coming forward – we have every indication that there will be applications coming forward. But as of this point the only EIA that's under way is for the Redwater application. No other applications have come forward to date, so it's all at this point at the discussion stage.

We're being proactive, as the member suggests that we should be, by looking down the road, reading the newspapers, hearing what individual companies have in mind and announcements that have been made. We should be preparing ourselves. We should be getting ready for it. We should be doing it proactively, and we are going to be doing that. But we do not have environmental impact assessments under way simply because we don't have applications that have been received at this point in time.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thank you. I would like to continue on, then, with the second section that I had indicated, which is talking about living conditions and health. Alberta emits significant industrial air pollutants, and these pollutants include certified emissions such as sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide, which have adverse effects on forest, fresh water, soils, and human health. They are the main precursors, as well, of acid rain, which contributes to the acidification of lakes and streams and such like. Health effects include breathing problems, respiratory illnesses, changes to the lungs' defenses, and worsening respiratory and cardiovascular disease. I would like to ask in a general sense: how does the province plan to deal with the acidification of water due to acid rain, and how does the province plan to prevent and attend to respiratory problems associated with the high acidification of these emissions?

The regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, which includes the city of Fort McMurray, is suffering perhaps the most acute strain from development. We've heard quite a number of interesting submissions and reports from this area. According to the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo it is particularly interested in the deficiencies of quality-of-life indicators identified by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which include a wide range that I do believe are not just health indicators but quality-of-life indicators:

affordable housing, social infrastructure, local economy, natural environment, personal and community health, personal financial security, and personal safety.

8:40

Particularly in regard to health care delivered through the area of the regional health authority in the Fort McMurray area, Northern Lights has difficulty delivering community health facilities, community care facilities in the community. The number of acute-care beds is lower than the provincial average, et cetera. I just was, in fact, at one of the EUB hearings up in Fort McMurray in August, and the emphatic request by the regional authority was to slow down the pace of growth so that the quality of life and some of these health indicators can be recognized. I was wondering why the province is not attending to this request from the population of the municipality, which otherwise probably has the best finger on the pulse of the overall health of the community of Wood Buffalo. In the face of the incapacity of infrastructure to keep pace with the project approvals up there, you know, are we in fact perhaps precipitating the decline of quality of life in that region, and what could we do to turn that around?

Some communities are also very concerned that the cumulative impacts of resource development on the environment have direct implications on the health of individuals. As the minister has pointed out, although we haven't had formal approvals of the industrial development to the northeast of Edmonton, certainly we will expect that to indeed happen. You know, it's important to be proactive, I believe, in regard to these issues in terms of acidification and the monitoring of carcinogens in the environment so that we can be preventative in regard to these issues.

What programs together cross-ministry, with the three ministries here available, do we have available to assess the overall impact of human health in regard to this rapid pace of development? This is an interesting discussion that I would like, you know, people to reflect on here in the province. Would this assessment or ongoing sort of revealing of this information be available as the oil sands projects continue to be approved?

You know, I note that the core business of the ministry of health is to lead and participate in continuous improvement in the health care system. However, this is at odds with the pace of development and the delivery of this core business pledge by the ministry for continuous improvement . . . [Mr. Eggen's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So much to say and so little time. The hon. member started off, I think, by saying that he was up there last August, so he has missed most of a year of progress in terms of health. Certainly, as I indicated in earlier questions tonight, there was a report done by former deputy minister Radke with some good support, some very good people on the committee. They did an analysis of a number of things relative to the development and the impacts of development in the Fort McMurray area. One of the areas that they focused on was health.

The issue that was raised, as I understand it, in the hearings previously was that there needs to be something done to ameliorate the impacts of rapid growth from the health authority's perspective, the increased population issue, and the shadow population issues, and how they deal with their ability to deal with that. That was their concern. Well, we've addressed that concern. We've added a significant – in fact, I think the Northern Lights health authority: 81 per cent increase in their budget – 81 per cent. Now, if that's not a significant addressing of the issue, I don't know what is.

Where does that money go? Well, a lot of that money went for the purposes of addressing their staffing issues because that was one of their primary concerns. The northern allowance, which they asked for as their primary concern: the first meeting I had with them almost immediately after I was appointed to the ministry, the issue hit the table as to what we were going to do with respect to the issue. They were particularly concerned about what was happening over the Christmas season and then following that.

So we started working with them immediately on that issue. I started working and the staff in the department were working with them over that period of time. I met with them as soon as I could in January, and we talked about what they needed in terms of being able to address some of the issues. We addressed those as soon as we possibly could through attending at Treasury Board.

One of the first issues that they had concern about was physician coverage, and we put in place a program. We worked with the AMA to provide for coverage at the hospital. There were some concerns. I mean, some of the doctors in the area were asking for about \$2,400 a day to provide coverage at the hospital because they had to take that time away from their very busy practices. We did better than that, Mr. Chairman. We provided \$1,200 per day and brought people in to help.

Now, that did impact other areas of the province. That's not a long-term solution, but it allowed the doctors who were there to continue to serve their patients and supplemented the resources that were there. That's the type of response that we made in the short term to immediately deal with the issues and then brought the resources to the table to help them with the northern allowance issue so that they could retain staff. The early report on that is that it has been very effective for them as a tool, as they expected. And we made the commitment to the community health facilities that they need in order to continue to sustain that population.

The hon. member asked about health status and points to our role in health status. Well, of course, that's very important. That's not just a Fort McMurray issue, to be frank. That's an Alberta issue. If we want to be able to sustain the acute-care health system, we have to be focused on health status. There are so many issues around that. We are very concerned about monitoring health status and making sure that if there are any spikes – and as I indicated earlier, we're doing enhanced surveillance, monitoring the data through disease and syndromic surveillance, lab data, looking for unusual sets of symptoms and syndromes, looking for unusual occurrences. But our clear focus is on encouraging all Albertans to take responsibility for health status, and that can very much be focused on in the Fort McMurray area.

Living conditions and health and quality of life are very important, and there are issues relative to quality of life that have to be dealt with in a fast-growing community. Government across the board has moved on those with respect to making sure that there's land available so that more housing units can be made available because housing quality is certainly an indicator of quality of life. Building bigger, more expensive houses doesn't enhance necessarily your quality of life, but making sure that you have living units available is certainly important.

Respiratory problems averted through analysis and environmental impact assessments to make sure that no unacceptable health conditions will exist . . . [Mr. Hancock's speaking time expired] I would be happy to come back with more.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Five minutes doesn't last long.

That's for sure. Perhaps what I would like to do is try to not bring up so much but, instead, focus on a couple of issues more specifically.

A statement of the Environment minister intrigues me, and he mentioned this the other night as well: looking for a Neighbourhood Watch model for environmental concerns and for health concerns as well, perhaps, as a way to engage the public in the way that industrial and drilling and energy initiatives in their environment – perhaps become more educated about those and participate. You know, certainly I encourage this as well, but what I've seen in the last couple of years or so is that municipalities do want in fact to engage in having more of a say in what sort of industrial activity or drilling activity is occurring in their area, but often they will be rebuffed at a higher level.

8:50

Say the Strathcona county was trying to place some limitations on sour gas well drilling in areas close to populated regions. You know, this is, I believe, an indication of this interest in the Neighbourhood Watch model. But then the reality of it is that often the municipalities or local groups will in fact be at odds. It's more of an adversarial situation set-up rather than a consultative approach, the same that I could see so often with EUB meetings, as evidenced by the 500 kV line, the controversy that's happening now in Rimbey. I mean, I want to encourage the idea, but then the reality is something else, and it ends up more of a combative model than a consultative and collaborative approach.

I would perhaps like to ask if there is any initiative that might be coming from either the Energy or the Environment group where we could see the actual consultation taking place on the decision for any given energy project or drilling project or electricity lines, where the municipality actually does get a say in whether or not these things go forward.

As well, certainly, the issue in regard to health and sour gas is an issue that I'm very concerned about because we're not necessarily seeing the full picture unfolding. Different anecdotal stories that I hear from different parts of the province, you know, suggest that the sour gas emissions, in fact, do cause health problems not just for humans but for livestock and such, so I was wondering if there was an initiative between Alberta Health and perhaps Energy and Environment to consult more specifically on the effects of sour gas emissions on livestock and human health as well.

Also in that vein one of the difficulties that I have categorically between Energy and Health and Environment is that so often when we're dealing with any given energy project, be it an approval in the tar sands with heavy oil or a coal plant or what have you, it seems that Health or Environment are less able to step in and shut down or to have the definitive say on a coal plant or on a tar sands project, as opposed to the EUB perhaps having the final say. So I would just like to see more of a collaborative approach between these three ministries.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Initially, I'll just address some of the concerns here, I think, with respect to the Industrial Heartland area and some of the questions around sour gas. Certainly, the Industrial Heartland area in the province of Alberta is a strategic region, and it will have strategic importance for the province and, most certainly, for the energy industry as we move forward. Industrial development in the area will improve the growth of the value-added sector in the province, and we'll do this taking into account and consideration all of the necessary environmental

and other approval processes that are currently and will in the future come into play in the province.

All of these projects, upgrading projects or any other projects that would move ahead in the Industrial Heartland, require Alberta Environment and EUB approval. Mr. Chairman, I would suggest to you that the health of Albertans and the health of our environment is top of mind during any approval process. The EUB guidelines in place ensure that any Albertan who may be affected by the development of energy or any facilities can participate in the process. The best interests of Albertans are a priority when we consider industrial development in the heartland or in any other part of the province of Alberta.

Suggestions that there should be municipal consultation or that we would initiate some form of consultation on a well-by-well basis or, you know, some kind of an idea that we can micromanage each one of these pieces of business that would come before the EUB by consultation and have municipal consultation on each well that's proposed in the province of Alberta would be, I would suggest, an interesting exercise because although we've had a little decline in activity in 2007, in 2005 there were, just wells alone, 24,000 some-odd wells drilled in the province of Alberta. Mr. Chairman, I think it would be quite an interesting process if we had a consultation on every one of those projects.

Sour gas accounts for roughly one-third of the total gas that's produced in the province of Alberta. Of course, the concern with respect to sour gas is that it contains more or less degrees, concentrations, of hydrogen sulphide. Hydrogen sulphide, Mr. Chairman, most certainly is toxic to humans and animals.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the time allocated for the ND caucus has now lapsed. The balance of the time, which is one hour, will now be allocated to any member of the Assembly that wishes to participate. It will be in 10-minute time slots.

The chair will now recognize the Member for Edmonton-Manning, and I'd request him to please introduce his guest to start with.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to introduce Robin Williams from Edmonton. Actually, her family is from the great Alberta community of Fort Assiniboine. She's here to help today. Thanks for coming.

I'm very pleased to rise. This is the first day I've been up on these debates. I'm very pleased and honoured to be able to stand in this Legislature to question the minister and departments. To start with, I must say that I think the 9.5 per cent increase in funding for the health authorities is a good move. I mean, it's far above inflation and all the rest of that, but I think there are many areas where we can gain cost savings in the long term and try to ensure the health of Albertans.

Now, the issue of home care is one that has come home to me quite a bit in the last little while. I've talked with a recipient with MS in my constituency office just a couple of days ago who is having great difficulty getting home care largely because of the issue of getting attendants who will actually be working in the industry and the shortage of people working in the industry. The difficulty in that is increased, and it's severe.

9:00

I raised this to some degree in speaking to Seniors this afternoon, but one area I saw in a presentation to an economic development conference in Camrose last fall, I believe it was, where an aboriginal leader spoke to the great success that they were having in Saskatchewan with training individuals from northern reserves in Saskatchewan to get their qualifications in various health care professions.

They moved into the urban centres of Saskatoon, North Battleford, and other areas to provide assistance in the shortages that Saskatchewan was having in that area. My one question is whether the minister is, in terms of training – and some of that goes to other departments, of course – trying to encourage that in terms of trying to find some ways to deal with the staffing problems that we have in so many of our health care and long-term care types of processes?

Now, the removal of the home-care ceiling. I think that was a very good move. I am just wondering what the total cost might be, on average, per individual for this type of funding. It's something that I must speak to a little bit personally because my mother was always a strong advocate for home care, going back 30, 35 years. She would even attend conferences and lobby in Ottawa and do other things. This is a very strong development in this area. I hope that it helps in the funding and will be a very positive development for many Albertans.

The Northern Lights health authority has been a great concern for many people in my riding because there are many Edmontonians that work and are that shadow population in that area and, you know, live on living-out allowance or fifth wheels or many in the camps. The provision of proper health care, the ability to access health care is an issue for many of them. I was up there just a few weeks ago and met with a number of the municipal officials, the mayor and such, and talked about the continuing problems. There is certainly a look by the government to try and deal with those problems by some of the ways that it has dealt with the community clinics, the northern allowances, some of the other factors, to try and deal with what are essentially labour issues and cost issues with a burgeoning population and a large shadow population.

I guess one question is: is there any true and hard estimate of what that shadow population does average out to in a year – I know it's up and down and up and down – and what the projected costs are in terms of health care funding for the Northern Lights authority?

Another area that I think is important in the health care area – and I'm just going to concentrate on Health for now and maybe, hopefully, get up again to speak about Energy and Environment. Now, I've lost about 85 pounds since December, and it's a good thing. Part of that is not having to sit in long caucus meetings and listen to . . . Sorry about that. I diverge.

You know, that's consistent workouts, and it's going to the gym, and it's changing diet a little bit. Wellness is important.

Mr. MacDonald: Eighty-five pounds?

Mr. Backs: Eighty-five pounds, yes. It certainly is a factor in health and certainly is a factor in making things good.

Being at the health care centre in my area, I'm getting a lot of questions. I'm seeing posters, actually, and they're asking me questions about these posters, about whether the ministry will support some extension of wellness accounts – I know that there are some for provincial government employees – in a larger area or to encourage them with private employers and, perhaps in the next budget, to look at some sort of a tax credit that is similar to some of the measures that are done for children at the federal level. I proposed a children's recreation tax credit as a private member's bill idea a couple of years ago and was pleased to see the feds kind of move a little bit on that idea. It at least gets a little bit of money for children into the hands of parents. Many people in my health club are asking about whether or not this type of thing could be extended for all individuals in our society and say that it, indeed, would be and could be a great saving for the health care system.

Now, again, primary care networks are a great success on the part of the department and the government and the health authorities in

our province and have very much increased the confidence in health care provision in our province by what has happened with hips and such. I guess another question is: what might be other additions to the list of these team approaches, and how might they be considered in 2010 in the three-year look forward on that?

I've also had raised with me some of the issues on the personal touch in terms of complaints. Capital health had a new restaurant information system, and just reading a little bit from an article here about getting waited on with a personal touch: Capital health launched a pilot project to offer information from the latest restaurant inspection reports via the Capital Health Link telephone line, but instead of having a Health Link worker give the information, inquiries are being returned by the actual health inspector who performed the most recent inspection on the restaurant in question. Now, that's only a temporary measure, but it's an interesting sort of pilot program. I've had it raised to me because somebody brought forward the article and said that, you know, they are interested in the same type of approach being brought forward, perhaps, on a province-wide basis and maybe even extended to such things as accommodations, rental accommodation, or even motels and such. There was a clear desire to ask on that particular point whether or not that might be some sort of possibility even if in the future.

The health care system. I must commend the minister for many positive approaches that have been brought forward. The communications on the part of the department have been, I think, very well done.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister for Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Those questions all seemed to be in the area of health, so I'll see if I can handle most of them for the hon. member.

Home care, getting attendants. The workforce strategy is a very important piece. It's one of my mandates. Obviously, while a lot of the focus seems to be publicly on where we get more doctors and where we get more nurses, the actual area of significant need is really on the personal care side. How do we make sure that people have access to appropriately trained personal care attendants to manage their living needs so that they can live independently if possible if they can live in their own homes with support where needed and also, of course, in residential accommodation, whether it's a designated assisted living or long-term care?

Getting personal care attendants and making sure that they're appropriately qualified. The hon. member will know that we have a new set of standards in place with respect to care, and that's being applied to continuing care and privately run facilities as well as to health authorities in terms of those care standards. But that adds some complications because now that there's a set of accreditations that are required, people are concerned that the income levels are not such that a person would actually be inspired to get the accreditation because it's not necessarily compensated for in income. Other service businesses are perhaps being too competitive in that area, so it's difficult to attract people to the field. So that's an area that we need to deal with. We need to get more personal care attendants. We need to make sure that they get access to the accreditation of the standards that they need so that we can serve well.

9:10

There are some very important things happening in that area. Alberta just signed an agreement with Capital health authority, for example, to make some training positions available on the aboriginal side, as the hon. member mentioned. Careers: the Next Generation

Foundation the hon. member will be familiar with, and Alberta Health pays for a special focus on aboriginal students in the health area.

I just came back from meeting with the East Central health board, and they're talking about things that they're doing in co-operation with NorQuest and with Grant MacEwan with respect to the workforce and involving local residents who perhaps have capacities that are underutilized. I think they told me they deal with 17 different advanced education institutions in terms of making courses available to local residents so that they can get the capabilities that they need to be consistent players and to be participants in the system, including discussion about a health care aide curriculum piece which could be added to the high school curriculum available just as courses are in cosmetology or other areas which would lead to a student graduating from high school with the appropriate accreditation in hand to enhance their ability to move immediately into the workforce if that was their desire and give them a leg up on a health care profession if that's where they wanted to go. So there are some very interesting things happening in that area.

Now, the hon. member talked about Northern Lights, particularly with respect to the shadow population. First of all, I should say that we're working with Northern Lights and Peace Country health to better define the whole concept of shadow population and a mechanism to count and what type of formula might work to include them in a funding formula. But having said that, there are some things that should be of interest.

First of all, in reviewing the health care data, it would seem to be clear that apart from emergency services most of the shadow population goes home for their health care. That home may be here in Alberta or it may be in other parts of the country. But there's no evidence, at least on the surface – and, as I say, we have a task force that will be looking into this in more depth – that there's a huge impact on those health regions from the shadow population other than, as I say, with respect to the provision of emergency services.

In fact, I would point to the data that we have with respect to our funding allocation for this year. The Northern Lights health district has actually paid an export of \$17 million. Now, I don't know whether we actually make them pay that or whether we just account that. [interjection] We just account it, but the suggestion would be, actually, that they send more people out than they bring in. If the shadow population was getting medical services in that area, the health data should reveal an import because they would be paid because the residency of the shadow population would be their home residency and the import/export formula should account for that.

As I say, we're not dismissing that area. We're looking at it very seriously. That's been a concern of both Peace Country and Northern Lights. We want to know the impact of the shadow population, but the surface evidence would suggest that that's not as big an issue as it's made out to be, and there may be other issues that the person should be looking to.

The hon. member mentioned wellness, and I'm glad he did because that's one of my favourite topics. If we want to have an acute-care system that's there to take care of our parents when we need it and our children when we need it and, heaven forbid, ourselves from time to time, we have to make sure that fewer people need the system. That's the only way it's going to be sustainable in the long term. This is a long-term issue because wellness is not something that you can accomplish and measure on a day-to-day basis, notwithstanding the hon. member's mention of weight loss. You know, this is a long-term project. I'm sure the hon. member knows, as I know, that weight loss can be fickle. It needs to be sustained over a long period of time.

The issues of wellness, though, are very, very important for us.

We can talk about all the acute-care delivery. We're going to expand. We know that we're going to expand the delivery of acute-care services. It's been exponential over the last 15 years in terms of the number of services that are delivered, the number of hip surgeries and heart surgeries, the number of MRIs, and the number of scans. It's been exponential in terms of its growth.

We can do more for more people because of the new techniques, new technologies, new drugs. We're doing hip surgery on 90-year-olds that we weren't doing before on 70-year-olds. If we're going to do that – and we are – then we need to make sure that fewer people actually need those services by increasing the health status of Albertans. To do that, we need to make sure that Albertans take responsibility for their health status and are supported by the health care professionals through PCNs and others in their community to make sure that they can take care of their health status.

Now, one of my favourites, of course. The PCNs are a great way of bringing a team approach to health care delivery and leveraging the health care resources, making best use of the health care resources, the health care personnel that we have so that doctors can do what doctors are well trained to do, that nurses can work to their capacity, that dieticians and pharmacists and other health care professionals can work as a team.

We found that approach to be so supremely effective with the bone and joint team, the Bone and Joint Institute process, and the steering committee. Yes, we put more resources into that project, but what we learned from that project was that by re-engineering the process and using a team approach and using health care professionals for the health care needs and using support people to help them to expand their capacity, we could take the same amount of resources and do a whole volume more of work and improve the access times and improve the results.

So we need to take the learning from that and translate it to other areas. The process engineering is what is really important, coming out of that, to show that the teamwork approach really does enhance our ability to deliver the services. That can be used not just on hips or knees; that can be used for any skeletal processes. It can be used in ambulatory care. It can be used right across the board, and that's very important learning that we have from that to be applied.

Now, the Auditor General commented on food audits in the 2005-2006 annual report. As a result of the issues raised by the Auditor General and issues raised in general by the community, we are moving to develop a process to address public disclosure of restaurant inspections. In fact, the project that the member referred to with respect to Capital health is in fact the pilot project that they're doing on our behalf to work out the kinks, to deal with the systemic issues that might have to be dealt with so that we can take the learnings from that and develop the system for a province-wide system of reporting that's appropriate. The recommendations from that pilot are expected in December 2007, and then we should be able, if it's successful and if the details work out, to expand it across the province.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've got a few questions that I'd like to leave for the Minister of Energy. The department's 2007 to 2010 budget plan states that "installed generating capacity will need to increase in order to keep pace with Alberta's growing demand for electricity . . . [pending] enhancements to Alberta's transmission system to ensure access to market." What kind of generation is being looked at for increasing Alberta's electrical capacity, in particular coal-fired generation?

Another question, Mr. Chairman. The business plan commits the

minister to developing an integrated, co-ordinated approach to research that supports clean-coal technology. How far along are these efforts, and how will this tie into plans for more generation capacity?

There's some talk about Alberta as a stable, reliable source for energy, but a lot of the discussion is about oil and gas, and that's natural gas. Coal is not such a prominent part of the discussion. What is being done to promote Alberta's coal outside the province?

Another question: what is being done to improve well site cleanups?

9:20

A lot of my constituents in West Yellowhead have been complaining that utility companies are not doing actual meter reading for months, and then they're charging large amounts on one month's bill to make up the difference. What sort of recourse is available to these individuals? The department's business plan says that metering policy recommendations will be developed to support advanced metering technology in the retail market. Is this something that can rectify this situation? Will there be guidelines preventing this sort of situation?

Another question, Mr. Chairman. The department has a significant increase in its budget for biofuel initiative. From \$5 million in 2006-07 it then jumps to \$41 million in 2007-08. The estimates are on page 128. What sort of work will be done to utilize wood debris left over from timber harvesting in biofuels?

Another one is on the orphan well abandonment program, which had its budget cut from \$13.5 million in 2006-07 to \$13 million in 2007-08. The estimates are on page 132. What I'd like to have the minister explain is: why these cuts?

Now, if I can jump into Environment. Many people in West Yellowhead are concerned about climate change. It was reported in March that 7 per cent of Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions result from logging in the province's boreal forest. What kind of effect is logging having on Alberta's carbon dioxide emissions? Is increased logging due to the mountain pine beetle going to have a greater effect?

West Yellowhead constituency office is getting a lot of calls from people looking for grants to help make energy efficient improvements to their home or for buying environmentally friendly vehicles. There have been a few small-scale programs run by Climate Change Central and Energy Solutions Alberta that have helped people make those sorts of upgrades. Are there any plans for new grants like these?

There is some concern from the residents in West Yellowhead about a possible contamination of water because of drilling new wells. The minister said that there are studies under way to see what effect coal-bed methane development has on groundwater and that there are a number of monitoring wells and there are ongoing programs for water testing. What sort of testing is being done, and when can we expect the results from these studies? Are the studies going to be ongoing or one time only?

When Bill 205, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, was hoisted, the minister committed to moving forward right away to improve reclamation standards. What sort of progress has been made on improving these standards?

If you can get back to me if we run out of time, I'd certainly be pleased to have those answers from both ministers. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Would any ministers like to respond? The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The questions that were asked certainly relate very well to the Ministry of Energy and, of course, to our budget. I think the first question had to do with increased capacity and the ability of Alberta to generate electricity. With the fortification of the transmission system in the province of Alberta, what are we looking forward to with respect to being able to supply more electrical capacity? The question was particularly asking about coal. What I would suggest is that investors certainly have more confidence in the electric industry in Alberta as a result of the competition and our open market approach. Industry has expressed interest in investing in about another 4,800 megawatts of new power development in the coming years, which would ensure that we continue to meet the province's growing demand.

Thermal sources account for the majority of Alberta's installed capacity, and coal-fired plants make up about 50 per cent currently of the province's total capacity. Natural gas accounts for about 40 per cent, and that includes some very efficient cogeneration at industrial sites that produce energy as a by-product of their normal activities. The remainder, Mr. Chairman, is hydro, wind, and biomass. Those sources of energy from organic waste such as wood waste, garbage, or animal matter are, again, an important piece of the business.

Among new projects coming on stream, there's a 450 megawatt coal-fired plant being jointly developed by EPCOR and TransAlta at Keephills. Those companies have a successful track record in developing coal-fired generation, and they're using state-of-the-art technology that reduces air emissions, reduces greenhouse gas emissions and NOx and SOx and particulate matter by significant amounts.

Genesee 3 was completed in March 2005. It's one of Canada's most efficient coal-fired electrical-generating facilities and the most advanced coal combustion technology in Canada.

The efforts to support clean coal technology continue. We have ongoing research involved with the hydrocarbon upgrading task force and most certainly hydrocarbon upgrading demonstration projects. We're working with and very interested in Sherritt's proposal to do coal gasification. We're working with the front-end engineering design – the FEED study – with our energy innovation fund. We've put about \$11 million dollars into it. That study will research the best design for power generation facilities capable of removal of significant percentages of the emissions, including NOx and SOx and particulate matter, mercury and carbon dioxide, all with a base of Alberta coal as feedstock.

Mr. Chairman, a pulverized coal-feed system. Recently, some articles have been coming forward with respect to it. It produces electricity at a very, very favourable rate compared to the standard processes. We see that it uses an air separation system and ultrahigh pressure steam. Of course, we'll be continuing to monitor these pilot projects that people have and continue to be involved with them.

Alberta's coal, of course, is promoted as a commodity outside of the province and around the world and is accepted in many places, particularly with respect to steel manufacturing, as one of the best sources of coal for that industry. We continue to support that, and the department of economic development does a very good job around the world with respect to helping people that have a requirement for coal to understand where we fit in the marketplace.

9:30

Well site cleanups. We're off on a bit of a different situation here and, of course, Environment's upstream oil and gas reclamation remediation program is in place and does ensure that land that's used for oil and gas development is restored to a productive state. We

have an orphan well program, and there were some suggestions that the budget for the orphan well program had been decreased. In fact, that budget is a number that's set at \$13 million, and it's a levy on industry. There wasn't actually a decrease. What happened was: of the \$13 million program there had been an ask in the last year to have some additional money for particular projects with respect to the orphan well program. We added the \$500,000, and in the budget for '06-07 that money doesn't appear because, of course, that ask was a one-time situation. So we're back at \$13 million, where we've been historically.

Another question that was asked: the meter policy. Again, we're working on recommendations now with respect to net metering. The idea that smart meters and net meters and meters that are capable of direct read by remote sources and that sort of thing: we're continuing to do that. Smart metering in the industry is referred to as advanced metering infrastructure, and that generic term is for meters that have advanced technological capabilities. The Department of Energy continues to work with market participants to develop this type of metering.

The biofuel initiatives. Of course, again, it's a topic, Mr. Chairman, that's predominant in the agricultural industry today in Alberta. The forest industry is extremely interested in this program. We've allocated \$41 million in this budget, and what we have in front of us is a program over a number of years that's going to provide \$239 million to biofuel initiatives.

The programs that were announced in October 2006 include two elements. There's \$30 million over three years committed to the commercialization program, that would support technology investment in the province with respect to biofuel. It also supports the establishment of infrastructure that's required to market and distribute bioenergy products. As you know, biodiesel would have to be blended at some point in time in the system, and today rack blending is the method of choice with the industry, so we want to promote the ability of producers to do that in the province.

Two hundred and nine million dollars over a four-year period: that's committed to the renewable energy producer credit program. What that will do is assist when people get up and running and have biofuel production in the province. There will be some assistance there to help them offset the initial costs of organizing and building infrastructure and getting into that business.

I'll leave it there. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. There may be some issues around water that my colleague would want to address.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Maybe I'll focus my questions to Environment since my colleague from West Yellowhead didn't have an opportunity to get some responses, and we'll give the Minister of Energy a chance to catch his breath.

First of all, Minister, I want to thank you and your department folks here for always providing a quick response when my office, either in the constituency or here, call, and especially a thank you through you to Rick Ostertag, that does the work out in Whitecourt-St. Anne. When I have a problem, he's there, and he's there quickly, and he responds quickly.

You have a \$164 million expense in your budget. Friends and constituents that call me often talk about the Department of Environment and what money is allocated to their concerns and what you're planning to do to improve on the concerns raised.

I want to talk a little bit about train derailments, cleanup, your emergency response team. In the last six months or so I've had two train derailments, and the last one I was able to monitor with your

team. It was just outside of Onoway. I have to tell you that they're very professional; these folks are ready and take charge on-site. I want to know, you know, if this team was ready for me at Onoway, what happens at the same time down in Lethbridge when there's a problem there. Is there a unit in the south? Is there a unit in the north? How has this response team worked with my 28 municipalities, getting the mayors and the reeves and their people in tune with what you're doing?

The second issue that I hear many times – I just got a report from the milk container recycling program, and, you know, they claim that great things have happened. I don't think that just over a 50 per cent recovery rate is great. I think we can do a lot better. We've proved that with our containers that we have a deposit on. It's pretty amazing when you hear the stats of, after a product is purchased and a deposit is paid and it's consumed, how fast it gets back to the bottle depot and gets back into that circle that we need it to. I'd like to know: in your budget is there opportunity to move the milk container program into the same type of a program, and when are you going to do that?

The other issue I get is from regional landfills and transfer stations. It's getting harder and harder to site these facilities. The municipalities are doing the best they can to make sure that these landfills stay as long as they can, but they all know that when it comes time to locate a new landfill, they're in trouble. You know, I've had the opportunity with your deputy to go and visit areas that no longer allow landfills. The technology is there. We don't have to study it through huge grants. Other municipalities are taking a zero landfill policy, turning that garbage or waste into energy, into heat. Just wondering when you're going to take some of this \$164 million and turn those funds into a program to shut down our landfills and turn them into fuel.

The other issue is the municipal water monitoring program, and I know that with many of my communities your staff has done some good work. I understand that there's a major effort coming about in the municipal water monitoring program. I want to know: in your \$164 million, when you identify problems in a community, is there enough money allocated into your budget for help to our communities when they run into a problem?

I'll sit down, and this will give you an opportunity to answer my questions and the questions from my colleague from West Yellowhead.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. First off, let me thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for his comments about our staff, particularly those that are in the Whitecourt area. I certainly share his admiration for some wonderful people that we have not only out in the field but here in our headquarters in Edmonton.

I'm going to take a little bit of time to go through each of the issues that he dealt with, but if I can be very, very brief, I want to try and address the issues that West Yellowhead brought forward as well and see if I can't get everything done all at once.

First of all, the issue with respect to climate change and logging and the fact that logging as a result of mountain pine beetle may have an effect on CO₂ emissions. I need to point out that the CO₂ emissions that would result from logging are not a direct result of logging but would result from the elimination of the carbon sink that a healthy forest is. While there may be some effect on CO₂, it's hard to calculate. It could be marginal. The pine beetle logging will also be accompanied by reforestation, so while you lose mature forests, those are replaced with forests that are aggressively growing. It's

really hard to calculate what the net effect would be, but I would say that overall it would be marginal. The one side benefit that we may have is that the available fibre that would result could be used in some form for conversion to ethanol. There may be some opportunities to have some advantages there.

9:40

The member also asked about whether or not the government has any plans to bring incentives for environmentally friendly vehicles. The answer to that is that at this point we do not, but we've just completed our community consultation on climate change. One of the issues that we discussed at those community meetings was whether or not there is a warmth on the part of Albertans for us to do so. That would be very much part of the discussion as we bring forward our new policy under climate change and climate change policy.

The next question dealt with water wells and coal-bed methane. There are a number of monitoring wells that we have in place. We have testing that's done on our own wells. We also are available to do testing on individually owned wells. The question is: is testing ongoing or one time? It's both. The ongoing testing in our own monitoring wells will be there for a length of time because we want to establish whether or not there are any trends that need to be noted, and we're also available to do testing on individual wells should individuals suspect that they have some problems that they would like investigated.

Finally, a member asked about Bill 205 and what the status of this bill is. He's quite correct. There was a hoist motion that was approved by this Legislature on this bill. I'm pleased to report to the member that as of this date a reclamation criteria advisory group has completed an update for forestry reclamation criteria. The update was agreed upon by a multiparty group, including the Alberta Forest Products Association and Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. We will be proposing an amendment to the conservation and reclamation regulation, and that amendment should ensure that reclamations are reviewed every six years as a minimum requirement. The criteria will also be updated as new science and knowledge become available.

Now, if I could deal with the questions from Whitecourt-St. Anne on the train derailment. As a result of lessons learned at Wabamun, I think we have a much improved position at this point in time. ASERT, which is a new organization that we've put in place, Alberta support and emergency response team, has a network throughout the entire province. So to answer the question, if we have two events at the same time, we have primary responders located throughout the province. Then they draw upon the support from the main operation here in Edmonton as is necessary.

Co-ordination with municipalities is actually one of the things that we're very proud of, and I'll give you an example. When I was in Fort McMurray earlier this year to talk with them about climate change and then we also spent the day working with the municipality and working with the local media to discuss the possible risk from ice jams, that very day our representatives from ASERT were in an exercise with the first responders in Fort McMurray, going through a tabletop exercise so that everybody fully understood what everyone should be doing should the issue of an ice jam cause some flooding. We're very proud of the work that they're doing.

The milk container issue. Frankly, hon. member, I'm not in disagreement with your views on this. I think, intuitively, container recycling is something that we need to have some consistency in. On the other hand, there are strong arguments made by the dairy industry that their containers should continue to be exempt from our recycling. I've indicated in this House before that I think this is an

excellent opportunity for us to review our regulations with respect to beverage container recycling, and it's one of the things that I intend to refer to a standing field committee as soon as they get up and running and established. I want them to have a look at this whole issue of beverage container recycling and provide me with some recommendations before we renew the regulations.

Finally, on the issue of landfill locations I don't disagree that it is increasingly difficult to deal with replacing landfills. I think that there are two issues that we need to have a look at here. We need to have a recycling program that is sufficiently supported, that we are minimizing the amount of material that goes into any landfill so that we have a policy in place that landfills are used a very minimal amount. I'm not so sure that gasification is the answer to replace landfills. I'm told that there are economies of scale associated with gasification and that in order to have the volumes that would be required to successfully operate a gasification disposal site, you would have to have a major population centre. I don't know that remote municipalities want to get into a situation of having to truck all of their refuse into either a Calgary or Edmonton facility for gasification.

I wouldn't write it off. Technology has a way of changing. But in the meantime I think that we're better off to concentrate on having landfills that serve regional needs at a reasonable distance so that we're not hauling huge distances, but that those landfills are designed so they pose no significant risk to the environment, so that they contain a minimum amount of waste material, and in the long term they serve the needs of Albertans in the most cost-effective and environmentally friendly way.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, you have the full 10 minutes, but if you want a response, you may want to leave a few minutes for the minister to respond to you verbally. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, I would like to talk about the energy side. I know that energy is very important to our province and is in the good hands of our minister and the department people.

I would like to just give an idea. I see that energy has two parts. One is our own consumption in Alberta for our industry and for our household consumers. So in this aspect I want to just pose a question about the ministry programs regarding efficiency and conservation of energy in our own home, our own province here. We need to meet the growth of economic development and also meet the needs of population growth. So that's talking about our internal usage.

Also, energy earners add revenues to fund health care and social programs and education, the people programs of Alberta. We should not forget that energy export is the source of our wealth, Albertan wealth. In that context, I want to address or ask the minister: what is the measure or the program in which the government helps industry to develop our industry sector in terms of making it attractive for investment and also removing uncertainty so that the energy industry keeps growing well in Alberta? That's for the Minister of Energy.

I want to focus on the Ministry of Environment. As far as I know, Minister of Environment, we are facing what I call the threat, a threat for our environment. But in any threat there is opportunity for Alberta. So I want the minister to tell me about how you deal with the threats. Then what are the opportunities for us to grow in our technology or economy in terms of dealing with the threat of environment?

9:50

Also, there are some other issues such as recycling of electronic waste, recycling of waste disposal in general. But there's one thing that I learned from other jurisdictions that I searched around the world. I learned about what they do for water recycling, preservation of water, conservation of water. Basically, I learned from some jurisdictions that they classify water into a kind of colour: the dark, the brown, and the clear. Each one has its own stream. The dark one is like sewers. It goes to different pipes and is going into different treatment. The brown water is like the domestic water that we use for washing dishes and in our sink at home and all that. That's the brown kind, and it goes through a different pipe and then goes into different treatment. Then the clear water, which is the surface water that either we water our lawn with or the rain, and disposal of that. I've seen that addressed in some other jurisdictions, so I wanted you to comment on that.

One thing that's pretty close to my constituency is the remediation approval process. It's a good process. It's a solid process, but some of the people in my area say it's too long. So I wanted you to take note of that.

My third area is on the health side, the Minister of Health now. I know that health is very important. It's a big expenditure in our budget. It's also the top concern for Albertans. But I see a lot of things that we can do. For example, I want the minister to comment on prevention investment – that is, the first part, the prevention side – so that we don't need to spend on curing.

Because the health care system has a lot of investment, big dollars, \$13 billion in there, there are a lot of operational efficiencies that I would think about. So my question is on re-engineering of health care operational processes. For example, just trace all the steps from the time a patient first starts and until the time that he's discharged. How many people touch that patient in terms of treatment and bill the government for all of those steps and the complexity of that? The more we look at that, we can streamline, and we can, I should say, allay the cost of health care to other areas of health care which are more efficient.

One other area I want to address, which comes from my constituency, is the community health centre kind of idea: one-stop shopping for a person to come in. Regarding that, there's a question about compensation to doctors, alternate compensation.

So I just want to leave with that and hope that the minister has some ideas. If not, then it can be answered in other forms. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. I'll be very brief. The initial questions, I believe, that the member had with respect to the Department of Energy had to do with the consumption of resources internally in Alberta and the export capabilities. Most certainly, Mr. Chairman, I'll start, first of all, with the disposition of crude oil. These are 2005 numbers, the most comprehensive thing that I can give the member at this point in time. In thousands of barrels a day the province of Alberta consumed approximately 422,000 barrels. The rest was shipped to the rest of Canada in exports and some offshore exports, actually. Total disposition: about 1,928 thousand a day.

With respect to natural gas disposition in bcf per year, consumption in Alberta nearly 1,400 bcf. We shipped internally in Canada about 1,200, 1,300 bcf and exports of around 2,500. Total disposition in bcf – well, this would actually turn into tcf – about 5.2 tcf a year.

The question I think related to: how much are we using, and what can we do about conserving some of it? Most certainly, in my

mandate, Mr. Chairman, conservation becomes part and parcel of our integrated energy strategy. We will be moving ahead. The Department of Environment continued to work with Climate Change Central with respect to looking at programs that assist people to be more fuel efficient and more conscious of their consumption.

With the consumption, of course, that we have and the exports that we have, the member alluded to: how do we continue to maintain a balance? Most certainly, we are working very diligently with respect to this issue. Part of our integrated energy strategy would be to provide for our customers internally in Alberta, Canada, and North America and globally a basket of products, Mr. Chairman, that we can go out and market that continues to provide Albertans with the maximum value for these resources.

With that, I'll leave it with the Minister of Environment to close his remarks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'll be brief as well and try and get time for the minister of health to get involved as well.

The member referred to threats versus opportunities in Environment. I think it's very true that there are some opportunities that we can deal with. It comes down to this whole issue of climate change, and do we see this as a threat or do we see it as an opportunity? There are very real issues related to climate change, but there also are opportunities. One is that if we can spend significant time and effort on the carbon management science and technology, there may be opportunities for us not only to control our own CO₂ but to export that technology and assist other countries and regions throughout the world in doing the same. So I think there's a good example.

He also talked about recycling, particularly with water. There are sort of two ways that we can recycle. One is at the home base, where you can have within an individual home two sets of pipes so that you have a double-flush toilet . . .

10:00

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Environment, but I'll now invite officials to leave the Assembly so that the committee may rise and report progress. I'd also like to thank them for their participation today.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(b) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Prins: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Energy, Environment, and Health and Wellness relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008. The committee reports progress and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:02 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 17, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/17

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of the Rockies, the denseness of our forests, the fertility of our farmland, the splendour of our rivers, the richness of our resources, the energy of our people. Then let us rededicate ourselves as wise stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a special treat today to introduce a former member of this Assembly who is seated in your gallery, Mr. Len Bracko. Mr. Bracko was first elected in 1993 as an Alberta Liberal Member for St. Albert. Before that, he was a teacher at St. Albert high school as well as an alderman in the city of St. Albert, and he is once again a councillor in the city of St. Albert. He's a wonderful servant of that city and of the entire province. I would ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of all members here.

Thank you very much.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all Members of this Legislative Assembly three very special guests seated in the members' gallery. The first is Mr. Darren Hill, who's a Saskatoon city councillor and president and CEO of Junior Achievement of Saskatchewan. Accompanying Darren is Jay Ball, president and CEO of Junior Achievement of Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories, and of course a very good public speaker, a past junior achiever and university student, Mr. Ryan Lim. They were all present yesterday at the wonderful celebration of Junior Achievement in this province, and together with the Minister of Education we enjoyed a wonderful evening of hospitality.

Once again, on behalf of all Albertans we extend to each and every one of you a sincere thank you for the effort and the time you spend with our students in all the schools and with junior achievers. Thank you so much. I ask you to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Legislature pedway has been the host site for several years for the annual Historica Fair, providing an opportunity for students from schools in the surrounding area to present projects celebrating Canada's heritage. This year the Legislative Assembly of Alberta initiated a new award to recognize an Historica Fair participant who demonstrates outstanding achievement in celebrating an aspect of Canadian parliamentary democracy, governance, or political history with a specific focus on Alberta.

It's now my pleasure to introduce the inaugural winner of this award, a grade 5 student who presented a most spirited and enthusiastic representation of the life and work of Nellie McClung, specifically her role as an Alberta MLA and one of the Famous Five. Please join me in congratulating Tierra Stokes, a grade 5 student from John Paul II school in Stony Plain. Tierra has also been invited to take part in the national fair, to be held this year in Lethbridge. She's accompanied by her mother, Mrs. Brenda Stokes, and her teacher, Mrs. Cory Berndt. If they would stand in the Speaker's gallery and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

As well, Mr. Speaker, we're always delighted to recognize young people who show such interest and initiative in participating in such events as the Historica Fair, and I'm pleased to welcome Colin Benesch, who is a grade 6 student who was chosen by his school to participate in the regional fair. He attends Leo Nickerson school in St. Albert, and he is accompanied by his father, Chris Benesch, also in the Speaker's gallery. If they would rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly three guests that I have here today. The first is Mrs. Rosemarie Oberg, who is a cousin of mine from Forestburg, Alberta. The second is Virginia Schorak, who is a friend from Forestburg, Alberta, and the third is well known to you and well known, certainly, to a lot of members in this Assembly, my wife, Evelyn Oberg. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 15 students from the Sturgeon composite high school in my constituency. Along with their teacher I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and an honour to introduce a group of volunteers from the constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs but, more particularly, from the neighbourhood of Dunluce. This week is Crime Prevention Week. Many volunteers throughout Alberta do magnificent things to limit and curb crime in our communities. Well, the Dunluce Crime Council has been chosen by the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security as a winner among this year's crime prevention programs. With us today is Alice Althouse, a manager of McMan Youth Services in north Edmonton; Donna Harasem, a capacity builder for the neighbourhood empowerment team, Edmonton Police Service, north division; Constable Neil North of the neighbourhood empowerment team, Edmonton Police Service, north division; and Maureen Morris, the resident manager of Lancaster Terrace in Dunluce. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure on behalf of the Member for Battle River-Wainwright to introduce

to you and through you to all the members of this House 15 students from Coronation school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Dan Kinakin, and parent helpers Terry Kopas, Terry Belcourt, Roxanne Canadine, Betty Tellier, and George Nichols. If you would please join me in welcoming them all with our traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 12 individuals from the inner-city schools' Breakfast for Learning program. This is an organization that promotes nutritional breakfasts for schoolchildren. They are in the gallery: Chelsey Chalifoux, Nelson Egbende, Nick Lannin, Cheyenne Moses, Meagen Pancel, Dave Sherburne, Don Turner, Deron Bilous, supervisor/teacher Nik Linden, supervisor/teacher Jayme Metzger, supervisor Val Wilbur of Breakfast for Learning, and Kay Joyce of Breakfast for Learning. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that all of my guests are here, but I will introduce the group that has arrived so far. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of concerned Alberta citizens. They're here today to say with one voice: enough is enough; we need rent stability and affordable housing. These guests were among the hundreds of people gathered on the steps to support the NDP's call for affordable housing and for rent guidelines. They're just a small fraction of the people who are affected by skyrocketing rent control increases. They're here to witness first-hand how the government responds to the calls for action from the NDP opposition. They are all seated in the members' and public galleries, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. First of all, I would like to introduce 15 members of CASA House who are here today to watch the proceedings and who are led by Ms Mary Johnston along with Najib Mohamed, Janet Cathro, Lyle Steele, Jamie Parry. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would like them now to stand and receive the welcome of the Legislature.

As well, I would like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Deron Bilous. Deron was born and raised here in Edmonton, received his bachelor of education degree from the University of Alberta, teaches English and phys ed at Inner City high, and he is our candidate in Edmonton-Centre for the next election. He is seated in the public gallery, and I would ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Rosalie Cristobal, Merla Jamandron, and Shirley Dalmacio. They are Palace Casino workers entering the 251st day on strike due to this government's failure to protect Alberta workers from unfair employers.

Rosalie has worked at the Palace Casino for five and a half years in the slots department. Rosalie is a very strong voice for her fellow workers, and she has spent many hours each week on the picket line.

Merla has been at the casino for almost three years in the slots department. She went on strike because the wages within her department are simply not enough to live on. When she's not working, Merla likes to spend time sewing, embroidering, and crocheting, and she gives all of her creations to her grandkids. She has five grandkids, ranging in age from eight months to 14 years of age.

Shirley has been at the casino for just over a year. When she is not being an advocate for workers' rights, you will find her either bowling or in her garden.

Rosalie, Merla, and Shirley are seated in the gallery, and I would ask now that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to introduce to you and through you today to the Assembly Harold Neth, one of my constituents who is a teacher and a member of the ATA's provincial executive council, one of three in Edmonton representing teachers in both locals. I'd like to ask Harold to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One other introduction for me, to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, is Sherry Robbins, who is an ATA district representative for the Edmonton public teachers' local. She is here to watch proceedings this afternoon carefully and to express her disapproval of the government's attitude towards teachers.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the summer STEP student for the Edmonton-Glenora constituency office, C.D. Saint. He has a BA from the University of Alberta in music and Canadian studies. In the fall he will be going to Austria for his master's degree in peace and conflict studies. Mr. Speaker, if you'd like to use him as a resource, I'd be glad to loan him. I invite him to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the members assembled Mr. Jim Sirup, vice-president of Jayman MasterBuilt, an organization supporting the Alberta MS Society. Jim is in the members' gallery. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Crime Prevention Week

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Crime prevention is about communities taking ownership of neighbourhood crime issues. It's

about families, businesses, all levels of government, and police working together towards a common goal of safe and secure communities.

May 13 to 20 is Crime Prevention Week in Alberta, and it's a good time to talk about what each of us can do to prevent crime in our communities. Our police do an excellent job every day preventing crime across the province, but every Albertan also has a role to play. Whether its kids, grandparents, businesspeople, homeowners, or renters, everyone has something to contribute in the fight against crime.

The efforts of individual Albertans are also being recognized. Every year the Solicitor General and Public Security crime prevention awards honour people and organizations whose actions have helped in preventing crime. This year, Mr. Speaker, the award ceremony is being held on Friday, May 18, in Calgary, and I extend my congratulations to the award recipients. I'm sure their actions will inspire others across Alberta to take action on crime-related challenges in their own neighbourhoods.

I'd like to extend a special congratulation to the Dunluce Crime Council, award recipients from my constituency. This group meets monthly to discuss community crime trends and develops action plans to address issues that arise. The Dunluce Crime Council also hosts community barbecues and cleanup projects to revitalize the neighbourhood.

Mr. Speaker, thriving and safe communities are made up of people who know each other, people who spend time with each other, and people who look out for each other. This week I encourage every Albertan to take the time to get to know their neighbours better and to work together to find ways to make their community safer.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

International Museum Day

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and speak about the importance of museums. Tomorrow, May 18, marks International Museum Day. Alberta is home to hundreds of museums, from those in our smallest rural communities to the world-renowned Royal Tyrrell Museum and Royal Alberta Museum.

Albertans and visitors outside of Alberta come to our museums and support our communities. Last year visitors spent \$30 million visiting 17 provincially owned museums and historic sites, generating an economic impact of over \$60 million to our province and helping to employ over 1,300 Albertans.

While museums have employment and economic benefits, more importantly, Mr. Speaker, they educate us, entertain us, and enrich us. As stewards of our past museums help us to understand and appreciate our heritage. At the same time, museums encourage us all to be responsible ambassadors for our future. They do this through collections, research, exhibitions, curriculum-based education, and lifelong learning opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, International Museum Day has been celebrated around the world since 1977 as a day to raise awareness of the value of museums. This year's theme for International Museum Day is Museums and Universal Heritage, reminding us that museums and all of us have a role in preserving and promoting our heritage.

And now for the really good news. To celebrate International Museum Day many of our heritage facilities will be offering free general admission on May 18. For the first time on International Museum Day Albertans and visitors to our province will be able to visit these historic sites at no charge for one day, an awesome opportunity for young and old to learn more about our great province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Albertans to remember how important our museums are. They're not just about our past; they're also about our potential. Museums share the Alberta story in all its dimensions while opening a window on the world for us all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May is Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month. The MS Society in Alberta kicked off the month by opening a new, expanded facility in Edmonton, which will offer even more education, support, and care to those who live with the chronic disease. This new facility was made possible in part by a grant from the Alberta government.

The grand opening of the facility featured a \$1 million gift from builder Jayman MasterBuilt. This gift will be used to improve multiple sclerosis care through education and research. I am pleased that Jay Westman, president of Jayman MasterBuilt, and his sister Diana Joseph, of Wen-Di Interiors, are represented today in the gallery by Jim Sirup, vice-president of Jayman MasterBuilt's home division.

There are more than 11,000 people affected by MS who receive care through community neurologists and through MS clinics in Calgary, Edmonton, and Red Deer. Access to the clinics, to the neurologists, and to the continuing care system throughout the province is vital. It's vital because Alberta has one of the highest rates of MS in the world, and that number is growing.

There is research being done which holds hope for new treatments and an eventual end to this devastating disease. The MS Society in Alberta is a leading investor in research being done at the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary.

However, a shrinking talent pool threatens to slow or stop the dramatic achievements made in recent years. The MS Society of Canada is building a program that will accelerate research so that new treatments and a cure can be discovered. It will also encourage young scientists and clinicians to choose MS research in Canada as their career path.

The MS Society in Alberta is doing what it can to improve the quality of life of Albertans with MS and to find a cure. So are donors like Jay and Diana, and they are to be commended.

Thank you.

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

1:20

AMPIA Awards

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 28 at the Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association dinner recipients of the Alberta film and television award, the Rosie, were announced. However, just to be nominated by a peer group is an award. There were 50 categories and on average five persons nominated for each.

Large numbers of professionals are required to make these movies, television shows, advertisements, and the written and musical scores. I was cheering for George and Sherri Gallant. They have Coulee Pictures, based in Lethbridge. Sherri is an awarded journalist. George as producer was nominated for best production reflecting cultural diversity. His documentary *Alone in Chinatown* is an amazing look at what remains of a very vibrant Chinese community in Lethbridge.

Chinatown has always been a part of Lethbridge's history. Of course, a fact of interest is the fact that some of the herbs and medicines found in their original jars were a hundred years old and

very valuable, but the knowledge that accompanies these herbs is beyond value.

This nomination is not the first nor will it be the last for Coulee Pictures. My frustration is: how do I and other Albertans access these productions? How can our young people interested in this industry examine nominated and winning works and learn from them? How about the general public just wanting to enjoy a good show?

I heard two days ago in this House how this government sent a thousand copies of a documentary by a Toronto filmmaker to schools across Canada. May I suggest that this government do the same for these award-nominated productions and send them to all the public, university, and school libraries across Alberta. In the past Alberta books were donated in this manner. There are four appropriate ministries that could cost share. What a legacy, visionary action, and benefit that all Albertans would use and enjoy.

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

Provincial Skills Competition

Mr. Herard: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday the Minister of Education as well as the members for Lethbridge-West, Calgary-Bow, Cardston-Taber-Warner, and I had the pleasure of attending the 15th annual provincial skills competition held here in Edmonton. This three-day Olympic-style event allows competitors from around the province to demonstrate and test their skills in their chosen craft. This year was no exception, with more than 600 of Alberta's most talented high school and postsecondary students and apprentices competing in more than 35 different areas of trades and technology. Competing disciplines range from automotive services to website design, electrical wiring to culinary arts. Winners will be competing in a national skills competition to be held in Saskatoon from June 6 to 9, 2007.

What is remarkable, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that many of the organizers who started this competition 15 years ago are still involved today. Karen Fetterly, from Alberta Education, and Terry Cooke, formerly from NAIT, were among the organizers of the first skills competition held at St. Joseph's high school in 1992. There were only eight events and 80 competitors involved back then, compared to the 35 events and 700 competitors today. Terry Cooke is now the national president of Skills Canada and also presides over WorldSkills Calgary 2009, when Calgary will host the international WorldSkills competitions in September 2009, with more than 40 countries competing in more than 40 skills, with thousands of students, experts, craftsmen, jurists, and parents from all over the world converging on Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, today's students are tomorrow's workers. The provincial skills competition is doing its part to ensure that our students are well prepared to leave school ready for the world of work.

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

Aga Khan Development Network

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Global poverty affects us all. Throwing money at it doesn't fix the problem. Give a hungry man a fish and you will feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you will feed him for a lifetime. We must find smart solutions.

Albertans, Canadians are some of the best in the world at innovating to build a better world for all of us. Health, education, rural development, the enhancement of nongovernmental organizations in the Third World require smart solutions. The Aga Khan Foundation Canada targets training and expert technical assistance to overseas

partners. It also sends young Canadians overseas to assist in international development.

The Aga Khan Development Network is a nondenominational group set up 40 ago years by His Highness the Aga Khan. It is dedicated to improving living conditions primarily in Asia and Africa. The members of the network share a common objective, which is to empower people to take charge of their own lives and environment. This network emphasizes community participation, the creation and use of local expertise, rigorous management of resources, use of appropriate technology, and ultimately self-sufficiency.

John Stackhouse in the *Globe and Mail* said, and I quote: through the Aga Khan world support program, Pakistan, more than 100,000 people have formed village groups that cover 3 out of 4 rural households in Northern Pakistan; they have built irrigation canals, schools, and health centres and pooled about \$10 million in savings; it has proved a textbook case of success. Unquote.

On Sunday, May 27, the Aga Khan Foundation Canada will be holding their 2007 World Partnership Walk in Edmonton. The opening ceremonies will start at 11 a.m. at our Legislature Grounds. Tens of thousands of Canadians in nine cities will come together to support this wonderful effort to alleviate global poverty. One hundred per cent of proceeds goes to programs. That is good. I wish all members, indeed all Albertans to support this walk.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This time I am tabling 27 signatures, mainly from Edmonton, on a petition that reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government . . . to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence in light of the ongoing rent affordability crisis which is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 211

Planning for the Future of Communities Act

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Currie I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act.

The purpose of Bill 211 is to provide a mechanism to plan for future sustainable communities where growth pressures are presenting a challenge to municipalities that have implications beyond their borders. This legislation will allow us to make rational and balanced decisions about the way we grow in the future, decisions that will strengthen our economy, promote a healthy and sustainable environment, and support a high quality of life for all Albertans.

This is enabling legislation that would allow the designation of certain geographical areas as growth plan areas and the development of plans to focus and guide the region's future development. These are goals deserving of this Legislature, and Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act, will allow us to achieve them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 211 read a first time]

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

Bill 212

Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, Bill 212.

[Motion carried; Bill 212 read a first time]

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ryley Landfill Project

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The landfill at Ryley, east of Edmonton, is poised to become the largest landfill in North America, yet nearby landowners and area residents have repeatedly raised concerns about adverse impacts on their lands and livelihoods and on the integrity of the environment. It has grown tenfold since it received original approval 15 years ago, and it hopes to grow much larger still, yet an environmental impact assessment has never been done, and impacts are accumulating. It's been piecemeal approval, typical of development in Alberta. To the Premier. The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, section 40(c), requires an impact assessment prior to approvals of large-scale developments. Will the Premier commit to getting an environmental impact assessment?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is talking about an approval establishing the landfill that goes back probably 12, 13, 14, maybe even 15 years. It's the county of Beaver and the regional landfill commission, and they have worked over the years with the Department of Environment, held extensive hearings. That area has been tested time and time again. The group bought a fair amount of land, a buffer zone, around that whole area. Extensive, extensive testing. If there is something, if the hon. member has a specific issue that we have not identified in the years and years of testing, I'd be willing to carry that forward.

Dr. Swann: Well, there are concerns, Mr. Speaker. Protection of groundwater and surface water is essential. It cannot be sacrificed to profit margins and other considerations. Leakage from the landfill site, known as leachate, is toxic and contaminates groundwater and surface water if there's poor design, poor maintenance, or flooding. Residents are concerned that the leachate systems were reported to have, quote, blockages or even collapsed without being fixed. Is the Premier confident that the landfill is being operated effectively to ensure maximum protection against contamination?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, today maybe there was someone who brought an issue forward to the hon. member. That development is in the constituency that I represent. I don't have a letter in hand today from any resident that said that there was some blockage. I watched some of that construction and toured the facility a number of times. We have, really, the latest technology applied there in the development. I guess that the best way to describe it is: one of the best natural bathtubs. It's blue clay. I can give much more information in terms of how impervious this is to any seepage.

Dr. Swann: We're also concerned about surface spray and spills as a result of flooding.

Mr. Premier, last year the landfill received approval to recirculate leachate, and concerned residents appealed it. At the appeal hearings the appeal board raised concerns about "important gaps in the scientific information . . . regarding possible negative impacts" when he made his original decision, including information on the effects of the toxic substances on the landfill's liner. To the Premier: is the Premier fully confident that critical environmental decisions on this landfill are being made on the basis of complete information and scientifically sound evidence?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I am confident in not only the engineering firms that have tested this but, of course, our staff in Alberta Environment. Again, if there is a specific concern, now is the time to send it to me personally. As I said, it's a development in my constituency, and I'd like to hear from the individual or individuals who had raised a concern. I've not received anything that I'm aware of in our constituency office but would certainly be willing to hear from those individuals.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Student Accommodation Costs

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard much over the past two weeks about the plight of Albertans on lower fixed incomes who face excessive rent increases. Alberta's postsecondary students are particularly susceptible to rent increases. This government's belated moves to increase the cost-of-living allowance will be completely negated by rent increases. My question is to the Premier. With Alberta's postsecondary institutions located in Edmonton and Calgary, does the Premier accept that the housing crisis presents a barrier, particularly for rural students, that may deter them from pursuing postsecondary education?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our government has a concern for all students in all communities. There are pressures, of course, in Grande Prairie, Lethbridge as well, and larger urban communities for students to find accommodation. That is one area that both the minister of municipal affairs and the minister of advanced education will be addressing: finding accommodation for students. It is a barrier. There's no doubt about it. It is increasing costs for those competing for space in these communities, so we are going to be addressing it.

Mr. Tougas: Caitlin Scruggs, a student at MacEwan College who wrote to the Official Opposition, certainly has a far better understanding of the housing situation than this government. She put it this way, and I quote: sometimes it seems that the boom in Alberta is only booming in the pockets of a few and busting the pockets of many. That's a pretty good definition of the price of prosperity. Students like her will have to take out bigger loans, and more will need hardship grants. Again to the Premier: what can the Premier say to this student and so many like her who are going to fall further and further into debt simply to keep a roof over their heads while they pursue their studies?

Mr. Stelmach: The college that the hon. member was referring to has of course just completed a large housing unit for students. I'm not quite sure if it has been fully subscribed, but it's millions of dollars of investment in housing. It's just another example of how we're working towards building more units in the province to reduce the pressures and increase the number of available units of housing.

Mr. Tougas: Alberta is the only province in Canada that allows its student residences to be charged municipal property taxes. At the University of Alberta alone that bill came to \$900,000 last year. Residences across the province pay millions of dollars to municipalities, and those dollars come from increased rents paid by students. There are two clear options for the government: either close the loophole that allows municipalities to assess property taxes on residences or pay the property tax. To the minister of municipal affairs: which of these two approaches will the minister take to ensure that, come September, students living in residence will have at least a slightly more affordable university experience?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of municipal affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government very much understands the challenges of students coming from rural Alberta to find housing, to find accommodation. That is why we have added funding for municipalities to try to address some of those issues as well through secondary suites. We have had discussions with universities. We've had discussions as well with student representative bodies, talking about housing and how we could best deal with those challenges.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Government Appointments

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears to Albertans that on the Premier's list of priorities, appointing political supporters is above integrity and transparency. The Premier's practice of rewarding his supporters is very clear. Just look at his cabinet. Mark Norris is the only one of the Premier's leadership supporters that has not received a cushy appointment. [interjections] Well, you can see. To the Premier: has the Premier had any communication with the minister in charge regarding the possible appointment of Mark Norris as an Olympic ambassador? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite sure some of the people sitting on the front bench here don't look at it as a cushy appointment.

I believe what the hon. member is talking about is that starting this evening and into tomorrow we'll be meeting with the government of B.C. This is the fifth time that both governments are meeting to discuss items of mutual interest to both provinces. We've come, really, so far ahead. What the hon. member is referring to is a letter that Premier Campbell sent to the province of Alberta, to me personally, to ask how we can work with the province of B.C. in terms of exposing more advertising for the province of Alberta during the upcoming Olympics.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the Premier again: does the potential appointment of a defeated Tory as an ambassador mean that the Premier is not confident that the minister of tourism is capable of doing his job to promote Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have tremendous confidence in my cabinet. In fact, they're all doing really great things for the province of Alberta.

Look, we're meeting with the province of B.C. They are our guests today, and all of this stuff being raised just takes away from the very positive story. Do you know what our attempt is? It's to build a much larger economic marketplace, build up western Canada

so we're a greater force within Canada, globally competitive around the world. There are so many positive things. Day in and day out just picking away, nibbling at the ankles: I don't know what it all means. You know, we're still going to stay focused.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

1:40

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again. The federal government publishes a guide showing government positions, rules for appointments, and compensation rates. This allows for an open process that prevents positions from being created to satisfy party loyalists. Will this Premier follow through on his promise of openness and transparency and create a similar guide for Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're way ahead of where the opposition is today. In fact, we do have a committee that was put together to review all boards, agencies, the way we appoint people to these agencies and commissions, and also a good governance model for both. We'll be bringing that report forward to the House once it's complete. It'll be a model, I think, that others can follow, and . . .

Mr. Agnihotri: This is their model. You show me yours.

Mr. Stelmach: The poor fellow gets excited over the smallest things.

We'll be bringing this forward this fall for further examination.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, when you utter the phrase, "You show me yours if I show you mine," it may lead us in opposite directions here.

The leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hate to sound a sour note on the day that the government is meeting with their soulmates, the Liberal government of British Columbia, but I have to ask this question. The rent crisis deepens, and this Premier has no answer. Alberta's NDP has heard from hundreds of Albertans faced with unaffordable rent hikes, and they get no answers from this government. They want action today, Mr. Premier. Will you help them?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are helping. Many times in the House I talked about the four-point plan.

I just want to cover one statement that was made with respect to our visitors to the province. The Premier of British Columbia coupled with the former Premier of this province have brought forward tremendous vision in terms of harmonizing regulations, reducing the trade barriers that we have between and amongst provinces. It is an agreement that's helped us. Other provinces are asking to join in to see how we can work together and reduce the \$14 billion worth of economic costs to Canadians as a result of provinces not being able to work together.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are close to a million Albertans who live in rental accommodation, and the Premier can't even be bothered to answer a question on that issue.

There's no new rental housing currently being built in Alberta. What little affordable housing that is going ahead will take between two and five years to become available. In the meantime, rents will continue to rise in this province for the next two to five years. Why doesn't this government take some real action for renters and support the Alberta NDP's proposal for temporary rent guidelines?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we held our convention a few weeks ago inside. Apparently, we should pick the stairs to hold it in the future.

I want to read you some housing stats: home base housing projects, 26 units, 17 affordable; Habitat for Humanity, low to moderate income, partnerships with every one involved, 40 units; the relocation project from Rotary, low-income single males, 20 units; North Bridge Suites in Ponoka, low to moderate single income, persons with special needs, 23 units; Heartland affordable housing project, town of Stettler, 30 units. To say that nothing is being done is absolutely nonsensical.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I have the government news release, and I'd like to inform the minister that this is all federal money. You haven't even put a nickel into this. It's 150 units. No units in Calgary. When are you going to get off your duff and do something for the renters of this province?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, let's keep trying. If he doesn't like that, how about the 200 at St. Michael's in Lethbridge? How about the 140 extended care in Lethbridge? How about the Medicine Hat Cypress View lodge, 40 more? This is all Alberta money. How about Spruce Grove? Or the 60 in Macleod Place? Or Sherwood Park, Summerwood Village, 30 more? Rosedale in Sherwood Park, 30 more? There are over 2,000 units on here that have been in the planning and in the works since 2005. So for the hon. member to suggest that nothing has been done or is being done is simply irresponsible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Capital Investment in Alberta

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oil prices rise and fall, are hot and cold like the seasons. Alberta knows the seasons. Capital investment, especially major projects investment, is the real driver in our booming Alberta economy. Many present projects were started in a climate of \$20 oil, but Alberta has high costs. Stability is the key to investment. Wages, income tax, royalties, and other revenues follow. At the Construction Owners Association conference yesterday in Edmonton it was reported that major investors have levelled off their investment plans for the coming years. My question is to the Minister of Finance. What is the minister doing to ensure that major investors in international investment sources continue to regard Alberta as a stable investment site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's an excellent and a very astute question. As a matter of fact, I attended the Alberta Chamber of Resources this morning, and they said exactly the same thing. Last week I had the opportunity of attending to bond agencies to private equity investors to the Wall Street people and the Bay Street people in both New York and Toronto, and the message that I wanted to send to them is that Alberta is still wide open, that

things are wonderful in Alberta, and that we would like them to invest in Alberta. The message I got back was a message of confidence from these people. Indeed, in going to Moody's and Standard & Poor's, the bond rating agency, they advised: well, I'm sorry, but we can't give you anything higher than triple A rating.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the same minister. The rest of Canada gains huge dividends in every province from the development of our energy reserves in Alberta. What are the estimated levels of economic activity in the rest of Canada that are the result of the Alberta boom?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again a very good question. What we have to remember in Alberta and in Canada in general is that when Alberta booms, the rest of the country benefits. CERI, the Canadian Energy Research Institute, has estimated that in the next 20 years there'll be \$885 million in spinoff benefits from the oil sands alone, and of that \$102 billion is designated for the rest of Canada. When it comes to federal taxes, we receive about \$17 billion in services from the federal government yet pay out \$32 billion. That \$15 billion goes directly to the federal government and other provinces. So the bottom line is that what happens in Alberta is good for the rest of Canada.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. The biggest benefit from large capital investments has been work for Alberta businesses and Alberta workers. They pay their taxes here and contribute to the community. Temporary foreign workers send their paycheques home. Foreign contractors do the same. Will the government be taxing temporary foreign workers and contractors to gain benefit for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much. Again an excellent and very astute question by the hon. member. Temporary foreign workers do pay taxes in Alberta. They pay taxes at exactly the same rate as any other worker in the province of Alberta, and it's money that is kept in Alberta. Yes, they do send money home, but that comes out of their net income. When it comes to foreign companies working in Alberta, if there is a treaty signed, then basically they do pay taxes here as well. They receive benefit from Alberta, and we want to ensure that they are putting their money back into Alberta as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Alberta/B.C. Joint Cabinet Meeting

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fifth annual Alberta/British Columbia joint cabinet meeting will be held tomorrow here in Edmonton. My questions are to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Can the minister give the House a general outline of what will be discussed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutillier: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One thing about this government and its Conservative principles, we work with those who have principles and want to keep taxpayers' money in

their own pocket. Unlike the Liberal opposition and New Democrats, who want to shut down economic growth like the oil sands, we are working on labour mobility. We are working with investment. On the agenda will be environmental issues, will be the Olympics. They want to learn from the Calgary Olympics, which is so important. We're going to be sharing with them best practices, and ultimately we are going to be demonstrating private/public partnerships. Alberta is viewed as a leader all over North America.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us what concrete results have come about from previous joint Alberta/B.C. cabinet meetings?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, it certainly is a pleasure working with a government with principles in British Columbia that have a plan about things that we have. Did you know that there were 25 agreements between both provinces that have helped the voters and the citizens of Alberta and British Columbia? Did you know that 7.8 million citizens benefit because of the principles we employ in this province, that B.C. wants to look toward sharing with us and them together. It's amazing that, ultimately, a Liberal government with good principles, unlike what we hear here, is something that can truly work in helping citizens . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the same minister. Can the minister advise us what will be discussed relative to the Alberta/B.C. trade investment and labour mobility agreement, TILMA, at tomorrow's joint cabinet meeting?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as you're aware, on April 1 we signed a monumental agreement with British Columbia. It is truly an economic juggernaut. Unlike the Official Opposition, who want to shut down development in Alberta, British Columbia is learning from Alberta. We're learning from British Columbia. Ultimately, the economic juggernaut that the rest of Canada is looking at is exactly why we are working collectively together with the Liberal government in British Columbia, who believe in the plan that this government is working on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

School Nutrition Programs

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hunger is often described as a real and persistent but hidden problem. It rears its head when a child is forced to show up for school with an empty belly, dreads having to go to the lunchroom, or makes excuses for not having their own meal. In a province as wealthy as Alberta it is unacceptable for that child to go hungry. It is here, though, where more than one in eight children live in poverty, and tens of thousands go to school hungry each day. To the Minister of Education: why does this province refuse to follow the lead of almost every other developed country and implement a comprehensive school lunch program?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, let's make sure that we understand that it is not the government's responsibility to feed, clothe, and shelter every child in Alberta. Therefore, we have a number of schools in Alberta, some 48 out of 62 school jurisdictions,

who do provide some sort of lunch program for those children in need. That's what we should be focusing on, children in need, not a blanket lunch program for every child going to school.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, let's look at it from an education point of view. A child who is hungry has difficulty concentrating, is more easily distracted, and may exhibit behavioural problems. Nineteen published studies connect participation in school nutrition programs with higher achievement on standardized test scores. Establishing healthy eating habits now can also prevent future problems with student performance and adult health. For a relatively tiny investment we can ensure that no child goes hungry and improve the long-term health and learning outcomes of all Alberta students. To the Minister of Education: why don't you make this an investment and get at it?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, that tiny investment would be added to the one that the hon. member yesterday suggested: that we increase the amount of funding so that we can give teachers salaries that exceed 5 and a half per cent. Then it adds to the one in the estimates yesterday that he talked about: that we need to increase our funding for disabilities by in excess of 6 and a half per cent. Then there's another one here where the hon. member is suggesting that our program unit funding go beyond kindergarten and go to grade 3. There's a whole list of them here. By the time this Liberal plan would be implemented, we'd be at \$10 billion for education and saving 30 per cent in the heritage fund. Booga-booga.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thought the budget was to be discussed this afternoon.

Anyway, let's try this one. Alberta is the only province in this country that does not directly support school breakfast or lunch programs. In Canada other provinces have taken the lead, Mr. Speaker. This year the Ontario government, which is Liberal, will provide meals to over 270,000 students in close to 3,000 sites across the province. To the Minister of Education again. Can you answer this question? How can Alberta have the best kindergarten to grade 12 system in the world that he tells us about when other provinces are much more dedicated to the nutrition and health of their students?

Mr. Liepert: The easy answer to that question is that I could say, "Yes, I can answer the question," and sit down because that's what the question was. However, I think I want to continue here, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we had the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford suggesting that we write a cheque for \$6 billion or \$7 billion to pay off the unfunded liability. I think we're now up to \$16 billion, \$17 billion a year on education under the Liberal plan, that is going to first of all take 30 per cent out of the nonrenewable revenue and put it in the heritage fund, which I don't disagree with, and they're only going to increase spending by 2 per cent across the board. It's unbelievable.

The Speaker: There will be a point of order raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, obviously, with this exchange that has just gone on. I'll ask both of the members to be there.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Removal of Home Care Ceiling

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's been a very welcome decrease in wait times for my constituents in Calgary

emergency rooms due to recently improved processes at the Calgary region. However, the region still cites a shortage of hospital beds, clogging the emergency room access. In turn, they point to a lack of long-term care beds clogging up the availability of hospital beds. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what can we as a province do to help address this situation?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was quite a lot of noise, and I didn't catch the full gist of the question, but if I understood it correctly, it was: what can we do to add more long-term care beds so that people who are currently in acute-care beds who should be in long-term care will free up those beds so that we can get more access from emergency? If I caught that correctly, I guess there's a whole strategy relative to that. We do need to add long-term care capacity, but where we're adding even more capacity is in the continuing care end and at the home care side. The hon. member might be aware that there was an announcement with respect to home care where we took the \$3,000 per month cap off. That will go some way to assisting in this area. It is a complex issue. Since the Broda report more beds have been added in continuing care, designated assisted living, and long-term care to help deal with that issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: can the minister explain how the removal of this home care funding cap will specifically address the needs of younger Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Often when we talk about long-term care, we think of it in terms of seniors. The reality is that there are a number of younger Albertans as well who have care needs which create a dependency. They need to either be in long-term care or they need assistance to stay at home; they need the assistance of a home care aide. By removing the cap of \$3,000 per month, a number which hasn't been adjusted for a considerable number of years, regional health authorities can work with individuals and their families to ensure that they have the supports they need so that if living at home is a choice, they'll be able to manage it within the dollars available.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week members of the Alberta Liberal caucus met with labour leaders representing a wide diversity of Alberta workers and professionals. Labour plays a critical role in Alberta not only in ensuring fairness and safety for workers but also ensuring the economic strength of Alberta. Unfortunately, this Conservative government has too often ignored their concerns and marginalized their voices. My questions are to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. The number of temporary foreign workers will soon double from 25,000 to 50,000, yet many unions report significant numbers of underemployed or unemployed skilled tradespeople from right here in Alberta. How can the minister claim that all of these temporary foreign workers are needed when we still have skilled Albertans ready and waiting for work?

2:00

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it's quite correct that there are frequently workers that are not employed where other jobs exist, and simply put, in many cases these workers refuse or choose not to take jobs in remote or outlying locations. Frequently that has been the issue. I've spoken with some of those people, for example, in the greater Edmonton community that have deliberately chosen for their own reasons not to take those jobs in remote locations. So there may be Albertans available to work, but they're not in the right place. I somewhat resent the implication that this ministry is not meeting with the labour unions. I have met with the labour unions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has claimed that employment standards protect all workers, including foreign temporary workers, yet this claim ignores the fact that workers seeking protection have to come forward with complaints. As the minister well knows, these temporary foreign workers have limited mobility rights, often language problems, and their jobs may be at risk if they come forward. Will the minister commit to a reasonable, realistic inspection program to ensure that foreign temporary workers are fully protected by employment standards and can come forward and complain?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, two nights ago the hon. member opposite that has just tabled the question was here when I explained that we hired 72 more workers in our department principally for the reason of enforcement of occupational health and safety and labour standards, investigators that will do just that. As testimony to the belief that the unions have that we're doing a good job, I have a letter from a Mr. Gil McGowan. He was highly complimentary. He could hardly believe his eyes when he read our budget and realized that this government is . . .

An Hon. Member: Will you table that?

Ms Evans: I would be pleased to table that letter the next week because, Mr. Speaker, I don't have it in front of me. But I think he was very pleased to see that we are putting our money where our mouth is.

Dr. B. Miller: These same labour groups that we met with are deeply concerned about the trade investment and the labour mobility agreement, or TILMA. The process behind this agreement was profoundly undemocratic. The government did not consult with the public before signing TILMA. The government did not properly consult with labour groups before signing TILMA. The only people the government did consult with were those they wanted to. That is not democracy. Will the government, therefore, commit to having a full debate in this House so that we can deal with the issues, the concerns that labour groups have so that we can better understand this agreement?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, further to TILMA agreement, I know that the minister of intergovernmental and aboriginal affairs will respond, but could I just say that we have not had those concerns expressed. We have had officials meeting with British Columbia officials. They're currently meeting on foreign certification and are very satisfied that we're working through some of the issues on certification. But about the agreement itself, to my colleague.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the preamble was 100 per cent totally inaccurate balderdash. We have consulted. We continue to consult. Furthermore, Chambers of Commerce, as I mentioned, the association of nurses had indicated their contribution towards this consultation process. We are in the Legislature now with it. Nothing could be further from what the hon. member has said relative to his preamble to the question.

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

Food Safety in Restaurants

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The restaurant and food business is vital to Alberta's economy and enriches our cultural diversity and quality of life. A recent discovery of a Calgary restaurant kitchen worker with hepatitis A has led the Calgary health region to issue a rare public warning. This affects a number of people directly and scares a lot more Calgarians. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. What are our government's policies and enforcement laws to prevent such health scares and threats to the public confidence in the restaurant business?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each regional health authority has a medical officer of health, and each regional health authority is responsible for ensuring public safety, making sure the public is protected when infectious diseases such as hepatitis A are confirmed. The Calgary health authority in this case took immediate steps to ensure public safety when the case of a food handler at the Wildwood Grill & Brewing Company was confirmed. The health authority issued a public alert to advise patrons who ate food at the Calgary restaurant from April 30 to May 13 that may have been exposed to hepatitis A. The health region has been holding public vaccination clinics throughout the week, and several hundred people have already been vaccinated as a preventative measure. The region indicates that the restaurant has been providing full co-operation during the investigation. In short, it must be made public, and it must be dealt with.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that prevention is better than a cure, does our government have laws or regulations that require health screening for restaurant food handlers or similar measures?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Public Health Act food regulations require food establishments with six or more employees on the premises to have at least one management or supervisory staff member who is trained in food safety and hygiene on-site during the hours of operation. The regional health authorities work closely with food establishments to ensure that food regulations are understood and followed. Courses in food safety and hygiene are offered at SAIT, NAIT, the Red Deer College, and through regional health authorities as well as through a number of private education providers. There are currently more than 50,000 food service workers certified in food safety and hygiene in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, it's not always easy to detect a disease like this early, but when it is detected, then there are mechanisms in place to make sure that the public is protected after the fact.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. In general, can the minister inform us of the effectiveness of the food service health safety inspection program in terms of inspections, number of violations, and remedies?

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Mr. Speaker, Albertans can be confident of the safety and quality in our food system. Health inspections of food establishments are performed by public health inspectors employed by local health regions. We depend on the health regions to use their judgment and local expertise as to how they can best ensure public health. In this case the Calgary health region exercised prompt action to protect the public.

As we discussed last night, there's also a pilot project happening with the Capital health authority with respect to the posting of health inspection reports on the Internet. If the pilot project works out, it will be expanded across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Affordable Housing (continued)

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The housing crisis is going to get worse before it gets better. Canada Mortgage and Housing has made that very clear, but this government stubbornly refuses to even consider rent guidelines because of the triumph of ideology over common sense. But at the very minimum, then, what they should be doing is telling us exactly what is affordable housing. How much of a person's income should be going towards housing? My question is to the minister of municipal affairs. What is the government's definition of affordability?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is talking about rent supplements, this government has a policy at the present time that an individual should not pay more than 30 per cent of his or her salary towards housing. At that time there is a program, the rent supplement program that does support individuals, to support them with that cost.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, then I'm sort of confused why the government would not accept from the task force when it says to adopt a consistent definition of affordable housing for policy and program development. It is 30 per cent. That's a standard thing. But the government doesn't accept the task force's recommendation, yet the minister is saying that 30 per cent is the case. Why didn't you accept that when the task force said it?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government did not accept it because we are already doing it. At the same time, we are having consultation with municipalities, with different groups and making sure that we do have the right definition of the needs of low-cost housing for individuals.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that doesn't make any sense at all. You reject the recommendation; the government does, yet you say that you're doing it. Why wouldn't you accept it? The sad reality is that

more and more people are spending 40, 50, 60, 70 per cent of their income on accommodation. That's why they didn't want to accept the recommendation. Is that, in fact, the case, Mr. Minister?

2:10

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, precisely, with the forecast that we're going to get even worse into a housing crunch, why would the members from the ND want us to impose rent controls, which are shown to be a disaster in building new things? You know, after they get rent controls, then they can go to price controls, and then they can go to wage controls, and then they can control every little part of their lives, and that's a wonderful utopia. I also want to tell you about \$2.5 million to the Polish seniors for affordable housing here in Edmonton or the \$1.5 million to the Vietnamese senior affordable housing, 62-unit housing. Rather than sit and live and try and talk about what rent controls or price controls would do, get on with it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Gasoline Prices

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Striking a balance between landlords and tenants is one area where the market needs to be monitored and, at times, regulated. Retail gasoline pricing is another. To the President of the Treasury Board. Alberta drivers are puzzled and angry at how gasoline prices keep going up for no apparent reason, and with the latest hikes they are particularly upset. Notwithstanding that this minister, myself, and all members of this House get our gas paid for by the taxpayers, does he have an explanation to give to those Albertans who actually do have to pay at the pump?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, when the price of gas goes up, the price goes up at the pumps. That's pretty simple. Gas is a commodity that is dealt with on a global basis. We are part of it. There's a danger in thinking that somehow we're isolated from the global economy. If the hon. member wishes to look on the Internet or go into the newspapers and see what the price of gas around the world is – across Canada, through the continental United States, or other areas – and look at what we get from gas in the way of taxes and the comparatives in the production and to the delivery and retail part of gas, he would see that even compared to the early '20s and '30s, when it was a far greater cost, we're still getting gas at a relatively . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The price of crude has not changed from 2001 till today. The price at the pump has changed. When the price of gasoline goes up, everything else gets more expensive, like food, for example. So this issue has implications. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has just released a study demonstrating that there seems to be no correlation whatsoever between the cost of crude – and then you add refining and marketing upcharges and then you add taxes and normal profit margins – on the one hand and then what we actually pay at the pump on the other. Every penny per litre adds more than \$1 million to the net bottom line of the oil and gas industry. What would the President of the Treasury Board's response be to these findings, and is he at all concerned that motorists are actually hurt at the pump?

Mr. Snelgrove: Absolutely. Mr. Speaker, if you were to go in and control the price of fuel, if this is another one of the good opposition

things – we've got to control the price of fuel so that people don't have to pay – then things like conservation efforts don't work. If we're going to reduce – and you need to agree that most of the people have said: if you let the price work, then conservation methods, which are truly the best way to control prices, work. When you artificially lower the price of gas, all of the efforts you use to conserve energy, which is ultimately what we're trying to do, fail.

The Speaker: There was a point of order raised there, which we'll deal with at the conclusion.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. Third question.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question here is investigating potential gouging. We're not asking for regulation of prices at the pump. When I introduced Bill 202 in this House earlier this session calling for better consumer protection, the President of the Treasury Board and many members of his own government caucus adamantly rejected the idea, claiming that consumers don't need any extra protection and that the market works just fine; thank you very much. One of their stock answers was that Service Alberta already has the mechanisms in place to monitor the marketplace. Can the minister tell us who in Service Alberta today is investigating potential gasoline price gouging at the pump, and if no one is, will he start an investigation?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's the gouge of the day. You know, it can be rents. It can be gasoline. It might be lettuce tomorrow. Whatever the Liberals feel is the important thing today, if it doesn't fit within their perfect little guidelines of how socialism works, it's gouging. The federal government competition bureau has investigated many, many times the price of gasoline. They have concluded that there is not collusion between them. It is a commodity that moves up and down. Is it difficult for business? Absolutely. Is it difficult on people that have to have gas to drive? Completely. That's why we need to make sure that we reflect the real price so that the conservation message we're trying to send gets through: that carpooling and LRT are all driven by something else.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Forest Industry Sustainability

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne has a strong forestry base. As such, it's largely dependent on the forest market globally. Other countries have significant competitive advantages, such as short growth cycles, much lower transportation costs, and companies with mills located right next to their plantations, just to name a few. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given these competitive advantages in other jurisdictions, is Alberta's forest industry resilient enough to withstand the current down cycle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity last week to attend a PricewaterhouseCoopers conference in Vancouver on the Canadian forestry industry's place in the global economy. The message was not an encouraging one, as the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne indicates. In addition to the fierce competition from around the globe, we're looking at the problems with the pine beetle, higher costs, and also the export tax associated with the

softwood lumber agreement. However, I have met with Alberta forestry companies. We've consulted on a competitiveness project, and I expect to receive very shortly a report on competitiveness and look forward to implementing and working with the industry on those initiatives.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that answer, you know, communities that depend on the forest industry, such as the one that I live in, Whitecourt, are very concerned about this. With the answer that the minister has given, I'm really concerned about the prospects for the sustainability of forest-based communities and the industry within it. Can he comment on what those prospects are for our communities that host these large forest companies?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, again referring back to the PricewaterhouseCoopers conference that I was at in Vancouver last Thursday, I do believe that what I heard was that there is light at the end of the tunnel in the median sense. A number of speakers pointed out that our forestry industry is next to the largest market in the world. Right now that housing market is depressed, but they expect it to come back in the next two years, by 2009, so there is light at the end of the tunnel.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'd like some clarity from the minister and his department on what he's doing to encourage our Alberta companies to diversify or to alter their practices in order to remain competitive.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again referring back to the conference I attended in Vancouver last week, there were a number of speakers that emphasized that global warming and fuel shortages create some new opportunities, unique opportunities for our forestry industry. A speaker from Finland indicated that if the forestry industry takes advantage of technology, it can contribute to mitigating climate change, mitigate the cost of climate change, and also develop future profitable business in alternative fuels. So we're working with Alberta industries in a number of ways to facilitate those opportunities.

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

Affordable Housing

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of my constituents is a single parent who is renting in a building that the family considers unlivable, with mould, ants, and an unresponsive landlord. They believe there is a connection between their living conditions and repeated trips to the emergency room and doctor for respiratory problems. Although they've tried to find other subsidized housing, they're told that they face a two-year wait-list. My first question is to the minister of housing. What advice does the minister have for this family, who has to decide between unhealthy accommodations or being on the street?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, I want to say that we would very much ask that individual to either contact our office or contact the president of . . . [interjections] Anyway, what happens is that there are guidelines in the tenancy act that should ensure that there is a standard of quality, so it has to be brought forward.

Ms Blakeman: Indeed it does, Mr. Minister, but if they bring in public health and public health certifies that that's an unsafe condition, they're out on the street now with no place to go and a two-year wait-list. What advice does the minister give to this family when those are the conditions they're facing?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly why we have the opportunity for individuals to come to EII, and I'll let the minister continue.

2:20

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, at lunch I had the privilege of speaking to people from our west-end office, who are very pleased to intake any person just exactly like the hon. member has described, assess their situation. Without having a director make a decision, they can look to whether or not these folks need income as a temporary basis for emergencies, whether they need any other provision for a place to live, and if there is a health hazard, our staff are very equipped to contact the proper health authority.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. You guys do not get this.

To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: is this government going to increase benefit programs so that low-income Albertans and Albertans already on benefit programs – they're not going to qualify for anything more according to your criteria – can maintain homes in the exploding housing market that this government refuses to regulate with rent caps? You've got them coming and going.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, the beauty of the programs offered by this government is that even if they are on an income support program that of itself does not increase, there are other programs available to supplement that program on an emergency and as-needed basis. Yes, we are prepared to look after people, vulnerable people, wherever we can help them to make sure that they don't face what the hon. member has described as homelessness or eviction. We have had meetings arranged with these people. There are not an overwhelming number of people coming forward, but those that are coming forward are being cared for.

The Speaker: Hon. members, during the QP we had 82 questions and answers and two points of order, which we'll get to momentarily.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of correspondence between myself and the Member for Edmonton-McClung. The correspondence relates to comments made in this House on March 21, 2007, in which the member referenced an alleged incident involving a disabled inmate in one of our correctional facilities.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition, the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Jason Rutledge, who is a young teacher in the second year in the profession: a very thoughtful letter expressing concerns about educational issues, the strains on funding and salaries, and the unfunded teachers' pension liability.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling a letter from Kent Ashbey. Mr. Ashbey is currently a resident of Athabasca who is very concerned about rent gouging, impending increases, and homelessness because the government refuses to protect Albertans by introducing temporary rent guidelines.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Construction Sector Council recently published the Construction Looking Forward document. I'm tabling a graph from that document shown to about a thousand delegates at the Construction Owners conference yesterday showing the levelling of oil sands investment.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, do you have a tabling?

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate amount of copies of a letter from Gerry Brin, and he is expressing some difficulties that he's had with the police.

Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today: the first tabling, answers to questions raised in Committee of Supply by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on May 8, and a copy of a letter to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona in response to a question that he raised in the House yesterday.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday evening I had the pleasure along with my colleague from Calgary-Varsity of attending the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' gala stewardship dinner and awards ceremony. I'd be pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the program outlining the 17 nominees for stewardship awards, including the four winners.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an analysis advocating rent guidelines for Alberta prepared by Professor David Hulchanski, who is the director of the Centre for Urban and Community Studies at the University of Toronto.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms. Tarchuk, the Minister of Children's Services, responses to questions raised by Mrs. Mather on May 3, 2007, Department of Children's Services 2007-2008 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Knight, Minister of Energy, responses to questions raised by Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Hinman on May 3, 2007, Department of Energy 2007-2008 main estimates debate.

head:

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms. Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(6) I would like to request of the Government House Leader that he share with the Assembly the projected government business for the following week.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Next week being a constituency week, we will reconvene during the week of May 28. Of course, on Monday there is no government business, it being private members' day. In the evening the estimates in Committee of Supply for the Solicitor General and Public Security, Justice and Attorney General, and Advanced Education and Technology. The Liberal caucus will be on deck there.

On Tuesday, the 29th, after Orders of the Day, time permitting, we would proceed with Government Motion 21 and anticipating government motions 23 and 24, those three motions being referral motions referring bills 1, 2, and 31 to policy field committees; also available, should time permit, bills 26, 32, 33, 39 in second reading. Obviously, there won't be time for all of those, but one of those would proceed if time permitted. Commencing at approximately 2:45, Advanced Education and Technology and Education would be in Committee of Supply with the New Democrat caucus questioning. Time permitting, after Committee of Supply that afternoon the same order of business that I mentioned before Committee of Supply. In the evening in Committee of Supply the Finance, Service Alberta, and Environment departments.

On Wednesday, May 30, in the afternoon the same order of government business that I mentioned because, of course, with the limited amount of time only a portion of that would get done. In Committee of Supply in the afternoon Energy, Infrastructure and Transportation, Sustainable Resource Development, Environment, and the government business that I mentioned. In the evening in Committee of Supply Agriculture and Food, Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, and Justice and Attorney General.

On Thursday, May 31, after Orders of the Day again the same government business that I mentioned in terms of motions and bills and in Committee of Supply Sustainable Resource Development, International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, and Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Speaker, one other government motion that may be on deck which is on the Order Paper is Motion 22 with respect to evening sittings. It's not in projected government business at the moment, but I thought I should mention that it could be brought forward as business should we determine that we'll need those evening sittings to deal with the pieces of government business that I mentioned. As I say, it's not on projected government business now because at the current time we don't anticipate needing it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, two purported points of order. On the point of order that will be raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I provided to both the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and the Minister of Education a copy of the draft of the *Blues* to this point in time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon the Minister of Education in his response to a question from the Member for St. Albert I believe contravened our Standing Order 23(h) and 23(i). As you know, 23(h) involves making "allegations

against another Member,” and 23(i) involves imputing “false or unavowed motives to another Member.”

Mr. Speaker, I’ve had the opportunity, as you just pointed out, to review the draft copy of *Hansard*, and the exact quote that is represented there from the minister says, “Yesterday we had the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford suggesting that we write a cheque for \$6 billion or \$7 billion to pay off the unfunded liability.” Well, that, in fact, is simply not the case. I would suggest that this is where he is making false allegations and imputing false or unavowed motives. In fact, yesterday afternoon the President of the Treasury Board did the same thing, and I should have called a point of order then. I didn’t, but I’m certainly more than . . .

2:30

The Speaker: Let’s stick with what we’re on now. Let’s not lead this astray, please.

Mr. R. Miller: Sure. Mr. Speaker, then I would like to draw your reference to the *Hansard* from yesterday afternoon. My question as it was presented to the Minister of the Treasury Board said, “My question is for the President of the Treasury Board. Will he admit that it’s a fiscally responsible thing to do to pay down this unfunded liability now . . .”

Mr. Speaker, I never suggested once, nor has the Official Opposition suggested at any time, that we pay off the unfunded liability in its entirety now. We have never at any point suggested that the government write a cheque for \$6 billion or \$7 billion. That’s not ever been a part of what we’ve said. Just to be clear, it was page 1185 of yesterday’s *Hansard*.

The Minister of Education went on to talk about the Official Opposition now having a total of \$16 billion or \$17 billion a year in our education budget. I would challenge him to show us where he gets that number because, again, that’s simply not the case, Mr. Speaker. He also goes on at the end of his reference today to suggest that we also want to put 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenue into the heritage savings trust fund. That again is not the case. If he would read the policy that has been tabled in this Legislature, he would see that, indeed, we do wish to save 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenues in a number of different funds, a percentage of which would certainly go into the heritage savings trust fund.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, he indicates that we would only increase spending by 2 per cent across the board. Again, this is simply not the case. It is very clear in the policy that was tabled in this Legislature that spending would increase by both the cost of inflation because those numbers are in 2005 dollars and also by the rate of growth of population.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you that the minister has contravened 23(h) and (i) on several fronts but, most specifically, on my exact wording yesterday, which asked the government to pay down the unfunded liability, not to pay it off.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On this point of order, Hon. Minister of Education?

Mr. Liepert: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to quote yesterday from *Hansard* with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. He does say, “My question is for the President of the Treasury Board. Will he admit that it’s a fiscally responsible thing to do to pay down this unfunded liability now, when we have money available to do so” – this is the important thing – “thereby saving taxpayers tens of billions of dollars in future payments?” Well, if

we’re going to pay down the unfunded liability by a couple of thousand bucks, we’re hardly going to save tens of billions of dollars. I’m suggesting in my answer today that if we’re going to save tens of billions of dollars, we’re writing a cheque for somewhere around \$6 billion or \$7 billion. I rest my case.

The Speaker: *Beauchesne’s*, page 151, has a very interesting section called Acceptance of the Word of a Member, section 494:

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

This may very well be one of those rare occasions, and both members were given an opportunity to clarify their positions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise on a point of order today referencing section 23(h) of the Standing Orders. It basically pertains to Oral Question Period today in an exchange between myself and the hon. Minister of Service Alberta, the President of the Treasury Board.

The questions that I was asking of the hon. minister were all pertaining to potential price gouging at the pump, gasoline price gouging. Section 23(h) basically talks about making allegations against another member. I would argue that it actually represents a case where the hon. minister made allegations not only against myself but against the entire Alberta Liberal caucus and the Official Opposition.

Unlike the point of order discussed earlier, I don’t have the Blues in front of me, Mr. Speaker, and I’m not sure if you yourself have them yet. However, the hon. minister alleged that one day we are asking for rent regulation or control and that today we’re asking for the same thing for gasoline. I would argue that the hon. minister did not correctly hear my questions. There seems to be a trend with this government where they don’t actually reply to what we actually said on the record. They reply to what they thought we would say. The question was about consumer protection and investigating potential price gouging. It wasn’t about ideology or where the Liberals are coming from or where the Conservatives are coming from.

Now, although I’m not terribly offended by the hon. minister’s response – and as a matter of fact, we on this side of the House have gotten accustomed to this tactic used by the government time and time again – I am more interested, Mr. Speaker, in the hon. minister retracting that comment in the interest of setting the record straight. This allegation is not founded. We didn’t raise it in question period today, nor was it ever mentioned in stated Alberta Liberal policy. Basically, the minister either did not hear the question because of the noise in the House or chose to reply to something that wasn’t part of my question and part of my preamble, particularly on the second part of my question.

Mr. Speaker, I humbly request that the hon. minister retract that comment. Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I honestly have to tell you that I truly hoped and felt that the first time I would be called on a point of order it would be more spectacular than this. I am very disappointed that somehow this is a point of order. Honestly, after listening intently to his suggestions about what I may have done, I am very disappointed that it will go down in *Hansard* that that was my first,

probably not my last, point of order. I have no idea what he would really like me to apologize for.

The Speaker: I take it there are no further ones.

Earlier this week, May 15, 2007, at page 1139 of *Hansard*, I indicated – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung basically stated this in his statement – that the rules apply to members, not to caucuses. I do not have a copy of the Blues; they're not here right now. But this appears to be pretty much a disputation of some facts.

It also has something to do with the preambles that come with the questions as well that lead to a lot of increasing debate rather than questions. The members themselves have written the rules about 45 seconds/45 seconds, and the chair will enforce that, but it also leads to this kind of a dialogue and debate. I think we had some clarification here this afternoon, which is good work on behalf of all of the members.

head:

Orders of the Day

Mr. Hancock: A brief point of order, if you'll permit me, Mr. Speaker. I made an error under Projected Government Business. The paper I was reading from was not accurate, and it may have to be corrected.

The Speaker: Well, okay. Might we have unanimous consent, then, to revert to the point of our Routine which allows the hon. Government House Leader to respond to a question from the hon. Official Opposition House Leader about the upcoming schedule?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

head:

Projected Government Business (reversion)

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My apologies to the House. I'll be more accurate in the future.

On the 28th in Committee of Supply in the evening it is the Solicitor General and Public Security, Justice and Attorney General, and Advanced Education and Technology, and it is the Liberals' day.

In the afternoon of the 29th Advanced Education and Technology and Education, and it is the New Democrats' afternoon. In the evening it is Finance, Service Alberta, and Environment, and that is the Liberals' evening.

I neglected to mention, I think, that on the 30th in the afternoon and the evening the departments are correct, but those are private government members' days.

On the 31st, again, the departments were correct, but it's a Liberal day.

Thank you.

head: 2:40

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

head:

Main Estimates 2007-08

Education

The Chair: Items for discussion today are the departments of Education and Agriculture and Foods, and I understand that it's an hour and a half allocated for each one, roughly. We'll start with the Minister of Education.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Today I am pleased to present the Education budget for the 2007-2008 fiscal year. Before I do, I should again introduce my deputy minister, Keray Henke. We did have the opportunity yesterday to answer a number of questions from our opposition members, and hopefully we'll get to answer the rest of them today.

This year's budget totals just over \$5.6 billion, which is an increase of \$195 million or 5.2 per cent more funds for the classroom over the previous year. Some specifics are: \$4.2 billion in operating support to school boards, \$357 million for the teachers' pension plan, \$144 million for accredited private schools, \$87 million for basic education programs that support school boards such as the learning resource centre, high-speed networking, technology, and provincial Microsoft licensing, those sorts of items.

There's \$86 million for program and ministry support – that, of course, being our department – and \$925 million for school facilities. I want to repeat that: almost a billion dollars for infrastructure, which includes \$417 million for plant operations and maintenance and \$508 million for the infrastructure portion of that expenditure.

All school authorities will receive a 3 per cent increase in operational grants for the 2007-2008 school year. In addition, other grant adjustments reflect the initial planning and development of strategies to address the three priorities in the Premier's mandate letter. Of course, they are explore early learning opportunities, improve high school completion rates, find a reasonable solution to the teacher's unfunded pension liability, and a fourth one that I've added, which is build schools where students live and learn.

Seven million dollars this year is going to be added to provide early learning opportunities for children as young as three and a half with English as a Second Language programming. Early childhood services programs for children aged three and a half to six years with mild or moderate special needs or as young as two and a half to six years with severe needs are available for children who are enrolled in a recognized program, whether at their local school or an accredited private ECS operator such as Head Start.

A \$2 million dollar increase is to extend English as a Second Language funding to accredited private schools; \$4.5 million is to support improvements toward existing career and technology studies, facilities, and equipment; a \$33 million increase for special-needs funding; an \$11 million increase in transportation funding and continuation of the 15 and a half million dollar fuel price contingency fund; \$6 million in new funding for technology initiatives, including more video conferencing suites; \$9 million for enhancing teachers' skills and abilities and the implementation of new curricula, which includes the third year of social studies implementation and the first year of math implementation.

Provincial support for the small class size initiative will increase by \$35 million, which is a 21.7 per cent increase, and that's for the retention of 2,500 new teachers who were hired under the initiative to maintain reduced class sizes. This brings funding to \$194.5 million this fiscal year, which will provide all school jurisdictions with a 3 per cent increase in their class size funding. The total government funding for CSI to date is about one-half billion dollars, almost \$500 million to reduce class sizes throughout Alberta schools.

In addition, the government continues its support for innovation and student learning through its \$73 million commitment to the Alberta initiative for school improvement, better known as AISI. Students and young children with special health needs will also benefit from the continued investment of more than \$44 million to the 17 student health partnerships across the province. These partnerships provide access to health care professionals and related support services. Under Budget 2007 funding for the student health

initiative will increase from \$41.7 million to \$44.2 million, an increase of two and a half million dollars, or some 6 per cent.

I'd like to deal briefly with school infrastructure. The government has provided significant funding for school infrastructure in the past and continues to do so. A total of nearly \$1.3 billion over the next three years has been allocated for previously announced projects. The 2007-2010 capital plan includes funding for 71 previously announced new or major modernization projects, including 12 schools to be opened in 2007-2008. An additional 8,226 new student spaces will be opening in this coming school year across the province. In the 2007-2008 budget a total of \$508 million is allocated for school facilities infrastructure, with \$96 million directed toward the infrastructure maintenance and renewal grants to school boards for school building upgrades or to improve school energy efficiency.

The capital plan also includes an additional \$300 million over the next three years, which has not yet been allocated to individual school projects. The government will examine alternative procurement methods to deliver school infrastructure, and this allocation of \$100 million per year over the next three years should help to drive some creative solutions for school construction. Treasury Board is taking a lead in planning on behalf of government.

I'd like to deal briefly with the teachers' unfunded pension liability. It's one of the priorities the Premier assigned to me. The teachers' contribution to their portion of the pre-1992 liability is and will continue to be a disincentive to teachers because just over half of the teachers in the system today did not have any role in its creation, and there is a feeling by those teachers that they should not be responsible for solving it. Paying off the past liability can be and is a barrier to the recruitment and retention of teachers.

In 1992 the government of Alberta agreed to pay two-thirds of the liability, which now stands at \$4.3 billion, while teachers accepted to pay for one-third, which is now \$2.1 billion. This totals \$6.4 billion and is increasing every day. At present contribution rates the liability will grow to about \$14 billion by 2044, and it won't be paid off until 2060. This means an increasing number of young teachers will pay for the pre-1992 liability for the next five decades.

I presented the ATA with an open and clear process for resolving this issue. A task force will be struck to research and consider options to address the teachers' share of the unfunded pre-1992 pension liability, and as a sign of good faith the government of Alberta will assume for one year 100 per cent of contributions for teachers with up to five years' experience, which equates to approximately \$1,400 on a salary of \$50,000 annually. Seventy-five per cent of the contributions will be paid for teachers with six to 10 years' experience, which equates to approximately \$1,300 on a salary of \$60,000 annually. For teachers with 11 to 15 years of experience the government will pick up 50 per cent of their contribution, again, approximately \$1,200 on a salary of \$75,000 annually. Finally, 25 per cent of the contributions for teachers with 16 to 20 years of experience will be accepted by government, and that equates to approximately \$650 on a salary of \$80,000 annually.

2:50

This approach addresses the fact that our youngest and newest teachers are the most disadvantaged by paying for a liability they did not create. This initiative is intended to create an environment that allows the task force to have a positive and constructive dialogue with the various stakeholders. This liability is the responsibility of both parties and needs to be addressed in an open and transparent manner. We're looking for fiscally responsible solutions that provide value to Alberta students, teachers, and taxpayers with specific attention to the recruitment and retention of new teachers.

I believe that Budget 2007 sustains our excellent education system and manages areas of growth. Our department business plan provides particular focus to the four priorities. Education is about innovation, outcomes, student success, and collaboration. Everyone has a role, and that's why I've listened and discussed education matters with a range of individuals and associations. All of our futures depend on what happens in the K to 12 system, so I intend to reach out beyond the usual education community and talk with business leaders and other decision-makers.

Since my appointment I have met with school board chairs, trustees, principals, teachers, parents, and students. Those meetings have been open and honest, and I've had some excellent discussions about school jurisdictions' local challenges as well as opportunities involving collaboration and innovation in delivering education. I'm impressed by the good work going on in our education community. I'm supportive of and strongly believe in locally elected officials and their ability and responsibility to make decisions that are in the best interest of their community.

In closing, I want to emphasize that this budget underlines government's commitment to manage growth and the need to have a plan for the future. I would entertain any comments or questions for the remainder of the estimates period.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll attempt to go at the budget. I thank the minister for his overview, and I'll try and go through some of the things that he raised and touch on them and bring some of my points clear.

First of all, operational grants to school boards will increase 3 per cent in September. Clearly, in the unique situation of Alberta and its overheated economy this increase in funding will frankly, Mr. Minister, not be enough. Several school boards have already told me that they aren't sure how they will be able to cover all their costs without making cuts. It reminds me a little bit of last year again, but anyway let's get into specifics.

I know that the minister likes to talk about 5 and even 10 per cent increases for his overall budget, but what it really comes to for the schools and teachers and students is the operational funding. The fact of the matter is that this budget only contains a 3 per cent increase in all existing operational grants to school boards. The thing that really interests me in this – and I'll raise these questions if it's all right with the minister, and he may want to write back to me or talk to me after I sit down – and my question is: how will school boards be able to ensure that the wages of their teachers keep pace with increases in the cost of living? Again, I'm just looking at this.

Earlier this week in question period the minister suggested that school boards should use any operating surpluses they might have to negotiate with teachers. I went out and looked at last year, 2005-2006 – and we're doing an analysis of this presently. For example, if you're using surpluses for funding teachers' salaries, I found it very interesting that the Calgary school district No. 19 – and, again, you can comment, Mr. Minister – has what I see here as a deficit position. I looked over at the Edmonton Catholic separate school district No. 7, and they have, let me just say, an \$8.8 million deficit position. I look at the Edmonton school district here, and they have a \$1.7 million deficit. I look to my constituency, which is the Greater St. Albert Catholic regional school district, where they have a \$1.3 million deficit. Will this be the policy of the minister, to instruct school boards to use operating surpluses to ensure teachers are given a fair wage increase? I don't know if that's the policy now, but I still want some clarification there.

The Minister of Education likes to emphasize that Alberta spends more money on education than any other province. While this may be true, it is important to remember that Alberta is not like every other province. In fact, when total education spending is seen as a percentage of total wealth, which is the more comparable measure used by economists, Alberta actually ranks last. How does this last-place ranking fit with the minister's overall vision of having the best education system in the world?

Now let me turn to maintenance and construction. School facilities operations and maintenance support will increase to \$417 million, a 3.2 per cent increase in the 2007-08 estimates, page 95, line 7.0.1. School facilities infrastructure has received \$508 million this year, which is a decrease, the way we look at it, of 13.8 per cent since last year. That's the estimates page 95, line 7.0.2. The question is: why is the department decreasing its school facilities infrastructure budget by over 13 per cent when need is severe and construction costs are only rising? Maybe you could explain that to me.

The city of Calgary, where the minister resides, and the municipalities all over this province are rapidly expanding. Premier Stelmach himself talks about that all the time. He notes that Alberta leads the country in area housing starts. Is this really the time to be cutting our school infrastructure budget? I don't think it is, but maybe there's something I'm missing there, and maybe the minister can straighten me out.

The estimates suggest that Calgary alone has a \$0.5 billion deficit in badly needed repairs to deferred infrastructure. I ask the question: what steps are being taken to prevent this situation from getting worse? I don't know. Maybe they're using decentralized budgeting, and maybe the money is going somewhere else down there. I'm not sure. We have heard from the Calgary education community that there are close to 40 subdivisions that need new schools. Can the minister confirm the size of the need in Calgary? Just clarify it for us.

Now, the minister talks about the whole thing of P3s. I talked to board members, you know. I talked to one of them that's in the construction business, and he said: maybe this is a great idea, Jack, and you're just being too negative. But why doesn't the minister come out with an operational framework, a rationale, and let the school districts know what he's planning to do? Why keep the thing a secret? If it's so good, tell us what it is, and then maybe we can get on the bandwagon and start promoting it. But we still wait and wait and wait. I'm expressing the frustration from some of our superintendents and some of our trustees that talk to me. I certainly don't talk to as many as the minister, though, so maybe I've a limited sample.

Anyway, school districts are hopeful that the infrastructure, maintenance, and renewal, IMR, funding that was announced in 2006 would be sustained over three years, and they're talking about a longer range period to do some planning and repairing, all that kind of thing. Rather, the 2007-08 IMR budget has been reduced from \$200 million to \$96 million. It is expected, therefore, that the allocations of school jurisdictions will be reduced by approximately 50 per cent. So my question is: why did this department decide to reduce funding for this year? Does it anticipate that the need for maintenance and renewal of existing facilities will be less? Maybe they do have something that they think is less. I don't know.

The unfunded liability. Let's just talk about that for a few minutes. The cost of financing the unfunded liability is \$156.7 million this year, an increase of 2.9 per cent from last year and 8.5 since the 2005-06 estimates, page 94, line 3.0.2. The minister proposed to take on a portion of the cost to teachers of the unfunded liability for one year at a cost of \$25 million. Now, during Premier

Stelmach's leadership campaign he promised teachers that he would . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, *Beauchesne* 484 . . .

Mr. Flaherty: Hon. Premier? Sorry.

The Chair: . . . allows a person to refer to himself by name, but it doesn't allow for a speaker to refer to other members of the House by name.

3:00

Mr. Flaherty: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can I say the leader of the government? Is that appropriate?

The Chair: That would be fine. Or Premier.

Mr. Flaherty: Anyway, I'll go at it this way, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. You're always on guard. That's great.

The promise that was made to the teachers that the government would separate the teacher liability pension issue from salary negotiations and resolve the issue once and for all. That was said. My question is: do the provisions attached to the \$25 million in this budget – this is from the letter that the minister wrote to the teachers, and I probably had something like 25 letters and about 40 phone calls, and I know the ATA has had many more on this letter. "In the event of job action, the Government may direct the task force to discontinue its work and discontinue assuming the teachers' share of the annual unfunded liability." What I'm still wondering: how does this letter help teachers to reach a decision and help the minister on this? In fact, how does this accomplish what the minister wants to accomplish? I'd like to know what his motive is. Maybe he could tell me right now today: is the ATA involved in this thing now, or where are they at? Are they refusing to sit on this task force? In other words, where are we at with this whole business of the unfunded liability? It would be very interesting for us to know that. I think that would be very important.

I'm running out of time here, I think. I'll skip over private schools and come back. Maybe I can get back on schedule because I know my colleagues . . . [Mr. Flaherty's speaking time expired]

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll attempt to address the comments, as I made notes. First of all, let's talk about teacher negotiations that will take place over the summer and into the fall. The hon. member is correct that school boards received 3 per cent across-the-board operational grants. Funding to education, however, as I've mentioned many times, has our budget increase going to school boards in the range of 5.2 per cent. It's school boards' determination as to how they want to use those funds.

I would remind the hon. member that in the last couple of months we've had two settlements in the province that settled their retroactive – in other words, for the current year that we're in – wage settlements in Chinook's Edge and Wild Rose, that averaged somewhere around 3 per cent.

Now, a couple of other things need to be noted. One, as I've said many times, the schools boards' accumulated surpluses across the province total \$220 million. As the representative of some 2.5 million taxpayers in Alberta I have difficulty in advocating for higher funds for school boards when they're sitting on that kind of money. Yes, there are a couple of school boards that have prior deficits. They have presented to us a plan to pay down those debts and are doing so.

It should also be pointed out that every school board has the ability this fall to put a plebiscite to the voters as part of the municipal election requisitioning 3 per cent on the mill rate, and they could specify, if they so choose, what they wanted to use that for. If the hon. member is suggesting that maybe his St. Albert school board would like to put to the taxpayers of his constituency a vote this fall that says, "Would you be in favour, Mr. and Mrs. Taxpayer, of a 3 per cent mill rate increase specifically to pay for teachers' salaries?" I suggest that he make that suggestion to the school boards in St. Albert.

There were some comments made around infrastructure that I think need to be addressed. No one knows the infrastructure backlog more than I do. My particular constituency of Calgary-West happens to have, currently, two public schools – one public, one Catholic – and seven private schools, and I say that that is not giving choice to the residents of my constituency, and it's not giving them the choice, frankly, of a public school system, which is not acceptable. We need to do something about our backlog of infrastructure deficit. However, that deficit is some \$3 billion, and if the hon. member has a suggestion on how I can find the \$3 billion in our provincial budget somewhere, I encourage him to give me all of his suggestions.

It should be noted, however, that in this particular school year we will be opening some 12 new schools. We've opened 16 new schools in the current year that we're in, and we will be increasing the number of school spaces by over 8,000 across the province. This is at a time when our enrolment is relatively flat. Our question is not a matter of not enough spaces. The problem is that there aren't enough spaces where the kids live, in the right parts of the cities. So we're working on that.

As I said earlier, we've put a hundred million dollars into the budget. I know that the hon. member is quite anxious to hear about how we want to allocate that money. That decision is currently being discussed. The hon. member is getting quite frustrated because we haven't come forward with a proposal on P3s here on the 17th of May. I'd ask him to be patient. We will have that in the next few months, and then he can assess whether or not proceeding with some different financing methods to get schools built where kids live is the right approach.

I'll conclude for this portion on the unfunded liability. The hon. member talked about the Premier's commitment to separate negotiations from the discussions around resolving the unfunded liability. Well, that's exactly what we are doing. We as government will be dealing directly with the ATA on the unfunded liability issue. School boards, on the other hand, will be dealing with their ATA locals, and the ATA has made it fairly clear that the locals bargain at the local level. We are not involving the school boards in the discussion around the unfunded liability, the negotiations, so they are in fact separate.

Now, relative to the letter that was written, I would ask the hon. member – he was pretty close to this particular situation – to reflect back to when the teachers were on strike in Parkland and think about that situation for a moment. That created an awful lot of angst. It created a situation that was less than desirable to hold any kind of negotiations or any kind of discussions. I ask that hon. member if he would feel comfortable with this task force that is out meeting with stakeholders in some way being influenced by bad feelings that exist throughout the negotiating process if we have various locals on strike. What I have suggested in the letter is that the government has the prerogative that if a strike occurs, the work of the task force is pulled back until the labour situation is resolved. The task force then

resumes its work. I think that's fair. I don't want to see this task force unduly influenced by a cantankerous labour dispute, and I would hope the hon. member would not want to have that happen either.

The final question is: where is the ATA at? I'm afraid I would have to ask the hon. member to ask that question of the Alberta Teachers' Association. The offer stands that we would like the Alberta Teachers' Association to name a representative to our task force. The offer will be open for a few days, but if the ATA does not choose to have a representative on the task force, we will proceed.

3:10

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to enhance some of my comments from yesterday, and I thank the minister and his assistant for being here.

I'd like to start off by paraphrasing from an *Edmonton Journal* article in March of this year written by trustee Don Fleming, looking at the history of education and school boards in Alberta. This is something that is dear to my heart for a number of reasons. But I want to clarify my position. I think every person in the community has an opportunity to help determine the direction of their public school jurisdiction through the election of public representatives.

In 1994, the Alberta government changed the way local boards operate and took on the collective obligation to fund centrally and completely the provision of educational services to every student in Alberta. It was a one-size-fits-all approach that ignored the historical link of the community to its schools and set in motion a chain of events which left school boards with little flexibility.

It is my belief that almost every problem that we deal with in terms of the school districts can be traced to that limiting nature of that 1994 legislation. I appreciate the minister's faith in school boards to make good decisions; however, we must return a reasonable level of local autonomy to school boards. Doing so would enable elected boards to once again be accountable to the communities and show them that they've been elected to serve.

Schools need to be ensured of an adequate block of funding each year. Schools, unlike factories or other industrial business undertakings, cannot be treated as though they are producing products that can be made, shaped, moulded in an identical manner. Stable and adequate funding allows schools to function, whether they serve an academically elite population or a population comprised of less able students. Without stable and adequate funding we teach too many of our students, I believe, young people who may already be disillusioned with adult society and angry, that school is irrelevant, that adults are not caring, and that society has abandoned them. It's a high price for society to pay.

There are many things here to look at, and I will try not to repeat what my colleague from St. Albert has said, although I will emphasize some of those points. In terms of the operating budget the biggest part of the school boards' costs are staffing related, so we have to ask: why does the government increase the basic instructional grant by just 3 per cent when the index for increasing MLAs' salaries was closer to 4.9, I think? A 3 per cent increase to the budget – when you factor in yearly inflation and that teachers are waiting for contract resolutions, if you look at the 4.9 increase that we thought was okay for MLAs, how do we expect teachers to accept less? Schools will be budgeting for probably a 4.5 increase to cover anticipated expenses, and that means that without inflation's effect, they may possibly be 1.5 per cent poorer to do the same work. Money must come from staffing to work the budget.

The goal of 17 in division 1 and 23 in division 2 is just not possible with the current money. Then we look at the cost of aides. Sometimes we can do that by splitting two classes for half a day and try to keep the numbers lower with the help of the aide. With grades 5 and 6 we're trying for 25 and 26 in the class, and the goal was supposed to be 23. I'm talking to various principals in the district, and very few of them are able to meet the standard of 23 or less for division 2.

If the province is serious about making each child successful, let's consider tying assistance to families to attendance in school and fulfillment of reading or homework assignments and so on.

I want to emphasize again the strong position that we have for school nutrition programs. They have proven to be successful in increasing student achievement. It only makes sense that if a student is not hungry, he's going to feel more comfortable, more secure, and have a better sense of well-being and a better idea that they do have potential.

I want to mention the reading recovery program, which is an amazing program. One teacher to seven or eight students twice a year has had excellent results, I'm hearing from one school. But it's so costly that schools are not able to afford it, yet they believe that in the early years it's probably the best program to promote success. Teachers in that program would work daily with seven or eight children, 30 minutes of structured reading one-on-one. However, a teacher unit cost is about \$80,000, and most schools can't afford that.

Again, I talked a bit yesterday about the full funding for aides. School boards don't get enough money for special-needs students to fully fund their needs. As a result, they either don't hire what they need or take money away from something else to subsidize. I know that there's only so much money. However, I think we have to look at the priorities. Once again, if we can invest in these early years, we're going to have cost savings down the road. We all know that. So I think the number one way to ensure success is to give the students that need it the teacher ratio to support them so that they have the opportunity for success.

The other thing that I've talked about many times in here is the time frame for the Education budget. Based on the budgets schools have in April, they make plans for the following year, and by the beginning of May the students having concluded, generally, the registration process for the next year, they start making serious plans for the next year. So by the end of May they may be having to declare teachers surplus, and a process begins to place teachers for the next year. Teachers move, schools change, and maybe they'll lose a teacher that they really did not want to lose. This causes angst for everybody. Then sometimes suddenly there's money in August, and you find, "Well, we could have kept that teacher," but you can't get that teacher back. I just don't feel that the timing of the Education budget is as supportive as it could be to make the process one that's efficient and less of a guessing game.

The differences in budgeting timelines between the ministry and school boards can lead to inaccurate or incomplete information being submitted by boards. School boards need to be sure of their budgets because of staffing completion by May. The ministry can improve this by providing early feedback on the feasibility of the budgets submitted and information on grants as soon as possible. So I really encourage you to take a look at that factor.

Another thing that I'd like to ask is – you've heard the term "clawbacks," I'm sure, and this is dealing with high schools and credit funding. If \$250 million of education funding is dependent on high school credit completion and the completion rate around the province is 90 per cent, that would mean that \$25 million would be clawed back from the school boards, which could go, possibly, to

teachers' salaries, textbooks, support staff. It could have gone there. I would suggest that in many jurisdictions the completion rate is much lower than 90 per cent. Some schools continue to load 40 students in a class because they know that students are going to drop out and there's going to be less course completion. Those schools and jurisdictions with the lowest levels of funding often have the highest dropout rate. So that's a real concern to me.

I'm wondering about AISI. My experience with it was generally very positive. Have we got evidence to say that it actually improved high school completion rates, or has the money gone to expensive consultants, PD days, which teachers often don't even want? I'm wondering if a more suitable alternative would have been to put that money towards reading recovery programs. I think about five years ago teachers identified lack of reading skills as the main obstacle to success, yet the Department of Education and school boards have ignored their recommendations and have chosen other areas to concentrate funding. I'm wondering if this is the best use of taxpayer money.

Another concern is the provincial curriculum review that resulted in science and social studies. Schools will have to have an additional \$110,000 in some cases for textbooks in these two areas, and there's no extra funding allocated from the province to assist with these changes. I noticed when I was talking to a colleague who had just been to B.C. that that province awards additional funding for high-needs schools and students based on socioeconomics and demographics. Thus there are schools in our city of Edmonton that would get additional funding to assist with programing needs for their students.

3:20

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, let me address the issue around the pooling of taxes. The member raises a good point. I think it's probably about due for review whether or not at least the residential tax base should be something we should be considering returning to school boards. That would be something that we'll be discussing as a caucus over the course of the next year.

The member made a comment that I absolutely have to take – it was not correct. If I heard her right, she said: discussing with principals, very few were able to meet the class size guidelines. Those are not our numbers. With the exception of the 1 to 3 classes almost across the board school boards have managed to meet the class size initiative. Keep in mind that that was over a three-year period. The recommendations of the Learning Commission were over a five-year period, and they've done this over a three-year period. Now, there is some tweaking to be done around this. We've now funded it fully, and I think it's time to take a step back and say: what is working well, and what isn't?

The one area that the member discussed was the timing around notifying school boards of their budgets. I think we'll both be pleased to know that that problem should hopefully take care of itself in the future because of our own House reforms. Part of what we're doing, in my understanding: the budget will be delivered on the third Thursday of February every year going forward, and therefore schools will certainly know, compared to this year, considerably earlier how much their funding is going to be. I think that would take care of that.

There was some concern around CEU funding and high schools and clawbacks. The CEU funding has pros and cons, but clearly one of the pros is that we are not going to use taxpayers' dollars to pay for kids who don't go to school, and that's the reason why it's funded in that manner. We have pretty flexible guidelines around funding relative to attendance and classroom achievements.

Comments relative to the AISI program. In my travels through the province in the short time I've been in this portfolio, I don't

think that there is an initiative that this department has taken that is more well received at the local level than AISI. There is just some wonderful stuff being done with AISI money. It is project specific. There are some pretty – I wouldn't say tough guidelines. It simply is not money that's just handed out without any accountability to it, so it's one that I really think is a good project.

I guess that I would just like to make one comment, and it was part of what we discussed in question period today. I know that I'm supposed to be supplying the answers, and they're supposed to be asking the questions, but I'm going to ask a question of our learned friends across the way. I would like to know from them: which one of the big-spending departments – Health, Seniors and Community Supports, and Children's Services – have they recommended we cut back on so that we could spend more money on education? I challenge them. I haven't heard any suggestions on which one of those departments we should cut back funding on. This province spends – what was our budget this year? – 30-plus billion dollars. So to continue to make suggestions that this needs to be funded, that needs to be funded, and this is underfunded: it's great to make all those accusations and raise all those concerns, but I haven't heard many answers.

I look forward to suggestions on what part of my hon. colleague the Minister of Health's budget we should not approve this year so we can increase that operating grant from 3 to 6 per cent. Maybe we don't build the south Calgary hospital. Which part of the disabilities programs that we have in Seniors and Community Supports should we no longer fund? Maybe we shouldn't spend money on the child care spaces program that my hon. colleague has announced, which is just a terrific program. So I'd be open to any suggestions on which programs we cut in the big-funding departments so that we can spend more on education.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and join the debate on the estimates for the Ministry of Education. First of all, I want to thank the hon. Minister of Education and his staff for the preparation of the estimates. I'm going to ask a few questions on key issues. If you can answer my questions today, it would be nice. If you don't, any time within a week at least if you can answer my questions, I would really appreciate that.

The key issues. I think a few of them have already been addressed by my colleagues the MLA for St. Albert and the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods, but I have few more. I want to talk a little bit on the school lunch program, operational funding, maintenance and construction – the unfunded liability was already discussed – private-school funding, transportation, special-needs students, and classroom size, as well as ESL.

First of all, I'll start with a few questions which concern my riding, Edmonton-Ellerslie. As we all know, not only Edmonton but all over Alberta the population is growing, especially in the new areas. My constituency, Edmonton-Ellerslie, is growing so fast. You know, when I was door-knocking last summer, most of the complaints I heard from that area were that they need a school and library in that area. Then I set up a meeting with the trustee in my riding – that was about 18 months ago – and he told me that the capital planning for the school in the Ellerslie area was 2007-2008, but recently he showed me another capital funding program. I'm not 100 per cent blaming the government, but when you talk to the trustees, they always blame the government because they say that they cannot operate without the money.

Money is important, and you have the chequebook, so here we are. This is another chance for me, and I would like to point out

those important issues, which are very important for my constituents. They desperately need a school. I actually had the opportunity to visit a few schools in my constituency. I mean, in one of the schools their library is carpeted, you know, and needs lots of renovations since five or six years. This is my personal feeling. They are so scared; they don't want to talk to the MLAs. I don't know why. You ask them: do you have any concerns? They hardly answer questions from the opposition side. They think that only members from the government side can help. I want to point this out because I think it's very important. Maybe next time I will take the minister with me to the schools and make sure that the minister will take care of that.

The trustee I met mentioned to me that, first of all, his concern was about the lobbyists' registry act. He said that all the trustees are elected representatives like MLAs, MPs, Senators. They read this act. I don't know which stage that bill is in, but they are concerned about that, that they are elected representatives like Senators, MPs, or MLAs, and they should be included. They don't need to register for the lobbyists' registry. I mean, naturally, they are complaining about why they were excluded, being elected representatives.

3:30

Another thing he mentioned to me, as other members also indicated: recently the government, you know, increased only 3 per cent, which is not sufficient. They called it operational funding. Operational grants to the school boards will increase 3 per cent in September. Clearly, in the unique situation of Alberta and its overheated economy this increase in funding will not be enough. This is exactly what he mentioned to me, that even MLAs got a raise, 4.9 per cent or something. He said: the MLAs can get a 4.9 per cent raise, and everybody else expects at least above the inflation rate. I think 3 per cent is even below the inflation rate, which is not reasonable, especially at this time. You know, the construction price, even the grocery prices have gone up, so this is one of his major concerns, and he asked me to pass on this message to the hon. Minister of Education. I think some other members already indicated on this particular issue.

I know that the Minister of Education likes to talk about a 5 and even a 10 per cent increase for his overall budget, but what it really comes down to for schoolteachers and students is operational funding. The fact of the matter is that this budget only contains a 3 per cent increase to all existing operational grants to school boards if you see the Education budget background. My question is: how will school boards be able to ensure that the wages of their teachers keep pace with the increases in the cost of living?

Earlier this week in question period the minister suggested that school boards should use any operating surpluses they might have to negotiate with the teachers. Another question: will this be a policy of the minister, to instruct school boards to use operating surpluses to ensure that teachers are given fair wage increases? If they are getting fair wage increases, when should they expect them?

The Ministry of Education likes to emphasize that Alberta spends more money on education than any other province. I heard this from many members from the other side of the floor again and again. While this may be true, it's important to remember that Alberta is not like other provinces. In fact, when total education spending is seen as a percentage of total wealth, which is the more comparable measure used by economists, Alberta actually ranks last. This is a shame. How does this last-place ranking fit with the ministry's overall vision of having the best education system in the world?

I want to touch a little bit on maintenance and construction because schools in Calgary and Edmonton – I'm not saying that all the schools need renovation, but most of them do. I receive so many

complaints in Edmonton, and I see a few e-mail letters from Calgary too. You know, the schools need some maintenance, but some schools have been looked after really very badly. Suppose they need some renovations today? If we don't spend money right away, the problem deteriorates. So if we don't look after that problem today, suppose today the cost is \$1 million, if the government approved in the capital . . . [Mr. Agnihotri's speaking time expired] That's it?

The Chair: That's it.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I had to slightly chuckle when the hon. member said that school trustees seem to be afraid to talk to the MLA. He must present a much more intimidating force than I do because, let me tell you, if there's one thing that I've encountered in the four or five months I've been fortunate enough to have this portfolio, it's that I haven't encountered any trustee who is afraid to tell me exactly what he or she thinks. So maybe I will have to take the hon. member with me one day out to south Edmonton and see if we can get the trustees to talk.

I am disappointed because I concluded my remarks a few minutes ago by suggesting that I would be more than open to suggestions as to which one of the high-spending departments the opposition would like us to take money from to add more money to Education. The member did not address that, so I await those suggestions.

The member used an interesting analogy: percentage of total wealth. Well, if I put that into my own personal perspective, that's like saying: the wealthier I get, the more I should spend whether it's necessary or not because you should be obligated to spend a certain percentage of your personal wealth. Well, I don't happen to agree with that, Mr. Chairman. I happen to believe that you do an assessment of need, and you fund it accordingly. I would suggest that no one could accuse this government of not funding education accordingly: \$30 million per school day. Let me repeat that: \$30 million per school day.

There was some mention made about maintenance of our schools. Yes, it is an issue. In previous years our infrastructure maintenance repair, more commonly called IMR, budget was \$48 million. Last year we did a one-year infusion where we increased it to \$200 million for last year. This year it's \$96 million. So you could either say that we doubled what we used to spend on IMR or you could say what I've just heard: we've cut it in half. Now, several school districts have told me that when we increased it from \$48 million to \$200 million, yes, they've got projects out there, but with the heated economy some of them are having trouble ensuring that all of those funds in that particular budget year are appropriately spent. I believe our school boards are very good managers of our money, and that's one of the reasons why we've got the accumulated surplus that I have mentioned on several occasions.

While we're dealing with maintenance, I think that's one of the real reasons why we need to look at some alternative funding mechanisms for schools. One of the mechanisms to look at is new construction or modernization that includes a 20-, 25-, 30-year maintenance contract with it, and at the end of that time frame if that school isn't returned to the school district or the government, whatever the arrangement is, in a condition that is set out at the beginning of the agreement, there's a penalty attached to it. I believe there are some great opportunities going forward so that those folks sitting in these chairs 25 years from now aren't going to be having the same discussion about deferred maintenance. That's one of our challenges.

3:40

The hon. member had some questions around infrastructure relative to new school construction. I think he's probably aware that

last fall we prepared a document called Schools for Tomorrow. It was, in fact, a compilation of the needs around the province, and we are now trying to address: okay, we've identified the need; how do we meet it? We only got halfway by the end of last year. Identifying the need is the easy part. Meeting that need and how to meet it is the tougher decision.

There were some comments around the lobbyist registry, and I completely agree with the hon. member. I have raised that issue with my caucus colleagues. I would encourage the hon. member in committee stage to propose an amendment to the bill which would exclude school boards from being listed as lobbyists. I think that's totally appropriate.

Those, I believe, were the notes that I made relative to the hon. member's questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a very important question. Some people are asking why in this budget the private schools receive a big increase this year. What is the main reason for this increase? Is it this government's plan to increase public funding for private schools? Why is the increase in operational funding for private schools larger than the increase for public schools?

Also, I want to talk about classroom size. Stats Canada's report released in 2004 confirmed that Alberta still had the highest student-to-teacher ratio. Could you tell me what the ratio was last year and how this funding increase will affect the ratio for 2007 and 2008?

[Mr. Pham in the chair]

Special needs is also, Mr. Chairman, a big concern. The overall special-needs per student funding for students with mild to moderate disability or delay increased by 3 per cent in the year 2007-08 funding manual for school authorities. Funding for students with severe disabilities also went up by only 3 per cent. Special-needs education remains critically underfunded.

Although I heard from several school jurisdictions that their severe-needs profiles may not reflect their actual need, most feel that in any case the decision of Alberta Education to review the integrity of the severe-needs profile assigned to each school jurisdiction will do very little to address the underfunding of special-needs education. One school division reported that the revenue it received per student was less than half of the actual division expenditure per student. In large part, this funding shortfall stems from coding issues.

We heard from the education community that the criteria of the severe-needs coding are too rigorous. There are a growing number of students with severe needs, but they do not satisfy the severe needs. The fact of the matter is that this budget only contains a 3 per cent increase to all existing operational grants to school boards. How will school boards be able to ensure that the wages of their teachers keep pace if they keep spending money on programs like this one? How can they spend money on ESL programs? How can they spend some money on classroom size?

And, especially, the transportation in my riding. I received a few letters recently, and the people were complaining that now they had to pay for their transportation. Sometimes they have to send their kids, you know. They spend an hour on the bus, and they were always worried. Transportationwise, there are some areas where they charge a small amount of fare for the buses, and the other areas are charging more than some areas. So that's my question.

I would really appreciate it if you answer those questions. Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I repeat again, I did not hear any suggestions by the hon. member whether we should not fund child care spaces or take money out of the hon. minister of health's budget. It's great to stand there and talk about spending more money on this, that, and the next thing. I said in question period today: I think we're now up to – I don't know. I'm just running numbers in my head. But the Liberal plan would be – I don't know; pick a number – somewhere between \$10 billion and \$15 billion spent on education. I mean, where does it come from?

I need to make a correction regarding private school funding. This year, for the first time ever, we're funding ESL in private schools. It's the right thing to do. It's a \$2 million investment above and beyond the operational grants, and what that translated into was the fact that private schools appeared to get more money. Private schools continued to get 60 per cent of the base operational grant, and that hasn't changed. To say that somehow overall funding for private schools was out of whack with public schools is not correct. Really, what we've done is that we've caught up on the ESL side of it.

There was some mention made around coding. We are going to do a review of our coding of students during the next year. It's an issue that we discussed at some length yesterday with the two hon. members. I don't think it would be good use of House time to repeat what was discussed yesterday.

I think that's about it.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, it's a pleasure, again, to participate in the estimates briefing from the Department of Education. I must get on the record, hon. minister, that I have been involved in a few of these discussions and debates over the budgets this spring, and I must say that you have a very small contingent from the department with you. Your deputy minister certainly did very, very well in Public Accounts. I'm confident that if we have any questions, if you cannot answer them, he certainly can. I've seen other ministers come in here with six and eight staff, but I can see why you only come with one: you only need one. That's an ace you've got there.

The Department of Education. I've been listening to the debate, and I've been listening to the questions all spring from various members. Recently, in the last half an hour, I was listening to the hon. minister talk about the schools that we're building, and the ones that, unfortunately, are being unnecessarily and arbitrarily closed, particularly in mature neighbourhoods in the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary. I don't understand the rationale why good public schools in neighbourhoods are being suddenly closed. It seems to be poor planning. I don't know who's to blame. Is it the department, or is it the respective school boards? In the city here if we're not careful, we're going to have a doughnut effect, where in the central neighbourhoods we're going to have no schools, and in the fast-growing suburban areas where we do need schools – we need new ones, and they are being built – we're going to have a major planning problem.

3:50

We have seen not only in this latest round of school closures in Edmonton but in the last round where the parents felt so strongly that they were willing to take the school board to court. Not only in Edmonton but in Sangudo and Whitecourt parents also took the school boards to court over this issue. We have to be careful about

this. We have a utilization rate that's cumbersome. It's out of date. It's not reflective of the times. In five years, in 10 years we could need the same public school again.

If it has low enrolment now, and I can only talk – let's pick on Glenora. Just the other day there was a meeting in Glenora about a large housing complex that is proposed to be constructed. That will change the demographics of that neighbourhood. Strathearn over in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar: if even half of that redevelopment proposal is accepted, it's going to make a heck of a difference. There are other neighbourhoods throughout the city where we're talking about increasing the density in the central area of the city, and we're closing schools. It just does not make sense. We're closing schools to save \$260,000 on an annual basis. It just doesn't make sense to me.

Also, I would like to at this time express my gratitude to the minister. The minister was quite open about sharing some information that the department had accumulated, regarding a Sabrina's Law for this province. I really appreciated receiving this. In fact, Mr. Chairman, I sent a note to the hon. minister on March 13, 2007, and the next day – I must say on the record that I was very impressed – we got a report back from the minister on what the department was doing with students with severe allergies. This issue brief is the progress of the committee that was struck to deal with this issue. I think it's time that we have in this province a Sabrina's Law, similar to the one that was introduced in Ontario to protect children who have severe allergies.

Now, some of these allergies – we all think, Mr. Chairman, that they are restricted to peanuts or other nuts, but they are not. This anaphylaxis is life threatening. It's a life-threatening allergy. It could be to food; it could be to insect bites. We have to be careful because some people think it is the same as hay fever. Unfortunately – and there are tragic examples of this – children could die from exposure within seconds of contact with peanuts.

It is at this time that I would urge in this budget year for the department to take a good, long look at presenting before this Legislative Assembly a law similar to Sabrina's Law in Ontario so that we have minimum standards across the province for all these children who are affected by this condition. There seem to be more and more, and I don't know why children are affected by this. I don't think it's too much to ask. It's not too much for the school boards to administer or the local schools to administer. It would just be a standard so that everyone would know if there was an incident or an event how to deal with it, how to handle it, and how to save a life. I would plead with the department to again consider a Sabrina's Law for this province.

I have some questions in regard to this. Given the recent death of Carley Kohnen, a 13-year-old person from Victoria, B.C., another child that has passed away from this, is the government of Alberta now prepared to introduce legislation to safeguard all anaphylactic children within Alberta schools? Again, in this budget year why is the government supporting a policy approach when Alberta schools already have the Canadian School Boards Association's policy handbook, a handbook for school boards since 2001. How will this new approach differ?

In conclusion, if the government is not prepared, Mr. Chairman, to introduce legislation to protect anaphylactic school children, is the government at least prepared to admit that anaphylactic school children are special needs as defined in the School Act, and therefore to complement any policy, these children require teachers' aides to ensure that preventative measures are consistently and objectively undertaken in each classroom no matter the size of the classroom and, more importantly, no matter what the teacher or the principal's predisposition is to the issue of anaphylaxis.

Now, I appreciate – and I’m going to express it again – the information that the minister shared with me regarding this, but I think we can do something proactive here. We can introduce legislation very similar to what Ontario has passed and British Columbia, as I understand it, is currently discussing.

With those questions at this time, Mr. Chairman, I would like to move on to another part of the budget – and I’m going to apologize if this was already covered – certainly, the funding of private schools. Am I correct in observing and listening at Public Accounts that there has been a significant increase as a percentage of total spending going to private schools that public schools are not getting, or are they both getting an equal amount of an increase? There is some talk that private schools are being funded by this government.

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: First of all, thank you for the kind words relative to the good work that our department does perform. I would just offer that going forward if a member of the opposition has an issue that he would like some help with in answering constituents’ concerns to ask, and we will be more than happy to try and provide the information for their constituents. It should also be noted that while I may only have one person sitting on the floor, we have some very capable people in the gallery that probably could give me various finger signs if I needed them.

Relative to Sabrina’s Law we have asked the Alberta School Boards Association to do a review around their policies, and that is, I would presume, soon to be completed. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has made comment in the House on a few occasions relative to us in government not supporting an initiative from the opposition. I would encourage the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to consider a private member’s bill on that area. You might be surprised whether we’d be supportive or not. So I’d leave that with him.

4:00

Just very briefly, to deal with the private schools. I did answer the question a little earlier. In essence, what it was is we committed \$2 million this year for ESL funding for private schools, and previously private schools did not get ESL funding. Their percentage of operating grants remains at 60 per cent of the public school funding on operating grants, but when you inject the \$2 million in there, the percentage goes up. I think that overall the funding that the private schools receive in total from government this year relative to last year is a 6 per cent increase, but it’s all because of that \$2 million injection into ESL.

I want to talk a bit about the closure of schools in more mature neighbourhoods. The hon. member sort of threw out the ask and said that he’s not sure who to blame. The answer to that is that I don’t think anybody is to blame. It’s a fact that in years gone by in a particular community we built more schools than we would build in a similar size community today. With some of these schools that are closing, there may be as many as three schools serving a community where, actually, all of the children could walk to one or two schools.

The other thing that has significantly impacted attendance at schools – it’s a good thing. The Edmonton public school board is probably the best example of offering a tremendous number of alternative programs. You may have Spanish over here. You may have an arts school over there. You may have a music school over there. What that means is that you have children from all over the city coming to that one particular music school or that one particular arts school, or it may be a charter school that has an all-girls school, as an example. What happens in a situation like that is you start to

pull children out of the community to go to schools elsewhere, and what happens is that, frankly, the numbers simply don’t warrant it.

It’s never easy to close a school, and I know that school boards don’t do it lightly, but I come back to the facts. The facts are that we’ll be opening 12 schools in the next school year. In this school year that we’re just wrapping up, we will have opened 16 schools. Well, there are 28 new schools, and our enrolment, in essence, across the province is flat. Those 8,200 spaces that we’re going to be opening up next year are going to be drawn from somewhere because currently they’re probably in the community where that new school is being opened. Those kids are currently bused into an older neighbourhood. So as soon as that new school opens, that school where they have been bused to is probably going to be underutilized.

It’s not an easy situation for school boards to deal with, but I believe they’re doing the best that they can under the circumstances. I think that for the most part, as I said earlier, it’s never easy when the school across the road from you is being closed. If I were a parent, absolutely I’d be trying to keep that school open, but the likelihood of those children having to go a great distance to go to school is not high.

I think that answers the questions, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests (*reversion*)

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. You know how proud I am of my hometown, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. I am even more proud because it has been named the cultural capital of Canada for 2007. So I would like to introduce two artists who work in Edmonton, who are helping to make Edmonton the cultural capital of Canada. Those individuals are joining us in the public gallery today. Mark Henderson is the artistic director of Theatre Prospero. With him today is Jennifer Spencer, and she is actually working for Theatre Prospero right now. They are currently touring Alberta schools with a production of *Hamlet*. I think Mark is actually from Edmonton, and we are very lucky to have had Jennifer move here to help us be the cultural capital. I would ask them both to please rise and accept the warm welcome and appreciation of the Assembly.

The Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Could I introduce a guest, Mr. Chairman, first and then go on?

The Chair: Yes. You may.

Mr. Flaherty: I’d like to introduce, in the gallery, Frank Bruseker, the president of the Alberta Teachers’ Association. He’s here. We appreciate his attendance.

head:

Main Estimates 2007-08

Education (*continued*)

Mr. Flaherty: We know that the minister is a wise politician. He used to be around Peter Lougheed. He threw out the hook, and I’m just going to bite into part of it. You should look back into the discussions I used to have with the former Minister of Education. I

challenged him. See, I don't want to attack other departments to get dollars; I want to look at your department to get some dollars.

One of the things that we talked about – and I think it's important to get this on the record – and one of the things that I got excited about when I heard about your background was that you really believed in prevention. I've talked very clearly in this House – and it's on record – that I think we should get rid of the achievement tests in grade 3.

We talked yesterday about PUF, making sure that we utilize that service, because I think it's a good program, I want to emphasize, in screening kids, so that all kids get it and that we look at that whole elementary area, laying the foundation for the school program and starting to identify where kids may be having some problems and do remedial education in the elementary school. That's what you can do with the dollars.

I even asked the minister last year if he would do a pilot in the province and try that. If you go over and talk to the people across the way here at the university, they're telling me that there are lots of kids leaving school, falling through the cracks because they can't read; they can't do their math.

You know, the other interesting thing about this, Mr. Education Minister, when I was on this panel with the ATA, was the question of – I hope I get this right or maybe Frank will kick me after – achievement testing. We don't do any of that with our aboriginal students. I was told by someone from the Fraser Institute in British Columbia – he said that we don't do anything. B.C. does, evidently, because they're not afraid to try and say: here are the problems with these kids; this is how we want to help them.

I think there are ways in your own system that you can develop some dollars or do some very exciting things. I think you're the kind of man that can do that. So I'd urge you to do that, and the money could be redirected.

We won't get into talking about the communications part of government. There are a lot of dollars there.

I just want to start touching on special needs. I think I'd better do this because I've got a lot of information from superintendents and districts here. Overall, special-needs funding increased. Funding students with a mild to moderate disability or delay increased 3 per cent in '07-08, and funding for students with severe disabilities also went up by 3 per cent. Special-needs education remains critically underfunded, Mr. Minister.

Although I heard from several school jurisdictions that their severe-needs profiles may not reflect their actual need, most feel that, in any case, the decision of Alberta Education to review the integrity of the severe-needs profile assigned to each school jurisdiction will do little to address the underfunding of special-needs education. One school division reported that the revenue it received per student was less than half of the actual division expenditure per student, and one of my school districts in St. Albert – and you know better than I do – has a massive debt in their special education program.

In large part this funding shortfall stems from coding issues, Mr. Minister. We heard from the education community that the criteria of the severe-needs coding is too rigorous. There are a growing number of students with severe needs, but given that they do not satisfy the severe-needs criteria, they are coded as mild and moderate, which has a much lower funding rate. The question is: why does this department not have any funding measure in place to address the needs of students that fall in between the mild category and the very rigorous severe-needs category? That's one question.

4:10

Learning disabilities can be magnified if children progress from grades 1 to 12 in the system without appropriate early programming.

For many students one year of ECS program funding is not enough. We talked about it yesterday. Why does this government refuse to extend the program unit funding until at least – and we talked about that – grade 3? You'll probably address that.

Strategy 1.7, which falls under goal 1, high-quality learning opportunities for all, states that the department will "continue to foster a safe and caring school environment through," among other things, "effective behavioural supports": Education business plan, page 104. I have heard from many teachers who teach behavioural improvement classes, BIC, that it's very difficult to secure funding for children that need extra attention. Is there any new money in this budget targeted for BIC children?

Now, the class size initiative you've talked on. Funding for the class size initiative is \$194.5 million, an increase of \$34.7 million, which is an increase of 17.8 per cent. A Statistics Canada report released in 2004 confirmed that Alberta still has the highest student to teacher ratio. Could you tell me, Mr. Minister, what the ratio was last year and how this funding increase will affect the ratio in '07 and '08? I think it would be interesting to know what that is at elementary, junior high, and senior high. Maybe you could clarify that for us.

ESL. Seven million dollars was added to the early childhood services program to provide children as young as three and a half with English as a Second Language programming in support of early learning opportunities; \$2 million was included to provide funding for children and students in private schools who require English as a Second Language programming. I guess the question is: is the minister confident that the budget increases for ESL will be adequate to support the full cost of putting in place an ESL infrastructure? Several school boards have told us that while they appreciate new funding for ESL, their need in this area is not really as large as needs in other areas. Did the decision to make English as a Second Language programming a priority come from school boards? That's another of the questions that we have there.

Now, we've talked about school closures. This came up in question period last week. Today I've learned to say the word properly relative to "Rockyford." I want to make sure that we get this on the record straight. Rockyford is very distressed by the announcement that their K to 9 school would be closing soon. The minister may remember that I raised this question in question period, and it was my fault that he didn't answer, not his fault. Although the minister denied knowledge of potential school closures in east Wheatland earlier this week, I believe he owes it to residents there to clarify his comments. Recently the Golden Hills school division announced that it would be closing the high school located in Hussar. In conjunction with that motion a second subsequent motion was approved to allow the school division to explore the option of a single, consolidated school to serve the east Wheatland sector. Is the minister aware of these motions? Probably he is by now. Certainly, I am sure he is right on top of it.

The second motion clearly demonstrates that the K to 9 school in Rockyford is at heightened risk of closure, as at three other east Wheatland schools. This motion also demonstrates that the minister is very aware that Rockyford school is facing a potential closure. At the meeting where the motion was adopted, Mrs. Christene Howard, chair, told the board that she had previously advised Hon. Ron Liepert, the Minister of Education, that the board would possibly be considering a second motion. Even better, the minister indicated to Mrs. Howard that he would support the board's request should one be forthcoming. Well, given all that, given that the minister is now clear where the Rockyford school is facing a potential school closure, can he please answer these questions from the village of Rockyford and the residents of east Wheatland? Maybe he can tell us today where they stand because they've asked us.

Schools are crucial to the health of communities everywhere, and this is especially true in rural areas. Strategic priority 8 in the Department of Education's business plan commits this government to keeping schools in places where people live and learn, business plan, page 103. Recent news of four potential school closures in rural areas of east Wheatland demonstrate that this government needs to look at this question.

The Chair: Just one more reminder, hon. member. You can't refer to members by their proper names.

Mr. Flaherty: Yeah. I got excited, you know. It's been a long day. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm learning, and you're doing a good job of helping. I'm in the disability class.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Let me deal first with the fascination the member has with east Wheatland. I'll try and fill in some of the blanks. The Golden Hills school division met with myself and the MLA for the area, who happens to be the Minister of Finance. They've got a unique situation in east Wheatland, and that is that, frankly, all of their schools are not in good shape. There may be one of them that is in pretty good shape, and I think it's Rockyford actually.

The decision to close the Hussar high school program was proposed by the board, and it was done for the right reasons. Hussar is 25 miles from Drumheller. We are spending a significant amount of money on modernization of the Drumheller high school as we speak. The decision was made that the Hussar program could be transferred to Drumheller. However, in meeting with the MLA for the area and the school division, we decided that at some point in time in the not-too-distant future a couple of their schools in that area needed to be replaced. So until we can get our capital planning finalized, we agreed that we would not make any changes in the east Wheatland area.

There is no intention to close the Rockyford school. Down the road there may be consolidation if the board determines that that area would be better served by one new school for four communities. That will be their decision. But there is no imminent closure of the Rockyford school. The decision to not hold high school classes at Hussar this fall has been put on hold. In essence, going into the 2007-2008 school year, nothing will change in east Wheatland, so you can relax on that one.

The member raised the issue around grade 3 achievement tests. I know that this is a discussion point that has gone back and forth a number of times, and there are certain stakeholders in the education system who don't happen to agree with achievement tests, period. We fundamentally believe that the achievement testing that we've done gives us a baseline so that we can determine how well our students are performing.

4:20

The thing about the grade 3 level achievement testing is that it also helps us identify some of those very specific situations that the member refers to around identifying early learning difficulties. It may seem like an easy thing to do and would free up a tremendous amount of money. In essence, it wouldn't free up very much money, maybe a couple of million bucks, but what it would do is it would not allow us to actually test students until grade 6. The member himself has mentioned on several occasions that in order to ensure that these students are properly screened and identified, that is one method of doing it, through grade 3 achievement testing.

A number of comments around special needs and funding for special needs. It's always an issue that you could always do more on. There's no question about it. I know that I have nothing but the greatest of respect for the teachers and the aides who work with special-needs students on a daily basis in schools. They really are special people. It would be tremendous if we could commit, you know, significantly more money to special needs and early learning identification.

We took a look at a number of areas in this year's budget. We were told in many cases by the local school districts that their greatest challenge is identifying the early learning difficulties in students who don't speak English as a first language. That was one of the reasons we focused the majority of our funds on combining the early learning difficulties with English as a Second Language.

One other thing. The member was quoting some Stats Canada statistics relative to class size initiatives, and I believe the Stats Canada data that the member was using is quite outdated. First of all, I think it would make the most sense, rather than to use statistics from somewhere else, to take the recommendations from the Commission on Learning and say: let's match up and see how we're doing. So let's do that. Keep in mind that this is only year 3. We have implemented the recommendations of the Learning Commission in three years when it was recommended that it be done in five.

So guidelines that were proposed by the Commission on Learning for grade 10 plus – I may be off by one here; hopefully, not more than that – were 28. We're averaging 25. For grades 7 to 9 the guidelines recommended by the Learning Commission were 25; we're averaging 23. For grades 4 to 6 the recommendations were 20, and that's exactly where we are on average: 20. Now, as I mentioned earlier, the one area that we have not managed to meet the recommendations is in K to 3. The Learning Commission recommendations were 17, and we're somewhere in the range of 18 to 19.

As I said earlier, it's those kinds of tweaking that we need to do to ensure that over the course of the next year to two years we get those numbers totally in line with the recommendations. Keep in mind that these are averages. There are going to be situations that evolve. Whether they're because of infrastructure inability to meet certain numbers or maybe even the availability of teachers, there may be some of these on occasion where you'll get a particular class that doesn't quite meet the guideline. But on average those are the numbers.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I would like in the time remaining to have a discussion with the hon. minister regarding the Auditor General's recommendations for the Education department. The Auditor General had a good look at the Department of Education in his annual report going back to 2005-2006, and when we discuss this budget year, we have to ensure that the department – and I'm certain they are – is taking a keen interest in the Auditor General's remarks and his recommendations.

Now, Mr. Chairman, recommendation 25 of the AG's report talks about an improved school budgeting process. To do this, they would like to see funding information as soon as it is available to ensure that school boards can prepare their budgets, grants, new funding. We always hear that from respective school boards across the province. The Auditor General is also recommending that we require school boards to use realistic assumptions for planned activities, costs to be disclosed to trustees and the ministry. The

recommendation also includes a suggestion that there be established a date for the school boards to turn in an approved revised budget with updated enrolment and results information and reassess when and how the ministry should act to prevent school boards from incurring an accumulated deficit position.

Certainly, in Public Accounts we had a very frank and robust discussion about which school boards had deficits and which ones did not. Some taxpayers are quite surprised when they find out that school boards have deficits and are carrying debt. They say: oh, but we thought the province was debt free. Unfortunately, that's not true. Not only do we have a debt carried by many of the boards, but in some cases it's a significant amount of money.

Now, the ministry is not providing, in our view, adequate guidance to school boards and trustees regarding interim financial statements to ensure that school boards fulfill their financial monitoring responsibilities. This can lead to poor financial decisions that affect the quality of public education. That being said, in light of some of the announcements in the last year where there was significant – I believe the same money was spent twice in the Edmonton separate school system. It was in the millions of dollars. I don't think we can blame it on this department, Mr. Chairman. It would be totally unfair. I think if there's a fault, it would lie with the auditing processes of the individual respective school boards. How this went on for two years if not three years is beyond me, but it did. The school board is making every effort to correct it.

When we look at the Auditor General's report, I don't think we can find fault with the department on some of these matters. Now, there certainly are differences in budgeting timelines between the ministry and the school boards, and this can lead to inaccurate or incomplete information being submitted by the boards. There's no doubt about that. School boards need to be sure of their budgets because of staffing completion by May. The ministry can improve this by providing early feedback on the feasibility of the budget submitted and information on grants as soon as it is available. The Auditor General specifically suggests providing assessments of school board budgets by February rather than May.

Again, out of the 75 school jurisdictions, Mr. Chairman, 28 school boards and two charter schools had annual operating deficits. Now, four school jurisdictions – that's up from three – had accumulated operating deficits as of August 31 of this year. Annual deficits are considered acceptable by the ministry. We have to have a good look at that now.

Also with this department, you know, we're talking in this budget about the price of prosperity. We look at the program spending on kindergarten through to grade 12, and we look at the grants for school capital projects. They'll reach \$5.6 billion. It's a lot of money.

Earlier today it was humbling to sit in here, Mr. Chairman, and see the teenagers from an inner-city high school coming in here, looking down on the floor of the Assembly, and think that some of those students may be hungry in school or before or after school through no fault of their own. We have an obligation and a duty to do something about that. We look at this enormous sum of money, well over \$5 billion, and I'm surprised that we can't find money to adequately fund on a yearly basis some lunch programs, again in the central areas of Edmonton, and I would assume that the same issue is occurring in Calgary.

4:30

We shouldn't have to point out, Mr. Chairman, the lavish grants that this government provides through the lottery funding to golf courses. Golf courses all over the province are using this money for everything from debt reduction to improving the paths to purchasing

new irrigation equipment to purchasing golf carts. It is quite ironic that if you look through the public accounts, you see this long list of grants to various golf courses. Some of these golf courses even charge membership fees in the thousands of dollars. You look at that and then you meet with officials who don't have enough money in their budgets. They're not asking for a lot. They're asking for less than \$2 per day per student to provide a hot lunch program.

These programs are really needed in some areas, Mr. Chairman, some areas more than others, and there are also other programs, I think, that we should have a second look at when we're spending our money and perhaps fund them so that the operators of these programs know that they can rely on this minister. In September they know that the funding is going to be there.

Another program would be for early kindergarten for some inner-city children. It makes a real difference for them when they get into kindergarten and go on through the elementary school system and get a good, solid foundation in the elementary school system to build an economic base for the rest of their life through a sound education. You know, we talk about the dollars, but we've got to be very careful about how we spend them and where we spend them.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I would urge the minister and his staff and all members of the government to take a second look. Not only is it the Department of Education; it's also the minister of tourism, who is the minister in charge of lottery grants these days. If we can afford to be so generous to these golf courses for debt reduction, surely we can provide programs for young people residing in the inner cities of Edmonton and Calgary and give them help in getting a good, solid foundation in the elementary school system.

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Well, as we've become accustomed to in this House, it's always interesting to listen to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar sort of cover the waterfront and link everything together. Whether it makes any sense or not, I'm not sure sometimes. I have no idea what he's talking about when he's talking about us funding golf courses. I can guarantee you that out of our budget we don't fund any golf courses, so he would have to take that up with the minister of tourism and parks when his budget comes before the House.

The member mentioned the school lunch program, and as I pointed out in question period today, 48 of 62 school boards offer some form of school lunch program. I guess it really comes down to the debate about: what is the responsibility of parents to children, and what is the responsibility of the state to children? I think we have a very solid Department of Children's Services. If in need, a child receives the attention and care that it needs. We have the Department of Employment, Immigration and Industry that also encompasses what used to be known as manpower and human resources. If someone is destitute enough that their children are going to school hungry, I'm sure there is a mechanism whereby there are other departments that can assist. But it is not the responsibility of this department to feed, shelter, clothe, and raise the children of Alberta. It is our job to educate the children of Alberta. I don't know how you institute a province-wide hot lunch program without feeding every kid. [interjection] Well, we are starting. Forty-eight out of 62 schools boards are already doing it. So why would we then go in and say: well, for the other 14 that aren't, we're going to come and provide free meals.

I get back to what I suggested earlier, that it's great to make these suggestions about how to spend more money, but I still haven't heard very many good ideas other than some cockamamie idea about golf courses that we're funding. I am not going to stand here and authorize that there's any authenticity to that claim. But we'll see.

Mr. MacDonald: I'll bring you the information.

Mr. Liepert: Yeah, I would like to see it.

The hon. member started off his comments about the Auditor General's report, and earlier in the debate we did cover that off. I met with the Auditor General early in the new year. We went over his concerns in his report as it applied to Education, and I believe that he was quite satisfied that going forward we should have no difficulty meeting some of his concerns. The major one revolves around when we actually deliver a budget. As we well know, this year our budget was significantly later than normal due to a whole bunch of things that happened last fall and earlier this year. The member would be aware that we have reformed the rules of the House, whereby under the new rules the budget will be presented on the third Thursday of February every year, and I see no reason why that budget presentation on a consistent basis wouldn't meet the concerns that were expressed by the Auditor General.

The member talked about school board debt and annual operating deficits. Again, we dealt with that question in question period a few weeks ago. It is correct that some school boards in the province now are running an annual operating deficit, but they in many cases, most cases in fact, have an accumulated surplus. In order for them to access that accumulated surplus, you have to run an annual deficit, or there's just no ability to access that accumulated surplus. As I commented earlier, I don't believe the taxpayers of Alberta want us to continue to see school boards build accumulated surpluses. It doesn't make any sense. I think we'll be dealing with that over the course of the next year or two.

I believe that answers the questions.

The Chair: Hon. members, there's about two minutes before the next item. Did you want to take the time for Education?

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

4:40

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank the hon. minister for the exchange that we had this afternoon and thank his staff. If he would take me to lunch some day with that expense account he has, maybe he and I could redesign the system in such a way that I could show him where he could do some wonderful things and still save some money right within his own budget. In fact, I had a section that I was just going to talk here about, his communications department, but we won't have time for that.

On a serious note, thank you very much. I appreciate it. Have a good two or three days with your family. I'll stop right now.

Thank you.

The Chair: Did the hon. minister wish to respond quickly?

Mr. Liepert: No.

The Chair: The time has elapsed for the discussion on the Department of Education. We will now start with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, discussing the budget estimates. I will ask the hon. minister to begin.

Agriculture and Food

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, and good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to speak today about the government's commitment to Alberta's agriculture and food industry and talk about the 2007-08 Agriculture and Food budget. Five months into my job as Ag and Food minister I can certainly say that the success of this ministry is due to the high calibre of staff that we have, who show real commitment and passion for the industry here.

Joining me here today are Rory Campbell, my deputy minister; Faye Rault, assistant deputy minister, organizational effectiveness and rural services; Jim Carter, our senior financial officer from Alberta Ag and Food; and Brad Klak, president and managing director of Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. Also, touring in the building here somewhere, keeping an eye on us, are Brian Rhiness, assistant deputy minister, industry development; Colin Jeffares, assistant deputy minister, planning and competitiveness; John Donner, assistant deputy minister, environment and food safety; Dr. Krish Krishnaswamy, vice-president, finance at AFSC; Jim Kiss, the Farmers' Advocate; Donna Babchishin, director of communications; and last but not least is my executive assistant, Michael Norris.

Mr. Chairman, agriculture has been at the centre of Alberta's history for a very long time. Homesteaders brought a strong work ethic, a sense of adventure, and a spirit of community to this province. This heritage is still part of our rural communities today. The agriculture and food industry is critical to maintaining diversity and resilience in the Alberta economy. With \$7.81 billion in farm cash receipts in 2006 Alberta is the second largest agricultural producing province in Canada, and the \$9.6 billion food and beverage industry generates 27,000 jobs in Alberta.

Today's farmers and producers still work the land to grow crops and raise the livestock that fill our food basket. On top of that, today we also see that sense of adventure in innovative entrepreneurs who are building our value-added sector. The producers will always be the heart of our sector, and they will continue to drive our reputation for the quality made-in-Alberta product that is needed for our value-added sector. Together with the growing value-added sector and so many new ventures, we have a recipe for success. This formula has resulted in tremendous growth over the years. In 2006 our agriculture and food industry generated \$5.8 billion in international exports, roughly one-fifth of the nation's agrifood products.

Like the rest of Alberta we know that the agriculture and food industry holds even greater potential, and we are focused on the future. This government is committed to ensuring that our agriculture and food industry continues to grow and thrive. Our current business plan takes into consideration the challenges facing our industry today and outlines how we're working with industry to take advantage of tomorrow's opportunities.

[Mrs. Ady in the chair]

Our current goals, core business, and strategies support the mandate set out by our Premier, but as a ministry we recognize that we are part of a bigger picture. Our objectives line up with the government-wide priorities set out by our new Premier. These priorities are reflected in our mission of enabling growth of a globally competitive, sustainable agriculture and food industry through essential policy, legislation, information, and services. Madam Chairman, that mission lines up with our ministry's vision of growing Alberta farms, processors, and all other agriculture businesses in support of a vibrant rural Alberta.

The work of the Ag and Food ministry directly or indirectly supports all the Premier's priorities. In particular, our programs are designed to manage growth, build a stronger Alberta, and improve our quality of life. We are strategically linked to the government of Alberta business plan, and we will continue to contribute to the goal of having a prosperous Alberta economy by enhancing industry competitiveness and growth.

Key initiatives such as the agriculture growth strategy and the agri-environment strategy will help provide direction. This also contributes to the goal of managing growth pressures. Managing

growth pressures means bringing challenges with opportunities, and that's something we do a lot of in the ag industry. We have been responding to some particular food safety issues, labour needs, and market influences. For example, BSE and several years of low commodity prices have presented some ongoing problems for our producers. However, in resolving issues, we have found ways to strengthen our industry, create greater stability, and capture untapped potential.

The Premier's mandate to me for the Ministry of Ag and Food builds on this desire to turn challenges into opportunities. I mentioned earlier that our mission statement speaks to sustainability and provided some examples. We are committed to building on the existing research as we lay the groundwork for an institute that would help us turn our concern for the environment into market opportunities. We already know that Alberta's farmers are good stewards of the land, so this is a natural fit for an industry that earns a living in partnership with Mother Nature.

Another mandate is to develop a transition program for agriculture to work within the boundaries of any World Trade Organization agreements. This work will be critical to our ability to compete internationally.

The success of our farmers also depends on ensuring that they have access to capital for their business. The Premier has asked that we work with our partners to improve agricultural financial services.

Madam Chairman, as a ministry we have been working diligently to address all these mandates, and we continue to move in the right direction. We need to work with our industry to ensure that they're ahead of the game and remain strong competitors in the changing global market. It is very clear how these mandates from the Premier fit with our three core business areas: facilitate sustainable industry growth, support and strengthen rural sustainability, and strengthen business risk management.

Within those areas we have identified the following priorities: developing traceability systems, which will help mitigate BSE risks and other food safety concerns; addressing labour shortages through a workforce strategy; expanding the value-added sector by capitalizing on innovation and untapped markets; and responding to evolving consumer interests as well as shaping and supporting our overall competitiveness.

At this point I'd like to talk about some of the specific areas of our budget that will help achieve these priorities. The total Agriculture and Food budget for 2007-2008 is \$1.026 billion. Together the ministry's leadership and spending reflect our support and commitment to the province's agriculture and food industry.

4:50

Our funding commitments overall have not changed dramatically, but I'd like to highlight some new funding. We have provided \$3.6 million in new funding to support our ministry's priority to enhance food chain traceability programs. This funding along with continued assistance to help industry respond to the enhanced feed ban will help keep us competitive. We have also allocated \$1.1 million to new workforce strategy funding. Alberta experienced extraordinary growth in 2006, but as you know, there is a price for this prosperity. Like other areas agriculture has experienced labour shortages. This funding will help address this impact on our success.

We have all seen some increases in funding to ongoing programs. We are directing \$5.7 million towards the Canada-Alberta farm water program. That's an increase of \$4.3 million. The extra funding will help farmers develop projects that promote efficient use and conservation of water in their farming operations.

That highlights some of our major programs provided for in this budget and those that have seen increases. I'd also like to point out

that many of our programs are demand driven and tied to our statutory commitments. We are influenced by what happens outside our provincial borders. Our needs vary from year to year. That's why you'll see some areas of funding go up or down slightly from year to year as we adjust to target resources where and when they are needed.

Our loan-based programs provide lending that is specific to agriculture at all levels, from value-added to stock start-up primary production. As I'm sure you're aware, our farmers routinely face some hefty cost pressures, such as fuel and fertilizer prices, which are dictated by the world market.

Madam Chairman, I quite look forward to continuing the discussion as we go on.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I have first on my list the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I again appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Agriculture and Food budget this afternoon. I'm still having difficulty getting around the fact that development is not at the end of this, and I think it was a mistake. I don't know what sort of politics were played there, but I still think of agriculture, food, and rural development together, and I hope that at some point the hon. minister gets rural development back where it belongs: in his department.

Now, I would like to first talk about the budget on page 46, the farm fuel distribution allowance. That's expense element 2.0.6. It's estimated to be 33 and a half million dollars. If one goes back 10 years, when the current Premier was minister of agriculture, the farm fuel distribution allowance was \$30,300,000. Actually, it was overexpended in that year, when the current Premier was minister of agriculture, by a little over \$2 million. So when you add that farm fuel allowance amount, \$32,427,000, roughly 10 years ago, to what we are today requesting in the budget, it's basically the same.

My first questions would be regarding the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General had a lot to say about how the farm fuel benefit program is working or not working in the department. I consider this to be scandalous over the last 10 years. The minister has to accept responsibility for all the inactivity that has gone on with the series of ministers in there over the last 10 years. The Alberta farm fuel benefit program is designed to offer fuel to Alberta farmers at prices competitive with those paid by farmers in other parts of North America, according to the Auditor General in his report, and there are 60,000 individuals registered in the program.

The Auditor goes on to state that the Fuel Tax Act and the fuel tax regulations authorize the program, which has two parts. It has an allowance part and a fuel tax exemption part. The allowance part of this benefit is costing us \$34 million. That's an annual direct cost, which I referred to, and we also have this fuel tax exemption for another \$72 million. This is an exemption that allows farmers to buy marked diesel fuel and gasoline without paying the provincial fuel tax of 9 cents a litre. The allowance gives you 6 cents a litre off the cost of diesel fuel. So in some cases here there is a significant saving, and there should be. Farmers are facing a lot of input costs these days.

No one in the province would have a problem, I don't think, with this farm fuel benefit allowance and the intent of the program, but when you consider that the Auditor General states that there are 60,000 individuals registered in the program, how does the program work when Stats Canada, in data that were released yesterday, indicates that the total number of farms in this province is only 49,431? We've got 60,000 people on the books with these cards to get fuel reductions, and there are only 49,000 farms.

That's not all, Madam Chairman. The Auditor General goes on about the eligibility criteria of these programs and indicates: anyone who has been "actively involved in farming in Alberta, with gross annual farm income of at least \$10,000." That's one of the criteria to be eligible. Now, the Stats Canada information that was provided yesterday – and I got it from the library today – indicates that there are a number of farms in Alberta where the total gross farm receipts are under 10 grand. So let's have a look at this. The total number of farms is 9,791 where the gross income is less than 10 grand. I have a lot of questions regarding these 60,000 individuals who are packing these cards in their pockets and how they're being used.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I think this government and this department along with the Department of Finance, Mr. Chairman, have failed the taxpayers miserably in the administration of this program. Is the Stats Canada data wrong? How on earth does this work? Here's what the Auditor General found in his audit regarding this program.

The Department does not verify the information in application forms before issuing a certificate. Nor does it have any other processes to ensure that only eligible individuals get certificates – or to identify people who become ineligible.

The Auditor General goes on to say that the renewal process has not been completed since 1997, when the current Premier was in charge of the entire department.

Program application forms state that a registration renewal is completed every three years and registrants must submit confirmation of their continued program eligibility then. However, the Department has not completed a renewal process or requested confirmation of eligibility from registrants since 1997. The Farm Fuel Regulation gives the Minister authority to extend the expiry date on certificates. This is what the Department has done for the past nine years – instead of a renewal.

This is from the Auditor General.

This total program costs us \$109 million. In 2005-06 the entire amount collected in gas tax in this province was \$664 million, and it's anticipated, Mr. Chairman, now that we are going to collect \$720 million in gas tax. Now, this amount that we're giving back in these programs through these 60,000 cards is close to 15 per cent of what we're collecting in total gasoline or in fuel tax according to the annual report.

5:00

I have a number of questions now. Is the Minister of Agriculture and Food registered in the Alberta farm fuel benefit program? Why does this department not verify the information in application forms before issuing a certificate? Why does the department not have any other processes to ensure that only eligible individuals get certificates for what could amount to in some cases up to a 15-cent a litre break? I'm not saying that it happens in all cases. It could be 6 cents, it could be 9 cents, but whenever you look at the millions of dollars here, this is significant. Why is there no process to identify people who become ineligible? Why has the department not completed a renewal process? Why has the department not required confirmation of eligibility from registrants since 1997, when the current Premier was minister? Why has the department extended the expiry date on certificates?

We look at this and we look at the Auditor General's report, and we see that in 2006 there were 60,000 registered, packing these cards around in the province of Alberta. Statistics Canada the 2006 Census of Agriculture indicates that there are 49,431 total farms in Alberta. If we do a little bit of math on this, Mr. Chairman, we find out that on average these 60,000 individuals would get \$1,766 in

savings every year per cardholder. That's a lot of money. That's \$33.80 a week if we wanted to look at it that way. If 10,000 of these extra cardholders should have been deemed ineligible, that's over \$17 million in one fiscal year that went out in unauthorized use. [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, a long time to ask two questions, but I appreciate where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is coming from.

I'll talk a little bit about rural development. Yes, we certainly have made some changes, and I was probably part of some of the discussions along the way. Of course, at one time we had moved ag societies, we'd moved 4-H and a few of the others and, of course, quickly realized, partially from the push back we got from the people out there, that they certainly belonged with agriculture, and they indeed came back to agriculture.

Rural development, I guess, hon. member, is a bit of a cat of its own. Yeah, it belongs with agriculture, but rural development certainly is more than agriculture. I know it's now in the camp of the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. They have a special board that looks after administering the finances because I think we sent about seven people and a hundred million dollars over there. It's now in their camp, but I think that probably we still have that relationship where we discuss, you know, what we feel belongs with rural development, as do the other ministries as well. The truth of the matter is, I guess, that rural development is more than agriculture, so maybe it'll come back someday. We don't know that. However, it's where it's at now, and I think probably it will work out all right.

You know, government understands that our rural communities have unique needs, so we have to take a co-ordinated approach to economic growth, probably, and quality of life and infrastructure, health, learning, and skill development. It's been moved over there. It's going to stay there for a while, and we'll see how it goes. I guess that if agriculture feels that it's definitely in the wrong spot, we'll make our thoughts known in the process.

Farm fuel. It doesn't surprise me, hon. member, that you probably brought this up. In fact, I thought you would probably ask me in question period about this earlier in the game because of the fact that certainly the Auditor General has flagged this as something we probably should be dealing with and reviewing. That process, I think we probably might say, internally is happening, and desk audits are being completed as we go along. Certainly, we will have to take it further than that, you know.

A lot of this goes back to the crisis, I guess, we were in with the BSE and the drought that we were having, where we were absolutely almost devastated in the farming community in either the grains and oil seeds or the livestock side. It's kind of tough to get out there and really chop at that particular stage of the game. I know that's not an excuse. You indicate how many people probably are, you know, using this that don't qualify, and no doubt that's what we have to look into. That's what we have to ascertain. It's really difficult, and I know that the \$10,000 limit is, as you say, what they're trying to use.

In farming today it seems that we have the great, large farms with hundreds of thousands or indeed millions of dollars' worth of income, or we have the people that are in the niche markets now, in organic farming perhaps and what not, and a lot of off-farm work. Perhaps there are some wives or parts of the family doing this that probably don't fall below that \$10,000 range that you're talking about. Does the wife qualify to drive her half-ton to town or not? These are the types of things that we probably have to look at.

Am I a user of farm marked fuel? Yes, I am. On the weekend I do go home, and I slog around in the corrals. I pick up the list my son has left me: "Hey, you're in the cattle business with me. You better get to work." So I have to drive my half-ton. I honestly feel that I qualify driving my half-ton around with marked fuel in it.

These are some of the issues, I guess. Certainly, you know, like I said, reducing access to benefits while industry is recovering would almost be impossible, but we will have to go that route. The Auditor General has directed us, so we will.

There are renewals called for every four years. I think that probably the first renewal was called for at the time of the first severe drought that we had out there. I can see what happened. I wasn't there, but I can see, you know. I can get some logic to what happened.

I guess I'll go back a little bit to: who qualifies? Certainly, we know there are some out there that probably don't qualify, and that's just the nature of the beast. Also, the fuel distributors are somewhat under the gun on this in that they're supposed to keep an eye on what's happening, and indeed they do. We do sign – I don't know if we've done it for a while – a declaration, you know, so it's not just willy-nilly. You put your name on the line, and there can be repercussions if you get caught, other than the purple gas man sticking his little dipstick in your tank and checking, which, by the way, they don't do a whole lot of anymore. That probably compounds the problem as well. Having said that, I don't know if I've particularly answered your questions on that, but I certainly understand where you're coming from with the questions.

One of the other issues we want to talk about: on a particular farm more than one operator on that farm can qualify. They can't use the same fuel, but they can qualify because they are using it. So that skews the numbers a little bit when you try and justify, you know, a farm or how many farms are out there. There could be, particularly on a corporate farm, I guess, three or four operators that could qualify under the same scenario. Even Stats Canada tells us that we have more operators, 71,000, than farms, 49,000, which I think doesn't quite line up, probably, with the numbers that you have because you've got the most recent ones. I think you've probably picked off the ones that came out yesterday. I think it was yesterday.

5:10

Mr. MacDonald: I'd been waiting, yes.

Mr. Groeneveld: Yes. Right. Exactly.

We have started the renewal process in-house, and we definitely will take it to the next step. To be honest with you, the Auditor General probably put his finger on a few other things that we were doing that we felt maybe were a little bit more important. We have dealt with some of those others, and we're in that process.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that answers the hon. member's questions. He's probably got a few more tucked away in there someplace.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I appreciate the responses from the hon. minister.

Certainly, I don't think we can relate this program to BSE or any of the other farm issues that we've dealt with over the last five years. I was waiting. I had read the report last fall, and I saw that 60,000 number, 60,000 individuals that had these cards, and I saw the fact that in 2001 we had roughly 53,000 farms. You can see that going down since 1976, I think, or 1977. You know, the hon. minister is absolutely right. There are less farms, and they seem to be getting bigger. But I was waiting. The librarians told me that this information would be available on May 16, and sure enough it was.

But there's no excuse for this. If these people are not farming, they should not be packing these cards around in their pockets getting a fuel break. It has nothing to do with the BSE crisis or any other issue that farmers faced. This is a simple case of a government dropping the ball not only for one year but for 10 years. I have sympathy for the hon. minister. He's been in this department for less than a year, but it's his predecessors that should be in here answering the questions on this because they did nothing. They did absolutely nothing to ensure that these programs were accurate.

Well, in the Stats Canada information the total number of farms in Alberta is 49,431, but over half the farms are sole proprietorships, so there should be only one individual with one of these cards. That's another point that I would like to make: 27,815 of our farms are sole proprietorships. There are another roughly 14,000 partnerships with and without a written agreement. There are 6,700 family corporations. The hon. minister is stating that, well, there could be more than one card with those outfits. You know, that's understandable, but the fact is that this doesn't add up. We've got 60,000 cards running around, and it's costing us megabucks. It's costing us year after year, in my opinion, a lot of money. If only 10,000 of these people were ineligible for one year and if we're going to average this, it means that the government is losing \$17 million. That's in one year, and that's if only 10,000 of them are ineligible.

Mr. Chairman, it's scandalous, and alarm bells should have gone off in this department with the overexpenditure on the farm fuel allowance in 1998, in the year ending March 31, 1998, when the Premier was the minister of agriculture. That's when people should have started paying attention to this. Obviously they did not because as the Auditor General points out, the department has not completed a renewal process or requested confirmation of eligibility from registrants since 1997. It's just a rubber stamp. I'm sorry, hon. minister; that is simply not good enough.

Now, what is the minister willing to do to investigate the abuse of this program over the past 10 years while the government of Alberta simply ignored its responsibility, in my opinion, to monitor? Mr. Chairman, I can only ask: what other programs under this ministry have gone unmonitored for so long? How does the hon. minister explain this department's failure to protect millions of dollars in taxpayer money over this time period? It's not unreasonable to ask – I don't know if there would be a privacy issue here – will the department produce a list of all the certificate holders? Surely, someone must know who the beneficiaries of this program are. Maybe there are 15,000 cards that are in the back of the wallet and never been used, and maybe others are racking up \$8,000 and \$9,000 in fuel savings in their operations in a year. Maybe it's all valid; maybe it's not. But who are all these people with these cards?

Alberta consumers right now, just before this long weekend, depending on which area of the province they're in are looking at well over \$1.10, \$1.12, \$1.14 a litre. And they're pulling up to the pump paying 9 cents a litre less for their gasoline. Taxpayers would love a break like this. They'd love to be able to whip out one of these cards. I'm sure if people had known that this program was not monitored – who knows? – the odd person may have applied for a card, but they didn't. This is completely unacceptable by this government that prides itself on fiscal management. Well, this is yet another example. It has failed. It has failed, Mr. Chairman.

Albertans will be outraged to hear that we've got this poorly administered program that's costing us millions and millions of dollars. The government has done nothing about it. Yet a consumer will roll up – hopefully, they won't have to push their car – to the pump this weekend and put \$50 or \$60 in it to top it up, and they'll pay the bill. They get no help. They get no help. This program should be set up for farmers and farmers only and farmers that need

it. I can only imagine what the bill has been since 1997 for people who are ineligible for these amounts. Now, when we look at the number of farms as reported by Stats Canada, there certainly have to be a lot of ineligible cardholders who are fleecing the taxpayer.

Mr. Chairman, hopefully, we're going to get some answers. I don't know how this is going to be investigated. I can see where the department has said that it accepted the Auditor General's recommendations in regard to this matter and plans and processes are well under way. This is good, but does that mean that the department is simply ignoring the fact that abuses may have been happening over the past 10 years? Are we just going to forget about this, hope that frustrated consumers forget about this, hope that taxpayers forget about this?

5:20

I just can't understand how this was allowed to continue to happen as the Auditor General has pointed out in his report. There are too many implications to this. Tax dollars, in my opinion, are being wasted, and I think we've got to have an immediate action plan from the government on this. Whoever was responsible for this omission – and it's not this minister; it's previous ministers – has to be held accountable. They have to explain why there is this complete lack of control over this program. Someone must have known. Someone must have known because in 2001 there were 53,652 farms registered by Stats Canada, yet this program just seemed to breeze through every year. The Legislative Assembly gave the money, Alberta Finance administered some of this, and the taxpayers year after year have lost millions and millions of dollars. Again, Mr. Chairman, it's scandalous. There's only one way to describe this.

Mr. Dunford: An outrage.

Mr. MacDonald: Taxpayers will be outraged, hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Chairman, every farmer in Alberta is not a crook.

Mr. Cardinal: That's what the Liberals think.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, obviously.

Mr. MacDonald: No. We're not saying that, and you know it.

Mr. Groeneveld: I think you kind of give that impression when you start talking about millions and millions of dollars, you know. How do you know that particular figure?

Mr. Chairman, it takes resources to conduct an audit. We know that, so that's part of where we're at. We agree that the issue has to be addressed. You know, I can only assume in answering your questions where you kind of lay the blame on the previous ministers that they probably figured it was maybe better to focus our energies on dealing with the response to the drought and the BSE that was out there. I'm not going to make an excuse for anyone, but I know that life was not a lot of fun out there in the last few years. In fact, it's not all a bed of roses yet, or probably the hon. chairman and myself wouldn't be sitting in this House if it was so rosy out there. I don't know. That's only an assumption.

I would also add that the Auditor General reported that the minister did an outstanding job of administering the drought and BSE progress. We sent out \$1.7 billion worth of support in that process. Perhaps the hon. member disagrees, but the Auditor General has reviewed our process and issued his opinion. I already indicated that we are going to go ahead; we're going to look into

this. We don't do that overnight. We cannot under the FOIP rules, of course, list the names of the people that use the marked fuels.

You keep talking about cars, and I think that if you go out into rural Alberta and you start looking around and you see the amount of tractors out there that use marked fuels and half-tons that legitimately use marked fuels, I think that probably millions and millions of dollars being misdirected is a stretch. At least, I certainly hope it is. However, we are going to deal with this in the future. You know, we're not ignoring anyone in the process. The Auditor General has brought this up; we know in our department that we're going to deal with this.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. member talks about the Statistics Canada release that came out yesterday, you know, and just to mention a few things that have happened on the agricultural side of the industry. This consensus provides a profile of Canadian agricultural operation information on the number of farms, the crops that are out there, how the land is being used. They talk a little bit about the land management practices, which, of course, is something that we're dealing with very much now with SRD and their land-use framework. They talk about the livestock and poultry industry, which as the hon. member said: BSE, drought that's no reason to do what we did. It's not a pretty picture out there yet, particularly, and I think the hon. member has to understand that.

They talk about farm machinery: what's happened out in farm machinery where farmers are now paying up to \$400,000 for a combine or \$400,000 for a tractor, of what that's doing to the farm economy out there and how, of course, we see fewer farmers out there. But that doesn't mean that they're all corporate farms. In my own instance, my son and I run a corporate farm for various reasons, but it's still what I consider very much a family farm. Statistics can be a tad misleading on quite a bit of those issues.

They talk about the gross farm receipts, which is kind of interesting. In Alberta here they actually went up. So that part is encouraging, I guess you might say. Maybe there's a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel.

You know, there are profiles on farm operators, and they talk about one other issue that we hear from the opposition from time to time: farm-related injuries. That's a statistic that we in Alberta are not happy with. I think we're .4 of 1 per cent higher than the national average. I guess that we work on that .4 or try to get that down, but as you've heard us say many times in the process: one farm injury or one farm death is too many. I think these are the type of issues that we have to look at these statistics and come back and say: "Hey. We have to deal with these in a prudent manner as well because we can't always look at the dollars and cents sign that is out there."

Of course, as I said, the major highlight from the statistics was the decline of farms in Canada. Nationally our numbers fell 7 per cent from 2001, to 229,373 farms. This trend, you know, was evident here in Alberta as the number of farms decreased by 7.9 per cent since 2001, to just under 50,000 farms. Despite this drop, Mr. Chairman, Alberta still has the second-largest number of farms among all Canadian provinces. As well, farm size in terms of the area has increased since 2001. The shrinking farm numbers should not be mistaken as the death of the family farm because as people move into corporate farms, as I said before, we are still family farms. Indeed, yes, we have some large corporate farms out there. But when we look at Alberta, we have quite a few of the Hutterite brethren farms out there, which are corporate family farms, and you certainly can't say they're not a family-run organization. There are some pretty big corporate farms out there that way.

Alberta Ag and Food helps maintain and grow family farms through a number of different programs. It probably should be noted

that with newer technologies certainly more people can farm more land. I'll just go back to my own situation where my son does the grain farming and we work together on the cattle. When I'm up here, he gets up in the morning. He doesn't get up, like you might indicate, at 5 o'clock in the morning to milk the cows because those days are long gone, but he gets up at a reasonable time in the morning. He feeds 200 cows, and if he doesn't seed 200 to 250 acres a day, he figures he's had a pretty bad day. The life has changed out there so much, and it's changing ever so quickly as we move along in the last couple of years. Really, it results in, you know, fewer farmers running the farms. It's not all gloom and doom, I guess.

5:30

The consensus also noted that farmer input prices increased 9.6 per cent since 2001 – and that's a concern – while the prices received for their products dropped 2.6 per cent. Of course, the people at AFSC certainly see that happening as they go through the various programs that we have. I think that probably in Alberta we are so much farther ahead of the other provinces because of the fact that the people at AFSC come up with the Alberta-only programs to add to that. In Alberta here we don't like what's happening, but we're probably still head and shoulders above where the other provinces are going. Certainly, my department is concerned about the increase in input costs and the decreased prices recovered for the products. We've known all along that the input costs are rising, and it's not just the farming sector.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I have a lot of issues to bring up with the department. I would like to state again for the record, to correct the minister: it's this government's total incompetence that we're pointing out. It has nothing to do with the farming community. It's the incompetence of this government – total incompetence – in administering this farm fuel program. I would advise the minister, clearly, to go over *Hansard* in the course of this debate, and I will expect an apology from him for his comments on the Monday that we resume discussions in this Assembly.

Now, Mr. Chairman, the Auditor General also has other recommendations for this department, but in the time we have, I would like to discuss some of the specific, again, line items in the budget, this element 2.0.3, regarding the Alberta Grain Commission. Now, the Alberta Grain Commission, from what I can see going over its website for the last five years, has been nothing more than a shell for the anti Wheat Board forces. Tax dollars going in here, increases all the time. The 2006-07 forecast for the Alberta Grain Commission is \$522,000, \$35,000, or 7 per cent, higher than what was budgeted last year, this respective fiscal year, Mr. Chairman.

The Grain Commission, again, does not publish an annual report. You're giving it megabucks, you're increasing the budget all the time, but there's no annual report, and there's really very little information to be found on the commission except its anti Wheat Board rhetoric. We've had to submit written questions, Mr. Chairman, just to get basic information about this organization. There's a serious lack of openness with the Alberta Grain Commission. Can the minister tell us why the commission overspent its budget last year? Why was this additional \$35,000 needed? Can the minister provide us with a detailed breakdown of how the Grain Commission uses its funding?

I know the Grain Commission played a big role, as I said earlier, in the campaign to discredit the Canadian Wheat Board in the past

number of years. Can the minister tell us where the commission will be focusing its attention this year? What initiatives will the Grain Commission, again, be focusing on? Will the department be providing public information regarding the Grain Commission's activities? In the spirit of openness and accountability, will the minister commit to having the Grain Commission publish an annual report so that taxpayers can see where the money has been spent? We shouldn't have to get a written question across to the department. They are tax dollars, and you should explain how they are being spent.

Now, the Auditor General had some concerns about the Alberta Financial Services Corporation. In the 2005-06 Auditor General's annual report, volume 2, page 43, the AG recommends that "the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation improve: employee information system security awareness." We all know that computer problems are rampant in the department, the use of computers at the wrong time. We've dealt with that issue, not to my satisfaction, but at least we've dealt with it.

The Auditor General also recommends that the AFSC monitor "employee compliance with its computer access policies and procedures," and we've seen what a lack of computer use policies can lead to in the case of the agricultural employee who had to be suspended for inappropriate behaviour. Can the minister tell us if he's dealt with the AG's recommendation as it relates to the AFSC? What, specifically, has the minister done to fix this problem?

Also, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to have a look at some of the major funding increases and decreases in the department. In the estimates on page 46, element 1.0.3, the Farmers' Advocate. The Farmers' Advocate is \$3,000 less than for the 2006-07 forecast year. The minister has been telling us about how tough times are. Can the minister tell us why he is reducing funding for the Farmers' Advocate if farmers are in as much trouble? And they are. I agree with him; it's tough these days. Given the important role that the advocate plays in assisting farmers, particularly with energy development issues on farmland, does the minister not agree that the advocate should be well funded to serve rural communities? Is it the minister's position that the advocate will need less resources this year than the office did last year, and if so, why?

Also on the same page in element 3.0.2, rural utilities. Electricity deregulation has cost Alberta farmers significantly, particularly when you compare farm electricity costs to other regions. I did a comparison with Stats Canada data, and it was shameful. If farmers are in a tough situation, it's even tougher when they walk to the mailbox or go to town and get their power bill. They've probably got to go right to the bank after that. Can the minister tell us if he supports electricity deregulation, in light of the fact that Alberta's farm electricity costs have risen by an unbelievable 38 per cent since 2000? Does the minister believe that farmers in Alberta should be paying more for their electricity than farmers in Saskatchewan, B.C., or Manitoba? How does the government of Alberta support farmers who are struggling to pay their electricity costs brought on by the failures of deregulation?

Also on page 46, line 3.0.3, rural community and leadership development. There's a very important item here, and I don't know if we're going to get time to discuss it. Maybe in question period we'll get the chance. Rural community and leadership development is \$412,000 more than was budgeted last year. This is a significant case of overspending. How does the minister justify spending more than \$400,000 more than was budgeted for this particular program? Can the minister tell us what this program does and how the additional \$412,000 was spent?

I think we'll go now, Mr. Chairman, to page 47 of the estimates, and we'll start with element 4.0.1, program support. In the 2007-08

estimate for program support there is a 38 per cent increase from '06-07. This is a significant increase in funding. Can the hon. minister tell us why this additional money is needed? How will this additional funding be utilized? Does the minister expect a significant increase in the level of support that industry development will require this year?

Element 4.0.5., bioindustrial technologies. The 2006-07 forecast for bioindustrial technologies is \$4.2 million, 60 per cent more than was budgeted for last year, an additional \$1.59 million. Can the minister please tell us where this additional funding was used? Why did the minister accept the need for additional funding? What kinds of bioindustrial technologies has the department been investing in? The 2007-08 estimate is more than \$1 million dollars less than the previous year. Will this be enough, or will we be overspending again this year?

5:40

Element 4.0.6, business expansion and commercialization. This is a 28 per cent increase. This is a significant increase. Can the minister explain where he would like to see this additional funding used? Is this additional funding going towards developing grain marketing options for Albertans in light of the recent CWB vote?

Line item 4.0.7, agriculture industry development and diversification. There's a 19 per cent increase in the 2006-07 forecast. Can the minister tell us if this funding will be focused on any organic food initiatives? In what areas would the minister like to see greater diversification? Will any of this funding go towards producer-owned marketing co-operatives? Will any of this funding go towards the development of agricultural tourism initiatives such as U-pick, farmers' markets, or value-added specialty products?

Element 4.0.8, the Growth Strategy Secretariat. Again, a 29 per cent increase from the previous year. Can the minister tell us what this additional funding will be used for?

Element 4.0.9, infrastructure assistance for municipal waste water. Oh, I've run out of time, Mr. Chairman, and I'm disappointed.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food to respond.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. My first discussion I would like to have – his opening comment on the last round was the total incompetence of this government. I would like to comment that that's probably one person's opinion, unless the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East would like to jump up and express her opinion. Then I might have to say that it's two people's opinion, but I'm going to take that with a grain of salt. Coming from that side of the House, I guess that's a natural thing to say.

Alberta Grain Commission, something I certainly don't mind talking about. Their budget is \$495,000. Hon. member, the results are reported in the annual report of the ministry. I would be happy to provide copies of the contributions to the hon. member if he so desires. His allegations, perhaps, about the barley plebiscite and the grain commission: Mr. Chairman, could we stay here till about 10 o'clock? Because I would like to express my opinion on that one. But I think probably the hon. member, as he did in the previous ministry, kind of likes to bait people, whether it's with golf courses

or whatever the case may be, so I'll take that with a smile on my face.

At any rate, I would suggest that the Alberta Grain Commission's position on the barley plebiscite is probably somewhat a direct result of what myself and the department's position has been all along on the Canadian Wheat Board, so to speak. As you know, it's a federal initiative, and they chose to deal with the barley portion of it. It was all that they chose to deal with at this time, maybe a little bit to the chagrin of myself and my department.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the Minister of Agriculture and Food, but I will now invite officials to leave the Assembly so the committee may rise and report.

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Chairman, I would gladly supply to the member the answers that we didn't get to.

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(a) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Education and Agriculture and Food relating to the 2007-08 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? That's carried. So ordered.

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 33 Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act

[Debate adjourned May 16: Dr. Pannu speaking]

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with regret that I move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. on Monday, May 28.

[Motion carried; at 5:48 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday, May 28, at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 28, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. As we begin our deliberations in this sitting of the Legislature, we ask for the insight we need to do our work to the benefit of our province and its people and to the benefit of our country. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, if you now would join in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please sing in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members and particularly the young people in the audience, the gentleman who led us in the singing of our national anthem, Mr. Paul Lorieau, one year ago was of course riveting everyone in North America in singing the national anthem at the hockey games for the Edmonton Oilers. Sadly, neither the Oilers nor the Flames are involved this year, but we are all supportive of the Ottawa Senators.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly His Excellency Tsuneo Nishida, ambassador of Japan, and his wonderful wife, Keiko. With the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations it was my pleasure to host the ambassador and his wife at a luncheon earlier today to welcome him to Alberta.

Japan is one of Alberta's most important international partners, with annual two-way trade totalling more than \$2.5 billion. Since 1970 Alberta has had a trade office in Tokyo promoting Alberta's exports and encouraging Japanese investment. But, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's Japan relations go far beyond trade. For example, 18 Alberta municipalities are twinned with Japanese cities and towns, and Alberta has had a sister province relationship with Hokkaido for more than 25 years.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that our honoured guests will now please rise and receive our traditional warm welcome.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very talented and successful Alberta youth, Mr. Ryan Hodgson of

Okotoks. Last year Ryan was chosen from among 132 candidates to receive the 4-H Premier's award, the highest award in the 4-H program.

Ryan has been a member of Alberta's 4-H program for the past 10 years, specifically the Millarville Stockland 4-H Beef Club and the Millarville 4-H Multi Club where he's held several executive positions. He is well known in his community for his exceptional leadership, communication, and personal development skills, and it was these qualities that earned him this great honour.

Along with 27 other exceptional youth Ryan spent last year as a 4-H ambassador promoting the opportunities of the program. I know that his efforts played an important role in contributing to 4-H, culminating this year as the 2006 Premier's award winner. Ryan is here to be presented to the Assembly and to meet with Premier Stelmach. Mr. Speaker, Ryan with his parents, Steve and Debbie, and his brother Matthew are seated in your gallery, and I ask them to now rise and receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three guests visiting from the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency. Watching these proceedings today are Francois, Elizabeth, and Sarah Hebert. Mr. and Mrs. Hebert not only farm; they operate a large feedlot in the St. Paul area. But, most importantly, they are the very proud parents of Matthew Hebert, who is a researcher with the government caucus. They are also accompanied by their daughter Sarah, who is in her third year of education at the University of Alberta. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a group visiting from Mother Teresa school in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. This is a group of 27 students who are here for the week, and they are participating in School at the Legislature. They are led by their teacher, Ms Kelly Laxdal, and she's also ably assisted by teacher-partners Ms Virginia English and Ms Jolene Ryall. This group is in the members' gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a class of 57 grade 6 students from Albert Lacombe, teachers Mr. Joe Esposito, Mrs. Paddi Brown, and parents and helpers Mrs. Donna Maxton, Mrs. Leslie Begert, and Mrs. Bourgeois. I wish them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The second group, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce the chairman of the Greater St. Albert Catholic regional school division and the vice-chair. The chair is Rosaleen McEvoy – and I don't know where she is, but hopefully she's here – and Jacquie Hansen, the vice-chair. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two series of introductions today. The first is a very special group of visitors from Norway that are here as part of a Rotary group study exchange. They're led by a Rotarian of 14 years, Kristin Mourud, who is a physiotherapist and also a coach. The team members are Siri Svere, who is a sheep farmer and also a municipal politician in Oslo; Roger Espeli, who is involved in hotel management; Mr. Finn Holm, who is in health management; and the last member of the team is Camilla Brekke, who is a lawyer. They're accompanied by three members of the Rotary Club of Edmonton South: Gordon Edmiston, Delores Knudsen, and Hank Hendricks. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is a very special person to the members of the Alberta Liberal caucus. She is a long-time health care professional, a former vice-president of the Alberta Liberal Party, and currently the nominated candidate in Sherwood Park. I would ask Louise Rogers to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Carol Wenger and Brenda Komick. Carol and Brenda are Palace Casino workers entering their 262nd day on strike due in part to the government's failure to protect Alberta workers from unfair employers. [interjections] The compassion can be heard around the House.

Carol has worked at the Palace Casino since June of last year in maintenance. Carol originally hails from Saskatchewan and came to Edmonton in 1972. In her off time she enjoys relaxing and going for walks. Brenda Komick is a slot attendant at the Palace Casino for the past three years. She has a son who is 17 years old and moved to Edmonton from Vancouver four years ago to be closer to her mother, who lives in a seniors' home. In her spare time she likes to be with her family.

I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that they please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Ukrainian Foundation for College Education

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge the efforts of the Ukrainian Foundation for College Education and its Kyiv Konnection fundraising banquet held earlier this month. More than 300 people attended the banquet, including representatives from the government of Alberta, businesspeople, academics, and members of Alberta's Ukrainian community. The event raised about \$12,000 for MacEwan College's Ukrainian resource and development centre.

The Ukrainian resource and development centre fosters innovation, leadership, and education within the national and international communities in community development, the arts, digital communication, business, education, and assisting Ukrainian Canadians to develop and retain their cultural identity and participate more effectively in the multicultural life of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the Ukrainian Foundation for College Education is a nonprofit society, and since 1994 its overall purpose has been to

raise funds to carry out Ukrainian education projects, particularly in co-operation with the college system. Projects include providing students with financial awards and promoting donation giving for Ukrainian college education. Over the years the Ukrainian Foundation for College Education has helped to raise more than \$4.5 million for these worthwhile projects.

Mr. Speaker, we should all be very proud of the volunteer work and the accomplishments of these dedicated Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Community Initiatives Program

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently in question period the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie raised objection to nonmatching grants issued by government to volunteer groups, which include St. Luke Catholic school, Alberta Native Friendship Centres, Kids Help Phone, River Valley Alliance, and St. Albert Senior Citizens' Club. These groups deliver valuable services to our communities. Their members offer thousands of volunteer hours. However, at times they are not in a position to match their grants. In these cases, from time to time this government supports them with nonmatching CIP grant assistance, which is subject to transparent grants reconciliation. In his question the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie further referred to the CIP grants issued to these volunteer groups by saying, "Well, you were paying [them] five times more than they deserved anyway."

Mr. Speaker, let me set the record straight. I suggest to you that this government could not do enough to support such volunteers, who take the initiative and donate their personal time for free to enrich our children's lives, to address social issues in our native population, to protect our children from violence and abuse and offer refuge, or build parks in the province or care for our seniors. Anyone who suggests that this government supports these groups five times too much is either ignorant of the value of the work that these groups provide or has little appreciation for volunteerism.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to use this opportunity to thank previously mentioned groups and assure them that this government will continue to appreciate and support their efforts despite the opposition's criticism.

Thank you.

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

Alberta's Social Infrastructure

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk about potholes and politics. Potholes happen. When we live in a climate where the ground freezes and thaws, spaces will open and road surfaces collapse. Depending on the budget for roads and the kind of winter, they may be repaired by summer, or we spend a long time trying to avoid them. We may blame the authorities, but we know that even with the best of care some potholes are inevitable.

Some political crises are like that. Whoever is in power, there will be incidents, many not of their own making, that they have to deal with. Though it's the job of the opposition to highlight these, to find neglect and call for inquiries so this never happens again, we know that some things do happen. If the sides were reversed, we could not prevent them any more than we can prevent potholes.

There are potholes that happen and potholes that proliferate. There are the potholes that run together to become trenches until the roads weaken from the water that flows through them. When roads become obstacle courses, we stop talking of potholes and talk of neglect. Mr. Speaker, this is precisely what has been happening in

the past decade in Alberta, not only on our streets but in social infrastructure. For years we've closed our ears to problems and dismissed messengers as whiners. We have shipped our poor out of province, drowning out complaints with chants of the Alberta advantage. Just as four-wheel drives weave through the washboard and call it freedom of the road, our Premier calls for managing the pressures of growth.

Given the neglect that has brought this on, we need a plan and new direction. Potholes happen; washboards do not. Accidents happen; neglect does not. Human neglect is no accident. I urge citizens to keep this in mind as they drive this spring.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Medicine Hat Tigers Hockey Team

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of pleasure that I stand in this Assembly once again to pass on the news regarding Medicine Hat's beloved Tigers Western Hockey League hockey team. The Tigers played well and fought hard during the Memorial Cup tournament in Vancouver. Unfortunately, this year it wasn't meant to be. However, this team has a great deal to be proud of. The tournament brought to an end a very successful season for the Tigers.

Last Wednesday night the Medicine Hat Tigers defeated the Vancouver Giants in a 1-0 round robin victory that secured them a spot in the finals. They once again met up with the Giants on Sunday night. In their ninth meeting in three weeks the Tigers had their last encounter with the heavy-checking and highly talented Giants that unfortunately saw our boys get shut out from the title by a score of 3-1. Throughout a tense and electrified game the Tigers put on a brave fight and left the Giants just barely out of the first period with a scoreless match. By the second period the two teams rallied back and forth in a tied pursuit. However, by the third and final period the efforts of the Giants came to the detriment of the Tigers. The underdogs – or should I say the undercats? – fought hard and proved that teamwork is a force like no other.

I'm pleased to be able to tell the House that this season was a conference-best regular season for the Tigers, who relentlessly clawed their way to the Memorial Cup.

To all the players that will be leaving the team due to age and other professional commitments, we wish you all the best, and your province congratulates you on all your successes with the Medicine Hat Tigers, including your hard-fought series with the Giants.

Also, I'd like to offer my best wishes to the Giants on their first win, a first in the team's six-year franchise history.

I know that I speak for the members of this Assembly and Albertans when I wish the Medicine Hat Tigers a restful off-season and all the best in the hockey season to follow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Government Task Forces

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unmasking the task force farce. In a pathetic attempt to appear more transparent and accountable than his predecessor, our interim Premier has not only assigned his new/old cabinet colleagues specific homework projects, which to date have gone unmarked, but has sent information-gathering task force farces hither and yon throughout the province, frantically compiling several clear-cut forests worth of pulped paper for what purposes other than a public relations/frustrations exercise.

Who can forget the 2005 task force that toured the province investigating long-term care shortcomings and abuses highlighted by Auditor General Fred Dunn's scathing report? That MLA committee set the task force standard as it toured the province, hearing a series of heart-twisting, gut-wrenching stories of neglect and abuse from concerned seniors' family members and advocates. How many of the task force recommendations has this government acted upon?

For 45 days this winter and spring the Affordable Housing Task Force toured the province, gathering several more forests worth of reported recommendations, including 38 of 52 which this government outrightly rejected.

1:20

The rigged royalty review's outcome has already been compromised by the Finance minister's premature conclusions.

The crime and community support task force completed its relatively short, by Affordable Housing Task Force standards, 14-municipalities tour this past Friday at the University of Calgary, in the Calgary-Varsity constituency, which I represent.

With the exception of the government's sleight of hand-picked royalty review, which won't report until after the Legislature's sessional spotlight has been turned off, the other task forces contained MLA men and women on a mission who sincerely wanted to hear from Albertans in order to address their concerns. They and their equally dedicated committee volunteers and Albertans who participated must feel duped and betrayed by this government, that sent them on a mission only to ignore and reject their recommendations.

Instead of the boy who cried wolf, Albertans have the Premier who cried task force but failed to follow through.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am rising today with a petition with 182 signatures on it. All 182 signatures were gathered during our housing rally on May 17. The petition notes the Conservatives' continued refusal to protect Alberta families from rent gouging and urges the government to immediately introduce temporary rent guidelines.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

Bill 39

Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 39, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007.

This amendment act proposes changes which reflect a new governance model that the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists of Alberta, fondly known as APEGGA, and the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals, fondly known as ASET, have agreed on. It's one act and two associations. This proposed model is in response to the request the Alberta government made of these two groups last year to work together to come to a mutually agreeable solution over the governance of Alberta's engineering and geoscientist technologists.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 39 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 40 Personal Directives Amendment Act, 2007

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce Bill 40, the Personal Directives Amendment Act, 2007.

These amendments reflect the input of over 4,300 Albertans and will make it easier to benefit from the Personal Directives Act. Bill 40 will include a voluntary standard form that Albertans can use to write their own personal directive, which will ensure that their wishes are respected if they are unable to speak for themselves. It will also include a voluntary registry for their personal directives. The act will also provide safeguards, including a new process to reassess decision-making capacity and a new process for investigating complaints about agents when there are concerns about harm to the maker of a personal directive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 40 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have three tablings, all from the same source. They were shared with me when I attended the Alberta Funeral Service Association annual conference earlier this spring. The first one is their booklet called *Funerals: An Information Guide*. The second one is called *Yours, Mine and Our Children's Grief: A Parent's Guide*, to help parents with little children who are grieving. The third booklet is called *Grieving: "Our Time,"* which helps grown-ups.

I must say that they were really pleased to have an MLA, who brought greetings from the Legislature, and they wish all members in the House all the best.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings, all with respect to questions raised in Committee of Supply on the evening sitting of May 16, answering questions from Edmonton-Calder, Edmonton-Manning, and Calgary-Fort.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today: the first from constituent Colin MacIntyre, noting that he thinks "the housing market is now officially out of control, and it is

hurting a lot of people" and believes "it is the Government's responsibility to do something."

The second from constituent Seth Franklin, who has a good-paying job but is feeling that he has to look away from this city for housing, but that would take him away from his young daughter, who lives in Edmonton with her mother. He's particularly disappointed with the Capital Housing decision to tear down a complex rather than to sell it, as had been previously promised, to low-income earners.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from a constituent, Gloria Williams. She has multiple sclerosis, and she can only work part-time. She's asking for help with the stress in her life caused by expensive medications and now an unacceptable rental increase.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, I rise to present two tablings. One is the program for the excellent theatrical production at John D. Bracco school on Friday of *Storybook Love*. It was written and directed by Darolyn McCrostie and Jason Ashmore. The program describes the role of each of the 36 students. A great night was had by all.

The second tabling is from northeast resident Liz Lister, calling on the federal government to act on youth crime. Her son was swarmed in a northeast Edmonton neighbourhood on the weekend.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is the 15th anniversary joint fundraising breakfast program of Apache resources, Calgary Stampeders, and the Calgary Urban Project Society.

My second tabling, along the same theme, is a homeless awareness week program pamphlet entitled: 3,436 people are looking for a place to sleep tonight. That pamphlet comes from Homeless Awareness Calgary.

My third tabling is a program entitled Living Legends, that highlighted a number of First Peoples' dance and music, which was put on by energetic youth from Brigham Young University, cohosted by the National Energy Board and the Church of Latter-day Saints.

My fourth tabling is the program from the 2006-2007 showcase awards of the Consulting Engineers of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling today copies of documents concerning correspondence on the transfer of water from the Red Deer River to the mall and racetrack at Balzac.

Thank you.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, pursuant to the Regulated Forestry Profession Act, the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists fourth annual report 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Knight, Minister of Energy, response to a question raised by Mr. Mason, hon. leader of the New Democrat opposition, on May 14, 2007, Department of Energy 2007-2008 main estimates debate.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Red Deer River Water Transfer

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The controversy involving the water transfer from the Red Deer River to the shopping mall and racetrack at Balzac won't go away. In fact, it's going to escalate. The Alberta Liberal caucus has obtained internal government documents clearly showing that this government is committed to this water transfer no matter what the Premier says. To the Premier: does the Premier still deny there is a commitment by your government to have this water transfer take place?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the matter of the water licence is before the Minister of Environment and before the committee to review the application. The leader tabled documents just a few seconds before you called question period. I'll review those documents that he tabled, and I will respond to his allegation tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The documents come from the government. Support by this government for this water transfer has been in place a long time despite this Premier's denials. An e-mail dated July 31, 2006, from a high-ranking official in agriculture, food and rural development states that "at a meeting that took place a while back with several Ministers in attendance, it appeared that support for the project was going to be forthcoming." Construction on the project was in full swing a month later. To the Premier: will the Premier finally admit that this government has been behind this project from day one?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, my earlier comments hold true. On occasion the Leader of the Opposition has tabled documents and carved out a few words to read publicly in this Assembly, but when you look at the total document, the meaning is completely different. As I said before, we'll have a look at what has been tabled to review it and respond appropriately. It's only fair given the way that this House conducts itself.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would have thought the Premier was well briefed on an issue of this size.

The case keeps building. An e-mail dated July 10, 2006, from the executive director of rural development states that "the developers were meeting with Ty Lund last week." To refresh memories, that would mean the developers were meeting with the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. To the Premier: will the Premier instruct the former Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to provide a written account of that meeting and any documents associated with it so that we can all see what deals were made?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that I didn't and I don't read all of the e-mails that come to every minister or every MLA in this House. He's quoting an e-mail from back in 2006. If it is part – if it is part – of the very thick documents that he tabled in the House earlier, we'll have a look at it and respond.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, when the Premier reads his own material, I see that it gets better and better.

An e-mail dated July 10, 2006, from the former agriculture minister's EA states that Doug "has flipped me an e-mail asking on the status of our work with the county on applying for the water/waste water program . . . Doug indicated that developers are looking for a letter from us today." The person referenced would be the current Minister of Advanced Education, by the way, who appears to have been interrupted in a caucus meeting for this business. Will the Premier instruct his government to make public whatever letter or other communications were sent to the developers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, allegations are raised in the House and words like "apparently." I said that we'll review the documents. We'll also pursue this particular matter, because again the member is using the privileges of this House to make certain allegations in the House. We'll look at all the information that was tabled today and review it and make the necessary statements.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the reply to that particular e-mail says, "Ron and I have a meeting scheduled regarding other matters at 1:30 – we'll get a draft done after that." The subject line on this e-mail is "Balzac-water for county." It doesn't get much clearer than that. To the Premier: exactly how many people in the government were working to make this water transfer occur?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Before I call on the hon. Premier, there's a point of order. Hon. minister?

Mr. Horner: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. At the conclusion of question period.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite sure that the Liberals have three questions. Three times three: that's nine. He'll find a few more e-mails to read out publicly in this Assembly. Keep doing that. The answer will be the same. We'll review the information, and tomorrow we'll make the necessary reply to these allegations.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even more evidence: an e-mail dated June 27, 2006, states that a representative of the United Horsemen inquired what the outcome was at Treasury Board regarding water supply for the project at Balzac. The e-mail states: "Apparently [the] issue was discussed at length last week at TB under Ministers Horner & Renner." To the Premier – we'll try to come at this a different way – has this government brought all work on the water transfer to this project to a halt?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the licence is before an authority for consideration, and once that authority makes its decision, that decision will be made public to all, not only the developer, the MD, but also to the opposition.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite this Premier's denial of his own government's involvement in this, the same thing is happening under his watch. On January 22, 2007, a briefing note to the minister of agriculture, food, and rural development states this, and I want everyone to listen carefully: "The government is providing funding for a project involving the movement of water from the Red Deer River to a development in the Balzac area near Calgary." There it is in black and white. This government is committed to this water transfer. My question is to the Premier. Will this Premier finally say in public what this government is saying behind closed doors, which is that this government supports the water transfer from the Red Deer River to Balzac?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if the e-mails or alleged e-mails or whatever this Leader of the Opposition brings forward in the House were all so true, then I'm sure that waterline would have been built right from the start. It's before an authority. That authority has very specific criteria that they follow in making very important decisions. It's up to that authority to make those decisions. They only respond to the Minister of Environment. Those decisions, of course, and all of the information that comes before the authority will be made public once the authority makes that decision.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this and in other material we've obtained, there is overwhelming evidence showing that this government was bending over backwards to get this water transfer approved. There are extensive meetings with cabinet ministers; there are thousands of pages of documents; there are millions of public dollars involved. To the Premier: on March 19 you said you would debate me on this issue of water transfer "any time, anywhere." Will you live up to your own word and debate me on this issue in Drumheller before the next by-election?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the opposition leader is showing his disrespect to this House. We also have a leader of the third party. If the leader of the third party wanted to get involved and debate issues with respect to rural Alberta and all the concerns raised across this province, I'm quite sure that all three would get involved. It's a by-election, both in Calgary-Elbow and in Drumheller-Stettler, and that's what the purpose is.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I'll give the Premier one last chance to live up to his own words. Will you debate me as you invited "any time, anywhere" on this water transfer in Drumheller before the next by-election? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the opposition leader is talking about keeping his word, especially coming from him.

With respect to the two by-elections, there are two candidates, of course, in the by-election of both Drumheller-Stettler and Calgary-Elbow. They are not members of government. They're seeking to run for the Progressive Conservative Party. There are also candidates representing the Liberal Party. They're up there to win those elections for themselves. In this particular case we have very good candidates both in Calgary-Elbow and in Drumheller-Stettler, and they debate all of these issues very well.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I would love to

debate the Premier and the leader of the Liberal Party, but I'd like to talk about a bunch of other issues.

One of the most important issues that we've got to deal with right now has to do with housing and control of rents because when it comes to helping renters, this Premier is all talk and no action. After learning of massive rent increases in Edmonton, the Premier called them un-Albertan. After residents of the Mission apartment building in Calgary got \$1,200 per month rent increases, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing called the increases immoral. Now, aside from calling gouging landlords bad names, what concrete steps will this Premier take to help the residents of Calgary's Mission apartments?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this House debated at great length a very good piece of legislation in terms of condo conversions. In that legislation there is a fine, and that's \$10,000 per unit. So if there is evidence of a condo conversion in violation of this act, there's a very significant penalty. If the hon. leader of the third party, who doesn't want to get involved in the other issue, has evidence to bring forward that there is hard evidence that this is a condo conversion, then deliver that evidence to the minister responsible, and we will take the appropriate action.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier seems to think the opposition should do all his work for him, you know, but I think it's up to the government to protect tenants in this province.

Now, the people in the Mission apartments have received an increase of \$1,200 a month. Condo conversion or not, Mr. Premier, that's too much. What will you do to help them?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, we have numerous programs in place. There's a very good rental supplement program. There are also safety net programs for those families that may be evicted or move into Alberta and can't find a place. My information is that we have helped a significant number in Calgary. We are compassionate. We do care about the residents, and we'll be meeting with them to see how we can assist them.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier calls gouging landlords un-Albertan. His minister calls them immoral. The Premier calls his own government compassionate, yet the facts say otherwise, Mr. Premier. The facts say that this government isn't going to do anything to help the people in Mission apartments in Calgary or other renters that are getting massive increases. Why not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again the third-party opposition leader said, you know, that we're not doing anything in this area. That is wrong. We don't have to rely on the opposition to do any of the work. We have very good programs in place. There are hundreds of millions of dollars that we're putting into housing, \$285 million. We also have millions of dollars in safety net programs to assist Albertans, not only Albertans that are here today but those that are moving to Alberta that can't find accommodations. So it's a very good program, and we'll continue to extend that program.

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

Municipal Financing

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This hon. leader would love to be part of the debate too, but the democratic process seems to be lacking. We'll see the numbers in the polls in a couple of weeks.

I've been out knocking on the doors of Hanna. I've been down in my own riding, and this last week the municipal assessment rolls have come out. Two weeks ago or a week ago the Premier said that the only way the taxes are going is down. It isn't correct. They're going up. It's affecting the families and the communities that I represent and those throughout Alberta. But, Mr. Speaker, what we need to do is to look at a different formula, one that the people can count on and one that municipalities can count on in order to fund them. My question to the Premier . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is referring to tax increases for property, that's a decision made by the local municipality. In terms of the municipal funds that will be allocated to various municipalities, we have a formula in place. This last weekend the minister of municipal affairs met with all of the CAOs of both urban and rural municipalities. They've looked at the formula. They've looked at the allocation and also at the accountability, and that is important. As municipalities receive money from the global taxpayer, each municipality has to have some accountability attached to it.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the question was that if this government would adopt a policy to return 10 per cent of the provincial personal and corporate tax back to the communities from which it originated.

My next question. The town of Magrath is suffering from lack of lots and trying to develop them, but the conditions that this government puts on funding says that they must go out and have a bid. They had a bid to develop six lots. The bid came in at \$560,000 to develop six lots. They went ahead, and they did it for \$150,000. My question is to the Premier. Will you restore the democratic process and allow the local government, like the Magrath town council, to decide what is best for their community by putting sewage and drainage ahead and making it their top priority?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe where the hon. member is coming from is the fact that in terms of procurement there is legislation in place, and I believe it's part of the internal trade agreement that says that any work \$100,000 or more has to go to tender. I believe that's what the hon. member is referring to. That can be changed. However, we would have to do that in co-operation with neighbouring jurisdictions because it's an internal trade agreement; that is, within Canada. I'm not saying that we can't do something about that. If he feels that it's important to bring it forward for discussion, we certainly will.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I'd like to, I guess, go back to May 14 again where the hon. Premier said:

Certainly we would be able to work out any issues in terms of getting that money out to municipalities and getting the best value for it. So if it's water, if it's infrastructure . . . We'll be there, we'll listen to you, and we'll make those programs work.

We have desperate situations in our constituency. Will the Premier please instruct the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to come down and meet with myself and our local mayors and reeves to work out these issues? They are desperate. They're not being addressed, and it's water and sewage, top critical issues.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in the capital plan our budget increased 105 per cent for water and sewer. It doubled. Plus new money

going to municipalities: this year \$400 million, of course, and then it will ramp up to \$500 million, and in 2010-11 it will be \$1.4 billion. So there is considerable money today plus in the future.

Now, with respect to some issues, if there is something to do with the allocation or the accountability that's attached to the dollars – the minister met this last weekend with all of the CAOs. If there's still some issue, then he can take it up independently with the minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Affordable Housing

(continued)

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As rents continue to soar out of control in this province, so do damage deposits. One of the biggest challenges that renters face when they're looking for accommodation is finding that first month's rent and a damage deposit. At a housing forum last week I met William, who's making \$11 an hour and sleeping on the front seat of his girlfriend's car . . . [interjections] Without his girlfriend. So I think all members can understand how uncomfortable this is.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the housing minister is this: will the homeless and eviction prevention fund put money into William's pockets in advance? Because when he goes and finds a place, then his challenge is to find that money . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In our present budget, as the hon. member knows, we have added \$285 million to housing, part of it going to the concerns of the homeless. We have also given \$143 million to municipalities. Municipalities have the independence to address the needs that they feel are most important. Also, there is funding that has been allocated for the challenge . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the minister doesn't understand is that by the time people get the funding that they need, by the time they get the supports they need from the government, they go back and the accommodation is gone. It's been rented by somebody else. They need to have something in advance so that they don't lose the opportunity. Now, let's not forget that the issue of affordable housing has been an issue in Alberta for a long time. The government was warned nine years ago by their own affordable housing symposium that this was going to be a problem, and that symposium was chaired by the current minister of immigration. The question is: how did they manage so badly to mess this up, and what did she do or not do about it?

1:50

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to share with the hon. member opposite that we do have a fund. We've had numerous applicants for the fund. It deals with evictions. It deals with damage deposits. If the hon. member would care to share his name and address, his co-ordinates or his girlfriend's co-ordinates, I will certainly try and get in touch with him and see what I can do to make sure that there's something provided for both of these young people.

Mr. R. Miller: If I can provide it, Mr. Speaker, I'll get the licence plate number for the car.

Mr. Speaker, everybody needs a home. It's now two and a half weeks since the passage of Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amend-

ment Act, 2007, and confusion continues to reign. As far as I've been able to determine, the bill has yet to receive royal assent. The minister's office says that it's coming soon, Parliamentary Counsel has told me that it doesn't need royal assent, and realtors, landlords, and tenants are still wondering what the heck is going on. My question is simply this: has it received royal assent yet? Is it going to? When is it going to? How long do these people have to wait so that they understand what rules they're working under?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it has not received royal assent yet. It will soon. We are working very closely with the different departments to make sure that both landlords and tenants understand what is in the new bill. It's not very complicated, but it's not all that simple. We will work very closely with all of the information avenues we've got to bring the bill out so that both landlords and tenants are familiar with all aspects of the bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Deer Overpopulation

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This spring the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development allowed a cull of 1,400 deer in eastern Alberta. The farming community in my constituency has experienced a devastating effect of deer on their hay feed. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: what plans in the near future do you have to allow the culling of deer in northern Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Lesser Slave Lake for that question. We've had many requests and letters concerning the population of deer, moose, and elk in your constituency and in other northern constituencies. It's related to the harsh winter we've had up north, and the snowpack has driven the animals into the farmyards. We're looking at that closely. But I have to tell the member that the cull that was conducted in eastern Alberta was in response to a disease that the deer had, chronic wasting disease. A cull is a policy of last resort and wouldn't normally be used for this type of issue.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: if there's an ability to allow culling for testing, why is culling not allowed for damages sustained to private property?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, both myself and all members on this side have a real concern with protection of private property, unlike members across the way here. When it comes to dealing with deer overpopulation, there's a spectrum of policy opportunities, policy choices, starting with meeting with landowners, providing fences, and that type of thing. We can also extend the hunting season. We might give multiple tags if there's an overpopulation of deer. We can also have quota hunts. A quota hunt is a hunt after the regular season. But this is done after a survey of the deer population, and this year we want to do a new survey because we don't know the extent of the damage done by the heavy winter.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, my last question is to ask whether or not that study will be done as soon as possible in order for us to be able to address the very issue that affects my farmers.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I hear the concerns of the Member for

Lesser Slave Lake and other members from the north. My department will give it their attention. But I have to warn the member that as seductive as her proposal is, I have to consult with Bambi first.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Education Funding

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government continues to fumble the education ball. First it bullies the teachers over the unfunded pension liability. Then it lowballed operational funding. Now it's turning its back on school boards. My question is to the Minister of Education. How does he expect school trustees to get re-elected on a tax increase platform when this government would never do the same thing?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure I understood the essence of the question, but let me just read into the record some facts. The operational funding to school authorities has increased by 86 per cent over 10 years. The inflation rate for that same period has grown by 28 per cent, and teachers' salaries increased by 45 per cent over that same period.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's give it another go. Education funding is about priorities, Mr. Minister, and this government's priorities are clear. Bob Maskell doesn't complain about his generous salary. Horse Racing Alberta doesn't complain about their millions. Why does this government continue to put its friends ahead of educational funding in the province? Tell us the answer, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, 3.3 million Albertans we consider to be our friends, and that's who we're representing in this Legislature by ensuring that there's enough money for education going forward this year and into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much. Will the minister accept that plebiscites will not help the Calgary Catholic school board? Mr. Minister, they don't help.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think it should be put on the record that last week the Calgary Catholic board released a document, or it was released, that said that they were going to have this budgetary shortfall this year. Well, I recognize that school boards are going into negotiations with the ATA locals, and if I were them, I would do exactly the same thing because what they need to do is ensure that there isn't an expectation that is too high. I was asked the question: were there other ways that school boards could raise funds? I said: there is the provision in the School Act to hold a plebiscite. That's as far as it went.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had an opportunity to meet with many teachers in Whitecourt-St. Anne as well as the ATA reps from Northern Gateway, Living Waters, and

Grande Yellowhead school regions. There were real mixed feelings on the \$25 million gift from Albertans to teachers to help offset the pension costs. Young teachers simply thanked me. More experienced teachers complained about the disparity in payments. To the Minister of Education: what was your reason for giving larger subsidies to younger teachers?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it should be clear that in the six months or so that I've had the privilege of being in this portfolio I have consistently heard that one of the issues that is a deterrent for recruitment of the best students into the teaching profession and keeping them there is the 3 per cent unfunded liability that each teacher must pay off of their paycheque. So as an effort while we resolve this issue in our budget, we made it clear that we would assist those younger teachers. Starting on September 1 all teachers that have under 15 years of service will receive approximately between 1,200 and 1,400 bucks a year.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister. Mr. Minister, you've told teachers that a task force will be established to address concerns about the unfunded debt that exists in the pension plan. Why would you tell this task force to suspend its activities in the event of a labour disruption? It hardly seems fair that one part of the province could go on strike and the rest of the province is penalized.

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, we are going to establish this task force so that it can meet with interested parties around the province to find out what would be a fair return for taxpayers in order to assume a \$2 billion liability. That task force will be up and running shortly, and it will report back to us by the end of October. What I wanted to ensure while this task force was meeting with Albertans was that if we had a situation – let's take as an example the Parkland strike, which we're all familiar with, of a couple of months ago. I believe that in that environment the task force could be unduly impacted by the negative media and opposition comments that were being made.

2:00

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister. The debt in the teachers' pension plan exists because of an equal problem between the ATA and the province of Alberta. Labour negotiations are an ongoing challenge for school boards and local unions. Why will you not treat these issues as two separate, distinct challenges? Why tie them together?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, they are in fact two separate issues. We as the government of Alberta are responsible for resolving the unfunded pension liability issue with the Alberta Teachers' Association. The individual school boards are responsible for negotiating contracts with their local of the ATA. Those two processes will work parallel to one another but, clearly, not together or in conflict with one another. So they are separate issues, and they will both go forward independently.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Affordable Accessible Housing

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a renters' listening forum last week, sponsored by city of Edmonton councillors and the Edmonton Social Planning Council, a myriad of issues were raised about the hardships facing renters. Affordability is not the only

issue facing some renters. There is a scarcity of rental units that can accommodate Albertans with physical disabilities who use mobility aids such as wheelchairs. My question is to the minister of housing. In this housing crisis what can the minister offer to Albertans in wheelchairs who require rental housing to be both accessible and affordable?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we look at affordable housing, we need to look at all sorts of different solutions. I will say that there have been applications that have dealt with associations or agencies that have dealt with people that are handicapped, and we have tried to address those situations and supported those projects.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister. For disabled Albertans looking for accommodation, their first priority is accessibility, and then they have to worry about the cost. It took one constituent four years to find accommodation suitable for her wheelchair. What are these Albertans supposed to do when their rents skyrocket and they find themselves on the street?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as mentioned previously, with the Minister of EII, if I could get her to answer, please.

Ms Evans: If they are concerned, if they receive an eviction notice, I would encourage them to come immediately to any of our offices or phone and establish where it's most convenient for them to learn about what's available.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. This question is directed to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. A person using a wheelchair who has lost their apartment because of high rents cannot sofa surf at a friend's or camp in the river valley. Even if they have a great job, rent is being raised beyond their means. Now, will these people with disabilities be able to access the homeless and eviction prevention fund? What exactly are the criteria? Will they be income tested?

Ms Evans: I think the best thing about this particular fund, unlike many of the previous funds, is that the director has the discretion to look at the personal circumstance of the individual involved: employment opportunities; needs of that individual, both physical and financial; the total social milieu. When I spoke to some of the workers in one of our offices, they said that the best thing about this fund is that they have the flexibility of making decisions that aren't confined to a strict adherence to a particular set of rules, but they deal with humans on a human basis, so they are entitled to identify what their needs are, and then we will look for them accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Education Funding

(continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Education minister owes Albertans a full explanation. He has underfunded classrooms in this year's budget and invented some half-baked excuse to claim that his 3 per cent cut to education is actually a budget increase. Calgary Catholic schools know better. They would lose 30 or more teachers with this budget. School boards across the province know better.

Just do the math. To the Education minister. Grade 6 students know that subtracting 6 per cent inflation from 3 per cent budget increase nets a loss of 3 per cent. Can the minister explain how six minus three does not equal a 3 per cent cut?

Mr. Liepert: Let me reread what I did a few minutes ago so that when we tie things to inflation, we keep it in perspective. Inflation over the past 10 years, Mr. Speaker, has grown by 28 per cent. Meanwhile, funding to the classroom has grown by 86 per cent over the last 10 years. Teachers' salaries grew by 45 per cent over the last 10 years when inflation grew by 28 per cent.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, those figures that he keeps going on about are half-baked at best. They're based on 1993, when the budget was cut to pieces, and quite frankly it's an insult to Albertans to continue to bring those up. The Education minister claims that his budget has increased, but he tells school boards to go ahead and hold a plebiscite for a separate tax increase to cover the shortfall built into his budget. Talk about a slap in the face to schools and the public. Here's a simple question. Why isn't this government giving schools the resources that they need to cope with inflation? Why not deal with this now, in the spring, before it becomes a crisis that could threaten instruction in the fall?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, if we want to talk about half-baked, we should talk about half-baked mathematics because there is no cutback in this particular budget. There is a 5.2 per cent increase in the Education budget. If we want to go back to the budget documents that were tabled in this House last year compared to the budget documents tabled this year, the increase in Education over a 12-month period is closer to 10 per cent.

You know, Mr. Speaker, just one final comment. There was a graduation class at Ross Sheppard high school this past week. Of 573 grads 236 graduated with honours or honours with distinction. It would be really good if these guys would talk about the positive stuff in education.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, perhaps we could get some of those Ross Shep grads to come and build the proper Education budget for this next coming year because, certainly, this one is not going to be functioning for the fall. School boards across this province have developed a dedicated capital reserve for expenditures. For example, a school board buys a bus and then puts money away for a replacement down the road. Maybe we could learn something from that too. The minister is now having the audacity to suggest that school boards should blow off that prudent long-term planning to make up for this government's poor budgeting practices. Did not this government learn from last spring that there's nothing to be gained and everything to lose from shortchanging public education?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I do appreciate about this caucus is that they don't hide anything. They want to spend, spend, tax, tax. At least they're not like these guys who want to say: we're going to save some money, and then we're going to spend, spend, and spend. So we have a philosophical difference of whether we're going to spend, spend, and tax or whether we're going to put a budget before this Legislature that is fair to Albertans, and that's what we believe in doing on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Trade Corridors to Prince Rupert

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been hearing a lot about the Asia Pacific gateway and the efforts to revitalize the port of Prince Rupert. There's a huge economic potential to be tapped for Alberta. I know that the federal government is putting a lot of resources into developing transportation routes to that port. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: what is being done by this government to help develop the Prince Rupert port to better serve Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question because this government really understands how important the port of Prince Rupert is to all Albertans, and we're working with other governments on strategies to develop key corridors to Prince Rupert that will benefit all of Alberta. Last week we announced a \$150 million highway interchange just south of the city – on 41st Street I think it is – in partners with the city of Edmonton and the federal government, that will facilitate a major container terminal in south Edmonton, that will be CP's new intermodal yard. Last month I was in Winnipeg and met with other transportation groups.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important to develop the north-south corridor to benefit all Albertans, but it's particularly important to develop an east-west corridor to especially benefit northern Albertans. A lot of farmers in northern Alberta, especially in the Peace country, can't get their grain to market because there are virtually no railcars available to move grain. What is this minister going to do to address this situation?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have met with CN about this situation. As you know, railroads are regulated federally in this province, but I've spoken with CN, and they're going to do the best they can to get more cars there. Also, a little bit of a problem is how all containers work in Canada, and we're working with the federal government to try to change that. In Canada we have to have our empty containers back to port within 30 days, and we can only reposition them once. In the U.S. they have 365 days and can reposition them as many times as they like to get the containers back to port. We're working on those regulations.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Minister of Finance. I know that the Alberta government made a significant loan available to the grain terminal in Prince Rupert several years ago. In the annual report from his department it shows the loan as still on the books. Can the minister tell us what the status of the loan is and how the government might be able to leverage this loan in order to make the grain terminal more effective?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back in 1981 a loan for \$106.3 million was given to the now Ridley Grain terminal. This was amortized at 11 per cent through a bond issuance. As of today we are sitting at a capital and interest payment of monies owed of around \$96 million. The loan is absolutely up to date. It is not in default. But I really must emphasize to the hon. member that we are

simply the lender. We do not have a share in the Ridley Grain terminal. We are simply a lender to that particular consortium.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Crown Land Adjacent to Bissell Centre

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Monday on land reported to be owned by the province, west of the Bissell Centre and north of the Remand Centre parking lot in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, the Edmonton Police Service was forced to evict homeless Edmontonians. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Why did the province force the Edmonton Police Service to evict the homeless people from Crown land last Monday?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, that's not quite exactly how it worked. Our department got a call from the Edmonton Police Service that they had a whole bunch of complaints about things that were going on in that yard, not necessarily legal things, and asked permission if they could go in and see. We did grant that permission.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: will the province consider selling this property for \$1 to any group who is interested in constructing affordable housing units at this location, or will the province consider selling for \$1 any other suitable location across the province that could be used for homeless initiatives? You've sold land for \$1 before to developers.

Mr. Ouellette: On that particular land the same thing I will say again. What was going on in there? After the police went in there, they found lots of garbage; they found human waste; they found condoms; they found drug paraphernalia. It was very much a safety concern. To his question: we do have a housing minister, Mr. Speaker, that I think is addressing affordable housing very well, and he will talk to us if he needs any more help. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the same minister. Given that on the Sunday previous I had walked across that land and found none of the incidents that this hon. member has stated occurred there, my question is this: how much is the fence around this property going to cost taxpayers, and why are you building this fence now?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure. I haven't seen any of the quotes on the fence. To be very honest with you, I'm not even sure that there was a fence being built, but now that he's brought it to my attention, I can check on that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Speed Limit Enforcement

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are all for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. A recent publication by the Alberta Motor Association Foundation for Traffic Safety states that there are around 100,000 vehicular collisions, 27,000 injuries, and 400 traffic deaths in Alberta every year. Almost

three-quarters of the fatalities occur on rural roads and highways. According to the foundation these crashes cost our society about \$4.8 billion per year, not to mention the toll in personal grief, sorrow, and pain. A major factor in these crashes is excessive speed. Will the minister take real action to reduce this carnage and step up enforcement of the speed laws on our roads and highways?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to let the hon. member know that this government is taking real action. We are committed to safe and secure communities. Highway enforcement is an essential element of the province's traffic safety plan. Since 2004 we've increased our spending on policing by \$31 million and put an additional 300 police officers on our streets. We now have 60 traffic sheriffs who are patrolling our highways, targeting aggressive drivers, helping reduce collisions and fatalities. In fact, on the July long weekend we'll have an additional 24, bringing that total up to 84. These sheriffs are making a difference. On the May long weekend alone they laid over 1,300 charges.

The Speaker: I think we have to go on.
The hon. member.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, many motorists speed based on the assumption that law enforcement officials will not ticket them if they're travelling 10, 15, or 18 kilometres over the posted maximum. This gap seems to be growing despite the increased accuracy of today's technology for speed enforcement. Even regular bus services between Calgary and Edmonton build speeding into their posted schedules rain, snow, or shine. Will the minister take steps to enforce the actual posted speed limit and not some nebulous and expanding limit, which seems to be widely practised by law enforcement officials?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. member. We have a strong commitment to making our roads safer. I want to acknowledge the great job that's being done on our highways by our police officers. As I was alluding to, on the May long weekend over 1,300 charges were laid by our sheriffs, including 773 for speeding and another 99 for seat belt infractions. The response to sheriffs working our highways has been extremely positive since they started patrolling last September. Since that time they've handed out 25,000 tickets. As a result of their work our highways are a lot safer today than they were yesterday.

Dr. Brown: Will the minister's department support the expanded use of technology, including more speed and red-light cameras, to reduce the number of crashes in the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly support any initiatives that are going to help reduce collisions and improve highway safety.

I would ask the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation if he may want to supplement.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, our department takes safety in Alberta very, very seriously, the same as this government does. We are working on a traffic safety plan right now, on implementing some of the traffic safety plan. We're looking at

speed on green right now. We would only put those at high-collision intersections to make sure that we can see what's going on, and we will put that technology in place.

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

Wind Valley Wildlife Corridor

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In 2003 the province developed a wildlife corridor plan for the Wind Valley just east of Canmore. Many species in the area are endangered, and they rely on this area for protection for their migration. The plan did offer that. But just last month the government sold a large portion of Crown land to a private time-share company for development. My questions are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Is this the kind of sale that you're hoping to get with your land-use strategy? Is that the type of sale you're trying to create?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd like the hon. member to clarify his question and say specifically who this land was sold to because I think he has his facts absolutely wrong.

Mr. Bonko: It was a private time-share company, Mr. Speaker. I'll go to my next question unless you'd like to have this one again. It was a private time-share company. I've clarified that.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to inform you and the House that this private time-share is actually owned by the members, 95 per cent of whom are Albertans. They've owned it for 25 years. They've asked to purchase another attached parcel. We haven't made a decision yet. I've talked with the mayor of Canmore. We're taking it under consideration precisely because that area is indicated as a wildlife corridor. We're discussing the matter with Canmore and other affected parties.

Mr. Bonko: The lands in question are within the boundaries of the town of Canmore. Sustainable Resource Development sent a request for comments from the council. The council passed resolutions making very clear their objections to the sale of this wilderness corridor. Is the opinion of the town council going to be ignored, or is it going to be accepted? They do not support the sale.

2:20

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems to be backpedaling rather quickly. I thought he began his question by saying the sale had already been made, if I understood him correctly. Now he's saying: oh, yes, this sale is under consideration. Yes, I've talked with the mayor of Canmore. As I said, this condominium complex is owned 95 per cent by Albertans. It's been there for 25 years. They're looking at an additional parcel, and we're discussing it with the mayor and the council of Canmore.

Speaker's Ruling

Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 90 questions and answers today.

A few comments on procedural matters before I deal with the point of order and recognize the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. First of all, there were three occasions today in which members' names were used. The two circumstances were rather different. In the case of the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food he clearly inappropriately used the personal name of a Member of this Legislative Assembly, and I say: inappropriately used.

Then we have the Leader of the Official Opposition. In the ten years that I've had the privilege of being in the chair, I've never really run across this kind of a situation before. The Leader of the Official Opposition tables some documents in the House. Then he quotes from those documents in his questions. An appropriate quotation would have to be 100 per cent accurate. In this case it meant that the names of members of this Assembly were used. That would appear from the chair's perspective to be an appropriate usage of names although the chair doesn't really think it's very good if hon. members don't pronounce those names correctly. That leads, then, to a different kind of a subject matter. But in this case the names were pronounced correctly.

So for those members who would say, "Well, why in this case would the Leader of the Opposition be allowed to use the name and some other member not?" the chair is ruling that, in fact, it is an appropriate usage of it to ensure 100 per cent accuracy of the quotation that's found in the document. But, again, the first time in 10 years that that has happened, to the knowledge of this chair, so that makes it rather rare.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford did something which is not very nice: he brought the table officers into debate on a question. Please remember that the chair and the table officers of this particular Assembly are neutral and nonpartisan. When we have questions and answers in the Legislative Assembly, often times under our new 45-second ruling there's some debate that goes on. In the case of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, making a point and addressing it to someone else, basically saying, you know, "Is it, or isn't it?" even when I've been told by the table officers that it is, in fact, brings the table officer into the debate or the Speaker into the debate. That's something we should not do, just to make sure that we have absolute clarity and that we respect the role of the chair and the table officers. [interjection]

We're having an exciting day today, aren't we, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar? I applaud your energy and enthusiasm, but sometimes it's best to be quiet for a while. [some applause] Well, that obviously was well received, hon. members. There's a message there.

Point of Order

Imputing Motives

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a point of order, citing Standing Orders 23(h) and (i), imputing false or unavowed motives to another member, as well as *Beauchesne's* 494 where it states that imputation of intentional falsehood is not allowed in the House.

The hon. leader of the Liberal Party has dug deep today to try to find something which, in his mind, represents some sort of secret deal that would impugn the integrity of the minister of the day, to which he was referring. That minister was rightly identified several times by the hon. member as myself at the time. In fact, he went out of his way to do so.

Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would have done his homework instead of casually tossing out what he perceives to be a scandal, he would have found and would know that the project he was referring to is one which has been in place for many, many years in the agriculture department in the province and the county that it was involved with. This is one area where the information was perhaps misleading: that there was somehow a deal between my department at the time and the company involved. That's certainly not the truth. The truth is that it was an arrangement, as we have with many counties around the province, with the department of agriculture for water and waste-water infrastructure should their water licence be approved, should their development be approved, should a number of factors move forward.

At the time, Mr. Speaker, as I recall, the county did have some urgency to their application, and certainly it is this government's role to work with our municipalities and to work with them as hard and as fast as we can so that they can move forward with these types of proposals where they want to move. As has been done many times in the past, our agriculture department has helped value-added agricultural commodity ventures grow in rural Alberta. The infrastructure/ag program in question deals with those water and waste-water issues. Our agreement, as I said, is not with the proponents but with the county.

In my previous role as minister of agriculture, food and rural development I met with many agricultural-based businesses. I'm not afraid to admit that. That was part of my job. I met this morning with some industry folks, some companies in the aerospace business because we're trying to develop those industries in our province. That is our job, and I pride myself in doing it with integrity, with honour, and with the utmost of respect to all individuals involved and, at the end of the day, with the best interests of our province in mind.

I and my family have invested heavily in the reputation which we have because that's all we have, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to this Assembly, the utmost respect to all hon. members should be given. There should not be any impugning of motives, especially when – and I have the documents in front of me that were tabled and have had an opportunity to quickly peruse but also being part of some of these documents. These documents prove my point: that there was no agreement between Agriculture and the proponent, that there was an application from the county, that the county has to apply for a water licence – they were advised of such – that no money had changed hands because no water licence had been issued, that the proponents fit all of the program criteria for the program and project that was in question.

Mr. Speaker, my issue is that knowing these facts, the hon. member still stood in his place today and gave Albertans by way of this medium a picture that would impugn the motives that I had at the time, that would impugn the motives that this government had at the time, and that certainly, I would say, even brings into question what the county and the members of the council of the day did.

In short, Mr. Speaker, the project in question met all of the criteria. The inference by the hon. member is that I approved something that was not right. This certainly makes an accusation, and it certainly in the way it was done impugns improper motives on my behalf, which I find to be offensive. I believe that the hon. member should recheck his facts and that he should apologize to this House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've reviewed this, and I've reviewed the Blues. I'm quite prepared to rule on this matter before hearing anybody else with respect to this.

What we have here is a situation whereby a member of this Assembly during question period raises questions and has before him and tables some documents. First question, and I quote the Leader of the Official Opposition.

An e-mail dated July 7, 2006, from the former agriculture minister's EA states, quote: Doug has flipped me an e-mail asking on the status of our work with the county on applying for the waste-water program. Doug indicated that developers are looking for a letter from us today. End quote

I'm assuming that that's correct and true, factually correct.

The person referenced would be the current Minister of Advanced Education, by the way, who appears to be interrupted in a caucus meeting for this business. Will the Premier instruct his government to make public whatever letter or other communications were sent to the developers?

It's pretty straightforward. I don't see where there are any accusations or innuendo with respect to the context of that.

Second question.

Well, the reply to that particular e-mail says, and I quote: Ron and I have a meeting scheduled regarding other matters at 1:30; we'll get a draft done after that. End quote.

I'm assuming that that's factually correct in this quotation.

The subject line on this e-mail is, quote: Balzac water for county.

Okay. That's a title.

It doesn't get much clearer than that. To the Premier: exactly how many people in the government were working to make this water transfer occur?

Okay. The Leader of the Official Opposition in this case makes the statement that "it doesn't get much clearer than that." Well, under our 45 seconds you have a chance to wax eloquent. It may be clear to the Leader of the Official Opposition, whereas it may not be clear to anybody else.

2:30

I think we've afforded the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology an opportunity to clarify the matter with respect to his understanding of the e-mail in question. This is all part and parcel of the give-and-take now of the new question period. It's not a point of order. It's part of the thrust of what we've arrived at. Hon. member, *Beauchesne's* 494 says, "Acceptance of the Word of a Member." I read this the other day into the record: "On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident." In this case there are probably not two contradictory accounts. In this case there are probably two different interpretations. There's nothing in the statements that I would find to be accusatory of the former minister of agriculture, food, and rural development. But this is question period and it's answer period.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd move that written questions on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that motions for returns other than Motion for a Return 4 standing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

Ministerial Expense Claims

M4. Mr. R. Miller proposed that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all ministerial expense claims broken down by minister submitted between December 1, 2006, and March 1, 2007.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the intention behind this motion is quite clear. There have been a number of examples and issues raised in this House over the past couple of years regarding ministerial office expenses. Given today's

technology I would expect that it should be relatively easy for this information to be consolidated and put into a form that could be provided in the way of a written response. Obviously, this is not the sort of thing that ministers responsible would be expected to provide during question period, but given the resources that the government has, I'm confident that they can provide it to us in this manner.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, as you most likely know, there has been a commitment to post such information on the Internet by the end of this month. We're looking forward to that. Here we are on May 28, only three days away, and looking forward to all of this information being posted for all Albertans to see in the future. All we're asking now is to go back a year and provide the same information that will be posted for all Albertans to see in the future for the previous 12 months.

I look forward to the government's response. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do propose to accept this question, although I would just want to clarify that it's not the past 12 months; it's December 1, 2006. I presume the intention of the question was back to the beginning of the current cabinet, which is actually December 15. We haven't actually brought forward a formal amendment to the question, but it would be our intention to accept this question because in the interest of openness and accountability, as our Premier has indicated, we will be posting expenses of ministers on the website effective April 1. So that information will be available from April 1 on, and there's no good reason why it couldn't be made available from December 15 on. That is what we will propose to do as I assume that the wording of the question really refers to ministerial expenses of current ministers. Certainly, we'll accept the question and look forward to making that information available.

Mr. R. Miller: Nothing much more to say, Mr. Speaker, other than that I acknowledge the interpretation that the Government House Leader has made. That was the intention of the question, and I'm pleased to see that the government shares our point of view on the matter. We look forward to receiving that information and, as I said, all Albertans having access to it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. The chair has to call a vote here with respect to this, and the chair would want to be very, very clear on what the members are voting on. The members are voting on Motion for a Return 4 as it's written, which says: commencing December 1, 2006, or are the members being asked to vote on a motion that says: commencing December 15, 2006?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, if it would help to clarify. As I read the question, it's clearly for the current ministers, and those expenses actually start after December 15. But it would be good for clarification if we had the unanimous consent of the House to read that as December 15 in the motion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. members now are voting on a motion which basically says that Motion for a Return 4 should read December 15, 2006, in place of December 1, 2006.

[Motion for a Return 4 carried]

head:

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

Bill 208 School (Restrictions on Fees and Fundraising) Amendment Act, 2007

[Debate adjourned May 14: Mr. Martin speaking]

Mr. Elsalhy: I'm pleased to rise to participate in debate on this particular bill, Bill 208, School (Restrictions on Fees and Fundraising) Amendment Act, 2007, which is sponsored by my colleague from St. Albert. Mr. Speaker, I will start my comments with one impression I've always had, the impression that with minor exceptions, very minimal exceptions, education, at least kindergarten to grade 12, is free or is supposed to be free or ought to be free.

I know that the hon. members from the government caucus always remind us in this House and outside of this Assembly that nothing should be entirely free because, to them, you have to put a dollar value on programs and services and products that the government is responsible for for people to value those services and programs because anything that is free could be abused or taken advantage of somehow. So they want to have some control over programs, services, and products that the government is responsible for for people to value those services and for them to respect those services and to, you know, take care while dealing with these services or using them.

A bit of history, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago, responding to some of my constituents in Edmonton-McClung and other Albertans from all over the province, a petition was commissioned. I put together a legislative petition and approved it with Parliamentary Counsel, and the petition was distributed province-wide in every school. It basically asked for the elimination of school fees that were for instructional essentials, schools fees for the basics. The petition did not ask for the elimination of all school fees. The petition just focused on what is deemed essential, what is deemed of instructional description.

It was widely received, and it was really telling how many people from across this province signed it. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we occasionally get signatures, even this year, from across the province because people understand that this issue did not go away and that it still exists.

Now, I would have to emphasize, Mr. Speaker, to you and to all my colleagues in this House that parents agree that they don't want to relinquish all forms of fundraising and all control over their kids' education. What parents agree on is that there seems to be no definition or no set criteria for what is deemed reasonable and fair and what is not. Parents don't want to relinquish all forms of fundraising for their kids. They don't want to not pay any fees whatsoever. The argument is basically: what is reasonable to expect from those parents, and what should we ask them to be responsible for, and what is pushing it? Again, it's the definition of what's essential and what's extra.

2:40

When you consider technology, Mr. Speaker, computer labs in schools, networks, you know, most schools now have networks where more than one computer is connected. When a certain school tells their MLA that their network seems to be failing all the time, that you turn on one computer and all computers crash, something needs to be done. Now, is it a fair expectation to go back to the parents and say, "Please fund raise so we can actually fix the network and replace older computers with newer ones that are more stable"? A school fund raising for photocopying paper is totally

unacceptable. A school that's fund raising for desks and textbooks is unacceptable, in my opinion.

Rev. Abbott: It's illegal.

Mr. Elsalhy: Now, some member from the government caucus is saying that it should be illegal, and I agree. It should be illegal, and maybe we should investigate.

The province every now and then comes in and sets the curriculum for certain courses, say, chemistry for example. Schools have to get new textbooks to deliver that new program. So they change the curriculum, and they tell schools that they have to change their textbooks. Now, in my opinion again, I think the province should really cover that cost or at least significantly pitch in to alleviate that concern. You know, if you're changing the curriculum, then support us to bring in the textbook that basically teaches that course.

Now, sometimes different books from different providers or different authors or different sources are available to teach that very new course that the government is asking to be implemented, but the Ministry of Education insists on one of them and not the others. More frequently than not, Mr. Speaker, the one book that they select is more expensive than the others that are available out there, and parents sometimes are puzzled. Why this one in particular, and why not the other ones?

I've had a constituent, Mr. Speaker, who came into my office and told me that she actually visited the Ministry of Education library and looked on the shelf under that particular subject matter and found two other books, but when she confronted the staff and said, you know, "Why not these, and why the one that the minister recommended?" they said, "Let us find out, and we'll get back to you." Then when she didn't hear anything, she went back. She went to that same spot on the shelf, and those books had mysteriously disappeared. When she questioned the staff, she was told: "Oh, you weren't supposed to see them. Actually, we shouldn't have had them on the shelf from the beginning." Maybe she's paranoid. Maybe I'm paranoid. But she felt that, you know, something wasn't entirely above board.

The question of fundraising expectations. Again, what do we consider necessary? What do we consider optional? What do we consider fair and reasonable on the part of parents and guardians? What's really pushing it when we ask them for stuff above and beyond? Fundraising expectations, school fees, bus fees, the cost of supplies, et cetera: you add all of these up, Mr. Speaker, and definitely certain parents are having a hard time making ends meet. Now to make things even worse, you add things like food and clothing, and the situation gets even harder for some parents.

Now, remember that the former Minister of Education, Mr. Speaker, had a reputation for touring the province and meeting with school boards and parents all over the place and listening to the public and listening to educators. I know that most parents and educators agree that that former Minister of Education was really trying to do a good job, and he was better than most who came before him and certainly now is being remembered with some degree of fondness given the current minister's style and the choices he makes.

Remember when that minister told this House and when he told school boards and the media and parents that he was studying this whole issue surrounding school fees and he promised to release his findings, the report if you will, last year, in 2006, before the beginning of the school year '06-07? Then we were told that, you know, final minor details needed to be worked in and that the report was going to be delayed slightly, and it was going to come after the beginning of the school year. Then we were told that another delay

was expected and that it was coming sometime in December of 2006. Then the minister lost his cabinet post. This new minister came in, and no word of the report. The ministry staff are not willing or are not allowed to tell us what's in the report or where it is.

My question would be to the current Minister of Education. Where is that report on fundraising and school fees? What's in the report, and why has it not been released to all members of this House and to the public and to the media and to all who are concerned? If that issue was studied and if it was examined that thoroughly, then at least give us the details and give us the evidence that's contained in that report.

Now, the issue of school fees and the issue of fundraising are not new. I remind you, Mr. Speaker, and I remind all my colleagues that this has been something that the Learning Commission studied. We know that there is a tendency in this province, there is a trend developing where task forces and commissions and fact-finding missions are established. They go around the province, and they hold meetings, and they listen to stakeholders and experts. The report is produced, and then the report is shelved, and nothing is done.

Now, the Learning Commission had some 89 or 90 recommendations, if I remember correctly. The province kept telling us which ones they are accepting this time, and which ones they are accepting this time, and so on. While any progress is good, sometimes slow progress is not that good. My question is: where is this one?

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak in support of Bill 208, School (Restrictions on Fees and Fundraising) Amendment Act, 2007. First of all, I want to thank the MLA for St. Albert for introducing this private member's bill. As we all know, education is one of the top issues, and the reason for supporting this bill is due to lots of concern raised regarding school fees and fundraising.

For example, the school fees can present an unreasonable economic burden on low-income families. School fees and fundraising allow government to pass on the cost of delivering public services to parents and communities. Higher fees attached to specialized programs can affect who can and who cannot attend or take part based on the family income. Educational opportunities may differ from region to region based on the relative wealth and willingness to pay of parents as well. So school fees and fundraising puts school boards and staff in the position of having to raise money to pay for public services. This takes time and energy away from educating and administration.

Mr. Speaker, the main purpose of Bill 208 is to eliminate school fees and fundraising for all curricular activities. The Department of Education will be ultimately responsible for ensuring that public education is funded adequately following this change. The impact of Bill 208 is that fundraising will not be allowed for raising funds for educational materials but is allowed for extracurricular activities, including clubs, school sports, and extracurricular trips.

2:50

Eliminating school fees, Mr. Speaker, will divert responsibility for school fees from parents back to the provincial government. Eliminating school fees would also ensure that quality of education is not determined by the wealth and willingness to pay of parents. The impact of this change will be determined by the willingness of the government to replace this lost source of revenue with government funding.

This bill requires that the minister report to the Legislature with a study to ensure that school programming and instruction will not be negatively affected by the reduction of the school fees. To ensure that students and school boards are not negatively affected by the loss of revenue, the Minister of Education must make a report to the Legislature detailing how the department will ensure that restricting school fees will not negatively affect the quality of education in this province.

Article 26(1) of the United Nations declaration of human rights states: "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages." School fees can create a financial burden for families, for low-income families in particular. High school fees for some extracurricular activities, including things like band class, field trips, can be prohibitive for some students, leading to a situation in which students obtain different educational experiences based on their financial resources. A refusal to introduce a cap on fees and fundraising or provide a province-wide guideline on these activities leads to confusion and vast differences from school board to school board.

Currently students enrolled in public school face different school fees based on where they live and what school board their school is in. This creates inequalities in the level of financial contribution, a contribution parents are expected to provide for their children's schooling based simply on place of residence.

Mr. Speaker, this government is happy to pass on the cost of public services, and in this case parents and school boards are the ones picking up the slack. Alberta has the money to make public education truly public, so why isn't it moving forward on eliminating school fees? The revenue from school fees represents less than 1 per cent of the Education budget, yet the government refuses to provide the funding necessary to eliminate school fees. Other provinces have done it. Why can't Alberta?

In the year 2005 Alberta parents paid over \$40 million so that their children could attend public school. That's an average of \$70 per student each year, but fees for things like band classes and class trips can be much higher than that. Ability to pay should not affect the education of K to 12 students.

This year the department provided only a 3 per cent increase in the operational funding. Without reasonable funding for operational costs, school boards will have no choice but to pass on the cost of education to parents. We need action on school fees now to ensure that parents are not paying for this government's refusal to fund our education system adequately.

Following the Alberta Learning Commission report the government pledged to take action on school fees, but instead they have done nothing to address this issue. The government has not even provided a set of guidelines or recommendations for what school boards should charge.

Rev. Abbott: It's called the School Act. You should read it.

Mr. Agnihotri: School Act. Okay. Thank you very much. Thanks for your advice, member sitting on my right-hand side.

An Hon. Member: Far right.

Mr. Agnihotri: Far right, yeah.

Mr. Elsalhy: Extreme right.

Mr. Agnihotri: Extreme right. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about school fees in Alberta very briefly. Currently the School Act allows school boards to charge

fees to cover the cost of instructional supplies or materials. Tuition fees are not allowed. In the year 2005 the Alberta School Boards Association released a report showing that while income from school fees remained relatively stable from the year 2000 to 2003, around \$31 million, they began increasing thereafter and reached \$40 million in the year 2005. This amounts to an average fee of \$70 per student each year. There is currently no cap on what school boards can charge in terms of fees, so this means that students in one jurisdiction can pay fees that are entirely different from students in another. Furthermore, there is no unified policy on how to address parents who are unable to pay. Recently there was some controversy in Alberta when a school board directed a file to collection agents.

The government has firmly supported the right of school boards to raise funds through school fees but has also refused to provide adequate funding to school boards. Fully covering the amount of funding gained through school fees would represent only .78 per cent of the current Education budget. Revenue from fundraising in Alberta's schools, Mr. Speaker, has been going up since the year 2001, and the total is about \$142 million in Alberta, \$280.58 per student.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, then Edmonton-Gold Bar, then Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to address Bill 208, School (Restrictions on Fees and Fundraising) Amendment Act, 2007. I wish to point out the importance of education. A highly educated citizenry is of utmost importance to Alberta's prosperity. Knowledge will enhance Albertans' quality of life. Education shapes the lives of those who partake in it. A reputable and educated workforce will attract investment. Technical training is crucial to the advancement of Alberta's economic success, and education will drive our province to be a world leader.

In 2003 the government of Alberta thoroughly examined our education system through months of extensive consultation and study. The government's aim was to make a great education system even better. Ninety-five all-encompassing recommendations resulted from the Commission on Learning. One specific recommendation is highly relevant to the debate on Bill 208, and that was recommendation 86, which stated:

Clearly define and set province-wide policy on what is considered "basic" and what are considered "extras" in relation to fund-raising by school councils. Limit school councils' role in fund-raising to "extras" consistently defined across the province and require schools and school councils to report annually on their fund-raising activities and how the funds were used.

The commission was concerned about the variation across the province of what was termed as basic and extra when fundraising. In some cases library resources, technology, computer equipment, and playgrounds were considered basic, and therefore fundraising was not allowed. In other schools fundraising contributed significantly to these areas. Consistency is needed across Alberta's school districts to ensure that all students receive an equal level of quality of education.

The commission was reluctant to exclude fundraising altogether. A number of special events and extracurricular activities add value to education but are clearly beyond a core curriculum. Preventing fundraising entirely would result in many of these special events and activities being completely eliminated or the burden being shifted entirely to individual students and their parents, many of whom

could not afford the extra costs. Among others, recommendation 86 was supported by the government of Alberta.

3:00

In April 2006 Alberta Education reported on the status of the recommendations and reported that during the 2004-2005 fiscal year the minister supported a project plan for province-wide consultations to determine and set province-wide guidelines on what is considered basic and extras in relation to fundraising. Consultations started in spring 2005, and during the 2005-06 fiscal year, Alberta Education consulted with stakeholders, and a draft summary of the findings was prepared for stakeholder comments. Recommendations are being considered in the development of a policy on fundraising.

School fees allow for flexibility and variety within our large education system. Some parents choose to enrol their children in specialized programs and courses, for example. Fees allow these children to get the specific type of education and training they believe is most beneficial to their growth. Because different children have needs and ambitions that sometimes exceed a basic level, I cannot support the restrictive nature of Bill 208.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, then Edmonton-Gold Bar, then Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 208. Speaking as a father of three sons who have been through the Edmonton public school system, I can tell you that this bill speaks to me. I have in my time spent an awful lot of money on extra fees, and I would like to discuss that for a moment here.

Now, I recall that two weeks ago, May 14, when this issue was debated previously, there was some discussion about textbook rental fees and how textbook rental fees were actually meant to provide an incentive to return the books. This isn't quite the case, Mr. Speaker. I have a \$75 fee for my son in high school right now. If it really was an incentive to return the books, I'd get that \$75 back, but I don't get it back. That \$75 is gone. It doesn't matter whether I return the books in tattered condition or whether I return them in pristine shape because he hasn't opened them all year. I don't get my \$75 back, so it is not really an incentive to return the books. It is actually a way to raise money for further textbook purchases.

There was also some discussion about how this bill would ban fundraising for extracurricular activities. In fact, it does nothing of the sort. It very specifically says that fundraising for extracurricular activities is allowed. We've heard a lot of discussion about: oh, well, we'd have to go to the minister and ask for money. Wrong again. This bill says very specifically that you can raise money for extracurricular activities.

Now, I have here a list of student fees from the school that my son attends. It starts off that this year I paid \$226 in compulsory student fees. I got off lucky. A friend of mine actually has three kids at that school, so her bill came to over \$1,000 in compulsory fees. That started off with \$75 for textbook rental; a student ID card worth \$5, this is like an eighth of a cent of paper; a student handbook, \$8; athletics, access to the fitness centre, and intramurals, \$13; learning resources – library, periodicals, and novels – \$5. I can understand asking for money to rejuvenate a library, so I don't have a problem with that. But there are also technology resources, which includes computer maintenance, printing, and mail-outs, \$20; student locker rental, \$5 to rent space in the school to put your coat – for some reason you get a dollar back at the end of the year, but I don't know

why – and student leadership activities, another \$5. That came to \$136 in compulsory fees. This is not: you have the option. This is: \$136, you must pay this.

There was also – and this goes back to the textbook rental fee – a student caution fee of \$90 which is refundable when you return the books. So what it's telling you is that that textbook rental fee is actually a fundraising thing for schools, and it is not the incentive to return your books in good shape because the incentive is the \$90 student caution fee, which I also had to pay.

Now, there were also fees for a variety of other courses. Art, \$20 or \$30 for supplies, I assume. There's a class called communication technology information processing, which is essentially a form of – well, it's like typing class really, and for some reason there's an additional \$15 for that one. Food studies, \$25; industrial education, \$30; fashion studies, \$25; English Shakespeare notes, \$7; physics 20 and 30 workbooks, \$13; phys ed 10 gym uniforms, \$25. This uniform, believe me, is not a \$25 uniform. The gym uniforms when you get into phys ed 20, which also includes out-of-school trips and speakers, are \$80. I can understand some extra money for out-of-school trips – I have no problems with that – but there's also a charge for the phys ed locker, another \$4. So you've got \$5 for your regular locker and \$4 for a phys ed locker. There's a workbook if you're taking Spanish that costs \$17. French student resource fee, I don't even know what that means, \$10. Instrumental music, understandable that there's some money involved in that because there's equipment, but there's also choral music, which as I understand it is voices, and there's a \$20 charge to, I guess, bring your voice.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are an awful lot of charges that accumulate for a typical school, and I believe a lot of it is just designed not as incentive to return books. It's really very small, sort of, nickel-and-dime fundraising things, and there should be a limit put on this. I'm very, very supportive of the Member for St. Albert for bringing forward this bill. Particularly, as I said, as someone who has paid out thousands of dollars over the years, I'm wondering exactly why I've been paying out this much money.

I know that previously the Minister of Education has indicated that it wasn't his government's responsibility to feed and clothe students, but is it not the government's job to fund education fully? We're talking about textbooks, technology, and the whole range of issues that I've discussed in this list of student fees that I have in front of me.

Mr. Speaker, I know where this bill is going. It's going down to defeat, but I certainly would wish that the members opposite would give it some thought. It's legitimately an honest bill, and it would do a lot of Albertans a lot of good.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, then Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 208, the School (Restrictions on Fees and Fundraising) Amendment Act, 2007, is aimed at stopping schools from charging students or parents for services or supplies required by courses of study or education programs.

The province determines education funding to school boards. School boards are then responsible for the allocation of funding to the schools. Alberta's education system is a balance between provincial responsibilities and directions, local school board autonomy, and considerable flexibility for individual schools and communities.

Alberta is not alone in allowing schools to charge for services or supplies. Up until last fall parents in British Columbia were required to pay school fees. The B.C. Supreme Court ruled that a school board is not permitted to charge student fees for any materials required to successfully complete a course for graduation. While this ruling is not binding in Alberta – and I understand that our two systems are very different – the effect of the passage of Bill 208 could be similar.

After the B.C. Supreme Court's ruling it became clear that optional programs and enriching activities like music, trips, and apprenticeship training would soon be eliminated for lack of funding. Charging school fees was the only way to maintain these programs at a high level of quality. This ruling left schools in British Columbia no option but to start cutting some worthwhile programs. This is not the position that anybody wants schools in Alberta to be in. The loss of revenue caused by the passage of this bill would be significant; it's estimated at about \$41.5 million in instructional resource fees. Schools in British Columbia could not accommodate a similar loss of fees.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The government of British Columbia has now introduced Bill 20, which does nearly the exact opposite as Bill 208 here. Bill 20 allows school districts to charge fees for some courses and materials, including noninstructional costs for specialty academics and costs in addition to those of a regular education program, the purchase or rental of musical instruments, and the purchase or rental of tools and materials for a student's personal use in trades training or apprenticeship programs.

3:10

British Columbia's Bill 20 will not impose financial hardships on students or parents. School boards will be required to have a policy in place to enable participation by students for whom the fee may be a financial hardship. Fees for specialty academics must also be approved annually by boards and school planning councils.

Continuing to permit the charging of reasonable fees to enhance school programs will maintain the exceptional quality of public education in Alberta. Again, while our education systems are far from identical, the example of British Columbia should urge us to seriously consider the potential impacts of Bill 208.

I appreciate the intention of the Member for St. Albert in introducing this bill, but I don't think legislation is needed to address this issue. Because I do not want the quality of education in Alberta to suffer in any way, I will not be supporting Bill 208.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. I have reviewed the bill thoroughly and read it, and I've been listening to the comments made by members on both sides on this bill. I find that perhaps I may contribute to this debate somewhat from various perspectives: from my past, somewhat limited experience in the teaching profession but more so now as a parent of a child in a public system where I am sitting on a parent advisory council actually involved in fundraising for a school.

Some of the comments that I hear from the opposition relevant to registration fees and fundraising fees are not the comments that I'm gathering from my parent colleagues on the parent advisory council and parents of the children with which my daughter attends. If you

were to pose the question to taxpayers – do you want fees? – the answer is obvious. The answer always will be: no, I don't want fees. It's like asking somebody: do you want to pay taxes? The answer would be no.

The fact of the matter is that any and all of those services which are provided in schools can be broken down into two categories. There are those mandatory curricular services, which constitute the basics that have to be delivered, which the government of Alberta imposes on school boards, which are further, then, superimposed on schools. Then there are those which we, probably all in this chamber, would agree are good for children. They are beneficial to children, and they enrich their school experience, but they are not the core basics, instruction of which are required by Alberta Education, and are not the basics on which students are tested in various parts of their academic career, particularly grades 3, 6, 9, and 12.

Now, if you look at the bare bones of education, the requirements, all that is within the budget which the school boards then schools receive. Just to put a little bit more factual information on it, it would be of interest, I imagine, to those who are viewing this debate right now or who are interested to read the *Hansards* later that approximately \$27 million is spent per day – \$27 million per day – on education between kindergarten and grade 12. We would agree that that's a lot of money.

Somebody will say: well, you have to spend money on that. Indeed, we do. Education is a priority. It's the second-highest expenditure in Alberta's budget. But we also have to compare ourselves to others. How do we compare relative to other provinces? The fact of the matter is that numbers are funny; you can play with them in many different ways, but if you're really honest, if you really compare apples to apples, we do spend, right now, the most on per-student funding between kindergarten and grade 12 in Canada. Budget 2007 ensures that operational grants to schools will increase by 3 per cent in September 2007 in addition to more funding which will be allocated for the small classrooms initiative.

That takes care of the basics of education; now let's talk about those extra activities. As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, when I say extra, I don't mean that they're not important. They're very important, but they're not mandated by Alberta Education; hence, taxpayers don't have to be on the hook for those expenses. We as parents want our children to have as rich an educational experience as they can; hence, we volunteer to raise some extra dollars. Those include intramurals, which keep our kids active during lunchtime. Those include field trips. They include uniforms, Mr. Speaker. They include the building of playgrounds on school properties, that we all volunteer for. As a parent I would be hard pressed to say that I ever had another parent come to me and complain about the fundraising.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that having had the chance to work a casino for the school and having had the chance to attend numbers, hundreds of these meetings, they are positive. There's probably more positive that stems from those meetings than negative because those meetings give parents an opportunity to discuss their children's education in a given school, they allow parents to partake in decision-making in a school, and they allow parents to then be involved in the decision-making on how the school will be operated and how dollars will be spent within the school.

Now, if I was to yet put a third hat on, a past hat that I used to wear prior to being elected to this Chamber – I was a chair of the Citizens' Appeal Panel, which is the highest level of appeal for any social benefits in this province – I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that there isn't one family in this province who is in receipt of social services who would be faced with children's registration fees that

could not request from the department a supplemental benefit for that particular expenditure because the department does have funds allocated for registration of children. It's actually very common. If you were to speak to any social worker within the ministry, they will tell you that in the month prior to registration of children to school many families reliant on social assistance do apply for additional benefits to offset the extra costs of registering kids at school. Furthermore, most schools, if not all schools, very often waive these fees for students whose parents have multiple children, where the fees would pose a hardship on the family, or where it is known to the school that the family simply is not in a position to pay these fees, and these fees are offset by other parents who pay for their children.

So to say that there is gloom and doom in the system and that there are children who are denied public education is simply not true. It's inflammatory, and it doesn't contribute to a good, knowledgeable debate in this House. The fact of the matter is that if you don't pay for these fees out of your right pocket, hon. Member for St. Albert, you will pay for those fees out of your left pocket because those are services that need to be delivered. Unless you argue that we as government should only be mandated to provide our students with basic education, based on which we test our children in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12, if that is the argument, then indeed we can eliminate all these extra fees, and only that will be provided to our students. But if you are of the opinion that we should enrich their educational experience as much as we can, you have a choice of which pocket you want to pay for it from, your right one or your left one, because either the minister will fund it through your taxes or he will fund it through what can be called a user fee, being parent paid and paying for it directly.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the system right now works very well. I have yet to receive phone calls from my constituents saying that their child has been denied registration to his or her school because they couldn't afford to pay. It simply doesn't happen. Are there other activities that we as parents would prefer to do other than sometimes attending a meeting or fundraising? Perhaps. But one of the benefits and one of the pleasures of having a child is to do those things. It's to coach soccer, it's to fund raise, it's to do bottle drives and attend scouting meetings, and that's what we as parents do. Now, to pass a law that will disallow parents from doing that, I don't find it would be productive and conducive to education.

Mr. Speaker, I can't vote in favour of this bill even though it is motherhood and apple pie because, simply, it is not addressing an issue that is out there. At least, it's not an issue that should be at the forefront of our debates in this House. I would suggest to the Member for St. Albert that there are many more important issues that we should be addressing than perhaps putting bills forward that, one could argue, would definitely attract the attention of many parents because you're asking them, "Do you want to pay, or don't you want to pay?" but will do nothing for our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get this opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill 208 this afternoon. I appreciate the efforts of the hon. Member for St. Albert in bringing this much-needed bill forward, and I would certainly encourage all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly to give it serious consideration when we have the opportunity to vote on it.

Before I go too far with my discussion this afternoon, I would like to remind all hon. members of Bill 208, section 49.1(2). Mr.

Speaker, it reads: "Nothing in subsection (1) restricts a school operated by a board from raising funds for extra-curricular activities offered by the school." Some members may be confused, but this clearly gives schools and school boards the option for extracurricular activities for fundraising.

3:20

What we find and what I think my hon. colleague is trying to do with this bill is follow the guidelines from the Learning Commission. The Alberta Learning Commission, when it reported, indicated that the government perhaps should take action on school fees. As I understand it now, the government has not even provided a set of guidelines or recommendations on what public school boards should charge or should not charge. Certainly, school fees can be an economic barrier for some.

In fact, yesterday I had an opportunity to have a look at an American newspaper, and on the front page of that paper was a story about how the education system in America was setting up an economic barrier. Very able students with a lot of academic ability from families who had low incomes, they were finding, could not participate in getting a good, solid formal education. Surely, we are not advocating that in this province. I certainly hope not, but after I listened to the remarks from the last speaker, I'm unfortunately concerned because one of the merits, one of the great benefits of a public education system is that everyone has an equal chance regardless of household income. If we don't start to control some of the fees that are being charged, then some people, unfortunately, through no fault of their own, Mr. Speaker, will be left behind.

Now, this government in the past has been very happy to pass on the costs of public services. There's no doubt about that. In this case parents and school boards are the ones again picking up the slack. Alberta has the money to make public education truly public, and I would urge all hon. members to support Bill 208 to ensure that that happens. There's probably not a member in this Assembly that at one point or another has not been involved in school fundraising projects. The hon. member talked about attending a casino or whatever to raise money. Everyone in this day and age is forced to do that.

With the changing curriculum, with the changes in information technology, it is not unusual for schools to organize campaigns to raise money for computers and computer labs and even security systems. Some parent advisory councils have discussed at their meetings whether or not they should spend money that was raised by the parents on a security system. Some school councils have replaced burnt out stoves and fridges that no longer work in home economics classrooms. That's not the role of parents, Mr. Speaker. Parents are already contributing through the tax system.

If there is more money needed to provide a basic public education, then perhaps the government should look at its priorities. One of the priorities that the government could change is the pool of cash that we're allocating through the lottery funds for the subsidies to the horse-racing industry. Well, perhaps we should look at ending those and putting that money directly into the public education system.

It's interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that in 2005 Alberta parents paid over \$40 million so that their children could attend public schools. That's an average of \$70 per student each year, but fees for things like band classes and class trips can be much higher than that.

Again, I would emphasize that the ability to pay should not affect the education of a K through grade 12 student. The \$40 million that we are using to subsidize thoroughbred horse racing: well, perhaps we got our priorities wrong, and we should just pool that cash into our public education system. If that wouldn't be enough, some of the golf courses that we are giving direct grants to could perhaps pay

their own way. I'm a golfer. Maybe I've got to pay 50 cents more for a green fee or a dollar more for a green fee. Well, maybe I should pay that.

Maybe these outfits should stand on their own merit and not be going back year after year to the lottery board for money for golf courses. Why should some golf courses get money from this government and not others? It's not fair to the ones that are family owned. It's just so ironic that some golf courses would be getting money from the lottery boards in this province, others are not, yet we're debating about whether or not there should be school fees or there should not be. I think it's another example of how this government has its priorities all wrong, and I would again urge members to please consider support for the hon. Member for St. Albert's Bill 208.

Now, how much revenue comes from school fees? Well, the information that I have, Mr. Speaker, is that revenue from school fees represents less than 1 per cent of the Education budget, yet the government steadfastly refuses to pay. Other provinces have done it. I don't understand why we in this province cannot. In fact, we are recruiting people from all over Canada to come to work here. One principal that I had discussion with last week told me that a lot of the parents that are getting set up in this province are concerned about the school fees. They're concerned about the school fees because a lot of them don't have a lot of financial resources when they first come here. They always respond to the principal in this way: well, where I came from, we didn't have school fees.

Mr. Lukaszuk: That's why they came here.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs says that that's why they came here, and they certainly came to better themselves economically. Perhaps not as many would come if they knew the consequences and how often they would have to open their chequebooks just to get what is considered a basic public education service. Maybe they would decide among themselves that they would be better off staying where they were and that perhaps it's not to their economic advantage to come here. If you have two or three children and you're paying the school fees, whether it's in high school, whether it's in junior high or even in elementary, it's a significant amount of cash in September and, in some cases, then again in January. Everyone, hon. members, should have a chance to participate.

This year the Department of Education is providing only a 3 per cent increase in operational funding, and this was debated and discussed in question period. It's quite interesting to listen to those exchanges, but without reasonable funding for operational costs school boards will have no choice but to pass on the cost of education to parents. So what is the likelihood that the fees are going to go up? Hon. members, it is significant.

Rev. Abbott: It's zero, zero.

Mr. MacDonald: It's not zero as the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar is indicating. I wish it was, but unfortunately it will not be. We need action. We need action right now on school fees to ensure that parents are not paying for this government's refusal to fund our public education system adequately.

Thank you.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take a great deal of interest in speaking to Bill 208, which is to restrict extra fees and fundraising

by parents and by community groups for schools. My arguments today are in balance, I would suggest, because certainly with a long experience in regard to school fees as a teacher and a parent I have a great deal of reservation as to the effectiveness towards public education that school fees, in fact, employ. The fundraising that schools are basically obliged to do to meet a certain standard of education, again, I found to be quite onerous as both a parent and a teacher. Particularly, I found the use of casinos to fund schools personally very difficult to reconcile in my mind.

It's a problem that only seems to be continuing as parents and schools require a broader range of funding and must seek the sources that will provide that funding in the biggest possible way, which is of course to get a casino licence. But then, you know, the problems associated with that, societal problems being the least of which, make it a difficult choice, I would suggest.

Anyway, as I said, I'm going to present both the pros and cons of this bill. I certainly do have some tentative support for it, though not without some quite significant reservations. This bill seems to add a section that would prohibit fundraising through parents, a provision of normal ministry . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member for Edmonton-Calder, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for St. Albert to close debate on Bill 208.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate, by the way, all the members participating in the debate, but I think what we have to look at here is the question of leadership. We have a new Minister of Education, and I think we have, I believe, a commitment from the government to look at this issue. You know, we have a wonderful information technology division in the Department of Education that we're spending millions of dollars on.

The elimination of school fees for basic education items, providing guidelines for school boards on what fees can be levied, and setting caps on fees were recommended by the Alberta Commission on Learning 2003 report. Now, why do I mention that again? It's because this information technology division – there was a pledge made by the provincial government that they would define and set province-wide policy on what is considered basic and what is considered extra in relationship to the fees. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think the Department of Education has failed us. They've passed out on the achievement test. They haven't passed it.

The failure of the Department of Education to provide guidelines as to what are considered basic and mandatory fees has led to confusion and complexity involved with varying fees across the province. We have a fee in the Lethbridge school system of \$40 in elementary, \$53 in junior high schools, \$71 in high school, and a band fee of \$65 for a total of \$229.

Now, I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, there are some people in this province, believe it or not – your own document says 1 in 5 – that go to school poor. I think the onus is on this Ministry of Education to look at this matter and give us some direction on school fees. Define what basic education is. Let's look at it carefully. These new texts that are coming out are a tremendous cost to parents, and that's what they're going to have to pay. The discussion of extracurricular: I couldn't believe what I've heard. Let's define it as allowing – remember, this bill allows individual schools to carry on with that funding, and that seems to have been missed.

Mr. Speaker, I have enjoyed the debate. I'm quite disappointed. I want to emphasize, you know, that the Minister of Education has talked many times about some new directions in the province, taking the bull by the horns and providing us with some new direction. So

far I have seen nothing. I'm waiting. When's he going to come out with something? This was a pledge, a pledge made by this government, a pledge made by this ministry to do something. Maybe the trustees are supposed to be doing it, the Alberta School Trustees' Association. Maybe they've got all of the material over at their office, and they're afraid to give it to us. I don't know. Are they working for the government? I'm not sure.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for allowing me to speak on this. I'll await the vote. Again, I'm going to remember this as something the government has pledged to us. They don't seem to want to take action.

I think there are some trustees in gallery today. I know that I talked to several school boards in Lethbridge, Alberta, last week and southern Alberta. Very disappointed. Some of them are going to be writing the minister and want him to come down and talk to them, see him eyeball to eyeball and talk about the real issues in education. I think this is one of them, and I think this government is missing the boat today.

You know, they set up these situations to listen, but nothing ever happens. The school fees are a perfect example of that. This was a pledge that the government made. Nothing has happened. The commission recommended that they look at this, and nothing has happened. I feel sorry for the parents today, but I'll sit down.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for your tolerance, and thank you very much.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:38 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Pastoor
Blakeman	Flaherty	Swann
Bonko	MacDonald	Tougas
Eggen	Mather	

3:50

Against the motion:

Abbott	Evans	Lund
Ady	Forsyth	Mitzel
Amery	Goudreau	Oberg
Calahasen	Horner	Oberle
Cao	Jablonski	Rodney
Cenaiko	Johnson	Snelgrove
Coutts	Johnston	Stevens
DeLong	Liepert	Strang
Doerksen	Lindsay	Tarchuk
Ducharme	Lougheed	Webber
Dunford	Lukaszuk	

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 32
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 208 lost]

Bill 210 Gaming Planning Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. It's my great pleasure and honour today to begin debate on Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act. I recognize that not all MLAs are given the opportunity to bring forward their own bill, so I am grateful for the opportunity, and I hope that we have a fruitful and thoughtful discussion about the merits of Bill 210.

Bill 210 is quite straightforward. The Gaming Planning Act calls for the creation of a nine-member all-party committee whose mandate is to investigate and report on the gaming industry in Alberta. This committee will conduct the first fully public investigation of all aspects of gaming in this province. The committee will assess the amount of gaming revenue that is allocated to charities and how it is distributed, examine whether we should re-establish the community lottery boards, evaluate the role of charitable organizations and gaming activities, address the social impact of gaming, and examine the role of gaming in Alberta in the future in regard to the number of casinos and gaming machines in the province. In short and in less legal terminology, Bill 210 will allow for a sweeping public review of how gaming is conducted in Alberta and ask Albertans what future they see for gambling in the province of Alberta.

Now, why a public review of gaming? Simply put, gaming is big business in Alberta, very big business. In fact – and this may surprise most hon. members – Alberta has the widest variety of legal gambling options available of any jurisdiction in all of North America. Yes, even the state of Nevada, the world's gambling mecca, does not have as many legal gambling options as does the province of Alberta. For the record the missing element in Nevada is a state-run lottery, which, oddly enough, is illegal in that state.

The dollar figure most often used in discussions of the economic impact of gambling on the Alberta Treasury is the bottom-line figure of profit. For 2005-2006 that number is \$1.4 billion. That number tells only part of the story. The amount of money actually gambled, coins put into machines, tells an even more remarkable story. According to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission's annual report of '05-06 Albertans poured more than \$11 billion into slot machines and more than \$10 billion into VLTs for a total of more than \$21 billion into gaming machines alone. There are more than 8,600 gaming machines and casinos in Alberta and another 6,000 VLTs in bars for a total of more than 14,000 gambling machines. There are now 17 casinos in Alberta and nine others in the final stages of the approval process. Little by little gambling has become a very big, very important industry in this province. This is an industry that is crying out for full, open, public scrutiny.

If I may, I'd like to give a little background on why I proposed Bill 210. Under the previous government there was a ministry of gaming. I asked to be assigned to be the critic for the gaming ministry because I truly believe that gambling in Alberta is both a social issue and an industry worthy of scrutiny. While I was gaming critic, I had on a number of occasions asked the minister of gaming what he saw as the future of gaming in Alberta. Was it an industry that we should grow, or should we rein it in? Did the gaming minister have long-range plans for gambling in Alberta? Was there any upper limit on the number of casinos or slot machines that would be allowed in Alberta?

Now, I asked these questions on a number of occasions, and repeatedly I received no substantial answers. After two and a half years of asking the government questions, I was not at all surprised by the nonanswers, but I started to wonder if the government didn't have a long-range plan for gaming, or if they did, were they keeping it a secret? It seemed to me that Albertans deserved an answer and that the public's opinion on gaming should be heard.

When I was the gaming critic, I was inundated with questions from the public about gambling. Was the government addicted to gaming revenue? Was it morally correct for the government to profit from gambling? Was it necessary to have volunteers work long hours for casino funds? Was the division of revenue equitable? The questions just kept coming.

Oddly enough, Mr. Speaker, I believe the government itself is of two minds about gambling. While it is happy to reap the benefits of a hugely profitable industry, it knows that there are moral implications to the whole issue of government profiting from what is still considered by many to be a vice. The government's confused attitude towards gambling is evident in its policy towards promoting the gambling business. While it has allowed and even encouraged a healthy domestic gambling industry, there still remains a prohibition against using gambling imagery in tourism promotion, yet the AGLC annual report notes that the new trend in the industry is destination gaming to attract tourists and businesspeople. It almost seems that the government acknowledges the gaming industry it has helped create but is not really proud of it.

Mr. Speaker, there has not been to my knowledge a full public debate about gaming in Alberta. I know that the government response will be that there was a major review of gambling in Alberta as recently as 2001. This review called *Achieving a Balance* was a gaming licensing policy review and was quite wide ranging, but it varied significantly from the committee that I am suggesting in Bill 210. The objective of the 2001 review was to "address issues of growth in gaming and continue to ensure the effective regulation and socially-responsible delivery of gaming activities in the province." However, the 2001 review did not hold public hearings into gambling and did not include the all-party element. The gaming licensing policy review of 2001 also did not include a widely distributed report. In fact, the final report was not even tabled with the Clerk of the Legislature.

It is also worth noting that the objective of the 2001 report was to "recommend gaming licensing policies" that spanned the following five years. Well, those five years have passed, and I think it's time for another more all-encompassing review that will set the course for the gaming industry and the administration of the charity model for the next decade. There has also been significant growth in gaming since the 2001 report. In fiscal year 2001 gaming activities in Alberta generated gross sales, that is before prizes, of \$14.6 billion from all forms of gambling in Alberta. In '05-06 gross revenue in gaming came in at more than \$22 billion.

There is certainly precedent in other provinces for a full review. In 2005 the government of Nova Scotia released its gaming strategy called *A Better Balance: Nova Scotia's First Gaming Strategy*. Nova Scotia has taken the unusual step of forming the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation, a Crown corporation governed by the provincial Gaming Control Act that is charged with leading an economically sustainable and socially responsible gaming industry for the benefit of Nova Scotians and their communities.

Should all gambling in Alberta fall under the umbrella of a Crown corporation? Perhaps, but that is just one idea that could come forward during a comprehensive review of gambling in Alberta.

The Gaming Planning Act would also give the committee the right to retain experts. We are fortunate in Alberta to have some renowned gambling experts such as Dr. Garry Smith, a gambling research specialist at the University of Alberta, and Dr. Robert Williams at the University of Lethbridge. You can applaud the University of Lethbridge.

Where will the final report on the Gaming Planning Act take us? Well, clearly there's a public taste for gambling. For the overwhelming majority of Albertans gambling is simply another form of

entertainment. Public opinion has changed dramatically when it comes to gambling. While once considered a vice that had to be curtailed at all costs, gambling has gone mainstream. The fact that we now have televised million dollar poker says a lot about how gambling has grown in public acceptance. Back when I first began studying the gaming industry in Alberta, shortly after being named the gaming critic, I would have bet, if you'll pardon the pun, that the public would have been opposed to growing the gaming industry in Alberta if they were asked. Now I'm not so sure. I suspect now that the public's attitude towards gambling overall has changed dramatically, so much so that it could be that today Albertans might even welcome the growth in gaming.

Could Alberta become a Las Vegas north? It may be time to look upon gambling as an actual growth industry and tourist attraction. Could gambling become an economic pillar for Alberta once the oil runs out? Again, another question that needs to be asked. And what of Internet gambling? Clearly, many millions of dollars are spent by Albertans on Internet gambling. Should the government tap into this revenue source as well or let millions in potential revenue slip away? And what of the volunteer sector? I have heard from many charitable groups who have concerns about the volunteer aspect of casino gambling and the tremendous pressures it puts on the volunteers. Even some casino operators I've spoken to have found the volunteer aspect to be problematic.

There are also questions about who qualifies as a charity. Why, for example, should one minor sports team with limited financial needs get the same revenue windfall as a social service agency that serves the needs of hundreds or thousands of disadvantaged people? Should all lottery dollars, regardless of where they're earned, go into a common pool for all Albertans to share? Again, these are questions that need to be asked, and I think Albertans would like to express their opinion on these matters.

4:00

Hon. members, before this government or any other government takes further steps in the gambling industry, I believe it is time to consult with the people. It is, after all, the people of Alberta who most benefit from gambling and who have the most to lose.

Hon. members, this is not a witch hunt or an attempt to derail gambling or to promote it. This is not an attempt to embarrass the government in any way. Bill 210 would ask Albertans in the most open and transparent manner possible exactly how they feel about gaming and where we should take the charitable model in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to put this bill before the House, and I look forward to the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to spend a few moments this afternoon discussing Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Bill 210 proposes a review of gaming policies in Alberta through an all-party gaming review committee. This committee would examine current revenue sharing policies for charities, roles of volunteers and casinos, social impacts of gaming, the future role and scope of gaming in Alberta. There may be many gaming opportunities in this province. This includes VLTs, casinos, lotteries, and horse racing.

Albertans partake in these activities as a source of entertainment and enjoyment. That said, gaming activities must be balanced with the need to be socially responsible. Gaming activities must also be conducted within a legal framework which discourages fraud and corruption. I believe that Alberta's approach to gaming respects and promotes that balance. Most importantly, proceeds from gaming activities benefit Albertans.

Albertans reached a consensus on gaming activities in 1998 as a result of the Lotteries and Gaming Summit held by the provincial government. A number of recommendations emerged from the summit. In general, the recommendations stated that, number one, resources be dedicated toward gaming research, particularly towards prevention and treatment of problem gambling, the social impacts of lotteries and gaming, native gaming issues, and emerging gaming activities; number two, a charitable model for operating casinos and bingo be maintained; number three, all gaming and lottery profits collected by the province be directed to charitable and nonprofit community initiatives; and four, gambling addiction, prevention, and treatment programs be increased. Our current gaming system reflects those recommendations.

Overall the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission regulates all charitable gaming activities in the province. The AGLC strives to maximize the economic benefits of gaming in Alberta. By monitoring gaming establishments and ensuring compliance with gaming regulations, the AGLC delivers on its commitment of generating gaming revenues that benefit community and nonprofit organizations.

The AGLC is one part of the gaming system in Alberta. The other part of the system is the Alberta lottery fund. The Alberta lottery fund collects the government's portion of revenues through gambling activities and lotteries. In this fiscal year the Alberta lottery fund will distribute \$1.45 billion to numerous initiatives that improve quality of life, build a stronger Alberta, and provide safe and secure communities.

I want to mention a number of important initiatives supported by the Alberta lottery fund. As announced in the recent budget, the lottery fund will be supporting two major initiatives to improve community facilities in our province. The major community facilities program will provide \$280 million over the next two years to assist municipalities and nonprofit organizations to upgrade and build large regional community facilities to encourage community participation and individual well-being. This program will support the construction of sports, recreational, cultural, and wellness facilities. Such facilities are needed to address the expectations of Albertans as they make the province a desirable place to live, work, and grow. The other component of the community facilities development announced in this budget is grants for recreation and sports facilities. The lottery fund will allocate \$90 million for this purpose in Budget 2007.

In addition to these two new programs the Alberta lottery fund provides funding to communities through the community facility enhancement program and the community initiatives program. CFEP provides funding to communities to construct and approve community use facilities throughout Alberta. In 2007-2008 CFEP's budget was \$38.5 million. The municipalities, First Nations, nonprofit organizations, and regional child service authorities can apply for CFEP grants. CIP supports community projects such as libraries, seniors' services, culture, sports, recreation, and health and wellness initiatives. CIP funding is approved on a matching grant basis. The maximum grant would be \$75,000 per project. CIP's budget for 2007-2008 is \$30 million.

The lottery fund supports research into the effects of gambling. The Alberta Gaming Research Institute examines the implications of gaming from a number of perspectives. This includes the impact on the health care system; sociocultural, economic, psychological impacts; and the impact on government and industry policy as it relates to gaming. This research institute is a partnership between the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge. The institute will receive \$1.6 million from the lottery fund in 2007-2008.

Communities receive additional benefits from gaming activities beyond the Alberta lottery fund. Charitable organizations receive a portion of gaming revenues as a result of volunteering at bingos and casinos, for example.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it's very clear that Albertans benefit from our gaming system. By striking a balance between offering a variety of gaming activities and providing social benefits that improve quality of life, Alberta is a model for other jurisdictions to follow. As a result, I cannot support Bill 210.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak in support of Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act. I want to thank the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark for introducing the bill. I really appreciate his time and efforts to prepare all the paperwork for this very important bill.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 210 would allow for a sweeping public review of how gaming is conducted in Alberta and ask Albertans what future they see for gambling in this province. This bill establishes a committee to plan the future role of gaming in Alberta. Part of the mandate of the committee is to reconsider re-establishing community lottery boards for distributing gaming revenues.

I still remember some time ago, when one filmmaker received \$5 million within a very short period of time and some other filmmakers were struggling. I just want to ask the minister if he could give us a brief summary, brief details, of how they assess the applications. I just want to make sure favouritism in awarding the grants doesn't happen in any of the programs under this Gaming Planning Act or the CIP grant or CFEP or other programs and general grants in different departments.

I think there should be a fair system for all. We are not against the grants as the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs mentioned in his private member's statement today. I just want to say a few words in response to his private member's statement. We always try to make sure the integrity of all the institutions is protected. We are not against awarding grants to any community. We just want to make sure that the system should be fair for all the recipients. We asked questions recently about the other initiative programs for which we don't have even the rules. We are always talking about the openness, transparency, and accountability, and we are always asking to make sure that the rules are not broken.

4:10

Unfortunately, the government made the rules, and they break their own rules. That is not acceptable to us, and that's the reason we raised a few questions about CIP grants and CFEP grants and, for example, the Applewood community. I'm still not sure, even after the investigation in the Auditor General's report, whether that money was recovered or not. I would request the hon. minister because this is a long time, okay? The public wants to know whether that money is recovered or not. Ordinary people, if they don't pay even a small amount of money to the government, receive one letter after another. Then they, you know, collect the money through different agencies.

My question is: why, so far, has this government failed to collect that money which the government is owed from the misused money in one of the grants? It's not only one grant I mentioned, the CIP grant; it was 43 grants. Rules were broken, but the minister very tactfully ignored. He hardly accepted that the rules were broken. Sometimes he said: it's a fraction of people. This was the wording used. Then he said: we give grants to thousands of people, and that

was only 43 grants. You know, it's not the number of people, the number of the groups. I mean, he should admit that the rules were broken.

Rev. Abbott: He did. Under his discretion.

Mr. Agnihotri: Listen. Let me finish. I just want to know whether in the future the government maintains the rules they make. That is what we were asking.

The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs keeps on saying – it appears to me that he was trying to portray that we are against awarding those grants. It's not true. This program is good. We always appreciated that. Lots of people see that the rules are broken and that favouritism is going on. If the ruling party MLAs or ministers are involved, they get the grant easily. That was the question.

Now I come to the little bit of background of this Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act, Mr. Speaker, a general and useful chronological listing of the gambling in this province, gaming history and facts. For example, you will find that community lottery boards were eliminated in 2002. Bill 210 addresses the gambling planning in Alberta. Recent government gambling planning initiatives include: 1990 to 2000, gaming licensing policy review initiated; Gaming and Liquor Commission undertakes a review of gambling in Alberta; casino moratorium issued. In the year 2001-2002 the gaming licensing policy review was completed, with 61 recommendations. According to the report the objective of the review was "to recommend gaming licensing policies that will address issues of growth in gaming and continue to ensure the effective regulation and socially responsible delivery of gaming activities in the province over the next five years." It's on page 2-1.

One of the problems with this study is that nearly six years have passed since its completion. In addition, the gaming licensing policy review was commissioned by the Gaming and Liquor Commission without all-party involvement or significant public consultation. During this period, Mr. Speaker, the casino moratorium was lifted. The minister of gaming established the MLA Review Committee on Charitable Gaming Licensing Eligibility and Use of Proceeds in January 2002. Yvonne Fritz was the sole MLA named to the committee.

An Hon. Member: Hey, you can't use the name.

Mr. Agnihotri: Sorry. I'm just giving the reference in the past, Mr. Speaker. I'm not trying to name anybody.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you were in the Assembly this afternoon when the Speaker did make some rulings, and I know that you're aware of it.

Mr. Agnihotri: Yes. I understand. I withdraw that remark.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003 that MLA Review Committee on Charitable Gaming Licensing Eligibility and Use of Proceeds made 42 recommendations, and now, after 2003, my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark introduced this Bill 210.

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

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for bringing this forward. As a former AADAC chair I've seen first-hand some of the negative sides of this industry, and surely continued diligence is required.

Now, Bill 210 as presented, the Gaming Planning Act, proposes establishing an all-party gaming review committee to conduct a

sweeping review of gaming practices in Alberta. This would not be the first time that gaming practices in Alberta have been closely scrutinized. The 1998 Lotteries and Gaming Summit, an open, public forum on all aspects of gaming, recommended maintaining the charitable model for operating casinos and bingos, and this model seems to have affected and served Albertans well. It directed all gaming and lottery profits collected by the province to supporting charitable and/or nonprofit community initiatives. The charitable gaming model allows eligible charitable or religious groups to apply for licences to fund raise with casinos, bingos, raffles, and pull tickets. Thousands of charitable and religious groups conduct charitable gaming activities to raise funds for their worthy projects and services.

Last year about a quarter of a billion dollars was invested in Alberta's communities through these initiatives. The government's revenues from ticket lotteries, slot machines, video lottery terminals, and electronic bingo and keno are directed to the Alberta lottery fund. These revenues totalled nearly \$1.4 billion in 2005-2006. Each year the lottery fund estimates are voted on right here in the Legislature. These revenues are then allocated through 12 ministries in support of public initiatives and the foundations and grant programs. Due to the support that these monies provided, thousands of volunteer, public, and community-based initiatives are able to proceed each year.

CIP, or the community initiatives program, provides support for project-based initiatives in areas like community services, seniors' services, libraries, arts and culture, sports, education, health, and recreation. I'm sure that pretty much every member has seen this in action and probably heard a lot of positive feedback from CIP.

Now, CFEP, or the community facility enhancement program, provides support for expansion and upgrading of Alberta's many community-use facilities. The Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Wild Rose Foundation, and the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund – that's a mouthful – also provide support to causes that improve Albertans' quality of life. It's very affirming to have these people come forward and express their appreciation.

4:20

Albertans are probably familiar with some of the government programs that the Alberta lottery fund supports. Last year over \$14 million helped support the Alberta film development program, to international acclaim; \$4.5 million was dedicated to the prevention of family violence and bullying initiative, something I think all of us in the House can agree on; and \$2.3 million helped support learning television. Hundreds of millions more supported other invaluable community services. I wish we heard about this more in the newspapers. Perhaps the news is too good and wouldn't sell enough papers.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, the 2007-2010 business plan for the Solicitor General and Ministry of Public Security sets a goal of ensuring that Alberta's gaming industry operates with integrity and social responsibility and benefits Albertans. In 2005-2006 92 per cent of Albertans reported that they were satisfied with the gaming activity they participated in and that it was provided fairly and in a responsible manner. I recognize that there is a certain percentage missing, and we must continue to take care of that remaining percentage. I believe our AADAC programs are aimed at exactly that: not only treatment but prevention and information.

But back to the task at hand. Given the support of Albertans' volunteer and charitable efforts that gaming affords, the level of satisfaction with gaming in this province, and the fact that the

Solicitor General and Ministry of Public Security conduct reviews of gaming policies, legislation, and regulations, I do not believe it's necessary at this point to create yet another committee to review gaming practices in Alberta.

Once again, thank you to Edmonton-Meadowlark. I look forward to the rest of the proceedings.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will certainly start by congratulating and thanking the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for working hard and developing this Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act. I think that the Gaming Planning Act is needed. It certainly would allow for a good public review of how gaming is conducted in Alberta and ask Albertans themselves what future they see for gambling in this province.

Now, if we were to adopt this bill, Mr. Speaker, we would establish a committee to plan the future role of the entire gambling industry in Alberta. Part of the mandate, as I understand it, of the committee is to consider re-establishing community lottery boards for distributing gaming revenues. Certainly, if for no other reason than that, I would urge all hon. members to vote for this bill because we know that back in 2002, when this government got rid of the community lottery boards, there was considerable disappointment in the community. We went to this sort of grip and grin, with Conservative MLAs going across the province with cheques.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, yes. Big, phony cheques.

Mr. MacDonald: Big, phony cheques with their own names on as if it was their own money. This is what happened.

Ms Blakeman: They got caught for doing that.

Mr. MacDonald: They certainly got caught by doing that, and I think it was the diligent research from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark that caught them. They were going across the province with their own names on the cheques. They were embarrassed into stopping this procedure. As far as I know, some of them may still be at it, but it's wrong. It's totally wrong.

In fact, one Tory MLA wound up in the Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency, and he was late, an hour late, with the cheque. He didn't know his way around the constituency. The local community league phoned me, and they had a great laugh about this. They thought it was hilarious that the Tory MLA didn't know his way around Gold Bar. The meeting was over by the time the cheque presentation was to take place.

An Hon. Member: It sounds like a problem.

Mr. MacDonald: It is a problem, hon. member. It certainly is a problem. That's why we need to go back to the community lottery board model. The allocation of gaming funds I think would go much smoother, much better because the community knows best. There is absolutely nothing the matter with allowing a group of citizens from the community to get together and decide which projects have merit and which ones should be funded and for how much.

Now, do I think golf courses would be getting all these megabucks that they're currently getting from this government if we had this community lottery board plan? I don't think so. I do not think that golf courses would be getting so many lottery board grants. In fact, it's a play on the whole idea of green fees, you know, and the Tory party I think should reconsider through this government this whole

plan of supporting some golf courses and not others. We talked about that earlier this afternoon, and I'm not going to continue on that.

I think we need to have a general and a useful listing of gaming in Alberta. If we look at the history and facts of gaming, we will see where it has grown from an industry, or whatever you want to call it – I don't know if industry is the correct term. But it has grown from a source of revenue for this government that was a little over \$20 million to what it is now: \$1.3 billion, \$1.4 billion. In some years it could go as high, Mr. Speaker, as \$1.5 billion.

There are 8,600 slot machines in Alberta casinos; 6,000 VLTs in the bars. That's over 14,000 gambling machines. That's a lot. I think it's too many. In fact, I was a volunteer at a casino up in Manning, and I couldn't believe the number of slot machines that were in there, yet there is another casino at Northlands, just a little bit to the south. I don't know how they actually stay in business. If we adopted this bill before we expand the number of casinos, perhaps this committee could have a look at it.

There has been a study that estimates that close to 5 per cent of problem gamblers in Ontario in 2003 accounted for 36 per cent of Ontario gaming revenue. Now, if we were to pass this bill, perhaps our committee, in a public review, could find out exactly what is going on in this province. In this study, according to Dr. Williams, a leading expert on gambling research, First Nations citizens have the highest rate of problem gambling in North America. Now, this is in North America, and I think we should have a look at this for our province. This, again, would be a role for this committee to perform.

Now, we know that there are racetrack slots, casino slots, VLT terminals, and we know the various percentages there to the retailer and to the government. We're talking about a considerable amount of money. Alberta needs not only a plan for gambling but it needs a plan in general, and it's evident to me that there is a plan for neither. How truthful was the former Premier when he finally admitted that this government has no plan. Bill 210 would be a way, certainly, for this government to develop a plan for gambling. Albertans need a say in how the gambling industry will operate in the future. Bill 210 will evaluate best management practices for the gaming industry concerning rural, urban, and aboriginal or First Nations communities.

4:30

When we're talking about casinos and we're talking about expanding casinos on First Nations land, I don't know what's next with this government. I would caution all hon. members about this. Legally I don't think there's anything that could be done, but we're setting up these destination resorts for gambling on First Nations land. I suspect that this government is also planning or encouraging private hospitals to be located on those First Nations lands. That'll be the next thing, and there are absolutely no rules or no laws against this. First Nations land is independent. They're autonomous, and if they wanted to set up a private hospital, there would be nothing to stop them. I certainly hope that this government is not using that as a way to finally get their private hospitals in this province, that they've been quietly promoting for the last dozen years or so.

Now, Mr. Speaker, again, Bill 210 considers re-establishing community lottery boards as a means of distributing gaming revenue. That is, as I said earlier, very, very important. Let's get on with it. Let's vote for this bill.

When we would establish under Bill 210 an all-party committee to investigate and report on the gaming industry in Alberta, I, if I was privileged to be a member of this Assembly, would like to sit on that committee. Now, with this committee we would assess the

amount of gaming revenue that is allocated to charitable organizations; evaluate the role of charitable organizations in gaming activities, including religious and other volunteer organizations; evaluate the existing formula for allocating gaming revenue to charitable organizations; examine the role of gaming in Alberta . . .

I'm sorry my time is up, Mr. Speaker, but thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and join in the discussion on Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act, which has been proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Alberta's gaming industry is a very important part of community action in this province. Gaming activities contribute to Alberta's quality of life by providing opportunities for charitable groups to raise funds through the provision of entertainment options to adults in Alberta. Our community organizations are able to benefit financially for their respective causes. These revenues, as was indicated, total well over \$1.3 billion each year and are used to annually support thousands of volunteer, public, and community-based initiatives.

While there is no all-party committee in place to review gaming policy, I'd like to make it clear to the hon. members that this government is committed to ensuring responsible gaming activities in this province. Certainly, as a ministry we review the gaming activities, and on the funding side we constantly review that. It will be noted that the First Nations funds were developed following some very extensive consultation with existing groups in the province of Alberta.

Alberta's gaming policies are founded on the basis of community giving. This Assembly can be sure that this goal will remain a guiding principle. The public expects the government to control and manage gaming activities in a socially responsible manner and expects appropriate measures to be taken on an ongoing basis.

The shape of the industry is determined by the legislation, regulations, and policies governing gaming activities, or the gaming policy framework of our province. Because we have such a sound system, Albertans have indicated to us in a 2006 survey on gaming that 74 per cent of respondents were pleased with the process of gaming in the province. Of those Albertans who had taken part in gaming activities in the previous year, more than 90 per cent felt that the service was provided in a reasonable and equitable manner.

Having cohesive gaming policies in Alberta means a stronger bond with charitable giving. Promoting a compassionate society is a part of this government's mandate, and we are consistently looking for ways to bolster this mentality. Mr. Speaker, as hon. members know, as Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture I was given the mandate from our Premier of setting up a community spirit program. This involves charitable giving to support increases for private charitable donations through tax credits. As per our Budget 2007 Alberta's tax credit system for total annual charitable donations over \$200 will increase to 21 per cent from 12.75 per cent. When combined with the federal charitable donations credit, Albertans will receive a 50-cent tax credit for every dollar donated over the \$200 threshold.

Volunteerism, Mr. Speaker, encompasses the importance of community spirit in this province. When organizations come together and partake in bingos, casinos, and the like, it presents communities with the opportunity to showcase a sense of pride in the causes for which they are raising funds. This sort of community benefit wouldn't take place without the participation of volunteers.

At the present time gaming proceeds may be used to reimburse volunteers for approved expenses that may be incurred as a result of participating in the administration of charity gaming events. According to the 2003 MLA review committee on charitable gaming report a credit is a value placed by a charitable group on the contribution of that member to volunteering at gaming events. It may be used, for example, to offset the cost of registration fees or competition fees in an acceptable, charitable activity, such as amateur youth athletics or dance. Volunteers working a licensed event may receive credits to help offset the cost of registration fees, competition fees, travel expenses, or other uses currently approved by the AGLC for an approved charitable activity conducted by the licensee.

Mr. Speaker, given the ongoing review of gaming policies that is undertaken by AGLC in conjunction with the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, the role of volunteerism in gaming is continuously being re-evaluated in order to ensure that their safety, reimbursement, and general best interest are certainly front and centre. The cornerstone of Alberta's approach to its gaming and liquor industry is that all activities are conducted in a socially responsible manner, including the role of our volunteers.

Over the course of the past two decades there have been a variety of reviews that have allowed the government to connect with the public and clarify the gaming needs of Albertans. Given the new structure of our government, we can remain confident that the appropriate competencies will be aligned to ensure maximum community benefit in an open and transparent manner. Given the presence of an appropriately regulated gaming industry in Alberta, hon. members can rest assured that the best interests of our volunteers are at heart as well as those of all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to join in – well, I can't call what I've heard a debate – an exchange on Bill 210. I really appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark bringing this forward in a very thoughtful way. I can tell by listening to his opening remarks that he had really thought about this. It's frustrating to hear other members respond to it by just reading something off a website because I think what the bill was designed to do was to generate a fulsome discussion about where we are with gambling in the province of Alberta. Is this really where we wanted to be in 2007? Are these really activities that we want people partaking in? Is this really the way we want to fund or reward our volunteer and charitable sectors? Do we feel that we are flowing an appropriate amount of money through to those who have problems with gambling? I think those are questions that should be discussed, and they aren't.

If I may indulge in a little historical vignette here, a little wander backwards in time, I always find it really interesting that this province got into gambling because they wanted to get in ahead of organized crime. Yup. Good reason for getting into gambling: so you could get in there ahead of organized crime. But that is indeed what is on the books as to why this province got into the whole VLT business.

4:40

Then in 1997, or it could have been the end of 1996, there was a plebiscite on VLTs across the province. Frankly, it didn't turn out too well. It was really, really close to 50-50. I think that scared the bejesus out of certain people in the government caucus because it really was people saying: "We don't like this. We don't like what

it's doing to our communities. We don't like the fact that it's inciting people to gamble more money than they can afford. This is not entertainment." It was really jeopardizing a huge revenue source for the government. I mean, we're well over a billion dollars, and it was VLTs that took us there. The amount of money the government has made from ticket sales, 6/49, our share of the Western, and all of that kind of stuff has been consistent at around the \$200 million, \$300 million mark. Consistent. It was the VLTs that really vaulted us from that sort of \$200 million, \$300 million up over a billion dollars. It just rocketed. It's a steady line upwards on the graph if you watch across those years.

So having that plebiscite really scared people, and two things came out of that. One was the gambling summit. It was very fashionable between '97 and 2001 to have summits on everything. We had a justice summit and a gaming summit and a whatnot summit. Lots of summits. Anyway, there was a gaming summit that was held in Medicine Hat, very interesting, and I attended that. Out of that gaming summit came a number of recommendations, most of which have yet to ever be implemented. The then Member for Lacombe-Stettler, Judy Gordon, who served this province very well and very faithfully around gaming issues and how to best find that balance between the community and the money-making aspects, led that gaming summit, gambling summit.

You see it right there; right there is something really interesting. Everybody else was calling it gambling. The government's Public Affairs Bureau kicked into gear, and now we're all going to call it gaming because that made it seem, well, kind of fun and kind of not so dangerous and not such a dark side. It's just about entertainment really, but there's no negative side to that. That's exactly the kind of mindless spin that this government has done over and over and over again. Don't deal with the issue; rename it and give it a better spin.

Anyway, coming out of that gaming summit we had quite a long review that was led by Judy Gordon, and we ended up with community lottery boards, which was a very good idea as a way of distributing those lottery funds back into the community. What was the problem that the government had? They had a whole bunch of communities saying: get rid of this gambling; we don't like it. There was a range of, you know, "We think it's evil" to "We think it's not a good idea" and everything in between. That really scared the government.

So, fine, we're going to give each community a little piece of that action. They can make up their own minds about how they spend it, and guess what? It actually worked. I don't think they intended it to, but it actually did work. Communities very thoughtfully put together committees of people, some of them on a regional basis, and distributed that money. There was no cap to the amount of money they could give out. It was based on a per capita as to how much they actually received in each community. The committee, the lottery board, could decide that "Look, what we really need here is, you know, a new recreation centre, and we're going to put all of our money towards that," and that's what they did, and it worked out. Localized decision-making.

The second thing that flowed out of that VLT plebiscite was core funding. Up until then really the gambling money had only been used for extras, funding the arts, funding the foundations that existed at that time: Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife; the Wild Rose Foundation; Multiculturalism; the Foundation for the Arts; those foundations. That's where the money went.

How could the government make it so that everybody needed to have that lottery money and nobody was going to say: "Well, we don't need it that badly. We'd rather not have the gambling"? All of a sudden – and you guys can go back and find this – the 18 departments found programs that had to be funded through lottery

programs. We went from having none of the core funding of core projects funded by lottery dollars to 18 departments having several projects in each of their departments being funded exclusively from lottery dollars. So you can't now say, "Oh, well, we would get rid of gambling completely in the province," because, oh my goodness, that would be capital funding for hospitals and schools, that would be an aboriginal program, that would be some farm programs plus all of the original foundations that had been disseminating money. Very interesting to watch that happen. We're still doing it. Fourteen departments get programs funded by lottery dollars. So it's very hard to say: let's get right out of gambling. The government does its level best to entrench gambling.

I would like to see some of the questions raised in Bill 210 actually discussed because I think the question "How much is enough?" has still not been answered by this province. How much gambling activity is enough? How much revenue generated by gambling activities is enough for this province? Is it limitless? Do citizens in Alberta really want to just keep going: more casinos, more bingos, more VLTs, more slots, more whatever, forever, ad infinitum? I think the answer to that is no, but I don't know where that threshold is reached, and I would like to have that discussion.

What are the consequences of having our funding for the voluntary, charitable sector primarily coming from gambling dollars? What are the consequences for the volunteer sector? Is this really where we want to spend our activities? When we go out for those volunteer activities, we want to help somebody. We want to deliver Meals on Wheels. We want to learn something by going and volunteering for a group that could teach you, like Habitat for Humanity. You could learn a new skill doing that. Or we want to have fun. You could volunteer at any number of festivals to have some fun doing stuff.

That's, I think, what people want to do, not work a casino to raise the money to offset the cost of having your kid play hockey. Is that really how we want to be spending our precious nonworking, nonhousework time, working a bingo or a casino so we can raise money for ourselves and our kids to participate in whatever time they've now got left because they're all spending it working casinos and bingos to raise the money? There's just a ridiculous treadmill that we start to get on with this. I think a lot of people would argue: let me off of this treadmill; this is not what I anticipated around this.

Do we really need this money to be doing that? Shouldn't it be just funded by regular sources through general revenue? All of those questions. We don't get the opportunity to discuss it. Why? Because the government squelches it. They darn well need that money, and they're going to weave it into the texture of everything to try and make sure those tentacles are really deep and can't get pulled back out again by another scary thing like a VLT plebiscite.

I've heard a number of references here to the voluntary sector. That's one thing that I keep raising here: the fragility of that voluntary, charitable, NGO sector right now. It has been hollowed out by choices that this government has made. We have a number of organizations that exist to serve or provide services in that sector who are literally hollowed out. They're quite fragile. Why? Well, because they're having to try and raise a number of their dollars for operation, thereby subsidizing the services that they're offering to make the province a better place. In a number of cases they're actually contracted by the government to provide services, and they're still having to go and raise charitable dollars to subsidize those services that the government is giving.

Please vote for Bill 210.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act, is aimed at establishing an all-party gaming review committee to undertake a review of gaming practices in the province. The provincial gaming industry is appropriately regulated and controlled. Reviews have been conducted to improve Alberta Gaming practices. Regular annual reports occur, falling in line with the Alberta government's priority of being open and transparent. The 2006 survey of Albertans' views on gaming-related matters indicated that 74 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the conduct of legal gaming in Alberta. Of those who had participated in a gaming activity in the previous year, over 90 per cent were satisfied that the activity was provided fairly and in a responsible manner.

The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission provides recommendations to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security regarding the procedures, licences, and licensing of gaming in the province. This ensures that key policy objectives are being met according to legislative and regulatory requirements.

Each year the lottery fund estimates are voted on right here in the provincial Legislature, ensuring transparency and full accountability. Thousands of volunteer, charitable, and nonprofit groups across the province benefit from the Alberta lottery fund each year. A complete list of lottery fund dollars allocated to the various ministries and a searchable database containing the groups and communities that receive funding can be found online at albertalotteryfund.ca. Using key strategies, like ensuring that lottery fund revenues are appropriately allocated and helping to inform Albertans about lottery-funded initiatives, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission manages the Alberta lottery fund to enhance the quality of life for all Albertans.

4:50

The committee that Bill 210 proposes to create would look at re-establishing community lottery boards to distribute lottery funds. Now, the community lottery boards were locally administered and made up of community representatives who were recruited or appointed by regional nominating committees. The community lottery boards were discontinued at the end of the 2002 fiscal period and replaced by the community initiatives program in order to increase transparency.

The government of Alberta created the CIP to establish standard criteria for CIP funding. This allows lottery funds to be allocated according to the priorities of Alberta communities and ensures that the funds are being utilized by communities appropriately. The CIP provides funds from the Alberta lottery fund to enhance and enrich project-based community initiatives throughout Alberta. We're all aware of these. They happen in all of our communities.

The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission manages and controls the growth of Alberta's gaming and liquor industries responsibly and with integrity. This means that all industry players compete on a level playing field where the rules are fair, clear, and consistently applied. It means that sound policy and effective regulation work hand in hand with monitoring and enforcement. It means a commitment to working in partnership with charities and private businesses to deliver high-quality services to the public. It means a commitment to excellence, openness, and accountability.

Now, charities report on the use of proceeds on an ongoing basis through the annual Charitable Gaming in Alberta review document, which includes tables that summarize how charitable and religious groups use the proceeds from gaming. This annual review provides information about Alberta's charitable gaming model, including which groups are eligible for gaming licences, how charitable gaming funds are used, the amount generated by charities from each

gaming activity, and how the province maintains the integrity of gaming activity.

Many reviews have been conducted regarding gaming practices in Alberta. These reviews have produced numerous recommendations that have been implemented to improve the transparency of gaming activity. A Lotteries and Gaming Summit was held in 1998 to fulfill a recommendation of the 1995 lottery review. The committee called for the impact of changes in gaming to be monitored on an ongoing basis. Now, the summit produced eight core recommendations. Recommendation 7 dealt directly with transparency and accountability. It recommended that lottery and gaming regulators and the provincial government improve accountability and disclosure of gaming activity in the province. This would include keeping citizens better informed of the amount, type, cost – both social and financial – and the benefits of gaming activity in the province. All of these recommendations were adopted by the government of Alberta.

Now, the MLA Review Committee on Charitable Gaming Licensing Eligibility and Use of Proceeds report included 42 recommendations that were adopted by the Alberta government. Building on these recommendations, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission has consolidated the current licensing eligibility and the use of proceeds policies into one set of policies.

In addition to the variety of reviews that have taken place, the provincial gaming industry remains properly monitored and controlled. Past reviews have produced recommendations on ways to ensure that gaming practices in Alberta are accountable and transparent, and most recommendations from these reviews have been adopted and are current practice.

Bill 210 is redundant and unnecessary. The Alberta government conducts reviews and continually monitors gaming activity to ensure that the scope of gaming in Alberta is open and transparent and meets the needs of the citizens of this province.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

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

Disclosure of Political Donations

508. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation to amend section 2 of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act to make donations to leadership campaigns subject to the same contribution limits and disclosure requirements as other political donations.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to indicate that the Alberta New Democrats have been actively advocating this particular approach for a considerable period of time. It became evident to us during the recent leadership campaign of the Progressive Conservative Party that this particular piece of legislation or clause of legislation was absent and that it could give rise to significant difficulties thereby. During that particular campaign race we raised the issue repeatedly and actually were partially successful in getting a number of the candidates to reveal part of their list of donors and the money that they had raised.

What was clear, Mr. Speaker, during that campaign was just how much money was actually being donated to the various campaigns,

the various leadership races. In particular, there were campaigns that raised and spent over a million dollars for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party. For example, TransAlta, Telus, and a number of law firms donated a considerable amount of money. I won't bore members of the House because it's a matter of public record exactly how much some of the candidates received. The fact remains, though, that there are considerable gaps in the public's knowledge, considerable gaps because there is no legislation which requires leadership contenders to disclose. However, if these donations were given to a political party, then disclosure would be required.

In our view, a number of the leadership contenders, including the Premier, have failed to demonstrate openness and transparency because they have not disclosed the contributions of all of their donors to their leadership campaigns. The Premier has failed to disclose the sources of 80 of his contributions, totalling almost \$163,000. There might be talk about transparent and open government, but Albertans know that corporations who donate to political parties or to candidates for the leadership of political parties expect that their issues and concerns will be taken more seriously. The claim that this government is committed to governing with transparency and accountability rings false in the ears of Albertans when even the Premier refuses to reveal who his supporters are.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that big energy companies in particular donate tens of thousands of dollars to the Progressive Conservative war chest on an annual basis, but we don't know in full whether they made similar donations to any of the leadership candidates either before the leadership vote was held or after cabinet appointments were announced. Open disclosure of campaign contributions actually protects former leadership candidates and ministers in particular from even a whiff of wrongdoing. The Premier's aim to govern with transparency and accountability got off to a bad start with their proposed \$5,000 access-for-cash fundraiser. Had that particular event taken place, it would have placed the Premier as well as the ministers of health and Finance in a conflict of interest.

5:00

Although the scheme did not occur, resulting in the Ethics Commissioner clearing the Premier and the ministers of any wrongdoing, the May 11 report of the Ethics Commissioner says:

There have been numerous media items about the lack of "rules" for leadership campaigns and, most specifically, the fact that no candidate is required to disclose publicly the names of contributors and the amounts contributed. Political campaign contributions are often viewed in media items and by "watchdog agencies" as potential conflicts of interest and even potential corruption.

In the interests of protecting leadership contestants in all parties from the slightest appearance of conflicts of interest or the perception of corruption, it's vital that the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act be amended to include the leadership contestants and guide and govern the financing of their campaigns.

The government has time and again voiced its support for legislation governing the financing of leadership campaigns. In fact, the Premier has vowed to introduce legislation on leadership campaign disclosure following the approval of his party. We believe that this position was adopted as a result of the pressure which the Alberta New Democrats applied throughout and following the conclusion of the PC's leadership race. The approval for that was gained when delegates to the PC convention in early May endorsed the development of provincial legislation that would set campaign finance contribution and disclosure rules for leadership elections for all political parties in Alberta. It's now time, Mr. Speaker, for the government to act on this endorsement.

I want to just add that federally and in provinces including Manitoba, Ontario, and British Columbia there is already legislation

that governs contributions and disclosures for party leadership campaigns. This legislation allows residents in those provinces and all of us at the federal level to monitor who is supporting our leaders and to keep an eye on whose interests the government is promoting. Surely, Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve the same respect and consideration.

Section 2 of Alberta's Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act presently reads:

This Act does not apply to campaigns and conventions carried on or held in relation to the leadership of a registered [political] party or in relation to constituency association nominations for endorsement of official party candidates.

So, in other words, Mr. Speaker, the current legislation includes a clause which specifically exempts leadership races or races for constituency association nominations, and it could very simply be remedied if this particular exemption was removed from the legislation.

The act also stipulates that contributions made to a candidate in a provincial election that in the aggregate exceed \$375 during the course of the campaign must be reported with the contributor's name and address to the Chief Electoral Officer and will be a matter of public record. This is very simple. This is very straightforward. It ought to apply in leadership campaigns as well.

The Alberta NDP has established leadership contest financing rules which set the limit at \$50,000. All contributions and expenses must be reported to the provincial executive. The maximum individual contribution limit is \$5,000. Those are the rules around leadership races in the New Democratic Party.

The PC government has made a number of statements on financing legislation. On Wednesday, February 28 of this year, the Premier avowed to the *Calgary Herald* editorial board that he would introduce legislation demanding that all donations to party leadership campaigns be fully disclosed. He said that he would run it by the party first.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that we believe that this is essential. There are very good and sound reasons why disclosure rules are applied in the case of political parties, and that's been accepted by everyone. That's been accepted by the Conservatives and the Liberals, and this should also be accepted by all sides of the House.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood more. As a matter of fact, I do appreciate the opportunity to join in the discussion of Motion 508, and it is important that we address Albertans' concerns regarding the sources of campaign financing.

Mr. Speaker, the most recent leadership race of which our great Premier, Alberta's 13th Premier, the Hon. Ed Stelmach . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you were here in question period today when you heard the Speaker make remarks about naming other members in this Assembly. This is the second time this afternoon that the same thing is occurring, so I'm cautioning you. Please.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill is rising on a point of order on this matter?

Point of Order
Referring to a Member by Name

Dr. Brown: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Speaker has already ruled once today on *Beauchesne* 484 that it's not the custom in this House to

refer to members by their proper names. My friend has just done so, and I'm rising on that point of order.

The Acting Speaker: I think the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar wants to withdraw his remarks so that we can proceed with the rest of the debate.

Rev. Abbott: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do apologize sincerely to the House and to the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill as well.

Debate Continued

Rev. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, the most recent leadership race directed attention towards leadership contests and the disclosure of the contestants' financial contributions. The disclosure of a contestant's finances for a political party leadership campaign is an issue that is being dealt with by the government of Alberta under the direction of our new Premier, the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. How's that, Mr. Speaker? [some applause] Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, accountability and transparency are characteristics of our new government, and I want to emphasize that we will continue to take appropriate action to improve the democratic process when necessary.

[The Speaker in the chair]

For example, Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the successful review of the Local Authorities Election Act, which was conducted in 2005. It demonstrates our ambition to further improve the democratic process for Albertans. The review took place after general, municipal, and school board elections, and it was an enhanced review that concentrated on the elimination of any discrepancies associated with municipal elections. The review was led by an MLA committee that focused on the following local election procedures and issues: voter identification and lists, special ballots, campaign advertising, and terms of office. The committee also integrated the recommendations from the Clark inspection report, which analyzed the alleged irregularities in the 2004 Calgary ward 10 election.

Mr. Speaker, the public was encouraged to provide input throughout the review process. Public participation in the election process is essential to the success of democracy. The mandate for the review included the following objectives: number one, promoting "integrity and public confidence in the election processes by setting appropriate election standards that [would] result in more secure and transparent election processes; number two, ensuring that "legislation permits small and large jurisdictions to respond to their specific election process needs by permitting some discretionary procedural options within the legislation's framework."

At the conclusion of the review, Mr. Speaker and hon. members, recommendations were provided, and, yes, these suggestions are being considered for the upcoming 2007 municipal and school board elections. My wish is that we will be like PEI and that we will see an 85 to 90 per cent turnout for these elections.

5:10

In closing, our government has been actively engaged in making sure that all election procedures and activities in Alberta are held to adequate standards; in fact, let me even say excellent – excellent – standards, Mr. Speaker, the highest in the country. The Alberta government will not remiss on the concerns put forth by Motion 508. As the hon. Premier has promised, he will continue to investigate all of the factors that impact the disclosure of party leadership

campaign contributions and make an informed decision that is in the best interest of our democracy. He will do what's right for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a list of some six speakers, and we'll go in this order: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, and I'll convey the remaining speakers later.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and participate in the debate on Motion 508, limitations and disclosure of leadership campaign finances. I support this motion because this motion fosters openness and transparency.

This motion supports the Alberta Liberal appeal for democratic renewal in Alberta. This motion brings openness, accountability, and transparency to elections, leadership campaigns, and the government. By having combined maximums for donations to the party, candidate, or constituency associations, no Albertan or lobby group will have a stronger voice in the Legislature. We cannot stop at campaign finance reforms. We need a lobbyist registry, whistleblower protection, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is dramatically behind the federal government and other provinces' initiatives to create transparency during leadership campaigns. If full disclosure is important for Ottawa and other provinces, why is it unnecessary here in Alberta? Albertans have a right to know who financially backs leadership candidates and at what price. By disclosing who is contributing and what the contributors may expect in return, it would offer a step in the right direction to correcting the democratic deficit in Alberta. Unless the Premier fully discloses leadership donors, concerns about potential conflicts of interest will continue to plague him.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for action on this issue. We are sick and tired of listening to lip service from this government. If you don't, stop claiming that the government is accountable, transparent, and open.

I have read so many articles from the media indicating that they were unsatisfied with the lack of regulation on their donations and disclosure being up to the discretion of the candidates themselves. Moreover, Democracy Watch cautioned against using broad donation categories and suggested that donors over a set amount should be named with the exact amount given.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk a little bit about the background of this issue. In British Columbia leadership candidates must file their campaign contributions for amounts greater than \$250 with Elections B.C. but are still allowed to list anonymous donors. In Ontario every leadership candidate must fully disclose all their patrons who donate more than \$100 even though there is no cap on donations. In the year 2001 Manitoba amended their Elections Finances Act to regulate a \$3,000 combined maximum that individuals could donate to any party, any provincial candidate, or to any constituency association. Moreover, Manitoba changed their legislation so that registered political parties, candidates, constituency associations must disclose to Elections Manitoba the details of all contributions, not just the contributions of \$250 or more. With the recent passing of the Federal Accountability Act, December 2006, federal party leadership candidates must disclose their donors who give more than \$200 up to a maximum of \$1,000 and have their finances audited when the campaign is finished.

In Alberta the regulation of donations to leadership campaigns is notably absent. Over the past year the concern for the lack of legislation governing leadership candidates was evident, especially

through the recent PC Party leadership campaign. Adequate guidelines are required with adequate disclosure. Until full disclosure is given, everyone in Alberta should assume that the Premier is in conflict of interest until he proves that he isn't when he discloses all his donors.

In August 2006, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Klein made an announcement of his retirement. The Tory leadership candidates began raising money unofficially for campaigns, which raised questions regarding public disclosure. After that, everybody knows, the former Premier, Mr. Klein, resigned, and then the leadership started. Four of the present ministers were candidates at that time, and at least three of them, you know, did not disclose the full statement. One or two might have an anonymous donors list.

If this government claims that they are open, they are transparent, they are accountable, it's about time they show what they believe in. It's what Albertans are looking for. They expect all of us to be open and transparent. Why do we delay?

Already so many questions have been asked during the question period time. Wherever I go, I mean personally, in my riding and outside my riding, the people keep on asking the same question again and again. Why some ministers . . . [interjections] Okay. Settle down. Maybe it's not a big issue for you guys, but Albertans are serious.

They want to know the reason why this government is hiding the money they received from – I have to choose the words because I should be very careful. What is the government hiding? Why don't they come clean and show Albertans the money they received, from \$1 to maybe \$1 million – who knows? – and what benefits they are going to get if somebody pays them huge amounts of money. I don't hesitate to say that if this is true, then this is corruption. I mean, why put the people in the dark?

All the candidates who were involved in the Tory leadership contest, I would request them: please come forward; please provide the full details, not the anonymous donors only but a full, complete list. Then we will believe that, yes, you know, the government is serious and they act on whatever they said. Otherwise, not only myself but the majority of Albertans will suspect that this government is just giving us lip service, nothing else. Okay? It's about time.

I already mentioned some background in other provinces and even the federal government. I mean, if they can do it, why can't we do it? It's a very serious thing if the government doesn't come clean, if four or five of the present ministers who were involved in the Tory leadership contest don't disclose their donors list. Lots of people can assume that they are hiding something. There will be many, many questions not only from my constituency but from all over Alberta. They are suspecting this government . . . [Mr. Agnihotri's speaking time expired]

5:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have to move on.

As this is a topic of considerable interest, it's 8:20 in Prince Edward Island, and the projections are that there will be a new government in Prince Edward Island. The Liberals are currently leading, projecting 18-plus seats.

The hon. Member for Red-Deer South, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

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

The Speaker: Point of order?

Mr. Lukaszuk: That's right.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I have risen prior, but I haven't had a chance to capture the chair's attention. Hence it seems a little out of order.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, Mr. Speaker, has been making allegations that definitely need to be dealt with by this chair.

Ms Blakeman: Citation?

Mr. Lukaszuk: I will get to my citations in due course.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please have a chair for a second, okay? Today is private members' business. If there's a point of order, make it very, very brief because I don't want this Assembly to use its time, which is only 60 minutes for this matter, dealing with procedural wrangling. So make it very brief.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This matter is really important. The citation is 23(h), (i), (j) of the Standing Orders. The Auditor General has dealt conclusively with the issue of donations to the Progressive Conservative Party leadership race. To be making comments – and he is attributing to certain members. He names the minister. He names the Premier of this province. He tells them to come clean. He makes allegations to the fact that they have received large amounts of money and that now they need to come clean to Albertans, which by reference – I don't think I'm drawing a long, far-fetched reference – means that they are not clean, that they're doing something dirty – come clean on the money that you have received – and that they're being influenced by certain donors on decisions that they are now making in their official capacity as ministers of the Crown and Premier of this province. It's simply unacceptable . . .

The Speaker: I'll interrupt the hon. member to say that the whole purpose of this motion is the debate. So the chair and hon. members will look forward to the hon. Member for Red Deer-South making exactly those points if the hon. member chooses to.

Debate Continued

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to enter into this debate. I want to actually approach this motion through a series of questions that, actually, the motion begs. The first question is: should there be disclosure requirements and contribution rules in leadership campaigns? That will be the first question that really has to be answered in this motion. If the answer to that is yes, then the second question should be: should this be governed by individual parties or governed by an act of this Legislature? If the answer to that question is yes, then you move to the third question, which is: if you agree that legislation should govern all parties, what should the rules be? In fact, you could ask a fourth question, although I'm not going to deal with the fourth question today. The fourth question would be: should those rules be put in place for municipal elections, et cetera?

I want to deal with the questions in the order that I've listed them. On the first question: should there be disclosure requirements and contribution rules in leadership campaigns? I think that quite clearly the answer to that is: yes, there should be. In our party, the party

that I represent, we grappled with that particular question at our most recent annual general meeting. Quite clearly on that question overwhelmingly the answer was: yes, there should be disclosure requirements and contribution rules in leadership campaigns.

That moves us to the second question, which is: should this be governed by individual parties, or should this be governed by an act of the Legislature? On this question there are actually compelling arguments on both sides to either agree with that or to not agree with that. There would be a really compelling argument that party business is party business and that you wouldn't want government to reach their hand into party business on all sorts of matters, including this one. In fact, that was one of the arguments that was presented at the annual general meeting.

Conversely, one of the reasons that I think this matter became evident during the last leadership campaign that our party had is because we invited all Albertans to participate in the leadership race, regardless of whether they might currently hold a membership in our party at the time. Our process was such that it was open to all the people of Alberta. They could participate, and they did so because they knew that the chosen leader of our party would also become the Premier, and hence I think they also demanded greater accountability. So in my own view that is a compelling enough reason to answer this second question also in the affirmative, that in this case because of the process that our party, in fact, has established, making it open, there should be requirements in legislation to make this happen.

Again, there are compelling reasons on both sides of this debate, and as our own party grappled with that question, it was not so clearly defined. It was probably more 60-40 in favour of legislation versus having it dealt with internally. I think, frankly, there are good arguments to be made on both sides. In my case, as I've said, I land in favour of the legislation.

This motion proposes, really, to make some rules, and it basically says that the rules should be the ones that are in effect currently for other matters of general elections. On this one I'm not so categorical. I think that is a good framework from which to start the discussion, but there are many more elements to rules for leadership that need to be discussed, including what form of legal structure you might accept for how you would accept donations, for time periods, for spending. So on that one, even though I'm going to vote in favour of this motion, I want it to be clearly understood that I'm not so categorically stuck to that last phrase in the motion that says these are the rules we're going to follow. I think that discussion has to happen yet in this Legislature and among all parties before we decide what the rules, in fact, are going to be on the motion.

I will accept the member's intent on his motion, that he, in fact, wants to create this transparency and accountability to Albertans. On that basis I will support the member in this motion.

The Speaker: The results from Prince Edward Island, if hon. members are interested: 293 polls out of 319. I guess at 8:28 P.E.I. time, so far unofficial results: Liberals 23, PCs 4.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to participate in the discussion or the debate on Motion 508 this evening, certainly a motion that I intend to support. I thank the hon. member for bringing it forward. It certainly doesn't go, in my opinion, far enough. We need to have a significant review of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, but it's a start. To amend section 2 to deal with donations to leadership campaigns certainly has merit. I would urge all hon. members to support it.

We should go even further than this. We should change the act so that prosecution – and this goes to section 52, Mr. Speaker: “A prosecution under this Act may be commenced within 2 years of the commission of the alleged offence but not afterwards.” Well, I think we should open that up too, hon. member, and also the restrictions here under section 53: “No prosecution shall be instituted under this Act without the consent of the Chief Electoral Officer.” I think if the Alberta Justice officials or any other officials would like to go after someone for a mistake or an error, then they have every right to do so. I don't understand why the office of the Chief Electoral Officer should have this power in this case.

5:30

Specifically to section 2, there has been a long list of campaign donations to respective leadership hopefuls from across the aisle. Some of those leadership hopefuls have given disclosure; others have not. Some may at some point give disclosure. But what I find interesting in this discussion is that we are not talking about limiting the amount an individual can give, and I think that there should be strict limits on the amount of money that can be donated, whether it's to an election campaign or to a leadership campaign. There should be strict limits. I personally would like to see corporations and unions prevented, prohibited, from donating to political parties. If your name is not on the voters' list, you should not be able to donate to the political process. This is my personal view, Mr. Speaker.

That being said, this is a very competitive occupation. One has to get donations. If you're going to compete with the Progressive Conservatives, you've got to take donations where you can get them. But I think we would be better served in this House and in this province if we were to take Motion 508 and expand on it so that we limit the amount of money that can be donated and where it can come from. I think we would have a better democracy.

Now, I'm pleased to see that at the May 4, 5, and 6 AGM that the Progressive Conservative Party held in Edmonton there was financial reform in the air. There was a notice of motion for a constitutional amendment from Calgary-Foothills, I believe, Mr. Speaker, and there was an effort with this notice of motion to make transactions and affairs that occur during the year regarding financial reporting more consistent. I commend the Progressive Conservative Party for doing that, and I have to ask the question: why?

Well, when we look at the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, we can see where there have been examples in the recent past where things just haven't worked out, and I'm referring, Mr. Speaker, to the foundation fund. I was going through the books up there last fall at Elections Alberta, and I saw reference to this foundation fund in the act. Some years where the Progressive Conservative Party was obligated to report the expenditures from this fund, they didn't. They didn't. The fund is of significant value. It's \$1.6 million, as I understand it, and only the interest from that fund can be transferred into the general revenue of the party. There were years where there was no disclosure of how this money was spent. You had to look through other parts of the financial statement to try to determine where the money went.

Some years, Mr. Speaker, there was half a million dollars – no, I think \$240,000, I should say; excuse me, I stand corrected – transferred from the fund to the party. Other years it's as little as \$40,000, \$50,000. But it is quite interesting. I'm not satisfied with the explanation I got from the office of the Chief Electoral Officer in regard to this matter. In fact, I had to wait a long time, from October 31, 2006, through to March 22, 2007. I'm willing to quote here, Mr. Speaker, a part of this letter, and it reads:

It is unfortunate that neither the records nor the annual reports themselves, for the missing years, were found. While the public

files maintained by this Office are lacking some of the annual reports, we have been assured by the Association and their Auditors that no were added to the Trust, and that the only expenditures from the Trust were the transfer of earnings back to the Association for the period in which annual reports were not filed.

Now, this letter that I received, I think there's a word missing there because it certainly doesn't make any sense to me at this time.

This is yet another example of why we have to support the hon. member with his motion. Not only do we have to support it; we have to expand on it because there are many things that we can do here. I understand that each political party has volunteers that do a lot of their work, and mistakes can be made. Mistakes can be made. We've made mistakes.

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. The Conservative Party, by my calculations, has made mistakes, and certainly the New Democrats have made mistakes in addition and subtraction. Everyone who campaigns knows that there is a group of volunteers that do their very best. These rules seem complex. Volunteers can make mistakes, and that's why you have an auditing process. None of these disclosures should be rubber-stamped, just checked over and "Yeah, that's good; that's good enough" and left to be filed. I think the election office should have a good look at all parties' respective filings before they put them in public view and make sure that they're right. Make sure that they're right. Hopefully, in the near future when there are leadership campaigns, regardless for which party, that will be part of the disclosure that's available in that little room that's off to the right as you go to the office of Elections Alberta. Regardless of who they are, they can go there and see for themselves who gave what money.

With that, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of individuals who have expressed interest in this matter, and I will cede the floor to another hon. member of the House. Thank you.

The Speaker: I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, then the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Just to give you the final update with respect to P.E.I., at 8:36 this evening it shows that with 296 polls out of 319 reporting, the Liberal Party, with 52.9 per cent of the vote, has 23 seats; the Progressive Conservative Party, with 41.5 per cent of the vote, has four seats; the Green Party, with 3 per cent of the vote, has zero seats; the NDP, with 1.9 per cent of the vote, has zero seats; and the independents, with 0.8 per cent, have zero seats.

I've received an impassioned plea from the leader of the third party for me to announce the results of the Manitoba election, which showed ND 36, PC 19, Liberal 2.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Motion 508 proposes that the government include donations to political party campaigns under section 2 of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. This would make donations to a leadership campaign subject to the same guidelines as donations received by political parties.

The topic of leadership campaign donations is especially popular at this time, as we all know, because of the recent prominent leadership contest. I don't know if Mr. Speaker would like to announce the results of the latest election here in this province. I'll just continue on with my speech, though. That leadership contest recently resulted in the election of the hon. Member for Fort

Saskatchewan-Vegreville – and I will not say his name, Mr. Speaker – to the office of Premier.

5:40

The first priority of the hon. Premier is to govern with integrity and transparency. We hear about that very regularly here, including with Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, which will let Albertans know who's accessing government and who's providing services to government. All-party committees have been established, allowing for additional debates on bills and items of importance. I'm looking forward to working with our colleagues from various parts of the House on that. They include the Affordable Housing Task Force, and they allow members on both sides of the House to co-operate in the development of legislation, I trust, a huge step forward.

Since taking office, this government has posted flight logs from government aircraft on the Internet, and soon ministerial office expenses will be posted online for all Albertans to see.

There is no doubt that this government is taking great steps in acting in an honourable, transparent manner. However, Mr. Speaker, that does not mean the government is standing still or is closed to new ideas. Our Premier is committed to discussing the issue of donations to leadership campaigns with the membership of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party. We know that, and we know that it's critical because leadership campaigns are a function of political parties, and political parties are critical stakeholders in this process no matter what political stripe we wear.

If you know the hon. Premier at all, you know that listening is one of his greatest assets, an admirable quality, and in addition to discussing leadership and campaign financing laws with members of the PC Party, he is keen to hear from all Albertans on this topic. Therefore, today's motion is very much accepted.

Mr. Speaker, briefly, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act may be the right model for disclosing leadership campaign contributions. The act requires political parties, constituencies, and candidates to disclose contributions by filing two reports, one outlining all contributions less than the magic number of \$375.01 in aggregate form from any single contributor and the second listing all contributions that exceed \$375 in aggregate from any single contributor. The act limits contributions to political parties, constituency associations, and candidates as follows in any year: \$15,000 to each registered party and \$1,000 to any registered constituency association, \$5,000 in aggregate to the constituency associations of each registered party. Furthermore, in a campaign period campaign contributions are limited as follows: \$30,000 to each registered party, \$2,000 to any registered candidate, \$10,000 in aggregate to the registered candidates of each registered party.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that these guidelines have served our political process well, and I want to thank the hon. leader of the third party for beginning this discussion in the Assembly. The hon. Premier is committed to looking at the issue, and the discussion must continue with all Albertans before concrete action is taken.

I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate. We don't have much time, so thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join in the debate on Motion 508, proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood essentially to amend section 2 of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, making donations to leadership campaigns subject to the same contribution limits and disclosures as other political donations. I support this as

an individual, as a legislator, as a member of the Liberal caucus. I think it's important that we achieve fairness and some certainty around this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I was really interested when I attended the COGEL conference a number of years ago to find out, you know, how they do it somewhere else, because one of the great values of attending those conferences is that in comparison you understand your own system better by seeing how other systems work. I was really interested in the American system, in which donations are a free-for-all there. Like, anybody can donate any amount of money to anybody for anything, but you absolutely, positively must disclose it. And I thought: "Well, that's a no-brainer. Why wouldn't you disclose it if there was no limit on who donated or how much? Why would anybody want to sneak around and try to hide that? I don't understand." The more you look into it and you talk to some of the other people that were at the conference, I did start to understand what this was about. Really, it's about the public's trust in us as individuals and in us as legislators and politicians. They want to know that we're approaching our job as we should, with all of that good heart and bright mind, and that we're not carrying forward somebody else's agenda because, essentially, we've been paid to do so. The public wants to know that.

So why would the Americans be so caught up in being interested in not disclosing? That just did not make sense to me, but when you started to look at it, you thought: well, yeah, if you had a politician and it was out there that they had received a significant amount of donations or all their donations from a particular sector, then everybody would start to think they're going to want to support that sector. And I don't care what sector it is; you're dealing with both a perception there and a reality. To be fair, that legislator may not care that they got all their money from a particular sector, and they may not be interested in carrying that message forward at all, but there's going to be a public perception of that. That's why the Americans structured the system in the way that they did: anybody can donate to anybody for anything for any amount, but you have to disclose it and no sneaking around.

Some of the things they get involved with there are things like someone that owns a medium-sized or a large company basically giving money to their senior executives and saying: you go and donate that money to so-and-so. That was a way of filtering more money through to a candidate without it appearing to be coming from either a particular individual, the owner of the company, or from a particular sector. That kind of stuff was hunted down with great fervour by a whole legion of lawyers that work for the equivalent of their ethics and chief electoral officers.

I was just fascinated by that because our rules are all about total amounts and at what point you disclose, and there are a lot more limitations on how much people can donate and to whom. The idea that you could have it wide open on one side but very clear disclosure and why you would need that disclosure was a real eye-opener for me.

The situation we have in Alberta is, I think, to a number of people not a level playing field in that they can't get their own certainty. They can't get assurance that any leadership candidate, if they don't have to disclose where they got the money, how anybody is able to look at the facts and go: "Okay. I know what's going on here. I can research this. I can look at the facts. I can see where this leadership candidate from any party got their money, and I can make my own decision based on this." We don't have that opportunity right now.

We have very specific rules that are set in place around political donations during an election campaign for all candidates and for all parties, but when we get to leadership contests – and those leadership contests can be very important. We've seen here in this province that in running for the leadership of one political party, in

effect, when they came out of that leadership race, they were going to be Premier of this province. That raises very, very high stakes, and with that I think we need to have very, very high standards as legislators.

We have an opportunity here to support this motion and to move very quickly toward getting legislation into this Assembly that would set in place a level playing field. It would give us that certainty that I think legislators, people interested in running for political office, but also the public are seeking.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Albertans are quintessentially fair-minded, and they really, really get annoyed when what they see is one person getting an advantage over another person. That really irks them, whether it's somebody getting an advantage over them in their own lives or whether they see that situation somewhere else. I think that's the situation that's been set up here with the lack of requirements for leadership candidates, people seeking the leadership of a political party, not having to disclose anything about their donations. They don't have to disclose who; they don't have to disclose how much – nothing – or how the money came to them, whether they raised it through a special-access cocktail party or through a plain old cheque or selling chocolates. We don't have any information on this, and I think it muddies the water as we try to restore respectability to political representation.

5:50

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think the battering that politicians have taken we are mostly responsible for ourselves. As we call each other names in the House and out of the House, as we allow and we participate in running down other elected officials, where we step in and, in fact, replace elected officials, where in Alberta we've had school boards replaced, we've had municipalities replaced: we've done that to ourselves. So it's very hard for us to look out in the public and say, "You should respect us. We're doing a good job. We're all working hard here," when we don't treat each other with very much respect and where we call each other names and get into long, protracted sessions in knocking each other down. You know, we've trained the public to think of us in a very poor light.

This opportunity presented through this Motion 508 by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood gives a venue to start to restore some of that credibility – I can't say this is a profession, and I don't think it should be a profession – to a calling, and I would support that. I support the motion. I think it's a good idea for everyone in this House to support this. I think it would also fulfill a desire from Albertans for us to do a better job as politicians, as representatives, as legislators.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this, and I urge all of my colleagues to support this motion.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise today and join in the debate on Motion 508. Since I only have a few minutes, I find myself in the unique position where I actually agree with the leader of the third party because this was a motion that was debated at the grassroots level of the PC Party of Alberta. The majority of people who were at that meeting also agreed with the member of the third party. [interjections] On this point only.

This motion aims to encourage the government to introduce legislation to make party leadership campaign donations subject to the same contribution limits and disclosure requirements as all other political donations. This is a timely issue and deserves discussion in the Assembly.

Alberta currently has policies in place to ensure that there is responsible conduct in electoral politics, and these processes have

served us well. But I'm pleased that we are taking the opportunity today to discuss this matter and that if we proceed with this motion, we will have a level playing field for all parties in Alberta. This Legislative Assembly is the entity that has control over electoral matters, so it's appropriate that we approach this topic. Our government is always committed to exploring opportunities to make the political process more accountable for parties and voters alike. So, Mr. Speaker, as I said at the beginning, I'm very happy to support this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. Very briefly, I just think it's interesting that this party here has had one leadership campaign in the last 14 years. The Liberals have had five, NDs have had four, and all the other parties in Alberta have had around 10. It's kind of interesting that when we have a leadership race, well, we've got to put all the money out there, or as one hon. member said: you should assume that anybody who gave money to this Premier, he's in conflict. That's what he said: you should assume that. Well, that's not what I assume most Albertans think. But it's interesting that they seem to have all the leadership races. You know, at a three-year average I think maybe they're getting ready again pretty soon. So I look forward to the campaign contribution openness that they would certainly like us to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to close the debate.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate very much all of the comments from all members on all sides of the House with respect to this motion, and I appreciate that it seems that most or all of the members who did speak are supportive of the motion. I actually have some hope, then, that this motion will pass,

and I will look forward to legislation when it does come from the government.

I also want to indicate that I heard a number of members say that Albertans need to be consulted on this matter, and I agree with that and, secondly, that all political parties need to be consulted on that. I look forward to that as well, if that should come to pass.

I think it's time that we took this step. This is a small step. There are other steps that need to be taken as well, Mr. Speaker. Particularly, we need to look at the role of corporations and unions in the financing of the electoral process. I believe, as does my party, that the financing of the political process needs a great deal of scrutiny and careful rules, but particularly we also believe that individual citizens are the components of our democracy and ought to also be the bedrock of the financial support for the political process. But that's for another day.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that I think this is an important step, and making sure of transparency and openness in government and in our political process is of the highest importance and not just a matter of words. But certainly, I think that it is an important step, and action is important. I thank members opposite for their support, and I will avoid responding to the hon. President of the Treasury Board and his somewhat provocative statements. We're not expecting a leadership race any time soon in our party, and we certainly think there's a chance that you may have another one soon, perhaps right after the next election.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 7 o'clock this evening, at which time we would reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, May 28, 2007

7:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/28

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

head: **Main Estimates 2007-08**

The Chair: I'll invite the hon. Minister of Justice to provide his opening remarks.

Justice and Attorney General

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's certainly my pleasure to be here this evening to present the budget of Alberta Justice to all of the members of the Assembly, who are obviously paying keen attention to what I'm about to say.

Before I start, however, I would like to introduce the members of my executive management team who are with us this evening both on the floor and in the balcony. I'll start with those in the balcony. In no particular order we have Sharon Lepetich, senior adviser to the deputy minister; Neil Dunne, acting assistant deputy minister, legal services division; Shawkat Sabur, senior financial officer and executive director, financial services; Sylvia Church, manager of business planning and corporate services; Kevin Quail, acting director of the maintenance enforcement program; Mark Cooper, director of communications; and Andrea Hennig, executive assistant to the minister.

At this particular point in time I have been asked by the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry that if there are any single men in the balcony, to please raise their hands. Seeing none, I will continue.

With me on the floor are Terry Matchett, my deputy minister, immediately to my right. Also to my right is Barb Hookenson, assistant deputy minister of court services, and to my immediate left is Greg Lepp, assistant deputy minister of criminal justice.

The Alberta Justice and Attorney General budget to be voted on for the 2007-2008 fiscal year is \$359 million. That's a net increase of \$15 million, or 4.4 per cent, over the 2006-2007 forecast, but if you take into account a decline of \$15 million in capital, it is actually an increase of some \$30 million in operating expense. The new funding will help Alberta's justice system respond to more cases and help improve public access to the courts.

In my comments I'll briefly highlight some of the initiatives we're working on in the ministry, and then I'd be pleased to address questions. I'll begin with initiatives that come under criminal justice. The overall purpose of the criminal justice division is to promote safe communities in Alberta by effectively conducting criminal prosecutions and striving for just outcomes. This year's budget for criminal justice is \$53.2 million, with a \$3.1 million increase.

A functioning justice system needs adequate resources to do the job. This year Alberta Justice will be adding 10 prosecutors and 12 support staff to help the system respond to more cases and improve public access to the courts. This is a total of 64 prosecutors and support staff added in the past two years. There will be five new family violence prosecutors, three new prosecutors to handle an increased caseload and megacases, one new prosecutor for the integrated market enforcement team, or IMET, and one new prosecutor dedicated to the education and training of our junior prosecutors.

Mr. Chairman, we're hiring the five new family violence prosecutors and associated support staff because this province has the highest rate of family violence in the country. I'm optimistic that the \$1 million we are allocating in new funding will contribute to breaking the cycle of family violence, and it will protect the safety and security of children, families, and communities.

Three new prosecutor positions are being added to manage the demands of megacases. These cases typically result in very lengthy and complex trials. Alberta Justice is currently working on two megacases: Project Kare, the task force investigating murdered and missing women, and Project Infiltrate, the mortgage fraud case investigated by the integrated response to organized crime unit, or IROC. They place considerable pressure on the prosecution services. They require several prosecutors to work on one case often for months or years. The addition of the new prosecutors will relieve this impact and enhance the ability to prosecute other serious and violent crimes.

Moving on to the court services division, court services promotes fair and equitable access to the justice system for all Albertans. This year's budget for the division is \$159.5 million, an increase of \$12 million. One of the major challenges court services is facing is that their major information systems are dated. These information systems are used by court administrators, Crown prosecutors, the judiciary, and ultimately they help the public's access to the justice system. Alberta Justice through the justice information management system, or JIMS, will convert mountains of paper into electronic information. This year \$2.5 million in new funding has been allocated to the JIMS project. Part of this funding will be used to cover project start-up costs for this multiyear project.

Another challenge in the justice system is the area of traffic tickets. An increased population and the Solicitor General's traffic enforcement initiative have resulted in more traffic tickets being issued. There is also an increase in the number of people challenging tickets in court. That means we need more people to process them. This year \$3.8 million has been allocated to deal with cost increases and to hire an additional 25 Provincial Court staff.

We also recognize that the justice system and, indeed, the government needs to pay competitive salaries to retain and recruit staff. With that in mind we accepted the recommendations of the 2006 Alberta Justice of the Peace Compensation Commission, and our budget reflects an additional \$216,000 for justices of the peace.

I'd like to turn now to the legal services division of the ministry, which provides effective legal and related services to government and other ministries. The budget for civil law is \$29.4 million for 2007-2008. Of this funding \$3 million will go toward dealing with complex aboriginal litigation against Alberta and aboriginal consultation matters. Another \$45.3 million will support the Legal Aid Society of Alberta. That's an increase of more than \$2.1 million. The additional funding will help Legal Aid handle the increased demand and continue to provide this important service to Albertans.

The Public Trustee administers the estates of dependent adults, decedents, and minors. This year's budget for the Public Trustee is \$12.8 million, with a \$700,000 increase to hire new staff.

The medical examiner's office investigates all unexplained deaths in Alberta. To keep pace with operating requirements as well as physician earnings and funeral director overhead in rural Alberta, the ME's office will require \$342,000 in new funding.

Dealing with the maintenance enforcement program, or MEP, this program ensures that individuals pay spousal and child support under the terms of their court orders and certain agreements. The program administers approximately 50,000 active cases and collects close to \$200 million on behalf of 65,000 Alberta children. This

year's budget is \$17 million. That is a \$2.1 million increase over last year's budget. Funding of \$1.6 million has been allocated for MEP to hire 18 additional collection officers.

The Alberta Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force is a key mandate for this ministry; \$1.5 million dollars in new funding has been allocated to this important initiative. We're confident that community groups can help us identify successful strategies to get at the root causes of crime that can be shared or incorporated as best practices.

There are a couple of other areas that are receiving new money this year to support ministry initiatives. The ministry strategic leadership team works with Albertans and stakeholders to respond to key issues in the justice system. They will receive \$614,000 and six new staff this year. The bill forfeiture collection team ensures that money owing to the Crown is recovered if an accused breaches bail conditions. The budget includes \$500,000 and six new collection officers.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to turn now to this year's budget for staff in the Department of Justice. Alberta Justice has a manpower department employing mainly highly trained individuals. The services Justice provides are heavily dependent on the knowledge and skills of its staff. More than 65 per cent of the ministry's budget is allocated to manpower. In this budget there is an increase of \$5.7 million to manage inflationary pressures, including manpower. Funding of \$4.3 million has been allocated to address the ministry's capital requirements in 2007-2008.

7:10

The Calgary Courts Centre will open this summer on time and on budget. This year there is \$2.8 million in capital funding to complete the installation of technical infrastructure and equipment at the Courts Centre. This includes electronic evidence: video, audio, and computers.

Other capital investments in this budget include \$800,000 for the maintenance enforcement program to enhance its management information system and to upgrade its telecommunication system, and \$340,000 to replace obsolete lab equipment for the medical examiner.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, it's clear that we all share an interest in an efficient and effective justice system, and I know that the additional dollars that we are seeking in this year's budget will take us some ways towards that.

I'm happy now, Mr. Chairman, to take questions.

The Chair: It's the chair's understanding that both members have agreed to share the time back and forth, for the timekeeper's benefit.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, a pleasure for me to rise to respond to the hon. minister's moving of the estimates for his ministry, the Ministry of Justice. I want to start by thanking the hon. minister and his staff for their warmth and their receptiveness when I first became the shadow minister for his department and they invited me to go over the general background information with respect to the ministry. Then we met again after that before the commencement of this sitting of the Legislature to go over their legislative agenda. So I wanted to put on the record that I truly valued those two meetings. Hopefully, we can work together in the future again, be it the fall sitting or next year if we're both still members of this esteemed House.

I also want to welcome the staff who are in the gallery and the deputy minister and assistant deputy ministers on the floor of the Assembly. You know, I'm truly envious of the support that this

minister receives from his support people in his ministry. I have one researcher, and there's one of me, but we'll try to sound intelligent today, and we'll try to seek some answers to some of the questions that we have with respect to this budget. Now, I just have to emphasize that we don't have too much time, so I'm going to try to be brief. I know the minister in his eloquent way is going to give us the answers that we're seeking in short sentences, please.

I'm not going to repeat some of the numbers or percentages that the minister mentioned. Generally, I like the direction that we're increasing funding for court services because there is definitely a higher workload on the part of the courts, and we need quicker justice. I've always maintained that quick justice is good justice; slow justice is bad justice. Definitely the workload is increasing. The minister mentioned something like traffic ticket processing and the fact that more people are contesting, you know, or questioning those traffic tickets and are fighting them in court and so on and so forth. We definitely need to address this increased workload, so that's a direction I like.

Also, funding for legal services is going to increase for the hiring of more Crown prosecutors, civil lawyers, and support staff, and on top we're also adding funding for maintenance enforcement, which is an issue, really, that I have many comments with respect to. So, again, that's a good direction.

The one number that I'm going to mention is the \$1.5 million that has been allocated for the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force. Time and time again in this House, Mr. Chairman, we talked about this developing trend, that this government seems to like task forces and commissions and, you know, fact-finding gatherings where they tour the province, listen to stakeholders and experts, and come back, prepare a report, and the report is given to the relevant minister, and then end of story. We don't know what happens.

So I'm going to ask the minister: with respect to this \$1.5 million what was the minister hoping to learn that we haven't heard before? We've all heard, you know, the same concerns with respect to drugs, prostitution, domestic violence, gangs. Not to sound like some of the people that are always criticizing, voicing those alarms and raising these flags, we know that there is also an underlying component, be it education, be it poverty. So it's not just a law enforcement issue. Really, what was the minister hoping to hear by putting together this Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force? We've heard from our hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity today, who really questions the merit of having task force after task force, and there doesn't seem to be any eagerness on the part of the government to listen to the recommendations by those different task forces.

The other question with respect to that exercise is: how much of this \$1.5 million went to or will go to the MLA from Calgary-Fish Creek, who chaired the task force, if in fact she receives any compensation? I wanted to know if some of that money was earmarked for her chairing the task force. Also, wasn't she the Solicitor General herself at one point in the past? What was the hope for that new information that she would now learn versus her time at the helm of that ministry in particular?

Lastly, does the minister agree that this money could have been better spent on actual law enforcement versus what I think was a public relations exercise; that is to say, maybe hiring 15 or 20 beat officers on the streets and playgrounds in Edmonton and Calgary, for example? Now, I know that the minister has all the details and has all the background information. He might question me on where I'm coming up with the 15 or 20. I don't know. I think a good beat officer in Edmonton or Calgary or Red Deer, the bigger centres, would probably cost the system somewhere between \$90 grand and

\$100 grand. I don't know, and I don't profess to know. What I'm thinking is that however many we can get on the streets is probably a better solution in terms of law enforcement right there. I know that any money is welcome, and I know that any increase in the number of officers patrolling and policing our communities would be welcomed by those communities.

This is my first launch into this debate, Mr. Chairman, and I am interested in hearing the minister's comments. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the Member for Edmonton-McClung, thank you very much for the complimentary introductory comments, in particular with respect to the support I have as Minister of Justice and Attorney General. You're quite right: you should be envious. I have professional people around me who do a very good job indeed. We have great challenges, but they lessen the burden, without doubt.

On the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force I would remind the hon. member of a community meeting that both he and I attended at MacEwan College. I believe it was in February of this year. I was on the stage as part of the panel addressing, generally, community crime issues along with Chief Boyd of the Edmonton police force. What I recall Chief Boyd saying at that point in time, among other things, was that the justice system is ill-equipped to address all of the issues associated with criminal matters. The criminal justice system essentially is a catch basin. The police and the prosecutors and the court system deal with people after they have committed the crime, and if we are going to address the issue of crime reduction and if we are going to address the issue of safe communities, we have to do something different than what we are doing.

Let me be the first to say that we will probably continue to increase, as we are this year, the number of prosecutors, as the Solicitor General in his budget likely will be doing in increasing the number of police officers, because we do have issues out there on the street that require what I would consider to be the standard way of addressing criminal matters, and that is catching the perpetrators and prosecuting them successfully. The other thing is that crime is becoming far more complex, and in fact it takes more people to do those things.

So that part is still part of it, but the crime reduction task force itself is trying to address two or three things that I think are absolutely essential for us. First of all, what they're asking for are best practices in communities as they go around Alberta. As you know, they've been to 14 communities throughout the province. They want to know what the community is doing, what has worked so that they can share this best practice. We firmly believe – I firmly believe – that it is the community that is going to be the best indicator of the problem and how to solve the problem. So that's very, very important information.

7:20

Secondly, from my perspective, the communities can give us some assistance in ordering the information that we have, prioritizing, if you will, where we should be putting our efforts. There's absolutely no doubt that there's a plethora of information with respect to the issue of what causes crime. Indeed, I believe the hon. member knows that as a government, going back to the spring of last year, we established a cross-ministry initiative called the crime reduction strategy task force, which involved, I believe, some 13 ministries.

That came about as a result of the deputy ministers identifying that something had to be done before the catch basin, if you will. As a

government that particular committee started a literature search of all of the literature that was created up until this point in time. There is no doubt that there is a lot of it, but you have to pick and choose where you are going to go, and I think that this work of the task force committee will assist us in picking the top priorities that we as a government can address.

I can tell the hon. member that I met with the task force in Calgary when they were in their last of the 14 meetings this past Wednesday, and each and every one that I spoke to said: "Thank you. We have learned a great deal. We are going to be able to produce a report that we believe will be of value to Albertans." All I can say to the hon. member – I have not been to the 14; I have only appeared at two briefly – is that the people who are in fact doing the work are very optimistic that they will be able to produce something that we in this House will be able to receive and work with in a productive way to make the communities in our province safer.

We will provide you with a breakdown of the expenses as we know them. At this particular point in time it's an ongoing exercise, so they will not have all been expended. I do not expect the report until later in the summer. Going forward, we have in the latter part of June a two-day symposium in Calgary, which, of course, has not yet occurred.

From my perspective, hon. member, it is important to do this task force. The \$1.5 million, which is a one-time expenditure, I think will prove to be money well spent. It is not ongoing, so you can't equate it to X number of police officers in the long term. It's one-year spending. This is all there's going to be. I hope to be able to show you a report in the not-too-distant future, one which we both will be able to agree will be of some assistance in making our communities safer.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the minister for offering that reply. Moving on, I mentioned briefly in my introductory remarks the maintenance enforcement program. I know that every member in this House receives numerous calls from constituents who are concerned about this program and how effective it is. I should really start by saying that it's not really a question of whether or not staff are doing a good job with the resources that they have. In fact, most of them that I myself individually or my assistant in the constituency office spoke to have been quite eager to help and quite efficient in their daily doings.

In the estimates on page 247, line item 3.0.5, we're talking about \$16.9 million, up from last year's forecast of \$14.8. I think it's really a small amount. I think any improvement is great, and any improvement is welcomed. It's just surprising that with all the information that we're receiving as MLAs – and the minister, no doubt, is as well – and numerous media accounts of difficulties parents are having with the maintenance enforcement program in general, this seems to be a very small increase.

Can the minister tell us how many new collection officers this will translate into? How many will be hired? Will this be enough to ensure that MEP, the maintenance enforcement program, is effective in locating and securing funds for Alberta families? Are there enough staff currently to deal with the increasing number of files that they deal with, and is this money going to only replace staff that are retiring, or are we, in fact, adding new staff to this program?

The other question, in general terms, would be on interjurisdictional co-operation between the provinces and territories when you have, Mr. Chairman, a deadbeat parent basically jumping from province to province, trotting, to avoid paying to support his or her children. What is the money in the program currently going to do in

terms of co-operation between the provinces and preventing that from being used as a way out for deadbeat parents, you know, parents who don't want to support their own children, which in my opinion is one of the lowest and most disgusting crimes? In general terms, maintenance enforcement is a big issue, and it seems to be a small amount. Can the minister explain: if it's only this much, why?

Mr. Stevens: Well, thanks to the hon. member. You're quite right: maintenance enforcement is a very important area. They have a very busy workload. A great deal of stress is associated with the job because the clients are often waiting for dollars or having difficulty coming up with them. So you're absolutely right about that. The funding of \$1.6 million of that amount has been allocated to 18 additional collection officers, which is actually a significant number.

I can tell the hon. member that like probably most ministers that appear at budget time, we would like and think we could in a perfect world justify more dollars with many of the programs, perhaps all of the programs that we have. I know that in Justice maintenance enforcement is one of those areas where we could spend more. We have other initiatives that we could embark upon, perhaps as pilots, or we would be able to put additional staff into the field. So you're quite right: you can always deploy more. But we feel that this is a significant number of dollars and a significant increase in collection officers to address the issue.

Yes, we are working with other jurisdictions relative to collection of dollars. In fact, we continue to expand that all of the time and from my perspective are doing a reasonably good job in getting dollars in Alberta for other jurisdictions and getting, through co-operation of other jurisdictions, dollars for children here in Alberta.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Moving on, I wanted to briefly touch on the extra allocation for enhanced prosecutor services, the hiring of additional Crown prosecutors and staff to assist them. We also know that many experienced provincial Crown attorneys in Edmonton and Calgary have either retired or have signalled their intention to retire either last year or this year. We know that in the past 18 months some 29 prosecutors in Edmonton and 26 in Calgary have reportedly left general prosecutions.

Can the minister tell us if his ministry is hiring enough prosecutors to replace the experienced ones who have left? In other words, are we going to see an increase in the overall number of prosecutors, or are we only replacing the ones who left via attrition? Can the minister tell us what he is doing to ensure that more senior prosecutors remain in the role as Crown attorneys? One would definitely reach the conclusion that as these new ones come in, maybe they don't have the expertise or the experience to handle complex and difficult cases, so to give them time to gain that experience, I think we should retain some of the veterans, if you will. So that's a question in terms of: how many new ones are being added, and how many of the old ones are we replacing?

Mr. Stevens: Well, clearly, we've been adding to the budget for additional Crown prosecutors. I believe that in the last two years we've added 20 to 25 new positions in the budget. This year it is 10. As people retire, they are still in the budget, and we would be replacing those.

I can tell you that recently I answered a question on this in the House, and at that time I indicated that, yes, we have lost people to the private sector. Yes, we have lost prosecutors to retirement. Yes, we have had prosecutors go from general prosecution into special prosecution, so you go from doing everything into, perhaps, one of

these specialized areas. But the average experience is 11 years at this point.

7:30

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but the time for this item has elapsed.

We'll now proceed with the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security. I will invite the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security for his opening remarks.

Solicitor General and Public Security

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present an overview of the Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security estimates and the 2007-2010 business plan.

Before I begin, I'd like to introduce staff from my ministry and the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. Those with us here today are Eric McGhan, Deputy Solicitor General and Deputy Minister of Public Security; Bruce Anderson, assistant deputy minister, correctional services division; Brian Skeet, assistant deputy minister, public security division; Jim Bauer, senior financial officer; Norm Peterson, CEO of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. In the members' gallery joining us soon will be my executive assistant, Maureen Geres, and Andy Weiler, director of communications.

Mr. Chairman, over the next 10 minutes I'll provide you with highlights of the services and supports that the Solicitor General and Public Security provide to Albertans. I'll also provide an overview of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, which now falls under my ministry. Following my presentation, I'd be pleased to answer questions that may remain. If we run out of time, I'll be happy to provide responses in writing.

In regard to our business plan Solicitor General and Public Security's vision is to ensure that Albertans have safe and secure communities in which to live, work, and raise their families. Every day we strive to achieve this vision by providing Albertans with services and supports in the areas of policing and crime prevention, corrections, and assistance to victims. We have eight goals that lead the programs identified in the business plan. They are to provide leadership in law enforcement to promote safe communities, ensure that crime prevention and community safety programs are in place to promote safe Alberta communities, provide secure and efficient custody and community supervision, ensure that offenders have the opportunity to access rehabilitative services and programs, ensure the safety of Albertans by providing government security services and crisis management planning, victims of crime will receive assistance information and support, Alberta's liquor industry operates with integrity, and Alberta's gaming industry operates with integrity, social responsibility, and benefits Albertans.

In regard to our finances Solicitor General and Public Security's 2007 budget has increased \$49 million over last year's comparable forecast, to \$506 million. Our booming economy continues to attract people and families from across Canada looking for a better future. Our province has a population of more than 3.3 million, and it is projected to continue to rise by 1.5 per cent per year. Unfortunately, we are not only attracting hard-working families but criminals looking to cash in on a hot economy.

In an effort to ensure that our communities are safe and secure, we have increased funding for public security by \$29 million over last year's comparable forecast, to over \$286 million. We will increase funding to our provincial policing programs by \$11.5 million, to \$162.5 million, to cover the full-year cost for 80 RCMP officers that were added in '06-07 and to address other inflationary costs. We will be adding 14 additional RCMP officers who will be dedicated

to six First Nations communities. We will increase municipal policing grants by \$1.3 million, to almost \$47 million.

We also continue our relentless battle against the spread of organized crime in Alberta. Drug dealing, identity theft, prostitution all have ties to organized crime. We will spend \$17.7 million this year in support of several specialized units that aggressively target criminal networks to disrupt and dismantle those operations.

With more and more people travelling on Alberta highways, we need to ensure that they get where they're going safely. Enforcement is an essential element of the government's traffic safety plan. Last fall we trained 39 sheriffs in traffic enforcement, and they now patrol provincial highways, targeting aggressive drivers and speeders. Our sheriffs have handed out almost 25,000 tickets and have helped take more than 50 impaired drivers off our roads between September of last year and the end of April this year. Budget '07 provides \$7.5 million for an additional 42 sheriffs, who will be on the highways this summer. In fact, the first class of 20 new recruits hit the highways on the May long weekend.

Mr. Chairman, everything police do now faces greater scrutiny by the public, who have more access to information than ever before. We have allocated \$3.8 million to establish the Alberta serious incident response team. This new investigative agency, to be headed by a civilian director, will investigate allegations of a serious or sensitive nature relating to the actions of a peace officer or incidents where the direct actions of a police officer may have resulted in serious injury or death.

We also received \$1.4 million to establish a warrant apprehension unit. As of December 2006 there were approximately 165,000 outstanding arrest warrants in Alberta, close to 8,000 of them for serious and violent crimes. Two teams of sheriffs, located in Edmonton and Calgary, will work closely with corrections staff and police to bring these fugitives to justice. Once caught, these fugitives will end up in one of our department's correctional centres. In Budget '07 we will spend \$176 million to operate correction services programs, including eight adult and three young offender facilities, four correctional camps, 41 community correction offices, and two attendance centres for adults and youth.

It is no secret that we are experiencing serious overcrowding issues in our remand centres. We will spend \$6.3 million this year on our interim solution to overcrowding at the Edmonton Remand Centre. Until a new, larger facility can be built, we are transferring inmates to various correctional facilities, including the Grande Cache federal institution. The \$6.3 million will be used to hire 70 additional staff, including 56 corrections staff and 14 sheriffs, cover transportation costs between facilities, and cover per diem costs to the federal government.

Our responsibility encompasses not only institutional programs but community correction programs, which involve supervising offenders in our communities. As part of Alberta's strategy for prevention of family violence and bullying, we're allocating \$1.3 million to hire additional probation officers. Their job will be to help break the cycle of family violence by ensuring appropriate supervision of offenders who will live in our communities.

We have also budgeted \$2 million to complete our comprehensive court security program and \$2.5 million to continue to develop our \$100 million information technology strategy announced last year.

Preventing crime is just as important as solving crime. To that end we've allocated \$1.7 million to crime prevention in Budget '07, including almost a million dollars in grant money for community-based crime prevention and restorative justice initiatives.

We're also spending almost \$18 million to support victims of crime through grants for agencies and groups that work with victims and financial assistance for those who have been victimized.

Under gaming and liquor, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission now falls under the Solicitor General and Public Security's mandate. We will ensure that the economic impact of gaming and liquor activities are maximized to the benefit of all Albertans. Having said that, much of the AGLC work is focused on social responsibility. We ensure that Albertans have the tools and programs to make informed choices about liquor and gaming and know where to get help if needed.

Money that the government receives from VLTs, slot machines, and ticket lotteries is placed in the Alberta lottery fund. This year lottery fund payments will total \$1.45 billion. Every year thousands of volunteer, public, and community-based initiatives benefit from the ALF for a variety of projects and initiatives. Some examples include community facilities, libraries, museums, athletic events, major exhibitions, arts and cultural groups, seniors' groups, and historic resources. The types of public initiatives that use these funds include building new schools, health facilities, and maintaining our roads. To assist government in making policy decisions, we will continue to provide \$1.5 million to the Alberta Gaming Research Institute this year.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my opening remarks. I welcome any questions that the opposition may have.

Thank you.

7:40

The Chair: Hon. minister, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has indicated his desire to share the floor back and forth as provided under Standing Order 59.01(2). Is that agreeable to you?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. minister and his staff and the deputy ministers and the program heads and the people in the gallery as well for agreeing to accompany us as we walk through this estimate and to provide the hon. minister with his background information and all the stuff he needs to answer our questions ever so eloquently.

I also want to thank him for meeting with me when he took over as the Solicitor General after the latest cabinet change and also again for meeting with me afterwards when we were discussing the legislative agenda. I want to comment on his willingness to share information and his willingness to allow his staff to be receptive to the requests from the Official Opposition. In that regard, I want to put that on the record and thank him sincerely.

The other thing I wanted to thank him very briefly for is the visit to the Edmonton Remand Centre, which he cohosted with the Minister of Justice, and allowing myself and my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora to tour the Remand Centre and speak to some of the guards and employees there and also to have a very brief visit with some of the inmates. Now, my kind request, which is going to follow from there, is for the hon. minister to organize a visit for myself and my colleague from St. Albert to hopefully visit Kennedale school in the north end of Edmonton. It's one of those institutional schools under his purview. I have to tell him that I tried to secure that visit on my own, and I was told that the hon. minister's approval is necessary. Perhaps it's for security purposes or it's protocol. So here is my new request, and hopefully, if he grants this one, I might think of a third one later.

Moving on to the budget, Mr. Chairman, first of all I want to do as the minister did and thank my researcher for coming up with the information and background research on this estimate. Without him, honestly, I can't conduct myself as effectively in this House as the shadow member for the Solicitor General.

My first series of questions are going to be talking about police funding. Definitely this should come as no surprise to the hon. minister. We've had some exchanges in question period on this very subject, and I bet he's also aware of some concern in the community, outside of this House. Agencies like the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and different community groups are highlighting the fact that the police funding formula doesn't seem to be as equitable or as fair as it once was, perhaps.

I would argue that a main area of concern in maintaining safe and secure communities as per the minister's mandate is the issue of police funding. It's an area that has not received a significant increase over the last number of years. The provincial policing program, which pays for the full-time costs of RCMP officers in Alberta, has received a very modest boost, in my opinion, from \$151 million last year to \$162 million this year. This area of RCMP funding and an increase in the numbers doesn't really show, in my opinion, a strong commitment to having more RCMP officers in our communities.

To be fair, Mr. Chairman, this was not the case in 2005, where the government reacted to the tragedy in Mayerthorpe. We saw a significant increase. I honestly can't remember if I participated in that debate then, but I know that I was very supportive of that direction, and I know that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora was as well. However, it was reactionary. We would like to see a commitment reflected in the budget every year in terms of RCMP funding.

Rural communities, which are served by the RCMP, have expressed certain concerns, and most of the concerns stem from the funding formula applying to different communities having different population sizes. The province's funding formula for communities of up to 5,000 is one way, and then between 5,000 to 20,000 is another way. The 5,000 to 20,000 increment provides for a base payment of \$200,000 annually plus an additional \$8 per capita. I would argue, again, that this is not enough to pay for true policing costs in rural Alberta. We know that there has been a documented trend now for certain criminal activities and organized crime to move into rural areas because they think policing there is less and weaker. So I'm interested in hearing the hon. minister's thoughts in terms of this particular issue.

Now, I know that we're told in this House that any minister in any department goes to his caucus and his cabinet meetings and asks for money for his or her programs, but if all of them ask for a ton of money for all their programs, then we are not going to have a budget; we're going to break the bank. My question is: did the minister, in fact, ask for the funding formula to be improved and was turned down in cabinet? Or should I stay tuned? Is there something happening next year that I'm not aware of? If he can commit today to doing that, then, you know, maybe it will be a good sign of things to come. But it is definitely clear that the funding formula as it is now is totally inadequate, and I want to know where this minister wants to take this particular issue.

The other question is in terms of the RCMP negotiating their contract in the near future. I want to know where the minister is with respect to this particular file and if even informal negotiations or contacts have been started with the RCMP. Maybe a quick update from the minister would be tremendously appreciated. That's the second question.

The third question would be if the minister has given any thought to a graduated funding formula. As the community increases in size, as the population grows, maybe we should have an escalating formula like a graph or a chart – basically a community under 5,000 is this way; a community between 5,001 and, say, 7,500 is this way; 7,501 to 10,000 is this way; and so on – to try to make it more fair

and more equitable instead of a one-size-fits-all. Again, if the minister can shed some light on this, it would be greatly appreciated.

I'll take my seat and listen attentively. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you. First of all, I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung for his kind comments – I certainly have enjoyed working with him – and his comments regarding my staff. I certainly believe that I do have the best staff in the government. I want to also commend the hon. member for his dedication to fulfilling his role. He's taken it upon himself to come and tour, as he mentioned, the remand centre, and I might as well let the hon. member know that I'd be pleased to approve a visitation by the hon. member to any facility that's managed by my ministry. So let's get together, and we'll set something up.

The hon. member spoke about our RCMP officers and the reason why we didn't have a huge increase this year. I want to let the hon. member know that we do have 14 new members who are coming to patrol our aboriginal communities, and that is going to free up some of the members who are currently working in detachments to provide more of their time patrolling off those aboriginal communities.

I would also like to mention that the hon. member mentioned a number that we increased our numbers by in the last couple of years. Well, unfortunately, we're still short approximately 80 of the positions that we requested from the RCMP, so until they have an opportunity to catch up on that, we felt that it would be better to put our resources into other areas, which we've done.

7:50

In regard to municipal police funding, as the hon. member mentioned, when urban municipalities exceed 5,000, they become responsible for their own policing costs. Our grant covers as much as 44 per cent of those costs for municipalities with a population of over 5,000 to 20,000, and the amount that we pay actually averages 24 per cent. Our department is exploring options to modify the policing grant formula and to provide greater support to municipalities when their population does exceed 5,000. We recognize that any modification within the \$46 million grant envelope will mean redistribution of those funds.

The hon. member had asked if I'd run anything by my colleagues and been turned down. No, that certainly has not been the case. We are reviewing, as I mentioned, our options, and we will take those to our caucus and ask for their input and support. I would also encourage the hon. member that if he has some ideas, which he spoke to, we certainly will consider those as well.

I want to mention that municipalities also benefit from policing in regard to some of our departmental initiatives, such as ALERT, which is designed to attack serious and organized crime in Alberta. We invest over \$17.7 million in that, and that includes such things as the IROC, the integrated response to organized crime; ICE, the integrated child exploitation initiatives; and Project Kare.

I also want to let the hon. member know that our sheriffs highway patrol program, which complements enforcement efforts by the RCMP on provincial highways, also allows the RCMP to focus their attention on a lot more serious crime issues. This year we have put an extra \$7.5 million in our budget to enhance our sheriffs program. Policing is all about working more effectively and efficiently and getting outside of our silos and working in unison with the other agencies. Again, our sheriffs program working with the RCMP is an excellent example of how we're doing that, and we're actually having great results with that in regard to patrolling our highways and increasing highway safety.

I want to mention to the hon. member that Alberta is the only jurisdiction I'm aware of in Canada which actually returns fine revenues to municipalities. I believe it was in 2006 that there was approximately \$90 million that was turned back to the municipalities, which, again, assists them in their policing costs.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I believe I've answered the questions.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the natural progression from here would actually take us to, again, police funding but this time for cities that are over 100,000, the bigger centres: Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Fort McMurray, places like that. The funding formula, as I understand it, for communities over 100,000 is simple: \$16 per capita, and it's a flat rate. The funding for this comes from line item 2.2.4 in the estimates, which is virtually unchanged from last year. It has only risen by \$600,000 between 2007-08 and last year's forecast. For Edmonton and Calgary what this means is that they are now receiving virtually the same amount of funding, but we know that this is despite the fact that there is more crime. Crime seems to be on the rise in terms of violence, in terms of frequency, in terms of sophistication. There are issues with drugs, there are issues with gang activity, and so on.

Again, it's wonderful on the one hand to have mandate letters and to have stated policy directions that, you know, this government is going to be tough on crime, but this commitment has to translate into numbers in the budget. We have to take it a step further from talking about it to really implementing it. So \$600,000, I would argue, is really, really minimal, Mr. Chairman. For 2008 the city of Calgary, for example, will receive \$15.8 million, up from last year's \$15.2, which is that \$600,000 which I mentioned. The city of Edmonton has the same amount of money. There has been no increase.

I understand that this minister makes decisions in terms of the province in general. You know, he worries about Alberta in general, and I do too. But the city of Edmonton, in which I represent one of its constituencies, has increased in population. The latest estimate, the most conservative estimate is that we've exceeded 1 million people already. I know that in my own constituency of Edmonton-McClung we have added at least 4,500 people since the last election. I need an explanation from the hon. minister why this particular area of policing did not receive the attention it deserves. The bigger cities are growing at a faster pace than our smaller communities and our rural centres, so why did this not translate into this budget this year?

Strategy 1.2 of the business plan under the ministry's goal 1 clearly states that the ministry will provide leadership to ensure safe and secure communities and that they will ensure effective policing through the provision of various programs. Now, I know that the minister had mentioned in his first reply that, you know, we're always behind because now we're missing 80 RCMP officers, so until we catch up, there's bound to be some concern. He's going to field those concerns and those complaints from myself and from this side of the House and potentially from his own caucus colleagues as well. Until we catch up, until we add on the 80 RCMP officers and then re-evaluate the situation, what other programs is the minister talking about in terms of improving policing services in Alberta's bigger centres like Edmonton and Calgary?

Before I take my seat again, I just want to clarify where the minister stands on the issue of supplementing traditional policing services with the use, now, of sheriffs as per the sheriffs department under his authority. Is it only a cost-saving measure? How complementary are they? We know that the RCMP are happy to

work with sheriffs and to facilitate and co-operate between themselves and the sheriffs department. But why the move to now utilize more of the sheriffs services versus traditional RCMP, and what is the obstacle to hiring more RCMP officers notwithstanding the fact that the bigger centres have their own police departments as well?

That's that, and I'm going to reference some communities in particular which seem to be feature communities for this extended or expanded role of those sheriffs, communities like St. Paul, Cold Lake, and Grande Prairie, for example. Again, we've heard some of these concerns attending Alberta Urban Municipalities Association meetings or even the AAMD and C meetings that actually happen every year throughout the province.

Funding for the bigger centres and the mechanism whereby sheriffs and the RCMP work together is an area of interest for myself, and I would appreciate the minister's response to this one.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, the hon. member mentioned earlier the RCMP contract and the status of those negotiations. I just want to let the hon. member know that those negotiations are with the federal government, and all provinces and territories are involved in those negotiations; it's one contract that covers all of Canada. We will certainly have our input into that, and we're actually kicking off those negotiations now in the sense that we're preparing all of our information so that we're in a position to make sure that we get a good contract for Albertans. We will soon be talking with our counterparts from across the country to hear what their thoughts are in regard to renewing this contract as well and then also, of course, sitting down with the federal government to kick off these negotiations.

In regard to the larger cities and the \$16 per capita the increase that occurred this year, of course, is strictly for population growth. I know that the AUMA had put in a request for a different formula, increasing it, I believe it was, to \$32 per capita. Well, our estimates indicate that that would have had an additional cost of \$60 million. We feel we could spend that kind of money better on some of our other initiatives where we work co-operatively with all of the agencies. An example I would use would be our new IT program. That's a hundred million dollar program where we will make sure that all policing agencies share the same data, and that's certainly going to help them work a lot more efficiently and effectively and also improve the safety of not only the officers but of the public. It'll be a great assistance to apprehending those criminals.

8:00

Another initiative that we're working on is a first responder radio system for the entire province, which will put a radio system in place that will allow the police and fire departments and the ambulances to communicate in a much more efficient manner than they are now.

A couple of other areas where we're investing money to improve policing are two warrant apprehension teams that we're putting together. We have a large number of outstanding warrants in the province. These people don't just stay in one jurisdiction. They move around, so it's important that we have a mobile apprehension team who can follow these people around and work with our law agencies to ensure that we get those folks behind bars, where they belong. We're working on a surveillance team as well to ensure that we can track in a lot more efficient manner the activities of organized crime in our province because again they do not stay in one municipality, so it makes it difficult for one police agency to track the activities. Again, if we have teams that can move around the province and follow those activities more closely, we believe that that's going to go a long way to reducing and fighting crime.

The member talked about the sheriffs and the reasons for putting that program in place. Our sheriffs are peace officers. They have expanded authority based on their level of training. The additional responsibilities they have taken on recently: traffic surveillance, our response to gaps in service delivery that we believe can be filled with an appropriately trained and directed peace officer rather than using a full-fledged police officer. Police services are experiencing significant recruiting and retention issues, and the solution that we are offering with our sheriffs allows them to focus their resources on a lot more serious matters without a drop in service.

The member also spoke about costing. Well, an RCMP officer costs the province in the neighbourhood of \$150,000* per man, and we can provide the services that we do with our sheriffs for approximately \$85,000. So there is a cost saving there. Again, their role is limited, but for the work they're doing, they are very well trained and just doing an excellent job.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that answers the questions of the hon. member.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Moving on and staying on the subject of peace officers and sheriffs, can the minister provide more clarification to the House regarding the training that sheriffs are receiving before they are allowed to conduct traffic stops on highways? We know that for the training they receive, they do good work, and this is reflected in the budget increase of about 7 and a half million dollars from last year's estimates, basically because they conduct, you know, traffic enforcement on provincial highways under the traffic safety plan.

But there is a concern that has been raised not just by the opposition but also by police officers themselves who indicate that the minister may want to ensure that these sheriffs can perform those functions but not jeopardize the safety of themselves or the public. Now, you know, stopping a racing car or pulling over somebody who appears to be under the influence are scary situations, I would argue, and we have to remember that sometimes there is something called road rage. Sometimes tempers fly high, and then these sheriffs are armed. They have side arms. So what training do they get to not put themselves in danger and also not to endanger innocent civilians? This is a very specific and serious concern which we have, and it was also raised by some members of the police. The training should reflect this safety component, and law enforcement, in my opinion, is primarily about safety, safety for the people who actually enforce the law and then also safety for the people who are either being questioned by law enforcement officers or innocent bystanders, like I mentioned.

The other question would be their training in terms of their primary duties. Do they receive any scenario training, or are they given examples of things they might encounter in real life, and how are they trained to defuse situations? How are they trained to try to talk somebody out of committing a crime on the spot, you know, the point control tactics training? I'm not an expert, and I don't even try to become one, but how do they defuse these situations, and how do they receive the training that allows them to deal with these scary scenarios and not use force except as a last resort? So physical training, situation training. I'm not sure if they also receive some basic psychiatric techniques that they can use to defuse situations. Any information from the minister would be greatly appreciated.

My overarching argument – and I would like to be corrected if I'm mistaken – is that they don't receive the same level of training as a full-fledged police officer. Are we asking them to perform a full-fledged police function without affording them the necessary

training in full? So that's my question, and again I would cede the floor to the minister to respond.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you. First of all, I want to clarify the response I gave previously where I indicated that RCMP officers cost \$150,000. That's what they cost, but our share is 70 per cent, so it's around \$109,000.*

In regard to the question around training of our sheriffs they receive 200 hours of safety training. Traffic training is another 200 hours. They have field training on top of that. I want to assure the hon. member that our sheriffs are trained to a higher level for traffic than most front-line police officers, and I also want the hon. member to know that our sheriffs do not do high-speed pursuits. Their use of force training is the same as the police follows, the AACP use of force continuum. Their responsibility covers enforcement of the highway traffic act, the liquor control act. If they see a Criminal Code authority activity required, then they call in the RCMP.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Carrying on with this training theme, I would like to ask the hon. minister why there seems to be no mention in this budget of any money associated with the proposed police college in southern Alberta. As far as I am able to tell, there has been no allocation of funds to continue with the announcement from last year with respect to the police college. Why is there no money in the budget for the construction of the college, and is the minister still committed to having a police college, or is this program being scrapped? Has he changed his mind, or did the government, in fact, change its position with respect to this?

Then maybe a general question that would follow from there is: can the minister tell us if there are, in fact, other files or other projects under his purview which have been shelved or postponed or frozen since he took over as Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General?

Basically, if they were priorities before and they are no longer, which ones, if in fact there are? The police college question: why doesn't this budget contain any money with respect to construction or progress on this said project?

8:10

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, in regard to the police college the reason there's no money allocated in our capital budget is because we are planning on proceeding with this initiative on a P3, a public/private partnership. It is going ahead in Fort Macleod, which is the site that we chose last fall. Before we go out for an expression of interest on a P3, we need to identify the projected class sizes, course material, that type of thing, to ensure that we get the appropriately designed facility. So we're hoping within the next month, actually, that we will be going out for an expression of interest on a P3, and we'll proceed from there. We hope that we will start construction next year, so that particular initiative is moving right along.

None of the capital projects in my ministry have been put on hold. As the hon. member knows, we have recently announced that we're proceeding with the Edmonton Remand Centre, which is a project much needed and will proceed at a cost of a little over \$300 million. Again, we are proceeding with the design of that facility, and we

*See right col., para. 3

*See left col., para. 2

hope to start construction on that later on this year. So things are moving right along, and we're quite excited about the projects under our ministry.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to ask the minister: why utilize a public/private partnership, or a P3 model, for the construction of the police college versus a project that's entirely funded by taxpayers? It might be a question for maybe the President of the Treasury Board to answer, but I'm just interested in hearing what this minister thinks. You know, the value of using a P3 versus an entirely public project and if he believes that a P3 is going to provide the taxpayers with cost savings and if, in fact, there has been any comparison of potential costs and, in his opinion, how much we stand to save by utilizing a P3.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yeah, I'd be glad to offer my thoughts on a private/public partnership. First of all, I want to assure the hon. member that unless this P3 turns out to be in the best interests of Albertans, it will not be proceeding in that manner. I am fully confident, though, that at the end of the day, when we look at the cost of a private/public partnership versus the government upfronting the money over a 25-, 30-year period, this particular project will be an example of how well P3s can work. I just firmly believe that it has all the right ingredients for a successful P3, and as we proceed through the expression of interest and getting in proposals, I guess that will be borne out. But at the end of the day, whichever avenue we pursue, we'll make sure that it will be in the best interests of Albertans. A lot of times, in this particular P3 example, there are examples when it's easier and a lot better to use other people's money to build something and pay it back over a period of time, when your maintenance costs are guaranteed over a period of time, et cetera. So those are all things that we will be taking into account. Again, I'm confident that this project will proceed.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I noticed that the minister was smiling. He probably knows that I'm skeptical, but that's a discussion we should have a different time.

Moving on to the victims of crime, on page 288 of the business plan under goal 6, core business 4, it states: "The ministry ensures that . . . victims of crime receive prompt financial benefits and assists community groups and organizations to establish . . . programs and initiatives that meet the needs of victims of crime." My question is: how will the ministry do this? Will the minister provide funding for things like sexual assault centres? The question is with respect to the victims of crimes fund. After those boards are chosen in the different jurisdictions, they resort to fundraising. Does the minister have any thoughts in terms of offering them assistance so their reliance on fundraising would be minimized or eliminated? You know, certain areas seem to be benefiting from the victims of crime fund allocation compared to others, so I'm interested in hearing the minister's thoughts on this.

I have an example here of an agency like the John Howard Society which stated to members of the opposition that they need more funding for operations. Currently their funding is tied to the delivery of specific programs. Will the minister as part of his strategy look

into providing more funding to organizations and allowing them some room to manoeuvre, some decision-making mechanism so they can actually administer their programs the way they see fit? I'm not asking for complete autonomy; I'm just asking for some wriggle room for them to allocate those funds as they deem appropriate, with full accountability to the minister and to this House on how they spend it.

I'm going to reference the MLA report of the Alberta Victims of Crime Consultation, which was released to guide the government's development of programs and services for victims of crime. Can the minister tell us if there was, in fact, any progress after that report was released and if any of these recommendations were implemented? Can the minister also tell us what specific initiatives have been developed to expand, one, the knowledge of the victims of crime fund and, two, access to that fund?

There is a major problem with the existing program in terms of what seems to be a surplus situation. I honestly think that people who are genuinely classified as victims of crime, people who have been seriously affected by crime, should gain access quickly to the program and to the funds in it and also equitably. How many people were turned away? How many people were told, "No, you don't qualify"? There seems to be an increasing surplus, a surplus that keeps growing every year in terms of this fund. Why is the money in that fund not being used more, if I can phrase my question this way? So there seems to be a sort of stockpiling of funds. What is it being used for, and why aren't more people successful in accessing those programs? Where are these surpluses going? Are they sitting in the fund? Are they leaving the fund? Are they being reabsorbed into the general budget? I need to know. I also want to know how many people are employed to adjudicate or to handle requests for compensation under that program.

To recap: why does there seem to be a surplus? Where is it going? How many people administer this program? Why can't organizations be given the flexibility to make those allocation decisions with more room and more responsibility on their part, again with full accountability to the minister. We're not asking for this to be taken away. You know, they're the ones on the ground. They're the ones with their ear to the ground, basically, and we should allow them to do this job if they choose to take it on. Again, helping them so they don't have to resort to fundraising in the different jurisdictions. Those boards, you know, once they're established, that's basically something that they do, and I think definitely there is a role for government to accept more of this responsibility as compared to those individuals.

Thank you.

8:20

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, in regard to the progress of the recommendations in the MLA report I want the hon. member to know that half of these recommendations have been completed, and the remaining ones are in various stages of completion.

In regard to funds for organizations that can apply to victims of crime, there is \$4.4 million in '06-07 that was put into that program. These services provided to victims by these organizations would include such things as information with the criminal justice process in the victim's case as it progresses through the system, information about the victim impact statement program, the financial benefits program, the requesting restitution program, preparation for court, and the accompaniment to hearings. Other specialized services to distinct types of victims are provided by approved community-based programs.

As the hon. member is aware, we recently released a victims of crime protocol, the first ever in Canada. It was introduced last month. This particular document was also translated into 11 different languages to help new Albertans through our system, to give them full knowledge of what they can expect as they work their way through our justice system.

In regard to actual victims of crime payments this is all covered under the Victims of Crime Act. In '06-07 that fund was at \$10.5 million as one-time payouts to eligible victims. Because we increased the awareness in regard to victims of crime consultation, we are seeing an increase in the number of victims coming forward, and the budget this year has increased by \$1.9 million, Mr. Chairman.

In regard to staffing levels there are 10 staff who look after the victims of crime funds.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Moving on, I would like to briefly talk about asset building. First, I'd like to mention the fact that the Alberta Liberal caucus has received a presentation from Chief Mike Boyd, who really thinks very strongly about this asset building component as a way to reduce crime and to catch stuff, as he refers to it, upstream rather than downstream, when the actual criminal act has been committed.

We discussed in the earlier estimate of the Ministry of Justice the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force, and I questioned the hon. Minister of Justice as to what value he thinks we're going to get from this particular task force. One thing the task force heard was that we should be doing more than just adding police officers and that we should be proactive and collaborative between the different police agencies and services, between the different communities, between the different levels of government, and so on, and so forth. It's good to hear these ideas, but really the communities today need more than listening forums. They need more than words. They need provincial leadership to address the root causes of crime.

Again, in the Ministry of Justice's deliberations earlier tonight we talked about education, and we talked about poverty, and we talked about all these root causes of crime and what we can do to catch things before they happen. The province has the financial capabilities, and according to goal 2 of the business plan they also have the desire to do this. However, the only action we have seen so far is the task force.

In Richmond, B.C., the RCMP have forged a relationship with communities based upon the model known as asset building, which I mentioned earlier. Quite simply, it basically means that the police and the community can work together to show young people that they care about them, that they care about their future. They help achieve this by building sustained relationships with youth and youth leaders, rebuilding connections and commitments in neighbourhoods, getting involved in youth service programs, influencing organizations and networks, sharing a vision of safe and healthy communities, and involving the young people in that vision to get them to be players, to be active participants rather than people who just watch things happen or watch things develop. The theory is that the more assets a young person has in their lives, the more likely they will make positive choices. That's one example.

Another study or another example titled *A Portrait of Sustainable Crime Prevention in Selected Canadian Communities* was conducted by Carleton University for the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group of Community Safety and Crime Prevention in 2004. This particular exercise looked at different community

profiles and developed strategies to form community partnerships to reduce crimes at the grassroots level. I would argue that reducing crime at the grassroots level is by far the most successful model, and it's probably the model we should be pursuing most aggressively.

Can the minister tell us if he has instructed his department to look at asset building as a provincial model to reduce crime in order to achieve goal 2 of his ministry's business plan? In other words, it's commendable that municipal police forces are looking at this on a municipality-by-municipality basis, and them taking the initiative is laudable. But more centrally and more province-wide is this also a direction that this minister is headed? Has he in fact instructed his staff to adopt this model, and what steps has he taken to do that? If not, then frankly the question would be: why not? If not now, then why not now, and why not immediately?

Mr. Chairman, I'll just cede the floor to the minister again because I think this is an important issue. Then I'll have a couple more questions, and I know that some of my colleagues also have a couple more.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you. Yes, in regard to asset building, Mr. Chairman, my ministry firmly believes that the whole community needs to be involved in crime prevention. In regard to consulting with our community, I believe it's important that we get out into our community to find out, first of all, what concerns they have and also to get their input on solutions to ensure that we utilize best practices as we move forward.

I also agree that it's important to have programs in place to ensure that our children stay on a straight and narrow path and avoid getting involved in criminal activities. I want to just mention the success we've had with the Hobbema cadet program, where I believe that over 400 of that community's youth are now involved in a program that keeps these children busy, teaches them some discipline, and keeps them away from gang activities.

I also want to let the hon. member know that, yes, my entire staff are committed to looking at the whole spectrum of crime prevention. It's not just a matter of putting more policemen on the street and building more prisons. Obviously, anything we can do – in fact, our whole government is committed to a number of cross-ministry initiatives which put programs in place to ensure that we get to the youth, especially, in our society to keep them active and involved in activities that keep them away from criminal activities. Also, in our correctional facilities we have a number of programs, obviously, there to ensure that those who do get involved in criminal activities have programs in place to ensure that when they get back out into our communities, they have the skills necessary to get on with their lives.

The hon. member should know that this department has developed a five-year vision that encompasses all aspects of a law enforcement network, from developing a single-site training centre to recruiting and retention to creating more dynamic and flexible information technology systems. This will help guide us as we continue to evolve our business to meet the ever-changing face of crime in the 21st century. At a recent round-table on policing held in Red Deer, we had law enforcement leaders. Those responsible for police oversight and academics agree that working together more effectively with available resources will strengthen how we respond to and how we prevent crimes. Our department will hold a similar round-table next month to look at options to address recruitment and retention issues currently facing all members of the law enforcement community.

8:30

Other asset-building priorities include the development of a correction services blueprint to ensure that our department is properly positioned to face short-, mid-, and long-term challenges related to infrastructure, staffing, and delivery of evidence-based correctional programs.

Replacement of the Edmonton Remand Centre with a state-of-the-art facility will improve staff and inmate safety, reduce transportation costs associated with moving inmates to other facilities, and also will reduce overcrowding.

I mentioned earlier our \$100 million information technology strategy to address the information needs of our department, the law enforcement community, and the criminal justice system.

We're also committed to work on a network radio communication system to ensure that first responders can communicate with each other during times of crisis and allow law enforcement agencies to continue to work together to tackle organized and serious crime.

We're also committed to the development of the Alberta police and peace officer training centre, our new training centre, which I already spoke to, which will deliver standardized training, which will ensure that all of our police and peace officers in the province have a similar and a standardized level of training.

Cross-ministry initiatives include the crime reduction strategy, which the hon. Attorney General and Minister of Justice spoke to. We will co-ordinate the work of 14 government ministries and the recommendations from the safe communities task force to help reduce crime in our communities.

Work continues with Alberta Justice to complete our comprehensive court security plan. This includes perimeter security at courthouses and the final stage of our video conferencing initiative.

Mr. Chairman, our government and my ministry in particular have a whole number of issues regarding asset building to ensure that we meet our goal of reducing crime in the province of Alberta.

The Chair: The hon. member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now, to switch gears to some extent, I would like to talk about this minister wearing the other hat, which is being the Minister of Public Security. You know, in other jurisdictions they call him the minister of interior, sometimes also referred to as the minister of emergency preparedness. I'm talking about security threats. We've heard that Canada has been identified as a potential target for terrorism, for example. Under goal 5 of the business plan for this ministry strategy 5.5 states that the ministry will "assist industry in their crisis management planning to ensure industry is prepared in the event of crisis." Canada, like I mentioned, has been on that target list for international terrorism. The RCMP has confirmed this through their own threat assessment protocols.

Can the minister tell us what involvement his ministry is having with industry currently to ensure that Alberta industry is protected from a possible terrorist attack? I'm talking about existing industry, Mr. Chairman, and then also potential industry because we've all heard musings or rumours about this government's recent change of opinion, and now they're appearing to be more receptive to having nuclear energy brought in for operations like the oil sands, for example. That has its own heightened level of risk associated with it just by the nature of that operation. Has the minister started talking to industry, both existing and industry that is contemplating moving into the province, to assist them in terms of their crisis management planning?

The other thing I would like to reference is that it's not only

industry that the minister should be talking to. I recently read an article that was published in the publication *FrontLine Security* in their spring 2007 issue. This particular article was written by Dr. Joe Varner. It identifies more than just industry; it basically talks about critical infrastructure. Critical infrastructure has a definition in the U.S., and it also has a definition in Canada. The Canadian definition is broader. It's more thorough and more complete. Basically, as per this article, it says that public safety and emergency preparedness Canada defined critical infrastructure as

those physical and information technology facilities, networks, services and assets which, if disrupted or destroyed, would have a serious impact on the health, safety, security or economic well-being of Canadians or the effective functioning of governments in Canada.

It identifies 10 sectors, so when I say that we shouldn't just be talking to industry, here are a few other examples. The 10 sectors are energy and utilities; communications and information technology; finance; health care; food; water; transportation; safety in terms of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear safety and hazardous materials, search and rescue, emergency services, and dams; government, in terms of services, facilities, information networks, assets, and sites and monuments; and manufacturing. That's the last one, manufacturing, and so on. So we're talking more than just industry.

I just want to know if the minister has really started developing this plan. Many times in this House the government has been criticized for its lack of a plan. I think one of the areas where we should really start developing this plan is right here in this minister's department because this is a plan we can't afford to not have. Is there a plan? I know the minister mentioned his five-year vision. Is this part of that five-year vision for his ministry? What negotiations, if any, has he started, and where is he going from here?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to assure the hon. member that, yes, we have a plan. In fact, our security plan is held up as an example for the rest of Canada. Our plan is a partnership between our province, our police, our industry, and the federal government. Our plan identifies terrorist threats as early as possible. We warn communities and industry of any threats, take immediate action to prevent or mitigate the terrorist act, and our plan will ensure the continued delivery of essential services. There is a protocol that ensures that I am informed of serious threats that may require an elevation of our province-wide threat level, and we are always examining and re-examining our counterterrorism and crisis management plan to ensure that it remains the best in our country.

In regard to nuclear reactors, the oil sands, or pipelines we definitely have a counterterrorist plan in place to protect all critical infrastructure in our province. As I mentioned before, we use the best intelligence that's available not only across our country but internationally. If a terrorist act were ever to occur, our plan gives all partners, including law enforcement agencies, the ability to respond immediately.

As I mentioned earlier, our plan is hailed as one of the best in the country, and I can assure the hon. member that currently there is no identified threat to our province.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to switch gears one more time and talk about the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, which has recently been moved and now falls under the Solicitor General's responsibility.

This might be looked at as a rhetorical question, or it might not be the place for it in the budget debate, but I would like to know if the minister is at all concerned that there seems to be a trend developing with respect to liquor retail in this province. We had at one point in the past a provincial monopoly, and then we were told that this was not the way to keep doing things and that it was bad for the consumer. We allowed privatization to come in, and now, with all the mergers and takeovers that are happening in the retail liquor network, we are basically seeing the creation of private business monopolies. I would like to hear the minister's opinion on this particular matter.

Also, in terms of the distribution network, if, in fact, the problems from last summer and, basically, the problems we witnessed in 2006 and early on in 2007 have been remedied, if he is satisfied with the liquor distribution network. Again, that's a monopoly, and there were suggestions that maybe we should have one distributor for northern Alberta and one for southern, if not three even. Where does the minister stand on this particular issue, and is he satisfied that all the wrinkles of the past have been ironed out and that the system is functioning again the way it was intended? So the monopolies question and then the liquor distribution question.

8:40

Under the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission my third question would be with respect to gaming. I have to emphasize that where I'm coming from, Mr. Chairman, is that gambling does not create wealth. Gambling only redistributes wealth, and it does that basically on the basis of a social ill. It's a problem, and the moral or ethical question of whether government should be generating revenue from gambling is maybe a discussion for a different day, but we know that a large percentage of the revenues generated by gambling in this province comes from problem gamblers. A question to the minister: in his opinion, what should we do to minimize problem gambling? And maybe, you know, a question with respect to programs to help people who want to quit their addiction to gambling, and the other question with respect to the lottery terminals in the province.

We've had discussions, you know, on and off about the integrity and security of those networks, if in fact lottery owners/operators are winning a disproportionate number of prizes. I know that the minister is currently reviewing some audit findings and recommendations and that there seems to be also an internal investigation going on now. Again, if he can share with us an update with respect to this particular issue. You know, if people absolutely have to gamble, then at least we can even out the playing field for them. Most lose their money, but some would win. That's how I look at it. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission now is under his authority, and I am interested to hear his thoughts on those two issues.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, in regard to liquor retail sales in the province of Alberta the hon. member spoke about the deregulation of the industry back in the 1990s, a time when we had, I believe, 200 government-owned liquor stores, approximately 3,500 different types of products on our shelves. Well, today we have over a thousand retail stores and over 16,000 different products on the shelves. In regard to customer service that has been very successful.

However, the hon. member talked about the concern around takeovers and if it follows a trend of big business, where we end up

again with only one particular company or two companies running the whole industry. We're nowhere near that in Alberta. In fact, the takeover that has been discussed recently in the news, if that were to proceed, would give one owner I believe 20 per cent of the market. The way our industry is structured with a lot of smaller ma-and-pa type stores, at this point in time, I don't have a concern with these takeovers upsetting the market. I think it's important that the Gaming and Liquor Commission ensure, as they have to this point, that it's a level playing field for all people who are involved in that industry. At this point in time, I'm quite comfortable that this particular buyout, if it takes place, will not create a problem for the smaller businesses, that they will continue to operate in an effective manner.

In regard to the distribution problems we had last year, yes, when the deregulation of the industry took place, there was a monopoly that was set up in regard to the warehousing. It actually worked quite well for I believe 15 or 16 years before we ran into a problem last year. The problem, of course, was due to an increase of sales in the province, which is a sign of our booming economy. Then when we did start having a few shortage problems, a lot of the retailers themselves escalated that problem by trying to stock up with more than what they would normally carry in the warehouse. It did create a bit of a problem, but at the end of the day liquor sales in the province were up approximately 15 per cent from the year before.

It was a bit of a glitch in the system. We've hired an independent consultant, who reviewed the concern. We have put in short-term measures and are quite confident that this year we're going to be getting through the busy season without the types of problems we had in the past. We have proposed some changes to the agreement with the warehouse to ensure that things move onwards and upwards, so I believe that in the short term and the mid term we're in pretty good shape, but we are, of course, reviewing long-term solutions to make sure that our public continues to be served in a very professional and forthright manner.

In regard to gambling the social responsibility side of gambling is certainly a big responsibility and one that we take very seriously. The hon. member talked about the per cent of Albertans who gambling is a problem for. Our numbers indicate that it's less than 10 per cent of the people who have a problem with gambling, and less than 5 per cent would be considered serious. That being said, we want to make sure that those people who need help get the help that they require, and we have programs in place to ensure that that's happened.

We're always looking at improving as well. We are setting up information kiosks in a lot of our casinos, information that would help somebody if they did think they had a problem. We're also looking at putting hosts in our casinos so that they can go through the gaming areas on a regular basis and monitor the activities there. If they see somebody who they think may be a problem gambler, then they can discuss that with them and, again, offer them the help that they need.

So there are a number of initiatives that we're moving forward with, but we're always cognizant of the fact that there are some people, whether it's through liquor sales or through gambling, who run into problems. It's important for us, and we take the responsibility very seriously. We're going to make sure that we have safety nets to make sure that those folks get the help they need.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. My questions have to do with the co-ordination of enforcement services. For example, we've got

a variety of enforcement agencies. We have special constables, we have sheriffs, we have court security officers, we have conservation officers, city police, and RCMP, and I've probably left out three or four different organizations. I'm just wondering how the government co-ordinates the services and how it establishes the priorities in terms of who outranks who, whose jurisdictional authority sort of covers or is in charge in certain circumstances.

I want to go very specifically to Crown lands, parks, and protected areas, where the chief responsibility for maintaining and enforcing laws has to do with the conservation officers. I would like to note that since the early 1990s almost half of the original conservation officers were laid off as part of the government's cutbacks in order to pay down the debt. Now conservation officers have such a wide expectation in terms of kilometres of radius that they're expected to cover. When it comes to long weekends, it's impossible for the conservation officers themselves to carry out their duties. I know that, for example, sustainable resources has co-ordinated to a degree, say, in the Ghost-Waiparous area, which was a fairly lawless area, particularly on long weekends, by having more off-duty RCMP put in overtime, and that's appreciated.

My personal experience from 2002 through 2004, when I ran the campground at Cataract Creek, was that the nearest RCMP base was over 60 kilometres away, in Turner Valley. The only time I ever saw the RCMP out was when one of the campers got lost. The RCMP came by the following morning, rather perturbed at having to follow up on the poor choices this camper made with his children to go hiking late at night. It caused an awful lot of consternation for the police services. Fortunately, everything worked out well, but in three years I saw the RCMP out there once.

8:50

In 2002 thanks to the G-8 we had a greater predominance. We had the army, obviously, providing extra security for members of the G-8, and we had a number of seasonal conservation officers added to the policing. But when it came to 2003-2004, I felt very much on my own as a campground attendant, and some very strange circumstances occurred.

For example – and I'll go back to 2002 – a military-style assault shotgun with a complete clip on the outside was protruding out of the pack of one of my campers, who was sporting a bowie knife, and I indicated to the individual that you can't have an unsealed firearm in a campground. The conservation officer responded about an hour and a half after I called in this particular article, but basically the only thing between me and the potential offender – another example: a fellow who was demonstrating to his kids that he could protect them from the roaming black bears and grizzlies set off a bear banger in the campsite, and again I was left to deal with this individual, who had frightened all the campers and all their children in order to demonstrate his capability to protect his own. I couldn't deal with that. I dealt with it on my end.

My concern is the lack of policing in general, the potential of communication between the various organizations. For example, RCMP are equipped with satellite phones; conservation officers aren't. As camp personnel, front-line individuals who frequently came across an accident first or a security breach in the wilderness, we only had our two-way radio, which was not a very effective service.

My last comment has to do with sheriffs' training. I do not believe that a six-week course qualifies a person to have the responsibility of operating a provincial vehicle, pulling over speeders, and, you know, enforcing a whole series of laws, including the potential of having a shotgun in the vehicle.

The last concern I have is: what kind of fluidity, if any, is there

between the various types of enforcement officers? Right now, I believe, the RCMP are taking on an awful lot of extra responsibility looking after and supervising the sheriffs. Rather than having the extra support from the sheriffs, it's taking them an undue amount of time to supervise them. I believe sheriffs should receive training similar to that of conservation officers, which is at least two years of training at, for example, the University of Lethbridge.

It's somewhat rambling, but what co-ordination of enforcement services is there? Will we require in the future sheriffs to have greater training before they're turned loose on our highways and court systems, et cetera?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, in regard to the opening comments, I guess, regarding the different agencies at different levels of policing authority in the province. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity spoke about our sheriffs, the police, the peace officers, the city police, the conservation officers, the folks that patrol our provincial parks. First of all, I want to say that it's important that these different agencies all work together to the best of their ability. They do that. You know, we certainly can always look at improving it. In regard to their authority, the authority of whatever agencies you've looked at is covered under legislation, so it's quite clear to each of these agencies as to what their roles and responsibilities are. I want to say that even during the May long weekend our sheriffs, the RCMP, and the conservation officers all did work together in regard to patrolling our Crown land and also privately owned land to keep in check some of those who tend to abuse those lands.

I want to also point out to the hon. member that it's the responsibility of the whole community to ensure that our lands are protected and looked after in a proper manner. Citizens need to be more and more vigilant to keep on top of these activities. The hon. member knows that Alberta is a big province. I don't think we could ever have the resources to patrol all of the Crown land and all of the lands that are being utilized by a lot of these off-highway vehicles that we see around today. Yes, it would always be nice to have more officers on the street, but, again, it's more than just having more people driving around in pickup trucks, et cetera, enforcing the law. It's also educating the public to let them know what's expected of them when they are on the land. Using these lands is not a right; it's a privilege. We have to improve our vigilance in making sure that we get that message out.

The hon. member spoke about the communications between the different agencies. The IT program that we're putting together now will ensure that we have a common database for all of our policing agencies across the province so that they can share data in a lot more proactive manner than they are today. We're also working on a first responder radio system, which, again, will tie in all these agencies to ensure that they can communicate back and forth. Those two initiatives are certainly going to improve the effectiveness and the efficiency of the agency as well as their safety and the safety of the public, so we are moving forward on those initiatives.

The hon. member spoke about the hours of training for our sheriffs and concern around their ability to patrol our highways. I want to let the hon. member know that these sheriffs are trained to a higher level than conservation officers are. They're all graduates of programs. They've taken an additional minimum of 400 hours of training. They do not carry shotguns in their vehicles. They are trained and carry side arms. They are all on our highways to enforce the highway traffic act and the liquor control act. They are not authorized to enforce the Criminal Code of this country. When they

run into areas like that, where they need the assistance of the RCMP, they call on the officers for that.

Now, initially, when the sheriffs first came out, there were comments around that they were going to create extra work for the RCMP, that they would have to come out and rescue them. Well, that hasn't been the case at all. In fact, all the RCMP officers I talked to are quite thankful that we have the sheriffs out on our streets because they work very well with the RCMP in carrying out their mandates. They're doing just a great job, and actually, by being out there, they allow the RCMP to do a lot more work in patrolling the backcountry that you're talking about to ensure that those people that are using those lands follow the laws that apply in those particular areas.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. You have about 30 seconds.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I just wanted to make one very quick comment about the provincial integrated child exploitation, the ICE team. I just wanted to say that if anyone in this House has ever looked into the eyes of a four-year-old girl who has been traumatized by a sexual predator, they would make sure that there was extra money being put into the funding for these teams that will protect our children.

9:00

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but the time for this order of business is past. The minister may want to respond in writing.

We are now moving on to the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology, and I will invite the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology to present his opening remarks.

Advanced Education and Technology

Mr. Horner: Well, good evening, Mr. Chairman, and thank you. It's an honour to present to the Assembly the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology's business plan for '07-10 and budget estimates for '07-08. Before I begin my presentation, I would like to introduce the officials within my department who played key roles in developing this plan and who are with me here on the floor of the House, the first being Bob Fessenden, my deputy minister; Phil Gougeon, the assistant deputy minister of adult learning; Shirley Dul, assistant deputy minister of apprenticeship and industry training; Gerry Waisman, executive director of postsecondary institution services; and Blake Bartlett, the executive director of finance and administration.

Before we get into the questions, Mr. Chairman, I do have some opening remarks that I'd like to make. Our business plan reflects how the ministry is moving to strengthen Alberta's advanced learning and innovation systems while helping to build a more diverse economy. This plan also focuses on ensuring that Albertans have access to develop the learning, work, and life skills they need while tapping into the long-held Alberta spirit of entrepreneurship and lifelong learning.

It was December when the Premier gave Advanced Education and Technology a clear mandate: increase access, affordability, and quality in postsecondary education as the number one; number two is to increase support for community education and literacy programs; three, develop a strategy for technology commercialization and value-added economic diversification. Our mandate and the three-year business plan guide the ministry's future initiatives and ensure continued collaboration with institution and industry partners as we work together to build a stronger Alberta. The business plan

details a number of key projects, priorities, and initiatives for Advanced Education and Technology. We want to ensure that Albertans have the opportunity to access postsecondary programs and flourish while within the system and following graduation.

One of the key priorities is to better define the roles and responsibilities of postsecondary institutions in Alberta. Work is already under way on encouraging institutions to work more collaboratively. From the youth in Lethbridge who is taking academic upgrading online to the adult student in Fort McMurray who plans to enter medical school, Alberta Advanced Education and Technology has significant opportunities to make the system serve people better. A key initiative where work is continuing is the concept and principles around Campus Alberta, which can be realized by emphasizing transferability, seamless learning, and curriculum sharing.

Another important initiative we've undertaken is to build on the momentum of the affordability framework, which was released last November, and to ensure that financial need is not a barrier to any Alberta learner. With Budget 2007 we've made critical investments that will provide direct financial assistance for students before they begin classes this fall. The ministry is providing increases to student loan limits and living allowances, eliminating vehicle restrictions, and reducing parental contributions. Students facing rent increases will be helped by these changes as well as through the regular programming that we have through Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry. The commitment to student finance is focused on enabling more students to qualify and access our world-class system while also opening the doors to more scholarships, bursaries, and grants and expanding tax credits to full- and part-time students. Our approach to creating an affordable postsecondary system is a holistic one.

My ministry is also providing institutions with funding that helps address and offset impacts of the affordability framework and the limits on tuition fee increases. Our business plan also addresses the capital and infrastructure needs of institutions by increasing our funding for the expansion, upgrading, and maintenance of Alberta's postsecondary facilities.

It's also important to note that a postsecondary education is not just limited to universities and colleges. My ministry is working to make a difference for Alberta's apprenticeship and industry training system. The business plan will see Advanced Education and Technology adding new apprenticeship technical training seats and funding learning resources, supplies, and services to support these additional training seats. This increase in funding answers the calls from industries in regions across our province. Registration for 2007-08 apprenticeship technical training classes at more than 10 technical training institutes in the province began May 14 of this year. For up-to-date information on the availability of technical training seats across the province you can visit the Alberta Advanced Education and Technology department's trade website.

Our commitment to apprenticeship doesn't end with our investment in spaces. We will also work with Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry to implement the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy.

Advanced Education and Technology is also expanding the amount of learning opportunities available in our communities, enhancing partnerships and ensuring that Albertans have the skills they need to contribute to our society, to our economy, and to the high quality of life we enjoy today. The goals for advanced learning in Alberta through this business plan are ambitious, important, and focus on the future, a future that is helping to build a stronger province for generations to come.

In terms of technology the '07-08 business plan continues to move forward with strategic funding for research, innovation, and

technology commercialization initiatives. The three-year plan covers our traditional sectors, including energy, agriculture, and forestry as well as new emerging areas like life sciences, nanotechnology, and information and communications technology.

With energy being the engine of our economy, it is important for the ministry's investments to advance energy research and innovation in bitumen upgrading, clean coal and carbon technology, enhanced recovery techniques, renewable energy, and CO₂ capture and storage. Enhancing Alberta's value-added capabilities is an essential element in realizing Alberta's energy future. Taking our natural resources further up the value chain offers hope for new industries and opportunities for Albertans. Our commitment to the efficient recovery and getting more value from Alberta's energy resources calls for and is met by an increase in funding to the Alberta Energy Research Institute.

[Mr. Johnson in the chair]

In November 2006 the government of Alberta committed \$30 million in funding towards implementation of a water research strategy developed through the efforts of the Alberta Science and Research Authority and other Alberta-based partners. The water research strategy implementation is being managed through an agreement with Alberta ingenuity, and the life sciences branch budget for 2007-08 contains an increase to support this investment.

We will also continue to support the implementation of the Alberta nanotechnology strategy. In every phase of technology and innovation a strong environmental platform has been created where highly qualified people can conduct their research and pilot their projects right here. To see these discoveries and technological advances come to fruition will require government's guiding hand to take them from concept to reality.

Implementing the goals for technology commercialization has been enhanced by the creation of the Value-added and Technology Commercialization Task Force created earlier this year. This summer the task force will bring forth a report to the ministry which will identify actions to increase the commercialization of market-driven, made-in-Alberta, value-added products and services. Ultimately, with feedback from other sectors of the industry we will create the right policy environment to spur individuals and companies to continue to build on Alberta's excellence in research infrastructure, world-class community of scientists, and renowned advanced learning and turn the dreams of technology commercialization into reality. The objective is to ensure that our economic and social well-being can be enhanced through science, technology, and innovation.

It's especially gratifying to see how far we really have come. The commitments to quality and access in advanced learning combined with our foray into frontiers like life sciences and nanotechnology will help to ensure a very bright future for Alberta's technology and innovation market.

Managing our growth is the theme of Budget 2007, and in a province that is realizing unprecedented growth, the postsecondary system and the technology capabilities must also anticipate and plan for the future. The total government of Alberta investment in Advanced Education and Technology for 2007-08 is \$3.1 billion. This year's spending represents a 22 per cent increase over last year. The '07-08 budget includes a 6 per cent increase in base operating grants to institutions, bringing total operating grant funding to \$1.5 billion. Further increases of 6 per cent per year will be provided in the next two years.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Postsecondary institutions will also see a funding increase of \$347 million for capital projects this year. A total of \$1.6 billion will be invested in capital projects over the next three years, including \$300 million in unallocated capital. This funding boost represents a 41 per cent increase in the '06-09 capital plan. This funding will help complete a number of projects, including the Robbins health learning centre at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton, the expansion of the Lakeland College campus in Lloydminster, the construction of the community learning campus at Olds College, and the University of Calgary's health research innovation centre.

Funding from Advanced Education and Technology in '07-08 will go towards the construction of facilities for the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Calgary, replace the Donald Cameron Hall at Banff Centre, and the Centennial Centre for Interdisciplinary Science on the campus of the University of Alberta. Decisions on the balance of the \$300 million in unallocated capital will be made in accordance with the government of Alberta's capital planning process after and during the roles and responsibilities process being finalized.

We're also ensuring that our postsecondary system is affordable and accessible to Albertans. The ministry is also providing an additional \$4 million for student spaces in '07-08 while increasing overall funding support to postsecondary learners by 31 per cent for student assistance. [Mr. Horner's speaking time expired]

I'll continue at another time.

9:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has indicated a desire to utilize the 20-minute time frame shared back and forth. Is that agreeable to the minister?

Mr. Horner: Sure.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to introduce my support staff, too, but as you can see, when you're in opposition, you learn to work lean and work a little smarter, I hope.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that we'll have a good 60 minutes of debate here. As you said, I'd like to do the little give-and-take thing so we can get as many questions and answers in as possible over the next hour.

You know, one of the good things about being the — sorry, what's the term now? — shadow minister for advanced education is that you get to travel around the province quite a lot and meet some very good people. I have to say that in my travels across the province the people that I've met in the positions of authority in the postsecondary institutions are really quality people. I'm very impressed by the calibre of the presidents, the executives, the students. I see that we have some representatives from the U of A listening attentively up above there. There are some excellent people working in the postsecondary world in Alberta, and I've been very impressed by them.

I hope that I can ask some questions that they have presented to me over the last several months as I've travelled around the province. As the minister said, we have a 22 per cent increase this year, which is good. But, of course, there is a lot of ground to be made up over the last several years, the years when postsecondary was not quite as high a priority with the government as it should be. We in the Official Opposition are very pleased to see more money going into advanced education since this is something we've been asking for for quite some time.

I have a number of topics that I'd like to touch upon here. I'd like

to start first with the access to the future fund or maybe the mysteries of the access to the future fund. As you know, it was the centrepiece Bill 1 two years ago, and at the time I believe it was said to be going to grow to be a \$3 billion fund. We're very supportive of this fund, and everyone that I've spoken to across the institutions in Alberta have all agreed that this is an excellent idea. Originally an Alberta Liberal idea, but that's the end of my political statements here. I just had to throw that one in. You know, I have to get one in anyway. That's the only one. That'll be it. No more after this. Well, maybe a few more.

It appears that the last time any money was put into the fund was in August of 2006, when I believe \$250 million was added. It doesn't seem, unless there's a massive infusion of money planned very quickly, that this will get up to the \$3 billion which was supposed to happen within three years if my memory serves me correctly. So I have a number of questions regarding the access to the future fund, and then we'll go on to some other topics if that's okay.

Now, I don't see anything in the budget adding to the access to the future fund here. Page 180 of the estimates, the Finance section, internal government transfers, shows that there is no planned transfer to the access to the future endowment. My first question is clearly: where is the money for the endowment, and what is the situation with it at this time? Are we going to see it reach a \$3 billion cap within the next two years, three years, five years? Do you have a long-range plan for what we can see for the access to the future fund?

I've also heard from a number of institutions that they were a little unclear about how the fund is being administered. Some stakeholders have expressed this concern with me. There's clear agreement, as I said, that the fund is very worth while and very welcome, but I sensed that there was frustration in the way it is being administered because they're not quite sure exactly what the rules are. Many donors also want to know what is going on. Prospective gifts hang in the balance, from what I've been told.

Now, the minister may recall that a while back in question period I mentioned that one senior administrator at an institution called the bureaucracy around the fund ridiculous. I won't tell you who said that; it doesn't matter. But it's an interesting point that he would come out and say that he thought there was something seriously wrong with it.

What I'd like to hear from the minister is an update on the access to the future fund. What is the situation? Why are there no funds being put into the access to the future fund at this moment? I'd like to hear a little bit more about what has been paid out and how we can get information about it. It seems that there's very little information available about the money that is actually being awarded from it. Generally there would be something on a website or press releases. If there's anything being awarded from the fund, it's very hard to figure out exactly what it is, so perhaps the minister can enlighten us a little bit about how much money has been distributed from the fund and if we're going to get a little bit more information in the future about it.

Also, I've been asked to inquire why donations of equipment have not been included in the matching formula. This is also another area where there's been millions of dollars of equipment offered to postsecondary institutions, particularly SAIT and NAIT, but it doesn't fall under the agreement so that they can actually get matching funds for it.

If the minister could expand a little bit on the status of the access to the future fund right now, I would appreciate it, and then we'll just go on to some other topics.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, agree that in our system we have exceptional staff. We have exceptional managers and CEOs of those institutions. We also have exceptional board members that are working with these CEOs and these institutions to help guide and direct Campus Alberta. We have high-quality researchers, very high-quality researchers. International countries are looking at us and saying: wow, you're becoming very globally recognized. We have high-quality students and motivated students that are interested not only in what their personal studies are but also in what's going on around them.

You know, as far as the access to the future fund and being very supportive of the fund as a good idea, I, too, think it's a great idea. You know, great ideas have many friends and cousins; bad ideas are always orphans. So it's interesting that who came up with it first is probably debatable.

In terms of the access to the future fund it has its own statements because it is a fund outside of government. It's an endowment fund, so they do establish their own statements. But what I can certainly tell the hon. member is that the access to the future fund is managed by the advisory council, who take their role very, very seriously, are very, very keen on the fund and the vision behind that fund, and are very keen on working on the original vision of the access to the future fund and the innovation fund to be coming out of that.

In 2007-2008 funding for the access to the future fund rises to about \$53 million. The fund was created to enhance access to high-quality, affordable advanced learning opportunities by matching donations as well as supporting innovative and collaborative projects. I think we're going to see that become very, very important when you talk about student access, student transferability, being able to access the system at one point and creating a pathway for your career learning. It is, after all, all about the students and filling that need, the societal need that the students are trying to fill. Each of the institutions gets an amount out of that \$53 million based on the criteria set up by the council. The council has a clear set of rules and mandates that are communicated to the institutions.

Yes, the hon. member is correct that when the fund was announced, there was, I guess, an outpouring of generosity from Albertans, you know: here's a great idea, and it all came at once. That was never the intention of the fund. The fund was set up to establish an ongoing amount every year that the institutions could then use to match with public generosity, which they will continue to do. As a period of time elapses, you're going to catch up on some of those. I think the generosity of Albertans isn't based on whether or not they get matched now or get matched over the future but that they get matched. Certainly, there are a lot of very good things that are happening with that access to the future fund.

The government, I think, made it very clear in their budget, when they announced the budget in early April, that should there be surplus funds to what was budgeted, the budget part of that is that one-third is going to go into savings. The first one-third of that is going to go into savings, as the Minister of Finance had mentioned. The priorities are set by the government as to the savings allocations, but the hon. member knows that there is only one other endowment that isn't in my ministry, and that's the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

I look forward to working on those priorities in the future. I agree with them. All of the institutions believe this is a good idea. All of the industry folks that we've talked to believe this is a good idea, and where we can leverage dollars, we will endeavour to do so.

9:20

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. I'd just like to clarify a few comments here. The access to the future fund: I just want to clarify that there is no additional funding going into the fund this year. I'd just like to clarify that. You did mention that \$53 million, I believe, is being allocated from the fund – is that correct? – in '07-08, as I understand it. But I would like to know: is there any additional money going into the fund right now? Does it still sit at a billion or whatever the fund is right now, or will there be some more money going into it?

You also mentioned there are a number of very good things that are happening with the access to the future fund. Again, I'd like to go back to that it would be nice to know what they are. I still haven't found an easily accessible way to see where the money is going and who it's going to.

If the minister could maybe just expand upon those two issues a little bit, please.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. In September of this year the annual report of the access to the future fund will probably be tabled in the House. I'll make sure that we do table it when we come back to the session in the fall. But, certainly, it probably would be released before that, so the hon. member will have an opportunity to review the annual report of the access to the future fund that the council will put forward.

In the meantime the hon. member is probably well aware that the institutions are the ones that are doing the programming to match the projects on an individual basis. In fact, where institutions were not able to raise matching dollars, those dollars are going to actually roll forward for them, so it actually adds to the ability in some of the more remote areas to add to that opportunity that they have.

At this point in time if there's some other detail that you'd like, I'd be more than happy to get you a copy of the listing that every institution – there's a list of what they received, their allocation if you will. We could get that to the hon. member.

Mr. Tougas: When you say their allocation, do you mean how much they are allowed to get or how much they have received in terms of matching funds? I just want to clarify the wording there.

Mr. Horner: Well, essentially the original intent was always that there would be a certain amount that each institution would be allocated from the funds coming out of the billion dollars that we currently have, the \$3 billion at its maturity – right? – when it's fully funded. Then there is an amount that every institution is going to receive from that to be fair to all institutions across the province. Some institutions have a much easier time at raising dollars than others, and that's part of the issue here. So the \$53 million which I referred to is separated out amongst those institutions, and I'd be more than happy to get the hon. member the list.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. Just one last time on the access to the future fund: is there no money being put into the fund this year? Is it just going to sit at that current total? Are there any plans for any further money to go into the access to the future fund?

Mr. Horner: Well, as I mentioned to the hon. member earlier in my response, the budget that was brought in this spring does not have any allocation to the access to the future fund; however, should we be in a position to do so from further surplus, the budget does state that we would be taking one-third to savings. It is my view and what

I will be lobbying hard for is to have an increase to the access to the future fund.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Tougas: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to go on to capital projects and capacity now for a few moments. I see that there was an increase of 88 per cent in capital grants this year, which is an impressive number and certainly necessary. We, of course, have a lot of catching up to do after a number of years when our postsecondary education was somewhat on the back burner.

I have a little bit of an understanding of what the minister must go through trying to figure out where the money should go. In my travels around the province I hear at each institution I've been to: "Look what we've got here. We've got this brilliant thing planned. We've got this monumental project here. We've got this. We've got that." Everybody has wonderful projects, and I suppose that if the minister had found another billion dollars floating around somewhere, everybody would be happy. [interjection] Four billion dollars. Okay. That shouldn't be too hard to find.

It does bring up the whole question of the decision-making process of I believe you call it the capital planning process, and I'd like to go into that for a little bit. For instance, SAIT, as you know, has that capital project, the trades and technology complex I believe it's called, and of course NAIT has the proposed Ralph Klein campus. From what I've heard, they believe that they're not getting any money for it. SAIT is not quite sure what's going on there, either, the last time I spoke to them.

Maybe the minister can go on for some time about how the capital planning process works. I'm sorry, not some time. Briefly. I know you could probably go on for a long time about it. Exactly who does call the shots on this? We've heard that institutions can put forward project options, but the ministry, of course, holds the purse strings, and they make the decisions about what is going to be funded, and what isn't. How collaborative is this process? Is there a certain amount of, "Well, NAIT got money this year; SAIT gets money next year." Is there anything along those lines? Does the President of the Treasury Board, say, have any sort of say in how this money is spent, or is this envelope of money that you would have entirely at your disposal?

I'm wondering if maybe the minister can talk a little bit about why the money is kept under such tight control. I know that you don't want to just throw away money all over the place, but at one institution I talked to, one of the representatives said: "Just turn us loose. We can raise money. We can do this if we just get the okay." There seems to be a certain level of frustration. They're waiting. You know, "We're ready. We've got our plans. We're ready to go." But then there's kind of a road block somewhere, and it's generally with the government, waiting for the money to show up.

Secondly, the press release that came out with the budget listed the following major projects as receiving funding over the coming three years: the University of Alberta centennial centre for interdisciplinary science, the University of Calgary digital library, a health resource innovation facility at the University of Alberta, a health research innovation centre at the University of Calgary. I believe the minister mentioned some other ones too. I didn't have time to write them all down. I'm wondering if there are any others in the future that we have not announced or if he can give us sort of like a pecking order, perhaps, like top of the list, some sort of priority?

Mr. Horner: You want me to announce them now?

Mr. Tougas: Yeah, sure. Why not? We've got nothing else to do here.

There's the whole question, of course, of construction cost overruns. As you know, it's getting hugely expensive to build anything here. Could we get to the point where you're just going to say: it's just too expensive to build this thing, and we're just going to have to shut this one down? As I recall, I think it was the previous Premier who said, "Just don't build it if you can't afford it" or something along those lines when he was talking about cities and how they're going to spend money. Is this going to be something that could be happening at some time in the future?

Maybe I'll let the minister answer a little bit of that question, and then I'll have some more supplementary questions on capital projects and capacity.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, the capital planning process and the prioritization of where we're going is a huge task given the number of institutions that we have in the province and the number of institutions that are currently experiencing growth and expanding. There are capital projects under way at pretty much all of our institutions at this point in time in one way, shape, or another or in planning, or the ground is dug.

In essence, we are moving towards the roles and responsibilities and mandate framework that we are working collaboratively with all of the institutions. I know that the hon. member is aware that we had all institutions into Government House in early February to discuss this idea of roles and responsibilities and mandates within a framework of Campus Alberta. As part of that, what we need to do on an annual basis is determine what the need is in terms of the capital, in terms of the spaces. What is industry telling us that the need is out there on the job market, as an example? What is the need in the health workforce strategy? What is the need in government? What is the need for the postsecondaries to offer the right type of programming, geographically, in remote areas perhaps? What's the appropriate need for the institutions in terms of their maintenance? All of those things have to come together for an overall plan for the province.

All of the institutions, then, need to look at their individual plans. Whether this was done in the past or not: I've only been in the post six months, hon. member, so I'm not going to say whether it was or not. Each of those institutions needs to look at their plans in the context of the Campus Alberta approach and the needs that we have throughout the province.

We need to be able to gather information from the students. What are the students telling us through their applications into the system? Once we have all of that information in hand, and we then take a look at the capital plans that have been prepared by the institutions, we're going to get a lot closer in the discussions with the institutions about how they fit into that and then determine whether the plan that they had is going to fit.

The hon. member mentioned NAIT and SAIT. There's no yes to that, and there's no no to it as yet, so perhaps NAIT was a little premature in that regard.

9:30

Having said all of that, we know areas where we need to expand. We know that we need to expand in the apprenticeship program, but are we expanding in the right places? Are the students in the right places? Are they able to access in the right geographic areas? We're going to be moving forward with a lot of that due diligence and have been doing so over the last several months.

The hon. member mentioned some of the programs that we're currently working on. As an example, we have the Bow Valley

expansion that is currently under way. Grant MacEwan College, Robbins health, I mentioned. There's the Keyano College sport and wellness centre, the Lakeland Lloydminster campus expansion. We are working with NAIT, actually, on some expansion of the apprenticeship training, their centre for apprenticeship technologies. We are working on a plan for the northern part of the province for trades expansion. We're working with Olds College on their equine centre of innovation, community learning campus; with Portage College, the Cold Lake campus; with Red Deer College, trades expansion.

Of course, we have a number of other larger projects that were announced, like the Edmonton clinic, the University of Calgary health research innovation centre, which I mentioned earlier, the University of Calgary Taylor digital library, University of Lethbridge Alberta water and environmental science building, and quite a number of other smaller projects, as I'm sure the hon. member can relate to. But in terms of how we develop the plan, that's the process that we are currently involved in parallel with the roles, responsibilities, mandate framework that we're talking about.

The Chair: The hon. member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Concerning deferred maintenance and the problem of the condition of a lot of the buildings, particularly at our universities, if you take the University of Calgary, for instance, they're facing what they believe is a \$300 million deferred maintenance bill. Does the minister accept that that's a roughly accurate number and that there is a serious problem with deferred maintenance or maintenance overall? I'm wondering if the minister can tell us what proportion of the capital budget is going to maintenance, if there is something specifically set aside for that, and is this problem going to get worse before it gets better.

There's a lot of building going on right now, but I'm a little concerned that there's not that much being put into existing buildings. Is this something that the universities and colleges have to take out of their existing budget, or is this something for which we can expect some additional money from the government so that they can catch up and improve the condition of some of the buildings that the students are in right now? While the new buildings are great and they're going to be great when they're finished, there are a lot of problems with some of the existing buildings. I think my friend over here will ask a few questions later on about the situation in Calgary.

I wonder if the minister, again, could tell us what proportion of the capital budget is going to maintenance and if he sees this as a significant long-term problem and what his approach to solving this problem is.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Chairman, one of the priorities that our Premier has enunciated I think very, very well is that deferred maintenance in all areas of the province's infrastructure is a key issue for us to work on. Our budget for the three years on the IMP funding for the various buildings and other areas that are not actually part of the renovation, where we're actually putting dollars into, is about \$107 million over the three years. Do I think that's enough? No. And I think the institutions would probably agree that it needs to be added to.

Again I go back to the budget announcement. Two-thirds of the surplus dollars, if there are surplus dollars, are already budgeted to be put into the capital account mostly for deferred maintenance. It's our intent – and the Premier has said many times – that you can build all the brand new buildings you want, but if you don't take care of the ones that are already out there, you're going to have longer term problems. So we are looking towards the coming years

and getting as much of that deferred maintenance taken care of as we possibly can.

Mr. Tougas: Is there a number in the budget?

Mr. Horner: Yeah. It's \$107 million over three years.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. From the outset of the discussions and questions I want to make it very clear that I am not, nor are any members of my Liberal caucus, suggesting a Peter/Paul scenario, that the U of C should do well at the expense of the U of A, that the University of Lethbridge get more funding than Medicine Hat College, and so on. So I want to put that notion to rest.

I do want to champion the needs of the University of Calgary, which I represent as the MLA for Calgary-Varsity. I had an opportunity to discuss through Public Accounts the concerns – and these were raised as well by Conservative colleagues from Calgary – of the discrepancies in funding between the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. I am very aware that the University of Alberta is an older institution, but I would like to indicate that the University of Calgary has a number of buildings that are now 41 years of age, so that aging infrastructure is definitely a factor in terms of the maintenance that my hon. colleague mentioned previously.

Now, the University of Calgary's difference is basically \$1,200 per student less than what the University of Alberta receives, and when you add up the total student population and multiply it by that \$1,200, the figure you arrive at is close to \$350 million. Acknowledging the fact of age, acknowledging the fact that there are different programs, such as the University of Alberta having a dentistry program, the University of Calgary does need greater support.

In terms of its priorities I had a chance last week during our constituency week to meet with Donna Mastel, government relations, and Roman Cooney, who is a strong advocate of the University of Calgary. They asked me to bring forward their top priority, and that is \$283 million for 600,000 square feet for the ISEEE building, and that's the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy, and an additional \$40 million for phase 1 of the experiential learning centre to address critical science lab safety deficiencies. Among the discussions we had was the fact that the province has suggested that we would have 15,000 new spaces by this fall and 60,000 new spaces overall throughout all the postsecondary institutions by 2020. Any assurances that I could bring back to the University of Calgary with regard to the acknowledgement of the \$350 million portion of their \$1.5 billion needs list – and notice that I didn't call it a wish list; I called it a needs list – would be very appreciated.

I would also like to bring forward questions about the downtown campus concept. The University of Calgary, Mount Royal, Bow Valley College, and SAIT have all expressed a desire to have a combined sort of education shopping mall, basically, in downtown Calgary. Lance Carlson, who represents the Alberta College of Art and Design, wants to preserve the uniqueness of his academic college of art but would like to be in an area where potentially shared facilities like food services could be shared.

Another one of the exciting parts of this downtown campus, which hopefully the government will support, is the idea of student dormitories. If we have a sufficiently large high-rise of dormitories, that would not only address the student housing issues, provide extra classroom space, which is absolutely essential, but it could also be a partial answer to the affordable housing crisis by having dormito-

ries partially occupied as affordable housing for not only the students but people working and living in the downtown area.

9:40

There has also been recent discussion about extending degree-granting capabilities to Mount Royal. In general the Liberal Party supports the idea of Mount Royal university as well as Mount Royal College, but there is the minimum expectation that the peer review processes that go into establishing the academic credentials be met. In discussions, for example, at Grant MacEwan, Grant MacEwan welcomed 32 different peer reviews to support their applied degree programs, and I'm sure that Mount Royal would undertake a similar circumstance.

I know that both Mount Royal and Grant MacEwan, for example, are much needed for nursing – we have a medical shortage – so any check-offs, any information I can bring back with regard to the downtown campus, with regard to the \$350 or \$1,200 per head discrepancies, and any future addressing of those problems, either in this budget or projected budgets, I would be very pleased to hear and look forward to.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I welcome the participation of the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. Certainly, I've had a number of discussions with the institutions in Calgary, and in terms of this issue around taking the total amount of grants, the total number of students, dividing it up, and then making the comparison, I'm sure the hon. member would agree that the funding, the mechanisms by which we teach, the course load that they take are all very, very complicated. It would be very simplistic to do that. It comes out with a nice easy number, but it doesn't make any sense. It's not a valid number.

One of the problems that you have is that the U of A has a number of high-cost programs that, quite frankly, are not even offered at the U of C, which contribute to the higher cost per student. An example would be dentistry at \$69,000 per FLE. Agriculture is even at \$17,000 per FLE and forestry at \$23,600. I'm sure that the hon. member would agree that you can't take that and just compare it straight across. The other thing is there are more students at the U of A, considerably more students. You mentioned the older buildings at the U of A, and that is a concern, given the maintenance costs of those buildings and their replacement. About 34 per cent of the U of A's buildings were built before 1960 and only about 17 per cent on the Calgary campus.

That's not to say that Calgary doesn't need more spots. It does. We are working with the University of Calgary, with Mount Royal College. We just did some announcements there earlier this year as well as with Bow Valley on their expansions. In fact, Bow Valley College right now is in phase 1 of what will turn out to be something in the range of a \$58 million expansion. We have already dollars set aside for their expansion into phase 2. Obviously, as has been mentioned in the House earlier, there may have to be a little bit of reconsideration of what that expansion might be, given current costs. But there's already an allocated amount for Bow Valley to expand there.

Certainly, when you look at the ISEEE building, I agree. It's certainly one of the higher priorities in our department right now, trying to figure out how best to see how we might be able to work together with the U of C and perhaps other partners in bringing forward a solution to their issue.

The hon. member mentioned the urban campus. Really, again, I want to go back to how we are planning on working with the

institutions in terms of: let's identify what the need is; let's identify what our current inventory is; then let's identify how we fill those gaps, whether that be by infrastructure or by spots. We have roughly around 140,000, 150,000 students participating in our postsecondary system today. That's a lot of spots, and the reality is: is saying that we're going to create a certain number of spots the right way to go, or is it better to do it in a collaborative, co-operative method, with all the institutions sitting at the table helping us plan what the future of Campus Alberta is going to look like?

The urban campus is a very interesting concept. How it fits into that Campus Alberta approach and the entire plan is what we're working on right now. It looks like there's certainly some opportunity there for P3s. You mentioned the housing. I think there's a prime opportunity there for some energetic institutions to look at the possibility of creating some housing spaces, student dormitories, through a P3 opportunity.

The hon. member mentioned Mount Royal College and the degree granting that they've been requesting. I'm sure he's aware that they do have now degree-granting capabilities. In fact, they are on a pathway that I think will fulfill their desires as we are trying to create the framework around which the institutions will define their niche and define their role and define what they're going to do for this Legislature because this government and we as representatives are watching the dollars that we send to those institutions. It has to be based on what the students need and what Alberta needs. I think Mount Royal College is agreeable to working with us in that way and on the pathway.

He may also be aware that earlier this year we announced 200 new nursing spots at Mount Royal College as well as an additional 200 spots at Grant MacEwan. We are working to address the space requirements in the health care sector, and Mount Royal and Grant MacEwan and other institutions around the province are all playing a part in that. Again, it goes to that holistic Campus Alberta approach, looking to what is the need for the province and then trying to meet that as a collective group, keeping some autonomy in each of those institutions so they can grow and flourish in a direction that their boards want them to go.

The other side of this. The hon. member mentioned, you know, peer reviews and this sort of thing. My goal is to ensure that we have a seamless, highly transferable system in play for our students that is high quality, that's affordable. Those are some pretty heavy goals. The department that I have is well suited to hit those goals because we have a great team, and we have a good plan in place in terms of these roles and responsibilities.

One last comment on the funding side of it. I think, you know, the hon. member would agree that it's difficult to make that kind of comparison between U of A and U of C, but having said that, we have a government funding to postsecondary review every five years. In 2005 that review did lead to an equity readjustment for several institutions, including the University of Calgary. There was an equity adjustment at that time of about \$2.7 million in ongoing funding.

Having said that, in our roles and responsibilities framework and those goals that we set out and the needs analysis and a lot of the stuff that we're talking about moving towards as a group with the institutions, I think it's generally accepted that we're going to have to look at the overall way that we fund institutions today and see if that's going to meet the needs of tomorrow in the Campus Alberta framework. I have given the commitment to a number of the institutions that we are more than willing to take a look at that and see if there's a better way for us to do things.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Since we do have some members of the University of Alberta Students' Union here, I'd like to ask a few questions about student finances now. Goal 1 of the business plan states that a desired outcome is: "Financial need is not a barrier to participating in the advanced learning system, and financial assistance is available to students to support a seamless system." I'd like to know from the minister: how far away do you think the system is from achieving this outcome, where financial need is no longer a barrier? It seems to me that it's always going to be a barrier at some point. Is it really an attainable goal?

The government has also made some moves towards improving student tuition affordability. Unfortunately, tuition fees remain in regulation, not legislation. I know that this is not strictly a budget item, but is there any interest on the government side in returning tuition to legislation? I was told by some students that during your party's leadership campaign the current Premier expressed an interest to returning tuition to legislation, at least as a possibility. I'm wondering if you could address that as well.

I have a question about specific line items in the budget. Line 3.0.3, bursaries and grants: last year it was apparently underspent by several millions of dollars; only 70 per cent of the budgeted amount was spent. Line 3.0.4, student loan relief benefit: less than half of the budgeted amount was spent. I'm wondering if the minister has any thoughts as to why this money is going unused. Is it a matter of not promoting it properly, or is it just that people don't know it's there? It's curious to me that there would be money left over in something that is as important as that.

Since I do have a number of other topics that I'd like to cover, and the Member for Calgary-Varsity also has some other questions, I think I'd just like to end right there and see if I could get some answers from you on those questions.

9:50

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The affordability framework came forward, and in my meetings with the students' union executives, CAUS and ACTISEC, I asked them: what would be the most important things that we could do? We can't do it all at once. I think everyone would recognize that some things take some time. This is the first year of a three-year plan on the affordability framework, and I think we've come quite a ways. One of the things that they told me was: "The cost of living hasn't been changed in a long, long time. You need to bump it up, and it needs to be more than 10 per cent." We did that.

The other thing that we talked about is that, you know, sometimes there are stupid little rules out there. As a father of two individuals who are either going or have gone to a postsecondary, I knew that they had to drive on the roads a fair bit. It didn't make a lot of sense to me that we would limit students to driving old junkers because I guess that didn't denote a need or something to that effect. I thought it was a stupid rule anyway, so we got rid of that, which the students also agreed with me on.

We introduced an increase to the annual student loan limits. It's important to note in Alberta the remission rate that we use on the loans, where it's quite likely and quite feasible that at the end of a student's student career, the loans that they're going to be left with are only, actually, the federal portion, which we have really no control over. A lot of what we provide is in the bursaries and the grants program.

Tuition in regulation versus legislation. I've talked to all of the student councils about that and talked to them about some of the reasons why I think maybe that's not such a bad idea. Either way

I've given them a very firm commitment from this ministry that if there was ever going to be some consideration to changing the way we're doing things now, they would be definitely consulted in that respect. I think that when one looks at tuition and the tuition policy that we have today, it will only get better and better and better in Alberta as other jurisdictions start to surpass us even more than they have already given the limit to the increase that we've done, whereas in other provinces and other jurisdictions there are no limits, and things have been moving quite steadily onward.

The hon. member brings up an interesting point on the student relief and the unused portions of that relief. All of the changes in the affordability framework that we're working on are to actually help students see that as a good program. An investment in one's education is the best investment they will ever make in their lifetime. Certainly, if we have a way to help them make that investment, we want to do that.

The student relief program: quite frankly, if the students don't apply for it, it goes unused. That is what has happened in some cases in some years. You see ebbs and flows in how it works. We had a limited amount of uptake in some of these programs. Granted, the strong economy may have something to do with that. There may be other areas of finance that students are accessing, and they may feel that perhaps it was too complicated and didn't want to get involved in it. We're working on the entire process of applying for the student loan. I'm actually quite excited by some of the things that I've seen in terms of the IT that we're going to employ to help students understand better their needs analysis that's done by the student finance system.

Again, hon. member, this is a joint project that we're working on with the federal government, and we have to be cognizant of what they want just as much as what we want and certainly be cognizant of what's easiest for the students.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. Just going back to the cost-of-living increase that you discussed earlier, is this something that we can expect to see on a regular basis? Are there annual reviews of the amount of money for students that you were talking about before, or is this kind of a one-time thing? Do you look at it every two or three years, every year? Can you just expand a little bit on that, please?

Mr. Horner: Well, obviously, Mr. Chairman, in the affordability framework report that came forward, 14 per cent was not the number that was in the report. The cost-of-living increase: obviously, in Alberta the cost of living is going up, and I would like to see that increased. We'll have to see, going through the next budget process, how successful we are at doing that. But I also think there are other ways we might be able to help students as well that were in the affordability framework, and I would like to introduce some of those as well, if I can, in our next two- and three-year plan so that we get a balance of the entire affordability framework and not just concentrate on one certain thing. We want to get a balance so that we catch as many of those students in need as we possibly can.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Just one of the benefits of the urban campus that I didn't previously refer to is the fact that not only would it provide more spaces for students and have that flexibility and interaction from one institution to another, as you mentioned, with the Campus Alberta concept; it would provide a possibility of allowing students who did not necessarily have the high grade point

averages to have an opportunity to receive a postsecondary education.

What's happening right now with a number of our university requirements is that they're becoming so high as to be almost to the point of elitist, and we're losing a lot of students who have rounded capabilities as opposed to strictly a one-sided grade point average. This isn't just a problem that the University of Calgary is facing although it has been noted that for the last couple of years running that 20 to 25 per cent of eligible students who could afford the tuition and who had the high grades were forced to turn away.

Can the minister give me some kind of sense as to how close to that 15,000 goal that was announced three years ago the government is approaching, and are we on track with our current policies to reach that 60,000 by 2020? Is that still the plan?

Mr. Horner: Well, one has to remember that apprenticeship spaces are also involved in there and that whole side of it. In fact, when you include apprenticeship spaces in all the things that we're doing, we are on track.

I want to go back to what I was talking about a little bit earlier, Mr. Chairman, and that is that we need to develop these spaces and the infrastructure plans and the capital plans based on the need of the province. Yes, it's true that we need more spaces in Calgary, and we're working on that. Undergraduate spaces do need to be expanded, but do they need to be expanded at the universities, or do we need to expand the entire system and feed into that so that the universities can work on the plans that they have and students have access in more than one place?

The hon. member mentioned Mount Royal College, which I don't think is one of the partners in the urban campus at this point in time.

An Hon. Member: They've been on and off.

Mr. Horner: As the member says, they've kind of been on and off on that one.

It's an interesting concept, and there are capital dollars that are out there for other projects that could conceivably – if the institutions decided that that was where they wanted to go, we could sit down and make a deal in that respect too. But having said that, I'm interested in following up on their discussions. I'm interested in the P3 opportunities that the urban campus may present, and over a long period of time perhaps that's an answer.

Twenty-five per cent of eligible students forced to turn away is a difficult thing for me to agree to because I'm not sure where they went. How many of that 25 per cent actually chose a different institution? It's very difficult for us to determine that right now. All we can say is that an offer was made by the institution and the student didn't accept, or the student made an application and there weren't enough spaces. But did that student get turned away, or did that student actually go to another place? Surprisingly enough, at certain times of the year all of a sudden there are spaces open in different places because students didn't go when they said they were going to go or, you know, life changes.

I think that given the new system that we're talking about putting in place in terms of applications, the APAS system, we need to expand that. We need to bring it more in line with what we're talking about in terms of the Campus Alberta approach. We need to ensure that the information goes both ways because it would be critical information for government and for the institutions to do that planning, to do that infrastructure and space planning, if we have an idea as to what the flow is actually doing. If we can get that flow properly documented and the information back and not just to government but to the institutions as well, it'll help us in planning

what we need to do in the future as well as the industry telling us how fast they're filling up their needs so that we can be flexible in how we build the capacity around the Campus Alberta approach. I think it's very, very important that we follow up on those things because remember that tuition is based on cost, and if we can reduce the cost in our postsecondary system, that will help keep tuition down.

10:00

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, but I will now invite officials to leave the Assembly so the committee may rise and report.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(b) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under its consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Solicitor General and Public Security, Justice and Attorney General, and

Advanced Education and Technology relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Acting Government House Leader.

Ms Evans: Well, thank you very much. We've had a very productive evening, excellent presentations, and I would move now that we adjourn and reconvene tomorrow afternoon at 1 o'clock.

[Motion carried; at 10:03 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 29, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/29

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning you hosted the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association bursary and essay contest award presentation ceremony in the Legislature Building. The bursaries are presented annually by the Alberta branch of the CPA to young people from TUXIS, Alberta Girl's Parliament, and the grade 6 essay contest. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the award winners and their guests, who are seated in your gallery. I would ask that the guests rise as I call their names.

The first-place CPA essay contest winner, Allyson Kupchenko from Strathcona, and her parents, John and Christine Kupchenko, grandmother Jutta Ferko, brother Mitch Kupchenko, and Candy and Kailee Dilley, family friends.

The third-place CPA essay contest winner, Emma Maria Van Loon from the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock constituency, and her mother, Ilse Van Loon, siblings Anne, Vincent, and Lisa, and family friends Jack and Alice Burlet from Barrhead.

The Alberta Girls' Parliament recipients are Rebecca Bootsman from Edmonton-Centre and her mother, Heather Nickless; Amanda Garrow of Calgary-Foothills and her parents, Pam and Curtis Garrow, and sister Naddison Garrow. They are accompanied by their adviser, Ms Edie Jubenville.

The TUXIS organization is represented by Mr. Tim Beechey, chairman of TUXIS.

Please give our guests the very warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A little bit earlier today I had the pleasure of having my picture taken with 50 of Alberta's brightest and best students. They are from the Calmar school, and they've come to visit us in the Legislature today. They're actually going around collecting autographs from some of the MLAs and talking about our favourite hockey teams. But let me tell you something else, and that is that they're accompanied by one of their teachers, Mrs. Jeanette Wilson, who is the mother of page Luke Wilson and former page Natalie Wilson. Also along with the 50 students is Mrs. Angie Podgurny, Mrs. Kathleen Sikliski, Mrs. Kathy Timmons, Mrs. Tammy Vandenberghe, Mr. Troy Mutch, Mrs. Lori Workun, Mrs. Randy Doolittle, Mrs. Tania Gartner, and Ms Heidi Hough. I would ask them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly Jon Friel. Jon Friel was born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. He left Moose Jaw and went to the University of Saskatchewan, where he was a linebacker for the University of Saskatchewan Huskies, and much to his mother's surprise he also excelled at academics. He has been retired for 32 years from Corrections Canada and now runs a private practice as a psychologist. He is still active as a hockey player in Sherwood Park. Dr. Friel is married. He's a proud grandfather of a grandson and granddaughter. He lives in Sherwood Park. He shops frequently at Toys "R" Us. In the last election he got 4,115 votes. Dr. Friel is in the members' gallery, and I would ask him to now rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 35 bright grade 6 students from St. Richard elementary school in my riding, accompanied by their teachers Roxanne Rachinski and Elizabeth Evaristo. They are all seated in the public gallery. I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. I request them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled my constituency assistant in Strathcona constituency, Laurette Strong, and the student working with us during the summertime, a student of the U of A political science program, Brittney Timperley. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House three people from my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora: Mary Ladouceur, Eunice Minkler, and Norma Bower. They are back again. They were here a few weeks ago. They are still concerned about the unacceptable high increase in rents in our community. I invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure as well to reintroduce a guest who was here a couple of weeks ago to hear her questions asked during the debate of Bill 34, and she's back again to follow up on that visit: Ms Marilyn Sjulstad, from the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. She's rising in the public gallery, and I would ask all members to give her the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three individuals who care for children and families in Alberta. The first is Anita Moore, board chair for Hospitals and Community Daycare

in Edmonton; the second is Cyndi Deloyer, Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society; and finally, Nancy Ranu, Rainbow daycare society, Edmonton. I'd like them to rise and please accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Richard Yiu and John Hladik. Richard and John are Palace Casino workers entering their 263rd day on strike. These Alberta workers have been on strike due in part to this government's unwillingness to create labour legislation that protects workers from unfair employers.

Richard has been at the Palace Casino for five years as a card dealer. He's a father of one daughter and one son. He works full-time at the casino, and in his off time he enjoys visiting other casinos and partaking in gaming.

John has worked at the casino for five years as a dealer. John has been active in community sports throughout his life but in the last few years has decided to relax a bit and enjoy his time a little bit more and take his mind off his trouble with a good book.

They are joined by UFCW 401 representative Don Crisall, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Little Bow, you have guests coming a little later?

Mr. McFarland: Yes.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Asian Dinner for the Homeless

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about an event at the Calgary Drop-in & Rehab Centre. On the occasion of the Asian Heritage Month of May a group of caring Albertans organized a taste of Asia dinner for the homeless. I took only a small part in it, so I want to thank those who organized this special dinner: Kim Hoang, Manh Hong Nguyen, Eric Sit, Vicky Hong, Kim Yoon, Jason Klinck, Evelyn and Doug Porter, Gwendoline Cham, Amtul and Naem Khan, and many individual volunteers, particularly from the MSBCA Association, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, and the Calgary Centre for Newcomers.

We served meals and performed musical entertainment for 1,300 homeless Albertans. I did partake in the meals and sang a couple of songs along with our homeless guests. It was an uplifting feeling for all of us who were there.

1:10

Mr. Speaker, I would like to share with you what is written about the homeless.

Homelessness has many faces. When visible, homelessness stands on street corners and panhandles, huddles beneath blankets in city parks or digs through garbage bins looking for bottles.

Sometimes, homelessness is not visible. A cousin couch surfs for a few weeks after leaving his girlfriend or losing his job. A woman hides [away] at a friend's while trying to get out of an abusive relationship. A friend moves from the other side of the country and needs a place to stay until he/she can find a job and afford a place to live.

Homelessness has many causes. Addictions, mental [illness], life crises, illness, bad decisions, escalating rent, conversion of rental

units into condominiums, economic booms leading to escalating rents and urban redevelopment.

Homelessness is numbing. It rips away self-esteem, destroys hope and breaks apart families.

I should note that the funding . . .

The Speaker: And I think, hon. member, we're going to thank you and move on to the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

4-D Human Atlas Project

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise to share a truly inspirational story based right here in Alberta. Last week Dr. Christoph Sensen and his team in Calgary unveiled a stunning new application of a technology which will benefit people around the world and will continue to move our province to the forefront of the international technology landscape. The 4-D human atlas project is a federal/provincial collaboration which is actually three provincial success stories in one. KasterStener Publications, a Red Deer company, and the WEPA team, based at the U of C, have employed the computer programming language Java 3D, which was created by a Calgarian, James Gosling, to convert anatomical and graphic details in ways that clinicians have only dreamed about.

Mr. Speaker, I witnessed the technology myself last week, and I can tell you that even when you see it with your own eyes, it's almost impossible to believe. Not only are the images in 3-D; they are also life sized and on four screens. The detail is 10 times clearer than any other system on Earth, and the images are customized to each individual's unique DNA. Then the fourth dimension is added, and the resultant demonstration of what happens to each body system and between each system when exposed to pharmaceuticals, illicit drugs, and disease over time will change the way we conduct research. Just as critical is the ability to evaluate treatment options in conditions like Alzheimer's, diabetes, and cancer, and there are amazing surgical applications as well. For example, doctors can actually practise open-heart surgery on a patient without ever even touching them.

This incredible project is evidence of what can be done in this province when government, industry, and academic interests collaborate for the advancement of science and technology as we work together to improve the quality of life for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Arts Awards

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the arts contribute enormously to the cultural, educational, social, and economic well-being of our province, yet the artists, the arts organizations, their staff and volunteers, sometimes do go underrecognized for the contributions they make. However, I'm very pleased that one of the top priorities for our new government is additional recognition of and support for the arts, including new initiatives and increased funding for the arts as announced recently by our Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

We also have arts scholarships that are presented on an annual basis on behalf of the province, such as the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta arts awards program, which was created to celebrate excellence in the arts and to underline the importance of the arts in Alberta.

Today it's my great pleasure to recognize the 2007 winners of the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta arts awards, which were presented in Lloydminster last Saturday. I know that our hon. President of the Treasury Board, who is also the MLA for Vermilion-Lloydminster,

was in attendance along with the special guest, the Lieutenant Governor, to celebrate this occasion.

This year's recipients were Greg Hollingshead, Edmonton author and professor emeritus at the University of Alberta; One Yellow Rabbit, a Calgary ensemble of theatre artists; Tom and Isobel Rolston, the Banff Centre's husband and wife musical team. Each of these artists or artist groups received a cheque for \$30,000 in recognition of their outstanding achievements and significant contributions to the arts, and each one of them spoke very glowingly about being an artist in Alberta.

Additional shortlisted artists included Bob Baker, the artistic director of Edmonton's Citadel Theatre; Rudy Wiebe, an Edmonton writer and editor; and Sharon Pollock, a Calgary author and playwright. Each of these artists received a cheque for \$5,000.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all Members of the Legislative Assembly join me in congratulating these very creative Albertans for their artistic skills, for what they do to open our eyes to our new perspectives, and perhaps most importantly for their dedication to enriching our lives, which contributes to the quality of life in Alberta.

Child Care Professionals

Mrs. Mather: Mr. Speaker, I draw the attention of my fellow members to child care professionals. Their duties place them in loco parentis, as teachers are. Unlike teachers they have no professional act to secure their standing. What they do is indispensable, yet we dismiss it as babysitting.

Recognition of professional child care goes back at least as far as the agreement between the pharaoh's daughter and Moses' mother. Many of the first child care workers were slaves. Alexander the Great expressed appreciation and admiration for the slave who reared him. A century ago many Americans paid tribute to the black nannies who brought them up, whose lot was little better than slaves.

In the movie *Why Shoot the Teacher?* we see the disrespectful way many teachers were treated during the Depression. In Alberta it took a new government led by a teacher to introduce legislation that treated teachers fairly.

A historical footnote. The six-sided Star of David is linked to a leader who began as a shepherd. Shepherds were looked down on then. The sophisticated considered them coarse. David's brothers, who were soldiers, thought him inferior. When a prophet came for his sons, David's father didn't include him. When asked, "Are these all your sons?" he replied, "There's one more with the sheep." The Hebrews' greatest king was a shepherd, who raised the status of shepherd from casual labourer to strong leader.

I have a challenge for the leader of our government, who carries with pride his profession as one who cares for the land. I urge him to show a similar regard for those who care for children. If he does, future Albertans may regard him as one who established the rule of heart and hand over the demands of the marketplace.

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

Affordable Student Housing

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The preparation of a qualified workforce should be a strategic goal for the future development of this province. However, under the policies of this government the university participation rate of about 16 per cent has remained the lowest in the country for several years. This is largely a result of the growing costs of pursuing postsecondary education in this province, and the cost of housing accounts for a large part of that increase.

When the government refused to adopt rent control guidelines, it left many Albertans unprotected, including thousands of students who are facing excessive rent increases all over the province.

Mr. Speaker, the average debt of an Alberta graduate is approximately \$20,000. The decision of the government not to control rent increases will only add to the burden that students and their families already bear. Many students come from rural areas and depend on affordable housing in the city. Student organizations have repeatedly complained about the shortage of housing appropriate to the needs of students. An average Albertan who wants to attend university or college and who lives away from home has few options to finance her or his education and is disproportionately likely to live below the poverty line.

Student loans are often the only means to handle the ever-escalating costs of pursuing higher education. As we know, these loans are controlled by a limit on the total amount and the living allowance. A recent increase of 14 per cent in the monthly living allowance can hardly offset exorbitant rent increases that await tens of thousands of postsecondary students as they prepare to return to school at the end of August. Students not only will face immediate hardship; they will be even more indebted in the long run when they graduate.

Instead of forcing large numbers of Albertans to incur massive debts, Mr. Speaker, the government should provide conditions for individuals to pursue an affordable higher education. Alleviating the student housing crunch and preventing rent gouging are vital measures to build a modern and ready-for-the-future workforce.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

U of A Augustana Faculty Convocation

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Sunday I had the great pleasure to attend and be the guest speaker at the University of Alberta Augustana faculty's annual convocation in Camrose. This was a special opportunity for me to reminisce on Augustana's history as I was a faculty member and administrator at Augustana for 30 years and prior to that a student.

This year 154 students received bachelor's degrees in arts, science, management, and music. Hundreds of these students' families, friends, and faculty were in attendance at Augustana's convocation hall. It was Augustana's third convocation under the University of Alberta banner.

1:20

Natalie Rayment, a bachelor of music graduate, received the Augustana medal during the ceremony. This medal is the highest academic honour at Augustana and is given to a student for academic excellence and outstanding campus leadership.

As I have mentioned in this Assembly before, Augustana is undergoing a period of growth and construction as a result of its merger with the University of Alberta. For example, Augustana is an important partner in the Camrose regional sport development centre, which will open this fall.

Most important to Augustana's growth is the construction of a new library, which is well under way, the groundbreaking having taken place last month. The library project will extend into the construction of the Augustana forum, which will contain student space, classrooms, and administrative offices. The new library and the forum project have been long awaited and dreamed about on campus for decades. They are both integral to the future of Augustana and will support additional students in the decades to come.

I am very pleased to say that our government is committed to completion of both facilities. This commitment is an important part of the fulfillment of the merger agreement between Augustana and the University of Alberta, which has put Augustana on firm footing for its second century, beginning in 2010.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, just a brief reminder that on your desks I've provided all of you a notice of an event that will take place tomorrow morning, Wednesday, May 30, at 9:30 in the Legislature rotunda. We'll make available to the public of Alberta a series of books that we've been working on for five years called the Centennial Series. Over 180 people have now indicated their intent to be present, so if hon. members choose to come, would you kindly convey your availability to my office later this afternoon so we'll have sufficient chairs.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to table Alberta's Promise 2006 report to the community, highlighting the achievements of Alberta's Promise partnerships created last year. As chair I'm proud to report that to date there are more than 1,000 partners across this province – last year about 600; we gained 400 – all working together to do more work for Alberta's children and youth. Our young people are the most visible beneficiaries of the partnerships established. Communities, service clubs, and businesses also benefit through their involvement. This report has been distributed to media throughout the province and is available online as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table responses to questions raised during the debate of Government Motion 20 on May 15. As well, I'm tabling responses to questions raised during Committee of Supply for Agriculture and Food on May 17, 2007.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I table responses to the questions on May 8 of the Committee of Supply with regard to Treasury Board.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings today. The first is an e-mail from July 31, 2006. This e-mail is from individuals in the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, and it's regarding the proposed east Balzac development area.

The second tabling is also from July 31, 2006, and it's an e-mail from Infrastructure and Transportation officials. It's a rejection of money for the east Balzac development area from that department.

The third tabling I have is a memorandum from Alberta Agriculture and Food, dated January 22, 2007. It's in regard to the grant agreement with the municipal district of Rocky View No. 44 for \$8.2 million.

The fourth tabling I have is a letter from the hon. minister of agriculture, food and rural development, dated August 16, 2006, and it's regarding the grant assistance, the approval of the \$8.2 million for an industrial wastewater infrastructure project.

My last tabling is a project evaluation report in regard to the racetrack that's going to be constructed north of Calgary at Balzac.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and table five copies of documents: an interoffice memorandum, a briefing note to the deputy minister, and correspondence between the deputy ministers of agriculture, food, and rural development and Alberta Finance dated 2006 related to the Balzac equine centre.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of correspondence from a constituent, Kristine Jassman, who notes that she's a single mother on assistance, and she's trying to start a day home. Her hopes for that were dashed when Capital Housing informed her that the program they were running where they sold off social housing – they decided to tear that particular building down and rebuild a new one starting at \$250,000 as a buy-in price. She noted that a rent cap would have been a prudent thing to do for this government.

My second tabling is also from a constituent, David Gurnett, who notes that as a renter whose rent has risen 54 per cent in the last year, he hopes that the government would consider placing a limit on the amount of rent increase as well as the number of rent increases.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of an e-mail from Stephen Renaud, a member of my constituency, stating:

It is absolutely outrageous that housing has become so unaffordable to many Albertans. Rents are out of control. Too many landlords are taking advantage of the situation and boosting rents to unconscionable levels. This is worse than loan sharking!

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is the 2006 annual report for the Edmonton Food Bank.

The second is the Edmonton Food Bank's Plant a Row Grow a Row instruction pamphlet, which draws attention to the press conference and such we had this morning, planting a row for food.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five sets of tablings reflecting the importance of recognizing and supporting Alberta's children. The first is a handout entitled Know the Bow, that I received last week from students at University elementary school in Calgary-Varsity as part of their SEEDS water conservation recognition assembly. Of the over a million conservation actions taken by children across Canada, Alberta kids are leading the way.

My second tabling, presented to me by grade 3 and 4 UES students, is a series of letters sent to the SRD minister appealing to the government to protect Alberta's endangered species, including the grizzly bear. The letters were authored by Kyran Lackan, Matthew Hunter, Meghan Mehra, Dana Murphy, and Jennifer Omoregie.

My third set of tablings consists of the 2006 annual report for Alberta's Breakfast for Learning, which notes among many high-

lights achievements of having last year served 1,853,379 student meals, an increase of 22 per cent over the previous year, and also noted that 791 individuals volunteer daily to make the program a success.

My fourth tabling is the launch of the Fuel up with Vegetables & Fruit handbook sponsored by the Edmonton Oilers community association. Also worthy of note is that Calgary-based Enmax has come on board in a big way this year to help feed Alberta's children.

My fifth and final tabling is a pamphlet entitled The Breakfast Club, Vegreville's school snack program, which, together with an award handed to the Vermilion breakfast support group, highlights the fact that child hunger in Alberta is not an urban anomaly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies from the Alberta Food Bank Network Association, its 2006 annual report. It highlights the impact that the food bank has not only on city but on rural folks within Alberta.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, pursuant to the Workers' Compensation Act the Workers' Compensation Board 2006 annual report; responses to questions raised by Mr. MacDonald, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and Dr. Miller, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, on May 15, 2007, the Department of Employment, Immigration and Industry 2007-08 main estimates debate; and the Consulting Engineers of Alberta 2006-2007 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Snelgrove, Minister of Service Alberta, pursuant to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act the freedom of information and protection of privacy annual report 2005-2006.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Red Deer River Water Transfer

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was a time when the Premier shared our deep concerns about a proposed water transfer from the Red Deer River to the Balzac megamall and racetrack facility. He went so far as to call it ridiculous, and he promised to get to the bottom of it. We're still waiting. Now the Premier and his ministers hide behind due process in trying to explain what's taking so long on the water licence decision. This process was supposed to have been completed last fall, but it's been delayed and delayed and delayed. To the Premier: why has the decision on the water transfer not been made yet?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, my information is that the MD pulled the request to apply for a licence. They delayed it, and that's where the matter sits today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again. It's almost four months now since we submitted our FOIP request for

Balzac-related documents to Alberta Environment. The information the Premier just shared with us about the MD pulling the water licence request is certainly interesting, but it's difficult to follow that up when you don't have all the supporting documentation. We are short some 1,700 pages of materials that are being hidden from the public. Will the Premier admit that the release of these documents is being delayed until after this legislative session and the provincial by-elections are over?

Mr. Stelmach: No. It's more of the unfounded allegations. Even yesterday if you really read the *Hansard*, it's like: more evidence. What evidence? A whole bunch of e-mails. Then you follow up today, which I could on every question that was raised. You know, the meeting with the then minister of infrastructure: the meeting was not about water; it was about an entrance and exit off highway 2 to the development. But would they say that in the House? No. You've got to raise that allegation to get everybody watching Alberta: oh, maybe there is something behind this. They continue to do that. We gave them all the FOIP documents; they've had them now for a considerable amount of time. Then the other member starts tabling them. Give them back to the Legislature. Well, you've got all the documents. What are you tabling them for?

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, that's only a partial fulfillment of his promise to respond to all the allegations yesterday. We do not have those FOIP documents. Let's not forget that the main issue here is that the government has been so supportive of a project that's dependent on taking water from the Red Deer River to service a horse-racing track. Let's not forget that the people in the Red Deer River subbasin were never consulted by the government, that the government was very secretive about the water licence application from the start. The simple fact is that they don't want the people of Drumheller, Stettler, Red Deer to know what they were up to. To the Premier: will the Premier direct his government to release the 1,700 pages of FOIP material that have not been released yet so the public can see what his government is up to?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, part of the information that this critic will not ever say to the public is that notwithstanding the application that has been pulled for the Balzac development, there is water that flows through a pipeline through three communities: Beiseker, Irricana, and Acme. There is water flowing through those communities. It's like they think this is just some big, new decision that was supposed to happen. All the allegations made in this House are totally unfounded. The application has been pulled by the MD. I suspect they're looking for, perhaps, other sources of water, but that's up to them.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Conservatives have continually denied any involvement in any aspect of this Balzac project, yet it's clear they have been involved up to their eyeballs in every single aspect of this project at every step along the way. Case in point: documents obtained from the Ministry of Finance reveal a high level of support for funding for the Balzac equine centre through the new rural development project fund in July 2006. A couple of problems with that: the new fund was supposed to operate at arm's length from government, and its funding process hadn't even been announced. To the Premier: is this high-level support for funding related to the merits of the project, or is it really about your government's ties to the horse-racing industry? Let's compare oranges to oranges, not oranges to road apples.

Mr. Stelmach: Here again they're trying to twist information more to excite individuals. Any grant program is fully accessible by either those municipalities or whoever can apply for those grant programs. In any application with respect to water there are programs available under various ministries. The number one issue here is: no money unless there is a water licence that's been approved. If there are no approvals, there's no money going to anybody. I'm going to repeat that again. If the MD wants to put the application forward and if it's approved, then money flows. But there is no application before it – they withdrew it – and no money flowing to anybody.

Mr. Taylor: Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, there was much talk about money flowing.

This same letter between the deputy ministers of Finance and Agriculture indicates that the assistant deputy minister of agriculture has committed to keeping representatives from Olds College "advised of the status of the corporation's developments to ensure that the college has opportunity to best position the initiative for appropriate support from the corporation." That would be the rural development project fund corporation. Does the Premier expect Albertans to believe that this support at the highest levels of government wouldn't influence the decision of a supposedly arm's-length funding agency?

Mr. Stelmach: That, Mr. Speaker, again doesn't read all the way down the e-mail. Those are the tricks that they try and pull in this particular House: always talking about having evidence, all kinds of evidence, but they haven't been able to prove anything or even deliver anything substantial, just parts of e-mails, making allegations against members of this government and members of other communities, especially those of the MD of Rocky View, totally unsubstantiated and misleading. Here's the proof. You have the evidence. Provide it right now. You want to read more e-mails; go ahead. They already have them because he tabled them earlier.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the evidence has been tabled. I didn't know that we could use visual aids in the House.

The Speaker: *Hansard* is not a visual aid.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Internal briefing notes indicate that Olds College was promoting the Balzac equine centre as – and you might want to pause to hear this – a legacy for the Deputy Premier. This would be the former Member for Drumheller-Stettler. They wanted to honour her past and continued commitments to the equine industry. They also indicated that because of prior meetings with the Deputy Minister of Finance the project would have "good potential to obtain support." The question everyone wants to know from the Premier is this: what did your government then and why does your government now continue to completely support a project that will draw its water from the Red Deer River over the objections of the people in southern Alberta? Why are you trying to steal their water?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, totally wrong information brought forward by the critic. They'll continue to do that, I guess, because they want to make some kind of a point, but they don't have any evidence to present. The application has been withdrawn by the MD of Rocky View. There's no money flowing to any authority. You know, what I hear from the opposition is that ministers are not allowed to meet with any potential developers, any Albertans with

ideas on how to grow the economy in this province, increase employment. We can't do that because all of a sudden it will be somehow in effect contravening or violating any of the grant programs we have.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Money did flow, and it flowed from the department of agriculture, food and development at that time.

On July 31, 2006, Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation refused a developer's funding request for the waterline at the Balzac racetrack. Sixteen days later, using ministerial discretion, the department of agriculture, food and development granted \$8.2 million from the taxpayers to this development. To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: why did the department use ministerial discretion to fast-track this funding approval when only 16 days earlier Infrastructure and Transportation said "no way" to that project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members across have very short memories. They asked the same question on Tuesday, March 20, '07. The answer has not changed. The municipality qualified under a program that's been in existence for nine years now, that no money has flowed until they get a water licence. To say that the money has flowed is erroneous and wrong.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, a letter from that department, tabled in this House this afternoon, indicates that the money did flow.

Again, Mr. Speaker, will the minister of agriculture admit that the ministerial discretion was needed because this development did not fit the government's program requirements?

1:40

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, ministerial discretion was built right into the criteria, and the program started in 1998. The bottom line: documents show department records eligibility.

I don't understand why the opposition across doesn't table the documents that answer the questions as they went about it yesterday, little clips here and there. The answer was right there. All they had to do was finish off the statement, but they come with little clips, and the answer was right there. Why can't they continue on?

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, taxpayers will not accept that answer.

Again to the same minister. The project evaluation report states:

The annual economic benefits of the operations of the Calgary Racetrack and Racing Entertainment Centre and the Olds College have not been estimated nor have the potential economic benefits of agricultural industries that are likely locate in the new development.

Why did the department grant more than \$8 million for a development that had not even estimated the economic benefits of the project for agricultural users?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, that was part of the program. That was the agricultural aspect of it. The whole program was \$48 million. We approved \$8.3 million if they qualified. The money is still there. If they qualify, they will get that money because they qualified under an existing program. Why don't you table the

documents about the grant checklist, detailed applications, supporting documents, a clearer report, and cost breakdowns? Why don't you table those?

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's more than water and money flowing in this Chamber today.

Mr. Speaker, the desire for a better life is a powerful motivation for anyone. Unfortunately, there are those who will take advantage of this for a profit. The temporary foreign worker program has opened the door to trafficking in vulnerable human beings who simply want economic security for themselves and their families. My question is to the Premier. Why does this government stand by while temporary foreign workers are enticed to Alberta by unscrupulous work brokers who leave them high and dry without work, money, or even a ticket home?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party raises a good matter. It's a human issue, and the process of approving employers and job offers, of course, rests with the federal government. Recruiters cannot charge a fee for getting people to come to the province of Alberta, but there are other parameters to this program. It's one area that our minister is going to work towards and resolve this issue. You know, to attract people to the province and then not have the jobs available for them is not right.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Recent reports of abandoned temporary foreign workers in our province crammed 15 to a house, isolated, and alone are disturbing to say the least. Yet it's the union, whose own membership is being deliberately being undermined by this government through the temporary foreign worker program, that is reaching out and lending a helping hand. My question is to Premier. Why is it that labour organizations such as the international boilermakers union and the Alberta Federation of Labour have to step in and help temporary foreign workers while this government has completely abandoned them?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the minister responsible has met with the union.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, well, I agree with the member opposite that deplorable treatment of any foreign worker is unacceptable, and I know that Service Alberta, under the terms of the Fair Trading Act, investigates those kinds of criminal allegations. I've met with the Alberta Building Trades. I've met with Gil McGowan and the groups that represent many of the trades up there and have had conversations with them. We are on the site that is being discussed here doing an investigation with a contract engineering firm. We have currently a stop work order in place. We're paying close attention to the allegations that have been made. We are working with the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, these bait-and-switch schemes exploit vulnerable human beings. Unscrupulous brokers are not properly regulated, and there is no place for temporary foreign workers to go. My question to the Premier is: will he, before this spring session is over, put in place a program or legisla-

tion that gives temporary foreign workers who are being exploited a place to go and a guarantee that help will be forthcoming from this government, that their rights will be protected by this government?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, if I may continue. We are negotiating currently under the new made-in-Alberta immigration agreement an annex over the next eight months with the federal government about the kinds of parameters for the temporary foreign worker. We are taking all of this kind of advice under advisement and finding ways to work with our federal government to provide for that worker when they arrive or compel the employer when they arrive to undertake the same kinds of protections that we give to any worker in any part of Alberta. We are paying close attention to it. Relative to anybody who does recruit in a manner that isn't consistent with the Fair Trading Act or the laws of Alberta, the Minister of Service Alberta can respond.

Land-use Framework Consultation

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents have expressed a desire to play a role in ensuring that Alberta's land and natural resources are preserved for future generations and as such would like to attend the remaining land-use framework public sessions under way across the province. However, some are questioning why these sessions were arranged for a time of year when these people are busy with spring work. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why are these sessions being held during a time when people like ranchers and farmers may be too busy to attend to provide their input?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, there's never a perfect time to hold public sessions: in the summer, of course, people are on vacation; in the fall there's harvest; in the winter travel on public roads is often dangerous. Our goal is to have a draft framework out by December, so time is very much of the essence. We've already held 15 sessions. We've had sessions in Edson, Peace River, Wainwright, Edmonton, Lloydminster, St. Paul, Slave Lake, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and High Level. People have come, they've read the workbooks, they've filled out the workbooks, and so far we're having good response.

Mr. Johnson: Now that the good weather is upon us, can the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development tell Albertans how they can take part in the land-use framework if they are unable to make it to the public information sessions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have until June 15 to complete their input, and there are a number of options on how to do this. There are still a number of public sessions being held: today in Medicine Hat, Hanna tomorrow, Calgary on May 30 and 31, and Red Deer on May 31. These sessions are usually from about 2 to 9 o'clock and are being advertised in the local papers. You can also pick up the workbooks and information books at an MLA office, including the opposition members' offices, and you can also do this online. So there are a number of options. My message to Albertans is: this is your province; this is your chance to influence how we develop into the future, so please participate.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have been asked to have their say in land-use related topics before. To the same minister: what

assurance can the minister give that the land-use framework will be more than just a paper exercise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member that all input will be taken very seriously. The completion of the land-use framework is one of the Premier's objectives in managing growth and also is one of the priorities given to me in my mandate letter. The workbook questionnaire builds on previous input from stakeholders. In fact, the input we're getting now from the public will go back to more stakeholder consultations, which begin next week. I'll be meeting with stakeholders in Red Deer next week. This is part of a serious policy development process. All of the input is valuable, and I'm looking forward to presenting the results to this Assembly next February.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Out of School Care

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta out of school care programs are struggling to provide quality care for school-age children. Many people operating in this field have told us that they don't know how much longer they can provide existing service levels, much less expand to address growing wait-lists. Children and workers are placed in unnecessarily stressful situations when providers are unable to find and retain qualified staff. To the Minister of Children's Services. Recently this department announced a staffing initiative aimed at retaining staff in the daycare sector. Can you please explain why out of school care providers were excluded from this initiative?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know I've had several opportunities in the last couple of weeks to address this particular issue. Very simply, it comes down to: the province has the mandate for providing services to zero to age six in terms of child care, but we do not have the mandate for six to 12. We do fund FCSS, and if they determine that that is a locally driven need, they do provide those services. Having said that, I've also talked to the Assembly about an FCSS review that we've done. Out of school care has been identified as an issue that we are looking at.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When care providers are unable to retain qualified staff members with their current funding levels, they must hike their fees to make up for the shortfall. In Alberta fee increases are particularly devastating for families with school-age children because parents with children in grade 1 and on are not eligible to receive child care subsidies. To the Minister of Children's Services: will this government join every other province and territory in Canada and ease the out of school care crunch by extending eligibility to cover children that are between six and 12 years old?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well, I know that I've mentioned this in the past. The FCSS review did identify out of

school care as an issue. We were waiting to get that report through the process, which we did last week. We have accepted all of the recommendations in that report, taken out the part with respect to out of school care and have committed to reviewing the issues surrounding that. I can tell the hon. member that in the next several weeks – we have already started to organize some stakeholder talks, and we'll also be endeavouring to survey parents. So we are moving forward on taking a look at workable solutions for the out of school care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. This year's budget provides a modest 4 per cent increase to the family and community support services, FCSS, program, which is responsible for funding out of school care programming, yet no new money was targeted at addressing the problem facing the out of school care sector. To the Minister of Children's Services. The FCSS review completed by this department identified care for school-age children as facing the most desperate challenges. I appreciate that you're going to look at this and have further consultation, but why was no new money targeted to this crucial area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the simple answer is: no new money was targeted for that particular area because right now we don't fund the out of school programs. But I will commit again that I will be working closely with all of our stakeholders to see if we can find some workable solutions and do that as quickly as possible in the next couple of months.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Agriculture Competitiveness Initiative

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we heard that Canada had been given controlled BSE risk status. Access to foreign markets is critical if we are to compete internationally. While this decision is good news for my constituents who are beef producers, many other areas of the farming and agriculture industry are also facing similar challenges. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Can the minister tell us what is being done to help all of our agriculture industry to compete in the global marketplace?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture and Food is well aware of the global challenges; for example, new competitors and technologies and a growing demand for the biofuels. But it's critical that we look at the industry as a whole. I'm very happy to report that today we announced a new competitive initiative. I've appointed a group of agriculture and business experts to identify concrete actions that can address both the challenges and opportunities. They will work towards balanced solutions and address industry's long-term profitability and competitiveness.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to hear about this new initiative and the approach being taken. To the same minister:

what will the process be, and will there be opportunity for stakeholders to provide input into this process?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, this steering group will be reviewing existing research and doing some further study and addressing any information gaps. Then they will determine some of the tough questions, I guess, and potential solutions. At that point I have asked them to invite a large number of agricultural and food organizations to meet with them and provide feedback. We plan to post the draft recommendations on our ministry website. It can be a very powerful tool when industry comes together to share their expertise and generate new ideas, so I'm quite excited about the potential of this initiative.

Mr. Prins: Thanks. My constituents will be glad to hear that the process provides the opportunity for them to contribute their thoughts on this important work.

Mr. Speaker, my final question to the same minister: when or how soon can we expect to see the results of this work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is certainly anxious to move forward, and we are pleased to provide leadership in this area. Considering the scope of the work ahead, we have set a pretty aggressive timeline for our steering group. The group is expected to have recommendations for industry feedback in early 2008 and a final recommendation to the government by June of 2008.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Renter Assistance

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of my constituents, Fred Bisschop, is facing severe difficulties paying his rent. He's on fixed-income support, so a rent increase of nearly 50 per cent to \$1,100 a month is well beyond his means. The increase takes effect on the 1st of June. Mr. Bisschop will not be able to pay that rent. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: is the homeless and eviction fund the minister keeps referring to where Mr. Bisschop should go for help?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I've been quite clear that if people have received an eviction notice or have any kind of income support problems, they should visit the office or contact our office. One of the issues we've discovered in Calgary is that some have not yet had a notice, and there has been some lack of clarity in the minds of people that have visited about whether or not they're asking for rent supplement or whether they need some other kind of income support, so quite clearly it's on an individual basis. We'd be pleased to get the information, and we'd follow up on his behalf.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. When I wrote to the minister detailing this case amongst others, I was indeed directed to the Employment, Immigration and Industry fund. Mr. Bisschop has called the so-called helpline offered by the minister. He called but got no help. He was told that because he is already receiving some rent assistance, he is ineligible. Clearly, something is very wrong with this situation. Why does the minister keep suggesting these helplines

and programs when they are completely inadequate for those affected?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, several people – hundreds of people – have received over \$300,000 in the last few days. There are several success stories where they have been helped. I can't comment on this particular circumstance because I'm not familiar with the detail, but if I'm provided it, I will follow up. While on one hand we have – when I say several, maybe hundreds, in certain circumstances a lot more than that. We're working on a case-by-case basis, and if someone has already been in the circumstances of receiving social assistance to some degree, then we have to look at them quite closely and see if there's something else we should be doing. But just please provide me the information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The information was already provided, and he can't afford the bus fare.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has claimed in this House, and I quote from May 10 *Hansard*: "The policy of this government is that individuals should not pay over 30 per cent of their salary – 30 per cent of their salary – for housing." Indeed they shouldn't. The minister's solution to the fact that many Albertans face sharp increases is to subsidize those increases. Well, Mr. Speaker, 30 per cent of Mr. Bisschop's income would still leave a \$650 hole. Is the minister suggesting that the best way of dealing with this situation is for the government of Alberta to pay Mr. Bisschop's landlord \$650 a month rather than putting temporary restrictions on these increases?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think this government has made it very clear that we do not believe that rent controls increase the availability of units. We do have programs that are available. The case that was brought forward by the hon. member: if he does bring the particulars forward to either myself or the Minister of EIL, then we'd be very glad to look at it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

2:00 Lesser Slave Lake Aboriginal Policing

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I've been blessed to have First Nations who are proactive and willing to improve the lives of their people. One of the ways they have done this was to take over the first ever aboriginal policing in Alberta. Unfortunately, last September the agreement with the Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council and the Horse Lake First Nation was terminated. This has been a difficult time for all involved. I've attended many a meeting regarding this issue. I'd like to ask the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security: what is the status of the negotiations which were taking place between his department, Canadian officials, and the Indian Regional Council?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say that every Albertan deserves to live in a safe and secure community. Last September, following a review of the former Lesser Slave Lake Regional Police Service, it was clear that a different approach was needed to address some very serious operational issues. Community leaders along with representatives

from the Alberta and federal governments have been working on a new policing plan for the area through a commitment of all parties to find a solution that works for everybody. We have developed a new, innovative policing model that will meet the needs of that community.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, we had a doggone good plan before, and that was tossed out. Could he explain to me and to my constituents how this new model is going to work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We believe it's a doggone good plan as well. The Lesser Slave Lake police service will consist initially of 10 RCMP officers over the next five years, qualified individuals we recruited and sent to the RCMP depot in Regina for training. Once they return to Alberta, these recruits will do six months of on-the-job training with the RCMP at the Lesser Slave Lake police service before assuming their duties. As recruits come on board, the original RCMP officers will return to the provincial police complement.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm so pleased to hear that we are going to do a number of really good things. However, one of the biggest concerns has been that there was never enough money to be able to help the aboriginal policing. My question to the minister: are there going to be additional dollars provided, and can you tell me how long this process is going to take to complete?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, yes, there are some additional dollars that have been committed to aboriginal policing. In fact, in the budget this year we've allocated dollars for 14 members to patrol aboriginal communities. In regard to the time frame for this particular plan with the Slave Lake region, if we can get the recruits, we hope to have everything in place within five years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Renter Assistance (continued)

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the annual meeting of the food bank associations last week concerns were raised about the increasing demand on Alberta's food banks. Albertans are spending more of their income on rent and have less money for food. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: given that many Albertans no longer have room in their budget for food, why does this government continue to refuse to implement temporary rent caps?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, in this budget we did increase support for Albertans that were in need, in fact \$285 million. That funding supported not only affordable housing and rent supplements; it supported the homeless. If I can say, when we look at the availability for individuals, we do look at it according to need.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister. According to the Calgary Centre for Newcomers immigrants are often not counted among the homeless because they stay with their friends and family. What advice does the minister have for families living in crowded spaces who face two-year wait-lists for an affordable place of their own?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, new Albertans, people that are affected by the lack of income supports, people that have special needs can come to one of the 59 offices in Alberta that deal with income supports. I'd like to just point out that many of the people that come don't come directly to Alberta. They haven't been solicited to come to Alberta. They come from other places like Toronto or Winnipeg or Montreal, and it's often much more difficult for us to track them. They don't come in announcing that they've come through another place. So beyond the immigrants that are here, that come because they've been invited for a job, they come frequently to visit family, and then they want to stay.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister is too eager to answer. I'll ask the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry this time. Some organizations are warning immigrants to avoid coming to Alberta until they have secured a place to live. Does the minister realize that this government's failure to implement rent caps will directly impact workforce recruitment and retention strategies?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think that everybody in Alberta recognizes that there are issues that we are tackling. Whether it's managing the labour force shortages, managing the housing, it's going to pose challenges. I think it's prudent, before you come here, to find out whether or not you have a job or a place to live. We're going to try and provide people offshore, particularly, that kind of advice so that they don't come with unrealistic expectations.

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

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Education minister has achieved something remarkable this year. He has angered teachers with his approach to the unfunded pension liability, frustrated school boards by shortchanging their funding and talking about a surplus that doesn't exist. School boards and teachers now stand united to defend public education against a confused and adversarial provincial government. So I'd like to ask the Minister of Education: when will he take a couple of steps back for the sake of good relations, cut the antagonistic attitude, and sit down to negotiate with teachers and school boards? Another round of layoffs and potential strikes serves no one's best interests.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the provincial government is not involved in the negotiation of contracts, so I'm not exactly sure what the hon. member would like me to sit down and negotiate with teachers and school boards. We provide funding to school boards. School boards are responsible for negotiating contracts with their local ATA, so that will proceed as planned.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, the issue that I'm speaking to directly is in regard to pensions, and there's a tremendous amount of confusion around this issue. The Premier, in fact, during his leadership campaign said, and I quote: I would never use such an emotional matter as a bargaining chip in the heat of a labour dispute. Unquote. If everyone is ready to sit down and sort out a deal now, isn't that better than waiting until November, when 30,000 teachers will be without contracts and the unfunded liability would have grown that much more?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I would be quite happy to negotiate a long-term resolution to the unfunded pension liability if the hon. member would give me some suggestions as to what the Alberta Teachers' Association would be prepared to give up in return for the taxpayers of Alberta accepting a \$2 billion liability. To date I haven't heard one single good idea from the third party as to what that might be as a trade-off.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, the very best and first thing we have to do is sit down and talk. Obviously, the parties involved with the teachers' pension are the government, which is you, the teachers, and the general public. The teachers are ready to go to the table and talk. The public wants this resolved, so clearly the stick-in-the-mud is over here on the government side of the House. The Premier said that he wants the pension issue sorted out now without tying it to contract negotiations. Why won't the Education minister ditch his pension task force idea and get this sorted out now, before it further erodes the good faith of teachers, parents, students, and the public at large?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just simply have to disagree with the hon. member. I think the prudent thing to do is to do what we are doing: have a small group go out and listen to Albertans. They can listen to the taxpayers of Alberta and get a feel for what taxpayers feel is a reasonable ask of the Alberta Teachers' Association for us to pick up a \$2 billion liability. It sounds pretty reasonable to me.

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

2:10

Incentives for Property Developers

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we are facing a serious lack of affordable rental accommodation in Alberta. The supply does not meet the demand, and in order to encourage the development of new rental units, we need to take decisive action. A healthy housing policy is essential in order to have a healthy economy. In 1981 the federal government introduced a program called multiple unit residential buildings, or MURBs, to encourage the building of rental units. It was a federal/provincial/municipal program that encouraged investors to invest in affordable housing by changing the tax laws to provide incentives to do so. To the Minister of Finance: is the provincial government thinking of any incentives that would encourage investment in housing and help alleviate this situation in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much. First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would say that there were a lot of lessons to be learned from the MURB investments back in the early 1980s. In essence, the federal government and the provincial government as well as municipalities allowed people to write off the soft costs, things such as legal fees and annual depreciation, if they were to go out and buy an apartment building. What subsequently happened is that we actually saw the prices rise because the write-offs were there. We saw people getting into a position where the business case just wasn't there, and subsequently in 1982, '83, '84, when we saw the real estate market crash, you saw hundreds of thousands of these MURBs actually being put on the sale block because people lost their money. They lost their shirts on this particular plan. But in saying that, I will reiterate what I first said. I think there are lessons to be learned. I think we can do better.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister. The provincial government has announced a generous program to provide assistance to those facing increases in rent or evictions. Would it be even more effective to use tax dollars to provide incentives to builders as well as providing assistance to those facing rent increases?

Dr. Oberg: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, that's a very difficult question. What we want is to get more doors on the market. We want to get more rental units on the market to give the renter more choices in where to live. How we can do that as a government is very difficult. As I was just stating with regard to the MURBs, they actually backfired to a large degree. They had their good points, a good point being that 195,000 units were built. The bad point was that it cost \$2.4 billion, plus numerous, numerous investors lost their shirts. What we need to do is sit down and take a look and ask the simple question: how can our tax system help with what is occurring out there?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister again. There are many investors in Alberta, large and small. Is the provincial government considering any tax incentives for large and small investors to encourage the building of more affordable housing units?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, as everyone in this House knows, we're currently debating our budget. Our budget for this year has not yet passed. When it comes to tax incentives, my department, certainly this government will take a look at anything that is reasonable. Indeed, in effect for next year's budget we will be looking very seriously at some tax incentives. We'll be looking at tax cuts. We'll be looking at the taxation issue from all different angles. I can't promise the hon. member anything, but if there are good ideas that come forward – we need to get more housing units on the market.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Temporary Foreign Workers

(continued)

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've talked to temporary foreign workers who, obviously, are being exploited by unscrupulous brokers when they come to this province. We heard the hon. minister's response earlier. What I want to ask the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry is this: does she think that laws have been broken in the actions of brokers based in Alberta, and is she prepared to investigate?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that is not the role of this minister. Service Alberta deals with the legislation that regulates and controls the Fair Trading Act, that deals with the people and what the licensing requirements are. I'd defer to the President of the Treasury Board.

Speaker's Ruling Legal Opinions

The Speaker: It's inappropriate for ministers to give legal opinions, and it's also inappropriate to have any questions dealing with interpretation of statutes. So I'm not sure where we're going to proceed other than to go to the second question, hon. member.

Temporary Foreign Workers (continued)

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that employers are told to inform the government when the temporary foreign worker leaves their job or quits their job. What happens to the temporary foreign worker who comes to Alberta and there is no job for them? They have a different language. They have a different cultural background. They don't understand our laws. What kind of government assistance is there for them?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, Service Alberta is conducting an investigation if it's relative to the story of 15 men that were brought to this country without the proper kind of opportunity provided. The opposition seems to infer that this is something that we would tolerate or provoke. We did neither. We're as upset as any other Albertan when people are brought here by people who are unscrupulous. They gained access to this country on a false pretext. We will investigate that. When we're made aware of their plight, they have an opportunity to come as people who are asking for assistance, like any other new Albertan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the costs of bringing foreign temporary workers to Alberta include all kinds of things, like payment for travel to and from Alberta, arranging accommodations and programs for spouses and children, language classes, orientation seminars, and so on. To the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure that employers take more responsibility for the costs of bringing foreign temporary workers to this province? Why are employers not bearing the costs rather than having brokers charge workers between \$7,000 and \$15,000 just to facilitate their arrival in this province?

Ms Evans: At last Friday's meeting with the immigration minister of Canada and my other counterparts, my peers from other provinces, we did talk about what the employers should be doing. They very definitely undertake a contractual relationship. Many are very honest, dealing with very honest brokers that follow through with the terms of the contract, provide housing, provide training, provide employment, provide return tickets home. If you were to talk to many of the people that are doing many of the larger construction jobs in Alberta, they are very solid employers that are doing their due diligence. For the people that aren't, for the people that might be coming here as new temporary foreign workers, we will provide more information in the months ahead.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Foreign-trained Physicians

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to talk to a new immigrant. He's a taxi driver. He's actually a doctor, born in India, and he completed his medical school in the Czech Republic. He's busy driving a taxi and trying to prepare for his tests with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. He told me that even if he passes his tests, there are only a couple of seats available for successful candidates. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Would the minister explain to me and to this individual why there are so few residency spaces available for these new potential doctors in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a number of options available to help internationally trained medical professionals to practise their chosen profession in Alberta, but we've more work to do. The Alberta international medical graduate program is one example of a highly successful provincial program helping these physicians to practise in Alberta. It provides international medical graduates residing in Alberta with dedicated residency training positions; in other words, residency positions which are outside the normal matching process for residency. Applicants are interviewed, put through a three-month assessment and orientation before being offered a funded residency program. Providing residency training spaces to qualified IMGs is just one option that Alberta is using to ensure an adequate opportunity for physicians to meet health care needs in Alberta. Last year an additional \$3 million was made available to support the expansion of the program.

The Speaker: I think we'll move on to the hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is such a well-spoken, qualified young doctor who wants to practise family medicine facing such barriers in Alberta today when we have a crying shortage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was indicating, we added \$3 million to the project. That takes the IMG spaces, the intake available this July, up to 48 residency seats. Additional residency seats will mean more doctors available to see patients in Alberta. There are, however, some other barriers that have to be taken into account. Some foreign-trained physicians have not practised for a considerable length of time, and their skills and knowledge are not current. Others come, perhaps, from a country or from a school that is very different from what they might have received here, so they need to be retrained. But we do want to make use of the medical talent that's available, and we do want to make sure that all those skills can be used in Alberta.

2:20

The Speaker: And we'll get it in the third question, I'm sure.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why can't these individuals work in the hospital system while they're upgrading their skills or preparing for the tests? Even a journeyman mechanic gets to get paid and make a living while he's earning his licence as a qualified mechanic or a tradesman.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question from the hon. member, and it's something that we're working on as we speak, to make sure that for every person who comes to this province with skills and abilities in the health care area, we have the ability to do a prior learning assessment, an assessment of their qualification and experience, and that we find a way for them to use that qualification and experience in our health care system. It may not be for what they felt they were trained for. In other words, you may not be able to be a doctor, but you certainly could be a physician's assistant. When we bring out the workforce strategy, we're working now on the mechanisms to make exactly that happen.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Referral of Bill 1 to Government Services Committee

21. Mr. Stevens on behalf of Mr. Stelmach moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly refer Bill 1, Lobbyists Act, to the Standing Committee on Government Services for the committee's consideration, review, and comment and request the committee to report to the Assembly on or before the first week of the fall 2007 sitting.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a significant motion. Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, is a reflection of this Premier's commitment to govern with integrity and transparency. The referral to this particular committee is a first in that we have amended the rules of this Assembly to allow for policy field committees to talk to Albertans about our legislation. Bill 1 has of course passed second reading, and we are looking forward to this committee and its report back to this Assembly later this year.

The Speaker: This motion is debatable.
The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's taken us a long time to get to this point and this day. When I look back upon this day, I hope that I'm happy it came. This is historic. We are now attempting to refer the first bill to the new policy field committees, in this case specifically to the government services one. Indeed, it's probably appropriate that it was the flagship bill of this government, the first one brought forward by the new Premier.

When I went into negotiations on this, I really approached it with good faith and good heart, hoping that these policy field committees would be good working opportunities to explore issues and to actually get a debate going, a discussion with an exchange of ideas, and I hope that that is what happens here. I mean, certainly what we had in the House leaders' agreement and what manifested itself through into the Standing Orders – you know, Mr. Speaker, it could go either way. If the political will is there and the political leadership is there from the government side, I think it could be quite a useful process. If the government decides that they're just going to do the same old thing that they've done for my whole 10 years here and just use that big majority to ram through whatever, then it's not going to be what we hoped for.

When I look exactly at what the policy field committees were to be doing, it really just notes in the Standing Orders that the "four Policy Field Committees, consisting of 11 members each, shall be established to consider the following," and then it goes through the four different categories. I do note – and I think it was a good idea – that the chairs are members of the government and the vice-chairs are members of the Official Opposition.

There's really just one line that pertains to the policy field committees reviewing bills, and it says, "A Policy Field Committee shall review any Bill referred to it." That's all it says. There's a whole bunch of information about what it can do when it's considering regulations, when it's considering any number of reports that could be referred to it from Crown agencies or provincial departments, government departments: public hearings on regulations and even independent inquiries, that the policy field committees could start their own inquiries on something. But when it comes down to the bills, it just says that they can be referred. So it's a pretty wide open mandate. It'll be interesting to see how the committee conducts itself and what sort of parameters it sets up for the examination of this bill.

One of the things I noted in Motion 21 that I did like was that there is a report-back date. One of my criticisms of this government has been the black hole that many of these reports and requests for

information disappear into. They never seem to come back onto the floor. We never know what happened to them. There's no tabling of anything. They're just gone. So I appreciate that in the crafting of Government Motion 21, there actually is a date that's given that the report will come back to this Assembly. Specifically, it's on or before the first week of the fall 2007 sitting, so we're assuming late October, early November. One presumes at that point that that information would then be integrated into the debate on Committee of the Whole and third reading.

The lobbyists bill itself, which is Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, has also had an interesting history. I mean, I think it came out of what's commonly called the Multi-Corp situation or scandal. Flowing from that situation, we had the Tupper report, that made a number of recommendations. This is appearing on page 6 of the final report of the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee from May 2006, and it's quoting the Tupper report here. The Tupper report did recommend that lobbyists be registered and that there should be standards governing their conduct.

In a democracy, citizens must know which organizations and individuals influence public policy, the techniques they employ, who in government they meet and when, and the extent of their efforts to shape public policy,

which I think is a good, all-encompassing statement. They felt very strongly that legislation governing lobbyists would enhance openness of public policy-making in Alberta. We also had the Ethics Commissioner make a submission to this committee, and they supported very warmly the idea of a lobbyists act. So I'm hoping that we will get an airing and a genuine give-and-take in exploring the ideas. That Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, obviously, did look a little bit at lobbying but mostly concentrated on conflict of interest.

I think there's a number of issues that arise out of the legislation that's been proposed here, and I think it's appropriate that it does go to that committee. I'm just very cautious that the committee will actually be a good working committee and will be respectful of all the points of view that are brought forward. I'll tell you why I have some hesitation around that. I noted that earlier in this House – actually, it was on May 14 of this year – we attempted from the Official Opposition to refer a private member's bill, that being Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act, to the appropriate policy field committee, and that was rather vehemently shot down by members of the government, with all kinds of excuses running the range of possibilities there, and I was very disappointed in that.

Granted, it's nice to have Bill 1, the flagship bill, the first bill of the new Premier be the first one that flows through into the newly created policy field committees. I mean, there's a certain appropriateness to that, a certain synchronicity, I suppose. But I was really alarmed at the push back from the government members to the idea of sending an opposition private member's bill through to one of these committees. That discussion takes place in *Hansard*, page 1088 onward. It includes a fairly severe and dismissive section from the Minister of Education against that amendment, and a number of others spoke against it as well.

2:30

As is always the case, Mr. Speaker, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. We'll see whether there actually are the leadership and commitment flowing from this Premier to uphold the idea of an all-party policy field committee which is to explore substantive issues and to see whether having the idea of a government chairperson and an Official Opposition vice-chairperson will help us in honouring and hearing the debate and encouraging the debate on all sides. Hopefully, we'll get better legislation out of all of this because that

was the point, that we would have more people on the record bringing forward their point of view and representing their constituents. Ultimately, we would end up with better legislation, the ability to call witnesses in, to access experts, to have committee resources to support research so that we could do a better job as legislators.

So I'm happy to support Motion 21 referring Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, to the Standing Committee on Government Services. I sure hope this is going to work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of remarks. Certainly, we're going to support this particular bill on the lobbyist registry going to the Standing Committee on Community Services. There is a very good reason, I believe, why this bill should go there. Looking at the original act, I happened to be on the select committee that recommended this, and it was a very good committee; I've talked about that. I believe there's a loophole in there broad enough to drive a truck through, and we've talked about that in the Legislature. I think it is quite appropriate that this bill be brought forward for this discussion. Hopefully, we can make it a better bill.

I mean, with the policy field committees we're into unknown territory, Mr. Speaker. I've called it a work in progress, and I believe that's exactly what it is. We'll see how this works. I think this is an appropriate one, as I said, to involve ourselves in, the committee, to work forward. I can see how it's going to work with bills being referred because I think now we have this one and two more coming forward in the next little while, and I have no problems with the other two coming forward. I think they are bills that appropriately should be looked at by the policy field committee. We'll see how it works once we're in there. That's a totally different situation.

I think that with the policy field committees, though, the other aspect of how they work is that they hopefully will have some room to be proactive themselves, and it won't be just a matter of only looking at bills that come from here, the House, and back there. There are many issues that perhaps the Legislature should be looking at but we're not in terms of having bills being debated in the House. There are issues that are occurring all the time. We've been talking about some of them, but I would hope that these committees, especially when the sessions aren't on, could be proactive in bringing groups in. Maybe flowing from there, we'd get some legislation coming back the other way. Because of what was happening with people coming forward to the policy field committees, it might work the other way. They would then posit that bills be brought forward here.

It's going to be an interesting time to see how these work. I guess that hope springs eternal, and as I say, I think this is certainly an appropriate bill, as the other two are, to proceed into the policy field committees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to conclude?

Mr. Stevens: Question.

[Government Motion 21 carried]

Speaker's Ruling Referral of Bills to a Policy Field Committee

The Speaker: Just a procedural comment here with respect to the Standing Orders, this matter now having been dealt with. Hon.

Opposition House Leader, comment was made with respect to an event that occurred in this Assembly earlier this spring when during the debate on a private member's bill an amendment was put forward to refer such bill to a committee. Well, Standing Order 78.1 would not have permitted that. Standing Order 78.1 says: "Immediately after a Bill has been read a second time." The circumstance in question had not seen the bill arrive at a conclusion to second reading. It was still prior to when the debate was still on. So there's perhaps a bit of an interpretation there. Clarification might be required.

I take it, then, we're finished with this matter?

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall call the committee to order. The committee has before it today estimates to deal with the departments of Advanced Education and Technology and Education, and today has been set aside for the New Democratic caucus.

Before I call upon the minister, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

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

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure today – and I apologize to my group for the wait. For 15 years we've had Vauxhall elementary school come up to this Assembly every spring, and this year is no exception. I am really pleased that the kids from Vauxhall elementary school and the parents and the teachers that have come along made a big journey up here today to take in part of the Legislative Assembly. Just so that everyone knows, these are potential stars of the Vauxhall Baseball Academy, and they're also from the town which is known as the potato capital of western Canada. Could I introduce teachers Ms Kim Kerr, Mr. Terry Olfert, who has been involved for 15 years here, and Mrs. Trina Mantler-Friesen; the parent helpers Mrs. Cindy Skretting, Mrs. Gwen Dorchak, Mrs. Sarah Hiebert, Mr. Chris Burns, Mrs. Dawn Cameron, Ms Cheryl Lanz, Mrs. Norma Brouwers, and Miss Jenny Tashiro; and all the kids from Vauxhall elementary school. Would the Assembly please give them a warm welcome and wish them a good trip.

The Deputy Chair: Before I call upon the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, I just want to let the members of his staff know that should you wish to have a glass of water or a cup of coffee, just raise your hand and somebody will come by and provide that to you.

head: 2:40 **Main Estimates 2007-08**

Advanced Education and Technology

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to discuss again in committee our ministry business plan and budget for the upcoming year. With me today in the Legislature I have, of course, our deputy minister, Bob Fessenden. I have our assistant deputy minister, adult learning, Mr. Phil

Gougeon. We have Mr. Blake Bartlett, who is the chief bean counter in our department. I've forgotten what his exact title is. We also have Shirley Dul, who is in charge of our apprenticeship programs, as well as Gerry Waisman, who is the executive director of our postsecondary institutes. We have a number of staff up in the gallery too. I won't get into the introductions on those.

Maybe I could give a brief overview. I did give some opening remarks last night, so I'll try not to repeat too much as I know that that's already in *Hansard*. I think it's important that we talk about the ministry's mandate up front. That was made very clear in December from our Premier. He gave Advanced Education and Technology a very clear mandate in the areas of increasing access, affordability, and quality in our postsecondary education, to increase support for community education and literacy programs, and to develop a strategy for technology commercialization and value-added economic diversification.

One of the key priorities is to better define the roles and responsibilities of postsecondary institutions in Alberta. Work is already under way, Mr. Chairman, on encouraging institutions to work more collaboratively. We brought the institutions together a number of times to talk about this roles and responsibilities mandate framework because our view is that a lot of our decision-making and a lot of the processing, a lot of the collaboration, co-operation, and co-ordination is going to come from that kind of framework. A lot of the aspirations of many of our institutions can be realized through the framework by identifying their niches, their roles, their responsibilities.

From the youth in Lethbridge who is taking academic upgrading online to the adult student in Fort McMurray who plans to enter medical school, Alberta Advanced Education and Technology has significant opportunities to make the system serve people better. As part of that, the key initiative where work is continuing in relation to the roles and responsibilities framework is in and around the principles of Campus Alberta. We want to emphasize transferability, seamless learning, and curriculum sharing. An important initiative we're undertaking is to build on the momentum of the affordability framework for students.

But also in terms of the roles and responsibilities we want to look at what is the need. What is the needs analysis of our system both from the student side and from the societal side and the industry side? Take a look at that needs analysis from a Campus Alberta approach and say: where do we need to build the capacity? We know that we need to build some capacity in certain areas. Intuitively, people can figure that one out pretty quickly. But where do we need to look into the future and say: in collaboration with the postsecondaries where do we need to build that?

After we've completed that process, there's obviously the process of: does the funding formula that we currently have meet the objectives of that framework, and can we make it better? Or is it adequate the way it is, and can we move forward based on that funding formula? So we'll be doing a review of that as well.

On the international co-ordination side is it appropriate that we have individual institutions with individual plans on international, or should we collaborate on that as well to try to get the biggest bang for our buck?

So we're going to be moving in a number of those areas over the coming months.

Certainly, with Budget 2007 we've made some very critical investments that are going to provide direct financial assistance for students before they begin classes this fall; that is, providing increases to student loan limits. I know that it was brought up today in question period about increasing those loan limits and increasing the cost-of-living allowance, which are things that we did based on

our discussions with the students this spring, simple rules like eliminating the vehicle restrictions and reducing parental contributions.

We're going to be working with the postsecondaries and the students to see if there are innovative, interesting ways that we might be able to help in the student housing initiatives that are ongoing around the province. We are within the framework of the postsecondaries building a number of new student residences and student housing initiatives. The department is going to be working with Municipal Affairs and Housing as well as the postsecondaries to see what we can do even further in that regard. This commitment to student finance is really focused on enabling more students to qualify and to access what is already a world-class system and open more doors to things like scholarships, bursaries, grants, and expanding tax credits to full- and part-time students.

The ministry is also providing institutions with funding that helps address and offset the impacts of the affordability framework and the limits that we have put on tuition fee increases. It's one thing to say to the students that we will not increase the tuitions to what perhaps the costs have risen to, but it's another thing to say to the institutions that we won't do that, so we are going to address that by way of additional funding to the institutions to offset what we have done in terms of limiting the tuition fee increases. The business plan also addresses the capital and infrastructure needs of the institutions by increasing our funding for the expansion, upgrading, and maintenance of Alberta's postsecondary institutions.

It's also important to note that postsecondary education is not just limited to the universities and the colleges. As this House has learned on a number of occasions, we are working very hard to make a difference for Alberta's apprenticeship and industry training system and expanding it considerably. There's a lot of pressure in that area, and we're working with, again, the institutions to try to bring as many spots as possible forward.

Advanced Education and Technology is also expanding the amount of learning opportunities available in other communities. We're enhancing our partnerships. We're working on ensuring that Albertans have the skills they need today to contribute to our society, our economy, and the high quality of life we enjoy today.

In terms of technology the 2007-08 business plan continues to move forward with strategic funding for research, innovation, and technology commercialization initiatives, of course covering the traditional sectors but also working in some of the emerging sectors like nanotechnology, like renewable energy, like CO₂ sequestration. We're making strategic investments in all of those areas.

We're talking about Alberta's value-added capabilities being an essential element to realizing Alberta's future, so moving not only our natural resources and agricultural products but our technology up that value chain is critically important to Alberta's future. We're working in that area as well. We're looking at the water research strategy and have committed \$30 million in funding for that as well as the implementation being managed through Alberta Ingenuity in the life sciences branch.

We're obviously going to continue our support for the nanotechnology initiative in this province. We believe that we can be very much a global leader in that area. It could be the next quantum leap in research and development and product applications. We want that to be researched and developed here in Alberta, and we want it to be commercialized here in Alberta to create that next economy.

Some of the other things that we're working on: obviously, in the life sciences, a number of the other science areas, enhancing the role of ASRA, looking at ASRA to do a review of all of the research and development that we're doing in the province to ensure that we are on the right track, that it's collaborative, that it's co-ordinated.

I can go into some of the detail on the estimates, Mr. Chairman. Our total government of Alberta investment in Advanced Education and Technology in the '07-08 budget is \$3.1 billion. That's a spending increase that represents about a 22 per cent increase over last year. The 2007-08 budget includes a 6 per cent increase in base operating grants to institutions, bringing the total operating grant funding to 1 and a half billion dollars. Further increases of 6 per cent per year will be provided for the next two years.

Postsecondary institutions will also see a funding increase of \$347 million for capital projects this year. A total of \$1.6 billion will be invested in capital projects over the next three years, including \$300 million in unallocated capital at this time. That funding boost represents a 41 per cent increase over the '06-09 capital plan, projects like and including the Robbins health learning centre at Grant MacEwan College, the expansion of the Lakeland College campus in Lloydminster, the construction of the community learning campus at Olds College, and the University of Calgary's health research innovation centre. Funding from Advanced Ed in '07-08 will go towards the construction of facilities for the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Calgary, replace the Donald Cameron Hall at Banff Centre, and the centennial centre for interdisciplinary sciences on the campus of the University of Alberta.

We will be looking at, as I said, this needs assessment that we're going through right now. My hope is that that will be done fairly quickly as we go through that needs assessment and sit down with the postsecondaries and talk again about what is the Campus Alberta approach. Decisions on the unallocated amounts in our capital budget will be made utilizing the capital planning process and utilizing the discussions that we have on this needs analysis so that we make the best decisions we can as they relate to the capital and the capacity of the province.

2:50

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I just need some direction from you. Would you like to go back and forth for a set period of time?

Dr. Pannu: Right. Ten-minute segments should work all right.

The Deputy Chair: Ten-minute segments? Okay.

Dr. Pannu: If necessary, we'll modify them on the way. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I want to start by thanking the minister for redoing a part of what he did do last night. I tried to do my due diligence this morning to go through the *Hansard* to see what's been already done so that I don't repeat much of what has already been discussed, but, unfortunately, the evening portion of the *Hansard* is not available to us until perhaps tomorrow. So if I do repeat, it's because I do not really know what had happened last night. I do want to thank the minister for making his introductory remarks, which touch on some issues which are important to all of us, are on top of our minds.

Before I go into the substance of the debate, I also want to acknowledge the presence of the minister's departmental staff. Welcome again. I think you were here last night, all of you. Without the work that you do, I know that we wouldn't have any information available to us of much value that people like myself can use in engaging the minister and the government in debate on its policies and expenditures, that turn their policy into programs and action. So thank you for your work.

Mr. Chairman, the minister talked about, among other things, the affordability framework. He made mention in his introductory

remarks to this. The accessibility/affordability framework certainly is a part of the business plan that the government has, a key part of it, as I think it is their core business 1: a learner-centred system accessible to all Albertans. I'm looking at page 59, I think, of the book that deals with business plans. Under strategies the very first point, 1.1, is: "Implement the accessibility, affordability and quality requirements in the Access to the Future Act." Speaking to this general issue, I am going to draw the minister into commenting on something that's, perhaps, not in the budget as such but certainly bears on what could be in the budget. Certainly, in terms of forgone revenues the government on a yearly basis does forgo some revenues as part of the education tax credits scheme.

I just came across a report that was released today by the millennium scholarship fund. It's a national report. I have before me the executive summary, and it certainly draws attention to the two kinds of tax credits that are available to students and their families in order to ease the burden of, I guess, affordability-related costs: the tuition fee tax credit, which is applicable to income tax paid federally and provincially; and the second one, the education tax credit available federally and in all provinces but Quebec, claimed for every month during which a student is enrolled in postsecondary studies and intended to defray such costs as books and living expenses.

I draw the minister's attention to this report because I think it has some significant policy recommendations here. I want the minister's initial comments on it if he can do that on short notice. I'm not sure if he had the chance or if his staff had the chance to look at the report or the short executive summary that is there. The report finds that the effects of the credits, education tax credits and the others, are at best neutral and at worst regressive and that they are bad policy, at least in terms of encouraging postsecondary participation. It proposes alternative ways to use the money over the discussion of the pros and cons.

Now, the minister did in his introductory remarks refer to perhaps even extending this tax credit scheme in order to move towards attaining the goal of affordability. This report speaks against the existing program, specifically educational tax credits and the tuition fee tax credit. What it does say, however, is this: as alternative, better policies, which are progressive, not regressive, in their effects and consequences, direct grants are one way.

Grants paid directly from governments are the largest source of funding for colleges and universities, currently accounting for 54 per cent of total expenditures. Increases in grants might enable an expansion of the post-secondary system and, consequently, the number of students.

Now, we know, whether we're talking about NAIT or SAIT or Mount Royal College or the University of Calgary or the University of Alberta, that thousands of students are finding it difficult to get in even though the participation rate in Alberta in the postsecondary system is one of the lowest in the country. In spite of that, there are thousands of Alberta students who are now being turned away from colleges and universities because of the problem related to availability of spaces, in other words an accessibility problem. Here is a suggestion that's made by this particular report, and I'd like the minister's comment on whether or not he's willing to look at changes in policy in light of the research that's available to us, that I'm speaking from.

The second recommendation that's made here is direct grants to students. The issue of affordability, I think, is addressed here. The money committed to the tax credits would be enough to give each postsecondary student a grant of approximately \$1,100 annually. That's the figure that comes right from the executive summary here. Another policy alternative to the existing policy that I urge the minister to consider and see if he would like to comment on where he might go with this suggestion.

Expanding the student loan program is the third one. Adding the value of the credits and their \$1.3 billion to the \$800 million – this is Canada-wide, so I must make this note – from the student loan program would expand it by 2.6 times, making it much more effective. This study also looks at other options, including one from a separate foundation study that says that eliminating credits would allow systemic reform so that needed funds could be targeted to low-income students.

There are a number of issues here that this report raises that certainly are a matter of concern to me, and I'm sure the minister would find it important to address them as well. Having said that, I want to make sure that I don't forget this or run out of time before I draw this to the minister's attention for his consideration, Mr. Chairman.

Now, I will go on to the estimates themselves. Mr. Chairman, this ministry, Advanced Education and Technology, is a sort of restructured ministry now. Some of its budget items are, I think, ones that perhaps appeared a year ago in the 2006-07 budget in the ministry of science, innovation and technology, so they are here. I'm not sure, when the minister says that the overall budget increases, that the percentages that he gave and the absolute numbers that he gave really are an accurate way of assessing the real increases because the ministry was very different from the ministry whose budget we debated in this House last year. I would like the minister to assist me in evaluating the exact range of the increase.

I'll stop here and let the minister respond to a couple of questions.

3:00

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, before I recognize the minister, I just wanted to bring to the attention of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and other members that the *Hansard* Blues are accessible on the Internet 60 minutes to 90 minutes after the words have been uttered in the House, so while the hard copy may not be available, the information is accessible on the Internet within the hour, hour and a half. In future, if you want to reference, please go on the website, and you'll be able to access that information.*

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This member is still in the paper mode.

The Deputy Chair: Okay.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. As the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology I was going to point out to the hon. member that we are online all the time.

As to some of the comments, perhaps I'll try and tick them off, hon. member, and if there's something that I miss, just point it out to me, and I'll come back to it. In terms of support for post-secondary learners there were a number of questions that were asked that were kind of policy level questions, not necessarily budget, but we'll throw some discussion out for you.

The voted budget for student assistance is approximately \$120 million, which is going to enhance the changes that we made via the affordability framework last fall. It includes funding for achievements scholarships, bursaries, grants, loan relief. The statutory budget for student assistance is approximately \$88 million, and that includes funding for the heritage scholarships, the Alberta centennial education savings plan, and the provision for the future cost of student loans because of our loan relief program.

The \$45 million increase between the '06-07 forecast and '07-08 estimate is expected due to the changes in the students' assistance

program. We believe that under the new rules many more students will qualify for more bursaries and more grants, so we are budgeting a higher amount because we expect that those students will not only apply for but receive those bursaries and grants.

When you talk about the tax revenues issue and the millennium fund report, the first thing that I would say is that the report the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation came out with was a look at the Canadian system. It wasn't necessarily a picture in time of the Alberta system. That, hon. member, is very important because the Alberta system is second to none in the country. If we're going to take an analysis of, you know, what is the average system across the country and what could be better, perhaps there are some very valid points to be made in the Canada Millennium Scholarship. I would suggest to you that the Alberta loan relief program is probably second to none in the country.

We were looking at more of a holistic, balanced approach to affordability for students. We have a number of programs that are out there for students who are in need in terms of the lower end of the income scale. Certainly, there has always been an approach, and it has historically been so, that where parental assistance is available, we would expect that that would come into play. The federal government's tax system has always been there in terms of student tuition relief on taxes. But there is a vast number of students who are neither rich, nor are they poor. I think what they're looking at is: I would rather see my income taxes reduced because of my involvement in my postsecondary education and my investment in my future and my career. So I do see this as one piece in the tool box to make the entire holistic approach a balanced approach to affordability for Alberta students. What we're trying to make sure is that, as we start to implement a number of these issues in the affordability framework, we don't identify just one group and just try to help that and put all of our resources into that. We want to have a very balanced approach to managing the growth in that.

We have a fairly substantial increase in the grants. The hon. member mentioned that he felt that one way of reducing tuition would be to increase the grants to postsecondary institutions. We've done that because we put a limit on the increase of tuition, so we had to increase the grants to postsecondary institutions to make them whole. I would argue that another way that you could conceivably reduce tuitions is by reducing cost, because tuitions are cost based. We're going to be looking at that as well but only in the context of maintaining quality, only in the context of building the capacity.

Another issue that the hon. member raised was that we do have an issue around students being turned away or not being able to find the appropriate space. I'd like to make a couple of points on that. The first point is that it has probably very little to do with tuition. It has a lot to do with capacity and having those spaces available in the right places, I might add. So what we've been doing – when you look at a \$1.6 billion infrastructure budget for postsecondary, I'm sure that there are many jurisdictions in Canada that would love to have that capital plan and those dollars to deal with capacity issues. We're working diligently at that. We have a huge amount of growth in the system.

The hon. member might remember a report that the same group, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, did some months ago that indicated that they were concerned that we might be 300,000 students short in the near future if we continued to build capacity or even if we didn't continue to build capacity. One has to take these reports along with other information from other areas, balance them out, and make the prediction for just Alberta.

The other point I'd like to make on this concept of students being turned away is that it's very difficult for us to determine whether they've been turned away, whether they've decided to go to another jurisdiction, whether they've decided to go to another institution.

*See p. 1345, left col., para.4.

It's difficult to track right now. One of the things that we're working on with the roles and responsibilities framework and some of the other collaborative projects that we have on with the post-secondaries right now is to figure out a system which would provide more seamlessness and transferability for the students and also provide us with the information that we need as a collective group to do the planning for those necessary spaces and to give us an idea of where the students really want to go. If we can track where they're actually going and what curriculum they're actually taking and where they're going after that in terms of their employment, that will help us project and determine what capacity we need to build into the system.

Currently we've got something in the range of \$50 million in bursaries and grants going out to some 30,000 students. The Alberta loan relief program automatically repays debt accumulated beyond \$3,750 per semester. The latest numbers that we have coming from graduates, some statistics that were given to us, show that Alberta students even today – well, in the latest numbers – graduate with the lowest average debt of any of the students in Canada.

I think what we're trying to do, as I said before, is take kind of the balanced approach to where we're headed. We're trying to make sure that overall we have the affordability framework on stream, on track. Did we do everything that was in it? Not yet. Are we going to try and do as much as we can? Yes. But it's going to take a period of time because the institutions have to be able to respond, and we have to ensure that the quality and student accessibility are still there.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is gratifying to note that the minister was paying close attention to remarks and tried to respond specifically to some of the questions that I raised that arise out of the millennium scholarship report.

I think there's something that intrigued me here that he might want to know. He talked about how students benefit from the education tax credit or the tuition fee tax credit. It is true, but the numbers, Mr. Chairman, the percentage of students who benefit from this is very, very small. It's very difficult for me, and I think for the minister, at this stage to be able to give the Alberta numbers, but nationally, at least, the numbers are given which are quite instructive. I'm sure that the minister and his staff would like to take a closer look at the corresponding numbers for Alberta.

3:10

Here are some numbers that I'm just going to draw the minister's attention to.

Most postsecondary students [Canada-wide] (61 per cent of full-time university students and 64 per cent of full-time college students) have an income of less than \$10,000. There is no real advantage for them to claim the credits during their studies.

I'm reading directly from the executive summary of the research report that I referred to.

Less than five per cent of youth earning less than \$10,000 pay any tax and, when they do, the average amount paid is a mere five dollars.

When income reaches \$20,000 annually, post-secondary students who use their credits realize tax savings of \$500 compared to non-students earning the same amount. However, less than eight per cent of university students and ten per cent of college students are in this earning category.

These are numbers for Canada. I think it's incumbent on us to find out what the corresponding numbers for Alberta are if we want to either defend the current policy in place or want to develop a

justification for changing that policy or tweaking it if these numbers here are, in fact, such that there is justification to rely on them in terms of policy guidance.

I agree with the minister that not every report you can take word for word. You have to read them critically and understand them carefully before you accept or reject the findings, but here is a report, in my view, that makes some very serious and sound observations, which merit the attention of the department and of this government and of the minister.

A question on loan relief. The minister did of course draw attention to the fact that the amount for student loan relief has been increased. My specific question to him is about numbers, both in terms of the number of students who have enjoyed loan relief over the last year and the total amount spent. What's the increase in terms of dollars to that particular item in the budget for relieving students of the loan burden? I think it's a needs-based program. Is this true? If the minister would outline the assessment criteria, then, as to for whom this relief is available. Are the conditions and the qualifying criteria being relaxed in this budget? I think the minister made a reference to it. I would like to hear more concretely about the relief and the criteria used to determine whether one qualifies to have access to the loan relief program that the government has.

The idea of loan relief, I think, is laudable, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Minister, I want to commend and express our support for that policy. The point is about how accessible it is and what percentage of students in need, in fact, are able to take advantage of it. I think that in my judgment, based on what I hear from students, this loan relief program is welcomed by students, but they think that it's unnecessarily restrictive in terms of its accessibility to students in need.

On the issue of quality, the minister again said that they were looking at the holistic picture. The minister talks about a 6 per cent increase, you know, the base funding increase, to postsecondary institutions, universities in particular. We know that the inflationary costs alone in this province now are close to 6 per cent. I'm not sure what the inflationary increases are with respect to educational inflationary costs. The minister might have some numbers on it. Is 6 per cent adequate even to maintain the current quality of services provided? Quality, Mr. Chairman, I want to draw to the minister's attention, is very much contingent on the class size in postsecondary institutions.

I have spent all my life in postsecondary institutions at the university level. I know that class sizes grew enormously during the period of difficulty starting in the early '80s, and the problem was simply exacerbated and became much more severe during the '90s and the early years of this century. Faculty-student ratio is one of the key determinants of quality, particularly at the end of the graduate level.

Is a 6 per cent increase, then, commensurate with the existing facts and the need to reduce class size, particularly at the end of the graduate level, in our postsecondary institutions? It seems to me that it's a budget made, in this regard in terms of a 6 per cent increase to postsecondary institutions, essentially to maintain the conditions that are currently prevalent in our postsecondary institutions, not to improve them. Is the minister satisfied, in other words, with the current quality of education? Is that the best we can have? Or does he in fact agree with me that there are challenges in that area? If so, what's in the budget to begin to address those challenges year by year over the next three years as part of the business plan? So that's a question for him.

The minister also I think misunderstood me when he said that the students are not necessarily being turned away from universities and colleges and that there's no way for the government to exactly have a clear handle on this. Again, the matter is complex. I think people

apply to two or three institutions at the same time, hoping to get into law school or medical school or so on and so forth. We know this. But if we have to have a policy with respect to availability of spaces which reflects the existing demand and our own commitment to creating a future workforce which will serve Albertans' needs in the coming years, then we have to have some way of developing a reliable picture of that demand. I'm asking the minister: is the minister or the department capable of doing this or not?

I mean, it's an inexact science, I'll agree. You have to rely only on best estimates. Nevertheless, in order to plan for the future and to increase accessibility, which is one of the commitments that the minister makes in the business plan, there has to be some way that the department has to determine potential demand. If we don't do it and simply say, "You know, the matter is too complex; no one can be sure about it," then I think that's not the answer. So that's my next question to the minister.

The fact that the University of Calgary admission standards have been sort of jacked up to an 85 per cent average from high school – and I think similar numbers can be found at the U of A – tells you that there's no clear relationship between admission standards, the minimum kind of average you need to have to get in, and your ability to take advantage of that. Is 70 per cent not good enough? Is 75 per cent not good enough? These are public universities. These are not the Harvards of the world. You know, it's not as if... [Dr. Pannu's speaking time expired] All right. Let's stop and go on from there.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I made a remark earlier about accessing the Blues on the website. I was provided information that's not necessarily accurate, so let me just make sure that the accurate information is provided to you and other members. I am given to understand that within an hour, an hour and a half of words being uttered in this Assembly a hard copy of the Blues is accessible in the backroom there. Otherwise, it's accessible on the LAO network, but only certain people have access to it. So it's not publicly available. My apologies for that.*

Mr. Horner: As to the LAO network, we do have access to that as well, Mr. Chairman.

I was interested in what the hon. member was saying at the end there as it related to entrance requirements set by the universities, so I'm probably going to ask a question at the end of my answers here of the hon. member because of his, I know, many, many years' experience in the postsecondary in his role as a professor.

We'll go back to the education tax credit. The hon. member is very correct when he says: do we have hard numbers as to, you know, income and earnings of students and how that affects? We do, actually, carry some fairly good numbers. When a lot of these students apply, they're using their tax base to establish their need in the student finance system.

3:20

One of the things that is kind of interesting in some of the data that we've seen is that Alberta students' income has risen 18 per cent in the last two or three years, which is indicative of the economy in which we are. It's indicative of perhaps a little bit of a shift in some of the students' lifestyle choices that they're making these days, a little bit of a shift perhaps in more part-time students and part-time work at the same time, which I think personally we're going to see more and more of in our institutions, and we're going to have to cater to a workforce that wants to take us up on our word of lifelong learning. They're going to want to be able to work and continue to increase their knowledge, which is a very good thing. It's not a bad

thing. It's a great thing. We want the highest level of educated workforce we can get. The student income is probably higher than the national, and again taking into context the national report applied to our province, there are going to be some differences, some variances, and we need to take that into consideration.

The other thing with these tax credits. If the students during their studies can't have access to those tax credits, remember that they roll over to the next year and the next year and the next year. At some point in time the student is going to benefit from the investment that he made in his education. Given that the numbers would indicate that a student taking postsecondary education is more likely to earn a million dollars more in their lifetime than someone who has not taken postsecondary, tax credits might come in quite handy down the road. Certainly, it's always nice to see more dollars in your pocket than sent to the government.

Again, it's part of the basket. It's part of the mix that we put together for the affordability framework, hon. member. We're going to continue to build on that framework. We are, obviously, as well enmeshed with the federal government in a number of these programs. We are mirroring the federal tax credit so that we have some continuity with regard to the program that the federal government has put out.

We talk about changes to the student finance system and the needs-based analysis that we do on the loan relief program. If the students qualify as needs students and their loan relief is fully implemented on the Alberta side, the interesting thing is that the debt that they are left with is entirely the federal portion. There's no loan relief available on the federal portion of the 7140 I think is the number.

Again, when you start to talk about things that Alberta wants to do within a federal/provincial joint initiative, if we're going to make some fairly significant changes to that, obviously we have a partner involved in this that we're going to need to make some changes with, and they're going to look at it from a national perspective. Would I like to look at some other methods that we can use provincially to open up more accessible dollars for investment for students? Yes, and we're going to be pursuing that avenue as an investigation this year. There's nothing in the budget for that this year.

I would agree with the hon. member that class size is certainly something that is important in the system. I'll go back to one of my other answers to the hon. member's questions about doing the roles and responsibilities framework and the needs analysis. The needs analysis is exactly what you're talking about. It's talking about: what is the demand, what is the employment demand, what is the inventory of capacity that we have in play today, and how do we mesh all those things together from a Campus Alberta perspective?

In order to plan for those capital dollars and plan for those spots and plan for those apprenticeship spots, that's the kind of needs analysis that I'm talking about doing. You were asking: why aren't we doing it? That's exactly what we're doing. It's ongoing work as we speak. We will be bringing all of the postsecondaries in again in August to talk about the results of that needs analysis and perhaps even sooner than that in terms of the capacity in the facilities to talk about where we see the future of the inventory of capacity versus the demand on that inventory and talk about their individual plans, their individual capital plans.

One of the things that I as minister will freely admit is that I think we have allowed an independent system of individual capital plans to be built up without a lot of interactivity between the two of them so that you get some semblance of a co-ordinated approach on the capital side. We're going to change that. We're going to start asking for a lot more co-ordination on the capital that they're going to put into the capacity for the system.

*See p. 1343, left col., para. 6

Quality is not always about dollars. It's not always about capital dollars or operational dollars. Quality is about being recognized globally as an educational system that provides the types of pathways for students to achieve their career dreams. That's the kind of system that we want. If you talked to our major universities, they would say that a global university has a ratio of postgraduates to undergraduates of perhaps 1 to 2 or 1 to 3. It allows them the opportunity to pick those undergraduates that are high achievers to work with those postgraduate researchers and to develop that global presence of international students and researchers.

I'm not saying that that's where we're headed, but if the colleges are interested in moving down further the undergraduate degree programs, I think it's not a bad idea to say that they would be a feeder source, that one of their roles, one of their mandates could indeed be taking some of these undergraduate programs to relieve the pressure from the larger universities. As the hon. member knows, that's already happening. Take a look at the nursing program at Mount Royal College, the nursing program at Grant MacEwan College, just to cite a couple of very good examples. I'd be interested in the hon. member's opinion of that type of system where the universities would perhaps aspire to have a higher ratio of postgrads to undergrads based on entrance requirements to compete, I guess, in the global environment.

One last point and then I'll sit down for the hon. member to ask some more questions. As he rightly pointed out, we are an amalgamation of two previous departments, although I must say that the two departments were intricately linked previously because of the research component that we do in our postsecondary system and the applied research component as well, so it made eminent sense to put the two departments together.

If you just looked at the old advanced education budget, if you will, and then pulled out numbers – and this is, as I'm sure the member would appreciate, a little bit of a difficult exercise and not one that we really did to any great degree, but just sitting here and doing some fast calculating – we ended up at just around a 20 per cent increase year over year on the operational side on advanced education if you separated all that stuff out. Don't hold me to that number one hundred per cent because we just did it really quickly here, but we can certainly start to pull some of those numbers for you, and I'd be happy to give that to you in writing.

As to the determination of need, I think it's pretty straightforward to say who's determinate of need based on income, and that's essentially part of what the student finance system does. There are a number of factors that would indicate need for the student. As an example, is it a single mom? Have you been living away from home for more than a year? What is your income? Do you have a disability? Are you geographically challenged? You know, there are a number of things. I'd be more than happy to again provide in writing to the hon. member the criteria that are used in the system to figure out where that need is.

Again, the loan relief program for those students in need, which is really, I think, the category the hon. member was pointing a lot of his remarks at. For anything over \$3,750, in terms of the loan, the Alberta government has a loan relief program that basically wipes that clean for the student. So it's a very good program. I don't think it's comparable anywhere else in Canada in terms of the loan relief, and we're very proud of that. Yes, it can be complicated at times. Yes, it can be onerous, if you will, at times. But the other thing we're doing on the technology side is we're going to use it to make it easier.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the minister for responding as best he could on his feet, as it were, to some of these questions which really don't have quick answers to them.

3:30

I don't want to return to the questions that we have already gone back and forth on, except that the issue of quality is an exceedingly important one. In pursuit of affordability, in pursuit of reducing costs per student that goes through our postsecondary system, over the past 15, 20 years I think we have ignored and, unfortunately, sacrificed quality in the process. It's an issue that does require, in my view, very special attention on the minister's behalf. I know that, typically, universities in this province have coped with the scarcity of resources – funding, that is – relative to staffing by resorting to changing their hiring practices. Full-time faculty, tenure track faculty proportions have gone down over the years, and that has been replaced with the casual employment of academics: teach two courses, three courses for a year and then see what happens, sessionals, increasing demand on graduate students to pick up the teaching load, increased class sizes.

I think there's a need to take a closer look at how over the last 15, 20 years postsecondary institutions, particularly universities, have found their hand, in fact, forced to change their recruitment policies and recruiting teaching staff and faculty and how that bears on the quality of education. I'm not at all saying that sessionals are less qualified. It's just a matter of how much they're called upon to do, the uncertainty under which they work from term to term, year to year, and therefore are unable to invest their most and their best energies to the task before them, including teaching and research, which, of course, enriches teaching. So there is an issue here that I think we shouldn't just pass off as a political point made and remade back and forth but an issue that really needs some serious attention.

On the loan relief, the \$3,750, I think that only students who meet certain needs criteria would enjoy the relief beyond \$3,750, not every student, if I understand the minister. Or does every student who qualifies for receiving the loan also qualify for this? There's some clarification, I think, needed there.

Moving on from there, Mr. Chairman, to some other questions. With respect to financial aid the minister said that's been increased this year. I think it's \$97 million – is it? – now to students in the budget. I think that's the number that I have here coming from the general revenue book, on page 26. I'm not talking about program delivery. I'm talking about the \$97 million for financial aid, or whatever that is. I think the question that I have relates to last year's expenditures on this budget item. Last year I think that for financial aid, \$94 million in the budget, of which only \$8 million was spent. So it was underspent. I think I would ask for some explanation on why it is that the money that is available for aid, which students claim is not enough, remains unused. What does it say? My worry is that the minister might draw the wrong conclusions from it, that it's not been used because there's not enough need there. So that's my question. I think one has to look carefully again at that one, you know, the underspending. Is it the too restrictive and limiting criteria that prevents students in need to qualify to access student aid, or what is it? That's a question that I have there.

On to some other questions. You know, when I looked at the Calgary postsecondary institutions, within the Calgary system alone 13,000 students were turned away from one institution or the other. Here are some numbers that I have for your note, minister. The University of Calgary received applications from 14,341 students, accepted 8,316. According to my numbers more than 6,000 students were declined entry. If you have some concerns about the reliability of the numbers, then tell me and say that we can't rely on these

numbers. For Mount Royal College I have only the number of declined admissions: 1,112 according to my numbers. SAIT had 11,376 applicants, and 5,337 were declined admission. So here are some of these numbers, and that refers only to Calgary. Calgary, albeit, is a major part of our postsecondary system, of Campus Alberta. Nevertheless, these are large numbers.

I need to know whether the minister thinks these numbers are, in fact, real. If they are, then we have to admit and acknowledge that there is an accessibility problem that is very serious in Calgary as we speak. We can't simply slough off this issue by saying: we don't really know how many people applied; you know, they apply to 10 different places, and then they don't turn up. The information available here is about admissions declined by institutions, not admissions people accepted and then not turning up on the day that the classes start.

If I may move to a question or two on the health workforce issue. You have a joint responsibility, I think, that you share with the Minister of Health and Wellness on this. I understand that that phantom report is available somewhere but not to the ordinary folks like us on this side of the House. Does the minister have access to this report? Is it real? Does it in fact exist? Is he willing to share that with this member and this House?

I think it's crucial that we have the report, have its recommendations, look at the numbers, and have an opportunity to assess whether or not the numbers in the report and the recommendations in it are current given the sort of expansion that's happening across Alberta both in demographic expansion, the expansion of the health care system, the needs of it, and the frantic attempts being made by public health care employers within the health system to seek nurses and doctors and others, physiotherapists and whatever have you, for their respective regional health authorities. There are serious shortages. We are going out to Britain and other places to recruit nurses these days. Why is it not important for us in the House to have that report available so that we can have some informed debate and discussion, exchange of ideas on it?

Here are some numbers that I have. I think they relate primarily to the Calgary regional health authority. An estimated 1,500 doctors will be needed in the next three to five years. That's 1,500. I just find it an incredibly large number. Calgary will need an additional 34,000 health care professionals by 2015 to handle retirements and population growth: 22,500 from retirements, 12,000 to handle demographic growth. I understand that an operating room at the Peter Lougheed Centre was unused for a week because no nurses were available. They were either retiring, or they were on sick leave. Yet only 280 nursing spots were available when 1,200 people applied for them at the Mount Royal College. The minister, I know, talked a while ago about how it's going to increase, the capacity of . . . [Dr. Pannu's speaking time expired]

3:40

Mr. Horner: I'm just checking a couple of my notes, Mr. Chairman. A lot of questions in that last little bit.

I'm interested to note that the hon. member feels that quality has suffered in our faculties. The student surveys that we've done, the interest that we've had internationally would indicate that, certainly, the perception internationally of our major institutions that have global reach – which, actually, all of them do now – is a very high regard for the quality of the students, the quality of the faculty, those sorts of things. I think what perhaps is happening is that there's a bit of a change going on in how they manage the affairs of the university to adjust for what is probably a current reality in terms of the students and the changes in the requirements coming out, lifelong learning in terms of the desire of the students and how they want to be taught.

That's not to say that if you were to ask me if I thought we were done, I would say yes. I think that there's much that we can do, and I think part of this whole concept of the roles and responsibilities in the framework is helping them focus in on what it is they want to be the best at. It's going to be a critical factor moving forward with this roles and responsibilities framework. I think that enabling the faculty and the institutions to be nimble, to be responsive and flexible is going to be just as important as, perhaps, you know, in the early days of universities when they had to be rigid and structured. Perhaps that's not exactly the route that the future will hold for them, with some structure to them, obviously.

I think one of the biggest things that's going to be critical for them in terms of some of the issues that the hon. member brought up is going to be the consistency of the dollars going forward, that they know that the dollars are going to be there. So we say things to them like: "Yes, we recognize that tuitions are not going to go up perhaps what market or costs would indicate that they're going to go up. Don't worry about it. We're going to make you whole. We're going to add and we've already put into our budget that 6 per cent to ensure that."

We're going to work with them on their capital and the plans for that capital to ensure that they have operating dollars when they build a building. What a novel concept. We're going to make sure that we do those sorts of things to fill the capacity on that needs basis. So we're not duplicating. We're doing lots of things so they can focus then on the quality of the instruction and the quality of the university and the research and all of the good things that happen there.

I'm just going to give you a very brief idea of the kind of provision that we put out there for the future cost of loan remissions. The loan relief completion payments are automatically awarded to students who have completed, graduated, or left full-time postsecondary studies and have an Alberta student loan, so they've qualified for a student loan, and have exceeded the minimum debt level for their program. The programs have minimum debt levels. If they have fulfilled those three items, then the relief program kicks in. It's fairly straightforward, although again I say that in order to get the loan, there's a bunch of other criteria that is embedded in that. We will make sure to endeavour to get that to you in writing.

The hon. member pointed out that we had dollars that were underspent and that he was concerned that I might get the wrong impression by that and decide that it must not be a program worth keeping. I would suggest to the hon. member quite the opposite. I'm somewhat concerned about it, that students aren't accessing the available dollars and programs that we have. I know that the hon. member was involved in the A Learning Alberta report and the affordability review, and they told us: "You've got a bunch of silly rules in there. Your cost of living is too low. The student loan limits are too low. So change those things, and we'll access the programs." If the hon. member would note, we've actually increased the dollars available for it because we're hoping that the students will take advantage of these programs that we've put out there.

You know, the stupid rules like the \$5,000 car: I just don't understand that one. We should have got rid of that one years ago. Raising the loan limits, raising the cost-of-living allowance: those are the things that we hope are going to attract more students to utilize the services and the bursaries and grants that are available under that program. So quite the contrary, hon. member. I think it's a very valuable program. It's part of the affordability framework. That's why we put more dollars into it as opposed to less.

My hope is that in terms of when we talk about accessibility and these numbers being turned away and the number of students applying and those sorts of things, it was not my intent to give you

the indication that I'm not listening to those numbers. Quite the contrary. We are doing a lot of work, trying to figure out how accurate the numbers are. We're doing a lot of work and spending a lot of time and resources on trying to get a handle on what is the actual need, what is the actual demand. As I've said, the needs analysis.

It's our hope, too, that a system that we're working on in co-operation with the institutions, called APAS, might help us with that. The vision, hon. member, is to have it so that a student sits at his computer and creates the pathway for his success in our postsecondary system. Through that system, he can apply for a loan, he can apply for assistance, he can apply at the various institutions that have outlined their pathway for the career of his choice.

I think it's important that we get information from that system that tells us whether he was successful in his application, where he went, and what course load he took – was it because the other one was full, or was he refused? – so that we have that information. You can imagine how important that is to us to do exactly what the hon. member has been talking about: determine where we need to build space and capacity. It's my hope and the vision of this government and this department that we're going to get to that type of a scenario sooner rather than later. We're going to push very hard to make that happen.

There was some discussion around a phantom report. I don't know about any phantom reports, but I can tell the hon. member that the three ministries are working very hard with industry, with the regional health authorities, and with the postsecondary institutions on doing a very similar kind of exercise of that needs analysis, saying: what is it that we need to do to train our own? What is it that we can do to repatriate? What is it that we can do to bring successful students from other jurisdictions to complete their studies here or do their residency here? We're looking at ways that we can co-ordinate the numbers.

Again, the numbers that the hon. member spoke of – the 1,500 doctors, the 34,000 health care professionals – I would say that those numbers are somewhat high given the information that I have seen from various different sources. Is that to say that we don't have an issue on our hands? No. We have an issue. The issue is capacity in Calgary. The issue is capacity in Edmonton. The issue is capacity in Grande Prairie. The issue is capacity in some of the northern areas, the University of Lethbridge, in certain programming areas. We are working hard to try to address that capacity. I can't wave a magic wand, and poof, there we go; we've got it. But we do have a plan, and we're working towards that plan of a strategy for the health workforce that I think we'll see how we're going to achieve those targets, how we're going to get there.

I think we're going to have to review that annually because, as you know, things change on an annual basis. There are different environmental aspects that may come into play in terms of the employment of these health care professionals that may change those numbers, and we need to make sure that we do this on an annual basis. That's our target. That's our hope.

We have committed, as the member said, some dollars already. We doubled the number of nursing spots in Mount Royal College. We doubled, essentially, the number of spots that were going to come out of Edmonton. We are looking at high-priority fields in health care. We've added \$47 million in the planning envelope to create spaces for degree, diploma, and certificate programming there.

We do recognize that we have issues around space not only in the health care fields but in many, many, many fields. We're working as diligently as we can to identify appropriately so that we're not overbuilding either, that we're identifying appropriately where the

right place is for us to invest those dollars. Even if you have the dollars, you still need the instructors, you still need the labs, you still need all of those things that I know the hon. member is very aware of. It can't happen really quick. It's got to happen in consultation with the institution.

3:50

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to follow up where the minister ended. I say that there's no doubt with the economy we have right now, that I call on steroids, it's creating all sorts of problems. Certainly, it's occurring. We talk about the housing. We talk about public education, health care. In your department I'm not sure how you deal with this problem, to be honest, in the short run.

You know, I look at the figures, and I think about all of us who went to university at one time. When you now need an 85 per cent to get into university, I doubt that there are many in this Legislative Assembly that would be going to university at this particular time. So that's sort of – and I know the minister is aware of it – a double-edged sword. Now we have a whole group of people, thousands of young Albertans, and we need them, certainly, in the workforce, but they're not going to get in. I don't have the figures, but I know that it's high to get into NAIT or SAIT or Mount Royal or Grant MacEwan in many of these programs. It's very hard. So we have a whole group of capable people, average or above average students, and I'm not sure what we do with them. I mean, I guess the oil patch can take some of them. But we're creating, I think, a definite social problem down the way. I know that you can't snap your fingers and deal with that capacity overnight. Again, I would argue that we should've been doing this planning a long time ago. I know that the minister has only had this portfolio for a short period of time.

Then the other double-edged part of the sword is this, especially in apprenticeship. We're trying to do some work in apprenticeship, but we're at such a shortage now that without our own people being trained, we have to try to bring in temporary foreign workers. We've had a discussion in the Legislature, you know, about the problems there that we're facing.

So I agree with the minister. There's not, you know, sort of a snap your fingers and we can solve this particular problem. I suggest, honestly, that as long as we're not prepared to put the foot on the brakes – and I think the fact is that nobody wants to overspend in any area – as long as we have the economy that we have, it's going to be very hard to keep up. We're going to have to spend more money. You can't do it on the cheap. I think that's true in this department. It's probably true in other departments. I know that the Minister of Finance talked about that in his budget this year, that we've had to increase it. Whether that's enough or not, it's a lot of money. But it has to do with the economy that we're facing.

I know that there's not a simple answer there, but I suggest that this is a dilemma to the minister, and maybe he could comment on it. How many students, then, are we losing, that can't get in because of the marks going up that ordinarily in the past would be going to one of our institutions? What happens to them? What sorts of social problems are we going to create down the way? At the same time, we need these people. It'd be nice to have them being trained to go into the various shortages that we already have. I think there's a huge social problem developing there, Mr. Chairman.

I want to just look again at the health care because that's partly in my area too. I've raised questions with the health minister about

this. I expect the problem is this. I think the task force was supposed to report – correct me if I’m wrong – a year or so ago. But I think the numbers keep changing because of what we’re talking about. If that’s the case, I wish the minister would tell us that and also indicate to us when we might take a look at this.

I suggest that we’ve got a serious situation developing. I think we’re in negotiations with a lot of the nurses right now. We’re in negotiations with the doctors. Next year we’re in negotiations with the health sciences. At the same time, growing shortages. We talked about whether the figures are high in Calgary or not. The minister knows that it is desperate in many areas.

I think it’s important to get that task force report out quickly. Even if we can’t deal with it, which I don’t think we probably can in the short run, at least we begin to know sort of the magnitude of the problem. Then, frankly, I think the government has to decide broader than this department, you know, how fast we should continue with the growth that we’re facing if we can’t keep up.

I think these are very broad issues that we all have to deal with. I have some sympathy, frankly, for the minister when I look at sort of the figures that I’ve seen. We have a department with a budget, whether it’s gone up a little bit or not, and we see the magnitude of the problem. How do we deal with it? But we’d better start dealing with it in a very significant way.

Mr. Chairman, I guess I’m asking, rather than a specific question, about some general problems that I see coming up overall and a little more specific about the task force on health care. In Calgary there are code burgundies almost all the time. There are the same in Edmonton. You know, we’re going to face these stresses. I guess I’d just like to follow up, if we could very briefly, on more sort of a philosophy, to see where we’re going, as he sees it, in a broad sense.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, you may proceed. We have enough time.

Mr. Horner: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I had the opportunity to recently travel to China with a number of our postsecondaries. They have a lot of very solid relationships in China as well as the Minister of Science and Technology in China. When the hon. member said that we have our economy on steroids, relatively speaking to what they’re doing over there, we’re a little bit. It’s interesting to see how strong their economy is going and what’s happening over there. It gives you a little bit of an appreciation. They’ve got some issues around infrastructure. They’ve got some issues around postsecondary, health care, all of those sorts of things. They’re all very similar. Relative to us, they’re very, very serious, and it’s managing that growth that’s going to be the key factor moving forward.

We didn’t believe and I don’t think there’s anybody in Canada – certainly, the Canadian millennium foundation – who believed that we might be 300,000 students short, for all of the facilities that we’re building. It’s very difficult to say that this is because we didn’t do it before. Before there was probably somebody saying: why are you building all this stuff when there are not going to be any students? Now they’re saying: why didn’t you build it? Because now we’ve got all these students.

It’s also difficult to ascertain, as I said before, even an approximation of the number of students who did not end up in a postsecondary institution somewhere in our system. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out, they may have applied to five different places and got into one, but those other four said: well, we didn’t have space for them. It’s difficult to determine that. That’s my hope on the APAS system, that we’re going to be able to get much clearer data about where we have the issues around capacity.

That’s not to say that we don’t have an issue around capacity. We do. I would love to not have the opportunity to say that it isn’t a tuition issue; it’s a capacity issue. If you reduce tuition to zero, you still wouldn’t get one more student into our postsecondary system. There just isn’t any room. We need to do a lot of expansion of the capacity in our system. That’s what \$1.6 billion worth of capital is at work doing today with our postsecondaries. We are responding to the issue, and we’re working hard on it.

When you talk about 85 per cent to get into university, the hon. member is very correct: there is no way I would have gotten into university with that kind of a thing. But I think it’s not a fair statement to say that every one of our postsecondaries requires an 85 per cent average. There are certain pathways that students can take that require less of an entrance requirement but will get them to the same end result, perhaps in a different way. I think that was true of my day and probably true of the hon. member’s day, that there were other ways to skin that cat, and there are today other ways to do it as well. That’s not to say, again, that we don’t have an issue around capacity.

Partly, too, in some instances the particular institution might be targeting a certain level and quality of student that they want to put into that particular place to work with some postgraduate researcher or some other quality issue that they might want to pursue, so that has to be taken into consideration when you start talking about that.

To say that we could have averted the temporary foreign worker issue by training our own, currently we are well over 65,000 spots for apprentices, more than anyone would have ever dreamed we could even possibly do in this province given the infrastructure that we have, more than I think any province in Canada with maybe the exception of Ontario. Certainly, we have responded in spades to the demand there, and we’re continuing to respond. In fact, in this budget there are allocations there to continue to expand our apprenticeship spaces.

4:00

Having said that, the industry tells me that there is no way that by doing this we could even hope to respond to the actual need that’s out there. We need more people. It’s very evident that we need to bring more people in. Can we bring them in and train them? You bet. We’re going to be working on that as well.

In terms of the health care task force, again, I will reiterate that, yes, we know that there is a serious issue around being able to train, repatriate, bring in health care workers at all levels and in all classes, all different vocations in the health care field. Again, the expansion of that industry and the expansion of the need has been very, very dramatic, much more than anyone would have ever been able to forecast.

As the hon. member knows, I used to be in a little bit of the forecasting business and based my income on trading in futures and grains and foods and everything else around the globe, on trying to predict where the next spike might come from. If I’d had the ability to predict any one of these things, I’d be a very profitable person today, and you would be asking for a lot of advice from me for a whole bunch of different things.

I don’t think anybody could have predicted this, nor could anybody predict the extent that it’s going. It’s going to be extremely difficult to predict what the need is going to be, and that’s why we have to be very careful about the information that we use when we do those predictions. As I’m sure both the hon. members would appreciate, we’re going to be as careful as we possibly can to ensure that our numbers are right and that our investments are in the right places. In the timeline that it takes, we have to be as close to being right as we possibly can.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, we have about eight minutes left to conclude advanced education, so you may use your time accordingly.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Absolutely. I appreciate you, Chair, for pointing that out. Certainly, my colleagues have done an admirable job in outlining our concerns in regard to postsecondary education. I perhaps just wanted to continue on the lines of our previous speaker just in terms of – and not to sound callous or anything like that but to make the best use of the labour that we have available in our province. You know, I bring that forward as not just someone who follows education but also as someone who has young people in my own family. I would like to ensure that they are getting the education that best suits their ability so that they can contribute in the best possible way throughout their lives to the economy.

You know, sometimes you just have to crack some eggs, so to speak, to make an omelette. We're at a place now, I think, that's not dissimilar to perhaps the early mid-60s in this province of Alberta where we expanded our postsecondary capacity by a tremendous amount. The benefit that we derived from that significant expansion we're still feeling here today in this province by having a reasonably high level of education amongst a certain generation, that allowed us to make a big leap over into sort of a postagrarian-based economy. Certainly, the oil and the gas and the energy were a helpful addition to our overall economy, but we had a whole generation of educated people who could exploit that in the broadest possible way, so the overall value of our society increased exponentially, not just from raw extraction of energy but our capacity to build value-added to that energy industry.

Here we are in the similar situation, I would venture to say, Mr. Chair, where we're looking at a need for a quantitative leap in our capacity to train people. This is evidenced by these lineups. It was like rock show or something in my constituency at NAIT where people were lining up 24 hours in advance to get a position in welding or radiology or what have you.

You know, these are all our sons and daughters that have the ability, the capacity to contribute to the next generation of our value-added economy. It would just break my heart, not to mention cripple us economically, to not make sure that they get the best education possible, and so my suggestion – and certainly I know that the hon. minister has this idea – to make sure that we go ahead and spend a bit to create that capacity to ensure that those students get an education in a timely manner.

There was one concern that I did have that I wrote down here: changing, perhaps, the way in which we look at a postsecondary degree to unfold and having that unfold over a longer period of time or a part-time basis and whatnot. Certainly, we have to have the flexibility to see that possibility, but, you know, it's again shortchanging the expertise that we require in our economy and shortchanging students as well to say: well, you're going to have to take, you're compelled to take your university or your apprenticeship training or your NAIT training or SAIT training over a longer period of time because – you know what? – we just can't accommodate you right now. I think that it would not serve the purpose of our secondary needs very well to look at it that way.

You know, I would say that this is a bit of a distortion of this idea of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is a great thing, and certainly if people can have the fortune to train for two or more careers over their lifetime, that's wonderful. However, we need to educate students to the very best of their ability in a timely manner so that they can contribute to the economy and contribute to a quality of life for them and their children.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, we have about two and a half minutes.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be very brief as I want to try and cover off four quick points. The hon. member talked about making the best use of the workers that we have in the province, so I look forward to his support when we start talking about scope of practice in the health care fields as to ensuring that workers in the health care fields are actually doing the things that they were trained to do and changing some of those perhaps archaic rules around some of the ratios and those sorts of things. I look forward to that, and indeed that would be cracking some eggs to make more than one omelette.

The lineups that you mentioned at NAIT is interesting commentary. You know, the perception is that that means that they were lining up to try to get in because they didn't have a spot. In actual fact, it was a lineup to try to get in because it's first come, first gets to pick the day that they get to go in. There may be better ways to do this, and, certainly, I think NAIT is probably looking at that. When you say that today is the day, and it's first come, first gets to pick the day that they get to go to school, it doesn't mean that the others don't get to go. It means that they don't get to pick, and I think we need to be cognizant that that was the reason for the lineups.

The other thing is that I don't want the hon. member to go away with the wrong impression about what I said in terms of part-time students. It's not that we as a government or that the postsecondaries are saying: "Gee, here's a neat way to save costs or do something different. Let's make them all part-time." The students themselves are making these choices; they're the ones. What we're seeing is that the students are making a lifestyle choice to say: I want to work, and I want to go to school to better myself, and I am more than willing to do it over a longer period of time because that's what I want to do. It is not us that are doing it. But at the same time, our postsecondaries need to be responsive to what the student body is actually asking for. That's, after all, what we're here for: to respond to the students. I didn't want the hon. member to leave with the impression that we were pushing that agenda as much as our clients are, and that's really who we serve.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, particularly your staff, I just want to thank you very much for coming here to support your minister and provide the necessary assistance.

Education

The Deputy Chair: I call upon the Minister of Education to introduce his staff and proceed from there.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I have only one staff on the floor, Deputy Minister Keray Henke, and I hope that we can answer all of the questions that are posed today.

I would not propose to make any opening comments. We went through this process with the other opposition members about a week ago. That time, it's well recorded in *Hansard*, my opening comments. So I would be open to try and answer questions from the third party.

4:10

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, just before I recognize you to speak, I need some direction from you and your caucus as to whether you would like to continue the format of the 10-minute or you would want a 20-minute time clock going back and forth, question/answer.

Mr. Eggen: If it's okay, we would like to continue with the system we were using previously if it's okay with the Minister of Education as well.

The Deputy Chair: Very well. We will begin with you with the 10-minute time slot. Go ahead.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. All right. Thanks, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to thank the minister and his deputy minister for this time to go over some aspects of the budget in more intimate circumstances, perhaps, than we did earlier in the afternoon. I would certainly like to thank, as well, the ministry for being quite forthcoming in providing information that we've required in the past, and we would certainly appreciate that to continue here in the present and the future. My questions are around, sort of, four areas: addressing capital projects, addressing program operating funds, discussing the unfunded liability issue to some degree, and speaking about private school funding. These are the areas that myself and my colleagues as well will pursue.

I'm going to start off with the capital project issue. You know, we have this overarching theme that goes on with each of these ministries, K to 12 education certainly not being excluded, and that is a tremendous growth in our population here in the province and a corresponding increase in students that require K to 12 education. We have a little bit of a mini baby boom taking place in the province, so we know that people must be feeling stable enough to reproduce. But that, of course, means that we have to look into long-term planning for the expansion of our K to 12 capacity in the province because of this, as I say, increasing population both from inside and outside of the province. It's a fine thing to have, and we'd like to provide that capacity.

You know, looking through the budget, the \$508 million this year going towards capital projects – that's from page 95 of the budget – is looking into this, sort of, vast chasm of requirements for building new capacity in the province. There are 71 previously identified projects, including 47 new or replacement projects and 24 modernization projects, 12 new schools or so announced this year, and \$96 million for infrastructure, maintenance, and renewal. My calculation is that while this certainly sounds ambitious and is a reflection of our growing economy, in terms of absolute dollars this seems to represent a drop by at least a number of 12 per cent. I would like to ask the minister if this corresponds to his perception.

As well, if you factor in inflation, which is quite a rampant issue here, unfortunately, in Alberta, then I'm seeing a 24 per cent drop in actual dollars. Perhaps the minister could comment as to how he perceives this to be unfolding – right? – from the previous year's budget.

According to our calculation, this leaves approximately \$400 million a year for the two subsequent years, including money for maintenance and renewals. We have an incredible request for 172 new or replacement schools, so, you know, by my simple calculations here this budget that we have before us barely addresses half of the recommended projects. I would ask the minister, then, first of all, how the government intends to deal with this chronic shortfall of schools that will be required across the province. We need both a short-term and long-term plan to deal with this infrastructure deficit, so to speak, as well as the practical development of these schools. So I'd be curious to see how we're going to tackle this here in the immediate and long-term future.

I would like to know as well how many new seats the government foresees this province needing in the next five years, let's say, considering this request for so many new schools as well as replacements with the population increasing like it is. You know, given that the maximum amount available for the next two years would be

\$300 million, I would like to ask the minister as well how he would intend to cover the inevitable space shortfall in the education sector. Really, that's a similar question as to how we're going to meet the needs of these new schools. It's a matter of geography, Mr. Chair. You know, there's a shortage of schools in certain places where new subdivisions are being built, where people are choosing to move from other parts of the province or other parts of the country.

Moving on to the second section that I had outlined, talking about program operating budgets. Again, we've had this discussion here and there, here and otherwise across the province. There's some confusion about the budget and how much base operating of the shortfall there is. Perhaps we can gain some clarification on this part of our debate.

Program budgets received a 5.5 per cent increase over the last year's budget according to page 94 of the budget. I'm seeking clarification here, right? Of what I see as a 5.5 per cent increase, 3 per cent seems to be going to general program spending by the boards. An increase as well is earmarked to the class size initiative, again on page 94 of the budget. Then 2.5 per cent goes towards prescribed funding, according to my calculations, Mr. Chair. You know, this is the nub of the debate that we've been having here. Again, I'm just seeking clarification if there's any other funding that is going to general program spending.

Of course, the big criticism that the school boards and the Teachers' Association as well as the Alberta New Democrats have is that this 3 per cent doesn't seem to match the inflationary pressures that we see, thus we could be in for a net decrease in capacity to run the schools, to hire teachers and support staff. We've seen the manifestation of that already with the Calgary Catholic board painting some bleak headlines in the *Calgary Herald* last week, saying that they would actually have to lay off teachers the next school year if we don't put some supplementary funding into place. That's our criticism.

As well, this is less of an increase than what other ministries actually received for their budgets. Other ministries seem to build their capacity for inflation and expanding programs, what have you, expanding economy in general, into the budgets, but with the K to 12 budget I just see a bit of a problem, right? So perhaps we could get some clarification on that. I would appreciate it.

The other issue that applies pressure to these budgets is that there are so many school boards that are going up for negotiations with their teachers. Of course, the teacher portion of the overall education K to 12 budget is by far the lion's share. How can we accommodate for the increases that will be inevitably negotiated with these new teacher contracts that will be coming up in the fall? I'm just looking for a sense of where the long-term stability in K to 12 is going to come from with some of these rather tight margins for base operations combined with the demands of labour, right? Of course, there's always hyperbole involved with these things, but with the teachers in particular there seems to be the potential for a bit of a standoff, which I don't think anyone would be well served by any means.

4:20

As I said before, Calgary Catholic has sort of been the first one to speak up on this. You know, a lot of the large urban school boards don't have that extra capacity built into them to perhaps accommodate for vagaries in the budget, so that's where you usually see the canary and the coal mine, so to speak. The large urban budgets being stretched as they already are is an indication of probably where a lot of other school boards are going to be as well.

So, with that first round, I would ask if the minister would care to . . . [Mr. Eggen's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much. I will attempt to try and cover all of the issues that were raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, but I may very well miss a few of them. If I do, we've got another hour and 22 minutes.

The member talked a lot about our growing population and the demand for seats. The reality of it is, though, that our enrolment is not increasing significantly. It's less than 1 per cent. This year alone in Alberta we will be adding about 8,200 classroom seats, and the enrolment growth is expected to be less than 5,000.

Our issue is not with lack of space; our issue is lack of space in the right places. I can say that nobody knows that better than myself. Although there are two new schools under construction today in my constituency – I have one public school and one Catholic school – I happen to have a catchment area that takes in an older part of Calgary, so the kids are all bused to the older part of town. We could meet literally all the demands if we could just pick up those schools and move them to where the kids are. Of course, the hon. member would know and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview would know that if you build a new school over there, that means you pull kids out of these schools in the older neighbourhoods. All of a sudden you've got three schools where probably only two are required; therefore, you run into the old issue around closing schools in the inner city.

While our population is growing, our actual enrolment last year was 1 per cent, and we're projecting a half a per cent this year, so we will have enough spaces for children. It's a case of them not necessarily being in the right place.

I wanted to deal with the issue around the decrease of some \$70 million in our budget relative to infrastructure. Two years ago our infrastructure maintenance funding stood at \$48 million annually. Last year we increased it to \$200 million, and this year we've set it at \$96 million. Now, you can either look at that as a 50 per cent reduction from last year or a hundred per cent increase from two years ago. If you compare it to last year's amount on infrastructure maintenance, we're down about \$70 million. So that's where that discrepancy comes in. I think you referenced it from page 94.

Now, there's also another issue in there which relates simply to cash-flow timing. There is a certain time of the construction phase of new schools when cash flows out at a higher rate than at different times of the year, and we just happen to be in the cycle where last year there was a significant amount of cash flowing out for the construction of new schools. We're in a bit of a dip now, and that'll probably increase next year. Overall, our capital budget for new school construction is relatively unchanged from last year. The only new funding that we've put in is the hundred million, which I hope to be in a position over the next few weeks to expand a little bit more on how we intend to allocate that. I would ask the hon. member to just watch the news.

We then went to the area around funding. Well, we have had this discussion in the House on a number of occasions. I know that there is always the desire, if you're attempting to negotiate contracts, to, I would say, tie it to the most convenient number you might want to tie it to. Today it happens to be the rate of inflation. I know that the Teachers' Association has talked about the rate of inflation of 6 per cent and that the base operating grant is only 3 per cent. I don't happen to subscribe to that just because this year the rate of inflation is 6 per cent. If it happens to go to minus 2 per cent next year, my guess is that we're probably not going to have a rollback in wages. I believe in a combination of things: the 3 per cent base grant, the fact that school boards across the province have an accumulated surplus. Some other issues that may evolve over the next while will

result in the ability of school boards and local associations to arrive at contract settlements.

I didn't quite catch the wording, but the hon. member related something about getting involved in negotiations. I want to make it very clear that we will not be involved in any negotiations. That is clearly between the ATA locals and the various school boards. I guess, just to sort of conclude on the negotiation side of it, I believe that teachers teach because of their passion for education. There are a number of young teachers in this province that could tomorrow leave the profession and probably earn twice as much money working on the oil rigs, and we're never going to be able to compete with that. That's just a reality.

I believe that our wage grid for our teachers is extremely competitive. It's among the best in Canada. I want to look at it positively. I don't want to sort of start on the doom and gloom and say that there's trouble on the horizon. I believe that overall we'll see some significant progress in that area. I've mentioned on a couple of occasions that we have had in recent months settlements that were retroactive in two or three school districts that were in the range of 3 per cent. Inflation last year was no different than inflation is going to be this year. So if there's a willingness there to sit down and work it out, I do believe that is possible.

I think that that probably covers the majority of those issues.

Maybe one more quick thing. I think it's important to put on the record that while the base grant increased by 3 per cent, we did increase our class size initiative funding in this budget by 21 per cent. Student health initiatives went up by 6 per cent. Our current cost of the teachers' pension plan is 7.4 per cent. So we really have to take everything in consideration and use the 5 and a half per cent as more of a guideline as to what school boards will be receiving versus the 3 per cent operating grant.

I think with that, I'll sit down and respond to any other questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the minister as well for his frank assessments. You know, there are a number of problems associated with what the minister is setting up here. I've raised these before in some small way, but I would like to perhaps speak to it in more detail, right? First is the overall accumulated surplus for school boards across the province of Alberta. My understanding is that there's about \$200 million, \$220 million, something like that, out there if you add it all up. However, because I was very curious about this, I actually looked into this and even consulted my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who has extensive knowledge of this issue. You know, what happens is that this is a calculation of all of the funds that school boards have put in place to ensure long-term funding of their operations.

4:30

The example I used yesterday, I think, was with buses, right? A school board will purchase their school buses but also buy into a fund that will allow for a replacement of those buses in eight to 10 years or however long a bus lasts. That's a calculation, the \$200 million or \$220 million, that includes those types of expenditures or types of investments, we could say, by the school boards.

You know, using that as an accrued investment that school boards have made and then somehow applying it back to an annual cost which school boards have in their teachers' salaries I don't think is a very fair comparison. In fact, it's a little bit dangerous because, of course, some school boards, the big ones, don't have a lot of that surplus there anyway. If you took all of that surplus and applied it,

say, to salaries or to the operation of schools across the province, then it would only last a couple of weeks anyway, right? So I don't think it's fair to look at that number and say that that money is there as a way to bail us out because we're in a situation where, as the minister very aptly pointed out, the overall increase in our population of students from K to 12 is not increasing to keep pace with the population.

What is increasing is the demand for schools in certain geographic locations coupled with a dire need to invest in the crumbling infrastructures that we've sort of been putting off over a long period of time. You know, I can think of so many schools across the city here and in Calgary, say, that are just crying out for significant investment. By putting that off for so long now, we've come back to having to pay the piper on those buildings. While the overall enrolment might be only increasing by 1 per cent across the province, the need to reconstitute our system is significant. It's historically significant here in the province now. So my question is: what are we going to do about it?

I know that the minister has been talking about P3s as a way to save the day. To what degree is he willing to invest in private partnerships with businesses to build schools in areas that require them or to refurbish schools that require extensive refurbishment? You know, where's the plan on that? We would like to see that because, of course, we have very serious reservations about public/private partnership arrangements to provide public services. We would like to certainly see the details so that we can provide the constructive criticism that would be undoubtedly required in regard to that idea.

The issue, as well, that we just were speaking about from the beginning is about this idea of negotiations and where we can go with it. Certainly, as the minister might know, I was a teacher and consider myself to be one still in some degree. It's certainly true what the minister says about the goodwill that teachers bring to the profession. It's a choice that they make. But my suggestion and constructive assistance for you in your planning is: don't rely on that goodwill too much. You know, you can put a certain price on it, but don't overestimate how much it's worth because at a certain point that starts to fall apart.

What I'm starting to see is that the new generation of teachers is much more practical, I would say, in this regard in looking at less of a sacrifice to the future education of our young people and not being willing to be taken advantage of by that. I think that's not such a bad attitude to have, quite frankly, because, of course, these are professionals that require a lot of postsecondary university training. They've invested a lot, and they want to get on with their lives too. So to rely on the goodwill of teachers, especially when they're facing large inflationary pressures on their own personal budgets, I think is a little bit tricky, certainly.

As well, I just wanted to speak on that and how it plays into teacher retention and building the profession up over time because, of course, the quality individuals that make the schools function – you have to invest in those individuals, both administrators and teachers, and support staff, over time to come to create that critical mass of a good public education system. I mean, let's not forget – and state it clearly now – that we do have quite a good public education system here in the province of Alberta. It's something that we are invested to keep and to improve upon over time. That's an important thing to remind ourselves of here.

You know, the individuals who run the schools and teach in them and the support staff who make the world go around with education – if we are somehow compromising the affordability of the profession, if people can make that choice and know that they can have a livelihood to raise a family and make a career out of teaching, if we're somehow compromising that with unstable funding or what

have you, then we end up in the less than advantageous position. We don't have to look far to see where public school systems have kind of crumbled and fallen apart. Believe me, we don't want to go there.

I would like to ask the minister as well about high school completion rates. This is an issue that is very much close to my heart because, you know, the system that we have available is a good high school system, but we seem to be losing a good portion of students from year to year. Students not completing within the three years is somewhere around 30 per cent in the province. I find that to be very unacceptable. Certainly, students come back over time to finish, perhaps over a five-year or a six-year period, but you lose a lot of those people. There's a critical time when you can educate someone and move them on to higher learning. I would like the minister to perhaps make some comment on the success of targeting funds to increase our high school completion rates. Our high school completion rates are not comparable to the rest of the country, and I think that we need to find out why and perhaps target monies directly to that problem.

As well, I just wanted to make some comment on private school funding. It's interesting, I found, from page 95 of the budget, that private accredited schools is one area where the budget actually went up in this year's K to 12 budget, which is nice to see some exception to a trend. In '06-07 the government spent \$135 million. In this budget, this year, the budget goes up by 6.5 per cent – there you go; that's a nice number reminding us of inflation – to \$144 million, including \$39 million for the school boards' administration funding. This is a greater percentage increase than, of course, what the public schools received. I would like to know why that might be so, to seek some illumination on that.

It is our position as New Democrats that we should be limiting the public monies that we spend on institutions that charge students because we lose some degree of accountability there. You know, you are creating some social stratification there as well because, of course, private schools can augment and supplement people's education in various ways and decrease student-teacher ratios far in excess of what we probably can do publicly. That's another question that I have too.

Thank you.

4:40

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Chairman, the member alluded to a few comments off the top relative to the accumulated surpluses of school boards. Let me just make sure that it is clear that the accumulated operating surplus for the Calgary Catholic school board in '05-06 was \$9.5 million, which was a 14 per cent increase from the year previous. Calgary public is at \$18.2 million, which is a 52 per cent increase from the previous year. Edmonton public – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview would be interested to hear this – went from an accumulated operating deficit of \$1.7 million to a surplus of \$5.6 million, or an increase of 429 per cent. So to say that the large city school boards don't have operating accumulated surpluses is not correct. I don't believe that the taxpayers of Alberta are prepared to say: we will increase our education budget significantly so that school boards can continue to build up surpluses.

I think the member also mentioned that these accumulated surpluses are there for such things as replacing buses and that sort of thing. I think we have to start to ask the question: what business are school boards in? Are they in the school bus business? Are they in the carpentry business? It goes on and on and on. I think it's about time that school boards took a step back, did a cost analysis to say: "You know what? It might be cost efficient for us to start to lease

school buses, or it might be cost efficient for us to contract out the busing services for school buses.”

It seems to me that unless we start to really take a look at how we operate our school systems, our school divisions, we’re never going to become more efficient and more effective if we always continue to do everything the same way we did it last year and the year before and going all the way back to the ’30s. So I think it’s time for some creativity, and I believe we have the people in place to do that.

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

Now, the hon. member referenced our crumbling infrastructure. There’s no question that we have a backlog of maintenance that, frankly, I wish we didn’t have. It’s there. We’ll have to deal with it. We simply do not have the money right now in terms of fixing it all at once. We made tremendous progress last year with the \$200 million in maintenance renewal funding. The city of Calgary alone repaired something like 49 roofs of schools.

I do hear, however, that with the \$200 million we gave to school boards last year for infrastructure maintenance, in some cases there was a real challenge to actually commit that money, a shortage of personnel to work, and just, frankly, spending all that money in one budget year. We’re going to sort of assess where we are on the \$96 million. We’ll talk to school boards as we work through the year and see whether that funding is where it needs to be or if it needs to be adjusted somewhere down the line. That’s work in progress, but there’s no question that it’s an issue.

Now, the member raised the issue of P3s. We have a philosophical difference around who should own every building in town. We don’t happen to agree that the government should own every building in town. I think one of the real values you can get through an arrangement with a public/private partnership is that you can actually get a long-term commitment that would build in the maintenance costs, and we wouldn’t be faced with this crumbling infrastructure as the member refers to.

The member made a statement that I’m going to take exception with. He said that we have quite a good education system in Alberta. Well, I’d like to say that we have an outstanding education system in Alberta, and I think he should be saying that we have an outstanding system. I could relate a litany of evidence to that effect, but I really think we need to start talking about our outstanding education system in Alberta.

He talked a bit about teachers and teachers’ salaries and are we competitive. Are we competitive with some of that external world out there? I don’t think we are, and we’re probably never going to be, but I don’t believe that we can have our – and I’ll use this term in a general sense – public servants, if I might. It doesn’t matter if it’s my deputy minister or if it’s a schoolteacher or a health care worker, we are not going to be competing with some of the external world out there relative to this province.

For instance, just a couple of weeks ago I met a couple who were teachers in Saskatchewan. I remind the hon. members of the philosophical views of the government of Saskatchewan. This couple actually moved to Alberta because we paid and treated our teachers much better than they did in the neighbouring province of Saskatchewan. So I would ask the hon. member to do a bit of a comparison on our teachers’ salary grid compared to . . .

Mr. Martin: I know two that just went to Saskatchewan.

Mr. Liepert: Well, there may be other reasons for it, but that wasn’t for pay reasons, hon. member.

Some discussion around the high school completion rate. I absolutely agree with the member: our numbers are not acceptable.

In fact, what I would say is even more concerning is that we measure those who enter grade 10 and those who graduate – and we’re in the 70-some per cent range right now – but what we don’t measure is those who actually never make it to grade 10. We have some real issues in the Métis and aboriginal communities. There are some issues around some of our newer Canadians that never make it to grade 10. They don’t even count in those statistics, so we have a lot of work to do there.

I don’t believe that money is going to solve the problem here. We did some good work last year with the high school completion symposium. What we really found out in that review and talking to students was that, you know, it’s the experience in school that keeps them there or makes them drop out of high school. So what we need to do is a better job of creating an environment in school, whether it’s career pathing, whether it’s ensuring that every student feels safe in the environment at school. We need to do a better job in that area, and I think our high school completion rate will continue to move upward.

I think another thing that could really help a lot is we need to involve all Albertans in the education system. We need to encourage more mentorship within the school system. There are many students who really would benefit by having an outside mentor that could help guide that student not only through school but after school years. Those are all things we’ll be working on.

Just one quick note around private school funding. The hon. member needs to ensure that he doesn’t distort the facts around private school funding. The only reason the increase in private school funding is 6.5 per cent is because this year for the first time we put an injection into private schools for ESL, English as a Second Language. We have to recognize that there are a number of private schools in this province – all private schools aren’t a bunch of rich kids, so let’s make sure that’s clear – that are ethnic based or are religion based around certain ethnic groups, and it is unfair for them not to be receiving English as Second Language funds. Obviously, if a particular private school doesn’t have English as a Second Language students, they don’t get the funding.

So just to be clear, private schools receive 60 per cent of the base operating grant, and this is the only additional money they receive. They receive the various programs like AISI and others, but there is no transportation funding; there is no operation and maintenance funding; there is no capital funding. I want to make sure that the impression isn’t left that somehow we were giving private schools a greater increase in funding than we were public schools. On the ESL side of it, which increased the percentage, we are only bringing them up to what we do in the public school system.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have a few comments I’d like to make, and there are a number of places to go. I would say to the minister, though – and I don’t want to spend a great deal of time on this – that the Edmonton public didn’t have a surplus for a long time. The surpluses were in the rural areas. My guess – you probably know better than me now – is that that budget would be \$700 million. If they’ve got a \$5 million surplus, that’s not a great deal. Now, what they’re using it for, I don’t know, but let’s keep that in perspective, that that’s not a lot of money in that sort of budget.

4:50

Friendly advice to the minister because I think we have the

potential of being back to where we were when I was a trustee in Edmonton public, when we ran into, you know, the situation with the strikes which started in Edmonton public and spread to Calgary public. Eventually the government had to get in. We went through arbitration. I'm sure the minister's well aware of it even though he wasn't here. I wasn't here, but I was very much a part of it as an Edmonton public trustee. These issues are difficult. Admittedly the minister does not have an easy job because we have an overheated economy, inflation is running high, pressures on salaries. It's not only teachers; it's all the other people. Roughly 80 per cent of the budgets have to do with staffing, you know, when you're dealing with public education.

But I want to say that there's no point in picking a fight right now with anybody: the school boards, the ATA, or anybody. Nobody wins in this situation. We went through this when the minister at the time, now the Finance minister, took the hard road on it and said: this is the way; it's my way or the highway. I was there. That's very much the impression that came back, and nobody won in that. Certainly, the government didn't win, and it created a lot of friction that was unnecessary. It's going to be difficult enough, you know, with the number of contracts that are coming forward now. So for a person I've known for a long time, that's some friendly advice. It's just not going to help anybody because everybody will get their backs up, and there's enough power on both sides that nobody wins. So I would really suggest that we have to try to improve the tone because the negotiations are going to be difficult as it is.

I want to though go to something that's very close to my mind. The minister talked about it. It has to do with the schools being in the wrong places. I think there are a couple of things that I'd like to suggest. I don't know if the minister has looked at it, but it was a discussion that we held with the previous Education minister about how we deal with school closures and how we look at schools generally. You know, there is nothing worse than going through a school closure process. I've been there as a trustee, and I was there as an MLA. It's a very emotional time. There's a community involved, and it's a difficult process.

Now, I'm aware that sometimes schools can eventually close themselves, you know, because enrolment keeps going down. But I think there's a process that we have to look at differently. Number one, I think the ministries have to work together. If there's something worthwhile that's happening in the school – I don't care if it's a seniors' group or if it's a daycare or whatever – we look at the school as a community centre, and we try to keep that going. As the economy grows, we can't begin to build enough new schools out in the new suburbs. Maybe we should be encouraging people to move back into the core group of the city. I think we're going to have to do that. History tells us that we have to do this. There's a chance, then, that people will move in with younger kids.

But I think that if we can keep the schools together – we have examples of this in some schools where we do have those groups there. If that would count on the utilization, as long as that school's active and it's participating with the community and it's a community-based school, it seems to me that that makes sense for everybody. There could be money not just from Education but from other departments that are involved in the school. I really think that we should take a good long look at that. We've made some strides in that direction. I know that. But I think we have to go all the way with it.

With the school closure process it is so divisive the way it is done now, you know, through the School Act. All of a sudden you get an announcement that the school could close. Then we have – I was there as a trustee – these phony public hearings. Everybody knows that they probably made a decision on them, and there's just rancour, and then all of a sudden the schools close down the way. The

pressure has always been on schools in the inner city to move. I'll come back to the minister's comments. If we build the schools in the right places – gee, if we close them down here, we're going to get new schools out in the suburbs. Well, it hasn't happened in many cases because we just don't have enough money to build all the schools that we would need.

As I've mentioned, in Ontario – and I wish we'd take a look at this – they say in the school act that you cannot use that as an excuse to get new schools, closing down the school. There have to be different criteria. They do it for a longer period of time. I was more up on this a year ago.

I really think that those two things would go some way in doing what the minister was talking about, trying to put, you know, the school where it's needed. If they were community centres and there were other useful things there, that certainly would be a use to keep that school going. I think it would be beneficial to the community, beneficial to the taxpayers. It doesn't matter whether it's the Minister of Education or the minister of health or the ministry of community development. It's all the same taxpayers; I think the minister would agree. There are things I think that we can do in that area to make the process better.

I'm sure we'll have time to talk about P3s. I will come back to that, but I wouldn't have enough time to go on about it now.

I just want to talk about the dropout rate. Some of the work that we were doing – and I know it's happening in other places in Edmonton public with the emphasis on full-day kindergarten, some of the high-needs areas, and some of the extra help that we are giving. Hopefully, that will be the biggest thing that we can do. The big impact is K to 3. Of course, you won't see if that's going to impact the dropout rate till much later.

You know, the biggest single indicator – and I think the deputy minister would probably agree – you can almost predict at grade 9. If a student comes into grade 10 and they're one year behind in their reading level, the odds are that they're going to be a dropout. There are some answers to that, I think, that wouldn't require a lot of money. But that's the fact as I understand it. If you're one year behind in your reading level, the odds are pretty good.

So somewhere in junior high or elementary we need some extra help in remedial reading because if you can't read well enough, then that's going to be the impact. I think we could take a very good look at that sort of area. That's not going to solve all the problems, but I think that with some remedial reading it might not take a lot of extra money to do that. I think you would have a major impact, at least from the studies I've seen in terms of the dropout rate, if you could do it as quickly as you can in elementary level or junior high.

Now, the reading recovery programs in elementary were very successful, especially in the high-needs areas. They're very expensive, but they may be a good investment over the long haul. I don't know – as I say, I've been away from being a trustee for a while – how many of those programs are still going, but the work that they were doing there at the elementary level was very significant. Even in junior high some remedial programs may be necessary, especially if we can predict the kids that are a little bit behind in their reading. If we're doing some work there, I think that that could have a major impact. I'd like the minister to comment on that. If he's not aware of the reading recovery program, I don't expect people to know everything overnight.

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Well, as the hon. member mentioned, we have known each other for a long time, so I accept some of his fatherly advice. But I also throw back a couple of comments. You know, it's been said before about picking a fight, improving the tone. I'd like him to be more specific about it. I'm not picking a fight with anybody.

We have some serious issues in this province relative to where we go with expenditures, and I think we have to start to become more creative in how we meet the public demands.

5:00

I know that it's very easy to sit there and say: spend more money. I understand the philosophical difference we have between fiscal responsibility on this side of the House and less than fiscal responsibility, I would suggest, on the other side. But this isn't about picking a fight. This is about making some tough decisions over the next few years because we are going to hit a wall here pretty quickly, and it might be as quickly as this year if some of the economic indicators that are out there right now continue. So there is no improving the tone; there is no picking a fight. It's laying out some of the realities that exist out there and trying to solve some of the problems.

Now, the member talked a lot about school closures and schools in the wrong places. I guess that one of the comments that he used was, and I quote: there is nothing worse than closing a school. Well, my learned friend I have to disagree with. Yes, closing schools are difficult choices, but we have to make those tough decisions once in a while in life. I can think of a whole bunch of things that are a whole lot worse than having to close a school. In many of these neighbourhoods where they're closing a school, you simply have several schools in an area. If one school is closed, it is not the inconvenience for those children in the larger communities that exist today in a lot of these newer subdivisions where children are riding the bus for an hour to get to school.

I come back to what I've said on many occasions. I was disappointed to hear the hon. member use the term "phony public hearings." Hon. member, you're degrading what you used to do as a public school trustee. Let me give you an example in Edmonton this year. Those phony public hearings resulted in one school not being closed; am I not correct? They were proposing to close four schools in Edmonton, and they had these phony public hearings and then chose not to close one school. I think the hon. member might want to consider whether or not he's using language that frankly does a disservice to the good work that our school districts and trustees do.

Good comments around the dropout rate. I would take his advice relative to remedial reading. I would like to say to the hon. member that I believe the dropout rate starts way lower than grade 9. I think that in elementary school on many occasions there would probably be a trend that you could see in grade 3 to grade 6 with your dropout rate. You could probably identify a pretty high number of students that might be dropping out. We have made a commitment this year financially in the budget relative to putting more money into early learning initiatives to identify some of those children who have early learning difficulties, to work with them to get them to the level at grade 1 where they can be on par with children who don't have any learning difficulties.

Just to flip back to the community schools concept: the member makes good points around the importance of a school to a community, whether it is turned into a daycare or it's turned into a seniors' centre or whatever it might be, but I would have to say that I don't believe that the member can lay that responsibility on the provincial government or the Minister of Education. I think that's a community decision, and somebody has got to pay for those facilities. School boards have budgets they have to work in. They have to run a new school over here; they choose to close a school at this location. It's a transfer of funds.

I guess we could say that going forward, there will be never be another school closed in Alberta. We could probably accomplish that with about a 10 per cent budget increase, but, again, it comes

back to a philosophical difference of whether you are fiscally responsible or not. I take great pride in the fact that I believe this government is fiscally responsible.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Yeah, there are some philosophical differences, no doubt. I prefer, if we're using language, to look at public education – we all have to live within budgets; we all understand that – as investment. The minister talks about it always as an expense, and I think that's the difference. A good public education system, hopefully, is investment.

Beyond that philosophical difference I wanted to come back to a couple of things about the school closures. Mr. Minister, you might not like the term I used, but I will repeat it. It wasn't the school boards because I'll tell you what happened, at least when I was there. There was a memo that was quoted in here where the minister was virtually telling the boards that you had to close schools down if you were going to get new schools.

Mr. Liepert: That's baloney.

Mr. Martin: No. There was a memo. I'll bring it to the minister. Not this minister, not you as the minister, but it was brought forward – and I think we put it here in the Legislature – strongly suggesting that.

That was certainly the feeling that I had as a public school trustee, that we had to close schools down if we were to get new ones. That was fairly common knowledge at the particular time. That's the point I'm saying. If we could change the consultation and make it longer, it would be more meaningful. The parents felt that they weren't being listened to and the communities, as I went through some of them both as a trustee and another one.

Mr. Minister, I said this very clearly, that sometimes a school will close itself down. It's just inevitable, but that should be the last step rather than the first step. That's why in Ontario they have said right in their school act that you cannot use that reason to get new schools. That's what I'm suggesting that we do here. Then the consultation would be much more meaningful in that regard.

Now, I do believe the previous minister, from Edmonton-Mill Creek, was trying to move away from that approach, but it was never written down or officially endorsed that I'm aware of that there have been changes. Again, I'm trying, whether it's fatherly or not, maybe brotherly advice to the minister to take a look at that whole process. That's all I'm suggesting. Then the process will be, I think, meaningful.

I can't speak for the rest of the province. Fair enough. But the ones that I went through both as a trustee and that, people felt that they weren't listened to. They thought the process of one public meeting was just pro forma. We do it, and then they do whatever they want.

Now, I want to just talk about the community school again. I agree with you. All this money can't come out of public education. The city centre project in Edmonton public when we there, what they did is health. They had a nurse working in the school, and they had social workers there. They came out of those departments. But it was really hard to get the bureaucracies together.

So, yes, the community has some responsibility, but I think there has to be some responsibility cross-ministry here, that they see the schools as a community centre and that money not just flow from out of education tax dollars but from other sources, wherever the source of the program occurs. Maybe it's Children's Services. Maybe they can donate as they were in some of the city centre

projects, Mr. Chairman. I agree with the minister that it shouldn't be just education dollars. That's my whole point about the community centre.

Just to come back to the other about the school dropout rate. Yes, absolutely, it's a cumulative effect. The only point I was saying is that in the studies I've seen on that cumulative effect, by grade 9 if you're a year behind – and I forget the actual percentages – then the majority of kids will not make it at that level, so it didn't just happen in grade 9.

I'm hopeful that some of the things that are occurring now in K to 12 – and the minister talked about the initiative, extra money going in those areas, that I think that will have an impact. Again, Mr. Chairman, we're not going to see the results of that for, you know, another, well, I guess, eight years. I'm trying to think of when the initiative occurred. There are some exciting things going on in the high-needs schools. As I say, full-day kindergarten, reading recovery, extra help with some of the social workers being involved there at the school, health, all those sorts of things working together. I think there are some very good projects going on. Hopefully, that will have an impact.

5:10

The point I was trying to make about grade 9 is that if we can predict it, it is a cumulative effect. If we can do something even in junior high with the remedials – and I don't think it would take a lot of extra money or some reading recovery programs – I think that might have a major impact. I think it would be worth looking at.

Mr. Chairman, I want to stress to the minister that I understand that there are limited dollars; I understand that there are priorities; I understand all this. I've been around, you know, a fair length of time. I had to make those decisions. It's not just because we're over there that there's a budget worry. But you're right. If it's priorities, if we have to move here, it's like I say: governments collect taxes. The question we ask is: are they collecting them fairly from everybody? Government then spends, and the question we then ask is: are the priorities straight?

Of course, that's what the budget debate is all about. I think that there are things that we can do that can have a big impact without a lot of extra dollars. Sometimes it does take dollars. We know that. You know, we have a public education system that costs a lot of money. A health care system costs a lot of money. It's well worth it, but there are things within that system I'm convinced – and maybe the minister and I agree on this – that we can do differently, that can sometimes make it better, that don't require a lot of dollars. That's, I guess, all our jobs: to try to figure that out.

Mr. Chairman, there are a lot of other areas. It's a broad department. I would certainly allow the minister to comment on what I've said, and we'll move on from there.

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I just want to make it clear that I feel very strongly that school closure decisions belong at the school board level. We as a department take in utilization as one factor only in terms of building new schools. There are a whole bunch of factors that go into it. I can't comment on previous ministers, but there will be no directive from this minister to any school board saying: you must close down a school before you get another school. That is not going to be happening.

Relative to the public hearing process I believe the hon. member has advocated in the past for a longer period of time for the consultation. Well, currently it's 12 months, which is a year. I think the most difficult part of the school closure is that public consultation time because that's when it becomes the most heated. That's when you have your public hearings. To extend that to 18 months or 24

months just doesn't make sense to me. If you can't make a decision in 12 months, then there's something wrong with the process.

Mr. Martin: It's within the school year. It's not 12 months.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I'm of the understanding that it's 12 months, so we'll have to debate that and clarify that. I believe it's a 12-month notification. Even if it's within the school year, let's assume the school board decides to close the school – well, I mean, I think that I will check on that. I do believe that the longer that you have it drawn out, the more difficult it becomes, and probably the dragging out of it won't change any decisions. I think that if you have meaningful public hearings, school boards have the ability to take the input, and I believe our process actually works pretty well with respect to that.

I take the member's comments around remedial reading, and I think he makes some excellent suggestions. It needs to be part of the whole student assessment that's in place. We'll take that under advisement and carry on with the discussion.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Further to that, then, we were just talking about remedial reading and focusing on students that we can see that could potentially not complete high school. I would venture to say that the real investment that you can make is in those very first years, when a child is educable, and I mean in a school setting.

In my estimation – and I think a growing majority of people would concur with this – what we need to offer as choice for parents is to have a full-day kindergarten program and a junior years kindergarten program. This is where you make the necessary foundation for students to succeed, especially students that could potentially be at risk for whatever socioeconomic reason or otherwise, right? The full-year kindergarten program and junior years kindergarten program: interestingly enough, countries that have those two programs functioning as a choice are countries that you will see doing the very best in terms of education retention and a lower crime rate and the whole range of socioeconomic things that are there.

I know that once again we're bumping up against some ideological differences that perhaps the minister and myself and the New Democrats have, but what I'm saying, using your language, quite frankly, is: give the people the choice to have full-day kindergarten and junior years kindergarten and see what happens. What you will find, Mr. Chair, is that the modern industrial work situation that we have in this province, combined with the high cost of living and whatever – there's a whole list of 21st century things that are going on – requires or has people making the choice to have both parents working, right? So that's the number one practical consideration.

Number two, we have a much more sophisticated work environment where we're looking for students that are not just intelligent and capable but also have the aptitude to learn. My suggestion is that junior years kindergarten and full-day kindergarten as choices that parents can have would seek to solve our high school completion rate better than any other single thing that we could do, and we'd get lots of other benefits to boot. This is something that we've been pushing for for years. I know that eventually we'll come around to it. I think that if we could lay down the tracks to do so now, the sooner we will get on with the benefits of having this as a program.

Certainly, Head Start programs are an indication of how successful this kind of thing can be. Head Start programs in different places, where there is perceived to be a potential problem, really do make a huge difference. What I always thought of as a teacher and

as a parent is that whatever good program you come up with, what's wrong with being able to use that in the broadest possible way for students in situations that seem to be in a similar type of need, like the city centre project that Edmonton public had instituted around the downtown Edmonton? There are so many places that aren't physically in the city centre that are just crying out for that kind of program. The potential there, at the very earliest level, I'm saying – pedagogically it makes sense, socioeconomically it makes sense, and ultimately it's an investment. It's value for your money because you get such a great benefit from having a student that is not just completing high school but is successful coming through our public education system.

5:20

You know, that kind of leads me somewhat tangentially but not entirely to another set of programs that I would like to see expanded that I know would increase the quality of learning and a whole range of other things, and that is offering school lunch programs. When I look around the world, I see that in the United States and Europe and in Asian countries and South American countries the overwhelming majority of schools offer some kind of lunch and nutrition program. I know that the particular historical circumstances here in the province have made it less common in Alberta, but certainly children are the same. Physiologically they're the same, and their learning needs are the same.

One of the things that I noticed over time as a teacher was that, you know, for students that had problems concentrating in school and coming to school and perhaps working with the material – so often there was a range of things that were getting in their way, not the least of which was the fact that they didn't come to school eating properly – right? – having either breakfast or taking a lunch with them or whatever. It's part of a larger process of what public schools serve to function when they're at their best. It's not just to learn your times tables and your alphabet but to enter into a positive relationship with public institutions in the broadest possible way.

We often scratch our heads and wonder out loud why young people will go out and vandalize things and have a negative attitude towards society and all of this kind of thing. Part of the way by which we can mitigate that is to have a positive relationship with public institutions at the very youngest level. A school lunch program, quite frankly, is one of those things where you know that you're going to be looked after, you know that you're going to not go to school hungry, you know that a child is going to get not just intellectual enrichment but some physical enrichment as well. The cost and the value are not even comparable, right? For the cost of the few cents that it takes to provide some nutrition at a school level, the value is immeasurably much higher.

I have a specific problem here with the budgeting. I learned recently that Alberta Education is no longer going to fund the construction of cafeterias. I learned that from the Victoria school plans, which change on a regular basis, it seems like, for a number of reasons. You know, there's not even any provision. Alberta Education says that they're not going to fund school cafeteria construction anymore, period. I find that indicative of the opposite direction that I think our school system should go towards generally, and then specifically, you know, this is an example of it. We have lots of these older schools with cafeterias in place, and somehow that all was the first thing to get axed. You put those cafeterias back into action, and you create, again, this much more positive atmosphere where kids learn about nutrition. Perhaps this child obesity thing could be somehow mitigated with a school lunch program as well. There's a whole range of possibilities there.

I'd like to speak very briefly about the unfunded liability question and the task force that we've seen almost put together. As I said this

afternoon, there's one important part of that that's missing, and that's the teachers. The teachers – and I take their arguments as being logical – say that they're ready to go ahead and start negotiating on this instead of having a delay.

You know, there's a practical thing, Mr. Chair. Here we are at the end of May, so during May, June, July, August we have a chance to sort out this problem during this four-month window without having to jeopardize or compromise or call into some question the fall and winter sessions of school. On a practical level this is just a great time to get this pension thing sorted out. Certainly, we're not advocating that the government just writes a big, giant cheque. I mean, that's ridiculous. But there's got to be a way to do it and a time to do it. I'm saying that the time is now. My suggestion, very helpful and in the most positive way possible and with the utmost respect, I would say, is let's scrap the task force thing and move on and start some direct negotiations.

The other thing that I would like to speak about specifically in the budget. As my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview mentioned, I think part of the issue is looking at older schools and the value of older schools over time. It's important because as we create different urban environments, we're creating density, so where there might less students around for a while, certainly the plan is to have more students there in the future. When we're looking at the long-term picture, I think that we have to change the utilization formula.

Thanks.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Chairman, I mentioned at the outset of the remarks today that there's an obvious philosophical disagreement between the opposition New Democrats and this government, and we're probably not going to solve that today. I think it is very interesting.

You know, it's probably a good thing that this budget debate only lasts an hour and a half. I'm sort of tallying up as we're going here, and if we were to implement what our friends in the New Democratic opposition would like us to implement, we've now added a billion dollars onto the budget. It's about a billion dollars. So if this went for another couple of hours, we'd probably be up to another \$3 billion or \$4 billion.

As I said at the very outset, we have a party over there that believes you can spend your way out of any problem that exists, and we have a party over here that happens to be in government that is fiscally responsible, so we have this philosophical difference. The member trots out a whole bunch of comments that there is no data that backs up what he says. In fact, he talks about countries in the world that have full-day kindergarten that have better results than we do. Well, we have the best results in the world, so how can we attach those two? It doesn't make any sense at all.

Then he goes into the school lunch program. Well, we have 48 of 62 school boards who provide some sort of school lunch program for children in need. We have a number of programs around the province for kindergarten and junior kindergarten for children in need. What we try to do on this side of the House is direct dollars to areas of need rather than this blanket coverage, you know, cradle-to-grave coverage for everything that exists out there: we're going to feed every child in Alberta; we're going to pay for their junior kindergarten and kindergarten. Let me tell you what junior kindergarten and kindergarten would cost us: \$375 million a year. Province-wide school lunch program: \$354 million. So now we're already up to almost a billion dollars. Again, it comes back to a philosophical difference.

I just wanted to make one quick comment. The member raised the issue around Victoria school, that the province somehow won't pay for a cafeteria. Well, we have a situation where the Edmonton

public school board would like to replace Victoria school, and what they're attempting to do is get within a reasonable budget to replace the school, and one of the decisions that was made, through the downsizing to try and fit the budget, was not to include the cafeteria. So for him to say that somehow the province says that we won't fund the cafeteria is just absolutely false.

I'd like to conclude my comments around the unfunded pension liability. The hon. member says, like many on that side of the Legislature have said: let's just sit down and negotiate. But I have not heard one suggestion as to what these members would ask the Alberta Teachers' Association to give up in exchange for the \$2 billion liability that the Alberta Teachers' Association is asking the taxpayers of Alberta to assume. So where do you start negotiating? I don't have the answer to that, and that's why I'm not going headlong into negotiations without some basis to start those negotiations. We know what one side wants, but let's find out what's a fair return. Let's ask the people of Alberta, interested stakeholders, what they think we should be asking the Teachers' Association to give up in return for the \$2 billion liability. I think that's fair. I think it's fair to taxpayers, and I don't think it's unfair to teachers. In the interim those young teachers who had no part in creating this liability will have their 3 per cent picked up starting September 1. I don't know what's unfair about that.

5:30

This is an issue that's been kicking around for 30, 40, 50 years, and for us to take three to four to five months to figure out some reasonable options for it, somehow that's unreasonable? Well, I don't happen to buy that particular argument. So we can have this debate back and forth all day long, but I know that if I'm going into negotiations on anything, I want to make darn sure I know what I'm prepared to negotiate away. If the hon. member has a whole slug of suggestions about what the ATA is prepared to give up, then bring it on.

Mr. Martin: Where do we start? We should keep this going for a couple of hours, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to come back quickly to the school closure because it's been a big issue with me, one of the reasons I went into being a public school trustee to begin with. Talking about the length of time – I won't go through the other things – I would say that I'm glad to hear the minister say that that would not be a directive from him. I don't think it was from the previous one, but it certainly was there before. I would say: take a look at Ontario. They actually put it in the act. It's not up to the minister; it's part of the school act. I think that would be useful to look at.

The reason I asked for the longer period is because I've been there. It's during the school year, and I think the deputy would agree with that. The problem – and I've seen it happen – is that in November it goes out to the board, you know, and then it's going to be done by June. Even if it's a legitimate school closure, the feeling is that it was just sort of railroaded through quickly. That's the reason I say to start earlier.

I think Edmonton public is starting to look at this a little differently too. As a school board policy – you're right – they can do this, but I think it might be useful in the School Act. If they feel they've been consulted, and they have a year or two to take a look at it – everybody has great ideas after the school closure comes through of how they could have saved the school. If they've had that opportunity, I think the feeling is: "Well, okay. It has been a fair process. We just couldn't do it." I think that's why I would look at a longer period of time, and even though some of the school boards are doing it as part of the act, inevitably I heard when there was a school closure: "Well, if we'd only known, this is what we should have

been doing. We could have got kids in this way or that way." I'm just throwing that out, Mr. Chairman, you know, for consideration, again, in the School Act.

The other thing I want to broadly talk about is – is it AISI? I'm trying to remember the program. Is it AISI? Yeah. That's a very good program. The only thing I would suggest, though, is that when we find things that work – it's like so many. It's not just in education. It's like we have these pilot projects that seem to work pretty well, but there doesn't seem to be some sort of follow-up on how we can bring them in as part of the broader system. I think that's happened in some cases with AISI because then you have to reapply two or three times.

I'm not sure what the answer is, but I'm thinking of the things in the city centre education project which I was aware of. We found out that certain well-documented things worked, I think, but there didn't seem to be a way to expand that beyond sort of that narrow selection of schools. I guess I'm sort of suggesting maybe best practices or some sort of way that if something really works well, it can spread throughout, you know, the rest of the education system in the province of Alberta. We don't seem to have a way to be able to do that, I don't think, particularly effectively.

The other thing I would like the minister to comment on, because it's been a big issue across the province, is the whole problem with child obesity and the role of the school here. Now, I'm not expecting the minister to go out and, you know, hand-pick parents and the rest of it, but there are some initiatives. I know that Trustee Colburn tried to get a motion through at Edmonton public – it didn't go – to at least look at the foods we're serving in the schools. I'm wondering, just quickly, if there's any initiative coming from the Department of Education in this whole matter.

The other thing that I would like to allude to. I know something about Victoria school. It started off as a \$63 million project promise from this government even while I was there. Then it got scaled back. By the time they come together with another project, the costs have gone up, so you have to redo it. Where are we now with Victoria school? Is it finally going to move ahead? I mean, part of it burned down now, so maybe there's some emphasis. But that's been going on. Remember, they were promised \$63 million to begin with.

The unfunded liability. You know, we can say that all of a sudden because we're advocating different things – you're the tax savers, and we're the spenders. That rhetoric, you know, doesn't work well. We all have to live within budgets, and people do it wherever. [interjection] You asked the question. It wasn't a billion dollars. You don't know that. There were no figures. You said that you didn't have any figures yourself.

Mr. Liepert: Right here.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. You know, I could take some of things that you've said, twist them around and say, "Well, they're spending \$2 billion on things that they shouldn't." But that's the reality of what I'm saying. It doesn't work in terms of that rhetoric. It's old-time rhetoric.

The unfunded liability. I don't have an easy answer to this, but we know that it's a serious problem. Now, the problem that I would point out to the minister – and I can't answer for the ATA, nor can you. That's why you have to negotiate. There have been some agreements fairly recently. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think Newfoundland just dealt with their unfunded liability in the last year or two. I don't know what they did. Maybe there's something that we can learn from that. I know about Newfoundland. I think it was about two years ago that they did. Didn't Manitoba just recently do some agreement on their unfunded liability? I know about New-

foundland for sure, but I think Manitoba. Maybe there's something there that we can look at as a beginning basis because the teachers there and the governments both accepted it. So there's a suggestion. Maybe we could take a look at what they did. It might be an opening. Who knows?

As I say, nobody's going to win on this as long as it keeps going because as the minister is well aware, the unfunded liability is going to get greater if we don't deal with it. I think that's the emphasis. Is there an easy way out? Probably not. Perhaps there is a way out if there's goodwill on both sides. That's the point that I'm making. But I don't know if there are things that would come forward from Manitoba and what they did and from Newfoundland to see if that could be a basis for opening. Who knows? Maybe.

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chair, let me start backwards and move forward while it's fresh in my mind. Let me be clear. My intention is to work with the ATA to get this issue resolved. What is missing in this equation is not what the ATA wants; it's what is fair for Alberta taxpayers in order to assume the \$2 billion liability. That's what I don't have the answer to, and I don't think the ATA has the answer to that. Why would they? That's not their job.

My job is to represent the taxpayers of Alberta, so I want to ensure that we take a little bit of time. I'm not suggesting two, three, five years out. I'm saying a few months. Let's meet with interested stakeholders, whether it's school boards, whether it's the ATA, whether it is the taxpayers' association. You name it if you want to make a submission. I want a small group to not only do that but also look at Newfoundland and Manitoba and maybe Czechoslovakia, for all I know. I guess it's the Czech Republic now. There are other examples out there of what would work, and that's all I'm asking the task force to do.

I do know about Newfoundland in a rough sense. It was assumption of the teachers' portion of the liability for a set increase in wages over the next several years and labour peace. That's one option that the task force may recommend. There may be a whole bunch of better options for taxpayers.

5:40

Manitoba is a little different. Manitoba went out and borrowed money to pay down their own liability. But we're not talking here about our liabilities, the government of Alberta; we're talking about the teachers' liability, the teachers' portion of it.

I still maintain that over the course of the next few months this task force will be fair. It will look at all of the options. It will come back with some recommendations, which I will make public. Those will be the basis to go to the ATA and say: here are some options to negotiate on.

A couple of other quick things before we have to conclude. I very much take your suggestions around AISI. I think it is an excellent program, but like anything else we do, we should be assessing it to see whether it needs to be broadened, whether it needs to be integrated. We shouldn't just say that it's a great program, that we'll keep doing it the same way we've always done it. So I very much take your comments.

Around the school closures let me say this. It is not my intention in the near term to open up the School Act, but if we open up the School Act for a whole bunch of reasons, I would take the hon. member's suggestions around school closures as something we would consider at the time the School Act might be opened.

Finally, the issue around student obesity and health issues. That is a huge challenge for us. I think what we have implemented and tried to implement into the school system is the daily physical activity. That has been received in some quarters with grudging

acceptance. I think, though, that student obesity, nonstudent obesity is a much bigger problem than the education system. This is an issue that we all have to take responsibility for as individuals.

I should say that there was an interesting program in Black Gold. The Black Gold school division actually has something called a student obesity intervention program. If they feel that there is a student who has an issue around obesity, they will actually contact the parents. They will have a session with the parents, and they will work out a program that they feel would be best for the student. It's been incredibly successful. I want to take a look and see whether there are some opportunities. They've won international awards for it.

You know, I guess it just comes back at the end of the day to some of the comments that we made earlier. We have so many wonderful things going on in our education system, things that are happening at the local level like this particular program in Black Gold. I believe that all of us need to talk more about all of the great things that are going on in education and, frankly, quit spending 99.9 per cent of our time talking about whether this is funded properly or that's funded properly. So that's my objective over the next months and years or however long I am in this portfolio: to highlight and focus all of the terrific and tremendous things that are going on in education.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we have about one minute left. Is there any other member who wishes to participate?

Very well. Then I will invite the official to leave the Assembly so the committee can rise and report progress.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(c) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Advanced Education and Technology and Education relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 26
Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate May 16: Mr. Danyluk]

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and join in second reading debate on Bill 26, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007. This is a fairly straightforward bill, and our understanding of it is that it essentially does a couple of things. It gives the minister the ability to make guidelines concerning standards and procedures for the assessment of property.

Additional amendments involve the financial cost to municipalities concerning compensation claims related to the effects of public works projects. There are a couple of other little housekeeping things in there, too, that the minister spoke to when he kicked off second reading debate. That's on record in *Hansard*, and there is no disagreement from this side of the House on that.

Really, as far as we are concerned on this side of the House, there's very little about this bill that causes us concern; only one area, and that is around the amendments to section 322. I'm hoping that when it comes time for the minister to close debate, he can speak to this. The concern I have – and I will admit quite freely that I am not clear in my own mind as to whether I'm interpreting this right or not. I've had some correspondence from an individual by the name of Wayne Llewellyn, who I believe has corresponded with most members of this House, who has some concerns that the amendments to section 322, which have the effect of allowing the minister to set the standards and procedures for preparing assessments and valuation standards for property and so on and so forth and which brings the substance of regulation 246/2006, the minister's guidelines regulation, into the MGA itself, might somehow prevent an ordinary taxpayer from appealing his or her property tax assessment.

I think, if I'm interpreting this bill correctly, that the intention here is to in effect legitimize the guidelines so that no one can come along and launch a frivolous appeal of their assessment based on the notion that, well, they just didn't agree with the guidelines; they don't like the guidelines; the guidelines aren't valid. But I don't think – and I hope the minister will clarify this, and I hope he's going to agree with my interpretation because if he does, I don't think were going to have too much in the way of problems with this bill – that it says that the property taxpayer can't appeal the assessment. I sure hope it doesn't because, of course, market value assessment does things to people's property taxes that people in Edmonton and Calgary and many other municipalities around this province very much feel a need to be able to appeal.

There is much about market value assessment that is far from perfect. I believe that the current minister's predecessor once described market value assessment in words something along the lines of the least-worst way of assessing property values. I hope that over time we can find a better way of doing that because market value assessment, although it may be less worse than the other methods tried so far, is far from a perfect way of doing it. Until we come up with a better way of doing it or until, I think probably more importantly, we move municipalities, we move cities and towns off their total reliance on property taxes as their only self-generating sustainable form of revenue, we need very definitely to protect the property owner's right to appeal an assessment that the property owner feels is unjust.

That is our concern. I do hope that when the minister rises to close debate, he can provide an answer to that, and I await that answer with great interest.

Thank you.

5:50

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to go on long. It's my understanding – and I'd like the minister at some point to comment on this – that the provincial government is facing a lawsuit regarding its regulations and guidelines. Correct me if I'm wrong about this, but I'm just trying to get the information before we go into Committee of Supply. My understanding is that there's a lawsuit from the city of Calgary claiming that it pays a disproportionate amount of property tax since market value assessment of properties has risen faster than the regulated assessment of properties. In my understanding it's brought forward by sort of the administrative staff of the city of Calgary.

I'm wondering how this fits into what we're doing in the bill. Is this the reason we went back retroactively, I think to 1995? How would this impact it, if you like? I take it that this would take away that suit. I'm wondering if there's been some discussion with the groups and where all this sits. It seems unusual to bring forward a bill, you know, in the middle of a suit, but maybe there's a reason for it that I don't see at this particular time. I'm not asking for it to be done right here, but perhaps when the minister has time, he could allude to it. I'm wondering if the bill does affect the lawsuit and its potential outcome. Where all this fits is what I'm trying to figure out, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. minister to close the debate.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I can reassure the hon. member opposite that Bill 26 does not affect the right to appeal assessments, on the basis that they have been prepared correctly, of course, or that the legislation has been interpreted properly. So, yes, I confirm what you are saying. You have a very good, I would say, summary and synopsis of what the situation is.

If I can clarify very quickly, the minister's guidelines have been used since 1995 to assess regulated properties, and I stress regulated properties. It has nothing to do with market value. I understand some of the concerns you have, but it has nothing to do with market value. Some stakeholders, as the hon. member from the third party has mentioned, have raised the procedural issue as to whether the guidelines were properly established. That's where we are. The procedural issue was that the guidelines were not filed as regulations. Bill 26 confirms the use of the minister's guidelines and ensures the stability of the property assessment base. Mr. Speaker, it is confirming the power to authorize the use of these guidelines.

If you have questions, we'll look at *Hansard* to make sure that we have your exact questions answered, and I will do so. Okay?

Mr. Speaker, I would like to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a second time]

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

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 7 o'clock this evening, at which time we would reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:55 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 29, 2007**

7:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/29

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: Good evening, hon. members and officials. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2007-08**

The Chair: The committee has for consideration this evening the budget estimates of the departments of Service Alberta, Finance, and Environment. The chair has been informed that an hour has been allocated for each department.

I invite the hon. Minister of Service Alberta and President of the head: Treasury Board to make your opening comments.

Service Alberta

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome all of my colleagues here tonight. It's an honour to be able to present to the Leg. the Ministry of Service Alberta. I would like to introduce for the record our staff here, that I've enjoyed to get to know in the past several months. Paul Pellis is the Deputy Minister of Service Alberta. Shirley Howe is the public service commissioner in the personnel administration office. Brian Fischer snuck in under the name of Brian Fischer. Brian is our assistant deputy minister of financial services. Cathryn Landreth is our assistant deputy minister of business services, Service Alberta. Tom Thackeray I'm sure used a different name to sneak in, but Tom is the assistant deputy minister of information services, Service Alberta. Dennis Mudryk, wearing that lovely tie in the second row there, is assistant deputy minister of technology services, Services Alberta. Laurie Beveridge, sitting directly behind me, is assistant deputy minister of registries, then Mary Anne Wilkinson, assistant commissioner of corporate human resource development, and my executive assistant and my boss in the stands, Dwight Dibben and Cathy Kiss.

Since everyone is here, we'll begin. Service Alberta's vision is one government, one employer, one enterprise driving innovation and excellence in service delivery. As we work to achieve this vision, the ministry has 1,855 full-time equivalent employees, who develop and deliver services and programs across Alberta and across government. Service Alberta includes the functions of the former ministries of government services and restructuring and government efficiencies. It also encompasses the personnel administration office.

PAO's vision is Alberta's public service proudly working together to build a stronger province for current and future generations. In support of this vision the PAO collaborates with ministries across government to develop corporate human resource frameworks that assist ministries in attracting, developing, and engaging employees.

The estimates I present today will be for both areas of the ministries. However, Mr. Chairman, as the opposition were not able to question the Treasury Board because of things, we're certainly open to questions about Treasury Board.

Service Alberta has a wide range of responsibilities that support to some extent all of the government's five priorities. To a great extent the work of the ministries is helping government manage growth pressures and improve the quality of life for Albertans. As Minister of Service Alberta my specific priorities as outlined by the Premier are to continue the public service renewal initiatives, which

include addressing the impacts of an aging workforce and strengthening the public services support to elected officials and developing policy; develop a plan for innovative approaches to improve service delivery to Albertans in a variety of ways: in person, by phone, or through the Internet; and accelerate the implementation of a corporate approach to information management and information technology.

Service Alberta's business plan outlines goals for Service Alberta and the PAO that link closely with the priorities assigned to me by the Premier as well as the government's five priorities. The business plan can best describe the work of our ministry through our three core business. First, the ministry provides services to Albertans. These registry and consumer services include registering a car or a house or starting a business. Service Alberta processes more than 17.5 million transactions each year on behalf of Alberta consumers and businesses. The ministry also ensures freedom of information and privacy, and we maximize consumer protection through the marketplace awareness initiative, a ministerial contact centre for enquiries and complaints, and regular reviews of business trends and marketplace practices.

Our second core business is providing services to government. Service Alberta provides corporate and shared services to ministries in a standardized efficient and effective manner. For example, Service Alberta is responsible for the timely delivery of over 22 million pieces of mail each year, and every year the ministry handles the photocopying of more than 39 million documents; 38 million of them are in my office. The ministry works collaboratively across the government to improve the ability of the departments to deliver government programs and services, reducing duplication of services and ultimately better serving the public.

The personnel administration office delivers the department's third core business: develop and promote effective human resource management. It is important that we position our public service to continue doing excellent work as they develop and deliver high-quality programs and services to Albertans. It's not always easy. Our government faces similar challenges as other employers in Alberta in attracting and retaining skilled and knowledgeable employees in a highly competitive labour market. The PAO is building a strong public service by developing and implementing progressive resource strategies, helping to ensure our public service continues to be one of the best in the world.

Service Alberta is structured to help the department accomplish these goals. For the estimates to achieve my mandate and our business plan goals, the ministry needs adequate government investment.

I will now outline the funding we require as I present the ministry's estimates for the '07-08 fiscal year. The overall amount to be voted on for expenses and equipment and inventory purchases is \$383,147,000, as noted on page 297 of the government estimates. Of the overall estimates \$13,762,000 is for the ministry support services. This includes funding for the minister's office, the deputy minister's office, and corporate services.

The estimated budget for the ministry's first core business, Service Alberta, is \$63,580,000. This funding will support registries, which includes land titles, motor vehicles, and other registry services. It also supports consumer services, which include consumer awareness and advocacy and the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

The ministry's second core business is service to government. The estimate for this is \$244,854,000, which will help Service Alberta continue providing efficient and effective services to other government ministries. A key program area is business service, which includes such things as mail and courier service, records

management, payment to vendors and to our employees, air transportation, and vehicle service. The second program area is technology services. This program includes funding for the data centre operations software licences, the running of the SuperNet, and support and security of government computers.

The personnel administration office. This year's estimated budget for the personnel administration office is \$20,140,000. The funding will support government efforts to attract talented people to the public service. Some of this funding will enhance the employee assistance program, a program that assists employees experiencing emotional difficulties in their personal or work lives. The funding will also be invested in continuous learning and development opportunities for employees. The funding will support building leadership capacity, and it will help the ministry provide employees with a healthy and rewarding workplace.

These are the 2007-2008 estimates for Service Alberta. The estimates you will be voting on will support us in our overarching goal to achieve service excellence within and outside of government.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my formal introduction. I would just say before we start that probably one of the areas we really want to focus on, hon. member, is making sure that the government is brought into one domain, that our computer systems are what any good corporate business would look at as the ability to communicate very quickly with each other, that we're providing Albertans with that opportunity to communicate with us. That has been a priority also. We are very cognizant of the fact that our workforce is aging, and the retirement numbers are very close. It's going to be difficult, but that has certainly been a priority of Shirley. Some of those things we recognize are being faced everywhere, but certainly in the government it's growing and also has an aging workforce.

So with that, we look forward to the questions, and we'll do as best we can.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to participate this evening in supply estimates for Service Alberta and, as the minister has outlined, Treasury Board.

I, too, have an introduction to make. It won't take quite as long as the minister's did. It is sort of a historic evening; not only does the minister have officials on the floor with him, but members of the opposition, as you know, Mr. Chairman, are invited to bring officials down as well. I'm pleased to introduce David Kincade, who has been my researcher since day one of my time in this Assembly. I'm probably one of the luckiest Liberal MLAs in that I've managed to work with the same researcher since the beginning. Dave, it's a pleasure to have you here.

The minister has kindly offered to answer some questions or at least receive questions on Treasury Board even though that's not listed on the agenda for this evening. I do have a few quick questions on Treasury Board, so we'll go there first, if it's all right, and then move to Service Alberta. On page 385 of the estimates in the Treasury Board department there are just a number of things that caught my eye, the first being the budget for the office of the internal auditor. I note that the amount that's been requested is nearly \$5 million this year. That's gone up from approximately \$2 million two years ago. So in a period of two years, we've seen a dramatic increase in the budget for that office.

7:10

You'll know that the Official Opposition expressed a great deal of concern last year with Bill 20 that the records of that office are now locked away for 15 years. I have a concern that not only are we not

able to access documents from that office for such a long period of time, but now we're spending ever more money to operate that office. I would ask the minister, I suppose, then, if he could outline why the dramatic increase in the budget for that office.

Likewise, the office of the Controller is showing an estimate this year of \$3 million compared to \$1.9 million the year previous, so a dramatic increase in spending there.

Strategic capital planning, I note, has gone from \$361,000 in '05-06 to \$2.23 million this year.

Likewise – well, actually, not likewise; this one is a little different – the alternative capital financing office, which is a new initiative, I understand, and didn't exist previously, is showing an estimate of \$1.711 million. These may well all be part of the new direction that the President of the Treasury Board has been given, but it is a lot of money and in some cases some dramatic increases. So I'd be pleased if we could hear some explanation as to the dollars that are being asked for there.

Also, I note that the full-time equivalents for staff has gone from 73 last year to 115 this year. That may well have something to do with the fact that that was a partial year, and that might explain the dramatic increase. I'm not sure if that 73 refers only to the period since the ministry was created or not, but an explanation for that would be good, too.

A couple of other things. No, I'm ready to move into Service Alberta.

Mr. Snelgrove: Can I answer the questions?

Mr. R. Miller: Absolutely. If you'd like to do that, Mr. Minister, we'll do that. Great.

Mr. Snelgrove: I may go backwards on the list. The alternative financing existed before in Infrastructure and Transportation, and the plan was that we would move the personnel from Infrastructure and Transportation into Treasury Board. Now, I can't tell you that in entirety that's what will end up happening because what we've learned from dealing with most of the rest of the world is that right now the department of infrastructure does about as good a planning on alternative financing of P3s on roads as any other entity. So if it's working in that thing, I'm not one to mess with it just because it seemed like a good idea. However, there are other opportunities coming forward to look at alternative financing that will be collected underneath there.

The strategic planning committee. I think the hon. member would even acknowledge that things are growing so quickly that it's going to take probably more timely information to be able to look after things like the Industrial Heartland growth and to co-ordinate all of the departments together. You know, with growth comes cost, and collecting the responsibility for co-ordinating all that rests with Treasury Board.

As to the cost increases in the internal auditor or as to the Controller, I'll have to look at the numbers and get back to you about where the increases come from. Whether that's simply in workload or whether it was in bringing different departments in, I don't know.

For the FTE reallocation, they came from several different departments. I think the total increase in numbers of Treasury Board from actual new is 26. I think the rest all came from existing positions within the government.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you for those explanations, Mr. Minister. I guess the other question I have – and I know it's referenced several times in the budget documents – is the fact that the alternative

capital financing is looking at P3s, and then it mentions other alternatives. I'm quite sure that in the Speech from the Throne there was some reference to that as well. Of course, we're always curious to know what those other alternative financing methods or models might be, so I look forward to learning more about that.

I will move to questions regarding Service Alberta now. The first one I have is regarding payday loans. Of course, you've met yourself with the Canadian Payday Loan Association and other representatives from the industry, as have I, and they're anxious to see some legislation or regulations come forward that will regulate their industry. I think that in both cases members of the Canadian Payday Loan Association and independent members are for the most part looking forward to those regulations coming in as soon as possible. So I'm wondering if you might be able to update us as to where that process is. I believe you're in the consultative process right now, but I'm curious to know whether or not there is legislation or regulations coming some time soon.

Also, Mr. Minister, I believe it was probably the first set of questions I had the pleasure of asking you upon your being named as minister and acting in that capacity in question period, some questions around a \$9 service fee that Albertans pay when they pay their traffic fines online. You know, there were some, if I can call them, flippant answers during question period, but you were kind enough to provide real answers to me the next day. I appreciated that, and I think I told you that I had known the answers at the time. But I'm not completely satisfied, and those people that came to me with the questions are not yet completely satisfied with the explanation.

The concern was that there's a \$9 service fee if you pay online, as you know, but if you mail it in, there's no service fee at all. That was the discrepancy: if you show up at a registry office or if you pay online, there's a service fee. I know the constituents that have approached me certainly are understanding of the fact that there might be a fee paid if you attend a private registry office, but their thought was that an online payment should in theory be more efficient, require less staff, and thereby wouldn't require the service fee or if, in fact, there shouldn't be a service fee for all. Again, I guess what we're looking for is: why is there no service fee for mail-in yet a \$9 service fee for paying online?

On to some broader questions regarding your strategic priorities. Page 266 of the business plan talks about one of the government's five priorities, which is – well, I'm not going to read it into the record because I think the whole world knows it by now. We're talking about governing with integrity and transparency. I'm wondering, in particular, about the sentence that says that “citizens will gain further benefits through enhanced integrity and transparency of the information each ministry provides to Albertans,” whether or not that might mean that this minister would be willing to look at amendments to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, again, particularly as it relates to Bill 20 from last year, which garnered an awful lot of public interest. I would submit to you that had the Legislature sat a couple of weeks longer – the public protests seemed to be just growing at that time – I think that there would have been a real public outcry. I'm curious to know whether or not that's part of the ministry's plans in terms of dealing with that priority to move towards, maybe in a perfect world, reversing the effects of Bill 20, in particular as they relate to ministerial briefings and internal auditors' findings. I'm wondering whether or not the minister is planning on taking any steps to contribute to that, as I say.

On page 268 of the business plan, the performance measure 1(d): “Percentage of Albertans who are satisfied with access to Government of Alberta services and information.” The last actual that's

listed is 75 per cent, and the target for coming years is 80 per cent. I'm wondering whether or not the minister is satisfied that 80 per cent is even high enough or if that might be considered to be some sort of a failure in terms of the government providing services to Albertans. What steps, specifically, is the ministry taking to improve from 75 to 80 per cent if, in fact, that target is sufficient? Would there be improvements to the FOIP Act to accommodate Albertans' satisfaction with access to information?

7:20

If I can then jump to what is perhaps one of the favourite topics for the Official Opposition, and that would be the flight logs. In the estimates document, page 302, line 3.1.3 under Equipment/Inventory Purchases, business services, for air and vehicle services the budget for this coming year is \$25.25 million, which is an absolutely whopping increase from \$1.85 million the year before. Again, there may well be an explanation for this. Perhaps it's some budgeting that's been transferred from one of the former departments, or perhaps there's a major purchase that's taken place that I'm not aware of. I don't know if we're replacing the entire fleet of government vehicles. I know we bought two airplanes last year, so I'm going to guess that we're not buying more airplanes, but I would be curious if you could provide an explanation for that in particular.

Mr. Minister, looking at the flight logs that are now posted online, as near as I can tell, there are five airplanes in the government fleet. You may be able to correct me on that, but I did notice five different identification call signs for airplanes. One of the things that caught my eye as well is a number of charter flights that have been taking place over the last several months. I'm curious. If we've got two brand new aircraft in the fleet and at least two or three others that are operating, why we would be chartering to what appears to me to be a great extent? I mean, I could understand that if there was a plane that was down for service for a period of time, we may have to charter, but it appears to me that there's a great propensity to charter over the last couple of months. So I'm wondering if you could account for the sudden appearance of charter flights on the logs. I'm sure there's a great explanation.

On page 303 of the same estimates, line 3.1.3 talks about \$11.73 million. I'm quite sure that that was for the purchase of the two new airplanes last year. That's showing, actually, the forecast for the last business year. So \$11.73 million. I'm quite sure that that was the purchase of the two airplanes, but I just want to make sure. If you could just clarify for me that that was in fact the two new aircraft.

On page 300 of the estimates, then, if we can move to consumer awareness and protection, we have here an estimate this year of \$14.2 million, which is a 13.6 per cent increase from last year's estimates. I know in particular there was an awful lot of talk about land titles, and I don't know if land titles falls into this or not. There was certainly a great deal of concern on our side about consumer advocacy and consumer protection. In fact, our Member for Edmonton-McClung had introduced a private member's bill which would have seen a consumer advocate named. Unfortunately, that was defeated. I believe the member from either Leduc or Whitecourt-St. Anne – I can't remember who it is – is doing some work in that regard. Perhaps some of this extra funding is going to support that initiative.

Line 2.2.2 on the same page, 300, shows that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is this year getting \$6.66 million, a 46 per cent increase from last year. Again, I would submit that that's probably appropriate given the concern that this side has had for utilities consumer protection.

Mr. Snelgrove: Oh, where to start, where to start? Good questions and we've got good answers.

The payday loans. We had said that we would wait until the federal government got their legislation done and then we would consult with the industry. Yes, we have met with certainly one component of it, but as you know, there are the other sides of the stories. After we're done the consultation – I think the payday loan industry does need the guidelines to work with.

The \$9 service fee. The registry agents built the site to do it, so they're recovering. Nine dollars may or may not be the right amount, but you know, people do have a choice, to mail it in or to go to a courthouse. If they want to use the system, you know, it's a definite fee for a service that a private group has set up.

Bill 20, in all fairness, as much as the opposition would like to make it out to be a secret thing, was actually making documents available that would previously never, ever have been made available. Do I think Bill 20 will be revisited? No. Are we trying to get around having to make you FOIP all these things? Yes. We're trying to make this information available to you online, through ministers' offices, through the plane manifest because I don't think anybody is served by the work we put our bureaucrats through, our personnel, to try and find out information. If we can put it out there first, we're perfectly happy to do that.

We'll just go a little bit backwards, which may explain some of the things we have from the internal audit services that went from two to five. We will now have enough people to fully staff the office. It is a complement of personnel from the different ministries, and we will be doing more audits.

The controller's office went from two to three. The additional staff will perform and consolidate all of the government's financial statements, that now include the regional health authorities, school jurisdictions, postsecondary institutions, and the operation of the lobbyists registry. So there are some other things there.

The vehicle thing. Yes, we are buying vehicles. We have watched very carefully our costs for the lease and the purchase of them. The number in there, the big increase, is because we are buying vehicles. We're not buying any more airplanes. We do have four airplanes: two six-passenger, a 10-passenger, I think, and then the Dash 8, which flies up to about 40 people. We have five; one is surplus. As you know, we have sold one, and the other one will be sold too.

We do have to charter aircraft. With the small planes, particularly if we're flying ministers to any other part of Alberta, it's impractical to send the Dash 8, and with 18 ministers there are always times when there's a greater call for flights. We do have an individual who closely tries to co-ordinate ministerial travel so that we can encourage a minister that might want to go to Calgary at 2 o'clock and one at 4 to go at 3. We're working and trying to get the information to other ministers that may request a plane to say: "Look. We do have one going at this time. Would you please arrange that?" But if one is going to Grande Prairie and one is going to Fort McMurray, we can't share the plane, so we do have to charter planes.

The \$2.1 million increase in revenue of the consumer advocate is primarily due to a public awareness campaign. The consumer advocate is funded by industry, so they're certainly involved in that.

Land titles. We'll go back a little bit to customer satisfaction. Land titles from January have brought the turn-around time from 28 days down to seven working days. In all fairness, these guys and gals in there have done this, certainly, with encouragement from senior management, but a heck of a lot of it has to be pride in their work. I know that they were working nights and weekends, and I think they developed a very keen drive there to show Alberta that they knew it was a real cost and a drag. Boy, I have to tell you that I can't compliment them enough for the work that they put into it.

We get to the satisfaction we talked about back in some of the early questions. I doubt that you'll ever have a call centre or a department of government that can tell you that people that call in are 100 per cent satisfied simply because human nature is much like question period here. You may ask the same question over and over and over and just not simply like the answer. There can be an answer that you don't like, and very likely that means you're not going to like the response. So I think it's a little bit unrealistic to expect that you would have numbers – and I know that the hon. member's got enough life experience to know that in the real world if you want to ask questions that you want "yes" answers to, you can, and if you want to fool around with polls and that, you can get a higher number. Realistically, I think most business would tell you that when you're in the business of delivering, a reasonable number is probably 80 per cent. I certainly think it's something we'll try for.

7:30

The \$11 million. I can reassure you – and you're aware – that that was for the two planes. Those were ordered and bought under Infrastructure and Transportation. The deal wasn't completed until the restructuring that put the planes under our department. That's why they show up in there. I'm sure that down the road, if the government decides that we need to update or expand the fleet, then it will be a normal budgeted item.

Certainly, the demand to get to the different parts of Alberta is real. I know that it may not seem in Edmonton to be that, but we would normally drive around 80,000 kilometres a year in a vehicle. If you just take that at 100 kilometres an hour, there are another 800 hours that we've spent on the road, going here, there. I know that my good friend, an instructor at Lakeland College – his full teaching component for the year is 740 hours in front of a class. I'm sure the hon. member spends quite a bit of his time running around the country too. I can tell you that the responsibilities in some of the ministries are extreme, that if they weren't able to get an airplane, they probably couldn't do their job in the way that Albertans demand of them.

Got another batch? Let's go again.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of comments in response to some of the things that the minister said. My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View would never forgive me if I didn't comment on the vehicle purchases. We hope they're hybrids – right? – not Hummers, hon. member, because I'll hear about it if they are.

As far as the land titles and the good work that your staff is doing in terms of improving that turnaround time, I was wondering if you might be able to second some of those people to the passport offices with your federal Tory cousins in the government of Canada because they could certainly use the help.

I'm sure the hon. member knows that I come from a business background. In my business 80 per cent would not be good enough, but I will readily admit that it's a little different than providing services from a government. But in private industry, 80 per cent: I wouldn't be in business very long if that was the best I could do.

I'd like to talk a little bit about registries. Page 266 of the business plan talks about providing safe and secure communities. One of the issues that we've raised in the Official Opposition in the past has to do with the privatization of registry services and the concerns that we've had about that. It's not that long ago, of course, that there was a report in the media that organized crime may have infiltrated some of the private registries in the province, and there

may have been false IDs and that sort of thing floating around out there. The questions I have would be: what steps has the government taken to ensure that employees at the private registries are not being intimidated or bribed for access to Albertans' information? How has the minister resolved the security threats that those private registries may have been faced with? Is he as concerned, I suppose, as we are that some private information may be for sale? Those would be some questions regarding registries. I'm wondering if you could tell us whether or not any private registries have actually had their security breached, and if so, how much of this year's budget would be going to address those concerns? That would be a very real concern for Albertans, I'm sure.

On page 267 of the business plan, goal 1, strategy 1.7 states: "Participate in cross-jurisdictional and inter-ministry initiatives to address identity related issues and propose amendments to legislation, policies and procedures where appropriate." I'm wondering what kind of identity-related issues we are referring to here. I just mentioned that there have been some concerns about drivers' licences and false licences. I also know that it's not that long ago – I think three years ago – when there was concern raised by the Auditor General as to the number of Alberta health care cards that might be out there. It was somewhat more than residents in the province. So whether or not that is also a part of the ministry's goal, to look at health care cards.

I've had several people suggest to me that we should crack down on the use of health care cards both within the province and, interestingly enough, externally, in other provinces. Other jurisdictions have raised concern about health care fraud, with false cards from their provinces being used out of province. I actually asked at Public Accounts when we had the health department up how carefully we investigate claims that are coming in from other provinces to verify that those cards are, in fact, legitimate. I don't know if that's what's being contemplated here or not, but I would be curious to know.

Performance measure 1(b) of the business plan, page 268, refers to the number of clients surveyed that were satisfied overall with services provided by the land titles registry. We talked about that a little bit earlier. The last actual year, '05-06, was 72 per cent, and then, of course, we know that throughout the past year, '06-07, we hit an all-time low of 52 per cent. I think that's what we were talking about, that now that's dramatically improved, but you might wish to elaborate on that a bit more.

I mentioned the land titles, I guess, the 14 per cent increase, to \$15.245 million this year. I was going to ask whether or not you believe that it's sufficient, but I'm going to guess, based on the answer you've already given, that you're probably quite happy with that.

On page 300 of the estimates, line 2.1.3, the budget for other registry services, \$13.1 million is what's shown this year, which is almost a 20 per cent increase from what was forecast for the last year. It's a significant increase, more than \$2 million up from what was needed last year. I'm wondering if you could just elaborate for us what other registry services are receiving this funding support and whether or not any additional money will go towards improving the efficiency of registry services or, for that matter, the security of registry services, as I mentioned a minute ago.

On page 302 of the estimates, line 2.1.3, equipment/inventory purchases, again for other registry services there's a fairly dramatic increase to \$1.445 million, a significant increase. That may well be for technology, i.e. computers; I don't know. I'm wondering if you can let us know and whether or not it's thought that that extra expenditure might actually improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government services to Albertans.

I know that I'm jumping around a little bit here. I hope that's not causing too much trouble for the staff. On page 300 of the estimates, line 3.1.4 is for business services, amortization and consumption of inventory. It shows \$3.419 million for this year. Again, that's a dramatic increase, 128 per cent increase from \$1.5 million the previous year, and \$1.1 million the year before. I'm just wondering if you could explain why the funding had to be doubled for that particular line item.

Then on the same page, 3.2.2, technology services, enterprise services, \$24.33 million. Again a big increase, 24 per cent increase from what was asked last year. I'm wondering if you could even tell us what enterprise services is because, offhand, I don't know. There's nearly a \$5 million increase this year over last year, so I'm curious to know what that's for.

The minister mentioned the personnel administration office and said that it would be all right if I asked a question on that, so I thought I should do so. In the business plan book, page 275, goal 2 talks about an engaged and healthy public service that is positioned to meet emerging and diverse government goals. Performance measure 2(a): percentage of employees who agree they are satisfied with their work as a government of Alberta employee. The last actual was 80 per cent, and the target for this year is 83 per cent.

7:40

Again, those numbers in private business would probably be lower than I would get away with. Perhaps in this current market that's as good as we can expect; I don't know. I'm wondering whether or not you're comfortable. You know, when we say 80 per cent, that sounds good. What that also means is that 20 per cent of the government employees might not be happy with the work that they're doing. That would be a concern for any employer, I think. I'm wondering what factors would be contributing to the 20 per cent other than growth pressures, I suppose, that the entire province is facing, and also what sorts of plans the ministry has to improve that number. Even if we're going to move from 80 to 83 per cent, which is probably a realistic goal, what sorts of initiatives are we taking to try to improve the morale of the public service?

Performance measure 2(b) talks about the percentage of employees who agree that their organization supports their work-related learning and development. The last actual was 71 per cent. Again, to me that seems a little low. I'm wondering how the ministry feels about that and what they're doing to try to improve that as well. As I said, understanding, of course, that I'm from a business background myself, I know how difficult it is in these times, but all sorts of companies across the province are providing all sorts of incentives to try to attract and retain employees and keep them happy.

I made a trip to Grande Prairie earlier this year, and I met with a number of public service employees in Grande Prairie who feel strongly that they should be given some sort of a northern allowance or a living-out allowance to recognize the increased costs of living in Grande Prairie, so that might be an example.

Mr. Snelgrove: Good questions. One that I'm really happy to talk about is the registries and, I think, the willingness of the registries to work. We're entering into discussions with them. In any system there is the opportunity for people to abuse their position. It would be probably irresponsible for me to say that it couldn't happen or it didn't happen or it wouldn't happen, but we monitor these registry offices very, very closely. We have started an initiative that will allow us to move quite quickly in a case or in an area where we find one that has used their information inappropriately.

Without trying to sound flippant, I really can't talk to you about what we know about the security of them or the breaches of them,

but I will say this: the department takes the concerns you expressed extremely seriously – I think as you would expect – and we are working to tighten up and to be able to move very quickly where there is a breach. We have probably the most secure system for drivers' licences in North America, maybe in the world.

An Hon. Member: Not the universe?

Mr. Snelgrove: Maybe the universe.

I had the opportunity to tour the department and see the process we have for verifying the drivers' licences and to authenticate other documents of other sources around. The Alberta government probably would – I mean, they surprise us with what the staff and our departments have done.

With working in the collection, the idea of the health card is something that will probably come, but it is an extremely sensitive issue around just how much information could be on a card. What would it do? You know, what would it mean for tracking? How secure could the card itself and the person be? I'll say this: the system around drivers' licences, the process, I think, probably gives us a leg up on being able to develop that card. That will be a very, very collaborative effort with Health and other agencies that might use an ID card for more than just health information. We've talked about the opportunity maybe to have a card that would allow us to travel, that wasn't a passport.

Really, as a government we're ready to get into the age of identity security probably far ahead of most areas. A lot of that has to do certainly not with my superior planning abilities, but there's a heck of a department that has been working at this for years and years and years, and they've put together an extremely responsible approach to it. So I'm very comfortable as we go into the discussion with whatever department or with whatever province or state we talk to about the ability for us to produce or to secure the cards.

Some of the budget items we've talked about. The amortization on 3.1.4 is an accounting procedure that reduces the cost of capital. It's recorded in there because the amount is a noncash item. The consumption of inventory relates to the air service parts used for maintaining the airplanes, and the \$1.9 million dollar increase in '07-08 is related to the new vehicle purchasing program amortization.

Under 3.2.2 the \$4.8 million increase between the '07-08 and '06-07 budgets is primarily due to a \$3.5 million increase in the government of Alberta migration project, which will consolidate all of the government information technology assets into one standard environment.

The other registries. The program expenses for document control records were previously reported under motor vehicles and have been reclassified as other registries for this season. They include vital statistics, corporate registries, and personal property registries.

The personnel administration office. I agree. I was in private business, as you know, a long time, and we get to measure by the bottom line a lot. You can track it through repeat customers, and you can do all that stuff. It is a little different. But employee satisfaction and also making sure that your employees are working to the level that's engaging – you know, we constantly strive to make sure that they have the opportunity to move up the corporate ladder, if I can say so. If you're not challenged, I don't believe you're a happy employee. I think we all need that, and I think we recognize that. So you have to constantly not only push but provide the opportunity for people to be able to show the abilities they've got to demonstrate, what they can bring to the table in different venues and different opportunities.

Anybody in private business will tell you that that kind of

opportunity in a big corporation or a big company is easier than a small business. Nevertheless, it's the same. You need to make sure that employees are not only working to the taxpayers' satisfaction but to theirs too. We're probably harder on ourselves than other people would be. I can just about tell you that if you wanted to come in and say, "Let's go do a satisfaction thing with all of our employees," I could come back with 95 per cent numbers that wouldn't accurately reflect the challenge we think is there to make sure they really are satisfied. So I'm comfortable with this, our very real, not trumped-up numbers.

What are we doing currently to make sure that this is happening and to attract more? Well, obviously, pay. We're reviewing the pay and benefits right now. We're in negotiations. We are working to be able to provide retention and attract employees to the northern areas. We've dealt with the issue in Fort McMurray with regard to some nurses and some others, but we have to work on a broader scale with them and make sure that all of the government employees up there are treated fairly, although that also needs to be done. It was done based on a formula of rental costs with other communities so that there's a real number so that you could say how much more it costs for you live in Fort McMurray and here's that number.

Now, matter of factly, the rest of Alberta is catching up to Fort McMurray in costs. A single house in Canmore is now selling for an average of \$714,000. So there are going to be numbers that bring the average up and allow us to reduce the support numbers for Fort McMurray. When Fort McMurray and the rest of Alberta kind of get a balance, then that northern support, if it's unnecessary to attract and retain, needs to go away but based on a formula that's transparent and that all employees can see as they head in there.

7:50

Some of the most dynamic people we meet as we go through the government offices are the people that are working on the co-op programs with the educational institutions. I think you can ask the managers, who will tell you that in many ways these new young people bring a whole new life into a department. They're there with all of the laudable goals we had, well, many, many years ago. The co-op program I think is a hidden jewel that the government really needs to set targets extremely high on and to develop kind of a seamless interaction with these institutions.

If you talk to the president of the university, she will tell you that too many students come in already knowing what they're going to do. They spend a couple or three years, and then go: oh, geez, that's not what I wanted. She's talked about how we need to look at that education system, get kids in, expand their education, get them into some of these co-op programs where they can get out and get some experience in the workforce.

Obviously, government has got some pretty exciting things to do too. I certainly don't think the bill of the old sit behind the desk is there. These kids can learn: "God, I really fell in love with that document ID stuff we were doing," or "That work in land titles I found to be, phew, exciting, and I want to redirect into that," or work in our legal departments or transportation and see the engineers. There are so many things that we can help our young people out with by giving them that opportunity to come and learn with us.

The other thing that we need to work on is to be able to move people, and it's to come with a challenge. As governments change and population changes, their demands on people change. You know, to be portable with our workforce and with our experience. I mean, I would love to see a department that said: guess what?

The Chair: Guess what?

Mr. Snelgrove: My time is up.

Mr. R. Miller: That couldn't have been better in terms of timing, Mr. Chairman.

A couple of quick questions since we have the appropriate staff here. I'm curious if you would know or if you could find out for us, Mr. Minister, the ratio of females to males in senior management positions within the public service.

Another question that I have I raised with the former Finance minister. There was a commitment made to move away from verbal contracts, where there was no reporting required and no accountability for taxpayers to look at. I'm curious where that initiative has gone, if, in fact, all departments have now moved away from it. I'm not sure that you're necessarily the minister I have to ask for that, but since you're the President of the Treasury Board and controller of all things financial, I'm guessing you might be.

The last couple of questions I have really relate to responses that you gave to the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere and the Member for Battle River-Wainwright when the government members had their opportunity to question you on – I think this was Treasury Board. Yes, it was. The Member for Airdrie-Chestermere asked about whether or not the manner in which supply support to vulnerable people is, in fact, the best way to support them. We all know that there are always issues around cross-ministry jurisdictional concerns, most recently with the affordable housing situation and the two new help centres that have been established in Edmonton and Calgary to try to sort of fast-track people through the bureaucracy so that we can get them the help that they need when they need it and move away from this sort of traditional model where you're being shunted from one department to another trying to find out where the appropriate programming is.

She was asking you questions about that, and she sort of talked about maybe it would be better if we just had a single method of supporting these people, which sounds an awful lot like a guaranteed income program. The written response that came was that "the proposal to create a single income support program merits further consideration," and then you went on in your written response to outline a number of reasons why it may not work. But just the fact that you did indicate in the written response that it merits further consideration has me intrigued, quite frankly. So I'm curious to know if, in fact, your department is looking at this or what initiatives you might be undertaking to study some sort of a guaranteed income program as opposed to the myriad of programs that we have right now.

Then the Member for Battle River-Wainwright was asking about the business plan that deals with managing expectations. The written response that came back from the ministry was that the portion entitled Significant Opportunities and Challenges within the Treasury Board's business plan refers to managing expectations. It says, "Public values and stewardship, implications of prosperity and population growth, sustainable program spending and infrastructure demands all have managing expectations as a consideration." I'm not one who believes in social engineering, and I'm sure you don't either. I must admit I didn't have time to go check *Hansard*, but I thought it was sort of interesting that we're talking about managing people's expectations and particularly public values and stewardship. I'm curious whether or not that means that there may be advertising campaigns or public relations campaigns that are being used to influence people's expectations of what they should be getting from government. It just kind of twiggled a little red flag for me. So I'm curious, if you have the time, if you could comment a little further on that.

Before I sit down, I would just like to thank the minister for his co-operation tonight and all of the staff because they did a great job providing really timely answers. I'm going to guess that there won't

be a lot that you haven't been able to answer for me already tonight, and I appreciate that.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: I don't know for sure what the other departments are, female to male, but I think we show pretty good in our senior management team here tonight. I can tell you: don't mess with any of them. I don't know. We'll get back to you.

I'm curious. The other thing that I wouldn't even mind if it was part of your question, because I think it's critically important too, is what about the disabled and other opportunities. It's absolutely essential that we show leadership. It's not just good enough that we make legislation around doing this stuff or that we talk the talk. We need to support it. So when we find out the ratio of females and that, we'll also get back to you with anything on the affirmative action, if you want to call it that, which isn't the right term.

The question around the contracts. I've asked the department to look at another way of even buying goods less than \$10,000 to try and save us some money. But, certainly, from a control point of view all contracts, all reporting – I think that's why there is a separation of Treasury Board and Finance, to make sure that we can solely focus on accountability.

The support to people and one-stop shopping. I would love to have the discussion with our caucus and with the general public about whether it's practical to have so many different names and different support titles and whether really in this day and age, where things happen so quickly and people need support, you would need to have six or seven or eight different ministers providing different supports to the same person or to things.

I used to say that the guaranteed annual income was completely socialist, and now I realize that it might be more organized than we really are. There needs to be a way to address the working poor and the help we give them. It's really problematic to me that people are qualifying. You can seem to take them along, yet lots out there working every day with whatever circumstance they might be in haven't fallen off the table, so we won't be able to pick them up. What I would like to see is a system that encourages people to better themselves and work where they can and do what they can do and support that without barriers in the way that say: well, you know, once we let you wipe right out, then we'll help you up, and then we'll throw you out again. So I'd love to have a discussion about the opportunity to support people as they get along.

Secondly, the expectations. You know, in many ways we create the expectation of Alberta just simply by what has gone on, what we're doing. I mean, I'm obviously very proud to be in Alberta. I live very close, as you know, to Saskatchewan. The expectations that I think the rest of the world has – and I say this to many people: if you stand too close to a magnificent portrait, it just looks like a blob or a smear; if you stand back 20 feet, it's gorgeous. The rest of the world is standing back 20 feet from Alberta and looking at a gorgeous province, and they want a part of it. Sometime we're too close to see how really pretty it is.

I'm getting the nod from the chair that this exciting and stimulating conversation around Service Alberta has come to an end.

With that, we would thank the hon. member for, I would suggest, his thoughtful questions.

8:00

The Chair: You would be correct, hon. minister. If I could invite your staff to retire from the Assembly so that the next group can come in. We'll allow a moment for that to take place if that's agreeable.

The next item the committee has for consideration is the budget

estimates of the Department of Finance. With that, I will ask the hon. Minister of Finance for his opening comments.

Finance

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It certainly is an honour to be here tonight and present the estimates for Ministry of Finance for 2007-2008. With me is Robert Bhatia, my deputy minister; as well as Grant Robertson, the ADM for budget and fiscal planning; and Bonnie Lovelace, the executive director of strategic and business services.

Mr. Chairman, considering that I gave the budget speech and that there was a lot of information in this budget speech, I won't go on at very much length. I would much prefer to take the questions that are going to be very thoughtfully put.

One point that I would like to stress, though, and would like to emphasize in this discussion tonight is that I would like to get into a discussion on the surplus allocation formula. As you know, in this budget we brought forward an allocation formula that put one-third into savings, that put two-thirds into capital, of which at least 50 per cent must be into capital maintenance. I would be more than happy to entertain any thoughts that the hon. members opposite have when it comes to that particular formula. The only thing that I would ask is that if any questions pertain directly to the estimates, you simply provide me with the page number so that I can access those for the numbers.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'd be more than happy to sit down and take any questions at all.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I'd like to thank the minister for his opening comments and welcome the staff aboard. I didn't have the luxury of trading my staff in for new staff as we went from one department to the other, but I am pleased to have David Kincade with me this evening, who, I mentioned earlier, has been my researcher since my first being elected and coming down here, so I'm one of the fortunate members of the Official Opposition to have had the same researcher over that period of time. If I have kept some of your staff awake at night over the last two and a half years, blame David.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Minister. I'm pleased to participate in the supply estimates for the Department of Finance this evening. We're going to start with a couple of generic questions. I didn't have a chance to ask the minister beforehand if he wanted to do 10 minutes and 10 minutes, more or less, or if you want me to just ask a few and you can come back.

Dr. Oberg: Whenever you sit down, I'll take over.

Mr. R. Miller: Very good. I'll maybe try to pick spots where I think it's relevant to give you a chance, and if I happen to hit the magic 10 minutes, then, obviously, the chairman will ask me to sit down.

Page 161 of the government estimates talks about expense and equipment/inventory purchases. I'm curious at what appears to be a dramatic drop in the overall figure there. We go from a forecast last year of \$1.168 billion to this year of \$124 million. That seems like a dramatic drop. Not that I would necessarily complain that we would be spending less money, but I'm curious whether or not that is, in fact, the case, and if so, why that would be happening.

Another point that I wasn't actually even going to mention as I first started preparing for debate becomes more and more relevant

every day. If we could just direct your attention to page 2 of the fiscal plan. There we're looking at the major fiscal assumptions. Now, I find myself in the unusual situation of not talking about oil prices or gas prices this year but, rather, the exchange rate on the Canada/U.S. dollar. It's shown there that the assumption for this budget year is 86 cents. I believe I heard on the radio this morning that we hit 93 cents. I'm going to guess that this may have some dramatic impact on the fiscal year assumptions. I'm curious whether or not the minister would like to comment on that and whether or not he has any major concerns as to how that might affect the overall fiscal situation of the province.

Specific to the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and the government estimates, page 162. Last year we put a billion dollars into the heritage savings trust fund. That's not in this year's budget, of course, and it does cause me concern. The minister knows very well, I'm sure, by now the position of the Official Opposition and the need to build that fund. I know that there is some move towards that based on surplus dollars – of course, we'll probably have the opportunity later to talk about a resource revenue savings plan – but I'm disappointed to see that that's not there this year. In fact, I've raised concern in the past about the fact that current legislation requires that the net profit generated by that fund actually is moved into general revenue and why we still do that in a time and an economic atmosphere when surpluses in the order of billions of dollars are routine and still forecast over the next period of years. That we're actually taking money out of the heritage savings trust fund causes me a great deal of concern.

If I could flip back to the fiscal plan, page 16, and the issue of cost escalation. I know that the minister has discussed this already with government members, when they did their budget estimates on the Department of Finance, but I think it's worthy of being mentioned on behalf of the Official Opposition as well. Out of the \$4.9 billion increase that's in there over the next three years for capital projects, \$1.3 billion is for cost escalation. I understand as well as every member of this Assembly what's happening in the construction industry right now. I hear numbers quoted of 2 per cent per month inflation. Whether or not that's exactly accurate, I have to admit that I don't know, but certainly there's no question that it is a concern, and that's why it's here in the budget. I'm wondering what steps we're taking to try to mitigate that so that we don't find ourselves, you know, with projects that suddenly cost 50 per cent more than what was originally planned.

I don't have to tell the minister that this has been a long-standing problem for governments throughout history, probably, certainly throughout my lifetime. I can think of several examples. Obviously, it's exacerbated in these circumstances. Some comment on that would be relevant, I'm sure. Whether or not the minister might wish to comment on the application of the P3 model and if, in fact, that is going to address this: I know that in theory it's supposed to, but I think it's a little early in the game still to have determined just how effective that's going to be.

I do have a couple of questions about the Alberta Securities Commission. The Auditor General, after his investigation, you know, made a number of recommendations. To this point there are still a few of those that haven't been fully followed up on. I'm wondering if the minister might like to bring us up to date as to exactly where we're at with the recommendations from the Auditor General regarding the Securities Commission. I know that I could probably ask those questions tomorrow morning in Public Accounts, but I have another plan for tomorrow, so we'll ask those here tonight.

Also, I have concern, and I have constituents and stakeholders expressing concern to me, about what are perceived to be mixed

messages coming from this government as to a single national regulator as opposed to the passport system. I'm going to try not to be too partisan tonight. I don't want to play politics in terms of, you know, the minister's message versus the Premier's message. But there are people out there that have expressed some concern that they're not exactly sure which way the province is moving. I think it's a relevant question. I have expressed concern, Mr. Minister, in the past. With all of the time and resources that have gone into developing the passport system, I would hate to see that lost if, in fact, at some point we do move to a single national regulator. I'm wondering if you could comment on that. Are we, you know, spending an awful lot of time and energy on something that is going to be irrelevant if we do move to a single national regulator, or is this something that we'd be able to transfer over and isn't a complete waste of time and resources? If you could comment on that, I would be appreciative.

8:10

Just a little bit of an editorial comment, I suppose, about automobile insurance and the fact that the Automobile Insurance Rate Board, I believe, is once again about to hold hearings into the cost of premiums for basic coverage. I'd like to ask why we don't offer the same protection to renters. I'm not sure that you can necessarily answer that, but I think it's important to get it on the record.

There was discussion, when the changes to auto insurance first came in in 2004, about monitoring the optional insurance coverages, the comprehensive insurance, and sort of watching the industry to make sure that they weren't making up for the rollbacks on the mandatory part of the insurance by making up the difference on the optional coverages. I'm wondering if you could update us on where we're at with that.

A couple of related questions which may have been more appropriate for the previous minister – and I'll just read them into the record quickly – and that is whether or not there are plans to expand photoradar in the province and whether or not we're considering attaching demerit points to photoradar. I'm going to guess that those might actually be more relevant to Service Alberta. I will give you a chance to respond.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll address those questions in the 10 minutes that I have. The first question had to do with page 161 and the difference of a billion dollars between the \$1,168,057,000 to \$124,346,000. The answer, quite simply, is: the billion dollars goes into the heritage savings trust fund. It is not budgeted in this upcoming year.

The second question had to do with the dollar amount. As a rule of thumb a 1 cent increase in the Canadian dollar accounts for a decrease in revenue of \$123 million, so if that was annualized over the whole year, it's \$123 million per 1 cent. Obviously, the Canadian dollar today is much higher than our budgeted estimate. We will wait and see. It depends what happens with the Canadian dollar. It is fluctuant, but we will address that in each quarterly report. Each quarterly report will address the difference in the Canadian dollar at that particular point in time.

It's unknown, in reality, what exactly the Canadian dollar is going to do. When you take a look at a lot of people, if they're predicting an increase in interest rates, which David Dodge did not do yesterday, what may well happen is that we may see an increase in the Canadian dollar even further than what we are. You've got decreased housing starts in the U.S., which certainly can be kind of a bellwether for what is happening down there.

The third question was about the heritage savings trust plan, and the question was: why don't we keep all the money in there? We have inflation-proofed the fund this year, so revenue from the fund will go back into it. I believe it's around \$300 million, roughly, this year that will go back into the fund to inflation-proof it. We are going to be addressing these questions. In reality, we do have a much larger issue and a much larger question to address. We have a lot of endowment funds. We have the heritage savings trust fund. We have numerous other funds out there to the tune of around \$40 billion that we have cash in at any one moment. These are dollars that I'm sure we'll be asked about in a little bit but will be moved over to AIMCO for investment.

The question that we're going to be putting to the financial management commission that is going to be coming out in a couple of weeks, is: exactly what is the best way to invest these funds? What is the best way to deal with the endowments? What is the best way to deal with the heritage savings trust fund? I fully expect that part of the recommendations that come back from this commission will actually be the answer to the question that the hon. member just asked.

The fourth point was on cost escalation. Yes, included in this budget is \$1.3 billion on announced projects that have seen an increase in cost. This is something that we have to get a handle on. This is also something that, in reality, it is going to be extremely difficult to get a handle on. What we have to remember when it comes to our capital expenditures is that we typically run about 8 to 9 per cent per year of the expenditures in Alberta. Currently today there's \$107 billion worth of capital expenditures under way in the province of Alberta. Our typical funding is around \$6 billion or \$7 billion. That's the range. In reality, it is very hard for us to determine the market.

Moving into the fifth part of the question, which is the P3s, unfortunately, in the media in Alberta there was very little made about the northeast ring road in Calgary. That – and I commend the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation – was actually a stroke of brilliance how they did that. Not very many people understand how they actually did it. What occurred in the past is that for every project that we put out, we actually put out our estimated cost of what it would be to build. On that particular project no one – no one – knew what it would cost us. What we did is: we put our bid into an envelope, and we opened up the bid of the envelope at the same time as the other bids for that tender. What we found is that we actually saved \$350 million less than our bid. We could have built that for \$350 million more. So on the cost mitigation side of it I do think we have to stop telegraphing how much we think things are going to cost. We do that for budgetary reasons and albeit most of this is in the Treasury Board portfolio, but I do believe that we need to look at a different way of doing that because what we always get is a cost plus as opposed to the actual cost.

The sixth one was about the Alberta Securities Commission, and the Auditor General has noted that we are well on our way to all of the recommendations that the Auditor General put forward. The Alberta Securities Commission has cleaned itself up very nicely and, indeed, is running very well.

The single national regulator: in reality, both the Premier and I have been saying the same thing. What we want is something that is easy for investors, that is easy for capital markets to be brought into, that is easy for companies who go onto the exchange, go onto the public markets, and that is safe, quite simply, that is safe.

There are some stories across Canada that would absolutely curl your socks. One of them, for example, is that just recently there was a gentleman in Vancouver that was convicted of fraud when it came to trading securities. The ironic part about this is that the same

gentleman was kicked out of Ontario in the year 2002 for doing the same thing. He simply uprooted, moved to Vancouver, did the same thing, and defrauded people of \$15 million. In a country of 33 million people that is just simply not satisfactory.

So the question was on the passport system: have we wasted our time? The answer is no. We absolutely have not wasted our time. Indeed, in the passport system it is intended to go down the road towards a single regulator at some point in time. When that point in time will be I don't know, but the passport system and everything that has been done to date, legislative and dealing with the passport system, is completely consistent with moving towards a single regulator, a common regulator, a common enforcement agency. This is something that we have to look at very closely because of what is occurring now in the capital markets. When you take a look at Sarbanes-Oxley in the U.S., when you take a look at what is happening in London, we have a huge opportunity to capture more than our share of the capital markets and bring the dollars into Canada.

When I was down in New York and Toronto a couple of weeks ago, the common theme was simply: "Well, we're scared off because you have 13 securities regulators. We don't want to go there because you have to do it 13 times. We have to pay 13 fees." This is very much of a concern, and again it is very much in keeping with what my earlier comments were, that we want something easy and we want something safe. So that is going to be my directive, and certainly that's the Premier's directive: to get securities regulators that are easy and safe to bring capital dollars into our market.

The other question: I must say, hon. member, that that's the first time I've ever had auto insurance compared to renters. I will say that that's the first time that has ever happened. Quite simply, you have to have auto insurance if you drive a car. You don't have to rent in a house. It's your choice to rent in a house. The optional insurance coverage is about the same thing.

Photoradar we can certainly deal with in a different department. I must say that I know very little about photoradar, so I'd be more than happy to pass that point on to whichever department – I believe it would actually be Infrastructure and Transportation where the issue on photoradar would come in, with a possible for the Sol Gen as well.

I believe I've answered all your questions.

8:20

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to go back to the heritage savings trust fund and the inflation-proofing for a minute, if I can. I'm certainly aware of the fact that legislation calls for it to be inflation-proofed, and in fact that's something that the Official Opposition had been calling for for years. I'm glad that that's being done finally. We're probably about \$7 billion or \$8 billion behind where we would be had we inflation-proofed it since 1987, so obviously that's a step in the right direction.

The minister will know that I was confused by the budget documents and traded some information back and forth with the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere and yourself regarding the way that this was communicated in the budget documents. I'll just point to page 10 of the fiscal plan under the title Surpluses, where it says in the second paragraph, "Surpluses are forecast to be significantly smaller, totalling \$4.5 billion, over the next three years. These surpluses will be used primarily for inflation-proofing the Heritage Fund and addressing capital cash requirements."

I had raised some concern that perhaps there was a change in

direction on behalf of the government. This would lead Albertans to believe that the Alberta heritage savings trust fund would only be inflation-proofed if, in fact, there's a surplus. I know you've told me that that's not the case, and you've pointed to the correct piece of legislation, but I'm wondering if you could clarify for me the budget documents that seem to indicate that the heritage savings trust fund would only be inflation-proofed if, in fact, there's a surplus.

Further down in that same column under the heading Savings it says, "In 2007-08, it is estimated that \$284 million will be added to the Heritage Fund for inflation-proofing," and I think you mentioned that figure yourself. But, again, my concern was that the average Albertan reading this document would draw the same conclusion that I did, and that is that somehow if there's no surplus, there's no inflation-proofing. I'm not sure what happened there, but despite the fact that we traded paper back and forth, I never was completely comfortable with the answer that I was given on that, so if you wouldn't mind commenting on that, that would be great.

I asked the President of the Treasury Board, and I'll ask you too because specifically last year it had to do with the Department of Finance, and it may or may not still to some extent. I'm going to guess that it's probably more on the Treasury Board side now. I had raised concerns over the last couple of years about verbal contracts and the number of contracts that had been let where there was no paper reporting required and no performance evaluations and that sort of thing. I know specifically that the Department of Finance, the previous minister had made a commitment that those practices would end, and I'm wondering if you can just verify for me that that has in fact happened in your department at least, if not across the board with all other departments. As I say, that may be a Treasury Board thing, but certainly I'm sure that you could speak for your department.

I'm wondering: on page 61 of the fiscal plan – and this gets back to the P3 question a little bit, Mr. Minister – it talks about the financing costs for government-owned capital, and then in brackets it says "P3s." That number is forecast to be \$8 million this year. It jumps to \$18 million the next year, and \$22 million is the target for the year 2009-2010. So I'm just wondering: are those P3 contracts that we've committed to, and why are we expecting that number to almost triple?

Dr. Oberg: Which page are you on?

Mr. R. Miller: I'm sorry. Page 61 of the fiscal plan. Debt Servicing Costs is what it says at the top of the page, and then under infrastructure and transportation it shows financing costs for government-owned capital (P3s): \$8 million this year, \$18 million the following year, and up to \$22 million in the third year out.

I would like to sort of go back to that heritage fund, I guess, but more generally to AIMCO and investment strategies. I had asked earlier this year, and the department was kind enough to respond with an indication as to how much money the government has invested either directly or indirectly in tobacco companies. This is particularly timely today since I've heard on the news this evening that the government caucus will be reviewing its tobacco strategy this Thursday, I believe is what I heard. The minister will recall that I had introduced an amendment to Bill 22, the AIMCO bill, asking that we divest ourselves of all tobacco investments. Unfortunately, that amendment was turned down, but I notice in the written response that we received that as of March 15 of this year we had directly invested \$18.1 million in tobacco companies and a further \$39.9 million in indirect investments, for a total exposure of \$58 million.

I'm not so sure that I like the word exposure because I'm not so

concerned about risk, but I am concerned about the ethics of being invested to the tune of \$58 million in a climate where I think we all understand the risks of smoking and the costs that are borne by the government as a result of smoking. I would certainly strongly encourage the government to proceed as soon as possible in divesting itself of those investments, and even more particularly I would like to see an ethical investing policy that would mandate that we just simply stay away from investing in tobacco altogether.

I'd like to ask about the income trust situation. In last year's budget when we had this discussion, I think the answer I received was that Alberta was exposed – and in this case I'll use the word "exposed" – to a potential loss of \$400 million per year if the federal government did not make legislative changes to income trusts. That was last year, and I'm wondering: now that those changes have been made, are we expecting \$400 million in additional revenues as a result of the changes that the federal government made? Will this be offset by other factors? I'm wondering if the minister can just sort of bring us up to date as to what effect the changes that the federal minister has made will have on Alberta's Finance department.

Inflation-proofing the heritage trust fund we already talked about earlier. I'm going to jump back to insurance, and I'll apologize to the staff and the minister if I'm jumping around a bit. Unfortunately, this is sort of the way I've got it laid out. I hope you can keep up, and if not I'm hoping I'll get written answers later.

An issue that's been in the news a little bit recently – and I recall that the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs asked a question of the minister about this recently – is the situation of fire departments across the province facing liability lawsuits when it's perceived by the party that's suffered a loss or the insurance company that the department didn't do a sufficient job in terms of controlling the fire and the damages. It's widely been reported that fire chiefs, I know, in Edmonton and elsewhere across the province are asking for the government to pass some sort of legislation that would protect them from those lawsuits. I'm wondering if we've made any movement in that regard, if we can expect to see something coming down the pipe fairly soon or not. So if you could bring us up to date on that.

I also note that the Independent Insurance Brokers of Alberta have indicated that they're working hard to hammer out a policy that would accommodate regulators' recommendations on disclosure of financial links between brokers and insurers. This is certainly a conversation that I've had in the past with Jim Rivait and the IBC in terms of protecting Alberta's consumers and full disclosure, something that, you know, we've been hoping would happen for a long time.

It looks like the industry's ready to move on that and indicate that they're hoping that their policy has something that will accommodate what the government is looking for. Again, I'm just wondering if you could bring us up to speed on where that is and if Alberta's consumers can look forward to some movement on that fairly soon.

Another one that I found particularly interesting was reported in *Thompson's*, an insurance industry magazine, recently. That was a situation where the Alberta government was found to be liable for a rental fraud loss, where a rental car company had rented a vehicle to someone who was using stolen identity, and that was unbeknownst to the renter. Subsequently, that renter using the stolen identity was involved in an accident, and it was determined that the province was on the hook and that the money would have to come out of the motor vehicle accident claims fund. With the propensity more and more, it seems, to have stolen identity, I'm wondering what we're doing to address that situation.

8:30

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, on the inflation-proofing of the heritage trust fund, unfortunately, the language was not 100 per cent clear in this document. Which page was that on again?

Mr. R. Miller: Page 10, I think.

Dr. Oberg: What it stated was: "Surpluses or forecast to be significantly smaller, totalling \$4.5 billion, over the next three years. These surpluses will be used primarily for inflation-proofing the Heritage Fund and addressing capital cash requirements." The reason we said it that way is because we expect around \$700 million in investment income from the heritage savings trust fund as part of that surplus. Certainly, this year \$284 million went to inflation-proofing it, and next year a similar type of amount for inflation-proofing it will come out of the surplus, out of the money from the heritage savings trust fund. Could the language have been a little different? Yeah. I certainly accept that from the hon. member, and we'll look at changing the language next year, but the intent is that it will guarantee that it'll be inflation-proofed.

The second one was on verbal contracts. As a matter of record, Mr. Chairman, the previous Finance minister actually tabled in the House a document about all contracts. So there has been a standardization of the contracts. Verbal contracts are not in. They're not a thing that we like to do for obvious reasons, and they are reviewed by senior members of the bureaucracy as well.

The P3 and the debt-servicing side of it and the contracts. Quite simply, the P3s are being built now. Why you're seeing an increase, for example, the east corner of the Anthony Henday: as the dollars get in, we start making the payments. So why it goes 8, 18, and so on is because the payments are actually accumulating while those roads are being built.

The AIMCO one is an interesting point. We have to decide from a policy point of view when it comes to investing these dollars, and these are very important and very difficult questions: do we want to simply make as much money as possible for the citizens of Alberta, or do we want to put caveats on how we invest? Should we only invest in green energy projects versus other projects? Should we only invest in non tobacco-related industries versus tobacco-related industries? I think those are all very valid questions. My personal belief – and this is nothing new to any hon. member here – I am definitely against tobacco; I'm definitely against smoking. But as Minister of Finance it's also my duty, it is my job to ensure that Albertans realize the most profit possible from the heritage savings trust fund and the numerous investments that we have. That is why this is going to be one of the issues that the financial management commission is going to be dealing with. I think it is a very tough question. It's a very apropos question, and the answer is something that we're going to have to deal with.

If, for example, we say that we don't want to invest in tobacco companies, we don't want to invest here, and we don't want to invest there, then I absolutely will not accept any questions in this House about why our returns were not as high as other funds, because that would be the reason. On the other hand, if we choose to invest in everything, then we can morally be saying that we are being complicit in the funding of tobacco, as one example. So it's a very tough question, something that we're going to be looking at with our financial management commission, and we'll await what they have to say.

The income trust. Our estimates were anywhere between \$400 million and \$450 million. The last estimate was roughly \$450 million that it would save us. We have to remember several things. First of all, income trusts have not been banned yet. Income trusts

are there for another four years and then will gradually start fading out. Second of all, and this is where I believe that the federal government has gone a little bit astray. I'll use, if I can, BCE. BCE is looking to be bought out by a pension fund, which in effect is going to work exactly the same as an income trust in that they will not be paying the income tax. There will be a lot of accumulated debt, which will allow them to not pay the income tax.

It's very difficult for me at this time to speak to the Assembly about what the actual amount of increased revenue will be from the lack of income trusts. We don't know what vehicle these income trusts are going to morph into. We have no idea what is going to happen to them over the next four years. We don't know if another government will come in and change the rules. So all we can simply quite literally say is: wait and see. We've had 11 foreign takeovers of income trusts so far. We don't know how many others are going to be taken over by foreign companies. Regardless of what happens, we recognize that this is a very large issue in Alberta, and it's something that, quite literally, we don't know what the end point is going to be.

When you add on the whole income trust issue, we also have to remember that at one point in time there was \$35 billion worth of capital that evaporated from Alberta, and we have to take that into consideration. So what started off as a very simple question and potentially a very simple answer has turned into something very, very, very complicated. I think the federal government is realizing that as well, that it is becoming a very complicated question and a complicated issue.

The insurance liability for fire chiefs and for the fire departments I believe at the moment is encompassed by the municipal liabilities. It is included in the municipalities' liability protection. It is something we can look at. I must say that I have not been approached since I've been Minister of Finance by the fire departments about this particular issue, but we certainly will take a look at it.

The insurance brokers versus the insurance dealers. Your point that you made is absolutely where we are. We're waiting for the insurance brokers to bring their paper forward. We'll take a look at it and then respond according to what they're saying.

The last point. If I understand your question about the stolen identity and the government being on the hook, there are a couple of issues here. For example, if it was on the hook on the motor vehicle accident claim fund, I don't know the reason for that. But it actually begs the question, if I may – it is something that we're going to be responding to, and this may be a little bit different than what you had actually asked, but it's the whole idea of vicarious liability. As you know – and this is very, very serious when it comes to much of what is being done on vehicle leasing in the province of Alberta – there have been some huge lawsuits in the U.S. and recently some huge lawsuits in Ontario where the actual vehicle lessor has been included in a lawsuit and indeed has been found liable because their name is actually on the ownership of the car. So despite the fact that someone drove the car into a fence post or into a post or into another vehicle, the companies – GMC, Ford Canada, many of the vehicle lessors – have also been implicated in this particular issue.

We are looking at the issue of vicarious liability. We're going to be moving on that, hopefully, in the fall. We're looking at legislation now. Whether it will be introduced this spring is probably very doubtful, but the issue of vicarious liability will be dealt with in the fall. In reality it just is not fair. It's not fair to the people who are the lessors to have them implicated when they had absolutely nothing to do with it.

So I believe those are the questions to date.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let's go back to ethical investing for just a second, if I could. The minister has expressed, first of all, his support for antismoking initiatives, and I appreciate that. I'd just like to point to Yale University, which has a large endowment fund which includes an ethical investment policy, and that fund traditionally vastly outperforms the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. So I would recommend that the folks at AIMCO have a look at that. Clearly, just because you're involved in ethical investing doesn't mean that your investments have to be less than they would be otherwise.

8:40

I'll repeat a concern that I had expressed to the previous Finance minister when it comes to the objective of the managers of the heritage savings trust fund. I can't quote it verbatim, but it pretty much says what you said; that is, to maximize the return to Albertans. My concern with that is: where do you draw the line, then? There are a number of porn sites, for instance, that are legitimate businesses. If they were to be publicly traded, would the Alberta government consider investing in those because they could, you know, generate a tremendous return? There are legalized brothels in the States and overseas that are publicly traded. So there are examples of things that I'm sure the minister and the folks at AIMCO would not invest in. We probably don't need a policy to say that. As you said, it's a difficult issue. At some point I would like to know what is acceptable and what isn't. Where do we draw that line? When do we say that it doesn't matter how good the return is; we're not going to go there? So I hope that, you know, we can continue to raise awareness on that issue and maybe at some point move towards the idea of an ethical investment policy.

I'm going to send over a copy of that particular item regarding the stolen identities so that the minister can read it. As an Albertan who pays taxes here and knowing that these sorts of things do happen and that now we have a ruling from a Court of Queen's Bench justice saying that we're responsible – I don't know how often it happens, but it does cause me some concern.

I'd like to ask about the special broker tax. The minister's office will know that we've asked questions about this before. If I could turn your attention to page 176 of the estimates. Now, in a written response that I had from the minister, he outlined that a special broker is a licensed insurance agent who on application receives a licence authorizing the placement of unlicensed insurance for the agent's clients.

I'm just looking at the revenue to the Department of Finance over the past couple of years. In 2005-06 the actual revenue from the special broker tax was \$6.016 million. Then for some reason we budgeted only \$1.75 million last year, in '06-07, yet the actual forecast now sits at \$5.012 million. I've never been completely clear why we went from an actual revenue of \$6 million down to a forecast of \$1.75 for the last business year. It turned out to actually be \$5 million, which is good but, obviously, a lot more than what was forecast. Then the estimate for this year is \$4 million. Again, it seems that we're expecting to bring in less revenue from this special broker tax than we did last year, yet last year we far outperformed the expectation. I'm still not completely clear on how this works and why we seem to have difficulty forecasting the amount of revenue that's going to be realized from it. So any enlightenment that you might be able to provide on the special broker tax would be appreciated.

I'd also like to ask, then, about page 95 of the Alberta Finance annual report. You may not have this in front of you, so if it's necessary to have a written response later, that's okay. On page 95 of the annual report it talks about dedicated revenue initiatives.

There's a line item there that says "Investment, treasury, and risk management," and it shows a shortfall of \$1.486 million. To my untrained eye that would indicate that we brought in nearly \$1.5 million less in revenue than we were expecting. I may be reading that wrong, but I'm curious. If you could provide an explanation on that.

Here's a question that I've asked previously. Page 45 of the fiscal plan talks about the total liabilities of the Alberta government. I've noted in the past that this number seems to go up from year to year. This year it shows a total of \$20.1 billion in total liabilities held by the government of Alberta. Last year in the same budget document it was listed at \$18.4 billion, and the year before that it was listed at \$15.1 billion. So it does seem that it goes up fairly substantially year after year. I do appreciate that the net financial assets and the net assets of the province go up as well. I mean, we're a booming economy, so I understand that our assets are going up, but it does cause me some concern that our liabilities seem to go up in a fairly dramatic fashion as well. I'm wondering if you could enlighten us as to why these liabilities would be increasing and whether or not you have any concern that they seem to be going up rather dramatically, a 33 per cent increase since 2005-2006.

I'm going to go to page 62 of the fiscal plan, which talks about loans and advances. There's a line item there that shows – well, we talk about Ridley Grain, and we talk about the student loan relief completion payments. But then there's a line that says Other, and it shows \$71 million in allowance for other doubtful loans, advances, implemented guarantees, and indemnities. I'm wondering if you might be able to tell us or give us some sort of a breakdown as to what the Other category would include and perhaps also tell us what the total amount of defaulted loans were in 2005-2006, with a breakdown of that. That's information that I wouldn't expect you to be able to provide tonight, but you might be able to gather that for us, or at least point us in the right direction.

I have questions for the minister on the Alberta Society for Pension Reform. I understand that there is an action before the courts, so I know that you can't say an awful lot about that, but I am particularly concerned. I've heard figures upwards of \$3 billion if, in fact, the courts were to find in their favour. I'm concerned about the risk that that puts Alberta's treasury at.

I'm wondering whether or not the Alberta risk management fund would . . . [interjection] Oh, the Alberta Society for Pension Reform. This is a group of retirees representing employees from a number of different jurisdictions. I know the local authorities is included in there, management employees are in there, the Alberta teachers are in there. There are a number of different funds in there. They have an action against the government. They feel that they've been wronged by the government in terms of their pensions. I've been told that that could conceivably amount to a total of some \$3 billion if, in fact, the courts were to find in their favour.

I'm concerned about what steps the Alberta government might be taking to address that if, in fact, the courts were to find in their favour. I'm sure that this is something that will wind its way through the courts over a period of years. It's not likely to happen tomorrow or next week; nevertheless, I am concerned about the liability that the government might face in that situation. As I said, I'm wondering if the Alberta risk management fund would cover that or if there are other thoughts in mind as to how we would address that situation if it were to happen.

I'd like to point out regarding the Fiscal Responsibility Act the fact that we use \$5.3 billion of resource revenue, that we allow ourselves to use that much every year. I'll congratulate the minister because this year for the first time since I've been in this House we didn't go up, and that's a good thing. Some have suggested to me

that we should actually roll it back a little bit. Well, I have a different plan, as you know, which would mandate that we save a certain amount of that money as opposed to mandating that we spend a certain amount of that money. Nevertheless, on top of the fact that the budget documents refer to the \$5.3 billion, there is also a notation in there that on average \$2 billion above the \$5.3 billion is spent on capital projects. So that would indicate to me that it's more like \$7.3 billion in resource revenue that we're spending. I'd ask you if you could clarify a little bit on that. It does cause me some concern if it's actually \$7.3 billion as opposed to \$5.3 billion.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much. I'll start off with the whole ethical investing question. Again, I commend the member because it is an excellent question, and it is something that in the year 2007 we do have to grapple with. But the downside is potentially being in a situation where we're not bringing as many dollars in, albeit that's a very small situation when you're looking at only a \$57 million exposure to tobacco companies both direct and indirect.

8:50

However, it potentially could be a larger question. For example, the downside of ethical investing is that ethics are different to whoever is out there, whoever happens to be in the government of the day, whoever happens to be talking about it. Is nuclear power ethical or unethical? Is coal mining ethical or unethical? These are all the various questions. In order to remain philosophically pure, I believe that one of the points we have made and what we've chosen to do is try to maximize the amount of dollars for Alberta taxpayers.

Again, though, I will reiterate that this is one of the questions that we're going to be asking the financial management commission albeit I believe that, ultimately, if it does come down to ethical investing. If they do put forward an opinion on ethical investing, that is something that should be debated in this House. It is something that should be brought forward and talked about because certainly one person's ethics in ethical investing are completely different than another person's ethics in ethical investing.

The second question was on the special brokers. Quite literally, what that is is a special type of insurance, and these are the fees that are collected on that as opposed to the insurance taxes that would be paid otherwise. It's a very small percentage. The reason for the difference from 1.75 down to 4 or up to 5.1 is quite literally that it varies from year to year as to how many actual dollars are needed and how much tax is actually being paid. So it does tend to be very much an estimate, but it's an estimate that is extremely variable.

The dedicated revenue costs – I believe you stated it was down \$1.5 million – those are simply the costs of our investment operations. They're the costs from the pension plans, the heritage fund, et cetera. Simply, if our costs are not as much, then we do not recover as much from the dedicated funds that go out for that.

The liability question about why we're at 20.1. By far, the majority of this is the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, which is lending out money to municipalities for their particular needs. We have seen an increase in the pension obligations, the self-supporting lending agencies such as AFSC, ATB. That is where the difference in the liability comes. It is collected, though, on the asset sheet, and it is in there.

Where are we here? The Society for Pension Reform. Again, that is something that we are looking at. Obviously, we are engaged in a legal action right now, so as Minister of Finance I can't really comment on this in this particular House. It is before the courts. We feel that we're in a very favourable position, but obviously that's ultimately up to the courts to decide.

The \$5.3 billion is the amount of dollars that we use for budgeting. The hon. member is absolutely right; it's exactly the same as last year, which is the first time that that has occurred. It is the maximum amount that we use for our budgeting purpose. Anything over that must be taken into consideration in the surpluses and, subsequently, the surplus allocation formula that is coming forward.

I believe I had one more question. The other loans. Oh, I'm sorry. The allowance for doubtful loans, advances, implemented guarantees, and indemnities, the other components. When you take a look at the top of that particular chart on page 62, what you see are all the various loans that are put out. What the Other is is a compilation of all the risks in those other loans. So it's a risk from the Ag Financial Services, a risk from the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act: all of these other things that are there. That is the risk amount. It's a culmination of those. The asset amount is at the bottom of the total loans and advances.

So with that, once again, I believe I've answered all of your questions, and I'd be more than happy to go again.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Since we're running close to the end of our time, I just want to thank the minister for doing a great job and the staff for providing answers as quickly as you have. I know we're making you work hard, and I appreciate that.

A couple of comments. This afternoon during question period there was a question from a government member, if I remember right, about tax incentives for apartment development and that sort of thing. You indicated that as part of the review that you're undertaking, you will be looking at those. I've had a number of people come to me and talk about a rental tax credit that used to be given to renters back in the early '80s, I believe. I'm wondering if that might also be part of the review that you're doing and if you may consider tax breaks for renters as well. I think that might go a long way towards addressing some of the situations that renters are dealing with right now. I'm pleased to hear that you're looking at incentives on the development side, but let's also look at incentives for those that are renting currently.

We didn't unfortunately have much time to talk about the surplus policy. You know, I'm passionate about that and a resource revenue policy, and I'm hoping that during the appropriation bill debate we can go there. I know that I will, and I'm hoping that you will too because it is a good debate. It's one that I think is long overdue and one that I would hope that somehow we can encourage all Albertans to be involved in and thinking about because it's crucial to the future of this province. I apologize that I didn't have an opportunity to get to it tonight but it's not for lack of interest, that's for sure. As I say, I commit to discussing it during the appropriation debate.

I want to ask very quickly about whether or not we've got any initiatives to increase the financial services sector in Alberta. We all know about the amount of activity that takes place in eastern Canada. Of course, we've got the Alberta Treasury Branch here, and Canadian Western Bank is headquartered here, and the credit unions, which do a great job, but I'm sure that we'd all like to see more involvement from that sector located here in Alberta. I'm wondering what you might have under way to encourage that.

Lastly, just a concern that I expressed previously and you acknowledged – or it may have been the President of the Treasury board that had acknowledged that it's a concern – and that is what implication TILMA will have on Alberta Treasury Branch, in particular, because it's owned by the citizens of this province, but also the others that I mentioned as well, Canadian Western Bank and

the credit unions. I understand that financial institutions are exempted until 2009, if I remember right, but that's not that very far away, so if you could comment on that as well.

Again, thank you for the work that you've done today.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much Mr. Chairman. First of all, when it comes to tax incentives it's very hard for the Minister of Finance to talk about any new taxation policy while we're still debating this year's budget. I do have to be very cautious as to what I say. I will simply say that we are looking at all options for tax reform. Any type of tax reform is a welcome approach and, quite simply, hon. member, we're looking at all different ways to get some tax reform.

The financial services sector. I think by far the single biggest thing that we will do in the upcoming year is AIMCO. By centring a \$70 billion company into Edmonton, Alberta, I feel that we will actually attract financial services here because people are going to want to come and talk to them in their own surroundings. I think that's by far the biggest incentive that we can give to get the financial services sector here. Obviously, we have low taxes and all the other good things that happen for business in Alberta.

The last one is TILMA. TILMA, we must remember, is a negotiation between two governments, of which we are one. I will say that there is nothing that is going to be in there, there is nothing that is going to be negotiated that is going to be detrimental to Albertans. Certainly the Alberta Treasury Branch is something that Albertans hold near and dear to their hearts. Do we have to make some changes to the Treasury Branch? Yeah, probably we do. We're going to look at them. Then we're going to take a very measured response in regard to the Treasury Branch and look at it very carefully, but we will not put forward anything with regard to any part of Alberta in TILMA unless it is beneficial for both of us, which I really feel there's a huge opportunity.

Mr. Chairman, with that, I'd like to thank the hon. member for his very good questions today and thank all the members who are here who happen to be listening. Thank you.

The Chair: The time is such that by the time we have the staff vacate the Assembly and allow for the Minister of Environment staff to come in, we will be ready to proceed right on schedule.

Hon. members, it's also been indicated to the chair that the minister and the private member wish to share the 20-minute speaking times back and forth under Standing Order 59.01(2). The table will just keep resetting the clock in 20-minute increments, so we can just carry on. If you hear it, we'll just reset it if that's agreeable. Do you want to go 10? I guess, then, we go at 10 back and forth because it has to be agreeable to both.

9:00

Dr. Swann: That's what I thought we agreed to.

Mr. Renner: Back and forth.

Dr. Swann: Sure. Whether it's a full 10 or five or eight, just when we're finished, we'll interact, if that works for you.

The Chair: So you want to set the clock for 20 minutes at a time or 10 minutes?

Dr. Swann: I think 10 at the maximum.

The Chair: Ten is the maximum, or 20 if it's allowable. We'll go with the 10.

Mr. Renner: But just so we understand because I'm not so sure that we're all on the same wavelength. Whether we go 10 minutes or 20 minutes or five minutes, my understanding of the agreement was that the hon. member would ask a question, and I would answer it, and then he'll ask another question, and I'll answer it. So where the clock is set is somewhat irrelevant because he's the only member that's going to be asking the questions.

The Chair: The Standing Orders are still the Standing Orders. We'll set the clock every 10 minutes, and if you ask a question that takes one minute and a minute to answer, we'll just keep resetting the clock.

Dr. Swann: I agree.

The Chair: That's the simplest way unless both parties are agreeable to the 20 minutes. That'll work the best.

Mr. Renner: Well, that's my point. I thought we were agreeable to the 20 minutes. That's just the way it has to be implemented, hon. member. So we either have to go for five minutes, and then you go for five minutes, or we can go back and forth for 20 minutes. So that's what I thought we had agreed to.

Dr. Swann: Oh, I see. Okay. That's fine for me.

Mr. Renner: So, Mr. Chairman, I think we have agreed to 20 minutes.

The Chair: I'll set the clock in 20-minute increments.

Mr. Renner: If it doesn't work for the first 20 minutes, we'll do something else for the second 20.

The Chair: Okay. That's what we shall do.

Environment

The Chair: With that, I will invite the hon. Minister of Environment to provide his opening comments.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I don't have a lot of opening comments, as was discussed with the member opposite. We are going to have an informal dialogue back and forth.

Before we start, I would just like to introduce the members of my staff who have joined me in the House. We have the deputy minister, Peter Watson; along with assistant deputy minister of environmental stewardship, Bev Yee; and assistant deputy minister of environmental assurance, John Knapp. So between the wealth of knowledge that they have at their disposal and in their heads and some that I have managed to pick up by osmosis over the last few months and some of the copious notes I have in front of me, I think we should be able to deal with most of the questions that the hon. member has for us. So at this point I think we'll get started.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Welcome friends, staff, and colleagues. It's my honour to speak to the estimates briefing for Environment 2007.

I want to acknowledge, first of all, the progress on issues that has been achieved with Alberta Environment. They're obviously working hard to make very responsible and sustainable decisions for

the province of Alberta on issues, for example, like baseline groundwater testing and mapping; the emergency response team, responding to spills such as we experienced last summer in Wabamun; new funding for Water for Life although infrastructure does appear to be taking the lion's share of this funding; the policy on climate change that was leading the country, and it begins to hold industry accountable for its lion's share of carbon emissions; and the slow progress on air quality criteria standards that's catching up with national standards, in some cases leading national standards. I wanted to acknowledge that there is good work and conscientious efforts by Alberta Environment to address through the budget some of the expectations and responsibilities they've been given.

I'll begin by just making a few comments about three of the five principles the government has articulated—improving quality of life, strengthening Alberta, and creating safe and secure communities—and comment that there is real doubt in Alberta today that our investment in the environment enables these three key criteria to be achieved, especially when one considers a budget of 0.5 per cent of spending in this province, this despite an exponential growth in new and old sites of concern. Albertans are looking to Alberta Environment for capacity to set higher standards, to monitor these standards, to enforce these standards, to force polluters to pay. There is a crisis of confidence at this time in Alberta that they're able to deliver on these expectations.

So with those as preamble, I'll just go specifically to the budget and ask for a clarification about a few of the line items in the budget. Page 142, for example, the line on stewardship is 9 per cent less than was forecast. Maybe you could comment a bit on where that change has occurred and why. Also on 142, the line item on water, a 16 per cent increase in Water for Life. This includes \$100 million, as I understand it, passing on to municipalities to enhance or develop their capacities to treat and distribute high-quality water to their residents.

Perhaps I'll just leave it there and allow you to comment on some of those key questions that just emerged from the budget. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to thank the member for his compliments. I think it's a tribute to the people in Environment, who have worked very diligently, and, frankly, I think, also to the hon. member, who as critic for Environment has taken the time to work with us, to become involved and ask intelligent questions and, hopefully, receive intelligent answers as we work together to deal with issues related to the environment.

I want to just briefly talk about the statement that spending on environment is not necessarily commensurate with the need. I've heard that before, and it's something that I find somewhat troubling although I think that it's in the minds of some a legitimate concern. However, I've pointed out on a number of occasions before that I don't share that concern. I believe that it's the role of Alberta Environment to develop the necessary policy, to ensure that we have in place the ability for the people who work in Environment to do their job, to ensure that environmental stewardship is at the levels that Albertans expect. Frankly, I think that it's a case of ensuring that we do have in place the mechanisms to ensure that the policies that we put in place are in fact followed and enforced.

A good example of that is on air emissions. We don't in my opinion need to have literally dozens or hundreds of inspectors on site at every plant, monitoring air emissions on a day-to-day or an hour-to-hour basis. We have very stringent regulations in place that say that if there is any kind of an anomaly, if there is a release of any

kind, there is mandatory reporting by the industry of that release. We see a bigger offence and treat with a far more heavy-handed approach any instances where there is a failure to report than when there is an actual emission. Emissions do occur from time to time. Sometimes they are the result of environmental conditions, an inversion or a number of other naturally occurring events, and sometimes they are unavoidable because there are breakdowns of technology. In those cases, we deal with dealing with the release of hazardous materials.

9:10

Nevertheless, it's, I think, far more efficient for us to have a system like that, with ongoing monitoring unannounced from time to time, than to have an army of people sitting around doing standard monitoring that for all intents and purposes could be done by a machine. So that's an example. It's a bit of an extreme example, but it's an example of how we can do a better job of stewardship without necessarily spending extra many, many millions ensuring that people are in place.

Now, the question on environmental stewardship: the significant change to the budget has to do with the increase in spending due to a \$2 million increase for the ministry's ongoing commitment to aboriginal consultation. There was also an increase in Water for Life; \$3.6 million of the increase in Water for Life is due to an increase from the energy innovation fund, and that will be used for groundwater mapping across the province. There's also a \$440,000 increase to address manpower inflationary pressures.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Two areas that this ministry has taken on, relatively new areas, have to do with the sustainable resource and environmental management collective cross-ministry initiative to try to make better decisions with surface land-use planning and energy impacts. I'm wondering what, if anything, in this budget addresses SREM and your role with SREM. A second one has to do with cumulative impact assessments and the degree to which the department is developing in-house capability and skills to do timely cumulative impact assessments and use those impact assessments in assessing development proposals and approvals.

Thank you.

Mr. Renner: The commitment to SREM is a very real one. Although it may not show up specifically as a line item in the budget, it is a true interministry, cross-ministry initiative. So that each department has the ongoing commitment to SREM, there is a financial contribution because there are some dedicated staff specifically to the cross-ministry initiative, but each department contributes relatively equally to it, that being SRD, Environment, and Energy.

The deputies are getting into a pretty steady routine of meeting on a biweekly basis. Of late the ministers have found it necessary that we have integrated our involvement into an alternate biweekly meeting. We were meeting on an as-required basis and determined that that was simply not going to be as successful as it needed to be. By the time we determined that there was a need for ministers to get together, it was increasingly difficult to work it into everyone's agendas. So we have determined that it's more appropriate for us to meet on a biweekly basis, and it's easier to cancel a meeting than to try and organize one.

The cumulative impact assessment is under way. We have a number of pilot projects that are either up and running or will be very shortly. We intend to have three pilots that will give us an

opportunity to test our thoughts on cumulative impact. One in the Industrial Heartland – and I've talked about that in the House before – will give us an opportunity to work towards regulatory regime for a heavy concentration of industrial development. The other will focus on southern Alberta landscapes. That will be largely a focus on water but not necessarily restricted to that because we also want to talk about the watersheds. We want to talk about how we protect the eastern slopes, which are the headwaters of the South Saskatchewan River basin. We'll be doing that in conjunction with our partner ministries. The third one is in central Alberta. That will be again using a similar model for coal gasification and how we can apply the model of cumulative effect in the development of coal-bed gas.

Interestingly enough, we also have as we speak 12 different EIAs, environmental impact assessments, for a number of different projects. Cumulative impact is part of every EIA although it's in a little bit different focus from what we might think of as cumulative impact from the pilot projects that we're going to be dealing with. One of the requirements of an EIA for the applicant is to show what the cumulative impact will be of this new application, whatever, and how it will have cumulative impact and what the intention of the applicant is to mitigate that cumulative impact. So there already is to some degree cumulative impact.

From a dollar perspective – correct me if I'm wrong – I thought we had at one point discussed a dollar figure of around \$2 million that we've allocated to cumulative impact. Is that correct? It's about \$2 million in our budget that will go to funding these pilot projects in the development of cumulative impact overall.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I'll move on a little bit, then, to outlining a dozen or so concerns that relate to the loss of confidence in Alberta Environment and ask your indulgence to respond to some of these concerns that I hear on a regular basis, mostly from rural but many urban residents in the province, and the widespread perception, again, that the department lacks the capacity, lacks the technical expertise, and lacks the resources to fulfill its full responsibility in a modern, highly technological, and highly industrialized province where there has been an exponential growth without an exponential growth in your capacities. There is a significant credibility gap that I think you ignore at your peril.

Compounding this is a perception that I heard directly from a senior Environment official at a conference, in which he indicated that, quote, our role is not to advocate for the environment but to mediate the interests of industry with the community. End of quote. To broker decisions between industry and community as if community has the capacity to adequately assess the long-term health and environmental impacts of some of these developments or any sense of cumulative impact with nontechnical, nonscientific volunteer municipal boards and councillors: whether they themselves recognize their inability to do some of these assessments or not, their residents do. In many cases they feel that Environment has abdicated its responsibility or hasn't the resources to adequately support municipal governments to do proper assessments, including cumulative impact assessments, before approvals, to do the science of analyzing all the local activities – agricultural and energy and industry and forestry and roads and residential activities – and put those into the context of a watershed that has limits and that this particular community has to live within.

9:20

They don't want to see the same thing happen as happened in the southern two river basins, where we failed to recognize the limits

until we were already there. They want to see cumulative assessments done before approvals are made so that we're not scrambling with moratoriums and catch-ups. They want to see evidence that the technical expertise exists within the department to do independent assessments of the total impacts on water, for example, or airshed as another example, in the Industrial Heartland, to know that we are not going to exceed limits, that we are going to err on the side of caution, that we're going to use the precautionary principle before approving some of these.

This quotation from one of the senior members of your staff at a conference raised more eyebrows than my own. I would perceive it as a mixed message from the department about what your role is in the province of Alberta.

Perhaps you'd like to just comment on those perceptions.

Mr. Renner: Well, I would say that I would agree with the statement to the extent that it's not the role of Alberta Environment to advocate on behalf of the environment. I don't agree with the second part of the statement, that says: but, rather, to broker the environment with industry. That is absolutely not what the role of Alberta Environment is. Alberta Environment does have a critical role in advising and establishing policy for the government of Alberta on how we are going to protect the environment, how we are going to ensure that we have sustainable development now and into the future.

We do that in a number of ways. We do that by enabling the stewardship of others. I have never been so impressed as I have been of late in travelling around the province and talking to Albertans in the round-tables that we've had on climate change. The one issue that comes out time and time again is the hunger that people have for information. Albertans want to participate. They want to become stewards of the environment on an individual basis, and they feel very strongly that the only way that they can do that successfully is if they have the necessary information at hand to assist them in making some quality decisions.

That is the role of Environment. I choose to define that a little differently than the hon. member may. When I say that I'm not advocating on behalf of the environment, some would take that as being very negative. I say: I'm advocating on behalf of Albertans. I am empowering Albertans to take control on their own, to provide them with the ability to have that local control, make those decisions at the local level from an informed perspective with the resources of Alberta Environment there to assist them because they don't have the technical expertise. Sometimes you need to have at least enough of the basic knowledge to know when you should call upon technical expertise so that you're not just buffaloed, so to speak, by technical expertise without understanding the practical aspects at the same time. So I see that as being very important.

I have been impressed and I continue to be repeatedly impressed by the ability of local groups to take a hold and take ownership of the environment, whether it be through WPACs, the watershed advisory councils, whether it be through local airshed councils, whether it be through what we hope will be a similar kind of a process on cumulative impact, when we start to put all of this together in one package.

The member indicated that he's disappointed that we don't do these impact assessments in advance. Well, that's exactly what we intend to do. We maybe haven't been doing it in the past, but we have every intention of doing it in the future. The process that we're determining right now is how we're going to get there. We want to make sure that we get there by having strong policy that protects the environment, but we just can't put the world on hold. We can't just say: "Stop the world; I want to get off. I've got to do some planning,

and I'll be back in a year or two when we get everything all figured out, and then you can start up again." The world that we live in doesn't operate that way. The world continues to turn. People continue to come to Alberta. We have to make sure that we're planning for the future, putting the necessary plans in place but also ensuring that what we approve today will be compatible with the direction that we're going in the future.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, a second area of loss of confidence in Alberta is the fundamental importance of water, both surface and groundwater. The recent reports by both the Radke commission and the Rosenberg forum clearly indicated some serious deficiencies in the way we're monitoring, measuring, and managing our water. As a wealthy province we must do better. We are compromising future generations, especially in the context of climate change. These reports gave some very practical examples and some very practical directions.

There has been a lack of complete and timely baseline testing. The issues of groundwater testing and coal-bed methane have been raised. You and I, Mr. Minister, have discussed isotope testing as the definitive way of establishing cause for gasification in water. I've yet to hear you acknowledge any resource well contamination in spite of a number of resource wells in the Rosebud area that have heavier hydrocarbons, including ethane, propane, butane, and pentane, and isotope evidence that these come from deeper sources.

Not only I but a growing number of rural people are asking: what are you covering up? Why are you not acknowledging either that we are unclear or that there is very clear evidence of contamination and that this is not due to lack of well maintenance, in fact? The five people that presented themselves to this House as little as a month ago all say that there is still lack of resolution in spite of scientific assessment to show contamination. You are simply prolonging the agony and reducing the credibility of your department by failing to acknowledge some of this.

I think that that is an important enough issue to ask you to respond specifically on and perhaps to respond to some of the recommendations of those two reports.

Mr. Renner: Well, with respect to the Radke report much of the reference to Environment is either part of our announced plan to move forward with respect to cumulative impact or is already under way with reference to the IFN. For example, the announcement of in-stream flow needs was almost coincidental with the release of the Radke report, so by the time the Radke report came out, we had dealt with a number of those issues, and we'll continue to deal with those in a similar manner.

With respect to coal-bed methane I have on a number of occasions indicated that from 2004 until 2007, over that three-year period of time, Alberta Environment conducted 95 investigations. That's the number of complaints that we have had drawn to our attention. Of those 95 complaints, every one has been investigated. Seventy-six out of 95 have been closed. They have been closed because there has been conclusive evidence of the cause of the complaint, and it has been resolved to the best of everyone's ability to arrive at a solution to determine what was the cause of the complaint.

It varies across the board. In some cases we simply have to accept the fact that in Alberta there is a long history of having gas in water, and depending upon where you drill a water well, you could well be drilling into the same formation that someone else would drill into were they wanting to create a gas well.

9:30

Seventy-six are closed; 19 are still open. Those 19 we continue to work diligently on. We continue to work with the landowners. Of late, we've had an increase of co-operation from some of the landowners who in the past had been hesitant to allow our inspectors access to their wells for whatever reason. I don't want to judge why, but we have had of late more success in accessing wells.

We continue to work to resolve the outstanding cases. We also have in that period of time had the opportunity to drill significantly more Alberta Energy wells that are used as baseline testing. We will have a much stronger, better system for us to use for the testing of those wells by having the proliferation of new baseline wells in place.

The Chair: Hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A third element, relating to water again, that has given evidence of and contributed to a loss of confidence in the department, is the recent approval of waste-water release into the Bow River from the Strathmore development and, again, the reliance on paid consultants and inadequate oversight and independent assessment.

A second, corollary question that is a little bit unrelated but going back to your earlier comments has to do with your developing new capacity in cumulative impact assessment. What budget have you established for that? What new technology and new experts are you contracting to help you to move towards the capacity to do new kinds of cumulative impact assessments? I haven't heard you speak of that. I hear you saying that you are developing the ability to do cumulative impact assessment; I don't see where you're investing to get the appropriate technical support.

Mr. Renner: Well, someday, Mr. Chairman, I would like – in fact, maybe I should make the commitment right here and now to take the hon. member through some of the offices that we have in Environment and let him speak first-hand with some of the people that we have in our department who are world-renowned experts on their own. When he asks where we are going to find the expertise to develop these policies, much of it, most of it is from within. We have got people who are PhDs, who probably could be earning in the private sector three or four times what we pay them but who believe very strongly in what they're doing in Alberta Environment, and those are the people that we rely upon.

I indicated that we had allocated about \$2 million to the cumulative impact file. That comes out of what shows in the budget as a \$13 million line item under approvals. That's where the \$2 million will come from.

On the issue of Strathmore the reason that we have the checks and balances in Environment that we have is to ensure that there are opportunities for affected parties to seek a second opinion. That's really the role that the Environmental Appeal Board plays in this case. The fact that there were assessments done by private consultants is not the least bit unusual. That is what every proponent is asked to do when they submit an application. The work that is done by the consultant is then reviewed by the experts that we have in Alberta Environment.

There is no logical reason why, if the Member for Calgary-Mountain View decides that he wants to put an application in for some kind of water-related project, we should go out and do his work for him to answer all of the questions that we are going to need answered in dealing with that approval. It's up to you as an individual or you to hire someone on your behalf to find out the answers to the questions that we ask.

In my understanding what the appeal board ruled was not that there were deficiencies in the questions that were asked. There was some question as to whether enough information was available that would allow for a determination of health risk. Where we stand at this point is that there will be a requirement for a health risk assessment before there will be further release into the Bow.

I have to emphasize – and I have repeatedly on this issue – that this is not the release of untreated municipal sewage. This is the release of treated waste water, treated to exactly the same level as the water that comes from the city of Calgary, the water that comes from the city of Lethbridge, the water that comes from the city of Medicine Hat.

We are very dependent in this province on ensuring that our neighbours are adequately treating their waste water to ensure that we're not affecting the drinking water for our downstream neighbours. In this particular case the issue came down to whether or not the close proximity would allow for a thorough dispersement of the water and whether or not there were sufficient studies and reviews done to determine whether there were any possible health risks. That is what is under way, and that is the ministerial order that I signed that will require that additional study to take place before a significant amount of treated waste water is released into the Bow.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A fourth area of crisis in confidence, I would call it, is the climate change policy and the failure to really lead the country on initiatives that essentially shift incentives for fossil fuels to incentives for energy efficiency and green energy, renewable energy. It is the test for this minister since this is the first time this government has admitted that climate change is real and requires a meaningful, substantive response in terms of government and industry and the public.

9:40

There has been by many accounts, including your own consultations, profound disappointment in the lack of leadership here to set firm limits, to set timelines, to ask legitimately of industry that they take their appropriate share of responsibility and consumers as they are going to have to pay their share as well, and the perennial response that this is going to cost something or that it's going to damage the economy as opposed to seeing this as an opportunity for a new economy in a world that is at war with carbon and that, following the Stern report, we know that we are going to pay. The question is whether we're going to pay a reasonable amount now and forestall a fantastic expense in lives and productivity and future opportunities for our children and our children's children or whether we are going to put all this onto the future generations by our failure and our dithering and our unwillingness to make tough choices as a government.

This is a dilemma for any government to say that everyone is going to pay more, especially industry, but it is precisely what Albertans expect of their government with the new consciousness that we are past due in making the kinds of decisions that are needed on this planet. If Alberta cannot make some of these decisions as the most privileged province in the country, who, then, will start making the tough choices about getting to carbon neutrality in a timely fashion before the ice packs are gone and the water levels have risen to the point of irreversibility?

There's a very serious credibility gap here in this province notwithstanding the fact that we are so dependent on fossil fuels. To show leadership I think would be absolutely vital, and some of the issues in the budget need to reflect that: a commitment to renew-

ables, a commitment to retrofitting buildings and homes, a retiring of old technology, demanding that new carbon-based technology for electrical energy like coal-fired plants must have carbon capture in order to be built. This is very fundamental to making a significant progress on the issues and the lack of extra funding for your own initiative out of Calgary, Climate Change Central, and the kind of leadership that it can take if they're given appropriate resources.

Perhaps you'd like to comment on some of those concerns.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman. Let me remind the member that this individual has been the Minister of Environment for five months, and I think in that five months we have a record that we can be proud of. We have advanced the issue of climate change significantly. In addition to that, it's roughly five months from today since I became Minister of Environment, but it was only about two to three months maximum that I was able to be minister before the budget that we're discussing today had to be finalized. There are timelines that are involved. So considering all of those timelines, I am proud of the work that I have done, and more importantly I'm doubly proud of the work that the folks in Alberta Environment have done because they have moved this file forward significantly in an extremely sped-up timeline.

We are the only jurisdiction in North America, not just Canada, that has introduced legislation that will, I'm told – because these guys have been working on it for so long, they now have a count-down – in 32 days come into effect in Alberta. We will be making that difficult decision. We have made that difficult decision. Industry will be paying on July 1, 2007, and it's not an insignificant amount. It's an amount that we feel will drive industry to make the kinds of decisions and kinds of investments that have to be made now so that we can see at some point in the not-too-distant future real reductions in CO₂. Those reductions can't come as a result of simply turning off the engine. That's counterproductive. No Albertan wants that. Nobody wants us to achieve the environmental objectives by simply eliminating the opportunities that Albertans have become so proud of; that is, the opportunities that the economy provides for them.

What we have to do is very much what the member has suggested. We have to turn our economy around so that we are not the resource based, dependent economy but that we do have the alternative kinds of energy that are available, we do have standards for housing, standards for automobiles, standards for the way individual Albertans conserve their water supply. All of those things are very much part of the ongoing consultation that's under way.

The commitment, again, is an extremely short timeline. We've committed to having the first draft of our updated climate change policy, which is an update, by the way, of a policy that was originally in place in 2002. Contrary to popular belief, we have not been in denial for the past 10 years. We've actually had people working on this file. We introduced our first policy in 2002. Our updated policy is in 2007, just five years later. That timeline, again, is tight. The end of June, possibly early July we will have our draft. We will have a verification process, again allow Albertans to comment on that process, and we hope to have a government-approved policy in place by fall of this year.

Why do we need it by fall of this year? It is my sincere belief that a year from now – well, maybe a little bit less than a year from now because I hope we're not here at the end of May next year discussing the budget. When the time comes to discuss budgets, the kinds of issues that the hon. member talks about, the fact that we do have recognition of having the incentives in place that people have been

talking about at our public meetings, that we do have the ability to put in place the necessary building code improvements so that we can build our buildings to a higher standard – all of those things take time.

I believe that the route to get there is Bill 3, the work that's been done under Bill 3 on the industrial side, and then the work that is going into, as we speak, the development of the updated climate change policy, which will then form the basis for our go-forward not only on the industrial but on the individual and transportation industry and small business industry, all of whom need to work together if we're going to deal with this climate change file in an effective manner.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A sixth area of loss of confidence is in the area of the Water for Life strategy and the tremendous dependence on volunteers, the lack of technical support. I met with a number of water planning advisory committees, and there is significant anxiety, especially in the south, that they can deliver on the expectations and the necessity to have a sustainable water management plan in some of these areas.

The budgeted amounts seem to be significant, but they are not adequate, especially in areas where water is already being recognized as in short supply and threatened. With climate change moving in and the moratorium on the southern two river systems, there is a significant amount of dissatisfaction with the failure of this government to deal with water as a priority, as the number one resource that we should be focusing our attention on.

I wonder if the minister wishes to say more about the investment we have or haven't made in getting the scientific assessments, the water conservation objectives done, an integrated plan for all these river systems, especially in the south, and the appropriate technical support for these people to feel confident that they're leaving their children and their opportunities for business in good hands.

Thank you.

9:50

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As the member correctly pointed out earlier, much of the capital investment side in Water for Life is within infrastructure's budget. But that being said, the budget that is contained within Alberta Environment increased to \$12.5 million this year, up from \$5.5 million last year. So there's a significant increase within Alberta Environment's budget over last year; \$2 million to \$3 million of this increase of \$7 million is devoted to providing additional capacity at the stakeholder level. The member is absolutely right. If we're going to involve the communities, which I believe is the right thing to do, we have to provide them with the necessary tools so that they're not operating in the dark.

But let's also be clear that we are not abdicating the responsibility that this minister has or that the officials have or the directors have within Alberta Environment to make the decisions on behalf of the environment. The groups that we have at the local level are advisory. They're there so that they can provide input on what meets their needs and how to best manage what is a scarce resource on a community-by-community, basin-by-basin basis rather than having the heavy hand of government come down and say: this is the way it's going to be, and if it doesn't fit for southern Alberta, that's just too bad because it fits in central or the north, or vice versa. That's the reason why we have the advisory groups. That's the

reason why people believe that they have a reason to spend the amount of time and energy that they do on these water basin advisory councils, not because they're under any illusion that they are the regulator, that they are the final decision-maker, but because they recognize the importance of having that local voice in decision-making, the ability to formulate a decision that works on the local basis.

The way that they're going to do a better job of that is by us allocating significantly more funding to provide them with the capacity at the local level, the capacity from an administrative perspective and also from a scientific and research perspective. They have to have the ability to get the kinds of studies done that will allow them to make the kinds of positive suggestions and advice that will result in decisions being made that benefit their water basin.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A further area that has eroded the confidence of Albertans in this department is the management of contaminated sites. These raise real concern, especially in rural areas but also in some urban areas. A need for adequate monitoring, timely initiation and timely completion of reclamation, independent assessment, and meaningful fines continue to be sore points with a lot of people that contact me, and also concerns about public liability for some of these sites and questions about how much public money is being spent annually on cleaning up after industry instead of holding industry accountable for some of these issues.

The reclamation processes appear to favour industry, especially since Bill 29 was passed. We now have moved from high-level reclamation/remediation to what's called colloquially risk management. It allows industry off the hook but also low fine levies and no requirements to immediately remediate spills at active sites. As I've indicated, no specific time to begin and end reclamation leaves the public anxious and potentially liable, with long delays in this area. I think a serious level of credibility enhancement would come from shifting, focusing more attention on these sites, and, finally, fulfilling the previous minister's commitment to an industry-funded cleanup fund, that would ensure that all industries share when one abdicates its responsibility and walks away.

Thank you.

Mr. Renner: Before I get to answering the question on contaminated sites, I just want to put on the record something that I should have mentioned when we were talking about water planning. I think it's critical to emphasize the amount of planning that actually has been under way of late. We have the Athabasca River in-stream flow needs study, that has been completed. The South Saskatchewan River basin plan is complete. The Cold Lake/Beaver River plan is complete. The Battle River plan is under way – it should be completed shortly – as is the North Saskatchewan in-stream flow needs. So we've completed a significant amount of work, and we have a number of other programs that are under way.

On the issue of contaminated sites. We have, admittedly, some issues that we need to deal with, but I must emphasize that the assumption that the member made that somehow industry is not held accountable is absolutely false. The basis of everything that we do with respect to contaminated sites is that the polluter pays. Industry is always accountable for paying the costs of cleanup. What we have done that has enhanced our ability significantly – and the member to his credit did acknowledge it in his opening remarks – is set up the ASERT organization. That is now a rapid response

organization that has responded to a number of incidents lately that simply never really made much of a news story because, frankly, the issue was contained and they did an outstanding job of dealing with the issue at the time.

That being said, there is some work that needs to be done on reclamation certificates. It's an area that I have expressed concern to staff, that I believe there's too long a gap from the time that the contamination occurs until the point when a reclamation certificate is issued. Part of that, frankly, is because we don't put the proper incentives in place for the polluter to clean up. Even when a reclamation certificate is issued, we may not actually remove the liability from the polluter. Then what incentive is there in place for anyone to go ahead and do the work when at the end of the day we give them a piece of paper that may or may not be worth anything? If I am industry and I'm trying to do some risk management, why would I spend a whole bunch of money today when I find out tomorrow that everything I did today becomes irrelevant? Because the government in its wisdom has changed the standards, everything that I just did is now irrelevant, and I have to start all over again.

That's where I think we have to accept some responsibility as society, that there comes a point in time when we say that the standards of the day we believe are the best standards. That's the expectation that we have. We want this cleaned up as best as it possibly can be by today's standards, and if tomorrow something miraculous comes along and we find out we could have done a better job, we can't expect everyone to come back and do everything all over again. Frankly, that's part of the problem that we have, and that's the discussion that is under way, and that's the work that needs to be done. Having been the former minister of municipal affairs and seeing contaminated sites as a blight in Small Town, Alberta, across this province, I of all people recognize the need to put the pressure on, get these sites cleaned up . . .

10:00

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister but will now invite the officials to retire from the Assembly so that the committee may rise and report.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(b) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Finance, Service Alberta, and Environment relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move that the Assembly adjourn until 1 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 10:02 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 30, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/30

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly His Excellency Dr. Abraham Nkomo, high commissioner for the Republic of South Africa. The high commissioner is accompanied by his wife, Mrs. Marjorie Nkomo, and Ms Mpumi Sibiyi, from the South African high commission in Ottawa. This is the high commissioner's first visit to Alberta, but it's already the second time we have had a visit this year by representatives from South Africa. It was my pleasure to host the high commissioner and his delegation at a luncheon today, and I will add that it's very nice to see another doctor in politics. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly someone who is perhaps well known by a few of our colleagues that have been here for some time, Dr. David Carter, the former MLA and former Speaker. He is seated in the Speaker's gallery.

He was elected in March 1979 to the 19th Legislature. He was elected to Calgary-Egmont in the 20th, 21st, and 22nd Legislatures. He was elected Speaker in June of '86 and served until August of 1993.

Mr. Speaker, he resides in my constituency since his retirement not only from government but as the pastor, curator, and owner of St. Margaret's Anglican church in the Cypress Hills. He also is a well-known author, who has written a great book, *Behind Canadian Barbed Wire*, the story about the World War II internment camps, and also an author about RCMP members who resided in the Cypress Hills area.

I'd ask Dr. Carter to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Trudy Coady and Jacqueline Dorchak. They're here today on the 264th day of strike at the Palace Casino due in part to the government's unwillingness to enhance labour legislation to protect Alberta workers from unfair employers.

Trudy has worked at the Palace Casino for five years in the slots department. She's a grandmother, who lives with her daughter and son-in-law as she takes care of her granddaughter and grandson while their parents are at work. When she has a moment to herself, she enjoys spending time walking or being in the garden.

Jacqueline has worked at the casino for four years in the coat check. In her off time she loves to garden and also to create paper tote pieces, which can take up to three years to create.

They're joined today by UFCW local 401 bargaining representative Richard Konkin.

I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce today to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two ladies who are very, very important to me. The first is a lady who has worked for me for six years in this building, and she is by any standards, I think, one of the very best assistants we have got. Her name is Carmen Frebrowski.

The second one is my new STEP student for the summer. Her name is Samantha Mertz. She's in her second year of poli-sci at the University of Calgary, actually just completed it, and we're looking forward to a very good summer together.

They're in the public gallery. I would ask both of them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Statement by the Speaker

The Centennial Series

The Speaker: Hon. members, earlier today all members received a set of four books known collectively as *The Centennial Series: Legislative Assembly of Alberta*. These four volumes, which took nearly five years to produce, were produced entirely in-house by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and people associated with the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

At this point in time I'd like to introduce to you two individuals who played exceptionally large and major roles in overseeing the production of these books. In the Speaker's gallery is the Legislature Librarian, Sandra Perry, who was responsible for leading this five-year project. On the floor of the Assembly is the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Dr. David McNeil, who provided the administrative leadership for these past five years. Members may be interested in knowing that on August 1, 2007, Dr. McNeil will be celebrating his 20th anniversary in association with the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

As Speaker of the Legislative Assembly I am extremely proud of the leadership that was provided to this project by both of these individuals and want to publicly acknowledge their outstanding work in this regard.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

The Centennial Series

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you indicated earlier in your introduction of guests, a number of Legislative Assembly Office staff were involved in the production of *The Centennial Series: Legislative Assembly of Alberta*. I have the honour of introducing members of this talented team to you at this time, and I

would ask each of them to stand and remain standing as I mention their names.

In the Speaker's gallery the former Assistant Legislature Librarian, Karen Powell, who coauthored *On Behalf of the Crown*, about the Lieutenant Governors of the North-West Territories and Alberta, and who assisted with the early research on the Premiers book, *The Mantle of Leadership*; Jessica Craig, coauthor of *The Mantle of Leadership*, about the Premiers of the North-West Territories and Alberta, and previously one of the researchers on the Speakers book, *A Higher Duty*; manager, library operations, Valerie Footz, who coauthored the book *A Higher Duty*, about the Speakers of the Legislative Assemblies of both the North-West Territories and Alberta, and who was co-ordinating editor of the Lieutenant Governors and the Premiers books, *On Behalf of the Crown* and *The Mantle of Leadership*; Jody Rempel, co-ordinator on behalf of the Clerk's office of the book *A Century of Democracy*, about the elected Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta; Philip Massolin, historian, who was the editor and historical consultant on the Lieutenant Governors, Premiers, and Speakers books; Sharon Bell, librarian and genealogist, who researched and drafted the family history sections of these volumes; Tracey Sales of the communications branch of the Clerk's office, who in consultation with the library was responsible for the beautiful design of these volumes.

In the members' gallery are the following individuals who also worked on the research and the initial drafting of the various sections of these books: Heather Close, Ronald Kelland, Robert Sadowski, Sharna Polard, Greg Morgan, Christine Bouchier, Rose Varkerti, Warren Maynes, Scott Scambler, Stephanie Christensen, Ronda Alberts, Megan Lewis, Anna Scott, Jessica Labbé, Torrie Knoll, Alfred Neitsch, and Kevin Kuchinski.

Mr. Speaker, the work that was done by these individuals was a tremendous accomplishment in researching and compiling the history of our province contained in these volumes and will be appreciated by all Albertans for generations to come. We thank them all for their dedication and efforts.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Chair of Committees.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Bursaries

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise this afternoon to congratulate Allyson Kupchenko, Megan Connors, Emma Maria Van Loon, Amanda Garrow, Rebecca Bootsman, and Annette Kelm. These exceptional young Albertans were recipients of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association bursaries. The CPA bursaries were given to acknowledge Alberta students for their achievements in an essay contest, the Alberta Girls' Parliament, and the TUXIS Parliament. All of these awards focused on recognizing young Alberta students who have taken an initiative to learn and engage themselves in the workings of parliamentary democracy.

1:10

As most of us are aware, democracy was formed on the idea of rule of the people and is enhanced by active citizen involvement. This involvement is strengthened by young Albertans who take an early interest in government. I hope that as these young women proceed through their lives, they continue to develop their skills and knowledge about government procedures and policies. As savvy and competent students they will serve as role models for their peers, communities, and this province.

Each of us has a great responsibility to exercise our freedoms and take an active role in the political process. That is what these young Albertans have done, and it is great that we have awarded their

efforts. I wish the recipients well with their endeavours, and I would like to encourage all Alberta students to participate in this capacity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Queen's Golden Jubilee Citizenship Medals

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 17 I had the pleasure of meeting five outstanding young people during an awards ceremony hosted by our Lieutenant Governor and the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture in Calgary. These inspiring youth are among the eight recipients of the 2006 Queen's golden jubilee citizenship medals. They were chosen from hundreds of other graduating high school students as best exemplifying the qualities and attributes of a model Alberta citizen.

Mr. Speaker, enhancing Albertans' quality of life is a priority for the Alberta government, and each of these students, whether providing leadership or volunteering for a social, political, or humanitarian cause, has contributed positively to Alberta's quality of life. For their efforts each young person received a letter of commendation, a Queen's golden jubilee medallion, and a \$5,000 cheque to continue their personal development and general education.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to name the recipients of the 2006 Queen's golden jubilee citizenship medal. They are Miles Aronson of Calgary, Atoosa Ghayour of Calgary, Steffen Janzen of Three Hills, Eric Leong of Edmonton, Stephanie Lim of Calgary, Joshua Sealy-Harrington of Calgary, Kali Taylor of Hanna, and Bethany-Anne Woodrow of Lacombe. Congratulations and well done to these young people. I would ask all members of the Legislature to join me in recognizing these great young people.

Thank you.

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

23rd Annual World Partnership Walk

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to salute and thank the Aga Khan Foundation Canada and especially its affiliates here in Edmonton for undertaking the 23rd annual World Partnership Walk this past weekend. This is Canada's largest and longest running annual event dedicated to increasing awareness of and raising funds for combatting global poverty. Local convenor Karim Kanji co-ordinated this year's event with help from numerous Ismaili community members and friends, which included well over 400 volunteers and well over 1,500 walkers, fundraisers, and other helpers from the broader community.

In the end about one-half a million dollars were raised right here in Edmonton alone, bringing the new grand total to about \$40 million Canada-wide. One hundred per cent of all of these funds raised goes directly toward numerous projects in Africa and Asia that address global poverty issues, including health, education, rural development, and strengthening community-based solutions. Many of these projects provide clean drinking water and address safe water collection methods, irrigation, and sanitation matters.

Here in Canada we sometimes take clean water for granted. However, in many countries in Africa and Asia about 50,000 people die every day because of water-borne diseases. The Aga Khan Foundation through its World Partnership Walk has pledged to alleviating these and other major problems stemming from global poverty.

Mr. Speaker, I was privileged to attend this partnership walk again this year along with colleagues from Edmonton-Whitemud and

Edmonton-Glenora. I would also like to thank my personal hosts for the day – Nadir Rajan from Crystal Printing, Karima Bapoo, and Sadru Nazarali – as well as Dr. Moiz Ramji and Nizar Mitha and numerous other volunteers for their enormous efforts this year.

I would urge all members in the Assembly to join me in congratulating all the volunteers for staging and participating in this extremely important initiative of the Aga Khan Foundation, which is a nondenominational and registered charity with an incredibly successful record of project accomplishments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Grants to Golf Courses

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to point out the facts to the hon. members for Highwood and Calgary-West. They did not believe me when on Thursday, May 17, I pointed out the lavish grants golf courses receive from this Progressive Conservative government. These lavish grants are not a laughing matter. Upon review of the government's blue book detailing grants by payee for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2006, I was able to uncover \$2 million in grants given out to golf courses around the province. In addition, I've prepared spreadsheets detailing these grants through the past three fiscal years for the hon. members' convenience. Total grants by this government to golf courses is \$7.2 million in three years.

Think of the difference \$7.2 million could make to any number of other government programs. For example, this money could secure annual funding for prekindergarten programs at inner-city schools. These programs give a valuable head start to disadvantaged children for only \$250,000 per year. We would be giving children who face potential educational disadvantages the opportunities to play on par with their counterparts in the more affluent areas of the province. We can provide golf courses handouts, or we can do the right thing and provide young Albertans opportunities to foster not only a standard for learning but an enjoyment of and desire for education, culture, and achievement.

All so often in this province we speak of investments, of the Alberta advantage. Why not make the smartest investment of all: an investment in the future? By thinking ahead further than the next round of golf, this government could make a tangible difference not only in the lives of today's children but tomorrow's standard of living. School children need our help a lot more than golf courses.

Thank you.

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

School Construction in Lethbridge

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today while I address you there are nearly 900 students from west Lethbridge sitting in crowded classrooms across the city, awaiting the long overdue west side school. The people of Lethbridge do appreciate the funding which has been allocated to the plan, but because of extensive and inexcusable delays to the beginning of the construction on phase 1, this plan is already obsolete. Even if the population were static, there would be roughly 880 high school students living on the west side of Lethbridge in 2009; however, phase 1 will support only 700 of them.

A shovel has not yet touched the soil where a multimillion dollar school should be opening in September of '09, a deadline which was already pushed back a year. There is no doubt that because of

material and wage increases, phase 1 will be significantly over budget. Unless something is done now to make room for phase 2, there will be 180 students, a number which is still growing, who will have to find their education elsewhere. This is unfair to students, parents, and teachers all over Lethbridge.

The idea of the west side school and library should be an attractive one to this government given its level of co-operation and partnership. The school will be a three-way group effort on the parts of the public school district No. 51, the Holy Spirit Catholic school board, and the city of Lethbridge. This school, if ever completed in both phases, will be a shining example of the benefits of the synergy between these three entities. If the future of Alberta's education is to become brighter, let us make an example of Lethbridge and give the students there the facility and the attention that they deserve.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) I wish to advise the House that at the appropriate time I will be introducing a motion that written questions and motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

head: 1:20 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll have to get back to you on that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table today the spreadsheets which I referred to in my private member's statement earlier this afternoon. This is for the fiscal year 2005-06, and it goes through to 2004-05 as well.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today: first of all, the requisite copies of an open letter from the mayor of Calgary to all citizens of Calgary.

Also, seven different tablings, all with the requisite copies, of correspondence from Alberta Environment – there's quite a lot of it here – all relating to our request under FOIP for access to documents having to do with the Balzac project. Didn't get any answers, but we got a lot of paper.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table seven letters and five e-mails. The letters are from Susan Howg, Marlin Howg, Wendy L. Thurston, Patricia Emerson, Ronna McKee, Christine Rogers, and Shanda McKnight. The e-mails are from Kim Orr, David Wetterstrand, Norine Dodge, Craig Brack, and Max Zaugg. These are all teachers, and they all have a common theme of asking and reiterating that there is inadequate and insubstantial funding for school boards and that the unfunded liability debt must be addressed and settled now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Dr. Chris Ayers, an inner-city physician in Alexandra community health centre in Calgary, raising serious concerns about the lack of AISH funding for many of his patients, who are now being forced into very difficult positions as a result of the cost of living and especially accommodation.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is an article from Energy Solutions Alberta lauding the benefits of geothermal energy use in home construction.

The second is a recent press release from the Alberta Building Trades Council. This document offers to assist CNRL's Horizon project by completing its tank farm with qualified, readily available, and competent Alberta tradesmen.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for your patience today, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table a motion which was adopted by the Idaho State Legislature in March of this year. The motion, passed by both Houses of the state, calls on President Bush to withdraw from the security and prosperity partnership agreement of 2005. With this motion Idaho joins 14 other states in opposing the reduction of standards, sovereignty, and democratic oversight entailed by the SPP.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm going to table in the Legislative Assembly one complete set of the *Centennial Series* books, but there are 17 pounds on your desks already.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, responses to questions raised by Ms Blakeman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, and Ms Pastoor, hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, on May 15, 2007, Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing 2007-08 main estimates debate; the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta annual report 2006; Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report 2006. Pursuant to the Safety Codes Act Safety Codes Council 2006 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Melchin, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, responses to questions raised by several Members of the Legislative Assembly on May 15 and 16, 2007, Department of Seniors and Community Supports 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Knight, Minister of Energy, response to questions raised by Mr. Strang, hon. Member for West Yellowhead, and Mr. Cao, hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, on May 16, 2007, Department of Energy 2007-08 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Before we move on to Oral Question Period, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour and pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 33 grade 6 brightest students from Meyokumin elementary school from my constituency, accompanied by their teachers Lisa Nachtigal and Shane Grundy. They are all seated in the public gallery. I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. I request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you three guests in the visitors' gallery. We have members of the Federation of Alberta Gas Co-ops. We have the president, Bert Paulssen. We have Lyle Kusik. We also have Dareld Cholak. If I could ask them to please stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Red Deer River Water Transfer

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans don't buy this Conservative government's denials about the deal to take water from the Red Deer River to support the Balzac megamall. You know, the Premier says it's our responsibility to provide the proof of a secret deal. It's not. It's his responsibility to give Albertans real answers and to make public all information he has. To the Premier. The Ministry of Environment has 1,703 pages responsive to our FOIP request, but its release has been delayed. If the Premier wants us to present evidence, will he release that evidence to us?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this member asked the question or something to the effect yesterday. There's a due date of the 7th of June, I believe. According to the kind of rules and regulations under the act, which we must follow, there is some consideration given to asking permission from third parties. All that will be done. The information is to be provided to the opposition by the date, which is June 7.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier. The Solicitor General's office has 1,500 pages responsive to our FOIP request. The release so far has been 14 of those pages – 14 pages out of 1,500. We've been told we can get 412 more but only after the session and the by-elections are over. Will the Premier release that evidence to us today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's incumbent upon certainly the government to follow the rules and regulations and the laws that have been established by the Assembly. So those are the kind of issues that I mentioned before. We have a responsibility to make sure that we follow the regulations and the act, and there are some third-party considerations. I'm not sure that in this Sol Gen request

we'll be able to do that. Maybe I'll provide more information tomorrow. But with respect to the first one that was raised, that's the information I have. The Minister of Environment may give further detail if necessary.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Untold numbers of pages are being withheld, hidden using just about every section of the FOIP Act: section 6(4), a record created to brief a minister for session; section 17, disclosure harmful to personal privacy; section 22, cabinet and Treasury Board confidences; section 24, advice from officials; section 16, disclosure harmful to the business interests of a third party. Will the Premier admit that he has the evidence that his government has backed this project from the beginning and that he's keeping it from Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this line of questioning has been going on now for most of this session. I've said before that there was no secret deal, as the opposition always alleges. They said that they were going to present evidence a few months ago. We're still awaiting that evidence. Now they're saying: well, we can't present it because we don't have any, but we just said that in the House. This keeps going on and on. All I'm going to say is that we are an open, transparent government. We are doing whatever we can within the law to deliver the kind of request that the opposition wants with respect to government information.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

1:30 Calgary Municipal Funding

Mr. Taylor: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. One of the key markers of character is the ability to own up and accept the blame when you're wrong. It's also one of the key markers of leadership. The previous Conservative government had a penchant for blaming the victims. School board gives you grief? Fire the trustees. Elected health boards getting uppity? Go back to appointing them. Today I see that this Conservative government, which actually is nothing more, really, than the rearranging of deck chairs on the *Titanic*, is back to shooting the messenger again. Why? It turns out that their sagging support in Calgary is the fault of Calgary's mayor. How impertinent. To the Premier: will he admit that the mayor of Calgary is right to be standing up for the interests of his city and his citizens?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, a number of months ago, when we announced the \$1.4 billion municipal fund, there were comments made by the media in terms of responses from various mayors. I said that the mayor is doing his job, that he's got a responsibility to represent his city. I stand by what I said a number of months ago.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mayor Bronconnier sent a letter to all Calgarians, which I tabled earlier in the House today, in their property tax bills this week explaining why he can't announce the start of the new west and southeast C-Train lines, more police, fire, and EMS services, more buses and C-Train cars, more expansion and repair of the road network, more parks, more rec centres, more sports facilities. Will the Premier admit that the mayor is correct in saying that Calgary can't build what Calgary needs because this Premier reneged on his no-strings-attached funding promise to municipalities?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in one of the letters I received there was a comment made – I believe it goes back to 1967 – with the construction of the light-rail transit system. In 1967 I was in grade 10. Please don't blame me for something that hasn't been done till today. I wasn't even in government then.

Look, it's \$1.4 billion going to municipalities. It's catching up with a whole bunch of infrastructure that's badly needed across the province of Alberta. This is a 10-year commitment of \$1.4 billion. There's so much opportunity now for planning and catching up with infrastructure both in housing and critical infrastructure that's necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the lady, methinks, doth protest too much. The Conservatives like to claim that they've given Calgary all this money, \$5.5 billion this year, although of course only \$42 million of it, barely the cost of one interchange, is available for the city to spend at its discretion on municipal infrastructure projects going forward. I would remind the House that this Premier was part of the government that decided not to do any infrastructure spending for the better part of 15 years. Would the Premier like to explain to Calgarians why, if they really have spent so lavishly on this city, there's so darn little to show for it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the values or the ethics of an opposition leader – of course, he isn't the leader; he maybe wants to be, but he's not the leader – is not to be subversive as an opposition, at least to put the facts on the table. The facts are completely different from what the hon. member has said. There's a considerable amount of money going to the city of Calgary. It's well over \$5 billion, going towards postsecondary, road infrastructure, hospitals. The money will continue to flow not only to Calgary but to other municipalities in this province because they're all important. We're not going to let the opposition try and divide this province into different areas: rural, urban, north, and south.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government allows the exploitation of temporary foreign workers to continue. There are at least 24,000 temporary foreign workers now in the province, and this government wants to speed the process up by fast-tracking at least another 25,000 workers. My first question is to the Premier. Why is the government planning to recruit thousands more temporary foreign workers when yesterday the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry warned prospective workers or migrants to this province to stay away?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, just a mixing up of words. I'll ask the minister to respond to this.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think that yesterday the House heard the most unfortunate circumstances of people who had been unscrupulously solicited, had to pay money to come. That was wrong, and that's against our laws. I was asked about housing availability. When people come under the terms of temporary foreign workers, the employer has made arrangements for housing. Those rules are in place, and they are followed. We make sure that they are adhered to. But when people come because somebody has recruited them

dishonestly, then we don't know how to protect them because we don't even know who they are.

Mr. MacDonald: Speaking of not knowing who they are, to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, how many temporary foreign worker visas for Alberta have been denied for reasons of espionage, terrorism, or human rights violations?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, the federal government deals with safety and security and health, and they do that screening and assessment. Let's be clear: 800,000 people have applied and are on the rolls in Canada today, waiting to come to Canada. The screening that the hon. member is talking about is something that's done federally. The screening that we do relates to labour market opinions relative to the availability of jobs for those workers and employers to place them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: is the minister currently working with the RCMP to protect temporary foreign workers from exploitation as defined in the Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, if one reviews the content of my budget, one sees that there are several people that have been hired this year to protect people, with employment standards, with occupational health and safety. Seventy-two additional people are working in our department primarily to do assessments, to conduct safety checks, to make sure that all Albertans are safe, among these, obviously, the workers that are temporary. May I say that at the immigration ministers' meeting last Friday we talked about just how we can best track temporary foreign workers.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Government Policy

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This province's overheated economy is making some people prosperous but leaving many people worse off. This might be a surprise to many members of this government, but Albertans are not only aware of the problems caused by the government's inability to plan; they're also increasingly putting the blame exactly where it belongs. The Premier's job is to create and deliver government policy for the benefit of all Albertans, not just those already benefiting from our boom. More and more Albertans are turning to food banks for help, and this is directly related to the Premier's refusal to protect Albertans from soaring rents. If the Premier's claim that he has the right policies for Alberta is true, then why are so many people worse off now than they were a year ago?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the overall economy of the province of Alberta is huge. It's growing. What spills over outside of Alberta's boundaries, of course, is shared by other provinces in terms of job opportunities, provinces like Quebec and Ontario. Definitely, we have more and more people moving to Alberta from other provinces, over 11,000 in the first part of this year. We have others moving from other countries. They're coming here because there are job opportunities. That in itself is a pressure point, and I won't argue it. It's a pressure point with housing, a pressure point with the kind of infrastructure and social programs that are necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and his ministers have repeatedly refused to protect Albertans from rent gouging and other price distortions because they have a blind faith in the market. Well, while this government dithers, more and more Albertans are falling behind. Last year 94,689 Calgarians went to the food bank. Alberta has the highest percentage in the entire country of users of the food bank who are employed. People are working harder and still struggling, but this Premier is either unwilling or unable to help. Will the Premier admit that his failure to help the people struggling in this province is resulting in declining popularity for his government?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this year's budget was an increase of approximately 10 per cent. A lot of that increase went to various social programs to support Albertans. Not only Albertans, you know, whether it be seniors or AISH recipients, but those that are moving to this province, looking for places to live, that are here because they have job opportunities. Mr. Speaker, you're well aware that we're critically short of people to fill many of the job vacancies. These are issues that we're working through. Our policies are good, and we will see that we'll catch up with all of these issues and improve the quality of life for all Albertans.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, more words.

The Premier has refused to touch the brake on our overheated economy, but he obviously doesn't have a grip on the steering wheel either. It only took a few hours for landlords to start jacking up rents after the government announced its response to the housing task force, and the ink wasn't even dry on Bill 34 before landlords spotted the loopholes in the bill and started making economic evictions. Why is this Premier taking Alberta in the direction of more homelessness, more hungry children, and forcing more middle-class families into poverty?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe I mentioned this to the House before, but of course this hon. member has most of his life received his salary from the public. There are a lot of people in this Assembly that remember the last time the government touched the brakes, in the '80s. We ended up paying 24 per cent interest rates. Albertans were vacating their homes, abandoning their mortgages, moving out to other provinces because the government did put the brakes on the economy and devastated this province. It took us years of good policy on behalf of this government to recover.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Calgary Courthouse

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is for the Minister of Justice. The government of Alberta is building a new and by some accounts overly costly courthouse facility in downtown Calgary at a time when government spending is already high. Can the minister please explain what need justifies the expense of this facility at this time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Courts Centre is actually one of the shining examples of what's going on in

Calgary these days. I noticed earlier in the questions advanced by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie that he was having difficulty in finding something good that's happening in Calgary. I would suggest that he check out 5th Street between 6th and 7th Avenues, and you will see the Calgary Courts Centre. The Calgary Courts Centre is the place where the Court of Queen's Bench and the Provincial Court will go. It will be the aggregation of five locations at one spot. It is something which has been talked about for over 20 years at this point.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you. My second question is to the same minister. Some constituents suggest, however, that the facilities we have right now are just fine. I'm hoping the minister can explain the return on investment that taxpayers are receiving for this somewhat considerable expense.

Mr. Stevens: Well, the considerable expense is \$300 million. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the \$300 million is what was established as the budget for this particular project when it started some considerable time ago. I can tell you that it is on budget and on time. We will be getting the keys to the buildings at the end of July. The courts will be moving in and operational in full in September of this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund Timberland Investment

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On April 17 and 18 in response to questions I asked in this House the Finance minister admitted that an employee in his department had made a mistake which cost taxpayers \$11 million. The minister admitted that his employee failed to hedge the timberland investment against the Canada/U.S. dollar exchange, yet the 2005-2006 second-quarter update of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund reported that "the under-performance is due to the strengthening of the Canadian dollar against the US dollar." My question is for the Minister of Finance. Why didn't the second-quarter report tell the truth about the losses suffered by the timberland investment class?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much. It's great that the hon. member has asked this question again because I believe this morning in Public Accounts he asked the Auditor General this in about eight or nine different ways. The Auditor General told him exactly why. He told him that we had informed the Auditor General exactly when we learned that this had occurred. He told him why he did not put it in his report. He told him what we had done and what we were doing about it. So he got all the answers from the Auditor General first thing this morning in Public Accounts.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, Mr. Speaker, this morning at the Public Accounts Committee the Auditor General, in fact, did indicate that all of the relevant pension funds and investment partners had been notified in writing of the circumstances surrounding the loss. They were all advised of what measures had been put in place to ensure that such a mistake did not happen again. That is true. Unfortunately, the most important entity of all, that being the taxpayers of

this province, were never informed why the \$11 million loss took place. Again to the Minister of Finance: will the department live up to this government's claims of openness, transparency, and accountability and make a full public disclosure of all of the details surrounding this loss to the taxpayers, perhaps an addendum to your annual report?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, included in my budget this year and over the past years, there is a constant compilation of timberland. When you take a look at my budget this year, you see a line item which says "timberland." I think what is very important as well to recognize is that, yes, there was an \$11 million mistake made, and, yes, I did come into this Legislative Assembly and stand here and say that, and, yes, we have made \$61 million on a \$170 million investment. So did we mess up for a bit? Yes. Has it been a good investment? Yes. Have we reported it? Absolutely.

Mr. R. Miller: And, yes, Mr. Speaker, this Assembly approved \$7 million in supplementary supply to pay off the partners that lost money because of your mistake. That's a fact.

Mr. Speaker, a Finance department official has been quoted as saying that the employee was let go not for making the mistake but rather for trying to cover it up. This morning the Auditor General said that he had found no evidence of a cover-up, and the deputy minister, when asked the same question, declined to comment. My question is for the minister. Did Alberta Finance discuss with the Auditor General the human resources issues involved, or was the dialogue . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've stood here before and stated, yes, there was a \$7 million issue that was dealt with. It was dealt with on the floor of the Legislature. It was put here in the budget. And, no, I will not discuss human resources issues in this particular Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Biodiversity Monitoring Project

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We take for granted all of the natural features and the living species that bless our province with their presence. Alberta looks at the government to have a plan to manage the biodiversity. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Since developing the biodiversity strategy for Alberta is one of the Premier's top priorities for his ministry, can the minister please tell the Assembly what the biodiversity strategy is doing to fulfill his priority?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to report to the Assembly that the biodiversity monitoring project is moving ahead very well. After three years of developing a prototype, we're moving into the field this year. In this year's budget we committed \$4.2 million to set up an institute that will do the biodiversity monitoring. Over the past several weeks the institute has completed the training of 22 seasonal staff who will do the monitoring. On Monday these researchers began the process of going out and monitoring the collection of information about plant and animal species across Alberta. This information gathered will be used to

build a baseline or a benchmark that will help the government maintain Alberta's valuable biodiversity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. It all sounds rather complicated. Can the minister please explain for the opposition how it works?

1:50

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'll try to draw a picture. There will be 1,600 sites in a 20-kilometre grid – 1,600; 20 kilometres. Every five years one-fifth of these will be checked. Over five years we'll develop a baseline. Five years times one-fifth: a whole. That baseline will then allow us to monitor changes going forward.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm sure there was great clarity in the answer.

Maybe your third.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister: why is biodiversity so important?

Dr. Morton: Again, very slowly for the opposition. As a practical matter this will allow us to do the environmental impact statements both for industry and government in a more efficient way. We won't be starting from ground zero, you know, the beginning point. We'll have a baseline to go.

Secondly, the biodiversity will help us with the land-use framework. Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, over the long term the biodiversity monitoring program will help us put together and protect the integrity of our environment, the beauty of this province that makes it the best place in Canada to live, work, and raise a family.

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

Affordable Housing

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. City councillors and the people of Red Deer have made a bold commitment to become the first municipality in Canada to eradicate homelessness. In fact, Red Deer has a 10-year plan. This government rejected the housing task force's recommendation of an Albertan 10-year housing plan. The city of Red Deer appreciates receiving money for affordable housing this year, but what about the next year and the year after that and the year after that? My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Will you enable Red Deer city councillors to plan for the future, even the next three years, by committing here today to renew their affordable housing funding on a long-term basis?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has committed \$400 million to the municipal sustainability initiative this year, \$500 million next year, and \$600 million the year after. We've also committed to funding for housing. The funding for housing for communities that are in need: those municipalities have the ability to decide how they feel their money should be spent and what direction they should take.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, the effort to provide affordable housing in this province, which refuses to regulate the market, can sometimes feel like one step forward and two steps back. This year in Red Deer

Monarch house, a 65-unit affordable housing project, was recently sold to a developer for a condo conversion. Monarch house was originally built as part of an affordable housing strategy and, therefore, received funding from both the provincial and federal governments. To the same minister: what is your department doing to protect future affordable housing investments that use provincial dollars from receiving the same fate?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, if an agency or a municipality applies for affordable housing and that funding is granted, and if that agency turns their units into condos or into another means, they have to pay back that funding pro-rated.

Dr. B. Miller: My final supplementary is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. The task force on housing was really concerned about the fact that we'd like to see people flow through the housing continuum, but there's a reverse flow. In fact, we invented a new category, the nearly homeless, who are one rent raise away from being homeless. Apparently, officials in Red Deer and other places have expressed concern that no one knows anything about the homeless and eviction prevention fund. So it's not a question of not only the people in need not knowing, but officials don't know. What steps has your department taken to at least inform municipalities about this program and about the specific guidelines and criteria of this program?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, all of the 59 centres plus the two special centres in Calgary and Edmonton were aware of it from the moment it was announced to go to municipalities. I think we could very clearly identify the web page. There are three simple criteria: that they need assistance, that they qualify for some income support, and that they get in touch with us. Very clearly, we've asked for the director to look in every circumstance at the individual needs before adjudicating any of these circumstances. We've had outstanding results, and people are getting served on the basis of the needs they have.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Diabetes Supplies

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we are hearing in the media of a growing incidence of diabetes among children. I have heard concerns from constituents about the considerable costs associated with purchasing diabetic supplies. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What assistance is available to Alberta families for the cost of diabetic supplies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Assistance for the cost of diabetic supplies is available to lower income Albertans through the Alberta monitoring for health program, which is administered for us by the Canadian Diabetes Association. Alberta monitoring for health is currently assisting approximately 21,000 Albertans with the cost of supplies to manage their diabetes. The program is intended to help people without health insurance and those most in need with some of the costs for diabetic supplies. These supplies include blood glucose strips, injection supplies, and lancets. People who are insulin dependent receive up to \$550 per

year. Those using oral medication receive up to \$250 per year, and people who manage their diabetes through diet receive \$100 per year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. I'll direct my supplemental question to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Could the minister outline the benefits available to Alberta families dealing with diabetes under the child health benefit?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, \$23 million to the Alberta child health benefit program benefits 83,000 children who receive supplies, medical benefits through that program as well as 38,000 Alberta families that receive funding through the Alberta adult health benefit. So we look after the families who require income supports for medical needs for diabetes.

Mrs. Jablonski: My last question to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. We know that with proper testing and treatment children with diabetes can achieve a good quality of life. As daily costs increase and eat away at family incomes, will the government consider increasing the income threshold for families to qualify for child care benefits?

Ms Evans: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will. The budget and the publication of our business plan this year indicate that on July 1 there will be regulatory changes to increase the income threshold for eligibility, so you will see support increases at that time. We look forward to that. For those that are students, those income benefits will be applied in August, and subsequent to that, if there were requirements, they would also qualify for benefits if they were in that category of need.

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

Climate Change

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On climate change Albertans are far ahead of this government. They understand that climate change is the crisis it is and are looking for leadership. The government's own public consultation on climate change indicated that nearly 90 per cent of people want to move quickly to absolute limits on greenhouse gas emissions, yet this government continues with the discredited intensity targets that favour industry. The Liberal plan would cap emissions by 2012. To the Premier: why did you spend millions of Alberta dollars if you already had a plan?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we took a leadership role as the government of Alberta with respect to climate change, such a leadership role that, in fact, the federal government worked very closely with the province of Alberta to establish a policy that's going to work with all Albertans in managing climate change over the next number of years. It is a good policy. We're going to continue to work in that direction. Other provinces are now looking to Alberta for the kind of legislation that we have and also for the fact that we took a leadership role back in 2002-03 by putting together a plan so that we can at least have a baseline measure, starting from a measurement so that we'll know how much ground we gain over the next few years.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This government prides itself on consulting with Albertans, but the evidence is that they ignore public values when it's inconvenient to government or to business, whether it's housing or FCSS and child services or, now, climate change. Again to the Premier: if not the public interest, the long-term needs of this province, whose interests are we making decisions upon?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's important that we clearly put into context the issues that we're dealing with in climate change from the public consultation perspective. I've indicated a number of times in the House that Bill 3 was the culmination of work that began in 2002. We immediately began a consultation with Albertans to develop a forward-looking plan. That forward-looking plan is in its final stages and will be released for initial consumption by Albertans over the summer and be ready for final adoption by government by this fall.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The climate crisis is the most serious issue to face the planet this century, and carbon emissions are the most significant contributor. This government has spent millions of public dollars in the last five years convincing Albertans that climate change is just a theory and that serious commitment to this would seriously undermine our economy. Last month this minister boldly announced that climate change is real, but nothing has changed. As with previous Environment ministers it's business as usual in Alberta. Mr. Minister, your job is to protect the environment. Why won't you do your job?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thought that's just what I was doing. When I attended a meeting in Toronto with Environment ministers from across the country, I expressed to them exactly what I have expressed to this House. I expressed to the national media the fact that Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada that has come forward with legislation. Many of those ministers were interested in what we were doing. Some thought, like the hon. member, that we should just put some kind of a cap in place without any plan on how to get there. Fortunately, I think, for Albertans we don't believe in making promises that we can't keep. We believe in making promises that have a road to get to the goal.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

West Fraser Timber Co. Ltd.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. What with low prices, trade disputes, mountain pine beetle, and other difficulties our Alberta forest industry has been through some tough times. However, this is no excuse to engage in inefficient and unsustainable practices that do not manage our forest resources in the best possible way. There have been many complaints that the West Fraser forestry management area in the Hinton region has been leaving good timber on the ground and burning fallen timber and then bringing in logs and chips from other FMAs to feed their pulp operations. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Will the minister please commit to stopping these inefficient and unsustainable forest practices in the West Fraser management area?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's concerns with the men and women who have lost their jobs, but I suggest that he spend a little more time outside of Edmonton and in the forestry

zones. He'd realize that the pictures that he showed to the media today of a few slash piles burning is pretty common in every province and everywhere that forestry is done. I'm afraid he's confused forestry practice with a labour issue. I know that his party pays a lot of attention to unionized workers. I respect that, but he's mixing up two different issues here, sir.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly beg to differ. I would encourage the minister to take a look at the pictures and others that we have available on our website, the NDP website.

Certainly, the workers have a vested interest in sustainable resource practices. Workers with 35 years' experience have told us that they've never seen this kind of waste on the ground before. We're looking for resolution, and we're looking for sustainability in this issue. To the same minister: given that West Fraser's forestry management licence clearly states that the company must not waste its wood, why are we allowing West Fraser to continue these unsustainable forestry practices? I'd like him to look into it, please.

Thank you.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member wouldn't know a sustainable forestry practice if it hit him over the forehead like a log.

I've been up to Grande Prairie twice in the last two weeks. I've been out in Kananaskis touring both cut areas and also reforested areas twice in the last two weeks.

Mr. Martin: Whatever the companies say. Right, Ted?

Dr. Morton: No. What we're concerned about is sustainable forestry. That means that the forest will be there in a hundred years. That's what the companies are concerned about. Their value depends upon a hundred years worth of wood. Sustainability is our goal, and West Fraser is committed to that just as strongly as we are. That's what our FMA requires.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's totally irrelevant and certainly not moving forward on this issue just to simply call names. I'm bringing something forward for the attention of SRD. They ignored it before. I'm asking the minister to take a look at this. It's not an unreasonable request. West Fraser is in negotiations with the government for the next 20 years for a forest management agreement. I'm asking him: please, will you ensure that the next forest management agreement will absolutely forbid these types of waste and unsustainability that we've seen thus far? I certainly do know the difference between a cut pile and a big pile of logs that are just wasted on the ground.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, these pictures could be taken everywhere and anywhere. Until we know where they're taken, I don't want to get into it. What I'll tell the Assembly and tell Albertans is that the sustainability of the forestry industry and the jobs you want to protect and the jobs you want to keep in this province depends upon a sustainable forestry. We're committed to that. Our FMAs require it. That's our policy, and we're going to stick to it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Farm Fuel Rebate Program

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent media reports have implied that there are problems with the Alberta farm fuel rebate

program, and recent numbers released by Stats Canada contrast with the number of farmers receiving rebate in our province. To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: can the minister tell us why there's such a discrepancy in these numbers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The farm fuel rebate program is a very important program, indeed, similar to the other provinces. The biggest reason for the difference in the numbers is simple to explain. The rebate is given to individual farmers while Stats Canada numbers show the number of farms. As long as there are separate income tax papers filed, there can be more than one farmer receiving a rebate per farm. In fact, there could be two or three, depending on a corporate farm.

Mr. Marz: To the same minister: can the minister tell us, given that the rebate program was flagged by the Auditor General, what he has done to ensure that the problem is being dealt with?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta certainly has stepped up its efforts on new application. As I indicated in the Committee of Supply, we will be starting an internal audit. We are also doing a review of the different provinces to see if there are any processes or materials that we can use here. We are committed to a good process. Once we've taken a thorough look, we can determine how best to proceed with a full renewal, which we have committed to. This is only a good, common-sense process that we're going through.

Mr. Marz: My final question to the same minister: with the rising cost of fuel can the minister assure this House and Alberta farmers that this program will continue to be available to assist farmers in managing their income?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, with today's rising fuel costs this program is probably more timely than ever.

Mr. Speaker, for the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to imply in the media that there is widespread abuse of this program is wrong, unfair, and very mean-spirited to Alberta farmers. Let's be clear: the vast majority of the people in this program are still eligible. Claims that there could be \$34 million a year in abuse is both negligent and wrong and unfounded. We will review the eligibility, and we will continue to support the Alberta farmers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Education Funding

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we heard from trustees and school board officials in Edmonton and Calgary about the specific challenges facing school boards in the province. In 2005 the metro school board study provided important recommendations for ensuring that the needs of these unique boards would be met and that the quality of education for students in Edmonton and Calgary would not suffer. To the Minister of Education: how many recommendations from the metro school board study has your department implemented?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member in this session has been so fixated on numbers and twisting the facts and distorting the facts that I thought I'd take some time. This might take me the

answer to the question and a couple of supplementaries, but I thought I'd engage the House and go through the Liberal plan and cost it out for us. So let's start here right now.

This particular hon. member has asked consistently in this House that we implement full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten. The cost of that, Mr. Speaker, is \$375 million. The hon. member has also called for province-wide school lunch programs, which is \$354 million. We've also heard from the opposition . . . But I'll finish in my next supplementary.

2:10

The Speaker: We'll probably get to it.

The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try and go a little slower. A large part of the problem faced by school boards in Edmonton and Calgary relates to the renewed funding framework, Mr. Minister. When this rural Tory government was developing the renewed funding framework, it recognized that the needs of both the smallest and the largest boards in the province needed to be addressed, yet somehow when the framework was finalized, only the small board administration grant was retained. To the Minister of Education: why did your government choose only to provide support to small rural school boards and ignore the needs of the school boards in Edmonton and Calgary? Can you tell us the answer, sir?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. member has his facts all wrong, and I'm not even going to respond to them because they're just wrong.

So let me continue on the Liberal plan for funding education, Mr. Speaker. The Liberals have called for a 5 and a half per cent increase in conditional grants, another \$73 million. They want to eliminate school fees. This hon. member wants to eliminate school fees, \$62 million. He also wants to eliminate fundraising, \$68.9 million. The total cost of that plan is over a billion dollars. Then the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity consistently doesn't want to look at alternative ways of financing new school construction. I'll finish it in my next supplementary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, we'll get this one answered. The school infrastructure debt in Edmonton and Calgary is out of control, Mr. Minister. The schools for tomorrow strategy promised to end the last decade of school infrastructure neglect, sir. But now we learn that the strategy has been shelved. To the Minister of Education: since you have thrown away the latest school infrastructure plan, where is your plan for eliminating the growing infrastructure problem in Lethbridge, Edmonton, and Calgary?

Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, again, I said earlier: distorting the facts. Nobody shelved anything. The schools for tomorrow document is still there, so let's call facts a fact.

What I said earlier was that this opposition says that we should spend \$3 billion and build all these new schools. And then there's the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who wants us to write a cheque for \$2 billion to clear up the unfunded liability. Right now, he says. The total for that, Mr. Speaker, the total cost of the Liberal education plan is \$6 billion. That equates to a 5 per cent sales tax increase. If they want to go out and campaign on a 5 per cent sales tax, let them go ahead.

The Speaker: Well, that's certainly innovative: a minister of the Crown outlining to the citizens of Alberta an opposition party's platform.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Recycling

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to protecting our environment, often the small steps we take every day are the most valuable, like using public transportation instead of driving individual cars or recycling used garbage containers. It's been reported in the media that fewer and fewer beverage containers are being returned for recycling every year. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Is this true, and if so, are the rates of recycling declining in Alberta even as more and more Albertans are becoming more environmentally aware?

Mr. Renner: Well, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it is true on both counts. First of all, small steps can collectively have a huge impact on the environment. But the member is also correct when he points out that the rate of return on recycling of beverage containers is going down at the same time as the number of beverage containers being sold in Alberta is rising rapidly. More than a billion containers were returned last year, but that only represents about 74 per cent of beverage containers like pop cans, only about 40 per cent return on milk containers, and about 90 per cent of beer containers. These numbers need to be improved, and it's time that we got on with it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Mr. Minister, why is it that the number of dairy containers sent in for recycling is so low?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a question that I don't know that I have the capability of answering, but I can point out that dairy containers are exempt from the recycling container legislation which people are familiar with: having a deposit and returning the container to get their deposit back. Some have suggested that that might be one of the reasons why the numbers are so low. Others would suggest that it's simply an awareness and that they've made some significant progress. I don't know the answer to that question. It's one that I would dearly love to have the answer to.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental for the same minister. I want to thank you for the clarification, Mr. Minister. Clearly, this is an issue that needs more immediate action. Can you tell us what concrete actions you're planning to take to get a handle on this?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we need to continue to work with our partners in beverage container recycling. We need to work with the Dairy Council; we need to work with the brewing and the bottlers. But I think we can do more, and that's why I believe that this whole issue of beverage container recycling is a prime example of an opportunity for the newly formed policy field committees to get involved. One of the things that I would like to do – and I intend to very shortly – is introduce a motion in this House that will refer the issue of beverage containers to the all-party policy field committee for their recommendations on where we go from here.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 82 questions and answers today.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Committee of Supply Responses

The Speaker: I would like to advise all members of Standing Order 59.05(1), particularly the Government House Leader and the Deputy Government House Leaders. Standing Order 59.05(1) says, "Ministers must table answers to questions asked in Committee of Supply within 2 weeks." Standing Order 59.05(2) says, "The vote on the main estimates under Standing Order 59.04 shall not be held until the answers have been tabled in the Assembly as required under suborder (1)." It's not clear who's responsible for monitoring that answers must be provided within two weeks, but the chair has kept a running tally and believes that there are a few that have not been. So I would encourage such compliance so that we do not run into problems in the future, when and if the day of the voting is to occur and somebody then says that you can't vote because not all the answers are here.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you raising that and bringing it to our attention. I can assure you that I as House leader have been diligent in my duties in reminding my colleagues that they are to table their answers to questions. You'll notice that every day we've had tablings of answers, and we're following up with the ones that remain.

Thank you.

The Speaker: One minister is saying: am I the one? Well, sorry. The difficulty the chair has is that the chair cannot determine that because under the rules it basically says that a minister will provide answers and the minister will agree to provide written answers. But if a minister during his estimates says, "Well, I answered the question in the estimates," and somebody on the other side says, "Well, no; you agreed to provide a written one," but, "No, no; I gave it in the *Hansard*," and somebody says, "No, no, no; the rule says that you must provide written ones," all of a sudden you're asking moi to make a decision, an interpretation on your part. So today I'd just simply advise: would you all be very diligent in what you have to do to uphold Standing Orders 59.05(1) and 59.05(2) so that we do not run into any problems, please. The onus is on the members.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Referral of Bill 2 to Government Services Committee

23. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly refer Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007, to the Standing Committee on Government Services for the committee's consideration, review, and comment and request the committee to report to the Assembly on or before the first week of the fall 2007 sitting.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A motion that doesn't need much debate. We yesterday moved Bill 1 to committee. Bill 2, again, is one of those bills that's robust enough and of sufficient degree of public interest with respect to the Conflicts of Interest Act that the public should have an opportunity to advise us as to whether we've got it right or whether there are other issues that should be

addressed. It's most appropriate that the appropriate policy field committee have the opportunity to address the bill before we address it in Committee of the Whole, so I'd ask the House to allow this bill to be sent to the appropriate policy field committee.

2:20

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to Government Motion 23, moved by the hon. Government House Leader, in my capacity as the deputy Official Opposition House leader and as the Alberta Liberal caucus democratic renewal committee chair. This motion is calling for the referral of government Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007, to the Standing Committee on Government Services for the committee's consideration, review, and comment. It also sets a timeline for the said committee, for which I'm humbled to have been chosen vice-chairperson, to report back to the Assembly on or before the first week of the fall 2007 sitting.

Clearly, I would speak in favour of this motion. First of all, I sat on the Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee when this particular legislation came up for review before the all-party committee. The discussions we had and the exchange of ideas and thoughts were positive and most useful, in my opinion. It is no secret, Mr. Speaker, that all-party committees work. They do work for the most part because members from any side of the House tend to be more co-operative and less adversarial in comparison to what happens sometimes in question period or a bill debate. The idea behind having all-party committees is to allow all points of view to be expressed and evaluated. The results always yield better legislation and a much diminished chance of this legislation being rejected by the House when it reaches its floor. You see, if we co-operate at the front end of things, Mr. Speaker, it follows naturally that the suggested bill could cruise through all stages of debate afterwards with minimal resistance. Also, deliberations in committees are not as rushed, and members tend to be more thoughtful and objective, more thorough.

I for one and all members of my caucus do take these all-party committees seriously. As a matter of fact, we campaigned on that very idea in 2004, and having true legislative all-party committees remains an integral part of our democratic renewal work. The situation in the past, where the government did not see a need to have such forums because they had a majority in the House and the government caucus was sufficient, was a bad one. It was a bad situation, Mr. Speaker. The Legislature is here for a reason, and democracy cannot be served when the opposition and the hundreds of thousands of Albertans it represents are excluded from the decision-making or candid discussion tables.

I'm excited that the new Premier has followed through on one of his campaign promises to establish these policy field committees. I also want to acknowledge the Government House Leader and the Opposition House Leader for their work and their negotiations and also acknowledge their legislative or parliamentary assistants who participated in those discussions for the hard work they put into these negotiations.

We need to ensure that these committees do work, and I know that the two House leaders from both sides – actually, the three, including the NDP opposition – had some discussions with their respective caucuses and tried to convince all the members in this House to buy into this new model. I know that our House leader on the opposition side of the House did not have any difficulty as compared, I think, to some members in the government caucus who initially expressed some hesitation or skepticism. But kudos still, and it's a day to celebrate that we now have these committees.

The challenge before us, then, is to make sure that they work and that they work well. This is not or ought not to be a public relations exercise. As I said, we are serious about these committees to the extent that we have recently requested formal training for the four vice-chairs, and I am one of them. In terms of reference we would like manuals and things like that, but above all, Mr. Speaker, we need a commitment from the government side that this is a genuine attempt at democratic renewal and that no voice or opinion will be ignored, ridiculed, or dismissed.

Bill 2 attempts to strengthen conflicts of interest laws. It goes hand-in-hand with Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, which was referred to the same committee yesterday with the passage of Government Motion 21. They both try to assure the public that politicians and senior government officials are not as bad as the public thinks, certainly not all, and that we are serious about restoring public faith and trust. Referring Bill 2 to the standing committee is a welcome development, and I am both thankful and excited.

I am also pleased that Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, is hopefully going to be referred to the sister committee on community services as the question of community treatment orders is a contentious and serious issue and deserves thoughtful consideration. So I am optimistic that that motion as well is going to pass.

However, what is alarming and displeasing, what takes away from my optimism, Mr. Speaker, with respect to these all-party committees is the fact that some government members today still think that these committees are just here to examine and discuss government business and government business only. They forget or choose to ignore the fact, as the Speaker reminds us from time to time, that all members of this House are equal and that no idea should be dismissed based on its caucus of origin.

We had an example earlier this session, Mr. Speaker, when my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora suggested that Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act, sponsored by my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, be referred to the Community Services Committee, and unfortunately that idea was dismissed. It was rejected.

The Minister of Education tried to be very careful in his choice of words when he said that that idea was not needed, but you have members in this House like the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, for example, who said, "The policy field committees are just being set up, and they do have a lot of very important work to do with regard to government bills." He also says:

And I know that there are other bills that are going to be referred to policy field committees that are again government bills that – I think we really need to spend our time majoring on the majors, focusing on the things that, you know, the Alberta citizens would like us to focus on.

Mr. Speaker, I totally disagree. No idea should be dismissed before it's given a chance to be discussed, and for the suggestion to be made that we only major on the majors . . .

Rev. Abbott: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order. Normally we deal with points of order at this time. What's the point of order, sir? A citation, please.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

Rev. Abbott: Yes. Standing Order 23(h)(i) and (j), imputing motives, Mr. Speaker. I would like to say right away that I believe you made a ruling on which bills should go to policy field committees and which bills should not, and the bill that he's arguing for right now, Bill 207, didn't even pass second reading. I believe you

made a ruling recently that said that unless a bill passes second reading, it cannot be referred to a policy field committee. Perhaps you could just elaborate on that, and then maybe all of these false accusations he's making could be withdrawn or be of no consequence.

The Speaker: Well, I think the hon. members were making some statements that may have been erroneous in fact. There were statements made in the House yesterday by the chair with respect to a certain matter. The point is a valid point to be raised. Let's just go with the point that we have and the referral of this other particular bill.

Debate Continued

Mr. Elsalhy: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, I disagree that these committees should only focus on, as the hon. member suggested, majoring on the majors because our ideas are not minor ideas. They're equally important. It's in the spirit of co-operation and serving Albertans that opposition members approach this new exercise, and we expect the same if not more from the government side.

Certainly, if things are turned the other way around and the government becomes the opposition, we are now faced with a situation of whether we give them a dose of their own old medicine, or do we improve upon what we have? I think this is a chance to build a new type of relationship between the government and the opposition.

I would respectfully submit, Mr. Speaker, that my quotation from *Hansard* was meant to demonstrate that some members of this government caucus are still not sure what the all-party committees are established for, and I would really feel upset and disappointed if that entire exercise was basically for those committees to discuss government business only.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, with respect to Motion 23 I support this motion wholeheartedly, and I look forward to more motions like it in the future, in the days to come. I'm also looking forward to when my particular standing committee convenes, and I am looking forward to working with the chair and the other members. For that opportunity, I thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very quickly, we went through a similar process yesterday with Bill 1. Bill 2 makes absolutely the same sense, I think, to be referred to a policy field committee. Again, I was on the same select committee, that worked very well. I see that the chairman is here in the session. He knows that there's one concern that I more or less had about the policy field committees. I'm glad they're under, but I think they should be treated the same as cabinet ministers in terms of the cooling-off period. I would hope that that would be an opportunity, to take a look at that in the policy field committee because I think that is a fairly important issue.

2:30

Mr. Speaker, I've said before that this is a work-in-progress. I don't think we should create problems. With all due respect to the previous speaker, I don't think we need manuals and that because I think we're going to be deciding as committees where we want to go. With the work-in-progress I don't know how you'd have a manual because I don't understand where we're going to go. I think the committee is going to have a fair amount of flexibility to determine their own way. I would not want to say: here's a manual;

you have to do all of these things. That would defeat the purpose. I'm suggesting that as we go along – I said it yesterday, and I think this is what the member was referring to.

Yes, it's important to take a look at these bills. I certainly would support, again, as I did yesterday, that the committees have some flexibility to bring in other issues as we go along. I'm not going to prejudge that. I take it that that's what we think is going to happen, and we look forward to seeing it happen. If it's not, we can be critical after the point. But at this point I think it's a big positive step forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly thank the members for their support for the motion. I believe that all members of the different parties in the House have had a hand in drafting the original recommendations of the committee, which were tabled in the House last May. Those recommendations have now been reduced to the particulars that are set out in bills 1 and 2. I certainly have no difficulty in the motion to refer Bill 2 to the all-party committee to look at the specific drafting in those bills, and I look forward very much to receiving the input of all members of the House and further discussion on Bill 2.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, should I call the question?

[Government Motion 23 carried]

Speaker's Ruling Decisions of the Assembly

The Speaker: There was a point of order that was raised by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar during that last discussion, and I would draw the attention of both that hon. member and the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to *Beauchesne* 479, where "A Member may not speak against or reflect upon any determination of the House, unless intending to conclude with a motion for rescinding it." The discussion on the resolution with respect to the referral of Bill 207 to the committee was a determination of the House. The rule clearly says that a member must not speak against or reflect upon any determination of the House. It was the House that made that decision, so it's not anybody else's fault.

Secondly, with respect to these committees please remember that they're committees of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and be prepared to serve on that basis. These are not government committees now. You have moved this away from the government. They're now committees of the Legislative Assembly.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 29 Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 29, the Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007. The Farm Implement Act regulates and provides licensing to dealers and distributors of agriculture equipment in Alberta. Its purpose is to provide Alberta farmers with warranty protection, availability of replacement parts, and minimum requirements of sales contracts. Under the current act dealers are persons operating in the ordinary course of business a retail estab-

lishment for the sale of farm equipment. Currently only dealers can sell and lease farm implements to a farmer in Alberta. This provision ensures that warranty service and parts are available to the farmer, which is good. However, the provision has served to restrict other sources, like banking institutions, from offering leasing options to farmers for their agriculture equipment.

Although the trend of leasing agricultural equipment is increasing, the sources for leasing are limited. Farmers have told us they want more choice and competition in their leasing providers. Mr. Speaker, Bill 29 addresses this concern by allowing financial institutions to provide leasing options directly to the farmer. Financial institutions will be required to purchase the equipment through the Alberta dealer network. Thus, warranty service and parts supply will continue to be provided by the dealer and distributor network.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 29 will lead to more harmonized farm implement legislation across the prairie provinces as Manitoba and Saskatchewan already have similar legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that the Farm Implement Board supports the provisions of Bill 29. The Farm Implement Board represents stakeholders from a diversity of agricultural sectors.

In conclusion, I can assure all hon. members that the majority of stakeholders are in support of this amendment as it allows more choice for Alberta farmers and the strong possibility of increased sales for Alberta implement dealers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 39 Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs on behalf of.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. It is my pleasure to introduce second reading of this bill.

In this province, Mr. Speaker, professional engineers and geoscientists who meet strict standards are represented by the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta, otherwise known as APEGGA. APEGGA members and their work are governed and regulated under the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act, EGGPA if you wish. Engineering technologists are represented by the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta, otherwise known as ASET. ASET members are outside the regulatory umbrella of the act of APEGGA.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to move second reading of Bill 39, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007. This amendment act proposes changes which reflect a new governance model for APEGGA and ASET have agreed to one act for two associations. This proposed model is in response to a request the Alberta government made of these two groups last year to work together to come to a mutually agreeable solution over the governance of Alberta's engineering and geoscience technology.

There are three main changes to the legislation that would be required. One is the designation creation. One change would be the creation of two new designations, ASET's professional technologist and APEGGA's professional licensee; the second one would be professional regulatory organization; and the third one will be ASET

titles. The third item that the legislation needs to reflect is the protection of ASET's current titles used by its members. Protected titles show that these professionals have met the highest professional standard and must continue to adhere to these standards to be able to use this title.

Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation is supported by the professionals within both of their organizations. This is indeed an achievement long awaited by all Albertans and this Legislature.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: 2:40 **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

Main Estimates 2007-08

The Chair: The chair has been advised that 45 minutes have been designated for each department, so we will set the clock accordingly. If you go less, that's fine. If there is a need to change that, please advise the chair.

Energy

The Chair: We will start with the Department of Energy, and I will invite the hon. minister to now present his comments.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Initially what I would like to do is introduce the members of staff that I have accompanying me today. I have Dan McFadyen, the DM, and Doug Borland. Anne Denman, I believe, will be in shortly. David Breakwell is here, and John Giesbrecht. We found that our time here in committee has been for the most part very productive, and what I would like to say is that I want to take this time to compliment the staff, that have put a lot of effort into making this process work relatively smoothly.

There had been some comments by the Speaker with respect to questions and questions that perhaps haven't been answered. You know, we have done our best to comply with the written questions. There are some circumstances, I think, that were left, and we're not exactly sure. In some statements that members make could be half a dozen or 10 questions. We answer the questions on the spot that we can answer, and I'm certainly hoping that as the process goes along, members don't feel that they haven't been adequately addressed with respect to their questions. If there are some of them that are, you know – a number of questions that would happen to have been in a statement – it might be difficult for us to ascertain if we've done every one. So we're doing our best to keep up with that, and we have given written answers to the questions that we understand we've missed.

I think with that, I would encourage members to get involved, and we'll continue to do our part. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to participate in the debate?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, may I continue?

The Chair: You may.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you. You know, I can add a few comments, I believe, to some of the comments that were made and have

been made in the process, and I've got a bit that I could add to it. Certainly, the way our industry is in the province of Alberta, we see that across the globe investors continue to seek opportunities to be part of Alberta's energy future, and activity in the energy industry has grown to record levels in recent times, Mr. Chairman, as you know.

All of this investment is for a good reason. In the energy industry Alberta remains the destination of choice for many investment dollars. Alberta is Canada's leading producer of petrochemicals. Alberta has the world's second-largest proven global crude oil reserve after Saudi Arabia, the majority of which is of course found in the oil sands, and Canada is also the world's largest supplier of natural gas. Alberta will play a key role in unlocking the natural gas resources in northern Canada and Alaska.

Mr. Chairman, while Alberta's conventional natural gas and oil are declining slightly, we're not running out of either commodity. Enhanced recovery of oil and gas through new and improved technology continues to help offset declining conventional production. As well, we're looking to build our renewable energy resources such as bioenergy.

Mr. Chairman, through such initiatives as the nine-point bioenergy plan we've been working with business across the province to create a made-in-Alberta approach to diversify our existing energy resources. Investment will ensure that Alberta continues to build the capacity and expertise needed to support an innovative and globally competitive energy sector, Albertans receive their fair share of resource revenues, and it will ensure that we remain attractive to investors in all facets of the Energy portfolio: conventional oil and gas, oil sands development, and unconventional and renewable energy sources as well.

To manage growth pressure brought on by increased oil and gas activity and the demand for electricity transmission infrastructure and generation and to bring about needed regulatory efficiencies, I'm introducing legislation, Mr. Chairman, that's going to separate the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board into two separate entities. The new energy resources conservation board will focus exclusively on the responsibility of the development of Alberta's resource well, and the Alberta utilities commission will oversee the distribution and sale of electricity and natural gas to Alberta consumers. These distinct boards of experts will make timely decisions to capitalize on opportunities in the public interest. The boards will have clear and distinct mandates, which will increase each board's accountability to both government and stakeholders alike.

Mr. Chairman, I see that there are some individuals, I believe, that would like to engage, so thank you very much for the opportunity to add a few comments.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do have quite a number of questions for the minister regarding his ministry and the budget allocation. I'd like to start with respect to some questions regarding climate change, which is certainly a topic which seems to be a very notable one in the public mind these days. Certainly, I know that the minister has spent a considerable amount of time addressing issues related to climate change recently.

I would like to ask him whether in his budget he can advise whether or not there have been specific allocations regarding the investigation of the feasibility of carbon capture and sequestration, whether or not there are specific resources being allocated through his department in terms of investigating the feasibility of these methods of carbon capture and sequestration, and whether he could update us on what plans and feasibilities there are with respect to not

only the carbon dioxide but also nitrous oxide and NO₂, NO₃, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and various other pollutants which we commonly call the greenhouse gases.

The second question related to the whole climate change thing is that there has been a great deal of talk recently about the nuclear option as a possible method of reducing the greenhouse gases. Of course, the fission process, nuclear fission, certainly is something that does not create greenhouse gases. I'm wondering whether or not his department is actively exploring those things and, furthermore, whether he can advise whether or not there are any resources in the budget to look at the pluses and negatives of the nuclear option perhaps to be used in certain parts of the province of Alberta. Particularly, it has been touted as one of the possible solutions to a great deal of carbon dioxide production in the oil sands area, where we're burning huge amounts of natural gas in order to produce the bitumen and recover the bitumen.

So I will perhaps allow you to respond to those. I do have a couple of other questions subsequently, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Chairman, and thanks to the member. Certainly, the budget numbers with respect to CO₂, carbon capture and storage in particular – the member knows very well that this department and the government in general terms are very concerned with respect to meeting requirements. As you also realize, the hon. Minister of Environment has put in place some very progressive legislation with respect to setting targets. We intend to support our industries in meeting those targets.

2:50

We have a blue-ribbon panel that's a shared responsibility federally with NRCan and our Energy ministry in the province of Alberta. For budget purposes the cost of our blue-ribbon panel is estimated to be a million dollars, and those funds will be shared federally and provincially. So we do have some dollars put forward with respect to that issue.

If you're discussing things around methods for capture and storage, again we've got some excellent programs in place that work towards enhanced recovery and technology around enhanced recovery. Our department supports a number of programs, in the hundreds of millions of dollars in fact. I can't give you exact numbers because some of it has been used. I can get in there and find them if it's necessary. But we do have a number of programs with enhanced recovery and innovation and technology that will assist us to align ourselves as a government with the best practices in industry with respect to capture and storage of carbon.

The discussion around SO_x and NO_x and particulate matter and other flue gas emissions that we understandably need to control and regulate: most certainly, again, the Environment minister would be in a position to be able to give you, I think, a better breakdown with respect to what the government's doing on those issues. But we work with our industry players in the same manner as we have done on CO₂ with respect to decreasing and eliminating these particular problems.

We've done quite a bit of it, and industry has been very responsive over a number of years, Mr. Chairman, on those issues. We've done it by decreasing flaring and venting in the province. Over approximately a decade we've seen a decrease of 72 per cent of flaring and venting in the province of Alberta, well ahead of targets that we set for industry. When you look at being able to take that much flaring and that much venting out of the system over a period of time, it

eliminates a tremendous amount of particulate matter that would have otherwise ended up needing to be addressed in another manner.

With respect to the nuclear issue, Mr. Chairman, again I want to make it clear that the government of the province of Alberta is neither a proponent nor a detractor from any nuclear project. At this point in time we do not have any applications in front of us to look at. We understand that there are proponents, and most certainly there are advantages, particularly in greenhouse gas emissions, with respect to electric generation and possibilities in some certain circumstances of hydrogen production and even the ability to use steam from nuclear generation. I think that there are some positive attributes that we certainly will be interested in exploring if and when proponents come to the table with applications. As far as our budget is concerned, we don't have anything in there that is particular to nuclear development in the province of Alberta, but I would say that, most certainly, our Alberta Energy and Utilities Board at this point in time has a capability and a capacity to deal with the upcoming project applications when and if they, in fact, surface.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps I could follow up on the nuclear energy question. Certainly, there have been a couple of ideas floated, at least, which are admittedly not hard and fast proposals at this point, but there have been some proposals by both Canadian and French concerns to become involved in the nuclear industry in the province of Alberta. It certainly would seem prudent to get ahead of the curve on that in terms of assessing what some of the particular costs to the taxpayers of Alberta might be in the long term. I'm specifically referring there to the costs and methodologies of storage of the waste from the nuclear plants. I would think it would be prudent for the Department of Energy to look into those issues. I wonder whether the minister could advise whether or not there are any resources, in fact, that would be allocated.

It seems to me that certainly the Department of Energy would be involved, but the Department of Environment must be as well. It would seem prudent for the government to explore what some of those ramifications might be and what costs might be incurred with respect to securing and storing those things because, as we know, those nuclear wastes are not only dangerous intrinsically, but there has also been speculation that they could become weapons for dirty bombs for criminal elements as well. So I wonder whether or not he could comment, perhaps, on that.

Another issue that I would like to raise with the minister is regarding the oil sands and whether or not there are sufficient resources, in his own opinion, allocated in the budget to ensure reclamation in the oil sands area in terms of the mining and the replacement of those lands and also ensuring that the settlement ponds that they have up in the area of Fort McMurray are properly rehabilitated and that the reclamation is being done in a proper manner. Are there resources there to ensure, in other words, that there's enforcement of the reclamation process in both the landfill area and in terms of the ponds that they use for retention of the waste waters from the bitumen recovery process?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, the member brings up an issue that's at the same time interesting to us, of course, as a government that's going to be responsible at the end of the day to, you know, be involved in and be mindful of any of the applica-

tions that would come forward with respect to a proponent of nuclear or, for that matter, any other opportunity for energy facilities in the province.

When we discuss the situation around what we do with spent fuel, the member indicates that this is waste. I'm suggesting to you that that's, again, a look in the rear-view mirror. When we look ahead with respect to the nuclear industry, most certainly spent fuel today is new fuel tomorrow. When you take a look at some of the opportunities that have presented themselves for that industry and governments globally to take a look at this fuel source, we're already seeing some very, very good results from recycling of spent fuel. The new generation 3 nuclear reactors in fact use a lot less uranium in the first place, and secondly, these companies are now able to recycle and reuse a lot of that fuel.

The spent fuel issue is not one that is a responsibility of the provincial government. In Canada the federal government has the sole responsibility to take care of spent fuel. They take care of the storage and the security of spent fuel in Canada, and we presume that that would continue. Constitutionally I believe that still remains the case.

3:00

The reclamation projects. I hope I'm right, but I believe that the member is asking about two different issues. One of them would be mining, so the reclamation of mined area, and then the reclamation of tailing ponds, which is a separate issue, really. In fact, if you look at the track record of oil sands players today, although there are many people that would indicate that they don't feel like the progress is fast enough, if you take a look at some of the reclamation that's been done, I think they've done a very, very good job. There is certainly tangible evidence of the reclamation that's being done now. The applications that come forward stipulate that reclamation is part of the application, and the dollars need to be in place to do that. I'm suggesting, Mr. Chairman, that indeed we are standing in very good stead. We don't believe that we would leave Alberta taxpayers responsible for large reclamation and cleanup costs with respect to oil sands in the future.

Tailing ponds. Most certainly, again, in some of the development that's coming forward, the newer developments: less water used in the first place, lower amounts of tailings that would end up in tailing ponds, and a lot of work being done by the industry to assess their situation with respect to tailing ponds and how they will move ahead to do the reclamation that's necessary. Again, a lot more water being recycled. I think, as things move along, a very good job being done of the reclamation of tailing ponds.

So the short answer, Mr. Chairman, is: yes, we believe that we do have the economics in place to take care of this in the future.

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've just got a couple of points. As I'm reviewing your estimates for 2007-08, page 134, I just question the aspect of the bonuses and sales of Crown leases. If you look at your budget for 2006-07, you had just about \$1.5 billion budgeted, but if you look at your forecast for that year, you've got \$2.4 billion. Yet when we look at your estimates for 2007-08, you're at \$1.2 billion. So I'm just wondering why the discrepancy, especially when we had an actual reading in 2005-06 of \$3.4 billion. Do you foresee that we're going to downgrade that much on that line item from revenue?

On the aspect of coal royalty I notice that in 2005-06 for the actual we had \$11 million, but we're estimating \$15 million, yet we forecast in 2006-07 \$16 million. With the resurgence of coal

especially the metallurgical coal in West Yellowhead is moving along a lot better now. Then the other aspect that we're talking about: gasification of coal. Wouldn't you think that we would be able to move those figures up more, or is it just a caution on estimates?

If you switch to Budget 2007, Managing Our Growth, the business plans, I guess that I'm sort of wondering about the aspects of core business 4, where you're talking about the regulation of energy development by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. I'm getting some of the feedback in my riding now on the aspect of the disparity on the funding. They're saying that the government isn't funding enough. I know this has been questioned a number of times. I'm just wondering whether we're looking at that now that we're moving ahead with the different aspects, trying to come to more of a balance on the funding factor with the aspect of industry and government. So if you can give me an outline on that.

The other one that I was concerned about and wondering about was the aspect of the competitiveness of electricity. With the hon. Minister of Environment moving forward with Bill 3 and setting up intensity targets and that, a lot of people are being led to believe that we are going to have very high-priced electrical utilities now, and I'm just wondering where we are on that, especially with your goal 5 on page 138, where you're stating: "Maintain a competitive market framework that provides Albertans with competitively priced and reliable electricity." I'm just wondering where we are with that.

As we see now with different aspects coming up in the province, with Enmax in Calgary looking at building a natural gas plant and sort of centralizing it in the area where it's closer to the users, I'm just wondering if that is what we're looking at as a government: to more or less centralize a lot of these different facilities to feed the market from the close proximity of the power plant.

If I can move on to Grande Cache, the Milner Power station there. With the changes in Bill 3 I'm just wondering: is there some way that we can work out some kind of a system now so that we can burn some of the tailings that are produced from the mining of Grande Cache Coal Corporation, that ships metallurgical coal to the Far East? With this new Bill 3, with the emission standards that we're setting now, they feel that to start with, it's going to cost them a considerable amount when we go into the 1st of July with that.

If you can give me some answers, I'd greatly appreciate it. Thank you.

Mr. Knight: Well, I want to thank the member very much. I like the 12-gauge approach as well. Like the shotgun approach, it works really well.

I've got to go back to the future here with respect to the bonuses and sales of Crown leases. I think he sees a decline in the numbers with respect to what we're going to receive in bonuses and perhaps the idea that somehow there needs to be an answer to the fact that this is decreasing. If you go back to '05-06, I certainly agree: \$3.4 billion. Moving ahead, we have numbers on the '07-08 projection here of \$1.2 billion. I think that what we need to probably explain is that, most certainly, there have been, you know, larger numbers of hectares sold at certain times, and most certainly the price per hectare varies widely. That is, I think, a reflection of the energy industry itself.

Forecast numbers, for instance, in '06-07: what we're looking at is about \$640 an hectare, and the '07-08 estimates are \$444. So we're down, certainly, something in the order of 30 per cent or so just on the value per hectare. There are, you know, reasons and explanations for that. I think that what we probably see in this is that in general terms, perhaps, industry feels that there are cases where

some of the maybe sweeter pieces of real estate are already in play, and perhaps they feel that on a go-forward basis some of the real estate that they're bidding on may not be quite as attractive.

3:10

That's an open-market decision that players will make, and most certainly it adds to our revenues. Again, I don't think that we've ever been in a position in the province where we have actually counted on those dollars coming in on a continuing basis. We realize that they fluctuate and make adjustments accordingly.

Coal royalties. Again, you know, they've gone kind of up and down, and that's depending on the amount of coal production and locations where it's produced. The coal royalties have not really changed drastically in the province in any of these estimates that we have here: from \$11 million to \$15 million. I wouldn't consider that to be really anything drastic. The member asks: why aren't we taking into account the fact that there may be more coal production and more opportunity for royalties in the future? Certainly, we're optimistic that gasification and the use of coal and the value of coal in our value-added and value maximization in the province will generate more interest in coal and, most certainly, generate more coal production. At an appropriate time, when we actually see a process that's on the ground and working, we certainly would take that into consideration and adjust our figures appropriately.

In the core business the member indicated that it looks like there's a disparity in funding to the EUB, and some of his constituents are questioning that. We've increased the funding to the EUB about \$4.5 million in our budget numbers. That actually translates to an increase in capability of the EUB that's quite a bit larger than that because, of course, there is an industry component to the EUB's funding. Most certainly, we've been, I think, very successful in this go-round, in this budget, and we will see some additional members on the ground with respect to compliance and that part of the EUB's business. We look forward to moving ahead and expanding their capacity and their role to continue meeting the requirements of Albertans.

The access and competitiveness in electricity and distributed generation or generation that'll occur nearer the load. Most certainly, Mr. Chairman, all of the generation that we see coming forward is required in the province of Alberta. There was a comment about Enmax. They're talking about a 1,200-megawatt generator someplace in the southern part of the province of Alberta. We think it's a tremendous asset for Albertans, and it will be part of the mix that we need. We look forward to the possibility, say, by 2025 of maybe requiring something in the neighbourhood of 8,000 new megawatts in replacement and additional generation capacity. So we're certainly very pleased to see companies that are looking forward and being productive and positive with respect to that issue.

The Milner tailings continue to be problematic not only for the company that's there but certainly for the Department of Environment and for ourselves in Energy. The answer that I can give the member is that although we haven't anything about Milner coal, particularly, in our numbers, it's the policy of our government to continue to work with these industry players. We will do that with respect to Milner and attempt to achieve a solution that's good for the generation of electricity in the area and, certainly, meets the requirements of Albertans on an environmental standard.

Thank you.

The Chair: Others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a couple more questions for the minister relating to the budget resources that might

be allocated particularly in the field of surface disturbance. I'm thinking of habitat that is somewhat valuable as wildlife habitat and wondering whether the minister could comment on whether or not there are resources in the budget allocated to ensure that, number one, there is minimal disturbance of wildlife habitat in instances where wells or pipelines or access roads are placed and, secondly, whether or not the same could be said with respect to aspects of reclamation when wells are abandoned and whether or not those standards are being developed by his department and are evolving.

I know that in the past the policing of that has been largely left up to the landowners at the time of granting access for surface rights and that there's monetary compensation for disturbance of things like natural habitat. I'm thinking particularly of some of the areas of eastern Alberta, where there are large numbers and the spacing units on the natural gas wells have been reduced considerably and where there have been lots of access roads put into large tracts of prairie land which are valuable wildlife habitat, in some cases for endangered wildlife.

I'm wondering whether or not the minister could advise of the current state of the art and whether or not resources are being increasingly put into that field to ensure that there is proper minimization of the disturbance in the initial instances. I know that in some cases trails are now used for shallow gas drilling rigs rather than building roads – I think that's a very positive step – and also things like using natural grass seeds instead of nonnative species, which tend to be very invasive into the surrounding environment.

I wonder if the minister could advise whether he has specific resources in the budget to keep on top of those things and to police those issues.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, the member brings up some very important topics and questions that Albertans not only want the answer to but, certainly, have a right to have answered. We continue to work with industry and Albertans and landowners and the government to address those questions and their concerns.

The discussion around surface disturbance. Of course, I can give you some very good examples of what we've done and what we've done in conjunction with industry players. If you go into the area southwest of Grande Prairie into an area that's got some sensitive habitat for a number of reasons, probably caribou being the primary one, we have industry players now that, say, five years ago or 10 years ago would have gone in and set up situations where they'd put six leases in place to drill half a dozen wells, and they now sit with two rigs on one pad and drill nine wells off a single pad using two rigs. I mean, those are the kinds of things that we're promoting.

Most certainly, when these applications come forward, the resources that we have there are, basically, resources that we use on a continuing basis. It's part of our budget with respect to the EUB both from the point of applications and licensing and permitting going ahead but also on the policing side, after the fact. We do have resources there.

3:20

The habitat reclamation. Again, you spoke about an area on the eastern side of the province. I certainly agree with you that there are some very sensitive areas there. Again, I know that many of the companies that operate there now are attempting to do very similar things: reduce the footprint. They do it dramatically by sitting on single pads and trying to access as much of the subterranean mineral deposit as they can from a single surface location. There are in-

stances where there are up to nine, 10, and a dozen directional wells from a single surface pad.

Conoco, I believe, and their predecessors in the caribou habitat region, where it's a bit sensitive, have actually invested about \$7 million recently to reclaim and restore caribou habitat in areas where they were not even actively working. Most certainly, you know, I think that we encourage these kinds of investments by players. We don't have at our discretion at this particular point in time a pool of resources to go out and do that kind of work, but we certainly work with the companies that are employing some of their capital with respect to that issue.

CBM and the roadways and minimizing footprints. Again, the member is right to say that there are things being done and to ask what more can be done and what interest this particular ministry is taking with respect to financing these kinds of positive developments in the industry on the surface and on the habitat and species that tend to be under pressure or at risk.

The land-use framework is most certainly led by SRD, but I think it will address many of those questions when we come to a report with respect to a land-use framework. Again, SRD is out in the countryside, but certainly in all of these consultations with Albertans the Department of Energy is participating actively. Of course, the dollars that we have in our budget to support our staff and to support the EUB find their way into that type of participation that does continue to address the requirements of Albertans with respect to those issues.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, I have one other speaker on the list, and the time is up at 3:25 unless the committee desires to have the full question-and-answer taken. I'll assume that's what we want, and I'll take one more question and one more answer.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. If the minister can refer to Budget 2007, managing growth pressures, I just want to sort of go back onto the same subject that the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill was talking about. We're looking at orphan well abandonments. If we look at our budget for 2006-07, it was \$13 million, but actually you spent \$13.5 million, yet you're forecasting the aspect of your estimate for 2007-08 at only \$13 million. Given what we had in activity in the oil field over the last couple of years, I'm just wondering why you lowered the amount of money to move into that part of your department.

Then I guess another quick one is on the Alberta royalty tax credit. Being that that was finished December 31, 2006, have we had much feedback on that now that it has been discontinued?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you. Certainly, the member points out an interesting situation there with respect to the orphan wells. I've answered this question, as a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman, in some discussion previously. In '06-07, it is true, there's \$13,500,000 that was allocated to the orphan well abandonment program, and then it declines, or it appears to decline, to \$13 million in '07-08. The fact is that there were some special circumstances in '06-07, and the \$500 million was moved into that program to fortify the program to take care of some specific pieces of business. Our normal budget had been \$13 million. We continue to put that money into the program on an annual basis. The anomaly that he sees there was a one-time boost to the program in the year '06-07 to account for some specific work that had to be done.

The second question around the ARTC. The legislation with respect to that is still to be passed in this session by Finance. I believe that that will be raised in presentations during the royalty review that's now before the public.

I believe those are the answers to those particular questions. Thank you.

The Chair: I will now invite the officials to retire from the Assembly so the minister of transportation may have his come in.

Infrastructure and Transportation

The Chair: The next item for consideration of the committee is the budget estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. I will now invite the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to present his opening remarks.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Before I begin, I'd like to introduce members of Infrastructure and Transportation's executive management committee and the senior officials that are present here this afternoon. On my left here we have my deputy minister, Jay Ramotar. On my immediate right are Winnie Yiu-Young, our chief financial officer, and John Engleder, regional director for Peace River, representing transportation and civil engineering. Up in the gallery we have Shaun Hammond, assistant deputy minister with transportation safety services, looking after our traffic safety plan, and Bob Smith, assistant deputy minister looking after our properties division. We have Barry Day, assistant deputy minister looking after all of our capital projects. We also have Jerry Bellikka, communications director, and my executive assistant, Warren Chandler. Maybe they should stand, and then you'll see how tall one is compared to the other. I just like joking with them, Mr. Chairman, because they're such good fellows, you know.

Alberta has one of the best transportation networks in North America, and our province also has one of the strongest economies in Canada. The link between transportation and economic prosperity is clear. It is also clear that the ability to move people and goods safely and efficiently is vital to our prosperity. Roads and infrastructure play a critical role in the success of our province and Albertans' quality of life. It's also clear that this province has seen incredible growth over the last few years. Since 2001 our population has ballooned by more than half a million people, and in the last five years, the number of cars and trucks on our roads has increased by more than 300,000. This has helped drive our economy, but it's also taken a toll on our roads.

3:30

As Alberta grows, my department is working to face the challenges of managing that growth. We are examining the state of our core infrastructure with a critical eye and developing an action plan to deal with the challenges. Building and maintaining roads is directly related to our government's priorities of managing growth pressures and providing safe communities. We recognize the importance of infrastructure and transportation in the success of our province. As a government we are making a huge commitment to our capital plan with a three-year target of more than \$18 billion. That's a level of investment this province has never seen before. On a per capita basis it's the highest in Canada.

The estimates I am presenting today are closely tied with the capital plan. This year the ministry's estimates to be voted will be approximately \$3.2 billion for expense and equipment/inventory purchases, a nearly 16 per cent increase from the '06-07 forecast. Of the \$3.2 billion, \$372 million is for noncash items such as amortization, nominal sum disposals, and consumption of inventories. When

the noncash is excluded, the ministry has a \$2.8 billion spending target for programs. Four hundred and twenty million dollars is primarily for highway rehabilitation and maintenance. Approximately \$297 million will go towards provincial highway maintenance and systems and \$124 million into highway rehabilitation. Almost \$41 million will go into transportation safety services to fund things like vehicle and driver safety programs, monitoring of the commercial carrier industry, and traffic safety initiatives, including implementation of the new traffic safety plan, which is one of Infrastructure and Transportation's three mandates.

The traffic safety plan is designed to reduce the number of people killed or injured on our roads. On average 400 people die in collisions on Alberta highways each year. This simply has to change. We are working to change driver attitudes and save lives. Part of this involves key initiatives to help prevent collisions, build safer roads, enforce traffic laws, and talking to Albertans about traffic safety. Some key aspects of the framework being developed for the plan include a focus on community traffic safety, co-ordinated enforcement, legislation based on best practices, and an emphasis on the safest engineering practices. More than \$1 million will go towards the Transportation Safety Board.

A key element of the ministry's program expense is capital support to municipal infrastructure. More than \$1.2 billion in grants will be provided to Alberta municipalities in '07-08. These grants help municipalities fund their priority infrastructure projects. In most cases the decisions are local. Using this money, local governments can direct funding at projects, including roads, bridges, public transit, water and waste water, and emergency services.

Over the next three years the ministry will provide \$422 million for the Water for Life strategy, of which \$103 million is specifically for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo; \$159.3 million was approved in the '07-08 budget, \$35 million for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo; \$174 million was approved in '08-09, \$34 million for Wood Buffalo; \$88.3 million was approved in '09-10, \$34 million for Wood Buffalo.

Also included in the ministry's voted expense category is \$360 million for government operations. This funding enables the ministry to maintain the day-to-day operations and maintenance of government-owned properties as well as leases, the Swan Hills Treatment Centre, and capital accommodation projects.

Funding for natural gas rebates in '07-08 is budgeted at \$477.3 million, a \$114 million increase from the '06-07 forecast. This reflects the projected increase in natural gas prices.

The ministry's capital investment budget will be nearly \$1.5 billion in '07-08, an increase of \$549 million over the '06-07 forecast. Approximately \$201 million will help fund several major projects such as the Royal Alberta Museum's renovation and expansion, the first phase of the construction of Edmonton's new remand centre, and the Brooks crop research greenhouse.

Notably, Infrastructure and Transportation will invest in provincial highway systems and the strategic economic corridor: \$626 million is allocated for the strategic economic corridor investment initiative, including the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads and the north-south trade corridor.

I want to take this opportunity to clear up any possible misunderstanding about the cost of construction on Anthony Henday Drive southeast. The '05-06 provincial budget provided \$83.3 million for this P3 ring road, but the Infrastructure and Transportation annual report for that period shows an expenditure of \$118 million. The additional \$34.7 million recognizes the actual amount of work completed by the end of March '06. The \$34.7 million does not represent a cost overrun as the cost of this project is fixed. This amount will be reduced from the future budgets to stay within the projected cost.

Continuing with program expenses, more than \$385 million will be used for provincial highway systems. To clarify the funding for provincial highway systems, it includes constructing and enhancing provincial highways and bridges so we can continue to meet the transportation needs of Albertans and others who drive through our province.

Infrastructure and Transportation plays a key role in managing Alberta's growth pressures. There has never been a greater need in our province for well-designed, efficient, and safe infrastructure, bridges, and highways. As our province grows and our economy continues to thrive, we are looking ahead to what Alberta's infrastructure needs will be many years down the road. Through careful planning and strategic investment in key projects, we can ensure that Alberta continues to be an economic leader in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I had five subjects, but I found that one of my colleagues is going to be asking questions on two of them, so I'll narrow my comments and questions to the minister to three specific subjects. First, I see through the capital plan in this budget that almost \$2 billion is being spent on the ring roads for Edmonton and Calgary. I was a little dismayed, I guess, that something more wasn't done in the government's general business plans, perhaps the minister of infrastructure's plans, to help deal with urban sprawl because we know that Calgary is one of the largest cities in the world now, covering the most land, not necessarily population. I was wondering if the minister had considered or if there are plans in the future to come up with something to deal with urban sprawl.

Perhaps instead of building another ring road around the city of Calgary 10 years from now and another ring road around the city of Edmonton 10 years from now, if something is considered or planned to address expanding the light rail transit system within those two cities so that they grow up rather than grow out – I know that in comparisons that I've read between Los Angeles and New York, New York has no more space to grow. It continues to grow up, and they continue to expand their light rail transit, add more buses, add more taxis. But Los Angeles has all the room in the world to grow, so they build now almost every eight years a new ring road around that city. When you watch where the road rage happens and the awful traffic jams, it tends to be Los Angeles, where they just keep building more roads, which encourages more people to drive and causes more traffic issues. I'm wondering why the minister didn't address it in this budget or if he plans on developing some sort of transportation strategy that limits urban sprawl and encourages cities to grow up.

The second category or question. I've argued for several years now that this province needs an extensively developed trade and transportation strategy. I know that there's a lot of discussion around the trade corridors and developing the north-south trade corridor. But I haven't seen in any business plans for any department something that actually addresses where the economies are being built, what types of economies are being built, and where the goods that they're producing need to be traded to. It seems to me hard to develop a complete transportation strategy unless you know where goods need to go, where they're coming from, and what's exactly being produced, what sorts of markets are you reaching to.

3:40

You can build roads for the sake of building roads because there are high traffic counts, but the essential principle, I believe, of

economics is that the economy will build where you build the infrastructure. If you build a road, eventually an economy will build on top of that road. We've seen it with highway 2. I mean, twinning that highway and growing it substantially meant more businesses locating along there. The communities along there grew.

I've argued over and over again that a major transportation corridor from Fort McMurray down to the U.S. border along the east side of the province would help generate a new economy there as you saw small businesses locate there, more transportation occurring. I'm wondering where – because I haven't seen it in the ministry's business plans – a trade and transportation strategy is going to be developed that will take this province through the next 10 years to ensure that infrastructure is appropriate and that we guide where the economy is going to grow instead of just responding to it.

My third subject matter. The question I have is for a long-term plan for saving money when the province is hot and the economy is growing quickly and then spending money when it's slow. I mean, we know, and with a substantial increase to the ministry's budget, that we have an incredibly fast-growing economy. Now that we're trying to build all of the infrastructure to meet the demands of that economy, we see costs spiralling out of control, a 20, 30 per cent increase on projects that are approved one year and then not built until the next year because the economy is so hot.

It seems that if we're building a proper infrastructure and transportation strategy, it would serve us well to save money during these hot times and pool it, and then when the economy slows down and we're not competing with the private sector for all of our infrastructure demands, we can build all sorts of roads, projects, schools, hospitals, whatever it is we need for five years out. Then when the economy does speed up, we've got a five-year window of extra space, extra infrastructure, extra transportation to fill up before we find ourselves in a situation where we wind up competing against the private sector for our construction and infrastructure demands.

Those are three things that concern me that are missing from the ministry's business plans and not reflected in the budget, and I'm wondering if the minister can address those three issues.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, hon. member. I do have to start out by saying to your first question, actually, that we addressed that quite heavily within our budgets and not just Infrastructure and Transportation but government in general. How we do that is we grant. This year alone in Infrastructure and Transportation's budgets there's \$1.2 billion in grants that go to municipalities, most of that totally unencumbered, for them to spend on whatever pressures they have. The AMIP grant alone is \$600 million. That's strictly to be spent on infrastructure. Cities can spend it on light rail transit. They can spend it on whatever infrastructure they need to try to stop the urban sprawl, as you spoke.

There are some of our cities right now that in their planning projects – and they've talked to us on that and stuff – are getting a lot higher density. It's still not the densities that you talk about, like New York has, with the real high-rise stuff, but I'll give you a for instance. Calgary right now on any plans that they approve – any developer that walks in to them needs to have a minimum of a nine-unit per acre density in order to get a development approved.

To talk more about what we do to plan for economic growth or where stuff is moving in the province, I will admit that we're in a catch-up mode a little bit. Our economy has been so hot that we have areas where things have even changed on our three-year plan, stuff that's been on the plan that you try to get to to build a road. There is just so much pressure that comes from an influx of people

and high growth in certain areas that you all of a sudden have to just put all of your resources there almost just to try to keep up.

We also have really worked on supporting the port of Prince Rupert, for example, because we know how important that port will be for Albertans. Our biggest market that we have to go to now because we are so efficient in Alberta, and we don't have a high enough population to consume what we're capable of producing – I'm not just talking in agriculture and food here. I'm talking in our oil and gas industry and in our manufacturing industry. Without ports that we can get to and roadways to get to those ports, we won't be able to ship our produce.

I understand a little bit of what you're saying: if you build it, they will come. We're looking at that because with the U.S. now negotiating also on opening Wild Horse down by Manyberries crossing– Havre on the American side, Manyberries on our side – we're keeping a real close eye on that. We could have a real trade corridor there, possibly, with highway 41. I was just down there last week, actually, and drove some of that highway just looking at, you know: how much traffic will this highway take before we have to spend a lot of money here? At this point the traffic count isn't there, but we're kind of looking at that.

We're also looking at our policies: is the traffic count the only thing that we look at, or can we broaden that some way? There are some roads that don't have traffic count, but they have a different makeup of traffic or they have other kinds of issues that say, you know, it really does justify upgrading here even though the counts aren't there. We're looking at ways of doing that.

On putting money away. One thing about Infrastructure and Transportation – and I guess it's because of our capital plan side – is that we actually do get to lapse money. If we don't spend all our money in our budget this year, it's not like most, where it has to go right back to Treasury. We can go get special permission and lapse money in our capital plan to use next year.

Some of the reason for that is because as busy as our economy is and with cost escalations the way they are, we really do cross-check our RFPs after they come back in and say: are these prices too high? If it absolutely doesn't make sense, we'll cancel the project rather than get a 40- or 50-cent dollar value on a program because the prices are just too high. We'd rather lapse that money for the next year.

We're also working on different policies to change things a little bit, where we can use the capacity of municipalities right now to maybe help us build roads, which wasn't part of government policy in the past. We didn't think it was a level playing field to allow government-owned equipment, that was bought with taxpayers' dollars, to bid against private enterprise. We're looking at that now because of how busy it is, saying, you know, that if some of these municipalities have capacity, let's maybe let them go ahead and do some building.

I think I answered your three questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, I've got a number of questions, but I'll just take them one at a time, and then the hon. minister can answer them one at a time. The first one was just touching exactly on what he mentioned last, and that is that it is very difficult to access equipment and personnel to build roads and build infrastructure. From time to time municipalities actually have equipment that's maybe not as busy as the private contractors', and there are municipalities out there – and I think the hon. minister knows one that I'm talking about – where municipalities would join together, do a joint project, and use municipally owned equipment and municipally hired personnel to be able to build these projects

and actually come under budget or under the costs that they would otherwise have. Not that they can do it more cheaply, but some of the costs are inflated because of the huge amount of work, not too much competition, so the costs get out of control. Municipalities can get in there and maybe do the work cheaper.

3:50

I'll just ask the one question first, and then we'll go back and ask more questions. What is the ministry doing right now to maybe enable some of these municipalities to do some of their own work with their own equipment?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The one particular project he's talking about I'm pretty familiar with. Our current policy is going to allow that one to happen. To expand a little more on that, it was a two-year project and not that big of one. They qualified for resource road program money, and then when the second year came along to do the project, the cost escalation was as high as their total amount of grant money. By the same token – and this is a town – their adjoining municipality came to them said: "You know what? We can still do that same job," because they were partnering on the job anyway, "with our own equipment at the same price or awfully close."

Of course, no municipalities, I don't think, or very few, have any paving equipment anymore, but a lot of them have grading and setting that up. In this particular case it's going to work out very well for them because the adjoining county has capacity, they have equipment, and they will go in and do it for last year's price for them.

What are we doing right now? We're working on different policies to see how far we can go. Right now we're just asking them to bid roads in their municipalities. We may let them go further than that. We're just discussing: can we actually make it work? Can we let them tender right against private enterprise? Because private enterprise, the private companies, are real dead set against this. In areas where they don't have enough, they're saying: "Okay. We'll let the municipalities build roads there." To actually get them to bid right against them on projects, we haven't quite got that far yet, but we're working on it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to take the minister back to my previous question on urban sprawl and the notion or concept of building fewer ring roads or having to build them less often and providing more incentives to municipalities to improve their bus routes, their light rail transit, taxis, whatever other form of transportation you can develop. The minister had mentioned that there were grants to municipalities totalling \$1.2 billion, which were unencumbered, and they were allowed to spend where they liked, how they liked.

I'm wondering. When the province turns around and helps support the development of ring roads and those municipalities receive that \$1.2 billion so that the city is allowed to continue to expand, where would be the incentive for them to develop more light rail transit or build more infrastructure instead of building new subdivisions and continuing to expand? The entire intent of my question was: how will the department help effect the change in thinking in some of those larger centres to encourage them to grow up instead of encouraging them, giving them the unencumbered freedom to continue to develop new subdivisions around the city,

eating up good farmland, and then building ring roads for them, which allows that to happen?

The other question. The minister had mentioned that there was a lot of pressure right now and that costs were escalating on projects, but they were trying to contain those costs. My question essentially was around: where's the policy or the plan or the strategy laid out in the business plans or in the budget to help contain that, to plan for the future so that there's long-term savings and then long-term projected spending when the economy turns down? I understand the pressures in the situation we're in now, and I know that there's not much we can do about it right now because what happened in the past is the past. But I'm wondering how we're going to affect the budget cycle so that over a 10-year period we can spend when the economy is slow, and we can get stuff built for 80 cents on the dollar as opposed to now when we're spending a dollar twenty to get a dollar's work done. How are we going to come up with a long-term plan to make sure that we don't wind up in the same situation 10 years from now where, I'm sorry, there are pressures, and we need to spend this money?

Mr. Ouellette: I have to tell you that we have some long-term plans. We run them internally. We run a three-year plan externally, and we have a five-year, a 10-year, and a 20-year plan internally. Our job as Infrastructure and Transportation is to try to get the very best value for the taxpayer's dollar but build as much as we possibly can within that. I agree as a Member of the Legislative Assembly and I believe that if we actually could set money aside for when there's a downturn, we could get twice as much work done for the same money plus keep all of our people working.

My job as Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation doesn't go there, though. I will always work towards that with the greater caucus and with our Treasury Board and our Finance committee. The job of actually putting money away today is between our Treasury Board and our Finance committee, so for me to say that Transportation and Infrastructure is making plans that way, I don't think that's our job. I think our job is to try to make sure that your constituents can safely travel wherever they have to. Also, for the businesses in your constituency we have to have roads for them to be able to transport stuff out. Today that's getting very hard to do with how busy our economy is and with the amount of dollars we have. So I'm almost working against what I'm talking about because I'm there at Treasury Board and at Finance saying: I need more money just to satisfy the growth of our province.

What was the other question? Oh, ring roads. I'm also in a difficult position because I worked with the hon. member on a committee that really believed in having a rural lens and making sure that anything we do that could affect parts of the plan we were working on would be looked at by every department before they made decisions. We also looked in that particular report, you know, that the bigger cities should really look at growing up instead of out. But my job when there's a city there is making it safe for those people.

Our ring road actually becomes a provincial highway, and it's really a wheel which is going to allow access by every spoke. The cities kind of take over from there and build the spokes. We also believe that we're going to save lives by taking away congestion on other parts of it. Our job, I believe, is making it safe for the people there, not so much being involved in stopping them from growing out.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Once again I have a question for the minister. I believe that one of the items that was in your

mandate letter when you were appointed Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation was to look after the community airport program, to give more money to the small community airports around the province. I think there are about 30 of these small airports, plus or minus, around the province that are used by communities, many of them by private business, you know, for pleasure crafts, people spraying crops. I think sometimes forestry uses these airports to fight forest fires and for search and rescue missions.

Now, many of these airports are falling into disrepair or falling behind in their maintenance, and I think there's about a \$2 million budget per year for the whole province. That's not very much money for all these airports. I know that there's quite a demand on their use, particularly by the oil industry and the exploration industry in the province.

I believe that there's a lot of activity happening in the north. There are a lot of people moving in and out of the north, equipment moving in and out of the north, and daily supplies going in and out of the north using airports.

4:00

Now, many of the big plants, the oil sands plants and the upgraders, in the north have airports at each site. There's an airport at Syncrude, there's an airport at CNRL, and I believe there are airports being built on the other side of the river to the northeast there at Fort McMurray.

So a lot of these sites where there are a lot of men living have access to flights going in and out every day. I'm wondering if we could be using our municipal and rural airports around the province to better advantage if we could get more money to upgrade these things and have an actual plan to move forward and maybe extend runways or improve tarmacs around runways to get larger planes and to get more flights going back and forth so that you could maybe relieve some of the pressure up north by moving people in and out from areas around the province.

I think that it would be a great asset to the viability of rural Alberta if you would spread out some of the business to the smaller towns around the province. Small towns that are maybe not necessarily connected right now to the north would be connected if they had better airports and better access.

Some of these small airports also have CANPASS. They have access to customs services at these airports so that the flights could even come in from the States or out of country and land at these smaller airports, take in flights from the States and move goods and services into the north or wherever we need them.

So just maybe a comment on what your plan is for moving forward on airports. Thanks.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you. You're right: one of my mandates is to make sure that the smaller airports in Alberta stay sustainable and viable. We are actually working on that plan, which we believe will be done before the end of summer, on the different recommendations and where we're going to go with them.

What Alberta has right now is two international airports, 12 regional airports, about 72 other paved strips, and then a number of private strips. We have areas that have three different airports within a 10-kilometre or 20-kilometre radius sort of thing. We understand how important airports are to the economy of the province. We understand how important some of the smaller airports work as feeder airports to the regional airports. I can't comment right now on what exactly we're going to do. We understand, though – and it doesn't necessarily mean that throwing money at it is the only thing we're going to do – that that \$2 million

was handling holding on to our runways for a while. But now a lot of them are getting more and more – and we probably are saying, "Haven't quite got there yet," that that \$2 million isn't enough, and even with other recommendations we're probably going to have to up that portion of our budget to support smaller airports.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not sure I have really any questions today, but I would be remiss and wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't take the opportunity to speak to the minister and his senior staff about some of the successes and some of the issues that we're dealing with in northwestern Alberta.

As I talked to the staff outside before we came in, I said I was sure that they could fill in the sheet as well as I can because they do know the issues, and we get to be a bit of a broken record. Nevertheless, if we keep making these comments often enough, I'm sure we'll see some action. As I continue to tell constituents, on a lot of these projects it's not a question of if we're going to get the project done; it's a question of when. Patience is definitely a virtue when it comes to transportation in the north.

A project that we have seen tremendous success with and the communities have shown tremendous patience with is the north-south trade corridor, or the Canamex highway, which runs from Coutts at the United States border right through the centre of the province and, eventually, through Grande Prairie, west to the British Columbia border just outside of Dawson Creek. The stretch that I'm familiar with, of course, is from Edmonton north. I'm not as familiar with what's been done south, but I think it's probably very close to being completed, maybe one community left to deal with. Other than that, it's tremendous progress.

Certainly, the stretch from Edmonton to Grande Prairie or just west of Grande Prairie is coming along very nicely. There are a couple of stretches that are going to be paved this summer and opened up to traffic. That will leave very, very little left that isn't twinned. It has become a much safer highway to travel up and down. I travel it often, and I often say that I'm not sure I can make the trip any faster, but you can certainly make it in a lot more relaxed fashion and not worry about someone getting impatient and passing a long line of semitrailers going one way or the other. So the amount of head-on collisions has been greatly reduced, and everyone appreciates that.

There is a stretch along that road from Wembley, which is just west of Grande Prairie, to the B.C. border which remains to be twinned. The traffic count on that stretch of road is particularly high from Grande Prairie to the town of Beaverlodge. A lot of commuter traffic: people who work in Grande Prairie and vice versa travel back and forth. So it's certainly a priority in the region to finish that strip of road at least to Beaverlodge. The road won't be finished until it hits the B.C. border, and we need to keep in mind that it is a highway running from Coutts to the B.C. border. We can't say it's finished until we hit that line just outside of Dawson Creek.

I'm glad that we're doing some work on the road to Fort McMurray. Not to say that it isn't needed, and I'm pleased that they're getting work on twinning that road there, but if you just go by traffic count alone, there's no comparison to the number of vehicles travelling northwest on highway 43 going up to Grande Prairie, to a lot of other highway projects in the province. Tremendous growth up there, of course, the city growing 27 per cent, I believe it was, with the corresponding increase in the number of vehicles travelling back and forth. We do have rail service south to Grande Cache and down that way, but the highway truck traffic is unbelievable to people who haven't experienced that road.

In conjunction with that road is what's been identified as 43X. It's a bypass around the city of Grande Prairie. It's a bit different in that I know a lot of communities – and I'm probably safe in saying most communities – when they hear that their community is going to be bypassed, the first thing they do is get into Transportation and say: "Don't go by our town, please. We want the road to go through the middle of town. Our commerce is going to suffer." There was a time when the Grande Prairie businessmen were saying the same thing.

Well, I can tell you now that the chamber of commerce is leading the charge on getting a bypass built around Grande Prairie. They are the most vocal lobbyists out there. They've compiled a very thick document supporting the case for taking the traffic around the city. I believe Transportation has worked very well with the communities of Hythe and Beaverlodge, who at one point were of the opinion: no, we don't want the road to go around. Now they're both in a position where they've said: we understand that it needs to, and let's get on with it.

I think it's significant that these communities see that it's not necessarily the death of their community when the road goes around. They start looking at the other side and saying: gosh, I'm not sure we want to be living with a freeway running through the middle of our city and making it unsafe to go back and forth, et cetera. So we certainly have a buy-in from the communities, especially from the city of Grande Prairie, to go around the city. The amount of traffic on what we call the existing bypass – and you certainly can't call it that anymore. I think there are 12 or 13 sets of traffic lights on that road now, so you can hardly call that a bypass. It's just become a local road, but it is part of the highway network and extremely congested and not built to handle the kind of traffic that we're seeing.

4:10

People are patient. We've been very patient with the twinning from Edmonton north. They're patient because they've noticed progress every year. We don't need to feel that we have to do these big projects all in one year or two or even three, four, or five. Your staff could tell us how many years we've been working on the stretch from Edmonton north. It's been quite a few, but as long as people see some progress every year, they've been very patient and very supportive of what we're doing.

That's what I'm asking for when it comes to the bypass around Grande Prairie, 43X. You know, we continue to hear that there's no money in the budget, but I know that there are engineers working on designs. I know that there are staff negotiating for rights-of-way. So if nothing else, we need to change our messaging and say that the money isn't in there for the big project but that we are spending money every year getting ready to do that project. There again, it's not a question of if we're going to do it; it's a question of when. My encouragement is to start saying that message and giving an indication that, you know, the money will flow, and eventually that road will be finished. That will be one less issue for me to deal with.

Just a couple of other issues. I want to thank you for the resource road program and the increase in that funding. The county of Grande Prairie was very successful in that program. You know, the title resource road perfectly describes the kinds of roads that they use their money for. They're roads that are leading to the resource-rich areas south and west of Grande Prairie, the deep basin gas field and the oil patch, heavily travelled with very big vehicles, so a perfect place to spend resource road money. I know that the county is really pleased with what they've received this year, and there will be an aggressive work campaign going on up there to improve a lot of those roads that are really getting beat up by the heavy resource traffic.

While I'm giving out thank-yous, also on the infrastructure side of things the community is delighted with the news that we are getting a replacement for our QE II hospital. The existing hospital was built many years ago for a city of 25,000. Our current city population is 50,000, but it's a regional hospital that serves a population of well over 100,000, so you can imagine the congestion that's going on there. The announcement has been made. The government is funding a new hospital on land that was donated to the province by a local businessman. It's a very, very good location for that hospital, right on the major traffic corridor, and will be a tremendous benefit to the entire region in retaining and recruiting the specialists that we need and have. So that was extremely good news. It was very welcomed by the community.

We have one other hospital requirement in the north, and it's the Beaverlodge hospital west of Grande Prairie, a much smaller project, of course, but it is the oldest operating hospital in the province, I've been told. It's very successful. It takes a big load off Grande Prairie and serves a very large population from the B.C. border east to the city of Grande Prairie.

Before I sit down, I noticed my colleague was talking briefly about airports. The Grande Prairie airport is of course owned by the city and operating and making lots of money . . . [Mr. Graydon's speaking time expired] I was going to comment on Peace Air going out of business.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, hon. member. It's not very often that you actually get compliments on how great everything is going there.

I would like to comment a little bit on the Canamex highway. Actually, the total just in Alberta is 1,175 kilometres from border to border. About 100 kilometres of that is within the city limits of one city or another. If you do the full Canamex highway, there are actually 6,000 kilometres there going from Alaska to Mexico, I guess. At one point in time it will be a twinned four-lane highway. There's going to be quite a bit more done this year. It basically will be twinned right from Edmonton to Valleyview this year. We're working on the west side of Grande Prairie on the engineering and stuff right now.

It's very good to hear that places are saying that, you know, a bypass will work for them because we still have those problems. In fact, on this highway we're actually this year finally going to do the bypass around Milk River. That's the only chunk at the south end that wasn't done as a four-lane, and we're doing that this year.

Also, the bypass in Grande Prairie: I've talked to a lot of people just in passing that tell me how busy. When I used to work in the oil patch and go up to Grande Prairie, the old bypass to me was great, but I hear that today it's like being stuck on the Deerfoot at 5 o'clock in the afternoon or worse. We are really pushing to work on that. I think we're going to get a little bit of it done. We definitely have part of it in the three-year plan, a little bit of it. We're going to finish off that overpass or build the bridge, as our department calls it, the interchange at numbers 2 and 43. We're doing that this year. So some of the things you were commenting on we're actually going to work on and get done this year.

Hopefully, we'll find the capacity and the dollars to push ahead as fast as we can on your bypass. The county should be happy. They've got probably more approvals than most on resource roads this year. That also goes back to say, you know, we always get the blame on, "Why isn't this road on a three-year plan?" or "Why isn't that?" or whatever. Our department has to work on where the highest pressure is right across the province. So sometimes it may look like one area is getting more than another, but that's because that's what met the criteria of how we do the criteria today.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, the time for this order of business has elapsed. We will allow a moment for the officials to retire from the Assembly, so we can get the next group in.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Chairman, I would have closed a little better if I had realized my time had elapsed, but I'd like to thank the committee and yourself for listening to us this afternoon.

Sustainable Resource Development

The Chair: I will now invite the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to present his opening comments.

4:20

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a privilege to be here today and to report on and answer questions on the Sustainable Resource Development budget for 2007-2008. I'd like to begin by both identifying and thanking the top-notch staff I have that have assisted me since I became minister. Starting immediately on my left, I'd like to recognize Mr. Brad Pickering, my deputy minister; a little further down Mr. Cliff Henderson, assistant deputy minister for forestry; and at the end Mr. Ken Ambrock, my assistant deputy minister for fish and wildlife. Seated next to him is Mr. Craig Quintilio, my assistant deputy minister for lands, and on the immediate left of Brad Pickering is Mr. David Bass, the assistant deputy minister for finance and administration. Directly behind me is Mr. Brian Gifford, the chair of the Surface Rights Board and the Land Compensation Board. Also behind me is Mr. Morris Seiferling, the assistant deputy minister for sustainable resource and environmental management. Thank you.

My opening remarks will be very brief. I would just like to clarify some misreporting in the press regarding the ministry's budget for 2007-2008. It was widely reported that our budget was cut 27 per cent, from \$486 million last year to \$353 million for 2007-2008, the estimate that we're discussing today. This confusion resulted from using different types of figures. In fact, the \$353 million allocated to SRD in the estimate that we're discussing today for 2007-2008, if we call that our base budget, actually represents a \$115 million increase, or a 48 per cent increase, over the base budget for last year, 2006-2007, which was a base budget of \$238 million. So comparing apples to apples, rather than the base budget of Sustainable Resource Development being cut dramatically, in fact, it's been increased significantly.

Now, that increase of \$115 million, or 48 per cent, is actually somewhat misleading on its own. It overstates the increase of our proposed budget in this year's estimates. Most of that increase comes about from two changes: one change in accounting practice, if you like, the budgeting practice, and the other in an emergency request. In past budgets much of the operating money for fighting wildfire came after the budget. This year we put it into our main budget. That will represent a permanent increase in our budget, and that represents \$45 million.

Also, knowing that we are in the midst of fighting the pine beetle invasion now, immediately as we enter our 2007-2008 budget year, we have already requested a \$50 million advance from the emergency fund, and we have put that into our budget as well. So set those aside, if you like – the \$45 million for our wildfire base and our \$50 million emergency request for fighting mountain pine beetle – and what I would call our actual, real equivalent increase is about \$20 million, or 8.4 per cent, which is in line with the overall increase for the government of Alberta estimates for 2007-2008.

That's the end of my introductory remarks. I would be happy to entertain questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to say at the outset that it's indeed a great honour for me to stand here today and question the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and his staff. As a registered professional forester myself in the province of Alberta, it is indeed a real honour. Certainly, the sustainable management of our forest lands is of very deep concern to me.

At the outset, Mr. Chairman, I would like to welcome the minister's staff here and congratulate the minister and them for what I see as progress on many fronts in the sustainable management of our forests in the province. Certainly, many of the staff members here I've known for a great number of years in a relationship that might at times be termed adversarial in that I found myself sitting across the negotiating table from a number of them for different reasons, but I can say without hesitation that at all times I was confronted with professionals in every sense of that word, and I'm grateful for it.

Mr. Chairman, I have a few questions about the budget and the management implications of the funding in that budget. I would like to start under forest protection, specifically the mountain pine beetle infestation that we're experiencing. The minister brushed on this in his introduction. Sustainable Resource Development has received an additional \$50 million in emergency funding for mountain pine beetles, which the minister alluded to, and an additional \$2.6 million in base funding for mountain pine beetle. I'm wondering if I can get the minister to explain why there's money coming from two funds for the same item. What is handled under base budget, and what's handled under emergency funding, and why was it necessary to handle it this way? Why is it necessary to declare a mountain pine beetle emergency, especially right now in the early part of the season, when there are no beetles flying?

Also under forest protection, firefighting. The minister also alluded to a base budget for wildfires. The Sustainable Resource Development ministry increased its base budget for wildfires this year by \$45.2 million. I'd like to have the minister explain to this House how this is different from the way wildfire preparations were funded in the previous years. What are the benefits of moving to this new approach, and is this strictly preparatory work? Does any of the \$45.2 million actually go to fighting forest fires, or is it just base preparatory work?

Another area of interest for me and a question to the minister is around the land-use framework. As a professional forester my career was largely in land planning, forest management planning, so this is an area that's very near and dear to me. I suspect, though, that when you talk to people in Alberta, it creates a great amount of confusion. I wonder if the minister could enlighten this House and thereby Albertans as to what exactly is the land-use framework and why it is needed here in Alberta. I'm concerned what effect the land-use framework might have on various industrial users. The concern expressed to me is: is this going to result in greater costs and be detrimental to their ability to remain competitive or detrimental to the rights that they enjoy on the landscape? I also am wondering when we can expect the land-use framework to be completed and implemented.

I have another question, Mr. Chairman, around the oil sands ministerial strategy if the minister can clarify that. What is the oil sands ministerial strategy, why has it become a priority for this government, and how is this ministry involved in that? What recommendations of the oil sands ministerial committee will the \$2 million funding identified in this budget address?

I'll move briefly, Mr. Chairman, to fish and wildlife. In this budget the ministry received \$1.5 million to hire more fish and

wildlife officers. I'd like to know how many new staff positions that actually creates. With those funds where are we going to allocate these positions? Where in the province will we find them located?

Also on fisheries, the fisheries revitalization program, as I understand it, is entering its final year. How will the \$1 million in new funds allocated to the program this year be spent? Can you provide a status on the program today?

I'd also like to touch briefly on the Alberta biodiversity monitoring program, Mr. Chairman. We had a question earlier in the House about that. Not just why is it important, but how will the \$4.2 million associated with the biodiversity monitoring program be used? What will the program look like, and why is implementing this program important to Albertans?

Finally, Mr. Chairman, in closing, just a general ministry question. I note that the ministry received \$6.4 million to cover cost escalations. I wonder if the minister could expand on exactly how that money will be allocated this year.

4:30

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I just want to congratulate the minister and his staff again, and I want to thank the minister for the excellent answer provided in question period today to a member opposite who asserted that he knows the difference between a cut pile and a log pile. As a professional forester I don't know the difference in that, but apparently the member does. I suspect he was referring to a slash pile. The minister pointed out that he probably wouldn't recognize a sustainable forestry practice if it hit him in the head, and I suspect he's not very far from the mark there.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to comment, and I look forward to the answers.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Peace River for those questions. I'll be happy to try to answer them.

The first question concerned the issue that I tried to address in my opening statements. The question was: why did Sustainable Resource Development receive an extra \$50 million in emergency funding for the mountain pine beetle and also an additional \$2.6 million in base funding for fighting the pine beetle, and why is this money coming from two separate sources, or two different funds? The explanation for this is the difference between actually having a team ready to go fight the pine beetle and then actually going out and doing the pine beetle control. If you like, I could use a baseball analogy: the difference between having a team in the dugout and then sending the team out into the field.

The increase in base funding of \$2.6 million is to have a team that's equipped, trained, dressed, and in the dugout ready to go out. In our case, dealing with this, it would include training, equipment, communications, and other types of expenses. The \$50 million is for actually coming out of the dugout onto the field and, instead of playing the game, fighting the pine beetle. This, of course, is an expensive operation partly because of the extent of the pine beetle spread, particularly in northwestern Alberta, and the nature of the preventative measures that we're taking involving removal often of single trees or smaller stands. This is not an economical way to remove trees, but we're doing so to stop the spread of pine beetle but also do so in a way that respects the environment and the integrity of the existing forest to the maximum extent possible. So that's where the \$50 million in emergency funding is dedicated to.

The follow-up question on that was: what's handled under base budget, and what's handled under emergency funding? I think I've just answered that in the response I've given.

The final related question to that was: why was it necessary to declare a pine beetle emergency now? Last year an emergency wasn't declared until sometime into the budget year. The difference, of course, is we know that currently we're in the midst of the pine beetle infestation, and we know that, in fact, with the detection and removal of infected trees that we've been doing all winter, it's critical we continue that effort in April, May, June, and July. We want to remove as many infected trees as possible before the migration, or the flight, of pine beetle, which usually takes place in late July or early August, which will put at risk or threaten to further extend the infestation. So we knew in advance that we had extensive and expensive work that needed to be continued the minute we started budget year 2007-2008, on April 1, and thus our pre-emptive request for the \$50 million in emergency funding.

The next question from the hon. Member for Peace River concerned the \$45.2 million increase in our budget for fighting wildfires. This, again, requires a little bit of explanation. If I can use the baseball team analogy again: having the team in the dugout ready to go as opposed to putting the team on the field. In the past we had a very small budget for having our firefighting team ready to go in terms of equipment, training, communications, and so forth and covered much of that expense later in the year when we began to ask for supplementary funding, usually from the emergency fund, once the firefighting had actually begun. Of course, you never know from year to year whether it's going to be a bad year in terms of many fires and a great deal of expense or a good year with fewer fires and similarly fewer expenses. So that's how we did it in the past.

Both our own internal financial analyst and also, I believe, the Auditor General pointed out that we knew that our base operating cost for being ready to fight, being prepared to go out and fight fires, was pretty constant from year to year, so that amount should be moved into our permanent base budget. That's what we did, and that's what the \$45.2 million represents. This represents a permanent increase in our base budget. It covers things such as training, securing aircraft, hiring seasonal staff who assist some of our firefighters, opening our tanker bases and our lookout towers, and all of the other activities that are related to fighting fire. We have to do those every year, so now we're putting them into our permanent budget. That's what the \$45.2 million increase addresses.

A supplementary question was: will any of that \$45 million be used to fight forest fires directly? Again, my previous answer was clear. The answer is no. This gets the team ready. It's our equipment, the training; we're ready to go. The actual fighting of the fire will be done from any emergency funding that's requested once the fire season begins.

The hon. member's next question concerned the land-use framework and why a land-use framework is necessary here in Alberta and a couple of follow-up questions. I don't want to use up the rest of the afternoon talking about the land-use framework. Suffice it to say that Alberta has reached a tipping point in both population growth and industrial activity. In the last 25 years our population has grown by 50 per cent, from 2.3 million to 3.4 million people. If we continue to grow at that same rate, which most people predict we will, perhaps even faster, it means we'll be over 5 million people in the next 25 years. A high percentage of that population of over 5 million people will be concentrated in the highway 2 corridor from the Edmonton area down to Calgary and now, actually, quite a ways beyond Calgary, into High River and Nanton and Claresholm and down to Fort Macleod.

What we're seeing both in terms of increase in human population and an equally great, perhaps even greater, increase in industrial activity is more and more activity occurring on the land in Alberta.

One of the things that Sustainable Resource Development does is manage certainly Crown lands, and we have an interest in what takes place on private lands as well. What we see with this increase in population and increase in industrial activity is more and more competition between different types of users often on the very same piece of land and the experience that I had just 10 days ago on the May long weekend, that some of the members are familiar with, that involved trying to deal with the camping, some of the off-road vehicles that were using some of the beautiful river valleys in southern Alberta.

4:40

You have recreational users on a piece of land that's also under lease for grazing leases used by a number of the local cattle ranch operations. In those same areas you have a number of leases for oil and gas exploration. In addition to the off-road vehicle recreation types you also have other types of outdoorsmen that prefer to hike or use horseback and don't particularly like to be on the same trail as an ATV user going by. So you can see that when you have too many different types of users trying to use the same piece of land at the same time, everybody loses. It's a suboptimal result. So the question is: is now the time . . . [Dr. Morton's speaking time expired]

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Strang: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I've got a few that I would like to move forward on. I guess the first one is that the housing slowdown in the United States has had a serious impact on Alberta's lumber mills. What is the department doing to help the forest industry develop a new market and new products for Alberta woods? What plans are in place to handle all the additional wood that will be coming in because of the harvest to head off the mountain pine beetle?

In March and April of this year Sustainable Resource Development had a public consultation on designating three portions of public land in the Yellowhead corridor for potential commercial tourism and recreation development. What are the outcomes of these consultations, and what is the plan for the corridor?

Then I would like to refer to your budget for 2007, the business plan, and move to page 299. I look at the aspect of 1.8: "Offer long-term, secure public rangeland grazing that promotes sustainable resource management." I'm just wondering as I look under that at your performance measures, and I see where you have actual for 1(b) on the public rangeland allocation for your AUMs. I notice that your targets are decreasing as they're going out from your actual of 2005-06. If I could get an answer on that.

Then if you go to page 301, what I'm looking at there is under your goal 3, which will sort of back up on my other one too: "Support efforts to increase the knowledge and research capacity required to expand opportunities for value-added processing." I honestly think that that word, you know, is really overused, and I think we've got to come up with something different so that we can get people moving on that. What I'd like to see on that is with the forest management agreements that we have. Of course, you were asked a question today in the House about West Fraser. He was talking about a 20-year forest management agreement. My understanding is that this is a rotating agreement, that we're really viewing a 10-year and moving it on so that we have a continuous, perpetual 20-year. I'm just wondering why the holdup on that one.

Then if we go to your goal 4 on page 302, I guess what I'm wondering about is under 4.3: "Develop and implement fish and

wildlife management plans and species-at-risk initiatives." As you realize, we've had the species at risk going on now since about 1998, and the committee has done a lot of work on that, and now we have the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater looking after that area. I'm just wondering: are we looking at moving any more funding to that area so that we can start working on recovery plans? That is a big thing that we have to look at now so that we can move forward to meet our commitments with the aspect of what the federal government has for SARA. If we're not doing it properly, then they're going to be after us.

To also move on and question the aspect of our Wildlife Act. As you realize, there are some species that are not covered under that. I'm just wondering if we're going to move forward this year to possibly come up with an endangered species act or a species act.

I guess one of my last questions. The government's response to the Auditor General in the 2005-06 annual report mentioned that SRD has developed an appropriate timing reforestation performance report to confirm the effectiveness of the regulatory activities. What are included in these reports? When are we going to expect to see the results of them? The Auditor General also recommended SRD strengthen its monitoring and enforcement of reforestation activities. How does the department improve the efficiency and effectiveness of these activities?

I guess, you know, some of the off-road use and users in the park – I must compliment your staff in West Yellowhead. They've cleared up an aspect on this random camping in nondesignated areas in the public, but it's still becoming quite a problem in some of the areas. We're lucky now that we still have fairly moist ground in our forests, but as we move forward, we've got to make sure that we keep moving on that so that we have the people understand. I know that we have lots of forest recreation areas, and I know that the West Fraser has worked well with that, and then we've also worked in co-operation with the aboriginal groups to maintain these. I think Fox Creek Development has done an excellent job on that.

I'll leave it at that so some of the other members can speak. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll begin by trying to answer the question that I'm sure is near and dear to the heart of the hon. member, about the public consultations dealing with the public lands in the Yellowhead corridor and their potential for commercial tourism and recreation development. I believe the question was: what is the outcome of these consultations, and what is planned for this corridor? The hon. member was correct: in March and April SRD did consult with Albertans to identify the suitability of the three proposed areas of public land along the Yellowhead corridor west of Hinton for possible recreation and tourism development.

The initiative plans for the orderly planning and development and use of public land in the region. The process integrates existing land and resource commitments with future recreation and tourism development and lays a foundation for future economic growth and manages that growth. The results of the public consultation are not yet complete. A final report is expected at the end of June. Following the final consultants' report, the Alberta government will provide direction on how, where, and what types of development could proceed. This direction will help determine what can and should be done on the land to ensure the highest value use of that land. Any outcomes will be consistent with the policies and approaches developed through the province's overarching and evolving land-use framework.

The second question that I'll address from the hon. member had to do with what plans are in place for handling the additional wood

that will be coming in because of the harvesting of trees. The question may be have been to head off pine beetle but also, depending upon the extent of the pine beetle infestation, if we're left, as B.C. has been left, with a large amount of dead pine beetle wood. The existing capacity of the forestry industry in Alberta could handle, I believe, another 10 or 20 per cent increase in supply over the next coming years. So within that level we have the capacity to handle it, but if we're unsuccessful in stopping the spread of the pine beetle into our lodgepole pine forest, we could be facing the situation that B.C. is in, having a large amount of beetle-killed wood.

4:50

Fortunately, we've worked closely with British Columbia and their forestry officials and also with the industries there, and they are developing plans to deal with beetle-killed wood or wood associated with fighting the beetle. Those plans range from new products, new approaches, biorefineries, cogeneration, wood pellets, that type of thing. We had a meeting just recently with an entrepreneur that's proposing to use that pine wood to provide the types of drilling mats that are good for environmental purposes for drilling rigs, so there are a number of possibilities there.

There was a question on reforestation and following the Auditor General's recommendation there. We have acted on that Auditor General's report. We have a unit within forests called forest operations monitoring program, or FOMP, which has been given responsibility and additional resources to deal with this. I think it's worth stating for the record that there was never any question that reforestation was being done. The question was: was it being adequately counted and verified? We know that our practice is that approximately four trees are regenerated in Alberta for every one that's cut. We replant one or two and through scarification and other techniques induce seeds for another two. So we have a high degree of and a legal requirement as part of our forestry management agreements to do reforestation.

I'd like to state for the record that the forestry companies, it's in their self-interest to comply with this requirement to the maximum extent possible because their value as a company depends upon not a 20- or 40-year wood supply but a 100-year wood supply. So I'm confident that the new plans, the new procedures put in place in response to the Auditor General's query will give the kind of tracking and records that the hon. member is looking for.

The question about off-road vehicle use and some of the things that occurred over the May long weekend. The hon. member is correct that my predecessors in Sustainable Resource Development have had a number of successes in implementing access plans, or some of them are often called forest land use zones. The acronym is FLUZ. We've had a number of successful efforts already in place in which the recreational needs of Albertans have been managed and directed in a way that allows them to use off-road vehicles on public lands in a way that they don't harm one another or compete in a negative way with other users.

Unfortunately, there are certain areas of the province that have become increasingly popular with this type of recreation, in particular the area that's south of the Big Horn, south of the Ghost-Waiparous area but north of the Crowsnest Pass. In those areas we have some access management plans, but in the Porcupine Hills and in Ranchlands, some of the MDs in that area south of Calgary, we have not had proper access management. The result was some of the destruction of public property, in particular wetlands, that we witnessed on the May long weekend.

I'm happy to tell the hon. member that I've had several meetings already with my staff to talk about both short-term, intermediate-

term, and long-term procedures that we can take to ensure that that type of destruction does not occur in the coming months on some of the long weekends when Albertans do go up to the foothills in the mountains for recreation. We will put in a plan, and I'm confident that we can replicate the success that we've had in other areas, particularly in the north, referred to by the hon. member, that we'll be able to replicate that success in the south.

I do want to say that our success in this effort will depend upon the co-operation of the off-road vehicle user groups. Some of the media, some of the letters to the editors have been suggesting that they're the problem. Some of their irresponsible members, obviously, have been a problem, but certainly in the areas where we've had success in other parts of the province, the voluntary efforts of these off-road vehicle groups are the key to the success because they're often the ones that dedicate the time and energy, their weekends, to go out and help build the paths, maintain the paths and bridges that are critical to have environmentally acceptable off-road vehicle use.

There's a question again about what the department is doing to help the forest industry develop new markets and new products from Alberta's wood. SRD has worked in the past and is continuing to work closely with the Alberta Forest Products Association. Last year a review was initiated, a competitiveness review, that addressed the global challenges to the industry profitability and the challenges but also the opportunities that the current depressed market poses to the Alberta forestry industry. I've seen a draft version of this report but not yet the final report, but there are a number of constructive recommendations for government to consider, and I will be discussing those with the Alberta Forest Products Association.

On the question of the endangered species program, obviously . . . [Dr. Morton's speaking time expired] Well, not so obviously. We'll get the rest of the answers to his questions to him.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne in the remaining moments.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do expect that you won't have enough time to answer the questions, so I would accept your answers in writing.

A few issues. Land compensation and the inability of transmission companies to provide power lines throughout Alberta are getting more and more difficult. I think a lot of the issue is that the land compensation group under your department has not paid enough attention to today's market values and isn't aggressively making sure that our landowners are being compensated adequately.

A second issue that I'd like to talk to you about is that landowners in my constituency have entered into long-term contracts with Al-Pac to grow trees. If you do support that choice, if you would push through in cabinet with cabinet colleagues from Service Alberta and Agriculture to support an order in council to give full choice to Alberta landowners and farmers.

The next issue is that burnt-over areas throughout the north, especially in my constituency and in West Yellowhead and constituencies further north, have had major forest fires, and there are no trees growing in those areas. Those plantations were free to grow. They were at a stage that they were the responsibility of the Crown. I'm quite disappointed that we haven't addressed to date the replanting of those areas. Is there enough money in this budget to address those concerns?

5:00

The next issue I would like to talk to you about is the fish and wildlife officers. In Whitecourt-St. Anne they've been served well

by officers in the Whitecourt office and the Evansburg office. Outside my constituency the Stony Plain office has provided great service to the east end of Whitecourt-St. Anne. But in previous years I've had to go to the minister to ensure, come January, February, March, that patrol trucks had fuel, that members had the opportunity to respond to concerns that were raised by the public, you know. They'd have to be paid overtime. I want to make sure that you have in this budget adequate resources that come January, February your staff aren't telling the people that serve my constituents that there's no money to do patrol and provide fuel and basic needs in their units. This happened, Minister, and it's a real disgrace that this has happened.

Maybe I'll leave it at that and give you an opportunity to comment on those issues.

The Chair: The time for this order of business has elapsed, so perhaps the minister could respond to the member in writing.

Environment

The Chair: I will invite the hon. Minister of Environment to provide us with his opening comments.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to be back before this committee once again. In keeping with the fact that this is not the first time that we've been here, I think I'll keep my introductory comments to a minimum.

Before I begin, I would like to take an opportunity for any of the members present who have not had a chance to meet some of the key staff in Alberta Environment to introduce to you, Mr. Chairman, and through you to all members that are present the deputy minister, Peter Watson, to my immediate left. Beside him is the assistant deputy minister of environmental stewardship, Bev Yee, and to her left is the assistant deputy minister of environmental assurance, John Knapp.

In addition to these two assistant deputies that we have with us today, members are also I think quite familiar with two others, one being Jim Ellis, the assistant deputy minister who's responsible for the management of the operational side of the department, and then Jay Nagendran, who is assistant deputy minister of our newly formed oil sands unit. I'll probably have an opportunity to talk a little bit about the oil sands unit as we proceed into the afternoon.

I want to simply state for the record that Alberta Environment received about a \$9.8 million increase in this fiscal year, bringing our department total budget to \$164 million. This budget will help to ensure that Alberta is an environmental leader and able to respond to increasingly complex environmental challenges and risks. Alberta Environment staff work every day to safeguard public and environmental health, promote environmental stewardship, and enhance our regulatory systems and environmental infrastructure.

Mr. Chairman, I'm confident that the Alberta Environment budget is well resourced and will meet our environmental priorities. This year, as I mentioned, we will be adding 30 new FTEs to our staffing, of which 30 are committed to the oil sands environment management, and that will bring the total complement in Alberta Environment to 142 staff.

We will use the increased budget dollars to support the development of the implementation of Alberta's priorities for Alberta Environment; for example, the lion's share of the increase, some \$7 million, will help us manage growth pressures related to cumulative environmental effects and the development of the oil sands.

With that, I will resume my seat and look forward to questions from members.

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. First, I'd like to start off and thank the minister for always having such a co-operative department to look after us MLAs in the field. What I'd like you to do is turn to your 2007-08 government estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund. On page 142 I'd like to talk about your expenditures, where you've got 2.04, climate change. As you go across there, I'm just wondering, being that we're coming out with your famous Bill 3 – and I look at what transpired in 2005-06, where you had almost \$5 million, and for your estimate for 2007-08 you're only looking at almost \$3.7 million – why we're moving down on that when we're moving into an area now where we're possibly going to need quite a bit more.

Then, of course, our Water for Life is moving along. As you know, the saying goes that whisky's for drinking and water's for fighting. I'm pleased to see that you've moved up on that aspect.

But if you move back to the business plan and you go to pages 148 and 149, what I'm looking at is your performance measures. You're looking at the different ones, especially on page 149, where you're looking at your quality of water, "measures the number of water quality incidents." You're looking at quite a decrease as you go out in your out-years. I guess I'd just like an explanation on how you arrived at that.

With the other aspect, as you know, a lot of different areas with the water and with the drinking water safety indicators, I see that you're moving up on those different percentages to meet the standards.

But I guess going back to the Water for Life in your department budget, I would like you to just give us an update on when you perceive to move forward on that. You look at almost \$6 million over the 2005-06 actual budget to your estimate of 2007-08. If you'd give me sort of an insight on that, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Thank you.

Mr. Renner: The questions were coming rapid fire, and I'm not sure if we managed to write them down fast enough, but I'll do my very best. The issue on the reduction in climate change funding has to do with the fact that administratively there are not the same requirements now as what we have seen in the past because with the implementation of Bill 3 a lot of the work is done. We now move into the management side of the equation. We're now into compliance and enforcement as opposed to some of the policy development. So that would largely explain the difference in funding there.

With the current consultation on climate change I would expect that it's fair to say that some of the expenditures that are involved with that consultation won't necessarily show up in the climate change line as much as they will show up in some of the other areas that we have with respect to education and communications. It's difficult to compare from one year to the next specifically on something like climate change, which tends to have impact across the entire department.

5:10

The question on performance measures and water quality is an interesting one. When you talk about setting standards for water quality, there are a number of factors that can influence those standards that are entirely out of the control of government, and that has to do with turbidity and those kinds of issues that are affected by stream flow. When you look at the outcomes that we have with water standards, there's a huge amount of impact that is based upon whether you're going through an extended drought period – so you've got reduced flow levels – or whether the reality is that you've

got high rain events. As all Albertans appreciate, over the last few years there's been a lot of volatility between drought and flood, and that volatility, then, creates the impression that we're setting targets that are below what we've actually achieved. That's because those targets are realistic based upon what we expect to have from the point of view of drought versus rainfall, and it's not necessarily that we are setting our targets exceedingly low so that we can be absolutely sure that we achieve them but, rather, that we're setting the targets based upon what we see as the long-term average from a weather perspective.

With the standards on drinking water it tends to be the opposite. As drinking water standards and policies are increased over time, as new technologies are introduced, then the measurement tends to be skewed the other way. It looks like we're going backwards. When we say in one particular year that 99 per cent of facilities were in compliance and then three years down the road we all of a sudden are forecasting that only 70 per cent will be in compliance, that's not because they've downgraded or gone backwards. It's because we've been increasing the standards. So we have to invest in the infrastructure to ensure that that investment in the infrastructure is compatible with the increase in standards that we set.

The decrease in long-term funding for Water for Life is a reflection of the removal of one-time funding for groundwater mapping that came from the energy innovation fund. During the renewal of the Water for Life we'll be examining what else is needed with respect to groundwater mapping. Again, it is sometimes difficult to do a comparison from year to year because there are from time to time one-time or time-specific injections of funding where we may get funded for one or two or three years.

Finally, the issue with respect to the oil sands. The \$6 million increase is a direct result of the creation of the oil sands unit. That's the very short and simple explanation of why there is that \$6 million change in the area that the member referred to.

I think that answers the questions, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to talk a bit about the emissions from coal-fired plants and what money you've set aside in your budget to help get the targets that Environment has set for coal-fired plants on mercury reduction. I think that this was a pretty hot topic a couple of years back. We've required the coal-fired generators to remove a major percentage of the mercury that's emitted into the air. I think it was 2010 – I could be corrected – that they have to comply with the new regulations, and I know that there's presently a lot of research and a lot of work being done by your department folks and the Alberta Research Council and our power generators.

You know, just recently you and I heard a presentation from a group calling themselves Ikon saying that in one swoop they could remove all the emissions and inject them downhole to use as a new solvent to enhance oil recovery on oil fields that have gone dry or at least where the production has dramatically been reduced. So has there been some new thinking with the targets set by your department on mercury? Is there any money in your budget to look at this opportunity with this Ikon group and others that want to recover other emissions from the stacks of our coal-fired power plants?

Mr. Renner: The member brings an interesting point up for discussion when he asks: is there anything in our budget to deal with reducing mercury emissions? The answer is: yes, there is. It would fall on page 142, 2.0.5, innovation and policy. That being said, that

is funding that is within the department to assist us in funding the team that we would have within Alberta Environment working with industry to develop the policy to ensure that the regulation that is developed is doable, is compatible, and is something that can readily be accomplished. With the input and a great deal of work within Alberta Environment in conjunction with industry policy has been established that will require reduction of 70 per cent of mercury emissions by 2010. Again, interestingly enough, Alberta leads the country. It's the only jurisdiction in the country that has put in place a plan to reduce mercury emissions. It's something that we worked very diligently on with industry, and we feel that we have a strategy that is truly going to get us there.

I have to point out that in the preamble to the member's question or in the direct portion of the question of if there is something to assist industry, that, no, there is not. We don't pay subsidies to industry. We don't invest in industry to encourage development. What we do is assist industry and from time to time, perhaps, invest in some research and technology that will then be applied on an industry-wide basis. We don't invest in specific plans to assist them to meet the, kind of, objectives.

The second part of the question with respect to sequestration is an interesting one. I'm not so sure where we are at with respect to sequestration as it relates to coal-fired power and particularly for enhanced oil and gas recovery. My understanding is that the type of CO₂ that is used for enhanced oil and gas recovery is very pure. It's the kind of CO₂ that would come as a result of production, as a by-product of producing something else, so it's pure CO₂. Anything other than pure CO₂, at least as the technology exists today, doesn't work in the same way for enhanced oil and gas recovery. It doesn't in fact work as a catalyst to remove additional oil and gas. It tends to actually work the opposite way. It starts to work like a glue, and it makes it even more difficult to extract. We have to be careful that we don't mix the two together. If we are able to sequester and capture pure CO₂, there's a tremendous amount of opportunity.

5:20

That being said, there is also a recognition that at some point in time if we're going to continue to produce CO₂ in flue gases of one kind or another, then we're also looking at ways that we can actually capture and sequester that flue gas. But that would be more as a waste stream. That would be treating CO₂ and flue gases as waste products, and in a similar manner as we regulate solid waste disposal, we would then also be in a situation where we would be regulating a gaseous waste disposal. I think that there is opportunity, and there is work to be done in that area, but I caution the member about thinking that there's going to be a huge opportunity to use flue gases in enhanced oil and gas recovery because the two are probably not compatible.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I just have a couple of brief comments and a couple of questions. First of all, I'd like to thank the minister and his staff for assisting me in preparing Bill 33, Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act. They've been very helpful with information and working that through the system. I think the regional water systems that are being built around rural Alberta right now are very, very important, extremely important to small communities for the continued development and strength of rural Alberta.

A couple of quick questions on the new CO₂ regulations. Do you have a cost of complying with these new regulations both within the department and within industry? Do you have the resources within

the department to monitor these regulations? Are there avenues to co-operate with these regulations with the federal government? They're coming out with their own regulations. Are there ways to co-operate with them and maybe build synergies? I'm wondering also if you are at the same time working with other departments such as Energy to ensure the co-ordination of your efforts so that there's not duplication or wastage there.

I'll just wait for your answers. Thanks.

The Chair: Hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, first of all, I want to acknowledge the kind words that the member had for our staff and the assistance on Bill 33. This is something that is critical to the village of Ferintosh, and I want to applaud this member for taking this bill on. I understand that he's been very successful in working with the opposition to explain the necessity of this bill to ensure that we're able to deal with it in as timely a manner as possible during this session of the House.

The CO₂ regulations contained in Bill 3. Interesting question on what is the cost of compliance both for industry and Alberta Environment. From an industry perspective the cost of compliance will be dependent upon how they choose to comply because, remember, there are three ways that they can comply. One is by investing in technology and actually reducing the intensity of CO₂. That varies from facility to facility, and I couldn't venture a guess on what that might be.

The second is by providing evidence of offsets within Alberta. Again, that will be dependent upon what kind of negotiations take place between the large industrial emitter and the partner that they are able to reach a financial arrangement with. We expect, at least initially, over the first six months to perhaps 18 months, that the majority of the compliance will come in the form of contributions to the technology fund, at \$15 a tonne. Our best estimates indicate that if all compliance were to take place in the form of investment into the technology fund, it would amount to about \$175 million a year in industry cost. That could change as new players come into the field, but it's a good ballpark figure.

The cost of compliance within the department is somewhat surprisingly negligible. Remember, Mr. Chairman, that we have been collecting this information from these industrial emitters now for four years, and Bill 3 is really just an amendment to an existing piece of legislation that has had mandatory reporting requirements. Really, the only additional cost to the department is that now that mandatory reporting is also going to include a reconciliation between what the actual production of CO₂ is and what the target is and then a determination whether or not the compliance that's chosen by the emitter is in fact reasonable under the terms of the regulations.

We don't anticipate that there will be a significant additional cost within the department. We're anticipating being able to deal with that under the existing budget. The overall cost of compliance across the board within our budget is \$11 million, but that's not just restricted to Bill 3. That's for all costs of compliance for all environmental legislation, and we don't anticipate any significant cost above that.

With respect to the co-ordination of our climate change legislation with Energy and, to some extent, SRD and, frankly, a number of other departments across government, we have been working as closely as we can with our key partners, being Energy and SRD and, where necessary, other ministries, to ensure that everybody is in

clear understanding of what everyone else is doing and that we don't end up having duplications.

Along the line of duplications and working together, obviously the biggest challenge is working with our federal counterparts to ensure that we don't have overlap and duplication between the province and the federal government. This is an area of jurisdiction that is not specifically defined in the BNA Act. It is a joint jurisdiction officially. We feel that because our legislation is up and running, or will be up and running in a very short time, there is a very strong constitutional argument that our legislation should be seen by Ottawa as having some form of equivalency. That will be the focus of much discussion.

Frankly, we've had positive comments from federal officials indicating that they will do what they can to work with us to ensure that we are able to harmonize both provincial and federal legislation and ensure that the end user, the industrial emitter that is subject to the regulation, isn't subject to duplicate and conflicting regimes from both the province and Ottawa at the same time.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My issue is water. I want to first make some comments regarding the situation in my constituency, and then I want the minister to help me to understand the role of government in making sure that Albertans have water.

In the last three months since session went in, the Balzac issue has come up repeatedly in the House. It's an interesting issue, Mr. Chairman, because normally we wouldn't hear about agreements between municipalities in this Assembly. But there was a political edge to many of the comments that have been made in this House about the Balzac area because there's a racetrack involved in it. There's no mention of the veterinarian connection for the University of Calgary. There's no mention of Olds College. We tend not to talk about all of the other businesses that would be developed around this. It's not actually our role to comment on whether it's a great project or not a great project. That was something that was done between the developer and the municipal district. The issue for them was accessing water.

5:30

For the record, a number of years ago the government of Alberta invested about \$30 million into the Kneehill water pipeline. I know that as an MLA, sir, you're familiar with that pipeline. In fact, it serves a portion of your riding as well as mine. I know that it went through Linden and Acme, came on down through Beiseker, Irricana, and ends there.

The truth of the matter is that the Kneehill water commission is in trouble. They do not have the ability to put enough water through that line to do two things: one, to keep the water quality high and, two, to keep the rates low. So the Kneehill water commission was also involved in this issue and required perhaps some assistance, or they will. I'm sure they will be back asking for help because without the Balzac end of their pipeline, they can neither reduce their rates for places like Irricana and Beiseker, where the water rates are astronomical, nor can they keep the quality of the water high. Because the pipeline is long, it takes so long for that little amount of water to go through that it's actually picking up contaminants from the pipeline now. That's on the one side.

The second side of this issue is that Drumheller had indicated that they didn't wish to proceed with the deal. So, in effect, the MD of Rocky View and Drumheller have no agreement, and there's no more issue about water coming from Red Deer to the Balzac area.

There is a second component to this, Mr. Minister, and that's that the Western irrigation district has a licence dating back to 1903. They're looking at transferring a portion of that 1903 water licence to the MD of Rocky View so that the MD of Rocky View could in fact have water for some of the MD area.

The reason I raise all of this, Mr. Minister, is because I need to know what our government's view is of water for Albertans. Are we of the mindset that if a river is called the Red Deer River, somehow the community of Red Deer gets to determine what happens to the water in the Red Deer River? Or, conversely, if the water is from the Bow River or the Elbow, that are connected somehow to Calgary, Calgary then gets to determine not only what gets built around their area but, in fact, who gets water from those areas.

So when MD of Rocky View and the Western irrigation district proceed farther down the path on their potential transfer of water, I'd like to know from your perspective, Minister, what happens when it hits the director's desk in your department. I know that he's independent and has the ability to make intelligent and rational decisions, but are we going to play politics with this again? Is this going to become yet another political football for somebody to indicate that the MD of Rocky View should not be allowed access to water? It's not just the racetrack or the Balzac complex that's in question here. There are many other developments inside the MD of Rocky View that require water. The people who are purchasing land and planning developments, trying to build affordable housing, and doing other things need to know what their chances are of ever accessing water in this province. While this is a glaring issue in my constituency, it's an issue that I believe, Minister, will start to ripple around this province.

What are we going to do to ensure that Albertans – not just people from the Red Deer River basin or the Calgary area but Albertans – have access to quality water at affordable rates in this province? I'd really appreciate your thoughts on that.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Renner: I am pleased to comment on some of the issues raised by the member, but I do so noting that she is quite right, that this issue is and has been and probably always will be clouded by politics. So I want to issue a disclaimer right off the top. I'm not going to get into the political debate. My job as Minister of Environment is to make decisions that are sound decisions based on sound management practices of water to ensure that Albertans do have access to water. The individual ways that they share that water tends to get a little bit more political, and I'm not going to go down that road. But I am certainly well aware that the member has an issue within the MD of Rocky View that is ongoing and serious and needs to be addressed.

First of all, in my previous capacity as minister of municipal affairs, who was responsible for water commissions and financing and the creation of water commissions, I am knowledgeable, or at least I was knowledgeable, about what the issue at Kneehill water commission was up until six months ago, when I left municipal affairs. The member is absolutely right. There are concerns that that water commission may have some viability problems because the cost of delivering the water is to such an extent that it's not economically viable for customers to actually buy that water. Part of that is due to lower-than-anticipated demand, and part of it is, frankly, due

to the cost overruns that resulted from some construction delays. So it's compounded. Both of those factors came together that are creating some real problems for that system.

As Environment minister my role is to ensure that the operation of that system as it contains drinking water is done in a manner that does not pose any risk to human health as a result of, perhaps, low flows in the system, those kinds of things, and we continue to monitor. I know that there have been opportunities explored to increase the demand for water on that system, and I hope that the commission and the town of Drumheller are able to explore some other opportunities, one of which was the Balzac application.

Now, I want to talk about the Balzac application from the point of view of the Minister of Environment because, as the member points out, we do not view the decisions that we make at the director's level or at any level as being down to choosing and picking winners and losers and saying: well, you're more worthy than you are; therefore, applicant A gets the water, and applicant B doesn't. We make our decisions based upon technical reasons and policy reasons.

Government sets policy, and one of the policy decisions that we made and we have been enforcing is that we don't allow for an interbasin transfer unless it's approved by the Legislature. That's why we have before us a bill, Bill 33, that will allow for a waterline to be extended into the village of Ferintosh, because it's going to be moving water from the North Saskatchewan into the South Saskatchewan River basin.

We have, on the other hand, allowed – and there are numerous examples – intrabasin transfers, where there is water that originates in the Red Deer River and ends up in the South Saskatchewan or the Oldman or the Bow River basin, because the Red Deer, the Bow, the Oldman, the Elbow are all connected and all comprise part of the greater South Saskatchewan River basin. So from a technical perspective it makes no difference, and from a policy perspective it makes no difference where this water comes from. What we also know is that because the Oldman, the Bow, and the South Saskatchewan are now fully allocated, there are no additional new allocations coming out of that portion of the South Saskatchewan River basin. The only area that has further allocation of water is the Oldman. That is what the application was all about. That is what the director was being asked to analyze.

5:40

Part of the process in dealing with any application is a public advertisement. Any individuals who wish to comment are encouraged to do so, and those that have direct involvement can voice their concerns. The director is then bound to take into consideration any negative impact that the issuing of a new licence may have on existing licence holders and on the viability of the river itself. That is the sole determination that would be used to make a decision. The fact that politics got involved and that there have been many things said about this particular application are beyond my control as minister and, frankly, are not part of the decision-making process.

The director has to be assured of a number of things: most importantly that it is within the capability of the river to be able to deal with the application and, almost as importantly, that the applicant has got the capability to draw the water from the system. In this case, as was correctly pointed out by the member, the original proposal was that Drumheller would draw the water and supply the water. Drumheller has now pulled out of their part of the agreement, so it pretty much makes any decision that the department would make to be moot at this point because the applicant has no way to draw the water from the river anyway. In any case the MD has asked that we defer any further decision on this project until further notice. We understand that that means at least October, perhaps

indefinitely. That's the way we've treated it. We're simply not dealing with it anymore.

There are opportunities within the Bow River basin, within the South Saskatchewan River basins, for existing licence holders to sell or trade or make agreements for others to use water on that licence. Transfers of licence follow a very, very similar process to the issuance of new licences. Like every other decision that Alberta Environment makes, they're subject to appeal; they're subject to public notice. Should someone make an application for a water transfer licence, we will advertise in the usual manner. We will hear from any parties who wish to voice objections or concerns, and the director will be making a decision based upon what is within the existing policy of government and within the scientific well-being of the water system.

I can't really say a whole lot more other than the fact that from Environment's perspective our first duty is to protect the environment. Above all that is where we see our role in all of this. How Albertans choose to share water: the role we play is to facilitate that sharing without compromising the river. We will do everything that we can to facilitate sharing, but we don't feel it's our role to pick winners and losers and direct who should share with who. We feel our role is to facilitate that sharing. That's what we do.

The Chair: I will now invite the officials to retire from the Assembly so the committee can rise and report.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(a) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Energy, Infrastructure and Transportation, Sustainable Resource Development, and Environment relating to the 2007-08 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 7 p.m., at which time we reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:47 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, May 30, 2007

7:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/30

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2007-08**

The Deputy Chair: The committee has before it estimates for four departments today: Agriculture and Food; Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture; International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations; and Justice and Attorney General. We shall allocate 45 minutes per ministry. It's a private members' day, so the 45 minutes will be spent back and forth. Should there be no further speakers, then we will move on to the next ministry.

Agriculture and Food

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, would you please introduce your guests first.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, good evening, Mr. Chairman. I'm certainly pleased to have another opportunity to speak about the 2007-2008 Agriculture and Food budget and the strategic investments that we're making this year. Agriculture is a priority for this government, and it's been my honour to serve as the Minister of Agriculture and Food for the past five months.

Our ministry demonstrates a real commitment and a passion for the industry, and I'm proud every time I meet a new member of the Agriculture and Food team. They're not only knowledgeable and professional, but they are clearly passionate as well. As a group they are very committed to ensuring that Alberta's agriculture and food industry grows and thrives.

Mr. Chairman, with me today are a few of these dedicated individuals to help bring you information on this budget and the important work of our ministry. They are my deputy Rory Campbell, AFSC president and managing director Brad Klak, assistant deputy minister Faye Rault, and senior financial officer Jim Carter.

Agriculture has been an important part of Alberta's history and remains a cornerstone of this province. It is a big part of the economic foundation of Alberta and the heart of our rural communities. To put the industry's contribution into perspective, we are the second largest agricultural producing province in Canada. Alberta had \$7.81 billion in farm cash receipts in 2006. The \$9.6 billion food and beverage industry generates 27,000 jobs in Alberta. Also, in 2006 our agricultural and food industry generated \$5.8 billion in international exports, and that's roughly one-fifth of the nation's agrifood exports.

Like other Alberta sectors the agriculture and food industry is growing in size and scope and holds even greater potential for the future. Our current business plan takes into consideration the challenges facing our industry today and outlines how we're working with the industry to take advantage of tomorrow's opportunities.

Our current goals, core business, and strategies support the Premier's government-wide priorities. Our objectives line up with these priorities, and in particular our programs are designed to manage growth, build a stronger Alberta, and improve our quality of life. We are strategically linked to the government of Alberta business plan. The agricultural growth strategy and the agri-

environmental strategy are two initiatives that contribute to the goal of having a prosperous economy and managing growth pressure.

Mr. Chairman, the Premier's mandates to me for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food speak directly to our ability to be competitive and sustainable. We are laying the groundwork for an institute that will help turn our concern for the environment into market opportunities. We already know that Alberta's farmers can earn a living in partnership with Mother Nature and are good stewards of the lands, so building on this is a natural fit.

Another Premier's mandate is to develop a transition program for agriculture to succeed within the boundaries of any World Trade Organization agreement. This work will be critical to competing on an international level. The success of our farmers also depends on ensuring that they have access to capital for their businesses. The Premier has asked that we work with our partners to ensure effective agricultural financial services.

Our strategic investments are having a positive impact on our competitive position. The total Agriculture and Food budget for 2007-2008 is \$1.026 billion. Overall, our funding commitments haven't changed dramatically, but I'd like to highlight some new funding. Mr. Chairman, \$1.1 million in a new workforce strategy funding. As one of the top four areas impacted by labour shortages, this is important funding for agriculture. We've also seen some increases in funding to ongoing programs, such as \$5.7 million directed to the Canada/Alberta farm water program, an increase of \$4.3 million.

I'd also like to point out that many of our programs are demand driven and tied to our statutory commitments. We are influenced by what happens outside our provincial borders. Our needs vary from year to year. That is why you will see some of the areas of funding go up or down slightly from year to year, as we target resources where and when they are needed.

As I'm sure you are aware, our farmers routinely face some hefty cost pressures, such as fuel and fertilizer prices, which are dictated by the world market. The Canadian agricultural income stabilization, or better known as the CAIS program, responds to these pressures. This budget provides \$3.63 million for CAIS to meet our commitments under this national program. As we continue to press for a better national program, Alberta has made necessary improvements, and compared to other provinces this government goes above and beyond to support our industry. For example, in 2006 and 2007 we invested approximately \$300 million for the Alberta margin enhancement and the Alberta reference margin initiative. That's support that only Alberta producers benefit from.

When our farmers were impacted by years of consecutive drought on top of low commodity prices, we were the only ones to take on a bigger share of the crop insurance premiums, and Alberta is the only province to offer what's called the spring price endorsement coverage to help manage their commodity risk. Overall, Alberta's farmers and producers are in a better financial position than previous years. Crops have started to rebound and commodity prices are increasing, two elements that are key to our ability to compete.

Mr. Chairman, further good news is that Budget 2007 aggressively addresses growth issues and industry pressures. However, actions must be realistic. We cannot exceed what is affordable and sustainable. Sustainability is a key theme that you will see run throughout our business plan: rural sustainability, industry sustainability, environmental sustainability. Agriculture operations are acutely aware of the need to protect our air, land, and water, the very future of this industry. We're finding solutions that result in rewards for both the environment and the economy. Sustainability means adapting to change, a theme that the Premier tapped into when he set out our priorities.

Staying competitive is a priority for industry sustainability. Just yesterday we took another step towards this mandate. I announced a competitive initiative and appointed a group of agriculture and business experts to identify ways we can enhance our competitive edge. New competitors and technologies, the growing demand for biofuels, market changes in developing countries, labour shortages: these are just some of the things influencing our competitive environment. We need to stay ahead of these changes. We need to determine the concrete actions we can take. The steering group is going to help us do just that. What is key to their work is the industry-wide approach I have asked them to take.

Each member of the steering group brings a wealth of knowledge and experience from different agricultural sectors, but they will apply that history toward identifying balanced solutions. Long-term profitability of the entire industry is the goal here, and we've dedicated \$450,000 to identify steps Alberta can take.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, while the clock is set for 45 minutes, we were hoping that we wouldn't be going beyond 10 minutes to allow more dialogue between the minister and members.

Mr. Groeneveld: Absolutely, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: So if you are about to wrap up, maybe you can wrap up, or you can finish off when you get a chance to answer the next question.

Mr. Groeneveld: Why don't I stop there?

The Deputy Chair: Very well.

7:10

Ms Haley: I wanted to first off, I guess, say that agriculture is one of my favourite departments. Minister, you have a great department with great staff that work very hard on behalf of Alberta farmers and ranchers, and I'd like to congratulate you and them for the work that you do.

I wanted to start my questions by asking if you could give us an indication of the recovery of the beef industry from the BSE crisis that we were in just a few years ago. If you could give me an indication of where we're at on our cattle numbers. How are we doing with packing plants, reducing our herd sizes, the aging cattle that we had as a result of the border closures? If you could give me an idea of where we're at with the United States right now with regard to some of the older cattle, above 24 months, above 32 months, that type of thing. How are we doing in our negotiation with them to have a completely open border again? Do you see that as a possibility, or is it still going to be more of a boxed beef kind of an issue? I am particularly interested in the packing industry because I know that they ramped up a little bit when our borders were closed. I'd like your impression of how they're doing, just anything on that side.

I also wanted to ask you about irrigation districts. I know that we have a program where we help with some money going out to the 17 irrigation districts on their canal rehabilitation. I'm particularly interested in the Western irrigation district and your impression of how they're doing, where they're at with their canal rehabilitation. You know, are they in any difficulties? What's just your impression of that, Minister?

On the Water for Life strategy, while not in your department, the irrigation districts could play a vital role in helping us with our Water for Life strategy. I'm wondering if you're working with other departments on sort of a cross-ministry issue, where we can make

sure that we're dealing with the irrigation districts for the betterment of all Albertans.

My third area of questions is under the WTO and the GATT system. Minister, I'd like to know where we're at right now. When is the next round of negotiations going to take place? Will the supply-side management issue be raised again, and if so, how do you see that one working its way through the WTO issues? If it goes the way people anticipate it will over a period of time, do you visualize our Alberta poultry industry, for example, as being able to withstand the pressure of an open-border position on the supply-side management?

The next one is under ag societies, Minister. I'd like your thoughts on how well they're working. Are they still fulfilling what their original intent was, which was to enhance the rural way of life, or are they more recreation facility focused, more working with urban communities? Has that shift occurred? Is that a permanent shift, do you see, as opposed to enhancing a rural way of life? If so, is this an appropriate use of that money, or should it be something more going through a CFEP issue, where we're dealing with 20 arenas or helping with swimming pools and skating rinks and that type of thing?

The second-last question is on the land-use management plan. I'd like your impressions of Agriculture's role in that, Minister, and how you see the land-use management plan actually affecting agriculture. Is there a way to work with industry and recreation and parkland and everything else so that we can have a sustainable agriculture industry in this province without worrying about somebody being offended by agriculture in some way, shape, or form?

My last question is on the horse-racing industry. I'd like your impression of that industry: how many horses there are in the province, what kind of volume of sales are being done. The last I heard, it was between \$300 million and \$400 million. I'd just like to get a sense of the economic impact of horse racing in the province as well as just the general horse industry. As somebody who raised quarter horses for a number of years, I know how much money we spent. Never made any but spent a lot. So I would just like a sense from you if that's actually something that your department thinks about, works with, or has any need to be involved in.

With that, Minister, I'll sit down. Thank you again for the opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I certainly knew that the hon. member would come up with some good questions, and I'll endeavour to answer them and give my opinion in some cases, I guess.

Where are we at post BSE? Of course, I don't have to tell anyone here that June 2003 was the mighty date that started this. At that time having the border shut a hundred per cent was to put it mildly, I guess, devastating to the beef industry. But not only the beef industry; it caught a lot of the sheep and the elk. A lot of the industry was caught up. It's not only my opinion, I guess, that we certainly have not totally recovered from BSE.

We came out at that time with some innovative programs to help the beef people in particular, and to say that they saved the beef industry would probably be reasonably accurate, I think. I guess hindsight is 20/20, and we'd probably do something different if that happened again. Heaven forbid that it should happen again that the border would close.

I visited the department here a while back, just talking to some of the people, and they talked almost fondly of the BSE days. They were so busy in the department trying to keep ahead of where we

were, the programs we came out with and the monies we made available and the set-aside programs, et cetera, that it was a real issue for them to keep up. The department did well, and probably the industry came out somewhat unscathed to what might have happened.

The hon. member was asking about the older-type beef cattle. I'll address that a little bit later.

Moving along, when the borders reopened for cattle under 30 months of age and we started shipping cattle out, of course, that certainly had a positive effect on our cattle industry. However, I guess what happened there, you know: I think we worked with the thought of having more of our cattle processed here. We did have to do it because we couldn't export, so they all were processed here. We all know the story of how Albertans and Canadians in particular came to our rescue and virtually ate a mountain of beef. They're still doing it. The average beef consumption is still up. However, once the border opened again, we're now shipping cattle south again.

I guess what's kind of scary right now is that now that we're shipping cattle south – and we've got to remember that these are cattle under 30 months of age – we are now shipping more cattle to the U.S. than we were in 2003. Not that that's a bad thing, but what's happened in the process is that our processed beef has started to come down, and the exports have started. It's scary to say that we're almost in the same position we were in before. Heaven forbid, but if that border shut on us now, we'd be right back where we were. We really haven't increased our slaughter capacity a whole lot. Yes, we've got some small ones going, but all of our slaughter capacity is impacted by labour shortages and the herds. Because the older cattle can't be exported, our herd numbers are older. We still have to get these older cows consumed or whatever.

The hon. member talked about what we call the rule 2 decision. They said that when rule 2 comes into effect, we will presumably, if we get permission, be able to export these older cattle. Now, having said that, there were a lot of parameters around there. The rule 2 decision is forthcoming. They had a comment period, and my understanding is that the comment period is over now, but I think it's still a 60-day period before any decisions will be made. That's my understanding right now. Hopefully, yes, the border will become a hundred per cent open.

7:20

That just increases the problem that we have. We're exporting these cattle again as a raw product. I've heard the comments out there: maybe you people haven't learnt a lot from the BSE crisis because we're pretty much back where we were. We may talk about this a little later. That's why now with the biofuel things and whatnot and the cattle and just the price of feed going up, our department has put together a competitive marketing group that's going to bring all of the livestock people into one room, and we've got a steering committee put together with some experts. We want to bring all the livestock – the poultry, the hogs, the cattle – into one room and try and deal with the situation we're at now because we're just, kind of, in the same situation where we were, and it's just not where we want to be at this time; that's for sure.

Irrigation. The hon. member certainly knows a lot about irrigation because she lives right in the middle of it. I understand that. It's an important part of our agriculture. The irrigation lands account for what? About 4 per cent of the land and about 17 per cent of the value of what we produce out there at this time. It's a major contributor to our rural development; that's for sure.

I've spent some time with the irrigation people. It's interesting because I had never been directly involved with irrigation. I think

that right now we have not increased our water usage, but just through efficiencies we irrigate, I think, about twice as much land as we did originally, and the irrigation districts are servicing a lot of the small towns with water and whatnot. We're committed to working with these people. To tie it in to where you were going a little bit with the Water for Life strategy, I think it's so important: that aspect, the irrigation aspect, particularly in southern Alberta where, as you know, we can get a tad parched and dry at times.

I had some frustration in the last couple of years that I've been here about where Water for Life was going because we talked about it, but we didn't do a lot about it. I guess that was kind of my impression. The irrigation people certainly are doing something about it. Now, I'd suspect it's not because of anything great this government did. I think these people on their own probably picked up that efficiency.

I think we're putting additional funding of \$3 million into the irrigation program and the Water for Life strategy this year. Hopefully, that's going to work up some interest because the Water for Life strategy, environment, that's the buzzword where we're at now; that's for sure, and rightfully so.

The WTO. I'll quickly move on to that, Mr. Chairman. Yes, the WTO does seem to be showing some signs of movement, moving ahead right now. We at one time were almost booked to go to Geneva to talk to the WTO. It's been pushed back a little bit. We're getting the word now that things are moving, and probably there will be a meeting scheduled.

Supply management people. Yes, this does concern them. Our position on supply management as the government of Alberta has not changed. It's exactly where the previous minister was at. We support supply management, but we also understand that this puts them under some risk. I don't think we'd ever get to the point anymore, perhaps, where the borders would have no tariffs on them and they'd be wide open, but certainly there could be some reductions there.

In our mandate, as you've probably seen, there's a transition time, a period there where we are to work with the industry in a transition program. Now, I don't think that makes supply management particularly comfortable hearing that. There's no doubt about that. However, you know, we certainly don't want this thing just to happen and not be prepared for it. We as a government are going to be prepared for it, so we can only hope that the supply management people will work with us. I'm not trying to scare anyone. We haven't changed our position, but this could change. I was in supply management myself, and I kind of got out of the business because I thought that with WTO my quota would be worthless. Bad decision. That was a lot of years ago, and now the supply management quotas, of course, are worth a lot of money.

The ag societies. I think probably where we're at with the ag societies – I think there are 297 ag societies, and 286 are small ones. Those are the ones that I'm kind of concerned about myself. I have made a commitment that I wasn't going to do a whole lot of looking at the big nine, so to speak, until we did something with these smaller ag societies. As the hon. member knows, probably the four ag societies that surround Calgary, which we are familiar with, really are considered small ag societies that really serve an awful lot of people out of the city and, of course, in the acreage area, where they're very busy.

At any rate, ag societies are still the backbone, I think, of Alberta, to be honest with you, and they play a role in the rural economies. One thing that the ag societies keep bringing up to me – and I really kind of appreciate where they're trying to go – is that they're very concerned about farm safety. I would like to see us get somewhat

more involved in farm safety myself because they would be the perfect vehicle for the education, and they themselves want to go that route.

Mr. Chairman, there was quite a list here. The land-use management, of course, is being led by Sustainable Resources. I facetiously say “thank goodness” because this is going to be a tough one, and I’m glad that it didn’t totally fall to Agriculture. But we certainly are going to be a big part of it. We have to be a big part of it; there’s no doubt about it. At this stage of the game, I guess, we’re fully engaged and have resources dedicated to the land-use framework. Sustainability is a key issue for the numerous interests to be addressed with land use. Our team, you might say, in the department is striving to do just that.

Having said that, I’m also trying to encourage all people, when I go out and do speak in the agricultural areas, to make sure they do attend the meetings that are going on. I think that’s absolutely critical because – same old story – we can criticize all we want, but if you’re not part of the game, if you’re not there, it doesn’t help a whole heck of a lot.

The racing industry. I don’t know if we have a magic answer to where that’s at. Of course, it’s managed by Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. We have agricultural people available to provide supports and maintain that connection to Agriculture, but the fact that the breeding industry is really an important part, you know, I guess that’s where the Agriculture part of it fits, probably.

Anyway, what physically are we doing? I think that probably we should give you a written answer to that because I don’t think I’m going to answer it very well. I know that when we meet with the people on the breeding side of it, that’s the Agriculture part.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister . . .

Mr. Groeneveld: You betcha. I’m at the end of my list.

The Deputy Chair: Just for your information we have only 15 minutes left for you, and I still have three other speakers. I’m just making you aware. I don’t want to cut you short, but we’ll recognize the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat next.

7:30

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure tonight to be able to rise to address the Minister of Agriculture and Food. I must also say that I find the staff of Agriculture and Food to be second to none with regard to agricultural knowledge and professionalism and, certainly, their timely response to any and all the concerns that I have brought to them.

Before I get into what I wanted to talk about, very quickly, Mr. Minister, you mentioned the spring price endorsement. I can certainly tell you that that was very well received and much appreciated. You also mentioned that the crop prices are rebounded, but also the input costs have more than doubled. I think we have to remember that in agriculture – where else? In what other type of industry do you have a way of life where you have virtually no control over the costs and certainly no control of the prices of the commodity that you raise? As I mentioned, it’s a way of life, and that’s why people do it.

I think I’ll get into one point that you haven’t had a chance to mention yet, and that’s why I bring it up. That’s traceability. I think that having the ability to enhance our traceability system is important for a number of reasons. It provides quick access to good, up-to-date data, which I believe is essential in responding to any animal health emergency. Without this, the time and effort of a slow response can come at a great cost, including economic loss and the risk of the spread of animal disease.

Never has it been so evident, especially since June of 2003, as you mentioned, Mr. Minister, and the border closure because of BSE, that traceability is one of the single most important means of renewing our beef export industry. I think we’re also aware that a good traceability system is becoming an expectation of the domestic and international marketplace. World-wide customers are demanding more information about the food they’re consuming. With an effective traceability system Alberta will be ready for this emerging market demand and will see greater market growth as a result. I believe the future of our cattle industry depends on our ability to market our cattle, both boxed and live, to the world and in particular the United States. Traceability is one of the reasons we have now renewed our trade with the United States, and other countries have come on board as well.

As the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere mentioned, we still have some issues with the OTM, or over 30 months, animals. I believe the number of animals considered as culls that are OTM are around a million that are in the system. In some cases OTM animals have records of origin, and these are probably some of our purebred varieties, but I think we’re mainly talking about our commercial cattle herds. While a good traceability system benefits market access in good times, it can also prevent borders from prolonged closure during a disease outbreak.

I have a few questions regarding the recent OIE ruling granting Canada controlled risk status for BSE, a decision that was welcomed by our beef industry. Can the minister tell me how this recent ruling reflects or impacts Alberta Agriculture’s budget? Who is paying for this new system, and who is monitoring and administering it? Will there be changes as a result of this ruling? How will it impact our traceability and food safety measures and initiatives? Perhaps a more important question which has been there is whether it has the full support of producers.

I have many ranchers in my constituency that belong to the Alberta Beef Producers, and they’re mainly cow-calf producers. In the last communication with me they expressed concerns that the regulations were very onerous on them. They cited additional costs and the need for additional handling of their animals. These animals aren’t pets, and they don’t have names. Actually, they’re handled as very little as possible. They’re also concerned with the perceived need for multiple tags needed and hung from the ears of these animals and the potential for these tags getting caught in such things as fences and feed bunks and being lost. This is also coupled with the extra record keeping requirement. The penalties for not keeping up with these are also a great concern. Perhaps the minister might want to speak on this.

I know that electronic chips embedded in the necks of the animals are perhaps the newest and the best way to keep track of the animals in their respective herds, but is this available at a reasonable cost? Given what I mentioned in the last two questions, are there any financial incentives available to do this?

My last questions: does this traceability system put us in the forefront in the world? Will we be recognized as leading the world with our system? Will it really make a difference? Is our system going to be able to give confidence to all of our global customers?

I’d like to thank the minister for being available, and I’ll await his answers. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister, followed by the Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I’ll try and get through this a little quicker than I did last time in the interest of time here. Anyway, to answer the questions on the effects of the

budget, the department has already put \$3.6 million into new funding to enhance food chain traceability and \$20 million over three years to help operators comply with the feed ban. Of course, the feed ban, we know, goes into effect July 12.

Who's paying for or monitoring or administering the new system? That's still being developed, Mr. Chairman. It's a shared federal/provincial funding arrangement. The industry has invested in the CCIA, the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency, for those who don't know. It's not just beef, of course. All livestock commodities are involved in this. That involves sheep, poultry, hogs, and cattle, just to mention some.

Mentioning the OIE, how it impacts our initiatives. The OIE decision, Mr. Chairman, is based on policies and actions. Sometimes we say that with tongue-in-cheek because it's supposed to be developed on sound science, but sometimes the policies get in the way. We have to commit to staying on that path, however, the next step being the enhanced feed ban. We can't relax our actions. We've talked to the federal minister about the feed ban and probably some unexpected costs in there. Alberta certainly is stepping up to the plate on that. I think that probably Alberta might perhaps be the only province that is as ready as can be for what we're going to have to face when July 12 comes along and the ban goes into effect.

Do we have full support of the producers? Actually, I guess, you never get full support, but the first step, the beef producers, you know, have created the CCIA, which is certainly working on the issue. I guess you might say that they've been leaders in the industry. There are concerns about the costs going forward; there's no doubt about that. We certainly are working with the CCIA on that.

Additional costs and additional handling. Current federal legislation already requires that all animals be tagged, and I think that probably the people that the hon. member has been talking to certainly fully understand that. We've been working with the CCIA to make it easier to put information into the systems. Of course, I talked about the SRM costs, and Alberta is the only province that has committed more than its federal/provincial share. We've raised the cost concern with the federal government, as I said, and we will press the federal government to be prepared for what's probably going to come down.

Multiple tags. The objective, Mr. Chairman, is one electronic tag – and that's what we're aiming for – with multiple pieces of information. It will not be the conventional dangle tag that we're used to seeing, which the CCIA came out with originally. They are the button tags. Yes, it's still not a hundred per cent. You can lose the button tags as well, but it certainly has improved maintaining the tags. Will it cause extra record keeping? Yes, it will. But, you know, the CCIA's system is based on farmers keeping adequate records, so I think to probably stay competitive in this world, we farmers and cattlemen – and I'm one of them – have to step up to the plate. You know, we've got to work with the farmers, but we also have to educate them and educate ourselves to the fact that this is the day and age where we have to get the record keeping up because a big part of traceability is the information on those tags.

7:40

Just talking about those tags, we say that there's going to be more information on those tags. I think that's absolutely essential, and then I think the average cowman or livestock person will see the benefits of what's available off those tags, and it will improve their breeding program as well. The new tags are going to be electronic. As I said, they aren't the dangle tags that we're used to. The information on those tags, the issue I just talked about, is important.

Also, the device reading those tags. We get warned all the time by the cattle people out there about our IT system. We have to have the most modern system available out there. There are some trial runs right now. I think there's one in Strathmore, as a matter of fact, where the animals are run through the chute in multiple lots. There are some pilot programs out there where the scanner will read all these cattle. They have to be, I think, within 200 metres of the cattle, which is certainly an improvement from the system that we've been trying so far. So the IT system has to be modern-day technology, and it has to work in the pilot project; otherwise, it isn't going to be accepted.

Is it going to put us at the forefront, leading the world? We would like to think so. It's going to help us get back in the market quickly, and it's probably going to take up to four years to be competitive. Enhanced traceability, in my opinion and my department's opinion, will give us access to some new markets, and that is so important. As the conversation we just had with the previous questions, it will meet what consumers are demanding. It has to, or it's not going to be accepted.

Mr. Chairman, I thank the hon. member for the questions, and I'll sit down.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for West Yellowhead, you have two minutes to put your questions on record at least.

Mr. Strang: Okay. So he won't be answering them. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

I guess, I've got a couple of items I want to talk to him about. If he can go to his budget for 2007 on pages 76 and 77, if you look at his performance measures there on the value-added products that he's developed, he shows that 2005-06 has got 42, but he's got no actual for 2006-07. Yet in 2007-08 he's looking at 90. So there's a missing figure there. I just would like him to let me know on that.

Then on page 78 what I'm wondering about is that with Bill 32 that we got, is this going to move forward to where we're going to look from the farm gate to the plate so that we can make sure that when we're selling our product, the retail outfit can show exactly where that animal came from? Is he going to work forward with the utilization of the tags? I'd appreciate it if he could let me know on that one.

The other issue is on the aspect on what technology and finance assistance is available to farmers and small business owners to start and operate the biodiesel or ethanol plants in rural Alberta. That's basically your goal five, page 81.

I'm saying this for my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka. I would pretty well say that's under your goal 1, and this is with the elk industry. Shouldn't we recognize this as a fully integrated agriculture entity separate from wildlife, and shouldn't there be harvest preserves?

Then, I guess, my other question. When I go to the government estimates for 2007-08, if you look at your budget on page 47, I guess I have a little bit of wonderment when I look at the aspects of your infrastructure assistance for municipality waste water. I'm just wondering, when you forecast for 2006-07, you had \$9,073,000, and you're only estimating \$5 million for 2007-08, yet . . .

The Deputy Chair: I regret, hon. Member for West Yellowhead, but the time allocated for the Department of Agriculture and Food has now lapsed.

I'd like to thank the officials that have participated by providing support to the minister for their attendance today. Thank you so very much.

Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture

The Deputy Chair: Before I recognize the hon. minister, I just want to welcome the officials and inform them that should they need a glass of water or a cup of coffee, just raise your hand. A page will come by and will be able to provide you with water or coffee.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present the estimates for Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture for 2007-08. Joining me here today are a few of my key department staff who help keep my ministry running very, very smoothly. On my right, Fay Orr, my deputy minister; Sue Bohaichuk, the acting assistant deputy minister of culture and community development; Dave Nielsen, acting assistant deputy minister of parks, conservation, recreation and sport; behind me, Bob Scott, assistant deputy minister of tourism marketing and heritage; on my immediate left, Pam Arnston, executive director of financial services. Also, seated in the gallery are Anne Douglas, my director of communications; Wilma Haas, acting assistant deputy minister of strategic corporate services; Susan Cribbs, executive director of policy, planning and legislative services; Bernie MacDonald, manager of recreation services; as well as Wendy Rodgers, my executive assistant. I think I have just about all of my staff with me tonight.

Mr. Chairman, Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture is Alberta's quality-of-life ministry. Our vision is to foster a superior quality of life to make Alberta one of the best places to live, work, and visit. Our mission is to promote, develop, and preserve tourism, culture, and heritage in support of vibrant, active, and inclusive communities. The work of our ministry touches the lives of all Albertans. With our population growing every day, it is vital that we continue to invest in the well-being of our growing communities for current and future generations. That's why Budget 2007 focused on managing growth pressures, one of our government's top priorities. With your approval and support our department will help meet some of the challenges we are facing.

I was charged with addressing three priorities under this new ministry: establishing an MLA committee to develop recommendations on a community spirit program for charitable giving; developing a plan for provincial parks and recreation areas; and the third one, developing a cultural policy for Alberta. I'm very pleased with the progress we have made so far in these important areas. Of course, our ministry encompasses a wide variety of programs and services, and we have many other priority areas that have received support through Budget 2007.

Our 2007-08 program expense is \$756 million, a net increase of \$300 million, the majority of which is one-time capital grants. We have allocated \$140 million a year for the next two years to create the new major community facilities program. This program will help nonprofit groups, municipalities, and aboriginal communities build, maintain, or upgrade recreational and cultural facilities for public use. Another \$80 million in one-time capital grants will support major athletic facilities, fairs, and exhibitions. We have allocated \$40 million for the first year of a three-year \$69 million commitment to the Calgary Olympic Development Association capital renewal project. These commitments have been made in response to the incredible growth and demands we are experiencing. Other budget allocations have also been based on the need to grow along with our population.

We have listened to what Albertans want and what Albertans value. The rights of all Albertans are always of the utmost importance. Educating Albertans and protecting their rights are key to

making our province a safe and welcoming place to call home. Ninety per cent of Albertans say that the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission is important to ensuring that our rights are protected in our province. With that in mind we will increase support for the commission and for programs promoting fairness, diversity, and inclusion by 7 per cent.

7:50

Another important group representing the interests of Albertans is the Francophone Secretariat. The secretariat represents more than 205,000 francophones in our province. An 8 per cent increase in its budget will support initiatives promoting French language and culture and will help to preserve a rich part of our heritage.

Another great example of what Albertans value is Alberta's artistic and cultural community. Mr. Chairman, most Albertans, 87 per cent of them, feel that the arts are an important contributor to our quality of life. That's why we will invest \$65.9 million in arts and cultural programs this year. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts, which supports festivals, exhibits, artists, and more, received an additional 4 and a half million dollars in lottery funding. This is an increase of 20 per cent over last year.

Lottery funding for the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation will increase by 15 per cent, an additional \$3 million, over the previous year. This foundation uses its total budget of \$26.6 million to support the Alberta Games, provide grants to more than 100 associations, to train coaches, and much more. With 82 per cent of adult Albertans participating in some sort of recreation or sport, this is a valuable investment, an investment in healthy, active lifestyles.

In addition to increased funding for entities like the AFA and the Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation we are also investing in provincial facilities. We will address services and maintenance in our provincial parks with an \$8 million injection. That means more conservation officers, interpreters, maintenance and gate staff to serve visitors and protect our land and facilities. As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of Alberta's provincial parks this year, it is a perfect opportunity to invest in these valuable resources.

Other provincial facilities receiving new funding are provincially owned museums and historic sites. Four million dollars more for these attractions will help with operating costs and refurbishing displays and exhibits. The Royal Tyrrell Museum has already unveiled its plans to renovate a permanent gallery. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump will produce a new presentation for their main theatre, and exterior and exhibit improvements will be done at Historic Dunvegan, Stephansson House, and Fort George and Buckingham House.

Our museums and historic sites are major attractions for Albertans and other visitors alike, attracting some 850,000 visits in 2005. Promoting even more visits to our sites and other Alberta attractions will increase in the coming year thanks to a \$9 million boost for tourism marketing and development programs. This boost is due to a combination of increased visitation, more rooms available, and higher room rates, which means more collections under the tourism levy. These additional funds will help us attract visitors from key markets and will allow us to focus on emerging markets as well. Albertans continue to be our largest market and represent about half of Alberta's total tourism expenditures. With new Albertans arriving every day, we will continue to encourage people to explore our province and all it has to offer.

Increased funding will also go towards developing new and improved tourism products that will help us be competitive in an increasingly competitive industry. Initiatives like the Canadian badlands come to mind. The Canadian badlands are being branded

as Alberta's next tourism icon. Reaching from Stettler in the north to the Montana border and all the way from just east of the Queen Elizabeth II highway to the Saskatchewan border, the Canadian badlands include an impressive mix of history, art, culture, and adventure perfect for any traveller. Drawing more visitors to Alberta with new and interesting attractions and experiences like those found in the badlands will bring more money to our province. Tourism, Mr. Chairman, already generates over \$5 billion for Alberta's economy and employs more than 103,000 people.

Our other investments in the arts, recreation, and parks not only help improve our quality of life but will make significant contributions to our economy. Recreation and sports grants generate impressive returns. Every grant dollar generates \$5 in community spending. Our volunteer organizations and nonprofits employ 176,000 people and have an economic impact of \$9.6 billion.

Finally, our provincial historic and cultural sites contribute \$61 million to our economy, while our parks contribute \$1.3 billion.

Mr. Chairman, it's clear that my ministry's efforts to improve Alberta's quality of life and address growth pressures also make an impressive impact on our economy. By supporting the 2007-08 estimates for my ministry, you are supporting our efforts and helping us make Alberta one of the best places to live, work, and visit.

I would now be pleased, Mr. Chairman, to answer any questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll start by referring to your government estimates for 2007-08 for the general revenue fund. First of all, I want to thank you very much, especially on the major community facilities grants, page 355. That's going to work very well for the communities.

If you can give me an explanation on page 354 under recreation and sports where you've got hosting major athletic events. For 2005-06 you had actually \$2,175,000. There's no showing for 2006-07, yet for 2007-08 you're only \$500,000. So what happened to \$1,675,000? You know, if this is for the Winter Games and Summer Games, we're always having a lot of trouble. You know what transpired in the second last one up in your area where everybody had a partner, and it puts a lot of stress on it. We've never had that function raised at all since its inception. So I really strongly believe we have to move forward on that.

You look on page 352, the third item there under expense. I see you've raised it \$14,436,000. I don't know what all you've got in that one there. So I'm just wondering if you can give me an explanation on those.

Then if you go to page 313 of your budget plan for 2007 and your goal 4, speaking on the aspect of tourism and increasing your visitation and that. What I'm looking at is your strategy 4.1: develop and partner domestic and international marketing programs. If you could just sort of elaborate where you are on that.

Then a couple of other ones that I'm looking at. If you can give me an update on where we are on the recreation corridor review. I mean, I'd certainly like to know where we're at with that aspect.

I noticed you mentioned in your opening remarks the aspect of the Tyrrell museum, that you're going to do a lot more there. But we've got a lot more to offer in Alberta, and we're always trying to get tourists to come to Alberta, stay that extra day or so, and I'd strongly suggest that we really work on the aspect of a dinosaur trail. We can move into Tumbler Ridge. They're finding a lot of aspects there now that we're working with British Columbia with TILMA. Then we go through Grande Prairie and Grande Cache and then on the way to the Tyrrell museum. I think we've got a real thing to sell there.

I know I had asked this question earlier today of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development as they're looking at the aspect of the Yellowhead corridor and looking at some tourism destination sites. I'm just wondering: what involvement are you going to have with these tourism nodes that they're developing in the Yellowhead corridor and especially in the Brûle area. As you realize, you have the Alberta Outfitters Association there, and they're questioning the aspect of moving into that area, especially with a lot of that land in there. Sure, it's not under your jurisdiction, but basically it's a lot of leased land for Alberta Outfitters.

8:00

On the subject of Alberta Outfitters I'm wondering if you could just give me some insight on the aspect of where we're at with looking at moving forward with them, possibly to look at some licensing of areas that they can operate in. I know that we've got some class 1, class 2 operators. You know, with the Willmore wilderness park we've certainly got to make sure we keep that as pristine as possible. I'd strongly suggest that we sort of work with the different groups, especially the Alberta Outfitters. I'm just wondering where we're at with the aspect of tenure and transferability.

I've got one more. You know, we're talking about tourism, and I wonder how far we're going with ecotourism. Also, another area that is working: I know we're looking at doing some partnership with Jasper and with Grande Cache with the aboriginal tourism. That's a huge area, too.

You had mentioned that Alberta parks are looking at the aspect of their 75th anniversary. Well, Jasper national park on September 14 will have their 100th anniversary, so I hope we're going to work co-operatively with them, too.

I'll leave you with those. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much. I want to thank the hon. member for the questions. Initially, just some quick comments on the major community facilities grant. As you are aware, we have \$140 million approved this particular year and another \$140 million that's been approved for the following year. That's what we're committing to spending. Mr. Chairman, that's broken down into four different sections, with about \$35 million allocated to each of the larger cities of Edmonton and Calgary and another \$35 million to the smaller cities as well as \$35 million to rural Alberta. We really believe that the facilities are very much needed. We're looking at major recreational facilities, some health-related type facilities in terms of facilities that promote active participation.

On the Alberta Games, basically, you look at the budget going from \$2.175 million down to \$500,000. I need to indicate that in 2005 \$1.3 million was used to pay for the World Masters Games. There was another \$250,000 that was used for the cross-country ski World Cup, another \$125,000 that was used for the world half marathon, and half a million dollars for the 2007 Western Canada Games. What's being budgeted now is the Western Canada Summer Games: half a million dollars.

Now, your comments on page 313, goal 4. I might reiterate that goal:

Develop and partner domestic and international marketing programs for Alberta through Travel Alberta that support the Strategic Tourism Marketing Plan, which outlines both domestic and international target markets and strategies to increase visitation, length of stay and expenditures in all regions of Alberta.

Certainly, we do have general sales agents that are working

around the world. They're hired. We're targeting Australia, Japan, Korea, Great Britain, and Germany. We're working very, very closely with the media in those particular locations to encourage visitations and to get them familiarized with our province.

On the rec corridors, Mr. Chairman, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod is working on that and is co-chairing our committee, our group, and is leading that. Basically, we recognize that trails are very, very important to Albertans and to our communities, and there is a need to manage recreational trail networks right across the province. Certainly, there's a need to have better outdoor experiences.

We want to look at a designation program that will help Albertans be involved in trails and, eventually, have better experiences and lead healthier, more active lives. Certainly, funding is available in our particular budget for the operation of the Alberta recreational corridor designation program as soon as that particular program is ready for implementation, and we anticipate that to happen rather soon. There's \$500,000 that has been allocated this year for that particular activity and another \$400,000 for the next two years following that.

Just some quick comments on the Dinosaur Trail. Certainly, there's a lot of work that's being done in different parts of Alberta. You're familiar with the work that we've done at Drumheller, the improvements that we're doing there, and the additional designation in the south. We recognize the fact that dinosaurs followed the whole length of the eastern part of the province of Alberta. We're looking at, you know, that whole area that can be exploited and developed and encouraged. We are working with a group out of Grande Prairie, as you're aware. Tourism in Grande Cache as well, the death race. Future development of the dinosaur tracks interpretive centre. Longer term tourism development could really include some secondary types of developments in those areas. We really believe that, you know, the whole Dinosaur Trail can become a very strong international icon or a draw for that.

With the outfitters, you're aware that we've met with them, and certainly through Sustainable Resources we're going to continue to work with the outfitters to try to accommodate them. Your comments about licensing of areas has to be reviewed. You know, we're mandated and committed to working with them as to how we might be able to accommodate them.

Ecotourism. We've met with individuals just in the last couple of months. Certainly, that was one of the big discussions that was there. There is a need to look at it. I don't believe that we've got anything formally planned for this year's budget. Basically, we're looking at those areas.

We want to enhance, as well, aboriginal tourism. We recognize and believe that they have a very, very strong role in the tourism areas of the province of Alberta. There are some activities that are already happening with that particular sector, and we want to keep on growing and developing the aboriginal tourism. We've got a committee that's looking at the whole aspect of aboriginal tourism, and certainly we will keep on working with that committee to have some ideas flow through and grow that particular sector.

Mr. Chairman, certainly, the member is right: this year is the 75th anniversary of our provincial parks. We are looking at some major improvements to a number of our parks right across the province. Hopefully, we will be able to join forces with Jasper to make sure that Jasper will have a successful 100th anniversary as well at their particular park.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you. I want to talk about your core business 1: manage Alberta's provincial parks and protected areas and promote recreational and sport opportunities. You know, in my constituency for years we had great roadside campgrounds. They weren't provincial parks, but they were places where tourists, international tourists – I had lots of family from Holland that loved to stop at those places and camp and enjoy the scenery. All of these in my area are either closed or turned over to the county and now have gates on them. But I do have one great park, and that's Carson-Pegasus provincial park. I think it was built when there were, you know, just a little over 2 million people in Alberta. With the price of gas I can see an early trend that's started: lots of folks coming out from Edmonton spending their complete holiday at Carson-Pegasus provincial park rather than going to B.C. or Jasper or longer destinations.

8:10

One thing that I'm getting loud and clear from my constituents – and I think, Minister, you've had an opportunity to talk with Leo Zelinski, the chamber of commerce president, and others from my community saying that we need to expand facilities. You know, we haven't had an expansion on camping stalls in our area for an awful long time. I wouldn't expect you to have this information today, but I would kind of like to know: as the population of this province has grown, have camping stalls grown equally? My observation in my constituency is no. I wonder if you have those kinds of stats. It would be interesting.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

You know, it goes back to that quality of life issue. Both residents and visitors have enjoyed our camping facilities, but they're getting harder and harder to get into. I'm wondering: where in your budget have you addressed the expansion of camping stalls in provincial parks? Where in your budget have you put aside some money to talk about P3 opportunities in expanding our existing parks? I think that a P3 may be an opportunity that we might have overlooked. Maybe your staff has done that.

I do want to mention, while I'm looking up at the gallery, two staff members who worked for me when I was minister of government services and acting minister of innovation and science. I always recognize a bright minister when he surrounds himself with bright people, and you've got two of the brightest around, I'll tell you that.

But I'd like some information on where we're going. Where in your plan have you allotted dollars to expand those core business opportunities that you talk about in core business 1? I'll sit down and hear from you on that.

The Acting Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne asks some very, very important questions and has some very timely comments as well. I need to indicate that, you know, initially the roadside campgrounds were basically privatized as part of the changes that were made in the early '90s. A lot of them were picked up by the local municipalities, yet others where no interest was shown actually got shut down and closed. Having said that, presently we have over 13,000 camping sites in the province of Alberta. We recognize that our provincial population has grown quite dramatically, and we also recognize that there is a need for more of that.

We are spending \$19 million on infrastructure projects, and they'll

cover quite a number of parks. I need to indicate that Carson-Pegasus this year will get about \$600,000 in upgrades but more so toward the sewer facilities, the water facilities. We're going to be upgrading the water treatment system at Carson-Pegasus, and we'll keep on working on all of our parks for that. My mandate was to develop a parks program and, certainly, to look initially at a needs assessment – that's what we're doing presently – for what's required and then come back with, you know, additional requirements for additional parks in the province of Alberta.

Our parks operations budget for '07-08 is set at \$39 million, just about \$40 million, and that's about a 17 per cent increase over what we were spending in previous years. So we are heading in the right direction. We are growing. We are committed to expanding our parks. We're adding full-time equivalents, people, there to run our parks better. We're adding conservation officers. We're adding, you know, interpreters, visitor service representatives, so we're hoping to be heading in the right direction.

You talked about P3s. Certainly, it's a great idea, and if the opportunity is there to entertain P3s, we will do that. We are hoping to enter into longer term contracts with our operators to allow them to make some necessary improvements, improvements that are required in our parks. If a contractor, for instance, wants to set up shower facilities or maybe a small swimming pool in a particular park, that he be allowed to do that providing he's got enough time to recoup his cost: we're really looking at those areas.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few questions for you, minister. The first is with regard to our park area, the actual physical area, including special areas, if you could give me a sense of what we're doing with that, how large it is. My understanding is that we have set aside approximately 12 and a half to 13 per cent of the province into a special areas program, but I also understand that we've not created any additional staffing – if we have, I'm not familiar with what it is – to look after these areas. I'd like your thoughts on that and what we're doing with them and how we can maintain or manage them without putting more resources into them. Do you see down the road a sort of master plan concept for the special areas of what you'd like to see actually being done with them, or is the idea just to freeze them and keep them the way they are?

I'd also like to ask you a little bit about film now that it's in your department and it's all back together, if you can give me a sense of where you see it going. Are we going to be able to increase the funding into the film development program by 10 per cent a year, which is something that we were trying to get done a couple of years ago in a Treasury Board situation? Will you continue to pursue that so that they know that they have growth on a continual basis, that they can continue to expand the film industry in our province until they reach sort of a critical mass?

You have an area of your department that helps with different sporting-type functions. You have a director of, you know, for example – I don't know – canoeing or kayaking or something, just as a thought, you know, but they really don't have a lot of resources to do much below them. I'm wondering if you've looked at that concept, at the various directors you have for different sports to see if there's a more effective or comprehensive way to deal with the sporting issues in our province. On the other hand, if it's truly a great system that we have now, I'd just appreciate your telling me that.

The other comment, minister, would be on our CFEP grants. I know that we've got additional money for the major capital projects,

but we're still missing the point on the CFEP grant, and that is: it's been a \$125,000 maximum grant, I think, since the inception of the program probably over 20 years ago. Costs have gone up dramatically since that time. Everybody's wants, needs, and expectations have gone up dramatically, but we're still dealing with \$125,000, sort of a capped grant. For a \$12 million project that somebody's trying to build, it doesn't go very far anymore whereas it used to. On a \$2 million project \$125,000 was a fairly substantive amount. Are you looking at changing the parameters of that program and, if possible, getting money from a major capital side but rolling it into a CFEP program so that MLAs would also have some input into what the priorities are for their constituencies?

I couldn't help but note that in Calgary's major capital grant they're already over \$500 million in asks compared to the 40 or so million that they're going to get. It reminds me of the centennial project that we came up with a few years ago, where we had about a hundred million dollars and about \$2 billion worth of applications. Now that we've created this storm, how do we maximize the good that this amount of money can do for the city of Calgary or for surrounding communities that will be dealing with a different pool of money? How are we going to deal with the massive overask that we're going to get on this program?

Those are my questions, and your thoughts would be appreciated.

8:20

The Acting Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has some very, very good questions. Her first one was on the special areas and sort of the special places, as we call them. There were quite a few new areas that were added. As a matter of fact, 81 were added under the special places program between 1995 and 2001, and 13 areas were expanded. We have currently about 278 permanent ministry staff and about 300 seasonal staff that provide interpretation and work within all of our parks. We're adding, as I indicated in my previous comments, to the numbers of people that will be working in the parks. Our budget will allow us to hire 34 additional permanent park staff and about 60 additional seasonal staff, and we're also adding, as I had indicated, conservation officers, maintenance service workers, and, again, interpretative and visitor information staff and gate staff.

The just a little over 500 protected areas cover about 27,530 square kilometres of the province of Alberta, and that's about 4.1 per cent of Alberta's land base. That includes the 69 provincial parks that I talked about and over 250 recreational areas or special areas. Different areas have different designations. I think where we're at at this particular time is to develop management plans for a lot of those new areas that were created, and we're at that particular process. We're working on a lot of those areas and, actually, adding and developing some of the management plans that are required for that.

The 12 per cent figure that you identified includes national parks. If we just look at the provincial side, then we're at about 4 per cent, but when we put in all the national parks, we're at that particular level.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

On the film side our increase to funding is 23 and a half per cent in 2007-08. That's about a 3 and a half million dollar increase to our budget in this particular year. Our intent is to grow that. We're getting tremendous interest in Alberta and tremendous interest in

what we have to offer. Some of the facilities that we have, the attractions, the province itself lead to more interest from producers, and certainly there's a keen interest there. With the added production comes, you know, increased interest. Increased interest means more applications, so more pressures on the film front. Basically, we're hoping to have it grow.

We're hoping to work with the industry. We're looking at potentially a new funding program for the industry to try to stretch our particular dollars a little further. We're looking at a pilot project with a couple of features whereby we might get two series occurring in the province of Alberta. We're very, very close to signing an agreement on those. That in itself would use up probably a fair amount of our film budget, but we'd probably just about double the economic activity of the film industry in the province of Alberta. The interest is certainly there. We want to grow it. My intent is to try to get additional money in the future. I think we're going to be okay this year, but at the rate that things are growing, we're going to be short in the future.

On the sports side we do have sports consultants, and we are working with various groups. We've got individuals there. Again, the whole sports side has received an increase in funding. My ministry is probably one of the luckiest ministries. We were able to accommodate and allocate additional funds in just about all of the sectors, so, you know, we have been able to allocate additional dollars to them.

On the CFEP one your comments are right, member. We have not changed the \$125,000 maximum. It's not our intent, at least my intent, on a short-term basis to see any changes there, and certainly that's why we came out with the major facilities program. The major facilities program is designated to cover anything over and above the \$125,000. And you're right: the requests so far, those that we know are coming towards us, already are at \$1.3 billion, and the list is growing on a daily basis.

We do have \$140 million this year, another \$140 million next year, but we need to point out one thing. If I total that \$280 million and if that covers, say, a third of the cost of new projects, we can probably cover about \$800 million worth of new construction or improvements to major facilities, so it will take a good chunk out of the \$1.3 billion of requests.

We will have a challenge to prioritize. In our larger centres we'll leave it to our members to make priorities within their community. When it comes to the smaller cities and to rural Alberta, it will be more of a challenge. Certainly, we'll have to look at them on a project-by-project basis and try to assess the importance of the individual projects as well as try to be equitable right across the province to ensure that some of our money is spent throughout the province, that some of our money is allocated to projects that will meet the greatest needs and provide the greatest service to Albertans.

The Deputy Chair: Any further questions? Anybody else?

Well, Mr. Minister and officials of the Department of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, thank you so very much for supporting the minister and providing him with the assistance.

International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be here. It's a pleasure to stand and be here. First of all, I'd like to introduce my deputy minister of many years of experience and service, Gerry Bourdeau, who is with us here today, and I thank Gerry and members of the ministry who are helping us tonight.

It's a pleasure to present the estimates for the new International,

Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, referred to as IIAAR. IIAAR means that I am not a pirate but, quite the contrary, the direct opposite of being a pirate, ultimately helping the 3.4 million Albertans in what we are proposing in this 2007-2008 budget of \$67.6 million.

This is, I want to say, quite a collage of ministries coming together from aboriginal relations and, of course, dealing with things such as the Métis settlements and Métis nation as well as dealing with our foreign offices as well as, of course, dealing with intergovernmental relations relative to working with the federal government and our territorial and provincial governments across Canada.

There is no question, in my humble opinion, from the work that Alberta has done in the past many years and, of course, of our Premier, who was also in this ministry as minister, that Alberta is without question a leader when it comes to the leadership role it plays in terms of intergovernmental relations as well as aboriginal relations in dealing with other important stakeholders across this country. I am very proud to say that we are looked on, this ministry, as perhaps without question one of the most experienced and senior ministries when it comes to a comparison to other provinces and territories. Specifically, Quebec has a very good reputation in their intergovernmental, federal/provincial relations, as we observe, and I want to say that Alberta is without question there, if not and then some, when it comes to what we do in terms of leadership in this country.

With this budget I will work with what's most important: the Premier's six mandated priorities in my ministry, two Canadian intergovernmental priorities in terms of co-ordinating Alberta's approach to intergovernmental relations but also developing and enhancing our intergovernmental strategy, and we've had some very good success in that.

8:30

One international priority, of course, is enhancing Alberta's international presence in trade relations, especially with our neighbours to the south, the United States. I might add that our budget is about \$2.16 million less this year, is what's being forecast. But it's interesting to note that one of our key components that we had in terms of last year and our one-time spending was the Smithsonian event, where truly Alberta showcased the world in Washington, DC, in terms of dealing with the international presence in trade relations with the United States. It was a huge success. In fact, we've received calls from the 10 provinces and three territories relative to the success that we had at the Smithsonian Institution last summer, which many ministers and MLA colleagues and our Premier, of course, visited during that time, in strengthening our relationship with our neighbours to the south.

I might also say that we have three important aboriginal priorities: finalizing the aboriginal consultation strategy, finalizing the long-term Métis governance funding, and building aboriginal self-sufficiency. These priorities, of course, cross most of my ministry's core businesses, and we look forward to working to address the specific key components arising from the Premier's mandate and our core businesses. For example, to finalize aboriginal consultation, we first need to help First Nations complete and share traditional land-use studies as they can better participate in consultation. I think that is an important part of our road map that we are moving down with very good success.

I might also add that through Alberta's 10 international offices and the Alberta international marketing strategy, referred to as AIMS, we are also working very closely to increase Alberta's – and I repeat this; I know that the hon. Member for West Yellowhead is

listening intently – \$81 billion in exports. You ask me how much: \$81.1 billion in exports in terms of what we are doing within our Alberta international offices across the world.

We also will review our international offices in light of Alberta's changing needs. It is very important to ensure that the right priorities are in the right place in this changing global economy. For example, the offices help export-ready businesses find markets, but also we are likely to recruit more workers where it comes to an identified need.

It's important to note that when it comes to workforce capability, this province and our Premier have a priority of Alberta first, other provinces and territories second, and international third. We will never stray from that approach where it's Alberta first, interprovincial second, and then, of course, international third. Because of the tremendous work that we are facing in this province, it is clear that successes we are having in the international market in foreign workers is important, but we continue to work with our stakeholders, with unions, and with others in terms of how we can have an Alberta first, interprovincial second, and then, of course, from national to international third.

Adding two new aboriginal relations divisions and international offices in trade resulted in a fourfold increase in ministry staff, and of course some amalgamated areas such as human resources, communications, and the newly established corporate services now have more staff but not new FTEs to serve the larger ministry.

Let me just summarize to say that the \$67.6 million that are serving 3.4 million Albertans is very small by government standards, but I want to let you know that some things are like dynamite. Dynamite may be small, but it does come with a big bang. I might add that there is no question that this \$67.6 million comes with a big bang. The Smithsonian, the work we're doing interprovincially, the work we're doing with aboriginals are just excellent examples of that huge success, and I want to thank our staff for the excellent work that they are doing in carrying out this road map of moving and continuing to move Alberta into the 21st century.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's always great to follow the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. I've got just a few questions. If he could turn to Budget 2007, page 214, under his goal 2 I don't see anything in here that is stating that we're looking at possibly opening up an Ottawa office. I know that 2(b) in his performance measures has worked very well in Washington, DC, so I'm just wondering if we can expect anything on that.

If you go to page 215 – and we're talking about TILMA; that's his goal 3 – I'm wondering if he anticipates any effects on the aspect of logging for the simple reason of partnership there and also working some type of a partnership with the aspect of tourism.

Then if I can sort of switch back to goal 2. As you realize, for a number of years we've had the softwood lumber tariff on the nation of Canada, and of course Alberta has paid a lot into that, and a lot of our different sawmills have paid a lot of money into that. I know that it has to work through the federal government before we start getting any money back on that, and I just wonder what he's doing on that so that we can get it back and get it back working in Alberta so we can move forward.

Then, I guess as a last remark, as you know, with the interim Métis harvesting agreement we're looking at a date of July 1 for the new agreement to come in. I'm just wondering where we're at with that scenario. So if you could give me some information on that, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutillier: Well, thank you. I want to say, first of all, on the softwood lumber agreement, which is so important, that the new Canada/U.S. softwood lumber agreement ends decades of past disputes and future litigation. I think we can all agree that rather than spending money on the legal profession, we're able to in fact really use our energy and money and financial resources in a positive way of helping Canadians, Albertans, and of course our neighbours to the south.

The U.S. has a history of launching new litigation when decisions are favourable to Canada. That is not a surprise to us. The deal is not perfect, but in exchange for no new litigation Canada accepts some limits on its softwood exports. It is not free trade, but it's managed trade, I think is what we refer to in the 21st century. There were two options to limit softwood exports: a higher export tax with no quotas or a lower export tax with a quota. Alberta, our province, chose, working with our other ministries, an export tax with no export quotas. Industry pays a higher export tax when prices are low but also no export tax when prices are high. Of course, this is favourable, and prices are very low right now, so industry is paying the highest tax. Now, that, though, of course, will change when prices go back up, which I think is so important. Our colleagues in Sustainable Resource Development are also working with industry to implement the softwood lumber agreement.

Pertaining to TILMA, the trade, investment and labour mobility agreement, I want to say that this is an excellent example of barrier busting. How do we help ultimately a trading economy of people, the second largest in Canada, 7.7 million people between B.C. and Alberta? I want to say that at our joint cabinet meeting of B.C. and Alberta last week, both our Premier and the Premier of B.C. talked about how we can move this forward even quicker because of the incredible benefits of trade that can help our taxpayers and our voters when it comes to barrier busting, and that's exactly what is taking place when it comes to TILMA.

Pertaining to the issue of the Ottawa office, I'm very pleased to say that at our CPC meeting there was unanimous support by all of our colleagues for the Ottawa office, but as the hon. Member for West Yellowhead is very familiar, we are doing a review of all of our offices, the 10 offices, and in our budget we have earmarked just under a million dollars for an Ottawa office. But we think it is very appropriate at this time that we review all of our offices – where we are, where our resources are being spent – before we determine to make a final decision if, in fact, that office is the most appropriate use of our resource.

8:40

So what we have done is we have factored in the Ottawa office with the other foreign offices, that the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake is doing and reviewing with the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright and also with the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. Obviously, we are taking that approach to be able to work collectively to be able to do the best review so that the financial resources will be directed in the best way to yield the greatest results for the province of Alberta in the next many years.

I think we're on the right track. Other provinces are paying attention. The Premier of Ontario has called our Premier of Alberta asking him for information and tips on TILMA. It really is clear to me that Alberta continues to lead on the intergovernmental side within this nation, and I'm very proud to be the minister of intergovernmental and international relations when it comes to leading in such important aspects.

I hope that answers the hon. member's questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just have a couple of questions, and I promise to be nice. I'm interested in the Métis settlement side of things, to know how that's going. Last year there was a lot of discussion. They had asked for an increase in funding, Minister, to try and get them to the point where they could be more self-sustaining in the Métis settlement concept. I understand that there was money given to your department to do this.

Now, the real question here is: when do we stop funding it? What is the transition period for them to go through so that they can be a small municipality concept where they have their own property tax and can work on an industrial base to increase their tax level? I'm interested in that side of it. I understand the concept of trying to help them get started, but it has to stop at some point.

They also asked for their own version of a heritage savings trust fund concept, where they wanted government to set aside a certain amount of money so that they could draw on it on an annual basis. It was not something that I was in favour of, although I understood their reason for wanting to do it. My question, then, with regard to how to help them create their own sustainability, comes back to the casino concept, Minister, that all of the First Nations will be sharing in some of the revenue for various charities inside that portion of aboriginal affairs, but I don't think the Métis settlements are part of that. So is there something on that side that can be done?

My other question on First Nations would be this. In the States one of their versions of First Nations through their casino concept also set up a series of scholarships for their own children growing up on a reserve, getting a great education, being sent out, becoming chartered accountants or lawyers or educators or professors and various things. Part of the requirement on the granting of their scholarship was that they had to come back and help the next generation develop their skills so that there would be literally a seamless transition between the reservation, with their own lifestyle, versus the rest of urban United States, where there could be a very good transition and a very good working relationship between both sides. I'm wondering, when you're looking at aboriginal affairs, if you look at anything like that, some modelling that you may be able to pick up on from the States on how maybe to make things work better on the reservations so that their standard of living improves in a similar pattern to our own.

My last comments would be on your international offices. Years and years and years ago I had an opportunity to do a presentation to then Premier Peter Lougheed on the need for international offices. The point was never for those offices to do everything for us as businesspeople. We were in an export business on both grain and purebred cattle. What we needed at that time was the government's ability to help us open some doors in other nations like Japan, China, Venezuela, or Peru, places like that, and even into Mexico. It was never about the government having to spend huge, vast amounts of money on, you know, big, fancy, palatial offices. It was always about helping us as businesspeople be able to access their business community. We needed somebody to help introduce us.

I'm wondering, when you're looking at your international presence, if you not only just appreciate that you're reviewing the offices that we currently have to make sure that they're meeting the needs, that we were trying to help Alberta as an export province, but also going back and looking at the original concept of what it was to do, which was to help open doors for businesses in this province. Part of your review, I'm hoping, would also encompass stakeholder input from not just large corporations but the SMEs, the small- and medium-sized enterprises, that actually go out with one person and try and sell, you know, a \$500,000 contract or a million dollar

contract on goods and services as well as on big petrochemicals. There are a lot of smaller companies, and we need to continue to encourage them to develop here and to encourage their expertise.

Your thoughts on those types of things would be appreciated.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to say that the last suggestion is an excellent one relative to our international offices. As much as we are exporters of \$81 billion, I totally agree with the hon. member, first and foremost, that government may have a small role to play, but government is not there to tell business how to do business. I think markets, which I am a full advocate of, will dictate those businesses who will be successful and those businesses who will not be successful. Ultimately, the fate of a business will be determined by how they read the market.

The approach I have taken with foreign offices, I want to say, is that, number one, this is not just simply a government review. I'm pleased to say that the hon. . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, I just want to draw to your attention that we are live on webcast gavel to gavel. Unfortunately, the camera is in this direction, so you may just want to be aware of that.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, I'm a bit shy of television cameras, but I will try to do my best.

Actually, on the foreign office side the suggestion by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is so important, that this is not just about government; this is a partnership. It's a partnership of how we collect from not only our key stakeholders, but I believe at the end of the day that if our international offices are successful, it will be Alberta businesses that are out there talking about the important support they've received because of the international work that we've done working with them as partners.

I'll give you a couple of examples of offices that are so important. For instance, I'll give you a good-news story: Olds College. The Alberta office in China put the Olds College in touch with a Chinese business and is supporting project work and student recruitment work. The trade office is identifying potential partners and keeping Olds College informed of business trends. Ms Pat Bidart, who is the dean of agriculture, technology, and college assessing, says this, and I think it's an excellent example on the important topic the hon. member mentioned: I've worked directly with international offices in China, Taiwan, Korea, and Germany. All of the offices have provided excellent support and assistance when we have contacted them. I have worked directly with the China office since 1999, over eight years, and whether it was assistance in identifying projects, determining market forces, or finding out an institution that dealt with management, the Chinese office had the connections and Olds College had the need, but the offices that we had were the ones that were being used.

Another example is Poon McKenzie Architects if I could use a small example. They were seeking to expand on the international market their consulting services into overseas markets. Rather than government saying what you should do, what we did was we partnered. The Alberta office in China supplied market research and information, created contacts with Chinese clients and networks, and provided advice and logistics of international expansions. The architect Mr. Stephen Suen said that he would have never have been able to make contact with Chinese clients and sign a contract without the support of the Alberta international office in Beijing; it was our first international project, and we look forward to many more

because of the assistance of the Alberta government and the Alberta international offices. So that's a compliment to our people that we have in those offices that are doing important work.

8:50

I might also say that on the international offices not only are we reviewing, but in this changing world and global economy, we are also looking at the BRIC, which is referred to as the countries of Brazil, Russia, India, and, of course, we now have two offices in China, both in Hong Kong and in Beijing. In fact, some financial people have met with me, and they are suggesting that the key part of China in dealing with financial markets and investment dollars is perhaps not in Beijing, as much as that's where the political discussions take place, which we play a role in. They also talked about Shanghai as being the Wall Street or, shall I say, the Bay Street of Canada in Chinese markets. So it's something we will be reviewing as well, determining if, in fact, our offices are located in the right area.

The BRIC of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Obviously, we are already in China. We are not in Brazil, we are not in Russia, we are not in India, but that will also be part of potential opportunities.

We are also looking for the important point that the hon. member mentioned, and that is their stakeholders, what markets and what businesses are saying in terms of where they think the Alberta government can play an important role politically in helping businesses become successful in what they know best to do, not what government knows best to do. Our job is to help open doors, which, of course, we'll continue to do.

I also want to say that in establishing our foreign offices review committee, their responsibility will be in terms of assessing where our offices are, the costs that are associated with it, but also determining the global economy and emerging needs in terms of assisting Alberta businesses in terms of how we can better integrate when it comes to international operations.

We are also taking a look at the mix of services, their locations, and if, in fact, we are getting the best value for our dollars. I must admit that I have been using not only stakeholders such as independent businesses; I also welcome the valuable advice I've received from many of my colleagues who have travelled around the world relative to offices they've visited. Of course, I've always appreciated the important input. In fact, I know that the hon. Member for Peace River has done some extensive travelling and given me some very important input when it came to particular offices around the world. I have factored those in and am making important decisions relative to how we can get the best value for our dollar with the office, the resource, and with our people that we have there. So I thank him for the important input that we have received regarding that.

Now, on the important point of Métis settlements I want to say that ultimately one of the mandates is self-sufficiency for our Métis settlements. What's really important to us in this example is that prior to 1990 Alberta provided almost 100 per cent of the settlement funding. Today the settlements as a whole are generating a significant amount of revenue that is required to meet the needs of their communities. I applaud the settlements' leader, Alden Armstrong, and his executive, whom I've met with on numerous occasions.

Statutorily mandated payments from Alberta to the Métis settlements ended, many may not be aware, in '06-07. But after negotiations and in terms of this goal and principle of self-sufficiency Alberta agreed to provide \$9 million to the settlements in '07-08 in one-time funding. The reason behind that is that the bulk, \$7 million, was divided among the eight Métis settlements for contin-

ued provision of essential services, but the remaining \$2 million – and this is an important point – will be provided to the settlements' council pertaining to the submission of their acceptable work plan, which they are working on as we speak, that they are intending to have in to us by some time during this summer, and that is predicated on the \$2 million that will assist them in their business plan in being successful towards self-sufficiency.

So I'm eager as minister to be waiting for their business plan of achieving the goal that the hon. member has mentioned when it comes to self-sufficiency. The intention is that the Métis settlements will move even closer to self-reliance, which I know is a goal of both their leaders, their people, and certainly this ministry. We continue to do very good work there.

I will conclude my comments at this point.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Two issues I want to talk about. First, on core 2, promoting and strengthening international relations. Some 20-plus years ago the province twinned with the province of Hokkaido. At the time the town of Whitecourt took up the challenge from the province and became a twin community with the town of Kamiyubetsu in Hokkaido. I've had the opportunity twice to travel to Kamiyubetsu, and I've had the opportunity maybe a dozen times to host mayors, dignitaries, students in my home over the years.

You know, this relationship that we have has gone a long way in our community to promoting and strengthening the relationship between Hokkaido and Alberta, Kamiyubetsu and Whitecourt, but more so it's given the students of both communities huge opportunities. We now have Whitecourt students that have studied the Japanese language. They have gone over on the JET program – I don't know if you remember the JET program on Japanese education opportunities for teachers – and taught English in Japan. We've had young teachers marry into Japanese families.

We're really getting a great relationship, but it's very hard to keep up to the generosity of the Japanese communities. You know, we fund raise to send our students and others over. The town will sponsor the mayor at times or council members, but it's really hard to match the generosity of the Japanese community because they tap into cultural grants. Kamiyubetsu taps into cultural grants from the province of Hokkaido and from the Japanese federal government. I'm just wondering if there's anything in your budget that my community members, especially the students, can tap into as some funding for these exchanges. It's a great opportunity, and I would encourage everyone out there that's listening to get involved and to know a bit about these exchanges. So my request is: what's in your budget to help promote what the province of Alberta has started?

The second issue I want to talk about is goal 6, the aboriginal relationships. In my band, the Alexis Indian reserve, the chief, Cam Alexis, is one of those chiefs that works very hard for his community like most chiefs that I know you work with. He's also the Treaty 6 housing director, so he has a responsibility to bring increased housing to reserve and off reserve. I know that the federal government is directly responsible for the on-reserve housing issues, but we have opportunities within municipal affairs now. I think there was a \$48 million or \$49 million grant, and recently some announcements made on off-reserve native housing. So I'm wondering where in your budget or where in your business plan you have people that make my chief aware of these programs because they really have to go and dig for these programs and news releases. They don't hear about this stuff. Where do they hear it from your department? Where is that communication?

So, Mr. Minister, at this time just the two issues, core 2 and core 6. I'd like to hear from you on those.

9:00

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you very much. They're very important. I want to say to the hon. member – and I might also say the former mayor of Whitecourt, of course – in these twinnings of the province of Alberta, in actual fact, we have 14 twin communities across many nations. Whitecourt, in your area, is certainly one that is a model for others in terms of the success that has been had regarding education. As a teacher I can say that it has been heralded as a model for other provinces to follow. That's a compliment to the leaders in Whitecourt-St. Anne and, I might also say, to the hon. member, who was the mayor back when the twinning was taking place.

I might add on his question regarding our inner core budget that I'm very pleased that our funding is going up to help our municipal associations. When it comes to that, we're adding an additional – it's under \$10,000, but it is intended to assist in building on the partnerships and strengths that have been developed over the last 20 years. So I believe that is very important. I might say that we have had cultural exchange with so many nations, and the one that he mentioned tonight is just an excellent example that this is truly not an expense but an investment in terms of that. I say that as a teacher in terms of so many of the exchanges we've had between our educational institutions from Japan, from China, from many other municipalities across Alberta.

As a former municipal affairs minister I know that the hon. member very much is aware of the fact that as we work collectively in these partnerships, municipal affairs is playing a key role in working with our First Nations, the Alexis band, that the hon. member talked about. Actually, the hon. member has a very, very good point. I've met with the minister of municipal affairs and have talked to him in terms of how we can continue to have a cross-ministry initiative. The hon. member is absolutely correct: we have excellent programs in this province on housing and so many other issues, but sometimes many communities and First Nations are not aware of them. So I see our role in this upcoming year of enhancing that communication with our cross-ministry initiatives. We have many cross-ministry initiatives, and I might say that one of our key ones is with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing because, clearly, housing has been identified within our First Nations and Métis settlements, and there is absolutely no reason why.

So the hon. member, I know, has probably already talked to the chief relative to the fact that this program is available. I appreciate his letting the First Nations chief know what is available. Ultimately this is about: how do we enhance housing in First Nations areas in this 21st century?

I continue to work with our minister of municipal affairs enhancing the advertising, where we can have a brochure sent to our First Nations and Métis settlements and the Métis Nation of Alberta Association president, Audrey Poitras, with our First Nations Treaty 6, Treaty 7, Treaty 8 grand chiefs, but also with Eldon Armstrong in the Métis settlements. It's an excellent example of how we can enhance with the excellent programs the province of Alberta has.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else wish to participate in this particular segment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just want to chime in on one point, and that's with respect to certain international issues as they pertain to Ukraine. The minister is well aware of one of the councils that comes under his purview, and that is the

Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations. I think the minister would also know that there are a number of very important issues that face the nation of Ukraine and particularly the government of Ukraine as we speak. They have just recently, for example, agreed to go to a general election sometime in the fall. That's a tremendous step forward, a mark of co-operation, if you will, between President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yanukovych.

That having been said, however, one of our roles that we play as we keep an international spotlight on these types of situations is to see where it is that we can be of some assistance and, perhaps, where we can also learn something from our friends and cousins elsewhere in the world. So my point here is with respect to some follow-ups that need to be done with the country of Ukraine as given rise to by two previous missions to Ukraine by our former Premier.

Now, this current minister is very well aware of some of these issues, and I'm just wondering if somewhere in the plans in the not-too-distant future there might be an opportunity for a follow-up mission, if not by the minister then perhaps by some others, in order to follow up on the many initiatives and many opportunities that exist in the oil and gas, the petrochemical sector, the agricultural sector, of course in education and in health care, on environmental issues, and so on.

So I'd just like a comment, if I could, from the minister on his feelings with respect to that particular set of questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek is absolutely correct in terms of the important relationship we have with Ukraine. I want to also thank him for the excellent work he does as chairman of this important provincial and, really, international committee, and I might say that in terms of a follow-up I look forward to the hon. member as chair of this important committee and with his vast amount of experience representing our ministry in a return mission to that area. I might also say that I do know that our Premier has also expressed an interest, and it's a matter of determining the timing of the mission. I believe that this is without question an excellent example of the partnership we have.

Of course, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek is very familiar with the special guests that we've had visit our province. Our Premier with his background and with the hon. member's background and as chair of this important Alberta-Ukrainian committee that we have, a future mission is very important in terms of not only what we have but also building on the strength of the partnerships we have.

I want to also thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek for recognizing the excellent work of the committee members from across this province who, of course, have played a key role in the many relationships that we've built with Ukraine. I see the future looking brighter and better when it comes to subsequent missions, and I am quite convinced that within this next year a return mission to Ukraine and building on our strengths that we've established is without question within the purview of this ministry. I might say, certainly, that this important Alberta-Ukrainian committee that we have is an excellent example of how we build on that. So I want to thank the hon. member for raising this and indicate that it is on our agenda relative to funding such an important mission in the next year.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: For his support and assistance to the minister I'd like to thank the official that accompanied the minister.

Justice and Attorney General

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I was here two nights ago, and I did outline at that particular point in time the budget of the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General and indicated, essentially, that there are some net \$30 million for operational expenses in this budget that were not there last year and that those particular dollars are going in a number of places.

In the criminal justice area they're going into additional prosecutors, some additional 10 prosecutors and 12 support staff, to help respond to the increasing workload and the complexity. So we have, for example, five new family violence prosecutors, three new prosecutors to handle an increased caseload and megacases, one new prosecutor for the integrated market enforcement team, and one new prosecutor dedicated to the education and training of our junior prosecutors. All of those are areas where there is a significant need for additional support staff, so it will be well used.

In the court services area one of our major projects and, indeed, from my perspective our major project in the go-forward is to implement the justice information management system, or JIMS. This is the new information management system that will be available to all aspects of the justice system, whether it be the courts, the judges, the prosecutors. We are at this particular point in time dealing with what they call legacy systems; in other words, the ones that are on their last legs. So this year's budget has \$2.5 million in new funding, which is allocated to the JIMS project, which will be used to cover project start-up costs for this multiyear project, one that will be ultimately dealt with over the next few years if, in fact, the current timetable is maintained.

9:10

One of the other areas where we are putting additional resources is ticket processing. The increased population and the Solicitor General's traffic enforcement initiative have resulted in more tickets being written, and our experience has been that more of those tickets are now being challenged in court. We are putting \$3.8 million into this particular area to deal with the increase, so we will be able to hire an additional 25 Provincial Court staff. We're paying additional dollars, some \$216,000, to the justices of the peace as a result of the recommendations of the justice of the peace commission in 2006.

Under the legal services division we're putting \$3 million into the aboriginal law area, which deals with some complex aboriginal litigation against Alberta, and some of that money is also going into the area of aboriginal consultation. There's an additional \$2.1 million going into support for the Legal Aid Society of Alberta. Legal Aid, of course, provides assistance to those people who principally are in need of criminal law talent, but there's also a family component, and the total amount this year will be \$45.3 million, money very well spent.

The Public Trustee gets some \$700,000 additional dollars to hire new staff. The Public Trustee administers the estates of dependent adults, decedents, and minors. This money is much needed.

The medical examiner gets \$342,000 in new funding to provide additional dollars for physician earnings and funeral director overhead in rural Alberta among other things.

Maintenance enforcement is an incredibly successful program with some 50,000 active cases, collecting close to \$200 million annually on behalf of 65,000 Alberta children. The budget for maintenance enforcement this year is \$17 million, which is a \$2.1 million increase, and will lead to the hiring of 18 additional collection officers, which will improve the ability of that particular department to provide much needed services to the families in Alberta.

We have \$1.5 million in new funding going to the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force, which is one of the Premier's initiatives supporting the concept of providing secure and safe communities in Alberta. That particular task force has now gone to 14 communities throughout Alberta over the past couple of months, led very capably by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. There will be a symposium in Calgary later in June. I believe it's on June 19 and 20. Following that, there will be a report later in the summer from the task force to the minister, and hopefully we will be able to have that reflected in some measure in the business planning for the following year.

There are additional dollars being put into the bill forfeiture collection team. That is the team that ensures that money owed to the Crown is recovered if an accused breaches bail conditions. There are some \$500,000 additional dollars, which will provide for six new collection officers.

Sixty-five per cent of the ministry's budget is related to manpower, Mr. Chairman, and the fact is that a large part of the dollars that I have talked about are going to additional manpower. With respect to the existing manpower we have built in \$5.7 million to manage inflationary pressures, including manpower.

There is \$4.3 million allocated to address the ministry's capital requirements, including \$2.8 million in capital funding to complete the installation of technical infrastructure and equipment at the Calgary Courts Centre, which is on time, on budget. At this point in time the total cost of the Calgary Courts Centre will be \$300 million. We anticipate that the builder will turn over the keys around the end of July, and over the course of August and September there will be a move into the courthouse by the Court of Queen's Bench and members of the Provincial Court, that are currently in four separate locations. By the end of September all will be fully operational, and indeed some of the courts will be operational in August of this year in the new space.

Mr. Chairman, those are some of the highlights with respect to the ministry's 2007-2008 budget. If there are any questions, I'd be happy to take them at this time.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. minister. First of all, I must compliment the task force that you sent out on crime reduction. It was very well received. I want to thank the RCMP from Edson, Hinton, and Jasper for coming. It certainly shows that there is a concern out there. It was very well received by the people that were there in the workshop. I sure hope that we can move forward on some of those initiatives.

On your business plan, page 227, what I'm wondering about – and you explained a bit about it in your opening remarks – is the Traffic Safety Act and the enforcement on that. There still is quite a bit of concern with a lot of the traffic accidents we're having now. I'm just wondering what you perceive will transpire in the short while to get a lot of these traffic violations handled in a quicker manner so that people are going to learn from the aspect of the speed and everything that we have to slow down and be a lot more cautious.

One of the other questions I had was on your goal 2, pages 228 and 229. There seems to be real confusion. I don't know how we can get it out to the public; hopefully, your task force is doing that. People have a hard time understanding the civil and the criminal justice systems. I'm just wondering if there is some kind of way that we could work with some better type of advertising or get some information out so that we can help a lot of people because we seem to have a lot of confusion on that.

Then on your goal 3, page 229, you spoke about your maintenance

enforcement. Just one precautionary measure I'd like to state on 3.6. I know that they're doing a good job, but sometimes it's the attitude. I realize that it's a tough portfolio in that aspect. If you're the claimant, they're really nice to you, and conversely, if you're the debtor, they treat you like a criminal in a lot of aspects. I've had a family in there and worked as a go-between for them. It works out well, but I understand that it's a tough scenario to work with on that. I mean, we do have some people that are trying to get out of it, and I think they should have the responsibility of looking after the children because the children are our asset. But if you could just sort of mention that to them, I'd greatly appreciate it.

So if you can give me some insight on those few things, I'd greatly appreciate it. Thank you.

Mr. Stevens: I appreciate the comments from the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. The task force, indeed, has been doing a very good job. As the hon. member knows, they've been to 14 different locations throughout the province over the past two months. Those locations have been north, south, east, west and reflect a variety of different settings. There has been a good turnout from stakeholders – that would be justice and community stakeholders – within those communities who are anxious to participate to ensure that their input is heard by the task force.

9:20

One of the principles behind the task force is that the justice system – and I'm talking about the police and the prosecution when I talk about the justice system in this sense – is really the catch basin for the problems of society and that it is not enough to simply put more police officers on the streets and more Crown prosecutors in the courtrooms. That will not address some of the issues that we are facing. We have to work upstream and develop some techniques which are going to divert people out of the justice system into more creative and productive roads toward active and healthy citizenship in our communities. That is one of the things that we are hoping Albertans will be able to help us with in terms of best practice, in terms of where the priorities should be as we move forward. Without doubt, there are also ways that we can protect our communities in a typical or more standard justice way, and we're interested in hearing from Albertans on that score too.

I'm very hopeful, hon. member, in receiving a good result from the task force. I think that the summit that we're going to have in about a month's time will be very useful. And I do know this: each of the members of the task force at this point in time is very appreciative of the opportunity of having gone through the province and having talked to Albertans and is very hopeful of coming up with meaningful recommendations for this minister and this government.

With respect to traffic situations and how to deal with those, the hon. member will know that the Solicitor General over the last year or two has been able to put significant new resources on the roads in terms of sheriff officers to patrol the highways. That has in fact given rise to a significant number of new highway traffic tickets, principally speeding, and that is one of the reasons why we are adding additional resources in processing those in this budget.

One of the things that we are also doing, hon. member, is bringing in the electronic ticket. There has been a pilot project here in Edmonton to test it. At this particular point in time – and we're talking about speeding tickets here – about 90 per cent of those are paid voluntarily by the people who receive them, and 10 per cent proceed to court. The 10 per cent that proceed to court need to ultimately be paper tickets, but the 90 per cent can be done electronically. We estimate that as we bring this out in fullness, we will be

able to save something in the order of I believe 380,000 hours of processing time by the people who currently do it, which will provide significant new resources. So we'll be able to redeploy within the system to other needs of the justice system.

Education is always an issue with respect to the justice system, and it's an ongoing interest of ours. At this particular point in time we do have a program to bring education into our public education system. We brought in a module – I believe it was last year – for the grade 3 level. We have one that's anticipated for grade 6 and then grade 9. We work with the folks in the public education, legal education field. There's an organization called PLENA, which I think is the Public Legal Education Network of Alberta, or words to that effect, and we try and provide some assistance to public education, legal education in that sense.

I can tell you, hon. member, that we've also just brought in an initiative called LInC, which stands for legal information centre. It is designed for people who are using our courts but who otherwise are not represented by legal counsel either by choice or because they cannot afford it and there is no assistance at this point in time available to them. In other words, they do not qualify for legal aid. The first of these was officially opened about a month ago here in Edmonton. I had the opportunity to go there. There's a kiosk on the main floor of the Law Courts in Edmonton, and then in the library there are resource people who can work with the folks in giving them education on how to fill in forms, where they can go for additional information. The librarians are prepared to assist them, and indeed there is the ability to refer them out to groups such as the Centre for Equal Justice in Edmonton, where free legal advice of certain sorts can be provided. So that is education, if you will, of a sort relative to civil and criminal justice here in the province.

With respect to the maintenance enforcement program, you're absolutely right; the people who are there are very, very busy. As I indicated in my opening remarks, there are some 50,000 files in Alberta that are open at this time. I believe there are 65,000 children who are the beneficiaries of this. If I recall correctly, the number of contacts on a monthly basis that the staff deal with is somewhere in the vicinity of 80,000 or 90,000 per month. There's an incredibly high caseload. The fact of the matter is that maintenance enforcement are well trained. They do an incredible job. Admittedly, because of the volume, mistakes are made. We recognize those, and we apologize for the mistakes that are made on occasion.

Indeed, as minister I can tell you that there are a number of complaints that are done up in response form that I send out to people. I can tell you that many of them are simply a recitation of fact for people who have a need to understand how the system works. We deal with orders that are granted by the court. We do not have the ability to amend those orders. Often the frustration that people have relates to the fact that they do not believe that the orders that are being enforced are appropriate to the circumstances. Those folks are told that it's necessary for them to go back to the court of originating jurisdiction so that they can address the matter.

I appreciate the hon. member's comments with respect to the need for addressing the needs of the clients. There's constant client recognition training being provided within that particular area, and everybody is very mindful of it. I think they do an incredible job. Certainly, it is something that has to be an ongoing aspect of maintenance enforcement so that everybody is in fact treated fairly. But, hon. member, at this particular point in time I think that given the load, given the nature of the assignment – that is, the collection of dollars from people who sometimes may not feel that it's appropriate that they be collected from them for people who feel that they need these dollars in order to get by every month in a very minimal way; I mean, given that often that is the situation that

people are dealing with – they do a very, very fine job indeed. But I do acknowledge that we can always strive to do better.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A couple of items. First I want to talk about goal 2: promote a fair and accessible civil and criminal justice system. I want to tell you how impressed I am on the mediation process. The Provincial Court civil mediation settlement rate is about 65 per cent. I'm just wondering: in your budget are you planning on increasing that opportunity for mediation throughout the province? You know, it is available in the larger centres, but it isn't available in our smaller centres. I think we could increase the actual use of mediation if it was more widely known and more widely used. It could be more widely used.

Goal 3: provide access to justice services for Albertans in need. I guess that if there is a complaint I get on a pretty regular basis, it's about legal aid. The expectations from Albertans using legal aid are pretty high. They think that legal aid can do everything for everyone accessing it. I'm just wondering if, in your budget, there is an increased allocation for legal aid.

9:30

Moving on to goal 4, improving the understanding of and confidence in the justice system. You know, we seem to get decision after decision that the public doesn't agree with. Just a simple one like the last one: Albertans widely accept that you should have a picture on your driver's licence, but a decision that comes out of the justice system opposes what the government of Alberta says. We have a piece of identification that's needed. It's our driver's licence. I know that this could be for further review, and I'm not going to ask you to comment on it, but it goes to the point of the confidence in the justice system. We have our local RCMP members do an admirable job with the tools that they've got to work with out in rural Alberta, but time after time the criminal element, you know, hires himself a good lawyer, and they get off on some technicality. Again, that doesn't bring us the confidence in the justice system that we need.

So those are my three issues. I'd just like some brief comments. Of course, I don't want to put you in a position with the Hutterite licence issue. That's just an example that I wanted to use.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Well, I thank you very much, and I do appreciate the comments from the hon. member. The mediation program is, indeed, an excellent program. Since I became minister some two and a half years ago, I can tell the hon. member that I've had the opportunity to appear in a number of communities to announce that the mediation program in a provincial court was expanding into their community.

Like much of what we do in Justice these days, it is dependent upon the community to establish the resources to allow that particular program to go forward. For example, in mediation you need people within the community who are prepared to become trained mediators to gain the experience so that they have the minimum threshold to go out and offer services like the ones that you are talking about. You have to have a community that is prepared to, in some fashion, either send people away to be trained or bring in trainers to allow people to be trained as mediators and then, as I said, people who are prepared to be trained. We've been able to do that in many communities. We now have it in Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, and I believe that there are

perhaps one or two other communities where that, in fact, is also present.

But I can tell you: as minister I feel that mediation is the way of the future. Mediation is very, very successful. As the hon. member indicated, it has a 65 per cent success ratio in provincial court or something to that effect. That means that people who go through the program resolve their matters short of going to court. They almost assuredly do it in a less stressful fashion. They have a resolution that they agree to as opposed to one that is imposed upon them, which is the case if they go to court. So it is very much a win situation for the individuals who have the dispute, and it's a win situation for the courts because time that otherwise would be spent in the courts taking up time of our staff, whether it be the court staff at the counters or whether it be the court staff and the judge in the courtroom, can be spent on cases that, in fact, need be tried.

Hon. member, I can tell you this: we continue to emphasize alternative dispute resolution. We continue to say that this is an area that we want to expand, but our ability to move it into areas where it is not today has a lot to do with the communities. If we have the will within the communities, I can tell you, this ministry will work with them to try and bring it into those communities. We will do all we can to continue to expand that program.

With respect to legal aid, as I indicated in my opening remarks, this is an excellent program. Indeed, Alberta has, in my estimation, one of the best, if not the best, programs in the country. I say that for a couple of reasons. First of all, the people who are part of legal aid Alberta are volunteers as the board of directors. There are paid staff, obviously, but the board of directors are very committed to this particular exercise and do a wonderful job in providing guidance. We have been able to provide additional dollars to legal aid so that they are able to meet their commitment.

The legal aid program in Alberta provides not only a criminal component but also a civil component, principally in the area of family but also in immigration. When you go to other jurisdictions in Canada, principally what you find is criminal only; in other words, there is no family.

When I go to my federal/provincial/territorial minister meetings, the very first item on the agenda in terms of priority of my counterparts is a plea to the federal government to provide us with long-term funding because what has been happening recently is year to year and, secondly, to increase the amount of funding because like so many federal programs it began as an equal contribution, and over time it has become principally a provincial contribution with a smaller and smaller federal contribution. While we do appreciate the federal contribution, and we couldn't do what we're doing without it, the fact of the matter is that we are asking for more.

The other thing that my colleagues ask for – and, by the way, I agree with all of this; it's just that this is always the way; this is the number one priority – is to expand it into family, expand it into civil.

We are putting more dollars in, some \$2.1 million this year. I think we will be fine this year. It's always a challenge for the legal aid people to do what they want to do, and there is so much more to be done.

One of the things I can say that I'm very proud of in Alberta that is a companion piece to legal aid is pro bono, or free, legal advice that the legal community provides. Calgary Legal Guidance is the prototype program in Alberta. I believe it's been in existence for some 25 or so years. It's been around for some time. It is the template that has been used to expand into Edmonton with the Centre for Equal Justice, which is in the process of being renamed. It got set up within the last several years.

Just two or three weeks ago I was in Lethbridge for the official opening of the Legal Guidance clinic there, a wonderful street-front

facility. I believe it's in excess of 50 per cent of the lawyers in Lethbridge – and there are some 80 or so lawyers in that particular legal community – that have signed up to provide pro bono legal services. Essentially, what we're talking about is to provide advice to people who have legal issues, whether they happen to be landlord, tenant, criminal, civil. It doesn't necessarily mean that they go to court. In fact, typically they would not go to court. There might be the odd exception. But the fact is that these members of the legal community are dedicating a set amount of time per month, month after month, to provide that type of service.

In this 100th anniversary of the Law Society of Alberta I can tell you that that body has as its anniversary initiative established a \$200,000 pro bono Alberta program, essentially a not-for-profit society, which is going to add management and guidance and leadership to the whole area of pro bono within Alberta. So as we go forward, you will see more of this pro bono, I think, offered by the legal society, not only in Calgary and Edmonton and Lethbridge but in other communities.

I think that one has to give recognition to and applaud what the Law Society of Alberta is doing to complement the Legal Aid Society of Alberta because it is fundamental in a democracy, in my estimation, that people do have access to legal services, particularly when their liberty is at risk – that is, in the area of criminal law – but also in the area of family. As we all know in this Legislature – certainly, I don't think there would be any dispute from any of the members – families are the core of our communities, and family law is so essential to ensuring that those disputes be resolved quickly and appropriately so that people can move on productively in their lives.

9:40

The issue of public confidence in the justice system is an ongoing one for this minister. I think it's one of those situations, however, where what you read about are the minority of cases. It's sort of as one of our previous Premiers liked to say: you hear about the plane that crashes; you don't hear about the thousands that take off and land safely. One of my remarks earlier was: 90 per cent of traffic tickets are paid voluntarily by the people who receive them; 10 per cent are challenged in court. We are doing very well in receiving convictions, if you will, for people who are charged.

The ones that we read about in the paper are the tip of the iceberg. They are the notorious ones, typically, and they are the ones, obviously, that are going to court and that are being fought out. Having said that, I do understand fully what the hon. member is saying because as Minister of Justice when I read the paper – and I do – I say to myself, because it is my department that usually has something to do with these cases that you're referring to: what is that all about? And often what it is is the newspaper reporting of the case. In other words, the way it is reported doesn't necessarily reflect the situation when one inquires into it.

One of the things that we have done in Alberta Justice is that we have said to prosecutors in certain situations: it's incumbent upon you to talk to the media, to explain to the media at the end of a case when you know there's an interest in the case why it is that the case was resolved by the court in the fashion that it has come. We feel that that's useful in the sense that the information at least is going to the media. Of course, there's always the issue of whether or not it's reported and the fashion. The information ultimately has to make it into print. But we do understand that, and it is a matter of constant concern.

What we do, essentially, with respect to the cases that we have is: we follow a principle, and that principle is that we proceed with prosecutions if the evidence produces in the estimation of the prosecution a reasonable likelihood of conviction. That is the test

that is applied in the initial trial. That is the test that is applied after a trial in consideration of an appeal. It is always that way, and it should always be that way.

I think it would be abhorrent to anyone if they said you were using some principle other than that objective assessment of the evidence as you understand it to proceed with the prosecution. You would not want us, for example, to say that we are prosecuting somebody because of a political reason. So that is the standard, and that is an area where we need to educate people better. I can tell you that sometimes it is very, very difficult to get that type of message across, but most of the cases that do get the headlines typically are on the basis of an assessment of the prosecutors or an assessment of the court at the end of the day that the evidence falls short of where it should be.

I can tell you that the prosecution service is very successful, generally speaking. We want to be more successful, and we are trying to expand the number of prosecutors that we have. I think in the last two years we've expanded by some 25; we've got another 10 this year. We've added judges to our provincial court over the last couple of years, so we are expanding the number of people who can address the justice issues. That's one of the ways that I think that we will get better justice and quicker justice, if you will. But we are challenged because there's an expanding number of cases, and the complexity of the cases is expanding.

Charter cases are complex now. Twenty years ago a breathalyzer or an impaired case would be dealt with in an hour. Today it may be a day or two days. That's all because of the nature of the Charter and the Charter arguments that are used. Organized crime is very, very complex today compared to before. We have the advent of the Internet, and that has made life very, very complex. So the nature of the work that the prosecution service does is much different than it was, but I can tell the hon. member that we are very, very concerned and mindful of the issue of public confidence in the justice system and are working on it continually.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I have exhausted the list that I had before me, and if there are no further speakers, I'm willing to ask the committee to rise and report progress. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I was intrigued by the discussion that the minister was having with respect to all of this. I just wanted to make a couple of brief comments and a couple of questions. It's to do with traffic enforcement. One of the things that I was impressed with was the Victoria weekend statistics of enforcement that took place just in that one weekend alone. One of the things that intrigued me was the number of people who were essentially stopped that had previous issues or previous warrants out against them and were in that way brought back into the justice system.

When I hear about electronic ticketing and the benefits of, you know, 380,000 hours' less work and all of this sort of stuff, I say that that's great except that there are two issues with respect to electronic ticketing. There's, of course, the issue that many people see this as essentially a cash cow type of robot law enforcement. The big issue and the one that I want to ask about is that if we, in fact, rely upon electronic ticketing, electronic surveillance, and so on for the bulk of our law enforcement, then the chances of someone being caught driving without insurance, without a driver's licence, without a properly registered vehicle, or who is a fugitive from other issues – the chances of being stopped are a lot less. So I'm wondering if there's a safeguard or at least a study of statistics that will take place to show that we're not gaining on one side and losing on the other,

which in my mind would be a whole lot more serious if, in fact, it's easier for people to get away with all of these other infractions.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Briefly, Mr. Chairman. I thank the hon. member for the question. The issue of electronic processing has more to do with the administration of the ticket internally rather than the issue of how the ticket came to be in the first place. What we're talking about is a situation where after the ticket is written internally, the processing is electronic rather than paper. Really, it's simply that the volume of tickets is so great. I think they estimate something in the order of three and a half minutes per ticket electronic versus paper, and that adds up to the 380,000 hours because the volume is so great. So it really doesn't address the initial contact, if you will.

9:50

The Deputy Chair: Any others?

There being no further speakers, the committee will now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Agriculture and Food; Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture; International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations; and Justice and Attorney General relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:52 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 31, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/31

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the distinct pleasure and honour today to introduce to this Assembly Ambassador Jose Brillantes of Philippines. Alberta is a province that has more than 30,000 Canadian Filipinos and is a partner in a trade relationship with Philippines that exceeds \$150 million a year. His Excellency Brillantes has been enjoying a couple of days in Alberta right now and will remain with us for a few days. He is accompanied today by the consul general, Joseph Angeles; second secretary and consul, Rhenita Rodriguez; the Philippines honorary consul in Edmonton, Esmeralda Agbulos; and the honorary consul general in Calgary, Mr. Guerrero. I would like the whole Assembly to extend the usual traditional welcome to His Excellency and his accompanying guests.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a distinct pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature two guests, very special guests, who have joined us in the members' gallery, Rebecca Edwards and Brad Rabiey. The young and talented Rebecca Edwards works as a youth worker for Boyle Street and is located in LYNC unit. Rebecca's positive demeanour allows her to successfully work on the front lines with Edmonton's high-risk youth, using an effective harm-reduction and client-focused approach. This positive demeanour especially comes in handy in Rebecca's work after time, when she keeps an eye on my senior policy adviser, Brad Rabiey, who is attending question period with her today. Brad is quite simply an outstanding member of our team, and I'm very proud to have him aboard. I would ask that Rebecca and Brad please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Michael Cheung, a senior financial consultant with MD Management – MD Management is a subsidiary of the Canadian Medical Association, providing financial management assistance to physicians and their families – and Ms Belinda Ferro, formerly with MD Management, now taking on a new role at the Stollery children's hospital. I ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure

that I introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 50 bright and enthusiastic grade 6 students from the Grand Centre middle school from the city of Cold Lake. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Jackie Crooks, Mr. Cass Claude, Mrs. Pam Wells, Ms Sara Wiebe, and Ms Brandy Berube; parent helpers Mrs. Karen Wehinger, Mr. Mike Longmuir, Mr. Rob Wilken, and Mrs. Donna Cordick. I had the opportunity of meeting with these students back in January in their classroom, and I can tell you that they are very, very keen on government and politics. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me also to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 52 bright young students from the Lacombe upper elementary school. These are two grade 6 classes, one of them a French immersion class. They are accompanied by a number of teachers: Mr. Bob Epp, Mme Christine Graves, and Mrs. Leslie Smale. They're also accompanied by a number of parent helpers: Ms Jannine Donalds, Mr. Darren Howie, Mrs. Cynthia Campbell, Mrs. Sandra Epp, Mrs. Jackie Lunn, and Mrs. Monique Mickelson. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would also ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As part of my ongoing celebration of Edmonton being named the cultural capital of Canada for 2007, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two sets of artists who are joining us today.

The first person I'd like to introduce is Edmund Haakonson, who is a very fine painter and sculptor, indeed so fine he was a finalist in the first national competition for portrait painters in Canadian history. This summer he's doing a special project, the Alcoa project for invited artists on Sir Winston Churchill Square, creating a six-foot by 12-foot sculpture from rebar and aluminum for the Works festival. He is also in his seventh year as president of the board of directors for Harcourt House Arts Centre. I would ask Edmund to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

My second introduction is a group that have just returned from a very successful tour. This is a local company called Guys in Disguise. With us today is the renowned Darrin Hagen, who is a writer, an actor, and I would have to say Edmonton's best-known drag queen. Would you rise as I say your name? Thank you, Darrin. With him today is Gina Moe, who is by far the finest stage manager that we have, and a great honour to have her joining us today. We also have Davina Stewart, who is a fabulous actor and forever elegant. Look at her; isn't she lovely? Also, as a real treat we have Trevor Schmidt joining us today. Trevor was with the company, which just got back from Orlando. Trevor is also the artistic director of Northern Light Theatre here in Edmonton. Congratulations on a very successful tour, folks, and thank you so much for coming down to join us.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure and honour today to introduce to you the parents of an accomplished young man who is a valued page in our Assembly. That is, of

course, Conor Smyth, who is presently sitting to your right, Mr. Speaker. His parents are here; that's Peter and Cheryl Smyth. Peter is a valued public servant with Children's Services, currently working with high-risk youth. Cheryl works in finance with Big Brothers Big Sisters. Peter and Cheryl Smyth are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

A second group, Mr. Speaker, is a great soccer club. They were the recipients of the Edmonton-Manning MLA's cup in 2005. That was the MLA's African Nations Cup for that soccer tournament. They're sitting in the public gallery. I'd ask them all to rise as I name them. The manager of the Leone Stars is John Elliott. Please rise, John. The coach is Foday Samura. The treasurer is Alimamy Samura. The team captain is Kelvin Kamara. The caretaker is Prince Thorpe. Three members of the team: Ansu Marah, Jacob Tamba, and David Dominic. I would ask all members to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Amy MacLeod and Lauren Keating. Amy and Lauren are Palace Casino workers entering their 265th day on the picket line due to this government's failure to protect hard-working Alberta workers from unfair and uncaring employers. Amy MacLeod has been at the Palace Casino for nearly two years as a bartender. Lauren Keating has been at the Palace Casino for three and a half years as a head cashier. Lauren admits that her weaknesses are shopping and reading, and when she's not working, you'll find her doing one of those two things. They are joined today by UFCW organizer Don Crisall. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very special friends that are seated in the public gallery today. I would ask that they please rise as I name them: Gibson Glavin, who is an RCMP officer with K Division; Jerry and Dee Calder from the fine city of Leduc, just south of Edmonton-Rutherford; and Shirlene, Ron, Natalie, and Jamie Sexton, all residents of St. Albert. These fine folks are here today to help me in celebrating the tremendous work that a group called the Compassionate Friends does for bereaved parents and their families who have lost children. I would ask all members to please give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Compassionate Friends of Edmonton Society

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If there are angels on this earth, then we are blessed to have a number of them in the public gallery with us today. These people all belong to a club with the highest initiation fees imaginable; that is, you have to lose a child to belong.

Mr. Speaker, Jerry Calder and his wife, Dee, lost their son Jay when he fell to his death in 1991 at the age of 21 years. Ron and

Shirlene Sexton lost their daughter Carly to a brain aneurysm in 1993 at the age of six years. Gibson Glavin and his wife lost Brendan in 2002. He was 8 years old.

Mr. Speaker, while these family tragedies are always devastating, these special individuals have turned their personal experiences into something magical by volunteering with the Compassionate Friends of Edmonton Society. This dedicated group provides support and caring for parents and their families who have lost a child. Shirlene has been the driving force behind the Edmonton chapter for 10 years now, while Jerry has shared facilitating duties off and on for even longer. Gibson has shared duties with Jerry and Shirlene for the past few years and speaks each year at TCF's annual candlelight service.

As you may know, Mr. Speaker, I too am a member of this society. A particularly poignant moment came for me when a 92-year-old great-grandmother attended a meeting. We all assumed that she had lost a great-grandchild. However, it turned out that she had lost her 69-year-old daughter, and she was as devastated as we all are in this circumstance. It is simply not the natural order.

As we have seen in the news this week, the need for compassionate friends is never-ending. With the support and assistance of these angels amongst us families can continue to grow as a result of what their loss has taught them about life, humanity, and spirit.

To all those parents who have lost a child and the many more that unfortunately will, I have this message: we need not walk alone; we are the compassionate friends.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod.

Pincher Creek, Alberta

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the beautiful town of Pincher Creek, Alberta. In 1868 Montana gold prospectors, hopeful explorers of the Kootenay goldfields, camped along a creek north of the border. Following their departure home, pinchers, a mechanism used to trim the hooves of horses, were left behind. Later, in 1874, the North West Mounted Police marched west to bring law, order, and good government to the North-West Territories, and on their voyage the pinchers left behind by the prospectors were found along the creek. Henceforth the area became known as Pincher Creek.

Shortly after, the North West Mounted Police established a large horse ranch in the area as its base of operations. The rolling foothills, mountainous views, and luscious grass quickly attracted many other ranchers to the area hoping to create a new life for themselves in the west.

By 1906 the town of Pincher Creek became incorporated. It has proven to be a town and a municipal district of hard-working individuals, and I'm proud to represent them in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, Pincher Creek continues to be an area which prides itself on its successful ranching sector, yet progressively minded people have been using other opportunities such as natural gas, wind, and hydro power to continue the prosperity within the region. The residents of Pincher Creek are pioneers of a green community. In fact, the largest wind farm in Canada resides within this area. The opportunity placed before the people represented by chinook winds has allowed them to embrace and to use green energy, and it has set a precedent for the rest of the nation.

This summer the community will welcome all visitors to their progressive town to relive history, enjoy their museums, parks, and attractions like the wind farms and the Oldman River dam. Make sure that you put it on your holiday itinerary.

For all of its accomplishments and for continuing its hard-working, example-setting attitude, I would like to sincerely thank the

people of Pincher Creek and district for being the pioneers of the future for a better Alberta.

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

World No Tobacco Day

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today, May 31, is World No Tobacco Day. World No Tobacco Day was created by the World Health Organization 20 years ago to draw global attention to the tobacco epidemic and the preventable death and disease it causes. This annual event raises awareness of the harmful effects of tobacco use, the business practices of tobacco companies, and helps inspire people around the world to embrace a healthy lifestyle.

Here in Alberta to commemorate World No Tobacco Day, AADAC hosted its annual provincial celebration this past Monday. Nearly 200 tobacco reduction stakeholders from around the province gathered together to share their ideas, learn from leading experts, and build new partnerships.

As part of this provincial celebration AADAC also presented the Barb Tarbox awards of excellence in tobacco reduction. To honour the legacy of Barb Tarbox, AADAC annually recognizes individuals, youth, businesses, and nonprofit groups that make significant contributions in the area of tobacco reduction, prevention, cessation, reduction or protection from second-hand smoke in Alberta.

After being diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, Barb Tarbox made it her mission to share her story with Alberta youth in the hopes of persuading them to quit smoking or preventing them from starting.

Mr. Speaker, the winners of the 2007 Barb Tarbox awards include: in the business category, All Weather Windows; in the nonprofit organization category, Red Deer College; in the individual category, Kathy McKenna; in the youth recognition category, Oliver school's Nellie McClung's BLAST team; and the youth scholarship award went to Trent Nabe of Medicine Hat. Each of these deserving winners has demonstrated outstanding leadership, commitment to their communities, and a dedication to tobacco reduction.

AADAC, Mr. Speaker, also remains dedicated to tobacco reduction and the principles of World No Tobacco Day. Under the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy AADAC and its many partners across the province continue to work towards our goals to reduce the number of young people starting to smoke, encourage and help current tobacco users to quit, and reduce nonsmokers' exposures to second-hand smoke.

Thank you.

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

Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this weekend I had the honour of walking with Canada's poster child for the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Peyton is four years old and lives in central Alberta. She has cystic fibrosis, but that doesn't stop her. Peyton was out in front, leading the many striders in the Great Strides walk held in many communities, including Red Deer, Edmonton, and Calgary.

Like most little girls her age Peyton enjoys playing with her dolls, fingerpainting, and camping. She also likes playing with her horse Jezzabelle. I learned from Peyton's mother, Charlotte, that Peyton is learning to count her own enzyme pills every day so that her stomach doesn't hurt when she eats.

Mr. Speaker, May is Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month, and these community events are held to increase awareness of CF. Cystic

fibrosis is the most common fatal inherited disease affecting young persons in Canada. CF attacks the lungs and digestive system. Thanks to advances in research and treatment half of all Canadians with CF are now expected to live into their late 30s and even beyond. Early diagnosis and early treatment have contributed to improved survival. We are proud that Alberta was the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement newborn screening for cystic fibrosis on April 1 of this year. Newborn screening for CF will provide CF babies with early treatment and a better start in life.

1:20

The Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation is a world leader in the fight against CF. Researchers discovered the gene responsible for cystic fibrosis in 1989 and continue to play a leading role in developing new treatments for this disease.

Please join me in congratulating Peyton, her family, all families who live with CF, all the Great Striders, the many volunteers, and the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation for raising CF awareness and for their work in helping to find a cure for this devastating disease.

Thank you.

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

Lottery Grants

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has landed in hot water over lottery grants to its friends. It's even ignored the Auditor General's own lottery grant recommendations to set up clear guidelines. This failure is of concern to all Alberta taxpayers. Let me give you a few examples.

First, the government ignored the Auditor General's other initiative program recommendations. In fact, volunteers can't even find an application guideline for it on the government website. Second, CFEP. Again, the Auditor General found that the government broke its own rules. Third, Applewood, a well-connected Tory institution, broke Wild Rose rules. Fourth, in this session we learned that the community CIP guidelines were broken 43 times. While we don't question the merit of any of the volunteer organizations involved, what we do question is why one Tory-connected outfit got to splurge so much money on high-end furniture.

In a heated question exchange two weeks ago about this grant program, Mr. Speaker, I said that the department was paying five times more than they deserved anyway. Poor wording, perhaps, on my part. My intent was to say that the department paid five times more than the application guidelines allowed.

The Alberta Liberals have a long history of supporting volunteer organizations. As shadow minister for TPRC I will continue to fight for the thousands of worthy organizations that apply to this government for lottery funds. I will also continue to call into question any grants that have received favourable treatment just because they are connected to top Tories.

Thank you.

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

Affordable Housing

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past several months we have seen how the affordable housing crisis affects Albertans from all walks of life. Especially hard hit are those living on fixed incomes as are many of Alberta's seniors. Recently we have heard many examples of massive rent increases, which have been labelled as gouging and called un-Albertan. These stories have been receiv-

ing a lot of media attention and have become topics of conversation in this House, in coffee shops, and on main streets throughout Alberta. Often overlooked, however, are the many less public stories that also deserve attention.

While landlords who gouge with \$1,000-plus rent increases are the exception, unaffordable rent increases are becoming the rule in Alberta. While they often don't make headlines, these rent increases are of great concern to Alberta's seniors whose fixed incomes simply do not allow them to cope with the rising rents. When seniors face even a moderate increase in their rents, they're often left wondering if their fixed incomes will allow them to both pay their rents and afford to eat. Surely we can all agree that it's unacceptable for our seniors to be forced to choose between staying in their homes and keeping food on their tables. However, this is precisely the choice that seniors and many other renters are now facing as the government has failed to adopt legislation with the power to help them.

Seniors in Alberta have spent their lives contributing to this province and creating the basis for the prosperity within reach of all Albertans, but the price of this prosperity is unacceptably high for many, especially seniors. Should seniors not also share in this prosperity? Must they now pray and hope that they are eligible for relief from the homeless and eviction prevention fund? What is this government going to do to help seniors remain in their homes? It is time to start showing Alberta seniors the respect they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition with 530 signatures on it. The petition urges the Legislative Assembly to "request the inclusion of Complex Decongestive Therapy in the list of accepted therapeutic procedures covered by Alberta Health Care." Last year my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview tabled a similar petition with 330 names on it, for a total of 860 signatures today.

Thank you.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to table the program for the 2007 Edmonton mayor's awards for the city of Edmonton Advisory Board on Services for Persons with Disabilities. There was a nomination in this category for the Fort Road Boston Pizza in Edmonton-Manning, and they do a tremendous job in trying to help people with disabilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Al Weir, and I would like the government to please read this one particularly carefully because of their concerns about the severe effects of clawbacks on AISH payments when spouses, even seniors on pensions, earn even a modest income.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public

Accounts. The first is a letter dated May 28, 2007, to Mr. Steve Petz, president and chief executive officer, East Central health region, and it is a letter to confirm attendance at the Public Accounts Committee meeting on Tuesday, September 11, 2007, from 10 a.m. to noon.

The second tabling I have today is also a letter of confirmation to attend the Public Accounts Committee meeting on Tuesday, September 11, 2007, from 1 to 3, and this is a letter addressed to Mr. Bernie Blais, chief executive officer, Northern Lights health region, Fort McMurray.

Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are five copies of a letter from Mr. Robert Hoover to Mr. Bob Hawkesworth, a member of the Enmax board of directors, about the problem of Alberta workers who are dealing with high power lines playing a dangerous game of recloser roulette.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a brochure outlining the services of VoicePrint. VoicePrint is mandated to broadcast full text readings of current articles from leading publications for all Canadians but particularly their core audience of people with vision and print restrictions. I know that many MLAs in the Assembly have gone to do readings for VoicePrint. It's an excellent organization.

Thank you.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Tarchuk, Minister of Children's Services, responses to questions raised by several members of the Assembly on May 16, 2007, Department of Children's Services 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Snelgrove, Minister of Service Alberta, response to Written Question 12, asked for by Mr. Miller on May 14, 2007.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, responses to questions raised by Members of the Legislative Assembly on May 14 and 16, 2007, Department of Environment 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, and the hon. Mr. Hancock, Minister of Health and Wellness, response to a question raised by Mr. Eggen, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, on May 16, 2007, departments of Environment and Health and Wellness 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, responses to questions raised by Members of the Legislative Assembly on May 8, 2007, Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing 2007-08 main estimates debate.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's failure to release 1,700 pages of information from Alberta Environment

related to the Balzac project can mean just one thing: they're trying to hide something. For almost four months they have used every excuse in the book to delay releasing these documents. This confirms what everyone knows. This government is involved in this project up to its eyeballs. To the Premier: if your government has nothing to hide, why will it not release these documents to the public?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I gave the answer to the question. In terms of the due date it's June 7, and there are some obligations on behalf of the government for third-party disclosure. The minister has all the information, and he may deliver that information.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, water taken from the Red Deer River to service the Balzac project was always a bad idea. Drumheller has twice said that there is no way they're supplying water to the project. The Minister of Environment stated yesterday that his department is "simply not dealing with it anymore." Now, we know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has met various parties trying to force a deal on water for the Balzac project from the Bow River. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us who his government has been meeting with to force a deal on water for the Balzac project: with municipalities, with First Nations groups, with water commissions, or any other entities?

Mr. Stelmach: We haven't been meeting with anybody to force anybody into anything.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] I guess they love me. Thank you. Thank you. [some applause] You know, it's a sign of desperation that they'll drown us out. [some applause] Carry it on, guys. Come on. That's your last tactic. You're on the run.

Southern Alberta is facing water concerns that are serious. Communities such as Strathmore and Turner Valley face tough decisions about limiting growth due to the lack of water. Farmers also face water issues . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier. [interjections]

A long time ago I said that when I call it, it goes. You're on TV. TV does not understand any of the clapping or the other noises. All the microphones are live on the questioner.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've identified that sourcing water is a serious matter not only for communities, for agriculture, for industry. That's why we have the Water for Life strategy. We've doubled the budget, a 105 per cent increase in that area working with municipalities. We're going to be moving further with planning in those areas where we have to look at long-term solutions to the availability of water. We're doing that by meeting with municipalities and talking to them and developing a plan.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

School Construction

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Albertans continue to pay dearly for the Conservative government's complete failure to plan for our

province's growth. They refused for years to invest in the renewal of our public and separate schools. As we all know, of course, this Premier proudly led the calls from the Deep Six for cuts, and the results are clear. Dozens of Calgary communities are without schools, older schools are crumbling, and transportation costs are skyrocketing. This is another critical issue that this government is unable to deal with. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain how in one of the wealthiest jurisdictions on the planet so many communities don't have the schools they need and deserve?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the growth in the province of Alberta has been phenomenal not only in the major cities, but you see growth in many rural communities. That is why we put forward an \$18 billion capital plan. It's the largest ever investment of public dollars in infrastructure in the province of Alberta. We also are in the process of introducing a policy that's going to be debated here in the House in terms of unbudgeted surpluses. We're asking that a good portion of those unbudgeted surpluses go towards maintenance so that we can not only maintain the buildings that we've built in the past but set some money aside for future generations to maintain all of the infrastructure we're building today.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I don't think anyone believes this government is getting value for all that money it's spending. Over and over this government tells people that it's spending vast amounts on education. My question will be to the Premier. Alberta governments could afford to build schools in the '50s, in the '60s, in the '70s, and even in the '80s, but for the past 15 years, when this government has never been wealthier, it suddenly can't manage to build schools. To the Premier: is this because of mismanagement or because the government doesn't support children going to school? Or is it simply incompetence?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, the opposition leader is totally wrong.

I will defer to the Minister of Education to read out the long list of new school projects, modernization projects in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think I heard the hon. member say that, quote, we're not getting value for money that we're spending. School boards spend 95 per cent of the budget, so I think the hon. member owes school boards an apology.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this PC government has come to power, they've taken over \$200 billion in resource revenues out of the ground. They've managed to save almost none of it. Will the Premier admit that Alberta's education system needs truly sustainable funding sources so that we can provide the education system our children need?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, many times as a government we've said that we're looking at how we can broaden Alberta's tax base, reduce the reliance on a major revenue stream, which is oil and gas. One way, of course, to diversify is a knowledge-based economy. Schools, education, play such an important factor in moving towards that goal and diversification of the economy, and that's why we're investing the billions of dollars in public education. We'll continue to do so not only in the infrastructure but in the people that deliver

the programs and make sure that we continue to be one of the best in the world in our public education system.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Investments in Tobacco Companies

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, today is World No Tobacco Day. At long last the government caucus is finally catching up to public opinion and moving towards a province-wide smoking ban in public places. For that, congratulations are in order. I want to assure you that the Official Opposition is prepared to sit further into this spring and summer if we can facilitate passage of this very important and long overdue legislation. My first question is for the minister of health. This year \$9.1 million is being spent on the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy. Can the minister share with this House the annual cost of tobacco use to the Alberta economy in health care costs, lost productivity, and other costs?

Mr. Hancock: Four hundred and seventy-one million, \$8 million, \$9 million, and \$1.296 billion: those are the costs that we incur every year as a result of using tobacco. The \$471 million is the direct health care cost. The indirect cost to our community and our society is \$1.296 billion.

Mr. R. Miller: Against that, Mr. Speaker, we spend \$9 million on the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy.

To the Minister of Finance: can the minister share with this House how much money this government has directly and indirectly invested in tobacco-based companies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows because I have sent a letter to him, the amount is roughly \$57 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly did know. I asked it to share it with all members of this Assembly.

My last question, Mr. Speaker, is for the Premier, and it's a very simple question. On this most appropriate of days will you and your government finally do the right thing: stop sending mixed messages to Albertans and get rid of the investments in tobacco-based companies?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We had a very extensive discussion on this during Committee of Supply, and what I outlined to the hon. member is that we're actually putting all of our investment strategies towards a financial management committee that will be formed almost immediately. We're asking them what it should be. On one hand, we have to say that we should be maximizing the amount of dollars for Albertans versus ethical investment. What is ethical for one person is not necessarily ethical for others. So this is a very important discussion item. It's a discussion item that we have had a lot of talking with the opposition member, and it's something we are taking very, very seriously and will be discussing in this House.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

1:40

Royalty Review

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance was quoted in yesterday's reports as being nervous about the royalty review. Well, he should be because Albertans are watching. Energy companies' profits are hitting the stratosphere while the government projects declining energy revenues in future budgets. Increasingly, the royalty review looks like a sham, with energy companies crying crocodile tears and the Minister of Finance trying to lower the public's expectations for meaningful change. To the minister: why is the minister so nervous about the royalty review? Is it because he's been torn between the oil patch lobby and the expectations of a public who know they've been hosed for years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the hon. member is absolutely correct. Any time you take a very critical examination of a revenue stream of roughly \$10 billion or \$11 billion, or close to a third of our budget, you have to be nervous.

What initially we talked about with the review panel was that they need to take a holistic approach on how they look at royalties. They need to take a look to ensure that Albertans receive their fair share as well as keeping the economic activity in the province of Alberta going. I'll certainly respect their decisions, and we hope to have their decisions back by around the end of August. Certainly, they're an independent panel and will be making independent decisions.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given the minister's public comments about concern about the oil patch and its future earnings, I'd just like to remind him that Suncor's earnings were \$551 million for the first four months of this year. EnCana's first-quarter earnings are up 15 per cent to \$1.8 billion this year. The new titleholder for Canadian corporate profits is EnCana with a \$6.5 billion profit in 2006, which exceeds the GDP of a number of small countries. So my question is to the Minister of Finance. How can he tell Albertans that the energy companies will not invest in the oil sands . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The answer is very obvious. EnCana is a world-wide company. It's a world-wide Alberta company that is investing right around the world. Their profits are being made from every other country in the world, being brought back to Alberta, funnelled into Alberta, and being spent in Alberta. EnCana is a true Alberta success story.

Mr. Mason: EnCana may be a true Alberta success story, but this Minister of Finance is not.

I would just like to ask him to please come clean with the people of Alberta and tell them that EnCana and other energy companies are making a killing in Alberta and that they're not paying enough in royalties to the owner of the resources, which is the people of this province.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, our Premier was very wise during the leadership campaign. What he stated was that we would get an independent panel of people to take a look at the royalties, have a very objective look at what the royalties were. Yes, indeed, all eight leadership candidates said exactly the same thing. That is what we

are in the process of doing. We're looking at it from a very objective point of view. The panel that we have put together is full of experts. They've heard probably around 50 or 60 different submissions. In the first week on our website we had 17,000 hits from Albertans. So we're going to be taking all of this information together and formulating from the panel the best possible results.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Honeybee Die-off

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albert Einstein once said: "If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe then man would only have four years of life left." No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man. Alberta's honeybees have had a huge die-off this year. Honey producers have lost at least 30 per cent of their bees; some in the north, 80 per cent. Bees are important. Pollination of crops is crucial. Our agriculture needs bees. Alberta exports a lot of honey, some of the best in the world. My question is to the minister of agriculture. When do you expect your ministry will note the extent of the die-off, and what means are you employing to find out given that this is a busy season for producers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A little bit of history along with a very good question, a timely question and probably kind of a concerning question. Yes, certainly, the bee industry is very important. We get about \$50 million a year out of it, and it certainly pollinates our crops and adds there. We are already conducting a scientific survey to gauge the status of Alberta bees. We extended the survey deadline twice because beekeepers have been late with their surveys. We're now following up with phone calls on the surveys. Although not all surveys are available, it appears that the average loss in Alberta is . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. A supplementary to the same minister. Honey producers say that U.S. bees are no more dangerous than those from other sources. With all costs included, importing bees from the U.S. is only one-third the cost of importing from New Zealand, the other main source. Given the bee die-off, importation is necessary. To stay in business, cost counts to producers. How will your ministry convince the federal government to allow bees from the U.S. to cross our border into Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working very closely with both the federal government and our industry on this issue. I have already written to Chuck Strahl, the federal minister of agriculture, representing the CFIA, to conduct their new risk assessment on importing honeybees from the U.S. Given the record challenges facing beekeepers in Alberta and across Canada this year, we are hoping that the federal government will listen to our bee industry and allow the importation of U.S. bees.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Official

Opposition laughs about issues from rural Alberta and doesn't seem to care very much about them, but these are important.

The honey industry in some parts of our province is extremely stressed. Some producers compare it to the effect of BSE on cattle producers a few years ago. What assistance is available to honey producers who have suffered significant loss due to circumstances beyond their control?

The Speaker: Point of order.

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. It is no laughing matter to the beekeepers in Alberta. I would say that in assisting, the Canadian agriculture income stabilization program assists all agricultural producers, and AFSC has been working with the Beekeepers' Association to examine how producers will be impacted and how CAIS could assist.

Just to follow up on the first question that I didn't finish, in Alberta we've lost about 31 per cent this year, and the national average over five years has been about 18 per cent. It's not associated with the colony collapse disorder that we hear about in other countries.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Smoke-free Places Legislation

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the government approved a provincial ban on smoking in all public places in Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell this House what the government's proposals will mean for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're planning to bring forward to this House legislation which will, among other things, prohibit smoking in all public places and workplaces, including within a reasonable distance from doors, windows, and air intakes; ban power walls and other tobacco retail displays and promotion; prohibit the sale of tobacco products in designated places such as pharmacies, universities, colleges, and health care facilities. We already have seen the tobacco tax increase, so what it will mean to Albertans is an improvement in their health status.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the support for the government's proposals, can the minister tell this House when government will bring legislation before the Assembly?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are still a number of processes. We have a very careful policy process in this government before we bring forward legislation. We've been through the policy discussions, and now we need to go through the legislative process discussions, but it's my hope that we'll be able to table legislation this spring so that Albertans will be able to see what we're talking about, see what it means to them, and have an opportunity to plan for its implementation. We'll be talking, hopefully, over the summer with retailers and others because it will have an impact on their business, and they need to know that impact and be prepared to plan for it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. How does the minister expect this legislation to improve the health of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since being appointed Minister of Health and Wellness and in the mandate letter that was given to me by the Premier, one of the four mandates that I was given was to strengthen public health services that promote wellness and injury and disease prevention. Well, the single most obvious thing to do is to reduce the amount of tobacco use because that tobacco use not only impacts us in terms of lung cancer. It's other forms of cancer, it's heart disease, it's lung disease, and in so many other ways it impacts the health of Albertans. By having legislation which is primarily aimed at ensuring that young Albertans do not start smoking, we will improve the health status of Albertans. We also want to continue to encourage adults who have started smoking to stop, and that will improve their lifestyle.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

1:50

Royalty Rates

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1996 published in the *Alberta Gazette* were two orders in council that gave both Suncor and Syncrude the one-time option to change their royalty structure from that of synthetic crude oil to bitumen. My first question is to the Premier. Why did the government sign this sweet deal to allow Suncor and Syncrude the one-time option to pay an even lower royalty rate than they are now?

Mr. Stelmach: I was appointed to cabinet in March of 1997, so I don't know what happened in 1996. But we'll get the information and present it to the hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: This is a very important issue, and I'm disappointed in the Premier.

Again to the Premier: how much will Suncor and Syncrude save in royalty payments to the province if they are allowed to pay royalties on bitumen and not on synthetic crude oil?

Mr. Stelmach: That's one of the reasons we're doing the royalty review. I guess that there's no answer I can deliver in this House to satisfy the member, so we'll just go to the third one.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. The constituents of this province, who own the resources, would appreciate an answer. Again to the Premier: is Suncor still using an allowed cost, which is an annual amount of \$158 million, for historical costs which were not being deducted before 1996?

Mr. Stelmach: I could be a walking encyclopedia and still have – Mr. Speaker, we are undergoing a total royalty review, not only oil sands but conventional oil and gas and coal-bed methane. That information will be presented to all Albertans as shareholders in this great province by the end of August – that's the due date – and

Albertans themselves will be able to look at the information and answer a lot of these questions for themselves.

Thank you.

Affordable Housing Projects

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, with reference to an earlier question, Notre Dame high school, Hunting Hills high school, St. Francis of Assisi, and Mattie McCullough have all been built within the last 15 years, not to mention Lindsay Thurber and Eastview.

My question, though, is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing about the 13 new affordable housing units that were announced earlier this month. Can he please explain to this Assembly how the priority of these projects was evaluated?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right that on May 17 we did announce \$50 million worth of projects for affordable housing, which took place in Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Ponoka, Stettler, Westlock. This federal funding was allocated, and the criteria were needs in the community, proposed clients for the project, the proposed rental rates. We also considered the experience of the operator and the availability of land.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, based on the two press releases, one dated May 17 and the other dated May 24, a simple calculation shows that the cost of these units varies from as much as \$350,000 per unit to \$35,000 per unit. Can the minister tell us how we are making sure that we get value for our money?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, each individual application in the project is independent. I would say to the hon. member that probably the average cost of a project is \$150,000 a unit. We also have, I mean, some cases that are lot less. Maybe I can use the example of Habitat for Humanity where we have private donations, we have companies that provide supplies, we have donated labour, and the cost per unit is approximately \$50,000. This reduces the cost, then, but does provide for more units and more availability for renters.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. I know of at least two other applications from Red Deer, one from the Piper Creek Foundation and the other from the Twilight Homes Foundation, that have applied under this program. Can he tell us how these people can find out where their projects are in the approval process?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, what has happened is that the process has changed. The autonomy of these projects has gone to municipalities. The city of Red Deer is getting over \$5 million. Those individual applications that were not accepted – or there wasn't enough funding for the acceptance of those projects – will be turned over to the city to consider and to look at the needs of that particular municipality.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister admitted that she cannot help exploited temporary foreign workers because

she doesn't know where they are. The government has lost control over the temporary worker program. Albertans have lost faith in their government. How can people have faith in their government when they lose people? This program was bad from the beginning, and it's getting worse now. It's becoming embarrassing. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: how can her department know exactly how many temporary foreign workers are in this province and where they're located?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I've acknowledged that that's a real challenge, but let's be clear: this is a federal program. This is a federal program where this province is co-operating. We are developing an annex to that made-in-Alberta immigration agreement with the federal government. We become involved when we talk to the federal government about these kinds of challenges. Many of the people that develop relationships with recruiters and contract temporary foreign workers certainly advise the provincial government. Clearly, there currently is no requirement for them to inform the provincial government, but many of them do in the course of their duties. We are looking at different ways and approaches to reach . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The CNRL Horizon project was one of the first Albertan sites to take advantage of the temporary foreign worker program. We all know that there are a large number of Chinese immigrants working on the site. We also know that two recently died up there, but that's about all that we know. To the minister: could she provide to this Assembly the exact number of temporary foreign workers on the CNRL Horizon project, and how can she be assured that they're being treated fairly?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there are about 200 foreign workers on that site. Principally, the foreign workers that are probably being referenced by the hon. member are from China. There is currently a stop work order in place, in the capacity that embraced the three tanks that were being questioned. Beyond that, we have an investigation under way. We have retained engineers to give us advice about the wisdom of when work could commence in that area. While that investigation is under way, there will be very little that I can provide this Assembly that would be of use.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister argued that she's confident that temporary foreign workers are being protected because her department hired 72 new staff to investigate their complaints. Clearly, the minister does not understand the issue. Exploited workers are unlikely to come forward. They've been lied to about their rights. Many lack the language skills, and this government denies them any sort of labour mobility. In these conditions, they're not complaining; it isn't easy to do that. To this minister: is the government committed to proactively checking up on the temporary foreign workers? If so, how will they do this? They don't know where they are.

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm listening to somebody who is determined to make a very full glass look half-empty. There are many good things happening with temporary foreign workers in this province. Just recently, in fact at lunch, the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture and myself were privileged to hear about the co-operation of the Federation of Independent Business,

the health and lodging association, the Canadian Restaurant and Food Services Association, and others that are making this a thoroughly successful program. There are many places where we are able to provide that kind of data, but clearly there have been times, and in the case of the Indian workers that came over unsolicited . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:00

Nonresident Hunting Regulations

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of Battle River-Wainwright and, indeed, many eastern Albertans have grown concerned over changes to regulations over out-of-country hunters entering the province to hunt. The permits they're entitled to have been reduced to only six days. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: can the minister explain why such changes were made and what policy decision encouraged this new regulation?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to explain the policy change, but I want to first confirm that the first priority of Alberta fish and wildlife is to provide quality hunting and fishing for resident Albertans.

An Hon. Member: First priority?

Dr. Morton: First priority. Yes.

Having said that, we've always welcomed nonresident and alien nonresident hunters, and we did introduce the six-day alien resident waterfowl licence last year. The purpose of introducing this six-day licence is to monitor the length of time nonresident aliens are in Alberta.

Mr. Mason: What's an alien?

Dr. Morton: A noncitizen, Brian.

An Hon. Member: NDP.

Dr. Morton: Not NDP, yeah.

The concerns are . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. American hunters come to Alberta to hunt, spend a lot of money on hotels, food, supplies, and so on, and are a boon to many small communities who count on those hunters and their money that they spend. Now, those hunters, at least the ones that come to my constituency, are crossing the border to hunt in Saskatchewan, and their money is going with them. Does the minister understand the negative impact this policy is having on eastern Alberta border communities?

Dr. Morton: Yes. Mr. Speaker, we do understand the economic value of hunting to rural Alberta, and we want to encourage it. But we're concerned about a new trend in what we believe to be rogue guides, who are nonresident aliens who come in, pretend they're hunters, but they're actually guides. Instead of spending two or three weeks here, they spend two or three months here, supposedly hunting with their friends, who, in fact, are paying clients. That's against the laws of Alberta. The only paid guiding in Alberta are resident Albertans. I'm happy to report that just last month we

achieved a conviction of \$25,000 and a lifetime ban from ever hunting in Alberta again for somebody who was found guilty of doing just this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that laws made to stop a few people who are breaking off and have impact on large numbers of groups who did nothing wrong, will the minister consider changing the regulations and perhaps do some advertising to bring back the hunters to eastern Alberta to help those communities that have been hit hard by the policies of the department?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, at this time we're not prepared to change the regulation, but I do want to assure the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright that we do and will support hunting tourism. Just in the last two weeks we met with Alberta Tourism to encourage greater exposure of hunting in their facilities. We'll be coming forward with a new website, a licensing website, in the next about 18 months which will feature those types of hunting opportunities on the Internet, and we'll also be working to add hunting tourism to the rural development strategy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's incompetence to deal with our overheated economy knows no bounds. To rectify its negligent infrastructure planning over the past years and to help out corporate friends, this government keeps pursuing P3 financing. On March 19 of this year the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation told this House that the Calgary ring road "will be done two years ahead of schedule than if we would have done it the conventional way, and we're going to have savings of hundreds of millions of dollars." My question to the minister is simply this. We're going to ask him to prove it. Will the minister, then, agree today to release a public-sector comparator that confirms his statement to this Assembly?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, you know what has been going on in cost escalations and how expensive prices have been rising. I'll tell you what: that hon. member should be wrapping his arms around everybody that even talked P3 on the money that we're going to end up saving by getting the job done now. Certainly, he can come and see whatever he'd like to see on anything to do with that.

Mr. Martin: I'm trying to quit wrapping my arms around people like you.

Mr. Speaker, the point is that we heard the same rhetoric about Anthony Henday here in Edmonton before. When we found out the public-sector comparator was the exact opposite of what the government said, we found out that the taxpayers could be about \$70 million cheaper. My question is again: rather than the rhetoric will the minister release the public-sector comparator that tells the Assembly the figures that he has? We want to know that in this Assembly.

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, sir, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Martin: I'd like to then follow up. We were promised this a couple of years ago, Mr. Speaker. When will he do this in this

Assembly, release the public-sector comparator on the Calgary ring road?

Mr. Ouellette: As soon as I have time, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Sign Language Interpreter Program

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past several weeks myself and, I suspect, a number of members of the Legislature have received a number of letters from concerned members of the deaf and hard of hearing community as well as prospective interpreters in American Sign Language. The sign language interpreter diploma program, a two-year course planned for Lakeland College, did not get funding in the recent budget, leaving a number of prospective students wondering what happened. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: can the minister explain why this worthwhile program was approved by his department but did not receive funding?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the program was approved at Lakeland College. They have, actually, two programs that were approved late in the year. The funding envelopes at the time had already been expended to the other course loads because of student timelines and the timelines at the institutions. The previous course, which was at Grant MacEwan College, had very low enrolments. That's where this other course from Lakeland is coming from. We are looking forward to proposals coming from Lakeland College for this fall, and we'll review the analysis of that when it comes forward.

Mr. Tougas: Well, in 2006 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that deaf and hard of hearing people had the right to government services in their choice of either ASL or the French alternative. Without funding this year Lakeland College will not start producing new trained ASL interpreters for at least another year. There's already such a desperate shortage of trained sign language interpreters that even Lakeland College couldn't hire one for their graduation ceremony. Is the minister concerned that without this program deaf and hard of hearing people may not be able to get government services in the language of their choice, as the Supreme Court has ruled?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not concerned that they won't be able to get those services. What I'm concerned about is providing the appropriate level of infrastructure in our institutions to provide the courses that the students want and that society demands. Certainly, Lakeland College has been very proactive in providing those two courses, that are actually integrated in a pathway, if you will, for other courses as well. As I said in my previous answer, we're looking forward to the proposal coming to us, and we'll look at the planning envelope and the envelope for this fall's enrolments.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Mr. Tougas: I have nothing else.

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

Youth Apprenticeship Program

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With our overheated

economy we all know that there's a huge need for skilled labour. One of the possible solutions is training our own – imagine that – and what better place to start but in the junior high schools. We've had three pilot projects in three school divisions doing exactly that, being very creative, getting students to sample a variety of trade possibilities in the private sector. My question is to the Minister of Education. What results did you receive regarding these pilot projects, and what did they achieve?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Lesser Slave Lake is referring to the youth apprenticeship program, commonly called YAP, and it is funded, actually, by Alberta Advanced Education and Technology. The hon. member is correct. It's a six-year pilot project that's now in its third year. This fall we will be looking at assessing the results to date. The project basically allows students to visit work sites and tradespeople to visit schools. The early indications are that it's being well received.

2:10

Ms Calahasen: You're right, Mr. Speaker. The project is really well received.

My question is, then, to the same minister. If this program is coming to its completion, could you please indicate whether the program will continue and whether or not we are prepared to do that?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the program has still got several years to run, and the determination on whether to continue it will be part of the assessment that will be taking place this fall. As I said, it is currently funded under Advanced Education and Technology, and I guess, at the end of the day, the determination of whether to continue funding it will be with the minister.

Ms Calahasen: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker, but the intent was to expand it further. If it is going to be something that is going to be really working well and we are going to be satisfying the needs of a labour shortage and we are trying to ensure that our kids stay in school, can we then expand this further into other schools so that we can see it be successful?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I guess that would be our desired result. There's no question that the one area where we can certainly do better both on high school completion rates and training our own is in the native and aboriginal communities, but again we need to do the assessment and determine whether or not the program is working. Maybe it's even a situation where you change it slightly. That'll all be determined this summer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Renter Assistance Programs

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The homelessness and eviction prevention fund is a temporary measure designed for renters who need one-time immediate assistance, and it's only good for a month. Everyone else is directed to the Municipal Affairs rent supplement programs, which are income tested. This program won't help Albertans who are spending anywhere from 40 to 80 per cent of their income on rent but are still not considered low income; in other words, anyone over \$26,000 for a one bedroom or \$33,000 for a two bedroom. My first question is to the minister of housing. What is the government doing to help these Albertans? If there are no temporary rent controls, what else can these renters do?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, we do have the temporary support that comes through Employment, Immigration and Industry. What does take place is in the rent supplements. We take individuals that have the most need and address those concerns. We did add \$285 million to the budget of Housing to address those concerns.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of EII. The homelessness and eviction prevention fund requires renters to either be in arrears or to have notice of eviction from their landlords. Why would this government rather force renters into debt, possibly ruining their credit rating, in order to receive support? Why aren't temporary rent caps an option?

Ms Evans: The issue of rent caps is something that our ministry is not directly responsible for, but I think there's been quite a significant amount of discussion in this Assembly. Let me just say that we have located 65 people, helping them establish new residences, and 273 families – 273 – that have been given assistance to avoid eviction. So we are providing that support and assistance.

Ms Blakeman: These programs are not working. They're too narrow.

Again to the minister of housing. Rather than address the rent crisis in this province, this government's short-term solution is to pay landlords the rent that Albertans cannot afford. Why does this government prefer to subsidize landlords rather than implementing temporary rent caps, that protect Albertans against unaffordable increases?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government's solution is making sure that there are more rental units available and that we have some stability in the market and making sure that there are more units that are being built. Also, I want to say that we have changed the program as well to try to accommodate individuals who need to have a rent supplement. We deal directly with those individuals and support them for a rent supplement instead of dealing all through landlords.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Aboriginal Housing Program

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More than \$16 million in new affordable housing projects to benefit aboriginal people was announced last week. Low-income aboriginal peoples and their families living off reserve in Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Cache, Lac La Biche, Lethbridge, Lloydminster, and Wabasca will benefit from 370 new affordable units approved for funding in their communities. To the minister of municipal affairs. Cam Alexis, the chief of the Alexis band in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, is the head of housing development for Treaty 6 nations. He has asked me if another round of grant applications will be considered.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, what has taken place is that this is a partnership with the federal government. The federal government has committed three years of support for housing and housing projects for Alberta. The first round, as indicated, has been distributed. We are in the process of looking at the second round and looking at the individual applications. And yes, they will be looked at.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again to the same minister: will the minister consider communities like Whitecourt and the Alexis band – Whitecourt using municipal sustainability funds and the Alexis band using this grant – to partner in projects to provide more housing projects?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess the quick answer would be yes. The long answer would be that any sort of partnering that we can do to enhance the support given to communities, working together with agencies, working together with groups, is very positive.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This time to the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs. Given those answers, what is he doing to promote the maximum use of these grants for our native and aboriginal communities?

Mr. Boutilier: That's a very good question. Actually . . .

The Speaker: I haven't recognized you yet.

Mr. Boutilier: Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: But proceed.

Mr. Boutilier: I'm so excited about getting a question, Mr. Speaker, that I jumped the gun.

What I am doing is answering questions that the hon. member has asked about the communication with our First Nations and our Métis settlements in terms of this important, positive government initiative: millions of dollars going to help in terms of affordable housing. We're working closely in partnership with the minister of municipal affairs. I might also add that the Alexis band is an excellent example of the partnerships that this government has formed in the past and, certainly, will do in the future.

The Speaker: Was that the short answer or the long answer?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Renter Assistance Programs (continued)

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, despite numerous appeals for detailed eligibility requirements for the homeless and eviction prevention fund, the minister responsible still has not made clear whether renters in need of assistance will be income tested or asset tested. Rather, the minister claims that this fund has flexibility because the director has discretion on a case-by-case basis. My question to the minister is: when renters contact any of the 59 Alberta Works offices and seek benefits, what are they going to be told? Given that not all cases will go straight to the director, what guidelines are in place for front-line staff to follow? What are the guidelines?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the comments I could make is that family size, family situation, pending employment: these are all things considered. If a worker needs their truck for work, obviously that's not going to be counted as a negative situation because they have that particular asset. I think it's very responsible to enable the workers to look at the individual circumstances that are facing the families. The policy is to give the director flexibility. That director, in turn, can work with the workers that are counselling

people on their needs for income supports and provide them accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, can the minister assure us that there's going to be fairness and consistency between offices? I mean, where is the line between discretion and inconsistency here?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member wouldn't be attempting to speak deleteriously about our staff between offices. Our staff take the policy and strive to interpret it in the fairest possible way. We recognize the pressures on families. We have spoken to all of the 59 centres, assuring them that we want them to be compassionate and considerate of the plights of Albertans. So I'm anticipating that this is a very consistent policy with some kind of capacity for compassion.

2:20

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, we get information from front-line staff that the information they receive from the department one day is different from the information they get the next day. The question of consistency is really important. I mean, clients are really in need. It's really confusing to them what this program is all about. This government has had plenty of time to come up with and communicate a really clear plan, but Albertans are still confused by flawed and inconsistent programs and policy. Will the minister admit that this government's constant scrambling is impacting services to people in need?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think that the 65 families that found new residences and the 273 families that were saved from eviction wouldn't say that we are constantly scrambling. They would say that we are responding. I'd like names, dates, applications that weren't properly dealt with, because that seems to be the inference from the member opposite, so that I can on an individual basis explore them.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 94 questions and answers today.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(6) I'd like to request that the Government House Leader share with the House the projected government House business for the week of June 4 to June 7, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, June 4, in the hope and anticipation that later on today the Assembly might approve a motion to allow for an evening sitting, we would hope to deal with government business starting at 8 p.m. That government business would include Committee of the Whole on Bill 33, Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act; Bill 26, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007; and Bill 32, Animal Health Act; time permitting, second reading on Bill 29, Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007, and Bill 39, Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007, and perhaps committee on those, time permitting. That would be Monday evening if the Legislature approves a motion later on today.

On Tuesday under Government Motions, depending on progress Monday night, Government Motion 27 calling for an evening sitting on Wednesday would go forward, if necessary, depending on progress Monday night. Committee of Supply in the afternoon would be Infrastructure and Transportation; Employment, Immigration and Industry; and Seniors and Community Supports. That's a New Democrat opposition day. In the evening on Tuesday, again, if the motion is passed this afternoon, Committee of Supply on Education; Employment, Immigration and Industry; Seniors and Community Supports; and Children's Services.

On Wednesday, June 6, in the afternoon cross-ministry day with Executive Council, and again, if we require the motion on Tuesday, the evening session would deal with the same order of business that I talked about on Monday in Committee of the Whole.

On Thursday, June 7, Committee of Supply cross-ministry on land use, and that would involve Energy, Sustainable Resource Development, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Environment. Then at the expiry of the time for Committee of Supply votes would be scheduled with respect to all matters before Committee of Supply, at 5:45 or earlier if time permits.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before getting to Orders of the Day, we have at least one point of order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in the proceedings, in an exchange on a question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning made some comments that under 23 (h) making allegations, (i) imputing false or unavowed motives, and (j) using abusive or insulting language I would argue were inappropriate comments to make. They were sweeping allegations that covered indiscriminately members of the Liberal caucus here, and I would argue that the imputed motives are flat-out wrong and inaccurate.

It was during his question about the bees, and it's interesting because at the exact time he was asking that question, I was having a quiet side conversation with the Leader of the Official Opposition, who was underlining to me how important that whole issue was. He certainly used language in his comments or his side comments that provoked a response from members of this caucus, and they certainly view that language as abusive. It certainly did create a disorder and provoked debate.

I think what's interesting here is that there was an assumption that the Member for Edmonton-Manning heard laughter as compared to the regular hubbub in this House and that he believes that it was made by members of the Opposition. Frankly, how does he know, if it was laughter, that it wasn't made by any of the other 82 members in the House? That can be very difficult to distinguish. And there was an assumption that the response was specific to his comments. There are often side conversations that happen while question period is on. Actually, later in question period I noted an eruption of laughter from the front bench on the government side, and I don't think it was in response to the question that was being asked by the member at the time, but how would you know?

I would argue that the member has contravened all three of 23 (h), (i), and (j) and would ask for a retraction of that comment, please.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on this point.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm surprised that a point of

order would be called on this matter. You know, I look at *Beauchesne's*, page 22, article 75, and that speaks to freedom of speech. "The privilege of freedom of speech is both the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the Member of Parliament on the floor of the House and in committee." I would think that that would apply to this Legislature as well.

Certainly, in looking at Standing Orders 23 (h), (i), and (j), to say "makes allegations against another Member" speaks in the singular, and I did not in any way make an allegation against another member, Mr. Speaker. Subsection (i) says, "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." I did not make anything to any particular member. "Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." There was greater disorder prior to my statement than after, in my opinion.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the nature of the issue and laughing at it, it was certainly clear to me that there was laughter coming from the benches of the Official Opposition. I did make some comment as to that, but I believe, from some experience, that there was nothing that would have been untoward in due order in this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Here's what was said: "I know the Official Opposition laughs about issues from rural Alberta and doesn't seem to care very much about them, but these are important." First of all, the imputation of motives under Standing Order 23 does not apply to caucuses; it applies to individuals. So that would be an inappropriate usage with respect to that. Secondly, there was no doubt at all in my mind that there was uproar before the Member for Edmonton-Manning was even recognized to raise a question. In this case the sightlines of the chair go directly to the position of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, and I have to agree about the laughs because I saw them with my eyes. No point of order.

Hon. Government House Leader, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it had been my intention to raise a point of order with respect to the inappropriateness of the question from Edmonton-Gold Bar because it related to specific details and related to a matter that was some 15 years old and would perhaps have been more appropriate in written questions, but I don't think we need to belabour that point, so I will withdraw the point of order.

head: 2:30

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Motions

The Clerk: Motion 24. The hon. Mr. Hancock.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, might it be appropriate to call 25 and 26 before 24?

Evening Sitting on June 4

25. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly pursuant to Standing Order 4 convene an evening sitting beginning at 8 p.m. on Monday, June 4, 2007, for the consideration of government business.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just in case we run out of time, 24 could happen another time, and 25 is important for today. When we brought in the new Standing Orders, there was consideration of trying to make sure that we didn't sit in the evenings unless it was necessary. We're coming to the time which has been well

advertised. In Standing Orders for the future we've provided for sessions to begin on the first Monday in February and to end normally on the first Thursday of June. This session, of course, started a little later than that. We have clearly signalled that the intention is to go to the 14th of June.

So we're coming to the close of the spring session. There will be, of course, a fall session called as per the new orders, for I think it's the first Monday in November to the first Thursday in December to deal with the remaining business. But there are some matters of government business which my colleagues have advised me they need to have passed during the spring session, and thus it would make sense to have a session in the evening on Monday so that we can deal with matters that need to come to Committee of the Whole. The Committee of the Whole is a time frame when you perhaps need more time depending on what sort of amendments come forward and in order to ensure that we deal with the business that we have.

We've had a spring session where since the budget came down, Committee of Supply has occupied most of the government business time of the session, which is quite appropriate when you have a budget the size of the government of Alberta budget. It's appropriate to have the time that we've used in Committee of Supply in examining the estimates of each department, but it's also necessary before we rise this spring to complete certain elements of government business. So I'd ask the Legislative Assembly for permission to sit on Monday evening so that we can deal with the items that I indicated in the Projected Government Business section.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are two motions in front of us, three actually, but two about additional evening sittings. We're dealing with them in order. This is dealing with an additional evening sitting on Monday, June 4.

Mr. Speaker, I note that in the revised temporary Standing Orders there is a setting down of the expectations of an end date under usual circumstances, but we're not in that this year. The government chose to come into the Assembly several weeks after it usually does – I think three or possibly even four weeks later – and now there is a great rush to try and get out by a specified date, and frankly there is no specified date. It's not in the Standing Orders.

The government has absolute authority and, frankly, the majority vote to be able to extend the sitting of this Legislature any time it wants. I've already signalled the opposition's reluctant willingness, but willingness, to extend the session during the day and for us to come back and do this business during the day. We did indeed go into those negotiations saying that it would really just need to be extraordinary circumstances for us to be sitting at night. We've had two weeks' worth of additional night sittings now to try and accommodate the government's desire to have the House rise by the 14th of June, and this is adding now a third week, the beginning of a third week of night sittings.

So I would argue that any business that the government needs to get done – I mean, one, we should've come into the session earlier to get that business done; two, to me it's reflective of the disorganization of the government, that it can't seem to organize its business in order to get it done in the time that we have before us; three, if it's really necessary to do it, then let's do it during the day, not calling people back here at night. If we were going to do that, then we could maybe be able to take the time to pass the coming bill on smoking. We'd be happy to do that.

I'm not happy to see this before us. Certainly, the government has the majority vote to pass it, and I'm sure they will today. But I don't think this is in the spirit of what we were trying to negotiate. Why

the government insists on pulling in additional evening sittings instead of just extending the sitting beyond an arbitrary day, I don't know and I don't support.

Thank you.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to get too uptight about this. If this starts to happen next year when we lay out the time frame and when we know it, then I think I would be very upset because that certainly would go against the negotiations that we had. In my opinion, I knew that the 14th was the sort of the deadline, and I expected this time to have night sittings. I don't like them particularly, but I'm not going to get that excited about it one way or the other. I just want to say on record here, though, that I'm prepared to support this motion but with the proviso that this should not be happening next year because that's clearly what we did negotiate when we set the time frame.

In this case this year I would tend to agree that there's been a fair amount of disorganization getting it going and the rest of it, but that's beside the point. We're here where we're at now, and I think most people expected the 14th to be the end date. So I think we might as well get on with it.

But I just do want to make the warning that this should not occur next year because then, clearly, we will come into the Assembly in February, and the end date is June, and there should be no night sittings. It should flow the way we set it up in the House leaders' meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Government House Leader to close the debate.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just two points: obviously, if we go past the 14th, there's a constituency week scheduled, so we'd go into the last week of June. The opposition knows that, and if they're prepared to sit, that's fine with them. But it's been very clear from at least halfway through the session that June 14 was our scheduled end date.

With respect to the negotiations that have been referenced, it was clear when we started talking about an end date – and I'll give this to House leader of the Official Opposition, that she always maintained that she didn't need an end date. But most sessions that have a clear, defined start and finish also have what I would call a fail-safe motion. A fail-safe motion is a motion which allows certain legislation to be passed. We agreed not to bring that kind of a fail-safe motion in, but one of the things that we needed then was the ability to either call an evening sitting or extend the session.

So this is not contrary to any of the negotiations or any of the discussions, but I would agree with the hon. member from the third party that this should not be our practice. It wouldn't be our intention to have this as our practice because one of the things that was intended out of those negotiations was to have the type of session where members could have a family life, go home at a reasonable time to their families or to their constituencies and constituency events, and that would be the practice that I would hope that we would intend to follow in the next year.

[Government Motion 25 carried]

head: 2:40

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will call the committee to order.

head:

Main Estimates 2007-08

The Deputy Chair: The committee has before it today the departments of Sustainable Resource Development, followed by International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, and thereafter Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. It's a total of three hours set aside for the Liberal caucus. We will deal with each of these portfolios for one hour beginning now.

Sustainable Resource Development

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, if you don't mind introducing your officials.

To the officials, I'd just like to let you know that should you need a glass of water or a cup of coffee, just raise your hand and one of the pages will come by and provide that to you.

The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I would like to begin by introducing my very capable staff, who've been a huge assistance to me since I was appointed minister. I'd like to begin by introducing Mr. Brad Pickering on my immediate left, my deputy minister; next to him, Mr. David Bass, the assistant deputy minister for finance and administration; continuing from right to left, the famous Cliff Henderson, the assistant deputy minister for forestry; next to Cliff, Mr. Craig Quintilio, assistant deputy minister for lands; and last, but far from least, Mr. Ken Ambrock, with his new hip, assistant deputy minister for fish and wildlife.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, you may proceed. After your comments we still have about eight minutes left in your remarks. It'll go back and forth between the Liberal caucus and yourself.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to begin by addressing some remarks on our estimates of \$353 million for budget year 2007-2008. We believe this budget responds to the challenges of managing our natural resources at a time of significant economic growth and pressures on our resources. We believe our budget and the way it's structured addresses both immediate and long-term needs. It will enable the ministry to better co-ordinate activities on public lands across the province. It also reflects the ministry's internal changes to better focus on forest lands and fish and wildlife.

Our area management model now provides a single window for service delivery, with dedicated area managers assigned to each of the 11 areas in the province. It also allows the ministry to be more responsive to resource management issues. The \$115 million in new money is directed towards the ministry's three top priorities as set out by the Premier, specifically the completion of the land-use framework; the implementation of an aggressive strategy to protect the health of our forest, specifically with respect to mountain pine beetle; and finally the implementation of our biodiversity monitoring strategy.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

A few remarks with respect to our forestry budget. The most significant 2007-2008 budget allocation was the addition of the \$52.6 million to combat mountain pine beetle in the province. Unfortunately, the front line in the war against mountain pine beetle has moved from British Columbia to Alberta. I've requested and received a declaration of forest health emergency to ensure that Alberta has the \$50 million from the sustainability fund to continue aggressive action against the mountain pine beetle.

An additional \$2.6 million was added to our base budget to deal with pine beetle. These funds build the capacity for both manpower and equipment. That's the \$2.6 million to our base budget. It allows us to develop and implement a strategic response to changing threats posed by the beetle. It also allows for the hiring of seasonal staff and equipment, to secure contracts for mountain pine beetle related operations, talking now about the emergency funding.

Activities that would be included include baiting for the beetles, trapping, cutting and burning of infested trees, and monitoring and identification of infested trees. We also will continue to assist municipalities, as we did last year, in their efforts to identify and remove beetle-infested trees. Last year we provided more than \$5 million to 16 different communities, and we're continuing that commitment in Budget 2007.

Having identified funds to support communities as they prepare to face increased control activities, we put that into the budget. This all is the result of the large fly-in, or influx, of beetles from British Columbia in northwestern Alberta during last summer, the summer of 2006.

Finally, we've also approved an additional \$5 million to the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta, known as FRIAA, to undertake specific mountain pine beetle management activities.

With respect to forest protection, continuing on that, mountain pine beetle is not the only issue we're dealing with. We have vast tracts of mature forest across the province. Because of the lack of age distribution, the relatively old-age cohort of our forests, our science indicates that this is a significant wildfire threat, so we propose to permanently increase our wildfire base budget by \$45.2 million. This will enable the ministry to achieve a full state of readiness prior to the start of the fire season. In past years these start-up costs were partially funded through supplementary estimates. This year we've made an accounting change, if you like, by fully funding these costs in the base budget. This provides a more realistic model with which to prepare for the coming fire season.

Activities that will be financed out of these funds include the hiring and training of contract fire crews, our network of support staff, and lookout tower personnel. The ministry will also complete contracts for air tankers and helicopters that are all part of our wildfire suppression effort.

In terms of capital spending the ministry is in year 2 of a three-year \$42 million commitment to upgrade our air tanker fleet. As part of this, \$14 million is allocated for this budget year, '07-08, to replace the aging piston engines in these air tankers with state-of-the-art, Canadian-built turbine engines. This change will make our planes 32 per cent more efficient and also reduce our maintenance costs. The ministry is also undertaking significant upgrades to the air tanker base at Fort McMurray as part of our ongoing maintenance of existing facilities, and another \$1 million has been carried forward from '06-07 to complete the work at the facilities at the Springbank air tanker base near Calgary.

Next, I'd like to address a few moments to our land-use framework. This is a top priority of the ministry and also was identified in my mandate letter from the Premier as one of my top priorities. One million dollars in new money is budgeted specifically for the land-use framework in 2007, bringing the total to \$2 million. This will enable the ministry to complete the work and present a draft framework by the end of this year. On April 30 we announced 17 public sessions in 15 communities across the province. We're finishing that public consultation this week. Albertans can also participate by completing a workbook in addition to attending these public information sessions. The workbook questionnaire is available through MLA offices and also online. We're looking forward

to hearing from several thousand Albertans on what their views are on issues that comprise the land-use framework.

In addition, the SRD land-use framework budget includes \$2 million to continue an integrated land-management planning and decision-making process to better co-ordinate the multiple pressures facing our finite land base, and another \$2 million for a natural resource information system to facilitate and improve land-use decisions. These latter two programs are not part of the actual framework development. They relate to dealing more efficiently and effectively with land-use issues at hand today.

Next, I'll spend just a moment addressing the oil sands strategy. The ministry received \$2 million in new funding to address recommendations from the provincial oil sands strategy. This will address the significant increase in environmental impact assessment work and approvals relating to oil sands development in the north and also allow us to better monitor and manage the cumulative effects resulting from this increased activity. Staff from the ministry's newly formed oil sands team is responsible for overseeing these tasks.

2:50

We have also received and have allocated half a million dollars, \$0.5 million, for new technology for an electronic disposition system that will improve the management of dispositions issued on public lands. This new system should reduce the turnaround times on applications, provide better service to our clients, and enable the ministry to maintain a better picture of the activity on the landscape.

On the biodiversity monitoring program, another one of the priorities of the ministry and in the Premier's mandate letter to me, we've committed \$4.2 million in new money this year to implement the biodiversity monitoring program. This is a joint undertaking between government, industry, and NGOs that will provide ecosystem-level information on Alberta's living resources, habitats, and the activities that affect them. This is the first operational year following five years of prototype development during which techniques were refined. The Biodiversity Monitoring Institute is up and running.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. minister. I'm sure you'll have a chance to continue in a moment or two, but right now I would like to call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, and I've got my clock going as well. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to say congratulations to the minister on his deliberating on his first budget as well as welcome to the assistant deputy minister and all the other members of his team.

You did speak first of all about the \$353 million budget, and right off the bat you went into the \$52.6 million, I believe, to battle the mountain pine beetle. It's unfortunate, but we've been at this now for two years prior to this date, talking about the mountain pine beetle. Before we were talking about the amounts that we were giving to B.C. When you think about the large scale that we're on right now, it was a pittance compared to now, \$52 million. If we'd have reacted then, maybe we wouldn't be in the position that we are now. But do you know what? That's then; this is now. We'll continue to go on.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

How much of that \$52.6 million that you mentioned is in conjunction with or in combination with federal dollars? I know that at one

point they had allocated or at least were proposing to promise some monies to help with this spread of the mountain pine beetle. How much of that \$52.6 million is federal money as well?

Part of the money you mentioned, \$2.6 million, is base funding for manpower and equipment. I think that's maybe going to be settled out. This is a separate line item, separate from the equipment and services. You said that you have a three-year commitment, so this would just be specifically for the mountain pine beetle, I'm assuming.

We talk about the pine beetle. I know it's spreading, and we've been doing some monitoring with some of our bases throughout the province. We had an exceptionally cold, quick drop in temperature in November. It was in some locations, I believe, around minus 47, and it did hit quite quickly. I'm just wondering as to the effect. I know we've had this conversation, but what would be the overall impact on the pine beetle? I know that we're doing, as you mentioned, some inspections, some cutting and burnings. But what would be the effectiveness of the cold weather that we've been hoping for for the last couple of years? Has it had the impact that we were hoping for? Has it taken out as many as 90 to 95 per cent? Certainly, that would be a big strike for us in combating this. If not, then we know that we're just beginning to do the work here. Alberta is, as we've said before, the battleground for the rest of the provinces that lie to the east of us.

I'm just wondering, then, if I can just go on on some specifics. Last year we cut down some of our budget from last year. We cut down on our forestry protection. That would probably be Cliff, then, who would be answering this particular piece. We dropped about — what is it? — 40 per cent or decreased our budget. I'm not sure if that was just because we're not expecting as high forest fires. I know that it's always hard to predict the volatility of the weather or where the fires are going to come in. Is the minister expecting a similar occurrence this year?

We've seen overspending before, but we're not quite there again, so we've decreased that particular budget. I'm just trying to get my exact figures on that. I think it was, as I said, about a 40 per cent decrease within the budget. We went down about \$140,000 compared to what we were looking at last year. Again, this is just an estimate. I'm assuming that we'll probably go to more specifics later on and maybe do a supplemental supply. I'm not sure how that will work then.

If you're able to break down the forestry protection spending, how much is going to go directly to defend forest fires in your best guess? I know that's a tough one, but if you can do that, that would be great. You've already explained how much is going to pine beetles, the \$52.6 million. Then there was another amount, \$26.2 million, for forestry capital investments. I'm not sure exactly where that money is being spent. If you could maybe elaborate for me on that particular piece, that would be great.

You did talk about leading into the land-use framework. This is something that the province has been dearly looking forward to for a number of years. I'm just wondering at what point you're hoping to round it up, at least by the end of this month, and have a report to Albertans, perhaps in the late year, December, maybe rolling into January.

I'm kind of skeptical sometimes about task forces, or at least this type of exercise, because we did the Affordable Housing Task Force. We talked to a number of people throughout the province. We were looking for information. It was an enormous cost not only to taxpayers, but a lot of people put a lot of time and effort writing out their submissions. We came and compiled it in a short amount of time, yet the majority, more than half of the recommendations from the Affordable Housing Task Force were dismissed. I'm just

wondering how much stock, how much hope people should put within this particular exercise? If they look at the same results as happened in the Affordable Housing Task Force, they were dismissed. I mean, are we going to actually look at what we're getting and take the good with the bad and accept it, or are we going to just cherry-pick like we have in the past?

The Premier, I think, is on record stating that, you know, oil and gas: we're not going to put the brakes on that; that shouldn't be on the table. But, clearly, that has a huge impact on the land-use strategy. Oil and gas has an impact on the lands and our waters. I'm just wanting to know: is that going to be on the table? If there are some negative comments towards the industries and their pace of growth, is this minister prepared, committed to take in some of those recommendations and to do at least a reasonable thing and do an overview as to what the impact of oil and gas is on our overall public lands?

That, clearly, is having a huge effect on northern Alberta and some of the outlying areas as well. When you've got competing interests out there, that's got to be taken into consideration. I know that most people will be giving their submissions on that. I know that the oil industry is already saying that right now they can't afford to pay less on that with regard to the royalties, but this is something altogether different.

I'm hoping that there will be a number of submissions with regard to the land-use strategy for off-road vehicles. There is a desperate need to have some control with regard to the recreational use. I'm not talking about the snowmobiles because we usually have plenty of snow, and they're not usually going out and trying to damage their snowmobiles when there are roots exposed. This is altogether different. Right now, spring, summer, and fall, when you get into the hunting, this is the absolute time that we need to be discussing this.

I've tabled pictures before in this Legislature of some of the activities and some of the devastating effects on some of the areas. You've got a six-foot-two man standing in a trench that has been dug out repeatedly by off-road vehicles. I mean, that's obviously just abuse. I'm just wondering: do we have enough people? We talked about hiring more people. I believe in Public Accounts, when we were there, we talked about 1,900 FTEs. But it's a big province. I'm not sure. I know that we've got them throughout the province on various things – fish and wildlife, fire protection, and various other things – but how many people are actually going around monitoring the responsibility?

I'm not saying that everyone is not responsible, but you know you always have those that aren't responsible when we're using the off-road vehicles. Like I said about the trench, you know, a six-foot-two man can stand in it, and it's up to his shoulders. You've got the repeated use of the trail, which continues to wipe out and wash away valuable watersheds. We talk about towns and municipalities. Some of these people aren't too far out from that.

3:00

Instead of just being critical about it, my suggestion would be to designate some of these public lands that we do have and allow these users that consider this a sport or a recreation to have, you know, square miles designated for specific use of off-road vehicles, whether it be landfills later on, like they do with the Clover Bar dump just east of the city here. That's a great area where people like to take their vehicles. You can rip up and down the land. It doesn't matter because at the end of the day, it's a landfill. It's just being covered over. We're hoping to generate some new growth, some trees and grass. But it doesn't matter. It doesn't affect anyone in the long term.

I'm wondering if the province has thought about, you know, in the northern areas, maybe in the south, and in the middle of the province strictly designating some of this area. Maybe it isn't good for much after. You know, coal-bed methane maybe or some drilling has taken effect, and the land is completely being used. We've got some great areas. Has this ministry considered setting aside some of this land to be specifically designated areas?

We have paths and all that, that they're supposed to stick to, but we know that at the end of the day they do not.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the hon. member for his questions. By my count there are approximately six questions with sometimes a couple of multiple questions thrown in there. I'll try to answer them all in 10 minutes.

Is that right, Mr. Chair?

The Deputy Chair: Correct.

Dr. Morton: Yeah, 10 minutes. Okay.

The question of the allocation for pine beetle of \$52.6 million. There were two questions there: should we have intervened in British Columbia earlier, and if we should have, why didn't we? The problem there, I think, is that the B.C. government didn't respond properly and early enough. There was a similar debate to the one we're having now, I guess, in Alberta about how proactive and how aggressive the fight should be against pine beetle in British Columbia.

I recently received a file of newspaper articles from British Columbia where there were many letters and editorials and groups urging the wait-and-see approach. In the end that's what the NDP government did in British Columbia. They adopted the wait-and-see approach, and the result was that the pine beetle plague exploded and got so big that they lost control. So we didn't help in B.C. because B.C. wasn't helping itself through this wait-and-see attitude. Of course, that's why we are not taking that approach and are being proactive and taking a positive and aggressive approach and an expensive approach, as the hon. member indicated, in trying to prevent the spread of pine beetle in Alberta.

The question about federal availability of funding. The federal government, when the Liberals were still in charge, announced a hundred million dollars that was dedicated, it would appear, solely to B.C. Since the Conservatives have taken over in Ottawa, they've announced another \$200 million. Very little of that has flowed yet. There were some perceptions that that \$200 million was allocated just for British Columbia. As you might imagine, British Columbia politicians encouraged that perception, but I'm happy to report that on my visit to Ottawa in April I was assured that the \$200 million that the Conservatives have put aside for fighting pine beetle is to go where that money can best be used to stop the spread of the pine beetle because the federal government realizes that this is no longer just about Alberta; it's about the whole boreal forest. If the pine beetle were to continue its eastern migration in the type of the massive numbers and density of insects that we've seen in British Columbia, it's not just Alberta that's threatened but, really, the entire north, all the way across the country.

The second question, I believe, was with respect to winter kill. That, of course, is historically how the pine beetle has been controlled in Alberta, certainly in northern Alberta. It has been partly the lack of colder winters that has allowed it to spread. The hon. member is right; we did have a couple of cold snaps this past winter, in November and then again in January, February. I was in Grande

Prairie recently attending a forestry exposition, speaking with a lot of our staff there and also forestry people. Definitely, the research they're doing, the inventory they're doing does show quite a significant winter kill in pine beetle, but at the moment it's looking to be in the 75 to 80 per cent range, not in the 95 to 97 per cent range, that you'd need to really set it back. However, 75 per cent is still a lot better than 50 per cent. Also, the results aren't in yet completely. Unfortunately, the die-off rate from winter kill decreases as you go south, so we still have an issue in the southern part of Alberta.

Your third question was a concern about the decrease in the budget and whether or not that decrease was due to the fact that we expected to do less firefighting this year, and if we didn't, if we thought there were going to be more fires, did we intend to go to supplemental estimates again? I have to admit that the communication on the size of the budget this year was somewhat confusing, but if you go back and look in *Hansard* at my introductory remarks today, you'll see – I tried to explain; I probably wasn't clear enough – that the \$45.2 million that has been added to the permanent base budget of the ministry in past years was being taken out of the emergency fund. It was decided partly on the basis of internal financial control – and also I believe the Auditor General had a suggestion on this – that if that's what it takes, \$45.2 million, to be ready for the fire season, then that money should be part of your ongoing base budget year over year and not considered part of the emergency request. So we did a transfer in, and that's a permanent new addition to our core year-over-year funding.

Fortunately, there was a good snowpack last winter and a wet spring. We haven't had any fire problems yet. We, in fact, have even been able to loan some of our forest firefighters to Quebec and Ontario in the last few weeks, but as the fire season develops, we will go into the emergency fund or the environmental enhancement and protection fund and draw on that to actually do the firefighting, as we have in the past.

Your fourth question dealt with the land-use framework and public input. Will we take it seriously? Is it going to look like the Affordable Housing Task Force, where the allegation is made that that was not taken seriously? Yes, we will take it seriously. You've heard me speak on this subject before. A lot of people came to Alberta for jobs, but I think they stayed here for the lifestyle. This government, the Conservative Party that's formed the government of Alberta over the last 36 years but particularly during the Klein era, addressed issues of serious debt, a stalled economy, and getting that back on track. I think former Premier Klein and his governments deserve credit for that achievement.

But we've clearly turned the corner in Alberta's development, and I think the quality-of-life issues now outweigh the quantity-of-life issues. The land-use framework initiative reflects that. Premier Stelmach, certainly, sensed that during the leadership campaign. Obviously, the opposition parties sensed that, talking to the public. So, yes, input will be taken seriously, and I'm looking forward to that.

Your fifth question dealt with off-road vehicles and damage to public lands and specifically wetlands. We have implemented access plans, or what are sometimes known as forest land-use zones, or FLUZ is the acronym. We've done that with considerable success in a number of recreational areas in the province where we've had this type of problem before with random camping, irresponsible use of off-highway vehicles, and destruction of public lands, particularly destruction of wetlands.

3:10

There are, however, some areas in the foothills that are not adequately protected yet. One of those was the area that I visited

over the May long weekend, and there was some media attention put on that. I'm happy to report that we've had two meetings now with my staff as to how we're going to respond to that in the short, intermediate, and long terms. I won't get into those details, but you'll see that on a go-forward basis.

You ask: do we have adequate personnel? Yes. We have added to our personnel, particularly in fish and wildlife. We borrowed fish and wildlife officers to help us with enforcement in that area. This was actually quite a strong priority of mine, and I fought hard in the budget process to get some new fish and wildlife officers. We have 12 new full-time equivalents, but actually in terms of people that turns into 20 new hires. Many of our hires are seasonal, and we certainly will be using them in this context of recreational use on public lands.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Maybe just to go back to a couple of points that I was hoping for maybe a little bit more detail or clarification on. When we talk about the land-use framework, I'm hoping for a commitment from the minister that all recommendations will be considered and that we won't cherry-pick the good from the bad. When you're asking for public opinion, you're going to have to accept good and bad and try and make that balance. But to toss half of them out because they don't, you know, mix with the philosophy I think is a slap in the face to the people when they come out and put their submissions in. So I'm hoping for a stronger commitment from this minister as to how much of the recommendations – I'm not asking you for a crystal ball. When you get them, you know you're going to get good with bad. Are you going to accept all, or are you going to cherry-pick?

The other one. I know that we had a lot of snowpack. The forest service right now is getting its training over in Quebec. I'm assuming that this isn't a goodwill exercise. The men and women that do go get paid, and it's just a transfer between provinces. I'm just assuming that that's how we're doing that in this particular piece.

We talked about that in the north last year or even the year before we had random camping. That's probably a specific incident that may be popping up now. It certainly pops up here in Edmonton in the river valleys. When I was up there in McMurray, they have tight rental accommodations. We know that we have at least a thousand dollars a month on one or two of the only available parks up there. How flexible is the minister with regard to random camping now? We know that we need the people. We're bringing in temporary foreign workers. Even the Minister of Immigration, Employment and Industry says: don't come unless you have a job and you have accommodations. Well, a lot of these people have jobs but are trying to find the accommodations. A lot of these people drag their trailers up there, and they do take advantage of, I guess, the environment and try and do the camping.

I'm not sure if the previous minister was inflexible about this, but if this minister is going to loosen up some of the regulations or restrictions that were once there – because some of these spots that were once held by some of the groups were bulldozed, with large rocks and that. I mean, I'm not trying to belabour that particular point and really get into it. I'm just wondering how flexible the minister is given the tight accommodations up north.

The other part is – I guess you mentioned it – bringing in new staff. But retention like any business is a big concern. How are you dealing with retention as well as attraction? You've got to compete with the private sector, and certainly we want to make sure that we're being competitive. I noted that within the budget there were

some modest increases in a number of the areas, communications as well as some of the other ones, but how much of that is dedicated just to basic salary increases to ensure that we do have the manpower to deal with that not just during the boom in the spring and the summer but fall and winter?

I'm going to switch gears here and talk about – you did mention about the oil sands strategy. The oil sands strategy committee report, otherwise known as the Radke report, was released earlier in the year, and it did make some recommendations to Sustainable Resource Development. It was clear that there was not enough Sustainable Resource Development staff up in the Wood Buffalo region. Without Sustainable Resource Development putting in the amount of people, we can't potentially know about the damage that's occurring in the lands, the forests, and the impact on the wildlife and that biodiversity that we were talking about there the other day and you just mentioned a little while ago. That's again a result of the mining and the oil sands activity and the cumulative impacts of long-term intense development.

So I'm wanting to know about recommendation 10 with the report. It says:

A substantial increase in manpower (FTE's) should be provided to . . . Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to focus on cumulative effects, [environmental impact assessments], research, policy development, monitoring and enforcement in the oil sands areas.

And that's not just specific to Wood Buffalo. I'm sure that particular piece could be encompassing where we do have the activities and seismic development going in, even in particular up in Marie Lake, but right now we're concentrating on the Wood Buffalo. What has the government done to address this particular recommendation?

Obviously, we're talking about an increase in staff. So how much money is going to be dedicated to that? Will it be just short term, or will this be permanent FTEs to deal with the ongoing development of the Wood Buffalo area and the oil and gas? I'm not sure if you have an exact number of staff or estimates that were going to be up there. There was talk about 87 new full-time equivalents in the ministry, so that's like a 4 and a half per cent increase. That would beg the question again: is that directly to deal with the Radke, and how many are going up into the Wood Buffalo? I'm not trying to put numbers and words in your mouth. I'm just hoping that you'll give me a little bit of feedback on that.

How many people or numbers are in the field versus the office? Of course, I mean, it's nice to have a little bit of extra people sometimes at the top, but you certainly need them at the base where all the activity takes place on the public lands, especially in the spring, summer, and the fall.

I asked the minister last year – and this would be with regard to the fishing, and I had received a couple of inquiries. When we have the freeze, we typically get people who are doing the ice fishing or we have people who are doing commercial fishing. I know that there were some payouts with regard to some commercial fishermen's licences up in the Lac La Biche or the Slave Lake areas. I'm not sure why the particular payouts were made in four instances. They were numbered anywhere from \$100,000 to \$150,000 for individuals with commercial fishing licences up north. So I'm just wondering if you'd care to comment on that particular piece.

Getting back to the commercial fishing, we sometimes have derbies, and we've got derby people coming from other provinces staking their claim on some of the bigger lakes, advertising prizes of \$50,000 to \$75,000. When we talk about how many holes you're punching in and how many people you're getting in there, who's monitoring the activity of these fishing derbies? I mean, yeah, it's a great idea, but overfishing is also a concern. So who are we

monitoring, and what is the effect of outside provincial people coming in and taking advantage of our lakes and maybe the lax regulations with regard to the fishing derbies? I wasn't sure where that had gone. It was your predecessor that I was asking, not yourself. I'll just clarify that particular point.

Just got a little bit more on the people or the manpower outside the Wood Buffalo region, then. I know that it's a huge province, and I recognize that we can't be everywhere all the time, but it would be nice to see that some of the work that we do do is appreciated and recognized, so I would certainly give, you know, kudos to the staff that are doing the ongoing monitoring and the hard work out there, especially those in the lookout towers. Their jobs are starting to become very much full time.

3:20

I did have the opportunity to discuss this with them last year. This year during the unfortunate incident where we did have the one woman, the senior lady, who had disappeared – and there were rewards posted, but we've still never found her – we did raise the question about workers' safety and working alone. I had received overwhelming phone calls, e-mails from people who said: "You know what? Just leave that sort of legislation alone. We're quite comfortable. We recognize that part of the benefit of this particular job is the solitude and the tranquility of being out there." So I'm assuming that you're going to continue to leave it just like that.

We're talking about the people that we need out there. Again, getting back to the retention and attraction, how do you retain these people? Last year there were some people that were here 38, 40 years, and I think that's commendable to be in one profession that long. We're just hoping that we can continue with that.

That will lead me into wildlife protection. I know that I'm going to run out in about 50 seconds here. We talked about this. I'm not talking about the bear with the camera on his head; that's just the one. I wanted to know. We did a study. We had a biologist that was in fact let go with regard to maybe speaking out against the report as to the actual numbers of grizzlies that are remaining out there. Best guess: I believe that we're underestimating the amount of grizzlies that are out there. I'm glad to see that the suspension of the spring grizzly hunt will continue, but that still just raises the issue as to how many bears are out there. I know that we do have a number that are hit at crossings and maybe on the tracks. Last year I think there was a 10 per cent decrease because they were females. That's a big issue. During the election that was a huge issue for Albertans. They called in concerned about the grizzly bears.

I'll just leave it at that, then. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the hon. member for his questions.

On the land-use framework: are we just going to cherry-pick the things we like that we're told, or are we going to take everything in? We'll take everything in. This is a consultation with a broad spectrum of Albertans. I can tell you already that there is very unlikely to be a consensus on a lot of the big issues.

I was getting both my internal reports from the media in Lethbridge two days ago, and also the coverage in the *Lethbridge Herald* that indicated that on a number of key questions what was being recommended verbally – we obviously haven't seen the workbooks yet, but just based on the conversations that were taking place with our consultants and officers, our land personnel that are involved in this, there are some very divergent opinions. We'll have to wait to see where the chips fall on that.

With respect to the question of reimbursement for the firefighters that we've sent to Quebec and also Ontario, there are mutual aid agreements between all the Canadian provinces when it comes to helping one another out to fight fires. There are agreed-upon rates for reimbursement, so that is a reimbursed cost.

With respect to random camping in Fort McMurray, random camping is defined as camping of up to a maximum of 14 days. Of course, the problem that we've had in Fort McMurray because of, as you properly indicated, the mismatch between the number of workers and the available housing is that we have seen a number of kind of camps set up not for 14 days but on a fairly permanent basis. Sustainable Resource Development does have the ability to authorize industrial camps for housing of workers as requested by industry, and we have that authority. But I don't think that is quite what you're talking about.

There are, of course, existing campgrounds, and we can and are working with private campground owners to possibly enlarge their capacity, perhaps on a temporary basis, to try to accommodate this. The bottom line is that while Albertans have a right to use public lands, they don't have a right to abuse public lands. The responsibility of Sustainable Resource Development is to protect the integrity of those natural resources.

On personnel retention I have both official and anecdotal evidence to answer your question there. I think we must be doing a heck of a good job because in March, I believe it was, I went to an employee recognition event for number of years of service, and it was so large that we had to have it out at Fort Edmonton. I practically got writer's cramp filling out all the certificates of appreciation to all the people that were getting recognized. I don't think Cliff was the oldest, but he was getting up there. There were a large number in the 20, 25, 30, 35 years of service, so certainly that gave me the impression that our retention is actually quite good.

I have some more specific answers to that question. We do do regular recruiting for all of our different sections or divisions within Sustainable Resource Development. When it comes to forestry and wildfires, we use our Hinton Training Centre to train people there. Many of our seasonal recruits are rehires, who may do one thing in the winter and come back and work for us in the summer. I have met with the forestry department over at the University of Alberta and talked to them about employment opportunities in our forestry division as well. I hope that answers your questions on that.

With respect to the Radke report and the oil sands strategy I believe the question was: has there been a specific allocation of personnel and budget to meet the needs that were identified in that report with respect to the type of both monitoring of impact on the environment and also the licensing of the activities of the dispositions that take place there? In fact, again, if you look at the breakdown in our budget – I might be able to give you a specific page number in a minute – you'll see that there was a very specific allocation made for that.

We have 11 new FTEs that were allocated to the department specifically for the oil sands strategy. Their responsibilities will include basically what you anticipated in your question: co-ordination of environmental impact assessment reviews and subsequent approval and/or placing of conditions, alignment of issue positions and integration of review, development of cumulative effect frameworks and the application of those frameworks. I think that answers most of your question.

The question of the buyout of commercial fishing licenses. I can tell you that this is a program that was implemented in 2003 with the goals of reducing the number of commercial fishermen and the potential conflict between recreational and commercial users,

basically improving the economics of the industry both on the commercial side and also on the recreational side. From an economic point of view there's a lot more economic value in recreational fishing than commercial precisely because it's so much less efficient as many of us know from hard-luck stories.

An Hon. Member: You want to talk about yours?

Dr. Morton: Exactly.

The number of commercial gillnet fishermen is now below our goal. Our reduction goal was to get to 200. We're now down to 177, which is down from approximately 800 at the start of this program, and we anticipate further reducing that number of 177 down to 140 by the end of this budget year.

3:30

Fishing derbies. The fishing derbies, as you probably know, are one of the most popular, particularly winter, activities in many parts of Alberta. You talk about out-of-province people coming in. They often run the derbies, but basically they're derby organizers, and they're contracted out by charities. I think I'm right in saying this: all of the fishing derbies that we authorize are nonprofit operations. They're to raise money. Obviously, the operators are paid a fee to come in and organize it, but the funds raised once expenses are paid go to, usually, good causes in those communities, including often the promotion and the improvement of fisheries and fishery habitat.

You were concerned also about the effect that fishing derbies have on the fishery itself. Almost all of these are catch and release. In fact, part of the problem we have is that we require certain types of tanks to hold the fish so they can be measured and counted before they're released back, and sometimes the specifications of the holding tanks impose some cost issues that are hard on some people to meet. These are factored into the fishing management for each lake they take place on, and while there's probably some percentage of kill just from the handling and so forth, our fisheries people believe that they're done in a good way.

I'll get you information on worker safety and fire watch.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, any other responses you can certainly provide in writing.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, I just want to let you know that there are about nine minutes left in this segment, so if you wanted any responses from the minister, you may want to leave some amount of time for him.

Mr. Bonko: Or if I preferred, could he respond in writing?

The Deputy Chair: In writing. That is another option as well. Yes.

Mr. Bonko: Okay. Wonderful. Thank you. Then I'll just proceed with a number of questions that I do have. I know you may not be able to answer them all quickly, but I'm hoping that I can have some clarification or some explanation and more detail in writing. I'll be a little bit all over the place so I can try and get them all in here.

The Canmore Golf and Curling Club. I just want to ask for some information about the lease that the Canmore Golf and Curling Club has with the ministry. Order in Council 65/2007 in February extended that lease for 25 years, from 50 to 75. I'd just like to ask a couple of questions. If the minister can't provide them, again, written answers would be great. Why extend it now with only 22 years remaining on the lease? I mean, preferably the entire lease. Why did we extend it now and add an additional 50 to 75 years? How much is the land worth as a market estimate, and how much is the

club paying to rent that particular land? It seems a little bit odd that we're doing this now still under the option before the land-use framework is even in place.

The other one is, again, getting back to some of the grizzlies and the wildlife protection. This year the ministry released its general status of Alberta Species at Risk 2005 report, which made it very clear as to how little the ministry does know about many of the species in Alberta's wildlife parks and areas throughout the province. It talks about 4 per cent of the mammals being at risk, but with another 5 to 6 per cent that are undetermined. Even worse, the amphibians, or reptiles: 30 per cent may be at risk. Sixteen per cent of freshwater fish are undetermined and 23 per cent of the butterflies or the gastropods or bivalves. You know, the little shells or snails. I'm not too concerned about them, but that all is particularly embedded within the report.

Dr. Morton: You're not concerned about them?

Mr. Bonko: Well, snails. It's escargot. Someone is going to be eating them. Right?

Why do we have measures like that if they really don't remotely even address some of the challenges that we're facing with some of these things? Isn't this just giving the ministry an easy target with some of these generalities out there without some specifics? What's going to be done to reduce the uncertainty? How many resources are being devoted to it, and can we expect a little bit clearer picture in the future?

Again, getting back to the grizzlies, why has the government withheld the numbers of the grizzly bears in the areas where the studies are completed? What's being done while we wait to find out how many bears there are?

Getting into the bears, we also talk about species at risk and the caribou. What's being done to manage the caribou management teams? Specific example: perhaps the Little Smoky group there. What impact are they having on protection? I mean, it's a competing interest when we have recreational and forest companies, oil and gas exploration, and they are going into some of the much-needed areas for migration, as we talked about a few days ago with regard to some of the questions.

Getting into the mountain pine beetle, then. How is the government going to address the threat? We talked about some of that. What proportion will be concentrated on clear-cutting in sensitive areas or areas at risk or block cutting? What proportion will be selective harvesting? What proportion will be – and we talked about this before – managed with controlled burns? What will the main determinant be: the value of the timber or the ecological sensitivity of the forest? How are we going to determine if we're going in or if we're not going to go in, or are we just going to leave it because of the age? I know it has a certain market value on it, but sometimes you've got to cut your losses and just allow nature to take its course.

The impact of the infestation. It's going to obviously tell our producers to increase their quotas, but we also know that under the softwood lumber agreement we're going to be over limits. Are we going to be unfairly penalized when we try and bring some of this lumber to market? We know that the product is dropping on the U.S. side, so, you know, instead of letting it sit and rot or at least be susceptible – I think Weyerhaeuser up north were talking about the Grande Prairie area. Some of the areas, the stands, are sitting there to be produced and in some cases are under attack already by the pine beetle there.

I just wanted to go back again to what we talked about in Public Accounts. The Auditor General had made some mention of general reforestation and our ability to ensure that it actually is being done in a timely fashion. Again, for the benefit of the minister, who

wasn't there, we talked about when we do self-monitoring. We did it in school. We used to mark our own exams. A lot of us managed to get a hundred per cent. I'm just concerned about the same sort of thing.

Dr. Morton: Say it's not true.

Mr. Bonko: Well, you know what? I can't say that because it was true.

A lot of us are just concerned. I mean, it just keeps everybody honest. I mean, I'd like to take everybody's word. You know what? Maybe we can get back to it next year. But sometimes we don't get back to it, and then it's the year after. I'm just concerned about the overall impact of the delaying and the reporting of this mechanism, about not having the actual timelines for reforestation and leaving it up to self-reporting. I'm concerned about that particular case. I did reiterate that during Public Accounts, and again it was in numerous recommendations from the Auditor General.

I'm just wanting to know: how much are we going to do with improvement on that area, reporting, and a little bit tighter guidelines for the forestry companies? What's being done to check for it? We talk about 80 per cent targets, I guess, with reforestation – we were hoping for that – but I'm not sure if that's too weak or if that's just fine.

We'll go to the NRCB. We've had some serious concerns about the NRCB. I know that a number of other members not just on our side but on both sides of the House have raised concerns about that, that sometimes the industry is getting a little bit too close, and it's not protecting the rights of Albertans living close to the intensive farming operations. We've talked about the relaxation in the rules.

We talk about some of the runoff. We talk about the large confined feedlot operations and their closeness to large bodies of water. Slave Lake has one that we were concerned about. It did pass last year, but, I mean, that's their main source of potable water as well as recreation. We're concerned about just the impact on the industry and the flooding, which we talked about, which is certainly a reality here in Alberta. What can we do with the confined feedlots?

Going to, I'm sure, a favourite one of the minister's, the interim Métis harvesting agreement. I know that it's something near and dear to his heart as he had mentioned it during his leadership campaign. He was concerned about the agreement and its workings. What's going to be going on with the agreement? Where do the Métis stand with this particular piece? Is the minister satisfied with the interim agreement right now, or are we going to press for a total agreement instead of making it interim? So far this has been an interim agreement in for the two years, so it's either, you know, fish or cut bait. Where are we going with this particular piece?

3:40

Dr. Morton: No pun intended.

Mr. Bonko: Yeah. No pun intended on that one. Exactly.

Those are some of the specifics that I definitely wanted to get out for the minister, then. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the time allocated for Sustainable Resource Development has now elapsed. I'd like to thank the officials that have accompanied the minister for this important assistance to the minister. Thank you so very much.

International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, what an excellent presentation by Sustainable Resource Development and their staff. I want to say that as we move forward, it's indeed my pleasure to introduce my contingent of staff here today: my deputy minister, Gerry Bourdeau. Gerry along with his staff have been doing an excellent job in terms of our ministry budget for '07-08 of \$67.6 million. We have done our very best in terms of doing this in a way that is easily understood by all Albertans, the 3.4 million. We welcome our questions today.

I want to say that with this budget the Premier has mandated six priorities for my ministry: two Canadian intergovernmental priorities in terms of co-ordinating Alberta's approach to intergovernmental relations and also developing an intergovernmental strategy and one international priority, which is enhancing Alberta's international presence and trade relations, especially with the United States.

Of course, we're all very familiar with – and I want to say all political parties – the success we had at the Smithsonian last summer, I think without question. For those who may not be aware, Canada was offered the opportunity to host in Washington. Canada chose not to take that opportunity, but the province of Alberta did. I know that was quite something. Other provinces would have welcomed the opportunity to have been able to host. Alberta, with its vision and, certainly, its foresight, was able to put on a very successful show at the Smithsonian. I want to say that I think it was a huge success.

We also have three aboriginal priorities: finalizing the aboriginal consultation strategy but also finalizing the long-term Métis governance and funding and building aboriginal self-sufficiency. These priorities, of course, cross most of my ministry's core businesses, and we also work very closely with other ministries relative to these important priorities.

I would also like to say, finally, that we work on addressing specific issues arising from other core businesses. For example, in finalizing the aboriginal consultation, we first need to help First Nations complete and share traditional land-use studies so they can better participate in consultation, and we are making good progress in that regard.

Another component of my very diverse ministry are 10 international offices, which now also include Washington. I don't know if the hon. members are familiar with where the 10 offices are, but based on the excellent work that our staff are doing, I want to say that the feedback I'm receiving from MLAs who've travelled with parliamentary committees through the Speaker – and that's all three political parties. I must admit that I have always appreciated the very positive comments that have come back when people are visiting, be it in Munich or in Tokyo or in Hong Kong or be it in Seoul. Wherever it is, I think that members of this Assembly, when they attended our foreign offices, were very proud to say that Alberta is rivalling, shall I say, one other province who has a very large international presence, and that is the province of Quebec.

What we have done is we have utilized our partnership with embassies to minimize our cost and, at the same time, have a profile for the province of Alberta because traditionally, I think it's important to note, we have observed that sometimes the federal government refers to Alberta along with the other provinces in western Canada as western Canada, and of course we're very proud as Albertans to be a little bit more specific than just western Canada. So the embassy may talk about western Canada; what we have endeavoured to do is to talk about the province of Alberta. Consequently, our offices have been successful.

But I have asked for a review of those offices, which hasn't been done in over 10 years. In the changing global economy that we have today, the question is: are we getting good value for those offices we

have? Should we be considering perhaps closing some or opening others in terms of what we refer to as the BRIC. It's a global term that is used referring to the four countries of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Of course, we presently have three offices in China: in Hong Kong as well as two in Beijing. One contemplation has been: should we be considering offices in Mumbai? I spoke to my colleagues in Ontario who just had a mission to India, so we are considering them along with South America.

At the end of the day, I've made this comment that it really should be Albertans who are benefiting from these offices, that they are ones saying: hey, keep this office open, or open another office here. I've taken the approach that if we don't have Albertans supporting it, saying these offices are doing very good work, then I will contemplate closing them, but I have been very encouraged by the very positive comments from the hundreds of businesses that have indicated the excellent work that they are doing and the value.

It's really quite amazing. If you look at our export market in Alberta, that natural fact under our international marketing strategy referred to as AIMS, the Alberta international marketing strategy, we are working to increase Alberta in exports to \$81 billion, which is quite something and actually rivals what other countries are very proud to I guess brag about. I can say that it's this collective effort that ultimately is showing and having positive results for Alberta.

With that, I'd just like to summarize my \$67.6 million budget by comparing to Health or Education. I think I can keep health care running for about three hours on my entire year's budget. I think I can keep the education system running for maybe a half a day with the budget. But I will say that please think of our work to be compared to things like dynamite. Some things come in small packages but have a big bang, and I do believe that our ministry does have a big bang in terms of helping Albertans.

Thank you, and I'll take my seat.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to say on behalf of myself and our caucus congratulations to minister and his wife on their very first born.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you.

Mr. Bonko: You're very welcome. I know that it wasn't mentioned, and I just want to make sure that . . .

Mr. Boutilier: That's Marc. Marc with a C, not a K.

Mr. Bonko: Okay.

You started off there with regard to the benefit that Albertans and everything that they have provides not only to Canada, but we're also proud to show it off, which was the result when we went to the Smithsonian Institution down there in Washington. You talked about how it was impressive, and we've done quite well on that. Well, that kind of just begs the question because when we do some of these and we refer to them as junkets or trade missions, whatever you want to call them, we do take staff. It does cost a number of hours, and there is a cost associated with it. How are we able to measure the results from a particular mission or junket? How are we able to measure the effectiveness, the amount of trade that you got from that one particular piece?

We talked about trade relations. You talked about BRIC: Brazil, Russia, India, and three offices in China. How do we know, in fact, that we're getting good value for our offices being there? In some cases we have overbudgeting. In Seoul, Korea, the office was 31 per

cent over budget. It begs the question: what are they doing if they can't effectively manage that particular budget in that area? How are they able to ensure that we're going to get fair dollar and fair trade from that relationship there? I think that's a fair question. I'm sure that the Auditor General would even say: "You know what? How do you measure that?" That's a tough one. I've asked the minister of economic development before when that ministry did exist. I'm again posing the same question to the minister now. Is the minister going to address, like I said, the overbudgets that do exist in a number of the trade offices? I know that there's probably a logical explanation.

3:50

But you know what? I'd certainly like to hear again what tangible benefits those offices bring not only to Alberta, but there's obviously a western Canada, we'll call it, being that we've now got the TILMA. Don't forget that I certainly will be going into that one as well. What checks and balances or measures does the government use to ensure those benefits? So just specifically talking on the trade relations and the overseas trade offices.

That will lead me into my favourite subject, which is the trade investment labour mobility agreement known as TILMA. I know and I recognize that that is an important issue. It kicked in April 1 of this year, and it's set to go with the signing off of the agreement in 2009, April 1 as well. Yet the government, in my opinion and in the opinion of a lot of Albertans, is being quite secretive on the workings of the agreement. You might say: no, no; we've been quite open and transparent on the whole thing, but I want to sign it behind closed doors. It's not yet come to the Legislature for debate in any way, shape, or form except through question period. Albertans and opposition alike as well as unions and voices of Alberta clearly have reason to be skeptical and suspicious of the TILMA.

Many groups, like I said, may support the agreement because, you know, trade agreements work both for best sides, but given some of the early indications of the TILMA agreement, we're concerned about it. So I'd like to ask some specific questions with regard to TILMA. How much money is in the budget that's going to be spent specifically on TILMA-related issues? What kinds of internal government co-ordination will have to take effect between B.C. and, of course, Alberta?

Now, I knew that they had appointed some specific people to the panel. I wrote to the minister in B.C., and he said: well, the minister here in Alberta has that. So we obviously have some people specifically designated to some of the workings of the TILMA. We have a panel, I guess, in place, and I wasn't sure if we have those names. That would be great to eventually have those provided to ourselves.

Again, how much money is going to be spent on this? What kind of information programs for the public who don't know that much about it? Quite frankly, there was just a little informative brochure, and that was about it. A lot of municipalities, like down in Lethbridge, don't know about TILMA and aren't sure exactly what the overall effect will be on their municipality. So I would encourage the government to come up with something sooner rather than later. This certainly would give them an opportunity to have input with regard to this agreement and the overall impact that it will have on their area.

One area I'm thinking of is the corporate registry. This is an incredibly useful tool to find out about businesses in Alberta, who owns what and so on. It provides a public service to Alberta. However, article 11, section 1 of TILMA states that "parties shall reconcile their business registration and reporting requirements so

that an enterprise meeting such requirements of one Party shall be deemed to have met those of the other Party." So I'm not sure.

This is where we talk about trade relations in B.C. If they're coming into Alberta, if they register in one, they don't have to register here? I'm not sure how that effect is going to be able to measure that here. We'd like to have a little information. Does that mean that companies registered in British Columbia are now considered to be equal and equivalent here within Alberta, as I mentioned? Will Alberta corporate registry now have to list all companies registered in British Columbia so that their details are accessible to Albertans as part of our openness and transparency? I'm sure there are other implications for the recognition of the B.C. companies that are considered registered in Alberta as well, but I'd just like to have some specifics on that.

We talked about alliance building.

I know that I've already gone through a number of questions, so maybe I'll sit down here. I know that I'm not quite at my 10 minutes, but I'll give the minister an opportunity to come back on some of the specifics that I've asked. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. Some very good points. I'd like to first of all say that I'm very pleased that on the issue of TILMA, the trade investment labour mobility agreement, that in front of this Legislature right now we have Bill 38, which is going to be dealing with in a very open and transparent way the penalties. It's demonstrating when both the Premier of Alberta and British Columbia met in our joint cabinet meetings last week – and I might add a Liberal government from British Columbia – where we talked about the seriousness. It's in the B.C. Legislature right now in an open way, and it's also in this Legislature. Of course, Bill 38 is going through the normal course of proceedings here relative to the potential seriousness of fines that will be allocated if, in fact, TILMA is not followed according to the agreement.

I want to go back just for a moment in terms of performance measures, which is a very good point, and it's exactly the point I asked when I first became minister: relative to our foreign offices what measurements do we use? I want to say that three separate client satisfaction surveys now fall under IIAR. The international office survey and the trade division survey are very helpful in determining client satisfaction. Client satisfaction really is Albertans and citizens who are travelling to our offices in terms of: are they satisfied; are they not; what can they do to improve? So we do have measurements. The IIAR program consistently has always scored very high.

I don't know if you're familiar with the actual trade policy program area, but relative to the client satisfaction question, for instance, in Washington, which the hon. member did mention, in the Smithsonian a client satisfaction office was introduced. At the end of the day, pertaining to a five-point scale, the Alberta office in Washington had scored a very high result, between 4.3 and 4.5. The target of the rating is somewhere around 4 on a five-point scale, so we have always been very pleased if we can be at 80 per cent satisfaction or higher. The fact that we were scoring closer to 90 per cent I think speaks very well of Albertans who are working there and also the satisfaction that Albertans are sharing with our offices. So that's just an example of a measurement that we are using because if it's not measured, it's not done. I agree with the hon. member that we need to continue to measure these types of successes.

The international offices survey also shows exceptionally high satisfaction. If you can imagine that in the '04-05 year – and I don't have the results for this year – it was 93.1 per cent. I think that,

obviously, for any of us that are working toward satisfaction, it clearly shows that we're in a top percentile.

The international trade division client survey is new in the '07-10 business plan, and I want to say that we have a benchmark where we want to reach 75 to 80 per cent in terms of satisfied clients. Of course, we'll be reviewing that. Key clients were surveyed within the Alberta government, with ministers, Members of the Legislative Assembly as well as seniors officials, businesses external to the government, and domestic and international private sector. Actual measurements were used to determine if, in fact, we're on the right track.

The ministry also, I might add, in terms of performance will constantly use a variety, a plethora, of stakeholders to evaluate. I want to assure the hon. member that whatever dollar that is spent in any office anywhere, if there is a sense that we can do better based on the client satisfaction rate, we will. Not only will we do a good job in our foreign offices, we will do a good job and then some. If I were to describe my ministry, "and then some" is how I best describe my ministry. These three words really separate the difference between what I refer to as excellent and average.

I believe that as members of this Assembly we take an approach in terms of the A personalities that we have to be in this business of serving the public sector, that ultimately we have an attitude that we can always do better. That is really what I believe is separating our province and our government from other provinces, that attitude. I'm very proud of that, and that will continue.

4:00

I also would like to say on the issue of TILMA, which was an important point by the hon. member, that as we go forward, it's important to recognize that the next two years are going to be a very key time, between '07 and '09, when we will of course be having a very complete consultation process with municipalities, with business associations, labour bodies, chambers of commerce, industry groups, academic groups. I'm very proud, when I was a private member, to have taught at the University of Alberta in the school of business. We're looking forward to working with the U of A, who will provide us with important input as well. By the end of June 2007 our formal consultations with the municipal associations, the AUMA and the AAMD and C, but also with our academic institutions as well as school boards and health boards – at the end of the day we want to ensure that whatever we do in this agreement, it is to help the taxpayers, that all of us have been elected to serve in this Legislature.

Our job is to ensure that we get good value and that there are not unnecessary barriers. When there are barriers, it is ultimately our voters who are being hurt because it means they have to dig deeper into their pockets. No one likes to dig deeper into their pockets in terms of obtaining value. So my commitment to all of these public institutions is: what can we do to get even greater value for what we do by working together? I must say that the Premier of British Columbia with our Premier had a very positive joint cabinet meeting talking about: how do we help jointly our 7.7 million citizens from both provinces when it comes to working together in terms of getting the best value? That is the ultimate objective of TILMA.

You asked some important questions, I want to say, on the issue of the Korean office. I think the comment was regarding being over budget. It's really important to frame this in context. Essentially, the Korean office is located with the Canadian embassy. Rather than Alberta just going out and having its own independent office, we partnered with the federal government at the time. Because we are

with the embassy, we are obligated under this partnership to abide by the federal local hiring guidelines. So we set aside funds for what is referred to as future compulsory one-time retirement payments because there are no pensions. Similar to the fact that we have no pension in this Legislature, well, we have the same approach in other foreign offices.

For the Korean office it's important to get the detail. It really is not over budget. What it really is about is that we had two local employees, and in lieu of a pension the cost in terms of when we are obligated to provide them with a separation when they leave the office – in fact, their office experience goes on for many, many years, so we're obligated. We followed the federal government rule on how their employees are treated; we're doing exactly the same.

Ultimately, it's important to recognize – and I'm sure the hon. member would agree – that we treat people fairly. I might add that they're local people from that country that are working there, and we are just treating them with the same respect and the same approach that the federal government has been doing. That was the reason, hon. member, in terms of what I believe is a very good question, and that kind of accountability I welcome because there are also very good explanations for that.

With that, I'll take my seat and welcome more questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just getting back to some of the specifics that the minister mentioned with regard to TILMA and his intent to bring this subject to the forefront with regard to municipalities, universities. I'm not trying to assume anything, and I'm not trying to put any words in your mouth. Would you be doing somewhat of a consultation such as we've done with the Affordable Housing Task Force, gathering stakeholder input and recommendations to enhance or claw back the agreement? If this agreement by the mass that are being consulted is not palatable, is this government prepared to pull back TILMA? That is the big question right there in itself. If, in fact, the AUMA and the AAMD and C as well as the other stakeholders are not in full support of this particular piece, is the government prepared to pull back that agreement before 2009?

I'm hoping that we do get this started sooner rather than later because this is a huge, impactful agreement which affects B.C. and Alberta. I'm hoping that we do give this much-needed time and consideration to do a really thorough and full consultation instead of something like the Affordable Housing Task Force, where it was a quick 45 days and turn around and bang something out, and we're still fighting about it.

This is huge, and like I said, a lot of people in Alberta in the small towns don't have an idea as to the vastness or the scope of this particular agreement. Can you give us some sort of an idea as to when you're prepared to bring this forward to Albertans? I'm hoping that we do have a good opportunity to really get in and pick it apart to ensure that what we're promising is in fact going to be the real goods because, again, without the proof and without the actual debate we're concerned about this, just like a lot of people would be skeptical. At that point, when we've in fact done the debate with the stakeholders, will it be brought forward to the Legislature to have a full debate as well as the opportunity to either pass or reject this agreement?

Those are two particular pieces that I certainly would like the minister to comment on.

If I could go on, then, next to another important component of this ministry, it would be aboriginal and Métis issues. Certainly, we talk

about the long-standing tradition that the people have had in Alberta and their contributions to it, and a lot of this ministry's budget is devoted to the aboriginal and Métis people in helping them continue to get out – no pun intended – from under a rock and be successful like the rest of the province, we're hoping, is successful as well. But it's tough.

Getting back to question period today, we talked before about displaced Albertans, aboriginals, farm people, and then Canadians. I think when we're bringing in these temporary foreign workers, we are absolutely and totally ignoring the workforce out on the reserves. The Member for Lesser Slave Lake mentioned trying to get people in the youth apprenticeship program or the registered apprenticeship program. That's an untapped resource of the aboriginal youth and areas out there that we're ignoring when we continue to bring in – and we'll just call it what it is – cheap labour. And it's being abused, labour. But you know what? I won't belabour that point because I know we could be here all day on that.

I'd just like to know some specifics about the particular program, about the resource consultation: how it works and what it is specifically going to be for. For example, this year it's gone up over 2 times and almost \$3 million. Just some specifics as to why that would be. Which areas are they consulting over? Is the government consulting on behalf of companies wishing to extract some of the resources, or is it just government dealing with First Nations and Métis?

I'm concerned about some of the Métis people. This is where it gets into a grey area, when you talk about the reserves and some of the settlements there. When they do have the opportunity to have resources and they own the land – of course they own the resources, but when you have companies that are going outside of the boundaries and they're directional drilling to take out those resources, in my opinion, if that's happening, that's just theft. I'd like the minister to comment on that because, surely, we should be able to allow these people to have the same benefits as the other companies from the oil or gas exploration boom and allow their community to benefit from the resources that are right there on their inherent land. When you allow other companies to go outside and, like I said, do directional, I've got some real concern with that particular issue there.

So, again, with regard to dealing with the First Nations with regard to the resource consultation, is the amount embedded with the dialogue, or is it with regard to just some compensation there as well? I know there are a number of questions in here.

4:10

If we go with the Métis settlements ombudsman, there is no extra funding for this office. I've had some conversations with him over the past, say, eight months since I've been appointed to this particular ministry, and he certainly does get a lot of concerns and calls on it. With the current rate of inflation this effectively means that it's going to be losing money, or it may not be able to continue to do the job that it does right now because with inflation it's going to have to do more with less. That's something that a lot of us complain about: doing more with less. Well, you're going to say, "You've got to be a little bit more prudent with money," as we ask our foreign trade offices to do. But I'm sure that they do get a line item and an increase in the budget. So in this particular case why was there no extra funding for the ombudsman there? Is his office, like I said, going to have to do less, or is it going to work more efficiently, then?

I've gone about seven minutes here. I'm hoping to have a little bit more information. There are a number of questions in there for you.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much. I want to say that on the issue of TILMA I think it's important for the record to be very clear. As someone who sat on a local municipal government for 12 years and as the youngest city mayor in Fort McMurray, the relationship, I'm very proud to say, that I had in my former ministry of municipal affairs with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, I can assure you that they will be 100 per cent onside as we go forward. The reason, in consulting with them, is because as all of us in this Legislature are elected, we want to ensure that we get the best value for our citizens, be it in British Columbia or in Alberta or wherever that is.

That being the case, I have met with them. We have consulted with them. We are consulting with them. When they raise an issue, we deal with it in a way that makes sense for both them and us and the British Columbia counterparts, the Liberal government in British Columbia, who sees the value in this. I'm quite certain that the hon. member will see the value in this.

Unlike – what are they called? – the Council of Canadians. Let me use them as an example. They said that NAFTA would fail and the world would come to an end. Well, ultimately that was proven wrong 15 years ago. As we look forward to TILMA, this is about getting best value for our citizens, that elect us. If someone wants to stand up and say, "I'm against getting best value for my taxpayers and my tax dollars," then I guess I will argue with them forever because I believe that it is a very worthwhile, critical principle to follow through with.

So we are consulting. We are also consulting with professional associations, I might add. They're taking place not only with municipalities. But TILMA does not apply to municipalities in 2009. I'm very optimistic that by that time we will have, by consulting with our key stakeholders, the best deal possible.

It will not be coming back to this Legislature. It's not necessary because of the fact that this is a trade deal. It's a trade deal helping citizens. There is no law that is required. It is about simple, good, old-fashioned common sense. My grandfather would often say that the whole problem with common sense is that it's not so common.

In listening to the Council of Canadians, one would think that the sky is going to come down. For some reason they think that there is some ulterior motive. There is no ulterior motive. You have a Liberal government in British Columbia working with a Conservative government in Alberta trying to say: what can we do to bust barriers to get the best value for our citizens? That is the principle behind what we are doing.

Now, the hon. member raises a very important point relative to aboriginals being part of the solution when it comes to the issue of employment opportunities. I'm very proud of what has taken place. But let me reiterate, and these are exactly the words that came from our Premier regarding the issue of foreign workers. This government has a policy: first and foremost is Alberta, second is Canada and other provinces and territories, and third is foreign workers. So Alberta first because it just makes good sense – and I say good sense: s-e-n-s-e and c-e-n-t-s – rather than having someone come from another part of the world.

Aboriginals and the training with the RAP program and Careers: the Next Generation. My very good friend Eric Newell, the former

CEO of Syncrude. Of course, I'm very proud to say that Syncrude Canada is the single largest employer of aboriginals in this country at over 25 per cent. It's because of a long-term plan, and that plan is being employed with tremendous economic opportunity. The approach that we are taking as a government is Alberta first, Canada second, and other provinces and territories and foreign offices third. That is the approach of our Premier and our government, and we remain steadfast to that approach. I want to assure the hon. member that that will continue to be and, without question, that aboriginals will continue to be part of the solution relative to successful employment opportunity and training.

Alberta is covered, by the way, under a First Nations consultation, which is an important point. Alberta is covered under Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8. More than 30 land claims with potential liability are out there right now. The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled – and Alberta is following this ruling – that the First Nations must be consulted. We are consulting with them. Alberta's aboriginal consultation policy and guidelines is a cross-ministry initiative where rights are respected, risks are mitigated, and greater investment certainty is provided for everyone involved, with tremendous opportunity.

First Nations and industry interact every day over resource development and exploration. Policy and guidelines help to avoid conflicts involving Crown land. I'm very proud to say that the province of Alberta is viewed by the rest of Canada as a leader. Why are we viewed as a leader? We had 15 land claims in the province of Alberta, and of the 15 land claims, working with the federal government and our First Nations, 12 of them, over 85 per cent, are complete. No other province can match that impressive work that has been done. I say that because of the good work and the relationships we've built over the last 15 years with the aboriginal people. They are a part of our solution.

I want to also say that as we go forward, the work that we are doing I believe is very important, and we'll continue on that way because at the end of the day we want to do what is best for our citizens, who are paying the bills in this budget that I present today.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I was just intrigued by the comments that the minister was making about TILMA. I disagree very strongly with the take that this government has on TILMA, that it's just a trade deal, so it needn't come before the elected representatives in this province. You can consult far and wide, but that is not bringing this matter before this Assembly and allowing the people of Alberta to have their say through their elected representatives. Once again I see this government doing things behind closed doors, secretive and arrogant. That's what this TILMA deal is.

You're not kidding me that this is just a trade deal. This is affecting every part of our lives, and more importantly, you guys are selling away, giving away our ability as local governments on any level to enforce public policy. If you now want to bring in public policy that contravenes what's in TILMA, you're stuck because TILMA is going to be paramount. If you've negotiated something that says otherwise, I'd like to see it. Table it in this House. Because what I've seen so far says that TILMA is paramount.

Just let me pick something out of thin air. For example, let's say you've got schools – and a number of them have done this. Let's say that you've got a school that, you know, sells pop and chips and chocolate bars and stuff, and they decide that in the future they want

to do something that is going to be better for their student population and for their students' health, and that is to not renew their contract with Coke or Pepsi or whoever has been supplying the carbonated beverage and not renew their contract with whoever is the distributor of the food that goes into the vending machines. But this is now a B.C. firm that has this contract or this agreement, and they go: sorry, but you're impinging upon our right to make money and to invest in this, and the school must keep providing these vending machines in the school.

So you've got a situation where local authorities, like a school board, a city council, a municipality, a provincial government, want to make transformative policy to either encourage the behaviour of its citizens or discourage the behaviour of its citizens through public policy. You are now limited by the terms that are under TILMA. That's the problem. It is arrogant beyond belief – and this government doesn't even understand how arrogant it is – that it did not bring that agreement here. You can be as flippant as you want, that it was a Liberal government in B.C. that did this, but that Liberal government actually had the respect for their citizens to bring it before the Legislative Assembly in B.C. and allow it to be openly debated. None of this 10 hours of debate, and then you've had too much, stuff. They allowed it to come before their Assembly and be openly debated for as long as people wanted to keep that discussion going.

4:20

We have an agreement here that affects every part of our lives. It affects labour. Let's not kid ourselves: this is going to affect the standards of labour here. We have some trade unions that have higher standards in this province. You think that B.C. is going to come up? I don't think so. It's going to be about Alberta's standards going down. Let's look at the differences right now between the standards of accreditation for nurse practitioners between Alberta and B.C. Do you think Alberta is going to end up going up or down to meet B.C.? It's not going to go up, folks. It's going to end up going down. Why as a legislator, why as a government would you people go in there and negotiate something that is going to put me and other Albertans in a worse spot than we were before? How could you do that on our behalf and then not even allow us to talk about it, supposedly in an open and democratic society?

This is not a new government. I'm looking at the same 60 people here that are approaching things in exactly the same way as they did six and eight months ago. It's about: we know better. It's completely paternalistic. It's done behind closed doors. Then all the citizens get a pat on the head, that you really know best, and they should just all fall in line and agree to it. Well, I think we're beginning to see that some of the provisions that came through under free trade and now under NAFTA have not been, particularly, to the benefit of citizens. I think there'd be a number of people who would be arguing that they'd rather have those jobs that are now being done offshore by somebody in India or Latin America. They would rather have that job here and be employed and have a salary and some dignity in their lives.

There's a lot more to TILMA than meets the eye, and I am extremely disappointed in the continuing intransigence of this government to refuse to get out there and support your beliefs in an open forum. What I'm getting right now is very one-sided. Even individual members of the public that have gone to meet with backbenchers in the government are patted on the head: oh, you don't really understand what's going on. Well, I'd argue that some of those citizens do understand what's going on.

I really am concerned that this government has gotten us into something that is not going to be to the benefit of the citizens of Alberta. I don't know why the government continually makes choices that put the profit and the health and wellness of the business sector ahead of the autonomy of our citizens. That's not to say that there's anything wrong with the business sector. There's not. They're very successful. They make a lot of people a lot of money here. They supply us with many goods and services. It's a well-respected profession. There's nothing wrong with them. But I don't understand why this government always opts for policies that favour that sector over their citizens.

Who else is going to speak up for the citizens? There's just us. That's our job, to look after them, and I don't understand why this government always abdicates that in favour of another sector. The business sector doesn't need a lot of help. They've got a lot of money. They've got a lot of connections. They've got good marketing skills. They've got lobbyists working for them. They're doing pretty well. They're pretty smart guys. They're good at looking after themselves. I don't understand why you always fold, every time, in favour of our own citizens. It doesn't make sense to me.

Once again, the refusal to bring it before this Assembly is really wrong. I cannot see how you can defend that choice. If you've got nothing to worry about, if you're so right about the choices that have been made here, if people are going to be so excited by this, then, great. Bring it before this Assembly for debate. Let's see how excited everybody is.

Thanks very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. In fact, I'm very pleased by what the hon. member said in her preamble, when she said, and I quote: the British Columbia government at least have it in front of their people in the Legislature. We, the government of Alberta, are doing exactly the same thing that the British Columbia government is doing in front of the Legislature, so I can interpret from that that the hon. member is obviously very pleased in terms of what we are doing. We, also, under Bill 38 have it in front of the Legislature. Obviously, the hon. member is not a free trader.

Ms Blakeman: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Ms Blakeman: Under 23(h), (i), and (j).

Don't twist my words. I very clearly was talking about bringing the whole idea of supporting that contract before this Assembly for debate, not one section of it that allows the fines to go through the court system. So don't twist my words. Don't impugn motives to me.

The Deputy Chair: Through the chair, please.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Chairperson, of course, through you. But please remind that member that, you know, if he's going to quote me directly, then he should quote me directly and include in that the intent behind it. Don't impugn motives to me. Don't assign things to me that I didn't say. Very clearly, in almost 10 minutes, I talked about bringing approval of that trade agreement before this Assembly to debate in its entirety, not one tiny little clause that allows the

courts to assign a benefit if somebody tries to sue us and we lose. And this is what he's claiming is bringing TILMA in front of us?

I'm sorry; I'm wandering into debate. I apologize for that, Mr. Chairman, but clearly the member's remarks have provoked debate.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister, on the point of order.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, there's no point of order, in my judgment. Having said that . . .

Ms Blakeman: He's the chairman. Allow him to rule.

The Deputy Chair: The minister has the floor.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, Mr. Chairman, in terms of twisting her words, I am not twisting her words. The words came out the way they were, and I do not believe I have twisted them. We have Bill 38 in front of this Legislature, under which is TILMA. It is in front of the Legislature. I will quite simply say that the facts are the facts, and I'm not twisting anyone's words.

I'd like to proceed with some of the other comments.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else on the point of order?

Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Centre did rise on a point of order citing Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j), I believe. The hon. minister has also responded on that matter. Every member of this Assembly is an hon. member, and we would like to respect every individual and believe that what they are saying is based on factual information. I hope that what transpired right now will be something that will clarify the position of both the Member for Edmonton-Centre as well as the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. I'd like us to proceed with the debate that was before us.

The hon. minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have interpreted that it's obvious that the hon. member, in making this observation, is clearly not a free trader. That is an observation, with the utmost respect. This government and the Liberal government of B.C. are free traders, and they're free traders in this way: they want the best value for the citizens that elect them. I'm quite certain that the hon. member wants the best value for the citizens that elect all of us in this Legislature, so that is the motive behind what it is that we're doing.

I would like to also say this, and I use a quote. I might add that everyone really listen carefully, and I will attribute the quote: we look forward to continuing to work with our counterparts in the B.C. government to facilitate labour mobility between both provinces; we believe that registered nurses in Alberta should without any barrier be able to go from one province to the other. That is of course said by Mary-Anne Robinson. Now, you may ask: who is Mary-Anne Robinson? She is the executive director of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta.

As much as we are all here supporting health care in terms of providing the services, I don't think anyone in this Legislature would want to stop a nurse. Now, one can only interpret by some of the other comments that it's almost like we don't want health care professionals coming from other provinces to Alberta. Well, we want them to come to Alberta, and that is our motive behind this mobility trade agreement.

We want to not have buses going from one province to another and then simply coming back empty. We want to barrier-bust. We want the best value. We want to ensure it. Rather than a truck of goods and services that used to stop at the B.C. border because the regulation was different in B.C. versus Alberta, we want to be able to allow the goods to flow to the other province. You know why? Because it means a lower and best-value cost to the taxpayer, be it of Alberta or B.C.

The fine example that we use is in Golden, B.C., where we have an Alberta vehicle inspection office. This is an inspection office where bales of hay that used to be reloaded at a border are now done in a joint Alberta/B.C. inspection office where we actually have joint mobility for inspecting our regulatory regimes that we have in a co-ordinated approach. It is harmonized. It avoids duplication. Who is the winner in all this? We do not compromise standard. We do not compromise safety. Ultimately, the people that are paying for that product and those goods and service are going to be the ones that benefit because of that, because we are more harmonized. That's what TILMA is all about.

4:30

I am proud to say that I am a free trader. I believe in the best value. I think every hon. member in here does support free trade. Contrary to the Council of Canadians, who on their website believe that myself and the hon. Liberal cabinet minister from B.C. are going to make sure that the sky falls because of TILMA, nothing could be further from the truth. Let me say one other thing. It could not be further from the truth when an hon. member suggests that the government, not a person, is arrogant. I can only say to you that this government is not arrogant. We are consulting. We are transparent. We are doing exactly what the British Columbia Liberal government is doing in their Legislature. Consequently, one can interpret from that that we are clearly, without any question, far from arrogant but, if anything, a consultative government that believes that we want to get the best value for our citizens.

Ms Blakeman: A complete fabrication.

Mr. Boutilier: On a point of order. She suggested a complete fabrication. She's calling me a liar. That's not true.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, first, the chair did not recognize you on the point of order. Secondly, there was no citation.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, just for your information, we have about nine minutes left in this segment, so govern yourself accordingly.

Mr. Bonko: Oh, boy. Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think the whole thing comes down to standards. I think we in Alberta are very proud of the standards that we've achieved as far as being journeypersons or being recognized as health care professionals. I think that's what the Member for Edmonton-Centre was trying to get at, that we're very proud of the distinction and the high standards which we govern ourselves by. When you bring in people with lower standards, that's when we do take exception. When we hired sheriffs, we were concerned about it being dumbing down. That's what the whole thing is about. Why would we lower our standards when we have been come to known as the province with exceptional standards? That's all I'm going to say about that particular piece.

Dr. Brown: B.C. is not a Third World country.

Mr. Bonko: Not at all, but they have lower standards. Why not come up to our standards? Then we're all competing on the same thing: an apple to an apple, an orange to an orange, but not three years versus four years. There's a big difference right there in itself because we go to grade 12 and they go to grade 13 there, so you get an idea of where I'm going here.

I'm going to talk about the Métis settlements transitional funding and about this program that relates to the significant opportunities and challenges listed in the ministry's business plan. This is clearly taking over from the Métis settlements funding, which ended this year. I'd like a little bit more information as to where the money is going to go and the single biggest chunk of it as well.

Could the minister please tell us what that particular money is going for? How will the minister's consultation with the Métis settlements work? What are the discussions to be with the public, or at least will there be an opportunity for public input? Is this one-off funding or is this long-term funding that's going to take the place of that other funding that was cut off there? What kind of end result is the minister looking for for his government with the relationship with the Métis people?

Again, this gets back to: how do we know of the effectiveness of the money? How can this be measured? Do we have tangible results so that we could say that from this point on there's been an improvement in area X, Y, Z? But just to say, "Well, there have been improvements," how do you measure the effectiveness and the use of this money? I'll just end right there specifically with some of that part on the transitional funding.

The other part that I'd like to raise is aboriginal health. We know that there are some real concerns with health strategies that need to be in place, and it's more about educating than, I guess, telling them. It's a long process because there are a number of them that have serious health concerns, and the biggest one would be with diabetes. I was at the one conference there, and that's one of the biggest single issues that they have to deal with right now, the increase in diabetes. How is the minister going to be dealing with the continued aboriginal health strategies, which were indicated on line 4.0.3 with the overall heading of aboriginal health?

I'll sit down and listen for some specifics, but just one more question before I do. I would like a little bit more specific, tighter timelines with regard to TILMA. When will we begin consultations with the public? How much time are we going to allow? Again, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre said, it would be fantastic to say that we did bring it before the Legislature, that specific bill, TILMA, the same way that they are bringing it before their Legislature in B.C. That's exactly what we're looking for: open, transparent debate, accountable to the public which elected us through our representation to be their voices. That's exactly what we're looking for.

Those are the specifics that I'd like to ask the minister for. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member raises some excellent points. First of all, addressing the issue of aboriginal health care, I'm very proud to say that, of course, diabetes has been an identified area within aboriginal communities. I must admit that I'm not aboriginal but also have a chronic disease, type 1 diabetes. Many of my aboriginal friends do as well, so we have something in common.

I'm very proud of Alberta Health and the cross-ministry initiatives that they have undertaken, working with the aboriginal communities.

The hon. minister of health, who was here today – I want to say that it is my understanding that these cross-ministry initiatives are working very well and will continue to work well because of the commitment of our government.

On the point of TILMA and its consultation the consultation and speaking with Albertans is taking place as we speak, and it will continue to take place over the next two-year period. That is very important to ensure that the process that B.C. is undertaking, that we're taking – we're both in the Legislature now on this component of TILMA. I can say that I'm very optimistic with the excellent advice that we get from many of the professional groups, nursing association, teachers.

We have a situation now where a teacher would actually move to Alberta with their spouse, be it male or female. They'd get here, but they would not be able to teach right away. The reason they weren't able to teach is because we did not have a harmonized approach. So this is really an example of, you know: here we are; our province is growing. We are building more schools with our capital budget. We have more teachers coming in. Ultimately, we're trying to ensure that we have the educators that are required, and TILMA will be another barrier buster to achieve that objective.

Consequently, I want to say that that consultation will continue in an open and transparent way. I'm very pleased that we're discussing it right here, right now, in my budget. I can't think of anything for the people of Alberta that would be more transparent and open than what we are doing as we speak.

The other comment that I was going to answer was on the issue of transitional funding on Métis settlements. Of course, we have eight Métis settlements. I work very closely with the president of the Métis settlements, Alden Armstrong. I just recently met with him again. We have \$9 million. The ultimate goal – and I know that the hon. member will agree – is self-sufficiency, building our communities in these settlements in a way that they are self-sufficient.

I want to say how pleased I am working with the Métis settlements council. The Premier has met with them. If you have an opportunity to see the most current *Métis Matters*, that messenger that just came out, you'll see where the Premier was awarded the important sash from the Métis settlements by Mr. Armstrong and his executive. I'm very proud of that relationship.

I might say that \$7 million of the \$9 million – of course, we're waiting for the business plan, which the Métis settlements are bringing back by the end of June. I've been informed by the chair that they are making excellent progress with the \$7 million that is being used for the business plan that they are doing relative to sustaining their communities. Also, I believe that there is \$2 million in addition. That is a million at the front end and a million at the back end of a successful business case. What we will be doing is evaluating the business case and the practices that are going to be utilized in terms of successes on Métis settlements across, you know, many, many areas.

I want to assure the hon. member that this initiative is a very positive one, and I do not view it as an expense but, actually, as an investment in terms of building that self-sufficiency within our Métis settlements.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just some more specifics. Will the public be able to have input with regard to those discussions on the transitional funding? Again, how do we know the effectiveness of the money? How can the effectiveness or the results be

measured? That's the big thing that we're looking for. It's easy just to throw money, but how do you know that the money is being well spent, and what are the results that we're getting from that money?

4:40

Mr. Boutilier: That's exactly part of the analysis, Mr. Chair, that we will be covering. This will be coming back to government, but right now we have tremendous confidence in the Métis settlements and their leadership. Their leadership are carrying out this very extensive review within their people, within the settlements. What we will be doing is working in partnership with them. We'll be coming forward and evaluating the business case. It's intended to be back by mid-summer. That was a commitment made by the chair. I have every confidence that there is no indication that any of those dollars that are being utilized for this self-sufficiency initiative are in any way deviating from that. In fact, quite contrary: I have been hearing very positive successes.

So we're measuring it, but I think it's fair to wait until the business case comes back, to allow the peoples within the Métis settlements to finalize with their traditional knowledge, with their examples of good work that will be done.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the time allocated for the Department of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations has now lapsed. I would like to thank the department officials and any other support staff for providing assistance to the minister. Thank you so very much.

Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture

The Deputy Chair: I'll invite the hon. minister to begin his opening remarks and introduce the officials present in the Assembly.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present the estimates for Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture for 2007 and 2008. Joining me here today are a few of my key department staff who help keep my ministry running smoothly: on my immediate right, Fay Orr, my deputy minister; on my left, Sue Bohaichuk, acting assistant deputy minister of culture and community development; Dave Nielsen, acting assistant deputy minister of parks, conservation, recreation, and sport; Bob Scott, assistant deputy minister of tourism marketing and heritage; and Pam Arnston, executive director of financial services. Also, seated in the gallery is Susan Cribbs, executive director of policy, planning, and legislative services.

Mr. Chairman, our ministry is known as the quality of life ministry. We help create a strong and vibrant province. Our investments in culture, recreation, parks, and so much more generate economic benefits and create jobs for Albertans. Our volunteer organizations and nonprofits employ 176,000 people and have an economic impact of \$9.6 billion. Recreation and sport grants generate impressive returns. For every grant dollar that's spent, this generates \$5 in community spending. Our provincial historic and cultural sites contribute \$61 million to our economy, while our parks contribute \$1.3 billion. Also, our tourism industry alone generates over \$5 billion for Alberta's economy, and it employs more than 103,000 people.

Mr. Chairman, it's clear that our investments are sound ones, but the main focus of our department, our vision, is to foster a superior quality of life to make Alberta one of the best places to live, work, and visit. Our mission is to promote, develop, and preserve tourism, culture, and heritage in support of vibrant, active, and inclusive

communities. The work of our ministry touches the lives of all Albertans. With our population growing every day, it is vital that we continue to invest in the well-being of our growing communities for current and future generations. That's why Budget 2007 focused on managing growth pressures, one of our government's top priorities. With your approval and support our department will help meet some of the challenges we are facing.

Our 2007-08 program expense is \$756 million, a net increase of \$300 million, the majority of which is one-time capital grants. We have allocated \$40 million for the first year of a three-year \$69 million commitment to the Calgary Olympic Development Association capital renewal project. Another \$80 million in one-time capital grants will support major athletic facilities, fairs, and exhibitions. We have allocated \$140 million a year for two years to create the new major community facilities program. This program will help nonprofit groups, municipalities, and aboriginal communities build, maintain, or upgrade recreation and cultural facilities for public use. These commitments have been made in response to the incredible growth and demands we are experiencing. Mr. Chairman, other budget allocations have also been based on the need to grow along with our population.

We have listened to what Albertans want and what Albertans value. The rights of all Albertans are always of utmost importance. Educating Albertans and protecting their rights are key to making our province a safe and welcoming place to call home. Ninety per cent of Albertans say that the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission is important to ensuring that our rights are protected in our province. With that in mind, we will increase support for the commission for programs promoting fairness, diversity, and inclusion by 7 per cent.

Another important group representing the interests of Albertans is the Francophone Secretariat. The secretariat represents more than 205,000 francophones in our province. An 8 per cent increase in its budget will support initiatives promoting French language and culture and will help to preserve a rich part of our heritage.

Other aspects of our heritage are preserved in our provincially owned historical sites and museums. Four million dollars more has been allocated to these attractions to help with operating costs and refurbishing displays and exhibits. The Royal Tyrrell Museum has already unveiled its plans to renovate a permanent gallery. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump will produce a new presentation for their main theatre. Exterior and exhibit improvements will also be done at Historic Dunvegan, Stephansson House, and Fort George and Buckingham House. Our museums and historic sites are major attractions for Albertans and other visitors alike, attracting some 850,000 visits in 2005.

Our provincial parks are another major draw for visitors, attracting 8 and a half million visits per year. We will address service and maintenance in these popular areas with an \$8 million injection. That means more conservation officers, interpreters, maintenance, and gate staff to serve visitors and protect our lands and facilities. Mr. Chairman, as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of Alberta's provincial parks this year, it is the perfect opportunity to invest in these valuable resources.

Our natural areas are very popular with Albertans perhaps because over 80 per cent of adult Albertans participate in some sort of recreation or sport. Albertans are interested in leading healthy, active lives, and we are committed to fostering this. Lottery funding for the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation will increase by 15 per cent, an additional \$3 million. The foundation uses its total budget of \$26.6 million to support programs like the

Alberta Games, providing grants to more than 100 associations to train coaches and much more. By helping to encourage Albertans to stay active, we are lowering diabetes and cancer rates, promoting higher academic achievement, and involving families in their communities, another sound investment.

Albertans also like to get involved with our artistic and cultural communities. Most Albertans, 87 per cent of them, feel that the arts are an important contributor to our quality of life. That's why we will invest \$65.9 million in the arts and cultural programs this year.

Mr. Strang: How much?

Mr. Goudreau: Sixty-five point nine million.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts, which supports festivals, exhibits, artists, and more, received an additional \$4.5 million in lottery funding. This is an increase of 20 per cent over last year. Our festivals and events draw millions of visitors each year, and they are a highlight for Alberta's tourism industry.

Promoting our cultural attractions, our exciting adventures, and our beautiful landscapes in a very competitive industry is a challenge. Our efforts to improve our tourism industry will receive a \$9 million boost this year thanks to increased collections under the tourism levy. These additional funds will help us attract visitors from key markets and will allow us to focus on emerging markets as well. Albertans continue to be our largest market and represent about half of Alberta's total tourism expenditures. With new Albertans arriving every day, we will continue to encourage people to explore our province and all it has to offer.

Increased funding will also go towards developing new and improved tourism products that will help us to be competitive in this competitive industry. Initiatives like the Canadian badlands come to mind. The Canadian badlands are being branded as Alberta's next tourism icon. Reaching from Stettler in the north to the Montana border and all the way from just east of Queen Elizabeth II highway to the Saskatchewan border, the Canadian badlands include an impressive mix of history, art, culture, and adventure perfect for any traveller. The Canadian badlands are a great example of how we are building on our natural advantages and our past successes and making smart investments in our future.

By supporting the 2007-08 estimates for my ministry, you are supporting our efforts in helping us make Alberta one of the best places to live, work, and visit now and for the years to come.

Mr. Chairman, I would be pleased to answer any questions that the members may have.

4:50

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and participate in the budget debate for the Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. I want to congratulate the minister for deliberating his first budget debate, and I want to thank the minister as well as his staff for their hard work and great effort in presenting all the paperwork.

First of all, I would like to start with some key issues and questions in regard to this ministry. I'll start with arts and culture. Mr. Chairman, overall funding for culture is being reduced by \$3.84 million. Even with a slight increase to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, according to the most recent Stats Canada figures available, Alberta ranks 11th of the 13 provinces and territories in its per capita funding for the arts. Even though we are the richest province in the

country, this government only spends about \$63 per person on the arts.

This contradicts a recent poll indicating that 55 per cent of Calgarians believe the government should invest more in performing arts, and 33 per cent of Edmontonians feel that the province doesn't spend enough on arts and culture. Young professionals in Alberta want to live in vibrant communities that value arts and culture. They want to have a variety of high-quality arts and culture events available to them.

Artists in Alberta have shown how incredibly entrepreneurial they are by finding ways to adapt to this government's neglect of their profession. They find creative ways to raise money and budget, but they have to accept low wages as the price of pursuing their dreams. Understandably, artists often leave Alberta to go to provinces where governments are more supportive and encouraging.

Stats Canada also reported that the economic impact of the culture sector in Alberta was \$4.3 billion in the year 2001. The arts are an important tool in job creation and economic diversification. The Alberta Liberals recognize the value of the arts and culture sector and have developed policies that include immediately doubling the budget for AFA and considering substantial increases in the future; reviewing the operations and the mandate of the AFA; establishing a \$500 million endowment fund for the arts, social sciences, and humanities.

Estimates, page 355, line 5.0.2. Funding for the arts is decreasing again this year by \$1.167 million, or 37 per cent. Why hasn't this government made arts funding a real priority yet? How will this money be utilized this year? What groups, organizations, or programs will be impacted by this funding cut?

Estimates, page 355, line 5.0.8. Funding for assistance to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is \$26.634 million, an increase of 21 per cent. Although this increase is welcome, it is once again far below what the arts sector requires in this province. Is the new minister prepared to work with the arts sector to ensure that their concerns are addressed? Is the minister willing to commit today to making arts funding a real priority for this government in years to come?

Arts groups have been asking for a substantial increase in funding for years. It has been estimated that the arts contribute approximately \$150 million annually to the economy of this province, yet this government continues to rank among the poorest supporters of the arts in Canada. The point here, which is agreed upon by many stakeholders, is: why does this government consistently fail to support the arts when municipal and federal governments recognize the importance of the arts? Can the minister explain to these artists why they are always underfunded? Can the minister explain to the citizens of Alberta why this government ignores their wishes and continues to underfund the arts sector? Previous ministers claimed that the Tory caucus did not support a substantial increase to arts funding. What is the new minister going to do to change this ongoing problem?

GOA strategic business plan, page 36. A goal of this government is to create a cultural policy. What groups has the minister consulted? How do professional artists fit into the cultural policy?

Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture's business plan, page 307. How does the minister expect to meet the goal of attracting and retaining knowledge workers by enhancing Alberta's reputation as a sophisticated, modern province with a thriving cultural sector without providing professional artists with more funding and opportunities?

The next issue I want to talk about is parks. Estimates, page 354, line 2.0.3. Funding for the parks operations is increasing to \$39.6

million, or by 18 per cent, for the maintenance, operations, and more parks staff. What problems with the parks operations has the minister identified that require additional financial support? How will this additional money be used? Which parks have requested additional funding? Which parks will be receiving this money? Is there a long-term plan that sets priorities for infrastructure renewal and conservation plans? Where do the Alberta river valleys fit on this government's list of priorities?

Estimates, page 354, line 2.0.6. One million dollars is allocated for nominal sum disposals. What is included under this line item? Where does this money go?

TPRC's business plan, page 308. "To keep pace with population growth and high visitation rates, new provincial parks and recreational areas that provide additional outdoor recreation opportunities, facilities and services need to be pursued." What areas are being considered for designation as provincial parks? Are municipalities and communities being consulted?

Now I come to sports. Estimates, page 354, section 3, recreation and sports. What plans does the minister have for implementing the Alberta sports plan? The Alberta Liberals have been very vocal in urging this government to implement the Alberta sports plan and make sports, recreation, and healthy living a priority.

Estimates page 354, line 3.0.4. A new recreation and sports facilities grant is being established this year. What are the guidelines for this \$90 million fund? Who is eligible? Who can apply? Where can interested groups find more information? Who will be overseeing the distribution of this fund? What limits or conditions are in place for this fund? Has the minister been working with the minister of health to develop sports and recreation programs?

5:00

I have a few miscellaneous issues and questions that I would like to ask the minister, Mr. Chairman. The new major community facility program is intended to provide funding for projects identified as a priority for communities. Given the fact that rules in other granting programs such as the community initiatives program were clearly broken by this government, will this minister guarantee that the rules governing this \$280 million program be consistently followed?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First, I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for his kind opening comments. I really appreciate it, and certainly my staff, who have done a tremendous amount of work on our budget and on our business plan, also appreciate that.

Your discussion started off by talking about arts and culture. You're aware that one of my mandates is to look at drafting a cultural policy that will encompass Alberta's cultural, historical, and natural advantages. My goal is to have a policy that reflects the widely held view that culture is recognized in a broad sense.

You talked about arts funding. Certainly the arts are very much a key element in quality of life, and improving Alberta's quality of life is one of my goals and one of our government's top priorities. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts received an additional 4 and a half million dollars through this particular budget, raising the foundation's total budget to \$27.3 million. In total, then, the foundation has received – and I have to emphasize that – a 63 per cent increase in lottery funding since 2002. This year's increase, at about 20 per cent, takes that to 63, so it's a significant change from where we were in the past. I'm not sure where your numbers come

from, hon. member, but in 2006-07 the numbers that we have ranked Alberta fifth out of all the provinces and territories in per capita funds awarded by provincial arts funding agencies.

We looked at funding that's given to other groups aside from the Foundation for the Arts. For example, a half million dollars is dedicated to supporting the 2008 Juno awards in Calgary. Resident companies of the Jubilee auditoria are given reduced rental rates, and those savings range anywhere from 6 to 7 per cent to 85 per cent. In addition, the government supports the arts through Alberta's educational institutions, where over 5,000 students are enrolled full-time in fine arts programs. Advanced education operating grants to institutions like the Alberta College of Art and Design and the Banff Centre exceeded \$21 million in 2004-05. So if you compare the dollars provided to the community, then you need to include those dollars and not just strictly the dollars that are provided to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. We can talk about the province's film industry, and that budget is receiving a 24 per cent increase, totalling \$18.3 million.

No doubt, as we evolve the cultural policy, arts funding will become a very, very strong element of that particular policy being developed for the province. In talking about the cultural policy, you've asked as to who we would have inquired or who we would have talked to. I need to indicate that extensive research has been completed to define the scope and the content of the policies. We've had a number of public opinions, research. There have been nine focus groups. There have been telephone surveys of over a thousand Albertans. We've had 13 stakeholder consultations and dialogue with other ministries and other jurisdictions on all of those policies and programs.

We've basically identified the key components of the cultural policy. We're establishing priorities and strategies and the desired outcomes. Those are going to be reviewed with further consultations that will be happening throughout this particular summer. Again, it will provide an assessment of priorities for the use, then, in developing the associated implementation plan. Certainly, as we move forward with that particular cultural policy, there will be additional budget dollars that will be tied to that, and we hope that we'll be able to introduce that in next year's budget.

You also talked about other funding, and I want to indicate to the hon. member that we've been supporting other groups and facilities. I just want to touch base very quickly on the Art Gallery of Alberta. You're aware that the provincial government has committed \$15 million to the Art Gallery. We are one of the largest contributors to this project to date, and certainly those dollars came from the centennial funding.

We recognize that the Art Gallery has a shortfall of \$32 million and that they've made a formal request for funding. That is being considered through our regular process, along with other government priorities and commitments, so as we speak we are considering the shortfall. We're committed. We want to see the Art Gallery proceed in the province and are prepared to cover some of those costs.

The question on nominal sum disposals. Basically, we are looking at the possibility of transferring ownership of assets. There are some discussions that we might be disposing of some provincial recreation areas. There are a number of sites that we are reviewing that we might be able to divest ourselves of and transfer those particular assets to local municipalities. That's where the \$1 million comes from.

I'm just going through some of the questions that you might have had otherwise. You indicated a decrease in the total overall arts and

cultural budget. Last year we had given about \$600,000 to support the 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC. It was a one-time commitment; that \$600,000 is not reflected in this year's budget.

As well, we had injected \$12.5 million as a one-time increase that was approved by our ministry and the government of Alberta to address the backlog of approved grants for the film industry, the film development fund. That 12 and a half million dollars is not in this year's budget. So if you look at 12 and a half million dollars and \$600,000, total those numbers up and remove them from our budget, you will actually see that our budget is increasing quite dramatically, rather than decreasing, as you indicated.

On the Alberta Foundation for the Arts we are doing a program evaluation as well. Certainly, we want to make sure that the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is providing the effectiveness that is required, and we are seeing how we might be able to make some improvements and actually increase its effectiveness for the province of Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, I'll sit down now and entertain additional questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll move on to the horse racing and breeding renewal program. That program is receiving about a \$56 million subsidy, an \$11 million increase over last year. How is this industry sustainable? What is the long-term funding strategy for the for-profit horse-racing industry? Why does this government continue to subsidize horse racing at the expense of other programs?

In the year 2006 the Auditor General's report recommends that the ministry approve its system for selecting private operators to run provincially owned parks and for monitoring contract performance. Have these recommendations been implemented yet? They were supposed to be implemented by December 31, 2006. What specific changes were made to the contracting process? How are improvements being measured?

5:10

The next question I have is about the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, which is no longer able to issue special permission for an underage musician to perform in a licensed premise. This move will limit opportunities for young performers to learn and practise. According to musicians, being able to perform in licensed facilities is an essential part of developing and applying skills. What involvement did the minister have in making this decision? Given that there were never any complaints about underage musicians working in these establishments, why was the decision made to ban them? Will the minister reverse this decision?

I'll move on to the film industry estimates page 355, line 5.0.5. Can the minister explain why the Alberta film development program overspent in the year 2006 by \$12.5 million? Can the minister explain why funding for this program is back down to \$18 million, a reduction of 33 per cent or \$9 million? How does the minister justify this cut given the slowing pace of production in Alberta this summer? Is the minister developing other incentives to attract the film industry to Alberta?

On tourism. On May 10 I asked the minister to release the Leitch report. The tourism community is waiting for the final report that identifies gaps in the accountability in the current tourism framework and recommends options to close those gaps. Will the minister make that report public immediately? What changes to Travel

Alberta's governance structure is the minister considering? How much of the \$57 million tourism budget does Travel Alberta control? What involvement does the tourism industry have in deciding how these funds are spent? We hear that there is an opportunity for tourism revenue growth in rural communities, especially agricultural tourism. How much support is being allocated specifically for agricultural tourism? What is being done to assist rural communities in creating marketing and development plans?

Mr. Chairman, I have a couple of other miscellaneous questions. I asked the minister questions about the Alberta Provincial Museum project that is delayed for the time being. I just want to know what progress has been made so far.

One of my constituents asked me about the name of the ministry. We call it Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. How come culture comes last? It's not even alphabetical. Arts and culture are so important, and culture is last. Even the former Premier of this province was suggesting that there should be a separate ministry for arts and culture. I'm really shocked to see the name of the ministry – Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture – with culture named last. I think we should think twice, I mean, a hundred times before naming this ministry. I want to know who named this ministry, and what's the secret behind this?

I want to ask another question about tourism. You know, it's the fourth largest industry in Alberta. Do we have the proper plan for this? If not, are we going to make a sustainable plan for this industry? If we have a proper sustainable policy for this sector, I think most of the stakeholders I talked to said that we can increase this industry to maybe a \$10 billion industry. If we have a long-term sustainable plan for this, I would love to see that plan. I want to know what the progress is on this sector.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you. I'll keep on responding to some of the initial questions first and then move on to the second series of questions that he had.

There were some discussions initially about the \$90 million under the ministry's budget. The hon. member was asking why \$90 million had been allocated towards recreation and sports facilities as grants. Those are one-time grants in the capital plan. There was \$10 million being allocated to Rexall Place, \$10 million for Pengrowth Saddledome, \$15 million for Commonwealth Stadium, \$15 million for McMahon Stadium, and \$40 million for Canada Olympic Park in Calgary. Certainly, \$40 million is a start towards \$69 million of improvements that we're doing to help train our Olympians for the 2010 games.

The provincial parks, a question there about the plan. Certainly, the ministry will develop the parks plan in three different phases, starting with the comprehensive needs assessment and reviewing sort of the deferred maintenance issues in existing parks. We're looking at some of the deferred maintenance there, and we're looking at options to expand the outdoor recreational opportunities. We're also looking at opportunities for new provincial parks, that will respond to increasing provincial growth and the overall services we offer to our visitors. Our visitors' expectations are rising all the time. We want to provide additional services there.

On the Alberta gaming and liquor control that the hon. member talked about, certainly that's not a mandate of my ministry. All of those regulations fall under the Ministry of the Solicitor General. Those questions would have to be directed at him. We are not

involved at all there. From the revenues that we get from lottery funds, we administer the revenue side and the spending side. But when it comes to the rules and the regulations and the control of the gaming machines, for instance, then that falls under a different ministry, so you would have to direct the questions there.

Going to horse racing. Certainly, the horse-racing industry is a controversial one amongst the opposition, but I need to indicate that we truly believe in the horse-racing industry in the province. It has a very, very long history in the province of Alberta. It generates some strong economic benefits and employs over 8,000 Albertans in the province. The thing that I need to indicate is that, you know, although they do get some revenues, a third of the money that's generated through the lottery comes back to the province of Alberta, and a third of those dollars are some of the dollars that we do use to support activities like the arts.

5:20

Certainly, they're not any different than other organizations where they actually work and earn a portion of the revenues from the casinos. They'll keep a portion. The other portion comes back to us as a province, and we allocate it back to other priorities that this province has. Last year there was \$41.8 million of slot machine revenue that was invested in the horse-racing industry. We need to remember that that \$41.8 million generated \$385 million of economic activity for the province of Alberta. So we still look at it as a positive investment, an investment that provides not only returns on the portion of the casino revenues but a portion of the revenues coming back in additional economic activity.

The horse-racing association, as well, has a business plan that they need to follow. That particular business plan is monitored very, very closely by ourselves as a government. The funding has to be used for very, very specific purposes. It's for the racetrack operations and capital. It's for breeding improvements and, certainly, purse enhancements. We are still supportive of the horse-racing industry. We want to see it grow. We want to see it evolve in the province of Alberta.

Going back to the Leitch report very quickly, the Leitch report has been made public over the last couple of weeks as information to you as hon. members. The four options that the Leitch report provided are there. They're on the Travel Alberta site. The Leitch report was released to the tourism industry and is being looked at and reviewed, and we expect comments from our stakeholders in the tourism industry.

When we look at the work that we might be doing in agricultural tourism, for instance, the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council advises the government on tourism. Generally, about a quarter of the funds that are collected through the levy is reinvested or expended in rural Alberta or targeted to rural Alberta initiatives. Right now, Travel Alberta spends about \$49 million for marketing out of the \$57.3 million that is collected under the levy, of which, as I indicated, a portion goes back to rural Alberta.

The question was asked about the overspending on the film industry. The hon. member needs to understand that the film industry budget went up by \$3.5 million. Last year we injected an additional \$12.5 million in one-time funding to the film industry, and that was to catch up on all the applications. There was a backlog of applications. To the member, that's a very, very positive thing.

We see the film industry growing quite rapidly in the province of Alberta. We are adding additional dollars to that particular sector, and we hope that it will keep on growing. At the rate that it's growing, we anticipate that we'll probably be again in a deficit

position this year and may have to go back sometime in the next year or two with, you know, maybe an additional one-time funding to catch up on shortfalls. We anticipate that a certain number of films might be filmed in the province of Alberta. We don't know how many will actually be filmed, so we tend to be somewhat, maybe, after the fact in terms of trying to support that particular industry.

But we are committed to the industry. We want to see it develop and grow. We want to eventually move into series productions in the province of Alberta, and we're looking at different alternatives to see that happen. The growth in the film industry and the television industry is basically due to Alberta's really strong winning combination of diverse locations that we can offer in the province. We're getting some very strong crews that are becoming experts in the film industry. We're having better and better producers in the province of Alberta. Certainly, the film development fund – all of that combined provides incentives to both our domestic and foreign productions.

The last comment that you had was on the word “culture” being part of the name of this particular Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. I need to remind the hon. member that the word “culture” had not been in the name of any ministry, well, for the last 15 years, probably.

You know, I had a chance to sit down with our past Premier Lougheed after he had made his comments. Premier Lougheed had not recognized or realized that “culture” had come back as part of the full name of a ministry. After he made his comments, I pointed out to him the fact that “culture” was back into a ministry name. He was very, very pleased to hear that. Certainly, we're heading in the right direction. The opposition member might say: well, it's the last name. It's at least within the name of the ministry.

On the Royal Alberta Museum the project renewal . . .

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the staff coming down and being on the floor to assist the minister today. I do appreciate the efforts of the minister, and I appreciate that he's made some attempts to get out and attend some of the artistic offerings in my city, Edmonton. I know that I've seen him at the opera and the ballet. There is much more in our cultural offerings, and I encourage him to continue to explore that. I think he's a nice person, and I think he's trying, but this government has set him at a task where he is coming from very, very, very far behind. What's that saying? A day late and a dollar short? Well, this would be about, oh, I don't know, 15 years late and \$20 million short.

I was going to say that I was disappointed in the efforts of the government around culture. I'm not disappointed; I'm flat out exasperated. You guys have missed the boat over and over and over again. To try and stand in here and say that we've increased funding by 25 per cent and 50 per cent or whatever number you're pulling out, you're funding the whole amount by so little that we have not allowed growth.

We had an amazing artistic community here, and in the last two incarnations of this particular Tory government, with the stagnant funding for the arts and the minuscule increases that we've had of \$2 million, \$3 million, or \$4 million, we've lost companies. We've lost theatres. We've lost dance companies. We've lost publishers. We've lost musical producers. The film industry was almost completely decimated by choices that the government made in the early '90s and has been rebuilding ever since then. So we're coming from way, way behind and trying to make up for the lack of support

and in some cases the outright hostility of this government towards our artistic communities. That's an editorial comment.

There are two particular issues that I'd like to raise with you today that have been brought to my attention. I appreciate the efforts of my colleague who is the shadow minister for Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture to have gone through a wide range of questions on this ministry. There are two things that I'd like to address. One is a situation where there has been an unlevel playing field created both in Edmonton and in Calgary. I'm referring specifically to the Winspear Centre and the EPCOR centre in Calgary. Those facilities do not receive funding for the operation of the facility. It's a commonly held misconception that funding the symphony is funding the Winspear Centre. It's not. They're separate organizations; there are separate boards of directors, and they have separate needs. The ESO is getting funding and does what it does, but the Winspear does not receive direct core funding as a facility, and neither does the EPCOR centre in Calgary. What we have is that they are trying to compete with the northern and southern Jubilee auditoriums, which are subsidized in one form or another by this government, so we have an unlevel playing field.

5:30

To the credit of the people that I've been talking to at the Winspear Centre, they're not asking particularly to start receiving money, but they are saying: let's make it a level playing field. I guess what I would say is that if you're going to continue to subsidize and make sure that the Jubilee auditoria never run deficits – which, let's face it, is a way of subsidizing them – then you need to have some kind of program that benefits the other medium and large performing spaces in Alberta.

Now, you currently have a program called major facilities where there are grants available to the Citadel Theatre and EPCOR centre, but that is grandfathered, and it's only those two organizations. Despite attempts by the Winspear Centre to be included in that grant, the government has refused, saying that it's grandfathered and it's going to be phased out. We have a situation where an artificial economy has been set up, where the Jubilee auditoria in both places are funded by Public Works and several other provincial agencies, which is creating a situation where the Winspear Centre has to remain competitive in a marketplace while not having the same benefit of support.

There is an inequity that has been created here, and I would like to see that inequity addressed specifically. I really would prefer not to have a bunch of excuses about how the Jubilee auditoria aren't really funded, because they are. They are owned by the province. They are never allowed to go into debt, and there is direct and indirect funding that goes in there. But here we have a well-respected – frankly, world-class – musical centre, and it doesn't get direct funding. Funding the ESO or funding other groups that use that facility does not fund that facility. In order to keep it sort of in the marketplace for other not-for-profits to use, it has to be competitive in the rates that it's offering, and that's not possible right now.

Again, they're not necessarily looking for ongoing funding, but they are looking for some kind of level playing field. To say, “They got lottery dollars once. That's government funding,” well, lottery dollars, as you keep telling me, are not out of general revenue, so I can't accept that argument. I'm happy to put the current minister together with the general manager of the Edmonton Concert Hall Foundation, which is the official name for the Winspear Centre, to see if we can get resolution for this.

I'm really concerned. We've lost two medium-size playing spaces in Edmonton with the Kaasa, and we have gained a number of them

in Calgary, thank goodness, with the Vertigo Theatre space and the Grand Theatre space.

An Hon. Member: Great support from government.

Ms Blakeman: Great support from government, that's true, because the other initiatives fund, that amorphous slush fund of the government, God bless them, came through and funded those two theatre spaces. So we have medium-size theatre spaces available in Calgary. We don't in Edmonton. While the Winspear is not suitable for all spaces – it is a smaller place than the Jubilee, for example – it's in competition with the Jubilee. So we need to look after that Winspear and make sure that it's available for groups to access. I would urge the minister to continue to look for opportunity. I'm happy to give him personal advice on how we can create – we literally need to build or modify, renovate, to create another mid-sized playing space in Edmonton because the loss of the Kaasa has really hurt us. The Catalyst and Third Space and even the additional spaces at the Citadel are not filling that gap.

The next issue that I wanted to bring up was brought to me by an individual artist who has actually just returned to Edmonton. He's quite frustrated by this whole idea of a one-grant policy. I remember when that came in because somebody got it in their head over there that the artists were double-dipping – oh, horror, horror – and that they should only be allowed to access one grant. What we had before was core funding, for example, or operating funding going to a theatre, and then the theatres could often apply for a special project grant for a special project. It wasn't for ongoing funding. It was a special project. Sometimes even artists could get additional funding if they were doing something unique or one-time only or special or a very large project that fed into that. So it wasn't double-dipping. It was about augmenting special projects.

If we want to keep our artists here, we have to help them and support them in the work they're trying to do. With this one-grant policy you've basically restricted artists to a particular field, and they're not eligible to apply for grants in more than one field. You're losing your cross-disciplinary people, which, frankly, with new media is where we all need to be going. You're cutting off a group of people from being able to access funding they should be able to access. I'm asking you to relook at that whole idea of the one-grant policy because it does restrict artists from practising in more than one discipline or arts organizations from doing that.

The second comment that I had from the individual was the frustration with the very odd timing of the new grant program, Alberta creative development initiative, which won't be announced until the fall. Then they're told that there's an intake deadline for these programs that will be, sort of, very shortly after the day of the announcement, and everything has got to commence before the fiscal year-end of March 31. You know, these groups are darn good at planning. Most of them have already announced next season, and now we're expecting them to come in and very quickly put together a project without knowing what the parameters are or very quickly after learning the parameters. It's not working, and you need to address this particular program.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. member for her initial kind comments at the start of her discussion. I want to re-emphasize that, certainly, on the arts funding the information that we have ranks Alberta fifth in all of the

provinces. You know, I agree that we might be low. We're heading in the right direction. We want to do more, and we want to go ahead and add to the support that we give. The cultural policy will allow us to move forward in that particular area. I need to re-emphasize, although we talked about percentages, that 63 per cent over the last three years or 20 per cent this year is still a very, very significant number, in my opinion. It certainly beats 6 per cent or 7 per cent, and we're going there.

When it comes to the film industry, again, we are doing well with the film industry. We certainly want to grow that particular side. Mr. Chairman, I see that we're slowly running out of time, so I'll try to be fairly quick with my comments.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, we have another about six and a half, almost seven, six minutes, 45 seconds to go.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you. That's fine. The review of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts that we're doing certainly will ensure that we have appropriate and optimal use of grant funds to meet the needs of our artists and our arts organizations in the province of Alberta.

The Winspear, you know, to talk about facilities, will certainly be invited to also participate on the cultural policy, and we would hope that that particular message would come through as well. The Winspear has never formally approached me as a new minister to ask for funding, and certainly they could do that. I'm not aware that they've ever approached us.

On the EPCOR centre. They are getting a couple hundred thousand dollars a year for their operational side. We are giving them some support there. The Citadel also receives a fair amount of funding in that way. So, generally, we encourage the Winspear and the Citadel or any other group, if we're looking at new mid-sized type facilities, to look at the major community facilities program that we've just announced. Certainly, that particular program, the \$140 million a year for the next two years, is aimed, aside from recreational facilities or health-related type of facilities, very much at cultural facilities. Those dollars are going to be there, and if there's a group that would approach us with a particular proposal, we'd be looking at it as a possibility in that particular area.

5:40

On the new program that you talked about, our recent partnership that we announced with the Canada council certainly will directly benefit, again, our arts and arts organizations. That's an additional \$6 million that's being injected into the particular community.

I'm going to close by talking about the Royal Alberta Museum. It's one question that I wanted to talk about initially. Our government is still committed to having one of the finest museums in Canada at the Royal Alberta Museum. We're still looking at a series of options to best implement that particular museum renewal, and we are committed to a museum in the city of Edmonton.

Mr. Chairman, I will sit down at this stage.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the three hours that were allocated for the Liberal caucus has elapsed. Is there any other member who would like to participate for the next three minutes that we have left? If none, I can recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have one more question for the hon. minister about the website. Normally when we see the website about all the grants, we don't find the full details in

there. It's sometimes misleading. When you see the website, you see the total amount of money and the name of the group. They don't say exactly how they get the grant and whether they are matching grants or nonmatching grants and some other qualifications. It's not there.

Another question I wanted to ask you is about the Human Rights Commission. I think that in the last budget the government hired two full-time employees. I just want to know whether the government has any plans to hire some more people because the workload there – what I heard from some of the stakeholders is that the applications are there for years. I mean, they have to wait a long time. So what's the plan for hiring some more people there?

The third one: as the minister knows, in CIP grants and CFEP and other initiative programs in the Applewood community the rules were broken, and even the Auditor General's report recognized that. Are we going to improve the system? I mean, even with the Applewood community, as far as I know, we couldn't recover that money from them.

So those are a few more questions. I would really appreciate if you would answer them in a couple of minutes. If not today, maybe some other time in writing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon minister, we have about a minute.

Mr. Goudreau: Okay. Very quickly, then, Mr. Chairman. On the grants, on the website: we're evaluating what information is provided there, and certainly we're looking at and committed to making improvements and providing additional information while at the same time respecting the names of individuals. You know, we can give more information and provide additional materials there to be more open and more transparent. Certainly, we want to show individuals what those grants are all about.

Under the Human Rights Commission we presently have 50 staff. We are adding two more, and you will note that this year we've been able to process more applications. Our total numbers actually . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but I will now invite the officials to leave the Assembly so the committee may rise and report progress.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(a) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Sustainable Resource Development; International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations; Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head:

Government Motions (continued)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Evening Sitting on June 5

26. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly pursuant to Standing Order 4 convene an evening sitting beginning at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, June 5, 2007, for the consideration of main estimates in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Colleagues will recall that a few weeks ago we had occasion to debate I think it was Bill 34, Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. At that time it was necessary to reschedule the afternoon of that Thursday that we debated Bill 34 for third reading, and it's therefore necessary to find the replacement time period for what was scheduled for that afternoon. I believe it's fair to say that all parties agree that it should be rescheduled for the evening of June 5. We now need the motion necessary to put that into effect and call the session for the evening of June 5.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, I'm happy to support this government motion. I'm not happy that it's sitting in the evening, but I understand the circumstances. I'm happy to support it because it was very good of the government caucus to agree to move their time to make way for a longer debate time on Bill 34 for the Residential Tenancies Act. That was a bill that everyone was interested in having before the House. So I appreciate the effort from the government caucus, and I'm happy to support having it moved to the evening of Tuesday, June 5.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Government House Leader to close debate?

[Government Motion 26 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Referral of Bill 31 to Community Services Committee

24. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly refer Bill 31, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, to the Standing Committee on Community Services for the committee's consideration, review, and comment and request the committee to report to the Assembly on or before the first week of the fall 2007 sitting.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both yesterday and the day before we debated similar motions with respect to Bill 1 and Bill 2. I think, if I may just say, that Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, is a particularly important bill to put before the policy field committee. There's a wide range of viewpoints with respect to community treatment orders. The committee will have the opportunity, I believe, to hear a variety of views with respect to community treatment orders themselves and their use, will have the opportunity to hear the concerns of families that have adult children with a mental disorder and who have a need of another tool. They'll also have the opportunity to hear concerns about the civil liberties of the individual, concerns about the ability of our health system to provide

proactive treatment in the community. That's a very important public discussion to have, and I can think of no better place to have it than in the policy field committee and then recommendations, perhaps, of amendments to the bill or at least a report on what they've heard back to the Legislature before we consider the bill for committee and third reading.

5:50

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I think this is a great opportunity, and this should be a very interesting bill to explore the many different facets of the particular policy field committee that this bill is being referred to for all of the reasons that the hon. Government House Leader has outlined. We are stepping into uncharted territory here. We don't really know how these committees are going to operate. I'm pleased to hear that the Government House Leader is open to having presentations made from the public. I'm hoping that we can have some experts brought in to present as well, perhaps have some additional research and literature reviews done for the members of the committee to help educate and explore the issue to the fullest extent possible.

This is a highly charged issue, and I think it's entirely appropriate that we get to move the issue to a policy field committee and open it up so that there is wider participation. I'm looking forward to this debate. I'm not on the committee, but I'm certainly going to be looking for my opportunity to attend and perhaps even participate in the proceedings. I'm pleased to see as well that there is a report-back date that's included in the referral motion from the government so that we know when it's going to be coming back before the session. I'm assuming that if there are recommended amendments

or observations that the committee is going to make, then they can be dealt with further in the Assembly during the fall sitting.

I urge all of my colleagues in the Assembly to support Motion 24 to refer Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, to the Standing Committee on Community Services. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the sponsor of Bill 31 I also support Government Motion 24. I'm glad to see all sides of the House agreeing on this, and I also look forward to bringing this bill to the policy field committee. I have received several letters of correspondence from different groups that are interested in having input on the bill, so I think this is going to be a great process.

I, too, urge all of my colleagues to support Government Motion 24. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Government House Leader to close debate?

[Government Motion 24 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It being 5:53 on a Thursday afternoon, I would move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. on Monday, June 4.

[Motion carried; at 5:53 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, June 4, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/06/04

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I'm now going to ask Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the ambassador of Belgium to Canada, His Excellency Mr. Jean Lint. This is the first time His Excellency has travelled to Alberta. I'm pleased to say that Belgium and Alberta have always been strong trading partners. Since 2001 annual exports have increased from \$118 million to over \$213 million, including nickel, wheat, wood pulp, and cobalt. Between 2001 and 2005 Alberta imports from Belgium were worth approximately \$134 million a year, including diamonds, medications, blood products, and chocolate.

Mr. Speaker, Belgium has been at the forefront of international trade and diplomacy. It is one of the six founding countries of the European Union, and the headquarters of the EU as well as NATO headquarters are located in Belgium's capital city, Brussels. Not only do we share a strong trade relationship with Belgium; there are about 15,000 Albertans of Belgian descent who call our province home.

Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to welcome His Excellency to our province. May I ask that he please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some very special guests who are with us in the House this afternoon. I am honoured to welcome 47 ladies and gentlemen from my constituency

representing the communities of Innisfree, Islay, Clandonald, Marwayne, Dewberry, Blackfoot, Mannville, and Vermilion. Through the organizational efforts of Shirley McRobert, the seniors' co-ordinator for the county of Vermilion River in the town of Vermilion, these fine folks are visiting us here today to take part in the Alberta Legislature's celebrations for Seniors' Week 2007.

Alberta's seniors have contributed much to our province. Their vision, their personal sacrifice, and unfaltering resourcefulness shaped our province and laid the foundation for our current prosperity. They continue to remain active and viable in our communities. The theme of this year's Seniors' Week, Celebrate Seniors' Present and Future Contributions, accurately reflects the important role of our most experienced citizens.

I would now ask these very special guests of ours to rise and please accept the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 19 bright and very well-behaved students from Eastwood school along with their teacher, Khery Wallace. I would ask that they now please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour and pleasure to introduce to you and Members of the Legislative Assembly some 60 energetic students from the Edmonton Christian school northeast campus. They are accompanied by two teachers, Elaine Junk and Mr. Greg Gurnett. I might point out again that his brother Jim Gurnett served in this Legislature with me many years ago. They're also accompanied by parents Angela VanKooten, Mr. Mark Hennig, Mrs. Linda Ryks, Mrs. Edith Sinclair, Mrs. Rose VandenBoogard, Mrs. Fran Wolthius. I would now ask them to stand – I think they're in both sections – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly a group of 17 industrious, hard-working employees from the Department of Sustainable Resource Development finance branch seated in the members' gallery. They're here on a public service orientation tour. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly representative students from the grade 9 class at Allendale school here in Edmonton. They are Maggie Boeske, Kira Dlusskaya, and Nikolai Semenenko along with their teacher, Robin Knight. They'll be joined by 22 of their peers at about 1:30, when room is opening up for them in the galleries.

Mr. Speaker, you may remember that a few weeks ago Dr. Richard Leakey was in Edmonton. One of the things that Dr. Leakey did was make a presentation to school students here in

Edmonton at the science centre. This particular class of students, as a class project, wrote individual letters to me, the Environment minister, about their impressions of what Dr. Leakey had to tell them. I was so impressed with the quality of those letters that I asked that those students come and join me here at the Legislature so that I could meet them face to face and answer their questions and deal with their concerns. We just had lunch in room 512. I'm here to say that this is an outstanding group of young Albertans that, I'm proud to say, will become, I'm sure, the leaders of our province in years to come.

I would ask that they stand and be recognized and receive the traditional warm welcome of all members of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Heather Massel, a public affairs officer in the Department of Justice and Attorney General. Heather is a fellow member of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force. We affectionately call her Princess. I'll ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome from the Assembly.

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

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two individuals from southern Alberta. The first is Gerard Gibbs, the executive director of the Empress Theatre Society. The Empress Theatre is that jewel on Main Street Fort Macleod.

An Hon. Member: Indeed.

Mr. Coutts: Absolutely.

It is Alberta's oldest working theatre. It started in June of 1912. Today it boasts about 12,000 patrons per year, and it is the unique cultural and historic resource in southern Alberta that stands, I believe, as the flagship today, as Gerard says, for performing arts in southern Alberta. Joining Mr. Gibbs is Lise Boutin. Lise is a Franco-Albertan artist, Mr. Speaker. She is an accomplished concert violinist. She is the concertmaster of the Calgary Bach orchestra, a member of the Pacific Baroque Orchestra of Vancouver. She has played with the Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Calgary symphonies, but her favourite place is the Empress Theatre stage in Fort Macleod. They are seated in the members' gallery. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was my pleasure to take part today in what has become an annual luncheon meeting, almost a meeting of the minds, if you will, as today in the Legislature seven central and southern Alberta MLAs met with six central Alberta ATA presidents to discuss a number of very important issues. I'd ask the gentlemen to rise as I call their names and please remain standing until all are introduced. Today we met with Jere Geiger from Central West, Gary Hansen from Wetaskiwin, Scott Lewis from Wolf Creek, Brenton Baum from Timberline, Hans Huizing from Red Deer public, and Bob Worsfold from Chinook's Edge. Sending his regrets, also, was Chris McCullough from Red Deer separate. I see that the gentlemen are all standing, so I would ask my colleagues to please give them the warm traditional welcome.

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

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been looking forward to this day for some time to introduce to you, to all members, and to all Albertans two of Alberta's brightest shining young stars. First, I'm very proud to announce that our STEP student for Calgary-Lougheed for the summer is Sandra Watson, who has spent time personally and professionally in Harbin, China, and speaks Mandarin Chinese. She has many, many other gifts and talents. She has two young boys, Austin and Zachary, and currently is in her final year of her bachelor of applied policy studies degree at Mount Royal College. She really enjoys dealing with people, does a great job of that, and she really loves politics.

Second, I'm proud to present a born and raised Calgarian named David Rothwell, who's always had a passion for public service. I can relate to him in a couple of other ways: an outdoor enthusiast who loves hiking and spending time in the mountains. This year David graduated with a bachelor of applied policy studies degree at Mount Royal College and recently completed a sport development policy framework on behalf of Sport Alberta.

So, Mr. Speaker, in the future if Alberta is in the hands of young people like this, we'll be just fine. I'd like to ask Sandra and David, who are behind me every step of the way, including today in the members' gallery, to please stand to accept the warm wishes of everyone in the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group from the St. Albert Catholic teachers' local 23: Ms Viviane Pezer, president of the Greater St. Albert Catholic teachers; Sean Brown, vice-president of the Greater St. Albert Catholic teachers' local 23; Carryl Bennett, secretary of the Greater St. Albert Catholic teachers' local 23; Sun Ang, high school teacher; Janice McDonald, elementary teacher; Herman Weidle, elementary teacher; and Claude Dubé, elementary teacher. Would they please rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As part of my ongoing celebration of Edmonton being named Canada's cultural capital for 2007 I'd like to introduce to you Robert Shannon. Now, Robert is one of the representatives from Canada who is going to the Prague Quadriennial. This is an exhibition of outstanding stage design from around the world. Over 60 countries are represented, and Robert is going to represent us here. His exhibit that is on display there is from Edmonton Opera's performance of *Weill in Weimar*. I think it was Robert's costume designs that were there. He is currently on faculty with the fine arts department here at the U of A in theatre design, specializing in costumes, lighting, and new media. I would ask Robert to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Florentino Yap, Juan Tamag, and Tania Wiest. They're on their 269th day of strike at the Palace Casino, due to this government's unwillingness to pass fair first contract legislation. Florentino has worked at the casino for five years. Originally he came from the Philippines, in 1992. He's a

husband and father of three. Juan has been at the Palace Casino for three years in the maintenance department. He's also from the Philippines and immigrated to Canada in 2002 with his wife of 43 years. Tania has been at the casino for three years in the food and beverage department. She enjoys sports and is looking forward to enjoying playing in the summer weather. Accompanying them is UFCW union representative Don Crisall. I would now ask my guests, who are sitting in the public gallery, to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, today over 500 individuals will visit the Alberta Legislature Building. Just as a point of interest, the Alberta Legislature Building and Grounds are the third-largest destination point for visitors to the city of Edmonton on an annual basis.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

International Aboriginal Film & Television Festival

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For 12 years Albertans and the international community have had the pleasure to be enlightened, entertained, and amused by the presentations at the International Aboriginal Film & Television Festival. Over the next six days the richness of aboriginal culture, life stories, and voyages will be highlighted for all to enjoy. Because Dreamspeakers is the only aboriginal film and TV festival in Alberta, it plays a vital role in allowing these stories to be told to the population as a whole, breaking barriers and facilitating cultural understanding.

It begins with a welcome reception tonight at the Citadel Theatre and will feature our Premier and the festival society's board chair as they welcome local, national, and international guests from as far away as New Zealand and Africa. In addition, the New Zealand movie *The Waimate Conspiracy* will be featured during the opening screening.

On Tuesday and Wednesday audiences will be challenged as they attend pitching workshops for TV and movies and will enjoy indigenous works of art and film. After all, Mr. Speaker, visual arts are a profound representation of the thoughts of our souls and allow us to express that which words alone cannot. When we celebrate and explore ecstatic joy, crushing pain, unbreakable connection with nature, our love and kinship, we are connected to our community and are filled with great freedom and strength.

Aboriginal youth are a key component in this year's festival. Over 20 youth workshops were held throughout Alberta, sponsored and facilitated by the Dreamspeakers' festival and resulting in evocative and moving films, each of which will be premiered to a broad audience on the featured Youth Day, Thursday, June 7. Programs like this build confidence and teach transferrable skills that can help our aboriginal youth cope and express their stories in positive ways, as well as create the next generation of filmmakers in Alberta.

Saturday, June 9, will be the wrap-up party. To one and all, come and join the Dreamspeakers' International Aboriginal Film & Television Festival as they party into the wee hours with the Jim Cuddy Band.

I commend the Dreamspeakers Festival Society and volunteers for making this unique cultural extravaganza possible. To the aboriginal talent brought alive on screen and in our hearts, your expression feeds our souls and gives us all great power. Enjoy a great week.

CFB Suffield

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, *eximius ordo* is Latin for "out of the ordinary." It is also the motto of Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Suffield.

Last week I attended the change of command ceremony at the base, where Lieutenant-Colonel Dan Drew, who is headed for duty in Afghanistan, was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel Malcolm Bruce. Lieutenant-Colonel Bruce, in taking command of CFB Suffield, now holds the reins of a very important military base. It spans over 2,690 square kilometres and is one of the largest live-fire training areas in the western world.

To give you a little bit of history, Mr. Speaker, in 1941 the need for a combined British/Canadian experimental station for trials in biological and chemical warfare was satisfied by establishing one in Suffield. In 1971 CFB Suffield was officially named and was allocated to the army. That year the Canadian government also ratified a 10-year agreement permitting the British forces to use approximately three-quarters of the training area for armoured, infantry, and artillery training. Four years later the Alberta Energy Company, now EnCana, was given permission to develop natural gas deposits and heavy oil deposits underneath the base. Since June 2003 458 square kilometres of the base have been protected as part of the CFB Suffield national wildlife area, home to a number of unique plants and animals.

1:20

Today the base provides support services for a number of units, including the British Army Training Unit Suffield, or BATUS, and Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC) Suffield. DRDC Suffield conducts research into areas such as artificial intelligence in robotic equipment and performs antiterrorism training for countries around the world. The BATUS battle groups, three to five per year, have between 800 and 1,800 soldiers who use this as their last training before deployment to places like Afghanistan. Prince Harry and his command are presently training out on the prairie.

A new Canadian/United Kingdom treaty and MOU to permit continued British Army training at the base was signed last year. The signing will ensure that the base remains viable well into the future.

Mr. Speaker, as you can tell from this extensive and quick history, CFB Suffield is, indeed, out of the ordinary. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Sports Hall of Fame and Museum Inductees

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend I had the pleasure of attending the 2007 induction ceremony for the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame and Museum in Red Deer. Among the group of 14 inductees at this year's ceremony were international athletes, Olympic champions, innovative business leaders, championship teams, and other men and women who have made their mark in sport not only here in Alberta and Canada but all over the world. In fact, the team that our own Lieutenant Governor played on for 10 seasons, the Edmonton Eskimos, was inducted into the Alberta Hall of Fame in the team category this weekend. His Honour and the Eskimos won three consecutive Grey Cups, between 1954 and 1956.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents and I recognize the importance of the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame and Museum to the city of Red Deer and to this province. It is a place for people of all ages to learn the history of sport in our province. From the amateur to the professional, Alberta's athletes, teams, and sports builders enshrined in the

Hall of Fame all contribute to the rich legacy of sport here in Alberta.

I would now like to ask the members of the House to join me in recognizing the 2007 Alberta Sports Hall of Fame and Museum inductees. They are Cassie Campbell, Megan Delehanty, Earl Ingarfield Sr., Curtis Myden, Eldon C. Godfrey, Harley Hotchkiss, D.K. Seaman, B.J. Seaman, Lorna Snow, the 1954, '55, and '56 Edmonton Eskimos, the 1987 and '88 Medicine Hat Tigers, John F. Mayell, Robert MacDermott, and Wes Montgomery. Congratulations to all the inductees.

Thank you.

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

Government Report Card

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tories failing Albertans: the June report card. For 32 years of my professional life as a public schoolteacher I and my colleagues were very busy in June preparing students to write final exams, the results from which would be averaged into their June report cards. As the end of both this Legislative session and the reporting period of June are fast approaching, it is time to issue the Premier and his government their report card.

From the top Tory to the bottom of his backbench this government has been a disappointment to the majority of Albertans. Our current Premier wasn't crowned even by the members of his own party. He was the compromise candidate, the least feared, with the least baggage. He ran on a ticket of not rocking the boat, of offering transparency and accountability. To Albertans' dismay those promises have not been kept. His boat has never left dry dock. Secrecy and superficiality continue to dominate this government's market-driven dogma. Whether it's the Premier's failure to disclose the source of \$163,000 of his campaign donations, his choice of a primarily male, rural-dominated cabinet, which refuses to allow municipalities, school boards, or health regions the autonomy of budget decisions, or its interference in the outcomes of task forces, this government has failed to deliver on its promise of transparency and accountability. It has failed to find a balance between economic and environmental issues.

The government, through its lack of intervention and refusal to set aside a significant portion of surplus savings, recommended not only by our Alberta Liberal caucus but by the Canada West Foundation, the Chambers of Commerce, and the Canadian taxpayers association, has jumped on the boom train and will ride it through to its inevitable bust. This tired government has failed. It's time for a change, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Councillor Terry Cavanagh

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to speak about a very well-known and respected member of the Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency, Councillor Terry Cavanagh.

Born in Edmonton, he was first elected to Edmonton city council in 1971 and served until 1975, when he was elected mayor by council after the death of Mayor William Hawrelak. Mr. Cavanagh was mayor from 1975 until 1977. He returned to council in 1983 as a councillor and served in this capacity until 1988, when he was again elected by council to serve as mayor. He served as mayor until 1989. Three years later he was once again elected councillor. He currently represents ward 6 and does it very well.

He was the first native-born mayor of Edmonton and is the

recipient of many awards, including the commemorative medal for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's golden jubilee in 2002, admission to the Order of St. John in 1999 in recognition of contributions to the city of Edmonton, the Alberta human rights and civil liberties association human rights award in 1996, and the Governor General's 125th anniversary commemorative medal in 1992 in recognition of significant contribution to compatriots, community, and Canada.

Both Mr. Cavanagh and his wife, June, have served diligently as councillors for the city of Edmonton. On May 15, 2007, Mr. Cavanagh decided to retire, after 27 years of service to the city of Edmonton and the citizens of ward 6. He will be greatly missed. I would like to thank him on behalf of all Edmontonians for his many years of dedicated service to Edmonton and its citizens. He is a proud Edmontonian. He is an avid promoter of this province. He is a patriotic Canadian. We wish him and his family all the very best in retirement, long life, and good health.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Brain Injury Awareness Week

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about Brain Injury Awareness Week, which runs from June 1 to 8. This special week helps to increase awareness of the effects of brain injuries and the ways Albertans can prevent them. Over 10,000 Albertans acquire brain injury each year. Many of them are preventable. For every preventable injury there is needless cost to individuals and to society.

The Alberta brain injury initiative, supported by the government through Seniors and Community Supports, since the year 2000 has addressed the needs of adults with acquired brain injury. The initiative works to support Albertans with brain injuries and their families by connecting them with supports that assist with relearning daily living skills, including managing conflict, also through co-ordination of community services, including assistance in finding appropriate housing and re-entry into the community, through providing training to family caregivers and professionals, and through providing information and education on all areas of brain injury to the public. They also publish the brain injury survival guide, which contains a wealth of information resources, and also sponsor the brain injury conference. As well, there's consulting going on with Albertans at community meetings in over 26 different communities. More information about the initiative can be found at www.seniors.gov.ab.ca.

We need to remember, Mr. Speaker, that when the roads are clear and dry not to increase our driving speeds or pay less attention, which potentially leads to crashes that can cause brain injuries. As Albertans get back on their bikes and rollerblades and skateboards, they should remember that one of the best ways to prevent brain injuries is to wear a helmet.

During Brain Injury Awareness Week I encourage all Albertans to learn more about brain injuries and their effects. Thank you.

The Speaker: Members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests (continued)

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House today two people who are vitally important in my professional life in that they keep me organized, on track, and are a constant source of ideas and challenges, which I think help to sharpen the saw around the constituency of Calgary-Currie. Evan Woolley is the manager of my constituency office and my executive assistant. He is here in the House today, as is Shannon Haggins, my STEP student for this summer, a student in the applied degree program of policy studies at Mount Royal College. They're up for the day to observe and learn and, perhaps, plot for the future. If they would stand, please, and receive the warm welcome of the House.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Contributions to Premier's Leadership Campaign

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberal caucus has obtained minutes from the board meeting of the Beaver regional waste management commission from August 17, 2006, in which Mr. Tom Walter and Mr. Ron Gaida, with the support of a Mr. Rod Krips, solicited a donation for a Tory leadership candidate. The minutes read as follows: Mr. Walter "explained the reasons that the Commission should support Mr. Stelmach in his campaign for leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta." My question is to the Premier. Given that this commission is incorporated under the Municipal Government Act, can the Premier explain what reasons were given that the commission should donate to his leadership campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in fact, I could double-check, but upon receiving funds from this commission, I believe the committee that was responsible for fundraising sent the money back. But I could confirm that tomorrow to make sure that my information, what I believe is correct, is absolutely true.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That does not change the fact that the solicitation was made, and the cheque was issued. The minutes from the commission meeting continue as follows:

Mr. Walter, Mr. Gaida and Mr. Krips left the Council Chambers at 7:33 pm.

Administrator Wright recommended that the Commission should donate \$25,000 to the Stelmach campaign.

Moved by CM Hrabec to donate \$10,000 to the Ed Stelmach campaign for Leader . . . and to leave communication open for additional funds in the future.

Carried.

To the Premier: does the Premier condone government policy under which a commission specifically created under regulation of this government to manage a landfill can make a donation of \$10,000 to a leadership campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the same error was committed by a particular municipality that bought tickets in support of the Liberal leader for one of his dinners, and subsequently they asked the money to be returned. So, again, it's an infraction according to the law, but like I said, back to the first question: I'm sure that the money was sent back. We didn't accept any money.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier should know that the laws are actually different in these circumstances. This commission had a specific mandate under regulation 75/92 of this government to provide regional waste management services to its shareholders, which are the towns of Tofield and Viking, the villages of Ryley and Holden, and Beaver county. Waste management services, nothing else. Yet they gave away \$10,000 in about 31 minutes for a political campaign. To the Premier: how does the Premier justify a regional waste management commission regulated by his government donating to a political leadership campaign, which is completely outside its mandate?

Mr. Stelmach: Again, this is something that volunteers did during the leadership campaign. Upon realizing that – again, I'll clarify absolutely tomorrow in terms of the money going back.

An Hon. Member: Did St. Albert give the money back?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, maybe St. Albert did. I don't know. Maybe the hon. leader will tell us if he did or not give the money back to St. Albert. But this is an omission on behalf of the commission or a municipality. The rules are the same.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The Beaver regional waste management commission gets its mandate under regulation of this government, as do all similar commissions. The minutes of the commission board meeting from last August 17 state the following: Mr. Walters "stated that the campaign would need financial support, not only from the public sector but also from the business sector." This suggests a systematic approach by this campaign to solicit political funds from publicly regulated bodies. To the Premier: how many public agencies were solicited for the funds by his leadership campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: None by me. If there are any that were approached inappropriately by any volunteer, I'm not aware of it. In this particular case, when it became evident that there was actually money received – and, again, I'll confirm it tomorrow – the money was sent back.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Only a party in power for 36 years could think it's okay to dole out tens of thousands of dollars in taxpayer grants to a commission and then turn around and ask the same commission for a \$10,000 donation for partisan purposes. To the Premier: will this commission remain eligible for provincial grants?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, here's an opposition that's been in opposition since – what? – 1912. Well, you know the history. That's the last time they served in government. They know the rules as well. Some of their volunteers approached a municipality for funding. I believe that once they found out that it was against legislation, they returned the money.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the nature of this donation and the nature of this attempted cover-up will the Premier

do the right thing and disclose all the donors to his leadership campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, obviously this was in the minutes, that are fully public. I don't know where the cover-up is or what you guys are talking about. It's getting really to the point that it's getting a little absurd. It's public minutes. They've been reviewed by the commission. Like I say, tomorrow I'll give further information in terms of the cheque.

The Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, the chair knows not if these documents have been filed before or tabled, but if they haven't been, you'll table them a little later in the afternoon, right?

Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're joined by a number of teachers in the gallery today. Similar to all Alberta taxpayers they're concerned about finding a solution to the unfunded teachers' pension liability. To the Minister of Education: will the minister please explain to these teachers why he's delivering a \$25 million wedge between experienced and less experienced teachers? Can you explain that, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, one of the directives in my mandate letter was to resolve the unfunded pension liability issue, and I intend to do that. In meeting with the Alberta Teachers' Association and many teachers prior to budget day, it was indicated to me that the 3 per cent of a new teacher's salary that is deducted to cover the unfunded pension liability is a huge deterrent to recruitment of new students into the teaching profession and retaining those young teachers in the profession. Our initiative is to assist those teachers so that we keep the best minds teaching in our province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the minister, thank you as well. To the Minister of Education: how do you expect Alberta teachers to trust their retirement savings to this task force when you've created a situation where their input is clearly not welcome?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we also did at the time of the budget was that we announced that we would be creating a task force. Let's make it clear what the role of the task force is. It is to meet with stakeholders throughout the province to come up with options that we can discuss with the Alberta Teachers' Association relative to what would be fair for Alberta taxpayers if Alberta taxpayers are asked to assume the \$2 billion liability that exists today. That'll be the role of the task force. The option to have a member from the Alberta Teachers' Association on that task force was rejected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Nowhere in the minister's mandate letter from the Premier does it say that you should divide teachers, undermine the ATA, or link salary negotiations with the pension liability. Why does he continue to do all three in this process?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there was no intention to undermine the ATA. The ATA was asked to participate in the task force and refused, so I don't understand what the hon. member is referring to. Relative to negotiations, those will commence over the next few months between ATA locals and various school boards across the province. In the meantime parallel to that will be the work of the task force, and at this stage they are not related.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

1:40

Keystone Pipeline Project

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The National Energy Board hearings into the Keystone pipeline are set for today in Calgary. If approved, this pipeline will export over 40,000 barrels of bitumen a day south of the border for processing. An estimated 18,000 jobs will be lost in the process, yet this government is willing to stand aside and watch as the sellout of our natural resources continues. When he was campaigning for the Tory leadership, the Premier promised to protect Alberta's jobs and resources, but now that he has the big job, that promise has been broken. To the Premier: will this government intervene in the NEB Keystone hearing to oppose the export of our bitumen and our jobs?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this question came up in the House the other day with respect to the amount of bitumen that's exported out of the province of Alberta. Today we process about 65 per cent of the bitumen in the province, looking to of course process more. But there are a number of areas of further consultation: not only how do we build the kind of plants that are necessary to upgrade, the impact on the environment, our water and also work with various companies with respect to the labour situation. Just the other day the third party raised the issue of greenhouse gas emissions and how we minimize those and minimize the impact on the environment. Well, these are the considerations we're giving.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, consultation is a wonderful thing, Mr. Premier, but these decisions are being made by the National Energy Board today, and there are massive increases in the capacity to export unprocessed bitumen from this province that are currently being considered. Why is the government not intervening at the National Energy Board hearing about the Keystone pipeline?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have the royalty review that's ongoing today and will be completed sometime in August. These are the kinds of questions and information that the royalty review will be bringing forward and answering in terms of how we get more upgrading in the province of Alberta but also, of course, looking at the environment and all of the other issues. Again, the other day this question came up, and I said that we're going to find that balance. The bitumen is leaving the province. It crosses a national boundary. That's why the NRCB is involved.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board is considering these matters. It has nothing to do with the government's royalty review. So they can review the royalties all they want; it won't affect the decision about export of our bitumen out of this province. Why is it that the government is failing to stand up for Alberta jobs and failing to stand up for a petrochemical industry right here in this

province? Why won't you, Mr. Premier, go to the NEB and present the position of the government of Alberta that we are against the export of our jobs and our bitumen?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in the first three months of this year more than 11,000 people moved to Alberta, migrated from other provinces. Just in speaking to the mayor of Calgary, 100 people a day come to the city of Calgary. They're coming here for jobs; there are many vacancies. That's why there's another balance to this, and that is available housing for the people that are all moving to the province of Alberta because there are job opportunities. That's why one of our priorities in this government is managing those growth pressures and making sure that we have the housing available and the infrastructure.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Economic Strategy

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the weekend we had a warning sign that our revenue is going to go down in the province because of our strong dollar. In the past we've talked about failing to plan for growth. We failed to plan for the windfall, but the real question is: are we planning for a downturn in our economy as we did in the '80s? We don't know why it'll turn, but we know that it will. My question is to the Premier. What plan does this government have for cutbacks when the downturn to our economy comes, or do you not have one?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the province is well prepared to of course cushion any of the loss of revenue stream for any particular reason. It could be a drop in the oil and gas prices; it could be because of the dollar; it could be because of manufacturing issues tied to global competition. That's why a number of years ago we restructured our financial reporting so that we do have a sustainability fund in place to cushion, if it ever does happen. Again, conservative, prudent forecasting for revenues as well. And that's why we also have quarterly reports to all Albertans so that all Albertans know the direction the province is taking in terms of its revenue and expenses.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that it's going to happen. It's just a matter of when. We don't know why. Our former Premier always said that we don't have a revenue problem; we have a spending problem. But that revenue problem will come. I ask the Premier: will you release the plan, which is a list, of how we would balance our budget or whether you're not going to balance the budget when that turns around on the next report to all Albertans that you continue to put out?

Mr. Stelmach: It's in the budget. It's part of the sustainability plan. It's part of the investment in various endowments. It's part of, of course, the money we put into our savings account. Without a doubt Alberta has always been identified – and that's nationally – as having the best books and being the best prepared to take any downturn in the economy. Mr. Speaker, we have the most volatile revenue stream in North America. We recognize that. That's why we plan and forecast our revenues very conservatively.

Mr. Hinman: It's obvious that they don't have a plan for a downturn.

An Hon. Member: He just told you.

Mr. Hinman: That isn't a plan, to say that we're going to do nothing.

The planning people and the elected representatives feel like they're buying a ticket when they apply for the different provincial grants. They don't know whether they're going to be accepted, the rules are always changing, and they sit on pins and needles on whether or not their next project is going to go forward. It's a real problem. The municipalities had to put forward a 10-year plan. This government has it. Obviously, they've looked at it. They must have prioritized it and what municipalities want. Will they release the plan and what order they're in so that they know that, yes, we're three years down the road or five years down the road? They wonder: when is it coming up, or is it just going to be a lottery? They need a plan on the funding.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure if it's to do with the revenue stream or with the expenditure, but working with municipalities, we put on the table a commitment of \$1.4 billion ramped up in the 2010-2011 budget to support municipalities during this unbelievable growth period. We're working with them. We also increased – doubled – the amount of money in the Water for Life strategy to assist those municipalities that have to increase not only their potable water supplies but also the sewer treatment. So the plan is there. We're working very well with municipalities, and municipalities are applying to criteria that have been consistent. We don't change from year to year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry for providing at least temporary rent relief for fixed-income renters in the 297-suite Varsity apartment complex, where rent was raised by \$50,000. Of course, this is only one-month June reprieve, and the news came too late for some 30 individuals who were forced to move, but it is helpful. A 91-year-old pensioner on fixed income who has lived in the complex for the past 17 years called my office last Wednesday, wondering how long this assistance would last, fearing that come July or August or September this band-aid solution would be exposed. To the minister: what can the minister say to her?

Ms Evans: Well, like I've repeated several times in this House, Mr. Speaker, every case will be dealt with on an individual basis, looking at the family situation, the availability of alternative housing, whether that's a practical solution, whether it's a 91-year-old or whether it's somebody who has a truck, a job, and is having troubles because of rental difficulties. We have given out over half a million dollars to over 500 people in the last three weeks. We continue to listen to people on an individual basis. Although this individual likely didn't have an improvement in the set of circumstances over the last month, we'll continue to look after them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll also offer another nod to the minister on the quality of staff that I and my constituent, Jeff Stewart, encountered at the Fisher Road processing centre last Thursday. Cumulative construction injuries have meant Mr. Stewart

cannot get work and is having to live on \$425 of social assistance a month. The obvious problem that even the patient and compassionate help of the centre's staff, including Ken, Francesca, and Deidre, cannot overcome is that Mr. Stewart needs to find an apartment in a failed rental marketplace first. Furthermore, even when he gets one, his ability to pay rests entirely on fickle and unclear government housing subsidies. To the same minister: what guarantees of long-term rent payment can Mr. Stewart offer prospective landlords?

1:50

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think this government has made it very clear that when people have a need, we will be there. We will work with them and counsel them and try to identify whether there are other opportunities available. We have had a diminished number of people coming that qualify for a rent supplement. There have been centres both in Calgary and Edmonton where we have been working with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's staff. We're not getting too many that are coming that need a rent supplement. Many of them need some short-term fix. But we will be there as long as they need us, Mr. Speaker. We will not put them out on the street. We will help them find other alternatives, help make them as comfortable as possible, and continue to work as long as it takes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Why is the government continuing to only provide patchwork solutions that reward the extortion of a few unscrupulous landlords at the expense of both taxpayers and Alberta's most vulnerable individuals rather than coming up with a longer term solution until sufficient affordable housing is built? Why didn't you just listen to your Affordable Housing Task Force's advice?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We did listen to the housing task force. One of the major challenges is to make sure that there is a continuing supply of units for individuals to rent. That is why this government has taken the position that it has in order not to have rent controls, which would definitely provide some uncertainty in the marketplace for those individuals who are building units. In that way, we would have some continuing future solution.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Nonresident Hunting Regulations

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday a question was asked to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development regarding out-of-country hunters entering the province to hunt. Some of my constituents have expressed concerns with the answers provided by the minister, and I was hoping that the minister could provide some further clarification for this Assembly and Albertans. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, and it's about the same issue. Are the six-day alien nonresident hunting licences he discussed renewable, or are the nonresident hunters limited to six days?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that these six-day permits for alien nonresidents are renewable. You have six days. If you want to buy another, you pay your \$77; you can buy a second permit. I'd also remind Albertans that nonresident Canadians,

nonresidents but people who are Canadian citizens, can buy a permit for \$33, and this is good for the entire season.

Mr. Prins: My next question to the same minister: is there a limit on how long or how many days nonresident hunters can stay in the province to hunt?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, there's no limit. They may stay and continue to hunt for as long as they please. Of course, nonresident alien and nonresident Canadian hunters are subject to the same daily limits and possession limits as residents. That probably explains why of the 4,500 nonresident aliens who came and hunted waterfowl in Alberta last year, 95 per cent only bought one six-day permit. In six days you can get all the ducks and geese you need in this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hunting tourism contributes a great deal to local economies and particularly to communities in rural Alberta. My last question to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: does the minister see an opportunity for enhanced hunting tourism in the province?

Dr. Morton: The answer, Mr. Speaker, is absolutely yes. Hunting tourism adds over a hundred million dollars to the Alberta economy every year, and much of this goes into our rural communities. In recent weeks I've met with Alberta Tourism to discuss greater promotion of hunting opportunities in Alberta for nonresidents. Our new fish and wildlife website, that will deal with licensing and that we expect to have online in about 18 months, will publicize these opportunities for both residents and nonresidents. I can assure the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka and all other members of the Assembly that I will work to add hunting tourism to our rural development strategy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Lottery Retailer Practices

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Provinces across Canada have been uncovering irregularities with their lottery retailer practices. In response to these problems and given my interest in consumer protection I wrote the Solicitor General back in early April, and the minister thankfully responded on May 1. The minister wrote: "I am pleased to confirm that a special committee, led by the [Western Canada Lottery Corporation's] Internal Audit, has conducted an internal review." The minister did not share any of the report's findings with me but detailed the scope of that review. To the Solicitor General: did the WCLC internal audit, in fact, find any discrepancies with respect to lottery retailer practices? What did you learn, Mr. Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As indicated by the hon. member, the WCLC is reviewing lottery activities in the province of Alberta as well as those across the rest of western Canada. Because of their findings in other provinces, they have

decided to take a more in-depth look in Alberta. I haven't seen the report yet, unfortunately, and to the best of my knowledge they have not found anything unusual. A preliminary look indicated that the winnings by retailers were at a normal average in Alberta. So I believe it's a prudent thing for them to do, to take a more in-depth look, and we await the results.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the minister's reply letter he indicated that in addition to that internal review, Ernst & Young was commissioned to conduct another assessment, so now I need clarification whether the first one, the internal audit, is continuing and then Ernst & Young is doing another one. He said in his letter that both reports will be provided to the WCLC board in May. Now we're now into June, and I would like to ask if the other report has been finalized and if he saw that one in particular.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that Ernst & Young is doing the review on behalf of WCLC. As I indicated earlier, I believe it's prudent that they do a more thorough look based on findings in other provinces, and I believe it's in the best interest of all Albertans that we do a thorough look. The wait is definitely going to be worth while.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would really appreciate the minister tabling these results when he gets them.

My third question to him is: in British Columbia and Ontario lottery retailer investigations were commissioned by offices of the Legislature, and then when you add the Atlantic Lottery Corporation, the reports for all three investigations are available for the public to see on the Internet. Your letter to me, Mr. Minister, did not mention making these reports public. Will these reports remain hidden, or are you going to release them? Basically, are you going to deny Alberta consumers the type of access to information that Canadians in other jurisdictions enjoy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is very open and transparent, and the results that I get will be communicated to all Albertans in an appropriate manner.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Law Enforcement Review Board

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the Law Enforcement Review Board is looking for a new chairperson. The current chair will step down on June 15 to accept a position as a Provincial Court judge. The board is dealing with a large number of cases that are being heard or have yet to be scheduled. This resignation has the potential to delay these cases even more. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can the minister tell us what his department is doing to fill the vacancy as quickly as possible?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to reiterate that this government recognizes that the Law Enforcement Review Board plays an important role in the administration of justice in this province. Unfortunately, we do have a backlog of cases. The resignation of the current chair is a matter of unfortunate timing; however, we are moving as quickly as possible to replace that chair. An acting chair will be in place in the LERB as soon as possible, and the LERB will be able to continue to conduct timely and efficient hearings.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. You mentioned the backlog. How bad is the backlog, and can you tell us how many cases are currently before the board and how many are yet to be scheduled?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the hon. member: there are currently 69 hearings in progress, another 21 waiting to be scheduled, and we have seven previous hearings that we're still waiting for decisions on. So, yes, we are behind the eight ball here a little bit. But I want to say that in December 2005 we did amend the Police Act to allow the LERB to have two panels conduct hearings at the same time in different locations. These amendments also allowed the LERB to appoint one of its members to deal with preliminary and procedural matters to improve efficiencies in our system.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. The Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police recently passed a resolution calling for increased staff and funding for the LERB, the Law Enforcement Review Board. Can the minister tell us what else his department is doing to address the backlog of cases before the board?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we are certainly aware of the recommendations by the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, and we are taking this matter very seriously. We will continue to work with all of our law enforcement partners to ensure an effective administration of justice. One thing we are doing is increasing the number of LERB members from seven to nine. We also are building a separate hearing room so that we can have more than one hearing at a time. So we are addressing these things in as expeditious a manner as we can.

Thank you.

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

Child Care Review

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are few fields where high quality and enforced safety standards are as important as they are in child care. Recognizing this, the Minister of Children's Services introduced a Child Care Licensing Act that will seek to increase the quality of child care available in Alberta. While this action is certainly important, many parents and child care providers

have raised concerns over the consultation process that accompanies the development of new standards. Staff retention is a chronic problem in Alberta's child care sector. To the Minister of Children's Services: how will proposed regulations to increase the number as well as the level of training of workers in each facility contribute to solving the staffing issues in this sector?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd like to say that our goal with going out with this consultation is to make sure that at the end of the day we create standards for quality child care in this province. We have just started a six-week process, and I haven't heard any concerns with regard to the process. I think what we're talking about is some questions and concerns with some of the proposals, but that's exactly what this is about. The proposals that have gone out are a result of what we heard over the last two years in consultations with the public. They are out there just as proposals. What I would encourage at this point is for as many people as possible who are interested in child care to get out there and get involved in the consultation and give us their feedback on the proposals, whether it's at one of the public meetings or whether it's online or through the discussion guide.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring that child care workers are providing the best possible care to children is only one part of a successful child care equation. The other half is ensuring that parents who rely on child care services are able to access them. This province could have the highest standards of care in the world, but they would be meaningless if no one could afford to use them. Improving the quality of child care will obviously make child care more expensive. To the Minister of Children's Services: how will you ensure that the costs of these new standards will not hurt accessibility?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point I don't want to speculate as to what the end result of the consultations will be in terms of the standards that do come out. What I can say is that you're absolutely right: this portion of the consultation we're going through right now is a focus on the quality of care. That is not to take away from the huge number of initiatives that we've come out with in the last couple of months to deal with access for parents, to deal with the attraction and retaining of staff, and to deal with the affordability of child care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many questions are on the minds of child care providers and parents as they head into this government's consultation process. I'm hearing them every day. Specifically, they worry that if they go ahead and welcome improved daycare standards, they may unknowingly be assuming costs they cannot afford. To the Minister of Children's Services: will you ensure that parents and providers are able to participate freely in the public consultations by assuring them today that they will not be responsible for bearing the costs of new government-mandated regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I would like to encourage at this point is that if anybody – parents, operators – has any concerns, whether or not it's specific to the proposals individually or that some of the proposals could impact costs of child care, please get out and take part in the consultation. Again, just to remind people, it can be online, or it can be through a discussion guide, or we still have meetings coming up in Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Whitecourt, Bonnyville, Red Deer, Calgary, Grande Prairie, Peace River, Lloydminster, and Fort McMurray. So I do hope that interested people do come out to participate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Palace Casino Labour Dispute

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks the 269th day of the strike at the Palace Casino in West Edmonton Mall. The NDP has proudly introduced to this Assembly 70 workers from the picket line – and there are more here today – in the hope that the government might finally take notice and do something to help these workers. Six months ago the NDP along with the UFCW brought forward concerns about patrons drinking alcohol outside the casino. It's been over six months, and the minister still hasn't arranged for proper enforcement mechanisms. My question is to the Solicitor General. Why is the Solicitor General turning a blind eye to the ongoing violations of the gaming act taking place at the Palace Casino?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, an example of allegations. If the hon. member opposite has proof of what he's suggesting, I would ask that he bring it forward. We are not turning a blind eye to any activities at any of our establishments, including the Palace Casino. I know that our inspectors are doing their due diligence and inspecting those on a regular basis. Again, if he has evidence otherwise, I would certainly appreciate having a look at it.

Thank you.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is precisely the evidence that was sent over six months ago, pictures like this. Surely, that's come to the Solicitor General's attention. My question is, again, knowing that he has those pictures: why hasn't the minister taken immediate action to ensure that liquor and gaming rules are enforced? That's his job.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that the pictures were delivered to the AGLC, and they have acted on them. They have increased their visits over there. Again, if it's still ongoing, I would like to see the evidence of it.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that it's probably getting worse over there rather than better. So when is the minister going to take responsibility and do something about these clear violations that continue to this day?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, to me it indicates probabilities, and the

probability and the facts are that we have increased our inspections there, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mason: You're doing nothing.

Mr. Lindsay: I would like to see evidence of that, hon. member, because they are doing something, and they are doing a great job for Albertans in enforcing rules and regulations of the AGLC.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Flood Preparedness

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans don't have to look too far into the history books to recall the devastating impact flooding can have on a community, my constituents included. In June of 2005 the floods that swept through southern Alberta nearly wiped out Fish Creek provincial park. As we approach the two-year anniversary of flooding in southern Alberta, residents in my constituency are getting nervous of a repeat event. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. What is the current risk for flooding for communities across Alberta this summer?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, fortunately at this point in time Calgary and Fish Creek in particular are at a very low risk of flooding although the Bow and the Elbow rivers may appear to be high. Our flood forecasting team continues to monitor levels around the clock and works with Environment Canada weather services. The fact of the matter is that with the snow pack that we have, above normal, and above-normal temperatures, we do have some potential and have issued some advisories of potential flooding in Banff and Jasper. We're also closely monitoring Canmore, Hinton, and Grande Prairie. If the weather changes, there could be additional advisories issued.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How will your ministry ensure that Albertans are well informed of flood potential this summer?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we work very closely with municipalities, and we issue advisories and warnings when conditions indicate the need. Municipalities are the first line of defence when it comes to dealing with an emergency situation. So municipalities do have within their emergency management plans the availability to actually one-on-one contact people who are at immediate risk from flooding. The important thing is that Albertans at this time of year should listen to the media, pay close attention to the media, and those that wish may consult with our website under Advisories, which are updated on a regular basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

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

2:10

Hospital-acquired Infections

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In March the Premier dismissed concerns about the government's risk of legal liability regarding negligence in monitoring and enforcing infection-control procedures. These are stemming from the problems in

Vegreville, Lloydminster, and other locations in Alberta. But now that testing for HIV and hepatitis B and C is currently under way for some 3,000 Albertans and the results will be released within weeks, does the minister of health still think that assessing the risk of lawsuits is unnecessary and premature?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it would be unnecessary and premature to assess the risk of lawsuits. Essentially, the whole issue of health status is the most important issue in this. The testing needs to be done, but I said at the time and I'll say again: the risks were low. Nonetheless, it was incumbent on government to make sure that all of the appropriate screening and testing was done. It would be too early to even consider whether or not anyone might come forward with legal liability or to try and put any sort of quantification around that kind of liability.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. In March we also found out that it took the College of Physicians and Surgeons two years to notify patients about infection and sterilization concerns. To the minister of health again: what specific changes to reporting systems have been made since March?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, immediately upon finding out about the incident that happened, I addressed all of the professions with a letter asking them to ensure that they had their members report on infection-control issues and how they handled it. We've also had some talks with the health professions relative to ensuring that they know and understand that the Public Health Act takes priority over their act. I will be meeting with registrars and presidents of health professions tomorrow, in fact, with respect to the next steps in that regard.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Research shows that one out of every nine hospital patients in Canada gets an infection that may force a longer stay and further treatment. In order to understand the extent of the issue in Alberta and the cost to the health system, we need to be collecting the right information. My question again is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does Alberta collect data on the frequency and cost of hospital-acquired infection?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is: not at the appropriate level. We should. The Health Quality Council has been specifically put in place to ensure that we are able to monitor the right kinds of data, and that's certainly a priority for me as minister and for this government. The health authorities are collecting data, but what we need to do provincially is make sure that that data is collected on a consistent basis and then take the next step to see what data the public should have in order to know and understand the risks they take. Entering a hospital is not without its risks, but the public should be able to be aware of those risks. So that information is important information for the public, and we need to be able to collect it appropriately and make it public in an appropriate way.

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

Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility Agreement

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend Calgary hosted the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to meet and explore how they can work better together. After many years of waiting for all Canadian provinces to agree to work together, Alberta and B.C. moved ahead with the Alberta/B.C. trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, TILMA. It's an important interprovincial initiative. To the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations: are municipalities being consulted on this important priority?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, of course, this past weekend was in Calgary where they hosted thousands of municipalities. This was a very productive time. We had 2,200 delegates there. It was about consulting, getting advice from municipalities because they are important partners. We're doing that, and I might also add that we are consulting in the north, in the south, east, and west. We're up in Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie. We're down in Medicine Hat and Lethbridge and further south. We're actually in Lloydminster. We're over in Edson and further west. We are really, really moving forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Some critics predict that TILMA is hopelessly tying the hands of Alberta's elected municipal governments. My first supplemental is again to the same minister. Can he tell us exactly what the impact of TILMA is on municipalities?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as you know, in front of this House right now is Bill 38. We are doing exactly what the Liberal government in British Columbia is doing: debating here in the Legislature. We are doing it because we are an open and transparent government. The opposition may not like what we're doing, but we're consulting because we want the best value for our taxpayers. The Liberals may not want the best value, but we do because we want to take a dollar and stretch it so that it can even do more. The Liberal opposition may not, but we do, and we will continue to. Even the New Democrats support some of the important principles of what we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Can he please clear up the confusion and explain how he can describe the TILMA as a trade agreement when some critics see it as more than that?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, there are, clearly, some critics. I can hear the hon. member across the way in the opposition saying that she doesn't like to be a free trader. We want our citizens to get the best value. That may be very much the case, and my view is that as we go forward . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Point of order.

Mr. Boutilier: This is so much fun today, Mr. Speaker. I haven't had so much fun in quite some time.

This really is about what we do to better serve Albertans and British Columbians. That's what we're doing today; we're doing it tomorrow. Regardless of what the Official Opposition doesn't want to do, we're going full speed ahead. It's damn the torpedoes.

The Speaker: We'll deal with the point of order at the conclusion of the Routine. The hon. minister might want to check the Blues to see where the hon. member, unidentified but presumed the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, said, quote, that she doesn't want to be a free trader. We need some clarification.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And things were going so well today, weren't they?

Government Contract with Former MLA

Mr. Bonko: On April 16 the Premier promised the House that he'd undertake an internal audit about the contracts awarded to Bob Maskell, a former Tory MLA. Well, it's been more than 50 days since that promise, and we've heard nothing. Clearly, without our prompting, this government won't clean up its act. My questions are to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Where are the results of Mr. Maskell's appointment and contracts as promised by the Premier?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I'm so pleased that the hon. member brought this up, in fact, and I'll tell you why. At the appropriate time I will show you the outcomes of the work that was done under this particular contract, referred to as the Alberta centennial project. It is a very detailed analysis of the work and the value that Albertans got for this excellent work with aboriginal communities.

Mr. Bonko: I'm assuming that he's going to table those as well, Mr. Speaker, since he's already shown them to us. We certainly don't want the spring sitting of the House to end before the results emerge. Usually they do it during the summertime, when most people are sleeping and enjoying their holidays. They need to come back to us during a relevant time, so we're hoping that they, in fact, get us the original questions. To the minister: does he think that the typical line, the way they answer the questions in this fashion, is appropriate with this government being transparent and accountable?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition may sleep, but this government does not sleep.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: A perfect example of sleeping: when he doesn't have the answer.

Thank you very much. We have to remember, Mr. Speaker, that the last time this government had names of members on the audit committee for public view, one was the vice-president of finance of the Progressive Conservative Party. Now, mysteriously, the names are no longer available on the government website. Again, no longer open or transparent. This is bad enough. Another situation: when it comes to the investigation of Tory insiders, patronage, and cronyism, Mr. Gary Campbell is in no position whatsoever to be able to give judgment on Maskell. To the minister: is Mr. Campbell on a committee investigating Mr. Maskell still? Yes or no?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to note that the hon.

member is making reference to, without question, a very valuable educator in this province and in this city. He has a reputation for what he has done over time. Rather than besmirching an Albertan's name, maybe we should be celebrating the successes of the aboriginal centennial initiative, which I am tabling, a very detailed outcome of the good work and good value that all Albertans got. Contrary to the comments and the assumptions that may be made and the sleeping that's going on across the way, we will continue to move forward in a productive way in helping all Albertans, including aboriginals.

The Speaker: Well, that was 88 questions and responses today.

head: 2:20

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This House might be winding down, but this issue is not going away. I'm continuing with the tabling of petitions with respect to housing affordability, 104 signatures, and the petition reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government . . . to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition with 293 signatures, or approximately 15 per cent of the people of Magrath, as they were just hit with exorbitant property tax increases. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly "not to grant additional taxation powers to municipalities."

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Standing Order 59.04(3) indicates that "the Government House Leader shall give notice of the date for the vote on the main estimates not later than the completion of the 4th 15-hour cycle of estimates." Standing Order 59.04(4) says:

Notwithstanding suborders (1) and (3), for the 2007 Spring Sitting the vote on the main estimates may be scheduled with a minimum of one sitting day's notice to occur any time after the completion of the 4th rotation of the 15-hour cycle, unless otherwise ordered.

That time would be this Thursday, so I'd like to give oral notice today that pursuant to Standing Order 59.04 the vote on the main estimates shall be scheduled for Thursday, June 7, 2007, at 5:44 p.m.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie on behalf of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and table on behalf of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition the requisite number of copies of minutes of the regular meeting on Thursday, August 17, 2006, of the Beaver Regional Waste Management Services Commission.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first tabling. In response to a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a value-for-money report from PricewaterhouseCoopers. This shows the public-sector comparator of the Calgary northeast ring road project as well as the bids submitted by all three companies that bid on the project. The documents clearly show that the P3 project will result in a substantial saving to taxpayers, in the range of \$350 million to \$450 million, than if the government had built the project the conventional way.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from GGC Consultants providing the results of a fairness audit on the bidding process for the same project. The letter is signed by Gary Campbell, QC. It certifies that there are no issues with regard to any question of fairness in the northeast Stoney Trail bidding process.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table the final report of the Alberta Centennial 2005: Aboriginal Centennial Initiative.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of an information package from the Academy of Learning career and business college, which is celebrating its 20th year this year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table today the appropriate number of copies of 18 letters from Alberta teachers. They're writing to express their concern over both inadequate operational funding and the inability of this government to immediately resolve the outstanding issue of the unfunded pension liability.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from Mr. John Younk, co-owner of Children's Academy Day Care Centre and out of school care, regarding the consultation program aimed at daycare centres and

proposing some very serious changes that will likely result in spaces being closed. The theme of the process is to improve care for children and the method being employed to reach this is to put a huge financial burden on owners of [daycares].

The second letter is from Blayne Rebinsky. "I am from Alberta. Why is Ontario getting cheaper gas than us? Do they even have oil! Explain."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling copies of photos taken by UFCW workers outside the Palace Casino. The photos show casino patrons drinking alcohol outside the facility.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter written by Mr. Noel Somerville, vice-chair, SALT, Seniors' Action and Liaison Team, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. SALT, this group, is disappointed in the government's ineffective response to the housing crisis and calls for short-term rent guidelines to prevent exorbitant rent increases.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: a report entitled A Workforce Strategy for Alberta's Tourism and Hospitality Industry.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to the introduction of guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Visitors

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly Her Excellency Evadne Coyle, Jamaican High Commissioner to Canada; Mr. Art Clarke, honorary consul of Jamaica in Edmonton; and Ms Coleen Neita, president of the Jamaica Association of Northern Alberta. Her Excellency is in Alberta to explore trade and business opportunities between Alberta and Jamaica and to reconnect with the expatriate Jamaican community. This member is very proud to be part of this community. Our guests are seated in your gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on a purported point of order.

Point of Order

False Allegations

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is referring to something uttered by the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations during an exchange between himself and the Member for Calgary-Bow earlier. I'm citing 23(h), (i), and (j). The minister has made a statement that I said something which I have not, not today and not previously. In doing so, he has violated 23(h) in making a false allegation, he has violated 23(i) in imputing a false and an unavowed motive, and he certainly violated 23(j) in creating some pretty rowdy disorder.

Mr. Speaker, I realize that he needs to fabricate support for the TILMA agreement, but I think he doesn't need to be making something up about me in order to do it. I have asked very clearly that the entire TILMA agreement be brought before this House for a fulsome debate, not just a bill which allows payment of fines which may be assessed against the government if they lose any cases brought against them by industry under TILMA. That's quite a different thing.

I ask at this point that the minister withdraw his statements and apologize to me for saying in this House that I made them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Anyone else want to participate on this point of order? Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to say first of all that I did not utter but actually specifically said, to be very clear. At no time and in no shape or form did I direct the comment to this hon. member.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on this point.

2:30

Dr. Brown: Well, Mr. Speaker, today was no exception to the fact that during question period there's often a lot of loud heckling from the opposition benches, and to me it's no surprise that occasionally there is a retort to some of that heckling. I don't see this as a point of order at all. I think it's a natural outcome of what is sometimes very boisterous heckling on the other side.

The Speaker: Well, here's what was said by the hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations: "Well, there are clearly some critics. I can hear the hon. member across the way in the opposition saying that she doesn't like to be a free trader. We want our citizens to get the best value." Actually, I could go on quite a bit, but I'll stop right there.

The reality is that the chair made an assumption that it was the certain member who raised the point of order, but that is an assumption. There is certainly more than one she across the way. The minister is absolutely correct; he did not identify the member. This allowed the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to rise on a point of clarification, which was very important, to clarify her position. So this really amounted to a difference of opinion, not a point of order. We will move on.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Written Questions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head:

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I likewise move that motions for returns standing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head:

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

Bill 210

Gaming Planning Act

[Debate adjourned May 28: Ms DeLong speaking]

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to address Bill 211, Planning for the Future of . . .

The Speaker: Actually, we're on Bill 210.

Ms DeLong: Bill 210?

The Speaker: Yes. The hon. member adjourned the debate. She has three minutes left if she chooses.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has not participated yet. Please proceed.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to speak to this bill. I feel that it's addressing a very important issue in Alberta. Bill 210 would allow for a sweeping public review of how gaming is conducted in Alberta and ask Albertans what future they see for gambling in this province. Bill 210 establishes a committee to plan the future role of gaming in Alberta. Part of the mandate of the committee is to consider re-establishing community lottery boards for distributing gaming revenues. In other words, Bill 210 addresses gambling planning in Alberta.

It's quite straightforward. The Gaming Planning Act calls for the creation of a nine-member all-party committee whose mandate is to investigate and report on the gaming industry in Alberta. This committee will conduct the first fully public investigation of all aspects of gaming in this province. The committee will assess the amount of gaming revenue that is allocated to charities and how it is distributed, examine whether we should re-establish the community lottery boards, evaluate the role of charitable organizations in gaming activities, address the social impact of gaming, and examine the role of gaming in Alberta in the future in regard to the number of casinos and gaming machines in the province. In short, Bill 210 will allow for a sweeping public review of how gaming is conducted in Alberta and ask Albertans what future they see for gambling in the province of Alberta. I believe this is very important. This is an issue that is significant to many volunteer organizations, many schools, many public facilities who are dependent on revenues from gaming.

It's important to note that Alberta has the widest variety of legal gambling options available of any jurisdiction in North America. The bottom-line figure of profit for 2005-2006 was \$1.4 billion. According to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission's annual report of '05-06 Albertans poured more than \$11 billion into slot machines and more than \$10 billion into VLTs, for a total of more than \$21 billion into gaming machines alone. There are more than 8,600 gaming machines in casinos in Alberta and another 6,000 VLTs in bars, for a total of more than 14,000 gambling machines. There are now 17 casinos in Alberta and nine others in the final stages of the approval process. Little by little gambling is becoming very big in Alberta. It's a very important industry in this province, but it's also a social issue and an industry worthy of scrutiny.

So what is the future of gaming in Alberta? Is it an industry that we should grow, or should we rein it in? I don't know whether the gaming minister has long-range plans for gambling in Alberta. We need to find out. Is there any upper limit on the number of casinos or slot machines that would be allowed in Alberta? The public's opinion on gaming should be heard. I hear questions such as: is the government addicted to gaming revenue; is it morally correct for the government to profit from gambling; is it necessary to have volunteers work long hours for casino funds; is the division of revenue equitable? The questions are there everywhere I go where people are working casinos trying to support good causes. The province reaps the benefits of a hugely profitable industry, but, you know, we

also know that there are moral implications to the whole issue of the government profiting from what is considered by many people still to be a vice.

I know that there was a major review of gambling in Alberta as recently as 2001. I think this review was called *Achieving a Balance*. It was a gaming licensing policy review and was quite wide ranging, but it differs significantly from the committee that is suggested by Bill 210. The objective of the 2001 review was to "address issues of growth in gaming and continue to ensure the effective regulation and socially-responsible delivery of gaming activities in the province." However, the 2001 review did not hold public hearings into gambling and did not include the all-party element. The gaming licensing policy review of 2001 also did not include a widely distributed report. In fact, the final report was not even tabled with the Clerk of the Legislature.

It's time for a more all-encompassing review that will set the course for the gaming industry and the administration of the charity model for the next decade. There has been significant growth in gaming since the 2001 report. In the fiscal year 2001 gaming activities in Alberta generated gross sales, that is before prizes, of \$14.6 billion from all forms of gambling in Alberta. In '05-06 the gross revenue in gaming came in at more than \$22 billion.

It is apparent that public opinion has changed dramatically when it comes to the question of gaming and gambling. While once considered a vice that had to be curtailed at all costs, it seems that gambling has now almost gone mainstream. The public's attitude towards gambling has changed so much that today Albertans might even welcome the growth in gaming. So should we look upon gambling as an actual growth industry and tourist attraction?

Many charitable groups who have concerns about the volunteer aspect of casino gambling and the tremendous pressures it puts on volunteers need to be listened to. Also questions about who qualifies as a charity. Should one minor sports team with limited financial needs get the same revenue as an agency that's serving homeless youth or that serves the needs of hundreds of thousands of disadvantaged people?

Bill 210 would ask Albertans in the most open way possible exactly how they feel about gaming and where we should take the charitable model in the future.

2:40

I'd like to see some of the questions raised in Bill 210 actually discussed because, as I remember my colleague from Edmonton-Centre saying, how much is enough? We need to have that answered. How much revenue generated by gambling activities is enough for this province? Is it limitless? Do citizens in Alberta really want to just keep going: more casinos, more bingos, more VLTs, more slots, more whatever, ad infinitum? I think the answer is no, but I don't know where the threshold is reached. I think that Bill 210 will offer us a reasonable consultation process to get some of these answers.

What are the consequences of having our funding for the voluntary, charitable sector primarily coming from gambling dollars? What are the consequences for the volunteer sector? You know, these are individuals that want to work, that want to do something good for the community, that want to help. However, we see many of them as parents working a bingo or a casino so that they can raise money for their children to participate in special activities. That's one thing. Those are extraordinary expenses, perhaps. But, at the same time, I hear about shelters with volunteers working casinos and bingos to help provide the basic essentials for those programs, like hiring staff, providing food. Shouldn't these things be funded through regular sources? Why is it that in Alberta we are dependent on volunteer help working the gaming industry?

I'm concerned about the fragility of our volunteer sector. More and more we're asking them to do more, and it's a concern. They're having to raise the number of dollars that they have by subsidizing the services that they're offering to the province to make it a better place. In a number of cases they're actually contracted by the government to provide services, and they're still having to go and raise charitable dollars to subsidize what the government is giving for programs that the government is very proud of.

I think we need an extensive review. I believe that Bill 210 speaks to that and offers that, and I ask you all to vote for Bill 210.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair will try and find a rotation to allow government members to participate if they wish, but none has been identified. Is there a government member who wishes or a third-party member who wishes?

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and make some brief observations on Bill 210, Gaming Planning Act. Gaming certainly is a very extensive activity in this province. It has become a critical source of public revenues, so it does need close scrutiny as does any activity that generates public revenues requires the regular and quite thorough scrutiny of this House. In general, I think a review such as the one proposed here of gaming in the province and also looking at the role of these gaming revenues with respect to the way current activities undertaken by voluntary or nonprofit or charitable organizations are funded through the allocation of funds generated from gambling and gaming activities – all of these are important issues and deserve a sober and thorough and careful scrutiny and discussion and public debate.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

With respect to the functions or the terms of reference a committee will be set up by way of the motion that's proposed in this bill that will come from the minister responsible for gaming to this House, and if that motion is passed, then by virtue of that decision by this House, a committee will come into being, and that will then address the functions proposed here. I think the issue of whether this list of functions are terms of reference exhaustive is an open one. I presume that the five or six or seven items indicated here could be some of the functions, but there could be more. So there's a need for more thorough consideration, and I would think that perhaps a different kind of action taken by this House to in fact look at the terms of reference themselves before they're legislated into existence would be a good idea.

Another question, Mr. Speaker, that arises in my mind has to do with the composition of the committee proposed here. The proposed bill fails to recognize the existence of the three recognized parties in this province. For some reason – I suppose it's the sponsoring member's judgment – here is a decision not to make a reference to all the recognized parties on the committee, and the necessity of those parties to be represented on this committee is a curious omission, in my view.

The third question, Mr. Speaker, that I have is that this bill might have been drafted before the coming into being of policy field committees in this Legislature. The committees were established by the decision of the Legislature through negotiations among the three House leaders, and perhaps the independent member was consulted in the process as well, but those committees are now in place, and I think that it would be perhaps more appropriate, given the fact that those committees, in fact, are more representative of the House as

they're presently constituted than the committee being proposed here, to have this matter referred to the appropriate committee, whether it's the committee that deals with services or community activities. I don't know which committee would be most appropriate, but that's easy to identify. So I would think that one of the existing policy field committees would be a more appropriate vehicle to undertake a review and propose a legislation if in the committee's judgment such a legislation is needed in order to proceed with a review by the committee.

Given, Mr. Speaker, in particular the unrepresentative nature of the proposal with respect to the composition of the proposed committee, I simply cannot see how I can support this bill in its present form. Second, I am concerned that this may lead to duplication of the committee structure. We have committees in place. As I said, those committees are in fact representative. Those committees are based on the consensus across this House, across party lines that those are the right kinds of committees, and we need to put those committees to use to see if they need improvement or if they can work.

In fact, they can show in practice what they promise in theory; that is, they are a way of democratizing the activities of this House. They will broaden the participation in policy-making by all members and all parties represented in this House, particularly parties that are recognized parties, rather than creating yet one more committee, which to me, on the face of it, seems to fail to address the issue of proper representation of parties that are in this House and are appropriately recognized according to the rules of this House.

So, with that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and let other members speak to the bill.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just in response to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona, rather than rejecting the bill outright on the basis of the potential of duplication or the failure to include by definition who the other member who is not a member of the governing party might be – I realize that we do have a member of the Alliance; we have an independent member as well as four members of the NDP – I would suggest that the hon. member offer during Committee of the Whole an amendment to this particular bill.

2:50

The second objection the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona brought up was the idea that the committees might take on this particular responsibility. I know that the committee structure is kind of a wide-open vehicle at this point. But one thing – and I think we'll agree on this – we could never accuse the government of is too much planning because to date that planning has not occurred. It may seem a bit of a juxtaposition of the terms “gaming” and “planning” in the title. Putting the two together might appear as a bit of an oxymoron because gaming suggests a free, open-wide chance circumstance where planning suggests that there is a series of events; there's an evaluation process; there's some thought that goes into it. I would suggest to not have planning would be moronic, and that's, unfortunately, what has occurred.

This government is so short on its ability to come up with diversifying methods of strengthening our economy that its sole dependence on the basically one-trick pony of oil and gas, nonrenewable resources, has placed gaming as its backup. So we have one sort of God-given quantity below our earth, and then we have the creation of a false economy through the gaming procedures. There is no doubt, as a former colleague from Edmonton-Mill

Woods indicated, of the amount of revenue that is brought into this province through gaming. My question has to do with the ethics and the morality of that type of process where people's lives are lost and their fortunes and families are broken up because of this particular pursuit.

When it comes to how the money is distributed – and this is what the Gaming Planning Act calls upon – let's look at the fact that AADAC receives approximately 3 per cent of the entire revenue of the lotteries, of the VLTs, of the slots, of the casinos to try and deal with those individuals who are most vulnerable to its effects. The government encourages the gambling process by sprucing up its VLTs and slots. In fact, it went so far as to put out \$120 million – it might be slightly larger – to get those bells and whistles to the point where they would be appealing, for lack of a better word.

An Hon. Member: Hypnotic.

Mr. Chase: Hypnotic. There's the word that I'm looking for. Thank you.

For a province as resourceful as this province not to tap into other methods of generating revenue such as, instead of our dependency on oil and gas, considering wind power, considering solar power, considering the power of the rivers without having to dam them, the river-run-through-it concept, putting money into Alberta's research and innovation, putting money into our postsecondary colleges because we know that those types of investments in education will bring a threefold return without the negativity associated with gambling, that community leaders in Calgary such as Bishop Henry have stood up and challenged – and I know that Bishop Henry received a bit of a backlash initially from members of his church and the school board because this government doesn't properly fund education. As a result, the Catholic board along with the public board were in such a state of desperation that they felt that the only way to get the large amounts of money necessary to run their education programs was through this casino, slots, VLT process. Well, I'm pleased to see that members of the Catholic faith, of which I am not, were the first to see the light and have supported their bishop in his strive to reduce, eliminate the dependency of his parishioners on gambling.

We have tourism in this province. We have all kinds of opportunities. We could have, if this government saw it as an investment, a thriving arts community. We could have as part of that thriving arts community a thriving film industry. But, unfortunately, this government doesn't put in the seed money, whether it's in the form of tourism in terms of looking after parks and protected areas, encouraging people to come and see them, protecting the landscape that serves as the backdrop for the various movies that have previously been shot, primarily of a western heritage nature. But we don't need to just reduce ourselves to our historical western past. We could be looking into the future in the areas of science and innovation. This government has to get off its lazy – and you can fill in whatever posterior form you want to use – and get on to using the brain part, the other end of its body, to come up with diversification ideas.

Bill 210 doesn't say: let's just get rid of gambling. It doesn't say: let's just get rid of lotteries. It says: let's look at the pros and cons. Let's weigh the issue. Let's consider how lottery funds could impact our province. I don't have the same difficulties with lotteries as I do with VLTs. They don't seem to have the same disastrous effect on individuals and families that the VLTs, slots, and casinos have. But this bill is saying: let's pause for some intellectual reflection; let's take a moment; let's actually steer the ship of state instead of, as I alluded to earlier, leaving it in dry dock.

We have an opportunity. We have good minds. There are the good minds. They're not limited to the opposition. There are good minds throughout this House. But, unfortunately, too much time is spent with the easy out. Sure, some sucker is going to continue putting money into the slot machines, and because of the underfunding of this government, people have become so dependent on casinos that they're an easy mark. That easy mark is not just the addict. That easy mark becomes the sporting communities. The easy mark becomes the schools. The easy mark becomes the arts associations because they are not properly funded in the beginning; therefore, they resort to holding their nose and participating.

A story from one of my constituents brought forth the fact that she had to withdraw her son and her daughter from a variety of choir activities that they had enjoyed for a series of years because the choir required parents to either fund the total amount of the tuition up front or participate in casinos. She made the choice based on her family's ethical and moral beliefs that it was better not to participate in these activities, although the children had enjoyed them for several years, rather than succumb to the casino gambling addiction.

We have all kinds of money in this province. We have surpluses. We don't need to have such a tremendous emphasis on gaming, but if it's going to continue to be acceptable to the majority of this House, then at least let's plan for it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to join debate on Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act. This piece of legislation aims to establish an all-party gaming review committee. This committee will focus on current revenue-sharing policies for charities, the role of volunteers in casinos, social impacts of gaming, and the future role and scope of gaming in Alberta. Now, because of the efforts of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, or the AGLC, our province already has an excellent gaming framework, which is continuously monitored and improving gaming in this province. As a result of the ongoing research and monitoring of the gaming industry by the AGLC and other affiliated agencies, Alberta has one of the most comprehensive and appropriately regulated frameworks in the country.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, gaming in Alberta has undergone extensive change and development in previous years in response to this government's priority to ensure accountability, solid regulation, community benefit, and social responsibility. Since the inception of gaming in our province our government has been consistently monitoring Alberta's gaming industry in order to stay on top of evolving trends, effectively managing growth, while daily ensuring social responsibility of all liquor and gaming.

Now, Mr. Speaker, to be honest, I don't really want to stand up and defend gaming in Alberta today because I don't particularly like it. I don't particularly think it's the greatest way for us to go as a province. Although if it's going to happen – and obviously it is – it needs to be properly regulated by our government, and I believe that it is. I wasn't even going to speak on this subject today, but after listening to the opposition, I felt compelled to get up and to try to set the record straight.

Mr. Speaker, in 2002 the MLA Review Committee on Charitable Gaming Licensing Eligibility and Use of Proceeds was established to consolidate licensing eligibility policies, to review the use of AGLC proceeds, and to evaluate charitable gaming policies. In

April 2003 the committee came out with a report and produced 42 recommendations, the majority of which were adopted by our government. As a result of our government's ongoing research and concern for the public, Alberta has the most comprehensive and well-maintained gaming framework in the country. The charitable gaming model, which allows all four major gaming streams – bingo, casino table games, pull tickets, and raffles – to be directly managed by religious and charitable organizations, provides organizations with the opportunity to directly raise funds while managing their own charitable gaming activities. This is an excellent example of our government's dedication to effective, innovative, and socially responsible gaming initiatives.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, for the fiscal year ended March 2006 charities in Alberta earned over \$252 million . . .

Mr. Rodney: How much?

Rev. Abbott: Two hundred and fifty-two million dollars, hon. member.

. . . to support their programs and activities, while British Columbia, by solely allowing charities to conduct and manage raffles and small-scale bingos, minimized the proceeds earned directly by charities to just over \$27 million.

Mr. Speaker, as a person who is sitting on the new community spirit committee, I've heard from charities. They need more. It's no different than health or education or infrastructure or anything else. They need more. They're asking for more. They would like more. They can do more with more. They can do more good in the community. They can do more good for the citizens of Alberta. The Alberta government empowers our charitable organizations, allowing them more freedom to act in their own best interests as well as giving them the potential to earn more money through our charitable gaming model.

Now, although this bill is focusing on gaming, another model unique to Alberta, mandated under the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, is the retail liquor model. This model is distinct from other provinces in that it continues to allow the provincial government or the AGLC to license and regulate the liquor industry while leaving the warehousing and distributing and retailing of liquor to the private sector. According to a recent poll, when asked to rate the overall satisfaction with the way the liquor business is conducted in our province, 78 per cent of Albertans indicated a high level of satisfaction. Again, this shows our government's strong commitment to responsibly and equitably regulating these sorts of entertainment industries.

The Ministry of Public Security and Solicitor General is currently responsible for regulating Alberta's gaming industry. It is committed to ensuring that Alberta's gaming industry continues to be progressive while operating with social responsibility, Mr. Speaker. Currently gaming research is conducted by the Alberta Gaming Research Council, or the AGRC, a broad-based advisory group to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. The Alberta Gaming Research Council helps direct the research activities of the Alberta Gaming Research Institute, a consortium of educational institutions supporting and promoting research into gaming and gambling in the province. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission prides itself on its ability to conduct ongoing research to continuously improve its programs to better the industry and, in turn, Albertans' way of life.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has the most progressive well-researched and well-regulated gaming industry in the country. I am confident with the AGLC, that it will continue to secure integrity, social responsibility for the best interests of Albertans; hence, I do

not believe that establishing an all-party review committee would be effective at this time. In fact, I believe it would be a complete waste of taxpayers' dollars. So I ask all members to carefully weigh the arguments for and against Bill 210, and I urge my colleagues to vote against it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was a very impressive off-the-cuff few minutes of remarks from my hon. colleague from Drayton Valley-Calmar, who said himself that he wasn't even going to get up and speak until he heard some members on this side of the House. Then he got up and spoke so eloquently that it sounded like he'd been up all night preparing those notes, or perhaps somebody from the Public Affairs Bureau had. I don't know.

You know, every once in a while the world of rock and roll provides us with a saying that has great wisdom and timeless value in it. In 1974 the Doobie Brothers came out with an album titled *What Were Once Vices Are Now Habits*, and that describes the state of gaming in the province of Alberta and, frankly, Mr. Speaker, throughout most of North America now. It is for that reason, if no other, that beyond the work of the AGLC, this Legislature, this House should periodically, regularly, on a regular schedule, review gaming in the province of Alberta because it was a vice and now it's a habit. Of all Albertans the Albertan with the biggest gambling habit is this government because it produces \$1.4 billion in revenue every year – \$1.4 billion – an amazing amount.

I know that you'll find it hard to believe, but 1974 was practically back in my childhood. Another saying from my childhood was that the house always wins, and, boy, is that ever true, Mr. Speaker. The government scoops up one-third of all revenues from racetrack slots, 70 per cent of all revenues from casino slots, 85 per cent of all revenues from video and lottery terminals. Nobody needs gaming more and nobody does better by gaming in this province than the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I wish I could say that over the years since 1974, when the Doobie Brothers first came out with an album called *What Were Once Vices Are Now Habits*, that in fact the quality of life of Alberta and all its citizens has dramatically improved because of our increased reliance on gaming revenues, our increased acceptance of gaming in all its forms, but frankly I don't see the evidence of it. Oh, the tennis courts in my community a couple of years ago got resurfaced using community facility enhancement program funds, which ultimately trace back to lottery revenues. You can look at all kinds of specific examples like that: schools that have been able to buy biology textbooks that they didn't have enough of a supply of because the parent council went out and had a casino night, something like that. But, really, are we better off as a society?

Are we better off as a society when we ask our school parent councils and our PTAs to hold casino nights, to raise money to fill in all the gaps caused by the chronic underfunding? I know that the Education minister right now probably wants to leap to his feet and say, "How can you say that the system in Alberta is underfunded?" because that's what he says every time you use the word.

3:10

So even for the sake of argument I'll allow that maybe the Education minister, maybe, just possibly, is right that the system is not underfunded. If it's not, then the only other conclusion is that the money, the billions that we spend on education in this province, is badly spent. Because how in 2007, in the middle of a boom, can 40 communities in the city of Calgary be going without a public

elementary school? How can parent councils still have to raise money for textbooks? Previous education and learning ministers have denied that that was ever the case, but talk to almost any parent council and they'll tell you what the real fact of the matter is. You know, increasingly elementary school parent councils rely on casino nights to raise the money they need to fill in the gaps caused by this government's mismanagement of the education file.

And there are so many, many other examples of that. Since 1993 the Conservatives have been downloading the responsibility for looking after people and looking after quality of life issues onto communities and volunteer groups who have nowhere else to turn for the money but casinos and gaming revenues because this province won't properly fund any of that, yet we suck from the people of Alberta \$1.4 billion a year. It's a voluntary tax. It's a tax on the poor. Sometimes people say that it's a tax on the stupid. I'm not going to go there because I don't think you have to be stupid to play the ponies or buy lottery tickets or go to a casino or whatever.

In fact, I'm not in any way really qualified to judge who goes to those sorts of places because gambling has never in any form held any interest for me whatsoever. I've been to the track a grand total of four times in my life. The only times I've been in casinos have been when I've been volunteering with my community association on our casino nights, that sort of thing. I think the last time I bought a lottery ticket they were still called Olympic lottery tickets. It was a long, long time ago. A long time ago. It doesn't turn my crank.

Clearly, it turns a lot of Albertans' cranks. Clearly, it has been deemed a legal undertaking. Clearly, it's better that the government should be the house than the mob. Clearly. However, it's also clear that while the vast majority of people who choose to gamble can do so responsibly, I guess, for lack of a better word, do so without getting themselves into a jackpot situation – oh, bad choice of words – without putting their family finances in the rhubarb, if you will, a study done in Ontario in 2003 clearly indicates that 4.8 per cent of problem gamblers in that province accounted for approximately 36 per cent of Ontario gambling revenue. Mr. Speaker, I hammer away at the government members opposite because that's part of my job as an opposition member, no doubt, but this is not a problem that by any stretch of the imagination is exclusive to the province of Alberta. It's not.

There are social problems attached to gaming. There are policy problems attached to gaming whenever a government makes as much money off other people's vices, other people's habits, as we make off gaming. There are significant issues that need to be monitored and studied and revisited, and decisions need to be made about those things. That's why I think it's essential that we not only have a plan for gaming, but that periodically we conduct sweeping public reviews of how gaming is conducted in this province and ask the people of this province what future they see for gambling in the province and to establish a committee to plan the future role of gaming in Alberta, and to ask the committee as part of its mandate to consider re-establishing community lottery boards for distributing gaming revenues is absolutely fair and on and justifiable.

This is not to take away from the ongoing work that the AGLC does. This is to enhance that. It's to add to it. It's to make sure that what we're doing around gaming is, in fact, in the public interest of the people of Alberta and to give the people of Alberta an opportunity to speak to that as well.

I would urge passage of Bill 210. I would urge everyone in the House to vote in favour of it. Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your time.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we make decisions in government, we normally make them for financial reasons because we are put here to tax people's money and then spend it appropriately. It shouldn't be a government's position to tax their morals or to tell them where they should or shouldn't go. I've heard about the people that are protesting outside the casino. They should probably watch to see how many people are dragged off the street and thrown into the casino to spend their own money. I'm presuming most of them do it of their own free choice, whether it's good or bad or otherwise. I, too, like most of the members have very little interest in playing at the casinos although I do occasionally travel to some of the sunnier spots south and do that. That's a choice I make, and in most cases I fully intend to lose some money. That's what it's all about.

The intent of this bill is good. Unfortunately or fortunately, it's being done. The government is far ahead of the recommendations here, with the exception of trying to put MLAs in a position of deciding what to do within that department, the money. I think the administrative details of the gaming industry and the regulatory approvals and supervision need to be done by people – to say professionals may not be it – who are involved in the business, who arbitrarily deal with the policies of the government to make sure that gaming is open and transparent and that it's done under the rules of the Solicitor General's department.

Another thing that one of the hon. members over there suggested was that, you know, it might be better if they spent their money on people's important initiatives. I'm not sure if some of the pages were left out of the budget documents they got or if they just chose not to look. When you look at what the lottery fund spends, whether it's on the Alberta film development program – one of them said that we should spend some on that; we do – or assistance to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts or the Wild Rose Foundation or the major community facilities program or the community facility enhancement program or the community initiatives program or the major fairs and exhibitions or the bingos or the First Nations development fund or the centennial initiative or the assistance to the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation or the human rights, citizenship and multiculturalism education fund, the recreational sports facilities, these dollars are going back into communities where people are living, raising their families, and contributing greatly to the quality of life.

There is a downside; there's no question. When you lose your paycheque, that was to buy the diapers or pay the rent, that has a cost to society. This government has taken that responsibility very seriously through AADAC and through the department itself and the responsible gaming initiatives, addictions. Mr. Speaker, you can't have it both ways. You can't simply say that gaming is all bad, all good, or that if we were to study it longer, all of the ills that are related to it would go away. In fact, what this bill is purporting to do is being done even better, more efficiently, more effectively, not politically. Practically it's being delivered. There are about eight or 10 departments that receive hundreds of millions of dollars from the gaming fund. Clearly, the Premier has made it a major initiative.

We recognize how important it is to diversify the income streams to this province, and we are. Mr. Speaker, the nanotechnology sector, that we're supporting, expects in 15 years to be a \$20 billion to \$22 billion industry. We have some of the most innovative approaches in medical research. We're providing health care to people at a level that is seen in very few places in the world by using innovative ideas, by accessing the total dollars that come to government, and they all contribute to the pie.

We're working with the energy sector to develop different and alternative forms of energy. We're working in the agriculture sector

to try and diversify, try and value-add to make sure that we have a good, safe, secure supply of food. The forestry industry has faced challenges for years, and we're working with research, development, and marketing to make sure that their products can be sold around the world and are of utmost quality.

We're working with arts and culture. In Lloydminster about 10 days ago, Mr. Speaker, I was actually pleasantly surprised by how glowingly the artists receiving the awards spoke of being in Alberta, where they had the opportunity to live the life they dreamed of in the arts and become writers or actors and to promote the things that the Alberta government and the people of Alberta supported. I was surprised and happy that they felt so blessed to live in this province, as I do, as many people do.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, most of us in Alberta can see the positive side of what we've got here. Most of us can see the opportunities for our children. Most of us know that our parents and our grandparents will be looked after by a decent, caring government in this province. Most of us in this province realize that the environment is critically important to all of us. None of us live in a vacuum. It's a balance, and it's all brought together. It's been 36 very successful years, and unfortunately for many on the other side I have a tendency to think it'll be many more years, particularly with the approach they've taken: everything in Alberta is bad; we're just a polluting, homeless bunch of people who just can't do much; we gamble too much; we don't have roads; we don't have schools; hardly anybody learns anything. If you listen to them, it'd be a terrible place to come to.

Actually, I think it's a darn good place to live. There's a good balance between responsibility yet giving people the rights they cherish: to do what they want to do and in some cases the right to make bad decisions. Mr. Speaker, it can come from gambling. It can come from buying lottery tickets. It can come from buying a car that doesn't work from a guy in a back lot or buying a house with a leaky basement or tying yourself to a mortgage at 16 per cent. There are a lot of decisions that we let you do because that's what makes it work in this country. The responsibility you have comes from you and your family and the people around you.

So I find it not surprising that the Liberals there know what's best for everyone morally. They magically won't collect money from gaming. They'll lower taxes. They'll spend more on education. They'll spend more on everything, and they won't collect much. I'd love to have a piece of the fantasy world they live in. The hon. member continues to talk about the '70s. I guess we should have saved a bag of what they were smoking then because it might come in handy now to try and understand the way their approach is.

Mr. Speaker, I would certainly hope that the reasonably intelligent members of this Assembly would vote this down, give a vote of thanks to the Solicitor General and his department for the great job they do, and move on.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on this topic. I wasn't around like the Member for Calgary-Currie in the '60s, so I'm not sure whether there were any songs about sucking and blowing at the same time, but if there were, I'm sure this member had a 45 spinning all the time.

It was really a relief to hear that he finally for the first time admitted that there is a possibility that public education is adequately funded in this province. That's the first time I've ever heard a member from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition admit that there is

that possibility that public education may be sufficiently funded.

But that in itself would be too positive. They just couldn't have it that way. So then he goes on to say and argue, Mr. Speaker, that even though public education may be well enough funded, the money is not properly spent. Well, it doesn't take a genius to figure out, then, that obviously this member has issues with school boards. I would challenge the Member for Calgary-Currie to have the fortitude — maybe he can find a song from the '60s that he can use as a vehicle by which to deliver that message.

An Hon. Member: *I Can't Get No Satisfaction.*

Mr. Lukaszuk: *I Can't Get No Satisfaction:* there is a song that you can use.

Go to all the school boards within the province of Alberta and tell them: you're getting enough money, but you're not spending it well, and that's why teachers have to fund raise. There is no other way of interpreting what this member is saying. Hence, Mr. Speaker, lottery . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I'll now invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to close debate on Bill 210.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I would like to thank all hon. members . . .

Mr. Rodney: Really?

Mr. Tougas: Yes, even you.

. . . for participating in Bill 210 over the last couple of days. I knew, of course, from the outset that Bill 210 would go down to defeat.

An Hon. Member: You're prejudging.

Mr. Tougas: I'm prejudging? Would you like to prove me wrong? It's quiet all of a sudden, isn't it. Yeah, I knew that was going to happen.

Mr. Loughheed: Wait for the vote.

Mr. Tougas: Oh, wait for the vote. Fine. The Member for Strathcona says that we should wait for the vote to see how this is going to go. That would be quite surprising, Mr. Speaker.

To be honest, I'm disappointed by the arguments that we've heard from the government side and quite often by the calibre of debate. When we hear terms like "sucking and blowing at the same time," that we heard from the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, it doesn't exactly elevate the level of discourse in this House.

Mr. Speaker, during the debate we heard a laundry list of all the wonderful things that come from various lottery programs. Now, there's no argument here, but none of what was said is relevant to the debate on Bill 210. We heard about how much lottery money went into the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the Wild Rose Foundation. Again, no arguments here, but again not relevant. Nothing in Bill 210 would limit or restrict the distribution of money to these organizations.

Now, there were some comments that Bill 210 would duplicate reviews that are done on a regular basis by the government. There

may be some truth to this, but the difference between the performance reviews by the government and the all-party committee proposed in Bill 210 is that there would be full, open, public reviews of all aspects of gaming policy that would invite the public to help formulate gaming policy. To date gambling policy is established entirely behind closed government doors, with only the barest minimum of consultation with the people. The heart of Bill 210 is the public consultation aspect of the bill. The so-called monitoring of satisfaction with gaming policies that we've heard from government members just doesn't cut it. The questions are simply measurements of satisfaction and don't really delve deep enough to come up with a true picture of gaming in Alberta. I'm not entirely sure why the government is so worried about bringing these issues to the public, unless they're afraid of what they might hear.

Gambling is a growth industry in this province, but like with so many other industries there are moral and ethical questions attached to this growth, that would have been addressed in Bill 210. The thousands of volunteers who provide millions of hours of their time to working casinos would have had their voices heard. Again, prove me wrong.

Bill 210 might have forced the government to outline its plans for the future of gaming in Alberta. We have heard much about the government's buzzwords this year of transparency and openness. Unfortunately, faced with a chance to act with genuine transparency and openness, this government has chosen to do what it does best: make decisions behind closed doors.

Despite the impending demise of Bill 210 – and, again, if you want to prove me wrong, please do – it has been an honour to have had the opportunity to present a bill to this Legislature. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for second reading of Bill 210 lost]

Bill 211

Planning for the Future of Communities Act

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to rise in the House today and speak to open second reading debate on Bill 211, the Planning for the Future of Communities Act. I think that this has the potential to be an extremely important piece of legislation that governs the direction that we take in high-growth, rapid-growth areas and gives the people of those areas a significant stake in planning their own destiny five years out, 10 years out, 50 years out. It gives us the opportunity to design the communities we want in the Alberta that we need.

The objective of this legislation is to ensure that a long-term vision and long-term goals guide the decision-making dealing with growth in the province of Alberta, and it provides for co-ordination of growth policies among all levels of government. What the bill would do is designate specific geographical regions of Alberta as growth-plan areas. Within these areas a regional planning commission would be established, consisting of representatives of the provincial government, all the municipal governments within the region, stakeholders, and public representation as well, and those commissions would develop appropriate growth plans for the specific regions.

3:30

So what this bill is about, in short, is a return to regional planning. It is about land use. It is about environmental considerations. It is about human health and well-being. It is about quality of life and sustainability of that quality of life. It is about continued economic

growth. It is about creating a predictable, sustainable framework within which that economic growth can occur, and it is about livable, sustainable communities, the communities that we want in the Alberta that we need.

Now, there are many already who are on record as supporting legislation very much like this, as supporting the concepts and the principles behind this legislation. The current Premier during the leadership campaign said, and I quote: without a regional plan we'll have a disjointed patchwork that will create additional problems in the future. To help municipalities facing significant growth pressures, I believe government must provide new, predictable, and long-term funding. I believe this will be welcomed in places like Fort McMurray where the infrastructure needs cannot keep up with the population growth.

This bill, of course, is a private member's bill. It cannot be about funding. It cannot be about money, so it's not. Money, funding, from time to time, if this bill is adopted, may have to follow some of the decisions made by the regional growth planning commissions, the regional advisory committees, and that will be dealt with in the fullness of time, Mr. Speaker. But one of things that is needed is to bring some order to chaos, and we've been in a rather chaotic situation. It wasn't too noticeable for the first few years since 1995 because we weren't growing as wildly as we are today. But since growth took off like a rocket, it's been rather chaotic, and it's, rather, not an every man but an every municipality for themselves approach to trying to grab at the brass ring, if you will.

That pits counties and cities, towns and municipal districts against one another. It has caused an untold amount of conflict between the city of Edmonton and the other 22 municipalities that are part of the Alberta Capital Region Alliance. There is conflict between the city of Calgary and the municipal district of Rocky View. There has been conflict, which seems to have been resolved to an extent I'm happy to say – and I hope that the resolution holds – between the city of Red Deer and the county of Red Deer. There's dispute between the city of Grande Prairie and the county of Grande Prairie. There are disputes almost everywhere you look, where urban and rural areas come into conflict and sometimes collision over what should be common interests.

The situation here is that there's a challenge that all this growth pressure presents to municipalities, a challenge that has implications beyond each municipality's borders. Bill 211, if passed, will allow us to make rational – and by us I mean all the people of Alberta, and I'll come back to that point in a minute – and balanced decisions about the way that we grow in the future, decisions that will strengthen our economy, decisions that will promote a healthy and sustainable environment and a high quality of life for all Albertans. This is enabling legislation that would allow the designation of certain geographical areas as growth-plan areas and the development of plans to focus and guide the regions' further development.

I want to come back to that notion that it would allow us to make rational and balanced decisions about the way we grow in the future and to reiterate that when I say us, I mean all people in Alberta; I don't just mean the provincial government. Bill 211 will provide the province with a flexible mechanism to facilitate intermunicipal planning. In periods and areas of rapid growth I don't think planning is an option; it's a required element. This bill balances our respect for municipal autonomy with the clear need for a provincial role in supportive integrated intermunicipal planning. The province has a clear role in ensuring that planning occurs, but we believe those plans are best developed by the local people: local citizens, local leaders. The outcomes of better, more integrated planning, we believe, will include more cost-effective delivery of services, stronger economic prospects, a certainty that the infrastructure is

located where it's needed and is in place when it's needed, a sustained high quality of life, whether that's in terms of community design, transportation, environmental protection, whatever.

As the bill itself says: a growth plan may contain policies, goals, and criteria in relation to intensification and density, land supply for residential, employment and other uses, the location of industry and commerce, conservation of energy, infrastructure development and location of infrastructure and institutions, transportation planning, municipal waste management planning, growth-related capital spending and financing, affordable housing – this bill would allow affordable housing now to become a planning priority – community design, including the heritage character of neighbourhoods and buildings and community historical resources. And as you have seen, because I know that everybody in the House has done their homework on this bill, a host of other possibilities as well.

The idea is to create growth plans that will govern future growth and development decisions in the growth area so that plans, bylaws, actions, developments must be consistent with the plan. The plan is the overarching design. So we enter municipal disputes over the application of the plan that get referred to the Municipal Government Board. Growth plans prevail over other regulatory approvals by the NRCB or the EUB. There are a growing number of people in Alberta affected by those decisions who do not believe that they have sufficient input into those decisions, sufficient influence over the process of making decisions, and they're certainly not happy with the outcome of those decisions.

Conflicts between growth plans and other plans and policies will always be resolved in favour of the one that provides the greatest protection for the environment and human health. Very good reason for that. We can make oodles and oodles of money over the next couple of years by continuing on in the current context, but we can only do that while creating great damage to the environment and to the social environment if we continue on the path we're on. We don't want to end up there. When this boom is over, as booms always end, we want to end up ensuring that the places where we live and the places where we grow provide an ongoing sustainable quality of life that in and of itself encourages future and ongoing economic growth and development. So this is important. It puts people first, but it puts people first in concert with continued, orderly economic growth.

There's really a great deal more that I could say about this, but I know that my colleagues want to join the debate. I would simply urge you to review Bill 211 carefully, see the wisdom in it, and hopefully this House will support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. The idea around planning and that is good. You bet. The municipalities all talked about it: the bigger centres that are infringing on the smaller big centres. There's no question that it's in the best interests of municipal governments to develop a framework where they can deal with the issues on a regional basis or on an issue basis.

The big difference from this government or this bill is that we want to work co-operatively with the municipalities. They want to maintain their identity within a bigger planning framework. This bill, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, is code for forced amalgamation. There is no way that you can give a regional planning group the responsibilities left out here in section 4, everything from capital spending and financing to waste management, transportation planning, location. That is creating another level of government that

most municipalities don't want. They want to be included in a planning process. They don't want to be told by a committee that only answers to the Lieutenant Governor that: "We have a plan that's being forced on you. You can like it or lump it, but we're going to do what we want."

3:40

A bill in this growth plan that says that the growth plan prevails over any licence, permit, approval, or other authorization granted by the NRCB and that – Mr. Speaker, one of the most contentious issues in this province is going to be water licence and water rights. If the hon. member thinks that you can just create a bill that will roll over or supersede water rights which were established long before the province was, then, while his intentions may be good, his understanding of the legal opportunity there is not.

Mr. Speaker, there are, as they say, many ways to skin a cat. I think the way our Premier and our minister have approached regional planning is that that is an opportunity out there. It shouldn't become another bureaucratic step in the way of development. Many municipalities – Wood Buffalo, for example – have done this, where they have developed a regional concept and they're moving forward, yet their problems are still there because of the tremendous growth. A plan or another group around a regional planning committee is not the be-all and end-all, the answer to all.

I don't believe that setting up a committee with the broad, broad tremendous scope as proposed here in Bill 211 would be accepted by municipalities in any way. I believe they would see it for what it is, which is forced amalgamation. Mr. Speaker, that is not where this government has come from. I certainly don't think as a former municipal councillor that I want to have a group appointed that has the opportunity to rule over all aspects of our communities. I like the approach of one of co-operation, done from a practical point of view with the municipalities involved. It is certainly far better in the long run. It certainly respects the right of individual municipalities and the tremendous opportunity that the municipal councillors and all of them bring to the table to work in this.

I wouldn't support Bill 211, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and join the debate and speak in support of Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act. I want to thank the sponsor, my colleague, the MLA for Calgary-Currie. The impact of this bill would mandate complete growth plans for specific regions. The rationale is that in order to accommodate future population growth, continue to support economic prosperity, and achieve a high quality of life for Albertans, planning must occur in a rational and strategic way that recognizes that an integrated and co-ordinated approach that determines future growth requirements must occur regionally to ensure that long-term vision and long-term goals guide decision-making, dealing with the growth in Alberta, and provide for the co-ordination of growth policies among all levels of government.

To provide for an appropriate range of housing types and densities required to meet the projected requirement of current and future residents of regional municipalities or regions facing unprecedented growth, Mr. Speaker, this legislation would allow for the provincial government to designate specific geographical areas of Alberta as growth plan areas. Within these areas a regional planning commission would be established, consisting of representatives of the provincial government, municipal governments within the region, stakeholders, and public representatives who would develop appropriate growth plans for the specific regions. These plans would

then be used to focus and guide the region's future development. This growth planning process would encourage broader, more comprehensive planning that links land-use planning decisions to future infrastructure needs.

Mr. Speaker, this would create a new mechanism to deal effectively with the broader planning issues that go beyond both the boundaries and the interest of individual municipalities. Elements contained within these integrated growth plans could be population projections and allocations; policies, goals, and criteria relating to issues such as intensification and density; location and the density of industry, commerce; protection of sensitive and significant lands, including agricultural lands and water resources; infrastructure development; and community design. In other words, a truly integrated system of planning completed regionally to guide present and future development of the region.

This type of legislation would require individual municipalities to bring their municipal development plans into conformity with the regional growth plan. This is essentially a provincial land-use strategy but could encompass much more. I would protect agricultural land; preserve watersheds, forests, and rivers; and address air quality issues; promote healthier Albertans by encouraging open spaces and parklands; set limits on where urban boundaries can expand and cannot expand; provide for affordable housing; more importantly, guide the development of Alberta well into the future. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Calgary-Currie already explained, you know, how this Bill 211 provides the province with a flexible mechanism to facilitate intermunicipal planning.

Mr. Speaker, we need to take a different approach to planning, and we want to start planning for the future of Alberta in a balanced and co-ordinated fashion. Bill 211, this proposed legislation, would ensure that whatever planning decisions we make, we would always ensure the protection of the environment, of prime agricultural lands and natural resources that drive Alberta's economy. We will ensure the future sustainability of our communities.

Alberta is growing at a rate that is unprecedented. Every day people move to Alberta in search of a better quality of life. Those numbers will continue to increase. We must plan right now for that growth. We must plan in a way that integrates and brings together under one focused plan everything required to build vibrant communities and a vigorous economy while at the same time protecting our natural environment and our health.

We cannot continue to make planning decisions in isolation. Alberta's future cannot be planned like that, so this legislation will allow us to co-ordinate growth for geographic-specific areas of the province. It will allow the integration of infrastructure requirements of roads, of affordable housing, of community design, of the location of industry and commerce, of the population projections and allocations. In short, it will guide planning and development across all sectors to ensure our future prosperity.

3:50

The purpose of this bill is very clear. We want our communities to be places where everyone has access to a place to live, to hospitals, jobs, and recreational facilities. We want our communities to be places where families can live and work and participate in vibrant communities. These are the communities we want and the Alberta we need.

Bill 211 allows not only for continued economic success, but it ensures that economic growth is sensible and sustainable. As Alberta's economy continues to grow, our environment and our quality of life must continue to be great. This legislation is all about helping the people of Alberta and the government make better choices for a better future. We want our communities of the future

to be places where all Albertans can enjoy clean air, clean water, and sustainable and vibrant communities. It's up to us right here in this Legislature to make that happen, to take these necessary steps so that we can leave the legacy for future generations.

These are goals deserving of this Legislature, and Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act, will allow us to achieve them, so I urge all the members sitting in this House to support this bill. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence and with the indulgence of the Assembly I would seek unanimous consent to allow us to be able to take off our jackets.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder to members that permission is not granted to assume the normal rules of committee, so you must remain in your seats. Just remove your jackets.

I assume that you didn't wish to speak in the debate.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to stand and talk to Bill 211.

Bill 211 proposes to establish growth plan areas that would be designated to oversee the development of municipalities in Alberta. As I understand it, each growth plan area would have to establish an advisory committee, including representatives from municipalities within that growth plan area, the government of Alberta, and the general public.

Improved municipal planning could alleviate concerns about the pace of growth, but Bill 211 is not the way to achieve it. Bill 211 proposes a significant change in municipal planning as it usurps planning responsibilities from municipalities and shifts them to the government of Alberta. Bill 211 does not recognize the cost of funding advisory committees and does not provide guidance on which level of government would bear this cost. Mr. Speaker, there is no indication of whether advisory committees are permanent planning bodies or are in place to address growth issues for temporary periods.

I want to emphasize that municipalities need some predictability and sustainability for the future, which very much involves regional discussion. Bill 211 would place this government in direct control of addressing regional planning issues as opposed to an open and co-operative approach to dealing with municipal issues. Mr. Speaker, this bill falls outside the planning framework laid out in the Municipal Government Act since there are consultations ongoing with municipalities on municipal planning. It would be more appropriate to include any changes within the MGA once consultations are complete. We have talked in question period many times about the consultation that is happening with municipalities, with the municipal associations, with the minister's council. I think it would be more appropriate to have consultation with those groups and those association and go from there.

The bill does not include any guidelines with respect to determining the representation of municipalities. Larger municipalities may feel that they are underrepresented due to the growth pressures brought on by rapidly growing populations. The municipal sustainability initiative is providing funding in 2007-08 for intermunicipal co-operative initiatives and co-operative projects. Mr. Speaker, additionally the Minister of Sustainable Resource

Development is developing a land-use framework which will provide a vision for an integrated, sustainable land-use approach that balances, if I can say, economic, environmental, and social concerns.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, this bill does not identify emergency prevention and preparation as an issue to consider within a growth plan. Advisory committees would be unable to conduct regional emergency planning without including that provision.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I am not supporting Bill 211.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act. I think that as we look at the purpose of this bill, it's important to understand the background. As Alberta continues to grow at an accelerated rate, there's a tremendous potential to enjoy lucrative economic benefits. However, this potential is seriously jeopardized in certain high-growth areas where the lack of a mechanism under the Municipal Government Act, the MGA, to mandate regional planning is affecting the future growth potential of municipalities and leading to serious land-use complications.

The current MGA was introduced in 1995, and it's main principle was to ensure that municipalities could act with natural person powers, essentially as individual corporations making decisions in isolation. The MGA does not prescribe intermunicipal co-operation on land-use planning but, rather, is permissive in this regard. The effect of this is that municipalities make land-use planning decisions in isolation that quite often are not in the best interests of the region or the province.

This is the 21st century. I think that in most cases we understand that with 21st leadership there is a need for co-operation and collaboration and greater understanding of community, but we have a failure with this MGA. An example of this is the failure of the Alberta Capital Region Alliance, ACRA, as noted recently by the mayor of Edmonton. The inability of Edmonton and its regional partners to pull together is our biggest challenge. Working in silos is not just silly; it's destructive.

We have report after report indicating that there is a greater need, a huge need, for regional planning. The government's own Radke report clearly indicates that the lack of regional planning in the capital region in terms of infrastructure, transportation, environmental considerations, water use by the proposed upgraders, lack of knowledge of groundwater quality and the government's lack of involvement in regional planning could have serious implications for the future of the capital region.

4:00

The purpose of Bill 211 is to provide a mechanism to plan for future sustainable communities where growth pressures are presenting challenges to municipalities that have implications beyond their own borders. This legislation will allow the province to make rational and balanced decisions about the way we grow in the future, decisions that will strengthen our economy, promote a healthy and sustainable environment, and support a high quality of life for all Albertans. This is enabling legislation that would allow the designation of a certain geographical area as a growth plan area and the development of plans to focus and guide the region's future development. It's in the spirit of co-operation and collaboration and understanding of community and the recognition that one area's benefiting means that the province benefits. If one area loses, we all lose.

Bill 211's approach is to be collaborative with municipalities as

partners in this process. Instead of the minister preparing proposed growth plans for designated areas as well as defining specific growth areas, this act has that responsibility passed to an advisory committee for the preparation of growth plans, with the Lieutenant Governor in Council approving the designation of growth plan areas and growth plans. So this legislation would mandate complete growth plans for specific regions. The rationale is that in order to accommodate future population growth, continue to support economic prosperity, and achieve a high quality of life for Albertans, planning must occur in a rational and strategic way that recognizes that an integrated and co-ordinated approach that determines future growth requirements must occur regionally. We must work together. To me it seems like common sense to ensure that a long-term vision and long-term goals guide decision-making dealing with growth in Alberta and provide for co-ordination of growth policies among all levels of government.

Local autonomy is crucial and important as decisions are made with continued orderly growth that benefits the entire province. This legislation would allow for the provincial government to designate specific regional or geographical areas of growth of Alberta as growth plan areas. Within these areas a regional planning commission would be established consisting of representatives of the provincial government, municipal governments within the region, stakeholders, and public representation who could develop appropriate growth plans for the specific regions.

These plans would then be used to focus and guide the region's future development, and these plans would have been made with collaboration and co-operation, with discussion, and lead to consensus, something that I hope in the 21st century is going to be more common. This growth planning process would encourage broader, more comprehensive planning that links land-use planning decisions to future infrastructure needs. This would create a new mechanism to deal effectively with broader planning issues that go beyond both the boundaries and the interests of individual municipalities. This type of legislation would require individual municipalities to bring their municipal development plans into conformity with the regional growth plan. Again, I emphasize that it's a matter of co-operation and a sense of community, that we really are one. What benefits one can benefit all. At the same time, what harms one can harm all.

This is essentially a provincial land-use strategy, which is sorely needed, but it could also encompass much more. It would protect agricultural lands, preserve watersheds, forests, and rivers, and address air quality issues, promote healthier Albertans by encouraging open spaces and parklands, set limits on where urban boundaries can expand and cannot expand, provide for affordable housing, and, most importantly, guide the development of Alberta well into the future.

Bill 211 provides the province with a flexible mechanism to facilitate intermunicipal planning. There is no doubt that we must have intermunicipal planning. In periods and areas of rapid growth planning is not an option. This bill balances a respect for municipal autonomy and the clear need for a provincial role in support of integrated intermunicipal planning. The province has a role in ensuring that planning occurs, but we believe these plans are best developed by local leaders and citizens. The outcomes of better, more integrated planning may include, for example, more cost-effective delivery of services, stronger economic prospects, sustaining a high quality of life, community design, transportation, environmental protection, et cetera.

I grew up in the Crownsnest Pass at a time when there was a great, I guess, desire not to amalgamate and not to work together. It's interesting to go back now after a number of years to see the benefits

of actually working together and the cost reductions, the co-operation that's going on to produce better opportunities for schooling and so forth.

I think that in order to accommodate the tremendous rate of growth in certain geographical areas and to accommodate the future growth potential of communities and to ensure their economic prosperity, to guarantee a high quality of life for all Albertans, and to maintain a sustainable and vibrant environment, planning must occur in a co-ordinated and strategic manner. We can look all over to find examples where planning and working together has benefited the people.

Bill 211 provides a mechanism to deal effectively with those broader planning issues, which all too often transcend both the boundaries and the interests of individual municipalities. We cannot, especially in key high-growth areas, continue to make decisions in isolation. It doesn't make any sense. We will all lose if we do that. The proposed Planning for the Future of Communities Act will ensure that our choices about the future are guided by a long-term vision of the kind of strong and healthy communities that Albertans want to see.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have before us Bill 211, the Planning for the Future of Communities Act. It proposes new co-ordination and planning requirements for municipalities. This is a complex subject and in many ways extends beyond the capacity of a private member's bill. However, I do appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie bringing this bill forward so that we may bring all members up to speed on this government's municipal initiatives.

It has been refreshing to hear once again how our government is actively working on addressing municipal growth concerns either through the new municipal sustainability funding or through the consideration of the report from the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability, which I know, Mr. Speaker, is vigorously working its way through the process. Clearly, when considering the work that is already being undertaken, the government is carrying its weight on handling municipal development.

I think the other speakers have adequately covered topics relating to municipal planning and development, so this afternoon I want to focus specifically on one element of the business of a municipality, and that would be the element of housing and community infrastructure. As Bill 211 recognizes, part of developing a productive municipality is addressing social and cultural concerns. The bill correctly identifies both these issues as critical to sustainable municipal growth. However, here, just as in most circumstances, the Liberal opposition fails to recognize the work this government is accomplishing in relation to housing and community infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, housing has been a significant issue facing every single member of this Assembly. It's an issue that confronts urban and rural centres in the four corners of this province. Or should I say five corners? There is no question that every Albertan needs some form of roof over their head. However, before I address the government response to the need for additional housing, we need to consider the housing construction that is going on in this province.

In the last three years, Mr. Speaker, housing starts have exceeded 40,000 per year and were over 50,000 in 2006. This represents 25 per cent of home construction in Canada. It is a reflection of the thousands of individuals that move to Alberta every month. Twenty-five per cent of construction, yet only 10 per cent, roughly, of the national population. This tells me something. It tells me of the great

desire of people to own their own home, which is really one of the greatest sources of independence for an individual. We must also bear in mind that this level of construction has sustained employment and supported many businesses and communities throughout the province.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, as I think of my own community of Drayton Valley and Calmar and surrounding area, I think of all the new homes going up as well as all the new businesses going in. What does this do? It creates jobs. It creates long-term sustainability. This level of construction and the eagerness of individuals to own their own home is a great Alberta success story despite the fog of rhetoric generated by members opposite.

In Alberta there are situations where individuals are unable to own their own home or unable to afford the rent for an apartment. This government opted to address the problem by supporting the construction of affordable housing and supporting individuals through income supplements. To support the construction of affordable housing units, our government announced a municipal sustainability housing program. This program has a \$100 million per year budget available over the next three years. Now, that's \$300 million, Mr. Speaker. This initiative is part of the new municipal sustainability program and will specifically address housing concerns in high-growth and high-need municipalities such as Drayton Valley. It is intended that this funding be available on a consistent and a sustainable basis for the next 10 years, and I believe that'll happen. I believe that our boom is going to continue and that we will be able to address these growth issues over the coming years.

Funding for affordable housing extends to capital enhancement of \$96 million in 2007-2008. By working with other levels of government and the private and nonprofit sectors, it is expected that 11,000 new housing units will be built over the next five years. Combined, both programs represent nearly \$400 million over the next three years for affordable housing units. The critical element to this funding is that it is given to municipalities to address their own unique issues. There is no cookie-cutter template to add affordable housing units. If it were available, I have no doubt that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing would have found it by now and would have informed the Assembly of its existence. The approach of this government is preferable because it recognizes that municipalities each have unique issues. They're all different. They all have ideas. They all have plans, their own municipal plans, as to how to address this important issue.

I also want to address what I'm going to term community infrastructure. I'm talking about libraries, cultural and community centres, swimming pools, arenas, concert halls, art galleries, and museums. All of these facilities enhance quality of life and, perhaps most importantly, make communities attractive places to live, work, and prosper. To address the need for community infrastructure, the municipal sustainability initiative has allocated \$75 million in 2007-08 through a community capital envelope.

Now, community infrastructure is not only needed in new communities and neighbourhoods, but there are many facilities needing to be replaced and refurbished. We know that. Alberta just celebrated 100 years last year, and some of these facilities are getting old. Recognizing the demand for such facilities, Budget 2007 announced funding for community facilities above the community capital funding in the municipal sustainability initiative.

The Department of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture is responsible for two new programs supporting community infrastructure. The first program – I think it was mentioned earlier – is the major community facilities program. Over the next two years, Mr.

Speaker, \$280 million is available to support significant public-use facilities in our province. It's intended that the program will allow municipalities to build recreational and cultural facilities that will enhance the well-being of Albertans. That is the singular focus of this initiative, and as such it is an outstanding legacy for future generations.

The second program will provide \$90 million through a recreation and sport facilities grant program. While it is specifically targeted to sports, I'm sure that the hockey and soccer moms and dads in my constituency will be appreciative of support for new fields and new arenas in addition to the other recreation and sport facilities that are needed in this province.

Overall there's sizable support for community infrastructure, which is part of a rather sizable capital plan for this province. In fact, it is an unprecedented investment in our communities. Our municipalities stand to build and enhance communities which will make every Albertan and every newcomer to this province proud to call this wonderful place their home. Mr. Speaker, this government is addressing the very concerns of municipalities, including housing and community infrastructure. Both items cover the so-called social issues that are very important in maintaining sustainable economic growth.

Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act, is an interesting document. However, I wonder when considering the initiatives of this government in relation to municipal growth – that is, the municipal sustainability program and the land-use framework – if this legislation was formed within some sort of vacuum. Now, there are growth pressures, and there is a need to address municipal co-operation, and this bill may help to provide the answer, but as I said, this is a complex issue. As legislators we cannot pretend that this issue would be dealt with after only two hours of debate.

Mr. Speaker, there will be positive results arising from the municipal sustainability program. It's already happening around Alberta. There's also the need to allow the land-use framework consultation to complete its work as the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has said in his comments on this bill.

When I weigh all of this together, Mr. Speaker, I have difficulty supporting Bill 211, considering that there is work already being done in relation to supporting strong communities. So I guess my answer is no. No, I will not be supporting Bill 211, and I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It is my hope that at some point within the legislative session this year or next the value of a variety of ideas and the wisdom of a number of sources will be taken into consideration. It seems that frequently in this House we're at the knuckle-dragging, chest-thumping state of mantra and chanting: government good, opposition bad.

We have the legislative democratic process. It's called amendment. So if there's something you don't like, may I suggest you use your intellect to amend and change and fix as opposed to just simply tossing it out because you don't like the source from which the information came or the party or the individual? We have to get past that. I had hoped that within this legislative session the all-party policy committees, the field committees, would be actually under way. This is the one change that I looked most forward to, the idea of combined, collaborative thinking. This is the type of thinking that Bill 211 is calling for.

Bill 211 sees the role of the government as a funder, as a facilitator,

as a collaborator, not a dictator, not a forced amalgamator, nor a micromanager. Right now this government has got its tendrils so far into municipal governments' planning that with the exception of, I believe, the \$127 million, for example, that was offered to Calgary as part of the eventual \$1.4 billion portion, this government feels that it needs to micromanage every last decision. It doesn't matter that municipal leaders and councillors were elected. It doesn't matter that school boards once had control over half of their own budget, which this government took away.

This notion, this nonsensical idea of: "We know best; we've done it for 36 years. Things must be just wonderful, so just leave them the way they are. Let the market decide. If the market needs a little bit of a tune-up, let's throw money at it, such as the millions and millions of dollars that were quoted by the member, as justification." Money does not equal planning, and that's what Bill 211 is trying to address. You know, we're accused of doomsday attitudes, of always seeing the darkness and refusing to see the light, but we don't accept that what we currently have in Alberta is the most illuminated circumstance that we could possibly have, that everything is fine; let it continue. What we as Alberta Liberals and other parties have tried to do is suggest alternatives.

4:20

The previous member spoke of the housing solutions, and he spoke in terms of dollars. Well, let me suggest that it's a lot more expensive to correct a mistake than to prevent it in the first place. You can't just hope to buy your way back to a just and genuine progress form of lifestyle for Albertans. If we could solve Alberta's problems strictly with money and we didn't have to plan and we just sort of tuned into the market – "What are the shares today? Okay. That's good. Let's buy a few of those" – then governing would be absolutely easy. It would be just a matter of reading the stocks and tuning into the market. But that's not the case. We need at times to intervene.

Right now the government is very content to provide emergency funding for vulnerable individuals. Far be it from me to say that they shouldn't do that, but how long do you keep plugging dollars into that leaky dike of taxpayers' dollars before you get your first affordable house built? Once you've got that first affordable house built, what kind of support mechanisms are there for the people who would potentially inhabit that house? You sort of see the beginning, you see the end, and unfortunately you frequently ignore the middle, and we're in that interim middle when it comes to affordable housing. The government has no balance. The boom is on, and we need people to fill the jobs, but we don't have accommodations for them. We're always playing catch-up, and playing catch-up is a very expensive, nonproductive game to play.

One thing that I believe all members in this House can accept – and it's based on the fact that it comes from a neutral source – is Dr. Brad Stelfox's presentations. Dr. Brad Stelfox has done a series of presentations on a variety of issues, but they all deal with the growth. They take a historical perspective, and then they provide a little bit of future suggestions as to: if we continue along this particular line, this is where we'll end up; if we continue along that line, here is where our projections say we'll finally end up.

Anyone who has seen Dr. Brad Stelfox's presentations, whether it was in Canmore in the spring of 2005 at the parks and protected areas or whether it was with the PNWER presentation in the summer of 2006, regardless of where they saw it, what Brad Stelfox does is show the growth that has occurred in this province since 1900. He indicates that growth by a series of dots, and what you start to see as the years progress is a series of dots of different colours that indicate agricultural land use, industrial well sites, and so on. It shows the

growth and footprints of the cities. It shows the current rate of loss of farmland. It shows the depleting nature of our water resources.

What Brad Stelfox doesn't do is exactly what I wish the government wouldn't do, and that's come up with the ultimate end answer. Brad Stelfox says: here's the information, people; let's get our collective heads around this and come up with a solution. Because of that Brad has been welcomed in numerous government presentations, and I thank the government for having the wisdom to have Dr. Stelfox take on these explanations and PowerPoint presentations. The last presentation that I saw from Dr. Stelfox had to do with the last five miles, the area in the southeast Rockies that the Nature Conservancy is so concerned about protecting.

If we don't get it right now, we leave no legacy for our children and their children and generations to come. What we don't have right now is any kind of a balance between our environmental requirements for a quality of life: breathable air, water that will continue to be available. All this government appears to be doing at this point is letting the market decide. Put that money into your pocket as fast as you can. Put it into your right pocket, and then transfer it to your left pocket. Overspend by \$2,000 per Albertan what you take in in general revenue. Dip into what should be going into the heritage trust fund. Dip into the surpluses. Just get that money out there. Why? Because the government failed to plan back in 1994. The preoccupation with paying down the debt has resulted in tremendous extra expense. [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, I have to remind you that we're not in the committee stage of the bill. We're in second reading.

An Hon. Member: Hey, George, get back in your seat.

Mr. VanderBurg: I apologize.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to make some comments today on Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act. This bill hopes to establish a new planning and co-ordination requirement to support municipal development and intermunicipal or regional co-operation. In other words, it's a shotgun marriage. The contents of the growth plans as proposed in Bill 211 would include population projections, growth strategies and policies, goals and criteria related to land supply, location of industry, and conservation of energy, among others.

This province has long recognized the critical importance of strong local government and has developed a tradition of visionary local government systems. This is reflected in the Municipal Government Act, which places a focus on the autonomy and the accountability of municipalities while empowering them to take more action on local planning and development. Most municipalities want to retain their ability to address planning and growth issues, allowing them to adapt to the unique challenges and needs of their particular region. For many areas of Alberta the broad enabling provisions within the current planning framework continue to work very well. Municipalities are able to develop plans and intermunicipal agreements to achieve high levels of co-ordination and co-operation, creating solutions beneficial to all parties.

By allowing municipalities to manage their own endeavours, we allow municipalities to grow to their fullest potential by giving them autonomy and empowering them rather than imposing restrictions.

The Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing strongly believes that each municipality must grow according to the desires of its citizens and own the right to realize economic development and prosperity. As a result, it encourages intermunicipal partnerships and facilitates common resource sharing, regional partnership initiatives, and various joint planning initiatives.

The regional municipality of Wood Buffalo is a prime example of a flourishing and successful model of intermunicipal co-operation. The municipality of Wood Buffalo has been able to work effectively by liaising with other stakeholders and surrounding municipalities to attain the region's goals and mutual benefit to all. For example, because of its flourishing economy and effective intermunicipal co-operation, it is predicted that by 2011 the municipality of Wood Buffalo will have created some 17,000 new jobs for our province. The creation of jobs in the municipality has a significant relationship to its increase in population. Between 2001 and 2006 Wood Buffalo's population increased by some 24.3 per cent, showing to be a benefit not only to the municipality and the region but also having a direct, positive contribution to our province's economic growth.

4:30

By creating a forum where municipalities must deal with one another by means of intermunicipal co-operation, we have strived to create stronger and more effective municipalities, resulting in tighter knit, municipally responsible communities which look out for each other's best interests. A great example of this is Lac La Biche in Lakeland county, approximately 220 kilometres northeast of Edmonton. Over the years the area has flourished into a stable economic climate and thriving business community. As Lac La Biche is conveniently located between two major oil sands producing areas, Fort McMurray and Cold Lake, seismic drilling and pipeline construction have become an issue among its citizens, but due to successful intermunicipal co-operation the region has benefited from the industries, turning the area into a vibrant and growing community.

Lac La Biche and its surrounding municipalities have learned to effectively work together on regional matters such as information sharing and networking, advocating regional interests, providing research on regional issues, providing a forum for stakeholders, facilitating implementation of regional initiatives, and working as a team to meet the economic and environmental and social goals of the region.

I'd like to talk a bit about the benefits that we are currently seeing in the Rocky Mountain House constituency. The county of Clearwater, the town of Rocky Mountain House, and Caroline have for years worked as a unit. As a matter of fact, there are a number of joint municipal plans and agencies working with the waste management system, fire and ambulance, joint planning around those urban centres. As a matter of fact, when I was still there, we initiated a program where we were actually cost sharing. We were giving to Rocky Mountain House and Caroline a portion of the taxes that we collected from the large gas plants in the county. This has enabled us to work with those urban municipalities, and I would just hate to see the provincial government force onto that area a new planning system.

It's now happening in the county of Mountain View with the town of Sundre, which is in the Rocky constituency, and I understand it's also happening with some of the other towns within the county of Mountain View. They have a joint ambulance service, joint planning around the municipality. In the county of Lacombe: in the town of Eckville an emergency building was paid for by the town of Eckville plus the county, with county money coming into recreation facilities within the town. So it's working. Let's leave it alone. Don't impose a new level.

Municipal Affairs and Housing understands the divergent benefits from well-functioning intermunicipal relationships and has for years shown dedication by means of providing long-term funding. Initiatives such as the targeted investment initiative provide grants to certain municipalities with limited financial resources. This has enabled many municipalities to cope with priority spending pressures, thus helping ensure long-term sustainability. As well, a partnership established in 2001 between Alberta and the federal government created the Canada/Alberta municipal rural infrastructure fund, which responds to local needs and priorities of municipalities by helping to provide clean water, better sewage systems, upgraded waste management processes, and safe roads and bridges. Also under the Canada/Alberta municipal rural infrastructure fund there exists a municipal capacity building special projects fund established to help municipalities to implement modern and innovative life cycle management plans for their infrastructure assets.

Furthermore, as a result of our government's dedication to providing strong, sustainable municipalities, the 2007 budget introduced the municipal sustainability initiative, which will provide some 1.4 billion dollars to Alberta municipalities, phased in over the next four years. This new funding will include incentives to encourage collaboration and co-operation between municipalities and provide needed financial support for critical core and community infrastructure projects. This will enable high-growth municipalities around the province to be better able to anticipate and meet growth-related challenges.

Through the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability our government received further recommendations on how to enhance the long-term sustainability of municipal governments and fully capitalize on the opportunity presented by Alberta's strong economic climate. Ideas such as further negotiating intermunicipal development plans and helping to establish more complex intermunicipal relations are all ideas our government is considering to strengthen intermunicipal co-operation while keeping power at the local level.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In order to achieve success in Alberta's growing economy, it is paramount that we support each municipality in its own endeavours. Strong municipalities provide critical and visible services at the local level while instilling accountability and responsibility through the region, helping to contribute to a great and strong and unified province . . . [Mr. Lund's speaking time expired]

Mr. Speaker, I remember years back, when we had the regional planning commissions . . .

The Speaker: I think it was time there, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: It's a good thing you got that last plug in there. That was very important. We weren't sure where you were going with that, so thank you for clarifying that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and say a few brief words about Bill 211, the Planning for the Future of Communities Act. I'd like to thank my colleague and friend from Calgary-Currie for bringing forward this bill. I hope he has a little bit better luck with his than I had with mine, but I'm not getting that vibe here this afternoon, so I think his is going to meet the same fate as mine. But we shall carry on. [interjection] Yes, vibe.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most amazing statements ever uttered by a politician in Alberta came from the former Premier, Ralph Klein. Now, when Ralph Klein was Premier, he made a lot of quite

amazing statements, but perhaps his crowning achievement was his admission that the government had no plan to deal with Alberta's explosive growth. That was really one for the history books. While it has been apparent for years that the government really had no plans for the future, the fact that the man in charge of the government would admit that the government was without a plan was quite astonishing, even by Premier Klein's standards.

With the government's well-known aversion to planning, Bill 211 is needed now more than ever. The purpose of Bill 211 is to provide a mechanism to plan for future sustainable communities where growth pressures are presenting a challenge to municipalities that have implications beyond their borders. The legislation would allow the designation of certain geographical areas as growth areas and the development of plans to focus and guide the regions' future development.

Bill 211 would be collaborative, treating municipalities as equal partners rather than junior partners in the Alberta family business. Mr. Speaker, the importance of planning cannot be overstated. Businesses around the world depend on planning for their long-term survival. Indeed, in the business world many very successful companies have foundered when they failed to plan properly. Alberta's current state reminds me of a number of companies in business history who expanded during boom times only to find that they had expanded too far and too fast, resulting in their demise. This legislation would mandate that the growth areas would produce complete growth plans. Planning must occur in a rational and strategic way that recognizes that an integrated and co-ordinated approach that determines future growth can only be accomplished with all parties at the table planning for the future.

4:40

Perhaps nowhere is the need for planning more evident than in the capital region. Edmonton is faced with an untenable situation of having 23 municipalities in the Alberta Capital Region Alliance. The mayor of Edmonton, Stephen Mandel, quite correctly described it as working in silos. Report after report indicates the need for regional planning. The Hemson report states that the capital region's inefficiencies will erode competitiveness. The Percy report clearly advocated for regional collaboration. The McNally royal commission, which is a 50-year-old report, reported that regional co-operation was necessary to deal with future growth issues. That's a 50-year old report, Mr. Speaker. The government's own Radke report clearly indicates that the lack of regional planning in the capital region in terms of infrastructure, transportation, environmental considerations, and the government's lack of involvement in regional planning could have serious implications for the future of the capital region.

The evidence indicating the need to establish a regional planning mechanism for high-growth areas that has the authority to make binding decisions on land-use matters is undeniable. Failure to implement such mechanisms and processes jeopardizes the future growth potential of not only the capital region but also high-growth areas such as Grande Prairie and Cold Lake.

We need, Mr. Speaker, to take a different approach to planning. We want to start planning for the future of Alberta in a balanced and co-ordinated fashion. Bill 211 would ensure that whatever planning decisions we make, we would always ensure the protection of the environment, our prime agricultural lands, and natural resources that drive Alberta's economy. We will ensure the future sustainability of our communities.

The purpose of the bill is clear: we want our communities to be places where everyone has access to a place to live, hospitals, jobs, and recreational facilities. This legislation is all about helping the

people of Alberta and the government make better choices for a better future.

I believe that earlier the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar said that it was too complicated an issue – [some applause] he applauds himself – to deal with in just two hours, which is a wonderful reason to vote for the bill, so that we can send it to committee and discuss it even further.

I encourage all members to vote in favour of this bill. Thank you very much.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join debate on Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act. The debate to this point has been most interesting. We've been going back and forth, but the debate essentially is about the recognition of the need for planning or defence of the status quo, that it's okay to keep on doing things the way we are doing. Clearly, I think one must recognize the absence of any regional planning mechanisms. They were in place at one time in this province. All of that arrangement was trashed by this government many years ago. The consequences of the lack of regional planning in terms of intermunicipal tensions and inability to co-operate are evident to all of us.

Urban sprawl as an issue is a huge one and the problems that it generates in terms of absence of any public transportation plans for the region. Take the capital region here. They're all so very evident. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the absence of any ability to regionally plan and to encourage and generate co-operation and collaboration between neighbouring municipal entities and areas creates absolutely huge problems.

There was a comment made earlier on by one of the members on the government side with respect to: what about the costs of establishing these advisory committees? Mr. Speaker, my question is: imagine the costs of not having any planning arrangements in place, costs in terms of transportation, costs in terms of urban sprawl, costs in terms of having no plans for population density, costs in environmental terms, social terms. They're huge costs when there is no attempt to in fact engage different municipal authorities/entities into co-operating and planning co-operatively for the future. Particularly in the context of rapid population growth and in the context of very, very rapid economic growth to refuse to acknowledge the need for some sort of co-ordinated planning arrangements is asking for trouble in the future. Costs, I think, of not planning are huge, much greater than it will cost to fund a regional commission or an advisory committee as proposed in this act.

At this point, of course, we are speaking more in terms of the principles entailed in this act, and I think the principle of some sort of need for co-operative and future-oriented planning is a principle that I support. I think it's an important principle and needs the support of this House. With respect to the details, or the substance of the bill, I think we should allow the bill to move to the next stage so that we can look at the details of the bill in terms of what it proposes to do substantively, clause by clause.

At that stage, issues such as the concern that I think one of the members on the government side expressed with respect to the centralization concern, that the bill, in fact, centralizes too much power with respect to municipal planning and interregional, intermunicipal planning into the hands of the Executive Council – I think that's a valid argument. We can certainly examine this, debate it, and ask ourselves whether or not that centralizing element of the bill can be mitigated by making some changes if some of the other provisions of the bill meet the approval of the House.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For example, I have a concern with respect to the role of this Legislature beyond it voting on this bill. I think there should be some provision in this bill with respect to the advisory committee's planning report when it comes before, for example, the Executive Council. Before the Executive Council ratifies it in the final stages, it should perhaps be referred to one of the policy field committees. I'm very concerned about us not paying attention to the presence of these policy field committees, which represent this House, which represent the province.

I think we could make those changes in a bill such as this one by suggesting how the centralizing elements of this bill perhaps could be mitigated by enhancing the role of this Legislature before this bill or another bill such as this one could finally get the approval of the House. So there are positive and constructive ways in which we need to engage ourselves with respect to the whole issue of the need for regional planning and the costs of not paying attention to the need for planning.

Land use policies. Fertile land around the province is disappearing without anyone asking questions about the long-term consequences of it. There are ecological microsystems in existence all over the regions in which these kinds of developments are taking place, and no one is paying attention to what happens to the loss of those microsystems, which represent very, very important ecological treasures. Once they're gone, they're gone forever.

We do need to pay some attention to the issue of how to address environmental issues, how to address issues of urban sprawl, issues of providing economical transportation for the future, how to deal with issues of greenhouse gas emissions which result from the excessive use of individual means of transportation in the absence of affordable and effective public transportation. Plans for the regions around big urban areas are developing as we speak.

There are a huge number of issues. There's the issue of leaving some sort of legacy for the future generations. That's where planning comes in, thinking about the future in the long term and making provisions and, in fact, being able to forecast and see some risks and dangers. In failing to plan, failing to forecast, we are failing to develop plans to deal with possible difficulties that will arise if we do not plan beyond existing municipal boundaries.

4:50

Existing municipal boundaries are there. They are a reality. Surely, the whole issue of regional planning, having a plan for a whole region, is complex. It's made more difficult, certainly, by the political realities that are there, but that doesn't mean that we should throw our hands up in the air and say in frustration that nothing can be done. Something has to be done. I'm sure municipally elected officials are as much sensitive to these concerns as we are, and simply saying that they will not listen, that they will be absolutely outraged if we raise some of these questions in this Assembly and encourage them to think in the long term, think beyond existing municipal boundaries, I think, is ludicrous. I don't think that's an argument that holds.

I think Albertans increasingly, whether they are elected municipal officials, whether they are provincial elected representatives, whether they are regular, ordinary citizens, parents raising their children and families, you know, looking to the future, all are concerned about the lack of planning. They would like to see this government take some leadership role in moving in the direction of developing regional plans which will address issues of potential water scarcity in the coming years, water conservation, issues of greenhouse gas emissions and how we deal with those through regional planning, urban planning, municipal planning.

They would certainly like to see the land use rationalized. Currently, in this free-for-all sort of development strategy that's happening all over the place, we are losing a most valuable natural resource called land. Very, very fertile agricultural land is disappearing without any thought being given to what will happen in the next 20, 30, 40 years, when this land is no longer there and our population base has changed, our environmental conditions have changed. What will we do under those circumstances? We're not here temporarily. We're not here just to exploit the resources for a while and then move on to the moon or some other place. It's a place that we need to carefully plan for, use, enhance, and leave something for our children to enjoy and further develop based on what we have done.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this stage I, certainly, support the principles underlying this bill and hope the House will do the same.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to address Bill 211, the Planning for the Future of Communities Act. This bill attempts to deal with a very timely issue, but fortunately land planning in Alberta is already being thoroughly addressed in many ways. The Member for Calgary-Currie calls for the enhancement of municipal development intermunicipal co-operation, and this bill aims to achieve that through new planning and co-ordination requirements. As I will explain, this act is very simplistic when it's compared to the steps that the Alberta government has taken and continues to take to co-ordinate land use in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as our province's population is increasing, more infrastructure facilities and parks are needed. In the last 25 years our population has grown almost 50 per cent. New communities are being formed across Alberta at an incredible rate. Economic development is also unprecedented in Alberta. Over the last 10 years our economy has grown at an average rate of 4.3 per cent a year.

Mr. Rodney: How much is that?

Ms DeLong: 4.3 per cent a year.

More land is required to accommodate the industrial and residential growth that is occurring, and it's important that these needs are met in a co-ordinated and co-operative fashion. At a time of growth, planning activity is of the utmost importance. Almost every industrial sector requires an increasing amount of land while our increasing citizenry populates more areas across the province. Agriculture, forestry, parks, tourism, wildlife, and watersheds must be minded. Growth has taken competition over land use to new heights. These development plans can naturally co-exist, but sometimes land uses are conflicting. Different groups want access to the same area, and sometimes there is a need to exercise caution when . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, but the time consideration for this item of business has concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Skilled Worker Immigration Program

509. Mr. Agnihotri moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately enter into negotiations with the federal

government to expand the provincial nominee program into a reliable and permanent source of skilled labour for Alberta, thereby reducing the demand for temporary foreign workers.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When this motion was originally tabled, there was no movement on an immigration deal, so we are going to amend this motion later on.

The provincial nominee program is a core strategy for ensuring that Alberta has enough workers 10, 20, 30 years down the road. We cannot afford to be unprepared again. If we are inviting workers to this province because we have a legitimate and desperate need for them, sending them back home in two or three years is not going to alleviate that need in the long run. Immigration has to be part of the solution. The temporary foreign worker program is not enough.

This province does not just have a skilled labour shortage; it has a worker shortage in general. The provincial nominee program must be extended further to include the lower skilled and semiskilled labour that small businesses rely on. If there's a long-term need for one type of worker, we have to address that with a long-term solution.

Temporary foreign workers are being exploited in Alberta, and government cannot do anything to stop it even though we have an Alberta trades act in place to protect them. Government has no control over the temporary foreign worker program, especially regulating overseas. They don't even know how many workers are in this province, much less where they are located. Add into consideration the heightened vulnerability of these workers, and you have a recipe for abuse.

The overall thrust of this motion is to strengthen the provincial nominee program. There are several motivating factors for this: sustainability, strength of the provincial program. There is really no valid reason for opposing the provincial nominee program in this province. The PNP is an important part of a long-term sustainable solution for addressing Alberta's labour shortage. By allowing skilled workers to permanently immigrate to Alberta, PNP can work in the long term to reduce further labour shortages.

This program also treats workers who would like to permanently immigrate to Canada more fairly than the temporary foreign worker. Under the provincial nominee program skilled and some semiskilled workers are able to enter Canada permanently. All other workers may only stay here temporarily.

It is also important to recognize that we do not only have a skilled labour shortage; we have a people shortage in general. This will not be going away any time soon. Expanding the PNP to include more types of workers can address long-term labour shortages across many industry sectors which are badly in need of people.

The provincial nominee program also allows Alberta more flexibility in determining what types of immigrants are best suited for this province. For example, according to the Alberta director of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 91 per cent of small businesses say that they need immigrants in the low-skilled or medium-skilled categories – that is, jobs that require high school, on the job, or some college or apprenticeship training – yet the permanent immigration system brings in only 25 per cent immigration in this category. While only 7 per cent of small business say that they need workers in the professional category, jobs that require a university degree, 65 per cent of permanent immigrants are in that category. We need to strengthen our commitment to the provincial nominee program.

5:00

By calling for the expansion of the PNP, this motion also recog-

nizes the need to strengthen the program and address existing weaknesses. Stakeholders like the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers have pointed to the weaknesses of immigrant settlement services in the province. Alberta has one of the lowest immigrant retention rates in the country. It's not just a matter of bringing immigrants here; we also need to keep them here.

The website for the provincial nominee program and the temporary foreign worker program is only in English. I think it should be in some other languages, too, to attract foreigners to Alberta.

An expanded PNP would do more for small businesses. Allowing more semi- and lower skilled workers would help small businesses. Making the program easier would also increase the participation of small businesses in the program.

The temporary foreign worker program has many flaws. This program has an unsustainable solution to the long-term labour shortage in this province. By definition, these people are temporary. They are here, and they are gone. Expansion of immigration is the best long-term solution we have. The temporary foreign worker is not immigration. Many stakeholders have indicated to us that they think businesses misuse the temporary foreign worker as a way to cut costs and undermine unions. We have heard many stories about the temporary foreign worker program by both employers and brokers.

Current weaknesses of the provincial nominee program. The difficulty with the provincial nominee program is that it's not user friendly for the small- to medium-sized businesses that require unskilled or semiskilled labour. Moreover, businesses with the hard-to-fill positions and no local labour market to accept the positions do not have the resources to recruit nationally or internationally. The nature of the program discourages industry from bringing in foreign workers for those which are in high demand, such as the construction industry, retail, and agriculture, to name but a few. The result is that many industries have a hard time filling the positions in the short term and long term. Unfortunately, with the PNP there is often a large responsibility upon small businesses that have less than 10 employees and only need to recruit one immigrant worker. Furthermore, it's not always possible to fast-track the immigrants under the provincial nominee program.

The key to ensuring Canada's economic growth involves an efficient and accessible provincial nominee program. It's recognized that as the Canadian population ages, over the next five, 10 years immigration will be required in every corner of the country to help ensure that our economy remains vibrant and strong. The provincial nominee program is a good example of using immigration to address the current and growing labour shortages in our province. The labour shortage in Alberta is already critical and getting worse. We need aggressive action to ensure that highly skilled workers are entering Alberta and staying here. Albertans want sustainable solutions, not short-term ones. The labour shortage is a long-term problem, and we need long-term solutions to solve it. Expanding the scope and strengthening the effectiveness of the provincial nominee program is an important part of finding a long-term solution to Alberta's labour shortage.

This measure should be coupled with an emphasis on the training of Albertans who want to become skilled tradespeople. Mr. Speaker, we should provide better training opportunities and improve assistance for Albertans and Canadians first and then foreigners.

Let us adopt this motion, expand the provincial nominee program further, and thereby reduce reliance on the temporary foreign workers. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since we recognize that the government has entered into an agreement with the federal government on improving the provincial nominee program, we want to change the motion to reflect that. I propose an amendment to this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll give the pages a moment for distribution to the members.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I believe you can continue on the amendment.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Motion 509 be amended as follows: (a) by striking out "immediately enter into negotiations" and substituting "continue negotiating" and (b) by striking out "reducing the demand" and substituting "further reducing the demand." The amended motion would read as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue negotiating with the federal government to expand the provincial nominee program into a reliable and permanent source of skilled labour for Alberta, thereby further reducing the demand for temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Speaker, I think this amendment acknowledges the good work that the government has already done in negotiating with the federal government. There's a lot of progress that has been made. We're a bit behind, because provinces like Manitoba seem to be way ahead of us in managing to draw permanent immigrant people to their province. Still, we acknowledge the work that has been done. It's a question of continuing to negotiate to improve this provincial nominee program, which the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has so well described, and then changing the last part to further reduce the demand for temporary foreign workers.

I could speak at length about the motion, but I would rather come back and speak about the motion as amended later. I'm not allowed to? This is the only time I get to speak?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Dr. B. Miller: But this is on the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: If you sit down now, your time is deemed to be given up.

Dr. B. Miller: Okay. The rules, I thought, were that you could speak to an amendment, and then later, after the motion is amended, you could speak again on the motion as amended. But I will take the Speaker's rule as the rule.

Well, then, let me just say a few words about it. In my questions to the minister in this House I've been very critical of the temporary foreign worker program because I think that it is fraught with all kinds of problems. Even an organization such as the Petroleum Human Resources Council of Canada has said, in advice to employers, that such a program is not without risk. "If it is not done properly, hiring temporary foreign workers can create its own set of problems and challenges." They're suggesting to employers that they have to count the costs. They may think that they're moving ahead by supplying needed labour by hiring temporary foreign workers, but they have to consider the costs. This advice from the Petroleum Human Resources Council of Canada says that the costs include recruiting costs, government fees to pay for immigration documents, passports, medical exams, and, of course, relocation costs, paying for trips for foreign workers to Canada and back home, also accommodation costs, and all kinds of other costs that they have to take into consideration.

5:10

It's obvious that some employers are not prepared to pay these costs and that, because there seems to be inadequate oversight, there are some cases of abuse. We have one example of a foreign worker who came to Canada from Mexico to work on a farm in southern Alberta. The employer did not cover his medical expenses, did not provide adequate accommodation. That worker actually came and appealed to us here in the Legislature and has since returned to Mexico. There is more and more evidence among temporary foreign workers of isolation, discrimination, fear, exploitation, and limited access to health services and social services.

It's much, much better to focus on permanent immigration when we can, through a provincial nominee program that's effective, identify the occupations that we need to fill and bring people with their families to Alberta as permanent residents. That is always the better way. I mean, if we look at it historically, we brought Chinese workers here to Alberta at the end of the 19th century to work on the railroads. That was not a particularly good example of what should be done. There was much suffering and many deaths, and there's the matter of the Chinese head tax. Mr. Speaker, I think we have to be careful and move forward in a better way.

I'm always in fear through the temporary foreign worker program that we're actually creating a kind of underclass of workers, guest workers who are here without the same rights as Canadians. They work here for a while, and they go back. They work longer, get paid less, live worse, and then they leave. Many temporary foreign workers come to fill jobs that no one else seems to want, and we create thereby an underclass of workers.

It's much better to put all of our focus into permanent immigration, something that's sustainable over the long run, not just a solution for the moment. That has been the policy on this side of the House, that the foreign temporary worker program is an unsustainable solution to the long-term labour shortage of this province. An expansion of immigration is the best long-term solution we have.

Those are my remarks, Mr. Speaker. I hope that this amendment is satisfactory to all members of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Others on the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment to the motion.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. In speaking to the amendment, I'd like to first thank the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for bringing forward Motion 509, to which the mover of the amendment, my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, responded. I don't want to cover a whole lot of territory that's already been referred to, but what it does, for potentially a change in pace and place, is recognize the wisdom of the government. Initially, when this motion was designed, we were concerned that the program would not be extended and would not serve as the sort of secondary source—I know that it sounds funny to say primary secondary source. Our primary source of employment has to be within Alberta, within Canada, but this recognizes the importance of a predictable and sustainable workforce.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora referred to the history of the head tax and the fact that temporary foreign workers at that point and temporary foreign workers today, you know, over 140 years later, are facing the same type of discrimination in the sense that they are not allowed to bring their family members with them. Therefore, they're in a foreign country without the family support and with a sense of isolation. We have seen the abuse that has happened to temporary foreign workers who have basically been preyed upon by unscrupulous travel agents or business promoters, and then they're left here to make their own way back if they can escape these conditions.

There is no doubt that our first commitment should be to providing the best employment for Alberta-born individuals. The most rapidly growing population in Alberta is our First Nations population, so we want to make sure that they have the training and the support possible. What we have noticed in general, except for little birth rate bubbles that are, for example, currently happening in Calgary, is that we don't have the home-born population to sustain and provide predictability into the future.

I have had first-hand experience, as I'm sure other members who have been in teaching have had, with English as a second language immigrants. When they have the stability of their family and the supports of their ethnic communities, they tend to thrive. The beauty of the immigrant community is that they have a built-in support system that enables the individuals who are seeking Canadian citizenship to have the language support, the cultural support, the support that is necessary to see them become Canadian citizens. The way that Canada and in this case Alberta benefits is the fact that we have the sustainable, educated individuals that take on the highly skilled jobs, and we also have a variety of people who for occupational reasons are able to fill other areas that are more of a menial or a manual area. But regardless of whether it's importing a surgeon or importing a person to, you know, serve coffee, Alberta benefits.

Again, what the amendment to Motion 509 brings forward is: government, you're doing a good job; government, please continue to do that good job and consider the permanency and the sustainability and the predictability of having a workforce that not only lives in Alberta for the long term but has the rights of Canadian citizenship to promote and protect.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to briefly address the amendment that's at hand. I think that as the member that made the amendment indicated, it is an amendment that reflects the fact that there has been some action taken on this motion perhaps since it was originally put onto the Order Paper and that the amendment really does truly reflect a little bit more, in fact virtually everything more, of what is in fact happening at this point in time. My suggestion would be that members may want to vote and accept this amendment now if they so choose, and then we could revert to debating the amended motion that more clearly reflects the intent.

The Deputy Speaker: Ready for the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to join in debate on this Motion 509 to expand the provincial nominee program in an effort to reduce the demand for temporary foreign workers, and I would like to commend the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for putting forth this motion before the Assembly today. I certainly appreciate that the hon. member has chosen to support our government's initiative. Alberta's unprecedented economic growth has increased the demand for skilled workers, and our government is developing a made-in-Alberta immigration strategy which will help businesses to alleviate their labour pressures. Part of the strategy focuses on assisting businesses to manage their labour shortages by effectively utilizing Alberta's provincial

nominee program. The skilled worker immigration program is employer driven. It expedites permanent resident applications and allows a provincial or territorial government, for that matter, to nominate a person for an immigrant visa on the grounds that the individual's labour market skills are particularly in demand in that province or territory.

5:20

Now, Alberta is the fourth-largest immigrant-receiving province, approximately 7.4 per cent of immigrants to Canada in 2005. Preliminary data indicates that Alberta received over 20,000 immigrants in 2006, exactly 20,561, compared to 19,403 in 2005 and 16,473 in 2004. The Department of Employment, Immigration and Industry has received another \$9 million, an increase in funding for immigration, bringing the total budget to \$68 million in 2007-2008. A portion of the funding will help to expand the number of nominees under the provincial nominee program to 2,500 nominations in 2007-2008, up again to 5,000 in 2008-2009, and 8,000 in 2009-2010.

In addition to the funding increases our government successfully negotiated an agreement, as we all know, with the federal government for Canada/Alberta co-operation on immigration, an agreement that removed the limit on the number of immigrants that the province can nominate for permanent residence in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I was on hand for that announcement, and I can tell you that it was very, very well received. I'd like to note that the changes to Alberta's provincial nominee program will continue indefinitely, allowing the program an opportunity to optimize its potential.

Some members are aware that Manitoba has a similar provincial nominee program, and it provides an excellent example of how effective this type of strategy can be when it is used to its full capacity. Manitoba was the first province with a provincial nominee program, and its program has been significant and very successful. Since 1998 economic immigration rose 311 per cent in Manitoba in contrast to an increase of only 56 per cent for the rest of the country. In 2005 Manitoba welcomed 4,617 immigrants through the provincial nominee program, and in 2006 the province very narrowly met its goal of attracting 10,000 immigrants of whom 6,600 were provincial nominees.

Our province will continue to address the labour shortage by facilitating several initiatives that will assist employers to adequately staff their businesses. The Alberta government will continue to support employers who use the federal temporary foreign worker program and the federal skilled worker immigrant program as a means for addressing labour demands. In 2006 the federal government reviewed applications for about 20,000 positions and issued an estimated 10,000 temporary foreign work permits for Alberta. For 2007 it expects to review applications for 40,000 positions.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's provincial nominee program is an excellent mechanism for employers to recruit competent, skilled, and knowledgeable employees to immigrate to Alberta. Our government has made a commitment to the businesses of this province to support them in finding qualified personnel in Alberta, and we're also improving our current immigration programs, which will assist businesses in reducing staffing shortages. I'd urge members of the Assembly to support our government's current immigration strategy, and I again want to thank the hon. member for supporting the government of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm pleased to be

able to rise today and join in the debate on amended Motion 509, regarding the continued expansion of Alberta's provincial nominee program. I do appreciate the hon. member's interest in a cause that has long been a high priority for this government.

Mr. Speaker, every year over 90,000 foreign workers enter Canada temporarily to work in order to help Canadian employers address skill shortages. Although temporarily bringing in workers helps address labour shortages, Alberta also offers skilled workers fast-tracked, permanent residency opportunities. Immigration has accounted for over 15,000 individuals coming to live and work in our province last year alone.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta provincial nominee program is an employer-driven, skilled worker immigration program that is offered by the government of Alberta in association with Citizenship and Immigration Canada to facilitate permanent residency for skilled immigrants. The provincial nominee program is a commendable plan that considers skilled and educated workers in a variety of occupational descriptions relative to their potential role in Alberta's workforce. Given our vibrant economy there is great potential for both this province and individual immigrants and their families to benefit from the provincial nominee program. Thirty-five per cent of immigrants over the age of 20 currently coming into this province have a bachelor's degree. There is no denying that there is great potential in utilizing those resources in our economy when the opportunity presents itself.

Unfortunately, there seems to be some confusion in the wording of this motion. It is unclear whether this motion encourages the government to broaden the categories associated with the provincial nominee program or to expand the number of positions available. Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear to hon. members that the provincial nominee program is one of the preferred approaches to immigration in the province of Alberta, and we are committed to continuing to examine all opportunities.

As Alberta's labour force develops both in quantity and variety of positions available, it will be important to source employees from outside of Canada. This government is developing a made-in-Alberta immigration strategy that ensures that there are mutual benefits for all parties involved. This includes (a) continuing to support the provincial nominee program by expanding the spaces available from 2,500 this year to 8,000 per year by 2009-10, (b) developing a new immigration agreement with the federal government, (c) increasing settlement services, (d) improving recruitment and attraction initiatives, and finally, supporting the strategy with an additional \$9 million as per Budget 2007. While the program has always facilitated permanent residency for immigrants in occupations requiring postsecondary education such as physicians, nurses, educators, and tradespeople, the made-in-Alberta thrust of the program will now also support jobs in manufacturing, tourism, and trucking.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, success in attracting, placing, and supporting new immigrants in Alberta requires balancing between the social, cultural, and economic needs of immigrants. Alberta will continue to attract potential immigrants through programs such as the provincial nominee program. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for supporting the government of Alberta in seeking to maximize the benefits associated with the provincial nominee program, thus I will support this motion on behalf of the people of Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. I, too, want to congratulate my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie for bringing this motion forward, a motion that urges government to continue negotiating with the federal government to expand the provincial nominee program and end reliance on the temporary foreign worker program. I think that reducing the demand for temporary foreign workers is also an issue that needs to be addressed, and when we look at the Alberta provincial nominee program, I understand that it's designed to meet the needs of Alberta employers who are unable to fill skilled labour positions with Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada.

In the latest developments in May 2007 the agreement for Canada/Alberta co-operation on immigration is that Alberta will be able to nominate more immigrants possessing skills needed in the province for quicker processing by the federal government, and that range of occupations eligible for nomination has been expanded. Any limit on the number of immigrants brought to the province by the nominee program has been lifted, and this year alone the government has set a target of 2,500 nominees. This target grows to 8,000 nominees by 2009-10. This number would ensure that Alberta receives the same proportion of all immigration to Canada, 10 per cent, as its proportion of the total Canadian population, which is 10 per cent.

5:30

Another new focus will be on applications from international student graduates who are being offered permanent full-time employment from Alberta companies. As we are looking at the current situation, there are 23,000 foreign temporary workers in the province. The foreign worker program allows temporary foreign workers to enter Canada if employers can demonstrate that they cannot find Canadian workers to fill job openings. Employers must be able to prove that they have made every effort to find and train willing and available workers in Alberta and Canada. Temporary foreign workers generally require far less labour skills or experience than immigrants under the provincial nominee program. Unskilled workers are only able to come to Alberta through the temporary foreign worker program.

Over a six-year span, from 2000 to 2006, the number of foreign workers has grown by 260 per cent, which means it's a program that we need to look at carefully. I appreciate the efforts with this motion because the overall thrust of this motion is to strengthen the provincial nominee program at the expense of the temporary foreign worker program.

There are several motivating factors for this. There really is no valid reason for opposing the provincial nominee program in this province. The provincial nominee program is an important part of a long-term, sustainable solution for addressing Alberta's labour shortage. By allowing skilled workers to permanently immigrate to Alberta, the provincial nominee program can work in the long term to reduce future labour shortages.

This program also treats workers who would like to permanently immigrate to Canada more fairly than under the temporary foreign worker program. Under the provincial nominee program skilled and some semiskilled workers are able to enter Canada permanently. All other workers may only stay here temporarily.

I think the need to strengthen our commitment to the provincial nominee program is evident because we recognize that there are existing weaknesses. Stakeholders like the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers have pointed to the weakness of the immigrant settlement services in this province. Alberta has one of the lowest immigration retention rates in the country. It's not just a matter of bringing immigrants here; we also need to keep them here.

A Canadian Chamber of Commerce brief recently provided an excellent overview of the potential of an expanded provincial nominee program for small business. Allowing more semiskilled and lower skilled workers would help small businesses find the labour that they need, and making the program easier to use for small business would also, obviously, increase the participation of small businesses in the program. Expanding the scope and strengthening the effectiveness of the provincial nominee program is an important part of finding a long-term solution to Alberta's labour shortage.

This measure should be coupled with an emphasis on training Albertans who want to become skilled tradespeople. Foreign temporary workers are pouring into this province while we have Albertans lining up overnight to fight for a spot at NAIT. We need to look at a long-term solution here. Again, the Edmonton Mennonite centre suggests that the immigration policy needs to address longer terms than five years because five-year quick fixes will lead to more problems.

We need a clearer provincial policy about temporary foreign workers and a general discouragement of employers to use this alternative rather than employing landed immigrants in this province. The Alberta Federation of Labour, AFL, statement in May 2006 states that the concern

does not lie with immigration or individual newcomers to Canada. Instead, we are concerned about the way our federal and provincial governments have designed and how they operate . . . the Foreign Temporary Worker program.

Again, the real solution to all of this is to

improve our post-secondary and apprenticeship systems to make sure that Canadians are properly trained for the jobs we will need in the future.

However, this motion addresses the need right now, and I'm happy to support it.

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

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Motion 509. It proposes the expansion of the provincial nominee program. This debate has become moot in my mind because our hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry recently announced an agreement with Canada about our co-operation on immigration. It is great news for Alberta, and I'm glad to have the opportunity to speak about the agreement.

One of the critical elements of the agreement is a permanent provincial nominee program for Alberta. Under this arrangement there is no cap on the number of people Alberta can nominate in any given year. The provincial nominee program allows Alberta to nominate potential immigrants to the federal government. This allows the province to select people to fill positions that are in demand. Furthermore, individuals nominated under the program are expected to be permanent residents. As such, it can expedite the permanent residency process, which is of benefit when there is a labour shortage.

To facilitate this new arrangement, funding was available in Budget 2007 to increase Alberta's nominations to 2,500 this year. Funding will increase to support 8,000 nominations in 2009-2010. This funding is part of a total \$68 million in support for immigration in Budget 2007. This is a significant amount and represents a 15 per cent increase over the last fiscal year. Both the new immigration arrangement and additional provincial nominee program funding are supporting this government's commitment to attracting newcomers to Alberta.

There is no doubt there is a need for more people to come to Alberta. Over the next 10 years Alberta may have a shortage of up

to 100,000 workers. Maintaining a steady supply of skilled labour is critical to sustaining economic development over the long term. Our prosperity is linked to the availability of labour, and businesses are loud and clear on the need for more workers.

Increasing immigration in Alberta is a priority of the hon. Premier and has led to the signing of the immigration agreement with the federal government. This agreement will improve Alberta's ability to attract immigrants to Alberta and assist them in settling in this province. It is a landmark agreement, and our Premier has said that this deal represents an increase in autonomy like Alberta's securing ownership of its natural resources in the 1930s.

The new immigration agreement also provides for co-operation on promotion and recruitment abilities abroad. It is critical for Alberta to attract the best and most qualified nominees to this province from wherever they may be in the world. Further, the agreement will establish a pilot program to facilitate the entry of health professionals wanting to come to Alberta. There is also a commitment from the federal government for ongoing, predictable, and, perhaps most importantly, equitable settlement funding for this province.

Mr. Speaker, before I close, I want to note a critical flaw in Motion 509, in that it links the provincial nominee program and the temporary foreign worker program. Their goals and objectives are unrelated. The temporary foreign worker program acts as a stopgap solution if no workers are available or able to be trained in the Canadian job market. The provincial nominee program is a permanent program which facilitates permanent residencies.

Mr. Speaker, I'm thankful that the hon. member gave me the opportunity to set the record straight on the government record on immigration. Looking at our new immigration agreement with the federal government and the expansion of the provincial nominee program, our government is on the right track. I support the continued efforts of the government in addressing the needs of a dynamic labour force.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others who wish to participate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

5:40

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Motion 509, which urges the government to expand the provincial nominee program into a reliable, permanent source of skilled labour for Alberta, thereby reducing the demand for temporary foreign workers. Like another hon. member who already spoke on the subject matter, these provincial nominee programs are an excellent tool to help in the economic development of Alberta. We have been doing it in the last, as far as I know, probably two or three years now. The government of Alberta is working on training our internal Albertan workforce in trades and also recently signed an agreement with the federal government to expedite the entry of foreign workers into Alberta. We also learned that the government of Alberta and the government of British Columbia have an agreement in terms of workforce and skills and all the other aspects of agreement on that. This has been going on and doing very well.

I had the privilege of attending the signing of the agreement between the Alberta government and the federal government on this immigration agreement. I was there and very pleased to see our Premier and Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry work with their federal counterparts in this matter.

Now there are two points in my interest in supporting this motion. One is: in my area there is a big industrial park and a lot of manufacturing companies, and they export to the world our products and earn wealth for Alberta. They need people. They need production

workers. They need assembly workers, not just highly skilled tradespeople but also people who just work on the production line. In this kind of direction I support the movement in this provincial nominee program, but I also encourage looking beyond the provincial nominee in the aspect of getting people here to do the assembly production work.

Many Alberta unions support immigration and feel that immigration is a key to building a strong and diverse society and are very proud that many of their members are new immigrants. They advocate for a compassionate immigration policy that addresses both the concerns of immigrants and the needs of the economy by allowing for a broader range of skilled workers to enter the country, to enter our province.

Now, the temporary foreign worker program, as it says, is temporary. In fact, people are allowed to get into the country with visa work permits. That is run by our federal government, and they are the ones who screen the permits to get into the country. Once people get into the country – let's say they come to Alberta – we have to have some programs that help those people to work, and we have employment standards that we should apply to all the people who come from any part of the world to come here to work. The provincial nominee program allows for workers to come to Alberta and remain here permanently if they desire. When the employee's application has been approved, they receive expedited processing, but it takes six to 12 months, and I wish that the federal government and the province worked together and reduced that time so that employers in my constituency can deal with that in an efficient manner.

I just want to point out that this is a great program. It's supported federally, by the province, the employers. Some of the employees have relatives overseas, and they know their skills, so the companies already has some connection here. I have talked to some companies in my area, and they'd love to see this program extended. I was very pleased to learn at the ceremony of the agreement between Canada and Alberta that the limit on the number of nominees has been lifted. This is a great initiative.

Going back to this motion, I commend the member for having presented this motion and bringing up this high-profile issue. With that, I urge everybody in this Assembly to support this made-in-Alberta solution. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others who wish to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to speak very briefly on Motion 509, put before the House by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I rise to speak in support of the amended motion. Knowing what we know about the problems attendant upon temporary foreign workers who have been brought into this province – the kind of shabby treatment that they have received, the kinds of risks that they face, the kinds of ordinary rights of the workplace that they're deprived of – we know that there's need for a more rational, more just, more stable, more acceptable policy to address the needs of the labour force in Alberta. Someone listening from the outside, one who also understands the talk about labour shortages in this province and the need to have more people out there in the labour market, would probably see the whole debate as a no-brainer. This is a sane and decent and appropriate way of addressing the very obvious need of having more people available to work in the Alberta economy. Therefore, I'm not going to engage in detailed defence or support of the motion. I think it makes sense to me that the province needs to move in this direction.

I just want to make one observation, Mr. Speaker. As we call for

a more rational, more updated, more modernized nominee program to bring in more workers who are, in fact, immigrants, when people come here as landed immigrants, they automatically are entitled to certain rights and protections under our Constitution, under our provincial and federal laws. That's why it makes sense to bolster our labour force numbers through what I call this socially just and humane way of bringing in people if you need more workers in the labour market and in the workplace.

One cautionary note here, Mr. Speaker. I meet with my constituents on Fridays, and over the last two weeks, two successive Fridays, I had the opportunity to meet with one foreign medical graduate, a foreign-trained doctor. She's having enormous difficulty, in spite of the fact that she has passed all the exams that she's required to pass, finding a placement. We are short of doctors in this province, yet she's unable to find a placement within our health care system. We proclaim that we are short of appropriately trained medical personnel. We are desperately looking for them, yet we have people here, and they don't get the help and the support that they need in order for them to become part of the health care labour force.

5:50

The next week I met an engineer, a foreign-trained mechanical engineer, who was smart enough and bright enough or deemed so by the University of Alberta to be admitted to a master's program in the field of mechanical engineering. He passed with flying colours and has been struggling since his graduation two years ago to find a job. We are told that we're short of engineers and technologists and technicians and plumbers and others, yet we have people in Alberta who are not getting the positions which, ostensibly, are available all over the place.

So that's a caution that as we try to address the issue of shortage of labour by way of updating and upgrading our nominee program in co-operation with the federal government, we must also pay equal attention to those who are already here and are having difficulty finding an appropriate place in our labour market, in our workplaces in spite of the fact that they have credentials and work experience which should qualify them easily to find these jobs.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, just to conclude, I want to again say that so long as we have these temporary foreign workers in our midst, they deserve absolutely the same protection, the same rights, the same opportunities as Albertans who are part of the labour force.

All these three issues are interlinked, and in this debate they should be seen as integral, complex, not just individual, isolated issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to participate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Motion 509 urges the government to expand the provincial nominee program into a reliable and permanent source of skilled labour for Alberta. Alberta's employers can attest to how important it is to be able to recruit and retain skilled workers. Our current prosperity means that skilled workers are highly sought after, so employers need all the tools to find employees who meet their needs.

Employers who are seeking persons with work experience in management occupations, occupations usually requiring a university education, or occupations usually requiring a college education or apprenticeship training can benefit from Alberta's provincial nominee program. In Alberta health professionals, administrators, nurses, senior managers, teachers, and professors all have unemployment of 1.6 per cent or less. This program has helped employers bring in qualified staff from outside the country since its inception in 2002.

The proportion of immigrants arriving in Alberta with postsecondary education continues to rise. In 2006 about half of the immigrants to Alberta had a university degree, roughly 12 per cent arrived with a non-university diploma, and just under 5 per cent held a trade certificate. The majority of immigrants to Alberta in 2006 were of working age, with almost 70 per cent between the ages of 20 and 64.

The provincial nominee program expedites the immigration process for workers with sought-after skills. Employers can seek out workers who have the qualifications, work experience, and certification that they need. Employers benefit from the reduced immigration wait-times this program offers because it allows them to have skilled workers on the job sooner. Because the provincial nominee program helps Alberta's employers fill permanent positions with immigrants who qualify for permanent resident status, those employers can meet their labour needs on a long-term basis.

About 550 people came to Alberta through the program in 2005-06, and another 650 made Alberta their home this past year. Due to the obvious advantages of the provincial nominee program the Alberta government has already committed to expanding it in coming years. In '07-08 the number of nominees will grow to 2,500, and in '09-10 this number will grow to 8,000. The government's made-in-Alberta immigration strategy is improving initiatives like the provincial nominee program so that employers in Alberta will be able to find the skilled labour they need when they need it. Welcoming new immigrants to our province will help ensure that Alberta's prosperity continues.

One recent improvement to the provincial nominee program will have a clear benefit to all Albertans. The recent signing of the agreement for Canada/Alberta co-operation on immigration includes a pilot project to speed the processing of health care professionals entering Alberta. This process will identify health care professionals who have already applied for entry into Canada and who intend to live in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to close debate on Motion 509.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to thank all the members who participated in debate on Motion 509. During the debate we heard so many good points. Some members mentioned a few bad points on the temporary foreign workers such as the immigrants who come here as temporary foreign workers are facing some serious problems like medical facilities, accommodation problems, and such. Most of the members mentioned the problem with abuse in the system, especially from both sides, employers and the brokers.

I think most of us have heard from constituents that this temporary foreign worker program is not immigration. I think the majority of the people are in favour of immigration. We should increase the nominations in the provincial nominee program rather than temporary foreign workers. That's the reason we sponsored this motion. Mr. Speaker, as I said before, when this motion was tabled, there was no movement in the immigration deal. Now we have a deal already in place. When the new immigration agreement was announced last month, we were encouraged, but we felt that it didn't go that far. We want to see a long-term, sustainable plan, like a 10-, 20-, 30-year plan, not what we have in the new deal, just for only five years.

I request the minister to consider that one because Alberta is booming. We are fortunate. If we have a long-term plan, a

sustainable plan, it will be good for all of us. The new deal does not eliminate this province's reliance on temporary foreign workers as a long-term solution. We are looking for a long-term solution. The new deal, Mr. Speaker, promises negotiation to speed up the process. The new deal may have a more provincial say in immigration, which is good, but I want to see this program where we can lead the nation. Other provinces had very similar programs a long time ago. Manitoba had this provincial nominee program about 11 years ago, and some six or seven other provinces had a very similar program about six or seven years before. Although we are a little late, we are never too late. I think I appreciate the minister who initiated this provincial nominee program recently.

To make the provincial nominee program the best, we must have

the provision for ending our dependency on the temporary foreign workers. I request all the members to support this motion. Thank you very much.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 509 as amended carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to point out that it's 6 o'clock and move that we adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, June 4, 2007

8:00 p.m.

Date: 07/06/04

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall call the committee to order.

Bill 33 Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to start out this discussion maybe with a brief introduction of some friends of mine. With us in the members' gallery are a number of guests. First of all, I'd like to introduce His Worship Ron Dyck, mayor of Ferintosh. With him is Marvin Jassman, councillor of the village of Ferintosh; also His Worship Bob Cammidge, mayor of Bashaw; Al Radke, the chief administrative officer of the town of Bashaw; Bill Knight, who is the chairman of the highway 12/21 water commission; and John Van Doesburg, the administrator of the highway 12/21 water commission. So I'd like to ask you all to welcome these people.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, while we are in committee, you are allowed to move around but not stand around. So please take a seat beside whomever you want to chat with. Thank you.

The hon. member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much. As you can see tonight, this is a very exciting day for the town of Bashaw and for the village of Ferintosh as these people have all come down to watch this discussion and to support us as a government in the passage of Bill 33.

The issue of water is always interesting. We take water for granted until the well runs dry, and then you see how valuable water is. That's when people have to get together and make sure that we can get water to every needy person in the province. This is also very interesting today that we have these two towns working very closely together: Bashaw sharing water with the village of Ferintosh. We talked this afternoon for some time about intermunicipal co-operation, and this is a prime example of what can actually happen when municipalities get together and solve problems together.

Before I go any further, I would like to thank all hon. members that have spoken in support of Bill 33. Opposition members have voiced some concerns, and what I want to do is answer some of the questions that have come up in discussion in second reading. Hopefully, I can address some of the concerns that were expressed during second reading.

First, let's be very clear about what this bill is about. It's just about transferring water from the same . . .

An Hon. Member: Treated water.

Mr. Prins: It's treated water. Exactly. It's treated water coming

from one town to another. It's aquifer water. It's not surface water or river water. It's water from the same geological formation going from one town to another. So that means there's very little risk of environmental impact. This was proven through the scientific studies that were done by the village of Ferintosh, studies that are required any time there's an interbasin transfer proposed.

You may ask: if there's no risk, why is a special act of the Legislature permitting the interbasin transfer necessary? Technically, it's because these two municipalities are in two different river basins. Even though this transfer is about groundwater and not river water, according to the Water Act they need special approval from the Legislature. The town of Ferintosh lies in the Battle River water basin and the town of Bashaw in the Red Deer River basin, so the water would have to be transported from one basin to another, and that's why we're here talking about it.

There was some concern expressed by the members opposite with respect to the amount of information that we have about groundwater. Mr. Chairman, I can tell you that currently we have a great deal of information available, but we're always adding to this database. We have a huge amount of information about the water in Alberta. Let me remind all members of this Assembly and particularly those opposite that this government has spent more than \$8 million in the past five years on groundwater monitoring, scientific research, and data management programs. In addition, another \$12 million in new funding is being committed for groundwater inventory work over the next three years, so \$12 million more to find out what we have as far as groundwater goes. This includes initiatives to assess coal-bed methane and groundwater impacts, conducting a provincial groundwater risk assessment, and completing a base of groundwater mapping, evaluating and upgrading groundwater monitoring and data.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was wondering if this water was to be used for racetracks or oil recovery, and the answer is simply no. Ferintosh needs this water for its citizens, and you can see that just by the members of Ferintosh and Bashaw and people from that area that are here tonight.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona suggested that new licences are prohibited in this area. This is also not true. It's incorrect. There's a prohibition on new surface water licences for the Bow and Oldman river basins. This happens to be in the Red Deer basin. There is no restriction. Particularly on groundwater, there's never been a restriction. The Red Deer River is not included in the ban of the Oldman and Bow rivers.

Someone else suggested that this was a hidden agenda to provide water to other areas and sidestep environmental concerns. This also is not true. This water will be strictly used for residential purposes. It's not for industrial, agricultural, or oil field use, and it's not for irrigation or confined feeding operations. So these concerns have all been allayed.

There was also some concern about the frequency at which these interbasin transfers are being requested, and let me assure him and all members of this Assembly that these are unusual requests that are not taken lightly. In fact, this is only the third interbasin transfer that this Assembly has seen for regional water systems in the past number of years.

The hon. member was also interested in how much water was being transferred. There was a concern that there was too much water. Let me tell you that the town of Bashaw has a licensed capacity of 236,000 cubic metres of water per year, and of that amount they only use 125,000 cubic metres. Ferintosh is using currently about 15,000 cubic metres, which is partially being trucked in, so they won't be impacting Bashaw very much at all. This is a very small amount of water. The act calls for 55,800 cubic metres

per year, and the question was asked: why do they need that much water if they're only using 15,000? This is a 25-year projection, Mr. Chairman, based on 3 and a half per cent population growth, so this 55,800 should last for a long, long time. This means that this interbasin transfer if approved by this Assembly will meet the needs of Ferintosh probably for the next 25 years at least, or a quarter of a century.

So, Mr. Chairman, the town of Ferintosh and the members of the highway 12/21 commission have done everything required. They've done the scientific tests. They've done the studies. They've consulted with their communities. They need the water, and this transfer is the best option available to them. I would once again encourage all hon. members to support Bill 33.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I just want to indicate that I will be supporting this bill, as my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View has already discussed with the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, and I will also add that I very much appreciate that discussion that you held and the reasoning that you provided at that time. It's based on that reasoning that I'm supporting it, and I'm very pleased that our guests from Ferintosh and Bashaw are here tonight.

Normally I would be opposed to interbasin transfers because in a number of circumstances they're interfering with the natural process. However, in this case, as the hon. member pointed out, this isn't the result of any fault of the citizens of Bashaw and overuse, too much industry, a pollution of existing systems, and so on. This is just nature's luck of the draw, and unfortunately nature is not always kind. So this transfer of treated water for people I see as necessary.

However, I do want to point out what Dr. Schindler has said for future developments in Alberta, and that is that very soon we should be looking at moving people to water instead of water to people. I would compare the circumstance that Dr. Schindler reiterated at this past weekend's Athabasca River conference, that my colleague the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View and the shadow minister of environment attended along with other notable researchers such as Andrew Nikiforuk. The point that was being made is that we have to treasure water and we have to treat it as a commodity, that we cannot count on it being replenished.

8:10

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka talked about the \$8 million that has gone into mapping at this point, and he also referred to the \$12 million more that's going to be expended. I just want to point out that water is of inestimable value; therefore, while \$8 million seems like a large amount and \$12 million is that much more, in the larger scheme of things knowing where our water is, both the quantities and qualities of our ground and especially our underground aquifers, is absolutely essential for any type of planning that is to take place in this province. We debated this afternoon Bill 211 that called for greater planning and greater process.

Now, I have great concerns as does my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View. When we've attended meetings in Stettler, Trochu, Drayton Valley, Ma-Me-O Beach, Nanton, and Ponoka, we have seen hundreds of people turning out to meetings because of their concern about how groundwater is being used or abused. There is great concern in the community of Rosebud because of concerns over the potential fracking and movement, the unnatural movement, of coal-bed methane into the water systems there. So in agreeing to this particular bill and recognizing the emergent nature for these townspeople, I don't want to suggest that it's a carte blanche for future water considerations.

I am extremely concerned about the effect of clear-cutting in the watershed in the Bow and Elbow and the Bragg Creek, Ghost-Waiparous, Sibbald Flats areas. I don't think that this has been given sufficient thought. I am also very concerned about the potential EUB approval of exploration in the southeast slopes, where fracking could very much interfere with the town of Nanton's water supply as well as all the ranchers and individuals who live in that southeast slope area. The water table is a very fragile circumstance, and we need to take it into greater account.

With regard to other developments. If somebody should suggest that we have a water transfer for the development that's being proposed at Seebe, I'll give you a heads-up. We will be adamantly opposed to that as we are to further developments in areas of protected parks and places such as further developments to Waterton, Jasper, Banff, and Canmore. At some point the primacy of nature and the importance of not interfering with the water flows has to be taken into account.

To the government's credit there is a moratorium on the Oldman and the Bow, and that moratorium should prevent developments like Seebe from going further ahead. Something that Newfoundland has realized – and that's another moratorium – is the moratorium on cod fishing. There comes a point when the product is no longer there. You can no longer have your livelihood dependent on that product, and moratoriums are going to be something, as Alberta further develops, that are going to be absolutely necessary for protection.

At this weekend's Athabasca conference it was noted that the glacier that feeds the Athabasca is rapidly melting. It was noticed that the flow of the Athabasca River, especially during the winter months, is dangerously low for the amount of development that is currently occurring in the oil sands, and further development is putting the Athabasca River in danger. The members of the Fort McKay band have recounted the stories of two-headed fish, the fact that they can no longer eat the fish out of the river. Dr. John O'Connor has pointed out the carcinogenic problems associated with some of the water in the Athabasca. So no amount of money – \$8 million, \$12 million – will make up for a lost water resource. As the former Environment minister said, it's blue gold, but it has to be valued at a much higher standard than the gold standard.

Because of the immediate need for these people, knowing that it will not be used for anything but drinking water, washing, and day-to-day activities of life rather than industry or irrigation or other developments, I support this bill, and I support the need for aquifer mapping, for baseline testing, for the protection and conservation of water, our most important resource.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to finally speak on Bill 33, the Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act. I think it's good for us to pause, to remind everyone in the Assembly of the importance of having to pass a bill to do these water interbasin transfers. You know, it's just such a sensitive issue. Considering the scarcity of water, it's absolutely incumbent upon us to debate and to analyze thoroughly any of these transfers of water. I think the gentlemen that are watching here this evening should certainly appreciate the tenacity of their MLA. I don't think I've been chased down so much in my life as I was with the MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka, asking me daily, sometimes hourly, about Bill 33 and would I support it. Certainly, upon great reflection and lots of study we do in fact support the bill.

The main issue, I guess, for me in defence of this enterprise of moving the water from the Battle River-Red Deer system, first of all,

is that it's part of a regional water system. My experience and study of this throughout the province is that, you know, it's very important that we expand these regional water systems to provide drinking water for smaller towns because, as we see in Ferintosh and many communities around that area as well as other parts of Alberta, the water quality and volume is just simply insufficient for the population of towns. It's very expensive to truck the water, and oftentimes the quality is left wanting. So setting up these regional water systems, certainly, the New Democrats support wholeheartedly. But keep in mind that each time we do an interbasin transfer or the potential for an interbasin transfer, we study the effects of this very, very carefully.

Our researchers were looking at this whole issue very, very closely. I think one of my researchers even stopped by the fine, fine town of Ferintosh just to take a peek on the way home from somewhere else. We wouldn't consider denying the population a steady supply of clean drinking water. I think that that's very reasonable. We just want to make sure that we're not setting a precedent, which we're not, because every transfer does require legislation to actually have it passed.

So I'm happy to say that with some reservation but certainly with a lot of reflection our caucus supports this bill as well. Thank you.

8:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Having listened to the debate through first reading and second reading on Bill 33, the Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act, I feel compelled to enter my thoughts into the record.

I think I'd like to start with the whole idea of interbasin transfers. Interbasin transfers from the South Saskatchewan River basin to the North Saskatchewan River basin was a point that was made. Technically, these specifically are from subbasins to respective basins. Clearly, this is not, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View suggested, that we're setting ourselves up as a province to actually move more water from northern Alberta to southern Alberta. This water actually moves in the opposite direction.

Another point the hon. member made was that this policy and specifically this project would allow organisms which are foreign to one particular basin to be transported to the other and thereby pollute forever the streams and rivers and the water supply in the receiving basin. As I see this project, it is groundwater, well water, not surface water that is proposed to be transported to Ferintosh, the very same type of water that was identified and approved in one of the prior interbasin approvals in 2005. I might add that this, too, transported water from the South Saskatchewan to the North Saskatchewan basin. On top of this, regardless of whether it's surface water or well water, it's also treated water, which means filtering and chemical treating, such as chlorine, and perhaps even ultraviolet light treating. Even I know that organisms native to Alberta can't survive subjection to that.

Another point that was made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore and then also tonight by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity was that perhaps it's time to stop growth in any community or area that is short of water, and the people should be moved to where the water is. Now, Mr. Chairman, it sounds like the point that's being made is that anyone who is short of water and, I've heard mention, especially in the south, should pick themselves up and move to where the water is, without any consideration of who is going to buy their present property, some of which has perhaps been owned for

three or more generations. There wouldn't be water for the potential purchaser as well. This begs the question: how could they possibly actually acquire property where the water is if they perhaps were not paid for their existing property?

With regard to moving because of the lack of water I can only think of one group of people who did this, voluntarily I might add, if my history serves me correctly, and that was the Anasazi Indians of Arizona and New Mexico, who I believe moved because of the lack of water. But having the government urge moving or force moving, I can only think of two instances. One was the Bolsheviks in Russia in the 1890s and early 1900s, who urged the people to move from Ukraine or to be given a one-way ticket to Siberia. I know this because my grandfather moved to the United States and then to Canada because of this urging. Another example of government urging was the government of the Stalin regime, who moved people from one point of the USSR to Siberia. The consequences of moving were very dire.

I recognize that these last two moves that I mentioned were not because of the lack of water, but the point I'm trying to make is that this was the result of government intervention. This is exactly what the two hon. members said, move the people to where the water is, which would require government intervention in order to carry it out. It should be the job of our government and us as leaders to provide opportunities for rural development and rural sustainability. I think this is the common-sense way, not a socialist philosophy, which makes absolutely no sense.

I will be supporting this bill.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to take this opportunity to put on the record my support for this very important bill. This is critical that we allow this sort of thing to happen, but I do find it rather disturbing that we're even having to do this. I happen to have a little history on the Water Act from my days in environmental protection. The fact is that it was never the intent that we would have to pass legislation when it's treated water. It was never the intent. I know that it's in the regulations currently. But when you think about it, the hon. member that just spoke mentioned about the organisms. That was always the risk where you have interbasin transfer.

I find it unfortunate that we're having to do this, but it is critical. It is critical that we move the water to where the people are. I mean, to follow the notion that you'd move the people to the water, basically what that's saying, then, is that we'd have to move Airdrie down and put it into Calgary. Extending it to the extreme, that's exactly what they're saying. So I think that this is absolutely critical, and I want to congratulate the sponsor of the bill. It's really important that we do this.

Mr. Chase: Well, just to set the record straight tonight, I have previously been called a Communist, and that occurred when I spoke up for medicare provisions. It was at a meeting in my constituency that was held by Diane Ablonczy years ago. For standing up for universal public health care I was called a Communist, but I've never been compared to a Bolshevik or a Stalinist.

My belief is that if we manage the water resources properly, there will be room for growth, but when we end up with transfers going north when the south has sufficient and then heading back the other way when it isn't and when we interfere with nature, we're playing a dangerous game. So growth has to be sustainable, and without that sustainability limits have to be applied. Never was I suggesting that there be a mass forced movement of individuals from one place to

another, but the reality is that when you no longer have the supply, you've got to go somewhere else.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to take this opportunity once again to thank all hon. members for speaking in favour of Bill 33 and supporting the transfer of this water. Members from Calgary-Varsity, Edmonton-Calder, Cypress-Medicine Hat, and Rocky Mountain House spoke tonight. I want to thank them for that. I want to thank my guests for coming down from Ferintosh and Bashaw and Lacombe county.

This is a very exciting day for Ferintosh, to be able to hear these kinds of comments. The people of Ferintosh can rest assured that there'll be no more rationing of water, that there'll be no more uncertainty about water in their village. They can look forward to construction of a pipeline as soon as possible when this is done and the funding is in place, and they can look forward to a quality and a quantity of water that will be needed to build and sustain normal growth in their beautiful village of Ferintosh.

I would once again ask all members to support this, and I would call for the question. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 33 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 26

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My comments will be very brief.

Some Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Danyluk: Not quite that brief, but very close.

Mr. Chairman, there was a question that was asked – and I'm going to try to answer it the best way I can – that came from second reading of Bill 26. There have been a number of procedural challenges to the validity of the minister's guidelines since the late 1990s. Working on addressing these procedural issues came long before the Calgary lawsuit was commenced, and I would reiterate that these amendments are to deal with perceived procedural deficiency and are not intended to take away anyone's right to appeal the amount of their assessment. I want to reaffirm that Bill 26 does not affect the right to appeal an assessment that has been prepared correctly or where the legislation has been interpreted properly.

8:30

Mr. Chairman, I would also say that I don't think it would be appropriate for me to comment on the Calgary lawsuit, for sure, at this time. If I were to try to put the context of the bill in one

sentence, it would be: confirming the power to authorize the use of the guidelines that we presently have.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will sit down and listen to other comments from other members.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I may not be quite so brief, and I may not be quite so prepared and supportive of the idea of us letting Bill 26 as it stands now go forward unamended.

We have a problem. The minister and I discussed part of this – and the minister has referred to it again tonight – at second reading debate because there was some concern being expressed in a couple of quarters at that time that Bill 26 as it reads, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007, might in fact impinge upon people's authority or right to appeal their property tax assessments. There were concerns in a couple of quarters about that.

Those were not concerns that I shared or that my researcher shared, but I had to check it out anyway, so I asked the minister about it. The minister said, "No, no, no; that wasn't the intention," and he just reiterated that tonight. I'm not questioning what the minister is saying. I take that at face value. However, there is more of a problem with this bill, apparently, than just that.

The minister has alluded to the court case currently before the courts involving the city of Calgary and its statement of claim against the province in regard to market value assessment and equalized assessment. In short, the belief by the city of Calgary is that ministerial guidelines with respect to equalized assessments are unfairly penalizing the city of Calgary.

Now, it's interesting, Mr. Chairman, that although not quite as dramatic, there are serious concerns about this with the city of Edmonton as well. On speaking with the city of Calgary director of assessment and also the senior market strategist for the city of Calgary, it's become clear to us that the amendments to the Municipal Government Act in Bill 26 are not in the best interests of either of Alberta's big cities.

With that in mind – and I do intend to talk to this a little further – before I go any further, I would like to move an amendment that Bill 26, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 3 in the proposed section 322.

The Deputy Chair: It would be nice for you to pass the amendment to the pages so they can circulate it, please. And make sure that the original copy comes to the table.

Mr. Taylor: Absolutely. The original copy is on its way to the table, sir.

While those copies are being delivered, I'll just move that Bill 26, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007, be amended in section 3 in the proposed section 322.1(2) by striking out "existing or" in both clauses (a) and (b).

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, while the amendment is being circulated, I'd like everyone to know that we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, you may proceed.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Amendment A1 it is.

The city of Calgary has been in conflict with the province and with the ministry of municipal affairs for some years now over the way in which equalized assessments are handled. The primary purpose for equalized assessments is to provide a uniform basis for the assessment and taxation of property in Alberta for the Alberta

school foundation fund. You have on the one hand nonregulated property, assessed at the market value standard. That's residential, commercial, industrial. Then you have regulated property, assessed at values based on regulated rates, and this applies to everything from farmland to linear property to pipelines and telecommunications. Machinery and equipment was included in the equalized assessment originally, but as of 1999 it was no longer taxed for education property tax purposes.

The effect of this is to give certain industries – agricultural operations, oil and gas – potentially huge windfalls by removing them from the equalized assessment. The effect on the big cities, where market value assessment is much more of a factor than equalized assessment, is to create a situation where both Calgary and Edmonton, with their high concentration of market value properties, pay a higher proportion of provincial property taxes than those municipalities with a higher concentration of regulated properties.

Now, in the case of the city of Calgary the estimate is that they've been paying \$94 million too much in school taxes per year for several years now. In light of this inequality the city of Calgary launched a lawsuit against the province over the way in which the province assesses regulated properties and for how the guidelines are set to determine the amount of education property tax each municipality has to pay.

The city of Calgary has tried to get the government of Alberta to sit down with them so that they can explain their position and work together to come up with an equitable solution, but the ministry of municipal affairs, according to the city, has refused to discuss the guidelines for equalized assessment. The feeling in the city of Calgary is that the ministry is treating the city as children – that's over a million children – and dictating instead of consulting with them.

The effect of the amendment to section 322 is to alter the rules governing the bringing of a legal challenge in the middle of said legal challenge. Whether or not the minister feels that it's appropriate to comment on the legal challenge while the legal challenge is in the midst of its challenge, that's the way it is, and that's unacceptable to the city of Calgary. The question of information sharing by the province with the municipalities has always been an issue. It has led some municipalities to believe that uniform standards that apply equally to all have not been applied. That's why these amendments are so contentious in Calgary and Edmonton: because it takes away their ability to challenge these guidelines that are imposed on them.

Now, I'm not going to ascribe intentions or motivations to the minister or his department. I don't know why there has been this apparent communication breakdown or lack of even establishing communication, perhaps, between the big cities and his department. I trust that he will take care of that in the fullness of time. I do not know that it was the intention of the minister to try and interfere in this legal challenge or to intervene in this legal challenge or to alter the rules governing the bringing of a legal challenge in the midst of that challenge, but I do know this, Mr. Chairman. If the amendment that I have moved is approved by this House, then what that allows is for this legal challenge which is in play involving the city of Calgary and the province of Alberta – that legal challenge will be allowed to play out as it should, in court, while perhaps giving effect to the minister's desire that he and his department and his government not be continually caught up in what I quite suspect that the minister regards in many cases, probably rightly so, as vexatious litigation.

Going forward, my amendment will allow the minister to accomplish what I believe the minister wants to do with this bill, but it does not try to change the rules in the middle of the game that Calgary and the province of Alberta are involved in now.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to say that the practice of having regulated assessment takes place, you know, throughout Canada and, I would say, throughout the taxation world.

I would also say that there are two different types of taxation that are used in this particular situation. The market value assessment, as was talked about by the hon. member, in which some properties are assessed based on their market value: these are types of properties where there are sales that can be used as identities, if I could so use the word, so it has some sort of base.

8:40

Regulated assessments are types of properties, basically, which we're talking about, based on the minister's guidelines, that are for pipelines and wells, railway property, telecommunications and electric power systems, and farmland. Now, let me give you a little bit of an explanation why there needs to be regulated assessment. How do you describe or how do you assess the value, a market value, for a pipeline that is in the ground? How do you assess the value for a railway property where it probably would keep changing depending on the use? How would you assess telecommunications and electric power systems that are also in the ground except by way of having some appreciated and depreciated values? That is how the regulated assessment works.

The other aspect of it is that you need to have, I believe, on farmland assessment on production value and not on market value because market value very much depends on where your location is. If you are beside a city and your market value is high but it's still assessed as agricultural land and you assess it on market value, you could never produce agriculturally, yet you would be in a situation where that land would not be able to be afforded, to be had. You can't sell it. It has speculation, yet as agricultural land you're taking it out of production.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say that we are doing all of those guidelines right now. What is being challenged is not the process in which we're doing it. What is being challenged: I guess what you would call it is an interpretation of how the guidelines are being presented. That is what we're trying to clear up. It is only a procedural issue.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, did you want to speak on this amendment?

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I find it interesting that the Member for Calgary-Currie found this section 322.1 contentious because, in fact, we were thinking the same thing. In our view, section 322.1 removes any possible challenges to the validity of the minister's guidelines, including possible lawsuits. Although there may be precedents in what the government is doing, any move by the government to indemnify itself from its actions by stakeholders is one, in our view, that chips away at the basis of open and accountable governance. Although the government may claim that stability of taxation is ensured through this act, such stability is best attained through laws and regulations that include meaningful stakeholder input rather than sort of an authoritarian approach, which, in our view, that is an example of.

If the government is worried about frivolous lawsuits hindering government business, then it would be wise to follow its own laws that already exist. With claimants that are considered to be frivolous, you can declare them vexatious litigants, and off they go. Right? If the test of the vexatious litigant fails, then the stakeholder should have the right to challenge the government, as is the basis for an open and transparent democracy.

I don't often think similarly to the Member for Calgary-Currie, but today it seems like we are. So I certainly support this amendment. Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to rise and speak again in direct response to what the minister was saying just a few minutes ago. I don't think that the minister would find that I disagree with anything that he said about regulated assessment. The issue, though, is not regulated assessment. The issue is about equalized assessment. Also, the issue is not about process. The issue is about a challenge to the validity of the ministerial guidelines.

As the minister said himself – and I'm going now from memory, and if I get this wrong, I'll admit that my short-term memory isn't always as good as it perhaps should be at this time of the evening. If, as I thought the minister said, this is really an argument over interpretation between the city of Calgary and the province of Alberta, then given the legislation that was in place at the time that the city tried to interest the province and the ministry of municipal affairs in sitting down and negotiating any equitable solution to the problem, and if in fact the legislation was in place when this degenerated into the filing of a lawsuit, then the appropriate place to resolve this is, in fact, in the courts.

Now, if the minister and the government wish to amend the Municipal Government Act so that going forward everything that the minister has talked about in regard to moving the guidelines so that they have the effect of regulation, so that they are legitimized, for lack of a better word, so that the practice is codified as the process, that's fine. Then if the city of Calgary or the city of Edmonton or the hamlet of Rolling Hills, for heaven's sake, or Farmer Jones has a problem with the process, then the appropriate avenue to follow, if the process is unacceptable to somebody, is a political challenge to that, not a legal challenge. I understand that. But we're in a situation where we're in the middle of a legal proceeding now, and the government is trying to change the rules without allowing that legal proceeding to see itself through.

There's an old cliché about closing the barn door after the horse has bolted, Mr. Chairman. This seems to me to be a case of the government trying to close the door on the horse as it's halfway out of the barn and do the horse some significant injurious harm.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The degree of arrogance of the government goes unchecked. What we have here is the suggestion that a minister is omnipotent, is omniscient, and therefore the guidelines that he or she comes up with are not subject to question or appeal.

Now, what we're doing with this proposed amendment is rather generous. We're not handcuffing future decisions or future guidelines, because we believe those guidelines should be discussed in the open democratic atmosphere of this Legislature. But we're not going to stand by and let two-thirds of Albertans who are directly affected by equalized assessment have their potential pockets picked

or micromanaged by this government. This government complains about federal intervention, but when it intervenes in the lives of the citizens of two-thirds of this province and attempts to do an end run by changing the rules midstream, the government needs to think twice.

8:50

The choices of this cabinet have already alienated people living in urban areas. While I appreciated the minister's explanation of the difference between farmland and city land and the need for farmers to have a different sort of tax structure, that makes absolute sense, but meanwhile city dwellers are getting hit with so-called fair assessments that do not take into account the nature of the house or the dwelling on the property. As the cities expand, the value of those inner-city properties increases to the point where seniors or anyone on a fixed income could have a ramshackle shack assessed at half a million, a million and a half dollars because of the land that they once had. The only way they can realize any of that value is by selling it.

For the member opposite to suggest that this is just bookkeeping or wording and to ignore the millions and millions and millions of dollars that are in dispute over the unfair assessments is not acceptable. I would suggest that by failing to heed our suggested amendment, the government will probably face a court challenge in trying to change the legislation in the midst of a legal argument. I don't think that would be legal to start with, but I don't know enough. My profession was education, not law, but I think the government would be walking on thin ground.

I would suggest you take what we offer, which is a single amendment which acknowledges the fact that the minister is not omnipotent or omniscient, that the appeal process should be able to take into account the guidelines. Otherwise, all we have is a kangaroo court, where the outcome is predetermined, and that happens far too often with this government in this province. What I would suggest for the sake of your future electoral potential: you'd better heed what two-thirds of this province and its two major mayors are concerned about.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, the hon. member opposite said that we were not willing to meet, some of those types of allegations. I would suggest to the hon. member that we did have discussions. We did have discussions about, you know, the focus that the mayor had in mind. We did not agree with that direction. It does not mean that we didn't have discussions.

Just to answer the other comments, guidelines are only an interpretation, really, of assessment. Those guidelines are large volumes. They talk about the size of wire. They talk about the size of pipe, you know, linear pipe. They talk about what services – let me find the right word – telecommunications and power systems supply. They talk about how assessment is achieved for farmland. Those guidelines are not referenced in the act. All that we're trying to do is reference those guidelines in the act and in that way being available.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Very briefly, I wanted to rise and speak in favour of this amendment, amendment A1, as moved by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie. Not to sound redundant or to duplicate some of my colleagues' previous remarks,

I just wanted to emphasize the fact that nothing in this amendment prevents the minister from moving forward and changing things from this point forward.

What we're trying to say is that it's not fair, and like my colleague from Calgary-Varsity I, too, as a layperson – I don't have a law background – don't think that this should be allowed or that, in fact, it is possible for a government, any government, to change things midstream and to come in and say that anything is going to be changed retroactively and that any claim that is being pursued in court would be cancelled or terminated or rendered invalid. I don't think as a layperson that this is right or that it is fair.

Now, I bet you the government has its own legal consultants, be it the Department of Justice, or be it Parliamentary Counsel, and they probably asked those questions, Mr. Chairman, ahead of introducing this bill. I just find it puzzling and unacceptable, to be frank.

The hon. minister indicated, contrary to what we in the opposition believe, that he in fact did have consultations and discussions with the different municipalities. What my colleague from Calgary-Varsity was trying to emphasize is that this is a changing province, Mr. Chairman, and it's an urban province. People who live in the major cities constitute more than two-thirds of the population of this province. Their interests have to be protected, and their points of view have to be heard.

One example that we have is an exchange of ideas and points between a Calgary resident who actually happens to be an assessor – his name is Wayne Llewellyn – and the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I noticed that the government is trying to say: we are fair, and we have your interests at heart. I noticed that the argument we're presenting from this side of the House is: no, you're not, and there's a bit of arrogance in your language and in your treatment of those municipalities, be it Calgary, Edmonton, or some of the other centres.

In one of the responses back and forth between the minister and that particular gentleman the minister in his response indicated, and I'm quoting.

However, government does not consider it proper to challenge the Minister's authority to set out guidelines for the assessment of regulated property through the assessment appeal system, and Bill 26 is merely a further confirmation of this position.

Now, why does the government think that it's inappropriate for people to question them? Certainly, governments have a right to govern, and they have the technical expertise and the support staff and all the people at their disposal to come up with legislation, which should be good legislation. There should be also an equally important mechanism for people who are unhappy or dissatisfied with government decisions to question those government decisions, and having the court was a mechanism that provided that functionality. Now, this bill is taking that away from people. Nobody could question the government. The government decrees what they see fit, and we should believe, first, that it's accurate, second, that it's fair, and third, we have no right to question it.

I doubt that this is the direction that the drafters of the bill intended. If, in fact, that was their intention, then I'm forced to say that this is the worst example of government arrogance I have yet to encounter after having been elected to this esteemed Assembly two and a half years ago. It's in writing, the government doesn't think that people should question it, and now they're putting it into law. I totally disagree, and I know citizens of this province will totally disagree. People who are affected directly will totally disagree. This amendment restores some of that balance that was lost when Bill 26, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, was introduced.

Mr. Chairman, not to prolong this discussion, I support amend-

ment A1, and I urge all members of this House to support it as well in the interest of fairness and, again, to avoid a legal challenge based on a government changing its direction midstream.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I need to reiterate again that an individual has the right to appeal. We are not taking away any rights as far as appeal on the basis that they have been prepared correctly or that the legislation has been interpreted properly. That is what we're talking about. As far as the right to appeal, we don't take those rights away. Those rights are still there.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The rights that aren't there are the rights to question the guidelines. They're at ministerial discretion. This is a repeat of what happened last year with Bill 40, where instead of tuition increases being discussed in the open light of this democratic institution, they were put into ministerial discretion. This is one more attempt to be covert instead of open and transparent.

9:00

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Chairman, you know, we need to talk about, let's say, the application. You can't appeal a speed limit. You can appeal if it's applied correctly, but the speed limit is still there. So when we look at regulated assessment, there are guidelines that are in place. Are they applied correctly? That is what you can appeal.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I think the minister needs to come up with a stronger example. A minister didn't sit in the darkness of his room saying: "Hmm, let me think. I think I'll make the speed limit on the Deerfoot 110. So be it." There was a committee involved in the decisions. There was a regulated, legislated process. Taking away the process of appealing based on the questionable guidelines just basically says, "I know it all, so accept me," and that, of course, is not acceptable.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Those guidelines are established with consultation: established with consultation with assessors, established with consultation with industry. I would like to inform the hon. member that, no, the minister did not just sit there one day and decide that these are what the regulations should be, the regulated assessment. What does happen is that there is a lot of consultation, and the guidelines that are formed are probably – and I'm only guessing – 500-plus pages long.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. When the government is formed by Liberals, consultation will be replaced with collaboration. We won't just tell people what we'd like them to hear and say: what do you think of that? We'll involve them in the decision-making. That way we won't alienate two-thirds of the province.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:04 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonko	Elsalhy	Miller, B.
Chase	MacDonald	Taylor
Eggen		

Against the motion:

Abbott	Forsyth	Melchin
Amery	Goudreau	Mitzel
Backs	Groeneveld	Oberg
Boutilier	Jablonski	Oberle
Calahasen	Johnson	Pham
Cao	Johnston	Renner
Cenaiko	Liepert	Rodney
Danyluk	Lindsay	Strang
DeLong	Lougheed	Webber
Ducharme	Lund	

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 29
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Further to the problems that we have seen in regard to Bill 26, I have an area that I would like to focus on which is to do with section 322(3), and I would like to distribute an amendment that I'll pass through the pages.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, if you wouldn't mind, you have to give them to the pages and the original copy to the table.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, you may proceed.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Good. As you will see, I'm passing the amendment around. Right now the bill states that the guidelines will have the same effect as the regulations but at the same time will not be considered as adherent to the Regulations Act. So while we don't challenge the right of the minister to create regulations and guidelines, we do have issues with the guidelines being treated as regulations while being exempted from the Regulations Act.

Mr. Elsalhy: That sounds simple.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. This would be the result of section 322(3), and that's what my amendment would endeavour to strike.

The Regulation Act is a substantial bit of problematic area in our parliamentary system, ensuring that regulations are published in a timely manner and in a manner that is open and transparent, which is good. Creating guidelines as regulations but not making them adherent to the Regulations Act is a step against this idea of openness and transparency. It removes the regulations for public scrutiny, and it takes away public accountability. Guidelines are written annually. There is no reason why a year isn't enough time

to process them through the appropriate channels and to in fact treat them as proper regulations adherent to the Regulations Act. By removing the restriction on the application of the Regulation Act, we can ensure that the guidelines, if treated as regulations, in fact will function in an open and transparent manner.

My amendment, Mr. Chair, is to simply strike that section, section 2, by striking out “, but is exempted from the application of the Regulations Act”. So, of course, we will all support this and move on in the most transparent and democratic way possible.

Thanks.

Mr. Chase: It makes me think of the line from the song: a horse is a horse, of course, of course; a horse is a horse, of course. In this case this exempting regulations – it's almost so absurd as to be difficult to argue. It, again, makes me think of 1984, where he who controls the past controls the future. How deep does this government want to go to bury the public transparency and accountability process? It's just unbelievable to me: the manipulation of the words. “A guideline established under subsection (2) is a regulation for the purposes of this Act, but is exempted from the application of the Regulations Act.” How can you have a regulation that doesn't fit into the Regulations Act? I don't know. I really think you need to have your legal counsel go over your bills before you bring them to this House because I believe you're wasting our time and that of the taxpayers.

9:20

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else?

Hon. members, first, for the record this amendment is referred to as amendment A2. There being no other speakers, I'll call for a vote on this amendment.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else on the bill itself?

Are you ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 26 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 32 Animal Health Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today in Committee of the Whole to present Bill 32, the Animal Health Act. I certainly appreciate the support received at second reading of the bill, and responses to the questions proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East during second debate have been tabled.

The provision in Bill 32 will allow Alberta to better prepare for an outbreak of highly contagious livestock disease and respond to

emergency situations quicker and more effectively to protect both animal and human health. Mr. Chairman, that is why I'm encouraging all members of this House to give their full support to Bill 32.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to participate in Committee of the Whole on Bill 32, the Animal Health Act. I first thought it was very good and sound legislation, but the more I look into it, I think it is legislation that if we pass in its current form will certainly hide from the public another outbreak of incompetence by this department because of the inclusion of a provision to essentially override the FOIP Act.

The hon. minister is absolutely correct, and I appreciate his time and his diligence in preparing answers to previous questions that we had in second reading. Of course, we asked if the Privacy Commissioner had been consulted and, if so, what his response was to the proposed paramountcy provision in this legislation. The minister writes that the Privacy Commissioner was consulted, but he does not agree with the proposed paramountcy provision in Bill 32.

Now, there appear to be differing legal interpretations of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, section 17(2)(b), from the Department of Agriculture and Food. This department believes that the proposed paramountcy provision is required to provide an increased degree of assurance to animal owners. Release of information will occur as required by section 32 of FOIP, when it is clearly in the public interest to do so.

If we look at section 32 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, we will see its division 4, public health and safety, that information must be disclosed if it is in the public interest. It goes on to say here, Mr. Chairman, in section 32(1):

- (a) information about a risk of significant harm to the environment or to the health or safety of the public, of the affected group of people, of the person or of the applicant, or
- (b) information the disclosure of which is, for any other reason, clearly in the public interest.

Well, I don't know who is going to determine the public interest. I certainly don't have the confidence that Agriculture and Food is going to do that. I'm sorry.

Mr. Boutilier: I have confidence in you, George.

Mr. MacDonald: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has confidence in the hon. minister, but certainly taxpayers are asking me a lot of questions about what's going on with that department.

The Privacy Commissioner, Mr. Chairman, does not agree with the proposed paramountcy provision in Bill 32. The Privacy Commissioner does not see the need for the extra secrecy. Citizens of Alberta can't understand why this government is so obsessed with the extra secrecy, but after question period today and the questions that were addressed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I can see why this government is so obsessed with these extra layers or veils of secrecy.

Now, I would reconsider my opposition to this bill if the Department of Agriculture and Food would table these legal interpretations of the FOIP Act that they have and that they're basing this letter on. If they'd table them in the Assembly, I will certainly make every effort to have a look at them. Mr. Chairman, it is alarming that the minister has consulted with the Privacy Commissioner on the paramountcy clause in section 55 and ignored his advice. The

Privacy Commissioner, according to the minister, does not agree that this provision is necessary. This government, as I said earlier, as we all know, prefers to hide information from Albertans as opposed to being open and transparent.

The minister states in a letter dated May 14 of this year: "Agriculture and Food (AF) believes the proposed paramountcy provision is required to provide an increased degree of assurance [as I said] to animal owners." Why do animal owners need an increased degree of assurance? Is it the minister's position that animal owners will hold back information if this provision is not included? Which animal owners has the minister consulted with to make this determination? Has the minister spoken with animal owners who say that they will not share information, even though the law requires it? Are there a lot of animal owners in Alberta, in the minister's opinion again, that would break the law if they don't have increased assurance in the form of secrecy provisions? Who has the minister spoken with specifically? Who is lobbying the minister to hide information from Albertans despite the advice of the Privacy Commissioner not to do so? If this paramountcy provision is, in fact, about protecting animal owners, why is there only a five-year limit on the release of that information?

Now, the Premier likes to talk about how open and transparent the current government is. Can the minister tell us how his decision to ignore the Privacy Commissioner's advice and to hide more information from Albertans fits with the Premier's claims? Did the minister consult with the Premier in his decision to ignore the Privacy Commissioner? Does the Premier support the minister's decision to hide this information from Albertans? Is creating even more secretive legislation part of this government's pledge to be more open and transparent? Why does the minister consult with the Privacy Commissioner if he simply ignores his advice? Can the minister tell us exactly what the Privacy Commissioner said about this paramountcy provision? Will the minister table in this House any correspondence or documentation between his department and the Privacy Commissioner regarding Bill 32, or is that secret as well?

9:30

Again, can the minister tell us, Mr. Chairman, why he believes it is necessary to continue with this government tradition of being secretive, hiding information once again from Albertans? Can the minister tell us why he's ignoring the Privacy Commissioner? Does the minister believe that the Privacy Commissioner is wrong? Why does the minister need to be so secretive? What does the minister hope to gain by hiding this information from Albertans? Can the minister please explain what the point of consulting with experts is if he's simply going to ignore their advice?

Now, in his letter dated the 14th of May, the hon. minister states:

The Privacy Commissioner was consulted. He does not agree with the proposed paramountcy provision in Bill 32 being necessary. Because of differing legal interpretations of the . . . FOIP, Agriculture and Food believes the proposed paramountcy provision is required to provide an increased degree of assurance to animal owners.

Can the minister now tell us who in the department is interpreting the FOIP Act? I hope it's not the same people who were doing your farm fuel benefit.

Now, demanding that this statute be more secretive than is necessary according to the Privacy Commissioner, in his letter, again, dated May 14, 2007, the minister states: "Release of information will occur, as required" – and we had a little discussion of section 32, Public Health and Safety, of the FOIP Act – "when it is clearly in the public interest to do so." Can the minister tell us who determines whether or not, as I said earlier, the information is clearly

in the public interest? Does the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner play some role in this determination? Why, then, doesn't the hon. minister just listen to the commissioner when he tells his department that added secrecy provisions are not needed? Why does the minister insist on moving backwards in terms of openness and accountability? How does the minister justify his decision to support a bill that increases the secrecy of this government? Is this the minister's idea of openness?

Mr. Chairman, there are also other parties that have come forward to our office with the claim that they were not consulted in regard to the drafting of this legislation. I'm wondering if the hon. minister would table a complete list of all the organizations that were consulted regarding the drafting of Bill 32, the Animal Health Act.

Certainly, there are provisions in here that are noteworthy. I think the Livestock Diseases Act needs to be updated. You know, there's an interest in Bill 32, the Animal Health Act. There's a genuine interest to improve things, but with these secrecy provisions, I'm sorry; on this side of the House, until we get further clarification and perhaps have a look at the legal opinion, we cannot at this time contemplate supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mittel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Having not had a chance to speak in second reading, it's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 32, the Animal Health Act. I want to thank the Minister of Agriculture and Food for bringing this act forward. I think this act will go a long way towards helping our livestock industry move into a new era, an era of global trade where market access is of critical importance. As an MLA and farmer I see benefits in this new approach, benefits for my constituents and Albertans as we adapt to the changing times. After all, we all want to and need to keep our livestock industry competitive and our food safe.

I've heard from my constituents about the devastating effect the emergence of BSE in our cattle herd had on them. I want to ensure that we learn lessons from the past and do better for our producers going forward. I'm keen on how this act will help meet our present and possible future challenges. One of the most devastating things for the farming regions of Alberta was the BSE crisis. The cow-calf operators of Alberta were extremely jeopardized when they were not able to market their animals to global markets. In particular, losing market access to the United States was our biggest loss as they are our largest market. Even today we've not fully restored market access for cattle over 30 months of age. This restriction certainly limits our ability to market cull cows. All the while, we continue to face organized lobby groups like R-CALF and other challenges that are making it slow and laborious to open borders.

Bill 32 also enables Alberta to progress with animal traceability. As the minister said, it enables us to move forward in a way that makes sense for Alberta, that considers the needs of our producers and industry as a whole. Not only will it help us fight disease, but I'd like to emphasize that this initiative can have direct benefit for producers seeking global market opportunities. Under the new Animal Health Act we can show our diligence with control and containment of highly contagious diseases. Our ability to trace our animals and animal products from the farm to the fork is beneficial to maintain and expand market opportunities. Consumers around the world, including my constituents, are demanding this assurance.

We've seen how our good work at BSE surveillance and our commitment to improving traceability has helped open borders. But I've also been talking to other sectors, and I can tell you that this is not just a concern for beef. Consumer confidence in all our animal

products will continue to become more and more important. There's no denying it. This is a global trend that is here now. I want to commend these industries that have already made the commitment to improve traceability. The way the regulations are being developed, I'm confident they will reflect the good work that has been started and will build on these successes.

Mr. Chairman, one of the issues that came up during the consultation period in this Legislature and was just mentioned by our previous speaker was centred around the information farmers would have to submit to help prepare for and respond to a disease outbreak and the level of protection that would be given that information by this government. I want to assure my constituents that any information collected under this legislation is considered necessary for the success of our industry and maintaining trade opportunities. I believe we need information in order to respond quickly and effectively to an outbreak of an animal disease.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, I understand that we are strengthening the protection of information under this act by seeking paramountcy over section 17(2)(b) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This will give members of our industry protection when an outbreak occurs with no direct threat to animal or human health in the immediate vicinity. We understand that farms are businesses, and we want to protect and respect their rights as businesses to maintain the reputation of their business. This exemption will encourage the sharing of information and increase the level of confidence in our system.

When there's a disease outbreak that poses a threat to the health of animals or humans in the immediate vicinity, it will still be subject to FOIP, section 32, that requires the release of enough personal information about the disease outbreak to those at risk to enable them to take precautions against the disease in question.

Mr. Chairman, the health and safety of Albertans is the number one priority of this bill and this government. We want to make sure that when an outbreak occurs, we have the right information to act immediately to minimize any impacts on animal and human health. By having this information readily available, we are able to respond decisively at the first sign of an outbreak. This legislation is not intended to pry into the records of Alberta ranchers. I think the protection provided by Alberta's FOIP laws and by the exemption in this legislation is very appropriate.

One of the concerns I had with this legislation was the amount of information that would be required to be kept and filled in as we progress to make important decisions on this act through the regulation development stage. I've consulted with the Minister of Agriculture and Food to ensure that stakeholders will be consulted as the regulations develop. The minister has expressed an openness and commitment to stakeholders.

There's a commitment to continue working with industry every step of the way to make sure that this legislation works for them. After all, it's the members of our livestock industry who will be most affected by this change in legislation. This will affect the way they keep records, the way they respond to disease outbreaks, and the way they set up animal health and biosecurity programs to support the viability of their operations. We need their involvement and expertise to make sure that what we implement is effective, attainable, and affordable.

A great deal of stakeholder consultation work has already been done, Mr. Chairman, and I'm satisfied that the same openness to various perspectives will continue as we find the best approach for all Albertans in the regulation development process. In fact, I was happy to learn from the Minister of Agriculture and Food that the first stakeholder meeting to discuss the development of regulations is already planned in the next couple of weeks.

9:40

I know that the Department of Agriculture and Food is full of knowledgeable employees who help keep our agricultural industry competitive and strong. However, these individuals may not be able to identify problems in the legislation like the rancher who is immersed in the industry every day, problems that can only be recognized by those who work in the corral or on the slaughterhouse floor. This is the input the department needs to make sure that this legislation is as effective as it can be, and that is why it is important to consult with these stakeholders. After talking with the minister, I am confident that the approach we are taking is the best one to get us there.

In conclusion, I believe the proposed Animal Health Act would repeal and replace the existing Livestock Diseases Act, which was created in 1946 to minimize the impact of diseases in Alberta livestock. Much has changed in livestock farming in the last 61 years, and much has changed in the expectations of consumers in the marketplace.

I support the passage of Bill 32, and I thank the Minister of Agriculture and Food for bringing forward a bill reflective of the best interests of the modern livestock industry.

Mr. Chase: My belief is that Bill 32 accomplishes the exact opposite of what it's intended to do. In fact, I believe Premier Klein would be proud of this Bill 32 because it supports his response to the BSE crisis: shoot, shovel, and shut up. Burying things in FOIP on a covert, need-to-know basis sounds like something that we'd find with the Sandinistas or the CIA. It kills the credibility for importers, and it goes against traceability rather than supporting it.

I may be a city-based individual, but my family members in the Vermilion area have very direct experience with BSE. It was one of my cousins who bought the cow from the Saskatchewan farmer where the end result was the culling of his entire Angus herd. This is a herd that my uncle, David, and his wife, Patsy – we've got the Chase and the Cross families of Vermilion – had built up over years and years and years, and because of the poor handling of the BSE crisis, the inability to test live animals, his whole herd was culled. That was an awful lot of expensive meat that went to waste.

Now, this government, when the BSE crisis broke out, couldn't act for three months because there weren't sufficient testers at the time. The lone one or two testers were so caught up with testing for CWD that the results weren't announced for three months, and the credibility of the Alberta beef industry suffered tremendously as a result.

We can't afford another BSE crisis, and the only way to be proactive about this is being transparent and accountable so that all people who would wish to import beef, whether it's across the border or meat sent to Japan, can trust the Alberta process. Bill 32 and its FOIP attitude take secrecy to another high level.

Today we have been talking about transparency and accountability in a number of bills. This government has got to really shake its head because there are outfits like the R-CALF down in Montana that are trying to prevent Canadian beef from crossing the line. I support what the former agricultural minister said, that we need to be shipping beef in a box rather than beef on the hoof. But as long as we're exchanging live animals, we have to have such an open and transparent process. We have to know that each of those animals has been thoroughly tested. I know that the test on live animals – I gather it hasn't been completed. But because we don't have that blood testing at this point, we need to reassure the world that Alberta beef is the best.

Bill 32, by saying that only certain people require this information, goes against the Privacy Commissioner's interpretation of what

necessary information should be out there. How can we possibly say to people who would buy Alberta beef that we've gone through the process, that it's thoroughly protected, when it took this government so long to do the feed recall? I know that it's hard to trace back, but it was suggested that for some of the feed that contained the animal products itself that were being fed to the cattle, we were so slow to act that it continued, basically, a year and a half after the BSE ban. During the BSE crisis the people that profited the most were the American slaughterhouse owners because they not only received compensation for their own internal large herds, but they did their own slaughtering first before regular Alberta ranchers could get their beef to processing.

We cannot afford to maintain a ranching industry and support farmers if the government is suggesting that anything but absolute transparency and accountability take place. We have improved the traceability. Why would we work against it?

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Speaking on Bill 32, I do support a number of the positions that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has taken about openness and transparency. If we're going to continue to ensure that everyone, including ourselves, has complete and total confidence in our industry, we've got to make sure that there's nothing that can be hidden from anyone. We've got to make sure that any and all available information is available to all citizens, not just a select few who happen to sit behind the privacy desk. The Privacy Commissioner did say that everyone should in fact have the opportunity to have the information.

Even though I believe that the intent of the bill is good, that we do need to modernize the legislation, my concern with this particular piece surrounds the game farming. Were the game ranchers consulted as well? That is part of the Animal Health Act because they do, in fact . . .

An Hon. Member: Are they covered?

Mr. Bonko: Well, that's right. Are they going to be double-fencing to make sure that they don't have the chronic wasting disease continue to perhaps affect that? That is a big industry. That's an industry that we've been concerned about for quite a while, since the breakout, and it was denied that it was ever in existence.

We've already done some culling twice or three times now. The last cull was around Oyen, where they did about 1,200, and they did in fact detect some more, that the existence is in the wild, and it's continuing. I'm not sure if it's slipping in from Saskatchewan or if it's manifesting itself right within the borders, if it's linked to the ranching. That's definitely some concerns that we have on our side of the House. I know there are concerns out there. As an avid hunter myself and people out in the area of Stettler, Drumheller, where the cull has occurred, are definitely concerned.

That is some of the talk out there during the door-knocking as we happen to be in a by-election right now. Those are some of the tips that people are talking about as a candidate does go out there in the area of Oyen and that. People want to know: what's the government doing about that? How has it managed to get this far this fast? Those are some of the conversations that our candidate has been inquiring about and has questions about, constituents out there have, myself as well.

I'm not sure if the minister is prepared to answer some questions with regard to some of that. If you could tell me, I wouldn't mind. Has the minister talked to some of the ranchers and insisted or flown

the idea about the double-fencing to ensure that we don't have the ability for the wild animals to get right in with our game animals, that are supposed to be domesticated?

Those are some specifics, Mr. Chairman, that I wouldn't mind having answered, then. Thank you.

9:50

Mr. Chase: Just to follow up on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, the Alberta Fish and Game Association and Bob Scammell, who frequently writes for the *Calgary Herald*, are extremely concerned about the interaction of wild and farmed elk, deer, and so on. Our first problem with CWD can be traced back to elk that we imported from I believe it was Montana. It might have been Idaho, but I believe it was Montana. Now we are taking such expensive measures, shooting from the air and culling large numbers of the wild deer population, again because we don't have the ability to test the animals live. So until the government decides that they're going to provide compensation for these people that they lured into the elk velvet and deer, we're going to be liable for an awful lot of compensation. The faster we get out of this industry, the better.

While I'm talking about that industry, the most offensive thing that could possibly be occurring in terms of the culling or the eventual getting out of that industry would be the penned hunts. This is something that the government had suggested, and some of the owners of these elk and deer, who were so frustrated by the lack of their industry's value, had suggested bringing people in. This is the equivalent of that large hog story down in the States, where it turns out that the so-called wild hog was actually one that had been on a farm and then was shot within a penned circumstance. Heaven forbid that that kind of penned hunting should ever find itself within Alberta boundaries.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Mr. Groeneveld: No way. After that got rolled at me, I'm going to roll right back.

I will for the hon. members across discuss the freedom of information and privacy act because apparently that's where they're trying to come from. I guess that I get a little disturbed when three members opposite stand up and once again try and attack the credibility of agriculture people. Whether it's the farm fuel benefit act or whatever it is, it's always these people that are doing all these illegal and secretive things.

Mr. Chase: We've got the government speaking, not the farmers.

Mr. Groeneveld: I was quiet when you were talking.

I will talk about where we're at with the FOIP Act on Bill 32. I don't think I'm going to have to table it. You may as well listen to it right here. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat explained it very well. I don't think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar happened to be listening at that time, so I guess that he'd better listen this time because I'm not going to table this document. I'm going to read it to him.

Clearly, accurate data must be available for any rapid response to a contagious disease. Not only is this information vital in responding to emergency health situations, but it is necessary for the success of our industry and maintaining trade opportunities.

However, it is important to note that this is also confidential business information. For that reason, the Animal Health Act aims

to gain paramouncy over Section 17(2)(b) of the Act to further protect information. This means that information will not be provided if it is requested by a third party who is not directly at risk. Information would only be provided subject to Section 32 that was specifically required to those at risk to enable them to take precautions.

A balance is needed between the need for the sharing of confidential information, the protection of human health and the protection of privacy. This balance will ensure participation and maximum confidence in Alberta's handling of information.

- FOIP section 17(2)(b) provides that if there is a request for information under FOIP, if the information can affect public health, it must be released whether or not the person making the FOIP request is personally affected.
- Release of disease information from a farm under FOIP 17(2)(b) could have a serious impact on the owner without providing any significant information to the 3rd party. In other words, if the 3rd party was not directly at risk, the released personal information would not facilitate mitigation of a risk but would compromise the owner's confidentiality.
- The [Animal Health Act] is requiring animal owners to provide information on the disease status of their animals. Compliance with this requirement will be a significant issue if there is not some guarantee of confidentiality of the information.
- The [Animal Health Act] proposes an exemption to FOIP section 17(2)(b) only. The information will be kept confidential for five years. After five years, there would likely be little impact of releasing the information because the disease will have been dealt with or would no longer be relevant, and in all likelihood will not be of sufficient merit to generate a FOIP request.
- Any disease outbreak that poses a threat to the health of animals or humans in the immediate vicinity will still be subject to FOIP section 32. It requires the release of enough personal information about the disease outbreak to those at risk to enable them to take precautions against the disease in question.

Mr. Chair, I have great faith in the animal owners to report the diseases that might come along under this. The hon. member always seems to think that we're out there and we're dishonest. But we have to change this act. We have to be modern. It doesn't have a lot to do with some of the issues that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity brought up.

Now, with the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, I sometimes wonder where his relevance comes from. I guess that it's a chance to sneak in some other issues that aren't relevant to where we're at with this bill. The elk and deer farm hunts in Alberta are not legal. We've never even brought them up since I've been in this capacity, so I'm not sure where he's going with that one.

Game farming is under the auspices of SRD, and the chronic wasting disease, certainly, has a relevance to this. Somewhere in there there was a question about compensation. These are wild animals out there, and I'm not sure who should be compensated and the cost that we are . . .

Mr. Chase: The game ranchers.

Mr. Groeneveld: The game ranchers? They have nothing to do with the wild animals out there.

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, I would encourage all people to look favourably upon this act. It is certainly not an act out there to try and be dishonest and hide things. It's exactly the opposite, and anybody that thinks different is exactly out of line as far as I'm concerned.

Mr. Chairman, I'm a farmer. My livelihood and my son's livelihood depend on what we do with the Animal Health Act. Why would we go out there and cut our own throat? I don't understand their issues. There are certainly issues that seem to come from the other side of the House that I don't agree with.

There is openness and transparency in this act. This is a good act. We have to move forward on it.

Mr. Chase: I look at this third-person, need-to-know basis in the same way that the Energy and Utilities Board conducts hearings. People who are in the surrounding area who are affected by the potential of fracking have a right to intervene at the hearings, but the government has prevented them from doing so. It's only if you're within I believe the distance is 500 metres of the well being drilled that you have any opportunity to respond to the effect it might have on your own agricultural and water well-being.

On this third-person, need-to-know, and the government decides with whom it will share the information: my limited understanding is that BSE is potentially transferred through prions. I would think that when herds come into contact with each other, the importance of the traceability is paramount. I'm also very aware, having worked in the park area and having been forced to be a cattle herder against my own will, that cattle don't necessarily respect fencelines, so there is the possibility of intermingling of the various farm animals.

10:00

The length of time it takes for the BSE to take hold is such that years later – and if I were the farmer down the road or beside the individual where the BSE was discovered, I'd very much want to know because I would be questioning the health of my animals. I'm not suggesting that we have to double-fence our cattle like I do believe we need to double-fence our elk and deer. Sharing information with those affected: I don't think you can go wrong by being overly accountable or transparent, but I do believe you can get into a great deal of difficulty if you don't share that information and appear to the world that will be importing your beef that your process is completely open.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 32 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report bills 33, 26, and 32.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had

under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 33, Bill 26, Bill 32. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 29 Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate May 30: Reverend Abbott]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First off, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for his efforts to update us on this side of the House in regard to this legislation. Certainly, the provisions of Bill 29 have been summarized already in the Assembly by the hon. member, I believe, and they have been summarized very well. I see this legislation as a step toward this province becoming aligned with Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Those Assemblies, as I understand it, have enacted similar legislation. It's interesting, I guess, for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder that the Conservative government here would be following in the New Democrats' footsteps in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Certainly, this bill is a step in the right direction. Whenever we look at amending the Farm Implement Act, enabling financial institutions to offer financial lease and financial lease-purchase options to farmers for the acquisition of farm implements, it's a change.

The board that is going to be set up with this bill – it certainly will be interesting to see how this board develops. It's a seven-member board, as I understand it, consisting of three farm commodity group members, three industry members respecting dealers, distributors, and manufacturers of agricultural equipment, and a member appointed by the minister. The board advises the minister on matters arising from the operation of the act. The Alberta Farmers' Advocate's office administers the act. I'm wondering: is the hon. member confident that the budget of the Farmers' Advocate is sufficient to administer this act?

First off, I would like to make a comment in regard to the member of this seven-person panel appointed by the minister. I hope the criteria for this is not a Progressive Conservative Party membership. You know, some of these commissions and boards that we've set up here recently are patronage appointments, Mr. Speaker. I hope this board doesn't become a soft landing for a Progressive Conservative Party member. We see this commission or this task force that has undertaken this review of all these agencies, boards, and commissions, and we'll see what happens with this task force.

A farm implement, as has been indicated earlier, is "any implement, equipment, engine, motor, machine, combine, tractor or attachment used or intended for use in farming operations" but does not include items exempted by regulation. There is a retail selling price mentioned here of \$4,000 or less. Currently, a farm implement dealer is defined as a person who sells, offers for sale, leases, or offers for lease farm implements. Licences are required for both

dealers and distributors with options to guarantee warranty service and parts available for a period of 10 years.

I would also assume that the lending agencies have all been contacted in regard to Bill 29 and they are satisfied. I was surprised with previous legislation that had been drafted and developed by this department where, you know, the banks had major issues with it. I'm sure the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food is quite aware of that situation and the consequences of that.

Certainly, whenever we look at this, farmers will have more choices when it comes to acquiring farm implements. Financial institutions will basically become middlemen, as I understand it, hon. member, in the transaction process, acquiring the farm implement on behalf of the purchaser from the implement dealer. Once the purchaser has acquired the farm implement, the implement distributor, dealer, and farmer are bound by statutory and other agreed upon guarantees or warranties relating to the implement.

This side of this House has nothing against farmers or rural people, as the minister of agriculture maintains. He is certainly out to lunch on that one, Mr. Speaker. It's the furthest thing from the truth, hon. member, and the minister knows that. He's just trying to get a lifeline because of inadequate auditing done by the department over the last 10 years. He can publicly try to blame us, but the farmers that phone us certainly know. I'm talking about the latest program delivery that isn't working out, and that's the farm fuel benefit. The hon. minister knows that it's not this side of the House that's at fault or to blame. He can point fingers at us all he wants, but farmers and taxpayers know what the real problem is and who caused it.

10:10

The purpose of this bill, Mr. Speaker, and the effect of this bill is to provide greater financing options to farmers who are looking to acquire farm implements. There does not appear to be any controversial provisions within this bill, and again through the course of debate I think we're going to find out which financial institutions and other groups have been contacted and what they've had to say about this. At this time I'm certainly willing to support this bill. The intent and the effect of this bill are positive, and I think that this bill will have some very positive outcomes for farmers in Alberta. I look forward to further discussion on this, and I thank the House and the Speaker for their attention.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just very briefly would like to also express the New Democrat caucus's support for Bill 29, the Farm Implement Amendment Act. This bill, in fact, seems to resolve a number of potential difficulties over warranty implementations by dealers and liabilities concerning issues with purchases of farm equipment, making the purchaser rather than the financial institution brokering the deal responsible for the payment of lease-purchase amounts to the dealer. In fact, this bill ensures that unscrupulous purchasers cannot get out of paying the dealer by stating that the financial institution as the broker is responsible for the payment.

So by making dealers responsible for enforcement of the warranty regardless of who bought the equipment, the bill ensures that farmers can get their equipment fixed or serviced even if it was the financial institution that brokered the deal. This bill does not put any unfair or onerous financial burdens on any particular party, so we see no reason why we shouldn't support it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise in support of Bill 29, the Farm Implement Amendment Act, and commend the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for bringing forth this bill. It's an important agricultural bill for our Alberta farmers, but it's also an important economic bill because it does increase the opportunity for capital aggregation, really, by ensuring that certain economic factors become more readily available to our farm producers.

Farming is a business, and it's very clear that this will increase the opportunities for farmers to finance their business. It's not only looking at Saskatchewan and Manitoba, although they have similar legislation. Some of the European models certainly look to leasing in a major way. The AIB, for example, has spoken about this quite a bit in trying to encourage greater leasing in Ireland.

Leasing is a method of financing agricultural equipment in a cost-effective manner. It is attractive to farmers as it avoids tying up money in depreciating assets. Leasing provides farmers with the option of making regular payments that suit their cash flow and budgetary requirements and as such presents a very cost-effective alternative to paying cash. Leasing may also confer certain tax advantages for farm businesses as payments made under a lease agreement can be tax deductible, making this form of asset financing even more attractive. Essentially, leasing allows farmers the immediate use of a productive asset while not imposing large restrictions on their cash flow. Leasing can provide financing with little initial outlay, thereby reducing the cash flow strain of capital expenditure. Importantly, given the significant expenditure involved with some of today's specialist machinery, leasing payments are a small portion of the purchase price of the equipment, and the lease payments can be scheduled to coincide with the seasonal cash flow of a farm business. In addition to preserving cash flow, the fixed payments associated with lease financing improve the ability of farmers to accurately budget and forecast their cash flows over the planning horizon.

Leasing is a very important type of option that must be made more available to farm producers, to farm businesses. In some countries in Europe leasing of implements and such is the preferred option in three out of four cases. It is a very important area in terms of increasing capital aggregation in the farm economy to have this option open.

Now, with all due respect to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar I have often heard the Official Opposition – in fact, this was raised the other day, when the Official Opposition was laughing at agricultural and rural interests in Alberta. There was some discussion and even a point of order raised on that. Actually, it's clear from my experience outside this House that I have seen that often and very clearly a factor that has been part of the Official Opposition's way of approaching agriculture. It's certainly not the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar but certainly the Official Opposition and its leader and leadership in general, and that is something that has been argued in this House and has actually, I think, been clearly proven.

Bill 29, in any case, Mr. Speaker, is a very important bill. I commend the mover again, and I do support this bill. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I, too, along with my colleagues support Bill 29. Although the majority of my life has been spent in the city, I was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. My grandparents lived in Meota, Saskatchewan, very near to Jackfish Lake, and we had a number of farming friends, and a number of my cousins were farm based. I have fond memories as a child playing with the combines and the tractors that my grandfather had partially carved

and partially built with pieces of tin, and I have fond memories of crawling through some of the old combines that were basically left in a heap to rust.

The face of farming, as I say, has changed tremendously since my father in the Dirty Thirties worked in threshing crews powered by steam engines. At that time there was, and there is still to a degree, sort of a collective nature to things. What the threshing crews did is kind of what the member referred to before. The threshing crews came through. They had the equipment, and the farmer would basically pay them in kind or after a fashion. It was almost like our modern leases today. They didn't have to have the overhead of having very expensive machinery.

For farmers today keeping the family farm intact is extremely difficult. What Bill 29 provides is a degree of reliability and liability for the implement dealership and the lessor of the equipment to treat the farmer in a fair manner. I know that we still have various combining crews that go from farm to farm and help each of their neighbours get the crop off, but the family farm is becoming almost a necessity for a number of farmers to survive. The whole historical roots and connection to the soil get lost when it becomes an industry instead of a family-owned business. Bill 29 gives the individual farmer the degree of support that is necessary to maintain a family farm in Alberta today.

10:20

I thank the government member and the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for recognizing the plight of farmers. Hopefully, through government land-use bills and so on we will stop encroaching on wonderfully arable farmland and maintain our proud traditional history.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar to close debate.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I would like to say thank you very much for the support. I do appreciate the support from all sides of the House on Bill 29. There were some excellent questions raised tonight by several of the members that spoke, and I will endeavour to answer those in Committee of the Whole or possibly in written form if we don't get a chance to do it in Committee of the Whole. I will answer those as soon as possible with detailed answers.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a second time]

Bill 39 Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate May 30: Mr. Lukaszuk]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in second reading of Bill 39, Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007. This bill is a result of a long period of discussion which culminated in a memorandum of understanding in December 2006, which was signed by both the members on the engineering side and also the members on the technologists side. The discussion paper accompanying this memorandum of understanding, which was published actually in *The PEGG*, provides valuable background material to help us understand

Bill 39. In fact, the discussion paper begins with this statement, and I thought it was a very clear delineation of the issue. "Engineering and technology are intertwined, and engineers and technologists work together across a wide spectrum of professional activity."

I mean, this is an important, descriptive statement. In the field, in the workplace, engineers and technologists work together to get the work done. There doesn't seem to be any conflict when work has to be done. They work together in teams, and in the field, in the actual workplace there's no conflict, but when it comes to organizing themselves into professional societies, that's where they perhaps get into conflict. It doesn't make much sense to have one group, engineers, having in place legislation pertaining to their profession, but technologists do not have legislation in place to regulate their profession.

Currently professional engineers, geologists, and geophysicists are regulated under provincial legislation as members of APEGGA, the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists of Alberta. Registered professional technologists are voluntary members of ASET, the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta. ASET is registered under the Societies Act but is not a legislated regulatory organization, so this bill is an attempt to elevate ASET and provide them the same kind of legislative protection and oversight and regulation as APEGGA. Discussions have gone on for some time to join the two together. B.C. tried to form the two into one association, and apparently that failed. What we have before us in Bill 39 is the proposal to have one act regulating two associations, so one act, two associations.

Why do this? Well, as the discussion paper indicates, this is in the public interest, and here I follow some of the points of the discussion paper. The model of one act, two associations will "better protect the public interest by assuring the competence of engineering and technology professionals across the spectrum of their intertwined practices." In the field engineers and technologists work together in teams, so it makes sense for their collected work, their integrated work to be regulated in an integrated way. If they work together in teams, are doing essentially the same scope of work, then they should have the same kind of legislation that oversees their collective work.

One act with oversight over all of its members brings professional standards and discipline and ethical standards to bear upon the members, so there is no discrimination or there's not a separate set of standards, set of discipline issues, ethical standards, or ethical code applying to one association and not the other. The same kinds of ethical standards apply to both associations, and this can be only a good thing.

The bill recognizes the independently practised engineering work of registered professional technologists who have been licensed by APEGGA. Now they will be recognized in this bill as professional licensees, and there will be a new designation, professional technologist, jointly regulated by APEGGA and ASET. I won't speak to specifics in the bill, but you have in the definitions in the front of the bill an outline of the various ways in which professional technologists are understood.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is all about professionalism or professionalization. It's about the ethics of professions. We've seen an evolution through recent history where all professions try to take charge of their own work, applying strict definitions, recognition of roles and responsibilities, and discipline. There's a great responsibility of professions to take care of their own house, so any kind of enhancement of the ethics of professions is something that I'm sure all members in the House would support.

The members of APEGGA and ASET are really to be commended in working together. I don't think it has been easy. You know, in

any profession there is a kind of pride in one's profession that often leads to, perhaps, a kind of conflict, if you like, with other professions, and especially when the word "engineer" is used. Some workers doing the same kind of work want to be considered to be engineers even though they're not, yet they're all basically working together, doing the same kind of work.

So it's to be commended that APEGGA and ASET have worked together to work out their relationship and to in a sense elevate the importance of their profession and the processes of accountability to the public. This elevation of the accountability to the public only will lead to an elevation of their professions' credibility, so under this act – one act, two professions – the credibility of the profession goes up and, I think, is enhanced.

Hopefully, this bill will bring to an end all conflict between the two organizations over the scope and role of each organization's members, and they will continue to work on this. Most of the bill is then putting into effect all the regulations with respect to ASET, which mirror what's already in place in terms of the legislation dealing with APEGGA.

We've met with members from APEGGA and ASET, and we are very impressed by the way they've been working together, so on this side we would certainly support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, whenever you look at this bill and you listen to the remarks of the previous speaker, I would urge all hon. members to support this legislation.

10:30

I would like to thank the members of APEGGA for their updates. There has been a lot of work done by both groups here, the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists of Alberta and the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta, to establish this one act, two associations model of governance. I, too, would like to commend them for their hard work.

I would also like to commend the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West and the previous minister of human resources and employment, the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, and also the current Minister of EII, because certainly this memorandum of understanding that has resulted in this legislation is significant. There have been some jurisdictional issues between these two groups. Hopefully, this will resolve the majority of them, and they will work together.

The engineers go out of their way to ensure that there is proper accreditation for engineers from other jurisdictions who come here to practise. I was very impressed with the work that they do to ensure that qualified engineers are given the proper accreditation so that they can carry on with their work here in this province. Other government departments could learn a lesson from APEGGA as far as professional accreditation goes, in my opinion, because certainly they do a very good job of ensuring that the engineers that are practising in this province meet their standards and the standards that, of course, are set out in legislation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this act has been a long time in coming. In the real world engineers and technologists work in integrated teams in order to serve the public interests effectively. Regulation of their respective professional practices needs to be conducted in an integrated manner, but we always must recognize that with engineered drawings and blueprints we've got to look down in the corner and we've got to make sure that the beaver stamp is there. There can be no shortcuts. There can be no cost-saving measures. We're all protected by the education that these individuals have before they

become professional engineers. We have to accept that, and we have to realize that we need the supervision of the professional engineer, the professional geologist, or the professional geophysicist. Let's not forget that.

I'm very pleased to see, as I said before, that these two organizations are working together to improve public safety by expanding the number of workers within their profession who hold themselves publicly accountable. We will always remember that there is a grey area between engineers and technologists, but this bill will make it easier for companies to identify qualified workers.

Again, in conclusion, let's not forget the role that engineers have to play, and it is a very, very important role. I certainly hope that we in no way are going to ever contemplate in this Assembly watering down the excellent standards that already exist for engineers, geologists, and geophysicists.

I would urge all hon. members to have a look at this bill and please support it. A lot of work has already gone into it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise in support of Bill 39, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007. This is an important bill and a long time in coming. I must commend the Member for Lethbridge-West for bringing this forward, the minister as well, and, most particularly, the two associations. I know that a lot of professionals in both organizations, APEGGA and ASET, take their work very, very seriously and are professionals. There has been some competition in the past and even – I wouldn't say conflict – real competition on certain sites for work in certain areas of the field. These are two very broad and wide-ranging organizations in terms of the work that they look at and the types of responsibilities they do have.

Bringing this forward has been the result of a lot of goodwill on behalf of both organizations. I think they are continuing that goodwill. I have spoken with executives and members from both, and I think this is a great move forward. I must commend, again, the mover on bringing this forward and the associations. I support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be extremely quick. One of the main reasons that I support Bill 39 is the fact that I'm a lifetime member of the Alberta Teachers' Association, which is another regulating, self-governing organization. The fact that two professional groups, while having similar interests but different regulations, have seen fit to come together and have been consulted under the professionalism of this Bill 39 is a tremendous accomplishment that I fully support.

In the interest of co-operation I believe that my members would be quite willing to move quickly into Committee of the Whole and get this legislation passed. There is no controversy here. All parties support it. We appreciate the research and the background work that was done and would like to see it passed into legislation sooner rather than later.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I promise to be brief as well. I, too, rise to voice my support for this bill, the Engineering,

Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007. I really like the direction that this bill is taking both organizations, both APEGGA and ASET, and I really like the fact that they're moving towards a one act, two associations governance model. The bill actually offers an effective regulatory structure for professionals from both sides to now work together and to maintain the standards of their profession, some 48,000 members of APEGGA. ASET is also growing. More people are moving into the province. As well, their current membership is mushrooming. It was really a long time coming for both organizations to work together instead of some of the conflicts or confrontations of the past.

Two of the reasons why I support this bill, Mr. Speaker. First is the fact that this bill improves public safety. As was mentioned by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, this bill does not lower the standards. It basically maintains and raises them, which is a good direction. Second, it optimizes the effectiveness of the Alberta workforce, and it basically streamlines some of the roles and responsibilities and codes of practice. It also allows more competition and more life and more energy in the workforce. So these are two things that I really like.

Again, the conflict of the past was not the right way to continue, and I commend both organizations on coming together and working together to achieve this. I really felt happy on April 11, Mr. Speaker, when both organizations issued a joint press release celebrating their agreement. They even had a picture, you know, of the officers of both organizations meeting with the minister of employment and industry and celebrating that direction. The ASET executive director, Barry Cavanagh; ASET president, Larry Stone; the minister; APEGGA president, David Chalcroft; and the APEGGA executive director and registrar, Neil Windsor, were there. It was mentioned that we've met with both organizations. Barry Cavanagh, in particular, I have met more than once in the past because before he moved to ASET, he was actually the CEO of the Pharmacists Association. As you know, I am a pharmacist by profession, so I know this gentleman quite well.

10:40

Really, I'm liking this because I see a role for both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to be the next phase of this interdisciplinary co-operation. We have some of the same issues that engineers and technicians have had in the past, and role clarification is necessary. Achieving this collaboration and working together is very important for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, again in the interest of collaboration, to maintain and heighten or raise job standards and codes of practice, to enhance public safety, and to maintain credibility in both industries or both professions, if you will, Mr. Speaker.

I see this as a tremendous day, and I am truly happy to support this bill in second reading. I hope it's a sign of things to come. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 29

Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007

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

Rev. Abbott: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to rise today in Committee of the Whole to present Bill 29, the Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007. As stated earlier, I do appreciate the support and the comments received at second reading of the bill.

Some questions have been posed by the hon. members; namely, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. He talked about the member of the board and their political affiliation, so we will check into that. He asked about the Farmers' Advocate office budget and if that was sufficient. Certainly, I believe it is in the fact that the Farmers' Advocate has helped us with Bill 29, but I will check into that. Thirdly, about the lending agencies and if they've been contacted: in fact, yes, they're the ones that were asking for this bill. But I would like to actually get the member detailed answers to these questions, so I'm going to send those over to him in written form. Also, I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Calder for his comments as well as Edmonton-Manning and Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 29 will allow financial institutions to lease farm equipment directly to producers. Farmers will have access to more potential sources for leasing and lease purchasing equipment for their operations. Farmers have requested more choice and competition in their leasing providers, and Bill 29 ensures that financial institutions will purchase the equipment through the Alberta dealer network. The dealer and distributor network will continue to provide warranty service and parts supply for the leased farm implement, so it is an issue of choice and possibly will help farmers in their quest for cost efficiency, et cetera.

Mr. Chairman, I know the hour is late, but I must tell one very brief, brief story. This past Saturday I attended the graduation at St. Anthony high school in Drayton Valley. A point came up there about a student who was approaching the guidance counsellor of the school and talking about what he wanted to do when he was finished school. He said to the guidance counsellor that he dreamed of making a million dollars in farming, like his father did. The guidance counsellor was quite surprised, so he said to the student: "Are you serious? Your father made a million dollars in farming?" The boy said, "No, he just dreamed of it, and I want to do that too."

Mr. Chairman, sometimes farming can be tough. Anything we can do to help our farmers out is appreciated, so I encourage all members of this House to give their full support to Bill 29. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I've previously indicated our support in second reading for Bill 29. Therefore, I call the question.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 29 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

**Bill 39
Engineering, Geological and Geophysical
Professions Amendment Act, 2007**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Mr. Chase: Again, we're referred to as the opposition because we're not in government, but when we view good legislation, when the research has been done, when collaborative efforts have been made to encourage feedback, as was the case with the two organizations APEGGA and ASET, then we would not want to halt the legislation. In fact, we would like to see it put through. Therefore, I call the question.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 39 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that we rise and report Bill 29 and Bill 39.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 29 and Bill 39.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, considering the progress we made this evening, I would like to move that we adjourn until 1 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 10:49 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, June 5, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/06/05

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some important members of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. Mr. Brad McManus has been acting chairman of the EUB for over two months now, and his handling of this challenging task deserves recognition here today. Taking the reins of an organization in an interim capacity, especially one as dynamic and robust as the EUB, is not something that many individuals are suited for. Thankfully, the culmination of his experiences, including that as a member of the Public Utilities Board of Alberta, has served him well in this position and has enabled him to step up in a leadership role during this time of transition.

Joining him today, Mr. Speaker, the talented Rich Jones, who was kind enough to make time to join us again today.

I would ask Brad and Rich, who are seated in the members' gallery, to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly quite a number of guests who are in the public gallery. I will proceed through the names fairly quickly because of the number. I'd like to introduce Indira Saroya, vice-president of the Alberta women's commission; Jagjit Singh Gill, president of the Gurdwara Singh Sabha; Darshan Singh Gill, former president of the Gurdwara Singh Sabha; Baljinder Singh Sandhu, president of Khalsa school; Jagjit Singh Sidhu, principal of Headway school; Reverend Patras Bhatti; Jagda Chanan; Surinder Deol, Punjabi Art Association; Sanjeevan Singh, Punjabi Art Association; Narinder Singh Bhui, president of the Gurdwara, Mill Woods; Paramjit Singh Ubhi, senior vice-president, Gurdwara, Mill Woods; Surinder Singh Hunjan, general secretary of the Gurdwara, Mill Woods; and Balbir Singh Kular, president of Mill Woods cultural society. I would ask the people I've named to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour and pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 10 outstanding community leaders. They are seated in the public gallery. I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. Allow me to read their names. Dr.

Shahab Ahmad, director, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Edmonton; Gurbhulinder Singh Sandu, editor, *Des Pardes* Punjabi news; Kamal Layal, director, *Des Pardes* Punjabi news; Joginder Singh Pannu, president, Gurdwara Guru Nanak; Skattar Singh Sandhu, chairman, Nagar Kirtan committee; Charan Singh Sagoo, chairman, Indo-Canadian liaison committee of Edmonton; Aman Gill, co-chair, Indo-Canadian committee of Edmonton and also a candidate for the Edmonton-Mill Creek riding for the Alberta Liberals; Dr. Prithviraj Kalia, president, Maple Leaf Writers Foundation of Edmonton; Sohail Quadri, president, Pakistan-Canada Association; Yogesh Ashta, editor, *Wildrose Times*; Vilmal Sharma, director, *Wildrose Times*. I request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you very much.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a number of wonderful leaders from Mill Woods. The first is Chander Mittal, president of the Bhartiya Cultural Society; Amarjit Sohi, spokesman for the Mill Woods crime council and candidate for ward 6 in the civic election; Gurcharn Buttar, host, Radio Sur Sangam; Mewa Singh Phul, vice-president of the Ramgarhia cultural association; Jaspal Singh Bansal, treasurer of the Ramgarhia cultural association; Sital Singh Nanuan, spokesman for the Sikh Federation and president of the Mill Woods-Beaumont Liberal association; Rukhsana Amin, president of the Multicultural Society; Sofia Yakub, president, arts and crafts centre; Naimat Khan, president of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Edmonton. I'd like them to rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome from the Assembly.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for St. Albert it is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House today 11 members of the St. Albert Red Hat Society. This particular chapter is known as the SALSA chapter, which stands for St. Albert Ladies with a Sassy Attitude. If all 11 sassy ladies would please stand and accept the warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two picketers from the Palace Casino strike, which is now in its 270th day due to this government's refusal to pass first contract legislation. Their names are Mark Mendoza and Jason Hnidan. Mark has been at the Palace Casino for two years in the slot department as a cashier. He enjoys outdoor activities like running and mountain biking. At the moment he's saving for school to be a civil engineer. Jason has been a poker dealer for two years and before that worked in computer sales and still enjoys working in that field. Accompanying them is bargaining committee member Richard Konkin and UFCW 401 member Tania Wiest. I would now ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

National Hunger Awareness Day

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and bring attention to June 5 as the inaugural National Hunger Awareness Day, a day that raises awareness about a solvable problem. Alberta's farm and ranch families are proud of our province's productive agricultural sector and are doing their part in a province where agriculture is such a vital part of our economy and food supply. In our agricultural sector we are looking at our practices and are committed to ongoing work to develop innovative, sustainable agricultural systems. We are continuing to find ways that encourage greater local food supplies, that in turn make food purchases more affordable for Albertans.

Eliminating hunger will also be achieved through greater collaboration amongst organizations, businesses, and individuals. For example, in Edmonton, Calgary, Leduc, and Olds residents are participating in the Plant a Row, Grow a Row program, that encourages local gardeners to plant an extra row of produce for their local food bank. This program demonstrates how solutions can sometimes be found, literally, in our own backyard. Building on the idea of people helping people, this unique program provides a simple way to get involved and make a meaningful difference in your community. This approach not only contributes thousands of pounds of produce for local food banks but also helps build and foster community spirit. We hope that innovative approaches like this continue to grow in other communities across Alberta.

As people prepare for summer activities, this is a good time to remind everyone that the actions of even one person can help make a difference. All Albertans can play a part by volunteering in their community and donating food and funds during special event food drives.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts made by food banks and Albertans across the province in bringing awareness to this issue and working together for the less fortunate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:10

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

Seniors' Week 2007

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to invite all Albertans to join me in celebrating Seniors' Week 2007 from June 4 to June 10. This special week is an opportunity to recognize our parents, grandparents, and older friends and neighbours for the difference that they make in our lives every day. One of these special people is my mom, who continues to amaze me with her wisdom, humour, and thought-provoking questions. My life is much richer because of her. I know that this is the case for many Albertans who think of a senior in their life when asked to name someone who has helped them to be happier, healthier, and smarter. Many families benefit from having a grandparent to help with their kids or provide advice to a mom or dad when they're in need of it most.

Alberta's seniors have made enormous contributions to our province. Their hard work helped to build this province into the vibrant place it is today, and their involvement in our communities will continue to benefit Albertans of all ages for generations to come.

I'm proud to be the chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, which leads the annual Seniors' Week celebrations. This year's Seniors' Week theme, Celebrate Seniors' Present and Future Contributions, recognizes that seniors are and will remain key to a strong and prosperous province. I encourage Albertans to participate in Seniors' Week events and to thank the seniors who have made

their lives better. A calendar of events being held across the province is available on the Seniors and Community Supports website.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Nate Gartke

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege and honour to acknowledge an outstanding young Alberta student from right here in the capital region who recently claimed second place in the 2007 Scripps National Spelling Bee in Washington, DC. Nate Gartke is a 13-year-old grade 8 student from Victoria School of Performing and Visual Arts, who lives in Spruce Grove. Nate out-spelled 284 out of 285 other participants from across Canada and the United States. He has truly demonstrated his tremendous aptitude when it comes to spelling. He advanced from regionally sponsored competitions in Canada to compete in the national competition in Washington, DC, as I mentioned before, winning second place on May 31.

This was Nate's first year participating in the Scripps National Spelling Bee, while many of his opponents were competing for their second, third, and even a fifth time, Mr. Speaker. Nate's preparation and training helped him outperform all but one of his opponents. After several hours of elimination rounds Nate was stumped by the word "coryza" in the 11th and 12th rounds. Please allow me to define that word for you. The word coryza is spelled c-o-r-y-z-a, and it is the swelling of the mucous membrane in the nose as caused by a cold.

Mr. Speaker, we can all take comfort in knowing that Alberta's education system is turning out wonderful students like Nate. This is highlighted by the fact that he is the second Alberta student in a row to place second in this prestigious competition. This young man is supported at all levels: by his school, his community, and his loving family. It's no surprise that Nate's parents, both of whom are educators, have raised a competitive, intelligent, and humble young man.

The Speaker: Well, all 82 members got that one right, didn't they? So I've got a test for you, hon. member. Honour: is it h-o-n-o-r or h-o-n-o-u-r?

We'll move on now to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Family and Community Support Services Association

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I recognize an organization that's been on the Alberta scene for 40 years and has made a significant contribution. The Family and Community Support Services Association was crucial in shifting us from a palliative to a preventative approach to social services. It has been an advocate of decision-making at the level that issues impact. As specialties increase, FCSS remains committed to volunteerism as an opportunity to involve the community.

In Hebrew thought 40 years represents completion of a cycle. There were 40 days of testing in the wilderness, the 40 days and nights of the flood, and for 40 years the escaped slaves wandered as nomads. Each of these marks a transition: the end of one state and the beginning of a new one.

Alberta has changed significantly in 40 years. New citizens coming here do not have the type of in-house networks to turn to, in child care for instance, that earlier Albertans did. They have brought new networks, new challenges, new opportunities. Human need has not gone away. It has taken new and acute forms.

I say that our most important task is reframing how we look at human need. We have to recognize that those who look to us for help offer us ways to affirm our humanity in serving theirs. What results is mutual sharing, not a division into donors and receivers. This cannot be funded in the old way of having agencies coming to government begging us as in the moving *Oliver!* with a plaintive, "Please, sir, may I have some more?"

It's time to give the fifth sector resources to meet challenges proactively. It's time for a mentality of investment rather than bottom line. It's time to index budgets to rising costs. It's time to take the truth that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers as a baseline and go beyond to recognize that in community when one suffers, all suffer, and as one benefits, all do. FCSS is an important part in bringing us to that awareness.

Alberta Water Quality Awareness Day

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, today is Alberta Water Quality Awareness Day. This is a province-wide program initiated by the Alberta Lake Management Society to increase awareness of watershed health and water quality through hands-on water testing. It is modelled after the World Water Monitoring Day that was created in 2002 to connect people personally with efforts to preserve their local water sources.

The test covers four basic measures for water quality, including temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, and turbidity. Through this successful program participants are provided with free water quality test kits and are able to learn about water quality and to gather information on local waterways. They can then contribute their findings to the online database and watershed map. Participation in the test helps Albertans to gain an understanding of the health of their watersheds, to provide input into a province-wide snapshot of water quality, and to become involved in watersheds at a local level. The program improves public knowledge and appreciation that will in turn help lead to effective management.

Mr. Speaker, every year our population grows, and along with it comes increasing demands on our province's waters. Albertans recognize that water is our greatest resource and are determined to ensure that abundant, high-quality water will be ours to enjoy now and in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Royalty Review

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The results of the Royalty Review Panel will be a clear demonstration of whose side this government is on, and it looks like it's not the side of working and middle-class Albertans. At a time when energy companies are reporting record profits, the Minister of Finance has undermined the review, telling Albertans to lower their expectations. The minister is rightly concerned about the political fallout the Conservatives risk by once again putting the energy companies' interests first.

There's a direct link between our overheated economy, record oil profits, and the economic and social pressures facing working Albertans. The strong Canadian dollar, fuelled largely by energy exports to the U.S., means that the government spending for Albertans does not go as far as it used to. So, too, the energy-fuelled boom is quickly making many Albertans go bust as they face rising rents and a lack of affordable housing. Rather than raising royalties to offset these pressures on Albertans, the government is getting ready to protect already record-setting oil profits.

It doesn't take a genius to figure out why the Conservatives are so eager to keep the status quo on royalties. Just follow the money.

The Conservative Party and its leadership contestants have long been supported by energy companies. For example, EnCana, which posted a record-breaking profit of \$6.5 billion in 2006, shared over \$10,000 of that wealth with the PC Party and donated between \$1,000 and \$5,000 to the Premier's leadership campaign. The list goes on with a who's who of big energy companies who donate hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Conservative Party every year, and the list is not that much different on the Liberal side of the House.

While places like Alaska and Norway have captured significant value from their energy resources, the Conservatives have squandered our opportunity with low royalty rates. The price of oil has tripled since the current royalty regime was put in place. Texans are getting 25 per cent on royalties while Albertans get only 1 cent on the dollar for many projects.

head: 1:20

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Private Bills has had a certain bill under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that the following private bill proceed with amendments: Bill Pr. 1, CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act. As part of this report I will be tabling five copies of the proposed amendments. I request the concurrence of the Assembly in this recommendation.

The Speaker: Would all hon. members in favour of the report please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Those opposed, please say no. It's carried.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm continuing with the tabling of petitions today. I am submitting 231 signatures, and the petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents . . . hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to:

1. Ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector, regardless of whether these workers are employed by government or by community-based or private providers;
2. Ensure these employees are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive . . .
3. Improve employees' access to professional development opportunities (training and upgrading); and
4. Introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 162 signatures on a petition that reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income, fixed-income

Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those . . . hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of the Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee annual report for 2005-06. As members here would know, I'm privileged to chair this particular committee at this time. It's a committee that monitors care and promotes high standards for patients in Alberta's health care facilities. In my final sentence I'd just like to say thank you to the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, who was the chair and steward of the committee at this time, '05-06.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of correspondence from a constituent, Brandi Roach, who's very concerned about the uncontrolled growth of Alberta's economy and notes that "the so-called 'price of prosperity' is not distributed equally and income levels simply cannot keep up with the rising cost of living." She's seeing that current circumstances are benefiting a very small, select group of people.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today as chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The first is a letter dated May 28, 2007, to Dr. David Marshall, president of Mount Royal College, requesting confirmation to attend the Public Accounts Committee on Tuesday, October 16, 2007, from 1 to 3 p.m.

The second letter I have is also dated May 28, 2007, and this is to Dr. Harvey Weingarten, president and vice-chancellor, University of Calgary. This is requesting confirmation to attend the Public Accounts Committee here on Wednesday, October 17, 2007, from 1 to 3 p.m.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from Herman Ansink, a constituent, who is writing to support antismoking legislation.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings today. One is the program for the Northern Alberta Brain Injury kick-off breakfast and kick-off for Brain Injury Awareness Week, which I attended on Friday morning. Ed Hervey of our Edmonton Eskimos gave quite a moving speech at that particular event.

The other tabling is a program for the 75th birthday party of Father Bernie Gilliece of St. Dominic's Catholic parish in Edmonton-Manning. Four hundred tickets were sold, Mr. Speaker. Archbishop Emeritus MacNeil and many other honoured guests travelled from near and far. I told a bad joke, and a good time was had by all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling eight letters from Albertans who are concerned about the government's handling of the teachers' unfunded pension liability. They're disappointed that the government won't sit down and negotiate. There are Dawn Duffy, Henri Chauvet, Tanya Oppedisano, Anita Kilpatrick, Helen Ford, Patrick Duffy, Lee Boylan, and Paul Seigny.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling five copies of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra's May-June 2007 *Signature* magazine. The magazine was given to me on Saturday, May 26, at the Winspear, when I attended the salute to the troops, an afternoon with the Canadian Brass. It was a wonderful event.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have six tablings today. The first set contains correspondence from the summer village of Norris Beach, the village of Longview, the city of St. Albert, and the municipal district of Lesser Slave River, indicating their top three infrastructure priorities and transportation. Like so many other Alberta municipalities funding for water treatment is their common concern.

My second set of tablings involves the municipality of Jasper, the town of Taber, and the village of Sangudo, which I described in great detail during the Infrastructure budget debate. Again, the common concern is provincial funding for waste-water management.

My third tabling is an e-mail from Fred Jack of Swan Hills, who notes:

I think it's great the Alberta government is looking at affordable housing. However, I think it must look at this concept wider and not just [look at] the lowest 10 per cent of income earners, and people who need an expensive housing and shelter.

My fourth tabling comes from Kathy L. Belton, who has an M.Ed. degree, who is the director of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research at the University of Alberta. This tabling is a position paper on demerit points to increase compliance for occupant restraint. Kathy notes that "research suggests an [Alberta] savings of 478 million could be realized by increasing the usage of seat belts by motor vehicle occupants."

My fifth tabling is a series of essays from students James Michael Rinehart, Carrie Jance, Cameron Tompkins, and Andrew Osborne in support of my Motion 510, to lower the voting age to 16.

My sixth and final tabling, a letter, comes from a teacher in my constituency in support of my Motion 510 on lowering the voting age to 16 and my second, Motion 511, which calls for the establishment of a unified family court.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Health Professions Act, the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta 2006 annual report, the College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta 2006 annual report.

On behalf of the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, pursuant to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act, the Alberta ingenuity fund annual report 2003-2004, the Alberta ingenuity fund tri-annual report 2000-2003.

On behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on May 15, 2007, Department of Infrastructure and Transportation 2007-2008 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the Minister of Education responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on May 16, 2007, Department of Education 2007-2008 main estimates.

Responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on May 29, 2007, Department of Education 2007-2008 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce a group under the leadership of Mrs. Andrea Cooper. They are students from Belgravia elementary school, which is a fine school. I am a graduate of that school as is the Member for Edmonton-Centre. The group here includes 33 people in total, and the parent helpers coming along are Gwen Berdan and Yvette Maskell. I'd ask them to please rise – I believe they're in the members' gallery – and I'd ask all MLAs to give them a warm welcome.

Thank you very much.

1:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this House guests from the Sun Country Christian school in Bow Island. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Christine Barkman*, Mr. Terry Barkman; their group leader, Mr. Kelly Reimer; and parent helpers Mrs. Wendy Reimer, Mr. and Mrs. Weldon and Brenda Reimer, Mr. and Mrs. Brian and Laura Thiessen*, and Mrs. Laura Isaac*. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Contribution to Premier's Leadership Campaign

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's campaign team sought a donation that the Premier now admits was unethical. He claims not to have known about it and is blaming another fundraising misstep, another stumble, on volunteers. Well, we'll be looking for some accountability. Section 602.34 of the Municipal Government Act requires commissions to prepare a financial information return on their financial affairs for the year and to submit this along with audited financial statements to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. My question is to that minister. Can the minister confirm whether this donation, a \$10,000 expenditure that

has nothing to do with its provincial mandate, was reported in these documents?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, at this time I cannot, but I will definitely find the information and bring it to this House.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to that.

The minutes of the commission reveal that the chief administrative officer recommended to the board of the commission that they donate \$25,000 to the Premier's leadership campaign. The largest donations disclosed by the Premier were between \$10,000 and \$15,000, but the CAO recommended \$25,000. I hope the minister will agree that political allegiances should not come into the CAO's recommendations. To the minister: will the minister admit that this recommendation for a political donation from the chief administrative officer of this commission was improper?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, what would be obvious from the presentation there is that that administrator knows what a disaster for Alberta a Liberal government would be. Obviously, in a leadership campaign there are literally hundreds of volunteers working across all of the many leadership candidates. They are involved in all the aspects: some fundraising, some doing mail-outs. It's a very busy time. At the end of the leadership campaign the Premier's campaign team sat down and reviewed all contributions to find out if there were any that were made improperly, and they were returned.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This commission in question has ambitious expansion plans and is in fact seeking reapproval of its licence from this government even as we speak, yet this donation clearly demonstrates that the commission is operating outside of its provincial mandate, which has nothing to do with political donations, spending money on helping the Premier win the leadership race rather than on waste management services for its shareholders. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Section 602.35 of the Municipal Government Act enables the minister to call for an inspection of a commission. Will this minister initiate a full inspection of this commission, and will he do it before its licence is renewed?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed in the authority of municipal affairs to be able to call an inspection on municipalities, also on commissions. As I answered in the first question, I am going to find out whether there was any donation made, what exactly did happen, and I will report.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Economic Strategy

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Only a PC government in power for 36 consecutive years without any real vision for the future would start lowering expectations. Yesterday the Minister of Education spoke about the Tory government hitting a financial wall. He said, and I quote: Do the math. The big days of budgetary surpluses are behind us. End quote. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Doesn't this just confirm what so many

*These spellings could not be verified at the time of publication.

people are now saying, that this Conservative government has failed – has completely failed – to manage Alberta's wealth?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how prudent financial planning, having a sustainability fund and having a capital fund and budgeting for cost overruns and balancing our budgets and paying off our debt and creating huge surpluses for Alberta, is a bad plan. We on this side of the House, quite frankly, think that spending money like it's supposed to be spent – carefully planning, saving, reinvesting – is all part of a great plan that's contributed to 36 years of very good government.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. You know, Mr. Speaker, this Tory government has received nearly \$220 billion in oil and gas revenues since it was first elected if you adjust for inflation. As we know – and the Treasury president is confirming that – they've spent it as if there was no tomorrow. Well, tomorrow is arriving. The Education minister is voicing concerns about this government's ability to continue providing something as basic as elementary schools. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. When will this government deliver a serious long-term plan that ensures a sustainable financial future for this province?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, while financial planning is critically important to any government, this party, this government also understands about the tremendous human aspect that a budget needs to include. That's why we spend more on health care than any other province. That's why we spend nearly \$6 billion on education. That's why we spend billions on advanced education. We're continuing to work and to spread our economy to increase the revenue streams because it's not all about money. This province was built by hard work. They expect good money management, but they also don't want us to turn our backs on the rest of Canada as the Liberals would like to do by somehow inferring that all of the revenue should come to Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, my question will be to the same minister. This government has, as I said, taken in about \$220 billion in nonrenewable resource revenue since it was first elected, an unbelievable amount. Yet even though it is spending more per capita than any other province, which the Treasury president is so proud of, it can't even deliver basics like roads and schools. To the President of the Treasury Board: can this minister explain how it is that his government is spending so much but can't even deliver basics like schools?

Mr. Snelgrove: I honestly don't know where the hon. Leader of the Opposition lives. I think we have 76 schools under construction right now, 76. We have population that's growing out. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, in a population of students that hasn't grown, the increase in spending in education has been enormous, the highest funding education system in Canada. But when the people move away from the schools, it's really difficult to take their schools with them. We are in the middle of working with other ways, alternative financing and bundling, to put schools in the high-growth areas of the bigger cities, and we're able to do that because we have been prudent money managers.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

1:40

Western Irrigation District

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears that the government of Alberta is now turning to the Western irrigation district for water for the Balzac project. For information purposes, this memorandum of understanding between the WID and the MD of Rocky View would be about plan D for a water supply. Now, an irrigation district's mandate is clearly for irrigation purposes. According to the district's 2006 annual report, the WID is part of the Alberta Crown and is listed as a tax-exempt government of Alberta agency. To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: can the minister deny now that this government has made a secret deal to supply water for a horse-racing track? The Western irrigation district is, after all, under provincial control.

Mr. Groeneveld: No secret deal, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, the Irrigation Districts Act says that if an irrigation district wants to transfer part of its water licence, it has to hold a plebiscite and can only make the application for a transfer of the allocation if more than 50 per cent of the irrigators vote in favour. Of course, as usual with the Conservatives, there's a way out of that one. The minister can overrule the plebiscite requirement if the board establishes that there's no risk to water supply. It would be quite interesting to see the minister make the argument that providing the badly needed water for irrigation to a horse track, casino, and megamall is somehow in the public interest. To the same minister: will the minister make a commitment right now that he will allow the plebiscite to take place and that he will abide by the wishes of the irrigators in the municipalities serviced by the WID?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, that's a great question, Mr. Speaker. I wonder why he asked the first one if he knew that one. It's a little strange to me. I certainly will encourage the WID to hold its public meeting. They've indicated that they're going to do so. Why would we have a problem with them holding a public meeting to see what the irrigators feel about the whole project? The WID makes a strong argument that the transfer of water will be taken out of the efficiencies they have gained throughout the system.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, that was, I guess, an answer to part 1 of my excellent question or however he described it. But part 2 went like this: will the minister make a commitment right now to abide by the wishes of the irrigators in the municipalities serviced by the WID and not use section 11(6) to avoid asking the people what they want?

Mr. Snelgrove: It's amazing. He asks a question that is unanswerable, he puts an answer in that isn't real, and then he bases his supplementary question on his answer that he provided to a question that doesn't apply if there's no deal. You know, it's amazing. I don't know why they call it question period, because he's got all the answers, and he doesn't even understand the question.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Strength of Canadian Dollar

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are some very serious issues facing the people of this province, and I'd like to deal with one. The Minister of Education has claimed that the higher Canadian dollar means that the days of large budget surpluses are behind us. He goes on to say that Alberta may soon hit a revenue wall and tells school boards across Alberta to think about

the hard facts of the funding they're likely to receive. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Is it the position of the government that the higher dollar means that Albertans need to lower their already modest expectations, or is his colleague the Education minister simply engaging in some clumsy negotiations with Alberta teachers through the media?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member, I'm sure, knows, for every one-cent increase in the Canadian dollar it actually costs Alberta taxpayers roughly \$123 million. In our budget the Canadian dollar is set at 86 cents. In February of this year the Canadian dollar was 84 cents. Many of us said that perhaps 86 cents was even a little bit too high. Well, in reality what has occurred is that we've seen a 10-cent increase in the Canadian dollar in the last four months, with it supposedly going up to eventually being at par by the end of the year. It's what the experts are saying. This does have ramifications for our budget and, indeed, potentially could be as high as one and a half billion dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Then I ask the Minister of Finance why, given that most economists believe that the increased export value of oil from this province to the United States is a major cause for the rise of the Alberta dollar, this government didn't see it coming, why they set the estimate in the budget at an 86-cent dollar when they should have known that the Canadian dollar was going north at a real high rate precisely because of Alberta's export of oil to the United States?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, many of us would like to think it is an Alberta dollar, but it's actually a Canadian dollar. Despite what the socialist economists actually look at, one of the real reasons why we're seeing the strength of the Canadian dollar is not necessarily the strength of the dollar, but it's the falling of the U.S. dollar which in relative terms puts our dollar up. This is a multifaceted issue. It is not – and I respectfully say it is not – purely because of Alberta's exports. As a matter of fact, we've had higher exports at higher prices, and we have not seen the Canadian dollar act this way in the past.

Mr. Mason: I'm surprised to learn that we actually have had higher prices for our oil than in the recent period.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the minister if he doesn't think that it's high time to quit messing around with a phony task force that's looking at royalties and just raise royalties so that Albertans get a reasonable return on the resources which they own. Why don't you do it, Mr. Minister? Raise royalties now.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, what we have committed to and what this Premier has committed to is looking at the royalties from a very holistic point of view. We appointed six very good, very dedicated, and very intelligent people to take a look at the royalty system in Alberta. What we must remember in Alberta is that there is not simply one royalty. There are very close to 50 to 100 different royalty patterns that are out there, depending on the type of well, depending on the type of research. The Royalty Review Panel has been charged with looking at all of them. They've been charged with taking a look at what is fair share for Albertans versus what will keep the economic activity in Alberta going, and that's what they're going to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Support for Seniors

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is Seniors' Week, our chance to celebrate older Albertans who contribute so much to our communities. Our seniors worked hard to create the strong and prosperous province we all enjoy today. For some the very prosperity they created seems to have come with an unwelcome price. With the province's cost of living at an all-time high some seniors are finding it difficult to make ends meet. My question today is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What is the government doing to help seniors deal with rising living costs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to first express my appreciation to the many seniors in this province. We are very fortunate to have a tremendous heritage. We've been richly blessed with a number of seniors that have built this province, and I would like to say that we have one of the most comprehensive packages of anywhere in this country. Over \$2 billion are actually provided for program services in one form or another to support the seniors in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the biggest concerns that I've heard from seniors in my constituency is that they have a safe place to live. My second question is to the same minister. What is the government doing to ensure that seniors have a safe place to live in the communities that they helped to build?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd first like to clarify, in case there was any misunderstanding, that over \$2 billion are provided in various supports by this government. They go from Alberta seniors' benefit, the special-needs assistance, dental and optical. But with respect to helping them stay in place, the first priority is to let and to help seniors live in place. About two-thirds, 67 per cent, of seniors own their own home. It's in response to that that we've had the education property tax relief for those for the rising cost of property taxes. It's our home care policies that help them facilitate being able to stay in their home. That is our first and ongoing priority. Secondly, we look to: how can we help them stay within their own community? As their health and those things deteriorate, we . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My last question to the same minister: what is the minister doing to prepare the province to meet the needs of a growing seniors population?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The seniors demographics: not just in this province, clearly in this continent there is a growing population of seniors. One of the mandates from the Premier is the demographic planning commission, and we are consulting and working with seniors on how we plan for the next generation coming

up, the growing numbers of people that will be seniors. It's with the groups like the Seniors Advisory Council, that's chaired by the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, that we do make sure we're getting out and speaking with seniors, consulting around the province to ensure that the programs are in place and designed specifically for the future needs as well. That will be part of the ongoing things we'll do with the demographic planning commission.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

1:50

Police Services

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency the biggest concern that we have is serious crime. My constituents are extremely concerned about the number of shootings, acts of violence, and they demand answers. Our police service is scrambling to keep up with the increase in violent crime with the same number of officers that they had years ago and with the same level of funding. To the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. The city of Edmonton is spending \$220 million this year for police. The provincial government is providing \$11 million, or only 4.9 per cent. That's it. Can this minister explain how this level of funding is enough to fulfill this government's responsibility to provide safe communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct in that our funding level for municipalities remains at \$16 per capita. It has increased over last year because, as we all know, the population is increasing. However, I also want to let the hon. member know that Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada that returns fine revenues to the municipalities. This year that number is over \$99 million.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister. In order to deal with the issue of quicker response times, the Edmonton Police Service has added a fifth division to Edmonton, instead of the usual four. What this means is that many beat officers, community policing officers, and street teams dedicated to fighting specific areas such as organized crime, gangs, are being disbanded to service the five districts. The EPS is being forced to make some very difficult choices. The Police Act states that the minister is responsible for ensuring adequate and effective policing in Alberta. This is not happening.

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjections] The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't catch a question there, but I will comment that community policing is seen by the police of the Edmonton Police Service as an excellent way to get a pulse on its community, and I support those initiatives. They've decided to go from four regional police stations to five, and I believe that that's a great move.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I have asked questions on behalf of my constituents before, and the answers have not been adequate. Everything is not all right in my community. Our children are not safe. It's the responsibility of this minister to provide safe and secure communities. People should not

be afraid to walk the streets, but they are. This government has underfunded the police for years, has failed to provide them with the resources they need, has failed to address the serious crime in our cities. Can the minister tell my constituents why he is not doing more to assist our police to maintain safe communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, in regard to community safety it's interesting that the majority of Albertans, including Edmontonians, feel very safe and secure in their communities. That being said, there's certainly more we can do, and there's more that we are doing. We are taking all kinds of initiatives to ensure that policing agencies work together in a more effective and efficient manner. We will continue to do that and to ensure that our communities do remain safe.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Strength of Canadian Dollar (continued)

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today in question period the leader of the third party talked about the increasing value of the Canadian dollar compared to the U.S. dollar. He seemed to allude to the fact that he thinks it's because of Alberta's oil exports to the U.S. that our dollar is going up. Maybe his researchers should have told him that back in 2003 our dollar was 63 cents, and we exported just as much oil then as we do today. At any rate, this scenario may be good for Canadians who are travelling to the U.S., but Alberta's primary market for goods is the U.S., and a lot of our province's revenue is based on resources sold in U.S. dollars. To the Minister of Finance: have you done any revisions to the provincial budget to take into account this increased dollar?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have not done any revisions to this point in time. We will however be doing revisions when the first quarter comes out. The first quarter will be done the end of June, and we will be making those revisions. We automatically make revisions on the price of oil, the price of gas, the price of the dollar, potential interest rate changes. The whole economic picture is taken another look at four times a year, with the first quarter coming out towards the end September. So the answer is definitely yes. We will be looking at these prices, and it will change our revenue forecast.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition seems to be calling question, question, and they don't realize that the private members on the government side also have 45 seconds to do our preamble before we ask questions of the other side. So, yes, we do have 45 seconds.

To the same minister: based on today's rising dollar, how much will the budget have to change as the Canadian dollar continues to go up? In other words, should we be expecting program cuts, Mr. Minister?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, as I alluded to in an answer to an earlier question, for every 1 cent increase in the price of the Canadian

dollar, we tend to lose \$123 million annualized over the year. So what this generally means is that potentially if it's 10 cents, if it does indeed go up 10 cents as it has now, if it stays over the year, we're looking at about \$1.2 billion that could be a difference. I will remind the Assembly, though, according to what the hon. member said, at \$60 U.S. a barrel and a 65-cent dollar we receive \$92.30 Canadian. At \$60 a barrel and 94-cent dollar we receive \$63.82.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will remind the opposition that *Beauchesne* 333 and 334 talk about keeping heckling to a minimum during question period.

Anyhow, to the same minister: should Albertans expect a tax increase to make up for this shortfall? In other words, how are we going to absorb this huge impact in our budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the excellent planning that this government has done, we have \$7.7 billion sitting in a sustainability fund, which is used to cushion those temporary cycles. Whether or not this is a temporary cycle is very difficult to say, but if indeed it does stay up there, if indeed the dollar does hit par and stay at par, we will have to take that into consideration in future years. But due to the excellent, excellent planning of this and previous governments, we have \$7.7 billion sitting there to ensure that these temporary cycles do not change our budgeting process.

The Speaker: Did I understand the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar correctly that he was quoting from "the good book"?

Rev. Abbott: Yes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Foster Care System

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When children are placed in foster families, it is done with the understanding that they need special attention and care. Without careful intervention at-risk children can slip through the cracks and may experience an entire lifetime of hardship. This is why reports of a foster parent shortage in this province demand the immediate attention of this government. The number of foster parents in this province has declined consistently over the last five years. In Edmonton alone last year the number declined by over 12 per cent. To the Minister of Children's Services: how many children are waiting today for a foster family?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I can tell you – and I know that we talked about this in the last couple of weeks, going through estimates – that we will be spending a large focus of this year on campaigns looking for more foster parents. We know that if we can find more foster parents, we'll be able to better match the needs of the children with the capabilities of parents.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When foster families are unavailable, children are often placed in hotels. This means that

they do not have access to the special attention, care, or even sense of normalcy that they need to grow. Even more shocking, many of the approved facilities used by the Department of Children's Services are in areas noted for crime, drug use, and prostitution. This is clearly not the best environment for at-risk children. To the Minister of Children's Services: do you agree that the placement of children in need of foster care in hotels is an unacceptable course of action?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say – and I know that I've mentioned this to the hon. member before – talking about the number of foster parents we have in this province, that we have a ratio in Alberta of 1.9 foster children per foster home, and that is lower than most other provinces in the country. With respect to hotel use – and I know that this has been raised as well in this House – it is a very rare occasion. It's exceptionally uncommon. Within the past year it has happened a few times only in extenuating circumstances, and we do provide one-on-one supervision for children by support workers when that does happen.

Mrs. Mather: Small efforts like the minister's long overdue public foster parent promotion campaign will not be effective unless the larger systemic problems are addressed. A lack of support for foster families is a major problem. Less than one year ago this ministry shelved new workload standards for social workers, yet agency staff, youth workers, and addiction counsellors report 15 per cent vacancy rates and high turnover rates. To the Minister of Children's Services: when will your department do something to meaningfully address the crisis in foster care in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that just last week I met with the Foster Parent Association. We had a great discussion. They actually are very pleased about this year's budget and the additional \$7 million that we put into foster care. As well, they're very excited to move forward on I think it's \$650,000 that we're putting towards raising awareness and a campaign to get more foster parents. I can commit to the House that I will continue to work very closely with the foster community and our foster association.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Property Tax Increases

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the property owners in Calgary received their city tax bills. The large increase in our city property tax will hurt and worry constituents. The increase in property tax also pushes up the cost of housing rent and also the cost of running businesses. So my question today is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Can the minister tell our constituents what the process is for the city tax increases and who is responsible for those increases?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities are responsible for municipal taxes, and those municipal taxes could increase or decrease depending on the services that are

required, maybe the cost pressures on infrastructure or just related to the cost pressures for municipalities. I want to say that some individuals may receive an increase, and some may receive a decrease due to the increased city assessment. Therefore, because of value added their costs could go down.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you. To the same minister: given that our Premier created the housing portfolio under your wing, and following the process you just explained, what measure can you or are you taking to alleviate the property tax increase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government supports municipalities directly through municipal affairs, and some of the services provided they support with the \$773 million, the \$600 million a year through the municipal infrastructure program, this year \$400 million through the municipal sustainability initiative. We do have a commitment to municipalities, and I want to say unprecedented in Alberta history, of \$1.4 billion to support municipalities after 2010.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you. My question is now to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Any upward move in property tax no doubt increases the cost of living and maintaining households, particularly for Albertans on fixed low incomes, such as seniors and Albertans with disabilities. Hon. minister, what measure can you or are you taking to help those individuals?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rising cost of living, property taxes, all taxes clearly become a burden for those on fixed incomes. That's why in 2004 the province acted to cap at those levels the rate of education property tax increases: so that seniors do not pay any more than what they paid in 2004 or, if they purchased their home at a later date, that level of education property tax. One interesting development that the city of Edmonton, actually, is working on through our Alberta seniors' benefits program: they're rebating a portion of their taxes, \$63. That is working in conjunction with our department through the Alberta seniors' benefits program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Lottery Retailer Practices

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period the Solicitor General said that he hadn't yet seen the results from the Western Canada Lottery Corporation's internal lottery retailer practices audit, but he told the House that everything seemed fine. To the minister: if you haven't seen the results from this initial review, how can you be so confident that everything is fine?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have not seen anything in writing from the WCLC in regard to their initial investigation, but they did indicate that things were looking quite well in Alberta. We

have done some work internally ourselves, and indications are that the winnings, as I indicated yesterday, of retail owners in our province are at an average which is acceptable. However, based on the findings of other provinces, which I indicated yesterday, WCLC has asked Ernst & Young to continue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The results that the minister is referring to were actually from a previous three-year study and not this one that we're talking about. Now, yesterday the minister told the House that the WCLC has decided to take a more in-depth review of Alberta's lottery systems. The minister didn't ask, and the WCLC did not voluntarily release the information. My question is: if all is on the up and up, according to the minister, why in fact did the WCLC commission Ernst & Young, as he just said, to investigate deeper at considerable cost to the taxpayers? It would make absolute sense that he would ask to see the results first, before a step like this is taken.

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that to ensure that the integrity of the lottery industry in Alberta is where we want it to be, the WCLC has requested Ernst & Young to take a more in-depth look, and that's what they're doing. When those results are in, we will share them with Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the risks involved and the gravity of the allegations that retailer fraud may be as costly and as damaging in this province as it is in other Canadian jurisdictions, will the minister instruct the WCLC to follow the lead of B.C., Ontario, and the Atlantic provinces and make the review findings public? He doesn't seem to have any issue with this. Will he instruct them to put it on the website, as those jurisdictions do?

Mr. Lindsay: As I indicated, Mr. Speaker, when we get the results of the study, we will be making them public.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Child Care Funding

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A comprehensive child care strategy is an integral part of supporting families, promoting women's participation in the workforce, and developing a flexible and efficient labour force. As the Minister of Children's Services knows, the number of child care spaces in the province has dropped in the last decade despite an increasing demand for services. It's no coincidence that this drop followed this government's decision to terminate the operating grants program for child care facilities. When will the minister commit to restoring operating grants to child care centres?

Ms. Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you is that we are very serious about ensuring that we have access to affordable and quality child care. A lot of time and effort, based on consultation with the stakeholders in the province, has been spent on implementing all kinds of initiatives that will help us reach that objective, and I'm going to continue working with those stakeholders.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to get the minister's attention on the core issue of operating grants to centres again. Many not-for-profit child care facilities allocate as much as 85 per cent of their budgets to pay for salaries, yet it is not enough. Lack of core funding for child care creates a downward pressure on staff wages and leaves hard-working child care providers subsidizing the cost of our child care system. No wonder that this very important service sector is facing problems with recruitment and retention. To the minister: how can the minister expect to create enough new spaces to keep up with the demand when she won't provide operating grants to help existing facilities to remain open and to retain and recruit staff?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we believe in supporting the parents, and there are a number of ways in which we are doing that. We have just increased our subsidies for parents. We have just increased wage top-ups for staff. Talking with stakeholders, we know that the number one issue that we're talking about with child care and the only way that we can impact capacity in this province is to attract and retain staff. That's what the bulk of our initiatives are based on.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, the minister's current consultation process – and we referred to this several times in this House over the last couple of weeks – is merely a tinkering at the edges and doesn't get to the core issue of child care in the province. Licensing protocols are important, but the real issue is funding. Why won't the minister admit that all Albertans benefit from having a high-quality child care system and establish stable operating grants to make it happen?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, our funding has increased dramatically in the last couple of years. In fact, I think it's doubled just over a period of a couple of years, and this year alone we've increased it another \$16 million.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Forest Fires

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's forest fire season blazed to life on the weekend when Albertans learned that a large wildfire had developed near Suncor Energy's oil sands plant near Fort McMurray, destroying thousands of hectares of forest. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister please update the Assembly on the status of this massive forest fire and whether it poses any danger to nearby communities or oil sands developments?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My latest information is that the wildfire has grown to about 10,000 hectares and is not yet under control. We have 120 firefighters there who are working on this. We have confidence that they will get it under control. Their job has been complicated by the hot, dry weather, but the weather is expected to change, and we expect that the cooler weather and, possibly, some rain will help us bring it under control. The good news is that no community nor any oil sands infrastructure is threatened by this fire. In fact, it's actually moving in the other direction.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental question is also directed to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Albertans are known for their generosity. In the last few weeks our province was gracious enough to lend more than 200 firefighters to Ontario and Quebec to battle blazes there. It was a gesture that I'm sure was certainly appreciated in those two provinces, but it begs the question: has that act of generosity depleted Alberta of crucial resources that could be fighting this massive fire in Fort McMurray?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to reply to that question. The answer is no. Our generous loan of our firefighters to Quebec and Ontario does not pose any risk to the province of Alberta. We have approximately 580 firefighters that are on call during the fire season, and we have a reserve, if you like, or a bench strength of another 2,000 that we can call upon. We did send 80 firefighters to Ontario on the May long weekend. They've all returned. The 120 that we sent to Quebec two weeks ago came back on Monday, and 40 of those have already been redeployed to the Fort McMurray fire. So I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all these young, hard-working Albertans for their good work.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, my final question is also to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Albertans expect his ministry to be prepared to fight blazes like the one near Fort McMurray as well as others that can pop up at any time anywhere. Alberta is known for its drastic climate changes. Last year his ministry also helped when grasslands in southeast Alberta had major wildfires. Can he tell us what preparations his department makes to minimize the wildfire risk to all Albertans in all of Alberta and how they ensure that wildfires are responded to with maximum emergency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to report that our firefighting crews are well trained and prepared to fight fires this summer. We have a system of moving our firefighting crews and also our air tankers around the province based on the probability of wildfires in one region or another. That puts them closer to where fires are likely to break out and thus minimizes the response time.

I'd like to remind Albertans that they can all assist in fighting fires by looking at our FireSmart program on the SRD website. Also, if you spot a fire, you can call 310-FIRE to report any wildfires.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Support for Seniors (continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, this is Seniors' Week, and it's quite appropriate that we've had many questions pertaining to seniors. They have contributed to the economic growth and prosperity of this province and expect that that contribution would be recognized. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. How does this government expect retired seniors, most of whom are on fixed incomes, to keep up with the rising costs associated with living in Alberta?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I too, as mentioned before, am appreciative of the seniors of this province for the great work that they do and the contribution they make. That is why our program design

was more tailored to assist those in the highest of need. As we have a growing population of seniors, I think that's going to continue to have to be the focus of where we look, those in the greatest of need, to ensure that we provide the supports for them rather than trying to see if we could do something for all of the seniors, some of whom may not require that assistance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question would be to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Finding affordable housing is a constant struggle that weighs heavily on seniors. The constant stress and insecurity about something as basic as home can aggravate both physical and mental illness. Will the government commit to conducting a comprehensive assessment of the health impacts of the policies before they're implemented?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's a very interesting concept. I'd certainly be willing to look at that concept. I think that's what we need to do, quite frankly, with respect to all of our policies as we move forward and look at reviewing the health status of Albertans and making sure that individuals can take responsibility for their personal health but have the necessary supports in place to be able to do that and, as we've talked about in this House before, looking at the continuum of care that's necessary to either support a senior or any individual, for that matter, who needs assistance in their own home versus the continuum of care through to living in a long-term care facility. Any policy that we bring forward from a health perspective needs to be examined in terms of how it impacts an individual's ability to take care of themselves and to use the supports in the system necessary for a healthy life.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Ms Pastoor: I'm finished. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Keystone Pipeline Project

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we are sitting here today, the National Energy Board is reviewing a proposal to construct a pipeline between Alberta and the U.S.A. for the purpose of exporting raw bitumen. This bitumen is to be refined and upgraded in the U.S. and possibly sold back to Canada as a value-added product. Unless the Minister of Energy has some additional facts to contribute, at face value this proposition does not seem to be in the best interest of Albertans and Canadians. My first question to the Minister of Energy: since diversifying Alberta's economy, promoting value-added production in Alberta, and expanding Alberta's labour opportunities are this government's priorities, why do we consent to exporting our unrefined, raw resources?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Initially what I have to say is that this government has a plan to build a stronger Alberta. Getting the best value from our resources involves more than just upgrading or refining. What makes the best sense for Albertans is to have the flexibility of a basket of products, a portfolio of resources, including everything from raw bitumen to synthetic crude to petrochemicals and transportation fuels. It's important that

we get the pipelines to the best markets for these products: for our bitumen, for other products that we ship out of Alberta. To be clear . . .

The Speaker: I think we'll ask the hon. member to continue.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. One could then argue that Albertans are getting the dirty end of the stick, where the environmental footprint of extraction of raw resources stays in Alberta, but the U.S.A. benefits from high-skilled employment opportunities and the value-added of the product refined in the U.S.A. What is the minister's comment on that?

2:20

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, we certainly do believe in increasing Alberta's capacity to upgrade and refine, and we will see a significant increase in these activities in coming years. But, at the same time, these operations are very carbon intense and require large amounts of resources, including electricity and water. More upgrading means more greenhouse gas. You have to look at the carbon intensity and environmental impacts of both – of both – recovery and upgrading.

Mr. Speaker, my comment with respect to the member is this. You've got one foot in the canoe and one foot on the dock. The boat is leaving. Make up your mind.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, it sounds like I'm doing splits, Mr. Speaker. I hope it doesn't hurt.

To the Minister of Energy: will the minister submit the Alberta government's position on this issue to the National Energy Board or intervene at the hearings?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, we already have. Alberta has intervened in this process to ensure that we get all of the information available about the Keystone project and what it means to the energy industry and to Albertans. On the issues of bitumen export and upgrading we will continue to intervene and represent the best interests of all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 82 questions and answers.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board to supplement an answer to a question raised to the Premier yesterday.

Contributions to Premier's Leadership Campaign (continued)

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Premier, the Premier committed to confirm that what he believed to be true was that the return of the donation had happened, and I'm happy to confirm it was returned to Beaver regional management, as the Premier had stated yesterday.*

The Speaker: That allows for a supplementary question from the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then my supplementary question would be: seeing as how the donation was made about six months before the money was returned and the cheque was cashed in the interim, what gives with all that? Why not just give it back right off the bat if, as the Premier said, it was unethical?

*See p. 1479, left col., para. 4.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I think we've explained the process and how large of an undertaking it is to run a leadership campaign, and as soon as the Premier was made aware of the donation, it was returned.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, a number of members have already commented that this is Seniors' Week in the province of Alberta, and as we're in the first few days of June, I'd just draw to the attention of all members the other weeks and days this month so that nobody feels left out.

June is also ALS Awareness Month, or Lou Gehrig's Disease Awareness Month. We've already heard a statement with respect to Brain Injury Awareness Month. It is also Recreation and Parks Month. It's also National Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Awareness Month. It's also Stroke Awareness Month. We've heard one statement with respect to that. May 28 to June 3 is also National Sun Awareness Week. June 1 to June 8 is Water Safety Awareness Week. June 3 was National Cancer Survivors Day. June 4 was International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression. June 4 to June 10 is also Canadian Environment Week. June 5 is World Environment Day. June 6 is Clean Air Day. June 6 to June 9 is Canadian skills competition, trades awareness week. June 8 is World Oceans Day. June 14 is World Blood Donor Day. June 17 is World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought. June 20 is World Refugee Day. June 21 is National Aboriginal Day. June 23 is United Nations Public Service Day. In la belle province June 24 is Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. June 26 is International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. June 26 is International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. June 27 is Multicultural Day.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2007-08**

The Deputy Chair: The committee has before it three departments today: Infrastructure and Transportation; Employment, Immigration and Industry; and Seniors and Community Supports. Today is also the New Democratic caucus day. What we shall do is we'll begin now. The first hour we'll allocate to Infrastructure and Transportation, the second hour to Employment, Immigration and Industry, and the third hour to Seniors and Community Supports.

Hon. members of the ND caucus, you will have to indicate to me whether you prefer to use the 10-minute time slots. Is that what you'd prefer? Okay. We'll use the 10-minute time slots and go back and forth between your caucus members and the minister.

I also want to welcome the support staff that are here with the minister and advise them that should they need a glass of water or a cup of coffee, just raise your hand, and one of the pages will come by and get that for you.

Infrastructure and Transportation

The Deputy Chair: We'll begin with the minister introducing members of his staff and giving his opening remarks.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm

pleased to appear before the Committee of Supply once again to represent Infrastructure and Transportation.

I would like to start by introducing the members of my department's executive committee and some other officials that are accompanying us today. To my left here is my deputy minister, Jay Ramotar. To my immediate right is Winnie Yiu-Young, senior financial officer, and Mr. Rob Penny, assistant deputy minister of policy and corporate services. Up in the balcony we have Shaun Hammond, assistant deputy minister, transportation safety services; Bob Smith, assistant deputy minister of the properties division; Barry Day, assistant deputy minister, capital projects; Angela Paterson, director of financial planning; Patti Van Mechelen, budget analyst; my executive assistant, Warren Chandler; and my communications director, Jerry Bellikka. We did find a booster seat for him today so that we could all see him.

Quite simply, roads and infrastructure play a critical role in the success of our province and in Albertans' quality of life. To be sure, the ability to move people and goods safely and efficiently is vital to our prosperity. However, the fact is that Alberta's population has increased by more than half a million people over the last five years. During that period at least 300,000 more cars and trucks have been added to our highways and roads, and this has clearly taken a toll. There has never been a greater need in our province for well-designed, efficient, and safe highways, bridges, and infrastructure.

As Alberta continues to grow, my department is helping to address the challenges associated with this growth. The construction and maintenance of roads is directly related to our government's priorities of managing growth pressures and providing safe communities. The Alberta government is making a huge commitment through the capital plan with a three-year target of more than \$18 billion. This level of investment has never been seen before in our province. In fact, on a per capita basis it's the highest in the country.

2:30

The estimates I am presenting today are clearly tied with the capital plan. For the '07-08 fiscal year the ministry's estimates to be voted will be approximately \$3.2 billion for expense and equipment inventory purchases, nearly a 16 per cent increase from '06-07 forecast. Of the \$3.2 billion, \$372 million is for noncash items such as amortization, nominal sum disposals, and consumption of inventories. When the noncash is excluded, the ministry has a \$2.8 billion spending target for programs. Four hundred and twenty one million dollars are primarily for highway rehabilitation and maintenance. Approximately \$297 million will go towards provincial highway maintenance and systems and \$124 million to highway rehabilitation.

More than \$1 million will go towards the Transportation Safety Board. Almost \$41 million will go into transportation safety services to fund things like vehicle and driver safety programs, monitoring of the commercial carrier industry, and safety initiatives, including implementation of the new traffic safety plan, which is one of my department's key mandates.

The traffic safety plan is aimed at reducing the number of people killed or injured on our roads. In 2005 a total of 466 people died in traffic collisions in Alberta. That same year there were more than 124,000 collisions. These are disturbing statistics, and we are working to change driver attitudes and save lives. Part of our plan involves key initiatives to help prevent collisions such as building safer roads, enhancing enforcement of traffic laws, and educating Albertans about traffic safety.

A key element of the ministry's program expense is capital support to municipal infrastructure. More than \$1.2 billion in grants will be provided to Alberta municipalities in '07-08. These grants

help municipalities fund their priority infrastructure projects. In most cases the decisions are local. Using this money local governments can direct funding at projects, including roads, bridges, public transit, water and waste water, and emergency services.

Over the next three years the ministry will provide \$422 million for the Water for Life strategy, of which \$103 million is specifically for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo; \$159.3 million was approved in '07-08, of which \$35 million is for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo; \$174 million was approved for '08-09, \$34 million of that was for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo; \$88.3 million approved for '09-10, \$34 million of that for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Also included in the ministry's voted expenses category is \$360 million for government operations. This funding enables the ministry to maintain the day-to-day operations and maintenance of government-owned properties as well as leases, the Swan Hills Treatment Centre, and capital and accommodation projects.

Funding for natural gas rebates in '07-08 is budgeted at \$477.3 million, a \$114 million increase over the '06-07 forecast. This reflects the projected increase in natural gas prices.

The ministry's capital investment budget will be nearly \$1.5 billion in '07-08, an increase of \$549 million over the '06-07 forecast. Approximately \$201 million will help fund several major projects such as the Royal Alberta Museum's renovation and expansion, the first phase of the construction of Edmonton's new remand centre, and the Brooks crop research greenhouse. In addition, Infrastructure and Transportation will invest in provincial highway systems and the strategic economic corridors: \$626 million is allocated for the strategic economic corridor investment initiative, including the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads and the north-south trade corridor.

I want to take this opportunity to clear up any possible misunderstanding about the cost of construction on the Anthony Henday Drive south-east in Edmonton. The '05-06 provincial budget provided \$83.3 million for this P3 ring road, but the Infrastructure and Transportation annual report for that period shows an expenditure of \$118 million. The additional \$34.7 million recognizes the actual amount of work completed by the end of March '06. The \$34.7 million does not represent a cost overrun as the cost of this project is fixed. This amount will be reduced from the future budgets to stay within the project cost.

To continue with program expenses: more than \$385 million will be used for provincial highway systems. This includes constructing and enhancing provincial highways and bridges so we can continue to meet the transportation needs of Albertans and others who drive through our province.

Infrastructure and Transportation plays a key role in managing Alberta's growth pressures. We are also looking ahead to what Alberta's infrastructure needs will be many years down the road. Through careful planning and strategic investment in key projects, we can ensure that Alberta continues to be an economic leader in Canada.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to ask questions of the minister and would like to welcome his assistants here this afternoon. The Alberta New Democrats, as you know, have been very concerned – and I'm sure the minister has been concerned as well – about the infrastructure of our province not keeping pace with the increase in population, the increase in our GDP, and just the overall expansion of the province.

I realize that your job is very difficult, but, Mr. Chair, I'm also concerned that for every month or quarter that we delay in building certain projects, the cost of those projects with inflation and other pressures just adds to the project to the point where we have to cut back or defer projects even further. I'm sure the minister and his department have been calculating this.

So my first question would be to ask if they've done a cost projection back five years, to say: how much more are we paying for some of these infrastructure projects because of the inflationary pressures that we find ourselves in now? We've kind of painted ourselves into a corner, so to speak, with some of these projects. Certainly, I'm sure that the Infrastructure department has some going back five years to determine how much more we're paying as a result of the inflationary pressures that we find ourselves today.

Of course, you know, while perhaps it's a bit of a crass way to put it, there is a measure of truth when you say that you build public works projects when there might be more of a lull in the economy. This is just an historical way of dealing with things, right? You say, "Okay, the economy is pulling back a bit here," so the government inserts capital projects to keep the economy going. It's a good time to do it, and you might even save some money off of it as well.

You know, we missed that opportunity, Mr. Chair. That's what I'm saying. In the past five years, with this sort of ideological stubbornness to not pay, now we do have to pay because, of course, inevitably you do need to build roads and infrastructure and schools and everything, and we're kind of stuck with a considerably higher bill. I would like to know what percentage more of a higher bill, in fact, have we been stuck with here in infrastructure projects in the province of Alberta.

As well, further to that, I'm just thinking of what you've been saying to me here. Now, we know that perhaps with the P3 project with the Calgary ring road we kind of hit a good bit of luck there, really, because, as you've said, these guys got stuck with a much lower contract bill, and then the inflationary pressure kicked in, and there we go. I just want my second question to be to ensure what sort of long-term contract we have with the maintenance of that Calgary ring road. Does it have provisions in place for the company or companies to add costs into the maintenance of the Calgary ring road so that they can defer their costs?

2:40

After all, they're going to have to make a dollar from the whole thing. They're not just going to take the loss. If they do take the loss, is there a provision to ensure that, you know, the contract isn't left out to dry somehow? If they really did take a loss in the tendering of this contract, then are we not at risk of the providers to perhaps pull out? They would say: "Well, this is just too much. We can't take a bath like this." So that's another question that I have.

Certainly, as New Democrats, we want to make sure that everything is transparent in regard to the public/private partnerships that the government might enter into. So we were just wondering, as another question, if we could make it as a matter of course that a public comparator is always done with these major projects and as a matter of course that that is always disclosed so we don't have to have that difficulty. Of course, we knew you had it. You gave it to us, and that's great. But if we could build that into this in a systemic way so that we can always know straightaway and we'll say: "Here we go. Here's the piece. Here's the P3 contract. Here's the public service comparator, and that's how the choice was made," we would appreciate that very much, and I'm sure the public would as well.

This isn't my department as such, but I found it intriguing that as part of Infrastructure you have the natural gas rebate as a line item in your department. You deal with a lot of money it seems, and I

can appreciate that as well. Certainly, with the natural gas rebates you must build that into your budget, and you must also have a projection for where the natural gas prices are going to go over the next twelve months. So I'd like to ask if you could give us that information of how you are budgeting for the rebates and where you think that natural gas price is going to go here in the next fiscal year.

Of course, Albertans have come to really count on those rebates. When the rebates kick in, it becomes a media story. Right? "The rebates are in today" sort of thing. You know, it has become part of our energy-consumption culture in the province, so I'd like to know how much you are projecting to spend on that next year. I think that would be quite revealing.

Just as a final note for our first round here, I know that there was a great folderol with the municipal funding for Calgary, and straightaway the mayor of Calgary came back and said: well, because of the perceived shortfall, we're going to cut our LRT projects. You know, I found it very disconcerting how flippantly and how quickly the mayor just said, "Well, that's the first thing to go" as if that is less of a priority than something else. Of course, with the change in the way we have to use energy in this province and the way the cities are both growing – Edmonton and Calgary and others as well – I'm very concerned about the expansion of the LRT.

We have an expansion project now here in Edmonton. I want to make sure that there is a guaranteed commitment from Infrastructure and from this government that we're going to continue to expand lines in Calgary, to build the west line in Calgary, and we're not going to let the vagaries of some political squabbling get in the way of building an expanded LRT. I would like to ask as well if the ministry is indeed committed to the expansion of the east/west line of the LRT here in Edmonton, again an absolutely essential project considering how fast we're building now.

You must build your train lines at the same time as the buildings of your city are being built, as the real estate is being committed so that you can commit to nodes of where the railway stations are and rebuild, sort of, the model of your city, quite frankly, around the train lines that you decide to plan on. That's a commitment to an east/west line in Edmonton and a commitment to the original funding to the Calgary west LRT line as well. I would like to know just to what extent the government is planning for that in a long-term way within the Infrastructure budget.

Finally, the last comment I would like to make, something that makes me sound like a municipal politician, is that the state of the roads in municipalities is quite a big deal. I know that everyone here drives on Edmonton roads at least a little bit, and you know that if you get past the point of rehabilitation and a road is not maintained properly, it really has to get redone. I know that this budget talks about kilometres of highway to be rehabilitated, but I'm just asking about capital commitment to the urban road systems, if Infrastructure has built into their budget some projections on how much the municipalities need to not just rehabilitate but expand their road systems to make the grade. I know that this is a municipal issue, but then a good portion of road development is funded through Infrastructure through the municipalities.

Certainly, Edmontonians are very concerned about roads crumbling around them. You know, it creates practical problems but also sort of an irony on a higher level because the economy has never been functioning at a higher level than it is today. This is a boom of unprecedented proportions. But then the population looks out at certain infrastructure things and says: well, this has never been worse. So the contrast, I think, creates a problem in a higher sense. People say: if this is the best of times, why have these things never

been worse? Municipal roads in the city of Edmonton and to a lesser extent in other municipalities would fit into that category.

Thanks.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, hon. member, for all of the great questions you're coming up with. I do have to admit that we do have an awfully hard time trying to keep up with the growth that we have in this province. I don't think anybody could have predicted as huge a growth as we've been having here and how strong our economy has been, and with all of that come all the challenges of the inflation problems that you've been speaking about and what those costs are going to be.

But let me tell you that we're going to do the very, very best we can to try to catch up in our backlog. It's not just costs we're going to have a problem with there, hon. member. We're also going to have a problem with capacity, I'm sure. There will be times that we will actually have the money and could probably do more roads and probably won't have the capacity.

You were talking about: how much more is it really going to cost? Did we go back five years? I think probably the department did. They've got some figures they've passed on to me. But I like to believe that we're a department moving ahead, not looking back. We want to move ahead, and we want to get things done. I will tell you that over the next five years there are some large increases coming. In the year '07-08 our prices went up: for buildings, 18 per cent is what we believe we're going to pay more for this year; highways, 25 per cent. In '08-09, both of them, another 15 per cent increase. In '09-10, 10 per cent on buildings; 7 per cent on highways. In '10-11, 10 per cent on buildings; 7 per cent on highways. In '11-12, 7 per cent on buildings; 5 per cent on highways.

Because my people beside me are so efficient, I'll give you a little backwards stuff also. I want them to be much more efficient moving ahead, of course. When we move back from '07-08 to '06-07, there was a 20 per cent increase there. If we move back another year, there was 15 per cent. From the '04-05 it only went back 5 per cent, and the '03-04 only went back 5 per cent. So now I've given you a 10-year span.

2:50

You were also talking about what we do on our ring roads when we go about doing the comparator. We will actually do that on every single job that we even consider as a P3. We will never, ever build a P3 in Alberta without doing the due diligence, doing the cost comparator, and making sure that it's a good deal for Alberta taxpayers.

You were also asking about: can they increase us anywhere along over that 30 years? There is a clause in the contract tied strictly to maintenance and inflation rate, so it can't be a made-up number or anything else. When we have those inflations going up, they can increase a little bit tied to the inflation rate. Basically, what we say we have is a 30-year warranty because they have to pay all of the major rehab. Most roads in Alberta are constructed with about a 17-year lifespan expectancy to them. That's what they're engineered for. This is a 30-year program, so they may end up having to rehab that road at least twice – once for sure, possibly twice – before we get it back. That's where, actually, a lot of that saving comes into play and why we talk so highly of P3 situations.

We have full intentions of carrying on with ring roads in Edmonton and Calgary until they're completely done as you were asking earlier. We're going to go into the process here right away for some of the other legs that are left to do. We'll get a conventional market comparator done, and we'll also look at it the P3 way. As you know, it's like anything else. On the last one in Calgary what was so good,

if you looked at what I tabled yesterday, is that the amount of money between those bids, how much money there was left on the table from the low to the high. That shows how competitive it is.

That also is a reason why we have to be very, very careful on what information we give out as far as how the comparator was done and everything because it actually will take away our competitive edge if all of the contractors know how each other priced that contract. It actually would take away some competitive edge. We want you to know what all the figures were as long as it's not releasing their private information and what they used, so their competitors don't know how they go about doing their tender. That's pretty important to us, and it's really important to them because they come to us and say: don't tell these other guys how we've done this. They're not talking about our opposition; they're talking about their opposition within the marketplace.

You were talking about whether or not we would make sure that the LRTs were done. It's really not any of our type of business, but I'll tell you how I believe it should be looked at. We probably give more grants out on a per capita basis to municipalities than any other jurisdiction in Canada. We have a lot of grant money, whether it's AMIP or CAMRIF or the new deals for cities, the gas tax. As I said in my notes, there's over \$1.2 billion in grants alone that goes out to municipalities; it basically flows through out of my department.

That's not counting the new \$400 million that came out this year. Yes, there were some strings to that one, but some of these others: there aren't a lot of strings there. They can use that money for their infrastructure anywhere they want. It's their choice on what their priority is, whether it's an LRT line or an interchange or any of those different infrastructure things they need to build. We're here to try to help them as much as we can, but there are all of those grants in place for them to use that money to do that job with.

You also talked about the gas rebates. Really, the gas rebates: we're just a deliverer of the program. The Minister of Energy puts the price in on the estimate of what he feels the prices are going to be at the time, and then that's how much money comes to us. I do know, though, that they felt that our gas prices were going to be high this year and drop in the following two years. It's the estimate that they gave us. In '07-08 natural gas prices are projected to increase by 80 cents to \$6.75; the following two years prices are expected to decline, falling to \$6.25 by '09-10.

I think that I've covered all your questions. I think I got all four or five that you'd asked in there. I'm just trying to read the notes that I got down. Did I get them all?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Pretty good job.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Hon. minister, if there are any questions that you may have missed, you can submit the answers in writing.

Mr. Ouellette: I'd just as soon get it over with now. I have lots of work to do later without finding answers.

Mr. Martin: We want to give you some writing lessons. Maybe we can do that, Mr. Chairman.

There are a number of areas, of course. I want to talk again generally about what we might call the infrastructure deficit. I don't envy you in an overheated economy – I call it an economy on steroids – trying to keep up. The impact is dramatic in infrastructure; it's dramatic in housing; it's dramatic in health care, education; you name it. But we have to deal with it. That's a reality. If we're not going to put the foot on the brake a little bit up in Fort

McMurray, then we have to deal with it, and it's not cheap. There's absolutely no doubt about that.

I notice some of the figures just in highways that I read, and maybe the minister can comment if these are correct. The figures that I've seen are that by year's end 17 per cent of Alberta's 30,860-kilometre highway network, more than 5,000 kilometres, are in serious shape and need to be fixed. You know, the potholes. We talk about Edmonton. That seems to be a big issue, but I'm talking generally around the province. I'm told that by 2009-2010 that is projected to hit 21 per cent. So even just in roads, and that's only a small part of the minister's department. I don't know how we keep up with that, frankly. I think we're going to have to look at what we're doing.

I guess the question flowing from that is that the department must have sort of a short-term and long-term estimate about what I would call the cumulative deficit across the province whether it be roads, whether it be bridges, whether it be schools, or whatever. In other words, how serious is this problem, and could they give us that sort of figure? People bandy around figures. I'm not sure. I've heard \$20 billion. I don't know, but the department's best estimates and how they see them beginning to deal with this. I know that we start in this budget with more money, and the minister has alluded to that, but when we're playing catch-up, it's very difficult. So I think it's important for us in the Legislature here, I think it's important for the people of Alberta to know exactly what sort of problem we have here.

As I say, the cumulative deficit and then what the department sees. I don't know if it's five years, 10 years, or how we're going to deal with this because you can never catch up because as the minister well knows, the longer you wait, the bigger the bill becomes down the way, right? So if we don't fix it today, and we wait until next year – I know that's true with schools – then next year it's even more expensive. It becomes very difficult to try to deal with this. We're trying to get a handle on just how serious the problem is and what the department wants to look at in terms of how they're going to deal with it.

3:00

That ties into another thing that I'd like the minister's comments on. It's fairly new. We've been talking about the rising Canadian dollar. We now know that it's 94 cents. I think the Treasurer has been alluding to this. That means that our revenues would be down about \$984 million. When I look at that, that's equal to all the capital dollars dedicated to schools over the next two years. Nothing we've done, but the dollar has changed. A lot of people are speculating that we'll have parity with the U.S. dollar by the end of the year. Who knows? But there is that speculation. If that were the case, we would lose from revenues here \$1.7 billion. When I look at that, that would be like losing every dollar budgeted for infrastructure support province-wide. So not only are we playing catch-up, we may be playing with our dollar.

I wonder if the department has had some discussion about this new reality of the rising Canadian dollar and what that may mean in terms of our projections down the way. If we start to lose something like \$1.7 billion, that surely is going to have an impact. Now, I think that would be tying in to the royalty rates that we've talked about and that there should be an increase there, but that's not in this minister's department.

Before we talk a little more about P3s – I know that they're the minister's favourite topic, and the minister alluded to it – I want to ask about just the transportation part of his portfolio. I think we all drive highway 2. If I can say, often I try – and I know it's not right – to go 10 miles over the speed limit, but I almost feel when I'm

doing that, that everybody is passing me. I know that this has to do with the Solicitor General, but I don't know how you deal with that problem either. I'm not expecting a magic wand here, but that is a very dangerous highway.

Of course, the other highway that I specifically want to talk about is highway 63. There have been a lot of complaints about that road. I know that we're working on twinning it. It seems to shift when we're going to have that road completed. Can you give me just an update for when we'll see that finally done, including I think it's highway 28, where the connection is? Because that's also a very dangerous road.

The other question. There'll be some other things that we can get into, but I want to talk a little bit about the school situation, having, Mr. Chairman, formerly been a trustee. At the time when I was there, it was Infrastructure that was solely responsible for school maintenance and building new schools. Now it's my understanding that it's both. I'm a little confused. I asked some of the board people that I know, too, and nobody seems to know who calls the shots here. I'd really like an explanation of how that works with schools, with Infrastructure and the Department of Education and who makes a decision and how it comes about in that reality.

I just want to come back to the overall Infrastructure budget and say to the minister that if we're going to move ahead in the next little while – he has three-year projections, and I've asked for what the total deficit is. But in the next one to two to three years we've got all these things occurring: the rising dollar, more projects coming up, overheated economy. The longer we wait, the more expensive. I've asked for 10 years, you know, how we deal with it. What does he see over the next one to two to three years, and how can we begin to dent some of this problem? It becomes a fairly serious matter. We've got people coming in, the quality of life that people talk about, wanting to live here in Alberta. If our roads are falling apart, that's the first thing that people notice. That's what they complain about. I remember being in B.C. once during an election campaign, and he said: you know, it doesn't matter what you do in a rural area; all you have to do is promise them that you'll blacktop everything, and you'll be popular. So roads are very much things that people look at very quickly, but I know that there are all sorts of other areas. I'm saying that it's not an easy job. I don't envy the minister in trying to deal with this, and of course you have to deal with the Treasury Board and the rest of it, but it is a key department if we're going to deal with the problems that we're facing.

I'd just conclude there and sit down. I'll have some more questions, perhaps about P3s, but I'd like the minister to fill me in on those issues.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much. There's a lot of stuff you're saying that you're right on the money with. I might jump around a little bit to try to answer some of your stuff.

I think I'd like to start out by addressing a little of when you were saying that we have this backlog, because I've been admitting everywhere that we are in trouble. We've got a deficit with our roads. One of the main reasons is that we've only been actually doing 350 to 400 kilometres a year of highway rehabilitation. With the amount of highways we have and the way they've been deteriorating, we should be doing about 1,500 kilometres a year.

We are working on a four-year plan. We basically have what we're considering as a four-year plan to get us caught up. We haven't got the money committed to us in the budget yet, although in this year's three-year plan we have enough money in that budget to do about 2,500 kilometres of highway rehabilitation over the next

three years. Again I want to stress that we have a little bit of two types of problems there. One is that we're not fully funded to get to where we need to be to completely stop the bleeding, and we're asking industry to ramp up their capacity to make sure that we can carry on. Even though we're working on a four-year plan right now, and it's not fully showing it in this year's three-year plan, we believe we're going to get there.

I'll tell you how bad it really is. As of March 31, '07, total deferred maintenance across government was \$5.8 billion, and the figure is going to continue to increase as funding for preservation has not been sufficient to cover ongoing maintenance requirements and escalation in wages and materials. Ongoing maintenance is currently underfunded by approximately \$500 million a year plus escalation. The backlog of deferred maintenance is expected to exceed \$12 billion by 2012. We're working on that. That's what our estimates are today. That's why I'm telling you that we have a four-year plan, to try and bring that down. Out of that \$5.8 billion, about \$1.8 billion is highways and the other is vertical.

You were talking about the dollar. I mean, there's no doubt that as a government as a whole we all have to worry about what the difference in our revenue stream is going to be and that our dollar rising is going to change our revenue stream. We have, though – I think it's in our capital account reserve – about \$6.1 billion sitting there. We have our sustainability fund. So as far as it affecting the three-year business plan that we have right now or especially our in-year plan, it wouldn't affect that in-year plan. What we've got budgeted for and have money for, if it falls short, that's when we use the sustainability fund, for operations-type stuff, and the capital account for making sure that what we've budgeted for to build capital this year would go ahead. I mean, that doesn't make the taxpayer feel better that we're not going to have as much money coming in, but it's good planning on the part of this PC government and our Premier to make sure that we don't have the big ups and downs of cutbacks and all of a sudden the influxes like we used to have. We're trying to create a good, stable rate of funding.

3:10

Highway 2. I think we're up to 45,000 cars a day on that highway on counts, or right in that range. That's a lot of vehicles and a very busy highway for a four-lane highway. The speeds are unbelievable on it. I've been asking our department to try to figure out: is it safer to try to slow those vehicles down or let them move? I'm just going by experience now of driving that highway. I drive it at least twice a week and lots of times four. If I happen to pick up a policeman or catch up to one or one pulls out in front of me on the four-lanes somewhere between Red Deer and Ponoka and he happens to be going all the way to Edmonton, you just watch in the mirror as the cars back up. By the time we get to Leduc, you've got four or five miles of traffic backed up in fully both lanes. Is it safer to let them clear, or is it safer to back them up when you hold them at the 110? Actually, most of the time the policemen are also driving 120 or 125. I have to say that I don't know what's best there, and we're trying to check it.

I don't mean this badly, but you might be listening to the media too much, who don't always come clean with things or have the right facts to give, because by our stats and everything if highway 2 is not the safest, it's right in that ballpark of the safest highways in Alberta to drive on as far as the billion kilometres travelled with no collisions or the number of collisions. Highway 2 is the safest in Alberta. I don't know if that makes you feel better because there are lots of vehicles on it. By the stats on how they test highways for their safeness, not just us but across the country – I think the U.S. uses that same testing mechanism – that's classed as one of the safest highways.

Highways 63 and 28. That's about a middle of the road one in our average. Highway 63, which really you hear about a lot in the media, saying that it's unsafe, by our testing is a little bit safer than the average for Alberta by the traffic count and the billion kilometres travelled on it. Right now we're doing the planning, and engineering is under way. We're getting land acquisition. We're doing our aboriginal consultations. In the areas where we already have that done, we're starting to twin. I think we've already tendered the piece between 881 and the townsite of Fort McMurray. That tender is given to twin that this year. Why we believe that piece is so important – now that last year we finished paving 881 all the way up there – is that at least you have two choices now. You've got four-lanes coming out of Fort McMurray till you reach 881. Then you can either take 881 or 63. So you have two highways you can travel on. That also will make things a little better for us with the overweight, overheight, overwidth loads. We could actually direct traffic so they don't have to be held up. We could actually turn them at 881 and bring them out that way or bring them up that way.

We're also working on the new five-lane bridge that's going to go across the river right into the town of Fort McMurray, which is very, very important. I was talking to some people up there. If there's ever an accident on that bridge at shift change coming out of the plants, and let's say that they're coming into town at 7:30 at night, it might be 10, 11 o'clock at night before they get it closed, and they can't get across the river any other way. So they're pretty anxious to see the new five-lane bridge go in also.

You were asking about how our budgets work today or whose responsibility it is on schools. We have . . . [Mr. Ouellette's speaking time expired] I'll answer it next go-around.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: We have until approximately . . .

The Deputy Chair: You have until 3:28.

Mr. Martin: Okay. I'll try to judge my remarks to give the minister time.

Just a follow-up, and hopefully we'll get time on the other. I just want to come back to the deferred maintenance to make sure that I understand what that means. I was asking about the cumulative infrastructure deficit, and I think the minister was alluding to the deferred maintenance right now of \$5.8 billion, \$1.8 billion being highways, and projected to be \$12 billion.

Mr. Ouellette: By 2012.

Mr. Martin: Yeah, by 2012. Right.

What does that figure mean exactly? Is it desperate need? We've looked at the cumulative deficit. In that period of time is that the amount of money we'll need, or is that sort of more the emergency of things that we have to deal with very quickly? In other words, I'm just trying to get a handle on what deferred maintenance means. The minister said – he'll correct me if I heard him wrong – something about vertical.

Mr. Ouellette: Yeah. That's buildings.

Mr. Martin: Buildings. Okay. So schools and the rest of things like that, right? We're talking about schools and that. I'm trying to figure out what deferred maintenance means exactly.

You know, I guess the only other thing I'd say is that I think we

still have to be concerned about the dollar and the amount of money. Yes, we do have the sustainability fund, and we do have the capital fund, and we can do that, but ultimately if we keep going into that, that disappears too. I mean, that's not just the minister's problem. That's a problem that the government is going to face. But if the dollar goes to, say, parity and it stays there for a number of years, even if it stays at 94 cents, I think we really have to reassess a lot of things with that dollar. That's all I'm saying.

I want to just briefly have a discussion about P3s. I know that the minister loves talking about P3s. I want to say a couple of things. I appreciate the fact that he gave me the public-sector comparator. I think the previous minister said before that it was forthcoming. I haven't had time to go through it because I've been in Calgary, but I understand that a lot of it is blacked out. I think the minister is alluding to why: because of the different bids and the rest of it. I'm not going to ask, necessarily, for the minister to go through it. I need to go through it and take a read of what you've handed me. But remember that the reason that we were skeptical is because Henday did come out different than what was said before the public-sector comparator, and finally we got that information.

It is startling, the figures that the minister brought forward. I'm wondering how long this company will be in business. You know, that has to be of some concern. I guess I don't know what's in the P3. Is it maintenance and all the things? That's what I will sort out, and eventually we can ask the minister through a letter or whatever to deal with that. But it seems almost too good to be true. You know the old saying: if it's too good to be true, it probably is. I just haven't had the opportunity yet. I will do that and take a better look.

3:20

I know the government gives me the idea that the courthouse was a success as a P3. Well, it's a success after the fact, I suppose, because the original budget of \$300 million, as the minister is well aware, went to \$500 million, a 67 per cent overrun. The government said that was because of the judges, because of the security demands. Then we cut back on the project, and then it was a P3 for that private company to run it. I guess it's all in the interpretation. I don't see that as a P3 raving success from where it started. I think the government perhaps learned something from that courthouse, at least hopefully.

The other area, though, that I want to mention – and this is why I was asking about the schools. The Minister of Education keeps talking about the schools, and I know something about schools. If we're going to go that way, I think there's a better way. When we have the traditional financing, we can even get a better rate. Even if we have to borrow, we can do it cheaper than companies because of our credit rating. With the amount of money we have right now, I guess one would argue whether we need to borrow or not, but we also know that there's a huge infrastructure, so we want to put it off over time.

Let's not kid ourselves with a P3. The old saying: if it quacks like a duck and walks like a duck, it is a duck. We still will be responsible for that money over a period of whatever that time is: 20 years, 30 years. We're still paying for the service, so I think we have to recognize that in our plans. We always say: well, it's not a debt. It is a debt if we're in a contract, and I think the minister would agree with that. We have to be somewhat careful about that.

The other point that I'd make, though, is that I know that in Breton, Nova Scotia, especially with the schools – I mean, I question the P3s, as the minister knows, and indeed with some of the others there might be more of a rationale than there is in schools because what happens after in the schools becomes a crucial thing, Mr. Minister. In Breton, for instance, they couldn't have school lunches

because the private people were the ones that determined what was going on in the schools. A lot of what happens in schools, you know, is after for the community in the schools, and if somebody else owns those schools, for the time being they're the ones that are going to determine.

I think there are all sorts of potential problems there that I don't think the minister has particularly worked out. If the minister is pushing the P3s on the broader projects and they can say that there is a good public-sector comparator, you know, and they can actually do it – and I can't tell yet on this other one because a lot of it's blanked out – that's one thing. But I think that when we get into schools, that's another thing.

There are some other things the minister wants to say, and I want to give him enough time to respond. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ouellette: I'll try to talk a bit faster because there's a quite a bit to talk about. On a really quick shot on where the schools are and where we are and who's responsible, we know that we have some of the best expertise across the country in being able to assess a job, being able to price that job, being able to do the due diligence to see whether we're getting good value for the dollar.

Way back when, Treasury Board decided or somebody decided, long before I got this ministry, where a school would be built, how much money would be spent on it and that sort of thing. Those decisions are all made by Education. After that point then we get involved. We check the tender out. We make sure they're getting value for their dollar and so on and so on, about the same as our P3.

Today on roads we probably have the best expertise. We're as good as anywhere in the world on being able to assess, design, construct, make sure the maintenance is done, the rehab is done, and the financing is right. We're working on trying to have that model with our vertical infrastructure, what you would call buildings. We still may have a little way to go there. I mean, we didn't do the courthouse P3. There's a portion of it that's being done as a P3, the finishing and stuff, and I'm not even a hundred per cent sure on how all of that worked.

The deferred maintenance stuff you were asking about: no, it's not an emergency. That's where we'll be if we don't do anything more than we've been doing in the past, just barely holding our own, I guess, or worse than holding our own. We're creating a deficit, I guess you'd say.

Currently on our road status 57 per cent is good, 26 per cent is fair, and 17 per cent is poor. If we do what our four-year plan is, we won't be in that position in 2012. We're only going to be in that position in 2012 if we don't pick up anything we've been doing. The target we're shooting for: we would like to have 80 per cent good, 15 per cent fair, and 5 per cent poor. We believe that at that rate you would have good roads in Alberta to drive on. People wouldn't say that they're deteriorating.

The buildings, the ones that I'm mostly concerned with now are the actual provincial buildings because all the budgets for the schools are in Education, the budgets for health are in Health and for advanced education in Advanced Ed.

I'm done. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the time allocated for this portion has now elapsed.

Employment, Immigration and Industry

The Deputy Chair: I'd to welcome the minister and the officials that have accompanied her today. I would ask the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry to bring forward opening remarks and introduce her guests as well.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. If I may, to my immediate right is Ulysses Currie, deputy minister; to my immediate left, Rick Sloan, assistant deputy minister. Duncan Campbell, who is the architect of much of the financial information that has been the background to the business plan, is with us. I believe that in the gallery we have assistant deputy ministers Susan Williams and Neil Irvine. I see a few others. Lorelei Fiset-Cassidy is there as communications director. I'm not sure if I see Ellen Hambrook. Peter Kennett and Shelley Engstrom are also joining us. Thank you. Glad to have you here.

I know that if the hon. members have had an opportunity to review *Hansard* for my last comments, they will indicate much of what I had said in the fullness of examining the issues that we're here for at the Committee of Supply, but I'd like to make a couple of brief additional comments to add to the opening remarks that were recorded previously.

First of all, since 1995 Alberta has created an average of 42,000 jobs a year and a growth rate of 2.7 per cent. Last year, 2006, we led Canada with a 6.8 per cent economic growth. We provide tremendous support in this department to the people of Alberta relative to the employment, the immigration as well as the industry.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

3:30

Our department has allocated almost \$300 million in support of employment in Alberta, so our relationship with many of the postsecondary institutions is well known. We provide skills training like English as an additional language, and we provide increased living allowances for people taking English. I tabled a response to this question, but I do want to indicate that with our increased living allowance this year of 5 per cent for all grant-funded students taking courses after the 1st of August, we are giving significant increases in support to many people that are taking extra programming, either upgrading or improving their skills. We also announced a core benefit increase of 5 per cent that will be put in place on July 1 for those who are not expected to have employment or are temporarily unable to work. I'd like to indicate that the cost of these benefits increased our total amount for 2007-08 by \$9.1 million.

If anybody is eligible for income support, including those taking English as a second or an additional language, they're also eligible to receive support under the homeless and eviction fund, something people ask me about, whether or not students would be able to receive support.

Relative to answers tabled on temporary foreign workers in my last presentation, I want to once again remind this House that this is a federal program. Although we are working over the next few months, right until November, it's our intent to negotiate an annex with the federal government to the temporary foreign worker program. Greater accountability, no doubt, will result as a result of that collaborative negotiation process.

I want to just indicate that so far we've had many pilot projects that have increased the capacity of this government to respond to urgent labour needs. Even with the provincial nominee program I remind this House that this is employer driven. We're committed to the PNP program, but employers themselves have a great deal of responsibility in the definition of who shall come and what jobs they will undertake.

We increased our immigration funding by 15 per cent to almost \$68 million in our immigration programs overall. Our provincial nominee program will increase from an anticipated 2,500 nominees this year to some 8,000 in the third year of 2009-10. So we're looking at a significant number of people that will be entitled to

come in on the PNP program. If you look back six years and think that only 128 came in, it's a significant amount of increase.

Recently with the signing of our made-in-Alberta called the Canada/Alberta co-operation on immigration agreement, we have defined just how we will work collaboratively on all aspects of the agreement to increase and speed up the flow of immigrants that will be coming and taking advantage of these labour issues that are coming forward.

Our funding for labour standards and workplace safety increased \$30 million, up from \$7 million last year. Seventy-two people helping us keep Albertans safer on the job. Assessments, inspections, workplace safety, and funding for labour standards have been given a great benefit and a great boost. As I indicated, Gil McGowan gave me a letter of astonished pleasure, that he believed we had given such considerable influence to improving our capacity to monitor compliance and support with the labour force.

So, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the questions, but I'm very confident with this budget that we will have a more comprehensive workplace health and safety campaign in place. It will be announced with further details this fall. I think that we have all the tools to address the issues that I look forward to receiving from our hon. colleagues.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's hard to try to get a handle on this department, all the various areas that the minister has to look at. I'm going to try to, you know, break it down in certain areas and go from there. I'll try to see how much time I have here. I think we'll do 10 and 10 and 10 and 10 if that's okay with the minister.

I want to start with the labour standards. We've been promised a review by the previous minister I talked to, and it was coming soon. In fact, after we dealt with Tyson, I was expecting it last spring. It's next spring, and I'm not sure when this is coming. I take it it is coming, so I'd like the minister, to begin with, to give us some idea. With all due respect, sometimes maybe in the past people on the workers' side would say, "Maybe it's better if they don't look at it because it might make it worse," but I'm sure that this minister would not do that to the working people, Mr. Chairman.

I think there are certain things in the labour standards that we want to look at, and we don't have to have a review. I think the minimum wage, again, has become an issue, especially with the overheated economy the way it is. I know that most workers aren't at the minimum wage, but the minimum wage has an impact on the rest of the wages. I'm wondering if that's part of the review. I'll come to the living wage part of it. Most people are now saying that in Alberta we should be looking at around the \$10 range because we've dropped behind, and with the cost-of-living here even at \$10 an hour it would be very difficult to live with the price of housing and the rest of it. So I wonder if the minister will talk about where that's at. Is that part of the review, or are they assessing that separately from the labour standards?

The other area – it sort of came upon us rather quickly – was the whole idea of 12-year-olds working. It wasn't during this minister's term but during the previous minister's. As the minister is well aware, that came up behind closed doors, and all of a sudden we knew that 12-year-olds were participating. Now, I guess there's a different argument here. Some people say: well, 12-year-olds, it teaches them responsibility. You know, that argument. I guess my bias is that I think 12-year-olds should be 12-year-olds. We're too anxious to get into the world of work. We're going to be doing that for the rest of our time. There are so many other things to do, and

I think there's a potential for school work and other things to suffer. Also, I think there is a health and safety matter. I know that the minister will say that we actually do monitor that, but I think that's very hard. You're not going to have a young 12-year-old that's going to have the confidence to take on the boss if they say to do this or that. So I really hope that we're taking a good look at that in the labour review. Maybe we're taking a good look, and we'll make it 10-year-olds. I would hope not. But I think that we should be relooking at that whole area. I'm wondering if the minister could comment if that's part of the review, when this comes forward.

The other area that I think is a real thorny one and probably one that the minister is having to deal with in caucus is farm workers, in terms of whether they should be included. I would say yes. I mean, we're not talking about the family farm. I think we could exempt them, you know, the one or two or whatever temporary people. But we have a whole agribusiness growing in this province. I think how ludicrous it becomes. I was down there during the strike in Tyson, and on one hand you had a labour union fighting for first contract arbitration with a union – I'll come to that later – and on the other side of the street there were workers there, and because they were called farm workers, they didn't even have labour standards. It seemed to me that was so ludicrous that it didn't make sense. I think we really have to straighten this out. As I say, there are these companies of agribusiness that can virtually move away from the whole labour standards in the province by calling themselves farm workers.

3:40

Now, I know that's a tough sell with some people. I think there's probably a way to get around it, you know, within the little family farms, but there are less and less of them, as we know, as we go along. So I would like the minister's comments on that. I have a feeling that that may be one of the small problems of why we've been waiting for this labour standards review to come public.

I want to ask the minister's comments – and it ties into the minimum wage and the rest of it – on the living wage. The minister is well aware that, I think, in Calgary they've moved ahead with what they call a living wage. It's Vibrant Communities in Calgary, and I think the city of Calgary has bought into this to some degree too. You know, they're talking that for a living wage – and I'm using Calgary figures here because these are the ones that I have. It's determined that "an individual working full-time (35 hours per week, 52 weeks a year) needs a minimum of \$12 per hour to earn a Living Wage (or \$13.25 in lieu of benefits). This figure is based on the Statistics Canada 2001," the reason being that Calgary's accumulated inflation rate surpassed the national average, as we know. In other words, they're saying that that's sort of a minimum to live in Calgary with any decency at all. So it's broader than the minimum wage.

I'm wondering if the minister is looking at it. I suppose we could recommend – I'm not sure how we'd go about doing it, but we could perhaps do it in government or whatever, but at least we know that Calgary is moving ahead. I wondered if the minister could make some comments dealing with the living wage and tie that, I guess, if you like, into the minimum wage.

There are so many other things. Maybe while I've got a minute or two, I'll throw out as many things as we can and bounce them here now. I've asked the other ministers about another report that's coming down the way – the minister is aware of this from her previous portfolio – the health workforce training. I think the minister's department is involved in this as is Advanced Ed and Technology, I think now, and the minister of health. This is a report that I thought was coming earlier on. I've asked the other two

ministers. Maybe this minister can give me an update about when we might deal with that because the minister knows better than anybody that the health situation is going to get severe. It's severe now, and it will get even more severe, not only with doctors and nurses but with everybody, certainly with the health sciences – that's a problem – to the point where it could be very dangerous.

I've seen various figures, Mr. Chairman, about the shortages that we're looking at down the way. I'm wondering if that's maybe why it's taking some time. At least it's better to get this out so that we know how serious the problem is. I was talking the same about infrastructure. We've got to know these sorts of things. While we're looking at reports, maybe we can comment on the two reports.

My time is almost up, Mr. Chairman, so I'd sit down and wait for the minister to come back with some of the answers. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Yes. It's always a pleasure to hear the comments from my colleague opposite. There isn't much that we haven't experienced at least peripherally together in the political arena. He was teaching students at a time when I was a school trustee, and we both had a passion for making sure that children had a proper education. He was very respected in Sal comp, I must say, and I'm never surprised when he has a lot of the insights that relate to students and children. We share a lot of common backgrounds and thoughts on those items.

Let me start in the order in which the hon. colleague raised issues. The employment standards review has been undertaken by previous ministers, and we are looking at still further consultation this fall. If I could speculate, it's because a little bit of the scene in Alberta has been changing. You could reflect on whether or not rules that the federal government has brought in place to address employment standards should be part of ours, or should there be an assumption that those, for example, dealing with compassionate leave and other issues should be understood from the federal perspective as addressing that issue?

I thought that it might be a simple matter, but the more I look at the employment standards, the results of the review, and perhaps some of the ambiguities between federal rules and where we're currently going with our rules – and I think that the hon. member has also profiled the issues that relate to safety of workers when on farms, which is the way I'll propose it. If you have somebody working on a farm that's an electrician, that is there under contract, it might be relatively simple to identify that they are an electrician when they're there, but it might not be assumed to be that in terms of liability for the farmer.

It's taking a little longer than I would have hoped to really put in place something that would address the issues in employment standards in the proper vein. What I'm working on is making sure that for the ones that this budget anticipates, we're putting emphasis on those employment standards we have to make sure that there is adherence to the compliance for those employment standards.

The hon. member makes an observation: will we make it worse? I sincerely hope not, but I think underscored in that remark is the thought I have that if we're not improving it for the people that are employed, then we have to take a serious look at it. An understanding that I have is that the employment standards have to be complementary both for the person that's employed and the employer, that there should be some reasonableness and understanding, but overall I have taken the belief in this ministry that I should work at trying to reduce injuries on the job. In any case, people should expect to have somebody go home safe at night. They shouldn't be injured on the job, and there shouldn't be a situation where people are asked to do

things that have jeopardized or imperilled their safety in any way.

I think to that end, comments that have been made in this House have actually taught me a lot through the questions. I'll give you one example, and that is that when we look at negotiating our annex with the temporary foreign worker, I think it behooves us to look at how we can ensure that we know where that temporary foreign worker lands when they come to Alberta so that we can make sure that the employers are compliant with the standards that we do have. I think that has been profiled by the number of questions surrounding the knowledge we have of where temporary foreign workers are and acknowledgments in the House.

On many fronts, especially as we're looking to the annex on the made-in-Alberta agreement on attracting a labour force, I think the responsibility for us to look at these employment standards through the lens of a province that's attempting to attract many new workers – far from being less responsible, we have to be more responsible in what we anticipate our attraction should include. At the very least it should include an understanding of what the safety standards are for people who are applying to come here, and we should be providing that information through the employer, ensuring that it's provided in a form that we believe is correct.

So with your indulgence I would seek a little patience as we do that consultation this fall, as we look at some of the major employers who will be bringing over for short periods of time temporary foreign workers and finding out the very best possible way that we can ensure they're keeping those workers safe.

3:50

I've spent quite a bit of time with representatives from the Building Trades Council and dealing with people who represent the unions here in Alberta, and they are drawing my attention to the needs that I have to represent the safety and the health of these people in occupations. Unsolicited, people have come forward to meet with me to make that same observation. To the hon. member: I think that with additional consultation this fall, with a little bit of extra time and due diligence with the people that are most likely to employ people for temporary periods of time, with the opportunities we have to site in the heartland some 10 to 13 new businesses and industries, we need to understand the changing face of what labour really looks like in Alberta as people come for both times of shorter duration as well as the sustained opportunities for people who will one day manage an operation.

I look back, and probably at the time the hon. member was in Strathcona, when we were looking at the Shell Scotford being built with some 4,200 employees, about 10 per cent of those numbers were actually put in place to manage the plant. So at one point you have an inflation of a large number of workers, and then all of a sudden you go down and just have about 10 per cent of those workers.

It seems to me that while we've got this boom of construction, looking at the employment standards for those people that are likely to work in those situations and reflecting on what their needs are and the employers' needs for workers but reflecting on the needs to make sure those employees are maintained in the same kind of safe environment we would expect every day of the year for any Albertan, we want to make sure that those standards reflect best practices, particularly with the influx of so many. While much has been said about the red seal and certification and professional regulations governing the various professions, I think much more should be said about being sure that we have a safe environment for people that are coming, however temporarily, to do any kind of work in Alberta.

In the very few weeks ahead you will see more on the minimum

wage, but let me just say this: I have every intention of tabling an increase to the minimum wage for our caucus, and that will be coming forward. I know that they're aware of it, and our Premier spoke in this House about that. I would remind this House that, in fact, along with supplementary benefits Albertans are doing better, but over the last several months, with the rise in cost of living and the squeeze on higher rent costs and scarcer accommodation, it has been harder. So the living wage index that's being presented by the hon. member is something that I will clearly use as an argument. Whether it's for supplementary supports like the supplementary supports that are provided for child care through the Children's Services ministry for those people that need child care subsidies, through our health benefits for children, through our income supports, in all of these areas we are looking at what it takes to support people.

Looking at the constituency that receives the minimum wage, you know, I went into Dairy Queen in Calgary just on the weekend and noted that their minimum wage is posted for part-timers at just under \$10 – I believe \$9.95 – and full-time starting wage, I believe, was \$12.50. But almost nobody today – admittedly, very few places are getting away, if you can put it in those terms, with paying minimum wage because they simply won't attract employees.

So it's a good time for us to be looking because then we take a reality check of what is out there, what the market has.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. You'll get another opportunity. I understand that you'll go through, and for anything that's missed, certainly, written is fine.

Just while the minister was following up, I'm glad she said that it was complicated. The compassionate leave is something that I didn't mention, but the minister did. Just an update because I think that's a crucial one compared to the federal, but the minister seemed to say that there were some – maybe I misunderstood – problems with it. But if she gets a moment, could she talk a little bit about the compassionate leave?

I'm going to ask just a couple more questions flowing from the minister's answers. I'm glad that the minister is looking at increasing the minimum wage. I guess I'm sort of curious as to what, if she can give us a hint. I expect that I might be disappointed, but I'll ask anyhow. You know, I think most people were talking around \$10. The minister alluded to what some of the fast-food places are starting at right now. If she would comment from there into the living wage. She probably just didn't get time.

The other question. I know that she'll come to the task force if she gets a moment, and if she doesn't, she can write. But for employment standards I was looking for sort of a hint about when this might come about. I know that the minister can't say it's going to be, you know, that on August 31 we're going to come down, but if you can give us some rough idea of when people might look for these reports.

I want to go from there, though, into sort of the broader issues. As I say, there are so many different areas in the minister's department. I do want to talk about – and I think she'd be surprised if I didn't raise it – the labour laws. I'm wondering if there is any review here about labour laws. We've had some very tough strikes or lockouts or whatever, you know, since I've been involved. The most recent ones are Tyson and the Palace Casino now. The one that I think cries out is first contract arbitration.

Now, the previous minister said that they were looking at it because, you know, other provinces have. I know that it's a Conservative government, and I probably could ask about all sorts

of things that I think would be necessary to tip the balance to make it fair on both sides, if you like: replacement workers and those sorts of things. But I know that I'd be dreaming if we thought we'd get that, even though I would always make the case for it. I think it should be important to look at that first contract arbitration. We've seen it a number of times. A number of them have been with the UFCW because they've had some tough strikes, but once the union gets in there, then it's very hard to negotiate, and they try to wait them out.

Tyson did the first time, and eventually the union passed. I mean, we saw the violence, the potential violence there. We saw another long one at the centre here in Edmonton. I'm thinking now that the Palace Casino has been going on a long time. It becomes hard to negotiate to get that first contract. If there was sort of binding arbitration at a certain point, you know, with the strike, I think it would lead to better labour relations for everybody. I would ask the minister if they are considering that because, as I say, I think there are only three provinces that don't have it. She may correct me, but I think that's the case. I think that would be absolutely crucial.

As I say, I won't bother going through all the list and litany of other things, but that one has been so much in the news. I think that would lead to some fairness, so I'd ask the minister to comment on that.

The other thing I want to talk about – the minister alluded to it – is the temporary workers. It's a difficult thing. I know that the minister says that it's a federal program, but it was jointly brought together by the now Minister of Education and the Provincial Treasurer. I don't think we understood the scope of what was going to happen. It's part of the overheated economy again. We've had a number of instances that we've talked about here in the Legislature. I know the minister believes that the employment standards should be there, the same as for any other workers.

4:00

I want to just broadly ask, though. There's some discussion – and the minister is aware of it – about the use, especially in the tar sands and that, of temporary foreign workers. As the minister is well aware, within the building trades there is a feeling that this is a way to get around what they would consider legitimate unions. They bring people in. You know, we could talk about the apprenticeship, the training, and the rest of it. Actually, I've had people tell us that they had applied for a job that they'd advertised for temporary foreign workers. A person that was a tradesman had actually applied for that particular job, and they were told: don't even bother. Many in the building trades are saying that there are people in the hiring halls that do not necessarily always have jobs, and I think the minister would agree that our first priority would be the people here.

The other thing. Maybe the minister could comment. I know we're doing some work here, but I'm wondering what the scope is of bringing aboriginal people, especially, into those types of skilled jobs. I think our priority is our own people first. Aboriginal people are our people, and they need the training, you know, so if we can deal with them ahead of the temporary workers. Then I think the minister mentioned trying to get a handle on who's bringing people in so that you can have some idea of where they're at and in which industries and which companies. I think I heard the minister say that. I'd be very interested if she could add to that a little bit. I take it that this is a fairly new initiative, and I'm wondering if she could comment about that.

I'll give the minister a little more time because there's a lot of information here, but there is, as I say, a feeling that – well, I'll tell you a good example. I was in Mazatlán, Mexico, over Christmas, and a guy, a peddler on the street there, came up to me. "Where are

you from?" I said, "Well, I'm from Alberta." "Oh. I'm trying to get to Fort McMurray." So it's certainly out there, you know, that people want to come in as temporary foreign workers, but we really have to monitor it. We really have to make sure that it is legitimate. I really say that it should not be a way to sort of drive down wages in the legitimate building trades, who have done a great job here of building this economy. I would hope that the minister is monitoring all that.

I'm going to give you a little more time to go through because there are a lot of questions. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you. Timelines on anything: I haven't got anything definitive. I said that on employment standards: more consultation in the fall. I can tell you from my thought about it that it's likely going to be sometime next year before it comes back and sees the light of day. I would love to give you a different answer. I don't know that with the fall session it's likely going to be that we're going to tackle something that would be big at that time, but we might have done the consultation period.

You also asked me to expand a little bit on the 12-year-old. You know, the 12-year-old still has very strict controls, still with parental guidance and agreement, and we could probably both have some long conversations about whether that's the right thing. It depends, I think, a lot on what the placement is, but if that is revisited during the employment standards review, well, I'm sure that it will be discussed, in any event.

The health workforce plan. I think we're maybe days away from the release of that plan, but that's because, just like the hon. member has noted, it is a very important piece of our activity. We're continuing to work on it. That's the point. We haven't stopped working on some of the things like the retention/recruitment initiatives, the issues that relate to the purchase of lifts for people so that we avoid overexertion. We know that there are several hundred people that are off work as nurses because of overexertion, so that's been crucial. The work is going on even though the plan hasn't been released, but it won't be very long before it's released.

I think it's been quite novel to actually have three ministers work together on this plan, but it's the right link. It's something that I would have so appreciated when I was health minister because it's linking the trainer and the training piece with the practical application, and it's linking it with our ministry, dealing with six ministries under one roof now. When Mr. Sloan and his team go off to other places to talk about immigration or about attracting a workforce, we've got an opportunity to put that health group under the umbrella. When I was in London, it was astonishing to see how many of the health group came forward. Our federal government has agreed to contact everybody in the U.K. with a letter if they have applied to be a health worker in Alberta and tell them that under the new terms of this made-in-Alberta agreement, the PNP program is open, and if they get a job – several of them had jobs when we were there – then they will be able to.

The hon. member mentioned first contract arbitration. Although it was mentioned, I believe here in the House, that my predecessor would look at it, there was nothing initiated at that time, nor have I initiated anything. But the labour agreements generally, overall, have been really satisfactory if you look at the fact that 98 per cent are resolved without government intervention, that there's less time lost in strikes here in Alberta than almost anywhere else in Canada – I think our statistics are really admirable – and that the negotiations generally have been very positive. We've had some exceptions to the rule, but in large part they have been going very well.

I'd just say on the temporary foreign worker and the comments made about people that are trying to come here that we're going to look this fall at marketing through a web portal – we're marketing currently – so that your friend in Mexico would be able to read in Spanish what the credential requirements were, so that he didn't have to pay money there to some unscrupulous recruiter to get a job in Alberta. Those are some things that we're really going to target in protection for that worker and in anticipation of what they need to know.

We know that we will continue to maintain the responsibility of the employer to find housing for them. This is one of the reasons why in our department now we're doing an inventory of these groups that are coming here, including Total and Air Liquide and Aux Sable, others that might be coming, to say: what workers do you need, and what are your provisions for housing for them? We're trying to get a bit of a tighter grip on that, and I really appreciate that question.

Mr. Martin: How much time do we have left, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Until 4:28.

Mr. Martin: Okay. I'll start anyhow.

Maybe we should have some time to talk about the homeless and eviction fund. In listening to the minister, obviously we have – well, I'm not sure if she and I do, but the government and I have a difference of opinion about what we need to do in the short run on a very serious situation. I do appreciate that the minister is doing her best with this eviction fund to try to deal with the severe cases, but again I would say – and this is not necessarily the minister – that it's a funny way to do government policy. I think we have a broader problem here, and there are hardships.

I'm glad the fund is there because that was one of the recommendations that we made when I was on the task force. It was always the idea, from our perspective in putting it all together, that the eviction fund would be, you know, there for people. There might be a big utility bill that they couldn't handle or the first month's deposit when people came in. That was becoming a problem, and it sort of got broader than that. I think the minister has said that there's a fair amount of flexibility, so it's sort of gone beyond that, perhaps because it has to.

4:10

I guess the question that sort of flows from here, though, is: is there any suggestion? I've asked the minister because it used to be that we looked at: accommodation should take no more than 30 per cent of your income. I doubt that you can do that with this fund because I think it would be too overwhelming with the amount of people that are paying over 30 per cent. Dealing with the eviction fund – I know this is a government policy – even though there's flexibility, I'm wondering if they're saying: "If it's 50 per cent or 60 per cent of your income, it's too much. We'll look at it. If you're paying 40 per cent, that's too bad. That's just the way it is. We can't do much for you."

Obviously, I doubt that we could begin to handle – and that's why we called for the rent guidelines in the short term – all the people that are paying over 30 per cent of their income. That was sort of the standard thing before. I know that there is a supplemental program, too, that the government has. It's been there for a while. I don't think we can begin to deal with the amount of numbers. At least, that's what we're getting from people.

I know the minister says that there's flexibility. I understand the reason for that with the circumstances we're in, but there must be

some rough idea that people are using in terms of how much of your income should be going and when we'd take a look at you. I'm wondering if in doing this, this will become a major government policy. When more people know about this eviction fund, are there more people coming forward or less? What's the minister's assessment about where this program will be in the future?

Ms Evans: I think that's an excellent . . .

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My apologies. I was up so fast. I didn't mean to cut you off there.

My understanding is that we've had over 500 clients now, who've received a benefit of over \$500,000. Now, that's really interesting because by May 31 there were 448 who received prevention eviction monies to the cost of \$385,900, an increase of 175 clients and \$151,000 over some period of time back, about a week before that.

What the director is to look at, if you read the one-pager that identifies the homeless and eviction fund, is they are to have the flexibility in one of the 59 centres in Alberta to judge the circumstance of the person themselves. I think that sometimes they probably subsidize considerably more than leaving a person with a situation where they would have been paying 30 per cent of their income. A rough idea would be hard to identify because periodically they're paying arrears in utilities for up to three months. We've got couples that have moved here who couldn't find housing, were given emergency funding, money for meals. We found them a residence, assisted them with a damage deposit. For people who are new to Alberta, for people who face arrears, it's just adjudicated on the basis of their needs.

There has been – and I think the deputy would agree – a considerable pride by the workers that we haven't struck an arrangement with them that forced them into any box in terms of what they provided. They had to look at the circumstances for the family, provide for their needs, and make sure that they were given what they needed for accommodation and, as well, that they didn't have to rob out of their food budget to pay for that. When I met, for example, with this city's west Edmonton office, they said that the best thing we ever did was give them some flexibility. I think that that's overwhelmingly been something where I think: if we were smart enough to hire those social workers, we should be smart enough to consider that they have the capacity to judge better themselves. The deputy particularly fought for us to make sure that there was some flexibility there so that they could make those decisions with the best needs of that family in mind.

Now, in this House, Mr. Chairman, I've received a lot of questions about how sustainable this program will be. Interestingly enough, there haven't been as many people as I might have thought across Alberta that would have been taking advantage of that homeless and eviction fund. But then I look ahead to the November to March period of this coming year. Last year during that period we spent some 9 million dollars supporting increased utility costs and all kinds of other things in emergency situations. At this point it may not be as severe, but I'm not sure that that will persist over an extended period of time because if people do get short, if the costs of living, as you pointed out, rise still further – and you see what they are saying in Calgary – we have no doubt that there are going to be more petitions to this fund.

Frankly, I'm surprised that there hasn't been a bigger uptake, which might speak well of the renter accommodation that's available, the attitude of landlords in not trying to pressure. But this homeless and eviction fund has been given very flexible latitude, and

I haven't had complaints come to my office that we haven't seriously considered the capacity of each. I think that where we have had some cautions raised is on whether or not they qualify for rent supplement on a different basis, and different kinds of criteria apply to the rent supplement program with the minister of housing.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. Just to follow up in the few minutes remaining. My guess about the homeless and eviction fund: what we're getting from our office is that people, seniors and people like that, probably would never go. You know, that's just the way they were brought up. They would not go. They might see this as welfare or whatever. So there are some people that just won't ever do that. Now, how many? I don't know, but I know there are some.

I think that probably the minister's department is doing a good job with those people that are coming in there. They see the need, and they are social workers. I agree that they should have the competence to look at each individual situation, and because of circumstances I agree that you have to do that.

I think that what I'm broadly getting at – and I don't know if the minister could allude to this – is what the social workers are saying about how much they are paying the ones that are coming in for their accommodation. I think there's a whole range of people that are hurting. Maybe they're not destitute to the point where they might need the eviction fund, but some people on fixed incomes and others may be spending 50 per cent of their income, and they're struggling and that. They probably wouldn't necessarily qualify because they're probably not as badly off as some other people, and they probably wouldn't apply. I think that's the group that I'm worried about. Well, I guess that we're worried right across the board. I mean, that's why we had the housing task force.

But that's what we perceive happening. We're not making it up, to the minister, because we are getting these calls at our office about people getting the rent increases. One of the things we talked about on the task force ties into the eviction fund. If we're not accepting the old idea of what affordability was – and that was 30 per cent. That's what we were suggesting on the task force. What is it now? The government said that they agree that there should be a definition, but they're not sure what it is. If the minister has any clout, I think that's something we have to deal with.

4:20

Now, I know the government has in the short run rejected guidelines, but then I think it's incumbent to take a look at what we now consider affordability. Times change, and maybe the government's mind will change if things cool off and we're able to get more housing on, but that takes time. That's the problem with the idea of the market. Most people say that it's two years, maybe three or four. Even if we're going to do all the right things to bring housing on and we have some money, in fairness to the government, to do this, it takes time, and that's what the problem is.

It's not just the destitute. It's a whole group of people that are probably spending way too much, and it's impacting their lives in very dramatic ways. They wouldn't necessarily show up at the eviction fund. I'll give the minister some time to talk about that.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

That ties in with the one thing we did miss in view of the minimum wage: the minister's – I know that they're not going to announce a policy – analysis of what Calgary is doing with the living wage. If there are some ideas that we can learn from there,

something we can do provincially, I think that that would help us deal with the housing crisis and some of the other things that we're talking about. I wonder if she would comment on her analysis of the living wage.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I think we could probably give you some more in a written response, and I'm going to volunteer that on the living wage. I'm reminded of what I looked at with the lost-time claim rate and WCB, where the modification of that rate based on the worker going back to the workplace may not show any lost time but may show that they're working at something differently. You have to add the figure from the modified claim rate to the lost-time claim rate to get the true number of the injuries. Right? So you really can't look at one without the other to get a true picture of the injuries.

What you're telling me is that you can't look just at the 55,000 households that are getting income supports or the 20,000 learners that are getting income supports or the people that come under this eviction fund to get income supports in times of crisis or to sustain them through a period of time. You have to really look at, with the rising costs of housing and the inflationary circumstances we find ourselves in in this boom, whether or not we should be evaluating what the standard of living is in that context, whether or not they are suffering a much-reduced standard of living because they are paying more for each of the things.

I'm going to undertake to see whether or not we can get a handle on that. I think that's a very valuable situation for us to look at: to see what the actual living wage should be. Even though maybe our officials are looking at it, the pressures that are being brought to bear on the family income aren't overcome by the fact that we don't have a PST or that we have some fairly decent supplementary health benefits.

So I think that what you've pointed out is something we should be examining. We should be looking at whether or not it's fair and, even if we look at a rolling average across the province, to see whether or not that judgment is a fair judgment. If we are imperiling the nutritional needs of anybody because they've had to convert themselves to a dinner of pasta because there's nothing left in the kitty for food, for protein, then I think it behooves us to understand that. I think that that's of real value.

I have actually had a conversation with my son in Calgary, who fortunately isn't in that circumstance but does recognize that many of the people expect to be less wealthy even though some of them are receiving a cost-of-living adjustment because the actual inflationary cost of almost everything is hard to measure. The impact on a family of three or four people, for example, with the children and everybody else – costs at school, with everybody accepting, "Oh, well, the costs are going up," et cetera – may not be reflective on the average weekly wage that people receive because that wage rate may not be keeping pace with the actual inflationary costs of so many of the commodities.

I think you've challenged me with something that I've been thinking about for a while because it's a little bit like our injury rates, where you should be looking at the cumulative effect. I will undertake to take a look at that because I think it's an important consideration that you've mentioned.

I think I probably should just leave you a last-minute comment. I'll just say that I really appreciate that question, and I will try and see how we follow up on that.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, we have about two minutes left in this segment.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Minister, for taking a look at that.

While we're in this mood, I would ask just one last thing: if the minister would at least consider taking a look at how first contract arbitration is working in other provinces. I know that it's not going to happen overnight, but take a look and see if there's something that might be of value that we could bring back in the future.

Ms Evans: I will consider that. I will have a conversation with the hon. member at another time, perhaps before we really get into that with my staff so that I'm clear on the elements. If you'd like to prepare for that conversation, then we can bring it back and at least cover the bases that you'd hoped we would.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Minister.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister and members of the staff, I want to thank you for your presence here and for answering our questions.

Seniors and Community Supports

The Deputy Chair: I welcome the officials that are present here and upstairs in the gallery to support the minister.

Before I call upon the minister, I just got word – and we don't have it officially exactly to what extent – that a tornado has just touched down in Stony Plain, and some form of emergency has been declared. As we get a little more information, I'll bring you up to speed.

Mr. Melchin: Hopefully we're safe and secure in this building. Tornadoes will not come into this area. Those are actually very severe occurrences, so certainly our thoughts go out to any challenges that may be there, hopefully minimal.

I'm delighted to take the opportunity to spend the next little while reviewing the estimates of the Department of Seniors and Community Supports, but before I do that, I'd like to introduce the officials: Tim Wiles, deputy minister; Susan McCulloch, our senior financial officer. Next is Chi Loo, our assistant deputy minister, seniors services division. We have Dave Arsenault, assistant deputy minister, community support programs, strategic planning division. Then we have Reagan McCullough, who's our assistant deputy minister, disability supports division. Very capable, really, I must admit, and I will reiterate again . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, your staff can easily move forward so that they can be of more support to you. There's room there.

Mr. Melchin: They're right behind me.

The Deputy Chair: They're behind the minister. Very well.

Mr. Melchin: "We're right behind you, Minister." "That's very brave of you, Minister." "Courageous initiative of you there, Minister." And they are. They truly are, I would say, and they're willing to change places if you wish, as they wish.

The Deputy Chair: Very well, Minister. I have no problem with it. I just want to advise you that we are covered on camera. The camera is in front of you, and every time you turn around, your back will be on the screen.

Mr. Melchin: Anything for the television.

The Deputy Chair: For the officials, should you need a glass of water or a cup of coffee, please raise your hand, and a page will come by and offer that to you.

Thank you.

4:30

Mr. Melchin: It looks like there's already some water that's been appropriately tested here.

Anyway, I am pleased that we can take this time to review the estimates of the Department of Seniors and Community Supports. Really an outstanding group of individuals in this department also, among the leadership in this government. I've been very pleased to see the quality of service and capability and strength that we have in the government in all of the departments where I've had exposure, outstanding expertise and dedication. We just had last week, I guess it was, the tenure recognition of awards, not 10-year but tenure, so the five, 10, 15, 20, 30, and 35, and there were some that had had 40 years' service with the government of Alberta, really quite a remarkable achievement. We need to do more to recognize the great achievements and devotion and loyalty of those that work for the government.

This department has just been enjoyable to work with. The people issues that you can deal with, everything from all of the seniors. Clearly, many of them or most of them might be on fixed income and those in various forms of need. Our department gets into providing services and supports and even recognition of seniors and their achievements. Then we do a lot of work on behalf of those with various forms of disabilities and how we might be able to facilitate them. I would say, really, that the objective is to help them to become and attain to the best of their abilities.

So how do we provide the support structures to facilitate just that? There are some tremendous differences, real differences that are made in the lives of Albertans as a result of the services that are provided through this department. Just as a note, we're investing in the ministry's budget about \$1.8 billion. That's about an increase of 10 per cent off forecast, 8 per cent over last year's budget, a very substantial increase to acknowledge that this is an area where the government does consider it a priority to help those in need and to try to assess in the priority of the allocation of dollars where there would be an allocation of resources to facilitate ongoing services that are provided.

You know, the better quality of life enables some to give back to their communities as volunteers and mentors. We talk about seniors as volunteers and mentors. It is a very familiar concept to all of us, and most of them that you see are just as busy or busier than when they were full-time employed. Their contribution doesn't end with, really, the end of their work careers but continues to be that of role models and mentors and examples of strength to ongoing generations of Albertans.

Persons with disabilities also serve as credible mentors and role models. In fact, I attended a conference recently for Alberta youths with disabilities. There was a speaker, a keynote presentation. I thought I'd just quote it. I was really captured by the topic and their thoughts around it. Everything Worth Knowing I Learned from Being Disabled was the topic, and here's the description of the address:

It is a tragedy that some people are born without disabilities. Because of fate's flip of a coin, non-disabled people are destined to live lives desperately trying to prove that they're worthy human beings, measuring up to arbitrary standards of normalcy, perfection and worth. It seems so unfair that only people with disabilities should have the opportunity to recognize that the standards are inadequate, not the people.

Really quite inspiring as we'd gone around and met with various

service providers that there's a real refocusing on how we think towards the abilities that one has to contribute rather than those characteristics that may be preventative of some of their participation and pleasing to see that there is that thought that people have interests and talents and abilities, and how do you tap into that to help them really attain more of the same goals and aspirations that each and every one of us would have? So it's in those thoughts and directions that we really are encouraged and want to build.

I thought I'd touch just briefly on the seniors' services. About \$275 million is for the Alberta seniors' benefit, and it assists about 142,000 seniors. That's about 40 per cent of the seniors that qualify for the Alberta seniors' benefit. It's income tested, as you're aware, and it's a graduated scale. The more income the less of the benefit you might receive. What it is and has been designed for is to really provide targeted assistance and higher assistance to those in greater need. The models of income, obviously, aren't the only ways to measure it, but it at least was a methodology to make it simpler to help those on lower income.

So the Alberta seniors' benefit provides monthly payments to low-income seniors to help with day-to-day living expenses. It's a supplement; it was not meant to be a stand-alone. This was a supplement to the federal programs. There are programs like the Canada pension plan for when you retire. There are also old age security and other programs that were built on by contributions over time, and just being Canadians, we've all participated. This was to augment and supplement those federal programs, not to be stand-alone, in isolation. As such, just now we've signed an order in council that increases the income thresholds because the Canada pension plan raised its amount that they're paying for both Canada pension and old age security. So we increased our thresholds to exempt that income. We're not trying to claw back the amount that we provide but that we would help ensure that it was a supplement to and in addition to those federal programs.

There is a variety of special-needs assistance for seniors. There's \$26 million in special-needs programs to fund low-income seniors, and these are for one-time emergency expenses. You know, we could list a variety of things that are helped. Just as an anecdote, Mary is an 87-year-old who received funding for two hearing aids through the special-needs assistance program. Initially, Mary's application didn't contain all the information needed by the program to make a decision, but our staff are committed to ensuring that seniors obtain the assistance they require. They followed up with Mary's daughter Liz to get the additional information so that the program could fund two hearing aids for Mary. Liz was very grateful for the assistance, saying that it made a huge difference. These are the kinds of human things that do happen in the lives of people.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the minister for his introductory remarks, short albeit they were, but I'm sure he'll come back at it later on. I also want to acknowledge the presence of the departmental staff. I appreciate their presence here.

I think the minister is right in stating that we deal with people who for a variety of reasons, whether it's age or disability or whatever else, are exposed to certain vulnerabilities which those of us who are neither old nor aged nor damaged by aging or don't have the disabilities sometimes don't recognize, and I appreciate that. On the other hand, I think it is true, as the minister again articulated, that although there may be people who are disabled, they have lots of abilities. That's a recognition, I think, that's been sort of progressively growing, I notice, over the last many years, and it's our job to

continue to ensure that all of us educate ourselves, keep up to date about the enormous potential and abilities that visibly disabled people among us do have. It's our job to enable them to translate that potential, those abilities into productive lives to the best of their ability and the best of our capacity to help them do so. That's certainly true.

Now, in order to do these things, of course, we need resources, and this budget is about those resources and availabilities. There is a fairly large number of people that the minister has indicated to us who, in fact, are the recipients of the programs and the assistance that the programs provide for both people who are seniors and people who are younger but suffer from disabilities of one kind or another.

4:40

The minister has drawn our attention to the fact that the budget has been increased by 8 per cent from budget to budget and 10 per cent if you look at what was spent last year. My first questions actually deal with the discrepancy between the forecasted program expenditures and the budgeted expenditures. I noticed that there's a noticeable difference between what was budgeted and what is now being forecast.

I look at the business plan, page 260, and then I'm looking at the other document too, on pages 281 and 280. I notice that there are several important programs where the money actually spent is considerably less than what was budgeted. Just to draw attention to a few things here that came to my attention: the budget for 2006-2007 for the seniors' benefit was roughly \$274,500 million. The actual spent, the forecast, is \$266 million, so there's about \$8 million there, or close to it, that was not spent. I know that the number of people in need and seniors in need is growing by the year, yet I find underspending happening there. I would ask the minister to perhaps try and explain to me what explains this discrepancy between the forecast and the budget.

Similarly, supportive living and long-term care: the budget was over \$5 million, \$5.364 million, and the forecast is \$3.864 million. That's again from page 260 of the business plan. Similarly, community support programs budgeted \$17.8 million and spent only \$11.8 million or so. I'm using approximate, rounded numbers here, Mr. Chairman. There are several of these discrepancies that cause me both some curiosity and concern. On the one hand, we recognize that these fellow citizens of ours are in considerable need, and the money that we budget is, in fact, to meet those needs, yet that money doesn't get spent. So there is need for an answer.

This is with the absolute due respect for the staff here. I was confronted with a similar discrepancy when I was debating with the Minister of Children's Services, and there were about \$30 million that were underspent in her budget, too, in the child care area. I probed her, too, about this. You know, why this underspending? I find this again happening here, so my curiosity is stimulated a second time around.

Let me ask this blunt question, as I've said, you know, with due respect for the staff, no reflection on them: are there any built-in incentives within the minister's office or in the government's policies which encourage departments to in fact underspend and find ways of underspending? Are there any built-in incentives, rewards, for showing forecast spending less than the budgeted spending? I hope that's not the case. We need to ask: why is it, then, that the budgets, which are carefully prepared, scrutinized in this House line by line, more or less, then appear to either be overestimates or to indicate some failures to spend them where they should be spent? Is it because of the qualifying requirements? Because these are income contingent. They are based on assessed need. Is the

assessment of needs, perhaps, responsible for this discrepancy between these expenditures? That's one question, Mr. Chairman, for the minister.

I was also looking at page 252 of the business section, on the business plans, and there is an interesting recognition there, rising cost of living, on page 252, I think. Yes.

Many of the Ministry's clients have relatively low or fixed incomes with limited capacity to adjust to the cumulative effect of rising living costs. In recent years, cost of living increases have been disproportionately higher for low-income households compared to higher-income households and the gap in after-tax income between families with the highest and lowest incomes has continued to widen.

Very, I think, cogent observations on what's happening in the province: the increase in the gap between high-income and low-income Albertans and the effect of the cost-of-living increases on family budgets, particularly for seniors and Albertans living on fixed incomes. I want to specifically ask the minister how these observations, which are not only cogent but very sober, I think, and important, are reflected in the estimates that we are examining. What's the response in the budget to the realities that a large number of Albertans are facing, both with respect to the impact of the cost of living on their budgets and also the increase in the gap between those?

One question that comes again and again to our attention . . . Later on.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you. We'll attempt to answer as many of those as we can right now. If we miss something, we'll follow up through *Hansard* as well and provide some more detailed explanation of some specifics, which would be easy enough to do.

First off, I will even ask – certainly we can do it by a nod. I'm not aware of any incentives which are encouraging the department to underspend the budgets. Would that be a true statement? Yeah. I must admit, I have not heard of anything. I've not heard the topic raised. I've not actually initiated such a thing. In fact, we really have tried to assess – this is not a department where we're trying to lead by cutting anything. We're trying to really assess. That's why there was an increase in the budget. We're certainly trying to attempt it.

I can tell you only from experience as a chartered accountant and having had some experience in the past in controllership and financial vice-president kinds of roles that budgets are estimates, and there's no way to anticipate all the issues that could unroll through the year, to get that precision. There are really too many factors that go into it. In fact, I would say, quite rarely, unless the program's quite easy in design, can you ever guarantee that your actuals and budgets will come within a few dollars. You're going to expect some degree of variation from program element to program element.

What we did actually do: in some of the areas where we didn't spend as much money, there has been some reallocation of those dollars. You'll notice that we reallocated some dollars. Some of them went to the RASL grants and from operating to capital for rural affordable sustainable living projects. Some of it had gone towards even some wages and PDD. There was a reallocation of \$11 million at the end of the year to really go back to within that specifically to address service providers and wages and retention of people.

The comments I've got with respect to some lapses, in particular – I've got to make sure I'm talking to the right line item. I'll talk about some of the lapses. There was \$10 million that was lapsed in AISH and carried forward to the next year. It was used for initiatives to encourage independence in employment. With AISH you

don't really know the numbers of people that may come, so that will be some. There was \$15 million dollars that was lapsed in various programs and carried forward to be used for supportive living programs. There was \$4 million that was lapsed in AISH when a request to transfer funds from operating to capital for an IT system was turned down. In addition, there was \$16 million that was lapsed, and these are more AISH related. These funds were redirected within the year and used to offset federal revenues for the affordable supportive living projects. Some of that I mentioned on the RASL.

4:50

The community supports reduction was for a specialized service initiative. There was an initiative to help disabled young people, other than seniors, living in long-term care to have other accommodation and so forth. It was a program that really didn't have its take-up and wasn't started and therefore really was not used for that in that particular year. That's still an ongoing challenge for us because although sometimes we have the health facilities that can help the individual, you don't necessarily have the numbers of younger individuals to group together. As such, even with the best intent you don't always have the ability to deliver or the desire of the individuals or the quantity of individuals.

The seniors' budget, the difference between \$274 million versus \$267 million: funds were lapsed due to lower take-up for the long-term care initiatives for keeping couples together. That was 7 and a half million dollars. Now, what will happen in future years? I can't say. But that one particular period of time you allocate for a specific initiative, and it doesn't always roll out as fast or not as fast of uptake. Some of it's also because of seniors' higher incomes, so that would have another impact upon the budgets that we would have. Seniors on the Alberta seniors' benefit: the seniors' average total income went up from \$14,790 in 2005 to \$15,940 in 2007, so those would have some impacts upon the quantities that would be paid.

I missed, actually, your last question. I think they're getting me some notes back here, so I'll see what I get on that. This was to address the cost-of-living increases. The Seniors and Community Supports budget provides an 18 per cent increase in the AISH budget as follows: there is \$40 for financial assistance – \$40 million. Sorry. Yeah, \$40. That might be in our wallets, but it certainly isn't in the budgets of the government.

Dr. Pannu: Even accountants can make mistakes.

Mr. Melchin: What's a few zeros among friends?

Yeah, \$40 million for financial assistance, a \$50 per month per client increase. There is an increase in health benefits, an increase in personal. We were talking about cost of living. I mean, clearly those are the challenges of going forward. That was in response to reviews being done on AISH, for example, in that program about: how do you help those individuals?

Over the last three years there have been continued increases. As we plan forward, that's going to be kind of the direction we're looking at. How do you continue to see that there is that ability to help those on our programs like AISH to be able to meet the ongoing rise in the cost of living? That's been supported over the last three years. AISH has gone from \$850 up to \$1,050, and it still is the intent that we would continue to move that forward on an annual basis.

PDD. We did put another 15 and a half million dollars for staff retention and volume, and those are in relation to wage issues, wage pressures, those providing services. That's why we put even in the

last year reallocation so that there could be kind of a top-up, an incentive to retain, not an incentive to not spend the money. It was actually given back out as an incentive to provide some dollars back to those providing services so that we could keep them and hire additional staff for those providing services with PDD. So those are just a few examples, and we'd be happy to, if we've missed some questions, respond in more detail.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Some more questions for the Minister. The minister has touched on the AISH program and the increases over the last three consecutive years, which will bring the monthly AISH payment to \$1,050, I guess, as of April 1 this year. I'm sure these increases have been welcomed. I've been looking at a graph here a moment ago, Mr. Chairman. I'll just wave it at the Minister and then translate it into numbers.

The monthly AISH financial benefit, you know, declined quite dramatically in actual dollar value terms between '93 and 2003. In 1993 the monthly payment for AISH was \$810, and in real dollar value terms in 2003 it was \$663. If you use a '93 dollar to look at the actual absolute numbers, it was \$663. So the last two, three years of increases have helped, but they certainly are far from having brought to the level at which these payments were, say, 14 years ago. Far from it. But what's hopeful – I want to look at the optimistic side, the bright side of the picture – is that over the last three consecutive years there have been increases.

My question to the Minister is: is he going to at least link these increases to cost-of-living increases, just as has happened in the case of MLA remuneration? People on AISH are diagnosed or assessed to be in very, very dire need of help, and that's why they receive the money. They are highly vulnerable people. Is it possible for the minister to say to me and to these AISH recipients that from now on at least the real value of their monthly payments will not be allowed to decline, in other words it will be automatically linked, with respect to increases, to the increases in the cost of living or the rate of inflation, one or the other? That's my question.

Some other questions related to this have to do, of course, with the earnings that people living on AISH are allowed now. What problem does the minister see with increasing the allowable earnings limit for the AISH recipients so that that gives them incentive to go out and work? People seek to go out and work not only to generate supplementary income or additional income, but it also provides a great deal of social support and social networks, which are good for the mental and the social health of everyone. So would it not in fact be a good thing to increase the allowable earning limits for people on AISH so that they have this added incentive to go out and work? The minister's comments on that, I think, would be helpful.

Similarly, medical and health supports that recipients receive that are directly related to their disability need to be separated from the income support. The income support and the medical and health support related payments need to be separate. If this were to happen, AISH recipients who are able to obtain employment would not risk losing the medical and health supports required to work or to live independently in the community. Again, there would be more incentive to work.

Now, I'm not entirely sure how these two things are linked and how they work. The minister has the resources. You're surrounded by them, so I'm sure you'll enlighten me on this. I've got lots of AISH recipients in my own constituency, and of course their numbers are increasing across the province. So these are important issues of policy that will affect the well-being and sense of well-being of lots of Albertans who are recipients of this.

5:00

Another question that has been raised sometimes has to do with the level of AISH support. Should we try to approach it in terms of the low-income cut-off levels and see if, in fact, it's appropriate to move it up so that it will at least be at the level of low-income cut-off rather than the somewhat arbitrary number of \$1,050 that we have this year? Although, as I said, I am pleased that there have been increases over the last three consecutive years. That gives hope to people on AISH and certainly relieves some of their anxieties.

The minister very briefly referred to persons with developmental disabilities, the PDD program. Services to persons with developmental disabilities are delivered through six regional boards. Most of those services are contracted through community agencies, many of whom are struggling to recruit and retain staff in Alberta's hot job market. You did refer to some increase, you know, in this part of the budget, and I understand that the increase is about 3.5 per cent. Now, it is unlikely, in my view, that the modest 3.5 per cent increase in the PDD budget will allow contracted community agencies to retain staff, let alone address growth in caseloads and to reduce caseloads in order to make those services more effective. I wonder if the minister has some reflections on that.

Yes, I acknowledge that there's some increase there, but is it sufficient? I have before me a document called Alberta Disabilities Forum: Addressing the Needs of Special Populations in Continuing Care, Issues Prioritization Summary. I'm sure that the minister has seen a copy of it too. In this document one of the major issues that is identified that needs addressing, you know, along the continuum of care, whether it's home living, whether it's supportive living, or whether it's facility living, is the problem of attracting appropriate staff and the ability to retain them once you have them there. It is a very serious problem. It cuts across various categories of care that is provided and received.

If a 3.5 per cent increase in the PDD is a reflection of the general increases that the minister has sought to provide, will that be sufficient? Will that be an adequate increase given the labour market pressures, given the problems identified by this group? There are 36, I guess, different groups. Yes. I'm told that the Alberta Disabilities Forum, a coalition of 36 disability organizations, prepared this report. I don't know if you have this report or not. I'm sure you do. So that's another question.

With respect to Seniors and Community Supports, yes, \$255 million is budgeted for Alberta's seniors' benefits for this current fiscal year that we are discussing, a modest \$18 million increase from what was budgeted to be spent in the previous year. If there was going to be an increase in the monthly benefit level, it will likely have been announced. I'm not sure what this level is or if there's going to be an increase. It's therefore likely that the increase will be used to cover the growing number of seniors eligible for the benefit rather than increasing the benefit itself. A 14.7 per cent increase in funding for seniors' lodges was announced, which will allow the addition of 250 more lodge units. I guess the increase would seem to be targeted on increasing spaces rather than on the assistance per person. Would the minister like to comment on that, the problem that it creates?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you. Some excellent comments. I'll start with AISH. You're absolutely correct. I guess that back in '93 there was an amount of \$810 per month, and it's only really been in the last few years that there's been any marked increase. But a number of things did actually happen in the past. There were some new personal benefits. Child care, transportation, a variety of benefits

went up in addition to rate increases. In fact, there were substantial additional health benefits: drugs, dental, and so on.

What happened in the past and is ongoing with some of the programs with AISH is that while it may not have always been to the monthly amount, there were benefit increases. I believe it's about \$350 a month, as an average, the amount of health benefits that we provide for AISH recipients in addition to the \$1,050 of income. So there are supports well above that. There is \$895 in financial benefits. On average, clients on AISH receive about \$1,245 per month. I guess that is what we're saying. In addition, a single AISH client can earn up to \$700 per month for the first \$1,000 of employment earnings.

A number of things did happen, actually. When you look at the cost of living, there were two things. One, we've been putting up in the last few years the monthly payment. Health benefits and other benefits have increased over the past years as well. Then there's been a shift also in the last reviews to increasing the threshold of income, exactly what you were talking about. But how do you encourage people to work, especially at that level of income to be able to retain some of that before losing their benefits, so that they have an opportunity to get on their own two feet before you take away the supports that might be helpful to get them there in a more long-term kind of setting?

I would fully agree and support that notion. How do you help someone get into some situations of more permanency and independence to the extent that they might? We have been working on this very much as a high priority and thinking that we have an opportunity of helping those on AISH to realize and think about their abilities rather than just their disabilities. How do we help them focus on how they, too, could be, like all of us, wanting to be active and contributing and earning and providing for those principles of independence and self-reliance? Those are very good qualities that we would wish for everyone.

I worry. There are 36,000 people on AISH, growing to 38,000, almost 39,000 in our projections this year. How can we get more of those back into the mainstream of life, work, and community and everything that would go with that? That's an enormous challenge, but I think that's more the direction we've got to really focus on. How do we help those individuals one at a time to be more capable of providing for their own needs, not just as a financial issue to us but for their own well-being? We are going to look at that.

As to whether we link it, that's a policy question. We've got some work left to do. The higher priority at this stage is to try to focus on helping those on AISH to really think about gaining their independence by providing supports to help them search and find work. We're working with Employment, Immigration and Industry quite actively on just that and hope to report through the year progress just on that front.

5:10

You mentioned some question about moving AISH amounts to other thresholds, the low-income cut-off and the like. Those are comments that are not in the business plan at this stage. Those are things that, I guess, we could certainly examine and see what that means. I don't know what that number would be, actually, off the top of my mind.

Dr. Pannu: I'm going to plant some ideas in your mind.

Mr. Melchin: Certainly. Yeah, I understand. That's part of the discussion. As we go forward, that's exactly, you know, part of the input. I'll be happy to accommodate and see what that means for us going forward.

The PDD agency staff retention: is 3.5 per cent sufficient? I

concur that that's still an enormous challenge. How do you retain staff? Three point five per cent in this environment is still an ongoing problem. We've increased the budget to PDD, though, 90 per cent since 1999. There's been an enormous increase to the budget over time and not necessarily a substantial increase in the number of people. There are about 9,100 people that we're servicing under PDD. Over half a billion dollars, a very substantive budget. It averages about \$58,000 per person for PDD. That's on top of AISH payments that they receive and on top of health benefits that they would also receive. For those receiving PDD, there's \$70,000, \$75,000 in financial resources that are being allocated. It's fairly substantive.

We've actually had a brainstorming session with service providers just recently, and it's part of our ongoing challenge. We've talked to them and said: "You know, we've put a high dedication of dollars to this. How do we see that this is getting to the front lines, to those providing the service?" We brought a cross-section of people there. It was just a brainstorming session. It was an excellent meeting. We plan to follow that up with providing people that are active, creative, looking at new ideas and new ways. There are some really innovative and successful models and ideas being employed by some of the service agencies. How do we encourage and engender more of that to come through the whole system?

If we can provide services more effectively, I think that would help us to reallocate more of those dollars, potentially from savings, to retention of staff. It won't be the direction of cutting the budget per se. But how do we get more effective in the use of these resources so that you can actually also afford to retain people to provide the services? It's very important and necessary.

I'm quite encouraged by the feedback we've had from the PDD, those that were there, the various boards and service providers alike. They are coming forward with ideas. It's not all about just a lot more dollars but how to better use those dollars. It's in that line that we're really trying to work hard this year and trying to find out those ideas. If it means that we have to start small and pilot some programs, we'll pilot them. We'll allow people to be innovative if they possibly can, provide the ability to try some things, get creative. It is about helping those persons, even those with severe disabilities, helping them and focusing on their abilities. How do we better do just that? How do we empower those 9,100 individuals to get the services that they might best qualify for? We are going to look at those.

Coming back to AISH, I wanted to mention, too, the income, and I'm glad to hear you speak in those terms. We do want to support their being able to earn income. We want to get rid of the barriers to people. You know, for those that are in that position, it's hard to give up those supports. We want to take away some of the barriers and risks to help them be able to get more positions of permanency and then, maybe, work on their transition off the support programs if they are able to support themselves. We will try and look at how flexible we can be and design programs or even work with individuals in contemplating those specifics.

Seniors' rates. You're correct that the rate increases have really gone towards the increasing number of seniors. There, too, we've had a number of discussions with various seniors' groups. One of the mandates from the Premier is a demographic planning commission. That's going to be a growing issue for us: the population of seniors as a percentage of the population. How do we ensure that the programs and the dollars that we have are best left to assist those seniors at that time and targeted to the highest need, to the best program? There is an ability for us to change what we have. It's hard to accommodate rate increases and volume increases and also see about sustainability of programs.

We've got some large challenges before us, and I think it's under that context that we start to engage some of the seniors' groups about how we might best do that. We have some other information that we'll supply also.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We'll continue. Again, I want to commend the minister and his staff for providing a very good analysis of the background to the budget and the business plan. On page 252 one cost that's identified as running almost out of control is the health care related costs, drug costs, number 4 on that page.

New and more effective drugs and advances in medical equipment can significantly improve the quality of people's lives and enhance inclusion in the community. Drugs have been the fastest growing component of Canadian health care costs over the past 25 years.

That, certainly, is true and has an impact when you later observe that there is an attempt, in fact, to move people out of long-term care facilities into community-based facilities or community-based support systems.

There, again, under 6 the observation is made that the shift from facility care to community-based care allows individuals to return home after shorter hospital stays or have their ongoing health and personal care needs met in their community where they may experience greater quality of life. However . . .

And I appreciate this observation here.

. . . this shift currently requires Albertans to absorb a significant portion of the costs of equipment, supplies, drugs, transportation and other items that would have previously been covered by facilities.

Now, it's been again brought to our attention that there's an attempt, of course, to move people from facility-based care centres into the communities, but the shift of costs over to families or to individuals is a key issue that's identified here under 6. Is there a response in the budget to this? As we encourage people who may have been receiving care in long-term care facilities over to more community-based support systems, how do you help such persons moving from one location to the other? It does translate into increased costs for them or for their families. What provision is there in the budget to support this policy of encouraging people to live in communities where, of course, there is a better quality of life? But in order for them to be able to do this, they have to be able to pay the bills, or someone has to pick up their additional costs. So that's one question.

While I have the book in hand, there's one little table here that I found somewhat intriguing. I couldn't make sense of it. It's right here on page 256. It's a performance measure, on the top of that page, having to do with seniors and persons with disabilities having appropriate supportive living options. The number of affordable supportive living units for aging in place developed with support from provincial funding: the last actual was 1,640. The target for 2007-2008 is 166, and by 2009-10, I guess, it will disappear, it seems to me.

5:20

Why is it that the business plan contemplates elimination, if I read the table correctly, of this number of affordable supportive living units for the aging in place program? I may be misinterpreting or misunderstanding this performance measure. How does it enhance performance? Performance measures are supposed to tell us something about enhancement, I guess, of some programs or the performance of those programs, but it seems to me that here we are kind of moving away from providing that particular kind of support in the first place.

Moving on, Mr. Chairman, to long-term care issues. Long-term

care facilities, of course, are operated – you know, several different players are coming into the picture. Public facilities is one, of course. Corporations and individuals under contract to authorities: these would be private facilities for profit, I would think. Then the third: private but nonprofit voluntary cultural or religious organization under contract to authorities. Three different ones.

As of a couple of years ago, 2005, there were 179 long-term care facilities, with 14,065 beds. There were roughly 600 people on waiting lists for long-term care beds. What is the picture with respect to waiting lists now, two years later, in 2007? Has the waiting list shrunk or, in fact, grown in size? If so, is it a matter that concerns the minister and the department? The waiting list is growing. What happens with people who remain on the waiting list for years?

I know that, personally, we had to deal with it when my mother needed to be moved to some facility. We just couldn't cope with all the services that she needed at home. The waiting list stood in the way. I know the excruciating kind of feeling that we had. We couldn't help her enough, yet we couldn't find a place for her, the waiting time issue. I'm sure there are families now that struggle with this day in and day out, and if the waiting list is growing, then I'm sure the minister shares my concern that this shouldn't be the case. Shortening the waiting list would be, certainly, a message of hope and relief to families who deal with their loved ones and can't provide the care that they need but at the same time can't find a placement for them somewhere in the facilities.

Now, one of the concerns that I have had – it may be a figment of my imagination, and I hope it is – is that more and more people in need of long-term care are having to move into private, for-profit facilities, where they have to bear additional costs. The costs of receiving those services in for-profit facilities are much higher than they would be in publicly owned facilities. If, in fact, it is the case that increasing numbers of Albertans receiving such care are having to move into private, for-profit facilities, then that would be a serious concern of mine. I wonder if the minister would have some light to shed on if there is a trend, if the cost differences are fairly considerable, and if that's making it difficult for people, seniors, particularly on fixed incomes, to be able to pay their bills. I hope to hear further on that.

We know that a lawsuit has been in the making with respect to the increases in long-term care areas. I think the increases are about 40 per cent to nursing care brought forward to nursing home residents, I think, three or four years ago, and that followed another 15 per cent increase just a year before that. With about 14,000 people in Alberta in nursing homes – and the numbers may be growing, so my numbers here may be somewhat outdated, and the minister can correct me on that – that would have amounted to \$128.7 million at the time the claim was filed, the cumulative, you know, money that went out of the pockets of families or persons in nursing homes because of the massive increase in fees.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, we have about two minutes left in this segment.

Mr. Melchin: Two minutes?

Yes, no, and yes, no. I don't know what the questions were up front, but we'll supply much of the answer in response. On drug costs: you were mentioning in number 4 or number 6 on page 252 opportunities and challenges. We do recognize that that's just in the category. Though we have programs, services, we don't have all of the answers other than we want to identify that these are some of the challenges. We'd like to see more people living in place, helping in their home and those kinds of questions. That could save us substantively in the hospitals and the like, but as you pointed out,

then some of the companion costs shift to the person to bear.

That's part of what we're trying to sort out. In the end there are probably savings for the government to help continue to facilitate even if we picked up some of the costs, but those are things we'll have to work with the health department to finally resolve. We don't have something specific today.

I would just say that on the affordable living units, your performance measure, there are about 4,256 units since 2000 that have been developed for the assisted living. You're right. The performance measure mentions that goes down. The capital budget we've had and some federal and a lot of the provincial dollars, those programs have ended. They were short term in nature, program, and design.

So that's part of the work that we're considering at this stage: what is that program design? Going forward, how do we continue to see about those units, and in what fashion are they provided? We'll have to be reporting more on this performance measure in due course in the next year's business plan.

Accommodation rates. I thought I'd just mention that for long-term care, whether it's private or public, at this stage those are all fixed. It's at 48 and something dollars per diem. So it doesn't really matter if you're in long-term care, whether it's a private or public facility, their rate is fixed as to how much they would be charged.

I guess that's two minutes. I want to thank you. We'll respond to other questions. Didn't have time.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the hour that was allocated between the New Democratic caucus and the minister has now lapsed. Are there any other members who wish to participate in the estimates? Anybody else have any questions? Seeing none, the committee will now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Infrastructure and Transportation; Employment, Immigration and Industry; Seniors and Community Supports relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

5:30

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly now adjourn and reconvene at 7 tonight in Committee of Supply.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on that particular motion, I just want to caution every member that there have been a number of weather advisories in and around Edmonton, so if you're going to be travelling, be careful. There was some word that there was a tornado that did touch down in Stony Plain, but I don't have any further information to give you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:31 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, June 5, 2007

7:00 p.m.

Date: 07/06/05

head:

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: Good evening, everyone. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head:

Main Estimates 2007-08

The Chair: We have for consideration tonight the budget estimates and business plans for the Department of Education, Department of Employment, Immigration and Industry, Department of Seniors and Community Supports, and the Department of Children's Services. I've been advised that there is a 45-minute time allocation for each department.

I will now invite the hon. Minister of Education to present his opening comments.

Education

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to introduce the members of the Department of Education that are on the floor tonight. First of all, Lois Hawkins, assistant deputy minister; Gene Williams, who is our financial guru; and Jamie Curran, from my office.

Mr. Chairman, this is the fourth appearance for me in estimates, so I'm not going to open with any comments. Considering the time of only 45 minutes, I would be pleased to take any questions from hon. members at this time.

The Chair: Are there any questions or comments from any members? The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a couple of questions that I think need to be addressed, and that is on the issue of school facilities. The minister and I have had discussion in the past with respect to some of the plans for school facilities. I know that the minister has had some discussion with school boards and, in fact, was recently in my constituency talking with school boards in the Medicine Hat area about opportunities for alternative financing in school facilities, opportunities for there to be co-operation among and between various school boards.

I have also had discussion with parents and teachers and board members, and while I think there is a sense that everyone would like to co-operate, to buy into the process, I think there is generally a feeling that this is something that is more suited for the Calgarys and Edmontons of this world, where you have private developers and much larger developments than you would find in a mid-sized city like Medicine Hat or Lethbridge or Red Deer. For that reason they have indicated that while they would be very pleased to come across with some innovative funding proposals, they feel that they are limited in opportunities. The impression that they have been receiving from the minister is that unless they're able to come forward with some innovative and alternative types of funding arrangements, there is a diminished likelihood of proceeding with some much-needed projects.

My question is very simple. Can the minister explain what his concept is on alternative funding and innovative infrastructure for school projects and how that kind of innovation would apply to

markets that are not Calgary or Edmonton but, in fact, are Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Red Deer: still growing, still with a high degree of demand but not to the same extent as the larger cities?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Chairman, I think that if I left the impression that the only way schools are going to be built in the future is through innovative funding methods, that is certainly not what I believe is going to be the case. As this House is well aware, we have some \$3 billion in infrastructure needs in the province, and there's simply no way that we're going to do all of that in the conventional, traditional method of building schools. I guess what we have to do is look at some options. I think that I would agree with the hon. member that creative methods of financing new schools are probably more applicable to the Calgary and Edmonton regions than they are to the rest of the province. I hope that within the next couple of weeks I can shed some light around that.

At the same time, I think what we need to do is start to address with traditional capital methods some of the other needs that are required around the province. The reality of it is – and Medicine Hat is probably not a good example; I'll use Lac La Biche – that it's unlikely we're going to get much interest from the private sector to be involved in the building of a school in Lac La Biche, as an example. I think there are some options in the medium-sized cities like Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Red Deer, but our first emphasis, if I might, on a new concept would apply to Edmonton and Calgary. If we can meet some of the needs in Edmonton and Calgary via that model, then I think it, actually, in the long run will free up more of the traditional dollars for other parts of the province.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the minister. I had some interesting conversations lately. Some of it started around the unfunded liability but branched into other areas of interest. Some of the messaging that we're hearing from the Alberta Teachers' Association relates to the retention of teachers and the impact of the unfunded liability on bringing teachers into the profession and also retaining them after they've started.

I think studies would probably show that teachers start their career, and if they stay for a few years, they keep on with their career right through and retire out of the profession. I would ask the minister if he could reflect a little bit upon how he views the unfunded liability to be impacting that aspect. I've been hearing from some folks in the profession that there are quite a few teachers applying for jobs these days as the hiring goes on right about now. There are many good prospects out there. We thought there might be a bit of a teacher shortage looming because the boomers are essentially retiring, and we're looking at that kind of scenario.

What are the long-term prospects for the profession, and is it going to be impacted regionally? The north has always had trouble attracting and retaining teachers. The migration seemed to be to the large cities, and even within districts teachers migrate after some experience to – I guess the word "preferred" schools could be used, in different people's minds, at any rate. There are many different reasons for that: proximity to larger communities and different kinds of facilities and different course offerings and different opportunities to grow professionally. I think one of the things that, certainly, has happened positively from the amalgamation of school boards was the opportunity for more professional development and more movement within a board, people not having to resign from one board and move off to another one to have different job opportunities within the teaching profession.

So could you comment on your perceptions with respect to the

future prospects of the profession and what it's looking like down the road for teacher supply? Does this province differ from other provinces? How is it going to be impacted around Canada?

7:10

Mr. Liepert: Well, a number of good issues raised. I'll try to cover them off. I guess, first of all, in a general sense our research is not indicating that there's going to be a teacher shortage. Indications are that because our enrolment has remained relatively stable – a slight increase but nothing dramatic – the universities are in all likelihood able to keep up with the numbers required.

The challenge is what the hon. member alluded to. Probably if we think about it for a minute, two-thirds of our population now live in the Edmonton, or the capital, region and the Calgary region. So the likelihood of two-thirds of the students coming out of those two regions is fairly high. Students probably would want to pursue their profession in the region that they were raised. Our challenge is to meet some of the needs in the rural, especially the northern rural. I think it also would apply to some of the areas where we've got declining enrolments and a sparser population. I can think of southeastern Alberta as an example.

There's no doubt in my mind that once someone reaches that, say, 10- or 15-year plateau, the likelihood of that teacher leaving the profession before retirement for another career is significantly less than it is if you're below that 10- or 15-year plateau. There's no doubt that the teaching profession, like any other profession today, is faced with the challenge of attempting to pay salaries that are in most cases below what would be considered, certainly, some less educated careers. I am a believer that teachers do not go into the field of education based on money. They go in for the passion of education. I think that we're never going to be able to compete in a dollar sense with the drilling industry. I don't believe that there are a lot of teachers who get an education degree and then decide: well, I can make more money working on an oil rig. But there are probably some of those.

Now, relative to the unfunded pension liability, I think that probably the first two words I heard after taking over this portfolio – three words, I guess – are teacher recruitment and retention. All of the discussions I had around that issue were relative to: what is it that we are currently doing that is deterring good, young people from entering the profession, and what is it that we're currently doing that is discouraging them from staying in the profession? Each time the 3 per cent deduction off their pay for the unfunded liability comes up. Now, I think that it is a factor, but it's probably also been, I would say, somewhat overstated in order that teachers get the attention of government to resolve this issue that I believe teachers feel has been out there for too long. I think the hon. member is quite aware of the steps that we've taken to get us to the resolution of this issue, and I am committed to doing that.

I guess there would be two other things that I would say related to teachers. There may very well be in the near term a number of teachers moving into retirement, and there are several reasons for that, which I won't get into. So we may have a number of teachers moving into retirement.

I guess the one concluding comment that I would like to make, however, is that I think that as much as all of the other issues that we've talked about, the thing that will bring and keep a teacher at a particular school is the environment that he or she has to go to work in every day. I've seen some tremendous examples in the short period of time I've been here of particular schools, be it where the board or the principal or the superintendent or whomever has created an environment that actually had changed from a situation where teachers did not want to be at a particular school. A principal has

come in, created an environment whereby he or she is now interviewing a number of candidates to come to teach at that school. Like a lot of things that we do in life, the work environment that you find yourself in on a day-to-day basis has as much to do with your enjoyment of the profession as just about anything else that happens to take place.

I think that I have answered most of the questions posed by the hon. member.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin with good news. I want to congratulate the minister and the staff, both present and in the recent past. We are quite aware, I think, of the achievement of Alberta students within our province, but those results, of course, transcend across the world. There are examinations that take place where Alberta students are involved in international testing, and Alberta has, in the recent past, anyway, that I'm aware of, shown very, very excellent results.

Actually, what pleases me as much as the fact that Alberta might be third or fourth in the world in some of these categories is the fact that we are ahead of Canada. It warms, certainly, my heart because those of us that have been around here since 1993 remember all of the stories about when we were trying to get rid of deficits and pay down some debt, and we, of course, believed that no department should not be touched by some of the rationalization and budget cutting. Every day in this hallowed hall we would hear all kinds of stories of gloom and doom and that the sky is falling and how 10 years on our education system would be in total ruin. Well, it's turned out to be the exact opposite. Alberta and its education system are now being held up as shining examples of what can happen.

Now, it isn't we the politicians, of course, that ultimately are responsible for that. It's the students themselves, the kind of upbringing that they've had with their parents, providing them with the curiosity and with a firm background, then, in the ability to learn, then also the excellent teachers that have remained in the system and have come into the system in, again, the last 10 or 15 years that some of us have been around.

While the published results of the international testing are very, very good and, of course, should be sent to every home in Alberta, as far as I'm concerned, it shows up in other places. One of my favourite articles that ever appeared in *Economist* magazine was entitled *Clever Red-necks*. I believe that one of the members of this House actually did circulate that article to other members, and I hope that everyone had a chance to read it. I don't have it in front of me, but my recollection, of course, is that the writer of the article began with the old criticism that we have that's just so easy, and it doesn't even need any thought in order to be critical: that anyone with the amount of money coming into Alberta could run that operation out there and that it didn't take any brains at all.

7:20

The reporter went on to say, "Well, if that was the case, then how do you explain the fact that Albertans do so well in so many areas?" of course including education, and then went on again to restate the standings that Alberta students have in these international testing procedures. For an article in the *Economist*, which isn't really a hard, right-wing kind of publication, to be acknowledging the great work in Alberta I thought was quite excellent.

Now, today during Members' Statements we had another student from Alberta that was recognized. This is tremendous. I don't know if people recognize the impact of things like second place in an internationally televised spelling bee and of Alberta being second for

the second year in a row. This is quite significant. I want to congratulate the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing that forward because it is very, very important and vital to Alberta's future that we start to celebrate scholarship instead of allowing American pop culture to continue to celebrate dumbing down or that it's cool to be stupid. Whatever we can do along these lines is very, very important and also significant.

I've talked about the students, again under the good-news portion of my little speech here. I want to continue by talking about the teachers. My colleague from Lethbridge-East, my colleague from Little Bow, and myself were on stage at a building at the University of Lethbridge last Friday afternoon for one session of the University of Lethbridge's 2007 spring convocation. Now, there were lots of interesting things that went on there, but I want to talk about what struck me. I've been on that stage at these convocations probably 13, 14 times. I'm not sure just exactly how many years that has happened. Mr. Chairman, I want to tell you and I want to tell the minister that I have never seen – never seen – on any graduating class that I've attended so many honour braids as were coming across that stage last Friday afternoon.

Now, as people here would know but just for the record, an honour braid at the University of Lethbridge is either in gold, which indicates great distinction, or is in blue, indicating distinction. Great distinction means that their marks are above 3.75, and for distinction they're above 3.5. Graduate after graduate coming forward with either blue or gold braids: it was a sight to see.

When one paid attention to the actual convocation book, then another thing became very apparent. There must have been – what? – 350 graduating students. I didn't count them. But do you know that the ones that were graduating with a degree in education probably made up no more than 30, maybe less than 10 per cent? Most of the people, most of them young people, that were coming across that stage were double-degree students. They had a bachelor of arts and a bachelor of education or a bachelor of science and a bachelor of education. Again, just a tremendous resource that is now coming out of the University of Lethbridge, and probably the same situation has happened at the University of Calgary and at the University of Alberta. A tremendous resource that's coming out into our schools. I have no doubt, after witnessing that, that we in fact are going to be seeing the same kind of standard of achievement by Alberta students because of the calibre of Alberta teachers that we have in those classrooms.

Now, that brings me to the issues, then, that I want to bring, and that is classrooms. I'm very, very anxious to view capital plans, and certainly as the representative of Lethbridge-West I cannot stand here and not mention the west side high school, a collaboration between the public school board and the separate school board in Lethbridge. Yes, the original . . .

The Chair: The time has elapsed, unfortunately, hon. member.

The hon. minister to respond.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I will because I know how passionate the Member for Lethbridge-West is about the high school and, I have to acknowledge, so is the Member for Lethbridge-East. I guess I could only supplement what I said earlier. We recognize the – I'll call it a backlog – backlog in school construction and some of the challenges that growth areas are facing, and I can only promise my hon. colleague that we'll be dealing with that very soon.

It would be hard not to make a couple of comments following the member relative to his praise for our students and the quality that we have witnessed. He mentioned young Nate Gartke, who is the runner-up in the international Scripps spelling bee in Washington.

I guess the thing that I find absolutely astounding is that this young student didn't come from Webber Academy or a school that specializes in high achievers. He actually went to Vic comp. I guess it used to be Vic comp. It's now the Victoria School of Performing and Visual Arts. I think what it does is it shows that for school boards who have taken the initiative to provide a variety of programming for students, it just can pay off in so many different ways.

The hon. member mentioned about the graduating class at the University of Lethbridge. I should assure him that if the recent graduating class at Ross Sheppard high school here in Edmonton was a harbinger for future students at the University of Lethbridge, those honours with distinction and honours graduates will be continuing to walk across that stage because out of 573 total grads at Ross Shep high school a couple of weeks ago, 236 were grads with honours or honours with distinction. I'm sure that's not an anomaly. I think that's happening all across this province. So I really appreciate the comments by the hon. member.

Thank you.

7:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few brief comments and questions for the minister and would just like to echo my colleague from Lethbridge-West in saying that I do believe that the minister and the department are doing an excellent job. In fact, I want to give them a chance to prove that, because I have a few questions around that.

The first one is actually a very, very general question, but I think it would be good to get it on the record. Could the minister explain or just outline briefly the total funding increases for Education over the past five years, and could he also, then, at the same time talk about the total enrolment increase over the last five years? What I understand is that we've increased our budget a couple of billion while enrolment has remained relatively flat, but I could be wrong there, so I'd like to know just approximates on that.

In the context of all of that, as we look at the 3 per cent funding increase for this year, I have heard some teachers and school boards talk about how this could affect the class size initiative. I'm wondering if the minister could explain, sort of, how the 3 per cent funding increase for this year's budget will be able to maintain or sustain the class size initiative. That's a very, very important question for many of my school boards and many of my teachers.

I did have a meeting with some teachers, actually, this past week, and they had some really good questions that I'd like to bring up and maybe just put on the record. Of course, some of the questions were around the unfunded pension liability, and I know that the minister and the department are working on that. Some teachers had a couple of suggestions. They said that they'd like to go to the weekly wage index, the same thing that MLAs use. In fact, they said that they'd like to see salaries taken right out of the instruction budget and treated as a separate line item with the weekly wage index built in as sort of an automatic trigger, which would be somewhat akin to, I guess, provincial bargaining, but there's really no bargaining to be had because it's done for us by the private and public sectors. That was one sort of question/suggestion/idea.

Also, I know that when we looked at the unfunded pension liability a couple of years ago, we did try to tie in a concept paper that had the ability to fire or remove teachers that were not meeting certain performance measures. I hope we don't lose that as we go through the unfunded pension liability review. I hope we can find some way of getting rid of lazy or poor teachers because right now it's very difficult, almost impossible, to do that. In fact, the sad

thing is that when I was a school trustee, we had to actually buy those teachers out in order to get them to retire. We would pay the bad teachers \$60,000 or \$80,000 to quit, and we couldn't reward the good teachers with any kind of bonus pay. That was very frustrating, to say the least, as a school board trustee. So some kind of a mechanism to fire or remove lazy or poor teachers would be a very good thing for us to do.

Also, when I talk to some of my teachers and the ATA presidents, they talk about the average age of teachers really going up, and I know that the unfunded pension liability would be a great tool in helping the attraction and retention of young teachers. That would be a good thing to look at.

Getting back to some more specific issues. Again, on the funding side, for the K to 12 rural schools, it would be great if somehow the rural schools could get a little bit more of the sparsity funding. Because of the class size initiative now, it's actually made it harder to fund these small rural schools. We used to be able to put, you know, 20, 23, 24 students in a class in order to be able to afford a teacher. Now that is really frowned upon by the department and by the board. I'm just wondering if there could be some further sparsity funding for some of the smaller rural schools.

A few other things. You wonder if it's necessary or if it's the best use of dollars for the review of coding. There's apparently a constant review going on of coded kids, which seems like a waste of time and money. Like somebody said: once you're blind, you're pretty much always blind; we don't have to keep recoding and rechecking that child to see if he's still blind. So for certain special needs I think that these constant reviews of the coding, maybe, are not necessary as well as some of the silly audits that are done and clawbacks by the department. Some schools and school boards are frustrated at that and would like to see some of those practices, maybe, reviewed by the department.

Also, another interesting one came up – and I guess I'm jumping all over the map – as we talked about teachers that we can, maybe, move or remove. It was interesting because one of the teachers said that it would be nice to have more mobility of teachers within Alberta. Right now you have pretty much total mobility within your school jurisdiction, within your board. We just did this big thing with TILMA, you know, where people – labour and professionals, et cetera – can move back and forth between B.C. and Alberta, yet within Alberta teachers are pretty much stuck within their own jurisdiction. Sometimes getting a change is a fresh start. Being able to maybe transfer to another division would give them, sort of, a new lease on life and a new look at things. Maybe there should be some kind of a mobility provision within Alberta for having teachers move around from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

I know that that creates a lot of work for the boards and maybe for the department, but it might be something to keep the new and the revitalization in the classroom, which is so important. Some people like to move around Alberta, and rather than go and start at the bottom of the scale again and have to apply and get in at the beginning, it might be nice to just be able to keep your seniority as you move around.

An Hon. Member: Portability.

Rev. Abbott: Portability. That's the word. Thank you very much.

The final thing I'd like to talk about is just the school buildings. I'm very appreciative that we are inching – very, very slowly but inching along – toward getting a new Catholic high school in Drayton Valley, the Holy Trinity school. I think there are some tenders out right now or due to come back right away. Also, the H.W. Pickup junior high school is one where we would love to see

the shovels go in the ground this summer or this fall. I think those two are kind of moving along.

The one I don't have any understanding of what's happening is the replacement school at Thorsby elementary, so I was wondering if the minister could give me an update on that. I'm constantly getting letters and calls from people in the Thorsby area asking me when their new replacement school will be funded. It's already approved. It's on the list, but it just hasn't been funded yet. If the minister could just explain how the capital plan relates to individual schools that are on the approved list. Is there any new funding for schools that are already approved, or is there no new funding at all for approved schools? Why do we approve a school without funding it? That seems like an odd way to do things. So if the minister could talk about that.

Then the final, final thing is on transportation. Again, some of the rural boards are having trouble these days with busing costs with regard to cost of fuel and what's happening with, you know, long, long commutes between residences. The busing costs are going up, and there doesn't seem to be any kind of a formula for that to help some of the rural boards with some of their busing issues.

I think that's it. Some very easy questions for the minister to answer, and if he can't provide it now, then later would be just fine as well. Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I'll make a few quick comments. First of all, relative to the hon. member talking about busing costs, he's absolutely right; there are significantly increasing costs for rural boards. It was interesting because I met with the Calgary Catholic board several weeks ago, and they were trying to impress upon me all these extra challenges they have as a large metro board that rural boards don't have. So it depends on which particular member of the Legislature you're talking to as to who is in the most dire financial need.

Just a couple of things. The comments around coding. We are reviewing that as we speak, and hopefully we can streamline some of that administrative burden. Every time I meet with school boards and they complain about administrative burdens that we place on them, I say: "Give me specific examples, and we'll deal with them. Don't just talk in broad terms about, well, you placed all these administrative burdens on us. I want to see specific things." So that's what they've been given.

I'm not going to comment around the couple of comments that the member made relative to teachers, what would be a fair settlement going forward, because we have created a task force now. I want that task force to go out and hear from Albertans as to what we should be taking to the table with the ATA, so I'm just not going to comment on that.

A couple of questions relative to numbers. In the past 10 years our enrolment is actually 4.9 per cent, in the last 10 years. At the same time our funding has increased by almost double, a 90 per cent increase, and inflation has gone up 28 per cent. I think those are numbers that do need to be put on the record.

7:40

Finally, I want to also just correct a couple of numbers that the hon. member used. He talked about a 3 per cent funding increase. I'm disappointed in my colleague that he has fallen into the media trap of saying that we've had a 3 per cent funding increase because, my goodness, we had a 5.2 per cent funding increase in our Education budget. Yes, there was a 3 per cent increase in operational grants, but there was a whole bunch of other envelopes of money, including class size initiative. Our class size initiative funding this year brings our total commitment over three years for class size

funding to just over a half a billion dollars. That has provided 2,500 new teachers throughout the province. We are doing a tremendous amount to get class sizes down to an acceptable level, as outlined by the Learning Commission.

I think that covers most of what the hon. member raised.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, there are a couple of areas here, and there may not be much coherence to this, but maybe in order to get the questions to you, I'll just go through a few different things.

It's interesting to hear the Member for Lethbridge-West speak about the honour grades and the number of students with honours. In the whole scheme of things any of us in this Assembly, I'm sure, would not want to pit our achievement on an exam against any of the students that are out there today and graduating from either grade 12 or our colleges. The course expectations have risen dramatically. The ability of the students to comprehend and to problem solve and to go through the calculus and all the rest of it is quite astounding when you compare it to our generation, when we went through those programs.

By the same token, it was interesting that within the last week or so I did read in the paper some concerns being expressed by colleges that the professors felt set upon by their students to make sure that their marks went up and up and up. When I left the profession to come to the Assembly 10 years ago, it was a concern in the diploma exam area that there was mark creep. The marks were being inflated. The averages were getting higher. Were the capacities and the capabilities of the students increasing relative to their cohort? How does that go? It appeared to me – and I don't know whether your department has studied these things – that there was a vast difference, a significant difference, a measurable difference between the marks from the 50 per cent classroom evaluation and the diploma evaluation.

Now, I know, before anybody thinks I'm being simplistic about this, that there is a vast number of things that fall into the classroom evaluation category. You don't simply mark that based on a one-shot observation. It is complicated, and there are a lot of parts that go into that. By the same token, the capacity and the ability of one student to be measured fairly against another student in a different classroom in the same school and, even more so, a completely different jurisdiction, a different approach taken by another school district: is the department doing anything to evaluate those differences? I know at the current time we're basing scholarships and we're basing entrance on blended marks. Universities, if they deem this to be not appropriate, may have to go to entrance exams of some sort and do their own evaluations for those purposes.

When we talk about diploma exams and those things regarding evaluation, one thing that I've been interested in observing over the last few years . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but the time allocation for this particular department has elapsed.

Mr. Liepert: I thought we had an hour, Mr. Chairman. Sorry.

The Chair: Forty-five minutes for each department. Perhaps the minister could respond to the member in writing.

Employment, Immigration and Industry

The Chair: Hon. minister, do you have officials here?

Ms Evans: I do, indeed, have officials here. As the Education officials here leave, I will begin, and then we can take it from there.

May I first introduce the officials that are in the listening audience upstairs: Dan Kennedy, Neil Irvine, Susan Williams, and Ellen Hambrook as well as Lorelei Fiset-Cassidy. They have all joined us here this evening. Then to my immediate right is Ulysses Currie, and to my immediate left is Rick Sloan, and beyond Deputy Currie we have Duncan Campbell, that I identified earlier as the person that has done so much in making sure that our figures are accurate and they're ready for you this evening.

This afternoon, colleagues, we amplified on some of the issues surrounding the temporary foreign worker program, the PNP program. We also spent some time, in response to members of the third party, talking about issues that related to the minimum wage and so on. So I will repeat none of the above and just simply say that we look forward to the questions from my colleagues.

The Chair: Are there any questions or comments? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to the minister and her officials. I want to begin by saying that I'm particularly impressed by the broad spectrum now of this department. I think it makes a great deal of sense in terms of the files now that, of course, would come under one minister. I keep forgetting that I only have 10 minutes. Sometimes I get up and assume that I have 90, but I guess that's in error, so I'll try to stay within the time limit and also recognize the admonishment about relevance.

In my comments I'd like to advise the minister of how concerned I am about the rural development strategy. I want to commend her for her efforts that she is making towards that end, but we need some kind of stimulation in order for that program to keep moving forward. The \$100 million that was put aside was, of course, hard fought at various tables that the government has to sit around. We don't want to lose the opportunity, then, to have that invested in rural Alberta. For the record I want to indicate that I agree with the definition of rural within this context, meaning outside of Calgary and outside of whatever definition we can use of capital region.

In any event, the recent announcement of five programs that receive funding is very good. It's a start. I know that wherever I travel throughout the province, when the Alberta rural development fund comes up, they're asking me what I think would be successful instead of the people within the region having to look at what they know best about, of course, and that is the local jurisdiction that they live in.

7:50

Sometimes, I suppose, Madam Minister, with your approval and sometimes really on my own initiative I've been trying to find ways in which to encourage people and challenge people to come up with some ideas that might generate. I tend to spend most of my time, in thinking about this particular issue, around the high school. I know that we're not talking about education per se; we've just had an opportunity to do that. In my experience – and I say it quite often and have yet to be seriously challenged on the attitude that I have – in terms of rural Alberta, you lose your school, you lose your community. So I think it's very, very important that we maintain that as one of the focuses when we're looking at rural development in Alberta.

We've got some examples right now in terms of the hockey school at Warner for both boys and girls and also the baseball academy for boys at the Vauxhall high school, but I don't think we need to

restrict ourselves just to athletics. I recognize that there are opportunities, perhaps, in other areas for baseball academies and hockey schools. The town of Cardston, by the way, is thinking of a rodeo as one of their activities. I've challenged Milk River with paleontology.

A couple from the Hussar area were talking to me one night about potentially losing their particular school. We chatted and talked about whether or not there wasn't an opportunity to work with Calgary developers and the lack of skilled workers that are available. You know, why didn't they go to a program of carpentry and build themselves a residence and then get into the situation similar to Vauxhall, where parents from around the province and really beyond boundaries are actually paying tuition in the order of over \$10,000 a year, at least in Vauxhall's case, for their son to attend that particular high school because of the programs that are being developed.

The fundamental, though, of what I'm saying is that we have to find ways to fund innovation and make use of that fund in order to keep away the temptation that seems to be very prevalent out there amongst not only politicians of all orders of government to gain access to that money to build a community facility, to build a road, to fill a pot hole. It is for innovative ideas and not infrastructure, and we must be cognizant of that.

In the area of labour mobility I want to congratulate the minister for her involvement in the recent MOU with British Columbia, affectionately known around here as TILMA. I hope that her officials, as we speak, are working on other bilateral agreements with other provinces. Part of the reason that I bring up this topic is that having had the experience of being a minister in charge of Alberta's portion of labour mobility in Canada, being charged by my respective Premier of the day along with every other peer that I had in the provinces of Canada, we were given a specific task and, of course, had to admit to failure when we were unable to get true labour mobility in this country by a specified date, which happened to be, again for the record, July 1, 2001.

I think the character of this nation is such that when a province undertakes sort of interboundary initiatives, we're really going to have to look at bilateral agreements and start dealing with provinces one by one because, in my experience, if there ever was a recipe for failure it was: we're not going to do this unless we get every province to sign on. It just won't happen in my lifetime.

On the labour mobility package I want to encourage the minister to be strident. We have given over authority and responsibility to self-regulated professions. I think that's a good thing; I support it. But like any other responsibility and authority, if you abuse it, you lose it. I think it's very, very important that we not only encourage but that we insist on some type of performance measurement from all of the different self-regulated professions as to what they are doing specifically that is allowing for more labour mobility in Canada. I would use APEGGA as an example of how to get this done. I think in my experience, although I'm dated now . . . I see I've used up my time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. The comments of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West very much touched my heart, and I'll explain in a moment. Let me first give credit to the hon. member for the yeoman's service he has done since my appointment in this role to facilitate a better understanding of the rural development fund himself. The work that he did as minister along with the minister then of agriculture to define a rural development initiative that would show innovation is deeply appreciated.

What touched my heart about the comments about the schools, that when a school closes, the community closes, was that in Stavelly, Alberta, when they closed the school that was named after my father and then ultimately tore it down, I had to accept the party line that if there wasn't sufficient use for that school, it wasn't economically wise for our province to keep it there. Many people had hoped I would be stronger as an advocate to retain that school because of their fear that bussing all of the children to some other point away would lead to an effective shutdown of the businesses in town. Also, the fact that we could never seem to find a reconfiguration, although it's been noted that the size of a classroom is perfectly positioned to become the size of a self-contained adult suite for retirees. It would have made an excellent community centre, and we could have put affordable housing in that place for people that need it and no doubt would have had many takers along with the other capacities. So sometimes these ambitions – we have to change the use or else destroy something that's built not because it wasn't a very adequate facility whatsoever. It didn't have asbestos in it, didn't have anything else, but it just wasn't something we were prepared to maintain for the community. As a result, if you go down the streets in Stavelly, you can see a number of boarded windows, so you know what's happening there.

In terms of the rural development strategy it's my sincere hope that with the five projects that have been approved and have been announced, they will spawn some initiative.

8:00

I suppose the one that I worried about a little bit more than most was the one with the clerkship, placing clerks for the clerkship program, doctors in rural communities, to learn because it's perceived that they will not only learn but they'll like it there and they'll stay there. It does smack of somewhat contradicting the intent of making sure that this fund doesn't fill potholes created in other ministries where there wasn't capacity to undertake that on behalf of Health.

I'd like to reassure the hon. member on the TILMA agreement. At the recent meeting we had with British Columbia, we agreed that we would try to accelerate the approval of the TILMA from the date of April 2009 to April 2008. It may not be available to us in all the professions because the professional list has increased from about 60 to over 150. So we may not be able to achieve it, but the intent of TILMA is certainly excellent.

I think that the intent of the buyer/seller forum that has been part of this ministry's mandate and the co-operative work we've done with the minister of economic development from Ontario sets the stage for us to explore some other initiatives where we can look at not just labour mobility but a business co-operative approach that ensures that people can still sleep in their own beds at night yet work for a program in another province many miles away. That is a wonderful use of Canadians working at home to better their overall economy and better their personal economy by working in another province, even though it may be thousands of miles away.

I note that the hon. member referenced the self-regulated professions. In Ontario they have taken the stick approach. Quebec has taken the carrot approach. But insisting on performance measures is a very noble objective, and I certainly respect the hon. member's comments on that and will try to accelerate that where that becomes a barrier.

What I've been most proud of is the initiative that he started that has resulted in one act, two associations, with APEGGA. That is a group that has made considerable strides in opening its arms to others that could be supportive of the profession and make this a better place to do business on the engineering front.

So thank you. I await others' questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do have a couple of questions for the minister. I want to start by asking the minister if she would perhaps expand a little bit on the provincial nominee program and how that fits into the plans of the department and whether any resources are necessary to be allocated to that program.

The second item that I wanted to discuss this evening was the rural development initiative, and it's an initiative that I'm certainly supportive of. I think anything that we can do to encourage diversification in the rural areas to take some of the pressure off the explosive growth that we've seen in the large cities such as Calgary would be an excellent idea. I know that the program has had a somewhat slow start, but I understand that some of the initiatives have now been funded. I wonder whether the minister could expand on what these program parameters would entail, what's envisioned in terms of expansion of rural opportunities for employment, and in general just to give us some feedback on what kinds of performance measures or criteria would be used in ensuring that the taxpayer dollars are well spent in that program and that the taxpayers are getting good value for their money and any funds expended on that rural development initiative.

So I'll leave those questions for the time being.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. Earlier today I commented that the overall immigration program was going to have this year under the budget a \$15 million increase, from approximately \$54 million to over \$68 million. I think that the most exciting thing about the work that we're doing is that if you look back six years ago, you see that we had about 128 PNP nominees that were successfully admitted. You look to this past year where we have 986 and in this coming year, in the 2007-08 budget, an anticipated 2,500 members. In '09-10 we'll have about 8,000 that will be members of that PNP club.

You can see that there's an intent to really accelerate, and probably the most exciting thing about the co-operation agreement between Canada and Alberta was the agreement by the federal government that indicated that they will send letters in the U.K., for example, to everybody who applied to be a health care professional in Alberta to ask if they're still interested in being retained in that area. So that will be a very definite plus for us this year as we're looking to augment our health workforce with people from other countries, and when they are socially and culturally and linguistically aligned with Alberta, it makes it that much easier.

The other observation I would make about the PNP this year that will be unique from the past will be the initiative of trying to attract those students who have come in from other countries that may choose, then, to make a career and live in a place that they have been educated in. So that will be a little more aggression that we will bring to bear on those postsecondary institutes. On that front, I think that the PNP will be as good and as positive as we can entice the employers and the communities to arrange.

May I just make one other observation? One of the performance measures in this budget is that we would try to improve our track record of a 70 per cent retention of people who chose to immigrate here to an 85 per cent, and I believe that some of the work that we're doing on our integrated settlement services will help us with that. A mere week ago we heard and saw some evidence of celebration of the roots program at St. Anthony's school and the tremendous capacity we have to make immigrant families feel more accustomed and comfortable in their new environment by defining programs that

help parents parent, which incidentally is a good part of what keeps families happy when they arrive, if they get that additional support like the Changing Together program here in Edmonton. Many of these kinds of programs encourage the caregiver at home to be comfortable, even though the grandparents aren't there, so it's just really quite an amazing domino effect, and in November we will have a program that targets vulnerable immigrant communities. We're looking at neighbourhoods unconfirmed yet, but Calgary and Edmonton and perhaps Brooks, where we have large settlements from overseas that would appreciate, I think, some more support.

On the rural development fund the performance measures are still under development, and later on this month we'll review them. One of the difficulties was really getting off the ground on how we provided the program itself, how we encouraged the initiative of people to become really truly innovative, and a performance measure can't be the same for exactly every program. If you looked at the ones that we announced, some of them are more easily aligned with a program of supervision and evaluation of students, a student-related program. For the others like ones that connect with the SuperNet, it's a whole different criteria.

I think one of the things that's key from my point of view is that they have to identify their values. They have to identify their cost accountability. They have to identify how they hope to sustain that program even without these funds and have to work in some kind of co-operative mode. I think we really have to consider that the community itself has to give a response on the effectiveness of the program, and your acknowledgement that the larger communities that need extra support in rural Alberta of programs that can make those residents feel like they are at home and comfortable in their surroundings is a very good one. So we can certainly look at that.

Overall, I think that you've probably got other questions, so I'll sit down and take the rest. Thank you.

8:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, certainly in this current economic climate we know that the demand for labour has increased. I wouldn't say exponentially because the level of employment was high already, but the demand, I guess, is maybe what's increased most significantly. There appears to be a shortage everywhere you turn. People are looking for people to fill all sorts of different jobs, whether they be professional or skilled labour or even in the service industry and not much experience is required.

For one group of Albertans, those persons with disabilities, they haven't seen that kind of increase in their opportunities. They have some increase in opportunity, but considering the kind of demand for labour, one would have expected to have seen perhaps even a quantum increase because there is so much demand unfulfilled that could be taken up by persons with disabilities.

Employers who, in fact, have hired persons with disabilities and have had them on staff for some time find them to be a real benefit to their workplace. They are loyal employees. They will be happy to work there for a long term. They aren't out looking for new opportunities somewhere, in many cases, because they're loyal to their employer. It brings stability into that workplace even. Other employees are pleased to have them in the workplace. They find them to be good to work with.

In many cases the challenges they face have to be accommodated. There are reasons why some employers think that they will have to make significant modifications of their workplace or their schedules or something. Mostly, it appears that it's a lack of understanding on the part of the employer. There's also a lack of understanding that

the modification in that workplace is, on average, less than about \$500 per workplace modification.

Some of the things that are required are perhaps flexible work hours because some illnesses require that a person is able to work a couple of days, and then perhaps because of fatigue they have to take a day or two off. So flexibility in the workplace is really important. If employers know these things before they go into the interview, it's found that they're much more receptive to employing people with disabilities.

Given that and given that the federal government has some initiatives, I'm wondering what kind of work you might be doing with the feds in that regard, what kinds of opportunities there may be to share resources and share some of the costs of moving the agenda a little bit to improve more employment for persons with disabilities.

I know also that the new federal government has recently announced changes to the tax structure that will better accommodate persons with disabilities. I've talked about a few initiatives that they're seeking to move forward. I'm wondering if your department is taking on behalf of the Alberta government any kind of lead role in this, or is another department taking that lead to interact with the federal government in regard to employment taxation issues as it relates, I guess, to employment expenses and deductions, which I think may not be directly your department but may have some spinoff onto it?

So those are questions that we know are out there, that the community is asking. People with disabilities are wanting to be more involved in the workplace. The opportunity that exists now may not come around again for a while if we don't move on this. I know that your department is doing a few things. If you'd elaborate on that a little bit and talk about that.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. I'm really glad that the hon. member has raised these issues. I think he's absolutely right; there's never been a better time to really push the frontier of employer expectations about the capacity of the person with a disability. We've got a cry for help, requiring many more people to work. Sobeys has been a particularly positive partner. But I think we can do more. The Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and his deputy and, obviously, our deputy, Currie, have equally expressed an interest in trying to identify those places and those situations in which we can give people that opportunity to work and to accommodate their schedule in a way that best suits them.

Mr. Chairman, just this Monday, speaking to people in the oil and gas and petrochemical business, I identified that we have to start looking at employment differently for everybody. The student that graduates from university today doesn't want to put in the hours that, no doubt, you did as a young dad, going many hours more than what a lot of people would have thought was wise on a health-related basis. Well, today's graduate does want a balance in both their work and their family life, so that is going to mean that we're going to have to be much more creative.

We're going to have to be more creative not only with people with disabilities, but Minister Prentice and I have spoken about those people in aboriginal communities, First Nations, either on or off reserve, in Métis settlements, how we can explore the opportunities available to them as well. For people who have traditionally either been ignored or overlooked in many of the opportunities for employment, we have to make some significant strides there. We are undertaking right now to work in a partnership. Officials at the ADM level are also working in partnership to see what we can do to

bridge some of the expectations of both the employer and the employee group as it relates to persons with disabilities. In my first federal/provincial/territorial meeting relative to labour we had discussions about labour issues, about tax credits, about some of the things that could be available. So, yes, indeed, you're talking to the minister whose ministry is the one that partners and makes those kinds of situations possible with the federal government.

I think that your comments are well observed, that the federal government has looked at a tax credit. We see some other options available, but at this time they're very much preliminary. In our discussions from our very first meeting there was supposed to be an additional meeting where the minister was to be available for touring out west, but then, as we find in a minority government, sometimes they have to change their plans. It's our intent, when we get an opportunity to meet again, to pursue that as it relates to those kinds of strategies, talking about not only compensation, health benefits, but tax credits for people where that may be prudent to do so and talking about other supports that the federal government can provide to accommodate adjustments at the workplace. I think that where these can be facilitated in a partnership with the federal government, the provincial government, and the employer, that's the very best initiative.

I'm really hoping to the larger degree that we can engage the employers because when they get an ownership in it—and I'll return, again, to Sobeys, who has an ownership in it, takes a pride in it—then we're going to make significant progress.

8:20

One other thing that I believe has been very positive for the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports is I understand that they're looking at different ways for accounting for all those other kinds of dollars that might be earned while somebody with a disability is employed. Rather than a monthly accounting, looking at some other options available. To me that just smacks of smart thinking while it relates to encouraging people to take the bold step of going back to work. We shouldn't make it unnecessarily onerous or encumbered by rules and regulations and red tape but make it as simple as possible for them to go back to work, to find the best market niche for their skills.

One final thing that I think you should know about. In our department our staff have all been charged with the responsibility of looking at their own area. If somebody is predominantly on the telephone, at a desk, in a government building, I think we should be saying that when that person leaves, retires, or moves to another position, that position, if still necessary, should and could be filled by somebody who is not in an office building downtown.

Consider the opportunity for us to employ many more people with a disability, allow them to work at their speed in their placements, allow us to have the benefit of not, for example, paying \$360 for a square metre of space in Commerce Place when this person could be working in a home office with a proper chair and a proper table and a dedicated line and could be working in a fashion that might be much more comfortable for them and give us a whole new opportunity not only to employ people with disabilities but to employ those people who do want to stay at home, who do want to work under those circumstances. Besides the benefit of not having that type of aggregate of people working downtown, we give them the opportunity to be there for their families or work in the comfort of their own home without the needless expense of transportation and many other things.

I believe that that initiative, proudly undertaken by our department, will be one thing that will create a whole smorgasbord of new opportunities. We do have call-centre capacity within the people

that work in our department, and I'm looking forward to us considering that that all should be jobs that could be done back at their home and not there.

I could just point out, as validation of the cost savings, that IBM has saved over a hundred million dollars, I believe, in a year by looking at this kind of option: if you will, delegating to home residence other opportunities for people to provide government support without that costly kind of situation that we currently have.

So I think we're on the threshold of opening up many opportunities, and your question gives me an opportunity to shine a little light on some of the things that we're actively pursuing.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Yes. Just briefly, in the time available, Mr. Chairman, I wonder if I could ask the minister to elaborate a little bit on the rural development initiative and to perhaps advise what type of performance measures or criteria would be used in approving projects that would qualify under that program and what kind of criteria or performance measures would be used to ensure that taxpayers of Alberta are getting good value for their money in those initiatives that are approved.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps the hon. member wasn't in this evening when I did mention that, so I will just reiterate my earlier observations. The criteria for the rural development fund is currently under review, and later this month we ought to have that criteria ready for publication. It will in fact be extended to the various projects in different ways. The accountability for the dollars must be there. The accountability to the community must be there. Obviously, the accountability back to government.

We have to have different sets of criteria for the various ranges of projects. If you think, for example, about the clerkship program that is being provided, evaluating the effectiveness of that will involve the university, involve the communities, involve the health care institutions, the partners that will be involved in administering that program. Then you look at the different program linking with the SuperNet. In their review of that program they will be looking at quite a different coterie of events in terms of the training, the skills development, the satisfaction of the student, the capacity to meet the needs in that part of rural Alberta. So we'll be looking at things like whether or not this technology adapts and removes the barriers and helps the apprenticeship trades training and postsecondary education. Better access of learning opportunities: that will be evaluated. The local capacity to meet the region's needs and new connectivity applications will be part of it.

Then you look at, for example, the Killam regional economic development initiative, which has had a fund contribution for agribusiness, to help attract key agribusinesses. Their expected performance measures will include whether or not the agriculture base was generally enhanced with greater crop demand and revenue, whether there was more local economic activity and employment, whether there was secondary value-added services for local residents, and whether there was more local ownership and return on investment for regional groups. What we have to do is take the anticipated results, see if we agree that those results are sufficient, give evaluation on the basis of the results of the return, and report back whether or not that expenditure of dollars either showed in the short term or in the longer term a credible return on our investment.

Much of what is done will be performance measures that are targeted to those descriptors of the learner and achievement of the

learning results. Different communities learn in different ways, whether it's about apprenticeship or whether it's about a retraining opportunity or helping people in rural communities expand their knowledge or their opportunity for learning.

One thing I wanted to indicate is that the Sunchild e-learning community, with a fund of \$220,000, is going to be able to look at whether or not this course content as delivered is adapted to aboriginal culture and learning needs. We will be working with aboriginal communities to evaluate that particular content.

I'd have to say to the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill that the performance measures will be at some degree of variance depending upon the project, and ultimately the report back to the rural development initiative will give those key indicators on each of the projects. Then, in the context of that, we will evaluate and weigh whether or not the RADF did a credible job in conducting their reviews.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wonder if the minister could perhaps consider moving some of the government of Alberta departments out to the rural areas, like the government of Saskatchewan did, perhaps using some of those rural development initiative dollars to move some of the civil service into the outlying areas in Alberta and provide some sustainable jobs and employment in those areas in that way.

Ms Evans: Well, you're speaking my language, hon. member. In fact, the . . .

The Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time allocation for this particular order of business has elapsed, the 45 minutes. We will now ask the officials to vacate the Assembly so that we can get the next group in.

8:30

Seniors and Community Supports

The Chair: I'll now invite the minister to make his opening presentation.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I maybe would just submit my comments from this afternoon in *Hansard* that we had as opening comments. We could certainly leave it in that respect.

I will make a few comments to introduce my colleagues that are here. To my right is Tim Wiles, Deputy Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. We have Reegan McCullough, assistant deputy minister, disability supports. To his left is Dave Arseneault, assistant deputy minister of the community support programs and strategic planning division. Then we have Chi Loo, assistant deputy minister, senior services division, and we have Susan McCulloch, senior financial officer, corporate finance.

For the benefit of those that are here, I would once again state that we are very fortunate to have the expertise and dedication and competency in this department of those that are here and many others that work for this department as well as, really, most of our departments in government: an outstanding group of professional, dedicated individuals.

We have a number of programs in this department that are fairly significant, all about helping Albertans, seniors and persons with disabilities: \$1.8 billion in the budget, a 10 per cent increase over forecast of last year and an 8 per cent increase over budget of last year.

I didn't get enough time for opening remarks to cover a few things for the record, so I won't go over some of the seniors' programs

initially. We have an Alberta seniors' benefit program. These are mostly designed for an income-based approach – a higher threshold of income will mean that you don't qualify – and targeted assistance to those in greatest need. That encompasses a large portion of what the seniors' programs are about. We have a few specific targeted ones like special-needs assistance for seniors to help with one-time emergency expenses. Then there's a dental and optical assistance plan for seniors. There's a variety of those related income-based supports.

The disability supports, \$751 million for assured income for the severely handicapped: about 36,000 individuals on AISH, and that's growing potentially to 38,900 this year. For people who have severe impairments to their livelihood, we did increase the monthly payment from \$1,000 to \$1,050. This is the third successive year of increasing AISH monthly benefits to those. There's about another \$300 or so in health benefits that are provided on average cost to those on AISH.

The concern is that with that number and growing numbers of people with disabilities not working, how do we re-engage to the extent possible more of them to be working, having opportunities to contribute to sustain their own lives? We're going to work very actively as a department, maybe starting with those that are more willing and able and desirous, to see if we can't build some success. Working with the Department of Employment, Immigration and Industry, we really put an emphasis upon how we take advantage of the opportunity that's in Alberta, with low unemployment rates, to let those with AISH participate in the workforce and be part of and included in the opportunities and not really be held back. There might be barriers to our programs that trap people into the concern about starting to earn some income and being cut off and losing benefits. We'll try and work on design to make sure that we don't make them worried, take away the barriers so that they might be more able to take those risks to find the work.

We have another program, Alberta Aids to Daily Living. That's part of the disability support. There's an Alberta brain injury initiative and a residential access modification program, RAM as it's referred to.

The other area of community support programs and strategic planning has to do with the persons with developmental disabilities. About half, \$519 million, of our budget goes towards this. There are about 9,100 adults that are supported, persons with developmental disabilities. A lot of those dollars are really to help for living, supervisory care, 24/7 for some individuals. So there's a lot of that expenditure just in helping them live. Some of it's to help them participate in activities in the communities. Some of those funds are to help them prepare for or retain a job, and others are for psychological and behavioural services. Even with those people we are working through service providers, the concern being, really, retention of people providing the services, wages, especially in an economy such as ours. How do they afford to attract the staff?

We brought together and had a brainstorming session among quite a few of the service providers and various stakeholders to just try and find more creative ways to deploy our dollars to give the best value, to help empower those that are receiving the services. We've increased our budget 90 per cent since 1999, a very substantial increase in this budget, and even those involved in providing the services acknowledge that it's not about more money; it's about more effectively deploying that money that could then allow redeploying those funds into even helping the savings in retaining their staff. So we're going to work substantively in that direction as well through this year.

I would say that there's also some discussion with, I got to see the hon. Member – I keep forgetting the constituency – for Strathcona,

the chairman of the Premier's council on the persons with disabilities. Really, I think our department in this business plan is encompassing some thought about how we prepare for many people, not just those that are on our AISH or PDD programs but those with disabilities that may not be funded for various supports. How do we see that there's more inclusion of all those with any form of disability and that there's that discussion on barrier-free access, inclusion in the workplace, and the like? Those are some of the things with which we were quite pleased that the chair of that council, the Member for Strathcona, is working towards and facilitating with our department.

With those brief introductory comments I'd be happy to entertain the questions from the members.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With those last few comments, Minister, you've been reading my notes. I'd like to just draw some attention to your strategic priorities, listed on page 253 of the budget document, and the government priority to improve Albertans' quality of life, an admirable priority for this government and something we're really interested in. First off for the ministry: improve supports and services for persons with disabilities. In many ways I wish there was a period there instead of carrying on to complete that sentence. The first priority for the ministry is to "improve supports and services for persons with disabilities through better coordination and integration of programs."

8:40

The reason I think it would be good to have a period after the first part of that sentence is because persons with disabilities who are served through programs like AISH and PDD and a few of those programs, although a large proportion of the budget, in numbers only comprise about 10 per cent of persons with disabilities in this province. Across Canada, typically, those are the kinds of numbers of people that would be supported versus people who have disabilities but are not supported through any particular program like AISH or PDD.

In order to improve Albertans quality of life, it behooves us to look at all sorts of other kinds of barriers that people with disabilities would be facing as they seek to be full participants in our society and, to use their term, that's often used, to enjoy full citizenship. When I look at some of the challenges that persons with disabilities are facing, it's in my mind easiest for me to describe it in terms of access. People with disabilities want access to society and to all aspects of our society. They want access to employment and to housing. They want access to the built environment, the physical environment. They want access to education. They want access to recreation.

If we just envision that part of the access component, the physical part, and think in terms of one kind of disability, people in a wheelchair, for them even the smallest of curbs, a four-inch or six-inch curb, is a barrier that people without disabilities would have to compare to a fence or something they couldn't climb over. If you can't get over a little curb, you have to either go around it or you have to go home. That, in my mind, symbolizes the access challenges that people with disabilities face. It's simple enough to envision that for things like the built environment, where access is encumbered because of curbs or other kinds of physical barriers like that.

There are all sorts of barriers that people with disabilities face with respect to employment, whether it be employer attitudes, ignorance, or again a lack of appropriate technology that they can

utilize to overcome whatever disability they have. Another barrier to full citizenship would be opportunities in education. Maybe they are not able to access programs or to travel to enjoy different kinds of programs and take part fully in all aspects of education. Recreation may be another barrier that they face.

Housing is a huge concern. We don't have opportunity for people with disabilities to buy an accessible house because we haven't as citizens become aware of the challenges that exist and the challenges that we ourselves might face if, in fact, say, our spouse has a stroke, and we're not able to access our own upstairs in our own home. We haven't encouraged people to look down the road and think about building what's termed visitable housing in their own circumstances in order to accommodate future disabilities that members of their family might face.

Those are the kinds of things that in order to improve Albertans' quality of life we have to look at, and it goes beyond those programs that the ministry or other ministries might be providing. We have to, I think, take a look at those kinds of challenges and do our best to address them. It shouldn't be viewed as some kind of altruistic motive that we have, because the challenges that persons with disabilities face with regard to barriers and access are exactly the same kind of challenges that people will face as they age. Whatever the mobility challenge is, it doesn't matter whether it's acquired through disease or injury or some problem at birth, something that a person has had through their entire life, or whether it's as a result of aging. Those mobility challenges are the same. They're faced in increasing numbers as people age, and we're going to have to prepare for those times. We're going to have to prepare for that through the education of Albertans so that we can take those things into account as we make our plans for the future.

We have a lot of these programs that exist, but beyond that could the minister elaborate a little bit on what direction the ministry might be moving for people that are outside of the programs like AISH and PDD, what direction the ministry may be moving in with regard to that in order to address that government priority number 1, to improve Albertans' quality of life?

I have some other questions, but maybe we'll deal with those later. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you. With respect to the comments on the priority 1, to improve supports and services for persons with disabilities, and putting a period at that point, we have, as you're aware, a mandate letter that we've received from the Premier with respect to priorities. This is the verbiage, actually, from there without the period.

I think that's an excellent point, though, on those without support through AISH or PDD. Much of our work through the programs and services we deliver doesn't really contemplate those with a broader range of disabilities that aren't provided for through the programs that we offer. I would assess that there is, I think, some degree of acceptance that that's the right approach: how do we assist in a variety of ways those with any disability whether they're on a program that's providing funding or services?

I would also state that I don't know; we'd have to be somewhat cautious that the expectation isn't there that we should see that government as providing programs and financial supports and a variety of things to everyone. We should be encouraging everybody to focus in more on their abilities. In fact, that's one of the concepts, as we've provided and worked with service providers, that they've been talking about. They're focusing much more on the abilities rather than on their disabilities, on their interests and their talents

and their capabilities. I would agree that that's an excellent direction and focus. While we want to encompass how we can make this a better place for all people, including those with any kind of disability, it may not be through more services and programs directly of the government. I think that would be consistent with the statements that you're making.

Though it would be very good – and there's a leadership role that the government could take in helping assess. It's not necessarily a program, but it gets into standards like barrier-free access, that I know your council has been working on, and how to get architects even in design at the universities so that they're teaching architects and engineers about barrier-free access and what makes it easier, more accessible, not just in public facilities like this but even planning in your homes. Like we were talking at one stage, building a home at the present time and contemplating how can you stay in your home longer: it might just be by some few minor modifications in your home design to anticipate when you're aging or you have a disability that you can still stay in your own home.

I think there are a lot of things there that have much merit in how we could help facilitate in our thinking and our planning in structures, in regulation, in design, in our culture more inclusiveness of people with all disabilities. When we're considering how you put out a design of recreational facilities, that could go into the planning because it might be just commonly accepted and understood that we could get to that stage as to what things you would have to put in a design for recreation and how you would facilitate access for people using it.

8:50

[Ms Pastoor in the chair]

Employment. I fully concur. There is a broader range of people other than on AISH that need employment. How do we work with the employers? We have a great opportunity, given the low unemployment rates, to try and work with those with disabilities whether they're on AISH or not, seeing that they're more included in the opportunities that are there in the market and in that light are very much willing to accept, I would say, the consideration of our department as we work through it this year.

We've made some minor changes already in some wordage in the business plan to start considering a broader range in advocacy on behalf of our department for those with all forms of disabilities. In that I'd be very happy and pleased to work with the Member for Strathcona as he chairs the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, though we might put a more focused and direct effort among his council members, among the department, and among other groups to consider much more positively the things that we as a society – individually, private sector – and those things which government could also do to facilitate more inclusion of people and access – the word they used – for all people whether they have some disability or not.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a couple questions for the hon. minister relating to seniors. As the minister is well aware, there are many seniors in my riding of Calgary-Nose Hill, and over the past year the inflationary pressures have been quite considerable in the city of Calgary. The consumer price index has gone up by over 5 per cent. The result for many seniors is that they're finding that their purchasing power is decreasing and, consequently, their standard of living.

Many of these seniors have concerns about being able to support

themselves and stay in their own homes, particularly from the point of view of their property taxes. I know that the minister's department has a property tax assistance program which rebates to seniors the increase in the provincial portion of property taxes on any increase over the 2004 tax levels. But given the fact that the purchasing power of their dollars, many of these seniors being on fixed incomes, is decreasing, it is becoming increasingly difficult for many of these seniors to stay in their homes.

I wonder if the minister could comment on whether or not his department has any plans to implement some sort of tax deferral program in conjunction, I suppose, with the city of Calgary, by which it would have to be administered. It certainly would be beneficial if seniors could defer some of their taxes until such time as their homes were either sold or they were deceased and thereby have some additional room for living expenses. I would just ask the minister whether or not his department is investigating that, if it's something that is feasible.

The second area that I would like to ask him about is relating to the PDD program. As he is aware, the cost of caregivers is certainly escalating, and with the employment rates as high as they are and the unemployment rates as low as they are, there is a great shortage of individuals in those fields of personal care. The result is that it's very difficult to keep people in those PDD positions. It's most disconcerting for those individuals that have become accustomed to being served by an individual. They form individual relationships with those people who are their caregivers. The revolving wheel of losing those individuals and having a constant turnover in personnel is certainly something that I think is very disconcerting to those individuals who are requisite of PDD care. I wonder whether or not the minister could comment on any funding in the budget to increase the support to the PDD individuals. I think it is certainly critical.

Also in the area of PDD I wonder if the minister could comment on the functioning of the regional boards – I know that the provincial PDD board has now been dissolved, and we now have more direct administration of the funds – and whether he could elaborate, perhaps, on some of the experiences of the department on whether or not that particular initiative is going well, whether it's proving to be more efficient in getting the resources where they're needed, on the ground.

Finally, in the area of protection of persons in care I wonder if the minister could advise whether or not his department has any plans to expand that program and the resources available in the protection for persons in care program so that it's expanded beyond the institutional care setting into the area of home care, because as the minister is well aware, we are entering an era where more of the delivery of care is taking place in the homes and outside of the institutional settings. I think it's certainly no less important that the individuals that are receiving their care outside of those institutions, like lodges and nursing homes, would also receive the benefit of the Protection for Persons in Care Act.

The Acting Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Madam Chair. First off, you mentioned the seniors' inflationary pressures. Absolutely correct: they face it along with all Albertans, everyone.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

As I mentioned, we do provide a property tax rebate all in assessment of our first priority to help seniors, to assist them to stay in their own homes. That would probably be the best opportunity for us to assist them. In that light, that's why we did bring in the rebate

so that no increases in their education property taxes will have to be paid. That'll be rebated for any years subsequent to 2004. It's in that light, really, that we have mitigated all those cost increases for that portion of housing. We have a variety of other programs that talk about a one-time, special-needs program. If there are some extraordinary costs, they can apply and receive some one-time assistance for their house.

Acknowledging that you mentioned a tax deferral methodology, I note that British Columbia actually has a property tax deferral program where seniors can defer paying property tax until they dispose of their homes or until they're deceased. In light of that, there's a variety of options, I say, that one could consider. I guess that one could consider that thought. Our programs in Alberta, for example: compared to British Columbia, we have a more generous program of assistance for seniors in total than the compensation package that would be provided for those in British Columbia. So I guess we provide different levels of service.

One concern I might have, though, is that there's a growing number of seniors, and clearly with the baby boom generation coming up, it's going to only increasingly be a challenge to provide for both higher amounts of payments per individual plus greater numbers of seniors. There's much we could do. Where our programs have for the most part been designed is to focus a greater amount of assistance towards those in need. We still have some programs that are universal. Even the education property tax one that we have is a universal program. If it was really looking to those in the greatest of need, we might have to do some further work in policy as to who should actually receive the assistance and under what format that might best be delivered.

9:00

Some excellent thoughts. At the present time there's no specific plan in developing a tax deferral with the city of Calgary or otherwise. I would say that one recent advent, I guess, is that the city of Edmonton did put in kind of a cap of the increase as well. They worked it through the Alberta seniors' benefit. We have the information on seniors of low income. Through our own systems as we provide cheques through the Alberta seniors' benefit program, the city of Edmonton is actually rebating, I think, up to \$63 of their property tax increase to the low-income seniors. So there is a facility, really, with not too much additional complexity or administration, given that we have the systems already in place, to identify the low-income seniors who might qualify. Other municipalities could look at theirs as well. That is an example that I think we could show to other cities like Calgary and other municipalities if that were their wish. We'd be happy to work with them in that regard.

I might mention just for information that for the property tax year 2007 in Edmonton 9,400 senior households will receive an average of \$95 in assistance. In Calgary 17,000 senior households will receive an average of \$130 in assistance on the education property tax rebates this year.

You mentioned the other one about PDD, persons with developmental disabilities: caregivers, retaining staff, the turnover. Clearly, that's a real challenge in this environment where wage rates have gone up, finding people. The challenge is for the caregivers to retain their staff and have the sufficient funds. We did increase our budget. In the last year \$11.3 million was reallocated at the end of last year in the budget specifically to address staff retention questions. We had some funds that were in that area that were rededicated just for the specific issue of the service providers to help retain their staff. That money has also been built into this year's budget to annualize that increase going forward, acknowledging that that's not going to answer the full questions, and there will still be challenges for them to compete with the wages that they might offer.

We had a brainstorming session just a little over a week ago and brought together a number of service providers, various stakeholders, those providing the services to persons with developmental disabilities. We've increased our budget, I mentioned earlier, 90 per cent since 1999, a very substantive increase. The rate of growth is well beyond inflation, well beyond our caseload. Even the service providers are acknowledging that this isn't a matter of just more money. It's really a matter of us starting to take a look at more efficiencies within the system. There's a real range of how services are provided, the cost of those various services that are provided, and how it may be best to deliver those services. If we could gain a lot more efficiency in how we provide those, using some of the best examples that are already being tried in Alberta, if we made that more across the board and used those as templates, we could free up dollars that could be redeployed among the agencies for retaining their own staff. It won't be a function for us of design, just to cut the budget, but it will be a matter of how we help build greater capacity among the service providers to retain staff and provide the services on an ongoing basis.

With respect to the protection for persons in care I thank the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for his work specifically on this area with the recommendation as to expanding beyond the people in the public facilities. We're in receipt of that report. We've got some more work to do on that. Specifically, I don't have any recommendations at the present time as to what course of action or direction we may take, though we do have that information, and we'll respond to it in due course as to what might be the best outcome that we could take.

We've added, for example, another million dollars in 2008-09 to address potential changes in the act such as home care, with specific reference to the protection for persons in care.

With those comments, I'll be happy to answer any further questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The second priority for the ministry is to bring forward an updated plan to expand long-term care and improve standards of care. The first sentence there talks about improving it for seniors and persons with disabilities, but it's working through Health and Wellness in order to achieve that. In discussing some of these issues with people with disabilities, there's a vast difference between people who need care because of an injury and need to be helped out for a while, home care and so on, to move into a state of health, and people who need home care – and I know this is talking about long-term care here, but the analogy is somewhat similar – the people with disabilities who are not going to move into the ability to just be on their own. I'm wondering if there are discussions taking place that will differentiate those kinds of programs whether it be for people recovering from an accident or from an injury or some kind of disease as opposed to those who will require care for the rest of their lives because of their disability. That's one of the questions I did have regarding that.

I was talking earlier about some of the challenges and the barriers that are faced. Goal 5 for the ministry: "Seniors and persons with disabilities live in supportive, barrier-free communities and have access to the necessary supports and services to enhance independence." I think some groups in our community should be commended for the work that they're doing. Christenson Developments and the president of the company, Greg Christenson: in some discussions recently he's been talking about this very type of community. In the hamlet of Sherwood Park, just adjacent to my constituency of Strathcona, just across Clover Bar road they're building a commu-

nity, and Christenson Developments should be commended for taking the initiative in building what Greg has called a prototype community where, in fact, people will be able to age in place. They will have access to all sorts of the community facilities in the immediate neighbourhood and be able to get about the community whether they're ambulatory or whether they are in a wheelchair.

In recent discussions with Jayman Master Built the same kinds of things: a huge amount of interest on their part to move towards incorporating these kinds of designs. These kind of builders in our community should be commended for the leadership that they're showing in these kinds of endeavours and the initiatives that they're taking.

I did have one question with respect to PDD, and that would be whether the ministry, in looking at the PDD-funded services, has in their performance measures and their satisfaction measures noted any kind of difference in the type of organization that's delivering the services, whether there's a difference between, you know, some of the for-profits and not-for-profits or whether there's any kind of variance in approach that leads to a higher sense of satisfaction from clients than is just represented in the blanket statement here.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to long-term care our priority 2, to bring forward an updated plan to expand long-term care and improve standards of care: in the long-term care area and a lot of the housing issues with respect to seniors I would concur that there's much work yet to be done in developing how we, one, maybe help people age in place first in their homes all the way through the various forms of facilities.

9:10

One of the issues in particular that you addressed is younger people in long-term care and how we can maybe provide some choice of facilities for them other than these facilities that are predominantly seniors, where they might have some choices to be with other individuals closer to their age. A specialized service initiative funding of \$6 million allocated in '06-07 is in the budget to provide people who are currently in long-term care with choices for community involvement to counteract the isolation experience as a result of these living conditions. The budget was also intended to prevent premature admission to facilities and to increase the housing options available for adults with disabilities in the community. There is some more work, obviously, yet to be done on that, but it is an issue that has clearly been identified, and some progress is being made.

You commented on this prototype kind of community that some of the private developers are putting together and developing. I would concur that it would be useful for us to further explore to see what they're doing. How do you replicate that? How do you get that more commonly thought of in various developments that are going on throughout the province: to increase the accessibility question once again in designing communities where all people can participate and live and enjoy the quality of life in that community regardless of their abilities and/or disabilities? So we look forward to working with the Member for Strathcona in following up on some of those. I know that we've talked previously on that specific point and, out of interest, look forward to seeing what some of those prototype kind of communities would look like, what interesting concepts they've brought forward, and what we might do as a department to help facilitate that thinking or correlate that with other departments.

That said about all those things, part of the challenge and focus of the department is that you can't spread your resources too thin, so we'll have to see, out of all the ideas that come forward, those that we can act upon quickly versus some that might be a longer term priority. As you were mentioning previously, there are strategic priorities that have been listed that we are going to continue to focus on. Sometimes the accomplishment of the strategic priorities is to the exclusion of other issues so that while there might be interest and desire to do many things, you have to be careful not to try to accomplish too many and spread your resources too thin and too defused to actually make headway in some key strategic areas.

With respect to the service providers for persons with developmental disabilities, the difference is in types of organizations, for-profit versus not-for-profit and their effectiveness or their efficiency and/or creativeness. I guess we'd only have some anecdotal information. We're not aware specifically that there is a substantive difference in the form of structure, like for-profit or not-for-profit. One organization could be profit or nonprofit due to the expertise or the creativeness or the innovation of some of them. Some of them are actually accomplishing and focusing more on outcomes, and it's in that thought that I would agree about where we ought to start pushing some of the next steps.

What do we desire to be appropriate outcomes for those persons with developmental disabilities? We need to start thinking about who's identifying them, to begin with. What are the appropriate outcomes? How are they measuring those? How are they delivering the services to accomplish that? What are their successes in achieving those results? We have obviously provided many services based upon inputs: so many dollars for so many people for so much time. Much of this is related to people, some of whom need care 24/7. They don't have the capacity to be on their own, so some of it is about just trying to care for a person, be it in a homelike setting where they might be safe and secure. Others would be services to help enhance that experience of their inclusion in the community or their development as an individual. But I don't have anything. We talked about it some in the brain-storming session we just had. Maybe along with the service providers and ourselves developing a web-based . . .

The Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to inform you that the allocated time for this order of business has elapsed. We will proceed with the next department. So if I could invite your officials to retire from the Assembly, we will have the opportunity for the next department, Children's Services, to come in.

Children's Services

The Chair: We will start by inviting the hon. Minister of Children's Services to present us with her opening comments.

Ms Tarchuk: Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I get started, I'd like to introduce the ministry staff here with me today. Sitting in the House we have Maria David-Evans, deputy minister; Shehnaz Hutchinson, director of financial strategies; Niki Wosnack, ADM, community strategies and support; and Gord Johnston, ADM, ministry support services. In the members' gallery we also have Mark Hattori, acting ADM; Sheryl Fricke; David Wilson; and Neris Havelock. I would like to say that these are just a few of the thousands of dedicated staff who work in our ministry committed to improving the lives of children, youth, families across the province. I would like to say for the record that their passion and hard work each and every day is what makes the ministry the success that it is.

Seeing that this is my third time doing estimates and the hour of

the day, I think that rather than going on at great length talking about all the wonderful things we're doing, maybe I'll just hand it over to you for questions. We'll endeavour to answer what we can. Anything we can't, we will get back in short order with fuller answers.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any members who wish to participate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I do have a number of lines of inquiry that I would like to delve into, and the first is relating to the daycare situation and the shortage of workers. I know that there is considerable difficulty in recruiting people into the daycare field as there are in many of the other services industries. I know that there is strong competition for those individuals and sometimes a tendency for them to take other jobs that may be higher paying. I wondered whether or not the minister could elaborate on what steps her department is taking to deal with that shortage of workers and the ability to remain competitive in the job market.

9:20

Another area that I would like to inquire about is relating to the recruitment of foster parents and what can be done to enhance that program, whether there are any other additional resources that her department is utilizing to address that shortage.

The third area that I would like some comment on regarding resources in the budget and the programs of the ministry would be relating to the provision of before and after school care for working parents. Particularly of great concern are those areas of the workforce that may find that they are in difficult straits regarding the availability of workers, and I'm thinking particularly in the area of the health care fields and whatnot, where the provision of before and after care sometimes becomes critical to the number of hours that nursing staff or other medical professionals are able to dedicate to their jobs. I know that's a great concern presently because we do have shortages in those particular fields.

I will allow the minister to make some comments on those, and then I may have some further follow-up questions later on.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm glad that the hon. member brought up some of the child care issues because that is one of the mandated priorities as given by the Premier this year. A lot of my time and effort in the last couple of months has been to meet with stakeholders involved with child care and to take a look at what was working well, what's not working so well, and get some ideas from them as to a number of things, ultimately how to create capacity in the province. But the number one issue that was identified over and over during the discussions and the consultation was the attraction of staff.

Before I specifically get into some of the initiatives that we announced that directly impacted the staff and specific to the attraction of staff, we did through the budget process get endorsement, well, first of all, committing to the five-point plan, which was huge, as well as enhancing the five-point plan. Specific to some of the strategies to help out with the workforce participation issues, we committed \$9 million to fund a 40 per cent increase to staff wage top-ups. We are putting \$1.5 million to fund a new child care leadership bursary, and that will help staff in child care programs continue their education and help them offset some costs. We also increased subsidies for parents and introduced funding to help cover

the start-up costs of creating more child care spaces across the province, and that was looking at \$1,500 per space created. We also put \$400,000 towards establishing a staff attraction incentive for child care programs to recruit back workers who agree to sign a two-year return service agreement. As well, we put together a \$1 million package to take care of some specific child care issues up in Fort McMurray. The total funding for child care is \$134 million, and that's \$16 million over and above last year. I can tell you that the response across the province has been very good for those initiatives.

I can tell you that we have put another \$7 million into our foster care. I know that we can see during question period that foster care happens to be one of the favorites to talk about and whether or not we have enough foster care parents in the province. I've pointed out several times that our ratios are actually fairly good when you're looking Canada-wide. Having said that, we know that the more foster parents we have, the better able we will be to match the needs of kids. Those efforts are ongoing. As well, this year we're putting in an additional \$350,000, so we're actually looking at \$650,000 that will be committed to recruit more foster parents and aboriginal caregivers for the children in government care.

The other comment that I wanted to make. When I talk about the increase to \$7 million, just to let you know, the ministry and the Alberta Foster Parent Association negotiate on an annual basis the foster care compensation rates and allowances. In meeting with that organization last week, it appears that it's a very positive relationship that we have. Certainly, they are very enthusiastic people about the work that they do, and they have a positive relationship with this government.

The last question, regarding out of school care. Again, I know that I've talked about this lots in the House, but very simply right now we do not have the mandate to deliver services for out of school care for children ages six to 12. We do have the mandate for zero to six. We do license zero to 12, and that is the extent that we are currently involved with out of school programming outside of the fact that we fund FCSSs. In fact, this year to the tune of \$71 million we are funding FCSSs. If they determine that out of school care is a local priority, they can deliver that service, and many of them do. I think that out of close to 300 FCSSs, we have 45 programs in the province.

Having said that, we also just finished an FCSS review, that was conducted throughout the year last year, and have just taken it through the approval process. The good news with the review is that it identified for us that FCSS is probably one of the best examples of partnerships in this province, a very well-respected program. Hundreds and hundreds of locally driven, really good preventive programs have come out of that program, and it is certainly one that

we will want to continue to support. In the review we are following through on all of the recommendations. There was one that we pulled aside for further review. They had identified that the out of school program needs to be looked at.

The out of school programs across the province are experiencing similar difficulties that the zero to six programs have, and the FCSSs and the municipalities where the FCSSs are have been asking for us to take a look at the out of school program. So I have committed, actually, to all Albertans and in this House that I will work with all of our stakeholders, whether it be businesses, municipalities, the child care community, and take a look at what's working well, what isn't, and see if we can come up with some solutions.

9:30

The Chair: Are there others? Seeing none, I will now invite the officials to leave the Assembly so that the committee may rise and report.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(c) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Education; Employment, Immigration and Industry; Seniors and Community Supports; and Children's Services relating to the 2007-08 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the ministers tonight faced some gruelling questions but conducted themselves most admirably, from my perspective, particularly in terms of being efficient in the time allocated to the answers. So I would move that the Assembly do adjourn until tomorrow afternoon at 1 o'clock.

[Motion carried; at 9:32 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, June 6, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/06/06

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Werner Baumann, ambassador of Switzerland, and his charming wife, Susanne; Mr. Walter Deplazes, the consul general from Vancouver, and his wife, Siegrid; as well as Mr. Andreas Bayer, the honorary consul from Calgary, and his wife, Yolanda. It was my pleasure to meet them all at lunch and earlier today to welcome them to Alberta.

Two-way trade between Alberta and Switzerland averages about \$200 million per year, so we have a bonding relationship with them. The Swiss have also had an important role in building Alberta. The town of Stettler in central Alberta was founded in 1904 by Carl Stettler, a prominent Swiss immigrant, and the Swiss mountaineers were crucial in the development of Banff as a world tourism destination. I would ask that all the honoured guests who are seated in your gallery today please rise and receive the traditional and warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Statement by the Speaker

Roberta MacAdams

The Speaker: Hon. members, just a bit of background before I call on the next member to do an introduction. In 1916 in this Assembly an act called the Alberta Equal Suffrage Act was passed. That act did two things. One, it provided for the first time the opportunity for women to vote. As well, it also offered an opportunity for women to run for political office. In 1917 a second act was passed that's relative to comments being made now, an act called the Alberta Military Representation Act. Remember, Canada was at war in 1917. That particular Military Representation Act indicated that in the next provincial election in Alberta two seats would be available for men or women of military background to earn a seat in this Assembly.

The provincial election of 1917 was held on June 7. The first woman in the history of the British Empire, one of the first women anywhere in the world, Louise McKinney, was elected as an independent in the constituency of Claresholm. At the same time servicemen and servicewomen had the right to elect two members of this Assembly. They were all located, of course, in northern France, in the trenches.

A lieutenant nurse by the name of Roberta MacAdams was in London, England, in the summer of 1917, and she visited a lithographer, who took a picture of her. The picture to my right, your left, is a painted portrait of the original picture. She then went and had a campaign poster printed with a very interesting slogan. It would

turn out that there would be 21 people contesting this election in the trenches in northern France for these two seats in Alberta. Her campaign slogan, very skilful, said, "Give one vote to the man of your choice and the other to the sister." At that time "sister" referred to a nurse. Twenty-one people contested that election in the trenches in northern France: one woman, 20 men.

Under the slogan, "Give one vote to the man of your choice and the other to the sister," Roberta MacAdams became the second woman to be elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. She received 4,023 votes, which was almost 700 votes ahead of her closest next competitor on the list. The other 20 competitors, of course, were men. Ninety-plus per cent of the people voting for Roberta MacAdams in the summer election of 1917 in northern France were men. So she joined Louise McKinney as one of the first two women ever to have been elected anywhere in the British Empire.

When she returned to Alberta, she became the first woman in the British Empire to have a piece of legislation introduced and passed. The bill that she introduced and passed was on the War Veterans' Next-of-Kin Association. This is a remarkable part of the history of this Legislative Assembly and a remarkable part of Alberta's history as well.

Little has really been known about Roberta MacAdams until now. Last evening a book was released in co-operation with the University of Calgary press. I'm now going to call on the Minister of Public Security and the Solicitor General for the appropriate introductions.

I might add one thing. This picture was commissioned in 1967 as a centennial project here in the province of Alberta. It's a painting. It then rested in the archives for years. It has been retrieved, and we're now going to place it on permanent residency on the 5th floor of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta so that all people in the future can come and see it. It'll be accompanying the Famous Five in the gallery.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

(continued)

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, last evening in the Legislature rotunda we jointly participated in a book launch for *Give Your Other Vote to the Sister: A Woman's Journey into the Great War*, a story of Roberta MacAdams, one of the first two female members elected in 1917 to the Alberta Legislative Assembly. I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly family members of our former colleague, Roberta MacAdams, and also the author of this work and her family. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery.

I would ask our guests to rise as I call out their names: Robert Price, son of Roberta MacAdams; granddaughters Nancy Long, Jane Price, and Cathy Price; great-grandchildren Phoebe Price, Lucy Marsden, Brittney Price, and Kelby Price. With Roberta MacAdams' family is Debbie Marshall, author of *Give Your Other Vote to the Sister*, who happens to be a constituent of mine in Stony Plain; and Monica Newton, daughter of Beatrice Naysmyth, Roberta's campaign manager. There are also a number of Marshall and Newton family members sitting in the members' gallery. They are Monica Newton, Jr., Rosemary Heidinger, Heather Marshall, Rachel Culbertson, and Tom Davey. I would ask all members to offer their warmest traditional welcome.

The Speaker: All members will soon receive a copy of the book *Give Your Other Vote to the Sister*. It makes wonderful reading.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. It's a pleasure for me today on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of youngsters and parents from Rosemary school. Twenty-four students are here in the Assembly along with 14 parents, and accompanying them are two teachers, Mr. David Blumell and Mrs. Lenora Dyck. Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I would ask them please to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of children and adults from the Lacombe Christian School. This is one of the 10 private independent schools in my constituency. There are 41 exceptionally bright young children in grade 6 and 15 adults. The teachers accompanying this group are Mr. Tim Van Doesburg, Mrs. Stephanie Littel, Mrs. Trudy Veenema, and Mrs. Noella Van Doesburg. The parent helpers are Mr. Herman Scholing; Mr. Martin Folkerts, who is also the principal, but he is accompanying one of his children; Mrs. Darlene Kleinjan; Mrs. Anita Zuidhof; Mrs. Marja Van Dam; Mrs. Lisa Bailey; Mrs. Lin Luymes; Mrs. Sandy Ubels; Mrs. Vivian Kooyman; Mrs. Teresa TenHove; and Mrs. Gwen Luymes. I believe there's a bus driver with them, Mr. Nick Den Oudsten. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them also to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had the pleasure of being introduced to representatives from the past in this Legislature. I'd like to now take an opportunity to introduce to you and through you some of the future of this Legislature. It's with great pleasure that I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two grade 5 students who are challenging the best of us in their roles as minister and deputy minister for the day. Today Mr. Eric Taylor of Calgary is Alberta's Environment minister, and Miss Briana Raffael of Lac La Biche is Alberta Environment's deputy minister.

These students are in Edmonton as part of the minister-for-the-day program to brief me about their environmental concerns. I had the pleasure of meeting with them as well as 10 of their peers, who are serving as Alberta Environment's assistant deputy ministers today. With these students are their teachers. They have some strong ideas on what should be done to protect our environment and how each of us can take action in our own homes, schools, communities: lessons we all take to heart this Environment Week. These are our future environmental leaders, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the members of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some special guests representing one of the crown jewels of Alberta's cultural sector, the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. Now, this is a particularly personal introduction for me because I have a very long-time connection to the orchestra. My sister has played in the symphony since she was a young child in the 1960s, and she continues to play in the symphony now. I'm also a long-time season ticket holder along with my wife. The symphony is

Canada's fifth-largest professional orchestra. They have represented Alberta in Ottawa and at the Smithsonian in Washington, and they have always done this province proud. The Edmonton Symphony Orchestra plays a vital role in music education in this province, mentoring thousands of talented young musicians.

Today the people I am introducing are here to celebrate the appointment of a new managing director, Mr. Jay Katz, who is a new arrival to Alberta and to Edmonton. He brings many years of experience, and we wish him well. I would ask Mr. Katz to rise in the members' gallery. Joining Mr. Katz is the musical director of the symphony, otherwise known as the conductor, Mr. Bill Eddins, who I think has completed his second season and does a very exciting job leading the symphony. With Jay and Bill are a number of others, and I would ask them to rise: Steven LePoole, vice-chair, Edmonton Symphony Society; Marc Carnes, fund development manager; Melayne Shankel, publicist; Nora Bumanis, harpist; Susan Ekholm, viola; Stefan Jungkind, viola; John McPherson, trombone; Donald Plumb, French horn; Colin Ryan, cello; Chris Taylor, bass trombone; Jan Urke, double bass; and, of course, my sister, Rhonda Taft. Please give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms. Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some very special students that are joining us today from St. Joseph's high school in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. There are seven visitors today. They're accompanied by their teachers and group leaders, Ms. Gerry Dawson and Mrs. Cheryl Place. I would ask my constituents and the students from St. Joe's to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a number of people who are gathered today with regard to the seismic testing and activity on and around Marie Lake. The people here are Bethany Bekolay, Nickara Bekolay, Pat Bekolay, Hal Bekolay, Don Savard, Charlene Bekolay, Sheldon Bekolay, Roger L'Abbe, Genevieve L'Abbe, and Sebastien L'Abbe. I'd like them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour and pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my constituent Chris Goss, who raised the issue of seismic activity in and around the Marie Lake area, which is known to be the nesting ground for the American white pelican and blue heron. He's seated in the public gallery with a large group who has the same issue. I want to thank them all for coming to the Leg. I request him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions this afternoon. Firstly, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two people that I'm very proud to be associated with: Mr. Nigel and Mrs. Helen Aspeslet. They are volunteers at the Heritage Senior Stop-in Centre

in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, and I can assure you that that fine facility would not operate without the hard work of particularly Nigel. Nigel, it's interesting to note, was a recent nominee for the minister's seniors' service awards. Unfortunately, he wasn't one of the successful winners that were announced today, but he was very well deserving of being nominated. I would ask them both to please rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I did indicate that I have a second set of introductions as well.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you.

I also have a group of concerned citizens that are here today to hear their concerns raised about Marie Lake, and I would like to have them each rise as I name them and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly: Ms Sarah Murphy; Mr. Josh Brown; Ms Debra Pelechovsky; Ms Irene Thompson; Mr. Jim Thompson; Mr. Leon Lechasseur; an old friend from my days of making rubber stamps for the bridge branch at Alberta Transportation, Mr. Ian Lawson-Williams; Gail Cunningham; and Brandon Cunningham. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the following guests who have come to express their concerns over Marie Lake. When I've called all their names, would they please rise to receive the customary greeting from the hon. members of this House: Leila Darwish, Don Heigh, Robin Haugen, Brett Finch, Harold Faertritt, Joanne Douchet, Dean Woods, Anke Feifried, Neil Goeson, Hilda Goeson, Robert Gibeault, Joan Ross, Roy Bibeau, and Robina Sobey. Please rise and receive the greeting.

1:20

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly three strikers from the Palace Casino. The strike is now in its 271st day due to this government's refusal to pass first contract legislation. The names of the individuals are Marnie Kenworthy, Madelyn Tamag, and Daisy Hernandez. Marnie has been a dealer at the casino for three years. She is originally from the Philippines and came to Alberta in the year 2000. She's newly married and has spent most of the first year of her marriage on strike. She is also a guitarist. Madelyn has been at the Palace Casino for three years as a dealer. She is the mother of two boys who enjoy singing. Daisy has been at the Palace Casino for two years in the maintenance department. She has been married for 23 years, and she and her husband have two children, a 21-year-old boy and an 11-year-old daughter. Accompanying them is UFCW representative Don Crisall. I would now ask that Marnie, Madelyn, Daisy, and Don rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Environment Week

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For more than 30 years Canada's Environment Week has taken place the first week of June to coincide with World Environment Day. We should all have the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to take action for a healthier environment. Everyday actions make a difference, and Environment Week is the perfect time for Albertans to learn more about their environmentally sustainable practices. The more we understand environment issues, the more environmentally minded decisions we make.

Communities across the province are doing their part in hosting Environment Week activities, activities such as nature walks, community cleanups, recycling and hazardous waste roundups, and wetland education, Alberta's theme for Environment Week. There are many more activities that I can mention. The end result of each is a better understanding of environmental issues. Albertans are encouraged to contact their communities to find out how they can take part.

Protecting and conserving our environment starts with all of us in our own backyards, neighbourhoods, schools, offices, and communities this week, next week, and all year. We are all stewards of the environment. No action is too small to make a difference.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Minister's Seniors' Service Awards

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to several outstanding Albertans for their volunteer service and dedication to Alberta's seniors. More than 100 nominations were received for the 10th annual minister's seniors' service awards from across the province.

At Government House this evening the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports will recognize the six individuals and two organizations who have been selected as this year's award winners. They are Neva Brierley of Rocky Mountain House, who supports seniors and their families with chores by helping them in times of illness and grieving; Edward Eschak of Mannville, who makes his town a great place for seniors to live by fund raising and helping to organize recreation activities; Swati Fernando, who helps senior immigrants in Calgary with completing forms, going to appointments, and learning about health issues; Robert Thompson of Claresholm, who visits hospital patients and helps seniors at the local seniors' centre; Rose Hayes of Keoma, who was instrumental in obtaining funding for a seniors' club and who plans and invites town residents to events; and Gordon Heaton of Evansburg, who volunteered nearly a thousand hours to renovate and convert an old seniors' lodge into self-contained suites.

The two organizations receiving awards are Pioneer House Club 50 of Fort Saskatchewan, which has been supporting seniors through recreation programs, health clinics, and other activities for more than 30 years, and the Seniors Outreach in Brooks, where seniors can access specialized services such as Meals on Wheels, Lifeline, home supports, and transportation to appointments.

I'm proud to recognize the 2007 minister's seniors' service award winners for their commitment and service to Alberta's seniors.

More information about their accomplishments and the awards program is available on the Seniors and Community Supports website.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Chancellor Richard Davidson
Dr. John Gogo
Dr. Terry Royer

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, last week in Lethbridge, Thursday and Friday, we celebrated the convocation at the University of Lethbridge, and there were three people that were honoured over those two days that I would like to point out to all the members here in the House.

First, Richard Davidson, a lawyer in Lethbridge, part of the oldest law firm in Lethbridge, by the way, Davidson & Williams. Richard was inducted as the new chancellor for the University of Lethbridge.

Then on Friday afternoon it was a special event for me in the sense that two friends of mine received honorary doctorate degrees: John Gogo, a friend of many of the people in this House and a former MLA, and Terry Royer, a businessman currently out of Calgary but, of course, who grew up in Lethbridge.

I met Terry when I first moved to Lethbridge many years ago. In fact, we played hockey together. Terry went on to a very successful business career and also had a couple of terms as the chair of the board of governors of the University of Lethbridge.

John Gogo was a friend and a mentor as the former MLA for Lethbridge-West, first elected in 1975 and here until 1993. So we're very, very proud of John, and I believe that we'll hear a little more about him shortly.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that in these three men we have a lawyer, a politician, and a businessman all receiving honours, and despite what American pop culture might say about these professions, these are very honourable men in very honourable professions, and I want to say congratulations to all of them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, then.

Dr. John Gogo

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also congratulate Mr. Richard Davidson as the new chancellor for the University of Lethbridge and the recipients of the honorary doctorates but most specifically a former member and Deputy Speaker of this Assembly, John Gogo.

John was conferred with a doctorate of laws *honoris causa* from the University of Lethbridge on June 1, '07. Mr. Speaker, no candidate has been more deserving. John was honoured for his extraordinary service to humanity. John served his country as a sergeant in the Canadian forces from 1949 to '62, serving in the Korean War and Germany in the airborne artillery.

John served his province as an MLA from '75 to '93. His responsibilities included chair of AADAC, Deputy Speaker, minister of advanced education, and Deputy Government House Leader. His Bill 207, the Remembrance Day Act, was assented to on May 31, '84. Bill 207 ensures that Remembrance Day is observed in all schools.

John served his local community through his participation in many community associations. He was an adviser to community boards as well as to the average person on the street. John had a soft spot for the military cadet corps in Lethbridge.

John served his family. He is the father of five – Susan, Stephen, Sandra, Sharon, and Shannon – and is grandfather to 14 grandchildren. Every step of the way he has had the support of his wife,

Joyce. She is a strong, self-sustaining, talented woman, a great mom and gramma.

His work ethic was to be emulated. His integrity was to be emulated. He shared his knowledge, he listened, and he cared deeply. John was a political mentor to the present sitting members from both Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West, and I am very privileged by his friendship.

I ask this House to recognize one of ours, Dr. John Gogo.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Contribution to Premier's Leadership Campaign

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The unethical donation solicited by the Premier's top fundraisers is at odds with provincial regulation 75/92 and raises doubts about whether government decisions on funding and regulatory matters will be made fairly and objectively. There are critical public policy issues at stake, and Albertans have a right to some credible answers. To the Premier: on Monday the Premier claimed that the unethical donation was returned "upon receiving funds from this commission." Let's be clear. Funds were unethically solicited in August 2006. Funds were used to help the Premier get elected . . .

The Speaker: I'm afraid we're now to the response side.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, again I'm going to repeat: after Christmas when the campaign was complete, I had directed a team of volunteers – and, again, these are professionals in terms of being chartered accountants – to review all the donations. They found this one. They sent the money back. It went back. It's over and done with. In fact, I also said that if there were any others that were sent back – there was one other one that was brought to my attention. That was an offer made by a tobacco company, and of course that was rejected as well.

1:30

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, on Monday the Premier claimed, "I'm sure that the money was sent back. We didn't accept any money," which he has stated here today. One out of two may not be bad, but it's not good enough for a matter of ethics. The money was sent back, but the truth is: it was accepted, cashed, and used during his campaign. Is the Premier willing to correct the record of this House and admit that he did accept the money and that he used that money to help him win the leadership?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, it's not like there were hundreds of volunteers every day in the office watching every donation coming through. It was a small group of volunteers that assisted me but after the campaign made sure that the files were reviewed very carefully. This one in particular, although – and, again, I'm not a lawyer – it was said that it was legal, it was considered to be unethical, and the money was sent back.

Dr. Taft: Half a year passed between receiving the money and refunding it. On Monday the Premier tried to suggest that he was somehow required by FOIP to not disclose who his donors were, yet the commission has confirmed that they did not request their donation to be kept secret. To the Premier: if the commission did

not ask for it to be kept off the books and covered up, can the Premier tell us who did ask for this to be kept secret? It was used.

Mr. Stelmach: There were no donations as I said before. I said that I'd have the committee review if there were any donations from municipalities or other commissions. There are none that we would be not disclosing under FOIP because there weren't any donations received, period.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's explanations for unethical fundraising from a body established by this provincial government and subject to provincial regulation are simply not credible. The Premier is attempting to claim it was returned because it was unethical. The letter from the campaign team simply says that they no longer needed it. The Premier's desire for this issue to go away is getting in the way of public accountability. To the Premier: which is it? Will the Premier admit returning the money had nothing to do with ethics and everything to do with expediency?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, and to all the people watching, the process here is that I have media availability Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the two opposition leaders sit in there. They listen to the questions asked by the media. There were a few media members running around with a letter that they had. Again, very public. This was given to them by the Beaver regional association. It was a letter that was sent back. It was a very polite letter not saying that this is unethical, but you know: "Thank you so much for the donation. We've met our goal. Here's your money back. Thank you very much." This thing about six months coming up: that's perhaps been the volunteers' approach to the association.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The commission has revealed that other Tory leadership contenders also approached it for money. The Premier has confirmed that it was unethical to seek funds from a public body since such activity undermines the integrity of government funding and regulation. To the Premier: will the Premier direct his ministers to reveal which of them also approached this commission and any other public body for funds, which ministers and which public bodies, or will we have to question them one by one?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, he just indicated he has the information, so you don't have to question. Just stand up and give the names. You said that you have information from the commission that there were dollars given to other ministers. I'm not aware of it, but stand up and give the names of the ministers, and we'll follow the same policy, but give us the names.

Dr. Taft: They're your ministers, Mr. Premier.

The Premier has again blamed overzealous volunteers for a mistake that he's ultimately responsible for. That's not good enough. Running a government should mean that the Premier takes responsibility. To the Premier: if the Premier really believes soliciting these funds was unethical, why are two of the individuals who solicited the funds remaining on the executive of the PC Party? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know which officials he's

referring to. One of the things that they brought up is a serious allegation. The member says that he has evidence that ministers have received money from the commission. I suggest that he table that evidence right now – right now – because he said he has the evidence, so now's the best time. This is the second allegation that this member has made in the House. First of all, a secret deal, and we've been here now till day 40, I believe, today, still waiting for evidence of the secret deal. Another false allegation made, and he can't present the evidence.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Resource Development in Marie Lake Area

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today concerned residents of Marie Lake have presented a petition with 1,206 names in an attempt to save their pristine lake from harm. To recap, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development very quietly sold the mineral rights under Marie Lake without any consultation and now is considering allowing disruptive seismic testing. This will have adverse effects on the aquatic and the environment. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: will you initiate a full public consultation regarding the proposed seismic testing on Marie Lake?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I regret to say that once again the hon. member has his facts wrong. Sustainable Resource Development does not sell mineral leases or dispositions. That's done by the Ministry of Energy. But as I've said many times before in this House, we're simply following the process. The Liberals that used to govern this province a hundred years ago understood that. The exploration process comes first. The development process comes second. We're in the exploration process right now. There'll be at least two more opportunities for public participation, intervenor input before the environmental impact assessment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, section 41, requires by law a full environmental impact assessment if "potential environmental impacts of a proposed activity warrant further consideration." This is a law, and it must be followed. You were asked the question before. We didn't get an answer, so we'll try again today. To the Minister of Environment: will you commit right now to conducting a comprehensive environmental impact assessment on any proposed seismic testing or drilling activity on or under Marie Lake?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again his facts don't exactly equate with reality. I've indicated on a number of occasions that should an application for development of the resources under this lake go forward, an environmental impact assessment will be required. As of today's date no such application has come forward, so for that reason an environmental impact assessment is not necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are wondering if everything is for sale in order to get the money here. Recently Albertans have weighed in with their thoughts on some extremely

important issues, only to be ignored. On affordable housing, climate change Albertans have been ignored. Marie Lake is a beautiful jewel in Alberta, and industrial activity will have adverse effects that cannot be reversed or fixed. The people around Marie Lake and, no doubt, Cold Lake and Bonnyville do not want this area damaged. To the Premier: will the Premier commit right now on behalf of his government to deny permission for testing or further development on Marie Lake if the majority of affected members of the public are opposed? Will you listen to them, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this question was raised April 4 in the House with respect to Marie Lake, and I said that no development will occur on Marie Lake until the questions are answered. That does include any new relevant concerns that are raised either in the House or by members of the public.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Bitumen Exports

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. During the Tory leadership race the Premier along with a number of other candidates for the leadership of the Conservative Party promised to do something about the growing export of unprocessed bitumen from this province. In fact, the Premier likened it to scraping off the topsoil on the family farm and then selling it. He promised that he would take measures to reduce the amount of unprocessed bitumen exported from this province, yet there's a dramatic increase, and there's another plan from Exxon and Enbridge to pipe Alberta bitumen all the way to Houston. It was announced yesterday. My question is to the Premier. What have you done since you've become the Premier of this province to reduce the amount of bitumen that is being exported to the United States?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this same question was asked the day before by the same member. We are of course moving in a positive direction in terms of adding value to bitumen. As I said in the same answer to the hon. member, there are many things to consider. One of them is working with the environment. Second is having the people in place to build the plants. There are other considerations in terms of housing. We do process about 65 per cent of the bitumen, and we want to increase that more because the taxes paid on the added value will be paid here in Alberta as opposed to leaving and being paid in some other jurisdictions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, yesterday at the NEB hearings on the Keystone pipeline the vice-president of TransCanada PipeLines admitted that he doesn't even know how much bitumen will be shipped south through that pipeline. He says that that will be up to the oil companies. My question is to the Premier. How much bitumen will be shipped through the Keystone pipeline and the Alberta Clipper pipeline, and does the Premier believe that that's okay? Has the Premier done anything to limit the export of unprocessed bitumen out of this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, his member sitting behind him in this House said: we must have absolute – absolute – reduction in emissions. He is a leader saying: no, we've got to add more upgrading, create more emissions. I just ask: "Where are you as a

party? Do you want absolute reduction in emissions?" Fine. If we want to do this in a very pragmatic, thoughtful way in terms of finding the balance with the environment, we have to hold those discussions with the various companies that want to invest in the province of Alberta, look at all the environmental concerns, labour, and housing.

Mr. Mason: You know, I had a little trouble following that logic, Mr. Speaker. The Premier seems to be saying that if we export it and it's upgraded somewhere else, then we don't have to be responsible for the emissions, or something to that effect. But in any event, he completely avoided the question because he has done nothing since he's become the Premier to keep his promise to reduce the amount of bitumen that is exported from this province in an unprocessed form. My question to the Premier is: why haven't you kept your promise?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is one area where we are working very diligently in terms of increasing the amount of bitumen processed in the province of Alberta. I didn't say that I was going to work to decrease the amount. I said that I want to increase as much of the value adding of bitumen as possible. But, again, here's a good example. Here's another member in the House saying that we should now, in order to find this balance in environment, take Alberta money, send it out of this province, maybe invest it in China or in Russia, and buy offsets so that we can keep polluting more in our province. This is the kind of flip-flop on so many of these policies that we've heard over the last number of months. You don't know where they are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Resource Development in Marie Lake Area

(continued)

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. OSUM Corporation has applied for seismic testing on leases they have purchased from the Alberta government at Marie Lake, in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency. A large portion of the land area which will use explosive charges for seismic testing was identified as an environmental protection area by a ministerial order back in April 1988. This order restricts activities which may have a negative impact on the surrounding area. To the Minister of Energy: as part of this lease is in the environmental protection area, will he cancel the land purchase agreement with OSUM Corporation?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, no, I won't. The mineral rights that were sold to OSUM were sold in accordance with the province's Cold Lake integrated resource plan, and cancelling a lease at this particular point in time would be inappropriate. The Cold Lake subregional integrated resource plan was approved in 1996, and it directed that Marie Lake be managed for recreation and ecological value. However, the same plan also directs that mineral activities might occur at Marie Lake where environmental issues can be properly addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that back in 1992 an application for seismic testing on Lake Wabamun was refused by the government of Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the

minister tell me why that application was refused, and can that precedent be used to refuse OSUM corporation's application for seismic testing at Marie Lake?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the application for seismic testing at Lake Wabamun was rejected in 1996 because the company involved did not address all of the concerns this ministry had about the effects of its testing. However, I'd point out that this is very much the exception, not the rule. Since 2002 seismic activity has been approved on 23 lakes, and in fact in one of those lakes, Lake Newell, the fish have done so well that now it's on the draw system for walleye. Sustainable Resource Development is working with OSUM corporation. We've conveyed our concerns to them and are waiting for answers. When we get all the answers we want, when we get the information, we'll make an appropriate decision at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In answering my question on April 4, the Premier assured Albertans that prior to any oil sands development on Marie Lake it was critical to maintain the quality of life for the residents of Marie Lake and to absolutely protect the environment. Scientific evidence would have to satisfy the protection of the environment and the people living around the lake. However, hundreds of scientific questions asked by the residents remain unanswered. My question is to the Premier. Will his government hire an independent seismic research group to review OSUM corporation's seismic proposal and evaluate the risk of environmental damage to Marie Lake if this seismic project is to proceed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, earlier today I received a petition that was handed to me by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I believe that 1,292 people had signed the petition. I remain committed to the position that I took earlier today, that no oil development will occur in Marie Lake until all of the relevant information is presented. We have two ministers responsible that will bring this information forward. To whatever degree they have to evaluate the information, I'm sure that they'll do it appropriately, and then we'll await those results when that information comes to our government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Calgary Concerns

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As MLAs our first loyalty must be to our constituents. Calgary Conservative MLAs' subjugation to their party has consistently trumped constituents' concerns, as evidenced by their *Hansard* voting record. Whether it is public transportation, affordable housing, environmental protection, or school maintenance and construction, this Conservative government has failed Calgarians. To the Minister of Education: why has this government presided over an entire generation of such neglect that Calgary school boards now face infrastructure deficits of over half a billion dollars and 40 communities are without schools?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, shortly we'll be in a position to announce some initiatives relative to school construction in Calgary. I would like to say, however, that I was pleased to see that the Calgary public board last night came forward with a balanced budget and was happy with the funds that they are going forward with.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many seniors in Calgary are the most vulnerable to the excessive rent increases some landlords have made. Their fixed incomes cannot stretch that far. This government has been blind to their plight. To the minister of seniors: why did the government refuse to implement temporary rent caps to assist seniors in Calgary on a fixed income who want to maintain homes in the city but cannot afford the disproportionate rent increases?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we had a lengthy debate in this Legislature about rent controls, and we certainly could go into that further, but I would want to point out that this province has one of the most generous programs of seniors' assistance of anywhere in this country. [interjections] We do. You can mention about how we've redesigned our programs to assist those in the greatest of need. They weren't meant to be universal, but we are looking towards those seniors in the greatest of need. How can we help and assist them in the future? We will continue to ensure that our programs are targeted to help those in need as they require.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. On June 12 I'm sure a number of those seniors will be out to vote.

We Calgarians appreciate the wonder of our location. We also love living in the natural beauty of the Rocky Mountain foothills, but that natural beauty is under government-sanctioned threat in the form of clear-cutting in protected and sensitive areas. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why won't the minister protect our Calgary watershed, wildlife refuge, and recreational areas from the devastating effects of clear-cutting? How does his action or inaction contribute to Calgarians' quality of life and environmental sustainability?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, my ministry is protecting the inhabitants of Calgary and all of Alberta on a sustainable forestry basis. I'd be happy to take the Member for Calgary-Varsity down to examine some of the forestry plots I've visited in the last week and show him. Where pine beetle sets in, you get the worst reforestation of all. I'd be very happy to take the member and show him with his own eyes, and he would stop making these accusations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Violence in Licensed Premises

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of violence in and around bars and nightclubs has many Albertans concerned. The government held two round-table sessions and released a report with a variety of recommendations. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. As a result of the round-table sessions conducted by the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission and the Solicitor General, what action is the government taking to address violence?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government takes

the issue of violence in and around licensed premises very seriously. The round-table summary report, released last year, included numerous recommendations. We have been working on these recommendations, and I'm pleased to update you on these activities. First of all, we're doing research to identify regulatory and operational best practices that we know will make a difference. We're going to be doing a public awareness campaign aimed at bar patrons. It's being developed. A security/door staff training module will be added to the current Alberta server intervention program this fall.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. You've mentioned a public education campaign to address violence. Haven't we seen similar campaigns from the city of Edmonton and others? How will this campaign be different?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are currently developing a provincial public education campaign specifically targeting young males aged 18 to 24. The campaign focuses on getting people to think beyond the heat of the moment and to be aware of some of the triggers and avoid getting into a fight or other confrontation. We're looking at a variety of materials and ways to best reach this audience, including drinking establishments, liquor stores, TV, and movie theatres.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. The idea of mandatory training for security and door staff in licensed establishments has been discussed for years. Can you tell me more about what is being done on this?

Mr. Lindsay: As I stated previously, the security staff training module will be available this fall. This module will be added to the existing Alberta server intervention program. Since 2004 this program has trained over 18,000 servers about the responsible and safe serving of alcohol. The security training module will cover many topics, including communication skills, screening patrons, crowd control, defusing conflict, and intervening with intoxicated individuals. The curriculum will be developed in consultation with industry, licensees, and police agencies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Electricity Generation and Demand

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The EUB report released yesterday is a testament to the failure of electricity deregulation. It confirms the worst about electricity deregulation. Unfortunately, we are now locked into permanently high prices for electricity due to this government's incompetence. I am very disappointed that the Premier is showing no leadership on this issue, and the Minister of Energy is in a total state of denial. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that the government has bragged for years that electricity deregulation would increase our electricity generation capacity, why was there a net loss of 330 megawatts of electricity generation capacity in 2006 in this province?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I am in a state of denial with respect to answering such a ridiculous question. The truth of the matter is that there is no deregulation in the province of Alberta. Every part of the electrical industry in this province is regulated. The systems that are in place with respect to transmission, with respect to distribution, and with respect to the retail part of the electrical business are completely regulated, and there are at least as many or perhaps more regulations on the generation side. What we've done, of course, was to open up the generation of electricity in the province of Alberta to a market-driven system. It has been a complete success. Four thousand additional megawatts . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was a valid question but a ridiculous answer from the hon. minister.

Now, the EUB's 2007 through to 2016 outlook notes that "over the next year, very little will be added to Alberta's generation capacity, while demand is expected to increase by 3 per cent." This means that electricity prices will be higher while we struggle to meet our power needs. Again to the Minister of Energy: how many more blackouts will Albertans experience over the next year? Is this a benefit of deregulation?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again a ridiculous question. I don't actually recall where we've had blackouts other than a natural disturbance that took down some transmission systems. There are no blackouts that are relative to the restructured electrical industry.

Mr. Speaker, on the idea that we will have no additional electrical generation in the province of Alberta, we have a program in place, \$239 million, in the biofuel/biogenesis piece of the business in the province of Alberta. We're going to have 1,800 megawatts of additional power, hopefully, that people are looking at with respect to hydro generation. We have in front of us, according to the same group of people, 7,000 megawatts of additional power that will come to the province of Alberta soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Am I to assume that the hon. minister thinks that this EUB report is totally wrong and that it's incomplete given that they indicate in there that the average wholesale price for electricity through to 2016 will be over 9 cents per kilowatt hour? How does this minister expect consumers to have that added onto their bill and be satisfied with electricity deregulation?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is not my position as I stand here to allow or disallow the hon. member from assuming anything. If we publish information that's very direct, very concise, and, in fact, accurate, he can assume whatever he likes.

The truth of the matter is that what we've done is we have allowed the people of Alberta to see the cost of energy for what it is. We have absolutely zero, no public debt with respect to our system. This system is: use energy; pay for what you use. That's just a go-forward basis for us. We believe that it's the correct way. We do not want to leave debts to our children and grandchildren on the back of energy that we consume.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Long-term and Continuing Care

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, concerns are being raised about the future of continuing care in Alberta. Some seniors are seeing long-term care spaces in their communities replaced with supportive living. They are wondering what this means for the level of care offered to residents. My constituents are also wondering if this is just the government's way of saving a few dollars. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Why is the government moving towards providing more supportive living and less long-term care?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, one of the great things that is happening is that seniors are not just growing in numbers but are living longer, healthier, and are more active. It's changing the way we need to respond to the services we provide for seniors. We shouldn't just provide a one-model, hospitalized type of nursing care facility. We're responding to what seniors are asking for. How can they, first and foremost, live in their own homes? How can we provide the services to where they are, not just build them a different place where they'd rather not be? In respect to assistive living, not everybody wants to be in an institutional hospital setting. They can provide different levels of care in a different facility without it having to be called long-term care.

2:00

Mrs. Jablonski: To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what is the government doing to ensure that long-term care will remain locally available to those seniors who have high health care needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It should be said that the article that I think the hon. member is referring to was written by a member of Public Interest Alberta. I really appreciate people who want to engage the public interest in discussion of necessary issues, but they should get the facts right, and they did not in that particular article.

Let me be clear. There's no move to change the structure of funding of continuing care services. Albertans who require continuing care services will get the services that they need in the most appropriate setting. This includes long-term care where necessary. As the minister of seniors said, there is a spectrum of continuing care which goes to supporting seniors in their own home if that's their choice and, if that's appropriate, in lodges, assistive living, and yes, long-term care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My last question again is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Are there plans in place to privatize Alberta's continuing care system?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, this isn't about a change in direction: privatizing or not. We do support what seniors really do want: to own their own private home, to stay in their own private home, support services in their own private home. When it comes to other facilities, we've always supported a mix of public and private facilities. Since 1999 we've supplied funding that built over 4,200 additional units of supportive living. It's because of both the public and the private sectors that we're able to supply the spaces for the seniors when they need it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Protection for Persons in Care

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Abuse of vulnerable Albertans is a serious problem. The 2005-06 Protection for Persons in Care annual report reveals that the overall number of complaints of abuse increased by 5 per cent to 818, and complaints of bodily harm increased by 22 per cent over the last year. There were almost a hundred complaints from nursing homes and hospitals that facilities were failing to provide the necessities of life. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: will the minister legislate a resident bill of rights outlining the treatment and care that residents should expect from Alberta's continuing care facilities?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of work. The hon. member has worked also on the continuing care standards. We've implemented much work this past year, effective April 1 of this year, to implement new standards, a higher level of standards to ensure that there is an appropriate level of care. But it's also been, the facility has mentioned, that complaints can – sometimes there are mistakes. We want to ensure that there is a facility for people to come forward, that there is enforcement of some type if there is any abuse. None of those things will be tolerated. We want to ensure that seniors and all people are cared for, and if there are mistakes and we hear about them, then we'll enforce those mistakes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister almost answered my second question as well, but I'd like to put it to him again. Often the investigations result in recommendations, but there's actually no enforcement to make sure that those recommendations are met. Would he put measures in place so that the protection for persons in care office actually has the authority to enforce compliance with the recommendations?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the protection of persons in care, the enforcement: a very valid issue. We have to ensure not only that we have standards and laws but that we have the ability to enforce infractions when they do occur. Those are things which we are looking at. There are many ways that we can cause enforcement, not just through that piece of legislation. There are many other laws and many other ways that we can ensure that people are protected and safe.

Ms Pastoor: Results of the satisfaction survey indicated that there was a very low level of satisfaction with the time that was taken to complete the complaint and the investigation process. Given that the budget for the protection for persons in care office did not receive an increase this year, how is the minister going to reduce the length of the process?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question. I'm not certain of any of the specifics. As to the length of time increasing, that is something that I'd be happy to follow up and ensure that there is timeliness. That's one of the other aspects that I would fully support. We have to ensure that when people bring forward complaints, they can get a timely response and a timely investigation to ensure that their issues are attended to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Public/Private Partnerships for School Construction

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, we have an infrastructure deficit dealing with schools. We hear that there are going to be some announcements about new schools, especially in Calgary, but we know from the Nova Scotia experience with P3 schools that they result in nothing but problems: poor custodial services, less money for field trips, less access to gymnasiums after hours, you name it. The P3 school scheme put in place under a Liberal government in Nova Scotia was so bad that even the Conservatives had to shut them down. My question is to the Minister of Education. [interjections] I've got them moving here. Given the sordid history of P3 schools in this country, why is this minister . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would agree that probably if it was implemented by the Liberals, there would be a lot of problems, so we won't follow that method. I would just ask the hon. member not to jump to any conclusions as to what we're going to announce. When we do, I will have that discussion with him.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, after the announcement is a little late for the discussion. We're trying to help you from making a major mistake here.

A P3 school will be run like a private business. One of the first things they'll do is contract out services. There's a study here in the Edmonton public that shows what a disaster that would be. Again to the same minister: why is he so determined to push through P3s when all the evidence indicates that they don't work very well dealing with schools?

Mr. Liepert: I can only repeat, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member is making some assumptions, and I don't know where he's getting his facts from. I haven't said any of what he's just been talking about. I'd ask him to wait till we come up with a plan, and then we'll talk about it.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I've seen this minister in this House talk about P3s. Is he now saying that he's seen the light and he's moving away from P3s and that we're going to do it by traditional funding? Is that what he's saying?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I've consistently said in this House that we're going to look at innovative, alternative, creative ways of getting schools built where kids live, and that's still what we're going to do. When we unveil what we have planned, then we'll be happy to have that debate. I'm not going to get into a debate on a bunch of hypothetical garbage that may or may not be true.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Calgary Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the population of Calgary grew by a record 36,000 people. That's about 100 persons a day. And last July Calgary joined the club of cities of 1 million. From a small town called Cowtown to a metropolis of 1 million people in less than 10 decades. Now, I've been told that the cities

of Paris and London took 1,800 years to get to that level. In 2006 Calgary also broke the record for construction values, more than \$1 billion, higher than Toronto and double that of Edmonton. My question to the minister . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. That's it. [interjection] That's it. Please. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm very much anticipating what he was going to ask me today. It was about funding to help Calgary deal with their infrastructure. The city of Calgary will receive about \$95 million this year, which is based on the city getting 5 cents per litre for road fuel sold within the city limits. The city can use this funding for public transit capital purchases if they wish. Calgary will also receive \$177 million this year . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. Now we'll go on to part 2.

2:10

Mr. Cao: Thank you. From the usage of the light rail transit in Calgary, the boarding every day is 260,000 persons. To follow the answer from the minister: what is our provincial funding to help light rail transit in Calgary?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, there are a number of different levels of funding that we have: the \$95 million from the transportation fund, the \$177 million for the municipal infrastructure program. The city may use this funding for capital purchases, whether it's for C-Train systems such as a new rail line or new cars or new stations. What's key is the city's decision on how much of this funding it wants to use for a light rail transit system. There's also \$71 million that comes from the new deals for communities . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps due to a misunderstanding of mixed messages some of my constituents expressed concern about the construction of the existing LRT extension in the northeast and northwest of Calgary that they started a couple of years ago. They had to stop because of lack of provincial funding. Can the minister clarify that?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, despite a lot of talk lately about strings attached to provincial funding and grant programs, all of the programs I mentioned earlier have very, very few strings attached, if any. Really, we've always tried to help all municipalities, but never have we gone out and planned or said we would pay for their internal transit systems. We do that by way of grants. I just think that Calgary has to decide for themselves what their priorities are, and we support that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on high-tech research facilities at our universities. The University of Alberta has certainly benefited in this regard. At the same time, undergraduate arts and sciences students still attend classes in old, sometimes poorly

maintained buildings, not the new shiny monuments that are sprouting up across the campus. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: would the minister agree that arts and humanities students across the province, who make up the bulk of the student population, have been overlooked as the government rushes to build high-tech, high-profile facilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It hasn't been in the past the department's responsibility to set the priorities at each institution for their capital expansions or the needs-based analysis that they're doing individually. What we are doing right now – and the hon. member heard me say this in estimates – is that we are preparing a province-wide needs analysis for all of those academic and those curriculum areas based on what the student requirements are, based on what societal and industry requirements are as well as where Campus Alberta needs to go for infrastructure and capital. We're preparing that capital plan as a total provincial plan.

Mr. Tougas: Well, Mr. Speaker, most students do not get access to the high-end research buildings. They do, however, pay the indirect costs of the operation because universities and colleges have to pay for maintenance from base funding, the funding intended for facilities and programs for all students. In 2005-06 the shortfall at the University of Alberta alone was an estimated \$110 million. Will the minister commit to funding all of the indirect costs of the research labs at Alberta's postsecondary institutions so that base operating funding is not used to make up the gap?

Mr. Horner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we don't set a lot of the priorities within the individual budgets of the institutions. I might also add that it may be a little bit off to say that the students are subsidizing other areas of the university when we're paying 70 per cent of what it costs to educate those students in most of those fields.

Dr. Taft: Baloney.

Mr. Horner: Well, do your math, hon. member.

The other thing that I would add to that, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor, and this is not a grocery store where we're asking the meat clerk to provide something.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, on the funding formula side I've said in this House in the past that based on the roles, responsibilities, and mandate framework that we're bringing forward collaboratively with all of the other postsecondary institutions, we intend to take a look at the funding.

Mr. Tougas: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a desperate need for improvement in the student/faculty ratio at the U of A. Again, because of insufficient base funding over too many years, this ratio has steadily increased. In the early 1980s the ratio was 12 to 1. Today it stands at an overall average of 24 to 1. In the social sciences and humanities it can be as high as 40 to 1. To the same minister: does the minister believe that a university student is getting a quality education with a student/faculty ratio of 40 to 1?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the faculty ratio is one aspect of quality in our institutions. I would suggest to the hon. member that the

quality of our postsecondary institutions is very, very good. That would be referenced by many of the studies and reports that have been put out by national accreditation agencies.

As it relates to the ratio, Mr. Speaker, again in our roles and responsibilities framework that we're putting forward with all of the postsecondaries in a collaborative fashion, we're talking about how transferability within the total system may allow some of those institutions to increase that ratio. Some of the students have better opportunities in other institutions. We're going to look at it from the students' perspective to ensure quality, accessibility, and managing the growth pressures that we have in the system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Deer Overpopulation

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Some of my constituents and, in fact, people that I've talked to from other areas of Alberta as well are concerned about the excessive deer populations in specific spots in the area and the problems they bring with them. In fact, my wife, who is probably my most important constituent, is extremely upset, having to continually chase them off our property after they've eaten her flowers, her bulbs, and her vegetables. What is your ministry, Mr. Minister, going to be doing to help curb these higher than normal deer populations in this and other areas of Alberta during this hunting season?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I recommend that the hon. member, when it comes to his own backyard, perhaps assist his wife in dealing with that particular deer. But for the rest of the province I'm happy to report that the number of deer licences that are being issued is very high. We estimate last year 78,000 general licences and another 29,000 special draws. Some of these are accompanied by multiple tags. We haven't done the final deer count this year, but we anticipate something similar this year. If we see excessive populations in a particular area, we can give multiple tags.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. In southeast Alberta there used to be a three-week season that quite some time ago was changed to four weekends of three days each. There has been some talk of changing this back to a full season again. Mr. Minister, will you be looking at expanding the three-day hunting seasons, as I mentioned, to allow hunters more time for their hunting trips?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the three-day hunting season, which is common for the deer hunting season in the southern parts of Alberta, was brought in to strike an appropriate balance between the interests of the deer hunters and also the agricultural landowners. Striking this balance is critical. On the three days, we don't have any intention at the moment to change that. It strikes an appropriate balance. It gives ample hunting opportunities for the hunters and ensures that landowners for four days of the week don't have . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is also to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. There was a recent announcement of Sunday hunting this year in the Cold

Lake and Bonnyville areas. What about Sunday hunting opportunities for hunters in other areas of Alberta?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, there are already ample Sunday hunting opportunities in the province. Most of northern Alberta for many years has had Sunday hunting. This coming season we have added the WMUs 501 and 258, that are adjacent to Cold Lake and St. Paul, to the Sunday hunting areas. These changes were based on information and feedback we got from the local fish and game associations and also the MDs and counties. At the moment we don't have any intention to expand Sunday hunting in southern and central Alberta, but if this is of interest to landowners and hunters in southern and central Alberta, they should let us know.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 84 questions and answers today.

We are now going to revert to the Routine.

head: 2:20

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: Today is June 6, a very important day in our history. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

D-Day Anniversary

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, June 6, marks the anniversary of a pivotal event in world history, the D-Day invasion of occupied Europe by Allied forces. Canadian troops joined the Allies from Great Britain and America in the greatest seaborne invasion in history. In the early hours of June 6, 1944, Canadians assaulted Juno Beach, one of the five Normandy beachheads. Over 14,000 valiant Canadian soldiers from all parts of Canada attacked Hitler's fortress Europe, assisted by 10,000 sailors of the Royal Canadian Navy. Another 450 men were dropped behind enemy lines by parachute and glider.

The attack on Juno Beach was a brilliant success but not without cost. In the first six days of battle 1,017 Canadian men died. Canadian casualties in the next 10 weeks of the Normandy campaign were more than 18,000, including over 5,000 dead. Over the following year Canadians, by land, sea, and air, continued to play a major role in the campaigns to liberate Europe from the monstrous tyranny of the Nazi regime. By war's end well over a million Canadians and Newfoundlanders had enlisted in our armed forces, and more than 45,000 had died in the gallant service of their country.

Mr. Speaker, it is appropriate for us to remember on this anniversary of D-Day all those who have served and those who continue to serve in Canada's armed forces in defence of our values of freedom and democracy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Youth Emergency Shelter

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to celebrate the Youth Emergency Shelter. April 20, 2007, marked the 25th anniversary of the Youth Emergency Shelter Society, or YESS. In that time the organization has assisted over 20,000 youth in crisis.

Their mission is to give youth at risk a chance and provide opportunities for youth and families to become confident and self-reliant. YESS provides residential care, support services, education, and training to those youth who, for various reasons, don't have the benefit of a warm and secure home. Otherwise, these children

would have to fend for themselves as they face the perils of the street.

Despite the enormous challenges that the staff and volunteers face in delivering these programs, the Youth Emergency Shelter manages to raise almost half of its \$2.4 million annual budget through various fundraising activities and events, such as Homeless for a Night, their annual golf tournament, and their annual winter campaign, which usually runs between December 1 and January 15.

This year the Edmonton-McClung constituency team is proud to support the Youth Emergency Shelter. On June 24 our third annual McClung community barbecue will be held in partnership with the Willowby Community League, with all proceeds going to support YESS and its important work. Representatives from YESS will also be on hand to answer questions and to collect cash donations. We will also help them collect items such as clothing, toiletries, and sports equipment, which are always in high demand.

Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that services such as this are needed, but we should be proud of the great work that the Youth Emergency Shelter Society does in assisting these youth in crisis. As we all know, being a teenager can be a difficult and confusing time, and when it seems like no one is there to help, the Youth Emergency Shelter has been a comforting resource to turn to. They have been extremely successful in helping young people to reach their full potential.

I would like to congratulate the board members, staff, and volunteers on reaching this important milestone. Happy 25th birthday, sincere thanks, and best wishes for another quarter century of commitment and service.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 1,206 signatures from residents of Alberta.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to immediately conduct a comprehensive environmental impact assessment and initiate full public consultations regarding the proposed seismic testing on Marie Lake, and to deny permission for testing or further development if possible adverse effects are identified or the majority of affected members of the public are opposed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ninety-four more signatures on the petition which reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that I'll submit here. It's signed by residents of Strathcona and Sherwood Park constituencies as well as others in the capital region. They're urging the government to introduce legislation to suspend a graduated driver's licence if the driver is involved in a serious accident.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) to advise the Assembly that we will be accepting written questions 15 and 16. I give notice that motions for returns 7 and 8 will be dealt with on Monday, June 11, 2007. There being no additional written questions or motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings concerning Calgary infrastructure and transportation, which I will briefly summarize. The first is a letter from Bill Wilson of Wheatland Developments Ltd. expressing concern over the lack of public consultation regarding changing the design criteria for the Calgary northeast link of the ring road. Among a series of specific transparency and accountability failings Bill notes that transparency and accountability . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, let's give the name of the person, three words describing it, table it, and we're moving on.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My second tabling is a detailed letter from Rob Lerouge expressing concern about Calgary's worsening affordable housing crisis. Rob emphasizes that "leaving the supply of housing to market forces does not work when many jobs remain open do not pay a living wage."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling seven more letters from Albertans who are angered by this government's unwillingness to sit down and negotiate with teachers to resolve their unfunded pension liability.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of a letter from Bob Borreson. Mr. Borreson is very concerned about the export of raw bitumen to be refined outside of Alberta. This plan, he feels, does not benefit Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of tablings from my constituent Chris Goss. He's concerned about seismic testing in and around Marie Lake and damage to the habitat and food stock of a variety of fish, mammals, and birds.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Insurance Act the Alberta Automobile Insurance Rate Board annual report for the year ended December 31, 2006.

On behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-

McClung on May 28, 2007, Department of Justice and Attorney General 2007-08 main estimates debate; responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for West-Yellowhead on May 30, 2007, Department of Justice and Attorney General 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, response to a question raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly Clareview on June 5, 2007, Department of Infrastructure and Transportation 2007-08 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During question period – and I'd like to have it on record – we had the opportunity to see a group that came from the Holy Family school in Grimshaw. They did come in. They observed question period and now have left. They were 10 visitors from Grimshaw. Grimshaw is a community in my constituency that's 500 kilometres northwest of here. They were accompanied by Charlie Bouchard and Mrs. Tracy Zweifel. Certainly, I just wanted to acknowledge that they were here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you six bright and shining representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who I see in the members' gallery today. They are serving two years on a mission. They interrupt their education. They work and pay for their own missions and go all over the world. These particular missionaries could be from anywhere in the world. I know, I've had three sons serve missions. I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-North West has also had a son serve. I'd like to introduce you to them. If they come to a door near you, remember that they like to eat. Their names are Elder Ruiz, Elder Johansen, Elder Parry, Sister Boren, Sister Walker, and Elder Walker. Could I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: 2:30

Orders of the Day

head:

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the Committee of Supply to order.

head:

Main Estimates 2007-08

The Chair: The time allocated: the first hour and a half will be to the Official Opposition, the next half hour will be for the ND opposition, and the last hour will be for any member in the Assembly.

Executive Council

The Chair: We will start by inviting the hon. Premier to give his opening presentation.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's once again a pleasure to be able to present estimates. I missed it last year because I resigned from cabinet, but it's great to be here presenting the estimates for Executive Council.

Mr. Chairman and all hon. members, I'm pleased to appear before this committee to discuss the 2007-10 Executive Council budget estimates and business plan. I'd like to first introduce from my office the staff who are with me today, the small team of political staff, who are led by Chief of Staff Ron Glen. Though he's unable to be with us here today, I'd like to recognize Ron Hicks, who is our Deputy Minister of Executive Council, who oversees the public service. On the public service side of my office and with me today are Paul Whittaker, deputy secretary to cabinet; Marcia Nelson, deputy chief of policy co-ordination; Leanne Stangeland, who is the managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau; and, of course, Elaine Dougan, executive director of corporate services. Some of my staff are also up in the gallery, including Jordon Copping, my executive assistant; Paul Stanway, director of communications; and Tom Olsen, director of media relations.

Before I get into some of the details on Executive Council's estimates and business plan, I'd like to touch on what I see as my role as Premier and how crucial it is that Executive Council help me fulfill that role.

I've said before and will repeat today that governing is a privilege; it's not a right. It's a privilege that I take very seriously. As Premier of Alberta, I lead a government that has wide-ranging responsibilities. I see my role as threefold, and those three pieces are the cornerstones that make up Executive Council. First, as a government we need to identify what our agenda and priorities are for government. Second, I need to manage the machinery of government, so to speak. It's vital we have a good decision-making process in place. Third, we need to communicate those decisions and priorities back to Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, my remarks today will include a brief fiscal overview of 2007-08 followed by some details on upcoming initiatives from the business plan. Executive Council spending for 2008 is forecast at \$23.2 million. When the transfer of corporate internal audit services to Treasury Board is taken into account, this represents a \$1.6 million increase from last year.

The increase is dedicated to three main areas: \$1 million, the larger part, will cover the cost of the board governance task force and supporting team, \$500,000 in additional funds will allow the policy co-ordination office to meet the increased demand and need for strategic policy development and co-ordination, and salary increases matching those allocated across government make up the balance of the increase.

I'd like now to offer an overview of Executive Council's program areas and priorities as outlined in the business plan. My offices here in the Legislature include communications and correspondence and the McDougall Centre in Calgary; the deputy minister's office, which provides advice and support to the Premier on policy and organizational issues and leadership to the Alberta public service, cabinet co-ordination and support; the policy co-ordination office; the Board Governance Review Task Force Secretariat; the protocol office; and administrative support for the office of the Lieutenant Governor and the Alberta Order of Excellence Council and the Public Affairs Bureau.

Executive Council has outlined the following strategic priorities in the '07-10 business plan. The first is to establish a board governance review to provide recommendations on how the government can improve its transparency, its accountability, and governance of its agencies, boards, and commissions; develop democratic reforms that include opportunities for all-party commit-

tees to work together; strengthen policy support and facilitate enhanced policy development capacity; implement a strategic communications plan for government; and implement a corporate communications policy for government.

These priorities are in line with Executive Council's focus on promoting government-wide achievement of the five priorities I set out when I became Premier. For example, we have made great strides on the priority of governing with integrity and transparency. We now regularly post ministerial expenses and flight information on the government website. We have implemented democratic reforms, which include fixed sittings of the Legislature, a fixed budget date, and all-party field committees. We still have much more to do, and we will continue to move forward in the next year.

Another important commitment that I made was to conduct a review of government agencies, boards, and commissions. As you may know, there are about 130 agencies, boards, and commissions in the province that manage over 50 per cent of government spending. This review, conducted by three task force members, is focused on helping these entities provide better governance, fiscal responsibility, and accountability processes for the programs and services they provide Albertans. The budget for carrying out this important review is estimated at a million dollars to cover staff expenses, remuneration, travel, and other associated costs.

Now, the policy co-ordination office is the next piece of Executive Council that I would like to talk to you about. It plays a key role in providing long-term strategic planning, promoting effective co-ordination of cross-ministry initiatives and other strategic initiatives. This year their mandate has expanded to support the identification and implementation of government policies, support decision-makers by ensuring that they have the best possible information on which to make decisions, and to promote a corporate cross-ministry approach to policy development that is aligned with government priorities. The funding increase of \$500,000 for the policy co-ordination office will allow it to expand and fulfill its mandate.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to touch briefly on our protocol office. It's a very busy office. As you know, this office is responsible for provincial government ceremonial events and visits from senior international dignitaries. The staff also provide protocol advice to government offices, community groups, the private sector, and individuals for special events. In fact, next week the Prime Minister of the Netherlands will be visiting our great province.

Mr. Chairman, the final piece of Executive Council I'd like to highlight is the work of the Public Affairs Bureau. The bureau supports all five of the government's priorities through external communication activities and provides internal communications leadership and support to government ministries. We need to communicate with Albertans. It is vital that they receive clear communication about the programs, the services, and directions of their government. It's also important that Albertans are given a way to provide feedback. Something new this year has been the development of a strategic communications plan that is being implemented across government to enhance the quality, co-ordination, and consistency of government communications and provide Albertans with improved avenues to access information and provide feedback.

We have recently redesigned the government website, which is becoming an increasingly important means of communication. We've refocused the site to improve user access to government services, ensuring that Albertans have the best information they need as quickly and as easily as possible.

2:40

The PAB has also developed a new corporate communications policy for government. This policy will clearly define what

Albertans can expect in terms of communicating with their government. We have a strong commitment to two-way communications with Albertans, and we want to make that clear. The policy will provide government staff with guidance in conducting communications-related work. The PAB has also led the responsibility for public communications with the various emergency response plans in place for the government of Alberta. As I mentioned before, the bureau has taken on responsibility for internal communications. Of course, we can't forget our internal audience. It's important that we keep our own public service employees informed about government policies and directions.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, that concludes my introductory remarks. I welcome members to ask any questions they might have.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour to rise and discuss the budget of Executive Council with the Premier. I congratulate the Premier on his first presentation in his capacity to the Assembly. I hope we can have a constructive discussion here.

An Hon. Member: More, more.

Dr. Taft: There may well be many more. Time will tell.

The amount of information provided is fairly limited in the government estimates book. In fairness, it's a very small percentage of the overall provincial budget. One of the striking things that comes out as I look at it and, I think, the kind of question that anybody's going to ask is just about the nature of the increase. Right now I'm on page 154 of the '07-08 government estimates. Over the last two years, as I'm reading the figures on page 154, the overall budget of Executive Council has grown from \$18,387,000 to what is predicted to be this year, \$23,209,000, if the Premier is on the same page as I am on this issue.

That's a growth over two years that has occurred even with corporate internal audit services being transferred from the Executive Council to Treasury Board, I believe. So an explanation of why there's an almost 28 per cent increase – I think it works out to a 27.8 per cent increase – in the budget of Executive Council over two years would be of course appreciated.

That increase actually, turning to page 156, becomes even more dramatic when I look at the first category there, the office of the Premier and Executive Council. In the last two years the budget has increased from \$6,214,000 to \$8,887,000, the overwhelming proportion of which is driven by the office of the Premier and Executive Council, a very small portion driven by increases in the office of the Lieutenant Governor. If you work that increase out over two years, it is a 42 per cent increase. Again, that draws questions. You know, what's behind such a dramatic increase over the last two years?

Of course, one year to the next, if we only look at one year, there are significant increases. Because it's just one year, it's not as large, but the trend is of ongoing increases despite the fact that some services have been moved out of Executive Council. If the Premier would be able to give some details and explanations of that increase and, frankly, justification to the taxpayer, I'm sure we'd all appreciate that, and some details which could elaborate on the functions performed by the different groups or functions itemized under Public Affairs on page 156. Corporate services is one, strategic communications is another, and then they seem to sort of merge. The two titles merge in the third line, 2.0.3, corporate communication services. What do those services perform? What do those people

do? Could you break it out separately and explain it category by category? You know, what's the difference? What does strategic communications do versus corporate communications? That sort of thing would be helpful. Again, why are there significant increases? I know, particularly under Public Affairs, that corporate services have virtually doubled in two years, and it's a pretty dramatic rise.

The very first thing, I think, that any taxpayer or voter is going to want answered is an explanation of the significant increases in expenditures. I note on page 160 that those increases are occurring despite a very limited increase in the number of full-time equivalent employees, going up a very small percentage over the last year. My page doesn't include a figure of full-time equivalent employees from two years ago. That would be interesting to have, but we don't have it here. So where's the money going? What's being done for that increase? I'm assuming, Mr. Premier, that a lot of that is going out through contracted services, maybe. If we're not seeing an increase in the number of staff or, well, exactly what – I don't know.

Once we get through some details on that, then a number of other questions will arise. Having, as I have had, a concern with the function and nature of the Public Affairs Bureau for over 10 years now, I will have a number of questions specific to the Public Affairs Bureau but will save those for the second round of questions if we can do that, if that's okay, Mr. Premier. Back and forth.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can't speak for the years prior, but I can certainly inform the House about the budget for this year.

Now, the first questions were, I believe, with respect to page 156. In terms of what we get for the expenditures in that particular area, there are various components. This is by element. First, office of the Premier and Executive Council. It's 55 FTEs, \$8.4 million. These are staff salaries and support services for the Premier's offices in Edmonton and Calgary, the deputy minister's office, the cabinet co-ordination office, which provides organizational and administrative support to cabinet and its key committees.

Dr. Taft: Line number?

Mr. Stelmach: It's 1.0.1. I'll cover all those on page 156.

The policy co-ordination also supports the implementation of government policies, works with departments to ensure that decision-makers have the best information to make the decisions, and promotes a corporate cross-ministry approach to policy development that is aligned with government priorities.

Now, the board governance review secretariat that has been established – and it is a major part of this increase, a million dollars – is to assess the effectiveness and the accountability of all our agencies, boards, and commissions. As I said before, about 50 per cent of our public expenditures are done by these agencies, and we want to make sure that we're transparent. There are a number of provinces – I believe Nova Scotia, Ontario, British Columbia – that have taken this route. Some have established permanent offices. I can't determine what the recommendations will be from this committee, but certainly we're going to take their recommendations to heart.

2:50

The committee has met. It's a three-member committee. They have met with our ministers. They have also, I believe, offered to meet with the opposition. I don't know. They were supposed to do

it yesterday, according to my information. But it's to build recommendations to make sure that we improve the transparency; you know, how we appoint people to the various agencies and boards and also how they operate, how they make their decisions with respect to spending this fair amount of money.

Now, it may stay in Executive Council if there's a recommendation that we need a full-time agency, or it may go to Treasury Board as part of its work in the future, but we have to wait for the recommendations. The three people know organizational structure very well, and I have every faith in them that they'll bring forward a number of good recommendations.

The protocol office has been busy. There is no question that the eyes of the world are on Alberta. We are receiving at least double per capita the kind of investment coming to Alberta than other provinces. We have so many ambassadors, consuls general, leaders from other countries coming to Alberta just to get to know us better and to look at how they can invest and also the predictability of our regulatory regime, of course, the questions they've been asking.

There's also funding in 1.0.1 for the Alberta Order of Excellence program. It's a very important program recognizing Albertans for their contribution.

The office of the Lieutenant Governor. There was a contracted position there before. Now we've absorbed that position into government, so there is a decrease of \$33,000 from that vote line 1.0.2. It was a support position.

Corporate services, 2.0.1: \$1.7 million, and there are 14 FTEs. It's an increase of a hundred thousand dollars, includes the office of the managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau, manages the human resource, finance, and administrative needs of Executive Council, is responsible for the business plan and budget preparation, performance measurement co-ordination, annual report development, records management and FOIP administration, includes the central budget for administrative costs, Service Alberta support services, training for all Public Affairs Bureau staff, general office equipment and supplies. In that \$100,000 the reason for change is the salary and benefit increases that apply to staff. Again, it's the same raise that is applied across government.

Strategic communications, 2.0.2: \$9 million, 81 FTEs. It's an increase of \$22,000. This is communications staff seconded to departments to support two-way communications with Albertans; develops communications for government's long-term strategic plans and priority initiative to support delivery of programs and services; plans, co-ordinates, executes cross-government communication activities – for example, the *Report to Albertans* is part of their responsibility – co-ordinates government communications to and from Albertans from major government officials, like public consultations and the budget, and of course during public emergencies; plans and co-ordinates government-wide internal communications; and implements a corporate communications policy to enhance the co-ordination and consistency of communications. Again, these are just the salary increases for the 81 FTEs, an increase of \$22,000.

Vote 2.0.3, corporate communications services: \$3.6 million, 22 FTEs, an increase of \$250,000 plus 7 per cent. It manages the government of Alberta website; co-ordinates cross-government standards for all ministry websites; manages the government of Alberta corporate identity and provides consultation for cross-government implementation; provides IT support to Executive Council, Public Affairs Bureau; provides advertising consultation and support to ministries and co-ordinates corporate advertising; distributes government news releases; provides media monitoring to ministries, including electronic access to news of importance to the government of Alberta; provides technical support for major

government news conferences and announcements. So that breaks that down.

Now, the corporate services one. There has been a change there because we're also providing support for HR and finance to Executive Council as well as Public Affairs. So there's an increase there because they're doing work for two different authorities.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Premier. I appreciated some of the elaboration. It's obviously impossible to go through the Executive Council budget without really focusing on the Public Affairs Bureau, one of my favourite topics and one of my biggest concerns, frankly, with the state of democracy in this province.

My experience with the Public Affairs Bureau dating back decades is that there has been a marked shift in the way the bureau operates and, indeed, in the purpose and resources of the bureau. Through the first two Premiers of the Conservative Party the Public Affairs Bureau was always a secondary responsibility of some other minister. It wasn't connected to the Premier's office, and it had a very clear mandate to provide corporate communications for the public service, to inform the public about government programs or services or issues. It was not an agency with any political mandate at all. The political side of communications, which I openly admit every government has to do, was contained within the staff of cabinet ministers and the Premier's office.

Well, frankly, around about December 5, 1992, over the period of just a number of days right focused then, there was a dramatic shift in the role of the Public Affairs Bureau under the former Premier, Premier Ralph Klein, and his staff in which the Public Affairs Bureau was reorganized, brought straight into the Premier's office, and was much more aggressively politicized, in my view, to support the political agenda of the governing party and particularly the Premier. I believe that was a dark day for democracy in Alberta that has never been corrected. So I am of the opinion – clearly, the Premier and I will differ – that the Public Affairs Bureau needs to be dismantled, effectively, and that a strong wall needs to be built, an organization wall, between the political work of the people working in cabinet ministers' and the Premier's offices and the public service of the bureaucracy.

The Premier mentioned that there are 81 full-time equivalents under vote 2.0.2, strategic communications, seconded to departments. Perhaps the Premier could elaborate on how those secondments work. The sense I have is that they are effectively assigned to departments by the Public Affairs Bureau. In fact, in many cases these communications directors, although they work themselves for the Public Affairs Bureau, have staff of the department working for them. In other words, there is a multiplying of the effective workforce of the Public Affairs Bureau, although that workforce is concealed because the actual payroll is covered by the department. So, for example, any major department – let's pick just as a random example the Department of Health and Wellness – has Public Affairs Bureau staff assigned, in my term and in the Premier's term, seconded, to the department.

3:00

Each of those Public Affairs Bureau employees has department of health employees reporting to them, which is – what's the word I want? – a distortion of proper accounting lines in an organization. In my view, all the employees of any given department, whether it's the Department of Health and Wellness or any other, should report, ultimately, to the deputy minister, not to staff of the Public Affairs Bureau.

That's a long-winded way of getting to my question, I suppose, which would be: of the staff seconded from the Public Affairs Bureau to the various departments, how many of those staff have staff of those departments reporting to them, if I'm making myself clear? In other words, we have 81 full-time equivalents seconded to departments, but my knowledge is that, in fact, the effective workforce of the Public Affairs Bureau is much larger than that, and I'm wondering how much larger. The Premier may not be able to answer right now; if he could have his staff undertake that.

The second part of my question would be: has the Auditor General ever had a look or a review of this particular structure and this particular way of reporting and allocating resources? If not, perhaps I will request that he have a look at it to ensure that proper and accurate reporting is being followed.

I would also ask the Premier to justify his continuing of the model of the Public Affairs Bureau that was brought in under the former Premier, in which the communications functions of all the different departments were handled not by those departments but by the Premier's office. Now, it seems to me a deeply problematic structure, that I had hoped the Premier would bring an end to. Since he hasn't, how does he justify continuing with the model of the Public Affairs Bureau in which all those communications staff report to his office as opposed to the model adopted under Premier Lougheed, in particular, and Premier Getty, in which the communications functions of the various departments were managed through those departments? A justification of that would be most helpful.

The Premier also mentioned briefly vote 2.0.3. Under Corporate Communications Services there are things like advertising consultation and co-ordination. That sort of work has led to huge controversy and, indeed, scandal in some other governments. Particularly, I'm thinking of the government in Ottawa under Adscam and that sort of thing. When lines get blurred, one of the areas they can easily get blurred is under things like advertising and sponsorships and all the related work that goes with that.

I'd appreciate some details, if the Premier could provide them, on what exactly advertising consultation and co-ordination includes. How are advertising and sponsorship contracts issued? How are they managed? How are they accounted for? There was a fairly dramatic case, albeit in the final year of the last Premier, I admit, but I'd hate to see this occur again, where I believe over a million dollars was spent on developing advertising for the third-way campaign, which was never used. How do we as taxpayers and citizens have confidence that that sort of million-dollar waste won't occur under this Premier? How are those contracts managed so that they actually provide some value for the taxpayers of the province?

Perhaps my questions are a bit meandering and long-winded.

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Dr. Taft: I have people agreeing with me. Fair enough; fair enough.

I have some really serious questions about the performance of the Public Affairs Bureau: a justification of why it continues to second so many staff to other departments instead of having those departments manage their own communications, an explanation around the function of corporate communication services in advertising, consultation, and co-ordination in management. Any elaboration on that would be much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Maybe if I could just cover, first of all, the role of the PAB and then, of course, the advertising policy

because it is important. It's something that Albertans want to know about. I do have to disagree with the member on one point: when he was questioning the state of democracy in Alberta. First of all, we had a very successful campaign for leader and Premier of the province of Alberta. I thought it was pretty democratic.

The other is that we worked quite closely together as all parties represented here in House. It was something that was important to me, and that was to direct an all-party review, you know, our policy field committees. This is new for Alberta. It's not new to, perhaps, other provinces or the federal government, but it's certainly new to this province. With the co-operation of all, we've come a long way in improving democracy, allowing Albertans input on legislation, on regulations. I feel that we're going to build better policy and better laws for Albertans through this process. Sometimes, you know, it may take a little longer, but that's the way democracy should be done. I feel proud of our accomplishments, and that, to me, is important. It's a step, and we've got a long way to go in some areas, you know, in terms of allowing all Albertans the opportunity.

You know, many times we talk in this House about websites and communicating through the web. Unfortunately, there are many Albertans that are not connected to the web. There are many seniors that cannot really find out more about programs that are available to them without our communicating directly with them through advertising, especially in the local papers, the weekly papers so that people know whom to contact at whatever time.

The role of the Public Affairs Bureau is quite extensive. But there's no doubt about it that this accusation has existed for some time. I think the hon. member even wrote about it in one of his books. There had been accusations that it's really been like a propaganda arm of the PC Party, and I want to be clear that there is no connection between the bureau and the PC Party. The partisan political matters are the domain of elected officials and the party and not government employees. Like all members of the public service our bureau employees are guided by a code of conduct, and they also take an oath of office. They are professional communicators who work very hard, and they work every day on behalf of Albertans.

Bureau staff help plan and implement communications to Albertans on initiatives like safety campaigns. It could be, you know, safety campaigns for workers. It could be government programs for seniors. Albertans deserve very strong, clear communication from the government. The Public Affairs Bureau helps ensure that citizens of this province receive the information they need when they need it and, of course, in the best way possible.

Now, some of the comments made with respect to advertising. Examples of communication programs include – and there are many – traffic safety. You know, when you are driving down the highway, there are a number of programs in terms of the safety of our workers on the highways or speeding through construction zones, et cetera. Those are all advertised in papers. We lost a number of flag people over the last number of years, so that, to me, is a valuable investment in advertising.

3:10

Farm safety, workplace safety: we put a huge effort in this area to reduce the number of accidents and fatalities.

In other areas: information for postsecondary students, seniors, families, the Alberta child health benefit, and of course there was a fair amount of information out there in terms of how Albertans can stay healthy, eat the best foods, protect our environment. So that really brings down the cost.

The advertising policy is quite straightforward. The Public Affairs Bureau does provide consultation and support for all government advertising. The cost is covered by the ministry

responsible, so each ministry has that included in their budget. In 2005-06 – again, I’m saying 2005 because we don’t have the figures for 2006-07 – spending on advertising by departments totalled \$8 million, but total advertising for the government is estimated to be about \$10.6 million.

Now, all advertising procurement has to be compliant with the agreement in internal trade and the TILMA agreements. We use a single agency of record for media buying, to purchase media space for all of its advertising. So it’s print ads, radio ads, TV spots, billboards, online ads. This allows government to take advantage of special volume buying because we consolidate it through one agency. The agency of record for a media buying contract is for a three-year period, with a possibility of one additional year if performance is satisfactory. The current contract is with Highwood Communications, and it will be retendered in 2007, so this year.

There are two additional standing agency-of-record contracts for advertising. DDB Canada is the agency of record for recruitment advertising, and it’s also the agency of record for legal and tender advertising.

Now, 2007-08 advertising campaigns principally inform Albertans about a range of topics from West Nile virus to family violence protection to bullying – we’ve done a fair amount there – to staying safe on the job to wildfire prevention. Although at the beginning of year, you know, we had a fair amount of moisture, these last few days of really hot weather have really increased, of course, the risk of forest fires in the province.

The upcoming campaigns for 2007-08 include the Alberta centennial education savings plan, informing Albertans that there’s an opportunity for Albertans to contribute and build resources for their children wanting to enter postsecondary, bullying prevention education and awareness, recruitment of aboriginal foster parents and general foster parent recruitment, climate change, drinking and violence prevention, victims of crime. A lot of work is being done on the land-use framework advertising to make sure that people come to our public events, public consultation, the mountain pine beetle. Now recent and ongoing – and this has been ongoing for some time – the prevention of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, prevention of childhood sexual exploitation, education awareness of bullying. Prevention of family violence will continue, Work Safe Alberta, pandemic preparedness and tactics – again, we’re working with municipalities in this case – West Nile virus, and given the amount of work that’s out there on provincial highways, more advertising tied to traffic safety, and, of course, wildfire prevention.

Now, secondments from PAB to departments. Some departments have other non-PAB communications staff to meet additional communications needs, and that is up to the department to decide and resource such positions. We’ll get back in terms of the number of communications staff because we’ll have to ask every ministry their responsibilities, and we’ll get back on that.

The Auditor General has never reviewed Public Affairs probably because he hasn’t seen a need to. To my knowledge he hasn’t reviewed it in the past. I think that reporting to the Executive Council, to the Premier’s office, is very important to co-ordinate communications to ensure that Albertans are getting the information they need. Sometimes program information is difficult to get through the regular media. That’s why we do the advertising. It’s paid for by the departments. Our role there is mainly to play the co-ordination role.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Premier, again.

Continuing with some questions specific to the Public Affairs Bureau. The Premier provided us a considerable list of public information campaigns, which are precisely what governments need to do, whether it’s, you know, traffic safety or all kinds of issues. Those are not concerns that we’re going to raise at all. I’m sure that we would support the large majority of those and perhaps even extend the list. I don’t know. The question I have with those is: how are the costs of those contracts allocated between the specific departments and the Public Affairs Bureau?

To pick an example: traffic safety. If \$1 million is spent on a traffic safety public awareness campaign, does that million-dollar cost turn up in the budget of the Public Affairs Bureau, or does it turn up in the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, for example? Or with the Healthy U campaign, which is quite expensive, does the cost of that campaign get assigned to the Department of Health and Wellness or to the Public Affairs Bureau? I would appreciate some explanation of how the costs for each of these contracts are allocated between the Public Affairs Bureau and the departments. I continue to ask the question for those various campaigns. Why aren’t those communications initiatives handled by the particular department as opposed to the Public Affairs Bureau? So it goes back to perhaps the theme of our discussion. Fair enough. There are different views on it.

There is a history with the Public Affairs Bureau and Executive Council of some controversies around some contracts, the agency of record that handles the media buys, in particular. Highwood has a long and intimate history with the PC party – it’s a simple statement of fact – has close connections to the chief of staff of the former Premier, Mr. Rod Love, and has the appearance of being a political favourite of this government. My question would be to the Premier. When this contract or when this position of being the agency of record comes up for renewal later this year, what steps will be taken by this Premier to avoid the appearance of political favouritism in awarding that very, very important contract?

The point that needs to be made here is that whoever handles that contract, whoever is the agency of record, has tremendous sway over communications agencies, public relations agencies, advertising agencies, and many, many media, who frankly depend on government advertising to help them meet their expenses. It’s a very, very powerful position. It’s one that needs to be handled, in my view, with the utmost of care and respect and openness and accountability and an absolute intolerance for any kind of political meddling whatsoever. So my question to the Premier would be: how is that contract going to be allocated? How is that role going to be determined, the role of agency of record, in such a way that avoids any appearance of political favoritism?

3:20

Related to that are other controversies around untendered contracts, some of which, I believe, have been handled by Executive Council in previous administrations and I hope will be brought to an end under this Premier. I’m thinking, for example, of an untendered contract to Mr. Rod Love for strategic advice, a contract of some tens of thousands of dollars for which there was no paper trail whatsoever. So we had a contract that was untendered, given clearly to an insider without any paper trail. Actually, I believe it was one of a number of contracts that raised concerns by the Auditor General. My question to the Premier: as a new Premier committed to openness and accountability and a new way of doing public business, can we be sure as MLAs and as citizens of Alberta that that kind of process of handing out untendered contracts without any paper trails will come to an end under this Premier’s administration?

I am now going to shift a little bit to specifics around salaries. I’m

looking at the annual report of Executive Council last year, which itemizes the salaries of a dozen or so senior officials and executives with Executive Council. I'm on page 33 of the '05-06 Executive Council annual report. The Premier may well not have that at his fingertips. Fair enough. The question will stay.

The page I'm referring to itemizes a number of positions: deputy minister, chief of staff, director of southern Alberta office, deputy secretary to cabinet, managing director of Public Affairs. It includes the three senior positions in the Public Affairs Bureau and the positions of a number of executives in the office of the Premier: the director of communications, deputy chief of staff, chief of protocol, executive director of policy co-ordination, and chief internal auditor. Now, I believe that position has been moved to President of Treasury Board. But otherwise, some details would be very useful to be provided on how these positions have changed. What are the details on the salaries for these dozen or so positions that were itemized in the annual report? They will be itemized again in the annual report, but it would be nice to see what their estimated costs are going to be. I'm sure that was probably compiled somewhere in the construction of your budget, and since it's going to be public information at the end, we might as well make it public information at the beginning for taxpayers of Alberta to see.

That's sort of a logical moment for me to take a break, so I'll again return the floor to the Premier. Thanks.

Mr. Stelmach: There are a number of questions. One of them, I didn't get a chance to answer the last time I was up. In terms of the PAB: no, the advertising is done by departments, and they pay for it; the role of Public Affairs is to play a co-ordination role. It's a co-ordination role with hiring agencies, and of course these agencies are hired through competitions. So somebody has to do it for all departments, and we do the co-ordinating. I think Public Affairs staff have never reported to ministries, the same in that sense since Premier Lougheed in 1972. But, you know, we can have another look at that and get more information.

This one on appearance: this is a good question because the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta has been successful. We've had the privilege of serving Albertans for many years. We go back on a regular basis to earn their respect, you know, through elections and earn their trust. So there are many people that may have a membership in the Progressive Conservative Party. They may have contributed to the Progressive Conservative Party. With respect to the contract, it follows all of the rules in terms of public tender.

If the one agency that is giving us the absolute best price for what we've tendered, but there's a connection somehow to maybe one of the board members, what the hon. member is saying is that we should not accept that tender because there may be an appearance – an appearance – that there is some connection even though all of the rules are followed. I submit to this House that that is unfair. Tendering processes are fully public, and the tenders are public. Whoever wins that particular tender for advertising in this province does so by giving us the best possible price to offer the best service. That to me is the fair way of doing the process.

In terms of untendered contracts, there are rules under AIT, agreement on internal trade. Contracts that are, you know, less than \$100,000 can be sole-sourced. I'm not a fan of it. We should make it public that we need this expertise. If they are sole-sourced, there has to be information that comes to the minister, something that the taxpayers receive. I have a certain position that I've taken on it, and I expect the ministers to follow.

With respect to the list of people that are in Executive Council working for the Premier, the amounts are public because it's senior

officials' compensation. There's a range for senior officials, and our duty is that the contracts we sign are within that range. That range is public, and maybe we can get it later today and put it in as a matter of record. I think that was all that was raised in terms of questions.

Now, again, this year we will be tendering contracts. The call for tenders will be public, and any agency can apply. In fact, now any agency, really, across Canada that wants to apply and tender can do so, but it will be done under very strict criteria that we follow the agreement on internal trade and also the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement that we have with the province of B.C.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the Premier for his willingness to appear before us today and discuss the supply estimates for Executive Council.

Mr. Premier, I've only got a couple of quick questions, and I'm hopeful that your staff may be able to come up with some answers fairly quickly. The first is sort of a follow-up on the Leader of the Official Opposition and his expressed concern that there's not an awful lot of detail in the supply estimates. You had mentioned earlier the Alberta Order of Excellence, which I believe you said falls under the office of the Premier. I would be curious to know up front how much money is being allocated to that particular program as opposed to having to wait until we see the Executive Council annual report sometime down the road.

Likewise the protocol office. Again, I'm sure there was a major expense during the centennial year when we had the royal visit and a number of other activities. I'd be curious to see whether or not there's somewhat less expenditure contemplated there this year or how, you know, one year might compare to previous years. So that sort of information would be very helpful, and I would submit that perhaps in the future we could have it in the supply estimates. Certainly, this year if some of your staff might be able to provide that now, I would appreciate it.

I also wanted to ask: in the most recent annual report of Executive Council, '05-06, in the statement of financial position it references \$191,000 cash held as assets within Executive Council, and I'm curious to know why there would be that much and how much might currently be there. Again, it's not reflected in the budget documents that we have for '07-08, so perhaps you could clarify for me a little bit as to why that much cash is being held by Executive Council and how much it is currently.

3:30

Then the last one, I guess, is just a little bit of a frustration that I'm having with the policy field committees, Mr. Premier. Obviously, you're well aware of the fact that this is something that members on this side of the House have been asking for for a long time and very much looking forward to being involved in. I have to admit that I'm a little concerned that we're now very near the conclusion of the spring session, and those committees have been populated, and we've had a couple of bills at least, perhaps more, referred to policy field committees at this point. But there doesn't seem to be any action in terms of even an initial meeting to discuss with members from this side the framework for how those committees are going to work, what sort of a meeting schedule might be contemplated, whether it's sometime before summer – I'm going to guess that there won't likely be a lot of meetings held over the summer – whether or not those PFCs may be meeting in the fall in advance of the fall sitting, which, I believe, begins on the 5th of November, or if it's contemplated that they'll be meeting, you know,

during the time when the House is sitting. So I would certainly ask that you might be able to clarify for us where that is at on the government side and how soon members from this side can expect to see some activity in regard to the PFCs.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. First of all, to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, it's my duty to defend the budget estimates, not the willingness. I'm here because I take pride in not only defending the budget estimates but in having an opportunity to communicate very clearly with Albertans what our budget is all about and the purpose of it.

For the Alberta Order of Excellence the budget is \$110,000. The Alberta Order of Excellence is the highest honour that the province of Alberta can bestow on a citizen. Members of the Alberta Order of Excellence come from all walks of life. Their careers range from medicine, science, agriculture, engineering, business, law, politics, the arts. All members of the Order of Excellence have one thing in common, and that is that they made an outstanding contribution not only provincially but nationally or even an international impact. We have, certainly, many people in Alberta that have done that. Now, the Order of Excellence is about more than simply doing one's job well. It's about recognizing Albertans who made a difference, who serve Albertans with excellence and distinction, and whose contributions will stand the test of time.

The Alberta Order of Excellence Council considers the nominations of candidates to the Alberta Order of Excellence. It's made up of very prominent Albertans. They're volunteer representatives, and they're appointed by order in council from across Alberta. Presently the chair is Dr. Bob Westbury. The members are Bunny Ferguson, Jack Gorr, Harley Hotchkiss, Walter Paszkowski, and Harold Storlien. Again, I must repeat that these are volunteer positions. They meet to review the applications – you know, the nominations – for the Order of Excellence and make the appointments.

Members are inducted into the order at a special ceremony held at Government House. Of course, the Lieutenant Governor, the chancellor of the Order of Excellence, presents the new members with a medallion and a personalized, illuminated scroll. This is one way of recognizing outstanding achievement, really, on behalf of all Albertans of those that have really helped build this province in so many different ways.

The protocol budget. It's \$856,000 with six full-time equivalents. We'll get the comparisons from the previous years. The hon. member talked about 2005 and the Queen's visit. Obviously, it was very busy in 2005. We received many, many visitors during our centennial year. Given, Mr. Chairman, the kind of economic activity and, you know, the fact that Alberta is playing a much larger role on the world stage, we have so, so many visitors from other countries: ambassadors, consuls general, government leaders. We even have opposition leaders from other governments coming to Alberta, looking at our regulatory review processes, our taxation policies, wanting to learn from what we've accomplished in the province of Alberta.

I know that we can get the comparisons, but as I said, just the number of visitors I've had to greet over the last number of months – and, of course, we've been assisted by all members, you know, with respect to luncheons, tours, making them feel welcome in the province because they're representing countries that are making substantial investments in Alberta and in Canada. It's important to build that relationship because we are going to look to many countries for very specific skill sets, to attract people to Alberta to meet the growing demands of human resources but in so many

different areas. We've attracted some of the world's brightest minds to do research. We also have to attract people in various trades.

Again, I just recently met with the ambassador for the Philippines. They're very eager to work with us. I met the ambassador from the European Union, Ambassador Dorian Prince, who is very open to working further. I learned a lot in that meeting in terms of how their agreements work within the European Union and how they've managed to reduce costs, especially those barriers at borders to trade.

Now, there was a question with respect to all-party committees and when they'll be meeting. The policy field committees are really matters of the Legislature, not Executive Council. Even though, you know, it's an idea that I want to promote with the other opposition leaders – and we found common ground, and we're proceeding with policy field committees – they are really the creatures, I guess, of the Legislature, so the Legislature will dictate, of course, what they will do.

However, there are four, and they have been established to sort of end the frustration of members and the public who before this change felt that they had very little influence on the development of public policy. They will meet regularly in an open manner. Bills 1, 2, and 31 have already been sent to the committees. This is really new in the history of Alberta, but my own personal opinion – and, again, I can only offer the opinion – is that we could meet as to how the committees agree to meet over the summer and help prepare, hear evidence from Albertans, and then bring that evidence forward. Some of the bills, of course, will be carried into the fall session, and we'll be able to have more information in terms of, maybe, possible amendments and build better legislation and regulation with respect to the three bills that I talked about.

I just think that not only the policy field committees but agreeing, of course, on fixed dates for the Legislature, a fixed budget date – that is really new, but it's good. It's good for democracy in the province of Alberta, and I think that it helps for better policy development. You know, the Committee of Supply – of course, the work is in progress today – is spending more hours than we did before in this House. It's more flexible. Every member of the House has an opportunity to participate, even the independents, and we do have multiple opportunities to speak, to talk about the needs of individual constituencies in terms of the budgets that come before the House. That's what it's all about: representing the member's constituency in this House to bring forward the kinds of needs and, of course, positions and opinions of constituents.

There are, I believe, more democratic reforms to come, and we'll work on those in the future, but I think that in the first few months we have really come a long way in improving democracy in the province of Alberta.

3:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise and respond to the estimates for Executive Council and to respond to some of the remarks made by the hon. Premier. First of all, I would like to correct a misconception that is out there that this Third Session of the 26th Legislature would be one of the longest sittings ever and that at the end of business on Thursday, June 14, if we do adjourn as scheduled, this sitting would have been the longest and that we have been awarded ample opportunity to discuss things in this House. The first half is correct because we're going to have more linear days, more afternoons, but we are not going to have the same number of hours as we did before. While we welcome the changes that were brought forward by the Premier in terms of the

policy field committees and the revised budget sittings and all these wonderful improvements that we have seen as a result of negotiations between the House leaders, really the end result with respect to the number of hours that are available for debate has been reduced.

Now, I have certain thoughts which I would like to put on the record and invite the hon. Premier to respond to. One of the things that I wanted to talk about was, again, the Public Affairs Bureau, but I'm going to submit to you, Mr. Chairman, that my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview has covered it eloquently. I would like to capture one comment from the Premier's response to him when he indicated that the Public Affairs Bureau is there for two-way communications with Albertans, two ways meaning to and from. I would register that, in my opinion – and I've been here only two and a half years as an MLA – I have seen this flow to be mostly unidirectional. The flow is mostly from the government to Albertans and not the other way back.

I realize that there is a sales job for the Public Affairs Bureau to convince Albertans that the direction taken by government is good and that the policies are sound, but I would argue that there is an equally important need for the Public Affairs Bureau to solicit public opinion, to seek direction from Albertans. I would actually give you some examples, Mr. Chairman; for example, the housing issue, affordability of housing and escalating rents and all that big concern that this Third Session of this Legislature has been dealing with.

Today, for example, we had these guys, the guests from Marie Lake, who were concerned about seismic testing. You know, Albertans are concerned about the environment, and the government, as indicated in their Bill 3, is talking about intensity targets for emissions versus a hard cap. I would submit that these are examples of situations where this government should have been surveying Albertans and asking them what they think. My question to the Premier is: should we expect in the near future more opinion surveys or plebiscites or other mechanisms where we ask people what they think? Now, I am not asking that this government govern by referendum. This is not really what I'm advocating, but as I emphasized before, two-way communication means back and forth, to and from.

Another observation I made comparing the hon. Premier now to the former Premier is with respect to his availability with the media. I have been brought up knowing that there are four levels of authority in any society: one being the government, or the Executive Council; the other being the Legislature, the elected officials; the third being the legal system, or the judiciary; and the fourth being the media. The media is the fourth level of authority. We noticed that the hon. Premier now only has two days a week of media availability compared to five. My question to him is if this is something that would be changed in the near future again.

Third, I wanted to touch on his promise to govern with integrity and transparency, which is really a noble promise. I commend him on wanting to do this. What I am seeking from him is commitment to translate words into actions.

Take, for example, last year, Bill 20, Mr. Chairman, the amendment that we had before this House with respect to freedom of information and protection of privacy. You may remember that the government – and this hon. Premier was a minister of that government – brought in time allocation, or closure, twice on the debate on Bill 20. I was the lead critic on that bill as the shadow minister for government services back then. The Premier voted twice to bring in time allocation. When questioned by the media, because he by then had declared his candidacy for the Premier's job, he indicated that while he's not hearing a lot of concern from his constituents, this would change.

I argued in *Hansard*, in this House, that basically the longer that debate continued, the more people became aware of it, the more people would actually start phoning and e-mailing their MLAs, saying: "Why are we making things more secretive? Why are we hiding things from the public, ministerial briefing notes, findings by the Internal Audit Committee, and so on and so forth?" The hon. Premier then indicated that while he's not receiving a lot of those concerns, he anticipated that this might change. Then he also indicated that if this was in fact the case, then whoever becomes leader of this province might actually end up having to deal with this issue.

I'm quoting from an article here which was published on May 17, shortly after the debate on Bill 20 ended. The quote goes: "At the end of the day with new leadership if there's a problem, this will be changed. If it does restrict openness and transparency in some way, then so be it. I'm sure no matter who is elected as leader will find a need to change this legislation." The question now is: is there a need to change this legislation to bring in more openness and transparency?

Another question, Mr. Chairman, to the hon. Premier. Again, back in 2006 there was an Official Opposition motion, Motion 502, to end government patronage. The motion was defeated, unfortunately, in this House, and there was a division called. The hon. Premier voted against Motion 502 to end patronage, and along with him voted people who are now on the front bench, people like the hon. Minister of Recreation, Parks, and Culture, Minister of Energy, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, Finance, Infrastructure and Transportation, President of the Treasury Board, and the Minister of Justice.

I realize that there is a task force now studying all the appointments to boards and agencies and commissions, but I'm seeking a commitment from the hon. Premier to work with this House to end patronage or at least severely restrain it or restrict it. We should have those appointments and those people put on those boards and commissions based on merit and based on their expertise and their excellence.

I have a few more questions, but I'll take my seat and allow the Premier to respond, and then I'll rise again. Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to the Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to introduce to you and to other members here in the House this afternoon a former colleague, former MLA from Stony Plain Stan Woloshyn. Stan was elected, I believe, in 1989 and served Albertans not only in his hometown but also throughout the province in many facets with the government. I remember him most as being a very big whip, but he was kind and gentle. Anyway, let's give a warm welcome to Stan Woloshyn.

head: 3:50 **Main Estimates 2007-08**

Executive Council (continued)

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. I knew that sooner or later, after

answering all of the questions in terms of the budget, it would start moving away from, of course, the estimates and start going more political. But isn't it funny how these guys change their opinion? Like, remember, a couple years ago: oh, we just don't sit enough days here. They never talk about the hours we sat. Clearly, compared to any jurisdiction in Canada, we sat more hours. Don't talk about hours; just talk about days. Now we sit days; they want hours. Well, make up your mind.

Mr. Elsalhy: We want both.

Mr. Stelmach: Oh, you want both. Well, we'll have a few night sittings. We'll keep you happy if you want the hours. Geez, it's just this way, you know, that way. You can slip through a knot and still come out straight.

Obviously, on Bill 20 he didn't do a very good job as a critic. But I can assure you that in terms of transparency and those other areas, we're moving very quickly on improving government transparency. We're going to be building on what we've accomplished so far, and we're going to do more.

Now, on two-way communications. When we talk about that it's one way, you know, that's not correct. I was trying to keep abreast of the authorities. The fourth authority was, I think, the media. I didn't know when the media was elected in this province, but I guess that if you take your direction from the media, then so be it. I'm glad they said it publicly.

Obviously, they can't present good policy evaluation without going to the media. I've heard some of the questions that come up in the House. The media asks one day, and then they come up in the House the next day. I could tell you more and more stories about that, but we're not going to drill down. I'm going to try and stay in Premierland with this group.

Two-way communications. I disagree; it's not one way. We very much value Albertans' opinions and, of course, their ideas, and I do listen. It's one of the reasons, you know, that this government has been successful and continues to be successful. We flow information to Albertans, but we also hear from them as well. One way is through Alberta Connects. It's via the Internet, their phone. Albertans can ask questions. They can also submit to us their ideas. I get e-mails all the time, and so do my colleagues. We respond to them. In fact, in our office we respond to the e-mails that come, and you know how many e-mails you can get in a day. That's one of the reasons why our correspondence branch is busy. We want to get back to them, whether it's a letter or an e-mail. We do some public opinion research.

Then on public consultations. You know, we're holding a number of public consultations. They just said that they need the public consultations. That's what they support. Yet in the House the other day, or maybe a couple of days, we were criticized by the opposition for having these public consultations. So, you know, obviously you can't satisfy everyone. Our job here is to satisfy Albertans, and no matter what we do here as a government, we will be criticized because that's your job. I go to bed every night realizing that that's your job. That's part of democracy, and democracy is very strong in the province of Alberta.

With respect to media availability we do two media scrums a week in the media room here, but many others are in Calgary. We had two media scrums not only at the opening of seniors' week, but we had one following the presentation I made earlier that morning. So there were two times that the media approached me in a single day plus when we got back here to Edmonton. I do one-on-one interviews. Many times various media representatives will approach me one-on-one and say: can I do an interview on a specific topic?

Some of those interviews now are spilling out in the various papers and articles. Sometimes, Mr. Chairman, as you know, they may do a media interview at the beginning of the month, but it may not be in a paper or a magazine until the end of that month or maybe even two months later. But we're certainly doing my part and our part as government.

Everywhere I go, you know, media follows. We appeared in Tofield early Saturday morning to support their rodeo and the breakfast, had media there. I was interviewed. There was an article in the *Journal*. From there I went to St. Michael. All the churches in the county of Lamont opened up their doors. It was an event just for part of their tourism plans. The media was there. I went to the final review of Air Cadet Squadron 341 in Mundare. The media was there.

The only time the media wasn't present was at a private event on Saturday. I went to a wedding, and some found it a little different. You know, before you can go to the washroom, security walks in first and checks, and then you can walk in. I mean, life has changed, but so be it. You have to realize that you will have media everywhere. I certainly have been always open and talk to them. You know, difference of opinion, but so be it.

Public opinion research. We do conduct public opinion research, of course, especially in our Report to Albertans, our annual report. We do that. All governments – provincial, federal – do that. We use this research to get unfiltered feedback from the public. The research helps provide valuable information on the views and opinions of Albertans. Overall research shows that Albertans are very happy and that they are happy with this government. We're continuing to build the policies based on that research. Will we be doing more? We probably will because there are new ideas that have come forward from this government, and we're going to ask Albertans for their opinions.

Just getting back to the public consultations, one of the key principles this government operates by is, of course, working with Albertans. A number of task forces have been set up and are gathering input from Albertans on everything from safe communities to the royalty regime. Safe communities are very important: huge participation. The royalty review has garnered a lot of attention, the land use framework as well. The public consultation on the environment has been very successful. We've had people in all parts of the province contribute. This information that comes forward is very valuable and will be inputted into the kind of policies that we'll put forward. I just think that we're doing well on the public consultation side and will continue, irrespective of the kind of, perhaps, criticism that we may receive from some members of the opposition, saying that it's too much consultation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and participate in the estimate on Executive Council, the Premier's office. I have a few questions, Mr. Premier. I'll start with the electoral reforms. During election 2004 I found out that there were some irregularities in the special ballots. I complained to the Ethics Commissioner, and it took about six months. After the investigation he said that I should have complained, I think, within 90 days or something. My point is, you know, I tried to. First, I talked to the Ethics Commissioner right away and the election commissioner, as well, but I didn't get any reply. Then I phoned him. Then he started the investigation. It took some time. An investigation was done, but still there was no action. Finally, I received a letter from the election officer: maybe the next time we will improve the election system.

4:00

I have seen the electoral systems in Europe, India, Pakistan, and some other countries which are not democratic countries. We have a better system here. But I was surprised. How come we don't do some, you know, thorough work on this system? Anybody can still go to the polling station and vote on behalf of somebody who's not even in this country. This is what happened during my election time. In one of the ridings in Edmonton the difference was only three votes, and that was after . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but the time allocated for the Liberal opposition has elapsed, and I will now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. The Premier can perhaps respond in writing to the questions that were asked.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's, indeed, an honour to be here opposite the Premier in his first set of estimates. I want to start off by saying that the Premier said he was at a wedding. I, hopefully, outdid him. I was at a wedding that I officiated on Saturday. I didn't have any problems with the washrooms, though, Mr. Premier.

In the limited time that I have in the give-and-take, I'm not going to worry about every budget item. I do want to talk specific in one area, a broad policy thrust. First of all, as the House leader of the New Democrats I was involved in some of the negotiations. I congratulate the Premier. I think this has been a very important first step, the changes that we've made. We'll see how they work down the way. But it would not have been made unless the Premier was behind changes. I know enough that if the Premier of a province doesn't want to do something, it's not going to happen. It's that simple. So I do congratulate the Premier for moving us along somewhat in democratic renewal and openness and transparency. I would say that we will have to see how these go.

I mean, I think it's pretty clear that the policy field committees, at least three of them, will have to meet sometime because they have to report back, in my understanding, in the first week of the session. So they are going to have to meet here in the summer sometime to be able to do that. You know, they're a work-in-progress. We'll see how they go.

I also want to congratulate the Premier – and we'll see how it goes in the policy field committees – about bills 1 and 2. I was on that committee. We've been pushing for a lobbyist registry. In fairness, the committee advocated it, and, you know, on the conflict of interest, an increase to what we thought was reasonable. I hope the policy field committees will look at what I consider some loopholes. We'll see where that goes, and we'll know in the fall. I'm going to be optimistic that they will come out even better bills as we go along.

I want to continue, Mr. Chairman, with the thrust towards more openness and transparency. I believe I heard the Premier correctly when he said that we'd be looking at some more reforms as we went along. I think I heard him saying that in terms of discussion. I want to have a discussion here today about electoral reform. I know that the Premier has already talked about looking at some reforms in terms of leadership races in the future, and I think that's good and proper, and we'll see where that goes.

I want to say that I think we can begin to catch up to some other provinces in terms of electoral reform. You know, I wouldn't be the last one in the world to say that the Progressive Conservative Party has been very successful over the years and has governed, and that's certainly their right. The people put them there, Mr. Chairman, over these number of years, and we accept that. But I think it must be

troublesome to all of us that in the 2004 election the voter turnout dipped from 53 per cent to 45 per cent of eligible voters. I suggest that that should be very concerning for all of us, regardless of whether we're in opposition or whether we're in government. Added to that, I think we're in the right direction by the reforms that we're trying to do in the Legislature and the lobbyists registry and these sorts of things because there's a great deal of cynicism out there, and again nobody wins with that cynicism. I think we even have to move beyond, certainly in electoral reform.

I might point out to the Premier – and I'm sure he's well aware – that other provinces are moving on in looking at reforms of the electoral system. There are five that I'm aware of. First of all is British Columbia. As the Premier is aware, they set up a citizens' assembly that went around the province. They had a vote on it. They didn't like that particular model, but they're coming back with a different model.

In New Brunswick in December 2003 a Commission on Legislative Democracy was established. It's my understanding that they've released a final report. They've now had an election, a new Premier. We'll see where that goes, but clearly some pressure there.

Ontario announced the creation of a Democratic Renewal Secretariat. It's scheduled now to submit its report to the Legislative Assembly. It's my understanding that it's coming forward immediately.

Prince Edward Island has gone through a process. It was defeated, actually. They had a referendum, decided to stay with a similar system, which is fair enough if that's what the people want.

In March Quebec brought out some reform of democratic institutions, and I understand that the citizens' committee rejected the draft bill and recommended a two-ballot system.

The point that I'm making is that they're feeling the same sorts of pressures, I think, with the cynicism and lower turnouts. We even see them talking federally, at least about some reforms. As you know, Prime Minister Harper has come out with fixed election dates, I think, if they last that long, some time in 2009. Highly unlikely, but at least they're moving in that direction.

I don't expect things to happen overnight when a new Premier comes in. I think that's unrealistic. I think we moved through this first stage. My question to the Premier would be: is he actively considering looking at what's happening in other provinces and looking at addressing the pressing issue of electoral reform? Along with that, if we could make those changes and if we had a citizens' coalition start to involve themselves, the bottom line, I think, is that that would encourage greater voter participation, which has to be a worry for all of us. I mean, I think we should have a similar thing as B.C. did, a citizens' coalition to look at different options without deciding: should it be proportional rep, first past the pole, fixed election dates? You know, there are a number of different things that we can do or a mixture or whatever. But if there was a citizens' coalition that went around the province, I think it would create some interest in our electoral system, and hopefully they might recommend some changes so that people would want to participate.

4:10

Now, I also understand – and this is the real dilemma, I'm sure, for any government – that the system has worked pretty well for the Progressive Conservative Party. To their credit, that's the system that was there, so it becomes harder to get people to change. It's true of an NDP government, and it's true of a Conservative government when it works well for them. It's not a matter of politics. Things are working well as long as we're the government.

If I may say so to the Premier, we've started with the all-party committees and what we're doing here in the Legislature. A great

legacy to leave would be an electoral system that had people excited, that had them involved. Regardless of the political stripe that we hold, I think that would be doing a big service to people. I'm not expecting an announcement here today, but I wonder if the Premier might comment – and I'll come back on it – on what he sees the future here in Alberta as compared to what's happening with other provinces vis-à-vis the citizens' assemblies, all of these sorts of things, if the government and the Premier as the leader would be prepared to take a look at doing something similar here. I'll come back on it after.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Well, I do have to thank the hon. member for his very kind words. I do agree that, you know, collectively, all parties, we brought forward some steps in terms of democratic reform in the Legislature. From what I get when visiting many corners of the province, Albertans are quite happy with the changes.

Electoral reform. Of course, talking first of all with respect to the leadership race, the leadership race for the Progressive Conservative Party was hotly contested. We weren't in the position – perhaps in some parties it's like, you know, you look behind you and say: "Do you want this? Do you want this?" No. This was a long leadership campaign, and through that leadership campaign we learned a few things that we can bring forward to this House in terms of legislation, work with the other parties in terms of building the rules and the regulations, however we put that together. I mentioned to the media the other day that it may be something we can discuss and at least have a framework ready for fall and start from some place. At least it's worthwhile to proceed because these questions will keep coming up in such a way as not that there was anything done wrong but always twist and turn and give a different kind of perception that something was done without Albertans knowing about it. So we'll have those rules in place. We'll learn from other jurisdictions that have gone through similar issues.

Voter participation. How do we work with Albertans to increase voter participation? Well, first of all, by treating each other with respect. There are roles for the opposition, obviously, and they're critical roles in a good democratic system. But when you look at how Albertans look at politicians, I believe that in the last poll that was done, we were at the bottom rung of the ladder. The first, of course, were firefighters, nurses, farmers, and then politicians. I feel good because if we, you know, get the average of where a farmer is and a politician, I'm still about 50 per cent, so I'm okay there.

How do we improve our behaviour in the House? How do we improve the way we treat each other as elected officials? There used to be pride. There would be pride in serving the public. It was a responsibility given to you by the power of the vote. It's not only here but in many other jurisdictions that today the voter participation is shrinking. School board representative, the hon. member knows very well, very important, public education in this province. Look at the low voter turnout. If you do not have an election for a municipal councillor at the same time as a school trustee, very few people come out to vote for a school trustee. In fact, if I remember correctly – I stand to be corrected – in Fort Saskatchewan in the by-election 15,000 residents, so 4,500 could vote or maybe 6,000; I'm not quite sure. Eighty-eight people. Eighty-eight people.

How can we improve that? That's something that we could do collectively. But if we constantly nibble at each other's ankles on a day-to-day basis and make allegations and hope to destroy a person's integrity and not debate policy, that doesn't do any of us good.

Albertans may be looking at it and saying: you know, what's the use if that's the only thing that political parties concentrate on?

Well, I can tell you that we're not going to concentrate on that. We're going to concentrate on the future. We're going to look at how, during this period of boom, which is unprecedented – there's no library that you can go to and pull a book off the shelf and read about somebody else's experiences. This is groundbreaking. It's groundbreaking in Canada. It's groundbreaking for many jurisdictions around the world. Yes, there are some countries like China that have the same rate of growth, but they do not have a democratic system. That makes a big difference in terms of how people are treated, how decisions are made. We've got to focus on managing growth. Decision-making, of course, at this time if we start looking at the kind of reforms that maybe the hon. member alluded to: we can certainly talk about them, but right now we need stability in the decision-making process.

I believe the hon. member talked about proportional representation. Well, in the little bit of review I did – and it's just very preliminary because I know that this topic is going to come up from time to time – voter turnout necessarily doesn't improve because of proportional representation. But it does kind of create an impression that kind of brings out the extremes of the political spectrum, and they do have greater support and influence than the parties that have, you know, the larger representation in the Legislature or in Parliament. It may lead to further division rather than uniting around some very important goals.

Speaking to other provinces over the last few months, the one meeting we had in Toronto with the Premiers, many shared their experiences, the kind of consultation that they've had. It has really been polarized, but that doesn't mean that we can't look at what information they've got so far from their people and use that in our decision-making.

The other is, as I said before, in terms of fixed election dates: if our party, the Progressive Conservative Party, was to put it on the table and discuss it at a policy convention, I'm certainly open to it. If somebody in another party goes for that, fine. I don't want to mention names, but the government member that I talked to that was in opposition before but now is in power is really scratching and saying: oh, geez, why did we push for fixed election dates, because now they have a fixed election date? Here it wouldn't trouble me, but it is something that we have to move forward collectively, talk to Albertans, and bring the information forward to the House.

Voter participation is important. It has dropped, and it continues to diminish. That's something that we can collectively talk about in this House and bring about more respect in the Legislature for its members and do a better job. That in itself will get more people out there to vote.

I don't think there was a question on any of the specific budget items but just in reply to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

4:20

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. There's no doubt. I mean, politics should never be personal. It's about policy; there's no doubt about that. I think we all should remember that the best we can. But within that, there's a debate. In this country, at least, we can do it across the way here rather than, if we want to change the government, having to go out and get the guns and everything else as in most of the world. Democracy is messy; it's no doubt. I think it was Winston Churchill who said that it's the worst possible system that you can devise until you look at every other one. I think that's where we're at.

I don't disagree, you know, with the tone and the rest of it. Mind you, the school board probably has the lowest participation. When I was a school board trustee, people tended to know who I was, but they didn't know what I did because of just the lack of knowledge. The rates of return at the civic level, where we don't have as much partisan politics, are worse, far worse than federally and provincially, as the Premier is well aware, in terms of the turnout.

I do say that the democratic system has to be looked at from time to time. Can we make it better? I agree with the Premier: when you're in power, that's why it's difficult to get changes because, obviously, the system works well for you because you're in power. But that shouldn't ultimately be the sole criterion of why the system is working properly. The Premier has acknowledged that we do have a concern with the participation rate, with the cynicism, and these sorts of things that are going on.

Proportional rep: is it the way to go or not? Prince Edward Island decided not after going through a commission. They had a by-election. I tend to think that it's better to have those extremes that the Premier talked about if you get a certain level, participate in the Legislature rather than outside. I think that's probably healthier over the long run. That may be a difference of opinion, but at least you see your vote counting. Now, it has led to a cynicism of strategic voting often, you know: I don't like either one of you, but I'm going to hold my nose and vote for one party because I don't like the other one worse. It's the least of the alternatives, as we have in the United States.

I would remind the Premier that in the so-called democracies, the lowest participation rates – I'm not talking provincially; I'm talking federally now – are in the United States, the worst. Canada has the second worst, and the United Kingdom has the third worst participation rates. They don't have proportional rep.

I think we should back up from there. That's the point I was trying to make, to see if the Premier would be interested in it rather than prejudging what the citizens may say. They may definitely go out there and say: "Well, we've taken a look at it. We believe that the first past the post that we have is the best system." Great. Or they may have two or three alternatives. I guess that's what I'm saying. Rather than prejudging even fixed election dates and the other things that people are talking about, I think it would be a very encouraging step, and I think it would go some way to even dispelling some of the cynicism that people have if there was an actual citizens' assembly or coalition or whatever we want to call it that spent a little bit of time as they are doing in other provinces. They did it in P.E.I. and rejected certain things. But it would create that interest.

I guess that's all I'm suggesting, Mr. Chairman: not prejudging proportional rep or fixed election dates. It's probably too far down the way. We should allow a citizens' coalition. If we really believe in democracy and openness and transparency, as we've started to do with the all-party committees and the other things we're working on, it seems to me that this is a logical next step along the way. Again, I'm not foolish enough or naive enough to think: "Oh, what a great idea. The Premier is going to get up and say, yeah, there's going to be a citizens' assembly announced here." I'm just trying to see if there's some interest in pursuing it. Without laying out what they do, allow them as a policy field committee here, but a citizens' committee, to take a look at this and report back over a period of time, be it a year or whatever, to look at the low participation rates, to look at maybe differences that there could be in our electoral system, and maybe lay out some ideas. That's all I'm suggesting to the Premier.

You know, this idea, too, I think, of the instant sort of things that happen has led to some of the cynicism. I've served in public life

for longer than I probably should, but here I am anyhow, Mr. Chairman. I say to people that I think there's some responsibility on the public, too, to not just take the flippant answer that all people are crooks or that they're all this or that. Whatever one's political philosophy, most people run for parties because they want to do public service. I've said to people many times, you know, that politicians are only as good or as bad as the people that elect them, because they're just people. There has to be some move, too, by the public to involve themselves more.

I think if we could do something like a citizens' assembly, it could be a basis for at least taking a look at it, looking at the participation rates, looking at the cynicism. I think it couldn't hurt. I don't think we should prejudge where they would go, whether it be proportional rep or the other things. They may well come back and say, "Hey, this works well the way it is with a little tinkering here and there," but I think the process would be as important as the end. That's why I'm asking the Premier if he might be amenable sometime in the near future to looking at a citizens' assembly.

Mr. Stelmach: One of the challenges of being a Premier is listening very carefully to the questions and the way they're structured. In my response earlier, just talking about what other elected officials had mentioned, had said in the past with some of the electoral reforms – and you're right; there were these discussions in other provinces across Canada – my comments were not in prejudgment of anything. It's simply what I've heard from other Canadians – other provincial leaders, provincial elected officials – in terms of the kinds of discussions they've had.

You know, no matter what the system is, we've had good wisdom in the electorate in this country and in this province. It's without a doubt the best country and province to live in in the world. From time to time we might have some disagreements, but the system has worked well.

With respect to the comment made that perhaps he has served in public life too long, maybe the hon. member will be able to tell us if he's planning on retiring.

Mr. Martin: Well, that's a good way around the question anyhow. The answer is no.

Again, you know, we don't have a great deal of time, but as I said, I'm aware that I'm planting in here, hopefully, a seed that the government and the Premier will take a look at the citizens' coalition. I think it is a serious matter that none of us are going to win down the way if things keep going the way they are with the public. I mean, in politics there are going to be people that agree and disagree. That's the nature of democracy, right? You know, some people are going to be mad some of the time and others mad at the opposition, and that's democracy. As I say, it's messy.

I really worry, Mr. Premier, about some of the younger people not participating in the system. Some of them are even activists. They think what we do here is irrelevant and that they have to go out on the streets to have a say, and I think that's dangerous, too. I'm not saying that people shouldn't participate and rally and demonstrate. I'm not saying that. But if they think that's the end in itself – and that is true of some very bright, active young people – I think we're facing a problem. I guess I would just leave it at that, Mr. Chairman, and say that I really hope that the Premier would down the way consider setting up some form of citizens' participation to look at our democratic system.

4:30

I'm not sure how much time I have; I don't think much. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on the PAB. I guess the only thing I

would say is that part of the problem – and it's a difficult one – is what is government information and what could be seen as being partisan. Often that's in the eye of the beholder, of course, so the question I might ask about the PAB is: what mechanism is there to oversee and control the use and to determine what is partisan?

In our constituency offices, as the Premier is well aware, there are certain rules that we have to follow in terms of what is partisan and what is not partisan, what we can do with our communications budget. I'm wondering if there is something similar through the PAB that sort of monitors what might be seen as too partisan – therefore, they would pull it off – and what is government information, similar to what we have at the constituency office.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, the time for this has elapsed, and now it's time for any members. I have an extensive list, and I will read that off: Calgary-Lougheed, Edmonton-Rutherford, Airdrie-Chestermere, Edmonton-Ellerslie, Calgary-Foothills, and Edmonton-Manning. There are more speakers than the allotted time. If you're brief, we'll probably get them all in. We'll start with Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. A big day, Premier. Congratulations to you.

We're so fortunate – and you know this very well – to have many, many hundreds of boards and agencies and commissions doing great work right across the province. My questions for the Premier are on board governance review, upcoming here. Two questions. What can you tell us about the three individuals that have been appointed? And can you shed a little light on whether they will review and make recommendations on the ongoing training for board members? We're living in such an interesting time, where there are all kinds of possibilities but all kinds of responsibilities, and we want to get our people as prepared as we can. So the two questions: what can you tell us about the individuals? And what do you expect when it comes to recommendations for ongoing training?

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, and thank you to Calgary-Lougheed. The questions raised are with respect to the board governance review secretariat. As I mentioned earlier, the numerous boards and agencies do allocate about 50 per cent of government expenditure on various programs, so it's important to have not only good policies in place but good people on the boards of the agencies and commissions to make the big decisions because they are multibillion dollar decisions.

Now, the process is written/verbal consultation coming to the members. The members are: Linda Hohol, who was the president of TSX Venture Exchange in Calgary; Neil McCrank, the chair, who has spent many years not only as a deputy but was the AEUB chair, years of experience; and Allan Tupper, from UBC, someone that actually was my professor at one time. He did spend some time here at the University of Alberta. I think he was the one that wrote on the Fulton-Favreau formula – remember? – on how to amend the Canadian constitution. I memorized it, but I forgot what it was.

The board will continue the task force and consultations. They'll bring recommendations to us by September 2007, and then we'll work through implementing those recommendations so that we also look at the people that we appoint and the interview process, the open transparency, and also look at the background of people, the kinds of skill sets they bring to the appointments and, again, how to do it in an open and transparent manner.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much. I will be brief because I know that you have a lot of questioners. Mr. Premier, in 2005 a three-member panel made up of government MLAs and chaired by the current Education minister reviewed the operation of the Public Affairs Bureau, and its findings were never released. I'm wondering if in the interest of openness and accountability and transparency you would commit to releasing the findings of that panel.

Mr. Stelmach: There was a report in terms of the PAB. I don't know if it was an external review. All I know is that it was reviewed internally, and there was a discussion that was led by an MLA who is now the Education minister. It was an internal review, for internal purposes.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Premier, for this opportunity. I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the managing growth side of your mandate. The issue in my area is high growth, lots of it. For example, in the city of Airdrie we have an annual growth rate of 10 per cent, and we're on about year 5 or 6 of that kind of a growth rate. In the Chestermere-Langdon areas we're dealing with up to 20 per cent – it's between 18 and 20 per cent in both communities – and it's been like that for the last five years. So the issues in my constituency, for example, are based on this huge growth rate, whether or not we can build schools fast enough, supply any type of health care, deal with high traffic-density issues, the underpass/overpass situation at the south end of Airdrie, where if you happen to be driving out of Calgary on any evening during about a two-hour block when it's rush hour, you would discover that there's traffic lined up on highway 2 trying to exit for sometimes up to three or four kilometres.

Mr. Goudreau: Go in the ditches.

Ms Haley: Yeah, go in the ditches. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The truth is that it's supposed to be a freeway system on highway 2, and this is clearly not a freeway when you run into that kind of traffic volume or the problem with getting people off the road. I raise this not to try and lobby – although, I could do that – but, rather, to ask this kind of a question in this framework, Mr. Premier. When you're looking at managing growth – we all know that a lot of this growth has captured everybody's attention – is there a role through your Executive Council leadership on setting up, perhaps inside municipal affairs, for example, a high-growth commission or committee? I don't know what the proper terminology is, but a focus of that department that would anticipate some of the growth issues. I believe there are 28 communities in Alberta that are dealing with over 5 per cent annualized growth. For me and for all of them coming back and asking for more schools, please, and “Could you fix my overpass?” and “When are you going to build me a clinic?” you know, is frustrating because it's always like it's a surprise. It isn't a surprise because we've got a track record now that shows that this massive growth is occurring.

So it seems to me that rather than just dealing with a granting basis from a municipal affairs point of view, perhaps there's an opportunity here to set up some expertise inside the department of municipal affairs that could help municipalities in their planning for the kinds of growth that they're dealing with. Maybe there's an opportunity there for your leadership to help us in the Airdrie, Rocky View, Chestermere, Langdon areas on planning for where we are

going to get our water. How do we deal with the traffic issues that are evolving and getting worse every day? So that's one spot.

4:40

The other spot, of course, is that in my area the whole area is dealing with water issues, whether it's the Kneehill water commission coming down from the current Red Deer River pipeline into Irricana and Beiseker, which it already does, but now we're dealing with water quality issues because there's not enough flow right in that pipeline.

These are not in your portfolio, Mr. Premier. I recognize that. But these are real issues that we're dealing with in some of these higher growth areas. I would love to have your views on how you see government reacting to that kind of growth pressure and maybe a more concerted effort on looking at how we deal with these problems in an anticipatory way rather than sort of a reactionary way.

The other comment would be, I guess, on the Water for Life strategy. Under managing growth do you see the Water for Life strategy taking on a much greater importance in making sure that we have reservoirs set aside that can capture some of the runoff waters that are going through now on some of the high-stream flow advisories? Is there an opportunity here for us to try to even work with irrigation districts or other partners to try to develop a more sustainable water reservoir system that could help us deal with that? I'm sure that by the time summer comes around, in August we'll be having water restrictions for everybody trying to water their lawns or their gardens at that point. So is there part of your managing growth where you're looking at that type of an issue?

I'd just appreciate your input, sir.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Managing growth pressures is one of the five government priorities. This is one area that is very important no matter what we talk about. An issue was raised with respect to roads and water, and we do have so many communities that are facing unbelievable increases in population and are putting pressures on the existing infrastructure.

The first thing, of course, is to move on the review that was done in Fort McMurray because that is something that we have to address immediately. The next step, again, is through Executive Council in terms of reviewing policy, looking at all of the ideas that are coming forward and starting to draft those policies for consideration. One of them is Water for Life, definitely. You know, will we be able to move to water storage? It is critical. It will do a number of good things, of course, not only provide water. It will improve some of the issues tied to flooding in some cases in terms of having water reservoirs and also will improve the quality of water considerably.

With respect to the roads it was visionary on behalf of the government very early, more than 30 years ago, to buy property for the transportation and utility corridor. So we're very fortunate that we have that property purchased, and we're building the ring roads. The question is: where is the next outer ring road for some of these communities? We have to do that planning now. That's looking at the future, and that's why it's imperative that we have the kind of planning with respect to the greater capital area and Calgary and area. What will the city of Calgary look like with two million people? Where will those borders be? Will they incorporate the city of Airdrie? How do you get from Airdrie, then, to downtown Calgary? Given the traffic volumes, at a million, know that if you double that, you won't be able to do it by car unless you want to take the whole day. Again, the transportation systems.

Then we look at something else and, again, not necessarily Calgary and the communities around but the capital area, you know, LRT, public transit. How do we look at: can we do something with waste management together rather than in each municipality? Can we pool the resources, again with water and then planning of roads? There is a lot of attention paid on the upgraders that are coming. Of course, Leduc has a number of advantages of having a container port. Again, improvements to highway 2.

But the population has doubled. In the first part of this year, in the first three months, another 11,000 people migrated to Alberta just from other provinces, not including other countries. Those pressures will continue because there are job opportunities. As more people come to this province, how do we encourage more housing development? Even though we're building many single dwellings and building a considerable number of spaces for seniors, it's low-income, affordable housing, low-income rentals that we have to encourage.

Part of that planning will be to work with the federal government, maybe through tax incentives, and the other is to look at perhaps even some zoning bylaws, that municipalities have to encourage this development. But I'm sure – in fact, I'm positive – with the additional money going into housing, \$285 million, into affordable housing, that will spawn some new ideas and new spaces.

If you look at the projections and the type of investment that's coming into the province, if it's going to be \$40 billion just on the Industrial Heartland, on the petrochemical side and upgrading side – we look at the number of new people that will be in the province, and that's where planning is critical. This is part of the reason that, you know, with the planning and the policy evaluation we need help to evaluate all the information that's coming forward because, as I said before in the opening remarks, there is no library you can go to and learn from someone else's experience. This is groundbreaking, and it will continue. I know that we're going through a number of policy reviews, but the one most important is that we've got to plan for more people, housing, roads, and water.

If we plan it well, even for recycling of water, we could probably, you know, if things work out, use some communities' lagoon water in the settling ponds for the petrochemical industry. Rather than drawing water from the river, use it from a source that's already there and then just ensure that it has been processed before it finds its way back to the river. There are a whole bunch of possibilities to use the same litre of water many more times.

The Water for Life strategy. The only comment that I can make, though, is that we can do a lot individually, you know: a shorter shower, less heating of water. Different jurisdictions have applied different rules. We're not in as critical a position as some other countries are, but we don't want to get there. If we triple our population, which could possibly happen, then the policies that we implement today will ensure that we have enough water for future generations. Storage is a critical component of that, and it has been in the Water for Life strategy.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for giving me the opportunity once again to ask a few questions to the hon. Premier. Mr. Premier, one of your priorities is honest, transparent, accountable government. The Member for Edmonton-McClung mentioned the FOIP bill, Bill 20, which this government passed last year. According to that bill, we can't have ministerial briefing notes for five years and internal audit reports for 15 years. You know, if you don't get all the details of what the government is doing for 15 years, how can we find out some things which are not done accord-

ing to the rules and regulations? By the way, I'm going to table a bill in which I'm urging this government to reverse this motion, so will you help me to pass that bill, which is maybe coming in this session, maybe in the next session?

4:50

My next question is about the big blue book for the general revenue fund. I tried to find a few things from that book, but we don't find the full details about the \$30 million or so that the government spent on that. If the government is serious about transparency, how can we improve? How can all the members find out if, you know, the money, the total budget of the general revenue fund is prudently or wisely – I mean, the full details on that. Also, how can the government improve the website on all the lottery funds? On the website it's not clear how the tonnes of money have been awarded. Every time we have to go through the FOIP, it takes lots of time and we don't find lots of details. It's very difficult for the opposition to play the right role in the democratic government. If you still really believe in a democratic, transparent, honest, accountable government, I'm sure you will look into that.

My next question is about the committee and task force recommendations, as somebody else mentioned. I know that the government has spent tonnes of money on wages and time, but if the government is not implementing most of the recommendations made by the task forces and committees, first of all, how much extra burden is that on the taxpayers? If you don't implement those recommendations, why do we have those task forces and committees? I know that it's very important in the democratic process, as you said, but still I want you to assess whether it's worth spending that much money. Now we have 18 ministries instead of 24. Work it out. Because we have so many chairpersons, deputy ministers, is that worth spending that much money? I know that your intention was really good because that's the reason you reduced the number of ministers. The same money you saved in the small ministries, I want to make sure that money is worth while.

Another question is: do you believe the leader should be decisive? When the time came for the affordable home issue, you said that you will talk to the PC caucus and PC membership during your annual general meeting. Do you prefer to take decisions made by the party or decisions made by Albertans? That's my question.

My last question, Mr. Premier, is about political favouritism. How can we improve on that issue? Maybe some members don't agree with me, but I have heard lots of stories about favouritism. They are saying that this party's in power for a long time, 36 years or so. If the MLAs from the government side interfere, if they approach the right department, they get the grants. If the opposition members are involved, they try to, you know – I shouldn't say that they are trying to stop that, but it's hard for them to help those communities. So I just want you to answer, if you can, some questions. I'm sure that your intention is good and that you will try to address those issues in the future.

Thank you.

The Chair: Before I recognize the Premier, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's indeed a

great pleasure to rise and introduce someone who would be well known to several members here in the Assembly and perhaps might be a new face to others. She distinguished herself with many years of dedicated service to Albertans. I had the pleasure of being a bureaucrat in the system, as they say, when she was an MLA. It's my pleasure to introduce on behalf of our Premier, who's asked me to make this special introduction, Shirley Cripps, a former MLA from the Drayton Valley area. Welcome and thank you for being here.

head:

Main Estimates 2007-08

Executive Council (continued)

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you. This gives me an opportunity to answer a question from the previous opportunity the hon. member had to rise, and that is with respect to election irregularities. Obviously, it must have been successful because you're here. What you're asking about is with respect to officers of the Legislature, and that's within the authority of the Legislature and not the Premier's office. Certainly, dealing with irregularities is important so that we do improve the confidence of Albertans in the electoral process.

There was a question with respect to task forces. The purpose of a task force is to provide options. After hearing evidence, ideas, opinions coming from people, the task force collates those ideas into options and may make recommendations to this House. It's really the elected people that are responsible to sort out all those options and recommendations that come forward and then make the decision. Yes, the task forces are important in gathering information. It certainly reduces, you know, the workload for us here while we're in session. They come out, hear the evidence, collate it, bring it here with recommendations, and we then debate them here in the Legislature.

With respect to the website I can speak to the website for the government. The website was redeveloped, and it's working quite well from what I hear. The approval rating is extremely high. I think it's 85 per cent or 86 per cent or something like that. So the government website has been accepted extremely well. A lot of people rely on the website. It was redesigned this year, 2007, after extensive research and looking at websites across Canada. It does focus on government services, which is the purpose of it. It flows the information out in terms of all programs. They like the clean layout, from what the feedback has been. The next step is to have a sort of consistent look to the websites of all ministries so that we, you know, deliver the messages of the government of Alberta.

5:00

There was a question with respect to the blue book. Under transparency and openness, of course, we brought about a lot of changes, Mr. Chairman, first of all, making public the manifests on government-owned airplanes and the people that travelled on them. It's now a matter of public record. You don't have to go to the library, don't have to go through FOIP or whatever to receive them. It's there, and I think that has helped a lot. You know, the media has it; the opposition has it. Usually the questions opened up: Well, through documents recently obtained by the opposition. Well, the documents are there.

The other is, of course, making public ministerial expenses, executive assistant expenses. Those are on the web. We just did those, I believe, this week. They are on the web. That's a giant step forward. Again, it will bring down a lot of the costs for the taxpayer because many times the opposition is FOIPing them. Rather than

paying for all of that, all we're saying is: "Here. It's available. We're not hiding anything." That, to me, has gone a long way in openness and transparency.

With respect to the blue book, that blue book is an interesting piece of information. I remember after the nomination when I was running for office as a nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta, I saw a lot of this blue book in many coffee shops. Remember, Mr. Chairman, in those days we used to have the Crow benefit offset, you know, the fuel rebate program, and all those things. They used to trudge that book around and take it to the coffee shop and say: "Look, there's Stelmach. He's running for the PC government, and look, he got some money from the Crow offset benefit program." We had a lot of hogs. We were feeding them. We qualified for the program. It was a real focus, and they'd say: it's patronage because you're a PC member, you're running for office, and look, you're getting paid by the taxpayer.

But, you know, it was interesting: you flip a little further and pick out other names. They happen to be very good Liberals, and – guess what? – they were in the book because they also received a Crow benefit offset and some, you know, fuel rebates. I remember that there was a 40-some dollar a ton fertilizer rebate. All of those were in the book, so it was very open and transparent, and information worked both ways.

But the opposition just raised a good question. Very secretly, the opposition has billed the Alberta taxpayers for an expense, and that was the expense of running radio ads earlier this year. I'm wondering if that's going to show up in the blue book. Will it be part of the blue book and identified as an expense for that purpose, or will it be in a bigger budget in the blue book, a bigger item?

You know, we have an opportunity to improve the blue book. I'd like to hear today, you know, in terms of openness and transparency, what the amount was that was billed so that all Albertans know. We're talking about perception. We're talking about appearance. We heard a lot of that today earlier from the opposition. Here's a very good opportunity to remove some of that perception and appearance, and give us exactly how much has been billed to the Alberta taxpayer for the radio ads that ran earlier this year.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You caught me off guard. It was indicated to me that I wouldn't have an opportunity to speak.

Mr. Rodney: You do now.

Mr. Webber: I do now. So thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour to stand and ask the Premier a couple questions. Mr. Premier, first of all, I just want to say that it's an honour to be able to sit so close to you, behind you every day, and learn from you.

Anyway, I just want to talk a little bit about a report that I got in the mail the other day, a Report to Albertans. It was a report that had a message from you, Mr. Premier, in there, and it also had some details on the budget along with an update on the government's five-priority plan and also information on access to programs and services. It was an excellent, excellent piece of work, I thought, because what it also indicated in here was what Calgarians will be receiving with regard to investment in this year's provincial budget.

Nearly \$5.5 billion will be invested in delivering services to Calgarians. I think that it is very important to indicate to my constituents and others in Calgary the amount of money that is invested: \$22.6 million will help with policing, crime prevention, and victim services; \$684 million in funding for research and postsecondary institutions; \$2.2 billion to provide health services

through the Calgary health region; and also \$1.3 billion for kindergarten to grade 12 education. This was in your report, Mr. Premier, and I thought it was excellent that we share this information with Calgarians.

Included in this document also were more grants: \$514 million in grants will be sent to the city of Calgary, including \$126 million for affordable housing and other grant programs, \$95 million for the 5 cents per litre gas tax, and also \$293 million for municipal infrastructure programs. Further, \$2.7 billion is being injected into Calgary infrastructure over the next three years. I don't know if this was clearly communicated in the past, but it certainly did with this document. I applaud your staff, Mr. Premier, for getting this out to my constituents and all Calgarians.

One thing that I would like to ask you, Mr. Premier, is that I hope you continue to send out this type of information to Albertans because it is so informative. I hope you do, and if you can indicate to me that you will, that would be wonderful. But also I'd like to know if you can advise us of the cost of this, the cost per household of the production of this document and the distribution of this document.

I'll leave it at that, then. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, and thanks for the support of our staff, the people that work very hard not only, of course, in Executive Council but in all ministries and all different roles and responsibilities throughout the province of Alberta. I've always taken huge pride in the quality of our civil service. They're outstanding. Compared to others, I know that in terms of policy formulation, ideas, bringing forward options in terms of policy, they're simply outstanding. They have served the public of Alberta very well and continue to work at encouraging more people to join the Alberta civil service. Just like in any other public or private sector we have to renew. We have many that will be looking towards retirement soon, so it's another task that we have assigned to ourselves as government to ensure that we interest young people in serving the public of Alberta. It is a responsibility, and it's also one that all those working in the Alberta civil service should do with pride.

With respect to the report, earlier this year we said that we'd do the Report to Albertans on a quarterly basis. It's to get information out on various government programs, information in terms of what's available to a particular, you know, group of Albertans, whether they be seniors, our youth, some of the programs available, let's say, under AADAC or Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, all of the government programs.

This time we have three reports. There'll be one designed to deliver the information to Edmontonians in terms of what's available here, what's going to Edmonton in terms of infrastructure grants and programs available; one for the city of Calgary, which will itemize the investments; and also a general one for all of the province of Alberta. Within the Alberta report there will be, of course, information with regard to infrastructure and programs available but general infrastructure on provincial highways and, of course, improvements to some infrastructure in many of the municipalities.

The cost is \$200,000. It's about 16 cents a copy, and that's going out to all Albertans. It's a very effective, very efficient way of getting information out to Albertans, and we'll continue to do that because as in our business plan we're going to do it four times a year.

Thank you for the question.

5:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased, indeed very honoured, to be able to rise here today on the very first occasion of our new Premier answering questions from the Assembly on supply. I'm sure that when we reach the year 2027, on the 20th time in a row when you're up facing this Assembly on supply, Mr. Premier, we will be facing a much more vibrant and strong Alberta. I'm sure that we won't be seeing the same Leader of the Official Opposition. Maybe – maybe – he'll be working on his radio program that he's picked up. I do welcome the dedicated, experienced, and qualified public servants with you today. I'm pleased to see the reforms that have allowed them to sit here and advise in this process.

This is supply, Mr. Chair, and Executive Council is one of the most crucial arms of government and in our province of Alberta. The priorities set out by the Premier for our Alberta government are correct and focused to the priorities of our times. Communicating these priorities and, indeed, all of the functions of government is a key responsibility of Executive Council and, in particular, the Public Affairs Bureau.

On page 161, performance measure 2.a of the Executive Council business plan 2007-10 states that public satisfaction with government communications sits at 62 per cent. I really do wonder if that is good enough. The Executive Council annual report 2005-06 states that this figure of public satisfaction with government communications in priority areas has never risen above 65 per cent, but the target in every one of these years has been 75 per cent and has never been met. My question on this is: how does Public Affairs aim to improve its score on this performance measure so it does not fall short again?

Mr. Chairman, I also think that credit should be given where credit is due. The fact that Alberta Connects e-mail questions have had a target response time of 72 hours with the goal to reach 95 per cent in that target in '05-06 and reached 98 per cent, which is a near perfect score, is amazing for government. This is not one that one usually hears about in terms of response time from government and must be commended highly. Mr. Premier, I ask that you pass that along to the Alberta Connects people.

A couple of specific questions to the Premier on board governance review. I've had the question asked of me when we will see the reports come forward in a comprehensive manner on board governance review and if the form of these reports will be consistent and comparable. I've been asked specifically also on one of those: when will we see the report on the Alberta Labour Relations Board, and what consultations have been made or are planned with stakeholder groups to improve the transparency, accountability, and governance of this particular board?

In a wider view of government, which, of course, is the Premier's responsibility, I am concerned that there seems to be a clear push in some quarters, from the Official Opposition really, to create an artificial rural/urban split in Alberta. Now, I often wonder: what is rural and what is urban in our province in this modern day and age? I have trouble thinking that Grande Prairie or Red Deer are rural, but I have heard them described as such.

My riding of Edmonton-Manning is the largest rural riding in the city of Edmonton. Market gardens, seed potato production, and all manner of agricultural pursuits actually form the greatest percentage of the area of my riding. Much of it is, indeed, rural, but it's defined as urban. You know, this is one of the problems we see. Again, agriculturally speaking, Edmonton-Manning, my riding, has a lot of people employed in the equine industry. There is a huge number of people in northeast Edmonton, indeed in all of Edmonton who work

in horse racing, rodeo, jumping, training, recreational riding, in all manner of jobs associated with the horse industry. Other agricultural pursuits and support functions for agriculture are crucial for our Edmonton city economy and for local jobs. I'm very surprised that the Official Opposition has had such an attack on the horse industry, on the equine industry. They have in this House laughed at agricultural issues and generally don't seem to understand their importance to our city and the economy of our province as a whole.

I would ask the Premier to comment on how we can communicate to Albertans that there is not really a rural/urban split in our province right now, that in fact we are one province, that we are working to ensure the benefit of all areas, and that agriculture benefits the cities, too, and indeed creates a lot of jobs.

Again I commend the Premier for the many new changes and initiatives he has brought forward. I thank him for being here today, and I look forward to his answers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the Member for Edmonton-Manning, thank you for the very kind words with respect to our staff, and I will extend those congratulations to them all.

I'm, of course, no guru when it comes to the business of communications and how you score success or no success or little success or lack of success in communications, but I'm told that a goal of 75 per cent in communications is like 100 per cent because they say that about 25 per cent of the public on average will disapprove of whatever government policy there is. We're at 62 per cent. We want to work towards 75 per cent. I think that we could increase that support with the Report to Albertans because it will be focused, and Albertans then will have that information in their own home in a very, I believe, cost-effective manner.

The hon. member brings up a very important point on this issue about rural/urban. You know, Mr. Chair, there are 3.4 million Albertans. We're competing against economies that are much larger than Alberta's, obviously. We're competing against economies and populations that are 10 times, 20 times, 40 times, 100 times larger than the province of Alberta's, and when we start tearing at the fabric of this province, trying to split, build divisions between urban and rural and north and south and east and west, that's not good. It takes away from the effort and the focus that we need in global competition.

If we can't co-operate locally, how can we compete globally? Here we are within the province. Some are trying to drive these wedges, you know, on a regular basis. Yet as a government we've made great steps in the last five years working with the Liberal government of B.C., a very visionary government led by Gordon Campbell. We're removing a whole bunch of trade barriers. We've moved on the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement. We're going to work further, like with the MOUs that we signed on working together on disaster services. We worked on, of course, wait-time guarantees. How can both provinces work together? Perhaps it might be in the area of oncology. I mean, that is groundbreaking. Nobody has been able to accomplish it before, but here this government, working with the government of B.C., has been able to do it.

I'll give you one example. In one of the first meetings, you know, the two Premiers of the day said: okay; give us some quick ones. Well, one of them, of course, was in transportation. On the highway today we have one vehicle inspection station. You know, it's on the B.C. side – it's towards Golden – but so what? It's an imaginary line as a truck travels. I'm sure that that kilogram is still the same

on this side of that imaginary line or on that side. It was jointly constructed, Alberta and B.C. Now it's jointly staffed, and it's saving us millions of dollars in operations. Most importantly, it reduces the cost of shipping our goods and services to the coast. And that's just one example.

5:20

Rural/urban. Many Edmontonians, many Calgarians have rural backgrounds. They still remember the communities, and many of them could have been brought up in a rural community not even in Alberta. It could have been in the Maritimes. It could have been in Ontario. It could have been in any other province. It could have been in any other country.

Again, as a government I'm committed together with all our caucus members to make sure that we work as a unit, work with municipalities, work with Albertans so that we don't create these shifts. We don't need division in the province. We need co-operation, whether it's intermunicipal planning, whether it's interjurisdictional, interprovincial. I can tell you that just with intermunicipal, the kind of growth that we see is in the billions of dollars in investment attracted to this province if we can deal with many of the intermunicipal issues. If we don't, we will lose some of that investment because then the investment climate will be unpredictable, and it won't be stable. Clearly, it's in the best interests of all Albertans that we work together. I can assure you that we're going to pursue co-operation, collaboration in all areas and are not going to allow anybody to drive these wedges between and amongst Albertans. I make that promise in the House.

The other is also working together in terms of broadening our tax base because, yes, the rural has so many strengths. If we look at the contribution to our economy from rural Alberta, it's outstanding because it's not only agriculture based, of course, like raw production. It's value-added, and you'll find that some of the companies that work in the oil and gas industry are rural based. They contribute to small communities immensely. That's of great help to Albertans. As we grow, with more population, we know that we'll have to of course deliver more government programs like health and education. That is the balance between our responsibility

of ensuring that there are enough people in the province to deliver those programs, that we have the housing for them, that we have the infrastructure and, most importantly, build on the co-operation.

The private sector will continue to invest, create jobs, and that's what really pays for the government programs but also secures the future for our children and their children. It's just the direction we're taking as a government. We'll continue to take that direction no matter how hard some may want to throw us off the rail.

The Chair: Are there others? Seeing none, I'll now invite the officials to leave the Assembly so that the committee can rise and report.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(c) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The committee has had under consideration certain resolutions for the Department of Executive Council relating to the 2007-08 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour, I would move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:25 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, June 7, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/06/07

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly officers of the Salvation Army in Alberta. Active in this province for well over 100 years the quiet commitment, dedication, and good work among those in need in our society by the Salvation Army is well known. Our six visitors are here to mark significant milestones in their lives.

After serving as divisional leader for Alberta, Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut for the last few years, Major Robert Ratcliff and Major Shirley Ratcliff will retire next week after 40 years of devoted service. Major Brian Venables and Major Anne Venables have been for 16 years residents of our province, Alberta. They will be moving to Regina in July to start a new ministry to give oversight to the Salvation Army's activities in Saskatchewan. Envoys Andy and Janet Kwak recently celebrated 20 years of service. They are responsible for the Salvation Army's community and family services. Andy has served international disaster relief secondment in Kosovo, Chechnya, Malawi, Ground Zero in New York City, and Mississippi.

The Salvation Army is unique and has served Albertans for over a century without favour or reservation and deserves our recognition.

Mr. Speaker, our guests are seated in your gallery, and I'd ask them to rise as I call their names once again, and I'd ask the Assembly to recognize them as well. Major Robert Ratcliff and Major Shirley Ratcliff, Major Brian Venables and Major Anne Venables, Envoy Andy Kwak and Envoy Janet Kwak. Hon. members, kindly afford them the traditional warm welcome.

Mr. Speaker, I apologize. There's one additional guest in the gallery as well. I didn't have the name earlier: Karen Diaper. She is with public relations for the Salvation Army. Could you please rise and be recognized as well.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly this year's municipal internship program placements. This award-winning program offers an excellent opportunity for postsecondary students to transition into the workforce while contributing to the sustainability of Alberta communities.

Mr. Speaker, each year my ministry places interns in municipalities across the province to help address the succession planning and training of future managers to contribute to operating efficient local governments. I am confident after meeting this fine group over the lunch hour that Alberta municipalities will be well served by this enthusiastic group which is eager to learn and assist in local governments.

Mr. Speaker, there are 25 interns that come from Alberta and other provinces across Canada – and I won't name them all – plus ministry officials in attendance. I would ask them to please stand and receive the official warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a very special constituent of mine. Jennifer Baker recently came home with a gold medal in senior girls singles five-pin bowling and is now the 2007 national champion. Jennifer not only can say that she's a national champion; she can also say that she is a back-to-back national champion, having taken home the junior girls singles gold medal in 2006. Jennifer is joined by her mother, Kelly Cornelius, and coach, Ernie McLellan, and his wife, Diane McLellan. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and my honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very important people. Seated in the members' gallery and visiting from Willowdale, Ontario, is my assistant's mother, Mrs. Molly Georgina Oliver. With her is her son-in-law Guy Gosselin. We know how important family is to all of us to encourage us and support us in our daily needs. That's why these are two very important people, and they're here to see us today. I would like to ask the entire Assembly to give them the warm welcome of the Assembly. If Molly and Guy could please rise.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour and pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. James Sexsmith, accompanied by my constituency assistant, Darlene Treder. Jim is a veteran of World War II, and he's active in federal and provincial politics. He advocates for the underprivileged and low-income people. He is here today again to voice his concern on the issue of rent relief. I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. They are seated in the public gallery. I request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the following visitors who are here concerned about high rents. They have actually sought help from the government and have been turned away and have got no results for their own lives. I would like to introduce Cora Davis, Shayne Tymkow, Danielle Boudreau, Lena Siben, Nicole Kuiken, Bernadette Thomas, Mary Ladouceur, and Norma Baker. I'd ask them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a group of wonderful people who represent the diversity of the population of

Mill Woods and who are concerned about housing issues for people wanting to rent or buy. I would ask that these people please signal their presence at the end: Pastor intern Reece Retzlaff from First Mennonite Church; Pastor Donita Wiebe-Neufeld, First Mennonite Church; Pastor Mike Magnus, South Edmonton Alliance Church; Pastor Damien Lee, South Edmonton Alliance Church; Pastor Dale Irving, Mill Woods United Church; Father Martin Carroll, St. Teresa Catholic Church; Pastor Larry Lindoff, Evangel Pentecostal Assembly; Pastor Wayne McNeilly, Evangel Pentecostal Assembly; Reverend James Hendericksen, St. Paul's Lutheran; Reverend Kathy Bowman, St. Patrick's Anglican Church; Pastor Debbie Kunst, Evangel Assembly; and Pastor Adam Andritz, Evangel Assembly.

In addition, I have individuals here today from the Canadian Paraplegic Association who are also here to express concerns about housing issues for the disabled, and I'd like to welcome Edgar and Sheena.

Would you all indicate your presence, and would you please give them the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Rhonda Starkel, a constituent from St. Albert who is anxiously awaiting to hear from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding housing concerns. She is a single mother with a child, and it's a difficult time to handle rent increases. I'm hoping the minister or someone in his office will call her. I wish to have her stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three UFCW members from the Palace Casino strike, which is now in its 272nd day due to this government's refusal to pass first contract legislation. Their names are Roxanne Draudson, Sheri Panas, and Susie Krajancic. Roxanne is a poker dealer and has been in the gaming industry since 1998. She is working towards a bachelor of science degree to work on medical research. Sheri has been a server at the casino for five years and has recently completed her studies in human resources. Susie has worked for seven years at the Palace Casino and works as an acting pit boss and dealer. She's married with two boys and enjoys taking her kids to soccer and ball hockey. I would ask them now to all please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure and an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the senior policy analyst of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Janine Halbesma. She is here today in the public gallery to witness and support first reading of Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act. In layman's terms that could be called the red tape reduction act. Janine, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

90th Anniversary of the Election of the First Female MLAs

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today feeling very privileged to speak to this Assembly as an elected official, as a woman, and as a representative on behalf of our government on the status of women.

In the early 20th century you picture a time when women wore bonnets and long dresses, travelling in horse-drawn buggies and down dusty roads. This may have seemed like an easy life, but in actuality it wasn't. I remember my grandmother Rose Laing, who in 1923 wrote of her experience to the *Calgary Daily Herald* of travelling alone, the first woman ever known to do so as a white Caucasian, with her horses through the Rocky Mountains and Radium Valley, through Sinclair Canyon to Fort Steele, and ultimately to Westbank, B.C., encountering a bear, lightning storms, mosquitoes, and no lodging along the way.

That pioneer spirit was evident in many women in those early days in our province. Two such women who encompass this spirit were Louise McKinney and Roberta MacAdams. These women were political pioneers who were the first women to be elected to a provincial Legislature in Canada, on June 7, 1917.

Louise McKinney's interests included social services, immigrant work, and the negative effects of alcohol and smoking. She was interested in legislation to aid people with disabilities, and her major initiative was the improvement of the legal status of widows and separated wives. During the June 1917 election Louise McKinney was chosen as the country's and British Empire's first female representative.

Roberta MacAdams, proudly recognized this week, became the first woman to introduce and successfully move a piece of legislation, the Act to Incorporate the Great War Next-of-Kin Association. In 1916 she was enlisted in the Canadian army medical corps, and during that time two pieces of legislation were passed in Alberta. The Alberta equal suffrage act extended the vote to the women of Alberta, and the Alberta Military Representation Act separated Alberta soldiers and military nurses overseas into a separate constituency. Roberta MacAdams was elected overseas by the Alberta soldiers and, as we've learned, by the nurses as a representative at large for Alberta for the soldiers. She was appointed to the Alberta Soldier Settlement Board with responsibility for the needs of those women, and her work in the Legislature led to the establishment of a teacher training school in Edmonton.

Louise McKinney and Roberta MacAdams undoubtedly left behind a political, educational, social, and military legacy that Canadians continue to benefit from today. Mr. Speaker, in this House all women elected represent their constituency and the modern-day Roberta MacAdams and Louise McKinney.

I would like to select a few others that are beyond this Legislature who have either been elected or provoked important political action: women like Colleen Klein, Shirley McClellan, Anne McLellan, Jan Reimer, and our own Premier's wife, Marie Stelmach. As women they are responsible to society and generate much in the way of interest and provide leadership for all Alberta women and for future generations. I am proud and honoured today to recognize all as we celebrate the 90th anniversary of the first election of women in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to commemorate the 90th anniversary of women voting in an Alberta election for the first time. While Alberta was one of the first

provinces to grant women the right to vote in 1916, it was 90 years ago today that Alberta women actually voted in a provincial election. Most notably, Louise McKinney and Roberta MacAdams were the first two women elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and, indeed, any Legislative Assembly in the British Empire.

Without the determination of this province and key women in the suffrage movement young women today would not have the opportunity to legally vote and participate in politics. As you can see in this House, Mr. Speaker, although this province took the lead 90 years ago to ensure the democratic equality of women, participation in politics is still unequal.

I am passionate about getting more women elected, and I mean to every party. So I went and talked to some younger women when I knew that I'd be making this statement. They told me that while they consider themselves political, they will not participate in electoral politics by running in a future election. It is not that they do not have the desire to participate, nor do they find themselves unqualified to do so. In fact, a couple of years ago one young woman envisioned herself as the Premier of the province and then Prime Minister.

For these young women electoral politics is less attractive and less feasible than when pioneer suffragettes such as Louise McKinney and Roberta MacAdams fought for women's franchise, access to the Legislature, and access to equality. These women explained that the nomination and campaign process exposes the economic disparity of women. To become a viable candidate and get elected, women must raise thousands of dollars while executing their primary care duties. Women are still the primary caregivers for their children and aging parents; thus, the lack of adequate child care, long hours, and extensive travel deter these women from participating.

Legislatures are still described as old boys' clubs, and this affects women's interest in participating in politics. For these young women they see women who are elected being sexualized in the media and channelled into traditional women's areas such as the portfolio of Children's Services rather than Infrastructure and Transportation. Moreover, these young women believe that they are restricted by an electoral glass ceiling in which advancement is narrow.

While they've made it clear that they do not discount the Legislature's ability to effect change, this younger generation requires that such social and economic barriers be redressed. Until the government and the Legislature initiate on-site child care, ceilings on expenditures for nomination and election campaign financing, and a demonstrated political will for women being elected, these young women will continue to be underrepresented in this government and this Legislature. But in following the example given to us by Roberta MacAdams and Louise McKinney, I know that we can prove them wrong.

Thank you.

The Speaker: We'll need unanimous consent to recognize a representative from the third party.

[Unanimous consent granted]

1:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems odd now that until 90 years ago, within the reach of living memory and history, women were struggling to be recognized not as equals in every way but simply as persons.

The Persons Case of 1927 and its subsequent conclusion in 1929

find their roots with Emily Murphy and the Alberta Supreme Court ruling in 1917 that declared that women, too, were persons in matters of rights and privileges. Without this challenge, that which we take for granted now, our inclusionary civil society and notions of rights and responsibilities for all, might have looked completely different. It was action, not hollow words, that dislodged the entrenched norms of a patriarchal society disenfranchising over 50 per cent of the population on the basis of gender. As the Lord Chancellor of the Privy Council in 1929 stated: Yes, women are persons, and "the exclusion of women from all public offices is a relic of days more barbarous than ours."

Mr. Speaker, here is a sample of a few more examples of relics from days more barbarous than ours. In a Legislature of 83 members there are only 11 female MLAs sitting here today. There still exist substantial wage differentials between men and women in the workplace. The famous glass ceiling, that ensures that the numbers of women in top corporate positions remain a small minority, still is in place. And let's not forget that Alberta has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in Canada even today.

Ninety years ago have passed since this journey began, and we have come a long way. However, Mr. Speaker, clearly we have miles to go. Thank you.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Federation of Canadian Municipalities Conference

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week Calgary hosted the Federation of Canadian Municipalities National Conference. Close to 5,000 attendees and their spouses enjoyed our hospitality. I attended a number of receptions where I met some municipality leaders from across Canada. My office also set up a booth at the night market in the Olympic Plaza in front of city hall. My staff and myself distributed Alberta government information from 4 to 10 p.m.

I want to thank Sandy Wilson, Sandy Matthews, and Jesse Kline for doing a great job at our booth. We met many local people as well as visitors and conference attendees. All those from outside Alberta that I met were so impressed with Alberta and the city of Calgary. They wondered why we talk negatively about our problems. They all wished to have our problems instead of theirs.

Alberta has the highest per capita public spending in health care, education, social support, infrastructure, municipal grants, and the list goes on. One delegate said to me: I just don't understand why there are people complaining about not having enough when others outside Alberta are starving. Realizing that I am a government MLA, another delegate said to me: "You guys have been doing very well. Your government policies are leading. I wish our government could do the same."

Indeed, my father once told me: when we live at the foot of the mountain, we don't realize how high the mountain is. Listening to the community leaders from outside of Alberta, I feel fortunate that we live in Alberta. Our children do not have to go make a living somewhere else. I also appreciate the freedom that if I don't like the way Alberta is going, I can always move to where I like it better. Paraphrasing an ancient Vietnamese saying, "Good land, birds nest," my Caofucius saying is: good government, people come. Last year in Calgary alone 36,000 people added to its million.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Lac La Biche Watershed Steering Committee

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past six years the Canadian environment awards have recognized exceptional individuals and groups who are working to develop sustainable strategies to protect Canada's biodiversity. Earlier this week the Lakeland county's Lac La Biche Watershed Steering Committee was presented with the silver environmental health award for what *Canadian Geographic* describes as the community-based water quality champions.

In 1999 it became apparent the Lac La Biche lake water quality was deteriorating. In 2002 Lakeland county struck a multistakeholder group of citizens who set out to develop a strategy to protect the lake and environment. Public education, school-based programs, and a transparent decision-making process were key to earning the community support necessary to launch a study of the watershed. Since then volunteers and scientists have worked together to develop regulations and policies to balance environmental values and development.

Mr. Speaker, Lakeland county is located in the scenic Lac La Biche area of northeast Alberta. With a mix of oil and gas, forestry, and agriculture as well as an abundance of recreational and cultural amenities the region provides endless opportunities for visitors in an area rich in cultural diversity and heritage.

I would ask members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating Lakeland county and the Lac La Biche Watershed Steering Committee on this tremendously successful initiative and most deserved and prestigious award. These visionary Albertans are an inspiration to us all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Volunteer Organizations

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I love our voluntary sector, also known as the NGO or nongovernment organizations or charitable agencies. To me they are all that is good with this society, from Meals on Wheels to Big Brothers Big Sisters to arts festivals to faith community programs to youth soccer programs to parent and teen mediation services to emergency shelters to trail grooming for cross-country skiing and everything in between. The willing donation of time and money by the citizens support a range of activities and services that make all of our lives better. Volunteers get a chance to learn new skills, socialize, make a meaningful and helpful contribution to their community, and many, many people work in this sector, including those who provide services which the government itself used to provide and now contracts out.

But I have a few observations about the long-term health and well-being of these organizations, their staff, and volunteers. The change in the nature of government support from core funding to project-based or contract funding has had a long-term impact. It is affecting the ability to recruit, train, retain staff and to successfully manage staff succession planning. Few organizations can afford to fund development staff, yet they need to raise additional money to pay for the capacity of the organization to deliver the service. There is no flex or fat, and it has compromised the ability to recover from disasters, emergencies, or anything unanticipated. Their organizational capacity has been hollowed out. Advocacy and service are getting lost in crisis fundraising.

We are losing our institutional memory as we lose long-time staff to better paying and sometimes identical jobs in the corporate and government sector. The fundraising arena now includes educational institutions, hospital foundations, and health programs: tough competition for those other charities and voluntary based groups.

Higher rents, electricity and utility costs, and insurance are additional financial issues they have to face, plus the ethical issues surrounding an increasing reliance on competition for gambling-generated dollars. Volunteers increasingly spend their time working casinos and bingos, not on the agency's main activities.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Kentwood Place

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, when a private assisted-care facility came up for sale, a local businessman, pharmacist, and board member for the Red Deer chapter of the Schizophrenia Society jumped at the opportunity to buy it in order to provide housing to individuals who have a severe mental illness. Pharmacist and philanthropist Mike Tweedy engaged the David Thompson health region and the local Schizophrenia Society in a partnership that would result in 24-hour staffing of the facility, providing an unprecedented level of support for the clients. The health region, with the provincial innovation funds, has agreed to provide support with staff and program resources. The David Thompson health region also entered into a partnership with the Red Deer Schizophrenia Society to provide specialized supports. All three partners work together in planning and supervision.

Kentwood Place opened on June 1 in Red Deer-North to provide housing and support to 23 individuals. The majority of these individuals, who will leave Centennial Centre in Ponoka, would traditionally have found it very difficult to live in the community as the support required was not easily accessible until now. The Kentwood Place P3 partnership reinforces that all sectors in Red Deer are willing to work together to ensure a high level of service in a more cost-effective manner. Traditionally Red Deer has shown leadership in the areas of partnerships, housing, and supports. This new initiative is another example. Kentwood Place is an example of how the community can work together through a P3 partnership.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to Mike Tweedy and his partners. Mike is another shining example of good people doing great things for the people in their community. Please join me in congratulating Mike and his P3 partners for their visionary and outstanding initiative.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Contributions to Leadership Campaign

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The chief administrative officer for the Beaver waste management commission has stated publicly that this commission was approached by other PC Party leadership campaigns for funding in addition to the Premier's. Albertans have a right to know the details. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Will the minister tell the people of Alberta if the Beaver waste management commission or any other public body under his authority was solicited for funds by the leadership campaign for the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, who is now the minister for sustainable development?

Thank you.

1:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When I

was asked the question, I believe, two days ago, I had said that I would look into it, and I am asking for a review of the commission's audited financial statements. At this time I believe my staff will be meeting with the commission's CEO next week.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's not the question I was asking.

Will the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing tell the people of Alberta if the Beaver waste management commission or any other public body under his authority was solicited for funds by the leadership campaign for the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, who is now Minister of Finance?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, sometimes some of their questioning goes from the ignorant to worse. For anyone there to suggest that any minister of this Crown has time to question, to call, to talk to all the commissions, to all the entities in Alberta on what they may or may not have done over the period of the last year during the leadership race for our party is, quite frankly, of very little interest to this House. To suggest that the minister of municipal affairs would have that information is simply being done to try and cast aspersions on the other leadership candidates that ran for the position of leader of this party and, quite frankly, has no place in this House.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The commissioner of the Beaver waste management commission has said that his commission was solicited by other leadership candidates. It is, as I'm sure you know, a commission formed under regulation of this government and under the authority of this cabinet. Again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: will he tell the people of Alberta if the Beaver waste management commission or any other public body under his authority was solicited for funds by the leadership campaign for the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, let me make this very clear. I have said that I am going to do a review of the Beaver waste management commission. I have also said that my staff are meeting with the CEO of that commission next week. We have asked for the audited financial statements of that commission. We will look at all of the financial statements that are presented to us, and, yes, at that time we will see what's there.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Beaver regional waste management commission was commissioned by this government to provide its municipal shareholders with waste management services, to run a regional landfill, period. That's what the regulations of this government say. Yet in defending the unethical donation to the Premier's leadership campaign, the CAO of the commission said, and I quote: there is nothing in the legislation that says we can't. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: is the minister okay with the CAO's attitude and his refusal to abide by the provincial mandate of the commission?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it is very lucky that we have large landfills in Alberta to hold that garbage. If he has any information of any kind that any municipality, that any government commission

contributed in an inappropriate or illegal way to anybody on this government side, bring it up, put it out, and let's check into it. To stand there day after day and continually make allegations of something that may not happen is irresponsible and should end up in the Ryley landfill soon.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The President of the Treasury Board knows well that we did bring a \$5,000 unethical contribution public, and we have the head of the commission saying there were other requests. Many, many questions remain. Why did the CAO of the commission recommend a huge donation of \$25,000? What reasons did the Premier's campaign team give to the commission to sell them on the donation? To the minister of municipal affairs: will the minister do the right thing and commit to a formal, independent inspection of this commission?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I have commissioned a review, and I am sure that that review will reveal where there were contributions. Possibly the party of the opposition may have gotten some contributions from that commission. Next week we are looking at the financial statements, and you never know what it could reveal.

Dr. Taft: I doubt it will reveal much, Mr. Speaker. We have a commissioner who's close friends and a supporter of the Premier reporting to a minister who's a supporter of the Premier on an unethical donation to the Premier by that commission. You, Mr. Minister, are not going to get to the bottom of this. What's needed is an independent inspection. Will this minister do the right thing – the right thing – and call an independent inspection into this situation under his authority?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea who is friends with who. The Leader of the Opposition seems to know better who is a friend of the Premier, how my relationship is with the Premier. I am a minister of the government of Alberta. There was an issue that was brought forward. At that time I looked at the situation and have said that I am going to do a review.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Western Irrigation District

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. This government stumbles from cover-up to cover-up, Mr. Speaker. In their desperation to push through the water transfer for the megamall and racetrack at Balzac, the Western irrigation district is now being asked to provide irrigation water for the project. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. How is it that a giant shopping mall, a hotel, a casino, and a racetrack qualify for water from a public body set up to provide irrigation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess that I can't particularly speak for the WID's motives or what they're going to do, but they certainly have an accountable process that they have to go through under these circumstances. It's up to the WID to consult their stakeholders through a public meeting. It's required by legislation. The public meeting is going to be held on June 21 in Strathmore. It's due process.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Irrigation water is not potable. It will need to be treated. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Can he confirm that millions of public dollars will be used to build a water treatment plant for this mega-mall development?

Mr. Snelgrove: You know what I can confirm? I can confirm that this government has taken the strategy of Water for Life very seriously. We have worked for decades to build regional water support systems for many, many communities across Alberta because we truly believe there are opportunities in rural Alberta that need water, and they need our help to get it, as with all of the major cities. Everyone understands the importance of water. Is there a secret deal to put water in Balzac? Absolutely not. Only in the opposition leader's mind, and he wants to continually stand up and do it. Bring forward the information. He makes an allegation. He then pretends it's true and throws the allegation on all the decent, hard-working people who are trying to provide water systems to all the corners of Alberta.

Dr. Taft: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, to the President of the Treasury Board: how does he justify spending millions of taxpayer dollars on a water treatment plant for a project financed by a major pension fund, the largest mall developer in this country? Why doesn't he allow the businesses to cover the cost of their own water treatment instead of taking the irrigation water for the farmers of this province and treating it for private developers at public expense?

Mr. Snelgrove: I wonder, Mr. Speaker, how he thinks West Edmonton Mall gets water. They deal with the municipality that they're in. They apply; they get water. They do it. How does every darn business in Alberta? We join systems, municipal systems, with the exception of some farms that have their own wells. The fact is that we are not supporting with millions of taxpayers' dollars the racetrack, the entertainment centre, and all the rest of his imaginary development out there. That is a business development on its own merit which has the right to work with the municipality that it is in to apply for water in the absolute normal course of business.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

1:40 Teachers' Unfunded Pension Plan Task Force

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government seems determined to create labour chaos with Alberta's teachers. The latest provocation comes in the form of the government's choice for the so-called task force dealing with the teachers' unfunded pension liability. Allan Scott is well known in labour circles for all the wrong reasons. His actions during the Shaw Conference Centre strike in 2002 needlessly extended the strike and cost the city of Edmonton close to \$2 million. His appointment is yet another instance of the Minister of Education waving a red flag in front of the teachers.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear a question there. However, I would like to say that Mr. Scott is one of the finest businessmen in Edmonton, and I think the hon. member owes him an apology.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, he ran the Shaw Conference Centre in 2002, when he was the head of Economic Development Edmonton. The Labour Relations Board found that Mr. Scott and Economic Development Edmonton failed to bargain in good faith. They ordered him, and I quote: to cease and desist discriminating against union supporters. Now, my question is to the minister. Is this the type of individual you want dealing with the teachers? As I said, it's like throwing a red flag in front of them.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, he's not dealing with the teachers. The idea of the task force is to go out and talk to Albertans. The hon. member can make a presentation if he so chooses, to find out what is a fair ask of the Alberta Teachers' Association from the taxpayers of Alberta for us to assume a \$2 billion liability. Mr. Scott will have nothing to do with the teachers and nothing to do with labour negotiations. So I have no idea what this guy is talking about.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, this is a person that's going to be giving this minister advice, and this is a person that the Labour Relations Board said to stop discriminating against union members. Now, why would you put this person on a board when you're dealing in labour relations? He is going to have a say on the teachers' unfunded liability.

Mr. Liepert: This process has absolutely nothing to do with labour negotiations. I keep trying to tell these guys over here that there are two separate issues. Labour negotiations are between school boards and the local ATA — school boards and local ATA. On the other hand, we have a task force that's going to go out there and hear from Albertans as to what is a fair ask of the Alberta Teachers' Association on behalf of us as taxpayers to assume a \$2 billion liability. There is no connection, and the hon. member is just raising a red herring that is just garbage.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Support for Seniors

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's Seniors' Week. I spoke at Londonderry lodge this morning to the wonderful seniors there. They always give me lots of ideas. There were about 30 lovely ladies there and Bill. Bill gets lots of attention. We talked about the growing numbers of seniors. Everyone here knows that the percentage of seniors will increase dramatically in coming years. The postwar baby boom and our first-rate Alberta health care system are reasons for that. We talked about the need for dignity and respect for our elders. We talked about the need for safe streets. But we talked the most about kids and the future and connecting children to the values of the past. My question is to the acting minister of seniors and such. What is your ministry doing to harness the creative power, the energy, and the wisdom of seniors in helping to involve them with children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly would like to meet the 30 beautiful ladies that the hon. member met. But that's a good question. I will take it under advisement and pass it on to the minister of seniors and get back to him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. A supplementary to the same minister. Sweat-equity helping organizations, like Habitat for Humanity, have worked to help those who want to own a home work to achieve their goal. Many seniors are concerned about their rising housing and other costs. Seniors' skills would be valuable to add to many community pursuits. Will your ministry examine the concept of encouraging community organizations to establish seniors' sweat-equity credits that could be transferable to housing costs in the future, and what is the potential for this idea?

Mr. Groeneveld: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I certainly listen to the seniors minister, and he has very eloquent answers, much better than I can give, so I will have him get back on this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Renters' tax credits were a popular measure in the last great Alberta boom. Will the minister examine this as a relief measure for rent-stressed seniors, or could this be expanded to all renters?

Mr. Groeneveld: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I will take that under advisement.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Beef Export Regulations

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta the cervid, buffalo, and beef industries are a very, very important component of the agriculture industry. Ever since BSE was discovered in Alberta, the industry has been under siege, but thanks to all the support from the provincial government, they did survive. Moving forward to something that's near normal, it looked like it was about two steps forward, one back, but it looks now as though it's going to be two steps back since the value of the dollar has been increasing, and now I hear that there are new federal regulations coming into force. To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: what are the new regulations, and what is going to be impacted by them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good question. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is enhancing the existing feed ban by requiring the removal of all specified risk materials from all animal feed, pet food, and fertilizers. This ban is to come into effect on July 12 of this year. SRM tissues have been shown in infected cattle to contain concentrated levels of the BSE agent. This includes the brain, spine, and nerves surrounding the spine, to name a few. The new regulations affect cattle of all ages to some degree but more so over 30 months of age. One of the more frustrating aspects of these new regulations is the significant amount of meat that can be lost from each animal in removing these materials.

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the most choice parts of the animal now are going to have to be disposed of under the classification of an SRM. I have heard that there could be anywhere from 400 to 600 pounds of the carcass of the animal having to be disposed. Could the minister tell us how they are going to accommodate this much waste?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the hon. member's numbers are quite correct. In many cases new infrastructure will be needed to properly dispose of these materials. Rendering, of course, is one of the viable options for disposal at this point in time, but we have invested in funding to find new ways not only to dispose of some of this material but also gain value from it.

It seems that every time the animal carcass loses a bit of value, that loss always works down to the producer. We have to ensure that these costs are not passed down to the producer.

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know exactly how this all works. The fact is that it is passed down to the producer. Eventually it ends down at the cow-calf operator. Basically, they're right at the limit currently as far as their expenses are concerned and their returns. Is there going to be any assistance from government as it relates to this very, very disastrous position that we're finding ourselves in? Not only are we going to suffer a big loss on the sale of the best part of the animal, but we've also got to now dispose of all that waste.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, of course, he's indeed right. In March of this year Alberta made a joint announcement with the federal government committing up to \$40 million in our province to help our beef industry comply and adapt to the federal government's enhanced feed ban. This funding will help alleviate the costs of complying with this enhanced feed ban. As a province we've gone over and above what was required of us in ensuring that our producers are not on the hook for these disposal costs. I certainly continue to press the federal government to ensure that the necessary funding is available in order to comply with the federal regulations that they're imposing on us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

1:50

Affordable Housing

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The housing crisis in this province is hurting Albertans all the way along the housing continuum. The crisis goes beyond impacting people with very low incomes. The price of prosperity also means that home ownership is unattainable for our young families. Last year alone the average price of a resale home in Edmonton increased by 50 per cent. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. What advice do you have for hard-working young families who now find that home ownership in this province is unattainable?

The Speaker: Well, let's deal with policy.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a very difficult question, and it's not a black-and-white answer. Last year we had approximately a hundred thousand people that moved to Alberta. They didn't come with teachers, they didn't come with doctors, and for sure they didn't come with housing. This year in January, February, March we had, I believe, 11,500 people move in. Most of the people that move to this province move during the time that their kids are out of school, so the high months are June and July. We have tried to address the issue of housing for all individuals.

The Speaker: We'll go to the next question, please.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, some municipalities

have publicly funded home down payment assistance programs, as does the Real Estate Board, that help some first-time buyers. The housing task force recommended that a new Alberta home ownership assistance program be developed within six months, and your department just rejected that recommendation. Why, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the policy of this government is to try to address the needs of people in need. We're trying to help individuals that need support for affordable housing. We're trying to address individuals that are homeless. We are trying to address individuals that don't have the ability to pay for their own lodging. Last year we had 50,000 homes that were built. In essence, that also provides support and lodging for individuals from the affordable housing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplementary is for the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Average home prices are starting to exceed \$450,000. Teachers, nurses, artists, musicians, daycare workers, writers, restaurant workers, and many, many more Albertans can't afford to live in our home province anymore. Our sons and daughters are being forced to leave, including my own. Maybe the minister of employment is unwilling to do anything to keep Albertans at home because she knows there will be temporary foreign workers to fill the gap. My question is: given that the high costs of living in this province are forcing Albertans to leave, why has your department not made housing a labour force issue? Why don't you demand that your government do more?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes an interesting point about the need for housing when we're attracting workers and so much economic development. It is, in fact, something in the broadest sense of the word, needs that we are evaluating when we look at the development of the Heartland, for example. It's not only about roads. It's about housing; it's about infrastructure. I think the point is well made, and it is a part of economic activity to make sure that you have the capacity to deal with housing. So, in fact, it is something we look at.

I don't want to overlook the point that was made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing because even if our anticipated average growth this year is 47,700 housing units, we'll have housing at an average of three people per home for over 143,000 people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mount Royal College

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A week ago it was my privilege to attend the graduation of the first graduating class from Centennial high school in my riding. As I spoke to the graduates, one of the things I asked them was to not let that be their last graduation, to ensure that they got further education. One of the ways that as government we've helped to facilitate that is by giving new degrees to Mount Royal College. So my questions are for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. How is your ministry providing for and supporting both the college's growth and its role in meeting this important need for these graduates?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a very good question. We want to ensure that all of the students in Calgary that want to move on to postsecondary education have the appropriate pathways for them to achieve their life's successes. The government has taken significant steps to address the needs of Mount Royal over the past several months, including, as has been mentioned in this House, the announcement of extended nursing spaces. We intend to add more as the years go on. But it means more nursing spaces for Calgary. Mount Royal will be enrolling 260 nursing students in '07-'08, which will grow to 980 students by '10-'11. We're looking at expanding spaces in other postsecondaries in Calgary as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is also to the same minister. Mount Royal's capital requirements also need to be considered in light of this growth. What are you doing to ensure that the college has the facilities that it needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we expand the number of spaces at the college, we obviously are going to have to expand some of the infrastructure that's there, but it should also be noted that in July of just last year the college opened its brand new \$94 million Lincoln Park campus, which included the learning centre. That was just completed and opened in 2006. We are aware of Mount Royal's current capital needs and some of the needs that are going to be occurring based on the expansion of spaces that we are going to have to do for them over the coming years, and we are working with them on some very innovative ideas.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Renter Assistance

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. One month ago Jim Sexsmith, a constituent from my wonderful riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie, visited the Legislature to appeal to this government to take action to make housing more affordable. After three weeks the minister finally told Jim that his only option is to get on a waiting list. Does the minister think it's fair to put a disabled senior on a two-year waiting list for an affordable place to live?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I don't personally know the details of the individual. All I can tell you is that approximately three weeks ago we had two visitations of groups of individuals that came in. There were approximately 25 the first day, and I'm not exactly sure how many the second. Anyway, nine individuals stayed to have discussions with our staff to see if we could support them. Out of those nine we did have eight that we had made contact with. I'm sorry; I don't know the details. But I will say . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. When presented with Jim's situation last month, the minister claimed he would look after it. Was putting Jim on a waiting list the best option the minister could offer?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, when we look at support for individuals that need affordable housing, we do look at the individuals that need help the most. There are criteria. The staff has criteria that they do use. If there is something that was overlooked, we will have my staff look at it again.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again. Jim came here again today to advocate for affordable housing measures. Jim is lucky, though, because his building has a new owner, who will not be increasing the rent by 20 per cent, as he had expected. To the minister of housing: what about the rest of Alberta seniors on fixed incomes who want to maintain homes in this province but can't afford double-digit rent increases?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes a very good point. I think it's increasingly apparent that it is necessary to have housing continually being built in order to accommodate individuals with affordable housing or individuals that need housing. That is exactly what we're trying to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Calgary Bow River Weir Project

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Bow River irrigation weir has been in place in Calgary for over a hundred years. The existing structure was built in 1975, and plans to reconstruct for safety and renaturalization has been under way for the last six years. Like any other construction, this Harvie Passage project is subject to rising costs. The original estimate was \$6.4 million. It has risen to \$11 million. My constituents and I are very grateful that the project has received an additional \$2.5 million from lottery funding.

2:00

The Speaker: I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask. I'm sure there's a minister who anticipates the question. The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the hon. member was kind enough to indicate to me that he would be asking me a question. I want to say that we're very pleased that the Alberta lottery funding could provide the additional funding to support this worthy project. The weir diverts water to farmers in the Western irrigation district, and the reconstruction will maintain this particular purpose but also increase the safety and make it possible for humans and fish to travel from one side of Calgary to the other. I understand that construction can't begin until this fall in order to accommodate fish habitat. But if costs continue to rise, then the partnership may be able to raise their funding privately or may need to make a case for additional funding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is exactly the answer I need.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the same minister. Could the project apply for the major community facilities program if additional support is required?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, certainly, we're very pleased to indicate that our ministry was able to initially fund this project under

the other initiatives program, as the member stated, for an additional \$2.5 million. The weir project partnership, if costs continue to rise, could apply for additional funding under the major community facilities program. I want to indicate that \$70 million has been allocated to projects in Calgary over the next two years, which is a quarter of the dollars that were approved under the major community facilities program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the project is completed, Calgarians can float down the river from Bowness park to Carseland, which is about 20, 25 kilometres in length, and the fish can rejoin their families after generations of separation by the weir. My question is to the same minister. Will the minister promise that he will attend the opening of the Harvie Passage when it's completed?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, it would be my pleasure to be part of those ceremonies. We recognize the importance of that river project. Certainly, it provides a tremendous service to not only Calgarians but everybody else downstream.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if it's determined that there will be a fish fry at the opening, then you will have defeated everything that you've advocated for today.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

AltaLink Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The hearings into the proposed AltaLink 500 kV transmission line have been a kangaroo court from the start. Residents have not been properly consulted. There have been allegations of threats from land agents, bungled needs assessments, and in April the EUB decided to allow only written submissions and to force interested parties to watch via video feed. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Given that there has been a string of serious errors, serious breaches of protocol, and a complete lack of transparency in this process, will the minister commit to calling a public inquiry into this proposed line?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear that this government, under this current Premier, has a plan to make Alberta stronger. Part of that strength comes in the form of a stronger backbone to deliver electricity around the province. There is a process in place. That process has been constructive, and it has been very positive for many, many years. The issue that's in front of them right now will be properly addressed, and at the end of the day the results will speak for themselves.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, on top of the stress and hardship that this process is causing for landowners, delays and fumbling around the planning for electricity transmission could potentially cause system troubles down the road. The solution isn't just to slap together a plan and try to push it past the EUB. Proper planning was needed from the start, and that's why we see these delays. Why hasn't this happened, and why won't the minister now allow a public inquiry to find out what's going on and what's gone wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's very

interesting, the comments that are here today. I would suggest that perhaps the hon. member would want to get in touch with somebody today in Lake Louise. They have a single transmission line into the town of Lake Louise, which went down because of flood waters in one of the mountain creeks. They now have no electricity available in Lake Louise. They would have probably been very well served by additional transmission. What we have here is an NDP individual that's suggesting that we shouldn't do anything. No damn progress: that's what it stands for.

Mr. Eggen: Well, if the Minister of Energy did his job properly and if the EUB did their job properly and the systems operator, then maybe we would have electricity flowing. But now we don't. We see in the newspaper that we're going to have a shortage, and that's going to be passed on to the consumer. At the end of the day I'm very concerned that we don't know much of the cost of this transmission line. Is it going to be stuck onto Alberta taxpayers' bills every month? Will the minister commit right here, right now to ensure that people who stand to profit from this line will foot the bill and not regular consumers?

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I will stand here today and say that in the province of Alberta under the current regulated transmission system – and it's been in place since 2003 – the consumers of the province of Alberta pay for transmission that delivers electricity for their consumption. Let us not forget, again, that the consumers are 85 per cent industrial.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Affordable Accessible Housing

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With all the talk of rising real estate prices and rental costs it is extremely important we remember that this crisis is about real people who face real challenges to the quality of their lives. For example, this crisis has meant that people with disabilities are unable to find housing that is both affordable and accessible. When this type of housing is unavailable, people with disabilities may be forced to try to function in situations where it is difficult for them to complete even simple daily tasks. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: what is being done to help people with disabilities who are forced to sacrifice their independence and standard of living because they cannot find appropriate housing?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I very much recognize some of the challenges that individuals have in regard to housing. I want to say that we have supported programs and housing initiatives that do support individuals that are handicapped, individuals that have other challenges, and we are going to try to continue to do so. As well, in the new municipal sustainability initiatives there is funding in place for municipalities to make those choices, for them to decide what they believe are the priorities of the community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the minister does find the situation unacceptable, surely he will help two of the people here today. The first person, Jocelyn Tremblay, is currently living at the Glenrose hospital. Jocelyn finished her rehabilitation program over two months ago, but her inability to find accessible housing has forced her to stay there. Jocelyn tried to apply for the innovative

housing program but was told not to bother, that the wait was too long. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Now Jocelyn is on the Capital Region Housing wait-list, which we all know is over two years long. She just cannot live in a hospital for two more years. What advice do you have for her today?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I would very much like her to contact either my staff or the staff of EII. We will definitely look at her situation, as we try to do with others, and try to address her needs as well.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sheena Alexis is a single mother with two children who receives income supports and is currently living in Capital Region housing. Her housing is not completely accessible and is in very poor condition. Her complaints about problems with mice have gone ignored. This house is located in an unsafe area, and in the last six months her home has been broken into twice. Sheena put in a request to transfer last year but has not had any response. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Sheena desperately wants to move to a better environment for her children, but she has run out of options. Can you help her today?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I would suggest that she contact our ministry or the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Industry, and we will look at her case and see if there's any way that we can support her.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last summer an exciting agreement was announced by our government to acquire land on the Bow River west of Calgary to create a new provincial park, to be called the Glenbow Ranch provincial park. The area consists of over 3,000 acres of spectacular landscape and will provide major recreational opportunities for the people of Calgary and visitors from elsewhere in the province. My questions are all for the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. What progress is being made on finalizing the transfer of land and converting the ranch operations from agricultural use to park use?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Glenbow Ranch provincial park spans 14 kilometres of the Bow River valley between Calgary and Cochrane. Its size is roughly equal to Fish Creek provincial park. Our first priority is to preserve this beautiful landscape and sensitive ecosystem. Since the land agreement was announced, a broad planning exercise has begun, including a detailed land survey. The land transfer, I may add for the hon. member, was completed in March of this year. Biophysical and inventory work is under way prior to developing a plan which will identify the types of visitor opportunities that may be provided.

Dr. Brown: Given the initial commitment of \$40 million to acquire the land, can the minister give assurances that the necessary funding will be in place to build the facilities to allow visitors to enjoy the park?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, budget approval so far has been only for the land acquisition. The department will request developmental and operating dollars once our necessary planning is completed. Let me add that the Harvie family has committed \$3 million to the development of that particular provincial park as well.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise Calgarians and other Albertans when they will be able to enjoy and access the new Glenbow Ranch provincial park?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, presently access is prohibited to protect the landscape and ecological balance during the transition from ranchland to parkland. Access is at least one year away. We expect to be able to open the new park to the public in late 2008 or early 2009.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Urban Campus Partnership

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgarians are desperate for more postsecondary education spaces. It's a sad fact that every year, thanks to years of government neglect, too many well-qualified young adults are turned away from institutions in Calgary. We're in danger of failing an entire generation of students. Calgary institutions came together over two years ago and offered the Campus Calgary plan to create these much-needed extra spaces. They need the full commitment of this government – real, tangible assistance – to achieve their goals. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Does the minister believe that the government has any chance of creating the 20,000 extra spaces by 2010 – that's just three years from now – that these institutions are asking for?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we have a very good working relationship right now with the urban campus concept, which I believe the hon. member is referring to, but I might point out, too, that not all institutions in Calgary are actually involved in that urban campus proposal. Secondly, individual institutions have been providing the department with individual plans for their capital expansions. What we're suggesting is a regional approach to this based on the needs analysis, which I've said many times in this House is what we're doing, based on the roles, responsibilities, mandate framework, which we believe will be completed sometime late August. We also have meetings scheduled with the University of Calgary and the other proponents of the urban campus for early July, to sit down and just see if there's a true need for the urban campus in addition to all of the other capacity or if we just need to do something on a regional basis.

Mr. Tougas: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Liberals are looking forward to Mount Royal College achieving a greater degree-granting status, which we've been asking for for some time, but in order for Mount Royal graduates to have their baccalaureate degrees recognized all over Canada, these degrees need to be acknowledged as adequate by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. Currently that body considers Mount Royal library to be insufficient to the purposes of a budding university, and this will impact the national recognition of their degrees. To the minister: when will Mount Royal receive funding for the library it needs so that undergraduate education is recognized across the country?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, partly the facts are right; partly the

facts are wrong. First of all, the accreditation of the courses is not based on what AUCC accreditation will give. We have the Campus Alberta quality control council, that reviews our degrees and the course loads. The institutions between themselves are the ones that decide which ones will be accredited for their individual institutions.

In Alberta, based on the Campus Alberta approach, we want to have a very transparent, transferable ability for students to create their own pathways within our system. Other institutions across Canada are recognizing that system and are saying: we want to be a part of that, too, because of the pool of students that we have. To say that there is one institution that is being penalized because they're not getting degree-granting status is probably wrong, Mr. Speaker, but we are giving Mount Royal a pathway to their success in their roles and responsibilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Tougas: Nothing else, no.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Biodiversity Opportunities

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent reports have highlighted efforts in British Columbia to turn waste wood which is directly resultant from mountain pine beetle infestation into green energy. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is this province doing to take advantage of this new bioeconomy opportunity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is developing bioeconomy initiatives through two different strategies: the life science strategies and also the securing tomorrow's prosperity strategy. We are exploring the full range of biorefinery possibilities offered by this emerging field, including bioenergy, biofuels, and bioproducts. This fits with the Alberta government's commitment to realize greater value-added from all our natural resources, and it also meshes with our support for a globally competitive forestry industry in Alberta that embraces new technologies for the pulp mills, the strandboard plants, and the lumber mills.

Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: The first supplemental to the same minister. I realize that 45 seconds is a short amount of time, and it's great to hear about the interest of turning, you know, bad news into good news, but I'd like some more practical terms and some specifics on the actual opportunities and how they can be turned into realities.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has two principal sources of feedstock for our bioeconomy: agricultural products and the forestry industry. SRD is working with Alberta Agriculture and Food and also with Alberta Energy to advance a nine-point bioenergy strategy that was announced last fall. This government has committed to a five-year, \$239 million investment to promote biorefinery initiatives in the agricultural and bioforestry industries. We're also working with Alberta Energy and Advanced Education through the Alberta Research Council to support research into the technology that drives bioeconomies.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: No. I'm okay. Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Continuing Care Standards

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are no provincial definitions outlining the health services, level of care, and personal costs residents can expect in each kind of continuing care facility, including long-term care, assisted living, and supportive living. The Auditor General pointed out over two years ago that without these standards "residents may not be receiving an appropriate level of continuing care, housing or personal care services." My question is to the minister of health. When is the minister going to establish clear, province-wide definitions to clarify what services and level of care can be expected in each continuing care setting?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that's a very important question, one that is the subject of ongoing work. I'll be working with the minister of seniors with respect to that continuum of care: how we define the particular care areas and, most importantly, how each is appropriately paid for. I've said, I think, a number of times in this House that we really want to focus on patient-centred care, on the individual being able to make the right choice for that individual with the health support that that individual needs either to live in their own home or to have assisted living in the community or, if necessary, to be in a long-term care centre, and not fund just based on the name of the institution.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister. Well, Mr. Speaker, many Albertans faced with choosing a continuing care facility have trouble understanding the basket of services and level of care available in each facility and in each region. What is the minister going to do to ensure that all facilities outline in unambiguous terms who is responsible for the cost and delivery of services so that families can choose the facility that best meets their needs?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is actually a very complex question because depending on where you are, what the size of the community is, and what the nature of the facility is, you may be actually offering different levels of services. I'm aware, for example, of an excellent facility in one of our smaller communities in northern Alberta where we have exactly this issue, where we have an individual whose care need has changed but there's no desire to move to a place that would actually support that care need. So it's not as simple as it may sound, and the important thing is to have the structure to allow families to know what they can get and where they can get it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the same minister: given that more and more dependent seniors are being reclassified into assisted living settings in which they are responsible for more cost, what protections are in place to prevent price gouging in these settings?

Mr. Hancock: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, a very important question and not one to give an easy, simplistic answer to. Again, in many communities you don't actually have either the ability or the need for a number of different facilities, so we have to actually redesign the system to focus on the patient or the person in need of care, make sure that the funding is appropriate to the care need on the health side, make sure that the housing costs are appropriately handled by either the family or the community, and make sure, as the hon. member asks, that there's not gouging involved but that we have the appropriate level of care and the appropriate choice for the family and the person who needs the care.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 90 questions and answers today.

Before we proceed with the remainder of the Routine, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, I am proud today to introduce to you a large group of guests from the St. Francis of Assisi school in that remarkable and beautiful city of Red Deer. I would like to introduce all the students by name, but I don't have their names. I would like to introduce the teachers and the parents and the helpers that are accompanying these students, and I apologize in advance if I mispronounce some names. I'd like to introduce to you teachers Miss Patricia Marques, Mr. Brian Munro, Mr. Brad Diduch, Mrs. Cara Joyce, Miss Sandra Heisler, and parents and helpers Ms Tina Diplacido, Mrs. Marlene Slipp, Mrs. Kerrie Jobs, Mrs. Patty Elkins, Mrs. Eileen Bantjes, Mrs. Candy Fertig, and Mrs. Debra Marcoux. I would ask all of these guests to rise and receive the warm welcome not only from myself and my colleague from Red Deer-North but all members of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're also very blessed today to have 28 of Alberta's brightest and best students from the glorious village of Thorsby. From Thorsby high school we have 28 students as well as three teachers and helpers. They are Kim van Steenis, Sam Kobeluck, and Lorraine Kuzio. I would ask all of the guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The central question in the royalty review is: do Albertans receive a fair share? Current royalties are not meeting the government's own modest Crown revenue share target of 20 to 25 per cent. This failure cost Albertans \$16 billion in lost revenue over the past six years.

I have some suggestions to bring us up to the 25 per cent fair share. When conventional crude oil prices were a fraction of what they are today, the government introduced various royalty holidays. In his annual report the Auditor General notes that these holidays reduced Crown royalties by \$1.5 billion dollars in the last two years.

At a time when commodity prices are at high levels, the government should consider amending or removing these programs. The generic royalty regime for oil sands has outlived its utility. The allowed costs that are outlined in the oil sands royalty regulation should be changed. For example, royalties should not be reduced in order to give the CEO of an oil sands company his \$2 million annual corporate bonus.

With regard to the conventional natural gas, the U.S. calculates royalties on the Henry hub gas price to project what they get in natural gas royalties. The Henry hub price should be used to calculate the royalty rate also in this province. Doing so would give us a more accurate assessment of the value of our natural gas production and higher royalties.

In Alberta the coal-bed methane royalty is calculated on the productivity rate of the well. The majority of the gas production from coal-bed methane wells is subject to the normal low-productivity well allowance. The EUB notes that coal-bed methane production will represent 13 per cent of total marketable gas production in Alberta by 2016. A coal-bed methane royalty rate of 12 and a half per cent should be introduced and subject to review annually. In order to ensure that Albertans receive a fair market value for their resources, the government should conduct a full public review of the royalty regime every five years.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Water Management

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Despite the numerous warnings concerning the future of our water supplies, this government continues to approve projects whose ecological impact is still unknown. One instance of this dubious style of development is the megamall and racetrack project in the Balzac area, that hit the planning board without any confirmation that there would be enough water to sustain the project.

Our water security is threatened from many fronts, including tar sand development, population growth, increasing demands on agricultural practices, and global warming. More people need potable water and an expanded sewer system, and it is the government's responsibility that population growth is ecologically sustainable.

One trend of economic expansion that is particularly worrisome is the hasty approval of tar sand projects without a proper assessment of their combined impacts on water resources. At present it takes approximately between two and five barrels or more of water to produce one barrel of bitumen. In other words, we need to multiply the 2,700,000 barrels of crude produced every day by a factor of four or five to understand the amount of water that is required for daily bitumen extraction in the industry. As a result, over the long term the Athabasca River may not have sufficient water to meet the needs of all the planned mining operations and still maintain adequate stream flows.

Climate change and economic growth will make water scarcity an even more pressing problem. The current housing crisis has demonstrated how this government deals with pressures of growth. Mr. Speaker, we need to plan for growth in this province in a manner that is more ecologically sustainable. It is time to seriously consider extending to other watersheds the sorts of restrictions that the Bow and Oldman systems have and ensure proper monitoring and enforcement of existing rules. It is also necessary to quicken the implementation of environmental management frameworks before more projects are approved.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Bill 213

Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act.

The purpose of Bill 213 is to reduce the burden of excessive regulation on all Albertans to reduce red tape. This will ensure that our Alberta advantage remains that way and that our economy is focused on productive work, not excessive regulations.

[Motion carried; Bill 213 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table responses to questions raised during Committee of Supply for Ag and Food on May 30, 2007.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter that I wrote on September 13, 2006. It's to the former Minister of Finance, indicating that if we are going to give a lot of money to golf courses, we should find a few dollars for Edmonton public schools who had to cancel a program.

2:30

I have another one. This is also a letter. It's dated May 24, 2007, to the hon. Minister of Energy, and it's questions I have regarding "the high pressure steam pipeline rupture that occurred earlier this month involving MEG Energy [Corporation's] Christina Lake Regional Project." I have yet to receive an answer.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry I'm tabling the requisite copies of a letter to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview with respect to a commitment she made to him in Committee of Supply regarding reviewing the issue of a living wage.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling documents that show another loophole in the government's hastily passed Bill 34. I have a letter from Midwest Property Management Ltd. that was sent to constituents of mine. The renters were told that an initial rent increase has been temporarily suspended, but renters will now be responsible for paying for the cost of heat in addition to the rent. It's not technically a rent increase, but they'll still be paying more.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of a

letter from Susan Meyer. Susan and her family recently moved here from Manitoba, and she supports rent guidelines as they have in that province. She feels that there is a need to consider fairness for working families from this government on this issue here in the province.

Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today with one tabling. I am tabling the annual report for Catholic Social Services. Their annual meeting and luncheon was held yesterday, and I was pleased to attend. Dr. Christopher Leung and Father Ron Rolheiser gave moving words, and we were also honoured with greetings from the Catholic Archbishop of Edmonton, the new one, the Most Reverend Richard Smith.

Thank you.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Service Alberta responses to the question raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on May 29, 2007, departments of the Treasury Board and Service Alberta 2007-08 main estimates debate.

head:

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader if he could share with us the projected government business for the week of June 11 to 14.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, June 11, just for the advice of the House we anticipate introducing for first reading Bill 43, the Appropriation Act, 2007, and Bill 44, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

On Tuesday, June 12, under Introduction of Bills it would be anticipated that we would introduce Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 42, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2007; and Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007. Under Government Motions it is anticipated that there would be Government Motion 28, which would be with respect to the adjournment of the spring sitting, and Government Motion 29, which would anticipate a motion to ask the House to suspend its normal routine on Thursday of next week so as to allow the Lieutenant Governor to attend at approximately 1 o'clock to provide royal assent. We would then proceed to government business: for second reading Bill 43, the Appropriation Act; Bill 44, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act; Bill Pr. 1, the CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act; and time permitting, third reading on Bill 26, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 29, the Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 32, the Animal Health Act; Bill 33, the Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act; and Bill 39, Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act. In the circumstance of those bills being dealt with, we would deal with other bills as per the Order Paper in consultation with the opposition House leaders.

On Wednesday, June 13, under Introduction of Bills we would introduce Bill 46 for first reading, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. Under Government Bills and Orders, Orders of the Day, we would be again in Committee of the Whole on Bill 43, the Appropriation Act, 2007; Bill 44, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007; and Bill Pr. 1, the CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act; and third reading on Bill Pr. 1, Bill 44; I would anticipate asking the House for unanimous consent to proceed with third reading of Bill 43, the Appropriation Act, in order that it might be available for the Lieutenant Governor to give royal assent on Thursday before we do government business – that would be, obviously, at the pleasure of the House – and other third readings as progress is needed and other bills on the Order Paper should we deal with those third readings that I mentioned for Tuesday.

Thursday afternoon, if it's the pleasure of the House, we will have the attendance of the Lieutenant Governor at 1:30 for Royal Assent and then third readings as per the Order Paper and such other business as we may be able agree upon with opposition House leaders.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall call the committee to order.

head:

Main Estimates 2007-08

The Deputy Chair: As per our Standing Order the first hour and a half is set aside for the Liberal caucus, the next half-hour is set aside for the New Democratic caucus, and the last hour is set aside for any private member. Before we proceed, I just wanted to check with the Liberal caucus whether the 10-minute allocation system is what they would prefer, or would you like a 20-minute back-and-forth question and answer session?

Mr. Bonko: We can go 10 minutes.

The Deputy Chair: Ten-minute slots. Very well.

Energy

Sustainable Resource Development

Municipal Affairs and Housing

Environment

The Deputy Chair: For opening remarks we'll call upon the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to introduce his officials. To the officials I'd like to say that should you require a glass of water or a coffee, please raise your hands. A page will come by and provide you with that.

The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm here today with the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Environment, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. With your permission I'll make some introductory remarks about the Stelmach government's plans for land use, and then I and the three other ministers . . .

2:40

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, I think this has happened one too many times. You know that we do not mention names of current members of the Assembly. Please proceed.

Dr. Morton: I'll make some remarks about our government's plans for land use, and I and the three other ministers will be happy to answer the questions of all the hon. members with your permission.

The challenge facing Alberta today when it comes to land use is simple but daunting. What steps do we take? What new policies or programs do we need to put in place to ensure that life in the province of Alberta in 2030 is as good as life today? We must recognize that everything we do in Alberta takes space. There are more and more of us, and we are doing more and more things.

The unprecedented population growth that we've seen in recent decades: in 25 years our population has grown to 3.4 million from 2.3 million, an increase of nearly 50 per cent. If this rate of growth continues, we'll pass 5 million people living here 25 years from now, and much of that growth will be along the Edmonton-Calgary-Red Deer corridor.

This greater number of Albertans are doing more and more things. When it comes to drilling activity, drilling activity has quadrupled over the last 20 years. Twenty years ago the annual number of wells drilled was less than 5,000. Last year there were more than 20,000 wells drilled in Alberta. Much of this is due to the increase in coal-bed methane drilling. Just seven years ago there were fewer than 50 coal-bed methane wells drilled in Alberta. Last year there were over 10,000. It's the same story up north in the oil sands. Oil sands production has more than doubled since the 1980s, from a million barrels a day to now over 2 million. It's expected to double again by 2015.

So there are more and more people doing more and more activities but on the same piece of land. Everything we do takes space. If we allow ourselves to try to keep doing everything in the same space at the same time, there'll inevitably be conflicts. Let me take a simple but telling example. Take your backyard as an example. Most of us in our backyard would have space for a patio, a swing set, a garden, maybe a dog kennel, and a compost pile. If they're all in their right place, the backyard works, but if all of those things are on top of one another, things don't work at all. Similar problems, of course, if we transfer back into the real world. For example, if we sell subsurface rights on land where we've said that we don't want any surface disruption, such as special places, then we have a conflict.

In addition to industrial use, of course, and all these new people, we have more and more recreational use. People expect to be able to go onto public lands for hiking, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, yet often these same lands are also used, have multiple uses, in the area of forestry, oil and gas, grazing, tourism, and settlement. Just several weeks ago we saw the problems that occurred when too many people tried to camp in the same area in one of our natural areas, and particularly the use of off-highway vehicle users on the May long weekend, another interesting point in time in terms of increase. In terms of off-highway vehicle ownership, this ownership has quadrupled in the past 10 years, from 20,000 to 80,000. In short, once again, more and more people trying to do more and more things on the same piece of land. The outcome is less than optimal for everybody.

Another way of capturing this issue of land use is to think in terms of our agenda shifting from quantity of life issues, economic issues, to also including quality of life issues. Not by coincidence, I would suggest, just on Monday of this past week, June 4, there was a poll reported in the *Calgary Herald* that said that Calgarians are more concerned about the falling quality of life in their booming city than the residents of any other city in western Canada. Almost half of Calgarians said that their quality of life had deteriorated in the past five years, and 36 per cent expected it would deteriorate further.

Now, we all know that Calgary is not Alberta except, perhaps, for Dave Bronconnier. But still this attitude captures why we need a

land-use framework. To put it differently, the purpose of a land-use framework is to avoid not having to say this to our grandchildren in 20 years. We don't want to look our grandchildren in the eyes and say: I wish you could have seen Alberta 20 years ago. That's what we don't want, and that's why we're going to have a land-use framework.

Some unfriendly interpreters have suggested that our call for a new land-use framework is a criticism of the Klein government for not attending to this, but nothing could be further from the truth. Premier Klein in his four consecutive governments met the challenges that faced Alberta in the 1990s, restarting the economy that had been devastated by Pierre Trudeau's disastrous national energy policy, reversing a chronic structural deficit in government spending that had run up over \$24 billion in debt. The bold leadership of Ralph Klein met these challenges. Indeed, the challenges we face today are the result of the success of Ralph Klein's government. Premier Klein did what had to be done on his watch, and now it's our turn to do what needs to be done on our watch.

That's what our Premier and leader of this government is doing: meeting the new challenge, the challenge of unprecedented growth and prosperity. The Premier has made meeting this challenge a mandate, a priority of his government and also of his ministers. He has assigned the land-use framework to me as the lead minister on this in my mandate letter. But the land-use framework is more than just a government priority. For me it's a personal priority. Like many others I moved to Alberta. I'm not native; I moved to Alberta. I came here to make a living, but I've chosen to stay in Alberta to make a life because I don't want to live anywhere else in Canada or anywhere else in the world. I believe that my cabinet colleagues in the six other lead ministries share this view, and we're committed to working together to collaborate to make it happen.

We will be busy in the coming months. We plan to have a draft framework available by December 2007. We think, obviously, that this is a challenge but also a great opportunity, an opportunity for Alberta to show national and even global leadership on sustainable resource management, an opportunity stated, quite simply, once again: to assure that life in Alberta will be as good for our grandchildren as it has been for our generation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we still have about two minutes and 24 seconds. Would the other ministers like to introduce their officials to use up the two minutes? Hon. Minister of Environment, just an introduction.

Mr. Renner: Well, sure, I'd be happy to introduce although this is the fifth time we've been here, so we're all getting quite familiar with the place. I have with me my deputy minister, Peter Watson, and assistant deputy minister John Knapp.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, do you have any officials to introduce?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Chairman, I would like to introduce Brian Quickfall, who is the assistant deputy minister in my department.

The Deputy Chair: Very well.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll lead off with the cross-ministries. We talked about Environment, Municipal Affairs, Energy, and SRD. I may as well start off with Sustainable Resource Development as he was the first one to lead off as well.

This is almost the same as we were talking about during our estimates here. The ministers talk about more and more people taking up space. Well, that is true when you have more and more people here, but you've got to talk about just taking up space or using smart space. There's smart growth, and there's just dumb growth. We've had, you know, poorly planned growth – and I'll just call it dumb growth – for the last 10, 15 years because we haven't had a land-use framework policy, something to be able to guide the municipalities, something to be able to guide Albertans over the next 20, 30, 40 years so that we can assure our grandchildren that the Alberta that we're looking for is the Alberta that we grew up with.

I'm a native Albertan. I've been here all my life. I can tell you that it has changed since I was a younger person going into the outdoors compared to how it is now. We're already seeing that change. Whether that change will continue to take effect, where we can tell our grandchildren, "You know, it has changed, but it hasn't changed quite as much," that's yet to be determined, but it already has changed. When you call it smart growth, as you say, over the Klein years, I beg to differ. Jeffrey Simpson, who was addressing the Alberta Congress Board up in Banff, called it the bozo years because there was absolutely zero and no direction up there. It was just basically: run by the seat of your pants, with no plan. That's exactly what the Premier had admitted: that they didn't have a plan. So to go there and say that there was smart growth and we had a plan and we developed it strategically I think is a crock.

Anyways, getting on to the whole point of this debate, we're talking about the growth. We've got many competing interests for our lands. We've got economic with regard to drilling, urban sprawl, recreation as well. We've got to be able to manage those, as I said earlier, smart.

2:50

We've got the competing interests with the economic and drilling with regard to our overall environment. Our animals are constantly under threat. The ministry has talked about it being a 90 per cent success rate so far with regard to our species. Right off the bat, he's already saying that 10 per cent are in fact suffering. I don't think that's an acceptable number. Why would you already discount 10 per cent of our species? It should be a hundred per cent, and we should accept nothing less than a hundred per cent. The fact is – you know what? – there might be a slippage, but to acknowledge that 90 per cent is acceptable or satisfactory, I think, is completely unacceptable for this government, that's charged with the stewardship of maintaining the integrity of our lands as well as protecting our species at risk and endangered animals.

I'm concerned about just our overall urban sprawl. We might as well go down to the south, where the minister resides. You go out there with Cochrane, Canmore, and all the other areas out there. More and more people are seeking to have the bigger lots, and it's evident as you drive from Calgary going out towards Banff. You see the sprawling acreages, and it's beautiful. Who wouldn't want to be out there in the midst of the mountains? But you know what? It's just not sustainable for you to have six and 10 and 12 acres for one family. We've got to be able to cut back a little bit because that's prime land, and that's going to be where a lot of our people come to see the natural wonders of Alberta. We talked about being a natural tourist draw, but if we continue to have urban sprawl, who wants to, you know, travel for an hour and just look at houses vastly spaced throughout the entire landscape before you get to the mountains?

Recreation. The minister talked about off-road vehicles or off-road use. During our deliberation with Sustainable Resource Development I asked if the minister would in fact put some of that land aside. I think that would be prudent, and that would be a good

measure to be able to see some of this growth. People always want to be able to go out there with their off-road vehicles, their quads, and, you know, rip it up a bit. I know that they do it up in Cadomin, and there's a lot of devastation up there on some of it because I don't think it's been adequately monitored. Depending on the week that you go up, you might find the officers checking for licences and making sure that people are on the paths.

I think that if we designate down to the south or at least halfway in the province, about four quadrants would be great; you know, 10 square miles. Wherever you find that land, you've got to find it sooner than later to allow these off-road vehicles their opportunity to be able to have their own space so that they're not competing with or running into the animals that are out there in the great wilderness. To have something that's set aside, specifically designated for off-road vehicle use, I think would be a step in the right direction.

You'd be looking well in advance, and then they know where they're allowed to go. You don't have to worry so much about them doing any off-road, off the paths, or running through the streams and that because they've got that land that's already been designated, set aside. You've already checked out with all the checks and balances for the department and made sure there's nothing fragile that's going to be damaged, and let them have their piece of it. Setting something aside, I think, would be far, far more visionary than we are right now in just letting them go willy-nilly, wherever they choose to go. That's part of my concern with the piece as it is right now.

The minister talked about quality versus quantity, and I think that's a very valid comment. Quality versus quantity. You said that, you know, Calgarians maybe aren't so concerned or that at least in all of Canada maybe they're less concerned with their quality than they are with their quantity. I would prefer to say that we'd be more with our quality of life than our quantity, but maybe that's just splitting hairs in that particular piece.

We talked about recreational use a little bit. The urban sprawl: again, this is one of the highly contentious issues. We've got counties as well as cities vying for the same spaces. Obviously, the larger cities such as Edmonton and Grande Prairie or Fort McMurray are at a disadvantage because they've been at the brink of their space right now for a number of years, so they know that they have to go up or make the lots tighter and tighter. Some of the counties are able to continue to expand, with little or no space with regard to the same ones that we have to compete with in the cities. They're making the lots that much smaller, whereas in the county – I guess that why you move out to the rural areas is to be able to have the larger areas. Eventually we know that we're going to be running into the same tightness there, and we've got to have some real land-use specifics there.

I'm hoping that the minister will be able to comment with regard to economic viability and drilling versus the environment itself. We talk about the plan that we're talking about and getting a number of stakeholders to come forward with their plans for the land-use framework, but I didn't think the minister had answered, during my debate there, whether oil and gas are going to be completely on the table with regard to the land use or are going to be off. Certainly, that's a big deal with regard to the competing interests of the land use. In fact, if it is detrimental, is that going to be slowing the economy?

I mean, we all realize that up to 50 per cent of the people directly and indirectly earn their income from the oil and gas sector. The Liberals don't want to see the economy slow down in any way, shape, or form, but what we do want to ensure is that there is smart development, smart growth, that takes effect that would consider all those particular pieces. We've got to make sure that if we're going to continue to allow expansion into some fragile areas – and we'll

talk about Marie Lake – at what point do we say that we're going to draw the line? Is everything for sale?

There are some areas – and people have been coming and giving petitions for the last few weeks since this was in fact introduced or the permit was given for this exploration or testing for the seismic. At what point are we going to put our feet down and say: "You know what? There are some areas that just aren't worth going in and destroying because of the beauty and the overall value that Albertans have for it." You can't, you know, do directional drilling and expect no ill effects from it.

I've nailed a number of specifics there. I know that I have about another minute, but I'll stop there, and maybe we'll get some answers, then. Thank you.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Chairman, I identify about five distinct questions there, and I'll try to quickly answer several of them. On the question of oil and gas and land use, I might ask the Minister of Energy. Then on the question of urban/rural competition, I'll also ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to help answer.

To begin with, you talked about smart growth over the past 10 years, complaining that you thought the good old days had already been lost. Normally, I'd say to the Member for Edmonton-Decore that I envy his relative youth compared to most of the ministers on this side of the aisle, but with youth comes a lack of memory of certain things. A lot of your members have talked about the current housing crisis. If you want to see a housing crisis, you should have – well, you were here, but you wouldn't remember the 1980s, when people were losing their houses left and right for a dollar. That's what a real housing crisis is. That's what Premier Klein dug us out of.

I'll give you a little free political advice: if you want to win elections in this province, don't rely on Jeffrey Simpson and the *Globe and Mail* for analysis of Alberta politics. Calling Alberta bozos when the province of Ontario elected an NDP government that went in debt a billion dollars a month for 50 months, \$50 billion in 50 months, when this government, the government of Ralph Klein, was paying off a \$24 billion debt – the bozos were back in Ontario.

Coming back to the topic of urban sprawl, I'll simply let the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing answer most of that, but I'll just say that I have met with and have also participated in or sat in on the Calgary Regional Partnership, one meeting, and then I've sat in on one of their two-day workshops. I'll be attending their annual general meeting in Banff tomorrow, in fact addressing it. I've read all their materials. I think it's a good example of what I want for the future of our larger metropolitan areas and I think what you want, too, in terms of co-operation. I'll let the minister of municipal affairs say more on that in a moment.

3:00

On off-highway vehicles I'd simply say that no government was set to deal with the increase from 20,000 ten years ago to 80,000 now. Nobody could have predicted that. In terms of dealing with off-highway recreation, I would point out that in a number of areas we have brought in access plans or forest land-use zones, in the Bighorn and in the Ghost. As far as the area down south I don't want to get ahead of myself, but watch what we'll be doing there in the coming months, for the July, August, and September long weekends. I agree with you or maybe you agree with me that a designated area, a bog area, for the larger trucks and the boys with toys is a good idea, and we're pursuing that too. But I can assure you that it won't be on sensitive public wetlands the way it happened on the May long weekend.

With respect to whether or not the oil and gas issues and the

question of land sales will be discussed as part of the land-use framework, the answer is obviously yes. Yes, it will be. But I'll repeat what you know: this government is in the business of managing growth, not stopping growth. So any recommendations there will be progressive and proactive, but I'll leave it to the Minister of Energy to elaborate on that.

Finally, with respect to species at risk our business plan actually does establish a target of less than 5 per cent, not 10 per cent, of our wild species being at risk, as you see on page 302 of the business plan. Our last actual assessment in 2005-2006 indicated that about 2.2 per cent are at risk. I think your 10 per cent figure was referring to the report that was released in January.

Mr. Bonko: February.

Dr. Morton: February. Okay. It was a slightly different calculation.

That finishes my remarks, Mr. Chairman, and I'll turn it over to some of the other ministers, as I've indicated.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. ministers, we have about four or four and a half minutes, so if anybody wants to add on any response, you may do so now. The hon. minister of housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Maybe I will start off from the aspect of saying that the focus when we talk about municipalities is not so much the disputes between municipalities, but we try to look at the co-operation that municipalities should and could have. I want to say just in answer to the question that when mediation doesn't work, we have the Municipal Government Board that will deal with any disputes in areas like annexation. We continue to encourage intermunicipal co-operation through planned development and also through funding, as the municipal sustainability initiative I believe has done. Our ministry has looked at the recommendations from the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability and is going to provide responses to recommendations, and one of them, of course, is the dispute resolution.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, in relation to sprawl, sprawl for sure is a concern. When we talk about competing municipalities, I believe that co-operation needs to happen. We need to have regional planning. We need to have intermunicipal planning. We need to reduce duplication. But I think most important is that we need to work together so that we reduce the footprint where not necessary.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just quickly to add to the comments that the hon. minister made with respect to the land-use framework and tenure in the province of Alberta. There is, you know, a relatively robust process in place. What I'd like to say is that if a request for posting comes forward, there is an interdepartmental committee that reviews each posting. It's the mineral disposition review committee, and they would allow only posting of appropriate parcels.

Mr. Chairman, I think it's also fair to say that the tenure system that has been in place in Alberta for a number of years and the bonus bid system and posting arrangements really are the cornerstone of the success of the energy industry in Alberta. They are looked at from outside of Alberta as models that other people would certainly like to be able to achieve. So I would agree with the minister that tenure and the successful bonus bid system will most certainly come up for discussion with respect to the land-use framework, and I believe that it would be appropriate to include those discussions and continue to allow those discussions openly with Albertans. With a

degree of caution I would suggest that . . . [Mr. Knight's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to participate in this cross-ministry discussion. We've got a lot to talk about, and we don't have that much time. Hopefully, we'll get some additional time later on.

Certainly, I would like to start with Sustainable Resource Development. The department was recently before the Public Accounts Committee. There was a rather robust, vigorous discussion that I enjoyed listening to. It was interesting, and questions from all sides were addressed and answered. I was very interested in the questions concerning the grazing leases. I found that quite interesting. Taxpayers are always discussing grazing leases. They don't understand how they work, how much money is involved, and why, for instance, the owners of the grazing leases in some cases can have surface rights or access rights.

However, I feel compelled at this time to correct the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. He's talking about the work that was done by the former Premier, the former Member for Calgary-Elbow, and I would have to remind him that he was also part of that government. In fact, he was Minister of Environment when we had this spending spree. It wasn't the New Democrats or it wasn't a government in Ontario or a government in Ottawa that put this province in debt. It was this Progressive Conservative government that put us in debt. It was no one else. So if we're going to talk about history, hon. Mr. Minister, read the entire chapter. Just don't pick little bits of it and make a speech.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'm looking at volume 1 of the Auditor General's report and specifically page 5. There are some audit objectives and some conclusions and findings to those audits and some recommendations made by the Auditor General regarding the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development. In the absence of the minister at Public Accounts I would really appreciate his take on this page from the AG's report, page 5, specifically key recommendations 13 and I believe 15 as well.

3:10

Now, the Auditor General asks this question:

Does SRD have adequate systems to regulate reforestation?

Its regulation activities include:

- developing and maintaining standards
- monitoring and enforcing compliance
- reporting its performance
- evaluating results

In the conclusion to this question – does Sustainable Resource Development have adequate systems to regulate reforestation? – this is what the Auditor General states:

Although SRD took three initiatives to improve its regulatory activities, it must still do more. Currently, SRD does not know what results it achieves. Lack of performance information is a critical problem.

To their credit Sustainable Resource Development

- implemented a reforestation monitoring program.
- emphasized to forestry operators the importance of their reforestation data.
- is developing public reporting information on reforested areas satisfactorily restocked.

Now, the AG's recommendations, there are five to the ministry:

1. Produce timely performance reports to confirm results.
2. Strengthen quality control process that produce performance information, and re-examine if its target for the reforestation rate performance measure actually measures reforestation.

3. Strengthen monitoring of reforestation.
4. Sign agreement with forestry association to clarify accountability expectations.
5. Improve controls over seed supply used for reforestation.

Now, these are some of the Auditor General's concerns, and I would really appreciate during the course of this afternoon's discussion and debate if the minister could respond on the record to how these things are going.

Also, I have an additional number of questions. Now, I'm looking at the budget, and I don't know where all this would fit into the budget, and hopefully the minister can clarify all this for me. I apologize; I can't recall the date, but I recall in the *Alberta Gazette* recently where there was an order in council put through where there was an extension to the lease of the Canmore golf course. There would be provincial Crown land involved in this. I even forget – I apologize, Mr. Chairman – how many years that this lease had already been in existence, and it has been extended for a period of time, I think for another 30 or 40 years. I'm not sure, but the lease still had a long way to go. There were 22 years, hon. minister, left in this lease, and I would like to know why at this time the lease was extended. Why did it not expire and then get into negotiations?

I would also like to know if there was an increase in the amount of money received from this golf course through to the department and through to the general revenue fund, hopefully, for this lease, all the details surrounding the extension of this lease at this time for that golf course just outside the Banff park gates. I would appreciate that. The money that is collected in that lease, where do I find it in the budget?

Also, I see under element 3.0.3, nominal sum disposals, that there is an estimate of \$4 million there, and this gets me to my second question, Mr. Chairman, and it's around Elinor Lake, up in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake area.

Mr. Danyluk: Lac La Biche.

Mr. MacDonald: Lac La Biche. I stand corrected. Pardon me. I always get you and the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake confused, and I apologize, hon. minister.

Now, this Elinor Lake, there was a couple hundred acres at least sold. This is just west of the lake that we're contemplating naming after the former Premier, as I understand it.

Mr. Danyluk: I didn't know that.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I've been reading the local papers up there, and there's quite a discussion on whether we should name a local lake after the Premier. I hope there's good fishing there, and he and the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater can go there and catch some pickerel.

Anyway, I was reading in the same newspaper, and I noticed this smaller parcel of land, and it's west, as I recall, of Elinor Lake. It was sold, I think, for \$500,000, and I would like to know all the details surrounding that sale. How many other properties are there like that around the province that the department puts up for sale? Are they advertised publicly? I think I would have made an effort to come up with some money. I think it was around 2,500 bucks an acre for this prime recreational land. I would have talked it over with my family if I thought I could bid on that competitively and if that would be the highest price that one would have to pay in order to acquire this land. Not only around Elinor Lake but around the entire province what inventory of land do you have that you sell in this manner? Who makes the decision to sell it? Does the public have access to all the information prior to its sale? When it's sold, where do I find it in the report?

Now, Mr. Chairman, those are some of the questions that I have regarding Sustainable Resource Development. I certainly have more questions for the hon. Minister of Environment and, particularly, the hon. Minister of Energy. If I could have answers to those questions at this time, I would be very grateful.

Thank you.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Chairman, I'll address first the question on reforestation, then the Canmore golf course, and then the question about Elinor Lake and land sales. Are there any other ministers that want to get involved in this round?

On the reforestation issue, the hon. member is correct that the Auditor General did identify this as a concern, but I'm happy to report that we have responded to those concerns in a very proactive fashion. Actually, the province of Alberta, the government of Alberta, has some of the most rigorous reforestation standards in Canada. We initially developed a performance measure in 2004-2005 on reforestation with a target of an 80 per cent reforestation rate in harvested areas based on a new reforestation performance survey. After this target was established, the ministry recognized that more data was required to assess the proposed 80 per cent target to determine if adjustments are required. So following discussions with the Auditor General, the target was removed from the business plan and will be reintroduced based on actual performance survey results.

The Auditor General reported that the SRD reforestation policy is sound but that more rigour is needed to manage information and interpret the initial 14-year performance survey information. SRD responded to last year's AG report by developing an action plan that improves reforestation monitoring and management. As the hon. member indicated, our forestry operations management has been increased and looks after that.

On a personal note I'll just add that last month I spent an afternoon in Kananaskis in some of the areas that have been subject to Spray Lakes Sawmills' logging and forestry in that area since the 1940s. I visited reforestation areas that were five, 10, and 20 years old and was suitably impressed by the success of that reforestation.

Just last week I had an opportunity. On Saturday I was down in the West Castle area, just in the very southwest corner of the province. There's some forest down there that's considered some of the most important wilderness area now in the province, and there's a big push on to create a new provincial park down there. At the very centre of this is an area that was harvested in the 1950s and, again, has reforested so well that, as I said, it's considered almost a wilderness area now.

3:20

A second question has to do with the Canmore golf course. The Canmore golf course is a public course, and I'd be happy to take the hon. member there to play. We'd pay the fee like anybody else. As a general rule for these types of leases that assist municipalities with public recreation facilities, we have a long history of these types of leases, and they're seen as contributing, certainly, to the quality of life of Albertans and also in areas like Canmore have an economic benefit to the community because, of course, they're available to tourism as well.

Now, the specifics on the Canmore golf course. The question is correct: its lease has been extended to 2054. The original lease was given in 1979 for a golf course. It was a 50-year lease. The reason that the course, the club, which, again, I point out is a not-for-profit, public club, requested an additional 25-year extension to the term of the lease to provide for certainty of the facility due to the increased demands for private recreation development in the Canmore area.

I think that translated, that means that they wanted to do some capital improvements to enhance the facilities there, but they didn't want to do it without the assurance that they would keep the lease for an appropriate length of time.

The club pays an annual rental fee of \$809.63 pursuant to the Sustainable Resource Development schedule of charges, and you wanted to know where in the budget that's reported. If you go to page 343 and look under Premiums, Fees, and Licences, the third line under Revenue, that's where it's recorded. Do you want me to repeat that, or will you get it from the *Hansard*?

Mr. MacDonald: No. I'm right there. Thank you.

Dr. Morton: You're a sharp fellow, sometimes.

Now, there was some question about land sales, Elinor Lake and land sales more generally, and concern about whether or not the government of Alberta is receiving fair market value. Certain land sales have occurred such as the Elinor Lake Resort where a land developer purchased the land. I guess that this left the impression with some people that fair market value was not paid. That's not the case, and I'll explain why.

There are two kinds of sales. To current disposition holders and municipalities: these are referred to as priority sales or private sales as they do not go through a public auction process. The second is to third parties through public auction. All sales, I would emphasize, though, are based on fair market value assessment by qualified third-party appraisers.

The process is as follows. A land disposition request application comes in, generally from individuals or an application to purchase received from individuals, corporations, or often municipalities that are looking to purchase Crown land. They initiate the request. Public land suitable for sale and held under a long-term lease for commercial or recreational purposes with substantial improvements may be sold to the leaseholder at current appraised value without competition. These are referred to as priority or private land sales. Also, municipalities may purchase public land. This would be a public municipality, obviously. They may purchase land for \$1 if it is to be used for public works, and they enter into a sell-back agreement that if the land use changes, it comes back to us, back to the government of Alberta. Sustainable Resource Development must charge the nominal sum disposal budget with the difference between fair market value and \$1. Land that's deemed suitable for sale is appraised by an independent, accredited appraiser. I think I've already said that.

I think that probably covers most of your questions there, so unless there are any other additions, I'll leave it at that.

The Deputy Chair: We have about a minute and 50 seconds. Any minister want to supplement any of the questions there?

There being none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The minister of municipal affairs was concerned that he was going to be left out of the whole process. Well, I assure you that he wasn't, and we'll start with him next, then.

How will the minister convince municipalities to buy into the provincial land-use strategy? The government has defended the complete autonomy of municipalities by allowing them to make their own decisions. As evidenced clearly by their opposition to Bill 211, that was proposed by the Member for Calgary-Currie, I believe, the Planning for the Future of Communities Act, the government clearly believes that municipalities making their own decisions in isolation, as the Municipal Government Act permits, is the best way to plan.

However, a provincial land-use strategy will have to take precedence over the municipal authority as they do right now.

Municipalities will have to conform to the land-use planning decisions within the framework of the strategy. How will the minister address the conflicts that are going to be arising, I guess, between the Municipal Government Act and the provincial land-use strategy? Will he amend the MGA to ensure that municipality bylaws conform to the framework that the province sets? Without this, the provincial land-use strategy will basically be meaningless unless we have this sort of agreement that's going to occur.

Different municipalities have different pressures facing them. The provincial land-use strategy must consider this. The pressures facing the capital region may obviously be different than those of Medicine Hat or Lac La Biche-St. Paul. How will this be addressed in the formation of the land-use strategy? Will the natural person powers granted to the municipalities in the MGA be altered in any way to facilitate the objectives of the provincial land-use strategy? Will municipalities be given full input into the development of the strategy? At what point will they be sitting down and be able to hammer out when it gets down to the completion part?

There are many factors that must be included in a provincial framework. Elements contained within these integrated growth plans could be population projections and allocations; policies, goals, and criteria relating to an issue such as intensity and density; urban sprawl; location/density of industries; as well as the protection of sensitive and significant lands, including agricultural lands and water resources; infrastructure development and community design. With all these factors being included in the provincial land-use strategy, I'm hoping that they in fact will include that. That's a large area to encompass and contemplate within that whole framework.

We talked about Bill 211. Essentially, you know, it's a provincial land-use strategy, but it could encompass much more. It would protect agricultural lands, preserve watersheds, forests, and rivers. It would address the air quality issues, promote healthier living by Albertans by encouraging open spaces and parklands. It would also set limits where urban boundaries can expand to and cannot expand to. I'm hoping that those are some of the specifics that would be addressed. That would also be able to guide the development of Alberta well into the future. However, the government was absolutely opposed to this bill and what it represents with regard to second reading. Can the minister tell us how we can have any faith in the ability of the government to deliver a truly effective land-use strategy when they are so opposed to the concept of growth areas and plans with regard to regional planning in high-growth areas?

Subject to any other areas with regard to the rivers, streams, and water courses right now, I think that's controlled with regard to the municipality. Will that ability be taken away from them, where they're going to be under the land-use framework? Like I said: "within the municipality, including the air space above and the ground below." Is that going to be included in that? Will the minister amend the section of the MGA to bring it in line with the provincial water objectives under the Water for Life and the provincial land-use strategies?

Now, I know there are just a couple. I don't know if the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar wants to take over on some of this, or do you want me to continue on this?

3:30

Mr. MacDonald: You go ahead.

Mr. Bonko: Okay. I just wanted to make sure you got a fair shot on that too.

There are other areas of the MGA that give municipalities

significant control over their own development, and maybe I'll quote those for the minister. Maybe he'll be able to answer me with regard to those. The Municipal Government Act, part 17, section 617, planning and development: "The purpose of this Part and the regulations and bylaws under this Part is to provide means whereby plans and related matters may be prepared and adopted." We want to make sure that they achieve an orderly, economic, and beneficial development of the land and patterns of human settlement. We want to make sure that the urban sprawl doesn't continue, as I said in the earlier piece there, because we want to have smart growth, whereas we're going to have to start going up and reducing our footprint on the land. I think we all agree within all the ministries that that is, you know, first and foremost. The most paramount thing that all municipalities as well as Alberta is facing right now is to lessen that footprint.

We've seen it not only just as a pressure here for Alberta municipalities but throughout Canada, where we know that the large centres, in fact, are being very much conscientious of their growth patterns and their effect. Now they've got some of the municipalities, large cities such as Toronto, where they're having to issue warnings with regard to the smog. I'm hoping that we're a long way from that stuff as in L.A., where they have a number of days in the summertime when it's so polluted that they have to issue advisory warnings for its citizens.

Like I said, I'm hoping that we are a long way away from that particular piece with regard to our competing interests when we have our industries just outside our larger urban areas. We've got the competing interests, and the municipalities certainly have raised some issues with regard to Upgrader Alley, just outside the northeast quadrant of Edmonton. Fort Saskatchewan: there are a number of proposed upgraders out there. How will those compete with the province's plans with regard to smart growth? Certainly, Edmonton has raised the issue as to its concerns with regard to the environmental impact as well as the use of water and how that affects the Edmonton area.

I know that there are probably a number of questions. I'll let you answer some of those. There will probably be time, and I'll get back up on that one again, then, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me first start off with talking a little bit about what was and what is and what we hope could be. First of all, what was prior to 1995 were regional planning commissions.

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah, and we should bring them back.

Mr. Danyluk: Pardon me?

Mr. MacDonald: Now that Steve West is gone, bring them back.

Mr. Danyluk: With Steve or without?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, first of all, go through the chair. Currently the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has the floor.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. As I stated before, the regional planning commissions were in place prior to 1995. There were some challenges with that form of planning as the planning was predominantly by population. What did occur was that

urban centres had, I would say, maybe more voice. At least that was the perception of rural municipalities, for sure. What did happen when you looked at the planning commissions, sometimes it curtailed growth – or I guess I can say muzzled growth – to the point that it eliminated growth.

Mr. Chairman, in 1995 this government got rid of the planning commissions and gave municipalities complete autonomy. Complete autonomy I think in some instances worked very well, but what it did do was eliminate some planning and especially what I would say was the co-operative planning. Without having that co-operative planning, what took place was that there seemed to be and there was an overlap or duplication of services, of infrastructure. With the recent growth pressures that our province has, municipalities, this government cannot really afford duplication. It's very important that municipalities work together. It's very important, as I said earlier, to have municipalities work together, to work together in co-operation so that we eliminate some of those areas.

[Mr. Eggen in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, this government has looked at municipalities: some of the challenges that they have, some of the issues that they have brought forward, and especially some of their requests for having initiatives and incentives to work together. Through the municipal sustainability initiative I know that these initiatives have provided those incentives to help municipalities work together. I think that is very progressive. There needs to be co-operation. The land-use strategy is not a strategy that is going to take one ministry to guide the future of where this government is going.

As you see here today, upon the request of the opposition and the third party you have four ministries before you. These four ministries have one main, common focus, and that is to work together towards a land-use strategy, to make and have an effective development of land, to work simultaneously, and, as I said previously, to have less of a footprint. The land-use framework is exactly that. It is a framework that is intended to be adopted by this government of Alberta as an overarching strategic policy that will provide provincial-level direction and guidance for land-use planning and management. It will define a vision for future land use, an approach to address balance. And I stress to you, Mr. Chairman, balance because I think that is what is very necessary: balance, the various demands of our lands, and our natural resources.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, I would ask if the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development would have any more to comment, especially, maybe, one of the questions that was asked of waters and streams and what support he may have to those questions.

Dr. Morton: Well, on water and streams I will defer to the Minister of Environment.

I will just reaffirm what the minister of municipal affairs just said, that certainly there'll be no proposal for an all-powerful land-use czar sitting in Edmonton trying to solve all the problems of the urban/rural conflict in Alberta. It's very clear from everything I've seen so far that with successful regional planning initiatives, the key factor is that it's driven from the grassroots, that it's community based. I think to the extent that we succeed in addressing issues of co-operation and co-ordination and planning in the metropolitan Edmonton and metropolitan Calgary areas that the key will be that sort of locally driven commitment.

I'd refer the hon. member to take a look at the report that will be

tabled tomorrow in Canmore by the Calgary Regional Partnership as an example of a report that talks about respecting the autonomy of municipalities but, at the same time, achieving co-operation and co-ordination. What it says, if I can paraphrase, is that the government of Alberta should not coerce co-operation but facilitate co-operation and co-ordination by means of appropriate financial incentives and other appropriate policy tools. I think that's a nice way of stating it, and that's an approach that I think you'll see more of as the land-use framework develops.

Thank you.

3:40

The Deputy Chair: We still have about a minute and 50 seconds. Does any other minister want to supplement? The Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that the member brings out a reality that we're all dealing with on this file, that there is overlap. There will always be overlap. The land-use strategy deals with issues of conflicting interest of land and deals with big pictures. There are municipal interests, there are individual interests, there are corporate interests, and there are government interests. Overarching all of that is the protection of the environment and the protection of rivers and streams in this particular case. There's nothing that is going to be negotiated into a land-use strategy that is going to allow for discretion on setbacks from rivers and forestry management and those kinds of things with respect to maintaining the ecosystem and maintaining the health of our water bodies.

I think we need to be clear that there is a great deal of work to be done on the issue of land-use strategy and conflicting interest of land, but there are some overarching principles that have to remain clean in that entire process. I don't think that I would get any argument from any of the other ministers that are involved in the strategy that those kinds of principles that protect our water, that protect our air would not be subject to the discussions and perhaps negotiations that would be involved in developing new land-use strategies.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The majority of my questions this time, if you don't mind, please, would be directed to the Minister of Energy. But before that – because I'm apt to run out of time – I would like the Minister of Environment's opinion on this, please. It is the EUB's 2007-2016 supply/demand outlook. It was released publicly two days ago, and it is an interesting snapshot of not only oil and gas development and production across the province, but it also for the first time includes details on electricity supply and demand.

It has been discussed many times in this House how we need to enhance or encourage more renewable power sources. The EUB maintains that about 5 per cent, Mr. Chairman, of Alberta's current electricity capacity is classified as renewable power that includes biomass and wind energy. They go on at length here to talk about some of the new wind projects that have been connected to the electricity grid in Alberta last year. They indicate here that Alberta's wind farms and turbines have the potential to supply a maximum of 387 megawatts of electricity to the grid.

You go a little further along, and they state that

in 2006, coal-fired power plants generated 63 per cent of the province's electricity . . . natural gas and hydro accounted for 31 and 3 per cent respectively. The remaining 3 per cent of electricity was generated by wind and other renewable sources.

You flip the page, and the EUB has a very interesting bar graph that

goes out through to 2016. Alberta's electricity generation is going to be in four sectors: coal, natural gas, hydro, and other. The "other," of course, includes renewable sources, and it doesn't seem to be growing at an anticipated rate. In my opinion it certainly doesn't satisfy our policy directives. I would suggest – and I may be wrong – that it doesn't meet the Minister of Environment's standards either.

I think we need to do a lot more to encourage and to incent the development of renewable forms of electricity. I know the limitations and restrictions there are on wind power because of the reliability issue, but certainly there are other forms of renewable energy that I think we should develop in this province. There's no percentage here, Mr. Chairman, that I have found to indicate that eight or nine years from now we're still going to only have 5 or 6 per cent of our electricity produced from renewable sources. I don't think it's good enough. If the minister could comment on that, I would be very grateful.

Certainly, there is a lot of work to do, and I think the Minister of Energy and his department will be instrumental in cleaning up our power plants, our coal-fired, baseload power plants through the development of CO₂ sequestration. I think this is a very good policy for the government to pursue whether it's with CO₂ sequestration from the oil sands or with our baseload coal-fired electricity plants. I think it can be done. We certainly need more research and development, but I think we should be going ahead with that. If there's such a thing as a fast-forward, I think we really should be implementing a fast-forward on the research and development of our CO₂ sequestration.

I read with interest in the paper today where the province of Quebec is implementing a carbon tax. Well, I considered your initiative, hon. minister, earlier this session to be a carbon tax. If that money that is to be collected, starting at \$15 a tonne, is to be perhaps put into research and development on CO₂ sequestration, it would be very, very worth while. The report didn't mention your bill, the newspaper account that I read this morning, and I thought it should have.

But, certainly, now with the Minister of Energy, you spoke earlier in question period about 85 per cent of the electricity use in this province being industrial. I would really appreciate if you could have a look at the EUB because they're quoting a different statistic. They give us a different number in section 9.2.3, electricity demand in Alberta. There certainly are industrial and commercial needs that would come up into the 80s there, but I think to say that 85 per cent of all electricity consumed is for industrial purposes is an amount that would include commercial users as well.

Now, the land. The hon. minister talked earlier about tenure. How much land is left to sell in this province for oil and gas exploration? I know that some always is coming back into the system, but how much is left? Is the patch going to slowly migrate further west to northeastern B.C. or over to Saskatchewan? How much land exactly is left that could be sold for oil and gas exploration?

3:50

I'd like to talk a little bit more, if you don't mind, about the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. The current approval process that the EUB uses when looking at project applications does not contribute to a sustainable land-use plan. When he announced his retirement, the former EUB chairman, Mr. McCrank, called for a single-window regulation and oversight of Alberta's oil sands development. The new process would include cumulative, environmental, and societal impact assessments for past, current, and future developments. Has the Department of Energy considered these

changes? Why weren't these changes considered in the past?

Can the Minister of Energy tell us why the government has pushed forward so aggressively on oil sands development without a comprehensive land-use strategy? Has the Minister of Energy consulted with his colleagues the Minister of Environment, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, and municipal affairs to discuss recommendations made by Mr. McCrank? Given that the former chairman only spoke out publicly about his concerns after announcing his retirement, can the Minister of Energy tell us if the former chairman raised these concerns with the minister privately at an earlier date? What do you call those conferences you have with employees? Exit conferences, exit meetings, or whatever they're called. If the Minister of Energy had an exit meeting with Mr. McCrank, was this discussed?

Certainly, members of the oil patch have suggested to me – and I know that he's staring at me crossly, but I'm going to say this anyway – that the Department of Energy, the Department of Environment, and the Department of Sustainable Resource Development should be made into one. There are some oil patch people that feel that is a good way to improve the regulatory process. This is a suggestion that they've made to this side of the House.

Mr. McCrank also called for regional hearings for major energy projects. Has the Department of Energy considered regional hearings? Does the Minister of Energy agree that approving project after project without considering the impacts on various regions of the province leads to significant problems? Has the Minister of Energy discussed the issue of regional hearings with the minister of municipal affairs? Does the minister of municipal affairs agree that regional hearings would be beneficial for the future development of Alberta's energy resources? We've seen the impacts of rapid development without a plan when we examine the Fort McMurray region. The mayor of Fort McMurray has been very vocal.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: You've got 10 minutes between ministers to respond.

Mr. Renner: Actually, I will be relatively brief. The questions that were directed my way had to do with the member asking me to comment on the AEUB report. Given that the AEUB report is the responsibility of the Minister of Energy, and he was asking me to comment on renewable and alternative energy, which is also the responsibility of the Minister of Energy, I really don't have a whole lot to say other than that report is the result of a reflection of existing technology, existing government policy. At present we are just in the midst of updating government policy with respect to climate change.

The issue of alternative and renewable energy has been a matter of much discussion at our public meetings, at our stakeholder meetings, and there seems to be an impetus for the government to have a look at existing policies in that regard. I would suggest to the hon. member that should the government find it reasonable and responsible to change that policy, that would reflect a different outcome in any kind of report that the member refers to that would be written by EUB.

With that, I think I'll just leave the balance of the time to the Minister of Energy.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the member opposite for some insightful questions because he comes to the core of some of the business that we have in the province of

Alberta going forward. Most certainly, the situation with respect to renewables and the fact that the member looks at EUB's graphs as not being necessarily very productive on the part of the Alberta government attempting to get more renewables into the grid with respect to electricity generation: what I would say is that one of the things that we're engaged in now is a wind study that we're doing with the wind energy people, and we'll have that completed, we hope, within one year. We're looking at about eight months from now. At that point what we would expect is that there will be a large increase in the amount of wind generation that will come into the grid in the province.

Of course, our cap right now is causing some nervousness in industry with respect to investment in wind power, and we will address that in a timely manner. We're very conscientious, and AESO has done very good work here with respect to being sure of the amount of wind power that we put into the system. It's nondispatchable, so when we put that type of generation into the grid, we must maintain the security of the grid in total. This will take us a long ways in being able to increase wind power.

I do have to also say that in the EUB's most recent publication with respect to the issue, if you go farther than the graph and start to actually look at the wind that's coming forward and even the things that'll come forward in '07, I think it's relatively robust. I mean, we've got 80 megawatts from Enmax, 54 from Benign, 14 from Wind Power Inc., Alberta Wind Energy with four. We move into the '09-10 time frame, and there's quite a bit of wind: 77 megawatts, again, with Benign on the out years. I believe that TransAlta is looking at 52 megawatts, certainly Alberta Wind, again, with 47, West WindEau with 100 megawatts, and Windrise with 100 megawatts. These things, you know, are there in the projections. They don't show up as strikingly in the graph format, but most certainly they're there.

Besides that, Mr. Chairman, we're moving ahead very aggressively with a program on renewables. As the member would know, we've got a \$239 million program in my department to encourage biofuel and biogeneration.

The situation with respect to what we are going to do to get things under control on the carbon side: again, excellent questions. I would like to suggest to the member that we're putting pretty good stock in what he's talking about with respect to carbon capture and storage. We've got in conjunction with NRCan a fairly major blue-ribbon panel of experts that are looking at where the best opportunities are for Albertans with respect to carbon capture and storage.

Of course, there are two pieces to that business. One of them on a value-added side would allow for enhanced oil recovery and also the possibility of enhanced gas recovery. These pieces will be certainly studied, and I think we can come forward with something very positive with respect to that. However, that probably takes the place of somewhere in the neighbourhood of a quarter or maybe 20 per cent of the CO₂ that we will need to attempt to deal with. We have opportunities also for straight sequestration, which is not as good an opportunity from the point of view of economics. There are some differences with respect to what we need to do with the CO₂ and where we're going to put it, but again Alberta is very, very fortunate because under us there's an ocean, so we have some deep saline aquifers that will really accept CO₂ graciously. We think that there are some opportunities there for Albertans as well.

On the coal side I'd just like to answer that question again by saying to the member – and, again, I know that he's on top of these situations – that Sherritt has an application coming forward not strictly to do with electrical generation but on the coal side, the product basket that we can derive from coal, that's beneficial across the board. We look at coal to give us hydrogen, coal to give us some

syngas, coal that then would allow us in the process to gather CO₂ economically and sequester it. So some very good information, I think, and very good projects will come forward out of that, and of course regular gasification of coal to produce electricity will also certainly be looked at in the future to do a replacement of plant retirements that are now fairly intense with respect to carbon emissions.

4:00

The load. Again, I did say industrial load, and I have to apologize to the member for not splitting it because it's kind of generally accepted when we discuss it that the commercial/industrial load is sort of a piece of business that's different from the domestic/residential load. So absolutely right: you need to take the industrial load and the commercial load together to get to the kind of numbers that I was discussing.

The land remaining for development, Mr. Chairman, is something that's very difficult to put a number on in acres or hectares or whatever because, of course, with every piece that we sell, you go from surface and a long ways down. You may have sold a piece of real estate that has rights at 3,000 metres, but there may be somebody that's interested below that, so that same piece of real estate can be sold again. Also, if somebody goes to 3,000 metres, decides that that's not an economic piece of business, and removes themselves from the play, it releases all the real estate above that, and it can be resold again. That real estate goes in and out of a basket, and it's very fluid. It's not easy for me to give you a number with respect to how many acres you could actually sell because it changes, and it's a robust business. The way it operates, of course, as the member knows: our bonus bid system generates revenue for the province, and that's part of it.

Chair's Ruling Dress Code in the Chamber

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I call upon the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, a question has been raised to me for clarification purposes. As you all know, we are currently sitting in Committee of Supply. When we are in committee stage, there is a little latitude for informality, and members are allowed to take their jackets off. What we do have also is officials present here today, and they have been sitting here throughout the estimates process. The permission for removal of jackets: as far as I'm concerned, heat applies to everybody the same way. You know, it's not only members who feel warm, but anybody else who is sitting beside them will also feel warm on a hot day. So I have no difficulty with officials being able to remove jackets during the estimates while we are proceeding with this matter.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm hoping that that explanation doesn't cut into our particular time with regard to the cross-ministry.

Debate Continued

Mr. Bonko: I will go on to the Minister of Environment. To the minister: I wanted to know if he will assure us that water protection will be a prime factor in any land-use strategy. He talked about some of the setbacks with regard to waterways, I believe, under the NRCB, and that would be under Sustainable Resource Development.

Confined feedlots have a competing use with the land, and where a lot of towns and municipalities have concerns is with regard to the runoff as they spread the manure. That manure not only impacts that particular operation but the majority who use that body of water for

their drinking, not just the one person but that whole municipality. If we get rains like we did just a couple of days ago, that would be an awful lot of flooding that it would in fact take into that lake, and it would be polluted just from that one operation. I know that we've raised this as a concern, and we've got ongoing concerns with this, but that would be one concern that we'd have with regard to the runoff.

The other one. When we talk about forests and setbacks with regard to lakes and/or streams, again, if we have some of the clear-cutting or the logging too close to the banks, when we get that downpour, that huge downpour, we're going to get so much of a runoff that all that silt will in fact have to be absorbed or dealt with by the downstream municipalities such as the one out in Calgary. When we've got the Spray Lakes, if they cut too close to the riverbanks, we're going to have all that runoff.

So there's where we're talking about some of the setbacks and concerns with regard to the bodies of water. Maybe there could be some specifics with regard to the setbacks or how far an activity or a business can in fact be from the bodies of water because of the concerns that we've raised not only in this session but ongoing in other sessions. Obviously, our land and water are closely connected, and as such it's essential that any strategy considers the implementation of the protection of our natural environment.

Can the minister tell us exactly how his ministry will ensure that a provincial land-use strategy provides the maximum protection for our water and our air? Can the minister tell us if the effects of climate change will be considered in the formation of the land-use strategy? Has the minister admitted the effects of climate change? They're undeniable. He's already said that as well, and the scientific evidence is irrefutable. Given that he has admitted this, how will the climate mitigation be adapted into the land-use strategy?

Water use is a massive concern, and I'll give you an instance. NOVA Chemicals draws more water per year from the Red Deer River than the city of Red Deer itself. The city of Red Deer, however, returns much of the water into the system. NOVA Chemicals returns far less. This type of practice, as we know, is unsustainable. What will the minister do to ensure that companies who have large water licences per year are required to return more than they currently do now and safely return it to the river from which it was drawn?

What mandate will ensure that the percentage of water licences must be returned? Are these some of the considerations that are going to be proposed within the development of the land-use strategy for the province? Will the minister ensure that the land-use strategy will always take the path that provides the maximum protection for the environment if there is a conflict with any act, plan, or law? Albertans have spoken loudly and clearly that they see environmental protection as one of the top priorities not only here in Alberta, but that's a concern that's starting to develop right through Alberta and Canada. In other words, will the minister ensure that the interests of the industry and the Ministry of Energy do not trump environmental protection? Will he guarantee a balance between often competing goals?

The provincial land-use strategy will be key to ensuring that the air that we breathe is clean. What role will the minister play in ensuring that the location of industry or the density of industry, such as the Industrial Heartland, that I mentioned earlier, will not have an adverse effect on the air quality? Obviously, 10 upgraders in a concentrated area of land will affect the air quality, so the location of these industries is critical. What plan does the minister have in relation to the Industrial Heartland to ensure that the air quality and water quality are protected and will not suffer adverse effects? How has he worked with the ministries of Sustainable Resource Develop-

ment and Energy to ensure that the environment is protected from the adverse effects of the high density of industry in Sturgeon and Strathcona counties?

Now, I know I'm getting close, so I'm hoping that you'll be able to get up and give me a little bit of the answers to some of the questions.

Mr. Renner: I will attempt to do so.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, you have about 39 seconds left in this segment.

Mr. Renner: I can't exactly give two or three minutes to the Minister of Energy, who asked for some extra time.

Let's talk about the last issue because I think that's the most critical issue that the member brought forward, and that is – and I'll paraphrase – will industry trump environment? The answer is: absolutely not. How are we planning to do that? I've been talking about cumulative impact. I've been talking about having an opportunity for us to turn our environmental legislation and regulation upside down so that rather than getting on a prescriptive basis and saying, "This is the way things will be done," instead we talk about . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but the one and a half hours that were set aside for the Liberal caucus have now elapsed.

We now have the next 30 minutes set aside for the New Democratic caucus. I would call upon the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. If we could proceed with the system we used before, with five minutes and five minutes, that would probably be the best.

Thanks for the opportunity to speak on this cross-ministry day, and I will try to cover, with perhaps some breadth and with brevity as well, a number of issues that are important. Of course, this all is an assembly around the land-use framework, and SRD has been given that responsibility. As the Minister of Environment pointed out, it's ultimately for the retention of a sustainable environmental use of the land and to hopefully leave the land in a reasonable way or even an improved way from the way we were given it in the first place, so my first sets of questions are sort of centred around that idea. Certainly, the land-use framework is absolutely essential to bringing all of this together.

4:10

My first question is to the Minister of SRD, to ask him when we might be able to see a draft of the framework. We're very interested to see it. I know that we were meant to see it sometime late this spring, but, you know, it seems to be delayed. In the interim, because we have so much unprecedented growth taking place, I think it's incumbent upon us to perhaps slow the pace of resource development until we have some decisions that are made that can determine how we use our urban and rural land and transition land into the future because, of course, you only get one parcel of land.

You know, it's like building the LRT system in a city. Once you lose corridors to build an LRT system through a place, it becomes unimaginably more difficult to build a framework for a train system. That same analogy can expand to other urban issues or suburban issues or rural issues. Once we've already committed, whether or not we've made a plan, that's the way it is. I know that you know that our position is certainly to move ahead with our economy, and

we are happy to have a robust economy but not at the expense of making unplanned decisions for the land that we have available to us here in this province.

With that in mind, I just wanted to ask something about the consultations that are being held. How many people have you been actually interacting with thus far in person, online, and by mail? I would be curious to know that, again, from SRD. You know, there is always difficulty in these consultations, and there never is a good time of the year, but certainly the consultation process during the spring, during the busiest time of the year, I think provided some problems for people to access that procedure.

When the Premier stated that he wouldn't tap the brakes on energy development, in effect, in our view, he undermined to some degree the value of this land-use framework and gave Albertans reason to believe that, you know, regardless of what our input might be, it's ultimately going to be business first with energy calling the shots. Again, I'm asking if the government is willing to slow energy development, particularly in the tar sand sector, if it is revealed to be necessary to protect the environment and to make way for other land uses, or are we going with the status quo on the tap the brake thing as the precedent that overrides other things and thus devalues the process of going through building a consultation for a land-use framework?

There are just so many questions that come to my mind in regard to land use and how the decisions are made by default, whether you make a decision or not, just because of the pace of development. You know, I found it interesting when I was following the news on the long weekend. The minister, of course, was aware, as I was, of the incidents that took place at Indian graves and other areas where there was a lot of environmental destruction from long-weekend partying and mud bogging and violent activity of all kinds. I was glad to see the minister there to at least have an impact on that and to hopefully make some decisions about that.

However, you know, when I fly over different parts of this province or I'm travelling on the ground in northern Alberta particularly, there is far greater damage taking place through resource exploitation. I'm sure the minister is aware that, say, for example, probably more bush is cut down by exploration of oil and gas than by forestry.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. ministers, just to remind you once again, the ND caucus had requested five-minute time slots. So we only have five minutes for response.

Any minister who wants to respond? The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Although these may be slightly unrelated answers, I would like to just quickly address the situation with respect to the EUB. The EUB, as you know, is undergoing change now, and recommendations that have been made with respect to some of these issues and former employees in positions there are more musing about potential things that could happen rather than recommendations. On the idea that under the land-use framework we could have, perhaps, a better way to manage some of our hearings and that type of thing, I would suggest that that is in fact going ahead. The regional hearing framework, as a matter of fact, is in the pilot stage now.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other minister? We still have three and a half minutes.

The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are several questions that apply to me, I believe, from the hon. member.

When should he expect the draft of the land-use framework? December of this year is our goal. That's a postponement of about six months. At the December '04-05 stakeholder meeting in Red Deer the stakeholders themselves recommended that if it took more time to get it right, take the time because it was more important to get it right than to rush and make mistakes.

In terms of moratoriums or slowing things down, that sounds simple in theory, but if you actually begin to think about it in practice, how you do that and the implications it has for all sorts of players and investors becomes a bit of an administrative nightmare. I think that given the fact we're still moving with relative dispatch, getting a draft out by the end of this year is practical. In terms of slowdowns the Premier has made it pretty clear that there's not going to be any policy the intention of which is to slow down the economy. But as far as the land-use framework goes, it's certainly possible that there could be a recommended policy that, if adopted, would have the effect of slowing things down. I think that's a fairly important distinction, between a purposeful policy and a policy that has the intention of, say, enhancing protection of water in the north that might have the secondary effect of slowing things down.

Finally, in terms of consultations, there were 17 public consultation sessions. I don't have the exact figure – but those will be published – of how many people attended, how many workbooks were turned in, or questionnaires were turned in at those. There are two other sources also. The questionnaire/workbooks can be mailed in, and they also can be done online. All that information will be made public when it's collected and collated.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: We've still got another minute and 10 seconds. Any other minister?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, if I could, I think there are a couple of things that I might be able to help clarify a bit. There was a suggestion that if you overfly the province of Alberta, you see a lot of environmental damage created by the energy industry. I would like to clarify that what you see if you overfly the province of Alberta may be, in certain circumstances, where harvesting is taking place with respect to the fibre industry. I think we have relatively robust systems in place to reforest. I know that the companies that are involved in that are very prudent with respect to what they do in that area. The other thing, of course, that comes up when these comments are made are situations with respect to the mining operations that take place in oil sands production.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I guess that it always comes back to being willing to assume best practices. I think, certainly, we have to have a strategy in place but to adopt best practices at every turn. You know, when I'm talking about the flying over thing, you see a lot of remnants of the historical exploration for oil and gas, with the cutlines and the wellhead sites. I know now that the industry is moving to not having to cut so many lines. So it's just a question, when you have that technology available, for us as legislators to implement it on a province-wide basis as soon as possible. I think that's what's incumbent upon us here when we're building a land-use strategy and making legislation in general. We are once again looking to augment and to enforce a strong economic policy at the bottom line – I mean, that's what makes the province turn – but at

the same time to ensure that we're not selling out for the future.

I know that five minutes is very short, so I'm just going to touch on a couple of areas that I would like to invite discussion and perhaps reflection on as well. One is the Upgrader Alley and the new bitumen upgraders that we expect to see northeast of Edmonton, starting now and into the next decade or so. Certainly, as you know, we've been encouraging the local upgrading of bitumen to finished products here in the province of Alberta but in a balanced manner. If we say that we have a certain limitation with the water and the land and the energy inputs that are required to do bitumen upgrading, then that becomes a natural limiting factor, we believe, to tar sand development and the mining and extraction of the raw material as well.

Now, one area that I would like to just point out here: where is the water going to come from for the bitumen upgraders? I read in the paper with some interest this morning – and I've of course heard this before in the Fort Saskatchewan plans and the Tofield plans with Sherritt – to use the municipal waste water to supply some of the water needs of the bitumen upgraders or the coal gasification plant in Tofield and so on and so forth. You know, we have to remember, of course, that you must put that water back. Part of the expectation is to have municipal waste water from Edmonton or the equivalent going back into the North Saskatchewan and into the river system.

We have to be careful that we're looking at the whole process. Of course, if you are taking that water out and it doesn't get back into the North Saskatchewan water system, then in fact we are ultimately shortchanging the whole water hydrological cycle that is necessary in the big picture to fulfill needs downstream, including other provinces downstream. So that's one issue I'd like to invite comment on. Where is the water going to come from for the bitumen upgraders, and are we going to impose a limitation based on how much we can sustain the water use of the Industrial Heartland projects and still maintain downstream flow?

Another question, again, in a similar area northeast of Edmonton but certainly around the province, is a glaring lack of protection for agricultural land. You know, within the land-use framework it's absolutely essential that we have written in stone that good agricultural land has to be protected in some managed way, certainly not in some blanket way, once again, but in some quite decisive way.

Let's say, for example, northeast of Edmonton, again, which has some of the very best land in the province and has some of the longest growing seasons – well, I think the longest growing season – in the whole province. You know, areas like that in other jurisdictions, in other provinces and countries, are absolutely off limits in terms of development because we know that's where food production takes place; that's where our future food production takes place. Considering the situation with energy and CO₂, we want to produce food inside the province as much as we can. It's just a wise thing to do. Is the land-use framework going to have some very solid and indisputable protection of prime agricultural land built into the whole thing?

Then my last comment and question is in regard to intensive livestock operations. I'm always getting complaints about intensive livestock operations and their inability to deal with the waste products that they produce. You know, there just seems to be a singular lack of interaction or even just practical analysis of intensive livestock operations. There's simply too much manure . . .

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. There's no doubt that land use, especially the concerns around quality land,

is an issue. It's an issue for agriculture producers and, I would also say, should be an issue for this land-use framework and this government. You know, as a farmer I definitely have a lot of passion about farmland and . . .

Mr. Knight: You sure don't show it.

Mr. Danyluk: I sure don't show it?

I would say that the development of urban centres all started out surrounding the land that was of best production. The expansion of urban centres, really, revolves around those centres, and the expansion of those centres covers some of our best farmland in Alberta. We very much need to be cognizant, and we need to be stewards of that land. I know that it's a cliché, but they're just not making any more good farmland. We have to protect it.

We do have, I believe, very good policies in place in regard to manure management, intensive livestock operations, and we need to make sure that that criteria are adhered to, that we protect the environment, protect the water, which is so critical, and also protect the land. We know that we have individuals and families that are coming from Europe and from other parts of the world, and their appreciation for what we have and their appreciation of the conservation of land is primary.

I just want to say that some of the comments that you have brought forward are very much near and dear to this ministry.

The Deputy Chair: We have another two and a half minutes.
The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, first of all, the hon. member talked about the longest growing season, northeast of Edmonton. I guess that it kind of proves the point the folks down my way have, that people in Edmonton don't see much past the horizon. In fact, the longest growing season is in the Medicine Hat area, not the Edmonton area. [interjections] Most hours of sunshine? All right.

I want to talk briefly about the whole issue of municipal waste water being used for industrial feeds. This is a genuine win-win situation. While the member is right that at present most of the municipal waste is returned into the river system, it doesn't have to be that way. I think everyone needs to understand that in many ways it's not preferable that it be that way. If we can find alternate uses for that waste water and not return it into the stream, a couple things are accomplished. We can reduce the number of other industrial licences that have to be given out because we're reusing water that's already been through the system once. More importantly, we're increasing the quality of water that's in the river. We're not adding nutrients to the river. As good as we are able to treat industrial waste water and municipal waste water, there still is phosphorus and there still are some other chemicals that are left in that discharge. They don't pose a health risk, but they do create the opportunity for a decrease in the overall quality of water in the river.

When we talk about in-stream flow needs, it's a balance. Sometimes we don't need as much water flowing in the river to maintain that ecosystem if it's good quality water as we would if we had compromised the quality of that water in one way or another. So it really, truly is a win-win situation, that we see municipal waste water being used at industrial sites. Most of the time it's used for cooling, so it ends up going into the atmosphere in the form of steam and goes back into the hydrological cycle. It doesn't necessarily come back into the river, but certainly it's not lost. It's not like injecting water underground.

4:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of, obviously, quick points. I would just refer back about the land use and specifically about densification around our major cities. Land use comes back to how municipalities operate around each other. Certainly, I'm talking about the city of Edmonton. I notice that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was talking about farmland, and I notice that from the *Journal* of, I think, March 29, we see that a whole "new city with highrise apartments and pedestrian-friendly streets is going to be built in Strathcona County." It says, "The city will be built from scratch on farmland west of Highway 21 and north of the Yellowhead Highway. It could eventually grow to 200,000 people."

Now, that worries me that out of the blue on the north end of the city this could happen. At least, they're looking at it. I think that we have to really begin to deal with this problem. It's a broad problem. It's densification within the city itself, it's how we get the municipalities to work together, and it's land use. I'd like some comments about that from the minister to see if there is an update on that.

I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing would be extremely disappointed if we didn't have a brief discussion about the housing. Obviously, the economy depends on housing. If we can't get housing on the market fast enough, well, you know, it's going to be very difficult to maintain the boom or anything else. Some would argue that that's not a bad thing, but that's reality. I just want to refer the minister to the latest rental market report from Canada Mortgage and Housing. I think it tells the picture very quickly. The Alberta apartment vacancy rates across the province: Wood Buffalo, 0.2 per cent; Grande Prairie, 0.9 per cent; Edmonton, 1.1 per cent; Red Deer, 2.1 per cent; Calgary, 0.5 per cent; Lethbridge, 1.3 per cent; Medicine Hat, 1.7 per cent.

That doesn't surprise us. Again, we can get into the arguments about rent guidelines and the rest, but I raise this because, actually, when we look at what's being done about apartments, we notice in Calgary and Edmonton that we've actually lost apartments from the spring to now. It's worse than it was before. There's been a slight improvement across the province, roughly a thousand units, but really not enough to have much impact. In our two major cities there are actually less apartments now than there were in the spring. I expect it's, you know, condo conversions, the rest of the things that we've talked about. I think, to the Minister of Energy and the others, that if we want to bring people in and we want to continue with the vibrant economy that we talk about, this is going to continue to be a problem.

In view of these latest figures, what contingency plans? We've obviously had the debate here in the Legislature, Mr. Chairman, about rent guidelines. We've said that we need to bring more affordable housing on, and we're talking specifically here about rental units. In our two major cities there are actually less apartments now than there were before. I guess I'd like the minister to comment on this. Is there a contingency plan? If this keeps going the way it is, you know, we're going to have this debate four months from now, six months from now.

I just would conclude with the remaining time in the minister's discussion, myself, about affordability. It's one thing for the government to say that we can help, and some help is being given on an individual basis with the eviction fund and other things. But there is a growing population, a growing number of people, that are just above that, and I don't know what we're going to do about them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. We do have roughly about three minutes left.

Mr. Danyluk: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll try to be fast. I can assure the hon. member that I have the same concerns about the development that you spoke of, the expansion, maybe not so much on the development side but very much on the land side. It is good land in that area, and there is a concern.

Mr. Chairman, just a short discussion about housing and the low vacancy rates. As I have mentioned many times, it is a concern when you have people moving into Alberta, trying to have increased housing. I really believe that we need to maintain stability as far as the investment into units. I think we need to encourage the building of secondary suites.

I want to say that the Municipal Government Act currently has provisions for municipalities to outline future development in their area with the creation of municipal development plans, and that is critical. It deals not only with housing, but it deals with issues of municipalities such as the comments that you made about Strathcona and Edmonton. It also encourages municipalities to undertake intermunicipal development plans with neighbouring municipalities. The recent recommendations from the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability on such issues as regional co-operation and dispute resolution are being reviewed at this time, and the government response is expected later this month.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, the new municipal sustainability initiative also provides, I would say, substantial financial support for intermunicipal initiatives to help municipalities cope with those growth pressures. I believe everything helps. We need to work together.

The Deputy Chair: Does any other minister wish to supplement? We still have about a minute and a half.

Hon. member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you may use the balance of the time.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. Very briefly. I'll just finish what I was talking about. The reality is that affordable housing is getting, especially in the two major cities, worse rather than better. We're going to have to deal with that, I believe, especially if we want to maintain or not put the brakes on in terms of the development. How are we going to deal with this?

To the minister. What I'm finding – and I'll be very brief – is that we're dealing with some of the most serious cases through the eviction fund, but there's a whole group of people. We used to say affordability – we've had this discussion – was that no more than 30 per cent of your income should be going to accommodation. What is that new affordability? I expect now that it's probably 50, 60 per cent. The government refused that, but there's a whole group of people – and this will have a serious impact on our economy and all the rest of the things we're doing – that are around that level. They're finding it harder and harder. They're working, finding it harder and harder to live, and the major reason is accommodation. I think we're missing a part of it. Hopefully, we can bring more housing on, but that will take time. I guess I'm asking if there's a contingency plan down the way.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the time allocated for the New Democratic caucus has now elapsed. The balance of the time, which is about one hour from now, is assigned for private members. If you would like to participate, please advise me, and we will recognize you.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Can I answer his questions?

The Deputy Chair: What I can do is I can recognize you as the first person to bring remarks, and you can answer some of those questions therein. But we will be enforcing, again, the 10-minute rule from here on.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

4:40

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It definitely brings me to a comment when we're talking about housing. I'm so happy to hear the New Democratic Party member talk about not putting brakes on development – I've been waiting for those comments – and making sure that our development continues and we try to continue to grow in this province. If I interpret his words right, my interpretation of his comments says to me that the hon. member is making sure that we do not have any sort or type of rent controls so we can continue in the development direction and development focus so that we are able to continue to have more units that are provided for individuals that need affordable housing, for individuals that are in need. So I thank the hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased and honoured to rise today in this Assembly to debate and bring forward questions on this cross-ministry. My questions will be primarily to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and the Minister of Energy, but I welcome any answers from the other ministers.

One of the first is that people in my riding want every effort to be put forward to maintain processing of petrochemical resources, petroleum resources in our province, especially bitumen. I guess the question on that particular item is: has the Department of Energy encouraged looking at the development of bitumen processing in the southern Alberta area, especially in the Medicine Hat area, given that there are many, many workers from Calgary, Medicine Hat, and Lethbridge that travel all the way to Fort McMurray on a regular basis to work in similar types of facilities and we may be bringing them to work in facilities in the Heartland region? Given that the piping of bitumen works to break it down and crack it somewhat the greater distance it goes, going to southern Alberta may be of economic benefit to Alberta if we develop there. That's the first question.

The second one is an item that I've talked about a number of times in this Legislature, and that's regarding geothermal power. What efforts has the department given forward to support the Alberta Geological Survey and the Alberta Research study on low and medium geothermal resources? For example, the May 2006 issue of *The PEGG* – that's the engineers' magazine – presents estimates of the potential energy locked in Alberta's geothermal waters at 2 trillion to 5 trillion barrels of oil equivalent given present technologies.

Now, another issue that I think is important in terms of the economics of oil sands development is the energy necessary for processing. One potential matter for developing that has been put forward is the idea of nuclear power generation. I've had some scientists come to me and say that in order to do it in a viable economic manner, this would take many, many smaller nuclear plants in the tar sands area. My question is: have there been any estimates put forward by the department, or has this question been looked into as to the number and size of nuclear plants necessary to be viable heating sources for oil sands production? Some of the scientific sources have said that it may make no economic sense for that particular industry.

I'll get back to geothermal a little later. But in looking at my 10 minutes, I'd like to just bounce back over to Sustainable Resource Development. I'm looking at the strategic priority 2 in, I believe, the business plan, the biodiversity strategy, which looks to conserving biological diversity and enabling "sound management of Alberta's natural resources on a sustainable basis." This is an important goal. In many ways forest management agreements, or in the short form FMAs, are charged with maintaining forest health by those forest industries enjoying access to these FMA areas. One of my primary concerns in the management of FMAs is the prevalence of monoculture replanting schemes for harvested areas, mainly monoculture replanting schemes.

If one looks to the government priority of managing biodiversity, indeed, maintaining biodiversity, I am very concerned that forestry companies, especially in difficult economic times for forestry, are not looking beyond monoculture to any large degree. A question to the minister is: how is the ministry ensuring that forestry companies maintain diverse planting schemes in difficult economic times for the industry?

Another concern with the biodiversity strategy and also linking with priority 3, which is sustainable resource and environmental management, is the planting and harvesting of species that are from western Canada but nontraditional for western Canadian industry use. For example, we've rarely utilized birch for much more than firewood. Mr. Chair, I have personal experience in the past of seeing valuable sawlog-quality birch being buried or wasted in other ways when pipeline rights-of-way or other resource industry needs and even the logging of other species are the priority. Now, birch sawlog of, say, 24 inches at the butt, once processed, cut, and kiln-dried, produces finished product from that sawlog of furniture-quality hardwood lumber worth thousands of dollars. Yet we often see this species wasted. I've seen it buried.

One of the problems is that we've never established a true finished hardwood industry. Producers have often tried to deal with these logs as if they were softwoods like spruce or pine, but hardwood is not handled in its drying or storage processes in any way that is at all similar to softwood production. What happens is that producers just throw up their hands and say that the species is useless and too hard to handle and it's warping, and they end up wasting even their finished product or what they attempt for a finished product. But it is very possible to do so if we follow the traditional practice that has been developed for hundreds of years in eastern Canada, in Europe, and other areas.

I submit, Mr. Chair, that the real problem is that we've not adopted these proper hardwood handling and production processes here in western Canada, especially Alberta, for the most part. There are a few producers, but we have obviously not been successful. If one just goes to the supply stores, you see that we are importing birch from eastern Canada and hardwoods from as far away as the Congo, while we are burying hardwood that could be used for similar uses. There is little economic incentive to replant birch if there is no use for it other than fireplaces, yet it is an important natural species for Alberta.

Mr. Chair, the birch species is just an example, but it leads to the question: is the ministry doing all it can to ensure that species such as birch are being used to maximum economic value? A second question in this area is: is the ministry doing anything to develop the nascent hardwood industry in Alberta for finished furniture products? A third question is: with little development in species such as birch, does this mean that we are limiting biodiversity and the replanting of this and other similarly dealt with species?

I return to geothermal now. I'll give some quotes from articles on *canada.com*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Edmonton Journal*, and other sources.

Like nuclear and unlike solar or wind power, geothermal provides a constant, predictable source of energy in the form of heat – used directly or to generate electricity. Another benefit is that geothermal energy releases virtually no airborne pollutants and there are no waste-disposal and security concerns like with nuclear power.

It's also Kyoto-friendly. According to Natural Resources Canada, new geothermal facilities emit 0.1 kilograms of carbon per megawatt hour of generated electricity, compared with 185 kilograms of carbon for a coal-fired plant. They also outperform coal and nuclear plants in terms of reliability . . . Geothermal power is generated from heat of 80C to 200C, deep in the Earth's crust, and is not the same as ground-source heat pumps or "geo-exchange" systems, which use constant temperatures just a few metres below the Earth's surface to assist in heating and cooling buildings.

Now those are often what we see in the geothermal house-heating business, which are actually quite viable.

4:50

It doesn't take much extrapolation to show that the deeper you go, no matter where you drill, you will encounter 250-degree temperatures . . . [and] the power supply should exist just about any place, if you go deep enough . . . Geothermal fits with our principles of sustainable development, in that there's a potential economic benefit, which is reducing our operating costs and dependence on natural gas,

especially for the oil sands, and emitting almost no greenhouse gas emissions.

In northern Alberta, the temperature of the Earth's crust rises by about 30 [degrees celsius] for each kilometre of depth. Wells drilled down six kilometres could encounter rock at temperatures above 200 [degrees].

Heat could be brought to the surface by forcing water down wells, under high pressure, so it would percolate through pores and fissures in the rock, return to the surface through recovery wells as steam, and be used to separate oil from sand . . .

Geothermal heat, rising to the surface . . . has been used [as a source] since prehistoric times . . .

Geothermal heat mining would build on Alberta's oilpatch expertise. The report says it would require improvements to drill bits, casing methods, cementing techniques, downhole sensors and reservoir mapping.

That's a report that's quoted in the *canada.com* article *Greener Oil Sands Would Drill for Heat*.

We have Shell. We have others in the oil sands looking at this. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to the member opposite for the questions and the interest in a couple of different areas in the province here with respect to the energy industry, certainly the questions with respect to upgrading and refining. As the member knows, the EUB have published their latest figures with respect to where we're headed on the energy front in the province of Alberta, the reserves and requirements for energy for the province over the next kind of 10-year time frame. Just as an overview I would like to let the member know that as we stand now in 2006-07, we're at about a 65 per cent level of upgrading in the province of Alberta. As the member knows, most of that's done in areas now where mining operations are taking place, and the mining and upgrading and, in some circumstances, some refining also are done in proximity, so these facilities are actually joint facilities.

However, as we move forward with respect to bitumen production and upgrading, on the out-years heading to 2014, '15, '16, in that time frame, very interestingly, those numbers actually turn heavily in the favour of Albertans with respect to upgrading. We don't

know yet where we would actually land on refining because the situation with respect to refining gets down to an ability to actually deliver transportation fuels out of Alberta to marketplaces where they're required. Nevertheless, the synthetic crude output and use inside the province will account for approximately 75 per cent and maybe even higher in the years 2015, 2016 and about 25 per cent of non-upgraded bitumen, you know, used as product out of the province. We are heading into an area where there will be a lot more bitumen certainly produced and a lot more upgraded. By the way, at that point, about 2016, we'll be in the neighbourhood of 2.8 million barrels to 3 million barrels a day of production. That is taking into account only projects that are before us and projects under construction currently.

The encouragement to process in southern Alberta. Although I understand the member's concept and don't disagree that there are potentials to do these things, the infrastructure around clustering for these projects isn't currently as robust in southern Alberta as it is in the Industrial Heartland. Most certainly, clustering with respect to the issue of upgrading and refining makes a lot of sense. Also, the Minister of Environment pointed out very clearly that water usage with respect to these issues is mainly nonprocessed water, so in fact it is cycled. The constraints in southern Alberta with respect to water would probably make these situations much more difficult in that area.

Geothermal power. Again, alternatives that are going to come into place and into play in the province of Alberta are very, I think, exciting, and geothermal is certainly one of them. I had an opportunity a couple of times recently – the most recent opportunity was yesterday – to meet with two representatives of the geothermal industry in the province of Alberta. You know, interestingly enough, they, again, of course, are very excited. There are about 23 commercial operations installing and operating geothermal systems now in the province of Alberta. I believe that they indicated to me that there are well over 1,000 installations that are operating successfully in the province. Again, you know, we're excited. We think that there are great opportunities here for Albertans with respect to geothermal.

The issue around geothermal and the production of electricity. There are two types of geothermal energy. I think that we need to kind of break this down. The one that most people think of as geothermal, that's used for home heat or, you know, that type of heat would probably be more appropriately described, I think, as earth energy. The actual deep geothermal: there are a few major players in North America that are doing some research projects with respect to deep geothermal, where you would perhaps find some relatively hot spots that would allow for steam generation. That is a different type of geothermal usage. Again, not normally the type of thing that we would see in general use for home heating or building heat, that kind of thing.

Mr. Chairman, again, oil sands energy intensity. There isn't, I know, a player in the oil sands industry today that isn't keyed very keenly on that issue. The energy in for each unit of energy out is extremely important. It does a number of things. Of course, it makes good sense from the point of view of the economy and the economics around a project, but it also helps them on the carbon side. The whole carbon cycle becomes a little better and more palatable if they can reduce the energy intensity.

Nuclear was brought up. Now, the question is: have we actually done work with respect to, you know, what size of a nuclear plant would fit what piece in the oil sands industry? I'll repeat that the province of Alberta is neither a proponent nor a detractor from any form of alternative energy, including nuclear. However, the proponents that would come forward would come from industry. Of

course, they will best assess their requirement for energy, and they would be able to best assess whether or not any current or future nuclear technology may or may not fit a particular facility that they're working with.

5:00

Of course, we've had recently in the media and, you know, press releases around some proponents that are looking. The process is in place. It initially under our Constitution is a federal issue, so if people are going to make application, the province would not receive the applications initially. They'll go to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission. We would certainly be involved from that point forward in the best interests of Albertans.

What we are doing is we're working on bringing forward a concept paper around the use of nuclear in the province of Alberta. It will be well discussed in public over the next few months as this thing unfolds. I'm looking forward to the participation of the public in the discussion to determine what it is that Albertans would like us to do with respect to the issue around nuclear generation. Given, you know, the environmental concerns and given the constraints that we have to produce electricity in Alberta by other means – and we do have lots; of course, clean coal and hydro come to mind – nuclear will be an interesting discussion.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few comments I want to make about land use. I'm going to start off by addressing my comments to the minister of municipal affairs. This is on land use for affordable housing. I think that somewhere along the way we got into the habit of thinking of affordable housing as being actual single-family dwelling or multi-family dwelling concepts as opposed to something that we may actually require just on a shorter term basis, for between five and 10 years, which would be more of a trailer court concept in or adjacent to some of our urban municipalities.

The reason I mention this is because it is something that perhaps on public land we could work on water and sewage services. People would be able to move trailers or winterized RVs into some of these areas for six months or a year while they're here working. A lot of people are coming from other provinces, not with the intention they'll necessarily stay but, rather, because there's a job that they can do here for six months or a year, and then they really want to go home. I have a number of people like that in my constituency, Minister, and they actually don't have a place to put things like RVs.

Today breaking in the news is a story from just outside of Chestermere. There's a small trailer park that was never really set up for overnight stays, nor was it ever set up for longer term stays. But today the Calgary health authority have expressed concerns, and there's now a court order to shut this place down because there are a lot of people in tents and small campers that are there. It's not safe. It's not properly sanitized. There are issues in that area – and it's not inside an urban area, but it is, in fact, inside Rocky View – with the private landowner who has developed this. Understanding their problem, they now have to find another place to go to, and the campgrounds are basically full.

So the real portion of my question, Minister, is this: have you guys considered when you're looking at this problem that we are dealing with today – and it is, I believe, a short-term issue – some of the quicker fix solutions that can be put together and then taken apart in five to 10 years, when they're no longer necessary? Then the land could be reclaimed and used for other purposes. I ask you that on your land-use side.

On the energy side I wanted to talk about biofuels for a moment,

Minister. When we're talking about land use there, we're talking about cropland, some forestry products that can be used in biofuels. When you're looking at that, can you please tell me the breadth and scope of the impact that you see that actually having on agricultural uses for land? Are we doing things on a fuel side, on a land-use side that will detract from forestry or detract from agriculture, or is this just a win-win for everybody? Will we be changing – and this is SRD – the scope of what we're trying to grow by way of trees for cellular consumption for biofuel concepts?

I know that you probably don't have a quick answer for that, but it is an issue that I think will grow in importance as the biofuel sectors continue to develop. Will it be impacting food sources for some countries, making it more difficult for very, very poor countries to actually supply food for their nations? I know that's probably way outside the reach and scope of what you're doing, Minister of Energy, but I think that it's an important consideration. We need to make sure we have proper answers for it.

On the land-use side I would like some assurance from one of you that when we're talking about our land-use strategy, we are not talking about shutting down industrial development in our province but, rather, working through a land-use strategy that will allow people to participate in recreation but also respecting that businesses and agriculture can continue to coexist on this land. I think that once in a while we get a little bit myopic on the size of this province, perhaps not necessarily understanding the immensity of it, that it is larger than most European countries, that in fact it is about the same size as California with 35 million people in it, and we have 3.4 million. We still have to be able to develop this province to the best of our ability, and that means there has to be room for economic development as well as environmental sustainability.

So whatever assurance you can give me on that side that says that we're not going to shut development down in our province while we try to be the great stewards of the world here. I do believe in land-use management and good stewardship, but I think that from the whole, as a person that grew up in the energy industry and then was involved in agriculture for 20 years, there was no part of it where I didn't see people that cared about our province and wanted to do the best job they could. I want to make sure that we don't lose sight of that.

My last comment is for Energy, and it's this. There are way less rigs working today than there were a year ago. The latest report that I've heard is that about 3,500 workers that have been drillers and rig workers are not employed this year. In a province that's short of labour, has anything been done to work with some of the oil sands companies or the big construction companies to make sure that these people, with all of their expertise, do not fall through the cracks somewhere but, rather, we utilize their skills and their energy to make sure that they're employed today on other things that we as a province need to get done?

So just your comments on any and all of those things would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: We have two ministers rising. I'm wondering who wants to go first. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll try to make my comments very short. I want to say that the affordable housing funding that is available is in conjunction and co-operation with municipalities. I do want to say that the trailer court proposal is a very good proposal. To give you an example, we have had discussions with the city of Edmonton, and the city of Edmonton is doing exactly that.

If the municipality has funds and they feel that that's the direction that they should take, that is a very good direction. If it's a municipality that didn't get funds because they didn't fit into the criteria of the three categories, they can apply to our ministry for a project like that. I will say that that is a very positive project because it is to get people some sort of lodging and quick lodging. It's a very good solution.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Danyluk: You weren't even ready.

5:10

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. In fact, I was. I was actually born ready.

The member brings up some very good points. With respect to biofuels, of course, the member knows that we have a program in place to encourage biofuel in the province of Alberta, and I'd mentioned it earlier. The points around, you know, the agricultural land and forestry land that may be involved in the biofuels industry eventually most certainly brings with it some challenges. There will be impact on agricultural land. When you look at some of the opportunities going forward, particularly in cellulosic ethanol, some of the agricultural crops that are only absolutely zero food value – they're only to be grown for things like cellulosic ethanol – will it become perhaps more economic for an agricultural producer to do nothing but cater to the fuel business? We certainly are cognizant of that.

Again, it's a critical thing that we maintain enough of our agricultural base in the food industry that we don't subject ourselves to total import of all the food products that we need in the province. So I certainly take your point seriously, and we have had an opportunity to look at it. It's a little early for us because, as you know, biofuel in Alberta is a very, very small piece of business. As it grows – and we hear, you know, the 400 million and so litres, infrastructure intending to come into the province. At those points in time we will certainly need to be prepared to address that.

On the forestry side we're already into this to a degree, although it's not on the cellulosic side or forestry issues around fuel. Most certainly, the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne will be very familiar with hybrid trees that we're experimenting with. We have them in my riding, and I've been and visited a few in Whitecourt-St. Anne. I think that we would, again, want to be extremely careful that we do not allow a situation that would replace our mixed wood stands or the boreal forest stands that we have with, you know, a type of reforestation, a type of tree that would only be useful for the fuel industry. Certainly, your comments are well placed and will be considered.

With respect to food costs, it's already happening. I don't know about internationally, but I can certainly tell you that in studies that have been done recently in North America, the United States particularly, anything that is using corn starch and corn syrup for sweetening, the price is already going up. Foodstuff will certainly take a hit when the biofuels industry gets into full swing – there's no doubt – because the competition for that product is there.

The rig count, I think, was the last issue. Most certainly drilling indications that I got today – and probably the same ones that the member is aware of – would indicate that we're at about 30 per cent.

The Deputy Chair: A couple of things I just want to bring to your attention. First, for *Hansard* to pick up your voice, it would be appropriate for you to speak up front.

Secondly, the camera that's capturing you is right in front of you,

and I'm sure that the audience that's watching you intently right now throughout Alberta doesn't want to see the other part of yourself.

You may now proceed.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This is probably my best side.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to the rig count and the workers involved, again, the member brings up, you know, a very important discussion around what we would do with 3,500 people that are actually very well trained and highly skilled with respect to operating oil well and gas well drilling rigs in the province of Alberta. Most certainly, those numbers of people that would want to engage themselves in other sectors of the industry will find opportunities there. We're very hopeful that we would not lose these individuals.

The way the cycle actually works, they're drilled ahead quite a bit, so there will be number of these wells that require tie-in. So although the labour for the drilling force would decrease, there may be, certainly, opportunities for those individuals to be taken up in the secondary process where these wells would be put into gathering systems and tied into the production facilities. That's where we will hope to concentrate our efforts: to have these skilled workers remain at work in Alberta, still, you know, in the energy industry and engaged but in a different part of the industry.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: We still have about two minutes and 40 seconds.

The hon. Minister for Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe the hon. member had a fourth question that had to do with the land-use framework process. She was concerned about whether it was just about recreation and ignoring the importance of continued economic and industrial growth. I just want to reassure her that I'm confident that that's not what will come out of the land-use framework, that it will strike an appropriate balance between environmental protection and recreation on the one hand and economic growth and industrial development on the other.

I think it's not a question, as the Premier has said, about stopping growth; it's a question of smart growth. I think you'll see a lot of discussion not about stopping drilling but about drilling practices. What are the best practices? Same thing with pipelining: are there better ways to do pipeline that are less intrusive? Similar best practices discussions around agriculture: when it comes to conflict of interest in some of the recreation areas, instead of prohibiting things, maybe sequencing who does what, when. I think it's obviously an important concern, but I'm confident that the land-use framework will strike an appropriate balance.

The Deputy Chair: Any other minister who wants to supplement answers? Very well.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a couple of items that I'd like to talk about, one with seniors' housing and the other dealing with the forest sector. You know, it's no secret that the lumber industry in Alberta has been in a very major slump. A recent report from the Alberta Forest Products Association provides numbers that show that the situation's likely to get worse before it gets better. Year-end product value of \$3.2 billion: the industry in Alberta suffered a \$569 million decrease over the previous year and was down dramatically from '04, which was \$4.3 billion.

You know, Minister, in the past 12 months a number of develop-

ments have occurred that provide signals to which scenarios are emerging that are very concerning to communities like Whitecourt and other forest-based communities. The pine beetle infestation is without a doubt accelerating in Alberta. Environment: the increased public concerns about water, climate change, greenhouse gas emissions. The biofuels: a major policy thrust in the U.S. to increase ethanol and biodiesel production with effects on grain and land prices. In industry increased competition and reduced profitability are leading to mill closures and consolidation in the industry. Questions raised about legal ownership of forest slash and carbon credits will rise.

Most of all what concerns me and other members of this government that have forest-dependent communities: we know that further loss of forest jobs, you know, are about to come. It may not be this year; it may not be next year, but we have some pretty strong signals that are being put in front of us.

5:20

So, minister responsible for SRD, I would ask, you know, that you respond to these issues. What in your budget are you doing to get ahead of the curve? What scenarios, what strategies are your department using to help industry, to help our forest-based communities? What do we have in the future to make sure that this industry stays alive, stays healthy? It's an important industry to Alberta. It's an important industry to our forest-based communities.

Next on the housing issues. I'd ask the Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing to think about a couple of scenarios, one of which concerns me and the job that I presently have as the chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. I'm hearing a lot from seniors just lately, especially since they've been receiving their municipal tax bills. You know, old age pension went up 1.9 per cent this year, 1.9 per cent. I saw my mum's tax bill go up 28 per cent. I saw from all over this province calls and the letters I'm getting from seniors about the ability to stay in their homes because of the rising municipal taxes.

You know, the department of seniors has done an admirable job understanding that the education portion of the taxes were going up. They left 2005 as a base year, and for the years after that seniors are able to apply and get a rebate, so it freezes their municipal taxes back to '05. But on the municipal side we haven't received that. Only one jurisdiction – the city of Edmonton is the only one that I know that has recognized senior homeowners in a rebate program. I have to acknowledge the mayor and the council for doing that. They have partnered with the department of seniors. They have identified those who get the Alberta seniors benefit program, and they offer a rebate.

As we all know, it's much cheaper to keep our seniors in their homes than for you to have to find money in your budget to provide seniors' housing. I'd like to know: in your budget, Mr. Minister, on your communications plan what are you doing to get this message to municipalities across this province about what the city of Edmonton is doing? Are there other great news stories like what the city of Edmonton is doing to share with Albertans and Alberta communities?

I think we have a joint responsibility: yours being the gateway to all the municipalities; mine being the ears and eyes and voice of seniors that can't be here to talk to you directly. So I'd like to know: in your budget have you allocated extra dollars to communicate to municipalities about how they can help and how they can step up? You've offered hundreds of millions of dollars in your budget this year to help municipalities with their infrastructure needs. I think a small, small portion of that that has gone to municipalities could easily be allocated to seniors of this great province.

I'll sit down and hear from both of you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Some very good comments and questions by the hon. member. I would suggest to the hon. member that the municipal sustainability initiative is trying to do exactly what some of your suggestions are.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, just earlier on I had made my comments to the Minister of Energy for two matters. One, for *Hansard* to pick up your voice, it would be important for you to speak through the microphone, and secondly, the camera is catching you live, as thousands of Albertans are watching.

Mr. Danyluk: It doesn't like the side view.

The Deputy Chair: Exactly.

You may now proceed.

Mr. Danyluk: Okay. Well, I appreciate that, Mr. Chairman. I'm not sure what the best profile would be.

Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that what has happened is as you see today. Hopefully, we're at the point that we can pass this budget. From the point where we have announced the budget until today, there has been communication. There have been different ways that municipalities feel that they can support their communities in affordable housing, helping seniors. I think very good points have been made by the hon. member as to how we communicate what other municipalities are doing, how we communicate what is possible to help address some of the seniors' housing and the challenges that seniors' housing have, and the comments that were made about the pensions going up 1.9 per cent, and the tax bill going up 28 per cent. I would hope that, you know, some of the funding that came from MSI would support that exact tax hike.

We are going to take that into advisement, and we are going to have communications with municipalities. I think that's an excellent idea that was brought forward by the hon. member, and we will bring that forward.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There's no question. The hon. member is right that the forestry industry has been hit with the perfect storm: the rising value of the Canadian dollar has hurt, rising energy and transportation cost here in Alberta, high cost of labour from the oil and gas economy, lower cost of off-shore producers, and then, of course, the impact of the softwood lumber agreement. We are working hard with the industry to mitigate those factors. We have adjusted the lumber dues cost as we promised to do last fall. We've also kept our commitment not to impose new cost without consultation. We're working with the industry on trucking and infrastructure issues. We'll be shortly reviewing a competitiveness report with the industry.

I would also point out that we've expended both last year and this year significant amounts of money to try to stop or arrest the spread of pine beetle: \$46 million last year and an estimated \$55 million this year. To the extent the pine beetle infestation spreads, we are positioning ourselves to work with the industry for new opportunities in terms of biofuels and products such as wood pellets that could be derived from beetle kill.

We also will be exploring the possibility of carbon credits for certain forestry practices or new forestry opportunities. Also, by

taking the lead on the biodiversity monitoring program, we hope to save the industry some of the costs that used to be put on industry in terms of meeting some of the requirements of their forest management agreement. So in all those ways we are working in a broad spectrum of ways to assist the forestry industry in these difficult times.

The Deputy Chair: Any other minister wishes to supplement any answers? Any questions? Hon. members, is there any other private member who hasn't participated as yet, who has any burning questions to put on record?

There being none, the chair will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to participate in the discussion, in the debate, this afternoon. Now, Bill 211, the Planning for the Future of Communities Act, which was introduced by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, calls for the establishment of growth plan areas along with an advisory committee for each area. I believe that this one strategy could lead to a more effective land-use policy.

5:30

Now, I don't want to get one ministry there working against the other, but has the Minister of Energy considered such a strategy, given the controversy and concern surrounding sour gas developments near highly populated areas, Compton's proposed sour gas well outside Calgary, for example? Why hasn't the Department of Energy developed a plan to deal with the inevitable clash between potential dangerous industry development in residential communities? Does the Minister of Energy believe that sour gas developments near highly populated areas are responsible and safe? Would the Minister of Energy, again, be willing to have sour gas wells close to his home? I would assume that up by Valleyview they're probably within sight of the kitchen window, but I don't know. And they would be sour gas wells.

Why hasn't the government established a land-use policy that would prevent potentially dangerous developments from threatening residential communities? We have the Compton application, for example, and if we look at this Public Safety and Sour Gas Final Report from March 2007, that the EUB just issued, there is a lot written here; there is a lot discussed. I'm not sure if we've done enough with the emergency zones. Certainly, we've had some sour gas leaks in the past, and I don't think the rules were followed. Just looking through that, I don't think that this is going far enough to provide a measure of public safety.

Now, there's the whole issue of industry, again, versus agricultural land. We don't have a comprehensive, effective land-use policy in this province. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was developing one, and it's the best plan that we have to date, a land-use policy. But in the interests of Alberta we see landowners and we see industry, and there seem to be continuous clashes between landowners and industry. Landowners certainly don't have confidence in the regulatory process. Every public meeting I attend, public member after public member stands up. Their issues are valid, and they're not being addressed.

Industrial development is going to continue. Tensions between industry and landowners will also continue. Rural landowners in this province are dealing with unprecedented growth levels, growth that often involves projects that infringe upon their lands, whether it's water issues, whether it's access issues.

Mr. Chairman, one example that illustrates the need for a comprehensive land-use policy is the proposed 500 kV line between

Edmonton and Calgary. I'm still not satisfied from before, the questions I had in regard to this 500 kV line, but why has the Department of Energy specifically failed to ensure that landowners who are affected by this proposed line are fully informed? Landowners are telling us that they have never been fully informed. Does the Minister of Energy agree that the entire process regarding this line has been flawed from the start, resulting in tense confrontations between landowners and the EUB? Does the minister agree that an effective land-use policy like the one that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview developed – a land-use policy like the hon. member's – would help to prevent such problems? I'm sure he agrees with that.

What process does the government currently use to weigh landowner interests against those of industry, and, again, why does the government favour industry always in these situations, as is apparent when looking at the land agent licensing process? You can't hire a friend or a relative or a family member to negotiate. You must negotiate with the industry representative. That's a bad law. That's a very bad law.

As this worked its way through the court system in Vegreville this winter, it was quite evident to everyone that that was a bad law. It still hasn't been changed. I would stay here until July and debate that legislation if the hon. minister is quite willing to change that – take a bad law and make it into a good law – because landowners are not happy. They're not happy with that. The courts did what they could, and hopefully the hon. minister of municipal affairs is going to change that law this session.

Now, Mr. Chairman, with a comprehensive land-use strategy we could avoid many of the problems that arise between rural landowners and oil and gas companies. We've also seen problems arise due to the flawed legislation, as I stated earlier, relating to the licensing of land agents and the inability of landowners to hire a representative who has their interests in mind. Does the Minister of Energy agree that the clash between industry development and rural landowner rights is an important issue that needs to be dealt with more effectively by this government by changing the Land Agents Licensing Act? Does the minister agree that an effective land-use policy would help to mitigate some of these problems, for instance by designating certain land as exempt from mineral exploitation?

Now, with the lack of planning with the upgraders, I would like to ask the hon. minister in the time that I have left about the CHOPS report, which is Cold Heavy Oil Production with Sand in the Canadian Heavy Oil Industry. This was an issue that we brought forward in question period earlier. This was done by the department, I realize, before the hon. minister's time as Energy minister, but the bitumen industry is the Rodney Dangerfield of the oil patch. It doesn't get the respect that it should. I think that in the next 10 to 15 years we're going to see a significant shift, and bitumen production and bitumen upgrading are going to take more of a prominent role in this province.

We have bitumen shipped to upgrading and refining facilities in Chicago and Minneapolis; Kansas City; Billings, Montana; and several other smaller facilities that have been redesigned over the years to accept a heavier feedstock. I for one think that there should be a different royalty structure here for a number of reasons. I almost think there should be a royalty structure on the viscosity, but also there should be a royalty structure on where it's upgraded. If it's upgraded south of the border, I'm sorry, you're not going to get it at a bargain basement price because the margins are so significant.

This is the Department of Energy's own research. This is using older figures, that are four years old. Assuming that the upgrading facility needs \$8 Canadian a barrel to be reasonably profitable, and assuming that 300,000 barrels a day of heavy crude go to the U.S.A.,

and assuming a differential that averages \$15 Canadian a barrel over the year, this is a difference of about \$760 million per year. That difference makes the upgrading of this bitumen extremely profitable for the Americans. I know the hon. minister did the right thing today when he pointed out the differences in the New Democratic Party policy. I couldn't agree with him more on that, but there has to be a long-term strategy by this government to deal with bitumen upgrading, and it has to be done in this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. ministers, we have about five minutes left. Does anybody wish to respond to the questions that have been raised so far? The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, there are a number of issues that the member opposite has brought up. Five minutes is probably not enough to really give you the full answers to all of these questions, but I will answer them all nevertheless.

Sour gas development near other developments, particularly residential developments, is a very serious concern in the province of Alberta. Most certainly, we do have in place a very good system with respect to the development, the application, the permitting, the requirements for emergency response. Those issues are all taken very seriously into account. The minister indicated the area of the world that I come from. Indeed, there are sour gas developments very close to my residence. It's been that way for well over 30 years. Certainly, the safety record in that particular area is impeccable. We have to my knowledge had no serious incidents with respect to the production and processing of sour gas as it relates to difficulties with residents.

5:40

The issue around not informing landowners with respect to developments and why isn't the department informing landowners. Again, Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that we have quasi-judicial boards in place to do exactly that. We do not want to politicize those types of issues, so there is a process in place that keeps that from happening. The EUB is certainly tasked with operating that, the application and hearing process, and most certainly under most circumstances they have done a very stellar job of doing exactly that.

The question around effective land-use policy and do I agree or not agree that this may alleviate some problems. Most certainly, I believe that over the years we have had fairly effective land-use policies, but the framework that's being discussed currently has potential, indeed, to help lay a path forward for the development – and orderly development – of the land use in the province of Alberta, not only with respect to energy but most certainly with respect to other industry, the general use of land for recreation and relaxation for Albertans. I believe that it is positive.

The report that the member speaks of with respect to bitumen refining. Certainly, we're headed down that path. Mr. Chairman, as I had indicated earlier to another member, the percentage that we upgrade currently, around the 65 to 70 per cent range, is headed well beyond that between now and 2016. There is a solid plan in place to do the upgrading. We have actually come forward with an incremental ethane extraction program, and that is going to incent additional upgrading and the use of the off-gases from that upgrading in the petrochemical industry. So the answer to that is that we are working; we have a solid plan to move ahead.

He asked about the royalty structure. Certainly, we are looking at being able to tie upgrading in the bitumen area into the royalty structure in some manner that would address the concerns that the member has brought up.

Vote on Main Estimates 2007-08

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but momentarily we will be proceeding with the votes. At this time I'd like to ask all the officials to leave. I want to thank them also for their participation today. I'd advise all the members to please return to your seats as we begin the voting.

Hon. members, I also want to advise you that as per our Standing Orders should we have division, the first division will be for 10 minutes, and any subsequent division will have a one-minute gap between the bells.

With that, hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.04(5), which requires that the estimates of the offices of Legislative Assembly be decided without debate or amendment prior to the vote on the main estimates, I must now put the question.

Agreed to:

Offices of the Legislative Assembly

Expense and equipment/inventory purchases	\$94,642,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

We now get to the ones that have been split up. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.04(1)(b) and in accordance with notification provided to the chair and the Clerk on June 5, 2007, I will now put the following questions.

After considering the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the Department of Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$4,248,416,000, and nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000, are you agreed?

[The voice vote did not indicate agreement]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:47 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Fritz	Ouellette
Amery	Graydon	Pham
Backs	Groeneveld	Prins
Brown	Haley	Renner
Cardinal	Hancock	Rogers
Cenaiko	Herard	Snelgrove
Danyluk	Horne	Tarchuk
DeLong	Knight	VanderBurg
Dunford	Mar	Webber
Evans	Morton	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Flaherty	Miller, B.
Blakeman	MacDonald	Miller, R.
Bonko	Martin	Taft
Eggen	Mather	Tougas

Totals:	For – 30	Against – 12
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[The estimates of the Department of Education were carried]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Hon. Members: Agreed.

6:00

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

After considering the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the Department of Environment for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$162,336,000, and nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000, are you agreed?

[The voice vote did not indicate agreement]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6:01 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Fritz	Ouellette
Amery	Graydon	Pham
Backs	Groeneveld	Prins
Brown	Haley	Renner
Cardinal	Hancock	Rogers
Cenaiko	Herard	Snelgrove
Danyluk	Horner	Tarchuk
DeLong	Knight	VanderBurg
Dunford	Mar	Webber
Evans	Morton	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Flaherty	Miller, B.
Blakeman	MacDonald	Miller, R.
Bonko	Martin	Taft
Eggen	Mather	Tougas

Totals: For – 30 Against – 12

[The estimates of the Department of Environment were carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

After considering the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the department of Executive Council for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, expense, \$23,209,000, are you agreed?

[The voice vote did not indicate agreement]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6:06 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

For the motion:

Ady	Fritz	Ouellette
Amery	Graydon	Pham
Backs	Groeneveld	Prins
Brown	Haley	Renner
Cardinal	Hancock	Rogers
Cenaiko	Herard	Snelgrove
Danyluk	Horner	Tarchuk
DeLong	Knight	VanderBurg
Dunford	Mar	Webber
Evans	Morton	Zwozdesky

6:10

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Flaherty	Miller, B.
Blakeman	MacDonald	Miller, R.
Bonko	Martin	Taft
Eggen	Mather	Tougas

Totals: For – 30 Against – 12

[The estimates of the department of Executive Council were carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

After considering the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$812,030,000, are you agreed?

[The voice vote did not indicate agreement]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6:12 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Fritz	Ouellette
Amery	Graydon	Pham
Backs	Groeneveld	Prins
Brown	Haley	Renner
Cardinal	Hancock	Rogers
Cenaiko	Herard	Snelgrove
Danyluk	Horner	Tarchuk
DeLong	Knight	VanderBurg
Dunford	Mar	Webber
Evans	Morton	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Flaherty	Miller, B.
Blakeman	MacDonald	Miller, R.
Bonko	Martin	Taft
Eggen	Mather	Tougas

Totals: For – 30 Against – 12

[The estimates of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing were carried]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Those members in favour of each of the resolutions for the departments not yet voted on for the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed, please say no. The motion is carried. Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The Committee of Supply shall now rise and report the 2007-2008 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund.

6:20

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2007-2008 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$52,086,000; office of the Auditor General, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$20,770,000; office of the Ombudsman, expense, \$2,546,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$13,228,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$884,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$5,128,000.

Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,918,055,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$118,300,000.

Agriculture and Food: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$574,522,000.

Children's Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$975,616,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$4,248,416,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000.

Employment, Immigration and Industry: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$856,883,000.

Energy: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$204,519,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$162,336,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$23,209,000.

Finance: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$124,346,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$59,695,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$12,023,189,000; capital investment, \$26,718,000.

Infrastructure and Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$3,173,447,000; capital investment, \$1,448,512,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$2,175,000.

International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$67,671,000.

Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$358,777,000.

Municipal Affairs and Housing: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$812,030,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,754,655,000.

Service Alberta: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$383,147,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$489,123,000; capital investment, \$23,894,000; lottery fund payments, \$1,454,407,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$344,725,000; capital investment, \$26,200,000.

Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$741,904,000; capital investment, \$19,284,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$9,712,000.

Treasury Board: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$19,240,000.

The Speaker: On the lucid report provided by the hon. Deputy Chair of Committees would all hon. members in favour of the report please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Would those opposed please say no. The report is carried.

The House stands adjourned until 1 o'clock next Monday.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:26 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, June 11, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/06/11

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, in the Speaker's gallery today is Mr. Paul Lorieau. I'm going to invite him to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I would invite all others to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Loughheed: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a person who is no stranger to this House. In fact, he was the second person ever to speak from the floor of this Legislative Assembly who was not an elected member. I'm talking about Mr. Rick Hansen, the chairman and CEO of the Rick Hansen Foundation, who is here today for a special announcement that was made in the rotunda. Accompanying him is Dr. Laura May, who is with rehab medicine and is also at the Glenrose hospital, and Teren Clarke, the executive director of the Canadian Paraplegic Association. They're in the Speaker's gallery. I'd ask that the members recognize them with their traditional warm welcome.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of individuals I recently met at the Edmonton Super Cities Walk for MS. This group is led by 16-year-old Courtney Kieser, a grade 11 student from Bev Facey high school in Sherwood Park. Her dad, Chris, was diagnosed with MS in 1993, just six weeks after her brother Riley was born. Courtney and her family have been participating in MS walks since 1994, and this is the third year that she has organized a team to assist in raising pledges for the cause. This year Courtney and her team raised close to \$5,000. The Edmonton walk raised \$581,000.

Courtney is a constituent in the constituency of Strathcona, but I was so overcome by her enthusiasm at the walk that I promised that if she ever found time to bring her team to the House, I'd love to introduce them to this Assembly. Accompanying her today is her

team from Bev Facey high school, her parents, Chris and Susan Kieser, and two representatives from the MS Society of Canada Alberta division, Darrel Gregory and Daniella Sabo. I would now ask the group to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mrs. Catherine and Dr. Michael Bullock, grandparents of Helena Zakrzewski, a page in the House and a constituent of the hon. minister of health. Mrs. Bullock is a graduate of Stanford University in California and Dr. Michael Bullock completed medical school at the University of Alberta in 1960. They reside in Saratoga, California, and have been married for 42 years. Mrs. Bullock enjoys gardening, and Dr. Bullock has an extensive car collection. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce two guests visiting the Legislature today. It's their first time to the Legislature, and they're visiting the capital region. It's Darwyn and Dorothy Larson. They reside in Stavely, Alberta. Stavely is celebrating its 95th anniversary as a community this August 24, 25, and 26 of the year 2007. The Larson family has been farming in Stavely since 1902. Darwyn's father emigrated from Sweden and set up the ranch and the farm in Stavely. It originally was a cattle farm; however, today they grow grains and hay and have landscape horses. The Larson family received their century farm award in 2004. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me today to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very good and long-time friend of mine Mr. Murray Buchanan. He's here today in his capacity as copresident of the midstream division of Provident Energy, but I know him best as a friend who's worked with me in the PC Association for our area for well over 20 years. He gets me into a lot of trouble. It's not hard to imagine, I know. He's just an absolutely wonderful person to work with. He's been a mentor of mine for, like I say, over 20 years. I'm very, very delighted to be able to introduce him to our Assembly, and I'd ask Murray to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also in the galleries today are other people that attended the announcement earlier this morning. In the public gallery is Larry Pempeit, who works with the Canadian Paraplegic Association. In the members' gallery is Dr. Gary McPherson, formerly the chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities; Marlin Styner, a member of the Premier's council; Barry Lindemann, who works with CPA. He's from Calgary. Accompanying Marlin is his wife, Diane Gramlich, and his parents, Roy and Nora Styner. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to rise to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a very bright, talented, and dedicated young woman, our STEP student this summer at the constituency office of Edmonton-Riverview. Her name is Anna Hopkins. She's in the public gallery. I'll ask her to rise. Anna has just finished her second year of university, pursuing a double major in political science as well as in Middle Eastern and African studies. She's a third year counsellor with a remarkable organization called the Seminar on the United Nations and International Affairs and is an active member of Equal Voice, which supports increased involvement of women in politics. I should also note that last year Anna served as a page in the Parliament in Ottawa. Clearly, Anna has a great deal of passion for politics. Her experience and enthusiasm have already been a great asset to my constituency office. I look forward to hearing remarkable things in the future of this fine woman. Please, everybody, give her a warm welcome.

Thank you.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of seniors visiting today from the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. These individuals are friends and mentors, and I'm glad to have them here today. First is Mary Tucker, Martha Tisher, Doug Lyons, Don McCrank, William Bohachyk, Vera Dziwenka, Elaine Shinbine, Doreen Maguire, Gordon Dedols, Rita Belterive, Mary Stephons, Mickey Paterson, Marie James, Helen Glatl, Doris Harasen, Marguerite Jacques, Melonie Vincent, and Ted Bale. I would ask them all to rise and please accept the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you a number of guests. These individuals from across Alberta participated in a rally today at the noon hour on the steps of the Legislature. The rally was organized by a number of organizations, including the Disability Action Hall, the Self-Advocacy Federation of Edmonton, the disability action force, and the Calgary housing action initiative. These citizens are calling on the government to guarantee them affordable housing, particularly for those on fixed incomes such as AISH recipients. Some of those who attended the rally include persons living with serious developmental and physical disabilities. These guests are seated primarily, I think, in the public gallery, but there may be some on the other side in the members' gallery. I would now request them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. I'm delighted to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Kyle Toles. Today Kyle is beginning his two-week internship with our caucus office in office support. He was born in Three Hills, Alberta, and has lived in Edmonton for the past 12 years. He graduated from W.P. Wagner high school in 2005 and has since achieved certificates in hospitality supervision and the office assistant program this year. I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction is Lisa DeMoor. Lisa graduated in 2006 from The King's University College with a BA in politics, history, and economics. She has worked as a researcher with the Canadian Peacebuilding Coordinating Committee in Ottawa, and she recently returned from seven months working in child rights and protections in Gambia, West Africa. In September Lisa will be returning to Ottawa to pursue a masters in international affairs from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University. We're delighted to have Lisa in our caucus office as our STEP assistant. She has already been of great assistance this legislative session. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two guests from my constituency who are sitting in the members' gallery. Laurie Huolt is in charge of my constituency office and has been for the last five years, does a great job. Laurie is accompanied by Jeff Behrens, who is a summer STEP student working in my constituency office. Jeff is a student of the University of Alberta at Augustana in Camrose. His parental home is Edson, in the West Yellowhead constituency. So I'd like to ask Laurie and Jeff to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to also greet the rest of the seniors that are in the group today up in the gallery, and it would be Pat Bale, Kenneth Marts, May Fine, Reggie Knowles, Dorothy Blace, Winona Walker, Edith Spenier, Marge Koss, Ruth McFarland, Yvonne Hardiney, Betty Lindsay, Mary Marks, Annie Rittie, Carol Lockert, Tennesie Hieppner, Dawn Maskell, and Olga Henka. I see that they've learned already and they're all standing, so would we give them the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly one of the bright stars from the aboriginal community here in Edmonton and my good friend. He's the author of *Patches the Beaver: Welcome to Harmony Woods*, the first in a series of children's books. He has a bachelor of education with distinction and a master of education in educational psychology from the University of Alberta and is currently pursuing his masters in liberal arts and management at Harvard University while working. He has worked as a research communications manager at Métis Settlements child and family services authority and is currently the aboriginal senior policy analyst for the prevention of family violence and bullying division of Alberta Children's Services. He is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that Mr. Shane Gauthier please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Spinal Cord Injury Initiatives

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I had the honour of attending a very special announcement regarding research

services and supports for persons impacted by spinal cord injury and other neuromuscular conditions. The hon. Premier along with the ministers of Health and Wellness, Seniors and Community Supports, with the support of the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, announced a \$12 million contribution to the Rick Hansen Foundation. This investment will support initiatives to assist Albertans with spinal cord injuries and other mobility impairments to integrate back into the community. As such, these initiatives will work to improve the quality of life of those with spinal cord injuries by increasing their independence and self-sufficiency.

Today's announcement helps to highlight the great work of the Rick Hansen Foundation that it does in support of people with spinal cord injuries. Since 1988 the foundation has distributed over \$200 million to spinal cord injury research and programs to improve quality of life. The foundation connects the people doing innovative research to the resources they need. The foundation is able to conduct such great work thanks to the leadership of someone who is no stranger to this Assembly.

Rick Hansen set out on a journey in his wheelchair from 1985 to 1987 that led him through 34 countries and raised \$26 million for spinal cord research. Since then, Rick has been a very visible spokesman for spinal cord research. He has received numerous accolades, including the Order of Canada and several honorary degrees. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Rick was inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame.

Rick has been an ambassador for a fully accessible and inclusive society, and thanks to his work we are reaching that goal. Thanks to his foundation's work we are getting closer to finding a cure for spinal cord injuries. This new investment transcends the full continuum of research and support.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

1:20

Leduc No. 1 Oil Discovery

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we come to the close of the spring session, I would like to make my colleagues and the Alberta public aware of an event taking place in my constituency this summer. This is a celebration of a major turning point in Alberta's history, something which forever changed our province and continues to drive Alberta's economy today.

That event is the discovery of oil at the Leduc No. 1 site on February 3, 1947. That bitterly cold day Imperial Oil's Vern "Dry Hole" Hunter, based on his success to that point, drilled his 134th well and tapped into what is now the Leduc-Woodbend field. Since that day, Mr. Speaker, more than 1,000 wells have been drilled, and the field has produced over 300 million barrels of oil.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, there was already a celebration held on February 13 at the Canadian Petroleum Discovery Centre in Devon, which was attended by our former Premier, Mr. Klein, and the Minister of Energy. That event was the kickoff to the centre's diamond anniversary year and the unveiling of the Ralph Klein Learning Lab.

This summer, on August 11 and 12, during the town of Devon's Discovery Days the Canadian Petroleum Discovery Centre will be wrapping up the 60th anniversary year of the Leduc No. 1 well discovery. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to invite all my colleagues to attend and to help commemorate this most important Alberta milestone.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Patches the Beaver Book Launch

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. May 29, 2007, was a delightful day not only for me but for all the children and friends present at Norwood school. It is indeed a rare occasion for anyone to be invited to witness the launch of any book, but this was not just any book. *Patches the Beaver: Welcome to Harmony Woods*, written by author Shane Gauthier, whom I introduced earlier, is targeted at educating grade 3 children about diversity and multiculturalism. The book is based on research showing that without diversity programs our children's appreciation of diversity may actually decrease.

I witnessed first-hand the wonderment of the children present at the storyline as Shane read page after page. The book not only entertained but captivated their interest and sparked in them an awareness of the importance of accepting those that are different than we are. All the people present were charmed by the characters Mr. Gauthier had created. This author ingeniously brought the reader into an endearing world made up of loveable animals such as Patches the Beaver, Star Squirrel, Feather Goose, Duke of Canot, Speedy Tortoise, and Lucky Rabbit, all based on true characters.

His writing is clever enough to hold the attention of any child long enough to teach children that we are all patched together by friendship no matter where we are from, who we are, or what we look like. It is infinitely clear that Mr. Gauthier is passionate about bringing the teachings about ethnocultural education and awareness to all children as this is the first book in *Patches the Beaver* series. As the Hippiity Hop Herald stated: Amazing; no other book has captured the heart and soul of beavers and beyond; this book is for the whole animal kingdom.

Congratulations, Shane, for your dedication to supporting and working towards bettering the lives of all children, youth, and families and to the importance of ethnocultural education awareness. I look forward to reading the next antics of Patches the Beaver.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Canadian Work Skills Competition

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Calgary will be hosting a World Skills competition in 2009 and a national and provincial skills competition in 2008. These competitions test and recognize the outstanding skills of hundreds of our secondary and postsecondary students across the province.

In preparation for these upcoming competitions almost 700 of Alberta's most talented high school and postsecondary students, including apprentices, recently competed in more than 35 different areas of trades and technology a few weeks ago at the provincial skills competition right here in Edmonton. Fifty-one of our high school students and postsecondary apprentices qualified for the national competition in Saskatoon last week. The Canadian Skills competition brought together 550 youth from across the country to participate in 42 different areas of skills competence.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that many young talented Albertans have done an outstanding job of representing this province. Four of these remarkable individuals took home gold medals: James McNeice, a student from Lacombe composite high school; Matthew Hebert, a student from Notre Dame high school in Calgary; Lloyd Van Maanen, a postsecondary apprentice from Picture Butte; and Garrett Pearman, a postsecondary apprentice from Allied Projects in Calgary.

Alberta also did very well in the silver and bronze categories, Mr. Speaker. Fifteen participants won silver medals, and six took the bronze. This is an extraordinary achievement, and the success of our students is a clear demonstration of our strength in the area of trades and technology education in every part of the province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very pleased to rise today and honour all of the students who participated in this national competition. I'd like to recognize the parents, volunteers, and educators who support them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Contaminated Sites Cleanup

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are increasingly anxious at the pace and scope and financial liability of growing oil, gas, and industrial development in this province. A growing number of contaminated sites are leaving a massive financial liability to future generations for remediation. Part of the problem is the ambiguous responsibility for contaminated sites resting with two ministries: Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Alberta Environment. There are also serious regulatory deficiencies reflected in, one, the lack of will to make polluters pay; two, the lack of enforcement of legislation requiring immediate spill cleanup and timely reclamation; and three, the lack of adequate monitoring to ensure that the land is returned to, quote, equivalent land-use capability, end quote, as required under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act.

Bill 29, passed last year, allows companies to, quote, manage and, quote, monitor contaminated sites forever rather than clean them up completely. This has created a multimillion dollar business to transfer responsibility for pollution from the offending party to the orphan fund and in many cases to the public purse. Current liability management programs and financial security deposits in the upstream oil and gas sector are not sufficient to ensure reclamation and prevent transfer of liability to the public purse. In the downstream oil and gas sector there's still no orphan-style fund to cover the cost of an industry that walks away from its responsibility, again left to the public purse.

The existing level of environmental fines issued by this government is small and rare. Fines and the cost of cleanup are allowable deductible expenses from corporate income tax and royalties. The legislative requirements to immediately clean up a spill have not been enforced, resulting in the persistence and migration of contamination to thousands of sites throughout Alberta.

Finally, it's our understanding that a proposal is being developed by this government for parties responsible for causing contamination to self-evaluate a remediation process specifically designed to terminate their liability. Is this the Alberta advantage?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Respect for Seniors

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are two mistakes we can make when we talk about seniors. One is to assume that we know what we're talking about when we begin. The other is to assume that talking with or about seniors is about the past.

The first mistake is evident in predictions we made about population. For decades we said that our pensions and health care were unsustainable with increasing seniors coming of age. It hasn't happened. Seniors are working longer, living longer, in better health, taking new courses, and undertaking new challenges.

The second mistake was the youth fixation of the '50s and '60s. Youth are the hope of tomorrow, we heard, and waited for them to save the world. Fixation with youth is a reactionary trend, for it has adults looking backwards. Adolescence may be full of energy, but it is not free. Teenagers are tyrannized by peer pressure and a market that exploits us.

It's no accident that the most reactionary regimes of the last century seduced the young as a path to success. Hitler Youth and Mao's Red Guard enforced conformity by cutting ties between generations. It is in intergenerational contact that maturity evolves. Societies in continual revolution are in perpetual adolescence. It's as we calmly evaluate our experience and learn from it that progress is made.

It was not under younger braves, hot to prove themselves, that the west was developed but under Crowfoot. Crowfoot was a brave and fearless warrior, so fearless that he didn't need to prove anything. He could see where continued warfare would lead and chose peace.

It is not ultimately in their needs, real or imagined, that seniors deserve our attention. We need them for balance and wholeness in our lives. We need to recognize them not on the basis of past achievements any more than we recognize children on the basis of future potential but simply for their being here among us. Our First Nations are rediscovering strength through the wisdom of elders. We would do well to follow the example.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Contribution to Premier's Leadership Campaign

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The matter of the donation to the Premier's leadership campaign from the Beaver waste management commission has raised some serious concerns, and no adequate investigation has been undertaken by this government. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier admit that having a minister who supported his campaign sitting down with the CAO who supported his campaign to investigate an unethical donation to that campaign by the very commission headed by the CAO does not meet any reasonable standard of accountability?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this matter, that the member brought up the other day, is very clear. In fact, after the leadership campaign was completed and we were preparing for the disclosure, this donation came forward. I said: "Send it back. It's the perception issue, even though, apparently, the legal interpretation was that this is what the commission can do. So just send it back." We sent the cheque back, and the matter is completed, period.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday in this Assembly, if you turn to page 1615 of *Hansard*, you'll see that the President of the Treasury Board said that this government's ministers don't have time to investigate this issue. My question, then, is to the Premier. Given that his ministers don't have time to investigate issues like unethical donations, will the Premier refer this matter to the appropriate policy field committee?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the member reads very selectively. But just setting that matter aside, whatever money was donated went back to the commission. I have asked for the co-operation of both leaders of the opposition to work with our government in preparing rules, legislation with respect to leadership campaign donations and how we should handle it, and I hope they come to the table and offer their suggestions. Like I said, I'm not in any hurry to leave, but maybe on the other side they may have some other intentions, and that's why I'd like to put those rules in place as early as we can.

Dr. Taft: Well, given that there are serious environmental issues with the Beaver waste management commission and the landfill it operates and that the commission is up for review and renewal of its licence, the credibility of the whole licensing and review process has been tainted. My question is to the Premier. What is the Premier going to do to restore the credibility of the environmental approval processes relating to this commission's landfill?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, the words that the member used earlier are wrong. If there is proof of some environmental damage, then bring it forward. Don't make allegations in the House and try and have this House protect. Present the proof here.

Secondly, I don't give the approvals. There are certain processes that the government has in place. They're very strict. I believe they're the strictest in Canada in terms of environmental approvals. The people that best know how to make those decisions, reviewing all the evidence that comes forward from various engineering studies – that's the kind of information that goes into the approval process, not what some person may feel is right or wrong. It's the information that comes forward. The safety of the residents around that site and everywhere else in Alberta is paramount to this government.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government seems to take convenient holidays when it comes to ethics. Double standards abound. This government continues to invest heavily in tobacco companies through the heritage fund, yet the Premier said that his leadership campaign did not accept a donation from a tobacco company because it would be unethical. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier do the right thing and end this government's practice of investing the heritage fund in tobacco companies?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe this question was answered the other week with another member, but I'll ask the Minister of Finance to report on what we do.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we do have some investments in tobacco companies. We have about \$18 million or \$19 million – million, with an "m" – out of \$16 billion directly and about another \$30 million indirectly. We have to ensure that we get the best benefit for the taxpayers, and that is the mandate that has been given to the heritage savings trust fund: to ensure that we get absolutely the best bang for the buck.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. The Premier's leadership campaign has publicly said that it developed policies in advance to protect the anonymity of donors if the donors wanted it, but no policies to protect ethics were ever developed. As a result, the campaign was caught soliciting and accepting donations from a public commission and only months after the fact returned the donation. To the Premier: when double standards on ethics abound, will the Premier admit that his office is setting a poor example to other provincial agencies when it comes to ethics and money?

Mr. Stelmach: You know, Mr. Speaker, this gentleman across the way refers to always bringing in some sort of legislation. It hurts every day when you get up in the House and you listen to these kinds of allegations. I go back to October of 1986, when I was running for the position of municipal councillor in the county of

Lamont. I will say that I forgot to mention to my dad and my mom that I'd be seeking the position. Well, of course, the advertising was out in the mailbox, so my dad over coffee one morning looked up from the paper and said, "So you're seeking public office." I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, whatever you do, don't ruin the family name." That's the kind of ethics I follow, not what the Liberals raise in this House.

Dr. Taft: Well, it's a great story, but soliciting donations from public bodies, bodies subject to the regulatory authority of this government, is unethical. The Premier has admitted that, yet he and his ministers have refused to disclose which other PC leadership campaigns solicited money from this commission. The CAO himself said that they were approached by others. Albertans have a right to know. To the Premier: will this Premier finally do the right thing and tell this Assembly which other PC leadership contenders approached this public commission for money?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I've done the right thing. Upon review we sent the money back. If there is any other, even the biggest conspiracy that the Liberals can ever put together in this House, if there are any members that have approached, they're all in the House, and they can answer to it. I trust them day in and day out. But, of course, here's the Leader of the Opposition, that is running on ethics. Perhaps today – today – he could rise in the House and inform this Assembly how much he billed, very secretly, the Alberta taxpayers for his radio ads. I didn't see on the bottom of the radio ads saying how much he asked the taxpayers to pay. Come on. Tell.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Affordable Transportation for Seniors

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the greatest extent possible seniors want to remain independent and take advantage of opportunities to participate in the community and meet their own needs. For many seniors, though, including many of my constituents, finding accessible, reliable, and affordable transportation is difficult. To the minister of seniors: what is the minister doing to ensure that seniors have affordable transportation options that allow them to preserve their dignity, maximize their independence, and protect their quality of life?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we have long since agreed that the best thing we could do is to ensure and facilitate that seniors can stay in their own homes as long as they possibly can, stay in their own affordable housing facilities, and transportation becomes very key to that. Accessibility is very instrumental. We work with the municipalities. It is a topic that I want to continue to encourage, that between the province and municipalities we work. How do we ensure that all people have access? Sometimes it's beyond just the seniors.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When seniors are no longer able to drive, they face a difficult transition that includes a sense of loss and dependency due to limited mobility options. This may jeopardize the physical and mental health of seniors since they now depend on assistance for things as simple as doing their own shopping, going to see their grandchildren, or travelling to appointments. Will the minister consult with seniors about what actions this government can take to ease this transition?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, in that respect we have the Seniors Advisory Council, chaired by the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, who with a council for seniors goes around the province literally for that aspect: to consult with seniors to ensure that we have the design, the right programs to meet the needs of seniors. They do exemplary work in that regard, and I'm very proud of the ideas that they bring back. Transportation, accessibility: those questions are part of what they are providing.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. Will this minister commit to working with health regions and local municipalities to design a co-ordinated, user-friendly transportation system for seniors who require assistance accessing services?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we'll continue to work with our Seniors Advisory Council in looking at those things that we assess to be the greatest priority. Thus far, really, what we have done is ensure that our programs are targeted to those in the greatest of financial need. Our Alberta seniors' benefit program was designed for that. How do we improve some of the financial capacity for them to take care of what their unique circumstances may be rather than a universal program per se?

That said, transportation is a very good issue, and we'll be happy to continue to follow that up.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Provincial Labour Legislation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Friday's landmark ruling by the Supreme Court recognizing the collective rights of people is an unprecedented step forward in recognizing the rights of working people. This government's own former Bill 27, which removed the right to strike for mental and community health workers and threw dozens of collective agreements out the window, may well now be considered unconstitutional. But this government's long history of antagonism towards working people extends beyond Bill 27. Alberta is well known to have the worst labour laws in the country. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Given the Supreme Court's ruling, will the minister commit right now to a comprehensive review of all of Alberta's labour legislation to identify and remove all provisions which violate the workers' Charter rights?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I do take some exception to the hon. member's observation about the labour laws in Alberta. Be that as it may – and I will respect his right to be wrong on that issue – we have a 99 per cent record of no strikes or lockouts in this province. We have better labour peace in Alberta than anywhere else in the country. So be that as it may, we are doing outstandingly well.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Justice is looking at the decision of the Supreme Court, and when it's appropriate to make comment, no doubt we will. There are many implications with a decision like this. It's important that we look at it thoroughly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I would like to ask the Premier, then: if aspects of Alberta's labour legislation are found to be unconstitutional given this ruling, will the Premier

commit to bring forward amendments to this Assembly to make sure that Alberta's labour laws are constitutional?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the member says "if." It's speculation. Of course, we wouldn't want to break any laws that are set in the country, so the issue would come forward, and recommendations will come to our government from the Minister of Justice after he reviews all of the relative information.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In May of 2005 this government gave a special deal to CNRL under division 8 of the labour code which allowed the oil sands giant to bypass agreements negotiated between construction trades and sign a sweetheart deal which required no vote with the employer-friendly CLAC, the Christian Labour Association. This is to the minister. Will the government admit that it was an unconstitutional intervention into the process of good-faith bargaining and act to rescind CNRL's division 8 exemption?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, this is before the courts. It would not be appropriate to make comment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Municipal Taxation

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So many problems, so little time for questions. To paraphrase Einstein's thoughts, that the people who create the problems are usually unable to solve the problems, rings out loud. We have a major problem in our communities: conditional funding, or micromanagement from Edmonton. This government is addicted to power and control, and their policies and programs are eroding the quality of life of our families and communities. To the Premier: will he do the right thing and keep his promise and return the equivalent \$1.4 billion education tax to the community of origin and do it without conditions?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are. The 2010-2011 budget will have the full \$1.4 billion in the budget for municipalities. There will be some accountability for the funds. You don't send out \$1.4 billion to municipalities without knowing where and how the money is going to be spent. It is by far the most generous support to municipalities ever, not only in this province but, of course, in Canada. Some mayors are saying that it's something like four times per capita more than other provinces have offered. So it's a good move. Now we work with all municipalities to ensure that they use these funds as best as they can.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, to quote from the Premier's campaign web page: I firmly believe that municipalities must receive more and more foreseeable long term funding; I will provide municipalities with an annual amount equivalent to 100 per cent of the education property tax; this fund will be fairly distributed based on an equalization assessment formula. The Premier promised a formula, not a partisan gift or a grant to apply or beg for. If there is a formula, it must be worse than the federal equalization formula that no one understands though it is great for partisan payments to buy votes. To the Premier: if your government has a formula, which I question, will you restore a little faith with municipal leaders and taxpayers by releasing the formula for all to see? Be honest. Be open.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the \$1.4 billion is going to municipalities based on agreements reached. All of the CAOs met, I believe, now two weeks ago: better clarification of the funds and how they'll be distributed to municipalities, the ramp-up time. Everybody is really excited in terms of the \$1.4 billion. Now they can plan. It's sustainable funding. It's predictable. Now they can really tackle the issues with respect to each and every municipality. Every municipality is different. They have different needs. Some have more maintenance to do. Others will be spending more on infrastructure. I mean, it's up to those individual municipalities to bring forward their plan, and the money will be there.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, it's a phony partisan formula, and it's not open for the people to see.

Mr. Speaker, if this government is going to continue with its chokehold on our communities and micromanage them, will they at least be open and honest about it? To the Premier: will the government admit that they don't have a 10-year plan for communities across the province and commit to make one and release it so municipalities can know when the money is coming and make real plans for the citizens? Again, be open. Be honest.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the \$1.4 billion is there, a full \$1.4 billion by 2010-11. I don't know what the word "partisan" is. It's an agreement reached with municipalities. They all share in the \$1.4 billion. It's a formula, an agreement that was reached with the CAOs and the elected officials, and we're just eager to go ahead. This year it's \$400 million, next year \$500 million. Like I said, by 2010-11 it will be \$1.4 billion. That's a considerable amount of money, and that \$1.4 billion was exactly the amount of money paid for the purpose of education through property tax last year in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Affordable Housing for Seniors

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday at our Calgary-Varsity seniors' appreciation tea held at the Dalhousie Community Centre, an 85-year-old constituent approached me. He was concerned with a very heavy-handed condo conversion that he and other vulnerable fixed-income seniors were experiencing. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. When this constituent approached one of your ministry's offices, he was left with more questions than answers. What advice are the EII outreach offices providing for fixed-income or otherwise vulnerable seniors facing serious housing troubles?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've actually been very pleased that this hon. member has taken advantage of following up on many of the circumstances his constituents have. I know that our staff have been working with his office to make sure that we're working in a co-ordinated fashion. Relative to everybody that comes in, as I've said in this House, it's on an individual basis. We'd be pleased to find out exactly what the circumstances are. To date we've given out over a million dollars to about 1,200 people and households. If the hon. member would care to provide me the information, I will do my due diligence and find out exactly what are the circumstances. There is not a blanket circumstance for seniors in these situations because homelessness and eviction is something that we are not going to be tolerant of.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Seniors have weathered a number of storms in their lives, from the Great Depression to wars. They shouldn't have to continue to battle with the Alberta government. They're a proud lot and reluctant to ask for a hand up, heaven forbid a handout. To the minister of seniors: my constituents would like to know why this government forces seniors to apply for subsidies which just translate into extra profits for landlords rather than temporarily controlling rent increases.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would say that we are very proud of the heritage that our seniors bring to this province. They're the ones that have brought the great principles of hard work, industry, self-reliance, independence: all of those things that have made this country wonderful. They've looked always to themselves first, to their families second. Certainly, the government was never meant to be the provider of first resort for everything. That said, we have always built our programs to assess those in the greatest of need. That's why the Alberta seniors' benefit program is there: to supplement those federal and provincial programs to help those seniors to be able to sustain their living.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Again to the Minister of Employment, Industry, and Immigration: can the minister explain what co-ordination exists between her ministry, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Seniors to ensure that vulnerable seniors trying to keep a roof over their heads aren't punted back and forth between ministries? I'd like to know, and so would my constituents, who is in charge.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in the case of Municipal Affairs and Housing we've done a lot of collaboration on the committee framing the terms of reference for the homeless and eviction and have worked together in the offices with staff complementary to each department, working in the same office relative to seniors currently with the seniors' ministry on a number of issues, not only housing and income supports but on those supports for people with special and unique abilities to engage in the world of work. Our staff at the administrative level of assistant deputy minister are working well together. It seems to me that the hon. member is making a case, raising questions about co-ordination. Again, if there is some particular issue affecting a resident, especially a senior, we'd like to follow up on that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Disaster Services

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The storms of last week caused considerable damage in central and southern Alberta, including flooding, damaged roads, and a possible tornado touching down. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Is the government and your department prepared to help people in the storms' aftermath?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's no doubt that last week's storms had a major impact on several municipalities in Alberta, and noting the hon. member from Calgary, there were severe storms that took place in his city. We do understand the urgency, and we're working as quickly as we possibly can to respond to the emergencies of residents of the city, working together, trying to compile the data that's necessary for support for those individuals and municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, minister, for that positive answer. Now, my only other question to the minister is: could the minister inform the House and Albertans as to how a disaster recovery program would assist affected municipalities, individuals, and small businesses?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the disaster programs are very much that: to support municipalities, residents, small businesses that have been affected by uninsurable damage that has been caused, for example, by overland flooding. If I can say, I was in Calgary over the weekend to see what damage did occur. Our department is very much looking to see how quickly we can expedite the process, making sure that those residents aren't facing undue hardship.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Electricity Deregulation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Conservative candidate in the Drumheller by-election stated that deregulation is a failure. He went on to say that it did not produce lower power bills. Everyone seems to know this but the government front bench in this province. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Will the Department of Agriculture and Food continue to support permanent high electricity prices in Alberta or will it finally admit that deregulation is a dismal failure and adopt the Alberta Liberals' low-cost power plan?

Mr. Groeneveld: This is quite a decision, Mr. Speaker. However, I think the hon. Energy minister has answered this question adequately so many times that I'm not going to follow up. Alberta farmers do not pay more for their power than anyone else. It's a mistaken belief that they keep coming back to and coming back to and coming back to on deregulation. It's not hurting us. We are doing just fine, thank you very much, in rural Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister is telling us that the candidate for the Progressive Conservative Party in the by-election is wrong. Now, Alberta consumers paid 15 per cent higher prices in 2006 than in 2005 for their power. As recently as last Wednesday the hon. Minister of Energy claimed that electricity deregulation has been a complete success. To the Minister of Energy: is the minister willing to admit that he was wrong in claiming that deregulation has been a success, or again is it the Tory candidate for Drumheller-Stettler who was mistaken? Which one is it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell this House is that I am not a candidate in any by-election, so I don't have to go and make ridiculous claims about anything.

What I can tell you is that the statements that I made last week are the statements that I'll make this week. They'll be the statements that I will make next week. They still remain true today. This government – this government – has a plan to build a stronger Alberta, and the restructuring of the electrical utility in Alberta is part of that plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: given that – and I will reread this quote for the Premier's benefit – deregulation is a failure, and the candidate goes on to say that it did not produce lower power bills, does the hon. Premier consider that the Progressive Conservative candidate's description of power deregulation is ridiculous, like the Minister of Energy?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have a very good candidate in Drumheller-Stettler in the person of Mr. Jack Hayden, who not only served as municipal councillor; he was president of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties and also participated tremendously in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Every candidate brings forward their opinions on various issues. In this particular case we're going to see movement in terms of new sources of energy in Alberta from bioenergy. The hon. member mentioned: follow the Liberal plan. If we followed their plan, unfortunately, in this province electricity would have quadrupled, given their environmental plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Criminal Justice System

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The families of young people murdered at the hands of other youth in the Edmonton area have been rallying together and circulating petitions to call for tougher sentences for violent crime. Their loved ones' lives were cut far too short by the senseless violence of strangers. Their petitions highlight the concerns many Albertans have about lenient sentences for young offenders and the perceived increase in violent youth crime. My first question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the minister tell us what his department is doing to ensure that young offenders receive stiffer sentences under the law?

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the hon. member and, indeed, all Albertans that the Alberta government is concerned about youth crime and appropriate sentencing. It is our belief – and we've been saying this for some time – that the federal legislation which governs this particular matter, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, needs to be overhauled, needs to be reviewed in its entirety, does not appropriately deal with violent crimes or chronic offenders. As a matter of fact, I had an opportunity to say this to my colleagues across the country last October in Newfoundland, when we met at an FPT, or federal/provincial/territorial, meeting at that time.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can the

minister tell us what his department is doing to reduce youth violence in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows, this government is committed to providing safe and secure communities for every Albertan. We are definitely concerned about youth crime and the violent behaviour of some young people in this province, and when I say "some," I mean a very small minority. However, preventing this behaviour is a joint responsibility of government, law enforcement, the community, and family. This year we are providing nearly \$1 million in grants for crime prevention, restorative justice initiatives, including programs aimed at drug and alcohol awareness, youth activities, and mentorships. We are also providing \$350,000 to 122 youth justice committees. These committees partner with the community to give back to these young lives . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What services does the department provide for families of homicide victims to ensure that they get the support they need before, during, and after court proceedings?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta believes victims of crime should be heard, and we continue to develop programs and services that ensure that victims are treated with compassion and respect. In April we unveiled the very first step-by-step guide ever developed in Canada to help victims of crime through the criminal justice system. The Victims of Crime Protocol also lets victims know what their role is, the type of information they can receive, and what services they can expect from the time a crime is committed to when an offender is released. Our department also provided over \$4 million in grants to victim assistance programs across this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Confined Feeding Operations

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A month ago I asked the Minister of Agriculture and Food whether he was concerned by this government's weakening of the regulations regarding minimum distance setback of confined feeding operations. His response was disturbing in its lack of knowledge of this portfolio. He said, and I quote: I'm not familiar with the specific regulations. End quote. These changes matter. They matter very much indeed to those living next to confined feeding operations. To the same minister: has he studied the regulations regarding reduced minimum setback distances from public buildings, and could he not answer the question now why this government allows this relaxation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the regulations are set out by the AOPA and are governed by the NRCB, but these regulations are not necessarily relaxed. There are some that are grandfathered in. But at that time he was talking about churches and schools and whatnot, which are generally in urban

areas. Of course, we're not going to have these institutions closer than the regulations would permit. If they're not good enough, there is a dispute settlement committee that you can report it to, and they will take care of it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two months ago I went to visit a number of landowners east of Airdrie, including John and Laurie Harnack. They have been affected by a confined feeding operation, the Thorlakson feedlot, which withholds surface water and whose waste manure has on a number of occasions passed onto their land and into public ditches through flood irrigation. Letters of complaint to the NRCB over many years have had little or no lasting solution but symptomatic coverage, and the letters to the Minister of SRD have gotten no meaningful response for these folks. They've asked serious questions about what this ministry is doing to protect their interests. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why is the government and the NRCB, in particular, being so lax in enforcing the property and health rights of neighbours of confined feeding operations?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm afraid the hon. member is simply not right in his assertion here. The Natural Resources Conservation Board has inspectors throughout the province who respond to concerns, such as the ones he's indicated, about livestock operations. The Natural Resources Conservation Board works closely with other agencies like Alberta Environment, Alberta Agriculture, and the regional health authorities, and it's the experience of the Natural Resources Conservation Board that the vast majority of operators are responsible and doing their best to comply with the environmental standards that govern this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several weeks ago I was contacted by the McCullochs who farm next to the AAA feedlot near Didsbury. They and several of their neighbours of the feedlot have been concerned about the cattle feedlot, which has appeared to be abandoned, leaving both live and dead cattle on the site along with vast amounts of manure. The waste ponds were overflowing when the McCullochs called, and I have pictures, which I'll table in the House today, of filthy water pouring off their land next to the feedlot. But, again, letters to the NRCB and the government since March have gotten nothing, no accountability. Will the minister accept that something is not working with the licensing and monitoring and enforcement of confined feedlots in this province?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, what I'll accept is that I think the hon. member is grandstanding in here. If Albertans have concerns, they call up the NRCB. Inspectors will be sent out. There was a successful prosecution with a very significant fine, \$50,000, just in the last few weeks. The system works. These are serious allegations. I appreciate that. But the place to take them is to the NRCB, not to grandstand in here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Conservative housing policy has created absolute chaos for renters. Desperately needed

workers are being forced to live in Edmonton's river valley because of the lack of affordable housing. Thousands of people are vulnerable and facing rent increases that could make them homeless. The new fastest growing industry in the province is the food bank because of rising rental rates around here. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. What is the government prepared to do now in the short run to help out thousands of vulnerable renters?

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you dwell completely on the short term, if you think that putting a band-aid as the solution in the short term is the right answer, then you do what the Liberals and the NDs want: you put in rent control, and then you create a much greater problem down the road.

This government has taken the approach that we will work with all the related industries to try and develop the long-term solution, which is more housing. We have in place many, many programs that are based to support those in need to get them through these tough times. This government has a great deal of compassion for those in trouble right now, but we also know that the problem is solved in a long-term solution and not simply forgetting all of your principles and selling out for the short-term solution.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that they're glad that the minister is compassionate because there are thousands of them being hurt out there right now. The reality is that in Canada Mortgage and Housing's April figures there are less rental units in Edmonton and Calgary than there were last October. Things are getting worse before they get better. I guess I'd say to the minister: when is he going to take off his ideological blinkers and do the right thing for thousands and thousands of Albertans in this province?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a problem to be stuck with ideological blinkers as opposed to ideological blinders. Canada Mortgage and Housing has indicated that nearly a full quarter of the houses in Canada were built in Alberta. These houses are not sitting empty. Albertans that have come here or Albertans that are trying to improve their housing lots move into these homes, and it opens up other homes. For them to suggest that our blinkers have stopped us from doing what's right is simply wrong. The solution is in more housing. That is from a stable market, from working with the private investment groups, from working with the government departments, and putting a long-term solution to this issue.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's an absolutely ridiculous answer because it's going to take three to four years to bring on housing. Surely, the minister is aware of that. What do we say now to thousands of Albertans – thousands, literally – that are paying 50, 60 per cent of their income on accommodation? What do you say: wait for three or four years till things get better?

Mr. Snelgrove: No. Mr. Speaker, we pick up the magic ND wand and wave it. Apparently, that's what they think is a solution to this problem.

It's a real problem, and we know it, but the problem is dealt with on many aspects. We support those who qualify for our programs. We've brought the departments together to make it simpler. We tried very hard to meet with those affected individuals who need our help both temporarily and long term, and we're working with private investment and with government departments and municipalities towards a long-term solution to this temporary situation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:10 Crop Insurance for Seeding

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to the cold, late, wet spring and the inability of farmers to get their crops seeded on time, many producers in many parts of the province are concerned about potential losses. Many have already invested significant dollars in chemicals, rent, fertilizer, seed, and equipment. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Will the current crop insurance be enough to cover these basic input costs if these acres don't get seeded in time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're certainly aware of how the weather has impacted seeding this year, and the AFSC has already taken some proactive steps. Last month we extended the 2007 seeding deadline for crop insurance to June 5 for a number of crops and to June 15 for barley, spring triticale, spring rye, and Polish canola. As a result the farmers continue their seeding as planned, and thanks to recent good weather most are almost complete now. The extended deadlines have also helped those who may have had to reseed because of the extended flooding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear that these adjustments have been made, but I'm not quite sure they're going to be enough. From what I understand, there'll be some smaller areas of the province that won't be seeded at all due to the weather. To the same minister: what's being done for those farmers?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, first, I'd like to point out that this province has the best crop and production insurance in the country. The unseeded acreage benefit under production insurance will compensate producers up to \$60 per acre depending on their input amounts. As well, producers with unseeded acres who have production insurance will also be eligible for an additional \$15 per acre from the federal cover crop protection program.

Mr. Marz: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: is the minister proposing any further changes to the Alberta crop insurance program to address these late-seeding issues?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, as already noted, our programs are very responsive and either enhance or are enhanced by the national programs. For example, producers with lower than average seeded acres and high input costs also benefit from the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, better known as CAIS. The provincial government will continue to monitor the seeding progress across the province and the effectiveness of our agriculture insurance programs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Not-for-profit Sector

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has neglected the labour issues in the voluntary sector for too long. In the next five years Alberta's not-for-profit organizations are

expected to lose 80 per cent of their executive directors as they are lured away to corporate and government work. The loss of this institutional memory and leadership will be devastating. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. The ministry's plan to release a not-for-profit labour force strategy later this year is too late. What concrete action is this minister prepared to take now to prevent these people from being lured away?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, with our 10-year strategy on building and educating tomorrow's workforce, there are many sectors which we realize are really struggling to retain staff, principally because there are so many jobs available that they tend to move on to other enterprises. So one of the strategic things that we're trying to evaluate is just exactly what the needs are in the various sectors and how we can do better with employers to ensure that there's some sensitivity around labour mobility. If I may, I had the same degree of difficulty when I was minister of health watching nurses go to cook at camps. When people choose to move, we just simply try . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Workers in Alberta's not-for-profit sector have become accustomed to being overworked and underpaid, but now the funding, labour, and housing crises have pushed staff in the voluntary sector to the breaking point, and even some volunteers have had to return to work to offset housing costs. My question is to the minister of housing. What specific housing actions have been developed to work in tandem with the strategy from EII that will open opportunities for those working or volunteering in the charitable NGO or voluntary sector, particularly for live/work artist spaces?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we continually try to look at providing spaces and housing for all individuals that need that support. As was mentioned previously by the president of the Treasury, the work that is being done in order to try to increase the number of units available is critical to the focus that this government has in order to provide units that would be available for seniors, for those that have special needs, and for students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the current definition of a charitable or voluntary organization is based more on how the charity spends its money than on the services it provides. This has long been regarded as an unsatisfactory and overly narrow approach. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. When is your department going to come up with a made-in-Alberta definition of a charitable sector, and what actions have you taken to work with your federal counterpart to create a definition other than the one used by Revenue Canada?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, as Treasury Board president we work with all of our departments to develop consensus around issues like this. We've brought forward the community spirit program, we are working with the minister from parks, culture, and recreation, and we understand how completely important to this government the volunteer association is. I've had no discussions with any member of the federal government with regard to this issue. I would wonder what the hon. member's had.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

International Trade

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday I had the privilege of taking part in the government of Alberta's hosting more than 65 members of the consular corps at the annual consular briefing. These ambassadors and high commissioners and consuls general and honorary consuls are important to Alberta's economic prosperity. Our efforts attract highly skilled people to our province. My question today is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What is being done to ensure that Alberta maintains and enlarges good relations with the consular corps and their countries?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's exactly events like this that build the bridge from the rest of the world to our province. I might say that at the meeting on Friday – I thank the many ministers of government and MLAs that attended, but many consular representatives have told us relative to the government of Alberta that they enjoy greater access to the government of Alberta than any other government across Canada. That truly speaks of the open and transparent approach of our government in terms of what we're doing in building relationships with the rest of the world.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's in the news that there's another important delegation visiting Alberta tomorrow. It is the Prime Minister of the Netherlands. So my question is to the same hon. minister. What is planned for the Prime Minister's visit?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a very busy day, and I'm very pleased to say that the Prime Minister of the Netherlands chose our province to visit. I think it really speaks of the role that our province and our government plays with the rest of the world. I want to also thank so many Edmontonians and others. The Premier will be hosting tomorrow a special luncheon at Government House but also will be meeting with the Dutch Canadian Club tonight with the Prime Minister as well as Mayor Mandel tomorrow and many others because of the important relationship we've had over the many years, from the liberation of the Netherlands to the important role that Canadians played with Allied troops towards that end.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the same minister. Alberta's strong economy depends on tourism. To increase guided group tourists to their countries, other jurisdictions have created guided tour group visas, which we don't have. We only have the normal, lengthy, more difficult to obtain visas for visitors, even if they're guided tour visitors. So my question is: what are you going to do to help Canada to implement tour group visas to increase tourism in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you very much. I'm working closely with my colleague the minister of immigration and employment. Essentially, the United States did have tour group visas, but since 9/11 they

cancelled them as well. We are working very closely with the federal government. We'll continue to do so because of the tremendous tourism opportunities we have right here in our province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 82 questions and responses.

head: 2:20

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to table a petition with 105 signatures on it. The petition notes the Conservative government's continued refusal to protect Alberta families from rent gouging and urges the government to immediately introduce temporary rent guidelines. This brings the total signatures on this petition to 287.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions. The first one has 20 signatures, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government . . . to work with the City of Edmonton to ensure that the traffic noise from the Edmonton Ring Road near our neighbourhood of The Woods is evaluated immediately and again in six months, and that if the noise levels measured are found to exceed acceptable provincial or municipal thresholds, that noise attenuation and reduction measures be implemented as soon as possible.

The second one has 38 signatures, and this one reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Edmonton, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government . . . to complete, as soon as possible, the overpasses and interchanges at the locations where the Anthony Henday Drive (Edmonton Ring Road) intersects Lessard Road, Callingwood Road (62 Avenue), and Cameron Heights Drive.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition with roughly 120 names from Tanya Woodruff, Cindy Iverson,* and Wendy Hugh* of the Tomahawk area of Alberta, requesting the government of Alberta to take the lead in protecting the quality of life for us and future generations in the climate crisis in relation to sour gas development near schools in that area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and in accordance with Standing Order 42 I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move that the Assembly

refer the matter of the unethical donation from the Beaver Regional Waste Management Services Commission to the Premier's campaign for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party to the Standing Committee on Managing Growth Pressures, constituted under Standing Order 52.01(1)(c), for a full and independent inquiry.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

Bill 43

Appropriation Act, 2007

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 43, the Appropriation Act, 2007. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, from the delivery of the budget back on April 19 by the Minister of Finance the Assembly has spent a lot of time, 60 hours, debating the budget, by far the biggest thing we've done, except for, of course, our one-night stand on rent control. I want to congratulate the members of the Assembly on both sides for not only the patience but the courage to take on a new approach and to try out different things to try and understand our budget better.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll give it to the page.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 44

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to request leave to introduce a bill being the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

This particular piece of legislation typically comes in at this stage of the proceedings in the Assembly, and in this spring session there are two bills that will be impacted by this Bill 44: the Forest and Prairie Protection Act and the Public Service Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and table five copies of the 2006 Climate Change Central progress report. Climate Change Central, known as C3, is one of the foremost organizations in Alberta. It is concerned about the environment all year long. It has solar heating community programs, on-farm, and car heaven programs as well as biodiesel research.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of questions and responses on Bill 29 from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I'd like to table these at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is an article from the *Calgary Herald* from Saturday, June 9 of this year, and it's to back up my question today in regard to the distancing of the candidate in Drumheller from the PC Party on electricity deregulation.

The second tabling I have today is a letter that I received this morning from the hon. Minister of Energy. It's dated June 6, 2007,

*These spellings could not be verified at the time of publication.

and it's a partial explanation of the steam line rupture which occurred at MEG Energy Corp.'s site on May 5, 2007.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of information released by the Alberta Liberal caucus on March 19 around the radio ads that the Premier was inquiring about, outlining various policies and procedures as to the financial accounting that was done in accordance with the rules that are set out for caucus expenditures through LAO.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, do you have one?

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of photographs of the AAA feedlot operation near Didsbury that I referenced in question period.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter from Edmonton-McClung constituent Barbara Hollman complaining about the noise from the traffic travelling the Anthony Henday Drive, which she can see and clearly hear from her house. She wants the overpass at Callingwood Road and 62nd Avenue made a priority. But until that project is again looked at, she asks that something gets done in the interim to intercept or reduce the noise, something like a berm.

The second tabling is a set of 13 pictures, Mr. Speaker, taken from Barb Hollman's deck and backyard showing how flat the landscape is between her neighbourhood and the Anthony Henday Drive. You can clearly see the traffic and can probably imagine the constant, unrelenting, and intrusive noise that Ms Hollman and her neighbours have to endure. She doesn't want to leave her home but hopes Infrastructure and Transportation delivers on their promise to attenuate the noise as promised.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, did you want to proceed today?

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll proceed later.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from my constituent Chris Goss. I'm tabling five copies of e-mail letters on his behalf. Chris is concerned about seismic activities in Utikuma Lake causing fish kills and not using that information in relation to plans for seismic activities in Marie Lake.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of e-mail letters from my constituent Glenda Murphy. Glenda is also concerned about seismic activities in Utikuma Lake causing fish kills and not using that information in relation to plans for seismic activities in Marie Lake.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling documents from 37 low-income Albertans. All of them support rent guidelines and have experienced significant rent increases. They are of course finding it very difficult to make ends meet.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a document with 512 signatures. The signatories are urging this government to take effective action on the housing crisis that's hurting tens of thousands of Albertans, particularly the problem of skyrocketing rent increases.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling one document here today. I'm very pleased to table an explanatory document from the Canadian Association for Disabled Skiing. I'm pleased to do so on the day of the visit of Rick Hansen. We got this at the abilities lodge meeting on Friday.

Thank you.

head: 2:30

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, Workers' Compensation Board, Alberta, 2006 Accountability Framework Report.

On behalf of the hon. Minister of Education, memorandum dated June 7, 2007, from the hon. Minister of Education to the hon. Member for Strathcona regarding grade inflation in Alberta's kindergarten to grade 12 education system.

On behalf of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on May 28 and 29, 2007, Department of Advanced Education and Technology 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy, a response to a question raised by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead on May 30, 2007, Department of Energy 2007-2008 main estimates debate.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 42**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition with respect to a Standing Order 42 application.

Contribution to Premier's Leadership Campaign

Ms Blakeman on behalf of Dr. Taft:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly refer the matter of the unethical donation from the Beaver Regional Waste Management Services Commission to the Premier's campaign for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party to the Standing Committee on Managing Growth Pressures, constituted under Standing Order 52.01(1)(c), for a full and independent inquiry.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The province is indeed facing tremendous growth pressures, and managing these is supposedly one of the Premier's top five priorities. Now, certainly, regional planning and service delivery is a critical piece of this. There are approximately 50 such regional service commissions

in this province, and the issue of whether they're operating effectively and whether there's clarity about their mandate and adequate accountability measures is critical. The stakes are very high.

Mr. Speaker, I'm mindful of the urgency test from *Marleau* and *Montpetit* found on page 584.

The Speaker: Hon. member, there is no urgency test. Please sit down. Under Standing Order 42 the member gives a very brief explanation. The chair then asks if there's unanimous consent. There's no urgency. It's simply that you get a shot for a minute or two, then I ask the question.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed. The minister of municipal affairs has had the power to call for an independent inspection of the commission. He has refused to do this. He said that he would do his own review and that they would be looking at the financials. But this minister was very public in his support for the Premier during the leadership race. The CAO of the commission is a personal supporter of the Premier.

We need something that is more rigorous and definitely more independent to ensure that the citizens of the member municipalities can be confident that their interests are protected. The issue is broader than the Beaver regional waste commission and looking at their financials. The policy field committee would be able to look at this issue in the broader context of the accountability and clarity of mandate of these public bodies.

The government has indicated that the Assembly is likely to rise this week. I believe it's important that the Assembly refer this issue immediately to ensure that there is time and accommodation over the summer to look into both the specific example of the donation but also whether other public bodies were targeted, donated, and what needs to be done to fix that problem.

As well, last week the President of the Treasury Board indicated that ministers of the Crown didn't have time to even call commissions or public entities on what they may or may not have done. Granted that, then this is the opportunity to do it, with a policy field committee, where adequate accountability measures could be suggested to be put in place.

Indeed, the time is possible to do so. Policy field committees have now been constituted. They have been staffed and peopled. They are up and running, and some of them have already been charged to meet and report back before the fall session. So this is within their mandate, given the standing order.

The Speaker: I think, hon. member, please, let's move forward now. If the House agrees to it, we'll have the debate. Then the member will be recognized for X amount of speaking time. Right now we do have a question, and it requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Energy and Utilities Board Hearing Costs

Q15. Mr. MacDonald asked that the following question be accepted.

What was the total departmental cost for staff time, legal fees, and consultative services to prepare the MLA for Fort

McMurray-Wood Buffalo for his presentation to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board 2006 hearings on Suncor Energy Incorporated's Voyageur project?

Rate of Recidivism for Sexually Exploited Children

Q16. Mrs. Mather asked that the following question be accepted. What is the rate of recidivism for sexually exploited children apprehended under the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act since its implementation?

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Wednesday, June 6, it is my pleasure to move that motions for returns 7 and 8 be dealt with today. There being no additional motions for return appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Meeting with Fort McMurray Mayor

M7. Mr. Chase moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including briefings, letters, memos, policy proposals, cabinet minutes, talking points, faxes, correspondence, and discussion papers, relating to the minister of infrastructure's meeting with Fort McMurray mayor Doug Faulkner on July 27, 1999.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason for requesting this information is the problems that Fort McMurray has been facing for years with lack of support for their infrastructure and which are compounded by the speedy approval of developments in the oil sands.

We would like to have this information. Mayor Blake had twice previously requested funding, \$1.2 billion, when she first came with a delegation in 2005. That amount was extended to \$2 billion in 2006. We're trying to get a handle on how many mayors' requests have been dealt with over this time period because it seems to be a rather sad underfunding circumstance.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have reviewed the Motion for a Return 7 from the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

The hon. member's request, including extensive documentation related to a meeting between the minister of infrastructure and the mayor of Fort McMurray in 1999, included a number of documents that are covered under FOIP, including draft documents. The list of remaining documents requires a manual search and will take several weeks to retrieve, and the request cannot be fulfilled within the time frame requested.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I recommend that the Assembly reject MR 7.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I would be pleased with whatever information the minister is prepared to release in the name

of the foundations of transparency and accountability, which his government states and will, hopefully, uphold.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 7 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

2:40 Racing Entertainment Centre Project

M8. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Dr. Swann that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including studies, reports, and environmental impact assessments, relating to the effects on water levels and water quality of withdrawing water from the Red Deer River to service a project in the municipal district of Rocky View that includes a major retail mall, a horse-racing track, a casino, an industrial park, and an equine centre from fiscal years 2003-2004 to 2005-2006 and for the period April 1, 2006, to April 10, 2007.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Environment assessment of impacts of diverting water from the Red Deer River to the Balzac development is what MR 8 is calling for. We were told that there are some 1,700 pages related to this request, but we received less than 500. This proposed amendment will not add further information to this question and is therefore not supported. It may add paper but not substance.

Of course, the amendment that has been circulated to all members, suggesting striking out "effects on," striking out . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think we're ahead of ourselves here. The chair doesn't know that there's an amendment, so just move the motion. We'll see what happens.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much for the qualification. I so move, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the enthusiasm that the member obviously has for the amendment, maybe we should just vote on the question as it stands. I won't do that.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to propose an amendment. All members are in possession of the amendment, and I will read it into the record. The amendment reads:

- (a) by striking out "effects on";
- (b) by striking out "of withdrawing water from the Red Deer River to service a project in the municipal district of Rocky View that includes a major retail mall, a horse-racing track, a casino, an industrial park, and an equine centre" and substituting "in the Red Deer River".

The motion will then read:

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including studies, reports, and environmental impact assessments, relating to the water levels and water quality in the Red Deer River from fiscal years 2003-2004 to 2005-2006 and for the period of April 1, 2006, to April 10, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, as the member has indicated, what the opposition seek with this return is information regarding reports, studies, and corresponding reports of environmental impact resulting from the application in the Balzac area. I've indicated on a number of occasions that this particular application was received by Alberta Environment and was subject to the normal procedure for approving

documents. There were not specific reports, environmental impact assessments, and studies related to the effects on water levels and water quality of withdrawing water from the Red Deer River. There are, however, a number of reports and studies related to the overall issue of the Red Deer River. Leaving this motion as it exists would result in virtually no information being provided for the opposition member because there would be no reports thus identified. By amending the report, there will be a number of pieces of information made available to the opposition, and that's why I suggest that we support this report.

I might also add, Mr. Speaker, that there was a FOIP request on this particular issue. All of the relevant information that was requested under that FOIP report has been provided to the applicant. So combined with what was received through the FOIP report and what would be made available through the amended motion here, there should be more than adequate information to serve the needs of the member.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're now on the amendment. Go.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It makes me think of 1984: he who controls the past controls the future. We've just had a large eraser or whiteout taken to our original motion for information. The fact that there is no government information on environmental impact assessments despite the fact that millions of dollars of the Rocky View municipality have gone out, millions of dollars of the local contractor and the United Horsemen have all proceeded and been spent without the required environmental assessments is indeed surprising; however, I do appreciate the minister's willingness to provide whatever enlightening information that will help us to see the justification of this project. Therefore, I accept the amended motion.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, if you wish to conclude the debate, fine. If not, I'll call the question on the motion as amended.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for again giving me the opportunity to close. We have to get past just the words "accountability" and "transparency." FOIP is preventing information from being received by taxpayers as well as members of the opposition and the independent members. You've got to not only talk, but you have to walk that talk. Hopefully, with the committee format, the field committees, this discussion will reach greater heights and true sharing will occur. I look forward to the field committees, but I am grateful for the crumbs that have been thrown my way.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 8 as amended carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 211 Planning for the Future of Communities Act

[Debate adjourned June 4: Ms DeLong speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, there remain 34 minutes of debate time. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise to discuss . . .

The Speaker: Sorry, leader. Did the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow choose to continue? Well, I'm sorry then. She still has eight minutes remaining. Please continue, and then we'll recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for letting me continue with Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act.

Growth has taken competition over land use to new heights. These developmental plans can naturally coexist, but sometimes land uses are conflicting, and different groups want access to the same area. Sometimes there's a need to exercise caution when locating certain developments next to each other. For example, Alberta has seven major watersheds which need to be protected. The government has taken steps to prioritize these competing demands, and as a government we must provide a road map for the orderly development of homes, cottages, roads, cities, facilities, and industries and decide which areas are going to be reserved for recreational purposes and animal sanctuaries. Furthermore, the better we plan development, services can be delivered more efficiently and effectively.

Now, co-ordinating these demands is a large undertaking, but it can be done. In order to achieve harmony while growing, it's necessary to have a plan and vision in place. A land-use framework provides the approach needed to better manage public and private lands and resources to meet the long-term economic, social, and environmental goals of Alberta. Alberta has 164 million acres of space which needs to be managed, and if the government of Alberta has a comprehensive approach to deal with land demand, all Albertan land uses will be balanced. With a very organized layout everyone can make the most of our vast geography.

2:50

While Bill 211 has good intentions, I assure the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie that the government of Alberta is taking every step necessary to attain sustainable land use for all of Alberta's communities. In order to be well executed, the Department of Sustainable Resource Development has taken the time necessary for the preparation of a comprehensive land-use framework. Development of this framework has been in progress since 2005.

Now, in the spring of 2006 the Alberta government began land-use stakeholder consultations. The Department of Sustainable Resource Development gathered information on a development framework, land-use principles, and identified challenges that Alberta is facing. From the beginning of this process Sustainable Resource Development has been constructing a road map for development decisions supporting strong leadership, educating Albertans, and promoting responsible decisions. These principles are guiding the development of the land-use framework.

Because of the important nature of this issue, the hon. Premier placed this project at the top of the list of priorities this government would accomplish. The completion of the land-use framework is one of the key actions this government is taking to help manage growth pressures in Alberta. At the end of last year the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development was mandated to complete the land-use framework. This framework is of utmost importance to the department, and they're working diligently to complete it in a timely fashion. I believe this framework accomplishes what Bill 211 is calling for, and I thank the hon. members opposite for their support of these efforts in land-use planning.

When the land-use framework is complete, it will provide clear steps for development, and it will address conflicts over the competing use of land and provide a vision for an integrated, sustainable land-use approach. This vision will help ease development by adding clarity to the process. The land-use framework will alleviate concerns about growth because Albertans will be confident that there is a plan for growth. They'll know that projects are guided by a vision of Alberta, and they're not just constructed anywhere.

How Bill 211 differs from the land-use framework is that this framework was not formulated behind closed doors. All Albertans were invited to give their input on the future of land use in this province. Because Alberta's land belongs to all Albertans, their vision of land use is going to be represented in this framework. Input was gathered through 15 public sessions across Alberta and through a workbook questionnaire that all Albertans were encouraged to submit. Albertans were asked to provide input on guiding principles to indicate which land-use issues are of most concern to them, which direction they would like the framework to go in, and what kind of outcomes they want. The land-use framework will be Albertans' framework.

Mr. Speaker, knowing that public consultation would be more successful if Albertans had the proper tools and background information to address land use, the Department of Sustainable Resource Development published two resource guides to increase public awareness of land-use issues. Understanding Land Use in Alberta and the land-use workbook ensured that Albertans could provide knowledgeable input.

The department also held focus group sessions where sectors affected by land groups were also given a strong role in the development of a land-use policy. In order to get a precise picture of land-use needs, input was gathered from agriculture, transportation, recreational users, oil and gas, mining, conservation and environment groups, aboriginal communities, municipal representatives, and academics.

A draft of the land-use framework is expected to be completed by the end of this year, and the government is working towards its future implementation. It will provide the context, overall direction, and decision-making framework which will govern and manage land use in Alberta. Once the framework is released, it will apply to all private and public lands in the province except for federal lands. Therefore, municipal development and intermunicipal co-operation will fall under its scope.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, the land-use framework is a comprehensive and detailed approach to co-ordinating land use in Alberta. As far as I'm concerned, not only has the government met the goals of Bill 211, but it has also surpassed them. It's quite clear that this government is working diligently to meet Albertans' long-term social and economic goals based on good land-use management.

I thank the Member for Calgary-Currie for his work on Bill 211, but the government of Alberta and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development are currently working on a land-use framework that will enhance our planning and co-ordination requirements well into the future. The land-use framework will be another tool to support regional co-operation and municipal development. Therefore, due to the redundant nature of the Planning for the Future of Communities Act I urge the hon. members of the Assembly to vote against Bill 211.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and hon. members, under Standing Order 29(3)(a) the hon. leader has a maximum of 20 minutes should he choose to use them.

The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, out of respect for everybody's opportunity to speak here and realizing that there are only about 20 minutes left, I'll keep my comments to, say, 10 minutes or so.

In our view Bill 211 is a very important bill. It confronts head-on some of the really challenging issues that this province is facing, and they're problems that are being faced across the province, from north to south and east to west. Those are the challenges our municipal governments face in working together and resolving issues in a constructive, timely, and co-operative manner.

Certainly, there are any number of successes. As I travel around the province, I meet with municipal councils, and they'll speak about how well they get along with their neighbours and how they're able to strike all kinds of different understandings on recreation and transportation and housing and whatever. But equally there are all kinds of communities where that kind of harmonious, neighbourly relations do not exist and are really strained. As a result, a lot of serious problems are piling up for the people of this province.

When I talk about areas where there are strains, I think about my travels; for example, Grande Prairie city and Grande Prairie county and some of the local municipalities there that have unfortunately got a long history now of friction and trying to resolve inter-municipal issues. Red Deer city and Red Deer county, I think, recently have made some headway, but frankly there's a lot of strain there and a number of development challenges that are taking years to address instead of months. Of course, we all know in this Assembly, as an example, the conflict between Calgary and Rocky View on water transfers relating to the Balzac project. Peace River. Lac La Biche. That doesn't even include the area of greatest concern, which is the capital region, in and around Edmonton, where there are 23 municipalities trying to cope with some of the most rapid growth in the history of the province and no mandatory structure with which to address that.

It at times feels like there are several chapters of *War & Peace* getting played out right here in our capital region, and it's an epic that I'd rather not see continue. I think we need to end the conflict that is arising and has become, frankly, systemic and sadly in some ways most disturbing: it's become personal. As I go and I meet with different councils, these are all decent people. They're all public-spirited, well-intended, capable people, but when they get in these conflicts, it ends up becoming a very personal kind of conflict in which you hear people describing each other in ways that just don't make sense and don't reflect the real value of each of those publicly minded people. We need to replace the structures or the lack of structures that have created that conflict with structures that bring about a culture of co-operation.

That's what this bill is intended to do. The bill, I think, as everybody knows who has read it, will require mandatory inter-municipal planning in areas that are designated as high-growth areas and will put the provincial government in a position of real leadership, give the provincial government the legislative basis to bring the different players to the table, and require that common issues be addressed. And there are no shortage of common issues, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

Water, ironically, or perhaps as a great example, is actually a subject on which the Edmonton region works very well. The municipalities surrounding Edmonton by and large depend on EPCOR, an Edmonton city-owned utility for water, and they get the water. The structures are in place, and the contracts are there, and there are no particular conflicts around water. So that's an example of how things could work if they were required. Unfortunately, in

Calgary it's quite the opposite. Water is a source of huge conflict in Calgary. Water is one of those topics that needs to be addressed, and fire services, emergency services, police services.

Economic development. We have in the Capital region any number of different economic development agencies, and some of them co-operate, and some of them are pursuing different kinds of agendas. That's a real problem that has to be brought to an end. If our economic development agencies can't get their act together, then the businesses who look for structure, who need common rules, who need a consistent plan are going to take their business somewhere else, and frankly I can't blame them.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow spoke about the land-use planning requirements of this province. They are overwhelming, and they've been piling up for years and years. This government, I think, is on their third round of a land-use strategy. We're still waiting for any serious and substantial results from that. The Alberta Liberals put forward our own discussion paper on the need for a land-use strategy close to 18 months ago, and still we await. Land-use issues are immense and intense. Whether it's conflicts over industrial use of land, residential use of land, land that could be used for transportation and utility corridors, land that should be set aside for environmental protection and left in its natural state, land for agriculture, unfortunately, it's the same piece of land that's being burdened with all these conflicting demands, and we need a plan. We need a plan to address those, and this bill, Bill 211, would help address some of those land-use plans.

Similarly, on something as basic as taxi service, Mr. Speaker, there is a sharp, specific conflict in the Edmonton region over taxi service to the airport. When there are intermunicipal conflicts over taxi service, you know that things have broken down. You know that the system is out of control. Something as simple as taxi service is becoming a victim of a lack of planning and intermunicipal co-operation.

Housing and the need for affordable housing. In St. Albert, in Edmonton, and all over the province housing issues and social service issues are not getting appropriately addressed.

Of course, environmental issues where we have concerns with environmental contamination or pollution or all kinds of other environmental stresses being imposed on lands in some areas where other municipalities think there should be housing as in northeast Edmonton where there's outstanding microclimate for market gardening, yet the pressure is on nearby for heavy industrial development. There's a whole host of problems.

I've spoken briefly about the problems. We could fill hours just itemizing those. What we are looking for through Bill 211 are solutions. The Alberta Liberals in this bill are bringing forward a proposed solution. The intent of this bill is to have certain areas of the province designated as high-growth areas and then require all municipalities in those high-growth areas to work together to develop a growth plan: no more relying strictly on optional participation, no more opportunity for a municipality who doesn't want to co-operate to opt out and go its own way.

The provincial government needs to establish, through this bill, a requirement that all the municipal governments in a designated growth area co-operate and work together and produce a common plan for the common good of all the residents of that area. Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, there must be a mandatory structure. This is a time and this is a province where that mandatory structure is required.

I'd urge all of us in this Assembly to vote favourably for Bill 211 to get it through second reading and into committee where we can

discuss it at greater length; we can go through it section by section; we can bring forward amendments. We are open to amendments as we just demonstrated in a motion for return. We're open to improving this bill or to compromising on the bill so that it gets forward, but the fact of the matter is that this province needs action on this issue. It needs solutions on this issue. Bill 211 is the solution that we believe is needed.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 211, the Planning for the Future of Communities Act, is aimed at establishing growth plans, areas to support municipal development, and intermunicipal co-operation. The Alberta government is already supporting municipal development and intermunicipal co-operation with the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability and incentives that encourage collaboration and sustainability such as regional partnership initiatives. Through the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, AAMD and C, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the AUMA, and the cities of Edmonton and Calgary are working with the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to come up with solutions for issues affecting Alberta municipalities.

All Alberta municipalities are represented on the minister's council, the urban municipalities through the AUMA, rural through the AAMD and C, and Edmonton and Calgary through their mayors. The urban and rural municipalities can contact their associations to provide concerns and other input to be discussed at the minister's council meetings and also to receive feedback on these issues once they have been discussed. The minister's council examines options for strengthening partnerships between the provincial government and Alberta's municipalities and for enhancing the long-term sustainability of municipal governments in the province. It is a provincial/municipal forum that was established to address municipal sustainability issues.

Four working groups within the council were formed to address important issues. The AUMA leads a working group to examine municipal roles and responsibilities. Calgary leads a working group to explore options for new municipal revenue sources. Edmonton leads a working group to explore intermunicipal relationships and other issues related to municipal growth challenges, including better co-ordination of land-use planning near municipal boundaries. The AAMD and C works with the AUMA to review how the proposals of other working groups would affect smaller urban and rural municipalities.

The role of the minister's council is to collaboratively work towards a consensus on how to deal with issues that affect all Alberta municipalities and what involvement they would like to see from the province. Once a consensus is reached, a report is provided to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who will then submit it to caucus for their input and consideration. The minister's council submitted a report to the government in early 2007. Following the submission of the minister's council report, Budget 2007 committed \$1.4 billion to municipalities by 2010-11 as part of a 10-year funding commitment to help municipalities move towards a more sustainable future. The government is considering all of the other recommendations in the council's report and will be providing a formal response.

Bill 211 seeks to support municipal development and intermunicipal co-operation. The Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability is already doing great work in this area, and because recommendations are from Alberta municipalities, partnerships are

collaborative instead of obligatory. The aim of the minister's council is to help municipalities address local needs over the long term. This includes reaching an agreement on how to address the provincial municipal fiscal envelope, clarifying roles and responsibilities, finding new revenue sources, and improving intermunicipal relations. Alberta municipalities want the freedom to work with each other as they know what the individual needs of the communities are and how they can work together to best fill those needs.

3:10

Previously, municipalities were subject to regional planning commissions. Municipalities within a region would co-ordinate development, but the commission was empowered to be responsible for the regional planning. The regional planning commissions were viewed as favourable towards urban areas and were using rural municipalities as land banks. This was part of the reason the regional planning commissions were eliminated.

In 1995 municipalities were given subdivision-approving authority under the new Municipal Government Act. As well, municipalities were given the option to co-ordinate planning through volunteer intermunicipal planning agencies to replace regional planning commissions. Municipalities are now able to conduct planning activities in-house or hire consultants. This can lead to cost savings for municipalities and sustain smaller municipalities as they can afford more cost-effective services. Municipalities know what their communities want and are able to negotiate agreements without feeling like their efforts are stifled by overarching legislation like the regional planning commissions or Bill 211.

The government of Alberta provides incentives for municipalities to work together on projects that are beneficial to many communities. The regional partnership initiative provides funding support for municipalities that wish to explore regional opportunities and for implementation of regional projects. These opportunities include shared service delivery, expanding cost-effective services, developing regional forums, strengthening municipalities, improving quality of life, and planning for growth. Collaborative approaches can create economies of scale and scope which provide the advantage of reduced per unit service delivery costs. Cost savings will in fact transfer to municipalities and their rate payers. Regional partnerships can be an effective way to leverage resources, support innovative ideas, expand service choices at lower costs, which will promote and improve quality of life in Alberta communities.

Alberta has many success stories regarding regional partnerships that have greatly enhanced the lives of the people who live in those municipalities. One example is the partnership between the county of Wetaskiwin, the city of Wetaskiwin, and the town of Millet. They produced a joint economic development initiative, JEDI, consisting of a cost- and revenue-sharing agreement that encourages industry to locate or expand in the region. It was selected from 36 submissions to receive an honourable mention in the minister's award for municipal excellence in the partnership category for their cost- and revenue-sharing master agreement in October of 2006. All three partners worked co-operatively for the benefit of all people in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, I do not support Bill 211 as the Alberta government is already accomplishing the desired outcome of growth plan areas by working with the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability and RPI funding. Encouraging municipalities to co-operate and collaborate on projects will allow them more flexibility in choosing what that co-operation looks like and how it will be the most beneficial to their individual communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank my colleague from Calgary-Currie for proposing and bringing forward this private member's bill, Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act. Bill 211, designating specific geographical areas in Alberta as growth plan areas and outlining the establishment of regional planning commissions, is exactly what we need to be able to cope with the growth pressures in this province.

This legislation, focusing on specific areas, proposes regional planning commissions with broad-based participation of the provincial government and municipal governments within the region, including shareholders and the public. So it's not something coerced; it is something that involves everybody. This bill is directed to the future. We can't afford not to focus on planning in respect of our regional economies.

We hear a lot today about globalization and international trade and continental trading blocs. This new reality means, in effect, that regional economies emerge as more and more significant. Attention is shifting from the national level of government to the local, so cities are the new units of global economic competition, and cities must be understood in terms of the region in which they are located. Only the region has the scale and diversity to compete globally. It is the region that comprises the totality of social and economic and environmental assets that make up a healthy community.

Bill 211 has this comprehensive view in mind. If we look at the list of items in section 4 of this bill, which refers to a growth plan that may contain policies, goals, and criteria in relation to – and there's a list of all kinds of items, including intensification and density, land supply, location of industry and commerce, nonrenewable resources, conservation of energy, transportation planning, municipal waste management planning, affordable housing. All of these items of course have to be considered in any kind of regional planning. Now, of course, there will be disagreements and conflicts between municipalities and regional districts about all of these items, but we can't afford any longer to have regional planning set aside, not if we're going to compete globally.

Now, the document Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horse-shoe, 2006, states – and this is the Premier's viewpoint: I'm not afraid to enter into the necessary debate about regional planning, provide true leadership, and sort out the disputes between neighbouring communities; without a regional plan we'll have a disjointed patchwork that will create additional problems in the future. Well, Mr. Speaker, this is exactly what Bill 211 tries to do: overcome that disjointed patchwork that's present now so that we can make sure that regional planning is going to take place. Bill 211 outlines the mechanism for promoting needed regional planning.

I've read the debate in *Hansard*, and frankly I don't understand the point of most of the criticisms that were expressed. This is not about forced amalgamation or imposing plans on municipalities, but it is about providing a mechanism that will enable those involved to move beyond their conflicts and sort out a compromise and articulate common goals for the future. That's what we need, especially in an area like Edmonton. The government has been arguing that a land-use strategy is important for regions. Well, this bill is outlining just such a strategy, enabling regions to decide where all the items should go, where industry should go, where affordable housing should go. If you are in favour of a land-use strategy, how can you vote against this bill?

Mr. Speaker, my feeling is: why do we have to wait until this whole land-use program, this consultation process is finished when we can just accept Bill 211 and move ahead? We need regional planning right now, especially if you look at Edmonton. The hon.

Leader of the Opposition mentioned the Edmonton region and how complex it is, how important it is in terms of competing globally, yet here we have an Edmonton region . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I must unfortunately advise that the time allocated for this item on our agenda has reached the point where we must now vote. The hon. mover of the motion is the only one under Standing Order 25 permitted to close the debate, so the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has moved second reading of Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:18 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Chase	Martin	Pastoor
Elsalhy	Miller, B.	Taft
Flaherty	Miller, R.	Tougas

3:30

Against the motion:

Amery	Groeneveld	Oberle
Backs	Herard	Ouellette
Calahasen	Horner	Pham
Cao	Johnson	Prins
Cardinal	Johnston	Rodney
Coutts	Knight	Rogers
DeLong	Liepert	Shariff
Doerksen	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Dunford	Lukaszuk	Strang
Evans	Marz	Tarchuk
Fritz	Melchin	VanderBurg
Griffiths	Mitzel	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 36
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 211 lost]

Bill 212

Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand today and be the lead for Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act.

Bill 212 provides an additional tool to help combat crime in neighbourhoods by holding property owners accountable for threatening activities regularly occurring on their property. Bill 212 will relieve neighbourhoods from the adverse affects of activities such as purchasing or selling intoxicating substances, prostitution, or drugs by targeting the location where these activities are continually occurring. This is a proactive approach at stopping and preventing disturbing and dangerous activities in our neighbourhoods.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Bill 212 proposes to create a new safety agency fuelled by the observations of disruptive behaviour in communities and subsequent complaints by residents.

Bill 212, although new to Alberta, is actually in Manitoba and has been for some five years, in Saskatchewan for approximately three years, was implemented in Nova Scotia in January of 2007, and implementation in the Yukon in 2007.

Bill 212 seeks to address illegal activity identified within the communities. Individuals voice their concern through the director. This Bill 212 is civil legislation. With civil legislation the balance of probabilities is the test as opposed to criminal legislation, in which the test is beyond a reasonable doubt. When a complaint comes in, if it is found, the director can then choose to send an investigator or inspector to the property being misused and either start an investigation or advise otherwise. The options could be to require more information from a complainant, issue a warning letter, resolve the complaint, apply to a court for a community safety order, or other action.

If an owner or tenant chooses not to comply with the request of the investigators, the agency will present the investigation to the Court of Queen's Bench for a community safety order. The person charged also can apply to the Court of Queen's Bench for an appeal. The serious crimes such as meth labs, huge grow ops, and other criminal activity are still dealt with by the police. This, again, is civil legislation, and this still only will deal with issues that can be dealt with in the community.

If an order is granted, tenants would have the right to appeal.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I think you're leaving papers on top of the microphone. That's why we're receiving all that echo.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The community safety order holds property owners accountable. The owner speaks to the tenant to curtail activity. If the property owner is aware of ongoing criminal activity at a property, they must work with the director or designate to eliminate the problem or face forfeiture.

Bill 212 would help redirect misguided individuals such as youth from entering into drug activity or related criminal activity. I saw an example of the safe communities and neighbourhoods at work in the Winnipeg area when I visited there in the fall of 2006. There was a 14-year-old in a home that was selling drugs when the single mom was away at work. The safe community and neighbourhoods director was called, a complaint was laid, and this was dealt with by way of a warning. So there were no charges laid, no court attendance, and the problem was dealt with in that way. This also helps alleviate pressure on police so they can deal with other matters.

Bill 212 also addresses excessive fortification such as bulletproof material designed to be resistant to explosives, protective metal plating on the interior of buildings, or armoured doors. After an investigation an inspector can designate a fortified building as a threat to public safety if it impairs emergency workers' access to the building, impairs the ability of people inside the building to escape in an emergency, or has fortifications that are unreasonable given the purpose of the building. If a building is found to be excessively fortified and a threat to public safety, the director can issue a removal order. If the fortifications are not removed, the director could issue an order closing the building for up to 90 days. This, of course, can be appealed through the Court of Queen's Bench.

As mentioned, this legislation has been very successful in other jurisdictions such as Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia and the Yukon this year. Bill 212 has the ability to be effective at getting disruptive activities out of the communities in a very quick manner.

As a retired police officer I'm very supportive of this piece of legislation. I think it will empower communities at a time when our

population is growing, and it will assist police services, addressing time constraints and the lack of manpower. I look forward to hearing the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and respond to the hon. mover of Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. First, I would like to thank the hon. member for sponsoring this bill and commend him on his initiative and his effort in bringing it to the floor of the Assembly for discussion. It's an area where he's not going to be met with any opposition from this side of the House because we agree with him that any initiative we take, any support we offer to citizens and to neighbourhoods and communities to bring them into that fight against crime is a commendable and advisable direction, and we agree with him that empowering citizens to take that active role in helping curb or reduce crime in their immediate neighbourhoods is a good direction we should all be supporting.

I'm also a little envious of him because he actually beat us to the punch. We were actually planning the very same idea as part of the Official Opposition's slate of bills for this legislative session. Initially we were hoping to introduce it as Bill 218, but because he drew Bill 212 in that random draw back in the fall, he beat us to it. I know that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie was hoping to sponsor a very similar idea. That's why we are supportive on this side of the House: it's an idea we agree with.

If you remember, Mr. Speaker, when we were debating the Police Amendment Act this year, 2007, I put in my remarks that in my opinion every citizen is a police officer, and all police officers are lay people. They're citizens as well. It's a partnership between the community at large and the law enforcement community to try to curb or reduce crime. We all agree that there has been an escalation in crime. Be it the magnitude or the size or the damages actually caused, the financial damage that it actually leads to, and crime and the criminals getting more sophisticated and more resourceful, if I can use that word, we need to actually rely on everybody – we're all in this together – to try to stem this systemic problem and to try to mitigate the adverse effects that communities suffer as a result of crime.

3:40

It's another tool in the arsenal in our fight against crime. People need to be allowed to take that initiative, and we need to empower them and tell them that once you make that decision to report an activity or to report an individual or a group that looks suspicious, then there's a place for them to go. There is an agency that would listen to them. This bill does just that. It basically creates an entity under the Department of the Solicitor General. People who have reason to believe something untoward is happening or unsavoury elements are moving into their communities or are doing things that should not be done in their communities now have a place to go to. They have an agency that would listen to them and then would take some action based on the seriousness and the significance of the claim or the report.

Why don't we go to the police immediately or all the time? Well, the police have the resources to handle some of the workload, but unfortunately, be it for funding or be it from a human resource standpoint, they cannot really handle all the calls and all the reports coming from citizens as well as from their own intelligence as well as from other law enforcement agencies or services, and so on and

so forth. So maybe this parallel mechanism is a good thing to have now under the Solicitor General, where people can report unsavoury property activities to that agency. We are keeping the police for more serious stuff. The police might actually be engaged at a latter stage if that agency now deems it appropriate that there should be some police intervention.

Examples. People say, you know, okay, give me an example or two about a situation where a citizen or a resident in a community can pick up the phone and talk to someone at the Solicitor General's department and report an activity that he or she doesn't think should be taking place. Well, we've all heard of crystal meth. It's a drug that people can make in their own homes. I saw a bulletin from my power company. They actually sent me a little brochure that says: look for the following if you suspect that your neighbour's house is actually being used for producing crystal meth. I found that bulletin very informative and very useful. So if I have reason to believe that my next door neighbour is doing something like this, then I have an agency to go to, and I can actually report it to them.

Drug trafficking. Child abuse. We've heard about situations where children are lured into a house, trusting the person who took them there, only to find out that they're being photographed or videotaped, and that stuff ends up on the Internet. We've heard those stories before.

Illegal liquor sales and other criminal offences. You know, we have a few examples, and we've all heard about them. At one point we've probably even suspected that some of the houses in the neighbourhood look suspicious or should be investigated or should be checked out, and we didn't know who to turn to because sometimes it's intimidating to phone the police. What if my information is not accurate? What if what I'm telling them is not correct?

I think this is a very sound approach to have this mechanism in place to allow people to really tell us, tell the government and tell the law enforcement community, that this place needs to be checked out, that this place needs to be monitored. Again, it's taking an active role in our own safety and security and in the safety and security of our neighbourhoods and communities.

This bill also allows us to put more pressure on the criminal. Any deterrents we can think of, any mechanism we can bring in to tell people: "You know what? You are not going to go unnoticed. And you know what? Everybody's watching. I'm watching you. My neighbours are watching you. The person down the street is watching you." It's the same philosophy as Neighbourhood Watch but now with a mechanism at the end where there is a result. There is a product. There is an outcome, Mr. Speaker.

The reason I'm supporting it and I'm urging other members of this House to support it as well is that it has been tried in other jurisdictions. Different governments from different sides of the political spectrum have tried it, Mr. Speaker, and they've all had success with its implementation. There hasn't been any criticism of this model where citizens are empowered to partner with the law enforcement community. I know that this particular bill is drafted very similarly, almost word for word, to the same legislation that is in Saskatchewan. We've asked a few stakeholders what they thought about it, and again we have not received any negative remarks with respect to this bill and its implementation and the results which ensue. It's really a good bill, and it's worthy of support in this House, and I would urge all hon. members from both sides to afford it that support, that I think it deserves.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I think this should not be the end of our initiative to make our communities safer and to make our people safer and more secure. This should be one mechanism in that bigger approach to reduce violence, to reduce violent crime, and to actually deter those criminals from moving into our communities.

I know that in the cities it's going to be very useful and very effective. I am hoping to see it also be as effective in the rural communities, where distances between neighbours are slightly bigger. We should really adapt this model to the rural communities because we all know that some of the gangs, some of the illicit drug organizations are moving into rural Alberta because they see it as being less monitored by police agencies.

So I support it, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would give credit to the member for bringing this forward. I'm always interested when the Liberals take credit for things. I was going to do it in Bill 218, but I guess we can say, if we really want to get partisan, that it was the NDP government that brought it in first. I know that the Liberals will take credit for that.

I want to say that this is an important tool. It is only one of a number of tools that we need, but it's an important one. I think the fact that we have some experience with it in Manitoba – the member talked about it. He mentioned, I think, that Saskatchewan and the Yukon now have it and that Nova Scotia is just in the process. So I think it's timely because it has become a serious problem in Alberta. I think we're all aware of that.

The history. As I understand it, in Manitoba the act was first established in February of 2002. Under the provisions of the act a unit of six investigators was introduced. The unit has grown to eight officers, has received roughly 1,470 complaints, and about 1,330 involved alleged drug offences to date. The unit has shut down 214 operations and 190 of those for drug offences. As mentioned, other places like Saskatchewan and Yukon are following.

I think we can't underestimate what happens in a community. I've had experiences, complaints in my own constituency when a drug house is set up, the havoc that that absolutely creates in the neighbourhood. People feel very powerless. What do they do? They can't necessarily prove it. The police don't have the time to deal with it because there are a number of other ones. So people feel very frustrated and very helpless in their community, and they know what's going on around it. So I think it's important because if we can deal in another way with what we call drug houses, we certainly would make our communities much safer and much better. I think it's another important tool that we need because we can't have enough police to do all that work. They just can't keep up to it.

I want to say, though, that the complaint that you hear in other places when these bills are brought in – many people said that the act criminalizes poverty, and they also said that alternative housing for people with addictions was a necessity. Absolutely. I mean, the fact is that they can move drug houses around. They still have the same ability to move into another community, and we still have to deal with that. I think the important point here is that we're making an important step to deal with the supply, but we're also going to have to try to deal with the demand.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, when I was talking to Edmonton's police chief, he said that if the police force could begin to deal with the addictions – 60 to 70 per cent of the things that we deal with, our crime, are directly having to do with addictions. So, I mean, this is certainly a step in the right direction, but I think we have to start dealing with young people at an earlier age. It's probably not a quick fix here, but that's what startled me, those figures, when he said that addictions are what is creating the problems. With the booming economy,

of course, and more people moving in, those problems become more immense.

While this is a useful step – certainly, as I say, I compliment the member for bringing it forward; it certainly will have our support – I think that in the broader perspective of dealing with crime, Mr. Speaker, we're going to have to deal with all sorts of other issues that tie into it. If the police chief in Edmonton – and I expect it's true in Calgary and other places around the province – says that 60 to 70 per cent of the things that they do are directly related to addictions, then we have to look, as I said, at the demand side of it too, and in the long run that's probably going to be more effective.

I also want to say that this works well when we have community policing. I think that's the key thing. It's police working with the community because it's the community that generally knows what's happening, and if they have the police working there, now they have another tool, not necessarily the policeman's or policewoman's time, but another unit can begin to do something. This becomes an extremely effective way of policing, I believe, and a bang for the buck rather than just driving around. I think we can begin to deal with those.

But I would say, just in conclusion, that with our growing economy, it's like everything else. You know, we talk about housing. We talk about health care, education. I think our policing needs a bump up, too, with the amount of people that we see coming, especially to our two major cities but other places in Alberta too. I think that for police to be effective, they can't be so over-worked that they can't begin to deal with some of these problems. As long as we have this overheated economy, the police are always going to be playing catch-up.

Again, I stress that this is a very good tool. I think it helps the police. We need more police. I think that community policing is the correct model, but I say that in the long run, if we're really going to deal in a significant way with crime in Edmonton or Calgary, we're going to have to try to get a handle on the addictions problem. We're going to have to try to get a handle on the younger people and their society. That's just the reality. We're always going to be playing catch-up.

I would hope that we could move ahead with Bill 212. Again, I know that the member has had experience in dealing with this, so he's coming at it with the experience of what he thinks would work, and he's checked into it. Certainly, he has our support on this side of the House to bring forward Bill 212.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in the House to speak in favour of Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. This is an excellent piece of legislation which emulates highly successful measures already enacted in several other provinces. I commend the member for proposing a proactive measure which furthers this government's ongoing efforts to ensure that all Albertans live in safe and secure communities.

Our communities are the most important places in Alberta. They're where we live, sleep, raise our children, grow old, and enjoy our province's prosperity and high quality of life. The vast majority of Albertans contribute positively to their communities, living in a responsible and law-abiding manner. Some people, however, choose not to contribute to Alberta's prosperity and legitimate ways. They come into our communities to conduct unsafe and illegal activities, tainting our way of life.

As legislators it's essential that we do everything in our power to safeguard our communities from these people. Mr. Speaker, Bill

212 would empower citizens to confidentially report unsafe and illegal activities which continually occur on properties in their communities. If the complaints are merited, reported properties may be investigated by the director of law enforcement. If a balance of probabilities indicated that illegal activities were in fact occurring, the director could warn property owners. Failing that, the director would be able to place restrictions on properties with the consent of the Court of Queen's Bench. These restrictions could go as far as banning people from occupying the property.

A member of the community may easily see that something wrong is taking place on a property. However, it may not be easy for authorities to use existing legislation to close it down. While the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act could conceivably be used to deal with the toxic waste that drug houses produce, the fact that drug producers operate illegally makes it difficult to apply environmental regulations to them. Moreover, environmental protection orders apply only to people, not to locations, and as such they cannot be used to close properties or evict tenants. Similarly, the Public Health Act is typically used to evacuate properties where grow ops have been found and closed down by the police. Municipal zoning bylaws mandated under the Municipal Government Act principally apply to concerns with the aesthetics of buildings.

Bill 212 provides a way to address the issue more directly. It will also be effective in situations where the Public Health Act or the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act do not apply. For instance, if a property is being used only to sell drugs and not to manufacture them, it could be sanctioned under the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. The point of this bill is to prevent criminal activity from occurring, shut it down quickly when it does occur, and prevent it from reoccurring. It is imperative to have the proper tools available to authorities to shut down properties that threaten public safety. While everyone relies on walls to protect themselves from the elements and to establish private space, walls also enable criminal activity by sheltering it from public view. This bill balances everyone's right to privacy with the need to halt criminal activity.

Bill 212 is commendable because it proposes an entirely community-based answer to crime. Citizens in our community are suitably placed to know when illegal activity is taking place. They know when something is out of the ordinary, and they have a personal stake in ensuring that crime does not happen in their neighbourhoods. Some examples that already exist are Neighbourhood Watch, crime watch, and Citizens on Patrol. Mr. Speaker, as a society we should use every resource available to combat crime, and our citizens are some of the best resources.

The prevention and interception of crime is everyone's responsibility. Adding more police officers is not and cannot be the only answer to this problem. We've recognized this in Alberta already and are using innovative programs to produce results. For instance, training sheriffs to patrol our highways has freed police officers to handle other more serious crimes. In a similar way, this bill would enable the closing of locations where crimes are probably taking place without requiring the use of police resources. The police would then be left available to deal with emergency lights-and-sirens calls and other more complicated investigations. Police officers are a valuable resource which should be focused on crime-fighting efforts that have the most effect.

Inspectors working under this act would be an effective way to address crime. We can look at the example of Manitoba, which has a law quite similar to what this bill proposes. In the five years since the Manitoba law was enacted, four investigators shut down 200 drug dens and prostitution houses. These same four investigators also uncovered and addressed 60 cases of children being sexually

exploited. The reason for the great success in Manitoba is, as I've said, that citizens in the community are law enforcement's best resource. Drug cultivation/activity can be spotted easily by neighbours, whether it's covered windows, odd smells, little outdoor maintenance, or unusually loud electrical humming noises. The sooner drug sites are shut down the better. Preventing illegal drugs from being produced is one way we can help remove them from our communities.

4:00

Drug production sites themselves are also dangerous. Methamphetamine labs are potentially highly explosive. Mould growth and the structural deficiencies caused by grow ops present health hazards to people in and around these sites. A study of grow ops in British Columbia found that fire was 24 times more likely to happen in grow houses because of the unsafe, substandard wiring. Furthermore, the chemically induced paranoia of those running illicit drug operations can cause them to deploy booby traps or other antipersonnel devices in and around the operations. No one wants any of these activities in our communities, and Albertans certainly don't want it in the house next door.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is also about addressing the root of criminal activity. Most of our current efforts to fight crime are targeted at individuals who are breaking the law. Comparatively little effort is targeted at locations where the law is broken. Illegal activities have to take place somewhere. Drug and gang activity don't cease when a person is prosecuted and subsequently removed temporarily from the community. After serving a sentence, a person convicted of a crime may return to where they broke the law and continue the criminal activity. In this way Bill 212 is complementary to current police antigang efforts. By closing down meeting points that are perceived by gang members as secure, the bill helps the police end gang activity.

Another provision of this bill helps keep our emergency responders safe. There's no need anywhere in Alberta for people to fortify or barricade their homes to military-type specifications. Bulletproof, reinforced, and armoured materials are all completely unnecessary. These materials prevent police from gaining access to buildings to serve warrants where probable cause exists to suggest that the occupants are armed and dangerous or likely to engage in the destruction of evidence. Criminals cannot be permitted to sit in fortified homes and houses and be immune to the law.

Fortifications prevent other rescue workers from accessing or leaving buildings in an emergency. If they so need, firefighters should be able to easily gain access to buildings without having to grapple with absurd obstructions. Fortifications also slow the egress of occupants from a building in the event of an emergency.

Community organizations like the Victoria Park community association in Calgary are trying to cleanse their neighbourhoods of prostitution and drugs. One big problem that these associations have to deal with is absentee landlords who do not care what condition their property is in or what takes place there. Mr. Speaker, property owners must be held accountable for the activities that take place on their properties. This bill provides a mechanism for accountability which recognizes that property owners may not be engaged in criminal activity even while their tenants are, but property owners have an obligation to ensure that the tenants are not breaking the law. This bill draws illegal activity to property owners' attention and gives them a chance to end it. If there is crime repeatedly taking place in the building, that building should be shut down.

Bill 212 offers a way for our citizens to take ownership of their communities and to say to criminals: you're not welcome in my

backyard. I ask that all members of this Assembly join me in voting in favour of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I, too, support Bill 212 and thank the Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing it forward. I would like to speak briefly on the role of youth in creating and maintaining safer communities and neighbourhoods. Of course, I'm going back to my past 34 years as a teacher, school and community coach. I'm very aware of the importance of involving students, engaging and empowering children.

One of the key first contacts beyond the teachers is the role of the school resource officer. Unfortunately, with the number of additional duties that are put upon police, the number of school resource officers has dramatically been reduced. For students to see police authority individuals in a positive light as their friend and their supporter is extremely important, not only for children who have the luxury of being born and living in Alberta, but it's especially important for immigrant children, who do not necessarily have that climate of respect based on their refugee status from countries where police officers were not viewed in a positive light. So having a school resource officer, not just at the high school level but at least on a visiting weekly basis to both elementary and junior high schools, is extremely important. That role model of a friend and protector is extremely important.

Being proactive and preventative is, to me, considerably more effective than simply having stiffer sentences. I would rather invest in youth than just simply punish them. I don't believe the way that south of the border is headed in terms of building more jails and larger jails than schools is the way to go. What we need to do in terms of connecting with kids is involve them in the schools and in recreational activities. We need to keep kids connected and positively involved.

Children are the eyes and ears of the community. Whether they have the good fortune of having someone at home and they can go home for lunch in the traditional role or whether they're in that latchkey necessity due to the economic drivers within this province and the need to maintain a household, kids are out and about to a greater extent. That can be either positive or negative. But kids certainly are probably the first ones to know what's going on in their community, and if they can communicate their knowledge, then that's of tremendous benefit.

In my 34 years as a teacher I've been involved in a number of youth leadership programs, such as school council adviser within teams, within clubs. I've also been involved with peer leadership programs, where you recruit not only your most positive leaders, but you recruit the kids who are perceived as the negative leaders, and you enlist their abilities to involve students in a positive manner. We need to counsel kids on their strengths, but we also need to recognize their limitations. When I was an adviser for a peer leadership program at Sir John A. Macdonald junior high school, in the northwest, we provided students with supports and counselling, but we also indicated to them what their limitations were. We would never ask them to or expect them to put themselves in a position of risk, whether it be approaching a particular drug house or trying to go beyond their capabilities in terms of counselling before turning it over to an adult professional.

I'm also very aware in a limited number of cases of the possibility of negative leadership. I've personally experienced working with a parent whose daughter was very much mesmerized by a young man

who advertised his drug dealings and some soft porn on a nexopia.com website. It's very hard for the police and school officials to deal with a student when they've reached that state of negativity. Therefore, by involving them in the positives, whether it be on the wrestling team, whether it be in community soccer, whether through the police officer, this keeps kids on the straight and narrow. As I say, we should never underestimate the power and importance of children and recognize that they have the tools and the capabilities if we support them in making a positive difference in maintaining and creating safer communities and neighbourhoods.

We need to counteract negative peer pressure, obviously, and we need to reward positive peer pressure, moving towards doing the right thing, being involved in your community. In the leadership programs I've run, students were required as part of their mark to volunteer 30 hours within a year, or 10 hours per term. The students weren't told what activities to engage in. It could be as simple as keeping their garage clean, walking the dog. But I had report after report after report from members of the community on how much their activities were appreciated.

So my message within Bill 212 and in Motion 510, that I'll be bringing in later this afternoon, is to recognize the positive potential of students and to encourage it. Thank you.

4:10

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a whole decade or more since I did stand before you and share my thoughts on any bill as a private member. I am really pleased to do so on Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act.

To the Member for Calgary-Hays: thank you for presenting this legislation before the Assembly, and I want to say thank you for a number of reasons. One, it is a priority of the government of Alberta to provide safe and secure communities. Our efforts to reduce crime and the degradation of our neighbourhoods are essential to providing a great quality of life for Albertans. Second, Albertans have always valued the family-oriented atmosphere that is present throughout this province. This government aims to continue this strong tradition by ensuring that Albertans feel safe on their streets and in their homes. Third, my constituents have articulated many times the need for more to be done to rid communities of illegal activity, especially known illegal houses.

The government of Alberta, through its various departments and agencies, places emphasis on crime prevention and protecting our communities from illegal activities because our objective is to ensure that Albertans are living in an environment which is conducive to a healthy lifestyle.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 212 offers a new alternative to approaching the criminal problems that are affecting communities throughout this province. The act aims to improve the safety of our neighbourhoods, which is commendable and will complement or enhance our current crime reduction efforts. The alternatives proposed in Bill 212 would assist and expand the current mechanisms that are in place to help protect our communities. We have well-trained and resourceful police services. There are also several active community-based crime prevention organizations within our province. As well, the Department of Justice is legally capable of enforcing laws that pertain to criminal activity, and municipal governments are within their authority to implement bylaws regarding unsafe or hazardous properties. However, I have a few communities which are having some difficulty even though we have these great programs.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that Bill 212 will build upon the current government framework and existing associations, supporting

their concentrated efforts to address the problems of criminally active houses in Alberta. I believe that we are currently doing an admirable job; however, as with most issues there is always potential for improvement. I would encourage the present departments and organizations that are relevant to crime prevention to continue to work together. I believe that if they use their resources efficiently and effectively, they will continue to produce successful results.

Alberta's police services are working tenaciously to improve on these results. Several accredited municipal police services exist throughout Alberta and are continuously engaged in the effort to provide safe and secure communities. The provisions under Bill 212 would serve as a tool to assist municipal police services and, hopefully, community organizations. Building on our strong foundation of municipal law enforcement is the RCMP. Although these policing branches may be separate in theory, practically they both share similar goals, which are focused on community-based crime prevention via intelligence-led and integrated policing.

Mr. Speaker, it should also be noted that all over Alberta we have a great number of organizations that concentrate on ensuring the prosperity and well-being of their respective communities by advocating against criminal activities. These organizations would greatly benefit from the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act.

Bill 212 fully supports and engages citizens who demonstrate a passion to better their respective town or city by establishing crime awareness and prevention organizations. It is important that I acknowledge a few of these valuable associations which are presently making significant contributions to mitigating crime in Alberta. Organizations such as the Alberta Community Crime Prevention Association, the Alberta Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association, and the national strategy on community safety are just a few of the groups that help Albertans create safer communities by increasing communication and enhancing citizens' knowledge about crime prevention and making a difference in their communities.

The Alberta Citizens on Patrol Association is an organization that works to provide safer communities across Alberta by involving its citizens. Members of ACOPA are volunteers who serve as the eyes and ears of their community. They take an active role in the safety of their communities by patrolling and liaising with local police agencies, performing surveillance, conducting research, executing checkpoints and traffic safety programs. The association, in fact, recently received a special honour during this year's Crime Prevention Week. ACOPA had the distinction of receiving a Solicitor General crime prevention banner in High Prairie.

At this time I would like to acknowledge the efforts of ACOPA's president, Brian Holmberg, and the strides that he has made. This High Prairie man should be proud because this banner is usually given to bigger centres, but because High Prairie is so involved with crime prevention, the Solicitor General chose this community as a place to hang the banner. So to ACOPA: keep up the great work, and continue to do the things that I believe are going to make communities safer.

Albertans will continue to receive support from the currently established authorities when they suspect that there are illegal actions taking place in their neighbourhood. Mr. Speaker, I encourage citizens to access and use the many programs and mechanisms that are currently available to them. Although strong communities require individuals who will actively clean up their neighbourhoods, like my ACOPA, Bill 212 would not support citizens that may not comprehend the restrictions of their participation and in certain cases exceed the limits of their authority. But we welcome the work that they do and continue to do. The bill would not promote excessive citizen vigilance that could possibly interfere

with the proceedings of important police investigations or conflict with the privacy rights of other individuals.

Alberta Justice will have the capacity to deal with derelict housing, drug houses, and fortified houses. Currently there are several statutes that enable the appropriate authorities to deal with unsafe properties. We have empowered our municipalities via the Municipal Government Act to establish bylaws that pertain to properties. For example, the Safety Codes Act allows accredited municipalities to investigate unsafe houses and take action accordingly. There are also sections in the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and the Public Health Act that provide detailed guidelines for dealing with unsafe and hazardous buildings when it is applicable.

Alberta's police services can work within the legislative framework to address unsafe property concerns. It is important not to create silos between the various police departments, community organizations, and Justice branches. I suggest that we continue on a course that further co-ordinates the efforts of all the respective parties. I believe that we should reduce obstacles that impede the sharing of information. It has been very beneficial to continue to use effective communication and exchange criminal intelligence. The knowledge of criminals and where criminal activity is taking place should be conveyed to the appropriate authorities.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure that communities recognize that the government of Alberta will continue to support an aggressive offensive to negate illegal activity. The safety and security of Alberta's communities are of utmost importance. The appropriate authorities need to be persistent and utilize all their capabilities to address the issues that arise from hazardous houses. As a province we must diligently focus on crime prevention because it is integral to ensuring a healthy and vibrant quality of life for all Albertans.

It is without question that criminal properties are affecting neighbourhoods throughout Alberta, in my area as well, creating feelings of fear and insecurity, something that I believe all Albertans don't want to have to feel. We must do everything we can to mitigate these feelings and improve the well-being of our neighbourhoods.

Mr. Speaker, not only do people come to Alberta for economic opportunities; they also come here because Alberta offers a great lifestyle for all people of different backgrounds, creeds, religions, and ethnicity. Our communities are a reflection of peace, co-operation, and respect. We must continue to advance this reality. If criminal properties are adversely affecting our neighbourhoods and decreasing Albertans' quality of life, they must be dealt with and dealt with swiftly. I wholeheartedly support the initiatives that concentrate on the government of Alberta's priority to provide safe and secure communities.

I believe that we can continue to deter criminally active homes by supporting community crime prevention organizations, using our extremely competent police departments, and prosecuting criminals through Alberta Justice branches as well as ensuring that the bylaws are followed by the municipal communities. Bill 212 will expand our capacity to do that job, and that is why I am offering my support. To the member: thank you for making sure that all communities do feel safe and that we have communities that can continue to thrive.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

4:20

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to speak in support of Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act.

I must commend the Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing this forward – it's a very important and timely bill – and for, you know, putting his extensive knowledge and experience into this bill. It's obviously very thoroughly thought through. It obviously goes through in detail many of the bases that would be necessary to make this a bill that could be passed by this Legislature this year. I think the timing allows for anybody in the public, in the break until the fall sitting that's scheduled, to come forward and bring forward any concerns on this bill. I think that my neighbourhoods in Edmonton-Manning would very much appreciate it if Bill 212 could become law by the time the year is over.

It is a comprehensive bill. For example, it respects the confidentiality of whistle-blowers. Remember that in some neighbourhoods where we have these types of activity established – you know, where there are gangs, where there are drug dealers, where there are some of these problems in a comprehensive manner, or where we have some new immigrant communities that might be a little bit more susceptible to pressures – this allows for whistle-blowers in the neighbourhood to let it be known that there are drug dealers, to let it be known that there are gang leaders operating out of houses, and to let it be known that they can do so in a way that's confidential and in a way that would not bring harm to them in a way that these drug dealers or gang leaders or whatever might choose to do if they knew.

In the way that the bill is written, you know, it speaks to specified uses. It looks at "the manufacturing, import, purchase, sale, transport, giving, possession, storage, consumption . . . of liquor." That's in 2(e)(i). Clause (ii) basically speaks to bootlegging, and (iii) speaks of a controlled substance under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act of Canada. It speaks in (iv) of "child sexual abuse or activities related to child sexual abuse." This is an area that needs tremendous surveillance and an ability to find out the activities of these criminals. "Prostitution or activities related to prostitution" is (v), and (vi) is "the commission or promotion of a criminal organization offence." Clause (vii) is "the accommodation, aid . . . or support of any nature of a gang or criminal organization." It does leave openings for others that may develop in (viii).

But the fact that it specifies these areas – and these have been areas in a lot of communities in our province. Certainly drug houses, certainly crack houses, certainly some of these fortified houses, which are spoken to specifically in the bill as well, have been a matter of great difficulty for our police in trying to control. Now, the use of surveillance as one part of that is important, and it has been getting much greater and widespread use by law enforcement authorities in the whole world.

I'll speak a little bit about the description of it from, actually, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, some information they put out.

The use of video surveillance to detect, deter and prosecute crime has increased significantly over the last few years – in Canada and abroad. Police and law enforcement authorities increasingly view it as a legitimate tool to combat crime and ward off criminal activity – including terrorism. Recent events have heightened the interest of public authorities in deploying video-surveillance in public places. It is widespread in the United Kingdom and increasingly used by law enforcement and anti-terrorism authorities in the U.S. and Canada, particularly since September 2001.

Here at home, police and public and security agencies monitor public parks and streets. Some cities have put in place video surveillance systems for specific festival periods. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) use cameras to monitor high-security areas such as Parliament Hill. Cameras are used to survey Canada-US border crossings. They are very extensively used in airports, and port authorities are becoming increasingly interested in using video cameras to monitor [activities].

We don't want to have a Big Brother society, certainly, but in looking at these specific criminal activities, to begin to use video

surveillance on some of these properties I think would be an important tool as this whole act is an important tool for our law enforcement agencies.

There are other types of technologies that can come into play, and many of them are new and developing and could develop over the next four years. You know, the importance of heat-detecting equipment: a couple of years ago, I think, the Supreme Court ruled on the allowability of the use of heat-detecting equipment to peer through homeowners' walls without violating the constitutional right to privacy. This type of activity by our police does not look to violate any constitutional rights, and I think that is clear. Some comments from the court: "Safety, security and the suppression of crime are legitimate countervailing concerns." That was from Justice Ian Binnie. "Patterns of heat distribution on the external surfaces of a house are not a type of information [which could give rise to] a reasonable expectation of privacy."

You know, the court was careful. "The nature of the intrusiveness is subtle but almost Orwellian in its theoretical capacity," the court wrote in a decision that ordered police to obtain search warrants for such surveys. It was the lower court that said that, but the Supreme Court disagreed, disputing the lower court's evaluation of the extent of the privacy breach. That shows that this type of technology is important and can be used.

There are many new technologies that may develop. I think it's important that we have a tool, a bill, a power that's given by this Legislature to our law enforcement agencies and officers to go forward and to deal with this very important area of making our communities safer and secure. Many of the other provinces are looking at it. Certainly, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and the Yukon Territory have already passed legislation and have had great success with this type of law. It would behoove, be important, and good for the government of Alberta to move forward on this type of approach.

I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that the demand problem in drugs is very much a difficulty and a problem that has to be looked at too. I believe that this does, in some senses, look to the demand problem as well because it could restrict the gang leaders, the drug dealers in trying to bring people into addiction, in trying to influence them into the use of drugs by being in their communities, by being in their neighbourhoods, and by having a readily available distribution potential.

This bill is very important, Mr. Speaker. I do support it. I hope it does go forward as soon as is reasonably possible or that a new government bill would come forward which would incorporate its ideas.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to join in the debate on Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for introducing this very thought-provoking piece of legislation. I support the intent of Bill 212 because it presents members with the opportunity to empower Albertans in procuring the safety of our communities. I cannot stress enough the importance of safe and secure environments for our families. Not only is this a priority for this government and this Assembly; it is a priority for all Albertans. Unfortunately, no single piece of legislation can deliver wholesale changes to the safety and security of our neighbourhoods. The fact is that there is no quick fix for dealing with crime. However, Bill 212 is a tool in terms of providing communities with what they need to address crime prevention in their neighbourhoods.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, by supporting a concept that strengthens community safety, this House is enabling individuals to protect their communities in a proactive manner. Albertans place a very high level of importance on family values and compassionate communities. With Bill 212 it is hoped that we will foster this ethos as Alberta leads the country as a bastion of safe environments to live, work, and raise our families in. While Albertans already have a profound sense of ownership and pride for their communities, this act reflects the sense of pride that so many individuals have as second nature. I'm pleased that this piece of legislation intends to address potential criminal activity through an avenue other than immediate criminal legislation. It represents the fact that Albertans are willing to work through the process of civil law to resolve matters of importance in their communities if it means expediency.

There is no shortage of questionable activities that threaten the safety and well-being of our communities. Mr. Speaker, residential crystal meth production, gang activity, and theft of personal property are challenges that all levels of government and law enforcement are continually dealing with. Bill 212 will provide a new community-based avenue to address these harmful behaviours.

These sorts of socially unhealthy activities are exacerbated as Alberta's population grows at an unprecedented rate. Between 2006 and 2011 Alberta's population is expected to grow 1.7 per cent annually, increasing the total population to nearly 4 million residents in 2011. With population growth so strong this Assembly owes it to Albertans to be open to the idea of new and innovative measures in strengthening our communities. With increasing development in commercial and residential areas it is no secret that these sorts of properties can serve as protection for criminals and gangs as a means of sheltering their activity from plain view.

Although Bill 212 is a proactive measure in dealing with these sorts of concerns, it is still important for this Assembly to give credence to the structural framework that we already have in place, a framework that is doing a fine job and one that has the capacity to continue to improve upon its mandate.

Mr. Speaker, in response to concerns from the community level this province funds a variety of grant initiatives that support and empower communities in addressing their respective crime issues and concerns. The Alberta community crime prevention, or ACCP, grant program is available as a part of Alberta's crime prevention strategy, founded on recommendations arising from the 1999 Alberta Summit on Justice. This grant, along with others, focuses on addressing the social and economic factors that may place individuals at risk to commit crime or be victimized, issues that threaten the safety of our communities. Situational crime prevention approaches like this are designed to deter criminal behaviour or make criminal acts more difficult to commit. This approach focuses on reducing the opportunity for crime to occur, increasing the risk of detection and reducing the rewards resulting from criminal acts. These sorts of organizations go to the root of the problems that often lead to instability in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, the government also supports a variety of other community networks that serve as the first point of contact in helping us understand some of the safety concerns that are emanating from communities. For instance, the Alberta Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association maintains a detailed network of partnerships that promotes an ever-vigilant, watchful eye on our rural communities. I'm in favour of supporting these entities through every appropriate measure. These groups do an excellent job in providing community awareness and set an example for public awareness. They deserve to be supported in whatever capacity necessary. When action must be taken against threats to community

safety, it is in our best interest to work with these sorts of valuable mechanisms.

All three levels of government are granted a variety of enforcement mechanisms to protect our communities from social disruption and criminal activity. Mr. Speaker, I am confident that our municipal and national police forces are endowed with the legal powers to investigate and provide the first level of safety management. I'm also confident that our hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security will agree that we are always working with our partners in law enforcement to address concerns of community safety that are expressed by all Albertans.

While the fight against organized crime, Mr. Speaker, is addressed in this bill, budget 2007 included \$1.5 million allocated to the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force. Funding initiatives such as this project support a dynamic framework designed to deal with drugs and gangs, among other social ills. In addition to last year's 4.8 per cent increase to municipal policing, budget 2007 included another 7.6 per cent, or \$11.5 million, for provincial policing.

Engaging your neighbours in dialogue and keeping a studious eye on activities, commonplace or questionable, are important parts of being a contributing member of one's community. Although this bill is ambitious and would require more consultation, it is important that we move forward and engage in meaningful discussion. Albertans currently have several channels to report suspicious activity. The provisions offered by Bill 212, if adopted, would provide another implement in the safety tool kit. Given our new government's resolve to provide safe and secure communities, I am pleased to see legislation of this nature. I support and encourage individuals to demonstrate concern for the safety of their communities.

Albertans should not rely on a false sense of security when dealing with the safety and security of their families and communities, but they should also not be spurned into feeling unsafe. This Assembly owes it to Albertans to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of legislation that will have a significant impact on the channels by which neighbourhoods deal with questionable activity in their neighbourhoods.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to support this bill and the positive role it will play in Alberta's communities. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to again add my voice to the discussion on Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, brought by the Member for Calgary-Hays. It is interesting that reports in the various papers today about people's perception of crime in their community find that the gap between perception and reality is increasing because people generally think that crime is on the increase. That has been the prevalent attitude of most people across Canada. The reality is that much of the crime statistics are actually declining, especially in areas of crimes like robbery and so on. But the gap between perception and reality is increasing. It's also important to note that there is a great deal of confidence expressed by the general public in our local police and the RCMP, which I find quite gratifying.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, what this bill deals with is not the general perception of crime but actually something very concrete; namely, the perceptions that people have about crime in their local communities. Of course, it's people in local communities that can best monitor and detect what is happening in their own communities.

I had a personal experience with this in my riding of Edmonton-Glenora. When in one particular community there were reports of

suspicious cars and strangers coming from outside the neighbourhood and entering into a particular house, a committee was formed of citizens within the community. This committee then contacted the police and also the MLA and also a member of city council, and we all met to discuss what we might do. Now, Mr. Speaker, I wish that we would have had this kind of legislation in place because this would have provided another tool for people in the community to be able to deal with situations which they see are really suspicious.

4:40

In general, I'm supportive of this kind of response. It is refreshing, actually. The usual response to crime these days, especially on the part of Conservative governments, is to focus on tougher sentencing and ignore crime prevention. Now, this isn't exactly crime prevention in the sense that it's dealing with programs that deal with young children to prevent crime, being able to anticipate crime in the future, and emphasizing programs that deal with education, and so on, but still it is in the area of raising the community awareness to try to detect where crime is taking place. It's another tool that people can use.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very empowering. Many members have already mentioned that. It's a question of empowering citizens in their own war on crime in the local community. Anything that empowers citizens to be more aware and to take back control of their own neighbourhoods by reporting problems that they see is really important.

This bill outlines a whole process in which a person can engage in making a complaint when residents see something that concerns them. There is a process of making a complaint to the director, and the director initiates an investigation. Now, it really would be important that that complaint be confidential. I don't know whether the Member for Calgary-Hays would like to respond to this issue. I searched in the bill for some assurance that such a complaint would be confidential. I mean, it would have to be held in strict confidence because of the possibility of recrimination on the part of people engaged in crime. So the complaint would have to be kept strictly confidential.

Then, once the complaint is received, the director launches an investigation. I suppose it's using some sort of team. In Saskatchewan it's the safer communities neighbourhoods investigation unit. I suppose what is in mind here is a similar kind of investigative team. After the investigation is made, the director has several options, including issuing a warning letter to the property owner, resolving the problem out of court, or applying for a community safety order through the courts.

The director. The definition of "director" in the bill is that this is the "Director of Law Enforcement appointed under the Police Act." I assume that that's the same director who has the oversight of all peace officers and sheriffs in the province. So it seems to me that the role of this director, the powers of the director, are increasing. I noticed also that in this act, in part 3, there's a reference to the use of peace officers. My question, I guess, to the Member for Calgary-Hays is that again peace officers and their role seems to be extended, broadened here.

It seems to me that peace officers were mainly going to be used for traffic control on the highways of Alberta. They weren't going to be used in an investigative way. I mean, it's the RCMP, it's our municipal police that are trained to do investigations. So I have a real question around the investigative power of the director and who the director is going to use in the way of investigators. Is he going to use retired police officers? Is he going to use civilian investigators? Is he going to use peace officers, who may not have very much training at all? How does the investigation happen in relationship to

the local police? They are obviously the ones that have the training to do these kinds of investigations. Are we going to have peace officers getting in the way of the local police? I think these are important questions in terms of putting this kind of bill into practice. Those are the questions I have right now.

I certainly approve of the intention of this bill. It's really important that we have safe communities in Alberta and that people be empowered to raise the awareness and to help each other locate where crime is taking place and to be able to have a mechanism to report and get some action. I compliment the member for bringing this to us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to speak to Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing such an excellent bill forward for debate.

The bill lives up to the expectations of nearly every Albertan, and that is, quite simply, to live in safe communities and safe neighbourhoods. I don't think any bill could capture its objectives any simpler. Bill 212 allows citizens to confidentially report activities that would threaten the safety of neighbourhoods and communities in Alberta. This bill aims to hold property owners and tenants accountable for unsafe activities that occur on their properties.

In examining this piece of legislation, it appears to me a very proactive tool which allows communities to take matters of safety into their own hands. This bill is not intended to place fear in the hearts of communities, and I do not think that Bill 212 is intended to feed paranoia between neighbours. We should perceive Bill 212 as a positive move to eliminate threatening and unwelcome activities such as drug houses, gang hangouts, or brothels from our communities.

I think all Albertans would appreciate that this Assembly is considering the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. Albertans value the ability to live in communities free of obscene activities. They want to raise families in a safe and loving environment. If activities that impede these desires from becoming reality are occurring in their neighbourhoods, it is incumbent upon us as legislators to protect individuals and their families. Bill 212 sends a clear message to criminals that their activities will not be tolerated in our communities.

There is no doubt that if criminal activities such as the manufacturing of crystal methamphetamine are occurring, these acts would be handled through the criminal process. Bill 212 answers the deeper concern of what occurs to the property where the illicit activities were taking place. Too often homes where gang activity or prostitution occur turn into incubators for ongoing criminal or illegal activities. There is a need to deal with this problem, to clean up or place restrictions on such properties, to put an end to what can quite simply be constituted as acts of depravity. Some may think that placing restrictions on a property owner as a result of another party's actions is unfair. Although there may be merit to that, it ultimately falls to the property owner to take the necessary precautions when renting out properties. If there appear to be suspicious activities being undertaken by a tenant, the landlord must be vigilant and not allow those individuals to occupy their property.

Landlords have a role in ensuring that communities are safe even if they do not live in the neighbourhoods where they own property. Mr. Speaker, placing the burden of responsibility on the property owner for undesirable situations is quite acceptable. Just as it falls

to members of a community to take leadership in the success and vitality of the community, it should fall to those who degrade the quality of community life to remedy its pitfalls.

The quality of community life is critical in maintaining a high quality of life for our entire province. If people feel that they are struggling with the scourge of illicit activities in their communities, how can they be expected to contribute fully to the life of their province? How can they feel that their children will grow up in safe and healthy communities? How can they go to bed at night knowing that drug dens or prostitution are taking root in their neighbourhoods? Mr. Speaker, no Albertan should have to put up with answering such questions. That is why it is critical that we empower Albertans through Bill 212 to take action in their communities.

4:50

Crystal methamphetamine is one example of what we are trying to counter. Last year a task force on crystal meth, led by our government, concluded that broad and co-operative community action was required to counter the impact that crystal meth is having on certain Albertans. Among its recommendations the task force asked government to get tough when it comes to the enforcing of the law as it pertains to crystal meth. They recommended that additional resources be put in place to get crystal meth labs and pushers out of the communities to end the impact it is having on children. Bill 212 lives up to that goal quite effectively by putting in place measures to remove drug labs and the great harm they cause from the community.

Mr. Speaker, I think Bill 212 would also find support from municipalities across Alberta. For example, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association requested that the Alberta government create more initiatives to further address the manufacturing of illicit drugs as well as their distribution. Although this example deals specifically with illegal drugs, municipalities have to bear the brunt of unrest in communities as they offer policing and other types of community support services. There is no doubt that municipal leaders care deeply about the quality of their communities and the ability of their residents to live in a safe environment. I am certain that they would be appreciative of what this act will accomplish.

Bill 212 also allows for the removal of fortifications such as bullet-proof materials or materials designed to be resistant to explosives from a door or window should they exceed acceptable security requirements. It seems self-evident that for those committing illicit acts, there should be no such thing as an acceptable security standard. This provision of the bill is critical in ensuring not only the safety of individuals but of law enforcement officials as well. I shudder to think about how drug dens or gang hangouts could be fortified to such an extent that it would be beyond the normal capacity of law enforcement officials to access the occupants of the property if illicit and criminal activities were occurring inside.

How could we as a society possibly tolerate the establishment of criminal fortresses in the midst of neighbourhoods and communities? I certainly cannot. Mr. Speaker, I doubt that many of the hon. members present at the moment would either. It is critical that homes or other types of properties are secure, and there are reasonable features available to permit people to be secure. But there is no room for security features that open the door to the types of fortifications that would put an individual beyond and above the law. If there is nothing else we can support in this bill, certainly there would be merit in ensuring that these provisions go forward.

Certainly, in looking at Bill 212, we may consider some of the reasons why certain forms of illicit activity are more prevalent at this time. I've addressed the rise of and the scourge of crystal meth. We are also aware of an increase in gang activity in different corners of

the province, which has led to an increase in the availability of different types of drugs as well as a rise in theft and vandalism. It's unfortunate that some of the increase in illicit activity is the result of the good economic times we are experiencing. It is sad but, regrettably, true. That is why Bill 212 presents part of the answer to combat crime.

There are other responses needed to make our communities and province a safer place to live. I for one am proud that I serve with a government that wants to provide safe and secure communities for all Albertans. Our Premier has emphasized the importance of safe communities, and he wants to find practical ways of reducing crime across the province. For a safer and crime-free Alberta to materialize, we have to keep in mind that the most effective way to bring this about is through local community measures. That's why I believe that the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act will bring about results for Albertans by allowing them to hold property owners accountable for illicit activities occurring on their properties.

Bill 212 quite effectively recognizes the need not only to punish criminal activity but also to ensure that secondary impacts resulting from the crime are addressed as well. Bill 212 closes off the cycle of crime by ensuring that properties housing illicit activities in one instance do not end up housing illicit activities again. The result of these two principles will be better and stronger communities.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting Bill 212, and I hope that my hon. colleagues will join me in doing the same. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, but the time allocated for consideration of this item has now elapsed. Thank you.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Minimum Age of Electors

510. Mr. Chase moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce amendments to the Election Act to lower the minimum age of electors in provincial elections from 18 years to 16 years.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You might find my sources of inspiration somewhat surprising, but one of my motivating forces is actually the policy of the Alberta provincial Conservative Party, who saw, in their wisdom, the capabilities of youth and allowed 16-year-olds to not only purchase party memberships but to make the ultimate leadership decision in voting for our Premier. I'm hoping that the same sort of enthusiasm and appreciation of the capabilities of 16-year-olds will allow them your support to vote for their Member of the Legislative Assembly as well as the leader of the government.

The core principle of citizenship is enfranchisement, having the right to vote. Other aspects of citizenship include public service of some kind – working in public office, serving in the military, the police, et cetera – but for most Albertans voting is often the only aspect of citizenship that they experience.

The current participation rates in elections are low. Voter turnout in the 2004 election was 44.7 per cent, the lowest in over 30 years. It is, therefore, impossible for a political party in this province to claim a strong mandate from the electorate because the majority hasn't even voted. Increasing the proportion of the public that votes should therefore be a priority.

One way of doing so is encouraging that engagement early in citizens' lives. If one starts voting when young, then one tends to

carry on voting all throughout one's life. One would hope that the enthusiasm of engaged youth would be contagious, and perhaps family members who may have lost interest or never formed it in the first place may be more motivated to explore issues and candidate positions and cast an informed vote. Youth are capable, ready to be engaged in the political process but need the system to be accessible to be relevant to them. Some may try to argue that youth are not interested in politics, are not mature enough, or don't have an adequate knowledge base to make informed decisions. However, one could accurately say that of many adults. We don't have an intelligence test or a means test that prevents adults from participating.

My first-hand experience with youth as a public school teacher of 34 years has permitted me to witness the energy, the enthusiasm, and the desire to explore current affairs, the solid grasp of issues and political process. Students have a thirst to participate, a thirst to be heard.

One example of the incongruity of the situation in which those below the legal voting age find themselves is demonstrated by the disparity between voting rights and financial contribution rights. The provincial Conservative Association is happy to take your money for a youth membership if you are 14. For \$5 you could vote last winter for the next leader of the PC Party and the next Premier, but come the next election you couldn't vote for your MLA. So a 16-year-old young PC in Vegreville could have paid for Ed Stelmach to become Premier, he could pay for his next election campaign, but he couldn't go and mark an X next to his name.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, before somebody rises on a point of order, I hope you have realized that we do not use names in this House.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I apologize for the use of the Premier's name. It was not out of lack of respect; it was getting caught up with the information. I apologize.

5:00

Of course, it isn't just the Progressive Conservative Party who allow memberships and attendant financial contributions younger than the voting age. The Alberta Young Liberals membership also starts at 14 as does the federal Conservative Party and the federal Liberals. Sixteen-year-olds can join the reserve forces and can get a driving licence. They can work too. In fact, the Alberta government briefly proposed but then swiftly aborted a move to allow children as young as 12 to work in bars and restaurant kitchens.

The province has some of the most liberal work regulations with regard to age in the country. In response to the uproar over this move, the Premier stated in the Legislature that

with respect to young people working in restaurants, sooner or later in this province, Mr. Speaker, younger people have to learn the value of hard work, work for their parents or maybe their relatives in a safe environment under good supervision. There is nothing wrong about people learning the ethics of work.

That comes from *Hansard*, March 20, 2007. Page 225 is the reference.

If there is nothing wrong with younger people learning the ethics and value of hard work, then surely the same logic should apply to the act of voting: the ethics and value of citizenship itself.

In 2005 Liberal MP Mark Holland, from Ajax-Pickering, introduced private member's Bill C-261 in the House of Commons. It was a nonpartisan, cross-party initiative that proposed to lower the federal age to 16. The fact that it was a Liberal who proposed it is only a historical reference. The bill was supported by both the NDP and the Bloc because they, like I, believe that anything that gets

more people interested in elections and interested early in voting is an important addition, in this case to Alberta's democracy.

Young people are often derided as cynical and uninterested in politics. Cutting them out of the political system doesn't help with that perception. Furthermore, lowering the voting age to 16 would allow schools to engage their students much more constructively over issues of voting and elections. All of a sudden these classes would become more real than they would be otherwise. The way to get young people involved in politics is to treat them with respect. The mark of respect in a democracy is the right to vote, and those over 16 should have that right. The Premier believes that young people should learn the value of hard work. We believe that young people should be respected as full citizens.

In preparing this motion, I had the opportunity to talk with young people. Through newsletters and direct send-outs to high schools I asked for student feedback, and I was pleased that I received a considerable amount of feedback. When I attended a social studies class at Sir Winston Churchill, one of the students asked: did I think that by allowing students aged 16 to vote, any party would be more likely to receive the benefit from student participation? I said that that, I believed, was highly unlikely. The worth of the candidate, the importance of the party's policies should trump any particular popularity.

I sincerely hope that my colleagues, regardless of their political affiliation, will support the intent of Motion 510, which recognizes youth's commitment, willingness, eagerness, maturity, and intellectual capacity to participate in the democratic process. For 34 years of my life I've witnessed first-hand the quality of students and their abilities to make important decisions whether they were in life or in classroom circumstances. I hope you support my enthusiasm and will support the motion to lower the voting age to 16.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to address Motion 510 regarding the proposed reduction of the provincial voting age from 18 to 16 years of age. I appreciate the hon. member's intention to involve more young Albertans in the governance process, but several steps have already been taken by the Alberta government which accomplish that goal.

In a democratic system voting is one of the most important civic responsibilities we have. All governments benefit from the guidance provided by the voting process. It is a reflection of the wants and needs of our constituents and tells governments how they should act in order to properly represent the will of their constituents.

As a province we benefit from an involved electorate. When Albertans are aware of the issues, we can all make more responsible decisions to address them. Because of the importance of civic involvement we instill democratic values in our children at a very early age. For example, we teach them history and about current events to better equip them with the knowledge necessary for the responsibilities which await them when they turn 18 years old.

In another attempt to involve Alberta's youth in our parliamentary system, Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta announced the formation of the Youth Secretariat in the spring of 1999. The secretariat was established to involve and further represent young Albertans. Some of the responsibilities and duties of this body are to identify key issues which affect youth and build on existing initiatives and partnerships to provide a mechanism through which issues impacting youth at risk can be identified and addressed.

Mr. Speaker, in June of 2000 a Youth Advisory Panel was established to provide an ongoing youth perspective on the work

done by the secretariat. The Youth Advisory Panel, or YAP as it's affectionately known, plays a critical role in providing the Youth Secretariat with a youth perspective and helps the secretariat identify important issues facing youth in Alberta. The panel provides the chair – and that is myself – and staff of the Youth Secretariat feedback and advice on proposed strategies, recommendations, and findings. The youth are available to comment on current initiatives and have an opportunity to propose improvements or new ideas to improve the quality of services for youth.

The Youth Advisory Panel is comprised of 16 to 18 youth from across Alberta ranging in age from 15 to 22 years old. Each panel member serves a one-year term. Panel members represent a variety of backgrounds and experiences, including members who are aboriginal as well as members who have received intervention services. The group also represents both rural and urban perspectives. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the Youth Advisory Panel may be invited to provide advice on other youth-related initiatives within the Ministry of Children's Services or other ministries.

With the creation of this panel Alberta is the only province to provide youth with the unique opportunity and privilege to be involved in government advisement. These are two of many initiatives which involve Alberta youth in the governance process.

Mr. Speaker, this government takes many steps like the Youth Secretariat and the Youth Advisory Panel to involve youth in the democratic process. I urge the hon. members of this Assembly to vote against Motion 510 because Alberta youth already have various avenues by which to get involved within the government process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm standing in support of Motion 510. Although I have great regard for the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, I couldn't disagree more with his position on the formal structures of government as being a way to introduce young people to be attracted to, to get involved in politics, and also to want to vote. So I'm going to take a different approach and look at this from why I think it's so important that young people get the right to vote at 16.

I had the experience in my constituency of door-knocking last summer, and I happened to meet some new people from Yugoslavia who had come into my constituency and lived in the community. One of their daughters was just starting, I think it was, her second year of political science. She now works in my office – she has just graduated in political science – and is a wonderful example of getting someone involved in politics at a very young age and the right to vote being very, very important.

5:10

Also – and maybe it's because of my age and needing lots of assistance – I've noted in my work with student councils and in my constituency office that there's a fair amount of interest from the young people in St. Albert. I hate to say this, Mr. Speaker: most of them are young ladies. In fact, we had eight of them out at our constituency breakfast the other morning, all talking about postsecondary education around a table. I wish the hon. minister of advanced education was there to solve some of these problems that they were raising.

Mr. Horner: You didn't call me. Why didn't you invite me, Jack?

Mr. Flaherty: Well, you were busy. I checked your schedule.

Anyway, the one thing that they wanted to ask the minister was

about the 70 per cent of the dollar that comes from the government to go to universities. They want to know what's happening to that.

The point I'm trying to make, Mr. Speaker, is that it's essential, I believe, to contact these people through informal kinds of situations. Again, I'll talk about Java with Jack, which we've had every year right after the session, in June. It's a wonderful way of contacting people and hearing about their concerns about government. One of the things we talked about this year was the whole question of getting involved and doing something about some of the conditions that students are faced with at university and school, doing something about that. The point is: at 16 why shouldn't they be able to vote and be involved?

I think, for example, some of the things I'm seeing at graduations this year – the number of women that are planning to go into medicine and law is just great. I think that one way to capture more people is to get them at a younger age and get them involved.

One of the things that I learned from my father – my father was a railroad conductor. I was very proud of my father. He was chairman of the railroad conductors. In fact, he got very involved with John Diefenbaker during the Canoe River train wreck, and he found Mr. Diefenbaker a very inspiring person. I think, again, that's another way of getting to know people, through travel, where you get to meet people and experience contacts and see them in action, see the different people. My father used to tell me how many people he would meet on the railroad that were in politics from across Canada and the impression that they made on him. I think that overly structuring things and not getting to see these people at a different level sometimes clouds a mystique about them.

Lois Hole to me is another perfect example of a very grassroots politician. As a trustee, as a member of the St. Albert community, as Lieutenant Governor what an impact she had on us. I can remember – and I probably shouldn't say this, Mr. Speaker – when she was meeting about 95 of us retired teachers in a room; I was chairing it, and she said: are there any press here today? I said: no. We sort of barred the doors, and she gave us a fairly Lois Hole insight into what the problems were in Alberta Education at that time, which we found very enlightening.

My approach to this and why I support it is that I think young people should be able to vote at 16. Sometimes the way we have to get to know young people is through getting them involved very early and letting them experience contact with the many of members of this House who are wonderful people. I think we should open the doors, where they can meet people and find out what they do and allow them to take part in their ability to vote in elections at the age of 16.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I just would like to make a few comments on this motion because I think it is a good one to debate in this House. It may surprise the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, but I happen to support this motion. I think that the Progressive Conservative party of Alberta showed tremendous foresight a number of years ago when it opened up voting for our leadership to 16-year-olds. We just went through a tremendously exciting leadership race where 16-year-olds were allowed to vote for our Premier. I think that the 16-year-olds brought a refreshing viewpoint to that leadership process. One of our problems in this province and, frankly, throughout Canada is that we simply don't have enough eligible voters who participate in the process. So my view is that if those of us who are over 18 are not going to exercise what I think is the responsibility of all of us, then maybe we should consider lowering the voting age to 16, and we might be surprised at how many of those 16- to 18-year-olds actually do value the fact that they have that incredible honour.

We have two by-elections tomorrow in this province. I'm not familiar with the by-election in Drumheller-Stettler, but I'm somewhat familiar with the by-election in Calgary-Elbow, and I would be very surprised if we had a very good turnout in that particular by-election. It wouldn't surprise me if the turnout was somewhere in the range of 20 or 30 per cent. We will have municipal and school board elections this fall, and again traditionally the turnout is very, very low.

I would suggest that if we can try 16-year-olds in adult court, we should let them have the right to vote, and if we can allow 16-year-olds to work in a workplace, I would suggest that giving them the right to vote is something that this Legislature should consider.

Mr. Speaker, I would support this motion.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Motion 510, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. The motion caused me to look at the debate that ensued following the attempts on the part of two young girls in Edmonton, high school students, teens, who were grade 10 and grade 11 students at the time, in 2001. Any time we can draw the attention of the electorate, the citizens of this province, to the whole question of the electoral process, the importance of elections, the importance of our right as citizens to vote is a good thing, and this motion I think serves that purpose. I should say at the very outset that I certainly am in support of this motion, as I was in support of the attempt in 2001 by these two high school students to seek the right to vote as a youth turned 16.

Mr. Speaker, just a reference to the history of the right to vote. The extension of the right to vote to more and more people in regard to the so-called universal suffrage was replete with resistance to the idea of expanding the right to vote because it was seen as a threat to the integrity of the electoral system. We in this House last week were paying tribute to a woman, an Albertan, who in 1917 took actions which then led women in Canada to have full citizenship rights, and the election of women to this Legislature resulted from her efforts. We need to keep this in mind. There's always this kind of resistance. We need to pay attention to that. We shouldn't put unnecessary roadblocks in the way of expanding the right to vote. We had similar laws prior to that, you know, which disenfranchised people based on whether they owned property or not or had educational levels that met the standards of the time or if they belonged to a particular ethnic or racial group. All of those matters have to be kept in mind when debating a matter as serious as this one, which constitutes consideration to extend the right to vote to young people at 16.

Having said that and having expressed my support for the motion, I want to just again caution ourselves with respect to our expectations that simply lowering the age would necessarily increase participation. More will have to be done. This is not a sufficient step; it's a necessary step towards reforming our electoral system. In one of the recent federal elections the participation rate for voters between 18 and 20 years was one of the lowest: 20 per cent. So the assumption that simply entitling a new group of citizens in our province to vote would necessarily lead to an increase in participation in voting either of that group or of all of us in general is something that we should take a hard look at.

5:20

We need to do a lot more. We need to improve the integrity of the legislative process altogether. We need to make this House a lot more significant in the lives of Albertans than it has been over the

last dozen years at least or more. We need to encourage a much greater role for the Legislative Assembly in the process of governance in the province. What we have seen over the years is a decline in the relative importance of the role of the Legislature vis-à-vis the executive, that is. We need to strike a new balance between the powers of the executive and the powers of the Legislature.

We are beginning to take some steps in that direction, but we need to go a lot farther. I think we need to also make sure that every vote that's cast counts and counts equally, and some sort of proportional system of voter representation would be a sure way of achieving that goal. If you take a variety of steps in tandem, I think we will likely achieve the result of both, making our whole system more democratic, more open, more participatory, and also one that people pay attention to. As people pay more attention to a system and find its activities meaningful to their day-to-day lives, they tend to become participants. So increasing participation in elections will require expanding the universe of those who can vote, surely, but in addition to that, other steps. Call a citizens' assembly. Put this matter as one of the items that should be debated at that one. So this motion, in fact, allows us, then, to open up the opportunities for all of us to engage each other in debate to improve upon the electoral system that we have.

Funding for elections, funding for political parties, funding for our leadership campaigns of political parties: all of these matters are vital to the goal of strengthening and broadening our electoral system and democratic system so that more and more citizens feel engaged and want to involve themselves in its workings. So, Mr. Speaker, I support this motion and certainly urge other members to do the same.

When those teenagers took their matter to the court to seek entitlement to vote, it really did open up some new opportunities for people to think about. I remember that in 2001 and 2004 I visited many high schools in the province. I remember my visit to Aberhart high school in Calgary, a very good school, and I was amazed how these high school students were most interested in what was happening here, their questions to me. They interrogated me and rightly so as a politician, and when they were engaging me in debate, that showed to me that they are in fact, indeed, honestly interested in being participants in the system in a meaningful way.

We have high school social studies curricula which focus on citizenship, rights and responsibilities, and opportunities to change the things that we don't like, to improve things from the way they have been. Young people usually have a lot more enthusiasm for these things and a lot more energy as well. But we need to acknowledge that they have the capacities. We need to make sure that they have the rights in order to be able to exercise those capacities and invest in those capacities in improving our democratic system. Similarly, I visited several schools in Edmonton and the same thing.

The interest of students at the high school level is stimulated by this court action taken by the students at the time. So what we need to do is to find ways of stimulating interest among young people and mature citizens as well in the question of how to make our democracy stronger, how to make it more representative, how to make it more responsive, how to make it more effective, and how to use this engagement to improve the democratic governance to which we are all committed.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll close my remarks. I do support this motion for the reasons given.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for presenting this motion to lower the voting age

to 16, and I appreciate the remarks of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. He has a great background in education.

I have the same experience in dealing with high school students, and I just want to give one example. During the last election I had the opportunity of participating in a forum at Ross Sheppard high school, which is located in Edmonton-Glenora. At first I thought: well, this is not going to be that important because there are not too many voters in the crowd, a few 18-year-olds and 19-year-olds who are still making their way through high school. So at first I wasn't sure how seriously to take it.

When I went to the forum – it was held in the gymnasium – there were between 2,000 to 3,000 students gathered there. The whole experience was just simply electrifying. All the candidates were up on the stage. At first we were grilled by the students, who had just extremely intelligent, interesting questions which really pressed us to answer and respond to the issues. It was like a leadership convention. There were students with signs for the various candidates up in the bleachers on both sides of the gym. It was just a most exciting time.

They also had a vote amongst the students in the high school – they didn't reveal their vote until after the general election – and the results of the vote were exactly the same as the general election in our riding, fortunately for me, which shows that there's the same level of intelligence and deliberation about the candidates as there was amongst the adult population.

So, you know, it's wrong for us to think that among the young people there are people who are too cynical, not interested, and not mature enough. I mean, frankly, Mr. Speaker, that's paternalism. There are just as many people who are too cynical and not interested and not mature enough among the adult population. Probably the percentage is about the same.

In fact, among students, especially at the high school age, you have some highly informed students who know about the political process. One example of this highly informed component of high school students is the TUXIS Parliament. The TUXIS Parliament is a long tradition in Alberta of having students come from various high schools throughout the province to spend time, usually here in Edmonton, to form a parliament and to become acquainted with parliamentary democracy. They really prepare hard. They understand the party process and the British parliamentary system. They form the government; they form the opposition. Somebody is the Premier; somebody is the Leader of the Opposition. They have debates on the same kinds of issues that we debate here in the House. It's quite amazing to watch them in action.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that in terms of principles our youth are the future of our province. They are the foundation upon which our province will be built in the future. It's important for us to involve them in the political process as soon as possible. I'm just very impressed by the work of our social studies teachers in high schools that engage the students in becoming more knowledgeable about politics.

5:30

It's true, Mr. Speaker, that generally 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds may not know a lot about party politics. Most adults don't know a lot about party politics. But ask young people about such issues as globalization, climate change, the war in Iraq, or AIDS in Africa, and they have clear opinions, and they'll debate those issues quite eloquently, referring to all kinds of evidence and so on. So I think it's a mistake for us not to engage them in the political process and enable 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds to vote.

I think there's considerable literature on psychological and moral development. I think of the famous psychiatrist Erik Erickson, who

illustrated the stages of growth. Young people who are at the age of 16 and 17 are in a stage of psychological and moral growth where they begin to discuss the big issues of our time, the universal issues, not just personal ethical issues but ethical issues that involve the whole of humanity. So that's why they're quick to engage in discussions of things like climate change.

Mr. Speaker, I really support this motion to extend the voting age down to 16. I think it would be great. I hope that in the future I will face a similar crowd at Ross Sheppard high school, and I'll know that among the 3,000 students there half of them will be voting in the general election. That'll make a huge difference in terms of the way we approach politics, getting our youth involved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to rise to voice my support and my gratitude for my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity, who introduced this motion lowering the voting age for Albertans from 18 to 16, Motion 510.

I'm going to start by putting two arguments on the record. One argument, which has been briefly touched on, is the participation rate, the voter turnout rate that we have seen in this province and which we have seen drop in this province over the last 30 years. Take 2004, for example, Mr. Speaker. The voter turnout was at an all-time low of 44.7 per cent, the lowest in over 30 years. You know, whether people stayed home or whether people actually intentionally chose not to vote in 2004 is beside the fact. The fact is that more people did not vote than who did. It is, therefore, impossible for any political party in this province to claim a strong mandate from the electorate because the majority did not vote. They chose not to.

Increasing the proportion of the public that votes should therefore be a priority, and it should be a priority for everyone involved in this House. One way of doing so is by encouraging the engagement early on of Albertans, people in their late teens, you know, 16, 17, and 18. If one starts voting when they're young, then the trend is likely going to continue, and they're probably going to exercise that franchise every time the opportunity arises.

Young people are often derided as being cynical or uninterested. We've heard examples from different sides of the House that, indeed, they are interested and they are connected. They're trying to learn, and they're trying to ask questions. They're trying to be active participants, not just bystanders or observers. Sometimes they do this with more energy and more interest than their parents, for example. So cutting them out of the political system doesn't help that perception. I think we should do the opposite. We should really say: "Okay. If you are really this much into it and you're really that interested, here is a tool for you. Here is our way of empowering you to make your voice heard, to participate." It's all about participation, Mr. Speaker.

Lowering the voting age to 16 would also allow schools, as mentioned by my hon. colleagues from Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Glenora, to engage their students more and more constructively over issues of voting and elections. All of a sudden, Mr. Speaker, you're going to have classes where these students are talking about something that is real, something that they can actually feel and take ownership of, something they can participate in instead of something that is just theoretical or something they hear about second-hand.

Now, one of the other reasons why I'm approaching this is the angle of democratic renewal. Voting and elections and people registering their voice is one component of democratic renewal, but

there are many more pieces to this puzzle. Democratic renewal is an area which I care about, and it's an area that I'm really interested in.

We've heard some remarks from hon. members, in particular the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, who listed some of the initiatives and some of the agencies or directorates or secretariats that are there in the government to engage youth, and that's all wonderful. My argument is that it shouldn't really stop there. If we engage youth in government operations and government decisions, that's one way to do it. The other way is to give them that franchise which I spoke about.

I can also give an example of the Youth Environment Summit, which was actually held in Kananaskis last year. It was sponsored by the then Minister of Environment, and all MLAs in this House were invited to nominate or delegate young people to go and discuss issues surrounding the environment. I was really pleased and quite impressed that I had many applications from people that wanted to go, and instead of just sending one, I actually sent three to that youth summit. The condition which I imposed on them, Mr. Speaker, was that they come back and report to me what they learned. I said: "There has to be an outcome; there has to be a result. You guys go, learn as much as you can, interact, talk to other delegates, and then come back and tell me what you learned." I was really impressed with the report that they gave me, and in fact I actually ended up putting it in my newsletter, saying: here are the three young ladies which I sent, and here's what they learned, and here's what they're sharing with their community. It was amazing, and I think we should do more of that.

Take my own campaign, Mr. Speaker. The youngest person on my campaign in 2004 was 12 years old, and then we had everybody between 12 and 83. The oldest was 83. They were equally energetic. These guys were equally effective and instrumental in getting me elected to this House. I had many people who were under the age of 16 who were door-knocking, and they were on fire. They were amazing in their style and in their effectiveness in reaching out to people. I was so impressed with their work during my campaign. Unfortunately, they could not vote themselves. They couldn't wait for that opportunity when they turned 18, so I know I'm speaking for them.

I also had an election promise, Mr. Speaker, where I said: elect me, and I'm going to engage young people; I'm going to talk to young people. I started an initiative called Young McClung, which basically meets once a month. We try to meet once a month. The only two times a year when we don't is basically during July and August because people go away, so we have a hiatus. Like my hon. colleague from St. Albert, who calls it Java with Jack, I call it Mocha with Mo. We actually meet nine or 10 times a year, and in September it's going to be my fourth season. Something I promised; something I kept.

Now, what do I gain from meeting with the young people? We actually gain a lot. The young people chair the meetings. The young people attend the meetings. They do the talking. They do the hosting. I just sit there and take notes, and I answer the odd question. It is tremendous. These people invite guest speakers. They actually look after reservations with the local coffee places in my constituency. They even held two all-candidate forums in the federal election in 2006, and they invited all the parties to be represented. They actually did that, and it was tremendous. We had some of the parents commenting: "You know what? No one else is doing this." None of the parties were interested. It's good that a nonpartisan youth group did that on their behalf, and they were particularly appreciative.

They also volunteer in the constituency. They do outreach. They do fundraising for charity and a whole gamut of initiatives that they

come up with and they chair. All I require of them is to come back and report to me, and they put a little article in my newsletter talking about youth outreach and what they do and what they learn. Actually, it's quite contagious, too, because every youth brings their friends and their siblings, and it keeps growing, Mr. Speaker. It is really heartwarming and gratifying that we have this dedicated block of citizens that are so far untapped. I think we should really allow them to exercise that franchise which I mentioned.

5:40

The other thing that they did on my behalf is that they added me to a new online tool now called Facebook. I'm not sure if you know about it, Mr. Speaker, but I really urge you to go on Facebook and see how many friends you make in your constituency and across Alberta and even across Canada and the world. You would be surprised, and you would be surprised at the quality of these young people and what they know and what they hope to learn.

Take this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. It is no secret that the youngest member in this House is the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, who is 34 – he's really young – and then myself being the second youngest. I'm 36. I think we should really have a 20-year-old in this House. We should have an 18-year-old. You know, there is nothing to prevent them from seeking public office. I think one way to encourage them to jump into that fray, to take that first step is to allow them to vote. If we argue that cynicism sets in between the ages of 18 and 24, I think we should bypass that troubled time and start at 16. If they start early, they're likely to continue.

Seniors vote. I think the second block after that would be young people who are really likely to vote. I think we should grant them that opportunity and not deny them that opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take my seat because I'm interested in hearing other speakers and, you know, listening to where they stand on this issue. I thank you for this opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to acknowledge and thank the Minister of Education and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for their support and recognition of the capabilities of young people. I'd also like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for using as an example the students of William Aberhart high school, which just happens to be in Calgary-Varsity. There are several wonderful teachers there, but a teacher by the name of Martin Poirier teaches history and also is a debate coach. A number of his students have gone on to be very successful. Of course, I would like to thank my Liberal colleagues from St. Albert, Edmonton-Glenora, and Edmonton-McClung for their support.

In my career as a teacher one of the subjects that I taught was social studies. I required my students in my social studies class each Friday to present a current event. I didn't say what their source had to be. It had to be some form of media source. Some students, because they got to choose their own topic and a topic of interest, would choose entertainment. Other students would talk about hockey. But the majority of students – and these were grades 8 and 9 students – chose to talk about political events. It didn't change their mark. There were no extra benefits for choosing political concerns. That was their own natural choice.

I believe that Alberta's future and most important resource is our youth. I believe that by engaging youth at an early age, engagement will continue into later life, and that is why I proposed the lowering of the voting age to 16 from its current 18.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 lost]

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, given the hour I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:45 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, June 12, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/06/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of the Rockies, the denseness of our forests, the fertility of our farmland, the splendour of our rivers, the richness of our resources, the energy of our people. Then let us rededicate ourselves as wise stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of introductions today, so if you'll bear with me. First of all, I'd like to say that as a proud parent I know the pride that all parents have in their children, and grandparents as well. So today it's a particular pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the proud mother and the proud grandparents of our head page, Jennifer Huygen. I'm sure that all members of this House will agree with me that Jennifer has done an absolutely outstanding job as a page in this Legislative Assembly, and we, too, consider ourselves as proud parents in that sense.

Jennifer is attending the University of Alberta faculty of arts program, and last year she received the University of Alberta scholastic distinction scholarship, the millennium excellence award, and the Governor General's award for highest academic average in grades 11 and 12. Jennifer also enjoys figure skating and Pilates and is a University of Alberta *Gateway* news writer and a member of the Red Cross youth group.

Mr. Speaker, seated in your gallery is Susan Huygen, mother of Jennifer and a constituent in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Susan is a research assistant with the department of medicine at the University of Alberta hospital. Accompanying Susan are Andy and Marge Bourgeault, Jennifer's grandparents, who I'm told are very much enjoying retirement. I know that they're proud of Jennifer as our head page, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two special guests. Mr. Chris Gowers is a constituent of mine and also the international service director for Rotary Club of Edmonton West. With Chris is Mariana de Leon Moreno, a 19-year-old Rotary youth exchange student from the city of Zapopan in the metropolitan area of Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco in Mexico. Mariana is here on a one-year student visa attending Ross Sheppard high school since August of 2006. I had the pleasure of meeting with Mariana today. She likes public speaking, arts and crafts, and design and hopes to pursue studies in communications and work in radio and television. While here Mariana has done hiking in the mountains near Nordegg, travelled to Yellowknife and flown over a caribou herd in the far north and built an igloo. She's also flown over the city of Edmonton, gone to an Edmonton Eskimo football game, an Oilers game, and Stars on Ice with Jamie Salé and David Pelletier, and many more activities. She's experiencing our food, our language, our culture, and is sharing with us what her country of Mexico is all about. I would ask Mariana and Chris to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have the singular privilege today of introducing to you and through you to the Assembly 17 key stakeholders who every day make an immeasurable contribution to public health in Alberta and to the wellness of people across the province. Our guests come from many diverse backgrounds, but all have been invaluable in the advancement of a province-wide tobacco reduction strategy, and they're here today to mark the introduction of Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007. Albertans support and indeed demand that we as policy-makers take resolute action in protecting the health of the province.

Our guests are seated in the public and members' galleries, and I'd ask that the House hold its applause until all visitors have been introduced. Dr. Tony Fields, vice-president of medical affairs and community oncology, Alberta Cancer Board; Dr. David Johnstone, clinical director, Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute; Dr. Roger Palmer, dean of the School of Public Health, University of Alberta; Mr. Greg Eberhart, registrar of the Alberta College of Pharmacists; Dr. Darryl LaBuick, president-elect, and Mr. Mike Gormley, executive director, Alberta Medical Association; Mr. Joe Rodgers, board member, and Ms Barb Davis, vice-president, provincial services division, AADAC; Ms Ingrid Meier, board member, and Ms Gina Smith, vice-president, health initiatives, Lung Association of Alberta and the Northwest Territories; Dr. Ian Montgomerie, chair, board of directors, and Ms Angeline Webb, cancer control analyst, Canadian Cancer Society, Alberta and Northwest Territories; Ms Kay Olsen, second vice-president, and Mr. Ken Kobly, chief executive officer, Alberta Chambers of Commerce; Dr. Roger Hodgkinson, honorary chair, and Mr. Les Hagen, executive director, Action on Smoking and Health; and Mr. Ken Chapman, policy consultant with the campaign for a smoke-free Alberta. Heather Jubenvill, a teacher with Nellie McClung who won an excellence in teaching award, and 12 of her students of the BLAST team had hoped to be here, but they had to stay at school and prepare for exams. I'd like all of my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome and thanks from our Assembly.

A final introduction, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly six students from Bosco Homes' smoking cessation and education program who are here to mark the introduction of Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act. Accompanying the students are Dr. Milan Njegovan, addictions clinician; Kathy Clarkes, Bosco jurisdiction vice-principal; Jarret Mymko, teacher; and Jody Zacharkiw, smoking cessation project teacher. The guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you didn't miss anyone?

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have but one introduction to give you this afternoon. It is an honour, though, for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of grade 6 students from Greystone Centennial middle school in Spruce Grove. There are 138 visitors in total, with two groups in the members' gallery and two groups in the public gallery, a very bright group who participated in the mock Legislature this morning and had some very interesting debate, I might add. The future of Alberta is very well represented in our two galleries today. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. St. Amand, Mrs. Scanga, Mrs. Papp, and Mrs. Steigel. I would ask all of the students and their teachers and parent helpers to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we're accompanied by Muriel and Arthur McMurdo. Mr. McMurdo is an example to all of us that no matter how late in life, we all can change and improve. He spent most of his life in Saskatchewan, where he was a staunch NDP supporter, was educated by Tommy Douglas, became the province's first full-time Crown prosecutor, and in 1960 the NDP government appointed him to the provincial bench. His cousin on the other side Agnes Macphail was Canada's first female MP, elected in 1922. However, he now resides in Edmonton and at the age of 82 has purchased his first PC membership. See, there is always hope. Both of them are accompanied by my muse, Stacey Brotzel. I would ask them to rise in the public gallery and receive the warm traditional welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka it's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly five members from the Lacombe action group. Seated in the members' gallery are Sandra Abma, Bob Doherty, Nick Nibourg, Trevor Taylor, and Tracey Oliver-Forbes. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As part of my ongoing celebration of Edmonton being named the cultural capital of Canada in 2007, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Kerry Mulholland. Kerry is the acting executive director of the Writers' Guild of Alberta. The Writers' Guild of Alberta is a provincial arts service organization that represents nearly a thousand professional and emerging writers from across the province. Their mission is to promote, encourage, and support writing and writers in the province and to safeguard the freedom to read and to write and to advocate for the well-being of writers. They offer a number of programs, including a summer camp for kids age 12 to 18 who love to write, and an annual conference. This year that will be in Grande Prairie and culminate with the 2007 Alberta literary awards. I would ask Kerry to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, I have pleasure today in introducing to you and through you to this Assembly my constituency STEP student, Mr. Rob DeSandoli. He is in his third year at the University of Lethbridge, studying political science, and is interested in international policy. Rob is from B.C. and has enjoyed comparing how democracy is practised in B.C. and Alberta. He is a marathon runner and has competed in the Vancouver marathon every year since '05, having won his age category in '05 and '06. Rob is capable of a seven-minute mile. He must enjoy speed because he drives race cars as well. Many of us have had the opportunity to introduce our STEP students and their accomplishments. If these young people are an indication of our future, we are indeed in good hands. I would ask Rob to stand and receive the traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Chris Samuel. Chris has been with the NDP caucus for the past three years and is currently our director of research. Previously he worked for the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona as his constituency assistant. Chris has been

a long-time NDP activist. He and his partner, Cory, have been involved in the GLBT community for a number of years. He was also the cohost for CJSR's *Gaywire*. Chris is very dedicated and has contributed immensely to our day-to-day work in this Assembly. We appreciate his hard work and support. I would now call upon him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Margaret Siemens and Betty Welch. Margaret and Betty are constituents of mine in Edmonton-Calder, and both are members of the Calder Seniors Drop-in Centre. They are here today to add their voices to a growing number of Albertans who want the government to implement rent guidelines. Margaret grew up in Edmonton before heading to Winnipeg, but then she loved her home province so much she returned in 1976. Betty was born and raised here in Edmonton and has lived here all her life. Betty has worked for Goodwill Industries for 37 years, and she's a wonderful guitar player and musician. I would now ask them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'm pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the House a visitor from India, Poromesh Acharya. Poromesh Acharya is a noted scholar and highly respected public intellectual in India. He has served as a member of the Education Commission in the state of West Bengal, on the Indian Council of Historical Research, based in Delhi, the government of India Curriculum Review 2005 National Steering Committee, and the National Literacy Mission Authority. He's a retired India councillor, a historical research fellow in education, and an accomplished author in Calcutta. Poromesh has also worked with UNESCO as an education researcher. He is seated in the public gallery, and now I'll request him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is of Wayne Moen and Henry Maisonneuve, both members of the Old Strathcona Foundation. Wayne serves as the past president of the Old Strathcona Foundation, while Henry is the current president. The Old Strathcona Foundation is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization. It was founded in 1974 to support the ongoing evolution and enrichment of the area's character. The Old Strathcona Foundation's main objective is to oversee the development of the Old Strathcona heritage conservation area while trying to balance the needs of the residents, businesses, and visitors. This year the Old Strathcona Foundation is celebrating Strathcona's centennial along with its traditional events, like the Silly Summer Parade and the art walk. I've been honoured by the foundation this year to be appointed as the lord mayor of the Old Strathcona area. I will now ask that Wayne and Henry please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Reynolds-Alberta Museum

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The preservation of our cultural heritage is critical for future generations to understand the

past. Our province's centennial celebration in 2005 reminded us of Alberta's rich history and the need to keep history in the forefront of people's minds. The Reynolds-Alberta Museum, in my constituency, is an award-winning museum which attracts thousands of tourists each year. Last year the museum presented the Life and Times of the Motorcycle, which attracted 100,000 visitors. This past weekend I had the pleasure of attending the opening of a new exhibit, Showin' Off, a unique display of 50 of the museum's rare, unusual, and one-of-a-kind vintage cars. The display runs all summer.

The elements are in place for the Reynolds-Alberta Museum to be a landmark museum in North America. The automobile, agriculture, and transportation artifacts are outstanding educational tools for future generations. It is also the home of Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame and has a collection of 86 vintage aircraft, the second-largest collection in Canada.

The Reynolds-Alberta Museum is also well served by the fact that the city of Wetaskiwin has embraced an active program of historical restoration. Notably, the city refurbished the old Wetaskiwin courthouse into a new city hall, which will be opened on September 15. The combination of Wetaskiwin's historical theme and the Reynolds-Alberta Museum presents a strong case for using tourism to boost the economic potential of that region. As a result of this potential, the Friends of Reynolds-Alberta Museum are spearheading a regional tourism study to map out the future of the museum.

Knowing our past is critical to understanding our future. The Reynolds-Alberta Museum presents a unique opportunity to this province to educate both young and old on the mechanization of Alberta. We have the means to support the preservation of our history and attract tourists to this world-class destination. Now is the time to build a lasting legacy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Volunteer Organizations

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday I did part one of a member's statement on the status of not-for-profit agencies in Alberta. I expressed my concerns over the change in funding from core to project or contract and the resulting erosion of capacity of the agencies. I also talked about the extreme circumstances being faced by many, many organizations as their top managers are lured away. Higher costs from choices this government has made in electrical deregulation, the wide-open insurance market, and a refusal to bring in temporary rent caps have also restricted the capacity of charities, their staff, and volunteers.

I ended up speaking about the increasing competition for fundraising dollars as smaller groups go up against schools and other academic institutions and against hospitals and health foundations. Added to this is the distaste or even the ethical crisis that many organizations feel in pursuing gambling dollars in order to subsidize a service which may well be extensively used by those very same gambling clients.

Mr. Speaker, these are resilient, resourceful, determined people working and volunteering in this sector, but they are struggling with a lack of understanding by government about how they work and what they need to survive. Charities, not-for-profits, and organizations run by volunteers are not free. They are extremely cost-efficient, tight with a penny, and very well managed, but they are not free. The choices this government continues to make in under-resourcing this sector are showing their toll. This is a great part of our society. They deserve to be treated as the valued partners that

they are. Please study carefully the reports and recommendations of the Canadian volunteerism initiative and listen to your local organizations for their suggestions and advice on how to achieve better partnerships.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

1:20

Wyatt Broughton

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to honour the story of an incredibly inspiring Albertan. Wyatt Broughton, a five-year-old boy from Red Deer, represents a modern-day miracle. Just two weeks before Wyatt was due, his parents, Shelley and Todd Broughton, discovered that Wyatt would be born with some health problems, the extent of which they were unsure. Following his birth, the doctors informed his parents that Wyatt had bladder exstrophy, two holes in his heart, and a missing valve in his pulmonary artery.

Mr. Speaker, Wyatt's first surgery occurred when he was only nine months old, and he has had 16 more since. Add to that over 150 X-rays, Botox injections, tests, scopes, blood work, and numerous other scans. Wyatt has congenital heart disease, chronic lung disease, and severe reflux. He cannot swallow and is completely deaf as well as blind in one eye.

Mr. Speaker, with Wyatt meaning "little fighter," it is truly a fitting name for him. Even while presented with such tremendous adversity, Wyatt remains forever enthusiastic. He continues his intense passion for life, inspiring all those who interact with him, and persists to embody a modern-day miracle. I invite all those who think they are having a bad day or week to hear Wyatt's story. This young boy remains in good spirits through the toughest of odds every day of his life. What a pleasure it was for me to attend a fundraiser in his honour on June 2 in Warburg, where 650 people from the Drayton Valley-Calmar constituency and surrounding areas came together to help this little fighter.

Mr. Speaker, both he and his family highlight the aspects of life which we should all hold most dear. For his continued enthusiasm through adversity which he cannot control, I would like to honour this young man in this House. In fact, I ask all those present today to duly recognize Wyatt's miracle story and inspiring journey through life.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Farm Safety

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to remember the life of Kevan Chandler. Almost a year ago, June 18, 2006, Mr. Chandler was killed while working at a feedlot in southern Alberta. His death was tragic. It was unacceptable and has had lasting effects for his family.

All Albertans deserve the security of knowing that their loved ones will return home to friends and family at the end of the day no matter what they do for a living. Mr. Speaker, let us dedicate ourselves to prevention. This is perhaps the single most important thing we can do because legislation alone cannot eliminate workplace or farm injuries or fatalities. Getting good, valuable information out to producers and families and farmers about safety practices is key to eliminating injuries and fatalities. That's the goal of the government's farm safety program: to address farm safety awareness and workplace safety best practices. The more we can raise awareness of workplace and farm safety, the more people will return home unharmed.

Alberta is striving for a culture of health and safety that is commonplace regardless of where people work or what they do for a living. I encourage all members of this Legislature and all Albertans to do their part in helping to create this culture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. At a time when Alberta is experiencing unparalleled economic growth, this government has saddled Alberta's school boards with rapidly shrinking budgets. For months school boards have been voicing their concern over budget shortfalls. Last night the Minister of Education confirmed what public education is up against. The minister stated: the budget is the budget; education in Alberta is adequately funded. It is ironic that the minister made this comment on a night when the Catholic school trustees in Edmonton approved an operating budget with a shortfall of a full \$15 million. Clearly, the minister is either out of touch with funding realities facing school boards throughout Alberta or he just doesn't care.

The Catholic school board announced last night that the funding shortfall has forced them to cut their infrastructure and maintenance budget by 55 per cent. The school board will also experience significant challenges stemming from a mere 3 per cent increase in their operating funding. This increase falls short of the 8 per cent school board funding required and will provide significant hardship in curriculum updates and special-needs education.

Beyond providing challenges to the school board, this funding shortfall also demonstrates a lack of foresight on the part of this government by failing to provide adequate funding for labour settlements. The contracts of 90 per cent of Alberta's teachers, including those in the Catholic system, are set to expire by August 31. The rising cost of living in Alberta requires 5.5 per cent pay raises for these teachers, something that is unaffordable for the Catholic board budget and other boards across the province.

This case of the Edmonton Catholic school board is just another in a long line of examples of this government's consistent failure to recognize the importance of education in the lives of Alberta's children. By failing to adequately increase the funding to school boards, this government has in essence cut education budgets, let down students, teachers, and parents, and created an adversarial situation that is bound to get worse before it gets better.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there an additional government member who chooses to participate today in Members' Statements? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I was just going to do a tabling, but I'll take advantage of this.

Shamsher Singh Sandhu

Mr. Shariff: On Saturday, June 9, 2007, I attended the 2007 outstanding Calgary seniors' awards. One of the award recipients was Mr. Shamsher Singh Sandhu, who is a poet having published four books and is a regular contributor to *Alberta Darpan*, *Sikh Virsa*, *Punjab Guardian*, *Desh Videsh*, *Desh Pardesh*, and *Punjabi Sahit*. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sandhu has translated the Canadian national anthem into Punjabi as well as the Alberta official centennial song. Later on today I will table those in this Assembly.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by 34 residents of southeast Alberta that petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to "introduce legislation to ban resident trapping within 5 miles of the Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park and in areas where species at risk are known to be present."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions here. The first one is signed by 40 Albertans that are concerned with the ongoing rent affordability crisis that contributes to Alberta's worsening homeless situation, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

My second one is from 178 people and reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to immediately conduct a comprehensive environmental impact assessment and initiate full public consultations regarding the proposed seismic testing on Marie Lake, and to deny permission for testing or further development if possible adverse effects are identified or the majority of affected members of the public are opposed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm continuing with submission of signatures on the housing petition, this time 269, and the petition reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Thank you.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, I will table a petition signed by hundreds of residents of the capital region. It urges the government to introduce legislation to suspend a graduated driver's licence when the driver is involved in a serious car crash.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 60 signatures on a petition. The signatures were collected at a town hall meeting in Britannia-Youngstown in Edmonton urging the government to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Rev. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, in light of the time, I would ask the House for unanimous consent that we immediately go to Introduction of Bills.

The Speaker: No. We're right now in petitions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to table a petition with 84 signatures on it. The petition notes the Conservatives' refusal to protect Alberta families from rent increases and urges the government to immediately introduce temporary rent guidelines.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before proceeding, we'll recognize a request from the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar to allow for Introduction of Guests. Is that okay?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Rev. Abbott: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. That was Introduction of Bills so that the people in the gallery could watch . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. We're not into Introduction of Bills yet.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Education Funding

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Governing effectively and responsibly is about choices, about getting the priorities right. The Edmonton Catholic school district revealed that they need an extra \$850,000 to continue delivering full-time kindergarten for at-risk children and will have to pull funds from other programs to keep this one going. Under an Alberta Liberal government this program would be fully funded. My question is to the Premier. The Premier boosted the budget of his own office by over \$1.2 million this year. How can the Premier justify increasing the budget of his own office when Edmonton Catholic schools are struggling to maintain a critical program for at-risk children?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition was here when I defended the budget of Executive Council, and I explained that in this year's budget we have, you know, an allocation of \$1 million for a total governance review that we're doing. That's all the boards, agencies, commissions. These boards, agencies, and commissions spend about 50 per cent of the Alberta budget. We want to make sure that they are accountable and that their actions are open and transparent. That's why the review is being conducted.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that the cost of that could be found somewhere else in the budget.

Parents in the Edmonton Catholic school district will have to pay more than \$300,000 extra in transportation fees to make up a funding shortfall. Let's look at the Premier's priorities again. This increase could be easily covered by the budgetary boost the Premier gave to the Public Affairs Bureau. To the Premier: can the Premier explain why all this extra money went to the Public Affairs Bureau when parents in Edmonton are being forced to pay even more just to get their kids to school?

Mr. Stelmach: I know that I defended the budget last week, but I can answer this question the same. When he's talking about finding places in the budget, the part of it being open and transparent is a very clear answer to the questions raised by the opposition last week in terms of defending budget. So for every increase, whether it's

increases due to staff increases or increases due to the annual pay increases or specific tasks that we are undertaking as members of Executive Council, those were clearly identified in the defence of the Executive Council budget last week.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Spin doctors should not take priority over schoolchildren.

The priorities of this government are way off. The boards are doing their best to prioritize despite the confusion of this government. School boards around the province will be faced with tough choices in the coming weeks and months. In a province this wealthy delivering the basics should not be this difficult. To the Premier: can the Premier explain why his government is forcing school boards to do more with less when he's also chosen to funnel \$56 million this year alone in subsidies to the horse-racing industry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, the allegations there are totally untrue. It's the money that the horse industry can raise providing that people participate and use the slots that are available in the horse-racing facilities in Alberta. So if people participate, that's how the horse-racing industry gets its support. If they don't, well, then, they don't get the money administered.

You know, in the interests of openness and transparency I raised this issue during the defence of the budget, and I'm going to raise it again. The Liberals very secretly billed the Alberta taxpayers for their ads. They have not come forward yet to be fully public and tell this House exactly what they are billing. What budget is it coming from? Let's be open and transparent vice versa. Come on.

The Speaker: Okay. We have a point of order that will be dealt with at the end of the Routine.

Let's all recognize as well that we're continuing budget debate this afternoon with the second reading of the appropriation bill.

Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Teachers' Salary Negotiations

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last evening myself, the Minister of Education, and a number of my Liberal colleagues attended a public meeting of the Edmonton Catholic school board. Unfortunately, the minister had to leave; he had another appointment. Had he stayed, he would have received an earful, I can assure you. When Edmonton Catholic school district teachers head to the bargaining table later this month, they will likely ask for at least a 5 per cent salary increase. If you consider the size of inflation, which was about 5.5 per cent this year, MLA pay increases at 5 per cent, and the skyrocketing costs of housing, 40.5 per cent in Edmonton this last year, this number is actually quite low. My question is for the Premier. If teachers and other staff in Edmonton Catholic are able to negotiate for the same pay increases that MLAs including this Premier received, the district will need at least another \$5.1 million. Where will this money come from?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the school boards are responsible for bargaining and negotiating with teachers. We don't do it in the venue of the Assembly. Public education is very important to this province. In fact, it's part of the long-term plan to look at how we can further move to a knowledge-based economy, and that's why there is significant investment not only in postsecondary education but primary education as well. It's all part of the longer term vision

for the province of Alberta to reposition this province on the world stage, especially in a knowledge-based economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier can try to argue that salary negotiations are just between the teachers and the school boards, but the fact is that this government has set the stage for widespread labour disruptions in the fall by failing to make adequate operating funding for school boards a priority at a time when 90 per cent – 90 per cent – of Alberta teachers will be renegotiating their salaries. Again to the Premier: who should parents and students hold responsible for lost class time this fall if fair agreements can't be negotiated?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have a tremendous amount of confidence in our teachers and also in our school boards in this province of Alberta. They have worked extremely well in terms of working out various innovative solutions to the issues that come forward to a negotiation table. They're very good at what they do. Again, I have great faith in the Alberta Teachers' Association, the teachers, and also the school boards. They'll find ways of dealing with various issues. They have in the past. Quite frankly, in the province of Alberta we have the lowest days of labour interruption, period, compared to other jurisdictions in Canada. We're very proud of that, and we'll continue to work in that positive . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In trying to explain away his fumbling efforts to divide teachers on the unfunded pension liability issue, the minister stated that he had decided new teachers would see the largest part of the new \$25 million because he was worried – he was worried – that the still unresolved pension issue would deter young people from entering the profession. My question is for the Minister of Education. How will forcing teachers to fight every few years just to maintain their standard of living and prevent salary cuts attract young people into the profession? How is this going to work?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, that's precisely one of the reasons why we put forward the initiative of the \$25 million: to remove that as a deterrent for young teachers. But I think we need to also reflect back to the fact that, as I've said in this House on numerous occasions, over the last 10 years funding for school boards – let me repeat – has gone up 86 per cent. Teachers' salaries in that same 10-year period have gone up 45 per cent. Enrolment has increased by 5.9 per cent and inflation by 28 per cent. So we can tie a particular fearmongering to whatever number we want, but I have a great deal of confidence that the school boards across the province and ATA locals will reach agreements.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Education Funding (continued)

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Inadequate operational funding especially impacts northern Alberta cities where growth pressures and inflation are particularly high. Last week the Grande Prairie school district released what it called, and I quote, a difficult but balanced budget, which contains plans to operate with 16 fewer

teachers. This means that the school board will not be able to meet the class size recommendations established by the Learning Commission. To the Minister of Education: given that inadequate operational funding means that school boards will not achieve the target class sizes, are you recommending that these standards be lowered, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there's been no question that over the past three years the department has funded class size initiatives to the tune of a half a billion dollars. The recommendations of the Learning Commission were that within five years we reach class size objectives. We've reached them for the most part within three years and fully funded them. There are some areas – and it's primarily due to infrastructure situations with the smaller class sizes with K to 4 – where we may be outside of the recommendations of the Learning Commission on class sizes, but for the most part we've met the objectives in three years as opposed to the recommended five years.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has advised school boards to exhaust any and all operating reserves to make up for funding shortfalls. Grande Prairie public does not have built-up reserves to fall back on. The only solution for them is to make cuts, Mr. Minister. Asking school boards to rely on any operational reserves to make up funding shortfalls creates inequality across the province for boards that lack reserves.

An Hon. Member: What's the question?

Mr. Flaherty: Yes. Thank you very much, colleague.

Does the minister's recommendation mean that he's prepared to accept that some Alberta students will receive a better education than others in other parts of the province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, budgeting is always a tough process. School districts are going through a very diligent time right now where they are making some choices relative to the funding that's available. Contrary to what the opposition is referring to, we've had a number of settlements. We had a settlement recently by Pembina Hills school division. We've had a number of school districts, including the largest school district in the province, Calgary public, which are coming out with a balanced budget. There are always going to be anomalies in certain areas of the province where it is more difficult because of growth pressures and other issues, but I again have great confidence in our school boards.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti has suggested to constituents that their school board may receive some extra help from the province yet because Grande Prairie represents a unique situation, but the Minister of Education has told this Assembly that there will be no more money for school boards this year. To the Minister of Education: who should parents, teachers, and trustees believe, you or the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, this hon. member has frankly twisted around what people have said on so many occasions. I'm not going to verify what he's saying were comments by other

members of this Assembly, but what I will say is that it's been very clear from the outset when the Finance minister delivered his budget several months ago that this government will have a policy going forward that the budget is the budget is the budget. We will not be coming forward with additional funds unless there are some circumstances around the unallocated surplus going forward. That policy has been very clear. Operating dollars are what is in the budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's economic policies have created a perfect storm in Alberta's housing market, and it's getting worse. New home prices in Edmonton have increased by 40.5 per cent, the highest in Canada. In Calgary new home prices have increased by 27.4 per cent, the second highest in Canada. There are less apartments in the market in Edmonton and Calgary than there were last October. People are getting hosed at both ends. They can't afford to buy a new home, and they can't afford the rising rents. My question is to the Premier. As leader of the government in the province of Alberta what is your advice to the thousands of Albertans that are being crushed by rising rents and housing prices?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is a pressure that our government identified a long time ago, and this is with respect to housing. That's why we put, well, more than a quarter of a billion dollars into affordable housing. That money will be distributed through the minister of municipal affairs, that will go to various municipalities. We're also working with municipalities and the federal government, looking at how we can create more spaces and available land. We just had a good meeting with Calgary in terms of some options. I've also met with the mayor of the city of Edmonton, that has come forward with some very innovative solutions. We are moving ahead. More units are being built, but just in the last five months or so 36,000 more people moved into the province of Alberta.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the Premier can make all the excuses that he wants. The reality is that there are less apartments now than there were in October, and we have these rising rents and housing prices. The other things he's talking about are going to take three to four years.

The definition of affordable housing is that no more than 30 per cent of one's income should go into accommodation. Now thousands of Albertans are paying much more than that. My question is to the Premier. What would the Premier's definition of affordable housing be in the new Alberta? Is it 40 per cent, 50 cent, 60 per cent, 70 per cent?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have a policy in place in terms of qualifications for affordable housing, that was clearly articulated by the minister of municipal affairs. If the hon. member needs the answer again, then I can ask the minister to reiterate the answer.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When we look at rent supplements for individuals, we try to have a guideline that will help individuals so they would not spend over 30 per cent of their income on housing.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, it's not working. That's the point. There are thousands of Albertans that are paying a lot more than that, and you can't begin to take it all under the rent supplement program. The minister is well aware of that.

My question, though, is to the Premier. You've rejected rent guidelines. You've also rejected the new home ownership assistance program, that would have had an impact on young people buying their first homes. Again to the Premier, and I'd ask him to be specific rather than generalities. What short-term measure is the government proposing to deal with the rental and home ownership crisis? All the stuff he has talked about is in the future. What's he going to do now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, we're increasing supply. That's the only way of bringing down the prices. You know, they always talk about guidelines – guidelines. They try and sneak that in: guidelines. There is no such thing as guidelines. Just be very honest and say: rent controls. That's what they want. I'm supposed to tell someone in the province of Alberta: oh, please, if you want to buy a house, don't spend more than 30 per cent of your income. What if they want to spend 40 per cent of their income on buying a house? It's not the role of government to dictate to individual families in terms of how much they want to spend on their mortgage to buy their own living accommodations. We're not part of that socialist thinking from that side of the House. I can tell you that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Political Party Donations

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard repeated assertions that volunteers for the Premier sought donations from a public body during his leadership campaign. Further questions have been raised in this House about other solicitations of the Beaver River waste management commission. Can the Premier tell us if he's aware of solicitations characterized by members opposite as improper?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, every day for the past two weeks the Leader of the Opposition has risen in this Legislature to attack my integrity. I want to quote from a letter dated October 3, 2006, to the Beaver regional waste management commission.

To be effective, political parties need both money and support.

That's why I'm asking you to write a cheque to the Alberta Liberals today. In fact, I hope you'll consider making the maximum annual donation of \$15,000.

That letter has been signed by the president of the Alberta Liberal Party. I have the copies to table.

The Speaker: At the appropriate time that document should be tabled.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, we'll see if the Leader of the Opposition still believes that those who mistakenly solicit donations from public bodies are guilty of heinous crimes.

To the Premier: is this an issue that this Legislature should clarify? Does this happen often?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that many, many volunteers, even very intelligent people like lawyers, didn't recognize the ethical issue at play. I have copies of a letter dated March 31, 2006, from an official of the Alberta Liberal Party asking the Beaver regional waste management commission to pay \$350 a seat, or \$2,800 for a

table of eight, for the Liberal leader's dinner. Now, that sounds familiar, Mr. Speaker. I believe they put the city of St. Albert in the very same predicament by sending them a letter, knowing very well that that was improper. I also have copies of letters to table with that as well.

1:50

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, so not once but twice.

My final question is to the Premier. What is this government going to do about this?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, to be perfectly clear, no laws were broken. That also includes the members opposite, who have gone repeatedly to the same commission for dollars. I am committed to open, transparent government. I have promised legislation on leadership campaign funds, and I'm going to ask the members opposite to work – here's an opportunity for the opposition to rise and tell Albertans how much they have billed the Alberta taxpayers for the radio ads they ran earlier this year. [interjections] As much as he wants to holler, the people of Alberta can still hear me. He can give the exact amount of how much he billed secretly the Alberta taxpayers for their radio ads, and he can do it right now.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, you rose on a point of order. We'll deal with it at the end of the Routine.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Grizzly Bear Management

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's own recent grizzly bear inventory of unit 5 between highways 1 and 3 makes for very sad reading. The number of grizzly bears in the southern half of the province is estimated at about 177 bears, and that population is in serious trouble. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why hasn't there been any action under the grizzly bear action plan?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad it's the last week here. I don't think I could bear another grisly week with this crowd.

This government's priority has always been to ensure that grizzly bears not just survive but thrive. That's why we cut off the hunt two years ago. We have a three-year moratorium. There were no grizzly bears hunted last year, none this year, none next year. We're doing a scientific count, and when we have the numbers in, we'll make an informed decision.

Mr. Bonko: When asked about this issue a month ago, the minister responded with the following: "The hon. members on the other side always hit the panic button and want to make a decision before all the facts are in. We'll wait until the end of the three-year study and make a decision then." Well, it's clear now that waiting any longer would be completely negligent. The grizzly bears in Alberta are endangered. Does the minister expect that the situation will be any better in two years when he is ready to act?

Dr. Morton: As I said – and the hon. member is correct – they do like to hit the panic button early. We've undertaken any number of policies already. In addition to the moratorium on grizzly hunting, we've undertaken the DNA census, we've introduced the BearSmart program, we're mapping bear environment, we have the Karelian dogs, and we have the grizzly bear intercept program. There are many activities under way as we speak to protect and enhance grizzly bear habitat.

Mr. Bonko: This minister, this Tory government is casually watching over the steady extinction of Alberta's grizzly bear. This minister was appointed the task of protecting Alberta's wildlife, and he isn't doing his job. What's it going to take for the minister to do his job, or will he stand aside and let someone else do it?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had paid close attention to the news that was released this week, he would have seen that in the southern part of the province there were 12 grizzly bears for every 1,000 kilometres. That's a 36-kilometre diameter circle. So if you're standing in the middle of the forest with an 18-kilometre radius around you, there are 12 grizzly bears within that 18 kilometres. If you walk down a straight path and by chance all 12 bears are lined up, you're going to run into a grizzly bear, hon. member, every 1.5 kilometres, every 1,500 metres.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Off-highway Vehicle Use

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There seem to be growing numbers of irresponsible off-highway vehicle users in Alberta. Unmitigated OHV use can create significant damage to our public lands and could ultimately spoil this form of recreation for responsible OHV users. My questions are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is his department doing to protect Alberta's public lands from this type of damage?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct. The number of off-highway vehicles has increased dramatically in Alberta. Sales have doubled in the past six years, and the number of registered vehicles has actually gone up by four times. There are many more users out there looking for a place for recreation. Our focus is threefold: education, regulation, and enforcement. I'd be happy to elaborate on any of those.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. I understand that you recently met with an OHV organization that promotes responsible use of our public lands. Is it true that these groups have told you about possible damage done to public land near Indian Graves after the May long weekend? If so, how can we stop this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I did go back to Indian Graves on June 2. I'm happy to report that the area was in much better order, and I observed many users enjoying the area for camping and off-highway vehicles in a responsible manner. I'd like to make it clear on the record that many Albertans who use off-highway vehicles do so in a very responsible manner and care about Alberta's public lands. These groups were just as upset as I was and many Albertans were about what happened on the May long weekend. These responsible off-highway vehicle users don't want to be tarnished by the irresponsible behaviour of others.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree wholeheartedly.

Again to the same minister: given that we want our public lands to continue to be used by both motorized and nonmotorized users,

what are these responsible OHV groups doing to demonstrate or aid stewardship?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, these groups have very active and positive programs in our schools that deal with both safety instruction and also with the respect the land message that's been developed by Sustainable Resource Development. On my June 2 tour I was in the Crowsnest Pass. I had the opportunity to work with the Crowsnest Forest Stewardship Society and also the Quad Squad. They were building a bridge as part of their Ed Gregor Memorial clean-up day. Another group put up a bridge in the Ghost-Waiparous area. Here are two great examples of good Albertans, responsible off-highway vehicle users, out there giving their volunteer time to improve recreational opportunities and protect our natural reserves.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

School Security

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the wake of bomb threats called into Archbishop O'Leary, arson, and later a mentally ill individual forcing a lockdown at the Victoria School of Performing and Visual Arts, and incidents of attempted child abduction and assault several months ago, the issue of school security has again come to the forefront. This is in conjunction with school shootings in Toronto and the United States. To the Solicitor General. There is no doubt that this is a complex issue. Has the minister had any discussions with his colleagues from Education and Advanced Education to discuss strategies to enhance school security in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member opposite mentioned, security in our schools and education facilities is indeed very important to this government and to this province and to all those who attend those facilities. When these incidents unfortunately do come up, yes, we do discuss these with our colleagues to ensure that we have the best plans possible to ensure that we can alleviate these situations.

Mr. Elsalhy: School officials do an excellent job, Mr. Speaker, with their limited resources, but too often when it comes to deciding between security considerations and instructional spending, a school is most likely going to choose teachers, textbooks, and technology. However, the issue of school security cannot be ignored for results can be tragic. Solutions could be as simple as a school using a private security person to conduct patrols of the grounds, installing video cameras, or even utilizing available parents to walk around the school yards during recess, for example. Will the minister commit to providing a dedicated funding envelope specifically for the enhancement of school security, that schools can access if they choose, based on need? We're not asking for much, and we don't want them to have to choose between competing goals.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm not sure who's asking for what, but I can assure the hon. member that we will work with the departments of Education and Advanced Education to

put together whatever programs and procedures we believe are necessary to ensure that our students remain safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safer communities task force cost taxpayers \$1.5 million, and I argued in this House that it wasn't likely going to hear anything new as it toured the province. To the Minister of Justice: if you were okay spending \$1.5 million on yet another public relations exercise, would you relinquish the same amount of money or half or even a third to the Solicitor General for his department to assist those administrators who want to enhance security in their schools and take action as compared to just talk?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, all hon. members of this House have been invited to a symposium of this task force being chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek next week in Calgary on the 19th and 20th. I think the hon. member should make a point of attending. I know that many of the people on this side of the House will be there. He will find out that the nine members of the task force have felt that the 14 days that they have spent going throughout this province listening to Albertans about their concerns about public safety, about safety in their communities, is of the utmost importance and is of the utmost value to this government. It should be also to the hon. opposition in understanding what we're trying to do to make our communities safer.

Driver's Licence Photos

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, a sampling of comments I've got in my constituency office lately: an abuse of religious freedom; only 11 family surnames in all of Alberta would be provided this provision – what a joke; individual and group pictures in the newspapers are okay but not on a driver's licence; if hotel operators can deny a young person access with all forms of ID except a photo driver's licence, I hope the same privilege will be extended to members of this church. As of 2003 Alberta required that everyone obtaining or renewing a driver's licence be photographed. Now, I understand, and the reason that I mentioned these comments, people heard about a recent decision by the Alberta Court of Appeal which struck down this requirement. My question is to . . .

The Speaker: We're out of time for this. Forty-five seconds is over, hon. member.

Mr. Stevens: I have a sense of where the hon. member was going with this, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member indicated, this has been the subject of a court decision, so my comments will take that into account. The driver's licence is now the primary form of identification in our society, and new abuses such as identity theft and creation of false identities pose a serious risk. With a digital photo of every licensee and facial recognition technology we can protect Alberta operators' licences from being used for identity theft and other such purposes. The Hutterites of Wilson colony near Lethbridge challenged the regulation that the hon. member referred to.

The Speaker: I'm afraid we're going back to the hon. member now.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Wilson colony is but one of over 170 colonies that make up two sects of one church, not all of which object to this ruling. What is Alberta doing in response to this court decision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. This past May the Court of Appeal upheld a Queen's Bench decision that Alberta's mandatory driver's licence photo is invalid because it impairs the Wilson colony Hutterites' freedom of religion contrary to the Charter of Rights. At this time we're advising the hon. Minister of Service Alberta about Alberta's options. We must decide whether to seek leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada or whether to amend the Traffic Safety Act. Two of the three justices found that a regulation made under the Traffic Safety Act could only be used to address traffic safety and not as a means to prevent identity theft. However, there was a dissent.

Mr. McFarland: My last question, Mr. Speaker: will Alberta use the notwithstanding clause or allow all individual Albertans to use the freedom of religion excuse not to have their pictures taken?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point in time the government has no intention of using the notwithstanding clause as indicated previously. We are considering two options. We're considering whether to seek leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada and whether the amendments are required to the Traffic Safety Act. The question of security is very important. We will take the necessary steps to maintain the integrity of the licensing system in Alberta, but at this time this government has no plans to use the notwithstanding clause.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Employment Standards Review

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Employment standards dealing with such basic issues as minimum wage, hours of work, overtime pay, parental leave, and statutory holidays are supposed to offer a basic level of protection for all workers, but Alberta's Employment Standards Code is about 20 years out of date. In 2005 we in the Official Opposition welcomed the employment standards review. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. It's been two years now, and Albertans are still waiting. When can we expect to see the results of that review?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, previously in this session in the House relative to employment standards, I did respond to the question, saying that I had asked for yet further consultation. Let's look at the situation in Alberta. We have considerably more workers, a more active economy, an expanding workforce. We have new federal regulations on a number of fronts that address employment standards. I'd remind the hon. member that we added 72 staff members to Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry to protect the workers' rights, to look after the workers, to assure that the current standards are being met, and to do their due diligence to make sure workers are safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister's communications staff has been on the record as saying that the review is being delayed because the Tory caucus has taken issues with some aspects of the proposed amendments. To the same minister: can you tell us

what part of your proposal was rejected or sent back for reconsideration by the Tory caucus?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, no, it would be totally inappropriate. There were areas of concern relative to the updating of the standards. I think it behooves me to be prudent and do further consultation and further work. I will be undertaking that work throughout the next few months ahead and paying very close attention to what we're learning with the new workers on-site to make sure that we're making appropriate amendments when we come forward, not bringing forward something in a half-baked form. Also, as we negotiate the annex to the co-operative agreement with Canada relative to immigration, I'll be looking at many suggestions made in this House relative to the monitoring of the foreign workers. It's another area we're examining.

Dr. B. Miller: We've heard from several sources that the results of the employment standards code review are so abysmal that the government has buried the report and has no plans to release it. When the Liberal caucus put in a request for the results of the public consultations through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, we were told we would have to pay over \$117,000 to see it. To the same minister: is the government afraid to release the results of the employment standards review? If you have nothing to hide, will you agree to release the information immediately to the people and stakeholders who put time and effort into this review? When are we going to see it?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of the items the hon. member has referenced. We had responses from more than 5,500 Albertans, including employees, employers, industry, and labour organizations. I'm not aware of this particular request, but I can assure you of one thing: nothing is buried.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Designated Assisted Living Facilities

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has a long history of using Orwellian language around health care and service provision. Privatization has been called a third way, it has been called deregulation, and now it's being called aging in place. Albertans are not fooled. Privatization is privatization, and the cost of privatizing long-term care services will continue to be borne by seniors and their families. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How can the minister justify off-loading the cost of long-term care privatization onto seniors and their families?

2:10

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's premise is exactly wrong. In fact, I had the opportunity yesterday afternoon to be in Pincher Creek at the Vista Village centre where seniors in that community can age in place. What happens at the Vista Village in Pincher Creek, which is a wonderful facility, is that someone who needs assistance with their living accommodation or with their ability to live independently can move into that facility. They don't have to be institutionalized. They can go for meals whenever they wish to; they can prepare some meals in their own rooms if they wish to. As their care needs grow, they can stay in the same location and have their care needs attended to in that location. What could be more appropriate than that? What could be more appropriate than that instead of, as the hon. member would have, changing your social structure every time your care needs change?

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, totally contrary to minister's spin, seniors from across the province are finding their residences being redesignated from long-term care centres to assisted living. Their health needs don't change. Their diet and personal care needs don't change. The only thing that changes is the cost that they have to bear. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: how many seniors will be paying more out of pocket because they find themselves in assisted-living facilities rather than in long-term care facilities?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, first off, this is an issue of ensuring that the appropriate level of health care is provided to the right person. People's circumstances aren't always static. They sometimes improve, and many of them might even be able to be put assisted living. What this does allow is choice for seniors to be in facilities that would best meet their needs. That's what this is all about. It's not about trying to save the dollar by taking from a long-term care to an assisted living. It's about trying to match that they are in the right place at the right time for their needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another Orwellian spin.

We anticipate long-term care facilities in Grande Prairie, Jasper, and other communities closing and being replaced by assisted-living lodges where the same residents will simply have to pay more. Residents in Hinton have already gone through this. To the minister of seniors again: what are the estimated additional annual costs to all those seniors whose residences will be redesignated from long-term care to so-called assisted- or supportive-care facilities? How much is the Conservative government going to save on the backs of frail and ailing seniors?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to go around and tour and visit a number of different facilities, and we have such a range of descriptions. Ultimately, the seniors themselves gave feedback that they would prefer to live in their homes. They would then prefer next to have a facility that most approximated their living conditions in a home, and less of them wish to have the institutional approach. It is very much in response to the seniors' request to have the facilities and then provide the health care where they are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Property Taxes for Condominiums

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Condominium owners in my constituency have written to me about the ability of municipalities to adopt a separate property tax class for condos. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Do municipalities have the authority to set different tax rates for condominium properties?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities do have that ability to set different tax rates for different groups or classes of residential property. Municipalities do provide different services for different classes of residential properties, and this government feels that municipalities know best how that distinction should be made and how those property taxes should be assessed.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister. Condominium owners often have to provide for the maintenance and repair of infrastructure such as water mains, sewer lines, roads, and snow removal. Why should these owners pay the same rate as single-family properties?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, owning a portion of a condominium very much involves the sharing of the responsibility for the maintenance of the common property. It's really, considering, akin to a single-family dwelling, where an individual has the responsibility of snow removal, driveway maintenance, yard maintenance. Those condominiums have that responsibility. But I will say that there is some overlap in the condominium fees, and property taxes cover a much wider range.

Mr. Johnson: My final supplemental is to the same minister. Since many seniors live in condos and some seniors on fixed incomes are experiencing financial difficulty in paying their property taxes, is the provincial government providing any assistance to these property owners?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the provincial government does recognize that property taxes can provide a burden and especially provide a burden for seniors who are wanting to stay in their homes. Starting in 2004, the Alberta seniors education property tax rebate program began, and that provided an annual property tax rebate to assist those seniors. The program provides senior owners with a rebate for an amount equal to any education property increase from 2004. So that is some support.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Physician Supply

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is currently short over a thousand physicians, and that number is expected to rise to 1,500 in the next three years. This shortage of health workers is contributing to lengthy wait times in emergency rooms, to see a family physician, and for surgical procedures. Albertans in need of a family physician, especially in rural Alberta, are the hardest hit by this shortage. My first question is to the minister of health. PARA, the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta, has recommended a variety of recruitment incentives to attract residents to practise in Alberta. Will the minister take their advice and introduce a signing bonus for family physicians?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to say that I don't like to argue the numbers as to how many we are short of anything in the province. We do need more of a health care workforce. We need to rebalance our workforce so that we use health care professionals to the full extent of their capability and expertise. We need to implement more policies such as the primary care networks, that physicians and health authorities in the province have embraced so that there are in excess of 19 primary care networks serving more than a million Albertans now. What we know, again from my trip to southern Alberta yesterday to meet with the regional health authority, is that in certain circumstances if you empanel persons to physicians, have 1,500 people to a physician, we might have exactly the right number of primary care physicians in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. To the minister of advanced education. According to PARA, educational experience in rural medicine has a strong influence on attracting physicians to practise in rural areas. Given that the budget for the rural physician action plan did not increase this year, will the minister provide higher bursaries to encourage residents to train in rural Alberta?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, between the three departments of Employment, Immigration and Industry, the department of health, and my Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology we're looking at a number of different incentives or programs that we can put into play to increase the number of rural health care providers, not just rural physicians but health care providers across the gamut. As the hon. minister of health has said, we recognize that there are a number of professions that we need to train, that we need to recruit, that we need to repatriate, and we need to bring all those things together to meet the needs geographically wherever they are in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the minister of advanced education: given that the physician shortages also mean shortages in medical educators, what reforms is the minister making to ensure that medical educators are available and adequately compensated?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. In fact, we're in discussions right now, as we speak, with the universities on how we accommodate the growth in our enrolment that we're going to need to accommodate to meet the needs as I just mentioned in my previous answer. Part of that is the capital allocation that may or may not be required for the spaces. Part of it is the per-student payment that we're going to make to the colleges or the institutions. The other component is that, very true, we have to attract the best – we're hoping – and brightest instructors and mentors, I might add, to come to help those health care professionals get out into the rural areas but also into the urban areas because we're in need across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

2:20

Affordable Housing (continued)

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Economic prosperity in Alberta has brought with it the imbalance between supply and demand. We don't need science to explain high price and cost when demand is higher than supply. My question today is regarding affordable housing supply. The question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. What was the funding for affordable housing development in 2006, and what is additional in 2007?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If we talk explicitly about the funding for affordable housing in 2006, it was in approximation of \$75 million. What we have done is added \$285 million, which included new funding, which included extra funding for affordable housing, homelessness, and services, and of that, \$272 million is spent explicitly for affordable housing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite early in his leadership our Premier correctly identified a high priority for housing. My question is to the same minister, reflecting queries from my constituents. How much of the affordable housing fund is allocated to Calgary, and how can a group propose a housing project, get to that fund?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The city of Calgary got allocated \$63 million for housing. From recommendations from the task force we provided funding directly to municipalities that were in high-growth areas, and the funds were allocated specifically for affordable housing projects. I would encourage the individuals or the groups to contact the city, for they, I believe, are the best to know what their priorities are and where their challenges can be alleviated. So contact with the municipalities would be the best focus.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city is the authority to give or refuse permits for condominium conversions and any housing construction. It also owns some land and decides on zoning. Given that the province has the funds ready, what measures is the same minister taking to encourage our city of Calgary to expedite the changes so the number of affordable housing units can be increased?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have talked with municipalities. We have talked with the city of Calgary about some of the focuses and the directions that could be taken looking at the scope of having short-term solutions, such as rent supplements, looking at intermediate solutions, which could be secondary suites, also looking at long-term solutions, which would be rental housing. We have had discussions, and we will continue to have consultations as the city of Calgary is now meeting and looking at the requests and looking at the priorities for their particular city, their particular municipality, of which would work the best.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 84 questions and answers today.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 45 **Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction)** **Amendment Act, 2007**

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to introduce for first reading Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007.

In introducing the bill for first reading, I'd like to thank a number of people who have been strong advocates and have really made the whole issue of smoking and second-hand smoke an issue for Albertans' health. I introduced earlier to the House today members from the Alberta Cancer Board, the Mazankowski Heart Institute, the public health school at the University of Alberta, the College of Pharmacists, the Alberta Medical Association, AADAC, the Lung Association, the Cancer Society, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, Action on Smoking and Health, and I referenced the BLAST team from the Nellie McClung school, and many, many others participated.

The amendments to the Smoke-free Places Act which are being introduced will change the name of the act to the Tobacco Reduction Act; remove exemption provisions which currently permit smoking in public places and workplaces where minors are not permitted – that will ensure that public places are smoke free – prohibit smoking within a prescribed distance from a doorway, window, or fresh air intake; prohibit the retail display, advertising, or promotion of tobacco products in any place where tobacco is sold; restrict the sale of tobacco in health facilities, public postsecondary campuses, pharmacies, and retail stores; and add offence provisions.

Mr. Speaker, this is a momentous day for health in Alberta. I would ask members to give Bill 45 first reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 41 Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

Amendments to the Health Professions Act and the Medical Profession Act will provide for greater accountability to Albertans about the consistency of health care standards of practice, require the reporting of public health issues despite any other confidentiality provisions in the respective acts, and provide for professions to be regulated under the Health Professions Act with government support in instances where professions may not have the resources to fully self-regulate.

I'd ask the House for permission for first reading of Bill 41.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 74.1(1)(a) I would move that Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, be referred to the Standing Committee on Community Services for its review and that the committee report the bill back to the Assembly in the first week of November 2007.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Bill 42 Insurance Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move first reading of Bill 42, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2007.

The purpose of this bill is to update the legislative provisions for insurance contracts such as life, accident, and sickness, as well as home and business insurance. The bill will provide a modernized legislative framework for insurance contracts, strengthen consumer protection, and address legislative issues that have been identified by consumers, industry, and the Ministry of Finance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 42 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition that was from 500 Alberta residents – namely, the Calgary communities of Rocky Ridge and Royal Oak in Calgary-North West – to urge the government of Alberta to “keep up with the Calgary Board of Education’s recommended capital plans for new school construction.”

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, earlier today I had a member’s statement on Mr. Shamsheer Singh Sandhu, recipient of an outstanding Calgary seniors’ award. As I indicated, Mr. Sandhu has translated Canada’s national anthem, *O Canada*, and the Alberta centennial song into the Punjabi language. I am tabling five copies of Mr. Sandhu’s translation for the official records of the Assembly.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is a copy of correspondence between the administrative manager for the Alberta Liberal caucus and the director of financial management and administrative services, senior financial officer for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. At the beginning it’s asking for permission and payment okay for the radio ads, and it, in fact, is answered by the director of financial management, saying that he sees “no party references in the ads that would cause concerns regarding processing related expenditures.” So the expenditures were okayed. I’ll table that.

As well, I’ll table the appropriate number of copies from Rod McConnell, who’s expressing concern about the potential privacy violations associated with government-contracted companies having access to health records. He would like to see his personal health records removed from these contracted databases with any third party and have Alberta Health immediately terminate all contracts and return all the data to Alberta Health and Wellness.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Premier it’s my pleasure to table for the House the requisite number of copies of two letters written on behalf of the Alberta Liberal Party in which they reference that they’re asking the Beaver regional waste management commission for their maximum “annual donation of \$15,000 or exceeding your 2005 donation.”

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings this afternoon, all related to the public meeting of Edmonton Catholic schools last evening. The most important, probably, is a copy of the agenda from last night, which highlights a number of teachers who were either nominated or received provincial teaching awards.

I also have a copy of their news release from last night indicating that a balanced budget would be approved and that there are serious concerns about provincial funding.

Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of a document entitled *The Impact of the 2007/08 Budget on Students, Staff and Parents*. Again, it outlines some of the difficulties they had and the need for what they described as creative budgeting in order to reach that balanced budget.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, a copy of a document entitled *Three Year Strategic Education Plan 2007 to 2010*, published by Edmonton Catholic schools, and it has the title *United in Heart and Mind: Growing, Learning & Loving*. I would hope that not only the Education minister but all members of this Assembly read through these. They're very important documents.

Thank you.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of a workbook now available for all Albertans to give their input on the government's proposed community spirit program. This program will encourage and celebrate Alberta's charitable giving. The workbook will be available online, through the local MLA offices, or by mail. It will also be available through public libraries by the end of June, and submissions are due by July 31.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from Kathy, who lives in Cameron Heights, in my constituency. She finds the noise emanating from the Anthony Henday ring road becoming louder as each month passes, and it is not unusual for her to hear brakes from semis and motorcycles at all hours of the day. She hopes that the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation will do something to attenuate the noise.

The other tabling, Mr. Speaker, comes from a young constituent, Alex Bernier, who has issues with the graduated driver's licence program, especially that people are required to take an advanced road test two years after they've received their class 5 licence regardless of their driving record. The cost is usually around \$120, depending on the registry, and then you add \$64 for the new card. As a student he finds it extra expensive, and he can't afford it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituent Eric Finley. He is a businessman in the nanotech sector. He would like all MLAs to read the report I am tabling five copies of, a report called *Taming the Tempest: An Alternate Development Strategy for Alberta*. The report offers several forward-thinking alternatives for economic development in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter that I'm tabling today from Eric Musekamp, president of the Farmworkers Union of Alberta. He wishes to remind the Assembly that August 20 will be the third annual farm worker day and urges all Albertans to think about the men, women, and children who toil unprotected on farms, ranches, and feedlots.

Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It is the program for the supreme kickoff of City Farm. Now, City Farm is in Edmonton-Manning, the largest rural riding in the city of

Edmonton. City Farm is a unique place where children and youth and adults can learn about growing food, animal care, and our natural habitat. I invite all Albertans to visit City Farm and learn a little bit about farming in the city.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on May 28, 2007, Department of Solicitor General and Public Security 2007-08 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two members who have risen with respect to points of order. The first we'll deal with is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am referring to an exchange during the first question between the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Premier, which was actually a question on Catholic school education. During it the Premier referred a number of times to making allegations – and therefore my citation is 23(h), 23(i), and 23(j) – that somehow a series of radio ads done by the Alberta Liberal caucus is out of order.

I did table earlier copies of correspondence in which the director of finance gave our caucus the okay to proceed with these, indicating that the cost was within the guidelines allowable by the Legislative Assembly Office to make payment. The Premier seems particularly exercised about this, and I don't know why. Yesterday I tabled additional information on these radio spots, but he seems determined to somehow cast an allegation upon the Liberal caucus that this is not in order.

Under 23(h) these expenditures are clearly in order; they were okayed according to the documents that I've already tabled. Under 23(i), imputing a false motive, that somehow we were attempting to get away with something that clearly we weren't: this has all been done above board. And 23(j), using insulting language: I would say that that's certainly the case in trying to make it out that the opposition caucus has done anything but follow the rules.

As the Speaker well knows, our caucus has no ability to write its own cheques. They have to be written by the finance department from the LAO. All the payments come from the LAO, and I doubt very much that the hard-working staff there would breach any rules on our behalf whatsoever. The Official Opposition has been under intense scrutiny. All of our public documents and utterances are reviewed. Our newsletters, our ads, our truck decals, our policy documents, every one of them, Mr. Speaker, has been gone over with a fine-tooth comb to make sure that we are in order, and that is evidenced by correspondence like the tabling that I made earlier. So I'm surprised that the Premier would disparage the staff of the LAO in somehow insinuating or making an allegation that they have been improper in their service in any way, and I can tell you that they certainly have not. They hold us to account, and when we have followed the guidelines and are operating within the rules set out, our expenditures are processed.

The Premier is trying very hard to make something out of nothing. We have followed the rules, and the Premier insists on misleading this Assembly, making allegations against us, and certainly provoking a great deal of disorder in the House by using insulting language and imputing false motives upon us. So I would ask that the Premier please withdraw his comments, refrain from making them in the

future, and apologize to this caucus and to the staff of the LAO, who've done a good job.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Who should I recognize? The hon. President of the Treasury Board or the hon. Government House leader?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, if making false allegations . . .

The Speaker: On the point of order.

Mr. Snelgrove: On the point of order.

. . . is inappropriate, then I would dare say that most of the questions that the opposition leader has put to the Premier in the last two months should have been called immediately on the spot because they were far worse and based on nothing.

2:40

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Centre is far too sanctimonious on this point. In fact, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has over the last number of weeks tried to call into question the integrity of the Premier by raising issues about the Beaver regional waste management commission only to discover when pressed to review with the Beaver regional waste management commission whether anybody else has solicited political donations that the Liberal party has solicited donations from that organization. They can't have it both ways.

However, with respect to this specific point of order, as I heard the exchange, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was asking why the government would have a budget for the Public Affairs Bureau when the Catholic school board needed money. I think it's perfectly appropriate for the Premier, in response to that, to point out that the Liberal opposition uses taxpayers' money to advertise, which is – I don't know – perhaps what the Public Affairs Bureau does. The Public Affairs Bureau is advertising on behalf of government, is communicating with Albertans what government is doing, whereas the opposition is advertising – yes, perhaps, if she says so – under the rules of the House and the rules of the Legislature and scrutinized undoubtedly by the Leg. Assembly but still for their partisan caucus concerns. What is more important to the public of Alberta and the taxpayer of Alberta, spending public money communicating to the public about what government is doing on their behalf and finding out what the public needs or advertising for partisan political purposes?

So in the context of the question about the Edmonton Catholic school board and whether or not their budget should be higher or school budgets should be higher instead of money going to the Public Affairs Bureau, it's absolutely appropriate for the Premier to point out that money is spent on advertising on both sides of the House. The money they were questioning was, of course, a budget for government, which has been held to account through the long process of Committee of Supply and which we're going to be debating later on in the House, or the money spent by the Liberal caucus, Legislative Assembly appropriated funds, also voted by the House but with respect to a Liberal caucus. I fail to see the point of order.

The Speaker: Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre certainly has the right to raise a point of order with respect to this whole matter, as it would have been an opportune time for members of the government to raise points of order over the last several weeks as well should they have chosen to do that. They made their decision with respect to how to deal with that.

Today there was a series of questions led by the Leader of the Official Opposition which included the Public Affairs Bureau, but essentially I think that the remarks that caused the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to rise had to do with the horse-racing industry and the prelude with respect to the Blues with respect to all of this. The Premier did respond to the question about slot machines and are they available in the horse-racing facilities. Then he goes on, and he says the following:

You know, in the interests of openness and transparency I raised this issue during the defence of the budget, and I'm going to raise it again. The Liberals have very secretly billed the Alberta taxpayers for their ads. They have not come forward yet to be fully public and tell this House exactly what they are billing. What budget is it coming from? Let's be open and transparent. Vice versa. Come on.

Well, in the last several weeks it would strike this chairperson that there was a whole series of questions that had a whole series of allegations and innuendo and other kinds of leading statements with respect to this whole matter. The chair also recognizes that this is something like day 42 of this particular session, and the chair also recognizes that there's a by-election going on today, and the chair also recognizes that it's coming to the end of this session. So if you take all of these sorts of things together, you come up with a kind of a fatigue factor that comes into hon. members, where basically, after 3,300 questions and answers in the question period, oftentimes it's easier to let some of these words that we wouldn't normally use in our daily living and our daily practice come into the discussion. So oftentimes you'll get things like ethical, unethical, misleading, leading, that lead to innuendo and everything else. That's been kind of more frequent in the last several weeks than it would normally have been, so the chair will recognize that all of this is part of the heat of the intensity of the battle on this particular Tuesday of June and say that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre certainly had an opportunity to clarify.

What the chair is concerned about, however, is that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta is brought into this debate.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Exactly.

The Speaker: Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre brought it into the debate.

All members have to consider this. If members are going to table documents that come out of the Legislative Assembly Office or my office in this House as part of the debate that they want to engender and engage in, you're setting a very dangerous precedent. There are a lot of documents that are not tabled, and hon. members would not want to see them. I will not allow them to be tabled. They'll stay in the confines of the Speaker's office and the office of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. If you want the Speaker to get involved in the debate by saying, "Well, somebody in the Legislative Assembly said this, or somebody said that," you may find that some knees will be cut out from under the hon. members with respect to that.

In this case, for the openness and transparency and clarification, the Liberal caucus is afforded a budget as the government caucus is afforded a budget. The Liberal caucus used some of those funds to buy radio ads. Some members of the Members' Services Committee take great exception to that. At an upcoming meeting of the Members' Services Committee the matter will be on the agenda, but there has not been a meeting of the Members' Services Committee with respect to this particular matter. In terms of the interpretations that were provided at the time, they were an acceptable utilization of caucus dollars for these ads. The Speaker is not going to reverse anything or take any exception to that. That was the rightful exercise of those dollars at that time.

Now, secretive: it may be a question that it wasn't made public, I suppose. I don't know what press release was put out saying who paid for the ads, but it's the taxpayers of Alberta who pay for these ads.

The government caucus has, you know, a million bucks. If they want to go and spend money on ads, presumably under the current situation they would have the right to do that. I would suspect that there would be questions in this Assembly if that were to happen, but at the moment that's certainly acceptable. In the last number of 10 days, I guess, there could have been all kinds of ads in Calgary on by-elections and what have you on behalf of the government caucus. That didn't happen.

Anyway, there's clarification now with respect to this matter. A lot of this has to do with the mood of this particular House, and a lot of this has to do with the utilization of language. We'll have an opportunity now over the next number of months, I do believe, to basically study the rules of what words are acceptable, and we'll have all this new money that all caucuses have to hire researchers to pen better answers to better questions. I'm sure we'll see a tremendous improvement in the fall in the quality of the question period because of these new additional dollars that we have.

Now, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, you have a point of order.

Point of Order Interrupting a Member

Rev. Abbott: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order with regard to the exchange between the Premier and the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. What happened is that the Standing Orders were breached during that time of questions and answers. I have several citations, but I'll start with *Beauchesne's* 333, which states that "a Member speaking shall not be interrupted except on a point of order". Then if you go down to 334, at the end it says: "If the interruptions are excessive, the Member speaking may appeal to the Speaker for help, which will be forthcoming. In extreme cases the Speaker may intervene without such request to restore order in the House."

Mr. Speaker, as you'll recall, the Premier was answering the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne about, again, some political donations that were being solicited by the Liberal Party, and for some reason the Leader of the Official Opposition felt that he had the floor, that he could just butt in and start talking and start intervening between that question-and-answer period. I didn't see any questions whatsoever that were directed towards the Leader of the Opposition, yet for some reason he felt that he could get into this exchange. He was talking excessively. Other members in the House were trying to admonish him to be quiet and let the two members have their exchange, but the Leader of the Opposition absolutely refused.

2:50

I want to cite from *Marleau and Montpetit*, Mr. Speaker. *Marleau and Montpetit* says, "When a Member is addressing the House, no other Member may interrupt except to raise a question of privilege which has arisen suddenly or to raise a point of order." If you go over to 503, this is a key citation in *Marleau and Montpetit*. It says:

One of the basic principles of parliamentary procedure is that proceedings in the House of Commons . . .

Or in this case the Alberta Legislature.

. . . are conducted in terms of a free and civil discourse. In order that debate on matters of public policy be held in a civil manner, the House has adopted rules of order and decorum for the conduct of Members towards each other and towards the institution as a whole. Members are to show respect for one another.

Mr. Speaker, I felt that this interruption by the Leader of the Opposition was an absolute disrespect for the Premier of this province. He did not let him answer a question from a private member when we know in this House that the private members of the opposition get to ask many questions every day and are expected to get answers. Therefore, the private members from the government side should also be allowed to ask questions and to get answers.

A final citation, Mr. Speaker, is from *Marleau and Montpetit* 513, which says: "Any Member participating in debate must address the Chair, not the House, a particular Minister or Member, the galleries, or the television audience." In fact, it goes on to say, "If a Member directs remarks towards another Member and not the Speaker, he or she will be called to order."

Mr. Speaker, I think there is a point of order here. I think that the Leader of the Official Opposition should apologize to the Premier, to yourself, and to all Albertans for interrupting a very important discourse between the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne and the hon. Premier. In fact, in our own Standing Orders if you look at Standing Order 13(4)(b), again it refers to how there should be no interruptions when we're conducting business in this House.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have studied the books, we do know the rules, and all we're asking is that they be kept in this House.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you can either choose to participate, or I can give a ruling.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I choose to participate in that I don't see that, in fact, either member engaged in this resumed their seat or stopped speaking or gave up on either the questions or the answers that they were engaged in. There's a fair amount of heckling in this House, Mr. Speaker, as you often point out to us, but I didn't see anything interrupted. The process of give-and-take between the questioner and the person giving the answers in that particular exchange continued on through three questions and three answers.

Certainly, if we're going to talk about disobedience, we could look at the number of times that the government caucus has chosen to totally drown out speakers from this side of the House by continuing to thump their desks and yell and scream, by which effectively, in fact, an opportunity to ask a question or give an answer has been cut off. I didn't see that happen today. There is no point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Peace River, do you want to get involved in this point of order?

Mr. Oberle: Actually on the last one, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, we've had the last one. Done it.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on this point of order.

Dr. Brown: Yes, sir. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. He raises a valid point respecting this point of order under Standing Order 13(4)(b) and under the citations which he gave in *Marleu and Montpetit* and in *Beauchesne's*. I would also add to that group of citations a citation from *Erskine May*, the 23rd edition, page 445, where it says:

Members must not disturb a Member who is speaking, by hissing, chanting, clapping, booing, exclamations or other interruption. On 22 January 1693, it was resolved that Mr. Speaker do call upon the Member by name, making such disturbance, and that every such person shall incur the displeasure and censure of the House.

Well, Mr. Speaker, a certain amount of interjections are certainly to be tolerated in the House, and well they should be. For the most part they are jocular in nature, and they don't detract from the ability of members to enjoy the excellent conversation which takes place in the House. But I think that with the quantity and volume of interruptions that were occurring today, particularly on the part of the Leader of the Official Opposition in response to those various questions, it was difficult if not impossible to hear what the Premier was saying on those occasions when those interjections were happening. I heard some various interjections, which I understand were in the nature of, "What are you afraid of, Ed?" and so on, which I think are completely inappropriate in the House.

In my respectful view, Mr. Speaker, the interjections by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition were excessive. They were worthy of a sanction of the House by way of, certainly, your finding that there was a valid point of order there.

The Speaker: Are there others? Peace River, are you getting up on this point of order?

Mr. Oberle: No.

The Speaker: Well, lookit, hon. members. I'm going to repeat what day this is. I'm going to repeat where we are. I'm going to repeat where we are in this session, the month and the mood and everything else. Okay?

Now, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar and hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, you should be commended for doing outstanding research with respect to this. When you can dig back into citations coming from 1693, this is just really good. I apologize to you if, in fact, because of a lack of my interjections when all the members of this Assembly were being so enthusiastic – and I say all members of this Assembly were being so enthusiastic. I very clearly can relate to the question period when the hon. Premier cited from a certain letter, and all members on the government side erupted with glee and pounding desks and everything else. I can recall that. Then I can recall another occasion when someone else said something absolutely correct. Virtually all the members on the other side of the House erupted.

So we had a good day today in terms of thunderous applause and enthusiastic participation. Maybe that is good, hon. members. Maybe it's good to see people who are alive. They have blood flowing through their veins, and they're really taking their work to heart. They're into it.

Look. This is not a normal reflection. There were some, I guess, bullets today. Some people would say that. I think there were some bulls' eyes, maybe, today. That raised the excitement level with a little more enthusiasm.

Hon. members, if you want me to rise every time any hon. member was offside with a rule, I would be up for the whole question period. The only person anybody would ever see on television would be me – it wouldn't be anybody else – and you'd all be thundering in the background, and the public out there would be saying some wonderful things.

I have to tell you a little secret, though, that you should all know. Those mics are live in front of the hon. member. So even though all the hon. members in the Assembly are pounding their desks in an attempt to drown out the speaker, that mic is live, and that television camera is only on the person who's talking. So the hon. members in here may be drowning somebody out, but the vast television audience that we have hears it all very, very clearly. They're not missing a thing. The only people who are missing something, perhaps, in this exchange are the hon. members. Any skilled

parliamentarian in this Assembly knows that, and they will continue to speak into that mic and look enthusiastically into that television camera, and that will be the tape for eternity. *Hansard* will not report this thunderous drowning out of people in this particular Assembly.

Again, I'm not standing up here every time somebody is offside a bit. That takes away the ebb and the flow of the Legislative Assembly. But by the same token there's a responsibility on all of us to be honourable, and that's really the key.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

Adjournment of Session

28. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the spring sitting of the Third Session of the 26th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until November 5, 2007, as per Standing Order 3.1(2) or until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

[Government Motion 28 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

3:00 Suspension of the Routine

29. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that on Thursday, June 14, 2007, the Assembly suspend its daily Routine under Standing Order 7 for His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to attend upon the House for the purpose of Royal Assent, with the daily Routine to continue after His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor retires from the Chamber.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a bit unusual. We anticipate June 14 being the last day of the spring session. We've requested the presence of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor to give royal assent to such bills as may have been passed by that time. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has a standing commitment that he's had for some time which precludes him from coming later on in the day while we're in session, which would be our normal procedure. So although it's unusual, I would ask the permission of the House for us to invite His Honour the Lieutenant Governor during daily Routine and that we suspend daily Routine for that period of time until he is able to attend, give royal assent, and retire.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this motion is debatable.
Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 29 carried]

The Speaker: I take it that by the decision made here by the Assembly, we would have the prayer on Thursday, and then the Lieutenant Governor would be invited before we start the Routine, after the prayer.

Mr. Hancock: That's my anticipation, yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

The Speaker: I'm going to call on the hon. President of the Treasury Board momentarily, but hon. Member for Peace River, you rose several times. Do you have a point of information that you want to rise on?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I do, and I apologize if the timing was inappropriate, and I interjected on what was a creative and thoughtful point of order from over there.

Mr. Speaker, during your ruling on your first point of order you said that the Conservative caucus could purchase radio advertising, and that would be consistent with the rules of this House as they stand today. I wish to clarify that in actual fact the Conservative caucus does not purchase radio advertising with their caucus funds nor will we do so. I don't want the taxpayers of Alberta to think anything different. We will not purchase partisan radio advertising with our caucus funds.

Thank you for the opportunity to clarify.

The Speaker: So I take it that the hon. member was rising under Standing Order 13(2), which requests, basically, a further explanation from the Speaker with respect to his statement. Okay.

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 43 Appropriation Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With all these numbers flying around, I guess that it's appropriate that it is my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 43, the Appropriation Act, 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The second reading of Bill 43, Appropriation Act, 2007. There's been quite a lot of debate through a number of weeks on all different parts of this bill, yet it's important also to look at it as a whole.

You know, my economics training, brief as it was, taught me to pay attention to history. History teaches us that when the economy is slow or even in a recession, it is wise for governments to spend money on capital projects so that workers have jobs and employment rises, but when there is a hot economy, as we have now, it is wise for governments to invest and save for the future.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Where's the wisdom in a \$33 billion provincial budget as we have before us here in Bill 43? This can only be a budget that will increase the overheated economy. It will do nothing to decrease inflation or slow down our overheated economy. I mean, it's obvious that we are at a special crossroads in Alberta in terms of our hot economy today. GDP increased one-third from 1991 to 2003. GDP growth in Alberta in 2006 was 6.8 per cent, more than double the national rate. Inflationary pressures grow. The consumer price index was 5.5 per cent in March. The government would prefer to refer to this growth as bringing about growth pressures, but the more we listen to ordinary Albertans, the more we realize that the growth

pressures are actually growth crises, especially when we look at people's individual lives and how they are struggling to cope with our overheated economy.

This especially is obvious, Mr. Speaker, in the area of housing. I have a special interest in this area. We removed that part of the budget of Municipal Affairs and Housing to vote separately on it because we were not happy with the response of the department to the Affordable Housing Task Force. I was a part of that task force. It was an amazing opportunity to go out on the road and to hear Albertans all across the province in all sorts of different cities.

The pressures are just amazing. The population increased by 109,000 in 2006. There has been a 10.4 per cent increase in population since 2001, so you have the pressures of increasing population. House prices in 2006 went up 31 per cent, in Edmonton 52 per cent, so you have tremendous pressures on families because of the high cost of housing. The rental vacancy rate is at .9 per cent. The overall vacancy rate in rural Alberta in 2006 was 1.4 per cent, a 10-year low.

The Affordable Housing Task Force concluded when they looked at all these statistics and listened to people throughout Alberta that this makes for a perfect storm. You have tight supply, not enough housing of any kind. There's not enough housing for people who are homeless, not enough emergency shelter space. There's not enough transitional housing. There's not enough subsidized housing and not enough affordable housing. There's not enough market housing for people coming to Alberta with high-skill jobs. There's tight supply, and there's high demand given the tremendous increase in population. Then there are labour shortages with the high cost of construction. All that amounts to a housing crisis in Alberta.

We were not happy with the Municipal Affairs and Housing response to the Affordable Housing Task Force. They proposed to support . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Were you disappointed or just not happy?

Dr. B. Miller: Well, we asked for \$480 million a year for five years to build 12,000 units of affordable housing, and the government response was half of that, \$240 million. So the numbers weren't there. Most of all, we were unhappy with the fact that the government didn't respond to our suggestions about reorganizing the government to have a more concentrated focus on housing, to have a secretariat of housing or a ministry of housing where there is a concerted effort to pull the pieces together from all the different silos within government to focus on housing because it is a huge crisis.

Mr. Speaker, the effect of this, the appropriation bill, Budget 2007, on Albertans to me raises the question: who shares in the Alberta advantage? Where is all the money from resource revenue going? Obviously, that money is not going to people with low incomes. Income support rates through Alberta Works programs have remained virtually the same for the last 15 years, but buying power has for those people dropped. The Edmonton Social Planning Council produced a document in which they state that after adjusting for inflation, the real value of monthly social assistance benefits since 1980 has dropped by over 50 per cent for families with children and, even worse, a 60 per cent drop for single adults.

People on social assistance are obviously falling further and further behind because the money that they get and the rates haven't changed considerably, appreciatively, in the last 10 or 15 years, yet they are not able to purchase as much with those meagre monies that they get. They fall further and further behind. This budget really doesn't have anything that's good news for people living in poverty, people on low incomes.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council points out that in this year's budget, which refers to, for example, people expected to work

or not expected to work or learners, that effective July 1 those clients not expected to work and those clients temporarily unable to work will receive a 5 per cent increase in their monthly benefits. Learners will receive their 5 per cent increase. This leaves the remaining Alberta Works recipients who are expected to work with no increase in their benefit levels, meaning they will keep falling further behind as living costs rise.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, the issue is really serious because if there's nothing in this budget, no appreciable increase in rates for people receiving income support, especially for the housing component, then these people are the near homeless. In the housing task force we decided to invent a new term, not just homelessness but the nearly homeless: people who are one rent increase from being homeless. That's the situation we face with people on low income.

With the huge increase in rents, monthly rents have increased close to 60 per cent in the past decade, but recently they've just gone through the roof. They're skyrocketing. So it's not surprising that in 2006 there were 8,900 people in Alberta who were waiting for subsidized housing. Alberta's homeless population is growing: 32 per cent of an increase in Calgary over the last two years, a 19 per cent increase in the homeless population in Edmonton over the last two years, a 24 per cent increase in the homeless population in Fort McMurray over the last two years. Five years ago the number of Albertans in need of core housing was 106,000. What is it now: 150,000, 200,000, 250,000? It's just incredible the number of people that can't get the kind of housing that they need for their families. We're hearing that.

I had a town hall meeting a few weeks ago in the Britannia Youngstown area of my riding, and I have another one tonight in the Inglewood area of my riding. I'm sure I'll hear the same story tonight as I heard at the first town hall meeting: that families with low income cannot cope in this hot economy. This budget doesn't help them.

This budget, an all-time high of \$33 billion, is certainly going to just exacerbate the inflationary hot economy that we have. It's not going to slow the economy down. It's not going to slow the inflation down. Those who are on the bottom end of the rich and poor scale are just in a worse and worse situation all the time. On that basis it's really a moral issue. If this government is not going to help considerably and effectively people on low income, then I raise an ethical question about this budget because every budget is a work of ethics.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to talk just about poor families and families with low incomes, but it's also an issue for families with middle incomes. I mean, with the GDP going up and up so rapidly and huge profits being made by oil companies, we have to ask the question: what about middle-class Albertans? It's obvious, I think, that the wages of middle-class Albertans are not going up as rapidly as the GDP. So we can ask the question: who benefits from this hot economy? It's not low-income Albertans. It's not even middle-income Albertans.

I think that we're going to see middle-income families squeezed more and more as time goes on, and 2007-2008 will go down in history as a time of tremendous labour unrest as more and more people – teachers, construction workers, people in all areas of life – try to catch up by asking for higher wages. Thanks to an inflationary budget like this and uncontrolled economic growth, all the costs are being driven up, and middle-income people are being squeezed as never before. People are becoming restless, and we hear about this all the time at our town hall meetings or in our constituency offices.

Mr. Speaker, one area of Alberta working life that I want to especially focus on is the people who work for not-for-profit

organizations. We're really in trouble when it comes to supporting people who are in the service sector or in the hospitality sector, people working in hotels and restaurants, people working in hospitals, the staff at universities and colleges, people involved in the helping professions, the care professions. Those people are being hit big time. There's a huge turnover of employees. People can't manage to survive on \$10 an hour or \$12 an hour or even \$15 an hour. It's especially distressing when you go to daycare centres or go to institutions that look after disabled children, and you realize that the most vulnerable children in Alberta are being affected.

A hot economy means that people working in those, even if they have a sense of calling, that what they're doing is really giving of themselves, they still have to survive. They still have to pay the rent. They still have to buy food. They can't manage on \$12 an hour or \$13 an hour. It's just impossible. Jim Gurnett of the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers says that the best of times produced by the boom results in the worst of times for many. He should know because the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers works with all kinds of people who work in the social institutions and the social agencies in the inner city. It's a shame that these people can't afford to live now in our cities in Alberta.

Now, New York City came to that point a number of years ago when they realized that their public service people, the police and those who work in the fire companies, couldn't afford to live in New York. New York had to adopt new strategies to build affordable housing. My understanding is that the mayor of Calgary and members of the staff of the city of Calgary went to New York to find out what their best practices were so that we could be in a position to be ready to take action here in Alberta because we've come to that point, Mr. Speaker. Many people working in the service sector can't afford to live in Alberta. They're making choices like: "Should we move to Saskatchewan? Maybe we should go back to Nova Scotia. Maybe we can't afford to live here at all."

It affects our own sons and daughters. I have two sons. One has moved to London, Ontario; one is moving to London, England. Part of the reason is that – they are in the arts field; one is a writer, and one is a pianist, a musician – given the rent costs here in the city, they can't afford to live here, which is a shame for me. I mean, I'll enjoy going to London, England, to visit them, but still it's a shame that they have to move away in order to make ends meet. So, Mr. Speaker, I was upset that the government's response to the Affordable Housing Task Force did not take into consideration the whole package of suggestions that the task force put forward, the variety of sticks and carrots, of incentives and also guidelines that would help to move us ahead to provide affordable housing in Alberta.

Well, those are my remarks. I want to conclude by stating that I agree with the Edmonton Social Planning Council that on reviewing the Budget for 2007, "it is clear that fighting poverty and addressing the needs of its most vulnerable citizens is not the government's top priority." Spending on capital projects is up by over one-third, and overall spending is up by 10 per cent, but there are no increases for vulnerable Albertans dependent on income support. Five per cent just for some, nothing for others. Mr. Speaker, I think that's deplorable.

3:20

I just want to conclude by mentioning, again, that it's community agencies that contract with provincial government to take care of our most vulnerable children, providing child care, child protection, family support for the developmentally disabled, continuing care, home care, all of those services: the people working in that sector are the most affected. Those institutions cannot find staff. They have trouble recruiting and retaining staff in the hot market that we have

right now. That is really unfortunate for this province. It raises the question about whether we can maintain the kind of quality of life that we've had in the past. The bottom line is that it's not just about money. It's about being able to maintain the quality of life that we all want for Albertans.

Those are my remarks about Bill 43 and about the budget in general. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to participate in debate on the appropriations bill in second reading, Bill 43. The appropriations bill, as you know, sums up the deliberations that we've had in the Assembly with respect to the Executive Council and all the ministries which fall under the provincial cabinet. Today I am hoping to state some aspects with which I was disappointed in terms of the provincial budget this year.

Now, I will start by talking a little bit about the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation. In Edmonton-McClung, my constituency, Mr. Speaker, we are waiting for three overpasses to be built on the Anthony Henday Drive. The Anthony Henday, as you know, is the Edmonton ring road. Initially, there wasn't a lot of traffic on it because it wasn't finished. It is still not finished, but there's a lot more traffic now than six months ago or a year ago because more legs of the Anthony Henday are opened. There is traffic that stretches between the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud to Edmonton-McClung to Edmonton-Meadowlark to Edmonton-Calder and St. Albert even and Edmonton-Castle Downs. It is growing. The Edmonton ring road is growing, and so is traffic that is taking it.

The government decided to use cement for sections of the Anthony Henday instead of the traditional treated rubberized asphalt. They did their research and apparently came up with the idea that cement is less expensive, and it lives longer. Now, I am not an engineer, and I don't know if that is true, but the end result is that there is a lot of noise emanating from the Edmonton ring road, Mr. Speaker. Many people who live close to the Edmonton ring road are complaining that the noise is unrelenting, the noise is intrusive.

You know, at any hour of the day you can actually hear trucks and vehicles gearing up and gearing down. You can hear them when they brake. You can hear them on the ring road. My challenge to any of my hon. colleagues who think that these people are maybe extra sensitive or maybe they're a little on the whining side is for them to go and visit. I would actually be honoured to receive any of my hon. colleagues from this House who are willing to come and tour these areas of my constituency in which the noise is unbearable.

Now, how would the overpasses help? The overpasses are going to even out, or smooth, that traffic so people don't have to brake and then accelerate again. Having traffic lights on the Anthony Henday, Mr. Speaker, is, to me, not the right thing to do. I think it is wrong to have traffic lights on a major speedway – you know, the average speed limit on the Henday is 110 kilometres per hour – and for somebody to be travelling at that speed and then slam on their brakes because 50 metres from here there is a traffic light.

The congestion is another issue, Mr. Speaker. Cars are backed up for long periods of time. We're not talking two or three minutes, as is customary and as is acceptable. We're talking 20, 25, and 30 minutes at times. Then, when you look at other sections of the Henday, for example 100th Avenue or Stony Plain Road, you're talking 45 minutes to an hour. I think this is unacceptable.

In this House I've stood up on a few occasions to table petitions from concerned citizens who have come together to sign a plea, a

plight, directed at the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation to finish those overpasses and interchanges. I don't know how far we are from completing these interchanges and overpasses, but this budget did not offer me any assurance that this was a priority. I know that the government prefers to keep opening new legs of the Anthony Henday because, quite frankly, it is a media opportunity. It's a photo op where the hon. minister and his colleagues would put on the hard hat and wave at cameras and give a speech. I think we should finish what we start.

Mr. Rogers: It's coming. It takes time.

Mr. Elsalhy: When? That's the issue. We don't know when. There's nothing in this year's budget. My hon. colleague from Leduc-Beaumont-Devon says it's coming. Well, I hope it is, because commuters and motorists are asking for it, and so are the people who live close to the Anthony Henday.

The other thing is noise attenuation, as I mentioned. Noise attenuation is not difficult, and it shouldn't be expensive. People don't have huge expectations. All they want is a berm, for example, or some trees to be planted. I know at least two of my constituents who attended every open house and every information session that was put on by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation before the Anthony Henday was constructed. They were promised: "Don't worry. Your berms are going to be in place to attenuate the noise. We don't want you to be troubled or disturbed in your own residences, and we also don't want your property values to drop."

In this market, Mr. Speaker, these people are now concerned that the promise which was made six years ago has not been kept. When they approach ministry officials, they're told that those ministry officials don't know the answer. They don't know when those berms or those noise attenuation measures are going to be brought in. Again, this budget doesn't offer that assurance. These people are starting to contemplate leaving their dream homes, the homes they bought with their hard-earned dollars or that they actually built. It shouldn't be that way.

I'm hoping that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation will take this issue to heart. Again, if he's really interested in touring my constituency, I would be honoured to take him along and to introduce him to some of these residents, who can actually offer him a cup of tea or some coffee or whichever other beverage he prefers, and they can actually make him stand in their backyard or make him stand on their deck, and he can actually see that.

The other thing I would draw his attention to are some pictures which I tabled in this House showing how flat that landscape is and how flat that terrain is. You know, all we're asking for is some dirt. Six or seven truckloads per location should do the trick for now, until those overpasses are built. That's one thing.

The other thing is with respect to Municipal Affairs and Housing, as echoed by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora. We know that the government was not prepared for the housing crisis, to their credit or in their defence, maybe because nobody could have predicted that it was going to be this big this quick. However, they had an opportunity when they were deliberating internally to come up with the figures for all the different ministries to say, "You know, housing is going to be a crisis. We should not only focus on the lowest 10 per cent of those people who are in trouble. We should expand that because 10 per cent," as my colleague from Glenora indicated, "captures only a small portion of that class of citizens that is in trouble now."

We talk about seniors. We talk about people who are on fixed income, pensioners, people on assistance, people who are having difficulty making ends meet. We talk about the definition of

affordable housing and affordability for rent or accommodations. There was the arbitrary number that 30 per cent of your income should be the maximum anybody has to pay for accommodation, be it rent, be it mortgage, and that anything over 30 per cent warrants intervention, warrants action by the government.

We know that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing kept talking about \$285 million which were added to fix a whole bunch of problems. My argument is twofold. The first part of that argument is: throwing money at the problem after the fact can help a little bit but not a whole lot. Using band-aids and using temporary treatments does not treat or fix or take care of the underlying cause or the underlying problem.

3:30

The other component of my argument is going to say that we need a plan, and we need a plan not only for housing. We need a plan for investments. We need a plan for education. We need a plan for health care and so on and so forth. The plan has to be not one year, not two, not three. It has to be five and 10 even, Mr. Speaker. Beyond the \$285 million that the hon. minister of municipal affairs keeps talking about, what else is there?

I'm going to switch gears, and instead of just talking about people who are currently suffering, I'm going to reiterate a request which was given to me by one of my constituents who is really excited about the opportunity for him as a landlord to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. He asked me and he asked my staff what programs there are. The government keeps talking about incentives and carrots for developers and landlords to bring in affordable housing to the market, increasing supply, as we all talk about. My staff phoned three of the government ministries, Mr. Speaker, and they didn't get a satisfactory answer. Every time they asked those officials, "What are those programs that we heard about in the House, and what are those programs which were promised by your hon. minister?" oh, it's still being worked on. I think this is unacceptable if we are asking developers and landlords to be part of the solution, and we're promising them that there is some financial incentive, you know, be it tax credits, be it money up front, be it assistance with their mortgages or their bank loans or whatever. I don't know what the programs are, and apparently neither do the government officials.

I am hoping that there would be like a one-stop shop for MLAs and for constituents alike to go to and say: "Okay. We have the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation. We have the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. We have the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports. There is Finance. There is the Treasury Board." The issue is so stretched out and so diluted that we don't know who to go to. So my question today with respect to this budget and with respect to the appropriation: who should I talk to and where do I go if one of my constituents wants to build 60 units or a hundred units or however many? Where do I take him, and who should he speak to in the government? If we're serious about getting these people to partner with the government, to be part of the solution, as I mentioned, then we shouldn't give them the runaround, and honestly, MLAs should not be given the runaround as well.

Mr. Speaker, education is my third concern because, as mentioned numerous times in this House, giving school boards 3 per cent is not adequate. I was speaking to the chairperson of the Edmonton Catholic school board, and she mentioned that school bus drivers are going to receive a 9 per cent increase this year. As a layperson: how is that possible? If I give you a 3 per cent raise but I ask you to do something that would cost you 9 per cent more, how are you going to reconcile both sides of that equation? Financial charts have to be balanced, and rightly so. School boards should be accountable, and

I agree, but we should also empower them to deliver the services that we ask them to.

Given that inflation is 5 and a half per cent and given rising labour costs, transportation costs, and all these other things, I think that 3 per cent actually amounts to a budget cut. If I'm going to be asked to vote on that particular department, you know, Mr. Speaker, I'm inclined to not support that particular budget because I really think it's not fair to the school boards to be asked to do this, and then they're the ones receiving the blame and having to answer to the parents and answer to the constituents. The government of Alberta keeps its distance, and they stay behind the scenes when in fact they're the ones holding the purse strings, and they're the ones that are underfunding and undermining public education.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on about what's wrong with the budget, but I'll take an opportunity to highlight some things which are good with the budget. Take, for example, the extra funding for hiring Crown prosecutors. This is an area which I oversee in the Official Opposition, and I thought this was quite a favourable development. The Edmonton Remand is finally being constructed. Again, that's an area which members of the opposition have asked for and asked to see over many years. I'm excited that now we can finally address this seemingly chronic issue.

I'm disappointed to some extent that funding for police services did not rise by as much as I'd hoped, but I know that government agencies and departments all compete for pieces of the same cake and that we have to make concessions somewhere for other areas to be looked at more vigorously, which is fine. I'm hoping that next year my concerns with respect to police funding would be addressed and would be addressed more equitably.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I would seek unanimous consent of the House that we could work for the rest of the afternoon without jackets.

The Deputy Speaker: As I understand, the hon. Minister of Education has asked for unanimous consent for the male members to not wear jackets. Is that correct?

Mr. Liepert: That's correct.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Any others under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the comments of the member opposite he seems to have bought into this fallacy that education is underfunded. I wonder if he understands that seven-tenths of a school year is funded in the previous year's budget. For example, for the current school year seven-tenths of that was in last year's budget and three-tenths in this year's budget. So for him to constantly parrot the messages that we get from certain interested parties on this particular issue and to say that education is underfunded, I wonder if he really understands how it is funded.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish to respond.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, this is the divide that we have. Members of the opposition think that education deserves to be given more attention. We think that education is an investment in the future and that school boards should be given at least the

amount of money that basically allows them to cover their rising costs and to also pay for inflation and so on. The government doesn't factor that in. Now, whether in fact 60 per cent or 70 per cent was paid for last year versus this year, the issue is chronic because the underfunding continues.

Mr. Herard: Ten per cent, not 3.

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, they keep talking about 10 per cent and 15 per cent, and then the minister says 80 per cent since 1992 or whatever. They forget sometimes that they actually severely butchered the funding for education when they brought in their cuts in 1992. They reduced it to almost nothing, and then they increased it. It's almost like, Mr. Speaker, you drop a nuclear bomb on a city and then pretend to rebuild it. Well, what you've done is severely undermined education. [interjections] Now all of a sudden they're starting to talk. I think, you know, they had the opportunity, when we were debating those programs, to defend them.

Anyway, the question is that after you cut those budgets that severely and then you tried to give 2 per cent this year, 3 per cent next year, 4 per cent the year after and so on, there is no systematic approach for those school boards to be able to budget properly. Sometimes, depending on when the provincial budget is delivered – and, you know, Mr. Speaker, that this year the provincial budget was late – their ability to budget and their ability to forecast what's going to happen in the future is restricted. We've heard stories and situations where school boards are now laying off staff, and then they'll see what will happen in the fall. So we don't know . . .

Mr. Liepert: Where? Name them.

3:40

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, haven't you heard in question period today that the question from the hon. Member for St. Albert mentioned 15 people being laid off? Grande Prairie, Mr. Speaker: here's an example.

They choose to ignore these facts, and it's a government that's in denial, Mr. Speaker. If educators, parents, and school boards, all of them, are agreeing that education needs to be funded in a better way and that more resources should be allocated to school boards to be able to deliver those essential services that we ask them to, then 3 per cent really doesn't cut it. Three per cent doesn't match inflation, doesn't match the rising costs of labour, transportation. Books even cost more. How can the Ministry of Education expect a school board to change curriculum, for example, and buy new books when, in fact, their costs cannot be met?

Well, the reliance on parents' fundraising and the reliance on school fees and casinos should really stop, Mr. Speaker. This is a government that should really live up to its responsibility. We elect governments, and we pay them taxes to deliver those services. We don't elect them to say: "Here, dear school board, take 3 per cent. You take the blame. We'll stay behind." This is unacceptable to me.

Mr. Liepert: Campaign on a sales tax next time.

Mr. Elsalhy: Oh, the Minister of Education would like to impose a sales tax for parents to be able to afford their kids' education.

Education is public, Mr. Speaker, and should remain this way. We should not really off-load that provincial responsibility and abdicate it onto the backs of parents and onto the backs of school boards, which are undermined.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I notice that the member over there that was just speaking was talking about adding more money to education. I guess I have a simple question in my last 15 seconds. How much more would he add, and where would he get the money? I heard the minister say in QP today that we've raised education spending by 86 per cent over the last 10 years. Well, inflation only went up about 29 per cent, and enrolments only went up about 5 per cent. I'm just wondering: how much is enough, and where would he get the money?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time for Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Others on the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate on Bill 43 this afternoon. I've been listening with a great deal of interest to the discussions so far. When we look at the budget this year and we look at the budget 10 years ago, it has certainly more than doubled. There are many reasons why we need this sort of instant infusion of cash. We are spending a lot of money. The government is certainly hoping that voters will forget that this is the same government who did very little to maintain our existing infrastructure, and now as a result of that, we have the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation digging into a big black bag over there because there are so many outstanding projects that need immediate attention.

Certainly, whenever we look at this budget and we look at this bill and we look at the current state of education, education cannot be neglected. I know public education is not respected by some members of the government caucus, but it cannot be neglected. If we need more money, hon. members, I would say that the first place we should look is Horse Racing Alberta. [interjections] Oh, yeah. I hear all these sorts of callous laughs over there.

Surely, the current minister of advanced education knows this better than anyone else. Why would an outfit like that need any government subsidies or any lottery grants? In the public accounts book it is a grant. It is listed as a grant in the blue book. Subsidy has been a little bit kind with that line item of over \$50 million. They can certainly afford to pay millions of dollars in cash, hon. minister of advanced education. You should know this from your past as the minister of agriculture. They can spend millions of dollars for land in Balzac. I think the total, Mr. Speaker, is close to \$15 million in land. They paid cash for this land.

An Hon. Member: Who?

Mr. MacDonald: Horse Racing Alberta or their corporate affiliates: that's who, hon. member.

Then whenever the department of agriculture is going to give them a grant for some waterworks, well, they can come up with another \$5 million or \$6 million of their own money for that portion of it. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation is listening to this with a great deal of interest, and I'm sure it's not the first time that he's heard this. But if they can come up with that kind of money, surely they can do without any grants or subsidies from this government, and that money could be transferred into the Department of Education.

Now, if that is not enough, I was sitting listening to the budget discussions last night at the Edmonton Catholic school board, and I was listening to the discussion of the \$15 million shortfall. I

reminded myself that in the last three fiscal years this government has granted to golf courses across the province over \$7 million. These are golf courses that, I think, can stand on their own.

Mr. Liepert: Name them.

Mr. MacDonald: I can name them if you wish, hon. member, and I can start with one in Calgary called Inglewood, which has, Mr. Speaker, a substantial fee before you can join that club as a member. Vegreville, for instance: the golf course in Vegreville got a \$200,000 grant. Now, if we can afford and if our priorities are to fund lavishly all these golf courses, why on earth can we not fund public education?

The balanced budget approved for the 2007-08 year for the Edmonton Catholic schools is close to \$300 million. It's as close to \$300 million as you can get. They state – and this is in their own press release – that “the 3% increase to the Basic Education Grant does not meet the increased costs of educating today's child, so creating a balanced budget for 2007/08 was a very difficult process filled with extremely difficult decisions.” That is a quote in the press release from the board chairperson, Debbie Engel.

Now, certainly, a shortfall of \$15 million may not mean much to a group of Progressive Conservatives who are gathering around discussing a \$33 billion budget because if there's one thing we know for certain, it's that you're quite used to spending a lot of money. Whether you spend it wisely, that's another matter, but you're used to spending a lot of money. You guys spend more money than . . . [interjection] No. The New Democratic Party in Saskatchewan would be perhaps the most fiscally prudent government in the country: balanced budget. This would be on a per capita basis the most extravagant government in this . . .

Mr. Horner: Make up your mind, Hugh. Do you want us to spend more, or do you want us to spend less?

Mr. MacDonald: No, hon. minister of advanced education, I want you to spend it wisely. There are certainly places in this \$33 billion budget where it is being spent unwisely. As chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee I see ministry after ministry come through there on a weekly basis, and I'm not convinced that all the money that you are spending is being spent wisely. I just gave you two examples of where you could improve.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this \$15 million shortfall. If we look at Edmonton Catholic schools' severe special-needs funding, in 2006-07 Alberta Education funded the district for 907 students even though the district serves 1,000 special-needs students, and this created a funding shortfall of approximately \$1.5 million.

Infrastructure maintenance renewal funding. This funding has been reduced by 55 per cent, from \$12 million to \$5.4 million.

Now, the negotiation process. I hope everything works out very well this fall for the government, for the minister, for the parents, for the students, and for the teachers. The Edmonton Catholic school district is negotiating with the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta union of public employees, and those contracts expire on August 31, '07. In addition, the district has just ratified a new two-year contract with the Edmonton Catholic Support Staff Association and will give staff a 4 per cent increase a year in each year of the contract.

3:50

Transportation. Costs for providing student transportation continue to increase. The budget increases by almost 8 per cent for 2007-08. Parents through the purchase of bus passes will also need to contribute an additional 10 per cent, or over \$320,000, in 2007-08.

The curriculum. The new curriculum costs for 2007-08, Mr. Speaker, will be in the range of \$1.5 million.

So those are some of the issues that Edmonton Catholic schools have.

Now, Mr. Speaker, here are some of the examples of the funding shortfalls the Edmonton Catholic schools will experience. In instructional programs, special needs: we talked about that. I would remind all hon. members of the House that funding in this area for 2007-08 has increased by only 3 per cent. With more students being served, allocations to schools remain at the same levels as 2006-07.

Full-day kindergarten – and we all know what the Learning Commission said – is offered at 17 schools, serving approximately 300 students considered at risk for failure because of socioeconomic status, language, and social/emotional factors. Now, the program was previously funded through the Alberta initiative for school improvement; however, as a second cycle of AISI projects concluded at the end of 2005-06 school year, the district is required to fund this much-needed program through other sources. Recognizing the benefits of a full-day kindergarten program, the district – and good for them – is committed to the educational benefit of the program and continues to fund the program even without dedicated funding. Surely we would be better off spending money on a full-day kindergarten program than direct grants to golf courses. Let's get our priorities right.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's one thing I do have to say on the record, and I don't know how much time I have left. I certainly admire the Minister of Education. It's not the first time I've seen him out and about without an entourage. He comes. He talks to the people. He talks to the officials, the public at large, the teachers that are there, and he's not like, you know, an aristocratic Conservative with an entourage. He comes alone, and he goes alone, and he does a very good job communicating with the citizens. I would urge all hon. members of the front bench there to take a page from his playbook and perhaps get out and meet the people alone without this crew of executive assistants and communications people and whatnot. You should follow his actions and speak directly one on one with the citizens.

I saw him at the Edmonton Catholic school board's meeting last night. It's not the first time I've seen him there alone, and I hope it's not the last. I admire him for that because he speaks with parents and teachers and trustees, and there's not this sort of ring of protection around him like I see with other ministers. Yes.

Mr. Rodney: What are you trying to say?

Mr. MacDonald: I'm trying to say, hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, that some of these front-benchers are out of touch with the citizens of this province, but not the Minister of Education. No way.

Infrastructure maintenance renewal funding. Now, this funding is provided to school districts to upgrade and/or replace building components that have failed or pose problems in order to meet health and safety requirements, to extend the life of a school facility, and to maintain the quality of the school environment. This funding, I would remind the hon. minister of infrastructure, has been reduced by 55 per cent, again, from \$12 million to this year's anticipated budget of \$5.4 million. Alberta Infrastructure has indicated that the infrastructure maintenance and renewal funding for school districts should be 2 per cent of the value of all buildings, or about \$12 million for this specific school district, the Edmonton Catholic school district. In 2006-07 the district received \$12 million, but in this year funding will be reduced to \$5.4 million, or a reduction of \$6 million, of 55 per cent.

Now, why is this? If this is such a great budget and we're funding public education the way it should be funded, why is this? We know what happens when there is a lack of planned infrastructure spending: the bill gets bigger later on.

With transportation and transportation fees one has to recognize that the price of gasoline is going up, and that's another issue. But costs for providing student transportation continue to rise due to the high cost of fuel and rising operator costs. That's the maintenance of the buses and the drivers' wages. Transportation grants have increased by 3 per cent, and as a result we're asking parents to pick up the tab again. Parents are required to pay the additional costs of providing transportation for their children. In 2007-08 parents will contribute 3 and a half million dollars towards getting their children to school, an increase of 10 per cent. In 2006-07 it's interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that according to the Edmonton Catholic school board this rose to approximately \$3.2 million, an increase of school bus passes of 33 per cent. In September of 2007 bus passes for elementary, junior high, and high school will increase by \$3 per month.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available again if anyone wishes to participate.

Mr. Bonko: Well, I was curious as to if the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was going to finish. He was cut off there, so I wasn't sure what he was going to say. I'd appreciate him being able to finish his little piece there.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you have some more comments?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore: in September of 2007 bus passes for elementary, junior high, and high school students will increase by \$3 per month. It may seem like a very small amount of money. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora met many of these individuals when he was on the housing task force, but that amount of money may be significant for some families who have been forced to pay megabucks for rental accommodation. One of the reasons why they're forced to pay these megabucks is because there has been an absence of planning – a complete absence of planning – by this government in the last five years.

Edmonton city council, Mr. Speaker, displayed their commitment to affordable bus transportation this spring when they reduced the original bus pass increase of \$7.75 per month to only a \$1.25 increase per month. We should note the commitment from Edmonton city council.

In conclusion I would just like to say, Mr. Speaker, that by attending that budget meeting last night, I learned a great deal, and I'm more convinced than ever that we have our spending priorities wrong in this government. Public education and public health care should be our priorities.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there others that wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate having the opportunity to speak to the Appropriation Act, Bill 43. It makes one feel that we're approaching the end to be able to sum things together here to some degree. I'm sure that there's a sense of relief although

a sense as well certainly in the New Democrat caucus that there are so many things that have gone unlooked after that there's a degree of anxiety as well.

4:00

You know, we have a proper economic and social service mandate responsibility in the Legislature here. The management of the economy and the services that we provide through the provincial government have to keep pace with the rapid changes that we're experiencing here in the province of Alberta at this time. The most general sense with this budget is that while the government has boosted its expenditures to start addressing some of the difficult problems that we're all facing here in the province of Alberta, the inflation as well as labour and resource shortages ensure that the government has a difficult if not impossible task to be able to meet the needs of the growing economy.

You have a classic situation where you have rapid expansion and the inflation and shortages that accompany that rapid expansion, and as a result it limits our capacity to deal with growth pressures in the province of Alberta at this time. Although others might look from the outside and consider it an enviable position – certainly, if I look around the large economies around North America, there is none that is growing quite as fast as Alberta – looking from the inside out, we realize, of course, that there are many serious problems that accompany such rapid growth as well.

My comments here this afternoon are just going to go around those basic ideas. Let's just take a look at a quick snapshot of the problems that we do have to face here with this budget. The provincial inflation rate in the province of Alberta is at least 5.5 per cent. This is the highest that it's been in 15 years in this province, and it's certainly the highest in the country. We have a labour shortage that's grinding away the productivity capacity of the province. We have a housing and construction industry that's looking at 25 per cent increases in building costs at least. That's not counting the cost of property, which is included in the sticker price for individuals and families looking to buy places to live. We have staff shortages in such critical areas as health care and in certain professions, engineering and construction.

Rents are increasing at twice the rate of inflation, which is even more troubling considering we have this 15-year high for inflation. Contributing to that but compounding it are these galloping rent rate increases, which of course cause no end of difficulty for people in their individual monthly budgets. We have an infrastructure deficit which we as New Democrats have calculated at being at least \$20 billion and counting, and that's not accounting for that inflation that's increasing that bill by the month.

We have a K to 12 education sector that certainly is very good, but we seem to have some structural problems financing that K to 12 education budget. I'll make more specific comments on that later.

We have postsecondary institutions around the province that have limited spaces and are requiring increased standards to apply to those institutions. As a result, thousands of students are being turned away from postsecondary institutions due to shortages of space.

Finally, I would like to point out as well that we're losing quite literally millions and millions of dollars every day through a royalty structure that's not capturing the value of our resources that everyone in this province owns. As I said, every single day, I would suggest, we are losing millions and millions of dollars. If we had one of those little clocks that they have that counts off some sort of countdown to the Olympics or something like that, if we had something similar that might demonstrate the money that we're losing from an outdated royalty rate, perhaps that would turn the balance in terms of people being concerned enough to have immedi-

ate action on the royalty rates rather than waiting months and months like we have been recently.

In our estimation this budget that we've seen before us in the last month or so makes two things very, very clear. Number one, the economy, despite budgetary surpluses that we have, is clearly overheated, and number two, only now is the government and its various departments waking up to what a formidable task we have ahead of us to put things back into balance.

The \$2 billion surplus in the government's pocket does not mean necessarily, Mr. Speaker, more money into the citizens' pockets. More money is better paid with lower costs for working Albertans; however, such is not the case as we've seen the spiralling costs that Albertans have to pay. So with these circumstances together the problem with the budget was that while the government has boosted expenditures to start addressing these problems, inflation is well above the absolute. As well, the labour and resource shortage will ensure that the government will have a difficult time dealing with this whole situation.

I would like to just look specifically at some areas here, and one area that I would like to talk about just briefly is infrastructure. The budget in infrastructure is reflective of, I think, an ideological basis to use P3s at every opportunity. Certainly, you know, we have seen kind of some luck in regards to P3s working to the advantage, but the thing with the P3 is that you have a deal over a long period of time, so at some point you're going to have to pay the piper; otherwise, the business that has signed into the P3 will either have to pull out because they're losing so much money or will have to renegotiate the terms of the contract. It's a hit-and-miss situation at best.

The evidence that we've gathered from around the world and across the country and, indeed, from our own experiences such as in the courthouse in Calgary shows that P3s are problematic. We have to at the very least watch them very closely over a long period of time to see if they, indeed, work the best for public monies being spent.

Now, infrastructure in general. The minister admitted that only a third of the roads that are required to be repaired at this time are in fact scheduled to be done, yet even with an increased allocation in roads and highway maintenance of approximately \$100 million, the construction industry has publicly stated that there are not enough people to even take on these additional projects. So while we might have the best of intentions, again, the whole different tentacles of an overheated economy come to lay waste to our best laid plans that we might have.

The minister has consistently shortchanged Alberta's cities and municipalities, still claiming to give municipalities extra money for capital projects, but conveniently tied at least half of these projects to provincially mandated priorities. That makes it difficult for municipalities to execute their long-term plans for, say, rapid transit and other projects if they have the money earmarked specifically for other things.

Despite an additional expenditure of \$600 million through the budget, Mr. Speaker, Alberta faces a \$20 billion infrastructure deficit, and that's conveniently similar to the amount of money that had been cut over the preceding years from expenditures here in this Legislature, so there you go. It's not as though you can avoid those expenditures over time. Eventually it comes back like karma, as I said before, to lay waste to one's plans for the future.

4:10

In terms of education I think that we see, again, an unwillingness to look at the long-term development and growth of this province, and education is a good example of that. We have \$508 million set

aside for capital projects in the education sector. This is actually a 5.8 per cent decrease in money from last year and will continue to decrease over the years. This is something that seems to be hidden within the budget somehow. The approved projects will be a quarter of the actual number of projects requested as of December 2006 so, again, not meeting the infrastructure needs of education. Just in one city, Calgary, by my count there are at least up to 40 communities that require schools but don't have them. This is not something that you can continue on forever.

The educational need of students is paramount, and it's very time sensitive. As we said earlier this afternoon, perhaps Edmonton Catholic school board's budget is a harbinger of things to come for many other school boards finding some problems with their capital budgets. Edmonton Catholic schools is saying that they've experienced a 55 per cent decline in their capital budget.

In regard to program expenditures certainly we've used up a fair amount of energy in the last few weeks talking about the program earmarked increase at 3 per cent here in the province. You know, this is, of course, out of sync with even the rate of inflation here in the province of Alberta. I still have not had explained to me adequately how exactly we are going to divide up those fishes and loaves to pay the 2 or even 3 or 4 per cent differential between what the program expenditure needs are and what school boards are being given to work with.

As, again, we talked about earlier today and previously, negotiations are coming up with the Teachers' Association. The school boards will be in a very difficult situation indeed. We really are not in a position to require this sort of strife here at this time. I just really question the utility of it. Why are we stirring up the public education system, which we all agree is a very, very excellent public education system and deserves to be reinforced and buttressed and not shaken and turned upside down?

You know, we often dispute figures. This is something that commonly comes out, but I beg to differ that we do spend the most money on students here and from across the country. There are other jurisdictions that do indeed spend more money and with less utilities available to them. So it's a question of how you say what their spending is. I think that we deserve to do better here in the province of Alberta. The main thing is to make sure that we are meeting the cost of delivering education here in the province of Alberta, which is expensive because of the very hot economy that we are functioning under.

The unfunded liability issue. Certainly, we've expended lots of energy on that as well. It's important that we do go and sit down at the table here as soon as possible. Now is a good time to do so and not delay that decision as well.

The last short bit of comment that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, is in regard to the environment budget. Once again, I'm just reiterating some of the things that I've said before. You know, I really believe – and I'm sure the minister would agree with me in his heart of hearts – that the environment budget in this province has been down by at least a third or a quarter from what it should be. The environment sort of underscores so much of our other economy that we participate in here in the province. If we are not investing in sustainable industry and reinforcing and using the Department of Environment to regulate and to police a sustainable unfolding of our economy, then really we're just living on borrowed time. Without an adequate environment program that is dedicated, then I think we're just living on borrowed time.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder just a few minutes ago indicated that there are other jurisdictions that spend significantly more money on education. I'm wondering which jurisdictions those would be.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, it depends on how you define it, but certainly the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon spend more. I'll have to check on it, but in terms of per-student funding for a certain category, I think Manitoba spends more by \$500, as well, from the 2004 figures.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Yes. I'd like to ask the hon. member to clarify the amount of the infrastructure debt that he spoke about. Can you give us a little more information?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks. I appreciate that question. It's something we've been working on for a number of months, and we will continue to unfold it as the summer progresses. What it is is that we've taken an accumulation of not just education and infrastructure but also health care, building long-term care facilities, lots of projects that have been deferred over time and that we now require. What our preliminary investigations revealed is that this infrastructure deficit is in excess of \$20 billion, which happens to coincide, very interestingly enough, with the budget cuts that we've seen over the last few years on these same projects.

You know, it's like you can't hide these things over time because, of course, the province's needs have actually been expanding exponentially with upwards of 100,000 people moving here, say, last year. We're supporting all of these new people and new enterprises and an expanded economy on the same infrastructure that might have supported 2 million or even less than 2 million people here in the province.

It's a classic case that we've seen. You see it all around the world. You might see a city like Mexico City or Lagos, Nigeria, or Bangkok, Thailand, you know, where you have a city that's designed for, let's say, a million people, and suddenly you have 10 million people living there, so everything is that much more strained. It's always prudent to spend a dime wisely when later on you'll end up having to spend considerably more. I was just astounded at the symmetry of the deficit that was paid down years before and now what we have to pay the piper. It's almost exactly the same. Isn't that interesting?

The Deputy Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder would elaborate on which particular departments' budgets have been cut in the last 12 years. I think he made reference to that, saying that there had been a number of cuts. I personally haven't seen a single cut. All I've seen are consistent increases, but perhaps he has some information I haven't seen. If he does, I'd ask him to share it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Well, sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker and hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek. The departments that I've been following – and let's not forget to take into account inflation and increased jurisdiction. The Environment budget is a perfect example of this

because you have an increased responsibility and an increased expectation, but the numbers are almost equal or very, very similar from 2007 and 2006, even 2005. You don't have, you know, any significant, real increase. Rather, you have just sort of holding the line, so to speak.

Another area that we've now started to see some small increase, you know, is in the area of arts and culture. When you're dealing from a deficit situation, when you're dealing from an underfunded department budget for quite a number of years, you know, when you put in some dribs and drabs of money, then in my estimation that is the definition of just holding the line and not increasing.

Thanks.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a second time]

4:20

Bill 44

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move Bill 44, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, for second reading.

The act is very straightforward. It deals with, as miscellaneous statutes acts do, basic amendments that are not changes in policy and direction but usually corrections of statutes or changes of names. I'd ask the Assembly to approve it for second reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wish to participate in debate?
Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a second time]

head:

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1

CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo I move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act.

This is a groundbreaking, proactive bill, and I commend the members of the Standing Committee on Private Bills, a multiparty committee, for their extensive consideration and visionary recommendation of this bill to the Legislature. In turn, I ask all my colleagues to support Bill Pr. 1.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to respond to Bill Pr. 1, CyberPol, in second reading. I want to indicate that I'm a member of the Private Bills Committee, which met on a few occasions to discuss both Pr. 1 and Pr. 2. While Pr. 2 didn't make it onto the floor of the Assembly, Pr. 1, in fact, did. I wanted to use this opportunity to highlight why it's important to be dealing with the rising incidence of Internet crime and cybercrime.

Now, let's start by talking about the definition of cybercrime, Mr. Speaker. These are crimes which involve things like child pornography, financial fraud, threats to infrastructure and intellectual

property, identity theft, and so on. I was looking on the Internet for a more concise definition, and I actually ran across one from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. They define cybercrime by going through an overview of situations which would be captured under that definition. They say:

Cyber crime consists of specific crimes dealing with computers and networks (such as hacking) and the facilitation of traditional crime through the use of computers (child pornography, hate crimes, telemarketing/Internet fraud). In addition to cyber crime, there is also "computer-supported crime" which covers the use of computers by criminals for communication and document or data storage. While these activities might not be illegal in and of themselves, they are often invaluable in the investigation of actual crimes. Computer technology presents many new challenges to social policy regarding issues such as privacy, as it relates to data mining and criminal investigations.

The RCMP has been dealing with this for quite a while. Provincial agencies and departments have been dealing with this for quite a while. It's an issue that is not new, but it's an issue that is on the rise.

In the Committee on Private Bills the petitioner who brought forward Bill Pr. 1 gave us a brief overview of cybercrime and the reasons which he listed for the province of Alberta to support the establishment of this privately run centre for securing cyberspace. The petitioner talked about the population on the Internet, you know, how many billions of people are on the Internet. Basically, he took the numbers from 2005, and then he extrapolated to 2010. He also talked about Internet usage in Canada, that 64 per cent of Canadian households had at least one member who used the Internet regularly in the year 2003, and that this number has probably grown since then. He also mentioned that 90 per cent or more of Canadian Internet users are between the ages of 18 and 24 years, and in 2005, another statistic, 67 per cent of Canadian adults used the Internet.

He also demonstrated that cybercrime seems to be on the rise, whereas, in fact, physical crime seems to be on the decline. Many reasons could be attributed to why this might be transpiring. Some of it might be explained easily, Mr. Speaker, by the fact that cybercrime is new, or at least it's newer than physical crime. Law enforcement agencies are getting more efficient, and their intelligence and their mechanisms and their tools are getting more sophisticated to catch physical crime or to mitigate its damaging effects, whereas their efforts to curb cybercrime are still in their first steps. He also talked about hacking and denial-of-service attacks, and he talked about terrorism and child porn as some of those examples.

You know, we've even heard of a situation where Russia as a country has used cyberterrorism against other smaller countries, members of the former Soviet Union, for example Moldavia. It's a small country, one of those small nations which separated from the Soviet Union. Russia, itself, brought them to their knees, brought them to a freeze, to a standstill, by targeting their government computers, and they didn't recover till about 36 hours after the attack when they actually resorted to engaging their backup systems and stuff like that.

It could be used on a global scale as well. Are we concerned in Alberta? Yes, you bet. Should we be concerned nationally and internationally? Yes, we should be.

Many of us in this House have received some e-mails and letters from concerned parents who approached all the MLAs in the House and urged us to support Bill Pr. 1. Now, we shouldn't really dismiss this because of the fact that these parents are under the impression that Bill Pr. 1 strengthens laws and toughens penalties for things like Internet child luring and child exploitation, for example. These parents are under the impression that Bill Pr. 1 achieves that. In responding to them, I explained: "Here is the text for the bill. You

can read it for yourselves. It only establishes a physical presence, a building where agencies, governments, and individuals even from Alberta, from Canada, from the international community are going to come together to talk about Internet crime, to study it, to research ways to curb it or to reduce it and so on and so forth, but this bill in particular, as it stands, doesn't really toughen laws or make things harder for criminals." They were under the impression that we're doing something to increase penalties, for example, for child luring and child exploitation online and things like this, child pornography, but really the bill doesn't do that.

I also argued both in committee and outside that this should have been a government initiative. I would have much rather seen this brought by the hon. Minister of Justice or the hon. Solicitor General, for example, introduced in the House as a government initiative, as part of a bigger government approach to cybercrime. Now, am I against a private citizen bringing forward an idea like this? No, not necessarily. But, you know, I think a private citizen would have had other opportunities to establish this centre, be it through the Societies Act or the charitable organizations act or whatever mechanisms exist in the statutes.

4:30

I also briefly touched on the fact that Interpol operates a high-tech, top-of-the-line centre in Ottawa which basically focuses on things that are being discussed here and that maybe Alberta could have collaborated more with Interpol and, you know, not have the need for a stand-alone, privately run centre to be established in this province.

Now, in deliberations in committee, Mr. Speaker, we also had the opportunity to ask some questions of the petitioner. For the most part we got some answers back, but I'm going to put on the record some of the other questions which I don't feel have been adequately answered. Take, for example, a question of whether, in fact, the petitioner approached the provincial government with this idea prior to introducing it to the Private Bills Committee. The answer was that, yes, some presentations were made to high-level government officials, that the overview of the bill was introduced to them.

One of the remarks in that answer, Mr. Speaker, indicates that the private objectives of Bill Pr. 1 may in the future be combined with public objectives, which I find vague. The petitioner's legal counsel goes on to say that this will only happen when a minister of the Crown, responsible to the Legislature, chooses to do so. Well, why don't they choose ahead of time? Why wait for a private citizen to bring this forward and then choose or not choose to engage this centre in government work?

Another question which was given to the petitioner asked if this centre would duplicate or interfere with some of the work currently being carried on by existing government departments and agencies. Examples were given as in the policing and community safety branch of the Solicitor General and Public Security ministry or the special prosecutions branch, technology and Internet crimes division of Alberta Justice. So we do have the mechanisms and the agencies in-house to handle things like this. You know, the integrated child exploitation unit is another example and so on and so forth. Why not use our own tools and facilities?

The answer which was given back to the committee reads, and I quote: due to cross-jurisdictional issues, limited capacity, and cost it would not be feasible for such a project to be carried on by an existing government department. I think this is a little judgmental, you know, for the petitioner to indicate that, in their opinion, government would not be able to undertake such an initiative. I think that this needs to be looked at more carefully.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

Another question which was given to the petitioner was asking about the information that is gathered or stored in the centre and whether, in fact, the government of Alberta would own this information and if fees are going to be charged for access. The answer basically came back saying that information gathered through the CyberPol centre would not be shared except where required by applicable law or treaty. With all due respect to lawyers and members of the legal community this is lawyer talk, and I don't understand what it says. Information is going to be shared as required by applicable law or treaty. The questions were: are you going to charge fees for access, and who owns the information? Those two questions were not answered.

Another question is asking the centre what its reaction is going to be if it receives a subpoena or an order to release information from a court of law in a foreign country, or from a foreign government for that matter. When can the centre say yes, and when can the centre say no? What are the criteria? Again, as in the other question the answer came: information gathered at CyberPol would not be shared except where required by applicable law or treaty.

What about the PATRIOT Act? You know, we've heard about situations like the Maher Arar case where Canadian authorities regretted releasing him to Syrian authorities because of the ill treatment he was subjected to and ended up, in fact, in a lawsuit and a financial settlement to compensate him for the damages that he sustained when he was in prison overseas. So how are they going to react to a subpoena or an order under the PATRIOT Act, for example, or anything similar to it from other governments across the world?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There's another issue, but it's not really that major, Mr. Speaker, with respect to directors and governors receiving remuneration. In my limited experience as an MLA I've come to the conclusion that typically with nonprofit centres and nonprofit agencies, you know, when you have directors or governors, they would be volunteers, for the most part. So, again, it's not really a major thing.

I just find it puzzling that somebody who is hoping to establish something of this magnitude doesn't go through the other avenues but chooses instead to come before the House. What if their objectives change? What if their mandates change? They would have to come back to the House again through the Private Bills Committee and ask for an amendment or ask for changes to their constitution. It could have been much simpler for them and for this House to come through those other avenues which they have available to them.

Mr. Speaker, again, just to emphasize, I would have much rather seen this as a government initiative, part of a bigger piece that this government is serious about Internet crime rather than allowing, you know, private people to come together and do this, even with the promise that it's going to be nonprofit. I'm really interested in hearing why the former Solicitor General is so enthusiastic in his support for this particular idea.

I invite further debate, and I thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am really glad to have the opportunity to speak to Bill Pr. 1, CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act. I have had constituents contact me asking me to vote in favour of Bill Pr. 1. They express concerns about our high-tech world. They feel that it is vitally important to

increase public safety against high-tech crime. There's a lot of fear. I think some of it, perhaps, is because of ignorance about what is actually the potential of high-tech crime.

At the same time, there's evidence that there's an increase in identity theft, hacking mischief, and child sex predators are a great threat to the citizens of this province. There need to be stronger laws and stiffer penalties for these types of crimes. I am concerned about cybercrime in general. As a parent and a former teacher I am really concerned about the luring and exploitation of children in particular. We need to be clear that Bill Pr. 1 does nothing to toughen penalties or to make laws stronger. What it does is establish an independent liaison centre for intelligence gathering and information storage or sharing but without the law enforcement mandate that I believe should go along with it.

I like the direction and intent of Pr. 1 and congratulate the citizen for bringing this forward, but I really would have liked to see this as part of a cross-ministry government initiative where Justice, Solicitor General, Education, and Children's Services could work together because all areas are concerned with crime in general and certainly with cybercrime. This bill is about intelligence gathering on criminal activity. It would be about individuals who are stealing identity and exploiting children. So I see it as working in conjunction with the RCMP or CSIS or the FBI or CIA or MI6, and this is all regarding, then, the ability of the policing or the law enforcement communities to work together to combat crime throughout the world from a centre. This makes good sense.

It would provide a centre in Alberta that would provide the type of law enforcement and/or law enforcement response or working with law enforcement throughout the world. We all know that our world has gotten smaller over the years partly because of high tech, and it only makes sense that we're looking at steps to be on top by using high tech. Certainly, this is something that we should be discussing. Internet crime is on the rise. Identity theft, financial fraud, child exploitation, and luring, all online, are significant concerns.

4:40

The agency resulting from this bill, as I understand it, would have the full weight of the law behind it, but it's still just a private entity attempting to do good. I wonder, as a colleague this afternoon mentioned, if it might be duplicating some of the work that has already been done or that, perhaps, it could interfere because we do have departments and agencies of this government that work in the area.

I have a number of questions too that I haven't found the answers to. One that I don't understand is: will there be fees charged for access, for the release of information? I understand, certainly, that many nonprofit agencies and centres might need the information. I'm wondering if the charge of fees will be based on necessity and merit. Will this become a revenue-generating mechanism because it will be private?

It's important to note that this legislation will not usurp provincial legislation or the Criminal Code of Canada. Those laws are in place. It's the law for the whole country regarding criminal activity, so they can't usurp that authority. That's very important.

It will provide the partnership of law enforcement agencies throughout the world working together regarding child exploitation, identity theft, and all the other issues related to fraud over the Internet. We don't have that kind of centre in Alberta. I know that we have the ICE unit that was formed. I believe there are about 21 officers that work related to Internet child exploitation, and I understand that their backlog is incredible with the amount of investigations that they have to work on. This bill is much bigger

than that because it's working with individuals throughout the world that are setting up these sites.

As I said, cybercrime is on the rise. It presents many challenges for law enforcement because it is so new. The extent of the potential for cybercrime is frightening. We must be concerned, and we must act. I think this bill is very important, but as far as I can see, it does not do enough in terms of what the public expects. The individuals getting in touch with me are actually thinking that we're going to be toughening up the laws and that law enforcement, as a result, will better protect us against Internet crime. I'm interested in hearing what others have to say about this.

Again, I certainly do support the intent. I feel that the need is very great. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any comments or questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very interested to rise on this bill. It's a visionary bill, and I must commend the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing this forward. The nature of cybercrime and cybercriminals is changing constantly as technology changes, and to establish a global centre for securing cyberspace would provide some very welcome ways to try and deal with a huge problem and a growing problem in our society.

I'd like to state some statistics from a study centred at the University of Alberta focusing mainly on the child pornography problem that we see in Internet usage. It looks at a lot of statistics from the U.S. Of those arrested in the U.S. for the possession of child pornography between 2000 and 2001, 83 per cent had images involving children between the ages of six and 12, 39 per cent had images involving children between the ages of three and five, and 19 per cent had images of infants and toddlers under the age of three. That was from a report in 2006 by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in Virginia entitled *Child Pornography Possessors Arrested in Internet-Related Crimes: Findings from the National Juvenile Online Victimization Study*.

Another point is that more than 20,000 images of child pornography are posted on the Internet every week. That's from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Another point is that "more babies and toddlers are appearing on the net and the abuse is getting worse. It is more torturous and sadistic than it ever was before. The typical age of children is between ages six and 12, but the profile is getting younger." That's from Professor Max Taylor, *Combating Paedophile Information Networks*.

On child sexual abuse there's a New Zealand Internal Affairs study that suggests that there's an association between viewing child pornography and committing sexual abuse. That's from New Zealand's Department of Internal Affairs, *Internet Traders of Child Pornography: Profiling Research*, by Caroline Sullivan in October of 2005 and January 10, 2006. Another point is that Internet pedophiles are increasingly adopting counterintelligence techniques to protect themselves from being traced. That's from the National Criminal Intelligence Service, and that's back in '03.

Another point is that 40 per cent of people charged with child pornography also sexually abuse children, police say, but finding the predators and identifying the victims are daunting tasks. That's from an article in Reuters in 2003. Another point is that 1 in 5 children who used computer chat rooms have been approached over the Internet by pedophiles. That's from Detective Chief Superintendent Keith Ackerman in the *Telegraph*, UK, in January of 2002.

The statistics go on and on. The quotes go on and on about this increasing and terrible crime. Another point is that 4 per cent of all

Internet users in 2005 said that online solicitors asked them for nude or sexually explicit photographs of themselves. That's from the *Online Victimization of Youth* study in 2006 from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. Another is in a survey conducted by The Intelligence Group. *Dateline* questioned 500 teenagers across the U.S., aged 14 to 18, about their computer habits. When asked if someone they met online had wanted to meet them in person, 58 per cent said yes, and 29 per cent said they've had a scary experience online. That's from the study *Most Teens Say They've Met Strangers Online*, MSNBC interactive, April 26, 2006.

Another point: 23 per cent of youth were very or extremely upset by exposures to sexual content online. That was K.J. Mitchell, D. Finkelhor, and J. Wolack, *Victimization of Youths on the Internet*, New York, 2003. Another point is that 31 per cent of 7th to 12th graders have pretended to be older to get onto a website, which can lead to other things.

The statistics, the studies go on and on. Mr. Speaker, this is a tremendous and ongoing problem. I hope this bill can be funded as soon as possible to establish such a site in Alberta. I think it is visionary. I think it is important. I think it is something that we must and should move ahead on. You know, there are people that have been in major stories, even close to this Legislature, being charged with child porn. I think it is something that is necessary for this Legislature to look at, to deal with, and to try and eradicate as much as we can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

head: 4:50 **Government Bills and Orders** **Third Reading**

Bill 39 **Engineering, Geological and Geophysical** **Professions Amendment Act, 2007**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to first say that I appreciate all of the discussion that we've had on this bill in second reading and also, of course, in committee.

I might note that we have a couple of guests in the gallery. I appreciate that the minister may have wanted to introduce them. Neil Windsor from APEGGA and Barry Cavanaugh from ASET are here to be part of this historic event, and I thank them for coming.

Just to recap very quickly, Mr. Speaker, Bill 39 will reflect a new governance model: one act, two associations to regulate professional engineer, geoscientist, and engineering technologist practice. This model was agreed upon by both of the associations, and of course the proposed changes will continue to ensure the highest standards of public safety are met both by APEGGA and ASET.

Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to move third reading of Bill 39, the *Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007*.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to respond and thank the hon. member for introducing this bill. This has been waited upon by many, and a lot of work has gone on in the past and in coming up with a memorandum of agreement, and both associa-

tions, ASET and APEGGA, have worked together to make this possible.

I don't have anything further to add from my comments during second reading. This model of one act, two associations will indeed better protect the public interest by assuring the competence of engineering and technology professionals across the spectrum of their practices. I would like to wish them all the best in the future as they continue to work together.

This is all about professionalism. As I mentioned in second reading, it's all about moving forward, and I commend them for the focus, especially on the ethics of the professions. It's really important to have an ethics code, and it's a question of providing the discipline, the processes of accountability for the members of the profession, so they can raise their heads high. This is a good day in the life of Alberta and especially for engineers and technologists.

I would support third reading of this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a third time]

Bill 26

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 26, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007.

The purpose of Bill 26 is to confirm the use of the minister's guidelines and to ensure the stability and integrity of the property assessment base. The minister's guidelines have been and will continue to be developed in consultation with assessors, municipalities, the taxpayers, and their associations. One important point is that Bill 26 does not take away the right to appeal assessment. There have been a number of challenges to the minister's guidelines, and these challenges are not about the content of the guidelines but merely about how they were put into place.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to express my gratitude for the work of the staff and the time and the effort that they put into this bill. I am, indeed, very grateful.

I would encourage all members of this Assembly to support the passing of Bill 26. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a third time]

Bill 29

Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and move third reading of Bill 29, the Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007.

As mentioned previously, Bill 29 will provide Alberta farmers with access to more sources for leasing farm equipment for their operations. I'd just like to say that I do appreciate the support received from all hon. members and anticipate their continued support at third reading. I'd also like to thank all of those behind the scenes who helped with this bill, and I'd like to thank the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food for giving me the opportunity to carry this important bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. Certainly, Bill 29 is, I think, a step in the right direction. I would like to express my gratitude to the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for his work on this legislation. Any questions that we did have earlier, he made every effort to provide an answer. I certainly see no reason or concern to hold up this legislation. I would hope that all farmers and farm implement dealers are satisfied with this legislative initiative.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third time]

Bill 32

Animal Health Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you. On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture and Food I'm delighted to stand up as an expert on this topic and move third reading of Bill 32, Animal Health Act.

The provisions in Bill 32 will allow Alberta to better prepare for an outbreak of highly contagious livestock disease and respond to emergency situations quicker and more effectively to protect animal and human health. During Committee of the Whole review of Bill 32 concern was expressed for the paramouncy over section 17(2)(b) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. On behalf of the ministry I can assure all hon. members that the bill is appropriately balanced to provide access to information when required to protect public health and also to provide the appropriate level of privacy protection for individual animal owners.

On behalf of the minister of agriculture I move third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, when we look at this legislation, there are some very good reasons for supporting it. Unfortunately, I cannot be satisfied with the explanation as to why we need to override the view of the Privacy Commissioner regarding this legislation. The Privacy Commission was consulted. I appreciate hearing from the minister of agriculture on that. As far as I know, he does not agree with the proposed paramouncy provision in Bill 32. There is this issue of differing legal opinions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food believes one thing, and others have a different view.

When you consider this, I am disappointed to say that I cannot support this legislation at this time in third reading. There have been some discussions about changing it, but that's not going to happen. I can see right now where the majority is going to rule.

Whenever you look at the disclosure harmful to personal privacy under section 17(2) and 17(2)(b) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, we have brought this up. We have put our concerns on the table. We have asked why this is necessary. There has not been to date, in my opinion, an adequate explanation as to why we need these paramouncy provisions.

5:00

So I'm sorry. There are other parts of this act that are very worth while, but on the record I think this is going to come back to haunt us. I hope it will not come back in some sort of trade sanction with our American neighbours and give R-CALF a reason to promote

further restrictions or limitations of our cattle exports to the American market. I just hope we're not walking into something that we will regret, and I sincerely hope for all the ag producers and for this Assembly that I am over the course of time proven wrong.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to speak about Bill 32, the Animal Health Act. The Livestock Diseases Act was created in 1946, and it's therefore outdated. The purpose of Bill 32, the Animal Health Act, is to repeal and replace the Livestock Diseases Act with a more modernized piece of legislation. This act will more appropriately address the issues related to animal and human health that have been discovered in recent years. The idea of this bill is that it will facilitate a more effective and efficient process for dealing with animal health emergencies.

We know that animal health issues have gained national and international attention over the last several years, most notably for Albertans the discovery of BSE, or mad cow disease, in our cattle. The discovery of BSE in Canadian cattle has led to severe trade restrictions that have had an enormous detrimental impact on Alberta's beef industry. Other animal health issues that continue to garner national and international attention include avian flu, chronic wasting disease, et cetera. So we do require a modern piece of legislation that empowers the province to deal effectively with the animal health issues that may have human health or economic trade implications.

As I look at this bill, I'm certainly willing to support it in principle, but I have questions regarding the inclusion of the paramouncy provision over the FOIP Act, section 17(2)(b).

Agriculture and Food . . . believes the proposed paramouncy provision is required to provide an increased degree of assurance to animal owners. Release of information will occur, as required by Section 32 of FOIP, when it is clearly in the public interest to do so.

The Privacy Commissioner was consulted, and he did not agree with the proposed paramouncy provision in Bill 32 being necessary. The Privacy Commissioner does not see the need for the extra secrecy, but due to differing legal interpretations of the FOIP Act, Agriculture and Food insists on hiding information from the public. That's what it looks like to me.

The minister states in a letter dated May 14, 2007, that "Agriculture and Food . . . believes the proposed paramouncy provision is required to provide an increased degree of assurance to animal owners." So what is the effect of this? Why are we doing this? Why do animal owners need an increased degree of assurance? Is it the minister's position that animal owners would hold back information, basically lie, if this provision is not included? Which animal owners has the minister consulted with to make this determination? Has the minister spoken with animal owners who say that they will not share information even though the law requires it? Are there a lot of animal owners in Alberta, in the minister's opinion, that will break the law if they don't have increased assurance in the form of secrecy provisions? I'm wondering who the minister has spoken with specifically.

If this paramouncy provision is, in fact, about protecting animal owners, why is there, then, only a five-year limit on the release of that information? Can the minister tell us why he believes it's necessary to continue with this government's tradition of being secretive, hiding information from Albertans? Can the minister tell us why he is ignoring the Privacy Commissioner? Does the minister

believe that the Privacy Commissioner is wrong? Why does the minister need to be secretive? What does the minister hope to hide from Albertans? Can the minister explain what the point of consulting with experts is if we then ignore their advice?

In his letter dated May 14, 2007, the minister states:

The Privacy Commissioner was consulted. He does not agree with the proposed paramouncy provision in Bill 32 being necessary. Because of differing legal interpretations of the [FOIP Act] Agriculture and Food . . . believes the proposed paramouncy provision is required to provide an increased degree of assurance to animal owners.

Can the minister tell us who in the department is interpreting the FOIP Act, demanding that this statute be more secretive than is necessary according to the Privacy Commissioner?

In his letter dated May 14, 2007, the minister states: "Release of information will occur, as required by Section 32 of FOIP, when it is clearly in the public interest to do so." Can the minister tell us who determines whether or not information is clearly in the public interest? Doesn't the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner play some role in that determination? Why does the minister insist on moving backwards in terms of openness and accountability? How can we justify this decision to support a bill that increases the secrecy of this government? This hardly seems to be the idea of openness that we hear so much about.

Another concern that I have is that although this bill's intention is very, very good, I think that these concerns are not being answered. I would like to state publicly, I guess, that I think this intention is great, but because the issues are so important, not only here in Alberta but throughout the world, I think that we must address the issues. But the concerns I have prevent me from supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, are there any comments or questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there others that wish to participate in the debate?

Does the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports wish to close on behalf of the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food?

Mr. Melchin: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a third time]

Bill 33

Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to conclude debate on Bill 33 on behalf of the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka and to move third reading.

During Committee of the Whole I was very happy to hear that so many members of this Assembly would support this important piece of legislation. I'm also happy that all members recognize the importance of providing the village of Ferintosh a safe, secure, and long-term water supply by building a regional waterline that would transfer water from the town of Bashaw. I know that the residents of Ferintosh appreciate the support and understanding of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

5:10

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've had quite a discussion on Bill 33 to date in this Assembly. Now, we're allowing another interbasin transfer between the South Saskatchewan River basin and the North Saskatchewan River basin. I understand that this transfer cannot exceed 55 cubic decametres annually. There has been a discussion about the surplus water and what it could or could not be used for. It seems that we are frequently passing these stand-alone bills, and it indicates to me that this is like a canary in a coal mine, that we are not using our water resources prudently. I think this is a warning to all hon. members of this House that we better take our water management seriously, and I think we should do a better job of monitoring our water supply.

You look at the purpose of this bill, and you can understand the predicament that the town of Bashaw and the village of Ferintosh are in, but we need to examine more closely the process of allocation of water. That's why I would support this bill, but we have to recognize what we're doing to our water supplies. I know that this area has seen extensive changes to groundwater. I do not know at this time if that is the result of coal-bed methane development. I suspect not, but coal-bed methane development may be one of the reasons why the aquifer has been depleted.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would urge passage of this bill, but I will be very disappointed if next year or the year after members of this Assembly are debating similar legislation because this tells me that we have a lot of water management issues, particularly in central Alberta. We have to be better stewards of our most precious resource.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. Normally I would be opposed to interbasin transfers because in a number of circumstances they're interfering with the natural process. But this situation that we're talking about in Bill 33 is not the result of any fault of the citizens of Bashaw or overuse by too much industry or pollution of existing systems, so this transfer of treated water for people I see as necessary. I have great concerns, as does my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, when people all over this province – I'm talking about Stettler, Trochu, Drayton Valley, Ma-Me-O Beach, Nanton, and Ponoka – hundreds of people, turn out to meetings and express concern about how groundwater is being used or abused. There is great concern also in the community of Rosebud because of the unnatural movement of coal-bed methane into the water systems there.

I'm concerned about the effect of clear-cutting on the watershed in the Bow and Elbow and the Bragg Creek, Ghost-Waiparous, Sibbald Flats areas and about the potential EUB approval of exploration on our southeast slopes, where fracking could very much interfere with the town of Nanton's water supply as well as the ranchers and individuals who live in the southeast slope area. The water table is a very fragile circumstance, and we need to take that into greater account.

But because of the immediate need for these people at Bashaw, knowing that it will not be used for anything but drinking water, washing, and day-to-day activities of life rather than industry or irrigation or other developments, I support this bill, and I support the need for aquifer mapping, for baseline testing, for the protection and conservation of water, our most important resource. Growth has to be sustainable, and without that sustainability limits have to be applied. We need careful planning. Any need for interbasin

transfers indicates a failure of water management and planning. The province's water strategy should be directed at eliminating the need for such transfers.

A major failure of Alberta Environment is that there's currently insufficient data in Alberta to determine how much water is actually being used each year. There are records kept by Alberta Environment of how much water is allocated to different users from the licensing process, but much less is known about how much of that water is actually being used. It is impossible to create any water conservation plan without knowing how much water we actually have, both surface and groundwater. Lack of data and information on the total supply of groundwater and surface water and the lack of data on the actual water use by all sectors makes it very difficult to make informed decisions.

Lack of information on demand and management are barriers to advancing water conservation. This government has failed to identify a vision that will state future economic development goals and the role of water conservation in achieving those goals. There must be a clear policy directive that identifies whether the goal of the water strategy is to benefit the ecosystem or to enable economic growth and expansion. The lack of a clear management plan for water resources creates this need for interbasin transfers.

Caution must be exercised to ensure that water problems in the future are not always solved by transferring water between basins. This is very poor water management. Most stakeholders agree that interbasin transfers are not a sustainable mechanism for water conservation. I recognize the need for the village of Ferintosh and support this bill, but I am concerned that the practice of interbasin transfers is becoming routine in Alberta. We have to implement better conservation measures so that in the future there is no need for interbasin transfers. We need mandatory watershed management planning for all of our seven major river basins, an inventory of water supplies in the province, and an understanding of how much is being used. We need ongoing monitoring and conservation of water use in all sectors: industrial, commercial, and domestic.

There's a great need here, but also there's a need in the village of Ferintosh. As a result of that, I support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes of questions and answers under Standing Order 29(2)(a) if anybody wishes to participate.

Are there others who wish to participate in the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: I might as well take the opportunity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this bill was introduced, Bill 33, the Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act, I had a chance to actually drive out to the area just to check it out to see exactly where it was located and what may be some of the, I guess, invisible problems that might occur for a town to be able to supply itself and its growing residents with water. I was pleasantly surprised. I think it's in a great little location. It's in a pocket of rolling hills and that in the midst of Alberta, just north of Stettler. I'm just still kind of surprised because it does look like it does have, on the surface, some adequate water within its basin right there, but I guess in the heart of it it doesn't, to be able to supply for the long term. For the short term perhaps it's able to supply its residents with water, but as with every town and municipality that's thriving and would like to expand, this is the case that's before us. They won't have enough of the supply right now to be able to expand.

I share the concerns, like my colleagues from Edmonton-Mill Woods and Edmonton-Gold Bar, about the interbasin transferring and am sympathetic towards the town's plight with regard to not

having it, and it wouldn't have it unless they are able to in fact come before the Legislature and put this bill to allow such transferring. Normally, like I said, I wouldn't support something like that as I think it's occurring far too often, but in this case I would certainly support the interbasin transferring, with this exception: that we do in fact closely monitor ongoing efforts to be able to reduce and reuse as much as possible, especially in towns where it's becoming apparent that it's becoming very much a fragile resource. We continue to say on and on that within the south water is our number one resource or, as the previous Minister of Environment used to call it, blue gold. We recognize that that's going to certainly be a commodity that may at one point be traded back and forth across the border. I know that there are talks on the south side of the border as to being able to transfer this on a large scale as they are running out in the south – that's the Americans – and this is where the abundant supply is. At least that's what we consider it to be: an abundant supply.

I would support the bill, like I said, with some concerns. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: Again Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there others who wish to participate in the debate?

Does the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose wish to close?

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a third time]

head:

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 30

Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 30, Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007.

The primary purpose of this bill is to facilitate the establishment of the Alberta emergency management agency. Creating the agency is a component of the government's response to the Environmental Protection Commission's recommendations following the CN Rail derailment at Lake Wabamun in 2005. We started building the framework for the agency last year, and this bill will allow us to complete the process. The agency will assume responsibility for provincial emergency management and as the senior agency will undertake a comprehensive all-hazards approach to emergency, disaster, and security issues management. This will lead to better co-ordination as well as preparation for response to and recovery from a wider array of disasters and emergencies.

The agency will include the fire commissioner's office and Emergency Management Alberta, both currently part of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The inclusion of EMA is obvious, and given the critical role that municipal fire departments have as first responders in most emergencies and disasters, we're making the fire commissioner's office and its community-focused approach to risk management one of the pillars of the new agency as well. This move will allow for closer co-ordination and an enhanced profile for fire service needs for training, support, and public education. Reflecting the importance of the agency, Mr. Speaker, the act will see the agency headed by a managing director with direct reporting channels to the minister as well as the Deputy Minister of Executive Council. This will make it easier for rapid decision-making in times of emergency.

The act will also allow for Alberta's summer villages to become full players in preparing for emergencies and disasters. Currently

summer villages are not included in the definition of a local authority. This means, for example, that they cannot declare a state of local emergency. This is vital because declaring a state of local emergency provides a local authority with specific powers necessary to resolve an emergency.

The act would further give summer villages the opportunity to enter into a memorandum of understanding with neighbouring municipalities. This would allow for co-operation and assistance if the disaster or emergency is larger than what the summer village can deal with on its own. Summer villages are also currently not eligible for grants that other municipalities receive to enhance their emergency response capabilities. This puts them at a disadvantage when compared to surrounding municipalities, Mr. Speaker, and this doesn't serve the interests and needs of their residents.

This act will also see the name of the act itself changed from the Disaster Services Act to the emergency management act. Renaming the act will bring it more in tune with current terminology and better represent our expanded focus on prevention and mitigation.

Overall, this act will help Alberta live up to its reputation of being at the forefront of emergency management, and I'd ask all members to support this very important piece of legislation. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be supporting this. I know that there are just a couple of minor changes in this. You know what? I think it's important. I think everyone needs to make sure that they're prepared. There needs to be a larger role that the province plays in the development and co-ordination of disaster and emergency plans. Then it's the responsibility of the local authorities. We cannot leave the entire responsibility of responding to disasters exclusively, as it was pointed out, with just municipalities. That's simply not fair. It's not an excuse, but it's just not fair. The province has far, far more resources and thus should play a more central role in developing the plans. This bill would help create that position, and then it has the exclusive mandate to be able to work with the local authorities to assist in the development of the plans and also co-ordinate the overall provincial response for emergencies. These would be good steps because in the case of Wabamun it just showed that the province was not prepared. It was caught off guard, and clearly we're still trying to respond to some of the reports on that.

The authority that now resides with the managing director used to reside with the deputy minister. By transferring the authority to one person with one mandate, it would allow them to have the position to focus on that one task instead of the many tasks that the deputy minister has to do and attend to. So this is a good step. It clearly centralizes that one focus. Ultimately any move to enhance the ability of the government and a local authority to respond to disasters and emergencies is a positive move. While there's still much to do, I think this is a very good move, and I certainly applaud that one.

We just had an awakening early, early in the year with the emergency response bulletin coming over the news about the funnel clouds or the supposed funnel clouds. Now, this certainly was a concern right off the bat, early in June. It shows that, you know, not only do we need to make sure that that system is alert to warn the citizens, but we've got to be able to in fact not only be on guard as a province but provide that service to the municipalities.

When I watched that as it did come over the television, I was a little bit concerned because it looked like the individual who was giving the response was clearly, I guess, rattled. It didn't give me confidence when I was hearing and listening to this person speaking

about this. I was looking outside, and it looked like the clouds were definitely going to be bringing us something. The voice was concerned, but the message was mixed. So I think that would certainly be a spot to take on. It was like an April Fool's Day, someone was saying here. I was definitely concerned.

We have high flood warnings throughout the province in various communities that reside around some of the high rivers where the spring runoff could occur. This is certainly where this bill could help the municipalities plan short term as well as long term. We've been talking about the midst of climate change. I think we're at the beginning of it, and we're going to be seeing a series of concerns throughout the years to come with the extreme cold and the temperatures that are bringing all the snow, the spring runoffs, and the rainfalls. I think we're going to be seeing an unprecedented weather change over the next few years, absolutely, so I think that to have this position created to be able to give municipalities and the government more of an opportunity to have co-ordinated services is definitely a plus because we're looking out for the benefit and the well-being of all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and voice support for Bill 30, Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007, as introduced earlier. I listened with interest to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore, and I agree with him with respect to that emergency announcement broadcast system that was tested last week when we had that hailstorm and the severe rain throughout the province. One listened to that announcement, and as you're listening to it, you hear the concerned voice of the broadcaster, and you think that there is something severe that is coming your way. Then at the end of the broadcast they said: by the way, there is no emergency. You know, some people had a good laugh, but it really underlined the need for a more co-ordinated and a more thorough approach to how we handle emergencies and also how we communicate emergencies to the citizens of this province. I think communication is probably 50 per cent of emergency response. You know, you need to communicate effectively and quickly with the citizens of the region or the municipality or the province that is likely going to be the most affected.

5:30

A while back we had the Wabamun incident, Mr. Speaker, and it created a lot of interest in how ready and how prepared our province is. We know that different agencies and different ministries, even, have different pieces on how to handle emergencies. We know that Infrastructure and Transportation has its own arm that does that. We have a ministry like the Ministry of Environment which also does that. The Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security has that function under his authority. Different levels of government – federal, municipal, and provincial – also have different agencies, and theoretically and ideally all of them should be talking to each other. They should be connected and, you know, on that hotline for when something happens. The municipality and the province and the federal government and, if need be, an international component should be brought in. All of them should be talking within minutes of that emergency occurring, and the plans have to be in place to handle the emergency and minimize the impact on people, livestock, wildlife, the environment, and so on and so forth.

One can argue that in terms of the Wabamun situation the province didn't appear to be as ready or as prepared as one would

have hoped. The Environmental Protection Commission was struck right after to analyze what the province and local authorities needed to do to deal effectively with disasters. One of the key recommendations was the creation of a senior agency that is responsible for an all-hazards approach to emergencies, disasters, and security. This is the role that will be fulfilled by Emergency Management Alberta, which this bill is hoping to establish. Having a dedicated managing director with the authority to drive this commitment is really critical to the success of this agency. As I indicated, this is an agency which I support being established. This is a good step, but we definitely have to ensure that more is done in terms of effectiveness and in terms of swiftness in that response. Disasters and emergencies should be dealt with as quickly as we can, and communication, as I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, is an integral component.

The commission actually issued some recommendations and findings, and they don't only pertain to the Wabamun situation. I think they're to be extrapolated and to be expanded to all other emergencies and crises in this province. One of the recommendations – and I'm reading from the commission's report – says that "the Alberta Government needs to adopt a comprehensive approach that can respond to any emergency, whether caused by nature or man." So that's one. The other one is that "the response to an incident has to be swift. It has to be the right response. It has to be there as long as it takes to deal with the disaster. And it has to be scaled to handle the worst-case scenario."

I'm hoping that this is the direction that this bill is taking, and I am hoping that this body is going to be there. I hope it's like insurance, where you pay into an insurance plan and you hope that you never use it, but in the time when you do need it, you want it to work. This is exactly the same. We hope that these people sit there and are never activated, that they're never invoked, that they're never asked to react but that in those remote and unlikely situations where they need to be activated and invoked, then they would do a good job. Only time will tell.

Other jurisdictions have similar agencies, Mr. Speaker; British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, to name a few. As I mentioned, also the federal government has an arm that is entrusted to deal with emergencies and situations which arise as such. The rationale for this type of dedicated response organization is that Alberta, due to the scope and volume of resource extraction and the subsequent transportation of toxic materials, is in a unique situation. There has to be a mechanism to continue to monitor and to react to and deal with emergencies arising from things like dangerous goods spills, for example, or fires or toxic fumes and things like that.

Mr. Bonko: This has all happened before.

Mr. Elsalhy: That has all happened before, as my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore indicated.

Provincial responsibility is paramount. Implementing plans and procedures for a co-ordinated provincial response is timely, and I commend the sponsor of the bill for introducing this.

Providing co-ordinated assistance and leadership to local authorities engaged in emergency operations. Now, whether in fact it's to deal with individual losses or remedying some of the side effects that individuals are subjected to or, dealing with the bigger picture, if it's a municipality dealing with a big toxic spill, for example, the environment, property, people, and so on are important.

Advising, assisting, and taking over, if there is need, the implementation of local authorities' emergency operations, including evacuation and re-entry. These are areas where I see this new agency being powerful or empowered enough to handle situations as they arise.

The safety and health of workers and citizens involved in emergency situations; you know, making sure that people that we send to react to a local emergency are equipped and that their gear is up to par and that we're not putting them or putting the citizens in that vicinity at any risk.

Assuming direction and control of an emergency at the direction of the responding environmental officer or health officer. If it's a health issue, the health officer is involved. If it's an environmental issue, the environmental officer is involved.

One last thing, Mr. Speaker, with respect to this is the whole issue of emergency funds. You know, we have situations where people apply for emergency assistance. I'm not sure if this agency is going to maybe look at some of those areas or adjudicate some of these requests, but I'm hoping that in the event that they don't and in the event that this agency is not going to handle requests for compensation or assistance, there should be a mechanism so that it's not left up to the minister in charge to make these decisions. People argue sometimes that they are subjective: which ones qualify, how much assistance people qualify for, and so on. We should have, really, criteria in place. I'm hoping that this agency might actually consider these requests or adjudicate these requests.

Mr. Speaker, this is timely, and I urge all my colleagues from this House to support it. I'd listen to more debate if more speakers are interested. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone.

Seeing none, anyone else? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. I rise in support of Bill 30, the Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007. It is important, I think, to bring in line the naming of this service and to bring into being the Alberta emergency management agency.

What I want to speak to specifically is the empowering of summer villages and including summer villages in this act. I have some members of the summer village executive that live in Edmonton-Manning, and I've spoken with them on a number of occasions. Sometimes they feel like they're, you know, a kid brother, a little overlooked and all the rest of it. Ensuring that this level of government has the ability to access funding for disaster services in the same sense as other municipalities, to include them in the act, is important. I applaud this move, and I think it is very important. I support this bill, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also support Bill 30, the Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007. This is a very important act. I realize that the main outcome of this act is to rename the Disaster Services Act the emergency management act in accordance with the creation of the new department of the Alberta emergency management agency in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

5:40

It also creates the position of the managing director, who will have the same authority to administer this act that the deputy minister used to have for the Disaster Services Act. I like the responsibilities here for the managing director, which will be to ensure that local authorities create and maintain effective emergency management plans. The director will work with local authorities to assist them in

the development of their plans and to make sure that these plans are responsive and adequate.

It's important to make sure that all of our communities are prepared to respond to disasters and emergencies. I would hope that this role would ensure co-ordination between the province and the municipalities so that disaster plans are clear and that there is the support that's needed to actually fulfill those plans. There needs to be a larger role that the province plays in the development and the co-ordination of disaster and emergency plans. We cannot just leave it to local authorities because it's just beyond their capacity. The province has far more resources and thus could play a more central role in the development of plans. I'm glad to see that consideration and that move because this is a good step, but let's ensure that more is done to ensure quick and efficient response to disasters and emergencies. We must help local authorities develop and maintain response capacity, and we must have a provincial response capacity as well. These have to be integrated.

I know that the Environmental Protection Commission had many recommendations because there has to be a provincial capacity to respond to emergencies such as Wabamun. In order to accomplish this, we must have a provincial capacity that can respond as part of an initial communication structure in an integrated approach. The province should take the lead in all communication efforts along with local authorities, the company involved, and possibly the federal government. Alberta should have 24-hours-a-day, year-round, dedicated emergency response teams, which include trained environmental officers, public health officers available around the clock. This would ensure that there will always be a trained representative of the provincial government to respond immediately to a spill or any other type of possible disaster.

I really do support this bill. I think, though, that if we are truly committed to protecting the environment and public health we must consider incorporating all the recommendations of the commission. We must show leadership and take strong action to protect the public safety, the public health, and welfare of the environment from the devastating possible effects of hazardous releases. We haven't done enough in the past. We've learned, and I think that this is a good step in the right direction.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much. I'd just like to make a couple comments to not only the member opposite who made comments but maybe to a couple of other comments. I think that the hon. member very much understands the focus and the direction of this agency. That is very much not only to encapsulate the government who will work together with different ministries but also to work with municipalities, to work with the fire commission, who will in turn work with the individual fire departments, whether they be voluntary or salaried, but most importantly also to incorporate industry. I think that when we're in a disaster, we need to be in a situation where we are co-ordinated with all of the different elements to make sure that whatever that disaster is it becomes nullified. There are some very good comments that you had made in that focus, and I appreciate them.

I want to say that this agency is under this ministry and not under Environment. I suppose it could be under any other ministry, but it's for ourselves to look at the best umbrella that we could possibly make, and that is with municipalities and with other ministries. It is a co-ordinating position as much as it is anything else as well.

Mrs. Mather: I just want to say thank you for that explanation. I think that makes this bill even better. I'm happy to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to close?

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour and the good work that has been accomplished this afternoon, I move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:47 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, June 13, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/06/13

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for our abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature four members of a delegation from our sister province, Heilongjiang. They are Mr. Zhang Chunguang, member of the Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection Committee; Mr. Pan Zhong, who is the deputy director general of the Heilongjiang department of science; Mr. Zhao Yiqiang, who is the division director of the Heilongjiang Department of Education; and Ms Liu Hongmei, who is the deputy division director, Europe and America division, Heilongjiang Foreign Affairs Office, and an alumna, I might add, of the University of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, this is the 26th anniversary of the very strong sister province relationship between Alberta and Heilongjiang. There are more than 108,000 Albertans of Chinese descent in our province, and it makes that bond very, very strong. We have exchanges in a number of areas in postsecondary and research and technology, and we have several co-operative agreements. We are following up with both offices and officials from both jurisdictions to ensure that those agreements generate win-wins for both jurisdictions. This delegation is in Alberta for only a short time, but it is building and strengthening that relationship. I would ask that the delegation please rise in your gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce 57 grade 5 students from a school in my constituency, Webber Academy. Last week the Fraser Institute released its findings on schools, and while that should not alone be a judge of a school's performance, it is one of the things that should be considered relative to quality of education. I must say that Webber Academy came out tied for first place in the Fraser Institute rankings, and I'm pleased to introduce today three teachers that are accompanying the students – Dan Mondaca, Jason Ash, Janet Adamson – and a parent, Elaine Butler. They've just arrived on the bus from Calgary, and I'd ask them to all please stand and receive the recognition of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce some of the brightest and best young students in my constituency and probably all of Alberta. We're joined today by a group of 18 students from the Cornerstone Christian Academy in

Kingman, which is located in the east end of my constituency. They're seated in the public gallery, and they're led today by their teacher, Mr. Rob Bowick. I would ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to rise and introduce two very special people in my life. First would be my former legislative assistant who is back visiting, Cheryl Koss, and also my current leg. assistant, Berenika Kalista. If they would please rise and enjoy the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two groups of visitors today. First of all, from my constituency are Bill and Beryl Bale. They're here today from Lacombe. Bill moved to Canada from England in 1959 and has spent the last 40 years in Lacombe. Joining them are two daughters: Hazel Chastell and her husband from Lincolnshire, England, and Susan Bale of Leeds, England. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

It's also my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two individuals from Lacombe that are also seated in the members' gallery. Sandra Scott and Shannon Sears are here today from Lacombe. Hon. members should know that Sandra also happens to be the daughter of the hon. minister of agriculture. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you two employees of Children's Services. Jamie Reid is a Grant MacEwan student and is currently doing her practicum in our communications office while she studies for her public relations diploma. Bobbi Klettke joins us from the Capital health region and brings her years of experience to Children's Services communications, working with our prevention of family violence and bullying program. Bobbi will join an already successful program that has seen great strides in bringing family violence and bullying the attention it needs to ensure that Alberta's children and families live in safe and caring communities. I ask Jamie and Bobbi to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly an honour on behalf of the minister responsible for the personnel administration office to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature seven individuals from PAO who are here as part of the public service orientation tour. I would ask Kari Hamilton, Christina Steenbergen, Rob Acker, Travis Skriver, Paul Oss, Jason Pomedli, and Dustin Lafleur to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a group of caring, hard-working, and courageous social workers. They are Lori Sigurdson, Papiya Das, Grace Elliott, Roxanne Dohms,

Kathaleen Quinn, Marilyn Jeske, Deb Johansson, and Kathryn Watters. I'd ask that they rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. I think the first group is here, and that is nine adult high school equivalency students who are currently attending CIT college in my constituency. They are accompanied today by their instructor, Joel Heidebrecht. I would ask them to please rise if they're in either gallery and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The second introduction that I have, Mr. Speaker, is part of my continuing celebration of Edmonton being named the cultural capital of Canada for 2007. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two wonderful, absolutely fabulous arts programmers. I'll start with Tony Luppino. Tony, if you would please rise. Tony, of course, is the executive director of the Art Gallery of Alberta. He is largely responsible for the new building that we will be able to enjoy, and it's on track to open in 2009. I know that he wants me to thank all the different levels of government that supported that building plus the private donors and the corporations. Very exciting exhibits are still going on at Enterprise Square, which is the old Hudson's Bay building. It's a super collaboration with the University of Alberta and shows what our city can do. Thank you, Tony.

Joining Tony today is Catherine Crowston, who is the chief curator and deputy director. It's her job to make sure that the programming continues. I think we have her to thank for exhibits like China Sensation, and of course many of you would have been able to take in the free-for-all that happened with all of the professional and amateur artists that came out to the closing show. They've also done things like the Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art, and currently running is Capital Modern: Edmonton Architecture and Urban Design 1940-1969. Please join me in welcoming these two wonderful additions to our cultural capital.

1:10

My third introduction today is also involved in the visual arts, and that is Todd Janes. Todd, if you would rise, please. I've known Todd for an awfully long time. I'm delighted to be able to introduce him in the Assembly. He has been the executive director of Latitude 53 Contemporary Visual Culture for over 12 years now. He is an artist, a curator, and a cultural worker who has worked very hard to raise the profile of contemporary art. I should note that next year is Latitude 53's 35th anniversary, making it one of Canada's oldest artist-run centres and a space that's exhibited thousands of artists in many different disciplines. Welcome, Todd, and thank you very much for coming to the Alberta Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly Mr. Merle Schnee. Mr. Schnee is a lifelong resident of Edmonton-Gold Bar. He is a retired firefighter, and he is very active in politics and a keen observer of all events that are public. He is in the public gallery, and I would now ask him to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 13 individuals who are the pride of my constituency. They have organized hundreds and hundreds of people, including me, to form the Munnky Krunchers, Canada's top fundraising team. They have raised 40,000-plus dollars for people suffering from MS. They have done tremendous efforts to raise the funds. The government should double their efforts to help scientists and researchers to find the cure for this disease. The group is seated in the public gallery. They are Donna Romanuik, Tanys Romanuik, Pat Semrok, Sammy Semrok, Ryan Kew, Alfred Nobert, Denise Nobert, Linda Craig, Olivia Craig, Emily Craig, Patrick Aube, Darlene Treder, Chantell Barone. I request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the brilliant, creative, hard-working staff of the Edmonton-Glenora constituency office: Jan Millson, Peter Marriott, C.D. Saint, and Craig Miller. I invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two guests who are joining us here today: Krista Mitton and Richard MacKay, who are both working with the Mira facilitation agency. Both of them came to the House before, and they even participated in a rally which took place on the steps of the Legislature six or seven weeks ago. They're also here to witness me continuing to submit petitions with respect to the people who work with people with disabilities. I would like to encourage them to continue talking to us, and I would invite them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Samuel Baron. Samuel grew up in Vegreville, Alberta, and has been a musician in the local Edmonton music scene for the last four years. He's been a student for the past two years at Grant MacEwan College and will be pursuing his bachelor of arts in political science at the U of A this fall. Samuel has a great interest in progressive politics, peace, and social justice. He has also volunteered in my constituency office and is looking forward to becoming more involved in provincial politics. I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three wonderful constituents of mine who reside in Shepherd's Care in Kensington. They are Mary Coupland, Shirley Murrie, and Jo Eggen. Jo Eggen came to Canada as a British war veteran 57 years ago after volunteering for military service since 1941. Jo is a world traveller, enjoying travelling even today. She has lived in Kensington for 45 years and remains a Calder resident to this day. She also has a lifetime membership at the Calder Seniors Drop-In

Centre. Shirley Murrie lived in Kensington for over 40 years as well. She's very active in volunteering for the Calder Seniors Drop-In Centre and for the Castle Downs United church. Shirley is an active social committee member and devotes many hours in her volunteer duties. Mary originally comes from Ireland but is a long-time resident of Edmonton. Mary resides at Shepherd's Care as well, where she spends time visiting with her son and family. I would now ask for all three of them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and to all colleagues in the Assembly Todd Lorentz. Todd was born and raised in a farming community in central Alberta and after high school worked for eight years in the oil and gas industry. He entered the University of Alberta in '64, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree with honours in philosophy, a master of arts degree in religious studies, and received many prestigious awards and scholarships for his work in eastern philosophy and quantum physics.

In 2005 Todd had the opportunity to speak in Nairobi, Kenya on global poverty. His subsequent visit to several slums in the Nairobi area brought him face to face with the victims of poverty, and that experience provided the inspiration behind the development of an organization to help alleviate the suffering of children called One Child's Village: A Global Orphans Foundation. He is its current managing director and will be travelling next week to establish the foundation's first orphanage in Kenya. Best wishes on that project, Todd. Todd is sitting in the far corner here in the public gallery. I would ask him to now please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Friday, June 15, is the second annual World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, and communities across Alberta, Canada, and the world are coming together to raise awareness of elder abuse. You may have noticed that members of the House are wearing purple ribbons today. I'd like to thank the members for wearing these ribbons and taking a small but significant stand in demonstrating their support for ending Alberta elder abuse and neglect.

It is estimated that up to 10 per cent of older adults experience some form of abuse, and about 90 per cent of that is financial abuse. Seniors in these situations are often reluctant to talk about abuse; however, we can do something about it. We can watch for the signs of elder abuse and neglect, including confusion, depression or anxiety, unexplained injuries, changes in hygiene, or seeming fearful around certain people. We can also report suspected elder abuse to authorities and encourage seniors to get help when they need it. There is help available.

The government of Alberta is working with partners in the community to assist seniors and raise awareness of elder abuse. From 24-hour help lines and shelters to awareness posters and information we are working together to help vulnerable seniors. Government is always working to address abuse or safety concerns for adults in publicly funded care facilities.

The Protection for Persons in Care Act legally requires anyone who suspects abuse to report it to the toll-free reporting lines or to

local police authorities. Individually each of us has a role to play. We can watch for signs of elder abuse or neglect of the seniors we know, whether they are our neighbours, our friends, customers, or members of our family, and we can report abuse when we suspect it.

This World Elder Abuse Awareness Day we can continue to spread the message that elder abuse will not be tolerated by Albertans. Together we can make a difference in the lives of seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

1:20

Surface Rights Compensation

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to urge the government to take action on an issue of urgent importance to many rural Albertans, that being the issue of surface rights compensation. The current system has not been reviewed for over 20 years, and landowners are still being compensated on an outdated formula using farm commodity prices to pay them for land they're effectively being forced to relinquish for up to 50 years for an industrial purpose. That's correct. You heard it right. Landowners are forced to settle for a price based on farm commodity prices for land being used for industrial purposes.

Even on the open market farmland is traded at market value rates, which have more than doubled in price over the last eight years. That has nothing to do with productivity, but that's the market. However, this has no bearing on surface rights compensation rates.

Since this issue was last reviewed, farmland has also doubled production as summer fallow practices have ceased in most areas of the province. The use of more fertilizers, chemicals, and improved varieties have allowed this to happen. Yet when an energy company comes to negotiate a deal, none of these variables are considered by the Surface Rights Board or the EUB.

Mr. Speaker, we do need development of our natural resources, but we also need to treat rural Albertans fairly. Those who have their land criss-crossed with pipelines and electricity transmission lines are receiving little to nothing in annual compensation for the inconvenience of these forced developments on their property. These developments greatly restrict their future use, the market value, and the enjoyment of their land. Fair compensation would result in costing the end-use customer of the product pennies per month, yet there seems to be a reluctance to deal with this issue.

I'm not surprised, Mr. Speaker, that the perception of the EUB and the Surface Rights Board by farmers is that of being totally biased in favour of the energy companies, and that perception will continue until a total review of this issue is done. So let's get on with it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Sandra German

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to recognize an individual who goes sight unseen but is pivotal in helping others see what they cannot hear. Sandra German is a broadcast captioner and real-time translation provider based in Cold Lake, transcribing events and television programming in order that the deaf and hard of hearing can visually read what they cannot hear.

Real-time captioning is not uncommon. For some time closed-captioning has been available on television. Captioning is becoming more widely used at many large-scale events and conferences, both for the hard of hearing and for better comprehension by the general public.

Sandra has been a pioneer in the field of real-time captioning. She has spent the last 18 years as a real-time translation provider and started doing broadcast captioning six years ago. Real-time captioning requires great concentration and skill, and with her years of experience Sandra types 300 words per minute. In the course of her day she captions numerous television programs and provides real-time translation for universities such as UCLA, University of Florida, and McGill. Sandra is able to do captioning from her home in Cold Lake due in part to the availability of the SuperNet, which allows her to make the connection to events around the globe.

Sandra's work is yet another Alberta success story. She is one of the very few people in this country who can teach others the trade. Her work in this field is moving the use of captioning into new areas such as for students learning English as a Second Language. Most importantly, her work is making this province a more accessible place. For that we are very grateful, and Sandra should be commended.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Social Workers

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Social work was one of three traditional occupations for women, after nursing and teaching. It was women, including Alberta's Famous Five, who created the first social infrastructure that helped to turn a frontier society into a community, a house into a home.

Thirty-eight years ago the Social Credit government of Harry Strom renamed our public welfare department the department of social development. This was part of a proactive approach to social issues that included setting up preventative social services, or PSS, committees and offices in each region and municipality.

At that time few public servants in the department were social workers by orientation. Most had previously worked as police officers, ministers, teachers, and nurses. The emphasis inherited from public welfare days was not on serving people as much as dealing with problems, pushing paper, and enforcing policy. A friend of mine who served a few months in the department in 1970 was told: "You're doing too much social work. You're not here to be an advocate for the client but an administrator for the government to tell the client what policy will permit."

Today our official approach is a client-centred one. We hire real social workers, but we don't give them the resources or backing to do the job they trained for. In a society that puts business at the top of the food chain, social work is seen by many as something of an embarrassment. The social workers we hire bounce between putting out brush fires and conceptual models developed by a layer of middle management.

Every day we see stickers urging us to support our troops. Our social workers also deserve that kind of support. If the world had committed and properly trained social workers in areas of need, we would have less need to be sending troops to deal with failed societies. To quote a sticker in a daycare centre: we'll know our values will have changed when every child gets the budgeted funds she needs and the military has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomb.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Low-carbon Fuel

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to draw my hon. colleagues' attention to the fact that, yes, Alberta may not run out of oil soon, having the second-largest oil reserve in the world, but also

highlight the possibility that we may actually run out of markets in which to sell this commodity. The world will move on and leave Alberta behind. The greatest market for Alberta oil is the United States. However, it is clear how the language and tone changed from two or three years ago when Canada was highlighted as being next door to the U.S., as being stable and friendly, producing reliable and affordable oil to now being called one of the worst polluters on the planet, to being pointed at as a culprit in worsening America's addiction to fossil fuel.

In his 2006 state of the union address President Bush announced that "America is addicted to oil," and he promised to change that. In an article published yesterday in the *Financial Post*, there was a quote from Mike Hudema, an Albertan who is now the director of the San Francisco-based Freedom from Oil Coalition. Mr. Hudema says that oil from the tar sands, unlike even conventional oil, is a lot dirtier.

People all over the world, Mr. Speaker, are starting to realize the threat to the planet and that action needs to be taken to preserve the environment. Governments and individuals of all political stripes are coming together in the fight against climate change. Take California's governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican who went from an environmental menace with his three gas-guzzling, exhaust-spewing Hummers to an environmental messiah using his celebrity status and political might to reduce reliance on dirty fuels and cut oil imports from places like Alberta. He was in Canada last week signing agreements committing Ontario and British Columbia to adhere to California's new low carbon fuel standard, which will cut the use of petroleum products from sources known to cause high levels of greenhouse gas emissions, sources like Alberta.

Quebec, and Manitoba, perhaps other provinces as well, and at least 12 U.S. states are expected to join the California standard, thus shrinking the market for the fast-growing Alberta oil industry. Is Alberta going to join? Will we be the last province? Is ours the only government that is in denial or that is resistant to change?

There is even an agency in the U.S., Mr. Speaker, called the Natural Resources Defense Council, which labels its 2006 annual report *Moving America Beyond Oil*.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A mortgage, a personal debt, unfunded liability: is there a difference? I don't think so. A debt is a debt; a liability is a liability. Fancy bookkeeping doesn't change the reality of the situation. Ask shareholders of Enron, WorldCom, Nortel, or Bre-X.

A story may help here. You owe \$25,000 on personal credit and \$4,000 to a friend. Let's just say he's a teacher. You also have a leaky roof on your home from a hailstorm and no insurance to cover the cost of repair. The first thing you do is you go to the bank and discuss repayments. They agree to a 25-year plan that works for everyone. However, they will not allow you to fix your roof. You say to yourself: it doesn't rain that often. You agree with the bank that they'll okay all expenditures and will get all of your profits.

Luckily, your business takes off, and you have the ability to pay off the big debt early. You celebrate 100 years in business, and you have a mortgage-burning party to which you invite your teacher friend. Then you go on a spending spree and hire new management and spend a lot of time golfing.

In the meantime, it has been raining. You haven't increased or accelerated your payments to your friend. You are content with the deal. He was generous when he made it. He was helping make sure

your business didn't go under. Your friend is getting worried, though. He sees your lifestyle as flamboyant and riotous. You tell him how great things are, but he is concerned about your spending and whether his payments will keep coming. He begins to feel a pinch in his lifestyle and asks if you could please pay off your debt. You say that you're doing okay and ignore him. You'll pay according to the 50-year agreement you made with him.

Mr. Speaker, this government does not have a sustainable budget. Spending continues to rise with a fast lifestyle of fine dining and exclusive resorts. We are not receiving good value for our tax dollars. With our surplus top priority should be to pay off the government's portion of the teachers' unfunded pension liability. We must also address the estimated \$60 billion unfunded liability that we have to the Canada pension plan. It is way past time to pay off the \$4 billion debt to the teachers and opt out of CPP and create our own Alberta pension plan.

head: 1:30 Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Calgary Concerns

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents of Calgary, including those in Calgary-Elbow, are frustrated that their voices are not being heard in this government. Like other Albertans they're still waiting for a comprehensive solution to the affordable housing crisis, one that works. Funding for renters is inadequate, and the legislation is full of loopholes. Of course, we're all still waiting for the Treasury Board president's famous website that's supposed to scare gouging landlords. My question is to the Premier. What is the Premier prepared to tell the residents of Calgary, including renters in Calgary-Elbow, who know that this government's affordable housing plan is not working? When can we expect the rest of his plan?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the plan is working. Of \$285 million for affordable housing for the province, \$63 million is going directly to Calgary in the first year. The other day the mayor, taking a suggestion from what we had talked about, is now moving with city council, looking at how they can provide land for affordable housing. That is one issue that we've got to get our heads around: getting enough land for affordable housing. So the plan is moving.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Expanding the LRT system is another priority for Calgarians. It's critical to managing growth and, of course, to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but to build it, you need a commitment for sustainable, long-term funding. Calgarians know that the Premier promised one thing during his leadership race and has delivered something quite different. To the Premier: when will Calgary have the funding assurances in place that will enable the expansion of the LRT system to move ahead?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I had promised \$1.4 billion for municipalities, and we delivered on that promise. The full \$1.4 billion will be in the 2010-11 budget. We said that it would be there for 10 years. We may review it, you know, in the middle of those 10 years, depending on the growth in the economy. It's difficult to predict the kind of growth that may occur and the revenues that flow. But the \$1.4 billion is there. I promised it, and it's there.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is developing a bad habit of lowering expectations rather than meeting them. The latest example is the backtracking on the promise of new postsecondary spaces. Calgary desperately needs more postsecondary spaces, and Mount Royal College is prepared to deliver, but this government has not given Mount Royal the support required to meet the needs of Calgarians. Again to the Premier: if Mount Royal College's applications for new bachelor's degree programs in arts, sciences, justice studies, and business are approved, will the Premier commit to funding them and to funding them at the level they need?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister is reviewing where spaces will be added. In fact, yesterday's comments from the University of Lethbridge and the University of Calgary were that they're agreeing with the minister in terms of the direction taken and adding spaces where they're required, so it's further dialogue, planning with the postsecondary deliverers.

Now, with respect to Mount Royal there is a plan in place, and the minister may want to speak further to it.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times in this House, we are in very close consultation with all of our postsecondaries on their role, their responsibility, and their mandate within the framework of Campus Alberta. For the first time that, I think, has been discussed, there is a pathway for Mount Royal to achieve their objectives.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Capital Region Municipal Planning

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals' Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act, accomplished the very same thing as the Premier's capital region growth management plan announced yesterday, yet in Bill 211 debates the minister of the Treasury Board stated that mandatory regional planning is "code for forced amalgamation." The Member for Rocky Mountain House stated that it's imperative that "we support each municipality in its own endeavours." To the Premier. A minister and a former minister spoke harshly against regional planning. Does the Premier support their statements, or are they both just wrong?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what, you know, the member is bringing forward. All I know is that it's very clear that we're moving quickly by getting all of the 24 municipalities together, focusing on a growth management plan for the capital region. It's going to take into account not only the physical infrastructure but the social infrastructure. I'm talking about policing, ambulance services, provision of services like water and sewer, waste management, and also looking at a governance model once we've collated all this information. If we don't do it, we are at risk of losing a considerable amount of investment. Predicted investment is about \$39 billion. If we don't move very positively with leadership, we may lose tremendous investment in the province.

Mr. Bonko: It's taken a long time to get to this point. Bill 211 and the capital region growth management plan both create long-term growth management plans for the region. They both establish regional boards. They both have provincial representation. They both include a land-use strategy, and they both create regional growth plans. The government cannot deny – cannot deny – the similarity. To the Premier: why did your government vote against Bill 211 when they both accomplish the very same thing?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, it's a private member's bill. You know, he's been in the House a few years and still doesn't understand the difference.

Very clearly, all 24 municipalities are onside. They're working towards one common goal. The other thing, which is very important here, is that this may be a model that we can use, perhaps share with other municipalities in the province of Alberta in terms of working together, planning towards much more effective delivery of public services. That's where the savings are, and that's where we can reduce a lot of the tax costs to local taxpayers.

Mr. Bonko: There's no legislative basis for the government to guarantee that regional planning will get things done. Despite the Premier saying that the province will have the partners, there's no mechanism to do this. The Premier does not have a legislative leg to stand on. To the Premier. On affordable housing the best solution your government could come up with to protect renters was a website listing bad landlords to shame them, not exactly a stroke of genius here. Is this Premier going to have the same tactic to force the capital region to come up with a plan if they can't agree: put their names on a website?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one thing I will tell you is that we're not going to use the same kind of strategy as the Liberals and try to hammer the municipalities. We're going to work with them. At the end of the day we said: look, we'll come up with a governance model that's going to be fair. I talked to most of the leaders. They agree that they will come to that governance model. Part of that model is already in the municipal sustainability report.

We have consensus. We're moving forward. We're going to bring this to a close in January of 2008. We'll have all the relevant information, and then we'll be prepared next spring. If we have to change legislation or amend legislation, we'll have all that information with the support of the municipalities, and I would then ask for the support of the opposition.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Safety of Human Services Workers

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta health and social service workers in the human services sector are 12 times more likely to be the victims of workplace violence than workers in traditional job sectors. Too often front-line workers in the Department of Children's Services are punched, grabbed, pushed, and verbally threatened by their clients. Casework overloads caused by staff shortages and increasing poverty issues increase worker risk. While the department has protocols for reacting to an episode of violence, little is done to prevent attacks. To the Minister of Children's Services: when was the last time your staff conducted a province-wide audit of the implementation of the occupational health and safety code in the Department of Children's Services, and what were the results?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of areas in there to address. The very first thing I want to say is that I agree with your member's statement that our social workers deserve our support and also to say to the House that I take this role as Minister of Children's Services – and I know that you would agree – very seriously. I see that my number one role is to ensure that this

government is placing as much effort into and value on our social infrastructure as our physical infrastructure, and I can tell you that that is the case. I can also tell you that we value the professionals who are servicing that social infrastructure. In fact, I can say that I'm very proud that most of the initiatives that I have been able to announce since the budget have been focused on valuing and respecting our staff.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What little preventative safety measures and procedures exist in the Department of Children's Services are piecemeal, inadequate, and inconsistent between regions. For example, Children's Services sets no provincial standard on the number of hours and frequency of staff safety and violence prevention training. There are also no standards for workplace security measures like plexiglass barriers, panic buttons, for the location of visitation rooms, or for the safety of human services workers working alone after hours. To the Minister of Children's Services: when will your department develop clear and consistent workplace violence prevention standards that apply to all provincial and contracted social service workers province-wide?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second thing I'd like to address is actually the comment about resources. I can tell you that I think that the Children's Services employees do a fabulous job in this province taking care of the interests of children and families. I can tell you that just this week alone I've had the opportunity of visiting staff in three different sites. When it does come to resources, I do think – and I know that you've also been taking a look at this – the casework practice model that we have started to implement in 13 sites across the province, preparing for a rollout, will make a significant difference and improvement on workload issues in this province.

Mrs. Mather: Last year, following the tragic death of social worker Boni Frederick, the American state of Kentucky implemented a new piece of legislation called Boni's bill. Among other things, this legislation included new standards for the creation of secure client visitation centres, provisions for social worker access to criminal records with one-hour turnaround time, and mandatory staff safety training twice a year. Also, recognizing the widespread impact of worker burnout on health and safety, the state hired an additional 100 workers. To the Minister of Children's Services. Alberta, too, has had its share of human service worker assaults and fatalities, yet little has changed. Has your department looked at these measures, and if so, why hasn't it implemented them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, there are a couple of questions there. A couple of things: if there are any particular instances that you know about, because I know that you're good at following up, if you'd like to share the information with me, I'll do due diligence as well. What I can tell you is that safety of staff is of utmost importance to us.

In Children's Services we do have a provincial occupational health and safety committee. It is their job, with representation from management and employee representatives, to recommend solutions that do address the kinds of situations that you're talking about. I

understand that the policies and guidelines are on the website. Like I say, I'll take a look at the *Hansard* and follow up with some information, but if you want to give me more details on specifics, I'll follow up with that as well.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Election Finances

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has admitted that soliciting donations from the Beaver waste management commission was unethical. The Liberals did not get any unethical money from the commission, but it was not for lack of trying. We have two parties in this province, the Liberals and the Conservatives, who appear to engage in unethical fundraising. Clearly, we need some legislation to protect Albertans from these two parties. Will the Premier finally do the right thing and introduce comprehensive changes to election finance rules in Alberta to make these types of unethical donations illegal?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, a number of times I rose in the House to say that our government's plan is to introduce legislation. We want to consult with the two leaders to build good legislation. This is more focused on legislation tied to the campaign fundraising for leadership causes. You know, I don't know what the other parties have in mind, but if we do this together, we would have good legislation in place, and we would avoid this kind of situation. It will be very clear-cut.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, these are not exceptions to an otherwise properly functioning set of election finance rules. It's just not the case. With the Liberals taking \$103,650 from big oil and gas donors last year and the Tories taking \$314,550, it's no wonder both parties have been soft-pedaling the need for royalty reform. Why won't the Premier commit right now to cleaning up Alberta politics and get big money out of politics and limit donations to individual citizens?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've come a long way this session in terms of opening up this Legislature to greater democracy, more openness, more transparency. Quite frankly, it came with the support of the opposition parties, and I thank them for that. We've got more to do, and we'll definitely move in that direction, again, in partnership with the two. We have the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007, that's going to be proceeding through the House and lifted, you know, for an all-party review, which to me is an important piece of legislation. There will be other legislation coming through. I want to work together with the other two parties to ensure that we have the best legislation in place.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we saw how transparent the government really was when they got that report from the Affordable Housing Task Force and kept it secret until they made all their decisions.

The province of Manitoba and the federal government have already limited political donations to individuals, and I would say that democracy is doing just fine in the province of Manitoba. There's a basic democratic principle here. The financial support of our political process should depend on individual citizens, not

corporations or unions or municipalities or even waste-water commissions, Mr. Speaker. When will this government follow Manitoba's lead on this matter and eliminate big money from politics?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I thought I just heard from the hon. member no acceptance of any money coming from unions. I'm quite sure he's going to bring that forward when it comes to discussion in this House in terms of the regulations with the proposed legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Capital Region Municipal Planning (continued)

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his questions a few seconds ago the Member for Edmonton-Decore clearly shows how clueless he is relative to regional co-operation and how he doesn't mind certain capital residential regions subsidizing the others. I'd love to see him explain his position in front of Mayor Mandel.

Mr. Speaker, the capital region integrated growth management plan is a monumental accord that was signed between the municipalities. I would like to ask the Premier: how will the entire capital region, all residents of the capital region benefit from this plan, which I understand makes all the mayors happy?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of components, of course, to the value of the plan to the citizens; first of all, co-ordinated planning, and it's not only for transportation but for waste water, sewer treatment, all of those particular areas that municipalities have a common share in. Secondly, how do we ensure the social side, the social costs like policing, the social needs of the various communities? How will they be affected with this growth? How can we co-ordinate those services, reduce the costs? But the other is of course leading to environment. I believe we can reduce the footprint, certainly, on the environment by working together with all the municipalities. That's part of the action plan and a benefit to every constituent in the area.

Mr. Lukaszuk: My first and last supplemental to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Maybe he can explain to the Member for Edmonton-Decore, who would rather blow out a candle to prove to us that it's dark out there, what we can do as legislators, including the Member for Edmonton-Decore, to make sure that this plan works, works well for all Edmontonians and works well for the entire capital region.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we have had consultation with municipalities. Municipalities and this government very much believe that we need to work together as far as regionalization, as far as working together as regions. I will be meeting with the municipalities as well as an implementation team consisting of the deputy ministers and a project manager and the municipalities and municipal leaders. Industry and the federal government will be at this meeting. It will take a concentrated and a co-ordinated approach to make this happen, and I think that all leaders are committed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Education Funding

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, another day, another school board forced to make really difficult decisions. Last night the Edmonton public school board announced the impacts of inadequate operational funding on their school district. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Does the minister accept that this year's funding shortfalls are undoing the progress that school boards like Edmonton public have made on class sizes? Will this pattern continue across the province in Alberta schools?

1:50

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think I read the same newspaper article that the hon. member read. What I happened to see was that the Edmonton public school board balanced their budget for this year. Here's what I also happened to read. The chairman of the public school board said: we had to use some creative, innovative thinking to balance our budget. I would suggest that maybe that's what we need, some creative, innovative thinking, which we sure aren't going to get from that group over there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you. I'm insulted, Mr. Speaker, terribly.

Edmonton public's budget only contains enough room to expand the teacher compensation package by 2 per cent in this year's negotiations. I will remind the minister that the cost of living in Edmonton increased by almost 6 per cent last year, and therefore a 2 per cent increase will reduce the quality of life for teachers in this province. Does the minister acknowledge that forcing teachers to fight every few years to maintain their standard of living has a negative impact on attracting young people to the profession of teaching? Yes or no, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it absolutely incredible that this hon. member would stand in this Legislature and falsely accuse me several times of combining and not separating negotiations from the unfunded liability issue. Now this hon. member wants me to get involved in negotiations. I will remind the hon. member that negotiations will take place over the coming months between the school districts and the locals of the ATA. The government will work with the ATA to solve the unfunded pension liability.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton public did not receive an increase in their maintenance budget this year. This means they will have to continue to defer required maintenance on many of their schools. Deferred maintenance today equals an unnecessary need for new schools tomorrow. To the Minister of Education. We have been down this path before. Calgary and Edmonton need 66 new schools today because your government neglected school infrastructure in the '90s. How can you ensure that we aren't repeating the same mistakes? Do you have a plan, Mr. Minister? Tell us.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think I heard him say that they received no additional funding for maintenance. That's absolutely incorrect, so I'm just assuming that everything else he's saying is equally incorrect.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Edmonton Ring Road

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Keeping goods and services on the move and helping people get to their places of work, learning, or leisure and then back to their homes as safely and efficiently as possible requires a sophisticated, well-planned roadway system. It also requires a great deal of co-operation among cities and municipalities as well as several strategic financial and economic partnerships. Population growth and economic growth in and around Edmonton are absolutely phenomenal, and the need for ring roads, overpasses, and so on is absolutely critical. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. When will your ministry and our municipal partners see the southeast leg of the Anthony Henday ring road completed and at what cost?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the excellent question. The Anthony Henday Drive southeast is a great project that is progressing normally and is scheduled to open this fall. It'll be part of the Edmonton ring road. I'd like to add that the Anthony Henday Drive southeast project is also a very successful P3 project. The total cost over three years for construction and maintenance, which will be like a 30-year warranty, is \$494 million total. It will make traffic around Edmonton run more smoothly and efficiently and is also a very good deal for the Alberta taxpayer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is indeed great news, particularly for my constituency because it borders that particular leg. I'd also like to know something about the roadway connections elsewhere. What are your plans, Mr. Minister, for the northern sections of this capital ring road system here in our area?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the 2001 functional planning study for the north ring road is being updated to reflect current traffic projections and provide a plan for 30 years and beyond. When it's complete, the northern leg of the ring road will stretch from the western edge of Edmonton all the way across the top of the city, then across the North Saskatchewan River and link to the Yellowhead near Sherwood Park. The timing for the design or construction of the north ring road is not set, but the 2005 goal was to have it all completed within 10 years.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, it appears some good news is coming.

Yesterday's announcement of good news, in fact, with reference to the terms of reference for the capital region integrated growth management plan is extremely important and is very well supported by all 24 capital region municipalities, as we've just heard. I'd like the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, however, to please explain how these plans relate to the overall transportation plan for the Industrial Heartland in our area, where about \$46 billion worth of construction projects are already planned or under way.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the plans for the ring road fit very well with the overall transportation plans for the Industrial Heartland area because transportation of goods will be done more efficiently around the capital region. The Industrial Heartland area will definitely benefit from the construction of the ring road around Edmonton because of a better access to transportation routes. My overall objective is to make sure that all the areas around Edmonton take advantage of the benefits of the ring road now and into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River will follow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, who I'll now call upon.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, remember the rule. If you choose to wear an identifiable piece of clothing, logos and what have you, you must provide one to every member of the Assembly. So by tomorrow would you ensure that every member has the right-fitting tee-shirt, compliments of the hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: What's your size, Mr. Speaker?

Arts Funding

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta needs to get serious about diversifying the economy. This government must move away from dependence on the oil industry and take advantage of the opportunities in other sectors, including book publishers and the film industry. They aren't receiving the support they need. The province has already lost six publishers, and only 30 per cent of the remaining publishers received provincial funding last year. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: why isn't the minister doing more to support this very important sector?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, certainly over the last couple of months I've had an opportunity to meet with the book publishers, and I've assured them that through the AFA, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, we would continue to provide them with support. As part of the overall review that we're doing this year on the AFA, we will include the comments that the hon. member has indicated to me, and we're doing that in light of seeing if we can provide them additional support.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Failure to plan for the future has resulted in an extremely high cost of living and in shortages of workers in all areas. Because of this, Alberta is having a hard time remaining competitive with other jurisdictions when it comes to attracting filmmakers. Has the minister considered removing caps on incentives offered to filmmakers?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, we are wanting to also grow the film industry in the province of Alberta. Again, I have met with that particular industry. We did some very specialized funding last year where we gave an additional \$12 million to support the film industry. We are presently looking at a couple of pilot projects that we think might come forward here in the very, very short while. They're pilot projects that we're anticipating to be successful and will give us direction as to how we might fund the film industry in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The Alberta Liberals recognize the value of arts and the culture sector. Will the minister adopt the Alberta Liberal plan and immediately increase funding to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts so that cultural industries are able to remain competitive and thrive in Alberta?

2:00

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite will know that in our budget we did increase the funding to the arts community in

the province of Alberta. I need to indicate that Albertans and this particular government really value the arts community. We recognize that they are a very important and integral part of the quality of life for all Albertans. We will move forward to supporting that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Critics of forest management and forest harvesting in Kananaskis Country continue to downplay the mountain pine beetle threat to the region. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why not do as the critics request and leave the infestations to manage themselves as they say was done to good effect during an earlier beetle attack in Waterton national park?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of visiting Waterton national park on June 2, and I inspected the pine beetle killed area there. You can see that in the absence of any intervention there has been virtually no reforestation: certainly no lodgepole pine, a few spruce, but mostly scrub willow. The ground is covered with deadfall, which of course will stunt further growth and also put wildlife at great risk. The Waterton solution may work for the national parks, given their priorities, but it's certainly not what Albertans want.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. My first supplemental, again to the same minister: is this just theory or can he point to specific examples that suggest that the current strategy really will result in healthier forests in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By complete coincidence, I can point to a specific example. On that same trip to Waterton I had an up-close view of the West Castle Valley, where pine beetle also occurred in the 1960s. We inspected some blocks that were salvage harvest there, and I'm happy to report that they have been reforested, replanted, and are doing very well. We also had the opportunity further down the valley to see some commercial harvest that was from the 1960s, and it is now prime 40-foot lodgepole pine. As I've said before, if we truly want healthy forest in Alberta, doing nothing is not an option.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, thank you to the minister, and I'm really impressed that he has specific examples that he can just whip out.

My second supplemental to the same minister: how will Alberta's approach to mountain pine beetle differ from what was done in Waterton?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, national parks and the province of Alberta have different management priorities and different management techniques. We manage our forested lands for multiple uses.

Parks Canada has different priorities and has a policy of minimal intervention. What works for them is fine. But, as I've explained in here, what hasn't worked in Waterton, particularly the lack of reforestation after pine beetle, simply is not acceptable in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Speaker's Ruling

Interjections by a Member

The Speaker: But first of all, does the hon. member have any idea what this might be? Can he see this? This is a piece of paper. The first time today that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity's voice was heard over everybody else's, I wrote down two. I was going to interject and say: look, let's have some more decorum. Then I went to three and I crossed it off; then I went to four and I crossed it off; then I went to five and I crossed it off; then I went to six and I crossed it off; then seven and I crossed it off; eight and I crossed it off; nine and I crossed it off; 10 and I crossed it off; 11 and I crossed it off; and 12 and I crossed it off. Thirteen times today. If the hon. member has any more energy, use it now with your questions, okay?

Commercial Vehicle Inspection

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At random roadside vehicle inspections the commercial trucking industry fails at a rate of approximately 35 per cent. Commercial truck operators are legislated to have mechanical inspections completed on their equipment annually. School buses at random roadside inspections achieve a pass rate of approximately 95 per cent. School bus operators are required to submit their vehicles to mandatory mechanical inspections every six months. At an additional cost of approximately \$1.5 million annually commercial vehicle inspection program administration and audit duties have been contracted to Transtrue Vehicle Safety. This upstart firm is reportedly unable to meet the program and audit requirements due to personnel shortages. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. What guarantee do Albertans have that the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation and Transtrue are meeting their obligations in CVIP goals?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this ministry is very committed to traffic safety, as I've been saying all along here. We're always working on innovative things and implementing more things in traffic safety. Just this week I was out at the Leduc safety inspection station. We're using a new image camera that actually can take a picture of a truck going by. It can check their weights, it can check whether their wheel bearings are overheating, it can check whether their brakes are even working, which ones are coming on or not, just by driving by the thermal image camera. That's the type of innovation that we're working on all the time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My unbridled enthusiasm today comes from having a fourth amigo in Calgary.

Although CVIP-related work has been contracted to Transtrue Vehicle Safety, fully capable people remain in the employ of Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation. Will the government commit to an investigation to determine why the CVIP is not administered utilizing government employees still working for the ministry? What's the point of this Transtrue outfit, that can't deliver?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of different private contractors that work through Infrastructure and Transportation on all different aspects of the ministry. We believe that all of our partnerships work great with us together, and whenever they have problems, we work with them to try and fix those problems.

On to his amigo problems: I just wonder. He needs every amigo he can get, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that the minister is aware of the Transtrue section within his ministry, but I'd look forward to his evaluation of them.

Will the government commit to improving the commercial vehicle inspection program, CVIP, by requiring all Alberta-based commercial vehicles to receive and pass mechanical inspections every six months?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, everyone knows how busy we are in this province. We are always looking at innovative ways and better ways to make sure that we have the safest highways in the country. We are always looking at better ways to make sure that everybody is getting their vehicles inspected, and we will continue doing so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Education Funding

(continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This Education minister is robbing our students to please the fiscal hawks. Because of this budgeting, classrooms in Edmonton public schools will be packed to capacity next year, and Edmonton Catholic will have less than half the money they need for maintenance. By starving the education budget, this minister is forcing school boards to think creatively and innovatively, I suppose: should we cut instruction, or should we cut our infrastructure? To the Premier I would ask: what has provoked the government to do this to the province's education system? Why are you putting the bottom line ahead of our children's learning?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education is very important to this government and to all Albertans. In fact, if you look at the last 10 years, the funding to schools has increased by over 86 per cent, and in that same period inflation has increased less than 30 per cent, maybe 28 per cent. So we've more than kept up with inflation.

We have more things in store in terms of the government dealing with the teachers' unfunded liability. We're dealing with that as a separate issue. We want to settle that as quickly as possible. We're always working with teachers and school boards towards improving the quality of education in this province.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks. Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, you have to pay the price of what public education costs in this province. Certainly, a 3 per cent operational budget when we have upwards of 5 to 6 per cent inflation: the two just don't match

up. We're losing a lot of good recommendations from the Learning Commission. School boards are having to choose between well-maintained classrooms and proper numbers of teachers. I would like to ask the Minister of Education, please. Perhaps he has some advice for innovative and creative thinking for school trustees. Should they let their class sizes grow, or should they just let their schools fall apart?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've stated on several occasions in this House that when the Learning Commission made its recommendation regarding class sizes, they recommended that we implement it over a period of five years. Well, this is the third year, and we have fully funded class size initiatives. The hon. member doesn't have any idea what he's talking about when he says we're not funding class sizes. Half a billion dollars in three years.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly, this budget will result in choices. Maybe schools will try to cut back so that they can maintain their class size, but it will be at the expense of something else. There's simply not enough money to be in keeping with the balance, the cost of providing public education today in this province. So I ask the minister once more. Perhaps I'm not sure what he's up to here, but certainly it feels like it's a razing of K to 12 education. What are we going to do afterwards? Are we going to have another Learning Commission to try to put it back together again, are we going to rely on private schools to come and fill up the gap, or are we going to end up going back to having emergency funding in the fall like we had to do last year?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was a comment made by the hon. member at the beginning of his first question about starvation. I would suggest that there are many departments in this government that would gladly accept a \$5.6 billion starvation budget. The hon. member continues to talk about underfunding. The Premier has just mentioned some numbers that – I don't know if the hon. member can't add or what his problem is, but in the last 10 years education funding to school boards has gone up 86 per cent. Eighty-six per cent. They love to tie numbers to inflation. In the same time inflation has gone up 28 per cent. I suggest we do the mathematics.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Railway Safety

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents as well as diverse organizations such as the Canadian Chemical Producers' Association, coal companies, and the Alberta Forest Products Association have expressed concerns regarding the level of service provided by CN in Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Can he tell this Assembly what can be done to remediate this situation?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague that there is room for improvement when it comes to CN's level of service in Alberta. I have written to the federal minister of transport to make him aware of Alberta's concerns about all rail service in western Canada. Alberta is a major source of railway shipments, with a total volume of 47 million tonnes, which is 20 per cent of all shipments originating in Canada. These CN service issues include inadequate car supply, lack of timely train service, and the recent strike at CN. That said, I understand that the newly introduced Bill C-44 will address most of Alberta's concerns regarding CN's level of service.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. Can the minister provide more details about the immediate action that can take place to help ensure CN provides the level of service that Alberta industry has the right to expect?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill C-44, that amends the Canada Transportation Act, will address most of this province's concerns. The intent is to clarify and strengthen the act's current provisions that protect rail shippers from market power by railways. I would also like to remind the hon. member and this Assembly that railways are a federal jurisdiction, which limits the province's influence. That said, my department is currently reviewing the new legislation to make sure that it improves on the situation in Alberta. We will also conduct formal public consultation with our stakeholders regarding this new legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. The American government has recently introduced a piece of legislation that would address railroad competitiveness and service improvements. Is this type of legislation something that the Alberta government should be looking at?

Mr. Ouellette: As I was saying before, Mr. Speaker, our goal is to ensure that goods and products can move effectively and efficiently for the benefit of the industry and Albertans in general. But, again, railways are under federal jurisdiction. My department is aware of the new proposed legislation, which is called the Railroad Competition and Service Improvement Act. I have instructed my staff to review this proposed legislation to see if there are any improvements or aspects of the legislation that the province could provide as input to the federal government. The objective is to make sure that Albertans get the best benefits from the railway industry.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, to receive government support services, an adult with fetal alcohol syndrome disorder, commonly known as FASD, must fall below a specific IQ level. However, this support system does not take into account adults with FASD who may be above the IQ level but lack basic functioning ability or for safety reasons, theirs and society's, require support. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Will this government commit to reviewing available supports to ensure that these adults with FASD don't fall through the cracks?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, absolutely correct. When we designed programs for persons with developmental disabilities, they were very much designed to help a certain classification of individuals, and they don't always encompass all forms of disability, FASD being one of them. In that respect we're pleased to be working very closely with Children's Services so that we can look at how we address those needs. They are ones, in particular, that don't fall under persons with development disabilities but are a group of people for whom we are very concerned about providing the right level of service.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that. We've also heard from experts that treatment facilities for addictions require more training to be

able to meet the needs of the FASD clients. Again to the same minister: will the minister consult with the FASD experts and addiction agencies to develop appropriate programs that are flexible and tailored to meet the individual needs of Albertans with FASD once they turn 18?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we do actually, as I mentioned in my last comment, work very closely with Children's Services, who actually provides the lead role on behalf of a number of departments. These cross a number of issues like health from when they are children from one to 18 and certainly to becoming adults. So all of our departments are actively engaged on this issue to ensure that we consult with those other groups that you've mentioned, make sure that we find out what are the right services that should be provided at the right time to the right person in the right place, and we'll continue to do just that.

Ms Pastoor: Recently the Minister of Children's Services announced that \$4 million would be awarded for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder networks but has given no indication as to how or where the money will be allocated. To the Minister of Children's Services: given that the ministry recognizes that FASD is a lifelong disability, how much of this money will go towards supporting adults with FASD, and who decides the distribution of these dollars?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you very much. I can tell you that in the next several weeks we'll have more information forthcoming. What I did announce, when I announced the additional \$4 million added on to the \$6 million that we currently spend on FASD, is that we will be establishing seven FASD service networks, and they will be responsible for providing access to very targeted prevention programs, diagnostic and assessment services, and also offering advocacy and support across the lifespan for those with FASD and for their caregivers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Budget Consultation

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government's budget has been criticized for increasing spending too much, not lowering taxes enough, not providing enough funding for municipalities. Several of my constituents are concerned about the government's saving policy in light of the province's prosperity. To the Minister of Finance: what are you doing to ensure that Alberta's priorities and my constituents' concerns are considered as the government begins planning for the next budget?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Included in my mandate letter, which I received on becoming Minister of Finance, was the mandate to do a prebudget consultation. Indeed, what I am very pleased to announce today is that we have launched a website, which is at www.budgetconsultation.alberta.ca, which will allow each and every Albertan the access, the ability to put in their thoughts about next year's budget. Despite the fact that we're not voting on the budget until tomorrow, work has already begun to ensure that next year's budget is going to be just as good and just as exciting as this year's.

Mr. Johnson: Well, I'm pleased to hear that the government is asking for input from Albertans for the next budget. Can you assure Albertans that their responses will be considered as you develop the government's next budget and not just to satisfy the demands of your mandate letter?

Dr. Oberg: Yes, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. That's one assurance I can definitely give. We're looking to hear what all Albertans have to say. Not only have we put it on the web, on the Internet, but we also have a toll-free line at 310-4455. Those people who do not have access to a computer can call up and receive the budget consultation document. Our intent is to use this information very much in doing the next budget.

Mr. Johnson: A final question. What plans, then, do you have for the results once the consultation is completed?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, given the compressed timelines that we have for this upcoming budget, with the budget now fixed at February 14, we're going to utilize this consultation, these results by around the end of August, the first part of September as we start to get into the finalization of our budget. They will first go to our cabinet policy committee, and that information will be made available to those committee members. It will then go on to Treasury Board and subsequently to caucus and will be put in the budget and the budget speech. This is going to be more consultation than any budget has ever had in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 82 questions and responses.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions today. The first one has 123 signatures, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government . . . to:

1. Ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector, regardless of whether these workers are employed by government or community-based or private providers;
2. Ensure these employees are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive with other sectors . . .
3. Improve employees' access to professional development opportunities . . . and
4. Introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

The second one has 260 signatures, Mr. Speaker, and it reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and myself to table a petition with 83 signatures on it. The petition notes the Conservatives' continued refusal to protect Alberta families from rent gouging

and urges the government to immediately introduce temporary rent guidelines. This brings the total signatures on this petition to 443.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge there are no Written Questions or Motions for Returns on the Order Paper; therefore, no notice should be required.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to rise and table the package that was given out this morning at the Alberta mental health research partnership program launch, a very successful launch of a program of mental health research that will be provided. I was very pleased to see that and pleased to see this program go forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of a letter from Bertha Clendenning. Bertha has been hit with a \$150 rent increase despite the state of disrepair her building is in. She's asking what the government will do about the situation.

I have a second tabling. On behalf of the leader of the NDP I table copies of a letter from Robert McLeod. Robert is a former journalist with CFRN. He is receiving a rent increase of 15 per cent. He's urging this government to introduce rent increase guidelines like most of Canada's other provinces.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of correspondence from a constituent, Nicole Braseth, who's noting that her rent will only go up by \$200 if she signs a one-year lease. If not, it's going to go up by \$400 a month. She would love to get a mortgage and buy a house of her own, but as a university graduate with a student loan she's required to carry as a result of this government's policy, that isn't a possibility. She notes that Saskatchewan is starting to look good.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a petition with 20 signatures urging the government

to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities I'm pleased to table five copies of the annual report, 2005-2006.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the

Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on May 30 and 31, 2007, in the Department of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness a response to Written Question 9, asked for by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on May 7, 2007.

On behalf of the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security pursuant to the Horse Racing Alberta Act the Horse Racing Alberta 2006 annual report.

head: **Orders of the Day**
head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will call the committee to order.

Bill 43 **Appropriation Act, 2007**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to briefly address the Appropriation Act, 2007. This is a really big budget: over \$30 billion under the expense and equipment/inventory purchases line. I like to do my own analysis of things, and with a great deal of help from my assistant Bartek – well, actually, he did the review of revenue and expense changes over the years that I've been in the Legislature. I thought it might be interesting to others to hear some of the changes.

In 1993 our revenue was \$15.4 billion. This year we've forecasted over \$35 billion. Over that period of time revenue has had some really wild fluctuations, but on average over that period of time it has grown by 6.27 per cent per year. Expenses, on the other hand, went from about \$16.7 billion in 1993 to about \$33.1 billion this year or, put another way, an average expenditure increase between 1993 and 2007 of 4.47 per cent. Inside that number is one number that stands out particularly dramatically, and that is health care. In 1993 spending on health care was approximately \$4 billion per year, and this year it's over \$12 billion, or a 300 per cent increase. Interestingly enough, I'm not sure that on a day-to-day basis the issues of health care that people worried about in 1993 are any different from the issues they worry about today: mostly wait time issues and hope that new drugs will get coverage under the provincial system.

2:30

In addition to health care concerns in 1993 people were also worried about keeping their homes. For those that don't remember, we had an unemployment rate of close to 12 per cent at that time. One of the biggest issues of the day was personal and corporate bankruptcies. We were \$28 billion in debt and had a deficit in 1992 of \$3.5 billion. We had very high provincial taxes, not just the initial tax rate, Mr. Chairman, but also at least two additional taxes stacked on top, commonly known as surtaxes on high-income earners. It is no wonder that people were leaving our province.

I experienced the boom in the late '70s and the early '80s, when the price of everything went up, and the federal Liberals at that time brought in wage and price controls on a Canada-wide basis. Inflation was running high, interest rates were high, taxes were high, and wages were literally frozen. We had rent controls which froze rents at a high level.

It took years for rent and interest rates to come down despite the increasing rise in unemployment and vacancy rates, that hit everyone hard. There were entire office buildings in both Edmonton and Calgary that were sitting empty, not to mention all the empty homes that were owned by the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation. It took years for those foreclosed and empty homes to be sold and at no small cost to the taxpayers for government intervention in the marketplace. By the time all of the addition was done, there was about \$3 billion in losses for Albertans. There was no new construction for almost a decade. That's how long it took for us to dig our way out of a marketplace intervention by both the federal and provincial governments.

One of today's biggest issues is rent increases, not to mention the rise in the cost of housing. I know that everyone would like us to be able to just fix this, but frequently the cure is worse than the illness. According to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, rental vacancy rates are the lowest in Alberta and British Columbia due to strong population growth in both provinces. The average rental vacancy rate in Canada's 35 major centres was 2.8 per cent in April. The lowest rates in April 2007 were in Calgary at .5 per cent, then Abbotsford at .6, Kelowna at .7, and Victoria at .8. All of the major centres in B.C. posted a vacancy rate lower than 1 per cent.

The highest average monthly rents for two-bedroom apartments in Canada's major centres were in Toronto at \$1,073. It was \$1,051 in Vancouver, \$1,037 in Calgary. One exception to the big-city rule was Fort McMurray, and it was the highest in the country at \$1,681. It's interesting to note that at the end of April, as opposed to the beginning of April, vacancies went up to 1.8 per cent, and that's no doubt due to the universities and colleges both ending their semesters in Edmonton and Calgary.

In British Columbia when house prices went up like they are going up here now, the pressure to not have houses with basement suites for rent was reversed. All of a sudden people needed to be able to rent out basement suites to help them make their mortgage payments. I believe that the same situation is actually occurring in Alberta and that residents of major centres in Alberta should be pressuring their municipal governments not to ban basement suites but to allow people to renovate and rent out units, a situation that I hope will change soon for the benefit of renters, with more suites available, but also for homeowners finding their mortgage payments a bit of a struggle with the upswing in housing prices.

Another interesting note is that of the 229,000 housing starts between May 2006 and May 2007 in Canada, 46,300 of them were here in Alberta, more than double what it would normally be for our population. One of the innovative things that the British Columbia government has done recently is to buy up some older hotel properties, and they're doing some minor renovations to them and using the hotel rooms to help people who have a problem finding a home or even a bed on a short-term basis. I wonder if there is merit, perhaps, in a Super 8 concept, that municipal, provincial, and federal governments working together on a short-term project idea could alleviate some of the stress that people are under with a short-term rental stay. I admire the people who built the Super 8 motels. They are prolific and seem to have one design, and they build it fast. I think it's an idea worth looking at.

Another interesting statistic is that Albertans have the highest percentage of home ownership in Canada. The average across the

country is about 67 per cent, but in Alberta it's over 75. We also have the highest weekly wages in the country at \$825 per week, about \$70 more than British Columbia, \$100 more per week than Quebec, and \$200 more than Prince Edward Island. Combine that with the lowest overall taxes in the country, and it makes a little more sense why so many people are moving here. I'm sure it is also why retail sales continue to go up here more than other places, with a year-over-year increase this past year of 11 per cent. While I know that people are feeling pressured right now with rising costs, I also know that most people are pretty happy to be here.

The Conference Board of Canada is forecasting an overall growth rate of 4.1 per cent for Alberta this year, compared to 2.7 for Canada. I hope that we'll all keep an eye on the dollar because if it hits par with the American dollar, I think that there will be major problems in our country, particularly in Ontario. The rising dollar is a wake-up call to everyone to improve their productivity, something many manufacturers in Canada didn't worry about when the dollar was trading at 70 cents. Truthfully, as Canadians we are not very competitive as to where our productivity should be. However, as Albertans we have much to be proud of as Alberta has, by any measure, the most productive workforce in the country.

I think our budget is a reflection of the growth in our province, and I believe that we have tried to address many of the issues created by such a vibrant economy. There is still and, I'm sure, always will be a little bit of fear inside of me of a repeat of the decline that we went through following the imposition of the national energy program. I saw what can happen, and I hope we guard against anything like that happening again.

I think we need to be careful not to get too far ahead of ourselves on program spending. I believe it is time for a thorough review of program line spending to ensure that money is being allocated to the highest priorities. I for one do not believe that the taxpayers of the province can afford to do everything for everyone all of the time. We need to constantly be reviewing programs. When a new idea comes along, I firmly believe that an old one must drop off if we are to keep things in balance.

I do support economic diversification. I think that value-added for agriculture, forestry, and oil and gas is essential. I also support commercialization of technology here in the province. I think, further, that we need to look at using our tax policy to ensure that some of those things get done. A tax credit, possibly, for a family looking after an aging relative, or a tax credit concept for renovating a basement to accommodate a renter, flow-through shares for mining technology, commercialization of technology: these are things that a provincial government can look at, and I really hope that we take the time to do so.

My last comments, Mr. Chairman, would be about the performance measures that we are using. While some of them are very good, I think we missed the point on some to do with health care or education, just as an example. I think Albertans should be able to understand, if we are spending an additional billion dollars on health care, what they are actually getting for it. Will more hips and knees be done, or will we be only paying everyone more? I think it's very sad that statistics about health care are so far out of date, particularly in light of all of the money being spent on computer systems for the electronic health records. How will we ever get to some kind of outcome management of the system if we don't know what we are doing on an annual and rapid basis?

For education I think the dropout rate is something that is important to Albertans. We all seem to know that thousands of young people could not access the University of Calgary last year, but I would hazard a guess that few, if any, know how many kids have dropped out of school at the high school level. I believe that

outcome measurements do matter. While we may well indeed have one of the best performance measurement systems in North America, as is evidenced by the Auditor General's comments, I honestly think that it speaks more about the lack of performance measures other provinces or states have rather than how good ours are. But that's just me, Mr. Chairman. I think that when you spend \$30 billion, you really should have a better idea of what you've accomplished with it.

Like I said, it's a really big budget, with no end in sight to the pressures that continue to build. But if I had to choose, Mr. Chairman, about going back to 1993 and deal with all the problems that we had then versus what we're dealing with now, I would pick today every day and twice on Sunday.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to put a few comments on the record in regard to Bill 43, the Appropriation Act, which is our budget and outlines a fairly large expenditure. I was very interested to hear the historical vignette that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere put on the record. Indeed, the first year I was here, in 1997, I think the budget was \$17 billion, and now we're looking at considerably more than that. So it's been an interesting time.

2:40

Since I mostly concentrated my earlier remarks on the area of Health and Wellness, for which I am the shadow minister, I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about some of the issues in the budget that were there or weren't there that are affecting more directly my constituents in Edmonton-Centre or are flowing from correspondence that I've had from people asking me to raise certain issues or wondering why something can't happen.

Having said that, the very first issue I have to raise is around medical error. I've spoken a couple of times to an individual out of Calgary who raises a really good point in that we're not really learning from our medical mistakes, our medical errors, because they are surrounded so much by the shadow of liability, probably stemming from the litigiousness of our neighbours to the south and what's happened with their health industry and the amount of lawsuits that they have to deal with there and, therefore, sometimes the extreme measures that they go to to try and insulate themselves from that.

But here, I mean, we can cast our minds back. There was, I think, a ruling just the other day on an individual that died from acute appendicitis in a Calgary hospital. That mirrors the Motta case from several years ago. We've had a couple of other terrible tragedies in the medical field that I think everyone truly feels really awful about and would like to see not happen, but we're not really operating with a process right now that allows for a really good, in-depth study without laying any blame. The example that's been raised with me a couple of times now is the air travel industry. They adopted, I guess when they first started out, a no-fault system with air disasters so that it wasn't about laying blame or finding fault; it was about getting to the bottom of what had gone wrong so that they could make the industry safer. I think that that is an area that we need to look to if we could. I certainly think that's still possible.

I mean, certainly, we get pushed into making choices because of our proximity to the United States, but in this case I would prefer to see us take a different route and to be able to study those medical errors or medical mistakes or adverse effects, whatever terminology

you want to use, to try and figure out what went wrong and how we can prevent it and make the system better rather than worrying so much about somebody being able to sue somebody else because the basis of that is really a punishment effort in order to have people not do it again. The other way of doing it is to say: let's figure out what went wrong here to make sure that we can correct ourselves and never do it again. So two different ways of doing it, you know, trying to achieve the same end result. I would argue that the punishment route is not really getting us the answers.

The second issue that I would like to talk about. I had raised in the debate for Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture the funding of the Winspear Centre and the inequities that are created there by the government's support for the two Jubilee auditoria, placing the Winspear in a position of, essentially, unfair competition because they receive no funding whatsoever for the centre. Now, immediately people will say: "Oh, that's not right, you know. The Edmonton Symphony gets money." That's true, but the Edmonton Symphony is not the Winspear Centre. They're two completely separate organizations. Although one of them certainly uses and has office space in the other, they are separate organizations. I think the government – I hope inadvertently – has created an unlevel playing field here, that I've raised a couple of times in trying to get it addressed.

I'm aware now that there's an additional complication in that situation in that I think the Winspear had been working on an arrangement to apply for a CIP grant and then was recently contacted and redirected that that grant had been suspended or that process had been suspended and would they please now apply under this new facilities program that the government has come up with in this budget. Well, the fact of the matter is that that's going to result in about a \$217,000 difference for the Winspear Centre, and I would like to see that difference made up.

So there is an issue here that needs to be addressed in that that level playing field needs to be achieved. I can't say restored because I don't know that it was ever there, but it needs to be achieved. There needs to be some sort of funding agreement in place that will address the Winspear because I can't see the government taking away the support for the auditoria. That's the other way to try and achieve that. But if you've got other brilliant ideas, I'm glad to hear them. Essentially, you know, we have to have a level playing field here, and we cannot disadvantage one of our not-for-profits and, frankly, our best musical space in the province because the government can't figure this out. There are enough brains there. I'm sure they can do it.

The second situation is the one that's been created by asking the Winspear's application to be moved from the CIP to this new facility program and the resulting loss in eligibility. I would propose to the minister that that difference be made up from the other initiatives fund that is at the discretion of, I suppose, the Treasury Board at this point in time. It used to be the minister of gaming. Of course, there's no limit on the amount of money that can come out of that fund. There's no application process. There are no criteria for it. It's entirely at the discretion of the minister, and I would argue that the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture should be pursuing that money to make up the difference for the Winspear Centre.

The next thing I'd like to talk about is around privacy. Increasingly I'm clipping articles out of the paper where protection of people's personal information has gone awry. Ironically, the fail point in all of this is human deliberation, not human error but human deliberation, in that someone decides that they are going to misbehave or use the system in a way that they've been told they shouldn't be using the system for, and at that point no amount of safeguards

that are in place is going to make this better. A part of that, of course, is the amount of information that the government is now holding on us and collecting on us. I argue that I think the best set-up for this that I've seen is in the Health Information Act, in which it argues that, you know, the least amount of information should be taken in all cases and that it should be the least invasive information. Absolutely true, but we don't follow that very much.

I was contacted by an individual out of Calgary raising concerns around the Calgary health region, that they have recently contracted out a portion of their human resource department to an offshoot of Telus, the Telus solutions outsourcing or something akin to that name. Essentially, this is, you know, well, obviously, human resources looking after recruiting individuals but then also setting them up with various benefit programs. So that's a lot of very personal information that's being held there. It's financial information. It's personal information, next of kin, medical information. Just about anything you could want to know about anybody is held by that department. So it is causing this individual some concern that we now have a corporation that's been contracted with all of this information.

It seems to be a new field that Telus has expanded into, and perhaps they offered the Calgary health region some sort of a deal or something to get the contract. I'm sure it was a surprise to many individuals to find out that their personal employment and health information was now held by a private company, and they had not consented to it, nor were they particularly informed about it. Perhaps that's an area that should be looked at by the Privacy Commissioner.

2:50

I think it is an issue. It's an issue for every single government department. I don't want to see this costing us money, and by that I mean lawsuits. But I think it will cost us money in other areas if either people start to catch on and start to refuse to give us personal information to work with or if it starts to cost us money in other ways. If the systems start to fail us, then that will be equally grievous.

The next issue was brought to my attention by an advocate who had sent me a copy of a letter that was directed to the Solicitor General in January in which she noted that the Traffic Safety (Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution Related Offences) Amendment Act was to be coming into effect. Her point was that she believes that the money that's received through the fine program there would be better put into action going directly to the sex trade workers to help them with recovery and healing rather than – I think it just goes into the province's general revenue. This individual has continued to work on this – this is Sharron Nelson – and I think has been in correspondence with the Solicitor General about this issue.

It's an interesting point because I also met several months ago with Kate Quinn's group out of Edmonton. I'm not going to remember what the initials stand for. It's the Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton, I think it is, PAAFE, an excellent group. Now, they get their funding from the John School, but they're also very limited in the money that they're getting and were meeting with me to look for other possible sources of funding.

It is a frustration when we've got a community-based group that's doing an excellent job, that is of great value to the government, and they're out there struggling for funding. That's not to say that the government should fund every single, you know, group that's out there. I'm not saying that, and don't try and put those words in my mouth. But I think this is a group that has proven their worth and has done particularly fine work around the issue of street prostitution. Certainly, these women have immense respect from the police.

They have immense respect from the sex trade workers. I think they've approached with great creativity the whole issue of Johns and how by using education as a tool they can help reduce the effect on our communities.

So I would ask the government and particularly the Solicitor General, since I've got him sitting here, to look at some innovative ways of assisting in the core funding of this organization. The only funding they really get at this point is through running the John School and from the fees there. I'd like to see a better, more reliable source of funding for them because certainly for the work that they're doing, they should have a larger budget to do it.

Okay. The next issue. Rent. There's been a lot said in this spring sitting of 2007 about the rent issue. We've raised dozens of different issues around it from the opposition side, you know, around all different kinds of people: seniors who are having to come out of retirement or postpone retirement because they can't afford their rent, people on fixed incomes like a pension or a social benefit that are really restricted in the kind of housing. The end result of all of this, Mr. Chairman, is that they're ending up in cheaper and cheaper accommodation in more difficult circumstances where their safety is at risk in some of the accommodations they've had to take, and that just causes a whole other set of problems, which usually ends up in the health care system.

So once again I ask the government to look at temporary rent controls. I know that this is against your philosophy, but honestly what your philosophy is getting us today is not working. Having people who are homeless or will be homeless phoning up and being told that they can put their name on a list to maybe come up with accommodation two years from now is just not addressing the problem. I think that when we're at a situation where making \$11 an hour can make you homeless because it's not enough money, this is a serious problem. I think we need temporary rent caps in place in order to get us through this anomaly, this failure of the marketplace, this catastrophe or unusual circumstance, crisis, whatever you want to call it. But just digging your feet in and saying: "No. We'll have landlords raise their rents once a year. We'll do a website to punish gouging landlords" – well, that certainly hasn't worked – is simply not working, and we're failing people that we shouldn't be failing.

I'd like to bring up one last issue about two government policies that are in existence that are pitting groups against each other. That's around the policy for new school buildings coming through the Department of Education, you know, given a utility rate or use rate – I can't remember what it's called. Really, it's encouraging the closure of inner-city schools in order to open schools in the suburbs. This pits against the municipalities' planning where in the metropolitan areas they're trying to rejuvenate and densify through in-fill housing the downtown areas. So you've now pitted these two policies absolutely against one another.

We're closing the schools. We're creating literally black holes in the centre of our downtown and inner-city communities in order to try and get schools in the suburbs. There should be schools in the suburbs. There should also be schools and use of those school buildings in the downtown areas. So I need the government to look at a policy that they've set in place on either side of this that is not working, very much not working for our students, and it's not working for our city planners and people that live in the cores of our cities and want to have a vibrant place to live.

Finally, just a word on arts education funding. I'd really like to see a reinvestment in arts education in our schools. I've just had to write support letters for a couple of my schools who are applying for grant programs all over the place, trying to buy band equipment, musical instruments for their students. This should not be happen-

ing, Mr. Chairman. This funding should be available through the school program. My constituents cannot understand how this government can be posting multibillion dollar surpluses, and we don't have enough money to buy musical instruments for students. We don't have enough money to buy schools.

You know, people walk out their door and look at the cracks in their sidewalks and the potholes in their streets. They look at their paycheque stub and how much money they're making and wonder why they're homeless or they're going to be homeless on that kind of a wage. They do not see where the financial management of this government makes sense, where the government just seems to be hoarding money, but the people are not reaping the benefit of it. Yeah, some people are, and there's great opportunity out there, and I think that's wonderful. A rising tide should lift all boats, not just the yachts. I keep seeing this government put policies in place where the tide only raises the yachts, and that's not right. It's not right at all. So we need a better government financial policy – we'd just end up with a better society for everybody – because what we've got sure isn't working.

Those are some of the issues that I wanted to raise while we were in Committee of the Whole on Bill 43, the Appropriation Act, which is essentially the budget for 2007. I look forward to additional opportunities to be speaking on this. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to make some general comments about the appropriation bill, Bill 43, at committee stage. There's absolutely no doubt that this budget is a lot of money. When I look at it, \$33.1 billion is a lot of money. Now, the questions that one asks: is it appropriate; is it the right amount; should it be less; should it be more? But the problem is that this government has created a monster. There's no other way to explain it. We have such an overheated economy. The only way the government seems to be able to react – because clearly stated by the Premier is that they will not put the brakes on, that we are going to move ahead with the tar sands as quickly as we can, get it out as quickly as we can. That's the economic strategy of this government. Now, when you have an economic strategy like this, Mr. Chairman, then the reality is that it's not that cheap to be able to do that. We create the overheated economy. As I said before in this Legislature, it's economy on steroids.

3:00

Now, this budget. It seems to me that the government finally realizes that we have this particular problem. So what do we do? Well, gee, there's a problem here. There's a problem there. There's a problem here. Let's just grab some gobs of money and throw it at these problems and hope that maybe that's enough. Maybe it'll make the people stop complaining at least.

Again, finally admitted – and I still don't see any difference – the previous Premier said we had no plan. We were having that debate right here in the Legislature when he said it. That's the reality of what we're facing with this budget, and that's why it's hard to get a handle on it. It's catch-up, you know, with the economic strategy of booming ahead.

So what do we do? Well, let's look at some of the various problems. The Member for Edmonton-Centre was talking about housing. This is, perhaps – well, there are so many others that I won't say it's the most drastic example of lack of planning but certainly one of the major problems. Yes, the government has

reacted. As they say time and time again, there's \$285 million for housing. I was on that committee, Mr. Chairman, and it was a very good committee. When we looked at the figures of what it would take right now, if we actually wanted to do a major job as quickly as we could to bring on more housing, to look at supply, it was over about \$450 million that you would probably need.

Now, we recognized that the government probably wasn't going to do that, but we thought they should know the severity of the problem. This problem, as I've said many times, is going to get worse before it gets better. The other thing about it, Mr. Chairman, is that even if we start to use this money, the \$285 million, which I hope we do – we all want to move ahead, working with the municipalities as quickly as we can; I think we all want that – it will take time.

That's why the task force at the time said: "Okay. We know that the government can't buy rent guidelines because of their philosophy." You don't need it. To be fair and honest, you don't need it at most times. It's only during the boom economy. So we said two years in that report, Mr. Chairman. Two years would at least give time on the supply side to build some of the infrastructure that's needed, bring on basement suites, whatever else we could do to bring more housing on the market. That would give us breathing space. I think two years is probably overly optimistic, but at least it would be a start.

What was good about that is that for the time being that wouldn't cost the taxpayers any money. We could deal with the problem in the short run without having to spend millions of dollars, to allow us time to catch up. Well, Mr. Chairman, the government, because of their ideology or the influence of landlords in terms of this government, refused that.

Now we hear the horror stories. It's not just the most vulnerable, although it's an important issue for people on fixed income, seniors, the disabled, all the other people that are, as they say, one cheque away from becoming homeless, but now we're impacting thousands and thousands and thousands of people. I said this in the Legislature. One of the other things in the task force that we recommended was to at least look, as they did in the previous boom, at helping people to buy their first house. They rejected that too. We reject rent guidelines. We reject putting money in to help people buy their first home. So the reality is now that it's not just the most vulnerable, but we have, as I say, thousands of people out there, Mr. Chairman, that are struggling.

There's no hope of buying a new home with the rising house prices. We saw in Edmonton over 40 per cent increase, Calgary 27 per cent increase. Calgary was already higher, the highest in Canada, so you're not going to be able to buy a house if you have an ordinary wage. No hope there. At the same time no protection with rising rents, Mr. Chairman. So there we are. The \$285 million, hopefully, will do some good down the way, but that's down the way.

We look at the other areas. Health care, Mr. Chairman. Code burgundies in Calgary almost all the time. I don't know what they call it now in Edmonton, but it's the same thing. Emergency rooms are flooded over. They can't keep up. They say that they can't keep up. We need more hospitals. Finally, we're building one in south Calgary that's needed, but it has cost a lot more than it was meant to at the time because of the overheated economy.

Long-term care. We need some help there with some of the problems. It doesn't matter what the minister of health says; they're still out there in terms of long-term care.

We look at education, and no matter how the Minister of Education sums it up, if you're not keeping up to inflation, there are going to be some serious situations in the classrooms.

You know, Mr. Chairman, this could be – I don't know where it sits in terms of the negotiations. The minister of health is here. I know that there are big negotiations right now with the nurses, but I see the potential – and I hope that this doesn't come about – of almost a public service situation that could become extremely serious. The teachers, 90 per cent of those contracts aren't there. The nurses are demanding more money, and rightfully so. These groups are finding the rising cost of living difficult to deal with. We could be into a major public service dilemma with both nurses and teachers in the fall. I hope that that's not the case, but when I look at the funding and the money, I don't know how else we're going to get around it as these groups try to fight for cost of living at least. This is big worry. It should be a big worry to this government.

We look at the infrastructure, Mr. Chairman. Well, the minister admitted that we can only do about a third of the roads that need it, that we have probably over \$12 billion in infrastructure deficit. What are we going to do about that? The answer seems to be the quick-fix P3s. The Minister of Education – I think this is going to go into schools – is now talking about some major announcement. I think we're all speculating that there will be a raft of P3 schools, and we all know the problems there.

They're looking for quick fixes because of the problems that they have created, Mr. Chairman. That's the point. When you have a boom economy encouraged by the economic strategy that you are in, there are the other problems that you have to deal with. You cannot do it on the cheap, and that's what this government has tried to do in the past. Now, as I say, they're trying to catch up right now. Trying to catch up, so we throw a little bit of money here, there, and everywhere.

Premier Klein said there was no plan. I would suggest that there isn't particularly a plan that I can see at this particular time, certainly, not from this budget, other than spending more money on it. The other part of the plan is: don't put on the brakes; let things go as the are. So I expect that next year will be even as difficult.

3:10

There are some worrisome trends on the horizon. We don't know how it will play out, Mr. Chairman. One is the rising dollar. I think the Minister of Finance said that if it stayed the way it was it would cost the Alberta Treasury \$948 million. If it went to parity – and many analysts are predicting that it could go to parity with the American dollar – that would be \$1.7 billion. Well, that's a huge dent out of our treasury right at this particular time with all of the needs that we have, all of the needs that I've just talked about.

The other thing is on the royalty review, Mr. Chairman, and I think we're already being set up, saying: well, all these problems are there, and therefore the poor industry can't afford much more. I think the fix is already in on that, so we're not going to get anymore money there. We're told now that natural gas royalties, which have been a big contributor to the Alberta Treasury, have peaked and are going down. So the only alternative, if we want to keep this sort of economic strategy, is in the tar sands; therefore, we will be ploughing into the tar sands even faster and faster to make up for the rising dollar and the other things that are occurring.

What do we do in the budget next year, then? Is it going to be another sort of splattering? Is it \$36 billion? Or is it that the fiscal hawks cut back, and then we have more serious problems with the infrastructure, health care, education, you name it, Mr. Chairman? The future, as I see it, looks relatively difficult.

Now, some people are doing very well. No doubt about that. The Alberta advantage for the haves is pretty good. If you're a CEO in Calgary, you like what's happening. If you have some technical skills and you're making big wages, well you're relatively happy.

But the point that I make is that the overheated economy is becoming a huge, huge disadvantage for more and more people, Mr. Chairman. If we're going to talk about the Alberta advantage and what a great economy we have, as this government talks about all the time, surely, surely then everybody, all Albertans, should be participating in the Alberta advantage. It shouldn't just be, as I say, for those that already have. That's a reality of what's happening now, Mr. Chairman.

I don't know where we go from here. I know the appropriation bill will pass. I know that the government, then, will all stand around. They'll pat themselves on the back, what a wonderful job they're doing, just as if they had discovered the tar sands and put it there themselves.

An Hon. Member: Mike did.

Mr. Martin: Mike did. Oh. I thought it was the hon. government over there. I don't know – they've been there, I guess, 35 years or so, so they would have enough time to put all that oil and gas in the ground. Right? Yeah. I think so.

But that's what they will do is say that this is a great economic strategy. We invented it. Aren't we smart? But the reality is that the problems are becoming huge.

Mr. Chairman, I know I'm just about out of time. I'm sure that that disappoints the members on the government side, but I just say that I don't know where we're going with this. We know what this budget is this year. I'll be very interested to see where they're going with the next budget, and see where the clouds start to hover over us even more and more. This fall could even be interesting, as I say.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There are a number of things that I think are left over from, certainly, our budget discussions. One of them would be the west side school. We have the money for phase 1, but the earth hasn't even been turned yet, and it's absolutely obsolete before we've even turned the earth. We're going to have 400 to 800 students over when this building is finally built. We need the ability to at least get the dollars into the system in Lethbridge to be able to come up with the drawings for phase 2 so that we can see how that's actually going to fit into the community. This is a partnership between public 51, the Holy Spirit Catholic school district, and our public library. The object of the whole thing is that we will have a community, both residential and commercial, being built around this particular complex. We really need to know where phase 2 is going to fit in, and to be able to do that, we need the money for the architects and the discussions that have to go around those sorts of plannings.

Town squares or city squares are sort of where communities are trying to build themselves so that people can actually walk more, ride their bikes more, and have things more available to their homes and be in close proximity. Certainly, the ideal would be – unfortunately, it's not happening – that kids could actually walk to school. I'm sure there are many of us sitting in this House that realize that we have good health because we had to walk to school four times a day. They didn't have lunch programs, and you went home for lunch. So the ideal is that kids actually would be able to walk to school. Of course, the overlay on top of that is that they would be able to walk safely to school.

We don't even know in Lethbridge-West what our increased school attendance would be like because the community itself, the residential part, not just around this new complex but around the

whole of Lethbridge-West, is growing, and there will be more demand for these spaces. But the other side of the city, Lethbridge-East, both south and north, is also growing, and there will be these demands. I think one of the things that upsets me is when we see community schools, schools that actually are the core of their community, being closed down and creating megaschools.

I watched a community start to renew itself. People lived in their homes as long as they could. They died. The homes were then sold to younger families just starting out. I also watched that community lose its school, and abruptly the families that were moving into those neighbourhoods didn't go because they wanted to be closer to the schools. We end up with a marginalized society that lives in these areas. It's too bad because eventually, over time, I'm not sure what's going to happen to our communities. I think it's been mentioned that we are creating black holes, and I totally agree with that. We need kids walking on the streets to be able to create a good community.

The point is that we really need a plan, a big plan picture. We need a vision for how our west Lethbridge school will develop, and to do those visionings, unfortunately, you do need dollars. You need the people that can bring in the information. But more so, we have to at least have the footprint, and to be able to do that, you need good architectural planning.

The human services in this province also, I believe, have been neglected. What is human services? Well, I suppose it would depend on who was doing the definition. Really, it could be anybody that I would consider to be front-line workers. They could be teachers, social workers, PDD workers, social justice workers, NGO workers, people that work in food banks, people that work in soup kitchens, people that help immigrants with English as a Second Language or just learning how to actually go into a supermarket and shop. These are all valuable, valuable services that we should be providing as a society to create a better society for all. I don't see it happening.

It isn't just the money that I'm talking about. I think it's an attitude that I don't see that these services are imperative for a civil society. It's about a system that must allow time for human interaction, and that often takes time. Unfortunately, the way we think in this province, time is always money. We have to learn how to put a dollar figure on human interaction so that it can be in a budget and so that it fits into a business plan.

3:20

There is benefit in allowing people, particularly young people and particularly old, to be able to develop at a different speed than what the younger generation can handle. What the 25- to 45-, 50-year-olds are handling in their everyday fast lives isn't necessarily good for seniors as they slow down in many ways. Many of them certainly don't slow down mentally, but often there'll be slowdowns in terms of the physical ability to be able to move as quickly. Certainly, we are living longer. We're certainly living healthier, but there are many who aren't blessed to have the benefits that they get by being healthy.

It's a very complex issue, and it's not just something that we can throw money at. I think we really have to do some serious reviewing on how we're spending the dollars that we have. A lot of dollars are going towards preventive health, and I do support that concept. However, I think that we can't negate the fact that people do get sick and people do need care and it isn't necessarily their fault.

I read something in the newspaper the other day that I thought was quite frightening, that surgeons had said that they wouldn't operate on people who are smokers. That smacks just a little bit too much of Big Brother and taking away personal choices and how to live a

personal life. I think the education out there is teaching people that they certainly shouldn't smoke. However, there are seniors that have smoked all their lives.

I can use an example of a woman that I know who, granted, had multiple, multiple health problems and wanted to move into a senior citizens' home that had the ability to give her the extra care that she required. But they wouldn't accept her because she smoked, so she did try to quit smoking. I believe she tried to use patches. She had smoked for over 55 years and within two days of the stress on her body actually had a heart attack and died. Can I tie that into her trying to quit smoking? Probably I can't. However, I think the questions are there. So I think we have to have some compassion in terms of what we consider to be preventative measures and what aren't often people's fault. Things happen, and I believe that as a society we should be able to provide, certainly, for those that are vulnerable.

The municipal dollars. Certainly, over this last many years the provincial government has downloaded responsibilities onto the municipalities, many of which are the social responsibilities, without the dollars to compensate. Municipalities have been doing, actually, yeoman's budgeting in terms of handling this. But the better the municipalities do, the more creative they are and the less that they have to do without in terms of the social benefits. It does make it look like they can do the job when, in fact, they're doing a job, but they're not doing the job. They need the dollars that have been taken away, and they have to be increased. More often than not some of the social issues are right on the streets and have to be handled immediately: the normal maintenance of public buildings, public roads, public sewers, public water treatment plants, wastewater treatment plants are put aside.

We have to be able to have a balance. We've lost the balance in this province. Again, as I say, is it money? Yes, money in this particular instance, by having the dollars taken away with increased responsibilities, then, yes, dollars are the answer. I think that many of these processes of how these dollars are passed through from the federal to the provincial and the provincial to the municipal and then the municipal or the health regions, how they pass those dollars along, I believe there's a huge amount of space for review in there.

The school boards. Some school boards have managed to create a surplus, and I believe that they're being penalized because they've created that surplus when I hear comments like: well, they've got a surplus; what's their problem? Where would be the incentive to be able to look forward, to be able to put money aside for buildings that they need in the future? To me that's visioning, yet I believe that they're being penalized to be able to think in that fashion.

Also, school boards have horrendous needs not only in terms of dollars but in terms of trained teachers and trained assistants. We have an increased number of special-needs children. We certainly have an increased number of children with behavioural problems. I think I spoke earlier about FASD and certainly just FAS, children with fetal alcohol syndrome. There are huge behavioural problems, and they require a tremendous amount of support systems.

My belief is that particularly the ones that often come with criminal records or experiences with the criminal justice system, that these just aren't Education dollars. I think Justice dollars should be put in there, I think social services dollars should be put in there, and I think Children's Services should be put in there, not just Education dollars. It isn't just education when you have to work with children with huge high-risk behaviours, not only risk to themselves but risk to the rest of the school population that is trying to learn.

Some of our private schools are doing very well, but they often do not have any of those behavioural problems. So it's not fair that education dollars in some of our more private schools or even home-

schooling can go directly to the actual education of the student when, in fact, in our public systems they're struggling with all of these students that perhaps wouldn't be accepted into any of those other schools. I'd like to reiterate that I believe that the other three ministries have to be involved with the education system in terms of dollars that can look after these children that are very, very high social and behavioural needs.

One of the other things that's been drawn to my attention is the fact that the curriculum at the high school level is going to be changed: science, math, and social, I believe. The question that has been asked to me is: where's the money for the textbooks? I find it incredible that I speak to teachers who have said that they've never had a full set of textbooks for a classroom, and they've been teaching for 10 years. Now the curriculum is changing, and where are the textbooks?

I've asked the question, and I've had: they're online. I don't believe that online is a suitable answer. It certainly might be online with teachers who have small classrooms and can help these students. Online may well be for the students that can afford computers, but believe it or not, there are many, many – and this includes high school students – that do not have computers in their homes. Or if they do have computers, they're certainly an older model, and they are definitely behind. So now they're fighting being behind in the instrument, in the technology that would get them the textbook. Why aren't these textbooks available for teachers to use and be able to give out? I'm not sure how these kids do their homework when they don't have the proper computers to work with.

3:30

One of the things that my colleague brought up that to me is a very troubling phenomenon that appears to be going on is the terms of having, actually, your medical records available to insurance companies. If you're trying to get insurance to go across the border to, say, the United States, the insurance companies can have access to your medical records to see what kinds of medications you take, et cetera, to then evaluate what kind of premium or what kind of coverage you're going to have. I think that's certainly a debatable issue in terms of: if you are not prepared to share that information, should the insurance company then be able to say that they won't insure you? I think it's a discussion that has to go on. I certainly know that I'm not very happy with having my personal information anywhere in a system that we all know these young kids in high school can often access just because they're good hackers.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I have a constituent with a concern, whose mother died of dehydration, and he wants to get the charts because he wants to see exactly how a doctor's order was not followed or that the doctor didn't give the proper orders in the first place. The health region evidently can give permission for the doctor to release it, but if the doctor refuses, apparently his only access to these – and he has been told this – is if he goes to court. Needless to say, with a woman who was older and died of dehydration, often the children are older as well and on fixed incomes, as this particular constituent is. He's appalled that the answer is to go to court instead of actually being able to access these charts. His contention is that the death certificate was actually signed by the brother of the doctor that should have signed it and that he had never actually seen his mother. I believe that he certainly has a legitimate concern and a right to these charts, and I think there has to be a better system than having to go to court.

Some of the cultural activities or nonactivities in this province are really phenomenal. We have a province with incredible talent. We

have an amazing school in Lethbridge, St. Patrick elementary school. It's a fine arts school. There's some very fine talent that is being nurtured in all avenues of the arts, print art and certainly within the drama portion of the culture.

But what I see and have actually spoken to before is that the AMPA awards were given out, and there were huge numbers of nominations. There were 50 categories and five people in each category. This is local talent and these are local dollars, yet we can't seem to be able to get these out to the people in Alberta to even realize exactly the talent that we have. It's an attitudinal shift that I think I would like to see, where we actually appreciate and learn in our economic culture. We have to learn to be able to say to our economic culture, "Look at the dollars that culture does bring in" because for some reason this province has a problem understanding the value of culture to a civil society. If that's the case, then let's try to put a dollar figure on it, and then maybe people would pay more attention. But I would like to see the movies, including the commercials because commercials was an area that was up for an award, distributed to the libraries in our province: the public libraries, the school libraries, the university libraries.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, the background conversations are increasing in volume and making it difficult to hear the speaker. Perhaps we could keep those down.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my great pleasure to rise and speak on the Appropriation Act, 2007. As we all know, the population increased by approximately 110,000 in the year 2006, and we all know that we have shortages of labour not only in Alberta but all over in Canada. I've talked to a few small businesspeople. It started hurting them. They are still saying that even though we have the provincial nominee program and we have temporary foreign workers, some small businesspeople can't bring some workers from overseas because of some complexities in the system. I hope this provincial nominee program works for them. The main objective for this agreement that the Alberta government made with the federal government recently is to speed up the process in the application for bringing in some more workers from overseas. But they are still complaining.

Sometimes, Mr. Chairman, the workers come to Alberta, and even though they are highly skilled or maybe semiskilled, when they come here as temporary foreign workers, they work with the employer. You know, suppose the employer runs a business like Dairy Queen or any other franchise and that skilled or semiskilled person that I'm talking about works in that restaurant or any small company because they don't come under the provincial nominee program. Sometimes after their visa expires, they have to go back to their country and apply again to come to this country.

I introduced and I'm really thankful to all the members that supported my motion on the expansion of the provincial nominee program, which was badly needed. I'm not sure when they will start, you know, implementing those suggestions in that motion. I would like to know because this is a big issue for small businesspeople nowadays. I want to know from the minister of immigration if she could speed it up a little bit more so that it helps the small businesspeople in Alberta because prosperity of the small businesses in Alberta is prosperity for all of us. We shouldn't be dependent on just oil and gas. We should look after the businesspeople, especially the small businesspeople in Alberta.

My second issue, Mr. Chairman, which is a very big issue, we all know, is affordable homes. People are complaining that they

phoned the departments, and the programs are still not helping them. There are some restrictions. If somebody has \$7,000 or \$8,000 in savings, which is nothing nowadays, they don't qualify for the program which is in place right now. It's very hard for especially the vulnerable people and the people on fixed incomes and seniors. For the time being – I don't know. Some people already have moved. They've started living with their friends or their families, but this is not the right thing. We should immediately help those people.

3:40

Another issue in my constituency, Mr. Chairman, is subsidized homes. I know that we all talk about affordable homes. I lived in England for 15, 16 years, and there were lots of subsidized homes owned by the city and the federal government. Lots of people, you know, whenever there's a shortages of labour, move into a subsidized home right away. I know they have a waiting list, but not a waiting list like what we have in Alberta.

One of my constituents came to my office about six months ago. She was nearly crying because even after waiting two and a half years, when her turn came and she was asked to look at the property that the department offered them, it was in such a mess. I mean, that house was not worth living in, but still she said: "Okay. I will move in." She would request some of her friends to renovate that property, and then she would move in. But one of the caretakers – I mean, maybe he didn't like her, but somehow he was the person who said: "No. She can't move in here." Then when he reported to the regional housing, they listened to him, and then they said that that was the only house available at that time. I'm talking about after two and a half years' waiting time.

You know, they put her again on the waiting list, and she is still waiting for a subsidized home. Her income is less than a thousand dollars, and her children don't allow her to live with them. I want to ask all the members and the minister: what should I tell her? How can I, you know, help her? Whenever she comes to my office, she is in tears.

I know that the minister of housing is trying his best. We had a task force and some different committees. Some people are complaining, Mr. Chairman, that out of 50 recommendations the government only implemented eight of them. People started saying that if the government doesn't implement the majority of the recommendations of the task force and the committees, what's the use of those task forces?

My office and the constituency office of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods had a town hall meeting. So did some other members in the Official Opposition. We listened to the views. I know that we can't help them directly, but we can voice their concerns in this House. That's exactly what the job is of all the members sitting. You know, some of them came here, they met the minister, and they are still waiting for solutions.

So I request the members and the ministers to reconsider those unfortunate people who cannot afford, you know, high rent. I know that it will take lots of time to catch up with the supply. You know, building the over 11,000 houses that the ministry is talking about will take more than two years. I'm a real estate agent. I know that most of the builders are helpless. They can't find tradespeople nowadays because there is so much construction going on. For the time being, as I said, there are so many restrictions on the program, and they should make it a little bit easier for those people who are vulnerable so that they don't suffer this pressure of the boom in Alberta. We live in a have province, Mr. Chairman. If we can't do it, who else can do that?

The other issue I want to move on to is the Ministry of Solicitor General and Public Security. Mr. Chairman, I've heard the stories

in Edmonton. We have around 1,400 police officers. They are working really hard, and we all should be proud of that. I heard that they have received over 1,300 complaints. The total number of police officers is 1,400, and if the complaints are about the same number, this is not a good sign. So I think the main reason for the people who are complaining is because we have shortages of police officers. I think they can't cope with the work. Especially, we don't have many specialized police officers, for example like a special constable for gang-related crime or domestic violence or, I should say, a drug squad. You know, if they are fully trained and we have more numbers, I think we will be able to reduce the crime sooner. But it's not happening.

I want to ask a question of the minister concerned: what answers should I give to one of my constituents? Most of you might have read it in the newspaper. Sangeeta Khanna disappeared more than a year ago, and we still don't have any news about her. Whenever I try to reach the department, you know, they say that they are still working. This is not acceptable for the families and friends of my constituent.

3:50

This is a serious, very critical situation happening to lots of people, not only on the south side but all over in Edmonton, maybe all over Alberta. This crime issue is spreading all over Alberta, even in rural areas. Even though we put some money in this year's budget, still it's not working. I want to know why. I want to know what answer I should give to those people.

Like, one of my friends: his brother was working in a Mac's store. That was two years ago. A gunman shot him right away. He's dead, and there's no news about him. Every year they get together and mourn his death. This year I was at their residence, and they were asking me lots of questions: Why is that? Is there racism or something? And some other questions which I couldn't answer at that time. It is critical, a very critical situation, Mr. Chairman, and we should take it very seriously and do something about it.

I'm also concerned about overcrowding at the remand centre. There are lots of complaints. I know that we are building a new remand centre very soon. But how long will it take, and for the time being what are we going to do? We don't know. I'm also concerned about the safety of the corrections officers in that critical situation at the remand centre.

Mr. Chairman, my constituents – when so many vulnerable people are complaining that they can't afford high utility bills, it has started hurting them. If they have gas and heating bills – gas and petrol – and their income is fixed, it's very hard for them to survive on a fixed income. Inflation is more than 3 per cent, and it is hurting them. Whenever they call me, it's very hard for me to answer them, especially the senior people. Some people are on medication, and they don't have a car, and they phone and say: you come to my house; I have to tell you the stories. Sometimes, you know, it's very hard to listen to their very touching stories.

Now I move to the ministry of infrastructure.

Thank you.

The Chair: Unfortunately, the time has elapsed, hon. member.

The next member is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to participate this afternoon in debate at committee on Bill 43, the Appropriation Act. We had a look yesterday in second reading at this government's spending habits. The hon. Minister of Finance was talking about his next budget, next year, earlier in question period, and there are areas where I believe he could cut

spending. There are areas where he has to increase spending. There's no doubt about that. One of them is certainly in public education. But there are areas where there is luxurious extravagance. We have a government that, of course, has been in power for a very, very long time, and over that period of time there has been a culture of entitlement. I think we have to urge the government to be very careful of that culture of entitlement getting further entrenched.

When we look, Mr. Chairman, at this overall budget and we look at various departments, I have to first go to the biofuels initiative in the Department of Energy. Now, this is relatively new. Last year, 2006-07, there was a forecast of \$5 million to be spent under resource development and management at the Department of Energy. This year we're looking at \$41 million in biofuel initiatives. Earlier in the winter the minister of agriculture was quoted as having a great deal of reservation regarding this program. He thought it was going to turn out to be a windfall for the big guys and the little producers were going to be left out. Now, certainly, I would agree at this time with the minister of agriculture. When you look at his statements and you look at his reference to Cargill and Lakeside Packers and the impact that this market concentration has had on the cattle industry, the minister has every right to be concerned.

Now, what exactly is the minister of agriculture doing to ensure that this \$41 million is spent in the right place in a timely fashion? That interests me. It's in the Department of Energy. The department of agriculture had some interest in the past in this biofuels initiative, but it's now in the Department of Energy. It's a considerable sum of money, and I think we have to heed the warning from the minister of agriculture as to who is going to get this money, how much, and why they are going to get it. Are one or two big parties going to get this money, or is it going to be divided so that many small producers can also participate in this initiative? Certainly, this initiative for the development of biofuels is not reflected in the EUB's forecast well into the future.

However, there are other issues that I would like to point out as well in this budget. One of them is in what we used to call the ministry of human resources and employment, which is now EII: Employment, Immigration and Industry. Now, Mr. Chairman, that department has a lot of issues to deal with, but one that I would like to flag is the fact that – and we're going to have to look after these folks. I was listening with interest to the discussion at Public Accounts today when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore brought up the bonuses that seem to be paid out on a routine basis annually to senior managers in Infrastructure and Transportation. Over \$2 million was spent in the fiscal year that we were discussing this morning in Public Accounts.

4:00

Senior management seems to be well looked after. I don't know who determines whether they're eligible for a bonus or not. I was left with the impression that it was themselves. I could be wrong. I could have a wrong impression, but that's what I was led to believe. The criteria seemed very open. It wasn't like they were hockey players with, you know, 20-, 30-, or 40-goal seasons and depending on what you got, you got a bonus, or if your team made the playoffs or you advanced beyond the first round, you could expect a bonus. It was just sort of: well, we got bonuses, and they came from the general revenue.

But the rest of the civil service is what I would like to focus on here, Mr. Chairman. If you look at the last report from human resources and employment 2005-06, before the name change and, you know, all the money coming from rural development into that portfolio and this focus put on immigration and whether we can

handle it or not as a province, when we look at the average age of permanent, salaried public service employees in the 2005-06 annual report, 50 per cent of the entire public service is between the ages of 45 and 59. There are 24,000 staff. That's quite a number.

Now, I would like to know what the government is going to do to recruit as these people retire. We're certainly going to have to have a good pension. We're going to have to have good benefits, and we're going to have to have good wage rates to attract people to the civil service because in these next few years we could potentially see half the civil service retire.

I know this has been a government that has been getting by on a wing and a prayer here for the last five or six years, and there has been no plan. This, in my opinion, is a question that needs to be addressed. We need an answer from the government. If 50 per cent of the civil service is between the ages of 45 and 59, what is this government doing to ensure that we attract younger people into the civil service? What do they plan on offering these young people to come into the civil service?

Certainly, we need people. Now, Mr. Chairman, it is interesting to note that in the civil service there is between the ages of 25 and 34 only 16 per cent. Only 16 per cent of the salaried civil servants are in that age category. Two per cent are under 25. Perhaps they're still getting their university degrees or their other postsecondary training. But we have to ensure that we have people to manage this government.

Now, the location of the public service employees: 60 per cent of them, Mr. Chairman, are in Edmonton – about 14,400 of the public service employees are in Edmonton – 13 per cent in Calgary, 16 per cent in other districts, 6 per cent in Red Deer, 1 per cent in Grande Prairie, 3 per cent in Lethbridge. That's quite interesting, not only where these good people work but the fact that if we don't deal with this problem, we're going to have a huge human resources issue to deal with. Again, it's symbolic of this government's absence of long-term planning that we would have this dramatic concentration of age in our 24,000-plus civil or public service. If I could have an answer to that question during the course of this debate, I also would be grateful.

Now, another issue that's coming up – and the Minister of Energy is very keen to discuss this, I'm sure – is the whole issue of royalties. I heard the New Democrats talking about royalties this afternoon. I'm unaware if they made a presentation to the royalty review commission. I don't know whether they did or whether they didn't, but I would be interested to read it if they did. But we certainly need to adjust our royalty structure in this province.

The last time – the minister is cognizant of this – in 1992, Mr. Orman and Mr. Getty had a good look at royalties and made some changes, and since 1992 there have been dramatic increases in prices for both natural gas and oil. I think it is one of the most important issues facing the province today, and I'm very disappointed that the Minister of Finance seems to have dismissed already the royalty review with: perhaps we don't need to increase royalties. The Minister of Energy has been sort of on the same page on that issue, and I'm concerned. I'm looking forward at the end of August to getting this presentation. Maybe as Energy critic I could get one in advance so I could read it before it is announced. [interjections] They're laughing at me, Mr. Chairman.

Now, do Albertans, the owners of the natural resources of this province, receive a fair share from the current royalty regime? I and many others I talk to do not feel that we do get a fair share. Similar oil and gas producing jurisdictions collect more for their resources than we do in Alberta. For example – and I'm grateful to the minister for providing some, if not all, of the stats on this – Texas collects 25 per cent in royalties. After the conclusion of session

tomorrow I'm looking forward to going up to the Department of Energy library – and I hope I don't need a permission slip from the Minister of Energy to get up there – and seeing if there's additional information on various royalty structures.

Current royalties are not meeting the Department of Energy's own modest Crown revenue share of 20 to 25 per cent. The corporate sector of oil and gas is enjoying record-breaking profits, and the public sector here, this government, is failing to meet its own standards, failing to meet its own plan. This failure to attain the government's minimum standard of 20 to 25 per cent cost Albertans at least \$16 billion – \$16 billion – in the last six fiscal years, and that's a lot of money.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Hon. members across the way were challenging us yesterday about where the spending would end. Well, we know where the spending would end, and we know where the saving would start. The vast majority of this money would be put in the bank.

You could just ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford about that because he's very anxious to make sure that the heritage savings trust fund grows and grows and then grows some more. He has put a lot of effort and thought into a plan. I would encourage the hon. members across the way: if you want to talk to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford or adopt his plan, I'm sure he would talk to you. Red Rover, Red Rover, he'd send it right over. Right?

Mr. R. Miller: I just happen to have it.

Mr. MacDonald: He just happens to have one there.

Now, as I said earlier, times have changed since the last royalty review was done, but the royalty regime must balance two competing interests: those of Albertans and those of industry. We've got to recognize that industry has faced significant financial risks in developing Alberta's resources, but the current royalty regime has been extremely effective in reducing these risks.

4:10

In the current international market, Mr. Chairman, an investment in Alberta's nonrenewable natural resources carries far less risk than it did 10 to 15 years ago. I would like to remind people that we are one of the most politically stable regions. Last night's by-election in Calgary-Elbow was an example of that. There was a change there, and it occurred democratically, without any force or without any fight. It was a democratic decision. That's why we're one of the most politically stable oil producing areas on the entire globe.

I suggest that the government of Alberta for once stick to its plan and collect the 25 per cent Crown revenue share that it has set out to do in the first place. If the current royalty regime is incapable of delivering 25 per cent Crown revenue shares, then immediate changes are in order. Here are some suggestions for the Minister of Energy. Now, again, in the 2005-06 annual report the Auditor General notes that there was \$948 million in reduced Crown royalties because of various incentive programs. The year before that it was \$533 million. So that's \$1.5 billion in two years, and this is at a time when commodity prices are at high levels. I would urge the minister to have a good, long look at amending or removing some of these programs.

Now, it's interesting that we can't have a cap on rent increases, but we can put a rate cap on royalties for both oil and natural gas. The minister is chewing on the edge of his glasses there. But there is a cap on that. There is a percentage cap on that, hon. minister. Again, citizens ask me: why should electricity prices be capped?

And the wholesale price, the Power Pool: that's capped at \$999. We were right up against that last July in the blackouts. By the look of that Power Pool and the action of it now – we had that hot spell here last week, and wholesale power prices were dancing upwards – I expect the same thing this summer. I hope I'm wrong, but I expect that there will be blackouts again. We can cap electricity prices, we can cap the percentage of royalty rates to be collected but not apartment rents. It just doesn't make sense. I just don't understand this government. [interjection] The hon. minister says that it makes sense, but ideologically, hon. minister, it makes no sense to cap one thing and be opposed to capping another.

Synthetic crude and bitumen royalty. It was just the other day I read in the *Globe and Mail* where the CEO of Suncor got a \$2 million bonus as part of his \$15 million compensation package. Now, the generic royalty regime was introduced at a time when bitumen or oil sands were still considered an undeveloped resource. That bonus could have been a reduction under the allowed costs that are outlined in schedule 1 and schedule 2 of the oil sands royalty regulation, 1997. Now, this should be changed. Mr. Chairman, that definitely should be changed.

By adjusting the allowed costs, investors will pay closer to the postpayout rate of 25 per cent as implied in the generic royalty regime. Those bonuses paid, corporate, schedules 1 and 2, section 2(e)(i): there is no need for those. If corporations want to give their hard-working executives bonuses, well, that's up to them, and they can deal with the shareholders on the matter. But I don't think there's any need at this time to facilitate these generous bonuses. If that's how they're calculated through our royalty structure, I'm dead set against that, and this party is dead set against that.

Now, there are a lot of allowed costs. I won't go through it in time, and I'm disappointed that I don't have more time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, it is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 43, the Appropriation Act, 2007, in committee. It's been interesting debate this afternoon. I have a little more that I'd like to add to it. [interjection] I hear that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development is anxiously awaiting my comments, so I hope that he'll pay careful attention and perhaps loosen his tie. I wouldn't want him to choke on anything. There have been a few threats of choking going around lately in this province, and we don't need any of that in here today, that's for sure.

Mr. Chairman, the first thing I would like to discuss is some stuff around schools. As has been mentioned in this Assembly a couple of times in the last few days, both the Edmonton Catholic and Edmonton public schools approved budgets in the last two days, and both took the minister at his word and exercised what both he and they referred to as creative budgeting in order to come up with a balanced budget. But the message from the Catholic school board meeting the other night, which I was in attendance at, was very clear. They asked in no uncertain terms that the message be relayed to the minister and this government, however possible – and I'm happy to do that, and I'm sure that the minister will be hearing from several others as well – that this is probably the last year that they can do that. They have cut as many corners as they feel they can cut. They have shifted as much money away from the general population of students as they can to accommodate the special-needs students.

Let me be very clear, Mr. Chairman. Every time I step into a school, I'm pulled aside by a teacher or a principal who tells me: "We love these special-needs kids. We want them in our schools. We love having them. We want to teach them, but we need more

funding in order to do it.” That message was loud and clear the other night at the Catholic school meeting. They’re saying: “We did it this year. We found a way to make it work. But if they ask us to do it again next year, it’s not going to happen.”

In fact, Mr. Chairman, one of the Catholic school trustees, who has indicated publicly that she’s going to be seeking the nomination for the Conservative Party, indicated that the previous year’s budget was one where they felt that they had done the best they could do and that this year stretched them to the absolute maximum, and she’s not sure that they can handle it again next year. I would suggest that if this trustee finds herself elected, the government will have someone on the inside that’s going to be expressing the same concern that those of us on this side have been expressing for so many years.

Now, yesterday in this Assembly in response to a question from the shadow minister for Education, the Member for St. Albert – and it was a question regarding funding in particular to the Grande Prairie-Wapiti region but, I think, in general was discussing funding for education across the province – the Minister of Education’s response was this, and I’ll quote from page 1687 of *Hansard*. He said, “We will not be coming forward with additional funds unless there are some circumstances around the unallocated surplus going forward.” This is where we get into the same old good-news/bad-news cycle that we’ve seen from this government for so many years.

Mr. Chairman, you’ll know, I’m sure, that I’ve been one of the loudest opponents to the off-budget spending that we’ve seen take place in the two and a half years that I’ve been a member of this Assembly. I’m a strong proponent of making a budget and sticking with it, and I’ve gone on the record as saying that I hope this government does that this year. That, I suppose, is good news if the government sticks to their budget.

The second part to that, obviously, has to be responsible budgeting and making sure that the proper priorities are budgeted for. I don’t think too many people in this province would disagree that the priorities really have to be education and health care. If we’re not budgeting properly for education – and certainly everywhere I go across this province, that is the message I’m hearing not only from teachers and administrators but also from parents and students – then there’s a problem. Now we have a minister who, it would appear to me, is opening the door at least a crack for additional funding off budget, and while I certainly recognize the need in the case of the Education budget, Mr. Chairman, at the same time I have a concern that we’re going to be falling back into old habits.

4:20

Here’s a concern that I’ve raised before. I’m particularly cognizant of it given the fact that we had a couple of by-elections last night, and certainly all indications are that we could very well be having a general election next year. That is the fact that the sustainability fund, which, I might point out, is an idea that a former member of the Liberal opposition and a former leader of the Liberal opposition first talked about in this Assembly, is currently mandated by legislation to hold a minimum of \$2.5 billion, and it is at this state, I believe, somewhat in excess of \$7 billion. I have not been made aware of any public plans that the government has made for using those extra dollars. I would be perfectly happy, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, if the Finance minister or the minister of the Treasury Board were to come forward with legislation saying that we should up that mandatory amount to maybe \$4 billion or \$5 billion. Given that times have changed and with the rate of inflation and everything else, maybe 2 and a half billion dollars isn’t enough.

But my fear is that we currently have about 4 and a half billion dollars sitting there unallocated, and we’re likely to be less than a

year away from a general election. We now have at least one minister talking about using unallocated dollars to address situations like we’ve discussed here, a very clear need for extra dollars in the Education budget.

Ms Blakeman: Off-budget spending.

Mr. R. Miller: Exactly as I had mentioned a minute ago, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is suggesting off-budget spending. Despite the words from some members on the front bench on the other side that we’re not going to see that this year, now we’re starting to see that door open a little bit. You know, in my mind, it’s probably not too long before we start seeing some of that again, and particularly as we inch closer to an election, I’ll be surprised if I don’t see it. Quite frankly, I’ll be surprised if I don’t see it.

Mr. Chairman, I’d also like to just touch on a couple of other things regarding education and, in particular, a school in my constituency, St. Stan’s. The great news – again, another good-news/bad-news story – is that St. Stanislaus has a portable. It was moved onto the property last week, and this is a portable that’s desperately needed because St. Stan’s has been operating for the last four years without a library. If you were to ask me why, I’d be happy to share with you and all members of this Assembly that the reason St. Stan’s has been operating without a functioning library for the last four years is because of a shortage of space. They’ve actually had to put a class of students into the library. The library, then, has been condensed into one little corner of what used to be the library and has not been functioning for four years.

Now, they were slated to have received a portable last year, and of course due to the shortage of portables they got bumped. There was a need, probably a greater need, to send those first 10 portables that were completed up into northern Alberta, and the good folks at St. Stan’s understand that, but what they don’t understand, Mr. Chairman, is how, in a province that was running, you know, probably an \$8 billion surplus this past fiscal year and nearly a \$10 billion surplus the fiscal year before, it can be that a school in Edmonton has to give up its library space to a classroom because they can’t get a portable. And that wasn’t a short-term situation. This lasted over a period of four years. So a very frustrating situation for the school, and they’re thankful that it looks like by the time schools open in the fall, they’ll have that portable up and running, and things will be back to the way they should be.

The last thing I wanted to discuss during my comments this afternoon, Mr. Chairman, is in fact the savings plan that the Official Opposition caucus put out last fall. We’ve been talking about it for several months at this point, and it’s been very well received across the province. I know I’ve spoken about it in this House before, but I want to touch on it again. The reason for that is because during the supply estimates last month when I was debating with the President of the Treasury Board, he indicated in his opening comments that he was hopeful that we would have time that evening to discuss the Liberal savings plan versus the government’s savings plan. That was a debate that I was looking forward to having. I think it’s a debate that I would like to see all Albertans involved in, so if I can help to kick that off by reminding the President of the Treasury Board and members of this Assembly about the Liberal plan, then I think that’s a valuable thing to do.

Now, this afternoon, Mr. Chairman, I know that there was a question from a government backbencher which referenced the government’s savings plan. As you will know from this budget, the government’s savings plan is not really much of a savings plan at all. It is a surplus plan which is not substantially different from the surplus plan that the Alberta Liberals had in our policy in the 2004

election. Certainly, it's better to have some sort of a savings plan than none, which is the way this government has operated for the last many years with literally billions and billions of dollars of surplus over the last several years. Not having had any savings plan, it is a step forward. Unfortunately, the way this is set up right now, there will be no money allocated to savings unless we realize a surplus larger than what is currently predicted in this budget, and then at that, only a percentage would actually be put into savings.

Now, I understand that for the first time in my memory of watching Alberta politics, we have Finance ministry officials, the President of the Treasury Board, and the Finance minister all openly conceding that this government has been overly cautious in the past in its revenue predictions, particularly as it comes to predicting the price of oil and natural gas. I'm on record in the past as saying that it's good to find yourself at the end of the year in a situation where you have a surplus as opposed to a deficit. It's good to find yourself having spent less money than you perhaps thought you were going to. You know, it's a better problem to have than the reverse, so that's fair enough.

But what happens, Mr. Chairman, as we've discussed, is you find yourselves in a situation where you have billions and billions of dollars of surplus with no plan on how to save it and, in fact, leaving that money, then, up to the will of the government and in some cases the Premier of the day. We saw that with the rebate cheques of 2005-2006, where the Premier on a whim and without even the consent of his caucus decided that all Albertans would be receiving a cheque. Although that was certainly, you know, needed for some people and in many cases spent very wisely and invested wisely, to this day I still have people coming to me and questioning whether or not that was the best use of \$1.4 billion.

I started out by saying that I was going to talk about our plan, and that's really what I wanted to do, Mr. Chairman. The Alberta Liberal plan is much more than simply a surplus plan. It is, as I've discussed before, an opportunity for us to pay ourselves first, just like your parents would have taught you. Certainly, my dad told me when I got my first job: take a cut right off the top; put it aside. That's what this does. We're certainly not the first that have looked at this, but we've looked very carefully at the numbers using – and this is an important point – the government's own projections in terms of future revenue for the province, which, as we've just discussed, are admittedly very cautious, very small “c” conservative. Using those projections, we've said that we would take 30 per cent of all oil and gas revenues off the top, set them into a series of savings plans, and do this all within a balanced budget.

4:30

Now, I know that the Finance minister is listening carefully because he has spent an awful lot of time over the last couple of months reviewing this document. I've noted that he's had it on his desk several days in the Assembly, and he's spent an awful lot of time poring over it. He's probably as intimately familiar with it as I am at this point, so he would know, Mr. Chairman, that the plan calls for a full 35 per cent of all of that money that we set aside, that we take off the top, to go into the heritage savings trust fund. By the year 2021, Mr. Chairman, that fund would have grown to an astounding \$120 billion, still only a fraction of what Norway has managed to save in a short period of time but, nevertheless, a significant amount. For the first time since the fund was established, it would really establish a purpose for the fund, and that is to generate revenue that would offset the government's own projections in terms of a downfall in revenue from oil and gas.

A further 35 per cent, Mr. Chairman, would be put into a postsecondary endowment fund, and that fund would grow to \$15

billion by the year 2021. I'm sure all members have heard the Leader the Official Opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, talk about the need to elevate Alberta's postsecondary institutions to amongst the very best in the world. We believe that with this extra funding that would be provided by that endowment fund, this is entirely within the realms of possibilities.

Twenty-five per cent of that savings would go into a capital fund to address the infrastructure debt. Had things begun when this plan was first announced, Mr. Chairman, we believed we could have completed it by the year 2008. Further monies would then go into the heritage savings trust fund, and the remaining 5 per cent, Mr. Chairman, into an endowment fund to support the humanities, social sciences, and the arts. There were questions asked today about that in this House, about how strongly we believe in supporting the arts in this province.

Just a bit of an outline in terms of reminding people of how this would work. Again, Mr. Chairman, I would like to remind all members that the work that was done on this in conjunction with economists and businesspeople projects that this could be done within a balanced budget and without increasing taxes. I think that that is a very important point: the only increase in this budget would be based on population growth and inflation growth.

I know that we've been accused by some members opposite, particularly the Education minister, of sucking and blowing at the same time. I would strongly urge the Minister of Education to take up the advice of my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar and come sit down and explore this document with us.

I'm not going to suggest for one second that it perhaps doesn't have some anomalies in it. Already changes would be required to the numbers. Favourable changes would be required to the numbers based on the fact that the government's own projections have proven to be more cautious than the reality turned out to be, so this is actually even better today than it would have been last September, when it was first released. I think what that shows, Mr. Chairman, is that the principle here is right.

You know, you could argue – and we talked about this before – about whether or not the percentages into each of the various funds are exactly right. Maybe we should put a little more into the heritage savings trust fund and build it up more. Maybe we should take a 5 per cent cut off one of the other pies and put that into a fund that would sustain municipal funding over the years given all of the talk about sustainable funding for municipalities and the need that we certainly recognize there, the need that was expressed in a by-election in Calgary-Elbow last night.

There are all sorts of ideas. This is not meant to be the final version, but certainly what this is a document of principle. It is a solid foundation for a plan that could be implemented within sound fiscal policies. All it takes, Mr. Chairman, is a little bit of fiscal discipline, and I do believe that that is what we offer.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 43 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 44**Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 44 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

head:

**Private Bills
Committee of the Whole**

**Bill Pr. 1
CyberPol – The Global Centre for
Securing Cyberspace Act**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo I move that Bill Pr. 1 be amended.

The Deputy Chair: Do you have the amendment with you?

Ms DeLong: I do, and copies were provided.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you are moving this on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Is that correct?

Ms DeLong: Well, I'm a little unsure of that because our committee recommended that it proceed as amended, so we essentially amended it in the committee. I'm a little unsure.

The Deputy Chair: Well, it happens to have your name, so we can have it under your name.

Ms DeLong: Okay. It does have my name on it. You're right: Ms DeLong to move that Bill Pr. 1 CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act be amended as follows:

- A The title of the Bill is amended on page 1 by striking out "SECURITY" and substituting "SECURING".
- B The preamble is amended in the first recital
 - (a) by striking out "certain citizens of the City of Calgary" and substituting "Ian Wilms and Kristen Lawson, both of the City of Calgary,";
 - (b) by adding "in Alberta" after "establish".
- C Section 1 is amended by striking out clause (c).
- D Section 2 is struck out and the following is substituted:

2 There is hereby constituted and established a body corporate and politic under the name of "CyberPol – The Centre for Securing Cyberspace" which shall have perpetual succession and a common seal.
- E Section 3 is struck out and the following is substituted:

3 The objects of the Centre are to use the funds entrusted to it to promote and facilitate the establishment, construction and operation of an international centre for the

research, coordination and advancement of public safety, intelligence gathering and public response related to cyber-crimes such as child exploitation, financial systems fraud, threats to critical infrastructure and intellectual property and identity theft.

4:40

- F Section 4 is renumbered as section 4(1) and the following is added after subsection (1):
 - (2) The Centre shall be operated on a not-for-profit basis.
- G The following is added after section 5:
 - 5.1 The head office of the Centre shall be located in Alberta.
- H Section 7 is amended by adding the following after subsection (4):
 - (5) The founding Directors shall serve until replaced by action of the Board or the appointment of the 8th additional Governor under section 6(6).
- I Section 8(1) is amended
 - (a) by striking out clause (a) and substituting the following:
 - (a) a Director is in a conflict of interest if the Director takes part in a decision in the course of carrying out the Director's duties knowing that the decision might further a private interest of the Director or a person directly associated with the Director or improperly furthers the private interest of any other person, and
 - (b) in clause (b)
 - (i) in subclause (i) by adding "child," after "Director's";
 - (ii) in subclause (iv) by striking out "having not more than 20 partners".
- J Section 9 is amended
 - (a) by adding the following after clause (i);
 - (i.1) manage or supervise the management of the business and affairs of the Centre;
 - (b) by striking out clauses (m), (n), (o), and (p).
- K The following is added after section 13:

14 Nothing in this Act exempts the Centre from the application of any other federal or provincial statute.

These were the amendments which we discussed to great extent during the committee meetings, so they were all individually and as a whole covered quite extensively by the committee. It was quite a bit of work by the committee, by the way, to proceed with this and to recommend it as amended.

I just wanted to again thank the committee – it was an all-party committee – for hanging in there and really doing a good job on this bill in terms of examining it at great length. I encourage everyone to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, just for the record we will call this amendment A1. The hon. member did read out the entire amendment, but should there be any discrepancy in understanding it, then the official record will reflect what has been submitted in a written format.

The hon. member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. If I could just make a small note that when we get amendments from the Private Bills Committee that are as lengthy as these ones, maybe just as a courtesy if they could have been circulated in advance. I know that the committee has already looked at them and recommended this to the Assembly, and I know that they do good work. I will do my best in accepting that they have recommended this, but it is a bit of a speed read. There are 11 different sections that are being amended. Actually, it's more than that if you look at the subclauses that are

being amended in this. It's a lot to be able to react to very quickly. I will accept the recommendation of the committee and not question them on them.

Very quickly, looking through it, some of the major questions I had about this bill have not been answered, and I understood that we would get some answers back in Committee of the Whole to questions that were asked in second reading. In particular, I was looking at the questions put on the record by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-McClung. So I was hoping that we could have had some answers back on that.

Here are the concerns that I have. Now, I notice that under section F of the amending act, section 4 is renumbered, and in fact there is a section that's inserted. It says, "The Centre shall be operated on a not-for-profit basis." But nowhere else in here does it talk about registering under the Alberta Societies Act, or perhaps registering under part 9 of the corporations act. This is looking to me like it's a private corporation that's now said that it's going to operate on a not-for-profit basis, which would mean that any surplus that they had in their proceeds, any difference between their revenue and expenses, in other words, would be reinvested back into the work of the global centre for securing cyberspace, known as CyberPol.

I'm also noting that there is an opportunity here, or at least there's no prescription against paying the directors, which is not done under the Societies Act and is not at all common practice in not-for-profits or charities or volunteer-based organizations, however you want to refer to them, in Alberta. The idea is that those directors are representing members of the public and holding the public's interest first in serving on the board.

I would say, in looking at the set-up of this organization, that they are serving the interests of the organization first or perhaps their own interests first, where we have appointees that are coming from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Association of Police Boards. They may well be there to serve the interests of the groups that have appointed them to the board. I'm not saying that that's wrong, but I'm a little cautious about this organization. It's not clear to me. I've read all of the *Hansard* proceedings. I've read these amendments as best I can. I've read the act. It looks like it's a private company. It's going to operate on a not-for-profit basis. The directors can be compensated. But it's not constituting itself as a not-for-profit as we know it here in Alberta.

Mr. MacDonald: It's under this special one-time act.

Ms Blakeman: It's essentially under a special one-time act, yeah. That's why I think they've chosen the route of coming through a private member's private bill.

Some of the other issues I have that are not addressed under what I see in the amendments are the powers of a natural person. Now, I'm not recalling that it's very common to see that in a not-for-profit or charitable agency's constitution and bylaws, which is essentially what this act is. Maybe the lawyers, of whom we have more than a couple in this Assembly, could explain to me why that clause would be in there. It does raise some issues with me or some concerns about why we would need, in addition to powers vested in the Interpretation Act, to be giving the centre the powers of a natural person.

There's also a lack of clarity around reappointments. It's clear that each member of the board shall be appointed. It's a three-year term. Then it talks about removing people and the reasons for which you can remove somebody, but it is silent on reappointments or even on the number of times someone could be reappointed. In the amending act it does talk about founding directors. Okay. Well, that's the two individuals that are named, but that doesn't help us

with the rest of the directors and whether they get reappointed. I'm assuming that if it's silent, they don't. So it's a three-year term, and it's over.

A lot of stuff about conflicts of interest, which is interesting, and their meetings, bylaws, auditing. I'm concerned about whether they're collecting information that could be considered personal information, what they're going to do with that information, how they're going to protect it. For our purposes, off the top of my head, would it fall under PIPA? Likely. But, frankly, as we review PIPA, I would say that it has certainly got some loopholes in it that I'm not too keen on.

I'm really concerned that if we're on the Internet and we're looking at cybercrime and collecting information about that, what kind of information are we collecting exactly? Is this suspicion of people that have been involved in something? How do you check the accuracy of the information that you've collected? How do you monitor it and make sure that it's up to date and relevant? If you've got somebody's e-mail or personal information in there that is five years old and they've moved and changed their name, got married, changed their sex, whatever, what do they do with this information? How are they going to monitor it and make sure that it stays accurate?

4:50

Mr. Chairman, I can tell you, from having served on the Health Information Act Review Committee and on the PIPA Review Committee, that one of the key issues that's arising for me is the accuracy of that information that's held and the ability of an individual Albertan to get at that information to verify its accuracy and to correct it. I don't see any of that under this act about what's going to happen with that information.

It may well be, Mr. Chairman, that we're not worried about people's personal information here, but it's not clear to me that I'm not, that that's not part of what will be done by this organization. It's talking about, you know, operating "an international centre for the co-ordination and advancement of public safety," et cetera, related to cybercrimes. But are they only going to deal with people convicted of these cybercrimes? Okay. Then we know that we're dealing with people that, in fact, have a record and have been punished by society in some way. Are they dealing with people who have been charged with it? That's a whole other kettle of fish. You're dealing with people that are still presumed innocent at that point. At what point do you clear those records up and say, "This person was declared innocent" or "They were convicted"? Do you just let it sit in there in a big stew of information going around? Especially when I see those legal beagle terms like "all the powers of a natural person," I start thinking: "Who is being protected here? Is it going to be the public, or is it the directors? Why are they imbuing this organization with so much power?"

Mr. MacDonald: Do you think the Bar Association should have a representative on the board of directors?

Ms Blakeman: Well, my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar is suggesting that the Bar Association have somebody appointed to this board. They may not be interested in doing that, but a lot of my questions are based in legal theory, so I can see why he would be thinking that.

This act is just not sitting right with me. I'm not sure why they're doing this. I'm not sure what they're going to do with it, where their money is supposed to be coming from. A wise member of this Assembly who then went on to serve as a Senator in the Senate of Canada once told me: if you're not comfortable with it, then vote no

because your instinct is probably right that there is either something that needs to be fixed or something that's not right with this.

I increasingly read newspaper articles every day about people's privacy being breached, whether it's boxes of health information left in somebody's garbage or whether it's an individual employee who decides to search police databases for information on the home address of a newspaper reporter. You know, these are serious. When you start collecting information that's out there on the Internet, the ability to control it is very, very limited for the individual, and the information can be sent so many places so fast.

I understand that they're trying to deal with stuff that's really important to society, like, you know, luring of children and child prostitution and pornography, horrendous things that as a society we want to deal with, but that's not happening in this bill. For any parents that have been led to believe that somehow this is going to strengthen the laws and the punishments, penalties for Internet child luring and child exploitation, that's not in this bill. So far, all we have is a group of people getting together in an office somewhere in Alberta being funded through a number of sources in a private company. That's what I'm seeing here, and it doesn't ring quite true for me.

There's still an opportunity in the rest of Committee of the Whole or in third for additional answers to be supplied, and I'd be very interested in hearing them. This one is just not sitting right with me.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow rose to answer a couple of questions, and actually maybe I can make things slightly more efficient for her by just tagging onto the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre's comments. I listened with care to those comments, and I want to thank the hon. member because it cuts what I was going to say in about half. I'm afraid I share similar concerns here.

I have some questions for the member that I think I need addressed before I could consider support for this bill. First of all, I find this to be a rather unusual avenue by which to establish a society or corporation given the legislation that we have in place in Alberta to do just that. I want to know why. What's different about this society or corporation that prevents its organizers from utilizing the legislation? Even if this is the avenue, of course, these petitioners would understand that any changes to that corporation would require another act of this Legislature. So I find that a very curious approach. I really need to understand why.

Second of all, I am very deeply concerned about the purpose of this organization. You know, the collection of information about crime is something that typically a government or an agency of a government, such as a police agency, would do, which is maybe why it's called CyberPol, which is a strange thing. If it's purely a research organization, then why wouldn't it be established under a university, as a research extension of a university? If this is a private society or corporation collecting information on the commission of crimes, either of accused people or convicted people or on the information about crimes, as in actual child pornography files or anything like that, then I have very grave concerns about where that information is. The storage of it would in fact be a violation of our legislation. I have some very, very grave concerns there. If they're not collecting such information, exactly what is it this organization is going to do?

I'm afraid that I have some very deep concerns here, and I'm unable to support this bill unless those can be addressed. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. I guess the first thing that I need to bring up for both of these members is to point out the final section, section 14, that we're putting in here. That is that "nothing in this Act exempts the Centre from the application of any other federal or provincial statute." So all privacy laws apply. All government laws apply. All laws apply. There is nothing that sort of overrules any of the privacy concerns or anything like that.

I guess the other thing is to try to understand what we're trying to do here. What we're trying to do here is set up something that is totally separate from government – okay? – but that can be used by police forces around the world to work together on things like pedophile crimes using the Internet. There's also a very large problem in society in terms of the banks. Our whole banking system is constantly under attack from around the world by people trying to get money out of the banks.

What we're doing with this legislation is we are just creating a shell. This shell is similar to setting up, say, the UN. The UN is a totally international body, but it happens to be in New York City. We are saying: this is the shell that we are providing in Alberta to be used internationally. The request to actually form this comes from the police services. It comes from the RCMP. It comes from those organizations that right now are trying in their own little ways to be able to fight this international attack, which is essentially coming from all over the world. They're trying to each solve it in their own way, but there is no place to come together like we have with the UN, where we can come together and work together.

Essentially, what we're doing is we're just creating the shell that can then be used internationally. It would not be sort of like a separate organization that would collect information. What it would be is an organization that our existing police forces could use. In other words, the RCMP would be using the shell that we're creating to work with other organizations around the world. I know that it's a very visionary, you know, very unusual, I guess, request to be putting in here, but it's something that really needs to be done. The need has been known for years, that we need to move in this direction, and this is the actual way that we're doing it.

5:00

The other thing that I think I should also talk about is in terms of the finances. This in no way indebts or says that the government is definitely going to put money into this. It's totally separate, and there's no commitment on government's part to say that they are going to be even using this facility. But this is something that is being asked for by the police services in Canada and actually around the world.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. This is a very interesting debate on amendment A1 on Bill Pr. 1, and I, too, have reservations about this. I as a member of this Assembly – I'm not a member of Private Bills; I was at one time but not anymore – certainly have not been contacted by any police force or representative of such a force requesting this bill. I know that we have to respect the Private Bills Committee and their recommendations, but the questions that have been asked by the hon. Member for Peace River and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre are very good questions, and I'm not satisfied that they're going to be adequately addressed here.

Now, I would much prefer to see the Solicitor General or the Minister of Justice or the Attorney General of this province – I don't understand why they can't perform this function. I'm sorry; I'm not satisfied with the discussions so far. There has been an indication that both federal authorities have been contacted, but I would like to

know what Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada stated to the committee in regard to this proposed bill. You know, Alberta Justice has indicated and everyone is aware that cybercrime is a growing concern and that we may require skills or data external to the traditional law enforcement agencies and prosecution, but I think they should consider if taking on the responsibility is necessary.

I've been told that both the Department of Justice and the Solicitor General have no substantial concerns with this bill. We are having this legislative debate, but I'm almost of the opinion after hearing the last three speakers, Mr. Chairman, that perhaps this should be referred to one of our new field committees. I'm not satisfied with our security act federally, but I don't know how this would work with that. I'm not convinced that this is a one-time global centre for securing cyberspace. Can this body that is being created by this special legislation be sold, and if it can be sold, to whom?

Now, who is going to audit this centre? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre talked about this. But who will audit this centre? How much money will be used, and where is it going to come from? You know, we're looking at this new section 3. The centre is to have funds

entrusted to it to promote and facilitate the establishment, construction and operation of an international centre . . .

This is not just for Alberta. Cyberspace is an international concern. . . . for the research, coordination and advancement of public safety, intelligence gathering and public response related to cybercrimes such as child exploitation, financial systems fraud, threats to critical infrastructure and intellectual property and identity theft.

These are all noteworthy and, unfortunately, crimes that are on the rise.

I'm just cautious about this. I don't know how this is going to work with the Interpretation Act. Perhaps the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, presenting this amendment, could explain to me the Interpretation Act, certainly section 8, which indicates, "No provision in a private Act affects the rights of any person, except as mentioned or referred to in the private Act." How is all of this going to work, then? I understand that there is reference to the Interpretation Act. Yes, there is in this proposed legislation. That is certainly under powers of the centre, section 5, Mr. Chairman. Now, I have those questions, as do others in this House, regarding this. In my time in the Assembly I cannot remember – and I could be wrong – private bills of this nature.

Before I conclude, I would also like to discuss the issue of having others on this because I'm not sure about the oversight of this board. Now, we're going to see the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police – they're going to have one member – the Canadian Association of Police Boards, but I would be much more comfortable if we had a member of the Canadian Bar Association or maybe of the local bar association here. I think oversight is needed here, and I'm not convinced that we're going to have it with this present structure.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will cede the floor to another hon. colleague, but I at this time cannot support this bill. I don't mean to be disrespectful to the Private Bills Committee, but I, too, am going to exercise the caution that I was told to do: if I'm not sure, don't go in favour. That was from a former member of the Alberta Liberal Party for the Redwater constituency.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. First of all, I do want to make it well understood that these questions that are being raised here have been raised previously in the discussions of the committee. We took quite a bit of time with this, you know. In fact, we took extra time with this. We had the presentation, and then the

following week we had a discussion. Because of the complexities that you are dealing with here, what we did was we actually put it off a full month, and we then had another special meeting, where we spent another two hours going in great detail, really thrashing out some of these ideas. So I just want to first of all let you know that.

5:10

The next thing is the other idea that was brought up. You know, why isn't this going through the Solicitor General's office, or why isn't this going through a government office? The thing is that if the Alberta government were to move forward and set up this centre, then the Alberta government would actually be in control. It would be like the United States taking over the UN, which would make it an unworkable situation. Essentially, all we're doing is just providing the shell, just like providing the shell for the UN. We cannot be sort of heavy handed as a government, coming in and saying, "This is ours," because, then, to get the co-operation just wouldn't work. By the way, the Solicitor General's office, of course, and Justice's office did look at this in detail and gave their approval to it. They knew that if they did it, it just wouldn't work.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, sorry. I just missed the last part. I was distracted here. Were you moving an adjournment to this?

Ms DeLong: No.

The Deputy Chair: Oh. Okay.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try to keep my remarks short. I thank the hon. member for her comments, but I'm afraid you've heightened my concerns rather than soothed them. First of all, the stated purpose of this organization is to collect intelligence. Now, I'm somewhat soothed, I suppose, by clause 14, which says that "Nothing in this Act exempts the Centre from the application of any other federal or provincial statute." That's good, except that effectively prevents them from collecting intelligence. They cannot store or disseminate any information relating to private individuals, nor can they under our criminal legislation collect any information about child pornography or store any information, download, intercept communications, or anything like that. So this organization is dead in the water by the application of clause 14.

Now, the member insisted that the police forces are clamouring for this. Well, then, I would suggest that this is an entirely inappropriate use of the private bills process. If they're clamouring for it, they should be going through ministers to get it established. But the member makes the point that there's a need to be independent because if Alberta were to take over this thing, then it would become unworkable. I would suggest that the public has always been responsible for law enforcement in all of its aspects, and to this point it's been rather workable. Furthermore, I would suggest, considering that this is some kind of international cyber thing, that really this is the responsibility of the federal government, who holds responsibility for international relations, international policing, co-operation with other governments, co-operation with other police forces, which further really confuses the issue.

Finally – and I'll say this in all due respect – the description of this thing as a shell is not at all a comforting one. I really believe I'm at the point where you're not going to be able to address my concerns. I'm not going to support this. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Chair. I think that the hon. Member for Peace River's concerns and suspicions are very well warranted. I, in fact, was and am a member of this committee. There were a number of us who voted against this private bill, I'll let you know. I believe there were government members as well that voted against it.

You know, the confusion that we've seen is the separation between the intentions of this group and the edifice, so to speak, that we're building through private bills that they are seeking approval from this legislative body. You know, in their presentations the gentlemen that want to set up CyberPol made no bones about it. They said: this would give us some legitimacy for our institute that'll help us to, you know, sell this in different places and different jurisdictions. I thought to myself: that is not necessarily the mechanism that we're providing as a private bills committee or as a Legislature, for that matter, so in that instance I was somewhat critical of this proposal.

Another issue that brought me to be suspicious were the very tepid letters from police forces in regard to putting together this cyber centre. The letters were very tepid, indeed. You know, it made me think that there was some jurisdictional problem, really, why these gentlemen were going to start this and somehow duplicate, certainly, what the Edmonton police force does with their ICE unit and other units as well.

The whole idea of private intelligence companies is not new. We have many examples of this around the world. They can be hired by corporations to gather intelligence and to somehow do the bidding of their clients. When I see a nonprofit organization coming here for some legitimacy to do something similar in that way, I find it, again, not in keeping with the spirit or the letter of what we're intending private bills to be.

Also, I have had registered to me serious reservations and concerns by lawyers about this bill, people who have looked at this bill and had serious reservations about the governance of the nonprofit organization and, you know, the collecting of information, as was pointed out by the Member for Peace River. There's just a whole range of unanswered questions that led me to vote against this in our committee. I'm now expressing my reservations here publicly, as a number of other people have, and other members of the committee did vote against this as well.

At this point, I think it's incumbent and useful for us to adjourn debate on this issue, and we will reflect on it as we spend our evenings. Thanks.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

Bill 30
Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to thank all members that supported this bill yesterday as it went into second reading. This is good legislation. There were a few comments and a few questions yesterday that were asked. I believe that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was able to give clarification to some of these issues. I would ask all members to support this and call for the question.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of my colleagues in the Official Opposition we're happy at this time to support Committee of the Whole for Bill 30, Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Decore spoke to the bill at length. As the shadow minister he is supporting it, and we will certainly follow his lead. We've had an opportunity to run through the stakeholders groups in a stakeholder loop, and it's been fairly positive feedback. It's essentially a housekeeping bill, so at this time we're happy to support it.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 30 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

5:20

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report bills 43, 44, and 30.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 43, Bill 44, and Bill 30. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill Pr. 1. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all the amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 44
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move Bill 44 for third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a third time]

Bill 30
Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 30, the Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007.

I'd ask for everybody's support. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 45
Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction)
Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007, for second reading.

I introduced it earlier this week. Government has agreed to a policy which will change the Smoke-free Places Act to expand the scope of protection from second-hand smoke and decrease access to tobacco promotion. The bill reflects government's belief that we need to support Albertans in improving their health status, and the bill certainly responds to the request from many Albertans. By building on the Smoke-free Places Act to extend protection from second-hand smoke by prohibiting smoking in all public places and workplaces, we advance the opportunity for Albertans to take responsibility for their own health. In order to ensure that that happens, of course, it's necessary to make sure that there's a space from windows or doorways or fresh air intakes, so that is included in the act.

The tobacco reduction act also purports to ban power walls. That's something that we know has been a very effective method for tobacco companies to promote their product and particularly promote their products to young people. I was chagrined through the whole process of putting this together to learn just how much is paid in product placement fees by tobacco companies to convenience stores and others who have power walls, particularly, as I understand it, if they're close to schools, which tells us just exactly who these products are being marketed to.

Mr. Speaker, suffice to say smoking kills. It kills 3,400 Albertans every year. We spend millions of dollars to treat disease caused by tobacco use. It's not just lung cancer; it's cancers of many forms. It's certainly lung disease. It's heart disease. It not only costs in productivity, it costs in health status and the cost to human life. And it's not as if it's a quick end to life; it's usually a very miserable end to life.

Pharmacists have long requested that we act to ban the sale of cigarettes in pharmacies, and this bill will purport to do that. Under the regulations there will be an opportunity to exempt certain places from the provisions of the act so that in a community where there is only a single source, there's an opportunity to deal with those anomalies.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important piece of legislation for health status in Alberta. We're at that time. Municipalities have asked us to level the playing field. Many others have asked us to do this. I would ask the House to support it for second reading.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Oh, my gosh, I didn't think we were going to get here, to this day, so I'm darn glad to see that we did.

Mr. Renner: Gosh, Laurie, all those days when you guys used to go out on the balcony and smoke.

Ms Blakeman: I'm being gently chided by one of my colleagues from across the way about the days when we used to go outside on the balcony and smoke. Indeed, that's true. When I first started, you could actually smoke in the rotunda around the stairwells. There were ashtrays and everything, with little nice imprints on the top like they do in the fancy hotels.

We've come a long way. I managed to quit smoking. Thank you to whoever invented Zyban; I really appreciate the help. I think it actually was the inconvenience of smoking that got me to take that extra step. There was so much time in planning where to go and how to smoke and how far outside the building you had to go. It just became too much work for my little administrative brain. It just bugged me how much time I was wasting trying to figure it out. It certainly was a factor.

Let's not kid ourselves; that wasn't easy. I'd smoked for 32 years. I started smoking as a 12-year-old. That's the time that tobacco companies are most successful in hooking young people to smoke. Once you get someone really young to smoke, boy, is it hard to break them out of that.

I think we as a society have come a long way in understanding the harm that smoking can do to individuals and the harm that it does overall to the workplace, to our productivity as a nation. This is the government showing leadership finally. Certainly, the Official Opposition was happy to support the other original smoking bill that was brought forward a couple of years ago. We were very disappointed in the amendments that, basically, had the effect of banning people or banning children rather than banning smoking. It was a very odd twist on things.

I'm pleased to see that there is a complete ban on smoking in public places and particularly in workplaces. Now we can protect all the workers, including the workers who work in bars and in bingo halls and in casinos because those workers have not been protected over the last couple of years. I'm pleased to see that we can protect a worker no matter where they are working. I think that's important.

For my purposes, I talked about becoming a smoker at a very young age, so to me the whole issue of power walls is a really important one. I think the government really has shown leadership on this one because they got out ahead of it. Bringing forward legislation that combines a smoking ban in public places and in workplaces, the banning of the power walls, and limiting where the tobacco products can be sold is indeed leadership. Putting them all together should actually catapult us ahead of many other places in Canada now for looking at the whole package, and I'm really glad to see that.

5:30

The Speaker is aware that I have worked very closely with a group of young people from one of my schools in Edmonton-Centre, and that is the Nellie McClung program for girls that is situated in Oliver school. They developed a BLAST team and started to work on the whole idea of whether they could get their hands on smoking products. Indeed, they even did a little video. They taped themselves being able to get hold of tobacco products in a local store. They also got very involved in the idea of getting power walls

banned, and they've really worked hard on this. I think they deserve a piece of the credit for helping to convince the government to take this seriously and to include banning power walls in this legislation.

They did a postcard campaign in which they went to different places and got their friends and family and others to sign postcards and send them through to the previous minister of health asking that power walls be banned. They did a conference at which they invited BLAST teams from other schools to come and join them in having a learning conference. This past winter, a couple of months ago, they came and did a rally on the steps of the Legislature. I've introduced them a couple of times in the House and tried to bring their message forward.

I'm really, really proud of those young women for sticking with this. You know, to somebody that's younger the idea that it might have taken a couple of years to change public policy just seems like forever. To me, the fact that we managed to turn this around in less than two years is very fast public policy. So I really appreciate those young women staying on this one. Special credit to their mentor and instructor Heather Jubenvill who was recognized for her work doing this with an excellence in teaching award from the Edmonton Public school board just recently. It really was very fine leadership, and I'm very proud of her and the work that she's done with those young women.

Now, is the bill perfect? Very close. The two things that I'm interested in – and maybe someone will be able to give me the answer for this. There's no proclamation date given. It comes into effect on proclamation, and that's undefined. I'm wondering if I need to bring in an amendment that actually sets a hard date on it or if there's a reason why the government doesn't want a hard date. For example, January 1, 2008, sounds darned good to me, but maybe there's a reason why there isn't a date that's given, so I'm happy to hear the reason on that.

I'm also aware that there is still a desire on behalf of people that have worked long and hard in this area, like the folks associated with the Action on Smoking and Health group, to expand the prohibition on where tobacco products can be sold. Right now the act is contemplating health facilities where anyone under the Health Professions Act would be providing services, the campus of a public postsecondary institution, a pharmacy or a retail store that has a pharmacy in it or where a pharmacy is directly connected by a hallway. Those are the places under this act where you can no longer sell tobacco products. There is a suggestion that it go further and prohibit the grounds and premises of primary and secondary schools, for example, the grounds and premises of child care facilities, and amusement establishments and facilities. That would include arts and cultural venues, theatres for example, and sport, recreation, and cultural events.

Now, for the most part in Edmonton, for example, because of the city of Edmonton bylaw we've had smoking prohibited in those places for a very long time, but this is also contemplating prohibiting tobacco sales. Somebody this morning said to me: do they still have cigarette vending machines? I haven't noticed them, but I bet you they're still out there. It would seem a little odd, I admit, to have a tobacco vending machine on a child care facility premise, but stranger things have happened.

An Hon. Member: There's a federal law.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, there's a federal law. Well, good on them.

There was a suggestion from them that we look at actually spelling that out in the bill. It may not be necessary, and I look forward to hearing from anyone that would like to supply an answer to that, as to whether it's just an oversight or, in fact, whether they are covered through other legislation.

I know that there are a number of people that want to get on the record with this, and I would like to see second reading happen this afternoon. So, although I would like to spend more time talking about this, I'm not going to, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to see the ban on smoking in public places and particularly in workplaces to protect workers, the result of a lot of hard work on banning the power walls. But I think that's particularly important if we're going to potentially convince young people to not take up smoking because it's really, really hard to knock that addiction once you start smoking when you're young.

That's, frankly, why tobacco companies spend so much time and money and attention on trying to convince younger people that smoking is cool. That's why we have power walls. Yeah, it's to remind the grownups of the colour of their pack of cigarettes, but it's really about getting the kids, to normalize smoking for kids. The fact that they could do studies and find children who had never smoked who could tell you the colour and the design of a Player's package of cigarettes tells you how pervasive and invasive that kind of tobacco advertising like power walls is. So banning the power walls and the advertising in the stores is incredibly important, and limiting where people can purchase I think is the final piece of this fairly comprehensive plan.

I'm very happy to support it at this point. I will let others speak to it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we will support this bill. I would give the minister of health absolute credit because two years ago we know what happened in this Legislature. This bill goes further than that bill did, and we couldn't pass it two years ago. I would have rather seen it happen two years ago because, you know, we may have saved some lives in those two years. But I think it's important, and I give all due credit to the minister and to the government members that we are coming forward with this bill today.

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of simple reasons that I'd like to put on record. I won't go on long. One of the reasons is an economic thing. When Edmonton did it, the patchwork didn't make much sense because I had bar owners in my constituency say to me: well, it's not fair; people can go right over to Sherwood Park, you know, in 10 or 15 minutes. It never made much sense to me, the patchwork. It was much more important to do it at the provincial level, and thankfully this is happening now.

I just want to put on record a couple of things on why we need a bill like this, Mr. Speaker. First of all, according to the Lung Association, in areas where similar rules have been placed, consumption decreased by 20 to 40 per cent. Such measures denormalize smoking and prevent new smokers from lighting up. Well, a 20 to 40 per cent drop is significant. It's significant for our health care system. It's significant for what the Member for Edmonton-Centre was talking about, young people starting the habit. The bill has the potential of reducing or limiting potential new smokers from taking up the habit, curtailing serious diseases, improving the quality of life for Albertans, and reducing premature death: all the things that the minister of health was talking about.

Then the figures are startling. They got this from doing a little bit of research. From 1998 to 2004, Mr. Speaker, lung and bronchial cancer rates in California declined at a rate four times that of the rest of the U.S.A. to decreases in cigarette consumption. In other words, after California brought in a similar bill, these are the figures. Now, those are big, startling figures. That came from the California

Department of Health Services, tobacco control section, 2002. They also go on to say that in addition, 58,900 heart disease deaths were prevented during the first nine years of the California tobacco control program. Same source. These are big figures. It shows you exactly how important this bill is as the minister of health said.

5:40

The other figure that I think is interesting comes from AADAC. It says that

in 2002, approximately \$470.6 million was spent in Alberta caring for tobacco related illness. Additional societal costs arise from lost income due to premature death, disability, worker absenteeism, reduced productivity, and tobacco subsidies . . . Tobacco is often responsible for substantial loss of life and property damage accounting for one in four fire deaths in Alberta.

Again, this is a lot of money. If we're looking at saving money for the health care system, this shows that this is a very significant step forward.

Additionally, according to the Review of the Quality of Studies on the Economic Effects of Smoke-free Policies on the Hospitality Industry – that's where you get a lot of the complaints – virtually every scientifically sound study on the economic impact of smoke-free laws demonstrates that while there may be an initial adjustment period, there is no – and I repeat – no lasting negative impact of smoke-free laws on the hospitality industry.

Those are the reasons we need a bill like this. Again, Mr. Speaker, we in the NDP opposition gladly support second reading of this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by Calgary-Nose Hill.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did want to get on record with this, and I will just make a few remarks on Bill 45, the tobacco reduction act. This is a good bill, and I think it really reflects what the majority of Albertans want and certainly believe in, but further than that it also reflects the majority of Canadians' feelings on this concept of a smoke-free atmosphere.

I just would like to make a very quick remark about what I feel is something that has to be looked at that has to go in tandem with this bill, and that's the fact that we – “we” being Albertans, the government of Alberta – own tobacco stocks, and I believe that we must divest ourselves of those stocks. The reason that I'm saying that is because I have travelled in Africa, Tunisia, and spent a lot of time in Turkey and other countries where I actually saw children as young as five and six smoking. It hasn't started to show up in statistics yet where the industry actually has seen their product sales go down. Unfortunately, it isn't happening fast enough, but it will. To make up for those loses, they are going to all of these countries. They don't need a power wall. They basically just give out free cigarettes to these young kids because there really are no laws to protect them.

That is the main reason, because I've seen what's happened, that I really believe that we have to divest ourselves of the tobacco industry stocks that are in our heritage trust fund.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to speak very briefly in favour of the passage of Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007, in second reading. I believe it's a very progressive measure. It shows leadership on the part of our province. Eliminating the sales of tobacco in places that include

pharmacies I think is a very progressive step. For many people it means that they'll no longer be able to purchase cigarettes when they're getting their groceries. As the Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, when we make it less convenient for people to smoke, we often reduce the incidence of smoking, and in some cases we cause people to quit altogether. I think that's been illustrated by the experience in some very large office buildings where people have to go down the elevator and go out to the back alley in order to indulge in their habit, and in many cases they have actually quit the habit because of the inconvenience. Similarly, by prohibiting smoking in all public places and near entrances throughout the province, it makes it uniform. As I said, it will also make it more inconvenient for people to smoke in those public places and will thereby reduce the frequency and the incidence of smoking. I believe the provisions regarding the reduction of display advertising for tobacco products is also a very good measure.

I would urge all of my colleagues in the House to support Bill 45 in second reading.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. I just want to briefly address Bill 45. I am in favour of it and pleased that we're making steps forward on this, but my concern, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that the tobacco reduction bill really is just a ban on public smoking because of the effects that smokers have on those people that they're around or people that are wanting a job not having to work in that atmosphere.

I feel like we're missing out on the most vulnerable of our society. We still have passed no laws regarding smoking around children. That's my biggest concern, that there are still many parents and grandparents in other areas, where people smoke in their own homes and kids come in there. I've said this before in the House, and I'll continue to say it. We're not allowed to drive to town without putting our kids in a seatbelt; we get a fine. We're not allowed to ride our bicycles with our kids; we get a fine. Yet it's just fine for a grandparent to smoke around an infant, and the parents say: I really can't say no to my parents or grandparents.

If we were to pass a misdemeanour or a fine to say that if you're smoking around children, it's \$150, and you can't say: “Oh, who's going to enforce it? How are we going to do it?” Just by putting it in place, people can say: “Hey, you're not supposed to do that. You could get a \$75 or a \$200 fine.” We're missing out on the most vulnerable of our society: those who can't protect themselves, those who can't get away from a vehicle with their parents smoking in it or whatever else the situation is.

We need to step up the bill one more step and have an amendment to protect those who can't get away from smoke. We have lots of good steps forward here. The purpose of this is to take it away, to make it more inconvenient, to make it tougher. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill just referred to a lot of those things, going down the elevator and having to go out in cold weather. All of those things are good, but how does a child in our society get away from an adult who's smoking a legal substance and says, “It's my right to do it in front of them,” and we have nothing in place? I feel that we need to put an amendment in there to make it an offence to smoke in the presence of children, regardless of where they are, your own home, wherever else. We should not be allowed to be smoking around children.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure just to speak briefly in support of this very progressive legislation. I congratulate the government. I think all of us in the House feel that this is progress. It's been called for by the citizens of Alberta for over a decade. I congratulate ASH, the people of Action on Smoking and Health, and all the tobacco groups, the health groups, the Lung Association. All have been active in trying to get us to move towards a stronger commitment to prevention, and that's what this really is.

The tax on tobacco has been an important influence. How to make the healthy choice, the easy choice, becomes the real question, and this is another layer on that to try to improve the health status of our population and reduce the impacts on our health system. There are only a couple of areas left, some of which are federal and some of which may be assisted by a provincial bill to look at more restrictions on sponsorship and a stronger commitment to education in school systems and beyond. I with my colleagues will stand in support of this Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007, Bill 45.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will be very, very brief. I would like to congratulate the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for his work on this and thank him. This is long overdue. I, too, as we discussed in caucus earlier today, had concerns about the implementation of this bill. I would like to see this bill proclaimed and be in force by the new year, 2008.

Thank you.

5:50

The Acting Speaker: Any others?
The hon. minister to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: We'll call the committee to order.

Bill 17 **Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 17, Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. This legislation is intended to clarify the law for Albertans and avoid unnecessary litigation in two areas. I have spoken quite extensively on this, but to add further clarity to the bill, I'm proposing one House amendment, which I have before me and I will ask the Clerk to circulate.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The House amendments are with respect to section 74(1) and section 106(1)(c) of the Land Titles Act. This House amendment to those two sections will ensure that the sections continue to operate as intended under the former Limitation of Actions Act and the current Limitations Act.

The clarification that's being made has come by way of a recommendation from the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and it was done as a result of consultation with both the Alberta Law Reform Institute and Service Alberta. I believe that there's general agreement that this does not change the intent of the bill but just simply clarifies the application of those provisions.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I would urge the approval of the amendment to the bill.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I have conferred with my colleague the shadow minister for Justice and the Attorney General on this House amendment from the government, and he has been in discussions with both the hon. sponsoring member and the minister and, I think, staff. There's been a fair amount of talking about this. He had no objection to the proposed amendment, and I believe he had enough time to study it. So at this point I'm happy to support amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

[The clauses of Bill 17 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 18 **Judicature Amendment Act, 2007**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to rise on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to bring this matter before committee, Bill 18, the Judicature Amendment Act, 2007. I have one small House amendment to propose to the House with respect to this, and that is with respect to section 23(2) of the act. I will ask the pages to distribute the amendment proposed.

Mr. Chairman, section 23(2) states that "for the purposes of this section, instituting vexatious proceedings or conducting a proceeding in a vexatious manner includes, without limitation, any one or more of the following." The word "section" should be replaced with the word "Part." Bill 18 creates a new part 2.1 in the Judicature Act containing two sections, sections 23 and 23.1. The provisions in section 23(2) are applicable to the whole of part 2.1. In other words, we want to be clear that the provisions apply to both of those sections.

The second House amendment relates to section 23(2)(d), and it states "inappropriately using previously raised grounds and issues in subsequent proceedings" is a factor indicative of vexatious proceed

ings. This is directed at a tendency of some vexatious litigants to bring grounds and issues forward into subsequent lawsuits often against the lawyers who acted for or against them in earlier actions. The report on vexatious litigants done by the Law Reform Commission of Nova Scotia included this factor as an example of vexatious behaviour, and we interpreted the word “inappropriately” to include some level of persistence.

Now, in light of the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, we believe that this should be clarified, and we would propose to amend section (23)(2)(d) to state, and I quote . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the committee has to now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 17. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Hon. members, it's 6 o'clock. The House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, June 14, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/06/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. From our forests and parkland to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a member seated in your gallery, Mr. Jack Hayden, MLA-elect for Drumheller-Stettler. Jack has a long history of service not only to his community but to all people in the province of Alberta. His honesty, integrity, and commitment will be a very welcome addition to this Assembly. It's a very special privilege for me to ask my good friend and new colleague Mr. Hayden to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly staff members from the government of Alberta intern network. These individuals are here today as part of the public service orientation tour. It's obvious in this government that these people could do their job without us, but we could never do ours without them. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to introduce to you and to all Members of the Legislative Assembly special guests from the Gateway Christian school, which, of course, is located in the heart of Alberta, Red Deer, Alberta. I'd like to introduce their teachers that are with them – Carolyn Stolte, Jim Driedger, Tracy Beingessner – and parents Cathy Nicolay, Christine Hopkins, and Chrystal Lloyd. I invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to make two introductions today, again. First of all, a school from Satinwood. Satinwood school is a small school out in the county of Lacombe. There are 31 students and two teachers: Mr. Ted Jardine and Mr. Chris Kooman. With them are six parent helpers: Mrs. Liana Walters, Mrs. Toni VanLanduyt, Mrs. Marlene Capton, Mrs. Bev Knopf, Mrs. Nancy Barnhill, and Mrs. Shauna Case. I would ask these visitors to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have a further introduction to you and to all members of the Assembly, and that is my youngest sister. I have

three brothers and three sisters, and my youngest sister, Laura Prins, is with us today. I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce my executive assistant, Dr. Carol Anderson. She literally runs my life. Also joining her today to my surprise – on May 11, as we know, our Premier celebrated his sixth 50th birthday, but today it's my pleasure to introduce for the first time our new son, Marc, who was born on the Premier's birthday, and my lovely wife, Gail.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, several months ago we needed to fill a staff position in our office, so the minister of advanced education and I jointly got together and stole Ms Lauren Parker from the minister of agriculture. She has been working as the receptionist jointly for the two offices. Lauren is about to leave public service. She's travelling to the Czech Republic, where she's going to become a teacher in early childhood education. I would ask Lauren to stand and receive the welcome from all members of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members in the Assembly Miss Sim Khehra, who is a constituent of mine and who is currently completing her second year of accounting at NAIT. Thereafter, she hopes to go on and complete her chartered accountant designation at the University of Alberta. Meanwhile, she's working and helping me in the constituency office as a STEP student. I'm grateful for her help, and I would ask Sim Khehra to now please rise and receive the warm welcome and thanks of our Assembly. [Remarks in Punjabi] A million congratulations. [As submitted]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What a distinguished pleasure for me today to introduce some volunteers, and if I listed all of their accomplishments, it would take longer than the time allotted. These are community members that unselfishly give of themselves for all kinds of causes, sometimes political ones but very frequently for charitable works, for good works that help out in our community. They really are the backbone and strength of my community. Allow me to introduce with great pleasure Anna Gnyp, Rick McDonald, Thomas Lo, Ted Tennison, Paulette Coburn, and Maria Kuhrt. If they would rise – they are in the members' gallery – and if we would show them the warm appreciation that they so richly deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, my guests are not here right now. I may request a later introduction. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three groups of introductions today, and I'd like to introduce them all individually.

Firstly, it is my great honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you Darlene Hasinoff, the mother of Maureen Hasinoff, who is an accomplished young lady and a valued page in our Assembly, also a resident of the Hairsine community in Edmonton-Manning. Maureen's mom is a customer service representative for our great Edmonton Eskimos. Darlene is here today in the Speaker's gallery. Darlene, please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is of Todd and Brenda Molineaux, who also live in Edmonton-Manning and who have been actively involved within their community as coaches and community activists and many things. Todd is the unofficial mayor for rural north Edmonton and is a leader in many community activities, as is Brenda. Todd is a firefighter in Edmonton, and Brenda is with the Edmonton Police Service. I would also like to make a special note that on July 2 of this year Todd and Brenda will be celebrating their 25th anniversary of marriage. Todd and Brenda, please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Last but certainly not least, Mr. Speaker, is my good friend Oliver Lepps. Oliver is an accomplished heavy hoisting expert, long known as a master in his trade all over western Canada and in the north. Oliver is a leader in the Guyanese community in Alberta and is well known as a community activist to many political leaders, both past and present. Oliver and his wife, Mavis, have raised a tremendous family, many leaders in their own right. I ask all members of this Assembly to give a very warm welcome to this great Albertan, Oliver Lepps.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Pascal Ryffel. Pascal was born in Switzerland, moved to Canada with his family in 1993. He has a degree in sociology from the University of Alberta and enjoys the constantly changing political environment of Alberta. I don't know who wrote this. He was president of the University of Alberta Amnesty International chapter in 2004-05. Pascal joined our NDP caucus team this May as our sessional outreach assistant. Before joining us here at the Legislature, he spent a few years overseas travelling and working in various countries, including Russia, Kosovo, and Iraq. I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mathieu Roy. Mathieu joined our NDP caucus team in mid-May. He's a participant of the Quebec/Alberta student exchange and is currently a caucus assistant in the NDP opposition. Mathieu is from Drummondville, Quebec, and is completing his honours degree in political studies at Bishop's. He is a recipient of the millennium excellence scholarship and the Florence May Foreman scholarship. Mathieu has been of great assistance this past month. We appreciate all of his hard work and enthusiasm, and I would now ask that he please rise.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Alejandro Pachon. Alejandro

originally hails from Bogotá, Colombia, where he completed a bachelor of arts degree in sociology. After finishing that degree, he moved to Ibagué, a smaller city in Colombia, and worked as a teacher for the SOS-Kinderdorf International organization, an NGO focused on neglected and abandoned children and orphans. He arrived in Canada five years ago to study English and French and decided to stay here and has since completed another degree in political science from the University of Alberta. In his free time he works on a research project about armed conflict and peace in his native Colombia, and whatever time remains he spends with his young son Sebastian. We are pleased to have Alejandro join the NDP caucus team as a sessional policy field analyst. He's done an amazing job over the months that he's been with us. I will now ask Alejandro to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three exceptional individuals that I'll call political Sherpas as they help me try and climb this political mountain under extreme conditions and thin air and all the other conditions they might suffer. I've got Steve Ellingson, Jonathon Iverson, and the third one, David Strong, here that help me out a great deal, the Alberta Alliance caucus. I'd like them to rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? Then, hon. members, let me do some introductions as well. On June 12 of this week two by-elections were held in the province of Alberta, but seven years and two days ago, on June 12, 2000, elected to this Assembly was the now-serving Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Tomorrow, June 15, is the 14th anniversary of the election of 1993. At that time, elected to the Assembly for their first terms were the following individuals: the hon. gentleman who now serves as the Premier of the province of Alberta, the hon. Minister of Environment, the hon. Minister of Finance, the hon. Member for Calgary-East, the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek. Fourteen years ago tomorrow.

head:

Members' Statements

Tribute to Fathers

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, this is a tribute to fathers. The humour belongs to Phil Callaway. The sentiments are mine. When I got married, fatherhood was not the first thing on my mind. In fact, kids can be disgusting. They stuff peas in their ears and corn down their diapers. They blow things out their noses, and then they want a kiss. With little money at my disposal, I believed that poverty was hereditary. You get it from your kids. But then one night my beautiful wife stood before me in some rather expensive lingerie and said: honey, let's have kids, tons of them. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Twenty-eight years ago I met the first two of my four children. Yes, twins. I would hold them like two little footballs, one head in each hand, and stroll down the mall proud as can be. Then came my daughters. I tell you, girls are sweet on their dads. They can

manipulate your heart like no one else. I've taken my kids into the wilderness and pushed them up mountains. Character building, I told them. They whined the whole way. Now I whine while they push me. I taught them to skate and play hockey. Now I can't match their strides. I've learned that having adventures and experiences with your kids is more important than buying them stuff. It has been an awesome ride.

Sunday is Father's Day. I want to thank my heavenly Father for the privilege of being a father and now a grandfather. I thank Him for the wonderful father that I have. God understands that not every kid has a good father and declares Himself to be the Father to the fatherless. I want to thank all fathers and encourage you in what you do with and for your kids. It is the most important and most rewarding responsibility you will ever have in life. Happy Father's Day.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Climate Change

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently climate change has become a movement popularized by pop culture and media bombardment. The reality is that climate change is a real issue affecting all members of the globe equally. To combat climate change, Albertans do not need to slow our unprecedented rate of growth or our broad, powerful economy. Rather, we must take realistic and efficient measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and live more environmentally conscious lives.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to draw your attention to Climate Change Central. This Alberta not-for-profit organization was established in the year 2000 to incorporate the views of the public and private sectors to address the challenges our resource-based economy has on the environment. As the vice co-chair in the executive I have witnessed practical solutions in working towards the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

The sunniest city in Alberta, Medicine Hat, was the first of 20 municipalities to sign up for the lasso the sun program. This program involves the use of solar modules on rooftops which connect to the power grid. It is expected that this program will reduce 25 megawatt hours of electricity and reduce CO₂ emissions by 22 tonnes every hour. In Lethbridge the waste-water treatment plant replaced its coarse-bubble aeration system with a more efficient fine-bubble system. Just by changing the size of bubbles, more oxygen transfer was achieved and savings of about 2,000 megawatt hours of electricity per year.

As of last year the projects administered by the government of Alberta through Climate Change Central resulted in \$2.8 million in energy savings and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 39,600 tonnes annually. Mr. Speaker, these are only examples of a couple of successes of Climate Change Central, and with progressive thinking like this, we can achieve more without compromising our growth.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ukrainian Shumka Dancers

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, Edmonton's exciting Ukrainian Shumka Dancers have been described as outstanding artistic ambassadors for Edmonton, as a jewel in the crown of Alberta, and as a Canadian cultural icon. Since 1959 Shumka has preserved, promoted, and presented Ukrainian arts and culture through dance, music, costume, and folklore. They have

evolved and developed enormously over 48 years and have performed throughout Canada, the U.S.A., China, Japan, Africa, Russia, Ukraine, and many, many other locations, including command performances for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, for Prime Ministers and Presidents, and special performances alongside great artists such as Anne Murray, Julie Andrews, Christopher Plummer, and others.

Ever mindful of their roots, however, Shumka has always presented most of its concerts right here in Alberta: in our cities, in our towns, and in dozens of rural communities. To date, about 400 dancers count themselves as former Shumka dancers, and I'm proud to say that that number includes myself, my wife, our son, and our daughter. We are all Shumka alumni.

1:20

This past weekend the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers Alumni Association unveiled the Shumka stage in the heart of Louise McKinney park in Edmonton's beautiful river valley. The Shumka stage is a truly marvellous performance venue that will be available to local performing groups and visitors and to service clubs through the city of Edmonton's community development department. I want to congratulate the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers Alumni Association on completing this legacy project, and I wish to thank the city of Edmonton, the government of Alberta, the government of Canada, and numerous private corporations and individuals for their contributions and/or support.

Thank you also to the founding artistic director, Chester Kuc, to subsequent artistic directors Orest Semchuk, John Pichlyk, George Chrunik, Gordon Gordey, to associate director Dave Ganert, to the Shumka alumni president, John Eshenko, and to all Shumka alumni who helped make this project a reality.

Well done and congratulations, Shumka and Shumka alumni.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Assistance for Low-income Seniors

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Seniors Advisory Council I'd like to congratulate the mayor and council of the city of Edmonton for running a program that helps low-income seniors. The city and the province each have programs which help senior homeowners to get financial relief on their municipal taxes. The city of Edmonton has the seniors' homeowner grant program, which gives a payment to 9,400 low-income senior households. This year city council set the payment at \$63. This is the third year that the city has offered the program. The government of Alberta's education property tax assistance program provides funding for senior homeowners to offset any increase in the education component of the property tax. More than 24,000 households in Edmonton receive an average of \$95.

Governments helping seniors is not unique. However, this partnership is unique because governments are working together to help seniors better. The city of Edmonton funds their programs, and they identify homeowners. The government of Alberta determines which households are seniors through the universal education property tax program. It determines which are low-income seniors by using information from the Alberta seniors' benefit program, and it produces cheques which reflect payments under both the city and the Alberta programs. Because the governments work together to administer this program, seniors do not need to fill out two sets of forms. They receive one cheque, and taxpayers save on the administrative and mailing costs.

I want to congratulate the mayor and council for the city of Edmonton for being so thoughtful and caring and helping so many

Edmonton seniors deal with rising living costs. I challenge other municipalities in the province to introduce efficient programs like this one to help out their senior residents.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Parks and Protected Areas

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's 504 parks and protected areas are a priceless resource. They contribute hugely to our quality of life, they improve the economy through tourism, and they support the protection of our precious natural environment. But according to a report released yesterday by CPAWS, this government must do more to ensure that our parks are properly protected and maintained. The report is quite critical of this government, noting that our parks are understaffed and that protected areas must be expanded to shield a much larger percentage of the environment from development.

As those protected areas expand, this government must ensure that funding can adequately keep up with the increase, as it has failed to do in the last 15 years. The report notes that Alberta has the weakest parks legislation in the country. This is a dreadful shame and an appalling truth, considering that Alberta is the steward of some of the most precious and beautiful wilderness on the entire planet.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, as stewards of Alberta's environment this government must do its part to protect the integrity and diversity of the province's wildlife. The General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2005 report shows that over 10 per cent of Alberta wildlife is at risk. The loss of so many species would be catastrophic. The government must act now to address this serious threat to our environment.

As Albertans we have a sacred duty to take care of the land and wildlife that we have been so fortunate to inherit. I would ask this government to take its duty seriously and to strengthen its commitment to our parks and protected areas.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Multiculturalism

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are winners, not whiners. That is why so many want to move to Alberta, to live in our Alberta, and to become Albertans. It is not only because of oil and other rich resources that people want in. It is because of the can-do, make-it-happen attitude that has grown from our rich tradition and history.

Part of that rich history is our aboriginal heritage. National Aboriginal Day is on June 21, and Alberta will again let that rich basis of our heritage shine. That week will see many celebrations and will also see widespread recognition of our First Nations and Inuit and Métis communities in the media and in our minds. I urge all to attend one of the celebrations and to honour our aboriginal heritage in Alberta.

Another crucial part of our Alberta heritage is our multicultural strength and diversity. Alberta is a model for the world on living in harmony. All nations are becoming multicultural as the world becomes smaller, but in the 49 countries that I have seen in my short time on this Earth, Canada and especially Alberta are certainly the safest and most secure area on the planet, especially for those who want to raise a family.

June 27 is Canadian Multiculturalism Day. In Edmonton we have heritage days on the August long weekend. It is the most well-attended festival in Alberta. We have the wonderful diversity of

dance and culture that has grown from our multiculturalism. We have the safety that grows from Albertans understanding the cultural background of others while at the same time celebrating that we are all Canadians. We even have great artists like Cheremosh going on a trip to China to showcase one of Alberta's great cultural heritage expressions, that of Ukrainian dance.

Even the effort to have multiculturalism in our Canadian Constitution was led out of Alberta, with the great former mayor of Edmonton, Laurence Decore, leading that charge. I am sure he'd be proud of the continued efforts for multiculturalism today in Alberta. I am sure he would be a supporter of our new Premier and his government.

Please attend all multicultural events on June 27 and at other times this summer. Let's grow Alberta and our understanding of others.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House Kristen Lawson from the law firm Miller Thomson, one of the petitioners for Bill Pr. 1, CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act. Though not up for debate today, the bill is currently before the House. Now, if Kristen would please rise in the members' gallery, I'd encourage everyone to give her a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very exciting day for me and for all members of the Alberta Liberal caucus because I rise today to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly a new colleague, the MLA-elect for Calgary-Elbow for the Alberta Liberals, Mr. Craig Cheffins. Joining Craig is his wife, who worked so hard on the campaign, Jocelyn Barton-Cheffins, and their son Sam Cheffins. Please give them a warm reception. Thank you.

Joining them are a number of other candidates, in particular the candidate who worked so hard for us in Drumheller-Stettler without success – and we all know that can happen – Mr. Tom Dooley, who is here with his wife, Dani. They worked incredibly hard. Win or lose, we all know how much participation is needed in the democratic process. Thank you so much.

We also have several other people with us. I believe Tom and Dani's son John Dooley is here – he managed their campaign, a recent grad of a political science program – and several other candidates for the Alberta Liberals: Aman Gill from Edmonton-Mill Creek; Keith Elliott and his hard-working wife, Gwen Elliott, from Wetaskiwin-Camrose; Bill Fraser from Stony Plain; Dawit Isaac, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview; Carole Oliver, Calgary-Fort; Bill Kurtze, Calgary-Hays; Jim Kane, Edmonton-Calder; Sandeep Dhir, Edmonton-Manning; Nancy Cavanaugh, Edmonton-Whitemud; Darshan Kang, Calgary-McCall, and one of his close assistants, Avinash Khangura, from Calgary-McCall as well; Pat Murray, Calgary-North Hill; and with them the executive director of the Alberta Liberals, Kieran Lablanc.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the competition. Please give them a warm welcome. Thank you very much.

head: 1:30

Royal Assent

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Assembly approved a motion earlier this week which would see the Honourable Lieutenant Governor call upon the Assembly.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Hon. members, in the absence of the Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms I'm going to do something that's never been done before. I've received a letter from the pages who are retiring or leaving, and I was so impressed by the letter that in this interim period I'm going to call upon the head page, Jennifer Huygen, to come forward, stand on the Speaker's dais, and read to you her letter.

Ms Huygen:

Mr. Speaker, as the Third Session of the 26th Legislature comes to a close, we would like to take this opportunity to share our gratitude for the amazing opportunity that has been bestowed on us through our service to the province of Alberta as Pages.

Firstly, we would like to thank you Mr. Speaker, all Members of the Legislative Assembly, the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Table Officers, the Legislative Assembly Security Staff, the rest of the Pages, and all those in and around the Legislature who have contributed to this unforgettable experience.

In an article published in the Edmonton Journal on Monday, February 10, 1913, the Alberta Pages are described as "bright streaks of mischief". Some things never change. On the other hand, from our humble vantage points at the front and back of the Chamber, we have witnessed growth and transformation within the Assembly and each Member who works so hard for the betterment of our province. We have also noticed a remarkable change within ourselves – we entered this building as teenagers and now leave as young adults, ready to tackle the world.

Whether we were here for one year or four years, we learned that politicians don't operate in black and white. Rather the experiences and ideas that we have seen emerge in this Chamber have opened our eyes to the human nature of politics.

Not many people have had the opportunity to walk this floor and serve the distinct people that make up the Legislative Assembly, and as each of us leaves this Chamber today we will be able to take with us vivid memories of all night debates, visits from members of the Royal Family, inspiring speeches, jokes and new friendships. This is why the Page Programme truly is more than mere employment.

It has truly been an honour and a privilege to work on the floor of this Assembly, and for this, we simply say, thank you!

Yours sincerely,

Maureen Hasinoff, Jennifer Huygen, Samantha Johnston, Taddes Korris, Kaley Pederson, Adam Pisani, and Danielle Wiebe.

[Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Isn't that marvellous? She was given no warning. That's the Alberta kid of today.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, and the Premier entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne]

His Honour: Hon. members, please be seated.

The Speaker: May it please His Honour, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta has at its present sittings passed certain bills to which and in the name of the Legislative Assembly I respectfully request your Honour's assent.

The Clerk: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- 26 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007
- 29 Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007
- 30 Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007
- 32 Animal Health Act
- 33 Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act
- 39 Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007
- 44 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated his assent]

The Clerk: In Her Majesty's name His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour and the Premier left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, while we await the return of the Premier and the beginning of the question period, I'm going to call on the hon. Deputy Speaker for some words.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Deputy Chair of Committees and myself and, indeed, all the members of the Assembly I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the pages for their wonderful service to the members of the Assembly this past session.

For those in the galleries that may not be familiar with what the pages do, they're the young men and women who are constantly scurrying about the Assembly assisting members and delivering documents and very important communications throughout the day and into the long hours of the night during evening sessions.

Sadly and unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, at least for us, seven of the pages will not be returning this fall. With the generous donations of all the members I've obtained some gifts for those retiring pages, and they will be sent out to them within the next day or two. I would especially like to acknowledge the outstanding service of those who are retiring. As mentioned earlier by Jennifer, they are Maureen

Hasinoff, Jennifer Huygen, Samantha Johnston, Taddes Korris, Kaley Pederson, Adam Pisani, and Danielle Wiebe.

I would like to invite all of the members to show their appreciation for the wonderful service of these fine young Albertans.

The Speaker: While we await the beginning of question period – I've got some numbers and statistics that I'll be providing to members at the conclusion of question period, but before we do that, there's a very interesting thing that's going to happen in the year 2007. On September 18, 2007, the current government of Alberta will surpass the length of service of the government of Alberta that served from 1936 to 1971 in number of days. The service then will be 13,157 days on September 18, 2007.

head: 1:40

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Public/Private Partnerships for School Construction

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a media conference in Calgary this morning the Minister of Education said that P3 contracts were required to build schools here in Alberta because, and I quote, the Treasury is going broke. End quote. My first question is to the Premier. Is the Treasury really going broke, or is the truth that the minister is simply scaremongering?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, today the Minister of Education made announcements both in Calgary and Edmonton with respect to 18 new schools being built. The plan announced today is going to build these schools quicker, much more efficiently, and at less cost. That's the real good-news story. Eighteen schools built immediately, starting with a template, and it's good news for all the school boards that participated.

Dr. Taft: Well, actually, it may be news to the Premier, but there's no proof whatsoever of anything you just said. The Auditor General of Alberta stated in his report of '04-05 that a detailed comparison should be made of P3s between the public and private financing models. With today's announcement the government is stating that it has already committed itself to P3s, that no contractor has been announced, nor any cost savings provided. To the Premier: has the government undertaken a full comparison of costs in building these schools, and if not, why is this project already being announced as a P3?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General also said that we should always look at alternative financing, public/private partnerships, for major infrastructure. The other thing, also, is that we have a policy in place that we will be doing cost comparisons with respect to the projects, but the Auditor did say: please consider public/private partnerships as you move on large infrastructure investment.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier has confirmed, in fact, that the homework hasn't been done on these P3 cases, will the Premier admit that there is no business case whatsoever in his government's hands to justify building these schools through P3s, and if he has it, will he make it public?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the last time we had a debate in the House over a public/private partnership was when I introduced, with

the support of all of our colleagues, the southeast leg of the Anthony Henday. That construction is going to be completed this fall. It's going to save millions of dollars. It's going to be complete flow-through traffic, done on time, much cheaper, and much more efficiently. That's what we're going to do. We're going to be bold in our policies. We're going to move ahead and not listen to the chatter that's just going to drag Alberta down. We're looking forward to the future.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Horse-racing Industry

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. This government's favourite P3 is its one with the horse-racing industry. The horse-racing industry knows all about the Alberta advantage. Their subsidy has gone up from \$12 million to \$45 million last year to a projected \$56 million this year. The industry indicates that the new deal they're striking may be even more generous than the last one, a new deal that's going to last 10 years. Ten years. To the Premier: can the Premier confirm that this 10-year subsidy to the horse-racing industry is going to cost Alberta's government over half a billion dollars?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again completely wrong information. It's not going to cost the government any money. It is the participation at the slots at the horse-racing facilities. People participate. The horse-racing industry gets a share of it. If the people don't participate, don't support the horse-racing industry, then there won't be anything going to the horse industry. So there's no money coming from the taxpayer. Those that willingly want to play the slots, they're the ones that are going to contribute to the horse-racing industry, not the government of Alberta. Again, that's another case of misleading information, and we've heard that now for – what? – 45 days from the same opposition. No basis to it all. Again, misleading. If he thinks I'm not telling the truth, get up and correct me. You know what? He can't because he gave the wrong information once again.

Dr. Taft: This is lively. Mr. Speaker, if the Premier knew his own budget, he'd see that there's a line item for horse racing right in his own budget. Is he saying that he's not responsible for his own budget or he doesn't even know his own budget? How can this Premier possibly justify throwing hundreds of millions of dollars at horse racing when so many communities in this province need schools? Why do horses take precedence over schoolchildren?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if it wasn't for participation in lotteries in terms of the share that goes to the government, the government wouldn't get any share. So the horse-racing industry gets some compensation from those people that play the slots; part of that comes to the Alberta government as well. But, again, day 45, conspiracy after conspiracy, they have not been able to prove anything but just kind of twisting words. We're ending session today, and – you know what? – the attitude still has not changed. Always misleading the public of the province of Alberta. Every time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in Alberta thousands of kids went to school hungry and sat in classrooms hungry because there's no school lunch support from this government in Alberta, not

one cent. My question is to the Premier. How can this Premier defend a government that spends \$56 million this year alone on propping up horse racing and allows thousands of kids to go to school hungry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again misleading. The government is not spending \$56 million. It's depending on the participation. You know, notwithstanding the doom and gloom that the Liberal Party of this province creates – and they spread it across the whole country, the doom and gloom – 36,000 people so far this year chose the province of Alberta as their home, and there are more to come. You know why? Because they see hope. They see job opportunities. That's why they're moving here in spite of the doom that keeps coming from that side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, we're here to lead into the next century, not listen to this kind of doom and gloom. I've got to be very careful how I choose my words in the public Assembly. But it's constant. Yet you know what? It is not destroying the hope of those people that want to seek their future in this province.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Temporary Rent Guidelines

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirty-six thousand people moved here last year, and a few of them even found a place to live. You know, despite the reality that the housing market is off the charts, the government maintains its neo-con philosophy of no market intervention no matter what. Yet despite an enormous shift in the market over the past decade in oil and gas, the Conservatives have gladly maintained a cap on the percentage of royalties that oil sands projects pay to the resource owners, the people of the province of Alberta. To the Premier: why, then, does the government refuse to allow Albertans and show Albertans the same respect and place a temporary cap on rents in this province until the market stabilizes?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, this government has not placed any cap. It's a percentage. The royalties are based on a percentage. So, again, wrong information. The other thing is: there's no such thing as temporary. You know, they're trying to slide that in. One party says "temporary guidelines." This one just says "temporary." From all the information we have, putting in rent controls is actually going to decrease the spaces available. Our role here is to work with municipalities and the federal government and increase the number of spaces. We're doing that. There were announcements made in Edmonton. We'll continue working with the city of Calgary and other municipalities across this province. We're going to be proactive.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta should be the place where people prosper, and some do, the rich do, but the poor get poorer, and the middle class have to work harder and harder just to stay in place. This government is hiding behind a philosophy of no market intervention to deal with the out-of-control housing market, but this is a double standard. Fact: the percentage of royalties paid by oil sands project owners cannot exceed 25 per cent of net revenue. In essence the royalties have been capped – yes, capped – for the past decade. To the Premier: why are the Conservatives okay capping the level of royalties paid by industry to Albertans but not with capping the level of rent that Albertans have to pay landlords? He's right. Apparently, with oil there's no such thing as temporary.

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: I don't know. I guess there was no question in there. He was trying to defend the mistake he made earlier in terms of saying that there's a cap. There isn't. It's based on percentage. With more activity we get more of a cut of the action as owners of the resource. Mr. Speaker, that is why we're having a very open, transparent royalty review. The results and the recommendations coming forward should be complete by the end of August. All that information will be made public. Albertans will be able to have a look at it and assess for themselves if they're getting a fair return as owners and also find the balance between the shareholders and also those companies that are making billions of dollars of investment in a very volatile marketplace.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This side of the House has nothing to defend.

It's not just oil sands project owners who get a sweetheart deal. Let's try this one. For conventional natural gas the cap rate, or maximum royalty rate, was implemented in 1993 at a buck forty-seven a gigajoule. Natural gas is currently projected to be selling at \$6.75 a gigajoule, so the maximum amount that Albertans receive is capped. To the Premier once again: why is this Conservative government okay capping the level of royalties paid by industry to Albertans but not with capping the level of rent that Albertans have to pay to their landlords?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the other side hasn't done anything. They haven't done anything, so they have nothing to defend.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Public/Private Partnerships for School Construction

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Normally the announcement of new schools is something the government would be proud to announce. Normally new schools would be announced before a by-election, not after. Normally new schools would be good news and not kept under wraps until the last day of the Legislature session. But 18 schools built by P3s in a discredited method of construction is a waste of public money. Cost overruns can almost be guaranteed. I want to ask the Premier why he kept the P3 model for building these schools until the very last day of session so that it couldn't be properly debated in this Assembly.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what did he want us to do: announce it after session finished? You know, if it had been announced before the by-election, it would have been perceived as: you're doing something to win the election in Calgary-Elbow. So you can't win. We're proceeding; we're not holding back. Here's an idea. We talked about it during the leadership campaign. We're moving forward regardless of what bantering we hear from the opposition.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the P3 model, far from being the innovative and new way of building public infrastructure that the Minister of Education likes to say, is a proven and discredited means of wasting public money and contributing taxpayers' money to the government's corporate friends. I want to ask the Premier if he's going to stand in this House and give us the details, including the

public-sector comparator for those schools, so that we know exactly how much it would cost if they built it through the public system, in the traditional way, which is the proven way to save taxpayers money.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would have been aware, that is our policy. We do always follow a very strict policy in terms of a public comparator model. The other is: we also punt it to a third-party committee to have a look at those comparisons. You know, in this particular case we're moving forward. These are schools that are badly needed. We're working with the school boards, and the school boards are very co-operative. This is a new approach. In terms of the comments made earlier, our neighbours to the west, the government of Premier Campbell, has moved in the public/private partnerships now for at least three years and has been very successful.

The Speaker: I think we have to move on. The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, there's plenty of experience with P3s, including P3 schools in this country, and the Premier just doesn't have to go to his Liberal soulmate in British Columbia. He can look to Nova Scotia to find out exactly what can go wrong with P3s. So I want to ask the Premier again: is he going to make the public comparator available in this House? Will he table it by the end of today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the template is being produced in terms of the schools. We're going to put it out to tender, and once those tenders come back, then we have something to compare to. You don't have anything to compare to unless you get feedback on the kind of tenders that are going to come back from engineers, architects, and the construction firms that are going to pull their resources together and focus on building the schools that were announced today. It's good news for the province of Alberta. It's the largest school investment in many, many years in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Regulatory Reform

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Red tape costs us all. Regulatory burden has become a problem in almost every aspect of our existence. It affects our business, personal, and even our social lives. Paper trails seem endless. Much time is lost. Many regulations are archaic; they make no sense. Most could be made more simple. Respected surveys say that compliance costs \$3.9 billion per year here. That's dead money. This work does not generate new dollars. These costs are huge but do not even count volunteer time wasted. My question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. How can you reassure Albertans that government is constantly vigilant in trying to reduce the burden of regulations on business in our daily lives?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. The hon. member is absolutely right. In many cases the regulatory burden that's been put on by the many different levels of government do far more to stifle business than they do to maintain the balance of business interaction.

Mr. Speaker, when I was first elected, then Premier Klein – I think I complained so much about it – set me up in something called the

dumb rules committee, which, we found out, basically ended up in a regulatory quagmire. Since then we've worked very hard to try and develop an understanding of how we can review the regulatory burden.

At this time the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House is chairing our Regulatory Review Secretariat. Indeed, all regulations that come from the government must go through that committee and be dealt with at that level.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary to the same minister: when might we expect an updated report on regulatory reform from the Regulatory Review Secretariat, and what might we expect from that report?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I think the member must have met with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business because they truly are constantly nipping at us to ensure that we have managed the regulatory burden as well as we can. We have eliminated the review committee and have put all of the responsibility for regulatory review with the regulation secretariat, and when they've completed their review of both process and potential, we'll release it to the public.

Mr. Backs: Again to the Minister of Service Alberta. Certainly, the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, has done some very credible surveys on this matter in understanding things. I understand that the government started many of the movements on this in the '90s, and it was built on by B.C. Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act, speaks to red tape and was introduced here a week ago. It looks to establish a count of all regulations. Such a count was performed for British Columbia in 2001, and this was done in a few months by summer students. When and how can we expect your ministry to bring forward such a count?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we have been approached about trying to follow the regulatory count that the province of British Columbia did. In fact, the opportunity through TILMA to deal with the province of British Columbia offers a good opportunity to learn, but the number of regulations isn't critically as important as what the regulations mean to the everyday Albertan and their ability to either just live their lives or to run their business. So while counting might be a process to a number, it's not the be-all and end-all to determine whether the regulatory burden is, in fact, too extreme. I wouldn't want to prejudice what we might report, but I don't think that the number count is as critically important as removing unnecessary regulation.

But what a treat to have a reasonably intelligent . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Trade with the Netherlands

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the Alberta government and the city of Edmonton had the great honour to have a visit from the Prime Minister of the Netherlands. Members of this caucus and across the way had an opportunity to meet him and talk about economic development opportunities between us and the Dutch. My question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What opportunities came about from this visit?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say, first and foremost, that the flags that fly in the hallway of the rotunda of this great building, of course, speak of the relationship that we have had with the Dutch people during many wars. I want to say today that many members of this Assembly have deep roots going back to Holland and the Netherlands and Canada's role. I want to also say that the Prime Minister chose to visit the province of Alberta, and I believe he did that because of the leadership that has been recognized in this government in terms of the approach we are taking. They actually met with a business delegation at the nanotechnology centre at the University of Alberta. Of course, there was a luncheon hosted at Government House, where many relationships were built relative to the future in technology.

The Speaker: Now we're going to move on to the hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Dutch through Royal Dutch Shell and other companies have huge investments in this province. Do we see further expansion in the oil sands with Royal Dutch Shell?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I can say that the Minister of Energy and myself and the member in this Assembly met in Fort McMurray at the oil sands with Royal Dutch Shell. They were fascinated with the co-operative approach we've had with the government at the federal level relative to a royalty regime that has attracted over a hundred billion dollars to Alberta. In actual fact, Royal Dutch Shell is one of those companies, with over \$10 billion, and it really speaks of the partnership we have and will continue to have in the future, and that was the purpose of the mission to our province.

Mr. VanderBurg: I understand that a Dutch bank, Rabobank, is a well-known, agriculture-based bank and is interested in making some partnerships with Alberta. To the Finance minister: can the Finance minister tell us what is being planned with Rabobank and partnerships with this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much. Certainly, each and every time we get a new bank coming into this province, it is a positive for the province of Alberta. We do like to see the availability of capital in this market, and we like competition. Each and every time there is a new bank coming in here, that allows its resources to be put in Alberta, it means more development for Alberta than is existing presently. Mr. Speaker, through to the hon. member, any time there is a bank that wants to come and put money into Alberta to allow for investment in Alberta, to allow for more growth in Alberta, the better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Postsecondary Education Affordability

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past few years this government has made some grand promises about advanced education. After years of fiscal neglect and skyrocketing tuition it finally appeared that the government had seen the light about the value of postsecondary education, but recently the government has

started backpedalling. Promises made somehow no longer apply. Take, for example, the former Premier's promise of the most affordable postsecondary tuition in the country. Alberta still remains a less affordable place to go to university or college than, for example, Newfoundland or Quebec. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: has the current government now officially reneged on its promise to provide the most affordable tuition in Canada?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, this is what happens when you do your research by reading the daily newspapers: you get the wrong facts. Essentially, what was reported was that we were reviewing whether or not the targets that had been set are still adequate targets. Those targets had been set in 2005, as the member well knows. In fact, if you were to just look at the numbers – and I think that the number reported was 60,000 – and if you looked at the 15,000 seats that we had committed to creating, we're already there. In fact, we may actually exceed that. Indeed, the number of seats that we create may be more; it may be in different places; it will most certainly probably be in different locations. We are working very collaboratively with the postsecondaries.

Mr. Tougas: Well, Mr. Speaker, apparently he didn't listen to the question or heard it very differently, but I didn't ask anything about that. My actual question was – and I'll ask it again: has the current government now officially reneged on its promise to provide the most affordable tuition in Canada? I wasn't asking about spaces; I was asking about tuition.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I simply took the opportunity to correct the hon. member's facts as he saw them, which weren't actually the truth. The affordability framework, which this government has brought forward and this government has acted on – \$25 million worth in this budget is to create the affordability framework that the students and the faculty have talked to us about through the Learning Alberta report. Mr. Speaker, we are well on our way in becoming one of the most affordable places in this country for students to access the pathways for their personal success.

Mr. Tougas: Well, Mr. Speaker, a government that used to crow about the Alberta advantage has now adopted a more downbeat slogan: the price of prosperity. While Alberta used to be a land of unlimited opportunity, there is now a clear government move towards lowering expectations. Rather than live up to a promise, just try to lower expectations on tuition and expansion and try to lower expectations on the access to the future fund. By previous pledges this should be fully topped up to \$3 billion by now but, instead, languishes at a third of that. To the minister: why at a time when surpluses have poured into government coffers has the access to the future endowment been so badly neglected?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the original intent on the access to the future fund was to utilize surplus dollars when they were available for savings. I would suggest to the hon. member that even under the Liberal plan that's on the website, they wouldn't probably have enough money to have put in even the billion dollars, if you did the math, which I don't think they've done.

But I want to go back, Mr. Speaker, to this affordability situation. Affordability in our postsecondary system is not just tuition. It's a lot of the issues that have been brought forward to this House. It is the total question of the quality of the education that the student has, the ability to transfer between our institutions, the transparency of our institutions as it relates nationally and internationally, where the

student wants to create that pathway for their personal success. That's what it's all about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Public/Private Partnerships for School Construction (continued)

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As mentioned earlier in question period, this morning our government announced a new and innovative approach to school funding in Calgary and in Edmonton. This public/private P3 approach will consolidate the design and construction of new schools in these two cities. Can the Minister of Education tell us what the advantages of this new approach to school infrastructure funding will be for the construction of schools in my hometown of Calgary?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think that despite what we've heard in the Legislature today, today was a great day for education in Alberta. As a result of our announcement today we have some 200 families in some 18 communities in Calgary and Edmonton who no longer have to worry about their kids riding school buses to elementary schools in these cities. Now, what we've done is we've announced that we're going to be bundling 18 schools in Calgary and Edmonton through one contractor.

An Hon. Member: How many schools?

Mr. Liepert: There are 18 schools, Mr. Speaker. So what's going to happen is that this will get schools built quicker, it will get them built more efficiently, and frankly what it will do is it will show that we have faith in the private sector despite what these opposition members have.

Mr. Webber: Again to the minister, Mr. Speaker: when can the communities expect construction to begin on these 18 new school projects in Calgary and Edmonton?

Mr. Liepert: Well, what's important in this, Mr. Speaker, is to work jointly with the four school districts because . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Please, please.

Mr. Liepert: We need to work jointly with the four school boards in Calgary and Edmonton, Mr. Speaker, because what we want to ensure is that what we design, that will be the design going forward, is what works for the school boards. The four school districts were elated this morning; 18 communities in Edmonton and Calgary are elated. The only people who aren't happy are the people in the opposition, who know that they're on a losing side in this argument.

Mr. Webber: There's also a great need, Mr. Speaker, for the expansion and renovation of existing schools throughout the Calgary area and, in particular, the Hamptons school in my Calgary-Foothills constituency. Can the minister indicate what timeline he is working with to allow other projects, such as the much-needed additions to existing school facilities, to go forward along with this new P3 model?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I was very clear in my announcement that this is the first effort in getting caught up in our school construction infrastructure. What we also need to do, though, is we have a

number of areas in the province that are growth areas that also require new schools. What won't work in those areas, in all likelihood, is a bundling model like this because there are individual school requirements. So it's going to be my job as part of the cabinet planning committee to ensure that I make the case that some of the unallocated dollars that we have, that schools become the top priority, whether they're in Calgary, Edmonton, or elsewhere in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

2:10 Hub Oil Contaminated Site Cleanup

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Environment minister has stated in this House that it is not the role of Alberta Environment to advocate for environmental protection. To the minister: what, then, if not environmental protection, is the role of Alberta Environment?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the role of the Environment minister and the role of Alberta Environment is twofold: first of all, to ensure that the government and Albertans view decision-making through an environmental lens, to take into account the environmental impact of any decision that the government makes or individuals make and, secondly, to provide the necessary technical advice and expertise so that the decisions that are made using that environmental lens have some validity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1999, eight years ago, the Hub Oil explosion rocked the city of Calgary, killing two employees and causing significant soil and groundwater damage. To the Minister of Environment: was the operator of Hub Oil prosecuted to the full extent of the law, and if not, why not?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's the responsibility of anyone who causes damage to the environment, causes pollution, to clean that pollution up. In this particular case, Hub Oil is working with Alberta Environment, with the various stakeholders to put together a plan to do just that. As long as they continue to own that land, as long as they put in place the necessary provisions to ensure that any contamination does not go beyond the land in question, they're not in contravention of our legislation. So it's up to us to ensure that they follow through on their commitment.

Dr. Swann: That's the result of Bill 29 last year softening our environmental protection legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Hub Oil is refusing to actively treat and dispose of this contamination. At public meetings Hub Oil representatives have repeatedly stated that a risk management plan is too expensive. Could the Minister of Environment please explain how Hub Oil's risk management plan, that shifts responsibility for contamination to other parties, is consistent with the polluter-pays principle?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, in this particular case the risk management plan that has been proposed by Hub Oil has not been approved. That plan is in the process. Had it been approved, it would have been implemented by now. So I think the member actually answers his own question. If the plan was appropriate, if it was going to be approved, if it dealt with all the issues that have been raised by its stakeholders, it would have been approved. It has not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Government Initiatives

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some great things have happened in this province over the last six months. Government restructuring: Liberals didn't like it. Co-operation in the capital region: Liberals didn't like it. TILMA: Liberals didn't like it. Today 18 new schools, three of which are in my area: the Liberals didn't like it. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding the recently announced municipal sustainability initiative, which Liberals don't like. This new municipal funding is for operating and core capital projects. Can the minister tell us what projects municipalities will be able to undertake with this new cash?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the funding of the municipal sustainability initiatives is being sent out in the very near future. The work that was done by municipalities, providing input for some of the guidelines, those guidelines are being sent out to municipalities at the present time. I think it's a good question. One of the prime examples is of the city of Edmonton, where they are spending \$17.4 million on these recommendations to support a rehabilitation plan around the city of Edmonton.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, my first and last supplemental to the same minister. Affordable housing is a very important matter in the capital region and, I imagine, throughout the province. Can the minister advise: how is this money spent relevant to affordable housing, so that the Liberals have something to complain about?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, as you know, this government put \$285 million of new money into affordable housing, and we have municipalities that are working very closely with municipalities on special housing concerns. In fact, the positive input that has been put in is from the city of Calgary. The city of Calgary, who received \$63 million, is spending part of that money on 300 new affordable housing units plus a thousand rent supplements.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Long-term Care Facilities

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's enthusiasm for public health care privatization knows no bounds. Every time they have tried to openly privatize, they have met fierce resistance on the part of an overwhelming number of Albertans; they're proceeding nevertheless. Their latest target is long-term care. In fact, the government has been moving to privatize long-term care for some time. It's privatization by stealth. The Conservatives know it. They just don't want Albertans to. According to documents tabled yesterday by the Minister of Health and Wellness, there has been a steady decrease in the number of publicly operated long-term care beds in the province and at the same time a big increase in the privately owned . . .

The Speaker: Well, thank you, hon. member, now we'll proceed. No, no, no. I'm sorry, hon. member. Remember we've got a rule.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I've obviously anticipated the question that would have been asked. We want to thank him for the direction the government is taking to ensure that the seniors' care is there as

they would desire, in the format that they wish. Yesterday I had the opportunity, for example, of being in the Speaker's constituency at Shepherd's Care. Certainly, this might have been a private care. This is assisted living, not necessarily long-term care, but they have a whole range of facilities here in Edmonton also that can serve the specific needs. It doesn't even mean that you have to transfer the place in which you live. It's a matter sometimes of providing the health to where you are rather than having to make them move from a building to another building.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors' concerns are the last thing this minister wants to address. The fact is that from 2001 to 2006 we lost close to 11,000 publicly run long-term care beds while the number of privately run beds increased by over 900. Why is this government quietly squeezing out quality public health care?

Mr. Melchin: On the contrary, we're actually working towards the direction of aging in place, allowing seniors to be able to live in their own facilities, in their own homes to the extent that they can. Many times those in long-term care actually even progress in health and can go back to assisted or designated assisted living. Their care and their standard of health do change. They're not perpetually having to be in a place where they might have to die.

In respect to whether it's private or public, it has always been a combination of private. The private sector has always participated in the provision of long-term care. That's why there's also a standard, provisions of continuing care that have been put in place to ensure that all facilities meet the requisite high standards of patient care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister knows that there are almost three times as many private supportive living units in Calgary than there are publicly owned, and there are twice as many privately run long-term care beds in Calgary than there are public ones. Why are seniors' lives being put at risk for the sake of a Conservative ideological bias toward privatization at all costs?

Mr. Melchin: Well, we're certainly glad to hear the opposition put on the table that they feel that everything should be public at all costs and that the private sector has no role in our lives. It's quite contrary to the whole development of this great country in which we live, in which you and I can make private choices, can have private ownership and even the provision of services to an individual that are private. In this case it is the level of care that's important and even sustaining a person in their own place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Safety of Human Service Workers

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I raised some crucial questions about the health and safety of human services workers in this province. Unfortunately, I was not able to get the answers that these workers need, so today I will try again. Workers in the Department of Children's Services report the second highest long-term disability rate in government. Overall, many workers feel that the Department of Children's Services has failed to completely implement basic occupational health and safety measures. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and

Industry. What is the minister doing to help Children's Services fully implement occupational health and safety standards?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I have identified in this House on a number of occasions, the occupational health and safety standards apply equivalently to all of those members of our staff that are covered. The questions that were raised yesterday: I've already asked my staff to make sure that we are networking with Children's Services to determine whether or not there is a concern that has been expressed that we should explore. I certainly take very seriously the mandate of trying to make the workplace as safe as possible. So we have taken that consideration. I will be hearing a report back, no doubt, and we'll share that with the hon. member. I know that the hon. member shares concerns about workers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Compassion fatigue is a tremendous problem for human service workers. The nature of social service work and constant case overloading can be both physically and emotionally draining. Of all Alberta government employees, workers in Children's Services comprise the youngest workforce but report the highest use of the employment assistance program, which deals with the emotional/psychological health of government employees. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: what is being done to work with the Minister of Children's Services to reduce the physical and emotional toll caused by compassion fatigue?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that's very specific to the compassion fatigue, and I think that there's a necessity to explore that. I would just say that in 59 centres where we also have in Employment, Immigration and Industry many counsellors, many social workers, many people that deal with compassionate issues related to low income, sometimes very difficult social circumstances in terms of children's benefits, in terms of family conflict, in terms of those kinds of circumstances which are stressors in family life, we have many social workers as well who do a very determined job to try and follow through on behalf of the clients as well as gain support. So we'll look at that in that context.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. Social service workers are often forced to enter alone into situations that armed police officers would not enter without their partners or flak jackets. Workers have told me that they have been called at home and told not to go to work the next day because the threat is too great. All too often social service workers are exposed to death threats, the presence of minor weapons like knives and baseball bats, and illegal drug use. To the Solicitor General: the main problem is that human service workers do not have access to the criminal and police records they need to identify clients that are a potential risk. What is your department doing to facilitate access for these workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member raises a very legitimate concern. We are doing everything that we can in our department to ensure that all of those who work in the social programs have the information that they require to deal with their clients in an appropriate manner.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Municipal Sustainability Initiative Funding

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. As the chair of rural caucus I've heard that some municipalities did not receive as much grant funding under the new municipal sustainability initiative as they did in the last fiscal year for capital and operating expenses. Now, this seems inequitable. So what steps is the minister prepared to take in order to level this playing field?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to emphasize that this government is responsive to the needs of municipalities. My ministry and myself have reviewed the situation, and I'm very pleased to announce that we are going to be providing supplemental support to those municipalities. We have said all along that no municipality should receive less, and we are supporting that with \$1.4 billion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's very good news. My first supplement to the same minister: who will qualify for this targeted investment? How do they get in on this action?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, last year there was a program in place, the target investment program. Some municipalities received more funding from the target investment program than they did from the municipal sustainability initiative. There are 56 smaller municipalities that are involved. Those are the municipalities that will be receiving that funding. There is one town, one municipality, and I believe 54 villages. Those municipalities will be contacted in the very near future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that municipalities need the assurance of long-term, predictable funding in order to do their planning, can the minister tell us how long this funding will remain in place?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have committed to consulting with the municipalities and the organizations on the funding in years 2 and 3 and in the future. Year 2 we will have \$500 million available, year 3 \$600 million, and there is a commitment at one point to be ramped up to \$1.4 billion up to year 10. I can assure municipalities that we will be working with them in ensuring that that funding will be delivered to best address their needs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Farm Fuel Rebate Program

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the recent budget debates the Minister of Agriculture and Food downplayed the fact that his department had not reviewed or monitored the farm fuel benefit program. The minister claimed that desk audits had been completed as we go along. Desk audits seem like something that Enron would use to validate their budget. We know that millions of

dollars have been wasted. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Will the minister admit that he was wrong when he made this statement, that no desk audits have in fact been completed and that the farm fuel benefit program has not been examined by this government since 1997?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, yes, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar made some interesting allegations during the Committee of Supply, and he probably will come back to those again. I did not believe state that desk audits are completed. I said that we are now doing desk audits, which is the initial process that we're going to go through in our review.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. If this government would follow the Alberta Liberals' advice and get rid of all the freeloaders on this farm fuel benefit program, there would be extra money for eligible farmers so that they could see a real drop in their fuel prices when they need it this spring. Now, will the minister commit to having a full audit done of this program before the next general election to determine how many millions of dollars have been lost, or does this minister require another 10 years to accomplish that task?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, this is about the third time I've been asked about following the Liberals' lead. I think, probably, it has to be in the Liberals' handbook that all farmers are inherently dishonest because it comes back to that, it comes back to that, and it comes back to that.

An Hon. Member: He called them all freeloaders.

Mr. Groeneveld: He did. He absolutely did.

Mr. Speaker, we started the program. The Auditor General has called our attention to it, and we're proceeding as we go ahead. The hon. member also alleged in the paper a week ago that \$17 million to \$34 million probably was being cheated on by farmers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If anyone should know, it should be the hon. minister, but it was Tory city slickers that ridiculed agricultural support programs during the PC leadership race. The current Minister of Finance knows all about it, as does the current minister of community development and services because it was his EA that was complaining about agricultural grants, not Alberta Liberals.

Now, can the minister explain why farmers in other jurisdictions such as Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and British Columbia have only seen minor increases in their electricity costs while Alberta farmers have seen a 38 per cent increase in theirs?

Mr. Groeneveld: Probably the biggest problem: there's not a whole lot of Liberal city slickers. That's probably a problem from the other side of the House.

As I said before, I'm a farmer. I wouldn't farm anywhere else in Canada, and I'm not paying any more for my power and fuels than anyone else.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Law Enforcement Review Board

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A key factor in maintaining public confidence in policing is timely and effective decisions from bodies such as the Law Enforcement Review Board, which hears appeals from Albertans who have a complaint concerning police officer conduct and from police and peace officers who have been the subject of discipline arising from a complaint. However, the board has been without a permanent chair for some time, hampering its effectiveness and creating a large backlog of cases. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can he tell us what is being done to ensure that the board has the leadership it needs to function effectively?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to confirm that Calgary lawyer John Phillips has been appointed chair of the Law Enforcement Review Board effective today. Mr. Phillips has 30 years' experience practising law in Alberta. His broad awareness of law enforcement and policing issues and processes makes him a valuable addition to the board. The appointment of Mr. Phillips ensures that the board's work will not be interrupted.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police recently passed a resolution calling for increased staff and funding for the Law Enforcement Review Board. Can the minister tell us what his department is doing to address the backlog of cases before the board? When will these cases be cleared up?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, we have taken a number of steps to address some of these concerns brought forward. We are increasing the number of board members from seven to nine, we're having two or more board members sit as a separate panel, allowing two hearings to proceed at the same time, we have now built a permanent dedicated hearing room to help address scheduling issues, and we have made the chair a full-time position.

head:

Statement by the Speaker

Spring Session Statistics

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 86 questions and answers today.

At this point hon. members might be interested in some numbers and statistics, recognizing that the Legislature will continue to sit, so these numbers will be amended tomorrow to give them current validity.

In this spring session of 2007 this is day 45. We've had 11 evening sittings. Last year, in 2006, we sat 42 days in the spring, including 28 evening sittings. In other words, we sat longer in 2007 than in 2006.

As of 6 o'clock last night this Assembly has sat for 14,873 minutes compared to 14,395 in 2006. In other words, there are nearly 500 more minutes as of 6 o'clock last night. If we sit today till 6 o'clock, that will be another 300 more minutes. That will be 800 more minutes, or 12 hours, more this year than last year. The number of hours as of 6 o'clock last night was 247 hours and 53 minutes compared to 239 hours and 55 minutes last year.

Thus far the words spoken in this Assembly this year are 2,014,117 as of 6 o'clock last night. Last year in the spring sitting it was 1,845,345 words.

Oral Question Period. This year, in 2007, we've had 10 question periods with 15 sets of questions, a set being three questions and three answers; 11 question periods with 16 sets of questions; and four with 17 sets of questions. In 2006 the Assembly had six with 15 sets. Remember: this year it was 10. Last year there were two with 16. This year there were 11. There were also four with seven.

The number of questions and answers in this Assembly in 2007 as of this question period, which ended just a minute or two ago, is 3,896 questions and answers compared to the 3,151 in 2006, a difference of 745. That does not include the 49 occasions when more than one minister responded to the same question.

This year the number of government bills that have thus far received third reading and Royal Assent is 20 compared to 42 last year. Government bills left on the Order Paper that we have – we'll see some progress, presumably, this afternoon – are 25 as compared to two in 2006. Since 1971 the number of bills left on the Order Paper varied between zero and 10 with the exception of this year, with 25; 1971, in which there were 22; and 1974, when there were 20.

Private members' public bills that have received Royal Assent is one in 2007, the same as in 2006. Since 1993, when the new provisions were made for private members' public bills to go through the process to actually receive royal assent, we've now had 41 of them.

In terms of sessional papers there'll be a few more tablings coming up, but it's essentially the same as last year. So far this year it's been 641; last year it was 646.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to read the preamble, but I am pleased to present a petition with 30 further names regarding rental difficulties that people are having in this province. The one point I would like to make is that these names were collected at the housing listening forum that was held recently at the Edmonton public library, and it's notable that the first two names on this petition under the area for address have indicated no fixed address.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three petitions today. The first one has 42 signatures, and it is the one that's calling on the government to finish the overpasses and interchanges at the locations where the Anthony Henday, the Edmonton ring road, intersects Lessard Road, Callingwood Road, and Cameron Heights Drive.

The second one has 60 signatures, and it's the one that is calling on the government to

take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

I'm under the impression that this brings the total number of signatures to 1,940.

The third petition, Mr. Speaker, is the one talking about the pay parity for workers who work with people with disabilities. I've submitted it before. Today I'm submitting 152 signatures, which brings the total to 3,065.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have today a petition signed by 176 people who are concerned with staff remuneration for those who are working with persons with developmental disabilities, and they are from 11 communities: Arrowwood, Vulcan, Carmangay, Blackie, Champion, Nanton, Milo, Calgary, Lomond, Mossleigh, and Okotoks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by a number of constituents from Edmonton-Centre. It's the same petition that's been circulating, urging the government to take immediate and meaningful measures to help low-income and other Albertans with the escalating and frequent increases in monthly rental costs.

The Speaker: Before we proceed on this matter, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce a group visiting from China. They're individuals employed by the Ministry of Finance in China. They're up in the public gallery. They're being hosted by the University of Alberta School of Business. They are being accompanied, I believe, by John Doyle, if I'm correct. I will practice my Chinese pronunciation here if everyone will indulge me.

All the guests may rise and remain standing if you like. From the Financial Bureau of Gansu, Zhang Qingguo; from the Financial Bureau of Guangdong, Lin Hong; from the Financial Bureau of Tianjin, Han Lin; from the Financial Bureau of Hainan, Qui Xiaona; from the Financial Bureau of Shanxi, Sun Xiangrong; from the Financial Bureau of Shandong, Xia Ying; from the Financial Bureau of Xinjiang, Liu Yan; from the Financial Bureau of Chongqing, Leng Xiang; from the Financial Bureau of Changzhou, Wang Xin; from the Financial Bureau of Zhejiang, Hong Xiaoran; from the Financial Bureau of Shaanxi, Wang Bin; from the Financial Bureau of Xianyang, Nan Yan; from the Financial Bureau of Qinghai, Kui Yinghong; and from the Financial Bureau of Fujian, Hu Shanhong. I would ask everybody, please, to give them a warm, Canadian welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Ni hao.

head: 2:40

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 46

Alberta Utilities Commission Act

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce for first reading Bill 46, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation will separate the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board into two separate regulatory bodies: a new Energy Resources Conservation Board and the Alberta utilities commission. An updated regulatory system supports this government's commitment to effectively manage growth pressures. There is an increase in applications brought on by increased oil and gas activity and the demand for electricity generation and transmission. Alberta has a world-renowned regulatory system for our energy industry, and this restructuring builds on that success and will ensure that Albertans have access to a robust regulatory authority as we develop our resource and utility systems. I would like to thank all the participating agencies for their co-operation and hard work on this important piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 46 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Bill 214 Healthy Futures Act

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce private member's Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act.

The purpose of Bill 214 is to require government policy decisions to undergo a health impact assessment to examine a policy's effect on a wide range of factors like income, education, and environment that influence the health of our society. It is more sensible and cost effective to focus on prevention rather than to deal with problems created by unhealthy public policy.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to give my thanks for the assistance I received from staff Lori Deluca and Glen Hughes and also to express my appreciation to the table officers for their help and their immense assistance on this.

Thank you so much.

[Motion carried; Bill 214 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today a presentation to the Alberta Residential Tenancies Advisory Committee, very clearly a nonpartisan group, on the experience with rent control in Ontario, showing what an absolutely disastrous effect it had on the development of rental properties and how it affected the most vulnerable in society and their ability to access any kind of lodging under rent controls.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness to table an e-mail from a constituent of his from the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud, one Kayla England, who raises some questions and expresses some concerns about seismic testing at Marie Lake.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. Youthful democracy is alive and well at Sir Winston Churchill high school in Calgary-Varsity as my first two tablings today will attest. The first set of letters my office received in favour of lowering the

working age were written by Them Hoang, Sina Behbahaninia, Sid Mehra, and Vivian Cho.

The second set of letters my office received were opposed to lowering the working age and were written by Harry Han, Hyungmo Gu, Amir Mominov, Flora Kim, Qurat-ul-ain Khan, Ashley Li, Kent Feng, Mehrgan Devony*, Winnie Hsiung, Tiago Lins, Nina Chang, Laima Ekhlis, and Simone Mehra.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Sir Winston Churchill ESL students and their teacher, Jodi Hill*, for voicing their concerns to you and through you to all members of this House.

My third tabling is of four letters from Janet McTavish, Ayodele Sombo, Suzanne and Grant Basiuk, and Sandra Harland expressing great concern over the lack of government support for school-age child care.

Mr. Speaker, my final tabling of the session comes from Carla Tetz, who writes, "We had the hope that perhaps we could stay in Calgary, maintain our employment and raise our children here . . . but it is apparent that we must move due to high rental increase."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is a petition from Mr. Mike Judd of Pincher Creek enclosing 368 signatures from the Friends of Mount Bacchus calling for "a moratorium on development on the eastern slopes (particularly extractive industry), and full scale public hearings to determine the future of one of Canada's premier ecosystems."

The second was tabled inappropriately earlier this week as a petition and is from Tanya Woodruff of the Tomahawk area, with 120 signatures calling for exposure guidelines to be strengthened for children, pregnant women, and the elderly in relation to schools, particularly close to sour gas operations.

The third is a letter from Mr. Eric Musekamp of the Farmworkers Union of Alberta recognizing the death of Kevan Chandler, a farm worker through Tongue Creek Feeders, one year ago this week and calling on the government to act to address basic minimum work standards to protect agricultural workers.

The fourth, again from Mr. Musekamp, is a letter to the Alberta government recognizing the third annual farm worker day, August 20, and calling for raised awareness of the working conditions faced by agricultural workers and remembering those that have died.

Mr. Speaker, a further one is from a Calgary teacher in my constituency of Calgary-Mountain View, Wendy Kurchak, and I quote: "Mr. Liepert seemed to say that teachers' salaries are the cause of operating cost deficits" and suggested that the school boards need extra operating funds as a result. She begs to differ.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an e-mail with the appropriate number of copies to table today. It's from a constituent of Edmonton-Mill Woods stating:

I am gravely concerned and disappointed about the government's lack of commitment to solve the "unfunded liability" for Alberta teachers. Without threats or conditions this issue needs to be solved immediately so that working teachers and pensioners can receive the monies that are owing them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition I'd like to table

*These spellings could not be verified at the time of publication.

the appropriate number of copies of a document we received through a FOIP request which clearly shows that the racing industry renewal initiative has been continued for a 10-year time period.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I beg your indulgence; they may both be a little long. The first is some summer reading which is highly recommended for all members of this Legislature. It's a university paper written by a brilliant young man who serves as the chief page at the Senate in Ottawa. His name is David Taylor. The title of the paper is *Glass Houses: A Critical Analysis of Democracy in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, Based on the Procedures and Practices of the Senate of Canada*.

The second tabling I have this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is the program from the city of Edmonton's 56th annual Salute to Excellence, the hall of fame induction ceremony. I'd just like to read off the names of those awarded if I could, please. In the arts and culture category: Walter Jule and Madge McCready. In the community service hall of fame: Margaret Weir Andrekson, Krishan Joshee, Dr. Dianne Kipnes, Mr. Irving Kipnes, and Reverend Donald Mayne. In the sports hall of fame: Orville Franchuk, Don Horwood, Leigh McMillan, and Danielle Peers. I would like to thank all of those fine individuals for their contributions to this city.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings today. I'm tabling first of all copies of a rent notice received by Mike and Patti Beaudry. Like thousands of other Albertans, they received this notice shortly after the government's policy on rent guidelines was announced. The notice is for \$400 per month more.

Also, a notice from a constituent named Linda Retallack. Linda is facing an increase of \$500 per month.

Mr. Speaker, neither Mike and Patti nor Linda have read the documents tabled by the hon. President of the Treasury Board, so they don't yet understand how well off they actually are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

2:50

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your patience while I table four documents today. The first and second are letters from Edmonton-McClung constituent Mr. Eric Lindstrom. In his first letter he talks about the rental crisis and the need to prevent the sale of rental buildings and for landlords to replace what they've already sold and also for rent controls to protect tenants.

The second is also from Mr. Lindstrom, in which he highlights the income or financial angle in terms of pensions, social assistance, inflation, and the cost of living.

The third tabling, Mr. Speaker, is from Edmonton-McClung resident John LeBlanc, a senior. Mr. LeBlanc wants the education taxes paid by seniors from 1993 till now refunded and to stop collecting this tax from seniors.

The fourth and last is from my constituent Ype Bouma and titled Driving in Alberta. Mr. Bouma has concerns and ideas with respect to drivers' behaviour, road design, planning, signage, and maintenance as well as vehicle maintenance and inspections. He even attached diagrams and pictures for everyone's reference.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today the 20th annual report of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for the

calendar year ended December 31, 2006. It also includes the audited financial statements for the fiscal years 2005-2006 and the 10th annual report of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Alberta branch. All members will receive a copy shortly.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the Minister of Energy: responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on June 7, 2007, in Department of Energy 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, the hon. Member for Strathcona, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on June 5, 2007, in the Department of Seniors and Community Supports 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the Minister of Children's Services: response to Written Question 16 asked for by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on June 11, 2007.

On behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness: pursuant to the Pharmaceutical Profession Act the Alberta College of Pharmacists' annual report 2006-2007; pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists' 2006 annual report, the Alberta College of Optometrists' annual report to government 2006, and the Alberta College of Medical Laboratory Technologists' 2006 annual report.

head:

Projected Government Business

Ms Blakeman: Under Standing Order 7(6), I think it is, could I ask one of the government House leaders to share with us the projected government business for next week?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, after giving it due consideration and careful thought, I've come to the conclusion that we should be able to finish the business of the House today, and it will not be necessary for us to meet next week.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 43 Appropriation Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 43, the Appropriation Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, the budget has undergone scrutiny for many days and many hours here in the House. Now it is truly time to take the budget to Albertans and let them see whether the government has reached and reacted to their priorities. I look forward to the opportunity to do that very shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and speak on the Appropriation Act, 2007. I'll be very brief. I want to talk about the ministry of infrastructure. As we all know, road conditions all over Alberta are really bad. Even though we put lots of money into this department, I still receive so

many complaints, not only in Edmonton but all over Alberta. What's the reason? I mean, I know that some members are saying that it's shortages of labour and that it's very hard for the contractors to finish the work in time.

Another thing I want to discuss, you know, in this ministry is that new areas, especially in my constituency, are growing fast. The new areas need new schools and new libraries and rec centres, and when I see the capital plan from the government side and we don't see that for at least – what? – three or four years, I'm surprised. I want to ask the minister concerned what answer he has for those people who live in the new areas. Where would the children go for the next three or four years? So new schools, new libraries, rec centres for the new areas: they need them desperately. Those are necessities, I think, for my constituents in that area.

The next question I want to ask is to the minister of seniors. Some seniors are complaining that some drugs are not included in the plans, and they have to pay money from their pocket. I just want to ask the minister if he has any plan to cover all the medicines for the seniors. They are also complaining about the transportation. Some seniors are complaining about the property education tax and also complaining about long-term care centres.

The next ones I want to move to are the ministries of education and postsecondary education: student loans, students' tuition fees, housing for the students, and parking facilities in the university area. You know, we need attention on those things for our students, our future, I should say. We need more apprenticeship spaces for them if we want a long-term solution for the shortages of labour in this province. Definitely we need some new colleges, universities for semiskilled workers.

Next I want to move on to some miscellaneous questions. You know, last year this government passed Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006. Is there any plan to reverse that because there's lots of criticism? I think the members sitting on the other side might have heard from some stakeholders that if they really are serious about transparency and accountability, they should reverse this Bill 20 and prove that they are transparent.

Another thing I already asked during the budget debate is about the general revenue fund, that the blue book is not up to date. We can't find lots of information in there. I want to see the full details. It would be really nice if the minister concerned takes that seriously and improves a little bit on that blue book for transparency.

My next question is on the website for all the grants: CIP, CFEP, and many others. The website is still not up to date. It's not showing the full details of how they get the grant, under which grants, and what the rules and regulations are. It's not very clear. I think we should work on the government's website, you know, especially with the government's new slogan that they want to be transparent. If they really are serious about this, then they should update the website, especially the rules and regulations and even on some of the grants. They don't even have rules in place right now. So, you know, the government should work on this.

3:00

Now, my next few questions are about my own portfolio, the Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Yesterday, I think, I asked the question about the book publishing companies and the film industry. We are losing the cultural and arts sector industry, and I request once again – I know I asked the question, and still the question was not answered properly – the hon. minister to reconsider their stand on this. I want the minister and this government to help this industry, help this sector as much as possible.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Artists, especially, are suffering because of inflation. You know, in this sector they really work hard, and I think that if we are serious about promoting arts and culture in this province, we should seriously help this sector. If this sector flourished, then it would help all other ministries, like health care, even education. The artists play a really important role in that. I don't want to go into details, but the minister knows how important the arts and culture sector is in this province.

The next questions I want to ask the minister concern the question of human rights. People know that the system takes lots of time. If somebody complains to the Human Rights Commission, it will take years. How can we find the solution to speed up the application process so that more and more people who are discriminated against can somehow complain to the Human Rights Commission? So far that's the only reason they don't.

I've asked this question about the sports policy many times, and I still don't see the sports policy. I heard that this policy was made, I think, a long time ago but never implemented. I once again request the minister concerned to implement the sports policy so that we have the policy long term, especially for the new areas, when and where we can have new schools, recreational facilities, and school grounds, et cetera.

I think some other members want to speak on the appropriation bill, and that's all I have to say, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to third reading of Bill 43, which represents the Appropriation Act, 2007. It is our view that the Assembly should not accept the Appropriation Act, Bill 43, for a number of very important reasons. Most importantly, we don't believe that this budget actually deals with the real problems facing Albertans in this period of the overheated economy and the extremely rapid growth that we're seeing in the province.

Mr. Speaker, before I elaborate on that, I would like to introduce an amendment to the bill, which I will provide copies of to all members and to the table. I will move that

Bill 43, Appropriation Act, 2007, be not now read a third time because the Legislative Assembly believes that the expenditures contained therein fail to deliver on the government's promise to manage pressures created by Alberta's overheated economy, particularly regarding infrastructure, health, education, and housing.

Mr. Speaker, this is, in fact, a nonconfidence motion in the government. Should the motion pass, the government falls.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we will allow the pages a moment to distribute the amendment, and we'll refer to the amendment as amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We believe that this bill should not now be read at this time because the expenditures contained therein fail to deliver on the government's promise to manage pressures created by Alberta's overheated economy, particularly regarding infrastructure, health, education, housing, and royalties. In terms of the economy the Premier was very clear right after he was elected as leader of the Progressive Conservative Party and thereby became the Premier of the province that the government would not touch the brake with respect to the economy.

Mr. Speaker, the government has created conditions for an overheated economy through a number of measures. Extremely low

royalties is the main one, the elimination of most environmental regulation in the area surrounding the tar sands at Fort McMurray being the other one, and the third one is, of course, creating conditions for the undermining of legitimate trade unions working in the oil sands through the employer-friendly unions like CLAC, the merit shop, and, of course, the temporary foreign workers program, which has left thousands of qualified Alberta tradespeople working at other jobs rather than the ones they are trained for.

The entire development of the tar sands in the present circumstances is not being done, in our view, in the interests of the people of Alberta and certainly not in the long-term interests of the people of Alberta, Mr. Speaker. They are being done in the interests of the foreign oil companies, the giant energy corporations, and, of course, in the interests of the George Bush administration's energy policy, which is to find a safe, secure, and relatively cheap source of energy given that their adventure in Iraq has come to a rather bad end. It's pretty clear that the invasion of Iraq was plan A for the Bush administration, and Alberta's tar sands and this government's policies around that are plan B.

I want to make it perfectly clear that we believe that the provincial government is selling out Alberta's natural resources. They are selling them for a price well below what other jurisdictions are requiring. Of course, the main examples that are most often cited are Alaska and Norway, but I think other members have during debate in this Assembly brought forward information that shows that many American states have much higher royalties than Alberta does. Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that I think it's absolutely unacceptable that we have a royalty regime in this province that allows much of the oil produced in Fort McMurray in the tar sands to be sold with only 1 per cent royalty being collected. That means that there's not enough value being created for Albertans and particularly for future generations of Albertans.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, I think that's one of the major issues we need to deal with because unless the government has a plan, a rational plan, for the development of the Alberta economy and particularly the tar sands, no amount of expenditure on infrastructure is going to be able to close the gap, and I think it's time the government realized that. There's nothing in the budget which addresses the main indicators of growth pressures. I want to just say that provincial inflation is now 5 and a half per cent, which is at its highest in 15 years in Canada. A labour shortage is grinding away productivity across the province. The housing and construction industry is looking at 25 per cent increases in building costs, and rents are increasing at twice the rate of inflation.

I don't think that the lack of a plan on the part of the Conservative Party, the Conservative government which is reflected in this budget is going to resolve these issues. In fact, I think it will only become worse. It's not management, Mr. Speaker. To quote Stephen Colbert: this is like rearranging the deck chairs on the *Hindenburg*.

I want to also talk a little bit about infrastructure. We've done some research on this, Mr. Speaker, and more needs to be done. We estimate that the debt of this province, if you measure it in terms of infrastructure, is close to \$20 billion. I remind the House that when former Premier Klein was elected as leader of the Conservative Party and became the Premier of the province, he talked about the \$23 billion that the province owed. That was the debt of the province when Ralph Klein became the Premier of the province. He tried to claim that he had paid it all down, but of course if you look at the cost for the infrastructure that exists, you'll see that there's \$20 billion or close to that in debt remaining in terms of the infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, \$20 billion is a lot of money. This budget has about \$600 million earmarked for capital projects. There are thousands of kilometres of roads and highways that have not been repaired. There's an estimated \$5 billion of infrastructure deficit in Calgary. Over a hundred new school requests have been ignored, with cost overruns and delays with the health care infrastructure. I just want to indicate that there's less than an inflationary increase for operating budgets, a 5 per cent decrease in capital funds for schools – no budgetary planning for the ATA, and school board negotiations are coming up – and there's more prescribed funding tying the hands of schools and school boards.

In terms of health, hospital beds and wards are not being used because of severe health professional shortage: 1,500 doctors short, 34,000 health professionals short in the next few years. Calgary health and other regions have a constant state of code burgundies and code reds. We have unforgivable delays and, subsequently, immense cost overruns in projects like the Calgary south hospital. The government refuses to be accountable and release the health workforce strategy. We have no idea how the \$300 million set aside for the health workforce will alleviate the workforce pressures.

Mr. Speaker, I want to come to housing, which is the most severe problem facing this government and, I think, one that they have dropped the ball on rather badly. Renters are stuck between a rock and a hard place. Rent is rising at twice the rate of inflation, but wages aren't even matching inflation. Low-income and fixed-income families, seniors, people with disabilities, and AISH recipients are facing housing hardships. The middle class will whittle away to nothing. Its disposable income is eaten by rent increases. But the government's limited plan will not help them, and they're becoming desperate and destitute. What is needed is what the government has repeatedly rejected: the need for rent guidelines.

I want to just indicate in closing that that is, I think, just a tragic decision on the part of this government and one that has doomed tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of Alberta families to loss of their homes, loss of their disposable income, and in many cases has doomed them to poverty.

So, Mr. Speaker, we cannot support the bill, and we do not believe that it should be passed at this time. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for questions or comments. The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much. I might have misunderstood what the hon. member had suggested, but coming from the oil sands capital of the world, which I'm very proud to have served as a mayor and alderman – and it is my home, and with our new one-month-old son we'll breathe the beautiful air in Fort McMurray and, I might also say, drink the beautiful water in Fort McMurray. Often it is said that politicians are inherently selfish. I can assure you that I will continue to do what this government is doing: ensuring protection of the environment and ensuring that all of us will enjoy the wonderful resource we've been blessed with.

I could interpret from what the hon. member has suggested that he really would like to see people out of work in my community of Fort McMurray. I could not disagree any more with what he is suggesting. The oil sands capital of the world, I might also remind the hon. member, as much as the New Democrats may want to shut down this economic opportunity – you know, the New Democrats have a wonderful reputation for working with unions as does this member in this government. I'm wondering what he is saying to the good union folks that are in Fort McMurray when really what he's suggesting is: shut down their jobs.

Mr. Mason: No.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, that's what I interpret. Maybe he needs to clarify, but I'm calling a spade a shovel here, and what I'm saying is that you're saying: shut it down. I could not disagree more with that because I want people to be able to feed their families, with a good job, while protecting the environment.

Let me add perspective as well. I remember that this government in its planning, and planning well out into the future, had a bridge to nowhere that was called the Peter Lougheed Bridge, a \$50 million bridge. It crossed the Athabasca River. Everyone joked. The opposition joked because of the fact that it was a waste of taxpayer money. Well, now that bridge to nowhere is a bridge to a hundred billion dollars of economic opportunities for jobs. So ultimately we can protect and sustain the environment, give people jobs so they can feed their families, and I also even . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order.

Mr. Boutilier: Okay. Well, I get to finish my point, don't I? What's the point of order? What citations?

The Deputy Speaker: We'll deal with the point of order, and then you can finish.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the point of order.

Dr. Pannu: I'm just seeking clarification. Is he going to ask a question, or is he speaking to the amendment? That's not clear.

The Deputy Speaker: What's your citation?

Dr. Pannu: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Is he speaking to 29(2)(a), or is he speaking on the motion itself?

The Deputy Speaker: This is dealing with Standing Order 29(2)(a) where there's a five-minute question and comment period on what the previous speaker has said. That's what he's talking on. He's not speaking on the amendment; he's providing a comment, the comments he wishes to have. Previously, the House has allowed a lot of leeway on that particular situation, including that a member can stand up and ask for the speaker to continue for the remainder of the five minutes. So I feel that I have to allow the same privilege to this member to make his comments on what the previous member has stated.

So continue.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I might also say that I hope that the commentary doesn't take away from my five minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: It didn't.

Mr. Boutilier: It didn't. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to be able to say that as we move forward, we had a bridge to nowhere that was criticized by others because we had planned ahead. We had streets paved, with fire hydrants and curbs, that people used to teach their kids to drive on, and we didn't have any homes on the investment of money that was put into it.

Let me just add – and the hon. member also sat on a municipal council here in Edmonton, a very good council – that it was interesting. We had a water treatment plant that we had planned ahead on, working in partnership with the provincial government, that accommodated water for 85,000 people – 85,000 people – and we were criticized because at the time we only had 35,000 people living there, enjoying the economic developments of the oil sands.

3:20

I had the opportunity and watched the fiscal regime that many people are critical of relative to the royalty regime that is in place today. Make no mistake about it. Working in partnership with the federal government that the fiscal regime that was signed when the Prime Minister came here with our Premier and the Minister of Energy back in late 1996 – I had the honour of being mayor – that public policy has attracted over a hundred billion dollars of investment opportunity. You know what? That is helping Edmonton. I might add to the hon. member, who comes from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, that this has created \$45 billion of direct and indirect jobs for the good folks here in Edmonton and in Calgary. It's been doing that, and it's having a tremendous impact all across Canada.

I do not ever want to see this type of example of something shutting out. Perhaps the hon. member can stand up and clarify what he's saying, but I have on what he has said assumed that he really wants to shut down the oil sands. Now, if he's suggesting not, I would appreciate him standing up. We can stand together and hold our hands, saying: full speed ahead with the oil sands with the good plan that we have.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you get to respond.

Mr. Mason: Neither one, Mr. Speaker. Steady, progressive development for full employment for Albertans and manage the tar sands in a way that benefits Albertans, both this generation and generations to come.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Okay.

Does anyone wish to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the NDP opposition in the House has given an eloquent explanation for the motion before the House, so I don't need to spend too much time on repeating what my leader had to say. But I do want to put on record a couple of concerns which have led this caucus to bring this motion forward by way of our leader as a presentation just concluded. In this House in response to all kinds of questions during estimates debate and during question period the Minister of Education has been claiming that the Education budget increase is more than adequate. He uses a year, '97 for example, to draw attention to the fact of how much increase the budget has experienced. I want to set the record straight.

Yesterday in the House during question period he talked about an 85 per cent increase in the Education budget between '97 and 2007. Mr. Speaker, I want to draw the attention of the House to the fact that that's absolutely misleading – absolutely misleading. If you adjust it for . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, are you speaking to the amendment, or are you speaking to issues that happened yesterday in the House?

Dr. Pannu: Yes, Mr. Speaker, speaking to the amendment before us.

The Deputy Speaker: Please restrict your comments to the amendment.

Dr. Pannu: Indeed. The amendment draws attention to the fact that the budget has failed to address the serious problems that this budget creates and that this government has created over the years for

education. Education is the most important responsibility that the government had, to secure the future of this province, to provide the best education possible for our children who are in school now so that they will become the guarantors of future prosperity. This budget fails, Mr. Speaker, and this is why this motion is before the House. Why this budget fails is because it doesn't provide enough money. That's the point that I was trying to make.

In 2007 dollars the increase in the Education budget from '93 to 2007 is 11.5 per cent, not 85 per cent. Again, in terms of 2007 dollars the difference between the 1997 and 2007 budgets is only 30 per cent, not 85 per cent as the minister has been claiming.

Now, on the other side, inflation over these years has gone way past 30 per cent. So the actual budget, the Education budget, included in the current 2007-2008 budget, in real value, in fact now means less in terms of money available to schools if you adjust for inflation and if you choose the right year for comparison.

I just want to set the record straight on that, Mr. Speaker. With that I conclude my remarks on the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is again available.

Seeing none, are there others wishing to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to be brief. I will be the first to concede that I, like the members of the NDP opposition, do not have a lot of confidence in this budget to address the promises that have been made by the government, and for the most part I agree with the sentiments expressed in this amendment. However, I do believe that the public service needs to be paid. The work of the government has to proceed, and I think that this amendment is nothing more than grandstanding of the highest nature.

The Official Opposition is long on record as having expressed our lack of support for the way that the Conservatives are managing this province, and I believe we've chosen a much more appropriate way to express that concern, Mr. Speaker. We held a series of standing votes under the Standing Orders where we took out those areas of the budget that we had concerns about and expressed our concern through that. As I say, I think that was a more appropriate way to do this. I don't believe we can accomplish much here today that hasn't already been accomplished, and for those reasons I cannot support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for question and comment.

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to participate on the amendment?

See none, does the mover wish to close?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: Now, does anyone wish to participate back on the debate?

Mr. R. Miller: Again, very briefly, Mr. Speaker, I've had a number of opportunities to speak on Bill 43 and the budget in general during supply estimates.

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order.

Mr. Mason: My understanding, Mr. Speaker, is that a reasoned amendment on third reading ends debate on the main motion. Is that not correct?

Ms Blakeman: No. Only a hoist.

Mr. Mason: Only a hoist.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have a citation to show that?

Mr. Mason: No. I guess that I'm wrong.

The Deputy Speaker: We're back on the debate. Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It must be the last day of school, I guess. I don't know.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to reiterate the concerns that I've made in the past regarding the lack of a savings plan in this budget. It causes me a great deal of concern as someone who would aspire to be the Finance minister for this province.

I'm particularly anxious to point out to members of this Assembly and all Albertans that the current Finance minister six months ago to the day believed in eliminating health care premiums, and somewhere over the last six months that seems to have evaporated. It's not represented in this budget, and I think that's unfortunate.

Six months ago to the day the current Finance minister was supportive of a resource revenue savings plan. That's not represented in this budget, and I believe that that's unfortunate.

Six months ago to the day the current Finance minister was supportive of the idea of capping increased spending at the combined rate of growth of inflation and population. That's not reflected in this budget, and I believe that's unfortunate.

I would hope that over the next several months, as the government does its planning for budget 2008, the Finance minister will perhaps revert to his old ways and find a way to convince his colleagues of the merits of those three very, very important initiatives, which are all reflected in Funding Alberta's Future, the document which the Official Opposition has produced. Not only the current Finance minister but, frankly, a number of people who sought the leadership of the Conservative party also supported similar initiatives.

3:30

I think there is a great deal of willingness on behalf of the people of this province to move in that direction, and I can only hope that the government will see the light, as it were. They've certainly come to recognize the will of the people when it comes to initiatives such as a broader ban on smoking in public buildings. I'm just hoping that they will as well recognize the wish of the people of this province to save some of the wealth that we're blessed with today to eliminate health care premiums, which has been high on many people's lists for a long time, and to find a way to cap spending at the rate of growth and inflation. Those are three priorities for this opposition, and I would strongly encourage them to be priorities for the government as they plan next year's budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone.

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going through my files of issues and concerns. Indeed, a couple of them come to mind here. I am particularly interested – and this is a cross-ministry concern – about what overriding policies the government has and what specific policies in each ministry are existing around

specific strategies to protect people's personal information. I know that we have the overriding legislation available from the Health Information Act and PIPA, but I'm increasingly concerned with what I see around the collection of people's personal information, the posting of it on computers, and the sharing of it by Internet.

Even if it's just sending some information from one place to another, it's very difficult once it's on the Internet to be able to control it. I'm sure that many of us as politicians have experienced that you respond to one constituent's e-mail, and they then forward it on to their Facebook companions or whatever else, and then you start hearing back from 50 other people. When you answered that first e-mail, you weren't thinking that it was going to go to 50 other people, not that you're worried about what you said. That's the power of the Internet. It really can go out there to thousands and thousands of people.

I'm increasingly concerned with what the government is doing. If you're just being silent because you've got a plan well in hand and you know what it is and you don't want to share it with the bad guys, okay. Fine. But you need to signal something to people like me and to members of the public that you do have something quite concrete. If you're being silent because you don't have anything, then that's a deeper problem.

You know, I look at some of the pieces of information that have come my way, like the ability now to transfer personal information that is stored on one kind of document like a credit card or a passport or even the pass cards that we have. There's personal information that's electronically stored on this. The ability now to be able to harvest the information off of this and other kinds of documents and to be able to then share that – what strategies does the government have in place to be protecting us about this?

The other one is around using the voice-over Internet protocol and the ability now of some particularly inventive hackers to be able to harvest the phone numbers that people are actually trying to phone on either end off of that kind of information.

At the same time, I notice ever more information being requested from certain groups of people. I remember an article in which our own chief of police in speaking I think to a group of his colleagues was expressing concern that there were limitations on how much information they can get on people and that, boy, they'd sure like to have more. I mean, in this day and age where there are GPS chips in your cellphones, I think we need to have a better overall strategy about this.

It's not something that you can tag to any one particular department. It is something that I wish I could see better research being employed and funds being expended on across the board. I think as legislators this is going to become an increasing problem for us for two sides. One, we need to educate the public to beware and to be careful about how much personal information they give out. At the same time, we as government are trying to collect that very same information from people to use to be able to analyze that information and help us to make better decisions based on what we can get out of that. I think it's an ongoing area of concern.

The next issue that I want to raise is around the Human Rights Commission and just some observations that I have around that. I don't feel that it's working as it should be. You know, people have now become reconciled in some cases to avoiding the Human Rights Commission because it just takes forever, and that's a quote from some of my constituents. I note that in B.C. cases go straight to tribunal, but here there are not enough resources to have investigators for human rights. So we end up with a first attempt at conciliation, and we end up with a partial investigation, a statement of fact.

Then the director will either dismiss it or allow it to go forward. Then an HRC panel looks at it, and at that point it leaves the control of the Human Rights Commission and goes to the chief commissioner.

The lawyers aren't terribly happy with this system. They say that it doesn't work and that the remedies from the Human Rights Commission are too low to be meaningful. I question whether it's useful. The focus and the mandate of the commission as it sits now is not to punish but to try and put people back in the position they would have been in but for the discrimination. But the process that seems to be working to support that doesn't seem to be working, is what I'm trying to say.

I think it could be argued that the website is not very happy, and I'm putting a very positive spin on the words that were actually used to describe it. In particular, it's very difficult to do any research on the judgments. The panel judgments are listed by the year but not by the issue. You don't go on there looking for what the Human Rights Commission did in any given year. You go on there looking for other cases of discrimination based on gender or, you know, discrimination based on sexual orientation or some such thing. You don't go on there looking: gee, I wonder what they did in 1967. Those were a couple of the additional concerns that I wanted to raise while I had the opportunity.

If I can just clarify, I did raise yesterday that the government has set up two policies which are in conflict with each other. I was talking specifically about the decision-making process for school boards to prioritize where they want their schools built. Of course, there's great encouragement there to have the school boards close some schools in order to have a utilization rate that would enable them to open new ones. That policy is pitted against policies that our urban municipalities, our metro municipalities are trying to use to keep the inner part of our cities, not necessarily meaning the inner city but the centre of our cities, vital and to keep schools open there in some form or another and to make use of the building. There's nothing like having, basically, a square block of darkness in the middle of a community to really suck the life out of that community. The building is dark, it's not occupied at night, there are no lights on in it, and it is literally a black hole. It really damages neighbourhoods.

3:40

My communities in Edmonton-Centre were amongst the first wave of schools that got closed. Now, this would be eight years ago or so. I can really see the effect of that, particularly in Queen Mary Park, where we had the Queen Mary Park elementary school close. What it's done to that community is really sad because it is a meeting place for the community. Even if people don't have kids, they see the kids walk by. They see the parents walk by. They see people. You know, when there's a special night at the school, other people come to hear the Christmas choir and those kinds of things. It does bring a community together. When that school is gone and when there's no activity happening in that building, you lose that opportunity to connect. It's that connection that makes those communities safe. It has people knowing who's around, who's part of the community. They talk to each other. They know who should be there and who shouldn't be there. It does help to build communities. I'm quite concerned about this. I really urge the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Minister of Education to make note of my comments here and to see if there isn't a way to stop pitting these two policies against each other.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise those additional issues around the appropriation budget. I appreciate it. I will let others make comments. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) does anyone wish to make any comments?

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 18 Judicature Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Hon. members, debate was adjourned on amendment A1, so we are still considering amendment A1. Are there any members who wish to participate in the debate on A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General I'm pleased to continue the discussion in Committee of the Whole on Bill 18, the Judicature Amendment Act, 2007. Yesterday in relation to the House amendment to section 23(2)(d) I was in the process of stating the rationale for that amendment. The report on vexatious litigants, as I was saying, done by the Law Reform Commission of Nova Scotia included the factor of, as an example, vexatious behaviour, and we interpreted the word inappropriately to include some level of persistence. But in light of the comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, we are agreeable to having that clarified. We would propose to amend section 23(2)(d) to state: "persistently using previously raised grounds and issues in subsequent proceedings inappropriately."

The third House amendment is in regard to section 23.1(3), which states: "The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Alberta has the right to appear and be heard in person or by counsel on an application under subsection (1)." The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung sought confirmation that the Attorney General would not be denied or prevented from appearing or being heard on vexatious litigant hearings initiated by a court on its own motion. I can confirm that there should be no difference between an application and a court's motion. Therefore, we propose to amend section 23.1(3) to clarify that the Attorney General has the right to appear and be heard at hearings initiated by a court on its own motion. The wording of the subsection would be: "The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Alberta has the right to appear and be heard in person or by counsel on an application or a Court's motion under subsection (1) or (4)."

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the fourth House amendment is to section 23.1(6), which provides: "the Court of Appeal or a justice of the Court of Queen's Bench may make an order . . . binding on any one or more of the other Courts." I am putting forward an amendment to delete the words "a justice of" preceding "the Court of Queen's Bench." As a rule of interpretation the word "justice," of course, refers only to a judge of the Court of Queen's Bench, and this amendment would clarify that masters in chambers of the Court of Queen's Bench would also be allowed to make such orders that may be binding on one or more of the other courts. The current section does not limit the masters' authority in this regard, and the intention of Bill 18 is simply to give the courts additional powers, not to take away any powers.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank the members opposite for their constructive comments on the bill in second reading. Their input certainly helped to formulate the House amendments, and I think they will clarify and improve the legislation.

I would now like to move the amendments as stated to the House.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on amendment A1.

Dr. Pannu: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very brief. I want to just indicate my pleasure at the fact that the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has recognized and incorporated, as a matter of fact, some of the suggestions that I made in comments during the second reading of the bill. The amendment that he's proposing to section 23(2)(d) I think does clarify and address the concern that I expressed. I want to thank the member for giving careful thought to, obviously, the constructive way all of us engaged each other in debate on this bill. Two other amendments as part of A1 also seem to make sense, so I'm happy to support these amendments, and we'll see. We'll then vote on the bill as amended.

Thank you.

The Chair: Anyone else on amendment A1?
Ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on the motion? Did you want to speak on the bill, hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill?

Dr. Brown: Just a couple of further comments, Mr. Chairman. I will be very brief. Bill 18 empowers the courts to prevent an individual who has been found to be a vexatious litigant. The hon. member, as I mentioned, from Edmonton-Strathcona expressed a concern that the provision cast a fairly wide net. I would say that, as a whole, the bill makes it clear that the provision is meant to manage certain types of mischief, and I certainly have confidence in the fact that the judges will make an order only in such circumstances where it's necessary to protect the legal process from abuse. Nothing in the Judicature Amendment Act limits the authority of courts to stay or dismiss a lawsuit, which are powers that they already have.

I think that I have dealt with all the questions and concerns raised in debate and that we should move forward with the bill. Mr. Chairman, once again I urge all members of the Assembly to support Bill 18, the Judicature Amendment Act.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 18, Judicature Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 18 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

3:50

Bill 14**Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I had put some questions on the record for the government that I was hoping to get a response about. But I will say again that overall I'm supportive of this legislation. For any of us that are at all close to the health sector, it's been made very clear to us that we need to have good preparations in place for a pandemic, which the experts tell us is almost certain to be coming within the next year to three years and which may well last in six-month scenarios, take us a couple of rounds or rotations to get through it. So it could be as long as 18 months before we're out the other side.

This bill is amending four pieces of legislation. It's essentially giving either the health regions or the ministry the ability, really, to do what needs to be done at times like that. I think we've been able to learn quite a bit from Ontario and their experience around SARS. Certainly, I think one of the major things is to make sure that lines of communication are clear and they're established prior to any pandemic actually beginning.

There is a Canadian pandemic influenza plan that maps out how Canada will prepare for it, and some of the questions that I'd asked were: what is Alberta's role in that overall plan? What can we expect from the provincial government, the roles and responsibilities? What's the co-ordination with other governments to anticipate problems? Provincial governments are responsible for mobilizing contingency plans and resources. What's been done with that?

I had gone through a sectional analysis previously, so I'm not going to repeat that. Overall I didn't have any large concerns with this. As I say, in second reading I had put some other questions on the record. At this point I'm happy to support Bill 14, the Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, and allow passage so that it can be implemented.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any others who wish to participate?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 14, Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 14 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report bills 18 and 14.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the

following bill: Bill 14. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 18.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head:

Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading
(continued)

Bill 12**Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007**

Ms Evans: So moved.

I hope that this passes today. I think it's essential. I think it's a good-news bill for our constituents.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I will try to keep my comments brief considering the amount of work that we're trying to get through here this afternoon. I'd just like to reiterate the disappointment of the Official Opposition that, once again, when passing an amending bill which looks after income supports, we're not taking any measures to tie income support to the rate of inflation despite the fact that MLAs' remuneration is tied to the rate of inflation. We should be looking at some sort of a market basket measure and making sure that the people that are most vulnerable and in the most need in this province receive some protection from inflation, which we do not currently do.

Just briefly, Mr. Speaker, a very poignant example of that came to me recently when I attended the housing listening forum at the Milner library downtown and met a young lady who had moved to Edmonton to be nearer to the supports that she needed. Her first apartment was in Mill Woods, a very nice apartment, but she was receiving AISH. As we all know, I believe it was for a period of about nine years the AISH supplement did not increase at all. As a result of that and increasing rents, she was forced to downgrade her accommodation to a not-so-nice apartment in the Beverly community. Then a couple of years later she was once again mandated to downgrade her accommodations to an apartment on 97th Street because she could no longer afford the place that she had in the Beverly community. She's currently living in a rooming house on 95th Street, with crack dealers and prostitutes in the same home.

It was just a really striking example of how the lack of tying income support to inflation has forced someone who through no fault of her own has now had to downgrade her housing to the point where she's living in not just undesirable but, in fact, unsafe conditions. I think it really illustrates why the opposition pushes so hard on this point and why I felt compelled once again today to remind the government of how important it is to take that into consideration. Again, I would hope that the next time we review income supports, we would take that step.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Martin: Just very briefly. I suppose we could talk about all sorts of things in this bill. We know that this is a result, Mr. Speaker, of how the government reacted badly legislatively.

Hopefully, I see this as a necessary cleanup bill, but we do really have to concern ourselves somewhat with how we are treating the vulnerable people in this society. There's a growing group of them. I understand that – while the minister's here – to our surprise there is a minimum wage announcement today, that there would be an increase to \$8. That came as a total shock to us, but the Premier announced it today.

I would hope that in the Legislature we could do things a little differently because we had this discussion. I was told that we would be moving along with this; there would be an announcement about an increase at some point. But sitting there, I was totally surprised, Mr. Speaker. So I think I tie this into how we're operating within the government here. I know that the minister's probably not going to comment on that because I understand that she has a news conference tomorrow, but I guess she'd be glad to know that it's already out there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, any others wish to speak?

Does the hon. minister wish to close?

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

4:00

Bill 17

Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-McClung I'd just like to say that we are prepared to vote . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, first we should allow someone to move on behalf.

Mr. Tougas: Oh, okay. Well, you called me.

The Deputy Speaker: I didn't see anyone standing up.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill I'm pleased to move Bill 17 at third reading, and that's the Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

As you know, this bill is a proactive solution that, it's believed, will clarify the law for Albertans. It'll avoid unnecessary legal action in two areas. The first area deals with the recovery of possession of land, while the second area deals with cases in the area of conflict of laws between Alberta and another jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has asked that I thank members of the Assembly on his behalf for supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Now the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Now, where was I? It was a very complicated issue. Again, as my colleague from Edmonton-McClung tells me, this bill is fine. We've looked it over and checked it out with stakeholders, and we're perfectly ready to vote in favour of it, actually. That's all I have to say.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else?

Does the hon. member wish to close?

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

Bill 18

Judicature Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to move Bill 18, the Judicature Amendment Act, 2007, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General for third reading.

Mr. Speaker, we just heard debate a few minutes ago in Committee of the Whole regarding this bill. It amends the act to give the courts in Alberta greater power to deal more effectively with individuals who waste time and resources in court. This legislation will simplify procedures for dealing with vexatious litigants.

Amendments to the act were made. They are important as well to make sure that there is a right of access to justice and that it's not undermined by vexatious litigants. I believe these amendments, as we heard earlier, will preserve the right of access to justice for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important bill. I know that the hon. minister, when he spoke to it in legislative review, was very clear that this has been a long time in coming. It's important for the province of Alberta. Having said that, I would ask members of the Assembly to support this in third reading.

Mr. Tougas: I might as well just repeat what I said before. My friend from Edmonton-McClung assures me that this bill is in order. I believe some of the issues he brought up were addressed in the amendment. We're very pleased with it, and we're prepared to vote.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

Bill 14

Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Red Deer-North I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 14.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I just spoke to this in Committee of the Whole and indicated that I was still awaiting answers to the questions, but I've been assured by the minister of health that those answers will be provided. At this point I'm prepared to support this legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a third time]

Bill 5**Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I move Bill 5 for third reading.

The Health Statutes Amendment Act essentially makes amendments to a number of health statutes, as the title suggest. In addition to some clean-up issues the primary purpose is to amend the Health Care Insurance Premiums Act and corollary acts to make it easier to appropriately audit the premium process and make sure that the system is working as it's intended.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. I'd just like to make a few comments about Bill 5, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. I understand, essentially, that this is an act to amend five pieces of legislation, and I'd like to comment on the first, third, and fourth sections.

The first section, which is amending the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act removes the requirement for a practitioner to provide permission to the department to review patient records and establishes a penalty for a practitioner who refuses to give his permission. My concern is around the protection of patient confidentiality. I know that this has been raised before, but I'm wondering what is being done to ensure that there's protection.

I also had a concern on the same first section with the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act around the minister's ability to select members of the committee that then reviews the claims that are submitted. I know that previous to this certain professions were required to be on the review panel and not others, and this has been removed. I understand that, but I believe it's important that we should always have members of the public involved so that we can have an independent view being brought into discussions. It's also important to ensure impartiality. Along with that, of course, I believe that representation from professions is important and wonder why some were originally excluded and what criteria there might be in terms of selecting the members to ensure, I guess, impartiality.

Section 3 is making it easier for Albertans to opt out of the health care insurance plan, and I wonder why we are doing this. It's just very few people that I hope would be concerned about doing that. I guess I'd like to comment here that I would like to see us get rid of health care premiums altogether.

The fourth section is about mandatory testing and disclosure, and I like this because it's going to capture the definition of guardian that's contained in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, and I think capturing that definition just makes good sense.

I think that pretty well summarizes my concerns. I support Bill 5 but again want to emphasize the concern regarding patient confidentiality.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to comment about one part of it and maybe lead to a question that if not here today the minister of health can do. Of course, I would say that medicare premiums – I think it's pretty obvious – should not be there. They're a regressive tax. But we can have that debate another time. I have a feeling that even the minister of health might agree with me although I know that it would cost the treasury some, but I think it's the most regressive tax we can have. And we wouldn't have to be playing with it here.

4:10

But in saying that, in the past we were making it easier for people to opt out. Basically, moving from 12 months to 36 months, I don't think that's particularly wise. My understanding from the latest figures that I was able to look at is that there were 255 registrants who opted out. That is somewhat not a lot, and if they're adults, I suppose they can make that decision to opt out under the act the way it is. I guess that I'm wondering: what happens if there are children involved in those 255 – I don't know if there are or not – and all of a sudden there's a serious illness with a child? It seems to me that that could be somewhat punishing. I wonder how that is handled.

I think that that's an important point in here. People can opt out. Now we're making it easier. I don't know if that would make the numbers go up from 255 to a little more, but there's obviously the potential there for some serious problems with people that are too young to make that decision, or rather if they couldn't, what happens to them if the parents opt out?

So I'd just leave it there, Mr. Speaker, if the minister has an answer to that or if he could get back to me on it, either way. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness wish to close on behalf of?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I do appreciate the member's comments and support. I will undertake to answer the question that was raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. My understanding is that if you opt out, you can in fact opt out for your dependants. But the fact of the matter is that this opting out provision is really quite a silly provision, in any event, if I may say so, because you can opt back in. So there's no real penalty involved in opting out. Very few people use it.

What we're really doing in this is making it easier to administer, easier for us, not easier for anybody else. So we don't have to monitor them on an annual basis because so few people actually use it.

With respect to the health care premiums themselves I do hope that we will have an opportunity to discuss health care premiums and how they're collected, whether we collect the premiums as part of the tax bill or whether they are in fact converted to a tax, and how we might incent Albertans to be more responsible for their own health using the premiums. In other words, if we collected it on the tax bill or converted it to a tax, either way we might be able to save collection costs; we might be able to save writeoff costs, but we might also be able to introduce some process whereby people could take deductions for things that they do to improve their health status. I think that's a discussion which we should look forward to. I'm pleased that you've not chosen to get too far into that one on this act because this act really is about clarifying our ability to audit the process.

I appreciate the concerns from Edmonton-Mill Woods with respect to confidentiality of patient information. There is always a trade-off, if you will, in terms of making sure that the process works appropriately and having the opportunity to audit, with the necessity for ensuring patient confidentiality. But that's inherent in the system. When the health care premium is billed to the department by the doctor that sees the patient, we get some health information as a part of that. It's our job to make sure that that health information is protected and is not let out, but it's also our job to audit the process to make sure we're being billed for appropriate procedures.

So I appreciate the concerns there. This will help protect the public dollar and the money that people pay us by way of health care premiums. I would encourage all members to vote for it.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Bill 10
Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure and honour to move on behalf of the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat third reading of Bill 10, Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act.

This being one of the most important bills of the spring sitting, I would hope that the passing of this bill would be unanimous.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the preceding member that this was a bill that demanded a great deal of time and attention of the Assembly. There was certainly vigorous debate involved, with participation of many members on a subject that is very near and dear to the hearts of many people. It was nice to see such a joining together of rural and urban MLAs as they worked together on this project. At this point I'm very happy to support third reading of the Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Does the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House wish to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise now to indicate that after 45 days in the Legislature this spring and after actually more hours and more days in the Legislature than we did in last year's spring sitting, a spring sitting which included new rules which allowed for thorough scrutiny in Committee of Supply in a manner which has not been done before, changes to our Public Accounts Committee to allow private members the full opportunity to hold the government accountable, and the institution of legislative policy committees, I think some momentous changes in the Legislature – I don't think it would be appropriate for me to move adjournment without having commented on those issues.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's with great pleasure that I move that the House adjourn until 1 p.m. on Monday, November 5, 2007, pursuant to Standing Order 3.1(2) and Government Motion 28.

[Motion carried; pursuant to Government Motion 28 the Assembly adjourned at 4:20 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, November 5, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/05

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. As we begin our deliberations in this sitting of the Legislature, we ask for the insight we need to do our work to the benefit of our province and its people and to the benefit of our country. Amen.

Hon. members, I'm now going to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I'd invite all present to join in, as well, in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Presentation to the Assembly of Mr. Jack Hayden Member for Drumheller-Stettler

The Speaker: I would now invite the hon. the Premier to proceed to the bar of the Chamber.

Hon. members, I have received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta a report of the returning officer for the constituency of Drumheller-Stettler containing the results of the by-election conducted on June 12, 2007, which states that a by-election was conducted in the constituency of Drumheller-Stettler and that Jack Hayden was duly elected as the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Stelmach escorted Mr. Hayden to the Mace]

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you Mr. Jack Hayden, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, who has taken the oath as a member of this House, has inscribed the roll, and now claims the right to take his place in the House.

The Speaker: Let the hon. member take his seat. [applause]

Presentation to the Assembly of Mr. Craig Cheffins Member for Calgary-Elbow

The Speaker: I would now invite the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition to proceed to the bar of the Chamber.

Hon. members, I have received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta the report of the returning officer for the constituency of Calgary-Elbow containing the results of the by-election conducted on June 12, 2007, which states that a by-election was conducted in the constituency of Calgary-Elbow and that Craig Cheffins was duly elected as the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Dr. Taft escorted Mr. Cheffins to the Mace]

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you Craig Cheffins, the new Member for Calgary-Elbow, who has taken the oath as a member of this House, has inscribed the roll, and now claims his right to take a seat.

The Speaker: Let the hon. member take his seat. [applause]

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real thrill today to introduce a former resident of Sherwood Park now living in Texas, whose father was media personality Ernie Poscente. His mother, Pat, is a person who has been active as a community volunteer and is well known as a marriage commissioner.

Vince Poscente has a BA in recreation administration. He moved to Calgary and became the director of Alberta Luge, assisting the Calgary Olympic Development Association. In the '88 Olympic Winter Games he was one of four Canadian delegates selected to the International Olympic Academy in Greece. He actually undertook to become an Olympic athlete and with no previous experience learned to ski race. He represented Canada in the '92 Olympic Winter Games in Albertville, France. Most recently, however, besides all of his expertise as an athlete he earned a master's degree in organizational management and has written a book, *The Age of Speed*. He's an inductee to the Speakers Hall of Fame with the likes of Ronald Reagan, Art Linkletter, and Og Mandino.

I'd ask you to join me in welcoming a man who lives in Texas but whose heart is in Alberta. Vince Poscente, please rise and receive the welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister for Capital Planning and Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a constituent, Mr. Ranjit Dhanoa, who is visiting the Alberta Legislature for his first time. He is seated in the members' gallery, and he's accompanied by Sukhi Randhawa from that area. I'd ask Sukhi to rise as well, and perhaps the Chamber could receive them on this special occasion. Thank you for coming.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 49 visitors from Aldergrove elementary school in my constituency. They are joined by teachers Mrs. Sandra Colquhoun and Mrs. Christine Steil; parent helpers Doug Parnham, Dana Hamilton, Kathy McDonald, Glennis Rideout, Christine Barringham, Pamela Young, and Cora Nicholson. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a visiting group from the Suzuki charter school in the Ottewell neighbourhood in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. The total number of visitors in the group today is 21. The group is led by teacher Miss Bauernhuber.

She is accompanied by two of the parent volunteers from that fine school, Mrs. Colette Grant and Mrs. Alison Schneider. The group is located in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two groups to introduce today. I'd like to introduce, first of all, to you and members of the Assembly 21 keen students from the Belvedere elementary school. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Janice Bogner and Miss Nicole Moores, who's a student teacher. They're in the public gallery. I'd ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly 40 energetic students from Belmont elementary school. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Gerke and Mrs. McKeen and parents and helpers Mrs. Hay and Mrs. Kruger. I would ask them also to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to stand before this Assembly and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature Janine Halbesma, the senior policy analyst for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. I'm pleased and honoured that Janine is here today in support of Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act. Also, with her to support Bill 213 is Walter Hrach, a businessman and community activist from north Edmonton. They are in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members five of our fine, fine research and administrative staff in the Liberal caucus. They are new members Michael Decore, Kristen McFaden, Marta Rzechowka, Derek Volker, and Amanda Krumins. They are seated in the gallery along with our chief of staff, Judy Wilson. I'd invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Looking up in the gallery here, I see a familiar face, a lady by the name of Kathy Watson, who is with the Alberta Home Builders' Association. She also served as a member of the Affordable Housing Task Force. I'd like you to please welcome Ms Kathy Watson to the Assembly.

Thank you.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Family Violence and Bullying

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. November is Family Violence Prevention Month in Alberta. Family violence surrounds us in our communities, affecting men and women of all ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientation, and ethnicities.

Children are negatively impacted by family violence regardless of whether they are the direct target of abuse or witnesses to it.

The government of Alberta has taken action. Nine partnering ministries are working together and investing a combined total budget of \$46 million to prevent and respond to family violence through the implementation of Alberta's prevention of family violence and bullying initiative. This year we provided an additional \$2.6 million to help communities provide services to victims of family violence and bullying, including additional support to women's shelters and sexual assault centres, for a total investment of \$23 million. We also launched a provincial safe visitation initiative earlier this year, and we continue to support community actions aimed at preventing family violence and bullying.

Along with our many community partners we have worked just as hard at preventing family violence as we have in responding to it. In fact, this morning our government launched the second year of the family violence public awareness and education campaign, which encourages Albertans to help individuals that are impacted by family violence. I encourage anyone who wants to know how they can make a difference to visit the family violence website at familyviolence.gov.ab.ca.

Mr. Speaker, putting an end to family violence requires a strong and collaborative approach from government, our communities, and our citizens. There are many ambitious goals that have been set for Albertans, like ending homelessness in 10 years. We can set another goal to end family violence, but it will take the whole community working together to help others. Together we can end the silence and stop the violence.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

University of Lethbridge

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year has been a very, very good year not only for the city of Lethbridge but for the postsecondary institutions that make up part of our community. Today I'd like to make special note of the University of Lethbridge, which is celebrating their 40th anniversary. This institution is incredibly blessed with the administration and faculty that they have, the tremendous appeal that they have toward students from all across Alberta and right throughout Canada but, of course, especially southern Alberta. I believe that – I should be close – approximately 25 per cent of the student body actually comes from the city of Calgary. We're a great opportunity for Calgarians to offer their young children an opportunity to attend a first-rate university situation away from home, which is important to many young people – it certainly was to me – and, of course, also a very safe community.

There has been tremendous growth at that university, now something over 8,000 students. Because of that, the government of Alberta has been assisting them in their capital plan. Just recently announcements were made not only regarding renovation money for the University Hall but also, of course, capital going in to a life science and management centre and then just recently a top-up of the water centre. This water centre, by the way, is going to be world class for water in a semiarid environment like we're in. It'll be great for Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Canadian Centre for Unmanned Vehicle Systems

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to rise to talk about a \$3 million funding announcement which was made last week in Medicine Hat for the Canadian Centre for Unmanned Vehicle

Systems. Funding will be provided through the rural Alberta development fund, which encourages innovation, collaboration, and growth across rural Alberta. The Canadian centre for unmanned vehicles will create limitless opportunities for this type of technological industry in Alberta.

The centre is a national and international hub for the development, testing, evaluation, and commercialization of unmanned vehicle systems. Company partners already include such entities as DRDC, which is Defence Research and Development Canada, and MacDonald, Dettwiler, who built the Canadarm for NASA. Research and development and testing will occur for unmanned air vehicles, unmanned ground vehicles, and unmanned underwater and surface vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, their vision is to reach across Canada to promote and bring focus to research and development and, as well, the commercialization of the UVS technology. The centre will bring together existing technology clusters such as university, government, and industry interests throughout Alberta with regard to aerial, marine, and land UVS applications. Three million dollars from the Alberta government in rural development funding will help kick-start this viable international business in Medicine Hat for southern Alberta and for all Albertans as emerging cutting-edge technology brings worldwide recognition to the centre.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the RADF for recognizing this project as a project that will develop a phenomenal industry in not only rural Alberta but all of Alberta. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

1:20

Children in Care

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The week that ends in Remembrance Day is a time to ask what matters in our lives. Some things that preoccupy us, such as oil royalties, will matter very little 50 years from now unless we convert the income from that source into things that do. Family values is one thing we say does matter; however, it is not uppermost in the day-to-day. This past week another child died tragically in the province's care in a foster home we commissioned to provide for those in critical need.

I believe we cannot in good conscience say that we support families unless we support them for all. The continued death of children in Alberta's care is unacceptable in a human society. These losses are not inevitable. A hundred and fifty years ago children died regularly working in conditions accepted as normal that we would not accept for a moment. These conditions did not just go away. Politicians resolved that those conditions would end and made it so.

I appeal to the hon. Premier to include the elimination of deaths in Alberta foster care in his objectives. This is an attainable goal if we increase the investment and attention given our social services. It is also a matter of faith and value. In a province that claims to be built in that tradition, Mr. Speaker, let us put our money where we say our values are: in building a child-friendly society.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Stewardship of Energy Resources

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The basic assumption of the whole debate on royalties is that Albertans own their resources. The Auditor General states it concisely. "Albertans own a world-scale hydrocarbon resource." Unfortunately, ownership, especially private-property ownership, too often means the licence to exploit.

Aboriginal people remind us that the land and its natural resources are a gift. Ownership is a foreign concept to them, and of course it's

obvious that we did not in any way create the huge deposits of oil and gas beneath the land. The authentic response to receiving the land as a gift is thanksgiving, and the basic value which emerges from thanksgiving is stewardship.

Stewardship is deeply rooted in our western civilization and in the Christian tradition. As a preacher for 30 years in Alberta I delivered many sermons on the theme of stewardship. What is worth remarking is that this word "stewardship" has continued to have profound meaning in the wider secular society. In the circles of business and industry and especially in the context of our natural resources the word "stewardship" is often used. We have received the land as a gift, and the issue is whether we are good stewards of the resources we have received.

The Auditor General choose his words carefully and correctly when he wrote that indeed "Albertans own a world-scale hydrocarbon resource," and that it is the government and the Ministry of Energy which have "final responsibility for the stewardship of Alberta's oil, gas, and oil sands resources." But instead of stewardship the government has demonstrated a continuing history of mismanagement and the squandering of our resources.

Albertans are now faced with one of the most important choices in Albertan history. The Progressive Conservative government of Alberta has forfeited its right to act as stewards of the resources we own. This government should be replaced by responsible stewards whose values and vision and long-term plan will truly honour and respect the gift of our bountiful land and the resources we own.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Anthony Henday Drive

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to pass a thank you to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and particularly the Premier of Alberta for fast-tracking and putting in place the third quarter of Anthony Henday. Earlier this summer our minister of infrastructure, under the leadership of our Premier, announced the construction of the northwest section of Anthony Henday. [some applause] Thank you.

I cannot express enough how important this particular stretch of ring road is to my constituents of Edmonton-Castle Downs. As you know, Mr. Speaker, with the P3 model which is being implemented at this construction, this entire section of the Anthony Henday will be built in one piece. It will be built as a free-flow highway with no traffic lights and no intersections, allowing for the already congested area of northwest Edmonton to have their traffic moving freely.

Mr. Speaker, more importantly, this project will link the capital region in the way that it is meant to be linked, and St. Albert residents will have free access to northwest Edmonton and other parts of Edmonton. But what makes this project even better is the fact that it has a 30-year warranty – how often do we hear about a 30-year warranty on a highway? – which means that in 30 years residents of Castle Downs will receive the highway in the shape that it was built on day one of its utilization. That is a great deal for residents of Castle Downs.

So, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all residents of Castle Downs, thank you to all members for supporting this project. We are looking forward to driving on this brand new stretch of road by fall 2011. Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 230 more petitions on the following:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to:

1. Ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector, regardless of [where they work];
2. Ensure these employees are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive with other sectors . . .
3. Improve employees' access to professional development opportunities (training and upgrading); and
4. Introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in this Assembly today to table a petition that's been signed by 18 residents of Whitecourt-St. Anne. The petition urges the Assembly to pass Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007.

Thank you, sir.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has advised me, but she has no notice of motion. You want to rise on a point of privilege later. This is Notices of Motions here.

Ms Blakeman: Yes.

The Speaker: We'll recognize that.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

The Speaker: But I do have a notice of motion from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my leader and pursuant to Standing Order 30,

be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the failure of the government to promptly introduce and pass royalty legislation to prevent the loss of billions of dollars to the public treasury as oil prices rise dramatically.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and present a document from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business which supports Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act, often known as the red tape act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling a letter from my constituent, Ms Elaine Hyshka, in which she expresses deep concern with Bill 46, that's before the Assembly. She goes into detail, section by section of the bill, on what she finds objectionable in that the government is now restricting public input and

placing the energy industry in a privileged position relative to ordinary landowners and citizens.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today, both from constituents. The first from Tina Danecke, who is noting that her rent has increased by \$305 a month. Needless to say, her salary has seen no increase. She notes that she's just a working schmo living paycheque to paycheque and believes she's being gouged because of greed and that nothing was done by the government to assist her.

The second tabling, also from a constituent, from Sarah Jackson, noting that herself, the majority of college and university students, and many Edmontonians want legally binding air quality laws and would love to see Edmonton set the Canadian standard for great air quality and low emissions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from a constituent, Mr. Neil Evans. He said that he would like to comment on the Royalty Review Panel and tell us that he supports and agrees with its recommendations: "My opinion is that changes in the royalty structure and policy are long overdue, and that Albertans have been shortchanged by the generous royalty policies of previous governments."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

1:30

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from RKS Research and Consulting. It indicates that when asked to identify the states operating the most successful deregulated energy markets, the response was none.

The second tabling I have is a press release dated June 20, 2007, from the Official Opposition of the province of Alberta, and this press release is regarding Bill 46, which will restrict Albertans' democratic rights.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll return to the remainder of the Routine at the conclusion of question period.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Today it is my pleasure to invite the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to commence the fall session question period.

Royalty Revenues

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's my pleasure to respond. Secrecy and incompetence continue to be trademarks of this government. The current and former ministers of Energy claim Albertans have been receiving their fair share of billions of dollars in royalties. This has proven to be false. Yet they continue to figure prominently as front-row ministers in this government's cabinet. My question is to the Premier. What does it take before ministers are fired under this Premier's leadership?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I see Dr. Doom is back from vacation.

Mr. Speaker, I promised Albertans a very fair share of the development of the resources they own, and we have delivered on that commitment. Our royalty framework is fair to the owners of the resource, which are all Albertans, and it also finds the correct balance, providing the certainty and predictability for the continued investment that's necessary to develop the resources. We have found the balance, and I am certain that the policy is good for all Albertans.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier's word is no longer good enough. Albertans do not trust this government.

To the Minister of Energy: given that the minister has vigorously defended the old royalty regime knowing full well – full well – that it was shortchanging the citizens of this province billions of dollars, will the minister do the honourable thing and resign?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer would be no. However, I can indicate to the House and to all Albertans that, in fact, if you attach the 20 billion plus dollars that have been invested in capital deployment across this province year after year after year for the last five years, if you include the 8-plus billion dollars invested in the Wood Buffalo region year after year after year, if you include the jobs, jobs, jobs that Albertans received from the policies of this government, we are on the right path.

Dr. Taft: Despite seven years of gross financial mismanagement and incompetence on the part of three consecutive Energy ministers, the Premier refuses to do the right thing and clean up this mess. Why? Why does the Premier allow these ministers to remain in his cabinet?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in the period of time that the member is talking about, we've eliminated, paid off, \$22 billion worth of debt. We now have the highest employment rate in Canada. For the last – what? – three decades we have had the lowest income taxes. We also have the highest per capita income of any Canadian right here in Alberta, plus at least 500,000 new Albertans voting with their feet, moving to this province because our policies are correct. They also create new opportunities for their children and their grandchildren right here in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, for the past seven years this government has assured Albertans that they were receiving a fair share of royalties. They should have known better. Albertans were losing billions. The Auditor General states that the minister's technical review staff "held the view that Alberta has not been collecting its appropriate share since 2000." My question is to the Premier. The department staff has known the truth for seven years. Surely the cabinet did. Surely the Premier was at the cabinet table. How long has the Premier known that Albertans have not been getting their fair share? How long have you known?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this whole question about: where has the investment gone, whatever is being raised by the Liberals . . . [interjections] I always give the opposition the opportunity to ask a question uninterrupted. I would hope that they would find the decency someplace there to reward me with the same behaviour, be reciprocal. Maybe now they'll be quiet.

Mr. Speaker, since being appointed Premier, I immediately asked for a review of the royalty framework to make sure that it's keeping

up with the times. We've seen increasing prices, especially in oil. We've seen changes in world politics that made our resources more valuable. That was the most appropriate time to do the royalty review, and we did.

Dr. Taft: I'll repeat my question. Maybe we'll get an answer this time. The government staff have known the truth for seven years. Surely the cabinet was briefed. The Premier was at the cabinet table. How long has the Premier known that Albertans were not getting their fair share in royalties? How long? One year? Two years? Three years? Seven years? Answer.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to this whole question of fair share, when I look at – and this will come out in the next quarterly report – Crown lease sales, the highest ever, look at corporate tax revenue paid in this province, personal income tax, again much larger than projected, and given the fact that we have for-hire signs everywhere in this province of Alberta, that tells me that the money was reinvested in Alberta for not only developing the resources, but it also created opportunity for many other Albertans and gave them a much better quality of life in terms of health care and education right here in the province.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a straightforward question, but it is of fundamental importance, and the Premier is evading it. How long has the Premier known that the current royalty system was shortchanging the people of Alberta billions of dollars? When were you first informed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is making an assumption. All I'm saying is that the current policies of the government over the last number of years have been very good for the province of Alberta. We've seen tremendous growth. We're on the world stage as the province of Alberta in terms of a good place to invest. Again, we have the lowest per capita taxes, income taxes. We also have a good return on the investments. We have \$70 billion in investments. We're the engine of prosperity for all of Canada right here in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The oil and gas don't belong to this party that's governing or to this government. This government are trustees for the people of Alberta, who are the owners of this oil and gas. As trustees they owe an explanation to the citizens, so I will once more repeat my question to the Premier, who seems so determined to evade an answer. Mr. Premier, how long have you known that the people of Alberta were being shortchanged with the current royalty system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the hon. member has finally come to the realization that the resources of this province are owned by all Albertans. It's also put in place the policies we have today to support the next generation and the generation after that, and that is why the new dollars coming from the royalty framework will be invested. One-third of that will go, of course, into savings, whether it be endowments, whether it be the heritage savings trust fund. The balance of that will be invested in infrastructure and the maintenance of that infrastructure so that the next generation doesn't have to reach deep in their pocket to pay for the maintenance of all the new infrastructure we're building in the province of Alberta.

1:40

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, this is a question of profound importance. I am asking it on behalf of the citizens of this province. How long has this Premier known that the current royalty system was shortchanging the people billions of dollars a year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member is making an assumption. When I look at this province, I can't see where this province of Alberta was shortchanged when you look at the quality of life that we enjoy, the excellent health care. In fact, we're attracting to Alberta the world's best physicians, some of the best research people to the province of Alberta because they see hope and they see opportunity. We're going to make sure that the new policies, the new framework continue with the kind of openness, predictability, and certainty that investors need to bring more money and more investment to the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've seen a demonstration here of evasiveness seldom seen in this Assembly. My question is again to the Premier. Why does the Premier feel it so necessary to evade answering a very straightforward question?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member across is talking about or he's trying to make the assumption that there are missing billions. Well, there are. There are missing billions: \$22 billion of missing debt. That's missing. That's gone. That's paid off. Billions of dollars invested in infrastructure, in fact the most aggressive investment in public infrastructure ever in the province of Alberta, \$18 billion over three years. We see the best quality of life here in the province of Alberta compared to anyone in the country of Canada, yet they seem to be the doomsayers of tomorrow. I don't know where they're coming from, but I'm looking to the future, not only for our children but for our grandchildren. That's what they can't see.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Ministerial Accountability

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Three years ago the NDP said that Albertans were not getting a fair share from royalties. The Liberals failed to support higher royalties while the Tories claimed the sky would fall. The Liberals will plead ignorance, but the Minister of Energy cannot. His department told him Albertans should be earning up to \$2 billion more in royalties every year, and he covered it up. My question is to the Premier. When will you fire that Energy minister for this massive betrayal?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, obviously the two leaders must have been – I don't know – recessing together here or something like that and drawing up their own questions.

Mr. Speaker, going right back to where we were before, this is a wonderful province to live in. The billions of dollars that they're making remarks on are invested in the province of Alberta. We've paid off the debt. We have \$70 billion set aside in savings to invest. In fact, we also have a stabilization fund set aside to cushion this province from huge revenue differences because of oil and gas or any other revenue streams that may change in the province. There is no better place in Canada than right here in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. When will the Premier get out of his lame message box and answer a very, very clear question?

Now, the Auditor General said that this minister had access to information showing that royalties could be raised without hurting the industry, and he denied it in this House. How can you condone that, Mr. Premier? Why don't you do the right thing and fire that minister?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has issued a report. We have accepted that report. But before the Auditor General issued the report, made it public, I had called for a royalty review very early after being sworn in as Premier. It took time to do the review. The panel looked at so many different pieces of information. It's quite a very complex issue, obviously. We've received that report, we looked at it, and we made our decisions. Those decisions are good. They're good for the future because these are depleting resources, and we have to make sure that we find the balance but also keep some of that money aside for the next generations because that's important. Once the oil and gas is sold, it'll never come back.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the minister had knowledge that you could have raised royalties years ago and earned billions of dollars without hurting the industry. He did not tell Albertans that, and by evading the question, you are condoning that behaviour. Why is that minister still in your cabinet, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, they're making an assumption based on, you know, what he said – I don't know – three years ago or something like that. They'll never be satisfied as the ND opposition. If there's still any life left in the economy, they'll keep taxing it. They'll tax it to its death, and once it dies, they'll subsidize it. The policy we have is good, it's sound, and it's going to carry this province well into the next century.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to change from tax and spend to: let's have some integrity. Alberta has developed a reputation for respecting the rule of law and keeping its agreements. We have been able to attract billions of necessary dollars for the development of our oil sands. The problem, though, is that the Premier has given his word to Albertans that he is going to rip up those contracts. From the New Royalty Framework, page 10, it says "in the event that agreement cannot be reached, the government will take other measures." Will the Premier be open and honest with Albertans and tell us what those measures are?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes reference to this government tearing up agreements. We're not tearing up any agreements. Those agreements were renegotiated many, many times, many times at the request of oil and gas companies as prices changed over the years. That's dating way back, I believe, to the '60s, so there's good evidence as to how many times these agreements were open. We said that we're going to sit down and discuss the new royalty framework with the two companies. We're continuing to do that. It's in the best interests of their shareholders

between the two companies, the government of Alberta, and future generations to reach an agreement, and I'm confident we will.

Mr. Hinman: What a bunch of political propaganda.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier says that he's a man of his word. He has promised to be open and honest, but evidence has not shown that. He will not reveal his donation list, he has already increased the size of his cabinet, and he broke his promise that he wouldn't have a TV address or infomercial. Will the Premier and this government come to its senses, though, and reverse its decision to break the signed agreements with Syncrude and Suncor?

Mr. Stelmach: Obviously, he never heard the first answer. We're not tearing up any agreements. We're entering into discussions with the two companies, and we'll continue to do that. I also said that once those discussions have been completed, then we'll bring that information to all Albertans, just like we did with the royalty framework report. As soon as the government received it, we made it public. The reason we made it public is that the resources are owned by all Albertans. That report went to the owners of the resources, and they had the opportunity to review it. Everyone – the company, the government, the opposition – had time to look at it. Again, we're not tearing up any agreements. That is a false statement.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, they've said many times that they're going to rip up the agreement, and they said: we'd rather them take the carrot instead of the stick. I mean, how much more blatant can it be?

This government has a spending problem, not a revenue problem. The question I'd like to ask the Premier: does he really think that the government can do better with \$1.4 billion than the economy and the economic spinoff that we'd receive by leaving it there?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, talking about being honourable and a person of integrity, I would ask that member to withdraw those statements with respect to tearing up agreements. The government is not tearing up any agreements. I make that very clear in the House, and he made those comments again and again. There's nothing ever, anyplace, where it says that the government is tearing up any agreements.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Royalty Revenues (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The incompetence of this Progressive Conservative government in general and the Minister of Energy in particular is evident. This Progressive Conservative government, an incompetent government, allowed a government agency to use undercover spies to snoop and eavesdrop on unsuspecting, innocent, rural landowners. This incompetent Progressive Conservative government allowed billions of dollars in royalty revenue to go uncollected for years, when they knew Albertans were being shortchanged. This incompetent Progressive Conservative government drafted Bill 46, which is an assault on Alberta's democratic rights. My first question is to the Premier. Why did this incompetent Progressive Conservative government hire and protect incompetent ministers but fire and reject . . .

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, not having heard all of the question, if that's the way the behaviour of this House is going to take place in terms of that kind of language, I would assume that – you know, we have people in the galleries that watch. This is the highest court of the land. I hardly ever see anybody delivering evidence to the highest court of the land in that kind of manner.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. If the Premier won't answer, perhaps the Minister of Energy will try. My next question. According to the Auditor General's annual report from 2006-07, which I'm sure he has read by now, there's a quote here that "for a significant portion of 2006, the Production Audit Group consisted of only one auditor." Given that in that year we collected over \$9 billion in resource revenue, how can this minister assure this House and the resource owners in Alberta that we collected every penny that was due us when we only had one production auditor?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, indeed, the Auditor General's report was very interesting reading, and I do have to say that I've supported the report and continue to support the report. In fact, with respect to the audits we take it very seriously, and his comments around the capability of audit we are dealing with. We have stated publicly that we will continue to work with the Auditor General in the aspect of dealing with volumetric audits. As you would know, the volumetric system that we employ in the province of Alberta is a highly technical computerized system. It doesn't take thousands of minions running around to sample everybody's production. We receive the information in bulk. We receive the information in an IT system. It's all computerized, and it's checked on very regularly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the Minister of Energy to call good, hard-working people in the EUB and good, hard-working people in the Department of Energy minions is wrong.

Now, my next question is to the Premier. The departmental review staff at the Department of Energy – and I don't consider them to be minions – assure us that they held the view that Alberta has not been collecting its appropriate share of royalties since the year 2000. How can the Premier not admit that we have not collected our fair share in royalties and that this incompetent government has squandered billions of dollars in lost royalties?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the same question over and over again. Again, the billions of dollars of investment that came to Alberta at a time when oil was around \$18, \$19 a barrel grew this economy. It paid for a lot of the programs that we enjoy in health and education, in social services, and in taking care of children in our province. Billions of dollars went into infrastructure, and it kept our taxes at the lowest rate compared to other provinces. Also, the kind of certainty and predictability and investment that's necessary to grow this province will continue under this new royalty framework.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Alberta Farm Recovery Plan

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rising Canadian dollar continues to put increased economic strain on Alberta's producers, who already have to deal with rising input costs. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. What is the Alberta government doing to support its producers during these difficult times?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We understand that the producers in Alberta are going through some very difficult times with the rising Canadian dollar and the skyrocketing price of fuel, feed, and fertilizer. That's why on October 16 this year we announced the new Alberta farm recovery plan, \$165 million in short-term assistance that will directly benefit producers being hit by these rising costs. But this isn't the answer. Rather, the plan is a temporary bridge towards the development of long-term sustainable solutions. Our expectation is that over our support industry will be able to develop their own long-term transformation plans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is to the same minister. How will this plan work, and when can producers expect these supports?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good questions from an MLA well connected to agriculture, and I appreciate them.

Producers who are already enrolled in last year's CAIS program will have their entitlements calculated automatically. Those who did not participate in CAIS last year must submit the 2006 application prior to December 1. Producers can expect payments, Mr. Speaker, to begin this month. Priority processing will be given to those key industries that have been devastated by these economic trends. Any producers who would like to know more about the plan can phone the CAIS call centre or their local CAIS field analyst.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we've heard today, both the royalty review and the Auditor General have indicated that at least \$6 billion has not been collected by this government, the biggest financial scandal in Canadian history. Not only has this government allowed money to slip through its fingers, but the only plan they have for the future is to hope for surprise surpluses. How can this government continue to fail Albertans by not implementing a proper savings plan for substantive investments in the heritage savings trust fund? I'll ask the question to either the Deputy Premier or the President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you where there would have been billions of dollars gone if Albertans ever – perish the thought – elect a group whose sole purpose here is to drain as much money out of business and people as they can and spend it on the list of things they've got. If you want to talk about missing billions, that would be the gang that can't shoot straight right there.

The Premier ordered us, Mr. Speaker, from our unallocated surpluses: one-third into savings, two-thirds into deferred capital and maintenance. We continue to build the infrastructure for all the Albertans coming here to share the wealth yet look to the future in a responsible manner with our medical research, our heritage savings trust fund.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the government's very own projections, the revenue that this province is going to receive from oil and gas will significantly – significantly – decrease in a very short time. Those are your own numbers. Even with the new royalty rates implemented, this province is still going to be facing some very serious problems. We're living in a time when we need to be saving every penny, not losing \$6 billion. How does Mr. Please Don't Call This a Compromise and his gang of merry men plan on dealing with this projected decline in oil and gas revenue? We're facing a serious problem here.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the very strategic reinvestment money created from our oil industry in Alberta has developed not only probably one of the best health care systems but allowed us to reinvest in an advanced education system that is second to none. We have research people coming here. We have identified how important it is to have a diversified economy. The increase in corporate income tax, giving the low rates, the increase in personal income tax when they've paid the lowest percentage of personal income tax: all of these are for a well thought out, well-planned, long-term financial stability for this province.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to know if they're going to cut programs, if they're going to raise taxes, or if they're going to do both. That's really what we're trying to get at with these questions. Over 30 per cent of Alberta's revenue is coming from a source that is not going to last forever: oil and gas. Stakeholders across the board, including some in the galleries today, are projecting deficit budgets or increased taxes if the correct trend of spending and lack of saving continue. This is a serious, serious problem. Now I'm hearing that the ministers are asking for anywhere from 7 to 30 per cent increases in their own budget deliberations.

An Hon. Member: That's the Liberals.

Mr. R. Miller: That's you guys.

So the question is: how do you respond, Mr. President of the Treasury Board, to the possibility of a deficit budget in the next few years?

2:00

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, what an appropriate time, then, to develop a new royalty framework that addresses the long-term goals of Albertans, that lets us share in the wealth from our oil sands, which are truly Alberta's next wealth generator. We are aware that the conventional supplies of oil and gas are diminishing. In that light, the Premier has set forward a new royalty structure that will enhance and increase Albertans' capabilities to tackle anything that may come at them with the exception of, possibly, a Liberal government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

New Royalty Framework (continued)

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's new royalty framework proposes many changes to the way we calculate and charge royalties. Some might say that sweeping changes have been proposed, more so than at any time in Alberta's history with the oil and gas industry. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What are the steps to be followed to implement Alberta's new royalty framework?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I must indicate that this is very important policy, perhaps the most important policy that's been developed in the province of Alberta for some time. This policy is supporting a royalty framework for the future, and it requires some legislation and regulatory amendments plus a large amount of work on IT programming and perhaps even hardware upgrades to continue to implement the program. The implementation requires work with producers, requires work with regulators, and requires work with the government to continue our Premier's commitment to build a stronger Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. The second and final question, then, to the same minister: does he have a time frame for all of this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we have indicated in our response to the report, the time frame that we have is approximately 14 months. We are determined that our new royalty structure would be implemented and in place in January 2009.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Boy, wouldn't it be nice if people got 14 months' or two years' notice of a rent increase?

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, had the Conservatives actually collected the missing billions and had they managed the money wisely, we wouldn't be in the midst of an affordable housing crisis, but they didn't, and we are. In Fort McMurray rents are through the roof and climbing. To afford to pay the rent on an average two-bedroom unit in Fort McMurray now takes a salary of \$78,000 a year. To the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Service Alberta: will he institute a temporary rent cap now or, failing that, explain to us when he thinks the market is actually going to solve this?

Mr. Snelgrove: He's probably right on one point, Mr. Speaker, that if they had been in power and taken all the money they wanted out of the economy, we probably wouldn't have a rent crisis; we would probably have a Saskatchewan crisis, where we need people moving back.

Mr. Speaker, rent is a service and in many ways is a contract between someone wanting a place to live and someone offering that. Never before in recorded history has it worked when governments got involved in rent controls, price controls, when it actually worked to the benefit of the people it was trying to help, especially in a city like Fort McMurray, where it is so difficult to get a chance to do repairs on a building to modernize it because they simply can't move out. It's been 24/7, and that is a discussion that's a contractual agreement between an employee and someone providing the rent.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, what a shemozzle they've made of this. In Lethbridge the crisis is growing worse by the week. I've heard on good authority that there could be as many as three affordable housing construction initiatives that should have been under way by now that aren't, that kind of fell into a black hole when the province

handed the file to the cities and sent everybody back to Go, or maybe it was stop because nobody seems to be going forward; you're just kind of chasing your tails on this one. To the Associate Minister of Affordable Housing and Urban Development: does she have the proper roles and responsibilities in place for this, and if so, can she explain why not very much building is getting done yet?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, there's been significant building throughout the province. This member knows that recently it was announced, in March of this year, through the Affordable Housing Task Force report: \$285 million toward affordable housing, toward homelessness. This year alone 196 million of those dollars were for affordable housing. That is the beginning of a plan to develop 11,000 units over the next five years. So we are working. We're working hard, Mr. Speaker, and we will ensure that people are housed through affordable housing.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, this is not rocket science. Humans have been building places to live since they crawled out of the cave. We know how to do this. We also know – this hon. member knows – that in the last three months 75 new secondary suites across the province have been approved for development, 75 only.

You know, the Conservatives' recent announcement of a secretariat on housing and homelessness was nothing more than another plan to develop another plan. I can tell you that if it takes the associate minister till April to define the shape and role of the secretariat, then people sleeping in shelters tonight will be in those shelters this time next year and this time the year after that. Will the associate minister explain to the House what she is doing right now to help people who don't have adequate housing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important announcement, a secretariat to actually deal with the issue of homelessness, and that announcement came about because of what the communities in the province are doing at the community level. There's a whole paradigm shift in this province in regard to homelessness. You know that through the Pathways to Housing program, through Housing First, we house people before we have supports and services for that individual. The secretariat will work with the communities. It is the communities that have asked for this initiative, and they'll work very closely. It will be collaborative, it will be research driven, and it will be successful because it's a solution. But it takes time to develop solutions, and April is not that far away.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Royalty Revenues (continued)

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been misled for years about the government's royalty policies. According to the Auditor General Energy department staff have been considering royalty changes since the year 2000, and at least three years ago they concluded that Alberta's share had fallen to unacceptable levels. Unacceptable levels. No matter how this government spins it, that means billions of dollars are lost to the people of Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Was this Energy minister

briefed by the former minister that this was the case, and if not, why not?

Mr. Knight: No.

Mr. Martin: Let me understand what that minister is saying. He said that when he took over this Energy portfolio, something as serious as a billion dollars being misplaced was not important enough for that minister to give? He wasn't briefed about this? Is that what he's saying?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying is that there is no billions of dollars missing from anyplace. There was no requirement for me to get a briefing from any former minister with respect to the royalty structure. I understand the royalty structure, probably much better than the honourable gentleman across the way understands the royalty structure.

What I have indicated and what I believe is true is that the royalty structure in the province of Alberta is a policy set by the government. The policy is not set by reports that are developed both internally and externally and given to any minister at any point in time.

Mr. Martin: I couldn't hear the huffing and the puffing because of the noise.

When the Auditor General comes out and says that Alberta's share has fallen to unacceptable levels and that government doesn't see that as important to change right away, where is the responsibility here, Mr. Minister? That is not your money. That is the people of Alberta's money that was wasted there, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I have indicated previously and will repeat that I am actually in agreement with the Auditor General's report. The outcomes of that report we're dealing with, and we're dealing with the Auditor General on a continuing basis.

However, there are no missing billions. Those dollars remained in the province of Alberta, were invested, were a magnet for additional dollars. There are literally hundreds of billions of dollars that have been invested in this province over the period of time that these members speak about. It was very good policy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

2:10 **Staffing of Human Services Agencies**

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's human services agencies have told government that if they could attract and keep more qualified staff, they would be in a better position to offer the high-quality services that Albertans expect and need. My first question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What has your ministry done to help agencies recruit and retain qualified personnel for important areas such as PDD staffing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's really an honour to work with the tremendous staff of the contracted agencies as they provide services for persons with developmental disabilities. They do tremendous work for those individuals. I am pleased to announce also today that we are increasing funding for those agencies by \$15 million. We're adding those funds in response to knowing that the labour market is hot, that the wages in the other jurisdictions,

whether it be the public or private sector, are increasing. As such, we want to see that those agencies are able to retain those staff to do this very important work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: can Albertans expect to see more permanent residential spaces open up for persons with developmental disabilities due to today's funding announcement?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, this funding is to be directed solely towards wages of contracted agencies. It's not to be intended for additional aspects of the program delivery. This is specifically for those contracted agencies to provide additional dollars, through their salaries, for those individuals that work for them.

That said, this is a lot more than just about money. We supply over half a billion dollars for about 9,100 individuals, a very substantive amount, one of the largest amounts of money of anywhere in this country. It is not just about dollars. It's about how we get the effective services to those individuals. We are working very closely with those agencies to ensure that we look at our service delivery as well. How do we get those funds to the people when they need it in the fashion they need it?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Children's Services. Given that Alberta's human services agencies do reach right across the chronological gamut, can the minister advise this House what this new funding announcement will do for the children and families of this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are contributing \$10 million to add to today's announcement. I can tell you that this will be very good news for the contracted agencies who deliver very necessary and important services for Children's Services. Over the last couple of months I've had an opportunity to visit many of them and to tour their programs, and I can tell you that I have been in absolute awe of their commitment and dedication to the children of this province. I know that this will go a long way in helping them with their staffing issues, but more important I think this is a great recognition of our commitment to them and our value of that working industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Calgary Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary desperately needs a complete ring road, and the most pressing section of that road is the southwest leg. Calgarians have known this for years, yet we continue to be mired in uncertainty, delay, and concerns over the cost of a deal for the right-of-way. More revenue would move this project forward, but this government has failed to collect billions of dollars in resource royalties as the Auditor General has shown. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: how can the minister justify to Calgarians the lack of any land deal with the Tsuu T'ina and no construction under way?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very easy to justify.

We started one ring road just this summer, we're finishing one ring road there, and we're very serious with our negotiations with the Tsuu T'ina. We honour the right to be able to negotiate that deal with them. We have full intentions that we are going to go through with the deal, and we have full intentions that someday we're going to come to the proper agreement.

Mr. Cheffins: Mr. Speaker, the cost increases on the south Calgary hospital project have quite rightly made headlines all over this province. Because of the delays in providing funding for the project, the cost of the building has spiralled. Of course, if the government had been collecting another \$1 billion to \$2 billion in royalties as they should have been, this hospital could already have been built. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: how can the minister justify the completely unnecessary cost inflation from \$550 million to \$1.2 billion and delays on the south Calgary hospital?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there haven't been any delays on the south Calgary hospital. This hon. member is too recent to know what's going on, I guess. The planning for the Calgary south health campus was announced a number of years ago. The planning process has been in place. The process has continued apace. It was budgeted for, and it's continuing to be budgeted for. There have been increases in terms of what's been planned for that area, and there have been increases in construction costs, but there haven't been delays in the process. It's proceeding rapidly.

Mr. Cheffins: Calgarians have known about this. Calgarians have been waiting since you blew up a hospital in Calgary. So my constituents know better.

Mr. Speaker, Calgary's postsecondary institutions have also felt the burden of underfunding. Mount Royal College needs a library. SAIT desperately needs to expand its trades and technology complex. A lack of funding for their urban campus has held that project back. No money, ever more delays. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: again, given this government's utter failure to collect our fair share of resource revenue, how can the minister justify not building these projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, perhaps the hon. member across the way will learn over time that he should really check with the proponents of some of these projects before he starts talking about them in this House. The urban campus is a perfect example of this. We are working on the urban campus with a number of the proponents. However, what was going to be program delivery has not been decided yet. The other partners that may become involved, like ACAT, have not been decided yet. These are things that the partners have had difficulty bringing together. It's not that we've had a lack of funding. In fact, we've granted some funding to the planning for the urban campus just recently.

I'd also like to suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that had we . . .

The Speaker: I have to call on the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Oil Sands Development

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that Prime Minister Stephen Harper is back home in our beautiful province today visiting Fort McMurray and our valuable oil sands industry there. [interjection] My questions are to the Minister of Interna-

tional, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What are the measurable economic impacts that Alberta's oil sands are having on Alberta and the rest of Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll give serious contemplation to naming a particular lake after, perhaps, Harry some day; lake Harry does have a particular sound to it that I think we'll have to contemplate.

At this particular point in time I'd like to say that the real benefit is simply this: over \$150 billion; we are the envy of every province and territory in Canada in terms of what we are doing; over a thousand new construction jobs.

I'm very pleased to say that our Prime Minister is visiting the oil sands capital of the world because it is about the future of our young people and the wealth that comes from the oil sands.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second and final question is to the same minister. How is Alberta's prosperity helping to fuel Canada's economic growth?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, Mr. Speaker, our Premier just recently was on Bay Street in Toronto, and when he was speaking at the Empire Club, he talked about the powerful economic punch that our province has in terms of what we are contributing. We contribute almost \$9 billion to the federation of Canada, but what is more important are the jobs we create in other parts of Canada and within Alberta. That's good news for Alberta; it's good news for Canada. As the Premier said, and rightfully so, from the respect he's garnered from other Premiers at the Council of the Federation in Moncton, New Brunswick – other Premiers defended Alberta by saying: let's not kill the goose that is laying the golden eggs. Unlike what the Liberals and the New Democrats want to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:20

Health Care Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgarians continue to suffer the consequences of this government's failure to meet their needs, which is particularly galling given this government's refusal to collect an additional \$1 billion to \$2 billion each year since 2000. Seven urgent surgeries were postponed last week in Calgary because there were no intensive care beds available. My question is to the minister of health. What is the minister doing to address the short-term lack of capacity across the province, especially in Calgary, where surgeries are being cancelled because beds and staff are not available? The south Calgary hospital is not going to help today.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of assumptions in that question which ought to be addressed; first of all, the suggestion of lost billions that keeps coming up over and over from these people. They fail to understand that an increase in the cost to business over that period of time when the prices of oil and gas were low might have had an entirely different effect. So they shouldn't be just assuming that there are billions of dollars.

To the more important question, the question about dealing with the needs of Albertans when it comes to surgeries and the beds being

available. There is an issue in this province. There's an issue of a shortage of people, and we've been working very hard in Health with Employment, Immigration and Industry and with Advanced Education to make sure that we have the nursing personnel both being trained here in this province and coming from abroad to work in those places. There's not a shortage of infrastructure right now; it's a shortage of people.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. That's not short term you're talking about.

To the same minister. A shortage of long-term care beds contributes to backups in hospitals, including longer wait times in the emergency room. With only 2 per cent of the lost billions at least 11 new continuing care facilities could have been built in Edmonton, Smoky Lake, Crowsnest Pass, Taber, Pincher Creek, Coaldale, Lacombe, Wetaskiwin, Bow Island, Bassano, and Hythe. What excuse does the minister have for the province's shortage of long-term care beds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The real issue today, as I said in the answer to the last question, is about people. The success of this province is such that the economy has been so strong that it has been difficult to get enough people to fill the jobs to keep those beds open. There are long-term care capacity needs, but the primary concern is not the beds. It's the health care aides, the personal care aides, to be able to provide the services needed in those areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Mr. Speaker, the \$6 billion this government failed to collect over the past seven years, minimum, could have paid the salary of over 5,000 doctors a year or 17,000 nurses a year or built new cancer centres in Calgary, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, and Red Deer. Why didn't the minister lobby his colleagues to collect a fair share of royalties so it could fund these essential health services?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the question of what's a fair share of royalties is a question of a point in time. When the royalty design that is currently in place was brought in, the price of oil was around \$11 and the cost of extraction in the oil sands was around \$17 a barrel. Times change, and our Premier moved immediately upon being elected Premier to call for a royalty review because in the last three to four years the price of oil has now reached the level that it is at. To suggest that there's a large amount of money out there that could have built a lot of things or paid for a lot of things is absolutely invalid.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, considering we've had a little sojourn for about four and a half months, that wasn't really that bad. We had 84 questions and answers today, and tomorrow we'll just ask you to sort of tighten things up just a bit more so we can try and get in a few more questions and answers. But it's important to have this opportunity to allow exuberance to come in after a little sojourn.

We're going back now to tablings. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was next on my list.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**
(continued)

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Friday

evening last I had the opportunity to attend the seventh annual registered apprenticeship program 2007 scholarship celebrations at the Chateau Lacombe. I just want to say what a wonderful event it was. I had an opportunity to sit with Christopher Rooyakkers and his parents. He's a chef apprentice, graduated from McNally high school. They were quite enlightening in terms of sharing information. I'm also proud to say that a resident of Edmonton-Rutherford, Brennan Haycock, who graduated from Louis St. Laurent, is now an apprentice electrician. I'm happy to table five copies of the program from that evening for other members to review.

The Speaker: Are there others under tablings? If not, then the chair has three.

Hon. members, pursuant to section 39(3) of the Legislative Assembly Act the chair would like to table with the Assembly five copies of Members' Services Committee Order MSC 1/07, Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 19), which came into force on October 24, 2007. The subject matter has to do with a recommendation from the Auditor General to take a look at the gifts and promotional items portfolio of all members' constituency office allocations. This is being tabled, and members might spend a few minutes looking at it.

Pursuant to section 28(1) of the Ombudsman Act I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 39th annual report of the office of the Ombudsman for the period April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006. For the first time in our history, as per Standing Orders changes made last spring, Standing Order 55.01, this report is referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. A copy of this report was distributed to members on October 24.

Pursuant to section 46(1) of the Conflicts of Interest Act, chapter C-23 of the *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000* I'm also pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Ethics Commissioner. This report covers the period April 1, 2006, to March 31, 2007. Again as per Standing Order 55.01 this report is referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. A copy of this report was distributed to members on July 25, 2007.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, responses to questions raised by Mr. Bonko, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, on June 7, 2007, in the Department of Environment 2007-08 main estimates debate; response to Written Question 15, asked for by Mr. MacDonald on June 11, 2007; return to order of the Assembly MR 8, asked for by Mr. Chase on behalf of Dr. Swann on June 11, 2007; pursuant to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, the Ministry of Environment environmental protection security fund annual report, April 1, 2006, to March 31, 2007.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, pursuant to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Act the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research 2007 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before moving on, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister for Capital Planning.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, colleagues and Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a very diligent constituent of mine, Mr. Vince Laberge, who has a keen interest in provincial proceedings. I know he cares deeply about the affordable housing initiative, as do I. He's very well known to me and to other members of the House here for providing very sound and solid advice to us on many occasions, today being one of them. I see he has risen. Welcome now, if you will, Mr. Vince Laberge.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, earlier today during the Routine under Notices of Motions the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre rose to give notice about a point of privilege she wanted to raise. There was no need under that part of the Routine, and no motion is required in terms of a member rising on a point of privilege. The member advised my office on Friday that she was going to be doing this, and that's perfectly acceptable. The document has been circulated. That can just be put in the storage container beside your desk. Unless there is a prima facie case of privilege arrived at by determination, there is no motion that can proceed.

At the moment the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is being recognized if she rises on a point of privilege.

Privilege Misleading the House

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This point of privilege arises out of a series of events that took place in this Assembly and subsequent to that on April 30, 2007. The direct exchange is found in *Hansard* on page 694. At that time the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked a question of the Minister of Energy regarding a tabling that had happened earlier specific to the content of the 2005-2006 internal royalty review. Significant portions had not been tabled or had been censored from what was tabled.

In his response the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, who is also, of course, the Minister of Energy, indicated, "Mr. Speaker, there is nothing in any of those documents that would indicate to anybody that we have not collected a fair share of royalties for Albertans." In fact, there were a number of references in the documents that were tabled, censored as they were, that did indicate that.

Mr. Speaker, the member made misleading statements. In doing so, he defied the dignity of the Assembly and interfered with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's ability to discharge his duties as the Official Opposition shadow minister of Energy. I would also add that because of the minister's statements that day, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was also impeded in the fulfillment of his duties as opposition leader in holding the government accountable.

2:30

Mr. Speaker, there are several tests that I need to meet today. First of all, notification, which you noted and as outlined in Standing Order 15(2). Written notice was provided to you. We also provided a copy to the affected member, the Minister of Energy and Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, and, as a courtesy, to the Government House Leader. All of this was on Friday, November 2, 2007. I attempted to give oral notice today during Routine, which was not necessary.

A second test that must be met in these cases is that the point is raised at the earliest possible opportunity. The statements were made on April 30, and we believed them to be misleading at the time, but with the release of the Auditor General's report on

Tuesday, October 2, this confirmed the fact that the Assembly had been misled in the member's statements of April 30.

There are two examples I will give you, Mr. Speaker, that address situations where misleading statements from a member were verified as incorrect and became known at a later date. All of these were as a result of the report of an Auditor General or another public inquiry.

In Manitoba on April 6, 1999, the then Premier was accused of deliberately misleading the Assembly regarding the Interlake vote splitting scandal, and the subsequent Monnin inquiry illuminated that the information was indeed misleading. These issues were a result of the Manitoba provincial election in 1995, and the Manitoba Speaker agreed that the point of privilege had been lodged at the earliest opportunity, that being as soon as it was verified through the report some four years later.

Likewise, allegations that the Manitoba Assembly had been deliberately misled because of statements relative to the Crocus superfund scandal did not surface until several years afterwards. Then a quote from the hon. Jon Gerrard. He says:

I raise this issue now because until we had the Cabinet document of November 27, 2000, we did not know in this Legislature that we . . . and the people of Manitoba generally have been so badly misled by the Minister of Finance.

Again, in this situation the Speaker found that the elapsed time was not a bar to the matter.

Clearly, the Minister of Energy made statements that misled this Assembly. The content of his department's own review offers evidence that the opposite was the case.

Now, specifically the intentions of the minister. As we have noted, his only intention could have been to mislead this Assembly because his own review showed that for many years the royalty structure was not, as he said, building a stronger Alberta.

What privilege has been breached? Looking at *Marleau and Montpetit* on page 51, I quote: "The House has the authority to invoke privilege where its ability has been obstructed in the execution of its functions or where Members have been obstructed in the performance of their duties." The essential role of the Official Opposition is holding the government accountable for its actions. In that role question period is one of our most important tools for calling the government to account, and as *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, sixth edition, states at 410(5), our ability to call the government to account for the loss of billions of dollars was hindered to a degree that was shameful.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it would be naïve to suggest that every question in this Assembly will receive an answer, but I do note in *Beauchesne's* 97, quoting Speaker Sauvé, that

while it is correct to say that the government is not required by our rules to answer written or oral questions, it would be bold to suggest that no circumstances could ever exist for a prima facie question of privilege to be made where there was a deliberate attempt to deny answers to an Hon. Member, if it could be shown that such action amounted to improper interference with the Hon. Member's parliamentary work.

Indeed, I believe that happened in the case specifically for the members for Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-Riverview. The statements of the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky have prevented these key functions. It greatly affected the ability of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to perform his role as Energy critic. Had the information collected by the Department of Energy been accurately reported before this Assembly, then the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would have conducted further inquiries and handled his duties differently. At the time of the utterance made on April 30, there were still 23 sitting days remaining in the session. Those are days the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar could have used differently had he not been misled.

The disrespect for the Assembly also greatly affected the conduct of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview in his role as Leader of the Official Opposition. For two months our own members but also those of other opposition parties were prevented from the effective conduct of their duties in this House and outside of it.

This is not a case where the information was not available, where facts were uncertain, or where the member was not informed of proceedings. All the information was in this minister's possession. His own department had passed on their conclusion, and the report of the Auditor General states this point with absolute clarity. In the annual report of the Auditor General of Alberta, volume 1, pages 91 and 92, the Auditor General states that the Department of Energy knew at least three years ago that Alberta's share had fallen below the target range. Without a doubt, in the period preceding the incident in question the member had been advised that this royalty structure was neither building a stronger Alberta, nor had the government collected a fair share of royalties for Albertans, as he stated in his responses on the 30th of April.

We hold these misleading statements to be a grave breach of privilege. The authorities I use, Mr. Speaker, include *Marleau and Montpetit*, providing explicit guidance on the concepts of contempt and privilege, pages 51 to 53 and 66 to 67. Also, those basic privileges are expanded in Joseph Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, second edition, page 193. I have also given a number of examples of *Beauchesne's* parliamentary rules at 410 and 97.

In order to represent the people of this province, it is clear that the integrity of this House and its individual members be treated with respect. How can we command any measure of public respect when members act in such a fashion?

I have already spoken of the importance of the role of the Official Opposition in ensuring accountability of the government, which we were precluded from doing because the statements we were given were false or misleading.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a situation that involves a misstatement or a misunderstanding of the use of language. It is not an issue that could have given rise to a subjective difference of opinion. What we are dealing with here is a deliberate attempt to frustrate the operation of this Assembly. This situation constitutes more than a mere allegation of misleading this House. The time has come for the government to accept absolute responsibility for the comments of this member before this Assembly.

I am guided by previous rulings from this Speaker, specifically May 4 of 2000 in *Hansard*, appearing on page 1339: "Members have to be responsible for what they say in this House, absolutely responsible, and there's no shirking of that responsibility." When referring to a purported matter of privilege on March 12, 2002, *Hansard*, page 267, the Speaker outlined this valuable guidance. In this case the allegation made by the member at that time for Edmonton-Highlands focused on a certain subjective interpretation. "Such an allegation is at best a disagreement between members and hardly meets the test of a point of order." But, Mr. Speaker, in this situation we clearly have a minister who provided information that either he knew to be false or, alternatively, should have known through the exercise of due diligence that the information was misleading.

Information cannot be subjectively misleading. The minister was confronted with the full and unedited text of the report and chose to contradict it. This behaviour is without doubt deliberately misleading. How can contradictory information which is known to the member be subjectively interpreted? If an individual offers information before a court of law that they know is false, that person is guilty of contempt, Mr. Speaker. What you have before you is

just such a situation. I ask the Speaker to rule that a prima facie case of breach of privilege has been established.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, I'm not sure where you'd be coming from on this point, but there is a case of privilege raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, and it would be most appropriate now to allow the hon. member who's been named in this point to respond as he chooses to respond at this point in time.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

2:40

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually pleased to have an opportunity here to initially respond to the point of privilege made by the hon. member. Simply put, I have nothing but the utmost respect for this Assembly, and I would not do anything to intentionally mislead you, Mr. Speaker, any of my colleagues, or any members of this Assembly or, for that matter, Albertans.

It's important to note that the Premier announced last December that the Department of Finance would be undertaking a public royalty review. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this announcement was made formally through the mandate letter issued to the Minister of Finance on the very same day that I was appointed Minister of Energy. During the entire time that I've had the privilege of being Alberta's Minister of Energy, this public consultation and review has been ongoing with the exception of the past two weeks, when the Premier announced our government's new royalty framework.

It was never my intent to prejudice the work of either the Royalty Review Panel or the Auditor General or to comment on work that had been done in the past. As part of the review process, Mr. Speaker, I took steps to ensure that the panel and the public had the information and support they needed from this ministry, including the release of analytical reports prepared for the Department of Energy by outside consultants.

Keeping in mind copyright laws and FOIP legislation, I tabled what I could in this Assembly, and I asked that the full reports, where they could be viewed by the public, be placed in the department's library. This was done, Mr. Speaker, in the name of ensuring that the panel and all Albertans had access to information that could help them reach their own conclusions about our royalty regime.

It is in this context, Mr. Speaker, that I rose on April 30, 2007, to respond to a series of questions posed to me by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. The question related to a specific set of documents I tabled in the House on April 16, 2007. The hon. member was asking about a chart which was part of, to use his words, "an extensive review of our royalty structure between 2005 and 2006" and why it wasn't tabled in the House.

In looking at only one part of an answer I gave to those questions from the member last spring, the hon. member is taking my point out of context. As *Hansard* clearly shows, Mr. Speaker, I said that you can look at any snapshot in time or look at one aspect of the system and draw a variety of conclusions about the performance of our royalty regime. However, if you choose to do that, I would suggest that your conclusions won't be very well informed because they are not considering the entire situation. The hon. member is doing the same thing with my statement: looking at one portion of it, drawing conclusions, and making allegations.

I stand by my comments from last spring, which were clearly in reference to the Wood Mackenzie documents and, specifically, information regarding internal international comparisons, which I have made public, by the way. Taken on its own, that information, international comparisons, does not consider countless other factors

such as cost environments, productivity levels, anticipated commodity pricing, or any other factors that must be considered before deciding whether a royalty regime is appropriate and effective.

As I said on that day, the information in the Wood Mackenzie documents is not sufficient to reach a well-informed decision on whether Albertans are receiving a fair share from the development of our energy resources. The table in question indicates what others are receiving and does not at any point make reference or determine what is fair. If it was not clear in my answers that day that I was specifically referring to the Wood Mackenzie documents – and I believe that the hon. member was questioning me about that – then I apologize to my hon. colleagues.

Clearly, the opposition feel that the present royalty system would not be the one that they would design. That is their right as Albertans and their role as opposition members in this Assembly.

I believe in the new royalty framework of the Premier, and, Mr. Speaker, that is my right also. Difference does not constitute a willful or deliberate attempt to mislead members of the Assembly or Albertans.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this matter in the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: The chair has heard from two hon. members with respect to this matter. As this is all now in *Hansard*, the only opportunity the chair and the table officers will have to review both arguments will be to review the *Hansard*, which we can't possibly do for several hours yet. So I will defer any decision with respect to this. I mean, there's lots of information contained in both statements.

Also, both hon. members have only had an opportunity in the last few minutes to hear the arguments from one another, so I offer them an opportunity to read attentively what's included in *Hansard*, the arguments from both sides. Should there be a need for either member to add something further to this matter, we'll invite you with the conclusion of the Routine tomorrow afternoon to do so as we move forward with respect to this matter. In other words, the chair will not have a decision rendered by tomorrow but will give both members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky an opportunity tomorrow to look at that matter. I appreciate the responsible approach taken by both hon. members with respect to this.

head:

Emergency Debate

The Speaker: Now we have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who has a Standing Order 30 application.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30 I would move that

we adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the failure of the government to promptly introduce and pass royalty legislation to prevent the loss of billions of dollars to the public treasury as oil prices rise dramatically.

Mr. Speaker, under this I would like to indicate that in section 30(7) motions under this standing order are subject to the following conditions. First of all, that "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." I would argue that the government's failure to bring forward legislation at the beginning of this session means that Albertans stand to lose billions of dollars in revenue as the delay prevents the implementation of new royalty legislation that would

raise rates. The government has stated that it does not intend to have its new royalty rates take effect until 2009, and it does not intend to bring forward legislation on the matter in this session; therefore, there is no other opportunity to debate this issue.

Mr. Speaker, with the price of a barrel of oil just about now reaching \$100, the unwillingness of the government to move quickly and promptly on the issue will cost the public treasury millions of dollars by the minute between now and 2009, and the implications of such a sizable loss of revenue make this an urgent matter.

Other requirements that "not more than one . . . motion may be proceeded with on the same day" seem to be satisfied.

Section (c) that "not more than one matter may be discussed on the same motion" I think is met.

That "the motion must not revive discussion on a matter that has been discussed in the same session pursuant to this Standing Order" has been met.

The motion is not based on a question of privilege, and discussion under the motion does not raise a question that can only be debated on a motion on notice.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that the failure of the government in the past but also going forward to deal adequately with the question of royalties has cost the treasury of this province billions upon billions of dollars. The decision of the government not to proceed with legislation immediately in this session means that additional massive quantities of cash which ought to be coming to the people of this province will instead flow to large multinational oil and gas companies.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, this is an urgent matter because we all know that there are priorities among the people of this province that are crying out for solutions, and the government's negligence, dare I say, on this whole question has cost Albertans dearly. I believe that this is a most urgent matter which requires the full attention of the Assembly, and we should be debating this question of royalties today in this House so that all Albertans can see where all of the parties stand on the matter and that we can ensure, hopefully, that the value of our resources, which is the heritage of our children and our grandchildren, is adequately captured by a government policy that puts the people of this province first, not the multinational oil companies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Do others want to offer some guidance to the chair? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would oppose the adjourning of the ordinary business of the House to speak to this matter for a number of reasons. One should only do that in the most urgent of cases, and while the question of royalties is very important – the whole question of the royalty regime and the way forward with respect to royalties is absolutely one of the most important questions for Albertans today – it doesn't necessarily meet the test of urgency as has been framed by the hon. member today.

He wants to have the House adjourn to discuss the failure of the government to promptly introduce and pass royalty legislation. Well, this is day 1 of the session. No additional legislation has been introduced this fall as yet because it is day 1 of the session. But I will say that I did indicate as House leader that it was not our intention to bring legislation forward this fall because it takes time to properly draft legislation to make sure that it has the appropriate effect, and it takes time to put in place the necessary technology to give effect to the legislation. It's been made very clear by this government what the new royalty regime will be and when it will

take effect, and the legislation that's needed to do that will be drafted carefully and appropriately and brought into the House when it's ready to do so.

Now, the question of the passing of the legislation, of course, is not the government's purview; it's this House's purview, so to debate the failure of the government to pass royalty legislation really denigrates the role of the House.

Preventing the loss of a billion dollars to the public treasury is another piece of it, and quite frankly if that's what the hon. member wants to debate, then there will be supplementary supply this fall, and there will be an opportunity during that supplementary supply to talk about whatever the hon. member might want to bring forward.

So there are a number of reasons why. While the question of royalties and the royalty process is a very important question for Albertans, the Standing Order 30 that's brought forward by the member today doesn't pass the tests of urgency and appropriateness.

The Speaker: Others?

Okay. Well, the chair is prepared to rule on this matter. First, the chair confirms that the notice of the application was provided to the Speaker's office this morning at 9:55 by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview of the leader's intention to seek permission, so the requirement in terms of notification certainly has been met.

Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed to be put to the Assembly, the chair must rule whether the motion meets the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that the matter proposed for discussion relates to "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

The relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic are *Beauchesne's*, paragraphs 387, 390, and *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589. The chair has reviewed these references closely in considering this request for leave, and there are two key points that the chair would like to emphasize to all members. First, to meet the requirements of urgency, there must not be another opportunity for members of the Assembly to discuss the matter, and secondly, the matter must relate to a genuine emergency.

The wording of the member's proposed motion is as follows.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the failure of the government to promptly introduce and pass royalty legislation to prevent the loss of billions of dollars to the public treasury as oil prices rise dramatically.

One of the key words in all of this is "royalties," at least in the eyes of the chair, who has been in Alberta for the last five or six months and has heard this word once, twice, three times.

The chair has listened attentively to arguments from both sides of the Assembly in this matter. The chair would however like to make some preliminary comments about Standing Order 30 applications generally. First, the chair has difficulty with the language used in the proposed application. It is provocative, pejorative, and in parts simply incorrect. The incorrect portion is where it says that the government can "introduce and pass royalty legislation." The government can certainly introduce the legislation, but it is only this Assembly that can pass it. The chair would think that this is a rather fundamental aspect of the law-making process of which members are involved.

The chair raised similar issues in an application by the leader of the third party on May 10, 2005, at pages 1400 to 1401 for that day. The chair's concern is that even though the debate under Standing Order 30 does not entail a decision of the Assembly, it would be perceived that if the application was to succeed, people can infer that

the chair and members agree with the provocative wording, which is not the case.

To return to the wording of Standing Order 30, suborder (1) refers to a member requesting leave to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of, again, "urgent public importance." The chair interprets the motion to be for the adjournment of the business of the Assembly. It should not entail the sort of wording found in the member's motion. The chair interprets the request to be for a discussion in the Assembly concerning royalties on petroleum-based resources. That's the interpretation that the chair gives to the submission.

The chair would also draw to all members' attention that this interpretation may have further implications, and you may find those further implications under Standing Order 30(7)(d).

In terms of meeting the urgency requirement, the chair has closely reviewed today's Order Paper to determine whether there is another opportunity afforded to members to discuss this very serious matter. It does not appear to the chair based on the November 5, 2007, Order Paper that there will be an opportunity other than the question period to debate the issue of royalties and all that has happened since the Assembly last met.

Finally, although the chair has concerns with the wording of the hon. member's motion, the chair would be hard-pressed to find that the matter of royalty rates in the province of Alberta is not a matter that qualifies as a genuine emergency for the purposes of having a debate in this Assembly on this matter this afternoon. The chair would not in any way want to be taken as saying that this does not constitute a genuine emergency when so much of the province's economic life revolves around nonrenewable energy resources. Accordingly, the chair finds that the request for leave is in order and now puts the following question: shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

I suspect that all members would like to know the process and the procedure. I'll go through the process and the procedure just so that everybody is aware of this; this is so infrequent that we've arrived at this kind of a conclusion. If 15 or more members rise, the debate proceeds and the Speaker calls upon the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. The debate time would then be 10 minutes and conclude when all members who wish to take part have spoken or at 6 this afternoon, whichever occurs first. So if 15 or more members rise, the debate proceeds.

If at least five members but less than 15 rise, the question on whether the member has leave to move adjournment of the ordinary business is put immediately and if necessary determined by a division; in other words, although the chair has said that this can proceed, if there are between five and 15 members, you will then vote yes or no, and you can overrule the chair. This is not a vote of confidence in the chair.

The third option is the following: if fewer than five members rise, the motion does not proceed.

So the question is now asked: shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

[Fewer than 15 but more than five members rose. The division bell was rung at 3 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

The Speaker: Hon. members, first of all, we have not called Orders of the Day yet, so if there are outside liquids in the Assembly, this is still inappropriate.

Secondly, this being a rather unique situation, for those members who may not have been in the Chamber, who may have been out

taking a very important call, dealing with a constituent and the like, there has been opportunity already. If 15 or more members would have risen, we would have proceeded to this debate *per se*. We are now into a division, and it will be a majority vote that will determine the decision. It will not be 15 or more members alone that will cause this action to move in a certain direction.

We currently have the question: shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

3:10

For the motion:

Abbott	Goudreau	Mitzel
Agnihotri	Griffiths	Ouellette
Amery	Hancock	Pannu
Blakeman	Hayden	Pastoor
Boutilier	Hinman	Pham
Brown	Horner	Renner
Cao	Jablonski	Rodney
Cenaiko	Johnson	Rogers
Chase	Johnston	Shariff
Cheffins	Lindsay	Stevens
DeLong	Lund	Strang
Dunford	Martin	Taft
Eggen	Marz	Tarchuk
Elsalhy	Mason	Taylor
Evans	Melchin	Tougas
Forsyth	Miller, B.	Webber
Fritz		

Against the motion:

Ducharme	Liepert	Morton
Graydon	Lukaszuk	Oberle
Groeneveld	Magnus	Prins
Knight	McFarland	

Totals: For – 49 Against – 11

[Motion to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly carried]

The Speaker: The chair will now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to proceed and will draw to all members' attention Standing Orders 30(5), (6), and (7). Essentially, the speaking time is now 10 minutes per member. When all members who wish to take part have spoken, the debate will end or at the normal hour of adjournment, which would be 6 o'clock this afternoon. This debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly, and no vote is taken. All members may provide their thoughts for 10 minutes.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's an unexpected pleasure and a great honour to rise to speak to the Standing Order 30 request for a debate on royalties. This is an issue that has been of great interest to Albertans from one corner of our province to the other for the past several months, and in fact it's an issue that goes way back in time in this province.

I want to go back to the days when Peter Lougheed, formerly the Premier of this province and a Conservative leader, raised royalties not once but twice, in 1972 and 1974, and the howls of outrage from the oil industry when he did that, Mr. Speaker. The oil companies stayed, and in fact Alberta has prospered. That brings me to the present decision of the government to raise royalties by an amount which is less than was recommended by the royalty task force of the province, which talked about raising royalties. That was for us a minimum amount, a good starting place. That task force report would have increased the revenue of the province by approximately

\$2 billion per year. The government's proposal falls short of that mark and raises royalties by \$1.4 billion according to the government's own numbers.

Mr. Speaker, clearly, the standard which I think the people of Alberta set, which is that the royalty task force recommendations are a bare minimum, has not been met by the government. We have the Premier taking out at great public expense advertising in newspapers, on radio, and so on claiming that he has met a commitment to the people of Alberta. He has not. He has not met the commitment the people of Alberta expect.

Let's be clear. The value of the oil in this province is rising very, very dramatically. Just the other day the price of oil hit nearly \$96 per barrel. The royalty regime we're now dealing with was set in the days of \$15 a barrel. Mr. Speaker, in the last election the Alberta NDP was the only party to call for an increase in royalties. The reaction that we got from the leader of the Conservative Party at that time, Mr. Klein, was that it was a new NDP NEP, that it would bring about a disaster when royalties were raised. The Liberals were completely silent on this question during the last election, when we were the only party that stood up in favour of higher royalties.

Mr. Speaker, we now are faced with the prospect of \$100 a barrel oil or higher. The royalty task force members have said that what they represented in their report was actually a compromise. In fact, they retained the penny-on-the-dollar royalty for the oil sands plants that were not fully paid out, and that, I think, is unacceptable. The Premier has talked about raising it to a nickel. No other industry receives that degree of subsidization from the public purse for its capital costs. In fact, the economic rent that we receive under the new proposal of the government will fall very far short of the potential of this province.

The government claims that it is going to increase royalties by 20 per cent. The Liberal opposition claims that they are going to raise royalties by 20 per cent. Well, Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that that falls well short of the economic rent on these resources. In fact, when oil increases from \$80 to \$100 and from \$100 to \$120 a barrel, there is no additional value that is brought by the operations of the company. These companies are profitable at \$50 a barrel, so when it goes much higher than that, why then does the government regime allow the majority of that increased value to flow to the companies? Where does it go? There's so much talk on the other side about the oil industry and the benefits that it brings to this province's economy, and that's true, but what they overlook is that the bulk of the profits that these oil companies are making is actually going to shareholders.

If you look at EnCana, last year it posted the highest profit of any company in Canadian history, \$6.3 billion profit. Mr. Speaker, EnCana could have paid the whole \$2 billion that the royalty task force proposed for an increase and still been able to give its shareholders \$4.3 billion in value.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it's clear that this government has settled for peanuts. We will remain among the lowest royalties in the entire world. Why, when Norway, when Alaska have built up huge funds, are we going to continue to collect a fraction of the value that we as Albertans deserve on our own resources? I thought that the task force report made a very good point. It said that there's a fundamental difference between taxes and royalties. Taxes are something you take from people who've worked hard to earn it, so every penny you take has to be justified. On the other hand, royalties are something you charge for something that you own, so every penny you don't take has to be justified.

3:20

Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has not justified the actions that it has taken. It has not justified the fact that it is taking so little

of the value. Why is it that under the new proposal Alberta will remain near the very bottom of royalty rates charged in the world?

Mr. Speaker, look what we have. We have in northern Alberta an oil deposit that is one of the largest if not the largest untapped reserves of oil in the entire world. Quite frankly, oil companies are finding less oil. We are nearly reaching the point of peak oil, where available supplies will not be growing but will be declining at the same time that oil prices and the demand that drives those prices is increasing constantly. So what we're looking at in the long term are continued, sustained, and significant increases in the price of oil on the world market, yet we are settling for less than half of that increase in value. If oil goes up a dollar, under the government's proposal less than half of that will come back to us, the owners of the resources.

I say that it's pretty clear that this government has caved in to big oil. It has surrendered the position of this province. It has sold the people of Alberta out. It has not got the best deal that we could have had, and quite frankly I think that the Premier should not be spending taxpayers' money trying to convince the people that he did get a good deal. It's pretty obvious when you compare Alberta's new royalty regime that's proposed to the royalty regimes of other countries in the world that we didn't get a good deal. I don't think that the Premier has delivered on his commitment in any way.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta NDP has been very vocal on this issue from the last election forward to today. We've campaigned very hard and we've been very clear that the royalty task force recommendations were a bare minimum. The government has caved in to oil company pressure, and I've been, quite frankly, very surprised that the Alberta Liberal opposition has been largely silent on this issue.

Mr. Elsalhy: Focus on the government.

Mr. Mason: Well, he'd like me to focus on the government, but I think there are three parties in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Four.

Mr. Mason: Four. I apologize.

It's important that we all know where we stand. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have been AWOL on this issue. The heavy lifting, as usual, on these kinds of issues has been done by the four-member caucus of the Alberta NDP. Until we get a fair deal on royalties in this province, we're going to stand up against a Premier who falsely claims that he has delivered on a promise. He has not; he has sold us out. He has left lots and lots of money on the table, billions that will not be available for our children and our grandchildren. It's a shame, and it's completely unacceptable.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. member.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, because of what the Assembly has done this afternoon, there wasn't an opportunity for the chair to say, "Orders of the Day," which would have allowed outside liquids and laptop computers to be used in the Assembly. So let's assume that this is okay because you're going to have a gruelling afternoon, and sustenance is always important for nourishment, not only nourishment to the mind but nourishment to the body. And you will not be interrupting anybody with the utilization of laptop computers.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: Here's what I have so far in terms of members who have provided notice of their intent to participate: the Minister of Energy, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. That's probably a pretty good list for the moment. There are other members who have advised.

We'll go with the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to stand and join the debate this afternoon with respect to the issue. I would not necessarily agree that, in my humble opinion, it would meet all of the requirements. Nevertheless, we find ourselves here, and I'm happy to engage in this discussion. I agree, in fact, with the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood that the issue of royalty review and reform is a matter of the highest importance, and I'm sure that all of our colleagues in the Assembly would agree with that.

While the discussion and implementation of the new royalty framework is a matter of utmost significance for this House and for all Albertans, Mr. Speaker, it's not a matter that can or should be treated with undue haste by this Assembly. The Premier has made a commitment that the new royalty framework will be implemented by this government, and it will be. However, making wholesale changes to Alberta's royalty systems for conventional oil and gas and for oil sands is not something that can be done overnight. It requires a series of legislative and regulatory amendments and a host of changes to the Department of Energy's software systems.

At a minimum, Mr. Speaker, changes will be required to the following acts and regulations: the Mines and Minerals Act, the mines and minerals administration regulation, the petroleum royalty regulation, the oil sands royalty regulation 1997, the oil sands tenure regulation, the natural gas royalty regulation, the freehold mineral rights tax regulation, and four regulations regarding royalty reduction for low productivity for high-cost wells.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

As all hon. members know, amendments to any complex piece of legislation cannot be written overnight. They must be carefully drafted by Legislative Counsel in consultation with department officials, who in turn would hold discussions with those who may be affected by these changes. Once the amendments have been scrutinized and fine-tuned in the policy-making process, they can be introduced into this Assembly for debate. Mr. Speaker, I submit that it would be irresponsible of us to do otherwise with a matter of such fundamental importance.

In addition to the requirements of due legislative process, Mr. Speaker, there are technical considerations which preclude this issue from being considered an emergency. Quite frankly, it's physically impossible to implement any substantive change to the province's royalty system overnight. Alberta Energy currently utilizes five software systems to calculate and collect royalties from industry. Implementing the changes outlined in Alberta's new royalty framework will require new programs as well as substantial rewriting to existing software programs. Of course, companies in the oil and gas industry face many of the same technical barriers to immediate implementation. More importantly, they must make decisions about future capital deployment, and it would be mani-

festly unfair of us to impose such sweeping changes so abruptly even if it were possible.

It is in appreciation of all the factors that I have outlined, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier determined that Alberta's new royalty framework would take effect in January 2009. While the hon. member and other members of this Assembly are free to disagree with the decision and will have an opportunity to do so in this Assembly at an appropriate time, I submit to you that the matter is not a fit subject for an emergency. Implementing Alberta's new royalty framework through immediate legislation would be both irresponsible with respect to the legislative process and physically not possible with respect to the systems involved.

3:30

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on the hon. member's contention that billions of dollars are at stake if these changes are not implemented immediately. As all hon. members are aware, a substantial portion of our provincial revenues derive from the energy sector, and this is an inherently volatile industry. Over a full year a 1-cent change to the U.S./Canada exchange rate costs the provincial treasury \$123 million. A 10-cent change in the Alberta reference price for natural gas costs can mean a swing of nearly \$100 million in revenue. When these changes occur, we do not react precipitously; instead, we budget prudently and make changes to our fiscal and royalty systems only after careful consideration.

Mr. Speaker, we have, I believe, set in motion a framework for the future that will put in place a royalty regime that will serve Albertans very, very well for a decade or more to come. To look back and suggest that at some point, some snapshot in history, government policies, for whatever reason, may not have put all of the dollars into a government coffer that could have been put there by some other policy of government I think is just not a responsible way to look at the royalty system.

I believe that in order to fully understand the share that Albertans have received from this resource, we need to take into consideration the fact that this industry has generated literally thousands and thousands of jobs for Albertans, very high-paying jobs. It has allowed us to expand our postsecondary education institutions. It's allowed us to expand our health care and medical facilities. It has allowed the province of Alberta to grow some 60,000 to 80,000 souls a year in the last number of years. It has made Alberta a very vibrant industrial community for all Albertans.

I believe that the debate that will go on with respect to the royalty issue is certainly an important one for Albertans. We believe that the system has provided a very good result for Albertans, and, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to it continuing to provide that result for some time to come.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to participate in the debate this afternoon on Standing Order 30. I would like to recognize the chair for indicating that this matter could proceed. I think it's very important. This debate is certainly very important at this time, and I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for bringing forward this Standing Order 30.

Certainly, I'm hearing lots of discussion on this already, but when the Alberta government compromised last week on the Our Fair Share report that was presented – and this is an independent panel, Mr. Hunter and his colleagues. When they indicate that we're not getting our fair share, the Alberta government, by choosing not to

increase royalties by the amount recommended by the Royalty Review Panel – that compromise is an emergency, a public emergency. We have a half a billion dollars here that we're not collecting on an annual basis, and this is added on, Mr. Speaker, to the billions and billions of dollars that went uncollected – and I'm very disappointed – knowingly uncollected by this government going back to the year 2000.

Now, when the Royalty Review Panel released their report in mid-September, they stated, Mr. Speaker: "Albertans do not receive their fair share from energy development and they have not, in fact, been receiving their fair share for quite some time." The panel, as everyone knows – and hopefully all hon. members have read the report in detail – recommended a royalty increase of \$1.8 billion between now and 2010. This was rejected for whatever reason by our government, and this rejection will cost us in this province at least a half a billion dollars in uncollected royalties annually. That is far too much money to leave uncollected; I'm sorry. When we increase royalties, we must also have the political will to collect them on behalf of the citizens. Alberta's citizens, I have to remind this Legislature, own the resources, and we have to look after their public interest. Unfortunately, this government has not been doing this.

Certainly, there is one act here, the Mines and Minerals Act, that needs to be amended, but the rest of the amendments that need to be made so that we can collect our fair share are all in the regulations. I for one would certainly love to see those regulations tabled here in the Assembly and vigorously debated, but I don't have confidence nor do the citizens of Alberta have confidence in this government that that will be done. There's no reason in the world why the Mines and Minerals Act could not be amended to facilitate these changes.

I certainly recognize the reason and the caution for a one-year transition on this. We have to get the bitumen valuation methodology done. That key recommendation from the Our Fair Share report by Mr. Hunter certainly indicated that we need to work at that. We need to work at it by June 2008 to have it implemented because we didn't have a fair market to determine the price of bitumen. The Auditor General in his report also indicated that by the year 2010 we could be losing upwards of a billion dollars a year if we don't have a proper bitumen valuation methodology. So that's why we should get at this, but at the same time I would advocate that there be a transition period through to June of next year so that we can get this bitumen methodology written in stone.

Now, the New Democrats – and we're very grateful to the third party for bringing this forward, but there are some things that I need to get on the record here, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I made a presentation on behalf of our caucus to the public hearings that were conducted by Mr. Hunter and his panel, but as far as I know, the New Democrats did not. I don't know why they didn't, but for them to continuously harp on about no one else seeming to care is totally wrong. If the New Democrats were really interested, why did they not make a presentation to Mr. Hunter's . . .

An Hon. Member: Why do you think that?

Mr. MacDonald: Why do I think that? Because the New Democrats, hon. member, are very confused. You've got one group of them who wants to shut down the entire oil sands for environmental consequences, and you've got another group within the party that wants to increase royalties by up to 90 per cent. So I think there were a lot of internal divisions within the New Democrat Party, and that's probably why they couldn't have taken the time to make a presentation to Mr. Hunter's review panel. [interjection] Yes, hon. member, it does do good. It's obvious the hon. Member for

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview doesn't understand the details of the report because, certainly, we made recommendations that are addressed in there, hon. member. So it can be done. The New Democrats have answers to give, and maybe they can in due course provide them, why they didn't make a presentation to such an important review panel.

3:40

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General – and we talked about him a little earlier – in his latest report also supported an increase in royalty rates: “The Department estimates that it could collect an additional \$1 billion or more per year without stifling industry profitability.” Certainly, I would urge all hon. members to consider the wisdom of the Auditor General and the Auditor General's office on this. We're all engaged in this royalty debate. Again, let's look at the recommendations of the independent panel appointed by this government and the wise direction of the Auditor General.

Mr. Speaker, there are those who say that this is not the right moment to increase royalties. I have never met an energy executive who thought it was the right time to increase royalties. We recognize that there are always issues the energy industry has to deal with. Today they're environmental issues and uncertainty caused by war. These are critical international issues. But there's also the uncertainty here caused by the Crown agreement that may have to be negotiated.

The New Democrats always bring this up, and certainly this party accepts donations from energy companies, but when we take a donation from a company like Suncor, for instance – this is to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder – that doesn't silence us in the House. It's us that are asking the tough questions and have been asking the tough questions for the last three years about the Suncor-Syncrude order in council, not the New Democrats. We ask the tough questions.

The Premier at the time we asked the question didn't have a clue what we were talking about, but I was glad to see this whole issue of how Syncrude and Suncor are treated come out in Mr. Hunter's report. It's not fair to other oil sands producers that some people are treated more favourably than others.

An Hon. Member: You guys want to shut them all.

Mr. MacDonald: No. We want fair treatment for all oil sands operators. The government said that they were out of the business of picking winners and losers, but certainly when the order in council was slipped through cabinet over 10 years ago, the winners were Suncor and Syncrude.

Again, Mr. Speaker, there are those who say that costs for the oil and gas companies have gone up significantly in Alberta and we cannot increase royalties. But it's interesting that in the June 2007 EUB statistical review that was done, they didn't seem to think that costs were getting out of hand. The oil and gas executives have indicated to us that costs are out of hand, but that isn't what was in the EUB annual statistical review in June of this year.

Mr. Pedro van Meurs, an international expert on royalties who has advised this province on offshore rig rates and royalty structures . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] I'm sorry; I can't continue, but thank you.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, indeed, Mr. Speaker, what a privilege it is to rise on this important initiative. I want to say to the New Democrats, who brought this motion forward, that it's quite nice to see. Obviously, the Liberals didn't do that. The Liberals are saying that the New Democrats are confused, and here the Liberals are with their policy on the fly as they go forward in terms of their approach

to royalty review. It is really reassuring to know that there is a government that gets it right – and it's the Progressive Conservative government – in terms of striking the right balance.

Mr. Speaker, a fair share was the theme of the royalty review report. It also is the theme of the new royalty framework that our Premier announced. Our Premier and the Minister of Energy made a commitment, and they are delivering on that commitment to all Albertans in terms of delivering our fair share.

As we just look around, it's clear that the old royalty system helped create one of the world's most successful economies ever. I draw to your attention what citizens have said to me.

Back in 1996 when the royalty fiscal regime was implemented, it was implemented to be able to combat what had just taken place in the province of Alberta. We had an OSLO plant, referred to as the other six leaseholders, that in fact was cancelled. We had Alsands, that was going to build, and that was cancelled. In fact, we had a bridge to nowhere. It was a bridge that spanned the Athabasca River, called the Loughheed bridge, that was built, it turns out, for the future. Ultimately, that bridge to nowhere is now a bridge to over \$130 billion because of the decisive action and because of the actual royalty framework we have in place. It is a royalty framework that will continue to improve, ensuring that Albertans continue to get their fair share.

Mr. Speaker, our Premier is striking the right balance. Just recently, to demonstrate how things change, the CIBC, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, and the Toronto-Dominion Bank have predicted that in the next 10 years the world price of oil will be set by the oil sands province here in our country of Canada, that Alberta will be setting and determining what the world price of oil is, something that was unheard of in years gone by. But it really demonstrates the volatility of what's happening on world markets, the fact that our province will be setting the world price of oil because of the oil sands.

What an incredible treasure we in fact have. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that as we look around in terms of this royalty review, first of all, in 1996 the fiscal regime predicted \$25 billion over 25 years. The policy of the Conservative government in this province has worked so well that it didn't generate \$25 billion of investment; it has attracted investment from all over the world that now nears \$130 billion, and it was predicted.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Boutilier: How much, do you ask? A hundred and thirty billion dollars. And that \$130 billion goes over to a bridge to somewhere, which is the investment because this government had a vision for the future in terms of where we are and where we're going.

What's really important here, Mr. Speaker, was that the price of oil was then under \$20 a barrel. Now as we look at WTI, west Texas intermediate, at something well over \$90 a barrel, it just demonstrates, unlike what the Liberals think or the New Democrats think, that things are just not stuck in time, that it's a continuous improvement approach that this government takes. That's what in fact attracts investment to this province: because of the resource we've been blessed with. As the Premier has said: the government doesn't own this resource, and industry does not own this resource; this resource is owned by all Albertans. The Premier made a commitment, and he is delivering on that commitment in terms of getting Albertans' fair share.

But times will continue to change, and the fact is that the Middle East, who now set the price of oil at the world international scale, will actually be changed because it will be the province of Alberta that will be setting the world price of oil because of the importance of the oil sands in the future. That really marks in terms of the next

20 years how important it's going to be for our children and our grandchildren relative to the impact that the oil sands are having.

The framework that's been introduced by our Premier and by our Minister of Energy is one that bodes well for the future of certainty, of confidence, and getting it right. Rather than being confused, like the Liberals accuse the NDPs of being – you know, “They're confused”; I'm not going to weigh into that battle – I can say, rather than others, who suggest that the Liberals operate on a policy on the fly perspective, that this government gets it right. We manage in a measured approach. We examine. We analyze.

To give you an example of that, we needed a new royalty framework that gives Albertans a fairer share in terms of today's energy sector. The Royalty Review Panel conducted a detailed study and an analysis, an extensive public and industry consultation. The Auditor General conducted his own review of how governments' royalty systems are designed and operated, and we welcomed that. We heard from industry and from more than 9,000 Albertans, the owners of this resource, who posted, faxed, phoned, and e-mailed their MLAs. Also, the committee in itself: they presented, too. Now, on top of that, the government also conducted its own technical analysis.

3:50

The new royalty framework reflects all of this, and that's why we are getting it right. We are not policy on the fly, like what we're hearing opposite the way. We are being measured in our approach, and we are getting it right because that is our responsibility as a government to the people of Alberta, the true owners of this resource. This gives Albertans a greater share when energy prices are high and helps sustain the industry when prices are low. While producing more volume, we'll pay higher royalties. This means that lower producing conventional wells pay less while higher producing conventional wells and oil sands pay more when the price is high. Overall, royalty rates will in fact increase. We expect these changes to deliver an extra over \$1.4 billion, depending on production, by the year just under 2010 and also depending on what the world price of oil will be at that time.

You can see that there are many spokes in the wheel. So often when we hear some of the discussion earlier today, it really just shows you that the opposition are using one piece of a puzzle that's very complex. I have confidence in our Premier, in his commitment on what he has delivered on and also the Minister of Energy on what he is acting on.

That really means this to Albertans: they are going to be receiving a 20 per cent increase over current projections for the upcoming years. One-third of those higher revenues will go to savings. Also, the rest will go to infrastructure in the many communities that have that resource where the work is taking place because we want to direct that infrastructure to the areas where the resource, in fact, is coming from. It's interesting to note that our Premier when he first became Premier came to the oil sands capital of the world in Fort McMurray and delivered on the oil sands secretariat, which falls under the Ministry of Service Alberta, where, in fact, they delivered over half a billion dollars on top of the \$900 million that is being used for infrastructure for twinning, on top of the \$102 million that went towards the city of Fort McMurray for the new water treatment plant, not to mention the extra \$1,040 that goes to teachers and nurses and support staff in terms of the infrastructure, and that is human infrastructure, which is so important for our future.

Mr. Speaker, I have a six-month old son – I don't think anyone else has a son younger than that in this House – so I want to say that I have a vested interest relative to the future of Alberta. I want to say that I feel assured that our Premier's commitment and what he is delivering on, both him and this government and the Minister of

Energy, is doing it right and is doing it for the future and the long-term sustainable future because that bridge to somewhere now, up over \$130 billion, is going to be the way of the future in terms of what the world price of oil is going to be.

Mr. Speaker, we are delivering on a commitment that our government has made. This new Premier under a new administration is clearly acting on that. I want to say also that when I talk to citizens of my community, they trust Ed Stelmach, and they trust this government on getting it right, and they are doing it.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we don't mention proper names in the House.

Mr. Boutilier: I'm sorry I mentioned his name, but I would like to say that the Premier is clearly delivering in terms of getting it right for his grandson and granddaughter and my son and Albertans' grandsons and granddaughters and children of the future because we can work in this. We are the only province in Canada where we don't have to leave our province to get a job. Just think of it: we are the envy of every single province and territory in this country. In fact, that is very obvious that we got it right, and we're continuing to get it right into the future.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think there are a couple of issues that I'd like to cover in my 10 minutes in responding to the motion set out in the Standing Order 30, and that specifically was outlining the failure of the government to promptly introduce and pass royalty legislation to prevent the loss of billions of dollars to the public treasury as oil prices rise dramatically. I think the issues that we need to take into consideration are those of stewardship, management, fiduciary duty, consequences, and issues of trust.

As far as stewardship, a number of people have spoken about the fact that this government collects royalties and is the steward of our natural resources on behalf of Albertans. I think we really need to underline that because where I come from, that means that there is even more onus on us as legislators and on government members to be careful. There's more onus to be careful because it's somebody else's resources. It's somebody else's money.

It's even more important that you're careful with somebody else's. When you are a steward for somebody else's belongings, you have to be even more careful than if it's your own. If you choose to make bad decisions with your own money or your own resources, fine; so be it. But when you're placed in a position of trust to look after someone else's, you'd better make sure that you're doing absolutely the best that you can possibly do for them.

I would argue that what we've seen come forward out of the Our Fair Share report and, indeed, backed up by what I'm reading in the Auditor General's report is that this government has not done that. They have not been good stewards. They have not been even more careful with somebody else's money – that is, Albertans' money and Albertans' resources – than they would have been about their own paycheck or their own bank account. I think that's going to relate to the loss of trust section that I'd like to talk to at the end of my remarks.

Now, you know, there was a very interesting day for me in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, when in response to a question the member – now I'm not going to remember the constituency up north – responded with, I think, what he thought at the time was a great insult by saying “Only the Liberals would plan and would look ahead” with great derision. He snorted that out, and we took that as

a tremendous compliment because, in fact, we have done a great deal to plan.

Our funding our future policy has now been out for a couple of years. It outlines that we believed in the pay-yourself-first formula, in which oil and gas revenues would have had 30 per cent taken off the top and funneled into a series of endowment funds, including the heritage fund but also one for postsecondary education, for capital infrastructure, and for the arts, social sciences, and humanities. That money would be put away and would be grown through careful investment and management so that as oil and gas revenues declined, the money from those endowment funds and investments would be able to replace that money going into our budget.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, the money that is currently being collected by this government in the form of income tax and business tax and various levies does not meet the amount of money that they're spending. They are subsidizing every year with oil and gas revenue right out of the ground. This is not some savings account that they're drawing on. They are taking oil and gas revenues right out of the ground and putting it right into this year's budget. So management of our resources, I argue, has been very poorly done by this government. They're not managing well, and I think that any money manager would tell you that's really, really bad practice to be doing that because if, for example, we had a terrible downturn, there was some catastrophic event, we'd be in serious trouble and would be looking at cutting massively into programs that, frankly, are just struggling to recover from the number of cuts that the government levied against them in the '90s.

Poor stewardship, a lack of planning, which the previous Premier took as a boasting point: I think, frankly, that will, sadly, end up being his legacy. That's what people are going to remember him for: really, he had no plan. That wasn't something to be proud of because, again, as stewards for Albertans we're expected to be able to do that.

I think we have a fiduciary duty as legislators and certainly as government members to be managing people's money wisely and to be getting the maximum amount of money for them and to be making financial decisions that are going to benefit Albertans. I would argue that that has not been happening. There has been a carelessness. There has been a lack of planning. Even the way the government is currently reacting to the two reports that are out. Do we get a government that's going, "Yes, all right. We didn't do very well, and we will do better"? No. What I'm hearing today – and it has been very interesting being back in this Assembly – is the Public Affairs Bureau spin campaign just a-whirring in the background, just a-whirring away in the background, giving all members of the government caucus those special words and phrases to say.

Are they acknowledging that things didn't go well and could go better? No. What I'm hearing is, "Oh, we the public didn't understand," and "We the opposition members really don't know," and "We're confused." Nobody is admitting that there was a problem here. Now what I'm hearing is the spin: "Well, others didn't get it," and "We didn't really mean it that way," and "We can't read the reports properly," and all the rest of that.

4:00

I notice that when the Minister of Energy was speaking and defending why he couldn't have passed royalty legislation to prevent the loss of billions, he listed off the things that would have to be changed. You know what? I listened, Mr. Speaker, and what I heard was one piece of legislation and a dozen regulations. Well, I am deeply sorry if the Minister of Energy, who sits in cabinet, does not understand the government process. Regulations in this province end up getting passed behind closed doors by the Lieutenant Government in Council, also known as cabinet. It doesn't require

legislation to change those half dozen regs that he rolled off in his response to this, and there's only one piece of legislation.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? We've seen examples of co-operation in this House, and I would dare say that if this government brought forward good legislation on the royalties and the oil and gas structure, it could be through this Assembly in four days. That's one week. No problem: first reading, second reading, Committee of the Whole, and third reading. We'd be done in a week if it was good legislation. But I don't see any attempt by this government to even deal with that. What I get instead is what I've come to expect from this government, actually, which is: don't take responsibility, don't be accountable, don't be transparent, try and make it somebody else's fault, and then tell everyone else they were confused and didn't understand it.

But you know what? Members of the public got a great opportunity this time around because they got two other reports, independent reports: the Auditor General's and Our Fair Share reports. They got an opportunity to read those reports on their own and make up their own mind. You know what? They are making up their own mind.

Let me talk about consequences. What we're seeing now is that even with the reports we have in front of us, there are significant consequences for the environment. That has not been discussed, I would argue, in any way, shape, or form as part of this whole discussion, and it needs to be. I can tell you that in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre that is a major concern: how this whole structure – the oil and gas resources, the revenue programs – is going to affect our environment, the effect on the environment being a major concern, and rolled into all of the decision-making on that, environmental assessment programs done as a part of that.

We have consequences for this province in that money was not collected that should have been collected, Mr. Speaker. I can really see that in the capacity of our NGOs, our nongovernment organizations – that's our charities, our volunteer-based organizations, our societies – in their ability to provide the programs and services that government has abdicated from. We also have a problem with funding for our health and education.

So the bottom line here is that our public now understands that this government can't be trusted. They won't accept responsibility for what they've done. They won't be accountable. They won't be transparent. And to just stand up and say, "Oh, this is not true," or "The public somehow misunderstands," is, I think, a gross miscalculation of what Albertans are capable of. I hope clearly that Albertans will show the government how much they understand these reports at the next election, which can't come too soon as far as I'm concerned. We've had a failing.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It does give me great pleasure as well to rise today to speak to the Standing Order 30 that has been accepted by the majority of this House. I think it's pretty apparent right now to all Albertans that there was a very important thing that took place in this province from about mid-September to mid-October. The Premier allowed the Royalty Review Panel suggestions to be out there for the public to have a look at and to comment back on, and I'm happy to say that the people of Drayton Valley-Calmar did take the time to read the Royalty Review Panel's suggestions, to send me a large number of e-mails, and to give me a lot of calls. I had several days of meetings as well as a town hall meeting that was set up by one of the oil companies in our town. A large, large number of responses with regard to the royalty review, I'd say probably over a hundred, which is very, very rare. In my

almost seven years as an MLA I've never seen a response like that on any issue.

The calls, the letters, the e-mails, the public forums, et cetera, all seemed to carry a fairly common theme. Of course, a lot of them had very good, interesting, individual issues, but the overriding theme – about 80 to 90 per cent of the people of my area of Drayton Valley-Calmar understood that a royalty review was necessary, that it was timely, but they did not want us to take the full 20 per cent, the panel's recommendation.

More importantly, what they did say was: whatever happens, we want you to do two things. Number one, make a decision. There was a lot of pain and angst out there while the industry was waiting for the government to make a decision with regard to the royalty review, so they wanted us to make a decision as to what we were going to do. Secondly, that once that decision was made, understanding that there would most likely be an increase in royalties, they would be given time to implement that decision. Speaking as someone from Drayton Valley, from oil town – in fact, as you drive into Drayton Valley, it says: oil capital of the world. I know that maybe that's a little bit presumptuous, but Drayton Valley is all about oil, as is the rest of my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, I have to happily say that the Premier did make a decision. In fact, on October 25 our Premier delivered on his promise to take decisive action and ensure that Albertans get their fair share of revenues from the development of energy resources that belong to them. Implementing our new royalty regime is part of our Premier's plan to secure Alberta's future by building our communities, by greening our growth, and by creating opportunity.

This plan proposes royalty rate increases that are reasonable and that will guarantee a solid future for our energy sector, which is so important to the people of Drayton Valley-Calmar. Under Alberta's new royalty framework energy royalties are expected to increase by approximately \$1.4 billion by 2010. This is an increase of 20 per cent over revenues forecast for that year under the current regime.

Reviewing and updating our province's royalty regime has been the topic of months of discussion, with literally thousands of Albertans expressing their opinions on the best course of action. This review has involved detailed review and analysis as well as extensive public and industry consultation. In fact, I think it's well known, but I'll just recap that Alberta's Royalty Review Panel hosted five public meetings across the province and accepted more than 220 submissions from Alberta residents, municipal leaders, and stakeholders in the oil and gas industry. The panel then made a number of recommendations for our government's consideration. Since then nearly 9,000 Albertans posted, faxed, phoned, and e-mailed their views on the panel's report. Once again, our government also considered the Auditor General's report, which has been mentioned in the debate earlier today, Mr. Speaker, further public and industry feedback as well as further technical analysis. Then all of these pieces were taken into consideration and incorporated into Alberta's new royalty framework.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this framework is the right plan to secure Alberta's future. It will provide Albertans with a fair share from the development of our province's energy resources while maintaining a healthy future for the oil and gas industry. It's a good deal for Albertans, and it's a fair deal for the industry that has made substantial investments in developing our energy resources, creating tens of thousands of jobs for Albertans, especially the people of Drayton Valley-Calmar and, of course, producing tens of billions of dollars in provincial revenues in the process, dollars that have helped us to build schools and hospitals and roads and new bridges and pave highways and do so much more, running social programs and the like.

That's important because an effective royalty regime is really only

one of the ways that Albertans benefit from the energy development in our province. Economic activity, jobs, and tax revenue generated from the energy sector are also important and are part of the broader considerations the government has taken into account. The new royalty framework also offers a stable and predictable plan to increase the royalty share for the province while allowing industry the necessary time to adjust to these changes.

4:10

Highlights of the plan, which is expected to take effect on January 1, 2009, include a royalty rate structure for conventional oil and gas that operates on a sliding scale determined by commodity price and well productivity to reflect oil and gas economics. In other words, as commodity prices rise, so will the royalty rates on all the wells. Those wells producing higher amounts of oil or natural gas will pay even higher royalties and vice versa, which is good. That's important. The lower producers will pay less, and that's important for the older fields like the Pembina Cardium field, where I come from. The region where I live, Mr. Speaker, has been producing for over 50 years. Some of those wells are getting very, very costly to produce. We need that sliding scale up and down so that we can keep the people working and use the infrastructure that's currently in place – the pipelines, the personnel, everything that's there – so that we can get the full value out of those fields, which is best for the environment.

This new, simplified formula will also eliminate the need for the current royalty tiers and exemption programs. There are so many programs; it's so complicated. It's time to simplify. Our government will also introduce a sliding scale for oil sands royalties, ranging from 1 to 9 per cent pre-payout depending on the world price of oil. The net royalty will start at 25 per cent and increase for every dollar that oil prices rise above \$55 per barrel to 40 per cent when oil is priced at \$120 or higher. And that's not out of the question now, Mr. Speaker. As you heard earlier from the leader of the NDP, we're already approaching \$100 a barrel.

Now, as the panel recommended, no grandfathering will be implemented for existing oil sands projects. Thus, our government is engaging in discussions with Syncrude and Suncor, who have Crown agreements that expire in 2016, to join the new royalty framework. In the event an agreement cannot be reached in 90 days, the government will take other measures to ensure a level playing field for all industry stakeholders. Mr. Speaker, this change recognizes the concerns expressed about the current oil sands royalty structure and will ensure that Albertans receive their fair share from oil sands development by providing a greater share of revenues as the prices rise.

Recognizing that Albertans want to see more of our raw energy resources upgraded here in our province, the province will also exercise its existing royalty-in-kind option. Now, this means that the province will be able to receive raw bitumen in lieu of cash royalties and then sell that bitumen so that it can be upgraded by Albertans in Alberta. In other words, we're going to create our own manufacturing sector right here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

Our government is also committed to ensuring that we have the best system in place to review how royalty revenue is collected and reported to Albertans, the owners of our resources. Former Auditor General Peter Valentine will lead a project to determine how these systems can be improved, and we'll provide his recommendations by March of 2008.

In closing, the big question is: what are we going to do with all this extra cash? Well, I'm happy to say that one-third of any additional revenues generated by Alberta's new royalty framework will be put into savings – into savings – and invested for future generations of Albertans, while two-thirds will be committed to

capital spending projects that meet the needs of our growing economy. We can keep up to the growth, Mr. Speaker. Maintenance of those new capital assets, much-needed maintenance that is, will come from these increased revenues.

In addition to the normal fluctuations that affect the energy industry, we recognize that the new royalty regime may have some impact on activity in the short term. My hope as the MLA for Drayton Valley-Calmar is that we will keep the current companies busy throughout this transition process. However, this is a plan that encourages prosperity for the long term. I believe that we will see prosperity in the short term as well as in the long term. This plan will preserve our current economic successes and ensure that future generations receive a fair share of a well-managed and vigorous energy sector.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you very much and thank this Assembly for this opportunity to debate this important and urgent matter. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd like to thank the Speaker for acknowledging this important issue and letting it go to a vote and to recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for bringing it forward – this is very important to Albertans – and to thank all the members who voted for it so that we could have this debate.

I would like to start off and I guess discuss the principle of what it is we're trying to do here in the province, and that is, as the Premier says, that we want to grow the size of the pie. Then we need to look at the principle and what allows us to grow the size of the pie. Throughout history we can see that whenever the government decides to step in and take more and spend more, the pie usually shrinks. Conversely, when the government has lowered taxes and lowered rules and regulations that are burdensome and don't serve any purpose, the actual take increases. If we were to look at the last three or four years and see the phenomenal increase in the income to the government, we'll very much see that this government and the people of Alberta have benefited to a tremendous amount from the boom in the oil and gas industry.

It's been disappointing, though, that this government has not recognized the oil and gas industry and acknowledged that to the public. It seems like in the last few years all they've talked about is that they have paid off the debt, that they are getting this infrastructure in there, and they fail to recognize that 40 per cent of our revenue to this province comes from the oil and gas sector. What they should be saying when they open up an overpass or a ring road or a new school or a hospital is to recognize and tell Albertans that we couldn't do this without the backbone of our industry right now, the oil and gas industry.

The increase in income tax of \$3 billion in the last few years has been incredible. Corporate tax is up. The most amazing of all, though, is what the mineral lease rents have gone for. I want to address this just for a minute in that what investment people look at isn't the economic rent or the cost of doing it. When we want to put an investment in and if other places in the world want to invest in Alberta, what they do is: what does it look like the rate of return is going to be, and what is the risk related to that investment? From there, they make a decision on whether or not to put it in.

One of the disappointing things that this report, Our Fair Share, didn't bring forward was to look at the actual rate of return here in the province versus other jurisdictions. It's interesting how many leaders from other provinces and states have come here and said: "Oh, whoa. We're not going to be raising our taxes. We're open for

business. Come here." Saskatchewan is also saying that they're going to continue the royalty holiday for high-production wells, and that's because they understand the rate of return on an investment, and they realize why we want that activity going on. It's disappointing that the government hasn't allowed Albertans to realize what an economic benefit the oil and gas industry has been instead of promoting themselves in gaming and lottery like that's what's driving our economy.

It's been reckless, though. What's happened to the industry over the last few months or, I guess, the last month is that there was a void, and they were not able to decide what to do for their fall drilling practices. The reports have come out that things are down significantly in what's going to happen this winter. We're going to see the economic downturn, and the revenue that's going to come in is going to I believe offset what little revenue they're going to try and grab in 2009. We'll again be chasing the car from the street behind and not catch the ride. This is just detrimental, the whole idea and the way they're attacking this.

We've also got the condition right now where our dollar has truly accelerated in the world market, but the price of oil hasn't. People were saying, "Oh, we're at all-time highs with oil and gas" when we're just reaching it now. Actually, we've lost it in the last two weeks. With the dollar hitting \$1.07, we are not at all-time highs, yet the costs continue to go up, which is another area that was disappointing in the review, that they seemed to think that costs weren't part of the formula.

I'd like to talk for a minute about the different investment companies that I believe are the true experts when it comes to what should be the economic rent or what should be the rate of return and how we should be looking at adjusting it. There's been talk – and we certainly agree with that and put it out – that we think we need to look at where the break-even point is, as industry does. Everybody in this Assembly, I'm quite sure, is aware of the fact that we're already in a downturn in the gas industry because of the price of gas. We're already having rig utilization down 30 per cent, and they're forecasting it down almost 60 per cent by next year because long term they look at it being probably 12, maybe 18 months before there's a recovery in the price of gas.

[The Speaker in the chair]

One might note also in these reports – and the Department of Energy also puts it out – that they recommend that we go after these high-flowing gas and oil wells. Probably the most detrimental part of this whole review is to go after those ones because those are the ones that are already paying it. It's interesting to realize that, I believe, 5 per cent of the gas wells pay 63 per cent of our gas royalties and that 5 per cent of the oil wells pay 61 per cent of our oil royalties. This government and the review panel seemed to say: let's go after those big winners because they're making too much money on those big winners. In fact, if we even lose one out of those five wells, we'll be losing 12 or 13 per cent of our royalty because they're no longer economical. Those are high-risk, complicated drills that are not just easily discovered and drilled. It's a very high risk, and to go after those – once again, I'll say that it's the wrong area to go after.

4:20

The Alliance truly believes that if we want to put in the royalty review or to update it, what we should be looking at is the actual cost per barrel and the cost per gigajoule – right now we believe it's around \$7.50 for gas and \$75 for oil – and then possibly put in a 5 per cent windfall tax when it's above those areas. Again, we'd have to have that indexed to the cost as it goes forward and not just pick

a number and then say that that's good where it is because it isn't \$17 a barrel to get bitumen anymore. It's more like \$35 or \$40, and we need to recognize that those costs have gone up significantly.

I guess I'd like to comment a little bit on the methodology and the philosophy of what we need to be doing and the fact that so many people have taken the emotional side, that it's our fair share. From my experience in life and even when I was young, I used to tell my father, "This isn't fair." He'd say, "Well, life was never meant to be fair." What's important is equal opportunity, and in Alberta I believe that we're very blessed, that it's one of the few places left in the world where there is equal opportunity for an entrepreneur to go out and raise money and then try and drill and reap the reward of that high-risk, highly technical opportunity, and we want that to continue. But by raising the royalty in the manner that this government is proposing, I'm afraid for those small oil and gas producers. I'm afraid for all those little workers. When we attack the big individuals and the big corporations, it's always the little ones that get hurt. The big ones are going to survive; there's no question about it.

We've been an environment that's been able to attract hundreds of billions of dollars for investment, and yes, that investment is there, but we need to continue raising that money. If we send the message to the rest of the world that this isn't an economically stable place, that the government will change it on a whim or emotion that they should get more money, we're in detriment.

I'd just like to finish off, I guess, with the example of lottery and gaming, seeing how this government has promoted it so much over the years. If lottery and gaming was to say to people that come into those places and buy a ticket, "We will allow you to take a 10 per cent winning of whatever your costs have been because we want to have 90 per cent back," nobody would go and buy a lottery ticket or go into a casino if they had to prove and say, "Well, this is how much I've spent in my lifetime," and then they're going to get a simple 10 per cent return on that. The only thing that's maybe not quite as risky as lottery and gaming is the oil and gas industry. It's very technical, it's very important, and we want to have an atmosphere where small business and those entrepreneurs can go out and really succeed here in the province.

So I hope that as this debate goes on, we'll have a thought on this, that our PCs are turning into LCs, and that seems like Liberal clones to see who can tax and spend the most.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's great interest in members wanting to participate today, and there are a whole series of lists floating around, so these will be the following six speakers: the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, then the Minister of Environment, then the Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to be in this House and to rise on this motion at this time. At the outset I'd like to simply say this. I think that the Minister of Energy in his comments right at the start directed the crux of this debate, and that is that in order to properly adjust to and make the necessary changes in government to accommodate the changes in royalty rates, one had to not just give a snap decision and implement right away but accommodate changing the systems to undertake a very important reconfiguration so that the adjustments could be made properly to our database.

The second very crucial issue is that the energy sector in Alberta accounts for at least 50 per cent of our GDP and 13 per cent of Canada's GDP, so it's a very important opportunity, when you make

a change, to acknowledge the importance of the industry, to pay due care and attention to the manner in which you're doing it and also to the people that you are affecting. I think that what has been lost in the callings – in fact, the first questions today, both from the leader of Her Majesty's opposition and the third party, consider that the most important question to our Premier was, in fact, the tenure of his Energy minister in the face of an issue that the Premier has actually delivered on, and that was his promise to Albertans to take decisive action and ensure a fair share for Albertans. At the same time, he wanted to ensure that we continue to have a strong economy.

Our new royalty regime will secure Alberta's future by helping to build our communities, protecting our environment, and creating new opportunities for Alberta and its industries. The old fiscal regime for oil and gas and oil sands delivered on its intended objectives – and I think we should be clear on that – in the process creating one of the most successful economies in the world.

In the mid-1990s the National Oil Sands Task Force recommended a generic royalty regime. It was predicted then that those changes would facilitate enough investment to reach between 800,000 and 1.2 million barrels of oil per day by 2020. Mr. Speaker, no one would guess that we would surpass that vision long before 2020 and see over a hundred billion invested in the production of bitumen, with a forecast production of in excess of 3 million barrels per day by 2020. This has been a tremendous success story for Alberta.

Now the global energy environment has changed again, and the policy of lower royalties as an incentive to resource recovery is no longer the basis for energy development in the province. We see the robust global energy climate, with oil prices reaching over \$90 per barrel and demand for energy resources continuing to grow in the developing countries. Our Premier is fond of citing the example of 300,000 new vehicles per month in China. Multiplying that over a year, we can well see why their requirement for energy is up to 47 per cent of imported crude to facilitate the expanding economy in this country.

The importance of long-term, secure global energy supplies has made Alberta a key investment destination, second only to Saudi Arabia, with a reserve of 172 billion barrels, which makes us the best and most safe and secure supply of energy on the globe. Doesn't it seem important, then, to consider that we do this right and take a look at a new plan? It proposes royalty rate increases that are competitive and responsive to prices while guaranteeing sustainability, stability, and predictability. The royalty changes represent an increase of 20 per cent compared to forecast royalty revenues for the current regime for 2010. They do not, however, exceed the levels prior to 1996, when reduced rates were introduced to sustain energy viability during a period of low energy prices.

The discussion about fair share and the amount of government take was only part of what was taken into account when our government went into action with a decision which is currently being discussed. Departments of government worked hard to assess the implications for our global competitive position. We know that oil sands development is capital intensive, increasingly expensive, and contains considerable technical and business risk. In making our decision, we were very mindful of the implication to industry and our shared interest in continuing to have Alberta as a world-scale energy hub.

4:30

We didn't stop listening with the release of the panel's report. In fact, we listened to Albertans and to people world-wide, liaising with the energy industry, people who have investments in this province. We completed a thorough technical analysis of the panel's report. All substantive stakeholder input, particularly Albertans' input, was

taken into consideration when government developed a plan to secure the future of our province, provide Albertans with their fair share of the resource, while working to maintain the competitiveness of our oil and gas industry.

The royalty framework is the right plan to secure Alberta's future. By making these changes to the system, the government is signalling that it clearly wants to provide leadership to the energy sector development objectives, fulfilling our role as stewards of the resource and respecting that the energy sector has created tens of thousands of jobs for Albertans and generated tens of billions of dollars in provincial revenues in the process.

The new framework offers the oil and gas industry stability and predictability, assures investors that Alberta maintains and remains a stable place to do business, a crucial item in the new regime. It is sensitive to market value, reflects the growing importance of unconventional oil and gas resources, and encourages value-added and environmentally sustainable production in Alberta. Industry will have a year, until January 1, 2009, to prepare for and adjust to the changes. I don't think that that's a significant amount of time given the importance of this industry to this province.

This new plan includes a royalty rate structure for conventional oil and gas that operates on a sliding scale determined by commodity price and well productivity to reflect oil and gas economics. Under this structure Albertans will get a greater share of higher prices, and industry will be sustained at lower prices. This new, simplified formula will also eliminate the need for the current royalty tiers and several royalty exemption programs.

Government will also introduce a sliding scale for oil sands royalties, ranging from 1 to 9 per cent payout, depending on the world price of oil. This change recognizes the concerns expressed about the current oil sands royalty structure and will ensure that Albertans receive their fair share from oil sands development by providing a greater share of revenues as prices rise. Our government is committed to ensuring that we have the best system in place to monitor royalty collection and to report to Albertans. To this end former Auditor General Peter Valentine will lead a project to determine how our current systems can be improved and will provide his recommendations to government by next March.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important and crucial that we pause and talk a moment about the fair share being not only about the royalty plan in place but the key element of the Premier's strong commitment to value maximization of our oil sands resource. Recognizing that Albertans want to see more of our raw energy resources upgraded here in our province, the province will exercise its existing royalty-in-kind option. This means that the province will be able to receive raw bitumen in lieu of cash royalties. The bitumen might be sold to local upgraders or refineries in Alberta to be processed into higher value products. This is exactly the kind of thoughtful policy that this government has been intent on pursuing.

Many of you know that in 2004 government and industry established a task force over a hundred members strong, the Hydrocarbon Upgrading Task Force, to develop and assess the business case for value-added bitumen processing within Alberta. This important initiative is a key piece to a larger vision that our government is working on with the energy industry. That vision is to maximize the value of our hydrocarbon resources – conventional oil, coal, natural gas, and oil sands – within Alberta. It is this unique combination of private-sector involvement and participation along with a clear articulation of government's strategic objectives that will move us forward if we're to be successful.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you very much. It's a valuable challenge, I think, to be able to discuss this issue, which we all know has been so important for the whole province, for MLAs. I'm sure we've had a lot of correspondence from every angle on it, so my commending to all members for supporting the emergency debate.

Ten minutes is not enough to get beyond barely scratching the surface, frankly, of the issues involved, but I'll do my best.

There are various ways to understand royalties. I often hear people say: well, a royalty is just a tax. It's not. They're different things. A royalty comes from selling something. In this case these royalties are collected when the oil and gas that the people of this province own is sold.

There are various ways of understanding the role of the government in this process. The government also does not own the oil and gas. In effect, the government is a trustee for the people of Alberta, who own the oil and gas. I think it's in some ways easier to understand this through an analogy like, for example, a landlord owning a building. If a landlord owns a building and hires an agent to manage that building and then collects rent, you're collecting a kind of a royalty there. In that case the government would be the property management agent. The question we have here, the question that the people of Alberta are so troubled about, is that of the property management agent: have they done the job they ought to have? Have they been honest with the owners, the landlord? Have they shared information? Have they maintained the property? Have they treated the tenants fairly? There's a tremendous amount of evidence that, in fact, the property management agent – in the case of the royalties it's the government – has failed its job.

Two compelling documents making this case are the Royalty Review Panel's report, Our Fair Share, and the Auditor General's report, although I should point out that these are by no means the only documents pointing out this problem. But I do want to put on record, Mr. Speaker, a few things from the Auditor General's report because I don't believe everybody in this Assembly has read that report thoroughly enough.

I would draw people's attention to page 91 of volume 1 of the most recent Auditor General's report, which says:

Beginning at least three years ago, the Department [of Energy] demonstrated that Alberta's share had fallen below its target range. The Department estimates that it could collect an additional \$1 billion or more per year without stifling industry profitability. However, neither this information nor the reasons why changes have not taken place have been made public.

In other words, the agency managing the resource on behalf of the people of Alberta has not been forthcoming with the people of Alberta.

The Auditor General's report goes on page after page like this, and it does so in quite a lot of detail. Just jumping ahead again to page 105, in fact, quoting from the Auditor General's report, he refers to "dozens of presentations" made by the Department of Energy to various individuals in groups raising concerns about the royalty regime. So it's not like this was isolated. I think, frankly, that this government owes it to the people of Alberta to make those dozens of presentations public so that we can see how the public feels.

The Auditor General goes on to raise various concerns starting in December 2000. He refers to the "Petroleum Royalty Review 2000" presentations [which] concluded that caps on the oil royalty rates should be removed."

He refers to – and I find this very troubling, Mr. Speaker; indeed, I wonder if there isn't a privilege here – the annual report of the Ministry of Energy '03-04, page 13, which is submitted to this Assembly, as a serious, indeed, I think a legal government document, and it quotes that report. In fact, I'll just read directly from the Auditor General's report.

The Ministry of Energy's 2003-2004 Annual Report . . . says that a royalty review was completed, focusing on the royalty structure and competitiveness. The brief description concludes that Alberta's royalty regimes "successfully encourage continued development while collecting a fair share of resource development profits."

That's what the annual report of a government department said, a report submitted to this Legislature.

4:40

The Auditor General goes on to say, "While the department did technical work during that year, no detailed cross-commodity internal report supports this assertion in the Annual Report." Nothing the department did supports the assertion made in the annual report. I think, Mr. Speaker, that there could well be a point of privilege on that as well. It raises the issue of trust, doesn't it? If we actually have as MLAs annual reports being submitted to us that we cannot believe, then how can we hold government to account? How can ministers do their jobs?

This report, meaning the Auditor General's report, goes on again and refers to the 2004 royalty review, the cross-commodity royalty review and assessment from December 20, 2004, the 2005 royalty review, and on and on it goes.

It also refers on page 107 of the Auditor General's report to "an 'Executive Committee Decision Request' dated October 4, 2005. In this 'Request', the Department described a Sustainability Levy with higher royalty rates." It goes on to indicate that "the 'Request' itself indicates that the 'minister decided not to go forward'." What in the world would possess a minister of a democratically elected government to not go forward on the advice of his own department to collect further billions of dollars that rightfully belong to the taxpayers?

I could go on and on, Mr. Speaker, but the crucial – crucial – evidence here is that for seven years this government has willingly forgone billions of dollars, has willingly and deliberately overruled its own officials. We need to get to the bottom of this. We need to understand why.

The work of the Royalty Review Panel I think is commendable. I will openly admit that we were skeptical when that panel was appointed. We challenged them. We raised concerns about the interests and background of the panel members. They exceeded our expectations. We took the process seriously enough as the Alberta Liberal caucus to actually make a submission to that panel, something that the third party did not do, and I'm not sure that the government did either. But we took the process seriously enough to make a submission. We also, after the panel submitted its report on September 18, took enough time to arrange a conversation with panel members because we thought it required that. Our position is that the destination set by the Royalty Review Panel was a good destination, that royalties need to rise, and they need to rise overall to the levels established and recommended by that Royalty Review Panel.

The details of how we get to that destination need to be sorted out, and as time progressed, even the panelists themselves began to agree that there was room for debate there. Perhaps we do need to go a little softer on the gas sector until their downturn is sorted out. Perhaps we need to treat different wells in different manners. Certainly, we need to be alert to environmental concerns, and this was one of the first things that struck me. There was not an environmental component to the terms of reference given to this panel. We have the idea that Alberta should perhaps become the upgrading capital of North America. We need to ask ourselves: do we want that burden placed on our rivers and our lakes and our air and our land?

Mr. Speaker, I'm running out of time. As I said at the beginning,

10 minutes is not enough. But I do believe that all of us, regardless of what side of this Assembly we stand on, need to take our role as trustees very, very seriously.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to what is probably a fundamentally critical issue for all Albertans for the next generation, for the next several generations to come. There's no doubt in my mind that 10, 20 years from now the royalty framework may change again, just as it did in the past decades. It has changed several times over the past several decades. There will always be a need to go back and review and take a look at whether our policy is doing what we intended it to do.

As the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry pointed out, 30 years ago, when my father stood in this House, they developed a royalty framework that was to encourage investment and exploration and create jobs. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, you have seen a number of different iterations of that royalty framework in your time in this House, and I'm sure the generations to come and perhaps future generations that might even be related to me might be standing in this House talking about what his dad did or didn't do in the year 2007.

The important thing that we have to understand is that no policy should remain stagnant if it is not meeting the objectives or if it has met those objectives. I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 – the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition suggests that there was discussion that maybe the royalty framework should have changed then, but I don't think that we had \$90 oil in 2001, 2002, and 2003. In fact, I think the oil was probably hovering, I seem to recall, somewhere in the \$10 to \$20 range at the time.

Certainly, when you take a look at the exploration for deep gas and the exploration for shallow gas, there are a number of issues that had to be addressed in the '04, '05, '06 time period, which is why my understanding, Mr. Speaker, is that it took almost two years to really come up with the right incentive to ensure that we had drilling rigs exploring for those deeper, unconventional types of resources.

There's a need to ensure that our policy is adjusted over periods of time. There's a need that we want to ensure that there's investment by our partners in this. We as Albertans are the owners of the resource, but we need partners. We need partners to help us to achieve the results from those resources. To talk about different numbers, 1.4 or 1.8: Mr. Speaker, those are numbers that are based on assumptions on what the market may or may not do. They're numbers that are assumptions that are based on what the production may or may not be.

"Is it the right framework?" is the question we need to ask ourselves in this House. Is it the right framework that is going to deliver on the next-generation economy that we want for the next generation of Albertans to enjoy the same prosperity that we have here today, to enjoy the same kind of prosperity as when Premier Lougheed introduced his royalty framework? During the '70s we had tremendous prosperity in this province as well. Is it going to be the right type of framework that we're going to have 20 years from now or 10 years from now to establish what our Premier is talking about as being that next-generation economy that's knowledge based and that will be the thing that will carry us forward for the next 20 or 30 years? The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that we'll be an energy province for hundreds of years to come, and these types of questions will be asked in this House 10, 20 years from now.

The question that's before us as to whether or not we should introduce legislation today or this session: I think, really, the Minister of Energy answered that quite clearly, and others in this House have said it as well. The panel even recognized that it will take time for these types of changes to be put into the system, into the infrastructure of the computer systems, the monitoring systems, the audit systems, exactly what the Auditor General was talking about.

The hon. members opposite talk about rising prices and that we should take as much of those rising prices as we possibly can. They seem to neglect the fact that there's a difference in the costs as well. As prices have risen, so, too, have the costs of exploration, even on what one might consider to be the easiest ones to get to.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition used the example of the fact that perhaps we were property managers of some sort. If his party was the property manager, based on that type of analogy, they would have raised the rent so high that none of the tenants could afford it, and they would have left. That, Mr. Speaker, would be the problem in raising the royalties so high that no one would invest; they would leave. He mentions that there was a document produced by the department that talks about: well, you could raise them if you thought that was the right policy to proceed with. That's like listening to the maintenance janitor say: well, I think the tenants could handle a little higher rent, so you might as well raise it.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that what's happened here is the government of Alberta, on behalf of all Albertans, has taken a very serious, long, hard look at what the policy was – what its objectives were intended to be, what the policy should be, given our Premier's vision of that next-generation economy and greening our growth and creating opportunities for young people today as well as young people 10, 20 years from now – and looked at the type of framework that we need. We've come up with a framework that works.

4:50

It was this Premier who made this a question of public debate. You will recall earlier this year, during the leadership for the Progressive Conservative Party, all of the leaders and, in fact, the opposition talked about having a royalty review. It was this Premier that said: we're going to make a royalty review, and we're going to make it public the day we get it. I don't recall, and I don't believe that there's any other jurisdiction that has had such an open and public debate about our share or Albertans' share or that jurisdiction's share. In fact, I think this is the only jurisdiction that has had this type of debate for this period of time about what a government was going to do as it relates to royalties or even taxes. It's not normally the case, and I think the Premier should be given the kudos and the recognition he deserves for the fact that he has brought all Albertans as shareholders in this province together to talk about what they believe is their fair share.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, in my riding I heard a lot of: "Yes, we should raise the royalties, but be careful. Be careful that you don't stifle growth to the point that we start to lose the jobs." That's what, really, this is all about. We had to come up with a balanced approach. The hon. members opposite talked about 20 per cent being soft on gas. I believe the hon. Leader of the Opposition talked about recognizing environmental issues, and that's exactly what we did. I would think that he'd be extremely happy about that.

I'm a little concerned when the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition starts talking about sending jobs to other provinces and having upgrading done in other jurisdictions. I don't quite follow the economic development potential of telling investors, "Don't invest in upgrading in Alberta. Take it somewhere else. We don't want it," especially when we can do it in an environmentally

friendly way. We've talked about how we can do that. We're doing research in that area, considerable research, I might add.

The NDP, on the other hand, would simply suck all of the dollars out of the exact people who we will need to have invest to get the resources out of the ground. Ergo, you wouldn't have any resources coming out of the ground. If we don't maintain Alberta as an attractive place to invest, they won't, and you won't receive any royalties at all. Careful consideration of all of these types of policy questions needs to be done, and we've done that, Mr. Speaker.

It's interesting that the Leader of the Official Opposition also talked about some of the comments that, perhaps, were made when the Premier announced the royalty review. Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the Liberals first trashed the process of the royalty review. Then they trashed the panel members. Then they trashed the report before it even came out. Then when the Premier made good on his commitment to release the panel's advice right away, within hours of receiving it, within hours of seeing it, the Liberals said: "My God. You have to implement it right away. It's a great decision." Now they're backing away from even that. They claim we lost a considerable amount of money over some sort of period of time, yet they fail to recognize that prices and markets have changed. Had they made a royalty change in 2000, it would have made a change in the royalties that you were going to receive in 2006. There has to be some recognition of the fact that being an armchair quarterback and looking back with hindsight certainly makes a good sound bite but probably not very factual.

The NDP have been claiming that we haven't been taxing or grabbing enough for 30 years. I find it interesting that what the opposition is talking about is: well, you could have had this much; therefore, you must have lost it somehow, somewhere. That's like saying: well, the NDP would have taxed considerably heavy on the – am I running out of time, Mr. Speaker? Well, the interesting fact here is that if you take the difference between what Conservative policies on tax and royalties have been – oh, well. Gee, I needed more time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was waiting with bated breath to hear the end of that speech, but I guess we'll have to wait for another day.

Mr. Speaker, just to make a couple of points. First of all, it's been alluded to; even the government members have said it, but I don't think they really believe it. The fact is that the resources in the ground were not put there by the Conservative government, contrary to what they talk about in their economic strategy. They did not put the oil sands there. These resources are the people of Alberta's. Plain and simple. It's Alberta's resources, not the oil companies', not the Conservative government's.

The point was made, and I'd like to enlarge on it. The Leader of the Opposition alluded to it: as business people we the people of Alberta should be trying to get the best return we can. Obviously, we recognize that companies that are drilling or working in the oil sands have to make a reasonable profit – and I stress "reasonable" – but being the owners of the resource, it is not our job to make them wealthy beyond any belief. Just look at what the companies have taken home recently, the major oil companies. It's unbelievable the types of profits that they're making. You know, while some money is rolling forward to us, especially with oil and gas, the conventional oil and gas is running out. We've lost that, Mr. Speaker. That's the bottom line that we must remember as the owners of the resource.

Now, you can't undo the past, Mr. Speaker, but to come back to the Auditor General – this is not the opposition; this is not anybody

else; this is the Auditor General of the province of Alberta, that's paid to look into these matters. He said very clearly that the Energy department staff have been considering royalty changes since the year 2000, and at least three years ago they concluded that Alberta's share had fallen to unacceptable levels. Well, if three years ago they had fallen to unacceptable levels, with the price of oil going up, we can only imagine how much more unacceptable it is today. We've sat on this for seven years, or at least three, to be fair. The Auditor General is saying – again, not the opposition – that this is money that should have been flowing into the Alberta treasury – it's the people of Alberta's money – but it didn't. We missed it, and that's a serious matter. That's the possibility of billions of dollars that should be in the Alberta treasury.

Mr. Speaker, then we've had the royalty review go around, hand-picked by the government, and they came back and said something very similar. They said that we should move on this fairly quickly because we're losing a lot of money. Again, this was not, you know, the opposition that appointed these people. These were business-people that sat down and looked at what they thought was a fair result. Now, I believe – and they said it – that that was a compromise position that they gave at the time. They talked about \$2 billion more as being a compromise, and they were comparing to other jurisdictions. When we look around anywhere else in the world, this is a sweet deal for the oil companies, no doubt about that, and they said that this is a compromise. Well, the Premier has sort of had a compromise of a compromise although he says that that's not the case. Well, very clearly it is.

But, you know, what's worrisome – and I come to the crux, Mr. Speaker, of what we're talking about in the emergency debate. They say: oh, this is so complicated; we're going to have to wait. In the meantime, if the Auditor General is right, we're not going to be doing anything here until starting in 2009, over a year from now, and then the full impact of even what the Premier is pushing forward as being his compromise of the compromise wouldn't even start until 2010 January 1. If the level of return three years ago was unacceptable according to the Auditor General and we know that the price has gone up now and that, as I said before, that would make it even more unacceptable, think about what's going to happen in the next year or two years.

5:00

Everybody is predicting that the price of oil is going to go up. Nobody can predict with certainty, but you now hear people saying \$100 a barrel and some people speculating that with the world situation it could be \$120 a barrel. Now, as the owners of the resource shouldn't we be getting some of that in the next year and a half? It wouldn't have taken that much. They had a whole six months to go through the royalty review. We've had a couple of months. They could have at least brought something forward to this Legislature that recognized this particular fact, and they haven't done so.

The reality is, too, when we look at the timing – Lord knows, I don't know when there's going to be the next provincial election. Who would even speculate about the next provincial election? But I would wager that there's going to be one before January 1 of 2009, when this starts to come forward. I would wager that, Mr. Speaker. I hope I'm wrong, but that's in the next year. That's a year from now, 2009. I would wager that there would be an election by then at least. Now, the Premier sort of alluded to: they would monitor this situation. They would monitor it. I'd just say, even with the little bit that we're getting now, that if this government is returned, there could be a lot of different changes by the time we begin to deal with this. That's why we should be dealing with this now, and that's the purpose of the emergency debate.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there's one thing that we should do. I know both parties won't like this, but we should not have the influence of big money in politics. The federal government has done it, and the Manitoba government has done it: taken out the idea that unions and corporations could donate to political parties. Actually, that creates some of the problems that we're in.

I know that the government and the Liberals probably think: oh, they just do it because they love us. They do it for a reason. They do it for influence. They do it for influence, Mr. Speaker. If this government was truly concerned about the democratic deficit, we would be looking at that, as other provinces are doing. It works well for them. I notice that the Liberals collected \$250,000 from the corporate sector; the Tories, \$600,000. I know that all this money just flowed into the coffers because they're good people and they just want to help out the democratic process. Well, even this government must recognize that this is important. It's not only the money; it's the influence that's there. I would argue vehemently with anybody that that's the reason we've had the royalty rates that we've had, because of that influence. I think that we should take a look at this democratic deficit. As I say, both parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, are running over themselves trying to collect money from major corporations, especially oil companies, who are the biggest ones here. I just say that that's plain, plain wrong.

You know, the idea that all these people are going to pick up and go, these corporations – the minister of intergovernmental affairs said that Alberta is going to be the peak in the world, that we now will have that influence in the world because of our oil sands. Do you really mean to say, then, that if they're not paying their fair share, they're all going to leave? Of course they're not. We can have the debate about: what's a fair share? We think the minimum was what the panel came forward with, but we think we could even get more, and it still would be fair compared to other jurisdictions.

I know the government members are disappointed, but I think my time is up. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the following six will be worked in, hopefully, before the adjournment time: the Minister of Environment, followed by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, then Lethbridge-West, then Calgary-Currie, then Calgary-Nose Hill, then Edmonton-Calder. The maximum speaking time: 10 minutes. Anything less than that allows more members to get in, and there's a list that long.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll do my best to stay under the 10-minute limit. However, this is a subject matter that is complex. Others have made reference to the fact that 10 minutes is hardly sufficient time to deal with this issue and its complexity.

Mr. Speaker, that really is, in a nutshell, the difficulty that I have with this discussion today and have with the intent of the Standing Order 30 that came forward from the NDP opposition. It takes what is an extremely complex issue, and it tries to almost trivialize it by putting a very complex issue into a very simple statement. Basically, what it says is that the government should introduce and pass legislation immediately. Well, many other speakers have spoken before me. The Minister of Energy, I think, probably gave the best explanation about why that's inappropriate, that there are a good deal of considerations that need to be taken into account with respect to legislation. If it were only so easy to simply introduce legislation and pass it immediately and the world would be perfect tomorrow, I think a whole lot of things would happen differently around this place.

But you and I know, Mr. Speaker, that it's never quite that simple, that there are often huge considerations that need to be made. It's not good enough just to pass legislation; it has to be workable legislation. It has to be legislation that is implementable. On both

counts there is a great deal of work that needs to be done. First of all, there needs to be a great deal of time and effort go into the development of that legislation. Then there will have to be, again, almost a total rewrite of the necessary software applications that will allow for the implementation. I'm not going to get into a whole lot of further discussion, for that simple reason, of why this motion that's before us is inappropriate.

What I want to spend some time talking about is the premise, the assumptions that are made, that have been made throughout some of the debate today by members of the opposition, not just the NDP opposition but the Liberal opposition as well, that somehow there is money that was left on the table, that somehow the government should be held negligent because money should have been collected by increasing royalty rates earlier than what was done. I think it really comes down to an issue, Mr. Speaker, of determining and distinguishing between "could" and "should." They're words that are very, very similar, but they have distinctive, different meanings.

So when someone points out that the government could have raised significantly more revenue if it had changed the rates earlier, that's true. That's absolutely true. The government could do all kinds of things. Every day I get people coming to me telling me that the government could or in some cases perhaps should be doing something that is going to result in either changing environmental outcomes, in the case of my ministry, the Ministry of Environment, or changing – it doesn't matter. We go down the row of ministers at this table. Everybody – our staff, the public – comes to us on an almost daily basis with suggestions, sometimes very well thought out position papers, that suggest that we could or should be doing something different.

5:10

What the opposition doesn't seem to comprehend is that simply because something could or perhaps even should be done, it is the responsibility of the government to dictate the policy, to determine the policy, to have that in-depth discussion because whenever some suggestion is made to change policy, it will result in one particular outcome, but it could also result in a number of other unanticipated consequences.

When someone comes to me and suggests to me that I could be tremendously reducing the amount of greenhouse gases, for example, Mr. Speaker, that are emitted in this province by simply restricting or limiting or ending any further expansion of oil and gas in the oil sands in particular, that's true, and I'm sure that there are many that have well-documented dissertations suggesting that that could or should be the case. But, clearly, there would be consequences of that, and the consequences, I would suggest to you, would be rather dramatic. Instead, it's the responsibility of the government to consider what the consequences are, to consider both sides of any issue before carrying forward.

When someone suggests that the Energy minister could have or should have realized that there was all kinds of money being left on the table, that somehow he is negligent or that the government is negligent, quite frankly I think that that is simply illogical. The responsibility of government is more than considering one particular side of any one issue. The responsibility of government is to consider what the implications are of adopting any new policy.

That being said, our new leader, our new Premier, after hearing from Albertans over an extended period of time that the government should review our policy with respect to royalties, made that one of his first acts after becoming Premier. He appointed an independent commission to do just that, to review the policies, and they did an excellent job. But, Mr. Speaker, they're not the government. They're not the ones that are responsible for considering all of the ramifications, all of the implications of adopting a new policy.

That's the responsibility of the government and the government caucus and the members of this House, that have been elected to make those kinds of decisions, and ultimately the responsibility of the members of this House when the government comes forward with the appropriate legislation for implementation.

That's the accountability, Mr. Speaker, and that's, quite frankly, the reason why this discussion that we're having this afternoon, while interesting, somewhat engaging, is really missing the point. The point of the matter is: what can we or should we be doing with respect to implementation of royalty reviews? The Premier set about a process, which is now about halfway through, maybe three-quarters of the way through. The policy has been set by government. Now it's up to the Legislature, and it will be up to the Legislature in a time period that's appropriate, that allows for the development of the legislation, the implementation of the legislation, and all of the various necessary safeguards to ensure that we have the capacity within our jurisdiction to be sure that the implementation of that policy is accurate and correct.

Mr. Speaker, wanting to abide by your earlier suggestion that less might be better, I think I'll conclude my comments there and encourage any other members who wish to speak to do so.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, that was less by three seconds.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this royalty debate regardless of the fact that it appears orchestrated.

The minister of advanced education without the benefit of a water inventory has indicated that there is sufficient water for all the in-Alberta upgrading and extraction. We Alberta Liberals don't share his view.

The Minister of Environment indicated that there is a difference between could and should. There's not only a difference between could and should; there's also a difference between did and didn't. The ministry did receive advice to increase royalties from their own department experts but didn't. That was negligent.

As early as 1994 the price of oil and gas had risen to the point that a surplus approaching \$1 billion was recorded. Despite this early indication that the value of our nonrenewable resources was increasing, former Minister of Finance Jim Dinning ripped a page out of Finance minister Sir Roger Douglas's plan that had such a detrimental effect on both the economy and the people of New Zealand. Mr. Dinning introduced totally unnecessary, draconian cuts to public education, advanced education, seniors, social services programs, health care, roads, and infrastructure. It is important to note that the \$23 billion debt that the government was so guiltily anxious to pay down, no matter what the cost to people and programs, had grown due to Conservative government mismanagement, the same type of mismanagement which remains rampant today.

To his credit former Premier Lougheed, a rare, enlightened Conservative leader, realized both the need for increasing royalties and setting them aside in the form of the heritage trust fund to create a future savings fund that would serve as a buffer, a replacement revenue source to draw from when conventional oil and gas revenue had peaked, as is the case today. Premier Lougheed recognized the necessity of investing in the extraction of another source of nonrenewable, predictable, stable energy, specifically the oil sands. Peter Lougheed also had the foresight to recognize that there had to be a balance struck between the economic value of the resource and the effect of its rapid extraction. Mr. Lougheed must have watched in disbelief and silent horror as his successors raided and undermined the heritage trust fund to the point that due to the combined

ravages of inflation and the lack of contributions, despite years of billion dollar surpluses, the fund is worth less now than when he left it.

These billion dollar surpluses, fuelled by the rising value of our nonrenewable resources, made these rapid cuts of the 1990s completely unnecessary. Half of Calgary's hospitals didn't need to be closed or blown up. Doctors, nurses, lab technicians didn't need to be driven to the States. University seats didn't need to be closed. The pain that was supposed to be short-term continues to have fallout ramifications felt daily across this province. Schools could have been built in the 40 Calgary communities that are currently without. The defrayed maintenance budget of the Calgary school boards would not be sitting at over half a billion dollars.

What compounds the draconian cuts of the 1990s is the failure of this government since 2000 to collect, according to both the Royalty Review Panel and our Auditor General, royalties worth between \$6 billion and \$12 billion. Not only was the government-inflicted pain in the 1990s unnecessary, but had the government, the majority of whose members opposite have been in this House since or before 2001, collected the money due and properly managed the boom, we wouldn't be facing the problems of homelessness, hunger, poverty, and illiteracy most commonly associated with a depression.

After 36 years it's time for a change of government. It's time to restore the faith of Albertans in the democratic process. It's time to strike a balance between the economy and the environment. It's time for a man with a plan. It's time for a Premier from Edmonton-Riverview. It's time for Taft.

5:20

The Speaker: Well, over five minutes and 14 seconds left on the table, which is appreciated. There were no points of order, which is even more appreciated.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Dunford: Well, I want to begin by thanking the previous speaker. I was starting to forget that I was in a House of parliament, where there is confrontation usually at all times. The speakers on both sides of the House up until the Member for Calgary-Varsity I thought were staying on topic, trying to deal with the particular issue, I guess, in their own particular way.

I'd like to use my time to try to get us back to that particular methodology. One of the reasons that I want to do that is that up until today I found that there was difficulty in discussing the royalty situation because emotion came into it so rapidly. I was reminded of some of the discussions, some of the focus groups, some of the town halls that I arranged and went to during many of the health care debates. What this House needs more than anything, of course, is not just heat, but we need light as well, and I think we've heard from many of the speakers today from both sides of the House trying to provide that.

What I am worried about more than anything, though, is that we don't analyze this thing to death. It's been my experience quite often that analysis leads to paralysis. I think we have a situation here where the Premier has pointed out the direction that he wishes this government to take. I think that there has been a general agreement amongst the silent majority out there that he has found the balance. I'm not sure of that because they are the silent majority, and then by definition they're not phoning me. But the ones that are calling me have a particular interest, and it's clear that they're the usual suspects that we hear from. Neither of them like it, you know: either for or against. Maybe what we have here is one of those affectionately called Canadian compromises, that we've actually done the right thing because nobody would particularly like it.

One of the things that's made me focus today has been the tremendous advantage of hindsight. I don't think there is any question for the people that were here in 1995 that if we could have seen what was going to happen in 2007, we might have done things a little bit differently. I'm proud that in 1995 I was at the table when the discussions around oil sands took place. I was proud to be a part of that discussion, and I was able then to listen to the various ideas, thoughts, reasoning that went around it.

The overall objective at that time, of course, was on one side monetary because we were still wrestling with a deficit and had that huge debt that we knew we were going to have to deal with. We felt that it was going to have to be some kind of an arrangement to attract investment in the oil sands. The way you attract investment is: you are competitive. Being competitive, of course, doesn't mean that you're stuck in the middle somewhere. If there is a list of countries that provide royalty arrangements, you're not in the middle. You want to be at the low end. You want to be competitive to get the investment. Even in today's time, now, with the benefit of hindsight we can see that it worked. In fact, I can talk about a situation where, not in '95 but after 9/11 in 2001, there was a situation in the financial markets, in all of the upheaval and concern that that particular event brought on us, and again a huge downturn in the particular markets. It directly affected the ability of this government to perhaps meet what was then an ambitious budget target.

There were discussions, and we asked various pools of talent that we have inside our government to bring scenarios to us. Of course, as experts will do, you bring a scenario that is likely what is going to happen over the next five to seven years. You get a worst-case scenario, and you get, then, of course, a best-case scenario. I remember, particularly, how optimistic I thought the best-case scenario was. I can remember sitting in my chair and thinking: "You know, that's too optimistic. I mean, there's no way that we can count on that kind of a thing." The optimism was \$45 oil. Our previous Premier, in talking about how there wasn't a plan for the major growth – I can say that there were none of us here that would have been able to plan for that kind of growth. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that if those experts that came to us in 2001 had come in with a best-case scenario of \$90 oil, I don't think they would have made it out of the room with their jobs. I mean, that just would have been so unrealistic.

For the major part of the time that we're discussing here today, the record should show – and I think that it does – that what was done in 1995 was not only appropriate. It was extremely beneficial to the people of Alberta, and the numbers, of course, define that. If you look at a chart showing the parabolic increase in the price of oil, now, of course, it doesn't look so hot. So what we've had is that there's been a change of leadership. The new leader takes a look at it and says: hey, I want a review. The review was done, and it was released, and now it's time, you know, for people to react.

To go back into the Auditor General's report where he talks about how officials were saying this – officials should say this. I had almost 10 years of experience as a cabinet minister in this government, and I always wanted scenarios. If I didn't have some part of the department pushing one way and another part of the department pushing another way, how was I ever going to tell what it was that I should be bringing forward to my caucus colleagues? Debate inside a department is just as expected as it is in this particular House. It's not unusual for me to imagine that there would be officials in Energy saying: look, you can get more. In fact, I'd suggest that if there weren't some officials in Energy saying, "You should get more," then we ought to have been looking at what kind of corporate culture we had within that department.

There should be a healthy debate also inside departments about

what it is that they think that the policy-makers should do. I use policy-maker deliberately because there is the difference. The difference is that administrators administer, of course, and then they bring forward their thoughts, their ideas to the policy-makers. That, ladies and gentlemen, is people that are inside this room. The policy-makers are on the government side, and then the people that want to challenge the policies, of course, are the opposition. They're doing that today and doing it admirably, and I congratulate them for that. But that shouldn't deflect us from seeing, not keeping our eye on the ball on this thing. The world has changed. We have \$90 oil. We have a situation where time needs to change. We need it done by January of 2009.

5:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, as someone who sits on the opposite side of the House and challenges the policy that the policy-makers produce, for that insight into the inner workings of cabinet and its relationship to senior public servants and administrators and the insight into the corporate culture of the Department of Energy and other government departments. It will come in handy someday soon, I think.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West makes, I think, some very good points with which I would not argue. I understand that the world and Alberta's place in it in 1995 was and looked very different from what it does today. Having been in the media and covering those sorts of issues and events throughout that period, I think I understand how the hon. member and his colleagues back in the day came to the conclusions that they came to. I understand, as we fast-forward to 2007, how different the world is, how different Alberta's place in the world is, how different it looks, and I understand that that prompted the new leader of the governing party to commission a royalty review and make the results of that review public on the day that he got the report. I commend the Premier for doing that.

What I don't understand, Mr. Speaker, is the intervening 12 years and especially the last seven of those 12 years. Given what the Member for Lethbridge-West had to say about the need for a yin and yang, differing points of view within a government department and how that's healthy and how that shapes better policy, it doesn't change the fact that the Auditor General identified that for the past six or seven years on an annual basis the department's advice to the minister and to this government has been to raise royalty rates because those administrators, although they are not the people who should be making the policy, are the people who advise and give good advice to the people who make the policy. Those administrators saw a shifting landscape, a changing landscape, a changing reality.

I believe that somebody in the House earlier today talked about a paradigm shift. I'm not sure that that's the appropriate way to describe it, but a paradigm shift usually means a pretty significant, near seismic shift in the way things are. Certainly, from 1995 to \$90 a barrel oil today: I think you could say that that's neo-seismic, at least. I guess the question that continues to plague me is how it was that we spent the last – I won't go back till 1995 – seven years, how the government spent the last seven years, in the face of the advice that it was getting from its bureaucrats, from its administrators, not seeing the change in the landscape, not seeing the approaching lights of the oncoming train, not seeing and seizing the opportunity.

Now, before you get all up in arms about this opposition guy saying "seizing the opportunity," I'm not doing a Hugo Chavez on us here. I'll leave that to the third party. I'm not suggesting that we

should go out and nationalize the industry or jack up royalty rates by 90 per cent because, you know, we can probably squeeze that much blood out of them or anything like that. I do think and certainly my constituents tell me that a balanced, well-thought-out approach to this that balances the need of the people of Alberta to get their fair share and the need of the industry, which generates so much economic activity in our province and which is responsible for so much of the wealth that we enjoy today, the need of the industry that develops the resources that we own to be able to continue producing a prosperous economy for the people of Alberta.

None of that, though, changes the fact that we the people own the oil that the Almighty in his/her infinite wisdom decided to put under our feet rather than under the feet of somebody else. We have a responsibility in this House. Whether we're members of the governing party, members of the Official Opposition, members of the third party, members of the fourth party, or sitting in this House as an independent, we have a responsibility to those people to strike a good, fair, and balanced deal that results in the people of Alberta getting our fair share.

There is one point that I wanted to pick up on, maybe a couple if I have time, Mr. Speaker, and that's the notion of what we do going forward as the royalty regime changes, what we do not only with the extra revenue that comes in and how we manage and steward that properly but how we steward and manage the environment properly as well. There seems to be – now, this is on the part of the third party – this notion that the government would ship all the raw bitumen that it possibly could to the United States of America and that we evil Liberals, quote, unquote, would ship it all to some other part of Canada. I'm only expressing my personal opinion here, but, you know, if I can't do it at home, I'd rather enrich my Canadian brothers and sisters than enrich a foreign power. That's why I would rather see upgrader activity happen in British Columbia or Saskatchewan or Manitoba or whatever.

Mr. Speaker, that only makes good sense. We cannot, in our view in the Alberta Liberal caucus, develop all the upgraders that we could possibly use to process our bitumen in the province of Alberta and not do serious, irreparable damage to our environment. We need to share the pain, we need to share the gain with the other western provinces in Canada, and I think that's a vital, vital thing going forward.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Speaker, and give others a chance to participate. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to join the Standing Order 30 debate of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I want to speak specifically to the motion. The motion speaks of "the failure of the government to promptly introduce and pass royalty legislation to prevent the loss of billions of dollars to the public treasury."

The first point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is that there has been no failure of the government to act promptly because it is, in fact, a matter of great public importance. It certainly must be something that must be dealt with with promptness, but that promptness must be measured also by the fact that it is of great importance. Not only is it a very complex issue in terms of the royalty regime itself, but it's also very complex in terms of the economic consequences which flow from any alteration of that royalty regime.

In my respectful submission, acting promptly was exactly what was done by this Premier. The Premier promptly fulfilled his commitment to the people of Alberta to review the province's royalty system. He appointed an independent panel of experts. He

gave them a mandate to thoroughly review the system. The panel of experts, I might add, which was seen as too biased in favour of the oil and gas industry by certain members of the opposition parties, was given a very broad mandate by the Premier to review the whole of Alberta's royalty regime for the oil and gas industry. They were given a mandate to review many aspects, including how we in Alberta compare to other jurisdictions; whether or not sufficient sensitivity is present in the royalty system to market conditions; whether the regime in the oil sands, which provides for revenue less costs, is an optimal regime; whether the various programs that we have for oil and gas are appropriate in the circumstances and whether they should be changed; and how the existing resource development should be treated. Also, the mandate included the examination of the economic and fiscal impacts that any changes might have.

5:40

The Premier gave the panel a very broad mandate. He gave them a limited time in which to respond. They came back within six months. The turnaround time, I would suggest, in view of the mandate was very short, so one could not say that there was a failure to act promptly in that case. Not a lot of time to hold public hearings, and there were 220 submissions made, as my hon. colleague has mentioned. That report was issued, then, consisting of 103 or 104 pages. The panel did make recommendations in the form of a report, which was called *Our Fair Share*, and again that is someone's opinion of what is fair. It's not based on science or certitude, but it's based on what is, in effect, a political judgment.

Again, speaking to the alleged failure of the government to act promptly. What did the Premier do when he got the report? He released it the same day. There has been criticism in the past that reports were not made public promptly, but it certainly couldn't be said of this report, where it was immediately released to the public for public comment and criticism.

After the report was released, within a very short time further consultations were undertaken both within the Department of Energy, by the Deputy Premier, and by other interested parties. A wide range of input was received with respect to reactions to the royalty regime and what some of the economic consequences might have been. Certainly, we've seen a great deal of that not only in the media, but the criticism has been made from both sides within this House during question period today. It would be my contention that the government certainly acted promptly in taking all of that input and bringing forward the plan, which is now being made into a new royalty framework, which the Premier has presented to the province in conjunction with the Minister of Energy.

Now, as to the legislation which the motion speaks to, other speakers have already made the point that this legislation and regulations flowing therefrom are not a simple matter. The regulations and legislation that needs to be drafted, as I understand it, are 11 in total. But one must also consider that not only do the law and the regulations need to be changed, but there has to be the imposition of a new economic regime, and a financial regime entails a lot of changes. New accounting software has to be developed both within the Department of Energy and by private industry. People have to be trained. There has to be a transition. These things do not happen overnight, so I would suggest that the accommodation in terms of introducing the legislation in the spring session is certainly not a failure to act promptly.

A second point that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the motion is the idea that there have been some lost royalties. The speculation of the lost billions of dollars: well, in whose opinion is there a loss of billions of dollars? The fact is that the assertion that is made that there is a loss of billions of dollars is

based on a number of assumptions. The most important assumption that has been made is that all of this activity would have remained unchanged had certain higher royalties been imposed. Yet if one looks at the panel's report, it quite frankly says, "The proposed increase in royalties and taxes will slow the rate of investment in the oil sands." I mean, even the panel suggests that these are not going to have consequences. So if there had been an imposition of a higher regime, it would have had consequences, and all of that activity would not have remained the same.

There have been suggestions that we'd have gotten more money in the government's pockets, but consider the fact that, number one, we had record land sales in the mines and minerals leases. We had a level of investment in the province of Alberta which was unprecedented, especially in the oil sands but also in exploration and drilling and conventional oil and gas. We had the highest employment rate, the highest creation of new jobs of anywhere in the country, growing salaries, billions of dollars in investments in the province, thriving businesses, which generated profits for Albertans and shareholders.

The second point I want to make with respect to these so-called lost billions is that those billions did not simply evaporate. To put it simply, it wasn't taken in by the government, but it didn't evaporate. It was left in the pockets of the corporations, both public and private corporations. The vast majority of those monies were then reinvested in the province of Alberta. People were buying goods and services and recycling those dollars. Our economy has grown, and as a result of the increased economic activity we have more workers, who are paying more taxes. We have more corporations and small businesses paying more taxes on their earnings. So there's a multiplier effect in the oil patch, not just in the oil patch but also in the economy as a whole: house builders, structural engineers, many, many small service companies. And who can honestly say how much less all of those taxes and economic activity would have cost the province than the money that would have been taken in by the treasury if those royalties had been changed? I don't think anybody could predict that.

Certainly, some hon. members have suggested that the failure to act promptly arose before the present Premier and the present Minister of Energy. One could say with some justification: well, that was then and this is now. More importantly, I think one must say that there were many complex pieces of information before the previous Minister of Energy. There were political judgments that had to be made, and those judgments had to be weighed against the economic consequences of increasing those royalties, which were not necessarily all negative.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, and all members might want to go take a look at Standing Order 8(3) to determine Thursday.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate having an opportunity to speak on this important issue, and I thank you as well for creating the opportunity through the ruling that we had here today.

I just wanted to return to the essence of our Standing Order 30 because, of course, what we're looking for here is a sense of urgency and a sense of prevention. What we're looking for here, as our caucus has been debating and deliberating over this issue for many months and years, is to collect a reasonable royalty rate in a timely manner. Considering that the hydrocarbon energy that we are collecting royalties from is a nonrenewable resource, then we believe that at any given point in time there is a sense of urgency to ensure that we're collecting a reasonable rate of return that is not going to interfere with the smooth operation of our most important

energy industry but also that it reflects the true value of this important nonrenewable resource.

Before I make any comments at all, I think that it's important for all of us to consider this review process to be something that goes on at least on an annual basis. The royalty rate, for example, is brought out with the budget every year in England, in the U.K., and in other countries there is a continuous reassessment of the royalty rates based on market conditions and circumstances as they change over time. So the comments from other hon. members across here are very much appreciated, and I think that by putting together a very concise system, we can in fact address all of those concerns in a reasonable way.

5:50

Besides reviewing royalties on a more regular basis, at least on an annual basis, I would suggest that we look at the terms of the Hunter report and ensure that we put in a progressive sliding scale for royalty rates based on the vagaries of the market conditions and the price of the product that's being produced. By having a progressive system that slides up and down on the royalty rates according to the price that that commodity is trading for, then you're virtually ensuring that you're not going to see the devastation or the distortion of the industry as well at any given time because you are capturing the change in the price with a progressive system to calculate the royalty rates.

I think those two things on a very urgent and immediate basis would serve this House and the people of the province of Alberta very well because, of course, every day that we fail to capture a reasonable royalty return on our hydrocarbon energy resources, we are losing that money. I hear not without some force and some logic people arguing on the other sides here that we didn't lose that money because the regime was different at the time. Well, I think it's important for us, Mr. Speaker, to recognize what is going on around us. This is not planet Alberta. It is, in fact, an integrated part of the rest of the country and North America and the world as well. What we've seen, very compelling arguments and data that's been collected, is that other jurisdictions around the world are in fact increasing their royalty rates in keeping with (a) the value and scarcity of the hydrocarbon wealth that they have at their disposal in their countries and (b) the lack of hydrocarbon, oil and gas, that's available to the world to actually develop.

Let's not forget that here in Alberta this is part of a rarified jurisdiction where the oil and gas companies still have reasonably equal and open access to the commodity in the first place. There are other countries around the world that are nationalizing, and there are problems in different parts of the world where oil and gas is being produced, unstable conditions and whatnot. So we provide here in the province of Alberta a very stable and very appealing place to do business for oil and gas because, of course, we are part of the North American continent, so it is reasonably stable and safe. We are close to the largest market in the world for oil and gas, and we are part of that market, in fact, you know, and finally, we have a very stable product, especially in the tar sands.

Of course, when you drill for oil and gas, although technology has improved tremendously and the geophysics of it has improved tremendously, still you're not quite sure how long that oil or gas well is going to produce, and then one day it runs out. With the tar sands you can make a pretty good estimate of how much more you have and how much more energy and investment you need to get that product out. You can see it there or you can pretty much poke around and find out how much is there.

That provides a stability which I would suggest, and lots of other people are suggesting too, has a premium to it, Mr. Speaker. It has a premium that allows us the certainty, the safety, the strategic place

of our oil and gas here on the North American continent. All of those things have value, and the value must be captured in our royalty regime.

I've been watching this unfold with great interest because, of course, since I was elected and before elected, we had a very active policy to increase the royalty regime here in the province, and I find it with no small dose of irony to see how things have changed very quickly over the last three years. You know, the price has gone up tremendously too, so that's a mitigating factor to some degree. But the point is that we've been pushing very hard over these past three or four or five years to have the royalty review changed, and I think now we're on the cusp of being able to do it.

What I fear, Mr. Speaker, is that we're going to say: okay; well, here is this compromise, and everybody is happy and away we go. Because already from the beginning, when the Hunter report was being presented, that was framed as a very reasonable compromise, to allow our oil and gas industry to continue on making a healthy profit and to adjust to greater royalty rates over time, but during the course of five weeks suddenly the Hunter report went over to an extreme, which I found very disturbing because this was really more the product of spin and communication work rather than reality. So when we saw the government unveil their version of royalty reform, suddenly what was a very reasonable, I think, report that we could live with, certainly, was thrown off into some version of extremism. That was just a misrepresentation of facts and reality, and any time we see that, we're compelled to put our feet down and at least try to resolve that.

This emergency debate that we have here today I think is truly a step in the right direction, and I hope that the public as they continue to become educated on this issue – remember, we're not just passing rules and then hoping that the public will go along with it. I prefer to see it as a continuum of education. People are just starting to understand what the royalty regime does and how this compromised royalty regime won't gain us any more money. In fact, with some changes in the system and changes in the market here in the next few years I would venture to say that we would be capturing less royalties than we are today. Certainly, I'm not suggesting that we capture more royalties at the expense of industry, especially the natural gas industry, because I know that the prices are very unstable there now. But, again, a progressive royalty system based on windfall profits, or the absence of, would solve that problem without a big deal.

It's incumbent upon us to take this royalty debate now, here today, and over the next three weeks as a starting point to come up with a real solution that everybody can live with but also that we can live with ourselves to ensure that we're not spending hydrocarbon wealth for the present at the expense of the future, not just the economic future but for our generational future of Albertans, who will hopefully benefit from the hydrocarbon wealth that we've been blessed with here in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'm speaking just very quickly on a couple of other points that I wanted to bring forward. We believe as New Democrats that this is a wonderful opportunity to have continuous reform and turnover with the royalties. We believe that the urgency will not subside today when we walk away at 6 o'clock but that the urgency will just begin. I've heard some rather spurious arguments about these royalties, and one of the more disturbing ones is that they say: well, the government collects lots of money, and what do they do with it anyway . . . [Mr. Eggen's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: I'll now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs as the 17th participant this afternoon.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm cognizant

that there are only some three minutes left on the clock. But a few comments are I think warranted. I've been listening rather attentively to this debate. If one was to arrive in Alberta and have no idea of what the political landscape of this province is, one would probably very easily conclude that the third party, the ND Party, is the Official Opposition in this province and not the Liberals. Kudos to them for bringing this debate to the House.

It was a rather enlightening debate without a doubt. I have known for a while what the ND position on the royalty review was, but up until today I didn't know what the Liberal position was, and frankly with two minutes left on the clock I still don't know what their position on the royalty review is. However, it would be very irresponsible to force this Legislature and this Premier and our Minister of Energy to now, in a very rushed manner, amend an act and some 10 regulations just simply to implement a policy that will have an impact on generations to come in the province.

Now, I often hear opposition parties arguing that legislation is

passed too quickly, not enough consultation, not enough discussion with the opposition, and now we are encouraged to pass what is arguably the most important piece of legislation that this Legislature will ever face without any consultation. Just put it on the table. As the Member for Edmonton-Centre said: we will give you co-operation to just ram it through the House and implement it without any possible consideration of adverse effects that may occur.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier has done an honourable thing. He has made a promise to Albertans to review the royalty structure. He has made a very difficult decision, balancing Alberta's economic growth with what is owed to Albertans as shareholders and owners.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time has now come where we must now rise. We will reconvene tomorrow afternoon at 1 o'clock.

[At 6 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 6, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/06

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise in the House today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a group of 37 grade 6 students from Sturgeon Heights school in St. Albert. They are accompanied by teachers Lorna MacKay, Darryl Propp; parent helpers Sandra Shelemey, Craig Toth, Beth Purdon. They participated in your mock Legislature this morning, and after speaking with them in the rotunda, I found out that they are very knowledgeable about the process and what we do here in their Legislature. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm truly honoured to introduce two guests that are here that have very special credentials. Originally they were from Sierra Leone. They came to Canada via Moncton, New Brunswick, and eventually found that many people from Africa had actually settled in Edmonton and here they might find a home and many people that they had much in common with. Today we are joined by managing editor Alhaji Kabba and his beautiful wife and secretary and layout designer, Martha Kabba, who produce the Canadian African. They have interviewed Stephen Mandel. They've interviewed the police chief in Calgary. Today they interviewed me to find out what it's really like to work bringing immigrants into Alberta. I would ask them to please rise and if we would give them the warm welcome they so richly deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a delegation from the Fulton Place elementary school. This delegation is on tour this afternoon. They are led by a teacher, Mr. Michael Lam, and they are ably assisted by three parent helpers or volunteers: Mrs. Wendy Dick, Ms Linda McBain Cuyler, and Mrs. Heinrichs. I had the pleasure of visiting this classroom at Fulton Place school during Read In Week, in the first week of October, and this class is very well organized by Mr. Lam. The students are bright and energetic, and that is reflected in their activities in the classroom. They're in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Alberta Film Industry

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta film industry is a means through which we communicate the voice and identity of this province. I'm not speaking just to the Alberta stereotype of the cowboy-inspired westerns set against the backdrop of the majestic Rocky Mountains. There is so much more. We're farmers, CEOs, police officers, nurses, and, yes, even politicians. We have stories set in our own unique heritage, and these stories are important contributions to our national cultural mosaic.

The film and television industry has long been of interest to this government. It's a knowledge-based, labour-intensive, value-added, and environmentally green sector with direct employment benefits going to jobs and service companies where films are being shot. The film industry also enriches our province's cultural images, acting talents, skilled craftsmen, and shares our enviable quality of life with the world. It's an industry that postsecondary schools like Red Deer College are focused upon.

The passionate vision of our Albertan identity is certainly reinforced in the indomitable spirit of Lorne MacPherson. He was the head of the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation when it opened its doors in 1981 and was instrumental in putting the Alberta film industry onto the global map. Lorne's vision and leadership helped shape a vibrant part of Alberta's arts community. By taking our culture to the world through film and television, he has helped to give global audiences a taste of our provincial perspectives and a clear insight into the Alberta experience.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Gaetz Apartments, Michener Centre

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Something very extraordinary happened in Red Deer last month. Thanks to the Premier's concern for the homeless and his mandate on affordable housing we were able to take an empty provincial building in Red Deer and transform it into 42 affordable apartments for people who have jobs but have no homes. Now called Gaetz Apartments at Michener Centre, these bachelor-type suites include three meals per day and laundry facilities for working people who will now have an opportunity to sleep peacefully and think about their future as they save money for a damage deposit and the first month's rent.

The idea to investigate the use of empty provincial buildings was first identified by Mayor Morris Flewelling. Thanks to the co-operation of the departments of Infrastructure and Transportation, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Seniors and Community Supports, central PDD, and numerous community agencies we were able to work through extensive program proposals and find the right people for this project.

I would like to thank Justin Hubert of Heritage Family Services and his dedicated staff, Maribeth Friesen of the city of Red Deer social planning department, all the contributors to the project whose staff worked long hours and late nights to complete the renovations for their belief in this project. There are many people from the government departments who also worked very hard to make this project a reality, and I would also like to thank them.

Mr. Speaker, Gaetz Apartments, which will give a home to 42 working homeless, is a great story, a first in the province of Alberta. It's thanks to the vision of our Premier that we have been able to make this project possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Food insecurity isn't a term that comes to mind in the province of Alberta, but it's a reality for many of our fellow citizens. Having access to nutritious food at all times is something that most Albertans take for granted, but a report released in June 2007, Income-related Household Food Insecurity in Canada, found that in Alberta 10.7 per cent of households have income-related food insecurity. As a province we have the second highest rate of food insecurity in Canada.

Food insecurity means that individuals and families do not have access to affordable and nutritious food through socially acceptable means. There has been a lot of talk in this province about the housing crisis. We need to be aware that those who are facing a housing crisis have faced food insecurity first. The homeless are severely food insecure. The precariously housed are food insecure. Housing, transportation, child care, and food security are affecting the low-income Albertans.

Most alarming is the finding that Alberta has the highest prevalence of food insecurity among its income assistance recipients. The Alberta rate is 84 per cent, more than 20 per cent greater than the Canadian average of 60 per cent. Eighty-four per cent is an unacceptable finding of food insecurity amongst Alberta's most vulnerable residents. Clearly, income assistance rates in this province are inadequate.

Food security is essential for healthy eating. Without consistent economic access to sufficient nutritious food, healthy eating cannot be achieved, increasing the risk of poor health. Food insecurity is an issue in Alberta. It is a cost to productivity in this province, to our children's future, and to our health care system. There is a lot that a responsible government can and must do to solve this problem. There is no excuse for hunger in Alberta, Canada's wealthiest per capita province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

1:10

Lethbridge College

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very good year for Lethbridge, and today I would like to recognize Lethbridge College. The year 2007 is the 50th anniversary for Lethbridge College, and actually there is no other publicly funded college in Canada that can make that statement because Lethbridge Junior College was the first publicly funded college that came into existence in Canada. Of course, over those 50 years it has a tremendous mark of excellence that it has made in terms of postsecondary.

Now, recently with the help of the Alberta government we have been able to increase the trades and technologies area within the college not only in terms of the renovation but also spots for more electricians, more welders, and more heavy-duty mechanics. We have now a board at Lethbridge College that's led by an excellent entrepreneur and, of course, a recent new president, who comes to us highly recommended as an administrator.

There are some programs that I would like to highlight at Lethbridge College, although all of the programs are of excellent value, in particular, again, that trades and technology that I've just talked about but also broadcast journalism. Right throughout this country there a number of faces that we see on television as anchors and also, of course, beyond our borders and even into Washington. The Global man in Washington, by the way, I believe grew up in

Barrhead or Westlock. So an excellent, excellent program, and I want to congratulate all of them.

Lethbridge College, happy 50th. Look forward to the next 50 years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Lougheed House Historic Site

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Historic sites like Lougheed House, located in the heart of my constituency, Calgary-Buffalo, keep our province's rich past alive. Preserving and protecting our heritage plays a key role in remembering who we are as a province and allows the next generation to help shape the future in building an even stronger Alberta.

Built in 1891, Lougheed House was the original home to Senator James Alexander Lougheed and his family. Lougheed House is a provincial historic resource and a national historic site dedicated to commemorating and preserving Calgary's early history. Discussions were held in the living room of Lougheed House with regard to the province of Alberta acquiring ownership of our natural resources in 1923.

Following the onset of the Depression in 1929 the Lougheed estate was unable to pay the property taxes on its real estate holdings. The city in 1934 took legal title to the house. Lougheed House is now owned by the province and operated in collaboration with the Lougheed House Conservation Society after a \$6 million renovation. As one of the city's most historic landmarks it will now receive additional support from our Premier and the Minister of Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture to continue sharing Calgary's proud past with Albertans and visitors nation-wide.

This beautifully restored building and gardens represent a tribute to the province's proud history. Lougheed House connects Calgary, Albertans, and visitors to our province with that proud past and gives us a glimpse into how Calgary became the great city it is today. The Lougheed family are proud Albertans with a rich heritage as leaders in our community, Alberta, and Canada.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is envied the world over for the opportunity presented by its natural resources. The amount of extractable oil in its tar sands is second only to Saudi Arabia, and we are one of a handful of oil-producing nations where private companies can still do business. Thanks to this climate we have a very powerful bargaining position with respect to royalty rates.

The owners of these resources, ordinary Albertans, expect their elected representatives to obtain the maximum economic benefit possible for those resources through royalty rates. These expectations have not been fulfilled, Mr. Speaker. The Conservatives failed to implement even the bare minimum recommended in the royalty task force. Instead, they brought forward a royalty system that will bring in \$600 million less than the task force proposed in a single year.

The Liberals sat out most of the royalty debate, and only at the very end did they bring forward the vaguest proposal for a 20 per cent increase, the same per cent the Conservatives say they want. The Conservatives or Liberals don't talk about real value for royalties because they want to protect their political donations. The

Conservatives took \$580,000 from big oil and gas over the last two years. Nexen, Enbridge, Husky, Imperial Oil, EnCana, and Suncor are just a few of the companies that funded the Liberals to the tune of \$185,000 over the last two years.

Mr. Speaker, it's time Albertans earned as much for their resources as Great Britain, California, Indonesia, Russia, Norway, Azerbaijan, Alaska, and Trinidad. The Liberals and Conservatives are settling for bottom of the barrel royalties. Ordinary Albertans deserve better, and that's why Alberta's NDP is demanding more.

head:

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Government Services I am pleased to table copies of two documents today. The first document is the committee's final report and recommendations regarding Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. The second document is the committee's report on Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, these reports are the product of 10 committee meetings. That's over 38 hours of meeting time, including eight hours' worth of public hearings over a few short months, not to mention the research, administrative, and procedural support of over a dozen individuals with the Legislative Assembly Office, including Mr. Robert Reynolds, Dr. Philip Massolin, Ms Rhonda Sorensen, and Ms Jody Rempel. I should also acknowledge the valuable support from the staff at Alberta Justice and the office of the Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to work with my colleagues from both sides of the House on this committee and a privilege to chair one of this Legislature's first policy field committees. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was a historic report. That's the first time in the history of this Assembly, in 102 years, that such a process has been followed.

I now call on the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As acting chair of the Standing Committee on Community Services I'm pleased to table copies of two reports today. First is the committee's final report and recommendations regarding Bill 31, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. The second is the committee's final report on Bill 41, Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, the committee met on both bills over a time frame of four months, held nine meetings, received 85 written submissions, and heard presentations from 21 witnesses at public hearings held in Edmonton. I want to acknowledge the legal research, administrative, and procedural support of individuals in the Legislative Assembly Office, including Ms Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel; Dr. Philip Massolin, committee research co-ordinator; Ms Katrin Roth von Szepesbela, legal research officer, and the research team; Ms Rhonda Sorensen and communications staff; and Mrs. Corinne Dacyshyn, committee clerk. The committee would like to acknowledge the very capable support from departmental officials at Alberta Health and Wellness as well.

Mr. Speaker, it was an honour to chair one of the Assembly's first policy field committees, and the committee is proud of the all-party co-operation demonstrated throughout this process. As well, I would like to thank the Premier for putting this very democratic process in place.

Mr. Speaker, I request the concurrence of the Assembly with

respect to the report on Bill 41, which recommends that the bill proceed with the recommendation that the minister consider imposing limits on the term of office for any person appointed as administrator.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I ask for concurrence, just a note of information. The reason that there was no request for concurrence on Bill 1 and Bill 2 is because those bills were committed after second reading, as was the case in the report on Bill 31. However, the report on Bill 41, because it was sent to the committee after first reading, does require concurrence of the Assembly. So I'll ask the question: does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Speaker: Opposed? It's carried.

head: 1:20

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This petition has 82 signatures. It's a continuation of a similar petition from the spring, where it reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition signed by a number of constituents from the Rocky Mountain House constituency urging the passing of Bill 45.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 266 Albertans, mostly from Edmonton and area. They are asking the Assembly to urge the government to ensure that remuneration paid to people working with people with disabilities is standardized to ensure that employees are fairly compensated, that employees have access to professional development opportunities, and to introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level of care standards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with this Assembly five copies of questions and responses to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. Contained in this is supplementary information to my responses as stated in *Hansard* and responses to unanswered questions for the Committee of Supply on June 7, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, I also am pleased to table with the Assembly today five copies of the 2006-2007 annual report for Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today five copies of the 2006 annual report for the Alberta Elevating Devices

& Amusement Rides Safety Association. The AEDARSA is one of the delegated administration organizations that reports to Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today annual reports for the year ended March 31, 2007, for the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation and for Livestock Identification Services.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to table five copies of a petition signed by 76 concerned citizens of Slave Lake and surrounding area urging the Legislative Assembly to "consider the addition of 25 more extended care beds for Slave Lake's aging population." People are finding it very difficult to travel back and forth.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter dated July 12, 2007, that I received from the hon. Minister of Energy, and it is regarding the security measures taken by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board during the 500 kV transmission line hearing in Rimbey.

The second tabling that I have today is a letter that I wrote on September 14, 2007, to the hon. Premier of Alberta requesting "a full public inquiry into the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (EUB), and specifically, the EUB's practice of hiring private investigators to attend and report on members of the public who take part in EUB hearings."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three tablings today, the first from constituent Ryan Warden, expressing his opinion to the Premier, asking him to accept the findings of the royalty review in its entirety and expressing concern about police, senior citizens, first-time homebuyers, and our best and brightest being driven away.

Second is from Mary Elizabeth Archer, also a constituent, asking for a plan to address the growing human resource crisis in the human services sector by asking for an increase in wages, benefits, and supports and also to invest in a three-year social infrastructure plan.

Finally, from constituent Vernita Caron (Beaudoin), who writes to express her frustration and concern with the health care system. She feels there is far too long a waiting time in the hospitals and believes that it's less of a service than would be received in a third-world country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is from Lindsay Chevrier, a constituent of mine, saying:

There is a shortage of more than 5000 units of affordable housing in Edmonton, waiting lists for existing units are years long, vacancy rates are zero, and few new units are being constructed. We must do something! Please give this great consideration and act fast!

Another letter, from Gabe Krahn: "I ask that the government continue to make a concerted effort to help alleviate this problem" of homelessness in this province.

Finally, from Jaysey Carlson: "Like everything else in prosperous

Alberta, the cost of educating our children is increasing. Provincial grants for education are not keeping up with rising costs . . . Don't short-change our future. Please make education funding a priority."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased and honoured to rise in our Legislature here today to make two tablings. One is the program for the proclamation of Family Violence Prevention Month from the city of Edmonton last week. It was ably chaired by Lynda Steele of Global news, who also was kind enough to autograph copies of her book for people there that day.

The second is a communication from 190 Edmontonians about the problems of particular predator violence.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter from Edmonton-McClung constituent Dr. Inderjit Singh Chohan, with respect to racial discrimination within publicly funded institutions, in this case Capital health, and what he believes to be a clear case of abuse of mental illness labelling to cover up the bigger issue of racism in the workplace.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is called *In Full Swing at the New Building*, which is an exact copy of a book produced back in 1907 to celebrate the first Young Men's Christian Association, or YMCA, in Edmonton. This archival treasure was shared with me by Mr. Franco Savoia of the YMCA when I attended the centennial birthday open house at the west-end location in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to table with the Assembly – and I will be providing copies to all members – a little booklet being put together called Page Biographies. It covers a bit of a biography of each of our pages. Quite interestingly, of the less than 20 of them I think five of them aspire to become doctors, two aspire to become lawyers, two aspire to become federal politicians, none aspire to become a provincial politician, and one aspires to become a professional golfer on the PGA. So enjoy reading them. I think they're quite fascinating people.

Mr. Martin: I would just like to bring forward a point of order after question period, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, pursuant to the Land Surveyors Act the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association report of proceedings of the 98th annual general meeting, April 27, 2007; the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors' radiation health administrative organization annual report, year ended June 30, 2007, with attached financial statements, Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors, dated June 30, 2007; the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association radiation protection program 2006 annual report with attached auditor's report on radiation protection program, dated November 20, 2006; the Alberta Dental Association and College 2006 radiation health and safety

program annual report, January 1, 2006, to December 31, 2006, with attached financial statements, Alberta Dental Association and College radiation administration program, dated December 31, 2006; the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta radiation health administrative organization annual report for the period April 1, 2006, to March 31, 2007; the University of Alberta authorized radiation health administrative organization annual report 2006-2007; the University of Calgary authorized radiation health administrative organization annual report for the period April 1, 2006, to March 31, 2007, with attached financial statements for the years ended March 31, 2007, and 2006.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Royalty Revenues

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General's report, the most recent one, provides shocking insight into this government's incompetence. Despite all of the evidence indicating that Albertans were being shortchanged on royalties, this government year after year after year did nothing. My question is to the Premier. On page 107 of his report the Auditor General refers to an executive committee decision request dated October 4, 2005. Will the Premier table this document unedited and uncensored for all Albertans to see?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this Assembly it was Dr. Doom. Today it's Phantom of the Billions. He just keeps coming up with all kinds of these stories.

I resigned from cabinet in March of 2006 to seek the leadership of this party. I heard from Albertans that they had some questions with respect to the royalty review. I made a commitment that if I was elected and sworn in as Premier, the first thing I would do is call for that review. I did. In September the report was given to the government. We also had the report from the Auditor General. All of that was made public. We also immediately – immediately – upon receiving the report from the panel gave it to all Albertans because they own the resources. We got feedback from thousands of Albertans.

We have a good decision in place. This is all about leadership. It's taking a stand and keeping commitments that I give.

Dr. Taft: Also on page 107 of his report the Auditor General refers to another document entitled Alberta Royalty Review 2005: Some Additional Questions, dated March 2006. This document predicts that Albertans could collect an additional \$1 billion to \$2 billion annually at prices for natural gas above \$5. The Auditor General confirms that the minister of the time was briefed on this document. Will this Premier live up to his claim of being open and accountable and table this document unedited and uncensored for all Albertans to see?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I am open and accountable. In fact, I also want at this point to take an opportunity to thank the leader of the third party. At least we know where he stands on the whole issue of royalties. This guy is hiding behind you two. You don't even know. It's at 20 per cent, but he doesn't know where he takes a stand on it. And today he comes up asking for all kinds of documents. Did you ever hear of where his stand is? No, no. Not even for 30 seconds. Nobody knows. In fact, not even his members know.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier needs to end the cover-up. He needs to come clean with the people of Alberta. The Auditor General refers to a 2004 royalty review culminating in a cross-commodity royalty review and assessment dated December 20, 2004, three years ago. This document again suggests increased royalties as prices rise, and the Auditor General again confirms that the minister was briefed on this document. Will the Premier end the cover-up, come clean with Albertans, and table this and all those other documents uncensored for all Albertans to see?

Mr. Stelmach: Finally the Leader of the Opposition is agreeing with our policy, which means that Albertans now have the opportunity, given this royalty framework, to share in the reward, which means that as prices go up, our royalties will increase, and if prices decline, we will get less. That's the Alberta entrepreneurial spirit, and that's what this framework was built around. Now we know that at least the Leader of the Opposition agrees with part of the framework. At least we now know where you stand.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is clearly in denial. They're clearly continuing the cover-up. Yesterday the Premier claimed that despite all of the overwhelming evidence before him, he can't see where this province of Alberta was shortchanged. Well, he needs to look a little more closely. The Auditor General of Alberta confirms that we lost billions. The Department of Energy technical experts say that we lost billions. The Royalty Review Panel concluded that Albertans were shortchanged billions. Is it the Premier's position that all of these individuals, all of these experts, are mistaken?

Mr. Stelmach: I know there's one person in this Assembly that is wrong, that is mistaken, and I'm quite sure he's going to get up and say, "Yes, I made a mistake." He advocated for building upgraders in Manitoba.

Dr. Taft: This government has been advised by the Department of Energy's own experts, by the Auditor General of Alberta, and by the expert Royalty Review Panel that billions of dollars of public wealth were left on the table. In the face of all this evidence the Premier denies, denies, denies. Who is advising the Premier that all of the conclusions drawn by all of the experts are wrong? Who is advising him?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, very smart people. All the people that are on the government side sitting in this Assembly. I receive my advice from locally elected officials, those MLAs in this House that bring back comments and thoughts from their constituents. We take advice, obviously, from others, but at the end of the day in this government the decisions are made by government, not listening to advice that may come from bureaucracies. That's advice, but the decision is still vested in the highest office of this province, in the Premier's office, and with our government, period.

Dr. Taft: The Premier must be accountable to Albertans. If the Premier has evidence that contradicts his own government studies and contradicts the independent public reports put forward by the Auditor General and the Royalty Review Panel, he should make them public today. Be accountable. Will the Premier do the right

thing and table all internal reports, reviews, and other documents that support his position that Albertans were not shortchanged, or does he have any?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Auditor General again made a comment to one of the reporters. I forget which newspaper. He said: look; this is a policy decision that was made by the government of the day, not by any external advisers, not by anyone else but the government. That decision was right. Look at the growth in this province. Look at the people that we have here from other countries that are coming here to Alberta because there's hope and there's opportunity.

You know, there's something. When you get out of this Assembly and actually travel around the province – something a young person told me the other day really hit me in the heart. He said: "You know, Mr. Premier, this is the only province in Canada where my grandfather, my father, and I have opportunity in the same province. I don't have to leave my province to go anywhere else in this country of Canada. It's here, in Alberta."

Dr. Taft: I've been travelling around the province, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you that Albertans know they have been ripped off by this government on royalties for seven years. They know it in their hearts, and they live it every day.

To the Premier. Albertans who travel on highway 3 near Lethbridge have been told that the highway will be twinned, quote, as fast as the budget allows, end quote. At the soonest it will be many years. Why did this government choose to make the people of southern Alberta wait for a highway while it let billions of dollars in royalties go uncollected?

Mr. Stelmach: Once again, the hon. member – and the thing that really surprises me: I thought he had a PhD in economics. Really weird here.

Anyway, if you look at the kind of revenue stream to the province of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, they keep focusing on just royalties. If you look at the annual reports, you will see much larger revenue coming from taxes: personal income taxes, well above estimates; corporate tax, well above estimates. The amount of Crown leases that were bought in this province is simply outstanding. Why? Because we have a very predictable, sustainable environment for continued investment, the best in Canada. We're going to continue to stay on that track because that investment is necessary not only to build highway 3 but all other highways that are necessary.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Energy. In Grande Prairie citizens are hoping for a NAIT campus to be built there any time soon. The land is available, but NAIT has been told by the province that no money will be forthcoming for capital projects at this location. Why did this government choose to make the people of northwestern Alberta wait for a desperately needed NAIT campus while it let billions of dollars in royalties go uncollected?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Yeah. Once again, he's totally wrong. There is a good plan in place in Grande Prairie in terms of increasing access to postsecondary.

Dr. Taft: Where's the NAIT campus?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, again, that's where you don't know what you're talking about. Now the minister will give us the right information.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are in discussions with NAIT in Grande Prairie on the Campus Alberta program, and it's an access plan.

Dr. Taft: Discuss, discuss, discuss. We want some action, you guys.

Again to the Minister of Energy. Citizens in Grande Prairie are waiting for funding to support a new aquatic centre for citizens there to enjoy. How is it that this government cannot afford to help the people of Grande Prairie with a swimming pool, but it can let billions of dollars of royalties go uncollected?

Mr. Stelmach: Again, the new – the new – recreation centre in Grande Prairie – and I believe it's about \$90 million – is being built. You know why, Mr. Speaker? Because of the new money – new money – that's going into the budget, \$1.4 billion for municipalities that will start in the year 2010-11. That's over and above a brand new hospital for Grande Prairie – and we know the needs – and also the ring road for the city of Grande Prairie. Those were the priorities of the people in that city, and that's why we're building them.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Until this government announced its new royalty regime, Albertans were receiving less royalties than any other country in the world. In two years from today, thanks to this speaker, we will be receiving higher royalties than Ireland. Now, that means that we're still behind Russia, Australia, California, Alaska, Libya, Egypt, Azerbaijan, Nigeria, Venezuela, Angola, and Trinidad and Tobago. So can this Premier tell us why his royalty regime will have Alberta collecting less royalties than almost every other country in the world?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I thought there for a while the leader of the third party was going to sing: I've been everywhere, man. But it was very good.

Once all of the framework is in place, all the agreements are in place, we'll be able to better determine where we're going to be with respect to comparison to other countries. There are so many different comparisons. There are, of course, different zones to drill into. Some of the other issues tied to the environment – we have very tight environmental rules in the province of Alberta compared to some of the other countries that were mentioned. There's a lot here to consider.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this chart from the royalty task force shows that Alberta receives amongst the lowest royalties in the world, and this will not change with the government's new regime. My question to the Premier is: why did he cave in to the big oil companies and give them bargain basement royalties?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I know where the leader of the third party stands on the royalty review. He's supporting the panel in its

entirety. He wants a production tax, which goes back to the old strategy a former party from Ottawa imposed on Alberta that drove Albertans out of the province, created a situation where people actually couldn't pay off their mortgages, had to leave. Businesses went broke. At that time I remember that interest was around 24 per cent, because I paid that interest rate. We're not going back to that kind of model of collecting royalties.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I just heard the Premier compare the royalty task force to the Trudeau government's national energy program. So my question is: if they came up with something that's equivalent to the national energy plan, Mr. Premier, why did you appoint those individuals?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, he's supporting the task force recommendations. Now he says: why did you appoint them? You know, that's just like some of the other comments I heard about: the process is tarnished; their appetite for royalty change is not significant; we have a flawed process. Then at the end they're all supporting the report. Make up your mind. It's either here or there. It can't be both sides.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Beef Safety

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent reports have indicated that an E coli outbreak in hamburger meat distributed by a U.S. company led to a number of illnesses. An investigation traced some of that meat back to an Alberta processor, resulting in a recall across the United States and Canada. This is a real concern to producers as to how it will affect their industry. To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: could he tell us what causes E coli, and what assurances does he have for Albertans and our customers that Alberta meat is indeed safe?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. E coli is a naturally occurring bacteria in digestive tracts of cattle, and it certainly becomes an issue during processing, of course, when the bacteria comes in contact with the meat.

Alberta meat continues to be very safe. We have strict sanitation, inspection, and testing procedures. Raw meat is never sterile. Consumers should always follow safe food practices when they handle meat and cook their burgers very thoroughly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: with the Alberta livestock so dependent on exports, will this recent outbreak cause significant and long-term damage to our beef industry? [interjections]

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, probably not a laughing matter, I don't think. This is a serious issue in all of Canada, not just Alberta.

The federal government, the embassy, CFIA, and our government certainly are in discussions over what the new measures might mean. Federal meat processing facilities already have testing requirements from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We will continue to work with CFIA in its ongoing negotiations with the U.S. because we have to minimize any negative impacts on our exporters.

Mr. Marz: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what steps are

being taken to reassure both our domestic and our international customers that our beef is safe?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government along with CFIA believes that any U.S. action is certainly unwarranted. The U.S. supports the same type of safety controls that we have here in Canada. Alberta meat is known throughout the world as a safe and high-quality product. One single incident in a federal facility has not changed this. Again, we will continue to work with CFIA and our federal counterparts on lifting any new and unnecessary U.S. trade restrictions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Staffing of Human Service Agencies

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few months ago community organizations throughout Alberta launched a campaign about the crisis facing agencies charged with assisting our society's most vulnerable members, the aptly named Who Cares? campaign. Only now, after a great deal of public outcry, has the Ministry of Children's Services seen fit to demonstrate a small measure of token acknowledgement. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Why did the ministry allow this situation to become so severe before reacting instead of being proactive in protecting Alberta's most vulnerable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I'd like to say is that I have been working with my contracted agencies long before the campaign that the hon. member speaks about. Frankly, when that came out – Who Cares? – I can say that I care, and I can say that everybody on this side of the government cares about these contracted agencies.

Mrs. Mather: In addition to problems facing the nonprofits in this sector, this government's practices have made them worse. Why does this minister continue to allow for gross pay inequity for nonprofit employees when compared to their much higher paid counterparts in government agencies? Is the ministry aware that this practice of paying one group substantially more than another is poaching from an already scarce pool of workers?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I can tell you that I take this issue very seriously. Contracted agencies are 25 per cent of our close to a billion dollar budget in Children's Services. As I mentioned yesterday, I have spent a lot of time in the last couple of months going out and visiting with contracted workers in their facilities. I can tell you, as I said yesterday, that I am in awe of what it is that those people accomplish. What amazes me even more is that these people can be working anywhere else in the province doing something else if they want. They choose to work with our kids. They're doing a fabulous job.

I am working with them and going through the budget process in terms of narrowing the gap regarding the issue that you're talking about. Yesterday was good news in offering immediate dollars to help with some immediate issues.

Mrs. Mather: This increase of about 30 cents per hour in wages to

people who find this a calling that the minister thinks is pretty good will barely cover the cost of annual health premiums for one family. This is a dismal indication of how much importance this government places on this crucial sector and the demanding, high-stress, essential jobs these workers perform. Will the minister please tell us what other more meaningful and effectual reforms will be instated and when?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can commit to the fact that I will continue to work with contracted agencies on their current needs and their future needs during the budgeting process. Again, I think that yesterday's funding of \$26 million was good recognition of the important work that these agencies do and also allows them to take care of the more immediate pressures.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Forest Industry Sustainability

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne has a very prominent forest base. Communities within my riding are concerned that the forest industry may not survive the infestation of pine beetle and now the impact of a record-high Canadian dollar affecting exports into the U.S. Industry players big and small need to know that this government is solidly behind them. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: what is your department doing to address the plight of Alberta's forest-based companies and communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These are tough times, indeed, for the Alberta forestry industry. They've been hit by the perfect storm: the collapse of the export market, the pine beetle, soaring labour and transportation costs, the softwood lumber agreement export tax, and the loonie going first to par and now past par with the U.S. dollar. I had the opportunity to meet with the Alberta Forest Products Association in September. We discussed these issues. I was able to announce a new committee that's being struck, the Alberta forestry sustainability committee, with three MLAs and three senior industry executives on that committee. The MLAs will be led by the Member for Peace River and will also include the members from Calgary-Nose Hill and Battle River-Wainwright.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that answer. I want to thank the minister also for visiting the forest-based companies in my constituency. I want to know from this minister: when will this work by this committee start, and what's the focus of the work to be done?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the committee has been struck. Their first meeting will be later this month. What will they be doing? A broad range of questions that look at the competitiveness and sustainability of the industry. This would include improved forestry management techniques; innovation in products, especially in the areas of bioenergy and biochemistry; also carbon offsets for this

government's new clean air emissions program; new technology and new investment to pay for that technology; new markets, questions of other opportunities; and transportation. The focus will be on: what can the government of Alberta do to work with industry to facilitate this innovation?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like I explained earlier, this industry is in trouble now. I want to know from this minister: when will this report come back, and when will he act upon it?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the members of the committee understand the priority that I and the rest of the government placed on them and on this report. I've asked them to move as quickly as possible. I've asked for a draft report by the spring of 2008. I have full confidence that the committee will meet that deadline and it will reinforce this government's policy of healthy forests, healthy forest communities, and a healthy forest industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Edmonton Remand Centre

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Delays and indecisiveness, trademarks of this PC government, are now costing taxpayers money. The latest example is the new Edmonton Remand Centre, which is now going to cost taxpayers an extra \$312 million at least, which is a jump of about 101 per cent. The reason given, as always, is construction cost overruns, not the government's own bad planning and foot-dragging. My question to the Solicitor General is this. If I believe the cost overrun story, can the minister assure this House that he has reviewed these increases and that he is satisfied that they are legitimate and justified, that no one is taking taxpayers for an expensive ride here?

The Speaker: The Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The good news is that we're building a facility that is very much needed in our province. In regard to the cost overruns that you just spoke of, certainly the costs have escalated. When the estimate was done in 2005, \$304 million, the site hadn't been selected yet, and the detailed design hadn't been selected yet. We need the spaces, and we will ensure that taxpayers are getting the best value for their dollar.

I would ask the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation if he wants to supplement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the minister. The remand space is needed. It was needed four years ago.

The province owns the land; they don't need to buy it. In fact, the government's own 2007 budget boasted under the heading Alberta's Major Capital Accomplishments that this was under way and that we have "selected [the] site for the new \$308 million Edmonton Remand Centre." Again to the Solicitor General: why did construction not begin immediately after the site was chosen?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would not be prudent to start construction on a facility until such time as you do a detailed design and a detailed analysis of the site. We've done that, and now we're proceeding.

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Speaker, I am concerned, as are many taxpayers in this province, that our government does not only let billions of dollars in uncollected revenue disappear on us and deny that an opportunity was ever lost, but it also gives in to any and all contractors who apparently and frequently lowball their offers to win those bids only to come back later and ask for more money. In my book a contract is a contract, and people should adhere to what they agreed to. Can the minister confirm whether or not any progress-monitoring measures, conditions, timelines, or performance bonds were ever put in that contract?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, if he's talking about the contract for the Remand Centre, we're in the process of developing that contract now, so of course there are going to be checks and balances there to make sure that we don't have a cost overrun. The information was put together by Infrastructure and Transportation. I have all the confidence in the world in it, and if the minister would like to supplement, I would invite him to do so.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we've decided to take this contract on with a contract management. Therefore, Stuart Olson will be doing that contract. They'll be putting out bids to every subcontractor out there. We will overcheck those bids. Stuart Olson is going to manage the job, and we believe we will get the best value for the taxpayers' money.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Homelessness and affordable housing are of great concern to my caring constituents. During the summer I attended several meetings on housing needs, and most recently at a meeting organized by the Calgary Homeless Foundation, I heard Dr. Sam Tsemberis of New York speaking on the Housing First program that he has successfully founded in New York City. My question today is to the associate minister of housing. Is the government of Alberta considering this model for the homeless in our province?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Affordable Housing and Urban Development.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Housing First model is an excellent example, and it's excellent for how the community homeless foundations and the housing trusts in our seven major municipalities in Alberta are changing their approach to addressing the needs of the homeless. They have a very bold, innovative plan that is looking forward to ending homelessness in our province within a 10-year period, and it's through an innovative approach that completely changes the conventional method of assisting the homeless. That means that the individual will be assisted through Housing First. Then they will be assured supports and services, and that will bring back their integration into the community.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: recently the Alex community health centre in Calgary announced the hospital discharge project for the homeless. How does this relate to the Housing First model?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, this hospital discharge program is a pilot project. Currently in Calgary there are approximately five individuals a day that access emergency services at hospitals. They are then discharged back into the community to the shelter, usually with needs for medication or dressing changes. They have a host of needs that are medical. What the Alex community health centre proposal will do is stop the revolving-door syndrome for 50 chronically homeless Calgarians by providing them with housing in the community, with their own apartments, where they will then have 24-hour access to a seven-member professional team made up of nurses, physicians, et cetera, that will address those needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what are the costs associated with this pilot project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our current method of responding to the chronically homeless requiring hospital treatment is well known. It's approximately \$150,000 per person. The Housing First model, the hospital discharge program, which will include, as I said, housing for 50 individuals a year as well as the support and treatment through a very professional team, is estimated to be approximately \$30,000 per person per year. You can see that that's a savings of about \$120,000 per person per year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Labour Relations Code

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years this government has promoted policies that unfairly discriminate against workers. The labour code established in 1988 is overdue for review. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. What is your policy in respect to reviewing the labour code? In response to the demands of thousands of workers, it appeared that the minister was promising a review but has since backtracked, running away from her promise.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in 2002 the then minister initiated a discussion relative to a review between both employers and employees. There was absolutely no decision made to advance any kind of review of the Labour Relations Code.

Earlier this year, right from January, when I had first a chance to take a look at some of the issues, I talked to different labour groups, I talked to different employers, and I had not one request until September, at roughly the time there was conflict between some of the members of both the union and the management on certain labour relations agreements, for any kind of review. We are satisfied that our Labour Relations Code works.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Supreme Court of Canada in June of this year submitted an important decision, a

historic decision in respect to collective bargaining. It set the bar quite high in making it clear that legislation which substantially interferes with the collective bargaining process is on a collision course with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This is yet another reason for reviewing the labour code. I wonder if the minister would now, in the light of the Supreme Court, move forward with a review of the labour code to make sure that a whole list of items – the first-contract process, use of replacement workers, et cetera, et cetera – could be in violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Speaker: The hon. minister, but we will avoid legal interpretations.

Ms Evans: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That is not something that I can address.

We have two groups in the province of Alberta that have issued a Charter challenge that is known before the courts.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I was referring to a decision that's already been made, the Supreme Court of Canada's decision. Surely the minister should proceed on the policy issue, you know, and be proactive, not wait. It's like saying: "It's okay to break the law. You might get caught." We have to be proactive and change the laws.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Rent Regulation

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the government made a grandiose statement that they were going to end homelessness within 10 years. Ironically, at the same time the number of families waiting for affordable housing in Edmonton passed 3,000. That's 500 more than it was six months ago, 20 per cent more than when the government responded to the government housing task force. Frankly, no government since the 1930s has done more to create homelessness. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. My question is straightforward: when will this government get off its ideological hobby horse and do the right thing and bring in rent guidelines?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I could answer the member's question by saying that this government has very much been proactive in its direction in trying to deal with individuals that have the challenge of housing, that have the challenge of homelessness. I don't want to be on the same broken record that maybe I was on in the spring, but \$285 million of new money was put into the budget last year.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, 500 more people are on the waiting list here in Edmonton. The same in Calgary. The same in Fort McMurray. Everywhere. We know now that the vacancy rate in Edmonton is going to be less than 1 per cent. Calgary has been at .5 per cent for months. Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is at .2 per cent. It's time, Mr. Minister, for this government to realize that the market is not working. We're getting worse instead of better. I again ask the same minister: what will it take for this government to implement rent guidelines, making it possible for Albertans to sleep at night knowing that they'll be able to afford to sleep in the same place a month from now?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not going to implement something that we know is not going to work. We need to have a focus and a direction that is going to have housing increased. We increased funding by \$14.3 million, to \$33 million, to assist 6,700 Alberta households. This includes \$9 million for the direct rent supplement program.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the point is that it's not working. Things are getting worse. That's the message we're trying to get through to this thick-skulled government. My question, then, simply is this to this minister: with the situation getting worse – they refuse to work on rent guidelines – what is the message we're saying to people that are spending 50 to 60 per cent of their income on rents and the homeless and all the rest of them? Are we really saying that the message is: "Enjoy yourself. Enjoy your cardboard box. Because that's all we're going to do for you"?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do understand that the situation and the challenges are getting greater. That's why we are doing things differently. That is why we looked at systems in the United States, in different parts of the world, as Housing First, that the hon. associate minister is working on, to look at having housing for the homeless, to bring forward different types of direction and focuses that put people in homes, that give individuals the stability of having a house or a home.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mumps Vaccination for Adults

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the government announced that it will be providing a second mumps vaccination to young adults. Free vaccinations are now available to young people attending Lethbridge postsecondary institutions, where a number of cases have occurred, and the vaccine will be available to youth province-wide next month. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why is government waiting until December and possibly allowing the virus to spread before making this vaccination available to all young Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is actually a very important topic. It has been discovered recently that a certain cohort of young adults did not get a second mumps vaccine when they were children, so anyone born after the year 1970 and under the age of, say, 26 or 27 is at risk for contracting mumps as an adult, which can be a very serious health risk to them.

There have been outbreaks of mumps at a university in New Brunswick, and now we've seen mumps cases at the Lethbridge Community College and the University of Lethbridge in Alberta. We've moved immediately to acquire the necessary vaccine to have vaccinations done in Lethbridge for young adults of that age cohort, and we're moving to get the vaccine to provide that to the rest of the province.

2:10

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, my last question to the same minister: will this vaccination put additional strain on the health care system, especially since the flu season is fast approaching?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it will. It's important for us to move to get the vaccine, first of all, that we need to make sure it's

available to all young adults who were born after the year 1970 and who are under the age of 26 or 27. We will move to have that vaccine available, and in December we will start a vaccination program across the province. We hope to align the vaccinations with other vaccinations that are happening; in other words, if people are getting a flu shot, we can align those resources. We are working with the health authorities to make sure that we have the appropriate human resources in place to accomplish this. Will it put a strain on the process? Absolutely. Is it necessary? Yes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Deferred Infrastructure Maintenance

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Deferred maintenance is the most important problem facing Alberta's infrastructure. It is maintenance that has already been put off at least once. It is overdue, and there is according to the Auditor General over \$6 billion worth of it in this province. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. How could this government possibly stand by over so many years underfunding vital maintenance until, as the Auditor General puts it, public safety may be at risk?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we're working very, very diligently and hard on making sure that we try to catch up. We admit we do have a backlog in deferred maintenance. We've worked on our capital plan and our budgets to increase that. We've increased them this year, and we are working as fast as we can. Remember, we have such a fast-growing province here and we have such a heated economy that we don't necessarily have the capacity to get it done as quickly as we'd like to.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General showed that this government hid from Albertans that we could have been pulling in billions more in royalties. He showed up another aspect of their secrecy, that there is "little public information on deferred maintenance." I guess there's no point in giving evidence of quite how incompetent their management of infrastructure has been. Unfortunately, hiding from a problem doesn't make it go away. It's time to come clean. Exactly how much is the current deferred maintenance backlog?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I think today if we looked at every single thing that is out there, if we talked roads, buildings, schools, hospitals, we're getting close to that \$4 billion to \$5 billion range.

Mr. Chase: Well, that is certainly a conservative estimate. Over 60 roofs in Calgary schools are leaking, and some ceilings are even collapsing. Brentwood elementary, Western Canada high school, Ernest Manning high – the list goes on and on. Getting an education in Alberta should not be hazardous to your health, and that's not to mention the crumbling hospitals and the potholes littering our highways. This is what a \$700 million deferred maintenance bill means for Calgary school boards. This is what a \$6 billion maintenance shortfall means for this province. All of its legacy of underfunding . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I just have to say that I don't know where this . . . [interjection] Oh, he's still screaming. I don't know where he's getting his information from. We fund the school boards with maintenance dollars, and there are times when they don't always put the dollars where they're supposed to go, but we do fund with maintenance dollars. We don't want any of our students to be in any type of health jeopardy, and we look after those problems.

Roles and Mandates for Postsecondary Education

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has been conducting a roles and mandates policy framework for Alberta's publicly funded postsecondary system. My questions are for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What problem are you trying to solve through this review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, it was brought to our attention by a number of the institutions that they needed a framework for clarity around who does what in the system because we can't all be all things to all people. So in the interests of students – and the students also have been very supportive in this consultative process that we've been working on – we've brought forward all of the postsecondaries to say: how do we create a better system, Campus Alberta, that provides for accessibility, transferability for the students, the taxpayers, and society and the economy as a whole? I might add that the areas of concern and regionality have been dealt with in the framework document, and things are moving along quite well.

Mr. Doerksen: To the same minister: what role will the comprehensive community colleges play in this framework?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of excellent colleges in our province. They all play a significant role within the communities. Grande Prairie was mentioned today by the Leader of the Opposition. Grande Prairie college plays a key role as a steward of the educational components in that area. A NAIT campus was mentioned. There's no need to have different stewards in a certain region. We need to have one steward, and that's where the comprehensive community colleges come into play. That doesn't mean that they deliver it all; it means that they are the stewards of that region. The comprehensive community colleges will provide for a broad range of program delivery for student access so that students don't have to leave home in cases like Grande Prairie. They can get their education right there in the city.

Mr. Doerksen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the officials at Red Deer College are particularly concerned with this framework in that they see that it might prevent them from the ability to offer degrees in an institution such as a comprehensive community college. How has the minister addressed those concerns?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I opened my first answer with: we can't all be all things to all people in terms of the colleges or the universities. There has to be some clarity of the roles and responsibilities within each of those institutions. The comprehensive community colleges actually in a collaborative approach will be able to offer degrees from any institution, whether that be the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, Athabasca University, the University of Lethbridge, the University of British Columbia, but

we've also allowed them the flexibility. If there is a described need, if there's something that will fit within the Campus Alberta transferability for the students, then we have allowed for a Campus Alberta review of a degree to be delivered by that institution. That's not going to happen on an ongoing basis, but in specific cases where need warrants it, we will allow that to happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Forest Industry Sustainability

(continued)

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The forestry industry in this province is facing difficult economic times, as the minister knows. In the past 24 months Alberta's forest products have fallen in value by about 29 per cent. As a result companies have been scaling back and slowing down in production and construction. This has resulted in job losses across the product as well as across the province. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: while you recently announced a committee to address and examine these concerns—that's great—what are you doing right now to address the problems that have been going on over the last 24 months?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, everybody on this side of the House knows that we're committed to a free-market approach to all sectors of the economy. We've worked closely with the forestry sector to deal with the five or six different factors that are hitting the industry right now. I can repeat them for the hon. member if he likes: the pine beetle, the dollar at par, the softwood lumber export agreement. These problems did not occur in the last couple of weeks or months, and they're not going to be solved in the next couple of months. We're working with industry. We've dealt with stumpage fees to reflect the lower prices. We're taking measured steps in appropriate time to deal with this in a responsible manner.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why has it taken so long right now to come up with a viable solution? What are you doing right now, today?

2:20

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member and his colleagues across the way have been out of power for so long that they've forgotten that quick responses to deep-seated problems just create more problems. We're dealing with this in a measured and responsible way. We didn't get into it overnight, and we're not going to get out of it overnight.

Mr. Bonko: Grande Prairie has had areas hit worse by the pine beetle. Even though the numbers of the beetles have not increased this year, they're not gone for good. This needs to have some action. Local officials have said that municipalities have not been consulted regarding the fight with the pine beetle. They noted that the grants have dropped from \$5 million to \$2.8 million. To the minister, then. Inadequate funds are being provided to fight the pine beetle in Grande Prairie. Where is the forestry industry? I thought it was vital to you. What are you going to be doing to increase it and fight the pine beetle?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to report to this House that I've been to Grande Prairie three different times since we rose last June. I've met with municipal officials, Sustainable Resource

Development officials, forestry industry officials, all in the area. In fact, there is good news about the pine beetle in that area. We did not have a repeat of the overflight from the year before. Our very proactive reaction to pine beetle is having a positive effect there. We've asked for new money to fight the pine beetle in the rest of this year, and I'll be asking for similar strong financial support to continue our fight with the pine beetle both in the north and the south in the next budget year.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 88 questions and answers today.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

head:

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students from NorQuest College that have joined us in the public gallery. Students from NorQuest are always very enthusiastic and very inquisitive, and we're delighted to have them join us today. There are 18 visitors in all, and they are led by their teacher, Ms Melanie Skrypnik. If I could get them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Privilege

Misleading the House

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday I indicated that at the conclusion of the Routine today I would invite either or both the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and the Minister of Energy to add additional comments to the subject that was being debated yesterday before we take all of this together and decide to deal with it by tomorrow.

Did the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre have anything further to add?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the remarks the Minister of Energy made yesterday. I have reviewed carefully his remarks, and I maintain that the minister deliberately misled the House, and in doing so, he did impede the work of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I maintain that as at the 30th of April 2007 the Minister of Energy knew that the government was not collecting a fair share of royalty revenues. Now, he knew this because it is contained in the documents that were tabled as a package on April 16 as Sessional Paper 250/2007, tabled by the Clerk and listed as a document entitled *Royalty Review 2006: List of Consultant Studies and Software*. It included a censored report from Wood Mackenzie, charts, e-mails, and a variety of other documents contained in that binder.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on page 213 of what was contained in this sessional paper, it does state that since 2000 the gap between prices and effective royalty rates has grown, suggesting that our royalty system should be examined.

On page 426 of the documents that were contained in that sessional paper, it says: economic rent, a demonstration of our rent share by pool size, price commodity, PSAC; this shows that we are not capturing our fair share at high prices.

On page 748 it notes that the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky participates in some of the oil and gas compact commission meetings. In the 2005-06 Ministry of Energy annual reports the then minister makes a special point of thanking the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky for his efforts with the U.S. energy council and PNWER, indicating to me that the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky was very much in the loop on the government's energy policy even prior to his appointment in December 2006 as Minister of Energy.

I also maintain he knew this because the department officials have been briefing ministers since 2000 that royalty revenues were not as high as they should be, that the system should be examined, and that we were not capturing a fair share. This is supported by the Auditor General in his annual report, in which he notes that in general staff have produced quality analysis, that staff support the minister by analyzing royalty issues and presenting that information to the minister, that at least three years ago Alberta's share had fallen below its target range, that the department could collect an additional \$1 billion more per year. That appears on page 91 of the Auditor General's report.

Also available to the minister was a 2000 royalty review; one dated May of 2003; a 2004 royalty review with suggestions to give consideration to increased royalty rates; a 2005 royalty review which also included that, and I quote: Alberta could increase its share; and another dated January 5, 2006, which was presented to the standing policy committee in August 2006 by the then minister. As far as I'm able to determine, both past and present ministers of Energy were on hand for that presentation. The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky was a member of that committee at that time.

In the exchange on the 30th of April 2007, page 694, the minister says, "There is nothing in any of those documents that would indicate to anybody that we have not collected a fair share of royalties for Albertans."

As I have shown, there was something in these documents that did indicate that a fair share had not been collected. The Wood Mackenzie document was not singled out by the minister during this exchange. An entire binder of documents was tabled together. We have shown that two speak directly to the minister's knowledge that we were getting a lesser share.

In the material that was available to the minister there were ample references to royalty rates and collecting a higher or fair share. It is a reasonable presumption that the Minister of Energy would avail himself of this information. The royalty structure is a core business of the Department of Energy, and the Minister of Energy is steward of these resources and responsible for the policies. Not only is it reasonable for him to avail himself of this information; it's necessary for him to do so in order to exercise due diligence. I have to believe as a member of this government that he was aware of this information.

The Minister of Energy knew when he said, "There is nothing in any of those documents that would indicate to anybody that we have not collected a fair share of royalties for Albertans" that the government of Alberta was not collecting a fair share. He misled the House with that statement and impeded the work of all members but particularly the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Energy, would you like to add additional information to the file?

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would. Again, it's a bit of

an interesting thing now that every document that ever has been published either internally or sourced externally for the Department of Energy seems to be a document that I was referring to. Of course, very clearly in the record of *Hansard* I was answering a question with respect to some severed sections of documents. The severed sections of documents were made available by me very shortly after being appointed. They're in the Energy department's library. All of the reports are there. All of the documents that have been referred to in this particular exchange with the member opposite are there.

The specific documents. There is nothing in those documents that makes anything other than comparisons to other jurisdictions. Nothing in there says anything about whose share is right, proper, or fair. Mr. Speaker, what it says is that there is a comparison, and that's what it was intended to do.

Mr. Speaker, again, the thing seems to keep revolving around the fact that somehow or other this government and particularly I have made an open and blatant attempt to mislead the House. I will continue to defend the fact that I had answered the question honestly and openly, and I do believe that the statements that I made can be supported. I very much look forward to your ruling with respect to the matter.

2:30

The Speaker: We'll try and return tomorrow afternoon at the conclusion of the Routine with a statement with respect to the matter.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on a point of order.

Point of Order

Tabling a Government Report

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The point of order is simply about the fact that the government has not tabled its crime reduction task force report in this Assembly. I would note that they are having a news conference with, I think, the Premier and three ministers at 3 o'clock. My problem with it is simply this: a report is being given to the media at 2 p.m., admittedly under an embargo, but none of the MLAs, especially opposition MLAs, who might be asked to comment on this, will know what's in that report till 3 o'clock. I think that when the government talks about transparency and openness, this should be the case, that if it's embargoed for the media, we should at least be having Members of the Legislative Assembly that could go under the same embargo. I know that there's not a lot you can do about it, but I think that this is an important point of order. Perhaps this policy or this practice might be changed in the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader on this point.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the fact that the member didn't quote a citation from our Standing Orders is probably reflective of the fact that this is not covered under our rules given that this is a government report, not a Legislature report. I think the member has made his point. I'll be happy to pass on his concerns to the government, but I can't see where this constitutes a point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm unaware of any constitutional requirement for the government to make the report available to all members. I do not believe that this is a point of order. It must be a complaint.

head: **Orders of the Day**
 head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 36

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to stand today to speak to Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007. This legislation brings the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act in line with initiatives announced in Budget 2007. It parallels amendments made at the federal level and makes the act consistent with current policy.

On September 20, 2006, Alberta announced the elimination of the double taxation of dividend income. Currently dividend income is taxed twice; first, when income is earned by the corporation, and again at the personal income tax level when investors receive dividends. To address this double taxation, federal and provincial governments provide dividend tax credits on personal income taxes as an offset. However, the dividend tax credits have not fully offset taxes paid at the general corporate rate. The current amendment will correct this. The amendment will also reduce the tax credit for dividend income received from small businesses as the current credit more than offsets taxes paid at the small-business rate.

A general antiavoidance rule, or GAAR, will be added to allow for the collection of tax from individuals who have used an avoidance transaction for no bona fide purposes other than to avoid federal or provincial tax. Such transactions are becoming more common in Canada. The federal government first introduced GAAR legislation in 1988. Since that time Alberta is required to parallel the federal definition of taxable income, and since GAAR allows for the reassessment of taxable income, Alberta should have introduced a parallel provision at that time. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's provision will be retroactive to 1988.

Charitable donations have a tremendous impact, Mr. Speaker, on the lives of Albertans, and the provincial tax system encourages these donations through a tax credit. This amendment increases the tax credit rate by 21 per cent for charitable donations over \$200, encouraging Albertans to give even more. Including the federal charitable donations credit, Albertans receive 50 cents in tax credit for every dollar donated over the \$200 threshold.

Mr. Speaker, recognizing the importance of continuing education, this amendment provides relief to postsecondary students on the costs associated with higher learning. This amendment also increases the education amounts, which compensate students for other costs of living while still a student. These credits can also be transferred to spouses, parents, or grandparents.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007, supports Alberta's well-known tax advantage, and I urge all members to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I'm taking a speakers list.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to confess to being a little confused, and perhaps the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon is a little confused because I believe we're doing Bill 36, which is the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007. Yet his comments . . .

The Speaker: Actually, we're doing Bill 36, which is the Real Estate Amendment Act, are we not?

Mr. R. Miller: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have in front of me Bill 36, and it's titled the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007.

The Speaker: Then I'm really confused here because I have in front of me something else, so I'll defer if the member has the actual bill.

Mr. Rogers: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. We should be speaking to Bill 36. I spoke to Bill 35.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, let's just unravel all of this. We're dealing with Bill 36. The hon. member spoke to Bill 35. Does the hon. member have comments for Bill 36?

Thank you very much, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, for drawing that to the attention of the House, including the chair.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your indulgence. I will speak to Bill 36. It is my pleasure to stand today to speak to Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007. The Alberta Corporate Tax Act is generally amended every year to ensure that our tax system is consistent with the federal regime, to correct current technical deficiencies, and to ensure consistency with the government policy. This year's amendment reflects two earlier decisions; namely, the termination of the Alberta royalty tax credit program and the phase-in of the increase to the small-business income threshold from \$400,000 to \$500,000.

The Alberta royalty tax credit program was established in 1974 in response to that year's federal budget. The program has since run its course, and this change is a reflection, Mr. Speaker, of today's conditions. The phase-in of the increase to the small-business income threshold from \$400,000 to \$500,000 will be effective on April 1 of each year, phased in by 2009.

Mr. Speaker, this year's amendment act proposes a change to Alberta's antiavoidance rule, known as GAAR. Our legislation currently provides that the rule applies when the transaction is undertaken primarily to obtain an Alberta tax benefit. This bill would amend the Alberta Corporate Tax Act such that GAAR would apply when avoidance transactions undertaken in other Canadian jurisdictions affect Alberta tax.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, this bill provides additional assistance to small businesses, helps discourage tax avoidance schemes, and eliminates ARTC, as announced by Alberta Energy.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to support this bill, and I thank you for your indulgence.

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, this is Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007, Bill 36.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well – you know what? – I won't say anything. We'll just let that go. There's so much, actually, to be said about both Bill 35 and Bill 36, which in many respects are parallel acts, and that may have been part of the source of the confusion for the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

First of all, when we're looking at amending the corporate income tax act, I want to talk a little bit about small business in Alberta and the reasons why this is certainly a good thing. I'm going to guess right up front that my colleagues from the NDP opposition are going to roundly criticize the Alberta Liberals once again. It seems to be their strategy these days. They're going to come after us for sticking

up for small business, Mr. Speaker. But, in fact, most people in this province understand that small business is one of the driving economic factors in terms of economic output in this province, and it's a good thing that we make some accommodations for them.

2:40

It was unfortunate, quite frankly, that yesterday, not to dispute the absolute relevance of debating royalties and the new royalty regime structure in this province yesterday, but as a result of that, the procedures with regard to Bill 213, colloquially known as the red tape bill, had to be set aside until, I believe, this Thursday, unfortunate in that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business had planned to be here for the debate on Bill 213, and once again it has been set aside. Hopefully, we'll have an opportunity to deal with that very important piece of legislation on Thursday.

Mr. Speaker, raising the small-business threshold to \$500,000 from \$400,000 is clearly a good thing. It will give those small businesses an opportunity to pay tax at a lower rate, at 3 per cent, and certainly encourage further growth and development of small business in Alberta, and that is a good thing.

In consulting stakeholders, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business did question the need for making small business wait through the taxation cycle for four years until they realize the full benefit of that. That was about the only concern that the stakeholders that I consulted with had raised.

One of the things that the government talks about in their press release – and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon mentioned it here a minute ago – was making the business tax system more equitable. In particular, they refer to the fact that the dividend tax credit on large corporations is going to be increased and that they're going to deal with some loopholes in the legislation that allowed more than a generous dividend tax credit for income tax at the small-business rate.

This would lead one to question the mover of the bill and perhaps the Finance minister as to just exactly how much revenue was forgone from the years 2001 to 2004, when this government failed to deal with this particular loophole. I'm going to guess that in this particular case, since it doesn't appear as if that part of the legislation is retroactive, we won't be able to get it back. But I think it's a relevant question to be asking: just how much income tax revenue did we lose as a result of not having addressed this earlier?

There was reference from the mover of the bill a minute ago about the Alberta royalty tax credit and the royalty credit for individuals and trusts being eliminated. As a result of that, an additional \$111 million is to be realized by the Alberta Treasury. Of course, this comes as a result of pressure from not only the Official Opposition but others to see some sort of a royalty review, something we've been asking for for years, Mr. Speaker. Last September we finally had a little bit of movement on that.

As was indicated by the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon a minute ago, this program really had run its course, and the goals of it were accomplished some time ago, I would argue years ago. It's probably long overdue that those two programs were eliminated. Again, I think it would be fair to ask: how much revenue might the government have realized if we had dealt with two particular tax credits earlier? A fair question, again, since we're talking.

I know that members opposite don't like to hear talk of lost billions, but the reality is that there are many examples in the Auditor General's report and the Royalty Review Panel's report of situations where we perhaps could have been and, arguably, should have been collecting more. When I look at this piece of legislation, it causes me to believe that, in fact, there's even more money that has been left on the table. It's good, I would argue, that we're doing

this now, but certainly some question as to why we didn't do it sooner.

One thing I note here: that announcement was made on the 29th of September last year, with the changes to come into effect December 31 or January 1 of this year. So, basically, Mr. Speaker, three months' notice to industry for changes in the royalty regulations that would realize us additional dollars as opposed to the 14 months that are being allowed industry for the changes that the Premier announced two weeks ago. I think it's probably valid to point out as well a comment that my colleague from Calgary-Currie made yesterday, that renters in this province would love to have the opportunity to have a 14-month notice of a rent increase as opposed to the three months that they get now.

In regard to those two tax credits being eliminated, I guess the other comment that I would like to make is just this. Obviously, somebody in the Department of Finance, some public servant, that was doing their job and working diligently to make sure that Albertans collected their fair share of revenue from corporate income tax, made a recommendation to the minister, and the minister took that advice and brought it forward in legislation. Clearly, there are many of us on this side of the House and many Albertans across the province who wish that the Minister of Energy had taken the same steps and followed the advice of his hard-working civil servants when they made similar recommendations to him in regard to collecting our fair share of oil and gas revenues.

Now, in talking about the general antiavoidance rule, the first question that springs to mind immediately, of course – and it wasn't addressed by the comments made by the mover of the bill – is that if these changes were first brought in by the federal government in 1988, a full 19 years ago, and we're now in 2007 and the Alberta government is finally moving to bring our legislation in line with changes that were made federally 19 years ago, what took so long? Why are we here today? Why was this not dealt with some time ago. I know that it's described as an inadvertent situation; nevertheless, it's a question that I think bears asking. I hope that perhaps we can have an answer from the mover of the bill or the Finance minister when we get to the committee stage, Mr. Speaker.

An obvious follow-up to that question, then, would be: is there going to be any attempt made to collect the monies owing as a result of the retroactivity? If we're now making this bill retroactive to 1988, are we going to be investigating to see whether or not, in fact, there would be money that would be owing from 1988 and subsequent years? What steps would the government be taking to chase some of those dollars down? How many dollars are we talking about, quite frankly? That's something that's not addressed in the government press release and wasn't addressed by the mover of the bill. So, again, questions that I think would be relevant to ask on behalf of Alberta taxpayers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to give credit where credit is due. Once again the Finance minister has been very accommodating with the Official Opposition in terms of supplying the so-called three-column document to us in preparation for debating this bill. So I'm going to reference that a little bit, and if it's appropriate, I can certainly table copies of that as well. I'm not sure if that's required, but if you wish, I could certainly do that.

Section 4 of the document refers to the nonresident withholding tax. A situation had developed where apparently the nonresident withholding tax is paid to the federal government and not shared amongst the provinces. In other words, the federal government collects this money; Alberta sees no part of it. Yet apparently the legislation as it sits now allowed an inappropriate exemption to be used in terms of calculating the amount of tax that was payable in

Alberta to the Alberta government. I think that most reasonable people would certainly agree that that's not right. If we're not gaining anything in the way of tax revenue, why would we allow that withholding tax that's paid to the federal government to be used as part of the calculation in terms of how much tax is going to be payable in our province?

I think that this is, once again, a change that's overdue and brings us up to par with other provinces. Again, the question would be, Mr. Speaker: how much of that tax revenue that we should have been collecting has been forgone over the years in that we didn't change this particular loophole?

Again, I think kudos to the staff at Alberta Finance for bringing it forward and kudos to the minister for recognizing that the government hasn't been collecting its fair share of taxation and doing something about it, again in stark contrast to the situation that we discussed yesterday afternoon with the Department of Energy and the minister's refusal to hear the many voices that were coming at him from his own civil service in terms of the opportunity and, in fact, I would argue, the desperate need to collect a fair share of royalties for us.

2:50

Now, that same document in section 5 talks about a situation where – you'll just have to bear with me for a second, Mr. Speaker, while I find the relevant piece of paper. The same document talks about corporations allocating taxable income to Alberta using rules contained in federal regulations and adopted by Alberta and refers to a two-factor approach, "allocating taxable income based on salaries and wages, and gross revenue, paid or earned through permanent establishments in the province over total salaries and wages and total gross revenue." A rather lengthy explanation of the situation.

I have a question, and I'm hoping that the mover of the bill can answer this for me. The act contemplates moving to a single-factor approach that "will be used for corporations subject to special rules when one of the factors is nil." The question I would have and, again, am hoping that we might have an answer to when we move to the committee stage is whether or not moving to a single-factor approach might in fact be an oversimplification of the rules and thus allow even more loopholes to come into play. I'm just curious – concerned, I suppose, rather than curious – that we don't do that by oversimplifying the rules, that by making it easier for corporations to use this section, we're not somehow opening a loophole for them.

I guess the last comment on that same page discusses moving the income allocation rules to the regulations. I didn't have a chance to quiz the member who moved the bill. I'm not sure whether or not that is actually contemplating moving legislation into regulation. If it is, of course, then that is a concern of mine that I've expressed many times in this House, and I will continue to do so. But I was unclear, having read the press release from the government and that document, whether or not, in fact, that's what we were contemplating there.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, as I said, it's a bill that certainly doesn't seem to be terribly controversial. It's a bill that has the support of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. I haven't had a lot of people expressing concern to me otherwise. It certainly does give some opportunity to small business to pay a little less tax although certainly shareholders of those small businesses will pay a little more in the way of a dividend tax. But I guess that it might ultimately be more or less revenue neutral. I'm not sure.

Certainly, I would like to reiterate my concern that the Energy

minister doesn't appear to follow the same practices that his colleague the Minister of Finance does in terms of paying close heed to the recommendations that come out of the department in terms of making sure that we collect our fair share.

Lastly, I just want to remind this House and all Albertans that the one tax that we would be looking for a reduction in, in fact an elimination of – certainly, if I were to be so honoured as to serve this province as the Finance minister, one of the very first things I would do would be to eliminate the health care premium tax, Mr. Speaker. I hear some chortling going on on the other side, but I think that's just an example of the arrogance that we see when a government has been in power for 36 years. There's some presumption from the Minister of Education, in particular, that that government is going to be in place for another 36 years. I'm going to suggest that that's exactly the kind of attitude that is rubbing many people in this province the wrong way: thinking that it's by divine right that he's a minister of the government in this province as opposed to, literally, a democratic process that allows him to be there.

The Speaker: Do I hear a point of order?

The hon. minister on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Horner: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. The member under 23(h), (i), and (j) of Standing Orders is imputing a whole raft of things to hon. members on this side of the House as to what we may think are our rights or anything else. We hold very, very highly the honour that citizens of Alberta have placed in us by election to this House, by election to the government, and by choice of the Executive Council to sit and to serve Albertans. He's imputing false motives upon how we got here and why we're here. I would ask the hon. member to not only retract the statements but also to tone it down.

The Speaker: On this point of order the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, clearly, Mr. Speaker, first of all I was referencing the Minister of Education, not the other ministers in the government. I specifically said that, and if you would like to review *Hansard*, you'll see that I was specifically referencing the Minister of Education, who, in fact, chortled openly when I suggested that I would be honoured to some day have the opportunity to serve this province as the Minister of Finance. Then I said that it seems to be his thinking for some reason that by divine right he serves in this role and not at the pleasure of either the electorate of this province or, for that matter, Executive Council or the Premier or whoever else may have asked him to do so. I would certainly argue that I was not referencing the cabinet members in general, the Executive Council, but one individual who was heckling me as I was speaking.

The Speaker: Well, herein lies the dilemma. If hon. members would focus on the subject matter and not sway and not gaze into the future and call upon the stars for intervention and if others would listen attentively and not throw barbs back and forth, we wouldn't have all of this.

Now, it doesn't take away from the speaking time of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. He still has three minutes and 35 seconds to proceed. We will proceed, and we'll ask everybody to basically conduct themselves with the highest level of decorum possible.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much for that guidance, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

Mr. R. Miller: I will continue to do a little bit of stargazing on the track that I was on and just simply say that an Alberta Liberal government has always said and certainly would make it a priority to eliminate the health care premium tax. This would be of great benefit to individuals in this province who currently pay it, including members of this Assembly, who pay, I believe, half of the premium tax – the Legislative Assembly is kind enough to pay the other half – and clearly, Mr. Speaker, of tremendous benefit to small business in this province. Having been and still serving as a small business owner myself and, certainly, having consulted with many small business owners over my time in this Legislature, it is very clear that this is an onerous tax that places an extra burden on small business. If we want to do something for small business in the way of amending the Income Tax Act, this would be a great place to start, in my mind: to eliminate that health care premium tax and give not only individuals in the province but certainly all small businesses in the province a tremendous tax break.

Members will know that we're one of only three provinces in the country that even collect a health care premium tax. As I say, it places a tremendous burden on small business to buck up and pay that tax for the employees. In fact, a number of small businesses that I know offer that as some incentive for employees because of the fact that they can't afford a full-blown health care plan, and the one thing that they can do is pay that tax on behalf of their employees. But, again, it is a burden on small business, and it is certainly something that we could do to show small business that we're serious about helping them out and promoting their causes and their needs in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I think my time is almost up. I'll be happy to listen to the comments of others. I do look forward to having the opportunity, hopefully, to hear some response to the questions and concerns I've raised when we get to committee and, certainly, to explore in more depth some of the issues that I've raised in my talk this afternoon.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be mercifully short and just say that certainly we will support this bill. It makes absolute good sense, but it does raise some concerns. As I understand it, the RTC was implemented back in 1974 as a response to the federal government tax structure making Crown royalties nondeductible for tax purposes. I notice it seems to be growing. There seemed to be about \$82 million refunded back during the 2004 fiscal year, and that goes up. I'll come to that.

I guess I'm wondering why it was that there was this confusion. The Auditor General seems to have been the person that started and put this in the realm. It was the Auditor General's report in 2003-2004 that recommended that the RTC be revisited as the federal regulations had reversed the 1974 decision, making the RTC invalid. Well, it's a few years later, and we're getting around to dealing with this. Mr. Speaker, I think if I look at it, it's probably \$82 million going up to, from the press release, \$111 million. That's quite a chunk of cash that we probably lost during that period of time. I think what's worrisome about that is that we tie that in to the whole debate about the royalties. It's the Auditor General, again, that's brought forward a report that this time the government seems to sort

of ignore or say it is wrong. How can the Auditor General be correct here and then so wrong later on?

I think it goes to the confusion when we deal with the oil industry of how we're dealing with them, whether it be through the ARTC or how we deal with them in royalties and the rest of it. There seems to be a lot of confusion within the department about collecting: what should we collect within the rules that we're playing by, and then are we collecting enough? There is this discussion going on.

Again, this is a good bill. It seems like if it was \$82 million that was refunded back in 2004, 2005 would be another \$111 million, and I notice that it's only retroactive to the beginning of 2007. I expect that's all you can do because retroactive legislation would probably end up in the courts, Mr. Speaker. I certainly think it is a step in the right direction, but it does lead me to question, as I say, the confusion here within the Energy department about collecting taxes or royalties or whatever. One only has to wonder how much more money the treasury has lost.

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, this is certainly a step in the right direction. If it's \$111 million, as said, in the tax – that was 2005-2006 – that's significant cash. I expect that would only go up, so it's a little late, but better late than never. Certainly, we in the NDP opposition will quickly support this bill and get on with it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, then, to participate in the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, as my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford, support Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007, because it, as has been said – and I won't repeat – brings into alignment our Alberta provincial tax structure with the federal tax structure. Whether or not it goes back to 1988 and should have been resolved back then, this is one case when, you know, credit to the Ministry of Finance. They're on it. If they would get similarly onto other areas, such as ending homelessness and providing incentives for students, this would be wonderful.

When it comes down to it, there's only one taxpayer, and that taxpayer is subject to a whole variety of taxes, both open and covert. In this particular case what we're doing by increasing the credit for small business is that we're investing in an entrepreneurial spirit, and that's part of where Alberta has been over the years. We've gone through a variety of values, primarily of an agrarian nature, forestry associated. For a long part of Alberta's development – and it's still the case right now – we've been dependent on resources: the resources of wood, the resources of the soil, the underground resources of oil and gas.

But Alberta has been dependent on primarily its God-given natural nonrenewable resources of oil and gas far too long. By supporting small business in 2007, at least we're starting to begin the diversification process that will get us beyond our dependency on nonrenewable resources. Bill 36, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007, recognizes a belief that has been long held by Alberta provincial Liberals: that Alberta's people are our most important resource, and by giving businesses a credit, a support, we recognize the valuable contributions that they make to this economy.

It is rather sad that in the Alberta economy there is such a tremendous dependency on a resource which in the conventional terms of oil and gas has passed its peak. We have the good fortune of years of coal that, hopefully, can be environmentally harvested, gasified, with the CO₂ and other emissions associated sequestered. But we know that even with the oil sands and even with the coal the effect on our environment of recovering these nonrenewable

resources can be very devastating. We know that the amount of water that is used to extract these resources is of great concern because without the water, obviously, nothing else in this province is going to go forward.

Bill 36, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act recognizes that we must come up with other ways of creating wealth in this province. What concerns me is that after the conventional oil and gas are sort of – if we had a one-trick pony, then this would be what I could consider a one-trick ass, or donkey, if there are sensibilities in the room. That's the idea: our great dependency for our general revenue on VLTs, slots, gambling in general, of which only 3 per cent is directed for prevention through the small amount that goes to AADAC. Again, by recognizing the contributions of the small-business individual and the number of people who are employed in small business, we're recognizing that Alberta is a place where the little man and the little woman can make a go of it. With this Bill 36 we're supporting their entrepreneurial spirit. We're supporting their desire to make a mark in Alberta, which will benefit us all through the taxes, obviously, that are collected.

3:10

We're recognizing, too, for the small business entrepreneur that they are paying a considerable tax for the privilege of doing business in Alberta, not only to the province but to the federal government. Harmonizing our tax structure will take at least some of the time out of the process in terms of calculating the tax and will encourage other individuals to set up shop in Alberta.

Of course, one of the problems of setting up shop in Alberta at this time is the labour. The government in it's wisdom or lack thereof has tried to deal with the labour shortage by bringing in – I think the figure is now approaching 60,000 – temporary foreign workers. Those aren't the type of people that are going to be employed, obviously, by the definition "temporary foreign workers," for any length of time in the small businesses of Alberta.

One of the aspects in terms of investment – and we'll talk more about this when we talk about Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007 – is the idea of investing in the training, whether it's vocational or academic, to provide the sort of trained-in-Alberta workers that will be the future small-business proprietors and work within those companies.

We have a vast untapped natural resource situated in the north, in central Alberta, and in the south, and that's our First Nations people. We know, for example, that shortly Edmonton will outpace Winnipeg as having the greatest number of First Nations people living off-reserve. This provides us with a wonderful opportunity of investing and supporting, providing the education, providing the social framework to support First Nations in their business endeavours.

Of course, Fort McMurray is one large evidence of very successful First Nations and Métis business. Whether it's owning the hotel that we had the pleasure of staying in, whether it's providing services, whether it's providing the heavy machinery, there is a great opportunity. Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007, reaches out to all Albertans in supporting the promotion of small businesses.

We're fortunate in Alberta in many ways. We have among the best educated population. I have the great honour to represent Calgary-Varsity, which has the highest number of postsecondary graduates, so I know very well the value of investing in people and education and supporting their endeavours, whether it be in small business, whether through academic pursuits, areas in the environment, and so on.

Alberta, as I say, in many ways has so many opportunities beyond just our nonrenewable resources. We have to recognize the value

that we have in Alberta, the value that our people bring to it, and we also have to recognize the fact that this Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007, simplifies the tax collection process.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

My esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford, in talking about taxes and how we could provide breaks for Albertans, brought up the notion that has been brought forward by Scott Hennig of the taxpayers association and, before him, Jason Kenney, who was also connected with the taxpayers association, of the unfair tax, the sort of hidden tax, and that's our health care premium.

If we wanted to make a major change not only for small businesses but for large businesses, for school boards, government, and so on, I realize that the income we would lose approaches a billion dollars, but the health tax – and that's what it is. It has nothing to do with health provisions. It simply disappears into the general revenue black hole. That tax does not recognize wealth. It doesn't recognize ability to pay to any great extent. There are seniors on fixed incomes who are excused. People below the poverty line are excused. But those who are struggling to pay their rents, to put bread on their table are adversely affected by this health care tax.

I look forward to the point in this House where the government will recognize what small-business associations have pointed out, what professional associations have pointed out, this cost to business of providing employee benefits to those that are fortunate enough to retain their employees through assisting with the paying of the Alberta health premium tax. When we get rid of this, this will be another major step for Albertans in general in having as a family over a thousand dollars to reinvest in our economy, \$1,000 less that they would have to pay on taxes, and an opportunity to get out from under that, of all taxes, most unfair tax burden.

In closing, I commend the government on Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007. The final comment would be: better late than never.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to close debate.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would encourage all members to support the bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a second time]

Bill 35

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would sheepishly stand up and remind the House that I have commented on the provisions of Bill 35 already, which is on record in *Hansard*. I don't know. I look to you for some direction. If you'd like, I could go through my remarks again, or whether they would suffice.

The Acting Speaker: You can just move the bill.

3:20

Mr. Rogers: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to move second reading of Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for saving me the hassle of trying to find the correct citation in the Standing Orders that would have prevented him from speaking to the bill again since he's already done so once.

Mr. Speaker, as I acknowledged earlier, this Bill 35, the Personal Income Tax Amendment act, 2007, and Bill 36, which we dealt with a minute ago, are in many respects parallel bills, accomplishing somewhat the same objectives on both the personal tax side and the corporate tax side. I think it's interesting to note, however, when we talk about personal taxes paid in this province, that government's own projections this year show \$7.318 billion projected to be collected by the Alberta government in personal income tax, yet on the corporate side \$3.126 billion, or 22.2 per cent from corporate tax, yet 52 per cent of the total tax take coming from individuals.

The argument has been made before – and I think would be safe to make it again – that individuals perhaps bear more than their fair share of the load of income tax that's collected in this province. It would I think have been a good thing if we went a little further with this income tax amendment act, perhaps raising thresholds once again for individuals in the province or somehow making things a little more equitable for them.

Once again, we talked earlier about the health care premium tax and what a great opportunity this would have been for the government to help out individuals who end up paying that tax either partially or wholly themselves, you know, whether they're self-employed or have an employer who doesn't cover all or part of that cost. This would have been a great opportunity, as my colleague from Calgary-Varsity mentioned a minute ago, to save families anywhere up to a thousand dollars a year, put that money back in their pockets. This is a government that argues that the individual knows best what to do with that money and that by having it in the economy as opposed to in government coffers, that actually increases economic activity. If the government truly believes all of that, then this is an opportunity lost, Mr. Speaker, and I think that's unfortunate.

I'm just going to go back for a second and talk about the personal tax versus corporate income tax. The reason I want to do that is because we talked a minute ago about corporate income tax and particularly making some accommodation for small business. I note that this year small business is projected to pay \$407 million in income tax, which is only a small percentage, I suppose, of the overall take. But, again, when you look at the number of large, large corporations that are operated in this province and the fact that they're paying only a fraction of what individuals pay, I think it would be fair to say that even a greater recognition of that inequity for the personal income tax payer might be in order.

We know as well from the last number of quarterly updates we've had that the province is taking ever more personal income tax than their own projections show. I expect that later this month, when we have the second-quarter update, that will once again be true. Again, sort of an opportunity lost, I believe, in terms of recognizing the individual taxpayer and not having given them a little more opportunity to save some money.

Now, this Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007, also discusses the medical expense credit. Currently that credit is \$5,000,

Mr. Speaker. It's being moved to \$10,000 and retroactive to January 1 of 2005, which is a good thing for those people who found themselves in the unfortunate circumstance where they might have been applying for that credit. Unfortunately, I don't think that we can give an awful lot of credit to the government because this is actually being done to parallel federal legislation. While I'm glad that we're doing it, it would appear to me that, in fact, the federal government led the way on that. Boy, I think if we go back to January 1, 2005, when that federal legislation took effect, that would mean that it was actually a Liberal government in Ottawa that put that increased tax credit in there for taxpayers. That's interesting as well, I suppose.

Anyhow, the notes that were supplied to me by the Finance department indicate, as I said, that this particular medical expense credit being increased to \$10,000 parallels changes that are made to federal legislation and that that is actually required by the tax collection agreement between the province of Alberta and the federal government.

Then there's a note that says that Alberta indexes most credits in the personal income tax system. Alberta indexes most credits in the personal income tax system. As someone who's standing before you today, Mr. Speaker, and before all Albertans defending the Alberta taxpayer, the obvious question is: why do we only index most credits in the personal income tax system and not all? I'll be curious to hear whether or not the mover of the bill or the Finance minister can provide us with some explanation as to which credits in the system are not indexed and what the explanation might be for not extending that courtesy to taxpayers when it comes to every credit in the system.

Now, the disability tax credit: there have been some changes there. Certainly, a little tweaking of the words. We're changing the wording "severe and prolonged mental or physical impairment" to read "severe and prolonged impairments in physical or mental functions." Certainly, those that I've discussed this bill with don't have any concern with that. It looks like it might actually, you know, give a little more flexibility in terms of allowing credits to take place. We're amending the bill to allow physiotherapists to certify a marked restriction in walking for the purposes of determining eligibility for the credit.

Particularly important, I think, section 13 of the bill amends the legislation to allow the credit where there are cumulative effects of multiple restrictions. So where under the current legislation perhaps a person may have an affliction that in and of itself wouldn't allow the tax credit to kick in, if you look at cumulative effects of that and other afflictions, under the new legislation they would be eligible for the tax credit. Again, that's a good thing. But again, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately it's actually coming on the heels of federal legislation that did just that. Our tax collection agreement with the federal government mandates that we parallel our legislation with theirs, so I think, really, the credit is due to the federal government.

There is also an adoption expense credit for the first time, Mr. Speaker, effective January 1, 2005. Again, credits go to the Finance minister for making this retroactive to January 1, 2005. A permanent, nonrefundable adoption credit of the lesser of \$10,000 or the total adoption expenses. This is wonderful news. This one, apparently, is the brainstorm of the Alberta Department of Finance. It is paralleling federal legislation, but it's not required under the tax collection agreement. This is something that we're doing because it's the right thing to do, not because the tax collection agreement says that we have to do it. I applaud the minister for taking that step.

One of the things that we know there has been an awful lot of discussion in this House on, particularly my colleague from

Edmonton-Mill Woods, who serves as the shadow minister for Children's Services, is the need to increase the number of families that are looking to adopt children, are willing to adopt children. If allowing them a credit of up to \$10,000 to deal with some of the expenses that they face in doing so will help in that process, Mr. Speaker, then I would argue that that's a good thing. Again, as I say, apparently something that wasn't required under the current legislation but a recognition, the federal government having made the move, that that was a good thing, and we're extending the same opportunity when calculating Alberta tax payable. That's fine.

The general antiavoidance rule. Again, this is parallel to what was discussed when we were talking about the corporate income tax amendment. The one thing that I do note is that although we discussed the fact that this is retroactive to 1988, apparently the first actual court case that dealt with this was in 2005. Up until that time it's apparent that there were not any cases that were relevant to Alberta's tax collection system. So I may have just answered my own question, when I asked during debate on Bill 36 how much money might have been forgone over the years 1988 to the present. At least it would appear that from 1988 to 2005 we didn't necessarily lose any money.

3:30

Then my question could be amended to say: what about since 2005, when that court case took place? Have there been any examples of companies that have avoided paying Alberta income tax since 2005? As I asked before, I would ask again whether or not we're taking steps to determine how much money might have been forgone and whether or not we're taking any steps to try to retrieve any of that money.

Also, Mr. Speaker – it was referenced by the mover in his initial comments – an increase in monthly education expense claims for students; \$400 per full-time student is going to be increased to a \$600 expense. For part-time students \$120 is going to \$180.

I have long been a proponent of not just helping out students but in particular of promoting lifelong learning. It's something that is near and dear to the hearts of the Official Opposition. Our leader has talked in this House many times about the opportunity we have right now, with the incredible natural resource revenues and the wealth that they're bringing to this province, to extend our postsecondary institutions to rival world-class institutions from around the world. Certainly, that's a major part of the policy platform that we ran on in the last provincial election and will undoubtedly be a major part of our policy platform when the next election comes around. We see here where there's some recognition by the government that, in fact, part-time and full-time students are facing higher expenses than ever before, and we have to recognize that by giving them a little more expense claims on their income tax calculations.

I asked earlier why we don't automatically index every tax credit in the system, and maybe this is one that should be indexed to inflation and doesn't appear to be currently. So I would ask either the mover of the bill or the Finance minister if they've contemplated indexing not just that, but we talked a minute ago about the \$10,000 eligible adoption expense and the \$10,000 limit for medical expenses. Why are we not indexing those automatically so that we don't necessarily have to come back into this Assembly every year and deal with an amending piece of legislation?

It would make perfect sense and particularly in this overheated economy right now, Mr. Speaker, where we know that inflation is running somewhere between 5 and 7 per cent in Alberta. Why would we not automatically be indexing these to inflation and

thereby giving recognition to those that are dealing with caregiver expenses or those that are attending postsecondary education or those that are dealing with adoption expenses? Automatically extend to them some inflation protection through indexation of these various credits that they can apply for. Perhaps that's an oversimplification of our income tax system, but it would make perfect sense to me. As I say, I'll be curious to hear some response to those questions from either the mover of the bill or the Finance minister.

I know there are other speakers that would like to have the opportunity to comment on the Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, Mr. Speaker, and I'm happy to cede the floor and look forward to the opportunity to explore in more detail some of those questions when we get to the committee stage.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, when we look at Bill 35 and we talk about the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007, one might say: boy, there are going to be some really major changes here; maybe they're going to get rid of the flat tax and we'd look at medicare premiums and all those sorts of things. But in saying that, I'd just like to take a look at a couple of points in this bill.

The government announced earlier this year that it would increase the tax credits. They've done that with increases for charitable donations, I believe, from 10 per cent to 21 per cent. I have no objection to this, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what worries me more about this is that charities or nonprofits are now expected to do more and more and more. Maybe this can help to get some money to them. Things that used to be done by the government are now being shifted onto them. We've had this discussion, again, in the Legislature. I think the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford mentioned it. At the same time that we're expecting them to do more and more and more, the salaries and even the recent announcement are not going to cut it. We're expecting them to do more and more and more, and there's less and less staff.

I expect that this is the government's attempt to say: well, maybe we can get a few more dollars out if we increase the tax credit. Maybe they can. For that reason I would support it, but I'd really question where we're going with this, Mr. Speaker. This seems to be sort of the Americanization of everything, that we're going to have, you know, the private sector deal with all of the social problems that rightfully, I think, belong with government. But in saying that, I'm certainly not going to say that we shouldn't allow this tax credit to go on.

Mr. Speaker, the bill tightens the wording on credits for mental and physical impairments. I'm not quite sure what this means, stating that the handicap would have to have "a marked restriction in the ability to perform a basic activity." Now, I take it that they've changed this wording. Are there some problems that have developed with the previous way we described it? I hate to do this, but is this a way to sort of cut some people off that maybe were getting funding before? If that's not the case, I would hope that the government would tell us why this change is necessary.

The bill adds a section that allows for deductions to be passed on adoption expenses. I believe it's up to \$10,000. We will support this, but again I wonder: is part of this problem that we, you know, try to get adoptions? That's a good thing, but I notice that the foster care that we have in the province right now is like the other organizations. They can't get enough people. Perhaps this is a way to try

to deal with it. Again, I think that the problem is much deeper than this. If this gets some kids adopted, that's good, but I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the whole problems in foster care are not going to be solved by this. In saying that, it's not a bad thing, and we will certainly support it.

The bill adds a section that clarifies the notion of tax avoidance.

Mr. Speaker, the bill itself is probably, you know, okay, but I don't think it's going to solve the serious problems that I've been talking about. In the meantime we could have a major debate – and I won't do that – about, as I say, the role of flat tax and the unfair taxation system in the province, but that would be stretching this particular bill, I think, and probably not worth while at this point.

Just in conclusion, we in the NDP opposition will certainly support the bill because it probably does some good and no harm. That's the reason we would support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak, I think rather briefly, to Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. MacDonald: No, no.

Mr. Taylor: My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar is urging me to go on and on, but I really don't have that much to say. I'll try and get to the point, stick on topic, and sit down, make room for other speakers.

Mr. Rodney: Brief.

Mr. Taylor: Perhaps my colleague from Calgary-Lougheed would like to get up and contribute to the debate as well.

A couple of points, really, that I wanted to make. First, on the section that allows for greater charitable claim, which when you put it together with the federal will take the amount up to 50 per cent deductible: good idea, I think. I support it in principle. Having said that, of course, it's not my preferred option to download even more of what we see in the Alberta Liberal caucus as responsibility for the province to look after the needs of our population and look out for our population and their well-being. But you can't get around the argument that if there's an ideological predisposition to do that, it certainly does help to encourage the private sector and philanthropists to step up to the plate and fund charitable programs and charitable initiatives.

So I think this is a good idea as far as it goes, and I would acknowledge it probably as far as you can go with an amendment like this first time out. But I would encourage that going forward, after we have dealt with Bill 35, we look at the possibility of perhaps allowing charitable donations to be 100 per cent tax deductible. If they are going to support charities and causes that under the income tax laws of Canada and Alberta are duly recognized as good works and good programs, then why not encourage people to donate as much as they possibly can by making 100 per cent of those donations tax deductible?

I like what's being done here in terms of increasing the amounts on postsecondary education in terms of the education expense claim there. I think, as my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford said, it acknowledges the ever-increasing cost of postsecondary education, and it's time we did that.

There's one other thing that I would like to get on the record, Mr. Speaker. It is not in this bill, but I'm going to take the opportunity for debate in principle on this bill to put it on the record and suggest that it is something that as a province we very much do need to be looking at doing sooner rather than later. It's a bit difficult because, you know, were we the federal government, there would be an obvious avenue to travel on what I'm about to suggest, and that's a capital gains tax exemption. But I'm going to suggest that we in the province of Alberta, as a way to incent the construction, the development of affordable housing to deal with what I believe is a very real crisis in many, many communities across this province, look at ways to make the donation of privately owned land for the construction of affordable housing tax deductible.

Now, you know, if we were at the federal level, there would be a model for this. We could simply look at what the feds do when land is donated for ecological or environmental purposes, donated as land or donated as a conservation easement through organizations like the Nature Conservancy of Canada, that sort of thing. There is a waiving of capital gains when that happens. You can't do that at the federal level when you're donating land for affordable housing because it's taxed as though you had sold the land and realized the capital gains. Perhaps my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford can correct me if I'm wrong, but my understanding is that we obviously cannot approach this through capital gains.

I wonder if we could get creative about it. We can and we seemingly do get quite creative about tax credits and eligible expense claims, that sort of thing, under provincial personal income tax rules. I wonder if there's a way that we could address that and provide some sort of credit – I don't know what it would be, Mr. Speaker – that would acknowledge that a property owner, whether that be an individual or a corporation, has donated land to a recognized land trust for the sole purpose of having it used for development of affordable housing.

With that, I will take my seat and let others take part in the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's a saying that the only certainties in life are death and taxes, and Bill 35 attempts to take some of the pain out of those taxes, as did Bill 36, by harmonizing the in-our-pockets nature of both the provincial government and the federal government. The greatest difficulty in coming up with a tax structure is getting the balance right. You have to have a tax rate that not only maintains but provides services without discouraging investment and entrepreneurship. Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007, attempts to strike that balance.

To take sort of a little bit of a satirical look and not to take away from the religious intent, with Bill 35 we have a case of the government giveth and the government taketh away, and I'll leave the blessed portion out. What is happening, especially at the postsecondary level, is that students are getting a bit of a tax break, but that tax break is rapidly eaten up by their increase in tuition costs. I believe that in Alberta we have the second-highest tuition costs in the country, and that, of course, is a concern.

Now, in previous years there was a sheltering. One of Ralph Klein's most thoughtful statements was that he told students that if they received an increase in their tuition, bring it to the government and the government would cover the difference in that cost. Well,

that protection left. Part of the reason that that protection for students left was the introduction of Bill 40, which took the right to discuss to what extent tuition should either be raised or lowered out of the discussions of the Legislature and put it into regulation, which became at the whim of the minister of advanced education at the time. Now, we have the good fortune at this moment to have an enlightened minister of advanced education, and I'm appreciative of that fact, but no matter how enlightened the individual is, the decision to raise tuition shouldn't be left to any single individual or the employees of their department.

Other esteemed colleagues, both Calgary-Currie and Edmonton-Rutherford and credit to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, indicated the charitable donation aspect, which has been somewhat left out of Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007. My colleague from Calgary-Currie raised a concern that Larry Simpson of the Nature Conservancy raised. That concern was that in order to promote the donation of land by private individuals, it would be wonderful if the government would recognize the value of those land donations and recompense the families for having made such philanthropic generosity with a tax credit. Likewise, the philanthropy of individuals, whether it's million-dollar endowments to universities and so on, needs to be recognized to a greater degree.

3:50

I would like to see just for the average Albertan some kind of encouragement when it comes to making charitable donations so that it doesn't have to be above the \$200 mark. There are a number of people who willingly, without any kind of recognition, provide donations, but it would be nice if we lowered that charitable donation ceiling to the point where people who have the least to give but give freely of the little that they have are recognized and compensated.

My colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, briefly at least, uttered the words "flat tax." At some point in this Legislature I think that could be the subject of a very interesting debate. While the flat tax purports to lower taxes in general, the reality of the flat tax is that it's the middle class that basically shares over 80 per cent of that tax burden, whereas a progressive tax, that seems to be more frequently used in other provinces, recognizes that you're taxed on your ability to pay. It seems that in Alberta the more money you make, the less overall you have to pay because of a flat tax rather than a progressive tax, so the people who are making the seven-figure salaries are doing rather well in the Alberta climate. We can say, "Yes, well, they employ people," and so on, but they also have access to services that the majority of Albertans are paying for on their behalf. I would welcome a discussion of the fairness and the burden that a flat tax puts on the majority of the people in the middle class.

The business of taxing students comes up again and again, and of course a tuition increase has the same effect as a tax. Last year I and colleagues attended basically a tuition concern rally at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. There were a number of students represented there – I apologize. It was actually the Alberta College of Art and Design where the event took place. I'm going back to 2004 for the rally at SAIT. Student after student, whether they were graduate students or undergraduate students, pointed out how much higher tuition costs are in Alberta and how much less of an opportunity there is to actually, if you can afford to pay the increased tuition, find a seat at a postsecondary institution, whether it be promoting technical, promoting art, or the academic universities and colleges.

What would be of benefit to both the students and to the colleges themselves would be to recognize and support a tax break for the institutions. For example, this past month my colleagues and I attended, again, a rally. It was a rally on affordable housing, but it was directly related to tuition increases. It was found that the majority of the students at Mount Royal were paying well beyond the recommended 30 per cent for housing that this government has suggested is a reasonable amount.

This is where both the students and the universities could receive a tax break if the government did away with the education portion of the property tax, at least for the student residences on campus. If you want to tie the institutions' hands somewhat, whatever money is saved goes towards residence construction. We know, for example, that at the University of Calgary student residences are able to at best house approximately 7.4 per cent of the entire student population. At the University of Alberta it's slightly higher; it's toward 9 per cent. But when we're making responsible income tax or tax amendments, such as Bill 35, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007, I would like to see that same sort of creativity applied both to students and to the institutions of higher learning.

We had an opportunity as Public Accounts and as a member of Public Accounts very recently to talk to the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, Mount Royal College, and Grant MacEwan here in Edmonton. They talked about the tremendous backlog in infrastructure. Again, if we could provide less tax on those venerable institutions, they would have more money to invest in infrastructure, programming, and, of course, their student population.

I am hoping what we're seeing in Bill 36 and Bill 35 is the beginning of a creative approach to tax relief in Alberta that can then be applied not only to individuals and small businesses but extending those benefits to institutions of higher learning and providing that seed money in the form of returned taxes or uncollected taxes to support the institutions.

Again, I repeat that Alberta's greatest resource is its people, and whatever we can do, whether it's through the specific lowering of dedicated taxes or providing greater room, that will benefit the province as a whole.

In summary, we have to balance the need for the collection of taxes, which provides predictability and sustainability and provides the level of infrastructure support that we cannot get from nonrenewable energy. When governments dramatically reduce taxes, such as the suggestion of knocking the flat tax down from 10 to 9 per cent, and then find out that in years to come they don't have the general revenue and have to drive the taxes up again, that loss of balance and political opportunism can take a great toll. We know very well that in 1994 basically every individual in a service-providing area, whether it be education or health care or social services, had a tax of 5 per cent added to them by a deduction from their paycheque.

Thank you.

4:00

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening with interest.

An Hon. Member: No way.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, I have. I certainly have. And to the hon.

minister in charge of Service Alberta I've also been reading your annual report, and I must say that I'm disappointed to have a good look at your annual report. Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, we will have a time to address that, but certainly I realize that it's not during the debate on Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007.

When you look at the consolidated financial statements of the government – they've been issued in two volumes this year – we see the direction of personal income tax, not only personal income tax but corporate income tax. We see, for instance, that in the year 2005-06 there was \$4.6 billion collected and in 2006-07 there will be \$7.6 billion collected, or a \$3 billion increase in personal income tax collected. It certainly is refreshing to see that there are some modest attempts being made here at tax relief. This bill is a companion piece for Bill 36, which finally eliminates among other things the Alberta royalty tax credit, which is certainly an interesting tax credit. It's had a long history in this province, and it has been frequently mentioned in various reports of the Auditor General.

When we look at the Alberta royalty tax credit and we do the math on it over a 25-year period from 1982 through to 2007, we see that certainly the taxpayers in this province have been very, very generous to the energy sector. If you add up over that 25-year period, Mr. Speaker, you will see that over \$7.1 billion was used to satisfy the Alberta royalty tax credit at the same time that the Auditor General questioned the whole purpose of the tax credit. It may have been necessary back in the early '80s and in some periods of the '90s, when resource prices for natural gas and conventional oil were very low, but to wait until this year to eliminate this program I think was unnecessary. It should have been done much sooner. If you look at this total bill, it's over \$7 billion, and that's not the only royalty adjustment program. But, finally, with Bill 36 and now its companion piece Bill 35, we're seeing the end of that.

If anyone has any questions, they can just refer to the Auditor General's reports, and they can see for themselves that the Auditor considered that program not to be of merit, and how this government administered it or didn't administer it – well, that's certainly another question.

With Bill 35 we see this reduction in a tax credit from dividends for small businesses to eliminate inadvertent preferential tax treatment by 2009. We see the increase in the amount claimable for medical expenses for caregivers, from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Sometimes one would have to question if that is enough and what determined the doubling of that. Why \$10,000? Why settle on that? The new adoption expense credit is added. I think that is really a step in the right direction, and the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon is to be commended and thanked for this initiative. The new general antiavoidance rule is added, and of course there are also the increases that hon. members have talked about earlier, the increases in monthly credits for time spent at qualifying educational institutions.

Overall, I think the intent of this bill is good, as is Bill 36, because when you look at Bill 36 and you see a \$7 billion-plus royalty tax credit over a 25-year period, certainly we have to acknowledge the generosity of the Alberta taxpayers to the energy sector, and it's time that the same generosity was reflected in our tax policy to those who are personal income tax filers.

Now, at the same time, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to refer hon. members of this Assembly again to the Auditor General's most recent report, volume 1, which I'm sure all the hon. members across the way have read and certainly have thought long and hard about the scathing report on the Department of Energy. The hon. minister in charge of Service Alberta must be very relieved that he's not

Minister of Energy because there were a lot of problems in that department. [interjection] I'm sorry?

Mr. Snelgrove: You've got the best one in the world right now.

The Acting Speaker: Through the chair, hon. members.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Sorry for that distraction, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] The universe? Yes, everyone in a democracy, hon. member, is entitled to their opinion, and that includes you. But one only has to look at the Department of Energy's conduct as is articulated by the Auditor General to know that there are major problems in that department not only with this minister but with past ministers.

When we look at the Auditor General's report on the government's revenue forecasting systems, I think it is noteworthy that we consider these in the debate on Bill 35. I'm not going to speak specifically to his recommendations regarding corporate income tax forecasts, but I think we should have a look at the personal income tax forecast as described by the Auditor. The Auditor is recommending that "the Department of Finance improve its method for estimating historical personal income growth used to forecast personal income tax revenues." The Auditor goes on to note that the historical personal income growth data may be unreliable.

Now, we know that there is a lot of unreliable data in the Department of Energy. That's a certainty, and I know that government members are very embarrassed by that and that they're ashamed and disappointed, but I think they should have a look at the Auditor's recommendations from other departments as well.

4:10

Now, it goes on to say in here, hon. members – and this is from the AG's report, Mr. Speaker:

Statistics Canada produces the personal income growth historical data on a calendar-year basis. Preliminary information on personal income is available for the previous calendar year in April of the following year. Statistics Canada produces revised information in November. Finance uses the November information to develop the budgeted revenue for the next fiscal year. The effect of using this information is as follows:

- In the budget for the year March 31, 2006, Finance forecasted the average income growth to be 5.7%. In preparing the financial statements for the year then ended, Finance revised the average income growth forecasts to 7.8%, based on preliminary income data from Statistics Canada and revised economic projections for 2006. The difference between budget and actual results for the year ended March 31, 2006 is more than \$800 million.
- For the year ended March 31, 2007, Finance's forecast of income growth was 6.6%. In preparing the financial statements for the year then ended, Finance revised the forecast to [over 10 per cent].

Ten and a half per cent to be precise, Mr. Speaker.

The difference between budget and results reported in the financial statements is about \$1.6 billion.

That's in two years.

Now, perhaps if we were to be a little bit more prudent, we should consider other tax relief for personal income tax filers in this province. The Minister of Service Alberta – I'm delighted to see that I'm putting more good Liberal ideas in his head. I would urge the government to not only stop at the measures that they have initiated in Bill 35 but to consider other measures. Certainly, we have been very generous, as I said, to the energy sector over the

years. When I'm talking about the \$7 billion Alberta royalty tax credit, I'm not talking about the other \$8 billion plus that we've given them in royalty reduction programs. That \$8 billion is only from 1992, so that's in a 15-year period. We can conservatively say, Mr. Speaker, that over that period of time we have provided – I'm not going to call it subsidies to the energy industry – tax concessions or royalty concessions in excess of \$15 billion. So if we can do it for that group of corporate parties, I think we should consider it for personal income tax filers as well.

One only has to look at the hon. minister's own projections here to see that in 2006-07 personal income tax is going to be in excess of \$7.6 billion and corporate income tax is going to be \$3.6 billion. So I think it's time for the government to go a little further than these good initiatives that are in Bill 35 and consider other measures to reduce the tax burden for individual Albertans. It's time we gave personal income tax filers more consideration.

In conclusion, I would remind the members opposite, particularly the hon. Minister of Service Alberta, that we have reduced significantly the combined corporate income tax rate for energy companies in Alberta over a significant period of time. I think it's seven years. We have reduced their tax by 13 per cent. The combined income tax rate has gone from 43 per cent to 30 per cent. We have been generous to one group of participants in the economy. Let's consider the others.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments? Any others?

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to close debate.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a second time]

Bill 37

Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. Well, Mr. Speaker, so much tax cutting has just made me light-headed. We have to turn that around.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to stand on behalf of the Minister of Finance today to speak to Bill 37, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007. Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and premature death in Alberta. Every year more than 3,400 Albertans die from tobacco-related causes.

Albertans are accustomed to having the lowest taxes in Canada, but in some cases higher taxes send the right signals. Increasingly, the tobacco tax will help encourage Albertans not to smoke. This is especially the case for young people who are more sensitive to price change. While the Alberta economy has raised incomes, tobacco rates have stayed the same since the last increase in 2002. The disincentive to smoke is not as strong as it once was.

Our primary goal with this piece of legislation is to help discourage smoking. Bill 37 proposes raising tobacco taxes by 16 per cent, \$5 on a carton of 200 cigarettes. The tax rate for loose tobacco and cigars will also be raised at the same time to ensure that the tax on all tobacco products is comparable. This is the change that was announced in Budget 2007.

Bill 37 also includes some administrative amendments and

ensures that the tobacco tax is consistent with other commodity taxes.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hope that the President of the Treasury Board feels better now that he has counterbalanced those massive tax cuts that we discussed with bills 35 and 36 with what would appear to be \$90 million in increased taxes for his treasury.

Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that certainly has the support of the Official Opposition. Anything that we can do to encourage those that smoke now to perhaps consider quitting is something that we would support, and certainly measures taken to encourage young people not to begin smoking are something that we would support. So this bill will have the support of the Official Opposition. But – and the President of the Treasury Board was obviously expecting a but, so I'm happy to provide it for him – incenting through increased taxes, while it may go some measure towards what the government is hoping to accomplish, clearly does not address the bigger issue of smoking and its cost to our economy.

Mr. Speaker, last May 31 in this House, on a day that just happened to be World No Tobacco Day, I asked the minister of health if he could provide us with the numbers. They're startling numbers, absolutely startling numbers. I asked the minister of health what the direct cost to the Alberta treasury was for health care services provided to deal with smoking-related issues: \$471 million in direct costs to the health department. The total cost to the economy, according to the government's own figures, \$1.296 billion – \$1.296 billion, for the those on the other side that are yawning and can't seem to stay awake for this most important discussion, the cost to the Alberta economy due to smoking and smoking-related issues. Those are the government's own numbers. Those are the health minister's own numbers.

4:20

The government projects that with the passage of Bill 37, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007, we will collect an extra \$90 million in taxes. That should bring us to a total this year of \$890 million in tobacco taxes. Now, you have to put all of these numbers in context with each other. So \$471 million is the direct cost to the department of health, yet we collect \$890 million in tobacco taxes. Those taxes once again disappear into the black hole of general revenue. They're not specifically directed to health care programs or to smoking cessation programs. In fact, Mr. Speaker – and this is perhaps the most disturbing thing of the entire discussion – only \$9 million this year is contemplated to be spent on smoking cessation and other tobacco reduction strategies.

So here we are with the government saying that we need \$90 million more from those that are smoking to encourage them not to smoke anymore and to encourage young people, who are particularly price sensitive, not to take up the habit, but of that \$90 million that we collect, we're investing only \$9 million. That's \$90 million extra. I'm sorry. It's \$890 million, almost \$900 million that we're collecting in tax, and we're investing only \$9 million of it back into smoking cessation and tobacco reduction strategies. One per cent, Mr. Speaker, of the tax that is collected goes back into programs to help people quit smoking or to help encourage them not to begin. Clearly, this is woefully inadequate.

I think the government should collectively hang their head in shame because this is much more about a cash cow than it is about smoking cessation or encouraging people not to start. If, in fact,

they were serious about those initiatives, then they would literally put their money where their mouths are and put some money into smoking cessation programs and tobacco reduction strategies, but that is not happening. Not only is it not happening, but it's pitiful. I'm sure I can't come up with strong enough words. It's beyond disturbing to see that we only put 1 per cent of the tax that we collect back into those programs that are so terribly important in terms of convincing people not to start or to stop partaking in the habit that they're in now. That is just huge, I think, in terms of this overall debate.

While we support the bill – we support the collection of more tax from tobacco, and we certainly support the idea of encouraging people not to start and those that are smoking to consider quitting – really what we're talking about here is a cash cow: more money for the government, more money for ad hoc spending, more money to be spent without any long-term savings plan or any real vision as to where we're going but no real, sincere effort on the part of the government to help with this major burden on our economy and with this major health concern for the people of this province. My head spins: \$1.3 billion cost to the economy; \$9 million that we spend to try to get people to quit. I just can't believe it.

An Hon. Member: He's light-headed.

Mr. R. Miller: Yeah, now I'm getting light-headed, and it certainly isn't as a result of those major tax cuts that we provided Albertans with a few minutes ago.

A couple of other things caught my eye as I was preparing for today's discussion, Mr. Speaker. I see that the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco has just recently released a study concluding that contraband in Canada – and we're referring to tobacco, of course – is increasing compared to their 2006 study. This study now shows that 22 per cent of cigarettes smoked in Canada are illegal, compared to 16.5 per cent in 2006, so a dramatic increase, a nearly 50 per cent increase in the number of illegal tobacco products that are being consumed in this country as a result of higher taxes, presumably. I think it bears asking the question of the Finance department: if they have any similar studies that would show the breakdown in Alberta. This particular study showed that \$449 million in Ontario alone was being lost to contraband tobacco and a total across the country of \$1.6 billion per year.

Again, if we're going to talk about forgone revenues and getting our fair share, as we have a lot over the last two days in this Assembly, here is another example of that, I'm sure, as governments continue to increase tobacco taxes. What this study is showing us is that despite, you know, the good intentions of the government in terms of trying to convince people to either quit smoking or not start, in fact, what we might be doing, Mr. Speaker, is simply driving the habit underground and thereby allowing a situation to develop where we're not collecting our fair share of tax. So that would be a question that I'd certainly be looking for more information on from the Treasury Board president or others on that side: if they could provide us with Alberta-specific numbers as to what percentage of cigarettes being smoked in Alberta are illegal and also how much tobacco tax revenue we might be forgoing as a result of that.

Interestingly enough, the same website, Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco – and this is not directly related to the tax amendment that's in front of us, but I think it's something that members will find informative and an idea whose time is due in Alberta, as far as I'm concerned. On October 10 of this year Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California signed a bill that would make it illegal to smoke in a vehicle if someone under the age

of 18 is present, and that bill comes into force in California on January 1 of this coming year, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, if we're going to talk about the negative impacts of smoking on our economy and on our society in general and if we're going to talk about initiatives to try to encourage young people not to smoke, I think one of the best things we could do in that regard is look at the situation where young people are in a confined space and being exposed to second-hand smoke. Clearly, one really good example of that would be the situation where they're in an automobile. So that's something that I would hope that perhaps the health minister would give serious consideration to as we prepare our legislative agenda for the spring.

Now, there is also contemplation in this bill, section 32(7) in particular, that deals with amending the act so that disclosure can be made to anyone of information that

- (a) is readily available,
- (b) is in a summarized or statistical form, and,
- (c) cannot, directly or indirectly, be associated with or identify a particular person,

This has been contemplated in order to allow a freer exchange of information between police authorities and other entities that might be investigating the contraband that I was referring to a few minutes ago.

On the surface clearly it would be a good thing that we make it easier for these various authorities to exchange information and try to track down that illegal trade of tobacco and make sure not only that it doesn't continue but that governments across the country are able to collect the tax that is due to them, but it certainly does raise some privacy concerns. We've discussed several privacy issues in this House over the last three years that I've been a member, and I would be looking for some assurance from the department or the minister or the mover of the bill that, in fact, there will be safeguards in place so that exactly what is described here is the way that this legislation does unfold, that the only information that is shared would be nonidentifying information in a statistical form and would not either directly or indirectly be associated with the identity of a particular person.

Also, I'd just like to note that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation recently polled their members, and as shocking as it might have been for Albertans to hear that this government actually supports increasing taxes, interestingly enough the Canadian Taxpayers Federation found that 70 per cent of their members who responded to the recent survey also supported this particular tax increase. I think it does show that in the right circumstance a tax increase can be supported by all sides of this House and by all political spectrums. But, again, my biggest concern, Mr. Speaker, is that, in fact, simply raising the taxes that are collected on tobacco and not addressing the much bigger issue is only a baby step in the right direction.

4:30

The other thing that I would like to comment on just briefly before we move on is something that I've mentioned many times in this House: the need for some sort of an ethical investing policy. With the new corporation, AIMCO, coming into being, the minister almost seems to have wanted to distance himself from giving any sort of direction to them in terms of where we invest our money. But last year in this Legislature the Minister of Finance conceded that at that point in time we had \$57 million directly invested in tobacco companies.

Once again we have the government talking out of both sides of its mouth. On the one hand, they're saying that we have to increase tobacco taxes so that we can encourage people to either quit smoking

or not start smoking; on the other hand, the same government and in this case the same minister directly investing \$57 million into tobacco companies. That's indefensible. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but there isn't a person on the other side of the House who could convince me that this is something that we should be doing, and I think most Albertans would agree. If, in fact, you believe that tobacco use is harmful to our economy, to our society, and to our citizens, then how can you possibly defend directly – directly – investing \$57 million into those very same tobacco companies?

I hope we'll have the time, Mr. Speaker, to deal with a private member's bill which I have coming up shortly, which will if successfully passed by this Legislature mandate that the Finance minister and by extension AIMCO would thereby divest themselves and never again directly invest in tobacco companies. That's something that I really hope we can move towards.

You may recall, Mr. Speaker, that earlier in the life of this particular Legislature we had successfully passed an amendment to the – I can't recall the exact name – cancer legacy act or whatever it was called, whereby the government agreed not to directly invest any of that particular money into tobacco companies. Here is a perfect opportunity for the government to do the right thing and put into legislation and thereby give direction to AIMCO that we will not direct any money directly into tobacco companies.

Those are my comments for this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, on Bill 37, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007. I look forward to comments of others and particularly look forward to having the opportunity to deal again with this bill in committee stage.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with pleasure to have a chance to make some comments on Bill 37, the cigarette tax amendment act. Perhaps working backwards from what I had prepared to just reinforce what my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford was just saying, you know, there has to be a certain congruency between different pieces of legislation and intention that our Legislature is putting forward into law here in the province of Alberta just so that one hand might not be doing one thing while the other hand is doing something else but also to have some congruency for the public to see that we have an integrated approach to reducing the use of tobacco here in the province of Alberta.

I certainly want to compliment at the outset the new advertising campaign that has been on television here in the last few weeks in the province of Alberta. The advertisements seem quite hard hitting and compelling, and they are in a tight rotation as well so that people are less likely to be able to ignore them.

I think that an integrated approach is absolutely necessary, but also a unified approach is absolutely necessary. As the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had mentioned, if we are demonstrating that we have, say, for example, an ethical investment policy on tobacco that avoids investing in that very tempting investment – because let's not kid ourselves; the return rate for investing in tobacco and alcohol and gambling is very high. We have to resist that temptation, I believe, in the interests of the larger public interest that we are invested to serve here in the Legislature, which is the health and well-being of the population.

Certainly, it's been said many times, but I'll say it again, that of course we have to pay for the other end of any degree of failure we have in regard to tobacco use in the province of Alberta because that ends up at the doorstep of the health budget. People have to be

looked after after they have picked up a debilitating disease or condition as a result of smoking on the other end of our same budget, same tax dollars on the health side. I guess my main point of argument here with Bill 37 is certainly that it is promising and it's a good opportunity for us to increase the tax, but then I just have a couple of comments as to how we might nuance that to make this bill the most effective act possible.

You know, the things that I have been reading about in terms of the price of tobacco and then the corresponding reduction in use of tobacco: there's an interesting equation that happens, and it has a lot to do with the wealth of the population. I read in the newspaper just recently that it's difficult to deter young people from buying tobacco, say, for example, even though the price of a package of cigarettes is over \$10 because in our economy these days this is what a young person can earn in less than an hour's work. If that money that they are earning is not for essentials, if they're living at home or, you know, they're having that as disposable income, then even a price of \$10 or \$12 is not necessarily a deterrent for young people to pick up the habit of purchasing and consuming tobacco.

Tobacco, let's not forget, is an addiction with very well-documented neurochemical costs. High prices don't necessarily stop people from addiction. We see, unfortunately, with other harmful substances such as cocaine or alcohol and whatnot that people will spend their last dollar to feed their addiction. So we don't necessarily have a magical price point that's going to price people out of using tobacco as such. Also, there are studies that show that a 10 per cent hike in prices, for example, might result in a 4 per cent decrease in demand but practically will really only bring up about a 2 per cent reduction in actual smoking prevalence. I don't think this is the kind of target that we want to realize from this bill. Of course we would like to see a better return, considering the damaging effects of tobacco use.

So the best way is to follow through on a taxation bill such as this one but also match it and exceed with better smoking cessation programs. My suggestion, then, is to target this increase of revenue that we would realize as a result of increasing these taxes to specifically target smoking cessation programs for individuals through our health system so that we're taking that money and we're targeting it and aiming it specifically at the thing that we're trying to achieve.

4:40

Of course, a smoking tax is, unfortunately, a disproportionate tax to the working poor, people working in lower socioeconomic areas. Certainly, you know, considering the circumstances of people, it's unfortunate that they will spend that last dollar on tobacco. But then, again, we have to target the psychological and physiological root causes of that addiction. As I said before, by targeting the revenues from the cigarette tax amendment act specifically to cessation programs, I feel that we could in fact manage that better, I think.

Certainly, I am encouraged by the focus of this provincial government on tobacco and trying to reduce the percentage of the population that uses tobacco and suffers the ill effects of tobacco. Perhaps by making a couple of small bits of fine tuning to Bill 37, we could realize the goal that we all, I think, share here in the room, and that is to increase the health of our population in the widest possible way by reducing the use of tobacco here in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007, is a bill that should be supported, and hopefully it will be supported by all hon. members of this Assembly. We are going to see with this bill increases in tax revenue. Of course this is going to occur because we are increasing the taxes on tobacco. When we look at this closely and we see section 32, which amends communication of information laws to be in line with FOIP and other commodity tax acts, this actually enhances the ability of the government, as I'm understanding this, to transfer information from other governments in Canada and allows people employed in investigating criminal offences to obtain information. I would only assume that that's, again, in light of the Auditor General's recent report and his comments regarding the marketing and the selling of tobacco products on or near First Nations' land.

I think those are, overall, very good initiatives and, as I said before, need to be supported. But we all know the power and the influence of the tobacco industry. We know fully well the lengths that they will go to to lobby and try through those lobbying efforts to influence legislators. Now, one of the outfits that is employed in this is a public relations company called Burson-Marsteller. Burson-Marsteller the tobacco industry, as I understand it, hires to advocate on their behalf. The tobacco industry has a history of opposing government initiatives such as this one with Bill 37, but they always hire, it seems, these public relations firms to do their work for them.

Now, if we look at this Burson-Marsteller, they had a very close relationship with the cigarette maker Philip Morris. As I understand it, they organized the smokers' rights group, the National Smokers Alliance, this NSA, for the tobacco company Philip Morris in the early 1990s. The purpose of the group was to mobilize smokers on behalf of the tobacco industry to protest clean indoor air loss, increase cigarette taxes, and other legislated efforts that would affect cigarette consumption. The smoke-free advocacy organization Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights compiled a report exposing the National Smokers Alliance's links to Philip Morris and showing that Philip Morris funded the National Smokers Alliance with \$4 million in seed money.

Philip Morris, as I understand it, was not the only tobacco company that helped support the National Smokers Alliance. In 1997 Brown & Williamson – whoever they are I don't know – donated \$500,000 in support of the National Smokers Alliance. Now, this, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to note – and I certainly hope that there's not this sort of influence occurring here in Alberta – is after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the EPA, ruled in 1993 that second-hand tobacco smoke could be ranked as a group A human carcinogen, the same rating EPA gives to asbestos, radon gas, and vinyl chloride.

Thomas Humber of Burson-Marsteller wrote a memo to Ellen Merlo, senior vice-president of Philip Morris, corporate affairs, urging Philip Morris to put into action a list of strategies to fight public health authorities on the issue of environmental tobacco smoke. Now, I'm getting this from the Internet. What I find troubling about this, Mr. Speaker, is the demonstration of just how far and to what lengths outfits will go to try to influence public policy-makers.

How does this relate to this bill? Well, Mr. Speaker, we look at this Tobacco Tax Amendment Act and we see what the government is trying to do, and I think we should applaud that. But we have in Canada here, as I understand it, a firm called the National Public Relations company. Now, as I understand it, National is also affiliated internationally with the same person, Marsteller network, and National Public Relations is also working in central Alberta.

They're representing the Alberta Electric System Operator. As I understand it, one of the groups they want to meet with is UPTAG. They have been phoning people in central Alberta who have been standing up and speaking out against the 500 kV line that the application for was eventually withdrawn by a regulatory body that was embarrassed by the whole process.

This public relations firm, the same one that's affiliated with the tobacco industry in the U.S., is now operating in central Alberta for AESO. Whether they're trying to smooth over the damage that has been done to the credibility of the whole regulatory process, I don't know, but certainly things remain mysterious as to what their motives are.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

An Hon. Member: Mysterious.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Very mysterious.

If this information that I have is true, I cannot understand what a supposedly independent and arm's-length organization such as the Alberta Electric System Operator would have getting an international public relations firm involved in holding meetings with landowners. Now, if the information I've been provided is true and these sources are reliable that indicate that it is an association with the tobacco industry, well, I think we need to have a good long discussion right here on the floor of this Legislative Assembly regarding this because I don't think it's a good way to do business and neither do the good folks in central Alberta who have been contacted by this public relations firm.

4:50

When you look at how these public relations firms operate for the tobacco industry, I would urge all hon. members to be very cautious in approving this process as a way of managing or increasing public confidence in what has been a very, very, very poor process for interested people to participate in, and those are the landowners around central Alberta. I'm going to keep my eye on this, certainly. I'm hoping that more people in central Alberta who have been contacted by this public relations firm will hopefully keep me updated on this. It's not a step in the right direction when you look at how the same sorts of organizations have been working for the tobacco industry in America.

Now, the tobacco tax, Mr. Speaker, we are looking at this. We have consulted the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. As I understand it, they support this bill. They conducted an independent poll, and they were certainly supportive of it. The hon. minister talked about the initiative from the Alberta budget 2007, the fiscal plan. I think we should pass this legislation, and hopefully it will help in a small way to reduce cigarette and tobacco consumption in this province, particularly among younger people.

With that, I will conclude my remarks on this bill at this time, but let's make sure that the same sort of measures that took place to try to discredit certain organizations that opposed second-hand smoke laws in America don't show up in central Alberta using the same techniques to try to discredit people who stand up and speak out and try to protect their democratic rights.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Unlike bills 35 and 36, Bill 37 isn't a good example of the adage better late than never.

Had this sin tax increase been legislated earlier, we could potentially have saved lives, hospital bills, and improved the quality of life of Albertans young and old. We know that tobacco is one of the key causes of not only lung diseases but heart disease, and between heart and stroke and diseases of the lungs these are the primary killers of individuals: Albertans, Canadians, the whole world.

We're not going to go into the details there, but I would like to flash back to 2005, and I want to shine a very positive spotlight on the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, a fellow teacher, and that probably has something to do with his enlightened attitude. When he brought forward in 2005 the idea of banning smoking in all public places across the province, that was a truly revolutionary idea. In second reading of that bill it appeared to have gained sufficient momentum that the third reading would just go through and so on, but unfortunately when it came to the Committee of the Whole, the whole concept of saving Albertans from second-hand smoke literally went up in smoke.

That was unfortunate because what has happened since is rather than the province taking a leadership role on banning smoking in public places, it's been the individual cities and municipalities who have outpaced the government in establishing their own legislation.

Again, my hat is off to the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who single-handedly came up with a good idea that the opposition supported and, unfortunately, the government didn't see the wisdom of.

Now, what this Bill 37 does is it recognizes that the government has a role in establishing what is the greater good for its population. The arguments against individual rights and, you know, "why should we have to wear a seatbelt?" or "if I want to smoke, too bad for everybody else in the room," and "it's my right as a member of such and such a legion," or "if I want to light up while I'm wearing my oxygen mask, that's my individual right" – obviously, the government decided that with raising this particular tax on tobacco, this was good for everybody.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Now, I'm all for sin taxes, both grammatical and in this case taxing questionable values. I'd like to see the same kind of increase applied to liquor. I would like to see a similar tax increase placed on the revenue that private individuals derive from casinos, from VLTs and slots on their premises; in other words, these activities that have very little benefit to them. You know, let's tax them out of existence and improve the quality of life for individuals, but of course that would be overreaching our government stewardship and responsibility.

Again with a flashback to 2005, my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre came up with a rather revolutionary idea: take the revenue from a sin tax and turn it into a healthy living promotion. The Member for Edmonton-Centre in her bill suggested setting aside \$250 million of the then \$600 million tax, which would go into health care initiatives. Instead of this money just being perceived as a cash cow, it would actually go into education for healthier living. It would go into financing smoking reduction, helping with student programs, putting more money towards AADAC. Again, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed had the opportunity to take over the responsibility for that area; I'm sure he would have liked to have seen that bill go ahead. By investing, as I say, tobacco money into healthy living, great things could be accomplished.

The member recognized that – you know, she wasn't suggesting that we reward people who have the good fortune of having the genes that allow them to be healthy in the first place. She wasn't

suggesting the government pick up the tab for private gym memberships or being on the golf course. She wanted to see this money going into improving our health care delivery system and into preventative health care measures. She recognized the fact that some people, despite their best intentions, based on their genealogical line have problems which are not of their creation.

I also want to recognize, and not dwell on, a point that my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford brought up, and that's the idea of ethical investment strategies for the heritage trust fund. The government is sending mixed, in quotes, smoke signals by investing in tobacco companies through the heritage trust fund while at the same time raising tobacco taxes. You can't have it both ways. Well, in this case I suppose you can.

5:00

Continuing to invest in tobacco is the equivalent of investing in munitions and land mines and so on. We know that smoke kills. It kills first-hand. It kills second-hand. So why would we want to have anything to do with investments in death, basically? Bill 37 recognizes that smoking isn't something that we can just outlaw, but if it's going to exist, at least we can get some derivative benefit from it. I would support, when it comes to discussion, a Bill 38 next year where we say: let's raise it another 16 per cent. The sooner we get rid of tobacco products and the damage that they cause, the better.

I appreciate that the government has brought forward Bill 37. I would encourage them to look at eliminating investments in the heritage trust fund for tobacco. I'd also like to point out, when giving credit where credit is due, that my Edmonton-Centre colleague also introduced legislation, I believe this past spring, outlining and pushing for the banning of power walls, which encourage young people to smoke and take up the negative habit, by removing these displays that entice students as they go into areas. I think that also as part of that proposed legislation there was discussion about taking it out of pharmacies and supposed buildings that promote health products. It was recognized, at least from a Liberal point of view, that you can't have it both ways.

There's no doubt that smoking has no side benefits. If taxing it will get rid of it, then bring on the taxes. Thank you, government, for Bill 37.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I promise to be very brief. [interjections] I thank my hon. colleagues for the warm reception. I appreciate that.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, my previous hat before joining this esteemed Assembly was as a pharmacist. I definitely would like to speak in favour of any measure that would end up reducing tobacco use in this province. Raising taxes is but one measure that is frequently used. I like the fact that by doing this today, should this bill pass, we are going to be the jurisdiction in Canada with the most tax on tobacco products. I am hoping that this would be something that we keep up. We definitely support any measure that would reduce usage in this province.

Eliminating tobacco products from drugstores is something I supported, and it's something the College of Pharmacists supported as well. We have spoken in this House repeatedly about the need to do something like that because you are definitely sending the wrong message when you have tobacco products in a drugstore. We should also look at ways to eliminate tobacco products from all drugstores, regardless of size, in terms of small community stores that are not

banner stores, not megascale grocery stores or the multipurpose ones.

Now, in terms of raising tobacco taxes and raising revenues, I would really like to see tobacco taxes put into a health promotion fund or a disease prevention fund rather than seeing these revenues go into the general fund to be spent on whatever the government decides. If we're raising these taxes to make more money in terms of disease prevention or health promotion, that's one thing, but if we're taking this money and putting it towards potholes or other infrastructure projects and so on, I don't think that's the direction we should be going.

Similarly, when we charge health care premiums. You know, health care premiums are not used for disease prevention and health promotion. They are basically a tax that is put into general revenue to be spent on government priorities that are not necessarily health related. I think this is something we need to be alert to and something we need to be discussing in this House.

Now, from my experience as a pharmacist I'm going to tell you something that you are going to likely find very strange, Mr. Speaker. Take Alberta Blue Cross. Alberta Blue Cross has private plans. You know, as an employer or as a business person you can go to Alberta Blue Cross and start a plan for your employees, and you can add your spouse and your employees' spouses and their offspring and their kids, for example, to that plan. But most of these plans are tiered, so if you pay X, you get coverage for X, if you pay Y, you get coverage for Y, and so on. Then we also have public plans. As MLAs we all have Alberta Blue Cross coverage, as civil servants who work within the government have Alberta Blue Cross, and so on and so forth.

We need to be telling an agency like Alberta Blue Cross that it is time to seriously consider covering smoking cessation aids. You think about the patch, you think about the chewing gum, and you think about all the other tools that are available to help people quit. Raising taxes and making it financially, you know, less attractive is one way, but then also looking at the treatment angle and to help people quit is another thing. I think the time has come for the provincial government to approach an agency like Alberta Blue Cross and say: "What can we do to make this happen? Where do we sign? How much money do you need?" Let's get this behind us. Let's move on. The time has come for smoking cessation aids to be covered under provincial plans.

Take something else. There is a medication, Mr. Speaker, that is called Zyban. Zyban is a medication that is made by a company called Glaxo Wellcome, or GlaxoSmithKline now; they've changed their name. It is a medication that helps people quit, and it is proven. Many research studies have indicated that, yes, it does work. It is not covered by some of those plans I mentioned.

Take the same formula, the same molecule, which is marketed by the same company, made in the same lab, in the same pill press, called Wellbutrin. What's inside is the same. The tablets are exactly the same shape. They're exactly the same strength. They have exactly the same effect. They're made in the same place. They're made using the same machine. Wellbutrin is an antidepressant, and Wellbutrin is covered because depression is a medical disease. It's a medical affliction. It is something that we can treat.

Well, I would argue that smoking and the addiction to nicotine and to the tobacco product is a medical affliction. It is something that we should be treating. There is no justification for this drug to not be covered when, in fact, it's the same formula. We know it's safe. The experts have told us that it does work. How can you justify to somebody who is dying from lung cancer that you can't get this? They can't fight that addiction. They cannot quell that addiction.

These are but a few things, Mr. Speaker, which I have discovered in my life as a practising pharmacist, and I think the time has come for this House and for the government to start thinking about these issues. Making it financially less attractive for people is one great thing – and I totally support this direction – but we have to take this money and put it towards disease prevention and health promotion. We also have to look at ways to help people quit who express that desire. Making that decision is about 50 per cent of the work. The other 50 is looking after that chemical addiction, looking after that chemical dependency and dealing with it.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hope that this bill passes, and I hope that the House and the government seriously take my points into consideration. Who knows? Maybe in the spring we will hear good things about, you know, Blue Cross and other insurance companies moving towards covering smoking cessation aids.

Thank you very much.

5:10

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

Any others?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 7

Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to provide further clarification and information with respect to Bill 7, including items that were raised during second reading of the bill. Now, it's been quite a while since second reading of this bill, back seven months ago, so I had to do a little bit of reading in the *Hansard* in order to refresh my memory.

During second reading of this bill, Mr. Chair, reference was made to two private institutions, the Canadian College International Institute and Columbia College, and it was referred to by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. In *Hansard* of April 3, 2007, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona talked about how he personally had to deal with complaints stemming from poor management of vocational schools. He said that

in 2005 the ministry had to deal with a complaint about the private school CCII [or Canadian College International Institute] that dealt with excessive grant funding from the government, falsification of attendance records, course quality dilution, and misrepresenting course hours, et cetera.

Now, to clarify, Mr. Chair, the Canadian College International Institute does not offer programs licensed under the Private Vocational Schools Act and is not regulated by Alberta Advanced Education and Technology. I don't know exactly what the hon.

member was talking about or what he was referring to here, but I'm not going to deal with the issue because it has nothing to do with Bill 7.

On the other hand, though, Columbia College does offer vocational training licensed under the Private Vocational Schools Act, and a question was raised by the hon. member regarding the \$87,000 provided to Columbia College in 2005–2006 as reported in Alberta Advanced Education's 2005–06 annual report. Now, this \$87,000 was from the first allocations out of the ministry's access fund. In this phase private vocational schools were eligible for support, and Columbia College was awarded funding for its business management program. Columbia College continues to offer this program and receives the funding awarded during that first access fund competition. However, private institutions offering licensed vocational programs are not currently eligible to receive access fund grants for programs.

Also, Mr. Chair, a question regarding the training provided to temporary foreign workers was also raised during second reading of this bill, and that was brought up by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who I see is here today enjoying the annual report of Service Alberta. Is that what you're reading there, hon. member?

Mr. MacDonald: The department of agriculture now.

Mr. Webber: Anyway, I'm a little bit confused by what the hon. member had started to ramble about way back on April 5. If I read it here, it says:

When we look at what's going on in this province and what's going on outside this province and recruiting workers into this country and province, we have to be very, very careful about what we're actually going to do with this legislation.

Then he went on to say:

There are also many agents recruiting temporary foreign workers. It is unfortunate that some of the temporary foreign workers are being asked for megabucks, thousands and thousands of dollars to gain access to this province. They're getting here, and they are finding there is very little, if any, work.

Now, there are people in this province that are offering training programs to prospective temporary foreign workers.

The hon. member went on and on. Then he had a question. He said, "How are these trainers affected by Bill 7?" the trainers to these temporary foreign workers. Just to inform the hon. member, temporary foreign workers are already highly skilled workers before they come to this country to work. They're functioning at a journeyman's level. In such cases that you've described, specific trade-related training is provided by the employer. So a temporary foreign worker's training does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Private Vocational Schools Act, just for your information.

A further clarification with respect to Bill 7. Government does not license private institutions. Advanced Education and Technology licenses and monitors vocational programs offered by the private institutions. Apprenticeship and industry training programs are generally not offered by private institutions and not licensed under the Private Vocational Schools Act. The exception is hairstylists or hairstyling training, which is offered by licensed private vocational schools.

Now, changes included in Bill 7 include the removal of the two-tier system of licensing, brought about through changing the wording of section 12(2), repealing section 13(1)(a), and revising the wording of section 24(b) of the act, the removal of the requirement that licences be renewed every two years, which is carried out by repealing section 12(6), section 13(1)(a), section 14, revising the wording of section 24(b), and by the addition of the new section

17.1, which provides a mechanism not currently in the act. It's all in here, all for you to read, and it was available right from day one. So the questions that were asked could have been researched through your own reading.

Advanced Education and Technology will still collect and review information and conduct compliance reviews. The rigour will continue; however, these changes will streamline administration.

Now, to explain these changes in further detail, I want to refer to the removal of the two-tier system of licensing. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora wanted more specifics on this, and he went on and on. I won't even go with the quotes because I couldn't understand what exactly they meant. But I will be clear. Removing class A and class B categories of licences requires all licensed programs to demonstrate satisfactory performance outcomes. From a consumer's protection point of view it is more effective for vocational training to be either licensed or not licensed, instead of downgrading licences with poor performance outcomes from class A to class B. Although the two categories of licences are being discontinued, licensees will still be required to report graduation and employment placement information for each licensed program to the ministry on an annual basis. The ministry will also continue to address instances where performance outcomes are problematic.

5:20

Now, I will quote also another member, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who back on April 3 said, "Overall, Mr. Speaker, I believe this bill is worthy of support." He went on to say, "The intent of Bill 7 appears to be quite straightforward." It is, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the chair for the opportunity to present this information on Bill 7, the Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act. These changes to the Private Vocational Schools Act are designed to enhance consumer protection and to be more reflective of current practices. I ask that the members support this bill as it moves forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate this opportunity in Committee of the Whole to participate in the debate. I for the most part support Bill 7, and hopefully the questions I ask won't be considered an affront. I'm looking for clarification.

Having been involved in the delivery of public education for 34 years, I'm very aware of the standards that are applied, very strict and stringent standards. A tremendous amount of Alberta's tax money and general revenue goes into funding education in this province, and I note that approximately one-tenth of what goes from the government to support public vocational schools goes to the support of private vocational schools. However, there has to be that same type of expectation, the need for regulation. I see that one of the points of Bill 7 is to try and make that regulation worthwhile and not necessarily as onerous.

Instead of reviewing the equivalent of a charter every two years, it's going to replace the monitoring on a regular basis. I apologize. I didn't participate in the second reading section of this, but if the member proposing Bill 7 wouldn't mind telling me about some of the monitoring methods that are effective that would be applied to private – I'm assuming it'd be a carry-over from how we monitor our public vocational schools – that would be appreciated.

I also notice that instead of a two-tier licensing system, there's going to be a single tier. That makes sense because then all

vocational schools will have to achieve a particular standard, and as such it'll be a high standard, and we should receive good service, good training from these schools. Again, these concerns may have come up in second reading, but my concern is the certification process for a private vocational school and how onerous the expectations are for a school. Obviously, they have to provide a business model. They have to have some type of start-up money that would ensure that they're not going to suddenly close their doors and leave students literally out in the cold. If the hon. member could provide some information on what assurances or what bonds schools have to take out so that in the event that for whatever reason they have to suddenly close, then the tuition is returned to the students who applied to take the training at their programs. I know that this has been a problem in the past in Alberta, where unfortunately we've had some fly-by-night opportunists who have opened and very quickly closed their vocational schools.

I can get past my public school preference by recognizing that at this point there has not been sufficient funding support for public institutions, whether they be of the academic or the vocational nature, and that has sort of by omission created a niche for private vocational training schools. If they do a good job in filling that niche, then they have a right to be in existence. There is no doubt that a number of students are being turned away from SAIT and from NAIT and from some of the training colleges that are publicly funded. I suppose that, as a result, they're making their way to these private institutions. Hopefully, they're getting a good education.

The explanation of standards set and government monitoring is an area that I would like to hear from them. Hopefully, these concerns of mine are recognized as being legitimate, based on my 34-year professional education career, and every effort will be provided to answer these questions. I appreciate that I'll have another opportunity to ask again if for whatever reason the answer doesn't provide the depth of explanation that I would appreciate.

As I say, in general I support Bill 7, increasing education opportunities for students across Alberta, but I would like clarification about enforcing regulations and establishing regulations before funding is provided. And what kind of protection is there for students so that they won't pay a tuition and then find on the following Monday that the institution has closed down and they're out that money?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I listened with interest to the hon. member who is sponsoring Bill 7, his comments regarding debate at second reading. I'm pleased to hear that he has had a look through *Hansard* going back to the spring session. I would like to remind not only that hon. member but all members of this Assembly that there is a role for the Alberta Advanced Education and Technology department. I don't think I should say technology, just advanced education. I may be getting ahead of myself there.

An Hon. Member: And technology. Yes, indeed.

Mr. MacDonald: And technology. Okay.

As I understand it, there's a private vocational training division within that department run by the director of private vocational training, and the director is given the power by the regulations to license and oversee the province's vocational programs. Now, that being said, I would like to alert the hon. member to the fact that there are many different classifications or types of visas for tempo-

rary foreign workers to this country. Some of them are very, very limited, and they restrict a temporary foreign worker. In fact, they prevent that person from getting any additional training or training in another vocation. I've seen these visas.

I would remind the hon. member that his comments earlier were not correct because the department of advanced education is the one that is giving these individuals temporary accreditation. They're supposedly looking at the trade qualifications or the vocational credentials of these individuals before the temporary foreign worker visa is issued and accepting or rejecting those qualifications. The individual, if the visa is approved, is allowed into this country, into this province, and they have six months to challenge and pass Alberta's qualifications. So those are the rules.

I had a group of temporary foreign workers visit my office. I had the pleasure of talking to them in September. Some of them couldn't find work.

5:30

Mr. Horner: Nothing to do with this bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, it does, hon. member, have a lot to do with this bill because it was your department that said that their qualifications were valid, yet whenever their original employer refused to hire them, others would not.

This is the niche that the private vocational colleges want to get in. Now, they want to get money – they're another group that have got their hand out to try to get these individuals involved in a rather confusing transaction, and that is the upgrading of their credentials or the acceptance of their credentials, to start with. So the temporary foreign worker: there is an issue around this bill and how they are being treated.

Hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, you should check with your own department and make sure that the accreditation process is working, because there's a gentleman in there – I've seen the letters myself – by the name of Mr. Olie Schell who was signing off on these qualifications. No one knows whether these qualifications have validity or not. There are people in there signing those letters, and I can provide to you, hon. minister, copies of those letters.

Mr. Horner: What's the relevance to the bill?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, the chair will be happy to recognize you next.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Private vocational schools see the plight of these innocent victims of temporary foreign worker policy gone bad. They see them as a market opportunity. I would ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills and the minister of advanced education to please be aware of that and try to do everything to stop it and protect these individuals from any type of exploitation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair, and I will keep my comments brief. I was only able to look briefly at Bill 7. Certainly, the Member for Calgary-Foothills seemed to alleviate some of my concerns that just come from the private vocational training facilities in general, specific to quite a number of complaints that I have had to deal with from some specific private training schools in the last couple of years.

I guess my questions here in the Committee of the Whole are very specific to whether or not Bill 7 will seek to streamline the accreditation process for specific skills and if that is one of the benefits or one of the capacities of this bill. I see that you are streamlining, as you say, removing the two-tier system for accreditation, which is certainly laudable. I guess what I see as a potential problem is that – well, I mean, it's a good problem to have – we have a demand for lots of skilled workers, and we have, then, a burgeoning industry to train people for specific skills. It is our responsibility to ensure that the regulations surrounding new training facilities are stringent enough so that people aren't wasting their time and money in vocational training that might not be in fact recognized by the trade or the workforce, the people doing the hiring, and people aren't spending their money on these things as well.

Everyone wants to improve their station and lot in life, and I see young people often taking a couple of years off after high school and then going back and choosing, perhaps, a commercial training facility as opposed to Grant MacEwan or NAIT or SAIT or university. Then if that experience is not to their satisfaction, they will give up in terms of postsecondary and further postsecondary training. The timeliness and the effectiveness of any postsecondary training is so crucial to ensure that the individual has a good experience, they're not wasting their money, and they can derive the benefits that they perceived that they would in fact get from signing up at a postsecondary training facility.

Mr. Chair, whenever there is a new, expanded opportunity for an industry, as we see now with postsecondary training, certainly it's necessary for us to streamline or cut the red tape, but it's also important for us to regulate. I'm just hoping that Bill 7 serves to be stringent enough to send a clear message to people, perhaps, choosing to set up sort of a training school or vocational training of any kind that the provincial government, indeed, will retain control of the integrity of that education.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? Are you ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Mr. Chair, I'd just like to refer to a couple of the questions that they had asked just before we call the question. I apologize to the Assembly here.

Anyways, with respect to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, he had asked a number of questions which are in the regulations. I've printed the regulations from the Queen's Printer. It's on the web. It has everything from criteria for vocation. It's got the exemptions. It's got conditions precedent. It's got licence renewal. It's got separate applications. It's got everything in here, in the regulations, that would answer all of the questions that you had asked with regard to monitoring methods, with regard to licensing, with regard to the certification process, the bonds. Are there bonds? Yes, there are bonds. It says it all in here. I would suggest, perhaps, that you read the regulations.

Also, Mr. Chair, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar went on again with regard to the temporary foreign workers. Again, the amendment to this act removes the distinction between types of licences. Okay? It also removes the stipulation that licences must be renewed every two years. It provides mechanisms for licences to request cancellation or suspension of a licence. It also changes the name of the act. That's what this amendment is all about. To go

into a debate with regard to temporary foreign workers has nothing to do with the bill, so I'm not going to bother with it.

With regard to Edmonton-Calder: again, read the regulations. It's all in there.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any others?

Are you now ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

5:40

Bill 8 Vital Statistics Act

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to take this opportunity to respond to the questions raised by the members for Edmonton-Strathcona, Edmonton-Rutherford, and Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I thank them for those questions.

With respect to the motivation for updating the act, the majority of the vital statistics work is done on policy as the legislation is outdated.

As to why the term "director" is being replaced with the term "registrar," we're doing this to update the language in the act to make it consistent with the terms used in other registries legislation.

In response to whether any changes to this act may have been spurred on by the need to improve security measures for private registries, there are no changes that were made specifically because of the private registries. Additional security measures were added to the Change of Name Act in 2004.

In response to how this bill will be responding to organized crime, there are two amendments that will respond to the increase of identity theft and fraudulent identity. First of all, this bill makes it an offence to fail to return fraudulent birth certificates to vital statistics. Secondly, the bill requires evidence of a birth and that it has occurred in Alberta if the birth occurs outside of a hospital. This will help minimize the creation of fake individuals and identification.

As to whether the law enforcement agencies were consulted in drafting the bill, they were specifically consulted on the requirements for minors aged 12 to 17 to submit their fingerprints with their change of name application.

In regard to our respect for cultural and ethnic diversity in the drafting of legislation, we worked very closely with the constitutional law division of Alberta Justice, who ensured that we were in line with the Charter.

With respect to whether any amendments are in response to Charter challenges, there is an amendment that has been added for this reason. It allows the registrar discretion to allow a child to have

a different last name from their parents if it is for cultural or ethnic reasons due to the numerous successful Charter challenges on this issue.

In response to how we are accommodating the provisions of the FOIP Act, we have added a regulation making authority to allow us to prescribe in regulation all of the information we are requesting on vital statistic forms to ensure that there is a clear authority for its collection.

To clarify what happens with fingerprints that are submitted with a change of name application, they are sent to the RCMP in Ottawa for comparison with their criminal record database. If a person has a criminal record, their record is updated with their new name; if not, no file is kept with fingerprints. In all cases the RCMP return the fingerprints directly to the applicant.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for providing responses to the questions that I raised during second reading.

I've indicated in the past that the Official Opposition caucus is for the most part supportive of this bill and the objectives that the government has laid out with presenting it. We're always cautious, Mr. Chairman, of the sensitive nature of the issues that are being discussed in Bill 8 and wary of the fact that attempts to accommodate ethnic and cultural diversity can lead to other problems. Those were points that were raised in second reading and I'm still mindful of today.

Since we're in committee, I do have a number of questions that I would like to get on the record. I'm not sure how much time we'll have to deal with them today, but perhaps tomorrow or at a later date we may see some answers to this.

Part 1 of Bill 8 deals with births in Alberta and particularly the registration of births in Alberta. One of the interesting things that I note, Mr. Chairman, is that section 3 of part 1 deals with the birth registration document and, in particular, describes that if more than one child is born, as an example twins or triplets, a separate registration document for each child must be provided, each document stating how many children were born.

I know it's a rare situation, but certainly we've seen an example in B.C. just recently with conjoined twins. I'm wondering whether or not – the Treasury Board president is chuckling, but it is a reality; it does happen, of course. I'm curious whether or not Bill 8 contemplates that situation and how, in fact, that might be dealt with if we had a situation of conjoined twins. Would there then be a single registration document that would suffice if the decision was made not to separate the twins? If that's the case, what happens down the road if the twins were to be separated? These are difficult issues, I'm sure, to be dealt with, but I'm wondering, if we're amending this act to deal with any number of things, whether or not that has actually been contemplated. It's been years and years, as the member indicated, since we've dealt with this issue and updated it, and here's a perfect opportunity for us to deal with a difficult issue that we've seen, you know, in the neighbouring province of British Columbia. That's certainly one that I would be looking for some clarification on.

Section 4 of the same part 1, dealing with birth registrations and particularly the notice of birth, goes to great lengths to describe how physicians attending the birth will deliver notice to the registrar. It talks about all sorts of responsibilities and encumbrances upon the registrar.

Then it goes on in section 5 to refer to the registrar again, that

within one year after the birth, after the registrar is satisfied that all of the documentation required by the act is sufficient, the birth would be registered.

I guess my question is this. Clearly, it would seem to me that the registrar must be trained and well educated in legal matters. I'm just wondering whether or not that is a deviation from the act as it currently sits. What sorts of safeguards would we be putting in place to make sure that the registrar's office would be fully competent and capable to live with the greater demands of Bill 8 as it's been presented to us here today?

Also, section 6 of that part 1, dealing with birth and again talking about registration after one year, describes that when a birth is not registered within a year but the registrar receives an application for registration, if it is then verified by affidavit and accompanied with a birth registration document, the prescribed evidence respecting the birth, and the prescribed fee, the registrar shall register the birth. The question that I would have there is: what exactly constitutes prescribed evidence? I'm not sure that it's necessarily outlined in the bill itself, and perhaps that comes in regulation. But that would be a clarification that I would be looking for. I see that the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne is nodding his head, so I'm going to guess that, in fact, that is the case.

Moving on, then, to section 8 of part 1, the naming of the child. Section 8(5) describes that the last name of a child must be registered as follows:

- (a) if the parents agree, showing:
 - (i) the last name of one of the parents, or
 - (ii) the parents' last names hyphenated or combined.

Then there's the contemplation that the last name can be a combination of the parents' last names.

Later in the bill it states that the registrar may refuse a name if he or she determines that it is offensive or confusing. My question would be: what would happen if the parents combined their names in a manner that the registrar opposes? Will that provision trump the provision that we've just described? It seems that it gives an awful lot of power to the registrar, I suppose, to dictate what is and is not an offensive name. I'm a little curious about that and might look for a little further discussion on that. [interjection] Now the President of the Treasury Board is asking me for some examples of melded names. Well, there's a great exercise that I've seen on the Internet, Mr. Minister, where you can actually put in your name and somebody else's name, and it'll come up with all sorts of examples, some of which, I'm sure, wouldn't be appropriate to mention in this body. Nevertheless, that is out there for those who wish to partake in it.

5:50

Now, as I said, the registrar has the ability to actually determine what is and is not an offensive name. Also, the registrar would be given the power to refuse to register names that he or she thinks might cause confusion, be a source of embarrassment, could defraud or mislead the public, or be objectionable on any other grounds. I'm going to suggest that the registrar should have had these powers when a fellow I know was given his name by his parents. His name is Robert Loblaw.* Of course, he's gone through his entire adult life being referred to as Bob Loblaw. I'm going to suspect that he wishes that the registrar had had these powers at that time. He might have been able to save an awful lot of embarrassment and heartache for Bob Loblaw.

In all seriousness, given the subjectivity involved in determining what might be an offensive or confusing name, the registrar would clearly have to be extremely well educated in terms of ethnic and cultural diversity. That is a question, I think, that we need to explore

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

a little bit. What might at first seem to be confusing or objectionable to the registrar might be perfectly normal and acceptable in other cultures. Really, it leads to a question of what sort of cultural training and qualifications the registrar would have if he or she is going to have the power to make these sorts of determinations. I think that's a valid question. Again, you know, the mover of the bill and the Minister of Service Alberta I think both have been very cognizant of the cultural sensitivities in the drafting of this bill, but it doesn't stop with the drafting of the bill, of course. We have to be awfully careful in the actual regulations and then even more so in the application of both the legislation and the regulation. That's something that's important to be mindful of. I think I'm going to leave it there for now.

There's one more thing I'd like to read into the record on the question of births, and that is the whole contemplation of a child being born on an aircraft. I think the mover of the bill mentioned, you know, that if the first landing of that aircraft is to be in Alberta, the parents should have the opportunity to register that child in Alberta. Fair enough. However, section 13(5)(c) allows "the person who has charge of the child" – actually, Mr. Chairman, I think I jumped ahead of myself here because I'm not actually contemplating birth on an aircraft anymore. What we're talking about here is deserted unidentified newborn children. So birth on an aircraft: we've dealt with that. The mover dealt with the concerns.

Here we are now talking about deserted unidentified newborns. Section 13(5)(c) currently allows the person who has charge of the child to select a first and last name for the child – that would be if this new legislation is passed – whereas the former Vital Statistics Act simply required the director to do so. Again, the question that arises out of this is: who is likely to be the person who has charge of the child, and how will that be determined? Is that, again, going to be in regulation? I'm supposing. Would it be a police force? Would it be Children's Services? How are we going to describe or narrow it down, focus in on who the person is that has charge of the child and has, then, according to the provisions of this new act, the ability to name the child? Perhaps it will also be the Minister of

Service Alberta that would have charge of the child. We could have all sorts of interesting names being given to these kids at that point.

There were questions raised about the amendment of the first name.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I regret that I have to interrupt, but we're getting close to the adjournment hour, so I will call upon the Deputy Government House Leader to move that the committee now rise and report.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that when the committee does rise and report, we report Bill 7 and we report progress on Bill 8.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 7. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 8.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move, given the hour, that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 5:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 7, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/07

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Let us pray. We give thanks for our abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Mr. Tong-Mo Suh, the consul general of the Republic of Korea. I also welcome Mr. Jeong-Sik Kang, the consul of the Republic of Korea. They are in your gallery today, Mr. Speaker.

I might add that Alberta's relationship with Korea is rich and multifaceted. We have 8,000 Albertans of Korean descent. We have two-way trade of over a billion dollars, making Korea Alberta's fifth-largest trading partner, and certainly a long-standing twinning.

I would like to just finally add, Mr. Speaker, that with Remembrance Day only four days away it is an appropriate time to reflect on another bond between Alberta and Korea. It was during the dark hours of the Korean War that the members of Alberta's Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry came to the assistance of Korea. What a proud moment for our nation in helping an important partner.

I'd ask all members of the Assembly to join me in asking the visitors to stand and be recognized as a welcome to the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I might just add as a supplement to the hon. minister that two former members of this Assembly served in the Korean conflict, Mr. John Gogo and Mr. Doug Cherry.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Mrs. Janice Sarich. Janice is the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Party in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore. She has extensive experience in both the private and public sectors, having served as a Catholic school trustee and also as the owner of her own business. Janice is a mother of two who has very strong ties to her community, obviously her city, and her province. I'm proud to have Janice as a member of my team as we move towards a better future for all Albertans. I would now ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two groups to introduce today. In the first group, a very special group, I'd like to introduce and present Raffaele and Rosetta Talarico along with their daughter Sandra Talarico and another daughter, Chiarina Rosin, who works

in my office. May I just say that Raffaele emigrated to Canada from Italy in 1952 at the age of 25. He travelled by boat from southern Italy to Halifax, then by train from Halifax to Wainwright, where he worked on the railway for four years and earned 90 cents an hour. Rosetta emigrated to Canada in 1957 at the age of 20 and joined Raffaele in Edmonton. She raised her family, working for GWG, the Hotel Macdonald, and finally for the University of Alberta hospital. They have been married 50 years and will celebrate that anniversary November 9, and Raffaele will also be celebrating his 80th birthday on November 17. Please join me in welcoming Sandra, Chiarina, Rosetta, and Raffaele. Would they please rise.

I have another introduction, Mr. Speaker. They are the dream team, some of Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry's finest, and they are Veronika Woek, Theresa Wilson, Terri Mason, Angela Woo, Joyce Ford, and Jan Bystrom. They're here today to have a look at the Legislature and be able to expand on our activities in their workplace. May they please rise, and please acknowledge them.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a number of people who were involved in a very special announcement at the Stollery children's hospital this morning. Thanks to a \$500,000 donation from Bell an echocardiography telehealth outreach program will be established at the Stollery using the most advanced technology from Bell Canada. The program will provide patients and health care professionals from communities throughout central and northern Alberta with access to Stollery's advanced diagnostic tools and medical expertise in cardiology. The solution will be delivered using the Alberta SuperNet, a partnership between the Alberta government and Bell Canada, which members know is a high-speed network made possible through that partnership.

With us today are Dallas Smith, chair of the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation board of directors; Dr. Terry Klassen, chair of the department of pediatrics at the Stollery children's hospital; Jean Trines, a senior echocardiography technician at the Stollery children's hospital and a recent new Albertan; Jack Janssen, associate director of government relations with Bell; Jeff Meerman, associate director of media relations with Bell; Judy Mahaffy, associate director of community investment with Bell; and Kelly Frank, the director of business development with Bell. I'd ask our guests to rise and be recognized for the contribution that Bell has made and the good work that Stollery does.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my privilege to introduce to you and through you today a very bright young man who's here on a work shadow with his father. Levi Dibben is a grade 9 student out in Lakeland Ridge in Sherwood Park. He's here today job shadowing his dad, my executive assistant, Dwight Dibben; however, he has promised not to share everything with his mom when he gets home. I would ask Levi to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am certainly honoured to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of young people who are taking part

in the national Take Our Kids to Work day today. We have Meaghan Mackenzie, Rachel Finnessy, Julianne Belzile, Lindsay Kitson, James Contos, Myles Grunling, Alicia Powers, Jacquelyn Harrison, Kiera Forrest, Jocelyn McDonald. They are accompanied today by Manfred Grunling, who works as a technical training manager in our division of tax and revenue administration within the Ministry of Finance. All of these grade 9 students are going to be working in the Ministry of Finance this afternoon, and I understand they're going to be doing such interesting things as consolidated financial statements and all of those. I would ask all the students to rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very dedicated, knowledgeable, and charismatic lady who hails from my constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul. She now resides in the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, in the constituency of the Premier, and she also happens to be one of my assistants in my office. Ladies and gentlemen of this Assembly, if I could ask you to give a warm welcome for Candice O'Neill.

1:10

Mr. Zwodesky: M. le Président, il me fait beaucoup de plaisir de vous présenter quelques élèves, des parents et enseignants de l'école Ste-Jeanne-d'Arc. C'est une école très magnifique dans ma circonscription d'Edmonton-Mill Creek. The students are all in grade 6. They're incredibly well behaved, and they speak impeccable French. Today they are accompanied by teachers, subteachers, and parents: Mylène Deschênes, Rachel Jean, Ron Liboiron, Amanda Chernyk, Michael Chernyk, Diane Noël, Fanta Camara, France Goudreau, la soeur de mon collègue l'hon. M. Goudreau. Also, Annie Renaud, Stephane Harvey, Nadia Chehayeb, Michelle DeAbreu, Mary-Lou Beaubien, and Murray Sinal. I would ask them to all please rise and receive the tremendously warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to this House a constituent of mine seated in the members' gallery. Her name is Kerstie Schreyer, and she is visiting today from Abee in my constituency. Kerstie is a grade 9 student at the Thorild central school and in her free time volunteers with the Abee Community Association and the Newbrook Recreational and Ag Society. She's also a violin player and a recipient of numerous Ukrainian dancing awards. I would ask her to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of Edmonton-Centre, Roy Skoreyko. Roy is a dedicated community volunteer and is very interested in the proceedings of the Assembly today and particularly wanted to see his own MLA at work. So I would ask you to please join me in welcoming to the Assembly Roy Skoreyko.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and Members of the Legislative Assembly some 51 energetic and keen students from Overlanders elementary school. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Ms Laura Wenger, Ms Christine Novesel, and Ms Cindy Chisholm. Also along are parents Mrs. Karen Timmann, Mrs. Kim Militsala, Mrs. Skye Griffiths, and Mr. Marcus Frey. They're in the public gallery. I would ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and privilege to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three constituents of Edmonton-Mill Woods: Rajiv, Sonia, and Nikhil Sinha. Rajiv is the vice-president of the Woodvale Community League, and he is a member of the Mill Woods President's Council. Their son, Nikhil, is 14 years of age, and Rajiv and his wife want him to have the experience of question period today. I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Alberta Utilities Commission Act

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Bill 46 was quietly introduced on the last day of the spring sitting of the Legislature. At the same time in Rimbey undercover spies hired by the EUB were eavesdropping on unsuspecting innocent Albertans. This bill appears to be written by an autocratic government determined to ignore both consumers and landowners in order to speed up the energy regulatory process. This bill will give the Alberta utilities commission the power to make orders and issue decisions without giving public notice or holding public hearings. It will give the Alberta utilities commission the power to prevent landowners and consumers from making verbal representations to the commission. It will limit the time period in which Albertans can appeal a decision or order made by the Alberta utilities commission to 30 days. Finally, it will restrict the ability of landowners to hire outside legal counsel when intervening in regulatory hearings.

This government does not want anyone to question their actions, and Bill 46 is a blatant attempt to silence Alberta consumers and landowners. Bill 46 illustrates yet another flawed decision by a floundering government. Bill 46 will allow regulations introduced behind closed doors by cabinet to quietly override legislation discussed and debated by all members of the Assembly.

Albertans should be very concerned about the direction of this Progressive Conservative government. They want even more power to override legislation without any public debate or knowledge. This government has spied on citizens, hidden royalty information from the public, and failed to collect billions of dollars in royalties. Now this tired government wants the power to override the Legislative Assembly. Enough is enough.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Torrington Community Wellness Centre

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to acknowledge the opening of the recently constructed community wellness centre in Torrington, Alberta. There are often challenges for rural

Albertans who live in remote locations to access a wide variety of health and educational services. Therefore, I'm pleased to acknowledge that our government is encouraging partnerships that will improve the availability of health and educational services in rural communities.

This innovative wellness centre will enable the residents of Torrington and surrounding area to meet their less critical but important health needs. The wellness centre will allow health professionals to provide their specialized services, which include reflexology, foot care, and massages. The centre will also provide educational opportunities by offering unique learning programs for children through its library and Internet services.

I'd like to commend the diligent work of all the volunteers, local businesspeople, representatives from the area's municipal governments, and the David Thompson health region. Together their collaborative efforts ensured that this health facility had the support it needed to become fully functional. I believe this is a great example of enhancing rural development within this province, and our government should continue to support community partnerships that will create opportunities for rural Albertans to improve their health and well-being.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Flu Immunization

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, flu season is upon us, and many people have and will experience its effects. As an example, last year in our province more than 30,000 individuals were diagnosed with influenza. Many people at high risk were hospitalized, and many others developed serious complications. This is, of course, a concern. Obviously, influenza has a major impact on Albertans and on Alberta's health care system. This year we urge Albertans to get a flu shot so we can reduce the number of infections and associated complications such as pneumonia.

It is critical that Albertans protect themselves and others by becoming immunized. We need to remember the importance of this simple precautionary measure and the positive impact it will have by reducing visits to hospitals and medicentres and lost time at work. Albertans at high risk for influenza such as seniors, persons with chronic conditions, children under two years, and pregnant and lactating women can get a free flu shot at their local public health clinic. Others can obtain the shot from their family physician.

I encourage all Albertans, like myself, to become immunized so that we can fight the flu.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Fetal and Pediatric Echocardiography Telehealth Outreach Program

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To all of us the Stollery children's hospital is a place where we receive hope. When our children are sick, when parents are suffering, that's where we go and receive hope. Well, today for a moment the tables were turned around, and the Stollery hospital was in the position of receiving hope from yet another corporate entity who has shown what epitomizes exemplary corporate citizenship, and that is Bell Canada. Bell Canada today has donated \$500,000, which actually today is \$550,000 U.S., to the Stollery children's hospital for them to implement the echocardiography telehealth outreach program. It's almost as hard to say as Lukaszuk; I appreciate that.

What it really means in real terms is that a child in remote Alberta will not have to come to Edmonton to have their heart scanned and to be diagnosed and monitored postsurgery but that that scanning

can happen in remote Alberta, and images could be analyzed via the SuperNet at the Stollery children's hospital by our experts. Now, that is quality provision of health in co-operation with the private sector and our ministry of health.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Bell Canada for their generosity. I would like to thank the Stollery children's hospital and the foundation for putting this program together and for providing our families and our children with hope.

Thank you.

1:20

West Lethbridge Centre

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, you have heard me say before that this has been a very good year for Lethbridge, and I'd like to reiterate that today. About two weeks ago the Minister of Education and myself were part of an announcement of funding for what is called the west side high school. There were, of course, other officials there as well as elementary students who hopefully will be finishing their high school in this facility. They took us out onto a windswept, barren field west of Lethbridge. I don't know if the wind that day was a hundred kilometres or not but just about. We're still bearing the scars of the grit that we were faced with – pun intended – during that particular event.

The significance, Mr. Speaker, I think is important for every member here in the House. What we have are two high schools going together. We have the Holy Spirit school division, and we have the Lethbridge public No. 51 school division, so we have in the same complex two school divisions putting their high schools together. In between – and this is the magic and the innovation of this project – we have a Lethbridge city public library. The contribution by the provincial government: something to the tune of \$40 million, \$45 million. The whole project, \$100 million, is in what will be known as the West Lethbridge Centre. Just a great project for our city and for this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Conflict in Darfur, Sudan

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada must lead in Darfur, Sudan. In July '07 the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1769, calling for 26,000 troops on the ground in Darfur by December 31, '07, to stop the genocide. The appeal then went out to all member countries, and based on the response so far, according to Senator Roméo Dallaire we still will be arguing logistics next year at this time.

The Sudanese government and Darfur rebel groups remain in conflict. Women, men, and children continue to be starved, violated, and killed, as have a number of the pitifully funded African Union troops. Humanitarian groups have left due to insecurity. Two and a half million displaced people endure a miserable existence. Darfur burns as member countries dither. One year ago UN humanitarian chief Jan Egeland said that if the camps explode in violence, as they're poised to do, hundreds of thousands of civilians, largely women and children, will die. The Sudanese government, supplied by China and Russia, continues to violate the fragile environmental and human rights in Darfur.

Canada has given roughly \$400 million over four years, mostly humanitarian aid and some military equipment. According to Roméo Dallaire it will cost about \$600 million to deploy the troops and equipment, 5 per cent of the current Canadian surplus. Today I'm calling on all citizens and representatives of conscience to add their voices to over 10,000 Sudanese in Alberta to ensure a Christ-

mas gift to Darfur: troops on the ground by December 31, 2007. Two years ago opposition leader Stephen Harper called on Prime Minister Martin to, quote, leave the bleachers and lead in Darfur. End quote. It's now time for the Harper government to honour its word to leave the bleachers and lead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed with 25 names provided to my office by the Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta supporting the minister of health's introduction of Bill 45 and hoping that all members of this Assembly will vote in favour of this particular bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 280 individuals who are urging the government to ensure that remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized, that they're fairly compensated and that wages are competitive, that employees have access to professional development opportunities, and for the government to introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level of care standards.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 53 residents of Lethbridge and area, and it is of course petitioning this Legislature to pass Bill 45 and to "not dilute its contents so as to compromise the version approved at second reading." I'd like to submit these.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by Albertans from Rimbey, from Bluffton, from Ponoka, and from St. Albert. This petition reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to launch a full public inquiry under the authority of the Public Inquiries Act into spying practices by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (AEUB) and the Minister of Energy's oversight role of the AEUB.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to present a petition signed by a number of residents of my constituency that urges the government to pass Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007, in its current form.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a couple of petitions that deal with similar issues, and they have been signed by over 500 of Alberta's oil and gas workers. The petition

calls on the Legislative Assembly to "discard the Royalty Review Report."

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in this Legislature today to make two tablings. One is part of the program for a fundraiser for the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. That was an inspirational evening with General Roméo Dallaire, and it was titled Sheltering the Innocent: Children, Violence and What We All Can Do to Help. That had hundreds of people there.

The second is another fundraiser for the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. It was Breakfast with the Guys. That was this morning in hall D of the Shaw Conference Centre, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and the leader of the third party, the Employment, Health, Municipal Affairs, and Children's Services ministers were all there as well as MLAs from Calgary-Shaw, Edmonton-Castle Downs, Edmonton-Calder, Edmonton-Glenora, and Edmonton-Whitemud. The Premier gave a very moving address with the mayor, and all of the men there rose and said: I pledge never to commit, condone, or remain silent about men's violence against women. It was very moving, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from a constituent, Kathleen Lowrey, who is another victim of this government's decisions about refusing to bring in a temporary rent cap. She notes that she was given an increase in April with notification for August of a \$50 increase, and the landlord later rescinded that and, because they could only do it once a year, made it into a \$200 rent increase. She is not very appreciative of that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is a letter that I received on July 26, 2007, from the Minister of Energy regarding CO₂ projects and the royalty credit program.

The second is a letter that I received from the hon. Premier of our province dated October 31, 2007, and this is regarding the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board and the conduct of the board over the last little while.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a chart from the Alberta Royalty Review Panel report, which I referred to yesterday in the House. The chart is entitled Oil Sands and Offshore/Heavy Oil Projects: Combined Ownership & Government Share. It compares Alberta's oil royalty shares to that of other countries and finds that even under the new regime proposed by the government, the only country which will charge lower royalties is Ireland.

The Speaker: We'll return to this part of the Routine at the conclusion of question period.

1:30 head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

head:

Royalty Revenues

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General, the Department of Energy, and the Royalty Review Panel all confirm that this government has not collected a fair share of royalties, but the Premier repeatedly denies this fact while refusing to share his proof with Albertans. Today the Premier is quoted in the media as saying that in his many years as a cabinet minister he was never told that Albertans were not receiving a fair share of royalties. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Since 2000 were any of the internal royalty review reports or presentations that are referenced by the Auditor General discussed with cabinet?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows very well that I have not been a member of the cabinet since 2000.

Just to touch a bit, if I might, Mr. Speaker, on the situation with respect to the accumulation of benefits to the province of Alberta and to Albertans. The member opposite indicated that something may or may not have happened in the year 2000. What I can tell you is that we had approximately \$15.5 billion worth of investment in the province in the year 2000.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Premier told the world in a media interview, and I quote: the previous royalty framework had no way of capturing higher prices. End quote. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier just now admit the obvious fact that Albertans were not receiving a fair share and that his government failed to act?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure if I shared the information with the whole world. I did do two CBC interviews early this morning, so I don't know if it is with the whole world but at least with the province of Alberta.

You know, it's a funny thing. When you look at all of the economic indicators in this province, the GDP growth, which has really doubled in this province, from well over a hundred billion to over \$200 billion . . . [interjections] See, again being rude; still hasn't learned in all the months that he's spent in the Assembly.

Then you look at the per capita spending of Albertans: much higher than anybody in Canada. You know why? Because all of that money ended up in the pockets of Albertans, who reinvested it back into the economy of the province of Alberta.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Premier continues to deny that Albertans have lost billions. He calls them phantom dollars. Well, to ordinary Albertans they're real dollars. What we have from this government is phantom accountability. To the Premier: will he end the secrecy and immediately release all the internal documents referred to by the Auditor General in his report uncensored? Just trust Albertans.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this question came up the other day. The opposition was asking for information with respect to royalty reviews, et cetera, done by the Ministry of Energy. In April the minister tabled at least 500 pages. My information is that there are at least a thousand pages that have been released by the Department of Energy to the opposition. Nine studies are available in Energy's library. I don't know exactly what pages he's referring to. There

may be a specific page with information that is production information from a company. That cannot be released; that can only be shared with the Department of Energy.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. It seems that this Premier believes in transparency right up to the point of accountability, and then he changes his mind. This is a matter of trust, and right now no one trusts this government when it continues to deny the evidence of both the Royalty Review Panel and the Auditor General, that Albertans have been shortchanged billions of dollars. To the Premier: is it the Premier's position that the Auditor General was wrong when he stated that this government could have been collecting at a minimum an additional \$1 billion to \$2 billion annually in royalties without hurting industries? Was the Auditor General wrong, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that question was asked by the media a number of weeks ago. My response to that was that the dollars that were referred to in terms of what could have been collected in royalties and what actually went to the economy in terms of increased Crown lease sales, personal income tax increases, corporate tax increases, and also the amount of money that was invested by the province, given the huge economic growth, into highways: I believe something like \$55 billion since 2000. The billions are there. It's invested everywhere, from corner to corner, in this province: good health facilities, new schools, and the best programs in the country of Canada right here in the province of Alberta.

Dr. Taft: It's just nonsense, Mr. Speaker. It's total nonsense.

Again I ask the Premier: is it the Premier's position that the Royalty Review Panel, which his own government appointed, was wrong when it indicated that his government was failing to collect a fair share of royalties on behalf of Albertans? Were they wrong too?

Mr. Stelmach: Now, finally, he gets to the Royalty Review Panel. Well, February 17, *Edmonton Journal*, the leader: "This royalty review process is tarnished from day one." Public statement, CHED radio, after the panel: oh, a very valuable report, and our position is based on the bottom line that the Royalty Review Panel set. You can't accuse the panel of doing something wrong as soon as it's appointed, and then all of a sudden ride this high horse: we're going to follow every recommendation. Besides, Mr. Speaker, as soon as I received that report, we made it public. Again, we made it public immediately, and every Albertan had an opportunity to review it. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the minions have finally woken up.

Is it the Premier's position that his own Department of Energy was wrong when it indicated that this government was failing to collect a fair share of royalties? I don't understand how everybody can be wrong but the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Maybe the hon. leader can help me understand because on February 17 in the *Calgary Herald* the hon. Leader of the Opposition said: the appetite for royalty change is not significant.

Then, of course, on CHED radio again on October 26: royalties must rise by 20 per cent; this is nonnegotiable. Where are you on this thing? Tell us.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. I assume, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier will table those documents he's quoting. Thank you.

The Premier indicated in this Assembly on Monday that he "can't see where this province . . . was shortchanged" on royalties, yet on a local radio station this morning he indicated that the previous royalty framework had no way of capturing higher prices. To the Premier: since this government refuses to release the uncensored documents itemized by the Auditor General, can the Premier explain to Albertans why? Why the secrecy? What is he afraid of?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, my reference this morning was – let's just take natural gas. There was a cap on the price of natural gas, I believe, at around \$3.50. Gas was much higher than that, but we couldn't really receive the optimum as much as now under a sliding scale, which puts gas at \$16.65, I believe. Once again, as part of the Alberta entrepreneurial spirit let's share in the reward as prices go up but also be realistic. If the prices do drop, we will see less revenue from the royalty framework. This royalty framework was put in place to provide certainty and predictability for the companies that are making investments of billions of dollars.

1:40

Dr. Taft: Well, again to the Premier. We all agree that the oil and gas belong to all the people of Alberta. My question is to the Premier. Why doesn't he trust the people of Alberta with the information he is concealing?

Mr. Stelmach: You know, Mr. Speaker, in September the panel reported. We immediately made that report public. In September the Auditor General reported. He reported to the public. Everybody has all of the information. If there's something beyond the thousand pages and the nine studies that are in the library and have been in the library all this time, if you don't have the time to go and research it in the library – certainly, the Liberals received extra money this year in the budget for extra help for research. You've got to find somebody to dig this up for you if you don't have the time yourself. It's there. All those studies and the thousand pages: it should be there.

Dr. Taft: In the past few days, Mr. Speaker, we've heard cabinet ministers refer to public servants with names such as minions and janitors and things like that. The Premier himself said he doesn't listen to their advice. Can the Premier explain these comments to the public, and will he at least offer an apology to the hard-working public servants of Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this Premier does not have to apologize to the public servants of this province because I always acknowledge their tremendous contribution. [interjections] I would hope that they would listen because if they keep talking, they won't get the answer.

What I said was, simply, that it is the elected people in this province that make the decisions. Certainly, we get advice from senior officials. We get advice from many other areas. At the end of the day the responsibility rests with this government, period.

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier sold out Albertans with his royalty plan, giving away billions of dollars to big oil that belongs in the public treasury. Oil prices hit \$98 a barrel yesterday, and forecasts predict prices well above \$100 a barrel. Everyone sees this but the Premier, who has decided to continue the goofy pennies-on-the-dollar royalty holiday for new tar sands projects. He's leaving billions of dollars in the pockets of big oil, billions that belong to Albertans. On existing tar sands projects alone the Premier's new royalty holiday will give big oil a \$1.8 billion subsidy next year. That's \$5 million a day given away to big oil. Why won't the Premier for once act in the interests of ordinary Albertans instead of big oil and end this program?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the new royalty framework reflects higher prices. As prices go up, our royalty take will be much higher. If those prices drop, of course, we'll see a difference, a lowering of the royalty stream to the province. The leader of the third party says that oil is at \$90, or it could even be \$100 a barrel. Bitumen is not priced the same way as west Texas crude. There's a substantial discount because bitumen comes out almost like grease. We have to add value to it, obviously. That's part, again, of the overall royalty framework. It's to see how much more value we can add to the bitumen before it leaves this province.

Mr. Mason: Oh, nice way to change the subject there, Mr. Speaker.

You know what? Albertans know that the Premier is giving industry a bargain basement royalty program. He's subsidizing some of the most profitable corporations in the world, and it's ordinary Albertans that are paying for it. We've crunched the numbers, and I'm sure the Tories have, too. They know better than anyone else that we could end the royalty giveaway tomorrow, and the oil companies would still turn a healthy profit, but they won't do it. Mr. Premier, you're selling out Albertans with a \$5 million-a-day giveaway to big oil. How can you justify it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the new royalty framework will set a much higher cap on oil, which will allow us to receive more. We did that, as well, with natural gas. We also did a fair amount of work on conventional oil by removing the three vintages, really dates when some of the wells were drilled. That makes for a much simpler way of dealing with the various vintages of oil, easier both for industry and for us. Most importantly, this provides a certainty and, of course, the predictability for business: new investment to come to this province. There's a considerable number of fields that can further be developed, and this will provide jobs well, well into the future.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, we've gone from a-penny-on-the-dollar royalties for new oil sands projects – you see, I said oil sands – and now the Premier is raising it to a nickel on the dollar. That's not a fair share. That's barely there. Alberta is on track to becoming one of the biggest oil producers in the world, but what good is that status if the proceeds go to subsidized multinational oil corporations? We've got a Premier that's bending over backwards to convince Albertans that black is white and that a \$1.8 billion subsidy for big oil is a fair share for Albertans. To the Premier. The Auditor General says that your government gave away \$1 billion to \$2 billion a year over seven years. How many more billions will you flush down the toilet with this royalty holiday?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the dollars that have been collected in

royalties over the years have been invested very wisely in programs, in infrastructure in the province of Alberta.

The hon. member refers to prepayment. The formula has been changed in a prepayment. It's also been changed significantly in the postpayment. That is going to bring a considerable amount of new revenue to the province. Of course, yes, the framework takes effect January 1, 2009. I believe, just going by my memory, that one of the major companies last year paid \$1.7 billion – just one company – in royalties to the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Crime Reduction and Safe Communities

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Safe communities are a very important part of ensuring the quality of life we currently enjoy. The Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force's final report and the government's response to the recommendations were released yesterday, November 6, providing one of the most comprehensive reports our Premier has requested through the task force, which included a number of government departments, including Justice, Sol Gen, Health, Education, and Children's Services. My first question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Now that we have the final report and know that Albertans want action on crime and its causes, what are the next steps the government will be taking to address crime?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member indicated in his question, this particular initiative was the Premier's priority. He asked that I co-ordinate the task force, and the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek very ably chaired that committee and produced the report to government late in September. The report makes a number of recommendations, 31 in total. We have accepted those, with the exception of two that will be further studied. They deal with recommendations regarding enforcement, treatment, and prevention, and we will be moving on those in the days ahead.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. We know crime prevention is an important component of any crime reduction strategy, and the treatment is a significant part of the recommendations in this report. Can the minister explain why these are critical areas surrounding treatment?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the report indicates very clearly is that in order to tackle the issue of crime and safe communities, it's necessary to have a holistic approach. It's necessary to have something more than enforcement. It's necessary to deal with the issue of treatment. We practically have some examples of that in the system today. We have the domestic violence courts, which have reduced recidivism from the 30 per cent range down to 6 per cent. We have a drug court pilot here in Edmonton, which has done very good work with low-grade criminal addicts. The fact is that this report has said that we need to do more of that, and we have committed to doing that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. It's clear that sustaining safe communities is best

served by a collaborative approach to fighting crime. How will the Minister of Justice ensure that this gets done?

1:50

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, the number one recommendation in the report was that there needed to be oversight with respect to this initiative. Crime and reduction of crime is a complex matter. It involves some 13 ministries in this government. There are five lead ministries – Health, Children's Services, Justice, Education, and Solicitor General – and it's necessary that there be leadership and co-ordination.

Additionally, it is necessary that all aspects of society are involved: municipalities, the federal government, individuals, and communities. The recommendation was that there be this safe communities secretariat established. It will provide the leadership and co-ordination on a go-forward basis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Royalty Framework Advertising

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Please Don't Call This a Compromise and his ministers have accused us of making up phantom billions of dollars. Well, I charge them with giving Albertans phantom accountability, as our leader said just a minute ago, and allowing their own political agendas to dictate the economics of this province, political agendas that used 350,000 real taxpayer dollars to fund the full-page partisan newspaper ads. Can the President of the Treasury Board, the man who is in charge of how much and how money gets spent, show us real, not phantom, accountability and try to justify this illegitimate use of taxpayers' dollars?

Mr. Snelgrove: You know, wasted dollars, wasted time. It fits in.

Mr. Speaker, what happens to these dollars? They were reinvested in Alberta. They were multiplied across Canada, and they've resulted in a Conservative federal government that's allowed to give approximately \$60 billion in tax cuts because they worked with the province responsibly managing their money, as opposed to how the last Liberal government from Ottawa looked at our energy sector and bled it dry and collapsed an entire country. That's what you get.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I'm going to read the question again, and I'm going to hope that perhaps – perhaps – the President of the Treasury Board might actually listen to the question and give me an answer that's relevant to the question. I was asking whether or not he can justify 350,000 taxpayers' dollars, real taxpayers' dollars, being used to pay for an advertising campaign that is clearly partisan, uses party colours, and is totally offside. Can you justify that? I don't know. You know, this is your last chance. I hope you can do it this time.

Mr. Snelgrove: There is a certain obligation in the House to try and tell the truth or ask reasonable questions, and I can appreciate that may be stretched.

What our Premier did is make a commitment to show his plan to Albertans. This government has a plan. This party has a leader who is decisive. This Premier of our party, of this government, doesn't have to go out and look at the weather vane to find out which way he's going today. This Premier made a commitment to Albertans. He delivered on it, and he's showing that in his plan.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of making things up, the Premier's desperation is clear when he distorts quotes by the Alberta Leader of the Official Opposition. The complete quote was this, and I wish he would have used the entire quote: we have a tone being set by the Premier – by the Premier – that suggests to me that the appetite for royalty change is not significant. In other words, it's pretty clear that the suggestion was that the Premier's appetite for royalty increases is not significant. For the Premier to use only half of the quote is totally, once again, offside. My question is for the Minister of Energy. Is the government so worried about public reaction to the missing billions that they have to distort quotes from the Leader of the Official Opposition?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, you know, most of the questions have been about the royalties: "The royalty structure didn't work. The royalty structure was allowing dollars to escape." This Premier in one of his first moves came in and said: "You were right. That royalty structure was then. It worked well. Now we need a new royalty framework to address the opportunity to capture the billions of dollars involved in the future of Alberta." That Premier identified a panel to give another independent look, used all of the input from Albertans, from the Department of Energy, and has put in an energy royalty framework that will last Albertans and serve them very well for decades to come. He's so far ahead of these guys; they're still biting their own tail.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Strength of Canadian Dollar

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning Canadians woke up to the news that the Canadian dollar had once again hit a record level. This time it's over \$1.10 U.S. My first question is to the Minister of Finance. With the dollar seeming to hit record levels quickly, can the minister tell the Assembly the reason for these jumps?

The Speaker: Okay. Go ahead.

Dr. Oberg: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there have been a lot of strange things happen in the dollar market in the past six months. In the last couple of days, though, we've seen a tremendous increase in the Canadian dollar relative to the U.S. dollar. There probably are a lot of reasons for that, although emotion and the ability to sell and buy play a lot in it. What we saw yesterday was the Chinese economy threatening to take \$1.4 trillion out of the U.S. economy by changing their purchasing powers from the U.S. dollar potentially to the Euro. This is probably China flexing . . .

The Speaker: Well, we'll go on to the member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's primary market is the U.S. Much of the province's revenue is based on the resources sold in U.S. dollars. To the same minister: have you made any revision on the provincial budget to take into account the new strength of our Canadian dollar?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, for every one cent that the Canadian dollar goes up, we lose roughly \$123 million in revenue from the province of Alberta. We've seen the Canadian dollar go from a high of 84 cents in February to \$1.10 yesterday. We certainly are seeing the

financial impact. Our Budget 2007 showed the U.S. dollar at 86 cents. We subsequently increased that to 93 cents in the first quarter. The Canadian dollar has averaged 95 cents to this point, so I would fully anticipate that in the second quarter we will be making some revisions. There is a huge amount of implications to our economy, but there is a huge amount of implications to the Canadian economy in general, especially the manufacturing sector.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are there any other economic indicators of this kind impacting on our budget?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, budgeting right now in the province of Alberta is a very difficult thing. We see the price of oil going to unforeseen heights. It's up at \$98. No one – no one – would have anticipated \$98 oil. Equally, no one would have anticipated a \$1.10 Canadian versus the U.S. dollar. We are currently looking at all of these. We are balancing out, on one hand, that a 1 cent increase, as I mentioned, goes up to a \$123 million loss, a dollar increase in the price of oil allows us to have \$130 million more revenue into our coffers. Our second quarter will be a culmination of all of these events. It will be our best estimate as to what is going to happen in the next six months. It is an extremely volatile market today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Alberta Utilities Commission Act

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 46 will restrict Albertans' democratic rights. Bill 46 is a blatant attempt by this Progressive Conservative government to silence Alberta consumers and landowners. My first question is to the Minister of Energy, who is also a rural landowner. Does Bill 46 adequately protect the property rights of farmers and other rural property owners?

The Speaker: Well, legal interpretation is one thing. This bill will come up for debate. That's clearly a question of opinion, but if the minister wants to pursue.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we put to this Legislature and what we will put to the people of the province of Alberta, particularly landowners who are affected by any developments on their land or even in certain circumstances adjacent to their land, in this case is an opportunity to have a very much strengthened protection of their rights as landowners. What we're talking about in Bill 46, of course, is a utilities commission. It has nothing to do with many of the other issues that seem to be dragged into the thing with respect to energy . . .

2:00

The Speaker: We'll get to the hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given what happened with the spying scandal in Rimbey in June, why is this Progressive Conservative government planning even more restrictions on Albertans who want to participate in future energy regulatory hearings?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, there's nothing further from what is correct with respect to Bill 46. It actually, in fact, expands the opportunities of Albertans to be represented in any intervention in

the utilities. With the addition of an Alberta consumers' advocate in Bill 46 and their mandate to represent Alberta consumers, this strengthens the opportunities for Albertans to be represented.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. The fact is that rural Albertans disagree with this Minister of Energy, and they disagree with this government on this bill.

My third question is to the same minister again. If he listens carefully, hopefully he will understand. Part 10 of Bill 46 and on in here is a provision that will allow this government through cabinet to override this bill through regulation. Why are you allowing that to happen?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you and all Albertans that Bill 46, in fact, much strengthens their opportunity to be heard with respect to any issues around utility development in the province of Alberta. Perhaps the Liberals don't like that. I can't account for that. Nevertheless, the Utilities Consumer Advocate in this bill, the Market Surveillance Administrator, and other portions of this particular bill much strengthen Albertans' opportunities to be protected with respect to their use and the installation of utilities infrastructure.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

School Construction and Renovation

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last June I was among many who witnessed the Minister of Education as he announced, and I quote, an innovative approach to building schools in the neighbourhoods where students live and learn. I go on to quote: the P3 delivery method is to provide Calgary and Edmonton area schools with 18 new schools by the fall of 2010. Obviously, parents want these schools as soon as possible. So my question to the Minister of Education is simply this: what progress has been made about getting these schools actually built since this announcement five months ago?

Mr. Liepert: Actually, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that there has been a great deal of progress made since June. One of the ingredients of the announcement was that the schools, when completed, would be owned by the school boards in Calgary and Edmonton. What we've done over the summer is ensure, working with the school boards, that we have all of the agreements in place. I'm pleased to say that another milestone was reached this week when the project team issued its request for qualifications. That'll take place during the month of November, and during that time we will have an indication of which companies have the qualifications to meet the construction requirements.

Mr. Rodney: My first supplemental is to the same minister. This P3 approach, this pilot project to new school construction, has had its share of critics, sometimes more heated than others. What my constituents want to know is: what has the government done to ensure that this method of delivery is indeed in the very best interest of Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the other tasks that was undertaken this summer was to do an external review of the traditional model of building schools versus the design, build, finance, and maintain model. That independent audit has determined that not only will this model be more cost efficient, but

frankly it'll get schools delivered to students where students live and learn much faster than they would be under the traditional model.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education. While this may be well and good for areas where new schools are to be built, there are many school jurisdictions throughout Alberta with school infrastructure needs not only in the area of new school construction but also major repairs. How does the Minister of Education plan to address those needs?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the P3 model doesn't work everywhere, so we are taking the more traditional approach to capital needs through our capital planning process. The Premier has made it clear that we'll be introducing a capital plan in the near future. However, I think it's important to note that in this current fiscal year we have some \$600 million in projects that are under way both in new schools and modernization. In addition to that, from the fourth quarter budget surplus we announced a couple of months ago that we would be investing almost \$200 million into modernization, including Western Canada high in Calgary and Archbishop MacDonald high school here in Edmonton and some 17 projects throughout the province. So the total infrastructure dollars in education this year is some \$800 million.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Water Management

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have let it be known very clearly that the management of Alberta's water resources is the highest priority. We are facing decreasing supply and increasing demands, especially in southern Alberta, on rivers now closed to new licences. The government's handling of the Balzac situation in the past year shows without a doubt that our water allocation system is not working. It raises a question: should water be sold to the highest bidder? The Eastern irrigation district has applied to Alberta Environment to give them the right to sell water to other users. Conflicts over water are staring us in the face, Mr. Minister. To the minister: does the minister support allowing irrigation districts to sell water on existing . . .

The Speaker: I think we have to move on.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the member has not been watching the news of late because the specific instance that he references the department dealt with last week, when we announced that we were going to defer any further consideration on that particular proposal. I'll be happy to enunciate the details in subsequent questions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Environment has not yet decided on the Eastern irrigation district licence change, as the minister has just said. That's good news. Albertans have said that they want to be actively involved in how the most valuable resource is managed. Will you, Mr. Minister, be making the decision behind closed doors, or will you ensure that the public is involved in this important decision?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the reality that we face in the South Saskatchewan River basin and, frankly, throughout the province of Alberta is that we have a finite resource in water. That reality means that we are going to as a society have to have a better understanding about what our ongoing policy for water management is going to be. Specifically to answer the member's question, there will be a broad base of discussion in the development of policy, but at the end of the day, like most decisions, there will have to be decisions made, and the government will make those decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With 70 per cent of southern rivers allocated to the irrigation districts under the first in time, first in right principle, it's clear that the Water Act is not able to deal with the many new demands. Mr. Minister, will you show the leadership needed and open the Water Act to ensure that environmental and human priorities are secure in southern Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member needs to again check the reality book because irrigation districts have been doing phenomenal work in becoming more efficient with the water that they use, much more efficient in ensuring that the value-added for that water serves not only the needs of the agricultural community but those of the surrounding communities. A very good example of that is the modernization that Western irrigation district is taking that frees up water. It's a win-win situation, creates additional opportunity for irrigation as well as supplying water for other uses. That was facilitated through the transfer of a water licence.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

2:10

Police Officer Supply

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we had another announcement about something that's going to be happening in the future, and I'm talking specifically about the crime strategy. With the overheated economy and more and more people rolling into the province, we have a desperate need for more police officers. Alberta ranks eighth in the country in police officers per capita, well below the national average. To get to the national average, we'd need 800 new police officers, with an estimated cost of \$80 million a year. With a growing population that's probably an underestimation. My question is to the Deputy Premier, and the question is simply this: why didn't the government announce separately a specific item dealing with hiring much-needed new police officers in the province?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, the report had some 31 recommendations. One of them dealt with, specifically, the issue of additional police officers. I can tell you that over the last three years the Solicitor General with the support of this government has put some 300 additional police officers into the streets together with additional sheriffs' personnel. This particular report calls for more police officers. It also calls for more strategic use of police officers so that they will be using the resources they have more effectively. Specifically, it calls for the targeted use of police officers in areas where they can weed and seed.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's all well and dandy, and there are some good aspects to the report, but the thing is that we have this

problem right now. The police are overworked. Everybody knows that. In the city of Calgary the police chief says he needs a hundred new policemen right now. This is stuff that's needed right now. There's no announcement in here, at least that I'm aware of, about how many police are going to be hired as a result of this. My question to the minister is simply this: can the minister tell us here in the Assembly how many new police will be hired in the coming year?

Mr. Stevens: The chief of police of Calgary was at the table, Mr. Speaker, when this announcement was made. What he said was: this is awesome; I welcome this report; I welcome this government's support of this report; I welcome the additional resources that we will be getting on the line in Calgary as a result of this report.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, frankly, it's all talk at this point, just like a lot of the other announcements we've had from this government. There's always something coming down the way.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I come back to the minister. Tell us again how many new police officers will be hired in the next year? We have a right to know that.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier was asked what the level of the commitment of this government was with respect to this initiative. We obviously have this as one of the principal initiatives of this government because our Premier said that it would be and because it should be, because the people of Alberta consider safe communities a priority. What he said is that this government is committed, and we are committed in terms of some \$470 million over the next three years. That's \$470 million over the next three years, and much of that will be going to enforcement.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Climate change continues to dominate as the top environmental concern for Albertans. A recent federal report on greenhouse gas emissions places Alberta as the number one provincial emitter of greenhouse gases in Canada. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What action is this government taking to reduce the province's emissions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the hon. member is absolutely correct that Alberta does lead the nation in greenhouse gas emissions. Alberta also leads the nation in the supply of energy not only for Alberta but for much of North America. This government takes its responsibility to deal with those CO₂ emissions very seriously. That's why we are the first jurisdiction in North America to introduce legislation to deal with CO₂ emissions. We are committed to continue to lead by example by establishing and committing to very real and achievable reductions in CO₂ over a realistic time frame.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. With industrial development expected to stay strong well into the future, what plans does Alberta have to place a limit on increasing emissions?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member is aware, we've been in a process over the past number of months of consulting with Albertans on an updated version of our existing climate change strategy. What we heard from Albertans is very clear, that there is a will that this government continue to lead by example, continue to bring forward the necessary means to have reductions in CO₂. That means that we need to concentrate on the technology that will allow us to begin that process in earnest, and we plan to announce the next, updated version of our climate change strategy before the end of 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. To the same minister: if Alberta is, as the minister claims, a global leader in taking action on climate change, why is Alberta keeping its carbon credit trading system exclusive to the province?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was asked that exact same question at an event I was at this morning at breakfast, talking to an international group who are in Edmonton this week, leading experts on carbon capture and management, and the answer I gave to them was very simple: there is a need for us to invest in technology so that we can implement that technology in Alberta. It does us absolutely no good for funds to flow out of Alberta and allow our industry here to continue to do what they're doing and let others benefit from it. Our commitment is to find within Alberta real reductions, verifiable reductions in CO₂. We'll recognize those as offsets, but we want the reductions in Alberta. We want the investment in Alberta. We want those dollars to stay in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Deferred Infrastructure Maintenance

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General added up the provincial deferred maintenance deficit because, as he put it on page 52 of his report, "government information on deferred maintenance is incomplete." The amount he calculated was \$6.1 billion, but yesterday in this House the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation claimed that the total amount was "close to that \$4 billion to \$5 billion range." Perhaps the President of the Treasury Board can clear up this murky picture. To the president: was the minister (a) saying that the Auditor General is wrong or (b) painting a rosier picture than actually exists?

Mr. Snelgrove: Or (c) none of the above. Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General in our several meetings with him has identified, as we have as a government, that there needs to be a way to identify ongoing maintenance to ensure that you don't get behind, to understand that when you build facilities now, you are going to incur maintenance down the road. When you're getting into a system like that in the middle of the hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars of investment that we have in infrastructure around Alberta, it becomes very problematic to pick a number on a snapshot in time as to what level of maintenance you're going to require to keep to that level.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It makes you wonder who's minding the store.

Responding to a different question I asked yesterday, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation stated that the government funds school boards for maintenance, "and there are times when they don't always put the dollars where they're supposed to." To the Minister

of Education: is it also this minister's position that the deferred maintenance backlog for this province's schools is a result of school boards not spending their money correctly, or does he accept that his colleague was wrong and that the budgets for school boards have not contained even remotely enough money to allow adequate maintenance spending?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that school boards have to deal with is the fact that some 25, 30 years ago we as a government put a lot of money into infrastructure, and like one's own home, it is now coming back that it needs repairs. We recognize that there are significant challenges relative to infrastructure and maintenance and modernization, and it was one of the factors behind us committing a good chunk of our fourth-quarter surplus towards the \$197 million modernization announcement we made a couple of months ago. As I said earlier in question period, that's going to allow projects like Western Canada high and Archbishop MacDonald and some 17 other projects around the province to get modernized and repaired, and I think that's the route we have to take.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier likes to bask in the credit for all the economic successes in this province; however, when it comes to the huge deferred maintenance backlog, his ministers trot out a string of excuses, blaming school boards, blaming an overheated economy. This is yet another example of a government that promises accountability but fails to deliver. To the President of the Treasury Board: why is this government avoiding its responsibility for the \$6 billion deferred maintenance fiasco?

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank goodness for the end of the nonsensical approach to questions we've seen.

Mr. Speaker, our Premier early in his mandate said that we need to work hard to address all of the liabilities we have around maintenance. He said that of unallocated surpluses one-third will go to savings; two-thirds will go to maintenance and replacement capital. That's a very responsible approach to it, to supplement the hundreds of millions of dollars we currently spend on maintenance on our government facilities, roads, and infrastructure and to supplement that with two-thirds of all unallocated surplus, a very responsible use of taxpayers' money. It's a plan that works.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 78 questions and responses today.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Cited Documents

The Speaker: During question period, Leader of the Official Opposition, when there was an exchange between yourself and the Premier, I seemed to have heard a request from you to have something tabled. Was that a serious request or not?

Dr. Taft: Yes, it was a serious request. Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. Government House Leader, is there such a document to table?

Mr. Hancock: The Premier was just alluding to newspaper quotes and media, all of which is in the public domain. It's been your ruling in the past that newspapers shouldn't be tabled.

The Speaker: No, there was no such ruling in the past. What the Speaker said is that it's most inconvenient to quote from a newspa-

per as an authoritative source. Quite a difference. So if there is a document, if it's a newspaper article, it's from the public domain anyway, a public document, table it. If we can move on with this. But if you don't have it today, I'm sure by tomorrow this could be arrived at.

On the Routine we left off today with tablings, and I was going to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for tablings.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**
(continued)

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is from the Canadian Federation of University Women, Alberta Council, and this is in regard to the draft guidelines for nutrition of children and youth in child care, schools, and recreation facilities. They're expressing a major concern regarding the "relegation of the well-developed recommendations in this report to the category of 'guidelines.'"

I have a letter that I'm tabling that went to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry and myself from a constituent stating that

now is the time that the oil companies and this government wake up to the understanding that the oil and gas in the ground under our feet do not belong to them . . . they belong to the people of this province. Now is the time that the government needs to do what is in the best interest of the citizens who elected them.

Another tabling from a constituent in Edmonton-Mill Woods.

I am writing concerning the problem of homelessness in our city and Province . . . I have heard of the One Per cent Solution and ask the government to call for federal and provincial governments to commit one percent more of their budgets to housing programs.

That's from Tracy Dunham.

Finally, I have a letter from Terri Calder in Calgary expressing concerns about the proposed child care licensing regulations that are scheduled to be implemented in the spring of 2008.

The Speaker: Before we move on, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of people who have joined us in the public gallery today, who are here for Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 45. This is a special group. Principal Gail Brierley and librarian Linda Krauss are joined by seven students, I think it is, from the Nellie McClung school for girls, which is located in Oliver school in my constituency. These young women are members of the BLAST team, which is building leadership for action in schools today. They have waged a very successful campaign to advocate for the banning of power walls, so they have a vested interest in the outcome and passage of Bill 45. I'm just delighted they were able to join us today. I would ask the principal and librarian Krauss and the students to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Privilege
Misleading the House

The Speaker: Hon. members, earlier this week there was an exchange in the House with two hon. members with respect to a

purported question of privilege, and I'm prepared to deal with that now. The chair and the table officers have considered the arguments advanced by the Official Opposition House leader on Monday and Tuesday afternoon in support of her purported question of privilege alleging that the Minister of Energy deliberately misled the Assembly in statements he made to the Assembly on April 30, 2007, concerning royalties. We've also considered the arguments made by the Minister of Energy in response to the purported question of privilege.

With respect to the preliminaries, there was proper notice given by the Official Opposition House Leader under Standing Order 15(2). The Speaker's office received a notice on Friday, November 2, 2007, at 10:40 a.m., so the two-hour requirement has been met.

Another important component in the question of privilege is whether the matter was raised at the earliest opportunity. When she was arguing this point on Monday, November 5, found on page 1791 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, the hon. member provided references supporting her view that the question had been raised at the earliest opportunity and that while the Official Opposition believed the minister's statements to be misleading at the time, they required the alleged confirmation found in the Auditor General's annual report released Tuesday, October 2. The member referred to numerous purported questions of privilege from Manitoba concerning the issue of earliest possible opportunity. The chair researched this point and discovered that all the purported questions of privilege from Manitoba shared one other thing in common: they were all found not to be prima facie questions of privilege. To continue the substance of the issue, the chair finds that the matter was raised at the earliest opportunity.

From the member's statements the essence of the purported question of privilege is what the minister said in this Assembly on April 30, 2007; namely, that "there is nothing in any of those documents that would indicate to anybody that we have not collected a fair share of royalties for Albertans." According to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre the issue is whether this statement was deliberately misleading so as to constitute a contempt of the Assembly. As the chair has indicated when allegations of deliberately misleading the Assembly have arisen before, these are very serious allegations. The chair commented extensively on the origins and backgrounds of such charges in rulings found in *Alberta Hansard* for November 24, 2003, at pages 1803, 1804, and February 19, 2003, at pages 18 to 19, to mention only the most recent cases.

These purported questions of privilege allow members to allege that someone is deliberately misleading the Assembly, which is something they could not say in the ordinary course of debate under our rules of debate. The nature of this offence in the Parliament of the United Kingdom is set out in *Erskine May*, 23rd edition, at page 132.

The Commons may treat the making of a deliberately misleading statement as a contempt. In 1963 the House resolved that in making a personal statement which contained words which he later admitted not to be true, a former Member had been guilty of a grave contempt.

The reference is to the notorious Profumo affair, which members of a certain age will recall.

As the chair has noted before, there is really a two-part test to be met in these types of contempt applications. The Canadian House of Commons committee studying the allegation that a former Minister of National Defence had deliberately misled the House with respect to troops in Afghanistan in 2002 used the same test. The chair should note that in that case, the Eggleton affair, even though the Speaker of the House of Commons found there to be a prima facie question of privilege, the committee found that the minister had not deliberately misled the House.

The test adopted by the House committee and in previous rulings by this chair is articulated by David McGee in his book *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, second edition, where the Clerk of the New Zealand House of Representatives states at page 491:

There are two ingredients to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt on this ground: the statement must, in fact, have been misleading; and it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement was made that it was incorrect and that, in making it, the member intended to mislead the House.

2:30

In this case the Opposition House Leader alleges that the statement by the Minister of Energy that “there is nothing in any of those documents that would indicate to anybody that we have not collected a fair share of royalties for Albertans” is misleading and that the minister intended to mislead the House. The chair cannot agree with either point. The minister was referring to documents that he tabled in the Assembly on April 16, 2007, Sessional Paper 250/2007. The minister indicated yesterday in the Assembly that some of the missing pages from the reports tabled can be found in his department’s library. Accordingly, they can be reviewed and evaluated.

The minister’s statement was clearly subjective when he referred to “a fair share of royalties.” The Assembly held a special debate on this issue of royalties on Monday, and the chair thinks that any fair observer would be hard-pressed to say there was any agreement on what constitutes “a fair share” of royalties. Accordingly, if the chair does not objectively view the minister’s statement as necessarily misleading, there is no reason to examine whether it was deliberately misleading.

It was interesting to the chair that the member raising this purported question of privilege referred to the Auditor General’s report as the basis for the allegation that the minister deliberately misled the Assembly. While the Auditor General as an officer of the Legislature performs important work for members, his views on policy do not supplant the views of those who have been chosen by the people of Alberta to represent them.

Accordingly, the chair does not find there to be a *prima facie* case of a question of privilege, and that concludes the matter.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I’d like to call the committee to order.

**Bill 45
Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction)
Amendment Act, 2007**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m absolutely delighted to rise this afternoon to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 45. First, I would like to welcome, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre did, the students, part of the BLAST team from Nellie McClung and say thank you for the student advocacy you’ve put in. I think that’s a tremendous effort, and it does make a difference. Thank you for joining us today.

Bill 45 I think is a major step forward in terms of health for

Albertans, so I hope that the Assembly will consider it very favourably this afternoon. I’d like to thank members in the Assembly for the support that they gave to this bill at second reading. There were a few issues raised at second reading which I do want to quickly address, but I do want to also say that since the bill has had the opportunity to sit over the summer and I’ve had the opportunity to consult with Albertans and hear from Albertans on it, I have to report to the House that the response has been overwhelmingly positive from all parts of the province and from all sectors.

There have been concerns raised, and I did engage in consultation with people who will be directly affected – retailers, for example – and have had a good opportunity to discuss the impact on the retail sector, but the enthusiasm that Albertans have for what we’re doing I think is very, very clear. In dealing specifically with questions that were raised, the Member for Edmonton-Centre asked that places from which tobacco products may not be sold be extended to include child care centres and schools as well as amusement and recreation facilities. I certainly am in sympathy with those views, but while developing the legislation, I can say that we took a strong look at what was already in place.

The federal government has a number of restrictions relating to the sale of tobacco, one of which is a prohibition on selling tobacco products to young persons in a public place or a place to which the public reasonably has access. Additionally, the Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act prohibits youth under the age of 18 from possessing or smoking tobacco in a public place.

When we crafted the bill, we looked at the number of things that we could include in it and made a conscious decision to go this far. There are lots of different things that could be added, and I hope, actually, over the years that this act will continue to be the leading act in the country with respect to the promotion of health through the cessation of tobacco use.

The other question that was raised was a question about vending machines. It should be clear to members of the House that the federal government has placed restrictions on vending machine locations. Vending machines are only allowed in bars, taverns, and beverage rooms or places to which the public does not reasonably have access, so it’s not necessary to include that again in this legislation.

The Member for Lethbridge-East commented on the investment in the tobacco industry by the government of Alberta. The only response I would have in this discussion, of course, is that that’s beyond the scope of this bill. That’s the subject for a different discussion.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner asked for additional prohibitions for smoking around children. Again, I’m quite in agreement with the sentiments expressed. In my personal world it would be against the law to smoke in a vehicle which has children present. I think there are a number of other circumstances, but this bill doesn’t go so far as to specifically delineate individual family situations. Again, there may be a time when we can actually do that, when we’ve moved the public to the point where that’s an acceptable thing to do, but I think the legislative process is an iterative process. It’s one where we shouldn’t be commanding all the time. It’s something where you actually have to move people to it.

So while I personally would favour that as part of the law – that people not smoke in a car, in a closed space where children are present, even, for that matter, in their own home where people are present – I can’t say that we would be agreeable to an amendment to do that in this act at this time. But it is the type of thing which I would ask the hon. member who raised the question and other hon. members to discuss in public, to talk about, to raise the public consciousness about the health effects on children, and particularly

in smoking in enclosed spaces, in cars. The evidence is coming out to confirm what we intuitively know: that that is bad for children's health.

Legislation is only one tool that's available to us. While it's an important tool, I think the educational tool and the public discussion tool are equally important, and I think that's where we should go next with the issues that have been raised, until we're ready to actually make them part of legislation. Leadership, prevention, education initiatives, and tools included in the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy are very important ways to carry these messages forward.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View commented on looking at more sponsorship restrictions and enhanced education programs. As I noted a moment ago, provincial legislation is just one tool. The federal government also plays a role in regulating tobacco in Canada and currently restricts tobacco sponsorships for events or facilities.

2:40

I just want to indicate how much we believe that education is a crucial component in reducing tobacco use, and I want to again comment on the work of BLAST, building leadership for action in schools today, and the BLAST team at Nellie McClung. As I indicated and thanked them, and as the Member for Edmonton-Centre thanked them earlier, it is extremely important that we mobilize and activate the student citizenship in the discussion. That's where we can have a very effective impact, and I think the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Centre with respect to the BLAST team clearly indicate as well that this is a testament to the power of motivated students.

Clearly, these students get it. These students are ambassadors to others, and I've found over my years in politics that students talking to their parents can often be the most powerful instrument of change. Again, I want to thank the BLAST team that's here and the other students who've written to me talking about how they advocate in their own schools and their own communities and their own families because that is a very powerful message.

In addition to the BLAST program, other programs that we have include the young adult tobacco reduction strategy, which funds initiatives at colleges and universities; teaming up for tobacco-free kids, a tobacco prevention/reduction initiative; sport for life; kick the nic youth tobacco cessation program; the Alberta spit tobacco education program, or ASTEP; as well as an aboriginal tobacco-use strategy funding, which helps off-reserve aboriginal communities develop educational programs with an emphasis on the difference between sacred and recreational tobacco use.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, there were questions raised about the proclamation date for this bill in the event that the Legislature passes it. We have posted proposed implementation time frames for discussion on the Health and Wellness website since June. The time frames suggest a staged approach, with the enhanced smoking ban that's proposed in this bill to be in place by January 1, 2008; the restrictions relating to display and advertising, the so-called power walls, by July 1, 2008; and sales restrictions in place by January 1, 2009.

Those were posted, Mr. Chairman, in answer to a commitment I made that we would consult about how these restrictions could be effectively implemented and take into account the concerns of retailers with respect to their ability to actually implement them, given, perhaps, the shortage of people available to actually do the revamps that are necessary.

However, I would say, Mr. Chairman, that I don't think it's too difficult for people to comply. They don't have to do the fancy work right away. Renovations can take time, but moving quickly, and

with six months' anticipation, I think that by July 1 all retailers should be able to comply with this. I think that's not an unrealistic time frame to ask them to comply.

Mr. Chairman, those would be my comments in response to the questions or concerns that were raised at second reading. I believe the bill provides a comprehensive move forward. I believe that we can implement it on a timely basis. Yes, there are other things we could do, but I would urge the Assembly to pass this bill as it is now, and let's work through the education process, through the public discussion process, and through the continued legislative process to make it even better.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am just delighted to be continuing on with the debate of this bill. I'm just going to do a quick refresher because it has been many months since we last spoke about this, and I do have two amendments that I had actually prepared last spring that I am going to be bringing forward at this time although, in fact, the minister has addressed both of them.

The concept of creating public nonsmoking spaces and also banning point-of-sale power walls and prohibiting sales of tobacco products in pharmacies and in educational institutions has met a number of barriers and hurdles over the years. In fact, the first couple of tries didn't succeed at all, even though in 2002 the Mazankowski report, which was the Premier's Advisory Council on Health, did include recommendations to reduce tobacco use through reducing advertising and promotion. It was specifically targeted at youth.

In 2005 we did have one of the government backbenchers introduce legislation to ban smoking. That bill was supported by my colleagues in the Official Opposition, but the bill was amended to allow for smoking to continue in certain places, which I really objected to because part of the impetus behind that 2005 bill was to protect workers. We created a situation where we protected some workers depending on the location of their workplace. I felt that it was most unfortunate that we would protect some people and not protect others because of where they worked. That, in fact, was the situation until the current Minister of Health and Wellness introduced Bill 45 in the spring of 2007. As I mentioned, that bill did include three things: the province-wide smoking ban in all workplaces, including the bars, the casinos, and the bingo halls, which were excluded specifically the previous time; the ban on the power wall advertising; and prohibiting the sales in pharmacies and educational institutions.

Because I have the BLAST students here, I want to talk specifically about why banning power walls was so important. The most fertile recruiting ground for new smokers is youth, and particularly pretty young people. I first became a smoker when I was 12, and I was a really good example of what happens when you hook a young person on smoking at that age. I smoked with great dedication for 32 years. The tobacco industry made an awful lot of money out of me. And it did really impair my health. But you're addicted to that, and nicotine is a stronger addiction than heroin. It's very, very difficult to unhook yourself from that. My entire body had grown up with nicotine and tobacco in it. Everything about my body changing as I grew older was hooked into the drugs and the additives that are in tobacco, so it was a huge change for me when I quit smoking.

The ability to be able to make it less attractive to young people to smoke and to make it harder for them to do it and to empower them with the tools to protect themselves is really important. It's why the work of the Nellie McClung BLAST team was so important. It

indicated the willingness of young people to recognize that and to work toward changing public policy, and they have been very successful at doing that.

Power walls are meant to be successful, and I'm sure they tested them until they got something that was very successful. Once again, what we had was power walls, or that sort of bank of advertising of the tobacco packages that appear at eye level behind the clerk at the point of sale. When you go to the cash register at a small convenience store or gas station, usually they have the gum and the candy down below the counter. On the counter are the lottery tickets. Then at eye level behind the clerk is the power wall with all the packs of cigarettes.

What they found was that young people who had never smoked – never smoked – could tell you the logo, the colour, the design: everything about various names of cigarette brands. Obviously, that was imbuing itself, and the advertising was really working and sinking into everybody's psyche. It was meant to stimulate impulse buying. You're standing there. You'll pick up a Mars bar and, "Oh, I'll have a couple of packs of cigarettes while I'm here." That's exactly what it was meant to do, and it was very successful.

I was very pleased to see the leadership from this particular minister of health. It did take us, I think it was, three ministers of health and two Premiers to get this far, so I was pleased to see the leadership that was brought forward by this minister of health in taking the extra steps in adding in the banning of power walls to this legislation. He didn't have to do it. We're not the first by any means. Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, P.E.I., and Nunavut have all preceded us in this, but I'm glad that Alberta wasn't dead last. I'm pleased to see that.

A couple of other things I want to say about those power walls. Teen smoking is rising in Alberta. We did have a drop in it for a while, and it has been rising recently. This is an area that we need to target aggressively, and I look to the leadership of groups like this BLAST team and others across Alberta to provide the leadership to their peers in not starting smoking, especially at a young age.

2:50

Now, I know that there was a hue and cry from retailers that they were going to really suffer as a result of the loss of advertising revenue if they had to dismantle the power walls. I've done a little bit of research, and I'm appreciative of the Action on Smoking and Health, who also provided me with some information. In fact, small-business people in Alberta can really work very close to the line sometimes to be making a profit for themselves. It often involves a lot of family members pitching in to make the family business a success.

Still, when you look at it, what's been shown in other provinces where the power walls have been banned is that at the most retailers suffered a 5 per cent reduction in their advertising revenue coming from the tobacco companies. If, for example, you had a corner store retailer or convenience store retailer who was making, let's say, \$3,000 from their tobacco product advertising revenue, this would mean a difference of \$150. You know what, Mr. Chairman? I think that 150 bucks is worth it. I understand the challenge that it can be for small-business people in this day and age, but I'm also confident that the retailers that I know and, I'm sure, the rest of the retailers in Alberta will recognize that that \$150 or that small amount is well worth it in order to protect the next generation and hopefully convince some of the existing generation of smokers to quit.

One other issue that I wanted to bring to the minister's attention is that as far as I can discover, a regular Blue Cross drug plan does not cover the smoking cessation drugs and patches and gum and things, so unless you're on a specialized or an enhanced plan

through your workplace – and some people are, but a lot of people aren't – you are paying full freight on the cost of smoking cessation. I would think, given the cost to our health care of people that are coming in with COPD, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, for example, and other effects of long-time smoking, that it would be in our best interest to try and assist people to quit smoking. Maybe I could ask the minister to have a discussion with Blue Cross the next time he's out there about whether they couldn't be covering smoking cessation products like – I can't remember the brand name now.

Dr. Swann: Nicorette?

Ms Blakeman: No. Goodness knows, I was on that drug for long enough.

The gums and the pharmaceuticals and the patches: as far as I could tell, unless you're on an enhanced program that specifically covered it, the regular Blue Cross coverage of drugs does not cover it, and frankly a lot of people – I think it's about half the people in Alberta – don't have Blue Cross coverage at all, so then they don't have access to that at all. That's something that we could look to, and I think it would be a good investment from the government.

Now, I do have a couple of amendments I'd like to bring forward, Mr. Chairman, and they have in fact been referenced already by the minister. The first one that I would like to bring for people is an amendment to section 9, striking out "on Proclamation," and substituting "on January 1, 2008." I have already supplied the table with the amendments.

The Chair: Could you just give us a moment for the pages to distribute them. We'll refer to this as amendment A1.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: We're ready to go. You may proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The amendment that is now before us, amendment A1 – in fact, the date on the bottom is June 13, 2007, so I was anticipating this some time ago. I really felt that we didn't need to be giving such a long lead time to the retailers to be taking down those power walls. I think you would really have had to not be exposed to any media in Alberta not to be aware that this bill was first introduced last spring, had quite a bit of debate at that time, then was on the website, and an additional consultation was solicited throughout the summer on this.

I felt that people had really had this top of mind since last summer, and waiting for another full year for them to be able to take down a display is really not necessary. To my mind I thought: why are we allowing something to stay in place that could entice how many more young people to smoke in that intervening period of time? I have a lot of small-business people in downtown Edmonton, Mr. Chairman, and I have consulted with a number of them on an informal and formal basis around this. They didn't seem to feel that there would need to be a huge amount of time involved in doing this, certainly not a year, which is what we were talking about, from summer of '07 to summer of '08, which is what the government was contemplating.

So I really felt that all things could be done together with a January 1, 2008, proclamation date; that is, to ban smoking in public places and all workplaces as of January 1, 2008, to remove the power walls from the retail businesses, and to remove the sales of tobacco products in the pharmacies and in educational institutions. We're seven weeks out from that date at this point. I still think that's a possible achievement, and I would really like to see us do it.

I don't see the point of waiting the extra six months. I don't see what we gain from that, and I can see what we can lose from it.

I ask the members to support me in this amendment to have the proclamation date set for all parts of this bill for January 1, 2008. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I agree with virtually everything the hon. member said except for the part where she said: could we please support the amendment? I'll explain why. In my opening remarks I addressed comments that were made in discussion of this bill in second reading back in June and indicated that timing for implementation, in our view, ought to be staged. Now, I would be delighted, actually, to have it all implemented on January 1, 2008. I think it's important that the ban in public places piece be implemented at that time frame, and I'm going to be working hard to achieve that on a proclamation. But I also undertook to consult and to talk to retailers and others and heard them, heard what they had to say about the changes they need to make.

Now, I will tell you that I'm not personally convinced that it's going to be a real difficulty or a hardship to comply with this bill. In fact, I don't think it's going to be a hardship to comply with this bill. However, there were some comments, some things brought to my attention by some of the people that I consulted with with respect to concerns about the safety of people in their workplace, for example convenience stores: if they had to put cigarettes under the counter, whether their safety provisions would be in place if they had to turn their back on customers, and those sorts of things.

3:00

Now, I'll tell you this. I didn't go into a lot of detail about whether there was any merit to their position with respect to that, and quite frankly I think the accommodations can be made very, very easily, at least on a temporary basis. It may take longer for convenience stores to make changes. But the bottom line, the commitment that I made in the discussion, was that we would have a reasonable time for implementation if at all possible. I think that giving them to July 1 to make those adaptations is reasonable.

The larger question with respect to sales in pharmacies is a little bit more difficult for some people who have stores. I have a letter from a retailer in northern Alberta who is an independent pharmacy who leases space inside another store and is going to have to actually change his whole operation unless the store that he leases from agrees to get out of the sale of cigarettes. Now, those are things they can do, but I think it's fair to give them time to do it, so I would ask that we not adopt this amendment, that we do allow the bill to come into effect on proclamation so that we can indeed proceed with the proclamation, hopefully, on January 1 for the nonsmoking piece of it. The proposal I'm taking forward is July 1 with respect to the power wall ban and January 1, 2009, with respect to sale in pharmacies.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just will be very brief because I would support this amendment. After all of the number of months and years that we've been talking about this bill, I think that the people who are selling smoking products are more than aware that it's coming. I think they're more than prepared for this to pass, and I think that it would take them a very, very short time to actually comply with this, which is why I am supporting this. I think they're ready, and to put it off for another six months really – who knows?

It may be just one kid less that isn't going to start smoking, and that would be worth it.

The Chair: Are there others on the amendment?

Are you ready for the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have a second amendment, that I'd like to put forward at this time, also at the table, which I suppose we would now call amendment A2, around locations where smoking products could not be sold. Could I get those distributed?

The Chair: Yes. We'll distribute them now, and we'll just give the pages a moment to do that.

Okay. You may proceed, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is amending section 6, the proposed section 7.3, which is the section: "Sale of tobacco in certain places prohibited." Specifically, the way the legislation reads now is that "no person shall sell tobacco products or offer tobacco products for sale in any of the following places."

What we already have is:

- (a) a health facility in which one or more health professionals regulated under the Health Professions Act or another enactment provide services;
- (b) the campus of a public post-secondary institution under the Post-secondary Learning Act;
- (c) a pharmacy;
- (d) a retail store if
 - (i) a pharmacy is located in the retail store, or
 - (ii) customers of the pharmacy can enter the . . . store directly or by use of a corridor.

So, in other words, a pharmacy that's attached to another retail space.

My concern about this was that there are still places where you end up with a lot of younger people congregating – frankly, we want them to congregate there – where we still see tobacco products sold, and I would like to address that. What is being anticipated here – and I'll skip the first one and come back to it – is a school or a school building. One of the things we're contemplating or that my caucus would like to see us move towards is more community schools. We could see a situation in the future, for example, where you have a tuck shop or a small shop in a community school in which things are being sold. We actually have those kinds of venues in some of our schools now where, you know, candy and pop and things like that are sold. I wanted to make sure that we wouldn't be allowing or that it couldn't be anticipated in the future that tobacco products would be sold anywhere in a school or a school building.

I also wanted to make sure that we were including facilities that are used for sports, recreation, arts, and culture; in other words, arenas, theatre spaces, other places where we really want everybody to be and to feel comfortable. They also often have vendors who are selling a variety of confectionery, chocolate bars and things like that, but also often tobacco products. I wanted to be very clear that they would not be allowed to sell tobacco products.

The third one is pretty obvious, but I just wanted to make darn sure it wasn't going to happen, and that was to say: in any daycare facility under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act. That one sounds like something that's pretty obvious. You wouldn't sell

tobacco in a daycare space, but we're looking at daycare spaces being in all kinds of buildings and associated with all kinds of other enterprises at this point, and I thought: better safe than sorry.

Really, I was trying to cover any additional space where we might have younger people congregating or where we'd like younger people to be congregating. That was the intent behind this amendment.

I know that I have spoken either on or off the record to the minister of health, and there was a feeling that this could be dealt with under regulations, but as always, Mr. Chairman, I really don't like things being added under regulation. Because it is done behind closed doors, it can be both given and taken away by members of cabinet without consultation with the public. It's harder for the public and even members of the opposition to get access to those regulations and to find them easily online or through the Queen's Printer. I really prefer that it's in the legislation, which is the other reason why I did the amendment and didn't just leave it to the good intentions of the minister.

Those are my reasonings behind bringing forward this amendment. I think it's worthwhile to be absolutely clear about what we anticipate here and that we really don't want those tobacco products sold widely at all. I can envision a point in time where – it's still a legal substance to consume, and adults are welcome to do that – they'd have to be going to very particular places to purchase those products and that it wouldn't just be easily accessible. You wouldn't be able to just run in anywhere and pick up tobacco products.

The harder it is to get those products, the more likely it is that people will either stop smoking or never start. Again, I'm speaking from personal experience on this. The major reason why I quit smoking was that it got so inconvenient, it drove me crazy. I'd been elected for a number of years at that point. You know, we were in this thing where the smoking rules that were coming in really made it inconvenient to smoke, and that turned out to be a very good thing. I was spending way too much time thinking about where I would be able to go to smoke and how long it would take me to get there and how long it would take me to get back and did I need to have a coat and was I going outside. I thought: "Why am I spending so much of my life thinking about having a cigarette? My whole life is being consumed by this. It's a colossal waste of time and energy." That was a real impetus in getting me to stop smoking.

3:10

When I look at how easy it is – you know, I can remember a story of a friend who went in to see her doctor. She'd gained a couple of pounds, and she just marched right out. There was a convenience store across the street, and over she marched and bought another pack of cigarettes and started smoking again. I thought: if only that convenience store hadn't been across the street. If it had been a little bit harder for her to find that pack of cigarettes, the likelihood that she would have started again I think would have been severely diminished. That's what I was shooting for here.

I ask for my colleagues' support in the Assembly for amendment A2. Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I don't disagree with the sentiment that the hon. member has expressed in bringing forward the amendment. I'm not aware of any daycare facilities where they actually sell tobacco products, but I suppose it could be possible.

Schools and school buildings across the province. School boards have routinely banned the use of tobacco products on their premises,

and that would include selling. Although laudatory, that's probably redundant.

The facilities used for sports and recreation, cultural, or artistic activities is something that I had actually contemplated bringing forward in the bill, but it begged a lot of questions and raised a lot of issues that I just decided were not worth dealing with at this point in time.

The sentiments, again, are very laudable, obviously. I want to tell you that in the discussions I've had with Albertans over the course of the summer, the number of times that I've heard from Albertans that what made it possible for them to stop was the inconvenience was quite heartening, actually. But having said that, I can't encourage members to support this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to the amendment to Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007. I also want to acknowledge the presence of young leaders, the group known as BLAST, building leadership for action in schools today. How refreshing to see young people pushing for the kind of action that this bill is about and the debate that we are having on it. I want to thank them for their interest and for the leadership that they are providing to their own age mates, their peers, and in fact for providing some pressure and encouragement to us to enact the kind of legislation that's before us.

Mr. Chairman, let me say that in general the bill is good, but it can be improved. It can be made better. This particular amendment, amendment A2, moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I think will make it better, improve it even if there is some risk of redundancy, as the Minister of Health and Wellness has indicated while expressing his tacit approval for what's being proposed in this amendment but suggesting that he would not support the amendment because of the risk of redundancy. I think that minor risk is worth taking so long as the amendment makes clear and clarifies the language and that particular section which does list public places where tobacco can't be sold.

I think we should extend that list as per this amendment, particularly to schools and school buildings. Schools and school buildings routinely prohibit the sale, but they're not required by law, I think, to do so. Sports facilities, recreational facilities, cultural and artistic activities are other places which are public places and are not covered in this list. So I think it would be a useful and helpful improvement to the proposed bill to have these places that are proposed in the amendment included in that list. So I'm happy to support amendment A2, Mr. Chairman.

One last point I want to make. "A day care facility under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act." It may be true, Mr. Chairman, that the daycare facilities that exist in the province at the moment may be highly unlikely places we would find tobacco products being sold, but who knows? The scene might change. As we hear through the media, there are very, very large and wealthy foreign multinationals that have indicated interest in moving into the daycare facilities field. They are private businesses, and they certainly are interested in this arena of activity because they want to of course enhance the returns on their investment, and selling tobacco would not be seen as something that would be considered by them as an illegitimate activity unless it is specifically outlined so in a piece of legislation such as the one that's before us or some other action is taken. So as a precaution I think that subsection (e) in the amendment that will be added to the existing list of 7.3(a), (b), (c), (d) is a good addition to that list.

I think all of these three additions as proposed in amendment A2

certainly merit our support, and I'm happy to do so, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I would like to support amendment A2 to this bill as well, particularly the one where it says about facilities used for sport, recreation, culture, or artistic activities and particularly the one for sport.

I know that I've been in numerous sport venues that aren't necessarily public buildings, and they have sort of a bar attached. I really don't think that having everyone sitting in a room where the air is blue is a good example for kids that are coming off a hockey rink or off the soccer pitch or, in fact, any of the indoor tennis and those sorts of things. I really would support it because I think these have to be labelled.

I'd like to just augment, I guess, what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had said about the daycares. When we look and see what's going on in this province where smaller daycares are closing for various reasons – some of which may be questionable, but that's my opinion – and we do see a large daycare come in that is private and wouldn't be under the same microscope in terms of their behaviour, I think it's very important that we do have these children protected. Even if it was the building and it forced people to go outside of the building, it increases the cessation of people quitting smoking.

I think that if these things are clearly labelled, it just strengthens what is probably already a good bill that has been many, many years in the coming. I would like to support that and hope that it would be supported.

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question on amendment A2?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Back on the bill as it is. The next person I have on the list is the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

3:20

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a privilege to rise in the House and to debate Bill 45 again. I appreciate the minister saying that he was looking at addressing the questions that I brought up this spring. I guess I just want to re-emphasize those again. We live in a free and democratic society, and with that we say that we respect the rule of law. I personally feel that the most important duty of government is to protect its citizens, and that entails their life, being first and foremost, their liberty, and their property.

What I want to go over again is the fact that the minister said that we perhaps need more evidence on the harm or the danger that is caused to infants or young children in a home or in a vehicle. I would have to say that we've got more than enough evidence. If we're banning it in the workplace because it's known to kill adults, we certainly know that it would be more harmful for young children and infants. So I'm disappointed that the government didn't take the initiative to bring forth an amendment. I thought that it was a good enough one that they'd do that. I guess next time I need to do my due diligence and bring in an amendment myself.

I just want to talk about the importance. When he talks about the law and not wanting to be intrusive on some of the areas where we've already stepped in, perhaps, then, what he's saying is that he's going to repeal those laws. We are not allowed to jump in our vehicle and drive our children to a soccer function or anywhere else

without having them securely strapped in with seat belts. The risk involved in a car accident versus a young child who's being exposed to smoke is certainly, I would say, in the same neighbourhood as the long-term detrimental effects on that child with the number of allergies and asthma and other problems that we know affect our young children today.

Even probably the most important reason why we need to amend this and we need to put in regulations that prohibit smoking around young children is the fact that those adults that have chosen that themselves and are smoking automatically expose their children to that. We have many laws. We have the children's helpline. If they want to be parents of ill repute, the children can call if there are other problems going on. We cannot jump on our bicycles and go for a bicycle ride without putting helmets on our children. All of those things are there to protect children who can't protect themselves.

I still want to continue to push this government to realize the importance of protecting young children in the presence of adults and the fact that they can and will smoke in their own private places. It'd be very easy to pass legislation to prohibit this and to put fines in place as we do for seat belts, for bicycle helmets, and also for child abuse. We have no problem going into a home if they're calling the 1-800 number.

The other, I guess, most important reason why we need to do this is because, as I said earlier, those adults who have chosen to expose themselves to this think that there's no harm with it and that it's okay to expose my grandchildren or my children or my nieces and my nephews. It becomes almost a dividing fight inside families on what they can do.

The most interesting thing to me – I listened to a grandfather in my constituency when he was talking to me about this. He'd smoked longer than the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. I think he was saying over 60 years, and he said he couldn't quit. His young grandson, though, had asthma, and the doctor finally wrote a nasty letter that the mother gave to him that said: you are not looking after your child if you allow him to go visit his grandfather and see him, because he smokes around him and he has asthma attacks. That grandfather quit smoking the next day.

There is something there. We can send a message when we're told: "You know what? We're affecting our children, our nieces, our nephews." I think that we're being negligent on this part and that we're looking after the adults, and we're talking about the teenagers and being exposed, but what about those who are exposed that don't have the ability to move themselves? I would very much like to see this government bring forth new legislation that starts to protect those, the most vulnerable in our society – and that's our children and our infants – that can't get away from this. I hope that we can see more in the future on this.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to Bill 45 in debate in committee. I listened to the Minister of Health and Wellness when he made his introductory remarks as we started this debate this afternoon in the committee on this bill. I find him very persuasive when he talks about the need for education, whereas some punitive penalties – I deem those as important to discourage Albertans from smoking in public places or selling tobacco products in retail stores or other measures that are included here, but education is also important.

I think the young students and their presence here today is a good example where that education should start. It is true that we learn to smoke by being with peers who smoke, and particularly in teen years

the approval of peers is very, very important. Being able to be with peers and enjoy their approval is very, very important. So it's encouraging and very hopeful to see young school students taking leadership in educating, playing sort of an educative role vis-à-vis their own peers, and I'm sure they have an impact on people of our age and perhaps their parents as well. [interjection] There is the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, who I know is somewhat disturbed, I guess, by this move forward.

Mr. Chairman, it's refreshing to see how things change in this Legislature. Over the last 10, 11 years we were at times quite restrained from talking about banning smoking in public places and other places, but it's good to see that climate change and us proceeding with a bill such as this.

The bill would have been much improved, Mr. Chairman, had certainly amendment A2 been approved by this House. Amendment A1 I think underlined the urgency with which we should undertake to implement the steps proposed in this bill once it becomes law. So the stepwise or staged implementation of the bill as proposed by the minister I think does not reflect that urgency, in my judgment. If some retailers or people who have these power walls in their stores need some time to make changes, certainly this could have been done in the next six months. I don't think we need more than a year to bring all parts of this bill into implementation.

So I'm disappointed that the minister hasn't seen it appropriate to take these amendments and at least give some sort of undertaking to the House that his proposed stages by which he's proposing to implement this bill would be reconsidered, that in fact, although he cannot accept amendment A1, he is willing to expedite the timetable and the introduction of stages by the end of which all of this bill will become enforced, not only proclaimed but enforced in the province.

3:30

Mr. Chairman, the point was made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on including drugs that are used for helping people cease smoking. Smoking is an addiction. It's a highly addictive habit. Tobacco is an addictive drug, and its cessation is important not only for our health but also for our pockets. We know that when we are not well, those diseases that are caused by smoking or by inhaling second-hand smoke not only prevent us from enjoying good health, but they also affect our ability to be productive citizens, they affect our ability at our workplace, they affect families, and they have destructive results sometimes.

The cessation of smoking and the use of drugs to help people stop smoking is an area which I think should be considered for coverage under our health care legislation. It should be seen as a medical necessity, a necessary medical expense, and therefore covered under our health care plan. It's a good suggestion, and I think I would like the minister to certainly reconsider his position on this and perhaps bring back some amendments to this legislation at an appropriate time to provide that coverage for drugs that are prescribed to help people to stop smoking.

The last point that I want to make, Mr. Chairman, is this: while the minister has not at the moment found himself in a position to accept the two amendments that were made, these amendments I think need to be paid some attention. I wonder if the minister would tell the House if he's willing to bring some amendments back to the bill in a certain specified period of time, two years from now or whenever. He's hoping that education will have an impact on people, and at that stage he'll move with the public opinion and bring in some of these changes. I wonder if he will comment on the wisdom of bringing this bill back for making some changes in it or if he would in fact put in a formal review of the bill in two years so at that time he can make some changes in the bill resulting from the review. The review itself could certainly invite people like the young people sitting up there to come before us in public hearings and give their

input or some other interested parties to come before us and do the same.

I wonder what the minister's position is on, in fact, including in the bill a need to review it in a couple of years from now in light of the experience that we gather over the next two years once the bill is implemented.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hancock: Just briefly, Mr. Chairman, to respond to the last speaker. I think that legislation should always be available for evergreening. I think that it's one of the most important pieces of work that we do in this Legislature. Oftentimes when we put out the lineup of bills that are available for the session, people chide the fact that the majority of those bills are not on major policy items, and indeed they're not.

Every piece of legislation that we have in this province should be reviewed on a periodic basis and updated and made whole. So I think it would be absolutely appropriate to do that with respect to this bill. Does it need to be put into the bill? I don't believe so. There are a number of mechanisms that we have now. We have the policy field committees, which can embrace that kind of a review of their own volition should they wish to do so. As I said in my earlier remarks, I think that we should revisit this. We should make sure that our smoking legislation provides leadership in the country in respect to this area. That's my personal view.

Now, I heard the hon. member ask me for a commitment to bring it back, and I have to say that I'm expecting between now and two years from now to have to reapply for my job, and if he would be so good as to ensure that there was nobody running against me, I could make that kind of a commitment, perhaps. So I would invite him to use his powers of persuasion on his party and those of the Liberal Party because I would be happy to continue in this role, but I have to admit that I am at the pleasure of the people of Edmonton-Whitemud as to whether or not I could be back here in two years and bring that forward myself.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise in Committee of the Whole on Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007. This in conjunction with another bill before us, Bill 37, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007, will go a long way in helping us to set the conditions to reduce the attractiveness of tobacco and to reduce the impact of second-hand smoke in our environment. Clearly, it's going to assist in preventing illness and disability and death. It's progressive. It's long overdue.

From a health perspective we've been pressing for provincial leadership on this issue for 20 years. It's great that the provincial government has finally come around and with pressure like BLAST and many other groups is bringing it to the Legislature. I want to acknowledge Action on Smoking and Health and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada. A long and tedious battle to try to get governments to stand up for public health. Be that as it may, it's here, and we're certainly going to support it in its many dimensions.

I would also like to add my voice to that of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre and others who feel that now the next phase needs to examine supports for cessation. We have a tremendous number of people addicted to tobacco in the province. We could tremendously reduce our health care costs if we could assist them as early as possible to get off tobacco and tobacco products, and we should be providing accessible, affordable cessation treatments within our purview. It's a no-brainer in terms of saving health care dollars in a system that is already tremendously overtaxed and another

opportunity to really make Alberta the healthiest place in Canada.

I would admonish the government to not wait to be badgered and coerced to take the next steps. We have been waiting 20 long years for this kind of leadership in the province. It's now important to take the leadership, continue on, and press for significant supports which are not covered under our present medical plan or health insurance plan or drug insurance plan generally. There's a real opportunity for leadership here.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to very briefly comment on the request from the Minister of Health and Wellness for me to arrange, certainly, for my party to not have someone run against him in the next election. I know that I have made it public that I won't run in my own constituency next time around. That's for sure. You know, we have a candidate already nominated, so I have no chance of changing my mind there. But I can assure the minister that I won't run against him if he accepts my suggestions here now. There has to be a fair exchange here. I won't challenge him in his constituency as a candidate provided – provided – he accepts the suggestions that I have made to him. I think that will improve the bill. That certainly would be another feather in his cap if he did accept the suggestion and would also save him this competition from an impossible source. That's me. I won't run.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be brief. I think it's quite clear that this is a bill that certainly must pass. The hon. member in front of me said that he's been waiting for it for 20 years. Well, actually, I've been waiting for a bill like this for 40. My father died 40 years ago of lung cancer. In those days it was just called cancer. Certainly, that connection had not been made to smoking, and yes, he was a heavy smoker right from the time when he was 14 years of age.

I remember shortly after that there was, I believe, the Surgeon General of the United States – I'm not exactly sure what his title was, but his name was Koop, and he looked like Uncle Sam – that came on television. He was reviled and he was made fun of, but he stuck to his guns. Forty years ago he was making that connection. So I am very honoured to be able to stand up in this House today and say: yes, I support this bill.

I've also been fortunate in my life to travel in Middle Eastern countries and see young kids smoking, anywhere from the ages of 5, 6, 7, up.

3:40

Our job is not done. Because we can protect Albertans and because we can do this in Canada, I don't believe our job is done. I think that this will be a successful bill. We'll go forward, and I'm hoping that we can take our leadership and go beyond our boundaries.

One of the things that I hope will be changed with this bill is the fact that we take in \$890 million in taxes, but we only spend \$9 million on cessation programs.

The other thing that I would hope would be changed is that we would take the money that we put into the heritage fund into tobacco companies and put it into – I'm not sure where – probably something that would be a sustainable stock market item. We really can't be two-faced about this. If we say, "Smoking is bad for you; we've

passed this bill," surely we will take those monies out of the heritage trust fund.

The other people that we are protecting, who probably will never know that they have been protected, are those who are exposed to second-hand smoke. Forty years ago second-hand smoke wasn't even a consideration, and now we have all of the evidence and research to prove that, in fact, you can get cancer from second-hand smoke.

I support this bill, and I'm delighted to stand up and know that 40 years later what killed my father will not kill someone else's father.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I'll try to be brief. I just don't want to let this opportunity pass with the brilliant young ladies from Nellie in the audience today. I'm going to provide them with some homework. You've probably got more than enough homework, but a little bit more won't hurt you.

Yesterday in this Assembly I pointed out the two numbers that my colleague from Lethbridge-East just referred to; that is, the \$890 million in tobacco tax revenue that we're projected to take in this year and the woefully inadequate \$9 million that we spend in tobacco reduction strategies and smoking cessation strategies. Also, I think it important – and the young ladies in the gallery can go back to the *Hansard* from yesterday and look at these comments – that in question period back on May 31 of this year the health minister also acknowledged that the direct cost to Alberta Health as a result of smoking activity is \$471 million.

Ms Blakeman: How much?

Mr. R. Miller: Four hundred and seventy-one million dollars. Even more disturbing is an acknowledgement from the health minister of indirect costs to Alberta's economy through lost production, time taken off work, all of those things: \$1.296 billion or nearly \$1.3 billion. These are staggering figures that I think just add fuel to the fire when it comes to the good work that the girls from the BLAST program are doing.

The other thing – again it's in the comments from *Hansard* yesterday – I just want to put it on the record so that they can hear it when they're here and perhaps for them to check into this. On October 10 of this year, Mr. Chairman, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger from California, a Republican I might point out, signed a bill that would make it illegal to smoke in a vehicle if someone under the age of 18 is present. That's exactly what the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner was talking about a little while ago, and I would like to draw the attention of the health minister to that. Perhaps in his next amending bill we can follow the lead of our colleagues in the California Legislature and take a bold step forward in terms of protecting young children as well.

Those comments I wanted to get on the record in front of the BLAST team from Nellie, and as I said, a little bit of homework for you to go and check out more in terms of Bill 37 and the extra tobacco taxes that we're going to be collecting in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 45 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 8 Vital Statistics Act

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move an amendment to Bill 8, which I believe you have for circulation. It's a very simple amendment to sections 42(4) and (6) striking out the term "the Chief Medical Officer" wherever it occurs and substituting "a medical officer of health."

The Chair: The amendment will be referred to as A1, and we will just allow the pages a moment to distribute it.

Okay. You may proceed, hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I won't dwell on this. It's simply a terminology change but an important one. The sections basically deal with disinterment, I think, and they refer to the chief medical officer of health, who is one person in the province. It should refer to a medical officer of health, which would then make it possible for the medical officer of health in any region to sign the appropriate certificates.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the explanation provided by the minister of health. I've had opportunity to consult with a former medical officer of health over the last few minutes. We have no problems with this amendment, and we'll support it.

Thank you.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Chairman, I also would like to express the position of our caucus that there's really nothing in this amendment that we have any concern about. It's essentially updating and changing the language of the existing piece of legislation, so we will be happy to support the amendment.

The Chair: Are there others?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Now back on the bill as amended. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. There were some issues brought up yesterday in Committee of the Whole, and I'd like to have an opportunity to respond to them.

With respect to the registration of conjoined twins we will leave this to the discretion of the doctors as this is a medical question. If the doctors complete two notices of birth, then we will register them as we would now.

With respect to the responsibilities and encumbrances of the registrar with respect to births there is no deviation from the act as it currently sits.

In response to what is prescribed evidence for a delayed birth, this evidence will be prescribed in regulation. Some examples include

medical proof, such as a doctor's record and affidavit, a certified copy of a church record regarding the birth.

Where a combined name creates an offensive name, the registrar would have the discretion and could trump the requirement to combine a name. Regarding how the registrar would determine if a proposed name is offensive or not, any names received that are obviously not acceptable will be refused by the registrar.

Regarding who has charge of a deserted newborn, this is not legislated under vital stats regulations or legislation. Generally it's a social worker with Children's Services. If Children's Services has provided a name, the registrar will accept that name. Where no name is submitted, the registrar will name the child George, Bill, anything but Sue.

I'd also like to thank the folks in Service Alberta: Barry Haugrud, Katherine Olson, and Rosanne Dofher for their assistance in drafting these amendments.

Thank you.

3:50

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne for providing those explanations to some of the questions that I raised yesterday. I'm not sure what he has against the name Sue. I know a lot of Sues that would probably raise their eyebrows at that, but hopefully the registrar will disregard your comments and leave that in his basket of names to choose from.

I do have a few further questions, Mr. Chairman. I indicated yesterday that for the most part our caucus is supportive of Bill 8 and doesn't see any particular reason to hold things up here. At the same time, I think some of these questions are worthy of asking and getting the government on record in terms of the thought process that went into drafting the bill the way that it was done.

Carrying on with names, then, under section 15(1)(a) it requires that the person be known as a different name before the age of 10 – this is in discussion of changing names – so I'm just wondering if the member might be able to outline for us why that particular line was drawn at the age of 10 as opposed to eight or 12 or whatever. What thought process went into choosing 10? Also, then, what processes will be in place to ensure that the registrar confirms that an individual was in fact known by a different name prior to having attained the age of 10 years old?

Also, then, I'm wondering about if a parent or a guardian applies to have their child's name changed and the child is over 12 years old, then the child's consent is also required. We're wondering why the age of 12 was decided on. In the one instance it's 10 years old, and in the other it's 12 years old. I'm questioning whether or not a child of 12 is responsible enough to have a say in the matter in the first place, so that would be something I'd be looking for a little more clarification on.

Section 15(13) refers to the registrar's own judgment of the acceptability of a person's first name. We talked about that a minute ago. Again, I referenced yesterday some of the concerns around cultural sensitivity, wondering what sorts of training the registrar might undergo that would qualify them to make that decision in terms of cultural sensitivity.

Section 19(5) discusses allowing a stillborn's name to be amended on application to the registrar only if the stillborn's birth was registered without a first name or if the name given was considered unacceptable by the registrar. According to a government document many cases of stillborn children exist where the parents are traumatized and try to distance themselves from the event, yet later, of

course, they may return and want to name the stillborn child as some sort of form of closure.

Part 2. Just one question in terms of the registration of marriages. It refers in this section to a requirement that a person complete a marriage registration document in accordance with the regulations. Of course, we're assuming that those regulations would simply dictate the process for filling out the document, Mr. Chairman, and not the content of the document itself, but I'm curious whether or not that's the case. If the regulations, in fact, touch upon the content of the documents themselves, then we would like an explanation as to why that needs to be done through regulation. Once again, my standard pet peeve about regulations being set or at least having the opportunity to be set behind closed doors, out of sight of public scrutiny, public debate, and public input. I'm not ever suggesting that that is standard practice, but certainly we understand that it could be done that way, so that's the concern there.

Under part 4, which deals with the change of sex, section 30 deals with the amendment of records on change of sex. I guess the only question I have there is in the case where an individual whose birth is registered in another jurisdiction changes sexes, why, then, did we decide to remove the requirement to notify that other jurisdiction of the change? If the member might be able to provide some explanation as to why that was done.

Part 5 deals with deaths in Alberta. Section 33(4) states that when an interim medical certificate of death is issued, it shall be delivered to the registrar within 60 days. The previous act mandated that it be delivered within 30 days. I'm curious whether or not the member could share with us why the period has been doubled and if there was a specific reason for making that change. I would have thought, if anything, in today's technologically advanced society that we would have less trouble than ever making that notification. Just curious why that time period has been doubled.

We talked a minute ago, with the amendment that was moved by the health minister and approved by this Assembly, about disinterment and the fact that, well, originally the proposed legislation talked about the chief medical officer; now we've changed it to a medical officer of health. Nevertheless, it states that a medical officer of health can make a decision regarding whether or not a body can be disinterred and that that decision is final. Is there, perhaps, a need for some sort of an appeal process or an appeal mechanism? Whether or not Service Alberta contemplated that when they were drafting this, or if they're completely comfortable that the decision now being made by a medical officer of health should be final, without appeal is a question I'd like to have answered if possible.

Part 6 deals with the administration of the act. There's a provision in there that states that the registrar may at his or her discretion refuse an application for registration under the act if it appears to the registrar that it's being done for fraudulent or improper purposes. Certainly, that would seem to be a good thing that we would have that power there, but again I'm just concerned that the registrar would have the proper training or background in place to properly identify fraudulent applications. Is there perhaps a need for the registrar to have training and a law enforcement background? That's the question I would have there.

I think we're almost done. Section 56(1) expands on the previous act by allowing the registrar to investigate, refer the matter to the police service, or refer the matter to an investigator. Again, I'm just wondering what sort of training the registrar would receive in respect to investigating these fraudulent activities. Should we not, perhaps, just be automatically allowing the registrar to refer the matter to a law enforcement body as opposed to the way that it reads right now? Particularly the word "investigate" is what I'm questioning there.

There's a lot more, I suppose, that I could question on some of the specifics of this bill, but frankly that's as much as I've had time to go through over the last little while, so I'll leave it at that and look forward to some responses from the member or the Minister for Service Alberta at the appropriate time.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a remark to make about registration of marriages, which is something I know something about because I've married so many people over the years.

An Hon. Member: How many, Bruce?

4:00

Dr. B. Miller: Hundreds and hundreds, which could be misinterpreted. Or it's ambiguous to say that you've married somebody many, many times, but I have presided at weddings, marriages. So the word used here is "solemnizing" marriage in Alberta. That's a good word, solemnizing.

It's interesting that the registrar must register a marriage within one year of receiving all of the information. I didn't think it took that long to process the information. When I performed a marriage, ministered at a marriage, I had to actually turn in the documents within 48 hours, and then presumably the office could deal with the matter. Then if the married couple wanted to get a wallet-sized, laminated marriage licence from vital statistics, they could apply for it.

Now, one of the interesting things in my transition from being a minister in a church, performing marriages there, to being an MLA – as MLAs we can preside at weddings, too – was that in a church context there actually is a book in which you register marriages. As I understand it, every church in the province has a registration book. Actually, you can record marriages, baptisms, and funerals in that book so that if the documentation that was filled out at the wedding somehow goes astray and doesn't actually reach vital statistics, then you can refer to this book because you recorded the names and the witnesses of the marriage. So you can provide that documentation.

The interesting thing: as an MLA we're not required to register that anywhere. We fill out a form, which we give to the couple. So if they hang on to it, okay, then maybe they would be able to submit that. If there was no registration of the marriage and a year had gone by, they would be able to submit that, and that's proof. Right? It's interesting that the MLA doesn't have any proof that he or she can provide, which I think is something that could be covered, actually, through changes in the regulations, whatever, to be able to have the MLA record that somewhere so that it could be copied if the couple comes back a year, two years, three years later and says: I couldn't get a wallet-sized licence from vital statistics because they say there's no evidence that you married me. Well, there is evidence because in my office I have a book in which I registered that marriage. It's a simple thing, but it seems to me that that's a way of covering it. I think that's really important. I leave that for consideration. Maybe that's something that is left for the regulations and not to be included actually in the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Chair, before we finish, I thank the members for their questions, and I'll make an attempt to answer them.

I think the first issue that you brought up: why age 10? Well, it's

currently in the legislation, and we're going to leave it at that.

The question on marriages. It will be better defined within the regulations. Remember that the Marriage Act is not being updated here. Vital statistics records the event, and the act only governs the registration of the events. We're not reviewing the Marriage Act here.

There was a question with regard to deaths. Thirty days was unrealistic for the medical examiner, and we did consult the medical examiners on that question.

Sex change was brought up. Two doctors' affidavits are required as proof to amend the record. Two doctors. Then you also asked about if a person was born outside the jurisdiction. The person who underwent the sex change must notify their home jurisdiction to have their records updated.

I think that maybe that clarifies some of the questions for you. I can provide further detail for the members before third reading.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, and thank you, Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, for the quick response to those questions. I just want to clarify: did I hear you say in regard to the sex change that it's up to the individual who's had the sex change to notify their home jurisdiction or the jurisdiction that they were born in as opposed to incumbent upon the government to do it as part of the act?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, yeah. I did say that two doctors' affidavits are required as proof to amend the record here in the province. If the person was born outside of this jurisdiction, the person who underwent the sex change must notify their home jurisdiction and have their records updated.

Mr. R. Miller: Okay. What you're saying is that it's up to them to make the notification. The act is telling them that they have to. Then I suppose the question would be: are there any processes in place to make sure that that actually takes place? That would be the obvious question out of that.

The other thing that you mentioned and I just want to touch on. You indicated that medical officers of health had indicated that 30 days was unrealistic in terms of filing the death notice, so that's why we're moving it to 60. I suppose inquiring minds would want to know whether or not there were a lot of examples of medical officers of health not being able to meet that 30-day deadline. Obviously, it's been in place for a long time, and I'm sure most of us would assume that it was working fairly well, but if they're telling you that it's unrealistic, perhaps there are many examples of times when that deadline was not being met.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again, Mr. Chairman, I don't have specific examples with me. The department folks had consulted with medical examiners, and I wasn't going to question that professional advice.

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 8, Vital Statistics Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 8 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 13

Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is obviously a household bill.

An Hon. Member: Housekeeping.

Dr. B. Miller: Housekeeping. I was thinking of the parable of the householder or something.

For the life of me I can't figure out why the changes are being made. I looked at it, I read it a couple of times, and it seems to me that there's just a substitution of wording. Section 4 presently reads, with reference to the minister administering the fund: "and any income of the Fund accrues to and forms part of the Fund." Now the new wording: the minister "shall administer the Fund." So that's the same. And the part about accruing to and forming part of the fund is in (1.2): "Any income of the Fund accrues to and forms part of the Fund." I could go through this line by line, and I just don't see what difference the changes make unless there's some secret code here that I'm missing. I taught a course on the da Vinci code a couple of years ago at the U of A, so maybe there's some hidden code here, and I need to analyze it more carefully.

That's all I have to say, Mr. Chairman. This is housekeeping. I assume that there are some reasons why these changes have to be made. It would be nice to have a little bit of an explanation, and that's where I'll leave it.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

4:10

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to Bill 13, Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007. I just want to make a few observations. Over the last several weeks and months I've had the opportunity to meet with and hear from several postsecondary institutions who have expressed some concern about the effectiveness of the existing piece of legislation, of the government's actions that should follow from the commitments made in this piece of legislation, which have to do with the fund's intention to match private donations to postsecondary institutions.

This certainly, I think, was an idea that was welcomed by institutions, and we in principle agreed, although I had several critical observations that I made when the bill was first passed. One of the criticisms that I made was that a more stable funding framework would be better for institutions than one where they have to first of all seek the private donations and then hope that the government will match them.

The experience of the institutions over the last several years now has demonstrated that the matching from the government side hasn't kept pace with the undertakings that were given to these institutions in legislation. The size of the fund has not kept pace with the donations that are flooding into colleges and universities. A December 4 *Calgary Herald* report indicated that \$225 million has been raised by institutions, with another \$200 million waiting in the wings, but only \$48 million has been distributed, and this was shared

among all postsecondary institutions, a matter of great concern to the institutions affected.

In fact, just last week I received some information from the University of Alberta. The university is very concerned about having in fact to fund endowed chairs based on the money they will receive from private donations and without at the same time getting the same amount under the access to the future fund from government sources. So this has added to the financial difficulties for the university, and I'm sure that's the case with other institutions in the province as well. Mount Royal College, I understand, has received only \$3 million from this fund so far, which is only one-third of what it actually is owed according to this piece of legislation.

The main concerns that I have, Mr. Chairman, when speaking to this bill in this debate during the committee stage, are ones that are long standing. The institutions just cannot continue to rely on the access to the future fund for making their future plans. If they are to receive and attract more private donations, they have to be able to assure donors that the money from the government side will be forthcoming in good time. If that doesn't happen, that impairs, in my view, the ability of postsecondary institutions to attract donor funds, funds that are premised, of course, on the undertaking given by this government by way of this piece of legislation that those donations will be matched and matched relatively quickly.

So it is creating a kind of difficult situation for many institutions in the province. The University of Alberta, certainly, has contacted me and expressed that concern. It hasn't come from the president's office, I should say. This comes from some other sources, some faculty, because faculties and deans raise funds, seek private donations unless they've got them. They then proceed to establish the process through which an endowed chair is created. Once an endowed chair is created and an appointment to that endowed chair is made, then financial commitment kicks in. The university has to find the funds to finance that endowed chair.

Now, that financing is based on two sources of funding, one from the donation and one from the government side. The one from the government side has not been forthcoming. The university receives a very small amount of the funds that it raises from private donations for the purposes outlined in this act, and then the government doesn't deliver on this. So this puts institutions in a very, very, very difficult situation.

Mr. Chairman, I want to just go on record reminding the government, reminding the minister of advanced education, postsecondary education, that there's a problem here, and this particular change in the bill, the amendment proposed in the bill, doesn't address the real issues and the real concerns that the existing piece of legislation, Access to the Future Act, has created, has produced. Those problems need immediate action. They need immediate attention from the government. Otherwise, the whole purpose of the bill will get defeated in the long run, and universities and other postsecondary institutes will find themselves in a very precarious situation, an embarrassing situation where they have solicited and received private donations on the premise of the Access to the Future Act and the commitments made under it that the government will provide equivalent funds in a timely fashion so the institutions can meet their promises they make to these generous donors who have made available large sums of money.

I was at a function at the University of Alberta I think a year ago or a year and a half ago when the China Institute was formally opened. The Mactaggarts were there, who had made a donation of these very, very rare Chinese textiles and other materials going back several centuries, and the value of the donation that they made was \$37.5 million. Mrs. Mactaggart, who spoke at the function, in fact was very critical of this government's failure to come forth with the

funds to match the donation that they had so generously agreed to make on the assumption that their \$37.5 million will be matched by the government under the Access to the Future Act. They were very disappointed. Mrs. Mactaggart was very, very critical and unhappy about the fact that the donation that they made had not been matched several years after having made their donation.

I'm sure there are many other donors in a similar situation who are expressing their unhappiness and frustration with this piece of legislation, and my fear is that this amendment will not address the real concerns, the failure of the government to implement the commitments made in good faith. I think the government has broken faith on this with institutions, and I as one MLA who represents that university and is contacted on a regular basis by the university with their concerns want to take this opportunity to put this concern of postsecondary institutions related to the ineffectiveness of the Access to the Future Act on record.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a privilege to get up and speak on Bill 13. I guess the point that I want to bring up – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is an example of the dilemma that we're in in that the sponsor of the bill said earlier in *Hansard*: "The first amendment will expand the ability to make financial transactions from the fund. The scope of financial transactions will be broadened to allow the minister to use the fund to match private donations for scholarships." That's the area, I guess, that I'm very concerned about.

I don't know. It seems to me that these guys have all these access to the future funds, sustainability funds. All of these, what they really are is just slush funds in order to promote the cause of the government in its need to prop itself up. I think it's an interesting situation here, where an individual has made the donation, and he's expecting a donation to match that. It sets up the political arena such that: I want to do this, and the government is going to match it. Why is it that the minister has the ability to do it on one occasion but not on another?

The basis of the real problem with these funds is that at the outset of looking at them, they look interesting. They're doable. It looks like it's going to be in the interest of the students. But I would argue, Mr. Chairman, that if they actually put the money towards the university and towards these things rather than hold them in a slush fund, it would actually make it more affordable for these individuals to go to school. More importantly, though, if we were really interested as a province and as a country in promoting our education system and all charitable organizations, what we really should be doing is looking at a system, as the Alliance has put forward, where charitable donations would be used as income deduction. Thereby people could donate to charitable organizations, schools that are accredited by the province in order to promote those that they feel are important.

The biggest fallacy of all of this, though, is that the do-goodness of the government really has to go and tax other people in order to match someone else's contribution. So what this is saying is that for Albertans who want to make a contribution to, for example, a university, the government now is in a position of power to go out and tax other Albertans to match that. Philosophically, it just seems wrong to me to say that we as a government will tax other individuals to match contributions, especially if they're our friends who the minister wants to accommodate and say: well, we'll tax other Albertans to match this.

I don't think it's in the best interests to broaden the scope and to

allow the government to give out more money with what isn't a firm and known formula. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona says, it's actually upsetting donors who thought they were going to be matched and aren't. In the interests of the taxpayers of Alberta and for those who want to support and give charitable donations, we should come up with a much better method than slush funds that promote political connections and being able to promote ourselves, saying, "Look what good things we're doing" as we tax Albertans. Just put the money directly to schooling, directly to housing and those other areas, and it will in fact lower the costs.

So I need to speak against this amendment. I don't believe it's in the best interests of the students or the taxpayers or the education facilities that we're trying to help with this.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not going to respond to the last speaker's comments. The access to the future fund was a very important step forward and actually has been hindered by its own success in terms of the encouragement it has given to Albertans to contribute to their postsecondary institutions.

I do want to just briefly reference the remarks made by Edmonton-Strathcona because I think that they were particularly unfair insofar as they referenced the Mactaggart gift. Members will recall that the Access to the Future Act was Bill 1 in this Legislature, and in that year in the throne speech in referencing the fact that this bill was going to be brought forward, there were two projects which outlined the power and the effectiveness that would be available under the access to the future fund. One of them was the Lois Hole Campus Alberta digital library, and the other was the Mactaggart gift to the University of Alberta which established the basis for the China Institute. Both of those were indicators of how the fund could work, and both of them have worked.

While there was a timing process, as I understand it, with respect to making sure that the funds were in place for the China Institute, that has in fact been done. That commitment has been met, and I wouldn't want it left on the record of this House that the commitment that was made in the throne speech in that particular year and the commitment that was made to funding that Mactaggart gift under the access to the future fund was not met because it has been met.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 13, Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 13 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 36

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd just comment that this bill proposes to do some housekeeping relative to the budget of this year and to be in concert with the federal tax changes. I would look forward to comments from members of the House.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thought I put a number of questions on the table yesterday in my comments during second reading, and I was hoping to have some response to those questions as we dealt with this matter in committee today. That is the normal practice of this Assembly, of course, that we get a response from the mover when we come into committee.

I'm not sure whether the member has some of those answers for me or if he wants me to read them into the record again or what, but it would be nice if we could hear some response to those questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do apologize to the member opposite. It was my hope to have those answers today, but I will commit to have those answers ready for the discussion for third reading.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the spirit of the bill I certainly stand and support it. We do need to harmonize and see that it's simple and straightforward. But I guess where I'm disappointed again, though, is that this government has taken the time to bring forth the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007, yet it has failed to keep its commitment to lower corporate tax to 8 per cent. It's talked about it time and time again. We've had many corporations, I believe, that moved to Alberta because of the proposal of this government to work it from 12 down to 8 per cent, yet they seem to have stalled out when they've had huge surpluses, when they could make those commitments. I guess I just have to say that I'm disappointed that that isn't part of a corporate tax amendment. We should be looking at lowering the tax as this government has promised but has failed to do.

With that, I'll sit down and wait to hear other comments.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to make some very few brief comments on Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007. Certainly, I think that these are welcome changes that will help to realize some additional funds for the government.

4:30

I just wanted to make note that the Auditor General's report in 2003-2004 recommended that the ARTC be revisited as the federal regulations had reversed the decision back in the early '70s, making the ARTC invalid. You know, this is an inevitable reaction, I suppose, to that.

Then in August 2006 the government of Alberta issued a press release stating that cabinet had recommended this review for royalty programs for deep gas, low-productivity wells, reactivated wells, and so forth. The results, in our minds, is that this restructuring would potentially bring in as much as \$200 million or \$300 million, that another \$186 million would be added to the provincial coffers. We seem to see that this bill will realize those things, and we do in fact support the bill.

I guess I would like to ask – and perhaps the hon. member who is moving this bill could give us that information as well at third reading – what might be the analysis of how much more funds this might realize as a result of the streamlining?

That would be my only question. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would just like to express my dissatisfaction with the proposal that we see answers to the questions that I asked in third reading. The member certainly understands that the time for proposing amendments, if we were to do so, is now, during the committee stage. I thought I asked some relevant questions, particularly in terms of the lack of indexing of some of the thresholds that are in here, and I was looking forward to having that information in front of us as we debated Bill 36. I'm going to guess that we're going to be dealing with a similar situation when we do 35 in a few minutes.

I just want to be on the record as suggesting that that really is not satisfactory to the Official Opposition. We support these bills. We've indicated that in the House. But I don't think it's the proper way to handle this, to allow this to move through committee without having the information in front of us. I want to be on the record as expressing that. I would really ask, quite frankly, if the Government House Leader might consider adjourning debate on these two bills until we have the answers to those questions in front of us.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that's a fair request, and I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 36 and then, if the House agrees with that, that we not call Bill 35 and move right on to Bill 37.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 37 Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 37, Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007. This does increase the tax revenue from tobacco. It amends communication of information laws to be in line with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and other commodity tax acts and enhances the ability of government to transfer information with other governments in Canada. It also extends the time period for objections and allows for people to directly appeal to the court without having a minister review the appeal.

We're clearly in support of this bill, not only in terms of increasing the barrier to tobacco and thereby reducing the incidence of smoking and tobacco use but also in bringing in needed revenue to deal with the adverse effects of tobacco on our health care system, in our human activities. The toll on human life, both quality of life and quantity of life, in this province is second to none. It's the number one preventable illness in our society still. Particularly for young people, the cost is a significant barrier and must be sustained, and this tobacco tax increase will make us among the top tobacco tax areas in the country. This is leadership. This is what we expect

from this government. We on this side of the House will certainly be supporting this.

One of the questions that does keep revolving around this whole tobacco issue is how the money will be used and whether and when we will be properly investing with this revenue in some of the other measures that will help us to reduce the incidence of tobacco use, whether it's smoking tobacco or smokeless tobacco.

Are we doing all we can as a society to address some of the addictions problems and reduce the impacts on our health status, on our productivity, and on our health care system? It's a response to growing numbers of people across the province who are having respiratory problems, cardiovascular problems, and cancers that continue to plug our system and limit our ability. This is a progressive decision and will, I think, add significantly to the preventive elements in our public policy. Prevention has to be a primary focus if we're going to ever get a handle on some of the cost issues in our society.

It's quite clear that this is a progressive bill that we'll be supporting, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak to it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I had spoken quite extensively on this bill yesterday, and I was reflecting on the one aspect of it quite a lot here just yesterday evening and today. Again, I would just like to reiterate that I think the responsibility that we have in collecting these extra funds is to see that we target those funds to tobacco cessation programs. I believe as well that we can have the capacity here through the Legislature to encourage health benefits like Blue Cross and the health regions to in fact target those tobacco cessation programs. Here we are, like I said yesterday, with this remarkable new ad campaign that seems to hit hard, number one, but also suggests that you the person with the tobacco addiction has a medical problem.

So the next logical step for me is for us to say: "Okay. We're going to treat this through the public health care system, and we're going to target the new taxes that we would realize through this legislation to pay for that." That one-two punch, that sense of unity, I think would send a strong message. Plus, it would give the punch both financially and medically for medical practitioners to in fact achieve the ultimate goal that we are looking for in this legislation, which is to reduce tobacco use amongst Albertans.

I just wanted to reiterate and strengthen those comments here this afternoon. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to also be on the record as speaking to Bill 37 and certainly supporting it, but again I would like to echo some of the words that we've heard already. Increasing the tax is wonderful, but I really don't want to see it go into general revenues because it'll disappear into the black hole called general revenues. I really would like to see it go directly to cessation programs, but I also would like to see it go to education. I'd like to see the education of our youth, starting in kindergarten, about the dangers of smoking, both tobacco and certainly the smokeless tobacco, and also chewing. There's been many a young person who thought he was imitating a ballplayer and ended up with cancer in the mouth. I think that I would like to see some of those dollars go towards education.

4:40

I would reiterate that I feel very strongly that we have to pull our

dollars out of the heritage trust fund that go towards the stocks in tobacco companies.

Also, I would like to see some of this increase in dollars go towards helping those that now have the addiction, some of the older people that I've certainly worked with who are on oxygen, who have emphysema, perhaps cancer even at this point in time. Who are we to judge how people got addicted? I think that it's fine to be able to say to our young people, "Don't smoke," but I also think it's very judgmental to stand and say to someone who is older, who has the addiction and could well be suffering or dying: well, gosh, you shouldn't have started smoking. I just don't think that it reflects a civil society where, because we don't smoke, we are smug and say that we won't look after you. I believe that extra dollars should go towards the treatment of those that are suffering now.

Otherwise, I certainly approve. Hopefully, by increasing this tax, we will have a quicker result in terms of people not smoking.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't have a lot today – I think I spoke quite extensively on this bill in second reading yesterday – but a couple of things that I just wanted to question. Several sections in Bill 37, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007, strike out the terminology "certified mail" as a means of communicating an objection or an appeal. Instead, now it reads that a person must file their objection either in person or through registered mail. Probably with a little more time, a few more hours of my life, I might have been able to figure this out on my own. I'm guessing that Canada Post no longer has a classification called certified mail, and it's now registered mail. If somebody could provide clarification on that, I would appreciate it.

Section 11 adds subsections (5) and (6) allowing for a person to have a minister approve an immediate appeal of a notice of objection, and if that consent is given, the person then has 90 days in which to appeal to the court. Then it says that they can appeal directly to the court without having the minister first hear the objection. It sounds a little confusing to me. I'm not a lawyer. I've acknowledged that several times in this House. One of the unfortunate things, I suppose, although many people would consider it fortunate, is that the Official Opposition does not have a lawyer in our caucus, nor, should I say, do we have the financial resources to keep a lawyer on retainer, so we're at a bit of a disadvantage, I suppose. That just seems a little confusing to me, and I wouldn't mind an explanation on that.

I talked yesterday about the area in section 32 that amends the act to allow for disclosure to anyone of information that

- (a) is readily available,
- (b) is in a summarized or statistical form, and
- (c) cannot, directly or indirectly, be associated with or identify a particular person.

This is information that would be made available to law enforcement agencies or investigative agencies that would be looking at situations involving fraud or illegal trading in tobacco products. I raised the concern yesterday in second reading about issues around privacy and just wonder what parameters are going to be in place to make sure that, in fact, this section 32 is adhered to and that personal information, identifying information is not made available in that circumstance.

Section 37 allows for a small amount owing, proposed in the legislation to be \$20, to either be collected or not collected. I think we're all familiar with seeing such allowances being made in other tax collection forms. I'm just curious whether or not the \$20 figure is something that would sort of be more or less universal across the board when we're talking about the collection of taxes or the

refunding of overpaid taxes and whether or not that is a change from current legislation.

Beyond that, Mr. Chairman, I think a number of people have talked about what a good step forward this bill will be, although I did suggest yesterday that I am concerned that it's much more about collecting revenue, i.e. a cash cow, than it really is about smoking cessation or a tobacco reduction strategy. I know that the health minister has attempted to market this as such, but the reality is that when you look at this small amount of money that we put into cessation and reduction strategies compared to the amount of tax that we're collecting, I mean, we're going to collect 10 times more tax as a result of this bill being passed than we currently spend on cessation and reduction strategies. In fact, a hundred times more will be collected in total than what we spend on reduction and cessation strategies.

It's clear to me that despite the minister's assurance that this is part of an overall strategy, as I said yesterday, we're not putting our money where our mouths are, and a lot more could be done. That's why I directed the young ladies that were up in the gallery earlier to review *Hansard* from yesterday and look at some of the minister's own comments in terms of the cost to society and the cost to our economy that smoking has. I think it's indefensible that we're spending only 1 per cent of the tax that we collect on those various strategies.

I think that will be the extent of my comments in committee stage. I look forward to the passage of this bill. We all support it on this side of the House, it would appear. I look forward to the early implementation of this. As I suggested earlier, when we were talking about Bill 45, I also look forward very much to the minister coming back to this House with some further concrete measures to curb the costs of smoking to our citizens. Particularly, I like the one that referenced where California has now made it illegal for people to smoke when there are occupants in an automobile under the age of 18. I think that that's something we should be moving forward to quickly, and I hope that the minister will take those remarks to heart.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 37, Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 37 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report bills 45, 8, 13, and 37 and report progress on Bill 36 and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 45, Bill 13, Bill 37. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 8. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 36. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
Bill 40
Personal Directives Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 40, the Personal Directives Amendment Act, 2007.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Member for Calgary-Shaw for her work during the review of this legislation and shepherding Bill 40 to this point. It's my pleasure to now take this important legislation through second reading and the remainder of the legislative process. In fact, I'm very excited about this legislation, and I hope to convince all my family and friends to make it a priority to have a personal directive written.

The Personal Directives Amendment Act will enhance the Personal Directives Act, a piece of legislation that has stood the test of time. For the past 10 years the Personal Directives Act has helped Albertans plan for a time when they may not be able to make their own personal decisions. The Personal Directives Act allows private citizens to write down their wishes about personal matters in case they're ever unable to speak for themselves. With a personal directive Albertans can lay out instructions for things like health care decisions or where they want to live or name a substitute decision-maker, called an agent, who will make decisions on their behalf, or use a combination of both. These documents help give Albertans peace of mind, knowing that their wishes will be respected.

Mr. Speaker, it's very important to know that a personal directive is very different from a personal will or a power of attorney.

When considering changes to the legislation, the government wanted to ensure that the amended Personal Directives Act would meet the changing needs of Albertans. To make sure changes were heading in the right direction, government held extensive consultations and really talked to Albertans about their experiences with this legislation. Through questionnaires, public meetings, and stakeholder sessions government consulted over 4,300 Albertans. These Albertans included doctors, lawyers, advocacy groups, health providers, private guardians, long-term care providers, and members of the public. They said they wanted personal directives to remain voluntary, and they were very clear about what they wanted to see in the legislation. They wanted it to meet the needs of a growing and aging population. The legislation should also be easy to use, understand, and access and include protective safeguards, and this is what the amended legislation achieves.

One of the ways this legislation is making personal directives easy

to use and understand is by providing a voluntary standard form. Albertans can choose to fill out the form or use it as a guide to help them write their own personal directive. The act will make personal directives easier to access by including provisions for a personal directives registry. This voluntary registry will allow health professionals to access the contact information of an agent in case of emergency, allowing the wishes of the person in crisis to be followed. The amendments also clarify the responsibilities of agents, service providers, and the writers of personal directives, making it easier for all involved to understand their roles.

Mr. Speaker, our population is becoming increasingly mobile, and Alberta continues to welcome people from throughout the country and the world. The Personal Directives Amendment Act will recognize other planning tools, like personal directives written outside of Alberta.

Personal directives will also be easier to use for parents with dependent children. The Personal Directives Amendment Act contains provisions that allow parents to plan ahead in case they're ever unable to make personal decisions. They will now be able to name a temporary agent who can care for their children until a formal guardian is appointed.

Protective safeguards are very important to Albertans. Under the new legislation there will be a new method to reassess capacity when there has been a significant change in a person's decision-making ability. There are times when a person who has an activated personal directive regains their ability to make decisions. A new process detailed in the Personal Directives Amendment Act will ensure that once an Albertan has regained their decision-making ability, the personal directive can be deactivated, giving them back control of their personal decisions. The personal directive will then lay dormant until it is needed again.

Another protective safeguard contained in the legislation allows the office of the public guardian greater investigative powers. Albertans said that they were uncomfortable taking concerns to court but wanted a way to ensure that concerns were handled carefully. Amendments to the act will allow the office of the public guardian to investigate complaints about agents after having received a written complaint. Complaints will be screened to ensure they meet the criteria in the act, which can include the agent not following the personal directive or the action of an agent resulting in physical or mental harm to the incapable maker. When necessary, the office of the public guardian can work to resolve the complaint, refer it to alternate dispute resolution, or take the matter to court.

The Personal Directives Amendment Act also contains provisions that allow the office of the public guardian to act as an agent of last resort. This mechanism will allow Albertans to have a substitute decision-maker even though they do not have a friend or family member who could act as an agent.

Personal directives speak for Albertans who cannot speak for themselves. Ensuring that this legislation meets the changing needs of Albertans will help it be even more effective over the next 10 years. The amended legislation will be easier for Albertans to access, understand, and use and will provide the protection they need. I urge all members to support Bill 40, the Personal Directives Amendment Act. This legislation brings peace of mind to Albertans and ensures that their wishes are followed in the event that they are unable to make personal decisions.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to stand and certainly support in principle this amended bill to the

Personal Directives Act. I'd like to just say a few words towards this bill and how it will help in my case, certainly, as someone who has worked within the health care industry, particularly with the elderly.

When someone is turned over to our care, it makes it so much easier when we are very, very clear on exactly what is expected of us. It's very difficult, in fact, in a nursing home situation and now probably in designated assisted living or assisted living to actually know how far to go when there has been some sort of a health episode with people that are in our care. I think this was probably long overdue, and I'm very pleased to see that these amendments have been done and have come forward at this time. I probably am going to have additional amendments where I think that the bill could be strengthened in some other fashion, but I would leave that until committee.

I think the other thing that this is going to help with is cutting down on elder abuse. It will give a mechanism to be able to protect elders from those that are actually their agents because there will be a chance to refer and have that agent's behaviour examined as to if they're actually abusing this person. Regardless of what the person has said, sometimes the abuse is on the side, but it would be able to protect them from that. Children also would be protected.

5:00

I think that when you do this form, which I think is a very good idea, I probably would go even one step further and ask that it be the only form that is used. When this form does come forward, it shouldn't just come forward as a piece of communication that this form is available. It should also come with some education so that whoever is going to use this form, either the agent or the person that then has to interpret it, we're all interpreting it in the same fashion because sometimes we're dealing with emergent situations, and you don't have time to double-check what was really meant by this person and what they had said on the form.

[The Speaker in the chair]

It would be nice to know when we sign these directives, as well, what our wishes are and that the person that we have entrusted will make sure that our wishes will be carried out and that it will just be so. I concur and certainly agree with my hon. colleague across that we should encourage people to have personal directives. I guess I would go even further to say that I think that the minute you turn 18 and become an adult, you should have a personal directive, particularly, I think, with our young people because from 18 to 30 there are huge traumatic episodes in terms of accidents. Many of our young people do become brain-injured and simply cannot make those kinds of decisions. More often than not they aren't married; their parents certainly are not their guardians anymore as they're adults. So I would really encourage personal directives being started at the age of 18.

There are a number of things that I would like perhaps considered. Considering the directives outside of Alberta, I think I would like a little more discussion on that. As a health care worker that has to work quickly or perhaps maybe work with a problem such as someone not speaking English as a first language, I think I would like a little bit more direction put in the bill on that one.

The other part that I think is good and that I'd like further discussion on is actually to be able to investigate complaints about the agent that is in place or, in fact, the public guardian, perhaps some safeguards for the public guardian when the public guardian has to assume that agency, and perhaps clearer regulations or clearer rules on exactly how the public guardian would fulfill their duties.

As I've said, I think this is very good, and as a health care worker

I certainly welcome it. I would ask that the House pass this bill through second reading to committee so that further considerations could be discussed that I believe I'll be bringing forward in the form of amendments.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very interesting bill, and it's very important. It evolves out of a long history of dealing with the issue of personal directives and living wills.

Recently a study was carried out by Alberta Justice and Alberta Seniors and Community Supports, the legislative review of the Dependent Adults Act and the Personal Directives Act, final report recommendations, and I assume that the shaping of this bill is in part the result of that review.

I mean, this idea of having a personal directive or a living will is not actually very old, and it's interesting how the context for making decisions has sort of shifted. It's broadened. At one time, I guess, you know, it really depended on the decision of physicians and also teams of physicians and nurses and hospitals and perhaps an ethics committee in a hospital. But now the wishes of the patient are part of the consideration, a very important consideration, when treatment plans are to be put into place. This brings into the picture other persons; namely, the agents or the persons who are named in the personal directives.

A personal directive gives an appointed person, the agent, powers in relation to decisions about the patient's health and personal care. The Personal Directives Act, which was enacted in 1996, really tried to address issues that were really major problems with the law; in other words, at the time the failure of the law to provide for substitute decision-making authority in terms of emergency health care or treatment and also a failure of the law to provide individuals with a mechanism to voice their intentions. Now we have that mechanism with the permission to proceed with a personal directive or a living will. That's very important because it recognizes an important principle, which is discussed a lot in medical ethics, and that is the autonomy of the patient and the independence, the recognition that the patient has a right to express their own wishes and that those wishes be considered by the health care team when they lose their capacity to make judgments for themselves.

It's praiseworthy that this legislation puts in place a voluntary system and also something that is simple and easy to carry out. Now, of course, living wills are not perfect, and they're not an ironclad process. I think one of the problems with personal directives and living wills in the past was that even the best clearly written personal directives can't include all possibilities. Otherwise, you might end up practically writing a book to cover all the eventualities that might occur in terms of hospital care, emergency care. Even if you have instructions that apply to a particular situation, they're still open to interpretation and must be interpreted and translated into specific decisions at the moment of a person's crisis when they are in the hospital. But this is certainly a step forward. As I've studied the literature on living wills and personal directives, this I think is a really important step forward.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to especially pay more attention to one section in this bill which I find quite interesting, and as the hon. member who introduced this bill mentioned, I think it's an important protective safeguard. That is section 10.1, determination of regained capacity.

The main purpose of a personal directive, of course, is to lay out instructions for health care in case one becomes incapacitated. If you lose your capacity to make a judgment about what kind of treatment you desire, then you need to have specific instructions.

But the question becomes paramount: what happens if you regain capacity after having lost capacity? The question is: is the regaining of capacity sufficient for a person, then, to be considered competent to decide on their treatment? There's a bit of ambiguity here, which I don't think this bill really deals with.

I mean, a very important point to consider, which the bill does deal with, is the issue of authority: who makes the decision about whether a person has regained their capacity or not? The bill outlines a process of consultation with the service provider, the health care provider, consultation with the named person in the personal directive, the agent. That consultation might actually lead to the involvement of a physician and a psychologist, especially if there's disagreement between the agent and the service provider. So I think that outline is good.

The whole issue of capacity and defining capacity still lurks here as an important issue. In my reading of the medical ethical literature, much of the discussion of capacity has focused on the question of death because it was important for the medical establishment to define death in some way. One of the definitions of death that has been put forward is an irreversible loss of capacity for consciousness or social interaction. But, of course, if you regain your capacity, it's kind of moving from death to resurrection. So I think it's important to try to understand what it is we're talking about when we talk about capacity.

5:10

What does it mean to have the capacity again to make a judgment about your own treatment? What constitutes capacity? Is it simply attaining consciousness? No, that's not enough. You would have to have the capacity to be able to communicate, to reason, to make moral judgments, the ability to think and feel and relate to other people: your family and the doctors. I mean, these are important issues, and one of the things that's really important is that the patients be able to make the judgments in their own interests in terms of treatment plans that could be put in place.

Capacity is not defined in this bill. I guess it's left to regulations. As 10.1(5) states, it suggests that a decision about capacity is made in conjunction with regulations, but I'm not sure what those regulations are. Presumably, if there's a discussion or debate, an argument between the initial care team and the agent named in the personal directive, and the physician and psychologist come in to make a decision, then they are going to follow some sort of guideline, some sort of regulation to determine whether the person has capacity or not.

It's very interesting. I think, you know, this whole process is evolving through time, and we're getting better at dealing with these kinds of situations. I commend the makers of this bill for that section. Except for the fact that it doesn't really define what capacity is, it still outlines a process that needs to take place, and that's a protection for people who seem to lose capacity and then through the miracle, if I could say, of modern science and medicine regain capacity. And then it's really important that they are considered, that their wishes are taken into consideration. Then if they again lose consciousness, if they lose their capacity, of course, the living will or the personal directive comes into play again.

Those are the points that I wanted to raise about Bill 40. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, should members wish to take advantage of it.

There being none, then I'll call on the Member for Edmonton-Calder, then Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to this opportunity to make some brief comments on Bill 40, the Personal Directives Amendment Act, 2007. Certainly, as the previous speakers have mentioned, there doesn't seem to be a great deal to be concerned about with this bill, and certainly the whole concept of strengthening and broadening the personal directive option that's available to citizens here in this province is a commendable thing to do. It has lots of positive socioeconomic implications, and I think that it's part of the evolution of how we look at health care at all stages of our life.

I do however have a couple of specific concerns that I hope during the course of this debate will become more clear to not only myself but other individuals in the province that have expressed this concern to me, actually, and that is working with the personal directive and the guardianship of others for individuals who become invalid through medical problems, just to ensure the integrity and the protection of a person who might lose their independence and freedom through a personal directive type of document. I guess it's incumbent upon us here in the Legislature to ensure that every possible mechanism is available to an individual with a personal directive to be able to find a means to appeal and to clarify their position at any given point in time, whether they've been declared to be not in the capacity to make decisions for themselves or not. Of course, Mr. Speaker, this is perhaps the worst-case scenario. What we're talking about is an individual losing their right to be a person with all of the rights and freedoms and responsibilities conferred upon all of us through the law.

We must be very careful when we're drafting a document such as this that it's very clear that a person might have the capacity to appeal or to have assistance and a sober second opinion on their case if they have in fact been declared to be incompetent and the mechanisms in their personal directive have begun to be executed. Of course, with the vagaries of human nature being what they are, you know, people might and do take advantage of others in these circumstances.

I believe – and again I'm looking for clarification during the course of this debate – that the Mental Health Act deals specifically with defining whether someone has the capacity to make decisions for themselves or not. That being given, still Bill 40 and the personal directive document that is being drafted for an individual become the vehicle by which someone can be declared incompetent, or it defines the term somehow for someone if they are having physical difficulties. So I think that we have to be very, very careful to ensure that such an act or a bill as this one does not make it more difficult for an individual to protect their freedoms and to not be preyed upon by guardians who might wish to have someone declared to be incapacitated and to invoke their personal directive when, in fact, that is taking place against that individual's will.

Those are the general comments that I wanted to make in terms of concern, and I hope that we all get clarification on that during the course of this debate. Of course, all of us here could be in that same situation where you have a personal directive, and we want to ensure that it's invoked only in the most responsible manner and at the most appropriate time and place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Is there any member who would like to participate under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

There being none, then I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to stand and comment at second reading on Bill 40, Personal Directives

Amendment Act, 2007. I also want to congratulate the mover on this. It is progressive policy that will, I think, help to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals at the same time as balancing family and societal obligations and do this in a way that is ultimately going to serve the individual without compromising and risking the resources or the people around that individual and the family.

It recognizes patient autonomy. At the same time, it assists families in implementing with some direction the wishes of an individual, and that's important. It also has addressed some of the inadequacies of the Personal Directives Act with respect to determining regained capacity, the care of minor children, the voluntary registration of personal directives, the investigation of complaints, and new powers of the public guardian to investigate and act on complaints as well as to collect information relating to the personal directive.

As it sits, there are some important measures to guard against abuse and neglect and exploitation of individuals, and I commend again the movers. This will improve our confidence in this important role for the public service around health care, social services, and meeting the needs of individuals in our society.

The Personal Directives Act addressed a gap in law by providing individuals with the ability to plan for their own incapacities, and now we recognize that some changes are needed to safeguard against exploitation of those very rights and options for individuals who do take the initiative. Prior to Bill 40, the personal directive had no public oversight, and we believe that this is an important amendment.

5:20

There are perhaps some minor suggestions we might make to strengthen it further, and that would have to do with some of the issues around directives made outside of the province, the investigation of complaints by the public guardian and how to ensure that all sides have an opportunity to be heard and acted upon, and the duties of the agents, which are not as clearly spelled out as they might be.

But given those caveats, we're on this side very supportive of this bill and look forward to further debate and discussions in third reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any participants under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?
Other participants? The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have listened to the debate in second reading on this Bill 40, and I just want to assure the members opposite that I will be bringing back the answers because I feel this is a very good bill and a very strong bill. I do not have the answer right now to answer who decides when capacity has been regained, but there's a very good process and a very safe process, a protective process.

Then also the directives made outside the province. I just want to say so that you can think about this. I raise the issue of the fact that my mother visits regularly from Ontario, and if she has a personal directive in Ontario, would we recognize that here in Alberta? The answer to that is yes, as in Ontario my personal directive would be recognized there.

I'll bring back some more answers, and hopefully we'll all be on the same page on this one because it is a great response to something that's badly needed in our society. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a second time]

Bill 38

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to second reading of Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007. Bill 38 would implement an enforceable dispute resolution process under the Alberta-B.C. trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or TILMA. It would permit a penalty imposed by an impartial dispute panel established under TILMA to be filed in Alberta courts. This amendment parallels legislation introduced by our partners in B.C.

As the hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations mentioned previously, the TILMA itself lays out the dispute resolution process. By permitting a penalty imposed by a TILMA dispute resolution panel to be filed with the courts, as this amendment proposes, this process would have some teeth.

Mr. Speaker, one of the shortcomings of the pan-Canadian agreement on internal trade is that it does not have an enforceable dispute resolution process. The TILMA enforceable disputes resolution process signals the commitment of the governments of Alberta and British Columbia to eliminate needless impediments to trade, investment, and labour mobility between provinces within our own country.

The TILMA has a three-step dispute resolution process: first, dispute avoidance; second, consultation; finally, if none of those are successful, three, resolution through an impartial panel. In the third step complainants will be able to make their case before a dispute panel. The panelists are independent and impartial. They have the ability to levy a financial penalty against a government but only if it does not change a measure that has been found to violate the TILMA. The maximum penalty is \$5 million.

Monetary awards under the TILMA are only available if a province has acted contrary to the agreement and only if that province does not comply with the panel ruling. This is to encourage compliance, not to compensate individuals or companies for business losses. Private parties cannot sue through the courts for damages under the TILMA. They can access the dispute resolution process, and they can seek recourse only on measures related to trade, investment, or labour mobility. Under the dispute resolution process only one dispute can be launched on what is essentially the same complaint at any one time. That allows a situation to be supported or corrected, reducing grounds for further complaints. To reduce the likelihood of frivolous complaints, the dispute panel can charge the full costs of a dispute resolution process to losing complainants.

The hon. minister of international and intergovernmental affairs has already outlined one example, Quebec coloured margarine, of how Albertans are hurt by the lack of an enforceable dispute resolution process under the AIT. Let me briefly give you a couple more. In 2004 an AIT panel agreed with Alberta that credit unions and Treasury Branches in our province would be hurt by proposed changes to federal regulations governing the way the cost of consumer loans are explained. Mr. Speaker, almost three years later we are still in discussions with the federal government about those proposed changes. Also in 2004 another AIT panel agreed with Alberta that Ontario's Edible Oil Products Act was inconsistent with the AIT. Ontario repealed its act. However, we are now concerned that Ontario has gone through the back door and introduced the same restrictive measures under its Milk Act.

Mr. Speaker, approval of the amendment that is before us will give the TILMA dispute resolution process teeth. TILMA panel decisions will be enforceable, unlike the decisions handed down by AIT panels that some Canadian governments have seen fit to ignore. I encourage all members to support Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, which will make penalties handed

down by TILMA dispute resolution panels enforceable by the courts.
Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to say at the outset that the Official Opposition will not likely be supporting this bill, and I'm happy to tell you why if you can't guess why. Although we've long been in favour of reducing trade restrictions with our neighbouring provinces – and, in fact, our leader recently released a vision statement called the Western Tiger, where we contemplate growth initiatives to . . . [interjection] Well, now the health minister is saying: shipping our bitumen east and west. Yes, that's exactly what it contemplates as opposed to sending it south across the border. Clearly, the vision is to create an economic western tiger, so that in itself would indicate, certainly from a high-altitude perspective, that we're in favour of things being done that would increase trade with our neighbouring provinces and reduce the number of restrictions to that.

However – and this is a really important point – there has never been any debate on the TILMA agreement in this Legislature. Full debate took place in the B.C. Legislature and none in this Legislature. That in and of itself is all the reason that I need to stand before you, Mr. Speaker, and the people of this province and say that I cannot support anything that moves TILMA into legislation by amending the Government Organization Act without first of all having a proper debate of what TILMA is and what the ramifications will be and addressing the concerns that have been raised by various stakeholder groups by acknowledging the good things that TILMA would do. Many groups are fully in support of TILMA. It's not so much the vision. It's not so much the concept of improving trade with neighbouring provinces and making it easier to take place. It's simply a question of the process or in this case the lack thereof, whereby we suddenly have an agreement foisted upon the people of this province, the businesses of this province, the trade unions of this province without proper debate ever having taken place in this body. That is clearly the concern that we have.

5:30

Now, I'd just like to go through some of the stakeholders that have been in touch with us or have publicly commented on the TILMA agreement up until this point. Certainly, Gil McGowan from the Alberta Federation of Labour is quoted as saying that TILMA is a wolf in sheep's clothing and that it is a way for companies to control elected decision-makers. I don't think anybody in this House would contemplate that as being a good thing if, in fact, it proves to be true.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives is not explicitly against TILMA being put into place, although they're openly against NAFTA and clearly skeptical, Mr. Speaker, about the need for TILMA in the first place.

Interestingly, the Ontario Federation of Labour – and I know the mover of the bill in second reading has referenced Ontario and some of the concerns that the Alberta government has with Ontario – has issued a review of TILMA done by the law firm Sack Goldblatt Mitchell LLP of Toronto, and they state that

TILMA represents a far reaching and corrosive constraint on the future capacity of the governments of British Columbia and Alberta to exercise the policy, legislative, and programmatic authority that is essential to their governance mandates.

They're clearly advising that Ontario and any other province should not adopt TILMA-like obligations without – and this is important – “the fullest and informed public discussion and debate.” Again, that is something that has not taken place in this Legislature and causes us untold concern.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees is against TILMA. They say, “TILMA will provide multiple grounds for challenging governments' right to regulate based on a myth – that there are substantial inter-provincial trade barriers.” Well, I'm not so sure, quite frankly, whether or not I would agree that there are substantial interprovincial trade barriers, but clearly there are still some. Clearly, they don't necessarily serve this province well, and they don't necessarily serve our neighbouring provinces well.

I've raised a number of concerns, and one in particular that even the Minister of Finance has acknowledged is the concern about the future of the Alberta Treasury Branches with the implementation of TILMA. I know that financial institutions were given a little bit of extra time before the TILMA agreement applies to them; nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, at some point in the not-too-distant future the Alberta Treasury Branches are going to as a result of TILMA be required to operate on a level footing with financial institutions that do business in both provinces. It's unclear to me to this point – and I think even the Finance minister acknowledged that it's unclear to the department – just exactly what ramification the implementation of TILMA will have on the Alberta Treasury Branches.

So here we are now amending legislation to ensconce the TILMA agreement into legislation and yet never having had the debate in this Assembly as to exactly what TILMA is, what the implications of TILMA will be, whether or not it in fact accomplishes the things that the agreement is set out to accomplish in the first place. So grave concerns over the manner in which this is being done, probably more so, Mr. Speaker, than the content of the bill. It's just concerns over the process or, as I indicated, the lack of process.

I think I'm going to allow others to speak in second reading. I know for sure we'll have much more to say when we get to the committee stage, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps be looking for some amendments to come forward as well. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to participate. Please proceed.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I rise with a tremendous amount of interest to make comments on Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007, here in second reading. You know, I find it a bit rich that this appears before us here now when all of the work and negotiation and drafting of this TILMA agreement was done behind closed doors and outside of this legislative office. In fact, Bill 38 is just the final little piece that's required to actually get the TILMA ball rolling, so to speak, to have a disputes inquiry board and all of this. It's like debating after the facts the substance of the TILMA agreement as drafted privately between British Columbia and Alberta.

I think all Albertans should take notice of what's going on here, British Columbia as well and other Canadians too, because this legislation and the governing structure of TILMA are definitely taking bites out of the autonomy and the capacity of different provincial Legislatures and municipalities to govern and to have the responsibility over the areas that they should be legislating on. You know, it's regressive policy in the worst sort of way, and we hope that we can certainly at least have this recognized in a wider context by the public here by debating this Bill 38. Perhaps that will be the only positive thing that could come out of it.

The Alberta New Democrats are rejecting this bill based on a lack of democratic principles, which it represents. The bill takes away democratic and governmental accountability and, I would say, holds it hostage to private and corporate business interests. This conflict resolution bill as described here is similar to the function of the WTO. According to many groups who have criticized this consider-

ably, for example the Council of Canadians, nine out of the 11 rulings of the WTO where governments tried to defend their regulations in fact came up short.

This bill cannot be amended, in our view, in any meaningful manner given that the governing structure of TILMA is in fact not contained within this bill. It becomes almost a bit, well, not just ironic but hypocritical to consider debating this when the substance and the effects are not contained in this piece of legislation. This bill, though, I see as the central kind of a binding element that TILMA needs to get under way, so I urge all members here in the Legislature to reject this bill.

You know, it's interesting to see how the debate is taking place as we speak here. We're doing this here in Alberta. In British Columbia this also is being debated now, and it's interesting to see how that is unfolding because it does give us a very, I guess, strong illumination that people are not happy with the bill in British Columbia either.

I believe that this bill does not represent the public interest; it represents private interest in the most narrow sort of manner, and it's akin to the privatization of the legislative process that we represent here in this House. It's a legal document that will give special rights to individuals and to corporations to sue the provincial government or municipalities if it's deemed that the regulations or the laws or the bills or the bylaws of municipalities and provincial governments are getting in the way of the business interest of that corporation.

I believe that the fears that have been expressed through different labour organizations and the Council of Canadians and municipalities across both British Columbia and Alberta are very well founded. The potential for the reduction of standards in both provinces, of labour standards, of safety standards, of food and health standards, environmental standards, social values – all of those things are put at risk here potentially by what seems to be this bill that's meant to create so-called efficiencies. I find that highly ironic and very troubling, too.

5:40

You know, a lot of the arguments that are being made in support of TILMA I find to be spurious at best. The Constitution of the country of Canada has always banned genuine interprovincial trade barriers and, really, very, very few exist. That seems to be the Trojan Horse by which TILMA is proceeding. What many commentators call interprovincial barriers are, in fact, just regional differences between provinces. All the economic evidence that I've seen indicates that these differences really don't have a big effect on interprovincial trade as such. What TILMA is aiming at is to lower the standards through the laws that are created by different provinces and different municipalities between British Columbia and Alberta.

Of course, the TILMA founders would like to dream that other provinces would like to join as well. I find it interesting that other provinces have not in fact said that they would go along with this. Perhaps we should find a message and a lesson in that rejection by other provinces of the principles of TILMA.

In fact, looking at some of the arguments, the Conference Board of Canada made all of these wild claims that the impact of TILMA would realize so many billions of dollars. I would refute that quite stringently. The Conference Board of Canada estimated that we would realize so many benefits from this change in the trade procedures between British Columbia and Alberta. For example, they say a 3.8 per cent increase in B.C.'s GDP, which seems impossible, considering that only 5.4 per cent of B.C.'s GDP actually went to Alberta in terms of interprovincial exports in the last available year. So it seems illogical that such an outlandish increase in their GDP would be realized through TILMA.

There is just a whole range of problems associated with this, not the least of which, I believe, is the devaluing of the legislative processes that we are entrusted to keep here in this Legislature and the British Columbia Legislature and all the municipalities along the way. Who is to say that a civil suit should bear more value than the legislation and the due process and the consideration that people have in each region in terms of their, say, environmental concerns that they have for their region or for labour concerns that they have for their region or food or safety?

There is just a whole range of things that we do and I think do quite well in terms of having regional government that should not be superseded by a dispute mechanism that they're suggesting here with TILMA, which amounts to no more than people sort of suing each other in a race for the bottom, the lowest common denominator, which is just to make a buck somehow. I find that to be reprehensible, and certainly I will stand in the way of this bill and any other TILMA legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Further participants? Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, do you wish to participate?

Prior to calling on the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, could I avail upon the Assembly to give permission to introduce some very special guests that are here today?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Speaker: In both galleries are a number of former members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly who have served with distinction in the past and are here to enjoy this evening at the first former MLA dinner. Members will recall that a bill put forward by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose gave rise to the creation of the Association of Former MLAs.

I'm going to introduce those that are here, and I'll just ask them to rise as I introduce them. Would you just kindly withhold your recognition until we have concluded this. Dennis Anderson, a former Member for Calgary-Currie; Bill Bonner, a former Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, and his wife, Jeanne; Fred Bradley, a former Member for Pincher Creek-Crowsnest; Dave Broda, a former Member for Redwater;

Dr. Walter Buck, former Member for Clover Bar; Jack Campbell, former Member for Rocky Mountain House, and his wife, Donna; Bob Clark, former Member for Olds-Didsbury; Bill Diachuk representing Edmonton-Beverly, and his wife, Ollie, I believe is here as well; Keith Everitt with his wife, Thelma – Keith represented St. Albert, and also with him is his grandson Dennis – Alderman Ed Gibbons, former Member for Edmonton-Manning; Alderwoman Karen Leibovici, former Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark; Mary LeMessurier, former Member for Edmonton-Centre; Jon Lord, former Member for Calgary-Currie; Jim McPherson, former Member for Red Deer; Mary O'Neill representing St. Albert; Leo Piquette, former Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche, and his wife, Mary; Bill Purdy, Stony Plain; Dr. Ian Reid, the former Member for West Yellowhead; Ray Reiersen, former Member for St. Paul; Dr. Horst Schmid, former Member for Edmonton-Avonmore; Gary Severtson, former Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake; Tony Vandermeer, former Member for Edmonton-Manning; Julius Yankowsky, former Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview; Les Young, former Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place, and Helen, I believe, is here as

well. We also have with us the widow of former Speaker Art Dixon, Marguerite Dixon, and her daughter. Art represented the constituency of Calgary-Millican. That's the past, and it's also the future. Welcome to our distinguished guests. [applause]

Well, that was very nice, hon. members. Thank you very much.

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 38

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007

(continued)

The Speaker: For our distinguished visitors the Assembly is currently debating Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007. We're in the second reading. I'm going to call on the fourth participant, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, to present her remarks.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be very brief. One of the things that bothers me the most about this bill is that absolutely nobody seems to know about it. I've spoken to people. I've certainly spoken to municipalities in southern Alberta. Many of them say that they don't have a clue. Probably that's because it was not debated in this House, where it should have been. So that's one of my concerns.

I won't go into some of my other, deeper concerns because they've already been addressed, and we will be speaking about it again, but I really believe that the main thing about this bill is that nobody knows about it. It's very important, and it will change the way we operate. For instance – and I'll speak about nurses – the standards in B.C. are not quite on par with ours. If we pass this bill that's coming up, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, the actual self-regulation will turn over to the minister. Under TILMA the minister will be able to do things that probably the nurses in this province will not be happy with or, in fact, probably the doctors because they will lose that power for self-regulation, which then levels off the two professions. I think that that can be very problematic in terms of how health care agencies actually self-regulate.

I'll stop there, but the fact that no one knows about it is very, very troubling.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you might imagine, I'm trying to get up to speed on any number of bills. This one strikes me as being one which really deserves careful consideration. I think we'd all agree that there are implications for this bill. Just upon quick reading of it, I mean, realistically the object of the bill, to enable the government to pay out any penalties that may be awarded against the province due to a claim under the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, is a lot in and of itself. The impacts and the outcomes are very huge. The act recognizes TILMA as an agreement to which Alberta is liable and in which the province participates, the mechanisms by which that agreement operates, or an adjudication panel and potentially fines. We are talking about \$5 million for a single infraction.

5:50

This is something that I know our caucus is going to want to try to pay particular attention to, particularly because of some of the points that have been raised here. With regard to the democratic

process, as far as this goes, this is of concern to me. I mean, this is a far-reaching piece of legislation that I think deserves the full debate of the House. I'm quite concerned, in fact, that from what I understand from one of my colleagues, this received fuller debate or considerable debate in the British Columbia Legislature. I'm quite at odds to try to figure out why it is that there hasn't been full debate in this particular Legislature. It's the democratic process that I'm concerned about here, and I'm, frankly, happy to be able to rise this early on to be able to address that. I would think that that should be something that would be a concern to all members of this House.

There are concerns about the measures to be in place that form the obstacles to trade, investment, and labour mobility. We understand that. We understand some concerns around article 6. Realistically, I mean, ours is a free-enterprise party. We recognize that trade agreements can have great benefit to business, consumers, and governments. Clearly, when unnecessary barriers to trade, investment, and labour mobility exist, we should work to remove them. But I'm not sure that there's been a full debate on that and on the ramifications of it. TILMA could have incredible influence on future government behaviour, and we therefore definitely need detailed discussions about it in the Legislature. If more and more policy areas come under its scope, as seems to be the intention, then this need becomes ever more important.

Again, it's an issue of transparency and accountability. This government has talked about transparency and accountability. Well, if that's the case, let's take our time and let's have a full debate so that the public can take a full look at this important piece of legislation and the ramifications of it.

We need to know exactly what areas of policy are to be included under TILMA. The agreement is not clear on this matter. What government policy is going to have to change? If none, then why have the agreement? But if some, then what? Albertans need to know, and we're looking to this government to have a debate in this House so that we can find out what changes will be forthcoming. All we're asking for is a debate here. We're not getting that, and we need to know why.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you for those comments. I said previously that I have a serious democratic concerns about this bill. I would like to ask you a question. Hypothetically, let's say, what happens if the city of Calgary decides to go on a green policy to have a higher percentage of renewable electricity being purchased through the municipality and then through a disputes inquiry board a private power company says: we'd like to take the city of Calgary to task on this because it interferes with our right to sell our electricity to the city of Calgary? What would you envision with this TILMA thing?

Mr. Cheffins: Well, I think you raise a valid . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, through the chair, please. Please proceed.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think you raise a valid question here. I think that there are concerns about the breadth of this bill and how it is that it's going to affect Albertans. But I think you also raise questions with regard to how this will unfold. What are the administrative ramifications? What are the ramifications with regard to various levels of government? I would expect that some of the members of this House, including ministers, would have

questions about that. We'd like to see those kinds of issues raised and debated fully so that we can really get at what's best for the province on this particular bill.

The Speaker: Others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow to conclude the debate.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are a couple of comments that you've made that I'd certainly like to address, and the other ones we can bring forward later. First of all, in terms of debating TILMA, TILMA is available to you. It has been available since April of '06. According to custom, when we bring forward things into the Legislature, that is how we debate them. This is your opportunity to debate. It is available to everyone. This is a wonderful time. We are in front of the Legislature, and the way that we debate issues within the Legislature is that we bring through legislation and debate it. We can deal with the rest of the questions later.

Thanks very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour I would move that we now call it 6 p.m. and adjourn until another day starts tomorrow for us at 1 p.m.

The Speaker: Before calling that question, just a little update. About 30 minutes ago there was a flurry of activity in this Assembly when a number of hon. members went to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta website, and on that page called Elected Members of the Assembly the following statement was in it: writ has been dropped. So this has now been fixed. It was fixed at 5:55. We will investigate what this was – if this is a renegade employee, a hacker, a computer glitch – and report to the Assembly tomorrow. But false alarm.

[Motion carried; at 5:58 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, November 8, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/08

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Today we're going to do something just a little different. I have with me at this auspicious place Nicole Stewart, a grade 10 student from Catholic central high in Lethbridge. She was the first-place winner in the Alberta 2007 intermediate poem competition sponsored by the Alberta-Northwest Territories Command of the Royal Canadian Legion, and she placed second in the dominion intermediate poem competition in the year 2007, sponsored by the Royal Canadian Legion. She has written a poem in commemoration of Remembrance Day called *Eyes*, and I am going to invite her to come to where I stand and read the poem for all Members of the Legislative Assembly, our guests here today, and all those who might be watching via our live video feed on the Internet.

Miss Stewart:

Remembrance Day is here once more.
I sit at a ceremony, lonely and bored.
There are seniors galore in dresses and ties,
I don't understand 'till I look in their eyes.

A mother's eyes glow with the ghost of her son
Who lost his life that had barely begun.
Just a few rows over eyes look to her love
Who's now watching her from heaven above.

A daughter's eyes shine with love for her dad.
She never knew him, what fun would they've had?
A brother's eyes fill with tears because
He never told his sister just how proud he was.

The eyes the most haunting are in the front row,
A blue so bright they cut into my soul.
A single tear forms in the corner and rolls
Down his face through the creases and folds.

He thinks of the day that he left on that ship
Not knowing what would come on that horrible trip.
The tears, the violence, the pain and the fright.
He thinks of the visions that still haunt his nights.

He thinks of a battle he barely escaped.
Why was he the one who was given this fate?
To this day he can hear the air raid alarms
As he thinks of his best friend who died in his arms.

A tear falls down for each memory he sees.
Suddenly it clicks, it makes sense to me.
We must honour our heroes with love and respect,
That's why we sit here today:
Lest we forget. [Applause]

The Speaker: Isn't that marvellous? A poem by Nicole Stewart, a grade 10 student from Lethbridge, an outstanding Alberta young person. Thank you very much, Nicole.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 29 visitors from Spruce Grove's Living Waters Christian Academy. I was speaking with them earlier today about the mock Legislature. As everyone can see, they're a well-dressed group of young folks, and their debate at the mock Legislature happened to be about school uniforms. I was told that it was a very interesting debate, and at the end of it all it did pass, which is hardly surprising. I was talking to them about what we do in this House. They're very knowledgeable about what we do and who we represent. They are accompanied by teachers Miss Kori Fehr, Miss Kathryn Lochhead, and parent helper Colleen Osback. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our House.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Tourism Promotion.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly the very first public school that I've had come to the Legislature in the seven years that I've been in office. It's a long trip, and we're very grateful for the opportunity to introduce the students from grade 6 from Father James Whelihan school and their teachers and group leaders Mrs. Niksic, Mrs. Royer, Mrs. Rutledge, Ms Van Dyke, Mrs. Paczulla, Mrs. Curzon, Mr. Donaldson, Mrs. Henezi, Mrs. Chalifoux, Mr. Felske, Mrs. Lapierre, Mrs. Borrelli, Mrs. Pariag, Mrs. Greyeyes, and Mrs. Yee. I'd have them all rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and to members of the House eight very hard working employees of the Department of Education. We have Marc Prefontaine, Natalie Reschke, and Heidi Looby, who work in the teacher development and certification branch. We have Cheryl Sides, Mary Fitzgerald, and Marni Pearce, who work in the health and children's initiatives branch of the department. Finally, we have Wieland Petermann and Romana Bedriy, who work in the international languages branch of the Department of Education. I would ask all eight employees, who are seated in the members' gallery, to please stand and receive the response from the members of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is a pleasure and an honour for me today to be able to introduce to you and through you to all of my colleagues in the Assembly some of the staff from the ministry office. Undoubtedly, all of my colleagues will understand that the minister's office over the last number of months has been extremely busy, and I think, again, my colleagues would agree that the staff in the office have been more than helpful. They remain very, very friendly. Of course, to me they would. But on all sides – the questions that are asked, the work that has been asked of them – they continue to produce what I think are stellar results in the minister's office. I would ask Stacey Leighton, Ethan Bayne, Diane Carter, Belinda Bridge, and Jason Chance to please rise, and I would ask my colleagues to give them the traditional warm welcome to this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Captain Mark Peebles, Master Corporal James Pantel, Corporal Zach Buchanan, Corporal Chris Megyesi, Corporal William Salikin, Corporal Ryan Shudra, and Corporal Michael Zmurko, who have either returned from Afghanistan or are deploying in the future. They are here to help us on Remembrance Day in memory of Master Corporal Raymond Arndt from the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, who was killed August 2006 in Kandahar, as well as many members of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry who continue to lay down their lives. I'd like them now to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly today two gentlemen that represent two separate and competing Alberta-based companies involved in the transportation communication business. These two men have contributed to revolutionizing their industry with new technological advances in respect to the electronic reporting of hours of service logs and vehicle inspections. I would ask Mr. Kim Sax from Mense Incorporated and Mr. Brett Duncan from Verigo Incorporated to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a family from southern Alberta who live on my western constituency border, right on highway 3, I might add. They've travelled to Edmonton for an education weekend. They're spending part of the day here at the Legislature. The Kroeker family are typical of most families in southern Alberta and, might I say, all of Alberta. They're hard working and want the best for their children. I would like to ask Henry Kroeker and his wife, Dorothy, and their sons Ben and Jed to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Energy, an additional introduction?

Mr. Knight: Yes, if I may. Thank you very much. The gentleman won't need an introduction to you, Mr. Speaker. He may need an introduction to some of the members assembled here today. Marvin Moore is in the Assembly. He joined us today. Many of us will know that Marvin served in this House as a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the Smoky River riding initially and then, I believe, the Grande Prairie-Smoky riding for a short period of time as it transitioned as well. Mr. Moore continues to serve Albertans daily. He works extremely hard with the health region in our part of the province. I would ask that Mr. Moore please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. I'd like to begin with Nicole Stewart and her family. I see that she has joined her family in your gallery, and I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature the family of Nicole. If each would rise when I mention your names, there's Roxanne Stewart, her mother; Russ Stewart, her

father; her sister Laurie; a grandfather, Bill Stewart, from Hairy Hill. The Stewarts, of course, are from Lethbridge, as you've mentioned. Then another set of grandparents: Metro Eliuk, grandfather from Sherwood Park, and Iris Eliuk, grandmother from Sherwood Park. I would ask all of the members to honour the family of Nicole, such a bright person.

The second set, Mr. Speaker, is Shelby MacLeod and a friend of mine, Reg Dawson. Shelby was around these parts for at least as long as I have been, and that's why I was around as long as I've been, because of Shelby. I want to welcome them to the Legislature and ask that you give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mr. Al Sauve, who is the executive director of the sheriff's branch in my ministry.

Our sheriff's branch has made invaluable contributions towards ensuring the safety of all Albertans. Mr. Speaker, we now have over 500 sheriffs working in partnership with other law enforcement agencies throughout Alberta helping keep our roads safe, transporting prisoners, protecting the courts, assisting with criminal investigations into gangs and drugs, ensuring the appropriate counterterrorism practices are in place, and performing many other duties that support this government's mandate for safe and secure communities.

Today I had the pleasure of introducing another new role for sheriffs, that of finding and apprehending criminals at large on outstanding warrants. Effective immediately we have 10 sheriffs who will be working in that regard. This new warrant apprehension team reflects the recommendations of the safe communities task force by acting to take these criminals off the street right now.

Mr. Sauve is sitting in the members' gallery, and I would ask that he rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

Remembrance Day 2007

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of the year 1918 the guns fell silent, and men lay down their arms across the Western Front of Europe at the end of what was then known as the Great War. This bloody conflict cost the lives of millions, including over 69,000 Canadians. The end of the war came into effect on the signing of an armistice between the warring nations, and thus November 11 became known as Armistice Day.

Despite the passage of time and other intervening conflicts the 11th hour of November 11 has retained its significance and has assumed a broader symbolic importance as the special time when peoples of the British Commonwealth and some other nations commemorate veterans and the sacrifices of those who have fallen in the service of their country.

In Canada November 11 is known as Remembrance Day. It's a time when we pause to remember all those who served in our armed forces and more than 117,000 Canadians who died in the Boer War, two world wars, the Korean War, and in UN peacekeeping and NATO actions.

Mr. Speaker, I know that all members of this Assembly join with me in recognition of Remembrance Day. The red poppies which are worn on the lapels of members today remind us of our solemn duty to remember and to pass on that legacy to the next generation.

This Sunday, November 11, at 11 o'clock in the morning may each of us in this House and all Albertans, young and old, stop to

take two minutes from our busy daily lives to observe two minutes of silence to honour the memory of all those Canadians who have served and especially those who have fallen in the service of our country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Remembrance Day 2007

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity today to honour those who have answered Canada's call to the military service and offer them our heartfelt thanks. Remembrance Day is a powerful tribute to the sacrifices made by over 100,000 Canadians throughout the history of our nation's military participation. Throughout World War I, World War II, Korea, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and peacekeeping missions around the world our soldiers have always been renowned for their courage and bravery. Their actions have helped shape our Canadian identity. The Battle of Vimy Ridge alone, now 90 years in our past, continues to instill Canadians with pride. Veterans have allowed our society to flourish as a democratic, open, and prosperous nation.

The constituents of Edmonton-Decore have always had a great deal to do collectively in supporting the military families, and I am proud to have helped in that regard.

To the members up in the gallery and to all Canadian veterans I offer my gratitude, respect, and solemn vow to remember those who offered their ultimate sacrifice.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Edgeworth Centre

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to recognize the opening of a sport development and wellness complex in the community of Camrose. The community and university project encompasses leisure, sport, education, health and fitness and features a large spectator arena and fitness centre. This state-of-the-art recreational and wellness complex, now named the Edgeworth Centre, will generate tremendous economic and health benefits as it serves a large regional population in east-central Alberta.

These and other worthwhile attributes that the complex brings were all reasons why the Alberta government, the city of Camrose, the county of Camrose, the University of Alberta, surrounding towns and villages supported by neighbouring MLAs, and the private sector proudly provided substantial funding for the centre. One of the greatest accomplishments of this facility was the co-operation and partnership between the stakeholders and supporters. Together their efforts culminated in the planning, construction, and grand opening of this multifaceted facility on September 28. It was my honour to be a participant at that time.

This Camrose sport and wellness project demonstrates the true potential of comprehensive rural development. The university's support ensures that this leisure campus is not only an exceptional sporting venue but a multipurpose university and community centre with a physiotherapy clinic, physiology lab, and technologically capable classrooms.

Mr. Speaker, the Edgeworth Centre is an inclusive model that will provide opportunities for Albertans to improve their health and minds. I anticipate that for years to come Albertans will enter this facility to attend a Kodiaks or Augustana Vikings game, participate in fitness activities, educate themselves, participate in the Viking

Cup, or simply to be an active volunteer in the community organization.

Mr. Speaker, this is a remarkable achievement for the community, the university, and a large section of east-central Alberta, and I wish to congratulate all participants on the opening of this new centre.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

1:20

Royalty Revenues

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been ripped off, ripped off by a government responsible for what could be the most expensive scandal in Canadian history. According to the Royalty Review Panel and the Auditor General the government has lost billions of dollars, at least \$114,000 per hour for every hour of every day for the last seven years, because of inadequate government oversight of the royalty regime.

My constituents are asking me many questions about the money this government failed to collect and how that money could have made Alberta a better place. They want someone to be held accountable for letting so many billions of dollars slip through the government's fingers. These dollars could have been saved in the heritage fund to build a better future for our province and to vastly improve the quality of infrastructure and vital government services. Homeless people wonder why this province still has so many problems even though it seems the government can afford to lose billions of dollars without a second thought.

Both the reports reveal that there are serious problems with accountability, transparency, and management within the Ministry of Energy, yet the government has refused to acknowledge that the Auditor General and the Royalty Review Panel both raised huge concerns over accountability within the Ministry of Energy. The people of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, cannot trust this government, that has squandered our past to build our future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Shelby Chalmers

Ms. Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been said that a library is at the heart of our community. I would also add that children and youth are at the heart of our communities as well, like the Nicoles of Lethbridge and in Slave Lake Shelby Chalmers, a 12-year-old student at Roland Michener secondary school in Slave Lake. I understand she's watching these proceedings from her school today.

Shelby loves her local library, and she took it upon herself to host a barbecue in September to raise money for the Slave Lake municipal library. Thanks to posters she put up at the library and around town, approximately a hundred people showed up to help Shelby with her fundraising mission. They ate hot dogs, hamburgers, buns, chips, and pop she solicited from local businesses. Attendees had more than just good food to enjoy at the event. They also had a chance to win door prizes and take part in kids' games. Shelby's parents and sisters helped out at the event as did the local Rotary Club members. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, Shelby raised more than \$2,000, money that will help build a new library, much needed in Slave Lake.

It was such a success that she's thinking of having another barbecue. The library board was thrilled, the community was amazed, and of course Shelby did such an outstanding job. This remarkable young lady reaffirms our belief in the strength, compassion, and dedication of Alberta's youth that inspires others to help

make our world a better place. To you, Shelby, great work, and thank you very much for taking it upon yourself to become a Slave Lake citizen.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask all members of this House to join me in recognizing Shelby Chalmers for sharing her gift of leadership and her love of libraries.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Conservative government likes to make grandiose announcements about what they're going to do in the future. Recently the Premier announced that we're going to have a housing secretariat and a 10-year plan to get rid of homelessness. This government has known about this problem for well over a year. They formed a task force to make recommendations. The final report was delivered seven months ago, and the government ignored most of the recommendations. Things have gotten worse. We now have 20 per cent more people on wait-lists for affordable housing in Edmonton. Our shelters are already turning people away because they are at capacity. Estimates for the capital region alone say that we are short at least 6,000 affordable housing units, and last week's announcement won't fix that.

No government since the 1930s has done more to cause homelessness. It is a problem started because of major cuts to social housing in the mid-1990s, and now we have an overheated economy with thousands of people rolling into Alberta looking for a better life, and it will get worse. Without a moratorium on condo conversions and rent increase guidelines, more affordable units will be taken off the market. It is frightening to think about what might happen to homeless people when the weather changes this winter.

This Conservative government has to stop worshipping at the altar of the so-called free market and do what is right for vulnerable Albertans. It's not too late to do the right thing. Stop this crisis from getting worse by listening to ordinary Albertans, and put a stop to rent gouging. Albertans should be able to sleep at night knowing they'll be able to afford to sleep under the same roof next month.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to present a petition signed by constituents of Lacombe-Ponoka and area. They are urging the Assembly to pass Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 1,232 Albertans asking the Assembly to urge the government to stop commercial logging in Kananaskis Country and protect the area as a park. The petition was spearheaded by a group of Bragg Creek and Redwood Meadows residents who gave away about 7,000 tree tags this summer to people who hung them on trees on their property to encourage the government to protect the northeastern districts of the Kananaskis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and

present a petition that is signed by the members of the area 17 council of northeast Edmonton, which comprises the presidents and the chairmen of community leagues, other NGOs, hockey and such, and it reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly [of Alberta] to pass Bill 213, Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act, which will eliminate unnecessary regulations and reduce red tape."

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Bill 216

Water Protection and Conservation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 216, Water Protection and Conservation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill will strengthen government's ability to manage water sustainably.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 216 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Bill 218

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (Repeal of Ministerial Briefing Exemption) Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and introduce Bill 218, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (Repeal of Ministerial Briefing Exemption) Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to ensure that this government remains committed to its pledge of providing the accountability and transparency that all Albertans expect from its public offices. This bill is being introduced with the people of this province in mind. The exemption of ministerial briefing notes from public access serves only one purpose: to allow the government to keep their dealings out of the public forum.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 218 read a first time]

head: **1:30**

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Alberta Utilities Commission Act

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I had the pleasure of visiting the Lacombe Memorial Centre, where I was joined by over 350 concerned Albertans. These Albertans were concerned about Bill 46. Speaker after speaker expressed serious reservations about the direction this government is going in regarding Bill 46. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. All electricity consumers in Alberta will pay the full cost for any future transmission expansions and upgrades. Why under Bill 46 is this government limiting and restricting consumers' ability to participate fairly in hearings which will determine those total costs? It will show up on their monthly bills. Why aren't they being treated fairly?

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will call on the hon. minister, but Bill 46 is at second reading. We will have an opportunity to debate this bill. The Assembly has not determined where it's going to go with this bill, so I don't know how the sponsor of the bill can respond. He may find that the Assembly goes in a different direction.

If you choose to say something, proceed.

Alberta Utilities Commission Act (continued)

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The line of questioning, of course, is very similar to the line of questioning that took place yesterday. What I would have to say about the issue is that there appears to be a propensity by some individuals both inside and outside of the Legislature to whip up an awful lot of angst in the communities in rural Alberta with respect to the issue of their utilities. The fearmongering that's going on will certainly subside once Albertans, generally speaking, get an understanding of what's in Bill 46 as it proceeds through the Legislature.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's Albertans that understand the bill and not the minister.

In October of this year the Auditor General did a great job of pointing out the Minister of Energy's failure to be accountable to Albertans. Bill 46 states that the Market Surveillance Administrator will not be subject to the Auditor General Act. Again to the Minister of Energy: why doesn't the minister want the Auditor General to audit the Market Surveillance Administrator? What are you afraid of? What are you afraid he'll find?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I have to say with respect to that is that Bill 46 is a piece of legislation before the House that is going to put in place a regulatory process that meets the electricity needs and the utility needs of all Albertans. There's need for utility infrastructure in all areas of the province. This is a very positive step forward for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Let's talk about need. Bill 46 amends the Hydro and Electric Energy Act. Currently this act requires the EUB to determine whether a proposed transmission line is and will be required to meet present and future public convenience and need. Why is the minister allowing the proposed commission in Bill 46 to approve transmission line projects without considering public convenience and need? Hasn't he learned anything from the spy scandals?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, that's a bunch of conjecture around something that may or may not take place. There will be a full debate of Bill 46 in this Assembly, and at that point in time all of the intricacies of the bill will be debated.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: Okay. I'm going to make the comment again. If the

hon. members want to cancel question period and move to second reading debate on Bill 46, the chair is at the will of the Assembly. But we do have a question period, and until you tell me differently, we're going to pay attention to what the purpose of the question period is.

Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. A confidential draft oil sands royalty regime report from this government dated October 2004 – and one can only assume that it was presented to cabinet – indicates that economic rent in 2004 on oil sands production was 34 per cent. This was described as extremely low by international standards. Again to the Minister of Energy: why did this government ignore the report for three years, costing Alberta resource owners billions and billions of dollars in lost royalty revenue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's obvious that the member opposite has himself wedged very squarely in the past. If you want to talk about the past, I'll tell you something about 2004. Royalty revenues to the province of Alberta in 2004: \$8.34 billion – \$8.34 billion. Capital investment in the energy industry only, province of Alberta, 2004: \$23.7 billion – \$23.7 billion. Jobs for Albertans, security for Albertans, infrastructure for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister and from the same report. You can see for yourself the blank pages. Now, why are you excluding this information from the public? Will the minister table all the recommendations made in this 2004 oil sands review for all Albertans to see? They own the resource. If you're truly open and accountable, you will show these recommendations on royalty rates and royalty collections, and people can make up their own mind whether they've been ripped off by this government or not.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, it's quite obvious, in fact, that the people in the province of Alberta have made up their mind. We're on this side of the House. They're on that side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing about this is that I would suggest to you and I would suggest to all Albertans that the member opposite spends too much time staring at blank pages.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the minister's information, I was in the Lacombe Memorial Centre last night when the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka asked if we need a new government, and there was a loud cheer.

Now, the Hunter report states, and hopefully the minister has read this: "The Panel is unanimous in declaring that Albertans do not presently enjoy a transparent and readily-evaluated royalty regime for oil and gas." Was this confidential draft oil sands royalty regime review of October 2004 shared with Mr. Hunter and his expert panel, and if not, why not?

Mr. Knight: Well, let's talk about the past some more, shall we? Let's move from 2004 to 2005. That was a nice year, 2005. I'll move ahead a year. In 2005 royalty revenues to the province of

Alberta: \$10.7 billion. Mr. Speaker, in 2005 the billions – the billions – \$32.8 billion energy investment capital deployment in the province of Alberta, \$32.8 billion. That's where the billions are.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When shown how his government let billions of royalty dollars slip through its hands, the Premier has claimed that this is not a problem. He stated that "all of that money ended up in the pockets of Albertans." The Premier's claim that billions weren't lost, that we get our fair share through some magical trickle-down effect is contradicted by the department staff, by the independent expert panel, and by the Auditor General of this province. The impact of those missing billions is all too clear. To the Minister of Education: could the minister explain why school boards have been underfunded for so long if all of those billions of dollars were actually in the hands of Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it hasn't taken this member very long to figure out that that party will go to any length to fertilize the truth, to sink to the bottom of the lowest denominator when they come up with their questions.

Mr. Cheffins: If the minister disagrees, he should be asked to stand under the leaky roofs, and that will change his mind real quick.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's municipalities have struggled for too long to get enough funding for all sorts of needs: public transit, roads, policing. The list is far too long to list here today. To the minister of municipal affairs: why were our municipalities so cash-strapped if, in fact, those billions of dollars were in public hands?

1:40

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say that our Premier and this government very much recognized some of the challenges that municipalities had with the growth pressures in the province, so this Premier and this government put forward \$11.3 billion over three years for sustainability and predictability for municipalities to do exactly that: to plan for transit, to plan for infrastructure, to plan for recreation facilities.

Mr. Cheffins: This government was around when all those problems were created.

Mr. Speaker, last year the mayor of Fort McMurray made an unprecedented personal intervention in the EUB hearings over the Voyageur project. The regional municipality of Wood Buffalo did not have nearly enough funding to address infrastructure and staffing needs. To the Minister of Energy: could the minister explain why the mayor had to do this if, in fact, the public had these billions of dollars?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, this government has been extremely proactive with respect to any of the infrastructure problems that have been created by a very robust economy in this province. The situation that the member opposite speaks about has been very, very well addressed by two reports of the government that we're acting on: one, the Radke report, and two, the multistakeholder commission that we put in place. Those things are moving forward. The recommendations have been accepted. We will rest on that very good work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, the International Energy Agency said that future increases in world oil supply will come from "nonconventional sources – mainly Canadian oil sands." Alberta's tar sands represent the largest, most secure, most valuable deposit of unexploited petroleum in the world, and as any small business owner could tell this government, that puts Alberta in the driver's seat when it comes to royalties. My question is to the Energy minister. Why, given Alberta's emerging dominant position in world energy markets, has this government proposed royalties lower than almost every other jurisdiction in the world?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you about the system in the province of Alberta is that it has generated a tremendous amount of economic activity in this province that has benefited all Albertans, all Canadians, and people from around North America and globally. It's a very robust industry; we understand that. We realize our position on the world stage; however, there is much more to it than just the oil sands.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'd love to play poker with this minister. Alberta has been dealt a royal flush, and the Premier folded. Mr. Speaker, all the rest of the people in this province could see that big oil was bluffing. So my question to Energy minister is this: why did this government cave in to big oil?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, there could be a very good case made here that the leader of the third party wants to gamble with Albertans' jobs. I do not want to gamble with Albertans' jobs, and certainly I won't gamble with Albertans' jobs with a bunch of jokers.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister sure is a card.

The fact remains that it is this government that is gambling with the future of this province by letting the lion's share of the value from our resources flow to shareholders in multinational oil companies. Those are the same companies that finance the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party in this province. Mr. Speaker, how is it that Albertans could ever trust this government to stand up for them against big oil given the fact that they are so dependent on big oil money to finance their election campaigns?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'll tell you, this is the gamble. Here is the gamble: 2006, \$9.3 billion in royalty revenue to the province of Alberta from the energy industry. Capital investment in the province of Alberta in the year 2006: \$36.6 billion. That's the gamble. That's what we put on the table. That's what Albertans have accepted and expect us to continue to do, and we will continue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Electronic Driver Reporting and Enforcement

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone wants safe high-

ways. Many truckers are so fatigued that they create danger and should not be on our highways. A tragic case decided just days ago in our courts showed how a tired trucker killed an RCMP officer doing his job on the side of the highway. Tired driver: deadly driver. People in the transportation industry have told me that the old-style time-consuming paper logbooks for truckers and bus drivers have little effect. Electronic means are now available for real-time, verifiable reporting of hours worked. My question is to the minister of transportation. When will your department simplify the onerous paper-driven system of drivers' logbooks and accept the 21st century existing, proven technology for logbooks?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this government supports new technologies that reinforce compliance with hours-of-service regulations and ultimately reduce the fatigue of professional drivers. Alberta is not alone in its attempt to accept such new technologies. The U.S. government, Transport Canada, and all the provinces are currently developing performance criteria for manufacturers, carriers, and enforcement officials to ensure that these devices have acceptable standards.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. A supplementary to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Federal regulations deal with interprovincial transport. The province handles enforcement of these regulations. All provinces except for Alberta have harmonized with the federal regulations on driver logs and vehicle trip inspection. When will your department, Mr. Transportation Minister, streamline, simplify, and harmonize to the Canadian standard, cutting red tape and implementing electronic driver reporting and enforcement?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the province is currently involved in harmonization of laws and governing of commercial carriers. We're also working with Transport Canada and other jurisdictions in developing guidelines for the introduction of hand-held electronic logbooks.

Mr. Backs: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Enforcement is the key. Proper enforcement follows simple reporting, little red tape. Our transportation department in its enforcement has not allowed implementation of electronic reporting. When will the department allow this, and have implementation timelines been established?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this government has long accepted the on-board electronic logbooks allowed by Transport Canada. That regulation is tied to the vehicle engine as a way to prove that driving activity matches the driver's hours of service. The new technologies being developed are stand alone, and current Transport Canada regulations do not support their use. We're in the process of changing that. We're currently developing policy guidelines for manufacturers, enforcement officers, and carriers to ensure that they're all provided with acceptable characteristics. We do support new technology, and we are actively pursuing harmonization acceptance across Canada and the U.S.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Repeat Offenders

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force report states that there is a serious problem with repeat offenders and that targeted action is necessary

to deal with them. My questions are to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Mr. Minister, why is it that repeat offenders are such an issue?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question, and if the opposition were in touch with the community, they'd recognize that the community thinks it's an excellent question. The fact is that some 15 per cent of offenders are responsible for 60 per cent of the crime. Here in Edmonton I can tell you that the Edmonton police have identified 136 or so individuals who are responsible for an incredible amount of the crime. To the extent that these folks can be identified and dealt with appropriately within the criminal justice system, we will be able to keep our communities safer.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how are you proposing to deal with these offenders?

Mr. Stevens: One of the recommendations in the excellent task force report, one that is accepted by this government because we have a policy with respect to safe communities, something that the opposition do not have, is that we will take some steps with respect to repeat offenders. First of all, Mr. Speaker, we will be ensuring that more often Crown prosecutors rather than police will be addressing the issue of bail in the first instance. At present that is the reverse.

Secondly, we've had great success with respect to identifying long-term and dangerous offenders through a flagging system. We are currently in the process of working with the Solicitor General and with police forces throughout Alberta so that we can develop a flagging system for repeat offenders.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when will this system be in place?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we are working on that as we speak, and we are working on it in earnest as it relates to the flagging system.

On the issue of the Crown prosecutors we have had a pilot project in Wetaskiwin for some time now, which has had incredible success. It's one of those situations which makes the police very, very happy because they're able to do what they should be doing, and more importantly, from my perspective as the Minister of Justice, we have appropriate people dealing with the bail applications.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Farm Fuel Rebate Program

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Please Don't Call This a Compromise and his ministers have failed this province and its people by leaving billions of dollars in royalties uncollected. Now we have further evidence of their inability to collect our fair share of tax revenue. The Auditor General has been made aware of cases where former farmers have notified Alberta Agriculture that they are no longer farming, yet senior department officials admitted yesterday that they do not even know if the department follows up by cancelling the farm fuel tax benefits received by those same farmers.

My question is for the minister of agriculture. How can you continue to allow millions of dollars to be lost in revenue by not cancelling the farm fuel tax benefit for Albertans who have admitted that they're no longer in the business of farming?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar earlier in the spring, we're reviewing the program and will be coming forth with a new program in the next few months. I suspect no fraud, but perhaps the program needs to be changed a little.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sixty thousand farmers are registered in the farm fuel benefit program in Alberta, yet numbers from Statistics Canada show that there are only about 40,000 farmers who would be eligible for the program. To the minister of agriculture: why have you not followed up the recommendations from the Auditor General's 2005-2006 report, a report which you agreed with and said that you would follow up on, by verifying application information and requiring regular renewal to avoid abuse of the program? It's two years later. What are we waiting for?

Mr. Groeneveld: Obviously, Mr. Speaker, the member across has a hearing problem because I just explained that. The purpose of the Alberta farm fuel benefit program is to allow farm operators to buy fuel at a competitive price with their North American counterparts. We're working on it, as I said. We're working with the Department of Finance, who actually administers the program, so there's no problem.

Mr. R. Miller: I can't imagine why it takes two years to start that work, Mr. Speaker.

A freedom of information response that we received earlier this year showed that the department of agriculture was aware of the abuse in the farm fuel program as far back as 1997. An internal audit done in 1999 again noted the problems with the program, yet nothing was done. During 10 years of mismanagement, Mr. Speaker, hard-working farmers who were legitimately eligible for the program could have been better assisted if the misused dollars had been redirected into appropriate programs. My question is for the minister: why has this mismanagement of the farm fuel program been allowed to continue for 10 years while several agriculture ministers, including the current Premier of this province . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: As I said, it's under the Department of Finance, so maybe I'll ask the minister to respond to that.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under TEFU this program provides approximately \$50 million worth of benefit to farmers in the province of Alberta. These \$50 million go to people who have had an extremely tough time with low commodity prices over the past several years, so it is a program that is working excellently.

Mr. Speaker, in my tenure as this minister I have dealt with farmers that have been taken off of this program, and realistically

they are very unhappy. Do we have to ensure that the farmers that are on this program are legitimate farmers? Absolutely. Do we do it? The answer is yes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Crime Reduction and Safe Communities

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force final report says that the justice system is broken. My questions are to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. How did the system get to the point where the report claims that it's fractured?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, as you know, the task force toured Alberta. They went to 14 different locations, received input from literally hundreds and hundreds of Albertans. What they were reporting is what people felt about the system, and, yes, they did call it fractured. There are definitely a lot of things that were outlined in the report that need to be done better, and I can say on behalf of this government that we acknowledge that, and we will be doing better.

On the other hand, it also indicated that there were many things which are going well. It is to be acknowledged that the prosecution service, the court service, and the police are doing a very good job. What we need to do is to have more collaboration, co-operation, and leadership with respect to this, and that was the essence of this particular report. We need to have some way in order to bring those groups together so that we can all go in the same direction collaboratively.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. What role do actual communities, such as my communities, play in this?

Mr. Stevens: The task force report indicates very clearly that this is not just simply a matter for Alberta Justice or the Alberta Solicitor General or for police forces. This is a matter for all communities, all municipalities, all individuals in Alberta. When we all understand that we have a role to play, then we will make incredible strides.

One of the things that was pointed out in the report that would help our communities is if we have safe communities legislation, and I'm happy to say, Mr. Speaker, that later today Bill 212, I believe, will be before the House as a private member's bill. It's referred to in that report as the kind of bill that we need here in this province to assist municipalities in addressing the kinds of issues that they have in their communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Royalty Revenues (continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Almost every day this week the Premier and his ministers have denied that this government failed to collect billions of dollars. They even claim that the missing dollars have been reinvested into the province and are benefiting Albertans. To the Minister of Energy: can the minister explain how we reached a crisis in the human service sector if this money actually trickled down?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. What's actually missing here is an understanding of what has happened in the province of Alberta with respect to the development of the resources of this province over a number of years. If people want to continue to dwell on the past, well, I've got more. If they want more, I've got more.

In 2003: \$6.5 billion in royalty revenues to the province of Alberta and capital investment in the province of \$19.4 billion. Mr. Speaker, what this does is provide jobs for Albertans, security for Albertans, and certainly allows Albertans to be able to take better care of themselves with respect to the issues that the hon. member is talking about.

Ms Pastoor: With all due respect, sir, EnCana has just spent billions in Texas, and that's not in the past.

To the minister of health. Seniors in assisted living are forced to pay each time if they need extra bathing, eating, or in fact receiving their medications. Can the minister explain how we reached this point in continuing care if this money has trickled down?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, they talk about missing royalties. There aren't missing royalties. The royalties that were assessed were collected. What they're talking about is perhaps a lost opportunity to collect royalties, and the Minister of Energy has indicated how by keeping the royalties at the rate they were we created economic benefit.

The member should also know that our Fiscal Responsibility Act puts a cap on how much royalty revenue can go into the operating budget. We should not be moving into the selling of the assets to pay for the groceries. So if there were additional royalty revenues, it wouldn't be appropriate to spend it on current expenses. It would be appropriate to save it to build a knowledge-based economy for tomorrow and to build the assets for tomorrow.

2:00

Ms Pastoor: People not receiving care really don't care about the economics; they know they're being ripped off. To the minister of seniors. Albertans on AISH are struggling to pay their rent and meet their basic needs because benefits have not been indexed to keep up with inflation. Can the minister explain how people on AISH are benefiting from these trickle-down dollars?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, over the past years we have ensured that each year there has been an increase to those AISH payments. We do acknowledge that those individuals with severe disabilities have an ability to have a monthly payment. This past year in this budget we did increase payments to those AISH recipients. That's a matter of each budget that would come forward for the future year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Crime Reduction and Safe Communities

(continued)

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A safe and secure community is very important to the people of Red Deer-North and all Albertans. This government has told Albertans many times that it is committed to safe and secure communities, so it's very disturbing to learn that there are as many as 200,000 warrants outstanding for the arrest of criminals throughout Alberta, 8,000 of those warrants for serious or violent crimes. These criminals need to be taken off our streets. My first question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What action is the minister taking

to get these criminals off the streets of Alberta's communities and neighbourhoods?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's commitment is firm. Albertans have a right to safe communities. Today I announced a new \$1.4 million program which will help take criminals off the street and keep them off. The new warrant apprehension team will work with police agencies across the province to target and bring to justice criminals on outstanding warrants. This is consistent with recommendations from the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force. Each one of these units consists of five sheriffs whose sole purpose is to find and arrest criminals with outstanding warrants who have evaded capture. We are turning up the heat.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: what will these warrant apprehension teams do that police can't or don't already do?

Mr. Lindsay: This new unit is going to work in partnership, Mr. Speaker, with municipal police, the RCMP, and corrections to identify, find, and arrest criminals who are unlawfully at large. Having a unit dedicated strictly to apprehending these criminals will make warrant apprehension much more effective. Getting these criminals off the streets ensures they won't reoffend and revictimize Albertans.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: what can people in my community do to help with the work of this new unit?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, enforcement alone will not curb violence. We need the ongoing support of the community to help police in their criminal investigations. For our part we continue to work with Alberta communities and with police to prevent crime and make criminal acts more difficult to commit. This year alone we spent \$18 million to help fight organized crime, and in the last three years we have invested \$31 million and added nearly 300 police officers to our streets. We have also established two sheriff surveillance teams that help police investigate organized crime and gang activity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In 1994-95 teachers reluctantly agreed to wage rollbacks to help the Conservative government get out of debt. Alberta's teachers have been asked to make sacrifices ever since, and they've been given very little support for their pension fund. Teachers here contribute more than any other province. They're still paying much more than their fair share. My question is to the Education minister. Currently the government is paying only half of the pension benefits you're meant to pay. Why don't you get off your high horse now and pay the proper amount?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to say that for the past several months officials of the Department of Education and representatives of the Alberta Teachers' Association have been holding meetings relative to working towards a resolution on the unfunded pension liability and other issues related to that. It was

determined at the outset that public discussions during this time would serve no purpose. I am optimistic that negotiations and discussions are proceeding, maybe better than what one might have expected at this time.

Mr. Eggen: Well, considering, Mr. Speaker, that there was a last-minute attempt jammed in the last budget forcing the teachers to do something with this and that during the budget as well there was 3 per cent underfunding of teachers to squeeze the school boards so that it made it very difficult to do these negotiations in the first place, I see a pattern of stalling. I would like to know how this idea of not funding the unfunded liability issue fits into this building tomorrow platform that we're supposed to represent. Are we going to get something for an unfunded liability before the next election?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member will recall that in the budget of this past spring we allocated \$25 million, and that is to assist the teachers' contributions. Starting on September 1 of this year the government of Alberta assumed the 3.1 per cent contribution the teachers were making towards the unfunded pension liability, so as of September this year teachers actually have 3.1 per cent more take-home pay than they did the month previous.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, I mean, I find that difficult to put forward, playing with numbers like he is. The fact is that school boards were given 3 per cent under the funding for the cost of living for this year and probably, really, for the cost of the price to do business in this province. I heard the minister say this before, and I would like him to say it again. Will he make a commitment to not tie the unfunded liability issue to the next round of contracts? There are only eight of 62 boards right now that do have contracts. There are many thousands of teachers who do not have contracts. Are you going to remove the tie between unfunded liability and the negotiations for contracts?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as I said at the outset, we are in discussions with the ATA right now, and I am very optimistic that things will proceed favourably. Unlike certain members of the opposition, I'm optimistic. I am not going to run around this province spreading doom and gloom.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Grizzly Bear Management

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent report shows that in Banff national park human contact has caused the death of female grizzlies and has compromised the population's growth capacity. Top scientific research shows that the death of just one female grizzly bear can be devastating to the whole group as well. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why was the grizzly bear recovery plan not adopted three years ago, when it was presented to Sustainable Resource Development? What are we waiting for?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to report to the House today that this government has a long-standing policy of putting the long-term well-being of the grizzly bear at the top of our priorities. I can go back to 2002, when the then minister, the Member for Athabasca-Redwater, right there, created the grizzly recovery team; in 2005, when the then minister of Sustainable Resource Development, the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, suspended for the

three years the grizzly hunt and instituted the population study. This government is proud of our record on looking after the long-term well-being of the grizzly bear in Alberta.

Mr. Bonko: Well, it's not much of a record to stand on, considering the population continues to fall. Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed the government still has not followed the advice of its own conservation committee to list the grizzlies as either threatened or endangered. Do something besides strap cameras to their heads. What are we going to do?

2:10

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm again happy to report to the House that I met with the grizzly bear recovery team in June, received their report and their study, one of the best presentations I've seen in my 10, 11 months as a minister. I did receive that report last month, in October, and we'll be releasing it shortly. I can tell you that, again, the long-term well-being of the grizzly bear is at the very top of the priority list of this government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recommended number of grizzlies to sustain a healthy population is 1,000 – 1,000 bears – yet in the past five years under the Tory government the number of bears remaining in the Alberta landscape is less than half. Notwithstanding the minister's provincial hunting day will he stop and act now and suspend the grizzly hunt indefinitely?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is playing with numbers from two different reports. Again, we, my predecessor from Livingstone-Macleod, undertook a four-year scientific study based on DNA of hair samples that will give us an accurate understanding of the nature of the population, the distribution of the population of grizzlies in this province. We have identified core grizzly habitat areas. That's the key to the study. We've identified the fact that unregulated public motorized access is the problem, and we'll be prepared to deal and recommend very positive solutions to that problem at the end of the study and when the three-year moratorium ends.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Apprenticeship Training

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy is at an all-time high, creating many opportunities across the province for skilled tradespeople. In fact, a number of industries are lacking so many workers that Albertans are now suffering the consequences of waiting weeks and months for services. Our province needs to start drawing from untapped labour sources such as youth. We need to be innovative to attract young Albertans to those promising careers. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is your department doing to attract youth to careers in trades to increase the number of skilled people in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very important question given the very hot economy we have and the huge invest-

ment that the oil industry has made in our province. We've centred on the students in the high schools and enabled them to enrol in the registered apprenticeship program, or RAP as we call it, as early as grade 10. By doing so, they can earn credits towards their high school diploma and an apprenticeship at the same time. More than 3,000 RAP apprentices who started high school have graduated and are now working full-time to complete their apprenticeship programs. Students get the opportunity in this program to experience the trades, develop some skills, gain knowledge, gain work experience, earn high school credits at the same time, and can earn an income while they learn and achieve their apprenticeship.

In addition to the RAP program we have the youth apprenticeship project, which is a pilot project in northern Alberta.

The Speaker: I think we'll pass it to the hon. member now.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I'm glad the minister talked about the registered apprenticeship program. Just last week I was able to attend the scholarship celebration for those fine young people, and several of those members that were receiving scholarships were from Whitecourt-St. Anne. You know, the RAP program started back in 1991 with great partnerships with industry, and apprentices have been spending thousands and thousands of dollars on training. But what are the tangible results from this program, and what is your department doing to assist these young people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to increasing opportunities for these young people. We have RAP scholarships, which encourage high school students to continue their apprenticeship programs after graduation. We've made over 500 of those available each year. In addition, \$4.4 million is available annually to regular apprentices who demonstrate excellence in their training programs. The government has also paid tuition increases for apprentices for the past two consecutive years. Grants are available for apprentices who demonstrate financial need.

Mr. Speaker, we're also making it easier for apprentices in remote areas to get their training. We have 1,600 high school students that are currently in the RAP program today. We're getting very, very positive feedback from both the students and the employers. We have over 66,000 apprentices in the province.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm afraid we must move on.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What's your department doing with the federal government to help promote postsecondary education within Alberta's First Nations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just yesterday I met with University of Alberta officials. In fact, we were talking about the economic partnerships that we have in place. Relative to tangible measurements you may not be aware of the fact that we've had over 1,200 apprenticeships, and our goal is to work towards 1,500 apprenticeships, many of them being in the aboriginal community. Truly, our aboriginal youth are a key to the future in the terms of economic development and opportunities here in the province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Anthony Henday Drive Intersections

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently received an e-mail from a constituent complaining about the single most frustrating stretch of road in west Edmonton, the intersection of Anthony Henday Drive and Stony Plain Road. The government brags repeatedly about the Edmonton ring road, and for the most part it is a fast, smooth-running freeway, but there is a major knot at Stony Plain Road and Anthony Henday. Common sense dictates that an interchange should have been built at the point where the two heavily travelled roads meet, yet while new sections of the Edmonton ring road have opened traffic light free, west end motorists continue to fume in enormous traffic jams at a series of lights on the Henday and Stony Plain Road. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: why did the government choose not to build a proper interchange at Henday and Stony Plain Road when the Henday opened, and when can we expect construction on these desperately needed improvements to begin?

Mr. Ouellette: We're doing an engineering design on that right now, Mr. Speaker. It's not in our three-year plan right now. We're trying to figure out how we can speed it up to get it there. We understand that that intersection is backing up traffic. We know it's busy. If we had done the first portion of the Anthony Henday under a P3 scenario, we probably could have had it all done at once. We couldn't get it all done at once within the budget we had at the time. We did the best we could, and we're working on putting it there as fast as we can.

Mr. Tougas: Another \$6 billion would have come in handy, wouldn't it, Mr. Minister?

Can the minister explain why the government chose to complete an overpass at 87th Avenue, an overpass that currently leads to a dead end, before completing work on the Henday and Stony Plain Road?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I will have to say that I'm not exactly sure what overpass he's speaking about. I haven't gone to that dead end yet.

Mr. Tougas: Well, to the same minister. The government has clearly put its fanatical devotion to P3s ahead of its obligation to the voters to build desperately needed roads. Is the government now telling the public that they can forget about highways getting built in a timely manner unless they follow the P3 model no matter how much they may be needed?

Mr. Ouellette: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. We are doing whatever we can to build highways whenever we can. I'm just saying that wherever a P3 fits, where it works right, we will do it. We've been working on that, and anywhere that needs a highway to keep our people safe, we're working on getting it done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. As we're into the start of the early fall, can he explain to me how he's working with the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and

Culture on the mountain pine beetle, especially in the area of the Willmore wilderness park?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report to the House that we are at a better position this year than we were 12 months ago on the pine beetle. The number of infected trees in northern Alberta has dropped to about 300,000 from over several million, and we think that the combination of the good weather and our very proactive policy with respect to identifying and removing infected trees is having a positive effect there. The situation in central and southern Alberta is not quite as optimistic. There are still heavy infestations on the British Columbia side of the border, and we're concerned that there has been, percentage-wise, an increase in pine beetle in southern Alberta. So we're continuing to pursue our aggressive policies there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. Can the minister give us an outline on what he's doing with forest management units E8 and E10 pertaining to the mountain pine beetle and the caribou?

2:20

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, the mountain caribou situation has been on our priority list for a number of years. Again, one of my predecessors, I believe the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, created the caribou recovery committee, and we now have that committee. There are a number of teams in place for the different caribou herds, and we have two plans already in place, and I'm expecting a third, local plan for a specific group of caribou forthcoming this fall.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. With the mountain pine beetle affected trees, how is he working with the other forest companies in the areas there to make sure that we're getting the best utilization of this fibre?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, again I'm happy to report that the various logging forestry companies in Alberta are working closely with Sustainable Resource Development to both stop the spread of the pine beetle and also to utilize infected trees. A number of new products are being investigated. We're working closely with counterparts in British Columbia, who, unfortunately for them, are much further down the road of pine beetle kill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period. There were 88 questions and answers today. We will return now to the Routine and on the Routine we were at Introduction of Bills.

I'll now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

head:

Introduction of Bills

(continued)

Bill 222

Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund (Tobacco Investment Elimination) Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In light of the tremendous progress made in this House yesterday on Bill 45, I'm

honoured to request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 222, Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund (Tobacco Investment Elimination) Amendment Act, 2007.

[Motion carried; Bill 222 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today five copies of the special areas trust account financial statements, December 31, 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Carrying out my MLA duty as the voice of my constituency in this Assembly, I would like to table a document given to me by a number of constituents. This document reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to pass Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of the confidential draft oil sands royalty regime review from October 2004. That was the basis of one of my questions to the Minister of Energy today.

The second tabling I have is a flyer that I got in the Lacombe Memorial Centre last night. It's called Kill Bill 46, and more information can be reached at www.killbill46.ca for those who are interested.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity to meet some very dedicated, committed members of the Central Alberta Refugee Effort in Red Deer, known as CARE. They are doing an excellent job for the community. I'm tabling five copies of their fall newsletter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to table a letter from a student in Mill Woods in which she's expressing concern about the homelessness in our city. She's asking that the government continue to make a concerted effort to help alleviate this problem completely. "We must do something! Please give this great consideration and act fast!"

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings today. The first tabling is the appropriate number of copies of an *Edmonton Journal* article written by the leader of the Liberal opposition on September 26, 2007, criticizing the inequity in the government's municipal infrastructure funding formula, which gives Calgary one and a half times more money per person than Edmonton.

The second tabling is a news release from the Liberal opposition dated November 2, 2007, which outlines their own spending

priorities, curiously giving Calgary three and a half times more money than Edmonton.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to make three tablings. One is a document from Veterans Affairs Canada. It's appropriate to table this with the Remembrance Day weekend coming up. It outlines material on Henry Louis Norwest, originally from Fort Saskatchewan, an impressive rodeo performer who was also a tremendously accomplished veteran in the First World War and was lost at that time.

Also, I have two documents pertaining to my question today. One is a description of electronic, or wireless, logs and how they operate. Another is a group of documents. One shows electronic procedures, and one shows the old-style paper procedures.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Stevens, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, a document dated September 2007 entitled Review of Section 8 of the Fatal Accidents Act and pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Law Society of Alberta annual report 2006 and the Alberta Law Foundation 34th annual report 2007 for the fiscal year ended March 31 with attached audited financial statements and other financial information of the Alberta Law Foundation, year ended March 31, 2007.

head:

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm hoping that the Government House Leader can share with the House the projected government House business for the week of November 13 to 15, 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In anticipation of an adjournment motion today which takes us to Tuesday rather than Monday because of the Remembrance Day holiday, we would have, then, under Orders of the Day on Tuesday for third reading Bill 7, Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007, and Bill 8, Vital Statistics Act; for second reading Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007; and in Committee of the Whole bills 35, 36, and 24, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007, and the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007.

For Wednesday, November 14, under Orders of the Day for third reading Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007, and Bill 37, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007. For second reading Bill 11, the Telecommunications Act Repeal Act; Bill 41, Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007; and Bill 23, the Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act. In Committee of the Whole, time permitting, Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act; Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007; and Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

Thursday, November 15, under Orders of the Day for second reading Bill 46, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. For third reading Bill 13, the Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007; Bill

1, the Lobbyists Act; Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007; and Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. It's all, of course, depending on progress from previous days.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**

Tablings

The Speaker: Hon. members, just two housekeeping items for today. First of all, there was an item that arose in the House yesterday with respect to an exchange with the Official Opposition Leader and the Premier, and it had to do with a tabling. I've been advised by the hon. Government House Leader that the quotation that the Premier used in the question period came from, quote, notes. Under the rules notes do not have to be tabled. Members might want to just refer to *Beauchesne* 495(1) and to *Marleau and Montpetit* at pages 517 and 518 for greater clarification with respect to that. Both those documents refer to documents, dispatches, official documents, and the like. Notes, though, that members may have in front of them that they would quote from need not be tabled.

2:30

There was also part of the exchange, I think, that occurred between the chair and the Government House Leader that had to do with newspaper articles. Today the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona tabled newspaper articles. The Speaker has indicated in the past that those were totally unnecessary to be tabled in the House. News releases of other parties need not be tabled either. They probably could be found someplace.

However, during the question period if a member was quoting something from a document, including a newspaper, I think it's only good courtesy, should another member ask for the copy of the article in question to be tabled, that it be provided if it's part of the complete document per se.

Nothing further.

The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Mr. Speaker, under 13(2), I'm wondering if the Speaker could expand. I note that on page 1853 of *Hansard* in the Premier's response he does say to the Leader of the Official Opposition, "because on February 17 in the *Calgary Herald* the hon. Leader of the Opposition said," and then he gave a quote. I take it that he was quoting from the *Calgary Herald*. He mentions it. Now, I am expected to see that document tabled in this House. To hear that it's in notes strikes me as an omission on behalf of the Government House Leader in not providing the document. I understood from the ruling that the Speaker had given and which appears on the pages that I'd quoted for you, starting on page 1859 and concluding on 1860, that the documents were expected to be tabled.

The Speaker: All hon. members, from where the chair sits, the chair has no idea what is in front of a member. The chair — oh, yes — assumed that there would have been a newspaper article or something that the quotation had come from, but the chair was advised by the hon. Government House Leader that the quotation came from notes, which made it different. The chair has no idea what's in front of an hon. member when they have a piece of paper in front of them. That's what the assumption was. The advice provided to the chair was that it came from notes, and if that's the case, well, notes are not required. If it came from a newspaper article, and there's a whole newspaper article in front, it would seem to me that as a point of courtesy that might have been provided. I don't know other than the word "notes," so perhaps the Government House Leader might be able to add some clarification.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, in preparation for coming into the House, we have notes and briefing books and things like that that we

refer to. Now, if I were to come to the House and use a quote from Winston Churchill, it wouldn't be expected of me to table either Bartlett's quotations or the original book that the quote was in. It is a matter of saying a quote and saying where it came from, and that should be of interest to the House.

Now, if I were waving around a newspaper and saying, you know, "I'm quoting from this newspaper" and was asked to table it, while in my view that would not necessarily be appropriate because it is a newspaper and is in the public domain, I'd be happy to table that. But if I refer to one of these notes, that's a briefing note, and that's where I get a lot of information to be able to answer questions. It doesn't make any sense to suggest that if I quoted somebody in an answer to a question, I would have to go to the source and find the book and bring it here and table it so that people could look up the quote. They're told where the quote comes from. They can go check the source, and that should be the answer to it.

Now, I believe, Mr. Speaker, you're absolutely right. When you were referring to it, you didn't know what the Premier was referring to. The concept of tabling goes back a long way. We have broadened the concept in this House, perhaps appropriately, to allow a whole lot of tablings, but the original rules, *Erskine May*, would suggest that it's official government documents, those sorts of things which are really intended for the purposes of tabling. For the purposes of public discussion in the public domain we allow tabling of all sorts of things, and I'm not going to suggest that that's inappropriate. But to suggest that everything that a person, perhaps, quotes from and has in front of them should be tabled opens the door to a whole new set of tablings which would be inappropriate.

The Speaker: It's not a point of order or anything.

Mr. Mason: I'm just looking for the rule that allows me to ask a question of the Speaker on a ruling for clarification.

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, the Speaker hasn't made any ruling. We're having a discussion.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Can I discuss?

The Speaker: Proceed, then. It's 13(2) probably that you're looking at.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If I can discuss, then, one of the concerns that I have is that when quotes from documents of whatever kind are transferred into notes for a member, who then quotes from their notes, at the very least, if they don't have to table their notes, then the notes need to give all members of the House a very clear understanding of where it comes from so that it can be found easily. I think if that was the case, it would prevent the government from doing indirectly what they're not supposed to do directly.

The Speaker: Look, the reality of all of this is that we do have a committee, by the way, that's supposed to be looking at all of these modifications and changes to the Standing Orders. It could easily be referred to them to have a discussion. All the chair is saying is the following. I'm not aware of any member who at one time or another in the past, if they've been here for more than a little period of time, has not had an article or something in front of them that may have a thousand lines in it, and then they have extrapolated one line out of that article and used it. Somebody else might challenge them then and say: well, by taking that one line out of these 1,000 lines, you have not given truth to the whole understanding of the whole

subject. It seems that if an hon. member takes one line out of an editorial and uses it and then another hon. member says, "Well, fine, by taking that one line out, you haven't given the whole ambience of the whole thing," but the hon. member who has taken one line out says, "That's in my notes. I wrote it down," under the qualification for notes they do not have to be tabled, and in essence you're going to have this kind of a situation.

But as I do recall, at the time in question the hon. the Premier did cite the date and the source as well. Having done that, I suppose I could go to the library and get a copy made if that would help everybody.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you.

The Speaker: You want me to go to the library to get a copy of the newspaper article on that day? Well, we'll have one of the pages go, okay? Clerk, would you look into the record for yesterday, see what date it was, get a copy, and provide it to all members of the Assembly.

But we're doing something different today in the sense that this is the first time that, in essence, one of the changes occurred in the order of business as a result of the special debate that occurred on Monday of this week. Standing Order 8(3), the new one, basically says, "If the business enumerated in suborder (1) has not received a total of 3 hours of consideration," then three hours of consideration for private members' bills must occur during that week on Thursday. So we have a situation today where we now have a three-hour block – a three-hour block – set aside for private members' business.

However, we also have provision in our rules that no later than one hour and 55 minutes into that three hours we must stop and then go to motions. So when I say Orders of the Day, the clock will start to run. One hour and 55 minutes later if we're still in private members' business, we will stop and go to motions, and there'll be one hour and five minutes of motions. If we were to follow this through, three hours from now would take us to 20 minutes to 6, and in essence we will have fulfilled the obligation of the standing order.

At that point in time I would hope that the hon. Government House Leader would give consideration, because our Standing Orders also indicate that we don't sit on Remembrance Day – well, Remembrance Day is a Sunday, just so there's no confusion – that when we rise, we do not return until Tuesday at 1 o'clock. Otherwise, I'll be back here Monday at 1 o'clock.

An Hon. Member: By yourself.

The Speaker: By myself.

Okay, if I say Orders of the Day, here's where we're going.

head: 2:40

Orders of the Day

head:

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 212

Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act

[Debate adjourned June 11]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to add some thought to the debate on Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Albertans have always placed importance on investing in children. Through initiatives such as Alberta's Promise this province has invested resources and expertise to ensure that our children have every opportunity to succeed in the world of tomorrow. By investing in our children and keeping them on a clean and clear path, we seek to ensure the vitality and strength and stability of Alberta for decades to come.

I'm pleased to see that our government is building upon the progress which has been made in continuing to make our children a priority. Our government has pledged to enhance early learning opportunities for Alberta's children, increase access to child care, increase high school completion rates, and ensure that Alberta students have access to high-quality postsecondary education.

We also have to realize that an integral part of our investment in children is protecting them from many potential harms in this world. Mr. Speaker, we've all seen the devastating impacts that social ills such as violence and drugs can have on the lives of our youth. These activities poison our social and physical environment, disrupt the bodies and minds of our youth, and create a culture of harm and abuse. Once this culture is entrenched, it is very difficult to eradicate. To this end, I'm encouraged to see that this government will continue forward with the prevention of family violence and bullying initiatives.

I support Bill 212, Mr. Speaker, because it is consistent with the government's objective of making communities safer for Albertans and especially for our children. The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act would place a tool in the hands of law enforcement which will allow immediate action to be taken when safety in Alberta's communities is compromised. Specifically, Bill 212 would give a director of law enforcement the power to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench to have restrictions placed upon a property when there is a balance of probability indicating that illegal or disruptive activity is occurring. This restriction could include removing excessive fortifications from a property or placing a community closure order on it. Among the many possible repercussions community safety orders would provide for the property to be closed for a period of 90 days. After the end of this order the owners of the property would be permitted to return while any troublemaking tenant would be permanently evicted.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I believe these restrictions will be effective in reducing dangerous activities in our communities because they offer creative solutions to address activities which compromise the safety and the quality of life of the residents. By forcing property owners who are involved in activities which present a danger to communities to vacate the premises for a period of time, we are in essence taking away their ability to endanger neighbourhood residents. This is particularly true in a case such as the manufacturing of illegal drugs, where property is directly tied to the hazardous activities because it makes concealed production possible.

Admittedly, Mr. Speaker, we already have several pieces of legislation in Alberta which could be used to stop activities which endanger communities. For instance, the Public Health Act mandates that property owners must ensure that their property is not injurious to others. In addition, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and the bylaws of many Alberta municipalities also include provisions to restrict homeowners and tenants from engaging in harmful activities. While these legislative tools are often effective at reducing dangerous activity, there's room to improve upon them. The existing legislation is limiting because it may be vague in some instances. Bill 212 represents an opportunity

for improvement because it outlines a specific process in reducing activities which may harm the general public.

Another strength of this proposed act is the creativity of the solution that is proposed. In this Legislature we have the proud history of approving legislation that is creative and that looks beyond the obvious answers and implements solutions which drive to the roots of the problems. Some examples of these are the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, and the Drug-endangered Children Act. Both of these acts take into account the broader implication of dangerous activity and put in place a solution to mitigate them.

In the case of the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act this legislation implemented a process to force endangered youth to receive treatment for drug addictions. The Drug-endangered Children Act allows for apprehension of children who are endangered by the manufacturing or use of illegal drugs. These solutions are not necessarily designed to be punitive but, rather, to prevent harm and to remove children from situations where they may be injured by their own actions and those of others.

One interesting thing to note is that both these acts are related to issues concerning youth. There's just something about our children, Mr. Speaker, that seems to bring out the best in the members of this Assembly. I think that Bill 212 provides this Assembly the same opportunity that the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act and the Drug-endangered Children Act allow. It gives the opportunity to make our province a safer place for children by being proactive and focusing on the prevention rather than waiting for harm to occur and punish those responsible.

To be certain, there is a great deal of value in punishing those who harm or endanger others. I believe that deterrence is a valid principle and can help to make Alberta safer. We have a criminal justice system for deterrence, and I believe it works quite well. Bill 212 would in no way detract from our current system of criminal justice or allow those who harm Albertans to elude punishment. Those who choose to break the law will still be brought to justice.

Rather, this bill will help to enhance Alberta's justice system. It deals with dangerous behaviour before it results in harm and can reduce the overall caseload of the justice system. In doing this, we could help ensure that our communities remain safe and our justice system can deal with offenders in a timely and efficient manner. Moreover, by avoiding the sometimes lengthy timelines involved in the prosecution of criminal cases, we can ensure that the action will be taken today to prevent dangerous activity, activity which harms Albertans and our children.

Finally, enacting legislation which ends up controlling dangerous activity through civil rather than criminal sanctions allows this Assembly to take direct action to protect Albertans. We are forbidden by the Canadian Constitution to pass criminal legislation, but we can help to achieve the goal of protecting Albertans through other means, such as this bill.

2:50

I'm going to end up where I began, Mr. Speaker, by talking about the duty we as legislators have to the children of this province. I believe that we owe them the right to grow up in a province that is nurturing, progressive, and, above all, safe. We owe them the opportunity to pursue their dreams and to be free from a life filled with fear caused by dangerous activity. I call on this Assembly to support Bill 212.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, I know that you've indicated that you'd like to speak next, but my records

indicate that you have already spoken at second reading on this bill. So I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill 212 for the first time. I recognize that this is something that not only big cities in the province but smaller communities around Alberta have been looking for, a little bit more ability to be able to take the criminals at hand. We recognize, in fact, that the police are tied up on numerous occasions and cannot act as swiftly as one would like, instances in my own constituency when people have called in with concerns about drug dealings or drug houses or excessive partying. Excessive partying goes away, but the drug houses are there because they seem to be profitable.

This particular bill, Bill 212, allows people to be able to call in anonymously, and the director of the detachment is able to make the determination, in fact, whether or not they go and investigate a little bit further. If that is the case – and they don't have to give their name – they've got several options, including issuing a warning letter to the property owners, resolving the problem out of court, or just applying for a community safety order through the courts, with which the property could in fact face closure, or applying for immediate closure.

If it's a rental property, the people may be a little bit more conscious as to who, in fact, they're renting to. If it's the owners, they're going to be obviously watching what they're doing because it now enables homeowners, regular community members, to be a little bit more diligent in getting rid of illegal activities, making communities safer for the children, as the member across has said, and I think that is paramount.

We all believe that our kids should have an opportunity, as we did years ago, to be able to have the community safe and sound, to be able to go to the playground that's maybe only two, three houses down without worrying what's going to happen to them. I think that this is a great step in enabling that. It's the first step. It probably can be improved upon later on, as the years go by. We recognize where there needs to be a little bit tighter pieces in it, but from right there I think that's an opportunity for everyone, as I said, to have a safe and secure community.

I appreciate the opportunity. I fully support Bill 212. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to rise and speak to Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I just want to indicate that I have represented much of northeast Edmonton in another capacity – that is, as a councillor for the city of Edmonton for 11 years – then the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands, and then Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood since 2000, so that's seven years, nearly eight, and I have had many interactions with my constituents on issues like this.

I believe that the constituents of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood would like me to support this bill. I think it is an important tool that would help the community itself as well as the police deal with difficult situations that arise from time to time in some of our communities. This kind of activity really has a negative impact on people's ability to enjoy their lives, to enjoy their property, and to enjoy their communities, to be safe and to be sure that their children are safe.

As a community we have done a great deal of work over the years to try and improve conditions, particularly some of the bad housing which exists, some of the rundown areas, and to improve the business districts along 118th Avenue. I'm proud to say that the

community's efforts have met with a significant degree of success, and things are getting better in some of the communities where this has been a problem. It's pretty clear that when bad neighbours move into a community and use the property for something for which it is not intended, use it for illegitimate activities, more needs to be done. I think this bill will provide the opportunity to do some of those things.

I recall that during my first term on Edmonton city council there were two fortified drug houses right downtown, side by side, and one of them was called the fortress. The police would make raids regularly on the fortified property, but it was all set up so that the drugs could be disposed of before the police could actually get in. So it was the city council that got involved in developing a strategy to deal with this. This was one of the early community policing strategies where it wasn't the police, particularly, that solved the problem but the utilities. By cutting off the water, by cutting off the electricity, by taking a number of steps to condemn the building, we were able to deal with this. Now, this kind of heavily fortified drug house is no longer the norm, but there are many houses in which drug activity or other kinds of unsavoury activity that ruins people's enjoyment of their community and makes them feel unsafe do continue.

Just about three weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, I held a community meeting at the Eastwood Community Hall with Detective Maurice Brodeur from the Edmonton Police Service, and he talked to the community. We had a full house. I introduced Detective Brodeur, and he talked about the Edmonton police's report a drug house program. It involves teaching people in the community to identify drug houses, to understand the different grades or degrees of drug houses and the types of activities that are normally associated with them, and to give the people a number where they can get the Edmonton police involved in dealing with that. So we've been proactive in the community in dealing with this, and I believe that this bill will give further strength to those police and community efforts to try and eradicate residences and other structures in communities that are not used for their intended purposes.

I note that this bill is modelled on legislation that was brought in by the NDP government in Manitoba, which, in my view, in my experience has been one of the leading governments in providing the kinds of tools that are necessary to deal with crime and illegal activity in communities. It's one of a number of pieces of legislation that the Manitoba government has established that I think have had a very good track record and have been very successful.

I would like to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing forward this bill and want to indicate that it has my full support and that of my caucus. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. Community policing has been a part of Edmonton for more than 30 years. It is important not only because a city the size of Edmonton is too big to be served from one downtown office; it is important for police officers, men and women, to be able to develop a sense of affinity for the neighbourhood and citizens that they serve. And it is important to us as civilians to recognize and integrate law enforcement officers as part of our daily lives and not only in time of accident or emergency. We need to recognize that they are part of us when they are upholding the law and ensuring our security.

3:00

Edmonton-Mill Woods is a reflection of the multicultural country

and world that we live in. People who have come to Canada from many authoritarian states sometimes take a while to get used to the different role the police play in our society. Edmonton-Mill Woods also had the benefit of Detective Maurice Brodeur's approach in the community, and it has resulted in a better understanding and appreciation of the work that police do.

What is it that distinguishes a police officer from a civilian in a democratic society? There is, of course, the training, the risks, and responsibilities for others and the attention that comes with the uniform. Civilians can fade into a crowd when things get tough; a police officer cannot. A civilian can treat public and private lives as two separate worlds, but a police officer cannot. They are held to a code whether they are on or off duty. Finally, when there is a challenge, a disturbance, or an incidence of violence in public, civilians can walk away, and in some cases, if they're smart, they'll do that; a police officer cannot.

For these reasons, our uniformed officers deserve our respect and our support. To be supportive is, first, a matter of attitude. It is to accept the police as part of us, to see the man or woman in the uniform as a fellow human being. To be supportive of our police is also a matter of actions. It means to come forward when we have been a witness at an accident or an incident, to avoid activities and crowds that disturb the peace or infringe on the law, to take responsibility for our society whether or not the police are present.

Canada brings together a number of values in unique combination. One of our national symbols is a mounted police officer, yet we are not a police state. It is possible to be both law respecting and democratic because our policing has historically been a community affair, reflecting and upholding values that we all share. Whether we are looking at our national police force, that patrols huge tracts of territory, or a constable on the beat in a small town, both are not something over and above but a part of the communities they serve.

Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, allows citizens to support the work of the police and to make a difference in the safety of their communities. I am pleased to speak in support of it, and I thank the Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing it forward.

As I speak, I am representing the wishes of Edmonton-Mill Woods. The intention of this bill is to promote community safety by providing a mechanism for the government of Alberta to respond to public complaints about a property, a community, or a person and then make a complaint to a director under the Solicitor General that the person's community or neighbourhood is being adversely affected by activities on or near a property in the community or neighbourhood; or it is being habitually used for activities criminal in nature and having a negative effect on the health, safety, or security of one or more persons in the neighbourhood; or the illegal activities interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of one or more properties. Investigators will undertake an investigation and take any number of actions, including a community safety order.

This bill allows the communities and neighbourhoods to have a say in the safety and security of their communities. This is about community empowerment and allowing people to be active in ensuring the safety of their neighbourhoods. This bill allows another tool for people above and beyond calling the police, who sometimes do not have the resources to effectively deal with and gather the necessary evidence to deal with some illegal activities. Empowering citizens in the war on crime is highly effective. People know what is happening in their neighbourhoods and often can gather the evidence that is crucial in obtaining a community safety order, evidence that can only be discovered through proximity to the troubled area. For this reason, having a mechanism to allow them to gather evidence and directing it to an agency of the government for investigation is a positive step in combatting crime.

This legislation improves community safety by targeting and, if necessary, shutting down residential and commercial buildings and land that are habitually used for illegal activities. This legislation empowers citizens to take back control of their neighbourhoods by reporting problem nuisances and businesses.

There are a couple of points to be raised for discussion. I am wondering about the makeup of the investigative team, what that would be. There needs to be individuals who are well trained in completing investigations, such as retired police officers, intelligence officers, or individuals with experience in conducting investigations, and so forth. This is a very effective mechanism, I believe, to combat crime in our neighbourhoods and to empower citizens to have a say in controlling the future and destiny of where they live. We need to know, of course, that this investigative unit will have sufficient funding to be effective because there will no doubt be many complaints from all over the province.

In concluding, I want to say that I'm very much in support of empowering citizens to take back their communities and to take responsibility in ensuring that our police are supported. This sends a message to criminal organizations and those who commit illegal activities that the people are watching and that they will not tolerate criminal behaviour in their neighbourhoods. The stakes can be high. We know meth houses, child exploitation: these are serious offences that need to be monitored by all sources, not just the police, and this bill will provide that mechanism. So I am very pleased and proud to support the intention of Bill 212.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in favour of Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. Before I begin, I would like to commend the Member for Calgary-Hays for the efforts he has made on this bill. [some applause] Yeah, let's do that. This is an innovative piece of legislation that we can use to address difficult issues, issues that require creative solutions such as this one. [interjections] I seem to have lost the attention of some of the members of the House.

I also stand in support of Bill 212 because it is so closely aligned with the government of Alberta's commitment to providing safe and secure communities for all its residents. The Alberta government has historically worked on and approached community safety very thoroughly and thoughtfully. This can be witnessed in initiatives in the government's recent response to the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force report, Keeping Communities Safe. Because crime can only truly be addressed in a community-based manner, it is with the input of Albertans that we get closer to resolving the tough issues confronting us.

Mr. Speaker, when I read the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, I immediately thought of the positive impacts this legislation could have on drug use in our communities. We all know there's no quick solution for eradicating drugs or harmful behaviours from our neighbourhoods. It takes more than imprisonment and treatment to address substance abuse and addiction. Thankfully, we are presented with new tools every day. I believe that innovative legislation such as Bill 212 can work to curtail these social ailments.

This legislation fully utilizes our best resource in the fight against drugs, and this resource, Mr. Speaker, is Albertans. The act is founded on co-operation, education, and prevention. These are approaches that involve and revolve around the community and the citizens who comprise it. Bill 212 gives Albertans the opportunity to make progress in the fight against activities which cause harm to their communities. The provisions of this proposed act empower citizens to identify activities which could disrupt families' healthy existence.

Bill 212 provides a direct route to address criminals who corrupt the fabric of neighbourhoods. Under this act if any Albertan sees disruptive activities frequently occurring in their neighbourhoods, they could call the director of law enforcement and divulge their concerns. If a director finds just cause to investigate the complaint, investigators will be stationed in the neighbourhood to collect information about the subversive activities. From there, if need be, the individuals involved would be taken out of the community, and the activity would cease. These activities would no longer be part of the lives of our children.

3:10

The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act aims to identify issues which do not necessarily require immediate attention and get slotted down the priority lists. While these matters are sometimes not urgent, they still have the possibility of building into something much more dangerous if they are not addressed.

The bill also targets activities that interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of our properties. Albertans should be free to enjoy their homes in safe neighbourhoods; therefore, this type of activity is unacceptable. With Bill 212 as soon as these activities are identified, they will be addressed. With immediate and direct attention, as is called for with Bill 212, disruptive activity taking place in communities will not be given the opportunity to flourish. In other jurisdictions using this act, safety agencies have been able to warn and scare petty criminals into stopping their actions.

Mr. Speaker, criminal activity is an ongoing battle in all jurisdictions. Because of its clandestine nature, it is hard to get a hold of it and to understand it. If we as legislators equip our communities with all of the tools possible to address crime, criminals will have less ways to evade repercussions. Furthermore, by reinforcing the idea that criminal activity has no place in communities, we're showing a strong example to our children. By showing our kids this example today, the notion of participating in illegal activities may not enter into the equation later on.

Mr. Speaker, if we are effectively to fight drug use in Alberta, our schools must be freed from drugs and other addicting substances. By eliminating or diminishing the number of locations within our communities which aid the production of addictive substances, there would be less opportunity for these to be introduced into school environments. Young children who previously lived in environments haunted by illegal activities would no longer have access to drugs.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays to close debate on Bill 212.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly for committing themselves to a serious and thoughtful debate on the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. During the debate many valuable points were brought up, but what was most striking was my colleagues' dedication to increasing the safety and quality of life in Alberta's communities. I'm also pleased that this act received overwhelming support. I know that if passed, the Safer Neighbourhoods and Communities Act will go a long way in making a real difference in our communities.

As was pointed out, this bill will empower Albertans to address disturbing and disruptive behaviours in their neighbourhoods. Albertans are the eyes and ears of the communities, and with this

legislation they can be fully utilized. They will be encouraged to work with the law enforcement services whenever possible.

I have seen this bill at work. I visited Winnipeg, spoke to the people that work with the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act there. They had been, at that time, for some three years. It works very well. They take approximately 400 complaints a year. This is also law in Saskatchewan and on the 1st of January of this year in Nova Scotia and Yukon.

If this bill is implemented, Albertans across the province, rural and urban, will benefit. Those who have ill intentions will learn that they are not wanted anywhere in our province. They will be driven out or be forced to comply if they want to stay in our neighbourhoods.

I would like to reiterate the prevention aspect of the bill. By identifying issues before they get out of control, as proposed by the act, we have the potential to help young Albertans choose a legitimate path. For example, if a community member identifies a young person's continually disruptive behaviour, that individual can alert the safety agency. If the agency decides to investigate the behaviour and finds ground for action, the agency can work with the youth and parents and find a solution before a criminal record is created. The agency may set something up where the youth goes to AADAC, for example. This gives the youth the opportunity to get on the straight and narrow before it's too late. Paired with Alberta's renowned addiction programs, this bill will be effective in prevention.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to address some specific comments which were made about Bill 212. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora is concerned about the confidentiality of a complaint made to the safety agency. I would like to reassure him that the bill states that it would be prohibited to disclose the identity of the complainant or any information that may lead to his or her identification. The information provided to the safety agency would not even be allowed to be released to a court.

The member also voiced concerns about how the roles of the director of law enforcement and the peace officers seem to be increasing. As mentioned, I've travelled to other Canadian jurisdictions which have this legislation, and this legislation works. Drug dens get shut down, and disturbing activities get identified before they turn into dangerous crimes.

I feel strongly that Bill 212 will strengthen our communities by making them safer for all Albertans. I hope to see this act be a part of the province's larger program and approach in achieving safer neighbourhoods. I would also like to ask the hon. members to consider Bill 212 and ultimately support the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act because it helps citizens take back their communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 212 read a second time]

Bill 213

Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great enthusiasm together with a sense of responsibility to Albertans that I introduce Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act, for second reading.

First off, I must thank the members of my staff in both the Legislature and my constituency office for the fine work and long hours that they have put in on this bill. Writing, research, and compiling views of constituents, community leaders, and other

MLAs is often very painstaking and time consuming. This has been done since I've had the independent office going. I thank Catherine Obacz, Desiree Ho, Kirstyn Rau, Kayla Tabachniuk, and Robin Williams for all the fine work that they've done. I also thank the Canadian Federation of Independent Business for their work and their input.

Small business has made it clear that they think that regulation needs reining in, that compliance is often confusing and counterproductive and eats up far too much time. Surveys from the CFIB indicate that smaller businesses with less than five employees spend as much as 20 per cent of their time on book work dealing with regulations. That covers all levels of government – municipal, federal, provincial – but it's certainly provincial that can take the lead.

Now, Mr. Speaker, these are the entrepreneurs that are at the edge of just starting out, these ones with less than five employees, at the most creative and challenging time in the life of their business. At this very crucial time they are the ones that are most saddled, comparatively, with the greatest burden of regulation. Just think of what greater productivity, new ideas, and greater wealth could be created if more of that time could be spent doing productive things.

From the CFIB members and from other small business I received over 200 faxes and over 400 e-mails from their members and others regarding and supporting Bill 213.

I also thank the not-for-profit sector for their input and support on Bill 213. I try to sit in on many meetings of the various community organizations in my riding of Edmonton-Manning, and it is universally clear that they are angry at the degree of regulation that they are subjected to. Why is it that every community league has to have someone who can handle the forms and the book work? Why do so many beg to have an accountant or a bookkeeper on their board? Why are they now starting to pay people to do their forms? Do we need to have grant money going to pay for getting grants?

3:20

People get active in community organizations to get their children into sports and other wholesome activities. They want to be involved themselves, not sitting in their basements in front of the computer trying to figuring out some incomprehensible set of rules to raise a few hundred dollars for soccer balls. For example, Mr. Speaker, why do we have a short form bingo handbook? I looked at this short form bingo handbook, and I read from many, many pages of this short form bingo handbook. Do we really need everything in this? You know: rules on how to describe the various volunteers and their roles, regulations on aprons, such things. Do we really need a 23-page section on pull tickets? Do we really need this type of thing? People want change. They want to see their children play, not to become experts on the pull ticket regulation.

You know, with regard to the nonprofits of community leagues, hockey organizations, and others actually earlier today I tabled a petition from the area 17 council of community leagues in northeast Edmonton, which represents thousands of volunteers, fully in support of Bill 213.

Change can happen. We have exciting new technology, Mr. Speaker, that is helping us to do many amazing things. This technological world can create more paperwork if we let it. Let's not. Use technology to simplify things. For example, earlier today I had a question regarding the transportation industry which now has mandatory logs that are handwritten and must be done every day. It's really a 20th century, if not a 19th century idea, this handwritten logbook. Twenty-first century transmission programs are more secure, more reliable, and are actually much better in terms of dealing with this issue. The message here is that regulation must

stay current, must be reviewed from time to time for real relevance.

This is not to say that we should not have any regulation. We do need rules, like for our restaurants so that we have healthy food there and can trust that what we buy there is safe. We need rules for food, air quality, water safety, and many things. But do we need so many? Are not the very purposes of the rules and regulations that are created so often defeated by their complexity? Are good regulations ignored because they are grouped with so many others that have no relation to common sense or relevance or are just too much into detail that people don't even look at them? Are rules redundant because they are a duplication of a similar rule in other regulations or other jurisdictions that deal with the same area? This is to say nothing about cross-jurisdiction differences. You know, for municipalities and such BizPaL is a great initiative, but maybe it's time to have a standard business licence that crosses municipal boundaries. The regulatory reform reporting plan for ministries in Bill 213 could lead to that.

Bill 213 sets forward a regulatory reform initiative that is wide ranging and comprehensive in its process. It is a bill that is the first statute of its kind in Canada, the first time that regulating regulations will not be done by creating new regulations. This will be a law of our Alberta Legislature. As a statute it sends a clear message that we must enter a new and more modern age in the way we deal with regulation. It sends a clear message that we must begin to use technology to simplify the way we do things, not to add more detail. This bill will change thought processes that leads to regulation, to make regulators think about the outcome and costs of the rules that they are creating. Make regulations clear. Make them simple.

Unnecessary red tape does create additional costs for business, not-for-profit organizations, and for individuals. The reduction of nonessential or redundant forms in regulations will streamline existing processes and enhance government effectiveness. We must ensure that the can-do attitude of Albertans is directed to doing. Reduce regulation, reduce red tape, and get on with the task at hand.

Bill 213 looks to establish a baseline measurement of the current number of regulations against which progress towards regulatory reform can be measured. When British Columbia instituted such a measure a few years back, it was completed by summer students in a few short months. Such a measurement will be of value in that it quantifies what is in place now. Other measurements, such as the hours necessary for compliance or other factors, would also be helpful.

Bill 213 would seek the avoidance of duplication and have someone in government check for that. Bill 213 would mandate an analysis of alternatives to regulation. Do we really need handwritten logs for truckers, for example? Do they work? Bill 213 would seek consideration of the economic impact of a regulation – how it would affect Alberta's competitiveness with other jurisdictions – and would look to minimize compliance costs. It makes sense. It might save some cents or maybe much more. Bill 213 would require public consultation. A little feedback can go a long way in these matters, Mr. Speaker. Bill 213 would mandate an estimate of the time and cost required for implementation. I'm sure that this is often done. This bill would require that. Bill 213 would require an ongoing review of relevancy of any proposed regulation through the inclusion of a sunset clause. Let's get everything into the 21st century and get rid of whatever is unnecessary.

Bill 213 would make all these matters public, with each ministry establishing a three-year plan for regulatory reform. This bill clearly addresses accountability. As the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has said: ultimately, governments have two main powers, fiscal and regulatory. We have an annual budget for the fiscal side in this province. We need accountability for the regulatory side.

Other governments are addressing that gap, including Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, British Columbia, and even the federal government. We must make our Alberta government accountable as to the full extent of regulation, the full burden it applies to our citizens. Make the bureaucrats think twice.

The bill looks to compliance. Let people in businesses focus on what is truly important. If rules can be kept as simple as possible, it is likely that they will actually be followed. The respect for the rule of law and compliance with laws is in direct relation to respect for the laws enacted and their complexity. Keep them simple, and you enhance civil society through respect for the rule of law. What about the labour shortage? Cut the paper burden and you'll free up more time and need less workers.

Mr. Speaker, hundreds of Albertans have written in supporting this bill. It is time for such legislation. I ask that all members of this House support Bill 213. I welcome suggestions for improvement. Let us as legislators send a message to Alberta and Canada that we can and we want to cut red tape.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by Calgary-Varsity, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak to Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act. The purpose of the bill is to progress towards regulatory reform. According to this bill, all proposals for new regulations would contain an assessment based on need, with a view to avoiding duplication, an analysis of alternatives, an examination of the economic impacts, evidence of public consultation, assessment of time and cost required to implement the change, and continuous review of the proposed regulation to determine if it is necessary.

Also, ministries would have to develop a three-year regulatory reform plan to establish targets and review the progress of each regulation. The proposed legislation includes a number of prescriptive measures. These requirements include ministries developing and making public a three-year regulatory reform plan, as mentioned, six months after this act comes into force. This timeline is established in section 3(1) of Bill 213.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta has legislation to handle regulatory reform targets and puts forward an efficient means for a review. Within the Regulations Act Alberta established a Regulatory Review Secretariat to handle issues of regulatory reform. The chair of the Regulatory Review Secretariat approves regulation impact reports that are mandatory with most proposed regulations. Only those that would not become regulation or do not have a considerable impact are not reviewed. This report must meet the satisfaction of the secretariat to be issued a compliance certificate. Without the certificate the registrar will refuse to file a regulation under the Regulations Act.

Mr. Speaker, this process allows the chair to determine the validity and efficiency of any major regulation, thereby delivering an efficient method for regulatory review. While this government does see the need to reduce red tape, there are numerous steps being taken to reach this goal as well as sound business planning within each ministry.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, Service Alberta's business plan reflects the department's objective to improve government efficiency and regulatory reform. Under the third goal the ministry has expressed the need to constantly manage Alberta's regulatory environment while retaining

a competitive advantage in our global economy. They are working with government councils, committees, and the private sector to assess and ensure the efficiency of government business. This identifies regulations put forth that would hinder growth for Albertans, small business, and the overall economic competitiveness of our province. Since Alberta is not the only government to constantly refine the efficiency of their regulations, Service Alberta is not the only department to constantly refine the efficiency of their regulations. The Department of Finance incorporates a similar strategy to improve service.

According to the Ministry of Finance's three-year business plan, Mr. Speaker, the ministry works with stakeholders, including service providers, to improve forms and develop e-service modules to ensure Alberta's continued success. This process identifies and mitigates areas with a high risk of noncompliance through partnerships with stakeholders in other Canadian jurisdictions to consolidate private-sector pension, insurance, financial legislation, and regulatory processes. The Department of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations encourages both provincial and federal solutions to improve efficiency and effectiveness through the reduction of overlap and duplication between governments and the reform of institutions.

When it comes to reaching accord with other provinces, Alberta is a leader. As a matter of fact, as of April 28, 2006, the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or TILMA, came into effect. The agreement removes barriers to trade, investment, and labour mobility. Mr. Speaker, both Alberta and British Columbia established the ability of workers to move between our provinces and streamlined business registration and reporting requirements.

The TILMA agreement created the second-largest economic region in this country, Mr. Speaker, removing obstacles to trade and mobility, and I would suggest that the rest of the country should take note and come on board. By doing so, the agreement diminishes the amount of regulation and improves efficiency. It establishes Canada's most comprehensive internal trade market, including over 7.8 million people. Neither province's people, investments, nor goods take precedence over one another. However, it does take into account certain differences in justified cost-of-service matters, thereby preserving the necessary provincial autonomy.

To further strengthen the efficient partnership, the Member for Calgary-Bow introduced Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007, on May 7, 2007. Bill 38 proposes to allow a penalty that would be imposed by a TILMA dispute panel to be filed in the Alberta courts. A similar piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, has also been introduced to complement this in the province of British Columbia. If the bill is enacted, the legislation would enforce the dispute resolution mechanism outlined in TILMA.

The trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement outlines a three-step process to resolve disputes through dispute avoidance, consultation, and, as a last resort, resolution by an impartial panel. Under TILMA the panel would have authority to impose a financial penalty of up to \$5 million for either province that violates the agreement. TILMA along with Bill 38 will work towards cutting red tape, making it easier to comply with the standards of both provinces, and will provide a dispute resolution mechanism to deal with any conflicts.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning for bringing forth Bill 213. I feel that Bill 213's proposal deserves further consideration in light of the measures the government of Alberta already has in place. With what is enacted in the Regulations Act, the government has a well-established plan to deal with regulatory review. The bill would set timelines and requirements that could improve the regulatory reform process. The

government is continually committed to reviewing regulations to ensure that they do not impede Albertans' business and government efficiency. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to further debate and the conclusion of debate on this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. It is my pleasure this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, to rise to speak in favour of Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act. As I'm very aware of the intent of the bill, I do not want to provide the verbal equivalent of the bureaucracy that this bill is attempting to eliminate. I will very briefly state that this bill increases the efficiency of the process rather than adding numerous layers of questionable oversight. It also improves the accountability associated with the bills.

As a teacher of 34 years I'm very aware of stifling bureaucracy, which has gotten to the point where field trips, even across the back field to the library, have become so overpapered that any kind of outdoor pursuit, even basically walking to the school across the block, has become prohibitive. Bill 213 recognizes that we need to get on with the job. The government has an oversight responsibility, but that oversight should be more with eyes and ears as opposed to just researching and reviewing documentation. Be out there. Do it. Don't just read about it.

I support my colleague from Edmonton-Manning on Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act. I appreciate the fact that the government members recognize that it focuses on the duties and requires them to speed up the accountability process while at the same time eliminating the unnecessary red tape. Thank you very much, Member for Edmonton-Manning, for putting forward this bill. I wish it speedy acceptance.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 213. I would like to support it. I appreciate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning bringing this forward to the House because the red tape dilemma is a growing one here in the province. It's something that we definitely need to address. With all respect to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, we're not doing well enough. We need to do more. The government is very slow on it. If they think that they have enough in place, we realize how negligibly we're working on this, that it just isn't happening.

CFIB put out a research paper a while back. We talk about Alberta having the lowest taxes in the country and the Alberta advantage, yet out of all of the provinces where the business owners sent back to them, Alberta had the worst record for red tape. So I think it's something that we absolutely need to address, not only as a province but as a country. Alberta should be leading in it and not allowing British Columbia to be, well, 20-some per cent ahead of us in business satisfaction.

One of the areas that I guess I want to speak on, being that I represent a rural area, is the number of problems that I have from constituents calling up dealing with the CAIS program. Here is an excellent example of complication, misunderstanding. Even the accountants who work on CAIS and predict and say, "Well, this should be your payment" are not able to come up with the right answers. There is just far too much paperwork, too many loopholes and, I guess, areas of arbitrary ruling that don't help. I feel that the real dilemma we have here in the province and in our country is that

we've got this mindset now that somehow rules and regulations, conversely, help us to have safety and productivity, and I think that it's wrong.

One of the sad things that we see is that more and more rules and regulations are imposed in industry. We see industry leaving our country, our province to go overseas, and then we have products that are coming back that are substandard, yet we say that we can't regulate and be the watcher for all of these items that are coming back. I think that we need to back up and think this through a little bit. Do we need all these rules and regulations, or do we pass laws and legislation that hold businesses and people accountable for their actions? It would be much easier to deal with these things in a court of law than in the reams of paper that have developed over the years to try and meet these regulations.

3:40

I just want to give one example. I had auto mechanics come to me two years ago because they were looking at passing new rules and regulations on who qualified and who could work on automobiles because in the big cities there's a problem with backyard mechanics in the fact that they were doing shabby work and then turning it back to the people, and there was no recourse. So the industry thought, "Well, if we increase the cost and the rules and regulations to become a mechanic, that will protect the people," whereas it doesn't. All it did was hurt those small mechanics from small towns that couldn't afford to buy a \$50,000 bond, which was what the proposal was. In a small town they know their customers, and they're held accountable. If you do shabby work, you're put out of work immediately.

This is a case where the law was failing the people, so they thought rules and regulations would help, and it doesn't. Those people should be held accountable for their shabby work and be able to be taken to a court system that's quick and efficient, and therefore we wouldn't need all these rules and regulations.

Just to go over a few of the other things in the CFIB research. They talk about the cost of compliance and what it costs per employee. It's just tremendous. Some of them estimated that it cost over \$5,500 there. Workers' compensation, occupational health: 67 per cent felt that the red tape there was excessive. The small business owners primarily deal with regulations. In 70 per cent of businesses in Alberta it is the owner who primarily deals with the regulations. It's very onerous, and they're not able to do the work they want in their own business because they're so busy trying to meet the rules, the regulations, and all of the red tape that goes along with that.

Somehow we need to be able to simplify it because what rules and regulations generally do is put small businesses at a disadvantage with large businesses just on the effect of efficiency. A large business can afford to hire one or two people in order to fill out all those rules and regulations, whereas a small business doesn't specialize in it. It's onerous on them, and it's very difficult for them to go forward. It's interesting. I've even spoken with the presidents of the different educational facilities, and the number one complaint they have is all of the red tape and the amount of information and forms that they need to fill out in order to look for funding, assistance, and other areas. It's the same with the municipal districts, the small towns, and villages. All of these are problems inside our own province that affect the efficiency and the competitiveness of our businesses here in the province, and we need, truly, to address it.

On the reduction in productivity, the percentage of members saying that regulations significantly reduce their productivity, by sector: transportation, 74 per cent. It's incredible when we think about the amount of goods and services that are sent around the

province at such an onerous cost of doing business. The question that the businesspeople ask: does government even have any idea what the cost is to corporations and the individuals and farmers to have to do this red tape?

I want to go back again and refer to British Columbia. When Premier Campbell got in there, it was one of his mandates that they were going to reduce it, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning referred to that. They've done an excellent job, and Alberta, because we can't lead, needs to follow those who are doing better. It's an area where there's no excuse for us not to do better, to realize the problem.

I again want to go back to the idea that these rules and regulations are forcing industry out of our province, out of our country to other areas, and then we're bringing in subquality, whether it's clothing, whether it's toys for kids, whatever it is, that doesn't meet the quality that we have here. It's very difficult to say, "Well, we should be buying at home" when we've driven those industries out of our country and they've gone overseas. It's a difficult thing to try and have it return.

Overall, I guess I'd also like to refer to the different taxes that we even collect here in the province. The health care premium is nothing but a bureaucratic headache in what it has caused. For the \$900 million that we collect, what is the real cost on that? The thousands and thousands of Albertans that aren't paying it: the government hires people to go and chase this down. This is a classic example of where we could streamline government, streamline the operations, reduce taxes, reduce the red tape, and truly make a difference for our health care system.

There's no reason to be collecting the health care premiums when we have the surpluses that we have just when we look at the red tape and the book work that has to be kept along with that. The problems that we have when those clinics allow people to come in and they haven't been paying their premium, to put them in the policing situation of saying, "Well, why are you here? You need to pay your premiums," puts them in an unfair situation.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Manning for the diligence that he has had on this bill and for bringing it to the awareness of this House. I would hope that we would pass this and that we would double our effort and try and pass British Columbia in their effort to reduce the red tape. It's something that we need to do. We want the Alberta advantage to be here. We want to be competitive, and we want to enjoy competition with other jurisdictions that do not have the red tape and the problems that we do here.

Thank you very much for the time to speak on this.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act, proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. The purpose of Bill 213 is to establish policy that will measure and assess progress made in the area of regulatory reform. This is to be accomplished in two ways: first, by evaluating new regulations to ensure that they meet specific criteria for preventing duplication and also ensuring that thorough analysis has taken place by considering effectiveness, cost, and public opinion; and second, by establishing regulatory reform reviews within ministries that include reform targets and ensure continuing regulatory relevance to reduce regulatory burden. This would place more responsibility on ministries for regulatory legitimacy and accountability.

I applaud the spirit of this bill and the goal to address inefficien-

cies in cost, resources, and bureaucracy. Clearly there is a need within government to eliminate duplication and overregulation and to limit administration to those things that are absolutely necessary. The impact of regulatory burden can limit growth for Albertans, small business, and overall economic competitiveness, which is why working towards streamlining interaction between government, citizens, and business and improving accessibility and service delivery benefit us all. This is something with which we are all in agreement.

My concern, Mr. Speaker, is how we go about achieving this goal. Many of the things that Bill 213 advocates are already in place, and the government is still hearing from Albertans that regulations are burdensome. Most regulations already have an expiry or review date as well as the kind of sunset clauses that the proposed bill recommends. These formal reviews allow for frequent assessments that provide a way of monitoring regulation on a continual basis to ensure effectiveness and relevance. In this case, therefore, Bill 213 would simply add to that which already exists.

We also have the Regulatory Review Secretariat, which was just renewed in March of this year. It is specifically responsible for overseeing ongoing review of regulations to ensure consistency, relevancy, and simplification to both new and existing regulation. It also ensures that new or amended regulation is in keeping with the core responsibilities of government. Much of this process is accomplished through regulatory impact reports, which all regulations require. These reports mirror much of what is advocated in the proposed bill. There are mechanisms currently in place that monitor and assess regulations to ensure effectiveness and relevance. Requiring ministers to follow regulatory reform plans and processes proposed in Bill 213 could mean asking them to duplicate work that is already under way or to place new administration on top of existing processes.

3:50

However, Bill 213 brings to light some important points that remind us of the need to deal with the issue of excess regulation and procedure before it becomes a problem. This is why the focus needs to be on creating a culture of reduction when it comes to regulatory burden. This up-from-the-ground approach helps us in two ways. First, when considering reducing and preventing duplication in the creation of new regulation, we will steer ourselves away from creating that which is burdensome, and second, in preventing bureaucracy rather than merely reacting to it, we create more opportunity to spend time on the efficiency of existing regulations instead of creating new legislation.

In short, the more we dedicate ourselves to preventing and reducing regulatory burden and creating a culture that supports efficiency and ease, the more expedient and valuable the regulatory process will become. In this way the practice of preventing an excess of regulation becomes institutionalized as part of the way of governing. This is what this government is already working to achieve through its existing regulatory review process. It helps to ensure that as a government we always strive to create legislation that is not only beneficial and responsive but is also efficient and relevant.

Regulatory reform is a priority for the Alberta government. Communicating how we are reducing and eliminating regulatory burden as an institution is crucial, and our commitment to this priority needs to be reflected in the way that individual ministries and departments do business. Indeed, many of my ministerial colleagues have already demonstrated a commitment to this process, with Service Alberta leading the way.

In its 2007 business plan Service Alberta focuses on strategies

geared towards streamlining regulations, improving efficiencies, and strengthening the competitive advantage for government, business, and individuals. Within its third goal of improving program and service delivery by government, the ministry outlined several ways this will be accomplished: first, by developing policy that gives direction to the regulatory environment to maintain a global competitive advantage while taking into account environmental protection and public health and safety concerns, second, by working in conjunction with internal government agencies and the private sector to look at innovative ways of streamlining government business, and finally, by consulting with other ministries and various stakeholders within the province to identify areas of regulation and administration that limit growth and economic competitiveness.

A multitude of other ministries, including Finance, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Environment, Energy, and many others, have also taken it upon themselves to address regulatory burden within their business plan. Targeted and directed approaches to deal with the regulatory accountability and transparency that Bill 213 identifies are already under way within government, Mr. Speaker. We must continue to encourage this kind of accountability since, ultimately, being accountable for our own regulation process is how we best serve the people of Alberta.

I look forward to further discussion on this issue and hearing from the hon. ministers on how they are dealing with the regulatory burden and their plans to improve the regulatory review process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to add my opinion and viewpoint to the discussion on Bill 213, Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act, and I congratulate the Member for Edmonton-Manning for bringing this bill forward. What I'm going to refer to is my experience with the Affordable Housing Task Force.

This previous speaker, our hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, had the same experience. He didn't share that with the House, but, Mr. Speaker, when we went around Alberta with the Affordable Housing Task Force, we went to seven different communities to hear what people had to say. One of the constant themes that we heard everywhere we went was about red tape, that with the whole process of making application for affordable housing, whether it's a local community group that wants to build a seniors' complex or other kinds of housing, the red tape that they had to go through was formidable. We're talking about the groups that reported to us, for the most part nonprofit groups.

In the case of nonprofit groups we're not talking about paid staff that are able to focus on the various kinds of forms that they have to fill out, the long application process, and so on. It's often volunteers who don't have that much experience, and there's tremendous pressure on them to be able to follow the process in the correct manner. Sometimes they have to actually use money from their nonprofit organization to hire somebody to just focus on the filling out of forms. In the case of social agencies that are involved in front-line work in our inner cities, it seems to me that that is a waste of money when those people could be actually engaged in caring for the needy and the people that they are concerned about.

When we reported to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the task force presented our document, *Housing First: An Investment with a Return in Prosperity*. Among our recommendations was this recommendation: cut red tape and improve efficiencies. It's exactly what Bill 213 is talking about. The first recom-

mendation under cutting red tape was that the government should develop initiatives to improve efficiencies, greater synergies, and reduce duplication within government among nonprofits and between both sectors and also improve government responsiveness. We heard that for many nonprofit groups that apply for funding to build affordable housing, the length of time, the process that they go through is so, so lengthy that by the time a year or a year and a half goes by, the costs of construction have gone up, and the nonprofit organization has to turn around and request more money because of those spiralling costs.

Actually, we recommended that all provincial departments adopt an eight-week turnaround on housing grants and funding requests. I notice that the government turned down that proposal although the government did agree to pass on our recommendation about improving efficiencies and reducing duplication among government and nonprofits, that this recommendation should go to a cross-department assistant deputy ministers' committee. So it's apparent that the government is listening to people's concerns and is trying to do something, but this bill really makes it more concrete about what should be done. There should be some sort of process to get a hold of this whole issue and improve the situation.

Also part of our recommendations, Mr. Speaker, was that the government should create clear, standard provincial grant and program procedures to minimize the time and money costs for nonprofit groups and developers, standardized cross-ministry grant forms and templates. I notice that the government is referring this recommendation to the cross-department assistant deputy ministers' committee but acknowledges that because there are so many different programs, there have to be different procedures, different requirements, different kinds of forms.

Then we also recommended that there be an elimination of provincial procedures for nonprofits and service providers that are ineffective and inefficient; for example, multiple audits of the same program, different application forms for each department, et cetera. Mr. Speaker, we heard time and time again complaints about the red tape that nonprofits have to go through. It's a tremendous burden on nonprofit organizations. Most of those organizations are made up of citizens who volunteer their time and put so much effort into those organizations, so to be faced with huge red tape, they need help. They need help to deal with all of that. They need assistance from the departments of government to make sure that they can follow the right procedures and get the outcomes that we all need and want to see happen, especially in the area of affordable housing.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, I don't have anything more to add on this. I thought that that experience was very important to attend to because the government established this task force. We went out and heard what Albertans are saying. They don't like the tremendous burden of red tape, and this bill is addressed to exactly try to minimize and cut it down and put in place a procedure to be able to oversee the whole issue of red tape. I commend it to the House. We should vote in favour of this Bill 213.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to be able to rise today in this Assembly and join the debate on Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act. I doubt that anyone in this Assembly would disagree with the opinion of the Member for Edmonton-Manning when he previously stated in the

House that red tape costs us all. I feel that this notion is largely personified by this government's commitment to identify opportunities to reduce and simplify the regulatory burden faced by the people and businesses of Alberta.

As a brief example of this commitment we can refer to the Regulatory Review Secretariat. Through the secretariat the government is working towards fulfilling an obligation to rationalize and simplify the regulatory environment for the benefit of Alberta's citizens and businesses. It ensures that any new and amended regulation is consistent with the government's core responsibilities.

The chair of the secretariat is responsible for reviewing each regulation and its supporting rationale or need to regulate. This body scrutinizes regulation impact reports submitted to them by departments wishing to amend or create new regulations. The secretariat provides consultative support to departments in preparing these reports and issues compliance statements once they've been approved. It should be noted as well, Mr. Speaker, that under the Regulations Act approval is required for filing a regulation. The Regulatory Review Secretariat reports regularly on the work of ongoing regulatory review and regulatory reform activities to the Minister of Service Alberta.

Bill 213 also urges us to establish a baseline measurement for regulation, an interesting concept that may require further consideration. I'd like to reiterate a sentiment expressed in this House back in June of this year by the hon. Minister of Service Alberta: "The number of regulations isn't critically as important as what the regulations mean to the everyday Albertan and their ability to either just live their lives or to run their business."

I'd urge this House to also consider that excessive legislation can also have negative consequences. Tacking on additional laws to reduce regulation may bog down the legislative process. This would have similarly detrimental results that could easily affect Albertans in a manner comparable to overregulation.

Although there are measures in place to reduce regulatory burdens, we continue to hear that regulations are a challenge to businesses in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to elaborate on this. Certainly, an excessive bureaucracy affects many parties, but my specific concern is about the small businesses in Alberta. How does overregulation affect them specifically?

In a report from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business called *Prosperity Restricted by Red Tape*, 2005, it was stated that 3 out of 4 small business owners indicated that regulations add significant stress to their lives. In the same report I was shocked to discover the statement that businesses with less than five employees paid \$5,317 per employee per year in compliance costs. The report concluded that businesses with more than a hundred employees paid \$1,104 per year to cover these same expenses.

Let's get away from the numbers for a minute and think about the impact of this for our province. How many Alberta communities depend on their local small businesses for jobs, investment, and growth? What happens to small businesspeople when they want to pursue dreams such as running their own hardware stores, establishing community law firms, or opening local delicatessens? The answer is that they are faced with huge financial costs that they may not have the resources to overcome. Also, in comparison with their big business counterparts they may not have the necessary workforce to devote to regulatory compliance.

This particular point emphasizes that there could be costs other than financial ones. Excessive regulation results in time being taken away from actual business operations as well as family and friends as long hours become necessary for some business owners just to make sure they're up to code. This is invaluable time and effort that could be better spent. Mr. Speaker, this creates a climate that

detracts from the entrepreneurial spirit of this great province. It may cause some small businesses to struggle. Albertans have big dreams and hopes. Those who have invested in them may decide that these obstacles are just too great to overcome.

Of course, small businesses aren't the only ones to suffer. An excessive amount of regulation creates a mountainous burden for everyone. It may dampen investment and in some cases restrict job creation. Albertans may be afflicted with higher consumer prices and a reduced range of product choices. Under the structure of a bloated regulatory framework the government itself becomes weighed down in its attempts to communicate and enforce regulations. Simplifying and streamlining regulations positively affects everyone in this province.

Having said that, the method of improving regulatory review should be considered with caution. I believe that this government is vigilant in reviewing and reducing regulation and is striving toward improving the review process. Having said that, there's always more that can be done.

The character of Bill 213 hits the nail right on the head when it speaks to the stifling nature of this phenomenon, and I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate on this issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to make a few comments about Bill 213, and I would like to start by congratulating the Member for Edmonton-Manning for bringing forward this bill. I did a little research going into the debate today – you could call it a historical vignette if you like – about the history of the term "red tape." Now, one school of thought says it goes back to England in the 1600s, when bureaucrats used red cloth tape to bind legal documents together. Another source, an American source, of course – Americans like to claim everything as their own – says it goes back to the U.S. Civil War, when long, bulky federal documents were folded into three sections, and the documents were then bound together with narrow red ribbon before being shipped off. The recipient then had to cut and remove the ribbons before reading the document, thus creating the term "cutting the red tape."

Now, I know that's not particularly relevant, but that's never stopped us before. Whichever explanation is true, Mr. Speaker – I lean towards the British version, personally – red tape and government are inextricably linked, and since governments pretty much invented red tape, it's up to us as legislators to do everything we can to rid society of this perennial problem.

The purpose of this bill is quite straightforward. It is to ensure that current and proposed regulations in regard to red tape for businesses and nonprofit organizations are necessary and not merely there to keep bureaucrats busy. You notice that I didn't use the term "minion." It attempts to streamline procedures for businesses and nonprofits to speed up proceedings and to cut down on unnecessary work. Since red tape is a creation of government, this bill puts the onus on government to ensure that all new regulations that will be passed are absolutely necessary.

There were some interesting statistics about red tape that we received from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which estimates that 35 per cent of Alberta businesses have reported an increase in red tape and that Alberta businesses lose 65 days a year to untangling red tape. It is especially interesting that British Columbia eliminated 113,000 regulatory requirements. I believe the Member for Edmonton-Manning said they just used high school students to do that. Other jurisdictions across the country have red tape legislation, and I'd like to think that this government is honest

in its desire to make Alberta a leader in all areas of government, not just in spending.

4:10

We've all received a glowing letter of recommendation about Bill 213 from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Now, the federation says that Bill 213 is about accountability and compliance. But, even more importantly, it is not entirely a business bill but an attempt to help nonprofit organizations and even MLAs, I suppose, wade through the sea of red tape that can so often trip up industry and nonprofits alike.

There is an interesting chart contained in a research document by the CFIB. The chart asks if there is a single bylaw governing business licences in specific cities and if it is easily accessible. The city of Calgary is one of the few municipalities that does not have a single bylaw, according to the chart. Apparently, there are a total of 10 bylaws governing the licensing of businesses in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, red tape costs businesses, entrepreneurs, and nonprofits countless millions of dollars and millions of hours of frustrations. I urge this Legislature to vote in favour of Bill 213 and again congratulate the Member for Edmonton-Manning for bringing this bill forward. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to debate Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. Reducing and limiting the regulatory burden placed upon business in Alberta is a paramount task for our government. Government rules and regulations are an instance of daily interaction between our government and Albertans, however unnoticeable the relationship may seem.

Now, our government prides itself on increasing transparency and accountability in all areas of government interaction with Albertans. After all, a key focus for this government is governing with integrity and transparency. This improves the quality of life in the process and builds a stronger Alberta through increased economic activity and efficiency.

Bill 213, Mr. Speaker, seems to infer that our ministries are currently unresponsive to limiting regulatory burden placed on business and are therefore responsible for regulatory inflation. The increased expectations and demands on our governments to regulate and address a broad range of social and environmental goals have postulated this concept of regulatory inflation. While there has been an increase in regulatory demand, it has been dealt with equitably and efficiently, with the full understanding that there is a need for a streamlined process.

However, if we were to make sure that we knew exactly how many regulations we had, whether we measured that by the number of regulations or whether we measured the regulations by the amount of time it takes businesses to fill them in, I think that we would become much more aware of the situation with the regulatory burden that we do have out there. Not only that, but if we were then to take the next step and were to say, "Okay; this department now has this exact regulatory burden upon Albertans," and the people that work for government were to actually measure them in terms of how much they were able to reduce the regulatory burden upon Albertans, then they would sort of get in on the whole concept, not only just the concept but also the goals of reducing those burdens.

So I think that it's really important that we engage the public service in this whole process, that we get them interested in this whole process of minimizing the amount of work that we are

creating for the people of Alberta. If we get them engaged in that whole process, they'll become our allies in this fight. Rather than a top-down approach of us saying, "Oh, you've got to cut regulations," as a government and as politicians, you know, if we ourselves are pushing that message instead of it just coming from the top down in terms of politicians pushing this idea, if we can get the public service involved in this whole aim, I do believe that the public service would be very interested in working on this. But it has to be part of the goals, and to be able to make it part of the goals, we have to actually measure what the regulatory burden is that we have on the people of Alberta.

Now, simply counting the regulations I think is not the best way to really analyze the situation. I think a much better way of analyzing it is to actually find out how much time it takes people to fill it in. If we were to change the measure to a more realistic measure such as that, I think that this bill would be a very good way to move forward.

I'm working right now on a project with BizPaL where we're looking at the total regulatory load on one particular part of the restaurant industry. We're not just looking at what the load is provincially, but we're also looking at what the federal government load is, what the municipal government load is, what the health region load is, all of the different regulations and forms that have to be filled in. This, I think, will be something where it makes it very easy to compare what we are doing here in Alberta or in one part of Alberta even compared to the rest of the country. Again, that will give us a little bit more impetus to really go after trying to cut back on regulations.

In summary, I must say that I do believe that this is the way to go. I don't think we've got quite the measurement, as you suggested, for this bill. I think there are better measurements. But the whole concept of it I think is excellent.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. Albertans, individuals and businesses, are faced daily with rules and regulations. Due to the impact that rules and regulations have on their operations in Alberta, I feel compelled to contribute my thoughts on this subject.

Also, as I've said many times in the past, personally I profess the four-E principles, being ethical, economical, effective, and efficient. So when I get into the government or the public policy operation, I would still want to see the efficiency, the effectiveness, the ethical and economical drive for public services and operations. When we look at this, regulatory efficiency is an issue that is very, very important to the government of Alberta and those who comply with them because these stakeholders stand to gain when most effective regulations are possible. Regulatory review is in constant motion in Alberta and has been demonstrated by my colleagues speaking previously and for years.

In many ways Bill 213 is very much aligned with this government's regulatory regimes. Just as the government does, the bill recognizes the burdens of dealing with unnecessary red tape and regulations. As a fiscally responsible government we realize that unneeded regulations can present additional costs to all stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this time just to address the organization that affects 120,000 employers and over 1.65 million workers in Alberta, and that is the Workers' Compensation Board, the WCB, may I say. It is a nonprofit institution mandated to

administer the workers' compensation system in our province. Like any organization, there are rules and regulations, procedures, and red tape. It is important to note that, as such, the WCB is autonomous and an arm's-length organization with the government.

4:20

Probably you know, Mr. Speaker, and my other colleagues realize that through payment of premiums the employers fund the no-fault system, which is designed to protect workers and employers from the full impact of work-related injuries and illness. Now, the WCB is a very important organization that aims to ensure that those who make Alberta thrive are well taken care of in times of need and misfortune, and with the sheer volume of players and funds involved and the intimate nature of the service provided, it is critical that the process involved with WCB be as simple as possible.

Through this example I can demonstrate how the government of Alberta has worked with WCB to streamline existing processes to enhance the outcome for Albertans that is called for by Bill 213. Mr. Speaker, I must note the complaints that some individuals and organizations have with the processes in WCB because they are directly related to Bill 213. Furthermore, when we acknowledge this perceived inadequacy, we can help dissolve those perceptions and make improvements. For instance, some business owners in Alberta feel that WCB regulations are quite burdensome due to paperwork and time requirements, and we should take note of that. Much has been done on the system used by WCB to increase the satisfaction of those who collaborate with the organization, but there's room for improvement.

I know that in the year 2000 two reports were released with the hope of improving the service delivery of WCB. The Members of the Legislative Assembly Workers' Compensation Board Service Review Input Committee and the Review Committee of the Workers' Compensation Board Appeal Systems both called for simplification of the WCB system. For example, the Members of the Legislative Assembly Workers' Compensation Board Service Input Committee recommended that the WCB use plain language in decisions, documents, and communication and stated that it was not clear how many Albertans actually knew the difference between temporary total disability and temporary partial disability. So this is a needed simplification.

In a 2005 status report it was stated that clear standards for communicating decisions are now set out in WCB style guidelines. In order to achieve this recommendation, the hearing chairs were provided with training on decision writing just to understand the subject and how to deal with the procedures. In addition, WCB declared that it was committed to improve communication with all of its stakeholders and recognized that this will be an area of ongoing improvement in their organization.

Now, I just want to emphasize the aspect of government operation procedures, red tape, that affects Albertans. Particularly in this situation, the example is 1.65 million Alberta workers and 120,000 employers, so the call for this change in government operation regulatory review and simplification to make our system more efficient, more effective, more economical is a very, very good drive.

I want to commend our Member for Edmonton-Manning, who introduced this notion in this Bill 213. Of course, many of my other colleagues will support this idea. I want to just call on our other members here to support the drive for making our government more efficient, effective, economical. Thank you very much for the time.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you had indicated you wanted to speak on this one.

Ms Blakeman: No. I think it was on the next bill. My apologies.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Any other speakers? Anybody? There seems to be some confusion.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South has now risen. Would you like to speak on this bill?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, I would love to speak on Bill 213.

The Acting Speaker: The chair will recognize you.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you. I will join the debate on Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act, moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

In listening to one of the previous speakers describe his experience with red tape, I have a similar story to share. One time I was the power of attorney for somebody who had to live outside of the country for a while. It was actually my brother. His mortgage came up for renewal, and I had to arrange for the renewal of his mortgage. I had to send the documents away to a different country – I won't mention the name – and it took an incredibly long process for that document to actually get back to me. When it came back to me, physically sewn onto the document was a strip of red tape. So when the other member mentioned the origins of red tape, it reminded me of that experience that I had some 20 years ago and what red tape actually meant in that case.

Mr. Speaker, this bill before the Assembly proposes a direct way to address a significant challenge that affects all organizations. This challenge is reducing the burden of navigating through excessive regulation. Our government is conscious of how tedious and ineffective it can be to have regulations that overlap and complicate processes. We also comprehend the necessity of enabling businesses and individuals to have the ability to operate in the most efficient manner. However, we also have to respect and abide by the laws and rules that have been established for the benefit of Albertans. It would be neglectful to ignore the responsibility that our government has toward matters as important as the environment or occupational safety. Ministers within this government accept their mandate to ensure that operations which are under their auspices will uphold standards that have been developed through consultation, research, and practical experience.

Our government recognizes that regulations are necessary in many situations. However, reviewing regulations is also necessary to ensure they remain effective and achieve their intended outcomes. I would like to refer to the developmental processes that are undertaken and implemented by various government ministries to ensure that regulations are developed for specific purposes that have measurable results and are not duplicated in principle by previous regulations.

There are many examples of ministries carrying out their work with due diligence, and they are implementing regulations with the scrutiny and thoroughness that Albertans would expect. Service Alberta documented in their 2007-08 business plan a strategy to improve and streamline regulations in order to improve the ability of ministries to deliver government programs and services. The ministry noted its commitment to developing policies that provide direction for Alberta's regulatory regime and maintaining a competitive advantage in the global economy while protecting the environment and public health and safety.

Service Alberta goes further to state that the ministry will "work

with internal government councils, committees and the private sector to identify, assess and manage innovative initiatives to streamline and gain efficiencies in the business of government.” The priority of Service Alberta is clear and consistent. They have and will continue to “consult with stakeholders from across the province and other ministries to identify regulatory burden and administrative policies that limit growth for Albertans, small business and overall economic competitiveness.”

Mr. Speaker, this type of commitment articulates the strategy of our government to reduce regulation for businesses and individuals. As I have indicated, it is in this government’s best interest to mitigate the regulatory obstacles that may possibly exist without jeopardizing our commitment to health safety and quality of life.

4:30

Our government should especially caution against overregulating the nonprofit sector. These benevolent organizations operate within strict financial parameters and may not have the staff to navigate through excessive regulations established by federal, provincial, and municipal governments. Often due to regulation nonprofit organizations dedicate much of their valuable resources both in staff and finances to establishing and maintaining registrations, providing reports of various events to regulatory agencies, and ensuring compliance in their operations.

The cost per organization of full compliance with all government regulations for donations consumes significant resources. The extent of this burden in some situations forces the organization staff to focus on paperwork rather than fulfilling their mission. The costs also redirect the financial means of charitable and other nonprofit organizations toward administrative duties as opposed to directing the funding at its intended objective. Ironically, nonprofit organizations typically reduce bureaucracy, thereby expediting the important services they provide.

In our effort to reduce governmental regulation, the Ministry of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations acknowledged they will promote both interprovincial and federal/provincial solutions to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Canadian federation through the reduction of overlap and duplication between governments. Everyone can realize how time consuming and costly it can be for Albertans to have to continually adjust for repetitive regulations.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, which has a significant regulatory framework due to the circumstance of their functions, has taken a proactive approach to addressing these regulatory issues. The ministry has identified in their core business goals, strategies, and performance measures that their first priority is to facilitate a legislative framework that enables municipalities to operate successfully and meet the local needs of Albertans by monitoring provincial legislation and regulations. Where it is appropriate, the ministry will recommend changes to municipal regulations that support improved approaches to local governance, election processes, and service delivery. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is committed to assisting municipalities throughout the province to develop an effective regulatory regime that accomplishes their objectives but does not act as a hindrance to the cities, towns, and villages. The ministry asserts that it will assist municipalities who are having sustainability or accountability problems to examine and pursue innovative approaches or restructuring that will address regulatory problems.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta’s provincial government acknowledges that excessive regulation is unnecessary. Our government has taken the proactive approach to expedite decision-making and allow departmental functions to operate with the effectiveness and urgency that

the residents of this province expect. It will never be our intention and should never be our intention to force individuals to fill out a seemingly unending amount of paperwork or obtain multiple licences or make individuals go through arduous committee procedures. The regulatory formalities and requirements of our government are implemented for the individuals to know that their government has not increased bureaucracy to ignite their frustration but for their benefit and well-being.

I can assure this Assembly that our government will continue to show leadership in reducing red tape for the financial and practical advantages for all Albertans. As I have explained in these deliberations, we recognize the importance of regulatory review and should consider, Mr. Speaker, Bill 213 in working toward improving our regulatory review process.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the time to address the Assembly on this very important bill, and I thank the member for bringing it forward and will be supporting him in his initiative. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. We only have about a minute and a half.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Sure. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to express our caucus’s support of Bill 213 as well. In our analysis it seems that the bill seems to reflect what has been done in the province to the west of here. Over the last five years the British Columbia government has implemented a regulatory reform legislation aimed at reducing red tape. Bill 213 seems to mirror that, and we seem to think that is reasonable. The bill has strong potential in streamlining the regulatory processes, making it more efficient for businesses. Reducing unnecessary, onerous regulations is an economically sound policy.

We have a couple of concerns. I might be able to get through one or two here now, however. One, the legislation in B.C. is in support of small businesses, and it is in the Ministry of Small Business and Revenue, but 80 per cent of small businesses say that it really hasn’t made much of an impact on their processes. That number rises to 90 per cent in the interior and the north of British Columbia, so perhaps we can learn and adapt to that historical fact.

The legislation allows for stakeholder input and has the potential perhaps of impacting social and environmental regulations, so we have to be careful of that issue as well. We should be wary, as well, of environmental regulations and labour regulations and health and safety regulations from the potential to be degraded through this.

Again, of course, regulation is important, and it has its value . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Unified Family Court

511. Mr. Chase moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to improve service for families involved in legal proceedings by implementing a fully effective unified family court, as called for by the Unified Family Court Task Force report.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to

introduce Motion 511: be it resolved that the Members of the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce amendments to create a unified family court as contemplated by the Graham report of 2001.

The value of a unified family court is that it provides a single forum for families and individuals to address legal issues that arise out of a family breakdown. As a corollary to the condensed court services, counselling and other social services would be provided by such a court. The benefits of such an approach are as follows.

Currently unified family courts exist in several other Canadian jurisdictions. However, Alberta has not yet created a unified family court system despite the recommendations of the government-commissioned Graham report of 2001. In addition, the government implementation committee was created in 2003 that was tasked with implementing the concepts of the unified family court. It has been illustrated through studies of existing programs in other provinces that unification of family proceedings is beneficial from both a cost and time perspective.

The concept of unified family courts first gained notoriety in January 1974, after the Law Reform Commission of Canada working paper 1 recommended a national network of such courts. This began a period of reforms to relevant provincial legislation which resulted in the creation of unified family courts in other jurisdictions as follows: Prince Edward Island, 1975; Ontario, 1977; Saskatchewan, 1978; Newfoundland and Labrador, 1979; New Brunswick, 1979; Manitoba, 1984; and Nova Scotia in 1999.

The following issues have caused the current approach to family law to flounder. Divided jurisdictions between provincial or territorial family courts and the superior courts creates confusion. It results in families basically being ping-ponged back and forth between various courts. When one court doesn't resolve their issue, they're forced to go to another one. This creates great confusion and great expense.

Parties in a family law case must follow detailed rules of civil procedure which are not tailored to meet their needs. To meet the procedural requirement of the forum, litigants must spend significant amounts of money in drafting paperwork which is often unnecessary. To me, the greatest tragedy is that the money that could have been spent on the children for a variety of concerns – education, health, funding for their futures – is spent on legal wrangling. Litigants are often forced to appear before judges who either have little familiarity with family law or dislike dealing with family law cases. The divorce process and also the litigation associated with it, issues such as custody and access and the division of matrimonial property, place parties automatically in an adversarial position. This has proven to have negative effects on the members of the family, especially children.

Making the procedure less adversarial, as the unified family court accomplishes, has benefits for all stakeholders. The unified family courts are a valuable tool to improve our legal system. Their creation will allow for a specialized judiciary and improved mechanisms for dealing with problems that are unique to family proceedings.

4:40

The reason for implementing and suggesting Motion 511, which would work towards the implementation of a unified family court, is necessary because the needs of families are not currently being met by the existing system. The availability of unified family courts is a proven means to expedite proceedings. This has been proved in the majority of Canada's provinces.

A unified family court will allow for greater attention to be provided to family issues without resorting to litigation, so that it

doesn't have to go to court. Facilitation can happen beforehand: save money, save conflict, save time.

These issues will be heard by a specialist judiciary who are well equipped to handle the intricate nature of family law issues. They're there because they're informed. They're there because they care.

Most of the work to implement such a system has already been completed, and proven models already exist in most of Canada. The government of Alberta stated in 2003 that the UFC was a priority but has yet to act on statements made to the press about the creation of the UFC system. That today is going to change.

The current duplication system is confusing, time consuming, and does not provide services that would be beneficial to Alberta's families. The implementation of a unified family court structure would allow all interested parties to have their needs met.

While researching the background in the preparation of Motion 511, I quickly realized that federal/provincial jurisdictional disputes, including funding of the unified family court concept, have delayed its implementation in Alberta. Thanks to the support and advice of the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, who worked with me to ensure that the intent of my Motion 511, of a single court dedicated to family law, remained intact and could therefore move forward, potentially partisan, divisive politics were set aside.

Having laid out the underlying precepts of the motion, I look forward to the amendment, whose wording has been previously shared and discussed. Today the rights and responsibilities of Alberta's children, their parents, and grandparents will move one step closer to receiving the unified legal process protection they deserve, with your support.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Motion 511 be amended as follows: by striking out "as called for by the Unified Family Court Task Force report" and substituting "process." The amended motion would read as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to improve service for families involved in legal proceedings by implementing a fully effective unified family court process.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the change is necessary for this motion to work effectively and provide the most benefit for all Albertans. Currently family law issues are addressed through multiple levels of court within our legal system. For example, Alberta's Court of Queen's Bench has exclusive jurisdiction in divorce and the division of matrimonial property while the provincial courts have the responsibility of young offenders and child welfare matters.

In accordance with the proposed amendments the concept of the unified process could denote more efficiency within our current system. If implemented, the jurisdiction of provincial issues or justices would not have to be relinquished to federally appointed justices as suggested in the Unified Family Court Task Force report. There are numerous constitutional issues which arise with the cross-jurisdictional concept as recommended within the report, not to mention access issues for Albertans.

Currently the Court of Queen's Bench sits in 13 major centres in Alberta while the provincial court sits in 75 major centres. Of the 13 centres in which the Queen's court justices sit, only 11 are regularly operated while the other two are operated on specified dates. Mr. Speaker, in order for success to be achieved within the family court system, the system itself must be accessible to all Albertans. A unified family court process would likely meet this litmus test without an exorbitant amount of resources.

Further, when a previous attempt at a structural unified family

court was introduced during the 25th Legislature, Third Session, through Bill 56, the Alberta Court of Justice Act, it was found that the federal funding scheme for structural unified family courts presents little financial advantage. The federal government has also not proceeded with legislation to allow for the appointment of judges to expand the unified family courts as they had planned. As stated by the 2002 Unified Family Court Task Force report, a unified family court should not be established if the provincial or federal government is not prepared to provide the resources needed to support the court. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendment to Motion 511 is the proper choice.

By incorporating the successes within our current system, family resolution in Alberta can continue to be accessible, efficient, and operate effectively. Also, following the previous attempt of the structural unified family court, a meeting was held with the Chief Justice of the provincial court, the Chief Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench, and the Chief Justice of the Court of Appeal and other representatives from both the Court of Queen's Bench and the provincial court to discuss the future of the unified family court initiative.

From this discussion the family justice strategy arose. The family justice strategy showcases an effective alternative to the structural unified family court system, as recommended by the task force, which works within our current court system, jurisdictional limit, and court funding. With these current initiatives along with a willingness to continue to streamline the court processes for families, Alberta is on the right path.

The proposed amendments to Motion 511 would allow another opportunity for this important matter to be dealt with further and in an appropriate manner. It would allow for results, and that's what we need for Albertans dealing with family law issues. I hope that the proposed amendment is satisfactory to all members of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. I'm pleased to speak in support of amendment A1. Motion 511, the unified family court, has as an intention to provide a single forum for litigants to address legal issues that arise out of family breakdown. At the moment different matters are addressed by judges in both the provincial court and the Court of Queen's Bench.

[The Speaker in the chair]

This bill would provide condensed court services, counselling, and other social services. The provision of these services can remove some of the acrimony that tends to accompany a family breakdown.

Unified family court processes do exist in several other Canadian jurisdictions. A government implementation committee was created here in 2003 and was tasked with implementing the concept of the unified family court in Alberta, but no further steps have been taken. This is disappointing.

I have some comments from a child protection point of view and based on observations of families that have engaged the courts. I know there are individuals who believe that one way to protect family values is not to make the court process simpler. It goes with the "if you build it, they will come" scenario. This is small thinking that does not address the problems or help families in need of assistance.

Court is very confusing for families in general, and I wonder how

many parents stay in abusive relationships because they feel they cannot access the court system when they have to. They feel intimidated; they feel overwhelmed and confused. I know that there are clients that social workers have worked with over the years that have told them that they got a lot out of the judicial dispute resolution process. I've studied that myself, and I believe that along with parenting and after-separation courses and mediation services we can do a lot to bypass acrimony that we presently often have.

Common to parties in a court action is that each party thinks they are right, hence the dispute, and it is amazing to see how a judicial dispute resolution session, where both parties sit in front of a judge and the judge gives a nonbinding point of view of how they would rule should the matter actually go to trial, often causes a settlement.

It is unfortunate, however, that recent legislation such as the new Family Law Act and the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act have made matters in court more complicated as both pieces of legislation provide the authority for an applicant to apply for private guardianship. The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act is far more robust and time consuming to go through because of the home study provisions, but the Family Law Act allows for private guardianship without the same steps or safeguards. A unified family court process would be an improvement. However, I think we need more unified legislation that does not offer differing steps to the same remedy with different expectations.

4:50

One huge problem in family law is dealing with the allegation and counter-allegation issue. There are many scary stories in child welfare where parents have used their children and the court system to get what they want via false allegation. Certainly, if we had a case management approach to dealing with difficult cases in family law, this could result in interesting outcomes. A case manager could be the front-line worker engaging with the family, and should there be a need to revisit the matter in court, a direct referral by a case management court worker could be ideal.

It would be interesting to review fatality inquiries to see how many cases had ongoing legal involvement or clients having difficulty accessing the courts. I am also of the view that we need more secure supervised visitation services to be used by the courts to assess and facilitate visitation when required. I would advocate for a tiered approach in a unified family court process where cases could be assessed based on the risk and streamed accordingly. Each stream could provide a range of services based on a clear understanding of the risk each stream is about and what their needs are.

I would also advocate for involvement of grandparents when appropriate. Grandparents are taking care of our children more often than we care to count, and they should be a part of the process and told that they have rights. I'm of the belief that families do want to resolve their issues without fighting. However, as it now stands, I think many stay together or do nothing to avoid the confusion of finding justice in the courts. Our present system of family court is confusing, even for social workers.

A single forum for issues relating to families and children makes sense for several reasons, one level of jurisdiction where court orders would apply across the board. Judges in family court would have to be knowledgeable in issues relating to family breakdown, children's services, and youth justice. For example, it is not unusual for parents to be in the process of separation or divorce, dealing with custody and access concerns, and the children involved in youth justice as well as concerns relating to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. These issues are dealt with at different levels, jurisdictions, although they have a common causal factor, which is the family breakdown. Not only would the family court judges be

more knowledgeable and, hopefully, more consistent in their decisions, but services for the family would be streamlined: parenting, psychological assessments, mediation, counselling, et cetera.

Communication between professionals delivering services would be streamlined, reducing duplication of services and increasing the effectiveness. Most importantly, a single forum for litigants would take much of the confusion out of the process for parents and other family members. Often individuals do not know where to turn for assistance, and when they contact different agencies or government departments, the process is extremely difficult to sort out.

I am speaking in support of Motion 511 and this amendment, which would establish a unified family court process, because it would provide a single forum for families and individuals to address legal issues that arise out of family breakdown. It has been illustrated through studies of existing programs in other provinces that unification of family proceedings is beneficial from a cost and time perspective. It is clear that the unified family court process approach is beneficial. It provides a positive alternative to what presently exists, which is divided jurisdiction between provincial or territorial family courts and the superior courts, which creates confusion.

Parties in a family law case must follow detailed rules of civil procedure which are not tailored to meet their needs. Litigants are often forced to appear before judges who either have little familiarity with family law or dislike dealing with family law cases. The divorce process and all civil litigation associated with it, issues such as custody and access and the division of matrimonial property, places parties automatically in an adversarial position. This has proven effects upon the members of the family, especially children. Making the procedure less adversarial would have benefit for all stakeholders. For example, access to the judicial dispute resolution process could eliminate much of this negativity.

The adversarial system of our courts and politics is at its weakest in family relationships. The intensity that created those relationships in the first place makes it very difficult to resolve, let alone dissolve them when something breaks the bond. It is like the forces that hold the atom together. Until a century ago we thought it was indivisible, but when it was split, those same forces released the blast of energy we call the atomic bomb. This analogy of trying to contain the energy loosed by splitting the atom shows why we need special courts to deal with family matters. The usual tools of analysis and cross-examination and argument don't work when emotions are high. They often make things worse.

Since relationships are important to women and we prefer to deal with issues by looking for common ground and consensus, with conflict as a last resort, it is not surprising that women played a key part in shaping family law and courts in Alberta, especially one woman, the hon. Marjorie Bowker, the first female judge of our family courts 38 years ago. Judge Bowker was instrumental in our adoption of a court-centred marriage conciliation model. Motion 511 and this amendment for a process which we are considering today are a tribute to her legacy. The recognition that court procedures had to be streamlined and facilitated to deal with real people and their relationships is what she was about. The fact that we have to modify her legacy is a sign of its importance and its ongoingness. Laws and traditions set in stone are not alive. As Deepak Chopra points out, it is sometimes necessary to change the words in order to preserve the meaning.

Mr. Speaker, I commend this motion and the amendment to my colleagues as a step in a tradition that recognizes that our laws exist for humankind and not the reverse. I thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for his foresight in bringing this forward.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a debate on an amendment

to Motion 511. Any further participants on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recognize what the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays is doing in bringing this amendment. It's stopping short of recommending an actual unified family court but emphasizing a unified family court process, which is not what the Graham committee recommended. The Law Reform Institute has been on record as long ago as 1978 as pushing for a unified family court in Alberta. Other speakers have mentioned the tremendous problems and the confusion facing people when they're dealing with family matters. You know, there are a number of courts having jurisdiction over different issues. I don't think the public really is sufficiently aware, so it becomes quite confusing for them when they approach this whole issue and face issues of family matters in court.

For example, federal matters such as divorce and division of matrimonial property are to be heard in Court of Queen's Bench. The provincial court has jurisdiction over local and provincial matters such as adoption, child protection matters, child welfare and domestic relations, issues like guardianship, custody and access, and matters relating to children of unmarried or separated parents who are not divorcing except if the court is to establish paternity, in which case Queen's Bench has jurisdiction. If you're a grandparent seeking access to your grandchild, that is a matter for the provincial court. In the case of child support, matters are heard in Court of Queen's Bench unless you are bringing an application for the reciprocal enforcement of a child support order from another province, in which case you will be heard in provincial court. Well, that is completely confusing.

I hope that lawyers know and have this figured out and know which court to approach with a family matter, but it's totally confusing for ordinary people. Just on this point, it's interesting that there is a practice among lawyers who often bring, actually, a matter to one court, and when things don't go right, they take the matter to another court, actually taking a lot longer time in the process. Sometimes it's the client that wants that to happen because they don't see what is happening for their betterment in one court, so they start a proceeding or have a proceeding started in another court. Actually, that's referred to as forum shopping. I've heard of church shopping. If people don't like one particular church, then they go to another church.

5:00

Ms Blakeman: And they MLA shop.

Dr. B. Miller: MLA shop, too. But forum shopping, that's interesting, shopping for the court that you think that you'll get a better deal in. That leads to a lot of conflicts and probably lots of delays, and costs go up because the court proceedings are much longer.

Mr. Speaker, I think this confusion is not helped when there's not one court. I know that there's a new courthouse being built in Calgary, but right now in Calgary I think you have to go to different buildings if you want to go to provincial court or to Queen's Bench. In Lethbridge if you walk into the front of the building, you go in one direction if you want to go to Queen's Bench or you go in the other direction if you want to go to provincial court. So even physically it's confusing.

I think what the Graham commission had in mind was the establishment of a unified family court that would overcome the confusion that's out there for people. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods pointed out, there are so many advantages to having a unified family court because you have judges who have specialized experience with family matters; you have family law

lawyers dealing with it. In that kind of context, where there's lots of understanding of the dynamics of family, there can be attention to mediation processes, which can even happen before a family gets into court. So a lot of good things can come out of a unified family court.

On the amendment. I know that my hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity is really interested in supporting this motion to move things forward. I really respect that. But the motion as amended doesn't quite get us to the physical entity of a unified family court.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the amendment. Further speakers?
Shall we call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: Now we will continue a debate on the motion as amended. If I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, that essentially closes the debate. I also note the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills wants to participate, so we'll call on him.

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise and speak on Motion 511, which as amended proposes a unified family court process to be adopted in Alberta. I truly believe the intentions of Motion 511 to be in the best interests of the people of this province. As many of the members know, expediting the judicial process to minimize the amount of time families spend in court is very important to me.

In the 26th Legislature, Second Session, I introduced a private member's motion to this Assembly which attempted to recognize the critical role that grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren and to encourage access when it is in the best interests of the child. This, Mr. Speaker, obviously refers to the custody or visitation rights for grandparents following a spousal separation, a parental death, or relational difficulties. Family issues are diverse and offer many complexities to our judicial system; therefore, prolonging the family interaction within the system only further exacerbates these complexities.

Mr. Speaker, I believe a unified family court process would be very beneficial for all areas of family law, including the issue of grandparents' access to their grandchildren. It is important to the well-being of the children to have an opportunity to know their grandparents and other family members and to continue the close relationships they have enjoyed in the past. Unfortunately, parents may disagree that such contact is appropriate even in intact families. In these cases the ability to apply for access must remain available to people who feel the parental decision is unreasonable or harmful to the children. Therefore, child custody cases should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

As currently written, the Family Law Act specifically mentions "grandparent" and the process they must go through to gain access to their grandchildren. The act recognizes that for most Alberta families grandparents and other extended family members play important roles throughout a child's life. However, this legislation also realizes that in some cases disputes between parents and grandparents result in grandparents being denied contact with their grandchildren. In situations where the guardians, usually the parents, and grandparents cannot agree on contact, the act includes a process through which grandparents can apply to court for a contact order. Mr. Speaker, in granting the contact order, the court is required to consider the best interests of the child. The Alberta Grandparents Association remains unsatisfied that this process is fair to grandparents.

I believe that the proposed unified family court process presents us with a great opportunity to incorporate issues of grandparents' access to their grandchildren in an efficient and expedited manner. Child custody as well as visitation rights are an important cog in the development of our next generation. Incorporating all areas of the family into a unified family court process will supply our justice system with the means to an effective outcome. For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I support Motion 511.

The Speaker: The discussion is on this motion as amended. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise on Motion 511 as it has been amended. Alberta itself has the sad statistic of one of the highest divorce rates in Canada, and Motion 511 would be a great benefit to couples and grandparents. I have received several letters from frustrated parents and grandparents who would love to have this resolved in a friendly manner. Grandparents, unfortunately, are caught in the middle, and I'll take my own case, for example.

Through divorce my grandparents were very instrumental in my life, and I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't had that relationship, because a lot of times they were the ones that helped raise me. I think that disallowing grandparents to have that influential opportunity with kids would be a huge loss. For anyone who has grown up without a grandparent, they may not know it, but for those who have had grandparents, try and put yourself in the position of not having the experiences, the wisdom, just even the knowledge being passed down. It's a shared family tradition that a lot of people cherish, being able to have that third family or, as I call it, a grandparent. I think it's instrumental in a lot of kids' lives. It's the one stable piece that's there because if there's fighting at one house or the other, there usually seems to be a little bit of continuity at the grandparents' house, where there is no war raging. It's just love and understanding.

I would certainly support this Motion 511. I think it would help a lot in family unity being a little bit better. Thank you so much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on the motion as amended.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am rising to speak to support Motion 511 as amended. I think that the topic that has been brought forward here is sufficiently important to look for some compromise, the spirit of which, I think, we're seeing with this amendment passing so quickly and reasonably unanimously.

The unified family task force we saw from several years ago talked with the public and the legal community and delivered a report more than seven years ago, and the government seemed to accept this report, but really we didn't see much happen since then. So this motion I think revives the interest in the sense of unifying family law here in the province of Alberta and working with our federal counterparts to realize this to happen. Of course, the co-operation of the federal government is necessary to enact this, so certainly our caucus urges the Justice department here in the province of Alberta to begin to undertake the mechanisms by which we can see a unified family court functioning here in the province of Alberta.

I, too, through my constituency office and through people contacting me over the past three years have come to realize that there's a tremendous amount of inefficiency and ensuing social problems associated with the court system as it functions now in terms of family law. Anything we can do to solve that process I

believe is in the public interest, which this Legislature is designed to serve. So we certainly support this motion as amended and look forward to other legislators doing the same.

Thank you.

5:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to spend a few moments to add to the debate of Motion 511, which as amended urges the government to develop and implement a unified family court process. I'd like to discuss some of the benefits of a unified family court process because such a system would streamline the adjudication of family law, and this may assist families in navigating their way through the justice system and has the potential of limiting large legal costs. As the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods indicated, it can be onerous for people and sometimes confusing and even scary.

A unified family court process could also make effective use of specialized judges and legal professionals which have an understanding of family law issues. This would be a benefit to the legal system as court cases relating to families would be handled by experts in the field. In many cases, Mr. Speaker, in my constituency we see a lot of situations where this kind of a process certainly could be used very well.

The motion as amended has the best interests of the family at heart and would further solidify Alberta as an innovator in family law issues. This government has been, is, and will continue to be a leader on this issue. Currently Alberta Justice has a family justice strategy in place. This strategy already embodies many of the principles outlined in the Unified Family Court Task Force report.

Perhaps most importantly, our province has cutting-edge legislation in the area of family law. In fact, in 2005 this Assembly debated and passed the Family Law Act. This act modernized family law by changing terms relating to child custody and access. It introduced new concepts such as parenting time and contact orders. Mr. Speaker, the Family Law Act modernizes criteria in the best interests of children, which includes recognizing spousal violence when considering parental access to children, yet another area where Alberta is providing clear and decisive leadership in the national sphere.

I'm not sure if many members are aware that Alberta is the home of the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family, otherwise CRILF. This institute is responsible for measuring the Family Law Act's effectiveness. Quite recently two board members from the institute stated publicly that our act should be a model for the federal government when it considers reforming custody provisions in federal law.

Mr. Speaker, our commitment to helping families goes beyond statute. It includes action as well. Lawyers are actively using less confrontational means to resolve disputes between separated and divorcing couples. These methods avoid traumatizing in hurtful court processes, which too often have a negative impact on children. It also ensures that the tension built into divorce cases is dissipated and rational negotiations are conducted, thereby reducing costs and avoiding bitter acrimony.

The net result goes beyond costs, though, Mr. Speaker. Families being torn apart by divorce are already traumatized enough, and we all know that. I'm sure that each of us has had family members going through that. Resorting to alternate processes to resolve disputes ensures that children are not put in compromising situations through the custody process.

This government cares about families and particularly cares about

the welfare of children. I believe that the new Family Law Act addresses many concerns about confusion within the legal system. Most importantly, the legal profession has resorted to other means than courts to deal with family law issues.

A unified family court process would be an opportunity for this government to further expand on its successful initiatives for family law, and therefore I will be offering my support to Motion 511. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there additional members that wish to participate in the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that the motion has been amended and the idea of a unified family court process has been put forward, I just wanted to give an example – and this is an example that was given by a provincial court to the Graham task force, which looked at the whole unified court process – which illustrates the problem that we have at present. This is maybe an extreme example, but a child reacting to stresses within the family is charged with shoplifting. The parents become involved in an argument over the problem, and one seriously injures the other in the presence of the children, thus bringing child welfare authorities into the picture and also bringing about a criminal assault charge. One parent claims custody and maintenance, the other claims divorce, custody or access, and a division of matrimonial property.

So what happens? Well, youth court is involved because the child committed a shoplifting offence; adult criminal court is involved because of the assault charge of one of the parents; Provincial Court, Family Division is involved because of the one parent's claim for custody and maintenance and the child welfare authority's application for temporary guardianship is involved; and the Queen's Bench is involved because of divorce proceedings. Provincial Court, Family Division would also have to be involved if there's a protection order under the Protection Against Family Violence Act. So here you have one, two, three, four courts involved with the same family. I mean, that's maybe an extreme example, but I think it illustrates that we really need to have a unified family court process.

I think the Calgary-Lougheed MLA Marlene Graham, QC, who chaired the Unified Family Court Task Force, stated that the status quo is no longer acceptable. I think that all members in this House would agree with that. She also went on to say that the time has come for a unified family court in Alberta. Well, we're almost there.

Mr. Speaker, I support this motion, which is getting there, because it's in favour of a unified family court process. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise briefly to join the debate on Motion 511 as amended, which seeks the implementation of a unified family court process within Alberta's judiciary. Family law is a very unique part of any judicial system. Negative experiences acquired during this sensitive process can have tremendous impacts on families. Through the intimate nature of family law it's important that this system operate as smoothly as possible.

A unified family court system is typically designed to bring the various jurisdictions of family law together at the superior court level. Furthermore, they're intended to reduce the time, conflict, and cost of litigation by providing a single court system with jurisdiction and authority to hear all issues raised in each distinct family matter. This system also aims to provide easy access to a full range of

family justice services, specialized judges who are experts in family law, and a user-friendly environment with simplified procedures.

To examine the potential of a unified family court in Alberta, the Unified Family Court Task Force was established by the government of Alberta in 2001. The task force provided many recommendations to make the family law process user friendly and accommodating. Following the task force, Alberta Justice conducted consultations with legal stakeholders to discuss the future of unified family courts within Alberta's judicial system in 2004.

Mr. Speaker, at that time, based on the stakeholders' commitment to a streamlined family law process, the previous focus on court structure was shifted to a more functional approach. This shift of attention materialized because it was determined that the majority of the objectives of the unified family court system could be efficiently realized through an initiative, goal-oriented approach. In other words, this simplified process may be attained through changes in the system.

Mr. Speaker, this motion encourages the government to continue to pursue a unified family court process. I encourage all members to support this motion. I also would like to take a moment to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity for working together with all members of this House to come up with something that we all want to support for the benefit of families in this province. He deserves to be commended for bringing this initiative forward, and I thank him for that.

The Speaker: Shall I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate on this motion as amended?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I recognized the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, but I also want to recognize the Member for Calgary-Foothills because he's been a part of this process basically since the beginning.

A lady by the name of Marilyn Marks, who has talked to a number of members of this House, a grandparent who has had difficulty with access to her grandchildren, has spoken to committees; she's spoken to individual MLAs. The Member for Calgary-Foothills attempted to bring a motion through last year to recognize grandparents' rights and improve grandparent access. I very much appreciate the work that he has done towards that end, and I very much appreciate the energy that Marilyn Marks has demonstrated over years of frustration of trying to do the best for all children in the province and recognizing that families consist not only of a mother or a father, or a mother and a father, but that grandparents play an extremely important role.

5:20

The Member for Edmonton-Glenora, based on his pastoral background, has dealt with families and breakups and the sadness of children who have not been supported and has every directly involved reason to especially want this unified family court process to work. That's been a large part of his lifetime's work to this point. We all want it to work. We have an opportunity in this province in that our current Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, who is a family man, has the authority within the federal jurisdiction to work with the province to make this work. I appeal to all members to encourage this process to not only work provincially but in partnership with the federal government.

Thank you for your support.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 511 as amended carried]

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 11

Telecommunications Act Repeal Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 11, the Telecommunications Act Repeal Act.

The act was proclaimed in 1988 to regulate the operations of two public organizations, Alberta Government Telephones and Edmonton Telephones. The act sets out the terms for the Alberta Government Telephones Commission: its purpose, membership, financial, and reporting responsibilities. The act also authorizes the city of Edmonton to provide telephone and telecommunication services within city boundaries through Edmonton Telephones.

The reason why I am asking for this act to be repealed is because both of these organizations no longer exist as corporate entities. You may recall that in 2006 the government intended to bring this act to this House as part of the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, but that act did not go forward at that time. That is why Bill 11, the Telecommunications Act Repeal Act, a stand-alone piece of legislation, is before us today for second reading.

I would also like to add that Alberta Justice and the Attorney General agree there's no legal reason to keep the act. As a result, this is a housekeeping item to clear the statutes of Alberta of an obsolete and invalid piece of legislation. The regulation of all telecommunications companies remains under federal jurisdiction through the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

I support the repeal of the act and encourage other members of the House to do so as well.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 24

Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, a complete review of the Real Estate Act has not occurred since 1996. In addition to several housekeeping matters, amendments being proposed will update and clarify legislation, address changes in the marketplace, and strengthen the Real Estate Council of Alberta's statutory authority to address the growing problem of mortgage fraud.

Mr. Speaker, some of the highlights of the proposed amendments include allowing the regulations to set out limits on current exemptions for financial institutions when they deal with real estate and mortgage products, requiring that industry members abide by the act and RECA's standards of conduct even in their personal trades and deals, and allowing RECA to require applicants to submit to a criminal record check for licensing purposes. This will assist RECA in combatting mortgage fraud by helping them identify individuals who apply for authorization under an alias to conceal a past criminal record.

Ensure more comprehensive industry representation on RECA's council by requiring that it include one licensed appraiser representative and one licensed property management representative, and make failure to comply with a direction from RECA an offence, which

will assist RECA in enforcing cease-and-desist orders in unlicensed practice situations. Clarify that unlicensed industry members cannot collect fees, and allow a consumer that pays a fee to such a person to initiate a court action to recover their money. Remove the requirement that RECA approve a prospectus on real estate located outside of the province of Alberta. Regulate real estate outside Alberta that goes beyond RECA's mandate and that RECA is not in a position to verify the information in the prospectus.

Set out situations in regulation where the executive director may refuse to investigate complaints, including anonymous complaints, Mr. Speaker. Provide that investigators can record information electronically. Make it an offence for an industry member to fail to co-operate with an investigation. Provide protection to individuals who co-operate as a witness by not allowing any incriminating evidence they provide in the investigation to be used against them in separate proceedings.

Allow nonindustry members who have relevant expertise to sit on a hearing or appeal panel, and allow a hearing panel that has cancelled an industry member's licence to specify the time period or the conditions to be met before that industry member can reapply. Require an industry member that initiates an appeal to pay the costs of preparing the record of the previous panel's proceedings. Give the executive director the ability to appeal a hearing or appeal a panel decision when it is in the best interests of the public to do so. Provide that a hearing or appeal panel can grant an application for a stay of proceedings, which postpones the penalty until an appeal is heard, rather than requiring an industry member to apply to the court.

Give more notice to affected trust fund beneficiaries when RECA has frozen an industry member's trust fund, and remove RECA's ability to appoint a receiver to deal with frozen funds as it takes RECA beyond its regulatory role. Clarify RECA's authority to include relevant personal information when publishing information about an industry member's licence. This is limited to business contact information and the type and status of an industry member's authorization.

Allow RECA to share relevant personal information that is limited to business information of industry members with other regulatory and law enforcement organizations in other jurisdictions. Simplify the consumer access to the assurance fund by allowing RECA to waive the requirement that an applicant obtain a court judgment where the case is straightforward, Mr. Speaker. Require an applicant to submit a statutory declaration to RECA setting out the details of their claim for payment from the assurance fund where the applicant has obtained a default or a consent judgment against an industry member but not a specific finding of fraud or breach of trust. Set out in the regulations the manner in which the assurance fund proceeds would be distributed if the fund were to be wound up, instead of having the proceeds distributed to all registered industry members. RECA suggests allocating the funds in accordance with uses authorized for surplus funds in the regulations to the benefit of the industry.

Provide for limited liability protection for governors, officers, and employees of the Alberta Real Estate Foundation. Remove the concept of a property user's licence as it relates to the use of real property, such as time-shares and vacation clubs so that RECA no longer regulates these. Remove the requirement for service agreements to be in writing although the act will specify situations where a written agreement is still required.

RECA's rules continue to recommend the use of written service agreements in all situations and to enforce the provision for written service agreements for exclusive representation of a buyer or seller and the representation of certain lender clients.

All of these amendments, Mr. Speaker, will update the legislation, improve clarity and consistency in the language, and add flexibility to address existing and future marketplace issues.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I wish to move adjournment of debate on Bill 24. Thank you very much.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: 5:30 **Government Bills and Orders**
 Third Reading
 Bill 37
 Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 37.

As everyone in this Assembly knows, this was part of budget 2007, which increased the tobacco tax. Also, as everyone here in the Assembly knows, by increasing the amount of tax on tobacco, we're hoping to cut down consumption, especially in those groups obviously who cannot afford the price of cigarettes.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important bill. It's an important element of the whole tobacco strategy that has been brought forward by the minister of health. I therefore would move that we adjourn debate on this bill.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've run out of things that we can run off this afternoon, so I would move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. on Tuesday, November 13.

[Motion carried; at 5:32 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 13, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/13

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome back.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of this Legislature. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we'll now participate with the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau, and I would invite all to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an exceptional person in the Edmonton community, Mr. Dave Dorward. Mr. Dorward is the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta for the riding of Edmonton-Gold Bar. Dave runs his own chartered accounting firm in Edmonton. He is an alumnus of both NAIT and the University of Alberta. He is very involved in the community with a particular passion for sports and youth, coaches a number of basketball teams, and I'm very proud to have Dave as a member of my team as we build Alberta's future. Dave is joined in the gallery by his wife, Janice. I would ask that they both rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today a group of 13 energetic grade 5 and 6 students from Kitaskinaw school on the Enoch reserve. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Ms Minnie Williams; teacher aide Mr. Romeo Waskahat; Ms Wanda Willoughby, teacher aide; and parent Rhonda House. They, I believe, are seated in the public gallery. I would ask that all members give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like

to introduce to you and through you 24 students from Eleanor Hall school, located in Clyde, who are participating in the School at the Legislature program this week. They are accompanied this afternoon by teacher Karen Potts, teacher Marci Zadunayski, teacher assistant and parents Shirley Donnelly and Kelly Miller. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 22 students and six adults from the C.B. McMurdo elementary school in Wetaskiwin, including teachers Mrs. LaGrandeur, Oystein Guren, Sandra Wilson, and parents Marlene Reglin, Monica Haukenfrers, and Darren Diprose. It was my pleasure to be with them when they took photos earlier, and I was certainly impressed with their many expressions of excitement about being here at the Legislature today. At this time I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 66 students from my favourite elementary school up at Lago Lindo. They're accompanied here by teachers Mrs. Natalie Goodall, Mrs. Maggie Corrigan, Mr. Scott Elgert, and Mr. Kevin Peters. They're also here with parent helpers Mrs. Tanya Cowan, Mrs. Mary Ann Mullet, Mrs. Cheryl Johner, Mrs. Carolyn Dubé, and Mr. Ched Lapierre. I would like them all to please rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of bright and handsome students from Meadowlark Christian school. They're accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Schroeder, and principal, Mr. Van Leeuwen, and parent helpers Karen Reschke, Michele Archutick, Kim Wheaton, Misty Schroeder, Emily Gee-Martiniuk, and Litsa Fournalis. I ask that they please rise and accept the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce a couple of individuals that are visiting today. One of the individuals needs no introduction: Mark Hlady is a former MLA for Calgary-Mountain View and president and director of International PetroReal Oil Corporation. Ben Anderson is a director for International PetroReal Oil, and Bill Marshall is the vice-president of exploration for Drumlin Energy Corp. I would ask that they all stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Sorry.

Mr. Mason: We didn't know which one should get up, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two guests who are seated in the public gallery. They are Cynthia Lazarenko and Robert Price. Cynthia recently retired from Alberta child care services in January.

She has been a member of a number of nonprofit organizations and boards of directors in both Alberta and Manitoba. At its recent convention the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees awarded Cynthia a lifetime membership for her outstanding dedication and commitment to the labour movement.

My second guest is Robert Price. He is currently the president of the federal NDP riding association of Edmonton-Leduc and treasurer of the provincial NDP constituency association of Edmonton-Rutherford. Prior to retiring and moving to Edmonton, he taught English and social studies in the public system. Robert has served on various community boards and on the executive of ATA locals.

Both Robert and Cynthia are here to observe the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am indeed pleased today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Bohdan Harasymiw. Bohdan is professor emeritus of political science at the University of Calgary. He lives in Edmonton and is still active in researching the processes of democratization in post-Communist countries. In September 2007 he was an official observer of the parliamentary elections in Ukraine. He is here to observe Alberta's form of democracy in action. I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Michael Butler. Michael is a small businessman who is actively involved in his community. He has been involved in the hospitality, retail, and home building industries. His other interests include visual communications and coaching basketball. He is here to observe the Legislature proceedings. I would invite him to rise now, please, and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two guests seated in the public gallery. They are Dr. Wasimol Haque and Charan Khehra. Dr. Haque has been a scientific executive in the Canadian pharmaceutical/biotech sector for the last 20 years. He served with local biotech companies like Biomira, Chembiomed, and the Alberta Research Council before moving to Winnipeg to lead the cardiovascular drug discovery division at Medicure Inc. Although he has been busy as a scientist, he has not stopped being a concerned citizen. In that capacity he has been commenting on human rights, social justice, peace, and other matters on the international scene and written on it both in national and international press. He is a strong opponent of militarism and believes that Canadians must play an effective role in bringing peace to the troubled world.

My second guest, Mr. Speaker, is Charan Khehra. He is a former director of special projects for the NDP caucus as well as my former executive assistant. Charan is a social activist who supports various nonprofit community organizations through volunteer work and currently serves on the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton's awards organizing committee and the city of Edmonton's Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board.

Both of these guests are sitting in the public gallery. I would now request them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Alberta Relationship Threat Assessment and Management Initiative

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, what can a person do who has just suffered another severe beating and been told that if she reports the assault to the police, her two small children will be hurt? What does a person do whose partner restricts access to the phone, to transportation, and to community resources so that you can't leave, and if you do, your children will be abducted and harmed? Where do you turn to for help when your partner has complete power and control over your life and when you are too afraid to trust the police?

Mr. Speaker, fortunately we now have ARTAMI, the Alberta relationship threat assessment and management initiative, to turn to. Under the competent direction of Val Campbell this initiative, that includes a Crown prosecutor, a family law expert, a victim safety specialist, a Children's Services liaison, RCMP and municipal police officers, is the first threat assessment unit in Canada to be operational.

The Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security has stated: "No one should ever live in fear." His department has the lead in this initiative, and they have helped more than 50 families to survive situations of violence and terror. ARTAMI brings together many experts to deal solely with reducing and preventing relationship violence and stalking and is part of the Premier's plan for keeping our communities safe.

The story that I told is a true story. It's a story of violence and terror that has a happy ending. Thanks to ARTAMI and the specialized training of its members this young mother, knowing her children were now safe and protected at school, had the courage to contact the police. She and her children were then able to escape to a women's emergency shelter and were reunited with her family to start a new life in a new location. Her partner was arrested and charged with 17 criminal offences.

Mr. Speaker, not all incidents of family violence have a happy ending, but through the response of ARTAMI we can more effectively address threats of violence and lead victims and their children to safety.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Alberta Utilities Commission Act

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard over the past few days statements about what Bill 46 is not. I want to use this time to tell Albertans what Bill 46 is and attempts to do. I'm very familiar with the Utilities Consumer Advocate, the UCA, since it reported to me when I was minister of government services. Under this bill, the creation of a UCA governance board, the government intent is that the UCA be independent from the Alberta utilities commission. This is being accomplished through the creation of a UCA governance board which will direct the UCA's regulatory interventions. Under this bill funding for the intervening and regulatory rate hearings will be restricted to the UCA. I do want to stress, so that there will be no confusion, that funding continues for local intervenors directly or adversely affected by an application

such as transmission siting hearings, and the opportunity for interested parties to intervene in regulatory proceedings continues.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, what has changed is a strengthening mandate for the UCA to intervene on behalf of small consumers. The UCA also has an increased responsibility for public communication and education. Responsibility for mediation and information continues.

A ratepayer advocate avoids duplication by groups with common interests, Mr. Speaker, provides increased accountability to small consumers, and has been shown to increase the likelihood of negotiated settlements and incentive regulation. Funded ratepayer advocates with policies that restrict reimbursement of intervenor costs are common in most states and are generally recognized as providing increased efficiencies.

Five true consumer groups have come together through a memorandum of understanding, agreed to pool their interventions under the UCA and sit on an interim governance board with similar powers as envisioned under Bill 46. I want to thank those true consumer groups: the Alberta Federation of Rural Electrification Associations, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association . . .

The Speaker: I'm afraid, hon. member, that we are now going to have to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ethics in Government

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Trust. As we drove down highway 2 last Wednesday afternoon headed for a public Kill Bill 46 forum in Lacombe, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, our chief of staff, and I were reflecting on the bizarre series of events of the afternoon's question period. The Premier had falsely attributed a quote on royalties to our opposition leader before rapidly exiting the House, as has become his custom, without tabling the document from which the erroneous quote had come.

On the topics of deception, manipulation, and suppression Sir Walter Scott warned: oh, what a wicked web we weave when first we practise to deceive. George Orwell spotlighted the power of falsely manufacturing consent by concealing dissent in his novel *1984*, when he noted, "He who controls the past controls the future."

We had barely left Leduc when we received an excited call informing us that the writ had been dropped. While initially catching us off guard given that the Conservative approval ratings in the polls continues to plummet despite a flurry of unbudgeted spending announcements, the possibility of a desperate cut-your-losses-and-run Christmas election call had been prevalent for some time. Because of this trust-challenged government's refusal to establish fixed election dates, its big stick of dissolving parliament to avoid the light and heat of the Legislature's public accountability has been held constantly over Albertans' heads.

It isn't a matter of if; it is simply a matter of when the most important trust election in almost four decades will be called. When the election is called, Albertans will be given a choice to place their trust in an Alberta Liberal government with a clearly focused, inclusive plan for the future or remain stuck in the covert quagmire of this rudderless government's status quo. To quote Joe Anglin, a Lavesta Area Group panelist from Wednesday night's Lacombe Kill Bill 46 forum: democracy isn't something you have; it's something you do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Remembrance Day 2007

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sunday, November 11, all across our province Albertans commemorated our Canada Remem-

brance Day. Each year I have the great honour to represent our government and Legislature at the ceremony held by the Canadian Legion Ogden Branch. Every day when I am in Edmonton working in this Legislature Building, I walk under the standards of our Canadian armed forces units that engaged in the battles of the past. Every day I walk by the bronze plaques engraved with the names of hundreds of Albertans who died in the wars, and every time I walk to and from my office, I can't help but feel thankful to those Albertans who protect myself, my family, and our fellow Albertans.

Thanks to those Albertans of the past who volunteered in the armed forces – and, unfortunately, some did not return – we have Canada as our country, Alberta as our province. Thanks to those Albertans of the present who also volunteer in the armed forces – and, unfortunately, some may not return – we have a place to call home: a nation and a province with security that we enjoy every moment and a world worth living in, with human dignity and freedoms.

1:20

Indeed, it's a precious gift being Albertan, being Canadian. It's a gift from our Creator. It's a gift from our parents and ancestors. Surely, it's a gift from those who died for us to live in the freedom and the dignity of a human being.

I'm fortunate enough to have lived and worked in many parts of the world under different governing regimes, under varieties of traditions and social rules. It takes much time to elaborate those life experiences, so please trust my saying that nowhere else can a person have a life of quality like we have in Alberta, in Canada.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Education Curriculum in Macao

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I had the privilege of attending an Alberta school not in Alberta but, rather, in Macao, not too far away from China. What makes that school really interesting is that this is the only Alberta school outside of the province of Alberta where parents, business leaders who have elected to provide their children with the best education available, have shopped the world for a curriculum and have chosen the Alberta curriculum to be the curriculum instructed in that school.

Mr. Speaker, you would find that school to be very exciting. You walk in there, and it's like being in Alberta: Alberta textbooks, Alberta certified teachers, and children writing Alberta diploma exams and graduating with Alberta high school diplomas.

When speaking with one of the parents, the parent indicated to me that they want their children to receive the best education available in the world. These children from 38 countries in the world have chosen Alberta education to be the one instructed to them. As the principal of the school writes in his message to the parents: the province of Alberta has a tradition of excellence in education which is continually demonstrated by Alberta students' high scores on international tests.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate our civil servants in the Department of Education for the great curriculum that they've developed and for expanding Alberta education world-wide and to thank the International School of Macao for choosing the Alberta curriculum as the best curriculum to instruct their children with.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Alberta Utilities Commission Act

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Conservative government likes to pretend they're all about openness and transparency when in reality they work to make public accountability and public input things of the past. Albertans owe a lot to the brave landowners who stood up to a flawed process in the 500 kV power line hearings in Red Deer and in Rimbey. They stood their ground, exposed the AEUB spy scandal, and what did they get in return? Bill 46.

The government is forging ahead with an antidemocratic bill that demonstrates its willingness to ignore Albertans' concerns for the convenience of big business. This government is setting up an AEUB that serves the interests of energy companies instead of the interests of ordinary people. Bill 46 would plug the power in the hands of an appointed commission rather than those who are democratically elected by Albertans. These officials would have the ability to discern whether or not Albertans would have a say in their own future.

This bill screams of antidemocracy, and it's not just the Alberta NDP who are crying foul. Opposition has been voiced by numerous groups, including the Environmental Law Centre, the Pembina Institute, the National Farmers' Union, Parkland Institute, Consumers' Coalition of Alberta, Consumers' Association of Alberta, the Sierra Club, and the Industrial Power Consumers Association of Alberta.

We can only judge a person, Mr. Speaker, by the sum of their actions. Bill 46 is a heavy-handed and regressive reaction to serious problems in the power industry here in Alberta. Albertans expect better. It's up to legislators to deliver.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition signed by 146 individuals residing in the Summerside and Ellerslie areas in my riding who are urging the government of Alberta "to consider providing additional capital funding to the Edmonton Public School Board and the Edmonton Catholic School District to address the need for new community schools in Edmonton-Ellerslie."

I have a second petition, Mr. Speaker, signed by 736 individuals, residents of southeast Edmonton, who are urging the government of Alberta

to establish a multicultural long-term care facility in South-East Edmonton to accommodate seniors from diverse ethnic groups who reside there and who have special needs relating to language, traditional customs and food requirements that may not be met in standard long-term care facilities.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition today to present to the Legislative Assembly, and the petition reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to launch a full public inquiry under the authority of the Public Inquiries Act into spying practices by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (AEUB) and the Minister of Energy's oversight role of the AEUB.

This petition is signed by citizens from Rimbey, Bluffton, Didsbury, Ponoka, just to name a few.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table this petition which is urging the government of Alberta to ensure that remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized and that they're fairly compensated and their wages remain competitive, to improve the employees' access to professional development opportunities, and to introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level of care standards.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eighty-two more signatures on the same petition urging

the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Most of these signatures today are from Edmonton.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Bill 215 School (Canadian History Content) Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 215, the School (Canadian History Content) Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill will improve Albertans' competency and awareness of Canadian history. The knowledge of Canadian history and culture is needed for our youth, particularly for those who have come here from other countries.

[Motion carried; Bill 215 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to present two tablings today. They represent two examples of outstanding artistic contributions to our Alberta. The first is a program for the excellent production of *Vimy* at the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton. This play very much brought to life that important milestone in Canadian history.

The second is the program for Red Boots, Ballet and Bubbly, the incredible gala held on Saturday at a packed Jubilee Auditorium by the incomparable Shumka dance group. They outdid themselves again with a tremendous and varied performance, and were even led in one of them by conductor Zwoz, or, properly, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek. Well done, Shumka.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is *The Artsroll Illustrated Birchon*, which is a book of Jewish blessings for various occasions, explained in both English and Hebrew. It was part of the Beth Israel synagogue 100th

anniversary gala celebration in my constituency, which took place on January 28, 2007.

The second tabling today is the 82-page program and commemorative book for the 2007 Edmonton Negev gala concert, which took place on June 14, 2007, Mr. Speaker. This year's event was in tribute to Mr. and Mrs. Don and Marion Wheaton.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Royalty Revenues

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Annual reports of government departments are important documents with legal standing. The Government Accountability Act gives direction on what is to be included in them, and the Legislative Assembly Act indicates that submitting false information in reports to the Assembly is against the law, yet it looks like this has been common practice for the Department of Energy. My question is to the Premier: given that the Premier has defended the decision to forgo billions of dollars in royalties as a policy decision, why did this government cover up that decision in their annual reports?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the Leader of the Opposition is making ridiculous accusations. It's all about philosophy. What the Liberals would like is to hoard this money, just bring it in and then dish it out to Albertans piece by piece, through his fingers, by having Albertans come on their knees, stand before him, and say, "Oh, please, give me some of that money back," that should go to all Albertans. That's what the Liberal government is all about. It's not going to happen in this province because I don't stand for that kind of behaviour.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Energy annual reports are where this government is to be accountable to the people of Alberta. People expect the information in these legal documents to be truthful. We now know that it wasn't. Does the Premier support this government's practice of misleading Albertans through annual reports that falsely claim the royalty system was working well?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm sure that tomorrow the leader will be able to table the documents that say where they were wrong, in terms of the annual report. We'll give them until tomorrow to table that.

The other thing is that during that period of time Alberta collected over \$75 billion worth of royalty revenue. At the same time we've seen increases, of course, in population in the province of Alberta as a result of people coming to this province because of opportunity, the highest standard of living anywhere in Canada, the highest per capita spending of people because they're also receiving the most per capita in salaries, and also the lowest taxes.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, this cover-up was not accidental. It was intentional and systematic, and it lasted for years. This government knew the truth. It deceived Albertans, and someone has to be held accountable. To the Premier. The Auditor General refers to various instances where the Department of Energy's annual reports indicate that the royalty system was capturing a fair share despite internal evidence showing otherwise. When did the Premier first learn of this cover-up?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the leader once again is making an assumption, reading into the words of the Auditor

General. The Auditor General clearly stated that there was no wrongdoing. There were no policies being broken. The government stands by what the Auditor General said in the opening remarks when he presented his annual report.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, in his report into the royalty system the Auditor General uncovered a disturbing fact. For several years the sharing the profits performance measure in the Department of Energy's annual report "portrayed satisfactory performance by the royalty regimes while detailed analysis in the Department indicated otherwise." In short, the Department of Energy's annual report repeatedly deceived this Assembly and the people of Alberta. To the Premier: how long has the Premier known that the Department of Energy was providing false information to Albertans? How long has he known about this cover-up?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, the allegations are totally false. The Department of Energy did not present false information to the Auditor General. If he has some text or something to present to the Assembly, then table it. Otherwise, again, the Liberal Party has a different philosophy, a philosophy that I talked about earlier, and it's something that Albertans have never accepted in the past and, I can guarantee you, won't in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. All this evidence is there for the Premier to read in the Auditor General's report.

In the Department of Energy 2003-2004 annual report, page 13, the government reported that the royalty regimes collected a fair share of resource development profits, yet the Auditor General says that no internal report supports this assertion. To the Premier: why did this government table an annual report with false statements in it? Who ordered this?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the government did not table any false documents or reports. Tomorrow, certainly, he can table any kind of documents he has in his possession that say otherwise.

You know, protected by the immunity of the House, he can make all these kinds of accusations against the government or against individual members, and that really shows a complete disrespect for the sanctity of this Alberta Legislature.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, Albertans put their trust in this government, and they were betrayed. In the corporate world there are requirements for full, plain, and true disclosure. Misleading the public in the corporate world leads to prosecution. The citizens of Alberta have the same right to high standards of accountability from this government as do shareholders in corporations. To the Premier: who will the Premier be holding accountable for this multibillion-dollar betrayal of the public interest?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier of the province of Alberta and as the leader of this government I am accountable to Albertans, and I'll stand up for every decision that this government has made in the past. It has led to the tremendous economic growth in the province of Alberta. In fact, over the last few days other provincial Premiers have expressed interest in how well Alberta is doing because they know that their economy is dependent on the

success of Alberta's economy. Really, again, Alberta's economy is the engine of prosperity right across Canada.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the Premier will stand behind this government decision. For seven years secret reports of the Department of Energy warned the government that the royalty system was losing billions in uncollected royalties. Despite this, for seven years the government has reassured Albertans through its annual reports that the royalty system was fine. Albertans were being deceived over and over. To the Premier: why did this government's annual reports tell Albertans they were collecting their due in royalties when it knew – it knew – this was not true. Why the cover-up?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, he has the opportunity to table these secret documents, and I'm quite sure he'll present them tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General notes that the Department of Energy's executive and staff knew that the sharing the profits performance measure needed to improve. Presumably, the Minister of Energy, a former member of the standing policy committee, was made aware. To the Minister of Energy: will the minister admit that he knew Albertans were being fed false information in the annual reports from his department? Was he involved in this cover-up?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that over a number of years – and if you want to talk about seven years and deal in the past, that's fine. We can do that. But for that time, at least, and many years before that and years into the future, where we are interested in going, the people of the province of Alberta have been very well served – very well served – by a royalty regime that produced stellar results economically across the board for Albertans and for all Canadians.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, for seven years Albertans have been kept in the dark about their royalty system by this government. It's time to end the cover-up, time to face the truth. To the Premier. Will the Premier do the right thing: stop hiding, end the secrecy, trust the people of this province, and immediately table all internal royalty documents that are referenced by the Auditor General uncensored?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this Premier made a commitment to Albertans during the leadership. Nobody on that side even talked about any kind of a royalty review; in fact, they even said it wasn't really an issue. I called for the review. As soon as we received the report from the totally independent panel, we made it public because we firmly believe that all Albertans are owners of the resource. Albertans had an opportunity to review the report. We further looked at the full report as a government, and we made a very important decision for the benefit of all Albertans that's going to take this province well into the next decade with good policy, certainty, and predictability.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, there's a bigger secret, and that's where the Liberals actually stand on royalties.

Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador's 6.5 per cent super royalty surcharge gets them a lot closer to a fair share than the Alberta Tories' sellout royalty regime. On oil price from \$80 a barrel and up Newfoundland royalties would earn Alberta over a billion additional dollars a year. My question is to the Premier. Why can a have-not province like Newfoundland stand up to the big oil corporations and get a more fair royalty deal when the government of Alberta folds like a cheap tent?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we can compare the two royalty frameworks, obviously, but it'll take more than the 45 seconds I have to respond. The province of Newfoundland and Labrador took a different approach. They're actually using taxpayers' money to invest in the industry. It's a different approach, completely different from the position we take in Alberta. We allow the private sector to invest, and we have a very fair framework that will find the balance between, of course, Albertans, that own the resource and should get a fair share, and the certainty and predictability in the marketplace where billions of dollars have to be invested in order to develop the resource.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this Premier is certainly no Danny Williams. If Alberta used Newfoundland's royalty rates, we would be earning an additional \$3 million a day – a day. So how is it, Mr. Premier, that the people of Newfoundland will get more for their oil than Albertans? Why did the Premier back down to big oil?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I heard on the campaign trail is that many Albertans were not too happy with a penny on the dollar in terms of the prepayment period in terms of the oil sands. That's one of the issues that came out quite often. I said, you know, from listening to that and listening to other questions being raised: well, we'll conduct a review. And we did. Now, this framework that we have put in place is one that works for Alberta. In speaking to the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, he said that this is what is good for them. He said that the Alberta model works for Alberta but this is new to their province. You know, they made the decision to go that way, by investing taxpayer money in the industry, and we didn't.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans cannot trust the Tories or the Liberals to get them a fair share. Both parties will give away billions of dollars in resource revenues to oil corporations because it will keep the big donations flowing. We think Albertans deserve better. If Newfoundland can do it, Alberta can do it too. To the Premier: why doesn't the Premier admit that the government of Newfoundland got a better deal than he did and go back to the table and get Albertans a real fair share?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in fact, our royalty framework shares the reward and also the risk. As oil prices rise, we will see more royalty coming from conventional oil and gas and also the oil sands. So it moves with price, which really puts in the kind of certainty for the industry. If the price should drop dramatically, then, of course, we will share in the risk as Albertans. On the other hand, we'll capture the upside with rapidly increasing world oil prices. So it's a very good model for Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The line of thought seems to be: bigger government; more money is better. I want to say that conditions have shifted, costs are up, and the current royalty structure isn't unreasonable: that was the Minister of Finance back in May of this year. I'd like to know why we're flipping on this and saying that something that was reasonable in May now isn't. As I was growing up, my father always said: if you want to know, go, and if you don't, send somebody. I'd like to know why the Premier hasn't gone himself and spoken with oil and gas. The Finance minister has, and he says that our rates were reasonable and that it is good for our economy. Why is the Premier doing this to the oil and gas industry?

Mr. Stelmach: What a difference of opinion in this building. A good thing about democracy.

One of the things that, as I said, came up in terms of the framework that we had before was to ensure that given the historic changes in the industry in the province of Alberta, the framework would keep up with those changes. One of those changes was rapidly increasing oil prices during the period of time, and the suggestion by many Albertans was: why don't you review it just to give us a bit of an indication if they're fair or not fair? Going through a review, the panel took one position, obviously. As a government we opposed the production tax on the wellhead. It was something that the federal Liberals put in place that devastated this province back in the '80s, and we're not going to do that again.

Mr. Hinman: They're going to destroy it with their own new tax system.

Protecting the environment is reasonable, but it must not be a barrier to the growing Alberta economy; my government does not believe in interfering in the free market: both statements by our Premier earlier this year. Mr. Speaker, if the environment isn't important enough and can't be a barrier, why is it that now the sentiment to get more from industry and drive them out of the province is okay? Why is this Premier attacking the oil and gas industry and wanting to drive them out to other jurisdictions by changing the royalty revenue programs that we have in place now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would have a look at the framework, we've maintained a lot of the programs, especially for shallow gas, also for flaring, capturing the flaring rather than the methane going into the air. We're capturing that. Also, with deep gas we've made adjustments in the royalty framework. We have listened to the presentations that have been made by many of the small and large oil and gas companies, found a balance. Again, we're going to have the certainty that's going to carry this province well into the next decade.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, it isn't a balance. It's a tipping point, and why do we want to go there? We went through the '80s. We saw that when government interferes, it's wrong. Why does he want to do this? You can't just step in and lower the boom on the growth and the development of the oil sands or elsewhere in the province. If that were to happen, the economic consequences for Alberta and for the economy of Canada would be devastating: again, words of the Premier. It seems like he understood it before. Why is he wanting to attack the families that depend on the oil and gas revenue? Why does he want to attack the oil workers, the small towns? This is an attack on Albertans. Why is he doing this? Why doesn't he admit that he's cowering to the Liberal/ND sentiment and say, "We will not destroy the economy in Alberta"?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we would have cowered to the Liberal sentiment by putting in a production tax. Our framework respects price. Of course, if price goes up, then Albertans share in a greater reward. If the prices drop, we share in the risk. It is part of the true Alberta entrepreneurial spirit, and that's what the oil industry has supported. They're okay with sharing the risk. We've always shared that risk over time. That's why our royalty framework is one of the best in the world, to be shared and studied by others: because we know how to strike the right balance and take a leadership role.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Alberta Utilities Commission Act

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans continue to voice their opposition to Bill 46, but this government does not want to hear that voice. The Minister of Energy continues to deny what citizens already know: Bill 46 will trample the democratic rights of Albertans. My first question is to the Premier. Given that Albertans want the government to kill Bill 46, why is this government forcing this bill onto consumers and landowners so soon, in January 2008?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the bill is before the House. It is going through a number of amendments. Part of the responsibility of the opposition and the government is to find a balance, look at the amendments that come forward and make this a strong bill, and leave it at that. We're going to have further debate in the House to see what amendments will be passed in support of Bill 46.

The Speaker: This bill has not come up for second reading yet. The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to hear that this government is at least going to try to amend this flawed legislation.

Again to the Premier: does this government bill protect the property rights of farmers and other rural landowners?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, that's the big discussion here in the House. Yes, property owners have a position to take. We're all property owners. There should be, of course, a fair hearing in terms of how somebody is, you know, wanting to build a power line or drill a gas well or build a road. There are all these opportunities in terms of fair hearings in front of a quasi-judicial authority to find the right balance.

Speaker's Ruling Hypothetical Questions

The Speaker: The chair has difficulty with this line of questioning. This bill has not come to the House for second reading. As far as the chair knows, this bill may never come to the floor of this Assembly for second reading. So how are we discussing something that, in the view at least of the chair, not knowing what the scheduling will be per se, may be a bit hypothetical?

Proceed with your third question.

Alberta Utilities Commission Act (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that Alberta landowners, including farmers, consumer advocacy groups, environmentalists, and members of the legal community, members of the business community, all oppose this government's Bill 46, yet the Minister of Energy here claims that the

bill is being misinterpreted, can the Premier please tell Albertans who was consulted by this government when this flawed legislation was drafted?

Mr. Stelmach: Two points. One is that this is reminiscent of the kind of scare tactics that the opposition used during another bill before the House a number of years ago, which was Bill 11. Again, they used misinformation, spread that misinformation across the country without giving the true and relevant facts of the legislation that's before us. Like I said, the bill will be up for discussion, for debate, and we'll listen to the opposition's position on it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Affordable Housing for Rural Alberta

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's housing market has experienced exceptional growth that has increased demand on affordable housing throughout the province. Often there tends to be a perception that this challenge is isolated to large urban centres, but in fact rural constituencies such as mine are facing this challenge as well. My question is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. What measures is your government taking to alleviate the affordable housing pressures on rural Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government is very much aware that with growth and prosperity come challenges, and of course one of those challenges is affordable housing. Rural Alberta is not immune to those challenges. Through the municipal sustainability housing initiative this government has allocated \$38 million as well as supported the rural communities with a supplement of \$68 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. What direction could you provide to rural constituents, builders, and tenants who are seeking to access funding for affordable housing?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, as I said before, Mr. Speaker, there is \$68 million that is available to smaller municipalities for them to be able to apply to our ministry for housing projects in their area. We're hoping to attain approximately 500 units with that funding.

Mr. Marz: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how are we ensuring that the concerns of rural Albertans are being taken into consideration when we develop affordable housing initiatives and programs?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the key is to make sure that we have more units available. The availability of those units very much helped the whole spectrum, whether it be rent supplement or whether it be the homeless and eviction fund. At present we are helping nearly 21,000 people with the homeless and eviction fund and 1,800 low-income families through direct rent supplement.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to say that the associate minister of housing is also working on a secretariat to look at homelessness in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Government Employment Contracts

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the Information and Privacy Commissioner's ruling this government is refusing to release details of contracts with Mr. Murray Smith and Mr. Rod Love. The Premier stated that the reason for this is that he views these details to be personal and private. My questions are to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Are the details of Mr. Smith's contract private and personal because he's a top Tory or because the Premier was the minister who picked Mr. Smith?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One thing that's very important. We are reviewing the decision that was made by the Privacy Commissioner. What we're going to do is ensure that this is open and transparent and at the same time that all taxpayers in Alberta fully understand where every single cent goes. That is something that we are committed to. But even more importantly, we're going to protect the rights of those relative to privacy. We're going to ensure, unlike the Liberals – they'll be out there ensuring that for every person in Alberta there is no such thing as anything that's private – that we're going to do what is right, what is right, and what is right.

Mr. Bonko: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's great to hear.

This government is only willing to be open and transparent up to the point of action. Then before you know it, secrecy kicks in. To the minister: how can this government claim to be open and accountable when it refuses to comply with the finding of the Information and Privacy Commissioner's ruling?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, our government has indicated that we're reviewing what the important words were from the Privacy Commissioner. We have 45 days to review what he is saying and to take the appropriate action. We will take the appropriate action, and we will do what is right. What the Liberals want to do is to simply circulate everywhere across Alberta so that no Albertan has any privacy on anything.

Mr. Bonko: Murray Smith, Rod Love, Kelley Charlebois, Bob Maskell: what do all these names have in common? Contracts. Government contracts to Tory insiders. With so many contracts with their friends, no wonder the government is trying to hide behind the details. To the minister: given this legacy of insider appointments and patronage, what kind of government are people supposed to expect, one it can trust or this one?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans expect and what they are assured to get from this government is this. As he mentioned some hon. members' names, perhaps trying to besmirch their names, we have tabled in here, in fact, the contracts that were done relative to the important aboriginal education initiative. Perhaps the hon. member didn't read it, but I will table it again today, as I have done before in this very Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are concerned about the recent discovery of bovine tuberculosis in a bull from British Columbia which was in fact born on a farm in central

Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. What is the status of this investigation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because tuberculosis is a reportable disease, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is the lead agency, of course. At present we have six B.C. and 23 Alberta farms under quarantine, and the CFIA is tracing and testing these animals. If there is a bright spot here, it is that the CFIA will compensate all producers for all animals that have to be tested and destroyed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the expected impact on Alberta's beef industry?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, this case will not change Alberta's test-free status as it's not a potentially contagious disease. It does restrict the movement of animals on these quarantined farms, of course, but it's not expected to have any international impact.

Mr. Speaker, it certainly does emphasize how we have to have our traceability systems in place. We in Canada and, probably more importantly, here in Alberta have the best traceability system going in probably all of the world.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: with everything that's going on right now in the industry – the high Canadian dollar, the high price of feed and fuel – what is the Alberta government doing to support this industry?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, the red meat industry probably is facing the perfect storm now, but we have initiated some round-table meetings. We had one with the industry on October 16, and we're having one again tomorrow, on the 14th. In the short term we're coming up with \$165 million which we will put into a farm recovery plan which will be delivered through the CAIS program. Long term we've charged the beef industry with working on some recovery plans of their own. We as the Alberta government have initiated a competitive initiative which has been in place for about six months now. So we are working on the issues to the best of our ability.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Community Grant Programs

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to a letter written to the minister regarding the administration of grant programs it was admitted that the major community facilities program has slowed down the processing and approval time for the smaller programs. My questions are to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. How does this minister plan to ensure that funding for the larger projects will not continue to impact the smaller projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is asking a very important question.

I want to say that although the major facilities program has taken up a lot of our staff time, I can indicate now that we are basically caught up with the community facility enhancement program, and we're not very far behind on being caught up on our community initiatives program. We have added additional staff and have asked our staff to work extra time, and they've done a tremendous job in responding.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my attempts to find out information about the guidelines and requirements for the MCFP, I found that the ministry had still not posted the names of who has received funding for this program on its website. This government needs to be accountable to the public for how their money is spent. To the same minister: why is this taking so long to post the names of the recipients on its website?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the member talks about the major community facilities program. There have been only a few of the hundred or so applications that we've received that have been approved. Because they're major facilities, we have to do extremely more due diligence, and we're in the process of approving them. Those that have been approved have been made public, and that particular information has gone out with major news releases on all of them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm still concerned about the discretionary ability of the minister to deny funding to any group that he sees fit, especially with the community initiatives programs. Now with the lack of transparency with the MCFP I'm even more concerned. To the same minister: can this minister tell us how he can assure Albertans that this money is distributed fairly among all constituencies and all organizations?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we look at the programs and we try as much as possible to distribute them on a number of criteria. One is on the basis of merit and the impact it has on their individual communities. The other aspect that we look at is more on a regional basis to try to ensure that individual regions have access to similar amounts of dollars. We don't specifically target individual constituencies, but we certainly look at the whole province and individual regions and identify the merits and type of impact it has on those communities and approve them accordingly.

Sour Gas Well Safety

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, families in Big Valley, in Drayton Valley, and other parts of Alberta have grave concerns with nearby sour gas wells, yet these concerns are being ignored. Sour gas wells near their properties are threatening the health of their children, their livestock, and the safety of their homes. As conventional supplies of gas run out, more and more companies will seek to engage in dangerous high-pressure sour gas well drilling with potentially catastrophic results. My question is for the Energy minister. When is this government going to set up regulations to protect residents instead of protecting the interests of the big oil and gas companies?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the regulatory process in the province of Alberta is renowned around the world. I must say that EUB as it stands today: one of the major

mandates and a major function of our regulator is the protection of Albertans. There is nothing that is constructed, no project that goes ahead, no facility that hits the ground without due consideration and a complete – a complete – review of all of the necessary emergency measures associated with that infrastructure.

Mr. Eggen: I don't know, Mr. Speaker. These days word is out that when the gas drillers arrive at your door followed closely by the EUB, you should be afraid, be very afraid. Why? Because one has got the drill ready to go, and the other one has the rubber stamp ready to go.

In many cases residents surrounding these gas well developments have been misinformed of what's even being drilled and how dangerous it actually is. Once again to the Energy minister: why aren't residents of this province being given a chance to voice their concerns about these developments in Big Valley and in Drayton Valley and elsewhere, and why was there not full disclosure about the potential danger?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, the regulatory authorities would take into consideration any of the emergency measures required with respect to any of these facilities. Most certainly, when there are citizens that are involved from the point of view of their proximity to any of this work, what happens is a complete due diligence. There is a situation, I think, that has been expressed today by a family in Alberta with respect to egress and their possibility of how they move away from a potentially hazardous situation if, in fact, one occurs. The board will reconsider that, and it will be taken into consideration with the application.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me, I recall, that it was only the actions of outspoken individuals and the Calgary health region that actually stopped Compton Petroleum from drilling a very dangerous sour gas well right in the city of Calgary itself. Since this government seems interested in tinkering around with the EUB, why does it not seek that the oil and gas side of the EUB be more effective so that it represents the interests of ordinary Albertans and doesn't just rubber-stamp every potentially dangerous project big industry puts in front of it?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, as I had indicated earlier, the mandate of our regulators is, number one, the safety of Albertans. That will continue on a go-forward basis.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Gang-related Crime

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Red Deer-North are very concerned about gang activity in their neighbourhoods. Recently there have been many alarming reports in the media about violent gangs from B.C. coming to Alberta to set up shop in our neighbourhoods and communities. Clearly something must be done to prevent this unacceptable risk to our safety and security. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What is being done to keep B.C. gangs out of Alberta and to control gangs that are already in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Police in our communities continue to work effectively to prevent crime and also to make

criminal acts more difficult to commit. That being said, the safe and secure communities task force report released last week sets out a blueprint for action, including more officers to front-line policing to target specific activities such as gangs and drugs and tough new legislation to support local police in shutting down derelict properties, which can be breeding grounds for gang activity. In addition, this year we will spend \$18 million to fight organized crime. We have also established two sheriffs' surveillance units to help police investigate organized crime and gang activity. Last week I announced the warrant apprehension team, whose sole purpose is to take . . .

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member for a supplementary.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: can he assure this House that Alberta's police have the resources they need to fight gangs and organized crime?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to providing safe and secure communities for all Albertans. In the last three years we have increased police funding by \$31 million and added nearly 300 officers to the front line. In Alberta we have 5,600 RCMP, municipal, and First Nations police officers in addition to about 5,000 peace officers, including sheriffs, correction peace officers, and community peace officers. We're also developing a new \$100 million IT strategy to make it easier to access information, and we're also putting in place a new first responder radio system.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, gang violence affects everyone, and it will take co-operation and co-ordination to combat this scourge. To the same minister: what can communities do to help?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Enforcement alone will not curb violence. We require the additional support of our community to help police in their criminal investigations and to make criminal acts more difficult to commit. Community residents need to be vigilant and report suspicious activities. Also, through their input to the safe communities task force Albertans have given us a clear road map to reduce and prevent crime in our communities. We are acting on the recommendations of the report. Victims' services, youth justice committees, and also community-funded safe houses are all areas where communities can get involved, and they do play a significant role in reducing crime in our province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Sour Gas Well Safety (continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A well-known rodeo family near Stettler along with their animals recently became seriously ill after a sour gas leak at the nearby Bears paw Petroleum site. This is the fourth reported leak at the site since 2001. In 2006 a leak resulted in a member of the family receiving emergency care in a nearby hospital. In each case the Energy and Utilities Board gave the facility the go-ahead to keep running. To the Minister of Energy: with sour gas releases at this site having gone on for six years, what needs to happen for real action to be taken against this company? How many chances before they're shut down, Mr. Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this particular incident I think that it's fair to say that the regulators have been on the site, continue to assess the situation, and I'm sure that a full and frank and proper report will come forward at the appropriate time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Gas leaks are of great concern, life threatening in fact, both in this area and in the Drayton Valley area, where there are plans to drill a sour gas well with high concentration of poisonous hydrogen sulphide only 420 metres away from one resident's property. The health and safety of Albertans must be the number one priority of this government. I recently spoke with the medical officer of health in the area of Stettler. If the EUB has the health of people as the top priority, how is it, Mr. Minister, that the health regions are still not being notified of sour gas releases?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There would be, of course, a requirement under the application and licensing of any of these facilities for an emergency measures program with respect to any sort of a release, be it sour gas or any other kind of a release, from a site. I am not aware at this particular moment if the application in question indicates that a health region should be notified, but I certainly will look into the issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Livestock are also suffering greatly from this gas leak and, indeed, throughout the province. In this case near Stettler a dozen competition horses and 40 cattle were seriously affected. To the minister of agriculture: why did the agriculture department allow the animal health investigation committee and its funding for such animal investigations after exposure to be disbanded last month? Do you expect farmers to pay the \$100,000 costs in these investigations?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, certainly we're concerned. It is a concern of anyone when these types of things happen. We aren't necessarily out of the picture because the Farmers' Advocate's office will advise landowners with options they have and what they might wish to pursue. However, the FAO, of course, does not have any legislative authority to act on the owners' behalf, but he certainly can advise them where they should go.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Police Officer Supply

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has told Albertans many times that it's committed to safe and secure communities, so it's very disturbing to hear that Alberta ranks eighth in the country in peace officers per capita. This is well below the national average. Labour shortages certainly are common in many different sectors across the province, and law enforcement is no exception. Many police services across the province simply cannot get enough qualified people in uniform. My question to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security: what is the government doing to make sure that there are more police officers on the street?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated earlier, in the last three years we have significantly increased funding to put more police officers in Alberta. We've also committed to increasing police resources in the coming years. Last week I announced the new \$1.4 million sheriff warrant apprehension team to take criminals off the street and to keep them off. As of now we have 12 new officers out on our streets who are reducing the number of criminals who are out there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister, then: what is the government doing to help police services recruit and retain staff as well?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, this government is fully aware of the serious problem of police recruitment and retention in Alberta, and that's why last June we brought together leaders in law enforcement in a round-table to address these concerns. Various organizations are now taking the lead on several strategies identified by the round-table. We are committed to completing this work as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then again to the same minister. This demand for police officers will mean that in the near future many young men and women will be hired to fill those vacant positions. What's the government doing to ensure that police training is consistent across the province as well?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, we are moving forward to develop a provincial police college in Fort Macleod, a college that will standardize training and ensure that police in our province will have the ability to work together more effectively and efficiently. We are also working behind the scenes to determine the building size and the number of students we can enrol there, and we are developing a provincial curriculum. We will be exploring revenue streams, and we are intending to release an expression-of-interest document in the near future to gauge private-sector interest in this much-needed facility.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Water Quality in Fort Chipewyan

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A report commissioned by the Nunee health authority of Fort Chipewyan and released last week confirms high levels of arsenic, mercury, and oil-related compounds in water and wildlife. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Dr. Timoney's report found flaws in previous studies conducted by this government. Will the minister finally initiate an independent study of the water, wildlife, and human health in the region?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, the government takes issues around this concern very seriously, but the fact of the matter is that there has been ongoing monitoring of a number of indicators since the early 1990s. The regional aquatics monitoring program, or RAMP, takes literally thousands of samples on an annual basis and has been doing so, as I said, since the early 1990s.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. My next question is to the minister of health. Mr. Speaker, there's no denying that elevated levels of arsenic and mercury in the water and wildlife will impact the health of residents who rely heavily on this for their diet. How much harm or risk is this government willing to write off as the cost of doing business?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The assumption in that question is invalid. There is no indication of elevated levels of either arsenic or mercury. The study that the hon. member referred to in her first question basically goes back and looks at some of the older data, which has already been dealt with. We've reviewed the data, we've had peer review processes on that data, and we're satisfied that arsenic levels in the area are actually lower than in other areas.

In terms of the resulting health implications, which we're obviously very concerned about, there have been allegations of higher amounts of cancer in the area. We've studied a hundred per cent of the mortalities in that region and discovered that they have no higher level of cancer in that area than in any other area of the province.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister. Policy decisions, especially around rapid industrial development, have a profound impact on the health of people and the environment. Will the minister admit that conducting health impact assessments before decisions are made is more sensible and cost-effective than dealing with the consequences of unhealthy public policy?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Environment indicated in answering a question, there are ongoing samplings of the water and the quality of the air. It's absolutely important to maintain a full understanding of what the cumulative impacts are in that area and in every area, particularly where there's industrial growth. Of course, we want to know what the impacts on health are, and we do want to know those beforehand.

Our department has been working very closely with the Department of Environment and, in fact, has been leading work on, for example, the enhanced environmental health surveillance biomonitoring project. We're involved with the Wood Buffalo Environmental Association's ongoing human health monitoring program. We're involved with the community exposure and health effects assessment program that was done earlier. We're involved with the northern river basin human health monitoring program. Health monitoring is absolutely essential in any area of industrial growth.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 90 questions and answers today.

When we broke for Oral Question Period, we were on the item in the Routine known as Tabling Returns and Reports. I'll now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate

it. I have two tablings today. The first is a government ad that appeared in the *Globe and Mail* on Saturday, July 7, 2007. Here the government is looking for a chair of the Alberta energy resources conservation board and a chair of the Alberta utilities commission. The closing date of these competitions was July 31, 2007. This is an ad placed before Bill 46, as you correctly stated, Mr. Speaker, has been debated in the Assembly.

The second is an ad that also appeared in a newspaper on October 19, 2007, and this is an ad looking for many senior officials in the Alberta utilities commission.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last evening I and the hon. Member for St. Albert had the pleasure of attending the new teacher induction ceremony at Barnett House, and I'm honoured to say that 75 new teachers were inducted into Edmonton public teachers local 37 and happy today to table the appropriate number of copies of the program from that event.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In following up on the Premier's request for the documents from which we were quoting, I table the appropriate number of copies of several different excerpts from the Department of Energy's operational overview with the particular sections highlighted for him to review.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is from Jennifer Matyjanka in Edmonton, where she's stating:

We have a fundamental right to voice concerns and opinions that lead to the creation of standards and regulations that promote quality and provide access, affordability and alternatives for child care . . . Without an appropriate amount of time for stakeholders to obtain background information on the effects these proposals will have on child care options as they are today, it was impossible to make informed decisions and comment regarding the proposed changes.

The second tabling is from Leah Weber, president of Meadowlark Park Childcare. She's stating that many married, two-parent households that do not qualify for subsidy are "being forced to face the decision of either quitting their jobs because they cannot afford to work or finding substandard, unlicensed child care."

My third one is from Sheila Gough in Edmonton, and she's asking us to "develop a real plan that will address the growing human resources crisis in the human services sector."

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a memorandum that I received from the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays requesting early consideration to Committee of the Whole of Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, pursuant to the Regulated Accounting Profession Act the Certified General Accountants Association of Alberta 2006-07 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Lindsay, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, pursuant to the Gaming and Liquor Act the

Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission annual report 2006-07 and Charitable Gaming in Alberta: 2006-07 in Review.

The Speaker: Hon. members, during Oral Question Period the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill advised of a point of order, and then at the conclusion of the question period, at the beginning part of the Routine, the hon. Member for Peace River advised of his intent to rise on a point of order. We will now proceed to the point of order by the hon. Member for Calgary Nose-Hill, that arose as the result of interjections.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today on a point of order pursuant to *Beauchesne* 484(3), *Beauchesne* 485, and *Beauchesne* 486. *Beauchesne* 484(3) speaks as follows:

A member will not be permitted by the Speaker to indulge in any reflections on the House itself as a political institution; or to impute to any Member or Members unworthy motives for [those] actions in a particular case.

Beauchesne 485 speaks to the following: unparliamentary words may be brought to the attention of the House by the Speaker or by any member.

The Leader of the Official Opposition repeatedly used the word "cover-up" during his questions. In so doing, he clearly offended the rules of decorum of this House. Mr. Speaker, there have been repeated rulings by both you and your predecessors in office that the phrase "cover-up" is an unparliamentary phrase. I would refer to page 5 of the excellent document which you've circulated to all members of the House in which it states a number of rulings, repeated rulings in fact, of this House that "cover-up" is an unparliamentary phrase. It's my respectful submission that there is a *prima facie* case of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition using unparliamentary language.

But I would like to go beyond that, Mr. Speaker, to a number of other points because the bare use of the words on several occasions did not reflect, in fact, the tenor of the way that those were used. I believe that the hon. leader has offended the rules not only against the use of our unparliamentary language but in respect of imputing unworthy motives for actions of members in a parliamentary case. That would offend *Beauchesne* 484(3) and *Beauchesne* 486, which speaks of injurious reflections being made against a member of the House. Not only did the hon. leader use the word "cover-up" repeatedly; he also referred to the government's annual report having false statements in it, and this was linked with the phrase "misleading the public." It's my respectful submission that the context and the tenor of the use of those words were clearly meant to infer that the Premier and certain members of Executive Council had participated in a cover-up, and as such it has impugned those individuals.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader ought to know very well that there was no cover-up, that there was no misleading the public. In my respectful submission, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition should be called to order by you, he should apologize to the House, and he should withdraw his remarks.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I may respond to the member and the citations raised. I appreciate his raising *Beauchesne* 486, and I will note that, in fact, in 486(2) in *Beauchesne* it does say, "An expression which is deemed to be unparliamentary today does not necessarily have to be deemed unparliamentary next week." At the same time, in 486(3) I note that it says, "There are few words that have been judged to be unparliamentary consistently, and any

list of unparliamentary words is only a compilation of words that at some time have been found to cause disorder in the House."

2:30

More to the point, if I may refer you to *Marleau and Montpetit*, page 71. I'm speaking of freedom of speech,

a fundamental right without which they would be hampered in the performance of their duties. It permits them to speak in the House without inhibition, to refer to any matter or express any opinion that they see fit, to say what they feel needs to be said in the furtherance of the national interest and the aspirations of their constituents.

I also note on page 74, continuing on the importance of freedom of speech:

This freedom is essential for the effective working of the House. Under it, Members are able to make statements or allegations about outside bodies or persons, which they may hesitate to make without the protection of privilege.

Freedom of speech is important in this House, particularly in holding this government to account. I am sorry if the member finds that difficult, but it's our job as the opposition to raise those questions and to ask for the government to account for that.

I will note the Auditor General's report in three different places. On page 92 he says – and this was the information we were basing this on: "In fact, for several years the measure portrayed satisfactory performance by the royalty regimes while detailed analysis in the Department indicated otherwise." Again I'll quote from the Auditor General's report on page 106: "While the Department did technical work during that year, no detailed cross-commodity internal report supports this assertion in the Annual Report." And if I may, Mr. Speaker, on page 125: "Indeed until the 2005-2006 Annual Report, the measure indicated successful performance by the royalty regimes while technical review suggested a different result."

So I would argue that there is no point of order that has been raised. I could also go through the impugning motives, quoting *Beauchesne* 69, and I've already gone through the unparliamentary terms in *Beauchesne* 485 to 492, but I would argue that the Leader of the Official Opposition was doing his job in questioning the difference between what was in an annual report, which is expected to be truthful, and what has been raised by the Auditor General.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill was quite correct in his desire to participate by raising a point of order, and that's the right of all members to deal with this.

At the outset there were a number of citations used by hon. members. The *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at pages 525 and 526, *Beauchesne's* paragraphs 485 through to 492 are relevant. Specifically, the chair did write down a number of words that were used today as he listened attentively to the questions and the responses, and he heard words such as misleading, deceive, cover-up, false, betray.

There are a number of factors and background that one would want to consider in dealing with this. One would be the tone, the manner, the intent, the person to whom the comments were directed, the degree of provocation, I guess, or uprising within the Assembly, the level of disorder that was created.

There's one theme, that these words were used consistently with respect to, quote, a report. The chair does not believe, in his attentiveness to the questions, that the usage of these words was directed at any individual, any hon. member; they were directed towards a report. We have had rulings with respect to this in the past, that a point of order, a point of privilege must be directed against an individual.

However, having said that, the use of unparliamentary language

– it's also very true that on one day it may be acceptable. On the next day and in the case of the context in which it is, it may not be acceptable. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill specifically used the word "cover-up," yet in section 490 in *Beauchesne*: since 1958 it has been ruled parliamentary to use the following expression: "cover-up." It's the context, essentially, in which it is. If the attack here is a cover-up against a report, that's entirely different than some hon. member standing up and basically saying that it was a member of the House. If it was a member of the House who was accused of a cover-up, then, in essence, there would have been an interjection, and the chair would have hoped that the House leaders would have been to the intent very, very quickly on that.

However, having said that, there is a line which all hon. members must conduct themselves by, and it's to that line that the chair would remind all members that they should be temperate and their statements should be worthy of the place in which they have uttered those words. This is an honourable institution, and this is an institution of decorum, and there are some words in the English language – it's amazing how there are some great books, in fact, dealing with synonyms, there are some great books on wit, and there are some great books on humour, and there are some great books on startling statements of innuendo, and sometimes we just use the base of the word. Great parliamentarians like Winston Churchill and others could always find a statement for a situation that would have much more impact than words like misleading, deceived, cover-up, false, betrayed.

Hon. Member for Peace River, do you have a point of order, sir?

Point of Order Members' Statements

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order pursuant to Standing Order 23(i). Earlier, in a member's statement given by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, he made what I believe to be disparaging remarks about the Premier's attendance in this Chamber during question period, offering not only his prediction about what it was going to be like today or in the future but what it's been like in the past. He also impugned some motives on the Premier, seemingly implying that he's ducking or for some other reason.

Mr. Speaker, clearly, page 522 in *Marleau and Montpetit* states: "It is unacceptable to allude to the presence or absence of a Member or Minister in the Chamber." I would ask that this member be called to order and asked to withdraw those remarks.

The Speaker: Actually, I'm going to deal with this without any further interjections. This Assembly dealt with changes to the Routine, and this Assembly agreed to invent the section of the Routine called Members' Statements. It was clearly understood by all members at the time, in the invention of this process, that members would have two minutes to speak on any range of subject that they would want to speak on and that the chair would not accept points of order or points of privilege on anything arising out of these members' statements. There was a warning given, in fact, by the chair before the Assembly agreed to this, saying: "How would the Assembly want the chair to deal with this? If there was a statement of such great insult and provocation, would the chair intervene?" The Assembly said: "No. The chair should not."

That has been the ruling when this has been raised on previous occasions. Members have an opportunity for two minutes to display their thoughts as they so choose. Needless to say, on all of us there always is, though, a responsibility, certainly, for honesty. There is certainly a responsibility for integrity. However, members may view what has been said in different ways, and that accounts for this.

This is not a point of order. This is following the tradition of the

House of a ruling of a part of the Routine we currently have. There is a committee, a committee of hon. members, set up that always consistently looks at the operation of the House and can deal with it if they so choose, but today it's not a point of order.

head: 2:40

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 7

Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 7, the Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007.

I would like to briefly summarize the proposed changes that are included in the bill and provide clarification on certain points raised by members during the Committee of the Whole discussion of the bill. To begin, amendments in the bill change the name of the Private Vocational Schools Act to the private vocational training act and change the name of the director to the director of private vocational training. This is being done to clarify that it is vocational training programs and not institutions that are licensed.

Other amendments included in the bill remove the provision for licensed programs to be categorized as either class A or class B based on performance outcomes. The intent of this change is to enhance consumer protection by requiring all licensed programs to demonstrate satisfactory performance outcomes.

Bill 7 also includes changes to the act to make it more reflective of today's environment with respect to licensing by providing a mechanism whereby a licence can be cancelled upon the request of a licensee, subject to all of the licensee's obligations to students being met. There is no mechanism in the act at present that accommodates requests from licensees to cancel licences.

Amendments also included in Bill 7 remove the requirement that licences be renewed every two years. I'd like to assure members that this change will streamline administrative processes but will not lessen the attention that is given to monitoring and compliance assurance activities. Although this change provides the flexibility to free licensees that demonstrate compliance from the administrative exercise associated with renewals for longer time periods, licensing periods can be made as short as deemed appropriate.

During the Committee of the Whole discussion of this bill members raised the matters of licensing requirements and ongoing monitoring, so I want to provide you with further information on these points. As I mentioned in the Committee of the Whole discussion, licensing requirements are specifically set out in regulation. These include the demonstration that there is a reasonable labour market for graduates, the posting of security to be used to provide tuition refunds to students when necessary, entering into a standard enrolment contract with each student that identifies all costs for the training program. Ongoing monitoring includes on-site visits, meetings with institution owners and representatives and frequent interactions with institutions, the review of requests for program changes submitted by institutions, review of complaints received from students and other parties, and the analysis of performance outcome information that must be submitted annually to the ministry.

I would also like to clarify at this point that private institutions that offer licensed vocational training programs generally do not receive government operating grants.

To conclude, the remaining changes included in Bill 7 update the

Private Vocational Schools Act by revising the wording used in reference to the information that is set out in licences, the manner in which notices of program licence cancellations or suspensions are provided to students, and the manner in which notices under the act are served.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members support the passing of this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. We're in third reading of Bill 7.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The vocational schools, whether public or private, do a great service to the province of Alberta, and I would like to recognize the Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute, which sits across from the University of Calgary and works with the University of Calgary in the constituency of Calgary-Varsity. This Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute will soon be celebrating 41 years of serving the community, and it has served the community very well.

In its early undertakings I had the opportunity as a first-year student in education at the University of Calgary to work with students of the Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute in developing language programs and specifically helping them with trade considerations such as the appropriate language that a salesperson might use in selling a product. I found the members of the class that I participated in at the Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute very excited and enjoying the role play associated with selling goods. In fact, their enthusiasm was so great that I had to caution them that if one of their classmates appeared less than eager or willing to purchase their piece of merchandise that they were role-playing and selling, then they should not threaten to pound the individual if those products weren't received.

Over the years the Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute had a series of programs to train individuals with disabilities to participate in a full life experience, and with the VVRI celebrating, I wanted to take this opportunity to recognize 41 years, which will soon be coming up, of dedicated service to the community and the long association with the University of Calgary.

With regard to Bill 7, Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, I appreciate the Member for Calgary-Foothills giving some of the oversight mechanisms that the government uses to evaluate vocational colleges. I know from having met, along with members of my caucus, administration from Grant MacEwan Community College that there is an expectation with community colleges and other vocational colleges as well as academic institutions of a peer review format. In Grant MacEwan's case they sent out to 32 different institutions to recognize their applied degree-granting programs. They welcomed that external input.

I would hope that in the government's oversight of much-needed private vocational schools, the peer evaluation of the various institutes would be the equivalent of a SAIT or a NAIT in terms of the programs that they would offer, granted on a much smaller scale because they are private and they aren't government funded. I am hoping that that government oversight is very much there to make sure that the programs are of value and that the students who participate in these programs can be assured of training that will then qualify them for the very necessary market that we're experiencing in Alberta, where we have a tremendous shortage of skilled professionals.

Again I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Foothills for bringing forth Bill 7. As a past educator I believe that government oversight, whether it's for public institutions or for private institutions, on an ongoing basis is absolutely essential.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 7, Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007. First of all, I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Foothills for sponsoring this good piece of legislation. This bill is about changes in licensing procedures for private vocational programs, eliminating different classes of licences and switching from biennial renewal of licensing to an ongoing monitoring system. The removal of the licence classes eliminates the current situation of second-class institutions. It also slightly weakens what private institutions must do if a program is found to be unsatisfactory by the ministry.

Definitely, I will support this bill, Mr. Speaker, with some clarification, a clarification of how the regulation will change, also with a reservation made over the weakening of requirements when a program is cancelled or suspended by a ministry. I just wanted to know why this change is needed.

They are not the most dramatic changes, but they are positive. Removing the class B licence of school is positive. If graduation rates and employment placement rates are unsatisfactory, then these institutions should not receive a licence. This does all rely on the government changing the regulation accordingly.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, we also need clarification of the oversight process. As it stands, the legislation limits licences to two years in duration. The renewal process for those licences means at least in theory that every two years the program is re-evaluated by the director, ministry, and this should ensure that standards do not slip. The proposed change suggests a rolling, constant evaluation. Whether this will take place is unclear. It places more control in the director's hands as they are no longer mandated to issue any extension.

The message we had from the ministry was that this was a housekeeping bill, changing the wording of the legislation to reflect current practices. That seems to hold with the reading of the bill.

Alberta, Mr. Speaker, has approximately 140 private vocational schools offering thousands of training programs from accountancy to hairdressing, for example Marvel college, professional medical associations, and so many others. We Alberta Liberals recognize and appreciate their contribution to our communities.

Students at private vocational schools are eligible for Canada and Alberta student loans. According to the latest statistics we have from the government, \$6.4 million went to students at private vocational colleges in the year 2003-2004, a tenth as much as the public-sector students, approximately \$64.6 million. The drop-out rate for private vocational schools is much higher.

With regard to the areas changed by this legislation, currently there are two classes of licences for private vocational schools. A class A licence means a licence that authorizes the licensee to provide the vocational training specified on the licence and signifies that the programs are new or the programs have a student graduation rate and employment placement rate that are satisfactory to the director. A class B licence means a licence that authorizes the licensee to provide the vocational training specified on the licence and signifies that (a) the programs do not have a student graduation rate and an employment placement rate that are satisfactory to the director; (b) the director is unable to form an opinion about the student graduation rate or the employment placement rate in respect of those programs. Thus, Mr. Speaker, currently the program can have an unsatisfactory graduation rate and employment placement rate yet still have a licence to provide vocational training. The bill would remove that distinction.

Also, Mr. Speaker, currently in place is a term limit for licences

of two years. After that time they need to be renewed. This provides some impetus for oversight by the director but doesn't guarantee it. The renewal process is not at all complex. As long as the director is satisfied that the licensee is in accordance with the act and regulations, then their licence is renewed. Removing the licensing category that allows private vocational schools to have unsatisfactory employment and graduation rates is a positive move. These programs charge students a lot of money. They should offer a decent service for that money. The government needs to ensure that all programs – all programs – offer students satisfactory graduation and employment rates.

Once again I commend the sponsor, the Member for Calgary-Foothills. I definitely support this bill. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Deputy Government House Leader, do you want to rise on this point or participate in the bill? Okay. Well, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be a question.

There being none, then I'll call on the hon. Associate Minister for Capital Planning.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise just briefly in support of Bill 7, the Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, as brought forward by our good colleague from Calgary-Foothills. I want to begin by saying that I certainly support the broad scope and nature of this bill. In addition to some of the often referred to cosmetic changes, such as changing the name and so on, there are some other very important changes that have been commented on at some length.

I happened to be speaking with some folks about vocational schools in general over the last few weeks, and I just wanted to indicate that I also support this bill because it goes on to also clarify that it is the specific vocational training programs that are being licensed hereunder and not the institutions per se. I know that we have a number of these vocational institutions in our province, dozens and dozens of them, probably a hundred or more, and I think that's very indicative of how important they are and how reliant they are on our reviewing the laws and statutes that govern their operations from time to time. That, in fact, is what the hon. member is doing here.

Just two other quick points, Mr. Speaker. I heard a lot of comments about putting in a clause that would allow for the cancellation of some of these licences after they have been granted mostly because there is a void in the act as it is currently worded. This will certainly address that particular void. So it's just as important and necessary to give the parameters surrounding such cancellation as it is to have the cancellation clause in there itself. I know that has been addressed or there will be further address of that subject in the regulations that will undoubtedly accompany this.

The other comment I wanted to make was that I also appreciate that there will be constant vigilance and monitoring of this whole licensing provision, including visiting the sites where program delivery is actually happening as well as consultations and also helping with respect to the compilation of specific information that has to now be submitted, as I understand through the bill, on a very regular basis. Those are two very important points. In the end, Mr. Speaker, we're trying to help students help themselves, and we're trying to help these institutions, these private vocational institutions, deliver the best programs possible.

I realize that there are other amendments within the bill, but those are some of the highlights that my constituents wanted me to comment on in particular, so I'm pleased to do that.

My last point is simply with respect to the overall enhancements

that are going to follow for consumer protection as a result of this new and renewed licensing program as evidenced in the act.

So with that, I'll take my seat and once again thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills for his vigilance in bringing this good law forward at this time. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

There being none, additional speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make a couple of additional comments in regard to this bill after my previous comments and reflection. I certainly will vote in support of this bill, but as the hon. speaker just previous to me has mentioned, perhaps, you know, I would want to make a comment to help to ensure that the regulative side of this bill covers a number of concerns that I have. The merging of the class A and B licences combined with the removal of the two-year limitation on licences I believe, in my mind, represents a downgrade of enforcement and oversight in regard to private vocational schools. So I just want to make that comment.

3:00

Although the ministry does promise to continue with oversight of this sector, current changes seem to be suggesting the opposite of that. The graduation rates, for example, which seem to separate class A and B licences and regular licenses, represent a part of this oversight procedure, and they also happen to be two criteria that are being removed from the act and its regulations, so I was concerned about that. As I said before, no clear indication of what sort of oversight might actually take place. This is one question that I had.

Another one was to know what kind of oversight is taking place right now within the ministry to ensure that these problems do not pop up. For example, how many private vocational schools have been in fact audited and investigated by the ministry in the last four years or so? How often does the ministry review the 140 or more private vocational schools to ensure compliance? You know, in the 2005-2006 report it stated that \$87,000 had been granted to Columbia College, which is a private vocational school. How much money has been given to private vocational schools in this last year, 2006-2007?

Mr. Speaker, I just want to ensure that the ministry through this bill or through its accompanying regulations institutes regular inspections of private vocational schools to ensure that minimum standards are being met for future development and for the benefit of postsecondary education in general here in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Additional speakers?

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills to conclude the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: All right. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. members for Calgary-Varsity and Edmonton-Calder for speaking about the bill and thinking that the bill is now fit to be amended. Your support is appreciated. I see that you must have read the entire documents on the regulations and the *Hansards*

in the past to answer most of your questions from Committee of the Whole, so that's great.

Mr. Speaker, I'd just like you to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

Bill 8 Vital Statistics Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce third reading of Bill 8. I'd like to also take this opportunity to further respond to questions raised in Committee of the Whole.

With respect to the time period to submit a medical certificate of death, the physician or medical examiner must file an interim medical certificate within 48 hours of the death. The timeline has been extended to file the final medical certificate from 30 days to 60 days because a final medical certificate may require autopsy work. Last year approximately 80 per cent of the final medical certificates were not filed in time to meet the 30-day deadline.

With respect to an appeal from a medical officer of health's decision whether or not a body can be disinterred, there is no appeal. This is because the medical officer of health would be evaluating the potential public risk associated with disinterring a person who has died of a communicable disease. If the medical officer declares a disinterment a risk to the public, his decision would be final.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Regarding register books for marriage commissioners, registered marriage commissioners must have register books. It would be too onerous to require a temporary marriage commissioner, who may only perform one marriage, to maintain a register book. Vital statistics has other mechanisms in place to register a marriage should the registration go missing, such as an affidavit from a person who has solemnized the marriage.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the individuals within the department who have helped work on this bill: Barry Haugrud, Rosanne Dofher, Katherine Olson, Barb Lepage, Nikki Abele, Heather Innes, Martine Sallaberry, Alice Barnsley, Allison Matichuk, and Di Nugent. I'd also like to thank the members of the opposition from Edmonton-Rutherford, Edmonton-Strathcona, and Edmonton-Glenora for their assistance as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My comments on Bill 8 in third reading will be brief. I think the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne has done an admirable job in addressing not only the questions that I raised in second reading and while we were debating in Committee of the Whole but throughout the first part of this legislative session, back in the spring, when we had a number of questions. He was very accommodating in providing answers to those questions.

As I've indicated a couple of times, our caucus will be supporting Bill 8. We've raised some concerns around the sensitivities involved, the cultural sensitivities particularly, and will be interested observers, I suppose, as this legislation is put into place to make sure that those concerns that we've raised have been addressed with this legislation properly, and if for some reason that proves not to be the case, then I'm sure there will be discussions with the ministry to

address those. But for the most part what we're doing here is moving into the 21st century some legislation which, I understand, in some cases can be 50 years old or older, so it's perhaps long overdue. I suppose the only question would be: why do we wait so long on some of these things?

The independent Member for Edmonton-Manning has before this House a bill that deals with red tape. One of the proposals that comes from the B.C. model is to eliminate two regulations for every one new regulation that is put forward. That sort of thing, if it were to be done in this province, might actually spur us on to review regulations and legislation more often, and maybe we wouldn't find ourselves dealing with a situation that's been left so long. I hope that those comments might spur those on the other side that are involved in drafting legislation to look at more pieces of legislation that perhaps should be reviewed.

As I said, for the most part we're onside completely with Bill 8 and hope that it accomplishes the things that the mover and the minister have set out for it to do. As I say, we'll be interested observers and hopefully helpful critiquers if, in fact, that's not the case.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. As my esteemed colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford has already noted, we are supportive of Bill 8. Again, I would like to just offer some cautions. FOIP, when used as it's intended, protects individuals and their identities, as it should do. When it's used to simply hide information that should be public knowledge, then there is a concern. We've had examples in Alberta of almost 2 million more health premium cards being printed than the actual population of this province; therefore, whatever we can do to make sure that identity theft or the misuse of a person's identity is prevented, the better.

We've also had experiences where unencrypted files stolen from a laptop computer with Calgary regional health records caused great concern. Recently in Edmonton the records of families looking after children for the government, foster families, turned up in a dumpster. We've had examples where computers have either been stolen or not been wiped clean of the government information on Albertans that was stored there. So I can't overemphasize the need to properly prevent identity theft. In Alberta we've had instances of people claiming that a property was actually theirs and causing individuals great loss of monies over identity theft in claiming that the house was actually belonging to them, and it turned out to be sold out from under them.

3:10

We have had concerns about how well contained our information is from the inquiring eyes of the PATRIOT Act and U.S. legislation which continues to, I would suggest, pry into Alberta and Canadian affairs way beyond the level of security that is necessary.

We had a circumstance this past spring with regard to the federal government's indication of names and identity. There was an impression left in parts of India, especially northern India, and in the country of Pakistan where the name Singh caused confusion. Because Singh is such a common name, the idea was suggested that possible immigration of individuals with the last name Singh might not be accepted. There was the appearance of a push to have individuals change their last name so that it was Singh hyphenated so as to clearly identify the individual.

While we support Bill 8, I want to share my colleague Edmonton-Rutherford's caution that protecting legitimate privacy is of utmost

concern. We will continue to support and hold the government accountable for protecting that legitimate privacy.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there others who wish to participate in the debate?

Does the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne wish to close?

Mr. VanderBurg: Call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 24
Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate November 8: Mr. Rogers]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to continued debate in second reading.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again to speak to Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007. This bill is just to strengthen the ability of the Real Estate Council to investigate cases of mortgage fraud. The amendment act also makes a criminal record check, especially for certain professions, like real estate agents, mortgage brokers, or appraiser guys – you know, some appraisers are licensed, and some are not. This is very important because they are dealing with the public, and the public should be aware of how those people are dealing with the public. It impacts. It's a huge amount of money sometimes, and the people who are not educated, the people who don't understand the practice in this field, sometimes lose quite a bit of money.

Mr. Speaker, the bill definitely will increase the amount of power for the minister to set regulations on various aspects of the oversight mechanism of real estate agents and mortgage brokers. This is something we have long had concerns about.

I am still a licensed real estate agent. I know there are many flaws in the system even though we have so many organizations like the RECA and the Real Estate Board. They always talk about their ethics, but still even some realtors who are licensed don't stick with the rules and regulations. We have a school in the Real Estate Board. They try their best. They teach all the real estate agents about ethics, but in the last, say, seven, eight, nine years in my profession as a realtor I found out that not many realtors are working according to the ethics that they learn from the school. This bill is very important for them, especially if this act has some teeth. If we keep on passing the acts and we don't enforce them properly, this act will mean nothing.

Mr. Speaker, in this bill we talk about the regulations again this time. I just want to know: what are those regulations, and why don't we discuss those regulations here in this Assembly? This is very important. Giving powers to the ministers, and they will deal with the Real Estate Council or the Real Estate Board – I think it should be open. We should discuss those regulations here in this Chamber.

This is my suggestion. Everybody should know, not just giving more powers to the minister, and they deal with the RECA or the board. Some government-side members sit on the board. They know the ins and outs, and they have connections, and some people know that. I'm not, you know, saying that they're not telling the people whatever is happening here about the regulations, but I think it should be open to all of us sitting in this room.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, will work to combat mortgage fraud more effectively if we discuss the regulations here, if we discuss the full details here of what those regulations are. If we debate properly on those regulations, it would be more effective for the public. After the bill passes, it makes the act, and not only the RECA but the public should be aware about this act. This is a valuable task. The Alberta Liberal caucus, however, has always taken the position that shifting too much out of the legislation and into the regulations is a problem. This basically gives the minister the power to change how the law is applied whenever they want through orders in council.

3:20

I just want to touch upon a couple of things about mortgage fraud. I remember that last time – I don't remember exactly; I think Bill 12 or 13 was also about mortgage fraud – I talked about that. I talked about the assumption of the mortgage. Let me say a few words about the assumption of mortgages. Some people might not know. Assumption of the mortgage is simply if somebody who has the mortgage sells their property, and the new buyer assumes their mortgage.

Some people, not all people, you know, are doing the right thing, but some people are making fraud because they want to sell their property. Sometimes they go to the bank, get the high percentage of the mortgage, and then when they sell their property to the buyer, they don't lose anything; they make money. But some people have the bad record. I think this is only happening in Alberta. Some other provinces in Canada are quite aware of this practice. I know that the RECA was working hard to stop this assumption of the mortgage, and I think that practice is still going on. I want the sponsor of this bill to make a note. I want him to discuss with the RECA if possible, and they can give us better suggestions as to how we can enforce that. Definitely if you don't have assumption of the mortgage in Alberta – other provinces are aware of this – then we can stop at least some fraud in the mortgage system here in Alberta.

The next thing I want to talk about, Mr. Speaker, is criminal record checks for all realtors. The RECA has the process. They always ask licensed realtors to update a certain number of hours. They educate them. But even after taking those classes, still some realtors don't, you know, go by the rules and regulations as well as the teachings from the real estate institutions. They are doing something which is totally unethical. They don't care about the public. They only care about the money they make. This is not right.

I'm not blaming the RECA. They are trying their best, but how can we control this thing? I mean, the process is there, but some people get some witnesses, and then they get away with that. They even do some criminal things, but after some time they come back and start a practice in the real estate profession. I think we need some enforcement. We need some more strict rules just to stop this kind of practice in Alberta. Some other provinces have. I think if we follow some other provinces, you know, it might help Albertans do their business. They can deal with the professional people in Alberta.

The third one is that some appraisers in Alberta still don't have licences. They appraise the property, and some people do it intentionally. They always appraise the property for less money.

They don't tell the truth, sometimes, to their own clients. Sometimes realtors and appraisers – they know each other very well – make deals, and it's very hard to find out if the dealings are done, you know, under the table.

I'm sure that if we debate this issue on all different types of fraud in this Assembly, we can find out some sort of enforcement method we could enforce and give some more powers, not only to our minister. Okay? After discussion I want to see a powerful organization that can go after the appraiser people who are not professionals, and I want an entity or organization that can go after those realtors who have criminal records. I want them to go after who makes the mortgage fraud in Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

This is not the first time I have seen legislation about mortgage fraud. The Real Estate Amendment Act is so very vast. I mean, there are so many loopholes in the Land Titles as well. I am sure the sponsor of this bill, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, worked really hard to bring this legislation again and again. His background is also in the same profession, and he knows about this very well.

My suggestion to all members sitting in this House is that we should take it very seriously. The fraud in this industry is still going on. Whether it's in the assumption of mortgages, whether it's appraising the property, or whether it's the practice, realtors – some, not all of them – are doing unprofessional practices in Alberta. So we should stop that practice here in Alberta and do the right thing.

I support this bill with some reservation, like I mentioned, and I'm sure the sponsor of this bill will look into this with some stakeholders, especially the RECA. Definitely we can improve this legislation. I want to make sure this time. When we pass this bill, it should help all realtors.

The majority of the realtors in this province are honest people. They are professionals and should do the right things in this province. So are most of the banks. They don't want to lend money to people who make frauds. There are lots of good appraisers, and they are doing a good job professionally. Definitely they should have checks and balances on all three types of professions, and we should make sure we strengthen this bill as much as we can.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm just rising very briefly to make a comment on Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act. Certainly, the New Democrat caucus is in support of this bill as well. For a number of very, I think, practical reasons the Advisory Committee on Mortgage Fraud urged the government to allow increased sharing of information related to mortgage fraud, so this helps, through Bill 24, to identify the ways to investigate the suspected fraud. A criminal record check is certainly a good thing to have for real estate agents, mortgage brokers, and appraisers as well that wish to be licensed.

3:30

I've actually encountered this unfortunate fraudulent activity on more than one occasion over the last three years through my work as an MLA, and I can't think of anything more financially devastating for a family than to be taken for a ride on the mortgage of their home and essentially lose a home under false pretenses. We're talking about many tens of thousands of dollars that, unfortunately, were misappropriated by unscrupulous mortgage people.

I welcome Bill 24 if this in any way can assist and reduce the incidence of fraud in mortgages here in this province of Alberta. Every interested party that we had a chance to speak to certainly did

endorse this change as brought forward by Bill 24, so I'm happy to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Like my expert colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie, who has spent a large part of his life dealing with real estate and appreciates the type of integrity it is necessary to possess to represent your customers, while I don't have near the expertise, I do have concerns which, hopefully, Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007, will address, and that is the area of fraud. As a young man I was the victim of fraud in terms of buying a second-hand car. I purchased the car with cash from a family friend. When I went to register the vehicle, nothing showed up in the way of a lien, but about five months into the driving of this vehicle a lien showed up to the point where the total value that I had paid for the vehicle was in fact owing to the bank that had previously financed the purchase of that vehicle. So I learned a relatively small lesson in honesty at the loss of \$500.

As has been pointed out, there isn't a great deal of difficulty in obtaining a real estate licence or an appraiser's licence, and with the hot market that we're experiencing in Alberta and the flipping of properties with such great speed, there is the potential for fraud. To whatever extent Bill 24 seeks to eliminate those fraudulent processes, the greater our support for it.

I should just mention that members of the Alberta Liberal caucus met with Privacy Commissioner Frank Work with regard to our responsibility as notaries public and commissioners for oaths. Quite often we're asked to attest to an individual's identity. In our capacity we're often brought in to review wills, transfers of properties, and so on. Obviously, for the majority of us this isn't something with which we've had previous training or expertise, so Mr. Work cautioned us to a great extent that before we provide our constituency office stamp or our signature, to the greatest extent possible we search the individual's information and background. Of course, as everybody knows, we keep copies of that information, but there is always the possibility that the seal that we have been given as elected representatives could be misused by individuals pushing to have a signature or with incorrect credentials. It's just a cautionary note to my fellow colleagues that as notaries public and as commissioners for oaths we have to be especially careful in our due diligence that we don't unwittingly participate in a fraudulent exercise.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there others who wish to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Yes, very briefly, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly not an expert when it comes to real estate, unlike a number of colleagues in this House, but just a couple of quick questions that I have in regard to Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007. I think the fact has already been discussed that an awful lot of this legislation is going to be in regulations as opposed to in the actual legislation. My concerns over that are well known and I think always worth reiterating.

I'm wondering, though, if the mover of the bill might be able to inform us when he responds in the committee stage as to just exactly what entities were consulted in the drafting of this bill. I'm particularly wondering whether or not the Alberta Association of the

Appraisal Institute of Canada was consulted, whether or not the Alberta Assessors' Association and the Canadian National Association of Real Estate Appraisers were consulted in the drafting of the bill. If, in fact, they were consulted, what sort of input did they have into the drafting of the bill?

When we get into committee, I'll have some questions about section 8. In particular, it discusses who shall and shall not collect a commission or remuneration for services. I'm wondering with particular reference to www.comfree.com and some of the other web-based sales tools that are out there now for individuals whether or not that section might directly impact the activities of some of those companies and how. That would be some guidance that I would be looking for from the mover of the bill when he comes back into the House at the committee stage.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question has been called. Does the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon wish to close debate?

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure. I want to thank the hon. members who participated in the debate for their input on this bill. Suffice to say that as someone who practised in this industry for 12 and a half years, I'm very pleased to see that we're bringing these changes forward.

For the most part, Mr. Speaker, this industry is made up of some exceptionally professional and credible people, but unfortunately, particularly in this hot economy that we have today, there are unscrupulous people that will worm their way into the industry, so to speak. I would suggest to you that these amendments that are proposed here will go a long way to bringing back credibility to the marketplace and to protecting our consumers.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 24.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

Bill 23 Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance it's my pleasure to stand today and move second reading of Bill 23, Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act.

Before I get into the details of the legislation, I would like to take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to provide some background information on how this legislation was developed. The Uniform Law Conference of Canada has recommended that all provinces adopt policies to protect a one-stop process for people to recover their unclaimed property and to provide governments with the ability to administer that property until it is reclaimed. At the same time various Alberta government departments suggested that processes be developed to resolve long-standing issues related to vested property from dissolved corporations.

3:40

Recognizing the cross-ministry implications, representatives from a number of Alberta government ministries prepared a discussion paper, that was released for public consultation in September of

2005. The resulting Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act was introduced as Bill 41 during the 2006 spring sitting. Although the bill passed first reading, it was allowed to die on the Order Paper to give Albertans another opportunity to provide input on this groundbreaking bill. Both the discussion paper and Bill 41 were well received, with only minor changes to the processes and legislation resulting.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 23 is being proposed to achieve two main goals. The first goal is to establish a primary repository and claim system for unclaimed or abandoned property of Albertans. To accomplish that, Bill 23 would require holders to pay or to deliver assets that remain unclaimed after the end of a specified holding period together with information on apparent owners to a central repository. Owners will be able to search a single registry to determine if the Crown holds assets that belong to them or that they are entitled to. A single-stop repository makes the process of locating unclaimed assets easier for all owners. To accomplish the second goal of establishing a clear process to manage and resolve issues related to property that vests in the Crown after a corporation's dissolution or in other circumstances, Bill 23 proposes several measures.

First, Bill 23 proposes a five-year period during which a corporation can be revived. Experience has shown that very few corporations are revived after five years. Once the period has passed, property vests permanently in the Alberta Crown. It is anticipated that vested property would include land. The legislation proposes a process that will enable the Crown to take title to the land and remove various encumbrances with sufficient warning. At the same time creditors would retain the right to enforce any security interest they may have in both unclaimed and vested property. Claims for the return of such unclaimed and vested property will be allowed for 10 years from the date the property is transferred to the Crown.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, this legislation will establish clear rights, obligations, and procedures for facilitating the return of unclaimed property to its owners when managing vested property. I urge all members of the Legislature to give their support to Bill 23.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We support the intention of Bill 23, Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act, 2007, but we feel that it needs to be strengthened. As a result, when we come to Committee of the Whole, we'll be introducing amendments to further strengthen this bill.

Just to provide a little bit of background on how we got to today on Bill 23. In 2005 the government released a discussion paper about Bill 23. It wanted to hear from Albertans about how to deal with vested property from dissolved corporations; that is to say, property that comes into the possession of the Crown after the corporation is dissolved and unclaimed personal property. According to a Finance spokesperson the government received rather dismal interest from the public, but credit to the government for having pursued this concern.

Last spring the government tabled this piece of legislation as Bill 41, but it died on the Order Paper. The government claims that it wanted more input from Albertans about the bill, and praise be to the government for seeking input. That's what Albertans are all about: providing that input, which, hopefully, the government then acts upon. Since that time the government has received no substantial submissions from stakeholders according to the spokesperson. The department, however, has not released the comments.

Bill 23 primarily gives the government rules to deal with property from dissolved corporations and unclaimed personal property.

When a corporation dissolves in Alberta “any property still owned by a corporation at the date of its dissolution vests in the Crown.” That comes from the 2005 paper. But in the absence of clearer guidelines or policy, the provincial government claims that it has limited authority to resolve these issues. Decisions are therefore made on an ad hoc basis. Some land issues have been difficult and time consuming to resolve. The department is not aware of any other province with legislation in this area, so Alberta would be a leader.

According to the 2005 discussion paper the second issue relates to unclaimed property of individuals. Four provinces – B.C., Quebec, Prince Edward Island, and Ontario – have enacted legislation to provide a means of reuniting people with their unclaimed or abandoned property and to provide governments with the ability to administer that property until such time as it may be reclaimed. That government stewardship role is key.

The Uniform Law Conference of Canada has recommended that all provinces adopt a uniform unclaimed property regime based on its uniform Unclaimed Intangible Property Act. Most U.S. states have also adopted some form of unclaimed property legislation based largely on the U.S. National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws from the 1995 draft uniform unclaimed property act or its predecessors.

I will not go into details on the areas of the amendment. I'll leave that to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford. But I would like to raise some questions that, hopefully, the mover of the bill can provide answers for. Amongst the questions are the following. Can the minister or the member introducing the bill explain the impact of repealing the Ultimate Heir Act? Will the minister confirm that net income from unclaimed property or estates is no longer being transferred to university scholarships? This is a concern we have: into the future are universities going to be limited in the philanthropic opportunities that preceded the enactment of this bill? If that is the case, what is the justification for cutting universities out of philanthropic opportunities?

A fourth concern is: do any other provinces, states, or federal governments have legislation to resolve property issues for formerly owned corporations? I would think that in the government's research for this bill they probably have examples that could be used to justify this Bill 23.

Another question. The 2005 discussion paper proposed, in quotes, an unclaimed property fund. I would be interested to know why this term has been dropped from Bill 23, the justifications behind the dropping.

My last question before passing along the concerns to my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford. The 2005 discussion paper noted that a number of corporations that dissolve revive within five years. How do we know that this legislation is going to actually make it easier for corporations to revive and get their property back?

Again, referring to the booming economy and companies' attempts at diversification and re-creation, consolidation, et cetera, how do we know that, as I stated, they will actually get their property back, property that they're entitled to?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As my colleague from Calgary-Varsity has indicated, we have for the most part support for this bill in our caucus although, certainly, questions remain, particularly around the use of the \$11 million that resides in the Ultimate Heir Act and, also, how those dollars are going to be dealt with in the future. Before I address that, though, there are a

couple of questions that I would like to put on the record, and hopefully either the minister or whoever is carrying the bill when we move into committee stage can respond.

3:50

The first of those would be around the consultation that was done following the bill's demise at the end of the 2006 year. As was indicated by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, when Bill 41 died on the Order Paper, one of the reasons the government gave for allowing that to take place was that they wanted to gather more input from Albertans. We've been told by people in the Finance department that, in fact, there wasn't an awful lot of input forthcoming. That would just prompt me to ask: what steps did the government take, what steps did the Finance department take to engage Albertans following this decision to let Bill 41 pass? I guess I should say “pass away” because it died. How sincere an effort was made to engage Albertans? As my colleague from Calgary-Varsity pointed out, despite the fact that the Finance department has told us that there was very little in the way of input that came back, we've not seen what that input was. Maybe a summary as to exactly what input was provided to the Finance ministry would be helpful in our knowing just exactly what the people of Alberta thought when they did respond to this particular bill.

Now, it was also discussed that the Uniform Law Conference of Canada has made recommendations. In large part this bill arises out of the recommendations that they made as well as the 2005 discussion paper. Apparently, other provinces do not have legislation currently in place, or at least as of the time of this research there are no other provinces that have legislation in place dealing with the dissolution of corporations, and clearly that's something that the Uniform Law Conference of Canada was looking for. I'm wondering whether or not the Department of Finance did any research to see how other provinces deal with that, then, if they don't have this particular legislation in place. Obviously, they're dealing with it in some manner, so I'm curious to know if we had a careful look at what other provinces are doing and also maybe a status report as to how far along other provinces are in terms of moving towards this as well. If the idea is to have all provinces on the same page, then I'm curious to know where we're at with that.

I will talk a lot about the money that's currently held by the Ultimate Heir Act. Apparently, as of last spring it was \$11 million. In legislation right now this money is supposed to be turned over to universities, yet in my consultation with a couple of universities they were unaware of the fact that there was money there and certainly unaware of the fact that they were to be getting money from that fund into the universities. So one of the things I'd like either the minister or the mover of the bill to respond to is: just exactly when is the last time that any money from that fund was transferred to a university? As I say, I found it interesting that they didn't even seem to be aware of this. I understand that in the big picture \$11 million across, you know, four or five universities might not be an awful lot of money. Nevertheless, it is money that, according to the current legislation, is due to them, and that doesn't appear to be happening, so I would be wondering why.

Now, my colleague from Calgary-Varsity also alluded to the fact that we might well have an amendment coming. In fact, that is something that I am contemplating.

I'm curious: if the legislation as it reads now is designed to turn this money over to universities, why do we see a need to change that other than for the fact that it appears not to have been happening? I think we all understand the importance of postsecondary education. The general revenue fund in this province seems to be relatively healthy and probably doesn't need another \$11 million, so I'm

curious to know why the need to dispense with that part of the legislation. If the legislation needs updating, fair enough. We're willing to go along with that. But why was there a need seen to take away another stream of revenue for the universities and transfer that back into general revenue? Certainly, that's an explanation that I would be looking for from the department.

A couple of questions further to where my colleague from Calgary-Varsity was going. The Minister of Environment, when he moved second reading of this bill, talked about the five-year timeline which corporations would have to revive themselves. I'm wondering if there might not be some unusual circumstances there that should be contemplated by the Finance department. As an example, perhaps, somebody who's serving in the military and is out of the country on military service for a period of time. Should we, perhaps, consider extending the five years to accommodate their service to the country? What about children under the age of 18? If it should be a minor child that owns a corporation that is dissolved, should there be some accommodation for that situation, perhaps five years from the time that that person would reach the age of majority? So just a couple of questions about that sort of thing.

I'm also wondering, I suppose, if a corporation that was dissolved were to be involved in litigation – perhaps somebody's suing them for money, and the corporation is now dissolved – what impact would that have with the new legislation? What role would the department play in that if there's a lawsuit involved? Then, indeed, I guess the question would follow: does the creditor need to notify the Crown of the lawsuit? Perhaps they already do in some legislation somewhere. I'm not sure. Then, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be obvious to ask as well: if the lawsuit were to take longer than five years to resolve, does it therefore follow that the five-year period during which a corporation could revive itself would also have to be extended because there may be litigation under way?

Sort of in terms of big-picture questions, I'm wondering if the minister or the mover can provide us with information as to how closely they've followed the recommendations from the Uniform Law Conference of Canada in the drafting of this bill. Is it an accurate reflection of the recommendations that came from the Uniform Law Conference, or are there deviations from their recommendations, and if so, what would those deviations be?

I'm curious to know what the costs of the administration fees are going to be under the new legislation. I've already asked the question about how other provinces resolve vested property from dissolved corporations. If they don't currently have this legislation in place, what are they doing to deal with that situation?

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will look forward to further debate in second reading and particularly look forward to some responses from the ministry when it comes time to deal with this in Committee of the Whole. As I say, there may well be an amendment from the Official Opposition caucus in regard to holding that money for universities as opposed to dumping it into general revenue.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

If not, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on the debate.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to just make a couple of comments on Bill 23, Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act. We as a New Democrat caucus don't have a problem with this bill. It seems to be talking about unclaimed private property, vested properties, and dealing with some movement on behalf of the federal government, I guess.

For unclaimed private properties the bill outlines the rights and responsibilities of the holder of the land. Currently regulations set out, when land is unclaimed, the holder having the responsibility to contact the owner and inform the ministry of unclaimed land. This bill, in our minds, outlines the transfer of vested properties to the ministry.

If corporations and co-operatives and societies are involved, the bill also ensures that the mineral rights in properties will be vested and put to the Mines and Minerals Act. Although there have been provisions for land titles to be transferred to societies or corporations that have been resurrected within a reasonable time frame, there's no mention if mineral rights will ever be transferred over, too. We certainly don't have a problem with that and find it interesting that the members from Calgary-Varsity and Edmonton-Rutherford are talking about some amendments. I would look forward to seeing what those happen to be.

Otherwise, this certainly doesn't seem to be a bill that is in any way onerous or difficult for the New Democrat caucus to support. Thank you.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to rise under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing none, the question has been called. Does the hon. Deputy Government House Leader wish to close?

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 35

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to once again speak to Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007. I appreciate the comments made at second reading by several hon. members, and I would like to take this opportunity, hopefully, to address some of the comments and questions that were raised regarding Bill 35 during second reading.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford asked why all Alberta tax credits and thresholds weren't indexed. Alberta indexes nearly all tax credits with the exception of the threshold amounts for political contributions and the charitable donation amounts. I think it's important to note that indexing the charitable donations threshold would in fact be worse for Albertans as it would raise the threshold at which the higher rate kicks in.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview brought up a concern regarding the wording on credits for mental and physical impairments and whether the new wording would in fact cut off funds from those receiving them now. Mr. Chairman, the answer to that question is clearly no. In fact, changing the wording adds clarity and allows more leeway in allowing people in need to benefit from this credit.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, there were questions raised regarding specific threshold amounts: namely, for charitable donations as well as the maximum amount for medical claims. The charitable donation amount is determined by the federal government under the tax collection agreement. I'd like to point out that the \$200 threshold does not apply to each donation separately but to total donations. The first \$200 in total donations claimed in a year receives the lower 10 per cent tax credit rate while annual amounts over the threshold receive the higher 21 per cent credit. As to the medical expense claim amount, the federal government increased the maximum allowable medical expense claim for dependants other than spouses and children from \$5,000 to \$10,000, and we've paralleled this increase.

As I mentioned before, Mr. Chairman, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007, supports Alberta's well-known tax advantage, brings Alberta's personal income tax in line with initiatives announced in Budget 2007, parallels amendments made at the federal level, and makes the act consistent with current policy.

Once again, Mr. Chairman, I thank the hon. members for their questions and comments, and I hope that I have provided sufficient clarification.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. In second reading we discussed thoroughly Bill 35, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007, and I would like to thank the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for providing answers to questions that we raised at that time. One of the areas that isn't absolutely clear to me and, hopefully, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon can clarify is the exemptions for a person who is providing care for a family member, whether that's a person who as a result of age is infirm or there may be a disability associated with it, and the ability to have the expenses associated with providing that care exempted.

I know that for a considerable amount of time my father was providing care for my mother. It took a tremendous amount of his personal time and the family's time to provide the support for my mother in the house, and expenses were associated with that care provision. In this case it was my mother, but whether it's a child, an infirm individual, or somebody with a disability, hopefully, the process of claiming the exemptions will be further clarified in Bill 35, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, as at this point there are so many individuals who have pulled themselves involuntarily out of the workforce to provide care, whether it be for children or, as I say, an individual who is no longer, for a variety of physical or mental reasons, able to cope on their own.

We pride ourselves in Alberta on giving a hand up rather than a handout, and the work of these caregivers, these care providers – it's absolutely essential that it be recognized. We're fortunate in Alberta that we have so many voluntary organizations, such as Meals on Wheels, that provide, literally, a lifeline to individuals who are forced to be at home. Of course, Meals on Wheels extends that lifeline to individuals at drop-in centres in the way of providing bagged lunch. It also through the duck soup program provides much-needed support for schoolchildren, and of course the program has a large waiting list.

I'm hoping that in Bill 35, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, every possible legitimate exemption can be provided to individuals who either voluntarily or involuntarily have forced themselves out of a working circumstance to care for a loved one in need, and I would very much appreciate clarification that these exemptions have been extended and the role of the caregiver and

financial support for them is recognized in Bill 35, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

4:10

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity at committee to get some questions on the record regarding Bill 35. I've certainly listened to the discussion, and I can see where there are some very, very good things being attempted here. I'm interested to know from the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon if in the drafting of this legislation there was any consideration given to the fact that a number of years ago, six years ago, as I recall, we had before this Assembly – and it was passed – a bill to help tradespeople out across the province with the purchase of their tools. Since that bill was passed by the Legislative Assembly, it was never ever put into law. So it was a tax cut that was promised by this Progressive Conservative government, but there was no delivery on that tax cut. Now, in all fairness to this government, it was a private member's bill that was passed, not a government bill, but the majority of members on all sides of the House voted for this bill, and it was never made into law.

When I first saw this bill during committee, I thought we could amend this and correct that wrong and give those deserving people a tax cut. Certainly, we all know that tradespeople, many of whom purchase their own tools to take with them on various jobs, have a great deal of difficulty financing those purchases. I would only have to look at auto mechanics as an example. Some of these individuals have to have \$50,000 and \$60,000 worth of tools with them whenever they go to their work site.

So I looked at this, and I couldn't find any place in the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, this current bill, where it could be amended to incorporate into this bill, Bill 35, what was initially voted on in this Assembly. I'm recalling, Mr. Chairman, that this was five if not six years ago, and it was a commitment made by this Legislative Assembly which was never ever delivered to the tradespeople of this province.

If the hon. member could answer my questions, I would be very grateful at this time. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. In referring to the questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, while I'm sympathetic to the questions he raises, I regret to say that we don't have any provisions in this bill for the situations that he has dealt with. The changes that are proposed do not reflect what he has asked about. Maybe that is something that can be brought before this House at another time, but there are no changes that would deal with the points that he raised.

Again the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar raises the questions of tools. I would agree that particularly in this economy, where tools are a big part of the trades and with the importance of trades in this economy, that might be a very wise provision to bring forward in the future. I think he referenced some changes in a private member's bill that were never proclaimed. They're also not referenced in this bill at this time.

I will take those points under advisement and hope, as the hon. member does, that we may see some of those reflected in future amendments to the Personal Income Tax Act, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I do have a couple of comments regarding the opening statement by the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, when he indicated that the reason that tax credits aren't indexed is because it would actually cost taxpayers money. Indeed, the example that he cited with charitable donations: that is true. He might have misunderstood my comments in second reading. I was referring to the government's own three-column document that they provided us with. The Minister of Finance has been very forthcoming and very accommodating in terms of making those available to us.

In discussing the medical expense credit – this is the one that the mover has indicated is being moved to \$10,000 from \$5,000 in response to a change in legislation by the federal government, and we're paralleling that. I congratulated the government and applauded their move in paralleling that, but the three-column document indicates that this \$10,000 threshold will be indexed commencing in 2006, so presumably that's under way or will be retroactive once this piece of legislation passes. Then it notes under the heading Rationale that Alberta indexes most credits in the personal income tax system. So my question in second reading was: why are we indexing this particular one, the medical threshold, at \$10,000, and why are we not indexing some of the other thresholds that this legislation establishes?

As an example, Mr. Chairman, we look at the new adoption credit, a nonrefundable adoption credit, again paralleling federal legislation. That adoption credit has been established at the lesser of \$10,000 or the total adoption expenses, but there's no indication in here at all that that \$10,000 maximum will be indexed to inflation. So my question is: why not? If we're indexing the medical expense credit, why would we not at the same time extend that benefit to adoptive families and index the \$10,000 maximum credit for adoption expenses?

Another example of the same thing. I complimented the government the other day on increasing the education expense claims, Mr. Chairman. In section 16(1) they're increasing those claims from \$400 for a full-time student to \$600 for a full-time student; likewise, from \$120 for a part-time student to \$180 per month for a part-time student. So this is good work, but again the question is: if we're going to index the medical expense claim, why would we not at the same time index the education expense claims for both the full-time and part-time learners? It just seems too obvious to me, and perhaps that's why we're not doing it, because we don't always do things that are obvious.

Those are the questions that I was referring to in second reading. In the government's own document it says that we index most credits in the personal income tax system. Again, the question is: why not all? Let's give every benefit possible to Alberta taxpayers, particularly in the case of adoptive families – Mr. Chairman, we know that we need to encourage and engage more Albertans in terms of adopting children, putting them into real family home situations as opposed to foster families as soon as possible, giving them that stability – and certainly support for adult learners by way of increasing the education credit. Those are obvious to me and I'm looking forward to a response from the mover of the bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In responding to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, again I would thank the hon. member for his comments, and I would agree that he makes some

very valid points of some other worthy changes that could be made. I would commit to the hon. member that since this type of an amendment is an annual amendment, reflecting the provincial budget and the federal budget typically, we have an opportunity in the next iteration of this act. Those are worthy suggestions that I would be willing to take up on behalf of him and all Albertans when we have that discussion. I hear the hon. member, but I would commit that we would take a look at that when we look at these changes for next year.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

4:20

Mr. Chase: Thank you. As I previously indicated in second reading, I appreciate the fact that the Alberta provincial government is paralleling personal income tax exemptions with the federal government. That working together makes absolute sense.

Prior to the federal Conservatives forming government, the previous federal Liberals had proposed a variety of child care expense exemptions that would have enabled parents to make a choice of whether they were going to receive funding support for having their children attend daycare or preschool/after school care. This is an area that I would like to see the Alberta government pursue to a greater extent in consultation with the federal Conservatives but also given our enviable position economically. The idea of expanding the exemptions for child care would be very much appreciated.

Alberta recently stopped supporting children in care past school-age entry at age 6, and there are a number of parents who would like to see just that little bit of time before school and after school supported so that they could be full members of the workforce. So I would encourage the government and the mover of this bill, as we move further into the budgeting process, to consider having a made-in-Alberta child care expense provision in the form of tax exemptions to give parents the right of choice, whether, as I say, that may be in the home or in private, institutionalized care.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just going back to the questions that I asked in second reading. I'm curious whether or not the mover of the bill may have an answer to this. I didn't hear him address it when he spoke initially today. That is the situation around the general antiavoidance rule and the retroactivity to 1988. I asked questions in second reading as to whether or not there may have been any cases where Alberta tax was owing. I think I indicated in second reading as well that I had answered my own question in terms of the period from 1988 up until the period 2005, when it appeared as if there weren't any, but I was wondering in second reading whether or not we had any examples of Alberta tax owing since 2005. I'm just wondering whether or not the member was able to determine an answer to that question.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In answer to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I was not able to ascertain any such situation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. When it comes to care in general, people have put forward in consultation at my constituency office and when I've travelled the province the idea of assigning a value to an individual. In some cases that assigning a value is called a living wage. In other cases it's called a care allowance, as I've indicated before, whether it's a child, a disabled person, a senior under the care of a family. In drafting the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007, was any thought or research done in establishing the worth of an individual and, by extension, the worth in the form of an exemption to the person, family member, that provides that care?

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My last comment, I believe, on Bill 35 in the committee stage, and that is just a disappointment that I have in regard to charitable contributions. I understand the changes here are going to make those tax credits somewhat more favourable for individuals making contributions to charities; however, in the calculations that I've done, I don't think we go as far yet as we do with the Alberta political tax credit. That's something that we've talked about in the past in the Official Opposition and raised in the Assembly, the need to give at least as much of a tax credit to individuals contributing to charities as we extend to individuals contributing to political campaigns and political parties. That's not happened here, and I am disappointed that we haven't gone that far.

It's still, unfortunately, more lucrative to donate to us as politicians and our political parties than it is to donate to charitable organizations, and that's something that I had hoped we would rectify with this bill. As the member said, we tend to have amendments to the Personal Income Tax Act every year, so I would implore the Finance minister and the department to make the necessary changes so that in the future we will be at least as generous with tax credits to individuals making donations to charitable organizations as we are to those that make donations to political parties and to politicians.

Thank you.

The Chair: Others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm trying to get up to speed on any number of things and trying to comment where I think it's valid. In this instance, as we're considering the Personal Income Tax Act considerations, Bill 35, I recognize that there are concerns that Albertans have around personal income taxes. I didn't hear specifically, directly about this during the campaign; however, I did hear concerns about the difficulties that families face, in particular with regard to, you know, health care premiums. I'm just curious as to whether or not the government in considering these things thought about the toll that health care premiums place on families and small businesses, and I'm just wondering whether or not those considerations were taken. Those are things that I did hear about recently, and I hope that those things are being given consideration.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. In answer to the hon.

Member for Calgary-Elbow, while I might suggest that health care premiums might be a great item for discussion, it was not something that was considered in this bill. I'm sure I look forward to your raising that again at some point in the future.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 35, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 35 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 36

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to once again speak to Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007. I appreciate the comments made at second reading by several hon. members, and I'd like to take some time to address some of the comments and questions that were raised regarding Bill 36.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford asked for clarification regarding the need for making small businesses wait through the taxation cycle for four years before they could realize the full benefit of the increase to the small-business threshold. The increases to the threshold as well as the reduction to the credit rate are phased in to give business time to adjust to the changes.

4:30

A question was also raised regarding the Alberta royalty tax credit, or ARTC, and how much revenue was lost by not having dealt with it earlier as well as how much the government is expecting to see as a result of the proposed changes. Mr. Chairman, the Alberta public accounts show the cost of the program in the 2007 and 2006 fiscal years as \$174 million and \$111 million respectively. With regard to how much the government is expecting to see, the cost of continuing to provide the credit has not been estimated for future years. However, the rate of credit provided under the program was a function of oil and gas prices and has been set at 25 per cent for both the years 2006 and 2007. Given current prices it would not be unreasonable to presume that future savings from the elimination of the program would be comparable to the program costs in '06 and '07.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford also asked about the general antiavoidance rule, GAAR; specifically, why it has taken so long for Alberta to bring its legislation in line with the federal legislation and whether there will be attempts to collect retroactively. Mr. Chairman, the Alberta Corporate Tax Act currently parallels the provisions of the federal general antiavoidance rule, or GAAR. After a federally sponsored review of the provincial GAAR legislation in May of 2006, it was determined that a strict adoption of the federal provisions would preclude the application of GAAR to Alberta taxpayers where Alberta tax payable was reduced as a consequence of an avoidance transaction entered into primarily to

avoid federal tax. The proposed amendment ensures that Alberta will be able to reassess under GAAR even when the primary purpose of the transaction is not to avoid Alberta tax.

With regard to retroactive collection, Mr. Chairman, the government's intention is that Alberta should be able to reassess in the same circumstances as other jurisdictions. The proposed amendment, therefore, corrects a technical deficiency in the legislation. As the GAAR rules have been in place since 1988 and the government's intention to apply GAAR to avoidance transactions was clearly communicated to taxpayers, a retroactive effective date is appropriate.

Since 1999, Mr. Chairman, there have been examples of avoidance transactions specifically directed towards reducing provincial tax and sometimes avoiding it completely. Attempts to collect the appropriate amount of tax owing to Alberta from these taxpayers will be made to help ensure that all taxpayers – and I repeat: all taxpayers – pay their fair share.

Finally, the question was raised about moving to a single-factor approach and whether this would be an oversimplification of the rules, thus allowing for more loopholes. Mr. Chairman, taxable income is generally allocated among provinces in which the taxpayer has permanent establishments based on two factors associated with the permanent establishments: gross revenue and salaries and wages. In some cases taxpayers have gross revenue but not salaries and wages, as between their branches. In these circumstances the use of the general formula would allow only half of the income that should have been allocated to Alberta to be allocated to the province of Alberta. The proposed amendment will ensure that the appropriate amount of income is in fact allocated to Alberta. Of limited application, the amendment corrects a technical deficiency in the legislation.

As I mentioned before, Mr. Chairman, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007, provides additional assistance to small businesses, helps discourage tax avoidance schemes, and eliminates the ARTC, as announced by Alberta Energy.

Once again, Mr. Chairman, I thank all hon. members for their questions and comments and hope that I have provided sufficient clarification. I look forward to further debate. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007, in the committee stage. I would like to thank the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for the clarification that he has provided to the questions that I asked in second reading. Indeed, they were thorough clarifications, and I do appreciate that, particularly with respect to my question about the single-factor approach and whether or not that might actually create a loophole. It would seem to me, based on the explanation we've just received, that in fact it's closing a loophole. I know that that was the intention, so I'm pleased to have that explanation.

In regard to the comment that the phasing-in is to give small business an opportunity to adjust, I can assure the hon. member that small business would relish the opportunity to have the full benefit of the higher threshold as soon as possible and not have to wait through the full four-year cycle to experience that benefit. Now, in fairness, they may not like to have the flip side of that coin, which is the increase in the dividend tax payable. I'm sure that, you know, they would like to have their cake and eat it too, but I guess I would suggest that if we would like to do something for small business, certainly a move we could have made is extend the increase of the threshold somewhat sooner. Certainly, in consultation with the

Canadian Federation of Independent Business that was their comment: "Why make us wait four years? Why not give that benefit to small business immediately?"

Then, Mr. Chairman, not to sound like a broken record, a question could be asked, and I guess I'm asking it. On the \$500,000 threshold for small business, once we get there in 2009, I believe it is, why would we not index that to inflation as well and once again extend that benefit to small business? We all know that small business is indeed a driving factor in Alberta's economy, and I think it would probably be something that would be very much appreciated and endorsed by small business, to index that threshold to inflation as well and give them the same benefit that we just discussed giving to individuals when we were talking about Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007. That would be a question, I suppose, for the mover: whether or not the department has contemplated indexing the small-business threshold once we reach the full amount of \$500,000.

Clearly, if one were to look at the economy as it is currently, with inflation running in this province somewhere between 5 and 7 per cent, over a four-year cycle we've chewed into an awful lot of that \$100,000 increase in the threshold that we're giving them. I'm not sure that we're doing anything on the flip side with the dividend tax to make up for that, so that would be something that I know those small-business owners that I talk to would be interested in hearing, and I'm sure the Canadian Federation of Independent Business would also be curious to know the answer to that and perhaps the Canadian Taxpayers Federation as well.

I'll leave it up to the mover of the bill to respond to those questions and concerns. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for his comments and his thoughts. As he spoke, I looked up in the gallery, and I saw the executive director of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce nodding his approval. I would agree with the hon. member that this is an idea certainly worth studying and something that I will take up with the Minister of Finance.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We certainly support the bill. I'm more interested in the reviewing of the Alberta royalty tax credit and what that means in terms of dollars. Now, it's my understanding that the Auditor General's report in 2003-2004 recommended that this be revisited, and I guess we've gotten around to it finally now. I'm trying to get some idea about how much money we perhaps lost to the treasury during that period of time up to the present.

Mr. MacDonald: Seven point one billion dollars over 25 years.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, hon. member.

The other point that I want to make is simply: why was it that the Auditor General brought this forward in 2003-2004, and what was the problem to the time that we're bringing it up now? The reason I ask this is because there are probably a number of different recommendations that could end up costing the taxpayers a fair amount of money, Mr. Chairman. It's important that when we find loopholes – and I think the member would agree with me – we try to deal with this as quickly as possible. One can only wonder if there

are some other tax avoidance issues that we don't know about or how quickly we can deal with them.

4:40

As I say, there was no point in having this particular loophole. Certainly, we should have known that in 2003-2004. I guess we should have known it before then. Even if the figures were from 2003-2004, can the member tell us exactly how much money that was and how much it might mean on a yearly basis now? There are various figures from the press releases that seem to contradict it, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for his comments. With regard to potential lost revenue, I mean, at this point, hon. member, we can only speculate because, as you know, it depends on whether a certain policy was implemented or not and what that would have meant in terms of collections.

In terms of the delay, well, I can't speak for previous members of this Assembly. You've been here some time before me and at different times. I would only say that at this point we have realized that this is something that's timely. To agree with you, hon. member, it's overdue. We're moving forward, and I'm glad that we're here. I don't have any exact numbers for you in terms of what it could have meant, but the fact is that we have realized now that it's time to do this, time to move forward, and I'm glad that we're doing it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I, too, have questions at this time regarding Bill 36. Certainly, to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, my questions are around the tax revenue and the corporate income tax revenue that's anticipated for 2007-08. I'll just use that as an example. It's over \$3 billion: \$3.1 billion. The previous fiscal year I believe it was \$2.9 billion. When this legislation was drafted, what considerations were made to the energy trust sector? Certainly, I'm going through this, and I'm very curious in light of the fact that in October of 2006 there was a fundamental change in how energy trusts were to be administered or not to be administered. I would like to know the implications for the energy trusts. What are the implications for them regarding the amendments here that we are discussing with Bill 36? If I could have a breakdown, please – if he has one, I would appreciate it – of what percentage of the corporate income tax in Alberta is being paid by the energy income trust sector, not only in 2007-08 but also what it was in the year 2006-07. I would be grateful if the hon. member could provide that information.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, again, I thank you for your comments. You're looking for some specific numbers that, unfortunately, I don't have at my fingertips, hon. member. I recognize your point in terms of the changes that were recently made that impacted the energy trust sector. The only commitment that I can make to you is that these changes that are being proposed will be consistent across the board, and, yes, they probably will have a little different impact

on the energy trust sector because of, I guess, the unique nature of that sector of our economy. But these amendments are intended to be applied across the board, and that's the best answer that I could give you, hon. member.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for the detailed answers to questions, which honours the legitimate concerns raised by opposition members representing their constituents' concerns over Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007. That recognition and the co-operation that has been demonstrated through second reading and now into Committee of the Whole are very much appreciated.

I also appreciate the member's explanation about the need for a phase-in period for this legislation to be enacted. There has been a great deal of discussion associated with the ramifications of following through on a federal government promise to first reduce the GST a single per cent to 6 per cent and then with the follow-up promise to reduce it a further per cent so that it is now 5 per cent. What has happened for a number of small-business owners is the question of whether the time for implementation – such as recalibrating cash registers, new tax filing programs, following the rules, the exemptions, and so on – was more of a headache than a financial improvement. This was more the case with the small individuals who primarily did their own bookkeeping within their family circumstance. But the debate as to where this revenue best fits is always going to be coming up for discussion.

On a recent *Cross Country Checkup* this question of the recalibration was brought forward. Some people would argue that the GST provided the federal government with a stable, relatively predictable source of funding that they could then apply to public programs that benefited the nation. Of course, the counterargument was: what does the government know about the needs of individuals? The money is best left in their pockets for them to add to the economy, to direct as they see fit. So that discussion of the appropriate ways of reducing taxes remains a topic of hot debate and concern as to what the role of a government is. We all know about what happened in the States with the Boston Tea Party, when people felt that there was taxation without representation.

Fortunately, with Bill 36 the intent is to give small-business owners a break, and that's a break that's also recognized by the federal government in paralleling this legislation. For a brief opportunity in historical time we have the alignment of two Conservative governments, a federal government in Ottawa and a government that has occupied the majority in this Legislature for the past 36 years. So my challenge is, given this very brief alignment of the planets, to push the federal government with the exemptions that the province is providing; in other words, instead of just aligning ourselves with already existing federal corporate tax legislation, be prepared to go further and institute a direction that will support all Albertans while still recognizing that revenue through taxation, whether it's property tax that's collected in the name of education, which should show up on education budgets, particularly when we have an inflation rate approaching 6.4 per cent and the money provided to the education is just barely over 3 per cent – likewise, let us be bold, and the money that is collected currently and, we would suggest, unfairly for health premiums be actually put towards health.

4:50

What I am challenging the provincial government to do is go beyond the status quo, strike out in a bold direction that recognizes

that tax that is collected in the name of education and health care actually goes to those areas. Show to the federal government that Alberta is not only a tax-friendly province but cares for the well-being of the public programs for its constituents. We have an opportunity in Alberta, by collecting the proper amount of taxes, whether they be in the form of royalties, whether they be in the form of property taxes, to make the quality of life in Alberta something that goes beyond just per capita averages and actually filters down to rents, to food, to support of Alberta's most vulnerable.

I challenge the government to go beyond Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, and take a serious look at taxes that have been collected in the name of property, that have been collected in the name of health but, unfortunately, bear no resemblance to either area.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for his comments, and I also thank him for his compliments at the beginning of his words. He touched on a number of things that I think were more policy than specifics to the piece of legislation, and I would suggest that what is consistent in this legislation is that Alberta continues to make sure that we collect a fair and reasonable tax burden while maintaining a competitive advantage, the most competitive tax regime across this country.

Furthermore, I'm quite pleased to hear the hon. member encourage us to work with our federal counterparts to reduce what has been traditionally a very high federal tax burden under previous Liberal governments. I'm pleased to hear that he's supporting what I believe is the type of direction that we've seen in Alberta for many years, that we also want to continue to see at the federal level.

The member also mentioned, Mr. Chairman, that he would like to see health care premiums going towards health. I'd like to remind the hon. member that the health care premiums that we collect plus some \$10 billion plus go towards the provision of one of the best health care systems in this country.

Hon. member, I think we're on the same page, and I thank you for those comments.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to come back, looking at some of the news releases to follow up on my previous questions. A news release from September 21 from the minister at the time said that "the elimination of the ARTC based on 2005-06 figures would increase revenues . . . to the province by a further \$111 million." There's another one on April 6 that says \$113 million, but they're in the ballpark. So I take it that that's roughly the amount of money that we're looking at on a per yearly basis. I don't know how far this goes back, to be honest, you know, when ARTC was irrelevant or invalid, but certainly the Auditor General said in 2003 – I know it's not this member's fault, but I'm making a point here so that we move on these things faster. That's roughly, if I'm correct – probably it wouldn't be \$111 million; it might be slightly less – around \$300 million that could have been in the Alberta treasury, and that's a significant amount of cash.

I think we have to have some mechanism within the Department of Energy or others to see that these things – and how far back before the Auditor General? Who knows? I'm not going to ask the minister that. The point I'm making is that that's a significant amount of cash. I'm glad we're dealing with it now. I hope the message to the Department of Energy and any others that we're

missing on these sorts of things is that this is expensive. That \$300 million can do a lot of different things for the province is the point that I would make.

The member alluded to the retroactive part of that, but that's not really much of a retroactivity. It just goes back to January 1 of this year, if I'm correct, and it's still in the same tax year. Am I correct about that? The release that I saw on September 21 – correct me if I'm wrong – says: "The decision follows a review and consultation with industry and stakeholders. It requires a legislative change that will be retroactive to the beginning of 2007." So we're really just looking at this year for the retroactivity. Am I correct about that? If not, then maybe the press release is wrong, and there have been changes. So I'd just like clarification on that, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I don't believe that we're limited to the beginning of the year. The point I do want to make, though, is clearly that the retroactivity that's being proposed here is intended to be consistent with the rest of the country. So whatever is typical across the country in terms of retroactivity, that is exactly what we will be reflecting in the changes as proposed by this bill. We will catch up, in effect, with the rest of the country.

Thank you.

Mr. Martin: I'd like some clarification before third reading on that because this was a release from the Department of Energy at the time. I think that's an important consideration because it requires a legislative change – maybe I'm missing something in here – that will be retroactive to the beginning of 2007. So maybe there's been a change. You don't have to answer now. Maybe I have time to take a look at it before third reading.

Thanks.

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 36, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 36 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 24

Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate November 8: Mr. Rogers]

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just looking forward to further exploring the options in this bill in committee, looking forward to further discussion in committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise again and speak to Bill 24, Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007, at Committee of the Whole stage. In December 2005 a committee made up of government, lenders, law enforcement, and real estate industry put forward eight recommendations to government regarding mortgage fraud. Number one, the government of Alberta participate in a mortgage fraud prevention committee to encourage communication, develop best practices, and improve training for workers in the mortgage and real estate industry. Number two, declare mortgage fraud a government priority and establish specialized mortgage fraud investigation and prosecution units. Number three, quantify the financial impact of mortgage fraud in Alberta. Four, amend the Real Estate Act to ensure that the Real Estate Council of Alberta has the necessary investigative powers and the ability to share personal information about mortgage fraud perpetrators. Number five, review privacy legislation and suggest amendments to facilitate sharing of personal information related to mortgage fraud between law enforcement and investigating agencies. Six, raise public awareness of the criminal nature of mortgage fraud. Seven, amend Alberta's Law of Property Act to allow lenders to sue on the covenant except on farmland and owner-occupied residential property. Number eight, review whether the land titles office should send notices to the lenders, property owners when there is a suspected incident of mortgage fraud or fraudulent transfer of title.

5:00

Bills 12 and 13 in 2006 also made some steps to address mortgage fraud concerns. My question is why we failed to implement all those recommendations. If not all eight of those recommendations, how many recommendations have been implemented so far? Why do we keep on introducing bills again and again and again? This time I request that the members consider this very seriously, make sure that when we make an amendment on this bill, it should be effective for all the people in Alberta.

I have a few other questions to ask the hon. member who sponsored this bill. Does this government have figures on the impact and size of mortgage fraud in Alberta? How many mortgage brokers are blacklisted? How much money is involved? What else needs to be done to combat mortgage fraud based on the 2005 committee recommendations, those eight points I mentioned?

So far bills 12 and 13 in 2006 and now Bill 24. What else? What else do we need? Who has the government consulted, like stakeholders, and on this bill what were their concerns? What were they asking for? Were their concerns adequately addressed? I know some stakeholders. I'm sure the hon. member knows about the Real Estate Council of Alberta, the Alberta Real Estate Association, and consumers' groups. What do those who suffer at the hands of mortgage fraud, the most important groups, think about this bill?

If we really, really want to strengthen this industry, I think we should protect the consumers first. Create consumer confidence and trust, trust not only in those in the real estate practice who are licensed realtors but those people who don't have a license, those people who are working in this industry. It's very important – and the hon. member knows about this – especially the commercial real estate. I don't know whether they are immersed in this industry or not. Commercial real estate is involved on a big scale, tons of money. Some, not all, of the real estate people are making deals under the table. How can we enforce that? If we don't follow the recommendations of the RECA in the last, say, five, seven years, after passing this bill, how can we guarantee that we could be able to help those people who are suffering because of this bad practice in this industry?

Public awareness, you know, is very important just to create consumer confidence and trust in this industry. We must promote the integrity of this industry. We should especially have more improvement on the educational side. We should especially educate the professionals working in this industry.

We must have an effective investigation system. Not only an investigation system, but we must have a detective system, how we can detect what's going on in this industry. So far my personal experience is that when we talk to the RECA or any other associations in this field, they always talk about ethics, but they say: we don't have the powers. If they don't have the powers, why do we keep on making laws, one after another? We must do something which has an effect on the industry, which gives some more powers to RECA or any others.

Even the committee I discussed that was made in 2005 that some government people were involved in, I'm definitely sure Official Opposition parties were not involved in that. You guys can't at least criticize the Official Opposition on this matter. I would suggest that, I mean, if this government really thinks they are accountable, they are transparent – and now recently the Premier has announced that some members from the opposition are involved in some other committees – how come Official Opposition parties are not involved in decision-making in this industry? They should know. The public should know. In all industries the government, if they are accountable, should talk openly. I think this could be the best thing for Albertans.

If we could have a detective system to detect realtors, to detect the appraisers, to detect the lenders, especially the mortgage, that I mentioned, the assumable mortgage. This is very important in dealing with fraud of any kind. I am not only talking about real estate. If we don't have a proper investigation system, if we don't have the interrogation or detective system, we cannot succeed.

So please make a note and if possible try to – when we say that the committee is made of the government, other parties should be involved, and they should know what is going on in this particular industry because it's not a small industry. It's a big industry. You know, representation from all parties is very, very important.

One more thing that I want to say: after the investigation or interrogation, whether it's the realtors or the brokers or the lenders, once they are caught, they must be severely punished. They must be – I repeat – must be severely punished. If the penalty is not enough, and if needed, if the lender or any other professional keeps on doing the blunder again and again, I'm sorry to say that that person, he or she, should be in jail. They should be in jail.

5:10

Now I move to sections 3(a)(ii) and 3(b)(i), (ii), and (iii). All add in "subject to the regulations," which invests more power in the hands of the cabinet and orders in council. Why? Why can't these sections be solidified in the legislation? Why? This is something that happens too often with this government: moving issues out of legislation and into regulations. I'm again talking about the regulations.

Next, section 4(a)(i) cuts sections that allow various national, provincial, and local organizations to pick between them and two members of the Real Estate Council of Alberta. Why are these institutions being cut out of the council selection process? What did they have to say about this?

Section 5(c), again shifting to the regulation powers, is no longer specifically prescribing the limit of a penalty. Why? How much is the minister intending the penalty to be?

Section 7. Why is the bill getting rid of this ban on industry members soliciting, accepting, or receiving money from their clients

except in the usual course of business? Why was the clause problematic?

Section 9. This section includes much more than it previously did. It has gone from land sales only to all business transactions. Why?

Section 11(a)(i). More use of regulation rather than an explicit time period. Why don't you tell us here in this Legislature about the regulation in detail? I mentioned it before. It's very important. Instead, we recommend something and then go back to the RECA. We are the elected body. I mean, all the regulations that we are going to recommend to the RECA we should discuss here in this Assembly because it's very important. If the government really believes in transparency, if the government really believes in accountability, we should discuss everything here.

Now I move to section 15(4)(b). This requires people being questioned in an investigation to answer even if that answer is self-incriminating. It does, however, prevent it from being used against them in any civil proceedings or in prosecution under any acts. This language can be found in a few other bills in Canada.

Mr. Chairman, this is a very serious thing that we have been through many times before, as I mentioned: in Bill 12, Bill 13, and now Bill 24. Why are we wasting time? I mean, the bill is in front of us today, and before we pass this bill, I want to make sure that this act is able to strengthen an entity. You name anything.

Also, I'm suggesting the participation of the opposition members whenever there is a discussion about amendment of the real estate laws. It's very important because we are directly involved with the public. Even politics start with the public and finish with the public. Same thing, real estate people or the lenders and the appraisers. They are dealing with people. When we are dealing with people, we should be very cautious. We should be careful because, you know, a huge amount of money is involved.

That's all I have to say, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for his comments. Certainly, with his background he's got a lot of knowledge in this industry. I think his comment are very relevant to this bill. I'm going to apologize to the member ahead of time. I tried my best to take some notes, hon. member, as you spoke. I don't know if I'm going to capture everything that you raised, but I think I can speak in general to the bill, as you know, from my knowledge of the industry as well.

Let me say right off the bat that I think it's a philosophical discussion as to whether regulations – because regulations are done outside this Chamber, you suggest that we probably should get into more detail in the bill. Well, the complexity of this I think makes that unrealistic. But that's a philosophical discussion for another day. I just wanted to acknowledge that.

Going back to the discussion in second reading, I believe that it was probably yourself that mentioned the need to have a stronger enforcement mechanism to keep out unscrupulous members of the industry, more power to go after bad appraisers. I think this change will not only get the bad appraisers; it's going to get the bad mortgage brokers, the property managers. As you know, all of these industry members are part of RECA.

Later on in your comments, hon. member, you talked about wanting the opposition members or government members to be more involved. The reality is that our involvement as legislators, be it as opposition or government, is right here. This is our opportunity to make sure that to the best of our ability the bill captures what we need to provide that confidence to the consumer. At the end of the day this is about the consumer.

In one of your questions you asked about the impact, the size of the fraud. How many dollars? How many brokers? Hon. member, I've got to tell you that one is too much. One is too much. In my time in the business, in 12 and a half years – I suspect you've got as many or more years in the business – I've seen many, and I can tell you that each one was traumatic for the people involved. They were caught up by very unscrupulous people, very selfish people that masquerade as professional industry members, but, frankly, they're crooks. I can't think of another word to use for them. I hope, Mr. Chairman, that's not unparliamentary language because that's how I feel about these people. I believe that one person taken advantage of is too much.

Anything that we do through this bill to strengthen the power of RECA – let me remind the members present that RECA, the Real Estate Council of Alberta, is a self-regulating body that was created under the legislation in 1996. It's made up of industry members, people from the different segments of the industry. Under the legislation they have the ability to regulate the members: who can become a member, what courses they have to take. You're well aware of the 18 credits that people have to take to maintain their licences. One of the key courses in that is one that has to do with conflict of interest and integrity.

You also mentioned, hon. member, about the ability to regulate other people that are web based or – I hate to label a particular company – the commissions that operate outside of the real estate market. As you know, hon. member, the definition of trading in real estate under these provisions specifically relates to trading in real estate. I would say to you that maybe that's something that should be brought before this Legislature. There are individuals that are operating in this business that, because they don't technically trade in real estate, are able to operate outside of this legislation. That's where you find some of these web-based companies.

Frankly, I don't like them any more than you do, but I think we need to find another mechanism where we can regulate these individuals who are operating on the periphery of this industry, because that's what they're doing. They're not technically trading in real estate, so they don't fall under the provisions of this act. I think the potential is just as good for consumers to be harmed by those individuals as it is by people who operate under the umbrella of the profession.

5:20

So I would say to people like yourself, hon. member, and me, who have knowledge of this industry, and others – I'm sure all hon. members in here want to protect the consumer – that we would seek to bring something before this House, or if it's something that has to be done federally, that we would work with our federal counterparts to make sure that these provisions are brought forward that will ultimately provide that protection that we want for the consumer.

One of the questions that was asked by yourself, hon. member, and others is: who was consulted? I want to tell you that we have a stakeholder list of some almost 50 organizations in the real estate industry that were consulted. You asked about appraisers, for example. The Appraisal Institute of Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the law society of Canada, the Real Estate Institute of Canada, the National Home Warranty Program, the Calgary Apartment Association, the Red Deer Landlord and Tenants Board, the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association, the Alberta Business Brokers Association, building owners and managers, the people that manage the apartment buildings: we consulted some approximately 50 organizations involved in the trading of real estate, hon. member. I can assure you that to the best of our ability we left no stone unturned in really trying to get the input of everyone involved in this industry.

Is this piece of legislation perfect? Probably not. But I can tell you it goes a long ways to getting that protection that we want for the consumer, strengthening the ability of RECA to do investigations, requiring criminal background checks to make sure that crooks stay out of this industry, allowing RECA to take copies of documents when they come in to do an investigation, reducing the amount of time and notification that have to be given so that, again, these crooks don't hide the evidence. I think this piece of legislation, hon. member, goes a very long way to providing that protection for the consumer that we all desire. I'm sure that at some point, when we find the need, maybe we can improve it again. But I think this goes a long way, and I would encourage you and all hon. members to support this piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I've been listening with interest to the discussion in committee this afternoon on Bill 24. I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon regarding this bill. I agree with the principle of the legislation. Certainly, whenever we think of any measure that works to combat mortgage fraud more effectively, I think it's worthy of merit.

We are discussing this bill at the same time as we have a subprime mortgage crisis in our neighbour to the south. In certain geographical areas of America, whether it's California, Arizona, parts of Florida, there is significant angst among consumers. When we look at what our neighbours are going through, we cannot afford not to have a very strong oversight measure and also the will to enforce that measure. Certainly, both hon. members indicated when they were speaking that they were quite willing and anxious to get tough if necessary on any violations. I couldn't agree with that more. One only has to look at the composition of this Assembly, Mr. Chairman. Not this term but in the last term, certainly, there was a former member for whatever reason – the reasons are still mysterious – who had to resign their seat here. We can never take any of these incidences too lightly.

I have, as do so many Albertans, a lot of reservations about allowing the minister or the minister at the time to make regulations without any debate in this Legislative Assembly. Now, as I understand this, we are giving the minister the power to change how the law is applied when it is necessary through orders in council. I'll use two examples, Mr. Chairman, to raise a caution about this being subject to regulations, which would allow more power, again, in the hands of cabinet and the orders in council.

Let's go back 11 years, back to 1996, when Syncrude and Suncor were given the right, the one-time right, to change from paying royalties to this province on synthetic crude oil production to a bitumen royalty, which is significantly less. That issue was never discussed before this Assembly. Surely, it was discussed at the cabinet table. I will never be allowed to see those discussions or read about those discussions, of course. But that's an example of one matter that was done before cabinet, behind closed doors, which now we are paying a significant price for. Certainly, the Hunter report talks that this could be in the hundreds of millions of dollars a year in concessions to those two oil sands producers.

That was done at the cabinet, behind closed doors, and that was a regulation that was just conveniently filed in the Leg. Library. Eleven years later it's a major problem for this government. I understand there are negotiations going on now on how to level the playing field. So much of the royalty suggestion – I shouldn't call it the suggestion – the royalty compromise that was made by this

government depends upon the negotiations with Syncrude and Suncor over that regulation. Suncor, for instance, was to receive \$150 million in historical costs over that period of time, whatever that means.

An Hon. Member: Relevance?

Mr. MacDonald: I can hear an hon. member talking about relevance, but I would remind the hon. members – all members, Mr. Chairman – that we are in committee, and that is one of two examples that I want to bring up as to why we should be very leery about giving another statute the authority to allow this government to continue to rule by regulation and not by being open and transparent and having full debates in this Legislative Assembly.

Now, that was one example. The second example – and the Minister of Energy will be really excited to hear about this, Mr. Chairman – is an example of the same sort of rule by regulation that is being proposed in this Bill 46, which we haven't had a chance to debate yet. Hopefully, we'll get to that, if not this week, next week. Not only is this Bill 24 going to be subject to regulations, but look at what we're doing with Bill 46. We're having a regulation-overriding statute, which is totally undemocratic.

So I have a lot of questions – a lot of questions – about why we would be providing cabinet with yet another opportunity to rule by regulation. That's one reason why I'm very cautious about supporting this bill.

5:30

Of course, the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon talked about the Real Estate Council of Alberta and the fact that this is a council that is self-regulating. Now, again, whenever we look at some of the chaos and the confusion that consumers are facing in America and some of the financial losses that are being posted on a weekly basis by major banks, by mortgage companies, by brokers over that subprime issue, I'm not so certain that self-regulation is the way to go.

Now, it's interesting. Our research indicates, Mr. Chairman, that Alberta is one of the only jurisdictions in North America with full self-regulation of the real estate industry, fully funded by industry members. In most other provinces and the states responsibility is either shared with government through coregulation or entirely the government's concern. The hon. member would have to prove to me that in this period of 11 years, or since the time of July 1, 1996, we are better off with self-regulation of the real estate industry.

The hon. member – and I really appreciate his time and his interest and his willingness to answer questions – in response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie gave a long list of those who had been consulted regarding this draft or this bill, but I would like to know if the Consumers' Association of Alberta or the Consumers' Association of Canada is one of the 50 members on his list. I certainly hope they were consulted.

I would like to go a little bit further with this, Mr. Chairman. As part of the Real Estate Council of Alberta – I understand the number one goal is to protect consumers through licensing requirements, effective investigation of complaints, disciplinary proceedings, and administration of the assurance fund – what consideration, if any, has there been of putting a representative of the Consumers' Association on that council? I understand there are a dozen representatives on that council. Yes, it's composed of 12 members representing residential and commercial real estate, property management, mortgage brokers, real estate appraisers, and the public, but are any of those 12 members of the Real Estate Council of Alberta from any recognized consumer groups? If I could have an answer to those questions, I would be very grateful.

Again, I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to please be very cautious. Let's think of the big bill we're going to face here with Syncrude and Suncor. Let's look at the implications of Bill 46. If we look at those, I don't think we should be giving more power to the cabinet to rule by regulation and not through open, transparent debate on the floor of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. In response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar I just want to make it perfectly clear that the Consumers' Association of Canada, Alberta branch, was consulted in that list of 50.

Also, Mr. Chairman, the makeup of RECA. It doesn't specify that this individual is a member of any consumers organization, but there are 10 industry members and one public member at large. One of the 12 members appointed must not be an industry member, so someone that is not connected with the trade of real estate at all. Of course, the terminology of the trade is everything from the mortgage industry, the appraisals, the property managers, realtors, someone that is not connected with the trade of real estate at all. Although that individual, I would admit, is not specified to be a member of a consumer association, they very well could be. A member of the general public outside of the industry could very well be anyone.

The other point, Mr. Chairman, raised by the hon. member. I would submit to you that the consumer is better off today because of the self-regulating nature of this industry. Again, unfortunately, one or two bad apples give this industry a very bad name. There are some extremely highly qualified, highly ethical, professional people in this business at all levels, be they on the real estate side, the mortgage side, the appraisal side. There are some very, very credible individuals, and frankly it really saddens me that these individuals are being tarred with the brush of these one or two bad apples. That is why I think it's so important that we strengthen this legislation, strengthen the regulation that gives RECA, this body – it is in their interest to keep up the good name, the quality of their industry, and they work very hard.

The other thing you mentioned, hon. member. Of course, it is self-regulating, but it's self-regulating that has to fall under this legislation, so we do have the opportunity in this Legislature to beef up or change or modify the legislation. This body, RECA, and what it does only survives based on what piece of legislation we put forward in this House. So, hon. member, I would suggest to you that if you feel that we need to do more at some point in the future, we bring that change here and we beef up this legislation and we continue to provide that support to the public that they need.

The other thing you mentioned is the subprime crisis. I would say to you that even though we don't have that kind of crisis in Canada right now, the reality is that when you have a business climate where people are willing to lend money beyond the values that they should – frankly, these are stupid business decisions, be they in the States or here. I can't understand why these people are crying now because if they were dumb enough to lend money to people who couldn't afford to pay it back, I think they deserve everything they get.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon alluded to it. I mean, apparently we're bringing this bill in because of the possibility of previous mortgage fraud, and he said that there were perhaps one or two bad apples. I

doubt that that would cause us to have this bill brought before the House. I guess the question I have is: how serious a problem is it? How many cases are we aware of that have come forward through the real estate board?

I want to go into the self-regulating part of it. I have no great objection, you know, to people self-regulating, but it's interesting that we're going to be debating a bill here tomorrow, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, where we seem to be moving into the territory of professionals like doctors and nurses and that, and here we have a bill dealing with real estate, where we're moving in the other direction. So I think there's a contradiction there.

You know, I wonder about the self-regulation. How can you control this? The figure I've seen – I think it came from RECA – is that there is something like 14,943 real estate mortgage brokers and appraisal industry members, almost 15,000, in the province. Now, that's a lot of people to self-regulate, and I think that we really are counting on the self-regulation here to be able to do that. When you deal with other professionals where we have self-governance, they don't nearly have those sorts of members, and of course they're trained. The amended act makes a criminal record check a prerequisite – I thought that would have happened before; it seems to be a no-brainer – for a real estate agent, mortgage broker, or appraiser.

5:40

Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems to me that the whole thrust of this – you know, it says: clarifies and modernizes the terms and all the rest of it – is that we're giving the self-regulators more power to try to get to what he calls the bad apples. I'd say that that's a major job. I think that if mortgage fraud is serious enough that we're bringing forward a bill because we're concerned about it – I'm not sure what the answer is, but I don't think that this solves the problems necessarily.

You know, we can talk about: there is more potential for abuse. We were alluding to subprime, but we've got even CMHC saying that you can have 100 per cent mortgages. That is the way of the future, that there are going to be more sales out there, probably people getting in over – when CMHC says that it's okay, there are going to be a lot of people involved in it.

I don't think this is going to do any harm and certainly not, you know, enough that I wouldn't support the bill, but I really do think that with the self-regulation in those sorts of numbers with a growing market, we're kidding ourselves if we don't think that even with this bill there's a potential still there in a very dramatic way. Perhaps we need stiffer laws. I don't know. That's something we could take a look at.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I think there are aspects of these changes that will make it easier to curtail mortgage fraud, but that is not the only intent of this bill. The self-regulating and tidying it up: it's been 10 years. We have looked at the whole industry over that 10 years plus, and we've looked at what has worked very well, what needs some adjustment. Part of that, underlying that, is, number one, first and foremost, protecting consumer confidence, protecting consumers. So while there are some tools that this gives to RECA, the council, to protect the consumer, the bottom line at the end of the day, hon. member, is to clean it up, to fine-tune the mechanism that was put in place in 1996 to ensure that even before we get to problems, we have the kind of mechanism that will provide the kind of confidence that we would all want. At one point or another even

we in here are consumers in this industry. So it really is intended to create a good environment for consumer confidence.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'd like to again thank the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for shouldering so much of the responsibility for bill debate today. I'd also like to recognize the member's professionalism and that of my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie. What the House has been treated to today is a terrific in-service on real estate and the cautions associated with the real estate industry that Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007, attempts to accomplish through further eliminating the possibility of fraud.

I have a concern that has been raised by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar with regard to the idea of regulation trumping legislation. We have been elected by our constituents to do due diligence to demonstrate the intelligence and integrity necessary to make decisions on their behalf, and that is how the Legislature is set up, so that those discussions can take place. If we simply give over the people's rights to a behind-closed-doors cabinet regulation as opposed to the little airing opportunity we have in debate, then we are basically neglecting our duty and saying that the state in its wisdom should just manage people's lives, including the lives of the members of the opposition. It has been noted by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie that this type of expertise to which we have been treated today should be sitting beside each other in committee in preparation for legislation and bills like this, which would then eliminate the need for the types of discussion that we're having here today.

It's a concern to me that there is a grim reality in this province that Bill 24 doesn't address. That grim reality is that Bill 24, Real Estate Amendment Act, talks about eliminating fraudulent mortgage processes, but inflation, cost of living, a desire expressed by the Premier to not touch the brakes on the economy, together with a lack of government legislation or regulation prevent people from obtaining the very mortgages that Bill 24 attempts to protect. There is a growing reality that owning a home and qualifying for a mortgage in this province is becoming more and more difficult. With no legislation other than the legislation to landlords that they can only raise their rent once, with no limitation on the extent of that raise, individuals who are in the position of wanting to rent or rent to own cannot put away the amount necessary to qualify for a mortgage.

Without legislation that requires condominium conversions to occur with sufficient notification to tenants, what we have is an end run whereby simply by raising the rents, you can drive those tenants out of the future condominium; therefore, no notification of the change from a rental accommodation to a condominium is necessary. That's the grim reality in this province. Unless we look at even temporary sunset rent controls of some sort, people will not be able to set aside the money necessary to have the stability of a mortgage. This is a major concern for Albertans.

We advertise, we brag, we beat our chest and talk about the Alberta advantage, but the grim reality is that that Alberta advantage is very elusive for the people whose rent continues to increase without any type of oversight. An example would be in the Varsity apartments that I brought up so many times during the spring session of the Legislature. While theoretically you can only raise the rent once, landlords are getting very creative. They're now suggesting: "Oh, yes, but we're going to now charge you for your cable," or "We didn't charge you before for your electricity and your sewer,

and we're now going to charge you for that, but that's not a rent increase; that's just a recognition that the cost of electricity has gone up; therefore, we're adjusting your rent to accommodate for that particular concern." There is no legislation that prevents landlords from being creative in the types of gouging they undertake.

So we can argue about regulation, and we can argue about legislation, but when it comes to rental circumstances, when it comes to homelessness, there is neither regulation nor legislation that addresses the need of individuals to qualify for that first mortgage and to enjoy both the opportunities and the responsibilities of owning their first home.

5:50

We've got a number of organizations that will appreciate Bill 24, Real Estate Amendment Act, and I credit the government for doing the research that would prevent that fraudulent activity from continuing. That background research and accepting the input from that background research is very refreshing. We have seen examples – the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and the Member for Edmonton-Glenora have first-hand experience of being on an expert task force tasked to tour the province to come up with the best suggestions possible to allow people to have ownership of their homes, to have a roof over their head, whether it's a rented room or whether it's the opportunity to have a home of their own. When the rental task force came back with their recommendations, unfortunately, the government rejected 32 of the 58 recommendations. So it is of great concern how the government picks and chooses between what will be regulated and what will be legislated.

I also want to touch on the concern that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview pointed out with regard to the self-regulation of real estate agents. Now, I don't know, and I'm sure the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon or the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie could give me a brief background on the type of education and the coursework required to qualify to be either an appraiser or a realtor, but I would suggest that it pales in comparison to that of a doctor. Yet when we talk tomorrow about Bill 41, we're saying that doctors who have had nine-plus years of training if they're going towards a specialty don't have the sufficient internal authority within their professional qualifications to self-regulate. There is also, potentially, the suggestion that while it takes six years to achieve a master of teaching degree, members of the teaching profession don't deserve a raise equivalent to inflation.

The government seems on one hand to be very willing to allow certain organizations to self-regulate, but when it comes to the professionalism of organizations such as medicine and education, they need to be shepherded because they don't have the intelligence to regulate themselves in a professional manner. You can't have it both ways. Therefore, what I would recommend is legislation that the open opportunity of the people of Alberta be recognized as superior to anyone's behind-closed-doors regulatory attempts.

The beauty of a democracy is that all voices are heard, and I appreciate the discussion and the voices that have been heard in this Assembly today. Again I want to thank the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and recognize the intellectual capabilities of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie in providing this House with a much better understanding of Bill 24, Bill 36, and Bill 35 than we had going into this discussion and debate.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 63 "the Committees of the whole Assembly shall rise and report prior to the time of adjournment," and I still have another member on the list. So we'll rise and report. I'll call on the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007, and also report Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007, and report progress on Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 35 and Bill 36. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 24.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour and the vigorous and rigorous debate of the afternoon, the tremendous progress made, I would move that we call it 6 p.m. and adjourn to reconvene tomorrow at 1.

[Motion carried; at 5:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 14, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Statement by the Speaker

Gift of Mace Rest to the Legislative Assembly

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the top of the Speaker's dias is the coat of arms of our province. Beneath the crown is Castor canadensis, the Canadian beaver. The significance of this animal and the trade in furs to the development of what became our province is well known. Our Legislature Building is within 100 metres of the fifth and last Fort Edmonton, constructed in 1832. From 1795 until 1891 Fort Edmonton was the regional centre of the fur trade. Then as now the fur industry continues to support our rural economy. It allows many of our aboriginal and Métis citizens as well as others who are living on the land to do so in ways that make use of a sustainable and renewable resource.

Today in the Speaker's gallery are board members and staff of the Alberta Trappers Association. They and their 2,700 members from throughout the province have given the Legislative Assembly a unique and fitting gift. This kind gesture celebrates our province's long and continuing connection with the land, its animals, and a way of life so integral to the development and character of our Alberta.

I would now ask the pages to unveil the gift. [The mace rest was uncovered] Through the generosity of the Alberta Trappers Association the Assembly's mace rest has been completely covered in the finest Alberta beaver pelt dyed in our Chamber's green livery. On it is engraved a silver lozenge which reads, "Presented to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta by the Alberta Trappers Association, November 2007."

From that group and with us today in the Speaker's gallery are Ted Callbeck, director from Onoway; Dennis Wohlgenuth, director from Sexsmith, with his son Nolan; Margaret Kidner, director from Edson; Linda Stolberg, administrative assistant; and Karen Lebeau, executive manager. Unfortunately, Mr. Gordy Klassen, president, and Ross Hinter, vice-president, both of whom had planned for some months to be here, could not be in attendance. I would now ask the Assembly to welcome our guests and give the gratitude of this House for the kind gift. [applause]

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of individuals who are visiting the Alberta Legislature today from my constituency. I think it is so important for these bright kids to visit the Legislature. As you know, Mr. Speaker, they will be tomorrow's leaders. We have with us today 38 grade 6 students from Bowden Grandview school,

that are seated in both galleries. They are accompanied by teachers Teri Patterson and Tracy Dreher and parent helpers Charlie Brooks, Kevin Robertson, Janna Miller, Jackie Berggren, Maggie Peckham, and Brenda Sherwood. I would ask them all to rise so that others may join me in giving them a warm welcome to the Alberta Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two groups of introductions today. First of all, it's my honour today to introduce a number of people who are involved in today's very important initiatives surrounding the treatment, research, and prevention of diabetes. As we recognize World Diabetes Day today, we are also celebrating a significant milestone in the fight against the disease right here at home with the opening of the Alberta Diabetes Institute.

The people who are about to stand before you all represent organizations that are making significant advancements in the prevention and treatment of diabetes, helping Albertans to live healthier lives now and into the future. I'd ask them each to stand as I name them.

With us today from the Canadian Diabetes Association are James Gibbins, executive director for the prairie region; Rami Chowanec, regional chair for northern Alberta and Northwest Territories; Jack Ballish, regional director for northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories; from the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation board members Lorna St. Thomas, Susie Marano, Sarah Lord, and Denis Baumgartner; youth ambassador Shayne Baumgartner; and Celina Paley, fundraising co-ordinator; from the Alberta Diabetes Institute, Dr. Ray Rajotte, founding scientific director – if I may, Mr. Speaker, Ray has been a very significant player in diabetes and leading the team that discovered the Edmonton protocol – and his successor as scientific director of the Alberta Diabetes Institute, Dr. Ron Gill, new to us, from Colorado: welcome to Alberta; representing Capital health, Dr. Richard Lewanczuk, medical director of chronic disease management for Capital health and professor in the University of Alberta department of medicine. I would ask you to give our guests a warm and resounding welcome to the Alberta Legislature and a thank you for the work that they're doing for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House five leaders of Alberta's voluntary sector. There are more than 19,000 voluntary sector organizations in Alberta working in a variety of ways to improve the quality of life of Albertans. The staff and volunteers of these organizations are active in areas ranging from education to recreation to social services to much, much more. Over the last few months many of us have heard from these organizations as they contributed to the public discussion on Bill 1. We're pleased to have these five representatives in the House today as we consider that bill further.

I'd ask our visitors to stand when named: Russ Dahms, executive director of the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations; Lois Gander of the Legal Resource Centre of Alberta; Scott Lundell, Volunteer Alberta's volunteer board chair; Katherine van Kooy, president of the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations; and Bob Wyatt, executive director of the Muttart Foundation. I'd ask the House to give these visitors our warmest welcome and thanks for the work that they do for Albertans.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, Diane Gramlich, her husband, Marlin Styner, of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and executive director Mark Nicoll are accompanying a distinguished visitor seated in your gallery. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled Ms

Susan Scott-Parker, the founding chief executive of the Employers' Forum on Disability, a group founded in the United Kingdom 16 years ago to get more persons with disabilities into the workforce. Susan, a former Albertan and a member of the Order of the British Empire, is one of the world's leading authorities on the employment of persons with disabilities. I'd ask Susan to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Affordable Housing and Urban Development.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some very special guests who have joined us today. These are seven outstanding individuals who are providing strong leadership in their communities with the development of regional strategies and 10-year plans to end homelessness. I had an opportunity to meet with them today, and I look forward to working closely with them in the future. I would ask each of you to please rise as I introduce you to the Assembly and to stay standing. We have Jim Burke from Fort McMurray, Maribeth Friesen and Pam Ralston from Red Deer, Susan McGee from Edmonton, Lynn Pack and Heather Manarey from Grande Prairie, Diane Randell from Lethbridge. Wayne Stewart was here earlier but was unable to join us for the introductions. I'd ask the Assembly to please give your warm welcome to this very special group of people.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In what may well be a first for Rotary but certainly a first in my three years in this Assembly, the Rotary Club of Edmonton Gateway held their regular meeting this afternoon in the Legislature Annex Building. We had about 20 members join us for a tour of the Legislature this morning, approximately 30 members and guests were with us for lunch, and a number of those have managed to rearrange their schedule so that they could stay and observe question period this afternoon. I would like to briefly introduce them and ask them to rise as I do so. We have with us today Hazel and John Bellingham, newly arrived from the U.K. and new residents of the town of Beaumont – they're guests of a Rotarian today – Cec Blackburn, a past president of the Rotary Club of Edmonton Gateway; Al Buchanan, a member of the Edmonton Sunrise club; John Drebit; Agnes Fisher; Richard Fryga; Timothy Haak; Michael Lawal; Doug McEwan; Tereena Morelli; Otto Nuoranne, who is an exchange student from Finland and hosted by the Rotary Club of Edmonton Gateway this year; Lorne Parker; and Judy Wilson, who is a member of our club and also a chief of staff with the Alberta Liberal caucus. Oh, did I miss Jim Jones? You're not standing. I would ask them all to please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: There also are a number of members of this Assembly who are Rotarians. Perhaps they would like to stand as well.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a really committed group of students who are joining us in the public gallery today. These students are with the international pharmacy bridging program at the Bredin Institute. These are internationally trained pharmacists who are completing upgrading here so that they can join our health professionals in Alberta, and I

appreciate very much the time and effort that they are putting in to do that. If I could recognize Cynthia Lambertson-Poon, who is their teacher – if you would please rise, Cynthia – Tariq Chughtai, Shatha Hanna, Sukhpreet Birdi, Iqbal Shahid, and Ahmad Abouzeed. If the Assembly would please join me in welcoming these students.

Thank you.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased again today to see two guests in the gallery from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. Well known to this Assembly are Ken Kobly and Terri Kemball, formerly an editor of *Sherwood Park News*, now serving with the Alberta chamber. They make a dynamite team, and we're sitting here wondering just exactly what bill might be on the Order Paper today that would interest them. I would ask them to please rise and get the warm welcome from this room.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Employment for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Louheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities co-hosted Real People, Real Jobs, a workshop here in Edmonton that helped Alberta employers understand the opportunities and benefits of hiring persons with disabilities. Our partner in this event was the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce. The chamber has done a tremendous job in recent years through its Edmonton Employer Consortium to co-ordinate services for employers and persons with disabilities. The consortium includes regional businesses, government authorities, educational institutions, business associations, staffing organizations, and service providers. Its promotion of inclusion and the employment of persons with disabilities has led to an increase in the number of persons with disabilities joining Alberta's workforce.

Encouraging employers to recognize the value of persons with disabilities and see job candidates with disabilities as a good hiring opportunity is important, particularly in the Alberta labour shortage and climate. Susan Scott-Parker brought this message to Alberta as keynote speaker for this morning's workshop. Ms Scott-Parker is founder and chief executive of the Employers' Forum on Disability, a group founded in the United Kingdom 16 years ago but whose influence is now sweeping the globe. I'm pleased that Susan Scott-Parker, a former Albertan, and now one of the world's leading authorities on the employment of persons with disabilities, is with us today.

The Employers' Forum on Disability makes it easier for business to employ persons with disabilities, serve customers with disabilities, and engage stakeholders with disabilities. Barclays, Cisco Systems, Merrill Lynch, the UN, and the European Union are just some of the global players in business and government that are moving to get more persons with disabilities into the workforce. The group's message is simple: there's a significant advantage to business and to society in releasing the potential of the world's population who have a disability.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Alberta Diabetes Institute

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to recognize the opening of the Alberta Diabetes Institute. As is well known, diabetes is reaching epidemic proportions in Alberta. In

fact, more than 14,000 Albertans are diagnosed with diabetes each year. That's approximately 40 people per day. More than 150,000 adults are currently living with this disease.

Diseases like diabetes are the leading causes of avoidable illness, health system utilization, and premature deaths in Alberta. But, Mr. Speaker, there is good news. The Alberta Diabetes Institute, located at the University of Alberta, officially opened today. This facility will bring eight groups of researchers under one roof for the first time. The Alberta Diabetes Institute will enable researchers to improve diabetes prevention, develop new treatments, and ultimately work towards a cure for this dreaded disease. Their research has already produced groundbreaking results. The Edmonton protocol for diabetes is a world-leading, life-enhancing procedure for transplanting pancreatic islet cells to the liver of a patient with type 1 diabetes.

Today we are also marking World Diabetes Day. The Canadian Diabetes Association and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation are using today's activities to increase awareness of this major chronic disease, to celebrate milestones in treatment and research, and to remind us not to take our health for granted. With the efforts of these groups, Mr. Speaker, our province will continue to be a world leader in responding to diabetes. Please join me in congratulating everyone whose hard work has made the Alberta Diabetes Institute a reality. To those who are raising awareness on World Diabetes Day, we wish them every success in the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Members' Statements

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to deliver a member's statement on, well, members' statements. I rise today to urge that all hon. members of this Assembly use caution in the exercise of the great latitude that members' statements allow them.

Yesterday the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity used a part of his member's statement to criticize the attendance practices of one of our members. What would the constituents of Calgary-Varsity think if I outlined the attendance record of their MLA today? Mr. Speaker, for that matter, what would Albertans think if I pointed out that that member's leader sometimes leaves the House before the completion of question period, a practice that the Member for Calgary-Varsity apparently takes exception with?

The Member for Calgary-Varsity also takes great issue with incorrect or incomplete quotes and outlined this in his statement. What would his constituents or, for that matter, his former students think if I were to outline today that he himself incorrectly quoted George Orwell by adding a word to the quote? Could you imagine, Mr. Speaker? The member seems to be concerned about using quotes out of context. What would his constituents think if I pointed out that his statement referenced a public forum that he attended, yet the government system in George Orwell's book clearly would not have allowed any form of public debate or input? Would his constituents accuse him of using a passage or perhaps an entire book out of context? Could you imagine?

What would the member's constituents think if I pointed out today that the injurious words that he freely tosses about, Mr. Speaker, words like "deception" and "manipulation," are words that in some contexts have been ruled to be unparliamentary? Would his constituents conclude that the rules established to allow for civil debate are . . . [Mr. Oberle's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

1:20

Ethics in Government

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a terrible thing when citizens lose trust in their government, but that is exactly what happens when the government keeps giving the people good reason to lose that trust. Earlier this year the people begged the government to take action against rent gouging. Months later Albertans across the province are still struggling to deal with the huge rent increases.

Landowners in rural Alberta, traditionally strong Tory supporters, are finding that their trust is being taken for granted as Bill 46 threatens to take away their right to be heard.

The province's public boards, which make decisions that affect hundreds of thousands of Albertans, are overwhelmingly dominated by members of the Tory party. This government has severely undermined the credibility and objectivity of these vital boards, and when they are undermined, so is the public trust.

The government forced through Bill 20, which hides ministerial briefing notes from the public for 15 years, a gross breach of the Premier's promise to be accountable to the people. What kinds of secrets do ministers need to hide from the people for a decade and a half?

Mr. Speaker, when a government comes to feel that it has a divine right to power, it is inevitable that they begin to take the trust of the people for granted. That attitude is not only an insult to the citizens of Alberta, but it is dangerous to our democracy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Funding for Nonprofit Human Services Agencies

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province is home to quality dedicated nonprofit organizations that provide care for families, youth, and children at risk. Some have been serving for more than a quarter of a century, yet since 1994 certain costs have not been addressed by the funding formula used by the government. While rapid growth is pushing up costs, these agencies are not receiving help with gasoline, insurance, and electricity. Any increases have been for salaries and benefits only. These are minimal and do not take into account the experience of staff and allow them to move on the salary grid.

Mr. Speaker, these are good people doing good work for a vital cause. They are not in it for the money. Yet oversight is putting their operations into poverty, increasing demand on their services, and forcing them to beg, like the theme where Oliver brings his bowl to Mr. Bumble in the workhouse and plaintively asks: please, sir, may I have more?

There's injustice added to this injury. Children's Services and other ministries recognize the calibre of staff of these groups and attract them with higher wages while using the private sector as a training ground and source of expertise. In a province where this government professes not to compete with the private sector and to be committed to dealing with the challenges of growth, workers in these organizations find it hard to accept, as I do, how those giving to meet a public need can be taken for granted by those pledged to serve the public good.

I appeal to the government to take this under consideration, to bring support for these groups from welfare basement to a level appropriate to one of the world's leading economies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Remembrance Day 2007

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure to rise and to recognize the achievement of two remarkable young women from my constituency: Corley Farough and Sarah-Anne Jozsa, both students from the St. Mary school in Taber who remembered to remember. Corley placed first nationally in her senior division of the Royal Canadian Legion's Remembrance Day poetry competition and was invited to Ottawa to participate in the national Remembrance Day ceremony by laying a wreath on behalf of all the youth of Canada. Last year Sarah-Anne placed first in Alberta in her junior division and read her poem here in Edmonton.

I would like to say how much I appreciate the emphasis of Remembrance Day that occurs in my constituency. It is inspiring for all, especially for other youth. It raises the understanding and awareness of the sacrifices of our veterans and their families. We as citizens enjoy the freedom bought with their lives. We should make sure to pass it on to young people in the understanding of that sacrifice. Sarah-Anne and Corley's poems show us that their parents and teachers are doing just that.

I would like to share a part of Corley's poem *Crosses with the Assembly*.

Crosses are standing row after row
A silent reminder of men we don't know
Men who have given up all of their lives
Men who left children and warm loving wives . . .

This pain in his gut is not hunger or fear
But the loss of his innocence and all he holds dear . . .

In the pit of his soul is an ache he can't mend
The news hit him hard of the death of a friend
The sickening feeling of loss only grows
As the fields keep filling with crosses in rows . . .

If tomorrow will come, he does not know
But crosses are standing row after row.

In closing, I would like to share Sarah-Anne's closing lines from her poem *I Will Never Know*.

I will never know what you went through
To set our country free.

But this I know, I won't forget,
That your death was for me.

head:

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The chair of the Select Special Personal Information Protection Act Review Committee.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the chair of the Select Special Personal Information Protection Act Review Committee I'm pleased to table five copies of the committee's final report. Copies are also being circulated to members.

I'd like to thank Mr. Tom Thackeray and the staff from Service Alberta for the time and expertise that they contributed to this project. I'd also like to thank Mrs. Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk of the Legislative Assembly Office, for her professionalism and dedication during the entire process and to acknowledge the contributions of committee members from all three parties for the completion of the committee's mandate.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to present

a petition signed by 65 constituents of Wetaskiwin-Camrose and area. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to pass Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, and not dilute its contents so as to compromise the version approved at second reading, in order to address the enormous health, social and financial implications of tobacco use in Alberta.

Thank you.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, like the previous member I am pleased to present a petition signed by 39 people from Red Deer and central Alberta to petition the Legislative Assembly to pass Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Likewise, I have two petitions: one from 18 residents of Cypress-Medicine Hat and one from three residents of Highwood urging the Legislative Assembly to pass Bill 45.

Mr. Martin: Likewise, likewise, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 60 Albertans also urging the Legislative Assembly to pass Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition today that reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to launch a full public inquiry under the authority of the Public Inquiries Act into spying practices by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (AEUB) and the Minister of Energy's oversight role of the AEUB.

This petition is signed by concerned citizens from Bowden, Bashaw, Ponoka, Innisfail, Bluffton, and Lindale to name a few.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two petitions today. I join my colleagues in also presenting a petition signed by 542 individuals, mostly from Calgary and Edmonton, who are urging the Assembly to pass Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007.

The second petition that I have today, Mr. Speaker, is signed by several hundred Albertans who ask the government to ensure that remuneration paid to employees working with persons with disabilities is standardized, that they are fairly compensated and their wages remain competitive, that they have improved access to professional development opportunities, and for the government to introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level of care standards.

Thank you.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Royalty Revenues

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General has exposed the fact that Department of Energy annual reports presented

false and unsupported claims to Albertans. This isn't about how one interprets fair share. This is really very simple. It's about this government deliberately misleading the people of Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Does the minister accept that he has a responsibility, a personal and legal responsibility, for his annual reports to this Assembly to be accurate, to be backed up by the facts, or is telling the truth simply a policy decision? [interjection]

The Speaker: That would be a point of order? Yes.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this question, again, it came up yesterday. We answered it yesterday. I'm well prepared to stand here today and for the rest of this session and answer that question again and again and again if it's necessary. The truth of the matter is that Alberta Energy and I stand behind the information that was included in the annual reports in question, particularly the one for '03-04.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, I paraphrase what you said in the last statement – we are going to have a point of order on it – but I'm going to caution you to avoid innuendo such as along the lines: telling the truth is a matter of policy. There's a very, very strong innuendo in there that I will not tolerate.

Proceed to your second question.

Royalty Revenues (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the decision to ignore evidence of failing royalty regimes and ignore recommendations from experts in the department is a policy decision, one made by governments, not civil servants. This Tory government was certainly entitled to make that decision, and unfortunately for the people of Alberta they did. But they are not entitled, despite what they think, to deceive Albertans about that decision. Albertans own the resources. This government broke the public trust and deceived the owners. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Will the minister admit that the decision to report false and misleading information in the annual report was a political decision, one made by members of the government with the support of this Premier?

The Speaker: We've got a second point of order with respect to this and its language.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is getting to the point of being absolutely ridiculous. I have said that I stand behind the report that was done, the 2003 report that the hon. gentleman across the way speaks about.

In fact, in that period of time there were three commodity reports delivered and work done with respect to three commodities in the province of Alberta and the royalties issue around those. The information was made available to the Auditor General. Whether or not there was a cross-commodity report done that he didn't feel was complete, the cross-commodity reports are there if he wishes to look at them all. I understand they weren't all reviewed. The information is there. The truth is there, and I stand by it.

Dr. Taft: Well, then, if the minister is so confident in the truth, let

the people judge. Will he make public all the internal documents itemized by the Auditor General in his report, and will he do it uncensored?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, every government in every democracy in the world has legislative protection with respect to some information that's provided to the cabinet. There are documents that are internal to every government, and those documents that are protected we will continue to protect.

What I will say is that in 2003-04 reports were done. The Auditor General is free to look at them again if he wishes.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only thing this minister is protecting is his government's butt.

For seven years – seven years – this government has covered up the fact that it deliberately failed to collect billions of dollars in royalties. The minister and the Premier deny that the Department of Energy's annual reports contained false information on royalties, but those denials ring untrue. To the Minister of Energy: page 13 of the Department of Energy's '03-04 annual report states: "A review of Alberta's royalty structure and competitiveness was completed." Will the minister admit that this statement is false and that his department's annual report deceived the Legislature?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, every day and every year from the year 2003, if we want to go into the history, till the year 2010 we have and we will continue to protect the rights of Albertans, and we will collect the royalties that are due to the people of the province of Alberta on resources they own. We have done it in the past, and we'll continue to do it.

Dr. Taft: The same government annual report claims:

This review compared Alberta's royalty competitiveness against other North American and international jurisdictions. Alberta's conventional oil and natural gas regime was ranked as among the most rigorous regimes in Canada and the world.

It turns out to be completely untrue, and this government knew it, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: how could he stand by when his government was misleading the people of Alberta so deeply?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what's misleading. What's misleading is the statements that are being made by the member opposite. I'll tell you what happened in '03-04. I'll tell you some facts: \$15 billion in royalty revenue to the province of Alberta, '03-04; \$2 billion in lease sales and bonus bids; \$43 billion in capital investment, 2003-04; jobs for Albertans. That's what we created.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, let's just see where the Minister of Energy actually stands. Is the Minister of Energy saying that the Auditor General is deceiving the public? Is the Auditor General wrong, Mr. Minister? Is he wrong?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you emphatically – and I can tell you that I believe that the people of Alberta agree with me – that who is wrong is the member opposite. That's who's wrong.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, this government wants to play forgive and forget with billions of dollars in royalties that rightly should have gone to the people of Alberta. Those dollars would have meant so much, for example, to the seniors of this province, many of whom bit the bullet for this government's cutbacks only to now learn that this government was squeezing seniors while letting billions of dollars slide out the back door. To the Minister of Energy: will this government come clean to the seniors of Alberta and make public all internal government reports on royalties, described in the Auditor General's report, uncensored?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, let's take a look at what's happened since I've been the Energy minister. We have a Premier who recognized that the royalty structure should be looked at from an independent point of view. Our Premier has done that. As we move forward in this province, the royalty regime for the future of the province of Alberta will serve this province and the people of this province very well.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the billions of dollars that this minister and this government want to pretend away were real dollars. They could have done so much. The people of Calgary, for example, are reporting a dramatic drop in their quality of life in recent years, citing concerns over roads and schools and hospitals. The people of Edmonton are facing double-digit tax increases, but this government let billions of dollars slide out the back door and then covered it up with misleading reports. To the Minister of Energy: will this government please do the honourable thing and tell the truth about what it knew about the failing royalty system and when it knew?

1:40

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you something that I know about the royalties. There is a royalty review that took place in the province of Alberta. It was delivered to the people of Alberta on the 18th of September. Shortly after that I sent a letter to the member opposite and asked him – I asked him – for his input so that we could add it – add it – to our own report that we did, that we generated. To this day I have absolutely no information from the people opposite. Nothing. None. No response.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the people of Alberta placed their trust in this government. The people of Alberta took the hit to their public services: public servants took pay cuts, thousands of people were laid off, hospital construction was delayed, schools were postponed. To the Minister of Energy: why did this government let billions of dollars slip away and then deceive the people of Alberta about it? Why did it betray the trust?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, we seem to have some kind of a broken record. Nevertheless, what I'll do is respond again. What I can tell you is that from 2000 to 2007 there weren't so many missing billions.

I'll tell you about billions. Royalty revenue to the province of Alberta: \$66.14 billion. Capital investment in the energy industry in the province of Alberta: \$202.7 billion. That's where the billions are. They're invested in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Quality of Life in Alberta

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While this government justifies its bottom-of-the-barrel royalties because of

out-of-control growth, the evidence is mounting that conditions are actually getting worse for most Albertans. Yes, most Albertans. While corporate profits and the incomes of the richest 10 per cent of Albertans are way up, thousands of ordinary families are one or two paycheques away from financial ruin or homelessness. In Calgary alone there are at least 20,000 people with a family income of less than \$15,000 who are paying more than 50 per cent of their income for housing. My questions to the President of the Treasury Board: what has this government got to say to those Albertans whose families are at risk of becoming homeless as a result of uncontrolled growth, sky-high rents, and a government . . .

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, there's no question that we are compassionate, that we have programs to look after those in Alberta that are less fortunate. But the biggest difference is this: our government tries to lift people to the top, and their philosophy pushes people to the bottom. Most Albertans want to strive for the top.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister can say that, but the facts are otherwise. Yesterday the city of Calgary released its 2007 citizens' satisfaction survey. Sixty-one per cent of Calgarians surveyed said that their quality of life has worsened in the last three years. The largest number cited overpopulation and pace of growth, but there are other reasons as well, including crime, cost of living, traffic congestion, poor infrastructure, housing costs, poverty, and homelessness. They are all identified by Calgarians for why they believe things are getting worse in their quality of life. My question is to the minister: how, with all of Alberta's wonderful opportunities and advantages, is this government able to make life for 61 per cent of Calgarians worse?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, if someone was listening to the question period from the start, they would wonder what on earth the facts have to do with the questions. That aside, there is a migration to Alberta from people all across the world. They're coming here to share in one of the most dynamic economies that we've seen. We are offering the highest average income, the highest standard of living. We provide the best health care system in the world and the best education system in the world, too. This government has consistently strived to lift people to the top, not attempted to drag them to the bottom.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Here's the chart from the Calgary report. These are the people that think things are getting better, these are the people that think that it's the same, and these are the people that think that it's getting worse. When will this government wake up and stop subsidizing big corporations with the lowest royalties in the world, tax cuts on corporations that are earning record profits, and do something for working families who are at risk of becoming poor or homeless?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it wouldn't surprise me at all if the hon. member had his chart upside down. It wouldn't surprise me at all. But we really want to ask Albertans: what do they want? They want an education system that's first class. They want a health care

system that's first class. They're coming here by the thousands, by the hundreds of thousands. They're coming here to get away from some of the provinces that his kinfolk have run into the ground. Alberta has become the destination for those with hopes and dreams.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Report of Premier's Task Force on Crystal Meth

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over a year ago government accepted the report of the task force on crystal meth, which recommended improved access to treatment as well as prevention programs to address crystal meth addiction in Alberta. Some of my constituents have been asking me: what happened to that report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year my department, the Department of Health and Wellness, was asked to take the lead in preparing a cross-ministry response to the crystal meth task force report. The cross-ministry review concluded that addressing the effects of crystal meth effectively actually should be done in the context of dealing with a broader focus on illicit drugs and substance abuse. I'm pleased to report that the crystal meth review has evolved into the more comprehensive Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force, which has now reported. The report of the task force provides the broader focus needed to address addictions to illicit drugs and substance abuse as well as mental health issues, another key contributor to crime.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary is for the same minister. Have any of the recommendations of the crystal meth task force been implemented, or is this another taxpayer-funded report collecting dust on a shelf somewhere?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most of the health-related recommendations of the crystal meth report have been addressed either through the crime reduction and safe communities response or through the ongoing programs of my department and agencies like AADAC. For example, under the leadership of AADAC the Alberta drug strategy was developed in 2005 on the principle that a comprehensive approach to the use and abuse of alcohol and illicit drugs is necessary. The Alberta drug strategy focuses on prevention, treatment, crime reduction as well as policing and enforcement. Under the drug strategy, the PCHAD legislation, funding for local drug coalitions, initiation of Better Together school projects in a total of nine school boards, all contribute directly to the reduction of crime and addiction.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Alberta Utilities Commission Act

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. What are this government's intentions regarding the buying and selling of water?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue that the member raises with respect to water is one which has to do with the licensing of water and the transfer of licences in a water basin that is fully allocated. The ministry has been developing a policy, will continue to develop a policy to allow for the transfer of licences from one licence holder to another, but it does not and will not condone the sale of water.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That certainly was an interesting response.

My next question is to the Minister of Energy. Under Bill 46 the Utilities Consumer Advocate is not only responsible for the purchase of electricity and natural gas . . .

Speaker's Ruling Hypothetical Questions

The Speaker: Okay. Please sit down. The third time now I've said this: Bill 46 hasn't been introduced for second reading. It hasn't been approved by this Assembly. It has no status. You're not going to use question period to debate a bill that hasn't even reached second reading. It's the third time I've said this now.

Alberta Utilities Commission Act (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: My question, Mr. Speaker, is: why is this government planning on turning water into a commodity to be traded and sold to other jurisdictions under the sections in this bill?

The Speaker: Okay. Last question. Proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm sorry?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

1:50 Olymel Pork Processing Plant

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A few days ago, in fact on Monday of this week, an order was imposed on the Olymel pork processing plant in Red Deer, temporarily preventing them from shipping pork products to the U.S. My question today is to the Minister of Ag and Food. Can this minister provide us with an update on this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it seems like it never rains but it pours. As we know, this is a temporary measure, the slowdown at Olymel. The CFIA has been in contact with the USDA, and together they're working with Olymel to help resolve this issue. Apparently, these infractions are only minor, so we're hoping it's only a short matter of time before they're resolved. Delisting doesn't happen very often, but from time to time it does, and we'll deal with it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. How will the temporary delisting of this Olymel plant by the USDA affect our pork producers in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Red Deer plant is still open, and it's still processing pork. Olymel can ship to the rest of their customers throughout Canada and to export markets other than the U.S. They do have other Canadian plants that can ship to the U.S., but the particular Olymel plant in Red Deer cannot.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: with the ongoing challenges that face the pork producers and their industry in Alberta today, what is the government of Alberta doing to help this industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess that's why when it rains, it pours. The pork industry and the red meat industry certainly seem to get hammered from time to time. I met with the pork industry in September. We have the short-term program, of course, the Alberta farm recovery plan, where we're going to make \$165 million available to the red meat industry as a transition program for the short term.

Long term, Mr. Speaker, the pork industry recovery plan on their own is now under way, where the pork people are coming up with their long-term plans, and we'll try to work with them on their plans as they move forward into some stability.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Contracted Human Services Agencies

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I last questioned the Minister of Children's Services regarding the wage discrepancies between government employees and contracted agencies, the minister answered that the issue is being reviewed. Given this government's track record on so-called internal reviews, this may never see the light of day. We need assurances now. Since these agencies provide a government-sanctioned service, why doesn't the government discontinue its practice of paying these people less immediately?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I want to say that I agree with the comment that the same member made just a few minutes ago that we have good people doing good work for a good cause. I do believe that.

It's not just that it's been under review. I can tell you that we've worked very closely with our contracted agencies in the last two years. We've given increased funding of \$20 million to address the issues that they have laid out for us. As recent as last week we gave another \$26 million, and I can tell you – and I said this last week as well – that I am committed to working with them on their current and their ongoing issues.

Mrs. Mather: Last week the minister assured this House that these funding and allocation practices were currently being examined. Despite the one-time funding patch awarded, there are still many agencies projecting the possibility of shutting down as early as this winter. Agencies provide for the majority of administered government services in this province. If they are forced to close, what will the government do with all of these children, youth, and families at

risk? Is this acceptable treatment for the most vulnerable citizens of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that we will never put a child at risk in this province. We are working closely with the association, like I said. We did offer a lot of relief with their current situation. I can tell you that as early as this weekend I am once again meeting with the association for Alberta families and children to make sure that we are in line and on target for working with them to meet their needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's practice of case-by-case contract allocation is yet another factor causing unnecessary problems for an already strained sector. The extreme competition that is fostered by these practices is sometimes resulting in less qualified agencies receiving a class of vulnerable individuals that they are ill prepared to handle. Will the minister commit to standardizing the contract award system for social agencies charged with taking care of our most vulnerable citizens based on merit and service rather than detrimental competition?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually glad that you've raised this issue. It was just within the last couple of weeks that I've asked for more information on the case-by-case contracting situation that we have, and it also will be a topic of discussion this weekend.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Child Care Licensing Regulations

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Red Deer, like in many other Alberta communities, child care continues to be of high importance to parents. The Child Care Licensing Act was passed in the spring session with the understanding that a regulation would also be developed. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Can you tell me the status of the child care licensing regulation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to briefly give you an update on the consultation. Between May and July we have consulted with Albertans. We heard from 1,500 of them through 16 public meetings in 11 communities as well as online. I do want to take a moment to thank everyone that took part. It's very valuable information to be moving forward with. We did commit to putting the results of the consultation on the website, and we did that last week, so people can go onto the Children's Services website and see what it is that we heard. I can tell you that we'll now look closely at all of the results and all of the viewpoints that were shared with us and move forward on what will be acceptable to parents, operators, and children in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My second question to the same minister. My constituents are concerned that the new regulation will make it even harder for them to find affordable child care. Can you assure Albertans that this is not the case?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to remind everyone that the consultation, the proposals were just for discussion purposes. It is a very open process, and like I said, it is on the website. When you go on the website, you can see that we had a variety of opinions. We have some of the proposals that were well accepted, others that were not. I can tell you that we will pay attention to the results of what Albertans had to say, and we will have a reasoned response for all of the proposals.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: when will the child care licensing regulation come into effect?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do expect that the act will be proclaimed in the spring. I can tell you that between now and then we will continue working with the child care community. Also, I would like to just assure Albertans that for any changes, we will make sure that there are reasonable timelines for implementation when we do agree with the regulations.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Regional Municipal Funding

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sitting here listening to all these problems being enumerated today, and now the citizens of Edmonton face a big, fat tax increase, a double-digit property tax hike. Edmonton city council is talking about that in order to pay for the necessities of life in a city: fire, police, ambulance service, snow removal, affordable housing, plus a whole host of services and infrastructure used by residents of all the surrounding suburban communities. The Conservatives' municipal funding plan doesn't sound all that sustainable to me. To the minister of municipal affairs. It's his responsibility to fix this. What's he going to do to get needed dollars into the hands of city governments so they can do the job they were elected to do?

Mr. Danyluk: I'm not sure what the member opposite is trying to suggest, if he's trying to suggest that the government should take over those municipalities. Municipalities have asked for autonomy. This Premier and this government have very much addressed the sustainability and predictability for the future for municipalities with a municipal sustainability initiative that amounts to \$11.3 billion over 10 years – \$11.3 billion – and, speaking to Edmonton and area, amounts to over \$3 billion to support those municipalities.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, cities are in this pickle because the Conservatives first failed to collect billions in royalties over the years. Now they're trying to fix things by throwing billions at the municipalities, talking a good game about autonomy but without a plan. Funny darn thing. Cities are still

having to raise their taxes to provide services to their citizens. That's not the way it should be. To the minister. Cities shouldn't be forced to raise taxes to pay for the province's incompetence. Is the minister prepared to rework municipal sustainability funding so that it's there and equitable to all municipalities?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe I should ask the Minister of Energy to again supplement the amount of funding that has been supported to this province of all the investment by the industry, which, in turn, makes this province the most attractive province in Canada. We have a hundred thousand people that are coming to this province to invest their lives into this province. Looking 10 years into the future for predictability for municipalities and sustainability is not a short-term solution.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, size doesn't matter. It's what you do with it.

The Conservatives continually dodge the issue of mandatory regional planning. The bills for providing the services for all the people of the capital region come to city hall in Edmonton, but neither the MLA for Sherwood Park nor the mayor of Strathcona county has any interest in sharing tax revenues from the refineries and the upgraders. You know, in Sherwood Forest Robin Hood took from the rich and gave to the poor. I think the Member for Sherwood Park has it backwards. To the same minister. Strathcona county has clearly indicated no interest in sharing their vast tax base. What will this minister do if an agreement cannot be reached on regional planning? Is he going to yell at them? What's the plan?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that Strathcona county and 24 municipalities, including the city of Edmonton, are around the table in the discussion of the capital city integrated plan. We are working with those municipalities, looking at ways that we can co-operatively work together and find solutions to some of the challenges we have. This is a province that has a lot of growth, a lot of prosperity. With that growth there are some challenges, and we are working on those challenges.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Forecasts from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation indicate the following. In 2008 some 55,000 new people are expected to move to Alberta, the number of new multifamily homes being built will decrease, and the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Edmonton will rise to \$1,090 from \$950 while vacancy rates drop to .5 per cent. Calgary rents will go from \$1,075 to \$1,140 with a vacancy rate of 1 per cent. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. When is your government going to stop being ruled by right-wing ideology . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister for the third time.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, to call a plan of 11,000 units over five years in support of housing I do not say is an ideology. It is the proposed plan. Two hundred and eighty-five million dollars extra this year in support of housing is not an ideology; \$143 million to high-growth communities, \$68 million in support . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the rents are still going up, and more and more people are being thrown out and are homeless. Those are the rates that are going up.

My second question is to this minister, then. Along with rent guidelines why are we not prepared to plug the loopholes in dealing with condo conversions? We're losing more rental apartments to condo conversions than we can build. That's the reality.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we do have more and more people coming to Alberta because Alberta is the place of opportunity. That is why this government is looking at supporting the housing and not only supporting the housing but supporting the rent supplement for those who need it. The prevention and eviction fund is for those individuals that may find hardship in paying their rent or being able to get their first month's rent. This government is addressing those needs and working with the people of Alberta.

Mr. Martin: That's why 61 per cent of Calgarians think they're worse off than they were in the past, Mr. Speaker.

The government's response, frankly – and the minister has alluded to it – has been pitiful. The homeless and eviction fund – yeah, it's taxpayers' money, running out of control, up to \$17.6 million, fraud charges. The mortgage fund subsidy is being tapped out. How can this minister justify his answer, using taxpayers' money, when all he has to do is bring in rent guidelines and condo conversion controls? That would solve the problem.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, rent control does not work. It does not add any units to the system. We have a hundred thousand people moving into Alberta. When you have a hundred thousand people coming into Alberta, they do not bring services with them, but more importantly they do not bring housing. We need to have initiatives for housing to be built.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Off-highway Vehicle Restrictions

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents, some who have recently moved here from other provinces, like to go outdoors and enjoy Alberta's beautiful trails on their off-highway vehicles; however, many of them have been telling me that more and more restrictions are being placed on where they can go. My questions are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why are these Albertans facing so many limits on public lands?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer is simple: our ever-rising population. In the last 25 years we've seen the population of this province grow by a million people, from 2 million to 3 million. In the next 20 years we expect another million people. So while the number of people keeps growing, the size of our province doesn't. There are more and more people doing more and more activities on the same piece of land. We've reached a tipping point. The old policy of allowing anyone to do anything anywhere any time just isn't going to work anymore, and that's why we're bringing in the land-use framework.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister:

given that 99.9 per cent of these OHVs are hard-working, law-abiding citizens, what should I tell my constituents who feel that off-road enthusiasts are being singled out and no one else faces such restrictions?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the reason that the off-highway vehicle community feels perhaps particularly affected by this is that they're the fastest growing recreational group in the province. In the last 20 years the number of registered off-highway vehicles has grown fourfold, from 17,000 to over 82,000. It's predicted that as many as another 30,000 will be sold just this year. So with these kinds of numbers come new challenges and conflicts. The land-use framework will be addressing these, but we already deal with some of these issues through the forestry land-use zones, the FLUZ activities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the same minister. Again, my OHV-riding constituents provided a lot of feedback to the land-use framework of which you speak. When can Albertans expect to see this land-use framework and see it in action?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the off-highway vehicle community indeed provided a lot of very useful information to the land-use framework process. We consulted both with the public and also with stakeholder groups, including the off-highway vehicle groups. All this information is now in the department. We're developing our draft, and Albertans can expect to see the draft framework early in the new year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Government Employment Contracts

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Billions of dollars in uncollected royalties, yet we continue to see top Tories benefiting at the teat of this government and yesterday a refusal from the minister of international and intergovernmental affairs to address the contracts and an effort to explain away not making them public.

Today I'd like to talk about the contracting practices of the Calgary health authority. When they appeared before the Public Accounts Committee this past September, Mr. Speaker, we learned that Kelley Charlebois was given \$12,000 by the Calgary health authority to help write a speech. He didn't even write the speech by himself; he helped to write it. Untendered contracts . . .

The Speaker: I'm afraid we're now out of time for your question, so I don't know where we're going to go with this.

2:10

Mr. R. Miller: My question is . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. The time is over by the rules of the House, so go to your second one.

Mr. R. Miller: I'll go to my second question. That's not the only one, Mr. Speaker. You know what happens? The gravy train seems to go on forever. The gravy train goes on forever if you're a top Tory. Rod Love, \$42,000, sole-source contract, no performance measurements. They didn't follow their own contracting procedures. The question is to the minister of health. When is he going to put a stop to this?

Mr. Hancock: You know, Mr. Speaker, what I'd really like to put a stop to is people rising in the House and besmirching the character of individuals by throwing out unsubstantiated allegations. The Calgary health authority has the full authority to hire the people it needs to do the job it does. They're not told who to hire by this minister, and if they think they need consultants for a reason, I'm not going to spend my time going into the depths of why they believe they need a consultant. The health operation is a \$12 billion operation. The Calgary health authority is close to \$3 billion, and they've got competent people running their business. But what I do decry is somebody rising in this House and besmirching . . .

The Speaker: And I have to go to the hon. member now.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not this hon. member that raised those names; it's the Auditor General of this province who has a problem with the way that your department issues contracts to your top Tory friends. It's time that we put a stop to it, and he suggested that you do. I want to know when your department is going to deal with it. When are you going to stop the secrecy? When are you going to stop the favouritism? When are you going to start following your department's own policies in terms of issuing contracts? And it's not wrong. Tell the Auditor General it's wrong.

Mr. Hancock: I don't have a problem complying with the Auditor General's request with respect to contracting and everything else with respect to accountability. What I do have a problem with is people who believe that just because you've ever done work for this government or have ever been involved in the political process, you ought not to ever do any contract work. This is an appropriate process for people to engage in, and individual reputations ought not to be taken lightly as these members opposite try to do day after day after day. [interjections]

Prairie Grasslands Land Exchange

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, members of the Alberta Wilderness Association and others have recently contacted me regarding a proposed land exchange. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member Calgary-Nose Hill has the floor. You may start over again.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Members of the Alberta Wilderness Association and others have recently contacted me about a proposed land exchange in the Hays area of southern Alberta. The association is concerned that ecologically sensitive public land is going to be swapped for potato production. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What can he advise the House about this specific land exchange that the Alberta Wilderness Association is referring to?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the concerns of the hon. member and also that of the Alberta Wilderness Association. The land-use framework has focused greater public attention on the importance of habitat conservation, including the native grasslands in southern Alberta.

I am aware that there have been inquiries with respect to the project referred to here, but this is pretty routine. We get inquiries all the time about the rights and obligations of leased land, of public land, and we answer those. I can tell the hon. member that as of

today my department has not received any formal application regarding this specific land exchange, so it would be premature and hypothetical for me to respond to that question now.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: what is his department's policy regarding the protection of Alberta's native prairie grassland?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the agricultural use of these prairie grasslands, they have significant environmental value that is recognized in our department's policies. Our policy is to protect these areas and to limit the footprint of any activities that occur on them. Prairie grassland under most circumstances is not normally sold, and if it were to be exchanged, it would only be exchanged if the private land obtained were more environmentally valuable than the public land given up; in other words, we only trade up.

Dr. Brown: Again to the same minister: will the minister advise the House what the policy of his department is with respect to land exchanges and particularly with respect to land being broken out of the native prairie state?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, in this context two criteria must be met. First of all, the private land that we would obtain in such a swap would have to have, again, equal or greater public value than the public land that would be transferred to private ownership. Public value here includes the conservation of habitat such as that of fescue grasslands. The second criteria is that the real estate value for the land that the government obtains, again, must be equal to or greater than the value of the land that we would swap. We also review these proposals through other departments to see how other interests might be affected. That allows us to detect if there are any other concerns. So I repeat: if we do trade, we only trade up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not a good time for temporary foreign workers in Alberta. Reports of abuses continue to pour in: employers providing housing with 14 people in a three-bedroom house, deductions from paycheques for housing, lower wages than promised. When workers finally find the phone number for the foreign worker information line, which is not effectively advertised and which is available in English only, they are referred to several other government departments. My question is for the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. How will these workers be informed about their rights and be provided with adequate government assistance instead of the runaround that they currently receive?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it's true that we get sometimes as many as a thousand, sometimes over a thousand, calls a month on our foreign worker hotline. These calls are not all about complaints relative to employers. There are frequently other questions about some of our programs, like earn while you learn. If anybody isn't able to access the phone number, obviously, calling the RITE government number of 310-0000 is available anywhere in Alberta. But we've had such a response to this that I'm pretty confident that most know it's 877-427-6419. Since October 2006 we've had a great deal of positive response to our number.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Temporary foreign workers are not a commodity to be purchased for a limited time and then sent back home. They are people, many of them with families. In view of the fact that a high percentage of these workers are filling low-income, unskilled positions, my question is to the same minister. What programs are in place to help new workers settle in Alberta and be made, also, aware of their rights?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, this year with the federal government doubling up their money and with continued support from ourselves, integrated settlement services have been available in several communities. We have had tremendous success with programs that provide them low-cost funds for loans if they need that for accreditation and other purposes. We have had tremendous fortune in working with nonprofit organizations both in Calgary and Edmonton. The Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers is a particular advantage for people in this city. I would say that we've had a very positive response, not only from the temporary foreign workers but others who have come here accompanying some of our PNP program candidates, too.

Dr. B. Miller: The United Kingdom has an excellent program of licensing brokers, agencies, and labour providers. It is called the Gangmasters Licensing Authority. If brokers exploit foreign workers, they are subject to hefty fines and even jail time. The British Gangmasters Licensing Authority is concerned with identifying the more persistent and systematic exploitation of workers rather than concentrating on isolated cases of noncompliance, as has been the practice of this government. Will the Alberta government put in place this kind of effective monitoring agency?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we have in place – and I would like to think we wouldn't call them gangmasters – very strict legislation with very severe penalties around those who would abuse temporary foreign workers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Alberta Diabetes Institute

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Diabetes touches all of us, and there is no cure. I had the opportunity this morning to attend the official opening of the diabetes research institute at the University of Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What financial contribution has our government provided to date to this new institute, and what will your department do to continue to support this institute?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a very important day, as we learned earlier both in a member's statement and in the introduction of some very important visitors to our Legislature. Dr. Ray Rajotte has led the Diabetes Institute for some time, and now we can be proud of a very solid facility, which will bring five departments at the University of Alberta together – the minister of advanced education may wish to supplement – into a common research facility. So it was a very proud day. The government of Alberta has contributed \$246 million to the health research innovation facilities at the University of Alberta, and other research dollars have of course been provided by the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, about \$20 million specifically to the Diabetes

Institute project. The Diabetes Institute could be one of the pinnacles of success in this province of Alberta.

Mr. VanderBurg: Back to the same minister. We need to create environments that support healthy choices, Mr. Speaker. Minister, when will your department start tackling other issues, like obesity, that contribute to diabetes? It's a nascent problem.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, a very good question. I've been tackling my own problem of obesity for some months now and, I think, with some success, but I do that as minister of health because I want to walk the talk that I've been talking with Albertans about for the last nine months or 10 months, maybe, since I've been appointed to this ministry. Talking about Albertans taking responsibility for their own health, weight is a very important issue. It's particularly important with respect to adult-onset diabetes. Members may have read in the newspaper on the weekend, as well, about the impact of obesity or weight with respect to those persons who have prostate cancer and their morbidity rates. So obesity is a very important program, and we need to talk to Albertans about taking that personal responsibility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Diabetes is on the rise within our First Nations communities. To the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs: do you think that this new world-class Diabetes Institute that has opened today in Edmonton will assist in mitigating the rise in diabetes within aboriginals?

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say as a type 1 diabetic that on my first day in Alberta 30 years ago I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. I want to thank every member of the Legislature who joined the Premier and the minister of health today at this world-class opening. It was interesting that last year, you recall, we had: who is Canada's greatest Canadian? My wife and I – no disrespect to Tommy Douglas, who truly was a great Canadian – voted for Banting and Best. I think this institution today is a shining example in this world that the next Banting and Best will come from right here in Alberta through this great institution that we have.

The Speaker: Well, that concludes Oral Question Period. There were 94 questions and answers this afternoon. We must now return to the Routine. When we broke from the Routine for Oral Question Period, we were on the Routine subject known as petitions, and I was in the process of recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

head:

Presenting Petitions (continued)

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This particular petition is extremely popular in this province. I am tabling 187 more signatures on the petition which reads that the undersigned residents of Alberta urge the government to "ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector" – we had some questions in question period today on this – ensuring that the employees "are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive." Number three would be "employees' access to professional development opportunities," and

number four would be to “introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.”

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to stand and present two petitions to the Assembly today. The first one is signed by 122 oil and gas workers and people from the province asking the government to “discard the Royalty Review Report and eliminate restructuring of the Oil and Gas Royalties.”

The second one is signed by 160 of my constituents regarding Bill 45 and ensuring that it passes and that we don't water down the smoking law that's coming in place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, did you have a petition?

Mr. Mason: A couple of tablings, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No, petitions.
Are there others?

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 48 Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce for first reading Bill 48, the Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

Bill 48 amends three key health statutes: the Hospitals Act, the Nursing Homes Act, and the Regional Health Authorities Act. These amendments clarify roles and responsibilities within our regional health system to ensure that regional health authorities have the authority and the responsibility to plan for and direct the delivery of health services in their respective regions.

The bill also addresses a need to clarify accountability, a need identified by the Health Quality Council of Alberta during its review of infection prevention and control practices. All health facilities in our province must be operated safely and effectively. Albertans expect and deserve no less.

The proposed amendments follow through on the government's commitment to make needed legislative changes to better assure Albertans of the quality and safety of the health service delivery system.

Mr. Speaker, I would move first reading of Bill 48.

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today that highlight health research in our Alberta. One is the program for the recent successful Northern Alberta Brain Injury Society event which I attended.

The second is the program for this morning's official opening of the Alberta Diabetes Institute, attended by many members here and

mentioned by other members today. That was a very successful opening. It brings to mind the fact that the Alberta building trades have raised almost \$950,000 for diabetes research in the last four years alone. This centre is vital. It's making our capital city and our province proud of the work being done on this devastating disease.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do have a petition. But it wasn't in the appropriate form, so I'm doing it as a tabling. That's probably the confusion. It's a petition of citizens in Airdrie, Calgary, and Crossfield who are concerned about Bill 46. They identify nine flaws in the bill, including lack of input farmers will have on future EUB activities, especially in light of the debacle surrounding the 500 kV line.

The second tabling is from Rhondda Dugdale, yet another Albertan who is very concerned that Bill 46 will be stripping away the democratic rights of Albertans to protect their property. She asks: who benefits from this bill, landowners or industry?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table correspondence from Peter Harvey of De Winton. He's gone through a terrible ordeal for months in getting the medical attention he needs for a severe shoulder injury. He's had to close his greenhouse business, which he had operated for 32 years. He's imploring the government to take action on surgery wait times.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling a three-page-long letter from Sharon Malott of Red Deer addressed to the leader of the NDP opposition. Sharon served our country in the Canadian armed forces in Wainwright in the '70s. Unfortunately, she now suffers from several mental health problems and is trying to survive in the face of an out-of-control rental market and low AISH rates. She has written this letter hoping to draw the attention of this Legislature to the plight of Albertans in the same position as she is in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table letters from 18 individuals concerned about the implications of proposed regulations for child care in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first one is a letter dated June 27, 2007, that I wrote to the hon. Minister of Energy regarding the invasion of privacy in Rimbey that occurred through the EUB.

The second tabling I have is an e-mail. This is the say no to Joe e-mail. This is an e-mail dated Wednesday, October 24, 2007. It's from the Department of Energy, saying no and “please exclude Joe Anglin from the meeting.” I can only assume, Mr. Speaker, that that was about Bill 46.

My third petition is a flyer that I got last week in Lacombe, and it's called killbill46.ca. I would urge all hon. members to have a look at this website.

Thank you.

2:30

The Speaker: Well, there's no such thing as Bill 26, as far as I can see.

Mr. MacDonald: Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. I said Bill 46, killbill46.ca. Sorry for the confusion. It's certainly Bill 46.

The Speaker: Okay. That's fair. I heard 26. There was no 26.

Anyway, any more kill bills? Any more tablings?

Hon. members, actually we had 94 questions and answers today, so it went along a lot quicker than I thought.

We had three points of order. The third one from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has been withdrawn.

Hon. Government House Leader, your first point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During Oral Question Period today we saw a shocking and bizarre performance on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition, which breached, in my view, *Beauchesne's* 485 with respect to the use of unparliamentary language; 489, which references statements which are unparliamentary. There were so many unparliamentary statements in the member's presentation today that I can't list them all. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but essentially they amounted to misleading the public, lying, deliberately misleading, false and misleading information. That was the tenor and the tone, if it was not the exact words, of the member.

He also breached *Beauchesne* 64 in terms of reflection on a member. *Beauchesne* 64, Mr. Speaker, specifically references, "The House has occasionally taken notice of attacks on individual Members." It goes on to indicate the types of attacks, including one particular attack in which the quote was "a cheat and a swindler." I would suggest that the tack that the hon. member took today in question period against the Minister of Energy clearly falls into that category in terms of suggesting – well, more than suggesting – directly, outright stating that the minister was deceiving the public, was lying to the public, that the government was lying to the public in annual statements. That, clearly, is unparliamentary. It was totally unsupported, and I'll get into the detail on that.

Also, Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne's* 409(3) is relevant. *Beauchesne's* 409(3) refers to: a question ought to seek information and therefore not be based on a hypothesis. Clearly, the whole gist of the member's questions was based on the hypothesis that there was something wrong in an annual statement, and I will deal with that particular piece. But also it should not be argumentative or make representations. Clearly, the member's questions were outside of *Beauchesne's* 409.

Beauchesne 409(7) also is a prohibition against casting aspersions.

Mr. Taylor: We get the point.

Mr. Hancock: You don't get the point. You've been belabouring the point over and over again, and you've been doing it in an unparliamentary way.

Beauchesne 409(7): "A question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions."

Mr. Speaker, the questions also breached the conventions of this House that one treats members in the House honourably and with respect and takes them at their word unless there is some proof that their word should not be taken. So let's get past the citations and into the substantive matter here.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview has today and I think in past days – but let's focus on today – gotten up and tried to ask questions and in his questions put a hypothesis that somehow this government misled, deceived, lied, and all those things and referenced an annual report.

Mr. Speaker, we have a Public Accounts Committee, and the Public Accounts Committee has the designated role of reviewing annual reports. If that hon. member believes that there is something inaccurate in an annual report or something that's in error in an annual report, he should be taking that to the Public Accounts Committee and exploring that. The hon. member should not be getting up in question period and casting aspersions on a member or using unparliamentary language to make political points. He should be doing his job as a member of this House and taking any error he finds in an annual report if he finds an error – and I submit to you that he won't find one, but if he did find an error, there's an appropriate way to deal with it, and that's not by using unparliamentary language, it's not by attacking members of the government, and it's not by using inflammatory language in this House.

Mr. Speaker, let's go further into the merits of what has been happening. The hon. member has been referencing the Auditor General's report. I need not remind that member or this House that the Auditor General is an officer of this House. Taking out of context out of the Auditor General's report, which is also, by the way, in the purview of the Public Accounts Committee to look into, they've been talking about lost billions of dollars. I believe the actual quote in the Auditor General's report on page 121 of volume 1 is that "the calculation estimates a range of \$0.7 to \$1.4 billion per year of un-captured rent, but this can only be considered a rough estimate." A rough estimate.

So the Auditor General's report doesn't say there was \$1.4 billion of lost revenue. That quote I have taken slightly out of context because there's a whole paragraph talking about what the calculation he's referring to is. But it's clear as you read through several pages of the Auditor General's report that the Auditor General was dealing with how you deal with a policy issue and doesn't come to the conclusion, not that I've seen in the report, that the Auditor General actually has a role in terms of determining public policy on behalf of the government of the people of Alberta but, rather, takes the role of pointing out some of the policy issues that he thinks should be undertaken, some of the reviews that he thinks should be undertaken, some of the issues that he thinks should be undertaken, none of which is done, Mr. Speaker, in the context of other aspects of government policy, none of which deals with the whole issue of whether there's an economic impact of a royalty change, none of which comes under the context of whether or not there might be an environmental policy, whether or not a gas flaring program might deal with another issue of importance.

I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member, by taking these out of the Auditor General's report and out of context without putting any framework around it, which, of course, he doesn't have time to do in a 45-second question, which is why he should be doing it in the Public Accounts Committee, and then suggesting, by using that language, that there's somehow lying in the annual reports of the government is not only substantively wrong but is definitely unparliamentary. I think the hon. member ought to be called to account now and ought to be asked to apologize to this House for his indiscretions.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, that was certainly a very wide-ranging discussion, considering it was a point of order called on two specific phrases that were used in the House. I think what's important here are two things. The first is the role of the opposition. I note that on page 32 of *Marleau and Montpetit* they outline how important that is. I quote, if I may:

The role of the opposition is key to our system of parliamentary democracy. Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier put it succinctly when he said: "... it is indeed essential for the country that the shades of opinion which are represented on both sides of this House should be placed as far as possible on a footing of equality and that we should have a strong opposition to voice the views of those who do not think with the majority."

The opposition, it's well recognized, has a role to play in this House, and that is about holding the government to account. We have a situation that has been referred to several times. In fact, I will take the same effort with it that the Government House Leader did. We have a situation where an annual report states some facts or holds something out that we are expected to take as true, and then we have other reports that challenge that.

Now, we have repeatedly asked the government and tried to hold them to account by saying, "Provide the information that backs up what you're saying because we can't get access to it," and the government is not forthcoming with those documents. We have an Auditor General's report which in three different places is saying that the information in that annual report is questionable. The Auditor General clearly had access to government documents which the government will not give us access to as well, so the questions arise.

2:40

Now, the issue of freedom of speech and the ability to raise those questions is a really important one in this House and allows the opposition to do its job. If I may reference page 74 of *Marleau and Montpetit*, specifically,

this freedom is essential for the effective working of the House. Under it, Members are able to make statements or allegations about outside bodies or persons, which they may hesitate to make without the protection of privilege. Though this is often criticized, the freedom to make allegations which the Member genuinely believes at the time to be true, or at least worthy of investigation, is fundamental.

Mr. Speaker, we have a situation where the Official Opposition under the guidance of the Leader of the Opposition has been pressing the government to release some information, and the government has chosen not to do so.

The Government House Leader spoke quite a bit about the tenor and the tone of recent exchanges in the House, and I agree. The rhetoric has inflamed; it has accelerated; it has become inflammatory on both sides of the House. I think that if we want to examine the *Hansard* with as much leeway as my colleague has done, we would find, in fact, that that tone, which is mostly set by members of the government, has elevated itself in this House. Simple answers and simple tablings would have cooled the heat that has accelerated in the words on both sides of the House here. There is an escalation of inflammatory language, and it exists on both sides of the House.

I've set out that it's important that the opposition hold the government to account; that there is an upholding of freedom of speech, which is important to allow the members of the opposition to press the government on those questions; that we do have a back-and-forth, a give-and-take; and, indeed, that the rhetoric on both sides has been inflammatory in recent time and particularly over this issue.

The reflection on the individuals. I will respectfully disagree with my hon. colleague the Government House Leader in the particular set of questions that were asked today, on which he called the point of order and then took a flight of fancy over several weeks' worth of interplay between the Leader of the Official Opposition and the government. Those specific questions today were not particular reflections on an individual, if you look at the Blues, and I'm assuming that the Speaker has access to the Blues. I'm looking at the questions that the leader in fact asked. He's asking – I don't need to repeat the questions – does the minister have a responsibility for his annual report to be accurate? That's not an unfair reflection on someone.

The Government House Leader also raised the idea of a hypothesis and under 409(3) somehow suggested that we should not be questioning the government based on this. Well, we do have a situation where we have sets of documents that are conflicting, and we are trying to get to the bottom of that conflict between documents, where we have one set of documents that says one thing and we have an equally respected legislative officer whose document indicates that there is something else at play here, and in three different places he does mention that quite specifically.

On page 125:

The Department does not reconcile the one ... to the other, so it is not clear how sensitive the measure is in comparison to detailed technical review ... Indeed until the 2005-2006 Annual Report, the measure indicated successful performance by the royalty regimes while technical review suggested a different result.

Well, we can't get access to that technical review; that's why we keep asking for it. The government won't provide it, so they should be expecting increasing rhetoric in the questioning.

The quote on page 92 of the Auditor General's report, again: "In fact, for several years the measure portrayed satisfactory performance by the royalty regimes while detailed analysis in the Department indicated otherwise." Well, let's have the rest of the detailed analysis, please.

Let's look at page 106. Again, quoting from the bottom of that page: "The brief description concludes that Alberta's royalty regimes 'successfully encourage continued development while collecting a fair share of resource development profits'." The AG goes on to say, "While the Department did technical work during that year, no detailed cross-commodity internal report suggests this assertion in the Annual Report."

So we do have conflicting information. It is our job to press for answers on that. We have a situation where this particular issue is becoming very heated in this House, but it is the job of the Official Opposition to press the government to be open and accountable and to press for that information to be released. I would argue, therefore, that there is no point of order.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the arguments made by the hon. Government House Leader. Yesterday I rose on a point of order under *Beauchesne* 484, 485, and 486 in regard to a number of remarks which I contended were unparliamentary and which I believe impugned the motives of some of my colleagues in this House, and I asked that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition be called to order and required to apologize for those remarks. However, you ruled on that occasion that the derogation was in reference to a report and not to any one person or persons.

In my submission, Mr. Speaker, the nature and the tone of those remarks have continued in question period today. If anything, they have become more personal in nature. As a consequence, I believe that the order and decorum in this Chamber is suffering. I would

implore you through your good offices as the Speaker of this House to rule on these points of order in a manner that will restore and enhance the order and decorum in the Chamber. It's my respectful submission that the Leader of the Official Opposition should be called to a point of order on this issue, and he should be required to apologize to the House.

The Speaker: Are there others? No others?

I take it, Government House Leader, that in essence that was both points of order in one submission? And that's fair to the Official Opposition House Leader that the two could be dealt with at the same time.

Hon. members, there was a deterioration today, in my view. Yesterday we basically had certain words used in the Assembly. There were points of order dealt with. The chair basically indicated that as both of those points of order and the usage of the words generally dealt with a report, they could not be targeted to a particular individual and that on that basis the custom and tradition of the House basically allowed us to proceed in a certain way.

I'll give you this analogy. In an earlier life I once had the ability to be an educator, and when you walked into the classroom, you set rules. There was always little Tommy or little Mary who wanted to know exactly where that line was. They would creep right up to where that line was and stop their fingers right there at the edge of the line or put their little toe at the line, and you got through the first day. But the next day little Harry or little Billy saw this happen the day before, so he went crawling right up to the line, put his little toe or his finger one inch across the line, wanting to see what the teacher would do. Well, there were some who came down – I'm sure the hon. Member for St. Albert has experienced this once or twice – and stomped on that little toe or that little finger. As a result, little Billy or little Harry withdrew within the line, and the other members in the class observed this, saw this, and said: "Okay. The rule was there."

It seems that wherever the line was set yesterday, we crossed it today. It just seems to be this human kind of trait that doesn't distinguish from men to boys or women to little girls. When you're younger, you test it; you get older, you test it.

2:50

However, this is a kind of responsible place. This is not a schoolyard. This is not a hockey rink. There are rules of decorum, and there are traditions and everything else. There were a lot of citations given yesterday for parliamentary language.

Quite clearly in what was said yesterday and was said on a previous occasion, it is unparliamentary – underline "unparliamentary" – to insinuate that another member is not telling the truth. Now, whether the statement is artfully crafted or unartfully crafted – to just simply come up and tell somebody that he's a liar would not be very artful, or you come from another direction – it is incumbent upon the chair to intervene in such circumstances, and the chair did such today at the conclusion of the first set of comments by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Anything that can possibly create an innuendo that another member is not telling the truth is not acceptable in this House, is not acceptable in any parliament. When I take a look at the words of the Leader of the Official Opposition, and I've jumped into the first part of the question, "It's about this government deliberately misleading the people of Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Energy," no intervention from the Speaker or anyone else at this point in time.

Then the next part of the question, "Does the minister accept that he has a responsibility, a personal and legal responsibility, for his annual reports to this Assembly to be accurate, to be backed up by

the facts": put a stop there with a question mark; everything's fine. But, you know, he's just got to add the following: "or is telling the truth simply a policy decision?"

Now, if I take a look at 409(3) in *Beauchesne*, it says: "The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations." I have a great difficulty believing in my head that that last phrase complies with *Beauchesne*.

Then we go on. After there was an interjection, after there was an intervention, a point of order raised, and an intervention by the chair, another question. It's midway through the preamble, then the question: "My question is to the Minister of Energy. Will the minister admit that the decision to report false and misleading information in the annual report was a political decision, one made by members of the government with the support of this Premier?"

Well, I'm going to repeat 409(3). "The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations." Clearly, to me, that was offside again. Twice in the same time. So I don't know what the jig is. I have been here long enough to know that some members deliberately will push the envelope to see where it will go.

There are other options than pushing the envelope. One option is, of course, that the chair can get up once, twice, three times, name the member, and the member's gone. I've seen that happen before, done deliberately, too, by some members: deliberately provoke and reach that point. The chair has experienced this, has seen it. Only once in 10 years that I've had the pleasure of being the Speaker have I named such a member. I'm prepared to do it if need be.

We've also seen a situation whereby part of the jig might be: well, let's all just sort of storm out if we don't get our way. I've seen that happen too. Things went on; life went on; civilization did not come to an end.

There are a number of comments that the chair wants to make as well. With respect to the hon. Opposition House Leader's explanation about the role of the opposition, this is not in question by any member in this Assembly and is most certainly not in question by the chair. The Official Opposition has a very responsible role to play. It must – it must – have an opportunity to express itself. It must hold the government to account, but it cannot interpret the account to its will for its own pleasure, at a minimum, or go to the extreme, fabricate the account to in fact find a benefit. It must hold the government to account, but that account must be one that is based on decorum, truth, honesty, integrity, and the like.

It doesn't help to say that the tone today was "mostly set by members of the government." If that isn't inflammatory in itself, I don't know what is.

Hon. members, the fact that one does not get one's way is not a legitimate reason to violate decorum, good manners, and responsibility. Yes, the opposition must hold the government to account. Yes, the opposition has every right to press the government to release documents. But there's a way of doing it without, in fact, providing personal innuendo.

The bottom line and the conclusion to all of this is that in listening and in reading, I do believe that there were words here that did cause offence. I don't think that's appropriate, and I'm going to ask that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition find a better way of expressing, "Is telling the truth simply a policy decision?" and "Will the minister admit that the decision to report false and misleading information in the annual report was a political decision, one made

by members of the government with the support of this Premier?" The intent there is to say through the back door that that was absolutely false. I think those comments have to be withdrawn. I do believe there is a point of order, and I find that that is the case today.

The question is: how do we proceed with this now? Can I accept that the message will be conveyed to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition by the Opposition House Leader?

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, I am empowered by the Leader of the Official Opposition to follow the ruling of the Speaker. I therefore withdraw his comments and apologize for the offence that was given to the House.

The Speaker: Hon. member, all hon. members in this House should accept that apology and withdrawal. This matter is now closed.

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Orders of the Day

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Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 45

Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On to the positive work of this Legislature for Albertans. I'm pleased to move today third reading of Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this to be a historic moment in Alberta. I answered a question in the House earlier today with respect to the role of obesity in terms of human health as we move forward and the importance particularly relative to diabetes but also other chronic conditions. I made a statement earlier this year that in order to deal with the issue of wellness, in order to talk to Albertans with some sincerity and credibility on the issue of how we keep ourselves well, we needed, first, to start with the most obvious and most direct health hazard that we have in our society, and that's smoking. I was very pleased, therefore, to be able to bring forward Bill 45, which does accomplish a number of things with respect to helping Albertans with their own personal health.

The bill speaks to smoking in public places and enhances the Smoke-free Places Act with respect to places in which smoking can be undertaken or, more particularly, places where it cannot be undertaken so as to protect other Albertans from the hazards of second-hand smoke. We haven't gone so far in this province – and I don't think I know of a jurisdiction where they have gone so far – as to tell people that they cannot smoke themselves. That's up to them. But in terms of being able to affect other people's lives with smoke, that is a public policy issue, and that is an issue of the protection of persons' health status.

The bill does provide for a broader range of areas in public places in which people are prohibited from smoking. That's an advantage. I think it's an advantage to say that not only can you not smoke in a public place, but you can't smoke within a certain distance from a door, from an open window, from an air conditioning vent. You can't draw the smoke back into the public place. You can't force people to walk through the smoke to get into a public place. This bill enhances the protection of Albertans from that perspective.

3:00

Are there other things we could do? Obviously there are, Mr.

Speaker, but I think this bill goes a long way to help Albertans with the stated goal of protecting their health and enhancing their health status.

We go further in the bill, of course, to prohibit advertising in certain places, the banning of the so-called power walls. The words "power wall" are not in the bill, but the effect of the bill is to prohibit the advertising and promotion of tobacco products in any place where they are sold or offered for sale or in any manner if the advertisement or promotion is visible from outside a place in which tobacco products are sold or offered for sale.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The sale of tobacco is also prohibited in certain facilities: health facilities, campuses, pharmacies. Mr. Speaker, the prohibition of sale is in some cases symbolic because, certainly, people can go somewhere else and buy their cigarettes. That is true. But I think it's important to make a clear distinction that a healthy area should be a healthy area, and when we're promoting health, we should be promoting health. So the act does that.

I think the act goes a long way to take away from the public view, again going back to the power walls, particularly, in my opinion, where it is focused on encouraging children or young adults to start smoking. Power walls are clearly aimed at advertising the sale of cigarettes, encouraging people to take up the habit or to resume the habit or to continue the habit at a higher level. This bill will at least slow that process, at least take that out of the faces of our children.

I think it is significant, Mr. Speaker, that over the course of the last several years we've had a number of children who have been advocating. I speak to grade 6 classes often, and when I do, I often talk to them about my role as a representative in this Legislature and what it means to be a representative. I also talk to them about the need for them to play their role as citizens, that I can't be a representative without them playing their role as citizens.

Well, it's absolutely encouraging, Mr. Speaker, that in the course of the discussion of this act, in the time that it has been in the House and over the course of the summer as the House was in recess, we've had numerous representations from students, from school groups. We had the BLAST team in, I think, both in June when the bill was introduced and was first discussed in the House and again just the other day while the bill was in committee, the students from Nellie McClung who have been very active in this promotion. That has been very important. It's been very important to me as a legislator that we've had students come forward and say: "We know this is bad for our health. We think there should be a law because we think that others should not be able to affect our health."

Quite frankly, I've had representations from students and from others that we ought to go further, that we ought to look at banning smoking in enclosed places like cars where children can be affected. This bill doesn't do that. But what I'm really pleased about is that we've engaged young people in this province in advocacy on a public policy issue that is so important to their health and to their future.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to acknowledge the hundreds of other Albertans who took time to make their views known on this bill. We've come a long way in a short time in terms of recognizing the need for this type of legislation. This speaks to the hard work and dedication of a number of organizations that are increasing awareness of the hazards of second-hand smoke and of the health concerns.

I was at the opening of the Alberta Diabetes Institute today, a very valuable facility which brings researchers together. In managing

chronic conditions, whether it's diabetes, whether it's stroke, whether it's the whole cardiac area, pulmonary disease, whether it's lung disease, we know that cigarette smoke is hazardous to our health. We know that it is a very significant factor in the health care costs that we all bear as a public. We know that reducing the amount of smoking is one of the first elements that we can undertake as a society and as individuals so that we can have a health care system that's sustainable, we can have a population that's healthy, and we can make sure that the acute care services that Albertans need and want are there for them when they need it because we're not using them unnecessarily. We're reducing the pressure on that system, and we're improving the productivity and quality of life of Albertans as individuals and in our communities by addressing a very, very important issue.

So I would like to ask members of this House to support Bill 45 in third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a good day, I think, in the House when we're able to see third reading of a bill like Bill 45. It's so often referred to just as the smoking bill; we forget what the real name is: the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007. I will quite likely repeat a number of the points that the Minister of Health and Wellness has already made because in many ways my progression through this has exactly mirrored his.

As the Speaker is aware, in second reading and in Committee of the Whole I was able to invite into the gallery members of the BLAST team from the Nellie McClung school in Oliver school in my constituency because they had been so instrumental in energizing their peers and colleagues in other BLAST teams in other schools to really get on this particular issue and follow it through. It was a great opportunity for me as a legislator to work closely with a younger group of people in teaching them about how important public advocacy and citizen representation is. I come from a social activist background, and I sometimes despair that that generation is no more. I was really excited by the reaction of the BLAST teams at Nellie McClung and also in other schools to jump onto this issue and really grab hold of it and run with it. I think it was a good experience for them. It was a good experience for me, and clearly the Minister of Health and Wellness also benefited from it.

I'm sorry that I can't remember the names of the other schools that participated, but about six months ago, in the spring, on a fairly chilly day, there was a rally held on the steps of the Legislature by a number of different BLAST groups from different schools. Again, it was co-ordinated by the group from Nellie McClung. So those folks certainly recognize the effect that smoking certainly could have on them as probably they've seen the effect that it's had on their parents.

We understand the numbers now of the effect that smoking can have on our health. We're starting to be able to get some hard data about what it costs us in financial terms. I think that many of us for many years have understood the human toll that cancer, particularly lung cancer, can cause us.

I was going to talk about some important people. You lose them to lung cancer. I lost someone to lung cancer this summer, and it makes me angry. So I'm very grateful to see this bill. I'm very grateful for the people that worked on it. I wish it could have come sooner to save people that I loved. I know we all feel like that in here. I'm sorry to get emotional on you, but this kills people. It's a human cost to our society. It's a tremendous financial cost to our

society. We have to do everything we can to be able to combat it. We're legislators. We're leaders. We should be able to do this work, and I'm glad we've done this work today.

Thank you to everybody that worked on it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.
3:10

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to share a few thoughts on Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007. As an advocate of anti-smoking legislation throughout my tenure in this Assembly I am pleased that this piece of legislation has received the support it requires to reach third reading.

Through the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy, introduced through the work of AADAC a few years ago, and other legislation brought by other private members we have made good progress with tobacco legislation in this province. The goal has always been to achieve a comprehensive strategy. This bill adds to what we have been trying to do; that is, to have a comprehensive strategy for tobacco reduction. We are responding to the concerns raised by our health officials and many other citizens regarding tobacco use, including many from my own constituency. They have been strongly urging that we adopt legislation that will help to reduce smoking, and I'm sure that everyone involved in public health and those concerned for smoke-free places are encouraged by the progress that we are making here today.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that as elected members we have a responsibility to promote healthy choices, and it is in the best interests of all Albertans to be able to interact in smoke-free environments. I want to congratulate the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness for bringing this legislation forward. It serves a valuable purpose by acknowledging the shared responsibility that we have to each other's health and well-being. I believe Bill 45 is a very positive step forward for this province, and I will be supporting it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of Bill 45. Bill 45 is a very positive step forward. I want to both thank the Minister of Health and Wellness for taking the leadership in bringing this piece of legislation forward and congratulate him for getting it through this session of the Legislature so that it becomes law in this province and we begin to enforce the provisions of the bill in order to reduce the dangers to health that result from both smoking directly and second-hand smoke, which affects the health of those who don't smoke but may yet suffer from the hazardous consequences to health. Those hazards are very serious, you know, leading up to loss of life, death.

Mr. Speaker, this bill brings us a long way from just a few years ago when we found it impossible in this House to move forward in the way this bill is moving the province forward, so it really is a good day. It's refreshing to see a consensus on all sides of this House with respect to what this bill proposes to do and the almost unanimous support that it seems to enjoy around this House, this Assembly, for the measures that it proposes to take.

Mr. Speaker, it's talking about the health hazards that smoking creates and the cost of it to society, to individuals, and to the health care system, I think, something that must be kept in view when debating this bill and speaking in support of it.

In 2002 approximately 470-some million dollars was spent on Alberta's health care system, caring for tobacco-related illnesses that smokers and victims of second-hand smoke perhaps suffered because of the use of tobacco products. They're, of course, in addition to the health care costs which we must try to contain and reduce as much as we can through prevention and through taking measures such as this bill proposes to take.

There are other societal costs which arise from lost income due to premature death, illness, disability, worker absenteeism, reduced productivity, and other such losses. Tobacco is often responsible for a substantial loss of life and property damage, accounting for 1 in 4 fire deaths in Alberta from smoking. You know, people fall asleep or accidentally start a fire in their dwelling or their workplace, resulting in entirely unnecessary and tragic deaths and property damage.

Mr. Speaker, every well-designed study that we know of produces the same evidence, strong evidence which shows that the economic impact of smoke-free laws is quite substantial. There were concerns in this province by some businesses a while ago. I'm glad that we don't have that concern anymore. These studies indicate that after the initial adjustment period, the so-called feared negative consequences of preventing people from smoking in hotels and motels and restaurants are very temporary. They're transitional, and after a while the hospitality industry does not suffer from what at one time was feared might result in terms of consequences for them.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that in drawing up the regulations for this bill, some of the amendments that are proposed, some by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, with respect to expanding the list of smoking-prohibited places could be expanded. We had an interesting discussion during the debate on the bill during the committee stage. Some of the proposals that were brought forward in the form of an amendment by the Member for Edmonton-Centre which has proposed the inclusion of recreational facilities and other places where cultural and artistic activities are performed, undertaken, would be a good start.

We do need to protect very young children from smoking. This bill is about public places, so we can't really perhaps talk about what happens to very young children when parents smoke when they're travelling in the car and the child is seated in the back seat. Given the conception of the bill, that it talks about public places, I think perhaps there are some constraints on us to seek the inclusion of the definition of a motor vehicle, a family automobile which has infants and young children travelling in it with adult parents who are smoking, to be included in the public spaces. It's a suggestion that's worth considering. We need to protect from the very, very severe, hazardous effects of cigarette smoke, tobacco smoke, our own children who are travelling with us.

I think some provision needs to be made either in the regulations or perhaps when there's an opportunity to revisit this piece of legislation to encourage Alberta parents, encourage adults travelling in family automobiles, private automobiles with their young children, to desist from smoking. We need to discourage as much as possible smoking activity in automobiles as well as in other places.

With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, again I want to reiterate our support for this and want to congratulate the minister for piloting this bill through this House to its conclusion, hopefully, today. Thank you.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions, comments.

The hon. Associate Minister for Capital Planning.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few brief remarks with respect to Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007. It's a bill that I'm going to support, quite obviously. I want to begin by saying on the record how much I appreciate the hon. minister of health and his efforts in bringing this particular bill forward.

We've heard a lot of talk over a lot of years in this Assembly with respect to the ills of smoking and tobacco use in general, with respect to the lethal consequences of some of its use or overuse. We know about the costs not only to one's personal health that arise from this. We also know about the cost to the pocketbook. We also know about the cost to the health care systems across this great dominion and, in particular, right in our own province. We also know about the cost of damage to property that often arises as a result of careless smoking and/or from improper extinguishing of those cigarettes. Property damage, forest fires, a number of things in some cases have been traced to improper extinguishing, and we're all well aware of those. The intention is not to blame one segment of society but to point out the ills and some of the consequences that may arise with respect to this particular habit.

We all know how addicting smoking can be. We all know that we need more emphasis being put on the prevention side, research on prevention and, ultimately, treatment, as we heard earlier with respect to another situation involving diabetes. While I'm not drawing a parallel between one and the other, I'm drawing a parallel between what goes into these programs to help educate the public. In this particular case we're doing a wonderful job educating them. Not only are we educating. We're also enforcing through this bill the serious commitment that our government has to helping people overcome smoking and in many cases overcome the commencement of smoking at an early age.

There are specific rules in the act, which we're all familiar with, that talk about how we will not tolerate the advertising or promotion or displaying and so on, and we also talk about the serious consequences of the contravention of these laws. The fines and the penalties that are reflected in the bill range anywhere from \$10,000 on the first offence up to, I believe, \$100,000 for a next offence up to the revoking of one's licence if necessary. I'm talking about retail licences.

I also find it very interesting that while we are again leading the way for some, we should be mindful of the impact that this kind of a discussion in this Assembly is having on other jurisdictions. Mr. Speaker, I was in England over the summer, and I noted that after several years of debate they have decided to go smoke free in that country. It's tremendous kudos to them as of July 1 of this year to have taken that step. Obviously, there are other jurisdictions that are following suit. So we should be mindful of how powerful a message like this can be elsewhere. Hopefully, it will influence others to take appropriate actions.

My final comments really are just with respect to the tragedies that sometimes engulf the young people who get hooked on this habit far too early. As a former schoolteacher myself and a business owner I saw all too often how negatively and how quickly our youth can be impacted by following peer pressure or following in the footsteps of adults. I think this bill will go a long way toward curbing that, hopefully putting the butt out forever.

I'm grateful, again, to the Assembly for its unanimous support. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Lougheed and also the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose and others who have made very eloquent and passionate presentations and/or bills. In particular with Wetaskiwin-Camrose, I recall when I was the associate minister for health some eight, nine years ago, when he first brought it up in

some discussions at the time. I'm sure he's having a joyous day of it today, as is Calgary-Lougheed, as is my colleague and friend from Edmonton-Whitemud.

Thank you very much for this. I will be pleased to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available again. Seeing none, the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would again like to support the minister on his bill and bringing it forward. I know that from the constituency of St. Albert there's been a lot of interest and a lot of support for this piece of legislation. I see in the research that was done by our people that 80 per cent of the population of Alberta supposedly are looking for a complete ban on smoking in public places.

I often wondered about the power of cigarettes, and I remember one of my good football colleagues who recently died in the States: good looking, beautiful voice, good actor, had everything going for him. Yet he had a tendency to smoke, and the power of that was unbelievable. I don't smoke, yet this thing seemed to grab hold of this gentleman.

You know, the influence of smoking on young people is just amazing. I would hope that we not only look at this as a start. I think that we should continue to do sound research into why young people, especially young women, smoke cigarettes. I'm always amazed when I go to chapel sometimes at the Sturgeon hospital on Saturday that there seems to be a tremendous number of people in the hospital that are sitting outside in the cold weather smoking. It's a very powerful addiction, and I think we have to remember that and continue to work at it as to the reasons why. I won't say much more about this. The eloquent speakers before me have suggested all the reasons.

The only other thing I would mention that amazes me is that where I live now – I've just recently moved to a condo that I think is going to be completed in 2014. They don't seem to be able to get the workpeople to do the job. But the amazing thing I'm noticing is the power of cigarettes at the coffee rounds in the morning and the number of workmen that smoke cigarettes. The implication of that to me is absolutely frightening from the health perspective and from the property perspective because I wonder what's going to happen to this condo that's in development in the future. Is it going to be destroyed by fire? I think there's a tremendous economic cost, and there is a strong addiction in the workplace, so I think there has to be some looking at that as well, Mr. Speaker, in terms of research.

Certainly, the government, the people that have worked on this bill deserve credit. I know that I am fully supportive of it, and I think it's a step in the right direction. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just take this opportunity to express my support for Bill 45. The point I really like is to think about the advertisement attracting people. I have been told that first it starts out with some thoughts, some thinking, and then it becomes words and becomes actions and then becomes habit. So if we can't have control of this smoking habit, we have to go backward a bit and stop the action of it and then to advertising and thought, starting out. I believe this bill will help to at least remove the habit of smoking.

I don't want to go into the debate of how bad smoking is to health

and other matters. That's been evidenced in health care. Also, I can say that in my personal family matters, among our family members I have a brother who started smoking very early, and then he developed health problems. The whole family clan worried about it and spent a lot of effort to help. Unfortunately, he did die at an early age because of the result of smoking affecting his health. From that personal perspective I really believe that we need to at least reduce or eliminate smoking in terms of health and cost to society.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

I travelled around the world a bit before I came and lived in Canada. Recently I travelled back to some places. I found that tobacco smoking in developing nations is increasing, and that makes me worry. When I got back here, I saw this bill, and I think this should be a beacon or an example that we can show to other parts of the world that we are doing something here that other parts of the world should look into and use us as an example or model.

With this, I want to commend the Minister of Health and Wellness for bringing this bill forward and the support from all my colleagues in the House for this bill. Thank you very much.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak in the third reading of Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007. I also would like to thank the minister of health and his staff for bringing this bill forward.

This bill will allow tobacco control measures to be implemented in Alberta, which include a province-wide smoking ban in all workplaces, including bars, casinos, and bingo halls; a ban on prominently placed point-of-sale tobacco displays, commonly called power walls; and prohibit tobacco sales in pharmacies, public colleges, and universities.

In 2002 the Premier's Advisory Council on Health, the Mazankowski report, included recommendations to reduce tobacco use such as regulating advertising and promotion targeted at youth and regulations to prevent smoking in public places. In 2005 legislation was introduced here to ban smoking in all workplaces. Unfortunately, that bill was watered down, allowing smoking in any building where minors are not permitted. This led to municipalities being forced to take the heat when it came to deciding on instituting a complete smoking ban in their community.

I want to make a note here and commend the work of our Alberta Liberal health critic, Laurie Blakeman. She has been working for over a year to increase public awareness of tobacco industry tactics, especially the use of power walls, and she did a lot of this work with students in Edmonton schools.

We know that teen smoking in Alberta is rising. As a former high school administrator it was often a great concern of ours where they could smoke, how we could discourage the smoking, and so forth. We became really aware that the number of female students smoking was increasing. Given that the majority of smokers begin smoking before turning 18, we need to take action to reduce the youth smoking rate. I know the answer is always education, but it is not enough. We do need restrictions to support education. Power walls placed at eye level at point of purchase influence consumers, especially the youth.

I particularly like section 6 of this bill because it adds a section restricting the display, advertisement, promotion, and sale of tobacco

products. It prohibits the display of tobacco products in a place visible to customers. That's power walls. It prohibits retailers from advertising tobacco products anywhere the public is permitted access or anywhere that is visible from outside the premises, such as windows. It prohibits the sale of tobacco in health facilities, postsecondary institutions, pharmacies, and retail stores containing a pharmacy.

According to the government's own numbers every year 3,400 Albertans die from tobacco-related causes. This province spends \$471 million annually on health care costs directly attributed to tobacco use and \$1.8 billion on lost productivity, fires, and property damage. Taking action to reduce these risks and costs is the duty of a responsible, accountable government. We must as politicians be leaders and take action on something the public has supported for years and most other provinces have already done. Even the government's own Mazankowski report from 2002, as I said, made these recommendations.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

If we are concerned about the retail losses, I'd like to quote from an Action on Smoking and Health news release of June 7, 2007, where it says:

Data supplied by Canadian tobacco manufacturers under Health Canada reporting requirements show that Alberta retailers received 11.8 million dollars from tobacco companies last year for stocking and displaying their products. The same data shows that tobacco industry payments to retailers in provinces that have outlawed powerwalls have remained largely unaffected. For example, payments to retailers in Saskatchewan have declined by only 5 per cent since the province's powerwall ban took effect in 2004.

"Alberta will be the first province to implement a powerwall ban and a tobacco sales ban in pharmacies at the same time," this Action on Smoking and Health news release says. "This coordinated approach will greatly reduce any potential impact on remaining tobacco retailers due to increased consumer traffic."

A few years ago 77 per cent of Alberta pharmacists voted in support of a tobacco sales ban in pharmacies following a referendum conducted by the Alberta College of Pharmacists. Both the Alberta Pharmacists Association and the Alberta College of Pharmacists have called for a ban on tobacco sales in any premises containing pharmacies.

It is time for a comprehensive action to support health for Albertans. This includes protection from second-hand smoke. We need legislation that is consistent across the province, that does the right thing; that is, a complete smoking ban in workplaces and public facilities. So I'm pleased to support Bill 45.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to get up and speak to this particular bill. I'm going to be very brief. Years ago people could smoke anywhere, even in hospitals. After more than 40 years plus of warnings and reams of information that we're receiving from Health about the effects of smoking, we're finally at the point in Alberta where, I think, it's a momentous moment.

I harken back to '93 with one of my friends, who is sitting in the gallery, when I met them at a policy conference. I think it was in 1993 in Red Deer. We were having this particular discussion. At that particular time I smoked. [interjections] See, Mr. Speaker? It's a good thing we can't see the colour of my face on the camera. But

we had this discussion about smoking, and I think I took him aback somewhat because when we were talking about this issue, I supported AISH at that particular time on their initiative in 1993. I happened to be one of those people that was hooked on cigarettes morning, noon, and night. I would get up, I'd have my cup of coffee, and I'd have my cigarette, and I'd be happily, merrily going.

If you remember, Mr. Speaker, through the period of this Legislature – I go back to some pictures when there used to be ashtrays and cigarettes in the Assembly. I think you've been around long enough to know that we used to be able to puff away in our caucus. So we have come a long way just since I've been elected, since 1993.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the hundreds of people that have worked hard on this bill and over the years have pushed the initiative to get where we are today. I'd like to acknowledge the Canadian Cancer Society, the Alberta Cancer Board, the Alberta Lung Association, the Alberta Heart and Stroke Foundation, Action on Smoking and Health, and the Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge two people that I have a great deal of respect for. One is Les Hagen, who has been pushing this initiative for as long as I can remember. The other person that I'd like to acknowledge is a friend and a constituent, Christian Velthoen, who has kept me abreast and has not let me forget about this particular issue from day one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone for questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was privileged to be able to speak to this bill in committee, so I'm pleased to be able to speak to it at the moment that it will be passed. Certainly, I would like to thank the Minister of Health and Wellness and congratulate him for using his skill and many years of parliamentary experience to get this bill to this momentous moment where, in fact, we will pass it.

In committee I spoke about my father having died of lung cancer 40 years ago. It was in those days that it was just starting to be a kernel in people's minds that there was the connection between smoking and cancer. My mother certainly made it and did live to be 95. I was pleased that the Solicitor General, I think, of the United States actually had started to bring that up because it made her think, and she quit instantly upon my father's death.

I think that my hon. colleague from St. Albert had mentioned about young women starting. Now that we have set this path that hopefully society is on in terms of not smoking, I think that where young women and some young men are influenced is that it's quite obvious that the increase in smoking in movies and on television is just very apparent. Hopefully, society will be able to put some sort of pressure on the movie companies that at this point in time actually depend on the cigarette money to produce their movies. That may well be the next big step towards having all of the planet clear of smoke.

But at this point in time I would just again like to thank the minister and am privileged to be able to vote and be in the House for the third reading of this momentous bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is again available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise to speak

to Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007. I must commend the minister for bringing this bill forward. Smoking isn't cool in Alberta anymore. Addiction to smoking tobacco is a brutal and devastating addiction. Bill 45 will certainly have a great effect in reducing this devastation and giving addicts a greater incentive to quit. The health effects and the discomfort to others through second-hand smoke in public places will be further constrained, the effect on children who see their parents in public places and other places and other people that they look up to will be further limited, and this will limit the pressure that they see to smoke. The societal pressure will be reduced.

Mr. Speaker, you know, the Member for St. Albert mentioned the tradesmen who smoke on construction sites. I worked on a lot of sites and spent a lot of time in lunch shacks in the past. Sometimes the blue haze was hard even to see through, and it still does continue to some degree to this day even though it is lessening. I hope that this will have some effect in helping to ensure that smoking isn't cool anymore.

The effect on young women who do seem to still have some desire to smoke – some of that I know anecdotally from talking to many – is that they think that, you know, it's helpful in keeping their weight under control, but I don't think that's true. I've lost a bunch of weight without having to get into smoking again or anything like that, and I think it's important.

When I did work in the trades, it was often, you know, seen to be sort of cool to smoke. But when I went back to university, I wrote a paper. Actually, it won an award, and it was published. It was on asbestos specifically, but it spoke also to the relationship between other factors and asbestos. One thing that a lot of us at one time would do was work with asbestos. Gosh, I remember even sticking it through table saws and watching and saying how neat it was to watch the asbestos fibres just float in the air around us. Everybody knows now how devastating that is. But one thing I found out in that research when I did that paper, Mr. Speaker, was that the incidence of lung cancer and the incidence of asbestosis was increased not once, not twice, but 40 times for people who are moderate smokers. Forty times, almost a death sentence. That has, you know, been seen in our health costs.

I helped people in later times to access the Johns-Manville class action suit, which settled asbestos-related matters. Also, because their addiction to smoking went along with their asbestos exposure – and you see this with other materials and other fibres. Mr. Speaker, the need to reduce smoking and the way that Bill 45 will help with that, the way that Alberta is breaking its societal addiction to smoking, which is helped by this bill, is very, very important.

I'm very pleased to support the minister, to support the bill, to support the government in this bill, and I commend the minister for bringing it forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is again available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and participate in this discussion on Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007. As was said before, this is a good bill which attempts to ban smoking in all public places, to prohibit tobacco product displays in retail outlets, otherwise known as power walls, and to ban tobacco sales in pharmacies and on postsecondary campuses.

Now, as you know, Mr. Speaker, I am a pharmacist by training, and this is something that I voiced my support for before in this Assembly, and it is something that my entire profession has

supported. It should come as no surprise that I like this bill, and in particular I like the piece around section 5 of this bill, which removes the exceptions which were put in place before, in previous acts, which allowed smoking in designated public places or where minors were not permitted. In essence, what we're doing is making the province truly smoke free in its entirety, and this is a direction that I am fully supportive of.

We don't want to leave these decisions to municipalities to make, and then it's hit and miss: some municipalities adopt that direction in their bylaws and regulations; some choose not to. I think direction and leadership had to come from the provincial government, and I am glad that the provincial government, now with the support of the Assembly, is sending that message – and we're sending it very clearly – that no one municipality should feel free to allow smoking in any of its public facilities, that it is provincial policy, that this is not allowed to happen.

It was also mentioned that in a plebiscite or a referendum amongst members of the pharmacy association – now it's called the Alberta College of Pharmacists – some few years ago 75 per cent plus or even a higher number, 77 or 78 per cent, of pharmacists surveyed indicated that they did support a total elimination of tobacco sales from drugstores in this province. I have said on record here before that this was a direction that I supported as one of these people who voted, and one of the things that I wanted to make clear was that we were not going to allow any exceptions, that regardless of size, regardless of the type of facility, or regardless of the design, any location that had a pharmacy, any location that employed a pharmacist would not sell tobacco products.

Again, I find this positive. I find it timely and a healthy move on the part of the government, and I urge all members of this Assembly to also support it at this stage.

We all know, Mr. Speaker – and you should as well – that second-hand smoke is dangerous. Second-hand smoke is hazardous. We're trying to help people to quit smoking for their own benefit, but we're also trying to protect others around them. Chemicals that are found in second-hand smoke include things like carbon monoxide, which is found in your car's exhaust. You're looking at ammonia, which is found in window cleaners. You're looking at things like cadmium, which is found in batteries, and arsenic, which is found in rat poison. These are but a few of the chemicals that are incorporated into tobacco products. You don't need me to tell you how dangerous these molecules are.

3:50

Second-hand smoke makes you sick. If it doesn't kill you, it makes you sick, and it makes you sick chronically, so you have many, many years of suffering as a smoker. There was once a study published that basically talked about what length of time it takes for your lungs to come back, for your lungs to heal, to restore themselves to their original state after you've been smoking. I can't remember the statistics quite clearly, but I know that they said that it takes at least two years for every year of smoking. If you have smoked for 10 years, for example, it would take 20 years for your lungs to come back to their original state.

Ms Blakeman: I smoked for 32 years.

Mr. Elsalhy: Who did?

Ms Blakeman: I'll be dead by that time.

Mr. Elsalhy: Okay. Some of the members here have indicated

they've smoked for 30-plus years. Well, I think it's hopeless for them.

Second-hand smoke hurts children as well, Mr. Speaker. It hurts babies because babies cannot detoxify their bodies. They cannot handle that onslaught of poison. It hurts older children as well, and it also hurts pets. Everybody that is close and dear to you, if you're a smoker, would be adversely affected.

One of the other things I wanted to briefly mention is that as we're talking about banning smoking and banning the sales of tobacco and making it harder for people to inflict that type of harm in terms of second-hand smoke, I would also like to draw the Assembly's attention again to the issue surrounding smoking cessation: smoking cessation aids, smoking cessation programs, and so on. As I mentioned before, most of our insurance plans do not cover smoking cessation aids.

If we look after the ill person after they have been diagnosed with an affliction or a disease like lung cancer, for example, and we cover their medications because we need to help them and come to their assistance, I think it would be also equally prudent to support people who want to make that decision, who want to quit early on, before they actually deteriorate and before they get extremely sick and it costs taxpayers more in terms of medication and operations and things like that. I am repeating my call for the minister of health and for his colleagues to maybe lean on and talk to insurance companies like Blue Cross and others to see what we can do as a government and as a society to get these insurance plans with the program, to get them thinking about what they can do to add to their formularies, to add to their benefit lists things like the patch, things like chewing gum, nicotine gum, things like the inhalers, and so on and so forth, and then even medications like Zyban, which I mentioned in the House before.

Mr. Speaker, again I repeat that I am in support of this. I commend the government, and I commend my colleagues in the Official Opposition for quickly realizing how beneficial this is and voicing their strong support as well. I urge all members to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Did you want to speak on 29(2)(a)?

Dr. Brown: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Please proceed.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to draw the attention of members of the House to the principles on third reading of a bill. I refer to *Marleau and Montpetit* page 533, where it states, "Debate on third reading is designed to review the legislative measure in its final form and is strictly confined to the contents of the bill." I think that if all members adhere to that, we would make further progress in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments, and I'll take that as a comment.

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, since I was the last speaker, I can only assume that the hon. member stood on 29(2)(a) to react to my comments. Or was that more general as to everybody in the Assembly? We hear the hon. member, and we know his expertise as a former lawyer, and we understand that he wants us to be focused on the effects of the bill in third reading. I thank him for drawing our attention to it. As one member I promise to adhere to that.

Thank you.

Dr. Brown: Well, I can assure the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung that the reference was not a personal one with respect to his debate. However, it was one of more general application to the proceedings in the House today.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on 29(2)(a). This is becoming popular.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I think, generally speaking, the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has quoted a specific reference, but there are a number of other references which quote third reading as being on the anticipated effect of the bill when passed. So it's perfectly appropriate for my colleague for Edmonton-McClung to be commenting on the fact that once this is in place, a smoking cessation program would be appropriate because that is following on the anticipated effect of the bill. We want more people to quit as a result of this bill, and assisting them to do so with smoking cessation programs is more than warranted. I realize this wasn't a point of order, but I'll contribute to the discussion thus.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

If not, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't indulge in a lengthy speech in support of this bill as I know all members are ready to vote on this, but I would be remiss if I did not express my support for this very important piece of legislation. I think in the closing aspect of this bill I would like to send my regards and send kudos to our minister of health for bringing this bill, which often was met with vocal criticism, albeit from a vocal minority but nonetheless with criticism. It took a lot of courage to bring legislation of this nature forward, and it is a progressive piece of legislation.

We all know that costs of health care are rising in this province. One of the drivers of our costs of health care is smoking, and there is just no way of denying it. As a parent of a young girl there is nothing that could be . . .

An Hon. Member: A beautiful girl.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you. Yes, a beautiful young girl. There is nothing that is as important to me as making sure that she doesn't take up the awful habit of smoking.

There are also other individuals instrumental. I know that a large community of medical professionals and other professionals in Alberta have been supportive and instrumental in drafting this bill, and they should be thanked at this point. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek listed many of them in her previous comments that I heard, but one that she would like to add, I know, and I will add on her behalf is Dr. Roger Hodkinson, who has also been instrumental in drafting the bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, I hope that with our young people in mind, with our health care system in mind, and with the health of Albertans in mind all members of this Assembly will find it in their hearts to support this piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is again available.

Seeing none, are there any others who wish to participate in the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. minister wish to close debate?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just very briefly I'd like to thank all members of the Assembly for speaking. I've heard every member speak in favour of the bill. I do not want to anticipate the Legislature, but I look forward to passage of the bill and thank my colleagues in this Legislature for what I think is a very good piece of public policy work.

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a third time]

**Bill 37
Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007**

[Adjourned debate November 8: Dr. Oberg]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and considering the wonderful accolades of the previous bill brought – and I certainly would lend my support to that – I believe that Bill 37 is a partner in this in that it increases the price of tobacco that will be paid, which ultimately decreases the availability of tobacco to a lot of people.

There were some questions raised about why the tobacco revenue was not specifically designated. As you know, we have a habit here of not dedicating revenue. We feel that all revenue should be put into one pot, and each particular area should be weighed against the other one for its importance, whether it's education, whether it's health care, whether it's infrastructure.

4:00

There was also a question about AIMCO and the investment in tobacco. I want to make a couple of points. First of all, there's about a \$57 million investment either directly or indirectly in tobacco-related industry in AIMCO, and one of the reasons for that, quite simply, is that we have tasked them in our policies to go out and make the best possible investments for Alberta. In saying that, I would also add, though, that the cancer prevention legacy fund, which also has very close to \$500 million in it, does not invest in any tobacco-related companies.

Mr. Speaker, we are also in the process of taking a look at exactly how we look at policy when it comes to investing. As you know, there is presently a financial investment advisory committee that is out, and we'll have the report in by the end of the month, so I wait with bated breath as to what they're going to say.

Mr. Speaker, this is but one of the reduction strategies that are out there. The hon. minister of health has brought in a wonderful bill that has brought together a lot of other components. As Minister of Finance it's my job to bring in the taxation component. Indeed, in this last budget it may have pre-empted a little bit – and for that I apologize – Bill 45, but it had to be brought in in Budget 2007, or it could not have been brought in until Budget 2008, and there's really no point in wasting that extra year in putting forward a project that we know will stop smoking, that will decrease the number of people that smoke.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Assembly to grant third reading to this bill. I think it's an important bill. I think anything that we can utilize to stop the amount of smoking that is being done is extremely important, and I would ask the Assembly to vote on this.

One other question, though, that I will touch on very briefly is the whole idea of illicit tobacco use and tobacco importation. When you raise the taxes, you open yourself up to having contraband tobacco brought into the province. I still feel, though, that ultimately the contraband tobacco is illegal and therefore should be dealt with under the courts, under the legal system. I believe that raising the

taxes is still the most important way to do it and that the majority of people are not going to be buying their tobacco from the back of a semi-trailer and that the police and the court system should come down very hard on those people bringing in contraband tobacco.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to our neighbouring provinces, which tend to be where contraband tobacco would come from, we are very close to the taxation in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. As a matter of fact, if you exclude the provincial sales tax, we're actually higher. I will not comment as to what is going to be in Budget 2008, but I would anticipate that people out there know my feelings well enough about tobacco.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the Assembly grant third reading of this very important tax bill, this very important adjunct to Bill 45, which we just passed, and I would ask for consent as soon as possible.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased on behalf of members of my caucus to support Bill 37, Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2007.

I agree. We do see this as a companion bill to Bill 45. It's something that this caucus has been urging the government to do for some time. At the same time we have also been urging the government to be very careful and, in fact, to regulate itself on investments in tobacco companies through the heritage savings trust fund. There have been some minor nods towards that, but I think that anything we can do to discourage smoking – as a smoker, you know, the cost didn't really deter me. A lot of people said that when cigarettes hit a buck a pack, they were going to quit, and they're still smoking at \$10 a pack. But I think there is a psychological break point for just about everybody. Increasing taxes is a disincentive, and I hope it's going to work.

I disagree, respectfully, with the minister that the funds shouldn't be targeted, particularly around the cessation programs. I would like to see more of a direct tie between the revenue collected through this and smoking cessation programs or support for AADAC and the programming that they offer there.

Clearly, we are all aware of the money that's involved here. Something around \$880 million will be collected this year in tobacco taxes. I would prefer to see some direct connection with how much is going into smoking cessation because at this point it's \$9 million. It should be more, particularly if we talk about funding through Blue Cross and making that available to more people than the approximately 50 per cent that can get it now. This is definitely a cost to the health care system. I think I heard the minister say that somewhere in the range of \$1.3 billion is a direct effect from smoking on our economy and our cost, so \$890 million and more isn't going to hurt if this bill passes.

Again, on behalf of my caucus I'm pleased to support this, and let's hope this is another useful tool in that toolbox to move us towards a healthier population overall. That will put us in a better place to be able to resist some of the other health issues that are coming our way in the future. I'm willing to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 37, the cigarette tax amendment act. Interesting to see two bills related to

addressing the whole problem of smoking and seeking reduction in the consumption of tobacco by way of smoking and other ways being discussed back to back. I think it certainly underscores the importance of taking a variety of actions, introducing interrelated policy initiatives together in order to achieve the real benefits of reduction in tobacco consumption.

Mr. Speaker, when such measures were introduced in California, for example, between 1988 and 2004, lung and bronchial cancer rates declined in that state at a rate four times that of the rest of the U.S.A. in reaction to decreases in tobacco and cigarette consumption. Similarly, close to 59,000 heart disease related deaths were prevented during the first nine years of the California tobacco control program. So there's no doubt that legislation and public policy initiatives intended to reduce consumption of tobacco by way of smoking and other activities is certainly a measure in the right direction, is a measure that needs to be supported by us.

I think that in addition, insofar as this bill is concerned, Bill 37, it's one step among many that are needed – Bill 45 is one – to discourage smoking in public places. This one will make it more expensive to consume, to smoke, but I think that when we talk about consumption, we also need to be mindful of the pattern of consumption of tobacco in society. There's a good bit of information available on this, that unfortunately people who are in the low-income bracket, in fact, are likely consuming tobacco and cigarettes on a larger scale than those who are not in those income brackets.

While the measure is well intended and based on the assumption that by taking this economic initiative – by making it more expensive to smoke, that is – it will discourage all kinds of people from smoking, two things, I think. The economic side effects of it will be borne, I think, primarily by people who can ill afford it unless at the same time we do invest more resources into smoking cessation programs to help the people who will bear the brunt of the economic burden that will increase as a result of this.

4:10

I think the point has been made already. The Minister of Finance, of course, while conceding that there may be a contradiction in the investment policies that the government presently has – that is, it continues to invest some money in the tobacco industry because of the returns that that minister was saying Albertans get from those investments as part of the heritage fund and other funds that may be invested that way – also drew our attention to the cancer prevention fund, \$500 million. That fund does not invest in this. Now, if the logic behind not investing from the \$500 million is a sound one, then surely the same logic should apply to any other investments from public funds that are made in the tobacco industry.

I will urge the minister to reconsider the investment of heritage fund related investments in the tobacco industry and to try to convince his caucus and colleagues to change the policy. True, it's the policy for now, but it's not a policy that can't be changed. If the logic behind the other investment, the \$500 million for the cancer prevention fund, is a sound one, I think it will be equally sound and appropriate to apply it to any other investment, be that from the heritage fund or others.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's time for the minister and the government to consider increasing funding in tobacco cessation programs. Nine million dollars is presently used, but it's not enough. Smoking tobacco has, as was pointed out by my neighbour here from Edmonton-Manning, devastating consequences in terms of afflictions. It also has devastating effects as an addictive drug. Addiction is a very, very crucial part of stopping smoking. I have known many friends over the years, colleagues that I worked with, well-educated

men and women, who struggled to quit smoking. They knew that it was hazardous to their health, that it could in fact lead to fatal illnesses that they would suffer from, yet they couldn't stop smoking because of the addictive nature of smoking.

That's the other side where I think attention needs to be paid. If this bill is to have a payoff, if this bill and Bill 45 are to bear results, I think more attention needs to be paid, more effort needs to be made in treating smoking not only as an indulgence that can be prevented simply by increasing the cost of indulging in it, but I think we need in a resolute manner to treat this smoking habit as a serious addiction. We should develop public policy measures that address the problem of smoking as an addiction and therefore help reduce its incidence and hopefully prevent disease and the waste of financial resources that we need, once smokers begin to suffer from it, to provide medical treatment.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and hope the Minister of Finance is taking some note of a few of the suggestions that I made and will try and address them as we move forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there others who wish to participate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'll be very brief. I just want to take a moment to disagree with the Minister of Finance. I really do believe that he probably has access to people who could find a better way of using that \$57 million than having to invest in tobacco companies. There are a lot of oil companies out there that I understand make a really good return on their dollar, so perhaps we could change our tobacco money to oil money.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there others that wish to participate?

Does the hon. Minister of Finance wish to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 11
Telecommunications Act Repeal Act

[Adjourned debate November 8: Mr. Dunford]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I promise to be fairly brief on this bill given how thorough and extensive it is. It basically repeals the name for Alberta Government Telephones, AGT, which is an old, old company that used to exist many years ago. I don't think we're necessarily opposed to that. It's something that doesn't exist anymore.

But I have to ask a question as a layperson. AGT ceased to exist quite a few years ago. Why did we have to wait until 2007 to actually sort of wake up one morning and say: "You know what? It no longer exists. Let's deal with that"? That's just one question I had, you know, as to the delay. I don't want to call it tardiness. [interjection] Yes, it was initially in something called a miscellaneous statute, which we deal with here, as you know, Mr. Speaker,

something that is typically minimal or of very minor impact. I think it was pulled out because it somehow raised a flag for some member of the opposition, and I need to seek clarity from the government as to why it would do something like this. I think it was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford who actually raised that flag, and I will be eagerly anticipating his explanation why he deemed it worthy of more scrutiny.

As a retailer – and many retailers in this province do this. We sometimes sell prepaid phone cards. Some of these prepaid phone cards are actually from the big companies, you know, the typical big players in the market like your Rogers and your Fido and your Telus. But some are also from the smaller companies, and I'm not going to mention their names because we have hundreds, literally hundreds of them available at grocery stores, at gas stations, in drugstores, and even in the bigger box stores like Zellers and the Bay and places like that. Everybody sells these prepaid phone cards now.

I wanted to remind my hon. colleagues and yourself, Mr. Speaker, that in the spring I was talking about consumer protection and the need for more recourse for consumers in this province who are sometimes wronged or deceived or lied to or robbed of their money. People buy these prepaid phone cards, and they're promised as per the displays and the advertisements that this particular card for \$5 gives you 500 minutes in Canada and the U.S., or this particular card allows you to phone the Philippines. For five bucks you get 37 minutes or whatever. People trust these outlets, these companies, and they buy these cards. They try the product, and then sometimes it doesn't deliver what it promised. Instead of your 500 minutes you get only 200, or instead of the 37 minutes to the Philippines you get 12.

4:20

Then some of them have hidden fees as well. They have, you know, per-minute charges and per-day charges and per-week charges. Not everything is listed in that brochure or that advertisement, and sometimes they offer you a website, but most times, no, they don't. Sometimes if you have a complaint, they give you a toll-free number and you try phoning it. Good luck. Nobody typically answers, and then should you get an answer, it's usually: oh, it's because you used it the wrong way or because you didn't finish it all in one call. Well, who's going to talk for 500 minutes in one call?

[The Speaker in the chair]

Anyways, I have experienced a lot of trouble with these products, Mr. Speaker, and as we're talking about telecommunications, I'm talking about updating our way of doing things and, you know, getting with the program. I think the government, hopefully, would address issues of this nature. People are losing money, and some people might argue: well, a card for \$2.50 or a card for 5 bucks or even for \$10 is not that much. But if you multiply that by the number of people who get ripped off and scammed, then you're looking at a lot of money.

I'm hoping that the Minister of Service Alberta, being in charge of our consumer protection division, would maybe task some of his employees in his department with maybe an investigation into this practice. I bet him and I bet you that it's a lot of money at stake, and many people, if asked, would come forward and even testify that they lost that kind of money for those types of products.

I have to repeat my call for better consumer protection legislation in this province, and I also would advocate that maybe we need a secretariat or a separate arm of the government that just handles that and is not tasked with other competing jobs because this is of utmost

importance, in my opinion. You know, if you get five people doing it or 10 people doing it, I don't think that's enough. I think it should be what it used to be under previous administrations, a stand-alone agency or arm of the government that handles consumer complaints, fair trading concerns, and unfair market practices.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I am not opposed to Bill 11, and I would urge all members to vote in favour as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon and speak for a few minutes on Bill 11, the Telecommunications Act Repeal Act. I actually think it's quite appropriate that we be here today to discuss this act because this act really is the final nail in the coffin of publicly owned telephone companies in this province.

I'm going to begin my remarks by thanking the Legislature Library for the good work that they do in providing information to us. One of the really neat features that they have is a page on the website called Scrapbook *Hansard*, and I'm sure Mr. Speaker will be familiar with that. Before *Hansard* was actually kept in this Legislature, they have gone back into newspapers, and they've managed to pull archival material from newspapers to represent what was said in the building, even though *Hansard* wasn't actually kept.

One of the first nuggets that I gleaned from this website was a reprint of the Speech from the Throne in full, the very first speech that was given to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, on March 15, 1906. Of course, Mr. Speaker, it was a Liberal government and Premier Rutherford who drafted that speech. The Lieutenant Governor read from it, and he read as follows:

The growing necessities of commercial and social activity in the Province require that telephonic communication between the different sections of the Province should be rendered as inexpensive and effective as possible, and your careful attention will therefore be directed to the consideration of providing means towards this end.

So there we have a Liberal government in the very first throne speech in this province espousing the need for a publicly owned utility, that being telephone companies.

Now, only a matter of a few days later the *Edmonton Bulletin* reprinted some more material from this House, and actually March 20, 1906, is when this particular piece appeared, again courtesy of the Scrapbook *Hansard* on the LAO website. In this particular piece, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition – and I have to confess I didn't verify whether or not Mr. A.J. Robertson was a Conservative Leader of the Opposition, but I'm going to suppose that that might have been the case. Anyhow, he responded to the Speech from the Throne with these words. He said that the government mention of telephonic communications was rather colorless; that it did not suggest or frame any plan. I thought that was rather ironic, that we had a Conservative Leader of the Opposition suggesting that the government had no plan. How times have changed.

It went on to indicate:

Possibly this was because the Government had no plan and had to meet the House in order to get one. The Conservative party he intimated believed that Government ownership was the proper solution of the telephone question and that they would be found coinciding in any move in that direction, but that they would have liked something more definitive in the speech.

That was the response to the Speech from the Throne and the suggestion that we should have a publicly owned telephone company.

Now, another piece that I found quite interesting – and this

appears to be an editorial column from the *Bulletin* on February 15 of 1907, and the headline is Telephone Policy. It says,

Hats off to the . . . government! Hats off to the Hon. W.H. Cushing! The telephone policy enunciated by the Minister of Public Works in the legislature yesterday marks an epoch in the history of Alberta. It is the most important step in public ownership ever taken by any government in Canada, and is a knock-out blow to the Bell Telephone monopoly in this province. There is no proposition to buy the Bell company out or to do business with them in any way, the government policy is a clear cut business proposition to build and operate telephones for the public. If the Bell has anything for sale or feels like selling they must come forward of their own accord.

Mr. Speaker, it goes on, and I'm not going to read the entire article into the record, but I do believe there are some interesting lessons there for all of us, coming from just over 100 years ago.

Now, of course, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Government Telephones wasn't the only publicly owned telephone company at the time. Edmonton Telephones was actually established about the same time, and I found it interesting to note that in 1911 and 1912, according to an article that appeared in the Edmonton Real Estate Board's publication, *Real Estate Weekly*, there was a two-storey brick building built at the corner of 101st Street and 112th Avenue, and this building, interestingly enough, was designed by a gentleman by the name of Jeffers, who, as you well know, also designed the Alberta Legislature Building. So that was a neat little melding, I suppose, of history.

The article went on to say that the two exchanges that were built in those two years along with the Strathcona Telephone Exchange, constructed in 1908 by Alberta Government Telephones, "were the electrical lifelines that kept people in touch." The Strathcona Telephone Exchange was purchased by the city of Edmonton after the two cities amalgamated in 1912.

The history of Edmonton Telephones and its relationship with Alberta Government Telephones, of course, became quite controversial at one point in the 1990s, and I thought it was relevant to discuss for a brief moment the role that former leader of the Official Opposition and a former mayor of Edmonton, Laurence Decore, played in that particular period. Those of you who have been paying attention to telephone companies in Alberta will probably remember that there was a period of time when Edmonton Telephones got into a bit of a dispute with AGT because while the rest of the province was served by Alberta Government Telephones, Edmonton Telephones had to purchase all of their long-distance service, all of their access from Alberta Government Telephones, and that wasn't just for other parts of the province but, actually, international calling as well. It all had to come through AGT, and therefore AGT had an awful lot of control over the rates that Edmonton Telephones charged.

The mayor of Edmonton at that time, Laurence Decore, decided to put a fight against that and fight for autonomy for Edmonton Telephones. Part of the agreement that they had with Alberta Government Telephones at the time was that we would submit Edmonton's telephone records to Alberta Government Telephones by magnetic tapes. Well, Laurence Decore did that, as required by the contract, but he encrypted the magnetic tape so that AGT's system could not read those tapes, and therefore they had no way to actually bill Edmonton Telephones for the long-distance services that had been used. This dispute was eventually settled, and life returned to normal, I suppose.

4:30

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, in 1995 Edmonton Telephones was sold to Alberta Government Telephones – by then they had become Telus

– and that was the end of that chapter in terms of a publicly owned telephone company by Edmonton. However, there is a legacy that carries on to this day.

City council in Edmonton decided to take that money, the proceeds from the sale of Edmonton Telephones, and turn it into the Ed Tel endowment fund, and that fund is doing quite well today. Initially, it was established in 1995 with \$467 million. At the end of the last business year that fund was now worth \$704 million. In fact, it's generating so much excess revenue that the city budget recently benefited to the tune of \$8.8 million. The city council decided to take some extra money out of that endowment fund and move it into their revenue so that they could lessen the blow of – I think it was mentioned earlier today – what is expected to be a double-digit tax increase.

The last thing I'd like to point out, I suppose, about AGT and the connection to this place that we do business in is the Annex building, that many of us have the pleasure of calling home, and it really is home. I have actually slept in my office in the Annex building a couple of nights since I've been here.

Mr. Speaker, the library staff were very accommodating once again in confirming for me what I had suspected, already knew, and that is that the building that we refer to as the Annex was actually constructed for Alberta Government Telephones in 1953 and was known as the AGT Building for many years. In the years 1963 and 1964 it was added to – it was originally only six storeys high – to the current 12 storeys. I'm not sure whether or not they added asbestos at that time. Certainly, there is asbestos in the building from its original construction. We heard earlier the Member for Edmonton-Manning referring to the negative effects of asbestos, and I'm going to guess that there may have been more than a few employees that worked on the Annex at one time or another that may also suffer from the effects of having been exposed. In 1966 the building was sold to public works, and presumably some time after that the Legislature started moving into the offices.

I just thought it was important to go over a little bit of the history of the public telephone companies in this province, Mr. Speaker. It's with some regret that I see this bill coming forward, not because it isn't a necessary bill. Clearly, we've spoken in the past about the need to review legislation and get rid of pieces that are no longer valid, and this is one that qualifies for that. But I think it would have been sad to let it go without a little bit of commentary on the long history that public telephone companies have had in this province and the great service that they've provided to the citizens of this province, and I'm glad to have had the opportunity to do so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Would there be additional speakers on this bill?

Should we call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

Bill 41

Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce for second reading Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

Bill 41 was referred to the standing policy committee after first reading, and I'm pleased that the standing policy committee did recommend to the House that we proceed with Bill 41.

Health care professionals play a very critical role in the health care system, and in this province as in all provinces in the country governance of health professions is done through regulatory colleges. It's a process that works well. Self-governance has served us well and will continue to serve us well. Regulatory bodies function independently of each other and the health system operators, so there's an issue of assurance that we need to deal with, hence Bill 41. Government's role is to provide that assurance to the public, notwithstanding that we have self-regulated professions and that those professions do operate in the best interests of the public, that they do have the capacity to provide for the most part the governance in the way of bylaws, codes of conduct, standards of practice.

The health care system is in fact becoming more and more complex. We're operating now where we have a stated policy of government that we want to have health care professionals working to the fullest extent of their capability, training, and expertise. We're working very diligently with health care professionals on multidisciplinary teams, methods in which health care professionals, different professions can practise collaboratively and collectively for the better good of Albertans. So it's important as we do that to make sure that our codes of conduct, our ethical standards, and standards of practice are synergized, that they work collaboratively together, and that they are synchronized appropriately.

It's also very important, as we have a range of health care professionals working together not only at cross-profession but within, if you want to call it, a range or a hierarchy of the profession, that their standards of practice, codes of conduct, et cetera, work together. So there's a role for the government, the Minister of Health in particular or through the Minister of Health, to work with the professions to make sure that we have that kind of a collaborative practice and that the codes of conduct, the standards of practice, and the ethical standards are working in concert.

Now, earlier this year we had a very unfortunate circumstance with respect to issues around infection prevention and control, which has been discussed in this House before, so I won't go into the details on it. But coming out of that incident, I as Minister of Health asked for a number of things to happen. One of the things which we did was ask the health professions to respond with a review of what they had in place with respect to infection prevention and control standards, and we had a report on that, which was released in August of this year.

While there are – and I want to say this – many very positive things happening in the province by the professions in respect to quality of care, infection prevention and control, there are gaps. There are issues that need to be addressed. So it's important when that happens, when you see that, to work collaboratively, to encourage the health professions to work both independently and to work collaboratively with each other to make sure that those gaps are filled.

But there is a responsibility as well on government. There's a responsibility on government to provide assurance to the public that those gaps are being filled. So I want to be very clear that it's not my intention as minister and it's not government's intention, nor would it be appropriate, for us to step in and do things with respect to the standards of practice or the codes of conduct. In fact, many of them, Mr. Speaker, are standards which are negotiated by the professions with their sister and brother professions across the country. It's not that easy to step in and tinker with bylaws or standards of practice or codes of conduct, but it is still fundamentally

important to be able to say to Albertans that the role of assurance that government holds is there, is being fulfilled, and that we have the capacity and we have the authority to do it if and when necessary.

4:40

With respect to Bill 41, then, I would just highlight that there are four categories of amendments being proposed to the Health Professions Act. The bill itself is called Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act because the medical professions are not yet, in fact, under the Health Professions Act. They're still under their own act. We anticipate the medical professions being brought in perhaps by the spring. So it's necessary to amend both acts in one circumstance.

Within Bill 41 there are four categories of amendments. The first category of amendments provides, as I've been speaking about, for greater accountability. Amendments are proposed to both the Health Professions Act and the Medical Profession Act, and it's really around this ability of the minister – and I want to emphasize – in extreme circumstance to be able to direct the profession to change a code of conduct or bylaw or standard of practice. I say in extreme circumstance because the expectation, the reality will be – it has to be – that one would not make such a change unilaterally or, as some have said in public discussion on this bill since its tabling in the spring, on a whim.

This is not about taking away self-regulation. This is not about defeating the very effective process of self-regulation of the profession, but it is about re-establishing the ability of the government to fulfill its role of assurance to the public.

It is about recognizing the complexity of the system and understanding that health care professionals are working together not only, as I say, in the hierarchy of the profession – in other words, nurse practitioner, RN, LPN, nursing assistant or personal care attendant, doctors, physicians' assistants, whatever other subsequent professions we might put in place there – but across professions, where you have, such as they proved so effectively in the bone and joint institute, the ability of health professionals to work together as a team and work with others, with the technicians and other support personnel, to make much more effective use of the health care resources and much better use of patients' time and provide a much better outcome to patients by working collaboratively. But if they're going to work collaboratively, they have to work with an understanding of a consistent set of ethical standards, of codes of conduct, and standards of practice.

It's government's role because if there was ever a problem, people wouldn't go back to the profession about the problem. They'd come to government. In a SARS pandemic, in a Walkerton situation, in any of those, to use extreme examples, it's not the individuals involved – sure, they're held accountable, but it's not those individuals that are expected to provide the assurance to the public. It's government that's expected to provide the assurance, so it's necessary for government to have the tools to actually do that assurance.

It should be clear that while the amendments that we're bringing in in this first category are about authorizing the minister to give direction to a health regulatory body to make, adopt, or amend regulatory bodies' bylaws, regulations, or standards of practice, it's to do so when there are gaps or inconsistencies. It's to do so after full discussion has happened, after you've gone through a process of discussion, unless there's an emergency. It's to do so only if after consultation, facilitation, mediation, and arbitration there needs to be a mandate. It should be clear – and I want to make that clear on the record – that this is not a first-in solution. This is a last-resort solution.

The second category of amendments basically talk about strengthening reporting on public health matters. Again, this comes out of discussions we were already having but was highlighted by the events this spring at East Central health, particularly at St. Joseph's hospital, and the necessity to make sure that there is a clear understanding of the primacy of the Public Health Act and the requirement on health care professionals to immediately report threats to public health to a medical officer of health. That provision, that requirement to report, prevails over any of the confidentiality provisions in the Health Professions Act, the Medical Profession Act, or any of the other regulations or bylaws governing health professions. It must be seen as paramount that the assurance of public health comes first, and if there's any question about the primacy of any of the various acts or regulations or bylaws, the duty to report has priority.

The third category of amendments that are being brought forward in Bill 41 deal with, in essence, the ability to provide support to colleges. This also had some degree of concern being expressed by members of the profession because you have, in fact, under the Health Professions Act a structural regime that applies to all of the colleges. But, in fact, one size doesn't fit all. Although it was a useful exercise, it's a very important structure to have a Health Professions Act and to have a standard organizational framework and a process for public involvement and those sorts of things.

In fact, when you have newer professions, when you have emerging professions, when you have some smaller professions that perhaps do not have the capacity to carry out all the functions that are required of a profession, there may be a need for support. It's in that vein that these amendments come forward, to say that in appropriate circumstances there can be an administrator appointed to perform a registrar function or to assist with a complaints director or to do the conduct and competency committee functions, that, in fact, these are helping provisions, but they also are fail-safe provisions. You could appoint an administrator in a circumstance where a profession fell on hard times and was not able to actually carry out its functions.

So while the major professions, the ones that we've known and loved for a long time – the College of Physicians and Surgeons; CARNA, the College and Association of Registered Nurses; the College of Pharmacists – are well-established, very strong professions, one would not expect to see the need to use this provision with respect to those professions. I can't even imagine a circumstance where that might come into effect. However, it might be very important to be able to have these provisions with respect to supporting a new or emerging profession.

Again, under our health workforce plan one of the things that we want to try and accomplish is to have new and emerging professions be able to come forward, be able to practise their profession in the province and add to the health workforce in an appropriate way to really, again, use the full skills that people might have, the education that people might have to provide appropriate health outcomes for Albertans.

The Standing Committee on Community Services recommended imposing limits on the term of office for any person appointed as administrator. The bill currently allows for a term of an administrator to be set in the appointment. The intention is to help colleges eventually operate without an administrator. I'm not anticipating an amendment coming forward in that regard, but I wanted just to highlight that that came out of the standing committee's report.

The fourth and last category of amendments really provides for greater clarity. Members will know that the Health Professions Act came into effect a number of years ago. It has been our practice, as we've learned and grown and as we've brought professions into the

act, to do amendments from time to time which, basically, update and improve the act. So the changes in that category, for example, deal with the responsibilities of employers and employees. Employees must provide evidence to their employers of valid professional registration. Employers must ensure that they employ the right health professional for the right job. Those are the types of amendments in that portion of the act.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 41 I would commend to the House. I would ask the House for support. I think it's a very important piece of amending legislation which will provide the minister and the government with the tools it needs to provide the assurance to the public of Alberta not only, as we've now introduced in Bill 48, that with respect to the regional health authorities there is a clear line of authority in process and accountability but that with respect to health professions there is a clear line of assurance and responsibility. While we do delegate significant opportunities to professions to self-regulate and responsibilities to professions to self-regulate, there is still a role of assurance that government must have, and Bill 41 provides the tools.

It's also important, as I said, because there needs to be a clear indication – and this is the appropriate place for it – that whether health professionals are practising on their own, in their own practices, or whether they're employed by or working within a health authority, they have a duty as health professionals to report any public health concern to the medical officer of health.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, I would ask for the support of the House on Bill 41.

4:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. If a government member would like to participate, kindly advise.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this is one of these interesting bills that you see occasionally coming from the government which has something good in it, and then that is balanced by bad things in it. We were willing to support the government in the amendments that they are proposing in Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, in providing clarity and certainty around the situation that arose specifically with the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Vegreville in which there was uncertainty about who was supposed to report to whom or even if there was a requirement to do that. I am a fan of certainty, particularly where public health is involved, so those amendments and the section that contains those amendments I'm certainly willing to support as the shadow minister for Health and Wellness.

I have not heard any complaints from any section of the health professions or members of the public who weren't supportive of this. I think it helps everybody to know exactly what the expectations are and that they're laid out clearly: what are the lines of communication, what is the timing around it, and who's supposed to do it to whom? That kind of clarity is very helpful.

We certainly had a scare around infection control both in Lloydminster and Vegreville earlier this year. It scared a lot of us and really brought into high relief the need to have those lines of clarity and authority. Certainly, the Health Quality Council report, from which flows much of the legislation that the minister has referred to, was pointing that out. In addition, when we look at some things like a pandemic preparation, as the minister alluded to at the end of his remarks, that is one of the key ingredients. It is around clear lines of communication and clarity of roles and responsibilities. So the first section that appears in Bill 41 under Public Health Threat

and the changes that flow through the Health Professions Act and others I think: we have no problem with that. That's the good.

Now the bad. A number of members of the health profession took advantage of the policy field committee public consultations to come and present, and I'm glad that they did. They were able to get their concerns well on the record. I may repeat some of those concerns, but I think it's important to have them laid out in this House.

I think the second part of this, specifically what's included in section 135 that's being amended, is pernicious, the part that's under Part 8.1, Direction, Support and Variation, specifically the minister's direction under 135.1 and everything that follows after that. I know that the College of Physicians and Surgeons really objects to this, and frankly so do I. This I think is an excessive reaction to the situations that arose. This is granting the minister an unwarranted extension of powers, and it is unwarranted.

Further, it fundamentally challenges the concept of self-regulation, and that is what we were trying to set up under the Health Professions Act. We have these professions. They're experts in their field. We recognize their right, essentially, to self-regulate and that they are the best people to be doing it. Then what we have is this overlay from the minister that says: well, yeah, all of that's true except if I decide that it isn't. So I would argue that this sort of thing fundamentally challenges that whole concept of self-regulation and all the other things that fall under that new Health Professions Act.

It's all about self-regulation. They've made every possible health profession conform to that by setting up a college, an association, a series of criteria for meeting standards in the profession, for self-regulating on discipline procedures, on training, on ongoing, lifelong evaluation of professional qualifications and practice. We've done all of this work to set this up. We've been operating under that assumption. It's worked pretty well for us so far, and now we have this overlay where the minister can basically interject himself into any component and for no good reason. The reasons that the minister has laid out are not good enough, not to make that kind of a change in what we have in a system that's working pretty well for us, not perfectly but, you know, pretty well.

I think there are a number of possibilities that arise out of a change like that. For example, how keen will the pressure be to capitulate on a negotiation in another area to avoid having the minister decide that this is such an enormous case that they're going to have to invoke these powers and come in? Pretty strong. I can speak from experience on that one. The not-for-profit sector in this province has been under enormous pressure to be careful, not to make too much noise, not to distress the government by pushing too hard on certain advocacy things because they held all the money strings in a lot of cases.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think we can look not too far in the province for other examples where the government has not played ball on this kind of thing and where there is a coercion factor that comes into play. You know what? Sometimes that's our own fault, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes we self-censor. Sometimes we make choices about our organizations or our companies in fear of some sort of interference from the government because they have the power to do it. Okay. That's our fault. We shouldn't have self-censored ourselves or made decisions based on that. But you know what? We do it because of fear. We do it because the government has already given itself the power to interfere with us. That's what's wrong with the whole second section of what's anticipated in this act, in Bill 41.

The minister says: oh, we're not really going to use these powers; you know, this is just really for an unanticipated extreme emergency.

Well, you know what? If the powers are not to be used, they should not be legislated. The government surely has another way to deal with this problem. If this extreme, far-reaching, highly unlikely situation is ever going to arise, then they have a number of other tools at their disposal. This makes it too easy, and it's too darn tempting.

I think we've seen a couple of other examples where we have major conceptual legislation that gets adjusted a bit by this government and as a result other things happen that, I hope, were not anticipated, but perhaps they were. You know, the idea of collective bargaining that got tinkered with when the government in negotiating with CNRL changed the division 8 labour code. That has now allowed for changes in master agreements. So there's an example of where they gave themselves the power. They changed something that was conceptual legislation, and then they've gone back and used it not for good but for evil, I would argue, if I may paraphrase, Mr. Speaker.

5:00

Where is another example? Well, that would be around the confined feedlot operators, where they tinkered with it and allowed those to be closer to things like schools and communities. You know, we can find examples of where this very same government, these very same people – not 25 years ago, Mr. Speaker, not 40 years ago or 70 years ago, but this group of people – have made changes in other substantial pieces of conceptual legislation, and that resulted in them then coming back and using it, again, I would say, not for good but for evil.

What underlying problem is being solved by the changes that the minister would like to see in this legislation? Again I'm not talking about the beginning part, about the public health, about that clarity. I'm talking about the other sections, where the minister is now able to go in and arbitrarily change regulation power and a number of other powers that are delegated now or are allowed to be evoked by self-regulatory organizations. What powers and what problem is being solved by this? I don't think the minister was able to articulate exactly. It's all sort of, "Well, maybe it's this," or "Maybe it's that," or "I could imagine possibly at some point in the future." Uh-uh, uh-uh. That is not what legislation is for: some whimsical, magical, possible thing in the future. It has to be more concrete than that to be giving itself such enormous power.

If it's not a problem that's being solved, then what policy issue is being addressed through this? Again, I can't see what policy issue is being addressed. What policy issue needed to be advocated that's now being addressed by the minister giving himself powers to be able to go in and arbitrarily change self-regulatory groups? Again, that can't be answered.

I heard the minister say: well, this was being done for what if or role of assurance. Well, again that brings up the issues of trust. This government continues to give itself very expansive powers, especially through regulations, which are not open to scrutiny by this Assembly. The discussions and reasons behind it do not appear in *Hansard*. They're not streamed through live audio or through live video streaming on the Internet. The citizens and the members of the opposition have no ability to scrutinize the government on why they arrived at those particular decisions. It's behind closed doors, and for the kind of changes that are being anticipated here, that is inappropriate.

There are a couple of things really wrong around those issues of trust. There are issues around transparency and accountability. What kind of report back do we get if the minister decides that he wants to come in and do this? What sort of accountability and

transparency do we the public or members of the opposition in this House on behalf of the public get to have to scrutinize when the minister decides to do this? It's not there, Mr. Speaker, and that is wrong.

There also need to be checks and balances on power. Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. This government continues to give itself more and more intrusive powers into every aspect of our lives. That is inappropriate, and we the people have to curb that power. That's part of the push back that citizens should have against a government. They should be able to advocate to keep the government in check, and so is it the role of the opposition to do that.

I will not support this legislation as it stands. As I said at the beginning, I'm more than willing to support the public health concerns that were being addressed because of the confusion that arose over those situations that started with St. Joe's hospital and then moved beyond that last spring. But the second part of what's anticipated in this legislation is inappropriate. It's more than that. It is pernicious. I don't trust this government with that kind of power. I'm not willing to give them that kind of power if I can't trust them with it. I have enough examples in front of me of where that government took that kind of power before and then did things that were against the tenor of what was expected out of that, and I feel they misused and abused that. I don't think it's appropriate to do that.

An Hon. Member: Do you have some examples?

Ms Blakeman: I gave the two examples, if the member was listening. He's welcome to check with *Hansard*.

I won't support it because this is being made unilaterally. I don't like it being made through regs, which this government tends to do. There are other opportunities for the government to react to pandemic situations. This kind of power should be used only as a last resort, and I don't see anything on the horizon that would justify the minister giving himself and the government that kind of power at this point in time.

I will look at amendments for this, but I do not think what's being anticipated here is appropriate in any way, shape, or form.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to participate in debate on Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. You know, some of the bill is, I suppose, absolutely necessary. We learn things as we go along, and the bill aims to provide for greater accountability to Albertans about the consistency of health care standards of practice, require the reporting of public health issues despite any other confidentiality in the respective acts, and provide for professions to be regulated in the Health Professions Act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as the previous speaker said, most of that's desirable, and certainly we learned things recently by what happened in east-central Alberta. But I think the other part of the bill, that we all know is the most controversial part, is that the minister gains new power to intervene in professional bodies. I notice that the minister said that one of the purposes of this act was to increase collaboration between the various health professions. He's done that indirectly because I think he has almost all the associations against him in section 135. They all seem to be of one mind about that, so I think

there is an amount of collaboration going on, probably not the kind that the minister wanted. We notice, I think, right across the board that the College of Physicians and Surgeons, CARNA, the pharmacists all strongly opposed to the new section, section 135, which creates new powers for the minister to intervene in the affairs of what are supposedly self-governing bodies. I know this was brought forward to the policy field committee, but they decided, I think unfortunately, to not recommend any substantive changes to section 135.

Now, I've listened to the minister. I wasn't on the committee, but I believe he said to the policy field committee that, really, this is just a what if, sort of, and he can't imagine – I heard him say today – for whatever reason that he would ever interfere with the established professional bodies such as the pharmacists, physicians, surgeons, nurses, and others, but maybe there are some emerging health professions that may need some help. Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that this is sort of taking a sledgehammer to a nail. If there are some particular smaller professions that are coming that need help, surely there's a way around it to put it into regulation that that's who we're to deal with, but to say that you take a broad approach and say that for all the health professions the minister has the right to intervene seems to me to be overkill.

As the previous speaker said, the minister said that he can't imagine ever having to do that. Well, why would we legislate it if you can't imagine us ever doing it? I mean, that just doesn't make a lot of sense to me. What could be a good bill we've now got in a controversy here with the minister. I know the minister himself is from a profession that's self-governing. I can imagine the outcry within that group of professionals if this sort of bill was coming forward. In the legal profession they'd be as angry as the other groups are, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

Last night in this Assembly I recall debating Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007. Interestingly enough, in that particular bill dealing with mortgage brokers – we were supposedly dealing with mortgage fraud – we were actually opening it up to more self-governance so that they can deal with these problems within the real estate industry. The next day, Mr. Speaker, we have a bill here dealing with established professions that have been around forever, and now we're taking away some of their rights. That just doesn't make a lot of sense with two different bills that we're debating right here in this Legislature.

You know, I say to the minister that I would have thought one would have wanted to be particularly careful when we're dealing with this. As I say, the collaboration, the groups – he's got the message, I'm sure, about section 135. So you've taken a good bill and learned from it, and now we have this controversy, unnecessarily, I would say, in terms of taking away rights of the professions. That doesn't make much sense to me, Mr. Speaker, because these are precisely the groups that we want to have on board on this accountability.

Now, I notice – and I'd like to come to this – why we have to do this. The minister was good enough to brief us about a bill that's coming forward, Bill 48, the Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, and he alluded to the problems with infection control in Vegreville, in east-central Alberta. This particular bill, Bill 48, seems to me to be solving his problems, Mr. Speaker, because he's working, correctly – and I believe it's a good bill – on accountability. Obviously, the minister is accountable overall.

Then the health regions. We've laid that out in Bill 48. It seems

to me that there's where the minister has the power to do the things that he needs to do. So why would we be taking this bill and messing around with the professions when we don't need to, Mr. Speaker? I just come back to what the minister said. He said that it's basically there for emerging professions. Well, surely you can put in some guidelines and that without going and saying: well, it may be down the way that I need to interfere in the professions that have been operating in this province for a long time. I really do say to the minister: imagine in the legal profession, that he's in, if a similar bill like this came forward, what the outcry would be. He knows very well what that outcry would be, and they'd probably be even more vociferous, because they're used to being in court, than the doctors and everybody else, I can imagine.

You know, if I may just quote from a letter sent recently to Mr. Hancock, that was delivered to all of us, from PARA, the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta. I think they put it very well. They talk about co-operation. I'll just quote the one paragraph: as resident physicians we have witnessed an era of productive collaboration between the Alberta government and its physicians; introducing legislation which may undermine the ability of Alberta's physicians to regulate themselves risks making the province a less attractive environment for new physicians deciding where to practise.

That's an important point, Mr. Speaker, because we're all in competition for health workers right across Canada, around the world, for that matter, and they're saying that this may have a detrimental effect, especially getting new young physicians. It says: resident physicians value sound discussion and good evidence from a broad perspective to implement codes of ethics, regulations, bylaws, and practices. I think they're offering their hands out and saying, "We'll help whatever way we can." They're saying: "Why are we doing basically this? We've had a good round of collaboration with the government." They're praising the government; they just don't understand the purpose of this.

Mr. Speaker, as I say, most of the bill is an important part of accountability and certainly, when we bring it in with Bill 48, absolutely a necessity, as we've learned in east-central Alberta. But I'd just say to the minister and to this government: why would we undermine a good working relationship with established health professionals that we need to make it a sound health care system by even saying that we may need this power somewhere down the line, that we may need it? As I say, the minister hasn't given us a good reason why he would interfere within the self-governance model of these established professions. He said, you know, that emerging professions may need help. Well, it seems to me that you can deal with that rather than what you're doing here. I think it's a major mistake, and it detracts from the good parts of the bill, and it certainly detracts from the bill that the minister brought forward today.

I'd just, with all due respect to the minister, say that I think we don't have a Senate here, but sober second thought – well, that's always a misnomer in the Senate. We need some sober second thought here by the minister and the government, and I would hope that they would take a look at this before it comes back in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to rise

and speak on Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. I have to start by saying that this is a new phase in democracy in this province because this is one of four bills which were referred to the newly formed standing policy field committees – I know, Mr. Speaker, that you and I together sat on one of them, the Standing Committee on Government Services; this is the other one, Community Services – which is really a direction that I like and I commend. We know that members from both sides of the House approached this exercise with open minds, and I know that for the most part it did pay off. I was more than pleased with the co-operation and the progress that we experienced in Government Services, and I'm sure that was the case as well in Community Services.

Now, Bill 41 as proposed by the minister has good parts and questionable parts. When we're amending the Health Professions Act to require immediate notification of the medical officer of health by a health professional, a college employee, an officer, or an agent of any threat to public health, well, that's okay. I think that is good in terms of, you know, public safety and in terms of reaction times and in terms of being quick on our feet to respond to an emergency or to a threat, so I don't see any reason to oppose this particular part of the bill.

But as my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Centre mentioned, it has become more the tradition and the custom of this government to lump good things with bad things, and I'm going to remind the House that this was the case last year when we were talking about Bill 20, the changes we did to the privacy legislation. We had some good components, which everybody agreed to, components that strengthened protection of personal information, components that made it difficult for personal information to be misused or abused, but then we also had components from the government which made government operations more secretive and added another layer of concealment to, you know, government decisions and blocked access to government information and so on.

5:20

So we were faced with a very difficult situation last year, Mr. Speaker: do we support a bill that has questionable parts, or do we oppose it? You try to amend it. You try to remove the offending parts, you try to stick to the good parts, and you try to move forward, but then the government responds by saying: "No. It's take it all or leave it all." This is a similar situation.

I mentioned the positive component. The negative component here would be the part that amends the Health Professions Act and the Medical Profession Act to give the minister that extra power, that added power, the concentration of power in the hands of one person, to either replace the functions of the entity that's in question – take the College of Physicians and Surgeons, for example – or direct a college to adopt certain bylaws, regulations, or standards.

Now, as the minister explained in his opening remarks, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the college of pharmacy, nursing, and so on and so forth, all of these entities, are long standing. They are strong in their mandates, they are strong in their history and tradition, and we don't have many complaints against them. We don't have many troubles with these agencies or entities. So why are we doing this now?

Definitely the concerns that were heard in the committee, from my brief scan of their transcripts and from talking to members of the Official Opposition that sat on that committee, regarding changes to existing medical health professions' self-governance were definitely the more pronounced concerns, the concerns that were heard the most.

Now, I think that this is in reaction to the crisis in Lloydminster, for example, and in similar situations with respect to infection control and things like sterilization and things like this. Responsibility for these situations rests with the health regions, and I have to mention, Mr. Speaker, on the record that I would have much rather seen health regions continue to be elected, but what's behind us is behind us. They are now appointed. Anyway, they are ultimately responsible for what goes on in the facilities in their immediate region.

Then I would like to see a strengthened central monitoring role for the ministry of health to have that oversight capacity, that oversight function centrally, that basically they would look after sterilization. They would look after equipment. They would look after most of these things. That would then hopefully alleviate the concern that maybe the health regions are to blame. I don't want to be pointing blame, and I don't think the minister is trying to do this here. But I think he's trying to react very forcefully. I think, you know, that co-operation with the health regions and maybe having that central monitoring function would alleviate that concern, and he doesn't have to really intervene in this fashion.

The committee received submissions, Mr. Speaker. They received written as well as in-person submissions, oral submissions. Again, sort of the uniform reaction, the most received feedback was: what are we trying to do here? The most important question was one given by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and I don't think they've received an answer yet: "What problem is being addressed? What is this legislative change attempting to do?"

Now, when we take a professional organization that has been there in some cases even longer than the government – I actually attended the centennial celebration of the Law Society. This Law Society was here before the province became a province. Similarly, I would bet you that the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the college of pharmacy have been here for decades and decades, some of them before the province even became a province. Now we're telling them: you cannot continue to do what you do because we know better. I think this would be classified, in my book at least, as short-sighted. I think it would be too much government, and we know that too much government is not necessarily better. Sometimes we enter into places that we shouldn't, and we venture into new places that maybe we should stay away from.

The other question I had. I know this is second reading, Mr. Speaker, so I'm talking to the essence of the bill. I'm talking to the basics of the bill, which is about the recommendation from the committee to the minister to impose limits on the term of office for an appointed administrator. Is the minister leaning towards that? Is he going in that direction? I need to maybe hear from him as to his rationale, what good he's hoping to achieve, and what problems, again, we are trying to fix or address. Appointed administrators: you know, I would classify them as employees. They're basically there to do a job. Have we heard anything that maybe advises us or tells us that maybe two terms is enough because the longer they stay, they lose their effectiveness or there are mistakes made or certain things that maybe we don't like to see?

I need to know the rationale and if, in fact, the minister is leaning towards that, if he's going to accept that recommendation from the committee. I'm not necessarily against it. Don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. I just need the clarity to make up my own mind whether, in fact, this is something I am going to be willing to support.

In terms of the minister using public interest as his trigger, who is going to define public interest? Is that interpretation or that opinion going to be one that the minister exercises himself? When we have situations where public interest is the focal point, the deciding factor,

who's going to make that decision? Again, I don't think it should rest in the hands of just one person because too much power concentrated in one person's hands is not necessarily the way I'd like our government to be going. Subjectivity and sometimes settling scores or personal agendas might get in the way of being objective and being a good manager.

I can go on and on, but I realize this is second reading, and I want to give the opportunity to other members of the House to put their thoughts on record and put their comments and questions on record so that we can all gain a better understanding. If we're forced to have the situation where we take it all or leave it all, I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I am probably going to oppose Bill 41 unless the offending sections are removed, and I'm hoping that this would happen in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order (29)(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, at this time I'd like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 41.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 1 **Lobbyists Act**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I understand you're offering some amendments to this bill.

Mr. Cenaiko: Yes, sir.

The Chair: I'd like to point out to the Assembly that this is an historic event in the province of Alberta. This is the first time that the newly formed standing committees are reporting directly to the Legislative Assembly.

With that, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

5:30

Mr. Cenaiko: Another historic event for the MLA representing Calgary-Buffalo.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today before the Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. This bill passed second reading on March 22, and on May 29 it was referred to the Standing Committee on Government Services. The committee met a total of 10 times, including two days of public hearings. We heard from 48 citizens and associations through both written submissions and public hearings. A number of issues were raised throughout the committee's review, and we had the opportunity to explore those issues with stakeholders.

I think it is important to note that the Department of Justice brought several proposed amendments to the committee so that the committee could consider all amendments. I would like to move a

package of amendments that are found in the committee's report and ask that they be marked A1. The committee recommended the following amendments.

Part A. Amendment (a) to section 1 was proposed by the Department of Justice. The addition of a definition of client will clarify that consultant lobbyists hired by individuals or organizations must register. Amendment (b) was also proposed by the Department of Justice and makes the definition of consultant lobbyist consistent with that of organization lobbyist without changing the intent of the bill. Amendment (c) would change the definition of organization lobbyist by adding a 100-hour threshold. Those organization lobbyists who lobby for fewer than 100 hours annually will not be required to register under the proposed legislation. The 100-hour threshold amendment has been proposed to exempt small not-for-profit charitable organizations, among other groups. The committee listened closely to the concerns of the not-for-profit sector, and this amendment is an attempt to address those concerns.

Part B. Amendment (a) has been recommended by the committee and proposes the exemption of members of boards of trustees under the School Act and the staff of those members or the officers or employees of the boards. This proposed amendment is recommended because school boards are publicly elected bodies, like municipal governments, and should be similarly excluded. This proposed amendment clarifies that unpaid volunteers are exempt from the bill. Amendment subsection (b) was proposed by the Department of Justice and clarifies that the exemption of certain submissions extends to submissions made on behalf of individuals as well as those made on behalf of organizations.

Part C. This amendment to section 6 of the bill was considered extensively by the committee. This proposed exception to the prohibition against lobbying and providing paid advice to government on the same issue at the same time would exempt those who are involved in multistakeholder committees and would permit the Ethics Commissioner to grant an exemption from this prohibition when it is in the public interest to do so. Persons are appointed to these committees due to their expertise in their field. The intention of the legislation is not to penalize a person or organization for participating on advisory boards and committees.

Part D. Amendment subsection (a) is a technical amendment proposed by the Department of Justice. The amendment proposes striking out a phrase because it is no longer necessary given proposed amendments to other sections of the bill, which clarifies the role of the Ethics Commissioner. Amendment subsection (b) would further amend section 11 by expanding the scope of the information to be kept by the registrar in the registry.

Part E. This amendment to section 14 was proposed by the Department of Justice and clarifies that only the Ethics Commissioner may issue advisory opinions and interpretation bulletins.

Part F. Amendment subsection (a) provides authority and a mechanism for making public reports submitted to the Speaker when the Assembly is not sitting. Amendment subsection (b) is a committee amendment proposed by the Department of Justice which clarifies the role of the Ethics Commissioner with respect to the publication of the details of a report.

Part G. Amendment subsection (a) was proposed by the Department of Justice and addresses concerns that only the designated filer is guilty of an offence if a lobbyist conducts lobbying activity while knowing that the designated filer has not registered or filed a return on his or her behalf. Amendment subsection (b) proposes a reduction of fines for violations of the bill. Fines for violation of the proposed legislation would be reduced by one-half. This proposed amendment is to bring the maximum fines in the bill in line with the

maximum fines in similar legislation in other jurisdictions. There was also the concern that the large fines may discourage some smaller organizations from lobbying due to the fear of inadvertent mistakes leading to prohibitively large fines. Amendment subsection (c) was proposed by the Department of Justice and clarifies that only the Ethics Commissioner may exercise the powers, duties, and functions in section 19(5), (6), and (7).

Part H. This proposed amendment would give the Lieutenant Governor in Council the authority to make determinations regarding definitions of time spent lobbying and to communicate. The committee felt that this was necessary so that adjustments can be made to the legislation regarding what constitutes lobbying under the proposed 100-hour threshold for organization lobbyists.

Part I. This proposed amendment would reduce the time frame for first review of the proposed legislation from five to two years. Given the nature of this proposed legislation, the committee believed that an earlier first review is warranted. It would also allow the not-for-profit and volunteer sectors an opportunity to evaluate the operation of the act at an earlier date.

Part J. This amendment was proposed by the Department of Justice, which clarifies what information must be provided when the client is an individual and not an organization.

Part K. Amendment subsection (a) was proposed by the Department of Justice and clarifies that a business address does not have to be provided for an individual. Amendment subsection (b) was also proposed by the Department of Justice to increase clarity.

Mr. Chairman, with that, the recommendations from the committee are before this Assembly.

I would just like to take the opportunity, then, having worked with all members of the committee from all parties, to address who the members were. The deputy chair was the MLA for Edmonton-McClung. We had representation from the MLAs for Calgary-East, Calgary-Nose Hill, Livingstone-Macleod, Calgary-Bow, Drumheller-Stettler, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, Lethbridge-East, Whitecourt-St. Anne, Edmonton-Strathcona, and Edmonton-Calder. Mr. Chairman, it was a tremendous opportunity to work together as MLAs and, as well, to ensure that legislation coming before this Assembly does meet the needs of the public, and we attempted to do that with the original drafting of Bill 1.

With that, I'll end my comments. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this amendment. I understand that there may be a move to sever the amendment so we can vote on the sections one by one, but I did want to speak prior to that admonition being made, so I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to do so.

First and foremost, I want to say that this is, in my view, a very historic occasion and an important one. We had a standing policy committee, or, as we call them, a policy field committee, which was able to hear from the public with respect to a bill and not just any bill, Mr. Chairman, but Bill 1. Bill 1 normally is a bill sponsored by the Premier as the first bill of any session, and often it deals with noncontroversial items. Often it doesn't deal with as important an item as what we're dealing with today with Bill 1. Certainly, it's unheard of to have the Premier's bill referred to a standing committee of the Legislature for this type of scrutiny and public input. It truly shows that the reform initiatives that this government proposed and that were worked on with members of the opposition and the opposition House leaders, both from the Liberal opposition and from

the third-party opposition – it shows the effectiveness of that process.

5:40

I wanted to go on record, first and foremost, by commending the members of all of the four standing policy committees, and particularly this one, for the service that they provided over the course of the summer break in the session and for hearing from the public and doing good work. I particularly wanted to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo as the chair of this particular committee but all the members of this committee because I think this is a very, very important step forward for our Legislature and one which was promised by our Premier and one which I as House leader was pleased to be able to bring forward and work, as I said, with the opposition House leaders on.

Now, having said that, it's important to recognize that the House has final control over a bill. So while I think there's been very good work brought forward, I have to say that I don't think the work that's brought forward completely captures the true concerns that were raised by the volunteer sector in our province. I just want to highlight that at the appropriate time I will be bringing forward a further amendment which will deal the question of what I would call a public-good exemption, an exemption which would make it very clear that charitable organizations and voluntary organizations are not part of the registry process unless they are constituted to serve management, union, or professional interests not having a majority of members that are profit-seeking enterprises or representatives of profit-seeking enterprises.

The reason I mention this now, Mr. Chairman, is, first and foremost, because it may impact how we consider all the rest of the amendments that we're bringing. If we're going to deal with them on a one-by-one basis, I think it's fair for the House to know that there's going to be a government amendment come forward to the bill to deal with this concern that has been raised by many members of the public, members of voluntary organizations. It's important as we deal with each of the amendments that's being brought forward that we understand that there will also be an amendment brought forward to consider, which I have stylized as the public-good amendment. I thought that in the context of the possibility that you might recommend that we vote on this package of amendments on a section-by-section basis, it was important to put that acknowledgement before the House and advise the House that this additional amendment would be coming forward, which I had proposed to bring forward after this package of amendments was dealt with.

The House may discuss as to whether or not some of these other amendments are required, but in reviewing the full package and the impact of the public-good amendment on the full package, I don't believe it's necessary to change the package as recommended by the committee. It's just to provide this additional public-good exemption. Having not circulated the amendment that I'm talking about, I would just reference it to be very similar to the Quebec act, which provides for an exemption for any person. Our language in this bill talks about directors, officers, or employees, but in any event it makes it very clear that persons who are in a voluntary organization which is truly a charitable or a public-good organization, as opposed to a special-interest organization, would be exempted from the registration under the Lobbyists Act.

Mr. Chairman, again, I want to say thank you to the committee for the work that they've done. This committee and all four committees this summer have done, I think, a service to this Legislature in carrying forward the interests of the policy field committees, or, as they're referred to in the Standing Orders, the standing policy

committees, and to bring the true interests of the amendments that we made that we agreed upon, first as House leaders and then embodied as temporary Standing Orders, to really bring that process to fruition. This is the first amending results of that process. I think the committee has done great work. The amendments that I'm bringing forward will intend to supplement that work, not to replace it.

With those comments, Mr. Chair, I would look forward to our dealing with amendments on the floor.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. In my role as House leader for the Official Opposition I would ask that the package of amendments that have been brought forward be severed into parts. Those would be the parts that are as presented, outlined by the alphabet A to K, which I believe gives us 11 separate amendments.

I am aware that we've had some people very patiently waiting with us in the gallery. They are representatives of the not-for-profit sector. So I am delighted to hear the Government House Leader speak of amendments to come following this package that would be addressing their concerns specifically around what's been referred to as the Quebec amendment, and I will be very glad to be reviewing these 11 amendments with that screen or focus put in place. I do look forward to that amendment coming forward, and I certainly appreciate the members of the sector staying with us all afternoon to see the launching of this bill. I'm pleased to hear what the House leader has put forward, but I do ask that the whole package be severed into parts, please.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. It's the decision of the chair that the amendment be tabled as amendment A1 and that we will deal with each part with subamendments. We will label each different part separately.

Ms Blakeman: We will end up dealing with different amendments, though, correct? I am asking this to be severed, not to be done as various subamendments. Am I correct in that?

The Chair: Yes. Separate parts.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. In responding to amendment A1 now, which is section 1(1) which is being amended, first of all, let me thank the hon. chair of the Standing Policy Field Committee on Government Services, whom I had the pleasure of working with for at least 10 meetings. I have to thank all the colleagues who sat on this committee for their open-mindedness and their patience as we all struggled to reach that balance, you know, that fine midpoint between our desire and our attempt to make government and the dealings of government more open and transparent and the reaction we had to give to members from the nonprofit sector and the volunteer sector when we heard their cries loud and clear when they said, you know, that the net of the act was cast too wide and it wasn't them that the act intended to catch.

It was a balancing act, and I think the committee actually achieved a good balance when members from the media, for example, were criticizing us for watering down a bill that was attempting to make

government more open and transparent and to allow us to govern with integrity. But then, on the other hand, you get members from the nonprofit sector saying: you guys went too far. I thought to myself that maybe we actually reached that balance. Knowing that all we do and all we did in the committee was going to end up on the floor of the Assembly in Committee of the Whole for all 83 members of this esteemed Assembly to work on and to debate and to talk about, that was the added level.

I am pleased that the Quebec amendment is coming forward. Had the Government House Leader not done it himself, I was more than prepared to do that on my own. Me and everybody else, Mr. Chairman. It was basically a good step. It was a good measure. The committee was really a positive exercise, and it was eye opening for me. I understand that this is one of the few times we've done it in this province, if ever. In that regard I am definitely pleased.

5:50

Now, to focus on the amendment that we have before us, this one here is renumbering some clauses and striking out some clauses, substituting another. I'm going to tell you in layman's language, Mr. Chairman, what we're attempting to do here. I'm speaking on behalf of the committee and all the members. What we're trying to do here is say that a consultant lobbyist has to register and report regardless of how much time the consultant lobbyist spends. So for somebody who is paid a fee or is under contract to lobby on behalf of a certain agency or a certain entity and gets paid, there is no threshold. If you spend one minute lobbying, you are caught under the act, and you have to register and report versus an organizational lobbyist, somebody who is in-house.

The committee deemed that an in-house lobbyist or an organizational lobbyist who is not paid, you know, somebody who is totally volunteering, does not have to register and report. Now, if that person is paid for their transportation, for example, or something like this just to compensate them for expenses that they incurred, they still don't have to register and report. But if they're paid any type of fee or any type of honorarium, then they have a threshold. If they meet that threshold, then they have to register and report.

We struggled in the committee between different models and different suggestions: the 20 per cent threshold, as you remember, Mr. Chair, and, you know, the eight days or 12 days and so on and so forth. We picked the Quebec approach, which is 12 days, but we further clarified it as 12 working days. Typically a working day has eight hours. We multiplied eight by 12; it gave us 96. We actually rounded it up to 100. We said that if somebody individually or collectively within an agency reaches that threshold and exceeds it, then that person or that entity has to both register and report any lobbying that they do.

This is, in essence, what we're trying to do in this amendment, that we're now calling amendment A1. As a member of the committee but then also just as an MLA in this House I think that that provides the clarity that was necessary to make that distinction very clear between who is a consultant lobbyist, somebody who makes a living lobbying on behalf of a cause or an agency or a group, and then somebody who is doing it as a volunteer in-house. Then if that volunteer gets paid, you know, we have that threshold here, which also offered a bit of clarity. Not having a threshold was an undue burden, in my opinion, on most of our volunteer-run associations, charities, nonprofit service providers, and so on.

Now, is 100 hours too little or too few? No. I think it's a reasonable thing. We're talking 12 days, which is one day a month.

They might argue that they need to do more. I'm hoping that with the Quebec exemption, then, we would address that, but till then, you know, till tomorrow or next week, this should offer the relief that is necessary in this case, in my opinion, because 100 hours is a lot of time.

We've heard the concern that maybe preparation time is also included. Maybe some people thought that that was not fair because how can you account for prep work? How can you account for research? How can you account for time you spend online trying to determine, you know, who does what in government and who is the person to talk to and who is the person to approach? Well, we struggled with this because you can't really discern what is prep time and what is actual lobbying time. So we said that it all counts. But then I'm hoping that with the clarity from the amendment, with the Quebec exemption, this might not be necessary.

The threshold is here to stay, and the threshold is fair, in my opinion. The distinction that we made was extremely important and useful to make to members of the nonprofit community and the volunteer community. An organizational lobbyist who is just one person, like a one-man show, a sole proprietor, or somebody who is a partner in a partnership: then they don't need to make a payment, and they don't need to receive a payment because they're basically running their own show, so they're still captured. I think that is also a good direction.

So, Mr. Chairman, speaking to this particular amendment, I do support it, and I thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 63, I will now ask the Government House Leader to rise and report progress. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 1.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 1. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the committee concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It being approaching 6 o'clock, I would move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:58 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, November 15, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of the House 25 guests from Hughenden, comprised of students, teachers, and parents. I had the pleasure a couple of weeks ago of being in that school and talking to the students about the role of an MLA. We do a little mock Legislature, and I was proud to say that those students were some of the brightest students I have ever experienced talking to. They are a brilliant young group that knows more about this Legislature than most Albertans do in general. They are accompanied today by their incredible teacher, who teaches them a lot about government, especially in Alberta, Mrs. Cathy Samson, by Mrs. Kym Poelzer, Mrs. Carol Anholt, Mrs. Brenda Buchanan-Charlton, Mr. Eric Poelzer, Ms Yvonne Waring, and Mr. Matt Samson. I'd ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a strong member of the community for the Strathcona riding, Mr. Dave Quest. Dave is the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association and brings with him a wealth of knowledge and experience. He served in various positions with the party, as executive of the Better Business Bureau of Alberta, and is a very dedicated member of his community on many levels, including coaching soccer. I'm certainly proud to have Dave as a member of my team as we build Alberta's future. Dave is joined by his wife, Fiona, and I would ask that they both rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, once again it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the riding of Edmonton-Manning, Mr. Peter Sandhu. Mr. Sandhu succeeded in his nomination after the second ballot of a very strongly contested nomination. Peter is a centennial ambassador, helping to celebrate Alberta's 100th birthday, a very dedicated member of his community, and a strong booster of not only the city of Edmonton but the province and the country of Canada. I'm proud to have Peter as a member of my team as we build Alberta's future. Peter is joined by his wife, Kamaljit, and I would ask that both of them rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure today

to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House 32 of Alberta's brightest and best students from Warburg school in my constituency. Warburg school is known as the small school with a big heart. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Mrs. Chandra Klatt, by parent helpers Mrs. Cheryl Garrett, Ms Lynn Lafreniere, Mrs. Tara Benoit, and Mrs. Nicole Moeller. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 18 grade 6 students and their teacher, Nova Gould. They are from Kameyosek elementary school in Mill Woods, and they are excited to be here. I'd like to have them stand, please, and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 18 students from the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta who enrolled in a course in legislative process and legislative drafting taught by our Senior Parliamentary Counsel Rob Reynolds and Chief Legislative Counsel for the government, Peter Pagano. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe I have two introductions today. The first person I'd like to introduce is Bonita Davidson. She is a constituent of Edmonton-Centre. She has been a dedicated personal care attendant for 25 years. She believes strongly that caregivers are not treated or paid fairly and that quality of care is suffering because of this. She also has collected thousands of signatures on the petitions that I've been tabling every day in the Assembly. Bonita, if you're here, I would ask you to please rise and accept the welcome of the Assembly.

The second introduction that I'd like to make to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to all members of the Assembly is Nick Palamarchuk. Nick is a senior in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre and a resident of Cathedral Close. I met him during one of my frequent visits to Cathedral Close. He came to the Legislature today, actually, to watch the debate of Bill 46, which I gather will be a very short debate today. He's a lifelong student and is currently working on his master's degree. So there we have it: lifelong learning in the flesh. Please join me in welcoming Nick Palamarchuk.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister for Capital Planning.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce some constituents who are accompanying Mr. Peter Sandhu today for their first visit to the Legislature. I'd like to ask Kulwinder Toor, Inderjit Gill, Harpreet Sandhu, and Heiko Lotzgeselle to please stand. Please welcome these wonderful members from my area.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured

today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two long-time NDP activists, Laurie and Christine Lang. Laurie was one of the founding members of the Knights of Columbus 12457 here in Edmonton. He's been active in his church, St. Dominic Savio parish. Laurie has been employed at Alberta Hospital and was president of his local and the United Nurses of Alberta. In 2004 Laurie was our candidate in Edmonton-Manning and ran a great campaign. He returned to politics, only this time on the federal scene, to run for the NDP in the riding of Edmonton-Sherwood Park in the 2006 election. I want to thank him for his contribution to the NDP and to democracy in Alberta.

Christine Lang is an active volunteer in her community. She teaches at Landing Trail school in Sturgeon county. She and Laurie have two sons, Ian and Keith. Ian and his wife, Dina, live in Beaumaris. Keith is married to Mandy, and they have two sons, Nicholas and Matthew.

Before I ask them to accept the warm welcome of the Assembly, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning for helping to facilitate and organize this visit today. I would now ask that Laurie and Christine rise or wave and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and introduce to you and through you to all Members of this Legislative Assembly a resident of Rimbey, Joe Anglin. Joe is a father of three, and he is a very active citizen in the affairs of not only this province but also in central Alberta. Joe is one of the many citizens who are actively fighting Bill 46. He is an articulate, reasoned voice in why Bill 46 should not become law in its present form. I would now ask Joe, who is sitting in the public gallery, to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure and honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly today two gentlemen. Father Bernie Gilliece and Nels Rissling are here in support of Laurie and Chris Lang today. Father Bernie is a respected educator and a Salesian priest and was a principal as well for many years. He is the very much respected and loved priest of St. Dominic's parish in Edmonton-Manning.

Nels Rissling, Mr. Speaker, is also a great contributor to the community, both as an active member in the Kilkenny Community League, his church, and local 488 of the plumbers and pipefitters, and was a former candidate for the New Democrats for Parliament in 1988. I ask that they rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

House of Commons Seating Formula

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in Ottawa the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper reintroduced in the House of Commons the Constitution Act, 2007. The act deals with the imbalance in representation in the federal Parliament as a result of growing populations across Canada, especially those in Alberta and British Columbia. Under the new formula proposed in

this legislation, Alberta will get an additional five members in the House of Commons.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that the Prime Minister from Alberta has the foresight and the political will to deal with this long-standing issue. On behalf of all Albertans I want to congratulate the Prime Minister and his government for taking this historic action, which will come into effect after the next federal census, in 2011.

As I have said many times before, as the engine of Canadian prosperity and economic growth Alberta does deserve a bigger voice in national affairs, and now thanks to the actions of the government, led by a proud Calgarian, we're seeing that happen again.

The Prime Minister is taking action to improve and, of course, modernize democracy in the House of Commons and the Senate. Now, these are all long-standing goals of the province of Alberta. The Prime Minister should know that this government and this province strongly support his actions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to participate.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to respond to the Premier. Alberta Liberals agree that additional representation for Alberta in the House of Commons is a good thing. We welcome the change.

As Alberta's population grows, so too should our influence and our presence within Confederation. It's equally important to ensure that Albertans are fairly represented at the provincial level here in the Legislature. Currently, urban areas are underrepresented in this House compared to rural areas, which have only a third of the province's population but half of the seats. Edmonton in particular has been shortchanged.

Seats should be redistributed to make sure that our cities have a voice in this Chamber that's truly representative of their proportion of the population. As the federal government pursues electoral reform, so too should we here in Alberta. Redistribution would help renew democracy in Alberta, but it's just a beginning. For example, we should consider fixed election dates, a citizens' assembly to discuss proportional representation, and whistle-blower protection: policies the Alberta Liberals have long supported.

This news from Ottawa should serve as an example for democratic renewal here at home. Let's see what we can do to make Alberta a more vibrant, robust, and representative democracy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Yes. I'd like unanimous consent for the leader of the NDP to reply to the ministerial announcement.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under our traditions and rules unanimous consent will be asked for by the chair and must be provided in order to recognize the leader of the third party. I'll only ask one question: is anyone opposed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Assembly as well. Alberta's NDP fully supports the move by the federal government to increase the number of seats for Alberta. I think it's a matter of common sense that in a province with a rapidly growing

population, its representation needs to be in proportion to its population. I'm also very pleased to say that it looks like Prime Minister Harper is taking the advice of the federal NDP leader, Mr. Jack Layton, and is considering a referendum on the abolition of the Senate in Canada, something that we have long supported.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, you're wishing to participate as well?

Mr. Backs: I'm wishing to seek unanimous consent.

The Speaker: Hon. members, again unanimous consent will be required, so I'll only ask one question. Is anyone opposed to providing an opportunity for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to participate?

An Hon. Member: No.

The Speaker: I think that said no, so I'll accept that as not opposed.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank all members of this Assembly for an opportunity to speak on what is an extremely important development in the history of our province and the history of our country. The importance of Alberta getting more seats gives more voice to our province, to our Alberta, and to the west in the Parliament of Canada, and we need that there. We need that there probably even more so in a reformed Senate or if we should get rid of it. You know, triple-E is something we should be pushing for, that we should see, and that we must have in our Parliament. Alberta's importance is increasing. I thank the Prime Minister for doing this, and I support him. I'm sure that, indeed, all Albertans do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Amber Alert

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday Alberta's most precious and valuable resource was put at risk. The resource that I'm talking about is our children. First of all, I want to say that the child that was abducted in my constituency is safely back at home with his family. Secondly, I want to publicly thank the young people in his community for their quick thinking and their accurate information that helped police and the public to recover this brave young man so quickly. The co-operation between the public and the RCMP through the Amber Alert program has shown that if you put our children at risk, the police services and the people of Alberta will come together very quickly to stop you. While I'm not sure what role the Amber Alert played in this particular case, I want to thank the police officers involved, and I want to thank all my colleagues for putting the Amber Alert program in place and all Albertans for responding when we are in a time of need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about AISH, the assured income for the severely handicapped, a group of approximately 36,000 Albertans who live on the edge of poverty and can do nothing about it. Many have mental health diseases, related mental problems, may be brain injured, or are physically disabled. Many are severely undereducated. Many were cared for in institutions and are now living in the community and struggling just to exist. Affordable housing is a challenge. Some live in subsidized housing, but for many shelter takes up to 70 to 80 per cent of their income.

There have been subtle changes to the eligibility criteria, evaluating disabilities in terms of activities of daily living despite the fact that there is no reference either in the act or the regulations. Many applications require appeals. This is a great hardship for this group of people.

1:20

There have been additional improvements to the AISH program – an increase in employment income exemptions and easier reporting – but there have been only three raises in benefits since 1993, still not enough to live with dignity.

The simple truth is that AISH benefits have not kept up with the rate of inflation. It needs to be increased and then indexed annually, as are MLA salaries. Cost-of-living increases affect all Albertans, not just MLAs. Remember the purpose of the AISH benefit. It is meant to provide financial support to Albertans with disabilities who are severely and permanently limited in their ability to earn a living. It is to eliminate barriers to full participation in society and increase independence.

I challenge every member in this Legislature to think how they would survive with dignity on \$1,050 a month while watching inflation eat every last penny. A society may be judged on how it treats its most disadvantaged, and so should a government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Métis Week

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. November 16 always evokes sad yet joyous memories for me. It was on this date 122 years ago that Louis Riel was hung for treason because he fought for Métis rights. Many Métis people feel that Métis are still struggling to take their rightful place in Canadian society. Some provinces in Canada even today refuse to accept and implement these rights as recognized and affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada. The Métis have had to use the judicial system to prove that their rights exist, and thanks to the Supreme Court of Canada time and again the courts have sided with the Métis.

Alberta has done better. We have had a positive and productive relationship with Métis that dates back to the 1920s. As an example, Alberta is the only province to provide a land base and recognize a governance system in legislation for Métis settlements. As well, we have had agreements with the Métis Nation of Alberta to ensure that Métis can be self-sufficient. In the area of child welfare the government of Alberta established a separate region for Métis in order to ensure protection and care of Métis children and families, the first of its kind.

We believe Métis people are part of Alberta's rich past and an important part of our future, and that's why Métis Week, November 11 to 17 of this year, is to be celebrated by all people and communities.

On November 12 the Minister of International, Intergovernmental

and Aboriginal Relations along with the Métis Nation association president, Audrey Poitras, helped launch Edmonton's Métis Week celebration with a special flag-raising ceremony at city hall. In addition, on November 16 at 11 a.m. here in the Legislature there will be a special ceremony commemorating Louis Riel.

Communities across Alberta will be celebrating Métis Week. Come join us as we reflect on past challenges and successes and in building a strong Métis community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

National Philanthropy Day

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the last 22 years one day of the year has been designated as National Philanthropy Day. This special day helps to recognize and pay tribute to the people and organizations that help to make our communities a better place through their generosity and charitable giving. Whether it's \$10 a month or \$100 a month, Albertans recognize the importance of charitable giving. In fact, a recent Statistics Canada study found that Albertans gave \$177 million more last year in tax-deductible charitable donations than they did in 2005. This is an increase of 15.5 per cent and is the largest increase of any province in Canada. Clearly, we can see that many Albertans are willing to help those in need, whether it is with an in-kind gift or a financial donation.

National Philanthropy Day is also the perfect time to remind Albertans about the enhanced charitable tax credit that was introduced as part of Budget 2007. Alberta's charitable tax credit increased more than 60 per cent for total annual charitable donations over \$200. When combined with the federal credit, Albertans will now receive a 50-cent tax credit for every dollar donated over the \$200 threshold. With this increase Alberta has one of the highest charitable tax credits in Canada. One of our government's top priorities is to improve the quality of life for all Albertans. The enhanced charitable tax credit is one way we are addressing this priority.

National Philanthropy Day may only be one day of the year, but there are 364 other days where Albertans show their generosity and giving spirit.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Laurie Lang

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many great people in our communities are often unsung heroes. They make a tremendous contribution to all but never ask for anything in return. Laurie Lang is such a contributor and is with us here in the Legislature today. Laurie is a community and social activist, a leader in his church, his union, and has been an active voice in municipal, provincial, and federal politics. Devoted to his family, Laurie is husband to Chris, father to Keith and Ian, father-in-law to Mandy and Dina, and grandfather to Nicholas and Matthew. Another grandchild is expected in not too many months.

Laurie was born in Killam, Alberta, and was raised in Spring Lake. During his time as a grain elevator manager in Trochu he was an active volunteer firefighter and continued that at the Alberta Hospital department in Alberta. Starting at Alberta Hospital in 1971, Laurie has worked there most of his career as both a registered psychiatric nurse and a registered nurse. Laurie also served on his profession's council. Laurie was a director of the board of Alberta Hospital, chaired the Alberta Hospital foundation, and helped found the AUPE local there. He was the president of local 183 of the

United Nurses of Alberta. Laurie ran four times as a New Democrat, twice federally in northeast Edmonton and twice in Edmonton-Manning. He is a strong advocate for a better mental health system. He knows that Alberta needs more trained mental health personnel, especially in children's and community health.

Laurie, to me, is known best through St. Dominic Savio parish and with his wife is active in many church functions. Laurie is also a brother knight, a fourth degree, and indeed the founding grand knight of St. Dominic Savio Knights of Columbus Council 12457. He is among the many knights who make many quiet contributions to so many communities. Laurie Lang is highly respected. He is presently in a difficult battle with cancer, and we pray that your recovery will be quick. We all wish you and your family well, Laurie. Another statement for Laurie will soon be made in our Canadian Parliament by the Member for Edmonton-Sherwood Park, Ken Epp. I salute you, Laurie Lang. You're one of those uncelebrated heroes that make our Alberta a better place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Labour Relations

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make a few comments today about lack of fairness in our labour laws in this province. The minister is aware that I've had correspondence with her asking that we take a look at the labour laws. I notice that the minister said in the letter, "The Alberta government periodically reviews its labour laws to ensure they are relevant to the needs of Albertans." Well, I'd like to see those periodic reviews because the last time we really had labour laws looked at in a major way was 1988. Unfortunately, for workers it made it worse than it was before. But I think there are some issues that cry out. The building trades have their problems, as the minister alludes to, and some of that's in court, and we'll have to see how that works through.

There are a couple of things that we could do that we should have learned right away, and one is first contract arbitration. We've had some very harsh strikes that lasted a lot longer than they needed to. Other provinces bring in first contract arbitration, and it's settled, and the union is there to represent the workers. We saw what happened in Tyson recently. We saw the Palace Casino workers being out for over 300 days. These went on far too long. The previous minister said that they would look at first contract arbitration.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind this minister that we should be taking a look at these things. Five years down the way is not good enough. There has to be more fairness in our labour legislation. While we're at it, we could look at replacement workers. That also leads to danger. Surely it's time for this government to bring fairness into our labour laws.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment it is my pleasure to table the required number of copies of the committee's final report on the beverage container recycling review. The committee chose to undertake this project after receiving a request in July from the Minister of Environment. This report is the result of nine committee meetings, which included public hearings in both Edmonton and

Calgary and the review of over 115 public submissions.

The committee also received administrative, research, and procedural support from the staff at the Legislative Assembly Office, including Mr. Robert Reynolds, QC, Senior Parliamentary Counsel; Dr. Philip Massolin and his committee research team; Ms Rhonda Sorensen and the communications staff; the *Hansard* staff; and committee clerks Karen Sawchuk and Jody Rempel. I would also like to acknowledge the valuable support from the staff at Alberta Environment and the contributions from members on both sides of the House for this project.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Royalty Revenues

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Premier. On November 7 the Premier claimed that he was never made aware during his years in cabinet that Department of Energy reports were recommending Alberta's royalties be increased. I make the next quote very carefully, and I'll table the documents. It's from a news story. The Premier told the Canadian press, and I quote: in the time that I was around the cabinet table, there was nothing coming to me. End quote. My question to the Premier. Does the Premier stand by this claim?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the media was asking if I received any information with respect to royalty information or whether anyone presented anything to cabinet. I said that I resigned from cabinet in March of 2005 . . .

Mr. MacDonald: In 2006.

The Speaker: Avoid these outbursts.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, at least he's listening.

. . . 2006 to pursue the leadership. I did that, and during that long campaign period I heard very clearly from Albertans that they had some questions with respect to the royalty regime, with respect to some of the, you know, penny on the dollar that came up with respect to the oil sands. I promised that I would undertake the review. We did. We now have the framework in place. The issue has been settled and is done with.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. My next question is to the Minister of Energy. Yesterday when asked in this Assembly to make public all the internal documents on royalties itemized by the Auditor General, the minister replied that those documents need to be protected because of "legislative protection with respect to some information that's provided to the cabinet." Does the minister stand by this claim that the documents itemized by the Auditor General were provided to cabinet?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, very clearly we're back into some more of living in the past. We're talking about royalty reviews. By the way, the Auditor General's report states on page 100: "We could not

find an authoritative definition of 'royalty review'. Not surprisingly, the term means different things to different people." Where was the royalty review?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Complete evasion.

Anyway, the government cannot have it both ways. It can't deny Albertans access to these documents because they were provided to cabinet and then turn around and claim that cabinet never saw them. The Premier needs to get his story straight. To the Premier. The Premier needs to clarify which of this government's stories are true. Were the documents shared with cabinet as the Minister of Energy has claimed, or were they not as the Premier himself has claimed?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, we took a very, very bold leadership move to review the royalty framework of the province of Alberta. It came as a result of listening to Albertans. The decision has been made. The member wants to live sometimes in the past. During this period of time, in the last number of years that he served as Leader of the Official Opposition, he still has not taken a public position on the royalty framework. He's still sitting on the fence.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is just too much fun. Yesterday the Minister of Energy claimed: "What I can tell you is that from 2000 to 2007 there weren't so many missing billions." I want to just repeat that. The Minister of Energy said: "What I can tell you is that from 2000 to 2007 there weren't so many missing billions." I want to ask his boss how many. To the Premier: just how many missing billions were there?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, at least \$22 billion worth of missing debt.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Energy also claimed, and I'll quote him again just to be right: "I'll tell you some facts: \$15 billion in royalty revenue to the province of Alberta, '03-04." Now, according to the government's latest annual report – and it is only an annual report, Mr. Speaker – audited by the Auditor General, it was in fact only \$7.6 billion, including not only royalties but bonuses and sales, rentals and fees, and all the rest. To the Premier: can the Premier explain why his Minister of Energy is claiming they took in \$15 billion in royalties when the true number is only half that amount?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll refer it back to the Minister of Energy. He can reply to the question or whatever is coming from the opposition.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, again, what we have here is more innuendo, more backtracking, more backpedalling, trying to get away from a situation they found themselves in yesterday where, in fact, the line of questioning was found to be a bit inappropriate.

With respect to the numbers we should just do the math. The Liberal math doesn't add up. If you add up '03 and '04, the numbers will support themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's recount some of the facts: deciding to let billions go uncollected year after year and then covering that fact up year after year. Now, in trying to defend the government's record on this file, the Minister of Energy is telling Albertans that they collected \$15 billion when they collected only half that amount. Albertans need a government they can trust. To the Premier. Will the Premier do the right thing: put the public interest ahead of personal loyalty and replace this Energy minister with a minister who's capable of cleaning up this mess and taking charge of this file?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have tremendous confidence in my Minister of Energy.

Not very often am I going to dig this low in this Legislative Assembly, but this person across the way made very serious allegations last spring with respect to a water issue. He said he had documents – he never did table them until today – at the same accusing me of receiving money through the Beaver regional waste management commission, and he'd sent a letter to them two years in a row to receive money. You're talking about trust. I'm clean.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Deferred School Infrastructure Maintenance

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation consulted boards . . . [interjections] Excuse me. The Infrastructure and Transportation minister consulted school boards about the deferred maintenance problem. The next day the Minister of Education blamed the problem on 30 years of wear and tear. The maintenance backlog is \$700 million in Calgary alone, an indication to you, Mr. Speaker, of the systemic underfunding not working. To the President of the Treasury Board: given the comments by the Education minister, why has the government therefore failed to address the maintenance needs of school boards for so many decades across the province?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, one of the first things this Premier did is to bring forward a policy on how we will handle our unfunded allocated surpluses. On top of the hundreds of millions that we spend annually on maintenance, he's going to put two-thirds of our unallocated surpluses to capital maintenance. What more responsible way for Albertans' money is that?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, thank you. We have \$700 million in Calgary. The government has certainly demonstrated through its actions how sincerely it takes this situation. A below-inflation increase in the budget has left school boards desperate. An Alberta Liberal government, on the other hand, would ensure sufficient, predictable funds for schools across the province. To the President of the Treasury Board: why is this government relying on unsustainable, surprise funding, luck-of-the-draw funding which doesn't work? Why are they relying on this? Tell us about that, Mr. President.

1:40

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised at the tone of someone who should know better about the education system in Alberta and the funding that it does. We fund the best education system in Canada, probably in North America. Our students achieve among the highest results, and we have an absolutely unmatched building program. But it's not just in Calgary, sir. It's all over Alberta where we build schools. We deal with the whole province. We don't try and separate one city from another. We look at the total education funding.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, let's go across the floor to somewhere else so we can get a better answer. When Alberta's provincial government told school boards that no additional funds would be allocated to education, they were instructed to get very creative. Two school boards came up with an idea to hold a plebiscite about possibly raising taxes to come up with the shortfall of monies.

An Hon. Member: And what happened?

Mr. Flaherty: Well, I'll tell you. Just be patient. Be patient.

This notion was overwhelmingly shot down by the public. They rightly see education to be the responsibility of this government. To the Minister of Education: given that this government has shirked its responsibility, are they now suggesting these creative approaches that the minister suggested for raising funds . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has been recognized . . . [interjection] . . . for the third time.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I suggest that the hon. Leader of the Opposition might want to look at a new caucus whip because he's got somebody there who managed to control the out-of-control members behind him.

The hon. member is correct that there is a provision in the School Act that if a school board so chooses, it can have a plebiscite at the same time as school board elections. In these past elections on, I guess, the 15th of October there were two plebiscites held in Alberta. As the hon. member correctly pointed out, neither one of them was successful, but that's the democratic process at work.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Taser Use by Law Enforcement Personnel

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The terrible incident which took place at the Vancouver International Airport on October 14 raises serious concerns about the safety and use of tasers by law enforcement personnel. I saw that last night. I saw the tape. I was really shocked. Within 30 seconds – this man was moving away from the police. He was retreating from them, he was tasered, and he died. The question is not limited to what happens in B.C. On August 10 Jason Doan of Red Deer died after being tasered three times, and on Christmas Eve a year ago Alessandro Fiocco died after being tasered in Edmonton. My question is to the Premier. In light of this continuing pattern of tragic losses . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier. [interjection] The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Justice minister has indicated that he's willing to look at a review of the use of tasers, but in this particular case he was supporting the very catastrophic event that we witnessed, of course, on the video. This happened at an airport,

which is federal jurisdiction, but we want to collate that information, work together, and work with the Solicitor General to see that whatever rules we have in place for the use of a taser are safe, find a balance between the protection of the police officer but also of the person that's being arrested.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Premier's answer. But this is a very serious matter, and this happens in Alberta from time to time as well. There's a question of the safety of the device, first of all, but also there's the question of its misuse from time to time by police. In 2002 Randy Fryingpan was passed out, drunk. He was tasered six times in 66 seconds, and there were no repercussions for the officer that was involved there. What we need in this province are some clear guidelines for police of when they can use a taser, when they can't, and serious sanctions if they misuse it, as has been the case a number of times. I would ask the Premier again: will he do a review of taser use in Alberta to make sure this stops?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's not only taser use. There are other issues that have come forward with respect to finding the balance. Do we have the right processes in place? We made some changes with respect to reviewing police actions. The Justice minister said he would take that into account. He's supportive of reviewing the process. He will bring that forward to caucus, explain the process, and then we'll take it from there.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I hope the government will actually take some action on this and do it before another regrettable incident happens in this province. In 2002 a constable tasered a woman in the back despite the fact she'd been arrested and was kneeling down in handcuffs. In 2004 an EPS officer tasered an arrested man who had surrendered and was lying face down in handcuffs. The judge called it excessive force.

Mr. Premier, I hope that you will do this. This is not a political issue between the NDP and the government or the Liberals or anything. This is a matter of ensuring the safety of our citizens and providing clear guidelines for police so that they know when they can use a taser and when they cannot. Will you please call for . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier. [interjection] The hon. the Premier has been recognized.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I said that the Justice minister will be bringing forward a process. The hon. member is right. There are situations, you know, of whether more force was used than necessary. There is also the other side of the story. We also have had police officers that were significantly, seriously injured in the line of duty. It's so difficult to find a balance.

Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member, we'll undertake that with the Justice minister and Solicitor General. We'll look at the rules, review them, and bring forward to the Assembly the results.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Environmental Management of Industrial Projects

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that Alberta is experiencing a tremendous boom, and that has meant that some areas in the province have had concentrated industrial growth that has had some negative environmental impact. Recently the Minister

of Environment announced a cumulative effects management framework that outlines a new approach of dealing with industrial development. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Are we implementing this approach a little too late?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say that it's never too late. In fact, the cumulative impact approach to environmental management is very much future focused. It's recognizing that the pace of growth that we have in this province has the potential to have significant impact on the environment if we don't do things differently. Up until now the approach that we have taken has been on a project-by-project basis. In the future we need to be more outcomes based. We need to determine in advance what is the expected outcome and then take the necessary action to ensure that we achieve that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since there are several pilot projects in place but none of them are in the areas of the province where most extraction of resources takes place, can the minister let us know how the decision has been made, and can we expect this to be done on a pan-Alberta basis?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the implementation of the cumulative effects is going forward from the basis of learning from experience with various pilot projects. To some extent we've already begun on the oil sands, for example, with the recent decision on in-stream flow needs and determining how we're going to manage the water allocations on the Athabasca River. To some degree and to a large degree we already have some of the basis for cumulative effects in the oil sands. Obviously, that is one of the areas where we look forward to expanding the program as soon as possible.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Can we expect this program to be implemented through all of Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, right now we are going through a process of testing, testing the type of regulation, learning from experience on the ground. We have three pilots: the Industrial Heartland; we will be implementing very shortly one in east-central Alberta; and one in southern Alberta. All of those pilot projects will be dealing with some different issues: some, more land; some, more air; some, more water. What we learn from those will then be implemented and brought together for a broader implementation across the entire province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

1:50

Health Care Aides

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bonita Davidson, a constituent from Edmonton-Centre, is here today advocating for better wages and working conditions for personal caregivers like herself. She's been a personal care attendant for over 25 years and has seen too many good, qualified caregivers leave the profession because wages and salaries are just too low. My first question is to the minister of health. When will the minister increase funding to provincial home care programs and providers so that caregivers receive reasonable and competitive wages and stay in the sector? Home care is still cheaper than facility or hospital care.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member raises a very important issue. We do have a concern, almost a crisis, with respect to the provision of home care and home care attendants and personal care aides, and salary is a very important part of that. I've been working with my colleagues, actually, in Children's Services and Employment, Immigration and Industry with respect to pulling together how we deal with wages in this sector and contracted-out agencies because in the service at the front end of the system in many systems, whether it's children's services or health or other areas, we are facing a crisis. With the tight economy and the shortage of workers that we have, we have to be able to pay more to keep good people in those areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, I'm glad to see that the minister is beginning to think about possibly working on it.

At the 2004 first ministers' meeting each province agreed to, one, provide first-dollar coverage for home care services; two, develop a plan for implementing these services by December of 2006, two years later; three, report annually on the progress. So my question to the minister of health is: where is this plan, and when will Albertans get to see it?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we tabled a health workforce action plan that was a product of work between three ministries in government, and in that plan we identified precisely this area that needed to be worked on. I have been working on getting the necessary budget and the necessary resources to be able to properly fund this particular area because it's an essential service to Albertans. It's taking care of the most vulnerable people at a time when they need it the most. So absolutely important. We're working on getting the budget resources in place and dealing with this very issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. My next question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Health care aides perform a wide range of duties, from assisting clients with bathing and dressing to walking and therapy. They may be required to lift items weighing up to 20 kilograms or be on their feet for very long periods of time. My question is: what supports are available for private caregivers without WCB who get injured on the job?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any private caregivers that are not covered by WCB, and I would be very pleased if the hon. member opposite would share those particular stories with me. I would be very interested in finding out exactly how we make contact. If I had that information, I would follow through.

We make sure as much as possible that we look after employment standards, occupational health and safety. We added staff in this area this year. We're very anxious to improve that. The hon. member will remember that when we announced the workforce strategy, the minister of health also announced the use of patient lifts in many of these facilities to help the personal care attendants.

I look forward to getting the information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Highway Construction and Maintenance

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Safety on our highways is of paramount importance to my constituents and to all Albertans. Sadly, two people lost their lives on highway 19 in my constituency yesterday. While it's not appropriate to speculate on the cause of this tragic accident, it is safe to say that if the highway was twinned, we may have had a different outcome. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Can the minister advise the House on the status of twinning this extremely busy highway?

Mr. Ouellette: To begin with, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I was very saddened when I heard about those deaths, and my sympathies go out to the families.

As to the question about the future twinning of highway 19, we're always concerned about any safety concerns on all the highways in Alberta, including highway 19. Even though the twinning is not in our three-year plan, Mr. Speaker, we have done the functional planning, and the detailed design work has begun. In addition, the department has begun acquiring the right-of-way. But I would also like to add that since we've opened the Anthony Henday, traffic counts have dropped by a thousand cars a day on that stretch of highway. As fast as we get all of the work in place, get the budget in place, we will be looking at going ahead with the twinning.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Mr. Minister, there has been a noticeable reduction or a lack of snow fencing on highway 19 and highway 2 between Edmonton and my constituency, resulting in drifting and many accidents. Has there been a change in maintenance standards, and can we expect to see this rectified this winter?

Mr. Ouellette: In fact, Mr. Speaker, we are still using snow fences between Edmonton and Nisku and on highway 19 in problem areas, such as the fencing that we've just installed at the Nisku interchange. We do keep tabs on areas where drifting snow might be a problem on that highway, and we will put up a snow fence anywhere we think it's required. We found that as more land opens up without shelterbelts, the need for snow fencing and other measures has increased. In addition to fencing, we're also looking at other measures such as snow ridging. That's where they go out and make a bunch of different windrows in the fields, and that collects the snow.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is for the same minister. Mr. Minister, how can users of these highways report maintenance emergencies encountered in their travels, and is it feasible to post signage at reasonable intervals on these highways?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, for the QE II south of Edmonton, highway 19, and other highways around the Edmonton area motorists can contact Alberta Highway Services at 1-888-255-5554. You can also go to our department website and find all the contact information there.

The department has a standard policy on how signage is posted on provincial highways. The standards focus on safety of motorists and take into account a number of factors, including distance between signs and intersections with other roads, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that this might be an example of the squeaky wheel getting the oil. AISH benefits have not kept up with the increased cost of living, resulting in extra stress and hardship for most of these recipients. While this government has let billions of dollars go uncollected, AISH benefits have increased only three times since 1993. To the minister of seniors: how does the minister explain this to thousands of Albertans on AISH who are struggling to pay their rent and buy their food?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that in each of the last three years we have raised those rates for AISH. It has gone from \$850 over a couple of years ago to \$1,050. [interjections]

The Speaker: The minister has the floor.

Mr. Melchin: We also acknowledged at that time and I said last year in our budget that those would be priorities that we'll look forward to. We do acknowledge the challenges that those on AISH are facing. That's why we made an increase last year. That's why we continue in our business plans going forward to look at the same issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. In his mandate letter to the minister of seniors the Premier urged the minister to "develop and introduce measures to benchmark improvements in quality of life for all Albertans." What benchmarks have been initiated? How are they evaluated? Clearly, life has not improved for those on AISH.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we are starting out on one of those mandates, a very good mandate, to look at the quality of life. This wasn't just limited to those with disabilities. That was for all Albertans. We are early in that process. But I would say that we've done much lately to help look at the lot of those on AISH. Part of it is not to trap them into a permanency of just having a support program. How do we build an opportunity for them to be more included in our society, in employment, and so forth? We want to look at it because it is important for those people to have those opportunities. That's where our focus has been directed.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here's where the squeaky wheel comes in again. Increases in costs of living affect all Albertans, especially those on fixed incomes. Does the minister have any plans to increase and index AISH benefits?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have done relating to income, for example, is that we did raise the level of income that AISH recipients can earn without it being clawed back, a very important initiative. The other side of what we're looking at is an annual reporting of income rather than monthly so that there can be some flexibility. The other directions we're looking at: we want to see that there is permanency of opportunity for those on AISH, for employability also, acknowledging that from time to time their health will be at a time when they can work and maybe a day later they can't work. So we're going to look at flexible arrangements,

broadening those opportunities for them to participate in the workforce as well as seeing that health and income supports are there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Energy Regulatory Hearings

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the summer I have heard a number of my constituents and other Albertans raise concerns about their involvement in energy regulatory proceedings. Specifically, they are concerned about their rights to be a part of the regulatory process that oversees the development of transmission lines, and they are concerned about being heard. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Will the minister take steps to ensure that Albertans are able to bring their concerns about power lines built on their property before the energy regulator?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have done that. We have ensured that there is full public notification of any application. We have ensured that public hearings must be held even if one person is affected by an application and requests one. There were 60,000 applications last year before the EUB, and in nearly all cases no one was adversely affected; therefore, hearings did not commence.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister: will the minister ensure that landowners will continue to have the ability to hire legal counsel when intervening in regulatory hearings?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Again, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have done that. Intervenor funding for landowners who are directly affected by proposed infrastructure continues to be available. Others can apply to be part of the regulatory process; however, funding may be reserved for those Albertans who are directly affected. These persons will continue to be able to hire legal counsel if they wish.

Mr. Johnson: My final question to the same minister: will the minister ensure that the decisions of our regulator can be appealed within a fair and reasonable time frame?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we have done that, and no one has ever discussed changing this. Questions of law or jurisdiction related to regulatory decisions can be brought forward to the Court of Appeal. The time period of 30 days is the same as the Alberta Court of Appeal, the highest court in our province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Southwest Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years this government has failed to successfully negotiate with the Tsuu T'ina nation the acquisition of land needed for the key southwest leg of the Calgary ring road. Calgarians are frustrated, and the city is understandably reluctant to act on municipal infrastructure before they know where

the provincial ring road is going. Adding to this immense frustration, the province has advanced the Tsuu T'ina casino development, which is scheduled to open this fall. This will add enormous traffic pressure on nearby communities. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: why has the casino been allowed to proceed without a final agreement on the necessary ring road infrastructure?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we're working with all the stakeholders, and I honestly believe that we are negotiating in good faith and we are going to get an agreement with the Tsuu T'ina. Everything went through the proper processes, and we're working on it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgarians need this road. The Tsuu T'ina nation deserves to be fairly compensated for the land. Throughout this negotiation, though, Albertans' demand for transparency and accountability has been frustrated. To the same minister: what estimates of cost and transfers of land in lieu have been discussed by this government?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, anyone at all knows that when you're in the middle of a negotiation, most people don't want any of their information given out, and we're under the obligation to deal in good faith with the Tsuu T'ina and not let everybody know their business.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cheffins: That might be more acceptable if he hadn't given the casino away.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The natural area of the Weaselhead is adjacent to the proposed route for the ring road. We cannot allow this wildlife habitat and primary source of drinking water to be ruined. This would be the case if alternate routes were to be considered should the government fail in the ring road negotiations. Once again to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: could the minister please assure us that full protection of this area will be considered and accounted for during all ring road considerations and developments?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I can assure everyone that water is very, very important to this government. We will always follow all of the environmental regulations, and even though we are a government department, we still go through all the same approvals with our other departments that anyone else does.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Child Care Funding

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to an article on child care published just yesterday in the *Banff Crag & Canyon*, a publication in the Minister of Children's Services' own riding, the only two child care centres in the Bow Valley both have two-year wait-lists. At the end of June Alberta received \$26 million from Ottawa to support the expansion of child care spaces in this province. Not one dime of that money has gone into creating child care spaces. Given that there is a serious shortage of child care spaces in the province, two-year wait-lists for spaces in the minister's own riding, why hasn't she used the funding for its intended purpose; that is, the creation of new child care spaces all around the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you that we have put a huge number of dollars into child care in this past year. Just to list a few things, we have enhanced the five-point plan; we have increased wage top-ups; we've started the staff attraction incentive fund; we've created the child care bursary. In fact, I can tell you it is working because we know that as of today we've created 1,600 extra child spaces in the last 10 months. We have attracted over 400 new child care workers to the industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day this government sits on this federal transfer of \$26 million, it fails to meet the needs of Alberta families who are waiting, waiting for you to do the right thing. When will you use that \$26 million that is transferred from Ottawa to create more spaces? Ms Minister, come clean on that.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I just mentioned, I listed off a few things. We've also increased our subsidies to parents. We have a significant list of areas that we've enhanced, the five-point plan. We certainly have increased the funding significantly over the last year, and we are seeing results.

Dr. Pannu: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Research in Australia shows that 40 per cent of revenues of ABC Learning Centres, an Australia multinational in the business of child care, come from government subsidies. We know that multinational corporations such as ABC are making offers to buy Alberta's child care centres as well. Can the minister assure Albertans that government daycare funding won't be used to subsidize giant, hugely profitable companies looking to set up McDaycares in Alberta?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that who we support in this province are the families and the parents, not companies.

Just to make a rather important point, the government's role is to ensure the quality and the safety of our child care programs. We require all operators to meet the very same standards, so we do not differentiate based on who it is that owns the child care program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:10 Highway Construction and Maintenance (continued)

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation has been talking about the work his department is doing to fix highways around the province, but some of my constituents say that they don't see much road construction going on these days. My question is to the minister. How can the minister say he's committed to fixing our roads when we don't seem to see much of the construction going on?

The Speaker: Okay. There; answer that one, Minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to let the hon. member know that we undertook a record amount of highway construction work this year. The government invested roughly \$1.8 billion for the construction, repair, and maintenance of highways this

year, which is the highest amount invested in Alberta's history. We did about 1,200 kilometres' worth of paving this year, which is 300 kilometres more than last year. This includes over 200 kilometres of brand new highway and 50 kilometres of brand new twinning. In fact, we received complaints that we were doing too much work and there were too many construction zones slowing people down too much.

The Speaker: I can't get involved, can I?
The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. These numbers sound impressive, but my constituents say that they don't see this work going on to alleviate the traffic problem. My question is to the same minister. Where is it being done?

The Speaker: Okay, Minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that a lot of it was done right in his home city of Calgary. We did roughly 25 kilometres of the Deerfoot Trail at the north end. We also started construction of the northeast ring road in the spring and continued construction on the northwest leg of the ring road throughout the season. We continued twinning highway 63 up to Fort McMurray and also continued twinning highway 43 between Edmonton and Grande Prairie. We continued twinning highway 21 near Sherwood Park, and we're rebuilding highway 9 near Drumheller. We finished the southeast leg of Edmonton's ring road, and then we opened the new interchange in Aldersyde.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is certainly good news, but how do we know this is not just a one-time thing that will disappear next summer? Can the minister assure us this effort will continue next year and the year after?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. This government plans to invest almost \$5 billion for highways in the current capital plan, so the level of activity in the next two years will either match or exceed this year. We've ramped up our investment for the repair of existing highways to address a backlog of projects. We will invest \$1.4 billion over the next three years to repair existing highways, which is \$800 million more than the previous three-year capital plan. We need to make these investments to address Alberta's growth pressures, support our economy, and we fully intend to continue building our highway network.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Deerfoot Trail Safety

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now for a real question. Recent traffic collision statistics from the Calgary Police Service, covering April through September of this year, which will be tabled today, show that too many intersections on the Deerfoot Trail rank in the top 10 Calgary collision locations. These rates are far too high. This summer the government committed to another short-term review of the Deerfoot safety, but immediate action is required. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Erecting a post and cable barrier was obviously a good preventative start. More initiative is required. What is the minister doing now to reduce these hundreds of accidents?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we're very concerned with safety on Deerfoot Trail, and we're taking a number of steps to improve the road safety. One of the identified intersections, Peigan Trail, will undergo major improvements during the '08 construction season. Another of the identified intersections, Glenmore Trail, is slated for major improvements as early as '09. We are also working with the city on a safety review of Deerfoot Trail, which potentially will give us a number of short-term measures to improve the road's operation and safety.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, a large proportion of the problems on the Deerfoot relates to dangerous driving practices. To the minister: given the high level of driver-caused casualties and accidents, is the minister satisfied with the level of provincial policing and enforcement dedicated to the Deerfoot?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I have to agree with one thing the hon. member said. It isn't very often I do that, but I will have to agree that, yes, driver error causes 99 per cent of the collisions we have in this province. I do have to say, though, that policing of the Deerfoot is under the city of Calgary. He should also be asking maybe the Solicitor General on this, but policing for the Deerfoot is handled by the city of Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While driver error is the primary cause of accidents, not 99 per cent worth, the McDermid report of 2004 concluded that poor road design and maintenance were major contributors to accidents. The previously mentioned police statistics highlight the unacceptable collision rates on the Deerfoot interchanges: Memorial Drive, Glenmore Trail, 16th Avenue, 17th Avenue, and Peigan Trail. All of these high-collision, questionably designed interchanges continue to cause great concern to Calgarians. To the same minister: why has the government not corrected the design flaws as recommended by the McDermid report?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I had just answered at the beginning that we are addressing some of the concerns on those intersections. I named two of them that we're going to get the work done on as soon as possible. The Alberta government has invested roughly \$250 million in the Deerfoot Trail since 2000, and another \$20 million worth of projects are scheduled for the '08 construction season.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Potato Cyst Nematode

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that a condition called potato cyst nematode has been detected in a couple of fields of seed potatoes in Alberta. This is a fairly common condition in many countries, but the United States Department of Agriculture has recommended closure of the U.S. border to all Alberta seed potatoes. My question to the Minister of Agriculture and Food: what is the status of testing on these farms right now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting to

note that in light of this, the CFIA has put a voluntary ban on sending seed potatoes down to the U.S. They are doing some intensive follow-ups, and I'm pleased to report that they found no further problems. But we certainly want to see that border open to the people on the farms that have tested negative for PCN. Our staff, of course, are going to work closely with the CFIA in their investigation and with the USDA to fully reopen that border again.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if the USDA continues its ban on Alberta seed potatoes, is there compensation for our farmers?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, of course. You know, it's a serious concern. Producers who experience these losses, of course, will be compensated through CAIS and production insurance. We are working with the federal government so that the compensation certainly addresses the value of these potatoes as well. Happily, at this time the seed potato shipment season probably doesn't start until after Christmas, so hopefully we can get it cleared up well before then.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Mr. Prins: No. That's it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Zoo Standards

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Zoocheck Canada and the World Society for the Protection of Animals just released a report documenting more than 150 violations of Alberta's zoo standards at two roadside zoos. This includes dirty cages with no potable water, social animals being housed alone, unlocked gates and poor fencing, and the list goes on. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why are these zoos continually not being enforced and checked?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we were made aware of these allegations on November 6. Obviously, we're studying the allegations. We conducted regular staff inspections of most of these private zoos, including the one under discussion here, five times in the last year. These are serious allegations, and we'll certainly pursue them.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has been going on since the previous minister held the portfolio – he was so proud about naming his accolades here yesterday – so I was just wondering at what point. The new zoo standards came into effect in August 2006, and there's supposed to be full compliance by the end of the year. Even though there have been some reports of inspections passing, there's still evidence of gross violations. To the minister. Many Albertans and organizations are concerned about the welfare of these animals and are watching quite closely. When will the zoo standards be brought into full compliance?

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to begin by saying that I'm still very proud of both my predecessors, the ministers of Sustainable Resource Development. Nothing has changed there.

Again I repeat: our staff checked these zoos as recently as three weeks ago, and there were no obvious violations. But as I said, we'll follow up on these new allegations and take appropriate action.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you. Under the new regulations zoos had to submit to the zoo development plan to indicate how they planned to meet the new standards. When animal welfare groups requested these copies through the freedom of information process, they were stonewalled. If this government claims to be open and accountable, then there should be no hiding the information from these groups. To the same minister: will the government release these documents to the public uncensored to show whether or not the zoos took appropriate steps to meet the standards to obtain the permits?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of these requests, but I'd be more than happy to work with the hon. member to provide the information that they're looking for.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes Oral Question Period today. There were 88 questions and responses.

When we went to Oral Question Period, we were in our Routine under the segment known as Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees. I'll now call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

head:

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees (continued)

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I'm pleased to table the requisite five copies of the report of the standing committee recommending the reappointment of Mr. Frank Work as the Information and Privacy Commissioner for the province of Alberta. Copies of the report will be distributed to all members this afternoon.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka on behalf of the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Bill 47

Livestock Commerce and Animal Inspection Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat I request leave to introduce Bill 47, Livestock Commerce and Animal Inspection Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

The bill will amend the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act and the Animal Health Act. Amendments to the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act will clarify the requirements and refine the legal language pertaining to security interest disclosure and directing of payment for the sale of livestock. Amendments to the Animal Health Act will add inspection authority over livestock market facilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 47 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you. I'd like to move that Bill 47 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the program for the SAGE awards dinner, that took place last night. SAGE is the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton. The honorary chairperson for this year's awards ceremony was none other than the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings here today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent from Ms Beverley Smith, a substitute teacher in Calgary concerned about the deterioration of schools in regard to improved libraries, more caretakers, and repairs to plumbing.

My second tabling is the appropriate amount of copies sent from Citizens Against Nuclear Development expressing their opposition to the proposed Energy Alberta Corporation nuclear power plant in the Peace River area.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased and honoured to rise with two tablings today. One is the program for the dinner for Father Michael Troy honouring his 90th birthday and 60th anniversary of ordination. It was a wonderful dinner that filled hall D of the Shaw Conference Centre. Another example of a fine educator and priest in our community.

The second tabling is the canola industry policy issues brought to many MLAs last night, things like biodiesel, international trade, and many other issues. This was presented to MLAs last night at a reception.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is from Jaysey Carlson, who says: "Like everything else in prosperous Alberta, the cost of educating our children is increasing. Provincial grants for education are not keeping up with rising costs."

The second is from Holly Doll from Ponoka. "Bill 4 will only hurt Albertans . . . Our childcare is fine. We all like it the way it is, so don't ruin a good thing. Leave childcare alone."

The third is from Christine Pittet expressing concern about the homelessness in our city and province, asking the government "to make an effort to alleviate this growing problem completely."

The fourth is from Richard MacKay stating that "a \$15 million dollar allocation to PDD barely covers the cost of inflation in this province."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of

the Leader of the Official Opposition, as indicated earlier today, I am happy to table the appropriate number of copies of a Canadian Press report in which the Premier said that he was never made aware during his years in cabinet that an Energy ministry report recommended Alberta's royalties be increased by at least \$1 billion a year.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table to the members opposite the appropriate number of copies of George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. These were given to me by demonstrators at the front of the Legislature. I shared with these individuals the belief that the government has previously allowed staff in the EUB to spy on Albertans. I would invite all government members to read the book. It should be educational.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling five copies of my letter dated June 14 and my cheque to the Lethbridge Food Bank as per my pledge of April 2, '07. Half of my MLA indexed pay raise, \$146.25, is donated monthly to a food bank until AISH is similarly increased and indexed. The Lethbridge Food Bank has 1,679 volunteer hours and feeds 42 people yearly and is directed by Amanda DeCecco-Kolebaba.

My second tabling is a letter from a very concerned Albertan, Evelyn Laqua. She states that there isn't Alberta health care, that it's regional health care, that home care is different in all regions, that qualifications for that care are also different, that senior health care facilities are being quietly privatized and care decreased. Who can you trust? Alberta health care is "a big cumbersome corporate monster business."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. The first tabling is the 2007-08 Film and Video Arts Society of Alberta fall/winter calendar. I received this brochure when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and I attended FAVA's 25th anniversary celebration on October 26.

The second one is actually a CD, Mr. Speaker, with information and a video about the Cityfarm project up in northeast Edmonton. It's like a camp for young children to learn about community and nature and how to have fun while staying out of trouble. I was really impressed when I was given a tour of Cityfarm after these children had just had elections for their own town's mayor, sheriff, and chief horticulturist. The website is www.city-farm.org.

The third one is a tabling I'm doing on behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity. Further to the questions he posed to the minister of transportation today in question period, these are the monthly traffic collision statistics for April through September obtained from the Calgary Police Service.

Thank you.

2:30

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Sorry.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A number of tablings I would like to do today on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. The first is copies of a public presentation done to the Royalty Review Panel by the shadow

Minister of Energy on May 14, 2007, outlining a royalty policy.

The second is copies of the printout from the Alberta royalty review website confirming that that member did in fact present.

I'd also like to present the appropriate number of tablings of a media release in which the leader outlines commentary on the Liberal policy on the royalty review, followed by the appropriate number of copies of the video transcript of a speech that he gave on October 23 on the Liberal policy on royalty reviews, and, finally, Mr. Speaker, a speech that was done to the Calgary Chamber of Commerce on October 25 also outlining the Liberal policy on royalty review.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Government Accountability Act on behalf of the minister responsible: Advanced Education and Technology annual report 2006-07, Agriculture and Food annual report 2006-2007, Alberta Children's Services annual report 2006-2007, Education annual report 2006-2007, Employment, Immigration and Industry annual report 2006-2007, Energy annual report 2006-2007, Environment annual report 2006-2007, Executive Council annual report 2006-2007, Finance annual report 2006-2007, Health and Wellness annual report 2006-2007, sections 1 and 2, Infrastructure and Transportation annual report 2006-2007, International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations annual report 2006-2007, Justice annual report 2006-2007, Seniors and Community Supports annual report 2006-2007, Service Alberta annual report 2006-2007, Solicitor General and Public Security annual report 2006-2007, Sustainable Resource Development annual report 2006-2007, Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture annual report 2006-2007, Treasury Board annual report 2006-2007.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Oberg, Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Government Accountability Act Measuring Up: Progress Report on the Government of Alberta Business Plan annual report 2006-2007, consolidated financial statements of the government of Alberta annual report 2006-2007; pursuant to the Securities Act the Alberta Securities Commission 2007 annual report; pursuant to the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund financial statements dated March 31, 2007; pursuant to the Alberta Capital Finance Authority Act the Alberta Capital Finance Authority 2006 annual report; pursuant to the Government Accountability Act budget 2007 first-quarter fiscal update 2007-2008, Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research endowment fund financial statements dated March 31, 2007, Alberta heritage scholarship fund financial statements dated March 31, 2007, the Alberta heritage science and engineering research endowment fund financial statements dated March 31, 2007, the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation annual report 2006, ATB Financial 2007 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, pursuant to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act Ingenuity Inside 2006-2007 annual report, Alberta Ingenuity triennial report 2003-2006, Alberta Prion Research Institute 2006-2007 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Education, school jurisdictions' audited financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2006, sections 1, 2, and 3.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Johnston, chair, Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee, Alberta heritage savings trust fund

annual report 2006-2007, Alberta heritage savings trust fund first-quarter update for three months ended June 30, 2007.

head:

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would ask the Government House Leader to please share with the Assembly the projected government House business for the week commencing Monday the 19th to Thursday the 22nd of November, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, on Monday, November 19, the House would deal with private members' business, so there wouldn't be government business scheduled for that day.

On Tuesday, November 20, after Orders of the Day we anticipate that the results of the second quarter will be tabled. We then would proceed with discussion on second reading of Bill 46 and in Committee of the Whole progress on Bill 1 if it's still before the committee, Bill 2, and possibly Bill 31.

On Wednesday, November 21, we expect to receive messages from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor with respect to supplementary supply; Committee of the Whole again progress on Bill 1 if still before the committee, Bill 2 if still before the committee, Bill 31, and Bill 40; and second reading on Bill 46.

We anticipate, subject to the pleasure of the House, that on Thursday, November 22, under Orders of the Day we will be in Committee of Supply to deal with the messages from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a rare occasion that I have the privilege of introducing anyone from my constituency in this House. Today I have that privilege of introducing to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a bright young businesswoman from Widewater, Alberta. Not only does she have her own consulting company, called Milestone consulting, she has also been newly re-elected as a councillor to the MD of Lesser Slave River No. 124. She is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask Darcie Acton to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on a point of order.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The citations are 23(h) and (j), and this is specific to the Premier claiming at the end of one of his questions that the Liberals, or more appropriately the Official Opposition, have no policies on royalties or on the

royalty review. I have already tabled a number of documents at the appropriate time which outlined repeated public presentations of the Official Opposition policy on royalties, which included the shadow Minister of Energy presenting to the panel itself on May 14, 2007, followed by media releases from October, transcripts of speeches given on October 23 and 25. I think most of those actually precede the official government response on the royalty review. So, in fact, we were out there ahead of the government.

In 23(h), making allegations against another member, the Premier clearly tried to make the allegation that we didn't have an existing policy, and I've tabled the actual documentation that shows that we do.

I think that the language that was used, if I refer to 23(j), was sufficiently insulting and abusive to take the notice of the House. [interjections] This is exactly what I was talking about, Mr. Speaker, when I spoke about this yesterday. There is a tone that is set by the leaders in this Assembly, and indeed the Premier is the leader of this Assembly, and he certainly did set the tone today. I don't think it's a tone that the rest of us should be very proud of.

So I would argue that comments like that, particularly where they are inaccurate – and I have provided the documentation to prove they're inaccurate – should not be made, and I would ask that the comments that the Premier made be withdrawn.

Thank you.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on this point of order.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's hardly a point of order. Interestingly enough, it was told to me by somebody who obviously had too much time on their hands at the moment that they had actually done a review of all of the Leader of the Opposition's statements and speeches from prior to the last election, through the last election and since, up until the spring of this year and in that review had failed to find any reference to the Leader of the Opposition talking about the need for a royalty review.

In fact, it's very apparent from that type of a review that the Leader of the Opposition had not been at all on the issue of royalty review until the new leader of the Progressive Conservative Party during the campaign prior to becoming that position, the person who ultimately became Premier and followed through on the promise to review royalties, made it an issue during the leadership campaign. It never was an issue that was brought up by the Liberal Party or by the Official Opposition prior to that time.

I don't have the Blues in front of me, but the Premier in referencing in question period today that he'd never heard from the leader of the Liberal Party on the topic was clearly referencing the fact that over the past two years there has been very little said by the Liberals with respect to the question of the need to review royalties. It became an issue when we identified it, when the Premier of this province, as a candidate for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party, indicated that there needed to be a review of royalties from the time, raised it, and then did it.

I can understand the sensitivity coming from the opposite side. I'm not sure it's a point of order that the hon. member has now tabled various documents to try and demonstrate to this Legislature and to the public of Alberta that they actually do think about royalties. We can now read those things, and we can determine whether, in fact, those statements are a well-thought-out policy or not. It's now clear that on October 23, I think she said, the policy was tabled. That's available for people to read.

Clearly, in the cut and thrust of question period the Premier was responding to the concept that the Liberals never had a policy on

royalty review up until the royalty review was called. Even then it's very clear from the record that when the royalty panel was empanelled, they were very critical of the panel itself. So to come as latter-day converts to the concept of royalty review – it's very clear where each of the parties stands from that perspective. They have a policy now. That's a wonderful thing.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs on this point of order.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you. Whether there is or isn't a point of order, you, Mr. Speaker, will be the one to decide, and I'm sure you will rule accordingly. However, the merit of the point of order is what the Premier has indicated as Liberals not having a policy.

Mr. Speaker, if you ever have enough spare time – and I don't suggest that anyone has enough spare time to go to the extent of doing that – I would challenge you to review the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition's web page, on which he proudly lists all of the speeches he has ever delivered prior to the 2004 election. There are dozens of them. If you were to do that, you would find that the term "royalty review" or any reference to reviewing the royalty structure for the province of Alberta for natural resources is not mentioned, I dare to say, once. As a matter of fact, in the platform of the Liberal Party for the 2004 election that has never been mentioned.

We know where the NDP stands on the royalty review.

The Speaker: I'd like the hon. member to please focus on this point of order.

Mr. Lukaszuk: I know that the Minister of Energy has challenged the Leader of the Official Opposition to contribute, and that has not been done. So I think it's a fair assumption that there was no platform.

The Speaker: Anybody else on the point of order? The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. Mr. Speaker, I indicated yesterday, and I do believe that . . .

The Speaker: A citation will help us focus. Proceed.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Premier's questioning and statement around the Liberal's lack of policy, I have to suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that in fact that is the case. As was indicated yesterday, I wrote a letter to the Leader of the Opposition and asked him to express his opinion with respect to the royalty review. No such opinion was forthcoming to this point in time.

The Speaker: I think we've probably heard enough testimony for this. The hon. Official Opposition House Leader cited 23(h), (i), and (j) in her submission, and it's very clear what those segments have. All members of the Assembly have the Standing Orders before them. Here's what actually was said, the latter part of what the response was from the Premier: "During this period of time, in the last number of years that he served as Leader of the Official Opposition, he still has not taken a public position on the royalty framework. He's still sitting on the fence," at which point the Member for Edmonton-Centre, the Official Opposition House Leader, rises to advise that there was a point of order.

We've heard argument from several members with respect to this and the tabling of certain documents in the House today. The chair does not recall if those documents have been tabled previously or if

they are reasonably accessible. But with those documents now having been tabled today, that will allow all members in the next couple of days and the weekend to study these documents. They are easily accessible, and all members who may have been unsure what the position was of the Leader of the Official Opposition now can ascertain that and determine that, in their own view.

Beauchesne 494 is pertinent. It says:

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

You've heard this before.

I think this demonstrates what happens when, basically, individuals talk about he/she/you instead of recognizing that the purpose of question period and the exchange in question period should deal with policy. Every time we venture into this personal thing, we seem to have responses at the end of the question period. In essence, members should stick to policy. Members can have differences of views with respect to policy, and if we deal with that, that would really be helpful.

This is something that remains an issue, and I guess we'll continue to have points of order with respect to this. It's difficult for the chair to determine if there is a policy or not a policy by just sitting here, but if two members disagree as to whether or not there is a policy, the chair is bound by basically saying that sometimes the House has to accept contrary views of the same item, so that's where that one will end.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

Committee Membership Change

30. Mr. Hancock moved on behalf of Mr. Zwozdesky:

Be it resolved that the following change to the Standing Committee on Community Services be approved: that Mr. Marz replace hon. Mrs. Ady as chair.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Motion 30. The House will know that the Member for Calgary-Shaw accepted an appointment to cabinet as the Associate Minister of Tourism Promotion in the summer. Since that time the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills under the rules has acted as a replacement for her on the committee, and we would ask that the House now regularize that or make that a permanent change to the committee.

The Speaker: Anyone want to participate? This is a debatable motion.

Should we call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 30 carried]

2:50 Committee Membership Change

31. Mr Hancock moved on behalf of Mr. Zwozdesky:

Be it resolved that the following change to the Standing

Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing be approved: that Mr. Lougheed replace the hon. Mr. Zwozdesky as chair.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Government Motion 31. The Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek has as well similarly been appointed to cabinet, to Executive Council, and the request is that the Member for Strathcona replace him as chair of the committee.

The Speaker: This is also a debatable motion if members wanted to participate.

There being none, we'll call the question on the motion put forward by the hon. Government House Leader.

[Government Motion 31 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders Second Reading**

Bill 46 Alberta Utilities Commission Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature today to speak on Bill 46, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, in second reading. As you know, I introduced Bill 46 during the spring session. Bill 46, of course, will separate the EUB into two regulatory bodies: the Energy Resources Conservation Board and the Alberta utilities commission. This recognition of two boards with clear mandates, improved management, and fresh leadership will respond to the increased number of applications brought forward before the board due to the increased activity in the oil and gas industry and the need for an electricity-related infrastructure, the infrastructure that will help meet the increased demand for electricity in the province of Alberta. The mandate letter I received from the Premier includes the responsibility to ensure that our province has an electric system that meets our province's growing needs, and that includes making sure that new generation capacity and transmission infrastructure are in place.

I want to make a few important points, Mr. Speaker, about this increased workload on the provincial regulators. When I say increased workload, I'm referring to a 300 per cent jump in the number of applications before the EUB each year, 300 per cent. In 1995-96 the EUB dealt with just under 19,000 applications, and in 2006 they had over 60,000. This remarkable increase is a reflection of Alberta's prosperity, but it has also made it necessary to restructure our energy regulatory process.

Without the ability to move electrons from where electricity is generated to Alberta's homes and businesses, Alberta's progress would be severely hindered and the effects would be widespread. Policies must be in place that address many needs and expectations. How do we meet the increased demand for electricity? How do we get that electricity to Albertans? They expect their lights to come on. How do we balance the demands for power with legitimate landowner concerns, and is our regulatory process serving Albertans? Is it responsive, efficient, and accountable, a process Albertans have confidence in?

Before I get to the specifics about Bill 46, I think it's important to provide some information about Alberta's electric system as this lays the groundwork for the intent of Bill 46. The Alberta Electric

System Operator, a not-for-profit company, is responsible for planning Alberta's electrical transmission system. The AESO produces a 10-year system transmission plan every two years, files this report with the province's regulator, and makes this document public. The most recent plan was issued in February 2007 and is available on the AESO website. The plan says that there's a need for over \$3.5 billion worth of transmission development over the next 10 years. Currently \$1.5 billion in transmission investments are in progress in the province.

The Speaker: You will move.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point in time I would like to move second reading of Bill 46.

Since 1998 demand for electricity has grown at a rate equivalent to adding two cities the size of Red Deer each year. Generation added in the last 10 years is more than Saskatchewan's entire power supply, and Alberta's load growth in 2007 is equivalent to Ontario's load growth, a province with three times our population.

Let me make one thing clear: Alberta's electric system has kept pace with the dynamic growth, and we have kept the lights on. It's only logical that as demand increases, the electric system must continue to respond. The fact of the matter is that all electricity systems regardless of market structure require maintenance and upgrades to keep the lights on.

The last major transmission projects in Alberta were constructed in the 1980s. Alberta needs new and upgraded transmission lines to meet the electricity needs of Albertans, and strong, interconnected transmission is essential in encouraging the development of more electricity generation. Power producers are not going to build power plants if they can't get their product to customers, so transmission lines are needed in all regions of the province. One important area is southern Alberta.

With the recent removal of the 900-megawatt threshold, there is the potential for the development of thousands of megawatts of wind generation. I appreciate that after that announcement the leader of the NDP issued a news release saying that the province should move quickly to build the transmission lines to accommodate more wind power. That's great. However, the province doesn't build transmission lines. But it's good to know that he agrees that it's important to have a strong transmission system. Albertans have heard the term "a reliable electric system," but what does it really mean? It means having enough transmission capacity to handle normal events that occur from time to time, like scheduled maintenance of a power plant or a storm or a downed transmission line.

Mr. Speaker, we could get to the specifics about Bill 46. When I tabled the bill, I said that an updated regulatory system supports this government's commitment to effectively manage growth pressure. There is an increase in applications brought on by increases in oil and gas activity and the demand for electricity generation and transmission. Alberta has a world-renowned regulatory system for the energy industry, and this restructuring builds on that success and will ensure that Albertans have access to a robust regulatory authority as we develop our resource and utility systems. I stand by those statements today.

Since tabling Bill 46 in the Legislature last spring, there has been significant public discussion about the bill's intent. This is an important piece of legislation, and Albertans are right to ask questions about it. I have met with citizens and landowner groups, I have listened to their opinions, and I have expressed mine as well. I can assure Albertans, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 46 has been written carefully to preserve and balance the rights of individuals and intervenors with the need for a functioning and responsive regulatory system that can serve the needs of all Albertans.

There has been a lot of work done on this bill. There are a number of respected organizations that are supportive of many aspects. These organizations do a fine job representing their stakeholders, and we have worked together to make this bill fair and effective. Today I'm happy to put on the public record facts about Bill 46. Respecting the rights and concerns of landowners and other members of the public is a fundamental principle to this government, and Bill 46 upholds that principle. Albertans expect a regulatory process that is focused, diligent, fair, and responsive to the province's growing needs, and this government couldn't agree more.

Let's look at specific sections of the bill, some of which have been the subject of much public comment over the last few months. Part 1 of the AUC Act creates the AUC and sets out its corporate governance and jurisdiction, including appointing more members to deal with the increased utility workload. It also requires the appointment of a CEO to allow the AUC members to focus on their duties while the CEO deals with management and administration of the AUC.

Mr. Speaker, section 9 deals with decisions and orders. I want to clarify its intent and purpose, and the section must be looked at in its entirety. Section 9(1) gives the AUC the right to make certain decisions without hearings if there are no affected landowners. This is not new, Mr. Speaker. This is an authority that's currently granted under section 26 of the Energy Resources Conservation Act. Section 9 balances this authority by requiring that a public hearing must be held if any person's right may be directly or adversely affected by an AUC decision.

It is also important to emphasize that section 17 explicitly requires the AUC to consider whether a proposed development is in the public interest and to take into account its social, economic, and environmental effect.

3:00

Bill 46 guarantees affected parties the right to receive notice and the opportunity to learn all the facts about an application. So to be clear: notice must be given to everyone affected, and if one person requests a hearing, one must be held, and concerns must be taken into account. I want to add that landowner rights are further protected by the fact that the AUC must comply with the Administrative Procedures and Jurisdiction Act with respect to rules on procedural fairness.

Section 9(4) gives the AUC an ability to require testimony in written rather than oral format. The EUB currently has this authority in section 40 of the PUB Act, and it's been used before. Again, Mr. Speaker, this is not new. This will not be the usual practice, but it may be appropriate to handle proceedings in certain circumstances. These would be highly technical matters such as the determination of gas cost recovery rates.

Sections 21 and 22 deal with intervenor funding, and I want to be very clear about this section, Mr. Speaker, as there have been some public statements about these matters that are simply wrong. There are two sets of hearings where intervenor funding can be applied: infrastructure hearings and rate hearings. In facility and infrastructure hearings, such as those for transmission lines, all landowners who are directly and adversely affected will continue to be eligible for funding to represent their interests. Other interested Albertans who aren't directly affected may apply to intervene in hearings as they do today, but these individuals will be responsible for their own costs. This in no way affects landowners' rights to retain legal counsel.

For hearings such as rate applications small consumers would be represented by the Utilities Consumer Advocate. The Utilities Consumer Advocate will have an expanded and more proactive role

in representing small consumers at rate hearings. The Utilities Consumer Advocate will be funded through electric and natural gas distribution tariff charges on those customers the consumer advocate represents.

Consumer groups play an important role in the regulatory process. Five consumer groups have come together through a memorandum of understanding and agreed to pool their interventions under the UCA and sit on an interim governance board with similar powers as envisioned under the bill. The organizations are the Alberta Federation of Rural Electrification Associations, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the rural gas co-ops, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Other groups can still participate in the process if they choose, but if they go outside the representation of UCA, they would be paying their costs. Intervenor funding for consumer groups is part of the approved rates that Albertans pay on utility bills. Intervenor costs and rate hearings were \$3.3 million last year, Mr. Speaker, and \$6.7 million in 2005. This funding would now be reserved for customers that are affected by energy development.

In urgent circumstances Alberta's regulatory agency must be permitted to give orders without notice; for example, in the event of a generator failing or a transmission line failure. Section 24 gives the AUC authority to take immediate action to issue orders in an emergency or other situations requiring urgent action. This is not new. Again, Mr. Speaker, this power is already contained in the PUB Act. I can assure Albertans that this measure is to be used in emergencies or matters that require urgent attention. It is not intended for infrastructure projects.

Section 29 provides the terms under which a person may appeal to the Court of Appeal. It specifies that leave to appeal must be filed within 30 days. It does not specify when the appeal must be heard or completed. This is not new, Mr. Speaker. In fact, this is taken directly from the current Alberta Energy and Utilities Board Act, and the section reaches a balance between ensuring due process and allowing for a reasonable time frame to settle matters. The UCA will have an expanded role in representing consumer interests in AUC proceedings.

Again, I would like to say that the Utilities Consumer Advocate has served Albertans very well in the past, and it will continue to do so. Many consumer groups are pleased with the role of the UCA and the role that it will play in the future. The independence of the office of UCA will be preserved by the office taking its direction from its own governance board.

Appropriate expert, technical, and legal services will be made available to best represent small consumers. The UCA will be funded by the small consumers it represents. The benefits of a centrally established organization to represent small consumers will be to strengthen the effective position of small consumers in hearings by consolidating the arguments, formerly made by multiple intervenors, to reduce the total number of intervenors, many of whom are representing a same or similar argument, which would reduce the time and cost to conduct hearings, and to ensure that the technical and legal counsel representing small consumers are experts in the field of utility regulation, providing strong arguments on behalf of small consumers. Individual consumers who wish to be represented by the UCA are encouraged to communicate their issues to the office of the UCA, and the UCA is given the new obligation to proactively seek out the opinion of small consumers.

Mr. Speaker, sections referring to the MSA not being under the jurisdiction of the Auditor General are not new. Under current legislation, the EUA, the MSA has never been under the jurisdiction of the Auditor General. Under section 50 of Bill 46 the MSA "shall

appoint an independent auditor to review and audit its financial statements." Further, under section 53 the MSA must prepare an annual report that is made public.

Finally, there have been some claims that Bill 46 will apply retroactively to 2003. Again, Mr. Speaker, this is not the case. Bill 46 confirms that need must always be considered. The act simply clarifies that need does not have to be addressed more than once during different parts of the regulatory process. Bill 46 clarifies existing legislation to make an administrative correction to the Hydro and Electric Energy Act. The overlap has led to some uncertainty, and Bill 46 clarifies at what stage of the regulatory process the need for new transmission lines should be considered. However, this will not change the fact that need must be formally considered as part of the process.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks on Bill 46. Let me be clear about public hearings. Full public notification of any application must be made. A public hearing must be held if one person would be directly or adversely affected by any application. If no person requests a hearing or if no one is adversely affected, a hearing would not be required. The AUC will continue to be able to review and vary any past decision, just like they do now. Under Bill 46 questions of law or jurisdiction related to regulatory decisions can be appealed to the Court of Appeal, just as they can now.

Let me be clear about intervenor funding. Intervenor funding for small consumers will continue through the UCA. Intervenor funding for local intervenors who are directly or adversely affected by proposed infrastructure would be available through the AUC. Bill 46 does not prevent any intervenor from appearing before the AUC. However, only directly affected intervenors receive funding in infrastructure hearings.

As Minister of Energy it's my responsibility to ensure that our province has an electricity system that meets our province's growing demand. This includes having a regulatory process that the citizens have confidence in, that finds a balance between the needs of affected landowners and the overall need of Albertans to have the lights come on when they flick the switch. This includes having the transmission infrastructure in place for today and to address the anticipated growth in years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

3:10

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has been recognized.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. It's a pleasure to participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 46. It's certainly a contentious piece of legislation. I listened with a great deal of interest to the hon. Minister of Energy in his explanation of this bill. It was quietly introduced here in the Legislative Assembly in June. Since then, our office has received call after call after call and we've received e-mail after e-mail after e-mail regarding this legislation, and all these calls and e-mails have been questioning the direction the government is going in.

Now, certainly, in light of recent events, the spying scandal at the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, some Albertans – and these are the ones that we are talking to – are now very concerned about this proposed Alberta Utilities Commission Act. I was quite pleased to learn the other day that the Premier is contemplating amendments to this legislation even before we have had any discussion on this

legislation at second reading, so that certainly indicates to me, Mr. Speaker, that there is a lot wrong with this bill. I don't know how it was drafted. I don't know who was responsible for the drafting of this legislation, but certainly landowners and consumers have a lot of questions. Who was consulted? Who knows? But we do know that there are major flaws in this legislative proposal.

One can only surmise, Mr. Speaker, why at this time this government went ahead with this legislation, but certainly there's an indication – and this is from the government themselves – that in light of what happened at the regulatory hearing in Red Deer and in Rimbey, the government has decided to limit and restrict public participation in the hearings. They say this themselves. This is in regard to oral testimony, and this is under section 9(4) of Bill 46, which gives the Alberta utilities commission the right to refuse to hear oral testimony during a hearing.

The government surmises that while there may be benefits from oral testimony, there is the potential for emotions to overtake the actual considerations of the situation. The Alberta utilities commission has a need to encourage calm consideration and must have the right to make decisions based on written submissions in some circumstances. Now, is that democratic? I certainly think not, Mr. Speaker.

What could we do to improve this bill? Well, certainly, there are going to have to be lots of amendments, and it is interesting that the hon. Minister of Energy didn't mention any deficiencies in this legislation. It is clear that in part 10 – and the government should be offended, Mr. Speaker, that this has gone from the drafting table to the floor of this Assembly. Here under part 10, Transitional Provisions, Related and Consequential Amendments, Repeal and Coming into Force, everything from part 10 through to the retroactivity clause to 2003, all this part of this legislation, this proposed bill, can be changed through regulation. This is clear in section 95(9). The hon. minister didn't mention this, but it states in here, "If there is a conflict between a regulation made under subsection (7) and a provision in this Part, the regulation prevails."

How can a regulation prevail over a statute? We know what happened to the federal Conservatives when they tried that with barley marketing, and we know what the courts had to say. Why is this being allowed on the floor of this Assembly? Why is this government, if it's open and transparent, trying to force on the floor of the Legislative Assembly a bill that will have a regulation override part of the statute? Not only would that regulation override a part of the statute; the regulation made under this section may be made retroactive to the extent set out in the regulation. The hon. minister in his opening remarks certainly didn't mention that. That, hon. minister, is completely, utterly undemocratic, and the hon. minister knows it.

Now, Bill 46 will restrict Albertans' other democratic rights. This bill, incredibly, was drafted at the same time as the spies were hired by the government agency to eavesdrop on citizens in Rimbey. When we look at this bill, it's repealing the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board Act, and we are setting up this Alberta utilities commission. One has to assume that this bill appears to be written by an autocratic government determined to ignore both consumers and landowners in order to speed up the energy regulatory process.

The reason why this energy regulatory process has to be sped up in the first place is because of the failure of electricity deregulation. The hon. minister knows the complete, dismal failure that has occurred. Certainly, we have this massive backlog not only in upgrading and expanding our transmission system but in our baseload generation, which has not kept up to the expanding electricity grid. It hasn't kept pace, Mr. Speaker, and it hasn't kept pace because of the chaos and confusion that was created because of electricity deregulation.

Now we're going to take this bill and try to convince Albertans that this is the right way to go after the spying scandal in Rimbey? I don't think so. Rural Albertans, urban consumers see through this minister's attempt, and they see through this government legislation.

Let's consider this with this bill. Bill 46 gives the Alberta utilities commission the power to make orders and issue decisions without giving public notice or holding public hearings. That's in section 9(1). It gives the Alberta utilities commission the power to prevent landowners and consumers from making verbal representations to the commission. It also limits the time period in which Albertans can appeal a decision or order made by the Alberta utilities commission to 30 days. I think that should be increased, and hopefully we'll get to that in committee.

This bill restricts the ability of landowners to hire outside legal counsel while intervening in regulatory hearings. This is in section 9(4). It is interesting that the government acknowledges this. The government acknowledges that this section 9(4) is limited to circumstances in which the Alberta utilities commission has provided an adequate opportunity to make representations in writing. In these circumstances the Alberta utilities commission is not obligated to allow oral representation or to be represented by counsel. That's from one of the responses that's publicly available regarding this bill, and that's a government response, Mr. Speaker.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Now, there are certainly limitations and restrictions being placed on Albertans here, and it is really, really unfortunate that this government would be attempting this at this time. Is this going to restore public confidence in the energy regulatory process, this bill? Certainly not. Is it a right step at the right time? It certainly isn't. The government knows this, Mr. Speaker, and it is very, very disappointing that they would present this at this time. Again, who is being represented here? It certainly is not consumers.

3:20

In the time that I have left, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to have a look at the excellent analysis that was done by the Environmental Law Centre in July of 2007 regarding the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. Before we vote in second reading on this, I would urge all hon. members to have a look at this, and you can see for yourself exactly what is being attempted here. This is not the innocent change that the hon. Minister of Energy is indicating that it is. If you read the bill section by section, line by line, you will clearly see that this is one of the most undemocratic attempts ever taken by this government. There have been many over the years, but certainly this one . . .

Mr. Taylor: Takes the cake.

Mr. MacDonald: Takes the cake. You're absolutely right, hon. member.

This is hopefully going to be changed, but we have to look again at section 9. This is perhaps the most serious flaw, this entire section, because we are restricting rights to public participation or we are granting these very wide discretionary powers to this proposed commission.

I'm using this as an example. Surely, if this government won't listen to the Official Opposition, doesn't listen to rural landowners, doesn't listen to urban consumers or farmers, you'll listen to the Pembina Institute. This is one of their observations regarding this section, Mr. Speaker.

- The Commission is allowed to make an order or decision

without giving notice and without holding a hearing unless it appears to the Commission that its decision “may directly and adversely affect the rights of a person” (sections 9(1), (2)). The ‘directly and adversely affected test’ has been a continuing source of controversy and litigation in Alberta because it is highly restrictive, often preventing participation by individuals and organizations who have bona fide and legitimate concerns with proposed projects.

They go on to say:

- Even when the rights of persons are ‘directly and adversely affected’, the Commission may further restrict public participation by deciding not to hold a hearing in several circumstances.
- The commission is not required to hold a hearing when it considers that “no person will be directly and adversely affected in a material way” . . .

I didn’t hear the hon. minister state that.

. . . (section 9(3)(b) . . .) This section adds another obstacle to public participation to the “directly and adversely affected” restriction and there is no way [at this time] of determining how the Commission will interpret “in a material way”.

We know what it meant in the lead-up in late April, early May. We know what it meant to the citizens in Rimbey, where a government agency hired spies to eavesdrop and monitor on them. We know what happened in that case. The minister across the way and all of the other hon. members on the government side are content to allow this bill to pass after that despicable behaviour? I hope not.

Now, the Pembina Institute goes on to say:

- The commission is not required to hold a hearing when it is satisfied that the applicant has met the relevant Commission rules respecting each landowner that may be directly and adversely affected (section 9(3)(c)). These rules have not been developed and the Commission [again] has broad discretion to create rules that could be used to restrict the use of hearings. For example, the rules could provide an easy path for an applicant to undertake limited public consultation and then argue that a full public hearing should not be ordered.
- Even if a person is entitled to “make representations” to the Commission because he or she qualifies as directly and adversely affected, this right only includes the opportunity to make a written presentation. The right to a “hearing” does not include an automatic right to make an oral presentation or to be represented by counsel (section 9(4)). This provision is another restriction of existing procedural rights found in the Energy Resources Conservation Act.

For your interest that’s section 26(2).

It will limit the ability of some people to participate effectively in the Commission’s [hearings].

The institute, Mr. Speaker, also states:

- The commission is not required to give notice to interested parties when making decisions on matters that it considers to be urgent or “for other reasons appearing to the Commission to be sufficient” . . . This [provides] an extraordinarily broad grant of discretionary power to deny the most basic procedural right that people should have prior notice of orders and decisions that may affect their interests.

Before my time runs out, I would like to spend a little bit of time on sections 96 and 98. That is at the very back of this bill. Now, this is the coming into force of section 96(14)(c)(ii). We want to have this section come into force on June 1, 2003, and that is the date that the last Electric Utilities Act amendments came into effect, as I understand it. This is, again, not the innocent little housekeeping change that the hon. minister has described. This is a significant change to this bill.

Now, what effect will this have? Well, if we allow this to happen, citizens will no longer have an opportunity for effective public

participation if this section goes ahead. The commission will no longer be required to address public need and convenience in the context of the Hydro and Electric Energy Act. Under the EUA or any other act there is a difference, and I hope hon. members will see that difference as we proceed with the debate on this legislation. There’s a significant difference when we’re discussing public convenience and need, and I hope that hon. members across the way recognize that. This, again, is going to water down the regulatory process. If consumers and landowners felt frustrated with the behaviour that was exhibited in Rimbey, their frustrations, unfortunately, will be greater if we allow this bill to go through this Legislature unchanged. We have a duty and an obligation to challenge this flawed law because, certainly, it needs to be.

I talked about the Environmental Law Centre, Mr. Speaker. In the time I have left, I would like to talk about the disrespect of this government towards this legislative process. In July of this year, July 7 to be exact, there were newspaper advertisements taken out to advertise for a chair of this new Energy Resources Conservation Board and a chair for the Alberta utilities commission. The closing date of this competition was July 31, 2007. How can we advertise for these senior positions before we know that the bill is going to become law?

Mr. Elsalhy: It’s very presumptuous.

Mr. MacDonald: It certainly is.

We also had on October 19 an ad for citizens to apply for senior positions with this new Alberta utilities commission. That, in my view, is a complete and utter contempt of this Legislative Assembly and the legislative debate that’s going to occur here. It’s like this is a rubber stamp. If we allow this bill to proceed, this will be a rubber stamp for all energy regulatory hearings in the future, and it is unfortunate. It’s also undemocratic. I’m sorry; I’m out of time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, landowners and consumer groups have expressed concerns about the changes to the energy regulatory system outlined in Bill 46. Bill 46, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, will preserve and balance – preserve and balance – the rights of individuals, intervenors, and industry with the need for a responsive regulatory system that serves all Albertans. This bill was introduced during the spring sitting so that landowners, consumer groups, and industry could be consulted. Consulted. Government is now considering amendments to respond to the input we received throughout the summer.

It’s important to understand exactly what the act will and will not do. The act ensures that the landowners can bring their concerns forward about the development that affects them. Directly affected landowners will have access to intervenor funding if they choose to participate in the process. Any other citizen can still apply to take part in the hearing process for both the infrastructure hearings and rate hearings, Mr. Speaker. Intervenor funding, however, is reserved for those Albertans directly affected. Consumers are well represented at rate hearings by the Utilities Consumer Advocate, the UCA. Although intervenor funding will be reserved for individual Albertans affected by energy development, other groups may participate in rate hearings if they choose. With our growing province we need new and upgraded transmission lines to keep the lights on and to meet the electricity needs of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about some myths that we’ve been

hearing, and I want to talk about some facts regarding this bill. Myth: landowners won't be notified or have the ability to participate in hearings about development on their property. Bill 46 fact: notice must be given to everyone affected. Everyone affected. If only one person requests a hearing, one must be held, and concerns must be taken into account.

Myth: Albertans won't be able to retain legal counsel or receive funding to intervene in hearings about electricity infrastructure on their land. Bill 46 fact: intervenor funding is reserved especially for affected landowners, and they can still hire legal counsel if they wish. Other Albertans who aren't directly affected by development may apply to intervene, as they do today, Mr. Speaker.

Another myth: because this bill is retroactive to 2003, Albertans won't be able to question whether proposed power lines are even necessary or challenge decisions already made. Mr. Speaker, Bill 46 fact: need and public interest must always – must always – be considered under Bill 46. The retroactivity only clarifies that need doesn't have to be addressed more than once during the regulatory process.

Another myth: this bill changes the way things happen today, including allowing the regulator to accept input in writing instead of hearing verbal presentations, allowing orders to be made in emergency situations without notice, and placing a limitation on the appeals period. Mr. Speaker, Bill 46 fact: these provisions are not new and exist under current legislation. Bill 46 balances the needs of affected landowners with the overall electricity and utility needs of all Albertans. All Albertans.

Another myth: new power lines aren't even needed and are only being proposed to sell power to the U.S. Myth. Myth. That's an Edmonton-Gold Bar myth. Bill 46 fact: Albertans' and Alberta's transmission system hasn't been upgraded in over two decades, Mr. Speaker. New electricity lines are essential in keeping the lights on for all Albertans and encouraging the development of new generation to meet power demands.

Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall call the committee to order.

Bill 1 **Lobbyists Act**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? Hon. members, we are also dealing with part A of amendment A1, that's on the floor. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to join in this discussion. I advocated for the idea of a lobbyist act, and a lobbyist registry is an important concept for me. I've talked about it a lot with my constituents. Actually, as I go around and speak at all of my different seniors' residences, it's one of the subjects that comes up over and over again because I really do believe in it. I think it's important that we know who is talking to whom in the government and about what, and that needs to be transparent.

I don't think it's wrong for people to try and influence public

policy. I'm a social activist rabble-rouser from way back. I try really hard to influence public policy, and I always have. I think that's perfectly appropriate, that citizens try and tell their government what they need them to do and try and influence them to go in a certain direction. That's perfectly legitimate.

What's important is that that process is transparent, that we can see who is approaching members of the government, in particular members of the government, to influence public policy and what public policy is. Either someone is advocating to put it in place or to change it. That's the important concept for me, that transparency; in other words, the registry and how that registry is set up, the kind of information that's easily displayed.

I spoke in second reading, I'm sure, and we in the Official Opposition certainly accepted the principle of the bill.

Now, the bill spent the summer on the beach of the policy field committee, I'm sure getting a great tan, wearing flip-flops around and cut-offs, and enjoyed its time at the lake with all the members of the policy field committee.

Mr. Elsalhy: It wasn't a trip.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, I'm sorry. I have been corrected. I have used totally the wrong metaphor. It was not a day at the beach. Okay. I withdraw that. I've been corrected by a member of the committee.

Nonetheless, it was in the policy field committee over the summer. What we have before us now are the amendments that have been suggested by the policy field committee, and they are sections A through K, and we are approaching these one at a time.

Specifically, we are talking right now about section A, and several people have described that, but essentially it was trying to make it very apparent that consultant lobbyists must register. It was also clarifying that the definitions of consultant lobbyist and organizational lobbyist are consistent. It also had several tests for an organizational lobbyist. That's where they brought in that the 100 hours was the test that had to be met, and if an organization wasn't likely to meet that test, then they didn't have to register as an organizational lobbyist.

3:40

Then at the end they struck out some of the groups that had been included in the original version of the bill as a public office holder, and this becomes an important definition as we go along because people who are talking to these public office holders or these public office holders who are speaking to members of the government become very important in the context because some will be prohibited from speaking to each other.

I am certainly in favour of what's being put forward in this amendment. I know the committee spent a lot of time working on it and then trying to come up with that test and those definitions, and I respect the work that they did here.

I am a little curious, however, and maybe someone can explain this to me. In the last section in what appears under section (e) in clause (j) of the original bill, which would be on page 5 of the original bill, for anybody following along at home or perhaps in the gallery . . . [interjection] I know. I always think it's much more interesting than everyone else does. One of the things that has now been deleted is the section that says:

. . . but does not include a master in chambers of the Court of Queen's Bench, a judge of the Provincial Court, a presiding or sitting justice of the peace, an officer of the Legislature or a member of a body acting in an adjudicative capacity.

Maybe a member of the committee can explain to me why that got cut out.

I looked through the comments from the sponsoring member, the

Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but he, interestingly, doesn't talk at all about that section of the amendment. Since we're in Committee of the Whole here and that allows us to go through the bill clause by clause, word by word if we need to – it's a detailed examination of this section of the bill – I'd be interested in hearing what was anticipated there.

For the purposes of debating this amendment in section A, I am supportive of it. I would like to enhance it.

Let me go back and be very clear that I am supportive of this lobbyist bill. I really want to see this bill pass and get into place. I also want to see it be the best bill it can possibly be, so I have sponsored a number of amendments, which will come forward over the next few days that we debate this bill. I want it to be the best bill it can be, and it's an important concept to me.

My experience has been that once you pass legislation in this Assembly or in any other one, you live with it. I know that there's a clause in here or maybe even an amending clause that says we're going to review it in two years. Yeah. But I still find it takes an awfully long time to come back and correct, amend, or add to a piece of legislation if you don't get it right the first time out, so I'm anxious that we do get it right the first time out in as many ways as possible. I hope there's an excitement here in the Assembly to do good work on this bill because I am very excited about it. I know a number of my colleagues are, and I anticipate some good debate and I hope good give-and-take between the sides of the House on how we're going to proceed on this bill.

Those were essentially my comments in support of section A, amendment A if you will, but I would like to introduce a subamendment, and that subamendment is already at the table. I'll ask for it to be distributed at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the subamendment that is being introduced now we shall refer to as subamendment A1. The main amendment is A1, and this is a subamendment. It will be referred to as subamendment A1.

Hon. member, you may proceed now.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again, it helps very much if you follow along on the original bill. So that's, again, back to page 5. This gets very confusing. Under section 1(1)(j) we get into Roman numerals, and I'm suggesting that we strike subclauses (ii) and (iv). Specifically that reads "an employee of a department." That's subclause (ii), and subclause (iv) is "an employee, officer, director or member, as the case may be, of a prescribed Provincial entity."

The reason that I'm suggesting this – and this has been brought forward by a number of the not-for-profits that I work with – is that there is a concern that we are limiting an already fairly limited pool of volunteers that we can pull upon to have come out and volunteer their time and expertise for the various community-based organizations. Let's remember that there's a pretty wide variety of people that are covered under these organizations. I'm aware that the Government House Leader has already indicated that there is a government amendment coming – so that flags to me that it's sure to pass – that will in fact use what's called the Quebec exemption to exempt all of the not-for-profits and charitable and volunteer organizations with the exception of those that are either sort of management oriented, professional associations, unions, and essentially associations which are there for a profit-making reason.

So just off the top of my head and not to pick on anybody in particular, for example, the AMA would still be covered under this legislation, but arts and cultural organizations would be exempted. The unions would still be covered under this, but youth recreation

groups would not. They would be exempted now. Profit-making groups – I guess it depends on the membership, but let me try. You know, Horse Racing Alberta, for example, would still be covered under the legislation because essentially they're representing people that for the most part are making money at what they're doing. So they would still be covered under this legislation, but social service agencies would now be exempted. That was a very, very important part of this legislation because that would have been the deal breaker for me. I had an amendment ready to go that would have done the same thing, but I'm now told the government will bring that forward.

Back to talking about the nonprofits. We have a situation now where volunteerism, the pool of volunteers and the actual number of volunteer hours that we're getting, is declining. We have a very different society now than we did in the 1950s, when just about everybody's mom stayed home, and then they were available to volunteer on the PTA or – we had a different name for it – home and school association, you know, to do good works at the church or to volunteer with the Heart and Stroke Foundation or whatever. There was a very wide pool of mostly married women that were pulled from at that time.

That has shifted as time went on. Now it's much more difficult to recruit volunteers, frankly. Even the big, sort of popular, fun volunteer-based organizations like the Folk Festival or the Fringe are struggling to get the number of volunteers that they need on a yearly basis to provide those festivals. And those are fun. You know, you'd think that would be easy for them to be recruiting, but almost every year you see them out there going: we need more people to help.

The point of my trying to exempt employees of departments and employees, officers, directors, or members of prescribed provincial entities is because that takes away a pool of people who are very knowledgeable about certain issues. Let me give you an example. For example, you've got people that are working in the mental health areas, let's say, or in agriculture. There's a better one. I talked about Horse Racing Alberta. So if you've got people that are working in the department of agriculture or they're working for a provincial entity that is connected with that somehow, and you now say, "Sorry; they're not really allowed to be involved in lobbying or advocacy," you've potentially cut those people out of the pool of volunteers that are available to a group like Horse Racing Alberta because, you know, they now have to start registering their hours and counting them to get to the hundred and have to list and maybe they don't want to register.

3:50

I think we have to be very careful that we don't put things in place that will have consequences for us that are larger than we're willing to actually work with, and I think this is such a situation. By cutting out experienced, knowledgeable people from being able to volunteer in a sector that they know – yeah, Alberta is a big place, 3 million people now. Okay; that's good. That still doesn't give us a huge pool of people to pull from for a lot of fairly specialized sectors, and I think it's important that we recognize this. This was certainly the advice that we had from the not-for-profit sector, that they felt this would reduce their pool of volunteers and that they didn't want to lose those experienced people, so I agreed to bring forward this amendment.

I am hoping that people understand what I'm trying to do, but I'm happy to answer questions or direct the answers back through one of my colleagues, and I hope I can get the support of the members of the Assembly for this subamendment, which is subamendment A1, which is amending section A of the committee amendments.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Not on the subamendment, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Not on the subamendment? Okay.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Being a member of this field committee has certainly been an experience. I had originally been on the select standing committee looking at the Conflicts of Interest Act, which, in turn, became these two bills, 1 and 2. I left that committee to go on the task force. So I have been familiar with what this has been attempting to do for probably a good couple of years now.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

Mr. Elsalhy: The long-term care task force.

Ms Pastoor: Right. The long-term care task force. So it was prior to that. It's been probably over two and a half years, then.

It's been a very good experience, having been a part of this new standing field committee, and up to this point I think it's been a very good process in terms of people being open and sharing their views, listening to their constituents, and bringing back what they feel should have been happening on this bill. We'll see how this actually plays out in the end. At this point in time it looks like it may be very interesting, seeing as how we're going almost clause by clause and amendment by amendment.

I think this is a very good bill. I think what we're trying to do is strengthen it and make sure that what we really attempted and what was intended by having this bill was actually the open process whereby people can know who is talking to their government. The Liberals, of course, have been calling for this for a long time, so I'm pleased that it is coming forward.

A really interesting concept that came up in the committee was presented by a private citizen. It goes a little off this subamendment, but I think it captures what should be happening with this bill. It should be open and certainly transparent on who speaks to whom. The citizen had sort of suggested that perhaps the onus is on the wrong end of the conversation. Perhaps the onus should actually be on the elected officials so that we would keep track of who we spoke to. I believe it's a lot easier for us as elected officials to say who we've spoken to, where we've spoken to them, and about what than it is for many of these hard-working, nonprofit volunteer organizations to try to keep track of their many people and what they're actually doing. Many people are doing all kinds of volunteer hours that are really unaccounted for because that's what volunteers do. They just get in and get the job done. So it's actually only the ones that can account for their time where this bill would be applicable.

I believe what we're trying to get at with this subamendment is that it's actually too broad. I think, as has already been mentioned, that it actually cuts out people who may want to volunteer. I think that if you're an elected official or if you're a public office holder, you're very aware that you are in the public and it's fair game and you should be responsible. But often volunteers volunteer on a private basis. They're not elected. They're not public officials. So I think that by having this, it's too broad, and we're capturing a lot of people who would be deterred, perhaps, in coming forward.

It also affects families because the husband may be doing one thing, the wife might be doing another, but of the two groups that they're working on, one may in fact have a paid consultant lobbyist

or the other group wouldn't, and then it becomes very, very onerous on good volunteer groups to try to sort that out. It's just too complicated.

Also, partly the employee for provincial entities. Now, at this point provincial entities haven't actually been defined as to who will be exempted. My understanding is that that will be done in regulations, but in fact that discussion can go back to the standing field committee.

I would support this and ask the support of the House because I believe that it is too broad. We're capturing too many people who really have nothing to do with what we're trying to achieve with this bill. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much.

I'd like to recognize the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the subamendment, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is with interest that I rise and participate in the debate on the subamendment on Bill 1 that was presented by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Certainly, we've heard from a lot of different parties and organizations regarding this legislation. I understand that the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung was involved, as was the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, in the field policy committee that looked at this. I don't know if you'd call it that.

I have been contacted regarding this bill by many people from the not-for-profit sector who are very concerned about the restrictions and limitations that this bill in its current form would have on their activities or their operations. Certainly, when we look at this subamendment as presented and we're looking at striking out "an employee of a department" and also "an employee, officer, director or member, as the case may be, of a prescribed Provincial entity," I think the intent of the hon. member is not to restrict or limit the pool of citizens who may be interested in volunteering after hours or on the weekend with any number of organizations. Am I correct on that assumption?

4:00

Ms Blakeman: Yes, you are.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Because certainly we have quite a large volunteer sector in Alberta. I can't recall which hon. member of this Assembly, but certainly last week there was a discussion here on the importance of the volunteer sector. The former Member for Drumheller-Stettler was a passionate advocate for the volunteer sector.

If we are going to change this, I certainly agree with the first definition of a public officer when we talk about an employee of a department: "an employee, officer, director or member, as the case may be, of a prescribed Provincial entity." I can only presume that those prescribed provincial entities would be anything I could think of. It's not exclusive to the list that's in the back of the government of Alberta's annual report of agencies, boards, and commissions. I would like clarification in the course of debate on that because certainly there is a long list there, and it would be in the regulations.

There is a lot about this amendment that as I discuss it I'm getting more and more unsure about, but I will only have to take the sage advice from my colleague that this is worth while. When I think of this, well, of course, hon. members, you'll have to excuse me because I'm very concerned about the agencies, boards, and commissions and if they're considered a provincial entity and the patronage parade that goes on there. I certainly wouldn't want to be excluding any of the patronage parade from scrutiny. Certainly, hon.

Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you're absolutely right: there needs to be scrutiny. But the hon. member assures me that they are caught in another section of this bill.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and cede the floor to another member. Thank you.

Dr. B. Miller: Well, Mr. Chairman, rather than just talk in general about the bill, just this particular amendment. It's all about the definition of public office holder, and I think restricting it to Members of the Legislative Assembly and any individual on a member's staff is clear.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

There are lots of problems by including just employees of any department. That's quite restrictive and unnecessary. I always have a real problem with restricting public servants from being able to speak out about political matters. My experience is that it's not until they retire that they really, really become outspoken about what they really feel in terms of politics. I think that's quite a shame that they are so restricted. As a matter of fact, in the last few years there has been a tremendous fear factor that's promoted by this government in various departments, and so many people, especially people dealing with welfare issues, for example, will not speak out for fear of repercussions, punishment, losing their jobs. I really would like to see them, you know, have the freedom to express their views. My understanding is that a lot of the references to other positions would be covered in regulations, like officers or directors of agencies, boards, commissions, and so on.

I'm not going to say any more about this. I support this subamendment and hope that we pass it.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, is there anybody else who wishes to speak on subamendment A1?

Mr. Hinman: I believe that I have the one here. I guess just a few quick remarks. This is a huge bill. We're going to have many amendments come forward. I guess my biggest and briefest comment is that I look at Bill 1. I realize we have a lobbyist problem. We need to do something about it. But my biggest concern is that we go on and we debate, and we're going to go for hours on this trying to find a solution that will hold lobbyists accountable and whether we want to take the patronage that goes on, to eliminate it if possible. I don't believe that we can eliminate it.

Last night I had the privilege of going to the canola growers' presentation. There the Premier had told those people: you have an open invitation to come and see me any time. By saying that, all of this whole bill is excluded. He's given an open invitation, and then it goes by all that.

My question on all of this and this amendment is that this seems to me to be a bigger problem than the gun registry in that the loopholes that going to continue to exist. Wherever the Premier goes, whoever he talks to – I could have brought someone from nuclear energy to the canola board last night, bumped into the Premier, talked to him, and it wouldn't be recorded. If he approaches me and talks to me on this – we have such a huge gaping hole in all of this and the bureaucracy that we're going to try to do.

What we're doing is we're holding the people of Alberta accountable when really it's the office of the Premier and the government that needs to be held accountable. So we want to have a bunch of bookkeeping and a bunch of extra work. Maybe it's the Premier and the ministers who need to report and record and do all of this work rather than all of these people that are trying to get on with their lives to work for charitable organizations.

You know, it just seems like we're going at this the whole wrong way. I wonder, like I say, even on this amendment to an amendment do we really understand? Are we just spending a lot of time when, in fact, the loopholes are going to be there? We need to take it and approach it from a different angle.

Just a few thoughts on this short amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on the subamendment.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, sir. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I have to start by saying that I do support subamendment A1 as proposed by my colleague from Edmonton-Centre.

An Hon. Member: Unobservedly?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Unobservedly.

She went into some detail to explain why she needs to clarify that particular section and why she's eliminating the clauses that she referred to. But I couldn't help but feel the need to respond to some of the comments made by my hon. colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner. I think he was referring to reverse onus, making that requirement on the elected official rather than the people who have the ear of the elected official. While this was brought up in the committee, it was felt by some members from the committee, not all but some, that it would be too much work for them and for their staff. We briefly talked about the fact that we actually do keep a log of who comes into the constituency office and talks to me, what is the subject matter, how long it took, you know, for that conversation, and so on. So we keep that log anyway.

Mr. Hinman: So do the MLAs who were at the canola thing last night report who they met and talked to?

4:10

Mr. Elsalhy: It would be very simple.

But it was felt that this would give the impression that maybe members of the government are becoming less accessible.

Now, I have to remind the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner that nothing we're doing here will prevent access to the government. What we're doing is requiring the registration and the recording of that conversation, of that discussion, but we're not saying that nobody can access ministers or the Premier. Nobody should feel restricted in that access. What we're doing is just offering that transparency, the layer of transparency that is missing. So when the Premier invited members from that organization to come and speak to him with no restrictions, well, that's fine. They can continue to have access to the Premier with no restrictions, but after this bill passes, it will just be a requirement for them to register and report. That's it.

Mr. Hinman: But can he ask them?

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, that's another thing. That's a loophole that might be addressed today, hopefully.

The other thing is that Bill 1 is actually a good piece of legislation, but we're trying to do our due diligence to make it even better. So when we seem to be belaboring the discussion and the debate and we seem to be introducing amendments and then reacting to amendments by introducing subamendments, well, this is what we're elected to do. This is what we're here to try to accomplish. I don't think any time spent under the dome here in the Assembly is time wasted. I don't think giving it the attention that it's seriously

deserving of, you know, weakens it or waters it down. No. What we're trying to do is make the good sections even better and to be friendly to those people who expressed the most concern in terms of the volunteer sector and the nonprofit sector, at the same time looking for these loopholes that have been identified through the submissions to the committee, through the deliberations of the committee, and trying to seal them one by one.

I know this is a new exercise, and I know the hon. chair of the committee, from Calgary-Buffalo, would agree with me. It's a multilayer thing, and that's why it tends to be confusing. We have the bill, the actual proposed act. We have the committee work, which was a layer on top, and we now have recommendations that are appearing before us as amendments and we have subamendments. So because of this navigational maze that we have to go through, some members might feel that maybe we're killing it to death, maybe we're talking too much. But I don't think it's time wasted, Mr. Chairman, and I know you agree with me. This is what we were elected to do, and we're making something that is good even better.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner on the subamendment.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, and just to clarify to the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung that perhaps I didn't express myself properly there. Yes, we want to know about the lobbying that's going on. We want to be able to understand it. But my question is that there are so many loopholes that are going to continue to be open. I don't think that we're ever wasting our time underneath here when we're debating and trying to do such a serious passage of legislation to see that the government is run properly. But when the Premier comes down to my riding and is the drawing card for fundraising, are all the people that have bought and put money towards that fundraiser and are speaking to the Premier going to be recorded and have to answer? Like I say, last night at the function, anybody could have been with me and spoken to the Premier, and I just feel that the loopholes are going to continue to be there. Will we ever be able to close those?

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other speakers on the subamendment that's before the committee?

Hon. members we shall now have a vote, and I just want everyone to be aware of what we're doing. We will be voting on the subamendment that's before us that was moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. After that, if we have no further speakers on part A, we shall have a vote on part A of the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Thereafter, we shall proceed to part B. Is that clear with everyone? Good.

[Motion on subamendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other speakers on part A of amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to talk about this amendment. I realize that it's really important in this legislation to make the distinction between a consultant lobbyist and an organization lobbyist, and this amendment is suggesting changes to the definition of organization lobbyist, which I think is important.

Just to back up a bit, I really also agree with my hon. colleague from Edmonton-McClung that this bill needs to be supported in general. The lobbyists registry is something that has been coming for a long time. I was a member of the Select Special Conflicts of

Interest Act Review Committee, and I was prepared because it has always been a part of our Liberal platform to argue for a lobbyists registry. When I saw that most members of the committee were in fact in favour of a lobbyists registry, we put it forward as part of our recommendations, but we didn't actually go into much detail. We left that up to future committees, so now we have a more detailed presentation in Bill 1 of a lobbyists registry.

I just want to point out that, you know, if you look at the federal legislation, there's one part that's missing which I think would be really important, that's not here in this Bill 1, and that is that the federal legislation, which has a lobbyists registry in place, also has a lobbyist code of conduct. Now, I raised that issue with the select committee on the Conflicts of Interest Act, that perhaps we needed a code of conduct up front, in front of our conflicts of interest legislation. I think it applies here too because I think it's important to have something like a lobbyist code of conduct. This act really doesn't present a code of conduct other than the whereases.

Now, it's interesting that Canada was the first country to reinforce the lobbyists registry by having a code of conduct. I think that's setting the bar high for provinces and for Legislatures, that we need to assure Albertans that lobbying is done ethically and with the highest standards with a view to conserving and enhancing public confidence and trust in the integrity, objectivity, and impartiality of government decision-making. I think that having a code of conduct that actually addresses that kind of high ethical standard would be a real addition to this bill.

I notice that in the lobbyist code of conduct of the federal government they actually list the four whereases; our Bill 1 has five. The first four whereases are taken right out of the lobbyist code of conduct: free and open access to government is an important matter of public interest; lobbying public office holders is a legitimate activity, et cetera. The one that's added is the reference to contracting with the government, which is not in the federal lobbyist code of conduct. But the federal lobbyist code of conduct goes on to outline principles like integrity and honesty, openness, professionalism and then rules: transparency, confidentiality, and so on.

Mr. Chairman, I think that that would have been a great addition to this Bill 1, if we had had the lobbyist code of conduct up front and then the specifics of how to put in place a lobbyists registry that follows on from a code of conduct. But we don't have that, so we're now looking at going through this bill line by line to try to make it a better bill. It's something I support. The time has come. There's been an evolution of concern by the public for a greater standard of ethics set by Legislatures across the country, and the lobbyists registry is a part of that.

Under organization lobbyist the definition is that it's a person who receives a payment for the performance of his or her function. That's a very important statement because we're not talking about volunteers. Volunteers are excluded from this. We're talking about people who actually receive a payment for lobbying and a person who lobbies or whose duty is to lobby on behalf of the organization at least 100 hours annually. You know, I've been persuaded that that is a good way of placing a limit on this definition of an organizational lobbyist.

4:20

The federal government in their lobbyists registry puts it at 20 per cent. So 20 per cent of an individual's activities, if it's involved with lobbying, then that person has to register. But that is vague, that 20 per cent. Twenty per cent of what? It is vague and hard to pin down, so actually I think this is a better expression of the limit in the definition by saying: at least 100 hours annually. I mean, in terms of reinforcing this, it's up to the lobbyists themselves to keep

track and then to register when they're supposed to register. Again, the onus is on them. It would be better, of course, as I said, to have a code of conduct for lobbyists, and that would set the bar high for them, just as we should have a code of conduct that covers our own behaviour.

I don't have anything more to say on that. I support this amendment, and I think it's a step forward. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other speakers on part A of amendment A1?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: I have an amendment to A1 to be amended in part B.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we are dealing just with part A for now.

Mr. Mason: I'm sorry. Thank you for that direction, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: So we need to vote on this one before we move to part B.

Any other speakers for part A on amendment A1?

Hon. members, we are now going to vote on amendment A1, part A of amendment A1, as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

[Motion on amendment A1A carried]

The Deputy Chair: We will now proceed with part B of amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Actually, it is a pleasure because the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East and myself and on a few occasions the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow worked on the committee. We had to do some explaining to our own caucus members, and they trusted us when we clarified and explained what went on in the committee. They trusted us when we told them about the amendments that were the outcome of the committee work because we possess that, quote, organizational memory. It seems like it was a natural fit for Lethbridge-East, Edmonton-McClung, and Calgary-Elbow to some extent to be participating eagerly in this debate.

Part B, Mr. Chairman, as recommended by the committee, attempts to do at least a couple of things. The first one talks about restrictions on the application of the act. What we're trying to do here is clarify who's exempted, who this act does not apply to. When we had the written submissions and then when we had the verbal or in-person presentations, it was brought up time and time again that school board trustees really should not be caught under the definitions of this act, just as we would exempt members from our health regions, for example.

Now, trustees also argued strongly that because they're elected officials, just like we are, they should not be looked at as lobbyists because they're elected to really advocate on behalf of their constituents, just as we are. If I'm talking to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation about those overpasses in Edmonton-McClung, I am not a lobbyist; I am an MLA. I'm doing my work. So a trustee who approaches the Minister of Education and says, you know, "We have school infrastructure issues" or "Classroom sizes are increasing beyond acceptable levels" or so on and so forth, that school board trustee is doing what he or she was elected to do.

The committee heard that argument from trustees, and we agreed that we needed to exempt school board trustees, school board organizations, even the employees in those school boards because that's what this entire entity was tasked to do; that is, to advocate for issues surrounding education, to advocate on behalf of the students, the children, and to some extent their parents as well. Section B is attempting, as is clear, Mr. Chairman, in subclause (a) that we're now telling the world that this act does not apply to "members of the boards of trustees under the School Act, individuals on the staff of any of those members, or officers or employees of the boards." That is the first thing that we're trying to do.

What we're also trying to do in section B is to exempt organizational volunteers who do not receive any form of payment. The committee also had the discussion of whether an in-house lobbyist, an organizational lobbyist, needs to be caught under this act. We agreed that if somebody was truly a volunteer, does not make a penny or maybe gets their expenses paid but doesn't really receive any payment or honorarium, then that person does not need to register or worry about reporting. But if it's somebody on staff that gets paid to do this, then there is the idea of a threshold, the idea of a trigger point.

We discussed it, and we agreed in committee that it would be on an individual basis as well as on a cumulative basis. If an organization has five or six or 10 people who do lobbying, they all count towards that 100-hour threshold. That was a distinction that we wanted to make very clear to members of this House because it all counts. If you have one person doing it or if you have five or 10 or more, you know, it doesn't matter. It all counts towards that 100-hour threshold if these people are paid. So in-house lobbyists who are paid have to worry about that threshold. I remind you, Mr. Chairman, that consultant lobbyists, regardless of what amount of time they allocate, have to register and report. That was a distinction we wanted to make.

Now, in reading the amendment as proposed by the committee and, you know, referencing the loophole that was identified by many people who submitted, and in particular I'm going to reference Democracy Watch, Duff Conacher, and Fasken Martineau DuMoulin. Mr. Guy Giorno highlighted one particular loophole, which the committee discussed. We discussed it very thoroughly but, unfortunately, couldn't reach an agreement, so we felt that it would be prudent for us to maybe raise the same issue again in the House here for all 83 members to hopefully look at and discuss. As such, Mr. Chairman, I move subamendment 2, and I'll wait for the pages to distribute it.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, there is a subamendment that is being circulated to you. With all these little subamendments coming through, this will be referred to as subamendment B1. The first one was subamendment A1.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, you may proceed.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Before us we have subamendment B1. As I'm telling my hon. colleagues, what we're trying to do here is address one particular loophole. It was something that was highlighted more than once whereby the public office holders initiates or invites the feedback or the discussion, and as such the lobbyist does not have to register or report. If hon. members want to read it, it's on page 2 of the recommendations from the committee, which is section 3(2)(b) and (c), and it's part (c) which now is suggested to read: "to a public office holder on behalf of a person or organization in response to a request initiated by a public office holder for advice or comment on any matter referred to in section 1(1)(e)(i)."

4:30

It makes sense, Mr. Chairman, and we know that members of the committee struggled with this. We don't want to be sending the message that we're not interested in what people have to tell us. Definitely not. What we're trying to say here is that when the Premier invites certain people to talk to him about royalties, for example, people have to know. When the Deputy Premier had these meetings with members from the oil and gas industry, well, had this act been in place, these members would have had to register and report.

To have this loophole here staring at us and really weakening something that we're all aspiring to achieve here in terms of openness and integrity was not acceptable. This is one way to address it: by basically eliminating that licence for an elected officer holder – Premier, minister, MLA – to initiate that discussion. In this way that person totally bypasses and sidesteps the act, and this person as a lobbyist is not then deemed to have breached the act and gets away with it and doesn't have to be held accountable nor pay a penalty or a fine. I know that members from both sides are going to be extremely eager to address this.

I have to note, Mr. Chairman, that so far it doesn't seem like any of the members from the government side have spoken, not to the amendments from the committee and not to the subamendments suggested by the opposition. I want to remind them that this is Bill 1, which is the flagship bill of the hon. Premier, and while keeping silent might signal that they're in support, people out there who are now listening or watching or reading *Hansard* might not necessarily get the same feeling or the same impression. I want to challenge some of them at least, maybe two or three, to stand up and put their thoughts on the record. We need to hear from them if they do support their own Premier. If, in fact, they're keeping quiet because they find some of these sections objectionable or questionable, we need to know. We need the assurance that this House is behind this direction, that this House likes to have a registry for lobbyists, and that we are definitely moving towards more openness in government, more accountability in government.

That's my challenge to them. Speak on the subamendment, speak on the amendment itself, and let's really make something that was good initially even better. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. When I was speaking yesterday with respect to this bill, I was very complimentary of the process that we had with respect to the committee, and I think it was a good process. I'm a bit surprised that a member of the committee, who would have had the opportunity to have raised this at committee, would now be bringing an amendment on it.

Be that as it may, the problem with this subamendment is that it would really have the effect of reducing the ability of an MLA to go out and find out about issues. The amendment is to remove (c). All the time members go out and ask people their viewpoint. If by doing that you're going to put somebody in a position where they have to register as a lobbyist because you went out to ask them their opinion, ask them to give you some advice on a subject – in other words, a request initiated by a public office holder for advice or comment on any matter – that would really inhibit us as MLAs in doing our job. That's not an appropriate way to go.

I would ask the House not to pass this amendment. I don't think this amendment is appropriate at all. What we want to have is a bill which makes it clear that lobbyists promoting their interests register and that the public is aware of lobbyists who are promoting their interests or promoting interests on behalf of some other organization. But an amendment which would have the effect of chilling conversa-

tions between an MLA and anyone that they might go to to ask for advice, to seek input, to solicit opinion would very seriously limit our ability to do our jobs and would put an onus on somebody that we talk to. Remember that under this act the onus is on the lobbyist to register and to keep track of their hours and that sort of thing under the appropriate sections. If I in my position as an MLA call someone and ask for advice, I put an onus on them, then, to determine whether or not they're a lobbyist and whether they should register, whether they should start keeping track of their hours. That's not appropriate.

I'd ask the Assembly not to accept this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, did you want to rise?

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes. I thank you for this opportunity for me to be able to speak to subamendment B1 to Bill 1. As sort of introductory remarks to my comments on the amendment, I had an opportunity to sit on this committee as a temporary substitution and had the opportunity, therefore, to engage in considerable debate with colleagues on the committee when we were reviewing Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, and also to hear individuals and organizations that came before the committee to express and register their concerns and observations on what they thought were the strengths of the bill and where they thought there were loopholes that needed to be plugged. While there was general support for the bill, there was serious concern expressed with respect to parts of section 3, which this subamendment B1 is an attempt to amend.

I was among those members of the committee that argued as best we could that the section of the bill which exempts government officials and any contacts initiated from the government side to talk to people who may be registered as lobbyists, people who have private interests to advance in their conversation with the government, that the prohibition, the restriction on application of the act when it applies to government leaves a very big loophole. Public interest groups that came before the committee drew our attention to it in a very specific way. They said: there's a huge loophole.

It should be incumbent on the government to also disclose the people that it has talked to, including people in organizations who may be registered lobbyists. But the bill allows the government to not disclose that information. In their view – and I agree with that view completely – it would in fact defeat the very principles of the bill and the objectives of the bill, which are to ensure transparency and accountability on the part of all of those people, including government representatives, who are responsible for enacting legislation which affects everyone in this province. The Lobbyists Act in itself, although long overdue, is a welcome legislative initiative on the part of the government. I want to leave absolutely no doubt about this. We are happy that this piece of legislation is before us.

What we are trying to do is improve it and improve it by plugging a very serious loophole to which attention was drawn not only by some of us, members of the Legislature who happened to be on that committee and had the opportunity to take part in the debate, but by public interest organizations. Organization after organization drew our attention to it. They said: for this bill to really work and to make a difference in the way we have been transacting and conducting ourselves as government and as lobbyists in this province, this loophole must be plugged.

4:40

If we do not plug this loophole, then the very essence of the bill is in a sense sucked out of it; its objectives are frustrated. Albertans will not have complete confidence in the ability of this bill to serve

the objectives that they expect all of us to not only respect but, in fact, enact in our daily behaviour and also in legislation that comes before this Assembly.

Mr. Chairman, this amendment – and I had the same amendment approved as well, so I won't duplicate it. It's there. I'm glad that I'm speaking to it here in the House. I'm very, very supportive of this amendment. I think it will make a very major difference to Albertans who have become cynical about the way this government has allowed lobbying to happen in the past. If this loophole is not really plugged, then that practice, about which Albertans have become very cynical and very critical, will be allowed to happen, albeit through the back door.

So long as the encounter was initiated from the government side, it will not be considered as lobbying. I don't think that's the best way to go. I don't think it's the right way to go. The right thing for this Legislature to do is to delete this subsection, that this amendment proposes and asks the House to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Elsalhy: Again, Mr. Chairman, just a few comments to react to what the hon. House leader was mentioning. I don't think it does that. I don't think that by eliminating that section, we're restricting access to MLAs or restricting MLAs' ability to solicit feedback and input from stakeholders and experts. We're not doing that.

Let's take a situation where the Minister of Justice, who is now the Deputy Premier, had these behind-closed-doors meetings with members from the oil and gas industry. He spent at least a month talking to them, and nobody knew what the subject matter was, what recommendations or discussions were about, and we were told that this is part of an ongoing dialogue with members of the industry. Nobody knows, and these documents will never be revealed because they were just informal discussions. Even if you try to go through the access to information way and try to FOIP some of these documents, I have to tell you: good luck, Mr. Chairman; you will not meet with success. This is one example.

Another example, Mr. Chairman. It is really annoying when you have a discussion that involves transfers of money or the payment of money and you have no records. Take, for example, verbal contracts, which is something we've complained about and criticized on this side of the House, where the government gives contracts to people for verbal advice. There is not a piece of paper generated. There is no record. There is no tape. There is no transcript. No record whatsoever. People don't get paid small honorariums; they get paid tens of thousands of dollars for something that we cannot prove was beneficial to the taxpayer. We cannot know that for sure. So when you have that, you tell me that, yes, this is annoying, this is irritating, and it is wrong. Well, this is not different.

Let's take a consultant lobbyist. Well, they have to register regardless. If I invite them or if they approach me, they have to register regardless. If you take an organizational lobbyist, if they're volunteers, they don't have to do it. If they're not paid, they don't have to do it, and even if they are, they have a hundred hours before they have to register and report. Well, if I invite them to talk to me for an hour and each MLA in this House invites them to talk to them for an hour, that's 83. They would still not have to register and report. So I don't think that the argument from the Government House Leader holds water. I think he is concerned, as he should be, because he doesn't want to be giving the impression that we're not accessible and that it's limiting our ability to solicit input. We're not going to do this. This amendment only seals that loophole so people in, you know, those places which the act was designed to catch are caught.

Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Just one brief comment on the hon. member's discourse. Ironically, of course, he raised the Deputy Premier meeting with oil industry interests. Well, if he's paying attention, he'd know that the Deputy Premier indicated that he would make public all the meetings that he held in that regard, and in fact he has disclosed as though there was a registry in place all of the meetings that he's had, the people he met with, in the same form as would have been disclosed if there had been a registry. You can look on the Department of Justice website and get that very information. So the point that he was making is not in fact valid on that particular matter.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I, too, listened to the discourse of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and would like to remind him that perhaps all the information, all the reports and fact-finding statements that have been made in regard to royalties, could be on that website as well, as well as who the hon. member has met with recently. That would be being really open and really transparent.

Now, regarding this amendment, I would certainly urge all hon. members to accept this. I do not think that this will restrict MLAs from doing their jobs in any way. I see this deletion as necessary to enhance and restore public confidence in the office that we hold. For that reason I won't speak at length on this, but I would urge all members to support this amendment. Certainly, it has been well articulated by both the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and the Member for Edmonton-McClung. Please accept this because I think it will go a long way to restoring public confidence, and it's not going to inhibit or limit in any way our ability to do our job or to talk to citizens who may have an issue or may have a concern. Certainly, they may be able to provide us with advice.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to make brief comments. I was reading through some of the remarks that were made yesterday by the Government House Leader when speaking to Bill 1, and he has made a very welcome suggestion to introduce the idea of public good. I think it is important in this House to always keep in mind what serves the public good, and I'm looking forward to the amendment that he's going to bring forward to improve this bill. He made the suggestion that that amendment will be coming forward to exempt nonprofit charitable voluntary organizations from the requirements of this bill. I think that's a good amendment. We hope to see it soon. I'm sure that if the amendment is going to be as it seems to me it will be, then it will have, certainly, our enthusiastic support.

Using the same principle of public good, I think it will serve the public good if subamendment B1 is voted in by the House. I think that it's a good principle. It's a good guiding principle. The debate on the bill should focus on whether or not any changes that we propose in it will enhance and serve the public good or make the bill better in its attempt to serve the public good.

4:50

I think that removing the restrictions, which would allow the government to contact lobbyists on its own initiative, thereby not having to report on it, will not serve the public good. I think that removing the ability of the government to not disclose its initiated contacts is a very important change that this bill needs to see made to it.

Mr. Chairman, I ask the members of this House to support this

amendment because it will enhance the ability of this bill to serve the public good. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else on subamendment B1?
Are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on subamendment B1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:51 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	MacDonald	Taft
Bonko	Miller, B.	Tougas
Elsalhy	Pannu	

Against the motion:

Abbott	Griffiths	Oberle
Ady	Groeneveld	Pham
Amery	Hancock	Prins
Boutilier	Jablonski	Renner
Calahasen	Johnston	Rodney
Cao	Lougheed	Rogers
Danyluk	Lukaszuk	Snelgrove
Ducharme	Lund	Tarchuk
Fritz	Melchin	VanderBurg
Goudreau		

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 28
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[Motion on subamendment B1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will revert to part B of amendment A1. Are there any other speakers who would like to participate? Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, did you want to speak on part B?

Mr. Elsalhy: Oh, no. No.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Well, then, we need to have a vote on part B of amendment A1 that's before us.

[Motion on amendment A1B carried]

The Deputy Chair: We will now proceed with part C. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Obviously, you've come to expect that I would be the first speaker each time, and good on you for being so observant.

Section C here is talking about contracting prohibitions. This section is talking about the fact that if you are engaged in a lobbying activity, you cannot have a contract with the government on the same subject matter that you're lobbying on or vice versa. If you have a contract with the government in a certain area or with a certain department, you cannot be engaged in lobbying on the same subject matter because that would present as a conflict of interest.

This section, as it's suggested in amendment A1C, captures also

your significant other, your partner, your spouse. We are calling them associated persons. While we struggled with this in the committee, Mr. Chairman, what we're trying to say is that the associated person probably has at times gained some information from their partner or spouse that would put them in this perceived conflict. The amendment here is talking about that to try to alleviate that concern.

Sub (2) addresses the issues surrounding multistakeholder situations, when an MLA or a minister or even the Premier invites feedback or input from multiple sources, you know, experts or people who are knowledgeable about a certain area or certain field. When you have these multistakeholders, then these individuals do not have to worry about the act applying to them.

I mentioned subs (3) and (4), basically telling us that it's an either/or type of situation. You can't lobby and be contracted at the same time on the same subject matter or vice versa.

Subsection (8) changes that the initial act had a provision for 90 days, a grace period of 90 days for you to cease one activity or the other. You either ceased to be a contractor or you stopped lobbying. The committee felt that 90 days was a bit generous and that we wanted to reduce it to 60 days.

So that offers the explanation for most of what's in section C, which really amends section 6 of the proposed act, subs (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), and (8). Mr. Chairman, it was felt that maybe the committee was a bit too rigid in terms of still insisting on having the associated person captured under the act.

I want to use this opportunity to address one of the concerns which I believe was raised by the Government House Leader or maybe one of the government members to my right when they said: "Well, you were a part of the committee. How come you're now presenting amendments and responding to amendments after the report has been submitted?" I want to put on the record and emphasize that while we were members of the committee and we had these discussions, we knew all along that it was the Assembly that was going to make these decisions and that it was all of us on both sides of the House that will now again discuss and study and scrutinize the recommendations from the committee. When these are done, well, guess what, Mr. Chairman? We're going to scrutinize and study the bill itself.

I told you earlier that we have multilayers. We have three layers here. We have the bill, the proposed act; we have the work from the committee, which generated 11 amendments; and then we have subamendments from the Liberals and the NDs. Potentially there is one from the Conservatives as well. Then when all of this is done, we go back to the bill itself, and maybe we'll have more amendments. We're doing our due diligence because that's what we were elected to do. We were elected to study pieces of legislation that are either bad, that need to be stopped, like Bill 46, or good, that need to be strengthened, like this bill, Bill 1.

So when the member opposite indicated that, you know, "How come he was a member of that committee and now he's doing all this work?" and "Why didn't he use the opportunity during the committee?" well, the committee was rushed, and the committee mostly focused on the submissions and presentations which we received. Let me tell you that the amount of contact that we were exposed to by members from the nonprofit sector, members from the volunteer sector was immense, and we wanted to alleviate their concerns because, really, in my book, in my definition, this act was not created to catch them. It was created to catch people who abuse the information that they gained while in government or while associated with government, and it was created to deal with the perception that politicians are less than honest and that people who have inside information and inside access to information were abusing this information through that revolving door: leaving

government one day, coming back the next week to lobby government on the same area of expertise that they were one week earlier entrusted to be working on.

5:10

I don't want to be citing names or giving examples because I know the hon. Government House Leader will jump to his feet and accuse me of besmirching people's reputations and dragging it through the mud. That is not my intention one bit. My intention here, as well as members from both sides of the House, I hope, is to tell people that we're not as bad as they think we are and prove to people that we are open and transparent . . .

An Hon. Member: You are.

Mr. Elsalhy: No. I don't think I am. And only time will tell how many of us will make it back here and how many will be swept aside.

Anyway, what I'm saying is that people have a right to know who has the ear of government, who is talking to government about what, and what we're doing here is just that.

Now, I know many of my hon. colleagues want to speak, and I know some of them actually are contemplating further subamendments. I want to cede the floor to them so they can actually proceed with that endeavour. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: I'd be the colleague. Thank you so much. I think this section for the most part is appropriate. I have a huge problem with part of a clause, but overall this to me is I think the Rod Love clause because essentially it's setting out that you can't be paid to be giving advice to the government, you know; in other words, hired by the government and also be lobbying on behalf of somebody back to the same government. That's exactly the situation that we had. So this whole section was set up to preclude that kind of behaviour, and I believe that is appropriate.

It tries to cover it off in several places, and I think my colleague and I'm sure others will explain why the committee made the choices that they made in replacing the original clause, which appears on page 10 in the act for those that are following along at home and in the gallery. In the original act section 6 appeared on page 10, and this amendment A1C is to replace it in its entirety.

As I said, I don't have a problem at all with the subamendment or even, actually, with the original. I trust that the committee did good work in asking for the replacement. When I look at what the sponsoring member of the amendment said, that it was considered extensively by the committee, the proposed exception to the prohibition against lobbying and providing paid advice to the government on the same issue at the same time, but it would exempt those that were on multistakeholder committees, which makes sense.

You know, again, I've talked before about having a limited pool of people with specific knowledge in certain areas, and you don't want to exempt them or take them out of your role of expert, if I may put it that way. We need that expertise in these committees, and we certainly value their input, but I think it's important that we don't let someone who really takes advantage of the system, and that's what we were dealing with there.

I do have an amendment to this section C. If I could ask, I would like to move that amendment at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the subamendment that is being circulated will be referred to as subamendment C1.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you may proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This amendment is structured to remove the same phrase that appears in two different sections. That phrase is "or a person associated with that person." Whether you're following along at home with the act at page 10 or you have the package of amendments in front of you and you're looking at the new proposed section C, in section (3) of the proposed section C it says, "no person shall lobby on a subject-matter if that person, or a person associated with that person, is holding a contract for providing paid advice on the same subject-matter." I'm fine with all of that except for having "or a person associated with that person" captured into that. The same thing happens in section (4): "no person shall enter into a contract for providing paid advice on a subject-matter if that person" – here's that phrase again – "or a person associated with that person, lobbies on the same subject-matter as that of the contract."

Here's why. We've got to grow up. This is 2007. What is being captured here is the idea that somehow spouses are the same person. We're failing to recognize that we have mostly two-adult working households. Where you have a family or a partnership happening, these people are usually both working, particularly where you have professionals. What this is is a really old-fashioned idea that somehow you can't have a husband and wife involved on something because – what is it: nepotism? – something bad will happen. It's essentially a very old-fashioned idea that they're the same person.

To me it's offensive that in 2007 we would still have that kind of thinking. We need to recognize that we have couples that are two independent individuals. They may share a home life, but they may be going in entirely different directions out in the professional working field. Or maybe they're even in some of the same fields. It's quite common, for example, to find a household with two physicians, two accountants, maybe even two people that are working for the same entrepreneurial outlet.

What is being set up with this by including those associated persons is incredibly convoluted, but here's what could happen. Let's say you've got two physicians. One of them works at this point for the AMA, but because of this extra clause in there the spouse could not go and volunteer, for example, for the Diabetes Association because it's assuming there would be some kind of collusion happening between those two people.

That's where it gets unacceptable to me. I think we have to allow that in this day and age you may well have a household with two physicians, one of whom would be contracted to be providing that advice and the second one who could be lobbying. They may not actively be lobbying, but remember the way this act is set up. You could have someone that's on the board of directors for the Diabetes Association or medical clinic or pick whatever you want, and any work they do in trying to change public policy would now be prohibited. You can't do that in this day and age.

Are people going to try and take advantage of this? Yup. That happens. We know that no matter what system we set up, 3 per cent of the people are scallywags, and they are going to figure out a sneaky way . . . [interjections] Well, there are all kinds of other words I could use. I thought scallywags would be the most appropriate today. So, yeah, there are 3 per cent of the people that are going to cheat and do bad things. You know what? Welfare system: we set up all those guidelines, and 3 per cent of the people consistently cheat the system. Okay. So we've got 3 per cent that are going to do it to us one way or another no matter how secure our system is. Why on earth would we stop the other 97 per cent? Why would we penalize the other 97 per cent? Why would we treat the other 97 per cent as though . . .

An Hon. Member: Guilty by association.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. That they're guilty by association. I'm going

to remind you again how small that pool of volunteers can be, particularly in sectors where we need some level of expertise.

One, I think we need to grow up and recognize who's actually inhabited, who our citizens in Alberta are, and what they do. Most households have two working adults in them. We want them to volunteer, so why on earth would we set it up so that either one of them has to quit their job if either one is volunteering in an associated sector or the person can't go out and volunteer? Why on earth would we pass legislation that does that when there are other ways for us to get at the law-breaking or the nepotism or doing something wrong that is somehow going to harm the system? There are other ways to pick that stuff up. But to me it is offensive that we would not recognize that we have independent people in this day and age.

5:20

Two, I think it's frightening that we would try and narrow that pool of volunteers in that way because that's really what would end up happening with this.

I'm thinking "spouse" when I read "or a person associated." I think in the definition it means someone that's pretty close in the same family, so it could mean an adult child; it could mean a parent. But, frankly, how many of you here are in absolute control of your parents? Right? Exactly. You know, my father – love him to death – do he and I agree on everything? Oh, boy, you can imagine those fights, right?

An Hon. Member: I like your father already.

Ms Blakeman: There you go. Mostly I win, I will point out. But that's the thing. That would be captured here.

An Hon. Member: You just talk him out.

Ms Blakeman: That's right. I just talk him out. No. He's a pretty good talker, too.

But that would be captured here, so we could have a situation that having an adult child who worked in a certain field would preclude their parent, who would be closely enough associated to be picked up by this definition, from either volunteering or working in the same field. I mean, come on, you guys. This is 2007. We've got to get by this one.

That's why I brought this in. I know I've been pushing some buttons here, and I know I've been challenging some people, but I think this is a good idea, and I hope I can get the support of this House. I think that by passing this, we will allow things to go on that happen already and should happen already. If we need to put other things in place, I'm sure the government, with its great fondness for regulations, can manage to capture any huge problem in regs if we do have a lot of problems with couples, for example, that do bad things in association somehow around lobbying.

But I do not think it is right in this day and age to be capturing those associated persons and counting them, which is what we're doing. We're including them in the way we figure this out. Just look at these phrases if I take out the phrase I don't like. You would end up with clause (3) reading: no person shall lobby on a subject matter if that person is holding a contract or providing paid advice on the same subject matter. That's what we want. That's what we wrote. That's the intention behind what we were trying to do here.

Let's look at clause (4): no person shall enter into a contract for providing paid advice on a subject matter if that person lobbies on the same subject matter as that of the contract. Well, that's what we're trying to do here. That is the Rod Love effect. That's exactly what we're trying to stop.

But as soon as you put in those two extra phrases, you've added in a whole other person and basically stopped somebody else from

either working or from volunteering. Why on earth would we do that? That does not honour the intent of what we were trying to do with this particular clause. It penalizes a whole other sector of people, whether they're your parent or adult children or a spouse. We didn't mean to capture them, and I don't think we should capture them, and if there is something that is going to go wrong and people are going to misbehave, there are other ways to deal with that 3 per cent that are miscreants, scallywags, evildoers than to pick off 100 per cent of the people the way we're doing now.

That's why I've brought this recommendation forward. I hope I can get the support of the House on it, and I welcome any and all further debate on this subamendment C1. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, I can't agree with the last speaker that this was somehow meant to capture spouses. I read the term "associated with" to mean, for example, partners in a law firm, partners in a consulting firm. I've got to tell you that I sort of resent the implication that somehow all of us on this side of the House are dinosaurs or living in the past age or something like that. Nonetheless, the member makes a valid point, and if this indeed captures spouses, I think I'm quite prepared to support this amendment. If need be, we can close a loophole later on or catch it in regulation. I think it's a good point. I don't think the point needs to be made by painting this side of the House as dinosaurs or living in a past age.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I think there is merit in what she says because I think we're right: you can't legislate goodness. We don't intend to stop people from doing it; we just want people to know who's doing what. So if this has done that – and I think she's probably correct. From someone who has a spouse in a high profile position, as you do, sometimes it takes those life experiences to understand what legislation may have an unintended consequence of doing. So I hope that we all give careful consideration to this simply from the examples.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you. I listened with a great deal of interest, maybe as a baby dinosaur, then, in that case in this caucus, if we are to be described as dinosaurs.

Mr. Elsalhy: Albertosaurus.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, let's not go there.

The only concern I have, Mr. Chairman, is this: very often we as government are criticized by members of the opposition that there is a perceived apprehension of bias, that there is a collusion and referrals to high-powered Tories in some way influencing the government decisions and policy-making. The Member for Edmonton-Centre has coined this clause as referring to someone who has once worked in the Premier's office, and it is her goal to capture that kind of a relationship with this clause.

Now, I would want to get some form of assurance from the members opposite that if the spouse of that particular person was doing the lobbying of the government and that person continued to work in the Premier's office, would they assure us that all of a sudden that would not be perceived by them as a collusion and one more venue of attacking the government? I don't think we are going

to get that kind of an assurance, so I think this government and the committee and the drafters of this bill have gone one step further to assure Albertans that there will be no reasonable apprehension of bias, and all the loopholes have been closed up.

If we allow spouses, children, parents, and perhaps other conjugal partners to now be allowed to carry on lobbying, what have we really achieved? Is there going to be a guarantee, now, from the opposite side of the aisle that when those occurrences take place and one member is working within a position of influence in government and his or her spouse is lobbying on a matter of policy with government, they will from now on keep those two separate and adhere to the Member for Edmonton-Centre's assurances that we should keep them separate and apart because they're separate individuals and not use this as a venue of trying to attack the government that there is a collusion? I personally am not satisfied that that will happen. If the Member for Edmonton-Centre would advise me that from now on they would not see that as being a collusion, then I would definitely support her argument and vote in favour of the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any other speakers on this amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Chairman. I agree with the speaker from Edmonton-Centre. I can't in fact validate what the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is asking her for. Again, it's probably case by case. But she was trying to make the point that we're grown up, and we should be able to conduct ourselves accordingly and make sure that we abide by set rules or at least know where we're going.

A perfect example that I would raise here is through associations and how it could penalize a spouse with them being Members of the Legislative Assembly. When we in fact were voted in as sitting members, we were given strict rules that if yourself or your spouse holds an account with Alberta Treasury Branch, you must cease those accounts. There would be a perfect example how that could affect an individual through this bill. Just because of my wife's association with me she was made to give up her account at Alberta Treasury Branches. She failed to see how her association with me constricted her ability to do the banking there, but that was the rule, and that's what she abided by.

5:30

Bring it back to this case. This is exactly where we're concerned with regard to spouses of individuals with lobbyists. Why should an individual's good work in a community or efforts with a particular organization be hampered through a spouse's involvement with said X organization? We're very concerned as to that person's ability to continue the work or be hampered for their work. Quite frankly, some people may say: "You know what? It's not worth my time, and I'm going to give it up." So not only is the organization, in fact, penalized with it, but the community at large through their work would be penalized with it.

I just wanted to bring up that working example as to the Alberta Treasury Branches because that was an example that some of us may have in fact had when we were elected. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, I find myself in the most unusual position of agreeing both with Edmonton-Centre and with Edmonton-Meadowlark.* In fact, I think what happened in this legislation: accountability legislation and codification of rules can sometimes have unintended consequences. Here we have the conflicts of interests legislation, the ethics legislation, which brings our spouses in exactly in the way that the Member for Edmonton-

Centre indicated. We're now capturing them under this act.

I had exactly those experiences that Edmonton-Meadowlark* talked about in terms of every year when we file our statements, we're reminded that not only our spouses but our children are associated persons, and we have to report on that. It is a bit of an extension because we don't in this day and age control our spouse's financial affairs all the time and certainly not our children's all the time. So I agree with what the hon. member has said. In fact, I would welcome the concept, when next time we review that particular act, of dealing with this issue as well.

So I would add my voice to those who say that this does not need to bring spouses in. It's intended to be legislation which lets the public know who is talking to government. This particular section is basically one which says that if you're working for government on a particular issue, you ought not to be lobbying them, being paid to lobby them on the same issue. I think this is one amendment which I certainly would be in favour of because I do agree.

My spouse has her own professional activities, her own volunteer activities, and unfortunately due to the life that we lead as members of the Legislature, our paths don't cross often enough. When they do, I'm certainly not too concerned about being lobbied. So I would ask that we do consider this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a very interesting argument related to the amendment here. I'm certainly in total sympathy in principle with the argument being made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on making clear distinctions between two adults who may happen to be married and thereby associated. I think there is a point in considering that we may be interpreting the word "associated" a bit too narrowly. There are a variety of ways in which persons can associate with each other. I think the argument would seem to reduce the whole notion of association to relationship and marriage, with which we have a bit of a problem.

One other, I think, current practice and legal requirement that we have, of course – they are not exact parallels – is where an MLA's spouse's assets must be disclosed to the Ethics Commissioner. That is a requirement as of now. If we were to take the logic of the present argument to its final conclusion, then we would say that even that legal requirement doesn't belong to the new century, 2007, but hearkens back to the past.

There is some reason why the disclosure requirements for us as members of this House oblige us to not only disclose our own assets but also make a statement about the assets of our spouses. There is some, I think, tension between what is being proposed here and what's already in place, but I think this bill, once it becomes a piece of legislation, will come back to this House for reconsideration, for re-examination, in two years; that is, if the amendments that are proposed here are passed.

I'm quite willing to support the amendment and see if there are some unintended consequences that follow from it because one concern that I do have here is the concern about creating another loophole. We were in this debate in committee very concerned about loopholes in the bill. As a matter of fact, one amendment that we just debated and voted on was about plugging a glaring loophole. This would seem to be creating a potential loophole, and I would be concerned about it. But two years is not a very long time. Let's vote on this amendment. Let's vote for the subamendment and then look back at it two years hence and see if it created some unexpected problems, at which time we can then return to amend the legislation if necessary.

Thank you.

*See page 2021, col. 1, para. 1, line 3

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, just briefly, I want the record to show that in my comments I was referring to Edmonton-Decore, not Edmonton-Meadowlark.* I wouldn't want to be accused of agreeing with too many Liberals at once.

The Deputy Chair: Any others?

Hon. members, we are going to vote on subamendment C1 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

[Motion on subamendment C1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, if there are no further speakers on section C, then we could have a vote on section C and proceed with the rest of the matters. Is there anybody else who wishes to speak on amendment A1C?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Amendment A1C as amended by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

[Motion on amendment A1C carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we now will deal with part D of amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: There's a pattern developing here, I think.

Ms Blakeman: That's what you get when you're a shadow minister, my friend.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yeah, but I'm not the shadow minister for Justice.

Mr. Hancock: Okay, so make it short, then.

Mr. Elsalhy: We'll try. I promise to be brief. Section D, Mr. Chairman, has two clauses only. It basically talks about the registrar. The registrar is the person who is going to control the registry. The registrar is the person who is going to be, you know, in charge of that registry: what goes in it, the method and mode of reporting, how accessible it is, and so on and so forth, and his or her relationship to the Ethics Commissioner as the officer of the Legislature who is going to oversee the registry. So we have two levels of oversight. We have a registrar, who reports to the Ethics Commissioner, and then we have an Ethics Commissioner, who reports to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

5:40

Mr. Chairman, this amendment from the committee, amendment D, is basically talking about that role and removing some unnecessary language. Initially, I think, the bill was drafted to highlight the registrar in most of the clauses, but we wanted instead, after having that discussion in the committee, to highlight the Ethics Commissioner as really the higher level, the upper level, in terms of that hierarchy and in terms of that chain of command.

You know, if we're talking about the registry, Mr. Chairman, I wanted to remind hon. colleagues about one particular discussion that we had in the committee. That discussion centred around the need for registration and filing to be extremely easy. I have to tell you that we have access to one of the best legislative researchers, who was made available to us to assist in terms of research. His name is Dr. Philip Massolin. One of the questions I posed to him

was, basically, to compare how easy it was to file, how easy it was to register and report in other Canadian jurisdictions which have established registries already. He came back and told us how easy it was, the frequency of the filing, whether there were fees charged, and, you know, which of these registries had an online presence where you can actually access the information and then also where you can do the filing online.

I think the Assembly wouldn't find it hard to accept the direction that the committee charted. The direction was that it has to be online, it has to be extremely simple, easy, and it has to be free of charge because we don't want to make money off the registry – that is not the intention – and we don't want it to be onerous and to be complicated. We want it to be very simple. If you have an online website where people can access the information, so you're looking after the transparency angle, and where they can also do the filing and the reporting, so you're looking at the operational angle, I think that is the way to go.

Most people now are checking for information online. The government website probably receives thousands of hits every year. The Assembly website, I know, receives thousands of hits every year. People are growing more comfortable in terms of technology and online access. This registry has to reflect that direction and that growth, where at the click of a button or a mouse you have the information at your fingertips, right in front of you, you can print it off, you can compare it, you can check archives and go back however long and see over time, you know, who is doing what. That is a measure of accountability and transparency that I'm definitely willing to support.

Clarifying the language where the Ethics Commissioner is the person in charge and the registrar reports to him or her I think is something that is self-explanatory and I don't think would face a lot of opposition from either side of the House in terms of the amendment that's before us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: No. I just wanted to make an important observation why this bill is better than in some other jurisdictions. Because it's interesting. I've made some considerable attempt to understand the federal legislation around the lobbyists registry and noted to my chagrin that the actual authority of the oversight of the lobbyists registry lies with the Ministry of Industry. It's under a cabinet minister at the federal level. Actually, the Gomery commission recommended that the registrar of lobbyists be freed from the requirement of reporting to a cabinet minister and instead report directly to Parliament on matters concerning the application and enforcement of the Lobbyists Registration Act.

This bill I think is better because the authority for the appointment of the registrar is under the Ethics Commissioner, so there is a more direct connection between the lobbyists registry and its functions and this Legislature, and it doesn't go through a particular department or cabinet minister. So that is, I think, a really important step.

I know that when I was on the Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, we did meet with people from Ontario, and I think it was important to move in this direction, to have it under the Ethics Commissioner's jurisdiction.

I just wanted to make that point. It's just a positive point in support of this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just

*See page 2020, col. 1, para. 8, line 3 and col. 2, para. 2, line 1

wanted to put in my little bit with regard to what I would be looking for had I in fact accessed the registry. I'd be looking for those who had registered. I'm hoping that it's going to be easily accessible, that there won't be a charge for myself to be able to find out, in fact, who has voluntarily put themselves down.

I'm also hoping that the website would in fact be open and transparent as well as showing on one side who is registered but on the other side who is being penalized, what the penalty perhaps was for – that might be going a little bit – but show the fine. I'm hoping that there will be fines. We're talking about the fines that are going to be put in for the people who in fact don't register and if they're caught exceeding 800 hours. But we're hoping that the registrar, in fact, does include that.

So I'm looking for a two-pronged piece from the registrar: one that would in fact have the people registered, the accessibility for myself, but on the flip side fines for breaches or warnings to those individuals who breach the act itself. I'm hoping that this amendment does take into account those comments as well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you now ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we're voting on part D of amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

[Motion on amendment A1D carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will now deal with section E of amendment A1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. Section E dictates that it's the Ethics Commissioner who now issues interpretations and information bulletins, not the registrar. I think you're going to agree with me that that's, again, something that emphasizes what we've just discussed. It's the Ethics Commissioner who represents the top person on that ladder, in that chain of command, and it will be up to him or her to tell us, you know, how to react to breaches of the act, how to adhere to the act and sort of behave within its clauses and what it tries to accomplish.

The Ethics Commissioner replaces the registrar in the proposed bill. I don't think it really necessitates a lot of discussion in this House. It makes sense. If someone in this House finds it objectionable or questionable, they would have to please rise and explain why this is not a good decision. But I think the committee felt that the Ethics Commissioner should be the one tasked with issuing these interpretation bulletins and clarifications and making these decisions because the Ethics Commissioner is the officer that reports back to the Legislature. Later on you will notice, Mr. Chairman, that there's actually a reporting function for the Ethics Commissioner in terms of what he or she would have to bring back to the Assembly and how timely that reporting function has to be and what's in the reports and so on and so forth.

Overall, I think I'm in agreement, and I know the members from my caucus are in agreement. We'll call the question unless there are other speakers.

5:50

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1E carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will now deal with part F of amendment A1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Essentially, this is providing authority and the mechanism for making public reports submitted to the Speaker when the Assembly is not sitting. That is a fairly new mechanism that we've developed here, I think. So if the Assembly is not sitting, it's a way of essentially tabling a report and complying with the requirements of legislation.

For the most part, that works. My only concern about this is the potential for it to be abused, so I'm trying to balance that against: how large is that potential for it to be abused? I don't think it's that large, and I think it's incumbent upon members of this Assembly to be paying attention, frankly, as the stuff goes through. Really, we need to read our mail more than anything because if the Assembly is not sitting and these reports come through, in essence they've been tabled, and it's accepted that we have that information. That's the function that is being allowed by this particular section or clarified by this particular section, if I'm reading this accurately.

I think it's a process that should allow the Assembly to operate more efficiently, and in that, I trust the work of the committee, and I'm certainly willing to support it, as are the members of my caucus. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1F carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 1. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tempted to ask a point of order to see what kind of a ruling we'd get.

Mr. Speaker, I would move that we now adjourn until 1 p.m. on Monday, November 19.

[Motion carried; at 5:55 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, November 19, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/19

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and future of Alberta. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen who are here, we'll now proceed to the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's just an honour today to introduce a total of 74 of my constituents from Pine Street school. There are three classes that are attended by their teachers and group leaders, Heather Lockwood, Cheryl Hawryluk, and Pegi Brown, along with parent helpers Mrs. Jill Sharp, Mrs. Wendy Rudnew, Mrs. Pam Fair, Mrs. Violet Gernsheid, Mrs. Denise Conrad, and Tracy McFadden. I would ask our honoured guests to please rise and for this Assembly to wish them well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm hoping that the group is in the gallery, and now they are. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition and the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview I'm absolutely delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 28 guests. We have 26 students and two teachers joining us from l'école Notre-Dame in the constituency of Edmonton-Riverview. They are led today by their teachers Mlle Magali Com and Mr. Paulin Larochelle. If the group could please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly a visiting delegation from Clara Tyner elementary school. Clara Tyner is another fine public school located in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. There are 27 visitors here today. As a matter of fact, they're here for

the week, and I certainly hope they find their week here informative and enjoyable. The group is led today by teacher Sandi James, and they're accompanied by Mr. Wayne Wheeler, a parent volunteer. They're in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me to rise today and to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Breton home-school group. We have with us today seven students: Tanner Daudelin, Mikayla Maciborski, Brittney Ellis, Brady Ellis, Brendan Ellis, Brooke Aldous, and James Aldous. They're here today with their group leader, and they're sitting in the very front row of the public gallery. I would ask them all to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you the Engler family: Garry; his wife, Dawn; children Jonathan and Patricia; and their guests, Lana LaFrance and Andrew Vandenhaak. Let me just, if I may, say a few words about Reverend Engler. Reverend Engler is the head of pastoral care at the Sturgeon hospital. He has a great compassion for those dying and sick. He's been instrumental in my life and my family. He's a wonderful man, and he's blessed by the good Lord for his good work. Would they please rise – they're sitting in the front row – and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two young Albertans seated in the gallery. They're Mandy Melnyk and Nathan Macklin. Mandy comes from a strong agricultural background and was born and raised in the Waskatenau area. She's a member of a long-standing family farm and has been active in organizing farmers at the grassroots level since she was just 14. Mandy is a passionate advocate for fair representation for rural Albertans.

Nathan Macklin is a young farmer in the Peace Country region. He's a descendant of one of the first homesteaders in the Grande Prairie and DeBolt areas. Nathan is active in the fight for farmers to retain their democratic control of the Canadian Wheat Board. He is also very active in the National Farmers' Union. Nathan is the NDP candidate in Dunvegan-Central Peace. I would now ask that both Nathan and Mandy rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly quite a number of guests seated in the members' gallery. If you could rise as I call your name. They are as follows: Phillip Crawford, Zenovia Wiwihar-Crawford, Breanna Crawford, Natalia Crawford, Aiden Crawford, Marek Crawford – we have most of the Crawfords here – Mellissa Brade, Amber Brade, Shannon Kusch, and Meagan Cote. These individuals have come all the way from Whitecourt to add

their voices to the growing number of Albertans who oppose the development of nuclear energy in this province. They're rising, and I would now ask that they receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. My first introduction is of a number of Edmontonians who joined the group outside the Legislature before noon today to protest nuclear development in this province. I believe they're seated in the members' gallery. They are Kate and Bryan Wrostok, Carl Beinert, Elizabeth Beinert, Zach Pentyluk, Kevin Wright, and Leila Darwish, who is with the Sierra Club prairie chapter. I will now ask the guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second set of guests, Mr. Speaker, is two federal candidates for the NDP here in Alberta. Ellen Parker, our federal NDP candidate for Crowfoot, is here today from Camrose to voice her concerns on the nuclear issue. Joining her is our federal candidate in Edmonton-St. Albert, Dave Burkhart. They are also seated in the members' gallery. We are honoured to have them here today. I will ask them to now rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It also gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and members of the Assembly a number of guests seated in the members' gallery. They are Cole Commander, Holden Commander, Bonnie Commander, Jensen Commander, Shannon Rosnau, Jeff Rosnau, Katty Rosnau, Ben Rosnau, and Noah Rosnau. These guests are also from Whitecourt and are here today to ask the government to oppose the development of nuclear energy in this province. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to inform the Assembly that this government has reached an agreement in principle with the Alberta Teachers' Association to address the teachers' unfunded pension liability. This agreement would resolve a serious issue that has hung over this province, its taxpayers, and its teachers for over half a century. Unresolved, this would have grown into a very mammoth \$45 billion problem for our children. Mr. Speaker, that simply is not acceptable. We will not leave this problem for the next generation.

As you can imagine, it was far from easy to resolve a difficult issue that has been around since the mid-1950s. I want to pay tribute to our Minister of Education and his negotiating team for the hard work they put into this on behalf of all Albertans. I must also thank a former member of this Assembly, ATA president Frank Bruseker, for his strong public support of this agreement. In my mandate letter to the minister last December I directed him to seek a very long-term solution that provides value for teachers, for students, and for taxpayers, and we have done that. This is a very positive, forward-looking move that meets the needs of a growing province.

Under the agreement the government of Alberta will assume the teachers' portion of the pre-1992 unfunded liability. In return,

Alberta will get five years of labour peace and the certainty that a massive, growing liability for taxpayers can now be dealt with. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that this agreement benefits younger teachers, who have been carrying an unfair burden. In doing so, it really does address the issue of attracting the thousands of new teachers Alberta will need over the coming years.

This agreement must of course be ratified by Alberta's teachers, and all collective agreements must be in place by January 31, 2008. But I'm confident that Alberta teachers will see the advantage in an agreement that will allow the education community to focus on providing the best possible learning environment for Alberta's children. This government made it a priority to find a lasting solution to this problem, one that balances the interests of teachers, students, and taxpayers. This agreement in principle does that, providing the predictability and stability that our education system needs.

Mr. Speaker, it is another very important step in building the future of this province. Thank you so much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Teachers play a vital role in Alberta's culture, progress, and prosperity, so I'm pleased that the government has reached a deal with Alberta's teachers, a tentative deal, to address the unfunded pension liability. It looks like a good deal, one that could make teaching far more attractive for Albertans considering the profession while reducing the financial burden on teachers currently serving the province. We're glad that the government has followed the lead of this Assembly, who in April passed Motion 503 urging the government to take action on this issue. My colleague the hon. Member for St. Albert introduced that motion. I think he deserves some credit for bringing this issue to the floor of the House, as does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who has been raising the issue in question period and debates for many months now.

We must remember, Mr. Speaker, that addressing this long-standing unfunded liability, which is a \$64 way of saying debt, is not some kind of gift to teachers. It's merely a long-overdue correction to a bad policy, as the Premier himself indicated, a bad policy, it should be noted, that this government has been aware of for almost 50 years. While this is a good deal for teachers, it remains to be seen whether this government can make it a good deal for taxpayers. The debt that the government has just assumed – the debt – should be paid off sooner rather than later. The longer it's allowed to fester, the greater the cost to all Albertans.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, a note on trust and accountability, if I might. We're concerned that Alberta school boards, locally elected representatives of local people, local parents with a stake in this matter, were shut out of the process and had no voices as this deal was made. This follows a troubling pattern of disrespect from this government for our school boards. In 1995 they hamstrung school boards by taking over management of the education property tax. They failed to fund the settlement for school boards reached following the 2002 teachers' strike. Not the best way to celebrate a hundred years of service from our elected boards.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, it seems like a good deal. Let's hope the government follows through by taking care of this incurred debt in a responsible and timely manner.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I do know that the leader of the third party would like to participate. We'll need unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and also to all members of the Assembly. It's good to see this Conservative government step up and take responsibility for a situation that they themselves made worse. The pay-as-you-go philosophy in place since the '50s was a problem, but since 1992 the situation worsened. In that time the deficit grew from \$742 million to \$6.3 billion. It is also important to remember that assuming this debt does not mean that this government has a plan to eliminate it, but taking this \$2.1 billion government-imposed burden off teachers is certainly the right thing to do. Young teachers will benefit, as will taxpayers.

While it's a good step, we also need assurance that the standards will not drop for class sizes, school closures, cuts to classrooms, and teachers' working conditions. Albertans need to know that their educational system will not decline during the five-year term of this deal.

Mr. Speaker, the government certainly messed up on housing and royalties, but I think they did the right thing here, and I'm prepared to congratulate them for it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner wishes to participate. We'll need the unanimous consent of the Assembly.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Dr. Bill Gunter
Dr. Stefan Bachu
Dr. David Keith

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is clearly recognized around the world as a good place for solutions-based research, and we have researchers in our midst who are taking us to new heights and accomplishments. As chair of the Alberta Research Council I'm pleased to note that three of Alberta's finest minds in research have been named as co-winners of the 2007 Nobel peace prize for their contributions to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change document on global warming. They are Dr. Bill Gunter, a distinguished research scientist with the Alberta Research Council's carbon and energy management business, Dr. Stefan Bachu, senior geoscience adviser with Alberta Geological Survey, and Dr. David Keith, director of the ISEEE energy and environmental systems group at the University of Calgary.

These gentlemen were already highly esteemed international scientists whose expertise was being sought around the world. This outstanding tribute through the Nobel peace prize recognizes their efforts to build and disseminate greater knowledge, in particular on the capture and storage of carbon dioxide in suitable geologic formations. This is of immense importance to Alberta as part of a practical and achievable solution to climate change. Each and every one of these individuals and the organizations that support them, including the Alberta government, and all Albertans can be extremely proud of the work done to enhance world-class interdisciplinary research, innovation, and education focused on a cleaner environment, a responsible energy industry, and a suitable economy.

Mr. Speaker, the 2007 Nobel peace prize is further recognition that Alberta is home to world-class research talent and an unparalleled research system built on partnerships among government, universities, research organizations, and industry.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

1:20

Adoption Awareness Week

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to recognize Adoption Awareness Week, running from November 19 to 25. Traditionally, the third week of November is a time when we stop and celebrate the many dedicated families who have opened up their lives to a child through adoption. It's a time when we ask families to think about the many children who are still waiting here in our province for committed, nurturing families and permanent homes.

Alberta has a number of successes to celebrate during this year's Adoption Awareness Week. We are the only province that has developed a dedicated website to profile children waiting for adoptive families. This year we celebrate our 24th anniversary working in partnership with CTV television on the Wednesday's Child series, the series that has proven to be a very successful way to find the right home for Alberta children hoping to be adopted. Last year Children's Services found homes through adoption and private guardianship for 471 children who were formerly in government care. In the first half of this year, I'm pleased to say, we've seen a 20 per cent increase in the number of children placed with new families.

Today there are about 165 amazing children who are still waiting to be matched with a loving, caring family of their own. To find out more about adopting a child in Alberta, families can tune in to the Wednesday's Child program, airing each Wednesday on CTV, log onto Alberta's adoption website at www.adoptionalberta.gov.ab.ca, or simply pick up the phone and call 780-422-2634.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Riverdale Net Zero Energy House

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday I joined over 1,100 interested Edmontonians in Riverdale, one of the many fine communities in Edmonton-Gold Bar, for a tour of one of Alberta's first four net zero energy homes. The duplex located 9926-87th Street combines ultra energy-efficient design with three solar energy systems to produce more energy than it consumes over the course of a year. The Riverdale net zero energy house is the most northern one under construction in Canada and will be completed in February. I was surprised to learn that it is possible here in Edmonton's cold, northerly climate for a home to generate all its own heat and light.

On the tour we saw installed solar heating and solar-panelled power systems, high performance windows, partially insulated walls, other insulation details, very efficient wall construction, air tightness, and heat recovery water and ventilation. The technologies used in this house are all off the shelf. The way they are designed and integrated into the house to achieve the net zero energy goal is new.

We need to recognize the financial contributions to this project by both Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Solar Energy Society of Canada, northern Alberta chapter. There are over 40 Alberta specialists on the Riverdale net zero house project. The core project team consists of Peter Amerongen, Andy Smith, and Gordon Howell. This house, which is healthy, sustainable, zero annual energy costs, is the house of the future. It is here now. The public interest in the project is noteworthy.

I would like to thank all those who organized Saturday's event and encourage all hon. members of this Assembly to please visit this

house in Riverdale. For more information and tours, please e-mail info@riverdalenetzero.ca.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Oil Sands Multistakeholder Consultation

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On July 7 of this year the report and recommendations of the Oil Sands Multi-Stakeholder Committee and panel released its recommendations to the government of Alberta. This is one of the most important public consultations undertaken in years, and the Alberta government has not yet responded to them. There seems to be a reluctance to publicly address these critical issues.

What is the government of Alberta's response to the recommendations on environmental, social, economic, and governance issues related to oil sands development? The consistent message from most presenters to the consultation was that the pace and scope of development is irresponsible, the social and health impact unacceptable, environmental risks too high, especially the massive tailings ponds, and the cumulative environmental impact not adequately understood. Industry is also asking what's going on. They invested many hours in the mining liability management program over several years. The proposal on who is liable for oil sands risks is still not out for public consultation. What are we hiding from?

Recently appearing on an Alberta Environment website is the index of reclamation and a clear indication that the government has changed the definition of reclamation. Reclamation means that a site has been cleaned up and restored to equivalent land use. Here it appears that Alberta Environment has redefined reclamation as any activity on a site that begins the process of reclamation.

In the face of mounting criticism, both within the country and in the international community, it appears that this government will do anything to give the impression: everything is fine; just trust us.

The multistakeholder committee and panel were not able to reach consensus on 26 recommendations. Most of the recommendations they were unable to reach agreement on relate to the protection of social supports and the environment, including interim, precautionary-based emissions and environmental thresholds, real greenhouse gas targets, and a limit on the cumulative amount of land that can be disturbed at any one time in each of the oil sands areas.

Albertans are increasingly . . . [Dr. Swann's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Registered Apprenticeship Program

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to expose an Alberta trades top secret, the registered apprenticeship program, RAP. A week ago I attended a celebration to recognize the apprentice scholarship recipients from around the province.

Industry and government work together to provide on-the-job trades experience. Students can start in RAP as early as grade 10. The work earns them on-the-job experience through their apprenticeship along with credits toward high school diplomas. When apprentices graduate from high school and start their new first period of in-class training, they are eligible to receive \$700. They receive the remaining \$300 when they start the second period of in-class training.

The registered apprenticeship program 2007 scholarships of \$1,000 have been awarded to 384 high school graduates participating in the program. Alberta government partners with industry to

fund the annual \$1,000 scholarship. The RAP scholarships are an excellent way to promote trades study in Alberta. As more and more young people explore these challenging hands-on careers, these young people have successfully demonstrated both high academic skills and employability skills as part of RAP.

Strengthening postsecondary education is part of our government's plan to secure Alberta's future in building our communities, greening our growth, and creating opportunity. Currently Alberta has 47,000 registered apprentices in 51 designated trades and six designated occupations. On behalf of the youth and parents in my constituency I want to thank the participating companies and the government for investing the time, effort, and funding.

Curb the Danger Impaired Driver Program

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to tell all members of this Assembly about a very successful program in Edmonton. Over and over again as I travelled the province as chair of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force, we heard about the importance of every Albertan getting involved to help make their streets safer.

Curb the danger is a process for curbing impaired driving through community involvement which was initiated by the Edmonton Police Service in October of 2006. This unbelievable and successful program urges road users of Edmonton to report suspected impaired drivers to the 911 emergency operators. Patrol and other members try and intercept these reported drivers. When an interception is not possible and a plate information matching the description of the vehicle, a letter is sent to the registered owner informing them of the incident.

Mr. Speaker, not only does curb the danger target impaired drivers, but it has been able to obtain stolen vehicles, suspended drivers, drivers without insurance, warrants, and drivers without valid licences. Since the program began, EPS has received 7,842 calls from citizens reporting suspected impaired drivers on Edmonton streets. Of the total, police pulled over 2,403, which led to 743 impaired charges and 148 24-hour suspensions. An additional 2,325 registered owners received letters in the mail, an indication that their driving habits were reported to the police.

I could go on and on, Mr. Speaker, about the wonderful job this program does and would like to acknowledge one of our own, Barney Stevens, who is a security guard. Thanks to Barney, EPS, and Edmontonians who have participated in a true example of community policing.

1:30

Oral Question Period

head:

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. deputy Leader of the Official Opposition.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Instead of solving the affordable housing crisis, the Conservatives have gone and turned it into a money pit, another black hole down which they pour your tax dollars and mine without anything of lasting value to show for it. Their rent supplement program is now \$10 million over budget and climbing. To the Premier: what excuse does he have for the program going so far over budget? And we're only halfway through the fiscal year.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in the spring I told this Assembly that for any people that are either moving to the province of Alberta from other jurisdictions or Albertans that are presently seeking housing on their own, we would be there to assist those families and their

children to find affordable housing and at the same time invest in affordable housing, working with the municipalities so that we would have more units available for families that continue to move to this province. That is our goal. We're meeting those obligations. It just shows that there are so many people coming to the province to seek opportunity here.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, the truth is that the Conservatives' rent supplement program subsidizes landlords. The truth is that the Conservatives show their true colours every day. Their rent supplement program is not about protecting tenants, not about supporting people; it's about doing whatever it takes to make sure landlords can charge whatever they want, and if Joe Tenant can't pay, Joe Government will. When is the Premier going to check his good landlord/bad renter ideology at the door, do the right thing, and bring in a temporary rent cap?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, don't ever get baffled by the statement "temporary rent cap." There is no such thing as a temporary rent cap. You can speak to Premiers from one corner of this country to another. That's how originally some of them got caught up in this temporary rent cap. Temporary in some of those provinces is over 10 years. Temporary, quite frankly, has significantly reduced the number of available units for housing and at the same time put serious impediments on constantly refurbishing rental units in those particular provinces. And that's a proven fact.

Mr. Taylor: This is so important, and the results of not having a home can be devastating. A new report on youth homelessness from the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo reveals that some homeless youth in that area are so desperate that they are trading sexual favours for a place to sleep. Fort McMurray has been pleading for help from the province for years to deal with growth pressures, and this, Mr. Speaker, is the government's answer. To the Premier. No more rhetoric; no more saying you're doing a job, because you're not. What are you going to do right now to fix the housing problems in Fort McMurray so children don't have to trade sex for shelter?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I will discount that kind of an opening statement. But let's face it—I don't know where he was this spring. He should know that this Assembly made a very important decision, and that is that we invested \$396 million into the community of Fort McMurray to deal with the critical housing issue, water and sewer treatment in the community of Fort McMurray. We've also put together a team that's moving the infrastructure dollars as quickly as possible. We've made huge, huge advancements in the community of Fort McMurray that he is not even aware of.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Department of Energy Consultant

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Energy has a contract with Mana Energy Group Limited. The president of this company is Murray A. Nelson. The company charges \$500 per hour for professional services to the Department of Energy, and they have invoiced taxpayers over \$84,000 for a total of 160 hours of service since June. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. What services does this company provide to the government for \$500 per hour?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The engagement of professionals outside of the department for issues such as the impending set-up of the new Energy Resources Conservation Board and Alberta utilities commission would be some of the work that's contracted outside.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what are the qualifications of this company to provide the service to your department for \$500 per hour?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would be my understanding that the individual that's being spoken about is indeed very, very knowledgeable with respect to the industry and the utilities system in the province of Alberta. I believe that during this transition period that is taking place, we will require the services of experts such as this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Was this contract—this contract here—tendered? Again to the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that I really understood the question. He asked me if that contract was tendered to me. I would suggest it was not tendered to me.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I'm certain that taxpayers are interested in how they can get themselves one of these \$500 per hour government jobs for giving advice.

Now, my next question, and perhaps the hon. minister can understand this one. Who in the Department of Energy authorized the contract?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of contracts, of course, that are out. Not only the Department of Energy but I think that a number of government departments would look outside of government for expertise with respect to the work that we have to do on behalf of Albertans. Most certainly, the work that will be provided on behalf of Albertans by this particular individual: I think the proof of that will come in the conclusion of the work that he'll be doing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is to the Premier. Why does the government of Alberta pay \$500 per hour for this company and this man's advice when you reject free advice from Joe Anglin of the Lavesta group regarding the electricity measures?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know who the hon. member is referring to. He may want to bring that issue and ask the Minister of Energy that question. I don't know who he's referring to.

Mr. MacDonald: That doesn't surprise me, Mr. Speaker.

Again to the Minister of Energy. For \$500 per hour this company

must provide a great service for Albertans. Will the minister table in this house the details of the contract, what work was done, what benefits Albertans received, and so forth? Or was this contract one of those secret deals this government is so famous for?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, you know, the work that's ongoing with respect to the transition from the EUB to two new regulators in the province of Alberta is extremely important for Albertans. At an appropriate time we will have two new regulators. We will do it right. In order to get it right for Albertans, we do require the services of outside experts.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Affordable Housing (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Ordinary Alberta families are being hurt by this mismanagement of housing by this Conservative government. Thousands of low-income renters are just a paycheck away from being without a home. The government's own audit of the homelessness and eviction prevention fund found that rental arrears were the cause of half of the claims to the fund, but instead of putting in rent guidelines to stop skyrocketing rents, the government is throwing money at the problem, and it's ending up in the pockets of landlords. To the Premier: if you're going to spend \$21 million over eight months on this program, how many more millions of dollars will you dump into this black hole in the next year?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we made a commitment to Alberta families that are in need of assistance. But I just want to go back to this other word that the opposition uses. The Liberals use temporary. The third party uses guidelines. Just give us guidelines. Don't legislate; just put in guidelines. Again, a misuse of words. You can't put in a guideline. If you want to put in rent controls, you actually legislate. You don't say that these are guidelines. That's another way of trying to kind of sneak this in, saying it won't harm the housing industry, keep down future construction, by using the word "guideline."

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's curious because we used the term that was used by the government's own task force on housing and homelessness. The term that they used was guideline, Mr. Premier.

But you can't get out of the question that easily. You know, it's important that this government recognizes that people are losing their homes because they won't stand up to landlords. To the Premier: is it because you want donations from big landlords for the Conservative Party that you won't take action?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, changing the questioning because I guess I struck a nerve with him with respect to guidelines. Let's be perfectly frank. Putting in legislative rent controls would only reduce the number of available units constructed in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Martin: Oh, they're really building them now.

Mr. Stelmach: By the way, one of the hon. members says that

they're really building them now. Well, quite frankly, yes. Individual housing starts for rental units are up. He should know the statistics out of Edmonton because they're quite phenomenal. In that short period of time many more built under this policy than the zero that would have been built under his policy.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the Premier is forgetting that most of the units that are now being built are condominiums and that condominiumization of rental units is proceeding faster than new ones are being built. If you really want to increase the supply of rental units, Mr. Premier, why don't you do something about the condominiumization that's taking place in this province instead of ignoring the problem?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, last spring we did pass legislation in the House to do that, and secondly . . . [interjection] I don't know if truth hurts them or what. By the way, a teacher – a teacher – that I know would want some kind of behaviour in the classroom is the one that's actually abusing the rules of this House.

Mr. Speaker, the policy we have has been implemented, and it's working well for Albertans. We see the number of rental units increase. We also see the cost of housing beginning to level off. We're seeing housing becoming more affordable. The policy is working, and that policy is working within just a few short months.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Health Care Accessibility

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The success of any society is often judged by its efficiency in providing goods and services. How long do you have to wait? Is there good customer service? These are questions asked. Public and private services are subject to the same questions. Our Alberta health care is a public and private mix. Albertans often have to wait months for health procedures. Health suffers. To even see a doctor or to take a child to a clinic, employees often lose a full day's work. What a waste to them, the economy. What a frustration. There is a shortage of doctors, but why the wait times? My question is to the minister of health. The hip and knee replacement program was a great success in cutting wait times. When will this team approach to health . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member was going to ask when the hip and bone program is going to be extended across the province. I can tell you that we've worked with the bone and joint institute to look at their process. We've extended financial resources to them so that they continue their work, and one of the most important things that can come out of that process is to use it as a model in other areas of health care, where multidisciplinary teams of both health care professionals and those that support them can work with individual Albertans to make the most effective use of the resources, which results in a reduction of the time that people have to wait.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how soon will a comprehensive electronic health card be in place for all Albertans, one that will save paperwork and wasted time for patients and staff in clinics and hospitals?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been considerable debate and discussion around the concept of an electronic health card, or so-called smart card. We haven't gone in that direction in the province. We've gone in the direction of an electronic health record which can be accessed by appropriate health care professionals. We expect to have that electronic health record fully operational in 2008 so that most, if not all, pharmaceuticals will be recorded on the record, the electronic diagnostic testing will be on the record, and most Albertans will be on an electronic health record by the end of 2008.

Mr. Backs: A second supplementary question to the minister of health: Mr. Minister, what penalties for clinics for excessive wait times has or will your department attach to fee payments for publicly funded procedures, and are there other measures, private or public, planned to improve service?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not going in the direction of penalizing, at least certainly not at this point in time. Instead, what we're trying to do is to create the environment or the climate in which clinics can adopt best practices, can use the benefit of health care professionals' training and expertise to their full value, working in the context of primary care networks, for example, bringing the full value of all health professionals to the table. At this point in time it wouldn't be appropriate to use a penalizing process because there's such a high level of integration between the various roles that are played. But it's very important to take the learnings from the bone and joint institute, to extrapolate that to other clinics and other processes and use health care professionals to the best of their training and expertise.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For some 50 years Alberta's teachers, governments of the day, and Alberta's taxpayers were strapped with the unfunded pension liability, which was only growing, until this Premier made an undertaking to address this issue. Promise made; promise delivered. The ATA and the minister and the Premier should be commended on it. However, to the Minister of Education: what will the actual benefit be to an average Alberta teacher in his take-home pay, having ratified this agreement?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess that first of all it needs to be pointed out that as a result of our initiative in this spring's budget, since September 1 of 2007 we have been picking up the 3.1 per cent contribution of teachers, which will expire at the end of December, so the immediate impact will not be seen. There will be a retroactive 3 per cent pay increase to September 1, and then there will be the lump-sum payment at the end of April, and then, going forward, there would be the ongoing wage increases.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In that case what will the benefit be to an average Alberta taxpayer from this expenditure?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think there are a number of

benefits to Alberta taxpayers. I don't know how you put a number on students being in class for five consecutive years without labour agreement. Secondly, I think it's also fair to say that the ATA and the teachers have come to the table. They have accepted a 3 per cent wage increase for the current fiscal year that we're in, and that obviously is a lesser amount than has been accepted by other public-sector unions. I think the long-term benefit, though, on this deal is that it's good for parents, it's good for teachers, but it's especially good for students of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Even though pension funding right now is not flowing through school boards, some are asking why schools boards were not involved in this negotiation. Can you enlighten us on that?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it needs to be pointed out that I was not involved in the negotiations as the minister, nor was the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association involved. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, we wanted to take politics out of the negotiations, and I think the results that we announced last Thursday show that we succeeded in taking politics out. Now, I know the opposition wants to make a political issue out of it, but we decided – we had a strong negotiating team led by the Deputy Minister of Education. The ATA came to the table with the intention of also resolving this issue, and unlike the Liberals, who will continually plant the same tree and expect to get different fruit from it, we took a different approach.

1:50 Affordable Housing for AISH Recipients

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, finding an affordable place to live remains a crisis in this province. People with full-time jobs can barely afford the rent on a one-bedroom apartment. For residents whose only income is \$1,050 a month, which is an AISH cheque, finding a place is almost impossible. A studio apartment is \$800 a month. To the minister of housing: do you expect people to live like this? Substandard basement suites are not the answer. What else can this minister do to get Alberta through this crisis? Whatever it is that's been happening up to now, it isn't working.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last spring, when we initiated the housing task force committee, that housing task force brought forward recommendations. One of the recommendations was the homeless and eviction prevention fund, the recommendation being for \$7 million to address those exact issues. We have presently served 21,000 individuals under that program, trying to assist those individuals in time of need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. It's actually helping the landlords.

To the minister of seniors. Band-aid measures this government has put in place in the spring haven't solved the affordable housing crisis. How are Albertans on AISH supposed to afford medication, food supplies, and equipment when most of it, 70 to 80 per cent, is spent on their rent?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, with respect to those on AISH we do take that seriously in the sense that we have raised AISH rates over

the last three years. We continue to work towards that obligation of looking at how we can improve that going forward. We provide a full complement of health benefits to those on AISH. We've also tried to work to make it far more flexible for them if they are employed, that a greater amount of their income would be exempt from any clawbacks. We've also tried to make sure that we're working on more flexible employment initiatives for those with disabilities.

Ms Pastoor: I agree with the minister. There have been some good changes made. However, most of these people really cannot work at a full-time job. Will the minister increase AISH payments to reflect rent increases, or is the government finally going to implement temporary rent caps, as recommended by your own housing task force? Mr. Minister, temporary can be temporary if this government has the political will to make it so.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, those on AISH receive a range of benefits. As we've said, there has been a very substantive increase over the last two, three years in AISH payments. We are going to see – and we're working towards that – that those payments do increase. We acknowledge that there are increases in living costs but have also tried to make sure that there are more flexible arrangements for employment. Acknowledging that they aren't always capable of working on a full-time basis, how do you ensure that you can work with employers in our system to ensure that to whatever flexible arrangements they can, they have opportunities to be included in work?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability (continued)

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An Alberta education is ranked as one of the very best in the world. It takes many people and a lot of hard work to ensure that our students receive the best education possible, so it's important that we work together to benefit our students. Throughout the discussion and announcement of the agreement in principle to deal with the pre-1992 teachers' portion of the unfunded liability, the focus has been on teachers and government reaching a five-year agreement, but the students ultimately are the reason we are doing this. My question to the Minister of Education is: what's required to finalize this proposed agreement?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that it is a memorandum of agreement, and in order for it to be finalized, the 62 school boards and 62 ATA locals across the province have been given until January 31 to resolve this particular issue and sign contracts. I think it is important to point out that there are issues at the local level that school boards and ATA locals may want to include in the agreement, and we've given them the opportunity to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this weekend during discussions with some of my constituents this question kept arising, so I need to ask the Minister of Education what the answer is. Does this agreement mean that the government is now bargaining provincially?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. This is a one-

off situation, and when this particular contract expires at the end of August 2012, we will resume the normal bargaining that exists today. I think it's fair to say that during the course of the negotiations there was a fair bit of give-and-take on both parts, and the ATA felt that it was in their best interests for their members to have labour peace in exchange for the assumption of the unfunded liability. That's the way this particular negotiation worked out, but we will revert in 2012 to the normal process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: That's all. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years this government has managed to systematically erode the powers vested in publicly elected school boards across the province. Their exclusion from unfunded pension liability negotiation is simply another example of this. Why did the government choose to exclude school boards throughout these negotiations when they are essential to the agreement's implementation, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member would have been listening, he would have heard the answer earlier. As I said to the very fine question from the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, the Minister of Education and the head of the ATA were also not involved in the negotiations because we have embarked on several occasions in the past which have not been successful, and our desire this time was to attain success. We put the two parties at the table that . . .

Mr. Chase: The Education minister gets in the way of successful bargaining.

Mr. Liepert: You know, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity wouldn't be spending so much time in his basement thinking about all these smart-aleck sayings that we hear from him every day, he might have been at the School Boards Association reception last night and heard the very, very positive response to this agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If one school board dissents, this agreement in principle will collapse. That's the way I understand it. This is to the minister. Given that they were just last week given the specifics, why has the government given the board such an immense responsibility in such a tight time frame to ratify the agreement? Why so tight, Mr. Minister? It's a very important agreement.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, this hon. member was at the reception last night, and if he would have been talking to the school trustees, as I was – and I've certainly been talking to my colleagues, who have been around the province this past weekend talking to teachers, talking to school board officials. I would say that there is a high degree of satisfaction with what has been put on the table. The school board trustees are saying to me that the fact that they now have the length of the contract, the funding in place, and the fact that they'll have labour peace for five years can now allow them to sign a contract with their ATA locals, and they can focus on educating students and not be negotiating contracts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the government has done with this latest agreement is create a two-tier bargaining model across Alberta, where salary is negotiated provincially but things like working conditions are negotiated locally. To the Minister of Education: since the government is systematically eroding the autonomous powers of school boards, what future role does this government expect them to play? What is their role going to be? What are they going to do in the future, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the Liberal opposition has looked long and hard and sometime this morning has finally found something that they think is negative about this absolutely incredible deal for all Albertans. I would just suggest that all of the feedback we have received has been very positive, and unlike the hon. Member for St. Albert I'm optimistic that we're going to have labour peace in this province for the next five years and students are going to be in the classroom getting educated, where they belong.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

2:00 Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was a teacher in my previous life. It is one of the most meaningful and noble of all professions, and its role is second only to parents in producing a successful next generation. I've seen many, some of the best, teachers, many young and energetic teachers, leave the profession to pursue other interests. To the Minister of Education: given that recruitment and retention are critical to the future of this province and our students, does the minister have information or statistics to indicate the significance of this trend or its impact on the profession, the school system, and our students?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that some 30 per cent of teachers within five years exit the profession. It's hard to put a number or a specific percentage on why a particular teacher leaves, but clearly in my meetings with teachers across the province in the last 11 months and especially with those who are new to the profession, they have indicated to me that paying for a liability that they had no part in creating was something that they felt was unfair. We have fixed that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the new pension deal will attract and retain more teachers, and I think many Albertans agree with that, but proof and evidence are important. Does the minister have evidence that would show that the recent agreement for Alberta taxpayers to assume \$2 billion of the unfunded liability will solve the recruitment and retention issue?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I guess, Mr. Speaker, only time will tell. There are a number of factors as to why teachers leave the profession, and some of them we have little or no control over. However, this is one that we clearly have control over, and we've taken action. Teachers will have the 3.1 per cent no longer taken off their paycheques. In addition to that, they will have a salary based on the weekly earnings index for the next four years and 3 per cent this year. I believe it will keep the majority of new teachers in the profession for much longer than in the past.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The pension plan liability issue has been resolved, but it's not a magic bullet for retention and attraction of professionals. Is the government considering other options to ensure that the best teachers stay in the profession for our students?

Mr. Liepert: One of the things, Mr. Speaker, that I think we need to do is recognition. Last night at the School Boards Association opening ceremonies they presented what was called the Edwin Parr award, and it is for first-year teachers. There were some seven recipients last year, and for those members in the House who were in attendance, I think everyone who was there will say how literally blown away we were with the quality of these young teachers. I believe that recognition either through such awards as the Edwin Parr award or our own excellence in teaching award – I would strongly encourage all members to nominate teachers in their constituencies for what is a very well received recognition of their work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The rumours around the plans to build nuclear power plants in Alberta are starting to spin out of control. The Alberta New Democrat caucus and most Albertans have grave concerns about these proposals and would welcome the opportunity for the government to set the record straight here and now. The Conservatives, and the Liberals, too, for that matter, have had closed-door meetings with Energy Alberta. We believe, as do hundreds of Albertans that met today on the steps of the Legislature, that this issue is too important to ram through in secrecy. To the Minister of Energy: will the minister kindly describe the details of their meetings with Energy Alberta, with particular emphasis on why you think this province would need nuclear power in the first place . . .

The Speaker: We have a 45-second rule. That's about a minute and something else.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the development of nuclear energy in the province of Alberta most certainly there is an application that's in front of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, and that's the proper place for it to be. Under our Constitution in Canada the federal government reserves a constitutional right to deal with these issues, and we respect that. Also, there will be at an appropriate time hearings that would take place and public consultation. You can rest assured that the Alberta government on behalf of the citizens of Alberta will be very active in that issue.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that these negotiations have obviously progressed along to a fairly advanced stage just with the amount of nuclear material we've been receiving around the province, yet we've had no position from the government as to their position on nuclear energy in general. So, Mr. Minister, please set the record straight once and for all. Does this government support a nuclear-free Alberta, or do they support building nuclear power plants on our soil?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, you know, it's easy if you want to just try to phrase a question that would put any individual in a corner. However, what I would suggest is that what will happen in Alberta, as may not be going to be done by the NDs, is that nuclear energy would be considered in the broader context of our comprehensive energy strategy. We are at this point neither a proponent of nor a detractor from any nuclear proposition in the province.

Mr. Eggen: You know, that's funny, Mr. Speaker, because I look at the 20-year plan for electricity, for example, in this province: no mention of nuclear energy. Suddenly here it is, popping up on the floor of the Legislature. Albertans deserve to know what's going on in the open in terms of nuclear power in this province. Why is the government pursuing this dangerous and costly nuclear route instead of investing in proven sustainable solutions such as conservation, wind, solar, and geothermal energy? The billions that it would cost to build and then clean up a nuclear plant afterwards could be invested in a much wiser fashion.

Mr. Knight: You know, again, Mr. Speaker, similar to some of the questions that we were dealing with last week, I can repeat the answer any number of times that the member opposite would like. We are neither a proponent of nor a detractor from any nuclear project in the province of Alberta. The mandate for this is clearly at the federal level. Clearly, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission will deal with it in a timely manner, and we as the government of Alberta will be involved in the process.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are also for the Minister of Energy. Today concerned citizens from across Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario gathered on the steps of the Legislature to express their deep concerns about the prospect of nuclear power plants close to their homes and families. While companies are filing applications and scouting locations, citizens feel ignored. These people and all Albertans concerned over the prospect of nuclear power were promised public consultations with full disclosure. Mr. Minister, is it your intent to push through Bill 46 to limit public participation in nuclear energy discussions?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: I see you refuse to answer, Mr. Minister.

Citizens have pressing questions about health, safety, environmental and economic impacts. The MLA for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne has been heard to say that it's not a question of if but when for nuclear power in the Whitecourt area. Tell me, Mr. Minister: is this the position of the Alberta government? When, not if, on nuclear power?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, to clarify the first issue, number one, I believe that if you read the Order Paper, Bill 46 appears there at some point, so I think that wasn't appropriate.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the answer to the second question, what another member might or might not say out in public is certainly not a concern for me.

I'll repeat the answer again. The government of the province of Alberta is neither a proponent of nor a detractor from any nuclear facility in the province of Alberta. It's being handled appropriately by a federal government agency.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is the government's duty to make balanced decisions, decisions that are made in the best interests of the people of Alberta and all future generations. Given the massive cost overruns of nuclear power in Ontario, will the minister commit here and now that no public funds and no public liability will be assumed to support the nuclear industry in Alberta?

2:10

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, you know, it's interesting when we get into these types of discussions. The answer to that question, I think very clearly, lies in the fact that it would be my observation that in Canada Alberta is the only jurisdiction that has no public money in the utility system currently, no debt and no public money.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Winter Emergency Shelters

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our province continues to experience strong economic growth, and along with that come a number of social needs for vulnerable Albertans. I know from past experience that with winter fast approaching, a number of homeless individuals in Calgary and throughout the province will require emergency shelter. My first question is to the Associate Minister of Affordable Housing and Urban Development. What is the status of the winter emergency shelters in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you. We've been very proactive in addressing the emergent needs of the homeless in the province. For a number of months we've been working with community agencies, with the municipalities and organizations, and that's to ensure that they're able to assist the homeless with winter emergency shelter in their own communities. Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Member for Calgary-Bow: in Calgary today we did open an emergency winter shelter, which was the Foothills Shelter. It will be operated by the Mustard Seed until April of 2008. This winter emergency shelter will provide 450 emergency spaces for the homeless, and that's good news.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. The second question is to the same minister. How many emergency spaces were provided last year, and will that 450 be enough for Calgary and others in the province for this year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that with our strong economy people will arrive in our province without resources to establish themselves. That's why, as I said earlier, we partnered with municipalities and community organizations to provide additional winter emergency shelter spaces. This winter we added other municipalities to the program, like Lloydminster and High Level. In response to the member's question this year we're providing more emergency spaces than we've ever had before in the province. This year the emergency shelter budget tripled to 7 and a half million dollars, which will provide 940 emergency shelter spaces, and that's fairly significant.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. A final question, Mr. Speaker, is also to the same minister. Are we doing anything to move people beyond their dependency upon the winter emergency shelters?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question addresses why the Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, which was recently announced, is so important. Each year we do keep spending millions of dollars on solutions which address the immediacy but not the long-term, fundamental causes of homelessness. We know – we've heard it in the Assembly before – we can't keep doing the same thing over and over again and expect different results. The secretariat will work with communities. They'll work with communities and the homeless foundations in assisting them with their long-term plans and their 10-year plans. Also, the secretariat will provide leadership collaboration and co-operation as the 10-year strategy for homelessness is developed for our province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Crime Reduction and Safe Communities

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One thing I've learned in this Assembly is that when the government is spending money on something, they announce it in the biggest and boldest lettering available. That is why the government response to the recent report and recommendations on the safe communities task force was confusing. Not once anywhere was there any mention of money, not in the press release and not in the background documents. Then when challenged, the Premier told us in a press conference that \$470 million over three years has been committed. To the Solicitor General: what assurances do we have that this verbal commitment will bind your government to fully funding the recommendations of the task force, or are we supposed to just take the Premier's spoken word?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member mentioned, our Premier did commit to \$470 million for implementing these task force recommendations, and I look forward to that member and his colleagues across the floor supporting it when you bring it up in the budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding, then, that we're going to see this in the spring budget, hopefully. This government, though, has so many examples of reports and recommendations that sit in a drawer or on a shelf gathering dust or are implemented piece by piece here and there with no clear plan. That is why I was questioning it. The best example is the crystal meth task force, headed by Colleen Klein, the former Premier's wife, which came out with many good recommendations after months of public consultation. As happens so often, this report is in need of an APB to determine its whereabouts. Again to the Solicitor General: what assurances can he give us that the safe communities task force recommendations are not going to meet with the same fate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, in regard to the crystal meth task force this ministry is already moving ahead on a number of initiatives that were mentioned in the crystal meth recommendations. In regard to the safe communities/crime prevention task force, we plan on implementing the ones that we have committed to.

Mr. Elsalhy: That's the disconnect, Mr. Speaker. They say they're moving on these initiatives. We don't see this in the House. The safe communities task force recommended, for example, adding more police officers, but to do this, the minister needs to review and revamp the criteria for municipal policing grants. This government has repeatedly refused to revamp these criteria, and in their report they state that the recommendations and the provincial funding formula need further study. The current funding formula is so ridiculous that a town that has 5,001 people will end up paying hundreds of thousands of dollars for policing while a town with just 5,000 gets everything paid for. To the minister: why are small municipalities being penalized for experiencing growth? Why is there no sliding scale for police funding for towns that exceed 5,000 people?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, any of the programs we have in place are subject to review time and again. The police grant program is one of those that we look at on a continual basis. In regard to the 5,000 population, we do give those communities two-year assistance on that particular program. The help is there. I also want to point out to the hon. member that this government also returns approximately \$100 million to police agencies as a result of fines that are collected in our province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Opening of U.S. Border to Live Cattle

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Border closures, court rulings, the changing dollar have created hardships for my producers. Many of my constituents in Whitecourt-St. Anne depend on the cattle industry for their livelihoods. Today the United States Department of Agriculture implemented its final BSE rule, allowing the importation from Canada of bison and live cattle over the age of 30 months. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Can the minister explain the impact of this rule on my producers in Whitecourt-St. Anne and others across the province? How quickly can they expect to ship cattle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this is absolutely a positive step finally for our cattle industry. It's been a long time coming, but some hard work by both the provincial government and the new ag department in the federal government has paid off. Live cattle and bison born on or after March 1, 1999, including breeding animals, which is very important, and meat products will be allowed into the U.S. Rule 2 restores trade and recognizes the effectiveness of our BSE safeguards.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the same minister. In Whitecourt-St. Anne I have an advisory committee made up of producers, and we've spent many hours talking about

age verification. Today's ruling will stress the importance of age verification for our producers. Can the minister tell us what steps are being taken to encourage age verification amongst Alberta's cattle industry and the producers border to border?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly an important question indeed. We've been working with the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency since October of 2006. To date over 3 million birthdates have been recorded in the CCIA database. Alberta beef, of course, represents over 50 or maybe 60 per cent of the Canadian total. Although we have a multitude of cattle age-verified and identified, it's time to move forward. Now is the time we must age-verify all cattle that are born in the future.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the minister responsible for international trade. Like I said in the preamble, this issue is very, very important to the producers in my constituency, and the issue is: what's next, Mr. Minister? You know, the producers have been faced with many issues. R-CALF always seems to have endless issues to raise in the U.S. courts. It seems like one barrier after another hits the producer at the primary level. My question is to the minister. What's next? What can we expect?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'm very proud to say that Albertans are free traders who certainly oppose unfair trade barriers. We are working with the federal government and our partners through the WTO, the World Trade Organization, but there is no doubt that Alberta's agri-food industry would benefit from the reduction of trade-distorting subsidies and market access barriers. We are committed towards that end and that principle. However, we are extremely frustrated at this time with the glacial pace of the World Trade Organization negotiations, but we remain committed to achieving that objective and benefiting producers here in Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 88 questions and responses. We'll now return to the Routine.

head:

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to the requirements of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, it is my pleasure to rise today and table the required number of copies of the 2007 report of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund. The report will be available on the committee's website, and I have arranged to have copies distributed to each hon. member. I'd like to thank the staff at Alberta Finance, the office of the Auditor General, and the Legislative Assembly Office for the dedicated support they provide to the committee throughout the year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I present a petition signed by 113 central Albertans requesting that the regulations for Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007, reflect the intent of the legislation as outlined in second reading.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon, and it reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to launch a full public inquiry under the authority of the Public Inquiries Act into spying practices by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (AEUB) and the Minister of Energy's oversight role of the AEUB.

This petition is signed by people from Buck Lake and Rimbey and Bluffton.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition from 85 Albertans. The undersigned residents "petition the Legislative Assembly to pass Bill 45, the Smoke-Free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, and not dilute its contents so as to compromise the version approved at second reading."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two petitions today. One, indeed, from a number of individuals: 252 of them supporting the passage of Bill 45. So their mission has already been accomplished.

The second: I actually have two collections of the same petition, totalling 560, who are urging the government to ensure that remuneration paid to employees working with persons with disabilities is standardized, that they're fairly compensated and wages remain competitive, that they have improved access to professional development opportunities, and would the government please introduce province-wide service- and outcomes-focused level of care standards.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from all the members of the newly elected executive of the Kilkenny community league and others, and it reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to cut unnecessary regulations that cause time to be lost in filling out forms and other burdensome and unnecessary rules (red tape) by supporting Bill 213 the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cheffins: Mr. Speaker, I rise with signatures from 18 Calgaryans petitioning the Legislative Assembly to pass Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition with 37 signatures. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to immediately establish, in consultation with community leaders and interested citizens, the Keystone Wildlife Preserve in a designated area west of Edmonton, north of Highway 16 and east of highway 751, to ensure that wildlife habitat and the surrounding environment are protected for generations to come.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions today. The first one is the same petition that's urging the Legislative Assembly to support Bill 45. I am pleased to tell the petitioners that we have done just that, and it's awaiting royal assent.

The other petition, Mr. Speaker, was signed by 231 Albertans from many communities but mostly from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Leduc, St. Albert, Grande Prairie, and Spruce Grove. It reads: we, the undersigned residents hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to "introduce legislation or amend regulations to give consumers in Alberta access, even if limited or controlled, to raw (unpasteurized) dairy products, particularly for health or medical reasons."

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there additional petitions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I just want to add the voices of a number of Calgarians to the successful passing of Bill 45 in order to address the enormous health, social, and financial implications of tobacco use in Alberta.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Government House Leader I wish to give oral notice to propose the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur on the November 15, 2007, report on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Franklin J. Work be reappointed Information and Privacy Commissioner for a four-year term.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. We've got a whole list of others.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two from the leader of the third party. First of all, I'd like to table the appropriate numbers of copies of letters from Wayne and Marjorie Brideaux of Calgary regarding this government's failure to rectify the housing situation by allowing rent gouging to continue. They ask when this government will "stop applying ideology in the face of fact" and listen to the findings of the housing task force.

The second one, Mr. Speaker, was to table the appropriate number of copies of letters from Aubrey Finnen, a landowner in central Alberta, regarding his objections to the way he has been treated by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is a document regarding geothermal applications, a recent document that shows how 2 per cent of the electrical energy generated for California is from geothermal now, and the entire capital of Iceland is heated that way.

Another is a communication from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business outlining support for the Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one document to table. It's the article from *Banff Crag & Canyon* of November 13, 2007, which I referred to in the House last Thursday and which reports that the only two child care centres in Bow Valley, one in Canmore and one in Banff, have a two-year waiting list.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one: A Review of Discovery Wildlife Park Based on the Alberta Zoo Standards by the World Society for the Protection of Animals.

The second one is A Review of the Guzoo Animal Farm Based on the Alberta Zoo Standards, again by the World Society for the Protection of Animals.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today pertaining to the same subject. On November 9 my wife and I along with the MLAs from Edmonton-Centre and Edmonton-Calder attended an event at the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers titled Global Gallery. The first tabling is the news release announcing this event, which was designed to showcase immigrant talent in the area of visual arts, as in painting, photography, and sculpting.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the actual program book, containing many biographies and samplings of all 25 of those artists' work. It is now available online at www.emcn.ab.ca.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

2:30

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a letter from Stephen Renaud in which he is talking about the need to look at the quality of life for persons with disabilities: "Because of the low AISH income many individuals are challenged in today's housing market. Available low cost housing is very difficult to find."

The second letter is from M. Platts, where she says: "I do not believe that the purpose of providing early child education in any form is to make money but to provide a service. I would like to see that service fully funded for all children by our government."

The third one is from Kerri Bischoff. "I was appalled at the decrease in the maximum Number of children allowed in a care facility, 24 down to 16, as well as the food catering fees and of course the rise in cost due to the decrease of spots allowed in a facility."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings today. The first tabling is the program of the western legacy awards, which we celebrated on November 9 at the Roundup Centre in Calgary. The awards were presented for innovation, youth, and sustained contribution.

My second tabling consists of the highlights of this past weekend's Parkland conference I attended, the theme of which was From Crisis to Hope: Building Just and Sustainable Communities, a goal all members of this House have been tasked by our constituents to achieve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling correspondence from Yvonne Mireau of Edmonton. She's suffering from a serious jaw injury and has had to have it wired shut for the past year, during which she has been on a liquid food diet. Now, her treatment has cost her over \$1,000, but she's not covered by Alberta Health as it's classified as dental. She wishes to draw the attention of the minister to this major hole in our supposedly universal health care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table the requisite number of copies of the Fort McMurray Youth Housing Needs Report, prepared under the direction of the Youth Shelter Subcommittee at the request of the Homeless Initiatives Steering Committee, regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. I referenced this report earlier today in question period.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first two are in regard to my questions from earlier in question period. My first tabling is an invoice from June 1, 2007, to Kellan Fluckiger, executive director, Alberta Department of Energy, for \$38,000 for 76 hours of professional services. It's signed by Murray A. Nelson from the Mana Energy Group Limited.

The second tabling I have is a similar invoice, but this one is dated September 1, 2007. It's for 92 hours at \$500 an hour for a total of \$46,000. It's to the same executive director, Mr. Kellan Fluckiger of the Alberta Department of Energy, and it's signed, "Yours truly, Murray A. Nelson."

My third tabling is a letter dated November 8, 2007, to the hon. Premier from Mr. Bronconnier, the mayor of Calgary. This is outlining some of the concerns that Calgary city council and the citizens of Calgary have regarding Bill 46, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly, if they have not read this letter, to please do so quickly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, before we move forward, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(continued)

The Speaker: That being the case, the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some guests from the Dunvegan-Central Peace constituency. I believe they are seated in both galleries. I would ask each of them to rise as I introduce them: Denis Sauvageau from Falher; Dan and Huguette Ropchan, Adele Boucher Rymhs, Knut Moller, and Eileen McGuire from Grimshaw; Peter and Sara Jessing and Trudy Keillor from Berwyn; and George Beinert from Whitelaw. Earlier I had a chance to meet with them. They're here to express their concerns over the nuclear proposal. Please join me in giving them our traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you. It's also my pleasure to welcome some constituents who have travelled from our far northwest corner of the province to express some concerns they have about nuclear energy and to urge the government to engage Albertans in a policy discussion. Mr. Speaker, I regret that I was unable to meet with my constituents earlier, but I plan to sit in on a meeting this afternoon. Nonetheless, it's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this House Brenda Brochu; Erik Moller; Micheline Danburger; Wanda, Genevieve, Monique, and Jacqueline Laurin; Louise Alm; and Carol Akininstall. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again it looks as though we're just catching the last few of the representation of guests from the nuclear demonstration this afternoon. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members Sonja Myllymaki from Edmonton, Izumi Kuribayishi from Edmonton as well, Art Jackson from Jasper, Bob Cameron from DeBolt, Connie Bresnahan from Hinton, Paul Pryce from Calgary, and David Cammeron from Calgary. If you could rise and receive the Assembly's welcome.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Motions for Returns**

Mr. Renner: I move that Motion for a Return 9 stand and retain its place.

[Motion carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 213
Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act**

[Debate adjourned November 8: Mr. Eggen speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder may continue. I believe he still has nine minutes in his speaking time on Bill 213.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I believe that I've completed my comments on that bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act as presented by the hon.

Member for Edmonton-Manning. I want to take this opportunity to thank him for introducing this legislation. I'm very appreciative because it indicates that he is very much in agreement with what the government is doing in this whole field of regulatory reform.

I want to make a few comments, though, about the proposed bill. Quite frankly, the intent of the bill, while admirable and right in keeping with what we would agree with – there are a few things that I want to bring to the attention of the Assembly. If we were to follow this bill, it would be very, very simple to do what is in here, but there's more to this than just counting numbers. In section 2(a) currently it asks for the number of regulations. If you're going to do just a number count, that would not necessarily accomplish what we really need to do. Some of the things that are in this bill that talk to the need of regulatory reform – I guess if you look at the preamble of it and you see the number of reasons for the introduction of this and the reason that we need to do it, we agree with those. But just counting numbers is not going to accomplish what the hon. member has identified in the preamble of his bill.

2:40

I would like to expand on what we feel needs to be done and what, in fact, we are doing. I think it's important, when a bill is presented, that it be in the greater public interest because that's really what you need to have as a driving force and to affect all the regulations. To address that issue, there are a number of criteria that I believe it should meet. Those are things like be necessary for the maintenance and/or enhancement of the public health, education, order, and safety; be necessary for the maintenance and/or enhancement of the environment; and contribute to the goals of sustainable development. Quite frankly, one of the things we hear often as we're talking to businesspeople about regulations and forms and things of this nature is that, in fact, there's a great burden, that they spend a lot of time and money having to fill out forms, having to meet certain regulations that maybe don't address some of the things that I'm just describing. It must contribute significantly and positively to the competitiveness of the private sector in the province, including promotion of innovation and encouragement of efficiency in the conduct of business, and of course be necessary for the effective internal administration of government of the province.

This regulatory reform is more than just outside of government. There's a big cost to government with some of these regulations. So I think it's important that we weigh that against the need – I believe that we need to look more at what it is that we're trying to accomplish; in other words, the outcome of the regulation.

Quite frankly, when we talk later in the bill about the accountability portion of the act, you need some way of measuring that, and I believe that we've got some suggestions that would really accomplish that. I think that there are some other very important elements that are necessary in the regulations, things like identifying the problem and desired objectives or outcomes – and that's what I spoke to briefly before – and to of course establish a clear case for the action and also to consider the options, regulatory or nonregulatory, for achieving the desired outcomes. Once again, it's a measurement of outcomes: how do you get there? Look at the problem and what it is you want to do. Now how do you get there?

Consult with those potentially affected in developing the regulatory action with the participation of the community. Once again, it is extremely important that as we develop regulations and/or review regulations, it not be just an exercise internally. Currently under our request for regulation we do have a section that speaks to having to consult with the stakeholders, consult with the public.

Assessing the impacts, costs, and benefits of each option for consumers, business, government, and of course the greater community, deciding on the alternatives on the basis of transparent criteria, and adopting the options of the greatest net benefit to the

community and developing a strategy to implement and enforce and review the preferred regulatory actions to ensure that regulation is relevant and effective over time. Now, I spoke briefly earlier about the need for having a way of measuring these regulations, and I believe that up front we have to make sure that we address certain issues so that in the process of approving regulations, we need to be able to look at the various terms and categories. I think that we can do that, and that will help with the measurement at the end.

I think we have to look at things like the environmental quality, the quality of life or health, social and cultural effects – that is, the awareness and tolerance, et cetera – changes in prices and quality of products, the effects on competitiveness and/or market openness, reduction in compliance and administrative costs, increasing market choice, improvements in information. Those are just a few of the things that I believe need to be incorporated. While some of them are alluded to in the principles of the act, I believe that there need to be some more things added to it. Certainly, if and when this reaches the committee stage, I would be wanting to look at some of those things.

There's going to be a lot of activity in the whole regulatory reform and all of the regulations because as TILMA develops, there is going to be the necessity to look at a lot of regulations. Currently we're asking departments to do an inventory. I'm not saying numbers; I'm saying do an inventory so that they know exactly what it is that they have in the form of regulations, that they know the quality of those regulations. Do they meet these other criteria that we're setting out for those regulations? Then as we try to synchronize with the TILMA process, we're going to have to be looking at how our regulations fit with the B.C. regulations.

Of course, another very good process that's developing – I'm very pleased to say that as I understand it, the city of Edmonton is going to be involved in it – is a system called BizPaL. What this system will do over time – it's a great undertaking, but what we're trying to do is make sure that business knows through one window what the municipal requirements are, for example, to establish a restaurant. What kind of regulations are there as far as the province is concerned? Then in some cases there are federal regulations that get involved. On the municipal side, of course, you get into all things like land-use bylaws and building codes that the city may have. Of course, on the provincial side, once again, you get into things like the building code.

There's another area that's very critical that we address, and I just don't see in the bill where this would be handled. For example, a restaurant: you're going to be affected by many government departments, not only the municipal but government departments. We've got to be able to say, whether it be to one ministry, "you will take the lead," and then it will be spread across the other ministries that are involved. Somehow we have to through the regulatory process determine which are involved and who should be taking the lead, which ministry, because that's one of the things that is extremely frustrating.

The Speaker: I think the speaking time is over.

Mr. Lund: Oh, I'm sorry. Just one thing.

The Speaker: No. You'd need unanimous consent for that. Sorry. It doesn't quite work that way.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak in support of Bill 213, Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act. The purpose of this bill is simply to ensure that current and proposed regulations in regard to red tape for businesses

and nonprofit organizations are necessary. It attempts to streamline red tape for businesses and nonprofit organizations and citizens to reduce what is an unnecessary cost.

Alberta Liberals have been strong advocates of this type of legislation in the past and applaud this member for bringing this bill forward. It is a bill worthy of support. This bill forces the government to do something that has been absent in Alberta for a long, long time: be accountable to the people and to the Legislative Assembly. It opens the doors that have been closed for so long. It's in the public interest and, as such, should be supported. Businesses in Alberta are drowning in red tape. It is time to throw them a lifeline.

This legislation is a long time coming, something that small- and medium-sized businesses everywhere have been calling for. Mr. Speaker, those calls have previously fallen on deaf ears. We have an opportunity to do the right thing here today, the right thing for Alberta businesses. A vote against this bill is a vote against transparency and accountability, and we must make effective and sustainable red tape relief a top priority.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, this bill is designed to eliminate unnecessary government red tape that poses a significant financial burden and a significant time burden on businesses, nonprofit organizations, and private citizens. This bill will place the burden on government to ensure that all regulations that are being posed or that will be passed in the future dealing with accountability and compliance will be subject to full process to ensure that they are absolutely necessary. It will ensure that all government regulations have an element of accountability to ensure that they are necessary regulations and that alternatives to regulations do not exist.

Bill 213 places a specific timeline on the Minister of Justice to develop a regulatory review, regulatory reform plans, and progress reports for all new regulations. In other words, Mr. Speaker, it forces government to undergo a process before passing new regulations to ensure necessity. It also addresses public documents that the minister is required to make public again. It puts into legislation a process to be followed regarding documents that the minister is required to make public. The documents must be placed before the Legislature and must be made available to the general public.

These are the strong accountability functions. Mr. Speaker, this Bill 213 is about accountability. You know, businesspeople are facing lots of burdens, especially fiscal responsibility, taxing, and spending, and burdens of regulations, especially increases in accountability. Government, I think, must reduce the burden on businesspeople in this area.

This bill also is about compliance, Mr. Speaker. I receive numerous phone calls and e-mails from some businesses in my riding. They are facing, you know, lots of problems with labour shortages. We all know that this is a problem, not only in my riding but all over Alberta, and lots of businesspeople are facing this.

Even the temporary foreign workers: there are so many flaws there. You know, they are blaming temporary foreign workers even though this program is a federal program. But they expect the Alberta government, because the Alberta government has signed onto this accord recently – they think that that accord is not strong enough. It is not in their favour because sometimes they get approval from HRDC, which is a totally federal government department, and once they get approval from them, they send those papers back to their potential employees back home, wherever those people are coming from, maybe in Asia, maybe in Europe.

They are facing lots of problems. Even, you know, the employees or some agencies overseas pay an application fee, and after that they don't get any response. What they get is just a simple letter that they

don't qualify for it; their financial situation is not sound enough. Sometimes they get a denial letter just saying: your intention is not to work in Alberta; maybe your intention is to stay here permanently. Those people are telling me that, you know, if their financial situation is so strong, why would they come to Canada to work as a temporary foreign worker?

It is understood, Mr. Speaker, that there are lots of other problems that foreign workers are facing in this country, especially accommodation, and inflation is going up. Everything, especially in Alberta recently, has gone up, and they are facing financial problems here as well.

I'm not criticizing only the department, federal government or the provincial government. There are lots of flaws in this system, especially in some agencies working overseas – we don't have any control – and some agencies working here. Employees are also, you know, playing some dirty games sometimes. I heard that some employees also come here on a sponsorship for a certain employer, and then afterwards they slip, and they work for somebody else.

Businesspeople are complaining that the labour shortage is still a big headache for them. It's a big problem, and it's a hurdle. The government of Alberta, I mean, has signed an agreement with the federal government, and they should talk to their Tory cousins in Ottawa and do something about it. I said that definitely, when I speak in the Legislature, I will pass on your message. I hope the ministers concerned are listening.

Even last session I introduced a motion to not rely on temporary foreign workers, to increase the number of PRs, permanent residents, or immigration in this country. These messages should be sent to the federal government so that it helps not only the citizens of Canada; it should help businesspeople. Also, some organizations working here who are nonpolitical, nonreligious: it might help them, too.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to Bill 213. I'd like to begin my speech by complimenting the Member for Edmonton-Manning on his hard work and dedication to this issue. It's an incredibly timely issue that needs to be addressed. Alberta has work to do on regulatory reduction, so I appreciate greatly the member's foresight and his dedication to this. I'm sure small business, volunteer organizations, and all Albertans in general appreciate him bringing this to the discussion in the Assembly today.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that

Bill 213, Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Government Services pursuant to temporary Standing Order 74.2.

Thank you very much.

This bill focuses, Mr. Speaker, on counting regulations, which is an incredibly important part of any regulatory review process that this government would undertake. It creates a visual picture of the regulations, and quite frankly it brings to the consciousness of Albertans and bureaucrats as well as members of this Assembly just how many regulations there are and how encompassing they can be and perhaps on occasion even a barrier to growth and productivity in this province.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, that is not the entire process that needs to be undertaken to make sure that we review regulations to minimize the burden that we place on society with the regulations that we have. It's critical that we're able to do a cost-benefit analysis of all the regulations. In fact, some statistics and some numbers show – and

I think some other members have mentioned them – that for every dollar the government spends to administer a regulation, the private sector spends \$20 trying to comply with that regulation. So when we come up with new regulations, it's critical that we do a cost-benefit analysis to determine just how much it will cost the voluntary sector or private business or any other segment of our economy or society that has to adapt to that regulation.

It's also critical – and I've heard a couple of other members discuss it here as well – that we're able to do a time-cost analysis on what regulations mean to sectors of the economy. In fact, I know some members here have cited information that some Albertans spend up to nine hours a week just trying to comply with regulations that we've set in this province, whether it's a small business or a voluntary organization. Mr. Speaker, that can translate into upwards of 40 days per year in just complying with government regulations. If we're going to do this analysis, it's very important – and this bill is critical – that we count the regulations, but it's also important that we do a cost-benefit analysis and that we do a time-cost analysis.

Mr. Speaker, one thing that I don't think I heard one member of this Assembly mention is that we need some place for people within society to actually come and speak to the government about a particular regulation that's creating a tremendous burden on their business or their sector of the economy or their sector of society. We hear all the time about the problems with regulations and how much of a burden they are, but very rarely have any of my constituents or the people that I've dealt with in the business community or the volunteer community come forward and said: this is the regulation that's creating a burden. They talk about regulations in general all the time. If there was some body or organization or institution set up within government that allowed members of the public to come and cite specific regulations and educate us on just what a particular burden it was to them and their business or their public-sector organization, it would really help us to address the regulatory burden.

Mr. Speaker, this field committee that I've asked by motion that this bill be referred to would provide an opportunity to discuss, examine, and recommend changes to this bill in an open and transparent manner. This process has the potential to determine the best means available when addressing the important issue of regulatory reform and to incorporate those actions with those currently being undertaken by this government. I know that there are many actions being undertaken by this government to reduce the regulatory burden. This process would allow a full evaluation, and it would allow review by the public, because even though we have some brilliant members in this House, we can't consider everything all of the time. The purpose of creating those standing committees was to get input from the public that has to deal with the regulations that we're dealing with. This regulatory efficiency is an important issue to this government, and ensuring that the system remains vibrant is essential to the prosperity of this great province.

I commend the member for bringing this forward. I think it's timely. I think he deserves the recognition of this House and the recognition of the public, both the private-sector businesses and the voluntary sector, because they face a lot of regulatory burdens as well that we often don't consider.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have an amendment to Bill 213. First of all, we'll proceed with the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, did you want to get in on this amendment?

Rev. Abbott: No.

The Speaker: We'll proceed, then. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. I have to start as well by thanking the hon. sponsor of Bill 213, the Member for Edmonton-Manning. I'm thanking him because he's raising awareness about this issue that, as was said before, does not only apply to members of the business community, in particular the small business community, but also community leagues, nonprofit organizations, volunteer-run organizations, and so on.

I also have to put on the record my appreciation for the effort he made to make every member of this House aware of his bill, you know, offering some background information and offering justification for why he was sponsoring this bill, which really should be adopted by all private members in this House. The model of sharing information ahead of time to try to enlighten those members as to why and the rationale behind it and, hopefully, to secure their support, as was said before, is something that has been part of the Alberta Liberal platform for some time. As such, we have no problem supporting this initiative.

Now to the motion as introduced by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. While I'm not necessarily opposed to referring this particular piece of legislation, the idea that's contained in it, the subject matter that it raises, to one of the four standing policy field committees, I have to question what I am starting to see as a pattern developing here in this Assembly and in this government, Mr. Speaker. By that pattern I am referencing the fact that it seems to be the easiest way out of having to make a decision by referring an idea or a bill to a committee or a task force. We have different names for these things now. Then these people meet, and they have hearings, and they invite submissions. A report or a file is issued with recommendations and suggestions, and then most of the time it gets ignored. I don't want to see this happen today, and I don't want to see this happen to this idea in particular.

The regulatory burden is not only huge, but it's increasing, Mr. Speaker, and we need to definitely address it. So I would rather see this House commit today and make the decision today and pass this bill today because I haven't heard anybody in this House from either side who has expressed any major concern to it. The opposition as well as members from the government have both indicated that, yes, it is timely, yes, it is important, yes, we have heard the cries and the plight of those people from the small business community, from the nonprofits, and, yes, we agree. So why delay it further? Why send it to the committee? The committee takes its time, and then the committee reports back to the Assembly. We're going to still make the same decision, I'm hoping, which is to reduce regulatory burdens and to make our regulations more efficient.

So I think that it's an unnecessary step. I think that it's wasting time. You know, in my opinion – maybe I'm a bit cynical now, having been here for three years – it just stalls. I haven't heard anybody opposed to the idea, so let's get on with it, and let's vote today. That is basically my two cents with respect to this motion to refer Bill 213.

Now, I did some research, Mr. Speaker, and this is not new. We're talking about an issue, you know, that is not an innovative thing that the House is discussing or contemplating. We've had task forces, and we've had review committees for as long back as the library here can produce records. I actually went and asked the Legislature Library, and they produced one of the reports. I'm telling you, we seem to have task forces galore in this province. We have reports galore. Here is the regulatory reform task force report from 1997, the status report, fairly thick. It talks about what should be done. The next year the same thing, 1998 status report, even thicker. Nothing has been done yet. The Regulatory Review

Secretariat, which evolved from the earlier task force, 1999 status report, extremely enlightening and very useful had it been implemented. Then you move on, Mr. Speaker, to 2001 as well, the Regulatory Review Secretariat status report, and so on. I didn't ask for all those records. I just asked for a sampling, and the Leg. Library was really generous and shared these with me.

This secretariat has not been eliminated or struck. It is still here. So why do we need to do this outside of something that is already here? Three members of this Assembly sit on it. One of them is the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, who has spoken earlier. Another member is the MLA for Calgary-Bow, and a third member is the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake. I mean, these people sit on this committee supposedly to study this. I don't think we need another committee, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On the amendment the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, as I've already recognized, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

3:10

Mr. Taylor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As deputy chair of one of the policy field committees I find this amendment interesting. I'm a little bit torn about the direction in which, perhaps, the House should proceed because I do believe the policy field committees have done some good work in their initial efforts over the spring, summer, and fall, and I believe that they have the potential to continue to do good work.

Having said that, I tend to support my colleague from Edmonton-McClung that we are adding in here a step that I don't think needs to be taken at this time, Mr. Speaker. I'm referring back to *Hansard* on May 14, 2007, when private member's Bill 207, which was introduced by my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, was up for second reading debate in this House and there was an attempt to bring in a similar amendment at that point to refer Bill 207 to another policy field committee, I believe community services rather than government services on that one. There were some quite strong arguments made by members on the government side of the House, albeit speaking, I am sure, privately, for themselves and for no one else, because it was a private member's business day, some fairly convincing arguments against referring that bill to the policy field committee. One member said that it should be debated here and now on the floor of the House, for instance, and there were other comments like that.

I'm reminded as well – although I wish I could reference this for today's *Hansard*, and I can't. I think I picked it up on a TV show somewhere some years ago. Maybe it was that British parliamentary satire *Yes Minister* – I'm not sure – where it would have been Sir Humphrey, if that was the show, the chief public servant advising the minister, who would have said: Mr. Minister, we're all in favour of cutting red tape as long as we cut it lengthwise. It strikes me that that's what we're attempting to do here. We're attempting to drag out the process of dealing with the red tape that small businesses across my constituency and all over this province are strangling in, and I don't think that we need to do that.

With respect to the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright and his concern about, I guess, the breadth and scope of regulations that could be involved here, if this Bill 213, the Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act, passes today on second reading, then we can refer it to the Committee of the Whole. Mr. Speaker, I believe we can do much of the same work in Committee of the Whole. I see no reason why we can't.

Now, again, as I said before, I believe that the policy field committees can do fine work. They can dig deeper. They can do all sorts of things that we cannot do at committee stage in this House.

They can call witnesses. They can commission reports, studies, et cetera, et cetera. But that, in my view, might be an appropriate tack to take after Bill 213 proceeds through the House.

I think Bill 213 gives the government the discretion to set a reduction target in the number of regulations if it chooses. It does not require or specify that the number of regulations has to be reduced, that sort of thing. I think that Bill 213, if passed by this House, can set a general tone – and perhaps we can get quite specific at the Committee of the Whole stage – for where the province wants to go on regulatory accountability and transparency. I mean, there are a few bad apples in any bunch, but you'd be hard pressed to find very many small businesspeople who would not acknowledge that there is the need for some, you know, government regulation of their business.

I take it I'm done. Thank you.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to close debate on Bill 213 as amended with an amendment in place. Proceed.

Mr. Backs: Just a quick point of clarification. Is the amendment still on?

The Speaker: Hon. member, we'll proceed to hear you close the debate. Then we'll proceed to take the vote, first on the amendment, and then, depending on the resolution of the amendment, we could go forward to the second vote.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very, very pleased to have seen such interest in this bill. There were very many speakers – I counted 17 – who have fully spoken to this bill. I think that that underscores the importance in many Albertans' minds, in many small businesses, in many voluntary organizations, and even in many organizations in the public sector of concerns over the time they spend on the regulatory burden and how to deal with it. We've had a number of, you know, questions that have been raised in question period that have looked at this issue, such as the issue that looked to the problems with the log books in the transportation industry and today in the issue of smart cards, perhaps, in health care and the issue of waiting lists and things like that. These are all parts of the paper burden, the time burden, the waiting that has made for some inefficiency in our society.

In reality, you know, the success of a society is defined by many things, but one of the things is its efficiency, and one of the things is its ability to do things in a way that doesn't waste the time of its citizens. I think there are many things that are in this Bill 213 that can work to do that. I think that many people have worked to bring matters forward on this, with many good comments from all of the 17 speakers on this issue. I really don't have time in the five minutes to speak to all of them although I would like to do so and thank them all for their many comments.

There has been brought to me the need for some improvements, some things that could be brought forward on the issue from further public hearings and from further debate in committee. There are, of course, two options to that. That's to go to third reading, and the other is to go to a policy field committee. You know, I'm torn somewhat on which would be the best, but I would support the amendment from the Member for Battle River-Wainwright in that I think it is important to take that extra public consultation and to put that forward to a little bit more sober second thought, you might call it, over a bit of a longer period of time even though we would like

to see that brought in in departments and in areas in a way and in a fashion that would come to implement some of these matters sooner. I think the fact that we have brought a lot of this to light will certainly have a psychological effect on many of the rule-makers.

With that, I thank the Assembly for their support in the many words that have been spoken on this one, and I close, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 213 carried]

head: 3:20 **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 212
Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is an honour to rise on behalf of the constituency of Calgary-Hays and begin the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. If passed, this innovative piece of legislation has the potential to bring community safety and quality of life to a higher level in Alberta. I believe that this is what we all strive for.

I would like to thank the members of this Assembly for the tremendous support they have shown throughout the process. I believe that the ways this bill will help our communities are numerous and far reaching. As legislators and representatives of our constituents we owe it to Albertans to thoroughly consider all aspects of legislation that can increase safety in our province. I commend my colleagues for doing just that.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to address some of the remaining questions which were previously raised by the opposition. During second reading debate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview raised concerns regarding the possibility that drug houses would move from neighbourhood to neighbourhood with the measures called for by Bill 212. I believe the diverse mechanisms within this legislation properly deal with this apprehension. The act is able to address this concern because it attacks drug and prostitution operations from two separate directions.

First, if it is found that the manufacturing, purchasing, sale, or consumption of intoxicants is occurring on a property, Bill 212 can shut the operation down by requiring all implicated persons to vacate the property and not allow them to re-enter or reoccupy it. Furthermore, the Court of Queen's Bench can require the safety agency to close the property for use and occupation for up to 90 days. This means that even in the event that an individual is found to be responsible for breaking the law and is subsequently sent to jail, the property itself would no longer be available for use. The individual in prison would not be able to ask associates to continue the disturbing behaviours, as is sometimes the case. Therefore, drug production would cease on that property.

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, any time and place that a drug or prostitution operation is brought to the attention of the agency proposed by this bill, pending a third investigation it can be shut down no matter what community it is spotted and reported in, and if the operation moves, it can be reported, investigated, and shut down again. Committing a crime is partly a matter of convenience. If a

drug operation repeatedly gets shut down due to community observations, eventually these individuals will get frustrated and cease production in Alberta. They may find somewhere else more convenient, without observant eyes and ears in every direction, but thanks to this proposed legislation that place will likely be outside the great neighbourhoods of this province.

Mr. Chairman, while the same member conceded that Bill 212 properly deals with the supply of illicit substances, he was concerned about the demand side of drugs. I am proud to say that one of the spectacular features of this proposed act is its preventative nature and capabilities. For instance, if someone in the community notices a lot of traffic at an individual's home and witnesses increasingly disturbing situations occurring on the property, the community member can call the agency for help. If the agency finds that activities are occurring that negatively affect the community but are not beyond repair, the agency can address the situation in a community-based manner.

In addition, those who may not be heavily involved in disturbing behaviours may realize that it is not worth losing their tenancy agreement over these activities and, consequently, cease them. This negative attention from the law holds the potential to lead a person out of trouble before the situation becomes too grave and before they are tainted with a criminal record. It is in this manner that I believe the act addresses demand. It identifies issues before they get out of hand and before addictions are created.

Mr. Chairman, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora voiced concern about the role of peace officers within the act. In part 3 it is stated that "if requested to do so, a peace officer shall provide any assistance required by an inspector or the Director in the performance of [their] duties." This just means that if an occupant of a property and any other persons at the property do not comply with a request to leave the property, the director may obtain the assistance of a peace officer to remove them from the property. The use of peace officers in this case would be a precaution in the event that the director fears complications.

The same member also had a concern with who exactly the director would use as investigators. In the jurisdictions which already use this legislation, directors employ individuals with extensive investigative experience. Their know-how is crucial to the success of this proposed act because these individuals are sworn in by the courts as experts. I assure the member that the investigators are of the highest calibre.

Lastly, I would like to address his concerns regarding the relationship of investigations under this act and those of the municipal police. Again, in the jurisdictions I have visited, these two bodies operate in a co-operative manner. The investigations mandated under the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act do not get in the way of police investigations since they keep in constant communication with each other and work as allies.

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I would like to move a package of amendments to the bill and take a few moments to briefly outline them.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we need to make sure that the amendments are circulated.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the amendment that is being circulated to you shall be referred to as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, you may proceed.

Mr. Johnston: Amendment A allows the director to delegate his or her powers, duties, or functions to an employee under the adminis-

tration of the minister. Amendments B, J, and Q call for the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act to be included under the jurisdiction of this bill. Amendments C, K, and L clarify which certificates of title are affected by a community safety order. Amendments D and P are simply style changes, and amendments E and M switch the term "interest" to "caveat" to be consistent with terms used in Alberta. Amendment E also ensures that caveats cannot be lapsed.

Amendment F clarifies the collection of information during the investigative process. Amendment G is a grammatical change. Amendment H seeks to strike out section 32(3) to be in sync with Alberta's Torrens system. Amendment I removes the term "summary conviction" since the term is not used in Alberta. Amendments N and O are cross-reference changes. Amendment R is a terminology change.

Mr. Chairman, I ask that these amendments be brought forward as one package if that is at all possible and acceptable to the committee. While these amendments are very minor, they will go far to strengthen Bill 212. The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act thoroughly confronts undesirable activities in our province. It presents many different approaches to deal with crime and disruptive behaviours. Therefore, we have a lot to consider here today.

I look forward to hearing the debate on the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act and the amendments I have brought forward. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm glad to speak again and add some further thoughts to the debate on Bill 212. As I look at these amendments, it appears that they're mostly housekeeping but also clarifying some things in terms of delegation. "The Director may delegate the Director's powers, duties or functions under this Act to an employee under the administration of the Minister." I guess I'd like to have an opportunity to ask for some clarification on that. The other parts of the amendment I think are quite clear, and I would support them.

3:30

Bill 212's purpose is to enhance community and neighbourhood safety by providing a way for people within the community to make a complaint to the government about properties that habitually negatively impact the health, safety, or security of one or more persons in a neighbourhood and/or interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of one or more properties in a community or neighbourhood. This bill will provide for a government agency through the Ministry of the Solicitor General and Public Safety to respond to these complaints and put an end to activity that adversely affects or harms a neighbourhood. I'm thinking that this amendment means that that power can be delegated to an employee.

The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act would place a tool in the hands of law enforcement which will allow immediate action to be taken when safety in Alberta's communities is at risk. Bill 212 would give a director of law enforcement the power to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench to have restrictions placed upon a property when there is a balance of probability indicating that illegal or disruptive activity is occurring. This restriction could include removing excessive fortifications from a property or placing a community closure order on it. Among the many possible repercussions community safety orders would provide the property to be closed for a period of 90 days. After the end of this order the owners of the property would be permitted to return while any troublemaking tenant would be permanently evicted.

The individuals in my constituency that I've talked to about this believe that these restrictions will really be effective in reducing

dangerous activities in our communities and that they are a creative way to address the concerns that they have that there is a compromise to safety and the quality of life in our community. This forces property owners who are involved in activities which present a danger to communities to vacate the premises for a period of time, and we're therefore taking away their opportunity to put neighbours at risk. This is particularly true when we're talking about drug houses, where property is, I guess, attached to hazardous activities because the police can't know everything, and individuals in the community can take responsibility and report these things.

Bill 212 represents an opportunity for improvement because it outlines a specific process of reducing activities which can harm the public. It gives an opportunity to make our province a safer place for children by being proactive and focusing on the prevention rather than waiting for harm or dangerousness to reach a level of crisis. I really like that approach. I think this legislation ends up controlling dangerous activity through civil rather than criminal sanctions, and it allows us as Assembly members to take direct actions to protect Albertans. All Albertans have a right to live in a safe and secure environment.

The provisions of this proposed act empower citizens to identify activities which could disrupt families' healthy existence, and it provides a direct route to address criminals. With immediate and direct attention as is called for with Bill 212 – and I don't see anything in the amendments changing that – disruptive activity taking place in communities will not be given the opportunity to flourish.

A number of other jurisdictions have already passed very similar versions of this legislation. The provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia and Yukon have all brought forth legislation similar to this, especially the Saskatchewan version.

This legislation empowers citizens to take back control of their neighbourhoods by reporting problem nuisances and businesses. It will also hold property owners accountable for threatening or disturbing activities regularly taking place on their properties. I really think that that's an important step, and I applaud the Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing this forward.

We know that the police do not have the resources to deal with all the complaints they receive even if the information is reliable. There simply are not enough police officers, so this bill will create another investigative agency, staffed by trained investigators. The member had that explained to me the other day. They will be trained to deal with problem properties in neighbourhoods where illegal activities are occurring. Any tool to deal with the rise in crime in Alberta is welcome.

I'm happy to support Bill 212. I do have a question, though, about the first amendment that's suggested here, 1.1. I wonder if I could get that explained more clearly.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to contribute to the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. After a very positive second reading debate the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays has moved amendments to the legislation in order to further strengthen the bill. With the proposal of amendment A the powers, duties, and functions of the director may be delegated to an employee under the administration of the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. This would allow the acting director to deal with the various requirements that may arise under the proposed act.

Mr. Chairman, the director plays a significant role in many aspects of Bill 212. Within the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act there are certain necessary functions that only the director can

accomplish. This role is vital to this bill. For example, complaints are given by concerned Albertans to the director. The director then assesses their validity. Section 3 of the act explains that complaints may be given to the director when a person believes their community is being adversely affected by activities within it or if property in the community is being habitually used for a specific purpose. The director is required to process the complaints by checking their validity and completeness before deciding the proper course of action. This will help ensure that those who have made complaints to the director will have their case heard as quickly as possible.

Amendment A, which has been proposed for Bill 212, allows for action to be taken by the acting director upon receiving the complaint. The transfer of duties will reduce the backlog of cases for the director upon returning to the position and ensures that concerns in the community are being dealt with in an expedient manner.

Under section 4 the director has the authority, upon receiving the complaint, to act in the best interest of the community. This includes investigating the complaint, sending a warning letter to the appropriate party, applying to the Court of Queen's Bench for a community safety order, and making a decision not to act in certain cases.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to the community safety order there is a provision which states that a complaint can be taken to court on an urgent basis. This may require the director to close the property from use and occupation on a specific day and keep it closed for up to 90 days.

A director can also apply to vary any order. Consequently, proposed amendment A would allow the director authority to be exercised when an order needs to be modified. This accommodates those who are indirectly affected by the actions taken by the director or the acting director. It can assist families who are not directly involved with the complaint to continue their daily routine. This may require further investigation, but the option to retain possession of their property will be available. Conversely, the acting director would have the authority to remove those remaining within the property upon further complaints.

While a community safety order may also be modified by a resident of the property, it must be sent to the director. This can discontinue an application for a complaint or the closure of a property. Furthermore, the modification of any order might need the appearance of the director in certain cases. It may also be necessary for a director or acting director to present the case. When the director deems the application for either a community safety order or an application for a variation frivolous or not in the public's interest, that would be a need for his or her presence in court. This would ensure that the director's position is heard and that the rationale of each case is presented.

The proposed amendment listed as amendment A provides an opportunity to address the concerns through the delegation of the director's powers and duties if need be.

Mr. Chairman, section 24 of the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act states that it is the responsibility of the director to handle property closures appropriately. Closure of a property once a community safety order is granted would require the director to be available to ensure that the copy of the order is both given to the respondent as well as being posted in a conspicuous place on the property. The director may enter the property to close it and keep it closed with or without the consent of the property owner.

Also, under Bill 212 the director would have the authority to take any measures in order to safely and effectively close the property and keep it closed. This includes ordering the occupants to vacate the premises, attaching locks or other secure devices, erecting fences, changing or terminating utility services, and/or making

alterations to the property to ensure that it is not a hazard while it is being closed.

3:40

Amendment A as proposed would allow for the employee under the authority of the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Safety to enact the safest possible solutions available under Bill 212 if the director was temporarily unavailable. According to the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act the director must ensure the necessary means to achieve that a property closure is met. If a director is not around when a property closure is scheduled, the process might not be handled smoothly.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the availability of a director is important to Bill 212 for information-gathering purposes. The investigation of any complaint would require the gathering of all necessary facts. Section 29 goes into details on the authority of the director with respect to information gathering. The director is authorized to collect data on those in question from various sources, including public bodies. Without a director present, access to the proper information would pose a challenge to the investigation. The ability of the director to gather crucial information gives the bill its strength. Through proposed amendment A, which allows for the delegation of the director's powers, duties, or functions, an investigation can be conducted thoroughly and accurately in all cases.

In conclusion, Bill 212 as proposed via amendment A has granted the authority of the director to be given to an employee under the administration of the minister. It gives the authoritative power necessary to continue with and carry out the objectives in Bill 212. By doing so, the director's role would always be available to provide safe communities for all Albertans.

The safety of communities throughout this province should not be put on hold for any circumstance no matter what may happen. Amendment A as proposed would not allow for security to be jeopardized. Mr. Chairman, I feel that Bill 212 is a positive piece of legislation and that the proposed amendment to section 1 will help strengthen it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to address the amendment, 1.1. I have a concern with that in that I really would like a clarification from the mover of this amendment as to who exactly that employee could be. I think this is a very good bill, and I've seen effective community behaviours in helping to identify crack houses or whatever. However, I see a problem with the director and going to the employee, who, I assume, will be one of the government police. Then I'm not sure how the two would actually work with the police department that's in charge of that particular area. I think I would like a little clearer definition on how that exactly would work in terms of working with the police departments that are responsible.

When I hear that a complaint can be made to a director and then it's going to go here and then it's going to go there, in that time frame a good gang could have had that house sold and moved out in two seconds flat. I'm just wondering how quickly these directors and these employees would be able to operate because I really can see people moving in and out of these houses as rapidly as they need to so that they don't get caught.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. Certainly, this bill, as

many members have noted, is a step in the right direction. Illegal activity, criminal activity in communities and neighbourhoods does increasingly present a serious challenge and often a threat to the safety of community members, people who live there, children, and others. So the provisions of this bill certainly are an attempt to address this growing threat to security of neighbourhoods and safety of neighbourhoods and communities.

Most of the provisions of the bill deal with what responsibilities the director will have and how the director will discharge those responsibilities. There's a fair bit of detail with respect to the responsibilities not only of the director but of other people, such as inspectors, who may be empowered by the director or by this act to undertake activities, all of which taken together will help prevent the incidence of crime in these communities and, if necessary, to be able to close down buildings and residences where such activities may take place.

There are provisions in the act which allow appeals to the orders or the decisions made by the director or people working on the director's behalf. So there is a due process provision duly included in here, which is a good thing, Mr. Chairman.

There's a fair bit of detail from section 24 onwards with respect to the closure of properties by the director and matters related to the recovery of costs in closing the property.

The bill, Mr. Chairman, is a good one. The amendments that are made: most of them are changes to language, either fixing minor grammatical problems or the terms that are used. The bill follows quite closely bills that are already law in other provinces. Manitoba has had this kind of bill in place for five years; Saskatchewan, over three. Nova Scotia and the Northwest Territories or Yukon have had similar bills proclaimed more recently, in the last year or so.

The usefulness of this kind of piece of legislation is demonstrated by the practices that have ensued and the ability of the governments in other provinces to get after the individuals or groups, gangs or criminals, individuals who take advantage of the relative anonymity of neighbourhoods, set up their operations related to illegal drugs and whatever have you in those places, and use those as safe houses for engaging in activities which certainly are to the detriment of both communities and individuals living in those communities. Particularly, I think our concern must focus on the exposure of children to such illegal and criminal activities.

Most of the sections of amendment A1 are quite good. This will improve the bill, clarify the bill, make it consistent with the language that is used in this province as distinct from the language that may be used in other provincial and territorial jurisdictions.

The concern expressed about the very first element in amendment A, which has to do with allowing the director to delegate his or her powers, duties, or functions to an employee under the administration of the minister, is one that can be addressed, I guess, in the development of regulations. I think the suggestion that was made that there is a need for clarification as to what level of employees should be able to receive the delegation of powers from the director is a good suggestion, but I think it's a matter that perhaps is better dealt with in the development of regulation pursuant to the passage of this act here in this Assembly.

One concern that I have, Mr. Chairman, with respect to the bill as it stands is a matter that was raised by the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I just want to get to the letter. The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner and the commissioner in particular, I think, rightly draw attention to the section of the bill which will override the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The point that the commissioner has made is that this is unnecessary. The section that he refers to is section 30(2) of Bill 212. The commissioner clearly says that it is unnecessary to have that section in the bill. In fact, he recommends that this particular

section be deleted. This is the right time in the debate on the bill, when the bill is in the committee, for the recommendation made by the commissioner to receive attention, I think.

3:50

The last paragraph of the news release that was issued by the commissioner's office I think makes an important point, and I will just read that particular paragraph – it's a short one – into the record, Mr. Chairman. The last paragraph states:

The FOIP Act sets out the Alberta Government's commitment for openness, accountability and protection of privacy. The Commissioner is concerned that override provisions which are unnecessary fail to recognize the purpose and objectives of the FOIP Act.

That's a fairly strong statement, in my judgment, Mr. Chairman, coming from the commissioner. I think we shouldn't be passing legislation in this House that suffers from that kind of failure and fails to recognize the purpose and objectives of another act of this Legislature. The concern, I think, is about section 30(2), and the concern deals with the ability of this act to ensure that the informant or a member of the community who lodges a complaint to the director has his or her identity kept confidential. The confidentiality issue is certainly an important one, but the commissioner's own observations suggest that the provisions of the FOIP Act already ensure that such confidentiality can be maintained and that the identity of the person who lodges the complaint with the director can be fully protected under the provisions of the FOIP Act. That's my only concern about the amendment: that it omits to include in the list of various elements of amendment A1 the deletion of this section 30(2) of Bill 212.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mittel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today and join the discussion on Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, at the committee stage. Before I start, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to acknowledge the efforts of the Member for Calgary-Hays. This bill represents an example of how we can move one step closer to making our communities safer for all Albertans. This legislation could empower Alberta citizens and enhance their sense of ownership and responsibility within the community while lessening the load on our hard-working police staff. As a government we have committed to creating safe and secure communities throughout the province, and this bill is a step in the right direction.

With that said, Mr. Chairman, I'll now speak primarily to the proposed amendments to section 29 of the act. This section is important to the overarching structure of the bill as it describes the role of the director and his abilities regarding the collection of information from the accused. The proposed amendment seeks to add the words "including personal information" after "collect information" in subsection (1)(a), (b), and (c). This would help to clarify any possible ambiguity with the jurisdictional limits of the director. Mr. Chairman, the range as well as the right to obtain this information is not clearly or sufficiently defined within the current wording. The addition of "personal information" solidifies the authority to obtain information about an identifiable individual or personal and distinguishable characteristics of that individual.

Mr. Chairman, personal information is clearly defined in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, section 1(n). The reference to personal information within the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act provides precedents for the legal meaning of personal information as well as an understanding of which aspects should be included. Therefore, as stated in the FOIP Act and as proposed in amendment F to Bill 212, the personal information which could possibly be collected by investigators

includes the person's name and address, the whereabouts of the person, and the person's place of employment. Access to this information would further the director's ability to make a well-informed decision on the complaint.

Mr. Chairman, the description of collectible information within Bill 212 combined with the proposed changes to section 29(2) also protects Albertans from misinterpretation. For example, acquiring personal information could otherwise include infringement on an individual's rights, such as information revealing the individual's race, ethnic origin, religious or political beliefs, or associations; the individual's age, sex, marital status, or family status; an identification number or symbol assigned to the individual; fingerprints; other biometric information, including blood type, genetic information, or inheritable characteristics; information about the individual's health and health care history, including information about a physical or mental disability; or information about the individual's educational, financial, or employment history. Quite simply, the amendments proposed for section 29 clarify the director's investigatory scope.

Bill 212 would protect communities and neighbourhoods in Alberta from disruptive or illegal activities that may cause harm or create a potential to cause harm while also ensuring that Albertans' rights are properly protected. Mr. Chairman, following implementation of Bill 212, a person may file a complaint if they believe that their community or neighbourhood is being adversely affected by activities on or near property in the community or neighbourhood or if the activities on the property indicate that the property is being habitually used for a specified use beyond the inhabitants' legal authority.

To state the obvious, Mr. Chairman, this legislation could allow for a vast amount of complaints to flow through the director's office. Without being supplied with all the information available pertaining to a particular complaint, how can the director make effective or accurate decisions regarding the complaint in question? Once again, the inclusion of personal information in section 29(1)(a), (b), and (c) clarifies the ability of the director to make just decisions on accurate information without infringing on the rights of individuals and without the meaning of the legislation being lost in interpretation.

The importance of the inclusion of personal information is reiterated in the proposed amendment to section 29(2). By substituting the preamending wording with the proposed amendment, any possibility of confusion or appeal by an individual under complaint should be reduced. The clarification of the rights of Alberta's directors will allow for a smoother process for all.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to also mention to the hon. members that the proposed amendments to section 29 are supported by the access and privacy branch of Service Alberta. The access and privacy branch is the entity responsible for co-ordinating and administering Alberta's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act as well as providing support to the government of Alberta and local public bodies that are required to comply with the act. The access and privacy branch also co-ordinates the province-wide administration of Alberta's Personal Information Protection Act and assists private-sector organizations that are subject to the act.

To carry out its mandate, the branch provides publications and resource materials on its FOIP and PIPA websites. The expert feedback they have provided on amendment F will further the positive impact Bill 212 can make.

4:00

Mr. Chairman, this bill will represent a valuable service enhancement for all Albertans. As Alberta continues to grow, the necessity of legislation which furthers the ability of communities to remain safe and secure is paramount.

Once again, I'd like to acknowledge the efforts of the Member for Calgary-Hays and urge all members here to vote in favour of Bill 212 and its proposed amendments. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to support the concerns raised by my colleague from Lethbridge-East with regard to the amendment and to support the Member for Calgary-Hays on this important piece of proposed legislation and to express the concerns of my constituents regarding public safety. I've had some direct experience over the past decade or more in considering these issues, and what I've learned, particularly from community groups, is that public involvement is key to public safety, most certainly over the long run.

Mr. Chairman, rising levels of gang activity are of great concern to Calgarians and Albertans in general. Increased gang presence represents serious potential encroachment, even entrenchment, within our communities of a criminal presence amongst law-abiding families and individuals. Crack houses, grow ops, and meth labs are dangerous to the public safety of Albertans and to their health and well-being. One of my brothers is a firefighter, an officer with the Calgary fire department, and these criminal operations in our neighbourhoods also present a risk and danger to such stalwart citizens providing services in our communities. We need to clean our communities up by cleaning these facilities out. Indeed, we need to take our communities back.

In order to accomplish this, we must facilitate the involvement of community members, who absolutely must feel protected in coming forward. That is key. We must protect concerned, involved citizens who step forward to report suspicious activities. Protecting these individuals will encourage them to contact authorities again the next time and will encourage others to do the same. These sections are of particular significance to this important proposed piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very, very pleased to rise and to commend the Member for Calgary-Hays for his fine, fine work in bringing this bill forward. It's a very important bill and an important bill to my constituents in Edmonton-Manning, and certainly the amendments I believe do strengthen the bill.

The one that's of a particular interest to me and very important to some communities in my neighbourhood is the addition of the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act to the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I had the honour of putting together the 20th anniversary memorial of the Edmonton tornado in the Evergreen community, which sustained some difficult losses in that tragedy. The one thing that came through to me in that was the strength of the community and how many people have stayed in Evergreen for many, many years. In fact, 25 per cent of that community is still there or have moved back since that time 20 years ago. They want to keep their community safe. They want to keep their community growing. They want to keep it a good and strong community. Sometimes in the recent past there have been some problems. You know, this act will come a long way to I think deal with some of those problems, and including the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act was very important in strengthening this bill so that it can be used for that community.

In general in northeast Edmonton this will be very helpful. We've had a number of instances that I've known about and a number that continue to be a problem. There are those that rent these houses and

don't seem to care. Well, I think this will bring them to bear and focus them pretty quickly. There are those that attract criminal activity because of their own ways. We've had one particular place I know that's been off and on that way for 30 years because the individual, although he does nothing criminal himself, sort of has lots of friends in that community. This will, I'm certain, begin to allay the fears of their neighbourhood and the police service and all the rest of them and begin to clean up that problem that's been in that particular neighbourhood for quite some time.

Again, I commend the Member for Calgary-Hays. I think he's done a very fine job in bringing this forward. I hope that the amendments and the bill pass with strength. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today and join the debate in committee stage of Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I would like to speak today about two proposed amendments. Amendment B proposes to add "or a tenancy agreement as defined in the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act" in section 2(1)(f), and secondly, amendment Q proposes to amend the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act by adding the following section after section 4:

Notwithstanding anything in this Act, if an order is made pursuant to the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act that terminates a tenancy or entitles a landlord to possession of the mobile home site, the tenancy terminates and the landlord regains possession in accordance with the order.

Mr. Chairman, illegal activity can occur anywhere, including in mobile-home communities. Mobile-home owners purchase their homes as an investment, just like people who buy houses or condos. The communities in which these investments are made should be subject to the same legislation. After all, Bill 212 is making all neighbourhoods more safe and secure. Mobile-home communities experience the same safety concerns as any other community. In some cases there may be a perception of added security for those who choose to break the law in these communities as they can be located outside the city limits and include a large number of residences in a concentrated area. With a high concentration of housing, drug dealers may also view these communities as providing an ample supply of buyers and sellers. These areas, like all other Alberta communities, could greatly benefit from the proposed legislation, and these amendments, amendments B and Q, allow for that.

Bill 212 would empower Albertans to kick this kind of activity out of their communities. The Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act is legislation that governs residential tenancy agreements for people who own or occupy a mobile home. A mobile home, also called a manufactured home, is usually a factory-built, single-family dwelling which can be moved from one place to another. It should be noted that the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act does not apply to holiday trailers or recreational vehicles being used for recreational purposes. A tenant under the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act is the owner of a mobile home who rents a mobile-home site from a landlord. If the owner rents the mobile home to another person, the act does not apply. The Residential Tenancies Act applies to this tenancy relationship. The proposed amendments ensure that mobile-home owners as well as tenants would be covered under the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act.

All dwellings should be subject to the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, and all residents who use their property for activity deemed unacceptable in this act should be subject to the same consequences as those who live in any other type of dwelling. Mr. Chairman, all Albertans have the right to live in a safe commu-

nity. Including these proposed amendments would ensure that the possession, growth, and sale of drugs and all other offences listed in the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act would not be tolerated in mobile homes and mobile-home communities.

4:10

Like any kind of housing, mobile homes can be purchased as a primary residence or can also be rented out to individuals with a tenancy agreement. Tenants may sublet this site to another tenant. A tenancy agreement may indicate that the landlord's consent is required to sublet; however, a landlord cannot unreasonably withhold the consent. The tenant arrangement can be on a month-to-month basis or can be longer, depending on the wants and needs of the landlord and the renter.

Currently for mobile-home owners and landlords there are two ways of dealing with problem tenants: one is with a 48-hour notice and the other is with a 14-day notice to vacate the premises. A 14-day notice is also called a substantial breach. If a tenant physically assaults a landlord or another tenant or there is significant damage to a mobile-home site or common area, the landlord can apply to the court to end the tenancy or give the tenant a 48-hour written notice to end the tenancy. If a tenant has been given a 48-hour notice but does not move out, the landlord has five days after tenancy ends to apply for a court order that confirms that the tenancy will end. If the landlord doesn't apply within the five days, the 48-hour notice is no longer valid, which means that the tenancy has not ended.

A substantial breach occurs when a tenant does not carry out any of the obligations under the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act or when the tenant commits a series of breaches of the tenancy agreement and the cumulative effect is damaging. If a tenant commits a substantial breach of the tenancy agreement, with the exception of nonpayment of rent, the landlord can apply to the court to end the tenancy or give the tenant a 14-day notice to end the tenancy.

Now, the amendment amending the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act to include the tenancy agreements of mobile-home sites would provide landlords with a good tool to use when faced with illegal activity occurring in and around the property.

Mr. Chairman, the amendment also includes provisions for mobile-home occupants to own their home and live there as their primary residence. First-time homeowners often see single mobile homes as a good alternative to buying a house, as stand-alone structures that have yards, good square footage, and enough room to raise a family.

Mobile-home communities have lots of children and seniors, who deserve the same protection as all Albertans. Without these proposed amendments mobile-home communities could possibly see an increase in criminal activity as these areas may not be appropriately addressed by this legislation. So if a landlord is unable to effectively evict tenants for activities that are in this bill, renters who are being evicted from other communities may see a mobile-home park as a viable option to continue their illegal activities.

I applaud the important direction of this bill, and I believe that the proposed amendments B and Q are necessary to ensure that all communities will benefit from the tool this bill provides and all of which work toward keeping communities safe. Mobile home communities are not exempt from the devastation criminal activity can bring to a neighbourhood, and therefore they should not be exempted from this bill.

Mr. Chairman, ensuring that mobile home communities are protected by this legislation and that all the consequences set out in this bill will apply to all members of these communities that choose to break the law is necessary if this legislation is meant to protect all

Albertans. I would like to urge all members to support this bill, including the proposed amendments B and Q, because of the positive role this legislation could play in Alberta communities.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm really pleased to rise and speak to amendment A1 to Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. You know, first of all, I want to applaud the Member for Calgary-Hays for, first, sponsoring the bill and then for his amendment A1. I think that with these amendments we will be able to strengthen this Bill 212. As well, we will strengthen the community. Anything for safety, you know, is very important for all of us, and I commend the member for adding extra amendments to improve this bill.

Mr. Chairman, now with these amendments I think this bill allows for communities and neighbourhoods to have a say in the safety and security of all communities. This is all about community empowerment and allowing people to be active in ensuring the safety of their neighbourhoods.

This bill also would enable another tool for the people to access above and beyond calling the police, who sometimes do not have the resources to effectively deal with and gather the necessary evidence to deal with some illegal activities. For instance, there may not be necessary resources to conduct a full investigation of a possible house being used for purposes of meth production, drug trafficking, illegal liquor sales, or any other criminal offences. People within the community are witnesses to critical circumstantial evidence, including illegal activities like vehicle traffic at odd hours, noxious smells, and disposal of certain toxic substances that police services could only determine through constant surveillance. Given the pressures the police forces face, this is another tool to be utilized for community safety.

A director of the Ministry of Solicitor General and Public Security can now investigate the complaint and take a number of steps, including informal resolution, warning letters, or application to the courts for community safety orders. These are all effective tools to discourage the illegal activities that may be harming the security of the neighbourhood. The amendments in this bill will also be effective in putting more pressure on criminal organizations that use property to carry out illegal activities. It will also allow for people to take control of the direction their neighbourhoods take to ensure safe and healthy communities.

Mr. Chairman, the investigator can also call in the support of police services or peace officers if need be, depending on the evidence. This ensures the safety of the civilian investigators and creates an integrated dynamic between the investigative unit and the police services.

4:20

Mr. Chairman, you know, this bill is all about empowering citizens to take back their communities, and it is another tool in the fight against illegal activities in our communities. The police do not have the resources to deal with all the complaints they receive even if the information is reliable. There simply are not enough police officers. We had task force recommendations, and I'm not sure how many police officers the government is going to recruit. I don't have that detail in front of me, but I heard from my community, especially my riding, and they keep on asking and putting pressure on some of the ministers that they should give us some more police officers in that area because the crime rate is really high. This is very important for all the communities.

This creates another investigative agency staffed by trained investigators to deal with the problem properties in neighbourhoods

where illegal activities are occurring. Any tool – any tool – to deal with the rise in crime in Alberta is welcome, and this sends a message to criminal organizations and those who commit illegal activities that the people are watching and that they will not tolerate criminal behaviour in their neighbourhoods. The stakes can be high. Meth houses, child exploitation: these are serious offences, Mr. Chairman, and need to be monitored by all sources, not just the police. This bill provides that mechanism, and this is critical in the fight to win back our neighbourhoods from criminal activities. This is a bill worthy of support. I will support this bill, and I applaud the Member for Calgary-Hays once again.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Ducharme: Good afternoon and thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and join the debate regarding Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. It is the responsibility of the Committee of the Whole to deconstruct the legislation brought before it in order to produce laws that best serve the interests of Albertans. The bill before us today and the proposed amendments certainly uphold the interests of this province.

Mr. Chairman, the Roman philosopher Seneca is quoted as stating: he who does not prevent a crime when he can encourages it. We can use this sentiment being addressed when we analyze the purpose of Bill 212: to protect communities and neighbourhoods in Alberta from disruptive and illegal activities. This would be accomplished by taking a hard look at the areas where these activities are taking place and holding the property owners accountable for those activities. In other words, we investigate the suspicious drug dens and criminal dwellings which may plague some of Alberta's communities, investigate them and take appropriate action depending upon the activity and reaction of the participants.

This legislation, it seems, becomes a preventative measure with the aim of improving public safety in Alberta communities in a more direct manner. Mr. Chairman, it doesn't get much clearer than that. This proposed legislation is a tool that Albertans can empower themselves with in order to feel confident that their neighbourhoods are crime free. Having briefly gone over the character of the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, I would now like to take the opportunity to dig into some specifics related to the proposed amendments listed as E, K, L, and M.

Mr. Chairman, I'll begin by introducing the common concept of caveat emptor. Generally speaking, this is the property law doctrine that controls the sale of real estate property after the date of closing. Under this doctrine the buyer takes responsibility for the condition of the property they purchase and should therefore examine it before acquisition. The only exception to this is if the seller overtly covered up latent defects. This concept is embedded in property legislation as a means of protecting the seller from unwarranted legal action.

I bring this up, Mr. Chairman, since Bill 212 as proposed is a piece of legislation with specific inherent features that refer to property and property rights. The Constitution Act, 1867, allocated legislative power over property and civil rights to the provinces. This included general property law, which encompasses succession law and matrimonial property law. The property laws of the common law provinces are generally similar, but one area in which the real property law does differ is in the system of recording the ownership of land.

In the Atlantic provinces and southern Ontario there is a deed registration system. However, in the four western provinces and northern Ontario there is the land titles, or Torrens, system. Under the deed registration system individuals establish ownership to land

as a result of their predecessors on the deed. Theoretically, to establish ownership, they should trace the title to the original grant of the land from the Crown. In southern Ontario it is necessary to show a good root of title dating back 40 years.

Under the land titles, or Torrens, system the state registers all lands within its jurisdiction by listing who owns them and who has claims against them. Prospective purchasers only need to be concerned with who the register says is the owner and not with whether there is a good root of title.

As we can see, property law itself is characterized by a great degree of historical continuity and terminology. I believe it would be in the best legal interests of Albertans that Bill 212 conform to this continuity. By saying this, I mean that when the bill in question makes specific mention of property, it is important that it utilizes the term "caveat" as opposed to other terms. This is the substance of the changes outlined in proposed amendments E, K, L, and M. These are significant, Mr. Chairman, as they would allow this act to fall into sync with other legislation relating to the rights of buyers and sellers in property matters. By doing this, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act would avoid any legal confusion.

As alluded to, various sections of Bill 212 require amendments in order to fall in line with this idea. For example, proposed amendment E asks that section 21 be amended (a) by striking out "an interest" wherever it occurs and substituting "a caveat," (b) by striking out "the interest" wherever it occurs and substituting "the caveat," and (c) by repealing subsection (4) and substituting the following:

(4) The registration of a caveat may be discharged pursuant to subsection (3) with respect to any or all parcels of land described in the community safety order.

(4.1) Notwithstanding section 138 of the Land Titles Act, a caveat registered pursuant to this section does not lapse and shall not be cancelled or withdrawn except at the Director's request.

A similar argument is relevant with respect to proposed amendment M, which asks that section 46 be amended (a) by striking out "an interest" wherever it occurs and substituting "a caveat," (b) by striking out "the interest" wherever it occurs and substituting "the caveat," and (c) by repealing subsection (4) and substituting the following:

(4) The registration of a caveat may be discharged pursuant to subsection (3) with respect to any or all parcels of land described in the community safety order.

(4.1) Notwithstanding section 138 of the Land Titles Act, a caveat registered pursuant to this section does not lapse and shall not be cancelled or withdrawn except at the Director's request.

These amendments are supported by the introduction of the term "caveat" in place of the term "interest." As I've indicated, this properly aligns the bill with our system of property law.

If I may beg your indulgence, Mr. Chairman, I would like to briefly outline that amendments K and L also seek to include the term "caveat" into the legislative framework of the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. This would be done by adding the specific clause stating:

(a.1) if the Director intends to register a caveat under section 46, specific references to the certificates of title with respect to which the order is made.

This new clause would be added to sections 43(2) and 44(2) after clause (a) respectively. Again we see the inclusion of the term "caveat," and I would again note the importance of this inclusion based on my prior line of reasoning.

4:30

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the proposed amendments are a step in the right direction, and the debate that has taken place is a necessary one. I encourage all members to support Bill 212 with its proposed amendment. As we are discussing the possibility of

property transfers, we must provide a context by which we would protect the rights of the potential buyers and sellers. The use of appropriate terminology assists in the construction of a more valid framework for this important legislation.

As I began my speech by referencing Seneca, I would like to finish it by reminding my colleagues of his sentiment that the prevention of crime is a crucial step in eliminating it. A safer Alberta begins with safer communities. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've been listening very intently to the debate and eagerly awaiting my turn, and I thank you for this opportunity. Now, typically when we see an amendment introduced in the House, it is usually very specific and it's usually very targeted, especially in Committee of the Whole. We're actually amending one section, taking out a clause, adding in another clause, or basically amending a certain section in the act. Bill 212, as you know Mr. Chairman, is a private member's bill. I spoke to it in second reading, and it is, in fact, my pleasure again to participate at this stage, being Committee of the Whole.

Typically on the opposition side we like to sever omnibus amendments into their individual sections, into their individual pieces, usually because of a concern that we have that sometimes the government attempts to lump together pieces that are good with pieces that are bad. It forces us, actually, to be in a situation where it's a take-it-all or leave-it-all scenario. I have to confess that this amendment, the draft of which was dated November 8, was shared with us in the Official Opposition sometime, I think, last week, and I also have to confess that today was the first time I've seen it. I'm not sure when it reached our research department, but they assured me that there is nothing contentious in it, that it doesn't raise any particular flags for us, and that it's for the most part based on the comparable Saskatchewan legislation. As such, I'm not going to be voicing any opposition to the amendment as it is worded. I just wanted to emphasize that it was our preference to see this broken down so that in the future we're not forced to either take it all or leave it all.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I wanted to confirm that on this side of the House we definitely applaud and appreciate any initiative that reduces crime, that basically addresses the issue of crime, which is an issue that is of concern to most Albertans, young and old. We particularly like initiatives that engage the community. We like initiatives that get people behind law enforcement and sometimes even in front of law enforcement. We have advocated for a long time to the government that the government should really put its money where its mouth is. By saying that, I'm basically talking about the various, you know, committees and task forces and studies that have been commissioned over the years to deal with crime in so many different ways. Sometimes it's child exploitation. Sometimes it is the situation about drug and substance abuse. Sometimes it's about, you know, prostitution, gang violence, drinking age, minimum drink prices, and so on and so forth. So many recommendations come and go, and so many committees come and go. Task forces come and go.

If you ask me, Mr. Chairman, I would have much rather seen this bill as a government bill, as some government bill that is the work and the sponsorship of the Solicitor General, for example, or the Minister of Justice. But failing that, I'm pleased that it's a private member's bill, and I'm pleased that at least somebody from the government side is finally recognizing the role for the community and, you know, moving forward.

We just recently had the announcement about the safe communities task force. The community actually met together, and they had

these public hearings, and they produced a document that is a good read. The government is promising to move forward on this, and they're asking us to be patient. Today in question period, in reaction to one of my questions, we were told that we have to stay tuned because it's going to appear in the budget next spring. I'm going to be watching very carefully and eagerly that it does because if it doesn't, we're going to be asking very hard questions as to why not.

About a month ago or so, Mr. Chairman, the sponsor of Bill 212 and myself and the Solicitor General and other members, namely the former Solicitor General as well, were attending the International Conference on Crime Reduction in Banff, Alberta. I have to tell you, I thoroughly enjoyed myself and learned a lot at the Banff conference. It was structured in such a way to bring members from the law enforcement community, lecturers, statisticians, people who study crime, and even people who were affected by crime all together under one roof to talk about ways to reduce crime. We covered a lot of ground, and I'm going to share with you some of the stuff I learned, which really hit the nail on the head in terms of Bill 212 and community engagement and community involvement.

The opening ceremony keynote was basically talking about something called reassurance policing. It's the type of community policing that, basically, reassures the community, that tells the community that we realize that there is a particular crime issue, and here's how we're dealing with it. It's not only actual crime, Mr. Chairman; it's the fear of crime. People are anxious, people are apprehensive, and reassurance policing addresses that. This particular keynote was extremely well received, and it was given by a person who is a PhD from Cardiff University in the U.K. His name is Martin Innes. We learned lots in that presentation.

Then the following couple of days we actually broke out into concurrent sessions where people listened to a presentation but then had a question-and-answer period right after. The one I attended first was something about public transit, ensuring safety and order. It was talking about the entire trip, Mr. Chairman, realizing that sometimes problems on public transit have a spillover effect in the community that is immediately adjacent. So our approach as per that discussion was the whole trip safety approach, where the person has to feel safe from the minute they leave their door, walking to the station or the stop, being on public transit during the trip, and then descending from public transit, walking to their destination, and then vice versa on their way back.

One of the people that I have to highlight on that panel was Mike Derbyshire, who is the director of safety and security, Edmonton Transit. Mike was basically seconded from being an Edmonton police officer to the public transit, and he takes that leading role very, very seriously. I have to applaud him because, yes, crime on public transit, for example, has that spillover effect.

The next session had to do with strategic approaches to crime reduction. One of the presenters who I thoroughly enjoyed and learned lots from was Ward Clapham. He's the superintendent of the RCMP Richmond detachment. It talks about, you know, blending both proactive and reactive strategies together, highlighting the fact that communities have to be engaged, you know, talking about crime reduction at the local community level, including evidence-based problem solving, evidence gathering, intelligence gathering, and so on. The community knows what the community has to deal with. We can tell them what we think is right or what we think needs to be done, but the community knows what ails it, and the community can tell us how to address that.

Superintendent Clapham actually has 25 years under his belt, and he has written some books that I urge members from the Assembly to maybe consider reading over the Christmas holiday, many books on community policing and, you know, root problem solving.

The fourth session which I attended was talking about turning

around subsidized housing and neighbourhood quality of life, to fix the broken window theory. It basically talks about taking pride in your rental property ownership, dealing with disorder, avoiding slums, avoiding ghettos or the ghettoization of our lower income people. Again, it addresses things like the fear of crime because sometimes when people are afraid of crime, they themselves tend to be aggressive, or they themselves tend to be more prone to disorder, conducting disorder, or causing more trouble or more problems.

One of the presenters, which I have to highlight, was Constable Dale Brenneis from the Edmonton Police Service, who is actually championing something called the crime free multi-housing project here in Edmonton, Mr. Chairman. I'm sure you've heard of it. It's a pilot project that I think should be expanded upon and should be implemented across the province.

4:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for the opportunity to join the Committee of the Whole on Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Member for Calgary-Hays. The hon. member has demonstrated exceptional leadership in community crime prevention by placing this legislation before us, and the committee should give it a test.

Our government must continue to provide police services with the support they need to adequately address unsafe properties that threaten the quality of life within all our communities. Thanks to the proposed amendments listed as amendments B and Q, all mobile-home properties will be included under this bill. After all, safety is important to every Albertan community. I especially appreciate this because I do have a large mobile-home community within my constituency.

Mr. Rodney: Do you live there?

Ms DeLong: I live very close by.

Bill 212 provides a clearly defined mechanism for residents to act on their concerns if they identify illegal or suspicious activity occurring in their neighbourhood. Section 3 of Bill 212 establishes that if residents in a community have noticed activities that are negatively affecting their neighbourhood and these activities are of a criminal nature or could present all the evidence to be deemed as such, the residents are then empowered with a complaint measure. The residents can take their concerns to an appointed director of law enforcement, who will then proceed by assessing the legitimacy of the complaint and decide on the appropriate action that should be pursued to solve the concern.

Mr. Chairman, this is a fundamental part of the process. Residents who have encountered conflicts with unsafe or hazardous properties in their neighbourhoods have indicated in some instances that their concerns are not being properly addressed. As I believe was mentioned earlier in this debate, proposed amendment A ensures the complaint mechanism can function properly in all circumstances by granting the authority to delegate the powers, duties, and functions of the director to another employee under the administration of the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Safety. By establishing a fully functional complaint mechanism, Bill 212 with its proposed amendments will provide a course of action that will give attention to these issues when they arise in a community.

Section 4(1) of Bill 212 details the thoroughness in which complaints are dealt with and allows for the director to take action depending on the seriousness of the matter being reviewed. Provisions in this section of the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act are intended to eliminate concerns that are frivolous,

vexatious, or may be more appropriately dealt with through an alternative route.

If the complaint requires decisive and strong action, then the next stage of the procedure, as outlined in section 5(1), could be the issuance of a community safety order. Before the community safety order is processed, the Court of Queen's Bench will determine, based on the facts that have been presented for its review, whether the property and its surrounding area are being adversely affected. The court will base its assessment, as indicated in section 6(1), on all activities that present an "immediate threat to the health, safety and security of one or more occupants of the property or persons in the community or neighbourhood." This is a central part of the procedure, enabling the court, which is a fair and just authority, to determine whether action should proceed. It strengthens the bill, adding another level of checks and balances. It would be concerning not to access the resourcefulness of our judiciary at this stage, and without this section of the bill questions could arise regarding the criteria under which a community safety order is to be administered.

Mr. Chairman, if the facts of the complaint necessitate the issuance of a community safety order, the bill clearly states what the community safety order will detail related to the property and the individual in question. The community safety order will give a description of the hazardous or illicit activity that initiated this course of action. This will enable those responsible for the behaviour an opportunity to stop what they're doing or be held accountable if they fail to comply.

There are two important provisions within section 6(2) that enhance the effectiveness of community safety orders: first, section 6(2)(d), which allows for the order to have a set date, and secondly, section 6(2)(e), which informs the individuals named in the order of their right to appeal. The amendment C will further improve section 6(2) by ensuring that the director intends to register a caveat under section 21 and that they specify the certificates of title on which the order is made. This ensures that the centralized registry of the Alberta lands system, which falls under the Torrens system, has all the relevant information for a given title.

Mr. Chairman, the community safety order is an essential tool and gives a mandate for more aggressive action against an offender. Its provisions will allow the court to provide direction through measures such as instructing those who are considered violators to vacate the premises within a prescribed time frame or terminate their tenancy agreement. This encouraging aspect of the procedure that's laid out with this piece of legislation and its proposed amendments is that it allows for the involvement of the director throughout the process. This is beneficial to ensure that the director, who is the representative of the community where the infraction has occurred, has an ability to sufficiently carry out the concerns that have been raised by residents.

Section 7 allows the director to apply to vary the safety order only to better address the safety concerns of the residents. On the other side of this provision the participation of the court ensures that the actions which will be taken are in accordance with Canada's laws and are solely carried out to uphold the safety of the community.

Within section 8 the proposed act defines the court's ability to negate a variance proposed by the director if the judiciary concludes that the community safety order has already appropriately addressed the issue raised in the complaint. The sections in this legislation and the amendments proposed to them continually emphasize a common theme, which is that Bill 212 strikes the right balance. It empowers citizens who are concerned about illegal or disturbing activities in their communities and at the same time involves the judiciary, that is best equipped to ultimately deal with unsafe or hazardous property.

Further to my point, Bill 212 includes section 9, which defines the

ability of the resident who is in question to take action to appeal or apply to vary the community safety order. This section is a valuable portion of the legislation as it allows for those who may be innocent or falsely identified as affiliates in the activity a method of recourse. The legislation has also enabled the complainant with the ability to apply to the court for a community safety order if they feel the director has not pursued their concern with the urgency and tactfulness that is required.

In section 17 the act indicates that the court has the authority to recoup the costs of assessing a complaint brought forward by a complainant that is not legitimate enough to demand their consideration. I believe that sections such as this illustrate the comprehensiveness of this legislation and the proposed amendments.

Bill 212 represents a new approach to dealing with illegal and unsafe activity in the residential properties, and I will offer my support to have it proceed with the amendments that have been presented.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. And I also advise you that I will be interrupting you within about three, three and a half minutes.

Mr. Martin: I will certainly step down so that if we want to vote on this, we will. I have no intention of going on very long.

I spoke about this, Mr. Chairman, in second reading. I think the amendments, basically, are housekeeping amendments. I think it's more to do with some of the terms used because of the fact that the bill was based on Saskatchewan law. So the amendments do not change the intent of the bill. Certainly, I strongly supported it, you know, in second reading because, let's face it, this is a small step in the right direction. We have to empower the community. The police cannot do it all. We have to empower the community, and the community feels more helpless when they have a drug house in their community. They don't know what to do. They call the police, but as we know, that's a very complicated procedure.

4:50

We're not reinventing the wheel here. This has been brought in in Manitoba for five years – and I've talked to the people in Manitoba; they feel it's had a really positive effect – Saskatchewan, for three years, Nova Scotia, and Yukon.

I do want to compliment again the Member for Calgary-Hays because it's absolutely crucial. This is a step in the right direction. If we do not empower the community to deal with some of these problems, we'll never solve the problems because, as I said before, the police cannot do it alone. So I think this is one tool. It's not going to solve all the problems. It certainly doesn't deal with the causes of crime. But if you have a drug house in your community, at least it empowers you to be able to do something about it, and I think that was the main message we got from Manitoba when I talked to them about this, that it had empowered the community to do something about it.

Mr. Chairman, I don't want to hold this up at all. I just want to say that we strongly support it. It's absolutely a good step in the right direction. I compliment the member for bringing it forward, and I hope that this will move forward and become law in the province as quickly as possible.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we have about two minutes or so. Does anybody wish to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I ran out of

time in my earlier remarks, so I wanted to just finish my thoughts. I was mostly talking about the crime-free model here in Edmonton in the rental market, and I mentioned that particular constable from the Edmonton Police Service heading that crime-free multihousing project. I just wanted to talk about that project.

It basically means that rental properties get certified, and to get certified is a really interesting way to tell your tenants and tell the community where your housing project is that you are not going to tolerate disorder and crime within your premises and that this would be the reason why somebody could get evicted, for example, if they get sucked into that cycle of crime and disorder. You basically get a plaque or a certificate, that you post on your wall, and then you get recertified every so often, like every two years, I believe, and if you fail, your certification is revoked, and then you have to apply again.

That particular constable actually was instrumental initially in something called the Oliver citizen's foot patrol, which is a form of community policing, Mr. Chairman, and he was also instrumental in establishing a proactive community plan in response to . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, but pursuant to Standing Order 8(3.1) I must now ask the Deputy Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 212.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report progress on Bill 212.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 212. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Education Property Taxes

513. Mr. Elsahy moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to take measures to exempt not-for-profit organizations that provide affordable housing and not-for-profit postsecondary education institutions' campus residences from the provincial educational property tax requisition and examine the feasibility of extending the exemption to small-scale landlords.

Mr. Elsahy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You don't need me to tell you that this motion is intended to increase the availability of affordable housing units by exempting the provincial education requisition tax portion of property taxes on housing provided by nonprofit organizations, postsecondary institutions, and potentially

extending it to small-scale landlords. We all know that we have a housing problem in this province, and we all know that there is need for new housing units to be brought onto the market, but until then we feel that we need to be looking at different things that we can do in the interim, different things that we can do today, right now, until that new supply hits the market.

Now, who are we trying to support? Who are we trying to assist? Well, definitely whenever you think about nonprofit or volunteer organizations, they're usually supporting people who are the most vulnerable or the least advantaged. Add to that seniors, for example, add to that AISH recipients, definitely add students. We've all heard those stories, you know, that particular student who was living in a shed with no heat and just a little lamp, and all his belongings were in that 1 metre by 2 metres space. We know about people with disability.

These agencies and these organizations look after people with disability. They look after people who have drug or substance abuse issues and so on. So it's definitely people who, for the most part, can't afford better housing options. These are people who are at the very bottom of that food chain that need assistance from the government, need assistance from community organizations. Their need is real, and it only gets worse. We know that sometimes, you know, there are situations where you have tent cities, for example, and people are concerned and upset because it doesn't look good, and it's an unsavory site. But what happens to these people in the winter? What happens when those shelters fill up? What happens when we can't secure affordable, dignified housing solutions for them?

I told you what the motion reads, Mr. Speaker. It is trying to provide something in the interim, something until new affordable housing units are brought onto the market, and it's one step of many. I'm not saying that this is the be-all and end-all. This is just one step of many, and hopefully the government is considering most of these options.

Now, whom did we consult, Mr. Speaker? Well, typically we consult people who are immediately affected or who are likely to be immediately affected. So we actually went and asked postsecondary institutions which offer that type of assistance, you know, both on-campus and off-campus. We went and asked municipalities. We went and asked nonprofit housing organizations. Then we also solicited some feedback from Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing, the ministry itself.

Let me talk about nonprofits very briefly, Mr. Speaker. We have many nonprofits in Alberta. Part of their work would be to provide accommodation, to provide housing. Like I mentioned, they're mostly serving those who are less advantaged, people who are left out, if you will. One of the examples I am going to highlight is an agency by the name of Edmonton Inner City Housing. That's in Edmonton, obviously. They have existing facilities, but they were planning on adding two new ones. The province, actually, back in 1998, if I remember correctly, changed the law with respect to property taxes, the education part and the municipal part. In 1998 changes to provincial rules took place that basically treated some of those nonprofits as taxable; namely, because these sometimes charge rents. Now, we all know that the rents they charge are token rents. These are by no stretch of the imagination representative rents or real rents. These are just minor fees to tell people, you know, "You're responsible for your unit," to do the upkeep, to take pride in the ownership, and so on. Because they charge whatever little rent, then they are deemed to be taxable.

5:00

It is typically a situation where you talk about row housing, for example. I'm really interested in this because there is supposedly a

new project in Edmonton-McClung that is going to offer row housing. It's in an area called Jamieson. Many people are concerned because they don't want it to be a ghetto; they don't want it to be a slum. They want it to be integrated into the larger community. They don't want the troubles and the disorders that come with a ghetto or a slum, and I understand their concern. We want it to be successful, and we want these people to have roofs over their heads. So that's a question.

You know, sometimes cities have to charge the education part of the property tax because if they don't, for example, the province will come after them and say: "You know what? You have to. Because you failed to collect it is no excuse, and we're going to take it from your revenues." Sometimes cities, you know, their hands are tied. We know certainly that the mayor in Edmonton here was frustrated a bit. Let me tell you that it doesn't affect only one agency or two or 10. It actually affects potentially hundreds. We know that at least 300 properties fit that description and are going to be reviewed in the city of Edmonton alone. If you add Calgary and you add all the other major towns and cities, the picture is far greater, Mr. Speaker.

At least 300 of these facilities are being reviewed in Edmonton; more are being reviewed throughout the province. If the city in question does not charge the education property tax component, the government, the province, is going to come after them and say: gimme, gimme. Where can they come up with that money? What it is doing is adding an undue burden on these nonprofits that cannot really make ends meet now.

In terms of students and in terms of residences the current situation as per the Municipal Government Act dictates that a student dormitory is exempt from the provincial tax component. But dormitories are one type of student residence. A student dormitory is a facility – and this definition, actually, was shared with us by municipal affairs – that houses students in a communal living arrangement where they share living and kitchen spaces. Sometimes the bedrooms are private. Sometimes they are; sometimes they're not. But that's a dormitory. Well, I would argue that not every student in this province who is living away from home lives in a dormitory situation because you can add individual residences, such as apartments or townhouses, which are not communal.

Motion 513, as I'm suggesting, explicitly includes all campus residences, both on campus and off campus, not just dormitory-style ones. It expands that exemption, and it basically says that a student is a student; a student residence is a student residence. If one is exempt, all the others are. It ensures that the tax exemption applies to all campus residences.

I mentioned some of those examples which we heard about, Mr. Speaker: people who are living in less-than-optimal conditions, people who are living in basement suites that are substandard, or people that are living in a shed or, you know, in somebody's backyard, and they're camping out. That is not acceptable. If they can't afford it, it is, I think, the duty of this government to make it less difficult. While this is not giving an incentive per se, at least it is removing a deterrent. These organizations do not need to be burdened with this tax requisition.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I'm going to give you examples, Mr. Speaker. For example, on campus I'll give you the example of Lister hall, which is right on the University of Alberta campus. Then off campus I'm going to give you Michener Park. Michener Park is a big community that houses thousands of people.

How many minutes do I get as the mover? Twenty minutes, I believe. Anyways . . .

The Speaker: We'll now call on the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to have an opportunity to speak to Motion 513, which centres on providing education property tax exemptions to a number of property types. I would like to focus on the element of student residences, also known as student dormitories, and show how through current legislation, the Municipal Government Act, student residences are already exempt from paying education property taxes.

Mr. Speaker, if anyone is for tax cuts, it is I. However, I cannot support this motion because we already do this. Our government has a well-thought-out education property tax system and a very effective structure for receiving adequate payment to fund Alberta's priorities in education. Every year the province calculates, based on assessment value, the amount each municipality must contribute towards the provincial public education system. Municipalities are each responsible for collecting the property taxes and then forwarding the education portion to the province for deposit into the Alberta school foundation fund, or ASFF. In 1994 the Alberta government established the ASFF to make sure that all education property tax is accounted for separately from general revenues.

As a result of the strong overall growth in assessment, the province has reduced its education property tax rates by about 5.8 per cent for the 2007 tax year. Mr. Speaker, this move marks the 14th straight year that the education property tax mill rate has been lowered or frozen. Now, it hasn't been raised in 14 years. Since property taxes are collected by local municipalities, it is the Municipal Government Act that sets out the provisions and legal basis for the way local governments in Alberta's cities, towns, villages, and rural areas operate in this regard.

The act also covers property tax exemptions and gives reference of properties and organizations that may be typically considered for exemption. In Alberta exemptions are provided to qualifying properties that tend to reflect social values that are based on collective principles. The usual basis for determining tax exemption is the facility's accessibility and the public benefit that arises from its use. Property used in connection with educational purposes, regardless of how it is registered, is exempt from property taxes as it falls under the Government, Churches, and Other Bodies division of the Municipal Government Act.

Section 362 of the Municipal Government Act outlines the exemptions available to postsecondary institutions in our province, specifically outlining the properties held by postsecondary educational institutions which are exempt from paying education property taxes. According to the act, a student dormitory is defined as a housing unit that is used in connection with a purpose referred to in section 362(1)(c), (d), or (e) or with a college incorporated under a private act of the Legislature. The definition also includes the residents of which are students of a facility and are used in connection with the same purposes, as listed in the given subsections of section 362 of the Municipal Government Act.

For the purposes of the act student dormitories are exempt from taxation in whole or in part by section 363(1)(d). Mr. Speaker, this section exempts student dormitories from paying property taxes but continues on to section 363(3), which states that it gives municipalities the option to tax student dormitories by establishing a bylaw. Even though Alberta municipalities currently have the option to tax student dormitories for other purposes, education property taxes on student dormitories are not collected.

Our government has an effective education property tax system and fully functioning legislation which takes into consideration the best interest of all Albertans. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, our government has already addressed exempting student dormitories

from the education property tax, and as a result I will not support Motion 513. In the future I hope that the opposition Liberals will do better research before they introduce motions in this House.

Thank you.

5:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make a few comments in regard to this particular motion. I was going to point out, the same as the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar did, that in the presentations that they made to the policy field committee on growth pressures, in the one that was the University of Calgary's, they made it very clear what they wanted. They acknowledged that the education tax has been waived for university residences, but they were still assessing. What they wanted was municipal tax; they want to amend the Municipal Government Act. That was their presentation.

The Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar is right that they do not pay taxes on student residences at this particular time. We've had quite a discussion in the policy field committee about amending the Municipal Government Act. There were differences of opinion there, but we'll come back to that.

I know that the member is trying his best to try to look at the affordable housing crisis and do something about it, and this is one motion trying to deal with it. I'm not sure how you would go about, beyond the residences, though, giving tax breaks exempting small-scale landlords. If I know something about landlords, if there's a tax exemption, everybody will be a small-scale landlord very quickly, I would think, so I think it would be very hard to define "small scale."

Again, we had the discussion in the Legislature about rent supplements, that in fact they end up being supplements for landlords. There's nothing to say that even if they had this tax break, they would pass it on in terms of lower rents. In our experience with the other programs, probably not. It would be another tax break for landlords rather than the people that need it.

I know that the member is trying to deal with housing, and I'd still say to the members here that it is a crisis in how we deal with it. The government has refused to look at a lot of the things from the housing task force that we advocated. They picked some things, cherry-picked them, and I think they've made it worse in many cases.

We look at all the things happening. Rents keep going up. I pointed out in the House the CMHC in another presentation to our policy field committee: rents are still going to go up significantly. Their projections are that in 2008 in both major cities they'll be up significantly. Condo conversions, even with Bill 34, go on unabated. We just can't keep up, so a lot of people are suffering, Mr. Speaker. There's absolutely no doubt about that.

I guess we try to do what we can here and there and everywhere, thinking: would this help, if we did the Municipal Government Act? Maybe a little bit. Would that help, if we did something else? Maybe a little bit. But the problem is so severe with the pace of development that I think it's going to take a very comprehensive approach in dealing with this problem.

I'd like to say, as some government members believe, that it's getting better. Mr. Speaker, contrary to that, I do not believe that it is. I think that the housing situation, for renters at least, is as severe as it's ever been. If the phone calls to my office are any indication, we're still facing the very same problems. Bill 34, where they took part of what the housing task force brought forward and said, "Rent increases only once a year": well, that in many cases, without the rent guidelines, made it worse because people were getting hit harder right at the start. Where it might have been two or three smaller

increases in rent, now we've got it all at once. And it's still going on, Mr. Speaker.

But, as I say, the problem is when you try to do a motion and it's a feel-good sort of thing. I don't think that this would particularly solve it because, as mentioned, it already is waived for university residences. I don't know how you'd begin to figure out where everybody was living, with students all over the city, to give tax breaks. I think it would take an army of bureaucrats to figure that out.

Then exempting small-scale landlords. As I say, I honestly believe that this would just be adding more profits to the landlords if we don't have rent guidelines. It's not to say that I don't appreciate the member bringing it forward. At least, this is an important debate that we should be holding in this House. I think the government had hoped that after the spring session this would go away, this whole housing crisis, but, Mr. Speaker, it hasn't.

I think we need to relook at where we're going in this province, but I do not see any urgency on the government's part. They seem to think things are working out well, that the heated economy is helping everybody, but it's not. Mr. Speaker, we talked in this House about Calgary, perhaps per capita one of the richest places in North America, and 61 per cent of the people there in a survey said that things are worse: we're worse off than we were a few years ago. Sixty one per cent of the people in Calgary. I expect that if you took that survey anywhere else, it would be the same. Of the big concerns they have – it's everything: health and the rest of it – one of the major reasons was housing and rents and what's going on.

As I say, Mr. Speaker – I won't go on much longer because other people want to get in – I don't think this solves the problem, but I do commend the member for bringing it forward to at least have another discussion in the Legislature about where we should be going with affordable housing. As I said, if this government feels that this is not a problem anymore, I just don't know where they're at. I honestly don't. People are still suffering. We all agree that we should get more supply on, but that takes time.

In the short run, then, what do we say to people? For instance, one of my constituents, a single parent, is working at very minimal wages, \$1,400, and he has two young girls. His rent went from \$700 to \$1,400. Now, in fairness, he has gotten some money from the homeless and eviction fund and some from the rent supplement, but he just can't keep up, and that's not untypical of the stories that we're getting. You know, rather than sitting complacently and saying, "We've spent this amount, and we spent that amount," we should look at if the programs are working or not, and they're not. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that they're not. Rather than with our head in the sand, I think we should relook at the whole housing area and what we're doing to people in this province.

It's not only the people on fixed income anymore. It's bad enough when they're paying 60, 70 per cent and in this case 100 per cent for the constituent I talked about, but it's starting to impact what I call middle-income people, too, younger people who thought at one time that they would have enough to buy a house. They don't have that anymore, Mr. Speaker. They don't have that option.

I would hope that the government would review these matters. I guess hope springs eternal, and I'll hope eternally that they will see the light, but I will not hold my breath at the same time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

5:20

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of Motion 513, provincial education property tax exemption for affordable housing. I'll be very brief.

First of all, I applaud the sponsor, my colleague the Member for Edmonton-McClung. I know this motion is not going to solve all the problems in the affordable home crisis in Alberta, but definitely this motion is intended to increase the availability of affordable housing units by exempting the provincial education requisition tax portion of property taxes on housing provided by nonprofit organizations and public postsecondary institutions. It will also ask the government to explore extending the exemption to small-scale landlords.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is very important in providing more affordable housing units for Albertans. We all know that this affordable housing problem is very severe, and lots of people are crying for help. All the programs we have at this moment are not working for all Albertans, and this is another try, you know, another tool to help those people who need some help.

As we all know, with subsidized homes we have a long waiting list, and the rent is really high. As my background I'm a real estate agent, with lots of people calling me to find a suitable place, especially some people who are on a fixed income. Sometimes I feel really bad that I can't find a suitable place for them according to their level of income. I feel really bad. I know that this motion alone, just the idea, is not going to solve all the problems, but I think it will help.

Why are we talking about tax exemptions for affordable homes? We all know it's demand and supply. We have, you know, shortages of supply. To increase the supply, we have to give some incentives so that they can, you know, work faster to build some affordable homes here and which we are not expecting. I heard from the Premier the other day that some affordable homes are nearly finished, which is good. [some applause] Thank you very much. Well, it's a long time due. The thing is that this is a problem created by the present Tory government. If after some time they have decided to take it seriously, it's good news, and we welcome that. But we must catch up with the supply. This is the important thing. How can we help to increase the supply? This is another idea. That's why I say that the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung at least introduced something, some ideas, so that we could consider this seriously.

While building new spaces is very important, as we know, further action needs to be taken right now, the sooner the better. In waiting for new units to be built, other measures, such as this motion, need to be explored – this is where we are today – especially for nonprofit groups. Nonprofit groups have a very limited amount of money, and they are sometimes totally dependent on provincial or federal or municipal grants. They're, you know, just looking at their financial hardship. If we help them, somehow give some incentives so that they could speed up the process, if we are able to help in this problem, which is really severe, and help the people who badly need some help from us – let's consider this motion. If we could add something, some better ideas, I think it's welcome. Giving some incentives, I think, like for the small-scale landlords, is needed badly. Yeah, some people may not like this idea, but I think, you know, that if we give them some incentives, it might help.

Considering all these things, I think this motion is a step forward. We should consider it very seriously. Once again I applaud the Member for Edmonton-McClung for sponsoring this motion.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some ambivalence to speak today on 513. Part of me, of course, is willing to look at almost any idea at all that will get people into proper shelter and properly aligned with their current ability to attract income. I guess

part of what would help me – and I realize that it's just an idle wish now, at this date – is if I had more information on the chronology of this motion. At 513 it obviously didn't come in this summer. It must have been on the books prior to the spring session. I note that it's amended. People here in the House might know when that amendment took place. However, as I stand here, I don't. I think what's happened is that current events have overtaken the attempt of the Member for Edmonton-McClung to provide some assistance in this field.

One of the previous speakers talked about the fact that a policy field committee is looking into this particular situation. I chair that particular committee, so another part of my ambivalence is: what's it going to look like if I stand up and give a speech denying your motion? Does it mean that I don't care? Well, it doesn't mean that. What has happened since, I think, the motion was probably formulated is that we had a task force with quite a number of recommendations, some of which were accepted, some of which were, I guess, put aside for a period of time, others that may never see the light of day.

Then, of course, we had this unusual situation the first time out for the policy field committee on managing growth pressures: to have nothing assigned to it by this Legislature. Well, I'm going to speak on behalf of the co-chair, not only because I like him but because I feel like I'm getting to know him. Neither one of us are the kind of people who are going to sit around and do nothing, so we made sure, then, that we had something to look into. I have to admit to a great deal of surprise in finding out that what we were going to look into was affordable housing after such a huge analysis had been done.

For the information of the Legislature on how some of these things happen, maybe in the future when you're on a policy field committee and you don't have anything assigned to you, we did quite a democratic procedure and allowed each member to bring forward three of their top picks. Nuclear power was one of them that I chose. I'm still surprised that I misread my committee to the extent that they wouldn't see the importance of it on the scale that I do. In any event, we ended up with a decision, then, to look at affordable housing.

5:30

Now, in the early machinations of getting the committee organized and that sort of thing, there was an idea that came up that because the committee had already looked at affordable housing, maybe we should zero in on a particular item. Somebody suggested student housing and that we would look at that as a single idea. However, it was spread to the point where we are now going to report to this House on affordable housing with an accent on whether or not there are either legislative or regulatory barriers to dealing with this particular situation. And to the Member for Edmonton-McClung, we're right in the middle of it. We had six focus issues that, you know, sort of came out of all of the hearings that we held. We've dealt with three of them, but there are three that are currently at the legislative research stage, and early next week we'll be looking into that particular area.

I find myself very, very hesitant to then further narrow our work by standing here and supporting your motion. I think what I'll do is simply state to my colleagues here in the House that, again, I believe that current affairs have overtaken the particular issue you were trying to deal with and that when our committee finalizes its report and tables it here in the House, I hope that you will find some consolation, then, in what we have done and maybe even say that you urged us and encouraged us and made us do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was a little bit nervous

there for a second at the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, you know, that when he said that he was going to speak for me, maybe there wouldn't be anything left for me to say. But there is. There are a couple of things left for me to say.

I have to agree with my colleague to the extent that I think current events have overtaken this motion. This motion is a motion that has had a bit of a long and difficult history, I think we could say. The motion as presently worded – and I'll just read it into the record again – is:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to take measures to exempt not-for-profit organizations that provide affordable housing and not-for-profit postsecondary education institutions' campus residences from the provincial educational property tax requisition and examine the feasibility of extending the exemption to small-scale landlords.

That is how Motion 513, I guess as amended or as worded today, reads right now.

That Motion 513 replaced the original Motion 513 that the Member for Edmonton-McClung submitted last fall because, Mr. Speaker, there is such an incredibly long read time on private members' bills and motions other than government motions and because the recommendations in his earlier motion were pretty much adapted in our debate on the Residential Tenancies Act in the spring, so the Member for Edmonton-McClung was given an opportunity to change to a new motion. So I hope that for the benefit of the Member for Lethbridge-West that sheds some light on the chronology that he was looking for.

Of course, as that was going on, our policy field committee on managing growth pressures, of which I am the co-chair, decided in late summer, early fall that the first issue that we were going to focus on as a growth pressure issue in the province of Alberta was, again, the affordable housing crisis. The Member for Lethbridge-West, who chairs the committee, is quite right that we decided to look at some specific areas that in the collective wisdom of the committee we felt had perhaps not been dealt with yet, and the work on that proceeds.

Now, I cannot speak for the chair of that policy field committee when he says that he hopes that when the committee's report comes forward to the Assembly in a couple of weeks' time, the Member for Edmonton-McClung will take comfort in the report. I don't know whether the Member for Edmonton-McClung will take comfort in the report or not. I do know this: although the chair of the committee, the Member for Lethbridge-West, was surprised – I know he was very surprised – when affordable housing came up as the top issue in our poll of committee members, that occurrence by itself is as clear an evidence as I think we could find that the affordable housing crisis is ongoing.

Whether it was me on behalf of the Alberta Liberal caucus back in January producing the first comprehensive affordable housing policy, whether it was the all-party task force on affordable housing struck by the Premier, which took that policy of ours as a significant guide in producing some very, very good work, whether it's the policy field committee on managing growth pressures, whether it's Motion 513, whether it's anything that any individual member has in the past or should in the future have to say on the floor of this Legislature or outside about the affordable housing crisis, there are a couple of key things to keep in mind.

Number one. We need to keep the focus on the affordable housing crisis until that crisis is solved. This should be our top priority in the province of Alberta. This should be our top priority as the province of Alberta because everybody needs a home. The other things we talk about, the other issues we talk about, while in some cases very important and in some cases not so important, pale in comparison to that inescapable, incontrovertible fact that every-

body needs a home. Shelter is as basic as food to the human condition, so we must solve this problem.

Another point which is very key is this: we are not talking about rocket science here. We're talking about creating something in the neighbourhood of 10,000 to 12,000 units of affordable housing in the province of Alberta within the space of the next five years. By comparison, for instance, President Kennedy's assertion in 1960 that the United States would put a man on the moon by the end of that decade is something that you know, Mr. Speaker – because you and I are both old enough to remember that although I had much more hair at the time – that they pulled off. That was a truly amazing achievement because they went from a near zero knowledge base to something that existed when the President made that declaration, really, in the realm of a dream more than anything else. This is not a dream. Solving the affordable housing crisis is not a dream. This is something that's absolutely doable, and we should get on with the job now.

The other key thing, Mr. Speaker, to remember – and Motion 513 is but one small part of this – is that if we're going to solve the affordable housing crisis, we can't just do it with an initiative here and a rent supplement program there and a Residential Tenancies Act that requires a year's notice if you want to convert your affordable rental housing to ridiculously overpriced condominiums or anything like it. You can't just do it with one-offs. Okay? This is an essential issue that we get right by tackling it simultaneously on a number of different levels and a number of different platforms. It will take time to build 10,000 or more units of affordable housing. If we started right now, it would take a couple of years before we could build a significant number of new units of affordable housing.

There are things we can do in the interim to increase supply, and the ideas expressed in Motion 513 speak to that in a couple of ways. But we also need to crisis manage this situation, and that means keeping roofs over the heads of people who have them now but can barely afford to hang on to them. That means we have to punt the ideology that says that it's okay to subsidize landlords through rent supplements because they're good guys, they're business, but it's wrong to subsidize tenants through rent caps because that'll hurt business. You know, both sides need to hurt a little bit over the short term for a long-term solution to this.

5:40

Motion 513 is a motion that you may or may not choose to support, but it is very definitely one member's attempt – and it's been a difficult attempt for the Member for Edmonton-McClung – to shed some light on the most important issue that we have facing us in the province of Alberta right now other than over the long term what we're doing to the environment; that is, supporting people through making sure that everybody in the province of Alberta has a home.

With that, I will take my seat and leave it up to others to talk about this. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Motion 513 brought forth by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. The motion recommends that the government allow exemptions for not-for-profit organizations that provide affordable housing and not-for-profit postsecondary institution residences from the provincial education property tax requisition, both of which have already been done.

The motion also suggests that the government look at the feasibility of extending this exemption to small-scale landlords. It is this last area that I'd like to address, Mr. Speaker, because I believe that it presents a whole host of difficulties, not the least of which include implementation, regulation, and monitoring.

I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-McClung for this motion and for bringing everyone's attention to this very important issue of affordable housing. It serves as a valuable reminder that this issue continues to be important for many Albertans and that we need to remain vigilant in doing all that we can for them. However, effectiveness needs to be an important consideration as well. We need to ensure that the way we implement solutions to address this need is going to be effective and efficient while making sure that the process itself is resistant to manipulation. We also want to make certain that those who receive the help are those who truly need it most.

My concern with this motion lies in the fact that the definition of small-scale landlords has no concrete, specific, and applied definition in the province of Alberta. There seems to be some commonality where usage of the term occurs, but even that is mostly implied. Generally, small-scale landlords are considered to be individuals or smaller companies who rent out one or more units in a small number of buildings. They may also include those who rent out rooms within a unit, wherein the owner may also share this space with another person or persons. They may also be those who own units or buildings but outsource the management of these properties to a managing agent. Mr. Speaker, according to these loose and vague interpretations the problem of application becomes evident from the beginning. What mechanism or criteria are we using to determine who is and is not a small-scale landlord? Clearly, the answer to this question is none.

I believe the danger here is threefold. First, not-for-profit organizations and postsecondary housing facilities are typically designed to help those Albertans who are facing challenges when it comes to finding affordable housing. Small-scale landlords are not necessarily interested in doing so, nor are they required to.

Second, how could we ensure that the savings we are passing on to these owners would be reflected in the rental prices that they would charge? This takes us back to the issue of effectiveness. Without accountability here we would not be solving the problem that the motion was designed to address.

Third, Mr. Speaker, the logical next question would seem to be: why? By what determination have we arrived at the conclusion that small-scale landlords represent a need to be addressed? In what way do exemptions for these individuals or small companies represent a need, and how does the tax exemption solve this? The truth is that without clear definitions we're not able to realistically know if a need exists and, therefore, if an exemption is even warranted. This may result in spending money that could be better used in other avenues that address the affordable housing issue, many of which are, in fact, already in place.

Again, the Member for Edmonton-McClung raises a valuable and worthwhile consideration, and I support his intentions, Mr. Speaker. However, considering that the substance of the motion is already being addressed through existing legislation, coupled with the important questions I've asked, I believe there is an inherent redundancy in this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support Motion 513 as sponsored by my colleague from Edmonton-McClung, which

refers to a provincial education property tax exemption for affordable housing. Indeed, as others have said here, I support anything that's going to keep this important issue before us. I've spent considerable time working for and with not-for-profit agencies. I have a strong belief in this important sector, and it's my belief that this sector is underutilized, underappreciated, and undersupported in general. This sector is critical as Alberta wrestles with the issue of affordable housing.

Not-for-profit groups which provide affordable housing face uncertain futures. Some have indicated that it's the worst crisis we've faced in decades. High tax bills put new projects by not-for-profits in jeopardy, which could result in less affordable housing for Albertans.

I'd like to take just a moment regarding housing for students. I note that a student dormitory is a facility that houses students in a communal living arrangement, where they share living and kitchen spaces, and that these dormitories are exempt from provincial tax. However, this doesn't capture individual residences such as apartments or townhouses. Motion 513 explicitly includes all campus residences, and I think this is a valuable consideration.

As my colleague from Lethbridge-West has indicated, he hopes that the initiative by the Member for Edmonton-McClung will nudge things along. We all support these measures in whatever capacity they might be able to have an impact, but I'd have to conclude what others have suggested, that this is a housing crisis that exists in Alberta, one that's seriously harmful for Albertans, including families and children. My constituents know, and those of us charged to listen and act should know, that bold action is required. Much of that bold action was recommended in the task force report and then ignored. But we'll keep trying. We'll keep the issues at the forefront, and we will not forget those who are suffering.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, have you indicated your desire to participate?

Ms DeLong: Yes, please.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and debate Motion 513. The ideas expressed in this motion are already covered by a combination of legislation and regulations. A campus residence of a qualifying educational institute is not required to pay the education tax portion of a property tax, and this exemption was implemented by the Alberta government through the Municipal Government Act. Several sections of the MGA also provide municipalities with the ability to consider and make decisions about property tax exemptions to respond to the individual, specific circumstances of nonprofit organizations providing affordable housing. So municipalities have the ability to decide if it is feasible to exempt certain small-scale landlords from paying the education portion of the property tax as well.

The difference between what this motion is asking and the current legislation is: who has the authority to grant the tax exemptions? To achieve the purpose of this motion, this government would have to take authority away from the municipalities. As stated in the MGA, it is under the purview of municipalities to grant tax exemptions. Now, within the MGA community organization property tax exemption regulation municipalities can also establish specific exemptions and regulate them through bylaws. Section 362 of the MGA gives not-for-profit organizations provisions for a property to be exempt from paying property tax if it's "used for a charitable or

benevolent purpose that is for the benefit of the general public.” Also, under section 364 “a council may by bylaw exempt from taxation . . . property held by a non-profit organization.” So currently student dormitories in Alberta are exempt from paying education property taxes. However, most municipalities still require that municipality taxes be paid.

5:50

All property owners pay the education property tax. People who rent or lease property contribute indirectly through their monthly rent or lease payments as the education system benefits all Albertans. As new development brings with it new taxpayers, the education requisition will be spread across a broader assessment tax base. Every year the province calculates, based on assessment value, the amount each municipality must contribute towards the provincial public education system. If the province's property tax rate decreases, the amount it requires from municipalities decreases as well, but if the municipality tax rate increases, the overall property tax may not change or could potentially rise. Municipalities use the property tax rate in conjunction with a local education tax rate to determine how much education property tax they will collect.

The relationship between property assessment and taxation is – and I have a little calculation here; I always like formulas – assessed property times tax rate equals taxes payable. The municipal council is responsible for setting the tax rate, and the municipality is responsible for calculating the taxes payable, collecting the taxes, and remitting the provincial education portion to the province.

Now, municipalities collect the education property tax and then forward it to the province for deposit in the Alberta school foundation fund. Although the provincial uniform education property tax rates will be reduced by about 5.8 per cent in 2007, the government will collect \$81 million more in education property tax revenue as a result of the newly built homes and businesses and real property improvements. The additional \$81 million will help pay for instructional costs, including teachers' salaries, textbooks, and other classroom resources. The education property tax provides Alberta's education system with a stable and sustainable source of revenue. Pooling the education property tax in the Alberta school foundation fund ensures that students receive a quality education regardless of their municipality's assessment wealth.

Mr. Speaker, creating more legislation around education property tax is not the most efficient way to achieve the goals and purposes of this motion. Municipalities already have the authority to implement all of these tax exemptions. Therefore, I do not support this motion, and I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that after listening to all the debate ahead of me, I support the process of actually discussing this on the floor. My colleague from Edmonton-McClung has brought forward a very thoughtful motion. Perhaps it has been macerated through the committee looking at housing, but the fact that he has brought it forward and that we have discussed it and that it is actually based on the fact that there were some nonprofit housing projects that actually did receive this tax benefit and now are going to be assessed is, I think, something worth looking at.

Nonprofits that can provide housing in this day, when we are in such a crisis, I think should be looked at. Because we do something at this point in time does not mean to say that it's actually cast in concrete. It should be cast in an evaluation process where we do

something that's right now and look at it a year from now because it may not be right a year from now. Maybe housing will have caught up. Highly unlikely in that short space of time, but maybe housing will have caught up at that time, and then we could relook at who would get breaks and who would not get breaks.

I think that my colleague from Lethbridge-West stood up and spoke with respect on how this process has come forward lends credence to what I'm actually saying, and so I'm supporting it in terms of the . . .

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 8(4) I would now like to invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to close the debate.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to thank all the hon. members of the Assembly, both who supported the motion and who expressed some hesitancy, for their contribution. Briefly, I just want to react to some of the comments which I heard earlier in debate.

First, I will respond to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, who was talking about committee work and the committee that he, in fact, chairs and that the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie is the co-chair of. Those committees are new. They're new creatures, and there is no manual. We're making those rules as we go. I would argue that this is just one layer which we didn't have before. Until they were announced, we only had the House; we only had the Assembly. This is a new layer. Even when they do meet and even when they do make recommendations and issue a report, these recommendations are presented to the Assembly in the form of a suggestion. They're not binding on the Assembly. It is basically a recommendation, and then all 83 members in the House would have the opportunity to debate it and make their own decisions. I would argue back to the Member for Lethbridge-West that it's the Assembly where all of these decisions have to be made, and it's the Assembly where all of these ideas have to be thoroughly discussed and researched.

My hon. colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat was talking about small-scale landlords and, you know, that the criteria were loose. My response to him would be that anything we do that, basically, even minimally addresses the affordable housing crisis would be useful; it would be beneficial. We have regulations, and this government loves to rule by regulations, loves to put everything in regulation, not in legislation. This is no different. They could put regulations in place that define what is a small-scale landlord.

To my hon. colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat, I'm not talking about all small-scale landlords. I'm talking about those ones in particular which offer affordable housing. Regulations can define what is affordable and what's not, but at least we know that 30 per cent of one's income should serve as a guideline. Nobody should pay more than 30 per cent of their income to be deemed affordable housing or affordable living.

The hon. member also mentioned abuse or effectiveness, misuse of the funds, whatever. I was really puzzled by his remark because we know that the homelessness and eviction prevention fund has been abused. It was reported widely that people who don't need the assistance are basically drawing that money out. If we need effectiveness with respect to Motion 513, I would argue that we need effectiveness with many, many different government programs and different funds. This is not an assistance to the landlord. This is an incentive for the landlord to continue to offer affordable housing.

In terms of students, again, I emphasize that “dormitories” is not the definition that is one size fits all. I am arguing that it is just one type, and then you have apartments and you have townhouses, that

are not included currently. Motion 513 was attempting to include them in the exemption.

The nonprofits, Mr. Speaker, have to be assisted. When an agency like the Edmonton Inner City Housing Society gets charged something in the neighbourhood of \$25,000 per new building to pay property taxes, I don't think it's fair, and we're sending them the wrong message. If they absolutely have to get that money to pay for that tax assessment, where it is likely to come from is from those poor people that these agencies are trying to help. If you're going to collect \$25,000 from 25 units every year, that is totally unaffordable.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members from this Assembly to support Motion 513. Let's keep that discussion going because the

crisis is real and it is continuing and everything we do here should have a favourable impact.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 513 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that given the hour, we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 6 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 20, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate ourselves anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

Ms Evans: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, I rise this week to introduce a fabulous group of students, this time from Wes Hosford school, an exemplary elementary school where my grandchildren both attended. Now we have 64 students in three classes here, actually a total of 72 visitors. We have teachers and group leaders Kim Lerbekmo, Jane Dimitroff, Cathy Brosseau, Stephanie McGladdery, and we have Miss Shannon MacLeod as well as Mr. Tosczak. We have parent helpers Mrs. Jocelyn Bell and Mrs. Penny Reid. I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a class from Fultonvale elementary school, who have been brought here by their teacher, Mrs. Karin Bittner, every year that I've served in this Assembly. The class is also accompanied by teacher aides Mrs. Diane Gunderson and Ms Jennifer Harkness. Along with them are parent helpers Mrs. Chris Douglas, Mrs. Shelly White, Ms Marj Langkamp, Mrs. Carrie Brunet, Ms Shauna Schryver, Mrs. Ruth LaFleche, Mrs. Karen Hachey, and Mrs. Jennifer Diener. They are in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm applause of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly four members of the Alberta Graduate Council. David Hayes, chair of the Alberta Graduate Council. Mr. Hayes is a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta in neuroscience. He's serving his first term as AGC chair but his second term as part of the Alberta Graduate Council. David Coletto, vice-chair of the Alberta Graduate Council. Mr. Coletto is a PhD candidate at the University of Calgary in political science. He's also currently the president of the Graduate Students' Association at the University of Calgary. Locke Spencer, vice-chair of the Alberta Graduate Council. Mr. Spencer is a PhD candidate at the University of Lethbridge in physics. Adrienne Huxtable, financial officer of the Alberta Graduate Council. Ms Huxtable is a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta in physiology. She is a former vice-chair of the AGC and has been involved with the AGC for three terms. I'll be meeting with this group later and look forward to the valued contribution that they give to Alberta. They are seated in the public and members' galleries this afternoon. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly representatives from both the public school board and the Catholic school board in my constituency of Fort McMurray. Joining us today we have Kath Rhyason, the superintendent of the Fort McMurray public school division, associate superintendent Amgad Rushdy as well as the chair, Jeff Thompson, and the vice-chair, Glenn Doonanco. Also joining them are trustees Glenn Cooper and Elizabeth Eenkooren from the Fort McMurray public schools and Maria Salvo-Vyboh and Laurelee Bouchard-Dutchyn from the Fort McMurray separate school board. They are here as part of the Alberta School Boards Association this week. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly here today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 10 special visitors all the way from Vulcan county. As you are aware, Vulcan county may be number two, but they were one of the oldest counties established in the province years ago when Grande Prairie and Vulcan first applied for county status. Today with us we have Mr. Ian Donovan, the reeve; Mr. Derrick Annable, Mr. Dave Schneider, Mr. Roy Lucas, Mr. Merle Wyatt, Mr. Rick Geschwendt, Mr. Doug McIntyre, Mr. Gordon Nelson, Mr. Rod Ruark, and their county administrator, Mr. Gary Buchanan. I would ask that they please rise in the members' gallery. I'm very pleased that they could come up as part of the AAMD and C delegation. Please give them your warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly some very special guests from the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake, the municipal district of Bonnyville council. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they please stand as I call out their names: Reeve Ed Rondeau, Deputy Reeve Andy Wakaruk, councillors David Fox, Barry Kalinski, Mike Krywiak, Don Sinclair, and Delano Tolley. I'd ask all members to please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the steering committee for the first Exposure festival, which is Edmonton's Queer Arts and Culture Festival, which is starting on Friday, November 23, and running to December 1. Exposure will invite members of the queer community to develop, exhibit, and explore queer artistic expression and provide opportunities for Edmonton audiences to appreciate this art. A number of the members of the steering committee are with us today. I would ask them to please rise as I call their name. To begin with, Heather Zwicker, who's chair; Anthony Easton; Todd Janes, who's also a constituent and runs Latitude 53 gallery; Ted Kerr; and Christie Shultz. Is Adam there as well? Okay. So please join me in welcoming these wonderful members of our community bringing us another festival.

I have a second introduction, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce

to you Herta Ogertschnig. She is a constituent and a senior. She's been very active in working with my office on concerns about standards of living, particularly around the amount of money that seniors have to buy good, nutritious food. We did contact the minister about this and asked him to review the income level in seniors' benefits. I would ask Herta to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly for her advocacy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Mr. Rod Olstad. Rod's family have been residents in Alberta since 1892. Currently, Rod is a volunteer steward of the Holmes Crossing sandhills ecological reserve, located northwest of Barrhead, and is also the volunteer chair of the Alberta NDP environment caucus. On behalf of my constituents and all Albertans I would like to thank Rod for his efforts and his advocacy on behalf of everyone. I would now ask him, please, to stand and that he receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Barrie and Richard Vickery

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge the agricultural achievements of the Vickery family, who farm in Kneehill county. Recently Richard and Barrie Vickery, while accompanied by their wives, Judy and Sandra, as well as their parents, Richard Sr. and Betty, were named Agri-Trade farm family of the year for my constituency.

Through the years the Vickery family have witnessed many changes in agriculture, and they have continually succeeded by drawing upon their great work ethic and passion for farming. Today Richard and Barrie rely more and more on their innovation and resourcefulness to balance the demands of a modern agriculture industry as they farm a homestead that was founded by their grandparents in 1919.

1:10

The Vickery brothers are a great example of intergenerational farmers who have gained an immense appreciation for the independence and accomplishment of cultivating their own land. Each brother had once pursued other endeavours, only to be drawn back to their roots to live a life that has allowed so many Albertans to prosper. Their decision to return to the farm greatly benefited their rural community as both men are active residents. Richard served as county councillor in Kneehill county and Barrie as a director for Rural Crime Watch. The Vickerys acknowledge that their success is credited to the support they receive from their family. Each family member contributes to help farm 1,650 acres of wheat, barley, canola, and peas and 150 acres of hay, and they tend to a small herd of cattle as well.

Their recognition is well deserved, and I wish the Vickery family continued success.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

National Child Day

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, November 20, is National Child Day. This day was first proclaimed by the government of Canada in 1993 to recognize the United Nations convention

on the rights of the child. Today we celebrate our commitment to ensuring that all children are treated with dignity and respect, given the opportunity to have their voices heard, protected from harm, provided with their basic needs, and given every opportunity to reach their full potential.

Children are Alberta's most precious resource. Supporting the growth and development of Alberta's children and providing them with the opportunity to pursue their goals will mean a bright future for all Albertans. We will continue to work together across government and with Alberta communities to improve the quality of life for all children and youth and provide families the support they need to lead safe and healthy lives. Mr. Speaker, today we will secure a bright future for our children.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Famous Five Maquette

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among the statues on Parliament Hill in Ottawa are a few that are neither Prime Ministers nor queens and kings. One of them is of Baldwin and LaFontaine, the pair of MLAs in the province of Canada 160 years ago who led the movement for responsible government. Another, the most recent addition, is a sculpture of the five who 80 years ago led the movement to have women recognized as persons in the British empire. This sculpture and smaller representations of it throughout the country are the work of Edmontonian Barbara Paterson. The five who led this movement were social activists for whom women's rights were not an end in themselves but an important part of building a more human society. Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Emily Murphy, and Irene Parlby were Canadians and Albertans. Three were MLAs who sat in this Chamber.

Leadership comes in many forms. Many who enrich the human journey are neither royalty, presidents, nor prime ministers. In our rotunda is one figure that falls outside these categories. That is the statue of Crowfoot, chief of the Blackfoot confederacy, whose wise leadership led to peaceful cohabitation of people of many origins – European, Canadian, and American – with his own people in their own territory. Crowfoot can be considered a father of this province.

It is time to add to the range of persons in our rotunda. To this end I propose the inclusion of a maquette of the sculpture of the Famous Five, who can be considered mothers of Alberta as a progressive and inclusive society. The spirit of the five cannot be contained by any one locale, yet it is time they be recognized here, where their work began. Their maquette in our rotunda will be a model of our possibilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Contributions to NASA Space Program

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to share a story of people and organizations whose limits are literally out of this world. I'll begin with a good friend, Scott Parazynski, who was an Olympic coach in the Calgary games. He is an extremely knowledgeable medical doctor, and he is also NASA's most experienced spacewalker.

Last month my wife, Jennifer, and I were invited to take a special tour of the Kennedy Space Center and witness Scott's shuttle team blast off into outer space, an event we'll never forget. I'm pleased to report that two weeks later, after performing the most dangerous

spacewalk ever in order to keep alive the hopes and dreams of those who are working on the International Space Station, Scott has returned safely to his family after his fifth and final mission.

When I reflect on the reception for family and friends on the night before the launch, I recall the most poignant statement from one of the astronauts who shared NASA's goal: to make life better for all people on Earth. Mr. Speaker, it would take the rest of this session to share even a partial list of the benefits that people around the world have gained from the space program, but it's worthy of note that many of the contributions originated right here with Albertans, including Dr. Bob Thirsk, who earned his BSc at the U of C, Professor Carlos Lange, Drs. Samson and Mann, senior scientist Ian Stirling, Shana Corporation, and in numbers too large to mention here, scores of Albertans involved with Canadarm and Canadarm2 projects.

These individuals, organizations, and events remind me of the incredible potential for good that human beings possess. I invite all members of the House to join me in saying thank you and congratulations to all associated with the space program for proving that, indeed, the sky is not the limit and for making our lives better every day in big and small ways.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Children's Rights

Mr. Eggen: Today marks the 18th anniversary of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. Today is also the day that UNICEF Canada released a study on child well-being. Canada failed in a number of priority areas for children, including child poverty, obesity, mental illness, and high rates of children in state care and detention centres.

Now, some of you may feel that you've heard this before, and it's likely that you have. Since Canada ratified the UN convention on the rights of the child in 1991, we have continued to fail our children in these areas of concern. The statistic that 1 in 6 children lives in poverty has remained constant for the last generation.

There is growing disparity between certain populations. Aboriginal infants are twice as likely to die than nonaboriginal infants. Those who have disabilities are still far less likely to participate fully in the education and employment sectors of our society. Aboriginal children are failed by the system in the greatest proportions. The UNICEF report highlights housing, water, and education as major shortfalls. This government might want to look to the reserves and federal policy as the root, but I'm here to say today that this is also an Alberta responsibility. Alberta's children are amongst these numbers, which means that we are failing them here too.

It's up to this government to provide for and to protect Alberta children to the best of its ability. This begins with ensuring that schools are supportive and encouraging places for all children, that health care is of the highest standard, and that children have quality, accessible, and affordable child care. It's time to make a difference and not excuses.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

National Addictions Awareness Week

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission I'm pleased to rise today and help AADAC-funded services and programs, staff, our community partners, and Albertans kick off National Addictions Awareness Week, starting November 18 to 24. This week features various events such as wellness walks, resource fairs, school presentations, family swims and skating activities as well as

announcing the winners of a youth video commercial contest.

National Addictions Awareness Week aims to create greater awareness of addiction issues and to reinforce the message that Change Is Possible, this year's theme. The week also encourages communities to take local action to reduce and prevent substance abuse. Providing addictions programs and services makes good economic sense. Research tells us that every dollar spent on addictions treatment saves \$7 in health care costs. Addictions treatment drives down demand for acute and long-term care and promotes more efficient use of the health care system.

In the area of prevention these figures are even higher. Every dollar spent on prevention translates into \$14 in savings. Prevention strategies like public awareness, education, and social marketing can shift attitudes and behaviours to help reduce the risk of substance abuse and problem gambling.

Albertans can receive support across Alberta through services in 51 communities and have free access to services, including assessment and outpatient counselling, day treatment, detoxification, short- and long-term residential treatment, and overnight shelter.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Albertans to contact their local AADAC office to find out more about the activities planned in their community and information regarding addictions programs and services.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to present a petition on behalf of the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace. Seventy-four of his constituents signed a petition to pass Bill 45 without diluting its contents.

Measure done. Thank you.

1:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition consisting of 67 signatures submitted to both the MLA for Foothills-Rocky View and to me as MLA for Calgary-Lougheed in support of the passed Bill 45, the smoke-free places act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to present a petition signed by a number of people across northern Alberta in support of the passage of Bill 45 "in order to address the enormous health, social and financial implications of tobacco use in Alberta."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition today to present to the Legislative Assembly. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation that will require schools to eliminate any fees that are charged parents or guardians for textbooks, locker rentals, field trips, physical fitness programs, music classes.

This is signed by constituents from Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 120 individuals, mostly from Edmonton, who are asking that the government ensure that remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized, that they're fairly compensated, that wages remain competitive, that they have improved access to professional development opportunities and urging the government to introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present this petition signed by 58 people to petition the Legislative Assembly to pass Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, and not dilute its contents so as to compromise the version approved at second reading, in order to address the enormous health, social and financial implications of tobacco use in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 66 residents of Alberta which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to immediately establish, in consultation with community leaders and interested citizens, the Keystone Wildlife Preserve in a designated area west of Edmonton, north of Highway 16 and east of highway 751, to ensure that wildlife habitat and surrounding environment are protected for generations to come.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise to present a petition from another 141 Albertans that ask the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to "discard the Royalty Review Report and eliminate restructuring of Oil and Gas Royalties."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Fifty two more signatures on a petition which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to:

1. Ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector, regardless of whether these workers are employed by government or by community-based or private providers;
2. Ensure these employees are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive with other sectors to reflect the valuable and crucial service they provide;
3. Improve employees' access to professional development opportunities (training and upgrading); and
4. Introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a petition.
We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative

Assembly to pass Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, and not dilute its contents so as to compromise the version approved at second reading in order to address the enormous health, social and financial implications of tobacco use in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition to this Legislature on behalf of 348 residents of Calgary urging the government to "enter into an agreement with the Tsuu T'ina First Nation to build a section of the Southwest Calgary ring road."

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Bill 49 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 49, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007.

The bill will amend the Traffic Safety Act. Amendments are required as part of Alberta's traffic safety plan. Legislative amendments will define an intersection safety device which can be used to gather evidence dealing with red light and speeding infractions at intersections and the introduction of this evidence in court by affidavit – these changes will incorporate and mirror existing provisions for red-light cameras – and also allow photocopies of registrations for class 4 commercial trailers to be carried as an option to the original certificate.

The proposed legislation will affect evidence considered by the Alberta Transportation Safety Board respecting alcohol-related driving. It will also streamline the process of applying for a court review of board decisions and confirm the amount of deference the court gives to board decisions.

Finally, the legislation includes a liability cap for the vehicle leasing and sale industry and lenders who retain title to vehicles as collateral for loans where these businesses do not have possession of the vehicle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 49 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the AADAC annual report 2006-2007. As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission it's my pleasure to table these. The commission continues to provide leadership in delivering services that assist Albertans in achieving freedom from the harmful effects of alcohol, other drugs, and gambling. This report summarizes the activities and achievements of the commission in 2006-2007.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to table five copies of a petition of another 15 residents from Slave Lake and region regarding the need for extended care beds in Slave Lake. This is signed by concerned citizens of Slave Lake. Of course, we wish to have our aging family members remain in this community, with familiar friends and family. Having to leave the community does not allow for much time to be spent with loved ones. Travel to visit is also an issue with costs, work schedules and other barriers.

They want us to consider . . .

The Speaker: Let's just move on with the tablings.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling correspondence from Eva Makowichuk. She's concerned about the treatment her relatives have been receiving in long-term care facilities and is asking for advocacy available for seniors.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is a pair of publications from the Edmonton Community Action Committee on Elder Abuse. One documents the intervention team's approach.

Another is the program for the 38th annual awards banquet for the Northeast Zone Sports Council. Their motto is Developing Youth through Sport. These were the awards for softball, baseball, soccer, and of course minor hockey.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a petition to the Legislature urging the government to re-evaluate the proposed changes to daycare regulations.

Another tabling I have is from Shauna Grabinsky, wanting to express a few concerns about the proposed Child Care Licensing Act.

Another one from a constituent, Dean Whalen, writing to express concern about the problem of homelessness in our city and province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Several tablings today. The first is a correspondence from Herta Ogertschnig, who is my constituent I introduced, expressing her concerns about the cost of living and Alberta seniors' benefit program; a second tabling from a constituent, Alyssa Fraser-Hopkins, asking that midwifery services be covered by health care – I heartily agree – and letters from Michael L. Smith and Eva Rose G. Angcoy, who are pointing out their concerns about the labour laws, asking for first-contract arbitration, recognition of bargaining rights, one labour law for all unionized workers, automatic certification of workplaces, and outlawing the use of replacement workers. Again I heartily agree.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. They are from constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar

Dave Wilson, Deano Mitchelmore, and Theresa O'Connor. These three individuals from my constituency are writing indicating their strong belief that Alberta's labour laws require major changes to encourage fairness to all working people in Alberta.

Thank you.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Child Hunger

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is the anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, a convention to which Alberta is a signatory. Article 24(2)(c) requires all parties to combat malnutrition and to support the provision of adequate and nutritious food, yet today and every school day in Alberta thousands of children go to school hungry through no fault of their own. My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier believe that the children of this province have a right to adequate food?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of our priorities of government is to improve the quality of life for all Albertans. In a province where the average per capita income is the highest compared to other jurisdictions, in a province where we have low tax rates, we have a lot of the general, very positive economic indicators, yet today we have children that are arriving at school without breakfast. We have a number of programs in place to support families that either through income or through some issues at home the children aren't given proper nutrition. The minister may outline all of the programs we have in place.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that Alberta schoolchildren by the thousands turn up hungry at school every day. The Alberta Liberal caucus sits here across the Assembly from a government that spends more per capita than any other province but often delivers less. Are Albertans getting full value for their money? I don't believe so. Does this government have its priorities straight? Again, I don't think so. This government continues to support subsidies to things like horse racing when just part of that subsidy could create a province-wide school nutrition program. Other provinces support hungry schoolchildren. This government supports horse racing. Can the Premier explain why his government has refused to directly support feeding hungry schoolchildren in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the leader is misinforming the House. The only revenues that go to horse racing in this province are those that are a share of the benefits of the VLT income. Those people that happen to use the VLTs, that income is shared towards horse racing.

However, with respect to children in this province, we have the best supplementary health program for children in the country of Canada. Close to 75,000 children are receiving benefits covering eyeglasses, prescription drugs, emergency ambulance service, dental care, and essential diabetic supplies. We have raised the maximum benefit of this program to give more Alberta children access, and there's more to come.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I introduced a motion in this Assembly for school nutrition programs a year ago. It's something, as members here will remember, I feel very passionate about. This government voted that motion down en masse. Supporting people in need, especially kids, is a fundamental commitment of the Alberta Liberals. When this government spends more per capita than any other province and can't stick to its budget, it can't call itself conservative, and when it refuses to support programs that feed hungry kids, it can't call itself progressive. To the Premier: when will this government recognize that systemic child hunger in Alberta exists and is unacceptable?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, over 1,600 children in Alberta receive support through the child and youth support program. We've also gone further than that, far beyond what the Liberals wanted to do, and that is that we've also expanded the program to pregnant women in low-income family situations, and we also offer child care subsidy for families that are in postsecondary education in the province of Alberta. It's an outstanding program and, once again, unmatched anywhere in the country of Canada.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Children's Services

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Article 3 of the convention on the rights of the child states that jurisdictions are responsible to take all administrative and legislative measures needed in order to support the rights and well-being of children in their care, yet the Auditor General himself has observed that more attention must be placed on follow-up care for children in the care of this province. To the Minister of Children's Services: when will the ministry have these additional measures in place to support vulnerable children throughout their childhood?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would like to say is that in this province we're really proud of the focus that this government has on children and families. For a province of 3 million people we spend close to a billion dollars on programs and services for the well-being of children and families.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The number of children being placed in hotels under the province's care is on the rise. How will the government work to bolster the number of foster families and provide them with the necessary supports to provide optimal care for the children that they look after?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that with our foster families, the member is aware, we are endeavoring to embark on a campaign. We are looking for more foster parents. We're also working very closely with the Alberta foster care association on both the campaign as well as supports for current foster parents as well as our future ones.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new casework model proposed by Children's Services looks promising, yet it will mean more responsibilities for an already overworked staff. How does the

government plan on addressing this gap between needs and resources?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct that the casework practice model is a good model. Currently we are testing it in 13 sites across the province. We do know that it is using the best social work practices. In the test sites we know it's more labour intensive. We are funding for more staffing in the test sites. As we implement it across the province, we intend to increase that staffing as well.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Homelessness Initiatives

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, as the associate minister for affordable housing announced here in the House, a new emergency shelter partially opened in Calgary, and by evening it was full. All over Alberta this winter shelter space will be full to capacity, and people will be left out in the cold. To the Premier. Full shelters are not good news. Shelters are not homes. Will he acknowledge and take responsibility for the fact that this situation is the result of years of neglect by his government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've had people move to this province from different provinces in Canada and from other countries to seek jobs and opportunity. We acknowledge the fact that the number of homeless has increased in the province because more people are here, but we also have numerous programs to address that. We fully support the Calgary homelessness committee that wants to eradicate homelessness in 10 years. We're putting resources towards that. Any further detail the minister responsible can provide.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, when the new Mustard Seed emergency facility in Calgary is fully open, it will have 341 beds. The last homeless census in Calgary counted more than 10 times that number of homeless people. Ten years ago this government got the first heads-up that the homelessness crisis was developing. Talking about a plan to end homelessness in 10 years now is 10 years too late. What actions will the Premier take immediately – immediately – to help thousands of homeless people in the city of Calgary and across the province of Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the associate minister will outline all of the programs available that we have, and those programs are supported in our budget.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm surprised by this question because I know that this member has been at meetings that I've been at, that he fully supports the 10-year plan to end homelessness. That's been with the students' union. It's been with the Homeless Foundation, you know. But having asked this question, there are a number of programs that are available. The immediacy of those we've been discussing in the House, like the eviction and prevention fund, like the rent supplement program that the minister has addressed . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province of Alberta needs a plan and a plan of action to move homeless people beyond the shelter. The Premier's affordable housing gambit is not working, as evidenced in Fort McMurray, as we talked about here yesterday; the increasing number of homeless on city streets; rents that are still skyrocketing. The recent announcement of a secretariat to end homelessness in 10 years was not a plan; it was a plan to make a plan. That won't help this winter or next. What actual action is the Premier or whoever he wants to pass this off to going to take to move Albertans beyond the shelter?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, along with the support through the budget for affordable housing and homelessness we're also providing support programs to those that are homeless. We find that many have issues of their own, generally addictions to drugs or alcohol. We have to deal with those addictions as well. So we have to provide a continuum, not only provide a very secure shelter for the individual, but you also have to take care of the reason that that individual might have ended up in a homeless situation. That is the full extent of the program, dealing with a lot of the issues behind the scenes to make sure that that particular person doesn't end up in that same situation again.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Olymel Pork Processing Plant

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Olymel pork processing plant in Red Deer was banned from exporting pork to the United States after food safety infractions were found during a U.S. Department of Agriculture audit. But in the House last Wednesday the Agriculture minister told us that "Olymel can ship to the rest of their customers throughout Canada" and called the infractions minor. My question is to the Premier. If Olymel's meat is unfit for Americans to eat, why is fit for Albertans to eat?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, unsafe food is not allowed anywhere in the North American marketplaces. We have a joint investigation always done by the USDA and also by the CFIA. It's a Canadian jurisdiction because Olymel was shipping product outside of the province and outside of the country, so it automatically falls within federal regulators. Those regulators are working with the provincial government to ensure safety of the product and to see how we can win back the market south of the border.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Maybe the Premier would stand up and make sure that his federal cousins do the right thing and make sure that food is safe for all people regardless of what side of the border it's on.

The USDA report is disgusting. They found condensation dripping onto carcasses from the ceiling, contamination on carcasses, cigarette butts, and so on. I'd like to ask the Premier why he's allowing his agriculture minister to downplay the safety concerns about unsanitary operations instead of demanding that the federal government step in and clean up this facility.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, when I referred to the USDA, it's the United States Department of Agriculture, and the CFIA is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Sometimes when you use these acronyms, people are wondering what I'm talking about. Both

federal agencies are involved in inspecting the plant and also ensuring that Olymel carries out any of the prescribed procedures that have been imposed either by the USDA or by the CFIA. We're awaiting those reports. We said that we'll support the two agencies in any way possible because the safety of food is of prime importance to the department of agriculture.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier talks a good line, but while he's doing that, his agriculture minister is trivializing the concerns about contamination and unsanitary conditions that were found at this plant. Will he stand up now and admit to the House that his agriculture minister was wrong in trying to minimize the impact of this USDA report?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of agriculture didn't minimize any report. He's a big man, and he'll be able to stand up and defend himself in the House. So the minister of agriculture can respond.

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, under no circumstance in this world will the CFIA allow unsafe food into the Canadian marketplace. I have full faith in the CFIA. The only triviality sits across the way, as far as I'm concerned. If the hon. member would like to come with me to Olymel, I would gladly take him on a plant tour. Then you can see for yourself.

It's pretty sad when the newspapers write the third party's questions.

The Speaker: As interesting as it is, I have to move on to recognize the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Pension Plans

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The taxpayers continue to pay a very dear price for the failure of this government to honour past contracts and to keep commitments that they have made and to accept department recommendations on safety and efficiency. They failed to follow their own legislation and to pay off all debt with surplus dollars. Consequently, we have now had turned over to the taxpayers an additional \$2.2 billion over and above the \$4.4 billion that they recognize they owe the teachers and failed to do it. Why is this government burdening the taxpayers with more debt without receiving a mandate from the people to do this?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm not quite sure where the member is coming from, but if he's talking about the teachers' pension liability, it's about \$2.2 billion. It's a liability. It's not an operational debt. A liability, of course, is an obligation to future payments, and this \$2.2 billion would have grown to a mammoth amount of about \$45 billion had we not dealt with it today. Why would we want to just sit and watch this thing grow in liability and not do anything about it and have the next generation deal with it? Ultimately, they would have had to. So today, now, is the best time. We dealt with it, and the matter is now put to rest. The vote will be taken by the teachers over the next few days, and we will know the outcome.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, they didn't deal with it. They signed now; they're going to pay later. Had they followed their own legislation, they would have paid off the \$4.4 billion years ago, and we wouldn't have raised the level of animosity between the teachers

and the province by not paying that. My question is: if unfunded liabilities are recognized, why is this government recognizing the teachers' unfunded liabilities? What about Albertans for the Canada pension plan and the \$60 billion that's unfunded there? What is this Premier going to do about future Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member has alluded to paying off the teachers' pension plan, and I'm assuming that the question has gone towards the direction of whether or not our bond rating will actually change. Well, six months ago I actually asked the bond rating agencies in New York and Toronto exactly that question, and they said that that has already been taken into consideration with regard to our triple-A bond rating.

When it comes to the Canada pension plan, the Canada pension plan is a 25 per cent funded plan and is deemed to be a 25 per cent funded plan. It is expected to be 25 per cent funded in the year 2025 continuing on to the year 2075.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, like the other contracts that they've broken or they haven't honoured, this is costing the taxpayers, and because the oil companies can pay extra taxes and Albertans can pay extra taxes, it doesn't affect our bond rating. The question is: is this government going to do something about the Canada pension plan and realize that we need an Alberta pension plan to protect the prosperity of all Albertans in the future?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe that what the hon. member is referring to is an Alberta pension plan, something that could be supplementary to the Canada pension plan. It's some of the visioning that we are doing, looking at the future, how we secure the future of the next generation and the generation after that. Certainly, discussion around that point has tremendous merit. Let's put it that way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Department of Energy Consultant

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past May a government agency was paying private eyes to spy on Albertans in Rimby and in Redwater. At the same time Murray A. Nelson, a former senior executive at TransAlta and a former board member of the Alberta Electric System Operator, billed taxpayers \$500 an hour for a total of \$38,000 for 76 hours of work done in May of 2007. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. What did Mr. Nelson do for the taxpayers at a cost of \$500 per hour in May of this year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it seems that the hon. member is calling into question value for Albertans. I certainly would have to say that I can explain the situation around Mr. Nelson's contract. However, I cannot explain the lack of value in the opposition with respect to what that's costing taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, the key deliverables that we've asked for from Mr. Nelson: an implementation plan to ensure that the new AUC is in place and functional by January 1, 2008. It will include but is not limited to terms of reference, a labour relations strategy, and identification of key supporting regulations to be developed by the department.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Electricity exports from Alberta will force the domestic electricity price in this province even higher than it already is. My question is: why did this government hire Murray A. Nelson at \$500 an hour to increase electricity exports in this province to the lower 48 states? Why is he doing that?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I guess it might be time for a little bit of discussion with the hon. member about which way electrons can travel because, as a matter of fact, if you beef up a transmission system and interties in the province of Alberta, electrons can also travel into the province at a time of need. [interjections]

Mr. MacDonald: Wow. You really should appoint one of these guys as Minister of Energy and let this one go.

Now, my question again is to the Minister of Energy. Who benefits from this \$500 per hour contract? Is it the electricity consumers, or is it the big shots that are promoting electricity deregulation? Which is it? Who benefits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will say again about this particular individual – you know, it's odd, and it continues and has done so for the years that I've been here. The members opposite, and particularly this one, take great pleasure – take great pleasure – in calling into question the character of Albertans that work very hard on behalf of this province and on behalf of Albertans. If that's the best constructive thing they can do, I guess they can just continue to be who they are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mental Health Services

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Health and Wellness said that the report of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force provides the broader focus needed to address addictions to illicit drugs and substance abuse as well as the mental health issues, which are another key contributor to crime. The need for psychiatric treatment, especially for those who may be self-medicating with illegal drugs and committing crimes, is great, yet the wait times for psychiatric treatment in Alberta are longer than in most other provinces. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why isn't the government doing more to help people get the mental health treatment they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a focus that came through on the crime and safe communities task force, and there is a commitment to do more in the area of mental health, certainly. But I think we should be very proud of the fact that the Alberta Mental Health Board has a comprehensive strategy for mental health in the province, and they're working towards it, particularly focused on children's mental health. Now with the federal government establishing the Canadian Mental Health Commission, with its head office in Calgary, also with a focus on children's mental health, I think we're really poised to make

progress in this area and make sure our children in particular have access to the mental health services that they need.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, by the time someone enters a treatment program, he or she has already suffered greatly from the devastating effects of mental illness, and when this happens, the greater society suffers as well. Surely, treatment is only one part of a larger strategy to address mental health needs. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness tell us what is being done in the critical area of prevention?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot that's happening. In fact, I'm going to be at a conference this Friday in Banff with the mental health showcase talking about all the programs that are available and the co-operation and collaboration that's going on in this area. The Norlien Foundation sponsored a conference in May that brought together a number of the thinkers and collaborators across the province in this area. So there's lots of good work happening. We brought in with the support of the Canadian Mental Health Commission three people from the Bluewater school board in Ontario, which might, Senator Kirby believes, have the best school-based mental health program in the country, to meet with a group of people in the Capital region about programming that they can do. In other words, there's a lot of collaboration happening and good work being done.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Ambulance Services

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The mess this government created is flowing downhill and landing at the front doors of our cities. City hospitals are so backed up that paramedics are forced to wait up to eight hours in emergency rooms, which also means that those ambulances are not available to respond to calls. My first question is to the minister of health. There were 24 red alerts in Edmonton just last month, and that is only expected to get worse. Why didn't the minister do anything over the past year to prevent this predictable situation?

Mr. Hancock: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, the minister of health did quite a lot in this area. I met with both the Calgary regional health authority and the Capital health authority to talk about what they might do in terms of the emergency areas, how we can expand the capacity of the emergency areas, putting in place the full capacity protocol, as an example, which has been implemented in both places with some degree of modification for the circumstances. We're doing a lot of work in terms of how we can move patients through so that there's more capacity at the front end of the emergency. The fact of the matter is that there is increased activity at emergencies notwithstanding initiatives such as the Capital Health Link, which was created a number of years ago and took a lot of pressure off the demand for emergency. That's been expanded across the province. There's lots of good work happening.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister. Ground ambulance funding has remained static since 2005. How does the

minister expect municipalities to respond quickly to emergencies when provincial funding is not keeping up with inflation or population increase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prior to 2005, of course, ambulances were run by municipalities and funded by municipalities. In 2005 the government made a decision to move to supporting ambulance services as a part of the health system, but that was put on hold. As a result of that, there was a hole in the municipalities' budgets because they hadn't planned in that year, and the government stepped forward and filled that hole with \$55 million. That doesn't stop municipalities from increasing their funding for ambulance services, as they used to do in the past. However, we are working on an ambulance policy, which I hope to be able to bring forward very shortly, to deal with the completion of that transition program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, this government backed out of the deal and left the municipalities on the hook.

To the same minister. In April, when there was still snow on the ground, the minister indicated that he would soon be deciding whether to transfer ambulance service delivery from the municipalities to the health regions. There is snow on the ground again. Has the minister made this decision, or are municipalities going to have to wait in limbo for another two years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One thing I've learned on this job is that issues aren't always as simple as they seem to be on the surface. With ambulance services that seems to be the case. There are a lot of interests across the province with respect to ambulance services. There have been at least five reports on the area. Over the course of the year I've met with a number of stakeholders and interested people with respect to the area. I've reviewed the pilot projects, I've reviewed the reports, and we're moving forward with a policy, which will come in the fullness of time.

Drug Abuse Treatment and Prevention

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, low-life, scumbag criminals are continuing to peddle drugs to young Albertans, hooking them on these harmful drugs and causing endless grief to Alberta families. Recently there have been reports that some Alberta families have had to send their children to clinics in the United States at great expense or to other provinces for drug addiction treatment. My question is for the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Why can't young Albertans get treatment here in Alberta, where they're close to their families?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this again was an issue that was addressed in the crime and safe communities task force, and that supplemented the work that was done on the crystal meth task force, which clearly identified a need for more treatment programs. Having said that, we're committed to providing those treatment beds right here in Alberta, but we do have services through AADAC: outpatient counselling in more than 50 communities, mobile services, intensive day-treatment programs in Edmonton and

Calgary, detoxification services and residential services in Edmonton and Calgary and Lethbridge. In instances where young people are using substances that endanger themselves or others, parents can access mandatory treatment through PCHAD, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act.

Dr. Brown: My first supplemental is to the same minister. One of the most important recommendations of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force was that the government provide mandatory, early, and ongoing education for children and youth to build their skills and reduce the risks of them getting involved in gangs, drugs, violence, and other crime. What is the government doing to ensure that Alberta students are properly educated on the dangers of drug use and addiction?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is one area where AADAC has very, very good materials. I've actually discussed this with educators, and they've told me that the materials that AADAC puts together are very valuable, very useful tools for the classroom. AADAC counsellors are available to do that resource work in our educational institutions.

It is very important that we deal with drugs on a preventative basis rather than having to always deal with it on a treatment basis. A prevention strategy will include social marketing as well, continuing the types of ads that people may have seen with respect to crystal meth. In fact, there's just a phenomenal one on YouTube that is now going around from Facebook to Facebook, which is an important way to get the message out to young people. We also, as I mentioned, though, have brought in people from a school-based program in Ontario to help us with collaborative processes here in our schools.

Dr. Brown: My final supplemental is to the Solicitor General. What is his department doing to step up detection and apprehension of these low-life scumbags that are dealing drugs to young people in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier said during the release of the safe communities task force report, "We're going to lower the boom on crime." The Premier also spoke about drug dealers who are sentencing our youth to a lifetime of addiction. We will ensure that these criminals are brought to justice. We are moving forward to implement the recommendations of the task force. This year alone we're spending \$18 million to fight organized crime. This includes funding for integrated policing units to target and dismantle organized crime networks and gangs who rely on the drug trade to make money.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Aboriginal Children's Services

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to UNICEF aboriginal children are one of the most vulnerable populations in Canada, facing enormous challenges. Overall the poverty rate for aboriginal children is close to three times that of any other Canadian

citizen or child. On-reserve aboriginal children who enter the children's services system in Alberta face care that is comparatively substandard to care for off-reserve children. The Auditor General himself remarked that there were observable declines in standard of care on reserves. To the Minister of Children's Services: why is this gap between provincially administered children's programs so wide?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member has raised a very serious issue. We know that aboriginal children make up 8 per cent of the child population in this province, yet they're 58 per cent of children in care. That is one of the reasons why our historic agreement with the First Nations and INAC was so important and so critical. It is intended to get money onto the reserves, modelled after the Alberta response model, and start supporting families before they reach a crisis on reserves.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over 50 per cent of children in care are aboriginal children, yet they make up only 15 per cent of the population. This is a huge problem in this community, and it has now yet again caught the attention of the international community, causing just embarrassment for Alberta. Why are there not more programs available that are specifically designed to bridge the gap between provincially administered programs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again she's raising a very good point. We obviously have some jurisdictional issues, but that is not to say that we as a province will ever walk away from trying to provide services. Aboriginal children are Albertans after all, and that is why we're working so hard with First Nations and INAC on the historic agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. In a system that should work to keep children with their families and use apprehension only as a last resort, Alberta's number of children in protective custody is nearly 10,500. The increasing number of permanent guardianship orders and adoption staff involvement in child apprehensions signal a move toward provincial wardship. To the minister: when will the ministry focus on strengthening supports to these families where appropriate in order to support reunification with their children rather than simply removing them?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we do. We will always try to have children remain with their families. But at the end of the day we will always do what is best for the child, and sometimes that does require us to intervene.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Emergency Housing

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's okay to talk about a 10-year homeless plan and secretariats and all the rest of it, but we have a crisis right now. The weather has changed, and there's a growing

homeless problem. More and more people are vulnerable out there today. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Rather than talk about grandiose plans, what is this government prepared to do immediately, as the weather has changed, to add capacity to our shelters so that nobody freezes out there?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question because I want to say that this government is addressing the issues of homelessness, addressing the issues of housing. In fact, this year \$285 million was added into the budget, including the housing rent supplement, also to the eviction prevention and homeless fund. We are working at helping individuals that need help.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's cold comfort to the thousands of homeless people out there. You can talk about all the programs that aren't working, but the reality is that we have a crisis right now. The weather has changed. What is your message to the homeless today? Is it, you know, "Be happy; get your cardboard box insulated"? Is that what we're saying? Don't give us numbers. What are you prepared to do now?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is that we have added more funding to the emergency shelters fund, and that addresses some of the concerns that are taking place in Calgary and in Edmonton and in Fort McMurray and in the rest of the locations where there is need for emergency shelters.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's absolutely not the case. With the amount of money we're putting in, there's still growing homelessness. There are 500 more in Capital health requiring subsidized housing than there were in the spring. It's worse now. What's it going to take? Is it going to take some stories about people freezing again before the government adds the capacity for shelters to get through this winter?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that winter has not caught this government by surprise. In fact, we have been working since summer, preparing if this situation should arise. Seven point five million dollars for winter emergency funding for Alberta communities: Calgary, \$4.3 million for up to 450 spaces; Edmonton, \$2.2 million for an additional 350 spaces; Red Deer, \$240,000 for 50 spaces; Grande Prairie, \$140,000 for 25 spaces.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Addictions and Mental Health Treatment

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's crime reduction and safe communities response includes the expansion of treatment beds by adding facility-based and residential treatment beds to address addictions and mental health problems, both of which are identified as key contributors to crime. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How does the minister propose to increase the number of treatment beds available for addictions and mental health problems when there's funding already in place for 400 treatment beds in the province's hospitals that cannot be utilized because of staff shortages?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member raises

a very good question related to the delivery of health care in the province. The reality is that there is a challenge to recruit the appropriate number of health care workers in Alberta's market today, and it's not limited to health care. We have a health workforce strategy that has been put together to try and increase both the way we value the employees that are in the market today and keep them and make them more productive, how we recruit more from abroad, and how we train more Albertans to fill those places. Also, Mr. Speaker, we've recently added money to the AADAC budget, for example, so that we could increase the wages for contracted staff to make them more competitive so that we can provide the workforce that we need. Under the crime and safe communities strategy . . .

2:10

The Speaker: We have to go to the other hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is to the same minister. While treatment may be a solution for those already known to be afflicted with mental health issues and/or addictions, both of these problems are clearly on the rise in our fine province. My question is: how much impact can realistically be expected from these beds over the short and long term? Doesn't this need to be part of a larger plan to be truly effective?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, treatment beds are the last-resort piece. Treating after the problem is already resolved, and of course, as I've been talking about over the course of the last year, the real future is in prevention. That's in working through the school portal to children in schools, providing the wraparound services that are necessary to make sure that they get the help where they need it, that we work early to avoid children getting involved with drugs. And, yes, as the Solicitor General indicated in an answer to a previous question, getting hard on those that are peddling drugs to our children. That's where the real action has to take place, and that's the strategy that's outlined in the crime and safe communities task force.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Cultural Diversity in Seniors' Care

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to Statistics Canada 1 in 4 Canadians are foreign born. That ratio will increase to 1 in 3 by the year 2010, and more often people from different racial and ethnic groups are moving into long-term care centre facilities. To the minister of health. Seniors from different ethnic backgrounds face challenges in long-term care centres like limited activities, communication, and discrimination. What is this government doing to increase the ability of long-term care staff to overcome these barriers?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very interesting question and not one that I've had raised before, but I think it is important for us to work with long-term care to make sure that, first of all, they're very sensitive to the ethnocultural needs of residents. For example, the Chinese senior citizens' centre in downtown Edmonton does a very good job of making sure that there's a full range of services for elderly Chinese people within a culturally sensitive location and supports them in that way. There needs also to be that kind of

sensitivity in other locations where it's not devoted to one particular group, to make sure that those services are available, both language services and food services, in a culturally sensitive way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, Minister, that was in the task force recommendation, and I was expecting the government to implement those things.

Anyway, my second question to the same minister. For many people entering long-term care centres, cultural integration and communication are the highest, biggest challenges. Will this minister consider a mandate re cultural diversity and sensitivity training for all long-term care providers?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it may be a bit of overkill to mandate it for all long-term care providers, but I think that any long-term care provider, whether it's being done in the private sector or by a not-for-profit organization or, in fact, by a regional health authority, needs to be sensitive to the needs of their customers, their patients. They should make sure that their staff have access to the cultural sensitivity training that they need to make sure that the Albertans that are in their care get the best service possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will this minister commit to building a long-term care facility on the south side, south of Edmonton, that accommodates culture specific needs related to food, language, tradition, and religion? Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Well, I guess that begs the question, Mr. Speaker, as to which language, culture, food, and religion. The hon. member didn't say. But the hon. member knows, because we've had discussions, that I'm very supportive of the idea that where there is a large enough group of people to sustain it, make sure that there are care facilities of a long-term care nature or continuing-care nature that are sensitive to the needs of the population. It's very, very important to have. It's important that Albertans, as they grow older, are treated with respect and dignity regardless of their culture, their background, or their needs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An AISH recipient receiving \$1,050 per month can't make ends meet no matter how they stretch them. This \$1,050 a month is spent in the following manner: 80 per cent on housing, 20 per cent on food, zero per cent left for utilities, zero per cent left for transportation, zero per cent left for clothing, and zero per cent left for quality of life and any other needs. My questions are to the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Could the minister inform the House and the 36,000 Albertans on AISH as to what services or supports are available to them under these very difficult circumstances?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak a little bit about the AISH program, that is much more than just the financial assistance of \$1,050. It does also encompass very extensive health

benefits that average about \$322 per person. That would be a waiver of the health care premiums. It would expand to all of their family coverage, spouse and dependent children. It would also give them prescription drugs, eye care, dental care. It would go on to emergency ambulance services, essential diabetic supplies, waivers of Alberta Aids to Daily Living copayments. All of those things ensure that they would also have the supports of whatever health needs would come along with it. But that isn't even all that would be . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Everyone from bankers to financial institutions to housing experts agree that only 30 per cent of your income is the most that you should pay for a safe and healthy place to live. Could the minister advise the 36,000 Albertans on AISH, especially those living in large urban centres, if help is on the way?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to those on AISH I would also like to mention that about one-quarter of those on AISH are also under the programs for persons with developmental disabilities. There are very expanded programs that cover one full quarter of all of those on AISH that are well in addition to these financial supports. That averages almost \$60,000 per individual for that program alone.

We could also go to the things that we're trying to do with their living. There are about 1,100 clients on AISH who, unfortunately, because of the disabilities and the health issues, have to live in modified AISH, which provides them long-term care assistance for their housing and their needs. Others have PDD support . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. It's understood that AISH support is paid to individuals based on the disability of that particular individual. My question is: why is this individual being penalized and his income clawed back because the spouse is working and earning money?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, nearly half of those who are on AISH do earn some form of income through supports other than AISH. It is income tested. What we've tried to do and have achieved is to ensure that there is a greater allowance for earnings of income that won't be clawed back from benefits. If you're a single individual, you can receive up to \$400, as a family \$975. Then even the next thousand dollars each would only have 50 per cent of that taken back off the benefits. We've had a major initiative that has been going for unemployment: how do we see that those people with AISH have an ability to also be involved in productive work and included in our society?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

All-terrain Vehicle Safety

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's children continue to die in ATV accidents. This past weekend a 12-year-old boy died in a quad crash in Nampa. He was not wearing a helmet at the time, unfortunately. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: will this government take measures to mandate helmet use by children on off-highway vehicles in this province?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, again, in tragic accidents like that my

heart really goes out to those families that that happens to. But we are looking at the Traffic Safety Act right now. We are going to consult with Albertans on helmet laws. We have legislation in place right now under the traffic act that it is illegal on public land for anyone under the age of 14 years old to operate an all-terrain vehicle without adult supervision, and we do plan on consulting with Albertans on that.

2:20

Mr. Bonko: Well, it's also against the law to not buckle up, but people still do it.

Mr. Speaker, Quebec is one example where helmet use by children on an ATV is mandatory. While it may be difficult to enforce such a law universally, taking concrete action will at least save some lives here. To the minister: why is this province lagging behind in protecting children from serious ATV injuries and accidents?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I don't think we're lagging behind at all. As I have just told the hon. member, we do have legislation in place. We do have education programs in place, and we plan on consulting with Albertans – I want to say it again – on mandatory-type laws.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While human costs of these accidents must be our primary concern, the health care costs must also be factored in. ATV injuries result in disabilities, brain injuries, blindness, and other lifelong conditions that are costly to treat. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: is the minister committed enough to a sustainable health care system to support a mandatory helmet law for youth?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wearing helmets any time you're engaged in dangerous activity is good advice, and it's one that parents really should instruct their children to do when they're engaged in that type of activity. I'm always at the forefront of promoting the idea that, first of all, we should educate, and then, if necessary, we should legislate to make sure that safe practices are carried out.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 86 questions and answers today.

We will now return to our Routine.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**
(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings. They come from Joanna Gottlob, Sarah Hillmer, Derek Wynnyk, Katie Russell, and Mark Sheppard, and they're all on the theme of homelessness and the lack of affordable housing units. They indicate that we're missing in Edmonton alone over 5,000 units.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Then, hon. members, today I'd like to table the appropriate copies of the following Members' Services orders as a result of recent

meetings of the Members' Services Committee. First of all, Members' Services Order 2/07, which will come into force on April 1, 2008; MSC 3/07, which came into force on November 13, 2007; Members' Services Committee Order 4/07, which will come into force April 1, 2008; Members' Services Committee Order 5/07, which came into force on November 13, 2007; and Members' Services Committee Order 6/07, which will come into force on April 1, 2008. I'm tabling this, and members will receive copies of this shortly.

head:

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Reappointment of Information and Privacy Commissioner

34. Mr. Renner moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the November 15, 2007, report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Franklin J. Work be reappointed Information and Privacy Commissioner for a four-year term.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion, if members would like to participate. If not, shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 34 carried]

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 46

Alberta Utilities Commission Act

[Adjourned debate November 15: Mr. VanderBurg]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is a stench that pervades this province, and that stench is Bill 46. The stench comes from something that should have been buried like an animal's dead carcass but has only been covered over. That is the stench that rural residents find when they smell their well after a fracking that has occurred in the area. It's the smell of coal-bed methane that has penetrated into their well without baseline testing preceding it. It is the smell of sour gas that is in the air that the family experienced from Bearspaw Petroleum's failure to adequately control their wellhead. It's the smell that residents in the Pincher Creek area woke up to the other day. It's the smell that came across from Fort Saskatchewan. After 40 minutes it was finally brought to an end when the fire was brought into control. Bill 46 stinks.

Two weeks ago when we were out to Lacombe – that is, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and myself – as we approached the town, we saw a large sign erected by the residents that said: kill Bill 46. The reason they wanted that bill killed was that it eliminated the need for spies because spies aren't necessary. If you can't get to the hearing, there's nobody to spy on at the hearing. People were incensed. Over 350 rural Albertans showed up at that meeting at Lacombe, and I want to give credit to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for having had the bravery to stand up as a member of the panel and represent his constituents.

Those constituents, however, reminded me of something from a

Frankenstein movie minus the pitchforks and the torches. They were concerned that their interests were not being reflected. Thanks to the expertise of individuals like Joe Anglin from the Lavesta group and a respected Alberta journalist, Andrew Nikiforuk, they went through every section of Bill 46 and pointed out the shortcomings, one of the shortcomings being the back-to-the-future clause, which would simply erase everything that has happened since now and 2003. The sins of the government would just very conveniently be covered up.

They also acknowledged the idea that an individual could only put forward a concern in a hearing if they were materially affected. Now, the definition of materially affected is an awfully broad definition. For example, I wouldn't have been able to be the last intervenor at the Compton hearing on the sour gas well in southeast Calgary. That hearing had the effect of causing the evacuation of 350,000 Calgarians living in southeast Calgary. Why that well ever got to the point of having a hearing rather than just simply being denied, I will never know. That is the problem associated with Bill 46. I and members who couldn't necessarily demonstrate that they were materially affected would not have been able to intervene.

This Bill 46 takes away individuals' rights. The arrogance associated with Bill 46 is the arrogance that is equivalent to what the member from Compton Petroleum stated, that the chances of a blowout were the square root of zero. Well, as I say, tell that to the people down in Pincher Creek in the spring of 2005 when twice the Shell Canada plant failed to ignite and sour gas permeated the region. Tell it to the people of Bearspaw, the family who was affected and had to go into hospital, whose livestock, whose special horses were affected. Tell it to the people in Fort Saskatchewan. Tell it to the people in Whitecourt who are concerned about the possibility of a nuclear reactor. If anything goes wrong with a nuclear facility, it will not be the appeal process that led to the concerns of a nuclear facility. The effect will be devastating, and it will be felt far beyond the simple borders of the county.

2:30

In terms of hearings that have currently taken place and have been ignored, look at what happened when Mayor Melissa Blake pointed out the concerns over the rapid development in the tar sands area and how it was directly impacting on the infrastructure of the municipality of Wood Buffalo and specifically the city of Fort McMurray. The EUB, like Pontius Pilate, just simply wiped their hands of the situation and said it wasn't in their mandate. They did not have the power to provide Melissa Blake and the citizens of Fort McMurray and surrounding areas that she represents with any assurance that there would be any slowing down of the rate of the development of the tar sands.

Of course, our Premier has said that he refuses to put the brakes on that development. Unfortunately, the Premier also seems to be unwilling to grab the steering wheel and stand up for Albertans who are very concerned about Bill 46 and the secrecy associated with it. Bill 46 limits the representation a person can have when coming before a hearing.

I mentioned the 350 that showed up at Lacombe. There was a smaller turnout but a significant concern from members of Camrose who came out this past Wednesday, when the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, my colleague from Calgary-Elbow, and I went out to talk to the individuals. In the crowd was, again, Mr. Joe Anglin of the Lavesta group, who has had his rights tromped, who has been spied upon but refuses to give up. As I noted in my member's statement, Joe Anglin states: democracy isn't something you have; it's something you do. With Bill 46 something is being

done to the democratic process that limits people's ability to attend hearings and to appeal the process.

We've already seen, before this Bill 46 came in, what happened to individuals in the Longview area who are concerned about the fracking that would take place along the eastern range, that area whose underground springs and aquifers provide the water for the town of Nanton and all the farms and ranches in the surrounding areas. Twice I've attended meetings at the MD headquarters at Chain Lakes, where members from the Pekisko Group, members from the town of Nanton, and surrounding landowners have expressed great concern about the possible damage from fracking that could occur hundreds of miles away from the source. However, because the exploration was not taking place on their specific land, they didn't have the right to appeal that decision.

Bill 46 makes it impossible for anyone upon whose land a drilling or a tower is put to have a fair hearing. It makes it impossible for literally millions of Albertans to have a voice. For example – and I'll not go into detail – the city of Calgary: over a million residents but they can't have a voice as a committee member on the proposed new utilities group. They were denied the opportunity to participate in the hearings on the transmission lines that were going to go from Lake Wabamun down to Calgary. One million people who cannot be a part of that group. They may get a partial representation through the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, but they have no direct input. One million people whose concerns are not being addressed.

Talk about appointments versus elected representation. That's what this splitting of the board is all about: government appointees representing government interests at the expense of individual landowners. Currently the EUB is funded 60 per cent by the industry, 40 per cent by the government. They're appointed by the government. Where in that formula are people represented?

Now, take Bill 46. Another clause in Bill 46 suggests that rather than having your own representation, the government will appoint an advocate to represent you, providing you qualify for that representation. They basically get you coming and going. First off, the fox in the henhouse is going to be representing the hens if those hens qualify because they can demonstrate that they will be materially affected. Well, as I stated earlier, whether it's nuclear, whether it's coal-bed methane, whether it's sour gas, people have a right to express their concerns at a hearing. It isn't just the person upon whose land the interference is caused. Every Albertan who has a concern, whether they're a member of an environmental group such as the Bragg Creek coalition, the Pekisko Group, whether they're a member of the Sierra Club, whether they are a member of the ND Party or the Green Party or the Alberta Alliance – if they have concerns, especially as elected representatives, they should be able to appear at a hearing.

At the hearing at Rimbey I understand that a member was denied access to the process. These concerns of lack of democratic representation, as I've mentioned before, cause a stench to be felt, to be smelt across the province.

Last week members opposite objected to my quoting of Sir Walter Scott's reference . . .

Some Hon. Members: Careful. Be careful.

Mr. Chase: Careful about quoting? I will be careful because I added "he." Yes.

Sir Walter Scott indicated that, oh, what a wicked web we weave when first we practise to deceive. Bill 46 is about deception. It's about suppression. It's about manipulation. I also brought forward

the quote from 1984, George Orwell: "Who controls the past controls the future." Bill 46 controls the past. In fact, it goes all the way back in the past to 2003 to cover up the government's mishandling between 2003 and 2007.

In terms of stench another literary example. This example comes from a play about government corruption, where a brother killed his own brother and assumed the throne. He then married his brother's wife, and in the process of the time of the play people die. At the end of the play it is noted that there's something rotten in the state of Denmark.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, hon. members, this portion has now left us, but we do have opportunity under Standing Order 29(2)(a) if an hon. member would have a question and for an answer. The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have numerous questions to the hon. member. He's made reference to the municipality of Wood Buffalo – it's not the municipality; it's actually the regional municipality – and made comments relative to our mayor but really, really, I think, missed the entire mark of what was said at the EUB. I might add, because I had the pleasure of being an intervenor at that EUB, and specifically it was dealing with the issue of the Suncor Horizon project, this government has always taken the approach that we can grow the pie, and we can grow the pie at the same time . . .

2:40

Mr. Martin: How do you grow a pie?

Mr. Boutilier: You can grow the economic pie that keeps people in jobs. I want to remind the member that it's called oil sands sweet blend, not tar sands. It seems to be another Jack Layton comment that comes out. Actually, that's more from the other comments.

My question is simply this. At the time when we were there, we talked about a government dealing with high-growth strategies. The mayor was there, and the mayor was very supportive of the approach our government was taking. When they said the Radke report that came out in dealing with high growth, which has offered an oil sands secretariat, which is headed up by the President of Treasury Board – I have a letter that I will table in this House where the mayor thanks the government for its vision and its leadership. So to imply that the mayor was intimating as if she didn't like our approach is simply not true.

I'm asking the member to come up and actually respond and withdraw the comment because the bottom line is that our oil sands secretariat – the Premier came to the discovery centre, announced over \$500 million, announced infrastructure programs of over \$200 million for housing. He announced \$105 million for a new water treatment plant. No other city has got that support, but a hundred per cent of the support is from the province. Then they proceed at the oil sands secretariat to offer \$1,040 for a living-out allowance for teachers, for support staff, for nurses. If you support the project, the reality of it is that we are taking quick action.

I ask the member: will you withdraw your comments? They are not reflective of the current reality.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Simple Simon met a pie man stretching his pie. Now we also have a stretch coming from across the way. When

the member opposite appeared at the Alberta EUB hearing, the member wasn't sure what hat he was wearing. Was he wearing the MLA hat for the . . .

Mr. Boutilier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Proceed, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. He wasn't sure whether he was wearing his hat as the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo or whether he was wearing his environmental hat. When members of the media asked him which hat he was wearing, I believe his answer was: I'm capable of wearing both hats at the same time. Well, this double-speak double-hat double-talk that's associated with Bill 46 is unfortunately prevalent in this House today.

Mayor Melissa Blake appealed to this government in 2005 along with a delegation of 30 individuals representing First Nations, Métis, health boards, education. She asked this esteemed group, with a very strong PowerPoint presentation, for \$1.2 billion worth of support in the way of infrastructure funding because she was aware that the town was not keeping up with the pace of approvals in the oil sands.

Rev. Abbott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chase: Therefore, she appealed to the government. What they got was an interest-free loan as opposed to an absolute grant that approached anywhere near \$1.2 billion. In 2006 Mayor Melissa Blake came back, and she indicated that because she hadn't received the \$1.2 billion, due to cost of inflation, the fact of not tackling a series of infrastructural concerns in Wood Buffalo, the price tag had risen to \$2 billion.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the time provision of five minutes under the Standing Order has now left us as well. However, we do seem to have two points of order. First of all, the hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thanks. Mr. Speaker, I ask the member to withdraw his comments. Simply, I'm very aware of what hat I wear. What he was suggesting was basically intimating that I didn't know. That was not true. He made quotes that were inaccurate and incorrect. In actual fact, he should withdraw it because, simply, what he said is not true.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader on this point of order? Okay. Please proceed.

Ms Blakeman: I think the member was responding to an incident that was quite well documented in the media in which there were a number of different titles that were offered and accepted by the member. Rather than saying that this is inaccurate, I think it's widely available that the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was trying to insist that he was there as an MLA and, in fact, was at that time the sitting Minister of Environment, and that caused the series of questions from the media. So the Member for Calgary-Varsity was entirely accurate.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, on this particular point. The hon. member couldn't be more inaccurate in terms of what he has said.

In fact, I also will suggest that his quote was wrong, inaccurate. It is widely published. I will table it here so the member can consider it. Even more than that, his comments relative to what was said by this member at an EUB hearing are inaccurate, untrue, and he should withdraw his comments.

The Speaker: Well, hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, you jumped up before I had a chance to recognize you. In politeness and courtesy from the chair I let you continue, but it really was a no-no.

The hon. member is both MLA and minister. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity alluded to that. We're going to move on unless we have another point of order.

Hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, you have a point of order?

Rev. Abbott: Yes, I do.

The Speaker: Well, then, we'll hear your point of order, sir.

Point of Order

Question and Comment Period

Rev. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order. It's actually our Standing Order 29(2)(a), which talks about: "a period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each Member's questions." There were a number of MLAs that were indicating that they would like to ask questions of the member. The tradition in this House is to allow 30 seconds for a question and 30 seconds for an answer when we're on the five-minute question-and-answer period. I would hope that we could hold to that. I know that the Member for Calgary-Varsity went on and on and on with his answer. I believe it was a diversion tactic so that other members could not get up and challenge him on the inaccuracies of his speech because his speech was completely inaccurate and completely out to lunch. It was totally off the topic of the bill, and members couldn't get up and say that. [interjections]

The Speaker: No. It's okay. I think I'm going to rule on this. Okay?

Number one, there is no tradition of 30 seconds. Number two, this is question and comment period, and the chair was actually really moving in the chair for quite a period of time because the hon. gentleman that the chair recognized first to raise a question actually made a comment for three minutes of the five. The opportunity then afforded to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity was less than two minutes of the five minutes. So who does the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar want me to draft and quarter? If it's a point of order against the hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations . . . [interjections] Okay. We've tested the five-minute thing today. We'll now move on.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: I did have a speakers list some time ago. These are the following six speakers: the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, then Drumheller-Stettler, then Cardston-Taber-Warner, then Calgary-Elbow, then Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The names will be identified as the next speaker comes up. If the member, unfortunately, is away at their office for a few minutes, we'll just keep going and substituting an alternate member back and forth.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have an opportunity to join the debate on Bill 46, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. I want to commend the hon. Minister of Energy for bringing this piece of legislation forward. I believe it is important to emphasize that Bill 46 will further our government's commitment to ensuring that Alberta's energy resource and utility concerns are dealt with in an efficient and expedient manner while protecting the rights of landowners and consumers. This legislation was designed to benefit all Albertans in this time of tremendous growth, which is one of the key reasons for introducing it in the spring sitting of this Legislature. The Alberta government realized the complexity of Bill 46 and wanted to allow Albertans and stakeholders the opportunity to thoroughly assess all the sections within this legislation.

2:50

I am pleased to acknowledge that while the Legislature was adjourned throughout the summer months, the Department of Energy conducted successful consultations with stakeholders regarding Bill 46. Understanding all aspects of the legislation was essential, and our government established a stakeholder advisory committee that has and will continue to meet with representative groups to develop a comprehensive implementation strategy. These discussions engage the public on the provisions of Bill 46 and provide opportunities for our government and Albertans to critically analyze what is being proposed.

As an MLA and as an Albertan it was a privilege for me to be a participant in a public discussion on Bill 46 in Lacombe on November 7. At this meeting in Lacombe some important issues were brought up that need to be clarified. It was indicated to me that the beneficial intention of a few sections of this legislation can be improved through amendments. Due to the importance of this legislation, I will be supporting appropriate amendments that will provide valuable clarification to these sections of Bill 46. I am confident that our government through the diligent efforts of the Department of Energy will continue to give critical attention to many issues regarding Bill 46 that are of concern to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 46 is a pragmatic approach to the huge amount of applications that the EUB currently oversees, as has been mentioned. This past year the board received over 60,000 applications compared to the almost 19,000 it processed in 1995-96, a mere decade ago. Our government has acknowledged that as the pace of our energy development continues to excel, Albertans will need a better mechanism for handling their concerns. To address these increasing workloads, Bill 46 will implement two separate boards with clear and distinct mandates that will improve the effectiveness of the board's proceedings. The mandate of the Energy Resources Conservation Board, the ERCB, will solely focus on the responsible development of Alberta's resources, including oil, natural gas, oil sands, coal-bed methane, and other mineral resources. Bill 46 will also establish the Alberta utilities commission, which will supervise the distribution and sale of electricity and natural gas to Alberta consumers.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of both of these boards is to ensure that our government is taking the appropriate measures to allow Alberta's regulatory system to address more issues, not less. I am pleased to reassure all Albertans that Bill 46 was drafted with their concerns at the forefront of our agenda. Our government sought ways to improve the ability of Albertans to voice their concerns. The Alberta government through the AUC will continue to ensure that intervenor funding is maintained for directly affected landowners. It is important to emphasize that small consumers will continue to

receive representation through the UCA, or the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

The boards will still preside over landowner and consumer concerns with the thoroughness and diligence that is expected for all legal matters. Openness and transparency are an essential aspect of this legislation. Each board will continue to ensure that full public notification is given when any application is made. To strengthen public participation, a public hearing will be held – and I'll repeat it: will be held – even if only one person will be directly or adversely affected by any application.

In the circumstance that no person requests a hearing and if no one is adversely affected, a hearing will not be held. But, again, I repeat: if only one affected person asks for a hearing, that hearing will be held. The legislation is designed to ensure that the public has the means and ability to exercise all their contentions and their concerns. As with any matter that has serious legal implications, there needs to be an avenue for appeal. Bill 46 will retain the present course for appeal that allows questions related to law or jurisdiction on regulatory decisions to be appealed to the Court of Appeal. In this area there is no change from present legislation. If new evidence and information are presented that would strengthen a past decision, the two boards will uphold the ability to vary a decision.

Mr. Speaker, our government has demonstrated leadership in establishing an appropriate regulatory regime for Alberta's energy resources and utilities. Bill 46 is an opportunity for this government to enable two boards to deal with energy applications in a proficient way that upholds the rights of all Albertans. We comprehend the implications that these decisions have for landowners and consumers of this province. That is why our government has taken every action within our capacity to ensure that Bill 46 does not favour the interests of any particular group or stakeholder. It will implement independent and nonpartisan boards that will function in the best interests of all Albertans, including landowners and consumers. I look forward to further discussion and the introduction of amendments at the appropriate time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have Standing Order 29(2)(a) available. Because of the interest by a number of members in the last few minutes, when we exercised this, we'll try and abide with 45 seconds, 45 seconds, which is the same approach we've taken, and that would allow within a maximum of five minutes about six responses.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. The clock starts now.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the member who just spoke, what is happening here is that the government is concentrating on this phrase: affected landowner. Does the member not understand how aggrieved the other parties feel that it's only the directly affected person that can trigger most of what's now included in this bill? If you have a house across the road from the landowner who is legitimately recognized under this act, you have no say in this. You cannot call a public hearing. You can't trigger any of the other mechanisms that are available in this bill, and that's why people are feeling so aggrieved. They can be in the shadow of a development. They can be literally across the street from it. They can be at an invisible line . . .

The Speaker: Could we move on now?

Hon. member, do you want to respond?

Mr. Prins: I believe all interested Albertans can write in, in writing.

They may not have intervenor status, but they can write to these things. All their considerations will be taken into account.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question at this time to the hon. member is this: if the effective representation of Albertans under this proposed bill becomes law and we have only intervenor status being provided by the Utilities Consumer Advocate, how is this system going to advance the interests of Alberta consumers of electricity?

The Speaker: The hon. member, if you wish to respond.

Mr. Prins: No. Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the previous speaker from the other side. Considering the industrial development that we've seen here in the province over these past 10 years and then into the ensuing 10 years, say, with the Industrial Heartland, how is this Bill 46 going to accommodate for the necessity to do cumulative impact assessments, which precludes your idea that you are in fact are going to have only people directly affected? This line that you're trying to draw here completely ignores the fact that it's cumulative impact assessments that we require.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you want to respond?

Mr. Prins: Well, I believe that the Department of Environment is dealing with that in another way.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you have another question?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, I do, for the hon. member. In section 9(4) of Bill 46 it states: "the commission is not required . . . to afford an opportunity to a person . . . to be represented by counsel." Can the hon. member please explain that line for us for the record?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member, if you wish.

Mr. Prins: I believe that members that are not directly affected can represent themselves, but they will not have paid intervenors.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm again looking at another problematic area. Section 9(3) says that the commission does not have to hold hearings if the proposal applicant has met the rules affecting landowners. I mean, how is that going to make it a more open process when, in fact, you can make a ruling that excludes people from the beginning by using a set of circumstances? It doesn't seem to make sense to me.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Others? Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. Again to the hon. member

regarding section 9(4) of Bill 46, which states: "the commission is not required . . . to afford an opportunity to a person . . . to be represented by counsel." Does the hon. member consider that to be unconstitutional?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

3:00

Mr. Prins: No comment.

The Speaker: Others? Okay.

Mr. MacDonald: I have another question.

The Speaker: We still have a few seconds left, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. This is very interesting.

Now, the city of Calgary was denied standing in the AltaLink application to build an export line because the board ruled that the city was not directly or adversely affected. To the hon. member: will Bill 46 correct that deficiency?

Mr. Prins: No comment.

The Speaker: Others? No more? Okay. Then we'll move forward.

The following is the speakers' list: Edmonton-Calder, followed by Drumheller-Stettler, then Cardston-Taber-Warner, Calgary-Elbow, Bonnyville-Cold Lake, Edmonton-Mill Woods, and Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking with great interest, and we're certainly going to explore this Bill 46 in great detail. At the most basic level Bill 46, in the minds of our caucus, runs contrary to the mandate of open and accountable governance set by the standards of this Legislature but also by the Premier since he's taken office. This seems to be crafted as a very broad bill and a very blunt sort of tool that is designed to shut down dissent and, in fact, will contribute to the EUB losing its credibility more so than it even had during this past summer with the spy scandal in central Alberta. It is, in our view, a very undemocratic bill, and we believe that it will stifle legitimate concerns of citizens over decisions being made, effectively, by unelected bodies such as the proposed commission in one section of this Bill 46.

While different people have been commenting and focusing on different words or clauses here, we would like to make some global statements in second reading, first of all that we believe that Bill 46 limits participation when it is necessary to have participation. Believe me, we saw from the circumstances in Red Deer and Rimbey this past spring and summer that if you don't follow an open procedure, you in fact will slow down the process and end up with unintended results. We also believe globally that Bill 46 narrows who can participate in hearings. It also seems to limit how individuals and groups might be able to participate, and finally we believe that it runs contrary to the commission's larger mandate, which is to serve the public interest. The sum of all of these effects, I believe, Mr. Speaker, is to make Bill 46 very restrictive and an undemocratic piece of legislation that we would hope would not see the light of day.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Specifically, in regard to limiting participation section 9(2) states the participatory rights that can be granted when individuals have

been affected directly and adversely by the proposal on the table. This is far too narrow, in our minds, when considering that utilities- and energy-related issues, in fact, affect a much broader swath of people than what could be deemed immediately affected. Energy-related issues affect all Albertans, and as I mentioned previously, the cumulative impact of building so many new industrial projects around the province has its own effect, this added-together effect, which I believe this legislation would seek to exclude.

I mentioned this previously, but section 9(3) states that, you know, the hearings may not be held if a person is not affected in a material way. This notion of being affected in a material way is at best legally vague, Mr. Speaker, and does not exist in any existing legislation in regard to the EUB function. So I would call that into serious question and into doubt as well.

Section 9(3)(c) states that the commission does not even have to hold hearings at all if the proposal applicant has met rules affecting landowners. This, Mr. Speaker, I think has at least three specific problems. First of all, such provisions do not exist in any current legislation, so it seems rather arbitrary and heavy handed. Second of all, the impact cannot be known, given that the rules affecting landowners haven't even been outlined yet. How could you make such a presumption without outlining the parameters under which you would make that claim? Third of all, we believe that it can be used as an opt-out. This is an opt-out clause. Even if people are directly and adversely affected, we believe that this is very poorly constructed language that could seek to exclude open participation.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, Bill 46 imposes limitations on who could participate in hearings, and we believe that by linking the directly and adversely affected test to the hearings, the bill somehow skews the participatory rights to those within a fairly narrow group of people. It makes the stakeholders who have broader concerns suddenly excluded. Once again, there's a whole universe of reasons why we should not exclude people from hearings affecting energy and other issues in this province. Coming to the table with this sort of legislation now just seems at best counterproductive.

Talking about intervenor costs. Again, this is a huge issue that we just saw being played out in the summer in Red Deer and in Rimbey. This new legislation that's brought forward here now is talking about covering local intervenor costs. This is a crucial component, we believe, in ensuring participatory rights and democracy. The hearings are difficult, and you need legal and issue-specific expertise, we believe, and this is absolutely crucial for intervenors. Yet section 21 and section 22 allow for the payment of intervenor costs but narrowly define the intervenors as being only people directly and adversely affected. This is particularly restrictive, Mr. Speaker, since groups may have a legitimate interest in hearings in a broader sense and require that funding to make their claims known.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I certainly have a whole universe of interesting things to say about this, but I believe that at this juncture I would like to pass forward a notice of an amendment that I'm doing on behalf of Mr. Mason, to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, be amended by striking out all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment."

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have copies of the amendment?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I'm passing it now.

The Deputy Speaker: We will refer to this amendment as amendment A1. We will allow for a moment to have them circulated.

I believe you may proceed, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, if you want to speak to the amendment.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thank you. Bill 46, Mr. Speaker, comes in the aftermath of one of the most dark times of the Conservative government and of the EUB, which was the Rimbey spy scandal. This spy scandal showed the willingness of an unelected body appointed by the Conservative government to treat the citizens of Alberta, quite frankly, like criminals for wanting to express their concerns over decisions that would have an impact on their lives in a very direct way. The problem was with the actions of the EUB rather than the actions of ordinary Albertans.

3:10

Given the catastrophic failure of the EUB and the firestorm of this controversy that ensued, it is natural to bring in changes to this system. However, any changes that are to be proposed should be proposed with full public discourse and insight into the processes that will be brought forward. This government, in introducing this bill in the manner that it has, has shown that it has not learned from the past mistakes.

Openness and accountability lie at the crux of this current debate. The government fails these basic values in a twofold manner. First, it introduces a bill that restricts the openness and accountability of the system and the people's ability to contribute to it. Second of all, it introduces a bill in a manner that avoids any kind of public input into the content of the bill. The government treats the people of Alberta as a problem that should be avoided for the next time, and then tries to cut them out of the process. If the government wishes to be truly open and accountable, then it will send this bill to committee, where all the parties can come together and lay out a proper framework for the commission in a co-operative manner. It can be done with the input of the stakeholders and concerned Albertans, who have so far been betrayed by this system and by the government.

There is no decision, in our minds, that trumps the need for participatory and co-operative politics and decision-making in correcting the mistakes of the past and in laying out a path that's more amenable to the future for everyone. So I say, Mr. Speaker, that we send this bill to committee, live up to the mandate of being an accountable government, and use the democratic processes that we've started here in the Legislature and outside to work through this problem of the EUB in a reasonable manner and in an open and accountable manner.

The mechanism by which Bill 46 was brought forward, I believe, is indicative of the problem that this government has with discussing important issues in a broad-based manner. Bill 46 is not a democratic piece of legislation, nor were people consulted to make the process by which they're presenting at an EUB hearing more amenable and more meaningful and somehow a democratic process that makes sense to them. Using Bill 46, I would say, as a microcosm of a larger problem, bringing this bill and the problem of a broken EUB back to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment, we believe, would be in the best interests of all people in this province at this time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is an interesting amendment, A1, at this time on Bill 46. Certainly, I support the amendment, but at the same time I'm very disappointed that it's going to restrict and limit debate at second reading on this bill. Many of the landowners in central Alberta who have been

directly affected by the distasteful behaviour of a government agency would appreciate a full public debate at second reading. For the hon. member who is proposing this amendment to limit and restrict debate at this time in second reading, I must say on behalf of the landowners that I'm very, very disappointed. However, in light of the major changes that this legislation will provide, one would have to support it and explain to those landowners that the third party is very anxious to see changes to this bill, but their excitement may significantly reduce and limit debate on this bill.

Certainly, we all know that Bill 46 is going to restrict and limit public participation and further public hearings on energy matters, just as this amendment is going to restrict and limit public debate at second reading on this legislation. Hopefully all hon. members will participate in the debate on this amendment, and hopefully all hon. members will support this amendment at this time.

Now, since we spoke at second reading last week on this legislation, there have been more groups come forward, Mr. Speaker, with articulate reasons why this bill should not become law. Certainly this amendment would give those individuals a chance to have a consultation with this government. We only have to look at the letter that was written last week and circulated to members of this Assembly. It was tabled earlier this week in the Assembly as well. In this letter the mayor of Calgary, which is the home of one-third of all electricity consumers in Alberta, would like to see as a result of the growing public opposition to Bill 46 that the government of Alberta suspend Bill 46 pending full public consultation. With this in mind I can certainly support the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

We look at the city of Edmonton. They, too, have concerns regarding Bill 46. We look at the Alberta Beef Producers. They have significant concerns and issues with Bill 46. Some of the industrial power consumers have concerns and issues around this. Consumer groups have issues around this. The Green Party has issues around this bill.

Now, the hon. Minister of Service Alberta is very anxious, Mr. Speaker, to participate in debate, but what he is stating at this time is not audible. I'm looking forward to his active participation in the debate this afternoon. Maybe the hon. minister is so worried about the Alberta Alliance in his constituency that that's one of the reasons why he wanted to restrict and limit their ability to participate in public discussions here yesterday afternoon. Not only is this bill restricting and limiting democratic rights, but that hon. member is doing that as well. There are many sections of this bill that are offensive to the various groups that have articulated their opposition. Whether the hon. member across the way wants to hear it or not, that's too bad.

There is a reason, Mr. Speaker, why we all should support this amendment. There are many reasons, but this bill will allow the public utilities commission to approve new transmission lines without considering present and future public convenience and need. This will give the Alberta utilities commission the power to make orders and to issue decisions without giving public notice or holding public hearings. This proposed law, if we allow it to proceed, will give the Alberta utilities commission the power to prevent landowners and consumers from making verbal representations in some cases to the commission. Again, we're going to limit the time period in which Albertans can appeal an order by this Alberta utilities commission, and that time period is 30 days. I know that 30-day period is in current legislation, but certainly that has to be changed.

3:20

Now, on Thursday we had a discussion on the role of regulations. As I understand it, the regulations for this legislation are already circulating, certainly not in the opposition benches but in the

government benches. This is another reason why we should be supporting the hon. member's amendment because those regulations have to be public. They could be part of the public consultation process, and the authors of those regulations could explain why they are necessary and why it is necessary in this bill.

Maybe the hon. Minister of Service Alberta could make a presentation to the public hearings and explain why in his view it is democratic for a regulation, in this case part 10, to override the statute. Maybe the hon. minister can explain that. Maybe we could have a public hearing in Vermilion or Lloydminster. Individuals there who've been paying very high power bills as a result of his policy on deregulation could try to explain to him – and hopefully he'd listen to them, Mr. Speaker, more than he's listening to me – just how directly they've been affected by electricity deregulation, negatively affected by electricity deregulation. Those are some of the points as to why we should support this amendment.

When you consider exactly what this government is up to: the Minister of Energy admitted yesterday that they've hired a \$500-an-hour consultant to implement this bill, both commissions on this. This is a consultant who in the past has worked for the Alberta Electric System Operator, has had a very distinguished career with TransAlta, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps this consultant could come arm in arm with the Department of Energy's minister, the current minister. I don't know who the minister would be if we were to have public hearings because I'm certain there are going to be changes in that department. Maybe they could come together to this hearing that is being proposed as a result of this amendment. They could explain the details of this bill, and we could ask, for instance, some of the questions that could be and should be asked at this series of hearings. Now, I'm just going to find those questions. Who suggested that intervenor costs for outside legal experts should not be paid for? Who wants that?

Mr. Snelgrove: Me.

Mr. MacDonald: The Minister of Service Alberta wants that. This is from a government minister who at the same time is willing to give an expert five hundred bucks an hour to meet behind closed doors and advise the government.

Now, the nine-member commission that's to be appointed by cabinet will determine who gets paid to intervene in hearings and who does not. Again, we're restricting and limiting landowners' ability to hire outside legal advisers. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie certainly will have a lot to say about how the city of Calgary is going to be directly and adversely affected in more than a material way by this draconian legislation, but I'm going to leave that for the hon. member.

The commission, this government-appointed commission, can make any order or decision it is authorized to make without giving notice and without holding a hearing. This is in the bill. You cannot deny that, yet you're trying to deny that. Maybe if we had a series of public hearings, you could try to justify it and see if your constituents will buy into it. See if they will after how you have treated the public who wanted to stand up and speak out in Rimbey against the 500 kV line. What was your solution? Let's hire some spies and have a look at them: that was your solution, and you got caught. You got caught hiring spies.

Mr. Agnihotri: They're still laughing.

Mr. MacDonald: I know, hon. member, that they're still laughing, and they should be ashamed of themselves, yeah.

We had the Premier initially try to defend this measure. I'm sorry; it was a disgusting chapter in the history of this province. This

government in its own internal speaking notes on Bill 46 admitted that the reason why they want this legislation is because of what happened in Rimbey. That was admitted in your own – yes, and I'll provide the hon. House leader with a copy of that if he hasn't already seen it because he's going to have a lot of work to do in providing a defence to those hon. members of this Assembly who sent letters out to their constituents, who did not exactly abide by what was in that Q and A and in those speaking notes. The letters that have been sent to the constituents by the hon. members are different than what the Q and A has suggested.

Mr. Speaker, the commission orders without notice allow 10 days for individuals to become aware of the order to challenge the decision. Again, that has to be changed. If we follow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder's suggestion with this amendment A1, then perhaps people could make some suggestions. How much longer than 10 days should that be?

The commission is going to determine who a local intervenor is, and that is very interesting. Maybe people in Rimbey would have a good idea and make some good suggestions as to who a local intervenor should be.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this bill through this government-appointed commission controls landowners and farmers and consumers who want to intervene on a hydro development, a power plant, a transmission line, or even a gas transmission line. But there's no control over the people who are going to develop the power plant or the people who are interested in developing the transmission line. It's a one-way street. It's complete control over the consumers, who are footing the bill, for instance, for an expanded or an upgraded transmission line, but there is no control over the promoters. [interjection] The hon. Minister of Service Alberta is talking about a confession. Well, perhaps he could stand up and tell us why this government gave AltaLink the right to build a 500 kV line without any sort of open competition. Perhaps he could tell us that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), questions or comments, the hon. leader of the third-party opposition.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to tell the House what the position of his caucus and party is on the need for the 500 kV line.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. That's a very interesting question. If the hon. member would check our documents, he would certainly see that we have suggested, and it's not the first time we've suggested to this government, that if Calgary, which certainly is in need of more electricity – I would say to the hon. member that we have a surplus of electricity around Lake Wabamun at our coal-fired baseload generation depot there. There's a surplus of electricity there. Calgary is short of electricity because of the failures of deregulation. We suggested three and four years ago, hon. member, that we build some baseload generation capacity around Calgary. Therefore, there wouldn't be the need for the 500 kV line or the expanded 500 kV line from Wabamun Lake down to Langdon.

3:30

I would also at this time, Mr. Speaker, like to mention that I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka tell the over 350 people that were gathered at the memorial hall there that we are going to have major brownouts; there's not enough electricity to go around. So that even encourages us to build more baseload generation capacity and . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we've been allowing 45 seconds for new questions each time to get more in.

The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. My question is in the same vein as the New Democratic leader's. What is the position of the Liberal Party relative to this idea of electricity? You can't suck and blow in terms of the idea that, well, we want Calgarians to have electricity, but at the same time we're not going to infringe. I have to ask you this question. What is your position? I have to ask you what your position is of the party you represent because, you know, I heard the theory: the lights are on, but nobody is home. Well, I've also heard the theory: maybe the lights aren't on under a Liberal government, and I know no one's home.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, that's quite interesting, Mr. Speaker. When he spoke, I couldn't see if his feet were moving or not to see if he was doing the jitterbug.

In regard to his question I'll say it again – and I'll say it slowly so he can maybe understand – there is a surplus of electricity generation capacity around Lake Wabamun. There is a surplus, and there is a bottleneck there that has been brought on by your own government's dismal failures as a result of electricity deregulation. It's your failure, not ours, as a result of that bottleneck instead of building the baseload generation capacity at Lake Wabamun. I would remind the hon. member that the 800 megawatts of power that are proposed for Keephills cannot be built because there's no way of wheeling that power through to Calgary. So why don't we take . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see once again that the Liberals are dodging very clear questions. I can still remember the very first time that the former member for Edmonton-Ellerslie received her very first question ever in the House under Standing Order 29(2)(a) – I think it was myself who asked the question – and she stood up and dodged it. The very thing that they accuse us of doing all the time they're doing right now.

Mr. Speaker, a question has been very clearly put forward to this Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Does he believe that we need a 500 kV line or not, and what is his party's plan to deal with this surplus of power and to make sure that the lights do stay on down in Calgary? It's a clear question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have provided a clear answer to two hon. members of that gentleman's caucus. That's perhaps the reason why he didn't receive his own nomination in Drayton Valley-Calmar, because he doesn't listen to them just like he's not listening to me.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Rev. Abbott: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). Mr. Speaker, I want those comments withdrawn immediately. This has absolutely nothing to do with the topic at hand. That was a direct insult to myself, and I will not stand for that in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't think there's a point of order here at all.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I have Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Mr. Speaker, sorry. This was not on the point of order. Did you want to proceed with the point of order? On the point of order. Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

On the point of order, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be quite brief here. There's no point of order here. I was clearly pointing out to this hon. member that he didn't listen to the response that I provided to two previous members of his caucus, and he persisted in the same line of questioning. I was just demonstrating that, clearly, he doesn't have the ability to listen to my answer. There's no point of order here.

The Deputy Speaker: On the point of order, the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: You know, I certainly think that both sides do have a bit of a point here. I think the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar certainly is correct in that he didn't get an answer, nor did the rest of us, from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. On the other hand, I don't think that it satisfies the conditions for creating disorder in the House to talk about some of these. So I don't think that there is a point of order, Mr. Speaker, although, you know, I certainly see where the hon. member from Drayton Valley is coming from.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there's something that needs to be said in this House and, first of all, that is that I do listen to my constituents. I do represent them very, very . . . [interjection] I beg your pardon? I could check *Hansard* to show that you said that. I do listen to my constituents, and I do represent them very well, thank you very much. If you want to start talking about nominations, we can have a debate on that, but I don't believe that's what we're talking about today.

Mr. Speaker, once again, I believe that this member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has sunk to an all-new low in this House. I didn't think you could get any lower than they've been in the past, but they're doing it now.

I do listen to my constituents. I do represent them well in this House. I represent them in caucus, and I represent them in the constituency. I listen to them in meetings. I sit down with them. I have had a number of calls and concerns about Bill 46 that I have taken very careful time to listen to and to represent to the minister. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, as you well know, I'm on the speakers list today so that I can also make some comments on Bill 46 on behalf of the good people of Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Once again, I am asking that this member withdraw those comments. If you have to check *Hansard* to see what he said, then go right ahead.

The Deputy Speaker: I think I'm ready to make a ruling on this. I have noted that there has been bantering going on back and forth on this debate from all sides of the House that is probably bordering

close to offending the rules of Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). So if we're going to call one, we're going to have to call them all. I would caution the House to be a little more respectful of one another during the course of this debate, and we'll proceed from here. There's no point of order at this point.

Cardston-Taber-Warner is the next speaker.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, this is indicative of the emotion that is throughout rural Alberta and even the metropolis of Calgary over Bill 46. And there are a lot more problems that are going to continue on if we don't have a more democratic process and expose the regulations and all of the information regarding Bill 46 because there hasn't been enough. So I want to stand up and speak in favour of the amendment, that this really does need to go to committee. It would be to the benefit of all Albertans.

I want to share a few reasons why it is important that we refer this to the committee. The first and most important thing, I believe, in a free and democratic society is education. The problem is that when there's a lack of knowledge, that is when tyranny can come in and oppression and when people are taken advantage of because of that lack of knowledge. Right now when landowners are faced with a so-called accredited land agent that shows up, they have a bunch of information that is pretty much overwhelming for the landowners, and they're buffaloed by them saying: "Everything is fine. There's nothing you need to worry about. Just sign on the dotted line." And if you don't sign on the dotted line, all you're going to do is delay this by 60 days because we're going to take it to the board, and we're going to get there. So the problem is that the landowners are approached the first time, and they're not informed with enough information. They don't really have the ability to go out and to speak with what the government has put these . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we are debating amendment A1, which is that the bill not now be read a second time and the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment. We're not debating the bill; we're debating the amendment to the bill, so if you could restrict your comments to that, I'd appreciate it.

3:40

Mr. Hinman: Yeah. I'll try and clarify. What I'm debating is why it needs to go to committee, and the reason is because the education process for Albertans needs to be there. Another reason why it needs to go to committee is because so far the debate that has gone on has been very limited, and it's going to be limited if we have to pass this by December 6 in what appears to be the rush of this government saying that we have to have this bill passed.

The information and the education is not there. What I'm trying to say, Mr. Speaker, is that this is a very tenuous situation. It's extremely important that the public is more educated on Bill 46. Even the experts that have read this in giving their opinions say: "Well, we need to see the regulations. We need to have more information."

The other reason why it needs to go to committee, Mr. Speaker, is because this is very much about public interest. The question, you know, with the 500 kV line: is it necessary? The question: is it necessary to have three, four, five sets of lines going down? That needs to go to committee so that can be openly debated, and the public can come in and say: this needs to happen.

An excellent situation in southern Alberta is that we have an abundance of wind down there. There have been a lot of windmills put up. Windmills are a benefit to society, yet there was a restriction there because there wasn't a line big enough to carry it, so the

government put a cap on the wind production. Thankfully, they've raised that cap now, and we can go forward. But in the interest of trying to get that line through there, again, a lot of hard feelings and problems were brought forth. Luckily those landowners were able to come together enough in unity to put a stop to the abuse of it going across their lands when they didn't want it. But not every group every time is going to have that ability to get the people of Alberta to come together to protect the community as a whole, especially with the notification process only within one mile of the pipeline, the power line, or whatever. It's very limited and it's hard. Not every time can the people get the communities surrounding to gather together to fight these things.

It's critical that this goes to committee so that we can understand and study this problem more and make sure that these areas aren't, well, basically just walked over by saying: well, you've had your say, and now you go forward. It goes to a quasi-judicial judge, and basically he has the authority to just say: well, I've listened to you, and now I'm doing it. It's not good enough.

The other problem is for the landowners to be able to reach out and find that there's a very limited amount of lawyers and land agents that actually work on behalf of the owners in the province. It's not in the best interest to move forward on this without a lot more debate on whether or not there's sufficient land agents that are accredited for the property owners. We know the incident in northeast Edmonton where someone tried to represent the landowners, and he was taken to court. I was just amazed at the outcome of that. We need other corrections in the Legislature before we can go forward.

The other thing is because of the failure of the government to plan and to realize that the need for power lines doesn't make it – what would I say? – an emergency on their part. It doesn't make it an emergency on the public's part to say: well, we've got to go ahead with this dictatorship bill.

There are so many reasons, Mr. Speaker, why this needs to go to committee. It's just critical that we understand that this is not in the best interest of the public to immediately say, "Let's pass this and go forward. The regulations will come along later," and we just don't have any worry in that area.

The other concern, I guess, and why it needs to go to committee is the fact that the landowners really are in a conundrum right now on how to protect their property. Really, this is the debate when it comes to a democratic society: do the landowners have, you know, property rights, or is it in the public interest? Unfortunately, if you want to look at the worst cases of abuse of the people and of the land, it's in those countries where the government is in a position of power to say, "Well, in the public interest we are taking this," and are doing – you know, some in here are very nervous about a nuclear plant going in. The only places where we had trouble with nuclear plants is where government can actually say, "We're putting one up, and we're going to have our own rules and regulations," as opposed to . . .

Mr. Mason: An industry looking after itself.

Mr. Hinman: . . . a body that is looking after the best interest of itself, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood says.

The point, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to protect property rights. This bill is an attack on property rights. It's an attack on the ability of people to say no to something that they're worried is not in their best interest. Basically, this bill could be – I hope that it will not be, though – rammed through by December 6. It's the same when people go to the old board or perhaps this new board: it's rammed through, and it's not in their best interest.

We have this balance, Mr. Speaker, and it needs to be debated

more in committee. It would benefit all Albertans for us to come up with a much better process to protect the rights of the landowners and the rights of industry to find a balance between development and keeping their land the way they want it and not being told: "Well, it's too bad. We're coming through because this is in the public interest." It isn't in the public interest when government is in a position of power where they can say that. Once again, like I say, we look around the world where government has taken away the property rights and said: we will expropriate and develop as we see fit. Those are the biggest environmental disasters, the poorest people in the world because the government first says, "We're going to take it from the big and the wealthy," and then six months later they come back and say, "Well, we're going to take it from you as well." There is no rule of law once they pass that point.

I once again want to speak in favour of this amendment. I would urge all members of this Legislature to take the thought that we need to have more time, more public input, more debate. This isn't an emergency, needing to pass this Bill 46. It will not be in the best interests of Albertans, so I would urge all members to support this amendment and send it to committee to be further debated openly and publicly for all Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to ask the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner – as it happens both he and myself are on the all-party committee to which I'm making reference to refer this bill. What in your view has been both the tone and the success of the all-party Standing Committee on Resources and Environment thus far? Do you think it would be worthwhile to send Bill 46 there, considering the tone that we've seen so far?

Mr. Hinman: Well, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder for that question. It is an honour to sit on that committee. One of the questions that we asked when we were discussing in that committee is: what are the more important issues that we should be looking at? I can't think of a more important issue than property rights and proper development throughout the province when it comes to energy and the environment. I think that this is an excellent bill to be referred to that committee. We sent many others already this past summer. We've gone through them in other committees, and I think it's been an excellent democratic process. I totally agree – that's why I'm supporting this – that it needs to go to that committee so that Albertans can and will have much better input, and I believe we will have better legislation for development in the future.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: I want to speak on the amendment, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Agnihotri: No. On the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, back to 29(2)(a).

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, once again talking about the success of that all-party committee thus far, how did you find the process functioning between the parties? Did we have success? Do you think that we could apply that to Bill 46 and come to some fruitful conclusion?

3:50

Mr. Hinman: Well, I think the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake would even agree with me on this. That committee worked very well. There was good, open discussion. A lot of the politics were taken out, and it became, you know, a nonpartisan discussion. We were looking for the public interest, that all sides brought forward, and there was excellent discussion. I believe our report will benefit Albertans. When it comes to recycling, we will do a better job in the province because of the work of that committee.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've noticed that a very venerable person, a former employee, a former leg. assistant as a matter of fact, has sneaked into the public gallery here while we were heavily debating Bill 46. That is Teresa Lightfoot, again, a former leg. assistant to myself and the Member for Strathcona. I see her up there. I think she's in the Legislature doing some research for a project she's working on. I would ask Teresa to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 46
Alberta Utilities Commission Act
(*continued*)

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. On amendment A1 the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're in Bill 46. The Member for Edmonton-Calder is asking that it not be read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment. Timing is often everything in politics. Even if this government thought that this was the best bill that they've ever thought and gone through all the processes, they should recognize by what has happened in the most recent past that there's going to be a great deal of cynicism no matter what because of the spy scandal and the other things that are occurring. For the life of me I can't see why we're in such a hurry to do this.

The policy field committees, it seems to me, were set up precisely – precisely – for these reasons: that you could take a controversial bill, send it to the policy field committee, and they could hear from various groups and come back to the Legislature with a bill that in their best wisdom after many public hearings is a better act.

So there's going to be cynicism. We've had the troubles with the EUB, and all of a sudden we bring through a major bill like that. What do you expect? What do you expect, Mr. Speaker, is going to happen? It's precisely what has happened. If we ram this through in the next little while without proper debate and proper public

hearings, that we could do through the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment, I mean, that cynicism is going to be out there even more. It's not just rural Alberta. We certainly know that they're very upset about it. But as mentioned previously, the mayor of Calgary has said that this process is wrong. We know a number of other people that have concerns about it.

Now, the government's response, basically, is: "Look, this is a good bill. Trust me. Just trust me. Just trust us." Isn't that a leap of faith, Mr. Speaker, from what's just happened with this particular organization? You know, I'm not saying that this is a perfect bill – far from it – but even if it was a perfect bill, you would still have this difficulty.

It seems to me that that's precisely the reason, as I say – and I want to reinforce the fact – that we set up policy field committees: to look at bills like this that could be referred to us. I mean, what's the hurry about this? Why is this such an urgent situation that all of a sudden after all the problems we've had with the EUB, we have to get it through this legislative session this fall?

An Hon. Member: By December 6.

Mr. Martin: As somebody said, by December 6.

Why not take the time to do it right? If the government's right in their arguments, they can make those to the policy field committee. They could make them to the various groups that have concerns, and if they can convince them or if the groups can convince them differently, that to me is what democracy is all about, Mr. Speaker. I don't understand why we can't do this. This seems to me to be a perfect way out for the government. You know, you just can't have the situation that occurred with the spy scandal, that was national news all over, and expect people to trust the government on a bill like this without going through the proper procedures. Mr. Speaker, that's precisely what we're doing here. We're not going through the proper procedures.

This is just a policy field committee. We could call it a chamber, if you like, of sober second thought here before we rush into this and create more anxiety, before we create more cynicism out there. If we did this, I think the government would be complimented. All we're trying to do is help the government a bit here. Lord knows they need the help. If they took the advice, I think, if they walked away and said, "Yes, this makes sense; we have policy field committees that work well, and we'd like to take it upon ourselves to do this properly," the government would get some credit for it, and they would get out from under this situation, as I said, Mr. Speaker.

Now, no matter how the government cuts it and says, "Trust me; don't worry," there are groups that have been saying – and I believe that to be the case until the government can convince us differently. You know, it's not just, as I say, rural Albertans. The Consumers' Association of Canada, Alberta branch, says that Bill 46 strips – and we know – intervenor funding. They make the claim that that will cost taxpayers more money. They say that every dollar spent at intervention saves consumers \$10 and that in 2005-2006 an estimated \$90 million was saved. Now, I think that that should be an important argument for anybody, Mr. Speaker, that we could actually save some taxpayers' money if we do this right.

Who will represent the small consumers? Well, they tell us that an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate is going to look after all the small consumers. But again, that's cynicism because here would be a group hired by the government, you know, and you take the complaints there. Well, obviously people are going to be cynical. So that's why we need to go back and have a discussion about this at the policy committee.

The Environmental Law Centre. I mean, they're not political, Mr.

Speaker. They say that it's going to be almost impossible for landowners to show that they're affected in a material way. This has been alluded to. These are all major problems.

The other problem that we looked at: can the developments proceed without a hearing? The minister says, well, they could do that before. Well, maybe they shouldn't have been doing it before, Mr. Speaker. Just because they could do it before doesn't necessarily make it right. We should be looking at that.

Can landowners hire lawyers? Well, only if they're directly affected. It's already been talked about. What does that mean, directly affected? Without money for people that have some knowledge and intervenor status, I think we have some serious problems.

If the government believes so strongly that all these arguments that all sorts of groups are putting forward are invalid, then surely they should have the courage to say: "We will take it back to a policy field committee. We will sit down, and we will listen. We will make our case, and you will make your case, and then we'll come back to the Legislature." They might change their mind, Mr. Speaker. That wouldn't be a bad thing, you know. Again, I just stress that I do not understand why we have to push ahead without this.

It seems to me that this particular bill, Bill 46, was handmade for policy field committees. It's what we looked at in trying to make the Legislature more responsible with all-party committees to take a look ahead at controversial bills like this. It seems to me this was tailor-made for this sort of bill. For the life of me I just do not understand why they want to antagonize, you know, thousands of Albertans, rural Albertans, people in the city of Calgary, all over, Mr. Speaker, why they have to do this. It's so unnecessary. They could walk away and say: "We're going to do the right thing, go to a policy field committee. We'll have this debate, and we'll hear from people. Then we'll come back to the Legislature after we've done that." Why do they need to create this anxiety, hostility, cynicism? It's so unnecessary. Unfortunately, when you create that hostility and cynicism, nobody really wins. Nobody really wins.

4:00

I would just conclude by urging the government to do the right thing. As I say, even at this point they could say: "Okay. We're not in a big hurry. We have time. Let's go back to the policy field committee, which we helped to organize." They'd get credit right around the province, and it would be taken away as a political issue, and the Legislature would work the way the Legislature should, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly, obviously, will be supporting this amendment. It makes absolute good sense at this time. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, does anyone wish to comment or question under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, back on the amendment. I have the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find myself torn by this amendment. The idea of sending it to committee is the equivalent of raising Lazarus, and there was only one individual who was able to accomplish that over the last two millennia. When something is as flawed as this piece of legislation is, I'm not sure that members of the committee would recognize how many hours and hours of writing, basically starting from the first capital letter and ending at the last period, would have to be rewritten for this bill to be acceptable, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview pointed out, for rural Albertans or urban Albertans.

It's fairly safe to say that the members of the government won't take my advice, but I'll offer it anyway. The government has the

potential of being perceived as getting on with good governance. If their plan to eliminate the unfunded pension liability succeeds – I thoroughly hope it will for the sake of teachers, for the sake of students, for the sake of school boards – if they can see that through, that'll be the first major piece of planning that they've been able to accomplish in almost a decade and a half. All the goodness that would be associated with putting an end to the unfunded liability, which means not only the \$2 billion and not just simply contributing the \$80 million a year but dealing with the actual \$2 billion and then the \$4.1 billion on top of that – the government has put forward a plan on getting rid of that unfunded liability.

Now, they haven't necessarily put a timeline to it or how much will be paid out other than the teachers' wages and so on over that time period. But if it can be accomplished, you know, I'll take my hat off – I only wear one hat at a time – to the government and recognize that accomplishment. In the face of that potential achievement, which I really hope goes through successfully – I don't have that same potential bitterness that it's just an election ploy. Having been a teacher for 34 years, I really want this thing to go through.

However, contrast the forward thinking of reducing a pension liability, which by 2060 would be in the area of \$45 billion, to this piece of legislation, that not only annoys the 2 million people living in urban centres but attacks directly their own Conservative credibility, that they have fought to establish over the last 36 years, in their power base in the rural areas. I can't understand why the government would go against the very people that have been their staunch supporters over the last number of years. Based on the distribution of rural MLAs to urban MLAs, the rural vote remains the strong point. The rural vote decides who forms the government. Why this government would be so anxious to cut out the people that they have been elected to represent, to give them an appeal process that would be cut down to 30 days providing they are somehow affected in a material way – I don't understand why they would be opposed to the notion of referring this to committee.

Now, I'll give the government another bouquet, two in a row. We have long criticized the government for a lack of accountability and a lack of transparency. We were the only province that didn't have all-party standing committees, and the Premier in his wisdom – well, that's three compliments – noted that standing committees should consist of members of all parties. He recognized the combined wisdom – the combined wisdom of the member of the Alliance Party, the combined wisdom of the members of the New Democratic Party, the combined wisdom of the Liberals, and the wisdom of the Conservatives, who are currently forming the government – to come to consensus through the committee format.

As I said, I'm torn because I know how hard the committee worked and the number of hours they spent coming to the decision that it was very important to recycle milk containers. We know that they recognized the problem that almost two-thirds or more of containers were ending up in dumps, and that wasn't, obviously, very effective. They recognized that not only should milk containers be recycled and that in order to encourage people to do so, they would have to provide a certain reward in terms of a deposit, but the government also – and I think it was partly through this committee – recognized the fact that not only were milk containers not being recycled, but likewise pop bottles, cans, beverage containers, and so on weren't being recycled.

The committee came up with the idea – and I'm attributing it to the committee – of raising the bottle deposits and the cans and so on so as to improve the environmental quality of life. Also, since there are so many homeless individuals whose livelihood, basically, is dependent on the recycling that they do, this gave people an

opportunity to actually participate in an ecologically supportive endeavour. However, I know how hard the committee worked on recycling milk cartons and rewarding people for it with a deposit.

When you compare the recycling of the milk containers to the difficulty associated with rewriting Bill 46 – taking out the covert clauses, extending the appeal period beyond that limiting time of 30 days, allowing for elected members on the commission – basically they would be starting from scratch.

Now, with regard to the covert nature of Bill 46 and why it's so difficult to correct, the individual who originally spent so much time in helping the Energy minister draft this contentious bill is no longer around. His disappearance from employment with the government would suggest that he found a more lucrative position. Possibly he reconstituted himself as a consultant and is being hired by another government ministry at \$500 an hour. But he's no longer around, and we have a new individual. We have the new sort of Steve Austin of government consultants at \$500 an hour, the bionic consultant, and so far he has cost Alberta taxpayers \$84,000. If his work is reflected in Bill 46, then we're going to need another consultant at goodness knows what an hour to undo the damage that this individual has contributed to the secrecy of Bill 46.

4:10

Now, the committee will be like an archaeological dig. They're going to have to do the equivalent of going to a mushroom factory and sifting through the various layers of detritus and dirt and try and uncover pieces of potentially amendable information. I'm not sure, even given the combined wisdom of this House, that that task is possible. It concerns me that the use of the member's time could be better spent than trying to breathe life into a bill that the signs along the roadway to Lacombe indicated should be killed. So I'm not convinced that the committee and its attempts to revitalize this bill will be successful.

However, I do recognize that there has been good work done; for example, on Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. Here are four compliments. Please. I hope we're keeping track today. The government recognized that nonprofit organizations in Bill 1 should be exempted. They recognized the flaw of requiring charitable organizations to be registered as lobbyists, so now they're going to be exempted. It does go to show – and, again, this is why the yin and the yang, the pulling I'm feeling – that there's the possibility of taking a bad piece of legislation and, with the help of all parties, turning it into a worthwhile piece of legislation that Albertans will appreciate because it takes into account the concerns that they have expressed through their representatives on the all-party committee, and the whole democratic process is revived.

Today I have taken the opportunity between debates to write approximately 110 times to a class in my constituency who came up to do the tour of the Legislature from St. Vincent de Paul. The expression I've written close to a hundred times is: democratic participation is essential. That is what amendment A1 suggests. It suggests an underlying faith in the democratic process, that despite 72 years of a Conservative-dominated agenda there is still the possibility of new thought, of shining light into those dark recesses by the combined efforts of all the members in attendance.

I don't want to see it as a sentence for those members. I want them to enjoy the love and the connection and the rejuvenation of being with their families over the Christmas period. I realize that in order to fix Bill 46, so much effort will have to be expended and so much time away from their constituents and their loved ones that I'm having trouble balancing the amount of time that would be necessary to fix Bill 46 as opposed to simply, as the signs on the way to Lacombe indicated, killing it.

With Bill 46, if it does go to committee, it does, as the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview indicated, give the government an

out. It does give them an opportunity, an amazing opportunity – in French you say “incroyable” – an unbelievable opportunity to get this right. While I have doubts that it’s possible to get this right, I would not want to take away from the opportunities that have been provided through all-party policy committee partnership to attempt the impossible. If they can fix Bill 46 in committee, then we’ve got the best system of democracy and participation in all of Canada.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise to speak to this amendment, which would send Bill 46 to a standing policy field committee in order to allow members of the public to come forward and make their comments in an open and democratic forum with respect to this bill.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that this bill has generated a great deal of controversy and is perhaps one of the most debated bills within the public as well as in this Legislature, so it seems to me to make a great deal of sense. I’m going to talk a little bit and lead up to the reasons why I think this referral amendment should be supported.

It’s very clear to us on this side, or at least in our corner, of this Legislature that the Tories are in the pocket of big oil. Mr. Speaker, they took nearly \$600,000 from big oil companies in the last two years in political donations. Somewhat farther behind, our colleagues in the Liberal Party took about \$200,000 from big oil in the same period. So it should be no surprise that they want to set up a structure that allows big oil and the big power companies, which are also significant supporters of the Conservative Party, to be able to override public opposition. I want to say that it should be no surprise that both the Conservatives and the Liberals are supporting royalties that would place Alberta amongst the lowest in the world. When we are sitting on one of the largest untapped reserves of petroleum left in the world and have the opportunity to set the price, the lion’s share of the additional value, according to the government’s proposal, is going to go back to the oil companies.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker – and I’m getting to the reason why this amendment is necessary – I wish to set the political context for what’s happening right now in this province with respect to public hearings on these matters and why significant changes to this legislation are needed but that those changes need to come about as a result of true democratic consultation with the people of this province, including landowners who are potentially affected. On top of amongst the lowest royalty rates in the world, both the Conservatives and the Liberals support a series of tax cuts for corporations in this province. These are amongst some of the most profitable corporations in the world. Just last year we had EnCana post over a \$6 billion profit, yet both the Conservatives and the Liberals want to cut their taxes from a few years ago, a 15 per cent rate, to 8 per cent.

4:20

When I was a newly elected MLA, Mr. Speaker, I attended a Chamber of Commerce lunch here in Edmonton, and I heard Steve West lay out this plan to cut the corporate tax rate from 15 per cent to 8 per cent. The government has been proceeding in stages to implement this in this province, and they’ve been supported, of course, by the Liberals in doing so. So we have everyone from Steve West, every provincial Tory finance minister, and the Leader of the Official Opposition all agreeing that we should cut corporate income tax almost in half.

We need to look at the mandate of the EUB. I think this is an important thing, Mr. Speaker, because we want to divide it. The government wants to divide the EUB into two pieces. One will deal with oil and gas and those types of resources; the other one will deal with electricity. That’s fine, but fundamentally the basic policy of the government is going to be: continue to facilitate the extraction of petroleum and its export from this province ahead of all other considerations, ahead of the rights of landowners, ahead of the environment, ahead of the general public interest. The same thing with power. They’re going to want to facilitate the development of a power grid that meets not the needs of Albertans necessarily but which provides for the export of electricity from this province and which allows the burning of coal in this province and all of the associated negative impacts with pollution in order to export that power to the United States.

It brings us to the spying scandal amongst the Rimbey landowners. Those landowners were very, very interested in the 500 kV proposal, which they believed negatively impacted them. They began to organize, and they organized effectively. They got their message out to the extent that the government and the EUB became alarmed, so of course there was the well-known incident of the spying.

It’s interesting that the investigation set up by the Minister of Energy with Justice Perras resulted in a report which was nothing less than a whitewash, Mr. Speaker. It was a whitewash. It didn’t look at anything that went on above the level of the director of security for the EUB, notwithstanding the fact that the NDP opposition produced e-mails that showed that at least three members of the panel, all the members of the panel hearing that case on the board of the EUB, were privy to the information that the spying was going on. And senior officials, colleagues of and superiors to the director of security for the EUB, were also involved, yet there’s no mention of their involvement whatsoever in the Perras report. So the Perras report was a complete whitewash. Nobody has looked at the role of the board, the senior administration of the EUB, or the minister or other members of the government or officials in the Department of Energy with respect to that spying scandal. That’s all been swept under the carpet. We may never know exactly what happened.

Now, Bill 46 attempts to deal with this problem, at least from the perspective of the government, who wants an EUB that will facilitate the oil companies’ interests: extraction and production of petroleum and of electricity, including electricity for export for profit. So what does the bill do? Well, aside from the structural switch, the bill changed the ability of public input into utility-related decisions by restricting it to those people directly and adversely affected by proposals on the table. Such a move would exclude the broader public and public policy groups from having a say in the process.

The bill also removes any obligations to hold public hearings if no person requests a hearing, if it, quote, appears that no one is directly and adversely affected or if it feels that the applicant has met the rules laid out for it regarding the owners of lands being affected by the construction of transmission lines. The bill can limit the public input to written submissions and not go the route of oral hearings. The bill explicitly removes obligation to determine present and future public convenience and need regarding the construction of new lines. This affects the hearings on system needs. The bill retroactively amends the act on public convenience so all changes become effective as of January 1, 2003, Mr. Speaker, four years ago. That is unacceptable.

That’s why there’s so much public concern. It’s a way of stifling public input into important issues in order that government can get ahead with its agenda, which is not looking after the public interest, not looking after the environment, and it is not looking after the

interests of landowners. I think it's interesting that the NDP is here standing up for the rights of landowners against a Conservative government that wants to take them away.

Now, I want to suggest that the principle of splitting oil and power into two bodies or jurisdictions over them is not a bad thing. It's the policy that the government has in those two areas that's really the problem. Our amendment would take this bill out to the public. It's interesting that when the government has its sort of flagship bills, like bills 1 and 2, they're prepared to send them to these committees, but when there's something that the public really has a concern about and something that could hurt the government, they don't want to have public hearings.

They are only interested in having public hearings and looking like they're transparent when it's convenient for them, not when the public demands it, not when the public wants to have input to a bill. When it's a controversial bill, if it hurts the government potentially, there's no way that they're prepared to allow a public hearing on it. I think it's going to be pretty clear in just a few minutes, when we vote on this amendment.

But that's what important. It's not that all of us in our different parties in our greater wisdom can come up with a better decision if we have a committee; it's that the public will provide the wisdom to its elected officials. That's the advantage and the value of this amendment. That's the advantage and the value of these standing policy field committees: if the government is prepared to use them even when it's not convenient. But – I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker – I don't think they will do that. I hope that they would, but I'm not holding my breath.

I would nevertheless reach out to the government on the other side to do the right thing just this once and make sure that we can have an open and public debate so that the public itself has a say, that it's not just an EUB that helps the oil and gas companies get what they want or helps the big utility companies get what they want but something that does make sure that we act in the public interest. We can arrive at that type of bill, Mr. Speaker, if we pass this amendment that we have open public hearings. If we listen to the wisdom to the people, it can be done.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Under 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Hon. member, you expressed a degree of cynicism that the government might not take this opportunity to deal with the problems associated with Bill 46. I share that cynicism, but obviously you've put this amendment out in the hope that the government will do the right thing. I've noted that they've done one right thing already: they're dealing with the unfunded pension liability. Do you have hope that maybe there will be sufficient members of the government who have faith in their own committee process that Bill 46 could go to committee and could potentially be fixed?

Mr. Mason: I'm ever hopeful, hon. member, that the government will do the right thing. They have done the right thing once already this session when they agreed to a debate on royalties. Previously, in the last session, they agreed to a debate on the state of seniors' care, which was another motion that the NDP opposition put forward. So they can be persuaded from time to time. But I'm just concerned that no member opposite has jumped to their feet and supported this amendment that we take Bill 46 out to public hearings. I think, you know, that if they do that, I'll be pleasantly surprised. It will be, in fact, something that I think we can all look forward to. If they do, I will be pleasantly surprised.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

4:30

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the hon. member. As you know, we can't introduce amendments until we're in committee. I guess my question to the hon. member would be: wouldn't it be advisable if you had a chance to see the amendments before it went to a field committee?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question because if the government wanted us to know what was in those amendments, they could have given them to the opposition already, but they haven't done that. Second reading is the time when you can get this referred to a standing policy field committee, and that's why we made the motion at this stage. If the government thought that they wanted to share with the opposition their amendments in the hope that the opposition would then support Bill 46, I would have been pleased, and this motion wouldn't have been necessary.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member. The fact is that if you sent it out now, then you would be sending out something that is not complete. Why wouldn't you want to have the amendments introduced in committee and then send it out?

Mr. Mason: Our understanding, Mr. Speaker, of the rules is that this is the time when you can get it referred to the standing policy field committee, and that is why we took the action at this stage. Those are the rules. I think that if the government has some amendments they think that we should support, they should have brought them forward by now.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly, I just wanted to draw to the attention of the leader of the third party that you can in fact refer things to the standing policy field committees after they pass second reading as well. That's a tool that's available, and maybe we should consider this if those amendments are not forthcoming.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you have a comment?

Mr. Mason: No. That's fine.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the next speaker I have is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to rise and discuss the proposed amendment from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Elsalhy: You have 90 minutes.

Dr. Taft: I won't use all 90 minutes.

I think it's worth emphasizing that the roots of Bill 46 really go back in many ways to the shift by this government to a deregulated electricity system and that a lot of the controversy that has arisen since then around transmission lines and the EUB and so on is a direct result of the shift to a deregulated electricity system. We're

just seeing here in Bill 46 and in the public protests and the spying scandal and on and on more fallout from a very flawed initiative to deregulate Alberta's electrical system.

When there was a regulated electrical system, people understood that high-voltage transmission lines were there to serve the public interest. They understood and trusted that the electrical system was being governed and managed to serve their interest: to keep their power rates low, to keep the system reliable, and to earn a reasonable but not outrageous return for the electrical utilities. The system worked incredibly well. Alberta had perhaps the best or certainly one of the best electrical systems in the world. It did all those things. It provided virtually the cheapest power rates in Canada. It was very, very reliable. The utilities who were involved in it earned a reasonable return on their investment, and there was tremendous public confidence.

Public confidence has evaporated under the electrical system that's evolved in the last several years under deregulation. People are confused. People do not trust the system. People find that their electrical bills are difficult to read. When they phone to get help, they don't get help. The government put in an attempt to have an advocate for consumers, but that went nowhere. People get hassled on their doorsteps by door-to-door salesmen trying to sell electrical contracts. Then on top of all of that, you get things like the EUB spying scandal. So this government has brought this controversy on itself. Instead of doing the correct thing and reversing deregulation and returning to the kind of system that we have in neighbouring provinces and still have in most of the states south of the 49th parallel, they continue to head down this path of building controversy, building public frustration, and diminishing trust.

Not only that, but we have an electrical system, governed under the EUB, in which there are genuine concerns about unreliability. It's not unusual for alerts to be put out that have the electrical system in Alberta, the grid, operating at the very edge of collapse during peak demand time in summer and peak demand time in winter. When either air conditioners or furnaces are on, when lights are burning, and you have huge industrial use, Alberta's electrical grid is stretched to the absolute limits, and there are many warnings out there from various sources that within a year or two we could see rotating brownouts.

In addition, you have higher costs, which not all but most consumers are paying. The only consumers who may be paying lower costs are the giant industrial users, who can employee people 24/7 to do nothing but monitor electrical prices.

We've got a real mess here, and Bill 46 is not going to correct that mess. Bill 46, in fact, fuels public distrust, fuels public concern about other agendas, and in the process also takes away some important public rights that might have rebuilt trust. People are concerned, when they look at Bill 46, that we're going to end up in a situation where the EUB or its successor agency will ram through transmission lines that aren't going to serve the public interest particularly but that are being built more and more to create a system that feeds the U.S. electrical grid.

If that happens, Mr. Speaker, then the consumers of Alberta understand that for power that may be generated within their own city or within a few miles of their home or places like Wabamun or Sheerness, they may have to be outbidding the people of Los Angeles for that power in a high-stakes poker game in which Albertans are going to be the losers because no matter how it goes on, Albertans are going to end up paying dramatically higher power prices. So that's exactly the kind of fear, backed up by various developments in the electrical system, that's underlying this controversy around Bill 46.

Bill 46, on top of all of that, comes before the Legislature in the wake of a political scandal that was accurately described by

observers outside of this Assembly as repulsive. The Premier, to everyone's surprise, I think, and the minister both initially supported the use of spies, of plainclothes security staff at the Rimbey hearings, and frankly Albertans were shocked. I think their lines were something like: what's the big deal here? Well, it is a big deal when you have undercover security staff hired by an agency that is to be unbiased, which is to protect the public interest, not only sitting in on public meetings and chumming up with intervenors but actually listening in on conference calls, sending e-mails, and, in effect, spying on the citizens of Alberta, who are trying to pull together as best they can an intervention to support their own rights as citizens of Alberta and as property owners. So I think Albertans were right to be shocked about the Premier's initial acceptance of this.

Now, we've had changes in the EUB. There's been a handful of firings. But I don't think that goes far enough, and Albertans don't think that goes far enough. When they look at Bill 46, nothing in here – nothing in here – reassures them. The EUB is supposed to be an unbiased quasi-judicial board that protects the public interest. Under this government and under this minister, who is proposing this bill, Albertans are feeling betrayed, and I don't think that's too strong a word. They're feeling betrayed by their own government.

4:40

The fact is that the EUB scandal was one of those watershed events that changed the way most Albertans think about this government. It has destroyed their trust in this government and particularly destroyed their trust in the regulatory agencies of the energy industry.

With fundamental principles of democracy under assault, with the future financial security of Alberta at stake, with the long-term success or failure of the electrical grid of Alberta in question, the importance of fixing Bill 46 cannot be overestimated. I agree, in fact, that this bill should be referred to committee, referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment, so that it can be studied further and fixed before it comes back.

Now, the government may claim it's going to make some amendments. Nobody in the public has any idea what those amendments are. We would invite the government to share those amendments with us so that we can properly examine them, so that the interest groups who are so concerned about Bill 46 can also properly examine them. People don't want the wool pulled over their eyes. They don't want this rammed through the Assembly. You can be assured, Mr. Speaker, and all members of the government can be assured that they're going to have a tough time pushing this Bill 46 through before Christmas. If they want to stay till Christmas, we'll stay here. If they want to stay in the evenings, we'll stay here. If they want to be here all night, we'll be here all night because we know what we're fighting for. We're fighting for democracy. We're fighting for the citizens of Alberta. We're fighting to defeat a bill that is deeply flawed. So I ask the members of this government to consider that and to consider the more sensible and attractive option of just referring the bill for correction.

When I look at Bill 46, there are a number of questions that immediately come up. Will this bill help secure Alberta's future prosperity through a strong, effective regulatory system? Will Bill 46 help to protect our environment? Will Bill 46 support and protect the fundamental democratic rights of Albertans? Does this bill respect and defend the interests of the people? Does this bill advance things such as the energy security of the province of Alberta and the people who live here? The answer to each of those questions, Mr. Speaker, is no, and that's why this bill fails. This bill, in fact, is further diminishing trust in this government and in the regulatory process. Without trust there can be no progress.

Mr. Speaker, the EUB is unique in Canada and perhaps unique in

North America in terms of the scale of Alberta's economy and society that it affects. The truth of the matter is that the energy industry accounts directly or indirectly for half of Alberta's economic activity, half of this government's revenues, half of personal wealth. Half of jobs depend on the energy sector. Who governs the energy sector? Well, the EUB, so the EUB stands with immense power and immense ability to influence the people of Alberta, and with that comes an immense responsibility.

The people of Alberta have historically placed their trust in the EUB, but that trust has evaporated for an accumulation of reasons, Mr. Speaker, and Bill 46 does nothing to repair that damage. Instead of taking real steps forward, instead of restoring public confidence, this government and the Minister of Energy have proposed this bill, which cannot help but further erode the right of the public to have a voice at hearings. It will have a huge impact on their daily lives, whether that's an impact on their land use because there's a high-voltage power line or a pipeline or some other facility going over or under their land or because it affects the quality of their electrical system. This bill will have a huge impact on the daily lives of Albertans. It's an impact that will not be democratic, and Albertans know that. This government is trying to push Albertans out of the regulatory process, but Albertans will not go down without a fight, and the Alberta Liberals will not go down without a fight. We're backing the people of Alberta all the way on Bill 46.

Now, I could and will in fact take the pleasure of going into some specifics on Bill 46. I might go the rest of the afternoon on this, I'm having so much fun. Let me tell the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, why I believe this bill is unfair and undemocratic and why the Alberta Liberal caucus believes it's unfair and undemocratic and why the people of Alberta feel it's unfair and undemocratic.

One of the most alarming changes under Bill 46 is the new restriction on who can participate in a regulatory hearing. Now, historically there were already limits on who could participate in regulatory hearings. It wasn't just anybody who could participate. There were guidelines. There were restrictions on who could participate. They had to be directly and adversely affected, and that was the test that was applied to Albertans before they were allowed to intervene in a hearing. Albertans who had legitimate concerns for the project were therefore not always given standing. They may have been ruled ineligible for any number of reasons. That's the system that was in place already.

Now, under Bill 46, Mr. Speaker, the minister further narrows this already narrow definition by requiring Albertans to be affected "in a material way."

The Deputy Speaker: I'd like to remind the hon. member that we are debating amendment A1 for a motion to the bill.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. I'm speaking to why I think this needs to be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment. It is so offensive. It's so plagued with problems that I support this amendment, and I'm trying to explain to the Assembly why. I can see that everybody is paying close attention to my comments, Mr. Speaker, including you, and I do appreciate that.

That fact that Bill 46 narrows the definition of who can intervene in a hearing by putting in a clause that they must be affected "in a material way" I think is limiting further the ability of Albertans to express their concerns. After all, what is a material way? It can be restricted to almost nothing. Maybe it means they have to be directly affected on their specific piece of property, not their neighbour's property or not a power line that might run a hundred yards from their property, but maybe it has to be right on their property. Or maybe it has to affect them in a directly financial way. So further restricting the ability of Albertans to intervene or to apply

for intervention is exactly the opposite of what's needed.

I think that in many ways to rebuild trust, the regulatory system needs to be more open, not less open. It needs to say to the people of Alberta: tell us your concerns; share with us your concerns. Instead, it's saying: you don't have a right to intervene unless you have a very, very specific and narrow clause. So that's one of the concerns here.

As the Environmental Law Centre points out, Mr. Speaker, "any person or group who has a legitimate interest that ought to be represented in the proceeding or process, or has an established record of legitimate concern for the interest they seek to represent," should have the opportunity to participate in the process. Bill 46 doesn't allow that. That's why I'm supporting this motion to refer Bill 46.

4:50

Bill 46 restricts people who can participate in a regulatory hearing and other ways, too. Section 96(14)(c)(ii) of Bill 46 attempts to subvert the public interest by removing section 14(3) of the Hydro and Electric Energy Act. Now, that section of that act requires the EUB to determine whether a proposed transmission line for which an approval is sought is and will be required to meet "present and future public convenience and need."

Mr. Speaker, that goes exactly to the heart of the matter that I was making in my comments near the beginning about what we lost when we went from a regulated electrical system that existed to serve the public interest to a deregulated system which doesn't exist to serve the public interest. It exists to maximize returns on investment and exists, therefore, to drive up prices and exists to curtail competition and may well exist within a very few years to put the interests of the United States of America ahead of the interests of the people of Alberta. We aren't interested in that, and the public is not interested in that either.

In the wake of the EUB spy scandal and the disturbing events that transpired from that and the fact that it was more than just Rimbey — there was Redwater, and who knows where else spying was occurring — I find it unacceptable that this government would propose a change to remove that section of the Hydro and Electric Energy Act through Bill 46. This minister and this government are clearly out of touch with Albertans on these issues. They have apparently no respect for the rights of Albertans nor for the public interest and have no intention of protecting that public interest.

I actually look forward to hearing how this minister or this Premier or anybody on the government's side justifies removing the requirement for applicants to demonstrate that their proposed transmission line serves the public need and convenience. I mean, let's be realistic here, Mr. Speaker. Why will anybody want to go along with a big transmission line across their property or in view of their property when they know that that transmission line is going to be carrying power to somebody outside of Alberta and maybe even somebody outside of Canada for the sole purpose of maximizing the profits of investors who might be from anywhere in the world? Why wouldn't you expect people to be upset about that?

Why are we gutting the very public interest requirement of our electrical system? Why are we doing that? We're doing that because this government has no interest in that public interest. This government is only concerned about market solutions to public interest problems, and we all know, Mr. Speaker, that market solutions don't always work. That's why we got into regulated electricity in the first case many, many, decades ago, and that's why most Canadians still enjoy a regulated electrical system. The fact that we got away from that has created all kinds of issues for the people of Alberta, as I outlined.

I think we need to come clean on this. This government needs to come to its senses and not underestimate the people of Alberta. You

know, the people might be prepared to say: well, I can live with that transmission line in view of my property because it's serving my fellow Albertans. They're not going to say that if it's serving people in L.A. or Phoenix or Colorado or somewhere else, and I don't blame them. I'd do the same thing, Mr. Speaker. So it's a betrayal of the public interest, nothing less than that in this bill.

The newly established commission under this act is proposed to be given the power to establish its own policies and procedures regarding conflicts of interest. Well, we know what happened when that was done with the health authorities, Mr. Speaker, don't we? We know where that leads. Health authorities were given complete control over conflicts of interest, and where did we end up? We ended up with a patchwork of conflict-of-interest regulations around this province that in Calgary led to some outrageous abuses. Are we going to see those same abuses here? Why aren't those conflicts of interest governed under legislation? Why aren't those conflicts of interest governed under the Public Service Act or maybe even the new conflicts-of-interest legislation? If they aren't, why should the people of Alberta trust the commission to look after the public's interest?

You know, when we saw this in Calgary, what did we end up with in the Calgary health region? We ended up with senior officials of that region on the payroll of the Calgary health region channelling contracts with that region to companies that those same officials owned. That went on for years, and that has been well proven and well demonstrated and well documented, Mr. Speaker. So those are the worries that are in people's minds and should be in people's minds when they see this kind of a provision in Bill 46.

A solution. Maybe the government will bring forward that solution. Or maybe it would bring forward that solution through the Committee on Resources and Environment if this motion is supported, the motion that I am discussing, Mr. Speaker.

The commission as it's proposed now will hold enormous power in Alberta, and the rules regarding conflicts of interest should be well established and, in our view, should be well established in legislation. The commission should not be self-policing. It brings to mind the Alberta Securities Commission, and we could talk at great lengths about the problems that arose there under conflict of interest when you have self-policing regulators. They sometimes think they're above the law, and that leads to all kinds of problems, and that fuels yet again the loss of trust, Mr. Speaker, in regulatory agencies and in this government. So why not bring forward an amendment to have conflicts of interest governed under legislation?

Albertans who participate in commission hearings will be stripped of their procedural rights under Bill 46. Participants should have these rights established and protected in legislation, not removed. We are here, all of us, as representatives of the people of this province. We are here as protectors and trustees of the citizens of Alberta. We are here to stand up for people's rights, not to erode them. Yet, what we see in Bill 46, once again, is the erosion of individual rights. The right to submit evidence, for example, the right to be represented by counsel, which probably goes back almost to the days of Magna Carta, and the right to cross-examine an applicant and make representations by way of argument should all be protected, and under Bill 46, Mr. Speaker, they are not.

Why not? What is this government so worried about? What are they hiding? Are they concerned that the people of Alberta might have ideas that are dangerous? Are they concerned that the people of Alberta might come forward with notions that are somehow subversive? Or are they simply concerned that the people of Alberta might question an electrical system and an energy system that no longer serves the public interest? I suspect it's the latter, Mr. Speaker.

I think we need to think very carefully about things like removing the right to submit evidence. How do we get off removing that right through this Assembly or the right to be represented by legal counsel? Mr. Speaker, that kind of right goes to the heart of our very system of justice. It goes to the heart of our right of fairness. When the citizens of Alberta might be up against huge corporations that have immense resources and entire legal departments and those citizens have their right to be represented by counsel removed by this bill, it cannot come as a surprise to the people of this Assembly that many Albertans are upset by this.

Another concern I have with Bill 46 is that many of the important commission rules, rules that will ultimately determine the details and degree of changes brought forward, are not even known, Mr. Speaker. We don't know what the regulations will be. We don't know what amendments this government might be proposing.

5:00

Why not accept this motion to refer Bill 46 to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment and have that committee come forward with a package of amendments? Just like other committees have done some very good work on bringing forward proposed amendments for Bill 1 or Bill 2 or others, I'm sure the members of that Standing Committee on Resources and Environment would be happy to take on that challenge.

Instead, the people of Alberta are left in the dark because so many of the changes are going to be handled under regulation or will be somehow handled under commission rules that it makes up for itself. These rules, which the commission apparently is going to determine at a later time, can impact whether or not a hearing is even held for a power development or for a power plant or for transmission lines or for pipelines. What kind of province will we end up with if those developments can proceed and there may not even be a public hearing into those things? What are we doing to the very foundation of credibility that was built up over decades of outstanding work by Alberta's regulatory commissions? We are gutting that. We are blowing it up, Mr. Speaker. And you can bet that the political fallout will be felt in places like Rocky Mountain House and places like, you know, southern Alberta and places like Calmar and Drayton Valley, all corners of this province. Albertans are rightly suspicious, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 46 allows the commission to refuse a person the opportunity to make oral representations or to be represented by counsel if that person is given the opportunity to make a written submission. How do we even know if a written submission is ever read or ever heard? How can you have trust in the regulatory process if you can't stand in front of it and speak to the people and listen to their comments? How can you know that they've given any attention at all to your concerns? How do you know that they haven't simply taken your written submission and shelved it or disposed of it or shredded it? You cannot. You cannot.

So what you need to have, in our view, Mr. Speaker, is the opportunity for intervenors to make both written and oral submissions. It only stands to reason. Why take away their rights? Why take away – literally take away – the voice of Albertans to express their concerns in a democratic forum? Why the gag order? Why the limitation? Open the doors. Open the windows. Let fresh air in. Let the sounds and the voices and the concerns of Albertans be heard, not be shut down. I ask the people of this Assembly, the members of this government to answer those questions. Justify for all Albertans why you're taking away their voice. Let us know.

Put that out there, maybe run an election on Bill 46, Mr. Speaker. Wouldn't that be an idea? If they are so confident in Bill 46, put it out there and call an election and say: we're going to run on this because it affects every single Albertan, and we will let the people of Alberta judge at the polls whether we like a government that

removes our voice, a government that steamrolls our property rights, a government that undermines the public interest and promotes instead the private interest and the interest of big investors over the interest of little Albertans. Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker. We'll run an election campaign, and we'll be on the side of the ordinary person, the little guy. We think we could win that election. So I challenge this government to call a campaign on Bill 46. If you're not going to do that, then have the guts to refer it to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment.

Without procedural rights the ability for Albertans to take part in a hearing in a fair and effective way is diminished. We should not accept the diminishment of rights, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, there are many others voicing concerns. It's not just all the little guy. It's not always the little farmer in central Alberta or the acreage owner in Redwater or some other small person. Sometimes the big people, the big interests express concerns as well. Interestingly, one of those big interests is nothing less than the city of Calgary, the biggest city in this province. The mayor of the city of Calgary submitted a letter just a couple of days ago asking this government to pull Bill 46. Well, maybe there's a better option, Mr. Speaker. The better option is to refer Bill 46 to the Committee on Resources and Environment so that the bill can be fixed. The concerns that I'm raising here today are shared by many people: by groups, by individuals, by organizations, by municipal governments.

The mayor of Calgary raises several concerns about Bill 46. I hope that this government takes these concerns seriously. The mayor, for example, has pointed out in a letter that goes to some pages – and I think it's probably been shared with every member of this Assembly – that despite the fact that Calgary is home to a third of all Albertans and is owner of one of the major power companies in this province, the city does not have a seat on the regulatory board. It has no voice. Why would you remove the voice of such a major stakeholder, a stakeholder who is elected democratically by the million citizens of the city of Calgary?

The mayor also points out that the Utilities Consumer Advocate as the sole intervenor for Albertans under Bill 46 will not have the ability to effectively intervene on behalf of all consumers. In fact, one of the most worrisome developments for me in Bill 46 is this Utilities Consumer Advocate. I mean, we've seen some of the attempts of this government to put in consumer advocates before, and they've been a joke, an offence to good sense. This is the government that took what was once a department of consumer affairs with a minister of consumer affairs and reduced that to a division and reduced that to a branch and reduced the branch to a desk of consumer affairs.

This government has no interest in protecting the consumer affairs and the consumer concerns of the people of Alberta. I have no confidence that a Utilities Consumer Advocate reporting to this government will do any better than the lame efforts this government has exhibited in the last decade or more on consumer issues. Once again, a reason to refer Bill 46 to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment so that they could consider better ways to protect consumer interests.

Who knows? Maybe they'd suggest that the Utilities Consumer Advocate become an office of the Legislature. Maybe they'd recognize that there's at least a little bit more independence for officers of the Legislature than people reporting to this government, or maybe they'd suggest that the Utilities Consumer Advocate be replaced with intervenor funding for genuinely independent consumer advocates so that those people can come forward fully funded and make their case in interventions. Oh, no, not the Tories. They don't like that. They don't like consumer rights. They don't want markets balanced. They want to steamroll them. This is, in my view, one more step in that steamrolling.

As the mayor of Calgary points out, the single funded intervenor model, that denies other intervenors cost recovery, is unlikely to advance the interests of Albertans in general. It's not. It's going to advance the interests of those people who can squeeze through that narrow opportunity to intervene and who can afford their own lawyers and can muster the case before the board. That's not going to be ordinary Albertans, Mr. Speaker. That's going to be an extremely narrow segment of our society, a very wealthy, well-financed, well-organized, well-connected segment of our society that doesn't have the public interest in mind, who will be there simply to represent investor interests. I have nothing against investor interests, but they need to be balanced.

5:10

Once again, the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment could consider that issue if we vote in favour of this motion to refer Bill 46 to them. Who knows? They might find a rebalancing through providing funding for intervenors. Who knows what ideas they'll come up with? I think they could come up with all kinds of them.

The mayor also raises concerns about the Utilities Consumer Advocate and potential conflicts of interest. Why not, as I said earlier, have conflicts of interest regulations clearly spelled out in legislation? Why leave it to chance? Why leave it to public suspicion? What has this government got to hide? If we have clear rules on conflict of interest for this, as the mayor of Calgary suggests, let's put them in legislation. Let's give them some teeth. Let's make it hurt if people violate the conflicts of interest rules. Instead, we shrug our shoulders, and this government seems to care less about conflict of interest concerns.

The mayor of Calgary goes on to state that "although there are problems with the current regulatory framework, we believe there is no reason to implement a new regulatory structure by January 1, 2008." Mr. Speaker, what's important here is not that we get this fast but that we get it right. Let's take the time to think this through. Let's take the time to rebuild trust. Let's take the time to put in mechanisms that protect the public interest. Let's take time so that we don't end up in a bunch of legal challenges to this bill, challenges that might go all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada under the Charter of Rights. How many delays might occur as a result of that? Is this just an exercise in rushing blindly ahead that will in fact lead to greater delays than would otherwise occur if it was carefully thought through? What's the hurry?

Again, if we allowed the motion and referred this bill to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment, we could take the time to think that through. We could realize that maybe it's important to put Bill 46 off or to bring it back in the spring sitting under a new government and bring forward a better solution than Bill 46, a bill that protects the public interest, puts the public first. Remember when governments used to do that, Mr. Speaker? It was a long time ago.

Now, the mayor of course has lots of company in raising concerns. The Environmental Law Centre is also very critical of Bill 46. Their thorough analysis of the bill includes the following statement: "under the proposed [Bill 46], participatory rights are few and are narrower in scope than under the current" Energy Resources Conservation Act. Why are we narrowing rights? Why are we reducing the ability of people to participate in decisions that will affect their lives and affect all of our lives?

The Environmental Law Centre goes on and writes several things on this legislation. For example, it writes: Bill 46 "also authorizes the Commission to create rules to further limit [public] participation." Imagine that, Mr. Speaker. This government is not satisfied curtailing and restricting the rights of individuals to participate in hearings through the legislation. It's prepared to go even further.

It's prepared, apparently, to say to the commission: well, if we haven't restricted people's rights enough, you go ahead and restrict them further. It's clearly – clearly – unacceptable and clearly the kind of thing that could open Bill 46 up to all kinds of legal challenges.

[The Speaker in the chair]

When you have somebody as credible as the Environmental Law Centre raising these concerns, the government should be paying attention. It's exactly the kind of issue that could be addressed if this motion were to pass, referring Bill 46 to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment.

The Environmental Law Centre raises other concerns too. For example, the proposed Bill 46 “contains consequential amendments to a number of Acts, including the HEEA,” which is the Hydro and Electric Energy Act. “These consequential amendments have the potential to limit public participation.” Again, why are we doing that? Why is this government wanting to curtail the rights of citizens of Alberta?

The Environmental Law Centre goes on. It says that section 9 of this act “operates to place potentially significant limits on effective public participation before the Commission.” It goes on to say that section 9(1) of this act, of Bill 46, “provides the Commission with the power to make any order or decision it is authorized to make without giving notice and without holding a hearing.”

Let's consider that for a few minutes, Mr. Speaker. Maybe we should consider it at great length. Maybe we should consider it through the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment because if this commission struck under Bill 46 has the power to make any order or decision it is authorized to make without giving notice and without holding a hearing, then where are we left with the hearing process? How do we know as citizens of this province that there won't be surprise rulings suddenly posted on the website with huge impacts for all kinds of people and no hearing involved? How do we know that there won't be meetings quietly held with selected stakeholders and selected interest groups rather than public hearings? We don't know any of that because Bill 46 is flawed, and it's deeply flawed. The Environmental Law Centre points that out over and over again.

Another group that's raised concerns, one for which I have a great deal of respect: the Consumers' Association of Canada. The Canadian consumers' association is particularly critical of the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate as foreseen under Bill 46. The Canadian Consumers' Association issued a press release just about a week ago, November 6 – two weeks ago now, I guess – voicing these concerns. I'd like to quote from this release because it explains why we should be accepting the motion to refer Bill 46 to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment. “Consumer groups,” says the Consumers' Association of Canada, “see Bill 46” – and this is their language – “as stomping on their right to oppose ever-increasing electric and natural gas utility rates and question the new costs and complexities of Alberta's deregulated utilities regime.”

When you have somebody like the Consumers' Association of Canada raising concerns that a piece of legislation stomps on the rights of consumers, we should be paying attention. We should be referring this to the Committee on Resources and Environment to get that fixed. The Consumers' Association of Canada says that “Bill 46 virtually eliminates the right and ability of groups such as the [Consumers' Association] to effectively challenge rate increases and ensure fairness among different customer classes.” What are we afraid of? Why are we afraid to have the Consumers' Association

stand up for the people of Alberta in these hearings? If they stand up and represent the general interests of the consumers of Alberta, isn't that good? Don't we want somebody to do that, Mr. Speaker? I'm sure we do. So why don't we fix this bill? Why don't we support this motion to refer it?

5:20

The Consumers' Association of Canada goes on to say that “Bill 46 stomps” – again, their verb – “on the rights of consumer groups while bolstering the power and role of the Minister of Energy and the government-controlled Utility Consumer Advocate's Office.” Bolstering the power of the Minister of Energy; now, isn't that going to make the people of Alberta nervous? Why do we need to centralize more power in the hands of a minister and in the hands of cabinet? Why don't we do the opposite for a change? Why doesn't this government actually empower the people of Alberta rather than bring more and more power to themselves?

Can you imagine what the Minister of Energy might decide to do with that power, given the history we have? I was reminded just yesterday of quotes from two ministers of energy ago – Mr. Murray Smith was his name, and we all remember him – speaking to an audience in the United States, and speaking to them, Mr. Speaker, I believe, as Minister of Energy, explaining that this government's purpose was to give away Alberta's oil sands to the best investors. Do we want a Minister of Energy who might stand up and say: under Bill 46 we're going to give away the electrical system, give away the rights of consumers, give away the rights of the citizens of Alberta? No, we don't. It shouldn't be up to the Minister of Energy; it should be up to the people of Alberta.

The Consumers' Association of Canada goes on to say that the Utilities Consumer Advocate “was created in 2003 to take the heat off government MLAs for the disastrous debacles arising from deregulation of the utility business by dealing with customer complaints.” Boy, isn't that true? I remember well the debates in this Assembly about electrical deregulation and the toothless responses from the government-created consumer advocate. It, frankly, became a bit of a joke, and I think the fellow who occupied that position for a while eventually left in frustration. Why do that again? Why not just have due process? Why not respect the legitimate fundamental rights of the people of Alberta to be heard by their own government? Why create a paper tiger, a puppet, when we could give the people their own voice?

The Consumers' Association also says that Bill 46 “will also significantly reduce already limited public scrutiny and discussion of intended changes.” Why is this government frightened of public scrutiny? It seems to be a pattern here. Why, for example, are they frightened of the results of the Internal Audit Committee, which are by law concealed from public view for 15 years? What are they so nervous about? Fifteen years. What's the scrutiny? What are the skeletons that this government is wanting to conceal, to quote one of the members of this government. What are the skeletons it's hiding? Why are they frightened of public scrutiny? Why would they force through a bill that limits public scrutiny, Mr. Speaker? I look forward to them answering that question.

The Consumers' Association also says, “Paying for the work of the [Utilities Consumer Advocate] but having no independent voice in utility rate decisions amounts to taxation without representation.” Taxation without representation, Mr. Speaker, is a violation of one of the fundamental principles of democracy and a violation of one of the fundamental principles upon which our country and our province are built. People who pay taxes have a right to a voice of representation, and we're seeing exactly the opposite through Bill 46. We are seeing the ability to have representation removed but the

requirement to pay the taxes continue. It's backwards, Mr. Speaker, and it's the kind of thing that could be fixed under the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment if the motion to refer this bill is voted on. I look forward to all the members of this Assembly standing and being counted when that vote comes.

The Consumers' Association also says:

Bill 46 not only tramples landowner rights; it stomps out consumer rights and public scrutiny. The Alberta government needs to drop Bill 46 from the current legislative agenda or risk losing all remaining public confidence in the regulation and oversight of the utilities and energy sector.

I think we need to look at that statement in some detail, Mr. Speaker. I can see that my colleagues agree with me. I'll repeat it: "Bill 46 not only tramples landowner rights." Well, we've discussed that. It removes their right to intervene. It removes their right to be heard. It removes their property rights. It at least endangers their property rights.

That quote also says that "it stomps out consumer rights and public scrutiny." Well, we've seen that. We see a bill that allows decisions to be made without any public hearings. We see a bill that allows the agency itself to make its own conflict-of-interest rules. We see a bill that removes the rights of all kinds of consumers to intervene, so clearly it's a legitimate point.

But I think the Consumers' Association has even stronger points here. It says, "The Alberta government needs to drop Bill 46 from the current legislative agenda." Do you know what? They have a lot of company in that. As I said, they have the mayor of the largest city of this province saying the same thing. They have landowners from central Alberta and landowners from any corner of this province saying the same thing: drop Bill 46.

I just drove highway 2 on the weekend, and I noticed going south and coming north a series of great big, round bales at the side of the highway that say: kill Bill 46. So we have the Consumers' Association saying that. We have the mayor of Calgary saying it. We have farmers saying it. We have all kinds of people saying it. Let's try. They can't all be wrong. Alberta Beef Producers are saying that. Of course, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Liberals are saying that as well.

That sentence continues. Its most important point, I think, Mr. Speaker, is its last point. If the government doesn't kill Bill 46, the Consumers' Association gives this warning: all remaining public confidence in the regulation and oversight of the utilities and energy sector will be lost. We need to think about that because, as I said earlier, those agencies govern half of Alberta's economy. Those agencies affect thousands and tens of thousands of landowners. Those agencies affect some of the largest corporations and some of the original homestead owners of this province. Those agencies affect us all, and they are having their credibility eroded.

If Bill 46 is pushed through and they lose even more credibility, where is that going to lead us, Mr. Speaker? That's going to lead us to more public protest and more efforts at public intervention and more frustration and potentially who knows what? You know, when people get sufficiently frustrated, anything is possible. Can we see the day because of Bill 46 when companies turning up to build high-voltage power lines run into protesters blocking access to land? We've seen that occur already in Alberta on oil well sites. Will we see the potential of violence, Mr. Speaker? We've seen that already in Alberta.

People from Grande Prairie well know the history of violence in that area, but people from central Alberta also know. There have actually been deaths because the public has lost confidence in regulatory agencies, so they take the law into their own hands. Anything can happen at that point. So I suggest that this government take the cautionary note of the Consumers' Association very seriously and consider the wisdom of referring this to the Committee on Resources and Environment so that those things can be corrected.

5:30

Citizens from across this province, Mr. Speaker – it's obvious – are very concerned about Bill 46. This kind of widespread opposition, vocal opposition, hundreds of people turning up in community meetings, should send a strong message to this government. I hope they're listening, but I don't think they are. I don't think they're listening to those people in central Alberta. I don't think they're listening to the mayor of Calgary. I don't think they're listening to the Environmental Law Centre, and I don't think they're listening to the Consumers' Association of Canada either. I hope I'm pleasantly surprised, but I expect that I and most Albertans will be disappointed.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, I support this motion before us right now. I support the motion to refer Bill 46 to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment. With fundamental principles of accountability, of freedom and fairness at stake, this legislation must not go forward in its current form. It must be amended and it must be amended dramatically, or it must be dropped from the legislative agenda, as so many people have requested.

Mr. Speaker, I'll wrap up with a simple message: this House must not allow the passage of a bill so dangerous to our democracy and our future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a very brief question for the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Should the government ram this through, should they force it down our throats through tactics like closure or time allocation, which they did last year, for example, on Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, what are you prepared to do after the next election, hopefully when you are sitting over there in the Premier's seat?

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and remind me: how long do I have to respond?

The Speaker: About 45 seconds. We're well rehearsed in that.

Dr. Taft: Well, first of all, before and during the election campaign you can expect there to be rallies in all of your constituencies about Bill 46. You can expect that. Secondly, after the election and after there's a new government and a new era in Alberta, we will revisit Bill 46. We will revisit it in the context of reregulating Alberta's electrical system and in the context of bringing in regulations and authorities that protect consumer rights and that do things like protect the environment and protect landowners.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do have a question for the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. It's the same question I had for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. What is the position of the Liberal opposition and the Liberal Party on the 500 kV line that had been considered by the EUB?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We support the people who are objecting to the line. We think there are better alternatives to the 500 kV line, and those alternatives could include everything from gasifying coal at Wabamun and building a pipeline to a rapid investment in wind energy and sustainable energy to the construction of power plants much closer to where the power is needed. We're not convinced for a minute that that power line is needed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was really a passionate speech. If I didn't know that member and didn't hear his previous speeches before, I would actually believe it. But if he is so sincere about it, why wasn't he the one to table that amendment to the bill? Why, again, is he following the NDP? Where is the leadership of the opposition?

Dr. Taft: Well, trust me, Mr. Speaker; it's yet again a delight for us to see the New Democrats and the Tories working hand in hand, isn't it? I will tell the hon. member from wherever he's from that he can just wait and see how many amendments the Official Opposition, the Alberta Liberals, bring in because you will get amendment on top of amendment on top of amendment. You will regret the day that you urged us on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also listened intently to the speech from the Liberal opposition leader. I noticed that he did mention towns like Drayton Valley and Calmar. I'm just wondering when the last time was that he set foot in Drayton Valley or Calmar because the fact of the matter is that he knows absolutely nothing about those communities.

I'm wondering if he's aware also, Mr. Speaker, that notice must be given to everyone affected with regard to Bill 46. In fact, if even only one person requests a hearing, then one must be held, and concerns must be taken into account. I'm wondering if he understands that intervenor funding is reserved especially for affected landowners and that they can still hire legal counsel if they wish . . .

The Speaker: The hon. leader is now recognized if he chooses to.

Dr. Taft: Oh, this is too much fun, Mr. Speaker. This is too much fun. I'd have to check my calendar to see the exact date I was in Drayton Valley, but I can tell you I dined at the Dairy Queen, and I met with a number of constituents there. It's not very long ago. I must say that it may be the nicest Dairy Queen, certainly one of the nicest, in Alberta. I think it was built by an Alberta Liberal although I'm not certain of that.

As for Calmar, I drive through Calmar really quite often. One of . . .

The Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. leader. The time frame for this segment has now expired. The Leader of the Official Opposition for the record should know that he spoke for 60 minutes and a few seconds.

We are on the amendment. Are there additional members who would like to speak on the amendment?

Hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, could you just hold off for a second, please. Could I revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Speaker: It turns out that these are my guests who are visiting the Legislative Assembly today. We have representatives from the county of Barrhead headed by Reeve Lawrence Miller – if they would all stand – representatives from Westlock county headed by Reeve Charles Navratil, representatives from Woodlands county led by Mayor Jim Rennie, representatives from Sturgeon county led by Mayor Donald Rigney, and representatives from the municipal district of Big Lakes led by Reeve Alvin Billings. They're all here for the 2007 AAMD and C convention. I would ask them to all stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 46 Alberta Utilities Commission Act (continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, and we are speaking on the amendment that has been presented.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tough act to follow, but I do have one or two things that I'd like to add to this discussion on the motion to refer to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment. I started out not sure whether I was going to support this motion. I wanted to get on with the debate and hear some of those discussions. But we are getting to the heart of some of those matters here, and I look forward to that.

This bill is an example of what's wrong with this government. I think it exemplifies what's wrong with this government. We've heard from a number of speakers here today: the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who spoke about cynicism with regard to this government and, I believe, wanted to talk about the political context of Bill 46 with regard to appointed boards. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview spoke about trust and about concerns with regard to this spy scandal, which I think people should be ashamed of, the incidents in Rimbey and in Redwater.

I also would like to see more discussion on this bill, and I have considered whether or not it should in fact be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment in order to have the public come forward and voice their concerns. This matter really cuts to the heart, I think, of democracy and the democratic deficit that's here and, in making the referral, whether or not that would allow for more public input, and we certainly need more public input.

5:40

I think there is tremendous power in the hands of these boards, including the EUB. Frankly, these issues came up in the last few months in terms of the makeup of these boards and the democratic process in the makeup of these boards. Frankly, this government's tepid response to the revelations of widespread, indeed almost universal Tory patronage completely fails to justify this government's long-standing practice of stacking boards. Many members of the public have not been pleased with the performance of the EUB.

Perhaps in considering Bill 46, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, we should give consideration to having it go back to the standing committee on resources in order to have the public have an opportunity to be able to address some of these concerns. Again, the

Tory patronage completely fails to justify the government's long-standing practice of stacking the province's public agencies, boards, and commissions with members from the PC Party. Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that calls out to be addressed. These boards are supposed to perform vital work on behalf of all the citizens of this province, and patronage can undermine the public trust in these boards. These boards must be impartial, and there must be no sense of political bias, and they have to be seen to be that way.

The makeup of the boards has also been questioned by Mayor Bronckner of Calgary, who has indicated that the citizens of Calgary really don't have a seat on the board. We need to be able to take a look at the makeup of these boards. I hearken back to the concerns about the 13-member board of the Peace Country health region, to name just one example, which appears to be composed of a hundred per cent Tories despite the fact that the PC Party makes up just 3 per cent of the Alberta population.

I believe that one of the ministers at that point in time, who should have seen the injustice of this – I think we were talking also about the Fatality Review Board. In this instance he pointed out that there was one competition for the Fatality Review Board but only for one of the positions. The chair, physician, and lawyer positions were all government appointments, but why wasn't there a competition for these positions too? For that matter, why aren't all of these vital positions open to competition? Shouldn't we be searching for the finest possible candidates without regard to their political affiliation? They may have political affiliation, but that shouldn't be a factor here, and I think the public is suspicious of that. Because of the public's suspicion with regard to the integrity of these boards and particularly with regard to the EUB, this matter should perhaps be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment.

We do raise these issues of the integrity of these boards and the stacking of these public boards. It's a grave concern, and it can call the decisions of the boards into question and threaten our democracy. Once again, we're talking about a democratic deficit, and this bill, I think, comes back to exemplify the concerns that we've got with regard to the democratic deficit in this province. Though there are doubtless many government appointees who do excellent work, widespread patronage of this kind casts a shadow over even the best appointees, and we need to clean this up. The government's defence of the status quo is very troubling because it shows they don't understand the seriousness of this problem. If top-level cabinet ministers feel this way, nothing is going to change. Indeed, this government continues to resist any efforts to alleviate this problem.

Last year my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar introduced a motion in the Legislature to eliminate patronage appointments, and the Premier himself voted against this motion. Again, we've got concerns about the democratic deficit. This bill brings those into the fore, and perhaps that's why this bill needs to be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment.

Alberta needs to establish independent public appointments, and we need, in fact, an independent public appointments commission to oversee these appointments to public boards and agencies. Such a nonpartisan commission would help to ensure that public boards will be composed of only the best people for the job regardless of which, if any, political membership they hold. So I think that that's a very important issue.

There are many reasons why it is that we've got to be concerned about this bill and perhaps why it is that this bill needs to be referred to the standing committee. One of the concerns – and I'm looking forward to hearing something on this from ministers that might be involved – is questions with regard to the amount of power here that's involved. You know, it seems as though under this bill the commission will be given the same powers as a judge of the Court of Queen's Bench. Now, that's a lot of power, and I'd be interested

in hearing how the government is going to explain why it's necessary to give the commission the same powers as a Court of Queen's Bench judge and perhaps even go beyond that with some of the provisions in this bill. How do these powers differ from those of the current EUB?

These are questions that Albertans need to have addressed, and this is why it is that perhaps this bill does need to go back to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment. These provisions are concerning, as are the provisions with regard to the rules of evidence. The commission is given the same powers as the Court of Queen's Bench, yet it's not bound by the same rules in its conduct of its hearings in the same manner. I'm interested in how the government is going to explain this provision.

I think there's an injustice that's at work here, and we've got to be concerned about the democratic process in this province. I'm hoping that the members opposite are going to share those kinds of concerns. Perhaps if we can get this bill before this standing committee and hear from the public, the government will respond to these concerns because as this bill stands, it needs to be killed.

This bill, again, exemplifies the problems with democracy in this province, and I'm hoping that the members opposite will recognize that. If they don't, I believe the members of the public will recognize it. This is again why it is that if it goes before the standing committee and the public has the opportunity to address these issues, then we'll hear from the members of the public. I can assure of you that. I know that from my constituents and the people that I've talked to.

I was happy to be able to join my colleague from Calgary-Varsity and my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar when we went to Camrose and heard about concerns out there from landowners. We heard people time after time coming to the microphone and expressing their concerns that this bill is undemocratic, basically. These concerns continue to grow, and they're growing across the province. We're going to hear from Albertans on that. Perhaps a good opportunity to hear from Albertans would be if this motion was referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment.

There are any number of reasons why it is that we should be concerned about this bill, but in its essence I think that we need the government to explain to the fine citizens of this province why they've introduced a bill that will restrict their democratic rights. It's really not clear as to why it is that that has been done. I think the minister responsible for bringing this bill forward needs to address those issues to Albertans. Once again, I'd like to see this matter referred to the standing committee.

I'm concerned about whether or not participants are going to have the right to submit evidence. We've heard from a number of people about the restrictions on who will be able to step forward at the EUB and be heard. I'm also concerned about their ability to be represented by counsel. Again, I know that certain members of the government who are concerned about justice issues should in fact be concerned about the citizens' ability to have legal representation when they go before such a board on such important issues. I'm hoping to hear from ministers, in particular, who are concerned about justice in this province. Once again, I think when we're talking about issues that refer to justice and the democratic process, then perhaps referring this bill to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment will allow for the people of Alberta to be heard.

Thank you.

5:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Snelgrove: I'm asking, Mr. Speaker, for a little clarification. It's the member's position that he would without reservation fund

the legal fees of the Sierra Club or Greenpeace if they were intervening to stop much-needed power from getting to Calgary, so without reservation pay whatever legal costs for groups such as the Sierra Club from the United States that could step in and be represented to stop power from getting to Calgary? That's your position?

Mr. Cheffins: No, and I think you know full well that it's not my position.

Mr. Snelgrove: It's what you said.

Mr. Cheffins: What I'm talking about here are the draconian measures within this bill that are going to restrict people who would like to address issues that are of serious concern to them and be able to have legal support and legal advice before going up before . . .

Mr. Elsalhy: What is his position? Ask him.

Mr. Cheffins: Yeah. What's your position: that they shouldn't have the opportunity, that Albertans shouldn't have resources to be able to address these issues?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, then Calgary-Varsity, then the leader of the third party.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow talked at great length on the makeup of the board. I guess I'd like to ask him the question on one of the things that many landowners have come and talked to me about, that there is no representative of landowners on that appointed board. Perhaps you'd like to expound a little bit on who should be on that board. Do you feel that debate should go on on how they should be put on that board, whether elected or appointed? Perhaps you could answer a few on that, please.

Mr. Cheffins: We know they're . . .

The Speaker: Please. Through the chair. Okay? The chair feels really sensitive when he's ignored. The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Well, there are concerns about the makeup of many boards, not just the EUB, Mr. Speaker. I'm in agreement that we really do need to take a look at this, and it does need to be referred to a commission. Again, this strikes at the heart of our democracy, so we really need to take a look at the appointments of all the boards throughout this and make sure that they're being done in such a manner that restores the confidence of Albertans.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to what the hon. member had to say, and obviously he was questioning; he didn't understand a lot of the bill. I wonder if he wouldn't be interested in hearing what, really, the bill has to say. If we put it in committee, then we would have the opportunity if there are amendments to be made to put them on the table and then turn it to the field committee. Would you think that that would be a good plan?

Mr. Cheffins: Well, again, what it is that we're addressing here is the amendment. I would give consideration to that, and I am giving consideration to that motion to refer because, again, we don't know what this bill is going to entail. We haven't been advised with regard to what amendments might or might not come forward that

might address some of these concerns. These concerns need to be addressed, or this bill needs to be killed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm very interested, as my colleague is our shadow minister for Justice, in what he feels about the totalitarian nature of this bill, that erasing rights back to 2003 effectively removes future rights so that we've got a back-to-the-future totalitarian Bill 46. I'd like to hear from our potential future government Justice minister.

Mr. Cheffins: Well, thank you, hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity. You mentioned the concerns about removing rights that go back to 2003 and the concerns about rights going forward, but I think you have been done one better by other members on this side of the House who have expressed concerns going back to the Magna Carta. So that gives us some idea just what a problem this bill represents.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow about his leader's comments a little earlier and just suggest that if the Liberals are feeling the heat these days from the NDP, it's because they're looking more and more like the Tories.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish.

Others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly to my hon. colleague from Calgary-Elbow. You talked about cynicism in your opening remarks. Do you think that just as some members of the Conservative caucus were kept in the dark and not told about our royalties, maybe some of them were reassured that this bill is a good bill and that maybe that explains some of their earnest support for it, maybe because they're really ignorant about what's in it?

The Speaker: I think that's time, hon. members.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests (*reversion*)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize and introduce to you and through you some friends that have stopped by from my constituency, very patient ladies: Dorothy Marshall* and Lorraine Grover.* If they would stand and be recognized, I would appreciate that.

head:

Government Bills and Orders **Second Reading**

Bill 46 **Alberta Utilities Commission Act** (*continued*)

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are still on the amendment. Is there an additional participant? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak to this amendment to Bill 46 because this bill is one of the most contentious bills to come before this Assembly. It is essential for the health of democracy in a province that prides itself on free thinking that every reasonable vehicle possible is used to encourage participation in decision-making. That is why I am happy to support amendment A1. This amendment to refer to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment supports the principles of democracy. This process can help establish trust with Albertans, many of whom are distrustful of the agenda behind Bill 46 and concerned that public interest will not be served.

Abraham Lincoln described democracy as government of, for, and by the people. We need all three aspects for it to work. It is not democracy if it is of the people and for the people but by one class or party and others do not qualify. It is not democracy if it is of and by the people but for interest groups. The people must be involved in all three ways: as the recipients, as the beneficiaries, and as participants. Anything less is not enough. It is not enough to have the vote if the airwaves are saturated by one point of view. It is not enough if access to decision-makers is limited. It is not enough if the agenda is set by special interests.

My experience with the standing committee was positive and encouraging. Many Albertans participated in educating the committee and in helping us make recommendations. I am proud that we have this opportunity with this Legislature, and I strongly

support amendment A1, that this bill "be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment."

It is just a few months ago that Albertans learned that their government had hired private investigators to spy on landowners and other concerned citizens who attended public meetings of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board at a transmission line hearing in Rimbey and at a hearing in Redwater on the northwest upgrader. The EUB spy scandal has made it clear that there are big problems with Alberta's energy and utilities regulatory system. When the government spies on its own citizens, citizens who are only trying to express their concerns with regard to proposed power lines and other utilities that could impact their quality of life, the system is badly broken.

Instead of fixing the problem, the government has drafted Bill 46, which puts new restrictions on concerned Albertans who want to have a say in how utilities and energy developments are managed in this province. This is another reason for supporting this amendment, that this go now to a policy . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but I must interject.

The House stands adjourned until 1 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

[At 6 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 21, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/21

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

You may be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a few guests joining us today from Delburne school. We have 30 grade 6 students joining us, and accompanying them are their teachers and volunteers. With them is Mr. Larry Neville, their teacher; Mrs. Terry MacDonnell, Mrs. Tracy Jackson, Mrs. Kathy Ivey, Mrs. Teresa Greening, and Mr. Hugh Greenwood, their bus driver. I get to coffee with him once in a while whenever I go to Delburne. I'm pleased that they could make their way up to Edmonton. I have visited Delburne school many times because both of my sons went to school there from K to 12. I just have a soft spot in my heart for that Delburne school. I'd like them to rise.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly students from the Thorhild school. Eighteen students along with their teacher, Mike Popowicz, are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my honour this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 76 visitors from St. Teresa school in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. We have with us today 70 bright, inquisitive young minds that are here to observe the proceedings of this House and to watch their MLA ask a question in question period. They're joined by three teachers and three parent helpers. The teachers are Mr. Charlie Stuart, Mrs. Thérèse Coates, and Mrs. Tracee Laba, and the parent helpers are Mrs. Susan Garbutt, Ms Kim Frey, and Mrs. Andrea North. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to introduce to you and through to members of the Assembly Dr. Cy Frank, executive director of the Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute. Under the direction of Dr. Frank the institute is dedicated to creating and maintaining a standard of bone and joint health and health care that is the best in the world. Dr. Frank and his colleagues

are well on their way to meeting that goal. The hip and knee joint replacement project at the institute was a great success, signifying reduced waiting times and benefiting patients in need. At the same time, it's garnered national attention for the institute and for Alberta as being a leader in the field. I ask Dr. Cy Frank to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Accompanying Dr. Cy Frank, of course, is my own executive assistant and senior policy adviser, Fred Horne, who has helped as well in moving this initiative along as we are working this week to provide ongoing funding to the institute so that Dr. Frank and his team can continue their great work. I'd ask Fred Horne to rise as well to be recognized and thanked by the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Clifton Purvis, the civilian director of the new Alberta serious incident response team, also known as ASIRT. This provincial unit provides another option under the Police Act to investigate serious or sensitive allegations of police wrongdoing in circumstances where there is a serious injury or death resulting from police actions. Maintaining objectivity, accountability, and public trust are key elements of these types of investigations. With that in mind, Mr. Purvis's extensive legal background, including 17 years' prosecuting all manner of cases, makes him an ideal choice to lead and guide this new team. I would ask Mr. Purvis to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. CKUA radio network has grown from a one-room low-wattage radio station into a full-fledged radio and Internet broadcast network staffed by world-class broadcast and business professionals. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a number of those world-class staff and board members. Joining us today to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the CKUA radio network is Lynn Friedrich, a board member of CKUA. Lynn, would you rise, please. Joining and with her is Ken Regan, the general manager of CKUA, and Katrina Regan-Ingram, the manager of marketing and communications for CKUA. A wonderful radio station. Thank you so much for the gift of 80 years. Please join me in celebrating and welcoming them.

head:

Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been told by some of my constituents in Red Deer-North that waiting for a hip or knee replacement is one of the most painful conditions they have ever experienced. I have listened to people in pain describe their agony and then ask me why they have to wait so long for an operation. Today I'm very proud and happy to let you know and to let all Albertans know about the success of the Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute. This not-for-profit organization is dedicated to creating and maintaining the best bone and joint health care in the world.

A couple of years ago the Alberta hip and knee joint replacement pilot provided 1,200 hip and knee surgeries using a multidisciplinary

team of health care professionals. It was a tremendous success, gaining national attention for Alberta as a leader in this field. An independent evaluation of the project showed these results: there was an 85 per cent reduction in wait times, from 145 days to 21 days, bone and joint institute patients spent less time in the operating room, bone and joint institute patients were discharged in 4.2 days compared to 6.2 days, and 94 per cent of the patients were satisfied with their overall experience.

That's just the start of the good news, Mr. Speaker. Today Health and Wellness announced \$18 million in new funding to ensure that the institute is able to keep up the good work and expand what we've learned in new areas of health care. Last June they received \$6 million to conduct projects regarding joint disabilities, conditions, and diseases and to share this knowledge of leading practices with regional health authorities and physicians. We need to use the pilot project as a model in other areas of health care to achieve better care and reduced wait times. Perhaps we can even duplicate the bone and joint health institute in other regions.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in recognizing the significant achievements of Dr. Cy Frank and his colleagues and thank him for helping to ease the pain of Albertans. Let's keep working towards the goal of achieving the best bone and joint care in the world and better wait times for all Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Castor Area Grass Fire

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak of an event that happened in my constituency last week. A grass fire broke out within the constituency just north of Castor. If you recall, last week when this event happened, the winds on that day were gusting over 80 kilometres an hour. The fire spread rapidly, with over 2,000 acres burning at any one time. But an amazing thing happened that I think is symbolic of Alberta and Albertans' spirit. Volunteer firefighters from Stettler, Castor, Coronation, Galahad, Forestburg, Hanna, and virtually everywhere else within a 40-mile radius jumped to the call of a local emergency disaster to stave off what could have been a provincial disaster with winds that high. These volunteers fought off a fast, hot fire in high winds. They came together like Albertans do to solve a problem, and they saved farms, and they saved lives.

1:10

One of the farms they saved is owned by a young friend of mine, Daryl Fetaz, who I'm sure someday will take my place in this Assembly. His parents, Rosemary and Paul, and his sister Jennifer watched as the fire licked around their farm right up yards from the house, terrified that it would take everything they owned. But it didn't, thanks to the hard work of those volunteer firefighters and locals that came in and joined to save this family's farm.

On behalf of myself, the Fetazes, the government, and all Albertans, thank you to all volunteer firefighters and those that jumped to the call for what you do and what you did that day. Thank you for answering the call. You made us proud.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

CKUA Radio Network Anniversary

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today is the 80th anniversary of the CKUA radio network, and I am pleased to

be joined by members of the network to celebrate this important milestone. CKUA has the distinction of being Canada's first public broadcaster and the first radio station in Canada to go online. As the voice of Alberta artists, musicians, and cultural enthusiasts CKUA broadcasts a wide selection of music and possesses a music library of more than a quarter million CDs and LPs.

CKUA operates on a not-for-profit basis, relying on listener donations, program sponsorship, subscriptions, and corporate support to continue offering its valuable programming. The annual fundraising drive supported by volunteers like my neighbour Louise demonstrates how important CKUA is to both individual listeners and to the Alberta music scene.

At a folk festival a few years ago a B.C. musician and music promoter spoke to me about how lucky we are to have a radio station that plays local artists and how important that is to promote artists on a wider basis. He was quite jealous.

The CKUA radio network has given Alberta, Canada, and the world many of its most beloved artists. Many of Alberta's well-known musicians have launched their career through CKUA radio network, including Jann Arden, k.d. lang, Amos Garrett, and Tommy Banks, to name a few.

The number of CKUA listeners continues to grow. Its audience has in fact doubled since 1996, with an average of more than 160,000 weekly listeners. A province-wide signal and online presence of 4.5 million hits per month brings in listeners from across Alberta and around the globe. The network has embraced the use of the Internet and iPods to offer its services to listeners.

Please join me in recognizing the leadership and the valuable contribution CKUA has made in its 80 years of broadcasting in Alberta. Happy birthday, and thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

National Bullying Awareness Week

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are in the very middle of National Bullying Awareness Week, November 19 to 24. No one deserves to be bullied, but research shows that 1 in every 4 Canadian children in grades 4 to 6 reports being bullied and 1 in 10 admits to bullying others.

The government of Alberta has taken a leadership role in preventing bullying in our province. Alberta's strategy for the prevention of bullying raises awareness of what bullying is, it identifies what we can do to stop it, and it encourages changes in societal attitudes towards bullying. Under this mandate our government launched the third phase of the bullying prevention and public awareness campaign this morning at H.E. Beriault school in Edmonton. The Reverse It; Be Better than Bullying campaign is aimed at children and youth between 7 and 13 years of age. It builds on previous campaigns and is focused on educating children, youth, and adults in prevention and safe intervention. It's based on research that shows that bullying behaviour is best changed by having the person who is exhibiting the bullying behaviour develop empathy for the victim.

I encourage adults who want to learn more about bullying to visit www.bullyfreealberta.ca. Links are available there for websites for children and youth, as is access to the 24-hour bullying prevention helpline number.

Mr. Speaker, bullying is hurtful and harmful, and in an ideal world it would not be part of growing up. Perhaps we can all agree that bullying can prevent children and youth from reaching their full potential and that together we can decrease bullying and help create stronger communities.

I just want to add that I'm really glad there are many young people in the gallery here today. I trust they will do all they can today and every day to make positive choices for themselves and others around them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Medicine Hat

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I have the great pleasure of visiting a model Canadian city, Alberta's own Medicine Hat. I've called Medicine Hat a model city many times because it really does set an example for the rest of the province and, indeed, the nation. For one thing, it has a fabulous affordable housing program, something the rest of the province desperately needs. Medicine Hat also had the good fortune to be exempted from electricity deregulation by this Legislature. Thanks to that decision and its vast natural gas reserves, Kipling's famous "all hell for a basement," the city enjoys some of the lowest power rates and best reliability in Alberta. By and large the people and leadership of Medicine Hat have done a superb job of managing growth and developing a balanced, diverse economy.

That's not to say that Medicine Hat doesn't face its share of challenges. Access to health care needs to be improved. As in other cities the people of Medicine Hat often face long waiting lists for basic services. Transportation links to the city must be upgraded. For example, my colleague the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has pointed out in this House that highway 3 should be twinned. Citizens in Medicine Hat are also considering the value of a new transportation corridor along Alberta's eastern border, linking the U.S. with Medicine Hat up through eastern Alberta all the way to Fort McMurray.

They want to make sure that their children get the best possible education, recognizing, as we all should, that Alberta's future can be assured only if we create the very best education system we possibly can.

I'll be speaking with the folks of Medicine Hat about all these issues and more and listening to their hopes for the future. In short, Mr. Speaker, I anticipate a productive and enlightening visit to the Hat. It may well have all hell for a basement, but what's above the surface is pretty divine.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

National Housing Day

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and speak about National Housing Day, recognized on November 22. A safe and affordable place to call home is important to our health and to our quality of life. It helps provide an atmosphere for families to grow together, for children to learn, and provides a sense of security and comfort.

This government is taking action to address affordable housing in the province. In April our government announced its response to the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force with \$285 million to address immediate housing pressures, where the goal is to create more than 11,000 affordable housing units over the next five years.

As part of this funding, Mr. Speaker, high-need, high-growth communities will benefit from \$143 million in new funding through the municipal sustainability housing program. Smaller municipalities that were not eligible to receive funding out of this program may

apply for a share of the \$60 million request for proposals fund. Successful projects, announced earlier today, are expected to produce more than 500 affordable housing units outside of Edmonton and Calgary. I was pleased to be a part of this announcement this morning in Beaumont. I'm also pleased to know that an application from my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat was favourably received and approved. I look forward to meeting in the near future with the Medicine Hat Community Housing Society and the city to help present the cheque for nearly \$5 million.

Sixteen million dollars was also made available for the off-reserve aboriginal housing program. The successful applicants will be announced later this month. In addition, the rent supplement program funding has been increased from \$14.3 million to \$33 million. The new homeless and eviction prevention fund has already helped more than 21,000 people, and our direct rent supplement program has helped over 1,800 low-income families across Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we're addressing affordable housing in the true Alberta spirit, by working together with our communities and our partners to give hope and opportunity for our families, friends, and neighbours so they can have a safe and affordable place to call home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to immediately abandon plans to increase the role of private insurance in the health care system, and instead, commit to strengthening the single-payer, public system.

This is signed by many constituents from Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

1:20

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 182 people, mostly from Edmonton, who are urging the government to ensure that remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across this sector, that these employees are fairly compensated and their wages remain competitive, that they have improved access to professional development opportunities, and also asking the government to provide province-wide service and outcomes-focused level of care standards.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to present a petition signed by 262 Calgarians to the Legislative Assembly that reads as follows.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to introduce legislation that will

1. place a temporary limit of 10% per year on the amount that rent may be increased; and
2. prevent landlords from avoiding the one year notice requirement for [condo] conversions by forcing tenants to leave due to unreasonable rent increases.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Bill 50 Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2)

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise to introduce Bill 50, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No.2), for first reading.

Bill 50 proposes providing liability protection to Alberta health care professionals who agree to assess the skills of other health care professionals from outside Alberta who wish to practise in our province. For example, this assessment is often required when health care professionals trained in another province or country apply for registration in Alberta. Providing this assurance will encourage a greater number of health care professionals to assist with these assessments and enable them to be completed on a quicker and more efficient basis. This legislation is another tool government is bringing forward in our efforts to recruit and retain health care professionals.

I move first reading of Bill 50.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 50 read a first time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 50 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Bill 53 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2007.

This Bill 53 is amending legislation, which will allow for the \$25 million payment to teachers which was previously approved in this Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 53 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to make one tabling. It's the program for the very successful community awards dinner in Edmonton-Manning last night. It is a very nice program, and it has a quote on it: "The heart and soul of Alberta doesn't lie in the rich farmland, the majestic Rockies, the precious oilfields or bustling cities. As wondrous and important as those features may be, that heart resides in our people." That's a quote from Lois Hole.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table two messages today. The first one is a letter from Kathy Hogman, chair of the Edmonton presbytery of the United Church of Canada. The

letter includes a motion passed by the presbytery expressing deep regret at the forcible eviction of homeless people last summer from a vacant lot in Edmonton and urging the province to implement the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force.

The second one, Mr. Speaker. I table the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent to me by Christopher Legere, one of my constituents. Christopher is waiting for minor surgery while appealing his WCB claim decision. He's concerned that the slow appeal process is delaying his return to the workforce.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Dr. Timothy Losey and Mrs. Cheryl Kerpan expressing their concern about a proposal to drill sour gas near Tomahawk, which is near a school attended by 139 students.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have six tablings. They have come from my constituents Ravi Anand, Raminder Gill, Carla Segura, Gladys Segura, Margaret Lenny, and George Lenny. They are all concerned about Alberta labour laws and strongly believe in major changes to encourage fairness to all working people, strongly urging this government to implement and support changes to our province's antiquated and unfair laws and bring Alberta labour into the 21st century.

I have two other tablings, Mr. Speaker, from residents of Edmonton Randie Anderson and Rebekah Movold. They are all concerned about the homeless problem in Edmonton, urging this government to do something.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take great pleasure today in tabling the requisite number of copies of a news release issued today. I'm tabling it just so that all members will be aware of the \$18 million that we have provided to the Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute to continue funding their good work on multiyear projects, focusing on areas of development of guidelines, processes, and clinical protocols to support planning and program design beyond hip and knee replacement to other areas of care such as back, spine, inflammatory joint conditions, joint surgeries, bone fractures, et cetera.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Section 15 of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act as chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it is my pleasure to rise today and table the required number of copies of the second-quarter update of the fund.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. They are both regarding Bill 4. One is from Nicole Scharmann, and

she says: "This proposal will not help the daycare situation in this province. My daycare will go from 24 licensed spaces to a mere 16. What we need are more daycares and more spaces, not less!"

The other one is from Carol Hanson of Sherwood Park.

As a mother of two boys aged six and seven, I am quite concerned about where our child care system is headed.

First I would like to start by saying it is a little hard for parents to become involved with attending the one and only information session when we find out about it after the fact.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the Seniors Advisory Council annual report 2006-2007.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate copies of five letters to table from my constituency requesting that Alberta's labour laws be changed to encourage fairness to all working people in Alberta. These letters are from Antonio Alves, Paulo Ferreira, Ernest Aumond, Ernest Fuller, and Anthony Scowen.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to table the requisite number of copies of letters I received from six of my constituents, all urging the government and the Assembly to look at revamping Alberta's labour laws, which, in their opinion, are antiquated and unfair to all working people in Alberta. These letters are from Larry Casovan, Richard Parks, Hakimeh Hashemzadeh, Dallas Ogilvie, Shauna Warrilow, and Barb Sutherland.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies from an event on Friday. It was at the Military Family Resource Centre. They were honouring corporate and citizen donors who keep the program running. If it wasn't for them, the program would not be able to support the military families.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to table five copies of a letter from Jennifer Dong, who writes concerning the problem of homelessness in Edmonton and calls for federal and provincial governments to commit 1 per cent of their budgets to housing programs.

I also would like to table on behalf of the same member five copies of a letter on behalf of Carlie Smith from the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton outlining in well-considered detail concerns about upcoming changes to child care licensing regulations.

Finally, on behalf of the same colleague I'd like to table five copies of a letter from Jules Munteer from the University of Alberta, pointedly expressing concerns with proposed changes to the Alberta child care policy.

1:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five

copies from my wonderful constituents, all on the issue of labour laws in Alberta. They're asking for five significant changes, the first of which is a process for first contract arbitration. The letters are from Mary Elizabeth Archer, Lauren Jeffreys, Jay Hannley, Dr. Basaraba, and Seymour Neumann.

Thank you very much.

The Clerk: Tablings to the Clerk.

The Deputy Speaker: We will continue with the Routine after question period is over.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: The first main question for the Official Opposition. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Industrial Development in Fort McMurray Area

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government did not collect billions in royalties, insisting this money was reinvested in Alberta. Fort McMurray knows without a doubt that these missing billions were not reinvested in public services in their community. The Premier has refused to touch the brakes on development in the oil sands, ignoring the impacts of unrestrained growth on Fort McMurray. My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier still hold the view that he is not touching the brakes on oil sands development despite the concerns of municipal leaders and residents who have said clearly that they cannot keep up?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the first things our government did was to support the municipality of Fort McMurray with an injection of \$396 million. That money is to go to water and waste water, additional infrastructure, look at supporting the municipality with additional staff support in a number of areas: social services, supporting people in education, and other programs. We immediately recognized the need, and we delivered as soon as possible.

Dr. Taft: Well, the people of Fort McMurray are not feeling the love from this government, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker.

Communities at the heart of the oil sands know the difference between private investment and public services. Again to the Premier. This government failed to collect billions in royalties, and industry did not invest that money in public services in Fort McMurray. Industries do not invest in public roads or in schools or in continuing care facilities. Given how critically important additional public investments are in this region, whose job is it to make these investments if it's not this government's?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, when I talked about the \$396 million, that's over and above what goes to the community with respect to the basic funding and all the programs. The \$396 million: \$100 million for the new municipal sustainability housing program, \$96 million to the capital enhancement fund, \$13 million for homeless support, a \$3 million increase to the provincial homeless initiative – that's a \$6 million total budget for the community – \$14.3 million for rent supplements, \$4.3 million increase for support to housing, \$45 million for new affordable housing for 300 units in Fort McMurray, \$7 million for the new homeless and eviction prevention fund, and \$2.5 million for the new Alberta transitional housing initiative.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Radke report clearly indicated the government's failings on the environment in the oil sands region.

The report shows that the Department of Environment has no capacity to complete environmental impact assessments. If there's no capacity to do individual EIAs, then there's no way they can do cumulative impact assessments. To the Premier: why has this government not provided the capacity to conduct cumulative environmental impact assessments in the oil sands as they have in the Industrial Heartland?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the Minister of Environment answer that question specifically. But once again the hon. member is totally wrong.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, sometimes it's easier to perpetuate a myth than to acknowledge reality. I want to point out to the hon. member what Environment has done with respect to the oil sands. We've realigned the department and created an oil sands division specific to the oil sands. We announced in-stream flow needs and a water management system for the Athabasca River. We began the water management framework for the South Saskatchewan River as it affects the Industrial Heartland. We have been involved in various issues with respect to cumulative impact, the in-stream flow needs being only the very beginning.

The Deputy Speaker: I'm sure we'll get to that with the next set of questions, hon. minister.

Second main question of the Official Opposition. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Watershed Management

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has released a cumulative effects framework for the Industrial Heartland as a pilot project. Terrific. However, they've not completed such a framework for the oil sands despite the recommendations of the Radke report and the Oil Sands Multi-Stakeholder Committee. A cumulative-impacts approach is desperately needed in the Fort McMurray region. To the Premier. This may be the largest industrial development on the planet. Is it the Premier's position that a development of this scale should proceed without an understanding of its cumulative environmental effects?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government undertook a policy to study cumulative impacts on all major development. We started with the Industrial Heartland, we're working in Fort McMurray, but we also made a commitment that if there is any large development anywhere in Alberta, we'll look at the cumulative impacts, those environmental impacts. Of course, our top priority in government is to ensure the safety of our air, soil, and water, certainly. That's a new way of doing it, I know, for the opposition, but we're going to find that a much better way to secure the long-term prosperity of the province of Alberta is by doing a very good, solid environmental review of the cumulative impacts.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, most people seem to have a different view on this than the Premier.

Water concerns in the Athabasca are serious. This government's water management framework, which the minister seemed to mention, was released in response to the Radke report, but it does not do enough to protect water resources. As one of our province's prominent water experts, Dr. David Schindler, said, I'm sure they're trying to put the best face on a bad scene. My question is to the

Premier. Can the Premier assure the residents that its framework provides the best science available to protect the long-term health of the Athabasca River?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have great confidence in the scientists that the Department of Environment uses to evaluate the cumulative effects of the various pressures on the environment, and I have great respect for Dr. Schindler. In fact, I talked to him not that long ago at the University of Alberta when we introduced a new approach for the Water for Life strategy. He is part of that group, and I am looking forward to continued working relationships with all of the scientists involved in this particular area, a very important area.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The heart of sound water management is watershed management planning, but in Alberta only the South Saskatchewan basin has a plan for the entire watershed. There is no way to make sound water decisions in the absence of watershed management plans. Again, to the Premier: why is watershed management planning not mandatory for all river basins, including the Athabasca River basin?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I guess, just another example of where the leader is completely out of touch. In fact, we've had more industry participation, not only from the oil and gas sector but from agriculture as well and forestry, working together towards ensuring the quality of water in this province of Alberta. We understand that good clean water is critical not only for continued economic investment but is also necessary for a good quality of life in the province of Alberta. It's a top priority. In fact, we've put more money towards the Water for Life strategy than ever before, and we'll continue to invest in this very important key area.

The Deputy Speaker: Third main question for the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

1:40

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Finance announced another \$2.2 billion increase in the surprise surplus while at the same time – at the same time – we learned that the Alberta heritage savings trust fund actually lost half a billion dollars in value. My question is for the Premier. When will you finally adopt the Alberta Liberals' plan for funding Alberta's future and start saving 30 per cent of natural resource revenue for future generations? When will you do it?

Mr. Mason: Just say never.

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, the leader of the third party gave me the answer, but I won't repeat that.

Mr. Speaker, the government is determined to secure long-term prosperity for the province of Alberta. Certainly, saving for the future is important. It's also very important to make very prudent, necessary investments in infrastructure, and it's also very important to ensure that we've set money aside to maintain the infrastructure that we're building and the infrastructure that was built a number of years ago. Yes, it's good to have savings – we have about \$30 billion in savings today – but it's also good to set some money aside so the next generation doesn't reach deeper in their pockets to pay for all the maintenance of the infrastructure we're building.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, Mr. Speaker, if he won't listen to us, perhaps he'll take the advice of his own ministers. "My platform has put forward a plan to save 50% of our non-renewable resource revenue in the Heritage Fund," said the minister of health just over a year ago. Or how about this one: "I will commit to saving at least 30 per cent of resource revenues collected each year to reinvest in the Heritage Savings and Trust Fund," said the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development just over a year ago. When will the Premier start taking the advice of his own ministers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I guess what the hon. member fails to mention is, I suspect, that those statements were made while all of us were on the campaign trail and had resigned from cabinet. So get the facts straight.

With respect to savings what we have done is appointed a commission to review Alberta's fiscal policy. Now that we've eliminated the deficit and paid off the debt, we have to look to further advice to see how we can secure the long-term future prosperity of the province. The Minister of Finance is awaiting the report. November 30 is when the report will arrive, and we'll be able to share that with the public.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, I'm glad that he mentioned the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker, because of course I have more examples. Let's look at this gem. "I have recommended in my platform that a minimum of 20% per year be placed into the Heritage Savings Trust Fund." That from the Minister of Finance a year ago. The Premier says he won't adopt the Alberta Liberals' plan. He won't do as his ministers say. My question, once again, for the Premier: how much longer is this Premier going to continue to ignore the advice of his very own Minister of Finance?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you one piece of advice coming from the Liberal party that we will definitely not implement, and that is building an upgrader in Manitoba. That's guaranteed.

The Deputy Speaker: First main question of the third party opposition. The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Homeless Children

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Tories' neglect of homeless children is unforgivable. The lack of emergency shelter space for kids is so acute that they are exchanging sex for shelter just to stay out of the cold. A worker at the Old Strathcona Youth Co-op says, and I quote: it's so common it breaks my heart; they're not prostitutes, they're not addicted to drugs or doing it for money; they're doing it because it's cold outside and they need somewhere to sleep. To the Premier. These kids don't have time to wait for your 10-year plan to end homelessness in Alberta. What are you going to do to protect them tonight?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that question was raised in the House the other day by the other party. We have a very good, solid plan to eradicate homelessness in 10 years. It's following up on a number of proposals that are coming forward from the city of Calgary, the city of Edmonton, and other communities. We just helped in partnership with the city of Red Deer to add another 40 units. We're increasing the number of units available in different communities across Alberta. This is something that, of course, we cannot deal with overnight, but we are making the necessary investment because I do agree with the hon. member that every family deserves a home.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, again, the Premier talks about a 10-year plan to end homelessness, but the government has known about this for some time. Boyle Street Community Services identified this problem last year. In the city of Edmonton there are only 36 beds devoted to kids that are 19 years old or younger, but there are up to 360 children under 17 years of age living on the street in Edmonton alone. Around half of those have fled an unsafe situation at home. There's one person who can do something about this right now, and that's the Premier. My question is to him. Mr. Premier, will you act to get vulnerable young people off the street today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we actually, not today, started a number of months ago with a very comprehensive housing program for the province of Alberta. We're continuing in that direction. We see some very positive signs. In fact, more housing units are available. There are more rental spaces available if you're looking at some of the statistics that are coming both from real estate and also from the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. So we're moving in a positive direction. Of course, we were criticized yesterday by the opposition for spending as much money as we did in the eviction fund protecting families so that they're not evicted and out on the street. That's the kind of compassion that this government shows towards families.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, no government has done more to create homelessness in this province than this government. Instead of spending the money necessary to fix the shelter problem, the Liberals and Conservatives voted for a \$265 million corporate tax cut. That money could have solved the shelter problem immediately and made a huge dent in homelessness today, not 10 years from now. My question is to the Premier. Will you do the right thing today and commit to spending the money needed to give every homeless child a safe place to sleep today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've already committed the funds. We have already committed the funds. But this, again, is a difference in ideology from the third party. What they want to do is to tax as much as possible and then share that money out. One of the proven examples in this province is that by working together with the private sector and finding the right model to encourage continued investment in housing, we see more housing units available, we see more rental units available, and in fact we have made tremendous progress in this area in the last eight months. If we would have followed their advice, we would have had less – less – rental units and zero increase in the number of housing available.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Affordable Housing for Students

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My constituency has experienced incredible growth. Rent increases have skyrocketed, and to find affordable rental accommodation is like finding hen's teeth. Students attending Northern Lakes College in Slave Lake are especially finding it difficult to get housing on their limited funding. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. What is it that you're doing to address the affordable housing needs of students in this province?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I want to say to the hon. member that our programs are designated to

address the people that are most in need, as identified by the local municipalities. This morning we were able to make an announcement for affordable housing in rural Alberta. In addition, on affordable housing and how it benefits communities, students are also able to qualify for funding under the rent supplement program, which amounts to approximately \$14.3 million more to assist 6,700 households.

1:50

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the announcement this morning. However, how does that, then, fit into what my needs are in Slave Lake and for the students of that community, who are experiencing such incredible difficulty in trying to find affordable accommodation?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, Slave Lake is a community with a college, and with the growth pressures that that community has in housing, the community of Slave Lake brought forward a proposal for housing for students. Students come into Slave Lake for trade schooling. It could be anywhere from seven to eight weeks to six months. There is no such facility to be able to address those needs. This morning we approved an application for over \$3 million for the community of Slave Lake to assist that community with student housing.

Ms Calahasen: I really thank the minister for that, Mr. Speaker. However, there are partnerships that have occurred in the past within my constituency with various groups. My question, then, is to the minister again. Is it partnerships that drive this kind of idea in order for us to be able to get more money for those areas or those communities that need affordable housing?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the criteria for the attainable or affordable housing, one of the criteria, of course, is contribution from other sources, co-operation. It's not necessarily necessary, but it adds to part of the project. I do want to say that it is critical that the communities, the municipalities get together with the schools, with not-for-profit agencies because in actuality communities are working together to one goal, and that is to make that community better. Yes, it is very advantageous to work together.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Energy and Utilities Board

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it was revealed that a government agency hired private eyes to spy on innocent landowners at EUB hearings, Albertans felt betrayed, violated, disgusted, and repulsed. Not the Premier, though. He initially defended the use of spies by his government. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that the government was provided all the details last May in advance of the illegal undercover spying operation in Rimbey, why didn't they do anything to stop it?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, you know, the situation around the EUB is certainly deplorable, I would suggest, to say the very least. None of us — none of us — on this side of the House and not very many, I think, on the other side of the House would agree that hiring any kind of private service to look into the private affairs of Albertans is something that we would tolerate. I haven't tolerated it, and the fact of the matter is that that has been dealt with very severely.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister

of Energy: why, then, are you tolerating the attending board members of the EUB by allowing them to still sit and serve? John Nichol, Ian Douglas, and Graham Lock were aware of the covert spy operation in Rimbey. You hired them. Why don't you now fire them?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I should probably suggest that the member do now is that perhaps tomorrow morning he may want to check with the EUB to see who actually is sitting on the board of the EUB.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister. Now, when the information was provided to the Legislative Assembly security that this covert spy operation was going to occur, why did this government not do anything and stop it, stop it right there before it occurred? It was illegal; it was wrong; it was intolerable. Why didn't you do anything?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, what I can tell you and all Albertans is that I have done exactly that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Affordable Housing for Smaller Communities

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta continues to be a beacon of hope for Canadians looking for a province that provides them with opportunities. The rest of the country and indeed the world is beating a path to our door, a place to call home. November 22 is generally recognized as National Housing Day in Canada, and it serves to highlight the importance of having a safe and affordable place to call home. My first question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Can the minister advise this House about what specific actions he is taking to help smaller urban and rural municipalities to address their affordable housing needs?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to acknowledge what the hon. member has presented in his question, and that is that rural municipalities or smaller municipalities are experiencing those growth pressures. This morning we did make an announcement. The program offered \$60 million, which individual municipalities were able to apply for. This morning we made that announcement, and there were 15 municipalities with 16 projects that were approved. We will get over 500 units that will be developed from that funding.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Can the minister tell the House more about the projects and what this funding will mean? What does it mean on the ground, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, what's on the ground are 500 units, units that are throughout Alberta in small communities where there is a need. Those projects are projects for education, attainable affordable housing for special needs. They are projects that are needed in those communities. I again suggest to you: over 500 units being built in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the same minister. Mr. Minister, we all know that partnerships can make a huge difference. You get a bigger bang for the buck. Can you give us any examples of partnerships on these projects?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that one of the best partnership programs or applications that came forward was exactly the partnership from Leduc/Beaumont/Devon. Their project was the three municipalities getting together and working together on a three-year project. In fact, that organization got \$7 million for 56 units to be built in their communities. So it does show how communities can work together for a positive, united goal.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Water Licence Transfer

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans expect their government to take their concerns seriously, to listen to them when they have concerns about actions and approvals, especially in relation to water in southern Alberta. Albertans are increasingly distrustful of this government, including issues around Bill 46, coal-bed methane drilling without groundwater testing, and the Balzac situation, and the list goes on. Now, in relation to Balzac the Springbank water provider Westridge Utilities and the Tsuu T'ina First Nation appealed Alberta Environment's decision to approve the water licence transfer from the western irrigation district to the megamall in Balzac and never heard back from Alberta Environment. To the minister: why did the minister ignore the statements of concern from Westridge Utilities?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that decisions with respect to licence applications, water applications are dealt with by a director within my department. If affected parties are dissatisfied with that decision, they have the right to appeal that decision to the Environmental Appeal Board. Then and only then, after the Environmental Appeal Board has dealt with an issue, is the minister entitled to be or in fact legally allowed to be part of that decision-making process.

2:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. With a moratorium on all new allocations from the Bow River can the minister outline what principles he followed in determining the priority that Balzac had for this replacement water?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge this particular issue is before the appeal board as we speak, and I think it would be inappropriate for me to comment one way or the other until the board has dealt with the issue.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The fact that the government ignored other water users' concerns and made sure the developers of the megamall got their water raises more questions of public trust and the involvement of this government in the Balzac megamall. This government also gave millions of taxpayer dollars to develop the water system there. They appear to have bent the rules to allow

them to access the money. They approved a water licence in the blink of an eye. Did the minister bury the statement of concern because of government promises to the developers in the MD, because this government was involved in the megamall from the beginning?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to comment on this particular licence application, but let me talk about the general issue of dealing with licence and water allocations on the South Saskatchewan River basin. As the member has already pointed out, there are no additional licences that are to be issued in that system. That, then, necessitates the transfer of existing licences. It's not the government that initiates those transfers; it's the licence holders that initiate those transfers. The responsibility of the government is to ensure that in the process of transferring licences, we don't put any risk or additional risk or harm to the ecosystem. That is the overriding policy.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Affordable Housing in West Yellowhead

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Later this week affordable housing day is being recognized throughout the province. Can the minister of municipal affairs please advise the Legislature what government is doing to help with the affordable housing issue for all Albertans that are in need?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I need to let this Assembly know that housing is a priority for this government: in fact, 11,000 units planned over five years – 11,000 – \$285 million this year allocated to housing and programs, new money, and also \$143 million of that going to the high-growth communities; \$35 million for homeless support to provide, an earlier question, 3,100 spaces; \$7.5 million for the winter contingency funding for 940 extra spaces.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What are you doing to answer the affordable housing issue in West Yellowhead?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In this morning's announcement of \$60 million there was a program for \$4.9 million going to the Happy Creek Estates project in Hinton. This project provides 58 units of low-cost, affordable housing, including 30 units that are accessible to assist Albertans with special needs.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. With affordable housing being an issue in West Yellowhead, what are you doing to help those other communities that didn't receive the grants process?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in particular in the constituency of the member \$550,000 for 23 community housing units, 85 rent supplements, \$4.4 million for 69 units in the Alberta affordable

housing program, \$2.3 million for off-reserve aboriginal housing for 35 units, more than \$900,000 under the municipal sustainability and capital enhancement program. This is just one example in one constituency of what this government is doing to assist in housing and services in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Continuing Care Needs in Fort McMurray

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a shortage of continuing care beds in Fort McMurray, and the few beds that do exist are located within the hospital. A hospital's ability to take new patients into an emergency room or for surgery depends on having the ability to discharge patients into a continuing care facility. To the minister of health. The health region has been asking for and has needed a continuing care facility for five years. When will they get one?

Mr. Hancock: Well, I guess, Mr. Speaker, the short answer is: as soon as I get the money for it. But I can tell the hon. member that, indeed, the health region has a plan in place and has requested as part of their capital request for this year – and we've approved money to buy land for it – to build a facility so that the continuing care facility can be moved out of the hospital, supplemented in terms of the numbers, and that we can reclaim the hospital beds for active hospital acute care.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of health again. I'd be more than willing to write letters to your colleagues when it's budget time to see if we can get you that money.

The region is under great strain not only because of not having the long-term care beds. They are very afraid of a major industrial accident or even a widespread pandemic and being able to go into all of those beds. You have indicated that it might be dependent on the budget. Could I have, perhaps, a little tighter time frame on that?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has offered to lobby my colleagues, I think – that's not the term she used – with respect to the budget process when it becomes time. She ought to be aware, of course, that the budget process for this government starts very early in the process, so it's well past the point where lobbying might be effective.

I can say this: it's a very important part of our capital projects. We put forward the requests, and obviously the result will depend on the number of priorities that have to be funded in terms of the capital that's available. But I'm very acutely aware of the need for a long-term care and continuing care facility in Fort McMurray and the need to reclaim the hospital beds that are currently occupied.

Ms Pastoor: Well, I'm disappointed to hear that I can't do some good, solid lobbying. I'm pleased to hear that this is where the minister is going because continuing care beds in the long run really are less expensive. But my question would be: at this point in time are people who are in considered long-term care beds being charged as long-term care beds, or are they getting them at hospital rates?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't answer that off the top of my head as to what charges might be levied. In terms of long-term care patients, normally long-term care patients are treated differently than lodge or continuing care in terms of whether they're charged for their housing. I wouldn't believe that anyone is being

charged for housing because I believe that's treated as a long-term care facility, but I would have to check into that and get back to the hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Condominium Conversions

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's housing policy stumbles and bumbles from one disaster to another. In the first 10 months of this year the city of Edmonton has experienced 6,915 condo conversions. Before this year the largest number was 4,776, in 2004. To the President of the Treasury Board. You brought us Bill 34. Wasn't the purpose of this bill to give renters a year of relief and peace of mind that they'd at least be able to stay in their homes for at least a year, or was the point of Bill 34 just to make the government look like they were doing something for renters?

2:10

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, there is a balance in governing, where you need to respect the property rights of people, and you need to balance that in some cases against the greater need of others. What we did with our landlord/tenant act was to ensure that people would have time to plan should circumstances change with regard to ownership of buildings or property and, if there were to be conversions or sales, that they would have the opportunity to look for other places to live at that time. It has never been this government's position to arbitrarily assume control or ownership of private property.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, what was the point of having Bill 34, then? We spent all night here debating it, and I thought the purpose was so that they would have that year. Now the minister is saying that they don't. The legislation is so full of loopholes that you could drive a truck through it. It's virtually useless. Service Alberta tells us to take the landlords to court. That's the advice we get when we call. Again to the President of the Treasury Board. Forget about the balance and worrying about the landlords all the time. When will you acknowledge that this isn't working and implement something that keeps people in their homes, like a temporary moratorium, till this has settled down a little?

Mr. Snelgrove: You know, Mr. Speaker, what keeps people in their homes are jobs and work. When we can support the people that need help, when we can put in programs that will allow people who for a short period of time need some assistance, we're very happy and able to do that. The only solution to a lack of housing, whether it be expensive or very affordable, is the number of units. If the hon. people would read any literature or just listen to anyone, they would understand that the solution lies in developing more units.

Mr. Martin: We're getting a lecture from Milton Friedman over there in supply-side economics, Mr. Speaker.

Let's put it in perspective. The minister over there is bragging about creating 11,000 units over five years. In Edmonton alone we're losing 7,000 units of affordable housing. That's just in Edmonton. Never mind Calgary and the rest of the province. How can you possibly justify this with this going on?

Mr. Snelgrove: His time, Mr. Speaker, would probably be better spent out looking where they're going to. They're not going anywhere, hon. member. They are housing people in Edmonton and

all of the communities around here. Under your plan people quit building, quit providing anything, and they leave. This allows an opportunity for people to transition to whatever kind of housing they choose. Rather than everyone moving in with your grandiose opportunity for Alberta, where we can all live in a cardboard box, we strive to let people go to the top.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Agricultural Income Stabilization Program

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, Alberta's livestock producers are facing many challenges due to the strong Canadian dollar and the skyrocketing cost of fuel, feed, and fertilizer. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. While my constituents appreciate the assistance being provided under the recently announced Alberta farm recovery plan, some are wondering why this plan is based on the CAIS program and not on a per-head/per-acre basis. Can the minister explain why.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, a per-head or a per-acre program does not reflect producer need, nor is it trade neutral. For the AFRP we wanted a quick response but not through an ad hoc or a shotgun, scattergun approach. CAIS, obviously, offers the best available data that we have to be able to target producers who require assistance.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, you know that in your constituency CAIS doesn't work for your producers. Minister, you know it doesn't work for your producers. My producers spread manure every day, but they can't spread it as high as the CAIS program. Mr. Minister, tell us: when will you fix this program? When will you get together with the feds and get this right?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've made no secret all along that CAIS has never been my favourite program. However, we are in this with the federal government on a 60-40 deal. We are endeavouring to make some changes to the CAIS program. In fact, I've charged the people at AFSC to come up with a new program. They have done so, and we've presented it to western Canada. It's been fairly well received. We presented it to the federal government last Saturday. It's been fairly well received there. We're now doing a comprehensive report to the eastern Canadian people, so hopefully down the road we're going to get this fixed.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, okay. I give. I'll give in on this point. Can the minister tell us: when will my producers get the cheques from this program?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, cheques have started coming out on the current program. So far we've sent out \$14 million, with an average payment of \$72,000. Hog producers will be the first to receive this program, and the cattle producers will follow very shortly. In total \$165 million will be distributed to all eligible producers by March 2008.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Drug Treatment Courts

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the recent report of the

Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force one of the simpler recommendations was the expansion of drug treatment courts to meet the needs of Albertans struggling with addictions. Will the Minister of Justice provide a target cost for establishing these institutions outside of Alberta's two largest municipalities?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, it is true that one of the recommendations of the task force was to expand specialty courts. At this point in time we have a very successful domestic violence court program, some eight domestic violence courts throughout the province. That is the template that we use when we talk about this type of court. We've been able to expand that one court at a time as a result of ultimately building the capacity within communities to deal with these matters, and as we go forward with respect to either drug courts or mental health courts, which are the other recommendations, that will be our approach.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The task force report points out that drug treatment courts will only work if offenders receive immediate help getting into treatment. How will the Minister of Justice address the shortage of treatment spaces that currently exists, for example, in Fort McMurray?

Mr. Stevens: The drug court that we have in the province at this particular point in time, Mr. Speaker, is located here in Edmonton. It came about as a result of a federal government initiative. The city of Edmonton and other concerned individuals put forward a proposal to the federal government, so we've now had a drug court here for, I believe, in excess of one year. The involvement of Alberta Justice with respect to the drug court – we do not do the prosecutions because prosecutions are done principally by the federal government; they prosecute adult drug offenders – is the participation of the court staff, and at this point in time the cost is being linked to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A related question. The task force also recommends, based on the earlier work of the Premier's Task Force on Crystal Meth's report, that a minimum of 200 treatment beds are required across this province. How can addictions treatment be expanded in this province given the struggle that service providers face in providing service to those currently involved in treatment programs?

Mr. Stevens: There's absolutely no doubt that treatment goes along with courts like the drug court. But, Mr. Speaker, the issue with respect to treatment beds is not a Justice issue; it's ultimately a Ministry of Health and Wellness issue. Perhaps another day he'll be able to comment on this.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

High-Security Drivers' Licences

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Officials from the United States recently announced that they plan to accept high-tech drivers' licences instead of passports to allow Canadians to cross the border. Such drivers' licences would have embedded personal information, including citizenship, and would be harder to counterfeit or steal. My question is to the hon. President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Service Alberta. What is his department doing to bring on the proper technology in Alberta to allow Albertans to cross the border without passports?

2:20

Mr. Snelgrove: That's a good question. I'm not exactly sure that the premise is correct, Mr. Speaker. There is a group that is working with our American counterparts to understand if there is a possibility to develop a secure document that may take the place of a passport. If that document were able to be included in a driver's licence in some way or another, then that would be good.

The Alberta driver's licence itself is one of the most secure documents in North America, but at this time it is only a document that entitles you to drive a motor vehicle. That's all it signifies.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: what does the minister anticipate in terms of timing in bringing on this technology to allow us to cross the border without passports?

Mr. Snelgrove: To be clear, Mr. Speaker, the standing right now for Albertans to cross into the United States on land without passports is likely going to be this next fall. If you travel by air now, you have to have it. Is the Alberta government going to be ready to produce a driver's licence that would enable them to cross into the United States within a year? I don't think so because the information that would be needed to do that in a driver's licence would very much resemble the information you need to collect to have a passport.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member?

Hon members, that was 83 questions and answers today. We will now resume with the Routine.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**
(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today, the first being a letter from Derek Wynnyk, a resident of south Edmonton, who is writing to express his concern about the homelessness situation and encourages governments to commit 1 per cent of their budgets to housing programs.

The second letter is from another south Edmonton resident, Bruce Horsman, with concerns about AISH. He wants to let the government know how difficult it is for people who live on AISH, and he says, "The streets are no place to live in a land so rich."

Mr. Hancock: A point of order.

Mr. R. Miller: A letter from Neil Evans, a resident of Edmonton-Mill Woods, who is writing with concerns about Alberta's parks. He says that every time that he stays in a campground in a B.C. provincial park, a Washington or Oregon state park, or a Canadian or U.S. national park, he wonders why we don't have the same high-quality parks and campgrounds here in Alberta.

The last one, Mr. Speaker, is from Joyce Peeke, a resident of south Edmonton, expressing her concern about unfair bargaining that she has experienced for local 003, chapter 008. She's a 24-year employee of the Alberta government.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Were there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate it. I have four tablings today. The first is on behalf of a constituent, Mr. Malcolm Ball, who is writing regarding prospective changes to labour law . . . [interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order. We'll deal with it afterwards.

Mr. MacDonald: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hancock: You don't interrupt question period for points of order, but it's appropriate at other times.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. What's your point of order?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Tablings to the Clerk were called and the Routine was finished.

The Deputy Speaker: We had some left over.

Mr. Hancock: But the Clerk called Tablings to the Clerk.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe it was premature on his part because I still had some on the list. It was a lack of communication, hon. minister, so we're continuing on with this program.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After that interruption I will start over.

The Deputy Speaker: Continue from where you left, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. On behalf of Mr. Malcolm Ball, a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar, I would like to table the following letter, which is indicating that we must change Alberta's labour laws in five significant ways.

The second tabling I have is a letter dated September 6, 2007, to the hon. Minister of Energy. This is in regard to the government's slow elimination of the regulated rate option and forcing up power bills.

My third tabling is on behalf of a constituent, Olga Sandberg, who also is very concerned about Alberta's labour laws and is suggesting in this letter that there be five significant changes.

My last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is from a constituent from Edmonton-Gold Bar by the name of Mr. Justin Fex. Mr. Justin Fex is also writing requesting that there be five significant changes to Alberta's labour laws.

Thank you very much for your patience. I appreciate it.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I have received a certain message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Deputy Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

You may be seated.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. When a second or subsequent set of estimates is to be tabled, section 8 of the Government Accountability Act requires that an amended fiscal plan also be

tabled. Accordingly, I wish to table the 2007-2008 quarterly budget report for the second quarter, which serves as the amended fiscal plan. This quarterly report was provided to all MLAs on November 20. I also made this report public as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The quarterly report tabled by the Minister of Finance provides the framework for additional spending authority for 16 departments of the government. I now wish to table the 2007-08 supplementary supply estimates. These will provide additional spending authority to 16 departments of the government.

When passed, the estimates will authorize approximate increases of about \$1.5 billion in voted expense and equipment purchases. The majority of these estimates are for the savings, with \$825 million going to the heritage fund and \$408 million for capital projects, including capital maintenance and renewal and affordable housing. This is available from higher than anticipated fourth quarter results from last fiscal year and this year to date. The remainder of the estimates are for \$197 million in disaster emergency assistance, and \$68 million for public service and salary settlements, contracted agency recruitment and retention initiatives, and the Fort McMurray allowance. Also, an additional requirement of \$15 million in statutory nonbudgetary disbursements is disclosed in these estimates. Disaster emergency assistance is funded through the sustainability fund, and other changes are addressed through dedicated revenue, expense changes, or the contingency allowance announced at budget.

Mr. Speaker, as was reported yesterday at second quarter, it is important to note that due to lapses operating expenses remain lower than forecast at budget.

head: **Government Motions**

32. Mr. Snelgrove moved:

Be it resolved that the message of His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2007-08 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Does anyone wish to?

The hon. President of the Treasury Board to close debate?

[Government Motion 32 carried]

33. Mr. Snelgrove moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2007-08 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund shall be one day.

[Government Motion 33 carried]

head: 2:30 **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 41

Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate November 14: Mr. Oberle]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River? Are there any others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand and speak to the issues of Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. Let me say that this is a bill that raises significant concerns for many of the professions, not only the health professionals. It amends the Health Professions Act to require immediate notification of the medical officer of health, and it amends the Health Professions Act and the Medical Profession Act to give the minister the power to replace the functions of the College of Physicians and Surgeons or to direct the college to adopt bylaws, regulations, and standards.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this raises some significant concerns for the medical profession in particular but all health professionals as it empowers the minister to make orders directing the college to adopt a code of ethics for standards of practice, to appoint an administrator to carry out powers and duties of the college if in the opinion of the minister it would be in the public interest. He could make any regulation, bylaw, code of ethics, or standard of practice that a council may make, and those decisions override any made by the college. This is both a heavy-handed and an unnecessary intervention by the minister, and it violates the principle of self-regulation that this government has said it was committed to over several decades. It raises a number of questions, most fundamental of which is: what problem is being addressed by this, and what is the best way to solve it?

Infection control practices, which appear to have been a stimulus for this new amendment, identify roles and responsibilities for infection control that include the Alberta Department of Health and Wellness itself. It's not clear where the responsibility for some of these breakdowns lies, but quite apart from that there are gross underfunding problems in the Alberta health ministry, low morale is well known, and it may prove just as constructive to look within the department to look at ways that we can improve the supervision and management of infection control in the province.

Another question in relation to this is the question that this amendment may prohibit or discourage doctors from criticizing government and health authorities from pointing out other shortfalls to the system. It's clearly not in the best interests of improving quality of health and improving relations with the medical profession to intervene in such a heavy-handed way.

A further question would be: how does the minister determine the public interest? Again, it's very unclear that politicians would have a better sense of what represents the public interest than those individuals who have spent their lives studying and committed to improving the public health.

Yet another question is: why is the minister undermining the self-governance process that this Legislative Assembly empowered them to have? Would the minister feel equally strongly about other professions, including the legal profession, if this is an important oversight that all professions may need by this government?

A further question relates to that of the cabinet role. Would the cabinet be in a better position to set standards of practice for medical professionals than these professionals themselves? Should politics be in a position to trump professional ethical bodies and their codes?

Yet another question that the minister may wish to answer is why he's focusing this draconian change on the health professions. Surely we have equal and serious concerns with all professions in Alberta.

Finally, will the health minister accept the liability associated with making decisions that affect the practice of medicine in this province, especially if it involves changing the roles and responsibilities of one profession in relation to others? If there are concerns or a failure of communication, as may have occurred in the infection control problems in Alberta East Central, surely the most appropriate

and constructive response would be to identify those concerns and participate in solving them.

It's unfortunate that the ministry of health has chosen to use a significant breakdown in infection control practice as an excuse to violate decades-old trust given to a deeply revered profession in the province. This does not bode well in a province struggling to meet minimum health professional numbers and practices.

So it's difficult for this particular member to support this health professions statutes amendment, and I think it would not be in the best interests of the public health and all Albertans to support this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to speak about Bill 41 in second reading, Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. Along with my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View I am also concerned about the kind of powers that are allocated to the Minister of Health and Wellness under this act. It seems to me that the effect of Bill 41 will give the Minister of Health and Wellness power to dictate codes of conduct, namely ethical and practice standards, of the various occupational groups that are covered by the Health Professions Act. It gives the minister power to dictate bylaws; that is, internal constitution and rules. It gives the minister power to order a council to do anything the council can do. It gives the minister power to take over the operation of any of the health profession self-regulatory bodies.

In part 8.1, 135.1, which indicates the minister's direction and the powers of the minister in respect to health care, if you ask the question "What is the safeguard against the misuse of such powers?" the only safeguard really mentioned here is the notion of the minister's opinion whether it is in the public interest or not if the minister interferes or participates and directs the council to do anything. That gives a tremendous amount of leeway, I think, or latitude for the minister because it's open to a tremendous amount of interpretation. What is in the public interest?

I think that's too broad. I don't think that's really in the interest of the regulation of the professions. I mean, Mr. Speaker, this bill seems to actually lead to the negation of the principle of self-regulation because it's suggesting that it's not sufficient for physicians under the college of physicians to regulate themselves. There's going to be some sort of oversight and interference in their ability to self-regulate. I mean, what are such statutes for when it comes to the professions if not to establish the right of professions to regulate themselves? Surely that's what we have in place when we look at various other professions. I might refer to Law Society in this respect. When we have these kinds of acts, they establish the parameters upon which the profession is going to regulate itself. To have this kind of statement in this bill seems to undermine the very authority of a profession to regulate itself.

Now, in the minister of health's explanation in second reading of this kind of change and this amendment in this bill the minister explained. He said, "I want to be very clear that it's not my intention as minister and it's not government's intention, nor would it be appropriate, for us to step in and do things with respect to the standards of practice or the codes of conduct." Well, Mr. Speaker, if that's the case, why have legislative powers to be able to step in if it's not their intention to step in? It seems to me to be inappropriate to have this kind of component in the bill. If the intention is not really to interfere with the ability of the profession to establish its own code of conduct and ethics, then why have legislation like this, which outlines the possibility of being able to interfere?

2:40

Now, I agree with the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View that if we look at the problem – the minister, when he looked at the issue of the problem that it's trying to address, named the complexity of the health care system, the multidisciplinary team approach, questions of collaboration between different professions. He mentioned, you know, the need for a synergizing of standards. Those are the words he used: standards "are synergized." But it seems to me that the solution to that is not through some sort of legislative authority that's laid on the professions. It seems to me that the professions, in dialogue with people in government and, namely, the Department of Health and Wellness, can certainly move forward in a collaborative way to share their expertise and to develop ways of dealing with the complexities of the health care system today.

I have a real problem once you pass legislation like this. Then the onus is on the department to provide some sort of expertise to be able to make decisions about these kinds of things when it's the people in the profession that have the expertise. I've done a lot of reading about bioethics in the past, and it seems to me that of all the professions that we have in our society, it's physicians and nurses, the health care practitioners, who have made the greatest advances in ethics and have developed codes of ethics that apply to their team approach in making decisions within a hospital setting and so on. I don't see the necessity of this kind of imposition through the role of the ministry.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, what we are doing with Bill 1 and Bill 2 in this Legislature is improving on our own codes of ethics for ourselves, so we as members of this Legislature are determining what is the code of ethics that applies to us. No one outside of the Legislature is imposing a code of ethics on us although it is true that we are responsible to the general public. But we are articulating and we are passing legislation outlining a code of ethics for ourselves, and surely that's what all professions are doing, and the physicians and the nurses have done it very well.

Mr. Speaker, I really take objection to this kind of imposition of authority from government upon a profession like the physicians and health care practitioners. My only question is: what profession is next? The legal profession: is that the profession that's next? And so we continue along a path of authoritarianism, which to me is not in the interests of professional development and the freedoms that professionals have to do their work and to get together and determine what are best practices and what is the kind of ethics that they're supposed to follow.

Those are the remarks that I have, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As an RN I stand here today very, very troubled with what I see on the pages before me. I returned to school as a mature student. I think that probably might be up for discussion about the definition of mature. However, I felt I was mature, and I worked very, very hard to get my RN. I also believe that once I graduated, I delivered very good care as a geriatric specialist. I loved my job, and I did it well. But now this is making me feel like I'm a widget in some system. I was very proud of the decisions that I could make as a professional because I had to make them often on the fly, but I could stand up and defend the decisions that I'd made because I was that professional. As I mentioned before, I think I feel now like a widget in the system.

An Hon. Member: Bridget the widget.

Ms Pastoor: A Bridget widget. You betcha. I want to feel like Bridget the nurse, not a widget.

Section 8 amends section 36, and it talks about adding criteria that fees have to be paid in order to become a regulated member. That also troubles me. In the old days, prior to this bill – which I hope will be defeated, but never mind – I really believe that the RN association, which was the AARN, which is now CARNA, actually had a very, very strong fiscal policy and were very responsible with the fees that we gave them, the registration fees. They had a very small staff, and they did huge jobs with the staff that they had. My fear with this one is that the increase could go in fees to pay for a huge bureaucratic administration that would be required in looking after these fees. They should not leave the profession.

One of the things that I think may have triggered this although it looks like it may have been in the works for a while is the infection control episode which occurred in one of our health regions. The minister stepped in – rightly so, certainly, at that point – and took over that particular problem and got it solved. However, it's at that point that he should have also stepped back because infection control really boils down to cleanliness. The dollars were cut in the middle '90s, and by cutting those dollars, we also cut the cleaning staff. I believe that that's where part of that infection control is. Even today we can go through hospitals that are public hospitals that really aren't clean, never mind sterile. Let's just go for clean.

The other thing that I have noticed with that particular episode is that there were dollars put towards the solution of that problem. I'm not sure where those dollars have gone, and what has really happened in the real world is that the cleaning component has now been downloaded onto PCAs and to some extent even the LPNs. So now we've got PCAs running around doing what actually should be cleaning staff duties, and now the residents have got even less of the PCA's time.

I'm getting a lot of letters and e-mails to that effect, that PCAs are feeling downloaded upon because of this infection control, and I'm not sure where those dollars went. They may have gone to, God forbid, another study. However, all they have to do is send the money down to the front lines, and the jobs will get done.

The RNs have been a self-governing profession in Alberta since 1916. Three weeks ago in this House we talked about real estate, and we actually gave them the ability to self-regulate. Surely, if real estate agents are capable of self-regulating, RNs, that have been doing it since 1916, certainly should be able to do it. Registered nurses have worked very hard to earn the privilege of self-governance, and the current level of public trust in our profession is very, very high. In fact, might I suggest that the public trust in an RN is a whole pile higher than the public trust in a politician despite the fact that I'm both.

Wellness is the ultimate responsibility for public safety. It does fall under the minister of health. However, I do believe that self-regulation should not come under a minister's jurisdiction. CARNA doesn't have the jurisdiction to review the policies and processes of health authorities, but what they did have and how they did address the infection control episode was that they had specific directions and guidelines for their members, particularly in the self-employed practice, who often then made sure that those guidelines were passed down to the actual front-line workers, the RNs who were really delivering that care.

2:50

CARNA also recognizes that infection prevention and control is a science, and it requires a considerable depth of expertise available at that service level. The expertise must be accessible to all health providers, and to be able to get it to those health providers, I believe that RNs are probably the ones that are best qualified for that.

CARNA is also concerned about sections 135.1, 135.2, 135.4 of this bill because it provides sweeping powers to the minister of health or to the Lieutenant Governor to direct that a council of a college adopt a code of ethics, adopt a standard of practice, adopt regulations, and carry out any power or duty of a council under the Health Professions Act in the absence of parameters clarifying prudent use. The proposed amendments can erode self-governance and were developed without the benefit of consultation with the health professionals affected by them.

Again, I see this government not talking to the people on the front lines. It's important to recognize that the foundation of public trust must be very, very clear, that the public totally trusts the people that are delivering their health care. You are at your most vulnerable when you're sick or in an accident and you need the care of an RN or another health care professional, i.e. a doctor or a pharmacist. You want to be able to close your eyes and know that you're going to be looked after.

Damaging the credibility of a profession is not in the public interest, and it's another reason that CARNA recommends clarifying the purpose of giving the minister such sweeping powers. What is the purpose? Why would he want those powers when it's worked well for so long? The precedent has been for government to take a collaborative approach to the college to resolve an identified issue. CARNA certainly supports this approach rather than enacting very broad legislation, which, again, could erode self-governance for all colleges. I believe that in the past this collaborative process has worked very well and served the people of Alberta in terms of being able to trust their public health care.

Section 135.2 allows the minister to appoint an administrator to take over the running of a college. There must be a clarification of the type of situation which would justify allowing the self-governing role of a college to be revoked using a ministerial order. This is very, very troublesome. I think this has to be clarified. If it has to be clarified to such a narrow degree, then why bother with it in the first place? If the intent of this is to provide support for small colleges, there really are other ways. Very small colleges could be partnered with larger ones which have the infrastructure to support them. I'm thinking, perhaps, that under the umbrella of CARNA we could have LPNs, that we could have psych nurses and also PCAs. At this point in time we are hiring people with less than two weeks of experience to work in an industry where vulnerable people are counting on them. We really, simply must have PCA training that could then give them that designation of a PCA professional that could be well looked after and come under CARNA.

The fees in this section 1(7), which amends 28(1)(b), is going to now refer to fees as an application fee. My questions would be: who is this going to become payable to? Would it go to CARNA, or will it fall into that black hole called the general revenue? If it does, then CARNA may be very, very strapped in terms of running its own organization, which really, really, really isn't fair. Should this bill go through, these dollars simply must stay in CARNA so that they can run the organization that they've been running since 1916.

The complaint resolution also troubles me as an RN. As an RN I want a fellow peer to be able to review my behaviour if someone has made a complaint. I want to be sure that all the information is there and that it is totally understood by someone. I could probably agree to an appeal panel that would be outside, perhaps, of CARNA or a professional complaint process. If someone feels that they haven't been fairly dealt with within their own profession, an outside appeal I could support. However, to actually take it out right off the top as a nurse I find really offensive.

I think that nurses have had, certainly, a proud hundred-year history of working collaboratively with the government, but I also think that if nurses hadn't had this self-regulation, we wouldn't have

the profession that it has grown into today. We have PhDs in nursing. I doubt very much if this would have happened, if it would have had the opportunity to grow if it was under a government ministry that probably could well be peopled by people who have never even been near a hospital or physically cared for someone or physically stood beside a bed and realized that that vulnerable person only had you.

Sections 135.1, 135.2, and 135.4 should be deferred and should certainly be reassessed to enhance provisions for transparency and accountability. All of this should be very, very open. I feel that if it disappears into a ministry, it will go, again, onto some shelf, into some hole, and it'll take forever. It may well take FOIP to get it out, and as we all know, FOIP comes back with lots of black marks on the pages, so you're really back where you started from.

I would leave you with one thought. Good governance starts in the Legislature, but if you don't listen to the people who work in the system – and that would certainly be the nurses, the doctors, and the pharmacists – then it is doomed to fail. For the many reasons that I have just reiterated, I simply cannot support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there others that wish to participate in the debate?

Does the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness wish to close debate?

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments that have been brought forward today with respect to Bill 41. I can let members of the House know that I have been having discussions with members of the professions, in particular the College of Physicians and Surgeons, CARNA, and the College of Pharmacists, with respect to certain sections of the act. I do anticipate that in Committee of the Whole we will be bringing forward some amendments to help deal with some of the issues or concerns that they have.

We won't be going all the way with respect to those amendments, and we won't be going all the way for a very simple reason. When the public is concerned about an issue, where they look for assurance is to their government, not to the colleges. While I'm a very strong supporter of self-regulation for professions – it's an absolutely important concept – it's not an absolute concept. Self-regulation is delegated to professions by act of the Legislature. When there are issues with respect to health – if there's a SARS pandemic, if there's an issue with respect to water quality – it's not the health professionals from whom the public requires accountability. It is the government, and it's the minister of health. The amendments that are being proposed in Bill 41 are not in fact intended to be derogation of the self-governance of the profession but, rather, to ensure that government has the ability, the role, and authority to carry out its duty of assurance to the public. That is the long and the short of it.

Now, I've indicated, I believe, in opening comments that with respect to sections 135.1, 135.2, 135.3, obviously, when you use language like "if in the opinion of the Minister," that is interpreted at law as acting reasonably. It's not a question of waving a magic wand or showing up one day in the office and saying: oh, it's my opinion that this should be changed. There is a course of construct with respect to statutes that requires an act being reasonably processed.

3:00

So it's not a question of the minister or the government interfering with professions just because it wants to, but it is a question, Mr. Speaker, of being able to play that role of assurance, which is so important in a public health system. Particularly in an environment

where we're seeing an increase in complexity in the system, where we're encouraging health care professions to work together collaboratively, that all health care professionals ought to be allowed to act to the full extent of their capability, training, and expertise, there needs to be standards of practice, codes of conduct, et cetera, that work synergistically together, that work collaboratively and, as well, when health care professionals are employed or work in the context of a health facility, that the standards of practice and the way in which they operate works in concert with the standards which are expected of the health facility.

Yes, there is a role for the minister of health and for government in making sure that those things happen, not in telling the health professions what to do – they obviously are the experts in the area – but in making sure that when essential issues are necessarily discussed, there's a process in place and an ability for the minister to play a role in bringing the health care professions to make sure that those concerns are addressed and, then, if that in the last resort doesn't work, to be able to direct the profession to do it.

Now, one of the questions that was raised was with respect to it being done by the Lieutenant Governor in Council rather than by the minister. Well, if you read the construct of the bill and the act, the minister can in fact order under the provisions of this act. But if that order is not complied with – in other words, if a college doesn't follow that order – then if you want to change the bylaw or the code, you have to come back and do it by Lieutenant Governor in Council. So in fact that provision is already implicit – well, actually explicit – in the way that both the bill and the act are drafted.

A number of the concerns that are being raised I believe have been addressed. Some of the other concerns will be addressed when we bring forward amendments in committee. So I would ask the members to vote in favour of this bill at second reading because it's essential, in my view, that government have the ability to respond. Quite frankly, I'm surprised that the opposition doesn't believe it necessary for there to be a comprehensive health system and accountability at the apex of that health system, in the minister and in the government, to make sure that the public of Alberta are protected.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a second time]

head: Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 40 Personal Directives Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today in Committee of the Whole to present Bill 40, the Personal Directives Amendment Act. I appreciate the support this legislation received in second reading. It is indeed progressive legislation that helps Albertans plan for a time when they may not be able to make their own personal decisions.

Before I respond to the questions that were raised in second reading, I would like to give a brief recap of the elements included in the Personal Directives Amendment Act. Bill 40 will amend the

Personal Directives Act, the legislation that allows Albertans to write down their wishes about personal matters in case they are ever unable to speak for themselves. This legislation allows Albertans to lay out instructions for personal decisions like health care and where they want to live. It also lets them choose someone to act on their behalf and make decisions according to their specified wishes.

The Personal Directives Amendment Act will update this important legislation through providing a voluntary form and a voluntary registry, allowing parents to include in their personal directive provisions for minor children, recognizing planning tools from outside the province, adding a new method for reassessing capacity should the maker of a personal directive regain their decision-making ability, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the substitute decision-maker, the agent, allowing the office of the public guardian to investigate complaints about the actions of an agent, and, finally, allowing the office of the public guardian to act as the guardian of last resort should an Albertan be without a family member or friend who could act as an agent. Mr. Chairman, all of these amendments will strengthen the Personal Directives Act and ensure that it continues to meet the needs of Albertans now and in the future.

I would like to now address some of the questions that arose during second reading of Bill 40. One of the defining characteristics of this legislation is that it's voluntary. Albertans have the freedom to write a personal directive if they want and when they want, and now they will have the freedom to either fill in a voluntary standard form or use the form as a guide. This is a very personal document, and we don't want to prescribe to Albertans how they should write it. A voluntary standard form will make it easier for Albertans to write a personal directive but will also allow them to have the kitchen table approach, which gives them the freedom to write a personal directive when and how they feel compelled. As well, many lawyers can use their own forms with clients.

There was strong support for a standard form during the legislative review consultations, but Albertans did not want it to be mandatory; they wanted a choice. We also feel that choice is important for the creation of a personal directive in the first place. We agree that young people should plan for their futures and that more public education to reach this audience should be a priority. The suggestion to reach high school students through the career and life management program will be followed up through consultation with Alberta Education.

One hon. member brought up possible confusion around planning documents from outside the province. Bill 40 requires that directives made outside Alberta must meet the requirements of personal directives under our act. These requirements include that a document is written, dated, signed, and witnessed and is about personal matters. This is expected to be a simple process for health care providers. Once again, it's written, dated, signed, and witnessed. If there are any questions, they can contact the office of the public guardian. Translation services would normally be available if the problem is that a person does not speak English well or that the personal directive is not written in English.

During second reading a few hon. members asked about the role of the office of the public guardian as investigator. The investigation process is clearly outlined in Bill 40 and will be further detailed in the regulations. If the maker is concerned about an agent's decision, they will be able to submit a written complaint to the office of the public guardian. If the complaint meets the criteria in the act in section 24.2(2), then the decision of the agent would be investigated. All complaints will be reviewed, and all complainants will be informed if an investigation will proceed or not.

To resolve a complaint, the public guardian could take the matter to court following an investigation or use alternative dispute

resolution mechanisms or the complainant could take the matter to court. There is no administrative appeal process set out in the act, but the court can review the decisions of an agent. In the case where the public guardian is acting as agent and there is a complaint, the public guardian has the ability to delegate the authority to investigate to a neutral third party to avoid a conflict-of-interest situation. The third party would have all the same responsibilities to investigate the actions of the public guardian as agent.

3:10

The question of regained capacity seemed to be the issue most raised during second reading. Capacity is defined in section 1(b) of the Personal Directives Act, not in this bill. We are not changing that definition. "Capacity" means the ability to understand the information that is relevant to the making of a personal decision and the ability to appreciate the reasonably foreseeable consequences of the decision."

Bill 40 outlines the required process for determining whether a maker has regained the capacity to make a decision about a personal matter. The agent is required to initiate an assessment if they believe that the maker has had a significant change in their condition, change meaning an observable and sustained improvement that does not appear to be temporary. The assessment includes consultation with a service provider who is providing health care services to the maker and may include interviewing the maker, reviewing health care records, and discussing the matter with others who may have contact with the maker.

If both the agent and service provider agree that there has been a significant change, then they complete the determination of regained capacity form and the personal directive is deactivated and the maker regains their decision-making powers in that personal area. Once a determination of regained capacity has been completed with respect to an area of authority – for example, health care treatment or all areas of personal authority – the adult is considered to have the capacity to decide on their treatment and be legally competent in this decision-making area.

A health care provider can also initiate an assessment of regained capacity if they notice a significant change. They consult with the agent and follow a similar process as the one that I just talked about. If there is a disagreement between the agent and the health care provider on whether the maker has regained capacity, a full neutral assessment needs to be completed by service providers, one of whom must be a doctor or a psychologist.

The maker also has many choices to trigger a reassessment if they feel they have regained their capacity. They can ask the agent or any health care provider who provides a health care service to them to do an assessment of regained capacity or ask the office of the public guardian or an interested person to consult with their agent on their behalf. They may also take the matter to court and ask the court to make a determination of capacity.

All of these options will ensure that if the maker of a personal directive does regain their ability to make decisions, their personal directive can be deactivated, and they regain control of their own decision-making. Personal directives speak for Albertans who cannot speak for themselves. These amendments ensure that Albertans have choices, freedom, and that safeguards are in place to ensure that agents are acting in their best interests.

I am encouraged by the support this legislation received in second reading. I hope that I have addressed all of the hon. members' concerns. I urge all members to support Bill 40, the Personal Directives Amendment Act, important legislation that helps Albertans plan for their futures.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly, I commend my fellow colleague from across the way. This is an excellent bill. It is so needed. I will speak further to the bill after I raise my amendment. I believe that it is being passed.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, there is an amendment being circulated, and the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East will be moving that amendment momentarily. We shall refer to this as amendment A1.

You may proceed.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The proposed amendment to this amendment of the original bill reads as so: "The Public Guardian must conduct an investigation where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the complainant has been, or will be harmed mentally or physically."

One of the reasons that I bring this forward – it's a small tweaking, if you will – is that I really believe it strengthens the authority of the public guardian by having very clear guidelines in the act rather than in the regulations. Often persons with discretionary powers, particularly when someone is dealing with someone's life or their personal safety or, in fact, just their personal care may feel more comfortable because it is quite a bit different than making a decision about increasing the number of widgets that a factory may turn out.

Bill 40 in section 24.3, the new provision for the investigation of complaints by the public guardian of situations involving the failure of an agent to comply with the personal directive or the duties of an agent, currently says that "the Public Guardian must review a complaint to decide whether an investigation of the complaint is necessary and must notify the complainant of the decision."

I believe that what I'm bringing forward strengthens that by saying that they must review the complaints. It's important as it explicitly states that an investigation by the public guardian is mandatory if there's a reason to believe that physical and/or mental harm to the maker has or is likely to occur. Making an investigation mandatory when harm is evident adds further protection to the maker of a personal directive. When makers write down their wishes, they want that total peace of mind that they know that there will be somebody out there to fight for what has been their wishes, certainly for their end of life and even when they're younger.

There are stories that cross my desk about people who are afraid to come forward. I think that if people knew that that public guardian would go ahead and investigate complaints, they wouldn't have the fear that they have today to come forward. It would give them the comfort to know that they wouldn't be ostracized and, in terms of staff, lose their jobs if they would come forward to make complaints. The other thing that sometimes happen is that families could be complaining about the care or the agent could be complaining about the care that the person they're in charge of would be receiving, and sometimes institutions' attitude to that is: well, if you don't like them, take your loved one home. That's not good enough.

I believe that this is where the public guardian could step in and protect people who have the courage to come forward. It establishes a mandatory duty for the public guardian to review complaints about an agent, but the duty of the public guardian to investigate these complaints is discretionary. Discretionary authority is not problematic on its own; however, there are no explicit criteria for determining when an investigation would be conducted by the public guardian.

In order to promote transparency and accountability, section 24.3

should specify the test to be applied by the public guardian in the course of deciding whether or not to conduct an investigation. If the test is met, a mandatory duty should be to investigate, and it should be triggered at that point. This same threshold is applied in the context of investigations of child abuse and neglect under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.

A similar recommendation was also made by the western Canada law review agencies in its report in relation to investigation of complaints about attorneys under the EPA. That report recommends that investigation should be mandatory where the public official has reasonable grounds to believe that the donor of the EPA has been declared incapable and that the attorney has breached one or more of the attorney duties listed in the EPA. I believe that the comfort zone that this would create would be appreciated by all people who have these discretionary powers.

I would ask the House for support for this amendment for what I believe would strengthen what is already a very good bill.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East for her proposal; however, the current wording of the proposed section 24.3(1) states that "the Public Guardian must review a complaint to decide whether an investigation of the complaint is necessary and must notify the complainant of the decision." The criteria for determining whether a complaint must be investigated are already set out in section 24.2(1) of Bill 40. We should retain the dual criteria of the complainant having reason to believe that

- (a) an agent of the maker is failing to comply with the personal directive or the duties of an agent, and
- (b) the failure is likely to cause harm to the physical or mental health of the maker.

The public guardian should have the authority to screen out complaints that don't meet both criteria before an investigation is commenced.

3:20

The existing language also recognizes that there are many agencies responsible for adult protection, and there will be cases where it is appropriate for others to investigate a situation. Examples would be the police or investigators with the protection for persons in care program. We didn't want to create a situation in which the public guardian would be compelled to do an investigation while someone else was already investigating.

For these reasons I respectfully recommend that we do not support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Would anyone wish to participate on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I support this amendment. This is a very, very difficult situation that we're looking at and considering, and I think the amendment strengthens what's here by specifically pointing to the issue of "where there are reasonable grounds to believe the complainant has been, or will be harmed mentally or physically."

There is a case that I had to deal with where a husband came to see me. His wife had a seizure and was debilitated and ended up under care and actually ended up under the care of the public guardian. Even though he was married to her, he was not allowed to be the agent or to have any guardianship whatsoever. He was concerned about the actual care of his wife and complained about the

care that she was receiving, but his loud complaints did not meet with any kind of positive response on the part of the public guardian's office. In fact, he was actually excluded from ever seeing her.

I think that having some sort of clause here that ensures that the public guardian must conduct an investigation, especially when there is indication that a patient under care is being harmed mentally or physically – I realize that this has to do with personal directives. In the case that I was referring to, there were no personal directives involved, so maybe that's outside of the parameters of what this bill would cover, but it does still point out the need for vigilance here to make sure that we are actually covering all the cases that we need to cover.

I think this amendment does add a dimension that's not present in the bill, so I would support it, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm also rising in support of my colleague from Lethbridge-East's amendment on Bill 40, the Personal Directives Amendment Act, 2007. I've had a similar experience, actually, in my office just recently to what was just described by Edmonton-Glenora. We're talking a personal directive, which ideally is done while someone is of full faculty and then is possibly implemented when they're not or when they're quite ill; that is, it's ranking along the same level as the trusteeship and the guardianship laws that we have in place. What I'm seeing in my office is that increasingly there are more shades of grey. Either we understand declining mental faculties and acuity more than we used to and see those many gradated shades of grey or perhaps there actually are more levels of that. I'm not the expert to be making a definitive statement on that, but I certainly see the effect of that.

I'm frustrated in some of the other areas I'm dealing with, like trusteeship and guardianship but also personal directives, in how you question these once they're in place. The Member for Lethbridge-East is clearly trying to capture that in saying that there has to be an investigation that takes place "where there are reasonable grounds" – we're not going to, you know, just go charging off on this one – "to believe that a complainant has been, or will be harmed mentally or physically." I think it's important to have those double checks in place there. We can start on this one, and I think we need to move on and look at the trustee arrangements and the guardianship arrangements in Alberta as well.

The other reason that I want to bring this up is that, to me, the personal directives is closely tied to another bill before the House at this time, which is Bill 31. That is a bill that is amending the Mental Health Act to implement or institute community treatment orders. When I spoke about that bill in second reading, I had recommended that personal directives should be used for people that are finding themselves in that situation – that is, they have a mental illness, they're diagnosed schizophrenic or bipolar, I suppose, some other kind of psychosis; not that bipolar is a psychosis – when they are in better health, in clear thinking to be able to make the choices about the kind of health care they're going to receive by issuing a personal directive. When/if their situation deteriorated, they stop taking the drugs, something happened to them, they get ill, whatever, the personal directive could then be brought into play to determine how they would get medical treatment.

I think it's increasingly important as we move forward that people are able to choose or even refuse medical treatment. I think this amendment would also be useful when we look at that idea of someone who may be subject to a community treatment order or perhaps is likely to be subject to a community treatment order. We need to be able to safeguard that there isn't a mental or a physical

harm or threat – and I think threat is equally valid – in the way that they're being treated.

We're uncomfortable around people that have mental illness. We're very quick to go, "Oh, they've got a mental illness. That scares me. I'm not going to deal with them," and we back away. We tend not to ever go back to them, so if somebody had a bad day – why is it that all of us are allowed to have a bad day except for people with mental illness? When they have a bad day, that's it. They're tarnished with that forevermore, and people won't deal with them. They won't go back to them and go: "Okay. Was that really true? Was that really happening to you? Are you feeling better today? Is that person still bothering you?" We don't go back and check. From then on anything the person says, it's – cue the scary music, you know – "They're dangerous. They're crazy. We're not going to deal with this anymore." I think we need to be particularly careful as a result of that.

I'm reminded of a small episode that I had with someone that I was visiting in long-term care. You know, they started talking about something, and to me it did not connect with anything that we'd been talking about. I thought: "Oh, oh" – cue the scary music – "this is it. They've lost it. They've lost their faculties. They've gone into dementia-land. They're never coming back." There was somebody else in the room with me who actually said: "Just a minute. They were watching television while you were doing something else. What they're talking about was actually on the TV a few minutes ago."

What it was was an older person talking about those games, Xbox, and those animated, computer-generated games. In my head, an older person, a geriatric person, talking about these young people's games: I thought they didn't know what they were talking about. Where on earth could this have come from? Well, it turned out they were watching TV. It was perfectly legitimate. But I'd already put it in my head that this was not expected or not legitimate. I think that as we move forward with people living longer lives, more likely to have multiple injuries or diseases that they are moving through life with – and we're going to live longer now. Probably the generation that we have in our pages here will live to be 100 and more. Yeah, they're going to be 90. They're going to have diabetes and a new hip and probably a new ankle. They probably will have had laser surgery on their eyes. You know, we're living longer, but the parts are wearing out, and we're replacing them.

3:30

We have to be particularly careful that we don't make those kinds of decisions for people without there being a double-check clause, which is what the Member for Lethbridge-East is trying to accomplish with this amendment. I encourage people to give it another look. I think we have to be very careful.

I really like the idea of personal directives. I think that would be a solution for many people, to be able to leave a clear indication of how they want health and other matters dealt with if they're not conscious and/or available to direct those actions around them, but we have to make sure that we don't put them in a position where assumptions have been made and then not let them be able to reverse that.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favour of this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else wish to participate on the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East? Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Very briefly,

I stand in support of my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-East, who brought the amendment to the floor. I don't think that this amendment is offensive, shouldn't be looked at as offensive to anyone in this House. What she's doing is basically something that really makes sense. You know, a review is one thing; mandating an investigation is another thing. What she's trying to say here is that the public guardian must review a complaint to decide whether an investigation of the complaint is necessary and must notify the complainant of the decision.

I don't think this should be looked at as anything that is aggressive to the sponsor of the bill. It is something that offers clarity. It is something that offers direction. It's a question of a review that is discretionary versus an investigation that is mandatory. I honestly don't think that there is any valid reason for the government side to reject this amendment. Nothing in it, you know, contradicts the bill. Nothing in it actually changes the intent of the bill or the content. It basically sheds more light. It offers the clarity that whenever something is worthy of an investigation, it should be investigated, and the results of that investigation or that decision should be communicated to the complainant.

Her amendment reads: "The Public Guardian must conduct an investigation where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the complainant has been, [in the past] or will be [in the future] harmed mentally or physically." Again, I emphasize that this is actually sort of a friendly amendment to the bill before us. I urge all members from the government as well as my colleagues in the opposition to support it. I certainly do.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to be very short, but I'd like to point out two things. I believe that for two reasons this amendment is not necessary. The intention of the amendment is already covered in the existing legislation. The public guardian uses two criteria to determine whether a complaint should go to a full-blown investigation.

But I would also like to point out that the language of the amendment does not appear to me to be accurate, and that is because it says: "where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the complainant has been, or will be harmed mentally or physically." The complainant is not normally the person that will be harmed. The complainant is an agent or somebody representing the maker. It's the maker that we're worried about, the person who cannot make their own decisions. We're worried about them. So the language in the amendment is questionable as well.

I would like to go ahead and recommend that we do not support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: On the bill as it is, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to make a couple of comments and just lay out the problems I see developing, that we probably can't do much with the bill. I think it's certainly a good thing that we're trying to make a standard form

because often this gets very confusing for people. That's an excellent, excellent suggestion.

Basically, I'm going to support the bill, but there's one thing that I just want to talk about briefly because I do think it's a problem that we're hearing about and we may hear more about. Section 10.1(4) describes what should happen when a person regains capacity to make their own decisions. I know the member said that they looked at the terms for capacity in the previous bill, if I understood it right, and they think that it's adequate. That may well be; I don't know. But I also know that for a lot of elder advocates this has become a major issue. They believe that this capacity is being abused often. They've had news conferences about it. The member is probably aware of that. I'm not sure in legislation how you do that. I don't have a great suggestion to make about how you would lay out that capacity, but I think that we have to be cognizant that this is a growing issue. As I say, I know that elder advocates are certainly making it a political issue that people have their rights being taken away and they believe the capacity is there, and they don't have any way to fight back.

As I said, I'm just throwing out the problem. I'm not sure if in legislation you can do that or not. But as we have an aging population, I think this is going to become more and more of an issue. Once again, I'm going to certainly support the bill, but maybe we should take a look at that whole area because, as I say, politically it's going to be, I think, a growing issue. So just a caution in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Despite having my amendment defeated, I certainly stand to support this bill. I support it as a health care worker because if I have to make instant decisions – and I really am more, I think, projecting myself into an emergency room – I really want to know what those people need me to do.

I think another place where this comes in, certainly as a health care worker, is when decisions are made to insert feeding tubes. If someone wants that feeding tube, then you insert it, but if they've said no, then it's really up to that maker's designated agent to make sure that it isn't, because when you insert a feeding tube, that person can well be kept alive for many, many years. Then the actual decision has to be made at some point to pull that feeding tube, on which, in fact, death follows fairly shortly. That's one of the reasons that clear directives should be made, and as a health care professional I'm delighted to have this go forward.

Also, I like the idea of having public guardians becoming designated agents because certainly in my experience we did sometimes have people that were homeless and were actually admitted to our care facility because it was the only care facility in town at the time. These people really had no one, and it's not fair that somebody has no one. Public guardians actually did a fairly good job in trying to ascertain what these people needed. More often than not it would be alcohol-induced Alzheimer's or dementia, and they're very, very difficult to deal with. That's where the public guardian really assumes the total responsibility for this human being in their care.

The makers themselves would feel very, very comfortable with this bill, knowing that when they have written down what they want, the person that they've designated as their agent understands it, and they trust that they will fight for them should anything happen to their mental capacities. We in the past have thought about creating these directives, and we've thought about it – certainly, I did probably 20 years ago – in terms of long-term care, and that's really

wrong. I think we have to start thinking about personal directives the minute we become adults. The minute someone is 18, they must consider a personal directive.

3:40

We have a tremendous amount of young people who are injured in car accidents and, certainly, a number of brain-injured young people as a result of these car accidents. We also have young people who have had strokes. We've had young people with neuromuscular diseases that, again, affect their mental capacities to make decisions. I think that the biggest fear of all of us who have been exposed to this and understand is that we would at some point have Alzheimer's. It is probably one of the worst diseases and one of the worst scenarios that can happen to a family.

When a person gets Alzheimer's and they have passed into that particular phase where they really don't know anyone, when they're cared for and loved and looked after, they really are quite easy to care for. For the caregivers, if they're fortunate enough to work with them on a regular basis, it becomes family, and they learn to love that person very much. But it is absolutely devastating on a family that faithfully comes to visit someone who doesn't even know who they are. Every day you come you just think there might be one little kernel of recognition, that your mom actually might know your name. It's very, very sad.

But to know that you've written it down and to know that when you get to that stage, your family doesn't have to make those decisions, that your family can know that they're doing what your wishes are – it's probably one of the most powerful things that we're doing here today, to allow people to age and die with great dignity.

Ms Blakeman: And by choice. It's a decision-making process.

Ms Pastoor: And by choice. Yes, you're right. My colleague is right. It's a decision-making process that they have full control of.

My hon. colleague from Red Deer-North mentioned about the education component of this and having it put into the CALM program, which I think is absolutely excellent because this is just prior to young people turning 18, and it will certainly help them think about what could possibly happen to them. It certainly may never, but there's always that possibility out there.

It's been happening in the past where people will go to make wills or they look at their estates, but lawyers today are really much more aware of being able to sit down with their clients and talk about these personal directives. The obligation of this – it's not mandatory. I think that over the last number of years many, many people – I think that there are hundreds and thousands of personal directives out there, so it probably won't be necessary to have it mandatory. I think that as education comes along, people will realize that this truly is their personal choice, and it's one of the best things that they can do for their family, that may ultimately have to look after them, whether it's an 18-year-old in a car accident and they've got devastated parents dealing with this or whether it's actually looking after your mother that's 95.

One other thing that I think might be at some point, maybe, even put into the educational component or perhaps discussed with lawyers is that we review our estate planning and we review our mutual funds or we review our retirement plans, certainly on a yearly basis. I know some people might even well do it at six months, and for those of us that don't have money, we look at it daily. I think that reviewing your personal directives: as you mature, your life changes, and as you mature, you change what you really want. An 18-year-old with a brain injury may well, perhaps, not want huge, heroic measures done, but as you get older, people aren't

quite as willing to want to move on quicker than their allotted time. So it's very important that it be reviewed and reviewed with that in mind. As you mature, what you perhaps wanted at 18 is not what you would want at 85 or even vice versa.

With that, I again thank the member. I think this is very good, and there'll be many, many people who benefit from this bill. I again applaud the Member for Red Deer-North.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else on the bill?
Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 40 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 1 Lobbyists Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Hon. members, just as a reminder, the last time we adjourned, we were dealing with amendment A1, and we had completed section F. We are now dealing with section G of amendment A1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman for this opportunity, and thank you to my hon. colleagues for the warm reception. Now, as you know, I participated in the Standing Committee on Government Services, which was one of four committees established to act as all-party forums, all-party think tanks. Some of us were tasked with reviewing legislation; some were not and had to figure out what their *raison d'être* was. We were really pleased that in our committee, of which I was the deputy chair, both Bill 1 and Bill 2 were referred to us. They were fairly important bills, bills that talk about democratic renewal. In particular, Bill 1, that we're talking about now, was something that the Leader of the Official Opposition and, indeed, all members of our caucus campaigned extensively on and support very strongly.

Through at least nine or 10 meetings, if I remember correctly, the committee held meetings, received submissions, invited face-to-face dialogue and feedback, and then had to come up with a report because the Assembly was expecting us to. The Assembly was awaiting a report from the committee to offer suggestions, offer a set of recommendations to all 83 hon. members in this Assembly as to how to proceed. We did that. We worked, and we had excellent support in our committee. The end product, the final result, was a group of recommendations, 11 of them, and we numbered them A, B, C, D, and so on. We covered six of them before, Mr. Chairman, and today, hopefully, we will cover the other five.

Now, part G of amendment A1 talks about the offence of lobbying without filing a return, and it reduces the proposed fines in half. It cuts them in half. Now, the committee was criticized by some that in so doing, we seem to be weakening the bill, that we seem to be sending the wrong message, that, you know, fines are being reduced,

and maybe we're not too serious about it. But I actually beg to differ. The committee felt that at least initially – at least initially – we wanted to be in line with other Canadian jurisdictions, to see what they're doing and to be, you know, in that ballpark, especially as was more than once explained and expressed to the committee, that the penalty or the fine attaches to the individual, not the organization they belong to or lobby on behalf of or represent. We felt that \$200,000 can really put somebody not only out of work, but it can ruin their life indefinitely. We didn't want to discourage people from continuing to volunteer, for example.

3:50

Now, one of the things which happened last week, Mr. Chairman, was a comment from some members from the government, saying: "You know, why are you guys speaking so much on this amendment? If you participated on the committee and you liked the outcome and you were active in the drafting of this report, why are you spending time here?" As I explained before, this is what we were elected to do. We were elected to debate and discuss and scrutinize ideas. Honestly, I felt it was important for me, as somebody who really approached that committee with an open mind and really liked to be on it and to participate and to be involved in the true sense of that word, that somebody needed to enlighten the Assembly and to tell all of the other members what we're doing here.

I'll bet you, Mr. Chairman, that not everyone read the report from the committee, but I urge all hon. members – I know some actually raised their hands, very few and mostly on this side of the House. We need to highlight the fact that this is the first time that this has happened. This is the first time in recorded history in this province that we have all-party policy field committees. Let's benefit from this. Let's learn from it.

The report is not terribly exhaustive or thick. It's only about 13 pages. Of note, if members don't have the time to maybe go through all 13 pages, is page 13, the very last page of this report, called Appendix C: Are You a Lobbyist? It offers a chart. It offers a step-by-step navigational tool, if you will, that basically people can refer to, and it tells them where they fit within the act. Are you a lobbyist? Are you a lobbyist that gets paid? Then you go a certain way, and it gives you certain answers. Are you a lobbyist that is mostly a volunteer? Then you go a certain way, and it gives you answers. Are you a volunteer that gets paid? Then you go this way, and then you find your answers. Are you a volunteer that doesn't get paid? Here are the answers for your questions. This is very useful. If hon. members and hon. colleagues don't have the time to go through all 13 pages of the report, I think this one would be the most useful.

We cut the penalties in half because we felt that, at least initially, people had to learn what the act was all about, and they had to learn how to sort of behave within its parameters and within its provisions. When I say learn, Mr. Chairman, I am also referring to a discussion that was initiated by myself and my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-East, who sat on the committee as well, that it was an education campaign that we were after. People had to understand what's involved, and they had to be taken by the hand and walked through the provisions of this act. This is the first time we do it, it's a new piece of legislation that affects many, many people, and we highlighted it to be an educational campaign.

Somebody commented that we already do this and we don't need any more, you know, propaganda. We said: "No, this is different. It is not just a press release or a news bulletin on some website." This has to be exhaustive. We have to have workshops. We have to have, you know, tutorial seminars where people get taken by the

hand and walked through the closets. This chart would be the first place to start: Are You a Lobbyist?

So section G talks about the offences. It talks about if you lobby without filing a return and what's involved, and it also talks about how much you pay in penalties for the first offence and then for repeated ones, subsequent ones. I think, you know, having served on the committee, that I'm definitely in support of section G, and I urge all members as well to do the same.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, did you want to participate on this?

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. You know, looking at section G, I think if we want to go back, it was quite a shift for this government to believe in a lobbyist registry. I remember the debates here for many, many years, in fact, with the previous Premier saying that he didn't know what a lobbyist was and the rest of it. I want to give some credit where credit is due even before the policy field committee. I believe the Member for Edmonton-McClung was there part time on the select committee that originally brought this forward.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, I was.

Mr. Martin: Yes, the select committee under the chairmanship of the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. I think that's where we first made it possible, in that select committee. In fact, I believe the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was there, too, at that time. [A telephone rang]

Mr. MacDonald: It's the government whip. He wants to talk to you.

Mr. Martin: Oh, does he? Tell him I'll do it after.

I wanted to say that that's where I think that this came from, because some government members at the time on the select committee actually sat down and listened. There was a great deal of cynicism to begin with about a lobbyist registry, you may recall. Because of the way that committee worked, eventually – not everybody was onside on the government side, but most of them were – we came up with that select committee. I think that made it easier for the new Premier to bring it forward. So I think some credit should go to that select committee. If that hadn't happened, I doubt, Mr. Chairman, that we'd be looking at Bill 1 and the lobbyist registry. I think members on that committee should take some credit for that.

I want to say, Mr. Chairman, that I like the way the policy field committees work. I think that in that particular committee that's probably the way it should work, all parties working together for the common good. We're going to disagree from time to time. That's the nature of the beast. But that's what the purpose of them was.

Now, Mr. Chairman, just to come to G. I don't think it really matters much what the fines are, and I certainly have no great objection to the amount. I do want to say, though, first of all, that I still think there are some major loopholes – we discussed one here, and we'll probably discuss that more in third reading – that I think still make this bill a little problematic.

If there's a lobbyist registry, especially the big lobbyists from business and that, these fines aren't going to deter them; that's not what's going to deter them. It's the fact that they're front and centre and, if they weren't doing it properly, the embarrassment that would come from it. It's not the fines that really matter, in my opinion. I think you have to have some there. That's not the important thing

for the people that I'd call the big-time lobbyists. That's not what's going to deter them. A hundred thousand dollars for some multibillion-dollar companies is a drop in the bucket, but the embarrassment, you know, on their business plan, if it comes out that they've done it wrong, is what would deter them.

I certainly have no objections to supporting the recommendations here worked through by the policy field committee. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Happy to have the opportunity to comment on amendment G. For those of you following along at home, that would be amending section 19, starting on page 18 of the actual bill.

A couple of observations on this. I've been talking to some people who would be classified as consultant lobbyists because, basically, they contract with organizations, admittedly mostly in the not-for-profit sector but, nonetheless, they do, and I think they would still be classified as consultant lobbyists under this legislation. One individual said that, actually, it was the right time for them but that this act was part of their considerations in deciding to take a different direction with their career. They're an individual, and they'd don't get very large contracts – enough to make an okay living, pay a mortgage, but nothing fancy – and these fines would be significant.

4:00

It was appropriate that the level was reduced because I think there wasn't an intention that someone be sort of broken but that it act as a deterrent. But what's going to happen is that it will affect the business insurance that consultants carry to be able to cover the cost of this kind of punishment or deterrent should it come into effect. We probably will see some people reconfigure their careers and move away from being contract consultants to organizations because of the choices that are made here.

I think it's still important that we have people file. The point of a lobbyist act is that we know who is lobbying whom on what subject. I have no problem with lobbying, but I think it's important that it's transparent and accountable and that we can see in the registry what's going on. I mean, legislation is always a plan – this is what we want to have happen – and there are always punishment sections in there to say: if you don't do it, here's what will happen to you. So it's appropriate that there is a deterrent or punishment section. I think the amount that's been arrived at is fine – that was some of the good work that the committee did – and that it has clarified that the individual who lobbies without a return being filed as required is guilty of an offence, which is, I think, a clarification in addition to the existing legislation.

Section (c) is basically housekeeping, in which "Ethics Commissioner" is substituted for the wording "Registrar."

This act is going to be very interesting as it moves along and becomes implemented in what we will see happen as a result of it. I don't have any problems with this section that's in front of us.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the remarks about the select committee on conflict of interest, which raised this issue of a lobbyist registry and did some work. I appreciate the change that this amendment is bringing in terms of the amounts of the fines, \$25,000 for a first offence and \$100,000 for a second and

each subsequent offence. That actually was recommended by the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee. In fact, when we talked about the lobbyists registry, we suggested:

Each statute contains offence provisions, and if convicted, a person or organization may be subject to a fine of up to \$25,000. In addition, some jurisdictions increase the maximum fine to a maximum of \$100,000 for second or subsequent offences.

We were quite mindful of the fact that those amounts are bringing this lobbyists registry – the offences, the fines – in line with other jurisdictions. So the field committee, perhaps, got carried away. I don't know, Mr. Chairman, what the reasons were for increasing it so much, but the amendment bringing it back to \$25,000 and \$100,000 is actually what we recommended in the first place.

The only other point I want to raise is in reference to the amendment here. Section 19 is amended (a) by adding the following after subsection (1):

(1.1) A person who lobbies without a return being filed as required by this Act is guilty of an offence.

Now, I really puzzled for a long time trying to figure out why that should be added when what we have here in the bill is a reference to the registration and the penalties that are to be followed if a person is in breach of this lobbyist registry act.

I am informed, Mr. Chairman, that the problem is that a person can register as a lobbyist but then fail to report his or her activities throughout the year as that person engages in lobbyist activity. It's not enough just to register. If you don't register and you carry out your lobbyist activity, then you're in breach of the act, but if you register and you don't submit a return stating what kind of lobbyist activity you're engaged in, then you can be in breach of this act. So now I understand why this amendment is suggested by the committee.

Mr. Elsalhy: There's a fine every time. It's not just once a year.

Dr. B. Miller: There's a fine every time. It's not just once a year. Right?

I think that clarifies it for me. So I am in support of section 19 being amended by these two changes.

The third change, of course, is to change the word "Registrar" to "Ethics Commissioner," which makes great sense because the Ethics Commissioner is the one that's in charge of the whole process.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A1G carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall now deal with part H. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really think that you have psychic powers. Somehow you sensed that I was going to stand up and address the Assembly again.

Anyway, I'm not going to talk much about this one in particular because section H is basically talking about the discussion we had in the committee about the definition of communication. Let me tell you, Mr. Chairman, we actually went to great lengths in determining the words "to communicate with a public office holder" and what that entailed and what it really meant.

I'm not going to belabour this topic, but I refer everybody in the Assembly to our own Assembly website. If you go there, there is actually a poster that refers you to committee websites, and if you go into there, you'll see that all the committees of the Assembly are listed, and one of them is the standing policy field Committee on Government Services. If hon. members are really interested, you

can actually click on that link and then read the transcripts word for word of what we said in the committee. It was really felt that lobbying had to be defined as, you know, an attempt to communicate with a public office holder.

We have a great resource in this Assembly, Mr. Chairman, in the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, who understands this stuff and who was also the chairman of that earlier committee, the select standing committee on the Conflicts of Interest Act. He can tell you in extreme detail what the reasons behind this amendment are. I know that once you ask him that question, you'll be confident that this amendment is really offering the clarity that is necessary.

Part of that discussion, as in (e.1), as is suggested here in part H, talks about the time spent. We had extensive discussions as to: is lobbying only the act of lobbying, like during that conversation, during that meeting, or is it maybe the time that you spent assembling a list of MLAs or a list of ministers or the time spent researching an issue, and so on? Section (e.1) actually addresses that.

Overall, I think this is a worthy point of clarification, and I think it shouldn't come as anything that the government side or members of the opposition should be worried about. I'm encouraging everybody to support this one as well.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1H carried]

4:10

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, maybe I should seek some direction here. We have three more sections: I, J, and K. Unless we have amendments coming forth, would you like to have a general discussion and then a vote on each one separately?

Mr. Elsalhy: No. One by one.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Well, we'll deal with section I, then. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, just to offer an explanation to my hon. colleagues. As the bill was written, we initially anticipated that the first review of the act, once it becomes an act, was going to happen five years after. Because of the impact of this act, if passed, on almost everybody that has the ear of government, be it nonprofits, be it a professional organization, be it a union, be it, you know, a management group, whatever – the impact is so huge, and we haven't done this before. This is basically navigating in uncharted waters. So we felt that at least the first time when this act comes up for review again, we would do it in 24 months instead of the typical 60 months.

I think it makes sense. I think it was the right thing to do, to allow people who are potentially unhappy with the act or unhappy with having to adhere to its requirements, its provisions, to maybe come back within two years and talk to us again about what they felt, what their findings were.

It also allows us in the Assembly the opportunity to go over it to determine how effective it was. We've heard the criticism so many times that other jurisdictions, including the federal government, who have similar acts, similar lobbyist registries, you know, are having difficulty enforcing the provisions. They're not meeting with success in terms of catching everybody that should be caught. We definitely anticipate that some issues will arise, and we need to find

out about them by not having to wait five years. Let's do it quickly. Let's do it within two years.

Now, I was also pleased with my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, who challenged me on this. He said, "Well, you know, why do it after two years only? Why not allow five years so we can gather better information, so we can gather fuller information, more comprehensive information?" We have done this before in this Assembly, Mr. Chairman, actually, with other bills, which I can't remember offhand. But I was told that we've done this in other situations. I think PIPA was one of them, where the first time it was after only two years and then after that it became every five years. Also the Health Information Act. So we have done it before. This is not new, and we're not deviating from our norm.

This is something that is probably warranted, and as such I think it's a good amendment. I urge all members to support it as well.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, would like to support this particular amendment probably because I was the one that actually made the motion within the field committee.

While I'm on my feet I will say a few words about the field committee. I think we will see how this plays out right through to the end. I believe that the Minister of Health and Wellness is going to bring forward an amendment which we would probably refer to as the Quebec amendment. Part of the reason, I think, that it had to come forward outside of the committee was that we did, I feel, tremendously good work inside that committee, but we could have probably used a bit more time to go into a bit more depth, which is why I felt that it was very important that we have the two-year review. If something is going wrong, you're going to be able to identify it within two years. So why would you perpetrate a mistake over a five-year period?

Mr. Rodney: Perpetuate a mistake.

Ms Pastoor: Perpetuate. I have just been corrected. Thank you. That would be perpetuate.

Mr. Rodney: You're welcome.

Ms Pastoor: A lot of harm can be done if a mistake – and it could be a very small item that would go on and perhaps affect many, many of the organizations that are going to be considered lobbyists and may well put them to a lot of extra work when, in fact, it could be, so to speak, nipped in the bud. So I'm pleased to support this and certainly support the work of the committee.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1I carried]

The Deputy Chair: We shall proceed with section J. Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1J carried]

The Deputy Chair: Section K. Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1K carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move an amendment to Bill 1. You have the amendment at the table for distribution, and I'd ask if it could be distributed now. The effect of the amendment is to make two changes to Bill 1. I'll give the pages a brief time to circulate it.

The first change is a very minor change, and I can just draw members' attention to it. It's with respect to section 1(1)(f)(iv). It's simply amended by striking out "charitable." The effect of that is to say that an organization includes any of the following, whether incorporated, unincorporated, a partnership, or a sole proprietorship, and (iv) would then read: a nonprofit organization, association, society, coalition, or interest group. So "charitable" is redundant and unnecessary. It's basically all nonprofit organizations.

But the most important part of the amendment is titled B. It amends section 3(1) of the bill. Section 3(1) is on page 7, but we're dealing with inserting something just after clause (h). Basically, section 3(1) is the restrictions on the application of the act, or, essentially, exemptions to the act. The purport of clause 3(1) is to say that the act does not apply to any of the following when acting in their official capacity and then outlines the groups of people to whom it does not apply. We've, I think, amended this already to include, for example in (i.1) and (i.2), members of the boards of trustees under the School Act, persons acting as a volunteer without payment.

The purport of this section is what I referred to in speaking to this earlier on as the public-good exemption. Essentially, what it would do is it would exempt from the operation of the act

directors, officers or employees of an organization referred to in section 1(1)(f)(iv) not constituted to serve management, union or professional interests nor having a majority of members that are profit-seeking enterprises or representatives of profit-seeking enterprises.

In essence, Mr. Chairman, the voluntary sector in this province does a lot of work, does a lot of good things in our community and sometimes – and, I think, quite accurately – are concerned that with all of the accountabilities that are built into the governance process, we make them spend about a third of their time applying for money and a third of their time accounting for it, and if we have a registry act with which they have to comply, they would spend the other third of their time complying with the registry act.

4:20

Now, that might be an overexaggeration on my part, but I think it's very important that we not overencumber voluntary organizations with unnecessary accountabilities. The purpose of this section is to ensure that for voluntary organizations which are acting, essentially, in the public good – in other words, they're not acting out of self-interest or out of interest for their membership from the perspective that their membership are profit-seeking organizations or unions or management of those sorts of organizations but organizations that are operating in the community interest – we expect that those people will be talking to their MLAs. We want them to be talking to their government. We want them to be adding to the public discourse and public debate, and we don't necessarily need them to be around counting their hours or worrying about whether two members of the same organization have each exceeded 50 hours or those sorts of things.

I believe the committee did some very good work on this bill, but

I think I would have hoped that they would have gone just this little step further and recognized the representations that were being made with respect to this area and understand that while it's very important for Albertans to be able to know who's talking to their government and who's talking to their MLAs about what issues, which perhaps are of a business interest or have a self-interest aspect to it, when we're talking about the public good, we do want to encourage the public debate. We certainly do want to encourage Albertans to engage in voluntary organizations, to be unleashed to give their capacity back to their community, and we don't want to restrict them in any undue way.

This amendment will have the effect, in my view, of relieving voluntary organizations of, even if it's just a perceived burden, having to comply with the act, of being in a place where they have to worry about counting their hours or counting their hours in conjunction with other members of the organization. I would ask the House to consider adopting this amendment, which I believe will go a long way to make sure that voluntary organizations know how well received they are by this government, this Legislature, what important work we think they do, and to relieve them of any burden of having to comply with the provisions of the act.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the government, thank you for this amendment. Frankly, if the hon. minister opposite hadn't brought forward this amendment, I had already prepared almost exactly the same amendment to bring forward because I think it is about understanding and valuing the contribution that that charitable/not-for-profit/volunteer sector brings to our community. My fear was that members of the government just didn't get it. They're so corporate focused that they didn't get how important this sector is.

Over the last year and a half I've been discussing in a number of debates and in private members' statements: just imagine what our society would look like if we took away some of these organizations. Frankly, capacity is an issue in those organizations right now. Many of them have been operational for a number of years. They've taken on more and more programming that, frankly, used to be paid for by government or run by government. Now they're being expected to do RFPs in order to get contracts when they're the sole possible contractor out there. That one always strikes me as a bit weird. But, essentially, that sector was really stressed, and I have been trying to raise that issue in this Assembly for some time. My fear, when I saw the work both of this bill and of the committee, was that the government hadn't gotten it, and clearly the government did get it, or at least some people got it because we've got a government amendment in front of us for this bill.

I also want to acknowledge the importance of that sector and their advocacy on their own behalf because this is a helping sector. This is filled with organizations that often exist to do good work for others, and they tend to be self-effacing. They tend to be vigorous in defending the interests of their client base but not so aggressive in promoting their own well-being. I had concerns that they were not going to be able to catch the ear and get the understanding of the government members, and, boy, did that community pull together.

Now, there are clearly some individuals who were introduced in this Assembly when we started into the debate on Bill 1. I'm thinking of Bob Wyatt from the Muttart philanthropic foundation, the centres in Edmonton and Calgary for the volunteer organizations. There were a number of key individuals who really worked hard and poured heart and soul into helping government understand how important this was, and I thank them for that effort. It was a lot of work. It probably cost them money that they didn't have to spend.

I think individuals probably paid for some things, mileage and things, out of their own pocket in order to get to Edmonton or get access to MLAs and help them to understand how important this was. I'm very happy to see it.

I can't underline enough the capacity issue. I hope that when this bill has passed, the government will remember this and go back and look at some of its funding formulas and come to understand better what has happened. I remember years ago hearing one of the government backbenchers talking about how great this sector was because everything was free and what else the government could get this sector to do because it was free. I cringed because I knew it wasn't free. Even for volunteer organizations there is a cost to them. There's a cost to the auditing. There's a cost to volunteer appreciation. There's a cost to volunteer recruitment and training. That stuff is not free. But the government has tended to approach this voluntary/charitable/not-for-profit sector with the idea that they are free because they have a lot of volunteers working for them.

As a result we've tended to have line-item funding for these organizations, so if they're, you know, contracted or they're given the responsibility of providing a certain program or service, all the government funds them for is just exactly that line item of that program and service. But when the government was doing it, they were covering the cost of the phone line that the person used and the benefits for the staff person and the desk that they used and the chair that they used and even the extra square footage in the office because you had an additional person running that program. It goes to the not-for-profit sector, and all of that ancillary money doesn't go with it, just the line item to deliver the program.

We have this situation where the not-for-profit/charitable/volunteer sector is actually fundraising the money to pay for that phone line, that phone, that desk, that extra square footage in their leased space to provide the programs. It has come at a cost. Now, those organizations have been happy to provide that and believe strongly in providing those services, but I still will push the government to examine the way they fund these groups.

I won't go into it now, but the other thing that has to be looked at is this ridiculousness of requiring some sort of request for proposal situation when in most cases you have sole providers existing in the community. Who else is going to give you mental health services but the Canadian Mental Health Association? I mean, come on. Nobody else offers those services, but you're making them go through this. It's ridiculous. Anyway, don't get me started on that tangent.

The minister had also referred to accountability in that sector. I can attest to that. I know that there are some, particularly smaller organizations, that to an outsider's eye may appear to be less accountable than you might find, for example, in a small business with a couple of employees, and you've got a charity or a volunteer-based organization with a couple of volunteers. That's true sometimes. People don't know what they're doing, and they make mistakes, and they don't file the correct paperwork or keep up with things. Yeah, that's true. But for the most part this sector is the most accountable sector out of anything you can come up with, including government, because every time they apply to do something, they have to be totally transparent and accountable. They account over and over and over again for their funding, and often they account three ways for the same dang funding because they've applied to the city, to the province, and to the feds. We still haven't managed to mesh our reporting structures so that they can do one report back and it's accepted by all three levels of government. Oh, no. We're going to make them do a different accounting report back to the city, a different one to the province, and a different one to the feds.

So the Minister of Health and Wellness is exactly right. They spend a third of their time trying to raise the money to deliver the programs and a third of the time accounting, and now they're only delivering a third of the programs because that's all the time they've got left. So we have created a number of requirements about accountability, and for the most part they meet them.

4:30

I also want to talk about lobbying from that sector. I would argue that that is the sector that we as legislators need to hear from. They are delivering those programs and services on the front line. They have an expertise that we need, so we should be asking for it, but they should also feel free to come to us and give us that information because in many cases that's where we get it. Who was it that first flagged for us the issue of children going to school hungry? It was that volunteer, charitable, not-for-profit sector. Who started to talk 10, 15 years ago or more about the increasing number of people who were homeless? That same sector. They're on the front lines. They're seeing it happen. They were the experts, and we need them to come and talk to us.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I would also argue, Mr. Chairman, that when they are lobbying or advocating to the government, they are not advocating for their shareholders. They're not advocating for somebody to make more money out of this. These groups are always coming forward advocating for their residents, for their clients, for the individuals that they are assisting. Whether they're talking about youth sports or seniors or Meals on Wheels or feeding programs or an arts and culture group, they're not there to improve their own lives even if we're talking about the administrator. They are there talking about how their audience or client or resident base is being affected, and that's information that as legislators we need to have. They need to be talking to us. We need to be listening to them. The idea of the requirements that we were going to subject them to of registering as a lobbyist and all of that other accountability I think would have really stood in the way of service provision.

What this amendment will do in the end is excuse or remove from the requirements of the legislation those groups that I tend to think of as the not-for-profit, volunteer, charitable sector. Essentially, this is the social service agencies, the faith-based agencies, people working in poverty issues, housing and homelessness issues, arts and culture, multiculturalism, youth, youth at risk, youth recreational programming, health and wellness for youth, seniors, the people in the disabled community, services for them, recreational opportunities. We keep saying that we need a healthier population, that we need to reduce obesity. This is how we do it: through those recreational opportunities. Eat less, exercise more. These are the groups that help provide that exercise incentive.

Of course, the health-based agencies like diabetes, heart and stroke, asthma, and a number of other agencies like that: those agencies are operating on behalf of the people they help. They're not there as profit-making ventures. The very definition of a not-for-profit doesn't mean that they're bad businesspeople. They're actually for the most part excellent businesspeople, considering that they can manage to squeeze change out of a penny over and over and over again.

I want to support this amendment. I think it's a good idea. It has addressed a huge problem with this bill. I wanted this lobbyists bill to come in. I've been campaigning for it for years. I would have been really in a position of struggling to support this bill if we had not had this amendment come forward, so I am very pleased to see

it. I am very supportive of it. I really encourage the rest of the members of the Assembly to support this amendment, and we will get on with the rest of the bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, I had some questions regarding the amendment. One came from the Chambers of Commerce wondering: in this amendment why are groups like the Chambers of Commerce excluded? Is it because the minister just feels: "Go online. It's free. Fifteen minutes later you're done. You're registered. End of story"? But in the preamble from the mover of this amendment there wasn't much said about fine groups like our Alberta Chambers of Commerce or our local chambers of commerce. What are they to think? You know, they're basically nonprofit organizations that do fine work like many other for-good operations. I just needed some clarification before I put my hand up on this.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member does raise a good point. I guess it depends on the size of the chamber of commerce. There's a huge, big difference between the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce and smaller communities, right?

Again, the focus here, which I appreciate, is the focus on economics. You know, the conflict-of-interest legislation that applies to us focuses in general on issues of personal economic interest. Modern society accepts that as citizens we should be free to pursue our own economic interests, but those of us in positions of public trust who are elected to this Legislature must not act in a manner that furthers our own personal economic interest. That's what we have adopted as our conflict-of-interest legislation.

When we look at a lobbyist registry, we're looking at people who are coming to influence the decisions of people in government and in the Legislature. Again, I think the focus should be on economic interests. If a company has lobbyists and they come and try to influence government, then of course they have an economic interest. That's why there should be a lobbyist registry, so that they register and declare how they are influencing government.

I appreciate the amendment because it takes out of the equation charitable organizations, so the word "charitable" is taken out of section 1(1)(f)(iv). I think that's good because charitable organizations, like religious institutions, do not have an economic interest in terms of economic interest for themselves to further when they are seeking to influence government decisions. I think that's really important.

I, of course, over the years in my former occupation as a minister in a church was very much involved in trying to influence government action. I did actually form a lobby group back in 1993 called Alberta Quality of Life Commission. We would be exempt from this lobbyist registry because as a matter of fact we were all volunteers, and none of us were paid for this activity that we were engaged in, and we had no money. We had no budget. We weren't even an organized society under the Societies Act. But we had great lobbyists because Lois Hole was one of our members and also Douglas Roche and Don Mayne and Kay Feehan, some great, active people in the community. I think we did our best to write good reports and bring them to the government. In fact, the Member for Athabasca-Redwater was the minister of social services at the time when we submitted our report Listen to Me, about poverty in

Alberta. Members of the cabinet did listen to us. They didn't follow our advice or our recommendations.

An Hon. Member: They cut funding.

4:40

Dr. B. Miller: Oh, yeah. They cut funding. Those were the days of cutting funding to everything. We actually haven't caught up to all those cuts.

Now, that kind of lobbying, I'm happy to recognize, is exempt from this legislation because there's absolutely no interest in furthering private economic interest, and actually there's no element of being paid to lobby.

I'll give another example. Religious leaders in this province have on occasion tried to influence or enter into dialogue with government ministers and even the Premier to express their views. For example, from 1978 to 1985 there was something called the Alberta church consultation. Actually, this church consultation, which included at that time mostly leaders from various Christian denominations, was brought together at the request of Premier Peter Lougheed. I think it was really quite good of him to put that into being because he was sensitive to the fact that people in the churches, especially church leaders, have a lot to say in terms of their value perspectives and addressing various social issues that the province faces.

Now, it's interesting that the Alberta church consultation was not continued with Premier Getty. Although in 1995 Premier Klein did meet with something called the interfaith coalition, which had as one of its members Larry Shaben from the Muslim community and someone named Ron Stevens from the Jewish community, Virindra Lamba from the Sikh community, and Reverend Rob Hankinson from the Christian community. They met only twice. Premier Klein wasn't interested in continuing it.

The reason I mention this is that currently the Edmonton and District Council of Churches actually wants to renew this tradition of meeting with government, cabinet ministers and the Premier, government leaders, to express their views. Now, this is a form of lobbying. Among those people that might meet with the Premier and cabinet ministers would be people who have high positions in religious communities: imams or bishops and so on. So they are paid personnel for their various denominations.

But what we're talking about in these cases is, obviously, charities. It's not just a nonprofit organization, but it is a charitable organization. With this amendment, then, those churches and mosques and synagogues and the leaders that represent them would not be included and come under this lobbyist registry. I think that is extremely important. You know, I was very upset initially when I looked at this legislation because I thought that it was blocking the ability of people who come from various religious backgrounds to express their views to political leaders, and we don't want that to happen. As an MLA I'm open to what people in the religious communities are saying and their concerns, and I think we ought to be responding to them and encouraging them to enter into dialogue with us.

I'm also pleased, Mr. Chairman, that nonprofit organizations are still left in this section. "Charitable" is taken out, but "non-profit organization" is still there. Yet the amendment in B, which amends section 3(1), adds that this act does not apply to any of the following. By identifying the "directors, officers or employees of an organization [who are] not constituted to serve management, union or professional interests nor having a majority of members that are profit-seeking enterprises," I think that makes it a little clearer though the language is quite dense. I'm not sure who the onus is on

to prove, you know, that your board only consists of a few people that might be engaged in profit-seeking enterprises but that the majority of the board is not.

I don't know about this language. I mean, nonprofit organizations are nonprofit organizations. They have boards. Mostly their boards are volunteers, and they're engaged in promoting their own organizations. For some of the inner-city agencies a social agency has a board, and their focus is not in furthering their own private interest, their own private economic interest, but certainly trying to influence government on the issues of poverty and so on. So I'm really quite pleased that such nonprofit organizations and faith-based agencies are not included in this lobbyist registry.

You know, all of this is part of an evolution of concern about ethics, and I'm really happy that now, finally, in Alberta, in terms of the evolution of ethics, we've come to this point where we're going to adopt a lobbyist registry. The time has come. We have to do it. I think it's really important to have these exceptions and to recognize the value of nonprofit organizations and charitable organizations in this province and all the things that they do for Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That's all I have to say about this.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to respond briefly to the Member for Whitecourt-Lac Ste. Anne with respect to the questions he raised about how this amendment would impact the Chambers of Commerce. I think the short answer is that it does not. I know that there is some concern among the chambers about where they would fit under the Lobbyists Act. This amendment is specifically related to the many small and not so small, for that matter, volunteer organizations around the province that are dealing with issues in our community.

I know and I appreciate, having grown up in a small town myself and my father having been involved in the local board of trade, as it was called then, that the chamber is a voluntary organization and that there are lots of voluntary interests expressed and that they do excellent work for us in our communities. For us. When I say "us," not government, but for Albertans and for Albertans' communities and Albertans' communities' growth. But this particular amendment does not in my view exempt them from the application of the Lobbyists Act.

That being said, I think the Chambers of Commerce as an organization across the province is perhaps not in the same position as the volunteer organizations that we're dealing with in terms of: they have more structure, they usually have paid staff, they usually are in a better position to comply with the provisions.

Again, the reason I wanted to reply, other than the courtesy of giving a reply, is to indicate that I didn't want to in my earlier comments suggest that the rest of the people who do have to comply under this act should be facing an onerous burden. The act should be implemented in a way which it makes it easier for persons who do have to comply with the act to register, to register online, to make sure that their lobby activities are disclosed in an appropriate way. That should not be an onerous burden for anyone, and certainly not for the Chambers of Commerce. That being said, Mr. Chairman, I think it's still prudent to pass this amendment and make sure that the volunteer organizations that it's intended to deal with are exempted from the act.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I just had a couple of comments to make in regard to this amendment. Really, I'm asking, I guess, from the experience that I had just in being at one of the meetings that precipitated this Lobbyists Act. My understanding – and I can perhaps get clarification on this from the minister who brought forward this amendment – is that there was an exemption of 100 hours for the act to take place, and in my view, 100 hours seems like a long time to not have to worry about registering and whatnot.

Certainly, I can appreciate everybody's comments about excluding the voluntary sector and not placing undue difficulties on what is already an overtaxed system. We've been using the voluntary sector to cover a whole range of essential services that, in my mind, have been dropped by the wayside from responsible governance in this province over the last 20 years.

4:50

You know, that being said, when you're creating something like a lobbyists registry or the Lobbyists Act, simplicity I think is the key. Universality is important as well. If the minister who brought this amendment forward could perhaps comment on this because I see the 100-hour exemption working to serve a very similar function to what this amendment is. Certainly, I don't think I'm going to vote against this, but I just want to know if there's a specific purpose that I'm missing here somehow.

I know that the minister has lots of contact and experience with the voluntary sector. In fact, I see his smiling face on the back of buses on a regular basis, which is wonderful although it has almost caused an accident more than once when I was shocked to look up and see him staring at me there. Anyway, all joking aside, as I said before, if I could see clarification of how this is deemed to be necessary, regardless of the fact that we put a 100-hour exemption into this bill.

Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: I think part of the issue, not that I would ever dare to speak on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness, is that you're still going to have to count that 100 hours because as you start to get close to it, you'd better know where you are because at the point where you hit that, you're going to have to register. So basically the burden is still on that whole charitable sector to keep track of it in the same way as that \$30,000 mark for GST registration. For most people, unless they know that they're really low, like \$5,000, if you have a really good year and it starts to creep a little higher, you're going to have to go back and make sure that you've got all of that in place. The point was that this was an onerous burden on that charitable sector, and the reason for the Lobbyists Act is not specifically aimed at them. It was aimed at others who were trying to influence public policy for their own purposes, and the charitable sector is trying to influence public policy on behalf of members of the public. Not that I would presume to speak for the minister, of course, but that's my reasoning for it and why I supported this particular amendment.

If I might just very briefly, Mr. Chairman, I lost my train of thought earlier and I've now remembered it. The point I was trying to make there is that the not-for-profit sector is not in business to make a profit or to benefit any one of its individual directors. The whole purpose of a board of directors is to represent the public and to oversee the operations of the organization in a policy-setting way to ensure that the organization serves all Albertans or all Canadians and not to benefit an individual. It's considered a huge no-no in that sector if somebody is benefiting financially in a major way beyond a reasonable salary from the activities of the volunteer/charitable/not-for-profit sector. I always put slashes between all those words.

It's not to say that not-for-profits always lose money. They don't. They're very good businesspeople, I would argue. In many cases there are fewer not-for-profits that fail from bankruptcy than there are small businesses, so in fact they're very good financial managers. Any surplus they have at the end of the year is reinvested into the programming, so no one individual benefits from that. They don't get to go to Hawaii. They don't get to give themselves a bonus. That money is reinvested in the product or the service that they provide on behalf of the public.

Again, that's another major difference between that and the corporate sector. That's not to say – please don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying that the corporate sector is some big, bad bogeyman. They're not. They do wonderful things for Alberta and create a lot of opportunities and a lot of jobs for people and generate a lot of money. That's a good thing. Why would I say that was bad? I'm not. But the not-for-profit sector is there for very different reasons, and they are guided and set up completely differently in order, basically, to guard against any one individual or group of individuals benefiting as a result of an activity of the not-for-profit and benefiting in, you know, a major, pay themselves kind of way, is what I'm trying to articulate.

Thank you for the opportunity to clarify that. Again, I urge everyone to support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Very briefly, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to also make the distinction that we have different layers when we're talking about the Chambers of Commerce, as suggested by my hon. colleague from Whitecourt-St. Anne. We have the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, which is really sort of the umbrella organization, the mother organization, but then you also have individual chambers of commerce in Edmonton and Calgary and then you have the smaller centres, too, you know, Rimbey, Tofield, and so on. The question here is: do you extend an exemption or do you make allowances or do you provide assistance to the bigger organization? Or do you require the bigger organization to register and report but not the medium-sized ones? Or do you go: the big one, the medium-sized ones but exempt the smaller ones?

We're not in any way saying that their work is not crucial and important, that it is not valued and appreciated. They definitely have a role to play, and it is a positive role in the province of Alberta. But the volunteer and nonprofit sector in terms of service provision are different, and that distinction has to be made because a chamber of commerce advances interests that are business related or business minded. The food bank is a different story; the Mustard Seed is a different story, the women's shelters, the Youth Emergency Shelter, Kids Kottage. These agencies are in a group unto their own. They're not the same. They shouldn't be caught in the same category as a chamber of commerce.

Now, Mr. Chairman, as was explained before, if a particular chamber of commerce has a volunteer on board that basically does that without getting paid, that particular volunteer and that particular organization by extension doesn't have to register and report. They don't have to file a return. If they have somebody on staff that gets paid, then they have 100 hours to accumulate before they are required to register and report.

I think that, yes, we're making a concession here to look after the volunteer sector, the nonprofit sector, but I argue that they're two different creatures; they're two different entities, two different descriptions, and that was the concern which we heard. You know, do you do it at the big level, the macro level? Do you do it at the intermediate level? Do you do it even on the minute level, the small level, and target everybody in every town or every city because each

of them has their own chamber of commerce? Edmonton, for example: we not only have a chamber of commerce, we also have regional business associations. I come from the west end, and we have something called the West End Business Association. They would argue that if the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce got exempted, maybe they should be as well.

I hear these cries, and I hear these concerns, but we definitely had to draw the line somewhere. In two years if they're still not happy, they can come back as we're reviewing this act and say: "You know what? You've done it for this sector, maybe we should be as well." But if you start exempting everybody, the question will be raised, Mr. Chairman: "Well, who's left; who's caught? If everybody is exempted, then who's left?" Who are we after? We don't want to be weakening it or watering it down. We need to be looking to the future. This is an act that I'm willing to bet on. This is an act that I'm hoping will be enforced, and I am actually looking forward to the first report from the Ethics Commissioner and the registrar as to how many registrations and submissions they received, how many entries were logged on the registry, and how many fines were issued or assessed.

I hear the concerns from the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, but that's something that we need to discuss. We need to draw the line somewhere, and this is a good line I think, and this is a good position.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today in representing the good people of Calgary-Elbow, who have expressed concerns about Bill 1 in its original form. Therefore, I'm pleased to speak to the amendment and the issue before us, section 1(1)(f)(iv). I spoke with constituents often during the by-election, and these and other issues are of concern to my constituents.

5:00

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora mentioned my predecessor, Mr. Klein. I know that he and his wife had interests in the not-for-profit sector, and I recognize that he and his wife did a lot of good work throughout Calgary. Certainly Mr. Klein as my predecessor and as the former Premier deserves the thanks of Albertans and particularly the constituents of Calgary-Elbow for his service and representation to the constituency. Of course, I'll do my utmost to continue that representation.

I am interested in the local perspective from Calgary-Elbow. I do feel I'm in a good position to represent the communities in Calgary-Elbow. I've been active in the not-for-profit sector myself for some time as well. I view my commitment to public service as an extension of my community work, having been a director, vice-president, and president of two community associations for many years in West Hillhurst and immediately thereafter for many more years in Lakeview. Also, I've done a considerable amount of work in the not-for-profit sector.

My community work has also brought me into contact with many of my constituents as a soccer dad, as a Little League coach, as a referee, and of course having the most important job in and around the local outdoor rinks, that of a rink shoveller, particularly with the children's Grassroots Hockey League, but also in Lakeview. Over this period of time these activities have brought me into contact with and I've been listening to many constituents.

I've been listening to and talking with people for a long time. I've learned from them what matters most to people: it's the issues that affect them close to home. Many of those issues are also addressed

within the not-for-profit sector. So I think this is an important bill and it's an important amendment, and I commend the hon. minister for bringing this amendment forward. I think it is something that makes it easier for many of us to support this bill knowing that this amendment will be coming forward as part of the package for us to be able to consider.

As I mentioned, I've worked in the not-for-profit sector going back some time, actually back to my days in Fredericton high school. Just after graduating from Fredericton high school, I was involved with an organization. I can't remember exactly if it was a not-for-profit organization, but we did have a group of us that were working together with young people, students in particular, who were grappling with being able to maintain their level of commitment to education and to reading over the course of the summer. A group of us as students and graduating students took that on. After that, actually, I took a job with the not-for-profit sector at Hull home going back to 1975. That was some time ago. I was actually not long out of high school, with not much more than a high school diploma. They were good enough to hire me, and I began to be able to understand and appreciate the not-for-profit sector and recognize that the not-for-profit sector is quite unique.

Now, I've also been politically active for some period of time. That's brought me into contact with other people who've been active in the not-for-profit sector and with issues that are often addressed in the not-for-profit sector. I worked on Sheldon Chumir's campaigns, who was a Member of this Legislative Assembly for some period of time. While Sheldon Chumir was involved, one of the things that was important for him was, say, public education. Again, I need some clarification, perhaps, on some of these organizations to know whether or not they would be exempted under this legislation. Of course, Sheldon has gone on, and his legacy is now represented by the Sheldon Chumir foundation. That organization is involved in human rights. We'd also need to know whether or not those organizations will be exempted as well. So there are still questions with regard to this bill, and I look forward to future debate on it. Again, I do think that this amendment is a step in the right direction.

Continuing on with regard to what I've heard from community members, I have continued to knock on doors and also hear from people at annual general meetings. The concerns I hear about there are often with regard to the environment. This is an issue that is of concern to people in my constituency, particularly local issues as well, such as the preservation of the Weaselhead natural area. I've been honoured to be a member of the board of directors of the Weaselhead Glenmore Park Preservation Society. The Weaselhead is a tremendous asset in Calgary. It encompasses 620 acres, making it perhaps the largest protected natural area in Calgary and I hear also within Alberta, Canada, and perhaps even North America as far as protected areas, particularly within a large-scale urban environment.

That area was purchased by the city of Calgary in 1931 in order to protect the source of south Calgary's drinking water. Today the Weaselhead area is instrumental in providing drinking water for nearly one-half of all Calgarians, nearly one-sixth of all Albertans. Over the years there have been many different plans for commercial development of that land, but Calgarians have always chosen clean water as their top priority. It's imperative that this area remain protected. In fact, organizations that are dedicated to that type of endeavour, if they're not-for-profit organizations, need to know how this bill will be affecting them.

Again, I look forward to further discussion on this bill, but also I do want to commend the minister for bringing this amendment forward. Certainly, that might go some way to being able to help address some of those concerns, to make sure that the not-for-profit sector is in fact protected.

Other social areas of concern arise in my constituency. I'm privileged to have Mount Royal College involved as a part of my constituency. I've also worked at Mount Royal College and appreciate the importance of this fine institution to Calgarians, and I particularly feel good about representing them. I've had the opportunity to have lunch with the president of Mount Royal College, and I know that the institution itself is also interested in social issues in and around the area and makes an effort each year to reach out into the community. I've also had the opportunity meet with the students' association of Mount Royal College, who have indicated concerns with regard to housing, for example. The housing issue is another social issue in which we know that many not-for-profit organizations work to help to relieve the problems, the issues, the crisis, indeed, with regard to getting housing in Calgary. We need to know how those organizations will be affected by Bill 1.

Again, we're pleased to see that the amendment has been brought forward, and perhaps that may help to alleviate some of the concerns that we have around protecting the not-for-profit sector because it is quite important.

This bill that has been brought forward will be improved. I know there have been comments made in the press with regard to this bill, the lobbyists registry act, and the effect it would have on the whole volunteer sector. In fact, this bill really has got the whole volunteer sector up in arms. I've had people from the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre into my office as well. That's an organization that I also worked on behalf of, and it happens to be within my constituency. That organization does terrific work on behalf of people with developmental disabilities. Their concerns were with regard to the amount of time that goes into filling out forms. They were concerned that with resources that are already stretched thin, this was going to be an onerous bill because we know that the human resources component, in particular in the not-for-profit sector, is really feeling the pinch these days.

I believe this bill started out with the idea of trying to curb, you know, insider influence, but somehow it seems to have gone in the opposite direction. I know that the press has picked up on this as well and had to bring it to the attention of this government. We're glad to see that the government, perhaps, may be listening. Bringing forward this amendment might be a step in the right direction on that front.

There were concerns that perhaps have also been addressed with regard to how the bill would affect people who are connected to individuals who work in the not-for-profit sector and whether it would affect their ability to seek a livelihood as well. However, it does appear that some of those issues have also been addressed.

5:10

This is an important bill, and as it moves forward, we look for opportunities to improve it. I think that this amendment that's been brought forward may be a very significant step, so I will be supporting this amendment. I look forward to more discussion and hearing more from my colleagues on that front because, again, these are concerns for the not-for-profit sector in terms of the number of forms that they need to fill in. It is really quite onerous, I think, for grassroots organizations.

Again on that front, just in terms of a grassroots organization, I think it's important to recognize that there are three sectors in our society and that, in fact, we need to be able to have all three sectors be strong. We know that the private sector is the engine for our economy, and it's important. I know that myself and my colleagues in the Liberal Party are a free-enterprise party. We recognize the value of that sector, particularly the smaller and mid-sized busi-

nesses, that are really the organizations, the corporations that hire Albertans on a wide-scale basis. It's important, that sector, but the not-for-profit sector is important as well, as is the public sector.

An influential book for me was a book called *Reinventing Government*, a book that I understand was influential on at least one president in recent years. I had the opportunity to do a book review on that book for a graduate studies class. That book talked about the importance of all three sectors. I believe the first chapter in the book is actually called *Steering Rather Than Rowing*. It pointed out that sometimes it's important for the government to recognize that they don't always need to be rowing; sometimes they can be steering. One of the ways that they can go about that is to be able to utilize the not-for-profit sector to do some of the rowing, to do some of the work. And the not-for-profit sector is close to home. It's close to the community. It is generally a grassroots organization.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Centre mentioned, there is a genuine connection between the not-for-profit sector and the community. We have to recognize that while accountability is very important and crucial, in fact, to this particular Assembly and through the government – we need to have accountability; there's no doubt about it – to the citizens of Alberta, there are other ways, other methods, and other means for that accountability to come through. That's through the not-for-profit-sector boards, many of which I've been involved with, sometimes serving, sometimes reporting to. But again, the not-for-profit sector and the boards there are that connection. I think it's important that we're taking a look at this, at how it is that they're affected by this bill, because I'm not sure that the original intention of the bill was to make things more onerous. So I'm pleased to see that this amendment has come forward.

The not-for-profit sector, as I say, is accountable. I squared off with some federal officials at one point in time. We tried to compare some of the work in the not-for-profit sector and concerns that might arise, the concerns that arose through Radwanski and that whole issue, which was absolutely stunning to me. I very pointedly had to set him straight and talk about how the not-for-profit sector is the opposite of that. The not-for-profit sector is a way for there to be accountability because, again, the not-for-profit sector generally does a very good job of reporting back to the community, to whom they report. Again, they're often elected, and there is a process that's in place for the not-for-profit sector.

So there are three sectors. I think it's important to recognize the not-for-profit sector and the accountability that comes forward. In general I'm hearing from Albertans that the not-for-profit sector is already hurting these days – and, really, we don't want to make things any more onerous for them – that the not-for-profit sector is probably, I think it's safe to say, underutilized, underappreciated, and undersupported. In that respect I think we can go a long way to try to make sure that they're not feeling less supported by making things more onerous for them, that they are in fact appreciated. I hope that this amendment goes some way to being able to bring that element into the considerations of this bill.

I think I may have more to say on this in general, but at this point in time I think that's about all it is that we can do to address this particular amendment. Again I commend the minister for bringing it forward. I know that members on this side of the House were looking at similar amendments in order to improve this legislation. I recognize that one of the important roles for the opposition is to improve legislation, so we are looking for improvements in this legislation. I do think that this amendment may take steps in that direction.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm delighted to be able to rise and speak to this amendment that has come forward from the Minister of Health and Wellness. I was a part of that committee, the field committee, that was one of the history-making committees, actually, in this House and for this province. It was, I think, probably an eye-opener for many of us. Although there have been, certainly, within the last 10 to 11 years very few what we would call true all-party committees, I believe this was a good example of how we all sat down and realized that we had a job to do and worked well together.

There was a lot of hard work put into this committee, and there were certainly many, many long hours. We were lucky enough to have excellent staff both from the legal side and from the actual writing of the bill side. For someone like myself who perhaps had never really worked with a bill in its complexities, it was very much appreciated. Anyone on that committee could have asked for a clarification either for a definition or intent or, in fact, the concept of what they wanted to talk about, and they were certainly forthright in helping us interpret it and to make sure that at the end of the day we actually were all speaking on the same page and that we had agreed upon what our definitions really, really meant.

There were huge amounts of information that we had to digest, as I mentioned before, and then be able to put them on an overlay over a complex legal document.

One of the most important things, I think, that happened with this committee was that although we didn't go through the province as perhaps a task force might have, we had the opportunity to have the public come and present to us. Because the nonprofit area was particularly troubled and, in fact, quite fearful of this bill going through as it had been originally thought about, they put together some very, very thoughtful and, certainly, worthy of discussion documents. Their presentations were in depth. They had done their homework, and I think what was very important was that they not only had done their homework locally, but they also had done their homework in terms of what other jurisdictions were doing with this exact concept of lobbyist bill.

The lobbyist bill certainly had been something that the Liberals had talked about for many, many years. Finally it was going to come forward, but the groups that were so concerned, the nonprofits, as I mentioned, had actually gone across Canada to see what other jurisdictions had done. One of the reasons this amendment has come forward is the fact that it was based on how Quebec handles it in terms of what they consider nonprofits.

It was divided into special-interest groups versus special-service groups, those that actually service the community and provide a service in very many ways as opposed to special interests. Perhaps I could say that a special interest might be the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, whereas, in fact, the service industries – and I'd like to mention some that certainly had approached me from Lethbridge. This is a short list, certainly not all: the Kidney Foundation, with the Lethbridge branch.

5:20

Our Galt museum, a wonderful museum that has had renovations within the last three to four years. We have a new curator, and some very exciting things have taken place at that museum, and certainly there are wonderful plans afoot to go forward. That was another one that was concerned that they were going to spend more of their time worrying about paperwork than actually getting on with the job and being able to produce the wonderful museum and exhibits that are

available for the world to see but certainly southern Alberta. The school trips that come from various schools outside of Lethbridge are numerous, and to a school these children have all said how much they've really enjoyed it, in particular the standing, static artifacts that they have in terms of the history of Lethbridge itself. The kids seem to really enjoy that.

The other ones, of course, were Volunteer Lethbridge, that co-ordinates many, many volunteer organizations; the YWCA, who run our women's shelter; Boys and Girls Club; Big Brothers and Big Sisters; Heart and Stroke Foundation; and also something that we have in Lethbridge called VoicePrint.

Mr. Rodney: It's fabulous.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. My colleague from Calgary-Lougheed has expressed his full support of the organization called VoicePrint.

What VoicePrint really does is have volunteers from the community read the newspaper so people who are visually impaired can hear it through the computer, and for some they actually can get very, very large print and follow along. Newspapers are read to them. Certainly, they can hear the *Lethbridge Herald* or the *Taber Times*. The scope of this is really quite amazing. Already I've had great comments back from the community, and it's only just been up and started probably within the last couple of months. It's these kinds of organizations that were so concerned that they were going to end up spending all their time on paperwork instead of actually, as I've said, getting on with the job.

I think another thing that's very interesting has happened since we've been on this committee and since the chair has put the report forward to the House. What is different with Alberta is that in other jurisdictions when they have what they would call policy committees, which is a little different than what we've done as a field committee, usually that policy committee is all-party, it goes forward, and as a rule it isn't discussed further in the House. What we've done here is brought this forward. There has been a lot of work put into it, and I think that all members in the House can appreciate that, but what it has done is actually open up further debate from outside of the committee, and I think that's a very healthy, democratic thing to do.

One of the activities that has happened – and I'd like to point out that we certainly were time constrained; we did a lot of work in a very short period of time – is that the report went through, and it didn't have a protection for the nonprofits, or they didn't see it that way. They didn't see that they were exempt, and all they could see was mountains of paperwork. What they did was exactly what this lobby was about. They put together an exceedingly hard-working, very comprehensive lobby. I believe there wasn't an MLA in this House that did not get letters from their local volunteer organizations. Certainly, the umbrella groups within Alberta sent letters, and we were phoned, just saying how upset they really were with this.

To me, I think it's the way it was supposed to be. It was a very open process. We all knew who was being lobbied, so to speak. As a result of that, because of the way the process works here in the House, the committee recommendations would have gone forward, the government were next, and then the opposition would come in after that. So we were certainly ready to go forward with very much the same amendment that the Minister of Health and Wellness has brought forward. Now we're talking about it again in a very open manner.

So lobbying does work, but I really believe that lobbying works best when it's out in the open and everyone knows who's involved. I also think that from the other side it does present an opportunity for

people to come together, and certainly in this instance the nonprofits definitely came together.

There was a great deal of depth to their information, and I think those of us on the committee were pleased to be exposed to that depth of knowledge because I'm not sure that the majority of us that sat on it have really understood the depth to which volunteer organizations are in our communities. I believe there are 19,956 – don't quote me on that number exactly – nonprofit organizations in Alberta. How many hours does that represent, certainly, in terms of the volunteers that work for these organizations? My question would be: if these volunteer organizations cease to exist, I would venture to say that our society as we know it would fall apart.

We rely so much on volunteers, and to be able to free them up to do the job that they're really meant to do is the right thing to do. But it was the right thing to do, as I've mentioned, because that lobbying effort was so open, so transparent, and there was an accountability factor in here that I think was very strong. We were accountable as a committee. We're now accountable as the Legislature. Certainly, the volunteer organizations and the people that made these presentations were accountable to the people that they were representing and the people that were behind them, the front-line people, saying: you guys have got to get us freed out of this mountain of paperwork.

It was frightening. I think it frightened a lot of people. A lot of our volunteer organizations do have seniors because seniors are retired. If you've been a senior in the workforce probably within the last five years – I'm going to label a senior at this point in time as anybody probably over 55, 60 – you have been exposed to computers, but anybody older than that has not been. A lot of volunteer organizations depend on seniors to do a lot of the small work that can actually be done on a piece of paper. So the fact that some of these seniors were thinking they were going to have to submit things, despite how easy it is, through computers and have to learn a whole pile of new skills – it was very, very frightening to them.

I also believe that the nonprofits didn't think of themselves as special. I think they just thought they wanted to get on with their job and be left alone to do what they had to do. But where they did think that they were special was that they were special in the same way as everyone else was in other jurisdictions, which is why they continually came back to the committee and have continually lobbied that we would then consider what we call the Quebec exemption. They will be, should this pass, exempted under a section where we can divide nonprofits into service, providing a service to society, as opposed to special interests. I did mention the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and even environmental groups. Although you could argue over what is delivering a service to the community, I think that if it's a special interest behind it, it's quite clear on who would be exempted and who would not be exempted.

I believe another exemption that came through – and it actually came through on the committee and, again, as a result of lobbying, that, again, was out in the open because it was quite clear when we discussed in committee, which was Hansarded. The school boards were most upset that they weren't going to be exempted. I, too, absolutely concurred. I believe that if you are an elected person – and I don't care if you're elected to be a dog catcher, a school trustee, an MLA, an MP, or whatever – you represent the people, and you should be allowed to speak to anyone you want, but more importantly anybody that wants should be able to speak to you. You're representing them, not the other way around.

5:30

I believe that the proportions of one-third/one-third/one-third were mentioned.

I believe that another thing that's happening to our nonprofits is

that the pressure to deliver services within our society has just increased immeasurably – I'm sure it's been squared by whatever – because of the distinct pressures that are in our province at this point in time because of the rapid growth and, certainly, the rapid economics. We have a whole huge segment of society that relies on services. We have young kids that need to be looked after. We have seniors that need to be looked after. We have young families that need to be looked after. We really have to be able to let these people get on with what they're doing. Already we're starting to hear from these nonprofits just how much extra work they are doing. Some of them are saying: you know, we're getting to the point where we really can't deliver the service to as many people as we would like to. That's sad. It is certainly a reflection on our times.

I think the other portion of society that is represented through volunteer organizations are the moms. We've got soccer moms. We've got hockey moms. We've got ballet moms. We've got art moms. These moms devote numerous hours over and above. A lot of these are working moms. Some are stay-at-home moms. But it's a tremendous amount of time driving the kids around. Often the soccer moms are driving the bigger vans. They're taking the kids whose mom can't take them.

I'm not excluding the dads. Often we'll find the dads coaching. Certainly, there are lots of dads that fight – actually fight – to be the coach for their daughter's hockey team. They often have sons that play as well, but the dads want to coach those girls because the girls hockey teams, I think, have a different kind of spirit. Perhaps they don't have the NHL hanging over their head, and they don't have agents looking at them when they're 10 years old. They can just get out and have a good time and play hockey.

It's not cheap to rent rinks. It's not cheap to play on soccer fields, and it's not cheap to have the proper floors to actually do ballet on. Children can be hurt at an early age if they start too early on pointes, and they have to have good floors to be able to do it. The art moms. It costs to have good art teachers. This is all outside and over and above, of course, what they do in school, so funds have to be raised. Huge, huge, huge amounts of volunteer time go toward the raising of dollars for these organizations.

One of the things that I did within this committee – and I am proud that it was I that brought it up and that it got passed – was that we review this in two years instead of five years. This is a pilot project, so to speak, and I think that it's very important that we keep our eye on these things. Sometimes if it goes for five years, it gets lost. Mistakes can keep falling all over themselves, and we could create a really huge problem that might turn off our nonprofits. I think that it would be an absolute shame if we lost even one hour of nonprofit volunteers at this point in time.

One of the things that came up that was quite interesting within this committee was a really different idea, and it was called a reverse onus. The whole concept of reverse onus was: should it really be on the people who are lobbying, or should it be on the people who are being lobbied? I tend to lean towards the people who are being lobbied. We all have Day-timers. We all have BlackBerrys. We all know exactly where we are at any given time of the day and night. Unfortunately, it probably makes our lives a little bit more difficult, but it's the way it is.

For instance, if I was being lobbied, all I would have to do is look at my BlackBerry and say that I talked to Joe on the golf course, and this is what we talked about. I don't have to go in depth. All I have to know is that I talked to Joe, who represented such and such an organization, and this is where we spoke. [Ms Pastoor's speaking time expired] Oh, that went very quickly. I have so much more to say, so I'm sure that we'll be able to go further.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I was really enjoying my colleague from Lethbridge-East's remarks. I just wanted to emphasize again as a member of the standing policy field committee and also as an MLA in the larger context that we have heard those cries, those plights, those concerns time and time again. We have reacted, and I think we have reacted favourably. I'm actually standing to support the amendment as suggested by the Government House Leader.

Now, I know that there was a bit of criticism initially. It was sort of a knee-jerk reaction by somebody in the volunteer community who indicated under a website, I think, or through an e-mail that they weren't pleased enough, weren't impressed enough with the concessions that the committee made, the changes that the committee suggested in the report to the Assembly because they wanted the full-meal deal. They wanted the full exemption. So I'm hoping that today the Assembly has demonstrated our being reasonable, our willingness to listen.

I want to mention a few organizations which I'm hoping would be pleased with this turn of events, with this direction that we're taking. First off, I would like to mention Volunteer Alberta. I was absolutely impressed with the campaign that they launched and the way they and the Muttart Foundation got together to mobilize everybody in that sector to talk to us both in the committee and outside to really listen to their concern, to pay attention to their plight. I think they were very successful in mobilizing. I think they were very successful in their attempt to talk to us, approach us to deliver that message loud and clear and repeatedly.

One has to really commend them on, first of all, the attention that they paid to Bill 1 and to the committee work. If you go under the Volunteer Alberta website, for example, it is quite impressive the way they kept track, the way they actually stayed with the different steps and the different hurdles that Bill 1 went through. I think the website is really well done and well designed, the way they actually kept that up. Every meeting *Hansard* was excerpted. Every meeting the transcript was copied to their website. They would then, you know, ask questions further to the meeting and what things were discussed, and they would ask their members to start formulating these questions and so on. I was really pleased with this.

I know that the executive director of Volunteer Alberta, Ms Karen Lynch, Mr. Chairman, is actually a constituent of mine.

Ms Blakeman: She's not. She's my constituent. You can't say that.

Mr. Elsalhy: Okay. Well, maybe her parents are, then. I know her parents. Yes, she's a constituent of Edmonton-Centre, Mr. Chairman. I stand corrected. Her parents are constituents in Edmonton-McClung.

At one point we had a very brief discussion where she indicated that it really annoys them that they will not have the ear of government. Be it for mischief or be it for fairness, I argued that, you know, it shouldn't just be the ear of government, that it should be the ear of the Assembly, and members of the opposition are equal to members of the government. Ms Lynch actually indicated that while she doesn't really dispute that outright, she felt that members of the government, because they make funding decisions, are maybe worth more or maybe deserve more attention from the volunteer community.

5:40

So I stand here today to say that while they make funding decisions, the Assembly helps them make those decisions, and the

Assembly actually gives direction and offers insight and scrutiny to these funding decisions. I don't think her being a card-carrying member of the ruling party has anything to do with it. I think there might be a sentiment out there that people think the government is where it all begins and ends. I need everybody in this Assembly to know that that's not true. The government is one arm, but the Assembly is the other arm, equally important if not more important.

The other organization I need to reference – and I'm hoping that they, too, would be pleased with the progress that is being made here – is the Calgary Chamber of Volunteer Organizations. Now, people might say: why are you not referencing the Edmonton Chamber of Volunteer Organizations? You come from Edmonton. Well, I met with the people from Calgary based on a request that they submitted to our southern Alberta caucus office. They intentionally wanted to meet with me because they knew that I was the deputy chair of the committee. So I went down and spoke to them. I remember meeting with Katherine van Kooy, Robert Pynn, and Heather MacDonald. I know that they, too, follow *Hansard*, and that they, too, read the transcripts. They, too, update their website, and I'm really pleased with their keen interest in this. I'm hoping today that they would be pleased.

These people, I'm hoping, are now used to accessing the Assembly and are now used to visiting the website of the Assembly, listening to the audio, watching the video, that they would keep that interest, that it wasn't just a one-time thing, that it wasn't just their own campaign that they were interested in. I am hoping that that interest would continue because we do discuss many important issues in this Assembly. I am hoping that this attention is maintained and expanded. I am hoping that they will now stay tuned to what goes on under the dome. We do have our moments of disagreement in this Assembly, but we also have moments where we actually agree, like today.

The other person who I am hoping is either listening or at least will be made aware of this progress is Carol Aubée-Girard. Ms Aubée-Girard is actually a member of ECALA, or the Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association. She approached myself and the Member for Edmonton-Centre because her association was very, very concerned. I'm hoping that today she would get some comfort that we heard her plight, we heard her organization's plight, and that the Assembly in total, as an entity, in general has reacted and reacted favourably.

Furthermore, two more people who actually met with me and that I am hoping to again give that comfort and reassurance to were Brenda Wentzell and Shabnam Sukhdev. These two ladies actually met with me as representatives of the Edmonton region of the Canadian Mental Health Association. They were board members in Edmonton.

I actually asked the hon. Government House Leader if his exemption, the Quebec exemption, is going to include an organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association. The reason I asked him this is because while the Canadian Mental Health Association itself is a volunteer organization that is a service provider in the bigger definition, members who actually sit on that board may hold a psychiatry degree, may be practising psychiatrists, for example. So in their outside life, the other hat that they wear, they're profit seeking just because they have a visit fee. You know, like, when you visit a psychiatric clinic, well, health care pays. So we are calling them profit seeking in that department. As the mover of the amendment and also given his legal expertise from his previous life, he indicated that in his interpretation he doesn't think that's the case. He's reassuring me that to the best of his knowledge this exemption extends to an agency like the Canadian Mental Health Association.

I am hoping that we have demonstrated flexibility, that we have demonstrated reason and that politicians are not necessarily opposed to good ideas. Here is one that both sides of the House are agreeing on. I'm hoping that that interest, as I mentioned, continues and grows. People have to pay attention. People have to stop tuning out, to stop ignoring the political scene in Alberta. Some think it's the minor league and that, you know, Ottawa is where the fun is. No, this is not the minor league. This is equally important. As a matter of fact, I think that the decisions we make in this Assembly are more important sometimes than the ones made in Parliament.

With that, Mr. Chairman, these were just some remarks. I'm hoping these people are tuned in and listening and, you know, maybe looking forward to more opportunities of co-operation in the future. Maybe this is the beginning of a very close relationship with members of the volunteer community, where we can maybe advance their cause, help them as they go through their projects and funding decisions. It is not just the government; it is everybody in this Assembly. We're all worthy of receiving that lobbying and receiving that communication from members out there.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Some of my colleagues are asking me to keep my comments brief, so I guess I will try to do that. But not having had a chance to speak to this amendment yet and, in fact, not having had a chance to speak to any of the amendments yet on Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, in the committee stage, I think it's important that I have an opportunity to put my comments on the record as well. Although I will try to be brief, I do have a couple of things that I would like to say.

As we know, this particular amendment is modelled after the Quebec model. The idea is to exempt charitable organizations from Bill 1. As many speakers have already said today, Mr. Chairman, we've all heard a lot of concern expressed to us, particularly from NGOs, charitable organizations, nonprofit groups, and so forth. I think it's fair to say that most of the members of this House come from that sector in one fashion or another. I'm going to guess – oh, now I'm getting a questioning look from one of my colleagues which, I believe, is suggesting that perhaps some of the members on the other side of the House may not have the same level of experience volunteering that those of us on this side of the House do. I don't know if that's a fair comment or not, quite frankly. I'm going to guess that most MLAs in this Assembly have a fairly extensive history of volunteerism, and in large measure that's probably how we get to be where we are today.

I know most of us have been lobbied over the last several months, over the summer, by any number of charitable organizations, but I think that even without that, there would have been a general understanding on our parts – and I say “our” collectively, meaning the 83 members in this Assembly – that this legislation as it was presented cast far too wide a net, Mr. Chairman. I suppose the first question that has to be asked is: how did that happen? How did we get to a point where legislation that was contemplated to deal with the Rod Loves of the world, with the Kelley Charlebois of the world, with the Bob Maskells of the world, a situation that was contemplated to deal with those sorts of situations, which are well documented in this House and have certainly raised a lot of questions about lobbyists and those well connected to the governing party, to a piece of legislation that cast its net so wide that we were including not only chambers of commerce, as was mentioned earlier today, but every little organization in every small community and big city in this province that is trying to do some good work for the people that live in their community?

I think there's a very serious question to be asked there, Mr. Chairman, in terms of how this bill was drafted: how did that get missed? How did we go from wanting to capture paid lobbyists – almost every person in this province, I'm sure, would agree there's a need to have those people registered and a need for the people of this province to be able to be made aware of who's lobbying the government as a paid lobbyist for what. How did we get from that to somebody who's doing a hotdog lunch to raise money for a school council in a small community in Alberta who suddenly has to register as a lobbyist because they managed to bump into their MLA at the grocery store?

5:50

I mean, I don't know what happened there, but clearly there was a major, major misunderstanding – I'm going to hope that's all it was – in terms of what was contemplated when the Premier made his commitment to bring in the Lobbyists Act to the drafting table, when this was all put together, and somehow we cast this wide net that captures everybody. I don't know how that happened to take place. I didn't sit on the policy field committee that looked at this over the summer, and I'll confess to not having read the transcripts of all of their meetings. Maybe that's been explored, and maybe there is an explanation for how we got from what was clearly the Premier's intention and what, I think, was the intention of all members of this House to a piece of legislation that is so terribly flawed that it has a handful of amendments, several amendments coming from the committee, which have now been dealt with. It has amendments coming from the government side and, we know for sure, amendments coming from the opposition parties.

So great, great concern about this piece of legislation. As I say, I really think it needs to be asked: just where did things go off the rails so badly that this became a piece of legislation that really should never have been controversial? There was some great work done by an all-party committee two years ago. I know there were members from my caucus that sat on that. Edmonton-McClung and Edmonton-Glenora sat on that committee that looked at conflicts of interest. I believe it was chaired by the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, if I remember right, and he did wonderful work chairing that committee. I remember, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, seeing some comments from the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, the chair of that committee, at the conclusion of its work, and I was pleasantly surprised at how progressive his comments were and how progressive his thinking was in terms of the changes that should be made to conflict-of-interest legislation in this province.

Clearly, there were good intentions on both sides of this Legislature to do the right thing, and I'll give credit where credit is due. The Premier lived up to his promise during the leadership campaign, came forward with a lobbyist act, which is great and, I would argue, is meriting its status as a flagship bill. That's all good. But something went horribly wrong, Mr. Chairman, and just where that happened and why it happened, I'm not clear as to how that took place, but it causes me great concern.

Now, it's been pointed out that this particular amendment is going to accomplish, I think, the addressing of the concerns that many of

those NGOs and charitable groups have raised over the summer with myself and with my colleagues, and that's good. In fact, I believe it was mentioned that the Official Opposition caucus had precisely the same amendment ready to go. I believe it had been submitted to Parliamentary Counsel and was queued up to be introduced by the Official Opposition. Of course, the Government House Leader and minister of health takes some precedence, I suppose, in this Assembly and was able to introduce the amendment before we were, and that's fair enough. I congratulate him for doing the right thing, and we're pleased that this is happening. [interjection] I'm getting that signal again. You want me to wrap this up. Okay.

I will conclude my comments there, then, I suppose, Mr. Chairman, so that we can conclude the business of the day. I do look forward to having further opportunity to speak to this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Government House Leader, I'd request you to move a motion that the committee now rise and report.

Mr. Hancock: As you request. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 1.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 40. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 1. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I am being cajoled, urged, compelled by members that the House do now adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker: The chair has no difficulty in entertaining that motion.

[Motion carried; at 5:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, November 22, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to make an introduction on behalf of the Premier to you and through you to members of the Assembly. I'm advised by the Premier that the group I'm about to introduce, who are grade 6 students from the Win Ferguson school in Fort Saskatchewan, are the very best grade 6 students in the Assembly today. They are accompanied by teachers Rory Larocque-Walker, Kari Archer, and Kelsey Shaw and parent helpers Joanne Burt, Genny Croteau, Paul Kristensen, Jeff Fischer, Bonny Bowes, Janet Wheat, Patrick Wheat, Lisa Spray, Carol Payne, and Patricia Ferguson. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly several classes from Wye school and, not to contradict the Deputy Premier, among the best students in the province. The classes are about 64 students, and they're accompanied by Mrs. Carol O'Connell, Mrs. Crystal Wujcik, Miss Heather Whitney, Mrs. Pat Beerwald, Mrs. Eskow, Ms Segura, and Mrs. Lianna Krook. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 31 students from Meyokumin elementary school in my wonderful riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie accompanied by their teacher, Dr. Wade Pike, and Mr. Stuart Kelm, a student teacher. They are seated I think in the private gallery. I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. I'd request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly four newly elected members of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo's council. In the gallery this afternoon we have Mila Byron, who is a successful young lawyer in Fort McMurray; Mike Allen, a former chamber of commerce president; Gordon Janvier, who is enjoying the new highway 881 that was built; and David Blair, who lives in the undisputed oldest community in all of Alberta, Fort Chipewyan. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister for Capital Planning.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some very special guests who should be in the members' gallery. Perhaps they're behind me in the public gallery, but I'll introduce them in any event. They've travelled a very long way to be here for their first visit to Canada and, obviously, for their first visit to our Legislature. In fact, they've come all the way from India. They are Mr. Naranjan Singh Kainth and his lovely wife, Balwinder Kaur Kainth. They are accompanied by two extra special friends who live in my area, Mr. Parmjit Purba, his beautiful wife, Beant Purba, and their two very well-behaved young children, Harmanjit and Ramanjit Purba. Sat sri akal. [As submitted] I'd ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, please.

Mr. Mason: It's my absolute pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Muriel Stanley Venne. Muriel is a Métis woman who was born in Lamont and grew up in the hamlet of Whitford, which was named after her great-uncle Andrew Whitford. She has three sons and a daughter and three grandchildren. Her oldest granddaughter is an RCMP officer in Whitecourt, Mr. Speaker. Muriel is an ally and advocate for the marginalized and particularly for Alberta's aboriginal women. Please join me in welcoming this dedicated, hard-working, and compassionate woman, Muriel Stanley Venne.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford I would like to introduce Peter Adamski. Peter is a resident of Edmonton-Whitemud, in fact. He has a very keen interest in environmental issues and particularly in global warming. He's come down to see us in question period today. I would ask that Peter please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you today a couple from Lethbridge in the members' gallery. Donna Bier and her husband are here joining us today. Donna has recently been active in PC politics at the nomination level. I'd like to thank Donna for all of her efforts, and I look forward to working with her in the future. If you would rise, Donna, we'll all give you the warm greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister for Capital Planning, did you have a supplementary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, members, and Mr. Speaker. The guests I introduced from India, the Kainth family and the Purba family, are here now. Sat sri akal. [As submitted] Please rise and receive our warm welcome. Sorry you were a bit late.

head:

Statement by the Speaker

Anniversary of 2004 Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is also a momentous day for a large number of members in the Assembly who I'd like to introduce to you. First of all, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview three years ago today returned to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Three years ago today, November 22, 2004, the following members were elected to this auspicious Assembly for the first time: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, the hon. Member for St. Albert, the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, the hon. Minister of Education, the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, the hon. Member for Peace River, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills. Three anniversaries for all of these members. May I introduce them to you.

Mr. Marz: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. It's rare when such an important date in the history of our Legislature escapes the watchful eye of the Speaker of our Assembly, so it's my privilege to bring to the attention of this Assembly that yesterday was the 28th anniversary of the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock and Canada's longest serving Speaker. Congratulations, Mr. Speaker. [applause]

The Speaker: That was not a point of order.

Hon. Members: Speech.

The Speaker: Well, we have the Routine, hon. members. We have business to do, and that's what we do. Thank you very much for the acknowledgement.

head: 1:10

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Restoration of Old Wetaskiwin Courthouse

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Monday was moving day for the Wetaskiwin city council as they took up residence in a 100-year-old courthouse that has been modernized to serve as the new Wetaskiwin city hall. Construction of the original \$80,000 three-storey brick and stone courthouse began in 1907. By January 1908 the courthouse was completed, with the Wetaskiwin district court presiding for the first time on January 21. The judge had 33 cases before him, many of which concentrated on a prominent judicial matter of the day, namely horse stealing.

Mr. Speaker, the design of the courthouse, which was considered a modern Renaissance when it was conceptualized, would demonstrate that its structure would stand the test of time. Recently the courthouse received its centennial status. It was also designated provincially and federally as a registered historic resource.

Modern times, increased needs, and security concerns called for the construction of a new Wetaskiwin courthouse in the mid-80s. This development raised many questions regarding what would be done with the original building. Together through a co-operative partnership the Alberta government, the city of Wetaskiwin, and the private sector proposed a great alternative and this week saw the

reopening of the original courthouse as a newly renovated Wetaskiwin city hall. The old courthouse was transitioned into an innovative building, which will be heated solely by geothermal technology. Next Monday, November 26, councillors will participate in the first meeting within the new council chamber, and I look forward to being there on that special occasion.

The community of Wetaskiwin will now retain all of the historic aspects of the centennial courthouse for Albertans to appreciate while providing a new forum that will allow civic leaders to share ideas for Wetaskiwin's future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Minister's Awards for Municipal Excellence

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge the recipients of the 2007 minister's awards for municipal excellence, which recognizes our municipal partners. Municipalities across Alberta are on the leading edge of co-operation and foresight, and it is important that we recognize the great work in providing outstanding services and programs to Albertans at the local level.

The towns of Banff and Cochrane in partnership with the Canadian Rockies public schools created an innovative transportation system between the two communities for low-income earners that takes advantage of empty seats on returning school buses travelling between the communities, earning the municipalities the outstanding achievement award.

Mr. Speaker, Parkland county, the town of Stony Plain, and the city of Spruce Grove collectively earned the excellence for partnership award. These municipalities have partnered with local RCMP to create a drug unit to combat the problem of illicit drugs within the trimunicipal region west of Edmonton.

The city of Calgary took home the innovation award for creating warm mix asphalt technology, which enables asphaltic concrete to be produced and placed at a lower temperature, thereby reducing CO₂ emissions and fossil fuels.

The town of Athabasca in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, also received the smaller municipalities award for creating a heritage management plan to protect and manage the Athabasca historic places.

These awards were presented at an annual fall convention of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, which wraps up today in Edmonton, and again at the Urban Municipalities Association gathering in Calgary next week. Mr. Speaker, recognizing the success of Alberta municipalities is very, very important, and I invite all members to give warm thanks to these municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Royal Society of Canada Fellowships

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Royal Society of Canada was founded on May 25, 1882, modelled on The Royal Society of London and the Institut de France to promote learning and research in all academic disciplines. Since its first meeting in Ottawa in 1882 it has met annually to induct new members who are recognized as exceptional scholars with national and even international reputations. This year the Royal Society met for the first time outside of Ottawa, here in Edmonton. It was an honour for me to attend their induction ceremony last Saturday evening at the Winspear Centre.

What was noteworthy for me was the fact that among the 80 new

fellows elected to the Royal Society, 12 are members of the faculty of the University of Alberta. This is a remarkable achievement. This year's new fellows from the U of A include Sarah Carter, History and Classics; Wiktor Adamowicz, Rural Economy; Timothy Caulfield, Law; Larry Heaman, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences; Philip Halloran, Medicine; Gary Lopaschuk, Pediatrics and Pharmacology; Ronald McElhaney, Biochemistry; Marek Michalak, Biochemistry; Richard Palmer, Biological Sciences; Keir Pearson, Physiology; Diane Taylor, Medical Microbiology and Immunology; Jonathan Schaeffer, Computing Science.

I want to also recognize three other Albertans who were admitted to the Royal Society: Peter Hackett with the Alberta ingenuity fund, Allan Bell from the University of Calgary in Music, and Ian Stirling, Canadian Wildlife Service.

Fifteen Albertans and 12 from the University of Alberta. On behalf of all members of this Legislature we congratulate all of these new fellows of the Royal Society, and we congratulate President Indira Samarasekera and the University of Alberta. The dream of creating the University of Alberta into a world-class university is being fulfilled.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert

School Boards Association Centennial

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A hundred years is a milestone for any organization. This week the Alberta School Boards Association celebrates a century of proudly serving Albertans as the stewards of their educational system in this province.

A good trustee is an invaluable asset to the community. As local residents they have a unique understanding of particular issues facing their jurisdictions. They have an intimate understanding of their community and as such are in optimal positions to help that wisdom serve the public education system. Because of their unique and valuable perspective, school board trustees were given powers which allowed them to tailor educational arrangements for their area. In 1994, however, with the sweeping reforms made to education, much of the powers originally held by school trustees were taken away. The drastic funding cuts that followed put boards in an impossible situation where the new centralized model made it incredibly difficult for them to cater or adjust their local schools' needs or preferences.

Despite this less than optimal situation trustees have continued to distinguish themselves throughout the past hundred years. People such as Don Massey, John Paterson, Dave Fraser, John Shorter, Joan Trettler, Jacquie Hansen, and Lois Hole are but a few of the shining examples of admirable community-minded individuals who have championed our children's education. As with these individuals, a good trustee will hold that single factor as their guiding principle, objectively seeking out what is best for the children of Alberta, clear of any interfering politics.

On this the ASBA's 100th anniversary I wish to not only praise the efforts of schools boards but also raise a little bit of caution. With this latest agreement over teachers' pensions reached without the participation of boards, school boards are yet again faced with new challenges. It would be an incredible loss to our educational system if we were to see school boards' powers diminished even further, Mr. Speaker. Let's make sure that government supports school boards rather than hurting their ability to support children in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

90th Anniversary of 4-H

Mr. Prins: Thank you. I rise today to recognize and bring attention to the 90th anniversary of 4-H in Alberta, which happened on November 17. Mr. Speaker, 4-H is the longest running youth organization in our province, shaping the lives of youth and adults for 90 years; 4-H members and leaders have gone on to be successful and accomplished members of society. I've been a member of 4-H, and I'm sure that in the last 90 years 4-H has touched many lives in one way or another, and we can all be part of the celebrations, slated to last for the entire year.

This is an organization that brings the whole family together because 4-H clubs rely on family support and volunteer leadership from adults and other 4-H members. By following the 4-H motto, Learn to Do by Doing, members take part in activities that meet their interests, increase their knowledge, and develop their life skills. Whether 4-H members are creating and displaying projects or taking part in summer camp experiences of canoeing and campfires, they build lifelong friendships with people from all over the province while developing valuable skills. Members acquire an understanding of livestock production and horse management by owning, caring for, showing, and marketing animals and maintaining records. They learn about pets, poultry, crops, even bees. They learn about running a business, preparing food, computer skills, performing arts, photography, veterinary science, and more, and all the while they are making lifelong friends and gaining leadership skills that will take them through their careers and beyond.

Our youth want to be involved, accepted, valued, and heard. In 4-H they run the show.

I wish to acknowledge the work that Alberta's 4-H has done for 90 years and continues to do: encouraging young people of all ages to take on leadership roles, make decisions, plan events, and participate in activities within their communities.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

1:20

Muriel Stanley Venne

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Throughout her life Muriel Stanley Venne has been speaking out for social justice and the rights of aboriginal women. She is the founder and president of the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women. She's been in the news many times calling attention to the plight of aboriginal women who are missing or slain and demanding action.

Muriel's service includes being chair of the commission on human rights, organizer of the Gathering Our Strength conference on violence against aboriginal women, a former board member of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, and founder of the Esquao awards. She helped spearhead The Rights Path, Alberta, a publication that received international praise and was endorsed by Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Muriel's awards include the Alberta human rights award, aboriginal role model lifetime achievement award, the national aboriginal achievement award for justice and human rights, the Hon. Lois E. Hole award for lifetime achievement, and the Governor General's award in commemoration of the Persons Case. Her Excellency the Rt. Hon. Michaëlle Jean said: your work is an inspiration to women throughout the country, and the award is an honour you well deserve. Muriel is also a Member of the Order of Canada. On November 7 Muriel's work was saluted by Canada's ambassador to the United Nations at the General Assembly, and I

quote: for over 30 years she has been a leader in Canada's aboriginal communities, working to fight racism and address the obstacles to equality for aboriginal women, children, and family.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, she has been very involved in politics and in the Alberta NDP and was a candidate for our party on four separate occasions.

Please join me in recognizing the awards, the work, and the person Muriel Stanley Venne.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move on, I inadvertently failed to recognize an hon. member who wanted to do an introduction of guests. Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly four constituents from the beautiful MD of Rocky View: two newly elected councillors, Hopeton Loudon and Mitch Yurchak, and our vice-reeve, Greg Boehlke, and his lovely wife, Lynn. Could you please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a petition from a number of people across northwestern Alberta. They are objecting to the construction of a nuclear power facility at this time and urge the government to initiate consultation with Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today is National Housing Day, and I am continuing to table a petition, this time signed by 50 concerned Albertans from mostly Edmonton, Lethbridge, Athabasca, and Leduc. The petition reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 251 individuals primarily from Edmonton. They are urging the government to ensure that remuneration paid to employees working with persons with disabilities is standardized, that they are fairly compensated and wages remain competitive, that they have improved access to professional development opportunities, and urging the government to introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level of care standards.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition today, and it reads: we the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to launch a full public inquiry under the authority of the Public Inquiries Act into spying practices by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board and the Minister of Energy's oversight role of the AEUB. This petition is signed by citizens from Edmonton, Daysland, Galahad, Alliance, and Bawlf.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Bill 52
Corrections Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 52, the Corrections Amendment Act, 2007.

These amendments to the Corrections Act will provide for safer facilities and communities, support victims by providing greater access to information about offenders, and enhance inmate disciplinary procedures. The bill will allow for electronic monitoring or recording of inmate phone calls to enhance safety within the correctional facility and in the community. It will also give victims more information about an offender convicted of a crime against them, including the inmate's date of release and conditions of that release that relate to the victim, and ensure that inmates subject to discipline are dealt with by an independent hearing and appeal adjudicators.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 52 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 52 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Bill 54
County of Westlock Water Authorization Act

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 54, the County of Westlock Water Authorization Act.

This bill will facilitate the delivery of treated municipal water within the county of Westlock and, recognizing that the county straddles two water basins, provide for the appropriate legislative approval for interbasin transfers of that water.

[Motion carried; Bill 54 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Bill 55
East Central Regional Water Authorization Act

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 55, the East Central Regional Water Authorization Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will ensure a safe and secure water supply for Albertans living in east-central Alberta communities. These communities have been impacted by drought and increased growth, and this bill will provide these communities with access to piped potable water.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 55 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 55 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table letters from my constituents Bill Elson, David Verkland, Iris Verkland, Mrs. D. Hewitt, Fred Baker, Aaron Stalder, and Gerry Riva-Cambrin. All of them are concerned about Alberta's labour laws, suggesting five changes, but today I will highlight their wish to have full legal recognition of bargaining rights for public employees, including the right to strike combined with reasonable essential services legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters I have received from 200 of my constituents calling for changes to Alberta's labour laws. The letters express strong support for such changes as first contract arbitration, full legal recognition of bargaining rights for public employees, and one labour law for all unionized workers, among other issues.

Thank you.

head: 1:30 **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Use of Private Investigators by EUB

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On May 9, 2007, the EUB's security team leader, Ray Ambler, sent an e-mail to the RCMP and the PI company hired, outlining the details of the covert operation that was to take place in Rimbey. Referencing the attachment the e-mail states, "The Sheriffs department has been provided this document under separate cover and at an earlier date." To the Solicitor General. The sheriffs knew what was happening before May 9. They knew about these repulsive tactics long before they happened. When did the Solicitor General himself know that the citizens of this province were going to be spied on, and was it he who alerted the Premier?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all,

let me say that our sheriffs' branch is certainly aware that the EUB intended on using some private investigators for security purposes. That's my understanding of it. Unless the hon. member has further evidence, that's the extent of what we're aware of.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Solicitor General. As Alberta's Minister of Public Security – and please underline public – what role did the Solicitor General and his sheriffs' department play in planning and executing this spy operation? The minister knew about it. The sheriffs knew about it. They allowed it to happen, and they took part.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the hon. member talks about knowledge and a spy operation. As I indicated before, we are aware that due to concerns for public safety the EUB had hired the services of private investigators, and that's the extent of it.

Mr. Elsalhy: Those private investigators, Mr. Speaker, were not at the courthouse; they were at the community centre.

To the Minister of Justice, who is also the Deputy Premier. The Premier and the Minister of Energy knew about this spying plan and initially defended it as something that is not a big deal. Now we find out that the Solicitor General and his sheriffs were at least notified, not involved, and that the RCMP was at least notified. When exactly was the Minister of Justice himself made aware of this repulsive scheme to spy on unsuspecting Albertans?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I can safely say that my knowledge of this matter appeared at the same time as others, when they read the newspaper accounts.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In Rimbey this pathetic government allowed a public body to hire private detectives to spy on the very citizens it is mandated to serve. Three board members from the public body have suddenly, mysteriously retired all at once. They took one for this tired old Tory team. Meanwhile, there is an e-mail trail from the EUB to this government regarding this covert spy plan. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Will the minister follow the example set by the board members and retire immediately?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, that would be an emphatic no.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. This spy scandal occurred under your leadership. Why will you not resign and accept full responsibility for this dismal action?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, first of all, as the hon. member knows, the EUB and the previous ERCB and other regulators have operated in the province of Alberta, I think, since 1938 or something in that sort of neighbourhood. I was responsible for the EUB from about the 15th of December last to the present day, and I can tell you that anybody that would want to spend the time to see what I've done

from that point to this point would understand that I am working in the best interests of Albertans on this issue, and on a go-forward basis I continue to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy. This is the minister's accountability statement from his own annual report, which he signs off on, and he should accept full responsibility for his actions. Again, in light of the fact that your department and you made a poor judgment in initially supporting the EUB's covert spying operation, will you do the right thing and resign, and resign now?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, you know, here we go chasing things from the past. They live in the past. I've addressed this situation. I think the hiring of a new chair of the EUB and the work that's been done in the interim speaks volumes with respect to what this government is doing with respect to making this issue completely transparent for Albertans, and the actions that we've taken I stand by.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Regional Municipal Planning

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Municipal leaders from the capital region will be presented with a plan today on regional planning. However, already some members of the region are criticizing the plan as being unfair to them. This reality is, unfortunately, that the city of Edmonton shoulders the infrastructure costs for the entire region and has a population base far in excess of the others combined. To the associate minister of housing and urban development: do you support the idea that the decision-making for the regional government structure should be weighted on proportion of population?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a technical question. As you know, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is responsible for the regional planning, especially in the capital region, which I understand has been going well. I'll take that under advisement for the minister.

Mr. Bonko: Yeah, there will probably be a lot of advisement today.

The municipal sustainability initiative was weighted towards communities with heavy industrial bases. For the capital region this means that as upgraders are built and many more people move into the region, Edmonton will bear most of the support costs; however, they will receive zero tax dollars from the massive upgraders to help pay for the support services. Those dollars will stay in the rural counties, with a fraction of the population and cost. To the same minister. The MSI funding arrangement was unfair to Edmonton and benefited counties with heavy industrial bases. If the new model for the regional planning addresses this inequity, will you support this and ensure that regional counties pay their fair share for the growth costs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that this morning

the mayor of Edmonton, Stephen Mandel, in his speech for National Housing Day was very supportive of the municipal sustainability initiative. I know the weighting is done by population and assessment, and I'd refer this question to our President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Bonko: Rural counties surrounding Edmonton believe that the regional planning model will take away from the rural power. The mayors of Strathcona and Sturgeon counties have already stated that they oppose any sharing of revenues, any regional model that affects their autonomy. Apparently, they do not care to co-operate for the good of the entire capital region. They will no doubt put political pressure on their MLAs. To the same minister. We already know that certain members of cabinet have been a barrier to this process. Will you stand up to those mayors and any members of cabinet who try and stall the implementation of the Radke regional planning model?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's a shame that the hon. member would present the response to a report that they haven't got yet as already wrong. What this Premier has done is made it very clear to Alberta that he is someone who does the right thing, not the easy thing. No one ever said that to bring the capital region together was going to be easy, and no one ever said that everyone would agree to all the things, but this Premier has tackled a job that has troubled this region for decades. From his past record this year you can be assured that it will be dealt with fairly, and it will be done completely. All sides will be included, involved, and the right thing will result from it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Use of Private Investigators by EUB (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government would have us believe that three board members implicated in the EUB spying scandal coincidentally retired on the same day. Albertans can smell a rat here. They know that these board members were fired for their role in the scandal. The Perras report, which purported to look into this matter, was a whitewash. Justice Perras didn't even investigate anyone higher than the director of security even though the NDP opposition produced documents which proved board members and officials knew all about the spying. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Will you commit to a complete public inquiry into this matter which looks into the role of all officials, including the Minister of Energy?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member of the third party is doing what he does so well, and that is criticizing people who are not here to stand up for themselves. Justice Perras was given an assignment. He's a well-respected former member of the judiciary. He came out with a report that clearly this hon. member does not like the results of, but the fact of the matter is that he's an honourable person who did what he was asked to do. He produced a report that, unfortunately, he doesn't like but which was of assistance to us.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What he was asked to do was to whitewash this matter and protect the government.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Alberta are demanding to know the full

truth in this matter. These so-called retirements point to nothing else but a blatant cover-up, yet other officials at the EUB, including the director of communications, the legal counsel, and other top officials, were copied on e-mails in which the board's intention to spy were made clear. This is to the Minister of Energy. When will you end this cover-up and call a full public inquiry?

1:40

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, you know, the question is phrased a bit differently this time, but nevertheless it's the same question, and I'll have the same answer for it. I've been responsible for the EUB from December 15 or 16 in 2006. Anybody that would want to take the time to have a look at what I've done with respect to the EUB from that point till today would be very welcome to do so. I can stand here and tell the people of the province of Alberta that I believe that we're moving in the right direction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Another thing that the so-called investigation by Justice Perras failed to investigate was what role the Minister of Energy and senior energy department officials had in this affair, so I'll offer the minister a chance to clear the air. Mr. Minister, what did you know about the plans to spy on Albertans by the EUB, and when did you know it?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, you know, questions loaded with innuendo. I think that it would serve Albertans very well to understand that the EUB is a quasi-judicial board, very similar to a courtroom setting and very similar to a provincial judge. I would no more go and influence the hearings that the EUB are carrying on for Albertans than I would attempt to change the decisions of a judge in the province of Alberta. That, in frank words, is the answer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Water Management

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My grandpa was a wise man, and I learned as much as I could from him while he was alive. He always had a unique way of telling me things that made them stick. He once told me that we often count things as being more important than they actually are. When you think about what is important, he said: remember, you can go for three minutes without air, three days without water, and three weeks without food. Water is critical. To the Minister of Environment: what are you and your department doing to oversee the wise use of our water resources?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct that we have a resource that, we are increasingly learning, is a limited resource. As we have increased growth pressures, that puts increased pressure on our water. That's why the government recognized a number of years ago that it's important that we have an adequate plan to ensure the proper use of that water, the proper planning for that water. We developed something that is world renowned, and that's the Water for Life strategy, that, frankly, is seen as the leading-edge way of dealing with water.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A lot of water flows down our rivers. The Battle River, flowing through my constituency, is the only nonglacial-fed river in the province and, as such, is subject

to incredible highs and lows in water flow, which has great impact on the economics of the region. There's not a shortage of water on the river; there's a shortage of water management. My first supplemental to the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure that all watersheds, not just the South Saskatchewan River basin, remain healthy?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the South Saskatchewan River basin is the one river basin that is under the greatest amount of pressure, and that's the reason we've been concentrating on that area first. But one shouldn't assume from that that that is the only basin that we're concentrating on. Frankly, plans are currently under way to establish similar kinds of regimes on the North Saskatchewan and the Bow River, and we're also beginning discussion for similar kinds of local decision-making and local input on both the Athabasca and Peace. WPACs, the watershed planning and advisory councils, worked extremely well. This government not only supports the concept of WPACs but supports them financially to the tune of about \$2 million in this budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nothing happens without water. You can't ensure ag production without water. You can't do value-added growth, manufacturing, or tourism without water. Indeed, you can't even grow the size of your town without it being able to supply the new homes with water. What is your department doing, Minister, to ensure some balance between the ever-expanding demands and competing interests on our water and water supply sources?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, one thing is certain when it comes to water, and that is that one size does not fit all. That's why we're so proud of the work that we have under way with the WPACs, currently eight WPACs in different regions throughout the province, expanding beyond that very shortly. In addition to that we have in excess of 100 watershed steward groups that are involved with decision-making on a local level.

Mr. Speaker, nothing works better to deal with planning and issues than dealing with them at the local level. However – and it's a big however – at the end of the day if the local groups are not able to come up with the kinds of decisions that are required, the buck stops here, and the government will ensure that those decisions are made.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Oil Sands Royalty Structure

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General, the expert Royalty Review Panel, and the Department of Energy's own reports confirm that Alberta's royalty system for oil sands was a give-it-away policy. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. When it comes to our oil sands royalty system, why did the government simply have this give-it-away policy for the last seven years?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, I'll repeat this until it comes, you know, quite clear to certain individuals in the House. My responsibility with respect to this issue also started in December last year. I will say another thing. One of the very first things the Premier did was call for a public royalty review. He indicated that that royalty review would be placed in front of Albertans when he received it.

That's exactly what he did. We're moving forward on this issue and many others.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm quoting from a speech by the former Minister of Energy, Murray Smith. This speech was delivered on October 16, 2006, in Austin, Texas. "The model that has worked so well for us is that the royalty structure for oil sands is we 'give it away' at a 1 per cent royalty structure." To the Minister of Energy: why is Murray Smith bragging that the government's royalty policy on oil sands is to give it away, when Albertans are told by your government that our policies collect a fair share? Why is that?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would have to suggest that whatever some former individual may or may not have said in Houston, Texas, is not really something that I need to concern myself with today. What I'm concerned with is the policy of the government, and the policy of the government has been and will continue to be that what we will do is get the best benefit for Albertans from their resources. The policy that was in place prior to the time that we've done the new royalty framework did exactly that. I've alluded to the numbers of billions and billions of dollars that have benefited Albertans with the result of this resource and other resources. We will continue to move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy should know what Murray Smith is saying because he has got your top patronage job in Washington.

Now, I'll ask a question of the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. He seems so anxious to get on his feet. Will the Member for Calgary-Mackay be promoting Alberta's royalty policies as a give-it-away royalty system when he goes to Washington? Is this the government of Alberta's real policy, this give-it-away policy?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, under our new Premier and this new administration it is about striking the right balance for all Albertans. Further to that, I remind the hon. member of when this government in future forwarding had a bridge to nowhere. We had \$50 million we spent on infrastructure, preparing for where we are today. At the time we had no homes built. Streets paved and fire hydrants but no homes on them. The fiscal regime was the right economic policy to get to this point today, unlike the Liberals, who have a policy on the fly.

Carbon Dioxide Capture and Sequestration

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, last Saturday the Nobel prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued its synthesis report, which analyzes the probable impacts of increasing greenhouse gases on nations, including our own. Although conservation measures and switching to alternative energy sources may have some effect on reducing the release of greenhouse gases, Albertans are going to continue to rely on fossil fuels for the majority of their energy needs in the foreseeable future, and any meaningful reductions in carbon dioxide emissions will necessitate capture and storage of those gases. My question is for the hon. Minister of Environment. What is the government doing to move ahead with projects to capture carbon dioxide here in Alberta?

1:50

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member makes a very valid observation, that increasingly the technology related to managing CO₂ is looking to be a very significant contributor into dealing with climate change related issues into the future. The government of Alberta will be very much part of working on various projects with respect to CO₂ capture and sequestration. There was recently, for example, funding through the Alberta Energy Research Institute, AACI, and Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry to do a feasibility study into the development of a pipeline from the Industrial Heartland.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: can you tell the House why this particular project in the Industrial Heartland would be a project to pursue?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of reasons. There are a number of alternatives that can be used for CO₂. One, of course, is enhanced oil and gas recovery, the sequestration of CO₂ that actually increases the production from existing oil fields. The other is the pure sequestration for the purpose of eliminating CO₂. In order to do any of those, you need to have a source of CO₂, and you need to have availability. By having the cluster of industrial development within the heartland, it makes a perfect combination of supply and opportunity to sequester.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, my further supplemental question is to the same minister. How do Albertans know that investing in carbon capture and storage would be a worthwhile step to tackling greenhouse gases?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this isn't something that has been dreamt up by Alberta Environment. This technology has been proven for a number of years. We just need to ensure that it can be scaled up to the kinds of developments that we have in this province. I can give examples of carbon sequestration already under way in Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, the United States. There are 30 years' experience in enhanced oil and gas recovery. Then there are other ways that I think Albertans should be aware of the recognition of this. Even our own Pembina Institute here in Alberta has pointed out the need for carbon capture and sequestration to deal with climate change.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Affordable Housing

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is National Housing Day, a day to raise awareness about the housing crisis that exists across the country and especially in this province. As a member of the Affordable Housing Task Force I was deeply moved by the stories of despair from so many people who cannot afford a place to live. We desperately need affordable housing. My questions are for the Associate Minister of Affordable Housing and Urban Development. The task force estimated that delivering a minimum of 12,000 additional units over five years will cost \$480 million a year. How can this government build the affordable housing we need by spending less than half of that amount of money? What are you going to build? RVs? Tent trailers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, today is National Housing Day. I'd like to begin by thanking the people in the

communities that are working so hard. There are thousands of people in this province that are working hard in providing affordable housing to low-income individuals and people in need. In answer to the question, this member knows that we have had \$285 million that was dedicated just six months ago to the issue of affordable housing, and \$195 million of that was for 11,000 housing units to be built over the next five years. That began this year alone.

I went on the website for this individual, and I notice that the plan he . . . [Mrs. Fritz's speaking time expired] I'll comment further.

Dr. B. Miller: Well, Mr. Speaker, we hear that amount, \$285 million, again and again. But it's not impressive because these are the facts: in 1986 this government invested the same amount of money in affordable housing – 1986 – with half of today's budget. So how can you say, Mrs. Minister, that you are really serious about solving the affordable housing crisis?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, how can this individual say that? It's remarkable to me. As I was going to say, on your website you're calling for a thousand less units than this province is building in the next five years: 10,000 units, and we're building 11,000. To further back that up, yesterday in this House the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced \$60 million for projects, one in your own riding, in Barrhead, Mr. Speaker. Excellent project, the community worked very hard. Sixteen communities are participating in that. So we are doing some significant good work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this government is really serious about eliminating homelessness in 10 years, will this government look at the task force's housing-first perspective? It is not enough just to provide shelter space. We desperately need transitional housing with wraparound services so people can move beyond the shelter, through the housing continuum towards independence and self-reliance. To the same minister: are you committed to funding these necessary services? If you don't, there will be a reverse flow through the housing continuum into more and more homelessness.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said to you in this House previously – in the last two weeks I think it's been a few times we've addressed this issue, and we know that Housing first is a model that we as a government are following. We're currently doing that today. We have \$16 million in outreach projects given to the municipalities and the communities and agencies, and it is housing first that they're providing. I mentioned one project here alone, and that was the hospital discharge project in Calgary, where 50 chronically homeless individuals who've accessed emergency are being met by a seven-member professional team of physicians, nurses, and they are being provided with housing first rather than being discharged back to their shelters.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Air Quality

Ms Calahasen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency has been blessed to be a hub for oil and gas activity. However, the recent releases of sour gas across the province have all Albertans concerned about the quality of their air. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What is it that you're doing to ensure that we protect all Albertans, even my constituents, about the quality of their air?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the member is quite right. The recent occurrences with respect to sour gas have certainly highlighted in the minds of Albertans the importance of air quality. But I have to point out that sour gas is something that is dealt with in an emergent way. We have the highest standards in Alberta with respect to regulations surrounding sour gas. The fact that we dealt with these releases and have in place the necessary plans is, I think, a compliment. But the greater question is: how do we maintain air quality, generally speaking? That really falls into the announcement that I made a while ago with respect to cumulative effects. How do we regulate airsheds within the region and keep them clean?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's almost been two months since the government announced the cumulative effects management framework, so my question to the same minister is: what programs and what progress has been made in regard to implementing this framework?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there's been a significant amount of progress on this framework. As an example, we've been seeking public input over the last period of time. We've had some targeted stakeholder group meetings. Just today I've announced the establishment of an airshed working group who will build a system that will allocate, monitor, and evaluate airshed targets. This group represents industry, environmental groups, municipalities, and, of course, representatives from the government. I have to emphasize that if this group can't agree on the system that we use on a go-forward basis, then, obviously, the government will be responsible for making a balanced decision at the end of the day.

Ms Calahasen: Then, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: if this working group is only just getting together now, when can we expect the airshed targets to come into effect? It's only beginning now, so I and my constituents would like to know: when is this going to come into effect?

2:00

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm expecting an initial report from this group as early as December of this year, but the targets themselves come into effect on January 1 of 2009, so we have in that interim period of time necessary opportunities to ensure that the system that we put in place in fact works to protect the environment and allow industry to continue to grow and also that we have an ongoing review of these programs. Every five years we'll take account of how well the plan is working and make necessary adjustments along the way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Women's Shelters

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The lack of affordable housing in this province has been especially harmful for women attempting to flee abusive relationships. Alberta now leads in domestic assault, homicide/suicide, and stalking and is second in domestic homicide. As the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters states: the impact of these realities on Alberta's families is enormous, and the infrastructure is simply not in place to the extent that it is needed to provide immediate and effective interventions. To the associate minister of housing: why isn't there a provision specifically for women who are victims of domestic violence included in the housing plan?

The Speaker: The associate minister of affordable housing.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will take that question under advisement because we do not have the secretariat membership advertised as yet. I'm assuming that's what you mean, in regard to the secretariat, so I will take that under advisement and look toward that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2006 the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters reported the following aggregate information for all 41 shelters: the number of women forced to return to abusive situations due to a lack of affordable housing in Alberta has increased by over 300 per cent. To the associate minister: what, if anything, will be done to provide immediate affordable housing to these women and ultimately prevent unnecessary tragedies?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious question as it relates to women's shelters. I know that the Minister of Children's Services has told the House in the past that the budget had increased from \$15 million to \$22 million in '07-08 for women's shelters, but for the emergent needs, which are the critical needs, women can be assisted. We must let women know this as well, about the good programs that we have, that our direct rent supplement programs combined are \$33 million to \$50 million. A thousand apartments this year in Calgary, for example, were made available through the Calgary Apartment Association, which we're assisting with the first month's rent and the damage deposit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The victims of crime fund consistently runs surpluses of millions of dollars, currently sitting at \$18 million and growing every year. To the Solicitor General: why are these funds not used to fund women's shelters or sexual assault centres?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member noted, we do at this point in time have a surplus of funds in the victims of crime fund, and those funds are used to assist people who are victimized by crime. We look at all different aspects of ensuring that the money gets out to those people who need it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Logging in Kananaskis Country

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. So the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development gets his way, and the trees are falling as we speak in the Sibbald district of the Kananaskis Country, just west of Calgary. Despite more than a thousand letters and more than 1,200 petitioners a beautiful woodland in Calgary's backyard goes down, and an essential watershed for more than a million people is endangered. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: will the minister listen to his constituents and Albertans in general and protect this area and Calgary's water supply?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, as I've explained to the hon. member across the way numerous times, Sustainable Resource Development has not one but two hydrologists on our staff. Any forestry management agreement, any detailed forestry management plan, particularly

this one because it's upstream from a big urban centre like Calgary, has detailed water studies and water modelling. We've met with the city of Calgary. If you'd read the article carefully, hon. member, you would have seen that the city of Calgary is satisfied with how we're proceeding with respect to the water issue.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I beg to differ because certainly there are thousands of people who are not happy with this thing. There is a city of more than 1 million people only minutes away from this logging site. Calgarians are proud to consider K Country as part of their own backyard, and I don't think they appreciate having the watershed for the Elbow River compromised by some half-baked notion of this minister's right to log with imprudence. So I'd ask the minister again: what is the backup plan that he has, then, for Calgary's water supply should the Elbow River be compromised because of this shortsighted logging plan?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite certain that some of my friends on this side would ante up for a one-way ticket for the hon. member to take a trip over to British Columbia. We could send him across the way, and he could see what happens when the let-nature-take-its-way group has their way. That's what they said 10 years ago in British Columbia: let nature take its way. They've lost hundreds of thousands of hectares of land. There are going to be children born in British Columbia now that won't see a healthy pine forest for 40 years. That's what we're not going to allow to happen in this province.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, I find that the logic of connecting this pine beetle crisis and logging the Kananaskis Country is absolutely ridiculous. It comes from some sort of Paul Bunyan idea of logging as opposed to forest management. Albertans were not consulted in this forestry management plan. The plan was hashed out between the Tories and their big-business buddies, and then the public was brought in. Bought and paid: that's what we hear. So the minister should have some inkling that the people in his region do not approve of this logging adventure, and it's taking place right in his constituency. Why is the minister alienating his own constituents and the city of Calgary by allowing the destruction of this important watershed?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the logging company involved here, Spray Lake Sawmills, is hardly big business. It's a family-owned business. It's been logging in the Kananaskis and the eastern slopes since 1946. Many of the recreational trails that we use right now are the result of this logging. Perhaps you've been on the Forestry Trunk Road. The Forestry Trunk Road would be a result of that. I'm sure I could collect another little money from this side to send the hon. member on another trip, over to southern British Columbia, down to Radium to take a look at the Kootenay River Valley, burned out for about 40 kilometres. That's what comes after the pine beetle. If you want to see a half-baked idea, that's the half-baked idea.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Bullying

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, bullying is unacceptable any time and anywhere. This week is national bullying prevention week, and we've seen a number of stories about bullying in our schools and communities. Most alarmingly, bullying seems to have moved out of our schools and into cyberspace, with online bullying becoming a significant problem. Children and teachers are being

targeted each and every day by people under the cover of the Internet. My first question is to the Minister of Education. According to the Media Awareness Network 34 per cent of students in grades 7 to 11 report they have been bullied within this current school year. Among those, 27 per cent say that they have been bullied over the Internet . . .

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think what the hon. member would like to know is what we're doing about it. I'd like to say, you know, that the Internet is going to play an important role in the 21st century with the 21st century learner, but along with that come bad people who do bad things, and they can remain anonymous. It was my pleasure yesterday to join the Minister of Children's Services as we participated with some 300 students at a west Edmonton junior high school and announced phase 3 of our antibullying initiative. That particular phase is geared towards looking at oneself to ensure that we're not doing things like bullying.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. If we're going to combat bullying, we need to get to the heart of where our students live, learn, and play. To the same minister: is the government's bullying prevention campaign doing enough to reach our children and their parents to make sure that they are getting the message?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, phase 3 is rather a unique campaign that is going to be released throughout movie theatres in the province. It will complement the two websites that we currently have up and running. The one is called bullyfreealberta.ca, and the other is b-free.ca. I guess that out of all three of those phases, quite frankly, our message is that bullying is unacceptable anywhere any time by anybody.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister. I know that the government's bullying prevention campaign is in its third year. What I don't know is whether or not the campaign messages are actually reaching our students. Do you have any proof that this campaign is working and has had any impact?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the only thing that I think we can report statistically is that those two particular websites that I mentioned have had more than 2 and a half million hits.

An Hon. Member: How many?

Mr. Liepert: Two and a half million hits in about two years.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, some 500 people have called our 24/7 toll-free bullying prevention helpline.

Just to conclude, Mr. Speaker, I think one of the things that all of us need to ensure – I don't believe that children learn to be bullies in schoolyards. I think they learn from watching adults, whether it's how adults perform at hockey games or how we speak to one another. I believe that we can give kids the wrong message.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Logging in Watersheds

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A portion of Alberta's oldest, rarest, and most threatened forest, in the Crowsnest Pass on

the slopes of Mount Tecumseh, was approved to be logged by the Department of Sustainable Resource Development. This rare forest has some of the most diverse and vulnerable flora and fauna in the province. It's a part of our natural heritage which should be preserved and protected for all Albertans. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: will the government protect the oldest forest in the province and stop the logging from proceeding?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member had better check his facts. I believe Mount Tecumseh is in the C5 forestry area. I postponed the approval of the next forestry management agreement in that area in March precisely because of concern about watershed and habitat issues. We're not proceeding with the forestry management agreement there until we receive the report on the Oldman water basin and we see an updated forestry management agreement for C5.

Mr. Cheffins: Well, then, the minister acknowledges the importance of water basins. If that's the case, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are concerned about logging currently under way in Kananaskis provincial park in the proximity of a vital watershed and within a pristine natural recreational area. Calgaryans are greatly concerned with the effect it will have on the quality of their water supply. Logging of this area can cause increased runoff and flooding downstream and increase the level of contaminants in a vital source of drinking water. To the same minister: will this government stand up for Calgaryans and all Albertans and stop the logging in this sensitive area?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I hate to waste the House's time by repeating the answers I've already given, but we have not one but two hydrologists on staff. Any forestry management agreement is both tested and modelled on water treatment. I met with save a tree, the Kananaskis protection group. I met with them in June. We agree with them that the highest use of the eastern slopes is watershed and recreation. The question is: how do you achieve that goal? It's not by sitting back and doing nothing. That's what they did in British Columbia. That leads to the pine beetle. That leads to the forest fires. If you want to see real water problems, sit back and do nothing; let nature take its way. That will cause worse problems.

Thank you.

Mr. Cheffins: Mr. Speaker, this minister knows that clear-cutting is not allowed in various areas in British Columbia upstream from drinking water sources such as in Vancouver. The minister refers to children in British Columbia. Well, if he'd come into some of the schools in my constituency, he'd see the posters there that say: stop logging in the Kananaskis. To the same minister. These are not normal areas for logging activity. They're vital areas, important watersheds. Will this government start treating these sensitive areas more responsibly and stop the mismanagement, which is outraging Albertans across the province?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we won't even take up a collection for this. I'll personally take the hon. member down to visit. He's new to the House, but he seems to have the same problems as the others: he doesn't listen very well. I'll take you down to the Castle Crown. I will show you areas that were logged 40 years ago that are now in such good shape, having been reseeded, that the same groups want to protect this area as pristine forest. Our concern about Kananaskis is just as sincere as theirs. We're using science, not romantic notions. We've seen what happened over in British Columbia. We're using science to do what's good for the long term – the long

term – not what's good for next week but the long-term well-being of the forest.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Edible Oil Tariffs

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture is a highly competitive international and global business. Changes to protocols or import tariffs somewhere halfway across the world can have an impact on Alberta and its producers. I recently learned that China has lowered its tariffs on soybeans and that this is having a negative impact on Alberta's canola producers. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Can the minister explain how soybean tariffs affect our canola exports and the impact that this has had on Alberta canola producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, canola and soybeans compete as edible oils. China is a big and growing market. Their tariff on canola is 9 per cent. Their soybean tariff was 3 per cent, and that has been reduced to 1 per cent. According to industry estimates, equal tariffs could potentially increase Alberta's canola exports by about 1 million tons, or \$400 million. To give this perspective, in the year 2000 China's number one and number two agricultural imports were soybeans and canola. Today, Mr. Speaker, canola is not even in the top 20.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amount of potential revenue being lost by our canola producers is of concern, so I wonder if the minister could tell us what the Ministry of Agriculture and Food is doing to address this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My staff of course has been advocating for trade parity and promoting benefits of canola with our Chinese counterparts. We've written the federal minister of agriculture. In fact, I talked to him last Friday and Saturday about the issue, and he agreed to raise the issue with the Chinese authorities. Pursuing change to canola tariffs will probably continue to be a part of trade talks with China as we move forward on this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear that the minister of agriculture is continuing to go to bat for the agriculture industry. I recognize that this is not just an Alberta issue but one also that impacts canola producers across the country. So my final question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Can this minister tell us if there is any other action we can take, perhaps through the World Trade Organization, to remedy this problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must admit our

frustration in the fact that the WTO, the World Trade Organization, is moving at a glacial pace relative to the complexities of countries that are involved. But I can assure you that working in partnership with our federal government, our cousins, we want to receive the outcome that, in fact, will serve Albertans and serve them better than presently is in place today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Regional Health Authority Budgets

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The July 2007 contract agreement between the United Nurses of Alberta and the health regions resulted in a 7.7 per cent salary increase for nurses. The minister has refused to provide additional funding to the health regions to offset this increase. My question is to the minister of health. The regions are now forced to choose between cutting programs and services or going into deficit. What should they choose?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, by law they're not able to go into deficit, so they should choose to follow the law, as any prudent board would do. But it should be mentioned that the regional health authorities, working together, negotiate the agreement, so they obviously would have known what impact the agreement would have on their budgets when they signed the agreement and so would have prudently planned for that eventuality.

Ms Blakeman: I think the minister left the health regions in a very bad position. Is the minister going to give the regions any direction on what programs he deems expendable that they can cut?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I was going to tell the regional health authorities what programs they would cut, what purpose would I have in having a regional health authority at all? I would just run it directly. They're the ones that are on the ground in their regions, determining what the priorities are for the region, what the priorities are for the investment of the resources that they get. But I would point out that a significant amount of the \$12 billion budget that this province spends on health care goes to direct service delivery through the regional health authorities. They have significant budgets, and they have to allocate those budgets in accordance with the needs in their region.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the minister: why is the minister avoiding accountability by forcing the regions to make the difficult and, most likely, unpopular decisions about cutting services?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the last thing on earth that I'm trying to do is avoid accountability. I expect that I will be roundly roasted by that very member when we get into debating Bill 41 and Bill 48, which set up an accountability structure which brings it right back to the government with respect to having the tools to serve accountably to Albertans and deal with the resources we need. The fact of the matter is that we have a complex health system. We have nine health regions that deliver within the context of a provincial health policy framework. Their job is to take the resources that are allocated to them and to allocate those resources in the best interests

of their region, providing the services that are needed in their region. They have large budgets, and, yes, we can always use more. But part of the role of governance, whether you're at this level or at their level, is to allocate resources in accordance with priorities.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes question period, and that was 90 questions and answers today.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**
(continued)

The Speaker: We'll now return to the Routine, where we were at, under Tabling Returns and Reports. I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two documents to table today. The first one: five copies of a letter from Doug Wiebe, executive director of L'Arche Association of Lethbridge, regarding the urgent need to increase support for persons with developmental disabilities.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of an e-mail from the Energy and Utilities Board security leader, Ray Ambler, advising EUB board members John Nichol, Ian Douglas, Graham Lock of a contract to spy on the landowners at the 500 kV line hearings in Rimbey, Alberta. Also copied on the e-mail are legal counsel Rick McKee and communication employees Davis Sheremata and Bob Curran, still employees of the AEUB.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of letters I received from six of my constituents, all urging us to look at revamping Alberta's labour laws, which, in their opinion, are antiquated and not fair to all working people in Alberta. One sample idea in the letters is a first-contract arbitration process, for example. These letters are from Jennifer Innes, Joyce Hass, Doreen Long, Harold Kitchen, Jarek Wysokinski, and Brenda Freeson.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is a letter from a constituent, Alfreda Strzelec. This letter indicates that we should have a more positive and fair labour relations climate.

The second tabling I have today is in regard to my questions from earlier today to the Minister of Energy. It's a transcription of tapes from the Austin annual meeting general session October 16, 2006, minister-counsellor Murray Smith, Alberta. This is the speech in Austin, Texas.

The third tabling I have is again another letter from a constituent, Donald George Milford, a resident of Edmonton-Gold Bar, of course, who is urging this Assembly to make five significant changes to Alberta's labour laws.

My last tabling is also a letter from a constituent by the name of John McLennan. Mr. McLennan is also advocating there be at least five significant changes to Alberta's labour laws to make them more fair.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings, and they have come from my constituents. They are Jorge Ortiz, Darren Milward, Ben Carandang, Leonila Carandang. They are all concerned about Alberta labour laws and strongly believe in "major changes to encourage fairness to all working people," strongly urging this government to "implement and support these changes to our province's antiquated and unfair labour laws" and bring Alberta labour into the 21st century.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is the victims' assistance program, a document on it from the Edmonton John Howard Society, and that just shows how to provide assistance to victims of domestic violence as they go through the criminal court system. Another is an excellent document, Wife Abuse: I Want the Violence to Stop! It documents 34 of our very necessary women's shelters and other resource centres for this difficult problem.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings. One, a letter from Tina Copp, who came here from New Brunswick to a job but is really concerned about high increases in rent.

I have another letter from Diane Currah, who is really concerned about increases in rent. Also, "What are the Seniors, kids going to school and the Working poor going to do in the near future? . . . We need to get this Government Out."

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(6) I would request that the Government House Leader share with us the business next week, the week commencing on the 26th of November, government business commencing on the 27th.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're hoping to have a very productive week next week.

Ms Blakeman: Hope springs eternal.

Mr. Hancock: It does. Monday being private members' day, government business would start on Tuesday, November 27. After Orders of the Day we would expect to be in Committee of the Whole very briefly with respect to Bill Pr. 1, the CyberPol bill, and I would expect, Mr. Speaker, just for the notice of the House that we would have a statement from the Minister of Justice with respect to that bill and then adjourn it. We would then be in second reading on the appropriation bill and possibly Bill 46, Committee of the Whole on bills 1, 2, 9, 11, 23, 24, 31, 38, and 41. I trust we'll make some progress on some of those.

Wednesday, November 28, under Orders of the Day we could be in Committee of the Whole on some of the bills left over from Tuesday, November 27, and for second reading Bills 47, 48, 49, 50, and 53 and 46 if it's in second or in committee, as well as Committee of the Whole on appropriations.

Thursday, November 29, after Orders of the Day Committee of the Whole, based on progress from Wednesday, including Bill 46

and the other bills in committee, and third reading, time permitting, based on progress from Tuesday and Wednesday, but third reading, certainly, on the appropriation bill. Bills 13, 35, 36, and 40 are also possible. When I mention progress on the appropriation bill, of course, the House will be in Committee of Supply this afternoon. If Committee of Supply approves supply and recommends it to the House, we would then anticipate introducing an appropriations bill on Monday.

That would be the projected government business.

The Speaker: Hon. members, during the Routine, the Oral Question Period, the chair was advised that two points of order would be raised. The first, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order Ministerial Responsibilities

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the sixth set of questions an exchange between the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Energy responded by indicating he was only responsible for the actions of the department following his appointment as minister on December 15, 2006. I'd like to draw the Speaker's attention to *Beauchesne* 409(6), which says:

A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his or her present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.

So it indicates, I think, that quite clearly, but let me also direct you to M and M, page 427, again around question periods. The advice given there is to "ask a question that is within the administrative responsibility of the government or the individual Minister addressed." Further, it comments that one may not "address a Minister's former portfolio or any other presumed functions, such as party or regional political responsibilities."

2:30

I'll also note at M and M 432 that Speaker Jerome in his 1975 statement on question period commented:

Several types of responses may be appropriate. Ministers may

- answer the question;
- defer their answer;
- take the question as notice;
- make a short explanation as to why they cannot furnish an answer at that time; [or they may]
- say nothing.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, it is laid out that whoever is appointed and holds that position of minister for a given department is responsible for answering questions to that department, not as of a certain date. Nowhere in here does it say: only from the day they are appointed. They are responsible for the actions of that department. They are the member of the government. It is the government's ministry. They're responsible for answering for the choices that have been made in that particular department. Seeing as we cannot question them on a previous portfolio – and that is specifically stated – it does indicate that they are responsible for answering questions for the portfolio that they're in, and there is no best before date, if I may use that colloquial expression.

So for the Minister of Energy to continue to evade questions by stating that he was only responsible after December 15, 2006, is not an appropriate response, and I do give you those citations in support of my contention that there is a point of order against the Minister of Energy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others to participate? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, there's no point of order. There's nothing in *Beauchesne*'s or M and M, as the hon. member referred to it, which requires the minister to answer the question in the manner that's asked. In fact, with the rules that we have in place now, the 45-second rule, and the abuse of the preambles that the hon. members opposite are engaging in, it is very difficult sometimes to know even what question is being asked.

The hon. Minister of Energy was merely pointing out and I think has pointed out a number of times in this House that the members opposite are often living in the past and they're asking for answers to questions relative to things that go back historically. I guess if the hon. members were to read the rules rather thoroughly, they'd find that the rules with respect to written questions are appropriate to ask for issues of the past and question period is really to ask for issues of the day.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, this is one of the long-standing dilemmas that, I guess, individuals have. Because so much in the question and so much in the response these days tends to be more debate than it is actually dealing with policy, we're invariably going to fall into this kind of a situation.

Now, for me to extrapolate from the Blues with respect to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar:

When it comes to our oil sands royalty system, why did the government simply have this give-it-away policy for the last seven years?

Then the hon. Minister of Energy – and I'm skipping the first sentence in the response – says:

My responsibility with respect to this issue also started in December last year. I will say another thing.

I suspect that one could read all kinds of different things in both of those questions, including the second response. By not saying he's refusing to answer a question – he doesn't have to answer a question in this case if he doesn't want to – I suppose one could make the argument that he did answer the question. That's the subjectivity that goes with this. I'm afraid it's all part of the give-and-take in question period and the phrasing of the questions and what have you. The fact that someone says anything, one might argue that he has answered a question. The fact that someone says nothing, that is within their right not to.

I repeat: this is Oral Question Period. Unfortunately, it's not called oral answer period. So we're going to have these interpretations from time to time. They will continue. They're not new. They've been here for 102 years.

The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the tone of your response to that point of order I will say under 23(l) and 23(i) – if I understood correctly the hon. member mentioned Washington, DC, representative Murray Smith contrary to the fact – and the member may not be aware – that, unfortunately, Mr. Smith no longer works in Washington. It is my understanding from what I heard that he was implying that he still did.

I might add that the Alberta representative, while he was there, did an absolute stellar job and helped with our fiscal regime policy, that has injected billions of dollars into our communities. That was 10 years ago. Here we are today, ten years later: we didn't generate \$25

billion; we generated over \$100 billion because of some of the good work of that member that he had mentioned.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: This appears to be more of a point of clarification than a point of order. Along those lines one might also want to go to this famous M and M. By the way, M and M is *Marleau and Montpetit*. There are sections in here dealing with all these sorts of things. I suspect that every once in a while it's a good release of energy. The intention was to have points of clarification, and that's the most we ever had today. It was not a point of order either. So along with the Deputy Speaker's that's 0 for 3 today in points of order.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call the Committee of Supply to order. Before I recognize the hon. President of the Treasury Board, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three members of Greenpeace Alberta. Greenpeace is an independently funded organization that works to protect the environment. These three members of Greenpeace have come to the Legislature today to present their concerns over numerous issues, including Bill 46 and nuclear energy in this province. I would like my three guests now to rise and receive the recognition of the Assembly.

Thank you.

head: **Supplementary Supply Estimates 2007-08**
General Revenue Fund

The Chair: Just a clarification for the chair on how we're going to proceed today. Have the House leaders come to an agreement on whether we're going to go back and forth within the designated time frame, or is it 20 minutes on one side and 20 minutes on the other? Has there been clarification on that?

Ms Blakeman: Well, the Standing Orders are silent on how supplementary supply debate actually gets organized. I left it up to my members to try and organize with their respective ministers. If they'd like to go to the 20 minutes, they will notify you in advance. Other than that, I assume that we're into traditional back and forth, but I do hope that the ministers will be cognizant of the short period of time we have to debate this.

Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: I don't think anybody on this side would object to answering back and forth if that was appropriate. You know, we want to get as many of the ministries involved as possible.

The Chair: Okay. Then that's what we'll do unless notified otherwise.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

2:40

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is now my pleasure to move the 2007-08 supplementary supply estimates for consideration by the Committee of Supply.

These will provide additional spending authority to 16 departments of the government. When passed, the estimates will authorize approximate increases of \$1.5 billion in voted expense and equipment inventory purchases. Mr. Chairman, the majority of these estimates are for savings and capital projects. These estimates will see \$825 million going to the heritage fund and \$408 million for capital projects, including capital maintenance and renewal and affordable housing. This is available from higher than anticipated results from last fiscal year and this year to date. The rest of the estimates are for \$197 million in disaster emergency assistance and \$68 million for public service salary settlements, contracted agency recruitment and retention initiatives, and the Fort McMurray allowance. Also, an additional requirement of \$15 million in statutory nonbudgetary disbursements is disclosed in these estimates. Disaster emergency assistance is funded through the sustainability fund, and other changes are addressed through dedicated revenue expense changes or the contingency allowances announced at budget.

Mr. Chairman, as I indicated in the House yesterday, it is important to note that our operating expense is \$77 million lower than at first quarter and \$53 million lower than was forecast at budget.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We look forward to answering and addressing any questions that the Assembly may have concerning these estimates.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think I'm going to lay out questions in a number of areas and then allow ministers to respond when they get an opportunity. I would think that the government members would be wanting, crowding, pushing each other out of the way to be here and talking to us about the different departments that are up for supplementary supply. [interjection] Oh, I'm getting an indication talking about the number of members I have present. Well, if you're the government, you want to be accountable. I notice that there are 16 departments that have additional money, and I'm afraid I don't have a corresponding number of ministers here, which is a great disappointment. I would have thought they would be proud to be talking about additional money in their departments, but I guess that's not the case.

I would also note, Mr. Chairman, that members of the Official Opposition received the supplementary supply during the very beginning of Orders of the Day yesterday, so we've had 24 hours to have a look at what is being brought forward in supplementary supply, which is a very quick turnaround for us even with additional staff that we secured. Those staff are for the policy field committees, not to do additional work like this. I'm just querying why the government felt that they had to do such a quick turnaround on this. Most interesting choices there.

We are debating \$1.5 billion in today's supplementary supply, which is a honking amount of money. That comes out to about \$1.5 million a minute in the time that we will have this afternoon, which indeed is, again, an awful lot of money to be trying to get answers from ministers as we go through.

Starting with the Department of Health and Wellness, for which I am the shadow minister, I'm finding it very interesting that we now don't really get an explanation of what's happening with this money in supplementary supply. We used to get a couple of sentences that

described what was happening. Now we're just referred back to an announcement that was made on a particular day, to which I thought, "Oh, great; I'll get a lot of detail out of that." But I go back and I look, and in the supplementary supply on page 44 it says that \$53.5 million is available for additional capital maintenance and renewal projects, as announced on August 22. Well, when I go to the August 22 announcement, that's a generic announcement for the entire government, and of course you've got to dig through it a bit to get your particular department out of it.

That announcement on the 22nd was actually an announcement of \$350 million in a number of departments, six different departments. So I've been referred to go and look at a press release in which the department I'm trying to inquire about is mixed in the midst of six other departments. I think: "Well, okay. Great. There'll be a lot of detail about what's happening there." No, Mr. Chairman, there isn't. It just talks about the \$350 million, and some people say some nice things, but it doesn't actually tell me what the Department of Health and Wellness is planning on doing with the \$53 million that they've been allocated.

Mr. Hancock: I'd be happy to.

Ms Blakeman: The minister is indicating that he's happy to tell me right now, and I hope he can give me the level of detail that I'm looking for because a one-sentence referral to a press release that gives me absolutely no information is not cutting the mustard right now.

The second thing I find very interesting is that if you read the small print that's available on page 45, Mr. Chairman, it indicates, "Adjusted Gross Amount reflects the transfer of: \$23,172,000 for emerging capital purposes from Infrastructure and Transportation." All right. We've got 53 and a half million dollars coming in, but that actually isn't new money; \$23,172,000 is being transferred out of Infrastructure and Transportation.

So I'm going back to this original media release of the 22nd going, okay, that \$53 million was also indicated there. Were the transfers from Infrastructure and Transportation included in that \$53 million? It doesn't say that in this media release. Were we going to get \$53 million on August 22, and now part of it is coming from somewhere else? Where did the rest of the \$53 million go? Well, that's my question. If you take 53.5 and subtract the 23 and change off it, you still end up with \$30 million. So where's that money? Did we not get it, or did it transfer? Why?

We were told that this was new money in the August 22 news release that we were given, but when I look at it, the \$53 million is not new money. Thirty million of it is new money; \$23 million of it is a transfer from someone else. So I go: where's the rest of the money? If it wasn't there, if it was never there, then why wasn't that in the August 22 announcement?

You know, this government gives rise to conspiracy theories because when you start to look at stuff like this – I'm not a great conspiracy theorist. I have some experts that are around me, however, and I have to say that it does give grist to their mill because you do start to wonder what is going on here. Now, it may well all be above board, but the amount of detail that is made available to members of the opposition, members of the media, and members of the public for how government is choosing to spend their money is reduced every single year. We get less and less specific information about what's happening.

So in this budget for Health and Wellness we have an additional amount of money of \$1,150,000 going to the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. Oh, look, Mr. Chairman. I'm referred back to a press release from November 5. Okey-dokey, let's have a look at that one, then. Well, that, actually, is in the middle of a \$26

million investment to help contracted agencies hire and keep staff, certainly something that we've been asking for as very much needed and, I'm sure, that the sector that is contracted agencies really appreciate.

When I'm trying to look at a supplementary supply budget, I'm looking for \$1.15 million, and it's buried somewhere in the middle of this \$26 million media release. So I start skimming through it, looking for details, and there is, indeed, a paragraph: "The government-funded agencies that are contracted by AADAC [are highly valued and] . . . this funding will help these highly valued agency professionals respond" and continue to respond. Okay, well, what programs? I get no detail at all about this. It's just sort of throw it all in a big pond, you know, and you guys should just trust us that it's all going to be okay there.

You know, Mr. Chairman, when I was elected to this Assembly in 1997, I did trust the government. I believed they were good and pure people, and I'm afraid that in the intervening years I've become a cynical old woman because I've been proven wrong in that trust over and over and over again.

My specific question around the one million and change to the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. I specifically would like to know, because it was through the contracting of other agencies that a previous executive director of AADAC was able to finance himself, in quotation marks, to the tune of some \$600,000 or \$800,000, and I believe he's now just been brought back into the province to face fraud charges – here we have an initiative where we're putting more money into that contracting. It is supposed to be going for improved wages, one assumes, but what has been done to make sure that we don't end up with the repeat of that situation, where I think it was \$600,000 that walked out the door into that person's pocket?

2:50

I have a number of questions that are really asking for specifics from the Minister of Health and Wellness. Please explain the discrepancies between the \$53.5 million, the money transferred in. How much new money is involved here? Was the infrastructure transfer money in that original press release? If it wasn't, where did the \$30 million go? Specifics, please. It's saying that it's for additional capital maintenance and renewal projects. What we're getting here is nothing new, I'm assuming, but I'd like that explained. It is ongoing maintenance and larger maintenance projects on existing facilities. Which facilities, please?

Also some details. I know that there's a new executive director in for AADAC. I'm pretty sure it's a woman, so I'm pretty sure she would have cleaned this up. I'd like on the record, please, what has been done to make sure that contract money is adequately supervised and there's a good audit trail in place there, actually, to prevent this kind of thing from happening.

Now, I'd like to go next, if you would allow me, Mr. Chairman – actually, as I said, Minister of Health and Wellness, thank you for your eagerness, but I am going to put on record a couple of different departments, and then I'll sit down. I'm sure he'll give it to me in writing, so I can peruse it.

The next ministry I'd like to raise some issues around, please, is Seniors and Community Supports. Okay. What we have here is \$15 million that "is requested to provide funding for a portion of the \$25,000,000 required for cost escalation of previously approved Rural Affordable Supportive Living projects." For those following along at home, this is on page 58 of your supplementary supply estimates book.

Now, I'm assuming that what this is is inflation. You know, I'm sympathetic to the rural areas that are trying to get affordable supportive living projects happening because, given this govern-

ment's whipping of the horses of the economy, we are now in hyperoverdrive here and are looking at significant cost overruns on anything that's being built or probably even maintained. I'd like some descriptions, please, of exactly which projects are being funded under this amount of money.

Now, the second part of this says, "The balance of \$10,000,000 is available from the budget for the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped program owing to a lower-than-budgeted rate of growth in caseloads." I'm really interested, Mr. Chairman, because there was a change in the spring around the eligibility criteria around AISH. My colleague had done a couple of written questions looking for information because we felt that people were now being denied from AISH that would have qualified previously.

I'm specifically concerned about the use of activities for daily living as a criteria for determining eligibility for AISH. That criteria, for anybody that's following along at home, essentially is asking a physician to make statements on things like: a mild deterioration of activities of daily living would be if the patient is generally independent in activities of daily living, only requiring little or temporary assistance, and is fully capable to continue involvement in community, social, and recreational activities as compared to, say, severe, where the patient is markedly restricted in their ability to complete activities of daily living, is frequently housebound, is limited in independent interactions with community, social, and recreational activities, and/or the condition is diagnosed to be terminal.

I'm looking at this and going: hmm, \$10 million was not spent in an AISH budget. I believe that there is some evidence to suggest that people not successful in getting onto the AISH benefit program would have been under different criteria earlier.

I'm also increasingly aware of two situations happening, Mr. Chairman. I have a number of people on AISH who are trying to live independently in the community. I have quite a bit of older housing stock, 1950s and some even before that, those sort of three-floor walk-ups, you know, 12 units in a building. I have a lot of those. They were, generally speaking, cheaper rental accommodation, and a number of people living on AISH took advantage of that because they could afford to rent one of those apartments. Let's face it, they were old apartments. They weren't well insulated. They didn't have new windows or anything like that, so utility costs were pretty high. But, you know, they were fairly safe, and they were okay accommodation, not grand by any means. They were able to afford to live there.

Since the government's – I'm searching for a term that is printable – ill-advised decisions on lack of rent control in this province, it used to be that an average one-bedroom unit in these older apartment buildings was around \$500, \$550. I can't find one for less than \$850 right now. Everyone, I hope, is aware that people on AISH are collecting a benefit of \$1,050. If the cheapest apartment they can find that is still safe, as compared to, you know, something truly horrific in a basement with bugs, is \$850, we've now left these people \$300 for all of their additional drugs that they have to pay for, for additional medical testing equipment or whatever else is not covered by the program, their food for a month, personal toiletry items, cleaning supplies, and everything else: \$300. So I'm a little bit ticked when I see that 10 million bucks is being handed over to another deserving project. I will say that, but it's \$10 million that I think should have been redirected to people who are collecting AISH benefits to help them pay that increased cost of the rent that they're facing in independent living situations.

The other thing that has been brought to my attention recently – Mr. Chairman, you know, sometimes I go to these meetings at night, and I think: oh, man, I'm just too tired for this. But a very interesting evening I had last night. I went to the local meeting of the PDD

board in my constituency, and there was a presentation there from a local society – and I haven't actually spoken to them, so I'm not going to mention their name so that I don't embarrass them – that provides services to people with developmental disabilities and also people with mental health issues in a number of locations.

In some cases they offer services, and in most cases they offer services and housing. Their point is that right now for AISH recipients who live in an accommodation that is a nursing home as defined under the Nursing Homes Act, a hospital or auxiliary hospital as defined under the Hospitals Act, a facility or part of a facility approved by AISH as a designated assisted living unit, or in some very unique care needs a residential facility, the private monthly accommodation rate is \$1,469, and the standard rate is \$1,205.

Now, Mr. Chairman, if we have nonprofit agencies that are trying to offer housing for hard-to-house individuals who can only charge the basic AISH rate of \$315, these groups cannot stay in business. They will have to stop offering housing because they can't afford to do it. We've got AISH people out there on their own who can't afford the rents. We've got 10 million bucks here that has not been distributed back to those people who need it to pay for rent. For shame. I would like to hear the justification from the minister as to why these choices were made.

3:00

We've been talking about the plight of AISH recipients in this province regarding rents for some time now, and we're not getting a good answer back. The department that is dispensing the rent supplements is completely inconsistent as to who gets these rent supplements and who doesn't. My office has been told that AISH recipients can't get it because they're already getting a government subsidy, and other constituency offices have been given different information, and even from the same office they've been told different information on two different people.

It's a mess, Mr. Chairman. What we really have is vulnerable people that are trying to live their life with dignity who are being faced with paying up to 80 per cent of their income for accommodation in independent living, and we have housing societies and assistance societies that want to help them that are going to go broke trying to offer housing on the reduced AISH rate. Why can't that money be given to those housing associations and help associations along the rate of what's being suggested and what's being given to nursing homes, auxiliary hospitals, AISH-approved designated assisted living units? They should be able to get that \$1,205 rate that is given to those other agencies.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, it's very obvious that the hon. member is not really interested in the actual answers to the questions she started with by the simple fact that she repeated the same things the first three times, but we're going to give them to her anyhow on behalf of the hon. minister.

She wanted to know about the \$53.5 million to address capital and maintenance for health authorities and the \$1.15 million to assist AADAC's contracted agencies in their work to deliver many essential components of Alberta's addictions services. The \$53.5 million will be used to address pressures facing the health authorities such as the need for additional infrastructure maintenance program funds, totalling \$9 million. The funds are needed for building systems and upgrading projects in seven health regions. These projects relate to fire alarm systems, roofing systems as well as heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems.

We are requesting \$8.5 million from the capital maintenance funds under the public health security and safety upgrade initiative.

This initiative was referred to in the Provincial Review of Infection Prevention and Control report, which, as you know, was released August 27 of this year. Funding will be used to correct physical plant design barriers that prevent effective infection control. The ministry is continuing to evaluate the use of this funding. We are requesting that \$27.5 million of the capital maintenance funding be used for the purchase and installation of mechanical patient lift and transfer equipment and related assistive devices.

The government is taking action to address health workforce needs. The Health Workforce Action Plan, that was released in September, stated that one of our action areas is to reduce and, if at all possible, avoid workplace injury. This funding will support our efforts in this area. By reducing and avoiding workplace injury, the safety of front-line and support staff will be improved as well as the safety of patients. Subsequent absenteeism costs will also be minimized.

Preservation and renewal projects in Peace Country health, Capital health, and the Calgary health region require \$8.5 million of the capital maintenance funding. In Peace Country health funds will go towards three specific projects: emergency department redevelopment and an endoscopic suite upgrade at the Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Grande Prairie, roof replacement and upgrading at the Fairview Health Complex, and roof replacement at the Sacred Heart Community Health Centre in McLennan. At Capital health a food production kitchen at Alberta Hospital Edmonton will be replaced with a food depot to accommodate a food receiving and holding area. Minor renovations will also be done on in-patient units to develop food rethermalization stations. In the Calgary health region funds will go toward upgrading of in-patient unit and emergency department medication rooms at three Calgary acute-care hospitals. This will ensure that current standards are met for the safe storage, preparation, and administration of medications.

In relation to the \$1.15 million in supplementary funding needed for AADAC's contracted agencies, funding will go toward addressing staff recruitment and retention issues. These agencies provide services in 25 different communities. They deliver many essential programs in Alberta's addictions services continuum, including aboriginal-based treatment and training programs, gender-specific programs, the AADAC helpline, outpatient and prevention services, residential treatment beds, and shelter services. I know, Mr. Chairman, that the opposition supports all of these initiatives. This funding is essential in order to provide the addictions services that are needed to help create healthy Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, with regard to the questions around the specific seniors' facilities that were requiring cost overrun funding, we will make the program list available to the hon. member ASAP.

The Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Since the minister is still here, maybe he'd help me with this. First of all, the total amount I'm going to be talking about is \$110,400,000. As I understand it from what I have here, \$97,300,000 is for additional capital maintenance and renewal spending. Specific projects were also announced on August 30, '07: \$11,500,000 to enable school boards to provide a monthly allowance to employees in Fort McMurray and \$1,600,000 for a higher than budgeted cost of salary settlements for provincial employees.

If we could look at the maintenance aspect of the budget, first of all I think that any additional maintenance that we can do in schools is certainly in order and appreciated. I guess the question is doubtful that the extra \$97.3 million will address the infrastructure and maintenance needs of schools in this province. I wonder if he could comment later, because I haven't got many questions. Does

delaying routine maintenance and major repairs increase the cost to Albertans rather than doing it on a regular basis?

The other aspect I just wanted to ask the minister. I don't know what's happening in all 62 school districts, so maybe you can help me. There is an interesting situation – I think it's in Camrose-Battle River – where they take all the maintenance and keep it under central control and don't decentralize it to the schools. As a result I've been told there – and you'd know more about this, and you can clarify this – that they have one of the best maintenance programs in the province. The point I'm getting at, Mr. Minister, is the question: when maintenance is decentralized to individual schools across the province through moving the budget from a central office to a decentralized position, much like they do in the public school system in Edmonton, is the maintenance dollar that should be going for the ongoing maintenance in the school being used for other purposes? I don't know the answer to that. Maybe you can help me with that information. I'd really be interested in knowing that, because sometimes individual schools have ways of moving dollars around that are a little easier than, say, at the government level.

Why has the government repeatedly taken the approach to addressing severe maintenance issues of schools in this province? Why did the government choose to announce these funding initiatives at a certain time? Is there a political reason, or is it simply on demand, when school divisions required the dollars? You probably know more about that than I do, so you'd probably be able to help us. Why does the government not adopt a comprehensive list of priority maintenance projects and make it publicly available? It seems that at times the government seems to make somewhat surprise announcements whereas in a school year it may be more helpful if you get an idea where maintenance problems are coming up at certain periods of the year. You could make regular announcements regarding dollars that are required.

The other thing I'd like to know, Mr. Chair, if the Minister of Education would be kind enough to answer, is: given the high cost of living, the cash injection programs in Fort McMurray – this is not a problem that simply appeared in the last few months – why was the high cost of living not factored into the budget and addressed in terms of a longer range plan? In other words, we know that things are escalating in Fort McMurray. I actually worked there. We know that there is some regularity in terms of an increase in the cost of living, and can you anticipate that? I'd be interested in knowing if he has insights into that and would share information with me regarding that particular aspect of cost of living and how to deal with it on a more regulated basis. I'm not sure of the answer to that question. Maybe he could help me with it.

3:10

The other question is salary settlements for provincial employees. I'm not sure, but I think this was, if I remember, \$1.6 million. Why was this expense not taken into account in the regular budget? Which employees specifically will be getting this increase? Is there a section or a branch or a particular aspect in the department that's getting these incentive dollars? Is that maybe in the reporting mechanism that was going to be set up to, I think, help get parents knowledgeable about the various reporting systems? They were planning to do some work there, and I'm wondering if that's an additional increase in the budget for staffing. Maybe the minister could share some information on that with us.

The other question I'd like to ask him: why has this increase popped up so suddenly as to deserve an additional injection before the next scheduled annual budget? Maybe, Mr. Chairman, if I could just stop there. He's here, and I'd like to take advantage of that.

The other thing I'd like to ask – and maybe I could continue with this later. I don't know how this works exactly. In terms of the

minister's goals, I think there were three. I think the teachers' unfunded liability was one of them, and I would formally like to thank him today for the good work he's done there. I actually enjoyed his speech the other day. It was calm. I guess that when you have money on your side, it makes it a lot easier to be generous and smile all through it. I've never had that experience at my age. Maybe the hon. minister would share some money with me there in building those P3 schools, that P3 school that we're looking for, and I would smile with him. I hope it's not going to be moved out of the one district that I want to see it go into, but I hear rumours that it is.

Anyway, two things. You mentioned in one of your goals, Mr. Minister, that you were going to do some things in preventative activities, early education. I know you have an interest in that. For the love of me I didn't see it in any of these supplemental budget items, but I was wondering if you have something you'd like to share with us today because it's not very often I get a chance to talk to you like this. The other thing that has impressed me with one of your goals . . . [interjection] I'm trying to waste time so that I get my 20 minutes, Mr. Minister.

The other thing I wanted to ask you is on this whole question of school completion. I've asked my leader to purchase a condominium in St. Albert. The Premier seems to be living in my constituency, so I'm getting very nervous. He continually visits. He gave us quite a high – he said that it was going to be achieved 90 per cent by the time the election was called. I think he was kidding us.

Seriously, if I could just share some concerns there. I really am sincere when I reach out to you on this. I was at a very impressive junior high school seminar in St. Albert. No. In fact, it was somewhere else. It was, I believe, the night the teachers were receiving their awards at Barnett House. One of the things that really impressed me – and I'm sincere about this – was that a retired principal said that there were two aspects: he talked about junior high school and moving into senior high school. He talked about the mental health of students. He said that we are not doing enough in that area.

The other thing he talked about, bullying – and I heard you talk about it, or someone talked about it today – in terms of children's self-concept. I'm wondering if specifically in junior high school, in terms of that completion that we talked about, the 90 per cent, there is going to be more of an emphasis on utilizing agencies at the junior high school level, social services agencies, to help because we don't have the initiative of the counsellors that we need. He talked about collaboration and co-operation with agencies. I was wondering if the minister could share some insights into that.

The other thing that he emphasized and I thought was very interesting was much more emphasis on careers, because he's saying that the mosaic of the culture in schools, especially in junior high schools, is changing. Some of these kids could be turned on by more information on a career-related curriculum and special opportunities. I know you've talked about visitations and this kind of thing. I'm wondering if there's more emphasis, in your vision, that could be put into careers. Then, going back to grade 9, when I was with the department we had a whole program called decision-making. Decision-making was done with the whole idea of exploring with kids about their preparation for high school. There was an emphasis not only on visiting but on doing some testing and helping kids look at their interest level and their aptitudes in order to move into more of an area of interest in high school. My point in all of this, Mr. Minister, is that I don't feel that kids are getting enough. If you're not going academic, it seems to me the we're losing a lot of kids. Maybe you have some plans on that.

Moving into the high school area, then, if I haven't lost you yet, it's the whole question that, again, I think we need a much heavier emphasis on career development. In fact, one of your good Tory

friends in central Alberta, an enlightened Tory, has just stepped down from the chairmanship of the Catholic school board in Red Deer. He's a wonderful guy. He talked to me – I think he got approval from your department – he's a house builder, and he has a project, as I understood him to tell me. He told me many things that day, but he talked about kids – I think they move from grades 10 and 11, if I'm not mistaken – that work in the trades under his foremen, and they're covered by insurance.

I think there is some real merit in that, Mr. Minister, if we could have projects like this throughout the province, because we know that we can't have these expensive shops like we have in Red Deer and all throughout the province. I think that in the vision of Edmonton, for example, we could have the various industries in Edmonton come into a major lab with the various tradesmen and so forth where they could focus in and kids could come in and be stimulated. I know you can't have a house building thing in each district, but I think there's a big area here that we have to turn ourselves to, and we're not doing the job.

As a kid that failed grade 3 and couldn't read – I can't pronounce words properly even today – I think there's a part of this thing we're losing. We're losing a lot of kids because we're not stimulating them. It's not because the kids, your department, and the education group are not doing their best; I believe they are.

I can't use the names, but I'm dealing with a man at the university that goes out to four districts. He's retired, and he's going to set up a company. He tells me – and I do believe him – that we're losing a lot of kids in the rural areas and the cities because they can't do the work of the academia in junior high school. They don't see anything for them in high school, and we're losing them.

Mr. Minister, I appreciate you hanging in today and talking and staying with us. Now maybe you can talk to us about some of my concerns. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I happen to share many of the views and comments that the hon. member just made. Actually, I think that I'm going to have a conversation with his leader and suggest that he encourage the hon. member not to run again. I'd like to hire him as a consultant for the department because I think he actually has some really good ideas.

However, we could spend a lot of time talking about some of the ideas and thoughts that the hon. member just relayed, but I do respect the fact that this is supplementary estimates. I think we should stick to what is in the supplementary estimate book and allow as many members of the opposition to ask questions as they possibly can. So with all due respect, hon. member, we'll go for coffee one day and explore those a little bit further, but I will talk about some of the other issues. I'll try and hit all of those that I can.

3:20

The hon. member first raised the issue of the \$97 million. I guess the question was, "Why now?" or "Why August 30?" There's a very good answer to that. Under this particular Premier we have now a policy in place that when we report quarterly, we update our fiscal situation. If there are unanticipated surplus dollars, one-third goes to savings – and I know the opposition is supportive of that – one-third goes to capital, and one-third to maintenance. Decisions are made at the Treasury Board level as to where those dollars are allocated. I believe that we were fortunate to get the \$97 million allocated, and then it was up to our department to determine how we can get the best value for those \$97 million.

The hon. member asked: how do we make these decisions? Well, I would refer to – and I'd be happy to supply it, but I'm sure he has

it – the document called *Schools for Tomorrow*. In the *Schools for Tomorrow* document are listed every school division's highest priority under modernization. So what we did is take that \$97 million – and, quite frankly, we wanted to get the best bang for the buck, and I don't mind using those terms. We could have allocated the \$97 million to two or three school boards, to two or three major projects and had 59 or 60 unhappy school boards.

We also tried to look and see where school boards recently had new school construction and where they didn't. What we attempted to do was to try and find some of those school divisions that had not had new school construction or new modernization dollars in the last few years, and we tried to take their highest projects and meet them. I'm, frankly, proud to say that we managed to come up with some 17 projects around the province. They were extremely well received, including, I'm also proud to say, four particular projects for francophone boards in Alberta. So I make absolutely no apologies for anything that we did relative to the \$97 million.

I happened to visit three of those school districts the day of the announcement, and I will as long as I live remember the meeting that we had at the Delnorte school in Innisfree, a small town in the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster's constituency. Those folks had tears in their eyes because finally they had the opportunity to bulldoze down that, frankly, musty-smelling old school and finally get a school that they were proud to call their own. So that was that particular announcement.

Now, what we also did – and I need to touch on this – is: at the same time we decided to reallocate the hundred million dollars that this Assembly approved in the spring budget, in our Department of Education budget. It was a hundred million dollars for capital, which we can debate back and forth whether it was the right allocation or not relative to P3 projects. The P3 project that we have embarked upon was not at the stage where we would be drawing down the hundred million this year. So we decided at that time to take the hundred million dollars, divide it equally between the four metro school boards in Calgary and Edmonton. We were finally able to address the Western Canada senior high situation, which the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has raised on a number of occasions. We addressed the situation with Archbishop MacDonald in the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora's constituency. The two other school boards, Edmonton public and Calgary Catholic, chose to use three or four projects for modernizations. Again, I was proud of that announcement. It was a good use of dollars that have long been needed.

Now, are we anywhere near meeting the needs for modernization and repair and maintenance? My answer is no, we're not. However, it must be noted that in the, I guess, 2005-06 budget year we allocated \$200 million to infrastructure and maintenance. We found, frankly, that there were a lot of school districts that could not use all of those funds, so in this year's budget, which we approved in the spring of '07, the '07-08 budget, we backed that off to \$97 million. That's in our three-year business plan. That will be a good start, and I hope that we've got the opportunity that if there are other unbudgeted surpluses that come available, we can allocate more of those dollars to modernization projects around the province because, frankly, I think that really does get us our best bang for a buck.

The hon. member raised an interesting question, first of all, in a situation that he referred to in Camrose-Battle River. I personally do not know of that particular situation, but I don't want to debate. I don't want to sound like I'm a smart aleck here, but, hon. member, it was you specifically in your member statement today who talked about us taking away responsibility from locally elected school boards. I'm not going to go into the 62 school boards around this province and tell them how to spend their maintenance dollars. I believe we allocate the dollar, and it's then up to them. They're

responsible to their electors to determine where those dollars are spent at the local level. So I take issue, and I will not agree – frankly, I don't know what they do in Battle River. I trust they're doing the right thing, so I'm going to leave that there.

A couple more questions relative to the \$11,500,000 for Fort McMurray. I stand to be corrected here, but my recollection of this particular issue is that we commissioned the Radke report, which came back with a whole bunch of recommendations relative to doing what's right in Fort McMurray, and there was not a specific recommendation made to bring teachers up to the \$1,050 per month extra cost-of-living allowance that's paid to provincial government employees. The Radke report recommended nurses and I think postsecondary, Keyano College. There seemed to be this absence as it related to teachers.

In conversation with the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo we agreed that it simply was unfair that all of these other quasi public servants in Fort McMurray were being elevated to \$1,050 per month and that somehow teachers weren't going to be receiving that same funding. So we agreed to use some of these contingency funds to ensure that Fort McMurray teachers were treated equally with all other public servants in that particular city.

Relative to the additional dollars, that is directly related to the contract that we signed with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, so any individual in the Department of Education who is a member of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees or was covered by that contract. I guess the short answer: the contract ended up being higher than what we had budgeted for in the spring budget, so that was the cushion that was there.

As I mentioned earlier, the member asked if there is documentation somewhere that would detail school boards' maintenance priorities. They are in the *Schools for Tomorrow* document.

I think that covers all of the questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to speak on supplementary supply with regard to the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development. Before I begin on that, I'm just going to read one piece from the Taxpayers' Platform. This was, I guess, a survey given out to all PC candidate members for the premiership on November 14, 2006. Question 8 says, "Will you commit to introduce legislation that restricts the government from increasing spending during a fiscal year (other than declared emergencies)?" In the minister's supplementary supply here he does have a large component of the \$152,600,000 which is allocated for emergency assistance, but the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development's response says:

Yes – A Morton government would return to the practice of responsible budgeting. This would include restricting in-year spending. This practice undermines the legislative process by taking away the duty of elected officials to debate and approve spending before [any] money is actually committed or spent.

Given that part, I'm hoping that I can see, in fact, the minister put forward . . .

Dr. Morton: Read the rest of it.

Mr. Bonko: Oh, I could read the rest of it. Sure. "Moreover, I would [like to] implement fixed budget dates to ensure further [sustainability] and transparency in the budgeting process and promote greater government effectiveness and efficiency." But you did get the highest mark. I will give you that one. You did get the highest mark on that one. I'm waiting to see when that part comes, that you're going to put forward that budget.

Getting to this one here, you're asking for a large portion of this for emergency funding except for the \$4.6 million, which is for higher than budgeted costs of salary settlements for the provincial employees, so I can see where that one's coming in.

3:30

You're also asking for a million dollars to prevent the spread of chronic wasting disease. Well, we can talk about that one. We've been raising this one in the Legislature House for about two years now. In fact, the former member who was the ag critic there was saying that there were no documented cases of chronic wasting disease, but now over a couple of years in fact there are, and it's becoming more concerning as the months go by. The deer population, in fact, has increased. That's why we're having the occasional cull out there, but I don't think that's doing the job.

The root cause of the chronic wasting disease is the game farming. At what point is a ministry and a minister going to look seriously at dissolving and eliminating the practice of game farming, period, from Alberta's landscapes? At one point they were considered to be a profitable pyramid scheme, which a lot of members perhaps got in on, but also for the elk velvet. No longer can that be said. The elk velvet has gone into the tank as well as the industry for the animal game farming.

So that's one question: at what point is a minister going to in fact eliminate the game ranching, game farming, whatever you want to call it, from Alberta's landscape? Pay the individuals off, allow them to get out. Right now there's no money in it, from what I've heard. A lot of these individuals say that they just can't make a buck anymore against it. It's compounded along with the beef industry. They're competing directly. In fact, they're having a tough time making a go of it right now with the increase in the dollar as well as the onslaught of other diseases going on out there. So that would be the first question.

The other one. A hundred and forty-seven million dollars for the following emergency assistance: \$117 million, it says, to provide emergency assistance for fighting fires as a result of the high wildfire hazard levels and the fire activity in some parts of Alberta's forest protection area. That I can see. I'm not sure if it's going to be up to a \$117 million. You know, I guess that's yet to be seen. But we right now have an unseasonably dry fall and perhaps winter, which will be a devastatingly dry spring and summer.

If we're being proactive there – you know what? – hats off to you. I'll give credit where credit is due. If we can prevent the fires before they happen, fantastic. But sometimes that does get us into trouble because we do a good job at preserving the forest, and it allows us to have the old stands that we do, which leads us into the other problem that we have been talking about. In fact, it came up in question period today with regard to what B.C. did with the hands-off approach and let nature take its course. Well, I've been on the record as saying that that, in fact, was not the best action to take. They should have nipped it in the bud early and taken care of it. In fact, it allowed it to spread, and we've seen the devastation which B.C. has had with regard to the pine beetle. Unfortunately, it has wreaked havoc on the entire industry out there and ravaged thousands and thousands of hectares.

So \$30 million here we're talking about to continue to survey the ground and control operations to fight the mountain pine beetle infestation. That's fine. I'm just wondering, you know, how much of that money, the \$50 million during the summertime, has been used up? Are we an additional \$30 million on top of the \$50 million, or are my figures not correct on that? I'm just curious. It seems like an awfully high cost.

I'm not sure how much cut and burn is going to be in here as a prescribed method, or is it just a matter of monitoring still? Because

at one point last year we had about 98 per cent effective kill in the northern part of the province, but around the Kananaskis area it was still maybe about 50 per cent, which isn't good enough. I'm just wondering: what area is this concentrated \$30 million going to be going towards?

I've had a couple of questions in there. I'll give the minister a chance to respond, and we'll be able to get up and ask him some more then.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The additional supplementary estimate that we're requesting, a total of \$152.6 million, breaks down as follows: \$4.6 million is for increases in government salaries as a result of the budget agreement, \$117 million is for wildfire – that represents, actually, the first- and second-quarter request – \$30 million for mountain pine beetle, and \$1 million for chronic wasting disease. If you sum those, you'll get \$152.6 million.

The hon. member is correct that the majority of this, the forest fire and mountain pine beetle, comes out of the emergency fund and is thus ongoing contingent expenditures, if I understood correctly. I urge support for both of those efforts. So I appreciate that. I particularly appreciate the member's comment that he agrees that the let-nature-take-its-way approach, that some of the communities in British Columbia adopted 10 years ago, was ill advised and has resulted in the type of forestry loss to pine beetle that has occurred since then. I've indicated in the answers earlier today that that's not what Alberta is going to do, not what this government is going to do.

If you'd like some detail on the chronic wasting disease – you didn't get to chronic wasting disease yet.

Mr. Bonko: No. I did touch on it briefly, but I didn't get to any of the details as to the million dollars.

Dr. Morton: Okay, we'll hold off on that.

You asked for some details on the fires. Relatively speaking, this was a slightly better year in terms of actual fires. We saw a total of 1,228 fires through to September 30, 2007, with a total of 103,325 hectares burnt to the end of September 2007. As you're probably aware, we imposed a fire ban in southern and central Alberta, a fire ban in mid-July and then an area closure on August 1 in southwestern Alberta. That was not lifted until mid-September. That was onerous on a number of operators and also recreationists, but it did succeed in preventing any major fires in that area.

The fire risk level during that period, in August and September, was actually significantly higher than the fire risk factor down at Lost Creek in 2003, the last really devastating fire we had, so it was the appropriate thing to do. Unfortunately, it cost us a lot of money even without the fire. We had to bring in, again, as a preemptive measure two CL 415 turbine air tankers we borrowed from Quebec. We borrowed them; we had to pay for them. Those were expensive items. We had additional overtime manpower costs in order to police the fire ban and then the forestry closure. Those contributed to greater costs.

On the pine beetle side we're continuing both our detection and control activities, level 1 and level 2. We're also working with municipalities to assist in the removal of infected trees on private lands, which I know the hon. members are aware of. There was no repeat of the devastating 2006 overflight from British Columbia this year. That's good news. The number of newly infected trees dropped from several million to several hundred thousand. Several hundred thousand is still a lot, but it's nothing in the realm of several million. We feel that a combination of our proactive policies in

western central and northwest Alberta is succeeding along with, of course, the cold weather we had a year ago. But we are concerned in the southwest corner, particularly both the Crowsnest Pass and the Kananaskis/Bow River area, that the risk there is high. The number of infected trees, while small in number, quantitatively, did represent a proportional increase, whereas we had a proportional decrease in the north. So we're shifting some of our control and removal activities into those areas.

I think I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair.

3:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, again. I was just hoping, again, for the minister to give some clarification. I did ask specifically on the chronic wasting disease and the \$1 million, so an opinion as to where the ministry is going on this. Are they in fact planning on just doing more culls – because that's a lot of money, a million dollars – or are we trying to eradicate, eliminate, and pay out the farmers eventually with regard to the game farming, which, again, as I said, is one of the root causes of the chronic wasting disease? I would like to be able to have an opinion as to where he plans to take the ministry with that and what the money is going to.

As we're getting into winter right now and we're talking about the \$117 million and the pine beetle, \$30 million, at any point in time are you going to do any of the prescribed burns? I know we're doing the monitoring, cutting, and burning, but at what point are we going to allow some areas to be burnt?

I know there's a fine line there. As long as it isn't going to in fact injure anybody, it isn't going to cause any property damage, if it's out and about in the middle of nowhere, I think at one point we'd be able to go out on a limb and say: "You know what? It's a risk that we're willing to take to prevent and have that buffer zone. Just in case we are able to have that flyover from B.C., we do have those areas where we thinned out." Now, the logging companies might say: "Well, you know what? That's not a good use of the resources. That's an area that we'd be able to in fact log." But, you know, if it's already susceptible to the beetle, are we burning or are we logging it, then?

These are just a couple of the specifics that I'd like the minister to answer. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On the chronic wasting disease control program I can report that as a result of the culling that we did last winter, there were 14 new cases of chronic wasting disease identified out of the deer. This brings it to a total of 29 to date. The concentration of the new areas appears to be in two specific areas near the Saskatchewan border, the Empress area and Chauvin-Edgerton. So we certainly intend to continue with the cull operation in the coming winter.

One change we've made is that, partly as a matter of economy but partly also as a matter of opportunity for hunters, we are trying to increase the number of deer that are taken by hunting and by Alberta hunters rather than by the actual cull operation itself. We've extended the season to include 50 days. That's for the general. Landowner season has been extended to 82 days. The licence has been reduced to a \$9 cost as compared to \$33 for a normal. The licence entitles you to three deer, whereas a normal licence, of course, is just for one animal. I think that covers that.

As far as the game farming goes, there's no consensus in the scientific community linking chronic wasting disease with game

farming. The jury is still out on that. Most, indeed all, of the identified cases of CWD to date are on the Saskatchewan border. Of course, there are many game farms that are much further west than that, and there's no indication of chronic wasting disease in those areas. In answer to his question there, we're not intending to eliminate game farms.

With respect to his question about prescribed burns, those will continue to be part of, if you like, the mixed approach or multi-pronged approach to pine beetle. Most of the prescribed burns are done in areas adjacent to the national parks, Banff and Jasper, because the policy in the national parks is to not cut. So we work in conjunction. All the managers of the national parks recognize the threat of pine beetles, particularly where there are already infected areas. They're willing to co-operate, but they prefer to co-operate using the burn. Burn has a place in the overall pine beetle control operation, and there will be additional burns this winter when the conditions are right. A number of the burns that we had hoped to do in the spring and fall were postponed because fire conditions were not right. So there are several on the books. If the member is interested, I'll provide specific information by memo as to when and where to expect those.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the supplementary estimates here this afternoon. There's quite, I guess, a bit of a mixed bag of things that I have identified in looking at this document. I will try to of course stick clearly to the supplementary supply side of things on this occasion and also stick to the ministers that I think are here to maybe give me a hand with this.

The first interesting number that I just wanted to highlight is actually in the Executive Council section, but perhaps the minister for the Treasury Board could help me with that. I just noticed that there is a line item here for \$325,000 for strategic communications. I was wanting to know two things, I guess, Mr. Chair. First of all, what was the price of the Premier's 20-minute television address that he had recently on Alberta television? Did this number of \$325,000 sort of correspond to the cost of paying for that 20-minute television address? I noticed it was very high quality, high production. It looked like they'd used film stock and whatnot. So I'm just wondering: (a) what was the cost of that 20-minute television address; and (b) the \$325,000 for strategic communications, is that the corresponding number that you required to add to the Executive Council budget?

Also in regard to, probably, the Treasury Board, I noticed that in the municipal affairs budget there's \$9 million more for rent supplements that is required for this program. As you would know, Mr. Chair and members of the House, there's been a lot of criticism around this rent supplement program. I think it's problematic in the most basic sort of logical way, that you are throwing good money after a problem that's not tenable, where of course landlords are increasing their rents. There's a range of reasons why rents are going up so quickly in Alberta. Then there's a supplement program to try to cover the balance.

So number one, of course, that rent supplement budget is not large enough to cover the many thousands of people that would require that assistance, if that's in fact the logical way to solve this problem, which it's not. Number two, you would never be able to build that big of a budget to actually make this function. If I could add a third criticism of this, it's that as you continue to add supplements to an inflating market for rents, you risk the possibility of actually adding to the problem. By adding those extra dollars into the system, it

creates a systemic problem for rent increases. In fact, landlords can watch this and increase their rents accordingly if they know that there's government money that might bring in the rest to make up that amount that they choose to increase their rent by. So on just so many levels it's not a logical way to deal with what I believe is a regulatory problem, right?

We either use funding in this Legislature to deliver public programs, or we use regulation to deliver public programs. In this case with an emergency situation in the rental market across Alberta it's far more reasonable and entirely logical to use regulation to deal with this problem. I can say with confidence that this is, in fact, a massive waste of money when we could put in temporary rent regulations that would stabilize the situation and allow us to get back to a degree of normalcy for thousands of Albertans with rent problems right now. I think that stands out as a huge, huge problem that needs to be dealt with.

3:50

Looking specifically to some other ministries in this supplementary supply estimate, well, globally it's worthwhile pointing out that we appreciate the fact that \$825 million is being delivered to the heritage trust fund. It's very, very important that we save for the future, and to see this being enacted is a good step in the right direction. It's avoiding the temptation to spend all of the extra funding and surplus that we have available to us. Rather, saving, I think, is a much more prudent thing to do.

However, certainly in different ministries in different parts of our society in Alberta right now there are emerging situations that we have to deal with probably more immediately than just waiting for the next budget year. The first one that comes to my mind is the crisis that is taking place in the cow-calf industry across the province. Myself, I'm not a farmer or a cow-calf operator, but certainly in my family we have a long tradition of doing so, and I've been monitoring this, of course, as a critic. Quite frankly, I don't think it's ever been this bad in terms of pricing and expenses for cow-calf producers in the province of Alberta. This is an emerging problem that is unfolding by the day and by the week, and it certainly requires attention in this fiscal year. We lose whole operations and herds every week. People are losing their farms and a lifetime of work on these farms, again, by the week.

There's a basket of problems associated with this, Mr. Chair, that we simply have to deal with immediately. For our larger society losing that capacity to produce food inside the province of Alberta I think is a potential crisis. Losing a lifetime of work to build up the herds, especially with family farms, is again a crisis that is not tenable to deal with. [interjection] Sorry?

The Chair: Hon. member, there's no supplementary estimate in agriculture.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. That's right.

An Hon. Member: There is no supplementary estimate.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, but I think that the absence of spending on this in the supplementary is what I'm saying – right? – that the agriculture budget requires . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, we're debating the supplementary estimates that have been presented here.

An Hon. Member: He's talking about what's not there.

Mr. Eggen: It's in the absence, right? [interjection] Well, yeah,

I'm trying to help you out, right? I mean, it's fair enough. Okay. The point is taken. I'm sure that the minister is aware of the situation. The immediacy of the problem is something that we have to deal with.

In terms of the K to 12 education budget, then, we . . . [interjections] There he is. There we go. See? I'm willing to accommodate my audience here.

An Hon. Member: They're still listening; that's good.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Oh, they're listening, all right. Yeah. Absolutely.

It's interesting to see that there's \$97 million for capital maintenance and recovery. I guess I need clarification on that issue, more specifically for my own edification, as to where that is going and if that's an ongoing additional expense that we need to incur. Of course, we have a serious infrastructure deficit in schools, and it's been a long time coming for maintenance that has been deferred over the years. It's made for, I guess, sometimes a situation where you can't even begin to repair; you simply have to demolish and start again. So I'm curious to know about that.

Considering that we're going to be building quite a number of schools here with the new plan of using private/public partnerships, Mr. Chair, I think it's very problematic. It has a lot of sort of unanswered questions about that. The one that's come to me straight off with that from two constituents of mine is the government sort of quietly stopping funding for cafeteria infrastructure building in the province of Alberta. Of the constituents that I spoke to, the one lady has a PhD in nutrition. Her child is going to Victoria school in downtown Edmonton. The parents and parent council and a lot of people in that area are very concerned that there's no longer capital funding for cafeterias. So considering our focus on nutrition and health and preventative medicine, preventative procedures and lifestyle, I think that, you know, I would certainly like to see this policy reconsidered. Or at least perhaps the minister can give us some explanation as to why that has been dropped from the policy for building new schools in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Chair, I think I'm going to sit down. Perhaps I can get some answers to those questions. I appreciate the opportunity. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The supplementary estimate for Executive Council, as the hon. member would be aware, was for the salary settlements and had precious little to do with anything else.

For municipal affairs I'm not exactly sure whether his statement about the \$9 million meant he didn't support rent supplements, and then he said that we should make it more for rent supplements. So I think that, obviously, they do know where the money is going; they might just not agree with it being there. Certainly, the money has been accounted for in supplementary estimates.

Mr. Eggen: I was saying that, categorically, it's not a tenable thing to continue with. Certainly, the emergency that has been created and the necessity of people to try to access some rent supplement is appreciated. It was a very sort of ad hoc program that I noticed was at first difficult to access, and then it sort of disappeared into the ether. So I'm suggesting that, categorically, it's not the way to deal with the problem we have at hand.

I do apologize. I just didn't quite catch what that \$325,000 for

strategic communications was for. Maybe I missed it. But if you could repeat that for me, I would be honoured.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: The Executive Council dollars were to pay the budgeted salary settlements for the provincial employees.

I'm still not exactly sure. Does that mean you don't want rent supplements or you do want rent supplements?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you. I'd just like to make a couple of comments because there were some questions and comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Caldor. Both the Member for St. Albert and the Member for Edmonton-Caldor had sort of indicated without saying so that somehow there was some clandestine effort here to not divulge where all this money went, this \$97 million in modernization projects. Well, I could take the time of the House to read the news release, read the list of all of the projects, if we so chose. I'm happy to table the document. It's already public. But if the members would so choose, I'm happy to stand here for 10 minutes and read it all out.

4:00

The member also made a comment relative to: he'd be curious to know what additional expenses we're going to incur as a result of this maintenance project. Well, I would venture to say, Mr. Chairman, that these 17 modernization projects will actually save us money because we're actually now going to have newer facilities with newer, updated lighting and everything else rather than a bunch of old buildings that cost a lot of money to heat. Rather than additional expenses – I'm not sure what he's referring to – there would be, I would believe, savings on behalf of the school boards.

Finally, he made mention of stopping cafeteria funding. The Department of Education has never funded cafeterias as part of the capital cost. Cafeterias have always been paid for, if school boards desired, as part of a project, that it would fund in addition. Cafeterias have never been part of provincial government capital funding, to my knowledge.

That's it. Thank you, sir.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I would just like to congratulate all hon. members on your third anniversary in this Legislature, here in the happiest place on Earth. It's also, coincidentally, the third time we've had supplementary spending estimates, three times in three years, at least for us anyway. So three straight years.

We do have a few questions here on Advanced Education and Technology, which I'm sure the minister will be able to handle handily. I was looking back in the history books here, and the last three years we've had supplementary spending in advanced education for substantial sums every year: in '05-06, \$99 million; in '06-07 we had \$107 million, I think; and now, \$145 million. [interjections] I'm letting secrets out, am I?

I have to compliment the minister. The minister knows the keys to the Treasury Branch vault, apparently. He knows the keys to the vault.

Mr. Strang: The combination.

Mr. Tougas: It's a combination, is it? Fine.

We do have some questions, though. There are only three major

items here, and I would like to get some explanation from the minister about them. In particular, we have \$30 million to the U of A to upgrade its district utility system. This clearly needs a little bit of explanation. I'm wondering if it's one of these matters, deferred maintenance that's sort of built up over time, or is it some sort of serious problem? It sounds like the whole system is going to crash if you need \$30 million at one time. If he could expand upon exactly why the \$30 million is needed at this stage.

Four million dollars for Keyano College to provide a monthly allowance to employees in Fort McMurray: I understand what that's all about. It's pretty well straightforward.

Then we also have \$111 million for capital maintenance and renewal projects, as was announced on August 22. It took a lot of looking around to find the announcement about what that was all about. I couldn't find it on the advanced education website. It took quite a lot of looking to find that. I'm wondering why, instead of just actually having that, we had to go looking for press releases, why it wasn't actually listed in this document. This is a problem that has come up frequently over the last several years, that we have one-line mentions of \$100 million expenditures. I think it wouldn't take too much effort to add a little bit more explanation in these documents. I understand it's for a variety of capital maintenance and renewal projects. Maybe there were too many to list. That's a possibility. Perhaps the minister could expand upon that, please.

If he could just fill us in on some of these problems, then maybe I might have some more questions afterwards.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would congratulate all the members on their anniversary of the third year of being honoured to serve in this illustrious House.

In answer to some of the questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the \$30 million for the University of Alberta district utility system is actually to augment a total system upgrade to meet the requirements of the Edmonton clinic and the Cross Cancer expansion and other areas around the campus. It's their power plant for the entire campus. This brings it totally up to capacity, to ensure that when we open the Edmonton clinic and we open those other buildings – we're doing a lot on construction over at the U of A – they'll actually have the utility requirements met by the plant. So that was the \$30 million.

Of course, the \$4 million grant to Keyano College is obvious. It's for the allowance for Fort McMurray.

The remaining \$111 million was for capital maintenance and renewal projects at various postsecondary institutions. The hon. member mentioned that there are probably too many to list. He's pretty close to being accurate on that one because what we tried to do was hit every one of the top priorities as far as capital deferred maintenance that the institutions had given us. Certainly, the ones that came out as their top priorities were the ones that we wanted to hit first, things like \$13 million for the safety system upgrades at the University of Lethbridge, \$2.2 million for fire alarm security system upgrades at Lethbridge College. We did eight different postsecondary roof replacements, that totalled around \$32 million. In total, Mr. Chairman, these deferred maintenance items were as requested by the postsecondaries, numerous ones around the province.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The \$30 million for the U of A: is this not something that was known about for some time? I mean, would this not be something that you'd see

in previous budgets, or was it something that came up later when they said: you know, "This whole system is going to crash if we don't get this infusion of money in a big hurry?" It sounds like something that would have been in the works for many years, and why we need to go off budget to get the money for this is interesting to me. If you could explain that a little bit.

Some of the other ones: the hundred million dollars. Again, are these the result of years where there wasn't enough money put into the system and now we're playing catch-up, or are these predominantly newer projects intended to fill in the gaps that have existed previously?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Chairman, there's no secret to the fact that there are a number of deferred maintenance issues within the capital that we have built up over the province. When you have institutions that are closing in on a hundred years old, you're going to have some issues around when you start to build brand new beside it. Is the plant and equipment that is on-site going to be capable of handling that type of expansion? If it's not, do you replace it, or do you augment it, or do you change it?

In the case of the University of Alberta, we're talking about close to probably a billion-dollar project in the Edmonton clinic going in. You have the interdisciplinary sciences building going in, you have expansion projects in the engineering field, you have expansion projects on a number of the different faculties at the U of A, all of which are dependent upon the power plant that the U of A has had there for some time.

In fact, by doing the project costs for the utility system that we're talking about, it's actually probably going to be a total cost of around \$89 million when you add it all up. But that utility system has proven to be very cost-effective for the university, so why would we replace it? We want to expand it so that it can handle the newer infrastructure that's coming on stream. We believe that we're probably looking at potential savings with the plant and equipment there of close to \$22 million once the Edmonton clinic is up and operational.

In terms of some of the other projects, Mr. Chairman, obviously around the province there are various issues related to institutions that have been there for quite some time. We've done a lot of expansion in the system as well as this deferred maintenance. All we're talking about here is the deferred maintenance.

Mr. Tougas: One more question on Keyano College. If you could just expand on that a little bit. Is this just also catch-up, or is this setting a precedent for increasing salaries for people elsewhere? Can you expand on that a little bit, please?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Chairman, that's the result of the negotiations around the province as it relates to allowances for northern Alberta. We want to maintain a competitive position for our institutions in the north and thus gave them the authorization to move forward with that grant so that they could augment those faculty and staff up there just as other government employees are getting the same type of allowance.

4:10

Mr. R. Miller: Just further to that, if I could, Mr. Chairman. Every time that I visit Grande Prairie – and I was up there again just recently – I hear this question from public service employees and educators and whatnot in the Grande Prairie region, arguing that they face the same pressures and the same challenges that residents of Fort McMurray do, yet they don't get the northern allowance that the minister just spoke of. I'm wondering if he would address the situation, for instance for Grande Prairie College, if he would

consider offering the same sort of benefit to the people that work at Grande Prairie College.

The Chair: The Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, it's probably not really a part of the discussion of supplementary estimates at this point in time to be discussing what might or might not be happening in other areas of the province, but obviously there's a difference in the cost of housing between Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie, and I know the hon. member knows that. There are also differences in the cost of living that are related to Fort McMurray as it relates to Grande Prairie. We are always looking at ways and means that we can encourage the postsecondary system to be more accessible, affordable, and, of course, of a high-quality calibre, and that's simply all that we're doing here.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to participate in the supplementary supply question-and-answer period. I have two ministers that I am responsible for. The hon. President of the Treasury Board actually happens to be the Minister of Service Alberta, and I have one or two questions for him. I also have a few questions for my hon. colleague who is the Solicitor General.

I'll start with Service Alberta because in this supplementary supply we're being asked to approve \$4 million, and I have two questions. The first one is with respect to consumer awareness and advocacy. I know the hon. minister remembers back in the spring, when we were talking about Bill 202, the Consumer Advocate Act. I made the argument then that consumers need a voice and that they need a representative voice, somebody to advocate on their behalf, somebody to defend their interests. The hon. minister back then argued that we have the mechanisms in place to adequately and sufficiently do this. I'm just wondering, you know, where this \$435,000 is going to be spent and if he can give us a brief update as to what was done with the \$20 million that we approved in the spring in the regular budget, not in sup supply.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, you know, we've pointed it out, and I know it would be probably beneficial, like the Minister of Education said, to someday sit down with the hon. members and talk about the budget as it goes along and are programs working or not working, but supplementary estimates are simply to be voted on money that has been reallocated within government to a pressure. In this case for Service Alberta we have nearly 2,000 employees, and with the settlement that was reached with AUPE, this was the money required to fund those settlements. Really, today, with all due respect, I'm only going to talk about what's in the supplementary estimates.

Mr. Elsalhy: Actually, I should have maybe quoted which section I am referring to. On page 63 of supplementary estimates, which is the ministry's own page, section 2.2.1 talks about \$435,000 more, as in supplementary supply, as in money that wasn't in the budget in the spring, as in money that is being spent outside of the regular budget on consumer awareness and advocacy. I know about the AUPE settlement. That was not the question. I am asking about consumer advocacy and awareness and where this money was going to be spent.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, where it's being spent is on the staff.

We have a huge department of consumer awareness and advocacy and the many different departments, and that is salary, staff benefits.

Mr. Elsalhy: Okay. So I'll take the minister's answer as indicating that anything from section 1 all the way to section 4.0.3 is being spent on staff. I'll accept that answer.

Then I'll move on to my bigger department, if you will, Mr. Chairman, which is the department of Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. I appreciate the fact that the minister is here, and I thank him for the effort to address some of the questions. The hon. Minister of Service Alberta has moved over so that the line of communication would be direct. You know, he doesn't want to intercept any of my questioning, which is okay.

The Minister of Public Security is asking the Assembly to approve \$9.45 million. I know that some members agree without even checking the details. I'm going to maybe focus my questions on three or four areas. The first one is crime prevention. I'm going to reference the section again for the benefit of the minister: page 67, section 2.2.1. He's only asking for \$11,000. While I'm always an advocate of not spending anything outside of the regular budget, I notice that other areas, other arms of his ministry, are getting a lot more money where, in fact, crime prevention should be highlighted, especially, Mr. Chairman, in light of the international crime reduction conference that both the minister and myself attended in Banff about a month ago and then also in light of the recent announcement from the government with respect to the safer communities task force.

Mr. R. Miller: That would be the announcement that had no dollars attached to it.

Mr. Elsalhy: And that would be the announcement, as I was reminded by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford, that had no money whatsoever indicated in its documents. You know, we had a press release. We also had a background document. It told us about what the government's response was to the recommendations of the task force, but nowhere in these documents and actually nowhere in the media event was there any talk about money except when the Premier was challenged and some reporter asked him: well, how much exactly are you allocating? And he came up with that number of \$470 million over three years.

So my question is that \$11,000 doesn't seem like much if we're really serious about crime prevention. I'll start with that to get the ball rolling.

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. To answer the hon. member's question, we pride ourselves in trying to stay within our budget, so \$11,000 is not a lot.

In regard to the comments on the task force recommendations we do plan on implementing I think it was 29 of those 31 recommendations. Again, as I had indicated earlier in this House, stay tuned because those are going to be items that we will be discussing in our next year's budget.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The second question I have is on the next page, which is page 68, talking about gaming research. Now, we have had report after report that indicates that gambling in Alberta is out of control, and we've had report after report that indicates that gambling itself is a social ill and that it

leads to the breaking up of families, it leads to people losing their money, it leads to people committing suicide, and so on. However, there's also research that indicates something that I refer to as a comorbidity, which means a coexistence of other ills, a coexistence of the tendency or the propensity for gambling itself to lead to other crime, as in theft, as in domestic violence, as in even murder or assault, and so on and so forth.

Now, I was really, really surprised that there isn't even a cent that is allocated in this sup supply to gaming research, regardless of the fact that Alberta is now the highest gambling jurisdiction in North America. We're really rivalling places like Nevada now. If you look at the initial amount, which was only \$1.6 million in the spring, we argued back then that was hardly enough, and now we have nothing more to actually alleviate that concern, nothing more to address that concern because the government doesn't think that there is an issue with gambling in this province. I think they're addicted to that revenue. They like the fact that in this second-quarter budget update we're making \$60 million more from gambling, and gambling is the second-highest source of income for this provincial government after oil and gas.

It comes as no surprise to me that they're not interested in collecting that type of research because if they do, maybe we will find out about it, and maybe we will hold them accountable. To the Solicitor General again: why the lack of interest in research that might give you a clearer picture about the gambling situation in this province?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you again, Mr. Chairman. Just to be clear, we're here to be talking about supplementary appropriation. Under this particular question around gaming research, again, we pride ourselves with staying within the budget.

4:20

The Alberta Gaming Research Institute is a recipient of this grant. They do a number of research projects every year that are passed on to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. For the hon. member's information, I recently met with the chair of the Gaming Research Institute, and they are actually meeting this week with the AGLC to ensure that the research they do is applicable to the challenge that we see facing gaming in our province today. We are serious about those who do not participate in that recreation activity for that purpose but get addicted. We take that very seriously.

We have, as the hon. member knows, a whole number of programs that are in place, that we're putting in place to ensure that those with problems have every opportunity to have them addressed. Again, it's an indication that we take seriously that we want to stay on budget. In this particular case the research institute is putting those monies to good use.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll now switch to something that is being spent. I'm going to start by talking about the remand centres. We all know that the Edmonton Remand Centre is in really, really bad shape. We were promised in the spring that the new remand centre was going to be constructed and that the government already owned the land and the site was chosen and that we are progressing and moving forward.

You remember, Mr. Chairman, that earlier in this fall session, on November 6, I actually asked the minister what seemed to be the problem. Why the delay? I then also asked about why all of a sudden the estimate for the amount of money it would take to

construct and complete the Edmonton Remand Centre, the new one, more than doubled. It was actually more than 101 per cent extra. We got some answers from the minister that indicated that this kind of stuff happens. When challenged, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation struggled to come up with an answer where basically he indicated that the contract is being reviewed, and the contractor is in negotiations with the subcontractors. Well, I don't think we can wait any longer. We need to start construction, and we need to finish it as quickly as we can.

Now, in this sup supply, the minister is requesting \$3.1 million, and that is on page 67, Adult Remand and Correctional Centres, section 3.2.1. So \$3.1 million. How much of this money, hon. minister, is going to the existing crumbling, deteriorating, and decaying Edmonton Remand Centre? How much of this money is going to be spent on that cost overrun for the construction of the new one? How much of this money might find its way to the Calgary Remand Centre?

The Chair: Okay. Hon. member, we're not talking about infrastructure. That's not part of the supplementary estimates.

Mr. Elsalhy: With all due respect, Mr. Chairman, there is a line in the sup supply that talks about remand centres. This money is going to the remand centre. I want to know where it's going and what it's going to be spent on. That's a valid concern.

The Chair: Hon. minister, respond if you wish.

Mr. Lindsay: I'd like the hon. member to clarify for me what page of the estimates he's looking at.

Mr. Elsalhy: I started by saying page 67.

Mr. Lindsay: The supplementary estimates that he's talking about, Mr. Chairman, are because of salaries. They actually don't have anything to do with the new remand centre. But just to answer the question as he indicated regarding the existing remand centre, we are doing some improvements to that centre because we're obviously going to be needing it for a number of years until the new one is built. So there is some money in capital that's being used there.

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Chairman, this is quite interesting, actually, because it seems like the stock . . . [interjection] Oh, the Minister of Education is also equally upset. I don't know why.

It seems like, Mr. Chairman, we're being asked here in this Assembly to approve \$1.5 billion in extra spending that is happening outside of budget.

An Hon. Member: Then ask about it.

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, that's what we are doing. I'm asking about \$3.1 million, and the stock answer now is that it's going to staff salaries.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I have to read you something from page 67, a footnote. The footnote says: "Adjusted Gross Amount reflects the transfer of \$5,500,000 for infrastructure planning purposes from Infrastructure and Transportation, pursuant to the Appropriation Act, 2007, section 5(4)(a)." This particular footnote is telling everybody who takes the time to read it that, basically, not everything on here is for staff salaries. It is telling us that some of the money is going to be allocated towards infrastructure projects. My question was: how much money from this \$3.1 million extra that the minister is trying to approve is going to be finding its way to the new Edmonton Remand Centre, what percentage is going to make its way to the old

Edmonton Remand Centre, and what percentage is going to make it to Calgary?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Chairman, maybe I can clarify. There's none of the \$3.14 million going to the new remand centre. Let me explain. The \$9.4 million: \$6.3 million of that pertains to higher than budgeted salary settlements. The \$3.1 million is for enhanced policing agreements. To elaborate on that, as allocated under section 22(1) of the Police Act the ministry has entered into numerous agreements with communities that require enhanced levels of policing. The costs of these enhanced policing agreements were billed to the ministry by the RCMP; however, we recover 100 per cent of these costs from communities. However, on direction from the Alberta Treasury Board we needed to change how we account for these reimbursements. Previously they were recorded on a net basis. Now these reimbursements are recorded to reflect both the revenue and gross expenses. Therefore, the operating budget needs to be increased accordingly to show the changes in accounting.

Mr. Elsalhy: I appreciate the answer. I mean, the minister had the opportunity to actually give this at the beginning instead of the push back, instead of raising their hands and shaking their heads and looking at us as if we don't know what we're doing.

You know, Mr. Chairman, the amount of scrutiny that we allocate and award to something like this is really minimal, and we have to use this opportunity to ask those questions. This is money that was not in the budget. This is the first opportunity we get to ask questions about this extra money. For them to want us to assume that all of this money is for staff salary and for staff salary settlements I think is inaccurate and I think is deviating from the norm. This is not the first time we've discussed supplementary supply. This is not the first time some of these ministers were on the front bench and answered these kinds of questions. I'm just curious why this, you know, hesitancy to share the answers with us.

Now, moving on to sheriffs. Provincial policing, as the minister indicated, is receiving an infusion of money, a shot in the arm. The sheriffs' branch seems to be getting a lot of money. I'm referring to page 67, section 2.3. Protection services is getting some money, security operations, traffic safety, investigative support, and warrant apprehension. Now, the minister might say that, yes, this is all for staff salaries – and I am going to accept this answer – but I'm comparing this to the overall expenditure. The supplementary request for the sheriffs' branch totals \$1.4 million, while provincial policing overall is \$3.2 million. If I do the math correctly, Mr. Chairman, that's about 30 per cent.

I know that initially the argument from the government was that sheriffs were going to save taxpayers money and that they were going to do very targeted and focused work. We were complaining that maybe our payments to the RCMP were, you know, huge or exaggerated and that sheriffs for their targeted and focused mandate were going to save us money. Now we're led to believe that, first of all, the difference is not that big. It's about \$4,500 or \$5,000 at most between what a sheriff costs the taxpayer and what an RCMP officer costs the taxpayer. That margin, that difference, is actually narrowing and shrinking, especially today when we're actually spending all this money on the sheriffs' department. My question to the minister is: what exactly was missed in the spring budget that we're now trying to catch up? Does he feel comfortable with a 30 per cent cut? Is this maybe indicative of things to come next spring in the budget, that sheriffs are going to occupy 30 per cent of that picture, that they're going to take up 30 per cent of that funding allocation?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, first of all, Mr. Chairman, to set the record straight, just so that the hon. member understands, when we talk

about sheriffs, we're not only talking about highway sheriffs; we're also talking about the 400 of them that are involved in prisoner transfers, court security. We also have a number of specialty units who are assisting police now in regard to warrant apprehension, surveillance units, and investigative work inside corrections. So, again, as I alluded to before, those dollars are for higher than expected salary settlements, and that's where that money is going.

4:30

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not disputing that sheriffs do good work for the mandate that they're given. Recently it was brought to my attention, though, that sheriffs have been reclassified. Their pay scale has been adjusted whereas people like corrections officers in our jails and remands, people like Legislature security, people like courtroom security have not. My question to the minister today in light of this sup supply and the \$1.4 million extra for the sheriffs' department collectively: why were these other, equally important arms of law enforcement left out? Why were they ignored? And are they, too, going to be reclassified or moved up the pay scale?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Chairman, first of all, let me point out to the hon. member that we respect the services of all government employees. You can't be comparing apples to oranges. In regard to sheriffs and corrections officers there are different levels of responsibility, different levels of training. They add different value to the government. Again, I want to reiterate that we appreciate the services of all our employees. It's also interesting that the new agreement was approved by not only the corrections officers and the sheriffs, so we believe there's fair compensation there.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One last thing. I'm looking at the ministry support services, and on page 67, if I may add, section 1.0.5 talks about information technology. We're only adding \$41,000 there. That's not a huge expense. I'm not necessarily opposed, but I wanted to know how that fits with information gathering and intelligence gathering and the integrated electronic system that the minister was talking about back in the spring.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, \$41,000 under information technology is just an indication of salary increases for the people who are employed there doing great work for us and justified and very necessary.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Now back to the Minister of Service Alberta if he switches his other hat and is now the Provincial Treasurer. On page 12 of the second-quarter fiscal update I just have to seek clarification. If I'm reading it right, for the first six months ended September 30, 2007, it shows that income taxes and other taxes are going up, transfers from the government of Canada are coming down, nonrenewable resource revenue is coming down, and then premiums, fees, and licences are going up. The flip side is in terms of expense. The other things were revenue. Expense is going up by at least \$938 million, so almost a billion. We're comparing the first six months in this budget to the same period in the previous budget. If I look at both curves,

expenses are going up; revenues are coming down. I think that if this trend continues, at one point we might be hitting a deficit, or we might be venturing into deficit territory. I want to seek the reassurance of the President of the Treasury Board as to what he's doing or what cabinet is discussing to avoid taking the province into a deficit situation. That's page 12.

Mr. Snelgrove: Once again, Mr. Chairman, it would be a very exciting discussion. We have it in here virtually every day about what we're doing to try and promote a balanced, diversified economy with different revenue streams, whether it's corporate tax, personal tax, the stability of a more appropriate royalty structure. Obviously, we've talked about the proceeds from responsible gaming, licences, and fees. We obviously want more transfers from Ottawa because we're paying such a disproportionate share to the rest of the country. So, of course, we're working on all of those to try and maintain a balanced portfolio if we could, less dependent on resources and more dependent on a diversified, value-added economy.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to start the clock because we know that it's a million and a half dollars every minute that we're debating, a million and a half dollars every minute. We'll just see how long I can talk and how much money we approve at a million and a half dollars a minute. Let me just begin by saying that I'm not proud of that fact, quite frankly. I remember the very first time I rose in this House to speak to a budget, and I said that the numbers made my head spin. Three years later my head still spins. A million and a half dollars a minute.

Mr. Chairman, as was pointed out by my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark, this is not the first time that we've had the opportunity in my three years here, three years today – and I would echo my colleague's comments. Congratulations to those of us who are celebrating a third-year anniversary. I suppose all of us in here today are celebrating an anniversary of one sort or another. It's not the first time in the three years that we've stood to debate supplementary supply, and I don't believe it's only the third time. I am quite sure it's probably the fourth or fifth or sixth time already that we've debated supplementary supply, because we usually end up with two of these every year.

I went back and I looked at my comments from the spring, the last time we debated supplementary supply. I indicated at that time, Mr. Chairman, that I was hopeful that that would be the last time that we would stand in this House and debate supplementary supply. The Finance minister had actually made a comment when he was first asked to handle the Finance portfolio, and his comment was – and I'm paraphrasing – something to the effect that he was hoping to bring in a surplus policy that would see an end to in-year off-budget spending. Of course, you'll know that that's something that as the shadow Minister of Finance I've been calling for for three years now.

I was hopeful that the Finance minister would have enough influence in the cabinet and in the government that we might actually not have been here today debating supplementary supply, but as we learned yesterday, when I was discussing resource revenue savings policy, the Premier doesn't always take the advice of his Finance minister. Clearly, he didn't take the Finance minister's advice when it comes to supplementary spending either.

So here we are today with a billion and a half dollars being asked for. We're only – let's see; this is the end of November – seven

months postbudget, and we're already spending a billion and a half dollars above what the budget was. I'm going to guess, Mr. Chairman, that by the time this House sits again in February, there may well be another supplementary spending bill in front of us. I think the President of the Treasury Board should be ashamed that this continues to happen with a government that claims to be more fiscally responsible than the previous administration was. Yet it isn't wholly backed up. I will say that there is less in the way of operational spending being asked for here than we have seen in the past. So I think that maybe with the help of the Official Opposition and groups such as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation we are slowly edging them forward in terms of eliminating this practice. But clearly – clearly – we have a lot of work to do.

I'd like to begin with a couple of generic questions for the President of the Treasury. I would like to ask the President of the Treasury Board how he can assure us that these supplementary supply amounts will actually help the departments to meet their stated performance measures. In other words, is this going to be the last time? Are we going to be back here in February, debating even further supplementary supply estimates because the money that we're giving the various departments today still doesn't manage to get them to where they need to be in terms of meeting their performance measures? So that's the first question I would have for the President of the Treasury Board.

Obviously, this is a question we ask every time. Why did the budget that was passed in April in this House not have sufficient money included in the various places for these departments so that we wouldn't be here? Most of the things that are being asked for in here were perfectly predictable, and it completely defies the purpose of supplementary supply as far as I'm concerned.

4:40

I know, for example, that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development agrees with me because of his comments that were read into the record earlier today from the survey that went out from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. The minister, Mr. Chairman, indicated at that time that he believes that this process that we're doing today is undemocratic. He says that it must be stopped now, and I agree with him. So here we are once again with a number of expenditures that are being undertaken. Some have already been undertaken, and the money has been spent without having come to this House first. That is undemocratic, as the Sustainable Resource Development minister pointed out. I think it's worse than undemocratic; it's just plain wrong.

My second question to the President of the Treasury Board, as I said and I reiterate, is: how do we know that by giving this money today, we're going to avoid the need for further supplementary amounts? Has the government established any sort of benchmarks or outcome measurements to determine that, in fact, when we give supplementary supply, it does meet its intended goals? I suppose the cynic in me might wonder once again whether or not this is not just a political move by the government to intentionally lowball their budgets, and then they can announce more program spending throughout the year. In this case it's capital expenditures, but it's the same idea, Mr. Chairman.

Those would sort of be the general questions for the President of the Treasury Board.

Now I get to talk about my favourite subject, and that is the heritage savings trust fund. The Department of Finance is asking for \$825,000 to allocate to the heritage savings trust fund. As the Minister of Education pointed out earlier in the afternoon, the Official Opposition is supportive of the fact that we're putting money into the heritage savings trust fund. You will never see this member stand here and complain about money going into the

heritage savings trust fund. I'm very pleased to see that that's happening. My displeasure, however, as is well known, comes with the fact that we do not have a savings plan for the heritage savings trust fund. What we have is a surplus plan. The two are very different. It might be too fine a point for some members opposite, Mr. Chairman, to understand, but the two are very different.

The Alberta Liberals had a surplus plan three years ago. Three years ago today we went through a provincial election with a very well received surplus plan that allocated surplus dollars and defined exactly where those dollars would go. We recognized, however, particularly in a time of economic boom with unprecedented oil and gas revenues coming into this province, that a surplus savings plan was simply not good enough. It did not accomplish what this province desperately needs; that is, a strategic effort to remove us from the continued boom and bust cycle that we've experienced for so many years and get us past the point where we're so terribly reliant on oil and gas revenues.

We took our surplus plan and turned it into a savings plan whereby 30 per cent of all oil and gas nonrenewable resource revenues would automatically go into savings. Automatically, not wait until the end of the year and see if there's money left over, not wait until the second-quarter update and find out that there is extra money and then you put some of it away but a little bit of self-discipline, a little bit of commitment on the part of the government to say: we're going to save some of this money for later. That has not happened.

So as happy as I am that we're putting \$825,000 in there, I'm displeased that three years on despite the fact that there are many members on the other side who I know personally support the idea – I've read some of the names into the record yesterday; there are others as well – despite the fact that we have a lot of support on that side of the House for a savings plan, we've yet to have one. Interestingly enough, when you go back and you look through the leadership candidates in the PC leadership race last year, all but one of those candidates supported the idea of a savings plan for nonrenewable resource revenue. Unfortunately – and I mean this sincerely – for the province of Alberta the one candidate that didn't support a savings plan is the one who ended up leading the party.

Without any question the Premier of the province has a certain amount of influence over his cabinet members and his caucus members. We now have a person at the helm who does not believe in a savings plan, didn't support a savings plan specifically during the leadership race. Therefore, despite the fact that a lot of the members over there believe we should be saving money for the future, we have a government that is not committed to doing so.

An Hon. Member: We are.

Mr. R. Miller: No, you're not. You're not committed to taking money off the top and saving it, and that's the problem.

I'm happy that you're taking some of the surprise surplus and putting it aside. That's good. Let's get real about this. Let's get serious about this. Let's start paying attention to chambers of commerce and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and everybody else out there who's saying that this is something that we should be doing. It's not good enough to wait until there's a surplus and take part of it. It's time to get serious about this.

The other thing, of course, that drives me crazy is the fact that we continue to have a law on the books that dictates that every single penny of revenue generated by the heritage savings trust fund after administration fees are paid and after it's inflation-proofed – and let me point out once again that it was the Official Opposition that called for years and years and years to inflation-proof the fund, and it was finally done two years ago – gets transferred into general

revenue. Then it's only through the largesse of this government that we take some of that money and put it back into the heritage savings trust fund. So the money that we're putting back into the fund, Mr. Chairman, is in fact the same money that was generated by that fund, that was earned by that fund, that was raided out of that fund and put into general revenue.

Now, because the government wants to look good, they want to appear as if they're actually making an effort, they take some of that money, not even all of it – budget documents indicate that about \$1.4 billion will be earned by the fund this year – and they put it back into the fund. Good for them. I'm happy. But I called it a shell game the other day, and I'll do it again. It really is nothing more than a shell game because what you're doing is you're putting a cup over it, you're moving it around, and you're hoping people aren't paying too much attention. Then you say: oh, look, we're going to put \$825 million into the heritage savings trust fund. That's good. As I say, it's good, but it's not good enough.

I think I'll give the President of the Treasury Board an opportunity to respond to my specific questions in terms of the general practice of supplementary supply spending. Then I hope he might also wish to comment on the idea of a savings plan and how desperately I and others believe we need one.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm surprised because the hon. member has consistently been, I would consider, someone who is a fiscally responsible person in the House with his questions and consistently supported a controlled in-year spending saving. When we come back with a supplementary estimate, he knows and all members in the House know that this is not about spending: \$825 million of it is going into savings, exactly what he asks for.

Then he tries to make that something bad, that in the middle of the year we're here telling Albertans we've been able to put another \$825 million into the heritage savings fund. They've got to make a big statement: you're spending a million and a half dollars a minute. We're putting that in the bank. When you talk about \$1.5 billion, you take \$825 million out, and put it in the bank; you take \$408 million out, and you put it into projects that they ask for every day in here to move forward our maintenance programs, to help out with affordable and renewables for housing and things. Of the money, \$200 million, firstly, is into emergencies and things like the pine beetle and forest fires that have to be addressed.

So we come in with the second-quarter supplementary estimates, which is an accounting procedure. We have to tell Albertans where the money is. We're \$77 million lower than at first quarter, and we're \$53 million lower in spending than we budgeted. Yet a question that I would have expected him to ask is: what about the \$15 million in nonbudgetary disbursements? Where's that going?

Well, we're not just into savings; we're into investment. We have started the process to set up AIMCO, which will invest Alberta's dollars into the long-term future for this province. It's good to use your money wisely. It's good to have it available to put into investments. But to simply say to Albertans, "Well, we're going to save it" – you know, a lot of people say when they're gone: boy, I wish I'd spent a little instead of putting it all in the bank. We're saying: let's invest it. Let's take what we can and reinvest in Alberta and in other areas that will provide long-term return to us. So the \$15 million, which I'm sure he would get to as he went through, is basically a loan, an interest-bearing loan to the AIMCO corporation to set up for us to look at if we can better use all of the dollars from the many, many different funds, including the heritage fund, to reinvest.

4:50

But I have to go back because the hon. member brought it up, Mr. Chairman, about his commitment to put 30 per cent of our resource revenue into the bank. Effectively, this year if they had done that, that would have shut the departments off: Children's Services; Employment, Immigration and Industry; Energy; Environment; Executive Council; Finance; Justice; Municipal Affairs and Housing; and/or Service Alberta or the Solicitor General, whoever you wanted. That \$4 billion would have been gone, and those departments or other ones – that would have just wiped out Education except for a little bit or shut down a third of health care. That's an option you have if you want to live under a number that's arbitrary. Let's take a third of something – we don't know what it is – and tell people that we'll put it in the bank. Here are the consequences of saying that's what I would do. Those departments: Solicitor General – I'd shut him down because I like my job – Municipal Affairs, Justice, Finance, Executive Council, Environment, Energy, Employment, Immigration and Industry, and Children's Services.

Albertans expect that when we live in a province like ours, that has been as bust as that, we do provide. We probably provide far more services to people than I personally believe in. I'm more cold-hearted than most people in Alberta. I still believe in the old adage: you get out and work. Get a kick in the butt and do it. That's where I come from. But average Albertans are saying that there has to be a compassionate part of our society, and this government has addressed that, and it's the balance. The Premier talks about the balance.

So you can't pick an arbitrary number and say that one-third will go and tell people somehow in a responsible way that that was doable or even appropriate. Those are the departments that would have been shut down if you'd take it, or mix and match, but that's \$4 billion worth of spending that you would have had to come up with if you were going to put it in the bank to save it for some future. And the future without those departments in Alberta, Mr. Chairman, would be very bleak.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Yes, it'll be as much fun as the time the Minister of Education was in Lethbridge. I happened to be in the city at the same time, and I turned on the evening news, and there's the Minister of Education holding on for dear life. His speaking notes were already in Montana. That looked to be a lot of fun. His feet were just touching the ground; the breeze was that stiff. I just looked at him. His hair was straight back, and I just figured his speaking notes were in Montana.

Now, the first thing that I would like to ask for regarding supplementary supply estimates: on page 6 under Notes is a series of Treasury Board minutes. They are designated here, any number in 2007, but the details surrounding these Treasury Board minutes – yesterday, after this document was tabled, I thought I would go to the Legislature Library and get these minutes. I assumed, Mr. Chairman, that they were publicly available. We all know – we are told – that there has been a new page turned in the history of Alberta, and we now have an open, transparent, accountable government.

Mrs. Ady: And we do.

Mr. MacDonald: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw is assuring me that we do, and I'm really glad to hear that.

So I'm wondering if it's possible if the President of the Treasury

Board could tell me where in the library downstairs I can find these Treasury Board minutes, whether they're publicly available not only to myself but to the taxpayers of Alberta. Certainly, when we look at some of these minutes and the expenses that are associated with them, it would be very interesting to see how these sums were finalized and the rationale behind them, whether it's for Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture; Justice; Health and Wellness; Education; Agriculture and Food; or Service Alberta.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

You know, there are two here, Treasury Board minutes, for over \$6 million for Service Alberta. The hon. minister in charge of Service Alberta – I'm certain that Steve West would have provided that information to the public. You know, you're following in Mr. West's footsteps from that constituency. [interjection] If you don't, I'm not saying that we're going to phone Mr. West and ask him to take you to the political woodshed or anything like that. But I would be really interested to get those documents and read them on my own time, outlining the reasons why this money was available.

Now, what I did find down there in the library was a series of Treasury Board directives.

Mr. Liepert: You've got time to do that.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Yesterday.

Some of the Treasury Board directives are interesting, particularly the credit card policy directive that's dated the 16th of May, 2007. Initially I thought these directives were the Treasury Board minutes, but they were not. You know, I can see why with the lax, loose manner in which credit cards were being administered by this government, there would be some tightening of the rules, but there are some exemptions. The Legislative Assembly offices are exempt, and also (b) "entities exempted by regulation from sections 37 and 38 of the Financial Administration Act." This is the sort of information, Mr. Chairman, that is available but not the details that I expected. I must say that I'm disappointed, but hopefully these Treasury Board minutes will be provided forthwith in the course of the debate.

Now, going through the details of the supplementary supply budget line by line, I certainly would be interested to know more about the \$30 million to the University of Alberta to upgrade its district utility system. If I could have some more details on that, I would be grateful. With our tight electricity supplies it's reassuring to notice that on occasion the University of Alberta's power plant is supplying electricity to the grid here in Alberta.

An Hon. Member: Deregulation.

Mr. MacDonald: Deregulation. Yes, hon. member. With deregulation the university is like a lot of other outfits, supplying electricity into a very tight market. If any of that money is being used to help out that power plant, I'm just curious about that.

Now, on the next page, Mr. Chairman, we are looking at apprenticeship delivery here. From the total gross amount of \$30 million to the amount of \$22 million: if I could have an explanation for that, with the credit or recovery of \$8 million, I would be grateful on that question.

Certainly, other people have talked about the supplementary amounts regarding staff recruitment and retention initiatives, whether it's in Fort McMurray or whether it's in contracted agencies around Edmonton. I know it's an issue that we have heard at the constituency office. I'm sure that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has had people come to her office with passionate pleas for

more money so that not-for-profits can retain their staff, particularly to look after Albertans that cannot look after themselves. There is some money in here for that, and I think that's a wise use of public expenditures at this time.

5:00

Mr. Chairman, we're also, as I say, looking at 11 and a half million dollars for school boards in Fort McMurray to facilitate this. Again, the basic education programs – and this will be on page 22, hon. minister – there seems to be a change in the credit or recovery here of \$42 million. If I could have an explanation for this, I would appreciate that.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Now, we go on here to some of the immigration policies under Employment, Immigration and Industry. Earlier in question period today we had an opportunity to talk about the former Energy minister Murray Smith and the speech that he delivered in Austin, Texas. I don't know if after he delivered the speech he went to Austin city limits or not. It's hard to say. At the end of his speech in Austin a little over a year ago Mr. Smith talked about the labour market mobility and how we need to continue to tell people how important labour market mobility is. Mr. Smith is putting a rather passionate pitch in here for anyone who is interested to come to the "naturally air-conditioned comfort of Fort McMurray as opposed to this oppressive, humid environment of Austin." Those are the words of the former Minister of Energy in his recruitment drive. He's talking about the temporary foreign worker program and how that may meet some of the needs here.

However, with this budget estimate here, when we're looking at the immigration policy support and the additional \$200,000 here, is that enough to meet the need? There is confusion among those who have temporary foreign worker visas, many of whom do not read or write the English language. Certainly, they're intimidated by their employers. The visa itself restricts and limits them to only that employer. Is this additional amount for the immigration policy support program being used to give advice or show support to those temporary foreign workers who may feel that they need more information about working in Alberta, whether it's information about the Workers' Compensation Board or about their rights under the Employment Standards Code or their rights under the Alberta human rights and citizenship act, or any of those questions that they might have? If I could get some advice from the minister on that, I would be very grateful.

The \$400,000 for workplace health and safety regional services: is that being used to hire additional OH and S inspectors, or is it just to top off the salaries of the ones that are currently employed? Certainly, we just have the one line item on that.

Now we get to the Energy department. I'm pleased to see that there is \$2.1 million going to resource development and management revenue collection. I was astonished, as were a lot of other Albertans, to realize that for a period last year, in the previous fiscal year, we only had one – one – auditor working for a significant portion of 2006 in the production audit group. I believe this was the production audit group that's associated with the EUB. There seems to have been a fire put under the feet of the minister, so to speak, and we have six individuals in there now. Historically I think there were 14 in that production audit group.

When we look at this \$2 million amount to begin implementation of Alberta's new royalty framework, it tells me that we're finally getting started on trying to get some sort of control back into that department. Now, I'm surprised that the government thinks that \$2 million is enough in this case. Perhaps they could take money from

other sources and allocate it to the Department of Energy. I'm sure we could cut the communications budget; we could cut the travel budget of other areas. In fact, last year the travel and communications budget for the government was \$159 million. For 2007 it is anticipated to be about the same, a million dollars more: \$160 million. There's a lot of money there. Maybe we should reduce our travel and communications budget and dedicate the savings to the Department of Energy.

When we look at implementing Alberta's new royalty framework, what we're really saying is that we've got to fix up the messes that have been identified not only in Mr. Hunter's report but also in the Auditor General's report. I don't know which report, Mr. Chairman, to start on. Certainly, Energy's royalty review systems, audits and recommendations, volume 1 from the Auditor General, Mr. Fred Dunn, for 2006-07 I think is a suitable place to start. Now, is this kind of money enough? I don't think so. Whenever we look at this report, we only have to read some parts of it to realize: what a mess; what mismanagement. The current Minister of Energy has a lot of work to do over there. His dilemma reminds me of a political speech I heard recently where a member of the federal House of Commons was commenting upon some of the Conservative cabinet ministers, and he said this: he's the worst minister since the last one.

An Hon. Member: Would you say that again, please?

Mr. MacDonald: He's the worst one since the last one.

I heard this at a political dinner, and it was in reference to a federal Conservative cabinet minister and his predecessor. I think it was the Foreign Affairs minister, to be precise, Mr. Chairman. Yes, I must admit that I thought of this government.

Now, let's have a look at this, Mr. Chairman, the Auditor General's report. In here he writes:

Since at least the year 2000, the Department identified significant changes in Alberta's oil and gas industry and analyzed their impact on the province's royalty regimes. In general, Departmental staff have produced quality analysis. During this period, the Department has adjusted aspects of its royalty regimes.

It was slow in coming, but the Alberta royalty tax credit was eventually phased out. It's currently a work in progress, but it was a program that cost us over \$7 billion in the last 25 fiscal years.

5:10

An Hon. Member: Twenty-five?

Mr. MacDonald: Twenty-five. Yes. I didn't go back any further in public accounts. I was going to go back to whenever it started, hon. member, but I just decided that 25 years was enough.

Mr. Snelgrove: That's enough. Good. That's enough to have a good vision of the past.

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah. But it's \$7 billion. Again, to the hon. minister in charge of Service Alberta, I would remind him that if he is not a student of history – and he says he's not – he's going to repeat the mistakes of these past Tory regimes.

Mr. R. Miller: Just look what's happening in Ottawa right now.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Isn't that an interesting observation by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

I can understand why the Conservatives are reluctant to talk about the past after what is being rolled out on the front pages of the *Globe and Mail* and other daily newspapers across the country. I can understand why this government doesn't want to have anyone look

at its record. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, if I'm being distracted by the government members over there.

The Department of Energy "has identified critical issues that have not yet been addressed publicly." Now, this \$2 million is a start on fixing this problem. But the Auditor states:

The Department estimates that it could collect an additional \$1 billion or more per year without stifling industry profitability. However, neither this information nor the reasons why changes have not taken place have been made public.

I wonder if the \$2 million is going to be used to get together a series of royalty reports that the government will not release and send them over to myself and to Sean Kochan from the research staff so we can read them over on our own time.

The Auditor states that readers of his report will ask . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

The Chair: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We'll start where the hon. member started but work through the irrelevant parts, though. The Treasury Board minute is the legal minute required for departments to transfer money either from department to department or to move from an allocated expenditure of, say, capital to another one. So that's the legal requirement to do it.

Mr. Chairman, there would be absolutely no point in trying to verify the numbers with the hon. member because his questions and his actions in here – the truth would just get in the way of all he does. There is really no point. He can make the numbers up much better than the truth, so we won't try and verify the numbers.

Ms Blakeman: Don't let him just get you annoyed. Come on, give him a challenge.

Mr. Snelgrove: No. I give up. Our colleague in the back says regularly: the truth will set you free. He's got a life sentence, I'm telling you.

His question about the central heating at the university was already asked by the hon. member from the third party. It's in fact being put together to try and maintain and keep up to the huge – huge – and appropriate growth at the University hospital here in Edmonton, giving Edmonton, if not the best, certainly one of the best facilities in the world. Albertans want that, Mr. Chairman. They want to have that University hospital, the research that goes with it, the new clinic that's being built, the Cross institute. It's fantastic that they're able to locate there and provide virtually to all Albertans, to a lot of the world, the opportunity to teach and to heal and to look after them. So I know the hon. member would support the expansion and the upgrade of the central heating plant and also because of the sound financial sense it makes.

Then, Mr. Chairman, we got into questions from the hon. member that had nothing to do with the supplementary estimates, but we appreciate his colourful way to appeal to our benches here about his flavour for immigration policies and the advanced ed issues and the questions around subjects that have no relevance whatsoever to the supplementary estimates. We all know his ability to look backwards into Energy and to use hindsight and to use his best attempt at whatever number he wants to pull out of the hat today, whether it's \$7 billion or \$25 billion or \$150 billion. We just wish him luck in keeping track of his birthdays, and that's about it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today.

I'll have a couple of questions, and I'll be brief. One will be to the Minister of Education and one to the Solicitor General.

First off, I'd like to, you know, commend the government for showing restraint this time in supply in a way that I think is very encouraging to the budgetary process and how we look at the budgetary process in the running of our province of Alberta. Of course, there are going to be supplementary items that are involved with things that cannot be controlled, that are beyond the control of the government. Certainly, the government is not going to control wildfires, not going to control flooding, not going to control the way the pine beetle and all the rest of that happens. Certainly, I think the provincial employees in all of the departments' estimates are quite happy to get an increase in their wages that'll be voted in these estimates.

Now, just a question to the Minister of Education. I see on page 21 under School Facilities, the infrastructure spending, there is something over \$97 million there, and it's actually quite welcome by many of the schools that are receiving this funding. In the P3 approach that we're seeing coming around, some of that maintenance will be taken up, and my question would be: would we be avoiding that maintenance cost down the road in future supplementary estimates by the P3 approach and by the ability to have that put over onto a long-term contract where the maintenance would be taken care of?

A second question would be to the Solicitor General, and that would be regarding the sheriffs' branch. I'm not exactly sure where the Legislative Assembly sheriffs come into play in this, but I was just wondering if as a part of the supplementary estimates there is any increased cost from the change from having commissionaires to sheriffs – and I understand we're going to be phasing out the commissionaires pretty much in the near future – and if the use of sheriffs is an increased cost or if there is some other reason for that.

Those are all the questions I have, Mr. Chairman, and that concludes my comments.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to respond briefly to the Member for Edmonton-Manning. I would not want the Member for Edmonton-Manning to confuse modernization with maintenance. In most cases the \$97 million went towards modernization. As an example, in Camrose the \$10 million for the Battle River regional division at the Camrose composite high school was to put the third of three phases of their industrial arts, their heavy equipment training into the composite high school. It's something that has been on the capital plan for quite a number of years, and that's clearly addition to capital.

5:20

In most of the other cases I know, as in the case in Innisfree, that I mentioned earlier – the Innisfree school is kind of a compilation of a whole bunch of additions over years. Due to declining enrollments the school is larger than it needs to be for the number of kids they've got there today. So their project was really to bulldoze down about three-quarters of the school, keep the gym and a couple of newer classrooms, and add a smaller part to the school. That ended up being I think it was about \$4 million or \$5 million.

There were a whole bunch of different kinds of projects, but when we move into the P3 process and we talk about maintenance, we're talking primarily about things like roofs and the changing of boilers. The maintenance there would not be what it was in most of these cases, which was really modernization, maybe bulldozing down part of the school, building part of it back up. As I say, in the case of Camrose it was additions onto their industrial arts area. Each one was a little bit different, but by and large I don't think we could consider the kinds of expenditures that we made, the kinds of

investments we made in August to be taken up in the future by the maintenance component of the P3 project.

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member asked a pertinent question. First of all, let me say that the change from reducing some of our commissionaires on-site to sheriffs is not reflected in the supplementary. On a yearly basis it's going to increase our spending there by about \$100,000, but we have that within the existing budget. Let me comment on why we're doing that. We had a comprehensive security review to determine that we required an increased level of security both in the Legislature and on the grounds. As a result some of the commissionaires will gradually be replaced by sheriffs. The sheriffs have the proper training, and they have the authority to ensure a better level of protection for the public, for the staff, and for MLAs.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much for a second opportunity to be able to question the government on its financial decisions and policies and what's there and what's not there. I'm hearing that if you get people riled up enough, they get up and read from their briefing notes, so you get real answers. So I'll do my very best, Mr. Chairman, to get them riled up so that I'll get real answers.

What I tend to do around this is actually do a feedback loop with my constituents about what they think we need to see in supplementary supply and/or other comments that they have around funding from the government. I have a number of different areas that were raised by my constituents, and energy, not surprisingly, was raised a number of times. The specific issues that were raised around energy – and I did go through and try and cross-check to see if anything they were asking about was in here, but frankly some of it is a bit vague, and I can't tell if it's here or not. These debates are about what's in there and what's not in there and why the government made those decisions.

To the Minister of Energy. A concern about peaking oil, the oil and gas resources starting to decline and what the government is doing. His questions are: how will we heat our homes, grow and transport our food, the need to implement renewable energy? Under the Department of Energy I am seeing salary costs and the implementation of the new royalty framework. Under that does any money flow to alternative energy sources? That is essentially my question.

Another Energy question. Actually, several people, including Ryan Warden and also David Smith, asked me about not caving in on the royalty structure. Now, I know the government members feel strongly that they didn't cave in on the royalty structure that came from the Royalty Review Panel, but if we could get more details. If this has already been asked, my apologies. I did step out briefly. I'll take it in writing, then, on what the money is to implement the new royalty framework. There's money going into a number of different votes under the Department of Energy: ministry support, \$25,000; \$3.2 million into resource development and management. How does that all shake down, and what are we doing with new sources of energy?

The other Energy question that I had were concerns that were raised around Bill 46, so I'll raise those at a different time.

Mr. MacDonald: No. Go ahead.

Ms Blakeman: Well, you know, that is an interesting thing. With

Bill 46 and around the money for that, was there a strategy behind that to save money?

Mr. MacDonald: It cost \$500 an hour. It must have come to more money.

Ms Blakeman: I'll let my colleague ask you the questions about the \$500-an-hour guy. I'm more interested in the strategy around Bill 46.

Was that partly to save money for the Department of Energy? My understanding was that they weren't actually paying for any of the payment of lawyers and intervenor status, so I'm not sure. Can the minister tell me if there is a link between the Department of Energy budget and trying to save money with the policies that are being implemented in Bill 46?

Under Environment, for the Environment minister, a number of issues have been raised: water quality, and does the province have any piece in putting fluoride in the water? What we have is \$2.5 million requested to provide for a higher than budgeted cost of salary settlements for provincial employees. Okay. Then there are a bunch of different areas where people are getting raises, but it doesn't look like there's any money going into any kind of water quality stuff. The other issues are around the environment and environmental practices with the oil sands and putting pressure on industry to clean up their act, to pressure industry to do that: they need our resources, and if they're good corporate citizens, then they will want to do that.

Air quality. That was the other question. Is anything being done specifically around air quality, particularly when you look at what's being anticipated in Upgrader Alley? Are any special initiatives being expected under that?

The next area is municipal and the questions there. Now, in going through this, I see \$148,700,000 for mostly disaster recovery and flooding: extensive flooding, rain and snowstorm damage, again flooding, groundwater seepage, overland flooding. Okay. It's all flooding. Then \$100 million to municipalities to increase the supply of affordable housing. The issues that have been raised with me around that: homelessness. When I spoke earlier, I was talking about the subsidies that are available for people on AISH. This money that is going out to these municipalities is not likely to actually create any more rental units for us or affordable housing units for us. A hundred million dollars isn't going to go very far when it's spread out amongst all of these municipalities. What other longer range policies does the government have in mind for this? I heard the minister speak about increasing a thousand units or something, but then she wasn't able to back that up with how that was actually going to happen and how new units were going to be created. I'm looking for additional information on that.

5:30

Now, the eviction prevention fund: that's gone over budget. There is an additional \$6.6 million that is being put into that fund, but really this is just subsidizing private landlords. At this point we've now got a system where private landlords can charge whatever they want, and the government will then fund some low-income person to make up the difference in the rent by getting money out of this prevention fund month by month by month and paying it to landlords. I don't understand. How is this the free market? If it's okay to interfere and subsidize landlords directly, why isn't that marketplace interference when putting a temporary rent cap somehow is a terrible interference in the marketplace? You guys seem to agree with marketplace management occasionally but not frequently and sort of pick and choose when you're going to do this.

Mr. MacDonald: Why don't you give an example of that?

Ms Blakeman: Well, I just gave an example of that where we're subsidizing landlords, but we're not actually creating any tangible new rental units, and we're not subsidizing in some cases, like people on AISH. They're going in the hole between \$300 and \$500 a month, and that's not being paid for out of the homeless and eviction prevention fund.

Then we have \$2.7 million to Alberta Social Housing Corporation for maintenance and renewal work on health and safety issues in three housing projects in Shaganappi Village in Calgary. Now, that's interesting. That's quite specific. Why is that such a specific project? I don't see anything comparable that's happening in, say, Edmonton or Lethbridge or Fort McMurray. I wonder whose constituency that is. Okay. So I had people raise issues both around affordable housing and around homelessness.

Finally, education. Issues were raised around teachers' pay, which I found very interesting. They felt teachers weren't paid enough. I thought the Minister of Education would enjoy that. Yeah. The money here is going to a monthly allowance for employees in Fort McMurray, which will be part of that initiative that the government had that was specific to Fort McMurray.

Higher than budgeted cost of salary settlements: now, that's interesting. How come the government can manage to come through with \$1.6 million for higher than budgeted cost of salary settlements for provincial employees, but they can't manage to do that to the health regions when they settle on a nurses' contract settlement? That was the question I asked in question period today. How come there's an inconsistency in government policy around that? Maybe the President of the Treasury Board can explain that one for me.

The last two ministries to go. Health again, and the minister can supply written answers to me on that one. Drug affordability. We still have a number of people that don't get Blue Cross coverage through their workplace, nor can they afford to do it themselves if they're working low income. So drug affordability has become a huge issue. Also those sort of newer drugs where you can get them on a compassionate program for a period of time. Doctors are prescribing them to people. They're not okayed by the expert drug committee, so now people are out of pocket by significant amounts. There's nothing in here about that. Where can we expect to see some movement on that? Also about funding for coverage of midwifery.

Finally, when I look at page 73 under the culture and recreation portfolio, once again, it's referring to that really generic media release from August 22, which really doesn't tell us what is happening in a given area. I'm wondering if the minister can explain. There's \$26.7 million for additional capital maintenance and renewal of provincial parks and protected areas. Which ones, please? If you could give us the details of what location, what is being done, that would be helpful. I don't know why there's this hide-and-seek. These budget debates would go significantly faster if the government would just provide us with the information.

You know what, Mr. Chairman? They could print it in the book. When I go back and look at the budget documents that used to be given out in the Assembly, you know, prior to 1993, there was information in them. You could actually tell. When there was a lump sum, it was broken down. You could tell exactly where it was going, what program it was supporting.

Earlier in the day I asked the minister of health which programs, which contractors through AADAC were actually getting this money. Well, we get nothing. So I can't tell if the money's going into smoking cessation or youth drinking issues or drug treatment for crystal meth. None of that information is given in the documents,

nor is it given when I ask the question, you know, in the Assembly. This would go faster if we just had the information. It's not that difficult. It really would. I can pretty much guarantee that.

There is \$5 million to complete projects at the Canmore Nordic Centre and at various centennial interpretive centres. Once again, where are the various centennial interpretative centres? What are they? Where are they? How much? Break it down and give us some details on this stuff.

Mr. R. Miller: The minister is here. Maybe he'd get up and tell us.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, the minister is here. Excellent. Okay.

I do note that in 2005 in a supplementary supply budget the Canmore Nordic Centre was given \$2.97 million. So here we are getting – well, I don't know how much out of that \$5 million is going to the Canmore Nordic Centre. They don't break it out between the Canmore Nordic Centre and the various centennial interpretative centres. But that's very interesting. Two years ago they got almost \$3 million. Now they're getting – what? – another \$3 million. I guess my question is: if this is a project that's worth doing, why isn't it in the budget? Why do we keep seeing this Canmore Nordic Centre, as an example, come up and get money only out of surplus money? I find that a really interesting choice.

Again, if we could get the detailed information under the expense and equipment/inventory purchases section for a breakdown of the \$2.5 million that is requested to support additional capital maintenance and renewal of provincial parks and protected areas as was announced on the 22nd of August but no detailed information was given at that time.

You know, if I go into the detailed vote, it just says: parks, \$1.5 million. That doesn't tell us anything. Under equipment/inventory purchases it says: parks. It doesn't tell us where, why, who, what's being done. Nothing. So I'm happy to get that information. Yeah, I'd like to get some information, please. It would just be so much easier if I could get it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Associate Minister of Affordable Housing and Urban Development.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to make a brief comment. The question was, I think, regarding the issue of rent supplement and the direct rent supplement program. The housing management bodies throughout our province do administer that program. It's a program that's working well. It's been in place for a number of years. We have enhanced it with additional dollars. As you know, the housing assistance represents the difference between the market rents and 30 per cent of a household's income.

I know that your view is that it's subsidizing landlords. My view is completely different. My view is that when you have – and I've met many, many people, you know, over the past number of months who have truly appreciated this program because if they didn't have the program in place, they would not be able to stay in a home that they've been in for some time, whether that be an apartment or a condo or a dwelling.

Ms Blakeman: I didn't say they didn't appreciate it.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, that's what I heard. That's what I heard.

The other thing, Mr. Chairman, is that today the referral was to a thousand apartments through the Calgary Apartment Association. I had referred to the Calgary Apartment Association making those apartments available for individuals of low income, that would be

assisted through the Calgary Housing Company with a rental subsidy. It's not that we are going out and building a thousand apartments as a government but more that the Calgary Apartment Association has made them available for low-income people. It was that clarification I wanted to make.

Thank you.

5:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm hoping that we have enough time. Is it till 6, or is it till quarter to?

The Chair: Quarter to.

Mr. Bonko: Well, then, I'll do my best to make the time that I have . . .

An Hon. Member: Profitable.

Mr. Bonko: Yes. I'd like to talk on a couple of the ministries, one of which was just up there: the Associate Minister of Affordable Housing and Urban Development. The budget here says that it's \$148,700,000. I'm trying to remember with all the numbers that are being tossed around. In the budget it says \$100,400,000 for municipalities to increase the supply of affordable housing. I'm looking to have maybe a bit of a breakdown as to how much of that's going to be allocated to Edmonton and Calgary specifically, those that house or don't house the amount of people out there. I recognize that the homeless count through the summer, obviously, is going to change, but can you give me some sort of a number as to how much of that \$100,400,000 is going to be directly for Edmonton and Calgary specifically?

We talk about \$9 million for the rent supplement program. The Member for Edmonton-Centre somewhat alluded to it as well. I'm just wondering, you know, what would have been better: to go with the rent cap, the rent freeze, the temporary rent controls, or with this? Have we done, maybe, a comparison to see what would have cost less? We know that we're already over budget with regard to the emergency funding and the rent supplements versus just capping the whole thing. As we say, right now we're subsidizing the landlords. Well, I don't see the whole difference in the other one.

The homeless and eviction prevent fund. Now, I've had a couple of constituents that we have taken down there. This fund hasn't worked for them. In fact, they didn't get the funding that they needed. You go to the office here in Edmonton, and it's absolutely astonishing to see the amount of people that are lying there, that are hoping to get in. It's almost like the passport office, but these guys are hoping to keep their home, not be able to go to another place for a couple of weeks. They're hoping to keep their home. The need in that office is unbelievable. It just seems to be a nonstop revolving door. The need is there. I'm hoping this fund is going to continue because it doesn't look like there's going to be any end to that one. So that is what I wanted to specifically ask on Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The other one was Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. There's \$34,224,000. Again, the Member for Edmonton-Centre asked about it. It specifically talks about the amount that's going to be going into particular parks. Well, I didn't see exactly which parks are going to be spoken about. I'm a person that actually is able to get out and around and do some camping. I don't do the hotel thing. I don't drag the trailer. I do the tent. [interjection] That's right. I do the roughing stuff. When you go to these parks,

they're falling seriously behind what they were, say, 20 years ago. I haven't even got to the fees. They don't even justify being able to camp there, what you get for the \$25. You've got to pay for the wood in some cases, or there is no wood.

But the amount of parks that are in disrepair is just outrageous. I don't care where you go. It does not compare to what we get in British Columbia. I'm going, you know, apples to apples. It's a big difference there. They do in fact put their money into the parks because they realize it is a big tourist draw. We have the mountains. People want to come and see them, but they want to sit in squalor. A perfect example is up in Banff.

Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2007-08 General Revenue Fund

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, but pursuant to Standing Order 62(2) and Government Motion 33, agreed to on November 21, 2007, I must now put the following question. Those members in favour of each of the resolutions not yet voted upon relating to the 2007-08 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: Those opposed, please say no.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Chair: The motion is carried.

Pursuant to Standing Order 62(2) the Committee of Supply will now rise and report.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows.

All resolutions relating to the 2007-2008 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund have been approved.

Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$145,100,000.

Children's Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$10,000,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$110,400,000.

Employment, Immigration and Industry: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$5,600,000.

Energy: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$3,250,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,500,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$575,000.

Finance: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$825,000,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$54,650,000.

Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$9,585,000.

Municipal Affairs and Housing: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$148,700,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$15,000,000.

Service Alberta: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$4,000,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$9,454,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$152,600,000.

Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,500,000; capital investment, \$31,724,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I think I speak for everyone on how much we've enjoyed this afternoon here together, but I would now move that the Assembly adjourn until Monday, November 26, at 1 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 5:48 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, November 26, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/26

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, and welcome.

I would ask members to remain standing after prayers so that we may pay tribute to a former colleague who has passed away in the last few days.

Let us pray. As we commence proceedings today in this Assembly, we ask for divine guidance so that our words and deeds may bring to all people of this great province hope, prosperity, and a vision for the future. Amen.

Mr. Dallas Wilbur Schmidt August 9, 1922, to November 22, 2007

The Speaker: On Thursday, November 22, 2007, Dallas Wilbur Schmidt, DFC and Bar, passed away.

Mr. Schmidt was first elected in the election held March 1975 and served until 1982. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Wetaskiwin-Leduc for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Mr. Schmidt served as a cabinet minister without portfolio from April 3, 1975, to August 29, 1976, associate minister for energy and natural resources responsible for public lands from August 30, 1976, through to March 22, 1979, and as minister of agriculture from March 23, 1979, to November 18, 1982. Mr. Schmidt served on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, Standing Committee on Public Affairs, and the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing.

Mr. Schmidt was a distinguished veteran of World War II, having served with the Royal Air Force with No. 227 Squadron from 1940 to 1945 and from 1951 to 1956. He was the recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross, 1942, and the Bar of the Flying Cross, 1942.

The archives of the Royal Canadian Air Force includes the following for Flying Officer Dallas Wilbur Schmidt, DFC and Bar, of Wetaskiwin, Alberta, who served with the 227 Squadron in the defence of Malta.

On his first sortie he shot down an Italian aircraft. In September 1942, he obtained a hit with a heavy bomb on an enemy merchant vessel which subsequently sank. A few days later he attacked a destroyer, in a convoy, with gunfire. In spite of intense opposition he pressed home his attack causing an explosion behind part of the ship's gun positions, which probably indicated hits on a magazine. On another occasion in November 1942, he destroyed two Ju 52s and assisted in the destruction of a Dornier 24. His aircraft was hit in some thirty places by return fire and the port engine was set afire, but he succeeded in extinguishing the flames and flew the damaged aircraft back to base landing it safely in very difficult circumstances. F/O Schmidt's total score was 5 1/2 enemy aircraft destroyed.

A memorial service will be held on Tuesday, November 27, 2007, at 2 p.m. at the Mulhurst Community Hall, Pigeon Lake, Alberta.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of his family, who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember hon. member Dallas Schmidt as you have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Now, hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I will invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Mr.

Lorieau is in the Speaker's gallery. Would we all participate in the language of our choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we sit, let me just point out Mr. Paul Lorieau again, who Saturday night last on national TV did an absolutely magnificent job singing the national anthems of both America and Canada in an evening dedicated to the dedicated, hard-working, and courageous men and women of our Canadian armed forces. Well done, Mr. Lorieau. [applause]
Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you three very special guests seated in your gallery today. First, Mr. Michael Chisholm. Mr. Chisholm has recently been re-elected as the member of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly for Cut Knife-Turtleford constituency, a large rural constituency that borders our province. Mr. Chisholm has also recently been appointed the legislative secretary to the Premier of Saskatchewan, responsible for western Canadian economic co-operation. From the number of green and white jerseys in our streets last night I suspect there is some significant potential for co-operation at least till spring.

The second guest, Mr. Speaker, is Chuck Moser. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce him to you. He currently works with the University of Alberta with their faculty of physical education, alumni relations department. I suspect that most of the members of this Assembly know Mr. Moser as he is an active member of the Edmonton community and an example of community service that makes this city and province the best place in the world to live and raise a family. Mr. Moser is also no stranger to this Legislature as he formerly served as the executive assistant to the former minister of transportation Henry Kroeger.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you Mr. Bradley Chisholm. Bradley Chisholm was recently hired as my executive assistant. Prior to joining my team, Mr. Chisholm was a commercial real estate lawyer with the Calgary firm Macleod Dixon. Bradley attended the University of Calgary law school. Prior to attending law school, Bradley received his undergraduate degree in economics from McGill University and his international baccalaureate from the United World College of United States of America.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Mr. Premier, do you have a guest?

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assem-

bly, seated in the members' gallery, the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the riding of Airdrie-Chestermere, Mr. Rob Anderson. Rob is a lawyer with a very successful law firm; a very, very active member of his community; and somehow finds the time to raise a young family of three children with his wife, Anita. I'm proud to have Rob as a member of our team as we build Alberta's future. I would now ask that Rob rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 25 grade 6 students from George P. Nicholson school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud; in fact, located in my neighbourhood of Twin Brooks. Accompanying the students is their teacher, Maxine Sprague, along with parent helpers Raylene Palichuk and Lora Lee. The class is here at the Legislature participating in the School at the Legislature program, and I can say that that's a very excellent program. I was able to answer some of their questions today. I'm looking forward to an opportunity to meet with them again and answer further questions because, of course, we can't do our jobs as MLAs unless citizens do their jobs as citizens and raise important questions with us. I can assure you that this grade 6 class can and will. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 97 visitors from the city of St. Albert, Muriel Martin school. These three classes of grade 6 students are in the middle of their studies on government. I can tell you from when we had the pictures taken earlier this morning, asking them questions, that they had all the right answers. I look forward to visiting with them in their classrooms. They are accompanied by teachers/group leaders Mrs. Jody Bialowas, Mrs. Katie Boyd, Mlle Danielle Jean, Mrs. Linda Foley, Ms Shelley Verlik, and parent helpers Mrs. Dixon, Mrs. Gamble, Mr. Martin, Mrs. Roche, Mrs. Kielt, Mrs. Jones, Mr. Nelson, and Mrs. Beaubien. I believe they're in both the members' and public galleries. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. Two of my favourite schools in Edmonton-Rutherford are joining us today. The first are 21 students from Sweet Grass school. They're accompanied by Mrs. Fiona Mark, their teacher. I don't believe they're in the gallery yet. They're coming in at 1:30 to watch question period.

The second school is Greenfield school, celebrating their 40th anniversary this year, by the way. Twenty-one students as well from Greenfield are with us today, led by teacher, Mr. Jeff Webster, and two parent helpers, Mr. Riad Ghazal and Mrs. Shari Johnson*. Again, they're joining us at 1:30.

I would ask that all members give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group of staff from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Too often the spotlight on government business is focused on the Legislature, but it's important to note the significant work carried out by our many public servants in Agriculture and Food staff offices across the province, including many who are located right here in Edmonton at the J.G. O'Donoghue Building. Today I am proud to welcome 10 valued employees of our strategy and business planning division. Their work to support and guide our agriculture and food industry is critical, and they certainly do a tremendous job. Today these folks had an opportunity to tour the Legislature and learn more about the official government process that helps them carry out the good work that they do. With us today and located in the members' gallery are Marcia Hewitt-Fisher, Dale Dowswell, Bill Olive, Eileen Chauvet, Elaine Kalynchuk, Debra Van Gaalen, Isabel Simons-Everett, Amber Gosselin, Shamim Rajani, and Laureen Kennedy. I'd ask that they please rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to other members of the Assembly someone I had the pleasure and privilege of working with in this building a few years back. Charlene Adam is here with her daughter Julie today. They are in the members' gallery. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and I had an opportunity to speak to the grade 6 class at their Leduc school a month or so back, and I can tell you that the questions were a lot tougher than the ones we get in this particular House. I would ask Charlene and Julie to please stand and receive the warm applause of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Morningstar Mercredi and Lorraine Hoffman. Lorraine Hoffman is an elected member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation council and is currently serving her second term as councillor. Morningstar Mercredi is a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and a committed advocate of her people. Both guests are actively involved in bringing to light the health care crisis caused by tar sands development and the lack of adequate resources to deal with the mounting health crisis in the area. On behalf of my constituents and all Albertans I'd like to thank them for their efforts and advocacy on behalf of all First Nation people and for all Albertans. I would ask that they both now please stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today Marton Kiss, a resident of Mill Woods. Marton and his wife, Lisa, are challenged with medical concerns and are faced with a critical housing situation. I'd ask Marton to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Human Trafficking

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 13, 2007, I attended the Alberta Symposium on Human Trafficking in Red Deer, hosted by Changing Together, a centre for immigrant women in Edmonton. Human trafficking has been described as a modern form of slavery. It is a serious human rights violation and is reported by the United Nations to be the fastest growing form of transnational organized crime.

At the symposium I discovered that I was among the many people who find it hard to believe that slavery still exists. I learned that there are more than 27 million slaves in the world today, including people in forced labour, women and girls trafficked for the sex trade, and children kidnapped and brutalized to be used as child soldiers. Slavery is flourishing in many parts of the world, and it is still every bit as ugly as it was 200 years ago.

Human trafficking nets organized crime \$7 billion each year. It is the third most profitable criminal activity after dealing in illegal weapons and drugs. According to Interpol a trafficked woman can bring in anywhere from \$75,000 to \$250,000 a year. In Canada organized crime groups have used young aboriginal children as well as eastern European women and children in trafficking between provinces for the purposes of sexual exploitation and other activities. In 2004 the RCMP estimated that 600 to 800 persons are trafficked into Canada annually and that an additional 2,000 persons are trafficked through Canada into the U.S. each year.

Mr. Speaker, 2007 marks 200 years since Britain abolished the transatlantic slave trade, thanks to the tireless work of William Wilberforce, a British MP. Today there are 27 million slaves worldwide, and we must work together with other nations and organizations like Changing Together to bring this international human rights tragedy to an end now and forever.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Health Care Aides

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand before you to recognize health care aide awareness week, beginning today, November 26, as promoted by the Alberta Continuing Care Association, Alberta Home Care and Support Association, and Alberta Senior Citizens' Housing Association. We all know that Alberta has experienced a critical shortage in health care aides, and stakeholders are working hard to raise awareness about training and employment opportunities in this compassionate, caring career.

Health care aides provide personal assistance and support services to people of all ages, including the elderly, the disabled, the acute or chronically ill, and those in need of short-term assistance or ongoing support. It is estimated that 80 per cent of the hours of care provided to Albertans receiving continuing care services are provided by health care aides. I can attest to that, Mr. Speaker. During my father's short stay in the Strathcona care centre, he received the greatest care, and it was the health care aides who were always there, patient, caring, and with total kindness.

The Alberta government supports the provincial health care aide promotion awareness campaign. This campaign aims to increase the health care aide workforce across Alberta as well as increase enrolment and generate the largest number of employable graduates in provincial health care aide programs. I'd ask all members to please join me in recognizing the significant value of health care aides in this province's health workforce and the positive difference they make in the lives of Albertans in their care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

1:20

Affordable Housing

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to talk about Marton and Lisa, two brave Albertans whose lives are crumbling around them. Lisa has fibromyalgia. Marton was just diagnosed with MS. Confined to a wheelchair, Lisa's inaccessible apartment has become a prison. She has been stuck there since August. Medical expenses have eaten up their savings, and now they're supporting themselves by selling off one piece of furniture at a time to pay for necessities like food and rent. Lisa is unable to evacuate in an emergency. She can't make it to medical appointments or physiotherapy.

This is unforgivable. As public servants we have a sacred duty to ensure that the people we represent have at the very least enough food to eat and an affordable place to live. We have a duty to see that all Albertans share the benefits of our economic growth. You expect to hear stories like this in war zones, not in Alberta. I fear for Marty and Lisa, Mr. Speaker, and I fear for all Albertans in similar situations because, clearly, public support for less fortunate citizens is woefully inadequate.

How much worse will it be in years to come, after the boom is over? This government is spending nonrenewable resource revenues as quickly as they come in, setting barely any of it aside for the future. How will even modest programs like AISH be funded in the years to come? History shows that Alberta's most vulnerable will pay the heaviest price for the government's failures. Do we want to be remembered as presiding over a regime that allowed people like Marton and Lisa to fall through the cracks amidst unprecedented wealth? Or are we prepared to take a hard look at our priorities and invest a reasonable amount of our vast resource wealth to properly support disadvantaged Albertans?

Simple human decency demands that we do more for Marton, for Lisa, and for the thousands of Albertans like them. We need to do more today, and we need to start saving our nonrenewable resources now, creating sustainable revenue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Political Party Donations

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is long overdue for reform of its campaign finance laws. Big money dominates the donation list of both the Liberal and the Conservative parties. These parties accept hundreds of thousands of dollars per year from big oil and other large corporations. Let's not kid ourselves. These donations come with strings attached. When big oil writes a cheque, they do so with the expectation that there will be minimum change to the royalty system. They do so also with other issues.

Tenants face gouging rent increases so big landlords with deep pockets can profit a little more. Big landlords make bigger political donations than tenants, so the needs of ordinary families are swept aside, and rent guidelines are rejected. The effect of big money even shows itself in long-term care facilities. The recommendations of the Auditor General are ignored, and conditions at long-term care facilities get worse instead of better. Big money and big political donations have a corrosive effect on democracy, Mr. Speaker. It means that the needs of regular families get put on the back burner in favour of the needs of large, profitable corporations, who can take care of themselves.

It's time for Alberta to follow the lead of the federal government and Manitoba and ban all political donations from corporations and unions. Our democracy has as its basis the individual citizen acting freely in their own interests and the interests of their community. Individual citizens should also be the financial basis of our democracy. It should not be undermined by special interests using their wealth to distort public priorities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Grey Cup

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Close to a million Saskatchewan residents and countless others across the country and beyond breathed a collective sigh of relief yesterday as their beloved Roughriders prevailed over the Winnipeg Blue Bombers in the 95th edition of the Grey Cup. Christmas came exactly one month early as the Riders did just enough to win 23-19. It wasn't the most exciting game ever, but that happened in 1989 with the same Riders. At that point Kent Austin was the quarterback. Yesterday he was the coach leading the team, the Green and White, as they ended the CFL's longest Grey Cup drought. That's over. The SkyDome became Riderville. It was a sea of green.

When I saw Jack Layton at the airport in the morning, I wondered if he'd like to know that, number one, his provincial cousins did not win the last election in Saskatchewan and that, number two, every time the Stampeders, the Eskimos, or the Riders have won the Grey Cup, the NDP were not in power. With the new Premier in Saskatchewan, Brad Wall, and the new administration in this province I believe the future does look very bright for Saskatchewan and Alberta, even brighter than this tie, I might say, Mr. Speaker, even if we do cheer for different football teams. I encourage families, friends, and neighbours to enjoy this victory because, pun intended, I do hope that the Saskatchewan party lasts a long time. But let's face it; we want that cup back here in Alberta.

In the meantime, I do have to say that we have a guest here, Mr. Chisholm, a representative from Saskatchewan. I hope he'll convey our warmest wishes to the new Premier. We look forward to working with him and the Saskatchewan government to make the new west even better, a strong force throughout the country and the world.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Riders for the entertainment.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, another milestone has been reached between the Alberta government and the Alberta Teachers' Association, representing the province's 35,000 teachers. In a meeting of over 400 representatives across the province the ATA's emergent representative assembly overwhelmingly endorsed ratification of the historic agreement. This memorandum of agreement will ensure labour peace for teachers, parents, students, and school boards for over five years.

Some of the details of the agreement are that the government will assume the teachers' pre-1992 pension contributions, teachers will provide five years of labour peace, teachers will receive a lump-sum payment of \$1,500 in the spring, and teachers' pay will increase by 3 per cent in year 1, with 2 through 5 based on the Alberta average weekly earnings index. School boards and students will now have guaranteed funding and budget predictability. Mr. Speaker, there will be uninterrupted classroom instruction for the next five years.

The next step is for teachers at the local level to ratify the MOA, and then the ATA locals and local school boards can work together to finalize their collective bargaining agreement by January 31,

2008. The Minister of Education, our Premier, Mr. Frank Bruseker, and, frankly, all teachers ought to be congratulated on this deal.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly today, and it reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seventy-six more signatures on this disability petition which urges the government to ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector regardless of where they work, ensure that these employees are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive to reflect the value of the services they offer, improve those employees' access to professional development opportunities, and introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level of care standards.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Affordable Housing

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple in south Edmonton needs this government to take some real action on affordable housing. Marty suffers from MS, and his wife, Lisa, has severe chronic conditions and requires a wheelchair. The wait list for an appropriate unit is long, and their rising medical costs are driving them into poverty. Lisa and Marty have applied for assistance from the rent supplement program, AISH, home care, Aids to Daily Living, and income support, and they are still forced to sell their furniture in order to pay their rent and medical expenses. My question is to the Premier. What else can they do, Mr. Premier?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that has just been raised in the House, and I'll ask the ministers responsible to further investigate this particular situation.

I know that the taxpayers provide substantial support to those in need of housing, those with disabilities also through the rent supplement program. We're doing a lot in terms of finding housing that's compatible with the needs of the particular family in question. If someone has fallen through the cracks, we certainly want to know about it, and we'll deal with it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They've tried to tell everybody they can about it, Mr. Premier.

This government held a housing symposium in 1998 that clearly

identified the need for more accessible housing. Ten years have passed with precious little done. Now this government comes out with another 10-year housing plan. Desperate people do not have decades to wait. My question again is to the Premier. Why are people like Marty and Lisa still forced to wait for an affordable place to live when the need for accessible housing was identified almost 10 years ago?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, progress has been made on affordable housing, but the hon. member forgets the fact that between 500,000 to 600,000 new Albertans have moved to this province to seek opportunity. Affordable housing and housing available for special needs, those individuals that quite rightly should remain in their home rather than institutionalized, is, of course, a very top priority of the government. It's centred around the quality of life, and we expect that all Albertans should have some equitable quality of life in this province. That's why we'll look into this particular situation.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Marty and Lisa also face enormous costs for medications. In 2004 the first ministers' conference agreed that "no Canadians should suffer undue financial hardship in accessing needed drug therapies [and that] affordable access to drugs is fundamental to equitable health outcomes for all our citizens." My question again to the Premier: when will this government finally implement a public pharmacare program that reduces the burden of rising drug costs on low-income Albertans like Marty and Lisa?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the mandates, of course, to the minister of health is to put together a pharmaceutical strategy so that it encompasses all Albertans. I know that a number of years ago Alberta was proud to have the longest list of insured drugs. So many more drugs have been added to lists covering various diseases, obviously with the new research that's being done in the province of Alberta, so we're constantly upgrading that list. But we do have to look at an overall strategy, and I also submit to this House that Alberta can't go it alone. We develop our strategy in conjunction with the federal government because there's dual responsibility.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Affordable Housing in Fort McMurray

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spent Friday, Saturday, and Sunday in Fort McMurray. There are many wonderful things about that community, but over and over I heard intense concerns about how this government is managing, or rather failing to manage, the growth of that region. The single biggest concern is with housing, which, I was told, is now more expensive in Fort McMurray than in either Toronto or New York City. There is real frustration, verging on despair and anger, over this government's delay in releasing Crown land for housing. My question is to the Premier. Why is it taking years and years for this government to release enough land for housing development in Fort McMurray?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, one of those baseless allegations that the hon. member is known for. Municipal Affairs and Housing has made three land parcels available in the Timberlea area, totalling 1,000 acres, available for new housing. These developments are well under way, and new houses are being constructed. We're also

working right at the moment to secure another 700 acres for housing in the Saline Creek area. There's a considerable amount of money being invested in housing. Plus, there were affordable dollars that were transferred over to the municipality of Wood Buffalo. So there's substantial support there.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, it's a real puzzle why this government will not release more land for development. I'm told that there are up to 40,000 people – 40,000 people – living in work camps in the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo region and unknown numbers of others living in the bush. These people use the hospital but don't generate funding for it. They use police services, the water systems, and the roads, but they don't bring revenue in for these because they don't count as permanent residents. To the Premier: what is the plan from this government for managing this out-of-control boom so that Fort McMurray can attract more permanent residents and have fewer people living in camps and the bush?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, \$396 million was advanced to the community of Fort McMurray immediately after the swearing-in, the reason being that we recognized the need. A lot of the money is going for water and waste water. It's one thing to build a house, but of course you also have to deal with water and waste water and the construction of additional roads. We've also committed to four-laning highway 63. We're completing 881. There was recent completion of an overpass on King Street. There's other work being done around that area. There are millions and millions and millions of dollars that are going into the community.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberal plan for funding Alberta's future includes a steady, strategic approach to addressing infrastructure debt. This government refused to make those strategic investments for years, including under this Premier's watch as infrastructure minister, and is now trying to cover up the mistake by driving spending through the roof. A recent report by the TD bank described this government's approach to infrastructure spending as, quote, throwing fuel on the fire. To the Premier: can the Premier appreciate that it is better to have a long-term plan for roads and hospitals and schools than to depend on ad hoc announcements made off-budget every few weeks by this government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, his plan for infrastructure in this province is probably similar to the position they took on the royalty framework, which is zip. They don't know where they are. It must get pretty difficult sitting on the fence all that time.

Dr. Taft: Point of order.

Mr. Stelmach: Raise another, a couple more.

There have been significant investments made in Fort McMurray. One of the critical areas is tied around housing, and this is where the industry, the government have come together to look at ways of moving construction further on housing. We also realize that housing is critical to the social well-being of the family, and the more houses we build in that area, the easier it will be to attract people to that region as well.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Low-income Support Programs

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prosperity in this province is obviously not reaching all Albertans. Statistics gathered by the Edmonton Social Planning Council and Public Interest Alberta indicate that 22 per cent of our workforce is earning less than \$12 an hour and that 36 per cent is making less than \$15. Last Thursday the President of the Treasury Board said in this House, "We probably provide more services to people than I personally believe in," and that "you get out and work. Get a kick in the butt and do it." But for countless Albertans work does not pay. They don't need a kick in the butt. They need this government's compassion to help make ends meet. My questions are for the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Will the minister review the adequacy of benefits for low-income working families? The Alberta family package of benefits consists . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has been called three times.

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, budget 2007 delivered the highest basic personal tax exemptions in Canada, meaning the greatest earnings with no taxes paid. The highest. We increased tax credits by 3.6 per cent, saving Albertans \$92 million. For those that are not able to work temporarily or full time, we were able to provide additional supports. We increased supports this year. A typical working family with two children can earn up to \$38,200 before paying any provincial tax. Through our subsidy programs, through income support programs, through Children's Services subsidies this government provides the best.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta families making \$40,000 per year pay the same health care premiums as families earning \$400,000 a year, and those with better paying jobs are more likely to have their employer covering the premiums. Eliminating health care premiums will do two things. It will eliminate the need for complex administration. It will also put more money in the pockets of low-income households. Will the minister convince her cabinet colleagues to once and for all eliminate the Alberta health care premiums?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I am no longer health minister, but we have health care supplements for children, which increased again this year, covered a broader knowledge and number of children that needed health care premiums.

Relative to health care premiums I defer to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A critical area for low-wage workers is the prevalence of part-time work with no benefits. Some Albertans are working three different part-time jobs and are still not able to make ends meet. This is an issue relevant to employment standards, but the results of the review of employment standards has somehow disappeared into a black hole. Will the minister look at those standards and change the code requiring employers to provide prorated benefits and pensions for part-time workers, at least those who work at least 15 hours a week?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, if you listen to the opposition today,

you would think the sky is falling and that we don't care for poor people. We improved the minimum wage this year to \$8 per hour. We put in a new indexing formula, so as of April next year we will have average weekly wage used to calculate what should be available to people on minimum wage. We have today the highest minimum wage in Canada after taxes and tied for highest among the provinces even before taxes.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just this month the state of Alaska raised royalties by 30 per cent retroactive to July 1. This is Alaska's second increase in just two years. Alaska will take in three times as much money per barrel of oil as Alberta. My question is to the Premier. Why can Alaska earn three times more per barrel of oil than Alberta can?

The Speaker: Well, the Premier is the Premier of Alberta, not Alaska.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can only talk to the Alberta royalty framework, which is going to be implemented January 1, 2009. It's a framework that really, truly represents Alberta's entrepreneurial spirit, and that is that as oil prices rise, we will capture the upside, but if they do drop, then all Albertans will share in the risk. It's the kind of model that's going to provide the certainty and the predictability for continued investment in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, entrepreneurial spirit really sounds like it's a spirit of giving to big oil companies.

Alaska produced a hundred thousand barrels of heavy oil less than Alberta but brought in nearly \$2 billion more in royalty revenue. Alberta has been shortchanged by billions on its royalties for years, and neither this government nor the Liberals have a plan which will fundamentally change that. My question is to the Premier. Why is it that Alaska can get \$2 billion per year more by pumping less oil?

The Speaker: Once again, stick to Alberta, please.

Mr. Stelmach: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I think the leader is a bit confused. He's comparing oil to bitumen, significantly different, and probably has to get a little bit more knowledge in the whole area of the differences between bitumen and conventional oil. However, this is the regime, the royalty framework, that works well for Alberta. If you look at the macroeconomic indicators in the province of Alberta in terms of the amount of corporate tax paid to the province, of course personal income tax paid, and the huge investment that consumers are making here in the province of Alberta, that speaks well for the royalty regime.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, perhaps if the Premier familiarized himself with the royalty rates of other jurisdictions around the world, he would hang his head in shame for the pathetic royalty regime that he has brought forward.

Mr. Speaker, the reports that we're quoting indicate that the costs to recover the oil in Alaska are actually higher than the costs of recovering oil in Alberta's tar sands, yet Alaska can earn between two and three times as much as Alberta can per barrel of oil. Why,

Mr. Premier, does your royalty regime fall so pathetically short of Alaska's and other jurisdictions'? Why have you left so much money on the table?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm just wondering where the hon. member has found oil sands in Alaska. But if he has, I'm quite sure that he'll inform the House tomorrow as to where he made this great discovery.

All I can say is that the framework is working very well for the province of Alberta. Obviously, my response has really aggravated him because he's continuing to chip away. The framework is good for Alberta. It's going to provide the certainty and predictability that I mentioned before, and in the future we'll see more wealth generation in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Industrial Development in Alberta's Heartland Area

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oil sands upgraders and other new construction in and near Edmonton will soon create one of the largest phases of growth in Alberta's history. It will create good jobs for generations. It will create wealth that will be felt for a hundred years and more. It has really just begun. The growth must be done right. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Albertans want clean air, clean water, and clean work. With the accumulative impact of Heartland construction affecting much of northern Alberta's environment, how will the cumulative Heartland impact be measured, kept clean, and communicated to Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the member has pointed out a very important fact in his question, the fact that Albertans have clean air, clean water, and clean work, and Albertans want to make sure that it stays that way. That's what cumulative impact is all about. It's not about fixing something that's broken; it's about ensuring that we maintain that clean air, that clean water, and that clean work. The cumulative impact program talks about including monitoring and allocation and verification. It talks about setting up the necessary infrastructure so that we can ensure that we make the necessary decisions now that will keep the pristine environment that we respect so much in place despite economic development.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the minister of municipal affairs. As part of the recently released Kline report looks to Edmonton's grey water as a natural economic source for industrial water needs for the Industrial Heartland region, what will your ministry do to ensure that the city of Edmonton gets a fair return to its taxpayers for this resource?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member speaks of grey water, or recycled water, and the industrial area. I know this subject is being discussed by the Capital region integrated growth management plan as well as the Industrial Heartland cumulative effects. I know the Minister of Environment has brought forward a committee that has two phases. One of those phases is working on the short-term needs, and the second phase is working on governance, funding, and establishing a foundation. I do

believe that the first phase is to report to the Minister of Environment by the end of this year, if I'm correct.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, the second supplementary is to the Premier. As groups such as the Construction Owners Association are working to smooth out demand for labour and matériel as well as other issues impacting industrial construction of the Heartland region, we will see completion schedules extended. Construction work may continue for at least a generation: good work and good jobs. Mr. Premier, how will your government keep this wealth, this work in Alberta for Alberta and for Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, definitely we're focused on adding more value to bitumen and, of course, increasing the size of the petrochemical industry in the province of Alberta. Other than what we heard from the opposition, wanting to build upgrading plants in Manitoba, we're not going to do that. We're going to keep it in Alberta. The next step, though, is to have a large workforce. Of course, we just issued a construction workforce strategy that's going to train more people. It's focused on Albertans. We want to of course work with the First Nations and Métis nations to ensure that they all have a good opportunity to share in Alberta's wealth and also then work on an immigration policy so that we can build these plants in a very competitive manner.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Rural Alberta's Development Fund

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Drayton Valley-Calmar and chair of rural caucus I know just how important rural Alberta is to our province, unlike the opposition over there. While we often think of rural Alberta in terms of our roots or our past, there's plenty of opportunity to branch out and create new growth, create a bright future. My questions today are for the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Last year our government invested \$100 million in the rural Alberta's development fund to help nurture economic growth and strengthen rural communities. How are those taxpayer dollars being used to benefit rural Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I have to thank the hon. member for his advocacy on behalf of rural Alberta and the development of this fund. We have some 21 projects that have already been approved, totalling \$18.4 million. They're helping us improve the issues related to providing interns for rural Alberta, wildlife stewardship, a number of very innovative things to build community capacity, including a \$3 million announcement recently to create a centre of excellence in Medicine Hat to develop unmanned vehicle exploration opportunities for land, sea, and air.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the same minister. Given that the RADF annual report was a hot topic of discussion at the recent AAMD and C conference held in Edmonton last week, one thing the rural communities need is newer, updated infrastructure. Why aren't these capital projects being approved by this fund?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, first of all, of course, all members of the

Assembly are aware that this government spends this year more than a billion dollars on infrastructure throughout Alberta, so there's a hefty amount of money already there. The amount of money that this approves provides long-term economic development opportunities by engaging communities and regions in working together to develop things beyond the brick and mortar of replacing an arena roof or looking at other things that are capital. This is instigating an opportunity for learning and development through the use of the SuperNet and new connections, new innovations, and new networks that rural Albertans are creating based on their own capacity to develop things that can improve their own lives.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you. My last question is also to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. With the RADF operating as an arm's-length initiative, what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the disbursed funds are used appropriately?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there is a grant agreement with terms and conditions to be met. There is an accountability framework within that grant agreement. The offices that are currently provided for in the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village to house the secretariat for the development fund have been retrofitted in a way that if the fund should no longer be in place, they can be very nicely used to support the administration of that particular centre. So on all fronts the RADF is being accountable for taxpayer dollars.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the next member is the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. I'd just like to advise all hon. members of the House that since we last met, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has now arrived at a new point in his life. He's arrived at his 60th anniversary of life on planet Earth. I understand from people who have arrived at the age of 60 in the past that there's a new form of wisdom that kicks in automatically at that time.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Highway Construction

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's failures to plan for the boom are obvious on so many levels. One of the many is our province's inadequate, substandard highway network. Highway 63 is only now being twinned, something the Alberta Liberals have been urging since the 1980s. For too long this government has waited while the safety of Albertans has been compromised and the connection to the oil sands, so important for our prosperity, incomplete. As a result the government is paying exorbitant, inflationary costs due to their failure to plan. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: after waiting so long, when can the residents of Fort McMurray and those who risk their lives . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we're spending over a billion dollars on twinning highway 63.

Mr. Boutilier: How much?

Mr. Ouellette: Over a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. We started this year. We're twinning right now from 881 into Fort McMurray. We're starting on our five-lane bridge crossing the Athabasca River in Fort McMurray. We're also doing some twinning on highway 43

north of Fort McMurray. We did some widening on 881, so now or next year, when we've completed that little short piece of twinning that we're doing, there will be two choices to go to Fort McMurray at least. We've got 881 and highway 43.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question was: when will the twinning of highway 63 be completed?

Another case of the government consistently behind the times can be found in southern Alberta with highway 3. It is a vital component in the international and interprovincial trade route that is the Canamex corridor. The Alberta Liberal caucus has been consistently pushing this government to twin this east-west connection that is so key to the prosperity of the region and our province. To the minister: why, despite all of the urging of residents and businesses along this corridor from Medicine Hat to the Crowsnest Pass, has the twinning of this road been put on hold?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as minister of transportation in Alberta I have to look after the whole province from one end to the other. We have criteria that we have to follow. We try to keep all of our highways as safe as possible, and where the construction is needed the most that fits into the capacity of the construction to be done and the money we have to spend, that's what we work on in order.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents of northeast Calgary felt completely out of the loop when this government pushed through the revised route for that leg of the city's bypass earlier this year. Now it seems that the residents of Grande Prairie are suffering the same fate. Grande Prairie residents and their city council do not feel adequately involved in the planning for the southwestern bypass. Will the minister commit to collaboration, not just meaningless consultation, with the mayor, council, and the residents of Grande Prairie to ensure that both local and provincial goals are achieved?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the wisdom you were talking about earlier I'm sure hasn't come through.

Mr. Speaker, I meet with all councils of all municipalities, and I always meet with municipalities any time they want. I met with a bunch last week at AAMD and C, and I plan on meeting with a bunch more at AUMA in Calgary on Thursday and Friday. I always try to work the best I can with them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Tourism Promotion

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, the Canadian dollar is the highest it's been in nearly 40 years. The results with respect to tourism are that costs are rising for American travelers, our largest economic partners. There is also growing confusion among Americans as to the Canadian passport requirements. My question is to the Associate Minister of Tourism Promotion. Has there been a decline in tourism from the United States to Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for my first-ever question on the floor of the Legislature.

The member raises an important point because the U.S. is our largest tourism market. In fact, in the year 2005 almost a million visitors came to Alberta from the U.S. They spent some \$624 million. So they are very important. But to the member's question. I think it's great to point out that in this year alone we've seen, actually, an increase of 3.5 per cent U.S. visitation through direct ports of entry, while the rest of Canada has actually seen a 3.5 per cent decline. We think that's because we have the greatest product ever in Alberta, but there are also some advantages.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What is happening regarding the passport requirements to minimize the impact on our visitors?

Mrs. Ady: Now, Mr. Speaker, passports are a federal jurisdiction, but we also know that they're very important to this tourism market. There is a bit of confusion out there. Sometimes the U.S. isn't sure whether they need a passport or don't, so we're working very hard with our partners and with the Travel Alberta website to let people know that you can still come into Alberta without a passport if you come via car. You only need a passport when you come by air. But there is some confusion, and we are continuing to work to clear that up.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. What steps is our province taking to ensure it retains the growth in its tourism market share?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, he's right: tourism is a very, very competitive industry. In fact, all other places in the world as well as Canada want this industry, so they're competing against us. Our closest, most ferocious competitor is British Columbia, but they also bring us one of our greatest opportunities, which is the Olympics that are coming to us. The world is now travelling to Alberta to compete on our world stage, and we're going to use that opportunity to bring the eyes of the world to us. Some hundred million people and some 70 countries will see Alberta in World Cup in the coming two years, and we hope that we'll see more of Jan Hudec's victory this week in World Cup as we go forward. But Alberta is a great place, and the world is going to see it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Research and Development Funding

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The latest figures from Statistics Canada show that industry in Alberta is not spending remotely the same proportion on research and development as industries in other provinces. Industry in Ontario, for example, spent eight times more on research and development as industry in this province in 2005. Alberta is clearly punching below its weight here, and it is vital for our future prosperity that this change. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: does the minister believe that this level of research and development spending is remotely sufficient to provide for Alberta's future prosperity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member brings up a very valid point, and that is that industry in Alberta has not been contributing, perhaps, as much in certain areas as what the ratio to government expenditures might be in other provinces. But one must also remember that the province of Alberta spends a considerable amount more than most other jurisdictions on research and development within our postsecondary institutions, within our institutes. The Institute for Nanotechnology is one that comes to mind very recently. We are working with industry to encourage additional partnerships to take advantage of and leverage the government dollars, the taxpayer dollars that we have out there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is notoriously difficult to raise venture capital in Alberta. The Alberta Liberals have had a policy for years that would change that by creating a joint government and industry venture capital fund. To the same minister: why hasn't this government moved to address the lack of venture capital in this province?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as part of the mandate for my ministry we had a task force created by industry and academics that reported back to us. I'm sure the hon. member has already read the report as well as the ICT strategy report as well as the fibre road map report. In fact, I recall speaking about those here in this House.

There are a number of other things besides venture capital. It's not just venture capital. It's what you do after the research component to get it into that precommercialization stage and then into that commercialization stage. Then you bring in the venture capitalists. We're looking at that valley of death for these bright young minds are creating these products. We want to help them with that, Mr. Speaker, and the venture capital will come.

Mr. Tougas: A clear example of this government's failure to plan for a sustainable, prosperous future can be seen in energy research funding. In '05-06 this government put less than a million dollars into alternative energy research at the Alberta Energy Research Institute. This clearly is not planning for a diverse future prosperity. To the same minister: what possible justification does this government have for giving alternative energy research such minimal funding?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to see where he derived the numbers from because I think I could probably add up from the various departments and various research institutes that we utilize that we have a great deal more than a million dollars being invested in alternative energies. We have programs running at the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, the University of Alberta as well as the Alberta Energy Research Institute as well as Climate Change Central. We have a number of programs. It's unfair to simply pull one number out of one report and say that that's the entire width and breadth of alternative energy that this province is doing. In fact, we are leaders in almost all of the areas of alternative energy: clean coal, wind, solar, the alternative energies that are nonhydrocarbon. We are considered global leaders in all those areas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Caldor.

Aboriginal Economic Development

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government has voiced its commitment to ensuring that all Albertans share in our province's unprecedented economic growth. Aboriginal Albertans make up the fastest growing and youngest population in our province, and many are in my constituency. My questions are to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What is being done to ensure that aboriginal Albertans benefit from our province's healthy economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the hon. member and to the Assembly I want to say that in the past two years our ministry has viewed this as a tremendous opportunity. This opportunity, if I could give one example, is that we've supported 27 economic First Nation partnership initiatives, 27 of them. Of course, this helps in terms of developing First Nation industry as well as working with existing industry in developing capacity to create jobs, create capacity for the future, and for young people in Alberta, so we have a tremendous opportunity that we are certainly building on for the future. I want to say that those 27 initiatives are very positive in terms of the results that have been produced.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is also to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Can he please provide some examples of the kinds of partnerships between First Nations communities and industry that the Alberta government is helping to support?

Mr. Boutilier: I think, Mr. Speaker, that's probably one of the best questions I've heard in here today. Let me give you examples, concrete evidence of those partnerships that are going on: a joint venture between three First Nations and Enbridge on the proposed Gateway pipeline project to British Columbia, to the coast, is one example; an agreement with International Business Machines, IBM, in terms of First Nation and Métis communities who are creating opportunities with youth and education and also within small business in terms of opportunities. Of course, these are examples of a business incubator which we are working with. One final example: we're working with economic co-ordinators in the hon. member's constituency for communities in Hobbema, an economic example that we're working on as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the same minister. Some of these developments are occurring on reserve, where the federal government has constitutional authority. How is the province working with the federal government to facilitate these important economic projects?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, this is so very important. I use the example in our own backyard in Fort MacKay, north of highway 63, where the highway is being twinned and being twinned very well. I want to give the example that we have just signed an innovative agreement between the province and the federal government with First Nations to commercialize land received under its treaty land claim. What this means is that the federal government have conceded that pertaining to commercialization Alberta's constitutional responsibility and Alberta regulation will apply. This is a

great example of a partnership that we have with the federal government, and I think it should provide assurance to all Albertans that we're working together: government, provincial and federal.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Health Issues in Fort Chipewyan

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2006 medical examiner Dr. John O'Connor publicized evidence of extremely high rates of cancer in Fort Chipewyan. Residents there are 583 times more likely to have bile duct cancer than the population at large. More than 18 months have passed since this information was in the media. This community is still waiting for action. One big problem is that the 1,200 residents of Fort Chipewyan are not as important to this government as the big oil companies that contributed to their Conservative Party election funds. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why has the government failed the people of Fort Chipewyan by continuing to do absolutely nothing but produce questionable reports?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That question is so inflammatory and so wrong. In fact, we've discussed this matter in the House a number of times. I've indicated each time that we took the allegations of Dr. O'Connor very, very seriously, and we investigated. We asked Dr. O'Connor for the evidence behind his suppositions, and he didn't provide it. We asked again, and he didn't provide it. We asked again, and he didn't provide it. Finally, in August of this year he provided some information but not all the information. The Cancer Board has gone back to Dr. O'Connor asking for the information, and he hasn't provided it. In the meantime the Cancer Board and Alberta Health have reviewed all the deaths in Fort McMurray, a hundred per cent of the deaths in Fort McMurray, to determine whether there's a higher rate of cancer there or not, and it found that it's not a higher rate of cancer.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Environment. There is no dispute that arsenic is a known carcinogen and that arsenic levels in the environment are compounded by industrial processes and industrial development, which has skyrocketed in the Fort McMurray region. A recent report found high levels of arsenic in the food chain in the Fort Chipewyan area, but with only two environmental compliance officers in the whole region almost nothing gets reported independently. Why has this ministry endangered the lives of thousands of people downstream by engaging in unreliable self-reporting systems?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's quite the contrary. There is ongoing testing of all toxins throughout the region, and they are not just related to self-reporting. There are a number of different organizations that work along with Alberta Environment. There are literally thousands of tests done every year. The member is correct: there is evidence of arsenic, but there is naturally occurring arsenic in the area. It is directly the reason why there's economic development, and the reason is because there are arsenic and other contaminants that are associated with oil sands that occur naturally in that part of the world.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eighteen months ago we knew that Fort Chipewyan residents are very much more likely to contract bile duct cancer than counterparts in other parts of the province. My next question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. How can you ignore the findings that show that this specific group of people is adversely impacted in larger proportions than Albertans elsewhere in the province? How can you justify putting big oil's profits before the well-being of people living in your constituency?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'm not quite sure what the hon. member is smoking, but I want to say this. The research that was made reference to: first of all, it was indicated that independent researchers out of Ottawa have indicated that the research that is being done by the independent general practitioner was not proper or protocol research that was done, yet Alberta Health has moved forward in a very prudent and responsible and measured way relative to the residents in Fort Chipewyan, which is of course the oldest settlement in all of Alberta. I might add that we are taking prudent action, contrary to what is really unresearched information by the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Agricultural Assistance

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Amidst all the oil and gas prosperity the farmers who feed us have been dealing with economic hardships. One concern is that they're not getting fair compensation for the petroleum wells and pipelines on their land. They're also left to clean up the land after poor land reclamation by the companies. Rural counties have been fighting to get this on the government's agenda. To the minister of agriculture: why is the government not listening to the concerns of the landowners, and how are they working to resolve this particular issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, probably, to say that we don't listen to the concerns of agriculture is a bit of a stretch at the best. In this particular instance, of course, the Surface Rights Board is not under my purview, but any time they have concerns, they can go to the FAO, and they will give them some guidance about where they might want to go when they have their problems.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, money is not the only thing that is needed to solve this crisis. Structural resources are needed to help our farmers. In 2002 your government closed regional agricultural offices, which provided important support and advice to these farmers. Again to the minister of agriculture: in this time of crisis for farmers why have there been so many quick fixes instead of addressing the long-term sustainability of Alberta's family farms?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, it would be, probably, helpful if the hon. member would describe what she means by quick fixes, but I suspect that she may be talking about some of the programs that we help the agriculture industry with, so we're certainly out there when we can and however we can do it.

The talk about agriculture offices: in this day and age of IT abilities I think probably we've got that covered off very well. I have very, very few questions or concerns about that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Cow-calf producers around my constituency are very worried about their futures. I received a call today from a cow-calf producer who is concerned that government programs are not reaching all the farmers and the meat producers. Further, the Auditor General also noted in his annual report that there are significant problems with aid delivery. Again to the minister of agriculture: why is the government failing to properly monitor and administer its support programs, whether they are alone or in conjunction with the federal government?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, certainly there are concerns out there, and there's bleeding, and there's hurt very much in the red meat industry right now. But to say that we're not there is not quite true when we've just come out with a \$165 million program for the red meat producers out there. This is strictly a transition program. We've charged these people to come back with a long-term plan, with which we will once again assist them on delivery.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Emergency Management Agency's programs respond to emergencies in Alberta communities when the need arises for its disaster recovery programs. I know that the residents are very grateful for the funding that they receive in these circumstances. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Can the minister tell us what the province is doing to prepare for future disasters?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. Financial services is one of the primary issues that this government deals with; in fact, this last year approximately \$50 million in support. The main focus of emergency management is co-ordination, co-ordination between the first responders, firefighters, different agencies, volunteers, municipalities, ministries, and of course the federal government. Also, education is a primary focus of our ministry in looking at how we can handle disasters in a better way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final and only supplemental is for the same minister. Mr. Minister, responding to these emergencies is a large undertaking that goes way beyond this agency's mandate and abilities. How is the response co-ordinated with other government departments?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have a working group that works with the Sol Gen, with Transportation, with different agencies, Environment, SRD, looking at mitigation, working with the federal government to try to mitigate some of the effects of flooding, of disasters so that we are better prepared, making sure that we have a warning system that is not only top of the line but has the advancement to be able to warn people in case of tornadoes or severe storms.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago the Premier said that he could not see any examples of where this province has been shortchanged. A \$500 million decrease in the value of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund since March certainly sounds like shortchanging to me, and I'm going to guess that most Albertans would agree. To the Minister of Finance: in this time of prosperity in Alberta how can you possibly justify losing half a billion dollars in the heritage fund when this province records multibillion dollar surpluses?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I would have to ask the hon. member if he's kidding in that question. We've seen the Canadian dollar go up from 84 cents in February to \$1.10 at one point in time and now settling back in essentially the \$1.01, \$1.02 range. We've seen a huge amount of tumultuous times in the market in the past six or eight months. Five hundred million dollars is certainly a huge loss in the value, but I will suggest to the hon. member that he also take a look at the amount of income coming in from the heritage fund. You actually see an increase of about \$125 million from Budget 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to remind everybody that they take all of the income from the heritage savings trust fund and put it into general revenue. There is a dark side to Alberta's boom, and it comes in the form of this government's fiscal mismanagement. Edmonton leads the country with the highest inflation rate, house prices are soaring, 64,000 kids in the province living below the poverty line: that's what the future holds, and people are becoming anxious. To the Minister of Finance: when, when will you ease the anxiety of Albertans, take advantage of the prosperity that we're experiencing, and commit 30 per cent of resource revenues into the heritage savings trust fund?

2:20

Dr. Oberg: A couple of things. First of all, Mr. Speaker, each and every year, as the hon. member knows and realizes, we do inflation-proof the fund. This year alone there was \$400 million that was put back into the heritage fund, which is a significant amount. On top of that we have another \$1.3 billion that has gone into the heritage fund this year. Certainly, there are significant issues when it comes to people who are not earning the amount of money. Currently in Alberta, though, as the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry noted, a family of four making \$38,200 does not pay any income tax to the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In July of this year the Finance minister stated that he wanted to see the heritage fund double in size in five years and hit \$50 billion in the next decade. At the rate we're going, it's going to take 16 years just to double the size of the fund. Every day we wait is another day of lost opportunity. To the Minister of Finance: can you explain to Albertans how you plan to more than triple the heritage fund when your government continues to drag its feet by postponing the decision-making? When are we going to start saving this money?

Dr. Oberg: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I will say that unfortunately the hon. member does not necessarily know exactly what he is

talking about. Currently, today, in the province of Alberta we have very close to \$36 billion in savings, \$36 billion in savings. Do we need to increase savings? Yes. I think it's a very laudable cause to increase savings and will provide security in the future, but what is actually happening today is that we have a committee that is taking a look at this exact question. Theoretically, we'll be submitting this report within the next two weeks.

Mr. Speaker, I am a fan of savings. I think it's great. I think it's savings for the future, and certainly you will be seeing more savings from this government.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 82 questions and responses today. We'll now return to the Routine.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. the Premier I'm pleased to rise today to table the 2007 annual report for Alberta's Promise. In it are success stories from some of the more than 1,100 partnerships Alberta Promise helped to develop. Alberta Promise partnerships understand the need to invest in Alberta's future. As the annual report shows, these organizations, communities, and individuals have invested a total of \$139 million since Alberta's Promise was first established five years ago. Children and youth feel the impact of that investment and are being given more opportunities to grow into happy, healthy adults. As the province's future leaders and shapers their growth and development means building an Alberta with continued prosperity. The report is also available at www.albertaspromise.org. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two sets of tablings today. The first from Pauline Alakija, who is actually a physician working in Calgary who is writing to me with her grave concerns over the current proposals in Bill 41 giving the Minister of Health and Wellness power over the College of Physicians and Surgeons and other self-regulatory agencies.

The second tabling is actually a series of tablings, Mr. Speaker. I have letters from constituents Sidney George Langston, Charles Foster, Philip Allan Judge, Daniel Corriveau, Jason Galarneau, Al Southwell, Allan Mullholland, Brian Raymer, Michel Parisien, and Jake Armstrong, all of them with serious concerns about Alberta's current labour laws and asking for changes. I'll highlight today "one labour law for all unionized workers, so that Alberta labour law would treat all working people the same."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is on behalf of a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar, Mr. Bernie Douglas, who is writing to my office expressing his strong view that "Alberta's labour laws require major changes to encourage fairness to all working people in Alberta."

The second letter that I have is from Mr. Orest Yakimishyn. He is also requesting that there be at least five significant changes to the labour laws in Alberta.

The third tabling is also from a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar, Mr. George Jurak, who is expressing his concern about the Alberta labour law and what he would like to see to have it changed.

My last tabling. It's a flyer, Mr. Speaker, called Kill Bill 46 Rally, which is going to occur tomorrow at noon sharp, Tuesday, November 27, on the steps here at the Alberta Legislative Building. This flyer is a what, when, where, why, and who.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of my letter and the cheque dated August 17 to the Coaldale food bank society. As per my pledge of April 2 half of my MLA indexed pay raise, \$146.25, is donated monthly to a food bank until AISH is similarly increased and indexed. The Coaldale food bank has 15 volunteers and helps 300 to 400 families yearly and is co-ordinated by Mr. Vaughn Caldwell.

My second tabling is five copies of a letter from a constituent, Doreen Brazier, in which she expresses her fear that if Bill 46 is passed, it will be at the expense of the basic democratic rights of the people and that for a bill to be retroactive is further infringement on those rights.

My third tabling I will table five copies of a letter from Marion Ellerman, who states that for some who need care, the change from long-term care to assisted daily living has been a huge mistake. People are needlessly suffering.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings. One is a set of documents outlining the recommendations regarding the northeast Edmonton study area to the executive committee of the city of Edmonton. That looks to soil maps as smart investment and looking to get some of the value-added opportunities for northeast Edmonton.

The second is the program for local 955 of the operating engineers' 20-, 30-, 40-, and 50-year award recipients. There were over 200 this year. One of those of that 450,000 member organization was N. Budd Coutts, who rose to the secretary-treasurer position. He is from Stony Plain, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings, and they have come from my constituents. They are Aylene Reynolds, Susan Lumley, Gayla Boake, Diana Rickard, Parminder Singh Pannu. They are all concerned about Alberta labour laws and strongly believe in "major changes to encourage fairness to all working people," strongly urging this government to implement and support changes to our province's antiquated and unfair labour laws and "bring Alberta labour laws into the 21st Century."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters that I have received from 200 of my constituents, calling for changing Alberta's labour laws. The letters express strong support for such changes as first contract arbitration, full legal recognition of bargaining rights, and one organizing law for all unionized workers.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter I received from Joyce and Edward Tona, concerned parents of a child who has been a developmental client of Michener Centre in Red Deer. While they feel their daughter has received excellent care at the centre, their concerns are with the PDD board, that they believe seems more interested in moving the clients into group homes than in building on the success of the Michener Centre.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter written by Jenny Hoops on behalf of Parents for Quality Child Care. The letter was written to the Minister of Children's Services, and in it she notes:

We applaud your continued efforts to improve the quality of child care in Alberta, however imposing higher standards without provincial or federal funding will likely cause availability to decline, worsening an already critical situation.

2:30

The Speaker: Hon. members, during Oral Question Period today a point of order was raised. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again during an exchange between the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition during the beginning questions in question period today, the Premier indicated that the Official Opposition of Alberta had failed to produce a policy on the royalty review. Citing 23(h), 23(i), 23(j), *Beauchesne* 484(3), I think it's unbecoming for the Premier to pay so little attention to the briefing by his staff, or perhaps this is just stubbornness about not paying attention to tabled documents.

Essentially, this point of order was raised exactly the same 11 days ago, on the 15th of November. The documents have been tabled. The Premier under 23(h) is making an allegation that the opposition has no policy on this royalty review. In fact, on November 15 I tabled all those documents. They exist as sessional papers 789/2007, 790/2007, 791/2007, 792/2007, and 793/2007.

I'll even note that during the exchange on November 11, the Minister of Energy got into it and pointed out that he had asked the Official Opposition to express our opinion with respect to a royalty review. Two of the documents that I tabled on that day, Mr. Speaker, were in fact copies of the presentation that our shadow minister for Energy had made to that very same royalty review in response to the invitation from the Minister of Energy. We have repeatedly tabled that presentation to the royalty review itself as proof that we were there. We've tabled media releases and copies of two public speeches that were made prior, in fact, to when the government's response was released.

The Premier has spoken contrary to the fact and is continuing to do so. In doing that, under 23(l) he is creating a disorder. Under 484(3) the documents have been requested and have been tabled, Mr. Speaker. To continue to make statements otherwise is, I believe, to take *Beauchesne*'s 494 off the table as a defence.

The Liberal policy on the royalty review is public. It is tabled. This point of order has been made before. I don't know why the Premier insists on repeating this. I hope that he listens to his staff, but clearly he's not willing to or not willing to pay attention to the documents that have been tabled in the House.

I would ask that the Premier withdraw the remarks today and to please not repeat them again because they are flat out inaccurate. To

continue to do so knowingly, Mr. Speaker, would certainly make me question why he continues to do that. I think he starts to move into a different area entirely.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pile of paper, whether tabled as sessional documents or not, does not necessarily a policy make. As you pointed out in your ruling on this very same point of order a number of days ago, there are differences of opinion, and those differences of opinion happen all the time.

In fact, if the hon. member raising the point of order wishes to rule out or have a point of order on any misstatement or any difference of viewpoint raised by hon. members during question period in their first 45 seconds, when they harassed a minister of the government, saying, “You don’t have a policy in this,” or “Why don’t you care” when you do care – as my hon. colleague from Peace River indicated to me just now, that’s entirely a difference of opinion, a viewpoint, and has nothing to do with the fact.

The fact of whether there’s a policy or not is entirely in the eye of the beholder. What the Premier has referred to a number of times in this House and I think is irrefutable, actually, is that back in 2004 there was an election, and there was no evidence then and I don’t believe now – and I say it’s not policy; it’s a question of evidence – that the Leader of the Official Opposition or the opposition at all spoke about the need for a royalty review. There’s no evidence that I’ve been able to discern – and I have it on reliable authority from others who have taken the time to look – that the Leader of the Opposition spoke between that time and earlier this year with respect to the need for a royalty review.

In fact, it was this Premier, this leader of the party that now is in government, his initiative which brought forward the royalty review. He first spoke about it during the leadership process a year ago and then followed through on the commitment that he made earlier this year, at which time the position of the Official Opposition, it would seem – and I stand to be corrected – was that the royalty panel that was appointed was not going to be able to do the job because it was somehow bitter and twisted.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that when the Premier was referring this afternoon – and I don’t have the Blues in front of me – he clearly was making a statement of opinion. It’s not something that he needs to be asked to withdraw. His opinion is his opinion and, in fact, probably is shared by most government members of the House, that the Liberals have no policy in this area. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. Official Opposition House Leader, in response to your last question, which was, “Mr. Speaker, how long will this go on?” that will depend entirely on the members. As long as the members want to raise questions with preambles and give answers that respond in kind and pretty much test the line in terms of debate all the time, it’s going to go on forever. This is not going to stop. Without any doubt one of the privileges that members have in this House is to express positions that they believe in. Whether or not other members agree with them is secondary to the fact that they have an opportunity to make a statement.

Oftentimes I’ve sat here and I’ve listened to members saying: the government doesn’t know what it’s doing. Then a government minister gets up and says: oh, yes, we do know what we’re doing. That’s part of the debate. So if somebody says, “We have a policy,” and somebody else says, “No, you don’t have a policy,” that’s part of the whole problem of the exchange in the debate with respect to

this. You know, we’re governed basically by *Beauchesne*, paragraph 494, which is relevant. It basically says that statements by members respecting themselves and within their own knowledge must be accepted. Oftentimes we will have a difference of opinion with respect to that, and oftentimes we’ll have to deal with two versions of the same thing and accept both of them.

There’s one last point that I do want to raise with respect to this, and that is a quote from Rules of Order and Decorum, page 541: “A Member may not direct remarks to the House or engage in debate by raising a matter under the guise of a point of order.” In essence, what we’ve got here is another extension of an opportunity to continue debate and clarification under the guise of a point of order. The statement that was made by the Premier at this point:

Mr. Speaker, his plan for infrastructure in this province is probably similar to the position they took on the royalty framework, which is zip. They don’t know where they are. It must get pretty difficult sitting on the fence all the time.

The chair is absolutely, totally neutral on the words involved, but the chair recognizes that if one looks at other questions and looks at other responses, this is not abnormal at all. It’s part of the ongoing debate, where “That minister is doing a lousy job,” and then the minister gets up and says, “Well, I’m doing a wonderful job” and proves it. I don’t know how you deal with this. As long as we have our preambles and as long as we have other statements and we’re always on the edge of this, this is going to continue forever.

There’s no point of order.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Written Questions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that written questions on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head:

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that motions for returns on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: 2:40 Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we’ll call the committee to order.

Bill 212

Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? Hon. members, we are currently dealing with an amendment, amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking to A1 of Bill 212, Safer Commu-

nities and Neighbourhoods Act, I had an opportunity to present to the task force that toured the province. I had an opportunity to present at the University of Calgary and then at sort of a follow-up in northeast Calgary, and at the follow-up in northeast Calgary a number of the suggestions I had made were in evidence by virtue of the Hobbema cadets.

The Hobbema cadets showed what positive interaction can take place when students and youth are involved in proactive, preventative measures. The members of the Hobbema cadets were trained by an RCMP individual, and they had such pride not only in their discipline but in their uniforms, and they were very supportive of each other. The precision with which they went through their parade and drills showed the type of pride that young people experience when adults take into account their willingness to do things right. As a teacher for 34 years I have seen the value of preventative and proactive programs such as school resource officers, and that's why in amendment A1 the notion of being proactive and preventative is so very important.

In order to achieve safer communities and neighbourhoods such as Bill 212 purports and amendment A1 attests to, we have to deal with problems of the cause of crime. These problems include such things as food insecurity. I noted that 85 per cent of families that are receiving benefits from the province, whether those benefits are through AISH or PDD or community living or through welfare, are more likely to experience food insecurity. If they can't receive the food in supportive, subsidized fashion, then they're forced to look otherwise, and sometimes crimes occur out of desperation, when food is shoplifted.

Poverty affects a growing number of individuals. Amendment A1 of Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, takes into account that factors such as poverty, such as homelessness are ever present in our province despite its boom circumstance. As I've noted before, so many of the factors that we are experiencing now are more likely to be experienced during a depression than in a boom time.

We know, for example, that one of the contributing factors to crime is illiteracy. Unfortunately, 40 per cent of Albertans in the workforce are workplace illiterate. That lack of literacy shows up in a large proportion in our jail system. We have an awful lot of individuals who are incarcerated who are drug dependent, who suffer from infant fetal alcohol syndrome, which is carried through their lives.

As a teacher I have noted the disenfranchisement, the lack of connection with ESL students, 75 per cent of whom fail to complete their high school education within a three- or four-year period. We know that, unfortunately, there are a number of young immigrants who get drawn into the gangs because they're not receiving the support that Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, purports to provide.

So in speaking in favour of amendment A1, it is important that in trying to achieve safer communities and neighbourhoods, youth and support for youth and parents of youth be taken into account. If we want to prevent crime in the future, we have to deal with the problems of poverty, food insecurity, illiteracy, that are, unfortunately, ever current in the present.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also rise to speak in favour of amendment A1 of the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act and to add my views to my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity with regard to the root causes that this bill purports to

address. I know from experience and working with the not-for-profit sector, as my colleague knows from his experience working in the education sector, that these root causes are and should be of concern to Albertans, particularly in this day and age with the economic climate that we face and the growing gap between the well-to-do and the not well-to-do in this province. It's like a magnifying glass that these boom times provide for us on all of that and all of those issues and all those items that are out there in our communities, and we need to be aware of them.

I know from speaking with people in the not-for-profit sector, with the Elizabeth Fry Society and the Calgary John Howard Society, for example, and other organizations that attempt to address these concerns, that we do need to address these in bills such as Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, and particularly with regard to amendment A1.

Illiteracy is something that, again, is recognized by people who are involved in the education system, recognizing that there are people seeing it, particularly those trying to get a foothold in the workforce and how difficult that is. Of course, we're all pleased when those people have the courage to bring those issues forward. It's an issue that people want to often see . . .

2:50

Ms Evans: I am sorry, but am I to understand that the hon. member's microphone might not be working?

The Deputy Chair: To the people who are managing the microphone system, it appears that we have low volume on this particular mike, if that can be attended to, please.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Cheffins: Okay. I'll try to raise my voice a little bit for the sake of the members in the Assembly.

As I mentioned, I do wish to raise my voice also in conjunction with my colleague from Calgary-Varsity with regard to the roots of crime and the need to address those in Alberta. My colleagues mentioned literacy and the attempts, that we need to address those through the education system, and mental health issues. Again, in the not-for-profit sector, where I have experience, we're very well aware of the number of people who are incarcerated who suffer from mental health issues. We need to address those. Hopefully, we'll be able to come to some of those through Bill 212 and this amendment A1.

My colleagues also mentioned poverty concerns in this province. Again, what I was trying to say, and perhaps what I need to speak up a little bit more about, perhaps what we all need to speak up a little bit more about, is the growing gap between the well-to-do and those who aren't well-to-do in this province and how that gap is magnified in times of a boom. We need to address those issues because food issues are of concern, the percentage of crimes that are committed that have to do with people trying to find some desperate way to be able to address their basic needs.

Just one issue I'd like to raise in conjunction with this is what it is that I hear from the Elizabeth Fry Society, and that has to do with the percentage of crimes that are committed by females in this province and have to do with trying to provide basic needs for themselves and their families. Frankly, this is a travesty in a province with the resources that we have. It should be a concern to all Albertans that people are falling through the cracks here in Alberta.

Again, I rise in support of Bill 212 and encourage this Assembly to consider addressing those issues in whatever manner possible, including through amendment A1. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by St. Albert.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and contribute to the Committee of the Whole debate for Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I'd like to start by commending the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing this legislation forward. I certainly believe that the possibility of changed safety levels in our communities for the better is definitely inherent in this bill.

I'd like to speak to that, the intent of the bill, and the amendment proposed for it. Generally, the aim of the bill is to make Alberta's communities safer by decreasing the prevalence of hazardous and disruptive activities within our neighbourhoods. The proposed act would accomplish this by empowering community members who observe events which negatively impact on their health or security. The situations that one should report are occurring are outlined in section 3 of the bill. Perhaps we can all agree that having an informed citizenry contributing directly to the safety of communities, as outlined in this section, is arguably the best method of crime reduction and prevention.

The bill also provides an additional avenue for community members, no matter where they live, to make a complaint to a special law enforcement agency. They can do so if their neighbourhood is adversely affected by activities on a property in a community.

I'd like to add briefly that proposed amendments B, J, and Q all enhance the intent of this bill. They do so by making it possible to include all mobile homes, even those on rented lots, under the scope of this bill. This would be a commendable change as it reinforces the fact that Bill 212 is aimed at the safety of all communities in Alberta: urban and rural, north and south.

Mr. Chairman, the enforcement agency under Bill 212 is different from the current resources available because it would be dedicated to the investigation of specified disruptive behaviour. Therefore, it would have the capacity to perform larger, in-depth investigations into citizens' concerns.

The information needed for these investigations must be made available while respecting the rights of the person being investigated. Proposed amendment F solidifies these aspects of the bill and would go a long way in ensuring that both sides of the equation are addressed appropriately.

This is also a different type of legislation because it targets behaviours on public and private properties. This proposed act places attention on the property that facilitates the questionable behaviour whereas the current focus is frequently placed on the individual and the crime. Under this bill, however, individuals who engage in dangerous activities in a private residence could be evicted from the residence if they rent or be barred from the property for a period of time if they own it. In any event the property could be closed over a certain time frame specified by the Court of Queen's Bench. By supporting amendments C and H, for example, we can ensure these caveats or interests that are placed on the property's land title will be appropriately assigned and in line with Alberta's legal and land systems.

The idea behind the bill is twofold. First, it gives residents an increased role by providing them with access to the resources needed to end activities which adversely affect their quality of life. Second, by closing the property where these activities are occurring, all individuals involved are basically removed from the community. Their ability to conduct the activity would be curtailed because they would simply not have a location to do it in.

Bill 212 makes a link between property and dangerous activity. Inherent in this legislation, Mr. Chairman, is the assumption that by

taking away a person's access to their property, we can impair their ability to commit unwanted acts. I think that committing a crime or a nuisance act is more than just a matter of personal choice. Even if someone willfully chooses to engage in an activity that could cause harm to others, an appropriate environment is also needed. If a criminal knows he or she may be caught and lose their residence, they may not follow through after all. I think that poor intentions can in some cases be rectified when opportunity is taken away and more consequences are put in line.

The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act goes further than that, Mr. Chairman. Once a legitimate complaint is received, the wrongdoers are given a chance to clean up their act before the property is targeted. After a complaint or a concern from a community member is received, the agency has the option to approach the situation in a variety of community-based ways. For example, as per section 4(1)(c) a warning letter may be sent to the owner of the property or its occupant. The letter could go a long way in informing the landlord of what's happening on the property, and perhaps after receiving that kind of information, the landlord could and would take action to eliminate the problem-causing behaviour.

Furthermore, the agency can try to resolve the complaint by agreement or informal action as outlined in section 4(1)(d). This is where the idea of a community-based approach may help the situation before it gets exacerbated. In some cases the disruptive activities can be solved by calling for further involvement from a parent. In many situations a warning can address the problem when a disruptive behaviour is in its initial stage.

In other jurisdictions, Mr. Chairman, this approach has worked very successfully. It's been found that individuals who are just heading off the track usually get scared straight with this type of warning. The problem is identified and addressed before it turns into a larger issue. This proposed act is effective at preventing activity because it rectifies the situation before it has the chance to get worse. It is more preventative than some other legislation. It sends the message that this kind of behaviour is not acceptable, is not wanted in our neighbourhoods, and that wrongdoers can't get away with it, because the whole community is alert and engaged.

Activities can be dissuaded with avenues other than the criminal justice system. There is no question of actions that are still to be dealt with under the Criminal Code, but Bill 212 attempts to resolve issues before they need to be dealt with through the Criminal Code.

Mr. Chairman, part 2 of Bill 212 aims to implement a process by which dangerous and excessive fortifications on a property can be forcibly removed. The rationale behind this provision is that excessive fortifications are associated with increased levels of dangerous activity. There are very few legitimate reasons why homes in our communities require bulletproof windows or metal cladding on their exteriors. It's my belief that if these fortified buildings are allowed in our communities, they may pose a threat to the safety of others in our communities by endangering the lives of police officers and emergency response workers amongst others.

3:00

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to digress just a little and comment on a few style and grammar changes included in the amendments that are before the committee. Much like the fortified properties this bill seeks out to avoid future danger to the community, errors in language can cause problems down the road for legislation, and many of the amendments brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays clear up some of these linguistic issues. The proposed amendments given as D and P clear up style inconsistencies, amendment G is a grammatical revision, it appears that amendments N and O are simply correcting cross-referencing errors, the amendment listed as R is reflecting a terminology change,

and all of these proposed amendments will help this legislation in the long run.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I want to reiterate my admiration for the intent of the member. The safety of all Alberta communities is of paramount importance to me and, I'm sure, for all members. I ask my colleagues to lend support to this bill and the proposed amendments as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also would like to support this document as worthy and compliment the member from Calgary for doing a job on this. He talks about one of the highlights of the bill. Looking at it, it promotes community safety by providing a mechanism for the government of Alberta to respond to public complaints about property.

I would like to take the word "property" out and use the words "community issues relative to crime" that are faced in the particular neighbourhood. For example, it would be worth while considering if I could lobby with the member to put functions such as property under the function of the safer communities and neighbourhood committee: say, in St. Albert put the property matter in there – curfews, drugs, community policing, youth – so that the function could be identified throughout the community as all under that particular heading, and people would be less confused and know where to go for one-stop shopping relative to their concerns.

Now, obviously, if you set this up with a board like an FCSS board, you would have to have some incentive funding. I think it would be worth pursuing that, broadening your scope from a property to a larger number of matters that are under the umbrella of crime. I think there would be some merit in doing that. I think this has a lot of merit.

One of the things that I would even put under a committee of this type is community policing. It's interesting that in my particular part of St. Albert where I have an office, the main core of St. Albert, I have obviously not seen a policeman over the last three years visit our office. I see them going by in police cars and stopping me on the highway once in a while. I'm suggesting to you that I think under a safer communities and neighbourhood structure you would get some co-ordination of this service. That's where I'd like to see this broaden up from just a property aspect to a more total picture of the crime issues in a particular community, and I think it would have a lot of merit.

I want to emphasize that I do support this. I think it has a lot of merit. I think with a few changes it would even make it more worth while for communities such as ours in St. Albert to follow this through and follow the model of the FCSS board in making this effective. It would cost them money, yes, to set it up, but I think it would be worthy, and it has a lot of possibilities.

I'll stop with that, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, we have about four minutes.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise again and speak during Committee of the Whole for Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I would like to take some time to address the various points which were brought up in the debate up to this point.

The hon. members for Edmonton-Mill Woods and Lethbridge-East asked for more information about who exactly the individual

acting as a director would be. As was stated during the second reading debate, the director plays a significant role in the execution of the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. The director or the individual acting as director must deal with and initiate many of the mechanisms set out under Bill 212. This includes receiving and acting on complaints from Albertans, collecting information, applying for and serving community safety orders, closing properties, registering caveats based on a community safety order, and at times asking residents to vacate properties.

Under the Police Act the director of law enforcement has a number of important responsibilities. Among many other duties the director is mandated to monitor police services to ensure that adequate and effective policing is maintained throughout the province. Furthermore, this individual develops and promotes crime prevention and restorative justice programs and works to enhance professional practices, standards, and training for police services.

Amendment A will allow the director of law enforcement to delegate the day-to-day operational and administrative functions to a qualified member of the department under the purview of the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. This will provide the most effective use of staff to ensure that front-line resources assigned to this important initiative are responding to the needs of Alberta's communities.

Mr. Chairman, the Member for Lethbridge-East also wanted further clarification on how local police services would interact with the agencies proposed by Bill 212. As I explained previously, in other jurisdictions these two agencies are distinct but work co-operatively. For example, as of October 31, 2007, Nova Scotia's public safety investigation section had 37 active and ongoing investigations throughout the province and had completed 68 investigations since it became operational in April 2007. Thirteen of those investigations were concluded through co-operation with other Nova Scotia agencies. In those cases the public safety investigation section responded to requests from police services for technical assistance.

More specifically, in October 2007 the public safety investigation section teamed up with the members of the Cape Breton regional police for the investigation of a property. At the beginning of that month the police conducted a warrant search of the property and seized marijuana, hashish, LSD, and other drugs. The tenant of the property was charged with drug trafficking and firearms offences as a result of the police investigation.

The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act investigation established that illegal drug activities taking place at or near this property were having an adverse effect on this particular neighbourhood. The problem tenant was subsequently issued a Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act notice to vacate the premise. By the end of the month the tenant voluntarily complied and vacated the premise.

Fostering strong working relationships and partnerships with other law enforcement agencies is a strategic priority for other jurisdictions' safer communities and neighbourhood agencies. They provide both investigative and technical resources to a growing number of police agencies while maintaining a focus on their specified public safety mandate. Clearly, there are open communication lines between both agencies to ensure that safer communities and neighbourhoods investigators do not interfere with the investigations already in progress by police.

Mr. Chairman, if I may, I would also like to respond to the concerned voice by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona regarding the Privacy Commissioner's news release on November 7, 2007. The information the Privacy Commissioner stated that overriding the

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act in Bill 212 is not necessary. Because it is imperative that a complainant's personal information remain absolutely confidential during this process, Bill 212 contains a provision which states that the identity of the complainant is to be confidential and cannot be disclosed without the written consent of the person in question.

Please allow me to clarify why this is the case. Section 30(2) ensures that the complainant's privacy rights are clearly established. Having all of the privacy expectations actually within the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act provides for the direct protection of privacy. This section simplifies any possible confusion about complainants' privacy. Bill 212 was fuelled by the observations of Albertans, their privacy of the utmost importance.

3:10

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(ii) and 8(7)(b), which state that all questions must be decided to conclude debate on a private member's public bill which has received 120 minutes of debate in Committee of the Whole, I must now put the questions to conclude debate.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

[The clauses of Bill 212 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I now request you to move that the committee rise and report Bill 212.

Mr. Renner: All right. I will. I move that we rise and report Bill 212.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 212. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 214
Healthy Futures Act**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am thrilled and pleased to be able to move second reading of Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act.

I've been in this Assembly for 11 years – this is my 11th fall sitting – and I'm trying to remember if I've ever actually managed to get a bill into debate. This could be my first time, so I really am delighted. Thank you.

This bill has excellent genealogy. It, in fact, comes directly flowing from the famous red book put out by the Liberal opposition, which is our plan for public health care called Creating a Healthy Future, made famous in this Assembly by the previous Premier, who made it into an airborne missive and had to withdraw that and apologize for it.

I can refer people to page 23 of that document for anyone that would like to read further the policy document that we produced that has resulted now in Bill 214. This is our policy position number one, which is to "require major policies and funding decisions to undergo 'Health Impact Assessments'." Essentially, many of the important factors in determining our health really have very little to do with the health care system, but they have an awful lot to do with lifestyle choices, injury prevention, the environment, et cetera. That is what we are trying to capture in this bill, that the government would adopt a policy of doing health impact assessments when they were considering either licensing or giving approval for large projects or looking at funding large projects.

I don't have to think very hard to come up with a number of situations that we are looking at in Alberta where a health impact assessment could be put into play, I think for very good effect; for example, the situation that we have in Fort McMurray and north of Fort McMurray and the situation soon to come in Strathcona county with the upgraders, what they call Upgrader Alley. Even a little further east from there is the new coal mine that's being opened up in the Dodds/Round Hill area. Or even I'm thinking back to the work that I did around the Turner Valley gas plant and trying to make that into a historical public heritage site and the problems they've had there with the ongoing leakage from the plant into nearby water sources and trying to test for that and get to the bottom of it. So there are just a couple of ideas of where a health impact assessment would be useful to have in place to help inform our decisions.

I think there's a fairly wide range that the bill would take into consideration.

The purpose of the health assessment process is

- (a) to support the goals of prevention and sustainable development and wellness,
- (b) to create and update, in the monitoring and audit stages of assessment, a body of information about health determinants and the impact of certain activities on health,
- (c) to predict the health consequences of a proposed activity and to assess plans to mitigate any negative health impacts resulting from [that] activity, and
- (d) to provide for the involvement of the public, proponents, the Government and Government agencies in the review of [those same] proposed activities.

We're suggesting that there would be a director of assessment review put in place, who could then oversee and administer these reviews, and there would be a screening committee, as well, that worked hand in hand. Proposed activities for the director of the assessment review are: a description of the proposed activity; an analysis of the need for it; consideration of alternatives to the proposed activity; identification of potentially affected populations, including residents, workers, vulnerable populations, and other identifiable groups; an analysis of site selection; identification of

existing health status of the population that might be affected; an analysis of possible effects on sociocultural well-being, et cetera. The list goes on. I encourage people to actually read the bill on this.

Certainly, one of the things that I have really come to understand as the Official Opposition shadow minister for Health and Wellness is how important those social determinants of health are. I started out by saying that a lot of the factors in determining our health really have very little to do with the health care system. Well, the social determinants of health take into consideration things like income, economic status, social equity, education, the environment, family life and community support, social stresses, job security.

I think one of the things that we find really important when we look at this policy of health impact assessments is agriculture and food production. If we're going to protect our food sources and also the farm workers that work with it, we've got to be very conscious of what we're putting into the air, the water, and the soil that they, then, have to work with. I argue all the way through this that it doesn't get us further ahead if we end up with massive development and a sick population or massive development and we've poisoned our land.

You know, I'm not saying that that's imminent, I'm not saying the sky is going to fall, but I am saying that we've reached a point where the level of our development gets larger and larger and larger. Who would have comprehended 50 years ago the kind of development that we are now looking at in Fort McMurray? Who would have contemplated work camps of 5,000 to 6,000 people, and not just one, Mr. Speaker, but many, many, many work camps with that many people in them supporting a number of different developments in that area? [interjection] Someone from across the way is saying that, oh, they knew about it 50 years ago, which frankly is making the member older than I thought he was. That was an interesting thing to learn today.

The World Health Organization supports the use of health impact assessments. From their point of view, they say that it's based on four values, and these values provide a platform from which the benefits of a health impact assessment can be derived and link health impact assessments to the policy environment in which the assessments are being undertaken: democracy, which allows people to participate in the development and implementation; equity, because it's examining the distribution of impacts from a proposal on the whole population, not just on the people that are going to expend the money or make the money but on everybody that's around it, and I think that's really important; sustainable development, which we with limited natural resources in this province really, you know, understand we need to get a handle on, but those short- and long-term impacts have to be considered for sustainable development; ethical use of evidence. I really believe in evidence-based decision-making using the best available quantitative and qualitative evidence to be identified and used in assessment.

3:20

That's coming out of the World Health Organization. Clearly we're not the only ones who are anticipating this, but the Liberal opposition issued our policy paper in 2003. That's when we came out with this recommendation. It's taken me this long to get a bill draw to be able to actually transform that idea into what you see before you as Bill 214, but I think that those concepts that are behind this bill are very important. We are in second reading of Bill 214, so I am generally speaking about the principles of the bill, but that is what is behind it.

I've mentioned some of the places where I think it would be useful when we're just looking at current development proposals that are in front of us, like Upgrader Alley and Fort McMurray and some

of those other areas. But, very quickly, when I go through and look at some of the newspaper articles that have been done around problems that have cropped up, you think we should be able to see this.

Mr. Ouellette: I was daydreaming. Sorry.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, boy. Yeah, you are. Might want to put that cellphone on vibrate.

I think this is a very exciting opportunity for this Assembly. I know a number of times in the past the government has stolen our ideas. I'm happy to have that happen with this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. This act proposes that any major government project or legislative proposal be assessed for how it may potentially affect a myriad of factors, including income, poverty, social equity, education, environment, family life, social stress, job security, and agriculture and food production.

Mr. Speaker, one of my main concerns with this bill is that it could effectively bring the decision-making apparatus of the government and this Assembly to a grinding halt. There's a long list of government departments that are mandated to address the factors in this bill. Income, poverty, and social equity involve at the very least Finance and Service Alberta. Social equity, family life, and social stress are topics covered by Children's Services, Health and Wellness, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Seniors and Community Supports. Our education system involves Education and Advanced Education and Technology while Environment consists of not only the Department of Environment but also Sustainable Resource Development and Energy. Agriculture and Food is obviously affected by the inclusion of agriculture and food production in this bill. This means that at the very least the operations of 13 of the government's 18 ministries, more than two-thirds, would be interrupted by this bill.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with a bill that would affect a lot of ministries, but this bill goes much too far, Mr. Speaker. The problem is not that the idea of health assessments is a bad one; it's that the mechanism this bill proposes to implement is simply unacceptable. There's no doubt there are numerous factors that contribute to human health. The question for this government is whether these factors can be studied in the manner that this bill proposes and still be timely and economical with respect to legislative decision-making.

Now, when I consider the study mechanism proposed in Bill 214, I think the clear answer to that question is no. First, the bill does not propose a mechanism that would work in a timely manner. Depending on the scope of the proposed changes or project, developing, carrying out, and analyzing the results of a study could take months or even years. In addition, making these health assessments available for public review before legislation is approved would require at least several weeks in the Legislature to ensure there is adequate time for public input. It seems that, in the end, the mechanism proposed by this bill adds unnecessary bureaucracy and duplication.

I also wonder whether the Member for Edmonton-Centre considered time constraints when Bill 214 was prepared. I think most members of this House would agree that the process to pass laws is already quite lengthy. It's hard to justify extending the process to accommodate the assessments proposed in the bill.

Second, Bill 214 does not propose a mechanism that will work in

an economical manner. There have been many studies done by Health Canada, the World Health Organization, and other respected health groups to determine how health impact assessments might best be implemented. Many of these studies suggest including health impacts in the environmental assessment process, in part because there's really no need to conduct two separate assessments and pay for similar assessments twice. As MLAs we require information on a broad range of issues when we assess policies or projects. At the very least, we look at how a proposal would affect Alberta's economy, our environment, and our citizens' health. To do this, we need information on each of these concerns at once, not only information about health to the exclusion of other issues. Why assess health separately from other issues when often the concerns involved are common to all of them?

The third question I have about the mechanism proposed in Bill 214 is whether these health assessments would provide additional information that allows me and others to better make decisions. I don't believe that they would. The problem here is that assessing health effects is nowhere near as straightforward as the bill may suggest. It's very easy, for example, to develop toxicological information about the effects of a specific chemical, to say that exposure to so many parts per million has a particular effect over a certain amount of time, but even very specific information like this is difficult to use. Most people are exposed to mixtures of substances. Another related problem is that there are only risk assessments for a few effects on physical health, particularly cancer. There are few ways to assess other physical health effects or effects on psychological and social well-being.

In short, mandating the study of health effects is absolutely useless if there's no systematic and scientifically agreed upon way to conduct those studies. In some situations health assessments may be scientifically possible and legislatively advisable and worthwhile given their potential effects. In those situations I don't see anything wrong with conducting such assessments, but that's not what this bill proposes. It would have us study legislation without regard to the need for such study or the costs and time required, not to mention whether it actually produces meaningful or useful information.

For the purposes of this debate, Mr. Speaker, let's assume for a moment that all of these issues I just listed are not concerns. The question about health assessments then becomes: who's going to conduct these assessments? It's clear that they're not the sort of thing to be undertaken lightly or by a layperson. Like so many health care issues, we need health professionals to perform these studies. Yet I hardly think I need to remind anyone in this House that Alberta is looking around the world for more health professionals. Doctors, epidemiologists, and public health experts, just to name a few: they're not easy to come by within our borders or beyond. Where would we find these professionals to carry out these studies? Should we divert health professionals already working in Alberta from their current excellent efforts to carry out health impact assessments? I don't think so.

The core issue in this debate is whether the positive effects of this bill would outweigh the negative effects, resulting in better legislative decision-making. I think it's clear that the negative effects outweigh the positive, no matter whether we're discussing time or money involved or the information that these studies would produce.

Health is not the only issue that must be taken into consideration when public policy is made. To give an obvious example, as MLAs we must also consider the impact that a given measure will have on the public purse. Moreover, it's not as though our present policy-making process has failed to consider health. These processes do so with far less expense and in far less time than this bill would require.

There's simply no justification for enacting a process that would effectively halt the legislative process for at least 13 of the government's 18 ministries.

Having given careful consideration to the Healthy Futures Act, I'm opposed to the passage of the bill and I encourage my colleagues to join me in opposing it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Calgary-Varsity, followed by Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A few comments on Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. I certainly commend the author for the intent of what was attempted here, to establish a health assessment screening committee of each ministry, the Health Quality Council of Alberta, and an expert in preventative health. I certainly understand the reason for this. We know from just the simple things about health, you know, the hospitals, what we tend to spend most of our time on, that in the long run we really want to deal with health in a much different way. We all agree with that, or at least I hope we all agree from time to time.

I'd certainly be prepared to take a look at this health assessment screening committee, but I tend to feel it might be more of a bureaucracy. I mean, I think we know right away, but we want to get some action. When I look today, we talk about the social determinants of health care. We know, for instance, by where you live and by the amount of income coming into your family that the chances you're going to have health problems increase dramatically. We know all these things, Mr. Speaker. I think what we need is some mechanism for action. Now, if this could do that, I certainly would be quite prepared to support it. I'd have to see how it looks, not just to set up a screening device with things we know that we should be doing immediately. Maybe it would be helpful in some environmental areas, you know, where we're looking at toxins and what they might mean, Fort Chipewyan perhaps being an example of where something like this might have worked.

You know, when I look today just at poverty – and it was alluded to in this Assembly earlier on in question period – when we see that 64,000 Alberta children are impoverished and the working poor in this rich province topped the national average, well, I can tell you right there that down the way we're going to have some health problems. Rather than a screening mechanism I would like to see how we could begin to bring these kids out of poverty. Of course, they're coming from poorer families. Many of these families are working in this rich province. How do we deal with that? How do we deal with the minimum wage and all the things that we need to do, Mr. Speaker? How do we deal with housing? All these are the issues that we need to deal with immediately. I don't think in this case that we need a screening device to know that we have to do some things to deal with poverty. It's self-evident. The evidence is clear that, again, depending on where you live and what your income is, chances are that you're going to have problems with the health care system in the future. That's self-evident. So what are we doing to start to eliminate poverty?

It reminds me of a 10-year plan back in 1989 to get rid of homelessness federally. We were going to end child poverty federally. It was brought in by Ed Broadbent. Now, we haven't made a dent in that, but we know that we should be dealing with that, Mr. Speaker. It's self-evident. But if there's no political will to do these things, it doesn't matter how many screening devices you have.

Mr. Speaker, as I say, certainly, it's an interesting idea. I would rather see, I guess, action in dealing with some of these issues –

environment, housing, education, all the things that we know have an impact on health – and I don't think we need a screening device to do that. Now, if this could move this ahead somehow, if I could be shown that it's not just, you know, another bureaucracy that we deal with, I certainly would be open to looking at how this might work. Of course, this is very hard to explain in the bill. I understand that. But one must take a look at it and say: well, it looks a little bureaucratic on the procedure when we know some of the things that we have to move on. We have a disagreement with the government about this. They tell us, say, with housing: everything is hunky-dory; we're moving along; there aren't any problems there. Well, it doesn't matter how many screening devices. If they take that attitude in government, they're not going to move whether they have a screening device or not.

As I say, with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I really would tend to think that there might be some things that might work in this bill, like green screens, for example, especially dealing with the environment. That's probably where something like this might be of some use, which obviously leads to health problems, you know, if we don't have those types of screens. I think the member was right in saying that a lot of things 20 years ago that we took for granted and we didn't think were health problems we now know. Maybe something like this, especially in that area, might have some bearing, that we would not make those mistakes with our younger people in the future down the way. So I guess I'm prepared to take a look at it. I'm worried about the bureaucracy, but there may be some use for this in certain areas.

Thank you very much for the time.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Calgary-Egmont, followed by St. Albert.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is willing to take a look at Bill 214. That's the whole point of why we're here in the Legislature.

I very much appreciate the fact that government members took a look at my Motion 511 on establishing a unified family court. To make it more palatable and potentially to make it more implementable, the amendment was changed to implement a unified family court process.

The government in its wisdom established a series of standing policy committees so that bills could receive the scrutiny of sober second, third, fourth, and fifth thought. What I am suggesting is that we have a number of opportunities. When we have the Committee of the Whole process on Bill 214, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview might wish to introduce an amendment which he feels would help to establish the clarity of the process in terms of creating the assessment. Likewise, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who believes at this point that this bill appears to have high precepts, imports, and intents. If he doesn't believe in his wisdom that it has the mechanisms necessary to actually achieve accomplishment, then I would suggest that, both in the process of Committee of the Whole or potentially as a referral. The ideas that Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act, puts forward I very strongly support and would like to see implemented. If, using the wisdom of the House as a whole, we can turn the concepts and the details into actual effect, then we'll have achieved a terrific result for Alberta.

For too long we've been flying by the seat of our pants in this province. We have taken the good fortune of the nonrenewable resources, and we've extracted them at rapid paces, which has had some negative effects. A former member of this House was very fond of expressing one of the primary laws of physics, which is that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. What has

happened in this province is that while we've enjoyed the wealth associated with harvesting our nonrenewables – gas, oil, the bitumen from the oil sands – it comes at a cost. What Bill 214 is suggesting is that before you undertake a development, let's do a cumulative assessment of the effect that that development is going to have. Is the amount of effort, time, money, and the process going to achieve the results that were intended? Can wealth end up buying happiness, or by sacrificing a significant part of our environment, are there going to be repercussions and ramifications that highly outweigh the intent of the project?

3:40

Now, we have this wonderful asset north of Fort McMurray in terms of the oil sands, but there are limitations to the aquifers that underlie that area. There are limitations to the Athabasca River. We have, through various studies, noted that there is arsenic and there is mercury. We have known that the amount of water that is contained in the Athabasca is going down. Of course, with any of that water that gets used in the refining process, whether it be in an upgrader in the corridor in central Alberta or whether it be in the oil sands itself, we have to know what that effect is. We cannot blindly go forward. Another statement is that if we don't learn from the mistakes of the past, we're doomed to repeat them. Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act, says: hey, before we go ahead, let's think this out. I would suggest that the time taken in thinking it out is a worthy investment.

In the urban areas we are encroaching on wells that were drilled in years previous. The most significant example of that was the proposed Compton well within a kilometre of the southeast hospital. Compton argued that the chances of a blowout of that particular well given modern technology and the pilot light and that as soon as the gas is leaked, it's immediately ignited – well, the Compton individual associated with that Energy and Utilities Board hearing suggested that the chances of a well blowout were the square root of zero. Yes, that's rhetoric, and, yes, that's hyperbole. He was trying to assure the 350,000 residents in the southeast area of Calgary, one-third of our population, that there was nothing to worry about. Fortunately, through the process and through the intervention of the city of Calgary and the Calgary health region, that well site was not allowed to go ahead. It was a lengthy process, but if lives can be saved, then that has to be taken into account.

We've had examples where because of a lack of due diligence, projects were allowed to go ahead; for example, the Lynnview Ridge project in Calgary, which was built on top of an old refinery site. We've had examples of trying to build greenhouses on former oil sites, thinking that there wouldn't be any problem with doing so. We just needed the space, so put the greenhouse in that area. The effect of what was coming up from the ground, whether it be creosote along the Bow River or, as I say, chemicals in the ground: these things weren't taken into account when all these homes were built in Lynnview Ridge.

The fact that the city had surrounded the Hub Oil recycling plant wasn't really taken into account when approval was given to carry out the type of recycling work that was done. Unfortunately, two individuals lost their lives when that event took place. We have examples. Turner Valley and Black Diamond, for example, have expressed desires potentially to amalgamate, but that area is a pincushion of early development. The good folks in Turner Valley have had to redesign, redraw their plan for their water reservoir twice, at great cost to the town of Turner Valley. Initially the locations of well sites weren't taken into account, and when it turned out that there was a well site smack dab, well, not quite in the middle but towards the southeast edge of that reservoir, then a number of environmental concerns were raised.

If we don't do due diligence, if we don't realize – I'll use a teaching example. Kids who are hungry don't learn well. If we don't address the issues of poverty in connection with education, in connection with health, then we're going to pay for it to a much greater extent after the fact. If we don't try, for example, to keep individuals in their homes as long as we can by providing subsidies and supports and they end up having to be institutionalized, then we know it's going to be more expensive.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by St. Albert, followed by Stettler-Drumheller.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 214, Healthy Futures Act. We all recognize the importance of health to our quality of life. It is the personal obligation of each of us to take the initiatives to better our physical, social, and psychological well-being. I hear somebody saying over there: look at who's talking. As elected officials who make decisions that influence the health of Albertans, we acknowledge our collective responsibility to be conscious of the consequences that government policies have on people's lives in this province. I'm proud that the government of Alberta has governed with the health and well-being of Albertans at the forefront of our agenda. Our government appreciates the potential health impacts of all our policy decisions and will continue to operate with due care and diligence.

Still, we recognize that there are numerous factors which impact health, and those factors are often very complex. Therefore, a broad health impact assessment may not be able to provide an accurate analysis. For the assessments to be effective, they will have to be specific and systematic. Unfortunately, the health impact assessments that are proposed through Bill 214 would examine the effect of policies on a vast amount of factors, including the technology being used, effects on a population's sociocultural well-being, and the environment. I feel that this spectrum is too large and would ultimately provide information that may not be an accurate representation of the impact of a certain policy, procedure, or program.

I think a more beneficial example of an impact assessment would be the blood tests currently being performed by Alberta Health and Wellness. The tests are examining the blood of 30,000 Albertans to determine whether contaminants from industrial sources, food, water, and household products are entering the system. The study will provide our government with a baseline which we can then use to take appropriate action if necessary. This form of biomonitoring provides us with comprehensive information. However, with a study of this size there is the chance that additional variables could influence the results. The larger the spectrum of a study the more factors there are to consider, which can be problematic when wanting to make direct correlations of the policy's impact on health. It's difficult to precisely and accurately predict how a set of factors will interact and impact public health.

3:50

I would urge this Assembly to continue to support the assessments that are conducted in certain circumstances. It is more effective to design an assessment with a clear objective that studies a specific area. We have performed successful assessments in the past that have been done in various circumstances. An example was the April 2006 report titled *Health Effects Associated with Short-term Exposure to Low Levels of Sulphur Dioxide: A Technical Review*. The study focused on a small sample and a specific element and concluded that in some conditions sulphur dioxide exposure can negatively affect the respiratory system. Another example was the August 2006 report titled *Wabamun and Area Community Exposure and Health Effects Assessment Program*, which analyzed the effects

of coal-fired power stations and oil and gas operations on the air quality and human health in Wabamun and the surrounding area.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few examples of health assessments that have been conducted under the auspices of our government. These studies all involve thorough and strategic research for a certain purpose which was then used by our government to improve Albertans' health and wellness.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I support detailed, focused assessments, and our government should continue to ensure that Albertans are consuming nutritious and safe foods and drinking clean water. Nonetheless, we can't conduct health impact assessments that try to gauge the effects of policy decisions on a wide range of factors as this bill proposes. It would be exhausting and ineffective. Even if this bill were amended to narrow its scope, I believe there are far too many determinants to assess what makes Albertans healthy or unhealthy.

As an example, take an individual who is in hospital for treatment of a concussion, and imagine if we had to analyze every aspect, every component of why their accident happened. First, we must determine why the individual has a concussion and if their concussion will pose additional risk to their health. Maybe it was because they were riding a bike in heavy traffic and were struck down by a passing vehicle. The bike rider was not wearing a helmet because they forgot it at home. Why did they forget their helmet? Well, they were in a rush to get to work since they had slept in because the individual had been up late the night before, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we can all see where I'm going with this fictional scenario. There are far too many factors and conditions that determine health. Overarching health impact assessments would have to deconstruct even more variables. The task would be endless, and the cost of administering adequate assessments would be daunting.

As a government, of course, we will continue to take into account the impact that policies and procedures have on Albertans' health and wellness. There are few, if any, decisions that are made without considering the impact on Albertans' health. After all, we have a responsibility not only to our constituents but to our families, our friends, and ourselves. We all share this province, and we all are impacted by the decisions made in this Legislature. This is why each of us has a responsibility to identify what we can do to live healthier and more active lives. I've been doing that for years, Mr. Speaker.

The government cannot be expected to manage every complex detail that may affect the health of Albertans, but what we can do is acknowledge that there are ways in which we can make improvements to our health and our quality of life. Maybe it's through organizing a recycling drive or a community choosing to walk to the corner store for groceries. They may be simple actions, but they'll have positive health outcomes that can reverberate throughout the community.

Healthy eating is essential to great health and is the key component of a person's development through life. I'm told that a healthy diet and good eating habits will contribute to reducing a person's susceptibility to chronic disease and increase their life expectancy. I've been told that and told that and told that, but you have what you have; it is what it is.

Albertans can also choose to become more active. Through physical activity a person can integrate healthy values that will guide them through their daily lives. Where have I heard that before? An active lifestyle provides many benefits. It can be done in various ways. There are hundreds of activities a person can do that are

suiting to their abilities. Funny; I've heard that before, too. It seems like the abilities tend to reduce as you get older.

Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage each of us to continue to take responsibility for what we can control. If there are changes we can make to improve the quality of life here in Alberta, then let's do it. All of us have an interest in the health of Albertans as elected representatives and as individuals.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I do believe we have the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East next, followed by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today to add some comments on Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. When I look around in society today and I see what's happening to some of the products that are coming in from China – toys, dyes, medications, clothes – many things that are coming and bringing, certainly, health risks into our country, I think we really have to look and realize that we are one huge, big neighbourhood. When we look at just one small portion of it, it truly can affect the whole system, which is why I think it's so important that we can't just take a small, little portion of Alberta, that we can't just take one small farmer's area. We have to look at how (a) it's actually going to affect his neighbours and (b) what that cumulative effect is as it spreads out like a ripple in a stream from that particular area.

We need a government policy that will undergo health impact assessments to examine the policy's effect on a wide range of factors. It will ensure that the government's decisions could potentially affect the health of Albertans, and it makes them subject to a greater scrutiny for the protection and the enhancement and the sustainability of the health of all Albertans. I think many people have said this before me, and I'm sure it'll be said again: wealth is great, but if you don't have your health, it really is nothing.

The EUB currently considers applications on a project-by-project basis, and it results, in my mind, in short-term decision-making. It doesn't really consider over time what those environmental or health impacts are going to be. We really don't live in isolation, and we really do live in neighbourhoods. I think that here in Alberta we hear about how independent we are and how we've pulled ourselves up by our bootstraps and that sort of attitude that we can make it on our own, that type of thing. I beg to differ with that. We've had farmers and ranchers helping each other, certainly, in the pioneer days. They've helped each other build houses. They've had barn raising. They've helped each other with their harvest when it was necessary. They shared combines. They shared horses. They shared what they had to do. No one really built this province on their own.

It isn't just this side of the table that thinks that something like this should happen. Former EUB chairman Neil McCrank commented to the *Calgary Herald* on March 15, '07, that we should look at the possibility of regional hearings where we examine the broader issues, the broader societal and environmental issues. It's expected that McCrank would be familiar with the flaws in the current process and see cumulative assessments as necessary as we look forward to the future. I think that when a man of his stature makes those sorts of comments, we certainly should be listening.

The oil sands development on the scale that we have in Alberta. I'm not sure how many people in this House have actually had the opportunity to take an airplane or, preferably, a helicopter, but either one, to actually fly over and see the immense tailing ponds and the total disruption of the environment in Fort McMurray. I cannot believe that anybody would have done that and just not realized that the development up there is bound to have an impact on the

environment and, consequently, the health of nearby residents. I would contend that it would certainly have an impact on the entire province over time. People who live in Fort McMurray for a while may well get sick, and they may come down to southern Alberta, depending on what types of maladies they may have picked up. In fact, they'll need health care, and they've moved from one region to the other, so it does affect us all. They will be using our hospitals in southern Alberta.

4:00

The Radke report stated that there are about 3,000 oil sands lease agreements with the provincial government totalling 49,000 square kilometres. Approximately 97,000 square kilometres, or 69 per cent, of leasable oil sands are still available. That's a tremendous geographic area to have so much more development into it. We need to see where those impacts are going to be. I don't believe that there have been proper studies to this point in terms of the cumulative effect or, in fact, how far the ripples of that development affect every community and our citizens. Rapid population increases have tremendous implications not only just for the small city, that has now become a gigantic city, but for all the small areas around them. Small towns are being absorbed in many ways. They're either being absorbed by larger cities or they're actually having to deal with people who don't want to live in the large city and are moving out to the smaller areas and putting tremendous pressures on their communities.

I think we all know that there's the potential for many more upgraders on the horizon, and we really should be understanding exactly what those upgraders are going to be doing. Whenever I hear "upgraders" and I hear words like "cooling towers," I can't help thinking of Erin Brockovich. I think that the movie, needless to say, had a Hollywood spin on it. Nevertheless, this was a woman that had done tremendous work in terms of the fact that although this company believed that they weren't having any effect and that they contained their damage within their fences, it was quite well proven with a very successful court case that, in fact, that wasn't the case.

The key issues related to the amount of surface and groundwater used in the extraction process: the overall impact on the quality of surface and groundwater, levels of greenhouse gas and other air emissions, land disturbances in the size of the footprint on the land base, land reclamation, impacts on wildlife and endangered species, and population health. These are only some of the ones that I believe should be considered. In fact, it might be interesting to have three independent opinions to look at the overall effect and see where they meet in the middle.

I heard that these would be very difficult to do because there are so many different government departments involved, but I believe that if there was a good template that was quite clear with very clear criteria, it would speed up that process. Public input is always necessary. I also believe that public meetings can be set up quite easily, not barring, of course, the time that it takes to advertise for it. I think it can be done quite easily when you don't have as many organizational people putting it together. Give it to a couple of organizational people that have experience in the logistics of putting together public meetings; that could be done very, very easily. I have been exposed to all-party committees, and I've seen just how effective staff can be in getting the notes from those meetings back to you the next day. So I'm not sure that I buy that argument that it's too much work to protect the public. The health impact assessments are a very prominent part of the Alberta Liberal health policy and have been for any number of years now.

Development is crucial to Alberta's continuing economic success. I don't believe that anyone would argue with that, and certainly I

wouldn't. Of course, we must always be moving forward. Of course, we must be always developing what we have been very blessed to have in this province, our natural resources. But we have to do it with the idea of sustainability, and we have to plan – we don't have to go hell-bent for leather – and go forward. The oil isn't going anywhere. The workers will always be, in the foreseeable future certainly, difficult to obtain. However, I think we all know how many temporary foreign workers are actually working in the oil sands.

The quality of public policy decision-making needs to be improved by taking the health of Albertans into consideration.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to join the debate on Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. This bill will require that health impact assessments be conducted for any major government project or legislative proposal that may affect public health. The bill requires that the health impact assessments be available for public review before legislation is approved. It would create a third-party office called the health commissioner.

The health commissioner would be responsible for collecting and reviewing health impact assessments to assess the government's overall strategy for improving health. In Alberta there are presently no legislated requirements to conduct health impact assessments. However, other types of legislated assessments, such as an environmental impact assessment, often address health issues. Needs-based assessments are also conducted to ensure public health and safety under unique circumstances.

Our government is fully committed to ensuring that the information used in creating policies is verifiable and accurate and, as well, that those policies represent the best interests of all Albertans. As a result of this commitment, our government is continuously finding innovative methods for information gathering and establishing effective planning tools. The Cabinet Policy Committee on Community Services works with Albertans, allowing them to have input into health policies, programs, and legislation by facilitating open discussions between government and the public. This committee meets with health care professionals and various stakeholders to hear their ideas pertaining to Alberta's health system and health policies. The Cabinet Policy Committee on Community Services studies Alberta's health policy in detail, hears public submissions, and sends its recommendations to cabinet for final approval. In some cases cabinet may refer the matter to caucus for discussion to ensure that a full examination of the health policies is in place.

Furthermore, our government recently established four policy field committees to deal with matters of public importance. Each policy field committee is mandated to oversee a portfolio of government departments and agencies and is responsible for further reviewing issues related to its assigned areas. By establishing all-party policy field committees to review legislation and call on outside organizations for additional information on health issues, our government is providing for sound decision-making throughout the legislative process.

The policy field committee on community services is mandated to deal with issues of public health. A bill can be referred to this committee right after first reading, at which point the committee conducts public hearings, reports observations, and offers expert opinions to enhance the bill. By having mandated committees to deal with provincial health care issues, we as legislators are able to highlight any danger or discrepancy in a proposed policy or legislation. This process ensures that sound policy decisions are made and that Albertans' best health interests are maintained.

Aside from establishing all-party committees to ensure sound

decision-making, the Alberta government has shown its commitment to continuous improvement in the area of health by creating the Health Quality Council of Alberta. This council evaluates quality improvement initiatives, identifies improvement opportunities, and reports the progress of our current health system to our government. This independent organization is legislated under the Regional Health Authorities Act and is mandated to achieve world-class excellence in all dimensions of quality and safety across Alberta's health system. It plays a key role in ensuring that objective, well-researched facts are behind policy-making decisions in our province. Given the existence and excellent work of the Health Quality Council of Alberta Bill 214's establishment of a health commissioner seems unnecessary.

4:10

Alberta is a world leader in health and wellness, and we're open to continuous improvements based on the best ideas, innovation, and the sense of shared responsibility. The Alberta government is continuously addressing the health impacts of policy decisions and effectively reviewing them to ensure that Albertans' best interests continue to be a top priority. As a result of the strong emphasis on Alberta's health and well-being, just last year the Alberta government allocated more than \$30 million in funding to create seven new programs helping to put Alberta's children and youth on a path to lifelong health. These initiatives include newborn metabolic screening, a healthy weight social marketing campaign, and a wellness fund for healthy school communities. They exemplify our government's dedication and proactive approach to ensuring the health of Albertans. I believe this government is doing an excellent job of promoting sound policies which have a positive impact on the health of Albertans.

The Alberta government is not only determined to sustain and enhance the general health of its population, but we are also taking the initiative to examine areas of specialized concern in our province. By focusing on unique circumstances in certain areas of Alberta, our government is able to ensure that appropriate health laws and policies are implemented for the benefit of all Albertans. For over 10 years the government has focused on conducting assessments to examine air contaminants in various regions of Alberta containing industrial facilities. On a case-by-case basis Alberta Health and Wellness has conducted community exposure and health effects assessment programs to examine health conditions that may be related to exposure to contaminants. These types of thorough assessments provide decision-makers with knowledge of unique health concerns occurring throughout the province, thus allowing them to create policies and laws reflective of the needs of the entire population.

The government of Alberta is already recognized as a leader for having an innovative public service which provides high-quality policy analysis and advice to support elected officials. Alberta Health and Wellness works diligently to provide timely, reliable, and relevant information to ensure that key decision-makers have quality information to support them in making informed decisions and setting priorities. To further expand their reach and accessibility to health information, Alberta Health and Wellness seeks out research conducted by various organizations to ensure that high-quality information is always available.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the Alberta government already has a strong and effective policy process, which places Albertans' health and wellness at the top of its priorities. As a result, legislated health impact assessments as proposed in Bill 214 are unnecessary. Their implementation will not achieve any positive effects which are not presently realized under the current system. The proposed legisla-

tion will just create more bureaucratic channels to achieve the same results. Therefore, I'm not at all convinced that an entirely new institutionalized assessment process would aid our government in improving public health in our province, so I ask all members to vote against Bill 214.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that has happened to Alberta, it seems to me, in the last number of years is the tremendous expansion in terms of population and industrial growth, and this is I think covered in the objective of this particular bill, where it states: to ensure that government decisions that could potentially affect the health of Albertans – and this includes mental health – “are subject to the greatest scrutiny to promote the protection, enhancement and sustainability of the health of Albertans.”

I think, for example, that in my constituency of St. Albert this particular bill would enhance the way we could take on issues before they become major problems. One of the things that has impacted our community and, particularly, our quality of life is the development of road systems around St. Albert. Certainly, we appreciate the fact that we have to have a better network of roads to get us into and around St. Albert and to the city and to areas beyond St. Albert, into Morinville and Legal and Redwater and so forth. I think that if we could have had something like a health impact assessment to ascertain, for example, the communities that were going to be affected by these changes in road designation, in dealing with things like noise, the well-being of people in terms of their own emotional and economic health, making sure that it wasn't going to have the impacts on property that they feel that it has had or is going to have, dealing with making sure that their homes would not be affected by the impact of roads on their quality of life, I think the west regional road and the Anthony Henday would have been a much easier task to relate to the community and to better explain what the impacts were going to be.

Another aspect of the health assessment methodology that I'm intrigued by is that we could be doing things like, for example, what we just had in the community of St. Albert: a major award to Neil M. Ross Catholic school. This was a very impactful thing on the physical education program that I think could be assessed in terms of its benefits and transferred to all other schools in the province at the elementary level, 1 to 6. I do see this particular bill assisting us to do those things.

The other thing that I think is impacting St. Albert greatly is the whole question of upgraders and what impact that is going to have on things like air, water, rural farmland that surrounds us, and wildlife. These are all things that could be looked at ahead of the impact of upgraders to see where we are now and to see if our quality of life and our health is maintained in terms of future development.

Another area that would be very valuable in terms of our own constituency would be the whole question of – I think we have one of the best aquasize programs in all of Alberta. Not only has it helped some of us older people maintain our ability to stay healthy, but it also works very well and is helpful in the mental health area. For example, it seems to me that in utilizing Bill 214, we could take a group study of that particular project: how people are doing with it, what's happening, look at the model now and what could impact us in the future, follow it over a period of three years, then utilize that in different centres across Alberta.

I think basically I'm supporting this bill because I do believe it enhances a lot of what I call preventative measures in order to equip communities and areas where massive changes are going to take

place so that they can be better prepared to handle these things in a much more healthy and sustainable manner.

I'll stop, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to speak to this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 214 as well. I'm assuming that many thousands of Albertans are already making good choices anyway of how to maintain and improve their health. Many put a lot of effort into physical activities like walking, running, biking, skiing, and hiking, to name just a few. Then, ironically, they have health issues which require corrective surgeries in later life. Many also make good lifestyle choices in other ways, like eating the right foods, following the Canada food guide, washing their hands after using the washroom – funny, they didn't listen to their mother when they were growing up – changing their underwear, drinking plenty of water each day, as well as getting enough sleep. All those sound pretty commonsensical to me. I don't know why we insist as governments in trying to legislate what's good for people when so much of it is common sense.

4:20

Every day more Albertans realize the benefits of making healthy lifestyle choices. Perhaps they're choosing to make these changes based on the advice of a doctor. Perhaps they believe the many contradictory news and so-called scientific reports about the benefits of being healthy. Maybe they choose to live well simply to feel good. Regardless of their reason for changing their lifestyle, they're making a smart choice that they feel good about. Those choices are the kind that we want to encourage.

Here in Alberta our health and wellness system is the envy of the world. Our doctors, our nurses, other health care professionals provide exemplary service for our citizens. Our facilities are state of the art and operate to the highest degree. Our medical research is world renowned for being on the cutting edge. A system of this calibre isn't free, however. In this last year's budget Health and Wellness program spending increased by \$1.3 billion – over 12 per cent, Mr. Speaker – to \$12 billion.

I don't know and I don't have to remind the members present here today or the general public of the many debates we've had on how to address rising health care costs. But regarding these debates, there is one point which I think most everyone would agree with. The most affordable health care is preventative. Preventative health care is, I think, what this bill intends to propose. However, what I believe the bill is actually proposing is a Liberal tenet of administrative prevention that would crush the ability of the government, and particularly this House, to exercise good judgment in making public policy. I think the mechanism is a little too broad, too all-encompassing, and there may be better ways for the government to be proactive in promoting health and wellness. In fact, I think we've already demonstrated that there are several initiatives that encourage sensible lifestyles that still strike a balance between the use of public and private resources.

Included in last year's budget was a 16 per cent increase in tobacco taxes, an effort to reduce smoking and promote a healthier lifestyle. I might add, Mr. Speaker, that just this weekend I spoke to one of the small-town businesses in our riding, a recent newcomer to the community who'd bought a hotel and restaurant. Without any government or municipal intervention the restaurant was smoke free for the past four years, the period of time in which he owned the restaurant. But now he asked me in his very straightforward way if, in fact, his little business was now going to have to be smoke free on

January 1, and I said: yes, it was. Given his background, I could understand his frustration. He came to this country a number of years ago and used his hands to supplement his English. He basically told me that this was like putting us in a box, in a jail. It was up to people to decide whether they wanted to smoke or not. In reality, I think he fears for the livelihood of his business because, quite frankly, the people that don't want to smoke in that small hotel just don't go there anyway.

However, back to this little bill. This means that \$167 million will be dedicated to injury and disease prevention initiatives and health promotion and protection activities. Of particular note is the \$95 million over the next three years that's being dedicated to vaccinations.

Many of you have heard of Healthy U. I think this is a great public information and education campaign that encourages Albertans to lead healthier lives by providing information on proactive ways to improve or maintain their health. As part of this initiative the Healthy U crew travels around the province attending community events, where they provide tips and resources on healthy living.

Another part of Healthy U is the Community Choosewell Challenge, that recognizes communities for making a positive impact on the health of their residents. I would imagine that many of us that are fortunate enough to represent rural ridings have had a number of communities that have these little competitions amongst each other. They do it on a yearly basis, and they encourage innovative programming, promotion, and participation driven at the grassroots level. Communities of all sizes are rewarded for making use of their local resources and encouraging healthy choices. In 2006 112 communities took the Community Choosewell Challenge, and the 2007 challenge is shaping up to be an even more competitive situation.

One recently announced initiative is the Alberta healthy school community wellness fund, that will fund projects that promote healthy school communities and improve the wellness of school-aged children and youth. Grants of up to \$50,000 are available for large projects, while grants of \$10,000 can be used for the smaller ones. Again, I would imagine there's a community or two in some of our ridings that have already approached us on whether or not a new playground area, a wellness area could be the beneficiary of these particular program funds.

While these programs address wellness through community initiatives, this government is also taking further steps to encourage wellness through our health care system. Primary care networks are being organized by physicians in health regions across Alberta. These networks provide wellness services in ways that best meet the needs of patients. By linking family physicians to specialists, nurses, dietitians, pharmacists, physiotherapists, and mental health workers, we are ensuring that Albertans' health is maintained and improved without needing to involve the health care system. Again, I would imagine that quite a few of us can relate to the small family clinics that some of us have in our communities that access a computer that is basically online and provides good information, takes away the need for people to contact specialists, and can actually find out where in a timely fashion some of their health care needs can be met.

In the past 20 years the health care system itself has placed greater emphasis on prevention and wellness. Tests like mammograms, pap smears, osteoporosis screening, and colorectal cancer screening are far more common today and are making a real difference in preventing health problems before they start. This is just a sampling of the programs we currently have in place to encourage wellness in Alberta. There is no question that we've done a lot in this regard. In fact, for public health measures Alberta spends more per capita

than all but one other province. This per capita amount is almost 50 per cent more than the Canadian average, Mr. Speaker.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

These initiatives are definitely having a beneficial effect on the health of Albertans. In its 2004 report the Health Quality Council of Alberta reported that Albertans' health status compares well with that of Canadians in other provinces. Almost 9 in 10 Albertans rated their health as excellent, very good, or good. That same year Alberta had the third highest life expectancy at birth among Canadian provinces. Why, then, is it necessary to require health impact assessments for virtually every government action? I doubt that anyone is against encouraging Albertans to live healthy, active lifestyles, but I don't know that they're ready for another bureaucratic set-up that evaluates and sets up other positions of administrative predominance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this bill. Through the course of my comments I hope that we can bring the conversation back to what this bill is really about, which is health impact assessments and collectively what it is that we need to do, instead of talking about what we need to do individually as far as our health goes and dumping things back on the individual citizens, which is just a red herring. It's not what we're talking about at all with regard to this bill.

Ms Blakeman: Do you think they read the bill?

Mr. Cheffins: That's a good question. That's a good question as to whether or not they're really attentive to what this bill is and what this bill could be.

4:30

I commend my colleague from Edmonton-Centre for introducing a bill that is forward thinking and that is proactive, that is trying to address larger scale issues in this province which have needed to be addressed. We're, frankly, maybe at a critical point in terms of whether we're going to be able to move forward and start to take a look at the larger picture in terms of the impacts that we're having on this province.

I just want to take a few moments to talk about that in general and then to address some of what it is I think has been raised here today just because I really think we need to dismiss some of the red herrings that have been raised here today and move back to a discussion of the value that's in this bill. Again, I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Centre has noted – and I'm in agreement – that development is good in this province. Development is crucial to Alberta's continued economic success, but such development must be sustainable and carefully planned and carefully considered for the sake of the health of Albertans and for the sake of future Albertans, the generations to come.

Now, this bill requires government policy decisions to undergo health impact assessments. I mean, if we think about it, that just makes sense. This bill ensures that government decisions that could potentially affect the health of Albertans are subject to the greatest scrutiny to promote the protection, enhancement, and sustainability of the health of Albertans. Again, this just makes sense because: what's more important than the health of Albertans? We need to

look after that collectively and not just individually. Yes, there are things that we can do as individuals, but that's not what we're talking about here today.

The truth of the matter is that what we're talking about are the collective actions that we take in this province. We need to remind ourselves that we are part of something greater than ourselves here. We're talking about life itself here, and because life, in particular human life, is dependent on the systems and the environment as a whole, therefore the actions that we take collectively affect the health of Albertans, affect us all individually.

We're taking very large collective actions in this province. Again, a collective action is not a bad thing. We do need economic development, but the impacts of the current collective actions that we're taking, as far as the development side of things goes, is just huge. Again, colleagues here mentioned Fort McMurray and the development that's going on there. It's really almost difficult to comprehend the amount of development going on there. Upgrader Alley has been mentioned and the development that's going on there and coal mining also and the development there. Again, these are all good things. We're just talking about taking a look at the collective impact of our actions here.

What hasn't been mentioned very much today is logging and the importance of considering the impact of logging on our environment and, therefore, on our health. The reality is that the air we breathe, the land we rely on for our food sources, and in particular the water that we all depend on are just absolutely critical. This is something that this government has been too slow to consider, but particularly over the most recent years, with the help of members on this side of the House, we are paying more attention to the importance of water.

Now, I want to take a few moments to address some of the things that have been raised here by other members. To begin with, you know, my colleague from Calgary-Varsity has indicated that considerations can be taken in, and it's worth while that people are bringing up concerns that they might have. I know the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talked about green screens, and he sees the value of that. But he'd like consideration of this bill, further consideration of this bill, and I think that that's a valuable position to take.

Again, my colleague from Calgary-Varsity indicated that perhaps there are ways to be able to go about that. Perhaps we can look at amendments. Perhaps we could look at a referral motion on this bill to a standing committee as something that might be of value because this bill is a valiant attempt to address issues that are critical and is worthy of full consideration. Once again, we're trying to be proactive. We're trying to be future looking. We need to take a look at what it is that we've done collectively, what we're doing collectively, and we have to figure out how we can act collectively to address those issues.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed talked a little bit about: "Well, can we do this? Have we got the resources to do it?" Realistically, we're talking about Albertans' health, so I can't think of other areas that are more important for us to address those resources to. The same member wondered whether the mechanism was timely and economical. When you talk about timely and economical versus the importance of health, it strikes me that Albertans would let us know where it is that they think the priorities lie. Again, we recognize that all of these things do need to be taken into consideration as far as the environment and economic factors. I don't see where this bill is going to stop that from occurring.

In fact, I think that what we're trying to talk about is taking a look at how things can be done across the spectrum of government activity. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed talked about 13

departments needing to be involved. Well, that's exactly what we're talking about: trying to get it so the various areas of government are working together and taking a look at the larger picture. We're talking about it as far as the environment goes and the impact on the environment. We have to talk about the collective actions and across departments take a look at the impacts that our actions are going to have on the health of Albertans. I think that if he has concerns, let him bring them forward. Let's take a look at some amendments if they think that improvements can be made. Let's take a look at referral if that's necessary as well.

I can't let things pass without mentioning some of what I think are really quite outrageous comments with regard to dumping this back on individuals. I know the Member for Calgary-Egmont talked about a healthy diet and if we walked to the store more, and I believe the Member for St. Albert said something to the same effect. I'm not exactly sure what they're recommending, that if we do a few more jumping jacks, we're not going to need health impact assessments. But, again, we need to take a look at the collective impact that our actions are going to have.

Then to, I think, really add insult here, the Member for Little Bow was talking about: well, if we washed our hands more and changed our underwear – he actually used those words – this is somehow going to limit the need for health impact assessments. I think it's an insult to Albertans to use that kind of language when we're talking about something that's as important as this, something that's as future looking and as far sighted, I think, as this bill is really attempting: for this Assembly to take a look and be far sighted and be future looking.

Other members have talked about how we're putting our children on the road to health with individual actions that parents can take. Those are all things to be commended, but realistically that's not going to do it when we're talking about collective action and the impact that it has on our health and the need for us to act collectively and take a look at the broader picture because far too often what we've been doing is too reactive, too after the fact. I think that this bill is an attempt to be proactive and to deal with issues before they become larger issues. The member is to be commended on that, and I would encourage the members of the Assembly to give every consideration to this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 214, Healthy Futures Act, would require that health impact assessments, or HIAs, be conducted for any major government project or legislative proposal that may significantly affect public health. The Alberta government has historically assessed these specific concerns and continues to do so.

This bill does not take into account, Mr. Speaker, the cost involved in conducting a health impact assessment for all government projects or legislative proposals that may impact public health. The government of Alberta conducts assessments on government projects that include impacts on the health of Albertans, projects such as proposed waste facilities and industrial developments. This method of conducting assessments on those projects that may have an adverse effect on health takes cost into account and is more fiscally responsible than completing an assessment on nearly every possible undertaking of the government.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 214 proposes that a health impact assessment be completed for all proposals that influence health, including income,

poverty, social equity, education, environment, family life, social stress, job security, and agriculture and food production, pretty much everything, almost, under the sun. As you can see, the list of all factors included in Bill 214 is very broad and does not at all consider the cost of providing assessments that affect any of these areas.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, it is likely that every proposal or project is going to fall under at least one or, maybe in many cases, a lot of these factors. Performing a health impact assessment on all of them would, in my humble opinion, be extraordinarily costly. Completing an assessment of this nature on all major government projects or legislative proposals is not necessary and, frankly, is fiscally impossible.

Currently the Alberta government requires various impact assessments such as environmental impact assessments, as I mentioned previously, Mr. Speaker. These assessments already include many of the areas described in Bill 214. For instance, the environmental impact assessment includes environmental effects, risks, and consequences associated with development proposals. The assessment report must usually contain such things as the potential positive and negative environmental, social, economic, and cultural impacts of the proposed activity. Normally it will also contain plans to mitigate potential adverse impacts, how to respond to emergencies, information on public consultation programs related to the proposed activity, and the identification of health issues.

Environmental impact assessments already analyze a number of factors related to health. Mr. Speaker, requiring health impact assessments on top of other current assessment methods would produce duplication and a lot of information overlap.

Mr. Speaker, some projects or proposals affect multiple jurisdictions. Ministers can enter into agreements with other provinces, territories, or the federal government on the assessment process. This encourages co-operation between governments on important issues and ensures that duplication is eliminated or minimized.

Mr. Speaker, performing health impact assessments on such a wide range of factors and so frequently may result in other jurisdictions choosing not to collaborate with Alberta as they may not have the budget, desire, or need for such an increase in the volume of assessments and related costs.

One example of jurisdictional co-operation occurred in 2005, Mr. Speaker, when Canada's four western provinces shared \$8 million in federal funding to implement common data standards and electronic messages to manage information related to three chronic diseases: diabetes, hypertension, and renal failure, commonly known as kidney disease. Common data sets and definitions facilitated the sharing of information to support clinical decisions by primary health care teams. The benefits of working toward a chronic disease management solution through a multijurisdictional collaboration led to benefits not achievable independently. It led to a clearer understanding of the common issues that are faced across the provinces and improved the collective knowledge base from which to make prudent policy decisions. Not collaborating with other jurisdictions can lead to duplication of information, which of course is very costly and also counterproductive.

Mr. Speaker, health impact assessments will require a considerable number of health care professionals. Health care professionals are already in extremely high demand and short supply across our province. The health sector is experiencing a global shortage, and their skills should be much better utilized by serving all Albertans. Reallocating the current supply of health care professionals for health impact assessments would increase the labour shortage very much in this industry. Clearly, there is not an abundance of health care professionals to perform the tasks required of the health impact assessments.

Mr. Speaker, some government projects and proposals involve many locations and different populations with specific needs. Some related projects are grouped together into one initiative but still target particular areas and their individual needs.

Mr. Speaker, early in 2007, 32 new projects were announced to enhance Alberta's telehealth network and provide Albertans living in rural and remote areas with better access to health care services such as chronic disease management, mental health care, cancer care, and hospital follow-up through technology that links specialists to patients.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

If health impact assessments were necessary before these 32 projects could go forward, it would be years – and I repeat, Mr. Speaker, it would be years – before any of these programs could get off the ground or even be implemented. The cost would be astronomical. Because of the different health effects on these individual populations, it seems that Bill 214 would require that the HIAs be completed on all of these projects. The government of Alberta allocated \$33 billion in budget 2007 from programs and capital grants. The complexity of subjecting all of the programs and proposals related to the budget to HIAs would be horrendously – horrendously – time consuming, not to mention extremely expensive.

Under Bill 214 it appears that all future budgets would be under scrutiny for health effects, wasting taxpayers' time and money. Implementing Bill 214 would be astronomically and excessively expensive. The time it takes for a project to reach the implementation stage would increase dramatically due to the time required to complete a health impact assessment. Mr. Speaker, you know what happens the longer we take to get projects off the ground. You've seen what has happened to costs over the last year or two. The cost of projects and proposals would significantly increase due to the cost of completing a health impact assessment prior to a project or a proposal receiving approval.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this bill, and I would encourage my colleagues to oppose it as well. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak briefly to Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. I was reminded as I've been listening to some of the debate that I attended the Calgary health region's report to the community on Thursday last in Calgary. I was pleasantly surprised and impressed that the entire report to the community was focused on wellness.

There's a very good reason for that, of course. The Calgary health region realizes that in the situation that it finds itself in – woefully short of hospital beds, woefully short of doctors, woefully short of nurses, woefully short of health professionals of all description and facing a future where it runs the risk of losing a great number of the people that it has now to retirement, to attrition and looking at what's happening to our population, to our aging population, as the baby boom demographic bulge starts to work its way through the acute-care system – there is no way that our health care system can continue being a sickness repair business, an illness and injury repair business. There are just too darn many of us baby boomers. We're getting too old, and we're only going to get older and sicker.

Now, some of us walk; some of us use a treadmill; some of us use a Stairmaster; some of us eat right. Some of us do all those individual things that a person should do to try and stave off the Grim

Reaper for as long as possible and stay healthy and productive for as many of those years that we're actually still drawing breath as we can, but statistically, actuarially, there is just no way around the fact that we have a huge bulge working its way through the population, the leading edge of which turned 60 years old last year. And that's going to cause no end of problems for the acute-care professions.

So we have to switch our focus. We have to switch our focus to wellness, to illness prevention, to injury prevention, and we have to do that not just on an individual basis, Mr. Speaker, but on a community basis, on a global basis. It is no longer good enough to lunge forward blindly – I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that in terms of wellness there are perhaps many on the other side of the House who could do with a visit to the optometrist to improve their visioning skills – and say: we'll develop economically everything we possibly can without regard to the consequences of doing so because there's money in it for us to shove into the pockets of our jeans right now.

4:50

We need to start considering something beyond, in the way of long-term planning, what we're going to have for lunch next Tuesday. We need to consider something beyond the value of our portfolios at the end of this fiscal quarter. We need to start considering what kind of province we're creating – I'm not even going to go the children and grandchildren route; I'm going to be totally selfish about this for argument sake for a moment – for ourselves, the baby boom generation, that's about to start getting a little too old and a little too sick to clean up the mess we've already made. Mr. Speaker, this is a vital bill. Health impact assessments are a vital tool to employ going forward to ensure that what we're doing in and to this province is not having a negative mitigating health and environmental impact on our population. We need healthier Albertans, not sicker Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to address Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. Certainly, this bill proposes that before proceeding with a major project or legislative proposal of any kind that may affect the public and the public's health, a health impact assessment would be conducted. When a bill or a motion is brought before the Legislative Assembly for its consideration, the sponsor believes that a certain law or a regulation or an activity must change because the current standard is in need of improvement or the current standards are not being met.

Bill 214 suggests that this government conducts projects without concern for the public health, income repercussions, or educational or environmental concerns. It has been mentioned in this Assembly this afternoon: a lot of concern around the social issues and that it hasn't been attended to. Certainly this is not the case. This government has proven itself a steward of healthy environments for Albertans, and in every action this government takes, all Albertans' health and wellness is the first priority. Given the overwhelming prosperity, health, and high quality of life that is found here in Alberta, it is clear that development in our province has been conducted in a thoughtful and responsible manner.

Health impact assessments are used as a mechanism to gauge the potential positive and negative effects that projects may have on a wide variety of factors that may influence health. Some of these factors include the environment, quality of life, safety, and, as I said earlier, the social issues. Health has been identified and defined as bodily, mental, and social quality of people's lives. Because quality of life can be affected by government policy, this government has

placed the enhancement of quality of life on the top of its priority list. I would like to detail a few of the many ways this government continues to uphold Canada's best interests in all its undertakings.

One way this government already meets the goals of Bill 214 is through its commitment to sustainable development.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Alcoholic Beverage Pricing

514. Mr. Tougas moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation that will set minimum drink prices in licensed establishments as recommended in the 2006 report of the Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises, which will help curb the overconsumption of alcohol that may lead to violence.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to present to the Legislature Motion 514, the establishment of minimum drink prices. First of all, Mr. Speaker, I realize that advocating for minimum drink prices in Alberta is no way to endear yourself to voting-age males between the ages of 18 and 25, who are most likely to take advantage of rock-bottom liquor prices. I feel, however, that the motion would ask the government to make a significant and important change to liquor laws in the province of Alberta.

Despite efforts to get some control over alcohol consumption in Alberta, there's still very much of a Wild West mentality to alcohol in this province. Perhaps it is because we are still, relatively speaking, a young province, still somewhat lacking in maturity when it comes to alcohol consumption.

It is interesting to see the evolution of liquor laws in Alberta. My father tells me that during the Social Credit years the sale of vodka was prohibited because it was too difficult to detect on your breath. Not long ago, certainly in the lifetime of many members present, there were segregated beer parlours in Alberta, where men and women had to drink in separate establishments.

Some Hon. Members: Right on. We like that.

Mr. Tougas: We're in favour of that, are we?

We had very early closing hours, no liquor sales on Sunday, rules against taking a drink from one table to another. The list goes on. Today's liquor regulations are light years removed from the puritanical laws of not long ago, and I think that this is overall a positive. Unfortunately, I think the pendulum may have swung too far in the other direction.

There's nothing new or radical about regulating liquor prices. In fact, Alberta would simply be getting in line with other provinces. The province of Saskatchewan, where alcohol sales no doubt set some sort of record yesterday, has had minimum drink prices for many years. In fact, the minimum drink prices in hotels, restaurants, and nightclubs will be increased next year by 50 cents, from \$2 and a quarter to \$2.75. In military and paramilitary messes and veterans' canteens the minimum drink price will go from \$1 to \$2.

Ontario, Canada's most populous province, has quite detailed minimum drink prices: a 16 ounce or 455 millilitre bottle of beer must sell for a minimum of \$2.67; a six-ounce glass of wine goes for

a minimum of \$2.40; one and a half ounces of spirits cannot be sold for less than \$3. Going further afield, in Aberdeen, Scotland, the licensing board there saw fit to implement minimum drink prices in light of shocking statistics. In Scotland alcohol kills four times as many people there as it did a generation ago.

In our Wild West bar scene there are no limits at all on liquor prices. I've gathered some examples of the giveaway liquor prices in some drinking establishment in Edmonton. Rest assured, hon. members, I did not gather these examples through personal experience but by asking the younger members of the Official Opposition staff to detail some examples of the discount drink prices they have witnessed. Since everyone in this Legislature today is on the far side of 40, these prices may come as a bit of a surprise.

An Hon. Member: I'm still only a few years over.

Mr. Tougas: Okay. Maybe not so far. Fine.

For example, a number of bars offer highballs for \$1, and some will sell you as many as you like. Another bar has had an event called "spare change Wednesdays," which simply meant you could buy any drink with whatever spare change you had in your pocket. Along the same lines is a promotion called "any coin, any drink." There are dollar shots on ladies' night, 25-cent glasses of draft, 75-cent highballs, for the ladies again. The list goes on. Of course, the main reason for deeply discounted liquor prices is to bring in patrons. In the retail trade they call this a loss leader, selling something at below cost in order to bring patrons into your establishment. Unfortunately, they're not selling toothpaste but intoxicants. I've heard of carloads of young people, mostly male, swarming into bars for cheap drink prices, slamming back glass after glass of cheap booze and then either staggering off into the night or to continue their drinking.

The link between alcohol and violence is well established and undeniable. The option of minimum drink prices was advocated in the government's own report, the Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises. Edmontonians remember with some embarrassment the spectacles of riots on Whyte Avenue following Canada Day celebrations and during the Edmonton Oilers' Stanley Cup run two years ago. Mr. Speaker, you can be certain that the rioters on Whyte Avenue were not intoxicated on the thrill of Oiler victories.

Of course, this is just one idea to address the problem of excess drinking and violence in Alberta's bar culture. I understand that the Solicitor General is actively looking at making changes to liquor regulations in Alberta dealing with a number of issues like happy hours that last for hour after hour. This motion should not in any way impinge upon the government's decision-making in regard to liquor regulations.

As all hon. members know, a motion does not order the government to make a decision but is simply an expression of the opinion of the Legislature. I hope, too, that hon. members will not look upon this motion as an attempt to throw a huge wet blanket over the bar scene in Alberta. There are dozens of laws related to liquor consumption in this province, and they haven't stopped anyone from having fun in Alberta's bars yet. Nor should it be interpreted as an attack on free enterprise or freedom of choice. There are many examples across this province of regulated prices on a number of products. The price of milk, for example, is much more heavily regulated than the cost of liquor in bars.

5:00

This motion does not seek to set minimum drink prices. Those prices should only be established after extensive consultation with bar owners so that the price would not be too high so as to discour-

age sales but not so low as to encourage overconsumption. The actual numbers are beyond the scope of this motion. Mr. Speaker, this motion would ask for a progressive, reasonable change to liquor regulations in Alberta. Minimum drink prices would encourage moderation in consumption with the likely result of less gross intoxication and a reduction in violence.

I encourage all members to give this motion serious thought, and I look forward to the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and share my thoughts this afternoon on Motion 514, which proposes that the government introduce means to implement minimum drink prices. Our government will continue to support legislation and regulation that will improve the safety and security of Albertans. However, we must ensure that these actions have a practical and proven effect, and those are key words, as far as I'm concerned: practical and proven effect.

We must take a pragmatic approach to all issues, and if the objective is to deter overconsumption of alcohol in licensed establishments and decrease the potential of violence that can follow, then we must be confident that creating minimum drink prices would be the most effective action. I appreciate that the Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises report stated that setting minimum prices is and should be looked at as an option. The necessary research on this suggestion is being done by the AGLC, and without evidence supporting its implementation, it would be irresponsible for legislators to move forward. Therefore, at this time Motion 514 is not the most appropriate action to take.

Alberta requires licensed establishments to be accountable to their clientele and to not promote intoxication. These businesses are accredited to serve alcoholic beverages, not to support destructive behaviour. The operations of licensed establishments should be conducted in an appropriate manner that respects the laws which pertain to them. To ensure that these businesses are operated legally, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, AGLC, has inspectors who regularly conduct inspections and operating checks on licensed premises to assist in preventing overservice and intoxication. To bolster Alberta's enforcement efforts, our government will be hiring seven additional inspectors in the next brief while.

The AGLC ensures compliance by investigating all licensed premises, including private liquor stores, restaurants, and lounges. The inspections ensure that licensed establishments are complying with regulations regarding the enforcement of operational hours, asking customers to produce proper photo ID, restricting service to those who are intoxicated or under the age of 18 years. These measures are taken to prevent practices that may potentially lead to undesirable or unsafe circumstances. The inspectors along with police services and business staff contribute to ensuring that licensed establishments operate in a safe manner that deters violent or illicit behaviour.

Still, in some instances there remains the possibility for harmful behaviour to occur. This behaviour may or may not be mitigated by minimum drink prices. We want to enable businesses to have the flexibility to control their prices. They can operate in productive and innovative ways. This flexibility should not be misconstrued as a means for promoting gross intoxication. As consumers we're all conscious of the price of a product, and the price is almost always a determining factor in a purchase. Setting minimum drink prices would interfere with the ability of a business to adjust their price to attract customers. Furthermore, establishing minimum drink prices may not reduce overconsumption.

The Alberta government takes measures to promote individual

responsibility and to reduce further service to intoxicated individuals. Mr. Speaker, it is important that we have healthy environments for Albertans to socialize in. The practices have been regulated and are being promoted through the AGLC. Police services and stakeholders support safe and secure drinking atmospheres. Unfortunately, at this time the measures of Motion 514 are not based on proper investigations and/or research, so it does not offer a concrete method for reducing overconsumption of alcohol in licensed establishments.

That sums up the reasons that I would not be supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take part in the debate over Motion 514, the establishment of minimum drink prices, a motion which reads as follows: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government." Let me repeat that because I don't think the previous speaker necessarily got that.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to . . . set minimum drink prices in licensed establishments as recommended in the 2006 report of the Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises, which will help curb the overconsumption of alcohol that may lead to violence.

I'm just trying to understand, Mr. Speaker. If I got it straight here, my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark consulted with a bunch of different provinces, but that research wasn't sufficient, wasn't valid, wasn't acceptable, didn't adhere to the established orthodoxy. Goodness knows, those other provinces probably don't let you smoke in bingo halls either. I am just amazed that I can come in here on a Monday afternoon on private members' day . . .

Ms Blakeman: Time rolls back.

Mr. Taylor: Oh, it does. Suddenly I'm on the set of *Happy Days*, man, and there's The Fonz back there in the back row talking about how we want to create healthy drinking environments. Healthy drinking environments, jumbo shrimp, and other oxymorons. Just amazing. Just amazing. It's absolutely amazing that it's always perennially 1957 on the other side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind members present that this is supposed to be private members' business, and as such you would think that all Members of the Legislative Assembly gathered here to debate private members' bills and motions, regardless of who put forward the bill or the motion and what party he or she may or may not be affiliated with, would come to this House prepared to engage in productive debate and make good legislation. Yet I'm amazed Monday after Monday after Monday to come in here and watch as the members opposite get up and read their scripted debating notes, explaining why private members' business doesn't jibe with Conservative orthodoxy. I just don't understand why these guys opposite – most of them are guys – are so afraid of lurching into the 21st century, so afraid of our dragging them kicking and screaming into the 21st century.

Where is it written in our Constitution or any other law . . .

Ms Blakeman: The Alberta Act.

Mr. Taylor: . . . the Alberta Act, the federal Constitution, that it is the inalienable right of a Canadian citizen or a citizen of Alberta to attend drink-and-drown night or dime-a-draft night? Where is that written? Where is it written that when my son or daughter, who are 20 years old and 18 years old respectively, decide to go out with their friends to what should be and what otherwise would be a

perfectly respectable establishment somewhere in the city of Calgary or anywhere else in the province of Alberta, for that matter, on a Friday night or a Saturday night, to have a few drinks and a few laughs, they have to be watching over their shoulder constantly for people who might do them harm because those people are involved in questionable activities or a questionable state of sobriety, have been partying and drinking their face off since, you know, 8 o'clock at night, and have a hair-trigger?

I think that asking people to pay a minimum amount, a set minimum amount, for a drink is a perfectly reasonable request to make of them and a requirement to have of them in a society such as this where we have among the lowest drinking age in the nation: 18. I don't have a problem with that, Mr. Speaker. Never have had. I've always figured that if you're old enough to vote and old enough to go off to war and, you know, shoot live ammunition at somebody in Afghanistan and have them shoot back at you and put your life on the line, then you're old enough to have a beer or a glass of wine or a scotch or whatever your poison is, you know. Old enough and responsible enough.

5:10

Responsibility at any age, although at the age of most of the people in this House today, certainly those on that side of the House – you know, I don't suppose those people would find themselves inside licensed establishments all that often for the sole purpose, you know, unless they're pounding back scotches with their steak.

Ms Blakeman: Not unless they do pink martinis with Geritol.

Mr. Taylor: As my colleague from Edmonton-Centre said, maybe some of them do pink martinis with Geritol. I don't know.

In any event, I don't see that it's an unreasonable limit on our freedoms or our rights at all to say that if you want to go out for drinks on a Friday or Saturday night or any other night of the week, it's going to cost you five bucks for a beer or two bucks or whatever the minimum price is, whatever the government decides. This House isn't even going to set that price. All this House is trying to do right now is urge the government to for once in its life do the right thing, you know. For once in its life.

We're not saying that a bottle of beer has to cost \$5 or \$2 or \$10 or \$20, you know. We are saying that it would be a wise and prudent idea to do away with the ability of licensed establishments to set ridiculously low prices, well below the cost of doing business, well below the rate of inflation, just to get primarily young people through the door in great numbers and get them good and hammered so that they'll buy even more after happy hour is over and the price goes up.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think there are too many people in this House who are against having fun. I don't think there are too many people in this House, although there may be a few, who are vehemently opposed to alcohol in moderation. I don't think there would be too many who disagree with the basic philosophy of life that says everything in moderation, including excess. You know, it happens from time to time. But there are reasonable limits in a civilized society that governments can impose on their citizens, and I think setting a minimum drink price is a reasonable limit.

Going to a bar in the city of Calgary or the city of Edmonton is proving increasingly dangerous and life-threatening, and it shouldn't be that way. There's no reason that it should be that way because on any given night the vast majority of patrons in just about any bar in this city or Calgary or any other in this province are honest, upstanding, law-abiding citizens. But when you mix in a great deal of alcohol with people's best intentions, people's best intentions tend to go in the rhubarb. When that happens, when inhibitions are

broken down and violence breaks out and arguments turn into fights and fist fights turn into knife fights and knife fights turn into fights with clubs or guns or something like that, that's unacceptable. There's no reason why we should put up with that or encourage it.

I know Fonzie and the gang will have a hard time with this, but I really think they should hold their noses, jump into the deep end of the pool, and take a shot at living for a few minutes in the 21st century. It might do them some good.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to this motion. Last Remembrance Day I attended services in Manning, Alberta, and then returned to my home in Peace River and attended the Legion there. Because I was late and a little bit of jostling around, I had to buy a round for the members remaining in the house. There were a number of legionnaires. There were also some active duty members there, some rangers and, actually, active military personnel. So I bought a round – it was personal funds, Mr. Speaker – and imagine my pleasant surprise that the round cost me less than 20 bucks. I'm legendary cheap, Mr. Speaker, and I greatly . . .

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Oberle: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker, you know, to the best of my knowledge legions are not hotbeds of trouble in serious activities, crime, those sorts of things. I say this in jest, but only partially in jest, that I want to point out that this is a complex issue and that there is research necessary. There are other factors at play here, lots of other factors. The safe communities task force did in fact identify drink prices as a possible factor, but there are other factors involved as well, I might point out: municipal planning, the density of bar seats in a region. There are a whole host of reasons.

Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie chastises us for not accepting the research of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I just want to point out that phoning around finding out what minimum drink prices are in other jurisdictions does not constitute research, maybe fact-finding. But what about connections: cause and effect? That research is not available, Mr. Speaker. And the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie chastises us, you know, that we're supposed to be in here making good legislation. Well, at the moment we're not making legislation; we're considering a motion before this House.

He chastises us for sticking to the Conservative ideological approach, entirely missing the irony of the fact that when he makes statements like, "For once in its life this government should do the right thing," that that's not apparently a Liberal ideological position. That's somehow productive debate standing on the floor of this Chamber. It's embarrassing is what it is, Mr. Speaker.

My approach to this motion is entirely nonpartisan. I don't object to this motion on the grounds that it doesn't meet our Conservative ideological viewpoint; I disagree with this motion because it's ill considered and poorly researched. If there is any ideological approach involved here, Mr. Speaker, it would be that this party wants to use the tools of this Legislature wisely and carefully, not frivolously.

Mr. Speaker, I would lastly point out to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie that I made this speech, ideological though it may

have been, without prepared notes or any ideological notes from some leader on this part, which is something that I doubt that I can say for that hon. member over there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Taylor: I do not have a single note.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. members.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, are you rising on a point of order?

Mr. Taylor: Yes, I am.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, 23(j). And I do need notes for this, unlike the member opposite who perhaps has nothing better to do.

Do you want 23(i) or (j)? I'll go for both of them, Mr. Speaker. What the heck, I'll throw in 23(h) as well:

- (h) makes allegations another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

Listen to the hubbub. Listen to the hubbub opposite. Can you imagine if this was drink and drown night? What they would be like?

Mr. Speaker, I want it on the record that other than for reading the text of the motion out loud, I spoke entirely without notes, as I often do, as the government whip opposite should know if he was paying attention. I don't know; was he paying attention? I wouldn't want to allege that he wasn't because I'd hate to have him call a point of order on me.

You know, I would like the member opposite to withdraw the remark. Thank you. And apologize.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

5:20

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure which remark I'm supposed to withdraw, actually. But under 23(h), (i), and (j) I might point out it was that hon. member that started the comments about ideological approach. [interjection] You don't consider it insulting to say that this party has never made a right decision in its life?

Mr. Speaker, I'm quite prepared to withdraw the remark that suggested that the hon. member made his speech with notes. I'm quite prepared to withdraw that remark. Actually, on reflection I'm not at all surprised that that member came up with that speech without notes.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else? Well, hon. member, I presume that with those remarks this matter is settled.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Debate Continued

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 514. The intent of it seems to be to encourage moderate drinking and to remain sober. I think the need is for all of us in this House to sober up for a moment and return to a more moderate tone of debate on a very serious issue.

I represent a constituency in the city, Edmonton-Strathcona, which has a sort of bar alley, you know, that they call Whyte Avenue. It's an attractive part of the city to visit, or used to be, at least. But about 10 years ago things began to spin out of control, and now there are at least 30 bars that stretch out over about nine blocks, eight blocks in the constituency. Remember, these bars don't exist on their own in a vacuum. They're in the middle of communities. So there is an impact of what goes on that's related to those bars: drinking and noise and shouting and loitering and violence, sometimes, and my constituents are very concerned.

I in fact had to convene a meeting which brought together community leaders who were very concerned about what was happening to their neighbourhood as a result of what had happened to Whyte Avenue, the bar owners and the Old Strathcona Business Association. This was three years ago. I brought them all together in my constituency office and asked them to talk with each other and find some ways of addressing the concerns, not just of businesses, not just of business associations, not just of people who go there for occasional fun, but also the people who live there and raise their children there. There are several well-known schools in the area, including Old Scona high school, Strathcona comp, and many wonderful elementary schools. All of these children and their families live in the area, and they are impacted by the excessive consumption of alcohol.

Ask them if they would like to see some measures taken by this Assembly before we have watertight proof, you know, that links the cause to effects. They would say: use common sense. You know that when people overdrink, their behaviour tends to get out of control. They engage in violence and noisy behaviour, rowdy behaviour, behaviour that's not conducive to a good quality of life for people who live in those surroundings.

Ask the Edmonton Police Service, who have to intervene and break up those fights right in the middle of Whyte Avenue, on the intersection of 104th and Whyte Avenue, 82nd Avenue, and they'll tell you that overdrinking is a problem. Overconsumption of alcohol is a problem.

Why do people overdrink? Why do people converge on Whyte Avenue to drink? Well, partly because of these competition rates. Each bar tries to attract as many people as they can, particularly on days when there are not that many customers around to attract these people. They come from all over the place: from Fort Saskatchewan, from St. Albert, and beyond, and you name it. These are young people. Often they get injured or hurt driving back. You know, they get drunk. They fall on the dance floor. They cause injuries to themselves and to others. So I think something that will encourage moderation in the consumption of alcohol is a good thing. This motion I think is an attempt to do that.

We know that other provinces do this. The concern here is that we will be sort of limiting the freedom of businesses to do what they want to do, we'll be reducing the competition. But I think places like B.C., Saskatchewan, Ontario – I've been looking at some of their regulations that were brought in to encourage social responsibility both on the part of people who consume alcohol and those who sell it. It's a hospitality industry, a hotel industry, a tourist industry. All of those are involved in it. Even if we are not totally convinced that having a floor price in the bars and the restaurants for alcoholic beverages necessarily reduces overall consumption, we have to look at the other side and ask the opposite question: does it really hurt businesses?

Well, Toronto wouldn't have those rules there if it hurt because they get a huge number of tourists. It's a city that really thrives on the hospitality industry. There are wonderful restaurants, bars, and hotels, and all of those are used by people who visit from outside, in addition to Ontarians and Torontonians who live there. My daughter

lives there, so I know a little bit about Toronto, more now than I used to. Similarly, in Vancouver, B.C., you know, the best city in the world to live – the best city in the world to live – yet they have a floor price.

The gaming and liquor control authorities in those provinces pay due attention to the interests of businesses, the hospitality industry, the prospects for tourism, and they know that bringing in these floor prices in fact encourages – it makes cities more livable, places more hospitable, safer for people to come from wherever they do to have fun downtown and in certain parts of the city without having to worry about running into people who are overly drunk and who are rowdy because they are drunk. So I don't think there is any doubt that introducing some sort of floor pricing, regulating that there be some minimum price for liquor, hurts businesses.

As a matter of fact, I worked with the Old Strathcona Business Association. Shirley Lowe, who is the executive director of it, was present at this meeting. She is quoted in the press as saying that bringing in these floor prices, some sort of regulation on how little you can charge for a drink, will not hurt the members of her business association. All the bar owners are members of their association. That's why Shirley was at the meeting that I convened three years ago. I then went with them to city hall to talk about, sort of, how many drinking spaces there should be in Old Strathcona.

There are all of these measures, you know: perhaps limiting the number of spaces, having some floor price related to the sale of liquor of various kinds, all multiple measures that we need to take in order to both promote social responsibility on the part of everybody, to make everyone feel safe and to assure communities that their life will not be disrupted simply because somehow we assumed that bringing in these measures will hurt the interest of business. Businesses themselves recognize that they have to put up with violence, put up with the breaking of their windows and their glass frames and everything else. They don't want to see that happen in their own bars. So businesses are not necessarily averse to the introduction of some price so long as all of them know that there's a level playing field, that everyone cannot reduce prices below a certain level.

For all of these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I'm speaking in support of this motion, and I encourage other colleagues in the House to consider supporting the motion as well. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak to Motion 514, which urges the government to set minimum drink prices in licensed establishments. As I understand it, it's an effort to address overconsumption that could lead to violent behaviour. I for one am fully in support of promoting safety in our communities and of encouraging good behaviour, but I do not believe that setting minimum drink prices is the way to accomplish this objective.

5:30

For people in Alberta, anyone over the age of 18 years, alcohol is a legal substance. Indeed, for many people it is one of life's small pleasures. For most people alcohol in moderation is a pleasant experience, and for most people it makes them feel better. For a lot of people a few drinks would make them enjoy life.

Do some people drink to excess? Of course they do. No doubt. For some people alcohol might tend to make them misbehave, but I would suggest that the price of drinks is not the cause of their misbehaviour. It is, rather, within their own makeup, their own personality. A few people having a few drinks might be inclined to

get behind the wheel of a car and do stupid things, like driving after they've been drinking, but I do believe that drink prices are not the way to pursue this. I believe that this is another instance of the creeping nanny state.

We have lots of establishments which cater to a clientele in our society which doesn't necessarily have a lot of money to spend. We have such establishments as the Royal Canadian Legion, which has moderately priced drinks. We have some pubs even in my own constituency which have moderately priced drinks and which are patronized by those in society that can't afford to partake in necessarily expensive activities, like going out to a Flames game, where it could cost hundreds of dollars and where a beer costs seven bucks.

Mr. Rodney: It was \$9.50 at the Grey Cup.

Dr. Brown: Well, my hon. colleague from Calgary-Lougheed states that it was \$9.50 at the Grey Cup. But it shows you there is certainly a diversity of different establishments in society which cater to different clienteles and people with different incomes.

I would also like to refer to a number of initiatives that the government has held. In November 2005 and March 2006 the government did hold some round-tables on the issue of violence in and around bars. As a result of those round-tables the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission along with the government launched the Cage Your Rage campaign, which is a new campaign to reduce bar violence. That was initiated in June of this year. This campaign was aimed at discouraging fighting as a result of drinking in bars and nightclubs by targeting males in the 18 to 24 years of age category. The campaign did have some effect of spreading awareness about the dangers of alcohol and violence and the value of peaceful environments in the bars.

As I said, these are a very small minority of individuals. These are individuals who have certain tendencies. I think to penalize the public at large – as I said, we are a government which believes in free enterprise. The price of drinks should be set by the free market and certainly not by the dictation of the government.

Mr. Tougas: That's free enterprise, isn't it, allowing smoking in restaurants? Should they be allowed to do that?

Dr. Brown: Well, you make a very good point, hon. member. Yes, it certainly is, but one could also argue in those instances that it's a detriment to society in terms of the cost, as a societal cost. But I would argue that the price of two or three drinks in a bar establishment does not have any societal costs. It's not detrimental to your health or anything else.

Mr. Tougas: It's detrimental to the health of the person having a drink.

Dr. Brown: Not necessarily. No, it isn't. In fact, there are plenty of studies out there which show that drinking in moderation is, in fact, a very healthy thing to do. In fact, it reduces the incidence of heart and stroke.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, it is, in fact, for many people one of life's small pleasures. It is also an area into which I do not believe that we as a government ought to intrude. Therefore, I would urge my colleagues to vote against this motion.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I want to go back to the original wording of the motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to . . . set minimum drink prices in licensed establishments . . . And here's the key portion of the motion.

. . . as recommended in the 2006 report of the Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises, which will help curb the overconsumption of alcohol that may lead to violence.

Tomorrow when your constituent asks you, "Did you vote in favour of a motion that had the potential of reducing consumption?" and you say to that constituent, as the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill said, "No, I don't believe in a creeping nanny state," and then you talk to a member of Mothers Against Drunk Driving and you say to them, "Yes, I had an opportunity in this House to vote on a motion that would potentially reduce consumption, but I believe that individual rights triumph collective civil responsibility," and if you can look at that mother or constituent and say that individual rights trump societal responsibilities, if you can do that with a straight face, then I guess I know where you're going to be voting on this.

This government and this province have this maverick quality to them. They were fine with children going in the backs of pickup trucks, in the box, because it was fun driving down those bumpy gravel roads; it was fun going across the fields. We don't have to license children on ATVs on private lands. They don't have to wear helmets because that's an individual right. It's an individual responsibility, so we're not going to interfere with that. This government had difficulty with helmets for motorcycles. It had difficulty with seatbelt restraints. This is just one more example of the potential of cutting down on an unsafe practice of continuing to serve liquor at cheap prices.

The member across the way suggested that it would have cost him more than 20 bucks to buy a round. Now, if that's the depth of the wisdom associated, then I have great concern. It's the cheapness of the liquor and its availability that take away a person's reasoning power.

I was fortunate. By basically age 19 I realized that for myself smoking and drinking just weren't worth it. I spent too much time over that big white phone, as you would say, before I got the message, but eventually I did, and I didn't put anyone else's life at risk in the process. I might have done a little bit of temporary abuse to my body, but I learned my lesson early.

Also, in my youth I played rugby for the University of Calgary Stags, and I played rugby for the Calgary Saracens, and I played rugby for the Calgary Saints. Those were 17 years of liquor-associated games and sports. Being one of the few individuals who did not indulge because I'd learned my lesson early, I was the keeper of the welfare of those individuals. I was the designated driver. You get tired of putting on the boots and putting on the coats, but you have a responsibility to your teammates. I would suggest that this government has a responsibility to its citizens to enact legislation that has the potential of making establishments safer.

5:40

Now, I appreciate what the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out when he referred to Whyte Avenue. The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, incidentally, is my MLA when I'm up at the Legislature. We have the equivalent of Whyte Avenue in Calgary. It's called the Red Mile. The types of celebrations that go on and the extra cost in terms of policing and the violence associated with what is supposed to be a celebratory circumstance is overblown.

Here we have Motion 514, which simply urges the government to follow up on the 2006 report of the Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises. It says to consider this: will harm

be done by setting base prices? If you say that harm will be done, that the entrepreneurial spirit of Alberta will suddenly be damaged, and you can live with the results of the violence and the rowdiness and the police placed in a circumstance of threat, trying to do their best to protect the public, then you'll vote against Motion 514. Then, as I say, live with the consequences of your constituents and organizations like Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Alcoholics Anonymous. Could you have done something, a small something, by setting minimum prices? You have a chance to do it. It's a small step. It's not made to be the major cure-all. It's one step in terms of creating responsibility.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to join the debate, too, on Motion 514. I would like to start by commending the member for bringing this forward. It shows his concern and his compassion for people who have faced violence in the streets, particularly in the evening after drinking establishments close, but I'm sincere when I say that I do have concerns that this motion will be viewed as a magic bullet that's supposed to cure all the violence issues that happen outside of bars in the evening.

Now, I know that the minister – I've spoken to him – is doing a comprehensive review about drink prices and a myriad of other issues to try and solve the problem of violence outside of bars. I appreciate that, but I'm concerned about setting minimum drink prices through legislation or regulation. I don't want to do it on a whim, Mr. Speaker. In fact, last week we had a discussion about rules and regulations, and most every member in this House recognized that we as members in this Assembly have the responsibility to make good legislation and good regulations and to do so in a way that doesn't cost taxpayers or business owners or society a tremendous amount of time or energy. We discussed that for quite a bit of time last week.

I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie suggested that excessive drinking leads to violence. I'm not going to dispute that. That could very well be one of the causes of violence, particularly out in front of bars in the evening. But again, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that that is the only issue. The Member for Calgary-Varsity talked about this perhaps maybe being able to curb the violence.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about rules and regulation and legislation in this House, I have a principle personally that I don't support anything that I don't know is going to work. I don't believe we should make rules or regulation or new legislation on the hope that it will work, on the anticipation that it will work, or on some myth that it might work without some concrete proof and evidence that it will do something to solve the problem we're addressing. Otherwise, we make decisions that aren't necessarily based on truth but are based on urban legend or are very heartfelt and done in good conscience but don't actually serve the purpose we intended and lead the public astray, leave warm fuzzies in everybody's heart that we're doing something but don't actually address the issue. I don't support something like that.

Mr. Speaker, a number of years ago I investigated going to the Cayman Islands for work. I talked to a lot of people on the Internet because it's very expensive to go down there, and I couldn't afford to go down there until I'd found a job. Talking to people on the Internet, I found something incredibly interesting. There was a lot of discussion on the Internet – you can probably still see some of this discussion going on – and that's that a lot of people who were

investigating going to the Cayman Islands to work got advice that the Cayman Islands was very expensive. There was an entire discussion board about how people who lived in the Cayman Islands who were foreigners and understood that things were expensive there actually had predrinking parties. They went to each other's house and drank because they couldn't afford \$10 a drink in the Cayman Islands. Now, that didn't stop them from overconsuming. That didn't stop them from going to the bar and getting drunk or causing violence in the evening when they came out of the bar. It just meant that they didn't drink in the bar, where it was expensive. They drank at home, before they got there.

That could very well happen in this circumstance. You could raise drink prices to \$20 thinking it's going to curb consumption, but if the bottles are still just as cheap in the liquor store, people will just go home and get drunk, and then they'll go to the bar and still cause the same problems. It won't necessarily be a solution.

Mr. Speaker, there's also the circumstance – when I was 16, between grades 11 and 12 I went to Switzerland for two months on a work exchange with a family. I was so excited because they didn't enforce any minimum drinking age. I thought: "Great. This is going to be my first chance. I'm 16 years old. I'm going to get to go to the bar." But when I got there, all of the people that I met didn't want to go to the bar. They were all allowed, but because they were allowed, it took all of the interest and excitement away, because they weren't prohibited from doing it.

In fact, in Switzerland when they were celebrating, I believe, their 701st birthday as a country, there was a huge party and a huge bonfire, and everybody went down there. Myself and another 16-year-old boy from the United States had a few drinks with the rest of them. The only two people out of hundreds at that big celebration for the 701st birthday of Switzerland who wound up becoming very, very ill were me and the American friend that I had. But no one else, none of the other 15- and 16-year-olds, overconsumed. Because they were allowed to drink, they didn't find any interest in it. There was no appeal.

Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if that barrier, that legal age when you're allowed to suddenly do it, doesn't create this image that the bar is an exciting, great place and that alcohol is a wonderful, great thing. Eighteen years of anticipation leads to the very first night of binge drinking and in some people's circumstance many, many years of binge drinking because it's an exciting place.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, my wife's family is all from Portugal. We've been over there a couple of times, and we went out for drinks with some of the family. The one thing that I noticed is that there were bars that opened at 7 o'clock and closed at 11 o'clock. There were some that opened at 10 o'clock and closed at 2 in the morning. There were some that didn't open until 4 in the morning.

Being in Portugal in some of their happening places that would be the equivalent of Whyte Ave. or the Red Mile, one thing I noticed, Mr. Speaker – at 2 o'clock in the morning here when we close the bars, we push everyone out into the streets drunk. That's what leads to violence: when you have thousands of people in the streets suddenly, inebriated and looking for a party and nowhere to go. But in Portugal when I was there, not once did I see a single act of violence because there weren't thousands of people in the street partying. People came and went all night. Some showed up and didn't start to party until 2 o'clock. Some went to bars at 10 and left at 2. Some didn't come out till 5 in the morning. I'm not going to explain who those were or how I know.

It was an interesting observation, Mr. Speaker. Putting the Cayman Islands and my experience in Portugal and my experience in Switzerland together means to me that we have to address the

entire situation around here of when bars close. Perhaps the concentration of establishments all along the same place is part of the problem.

I applaud the member for bringing this forward. If there's evidence – I know the minister is doing research – that shows that this will work to curb violence and curb overconsumption, I will be the first member to stand in this House and support this. But until I have proof, I won't support bringing in new regulations or new legislation that could cost businesses a lot and make the public think we've addressed the violence issue and it's magical unless there is some evidence that it works. If this is part of an entire comprehensive plan that deals with concentration of establishments in a place or deals with closing times – and I think it should deal with the legal age of consumption of alcohol – then, Mr. Speaker, I hope that will be the plan that will curb violence in our streets, especially in the evenings.

I won't be supporting this, but, again, I do support the member for bringing it forward. It's a debate and a discussion that needs to be had, and I encourage all members to vote with their conscience and make their choice.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

5:50

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me get this straight. We have an Alberta government-sponsored panel, the Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises, that makes a recommendation that one of the things that should be tried to try and deal with some of the violence and community safety issues – and didn't we earlier today debate a bill about safer communities? But here we have an Alberta government round-table that recommends something. That recommendation is incorporated in a motion brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

While I'm at it, I went and looked at the AADAC annual report, that was tabled in this very House within the last couple of weeks, and what did I see on page 23? A performance measurement: prevalence of regular heavy drinking amongst young Albertans, 31 per cent, one-third of our young people. Let me read the small print for you just so you don't argue with me about the facts. Once again, it's on page 23: "Regular heavy drinking is defined as the consumption of five or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion, 12 or more times a year for Albertans 15 to 29 years of age." So in your own AADAC report, your own government-funded agency, it says that this is not a good thing. One-third of our young people are binge-drinking. Now, "binge" is my word. They don't say binge-drinking in here. Five or more drinks at least 12 times a year. So two, not one but two of the government's very own funded . . .

Mr. Elsalhy: Actually, three if you add the safer communities task force.

Ms Blakeman: If you add in the safer communities task force, there are three that have all made the same recommendation, but this government gets up one after another, those private members, on this private members' day and says, "Oh, no. We really need to leave it up to individuals," completely negating the work that you collectively as a government have set out in front of us. You make me laugh sometimes. You really do. You have absolutely contradicted the work of your own government.

All of this "Oh, don't interfere in the marketplace" stuff: you interfere in the marketplace all the time. I wish my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar was able to get up and speak with me right now. He could list all the times that you've managed to interfere in

the marketplace. [interjection] Oh, for heaven's sake. You want to address the entire situation.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), language that's likely to insult or cause unrest in this House, not a single member on this side of the House stood up and said that this issue should be left to individuals. Not a single one. What we said was that perhaps a well-reasoned, well-researched approach that addresses this issue in its totality might be the approach to take. Not a single member suggested that this should be left to individuals. I would ask the member to withdraw that remark as being flippant and inaccurate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I won't withdraw it until the Blues are available to have a look at what's been said. Then I'll look at withdrawing it. I sat here for this whole debate. I listened to it all, every word, and that's what was being said: leave it up to the individual; don't curtail it; don't bring in anything; don't put any restrictions on the marketplace. So, no, I'm not willing to withdraw that.

I don't think there's a point of order here. I think they're just trying to run out the time so I can't speak, and it'll impinge upon the mover of the motion. They've been successful in doing that, so I hope you're all proud of yourselves there, boys. Did you have a good time?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I know that it is Monday afternoon, that we've had a long weekend and have come back here, but it has opened up some interesting debates this afternoon. The hon. Member for Peace River rose on a point of order. I guess the subject matter before us today was one on which people were speaking from their heart and their mind. I do not have the Blues in front of me. I do not believe any allegations were made against an individual, but certainly there were statements thrown out at the government. I hope that members will take an opportunity tomorrow to read the Blues and reflect, and if they so wish, they can bring forward a point of order at that time, and we may deal with it then.

Debate Continued

The Acting Speaker: At this stage we are at 5:55. I hesitate to interrupt, hon. members, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I will invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to close debate on Motion 514.

Mr. Tougas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been amazing to listen to members twist themselves into knots to come up with reasons to vote against what seems like a very straightforward motion. We're just asking the government to say: look into this. We're not saying: do it. We're not saying that this is a panacea, that it's a cure-all for everything. We're not saying that it's going to solve every liquor problem in the province of Alberta. We're just saying: "Will you look into it? We feel that this is something that should be investigated. Please give it some thought." It's as simple as that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I forgot to mention one province that has minimum drinking prices, and that's Manitoba. I want to tell you why Manitoba instituted minimum drink prices. There was a university student by the name of Kris Howard. He was a student at the University of Winnipeg, a second-year education student. One night he went out with only 20 bucks in his pocket and went to a nearby bar where they sold discounted drinks. It's estimated that he drank three beers and at least eight doubles for \$20. Then he went out that night. He said, "I'm going out to get a breath of fresh air," and he disappeared. It took three weeks to find him. The police believe he got so drunk that he fell down a riverbank into the Red River and drowned, where they found his body three weeks later.

We can make a simple declaration to the government that we need to get some alcohol consumption under control before we have a tragedy like this happen in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 514 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:57 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman
Chase
Cheffins
Doerksen
Dunford

Elsalhy
Flaherty
McFarland
Pannu

Pastoor
Taft
Taylor
Tougas

Against the motion:

Brown
Cardinal
Coutts
Danyluk
Evans
Fritz
Graydon
Griffiths
Groeneveld

Haley
Hayden
Hinman
Horner
Johnston
Knight
Melchin
Mitzel

Morton
Oberle
Ouellette
Renner
Rodney
Rogers
Stevens
VanderBurg

Totals:

For – 13

Against – 25

[Motion Other than Government Motion 514 lost]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[At 6:09 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 27, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/27

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. From our forests and parkland to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of yourself I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 19 grade 6 students from Neerlandia in your constituency. They are accompanied this afternoon by teacher Jim Bosma and parent helpers Jina Greilach and Jannie Slomp, Rudy Sybesma, Garry Wood, Evelyn Krikke, Patrick Fountain, and Krista Fountain. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 29 bright and wonderful grade 6 students from one of my favourite schools in my constituency, and by that I mean Ormsby school. These 29 students are joined by Mrs. Liz Branco, Mr. George Diduck, and Mrs. Joanne Zuke on a tour of the Legislature. They're in the Assembly today to experience some of question period and to see what hon. members on both sides of the House do as we conduct ourselves in this Assembly and, you know, deliver democracy to the people of this province. I would ask them to please rise, and I encourage all my colleagues here to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to have the opportunity to introduce through you and to all members of this Legislature 45 of Edmonton's brightest students from the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, in fact St. Augustine school. They are accompanied today by two teachers, Mrs. Nancy Darwish and Mr. David Masluk, as well as three parent helpers, Mrs. Valerie Mallon, Mrs. Laurie Simons, Mr. Ken Ferguson. As my colleague from Edmonton-McClung said, they're here today to watch the proceedings of the House and learn a little bit about our democracy. I would invite them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four distinguished members of the Alberta medical profession. These gentlemen along with nearly 50 other doctors and staff from the Alberta Medical Association are in the Legislature

today to connect with their respective MLAs, share their views and concerns with their elected representatives, and learn more about our system of parliamentary democracy and, quite frankly, how to influence us to the greater good. I would ask that our guests stand when called but that the Assembly hold its applause until all of our visitors have been recognized. I won't introduce all 50 by name, but I would like to personally introduce Dr. Darryl LaBuick, president of the Alberta Medical Association; Dr. John Huang, chair of the AMA's government affairs council; the hon. Dr. Grant Hill, former interim leader of the Official Opposition in the House of Commons and former Member of Parliament for Macleod; and Dr. Michael Auld, a constituent of mine from Edmonton-Whitemud. I'd ask all of the other members of the AMA group to stand and join them, and I'd ask the House to give them our warmest welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sitting in your gallery today are two gentlemen. First will be Mr. Carlo Amodio, the president of the National Congress of Italian Canadians for the Edmonton district, and Mr. Leopoldo Sorgiovanni, producer of the Italian radio station here in Edmonton on World FM. Both of these individuals have been decorated with the cavaliere de la república designation by the Italian government. They're here to observe statements and tablings of petitions relevant to a possible closure of the Italian consulate in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you two guests. My first guest immigrated to Canada from Ethiopia. His name is Ibsa Befakadu. He now lives in Edmonton and volunteers much of his time as a human rights and peace activist, volunteering with Amnesty International. My second guest is Mary Boloweza, who is visiting her friends Sylvia Krogh and Alan Boyle in Edmonton. Mary is from Blantyre, Malawi, Africa, and works as a tourist information and HIV/AIDS prevention person in her home country. On behalf of my constituents I would like to ask both of my guests now to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Italian Consulate

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. What makes Alberta a great province to live in, do business in, and raise our children in is due in part to the diverse ethnocultural makeup of our citizens. Our Italian community, now boasting some 67,000 Albertans, is definitely an important part of our social and economic fabric. Why do I make reference to our Italian community? Well, Mr. Speaker, it is because Alberta's Italian community is concerned with the Italian government's recent decision to close its Edmonton consulate. This is an occurrence for all of us to be concerned with.

Presently Italy is Alberta's eighth-largest export market, with annual exports averaging \$156 million. We also import some \$429 million worth of goods from Italy, which include some of their famous wines, olives, and tiles. Italy is also an important partner in academia, where the University of Alberta has created a Faculty of Arts in the town of Cortona in Tuscany and where the U of A is a signatory to an agreement of academic and scientific co-operation with the University of Siena.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Italy serves as the head office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; therefore, it is a hub for many multinational agriculture projects.

Mr. Speaker, Italy is important to Alberta, and as such I urge all members of this House to contact the Italian authorities and respectfully encourage the Italian government to reconsider their decision to close their consulate in Edmonton, Alberta. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Jan Hudec

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend at the World Cup downhill ski race in Lake Louise a friend and an Albertan made history. Calgaryan Jan Hudec crossed the finish line with the fastest time, which is the first time in the event's history that an Albertan, let alone a Canadian, has won at home.

It must have been an incredible feeling for the 25-year-old to stand on top of the podium in front of friends and family, singing *O Canada*, especially considering all the things that he has been through over his lifetime. He's battled through multiple knee surgeries, including one that left him off the hill for almost a year. Other athletes might have packed it in and moved on, but not Hudec. Adversity and following a dream runs in his family.

When Jan was a baby, his parents escaped communist Czechoslovakia, which included a harrowing trip in a leaky, homemade boat across the Adriatic Sea. They eventually came to our province, and Jan grew up on the world-class ski hills of the Alberta Rockies.

His victory is a sign of great things happening in sport in our country. The 2010 Vancouver Olympics are just over two years away. The excitement is building across the province for good reason. With our tremendous facilities and successful athletes the road to 2010 travels through Alberta, and it will also return here after the Olympics are done.

I ask that all members of the House join me in congratulating Jan, his teammates, and his family for this historic win. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

1:10 Alberta Utilities Commission Act

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By introducing Bill 46, the Minister of Energy proved that this government has lost its credibility with Albertans and does not trust Albertans. Fuelled by a culture of entitlement and arrogance, this government doesn't want to hear what Albertans think, and now it's trying to silence them by implementing Bill 46.

After it was caught allowing a government body to hire private spies to spy on citizens, this government should have apologized to the very citizens it spied on. It should have fired those responsible, including the Minister of Energy, and made fundamental changes to how the EUB operates. Instead, the minister refused to accept responsibility, refused to hold anyone accountable, and introduced the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, Bill 46. Just when the public's confidence in the regulatory system was at its lowest, the Minister of Energy has delivered a knockout punch. Bill 46, if passed, will forever destroy Albertans' trust of this government and of the energy regulatory process.

After the spy scandal Albertans demanded more transparency and accountability. Bill 46 eliminates both. The government has been repeatedly defending this autocratic legislation, claiming that it has been misinterpreted, claiming that the concerns of Albertans are false. They point the finger at people who they see as troublemakers. These troublemakers are simply fearmongering. And who are

these troublemakers that the government has identified? They are rural landowners. They are people who do not believe a government should spy on its citizens. They want true consumer protection. They are the mayor of Calgary. They are the Environmental Law Centre. They are the Pembina Institute. They are members of industry. They are urban utility consumers.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I remind all hon. members of this House that it was the government's own member, the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, who on November 7, 2007, told a crowd of Albertans . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Ukrainian Famine/Genocide

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With deep respect, I rise today to acknowledge the memorial tribute that took place last Sunday regarding the man-made famine that was forced on the Ukrainian people in their homeland in 1932-33. During this communist-imposed famine, millions of men, women, and children perished because of an ideologically driven communist Soviet government in Moscow. The purpose of the communist Soviet government was to break the spirit of the Ukraine and drive its people into submission to their totalitarian rule. Grains and other food were taken by the ruthless communist authority and kept away from the starving citizens.

Mr. Speaker, the Soviets later sent their advisers to China and to Vietnam and used the same method to implement the communist ideology. As a result, millions more people suffered and perished in those two countries. In 1954 my parents brought our family away from the communist regime, and my grandparents could not make the trip. I still remember the last goodbye to my grandmother. Part of our family suffered and perished in a similar famine created by the same communist policy.

Every year I have attended the Ukrainian famine memorial tribute in Calgary, and I share the deep feelings for the victims of the Ukrainian famine. I know that our Premier and the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek attended the same tribute in Edmonton last Sunday. Our thanks go to the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and their local organization for co-ordinating these important tributes. Our thanks also goes to organizers who helped to erect the first monument in Canada right here in Edmonton in tribute to the victims of this horrific man-made famine.

As we remember those who perished, let us honour those who survived to tell us about the inhumane policy driven by the communistic socialist ideology. *Vichnaia pamiat'.* Eternal memory.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute, the VVRI, is an indispensable part of the social fabric of Calgary. Described as the gem in the northwest, located in Calgary-Varsity, the VVRI is a multi-use hub of activity that offers so much to the community. Providing excellent services to people with disabilities is what they are well known for. Are you aware that thousands of families avail themselves of its day camps, swimming lessons, birthday parties, preschool programs, and parent/child drop-in activities? The VVRI runs the only nonprofit bottle depot in Calgary, and they go to Calgary schools with messages about recycling and going green. The VVRI also operates Calgary airport's baggage retrieval service, serving 11 million passengers a year.

All of these socially responsible businesses operate with a fully integrated workforce, where people with disabilities work side by side with others to get the job done. With all the activity at the VRRRI let's not forget the primary reason for its existence: to be leaders in innovative services and research to support persons with disabilities to live as valued and contributing members of the community. They've been trailblazing and providing a wide array of research and services for 40 years, but the fact of the matter is that the VRRRI's 40-year-old building on five acres of land in the University Innovation Park is not sustainable for the disability services and community resources that it continues to provide. So the VRRRI has been doing their homework, planning and seeking the resources needed to build a world-class facility for the next 40 years and beyond.

They are working hard to find the very best ways to support people with disabilities in the community at large, and they are very deserving of the support of all of us here today. I urge all MLAs to throw their support behind this institute as it continues its progressive and proactive evolution to meet the needs of the growing and aging population of Albertans with all levels of ability.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Goodwill Industries of Alberta

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in this Assembly today in recognition of Goodwill Industries of Alberta. On November 9 I had the pleasure of attending their annual charity fundraiser. This event really brought home to us how important it is to support Albertans with disabilities. Disabilities can do more than simply impair a person physically. They can overwhelm individuals with feelings of helplessness and despair. That's why I believe it's incredibly important for us to take a moment to acknowledge the good work being done by Goodwill Industries of Alberta.

Goodwill is an international nonprofit agency that was founded in Boston in the late 19th century by Reverend Edgar Helms to offer a hand up, not a handout to impoverished members of the community. Today they still uphold this notion, valuing the independence, sustainability, and dignity given to an individual through the power of work.

Goodwill's mission is driven by donations. They operate thrift retail stores stocked with gently used household items from the community, both providing these goods at affordable prices and recycling items to help our environment. Every dollar earned counts towards enriching people's lives. When you support Goodwill, you're making a difference in the community by helping them provide employment and training services to individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment. It's important for all Albertans to be proud of who they are and to continue to strive for a better quality of life for themselves, their loved ones, and their communities. This is what Goodwill Industries is all about.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly today, and it reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to launch a full public inquiry under the authority of the Public Inquiries Act into spying

practices by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (AEUB) and the Minister of Energy's oversight role of the AEUB.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This particular issue is not going away, so today I'm actually tabling 26 more signatures on the petition which reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents . . . hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government . . . to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

1:20

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition on behalf of several southern Albertans. It's regarding, of course, the passage of Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007, and asks us to "not dilute its contents so as to compromise the version approved at second reading."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition with some three and a half thousand names on it, Italian Albertans expressing their dismay relevant to the closure of the consulate.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister for Capital Planning on behalf of the hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Bill 56

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (No. 2)

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the President of the Treasury Board I beg leave to introduce Bill 56, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (No. 2). This bill will provide additional spending authority in the amount of \$1.5 billion to 16 departments of government for purposes of savings and for capital projects. Because it is a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to this Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 56 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table the appropriate number of copies of amendments to Bill 46 as well as a background document explaining the amendments in more detail. Albertans have expressed their views about this bill, and we have responded to the concerns, particularly those about landowner participation at utility hearings and about continuing to allow third parties to apply for funding when they intervene.

I look forward to further discussions about this bill and in particular these amendments when it comes before this Legislature at a later date.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is from the very successful open house of the North Edmonton Seniors Association that their more than 600 volunteers held there recently, a very successful day.

Then also one from the circle of safety family violence program from the Aboriginal Consulting Services Association of Alberta, a document outlining their services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Dave Denholm concerning the cancellation of a program for outpatients at the Edmonton General hospital. The program provided valuable physical therapy for seniors with a variety of health problems.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in reference to building quality child care together. They are writing on behalf of their private child care members in Alberta to raise their specific concerns about how the proposed regulations will impact their human and financial resources.

The second is from William Parker, a letter out of concern for the proposed child care licensing regulations.

The third is from Cathy Pasula-Jones about the proposed changes to child care licensing regulations.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter to the Premier from the president of the Coalition of Seniors Advocates, Stan Nykiel. The letter is requesting that the province of Alberta "immediately re-instate the Seniors' program that existed in the 1990's, exempting all senior citizens from having to pay the education portion of their tax bill."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have tablings today. My first group of tablings are proposed amendments from the Official Opposition regarding Bill 46. The first one is an amendment to section 8(2). The second amendment is to section 8(5). The third amendment is also for section 8, striking out subsections (3) and (4), and the next two amendments are trying to clear up some of the confusion that has been caused by this government regarding section 9. These amendments were prepared with the able help of Mr. Joe Anglin.

Also, I have a constituent letter here from Mr. Garry Grykuliak. It is concerning changes to the Alberta labour code. I have another letter from a constituent, Mr. David Lunt, also concerned about Alberta's labour laws and how they can be improved. I have a third letter from Quinn Nichols. It is also concerning the Alberta labour code and how it should be improved. My last tabling is from Mr.

Roger Berger. It is a letter indicating that we need to make the labour code fair.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the seniors' centres funding report presented by the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta and the Alberta Council on Aging to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. I'd like to thank the more than 200 seniors' centres that helped with this report.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling copies of letters I received from seven of my constituents, all urging us to revamp Alberta's antiquated labour laws to ensure fairness for all working people in Alberta. One of their ideas, for example, is for full legal recognition of bargaining rights, including the right to strike. These letters are from Angel Rowsell, Michelle Rowsell, Lois Boyd, Vivian Crowell, Nancy Forget, Zodie Kebede, and Charmaine Smythe.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail from Wendy Nelson asking this government to not put in passing lanes but actually twin highway 3, on which her daughter Ashley was killed when rear-ended and pushed into oncoming traffic a little over three years ago.

With this e-mail I am also tabling the appropriate number of copies of Ashley Nelson's 2003 graduation photograph.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings. They have come from my constituents A. Meads, Glenda Tarnowski, Shernett Paes, Mary Kutschke, Eufemia Cabarrubias. They are all concerned about Alberta labour laws and strongly believe in major changes to encourage fairness to all working people in Alberta, strongly urging this government to implement and support changes to our province's antiquated and unfair labour laws and to bring Alberta labour laws into the 21st century.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter to His Excellency Gabriele Sardo, the Italian ambassador to Canada, encouraging him and his government to continue with the tremendous opportunities with the Italian consulate here in Edmonton as well as the over 70,000 Italians that are represented here in our great province of Alberta.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr. Melchin, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: a report dated 2007 entitled Seniors' Centres Funding Recommendations,

presented by the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta and the Alberta Council on Aging to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

head:

Oral Question Period

Soccer Ban on Religious Headgear

Dr. Taft: Alberta and Canada are proud to welcome people from all corners of the world. Just the other day in Fort McMurray I was speaking with people who came to Alberta from the Middle East and are thrilled at the welcome they receive. They told me, and I quote: if God were ever to outsource running the world, he should give it to Canadians. But sometimes, Mr. Speaker, we slip up. A few days ago a 14-year-old Muslim girl in Calgary was ejected from a soccer game for wearing a hijab. She left the field in tears. My question is to the Premier. Does this government see this as an issue of religious and cultural freedom and of human rights or not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is an issue relating to a sporting event. The minister responsible has been involved and working with the two organizations, and the minister responsible may wish to comment.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

1:30

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This incident is the latest in a long line of needless controversies that should be behind us, including the wearing of turbans, religious symbols, and the like. The Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, who is also responsible for the Human Rights Commission, said yesterday that he has to support the referee's decision. My question is to the Premier. Why is this government allowing soccer rules to trump basic human rights?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister is supporting, I believe, the referee who made the decision but has also advised that he will meet with the parties to make sure that this doesn't occur, to work out an arrangement. In this particular case the referee was only following, apparently, the rules and regulations that he's supposed to for safety reasons, according to the association. The minister has offered to intervene, meet with the two parties, and I know that we'll be able to resolve this situation.

Dr. Taft: We should not be allowing soccer rules to trump human rights in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. Safety was cited as a reason for disallowing Muslim girls from wearing hijabs during soccer games. I don't think this is about safety. After all, we live in a province where this government allows children to ride all-terrain vehicles without helmets, even though many Alberta children die in ATV accidents every year. Again to the Premier: will the Premier take steps now through Alberta's human rights legislation and commission to ensure that this sort of incident does not happen again in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to ATVs, the minister responsible will be bringing forward regulations and/or legislation, if necessary, on public roads. Apparently, he wants to get involved with private land. I guess that's his business, but that's the Liberal way.

Anyone who believes that they have been discriminated against by any amateur sports organization because of religious beliefs can contact the Alberta Human Rights Commission. It's their responsibility

to hear the case, and they will listen to the individual and make the appropriate decision. That's their role. It's not the government's. It's the Alberta Human Rights Commission that's assigned this responsibility.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Treasury Branches Investments

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Treasury Branches is a treasured institution in Alberta and plays an important role in Alberta's prosperity, particularly outside the major urban centres. The government has an important obligation to ensure that it fulfills its mandate to the people of Alberta, yet the ATB recently revealed an \$80 million loss due in part to exposure to the highly speculative U.S. subprime mortgage sector. Ultimately, the exposure could be far higher. This is more than just another bad day at the office for the Department of Finance. My question to the Minister of Finance: can the minister explain what happened? Why was the ATB in a position where it was exposed in this way to such risky ventures?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The ATB's total exposure to asset-backed commercial paper, which, by the way, is not all subprime mortgages, is about \$1.2 billion. They've been reassessing this. They've been looking at this very carefully. They determined through several consultants as well that their exposure, their potential for loss, was around \$79 million. They certainly hope that this won't occur.

To put this in perspective, Mr. Speaker, that's about a 6 and a half per cent writedown which occurred. The National Bank of Canada, which is exposed considerably more, took a 25 per cent writedown. Would we sooner have had no writedown? Absolutely. But 6 and a half per cent is better than the rest.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. To put that in perspective, \$80 million would help an awful lot of seniors, would hire a lot of nurses, and would feed a lot of hungry schoolchildren.

The Minister of Finance claims that he has no legislative authority to control ATB investment policy, but the Alberta Treasury Branches Act actually provides clear authority for this government to set some rules about the ATB investment strategies. To the Minister of Finance: given that the taxpayer is ultimately on the hook, why does the minister allow the ATB to take on such risky investments, which any responsible financial adviser would recommend against?

Dr. Oberg: Actually, Mr. Speaker, I find that incredibly humorous, what he just said. This whole subprime mortgage issue, the asset-backed commercial paper, is an issue that has hit all financial institutions: the Royal Bank of Canada, Scotiabank, TD Bank, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, and so on. As I stated before, the National Bank of Canada was exposed for 25 per cent. The ATB is conservatively estimating \$80 million, or roughly 6 and a half per cent of their financial exposure is what the writedown is. Ultimately, we hope none of that writedown will occur, and in fairness it may well be that none of that writedown occurs.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, the ATB is a valued institution in this province. It's been there for people when other institutions have not. But under this government the ATB has gone way beyond its original mandate, into high-risk U.S. investments and large Bay Street corporate financing. Alberta taxpayers are on the hook for this added risk. To the Premier. It's one thing for this government to own a financial agency that supports rural Alberta; it's quite another to own what amounts to a quasi-bank that competes with the credit unions and chartered banks. Does this government have any interest in reining in the ATB, or does it plan to continue operating what amounts to a full-fledged bank?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, just listening to the member, he's made two statements that are totally wrong. First of all, he's talking about \$80 million. This is a writedown. It's not something that comes to the government that the government allocates to different programs. This is a writedown, and those securities that do not fail will go back into the revenue side. That's very clear. The other thing is that this government is a very, very strong supporter of the Alberta Treasury Branches. It has a very good board in place, which has increased the assets of the Alberta Treasury Branches. It will continue to not only serve rural Alberta but every Albertan. I see them in Edmonton and in Calgary and in any other major city in Alberta.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Sustainable Water Management

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sustainable water management in Alberta is a vital issue for all Albertans. The introduction of up to 15 upgraders in the Industrial Heartland will have serious consequences for our water supply, and this government is about to pass yet another bill for interbasin transfer from the Athabasca River to the North Saskatchewan. To the Premier: is the Premier going to set limits on regional water use, or will we continue this unsustainable practice of pulling water out of the north for the south?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the interbasin transfer that the individual was talking about is with respect to treated water. In terms of the process and how hearings are held in terms of any transfer of water or allocation of water, I'll have the Minister of Environment answer because it is a very detailed public process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a guiding principle in making wise water decisions, and it relates to the need to know how much water we have and where it is. Unfortunately, the government continues to make decisions about water without the critical knowledge that we need. There is no complete mapping of aquifers in the Industrial Heartland, according to the department. We still don't know the relationship between surface and groundwater, and there's no independent assessment of cumulative impacts. To the Premier: will you continue to make decisions on massive upgraders without this key information?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member knows perfectly well that the government recently talked about and implemented, in fact, for the Athabasca and is in the process of doing the same for the North Saskatchewan an in-stream flow need that recognizes the quantity of water that is required to maintain the ecological viability of any particular water stream. The cumulative effects regime that

is in place ensures that we do not exceed that minimum amount of in-stream flow need that is required to maintain the economic viability of any river in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As all of us know, Alberta is experiencing industrial development on a massive scale, particularly in this area, and the environmental consequences of unrestrained, unmanaged development are extremely serious. Already in the capital region there are water concerns, and this is before the extra upgraders. One of these concerns is that a major groundwater aquifer has been contaminated under the Industrial Heartland, the Beverly Channel. That aquifer has already had a significant degree of contamination. To the minister: does the minister have any scientific evidence to assure Albertans that this channel or others will not be further degraded by these 15 upgraders?

1:40

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this issue was discussed at the time that we talked about cumulative impact. We talked about the fact that there has been monitoring of this particular issue for some 30 years and that there has been no appreciable change and that the cumulative impact program that was put in place is designed to ensure just that: that there will be no significant impact on groundwater. That's why we talked about the need to manage the sulphur that will be stored as a result of the development in the area, to ensure that we maintain the viability of the groundwater in that particular part of the province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While the Premier claims to be raising royalty rates, his Minister of Finance is setting the stage for a bait and switch of epic proportion. Usually governments wait until after an election to break their promises, but just yesterday the Minister of Finance told big oil executives that the new royalty structure might have to be dramatically changed to suit the suits. The royalty consultations are still on but only behind closed doors and only with big oil. Ordinary Albertans are being left out in the cold. To the Premier: having already caved in to big oil by keeping Alberta's royalties among the lowest in the world, what assurances do the people of Alberta have that you won't sell them out again and give away even more of our wealth to your corporate backers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, a number of allegations that are totally wrong.

An Hon. Member: You always say that.

Mr. Stelmach: They say that I always say that. Well, because they always make those wrong allegations. That's why I'm saying that.

Our Justice minister has very publicly tabled lists of all of the individuals that he met with while we're listening to all Albertans with respect to the positions they've taken on the royalty regime. To say that we're meeting behind closed doors is wrong, simply wrong. Unless the member has something else to offer, have him ask another question because I'm not going to answer something that allegedly is totally wrong.

Mr. Mason: So allegedly totally wrong.

Well, Mr. Premier, it's well known that both the Conservatives and the Liberals collect significant political donations from big oil. With the Liberals saying virtually nothing about royalties, the Conservatives are scrambling to keep the donations coming. Now the Finance minister has suggested that the royalty review was due to Tory leadership candidates jumping on a bandwagon. On the one hand we have a Premier trying to convince Albertans that he's delivered a fair share, and on the other hand we have a Finance minister saying something else to the people who really pull the strings of this Tory government. My question is to the Premier. Why is he telling Albertans that he got it right when his Finance minister is telling big oil that maybe he got it wrong?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the Minister of Finance answer the latter part of that question.

This government is committed to the royalty framework. There is no part of it that's negotiable in terms of the 20 per cent. We are working with the oil industry. We're working with those that supply services. Once again, the implementation period is January 1, 2009, and for a very good reason: so that we have an opportunity to meet with all Albertans during this period of time to make sure that the implementation is done right.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, the Finance minister is suggesting that there will be dramatic changes to the royalty regime. I understand that he claims he's been misquoted. I would like to challenge the Minister of Finance to table the speech that he gave to the oil sands executives down in Calgary so that we can see what he really said.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd be more than happy to do that from a couple of points of view. First of all, the comments about change in the royalty review were in regard to a review of the royalties. It was put out that it was going to occur every five years. I suggested that the hon. Minister of Energy had been misquoted on that and that it is actually 10 years and beyond and that we hoped that this framework would last forever because there's price and volume sensitivity built into it.

Second point, Mr. Speaker. This was an oil sands conference that the media was at. This in no way was behind closed doors or anything at all like that, so I really don't know what the hon. member is talking about. Realistically, the hon. member should start attending some of these things as opposed to listening to CBC.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ethics in Government

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The smoke and mirrors continue, and the deception is greater than ever. Our Premier says he's going to post an imaginary guard at his front door and make sure any Albertan registers before he comes in and speaks with him. All the while his campaign donors and his buddies go in the back door and go golfing to discuss important matters. My question is to the Premier. If he wants to be open and honest with Albertans, will he record and report who he meets with and make it public to all Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, it's about minus 15, so I'm not going golfing today. I can assure you of that.

The other, Mr. Speaker, is that I made a commitment to all Albertans that we're going to pass two pieces of legislation, one very important, that's the lobbyists registration, and the conflicts of interest. Those bills are proceeding through the House. These are good bills, and I know that the House will support them and so will the hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, hopefully he's not going this evening on a flight south to do some golfing.

Mr. Speaker, the Lobbyists Act will be even less effective than the gun registry, and he might as well open up a volunteer gang registry. His own party members go out and solicit donations from school boards, counties, towns, and other things. Will the Premier send a strong message and stop having taxpayers fund party fundraisers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the hon. member is not aware of some of the clauses in the Municipal Government Act that do not allow municipal officials to use public funds to participate in any political function, to buy tickets. That not only includes the Progressive Conservative Party, the Liberals, and the NDs, but the Alberta Alliance, I believe, unless they play by different rules.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, he knows that he's been getting donations in there and has to keep returning them, so he needs to tell his party members.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier please explain to Albertans how the Lobbyists Act is going to protect Albertans and the taxpayers who spend an exorbitant amount of money with such things as the Milk River bypass, where the meeting was held but it was discontinued?

The Speaker: No. We're not going to accept that question. Within a matter of minutes from now this particular bill will be in committee. We've had second reading. We're in committee stage. That's not an appropriate use of question period for this.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Land-use Development Framework

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quality of life depends on our commitment to protecting our land. Unfortunately, our need for oil makes us forget this. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: will you commit to a system for conservation offset to balance lands impacted by development?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to tell the House that very shortly I'll be bringing the land-use framework draft to the cabinet and to the Premier. Caucus will look at it over Christmas and January. We're bringing it forward. Those issues are addressed at length and quite specifically in the land-use framework.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even with the small amount of land that is protected, there are no standards to ensure that the provincial land is managed with the same level of care. To the same minister: will you implement a mandatory provincial parks management program to ensure that Alberta's land is used and maintained properly?

1:50

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of this government's management of public lands. In the green zone and forest areas our

integrated land management is reducing the footprint, the impact, of forestry and oil and gas activities by significant amounts. The target for the integrated land management is in the 15 to 20 per cent reduction. Two of our pilot projects are achieving reductions of impact in the 40 to 50 per cent range. In Crown grazing leases in the white zone we have policies in place to protect native grasslands. So we have nothing to apologize for. I'm quite proud of our public land management.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Provincial parks and protected land improve the quality of life for Albertans. Unfortunately, other sectors within our economy such as oil and gas can impact the quality and sustainability of the protected land. To the same minister: when will we see a provincial land-use strategy?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I've already answered that question. You'll see a land-use framework in January.

I want to make it very clear that the object of the land-use framework is not to stop growth; it's to manage growth. This party understands that good environmental policy costs money. The best environmental regimes in the world are in wealthy, prosperous countries. That's what we're going to do: we're going to have a strong economy and a strong environmental regime.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Alberta Utilities Commission Act Amendments

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before question period I noted that the Minister of Energy tabled amendments to Bill 46, which will be discussed once they come before the Legislature during the committee phase later this session. I know that many of my constituents, especially those in rural areas, have expressed concerns about this legislation. I am hopeful that these amendments will address many of the concerns I've heard, and I would like more information from the Minister of Energy. To the Minister of Energy: can you advise the members of this Assembly how the legislation will address concerns raised about third-party groups who wish to intervene during regulatory or rate hearings?

The Speaker: Well, the hon. member would have heard my comments to the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner before. This had better be policy questions and nothing specific; otherwise, we're moving on.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, the government's policy with respect to the ongoing development of the infrastructure required for utilities in the province of Alberta is going to be very clearly laid out and debated as we go forward. As I'm sure you know, the amendments, of course, are imminent, and we will deal with them in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question for the same minister is: how will these amendments address landowners' concerns . . .

Dr. Taft: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Prins: . . . particularly those who feel that they won't be able to participate in hearings?

The Speaker: Okay. There's a point of order on it. I'm not going to rule the question in order unless there's another item, so no. If you have a third one, go with it.

Mr. Prins: No. That's it.

The Speaker: Do you still have a point of order?

Dr. Taft: No.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Treasury Branches Investments

(continued)

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was mentioned earlier today, the Alberta Treasury Branch is an institution that represents a pillar of financial strength and independence for both rural and urban Albertans alike. But I am very concerned about the losses reported and the investment strategies undertaken. The minister is concerned, too. I quote: I don't want them coming back and saying we've had to do another writedown. To the Minister of Finance: how can Albertans continue to put their trust in the Alberta Treasury Branches if even you are concerned that the actual loss is higher than what's being reported?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under the due diligence that I have as Minister of Finance I wanted to be absolutely sure that that was the correct number. I did not want the Alberta Treasury Branch to be coming back two or three or four months down the road and saying: by the way, there needs to be a further writedown. The asset-backed commercial paper has been a large issue in the banking industry, and we had to ensure that these were absolutely accurate numbers. I am confident in the Alberta Treasury Branch, that the numbers that were put forward by them were the correct numbers, that they had the due diligence applied to those numbers. Hopefully, that \$79 million writedown will not be realized as a loss. Hopefully, the asset-backed commercial paper issue will turn around and will survive.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Investment in risky, asset-backed commercial papers is not normally recommended by financial consultants, so I do have concern that the board of directors for Alberta Treasury Branch would feel that it's an appropriate move. To the Minister of Finance. It is within your legislative powers to ensure prudent loan and investment standards. Can you explain why this \$80 million loss happened? Should it not have been avoidable with these high-risk investments?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, obviously, there has been a writedown of \$80 million, and as I stated previously, we would sooner not have had any writedown at all. Two years ago asset-backed commercial paper was looked upon as being a very positive investment with high returns, and indeed at some point in time it did give better returns than other investment modalities. This is something that has caught

the whole financial industry in North America in investments that have decreased liquidity, which has caused significant issues with them. Is the Treasury Branch any worse off than any other financial industry? The answer is no. At 6 and a half per cent I am confident that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the Yukon Territory the Official Opposition considered this type of risky investment of public money serious enough to call for an audit, and they got it. The Auditor General of Canada has agreed to investigate \$37 million of public money invested in high-risk credit markets, so for us to call for an investigation regarding more than double that amount seems quite reasonable. To the Minister of Finance: will you be asking for a complete audit of the financial decision-making processes and risk management policies within the Alberta Treasury Branches to ensure that public money is not lost due to unnecessary financial gambles?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, once again this side of the House is way ahead of that side of the House. The Auditor General has been working very closely with the Treasury Branch and has been involved with the Treasury Branch right from the start on the asset-backed commercial paper issue, and indeed the \$79 million was done in conjunction with the Auditor General.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Support for Seniors' Centres

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Council on Aging has partnered with the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, which I chair, to learn about the financial status of seniors' centres in the province. From our findings recommendations were developed to help the seniors' centres access the funding that some of them may need to remain open. More than 200 seniors' centres helped with this report. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Can the minister tell us what he's doing to address these recommendations, and when is he going to do them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd first like to thank the Alberta Council on Aging and the Seniors Advisory Council of Alberta for their outstanding work as they go around the province and meet with seniors and seniors' organizations to get the feedback and help us ensure that our programs do meet their needs. There are three recommendations in this report that came back to us on seniors' centres in particular. One is to provide more information on all the sources of financing and funding that could be available to them. We were happy to see that we could act on that quickly. The other is to get into some of the financing sources that seniors' centres could access. One of those in particular would be easy for us to start actively working on instantly. The other will take a little bit of time. Excellent report.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I thank the minister for the pat on the back, but I guess I'm looking for a more conclusive action. The FCSS funding of more than \$60 million is available, but many of these seniors' centres complain that they don't get access to that funding. Can the minister explain why not?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, family and community support services

actually provides substantial funding for seniors' organizations and family organizations throughout the province. About 80 per cent of those funds are provided from the provincial government, and about 20 per cent of the total funding from FCSS actually goes to seniors' organizations, many of them to seniors' centres. So they are actually accessing it. It was intended that this structure would be community based, that they could respond to the individual and local needs. In that respect, I am pleased to see that this program continues to be a viable support of seniors' centres and programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Surely, there are other sources of funding that seniors' centres can apply for. Utilities are an issue that our seniors' centres are all facing, probably the number one issue. Can the minister explain maybe other sources of revenue to volunteers for these centres?

2:00

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, one of the recommendations that they did give was to ensure that the new community spirit program for charitable giving be designed so that seniors' centres receive donations that would be eligible for matching funds from the community spirit fund. Now, that's been designed, and it's certainly working with our colleagues in the other departments to see that that would and could qualify. That is the intent of the spirit of giving. That is what makes our seniors' organizations very viable as a volunteer base and the charitable contributions and the support from the local people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Logging in Watersheds

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's approach to forest management on the eastern slopes of the Rockies/Kananaskis is unacceptable. It's an approach that privileges industry over environmental well-being in a vitally important region. Our concern is not with the forestry industry. It's with what this government allows the forestry industry to do and where they allow them to do it. Our problem is with a minister who thinks: "If you want to see real water problems, sit back and do nothing; let nature take its way. That will cause worse problems." To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: how can a minister in this portfolio be so afraid of nature?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we've explained to our friends across the way many times that water is the highest value that we manage for in our forestry in the eastern slopes. We work closely with our counterparts in British Columbia on both the pine beetle and the fire strategy.

Half their questions are: why don't we follow science? The other half is: let nature take its course. The message from British Columbia is very clear. They sat back and listened to messages like this in the late '90s. The result is that they lost 90,000 hectares of lodgepole pine. We're not going to make the mistakes that were made in British Columbia.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the 2004 elections Spray Lakes Sawmills, the forestry company who has the forest manage-

ment agreement in Kananaskis Country, gave \$2,000 to the current Minister of Sustainable Resource Development's election campaign. That same minister refuses to make public his Progressive Conservative leadership campaign contributions. There's a clear potential for a conflict of interest arising when the minister responsible for forest management agreements has a history of campaign support from the company holding the FMA for the most sensitive region in this province. The question needs to be asked. Will the minister release his donor list so that Albertans know the full situation here?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, Spray Lakes Sawmills has operated in the Cochrane and Kananaskis area since the 1940s. They are a family-owned local operation. If you visit Cochrane, I'll be happy to take you out there. The local community centre is donated by Spray Lakes. They're the kind of company that have helped build Alberta – north, south, and centre – and I'm very proud to have them as constituents.

Mr. Cheffins: Are you in a conflict or not is what we want to know.

Continued clear-cutting in this area is having a negative impact on Calgary and the surrounding region's watershed. It is ruining the valued leisure and recreation resource in this area, and it hinders attempts at wildlife protection. Will the minister do the right thing: end these damaging logging practices and declare this entire area a fully protected provincial park?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, nothing will damage more the watershed and recreational value of the eastern slopes in Kananaskis Country than devastation by pine beetle and/or forest fire. That's what we're managing the forest for. That is our goal. I've met with the Friends of Kananaskis. We've discussed it. We share the same outcome. We see recreational watershed as the highest use. But the question is: how do you achieve that? Again, we've learned from British Columbia and we've learned from the Canadian Forest Service that sitting back and doing nothing is not the solution. It didn't work in British Columbia. It won't work here, and we won't make those mistakes again.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, according to CMHC the average two-bedroom apartment in Calgary is currently \$1,075 to rent, and we know it's going up. Recent figures from Stats Canada show that over 20 per cent of Albertans earn less than \$12 an hour. Those working for \$12 an hour in the city of Calgary would have to work 69 hours a week to afford this average, ordinary apartment. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Could you explain to these people how the Alberta advantage is supposed to work for them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member very much knows, there is an influx of people into this province, and this government is very much trying to address the challenges of a hundred thousand people coming into Alberta and providing housing. We do have a program that is in place looking at providing 11,000 more units into the marketplace over five years. Also, Mr. Speaker, the philosophy of this government is very much to deal with the individuals that are in need, and through the rent supplement and other programs we are going in that direction.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess working 69 hours is okay by this minister.

The other figures from Stats Canada show that 36 per cent of Albertans earn less than \$15 an hour. Again to the same minister. Also, at the same time housing prices are going up. Mortgage payments would cost twice as much as rent. House payments, if they went that route, would cost three times as much. They're between a rock and a hard place. What do we say to these hard-working Albertans who can't afford to buy, and the rent keeps going up. What is your message to them?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been working very co-operatively with the municipalities. In fact, in the city of Calgary through housing support this past year we have given them \$63 million, and those municipalities have that autonomy to be able to choose how they feel that funding should be spent – whether it should be spent on rent supplement, whether it should be spent on new units, whether it should be spent with support from different agencies – to work for the betterment of their community.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're talking about hundreds of thousands of Albertans that aren't sharing in this so-called Alberta advantage. Apartments being turned into condos means this: what cost you \$1,000 a month in rent now will cost you \$2,000 a month for a condo plus \$33,000 down payment. This is a crisis. My final question to this minister is simply this: does the minister finally get it? In the short run there are only two things you can do: rent increase guidelines and a moratorium on conversions. For the sake of thousands of Albertans, will you at least take a look at this and commit to it?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I do want to say that the Premier brought forward a task force that the hon. member sat on. The hon. member also brought forward in that task force some of the directions that this government is using at this time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to you also that when we look at the delivery of services in the two communities, it is in conjunction with the municipalities; it is in conjunction with the agencies. All of these individuals are working in the best interests of where the needs are most needed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Affordable Housing in Calgary

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the unprecedented population growth in Alberta, our Premier is right in putting affordable housing among the top priorities of our government. However, some of my constituents have expressed concern that they are struggling to find rental accommodation that is affordable for themselves and their families. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. With the mandate given to him by our Premier on affordable housing needs for my constituents, what is the minister doing to address this affordable issue in Calgary?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member brought forward: what is the government doing? As I stated earlier, the government is looking at programs and assisting municipalities: \$63 million for Calgary; \$45 million for the city of Edmonton. In fact, recently \$60 million was announced for rural Alberta to support units. Also, I want to say that, in fact, last Friday we had an announcement that was made for \$450,000. That was a Canada-Alberta affordable housing project that was very much a co-

operative effort between the municipality, the agency, and two levels of government.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that the housing demand is outstripping supply, is the government participating in any other projects to address affordable housing in Calgary?

Mr. Danyluk: Very much, Mr. Speaker. We very much look at what is needed the most, as I talked about before: the number of units, the rent supplement, the homeless and eviction prevention fund. We are bringing forward programs. But this is a challenge. We need to look at housing in different ways. We need to look at homelessness in different ways because this challenge is not going to go away. And we are doing exactly that. This Premier has brought forward a secretariat to end homelessness over 10 years.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Confined Feeding Operations

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his 2006-2007 annual report regarding confined feedlot operations the Auditor General noted that the Natural Resources Conservation Board "cannot demonstrate that it uses its resources effectively to manage the risk of environmental harm." The risk identification was incomplete, reports were lacking important information, and this issue was raised previously in the Auditor General's report in 2003-2004. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why has the NRCB not addressed the issue in the past three years?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I can only answer that question with respect to the last 11 months, and I can say that internal reforms are under way to address the Auditor General's concerns.

Mr. Bonko: Environmental risks at confined feedlot operations are a significant concern to Albertans. They've raised it in the past, and they continue to raise it, especially over this wintertime. When we receive calls and letters from outraged Albertans about filthy water and pouring manure on the land, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development said that these concerns should be taken up with the Natural Resources Conservation Board. Yet it's clearly not working. When is the minister going to oversee the NRCB and ensure that they're taking responsibility for these actions?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is now making baseless accusations against good people who work on the Natural Resources Conservation Board. He didn't give a single specific example. He's just making things up. I'm not going to answer questions like that. Thank you.

Mr. Bonko: Okay. The Auditor General has described very clearly what needs to be done to address environmental concerns at CFOs. To the minister: will he finally commit to fully implementing all of the recommendations outlined in the Auditor General's report 2006-2007? Is that specific enough?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, like the other departments of this government, we absolutely are committed to resolving any problems

identified by the Auditor General, but we decide how to solve those problems.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Italian Consulate

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No longer than a month ago I had the honour of hosting the Italian ambassador to Canada here in Edmonton. During our discussions many areas of potential co-operation were explored. Learning of the imminent closure of the consulate definitely was bad news not only to me but to all Alberta Italians. My question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What impact, Mr. Minister, will the closure have on Edmonton and Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for the excellent work he's been doing here rallying the troops in terms of the Italian community, with over 70,000 proudly living here in Edmonton.

I could give you an example. Did you know that Italy is one of the top 10 exporters, of course, that Alberta deals with, which is very important? The employment opportunities, the tremendous jobs that are provided here, and also the tremendous traditional value that Italians have brought to Edmonton are significant not only to this city but to all of the province of Alberta. I want to say that we are working very closely with the consul general relative to keeping the office open.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: since the value, not only economic but also cultural value, is of such paramount importance to this province, what is the minister doing to prevent the closure of the consulate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say what I am doing and this government is doing is. I tabled in this Assembly earlier today a letter which was sent on behalf of our government to His Excellency Ambassador Gabriele Sardo in Ottawa. We're encouraging him to meet with us as well and are also reminding him of excellent examples of Italian companies who are doing work, in fact, in my own constituency of Fort McMurray, where over half a billion dollars are being spent. That is being done by Snamprogetti, which is, as you know, an environmental company that is building three hydrotreatment plants in Fort McMurray. It's another example of Italians who are working with their expertise here in our province, and we welcome it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Energy Efficiency in Government Vehicles

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has adopted the lead filter standards to reduce emissions in public buildings, yet this government seems to lack an implementation strategy to modernize its vehicle fleet in a similar way. Can the Deputy Premier explain to Albertans why similar steps have not been taken to reduce vehicle emissions?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue with respect to emissions of the

government fleet is something that came up quite frequently during the public discussions we had on climate change this summer. I can advise the member that it's the government's intention to respond not only to that issue but to a number of other issues as we bring forward our updated climate change strategy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister, then. Alberta currently produces the bulk of Canada's fossil fuel emissions. The minister should know that at present technology is available to reduce automotive emissions and is being deployed in provincial service fleets in jurisdictions like British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Ontario. To the minister: will the government commit to making our provincial vehicle fleet more energy efficient and less polluting? I appreciate the answer. My question, then, is: when?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of issues. There's the government fleet of vehicles, and then there's the broader perspective of vehicles at large. There are two issues related to this. One is that older vehicles tend to be much more emitting than the newer vehicles, so as the vehicle fleet in Alberta begins to move into newer vehicles, there will be a natural improvement. We've also been working with CASA, and they'll be presenting at their next board meeting, on December 6, a program that will include incentives, antitampering, a hotline for visible emitters, and inspection and maintenance issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was mostly interested in the government fleet itself, automobiles that are under the control of this government. The Alberta Liberal caucus has always viewed fleet conversion as a measure for reducing emissions and mitigating environmental stresses: things like hybrid, ethanol, or NGVs, for example. The government should lead by example and demonstrate its commitment to reducing emissions. Can we expect the same from this government, or will they continue to be oblivious and resistant to the realities of climate change?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the government should lead by example too. That's why I as the Minister of Environment am leading by example by buying and using and driving a hybrid vehicle, and I'm encouraging all others in government to do the same. In answer to the first question, I answered that clearly this is something that the government needs to take under consideration. At times it is appropriate. At other times the use of hybrid vehicles may not be available to serve all needs, but clearly that's the direction we should be heading in.

2:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 82 questions and responses today.

On a lighter note I would like all to know that, actually, the Sergeant-at-Arms leads all of us by example. He rides a bicycle to work every day.

Speaker's Ruling Use of Laptop in the Chamber

The Speaker: Now, hon. members, during Oral Question Period I received a number of notes with respect to an item that I think I have to clarify. In the letter that I sent to all hon. members March 5, 2007, with respect to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 20

different items were covered. One was called 17, Laptop Computers in the Chamber. Essentially, my request was that laptops are not to be used during the question period or on ceremonial occasions. Today when we had Members' Statements the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow used not a laptop but a notebook. That brought forth a number of notes. So a dutiful investigation was conducted during Oral Question Period, and the response was that, yes, a notebook was held in the left hand and was read from. That is a no-no. That violates the rules of the Assembly. I suspect that in ensuing months and in ensuing years there will be another technological innovation that will come forward, but that is generally covered under the whole guise of the laptop definition.

There was no point of order.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Private Bills
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill Pr. 1 CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to stand and make a few comments with respect to Bill Pr. 1, CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act. This bill essentially is an effort by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to establish a centre which has a very, very good purpose. The bill itself sets out the purpose on page 2, section 3, where it says:

The objects of the Centre are to use the funds entrusted to it to establish, construct and operate an international centre for the co-ordination and advancement of public safety, intelligence gathering and government response related to cybercrimes such as child exploitation, financial systems fraud, threats to critical infrastructure and intellectual property and identity theft.

I can tell you that all of those threats, all of those crimes are indeed serious crimes that we are facing today.

I will use the example of child exploitation to give you some example of how it has grown over the last handful of years. In 2003 Alberta established its first specialized prosecutor in the area of Internet child exploitation. In 2003-2004 throughout Canada there were something in the order of 60 prosecutions of child exploitation involving the Internet, child pornography, and such. I can tell you that it has grown, Mr. Chairman, so that today here in Alberta alone we have in excess of 60 cases before the courts. In other words, one jurisdiction, this jurisdiction, has the total that there was in 2003 throughout Canada, and we now have four dedicated prosecutors in this specific area dealing with nothing else. All I'm talking about, so we're absolutely clear, is the one crime of several that are mentioned here, namely child exploitation.

The object of CyberPol is also to deal with financial systems fraud, which is huge, threats to critical infrastructure, intellectual property, and identity theft, which are also huge. Indeed, the federal government has just recognized that by introducing legislation in this session to enhance the criminal law with respect to identity theft. So I can tell you, Mr. Chairman, that this is indeed very, very important work that the CyberPol centre proposes to do.

This government is completely supportive of this initiative. We

think it's a wonderful initiative. This initiative, however, is in its very, very early days. I know that people have been working hard, the people who are behind it, in trying to raise dollars to support a business case, to support a feasibility study, and, indeed, have I believe received funding from the city of Calgary and also from the federal government. We as a province are prepared to provide funding for a feasibility study and a business plan, and I believe that the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security will be able to speak to that.

What I want to say today to the Assembly is that the government is supportive of this idea. I personally as the Minister of Justice and Attorney General see this as a potential incredibly important tool in dealing with Internet-based crime, which is a proliferation and which requires incredible skill, which, candidly, we do not have enough of at this particular point in time either in Canada or in Alberta.

Furthermore, this is an initiative which would see CyberPol here in the province of Alberta, and we would be able to provide guidance and leadership, not only for all of Canada but also for North America and, indeed, probably Europe, the way the proposal is being structured.

We need to know the answers to a number of questions before we determine what type of vehicle is appropriate for the centre. What we have in this particular act, Mr. Chairman, is essentially a corporation by private bill, and that is what it is trying to do. I think the issue here that I want everybody who is interested in this to understand is not a lack of support by the government – we have complete support for the idea – but, rather, the idea of committing to this particular vehicle today when a number of questions have not been answered. Those questions, I respectfully submit, require a business case and feasibility study to be done so that they can be answered. We need to clarify roles, functions, mandates, and day-to-day operations of the centre.

Some of the specific questions, I think, that need to be addressed are: should the centre have the authority of a law enforcement agency? Should there be government oversight of the centre? Should the centre be a public body for the purposes of FOIP? With regard to the sharing of information, it's unclear whether the centre itself, as opposed to law enforcement agencies that work within the building provided by the centre, will actually collect or have custody and control of any personal information which it could share. I know that there has been some guidance provided by the FOIP commissioner with respect to this particular bill. When I read it, I could tell that there were a number of questions that were left unanswered. Obviously, whatever goes forward will have to comply with the laws of Alberta and Canada as appropriate.

Other structures that can be considered for an organization like this are quite numerous. We have the possibility of a society under the Societies Act of Alberta. We have the possibility of a nonprofit corporation under part 9 of the Companies Act of Alberta, a for-profit corporation established under the Business Corporations Act of Alberta, a nonprofit corporation established pursuant to the Canadian Corporations Act, a statutory corporation pursuant to a private act, and a statutory corporation pursuant to a private member's or government bill. Of course, Bill Pr. 1 is the statutory corporation pursuant to a private member's bill.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the government I wish to say that we are supportive of this particular program. We are prepared to provide funding with respect to a feasibility study with respect to some business planning. That is the responsibility of the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, and he will have further to say about that in due course. We firmly believe that more work needs to be done there before we can proceed with this particular bill today or, perhaps, at all. Once we have more information with

respect to the matter, it may be that a different vehicle, a different corporation will be appropriate for the go-forward on this.

For the time being, Mr. Chairman, I would like to move that the debate on the matter be adjourned.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: 2:30 **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

Bill 1
Lobbyists Act

The Chair: Are there any amendments, comments, or questions to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, indeed, Mr. Chairman. I do have an amendment, and I have sent it to the table already. It's held by the table under the heading of L1.

The Chair: We will just allow the pages a moment to distribute it, and we will refer to this amendment as amendment A3.

Okay, hon. member, you may proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, as the House is aware, I have worked closely with the not-for-profit sector in trying to make sure their voice is heard in this Assembly on the debate around the Lobbyists Act. This is one of the things that they would really like to see happen.

I know it's a bit unusual because what the amendment is asking is under the Regulations section, which is section 20, appearing on page 19 of the original bill. They're asking that a subsection be added in that says, "Any exercise of the above regulatory powers must involve consultation with the voluntary sector to address adverse impacts of any regulation." What they're really seeking here – and I, obviously, agree with them because I've brought forward the amendment – is to try and enshrine a consultation process with the members of the not-for-profit sector when regulations are being made or changed for this Lobbyists Act.

Now, for those of you that have been following along with this debate, you'll know that a fairly large group that was classified under the not-for-profit sector has been excluded now from the effects of the Lobbyists Act. One might say: well, why, then, are you still trying to make sure that this group is being consulted under regulatory changes? The reason is because there's still a number of not-for-profit organizations that are captured under the Lobbyists Act, and regulations that will fine-tune the act will likely affect that sector.

Let me give you an example. One of the qualifiers, criteria, or tests in the act is around whether you're paid or not paid. But there is a clause in there that talks about being paid in other ways, and in the voluntary sector, charitable sector, no, we don't pay our volunteers – and we certainly rely on volunteers – but we do try and recognize them in other ways. Some organizations for their annual general meeting pay for all their members and their spouses to go to a retreat, which may well be in quite a nice place and might be regarded by some people as a darn nice treat. What's that worth? Should that be counted as part of a payment, perhaps?

If the government starts to make regulations through this Lobbyists Act that will reflect upon that NGO sector, sooner or later that is also going to travel into the part of the NGO sector that has now been exempted out of this bill. I think it's important that the NGO sector is included with some sort of consultation because what happens here is really going to affect them in a very immediate and

visceral way. So the amendment is asking that that consultation be enshrined.

I'm noticing that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed is involved in a very energetic conversation, and I'm wondering if, perhaps, he and his colleague might like to step outside with it. I'm sure he wants to keep going with it, but maybe he could take himself outside. I'd appreciate that.

I've done the example of the trip, for example, for the individual and a spouse, but at what point do you include gifts? Is there a value? For example, often at a volunteer appreciation night volunteers will be given a token. They'll be given a coffee mug, let's say, so everybody gets a coffee mug. All right. Do we count that as payment? I'll put that in quotes. All right. The government may decide that a \$5 coffee mug is indeed deemed to be payment. Okay. Fine. But what about the volunteers who didn't come to the appreciation night and didn't get their coffee mug? What happens to them? Are they now a different kind of volunteer? Are they an uncompensated volunteer versus a compensated volunteer? Do we now treat them differently in what they're doing?

I think it's important that we recognize that there are still a lot of details to be worked out in this act, and I think it's important that the NGO sector is included in what happens, that they're consulted. There's no expectation here that they would have a veto power, that they would somehow dictate what was happening, but they really want to know what is going on, and they want to be consulted in how these regulations come forward.

That is the essence of this particular amendment. I hope I have explained it satisfactorily, but I would like to get all of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to support it. I realize it's a bit unusual. I'm the one that's usually standing up here shaking my finger at the government, saying, "Thou shall not make regulations behind closed doors," and now I appear to be saying, "You can make regulations behind closed doors if you consult the group that is going to be affected by it." I suppose it could be read that way.

I still am no keener on having regulations developed as part of legislation than I was before, but I am speaking on behalf of a group that is very concerned about how this will affect them, and they want to make sure that they will be consulted. Without it being in the legislation, that consultation – you know, this minister, I'm sure, would say: absolutely. He would do that, but ministers turn over every two years. We have no guarantee that the next one or the next one or three or four down the road would honour that same commitment that the first one might have. This is trying to make sure that we have an ongoing requirement that that sector is consulted and consulted in a thorough way.

Having said that, I'm not sure if I have a few members who want to speak in support of it – I hope so – but I do urge all members to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think this amendment is extremely well intentioned, but I would ask that the House not support it. This would set, perhaps, a potential precedent for suggesting that in every act which has regulations, there would be a litany put into the act of who should be consulted before regulations be promulgated. The reality is, of course, that there is consultation before regulations go forward, but more than that, we now have in this House a process which the House can avail itself of with the all-party committees, where a minister can in fact refer potential regulations to a committee for review ahead of time, or the committee can determine that it wants to review the regulations once they're

passed. So there are opportunities in the area of regulations which should have greater public scrutiny or discussion, or if there are concerns about them, there are opportunities for those to be determined.

2:40

Again, I understand the sentiment behind this. Certainly, the issue that the hon. member is concerned about and one that I and many members, if not all members of the House, are concerned about is that we do not want to put undue regulation, undue framework around voluntary organizations that are doing wonderful things in our communities and our province to build our province.

As I said when I spoke to another amendment earlier, we already find ourselves in a position where because of the accountability frameworks that are in place, we find voluntary organizations spending a lot of their time and effort and passion applying for grant money and a lot of their time and effort and passion accounting for the grant money and some of that time running bingo and fundraisers so they can actually fund their activities and not enough time actually doing the activity that the people are passionate about. If there's anything we should do, it should be to unleash those organizations so that they can actually expend their passions on the good works in the community.

We probably can't get there from here right away because we have this fondness for accountability structures. Even the hon. Minister of Employment, Industry and Immigration brought in a program this year for the homeless and eviction fund. I thought it was a brilliant program because at the front end of it it basically said that we're not going to put an undue amount of strictures around it. We're going to let the front-end people use their judgment and make the expenditures that are necessary to help people.

The first piece that comes back, of course, is a question of: "Are you giving some money to people who shouldn't get it? How can you be accountable if there aren't more rules?" All of those sorts of issues. Well, we shouldn't be doing that, and we shouldn't be doing that particularly to volunteer organizations, wasting their time and effort on an overabundance of accountability. I'm afraid that with this amendment we're going to actually add to that burden.

All sides of this House agree, I think it's fair to say, that voluntary organizations and volunteers are very important to the fabric of our community, and we shouldn't unduly restrict them. Obviously, the concern about regulations under this act is that you don't want unintended consequences. You don't want to catch volunteers. I think that that's understood in terms of any regulation that comes forward. There needs to be discussion with affected parties before they're promulgated, but if by chance you miss that or if by chance there's an unintended consequence, there's a venue for reviewing those regulations at our all-party committees. I would suggest that that's a more appropriate route to go.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry, I can't remember the rules, which I shouldn't be admitting, but may I speak again in an amendment without closing the debate?

The Chair: We're in committee. You can rise as often as you wish.

Ms Blakeman: We're in committee. Thank you. Just double-checking.

I hear what the minister is saying, and I understand that. My only caution about that is the same concern I've had all the way along about that. It's government controlled. It's the minister supported by a majority government who will vote a referral of something to

a policy field committee, and/or the policy field committees are set up with a majority of government members on the committee itself. So once again this agenda is controlled by government, and a non-for-profit representative or an individual not-for-profit has no way of getting an agenda item up in front of one of those policy field committees without convincing the majority of the government members to in fact support it.

I would agree with the minister except for that process itself has problems in it. That's my argument around this. I'm sorry, I don't accept that that is a valid replacement for actually putting it in the legislation because, once again, it continues to be controlled by government.

I guess what I could say is, you know: how happy would the government members of today feel if members on this side formed the government in a few months and they start controlling all of those committee memberships? How pleased are they going to be at that point with the government controlling all of it? I think the answer is: not so much. So you can understand my small alarm at hearing that the way that that sector could try and be involved in consultations is depending on a majority of government members to allow it onto the policy field committees.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just rise to briefly comment and support the amendment from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Clearly, the major issues that we've heard about in Bill 1 are from nongovernment organizations, nonprofit organizations, who are deeply concerned that the existing bill will seriously impact their sense of freedom and their security about lobbying, and at the same time they're being excluded in some areas where they feel very powerfully the need to participate.

Examples abound in our recent history of NGOs having to respond to fairly draconian changes in the regulations or in the implementation of guidelines, and as the minister himself has stated, there are tremendous implications if there are fines or if there are found to be irregularities according to this new act.

This, I think, will help us to encourage meaningful consultation. It will enable nongovernment organizations to feel that they are being meaningfully involved in decisions that ultimately will affect their viability and their ability to do the good work that they have been doing. There is no evidence that this would be seriously delaying or denying any of the good purposes of a lobbyist act.

I think, in short, that this will satisfy a significant number of nonprofit organizations particularly and make it much more accountable, much more democratic, and much more likely to include relevant and important considerations in government.

I'll be supporting this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, will be supporting this amendment. With respect to what the hon. health minister and Government House Leader had to say in arguing against this amendment, the sense that I have from the voluntary sector people that I know is that they would be quite happy to take a few minutes out of their day from time to time to be consulted by the government over the exercise of these regulatory powers.

The Government House Leader made some very valid points about the stress that's put on voluntary sector people and organizations following the rules of accountability and so on and so forth. That is true: it does sometimes very much get in the way of those

volunteers' ability to do what their passion is. But this amendment, I believe, Mr. Chair, speaks to part of their passion and their need to be informed and be part of the process, so I will be supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of the amendment introduced by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Consultation with the voluntary sector to address the adverse impacts of any regulation is very important. Recently, you know, so many NGOs, the charitable organizations, and volunteer organizations in my constituency approached me, and they think this is not fair. They shouldn't be exempted, and they said to voice their concern in the Legislature, so that's the reason I'm supporting this amendment. I think we shouldn't exempt them from the Lobbyists Act. I know lobbying itself is not a bad thing, but excluding important institutions, especially those volunteers – we have I think 3 million volunteers working all over Canada. I don't know the exact number of volunteers in Alberta, but they are doing a wonderful job for our community, and they shouldn't be exempted. We should consider them as a servant, just like all the MLAs and Members of Parliament and some other elected officials.

Thank you very much.

2:50

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question on amendment A1?

Ms Blakeman: No. A3.

The Chair: A3. Thank you for that, hon. member.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have a second amendment, that I have already sent to the table in a package labelled L2. If you would be so kind as to ask the pages to distribute that at this time.

The Chair: We will refer to this as amendment A4, and we will just allow a moment to have them distributed.

I believe you can proceed, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This amendment A4 is striking two sections in each of two schedules. In schedule 1, which is page 21, under section 1(3)(c) it's striking the section that says, "Any individual who formerly occupied a prescribed position with a prescribed Provincial entity." That's actually repeated under schedule 2 and appears on page 25, and exactly the same clause is struck again. What these are are definitions, essentially. Earlier in schedule 1 it says, "For the purpose of section 2(1) of this Schedule, 'former public office holder' means," and then it gives a long list.

I've already talked about how the face of volunteerism is changing in our province. We've long ago left behind the 1950s, when all of the nice housewives were available during the day to go out and volunteer for all kinds of good works. We are now dealing, for the most part, with families where two parents are working, where children are very involved in a number of activities – parents

actually have to volunteer for those activities – so the availability of people's time and dedication and resources as well, if we're talking about donating money, is really quite precious. The concern that was voiced to me was that if we describe people that used to hold a position with a provincial entity as being named under one of the groups of people with whom lobbyists couldn't associate, we've essentially said that someone that used to work for the Alberta Mental Health Board, for example, couldn't volunteer.

That, I think, could be problematic for us. We don't have a huge pool of volunteers to pull from. We're not New York. We don't have millions of people that we could use as a volunteer pool. We're a lot smaller than that. It's harder to find volunteers with expertise in certain areas. I think what we've done here is we've discouraged or in some cases made it wrong to allow someone who used to hold a position with a provincial government entity to be involved with a volunteer organization.

Now, we have exempted the charities and sort of the good-works, charitable groups out of this, but you are still dealing with things like professional associations, chambers of commerce, the Alberta Medical Association, who was in here today, business groups, umbrella associations, unions, for example. They are still looking for volunteers and people willing to serve in their executive positions as well. Especially when you start looking at some of the groups that need a specialized interest and a specialized background – at least it would be a really steep learning curve for somebody else to pick it all up – I wonder if it's really advisable for us to be cutting out people who may have gained their expertise by working for a provincial entity or, more to the point, formerly working for a provincial entity. The request was made to me to see if we couldn't agree to exempt those individuals in this one particular section, which would open up that pool of volunteers. I agree, and I was clearly willing to bring the amendment forward and to argue for it.

I hope that others in the House will see how difficult it can be to recruit volunteers in this day and age, especially when we're looking at specialized or niche groups, where the hope is that there would be some kind of knowledge around the organization from the people who become involved with it, especially in executive positions. I mean, our civil service is not huge, but it's a good pool of volunteers for us to be pulling from, and to say that anyone that formerly worked for a provincial entity is out, I think we've narrowed that pool of experts that might be able to contribute by quite a bit.

I'm encouraging members of the Assembly to support this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I don't really have a lot to add except that I'm certainly supportive of this amendment and would echo the comments that have been made by my colleague from Edmonton-Centre, particularly when it comes to striking section 1(3)(c): "Any individual who formerly occupied a prescribed position with a prescribed Provincial entity." As was pointed out, this could encompass so very, very many individuals and, in fact, limit the pool of those who might be willing to serve in this capacity.

A number of my caucus colleagues and I were recently in Grande Prairie, and we met with the Grande Prairie and region chambers of commerce. This was one of the concerns that they raised, actually, so I'm going to guess that if the Grande Prairie chambers of commerce have that concern – and I know that they do a lot of work with the Alberta chamber – this is something that chambers of commerce across the province would share with many, many others. As my colleague from Edmonton-Centre was just whispering in my

ear: the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. It goes on and on and on. In fact, I can think of several examples: certainly, with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, people that work for that entity now who previously worked with provincial government entities. I can think of similar examples with the Insurance Bureau of Canada, and I'm sure the list is endless, Mr. Chairman.

Indeed, I think this is probably more far reaching than was contemplated when the act was first drafted. I think it would be the appropriate thing to strike these two sections from the proposed legislation, as is being suggested by this amendment. I do support it, and I would urge all of my colleagues in the Legislature to do the same.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I at first glance cannot accept this amendment. We had a discussion with the Ethics Commissioner when we looked at that, and we were trying to expand who should be included in terms of conflict of interest, a cooling-off period. We eventually moved that it wasn't only cabinet ministers that had this sort of influence; it was people that worked, say, in the Premier's office and for some of the cabinet ministers. If we look at the previous bill, we were trying to do that. Here we seem to be lessening or watering down some of the impacts of people that would have that sort of influence. It's not that they can't do it forever, Mr. Chairman; it's a cooling-off period. These people could have as much power.

3:00

In other words, I'm worried about moving on the Lobbyists Act and watering it down as we go along to the point where it might be meaningless. I think that any individual who formerly occupied a prescribed position – we've already taken out the voluntary sector generally, so it's not going to impact them. So it's going to be precisely, it seems to me, the people that we might want to know are lobbying the government.

You know, unless somebody can tell me differently, I see no reason why we should not have that in (c). If this was a concern, it should have been dealt with. Probably the people that had more time to look at it were the people in the policy field committee. They must have thought it was important for a reason. Unless something I'm missing totally jumps out at me, I think that's why you want those particular people there, because they may have influence. We want to know who's talking to government. It's not that they can't talk to government. But who is talking to them? That's the whole point of a lobbyist registry.

Again, I accept the argument from the nonprofit sector, but we have already taken them out of the picture. So who else is left, Mr. Chairman? We are concerned that there are some people from some of these groups that are mentioned. I'd like to know if they're talking to the government. That's precisely what a lobbyist registry is. Not that it's illegal or anything else, just that we know who's talking to them. That's the whole purpose of the Lobbyists Act, Bill 1.

I certainly would not support removing 1(c) from this act. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question on amendment A4?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. We're back talking to Bill 1. Bill 1, as you know, Mr. Chairman, was the flagship bill for this legislative session. It was referred, as you know, to one of the four standing policy field committees, which met over the summer a number of times and invited feedback and input from members of the public, identified stakeholders. They did in fact come back to us with recommendations both in written submissions and also in oral presentations when they appeared before the committee. Some of the recommendations were dealt with earlier in the Assembly, and now we're talking to the bill itself.

Let me tell you a bit of history from the committee, Mr. Chairman. You don't need me to remind you because you sat on the committee as well. We had a fairly extensive discussion in the committee about the words "to communicate" with a public office holder, and we spent some time trying to narrow it down and define what constitutes communication. It was an area where the committee actually had some serious discussions and serious thought on the idea that lobbying in itself, as you know and agree, is not forbidden. It is not prohibited. Lobbying is something that goes on and should be allowed to continue to go on. However, we wanted to give clarity to the word "lobbying."

We arrived at the destination, if you will, that lobbying is basically attempting to do two things. You're either attempting to influence policy or you're attempting to influence funding decisions, maybe securing funds for your organization or, you know, setting policy where funds can and should be allocated over where funds cannot and should not be allocated. So policy decisions and funding decisions.

Now, if I can draw your attention, Mr. Chairman, to page 3 of the proposed act, that's the section that talks about the interpretation. What does the act do? What does the act attempt to accomplish? Section 1(1)(e) talks about lobbying, and it says here as it's worded: "lobby" means, subject to section 3(2),

- (i) in relation to either a consultant lobbyist or an organization lobbyist, to communicate with a public office holder in an attempt to influence.

Then it lists various areas from section (A) all the way to section (G), talking about the development of any legislative proposal, the introduction of any bill or resolution, the development or the enactment of any regulation or any order in council, the awarding of a grant, a decision by Executive Council, and so on and so forth.

Mr. Chairman, I want to offer that clarity, building on the excellent discussions and presentations we had in the Standing Committee on Government Services, and as such I am proposing an amendment, which I have already delivered to the table. I'll await its distribution.

The Chair: We'll refer to that amendment as amendment A5.

You may proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As hon. members know, the registrar and the Ethics Commissioner expect the registry to be up and running fairly soon after this bill passes. If we consider the fines and we consider breaches of the act, somebody who fails to register will be held accountable. Somebody who registers and fails to report will be held accountable. What this amendment is trying to do is tighten the bill a little more and offer that clarity which I talked about. Somebody might appear before the Ethics Commissioner or a court of law even and say: "Mr. Ethics Commissioner or

Your Honour, I was not attempting to influence any of these areas. I was basically stating my mind. I was making an expression. I was making a statement." I am afraid that this might be used by some people who maliciously and intentionally break the law, basically, and breach the act by saying: I was not attempting to influence; I was basically making an observation or making a comment.

So I think that this amendment should be agreeable to all members of the House. It is basically making a good bill even better. It is tightening it up in such a way that if you consider this a loophole, it is not going to be available for those people who maliciously want to break the law, maliciously want to circumvent or sidestep the lobbyist registry, that we're all eager to have passed and have implemented, you know, in this Assembly.

Mr. Chairman, I invite comment, and I'm hoping that members of this Assembly are going to agree to this amendment and help make a good bill even better.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, am pleased to stand to address amendment A5 to Bill 1, and I also served on that committee, as you are aware, I'm sure. I think that this is a very good amendment. I believe that it does tighten it up, as my hon. colleague has noted, because to my mind it really does make it too easy to get around what really should be the intent. The intent is that if you are lobbying or you're speaking to someone, the information that should be available is: who spoke to whom, and what did they talk about? I don't think that the details of that conversation are particularly important, but it really has to be registered at some point in time. So that's why I believe that the words "in an attempt to influence" make it too easy.

3:10

One of the things that came up in the committee was that we spoke about transparency, openness, and accountability. I believe that the way it sits, it will not address those three parameters that really should be respected in this process. We talked about something that was interesting in a way, and it was called reverse onus, and that was going to be about who actually was responsible. This is a conversation that I'm hoping will still come up at a later date. I believe that if we had that reverse onus, where in fact the onus is on the elected official to say whom they've spoken with, where they spoke to them, and what they spoke about, it would take away all of these abilities or intents for someone who wants to get around this bill.

So for those reasons I'm supporting this amendment. I hope that the House has paid attention to why they should be supporting it, and therefore I will.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak to amendment A5, which I think does exactly what the member has indicated. I think we would be wise to support this amendment because we want to give clarification to the whole issue of lobbyists. We want to tighten up the regulations around lobbyists, and we want to be seen doing that as well. I think this does both. I think it tightens up the regulations in a couple of key areas, and it is seen to do that as well and sends a powerful message to the people of Alberta that their provincial government is serious about a lobbyist registry act.

I think that, quite frankly, when you look at the substance of the

amendment, which is to strike out the phrase “in an attempt to influence” and substitute the phrase “with regard to,” and then you read it the way that the legislation would read, it makes a lot of sense in regard to that. So if the amendment were adopted, it would say, for instance:

“lobby” means, subject to section 3(2),

- (i) in relation to either a consultant lobbyist or an organization lobbyist, to communicate with a public office holder with regard to
- (A) the development of any legislative proposal.

I could go on because there are a number of sections there, obviously, as opposed to reading: “in an attempt to influence” the development of that legislative proposal, et cetera, et cetera.

Again in subclause (B):

- (ii) only in relation to a consultant lobbyist . . .
- (B) to communicate with a public office holder with regard to the awarding of any contract by or on behalf of the Government or a prescribed Provincial entity.

This reads considerably more strongly than “in an attempt to influence the awarding of any contract.”

My colleague from Edmonton-McClung I think is right that when you phrase it in terms of an attempt or an intent to influence, you leave a very large amount of wiggle room for the alleged lobbyist, if he’s called on it, to say: well, no, that wasn’t my intention at all; I wasn’t really trying to do that. I think that if you change the language to “with regard to,” that makes it good and clear to everybody – to prospective lobbyists, to lobbyists registered and not yet registered, to anybody considering getting into the lobbyist business, to MLAs, to cabinet ministers, to anyone involved in the process of government – what the expectations are around that. Clarity like that I think makes for better legislation.

So, Mr. Chair, I’ll be happy to support amendment A5 when it comes to a vote. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This particular amendment I will support because I think it makes good sense. I don’t know how you would talk about a, b, c, d, and e, the semantics. You say: I want to talk to you, but I don’t want to influence you. I think this makes it clear, and I hope the government would take a look at it. If you’re going to discuss these matters, the semantics are fairly important because, as I say, the person said: I just happened to be chatting with the minister about this, but I didn’t really influence him or try to influence him.

Now, I don’t know how you have a discussion about a bill or any other matter coming from the government without having some bias towards it, and I think this amendment says that discussion about this – and we don’t get into that debate about what’s an attempt to influence or not – about a particular bill or resolution or anything coming from an order in council: if there’s been that discussion and you’re a lobbyist, we should know about it, plain and simple. So I think this does add to the bill, and I will support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just briefly, I would like to point out that this amendment was approved by Parliamentary Counsel on the 20th of March 2007. Of course, you will understand that that was actually in advance of Bill 1 having been referred to the policy field committees. In fact, I’m quite sure it was the first bill that was ever referred to the policy field committee on government services.

I think it’s important to note that because what that shows me is that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung actually had these concerns way back in the spring, prior to any discussion ever having taken place at the policy field committee. I know that in speaking to my colleague from Edmonton-McClung and other members who sat on the committee that this particular issue, this particular wording was discussed at length during the meetings of that Government Services Committee and apparently never really came to any full resolution, certainly not to the satisfaction of the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

You know, what we’re doing here when we debate these individual amendments, of course, as has been discussed previously, is trying to make what we believe is a good bill even better, even stronger. I just feel that we leave too many doors open too far when we don’t nail down the wording exactly.

If what we really mean is that an individual has to register as a lobbyist if they’re discussing a particular issue with a minister, we don’t mean whether or not they were attempting to influence because if they’re required to register as a lobbyist and they’re having the discussion on a particular issue with a minister, as an example, clearly that’s why they’re doing it. They’re not chatting over coffee. This is an issue that is important to the lobbyist. It’s important to the relative minister or whoever it might be that is being lobbied. To leave the door open by saying that it would only qualify under this legislation if, in fact, there was an attempt being made to influence is just a little too broad.

In the last amendment I discussed how I didn’t feel that when the drafters of the bill drafted the act, they intended it to be that broad. In this case I would have to think that the drafters of the legislation actually intended it to be as broad as this amendment contemplates, and narrowing the wording to simply talk about an attempt to influence I believe doesn’t capture the intent of the Premier when he first contemplated bringing forward a lobbyist act. And I don’t believe it captures the intent of the drafters of the bill when they put it together.

I, too, speak strongly in support of this amendment, and I would encourage all hon. members to support it as well.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

3:20

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It’s my great honour to rise and speak in support of amendment A5. If we really want to strengthen Bill 1, which is a good bill, we must consider the intention of the lobbyist. In this amendment the Member for Edmonton-McClung is trying to say that we should clarify the difference between intention and influence. It’s very important because with this amendment we will be able to clarify more about intention and influence. If we really want to strengthen this bill, we should clearly make important changes.

This amendment is very important. This definitely will make this bill even better. That’s the reason I support this, Mr. Chairman. If we find out the difference between intention and influence, we definitely will be able to see the intention of people who come and see the government, who apply for grants, or who apply for contracts. The public has every right to know. We will definitely, you know, strengthen this bill with this amendment.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 1, Lobbyists Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 1 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill Pr. 1 and report Bill 1.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 1. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill Pr. 1. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 50
Health Professions Statutes
Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to commence debate on Bill 50, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2), in second reading.

This bill proposes an amendment to the Health Professions Act and the Medical Profession Act. The amendment extends liability protection for Alberta health care professionals who conduct competency assessments of health care professionals who are educated in other provinces or in other countries. A competency assessment must be completed before these health care professionals are allowed to practise in Alberta to ensure that they have the proper credentials and expertise to treat patients safely and proficiently.

The Deputy Speaker: You're going to move this, are you?

Mrs. Jablonski: Yes, I am. Thank you. I am moving this bill in second reading, Mr. Speaker.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta has requested the amendment to provide liability protection for those who carry out these assessments. In considering this request, it became clear that the amendment should apply not only to doctors but to profes-

sions under the Health Professions Act as well. This amendment will encourage and enable more health care professionals to assist with assessments, enable more health care professionals to work in our province, help improve the capacity of the health care system, and ensure that Alberta's quality standards are upheld.

Mr. Speaker, I have finished my speech in second reading. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I am certainly willing to support Bill 50 in principle. As the member opposite outlined, this is really an enabling bill. It's essentially expanding the liability protection to members of a number of other health professions and colleges who complete competency assessments of health professionals trained outside of Alberta.

Given the struggle that we're having not only with physicians and nurses but with other health professionals in recruiting them into Alberta and being able to retain them, I think it's important that we look at innovative ways to complete this work. Part of the struggle that we have experienced is that even when we're trying to train people, we don't have enough trainers, and certainly in the medical profession the trainers are themselves physicians or hold MDs.

I think this is a good step to be taking. I believe that it is part of the health workforce plan that the government finally tabled after more than two years of the Liberals urging them to do so. So I'm willing to support it for that reason as well. I would even look further down the line and recommend that the government research wooing some retired health professionals to come back and, maybe with a small amount of in-service upgrading, be able to then serve in a similar capacity as a mentor or a trainer of residents or a tester of capacities because, again, we don't have enough people that are currently working. Maybe there's a way to get a couple of people out of retirement willing to do this on a part-time basis, which would still be helpful.

The real stumbling block was liability. Medical liability, as you know, is staggeringly expensive because the payouts are staggeringly expensive. Some of the people that were willing to do this said: well, you know, I'd love to, but not if it's going to cost me, and if I have to look after increased liability insurance, then no. So this bill is really trying to address that to make sure that we've looked after the people who have come forward and offered to work with us to offer those competency assessments of health professionals that are trained outside of Alberta, again stressing that it's not just about physicians and nurses but all health professionals, that are sometimes called the allied health arts.

At this point I'm certainly willing as the shadow minister for Health and Wellness to support Bill 50 in second reading. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand and speak on Bill 50, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2). Clearly, this does go some distance in helping us to train, recruit, and increase our health professional workforce. I think it's a positive amendment, one that will be felt not only in the medical profession but across the professions.

3:30

I certainly hear, and did today, from physicians who are concerned about not only the lack of physicians in the province but also the speed with which we help new Albertan physicians, new Canadian

physicians trained elsewhere to get into the workforce, many of them frustrated, not contributing as they would like to and could. It raises the question of just how well we are streamlining and attending to the individual strengths and weaknesses of physicians trained in other jurisdictions. It also speaks to the need to protect the trainers in the assessment of these folks, who for many reasons – not only one of liability but remuneration, resources, and other factors – do not choose to be either trainers or evaluators in this very vital time when we desperately need new professionals in the health system.

So there's every reason to think that this will do nothing but good to help promote among physicians and other health professionals the interest in and willingness to take on the sometimes onerous responsibility, with marginal returns, of this evaluation process. To remove the liability is a very positive step. I will be supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] Thank you. I'm not used to that. Will you even like what I'm going to say this time?

Actually, this is an important step forward. As the previous speaker talked about, with the College of Physicians and Surgeons in lobbying us today about Bill 41 and the shortage of doctors, as mentioned, health professionals generally, we know that we have a lot of people that are trained as medical practitioners here in Alberta. You run into some of them, Mr. Speaker, you know, if you're driving in a taxi or other places. I think there's a great need to bring these people in as quickly as we can.

Apparently, one of the things that was very concerning for the medical profession was the fact that if they were training people, legally they could be sued if something went wrong. I think that this is an important step for them so that they can work with these people that we need to bring into the profession. Certainly, we know that there's a shortage there, a huge shortage. According to them it may be a bigger shortage if Bill 41 goes through as such.

I want to say that this is probably a step in the right direction. I think there are other impediments there that we're going to have to look at, Mr. Speaker. We just cannot afford to have a number of these people that have these sorts of skills that we can use. Any impediments that we can do without in terms of getting them into the profession – and it's not only the medical profession but throughout the health professions. We need a lot of skilled people. Now, in the health professions it is not only a shortage here in Alberta. It's a shortage across Canada, and to some degree it's a shortage around the world. This becomes an important, I think, first step in trying to at least do something about that.

When the member is commenting later down the line, obviously they've had the discussions with the medical profession. I think the question to be asked of the medical profession would be: are there other impediments that we need to deal with? Maybe that's part of what the profession has to look at themselves. Are there things that they can do within their own profession that can move this process along?

This is a good bill and a necessary bill and a step in the right direction. I would certainly be glad to support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to stand as a health professional and speak to this Bill 50, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2). I, too, support this as an RN. I have never been in this particular position because I've obviously been sitting in the House for the last little while, but there were a number of times when certainly people would have been presented in various ways, where I was asked an opinion on if I thought, not necessarily if they had the skills but if they were competent in actually using those skills. I think probably everyone in the House that knows me knows that I wasn't, probably, very reticent with my opinions. I saw it, I called it the way I saw it, and away I went. However, in an instance with this to protect me, I would probably feel a lot better in being able to express those opinions, making sure that we do get more people into the health profession, either doctors or nurses or pharmacists or any other number of people that are considered health professionals.

Language often is a barrier. They do have to have a certain English competency, which is fine, but what I saw sometimes with working with people with language barriers is that it was very, very clear that the knowledge was there, the experience was there, and certainly their desire to help their fellow man was there. As has been mentioned, perhaps we should be looking very carefully at other aspects of this in terms of the language training. If you look at somebody on a piece of paper and then you look at them face to face and you can talk to them, you have a far better idea of what this person can actually provide to our society within the Health Professions Act.

For those reasons I very much support this. I'm glad that it's coming forward. It does give the protection to the Health Professions Act, of which I'm a member and proud to be.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

I have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and speak to Bill 50, Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2). First of all, I want to applaud the Member for Red Deer-North for introducing this bill. I think this is a very important piece of legislation, a step forward, and it was a long time due.

In my personal experience I met so many foreigners with education from a different part of the world. They have the right qualifications, but they are not eligible to work in this country. Some people are doing odd jobs. If we pass this legislation, I'm definitely sure it will not only help those people; it will help all Albertans as well as all Canadians because we can utilize their educational background, we can utilize their expertise, and it will help their families. It will help Alberta as a whole because once somebody is doing the right job, it gives a person satisfaction. Once a person is satisfied and working happily, they can definitely contribute something for the nation.

3:40

The Alberta Liberal Party has been asking for a long time and pushing very hard to bring forward legislation something like this, but I think we should have some more training centres to upgrade them here in this country. You know, they are complaining that they can do certain jobs here, but they don't find the training centres. Some people are even saying that some doctors from overseas come to this country, but no other doctors are ready to take them to work as an assistant doctor to get the training while working. I think it's a very good idea.

I don't know the intention of the Member for Red Deer-North:

how she can help those people right away. You know, they get permission to enter this country from overseas, and for many, many years they are doing odd jobs. Sometimes they get fed up, and some people go back to their own country. Some people do the odd jobs, and after a few years they go back. This is not a good sign.

I definitely applaud the member. At least she is trying to bring forward something which is badly needed. If we could do something for those people who need the right legislation to help them out, I think we should. I definitely support 120 per cent this legislation. I've met so many people who are desperate. They want to do something in this country. They are capable of doing fantastic jobs because they've been doing so in the past in their own countries. I'm sure that if they get the proper tools here, the proper certification which we require here, they can be very helpful for our province, for our country.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise this afternoon and add a few comments to Bill 50, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2). As my colleague from Edmonton-Centre spoke about earlier, the Alberta Liberals have a primary focus when it comes to wait-time strategy, and that is recruitment and retention of health care professionals. Any measure that will increase health care workers and improve services available for Albertans will receive the strong support of our caucus. I, too, would like to personally congratulate the Member for Red Deer-North for bringing this forward because it looks to me that that is exactly what will happen.

The reason I feel compelled to rise this afternoon and add my comments to the record, Mr. Speaker, is because I have fond memories of the period after I was elected on November 22, 2004. One of my fondest memories is of the very first constituent visit that I had in the office as MLA. It was from a young lady who had received her training as a medical doctor in South America and was experiencing all sorts of difficulties and barriers in terms of having those credentials recognized here.

I often think of Irma and wonder how she eventually made out and whether or not she is in fact practicing now. I hope that things worked out for her because as a newly elected MLA trying to find some help for this young woman, it was clear that there were any number of barriers to people in her situation. If removing liability from somebody that might be looking at those qualifications and passing judgment on whether or not that person is qualified to practise their profession in Alberta is a step towards removing some of those barriers, then clearly it is a good and proper thing for us to be doing.

I, too, as my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie has said, have had many, many visits to the office or calls and concerns from constituents who find themselves in similar situations. And you know what? If it's happening in Edmonton-Ellerslie, and it's happening in Edmonton-Rutherford, I'm going to guess that it's happening in Red Deer-North and probably every constituency in this province. I'm going to have to assume that most if not all MLAs have had similar visits in their offices. As I say, if this is a step towards attracting and retaining more health care professionals for the province, it's got my full support and that of my caucus.

I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to put those comments on the record. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Seeing none, are there others who wish to participate in the debate?

Does the hon. Member for Red Deer-North wish to close?

Mrs. Jablonski: Just call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 50 read a second time]

Bill 53

Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Education I would like to move second reading of Bill 53, Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2007.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's my pleasure to respond on behalf of the Official Opposition to Bill 53, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2007. It's quite a journey that's brought us to today. As everybody in this Assembly and, I'm going to guess, probably by this time almost everybody in the province is aware, the Alberta Teachers' Association and the provincial government have finally come to a resolution on this issue. That's a good thing. It's something that I as the shadow minister for Finance have been calling for action on for a long time, ever since I've been in this House actually. This bill is a part of that. It's a part of what got us to where we are today.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the \$25 million that is contemplated in this bill to put towards the teachers' unfunded pension liability is something that was announced in the budget that was introduced and passed in this House back in the spring sitting. But it's interesting to note that at that time the \$25 million was somewhat more controversial than it is today. I think it would be wrong to let this particular bill go by without examining the history of that \$25 million. [interjection] I hear some grumbling from the other side. I know there are a number of people on the other side who accuse the Official Opposition of living in the past and don't want to acknowledge what history has taught us and what brought us to where we are today, but it's important because, as we all know, if you don't pay attention to the lessons of the past, you're bound to repeat them, and Lord knows we don't want to be repeating this particular situation.

Back in April – actually, it was April 19, budget day – when this \$25 million was first announced, it was trumpeted by the Minister of Education as a sign of good faith to teachers. You will likely remember, Mr. Speaker, that at that time the \$25 million was contemplated to address particularly teacher attraction and retention, and the minister talked about aiming it specifically at new teachers. As a result of that, teachers would have found that for a whole year 100 per cent of their contributions, or approximately \$1,400 on a \$50,000 salary, would have been looked after by the government for teachers in their first to fifth year of teaching. However, if you were a teacher with six to 10 years of experience, the government was only going to look after 75 per cent of your UFL contributions. In fact, if you were a teacher with 11 to 15 years of experience, the government was only going to look after 50 per cent of your contributions. If you were a teacher with 16 to 20 years of experience, the government was only going to address 25 per cent of your contributions.

Mr. Herard: Because they get all the benefit.

Mr. R. Miller: The Member for Calgary-Egmont seems to have a lot to comment on. I hope he's going to get up when I'm finished my comments and put them on the record rather than just mumbling in the background.

The most important thing to note here, Mr. Speaker, is that if you were a teacher in this province with more than 20 years' experience, the Minister of Education was willing to completely discount that contribution and was not going to contribute whatsoever – whatsoever – with this \$25 million to the unfunded pension liability that you were paying for.

An Hon. Member: They're the ones that screwed the others.

Mr. R. Miller: Now I think I also hear someone else on the other side. I'm really looking forward, Mr. Speaker, to these members getting up and putting their comments on the record officially. I'm going to guess that there might be any number of individuals, particularly teachers, who would like to hear what the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has to say on this issue. Oh, no. Now he says he's not going to put those comments on the record. Why should I be surprised?

3:50

So there we have it in a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, where the more time that you had spent as a teacher in this province, the more time that you had spent contributing to the growth and the prosperity of this province by sharing your knowledge and helping to raise youth into successful, contributing members of our society, the less recognition you got from the Minister of Education in terms of looking after this UFL. I can assure you that despite the fact that it was trumpeted as being a sign of good faith, it was not received as such by the teachers of this province. In fact – let's be clear about this – if it were not for the Premier stepping in and mandating that the \$25 million would be shared equally amongst teachers, we probably would not have the agreement that was announced just days ago between the Alberta Teachers' Association and the government to address the unfunded liability.

Mr. Danyluk: How do you know that? How can you say that?

Mr. R. Miller: Are you going to stand up and put your comments on the record, too? I hope you do because this is a really important issue, and Albertans deserve to hear what members opposite have to say.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has the floor, so I'd appreciate the comments going through the chair.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure you also meant to remind me that I'm to make my comments through you and not directly to members opposite, and so I will accept that.

Mr. Martin: You're self-regulating.

Mr. R. Miller: Yes, I'm self-regulating. That's right.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to recognize how we got to where we are today. You can't just pretend that this situation didn't develop back in April. It festered throughout a period of time before, as I said, the Premier stepped in and changed the rules of the game so that the \$25 million would be shared equally, which I'm

sure everybody would agree – well, maybe not everybody would agree, but certainly everybody on this side of the House would agree – was the right thing to do.

Now, the other thing that I have to say, because we have an opportunity to talk about the unfunded pension liability, is once again reiterate the fact that the Official Opposition is really, really pleased that an agreement has been reached. We believe that this is a good thing for teachers. It's a good thing for students. It's a good thing for parents. It's something that we've been calling for for a long time.

[The Speaker in the chair]

My disappointment continues to be that the Alberta government has taken no step whatsoever to this point to address the unfunded liability, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, our unfunded liability, the debt that we as taxpayers carry, has now officially gone from \$4.3 billion to \$6.6 billion overnight. At the snap of my fingers we increased our debt to the unfunded pension liability by 50 per cent. Again, I'm not necessarily suggesting that that was the wrong thing to do because we needed to have an agreement; we needed to get on with dealing with this situation. However, we've heard absolutely nothing from the Minister of Education or the Minister of Finance or the Premier as to how that, what is now a \$6.6 billion debt, is going to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I'm on the record and the Finance minister has acknowledged and the Auditor General has acknowledged that if this is not . . .

Mr. Agnihotri: They don't accept this as a debt.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, no. My colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie is suggesting that the government doesn't accept that this is a debt. They don't necessarily talk about it as being a debt, but they do accept it as being a debt. I've had the Finance minister on the record in the House admitting that it is a debt. So I think they accept it. They don't like to publicize the fact that it's a debt, but clearly it's a debt. The Auditor General certainly calls it a debt, too.

The concern is that we now have this \$6.6 billion debt, which has been acknowledged by the Finance minister will cost us \$45 billion by the end of the current payout scheme if, in fact, we don't address it sooner, \$45 billion to the taxpayers of this province. Despite the fact that we've been talking about it for three years in this Legislature, in my time here, and I'm sure it was talked about for many years beyond that, and despite the fact that the province continues to post multibillion dollar surpluses year after year after year – I think we're up to 12 years now – there has been no movement on this \$6.6 billion debt. That is the real concern I have, that despite the fact that we've done the right thing for teachers and students here, we haven't done the right thing for taxpayers. We haven't announced yet how we're going to address the \$6.6 billion debt, which is in danger of ballooning to \$45 billion if we don't do something about it quickly.

I think those are the comments that I have today for Bill 53. [some applause] Although if I continue to get encouragement from the other side, I'm sure I could find other things to discuss on it. In particular, Mr. Speaker, as I said, the upshot is that anything that can be done to attract and retain teachers in this province and provide some stability for parents and their students in school is a good thing and will get our support, and this bill will get our support.

I thought it important to remind members as to how we got to where we are today, and it wasn't all a rosy picture. In fact, there was an awful lot of animosity created by the announcement of this \$25 million on April 19, and an awful lot of hard work and goodwill

was required to get past that animosity. It wasn't an easy thing, I know, on the part of teachers. I know that for a fact because I had any number of correspondences into my office, many of which I tabled in this Legislature back in the spring, expressing displeasure with the position that the government took on the unfunded liability in general and in particular on this \$25 million and the way that it was originally to be applied. I'm glad that we are where we are today, but it's important that we learn lessons from history, and it's important that we remember how we got to where we are today.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 53, and I do look forward to the many members opposite who had comments to make while I was speaking. I look forward to their getting up and putting their comments on the record. I think that that would be a good thing for all Albertans, to hear exactly what they have to say on this issue.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and speak to the second reading of Bill 53, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2007. When the Premier was sworn into office, he pledged that ministers in his new cabinet would listen to and meet Albertans' priorities. One of the priorities identified by the Premier was solving the teachers' unfunded pension liability issue, and this legislation represents one of the first steps forward in honouring that commitment.

As part of Budget 2007 the government of Alberta allocated \$25 million to assume the payment of the teachers' portion of the pre-1992 unfunded liability of the teachers' pension plan for a period of time. The pension relief was part of an initial step while a reasonable long-term solution could be identified. The payments are to be made until the \$25 million is exhausted. That is expected to cover payments for all teachers who contribute to the pension plan where the government is the employer contributor for the period from September 1, 2007, to the end of December 2007. The decision to assume these payments was a clear sign of the government's commitment to finding a long-term solution to the issue of the unfunded pension liability.

The requirement of teachers hired after 1992 to pay off an unfunded liability they did not help create was seen by many as a barrier to attracting and retaining new teachers and to creating an intergenerational inequity. It was also a constant irritant in relations between the Alberta Teachers' Association and the government and could serve as some barrier to the stability of an education system that would truly meet the needs of the 21st century learner.

In keeping with the government's commitment, the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund Board was asked to notify boards to stop deducting the additional 3.1 per cent from teachers' pay that was previously allocated to paying the teachers' portion of the pre-1992 unfunded liability. The Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund Board did as requested, Mr. Speaker, and the teachers of Alberta saw an immediate difference in their take-home pay.

4:00

Bill 53, Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2007, will authorize government to make a retroactive payment of \$25 million plus interest costs to cover the teachers' share of the pre-1992 unfunded pension liability from September 1 to the end of December. Contributions made by the government during the September to December period will be treated like any other Crown contribu-

tion and therefore will not be reflected on a teacher's T4A for income tax purposes as this would provide an additional benefit for pension contributions that were not made by the teachers. This payment of \$25 million plus interest to the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund Board cannot be made until this legislation is passed, Mr. Speaker, so I would urge all hon. members to move the legislation as quickly as we can.

It has often been said that one reaps what one sows. It's worth noting that by making this financial commitment, the government was intent on planting the seeds for a new era in education. By doing so, the government has clearly indicated to the Alberta Teachers' Association that it was truly committed to finding a fair and equitable long-term solution to the unfunded pension liability and that it would negotiate a solution in good faith. Mr. Speaker, as the events of the past few weeks have shown and as has been mentioned by other hon. members, those seeds have borne real fruit, and the students, parents, teachers, school boards, and taxpayers of Alberta will reap those rewards.

By making this significant first step, the government in co-operation with the Alberta Teachers' Association is helping to create a positive environment for change in education. Bill 53 is a first small step among many this government is taking towards ensuring that Alberta's K to 12 education system remains one of the best in the world, Mr. Speaker, a system that will prepare students for the challenges and opportunities that will face them in the 21st century.

Alberta has one of the best education systems, and it ranks among the best in the world. There are several reasons for that: our teachers, our curriculum, our students, our parents and volunteers, and the range of choice available in our schools. All of these factors mean that our grade 12 students compete in a global education system. They have a well-rounded and comprehensive education that makes them prepared for their future, including our postsecondary system and the world of work.

The first wave of the baby-boom generation is preparing for retirement, and there are implications across the workforce, and clearly the education system is not immune. The loss of our most experienced teachers from the classroom environment is a concern. As you well know, Mr. Speaker, I have a brother who recently completed 30 some-odd years in the education field and has retired. He was very proud of the contribution that he made to our province, but that just goes to show that we are losing some very experienced teachers to retirement.

It's my opinion that the pre-1992 teachers' portion of the unfunded pension liability serves and served as a disincentive for young Albertans to enter and to continue in the teaching profession. I believe that concern is recognized by both government and the teaching community, and that's why it is so important for both plan sponsors to work together to resolve the issue, which is what they have done. That's why it's so important for this province to recruit the best into the teaching profession and to retain those excellent teachers.

Bill 53, Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, requires the wholehearted endorsement of all members of the Assembly to ensure that this enabling legislation can come into effect. It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that while the opposite side of the House will say that they support this, they also want to continue to claim that they could have predicted the future and that they can correct the past. Instead of talking about what we can do to make our system better, they continually want to take credit for what we have already done.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of this House to support Bill 53 so that we can continue on with the good work of the relationship between the government of Alberta and our education system.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for five minutes should there be takers.

There being none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened intently to the minister of advanced education. If I heard him right, I think he's making a case for increased spending in the next budget for education so that we can maintain this wonderful system that he's talking about. I think we'll have to take a look later on.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to bore you with the past. The past is the past. Certainly, we support the bill. We support the agreement. It was a necessity, I think. We've been saying that before, and we'll say it again. I think the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had an important point to make, though, and that is that now that we've solved the problem with the teachers, we have an extra debt for the people of Alberta. Again, it was the right thing to do, but I think it's important that we try to figure out how we're going to deal with it. I know that maybe "planning" is a bad word with the opposite side, but now it is part of the province's debt, if you like. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford alluded to that, and he was right.

This is a debt right now, and if we don't deal with it fairly quickly, it will be a bigger debt down the way. Then if you deal with it quickly and with the infrastructure deficit and the social deficit and all the rest of the problems that we have, it creates a problem that way, Mr. Speaker. But I think it's incumbent on the government, now that they've accepted this teachers' unfunded liability, to tell us exactly how this is going to be looked after. Is it going to be short term, that we're going to bite the bullet and try to save the money down the way? How is that going to happen? Is it over one year? Two years? Five years? Or are we just going to let it sort of drag along over the period of time? I think this is an important point to make.

As I say, now that the government has accepted this debt, I would hope that very soon they would tell us how they're going to deal with this. At the latest, Mr. Speaker, I'd take it there might be a budget coming down in the spring, early – who knows? – and that they would at least by that time tell us as part of the financial picture of the province how this is going to be handled.

As I say, I'm glad that this is settled, and this is the first step. Certainly, we'll support it here. I'm glad that the Minister of Education and the Premier were able to come to an agreement with the teachers. I'll give them credit for doing that. I'll give credit to the teachers. There's no point, as I say, in going back in history, but I really think the future is something we have to look at. The future is: how do we deal with this \$6 billion that is clearly on our books right now as a debt? I think it's incumbent on the government to very quickly show us how they are going to handle this particular debt.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It indeed is a pleasure for me to rise and respond to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Hon. member, I do want to respect, you know, your position, and your position is very clear. It's very straightforward. It's very clear. It talks about: how are we as the government going to respond? I suppose I want to ask you: how do you feel that that response should happen? What commitment do you feel should happen? I mean, it's much better than the comments that were made by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, where he

typically rode the fence from one side to the other and couldn't decide what side of the fence he was on: deciding that we're spending too much money, not spending enough, then spending too much, and not spending enough.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear the comments from the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. To the hon. member, my first comment would be that that's why you guys get the big bucks over there: to decide this. Mr. Speaker, I guess what I would say is that I think probably we should try to get rid of it along with our other priorities as quickly as we can. Maybe it can't be done in one to five years; the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is right. I mean, we know that it will just keep going up to \$45 billion. We have to pay the price one way or the other.

As I said, that's a decision you would have to make. It's ours to criticize after if we don't like the decision, but I just don't think you can allow it to keep going up because it is a debt, like anything else. Trying to find a balance, Mr. Speaker, between the problems that we have now with our overheated economy and how we deal with this – it's going to be easier to deal with it while we have money coming in rather than later if we hit a recession, I can tell you that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister rose first. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, then, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford if we have time.

4:10

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very obvious that this government has taken the first step, that this government has moved forward, that this government has looked at the solutions for the unfunded liability, and this Premier has led the way in that focus and in that direction. I think it's wrong for you to make that assumption, in comparing and aligning yourself with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, suggesting that the unfunded liability would be at \$45 million. That would happen if nothing was done, but something has been done, so I ask you the question. I know you said one to five years, and I appreciate that. I just wanted to compliment you on that comment.

The Speaker: A comment, hon. member?

Mr. Martin: Well, yeah. I didn't suggest. I mean, what we're saying is: if nothing was done down the way. The point I'm trying to make is that we haven't seen the plan from the government yet on how to deal with that. I'm looking forward with bated breath to see this, if we may, to the hon. minister, in a very short period of time. I think that's incumbent on the government. I mentioned whether it be by the budget or sooner, but I think it's important that we do see that fairly quickly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview whether or not he would support taking some money out of the sustainability account, which currently sits at \$8 billion, taking some money from there and making a paydown on the \$6.6 billion debt, which for the information of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is actually a position that I personally have espoused in the past.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, you know, I'd be prepared to look at it. What I would suggest is that we have this debt, that we figure out whether it's best out of the sustainability fund or the general revenues or whatever. The point is that that is there. That's the most important thing, that we see how the government is going to deal with it, whether it's, as I say, out of the sustainability fund or out of another fund or whatever. It's a debt, and we have to deal with it. That's what I'm looking forward to seeing from the government in a very short order of time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll now move on.
The Associate Minister for Capital Planning.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to add a few comments very briefly myself from the perspective of being a former teacher in this province and having enjoyed every minute of it and also from the perspective of having been privileged to serve as the Minister of Education for over two years. Obviously, I'm supportive of anything that helps with our teacher recruitment and teacher retention plans because this is extremely . . .

An Hon. Member: Are you going to get a pension?

Mr. Zwozdesky: No, I'm not getting a pension, hon. member. I wish. And there's no pension in this job either, neither as a teacher nor as an MLA.

Anyway, I'd just say these few words, Mr. Speaker. We are privileged to have a world-class education system in this province, as everyone knows, and I think the first reason for that is the outstanding teachers that we have, truly. Of course, there are many other reasons: the students are very good, the facilities are great, the province-wide curriculum serves us well, and our resources and our labs and everything else that we have all dovetail into that. But the first reason for our excellence is our teachers.

Secondly, I just want to add that this particular bill, which covers about four months of time of teachers' pensions, is similar to what we did a few years ago, five or six years ago, when we provided something like \$63 million to take over the pension liability from the teachers. I'm hoping everybody will support this because it's really not any different than that, and that was immensely popular with all teachers, and so, too, will this be. Our teachers do deserve this full support.

Now, of course, we have the companion piece coming along, that being the full takeover permanently of all of the teachers' unfunded pension liability by the government. So let us not feel that this is not good value for our education system because it truly is. I think the taxpayers are well served by our teachers, and this bill recognizes that service, at least in part, and the value that we place on teachers in our province. So let's celebrate the positive aspects of what we have here and move on.

My last comment is simply to say that during the two years that I served as Minister of Education, I met many times with teachers, with parents, with the ATA Executive Council. We did a lot of negotiating to help set up some of the deals that we're here today saluting and, hopefully, supporting. But the credit on this one really goes to our Premier, who had the courage to take this on with our Minister of Education at present and get the deal moving and get it done. This particular introduction of this takeover for this portion of the unfunded liability was a good signal that really set the tone for the rest of the negotiations that have occurred.

With that, I want to indicate my full support for Bill 53, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2007. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as we all know, turnabout is fair play, so I would like to ask the Associate Minister for Capital Planning: what is he recommending to his cabinet and caucus colleagues as a plan for addressing what is now a \$6.6 billion debt to the Alberta taxpayer and will become \$45 billion if it's not addressed over the lifetime of the agreement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, there will be an opportunity to address that very question in a much larger and more detailed fashion. The reason that I provide the answer that way is because we know that it's a complex issue that the government has far more ways of addressing than does any private citizen or any private body, such as the Alberta Teachers' Association, or anyone else. The hon. member should take some solace in knowing that we will be dealing with this. It will in the end prove itself out to have been a very good deal for teachers and for settling things with our teachers and the students and the parents in the province. The other part we will get to in due course.

The Speaker: Additional questions or comments?

Shall I call on the Deputy Government House Leader to close the debate, or should I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 53 read a second time]

Bill 54

County of Westlock Water Authorization Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to move second reading of Bill 54, the County of Westlock Water Authorization Act.

The purpose of this act is to provide for the development of a regional water system within the county of Westlock and specifically to transfer treated potable water from the town of Westlock to the hamlet of Vimy and the village of Clyde. It's an area of the world I think you may be familiar with, Mr. Speaker.

This particular regional water distribution system is really no different than a number of other regional water distribution systems that we have throughout the province. However, what is unique about this one and a few others throughout the province is that geographically the county and the area that will be served by this regional water system are located in and straddling a major water basin. Part of the county is within the Athabasca watershed, and the other part is in the North Saskatchewan, so in the town of Westlock treating water and putting it into a pipe and sending it to the hamlet of Vimy and the village of Clyde, who will in turn treat the municipal waste water that results from the consumption of that fresh water out of the municipal water source. Their return of that water into the system would go into the North Saskatchewan, thus we have the legislative requirement – I think a good requirement, frankly – of requiring an act of the Legislature to authorize that interbasin transfer.

4:20

I want to talk about the fact that this is a regional water system.

The reason why we have these regional water systems is to ensure that we have a cost-effective way to provide safe drinking water. We eliminate the need for a number of smaller communities to build, maintain, and operate very expensive water treatment facilities. By any yardstick, Mr. Speaker, I think anyone would have to agree that regional water systems are the appropriate way that we should be serving our municipal water needs throughout the province.

I want to emphasize that this water under question here is for basic human needs. It's not a sufficiently large quantity for large developments. The bill specifically limits the annual amount of water that can be delivered to 208.78 cubic decametres. That's enough water for about a thousand users over the 50-year projection, so it allows for some growth. But let's put it all into perspective, Mr. Speaker: it's a very small quantity of water in the grand scheme of things.

There have been public consultations throughout the region. The public is very supportive of this water system. I want to also emphasize that there are absolutely minimal environmental impacts. This is piped potable water. It's not raw water. As a result, there is virtually no transfer of any biological organisms. We're not going to be moving fish from one water system to another.

There is a conservation plan in place that will be enhanced over time to ensure that the users of this system, like all other users, quite frankly, ensure that the use of water is kept to a minimum. Above all, this is a way that we can ensure that we have quality drinking water and that we meet the quality drinking water standards for large municipalities as well as small ones.

Alberta Environment is committed to safe, secure drinking water supplies for all Albertans. This kind of a regional municipal water system is exactly what we need to ensure that those safe, secure water supplies are in fact available to all Albertans. I would encourage all members of the Assembly to give their strong endorsement and support to this legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this bill before the House, the water transfer bill. It's an important issue, obviously, to all Albertans, probably the most important issue in southern Alberta and growing in importance as a result of climate change and the implications that that has for both quantity and quality of water in our province.

Many volumes have already been written and concerns expressed by both scientists and the lay public about how we're managing water in the province and real concerns about sustainable management plans based on good information, based on projected models around climate change and its impacts, and better knowledge about how clear-cut logging is impacting our water systems, particularly in southern Alberta, Calgary in particular, with the Elbow and the Bow rivers being the lifeblood of the city.

Water management has to be seen as the primary role of government, and there are real concerns that we're not putting the resources and the expertise into assessing our water, both surface and groundwater, and to analyzing the prospects for the future in relation to climate change and its negative impacts on both quality and quantity in the future.

I think the bill has some positive dimensions to it and recognizes the need for better quality control, better cost efficiency in delivering potable water to individuals and to businesses. I think some of the reservations we have about this have to do with the fact that this is the fourth or fifth interbasin transfer since I was elected three and a half years ago. It raises some questions about whether we have a long-term management plan that is going to be sustainable or whether we are going to continue to transfer water from north to south as the demands outstrip the local resources. That's really what

Albertans and scientists are asking: how can we get a better handle on reducing demand, primarily water conservation, on measures to use water more efficiently and to find substitutes, for example in the oil industry, where we're now using water that is being lost to circulation?

Clearly, there are a number of concerns around our quantity and quality of groundwater: how well we understand its connection to surface water, and whether we will in fact begin as a government to take back some control over our water resources when, especially in the south, roughly 70 per cent of it is controlled by irrigation districts, and how that will translate into the best water management and for the highest purposes in southern Alberta, where we're seeing increasing business and development demands as well as even recreational and domestic uses.

So it's with real concern that we see yet another bill addressing the question of interbasin transfer. I think we all appreciate the fact that this is potable water; it's treated water. It may not have all the risks associated with interbasin transfers that the minister has referred to, but I think it's fair to say that microflora, microfauna can easily be transmitted in treated water. What the long-term implications of that are I don't know. I don't know what the scientists are thinking about that.

What we do know is that interfering with natural flows, natural processes, risking in-stream flow needs in some areas, which is the support system for the ecosystem within the river and on the banks of the river, is a dangerous proposition. We seem to be doing this more than once per year just in the last three years. I think that the writing is on the wall, Mr. Speaker. If we don't start looking at limits to growth on these river systems, we are going to be faced with very severe economic as well as, I think, biological and ecological impacts from this penchant to pipe water from wherever it is presently in abundance to areas where it's presently or predicted to be in shortage.

There are some real concerns about this whole process, and I think some questions that need to be addressed include some of the following. It's not clear to me as the opposition critic and to many in the public what process Alberta Environment follows when addressing the question of an interbasin transfer. Is there any kind of public consultation both in the receiving communities and in the donor communities? In the broader context do Albertans have a vehicle for having input into this decision-making that is of vital concern to the future of the province? It's not clear that there is a transparent public process where issues can be discussed and debated, including the issues that I raised earlier.

Secondly, are there restrictions on the purpose for which the water is used in an interbasin transfer? How is the provincial Legislature, for example, to evaluate a bill before us to recommend a water transfer? On what criteria would we say that it's either in the public interest in the long term, which we increasingly have to look at, or it's not in the public interest in the long term? Maybe the minister could help to define some of that for us in terms of what restrictions are placed on the purpose for an interbasin transfer.

A third question is: in such an important decision for the future of the province have we done any environmental impact assessments on any of these interbasin transfers? What, if any, are made public, preferably independent assessments, to assess, again, the risks and advantages of interbasin transfers?

Fourthly, for these specific bills, bills 54 and 55, you've indicated that about a thousand users will be supplied for the foreseeable future. It's not clear what that means and what volumes, what small businesses might expand, what domestic needs might expand. Will we be facing another request for an expansion of this water transfer in the next few years if there is, perhaps, more growth than is expected there, or are we in fact going to establish these interbasin

transfers on the basis that there are significant conservation measures implemented, significant efforts to reduce the demand, and we're actually going to put a limit on growth in that particular community, or will we simply allow them to grow and grow and grow and be faced on an annual or semiannual or semidecadal basis with more requests for more transfers? This does not appear to be a responsible way to manage our water.

4:30

There are some concerns about these continued requests for interbasin transfers when it's the most serious decision that we can make in the province. We bring it to the Legislature for that reason, because it is a serious decision, yet we see no criteria on which to make our decisions about whether this is or isn't in the longer term best interests of the public of Alberta.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would welcome the opportunity to hear more from the minister and hope that we can take very seriously our role as legislators in this most vital time in our history in how we manage our water and whether we can be assured that this government has the backbone to set limits on development and water use for the purposes of ensuring a future, not only an economic future but an environmental future, a future for people where their basic needs are going to be met.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the bill before the House is Bill 54. Additional speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly am glad to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 54, County of Westlock Water Authorization Act.

You know, I was struck when I saw this bill come forward just recently because, interestingly enough, I believe it was last winter that I was approached by a number of people in this area that were having concerns with their water quality. I actually ended up going out to a number of these towns and even took some water samples, so it's interesting to see how life has its twists and turns.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I'm thus very aware, as I'm sure you are as well, of the importance of having potable water to communities. Quite literally, people are making decisions to either move to or move away from a community based on water quality. This can be a determining factor, and a number of these communities aren't so terribly large in the first place. This can be a crucial factor as to the survival of the town or village itself.

Also, I certainly have been an advocate of building some shared water systems because, of course, you realize efficiencies through using economies of scale and building both the water treatment systems and the sewage treatment systems and sharing those collectively.

Those two things being said, still I'm having some serious concerns about the manner in which these regional water systems are coming forward and being developed not just in the county of Westlock but right across the province. Of course, this isn't the only bill for a water transfer that we have before us here this session, Mr. Speaker. We have another one. It's a water transfer that we already started to work on last spring, and lo and behold after a few months what was a very modest expansion of a water transfer to facilitate potable water to a small community in central Alberta now has come back in a completely different form in terms of volume and scope and everything, really, that you could use to define a water system, just within a very few short months.

I guess the question that comes to my mind, then, is: do we have the capacity to make a water plan that encompasses the larger

region, both in central Alberta with Bill 55 and then with this particular bill, Bill 54? Interbasin transfers are only one part of the equation, Mr. Speaker. I believe that we are also looking at the concern about conservation and land-use planning and making the most efficient use of the resources that we have available to us. Water, as we've heard people say innumerable times, is perhaps the most valuable commodity we have in any given region, the absence of which would of course preclude any development or habitation at all.

I guess when we're talking about building regional water systems and piping water out to areas, we have to not just look at the immediate efficiency or usefulness of this but also in terms of conservation. This particular one, of course, Bill 54, is only 208.78 cubic decametres of water, and this is municipally treated water being pumped from one basin to the other. But, you know, as the next bill here, Bill 55, tells us, nothing ever stays the same, necessarily, with the province expanding like it has been expanding and particularly with people choosing to move to smaller centres around the province, which is a good thing. Certainly, it's good to distribute the population around the province. It makes for, I think, healthier and stronger communities. But then, you know, we're making the decisions. The water is kind of following those movements.

Of course, when you build a water system, as I said at the outset of my comments, then people are more likely to move to a place if it has a good potable water system. I know that in this particular area the water, if I recall, has a very high sodium content, the water that the people are having to use now, a high sodium and particulate content as well as sort of dissolved solids in some places that seem to give the water a certain colour. All of these things are problems that undoubtedly Bill 54 was designed to overcome.

My point is that, certainly, when you build a water system, this is going to enhance the population in growing. If we built in the provision for a thousand people to live on this system now, because people would have a choice up in that area to get better water, then probably you'll end up with more than a thousand people. Let's not forget, as well, that this is a growing part of the province. I know, Mr. Speaker – and you would know this better than me – that they want to expand services with the airport in Westlock, which is great, so people can work in different parts of the province and, you know, go back to those smaller communities. All of this is good, but I just would like to see a regional water plan that says we're going with 208.78 decametres, that that's the allowable limit sustainable for the water basins that we are talking about here, and not just perhaps building these things in an ad hoc manner.

I look forward to the continuation of the debate on this particular Bill 54. As I said before, I have sipped the water in this region before and do recognize the need for something better. Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I suspect that the chair should preclude himself from having an opportunity to comment.

The hon. Minister of Environment, then, to close the debate.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I've noted with interest the comments of the members opposite and look forward to addressing them during committee and call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 54 read a second time]

4:40

Bill 55

East Central Regional Water Authorization Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 55, the East Central Regional Water Authorization Act.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are becoming increasingly aware of the value of a safe and secure water supply. For many communities across the province, particularly in southern and central Alberta, water is a precious and often scarce resource. Due to drought and increased growth, communities in east-central Alberta are facing serious drinking water quality and quantity issues. Some communities have even been forced to truck their water in from neighbouring towns. This is just not acceptable. These Albertans need a long-term solution.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

A regional supply line is a cost-effective way for providing these Albertans with safe drinking water. A supply line will eliminate the need for smaller communities to build, maintain, and operate expensive facilities. The Stettler Regional Water Authorization Act and the Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act authorized licences for interbasin transfers of treated municipal water to some but not all of the communities and residents along this line. I would say here that this is a co-operative effort that's taking place now that involves over 30 communities who have come together to do this. The East Central Regional Water Authorization Act will repeal the two previous acts and supply water to the entire area. If passed, Bill 55 will allow Alberta Environment to amend or issue water licences to transfer up to 10,800 cubic decametres annually of piped potable water to those east-central communities in need.

Mr. Rodney: How many?

Mr. Hayden: Ten thousand eight hundred.

Mr. Rodney: Cubic?

Mr. Hayden: Cubic. Sorry.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you. Just clarifying.

Mr. Hayden: Yes.

The act covers the regional water needs for the next 50 years, at a time when the population is estimated to increase by 74,000 people. The act also includes controlling conditions to allow rollbacks if the population projections are not met. With the passing of this act, Mr. Speaker, no further special acts of the Legislature are expected for these areas.

Let me remind the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, that the South Saskatchewan River basin water management plan sets a limit on the amount of water that can be allocated out of the Red Deer River. Those limits were developed through extensive public and stakeholder consultation and were taken into consideration when developing this act.

Interbasin transfers require thorough scientific studies and public consultation prior to being brought to this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, this has been done. The transferred water will be treated, drinkable water, not raw water, so no transfer of biological organisms is expected. Public consultations conducted throughout the region show great support for this proposal. Red Deer already has enough water to cover projected growth for the next 50 years. In fact, in a written statement the mayor of Red Deer stated he does not oppose the transfer.

These communities need this water for drinking, bathing, watering their gardens, and for other municipal purposes. Without this transfer the residents of these counties and towns will continue to face uncertainty of their water from both a supply and a safety perspective. Bill 55 will ensure that the approximately 35,300 Albertans currently living in the counties of Lacombe, Stettler, Camrose, Paintearth, and special area No. 4 will have access to the safe, secure water supplies that they need to survive and to thrive. I urge all members to support Bill 55 to end the uncertainty.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to ensuring safe, secure drinking water supplies for all Albertans. It is a major component of Alberta's Water for Life strategy, North America's most comprehensive water management plan.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand and speak to Bill 55 and the important issues that again it raises with respect to water management in the province and the concern that many Albertans have expressed to us, including scientists, that we need a better management plan for the province. It's clear that people all over the province need to be guaranteed safe, potable water, and in no way would we want to jeopardize that right. The responsibility of government to provide that is a fundamental human right.

At the same time we want to be sure, as stewards of the environment and stewards for future generations, that we are recognizing limits. There's the question of how many of these interbasin transfers we will continue to approve, again without clear criteria, without a sense of setting limits, without any clear sense of what demand-management procedures are in place, and without a strong sense that we understand the impacts of climate change and what it's going to mean for the whole province. Obviously, the best of science is needed here. It's not clear to us on this side of the House what kind of expertise the Alberta Environment department has called upon to make these recommendations and to support these kinds of decisions.

While the hon. member did say that they're looking at a 50-year growth pattern in the area and that this should cover all the needs for 50 years, it's unclear to this member what that means and what kind of growth is expected and what kind of industry demands there might be. While no special acts in the future might be anticipated, I don't see how it's possible to make that suggestion without knowing more about the future of Alberta in terms of immigration and agricultural development, oil and gas development, and the demands that people might place on this particular area.

It's reassuring, of course, that some scientific assessment has been made of in-stream flow needs for the Red Deer River, but there is still lots of controversy in the nongovernment community and among scientists about what in-stream flow needs are, how they are defined, and to what extent we are actually intending to meet them, especially at the lowest flow times in the late summer. It's not at all clear to us that the protective mechanisms have been put in place and established and that this will be honoured when human needs supercede everything else. Given the possibility in the next 30 years that there will be significant shortages in flow in the Red Deer River, it's not at all clear that we anticipated the declines and flow and the capacity of the Red Deer River.

We are not at all reassured that the government has done its homework in assessing the true implications of yet another interbasin transfer or that they have the backbone to set limits to

growth and ask or give incentives for people to move to where the water is as opposed to continuing to shift water from north to south as a result of expectations that people may have or industries may have that they want to locate in a particular area when there is no guarantee of water. Then we'll be faced with increasing numbers of applications in this Legislature for interbasin transfers from north to south at a huge public cost. Mr. Speaker, that needs to be addressed and continues to be sidelined or not treated as seriously as we need to.

Just in 2005 the Stettler Regional Water Authorization Act was passed in this House, Bill 11, another interbasin transfer. It's not clear to us how this new bill relates to Bill 11 and the Stettler water needs in that particular area and why these needs weren't anticipated back in 2005. Again, Mr. Speaker, it raises serious questions about whether we are simply going to be a reactive government, looking at "Wherever people need it, we're going to supply it," or whether we're actually going to have a plan for this province, that we're going to set limits, we're going to demand accountability at local levels, we're going to give incentives for people to move to where the water is and for businesses to move to where the water is as opposed to continuing to look at this unsustainable approach to water management.

I think that summarizes the comments from this side. We would like to see some amendments coming forth in the committee stage to look at some of these concerns and to responsibly show Albertans that we are simply not a rubber stamp in this Legislative Assembly, that we simply react to problems that arise as a result of both climate change and increasing pressures on our water systems.

That concludes my comments, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to further debate in the committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise with interest to speak to Bill 55, East Central Regional Water Authorization Act. It's not dissimilar in a way, theoretically, to the circumstances that we had before us with the previous Bill 54 in that it's an interbasin water transfer request. However, the scope of this one is far more extensive, looking at 10,800 decametres of water and expanding the access to the system to nine different communities this time around in central Alberta, southeast of Edmonton. This is interesting in a number of ways in my mind because, of course, we are repealing the act that we passed only two months ago and putting in a much more wide program of piping water into communities in this region.

4:50

Once again, I don't certainly dispute the requirement of each of these communities to have a system that provides potable water to their communities. It's a qualitative leap forward to be able to access a system like this. You have to weigh different elements. What sort of resources are you using to provide, say, for example, water to these communities before this pipe system is put into place? For most of these communities I would suspect that people are trucking their water in, so of course that has an environmental impact of its own. If you're transporting water, which is a very heavy commodity, by vehicle to different places around central Alberta, that is problematic and expensive, too. I mean, pipelines do have their merits. There are no two ways about it.

But just even looking from the outside, the fact that we brought in the Ferintosh bill in the spring and then repeal it a few months later does give the impression that there is a lack of a comprehensive plan that's encompassing this whole region. I have serious concerns

about that because, of course, the drought that is precipitating this requirement for the transfer of water between basins and a regional system is not just ending at the end of this pipe. It continues all the way to and past the Saskatchewan border through this part of the country. It's been becoming progressively drier in this region for a long time, and this has been causing problems for both agriculture and cow-calf operators in the area and for human consumption as well.

At what point does one make the decision to say that the circumstances aren't going to reverse themselves? How sustainable is it to continue to expand this system into east-central Alberta? I mean, those decisions are difficult, but those are decisions that, I guess, are meant to be made here at this level of government. I think we all have to think hard about this because unless things change, the drought and the dry circumstances that east-central Alberta is having to deal with will only continue and, perhaps, will even get worse. So we have to think about that.

As well, we have to think about the basin to which we are drawing more and more attention to meet our water needs, at least in this part of the province, and say: at what point do we need to have a comprehensive water plan for not just the South Saskatchewan River basin but for the Red Deer, Athabasca, and the North Saskatchewan basins as well? Again, I don't want to be creating policy just on the fly here. It would be, I think, wiser and easier to manage to know that we are working with a plan here that will meet these needs over a long period of time but will also be sustainable at the same time.

Just the fact that we're repealing the Ferintosh act here a few months after we created it to bring in a quantitatively much larger water allocation for nine communities instead of two does raise my concerns. I think we need to continue to work on this, and we need to debate it in this House. I would recommend as well that we do gather more data so that we can make the best decision possible.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for those who wish to participate.

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to comment briefly on this bill and some of the comments that have been made regarding the repeal of the Ferintosh act that was just passed. Frankly, I share the concerns of members that have expressed concern with this. The truth of the matter is that shortly after the House adjourned last spring, I had an opportunity to travel out into that part of the country. In talking with some of the municipal councillors in the area, they were thanking me and thanking the Legislature for passing the legislation so they could get on with providing water to Ferintosh, and in the course of that conversation they said, "Oh, and when can we expect that you'll introduce the legislation to take it on to the next town?" My reaction was, "Well, what next town?" If there was an intent to have this water delivered to more than just Ferintosh, why didn't we deal with it? Why didn't we acknowledge it at the time that it was in the House? Every time we extend this waterline by another 30 or 40 miles, are we going to be back in the Legislature with another piece of legislation?

My instructions at that point to my staff and to everyone in the area was: get your act together. Figure out what the plan is. Figure out what this regional plan is going to be, and let's deal with it all at once. So, Mr. Speaker, if there is someone to accept responsibility for repealing legislation that was just passed this spring, I accept that responsibility; it's mine. Frankly, I think that we have a much better approach dealing with it this way than the piecemeal approach that had been undertaken in the past.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Dr. Swann: Yes. And thanks to the minister for acknowledging some leadership issues that are needing to be filled.

I did ask for some guidance about the principles that are involved and how we make these decisions and the extent to which we could open up that process so that Albertans could be assured that we are making decisions in the longer term interests of Alberta. I wonder if he could comment at this time or would like to comment later on the principles. We're talking about the principle of the bill in second reading. What are the principles that we are using to make these kinds of decisions?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, do you wish to respond?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issues regarding the approval mechanism that would be allowed by this legislation are the same as for any other licence that is issued by Alberta Environment. There is a process by which notification is required. There is a process by which affected parties may submit a letter of concern. At the end of the day, like every other decision that is made by Alberta Environment, ultimately individuals have an opportunity to ask the Environmental Appeal Board to consider an appeal of any decision. All of those same kinds of ongoing requirements of the Water Act will continue to apply to any licences or amendments that would be granted under this act.

All this act does is take off the table the interbasin transfer because, frankly, that's now been decided by the Legislature. Everything else to do with the water application remains in effect and will continue to be dealt with in the normal manner.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: under what conditions would we as a Legislature turn down an application for interbasin transfer?

Mr. Renner: Well, my crystal ball is no better than yours, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what the conditions would be where that would be turned down. I can think of some conditions where I would not bring forward a request. Those conditions would be where we would be suggesting a wholesale transfer from one water basin to another through very large diversions. That is my understanding of the intent behind having the legislation that we have currently in place: to ensure that we didn't have massive, wholesale diversions from one water basin into another. I would suggest that that may be something that the Legislature would consider.

5:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: would the minister entertain any notion of setting limits to growth in communities particularly that are clearly straining the limits of water supplies in southern Alberta? Are we going to continue to see the freedom to completely grow and make more demands as time goes by as water supply is outstripped by demands?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond. The answer is no. I would not consider that we should be restricting growth, but – and it's a very big but – what we do have to do is start to consider how we use the water, how we can conserve the water, how we can accommodate growth. I actually made reference to it earlier today in question period when I talked about the development of in-stream flow needs for rivers. Those are what I think we should be basing our decisions on, whether or not the ecological health of the river would be impaired by additional withdrawals. If that's the case, then we don't restrict the growth; we restrict the use of the water and require that the new development live within the set limits. There is only so much water to go around, and we'll have to figure out how to share it better.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, there's a lot of background noise, making it difficult to hear those who have the floor.

The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister. Thank you for those responses. What is emerging in southern Alberta is a market for water. The Balzac situation clearly illustrates what happens when we don't have a plan in place to address demands that outstrip supplies.

The Deputy Speaker: That concludes our time under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Back on the debate, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 55, East Central Regional Water Authorization Act. You know, I think Albertans will always come to the aid of those who are in need, especially in times of drought. I remember stories from my mother of the time of the Great Depression, which was a great drying time, a great time of warming on the prairies, so to speak, where the dust would rise against the walls of the farmhouse above the windows. People would come to help. Nobody wanted to take help and all the rest of it but were certainly happy to see some when it came.

The need for water and the need for a policy on water to look at what will happen in the future is becoming increasingly clear. We're seeing the glaciers drying up at the end of an ice age. The ice used to be a kilometre or more thick here not too many thousands of years ago. There are glacial cirques in the mountains, if anybody knows land forms or anything, that are already dry. Anybody that's gone to the Columbia glacier knows that that's been receding for 10,000 years. It used to be here, but it's getting much, much less. Those are decreasing the water supply and the flow of the rivers, and they will continue to decrease as time goes on.

Having been in a fairly high precipitation area in the Peace at one time and seeing those that would move our water down there, there were always a lot of concerns that that might happen. I don't agree with the idea of arbitrarily moving people to the water because a lot of the places where the water is are muskeg, are not the greatest places to live. You know, I don't think it would be sensible to try and force people.

I do agree with market systems, and I would appreciate, you know, if the minister could in Committee of the Whole come back with some sense of how the market for water allocation transfers and the use of incentives will work in the long term and how we will see those develop in the long term as water becomes, in effect, more valuable and as those who are in areas of a lot of water or less decreasing water become more protective of their water. We don't want to see water wars, and we don't want to see areas unnecessarily

restricted in their economic development, but a market allocation system that is properly priced in the long term may be the way to do that so that those places have the right sort of feeling that they are ensuring that they're getting the proper return for their resource.

That's all I have to say, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to keep my comments brief. I just noticed a couple of things that I'd like to comment on, the first being that when the mover of the bill, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, suggested that this allocation – and we're talking 10,800 cubic decametres annually. I have to confess I don't know how much water that is, but it certainly sounds like it's an awful lot more than we dealt with previously in Bill 54, which was only 208.78 cubic decametres annually for the county of Westlock. Now we're covering off several counties, several communities, and 10,800 decametres annually, so an awful lot of water, clearly. That's not necessarily a bad thing. [some applause] I hear some applause from the other side of the House.

You know, as has been mentioned I think by every speaker so far, nobody is going to stand in the way of getting potable water, safe drinking water, to those people who need it. But I share the concerns mentioned by the Minister of Environment earlier in that we were here just last year dealing with the county of Ferintosh. As much as the mover of the bill contemplated that this should address the needs of these various communities for the next 50 years, I'm not completely confident that we won't be back here, perhaps not next year – I would certainly hope not next year – but at some point in the relatively near future contemplating moving even more water into these counties.

I guess the thing is, as was mentioned by my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, that we're here to discuss the principle. I think it has to be asked: how many times can we come to this Legislature? How often are we going to be coming to this Legislature, moving water from north to south? It has become almost a pattern already. The legislation contemplates a special act of the Legislature when this is required. Just that wording itself, I think, Mr. Speaker, would indicate that this is not something that should be contemplated as routine but, rather, in special circumstances. What we're seeing, unfortunately, is that the special circumstances contemplated by the legislation are in fact happening more and more often. My suspicion is that given that the rivers in the southern part of the province are fully allocated, we're going to continue to see these special circumstances and these special acts of the Legislature being asked more and more often to address the serious situation that we're facing with water in this province.

Now, the other comment that was made by the mover of the bill – and I'm going to ask him if he could clarify this for members of the House before we deal with this bill in committee stage. He said that the act currently contemplates rollbacks in the allocation if, in fact, the population forecasts are not met. Well, it's clearly not in this act, so I'm not sure where that is. Perhaps it's in a regulation or perhaps it's in another act. As a member who will be voting on this ultimately and who has constituents that I have to answer to, that is something that I would like to know about because if, in fact, we do contemplate rollbacks if the population growth doesn't take place, that would give me some small measure of reassurance, I suppose. If you could undertake, hon. member, to have an answer on that

particular question for us when we come back to committee, I would appreciate it.

5:10

As I said I would keep my comments brief, I'll stick to my word, Mr. Speaker. In particular, I wanted to raise the question about the rollbacks. I think it's important that we all think in a more broad sense about how often we're doing this and what it might mean for the future if we continue to come back every year or two and ask for ever more water transfers from one basin to another.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any comments or questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to comment about this bill. As we all know, the very first bill that moved potable water, water that had been treated, from one system to another was the North Red Deer Water Authorization Act, and I can tell you how successful that was for the people who received the water. The question has been asked: how often do we move water from north to south? I would say to you that we should only do it in special circumstances, but as often as it is necessary for life and quality of life is how often we should do it. At no point in time will we ever refuse to give water for drinking and livelihood purposes to any Albertan.

Now, I do have to admit that I had a problem with using water for irrigational purposes and that sort of thing, but that's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about domestic use only for people and for animals, and it's treated water, so I have no qualms whatsoever about supporting this bill. I think it's absolutely necessary and important. At the same time, after having said that, we do need to be cautious about how we do things with our water in the future. But in this case it's important and necessary, so I would ask all members to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Again under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Member for Red Deer-North. When she says we should transfer water as often as is necessary, that in effect implies that there would be no end to the amount of water transferred, that if a town in a dry area got a new subdivision, we'd transfer it, and if they got another new subdivision, we'd transfer more water. Does this member really mean what she's saying, or does she actually see some requirement to limit water transfers?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. I think that what you're referring to is planning. It wouldn't be very clever to be planning to build neighbourhoods in communities and areas where there is no water available. So I wouldn't be supporting that at all. Let's not build new communities in places where there is no water. Planning is the answer to that, and planning is what we need to do. However, when people are living in a community and they run out of water and we can help to support their livelihood by a simple transfer, I would be very supportive of that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, under 29(2)(a).

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the

comments of the member. I guess my question in a follow-up would be: do you see any basis for limiting growth? It's one thing to say that the people run out of water when they've been established in a community; it's another thing to say: "We will not put any limits on growth. If you have problems in five years or 10 years, we will simply increase the demands from this resource."

Mrs. Jablonski: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I would say that the key issue here is planning. Obviously, it's not a very clever plan to continue to grow in an area where there's no water to support that growth. So I look to the wisdom of the planners.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the comments made by the Member for Red Deer-North is certainly something that intrigues me, and that is her assurance that in both Bill 54 and Bill 55 the water is for domestic use only. I understand it's potable water, it's drinking water, but I have concerns that some of this water will end up being used for commercial or industrial use. I don't know how you could possibly stop that from happening once it's moved into a community. So do you not share the same concerns I have that some of this water may end up being used rather than simply for domestic use, as you said a minute ago, that some of it may actually be for industrial or commercial use?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the amount of water that is allowed for this bill has a cap. I would say to you that because we know how much water is going to be transferred, that's where I take some comfort in knowing that it's not a never-ending supply. We know it's the 10,000-whatever decametres that's in the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. I really appreciate this exchange. I hope that the Member for Red Deer-North urges her colleague in the cabinet the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to address the kind of planning she's talking about in his land-use plan. It doesn't make sense, we agree – at least you agree with us – to allow development in areas where there's no water. That may well be the kind of restriction that we would look for in the land-use framework, whatever you're calling it, that's going to come out soon. Lean on your minister to make those plans happen.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Red Deer-North wish to respond? Others on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there others that wish to participate in the debate?

Does the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler wish to close?

Mr. Hayden: Let's vote.

[Motion carried; Bill 55 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 2

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to rise today before the Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. As you know, this bill passed second reading on May 9, 2007, and was then referred to the Standing Committee on Government Services on May 30, 2007, very shortly before the spring session adjourned.

The Standing Committee on Government Services met a total of 10 times and received six written submissions on this bill from individual citizens and associations, people who had issues or people who had some ideas or remarks. A number of issues then came forward, came to the forefront throughout the committee's review, and we had the opportunity to explore them both as members, amongst ourselves, and with stakeholders. The committee issued a report, and I'm sure everybody in this House actually read it and read it very thoroughly.

This was the same procedure we used for Bill 1. The report is actually available as a sessional paper because it was tabled in the Assembly. It's also available online for those members who care to go to the Assembly website and read it. Unlike Bill 1, though, it is not as thick or dense as the recommendations from that particular legislation. This one here is roughly two and a half or three pages, so I urge all members to check that out.

Most of the amendments that the committee is proposing are of a technical nature. We had extensive help, assistance from officials in the Ministry of Justice as well as our own Legislative Assembly Office, and I actually have to express my gratitude as the deputy chair of the standing policy field committee and on behalf of all members who sat on the committee for the assistance we received from those officials from Justice and from the LAO.

The committee actually made some recommendations. Those recommendations were tabled earlier. Today I would like to actually introduce these as an official amendment in Committee of the Whole. Hopefully the pages can distribute that.

5:20

The Chair: We'll allow time to do that. We will refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

The amendments that are written here say moved by Mr. Cenaiko.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. On behalf of the chair of the committee.

The Chair: You're moving it on behalf of him, so we'll change the wording to that?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. I believe you can proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The first thing I have to ask you to do, please, is that we are hoping that the amendments get severed. We have amendments A, B, C, and D, as per that sheet, and we don't want to proceed as an omnibus amendment. We want them severed into their individual clauses, please, as is customary.

The Chair: So you're suggesting that we deal with them in four parts: A1A, A1B, A1C, A1D?

Mr. Elsalhy: Please.

The Chair: This has been done in the past, and we'll allow that to happen again.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much. As such, I will start with the first one. The first one is amendment A1A now. It's a committee amendment that was proposed by the Department of Justice. It recommends that a member should only be required to disclose those legal proceedings of which he or she is aware. This proposed amendment would bring the provision more closely in line with the recommendations of the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, which I also happened to sit on about a year ago. That committee actually did extensive work on the Conflicts of Interest Act itself and made wonderful recommendations which led to the introduction of Bill 2. Now we're making it extra clear. We're making something that is good even better.

People have indicated to us that sometimes there is a legal proceeding that is brought against me that I'm not aware of. Maybe somebody is a vexatious litigant. Maybe somebody is doing some frivolous lawsuit just to get me in trouble or just to maybe distract me from my duties. That extends to all other members of this House, and it also extends to members of cabinet and so on. There might be a legal proceeding against me; there might be 10 of them, and maybe I'm not aware of any of them. This particular amendment, as suggested by the Department of Justice, deals with this in terms of me disclosing to the Ethics Commissioner based on what information I know. If it's something that I'm not aware of, how could there be an expectation for me to report it to the Ethics Commissioner?

I think it makes sense. I'm urging all members of the Assembly to support amendment A1A.

The Chair: Okay. Does anyone else wish to participate?

Are you ready for the question on amendment A1A?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1A carried]

The Chair: Do you wish to proceed to some more?

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. Now moving on to amendment A1B, this is a committee amendment as well that was proposed again by the Department of Justice. This proposed amendment would allow a person who has been financially affected by a member's breach of the act to pursue an action against any person, including the member himself or herself who has gained financially from the breach. The proposed amendment would bring the provision more closely in line, again, with the recommendations from the select special committee which reviewed the act a year earlier.

Basically, it talks about furthering the interests of somebody. Furthering their interests resulting in a financial gain or otherwise doesn't only apply to the member in question; it also applies to any other person out there who might or might not be related to the member. So we're just extending that definition. Again, it's a recommendation that was supported by both the earlier committee and the latter one.

Dr. Taft: You know, my advice to members is to pay close attention to some of these because everyone of us will get caught up in this kind of legislation.

My questions to the Member for Edmonton-McClung: are there any limits to the scale of restitution that might be sought, and can that include both punitive as well as compensatory aspects? In other words, could an action be brought against one of us that seeks not only to be compensated but also to punish, which is not uncommon in some courts of law?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. While this is definitely a technical question, a legal question that I'm not qualified to answer, my understanding as a layperson is that if as a member of this Assembly or a member of cabinet I did something that basically amounts to a proven or evident conflict of interest that led to somebody benefiting and then maybe also led to somebody, you know, being unduly impacted or being negatively impacted, that person can bring action against myself and also can bring action against the people who benefited from my conflict of interest. That is my understanding. Whether it is punitive or whether it's only restitution, I honestly am not qualified to answer that, but I know that one of my colleagues who sat on the committee has the legal expertise to address it, the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. In response to the hon. leader's inquiry, my understanding of the provision is that restitution means that. It means to restore to the previous state of affairs prior to the ill-gotten gains. In other words, there is no limit on the amount deliberately because it's limited to the amounts which are in fact ill-gotten gains. I think that responds to his question.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again, I suppose, to the Member for Edmonton-McClung on this particular issue. This will involve a case in the Court of Queen's Bench, as I'm reading the section here, which could be very costly. I'm wondering if there was any thought given to who might cover those costs. You know, if there was a prolonged legal battle and in the end the case from the government fell apart or the case from the person seeking restitution fell apart, is the MLA personally exposed to paying the costs of defence?

Also, a second question would be: I suppose there's a safeguard in here, but is there any risk here of mischievous actions?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Actually, we discussed the issue of mischief and people just suing for the sake of suing. We felt that nothing that we do here is going to prevent people whose minds are set to sue us and to make us look bad from doing that. What this is dealing with, to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, is basically when I as a member use inside information or use accessed information that is not available to other people to further the interests of either myself or people I know and in doing that somebody gains either financially or otherwise and somebody may be hurt or loses financially or otherwise, that person, who in their opinion experienced that loss, would now have the ability to sue to get restitution and potentially even for fines or other sanctions against me.

5:30

I have to have committed the conflict of interest initially to be subject to this. It's not just any MLA, and it's not just anybody

suing any MLA because they feel like it. It's basically because I put myself in that conflict that somebody has experienced a loss or experienced some ill effect or side effect from my action as somebody who has inside information, and maybe I used it to, you know, further the interests of a friend of mine, for example, or somebody the government is in a contract with. There is nothing to stop people from continuing to sue us vexatiously or frivolously. This is only if I am asking for it. As a member of this Assembly or a member of cabinet who did something wrong, I deserve what's coming.

The Chair: Are there others on this amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again on this particular amendment, I think people should be paying close attention. As I read the section, it says: "any person affected by the financial gain, including the Government or a Provincial agency, may apply to the Court of Queen's Bench." So one of us could be taken to the Court of Queen's Bench by a government agency, which is quite a different situation and, I think, one that we might want to consider the wisdom of. I don't have any specific concern, but I just want to point that out.

I also wish to ask the Member for Edmonton-McClung if he can tell me if this would have any retroactive applications. For example, if somebody last year was discovered to have made a tremendous amount of money through a conflict of interest and was found in breach of the act as laid out here, could they be taken to Court of Queen's Bench by a government agency next year?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. Let me start by saying that I definitely don't have the legal expertise to maybe give as full an answer as the Leader of the Opposition is hoping for, but I'm going to reply to him again as a layperson and someone who sat on the committee.

I don't think the act would be applied retroactively. I think the act comes into force and then moves forward. The discussion in the committee and even in the earlier committee, if I remember correctly, had to do with how much time those records are kept in terms of potential conflict, you know, our returns, submissions to the Ethics Commissioner, how long he keeps them for, and so on. I don't think the act could be applied retroactively.

Now, in terms of a government department or a government agency going to the Court of Queen's Bench to sue, I actually don't view this as a negative. I think it's also a positive because it offers that added accountability and that added layer of openness. If a government agency — they're not all necessarily bad, and we have to make this clear in this House. Government agencies sometimes discover things through their own internal audit mechanisms, or the Auditor General might unravel something that a government agency would then investigate further. If they discover wrongdoing against myself or against the Minister of Justice or the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry or whoever, maybe we should give them that tool, give them that licence to go to the court and alert the court and say: "You know what? We discovered that this particular MLA or this particular minister has done something wrong. We think that the money should be paid back, and maybe compensation should be offered to the other person or entity that got adversely affected."

I look at it as a positive, actually. I don't think it is particularly negative or particularly unsavoury. You know, yes, if they discover that there has been wrongdoing and that money changed hands

because of it, I think they have a duty to report it, and they have a duty to pursue it. If we can save taxpayers money by doing this, or if we can reclaim some of the money that was maybe inadvertently lost or misplaced, then I think that's the way to do it.

Would the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill care to supplement?

Dr. Brown: Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has certainly covered it very well. As I mentioned previously, the purpose of that particular subsection of the legislation is to require anyone who has wrongfully benefited or made a personal financial gain to disgorge those gains. I think that's equitable.

The amendment that the hon. member refers to, part B, is just expanding the concept to include any other person who has improperly gained. That could be the member's brother or the member's spouse or anyone else. That's simply, I think, a reasonable provision, to require anyone who has benefited improperly by reason of a conflict of interest to not gain financially by those deeds.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now moving on to amendment A1C . . .

An Hon. Member: No. We have to vote.

Mr. Elsalhy: Oh, we have to vote. Okay.

The Chair: Has everybody spoken on A1B that wishes to? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, did you wish to speak on this particular clause?

Mr. Eggen: No. Thanks.

The Chair: Are we ready for the question on A1B?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1B carried]

The Chair: Okay. Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, you may proceed on C.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the committee section C here is a committee amendment that was proposed by the Department of Justice, again, and it's basically cleaning up some of the language. The word "activity" is inappropriate in the context of this provision. An activity cannot be awarded, approved, or given. An activity is undertaken, but it's not awarded or given or approved. This proposed amendment reflects a simple improvement in the drafting language, something that was missed initially.

Then sub (b) under there is also a committee amendment that was proposed, one more time, by the Department of Justice, as you guessed it, which would allow a person who has been financially affected by a former minister's breach of the act to pursue an action against any person, including the former minister himself or herself, who has gained financially from that breach. While the original recommendations of the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee did not contemplate claims against persons other than the former minister, we're now offering that extra accountability mechanism. We're opening the door, basically, for anybody who benefited to be held accountable, to be held liable. This proposed

amendment would bring this provision in line with the restitutionary provision applicable to members. So now we're extending it as well to ministers and then to anybody who benefited from the conflict of interest.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again I urge the members of this Assembly to pay careful attention because we are on the hook here.

Would the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, who is doing a marvellous job, for the record, be able to advise me – and this may sound farfetched, but I don't believe it necessarily is – when it says in this amendment “or any other person,” if that person might be liable for an action against them, recovering money obtained through a conflict of interest, if there was not knowingly a conflict of interest there? I'm thinking, for example, if a cabinet minister's daughter or any other person – a cabinet minister's business associate or, indeed, the way this is written, a cabinet minister's business associate's daughter; I could go on and on because it says “any other person” – benefited thinking that a deal had been conducted properly, only to discover after the fact that somebody in that chain had been in a conflict of interest: was there any consideration of that sort of possibility, if you're understanding what I'm saying? We may be casting the net a little bit casually here.

5:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, as a layperson I'm going to explain to the hon. Leader of the Opposition how I understand this and how the discussion of the committee went. Basically, I think the rate-controlling step, like we deal with this in the laboratory or as a pharmacist – this is something that we've discussed. You have an equation, you have a chain of reaction, but then there's usually a rate-limiting step or a rate-controlling step. In here the rate-controlling step is: who is the person going to the court asking for sanction? The person who has been adversely affected by a conflict of interest: this person lost money, lost business, lost an opportunity somehow and is now seeking compensation. So that person goes to the court and says: through a conflict of interest the government awarded, you know, a contract or a benefit to X, Y, and Z, and I think that because of that conflict of interest X, Y, and Z should pay the money back, and I should maybe be considered for that particular contract.

Now, the court will make that decision. The court will study the case, will study the circumstances surrounding the case, and will say: okay; was that particular minister in a clear and proven conflict of interest? Could we prove that he knowingly advanced the interests of his daughter or his business partner, that through inside information that's how the business partner or the daughter submitted their tender, for example? And so on.

Based on this, the court is going to make that decision. If it's not convinced that there was a clear conflict of interest, that it wasn't malicious, that it wasn't criminal, the court might dismiss it. If the court is convinced that it was, then both the minister or that person who had that inside information, had that conflict of interest, is going to be held liable. Then that person or entity who benefited is also going to be brought into this court case, and maybe they'll be forced to relinquish, pay back the money, give up the contract, or there might be other sanctions as the court deems necessary.

I'm not a lawyer, unfortunately, and this is a question that is best directed at somebody who has the legal expertise. But that's my

understanding. As such, I don't think it's an unfair amendment. I think this is a fair amendment, that that third party that benefited is brought into that court case.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let's just take an example that's very newsworthy right now, or let me use an example that will echo with the newsworthy example just so there's, you know, no problem. Let's assume a senior elected government official obtained \$300,000 in cash in brown envelopes. Let's just imagine that might happen. Then that person who received the \$300,000 cash left office and got into a business deal, and it wasn't discovered at the time, and that \$300,000 of cash was mixed in with the interests of the other business associates. They didn't know that it was obtained inappropriately, and they continued to develop their business. Is there a point at which those people, because it does say in this amendment “any other person,” might find themselves on the hook for that \$300,000 cash even though they never had any idea that it was obtained inappropriately?

Mr. Elsalhy: Now, that's an interesting example. I know it's hypothetical. This kind of stuff, hopefully, doesn't happen in Alberta, but should it happen in Alberta, with the act as it's presently worded, the Ethics Commissioner will now hold that person liable and accountable because that person failed to disclose income.

You know, Mr. Chairman, we all disclose income annually. Even gifts and stuff that are given to us if they exceed a certain limit have to be reported. Everything we own, everything we invest in, all the investments, all the companies we hold, and so on have to be disclosed to the Ethics Commissioner on an annual basis. So that particular politician, before having left office, made that kind of money or received that kind of money and has not reported it to the Ethics Commissioner: in this particular case that person is in deep trouble, is in extreme hot water.

Now, if that person used this money to advance the interests of that other person and knowingly did this to circumvent the rules or to bend the rules or to give an unfair advantage to that person, well, yes, that person should be also brought into it because that person gained from that arrangement, gained from that relationship unduly. He didn't deserve to make that money or he didn't deserve to win that contract in particular, and that conflict of interest right there led to that award, and maybe that should be reversed. The person who had the conflict of interest should be dealt with forcefully, and he should be made an example of. The person who, you know, unduly secured that benefit or that award should also be at least asked to repay it to the public purse.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If the recommendations are made by the Department of Justice, why don't you, the Member for Edmonton-McClung, ask the question to the Minister of Justice?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Just for clarity, it was basically officials from the Department of Justice who helped the committee all along. They offered the technical assistance, they offered the expertise, and they actually acted as a resource for the committee, so it's not really a question of us versus them. This was an all-party committee, and whenever we needed that support, whenever we had questions that

maybe we couldn't answer ourselves, we had Parliamentary Counsel and we also had the Ministry of Justice staff that were there at our disposal. I'm actually quite envious because I think we can use some of those same officials in our own caucus whenever we're doing internal discussions and internal deliberations. Maybe in the future there might be a provision for, you know, legal expertise to be made available to us.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. Just picking up that comment from the Member for Edmonton-McClung, do you think there's perhaps a conflict of interest or an unfair advantage when one caucus gets access to the legal resources of the Department of Justice and the opposition caucuses do not?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you. I am basically going to restrict my comments to the committee. The committee was an all-party committee, and it's a creature of this Assembly. As such, it was deemed appropriate and prudent to offer the committee that resource.

Now, if the Leader of the Opposition has any proof or evidence that members from the ruling party get access to government expertise and government advice, then definitely I think it's an issue of fairness, and maybe that courtesy should be extended to all caucuses operating in this Assembly.

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question on amendment A1C?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1C carried]

The Chair: Hon. member, on section D.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Section D has two parts: part (a) and part (b). Part (a) is something that we discussed in the committee, and it was brought forward by Justice. Again, the word "activity," just as we did briefly before, is inappropriate in the context of this provision. This is basically a drafting fix – you know, we're fixing some of the language – so it's really minimal, and I hope we don't spend any time on this particular one.

Amendment (b) under there is allowing a person who has been financially affected by a former political staff now – we talked about MLAs; we talked about ministers; now we're talking about political staff – when they breach the act to pursue an action against any person, including that former political staff member, him or herself, who has gained financially from the breach.

While the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee made a general recommendation in that regard, you know, with respect to the cooling-off period, we felt that those political staff, those senior officials, also have a lot of access and a lot of clout. We felt that bringing them in under here was also a measure of accountability and a measure of tightening up the rules a bit because we felt that they, too, have a lot of access and a lot of clout. Their cooling-off period should be introduced, and that is something that everybody agrees to. The length of that cooling-off period is a question that maybe should be brought up in the Assembly because we all agree that cooling off is a done deal. How long, I think, is the question.

The committee felt that it didn't address questions of punishment

and restitution for violations of the cooling-off provisions. This proposed amendment would bring the provisions in line with that restitutionary direction that is applicable to both members and former ministers who are now bringing in senior political staff in this mix.

5:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A question for either the Member for Edmonton-McClung – I guess I need to identify a specific one – or if he's unable to respond, the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill could respond perhaps. My question is really pretty straightforward. How extensively was the Ethics Commissioner and/or his staff involved in developing this amendment or, for that matter, any others?

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Ethics Commissioner was actually involved and engaged from day one. It was basically the committee, that Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, which did the initial work. The Ethics Commissioner was not just invited as somebody who presents to the committee; he was actually engaged more like a partner to the extent that the Ethics Commissioner and his staff actually made a presentation. They made a submission to the Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee detailing what they would like to see. They actually told us: if you're coming to us to tighten the act and to make it, you know, less leaky and to rid it of some of the loopholes that are in it, these are things that we would like you to discuss. They didn't tell us we had to do it, but they told us that these were things they wanted us to go over and to discuss and to evaluate.

We heard the Ethics Commissioner and his staff. We actually addressed most of his concerns, but this is basically taking it a step further. This is basically offering that extra layer of accountability. I think, to answer that question, that the Ethics Commissioner was actually a partner in this process from day one.

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question on amendment A1D?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1D carried]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak back on the actual Bill 2. I actually had an opportunity to sit in on one of the meetings where Bill 2 was being drafted. It was an all-party committee that seemed to be functioning quite well. Certainly, the spirit of co-operation was more prevalent than not, although in one section that I happened to attend, I did have a problem with the fact that the cooling-off period was changed in Bill 2 from I think it was 12 months down to six months. I was wondering about that because it seemed as though people had voted on it before, and then it was as though it was being rescinded. Certainly we didn't see that in the energy and environment committee. You know, once we organized it, we organized it. I felt as though there were larger forces at hand somehow, pulling this committee back from making a reasonable decision and perhaps nefariously influencing the causes of democracy within the committee.

I was a bit concerned about that, and I was curious to perhaps seek

clarification as to why that sort of happened in the 11th hour of the formation of Bill 2 through this all-party committee. Of course, whenever you're making these sorts of regulations and the amendments that were brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, forwarded from the chair, I was struck globally by looking at these as to the importance of all-inclusivity when you're making rules about conflict of interest. You can't pick and choose too much because, of course, you can always find exceptions to any circumstance. We do that all the time when we're making legislation in this House.

You know, while the accommodation for exceptions is useful, when you're talking about conflict of interest, I don't think that that is the best path necessarily because when you're dealing with the highest level of government decisions, the capacity to influence legislation that might benefit one group over another or one individual over another is massive. By definition you are, by choosing, making a potential opportunity for one or another group, right?

I believe that this does not just extend to the elected members of this House. It seems to me that there are people behind the scenes that are making these decisions at least at the same level or even more so. Referring back to the example of my one time in this fine committee, the elected people all decided something, and then somebody else obviously had decided something different. That could very well be nonelected officials who are making those recommendations to the elected officials. That very example I think proves the necessity of actually extending that 12-month cooling-off period to all individuals and not just to the ministers involved.

I think that that is an eminently reasonable condition to bring forward. Thus, I will do so with an amendment that I have available to me here now. I have an amendment that I would like to pass on to each member . . .

The Chair: Did the hon. member wish to make a motion to rise and report progress as well?

Mr. Eggen: I'd like to rise and report progress of the evening thus far.

The Chair: Do you move that we rise and report progress?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Absolutely. Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate the members for making some considerable progress this afternoon and suggest that given the fact that it's 5:58 we give ourselves a break and go home a little early, call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 5:59 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, November 28, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mr. Fred Underwood, a state of Texas transportation commissioner. The Texas Transportation Commission is much like our provincial ministry of transportation. Mr. Underwood is meeting with several of my cabinet colleagues and ministries, and together we're exploring areas where our great province of Alberta and the great state of Texas might work more closely together, such as in transportation, energy, and enhanced trade. Mr. Underwood will also be visiting our oil sands developments in Fort McMurray and learning more about Alberta's position as a secure, reliable, and growing supplier of energy to the United States.

Accompanying Mr. Underwood are Mr. Michael Reeves, the president of the U.S.-based Ports-to-Plains trade corridor commission, and Mr. Scott Flukinger, adviser, cross-border affairs, with Ports-to-Plains trade corridor commission. The Ports-to-Plains trade corridor is potentially a sister corridor to Canamex but on the eastern side of the Rockies.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask our honoured guests to rise – they're seated in your gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two different introductions today. The first is of a young woman who is volunteering in my constituency office in Edmonton-Centre. Madeleine Kobi was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo and was schooled in Ottawa, where she also participated in a gospel band. She has now moved to Edmonton and is starting in January in the social work program at Grant MacEwan College. She wanted to volunteer some hours in my constituency office to give her a better view of her future career. She has now stood in the public gallery, and I would ask you all to please welcome her to the Assembly.

My second introduction is for Victoria school. This is a very special school to me, Mr. Speaker, because it is a fine arts based school. We have 47 grade 6 students joining us in the public gallery today along with their teachers, Mrs. Stacey Taylor and Ms Carla Kerr. This is a terrific group of young people. They had very good questions for me when I met with them earlier today. I'm delighted that they've come to join us in the Assembly, and I hope they'll come back again. I would ask them all to please rise now and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is really a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a grade 6 class from John Paul I in Edmonton-Mill Woods. We have 23 students visiting today along with two teachers, Mrs. Elizabeth McKay and Mr. Dave King, and two parent helpers, Mrs. Pam Vona and Miss Faye Johansen. I'd ask them to please rise and accept the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure today of introducing to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ms Debra Jakubec, vice-chair of the Alberta Community Council on HIV, ACCH, and executive director of HIV Edmonton. Debra is here today to witness the member's statement recognizing HIV/AIDS Awareness Week and World AIDS Day 2007.

The Alberta Community Council on HIV understands the importance of emphasizing prevention, public health initiatives, education, and community support in ensuring that people can be well and that our health system is available for all Albertans when they most need it. Members saw when they walked into the Chamber today that red ribbons were placed on their desks. By wearing a red ribbon, one can demonstrate understanding and concern for the issue of HIV/AIDS as well as recognize its impact on the lives of many Albertans and people around the world. I'd ask Ms Jakubec to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this House student leaders who have played such an important and vital role in the development of the roles and mandates policy framework. We ensured that student voices were heard through the consultation process because that's what the postsecondary institutions serve. We have with us today Mr. David Hayes, chair of the Alberta Graduate Council; Matt Koczur, vice-chair, Alberta College and Technical Institute Students' Executive Council; Adam Boechler, executive director, Alberta College and Technical Institute Students' Executive Council; Duncan Wojtaszek, executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students; Mike Selnes, chair of the Council of Alberta University Students; and Steven Dollansky, vice-chair of the Council of Alberta University Students, or CAUS.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the dedicated student individuals who I've had the pleasure of working with over the past months along with a huge array of other stakeholders. They are in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly three people. The first is Sam Libin, who is a very typical nine-year-old except back in June he raised over \$5,000 for Kids Cancer Care by having his hair cut off. His brother Austin Libin, who is eight years old, is with him. Austin is starring, very much like his father, as Mortimer in the Robert Munsch play of the same name. They've brought their dad, Sean Libin, with them today.

They had the opportunity of meeting the Premier and talked to me and asked me some very, very difficult questions. I would ask Sean, Sam, and Austin to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister for Capital Planning.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure now to introduce some very special guests. Over three days during this past weekend and in honour of the birthday of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, the Punjabi media along with our Sikh gurdwaras and some local Punjabi organizations raised over \$72,000 in cash, and that amount is growing. [some applause] Yes. They also gathered three full two-tonne truckloads of donated food, all for the Edmonton Food Bank. They did an amazing job and have just received the personal thanks and congratulations from our Premier and myself during a brief luncheon that we had.

Mr. Speaker, I will ask each guest to rise and remain standing as I call their names, and then we can applaud and thank them all ensemble. The co-ordinator of the group, Mr. Gursharn Buttar, SurSangam Radio and Guldasta TV; Miss Rajwinder Klair, SurSangam Radio and Guldasta TV; Mr. Sukhdev Aujla, Desh Punjab Radio; Jasbeer Singh, Parivartan magazine; Gurbhalinder Sandhu, *Des Pardes Times* and Virrasat TV; Kanwal Lyall, *Des Pardes Times* and Virrasat TV; Ranjit Singh Powar, *Punjab Guardian* newspaper; Ashok Gangwani, Guldasta TV; Sukhdev Dhillon, Radio Punjab 101.7 FM; Harpreet Sandhu, *Desh Videsh Times*; and Dr. P.R. Kalia, *Asian Times*.

Bohut, bohut shukria. Lakh, lakh wadania. Many, many thanks and one million congratulations. [As submitted]

Please join me in saluting these outstanding members of the Punjabi community. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this House Dr. Jason Dewling. Dr. Dewling is a professor at Lakeland College in Vermilion. He sits on the Wainwright town council and lives in my constituency, and he's also a close personal friend. Jason is the gentleman who asked me if I first wanted to go to Guatemala to build houses with Habitat for Humanity. It was an incredible, life-changing experience, and I thank him for that. He's leading another delegation to the Dominican Republic in May, and if anyone is interested, they can contact my office as I hope to be going again, too. I'd ask Jason to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you several guests visiting today who have a very strong interest in Bill 41. They believe that a profession that has been very successfully self-regulating for the last hundred years should remain self-regulating. Margaret Hadley is the president of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta. Unfortunately, her son Robert, who was to join her today, who is also an RN – and, as we all know, most RNs do double shifts, and that's where he is today. We also have Mary-Ann Robinson, the executive director of CARNA. I would ask them to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a member of my constituency, Mr. William Eady, who is here. He's interested in educational issues, and he's here to see a letter by him tabled later in our proceedings. I'd invite him to stand and please receive the warm welcome of this House.

head: 1:10

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Bishop Routhier School

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Academic excellence is not a level of distinction which is easily achieved. It requires many hours of work and a tremendous amount of dedication by teachers and parents alike. One particular school in the beautiful constituency of Lesser Slave Lake has attained this standing. Bishop Routhier School in Peavine has made its whole community very proud with the latest provincial academic test, or the PAT, results.

In Alberta the PAT is used as an instrument to help monitor student success. It is a comprehensive test based on the curriculum for the entire year. In June 2007 a hundred per cent of the school's students wrote the test, and a hundred per cent of them passed. On top of that, 21 per cent of the students were in the excellence range. This was no easy task, Mr. Speaker. Parents diligently engaged their children to make sure their homework was being done while teachers made sure that each child received the attention necessary and understood the material being covered.

Furthermore, one of the main reasons these students improved so rapidly is the school's focus on reading. Bishop Routhier implemented the precision reading program, PRP, again this year. Under the program every day includes 40 minutes of reading time with each staff member meeting with a small group of students to do so. Every student in the school has gone up at least one year's reading level, and PRP has certainly played a key role in this.

What is most impressive of all is the school's determination to continue achieving such good grades. They are now focusing on elevating their excellence level for the next PAT. I commend the students of the Peavine school of Bishop Routhier, principal Brian Dewar, all the teachers, and the parents for working together to achieve such great scores.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Support for Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors are the fastest growing demographic. This is not new information. It has been talked about for the past 25 years. The planners knew it was happening, but it appears that no one even tried to guess what the consequences were going to be to society at large. Not only are the numbers increasing, but people are living longer. In my riding I gave out 13 centenarian medals in 2005, and my dear Mrs. Yvonne Harris, who I took to see the Queen at 100, is now 103 and bright as ever.

Seniors can be loosely generalized into three categories: the independent senior with enough money to ensure that they can live with dignity and have enough hired help when required; seniors independent but on a tight, often fixed income and who find it difficult to meet inflation; seniors requiring health care on an ongoing basis.

Seniors want to stay in their homes as long as possible but not at the expense of their sanity. Worse, senior suicide is on the increase.

People can die of loneliness. We need senior community centres that provide one-stop services, government information offices, small health rooms for basic assessments, exercise opportunities, outreach for shut-ins. This approach would save the health system millions and keep seniors active, healthy to live out their lives in the dignity that they deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Stoney Trail Project P3 Award

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to share a success story with you, with members of the Assembly, and with all Albertans. This week the government of Alberta and the Stoney Trail General Partnership received a national award of merit for P3 implementation from the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships. It's a very prestigious award, and it's very difficult to win, and I congratulate all involved for this great achievement. The northeast Stoney Trail project is an innovative partnership between government and the private sector that will save taxpayers millions of dollars over the life of the road.

This award further demonstrates that Alberta's P3 process for highways is a great success. The recently opened southeast Anthony Henday Drive in Edmonton was the first project to be built this way, and it was made possible by the innovation and progressive thinking of the minister at the time, who happens to be our Premier, and the outstanding staff at the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. We're partway through the process for the northern section of Anthony Henday Drive.

The P3 process delivers these vital roadways sooner than the traditional approach, plus government receives a fixed price, which is especially important given the double-digit cost escalation we've experienced during the past few years. Government also receives a 30-year warranty on the work while we only get a one- or two-year warranty on most projects delivered conventionally.

This government is committed to exploring more P3 opportunities where they make good business sense and where they save taxpayers money. Mr. Speaker, the P3 model of building major projects is a major success story for Alberta, and I congratulate the Premier, the minister, department staff, and the Stoney Trail General Partnership for this prestigious award.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Violence against Women

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Violence against women is one of the most serious human rights violations on the planet. Across Canada and around the world there is a growing momentum for organizing around men's roles and responsibilities in ending violence against women.

I think violence against women troubles us so deeply because women are seen as caregivers, as mothers, as the foundation of family life. When a woman is assaulted, it's an attack not only on an individual but also on the community, on the collective values we hold dear.

Sadly, no community is free from the spectre of violence against women. This madness is a real and undeniable problem. It is a problem without a single solution. There is no magic wand that will make it all go away overnight. But we are not helpless. This is not an insurmountable problem. With a good education, with respect for women, with the conviction that violence is never the answer, we can dramatically reduce violence against women.

Colleagues, it's our duty to pass comprehensive laws against all forms of violence against women and to fund programs for survivors of this violence such as shelters for battered women and rape crisis centres and for services to treat violent men.

I believe that respect for girls and women and equality between men and women are preconditions to ending the violence. It has been the longest war, the greatest epidemic, and the biggest disaster. With strength and love we commit ourselves to work alongside women to bring this violence to an end.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

HIV/AIDS Awareness

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to speak about the important issue of HIV/AIDS awareness. Please join me in recognizing HIV/AIDS Awareness Week and World AIDS Day 2007. Canadian HIV/AIDS Awareness Week begins on November 26 and culminates with World AIDS Day on December 1. It's a time to remember those lost to HIV/AIDS and recognize those who continue to live with the effects of HIV/AIDS.

As many of you know, HIV weakens the immune system. When the immune system is damaged beyond repair, infections and cancers overwhelm the body, resulting in the final stage of HIV infection, AIDS.

1:20

HIV/AIDS is still with us. It affects people from around the world as well as at home here in Alberta. There is no cure. In fact, in this province in 2006, 218 new cases of HIV were identified in Alberta compared to 170 in 2005. Most recent estimates from 2005 indicate that approximately 3,700 individuals are living with HIV in Alberta. The good news is that this government together with stakeholders and community organizations is developing a long-term strategy to address the prevention and control of HIV and sexually transmitted illnesses in all groups.

As an example of what great accomplishments can be made through strong collaboration, I refer to the Alberta prenatal HIV screening program. This program currently tests more than 95 per cent of pregnant women each year for HIV and routinely screens all for syphilis and hepatitis B. It is regarded as one of the best screening programs in the world.

Mr. Speaker, scientific data leaves little doubt that the presence of sexually transmitted infections facilitates HIV transmission through direct biological mechanisms, so early testing and treatment are critical to a high quality and comprehensive HIV prevention strategy. Additionally, we are increasing funds to AIDS service organizations in Alberta for 2007-2008 and continuing to provide fully funded testing for HIV to all regardless of health care coverage.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring to the attention of this House a concern I have for the future prosperity of all Albertans. In comments yesterday the hon. Premier displayed a profound and fundamental misunderstanding of the oil and gas industry and the investment world. When asked about the slashing of drilling plans in Alberta's natural gas industry, the Premier's answer was very naive. The new rates don't take effect until January 2009, he said, so the current slowdown is a result of other things.

It's a very basic concept in the oil and gas and investment world.

A business plan reflects what will happen in the next few years, not just this moment. Gas wells drilled today will pay royalties in 2009. Investors will be looking for returns in 2009. Apparently, the Premier does not understand this.

Preston Manning wrote about similar concerns earlier this month. Speaking of renegotiation of the Syncrude and Suncor deals of the Premier, he said: this creates long-term uncertainty and questions the competence of his government to lead on major energy issues. While this government may not be looking beyond the next election, the people and companies that have made Alberta great do look and plan long term.

Looking forward, there are real negative consequences of the new royalty framework. I quote BMO Capital Markets global portfolio strategist Don Cox, a respected financial adviser whose *Basic Points* column is read by investment world-wide. Cox said:

We considered the report such a poorly-written, poorly-reasoned, mean-spirited betrayal of the traditions of a great province that we assumed it would be treated as an embarrassment. It failed to achieve even mediocrity, so it could be safely ignored . . . Premier Stelmach stunned us by endorsing both the tone of the Panel's collectivist rant and most of its recommendations. Most importantly, he broke a promise he had made publicly not to accept its recommendation to break promises made to Suncor and Syncrude, the pioneers of the oil sands development . . . With deep regret we are forced to remove Alberta from the shrinking list of politically-secure regions of the world for the oil industry, taking its rating from AAA to A . . . Once a political region has violated its vows, those who believe it can be trusted not to break its new pledges are betting their companies' . . .

[Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired]

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, a petition.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter and petition from 128 Albertans from Lac La Biche and the surrounding area in support of Métis harvesting.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give notice of a motion to be moved tomorrow with respect to a motion to hold sittings on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evening, December 5, 6, and 7.*

I'd also like to give notice of a motion under the Standing Orders to allot one hour of time to debate the motion I just gave notice of for tomorrow.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise in this Legislature to make two tablings. The first is to table the appropriate number of copies of the roles and mandates policy framework for the publicly funded advanced education system. This framework was developed in consultation with Alberta students and our publicly funded postsecondary institutions. It more clearly

defines the roles and mandates within our system while supporting a high degree of collaboration and fulfilling the goals of Campus Alberta.

The second tabling contains letters of support from three of Alberta's postsecondary student leaders, including David Hayes, who on behalf of the graduate students commended the ministry for the leadership and vision for an integrated, sustainable system that clearly recognizes the strengths of graduate students in the future; another letter from Jonathan Hill, who represents students in colleges and technical institutes, who calls the framework a blueprint for a better postsecondary system; and finally from Mike Selnes, from the Council of Alberta University Students, who writes that this step will ensure that instructional excellence will remain at the core of Alberta's advanced education system and that they are excited about the possibilities that this framework can create. We will continue, as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, to work with these students to ensure that that happens.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the June 12, 2007, by-elections held in the constituencies of Calgary-Elbow and Drumheller-Stettler. Copies will be distributed to all members early next week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have letters from constituents Sandra Hill, James Hollett, Chris Byrne, Alice Bartram, Lorne Marr, Sylvia Wolowidnyk, Jijun Yuan, Yongjie Liu, Marie Kopr, and Jason Ness. All of them are expressing their concerns with Alberta's labour laws and, in particular, asking for the outlawing of the use of replacement workers.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Geoffrey Pounder of Rocky Mountain House. He is concerned about the number of weeks he has to wait for a simple doctor's appointment and asks how many people are unable to have their short-term ailments treated due to such waits.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is five copies of my letter and cheque dated September 6 to the Kainai Food Bank. As per my pledge of April 2, '07, half of my indexed pay raise, \$146.25, is donated monthly to a food bank until AISH is similarly increased and indexed. The Kainai Food Bank has 300 volunteers and has helped 3,000 families yearly. The executive director is Kimberly Jimmy.

I will table five copies of a letter from a Marg Triskle, in a long-term care facility, who suffers from multiple sclerosis. She is 58 years old, with all her mental faculties, and lives with very little social or mental stimulus. She states that she now is paying twice as much, the care has declined drastically, and this care is going to have to be increased as her condition does decrease.

I will also table five copies of a letter from Edward and Geraldine

*See p. 2249, left col., para. 8

Buchanan, who are my constituents and object very strongly to Bill 46. They feel that it is fundamentally wrong and has a profound impact on the democratic rights of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to rise today to give two sets of tablings. One is a program from the Royal Canadian Golf Association. A few months ago the Royal Canadian Golf Association held the extremely successful Canadian Women's Open in Edmonton and made Alberta and Edmonton proud. It was at the Royal Mayfair golf club and had thousands of volunteers.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a document on advanced affordable housing solutions from CMHC and how people can contact that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table the requisite number of copies of a report entitled Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan Statistical Supplement, 2006-2007. It is essentially an annex to the annual report of Alberta Health and Wellness and provides some very interesting statistics such as: 24 per cent of Albertans paid reduced premiums or were exempt from paying premiums, the number of physicians in Alberta increased 21 per cent in the last four years, a total of \$1.6 billion was paid in fee for service, and very many other very interesting statistics that members might want to see.

I'd also, if I might, Mr. Speaker, just indicate that I misspoke when I said December 5, 6, 7. I was looking at the November calendar. It should have been December 3, 4, 5.* I assume the Clerk caught that, but I did definitely say Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Fall Session Timetable

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Assembly has about 30 bills before it that have not yet had full debate, yet the legislative session is scheduled to end next week, as far as we know. These bills include the Premier's own flagship bill and others that impact the fundamental rights of Albertans. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Will this government commit to extending this session beyond the end of next week until these critical pieces of legislation have had full debate?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we'll consider anything that's appropriate in order to deal with the business of the week. But as I've just given notice, we anticipate that we should be able to accomplish that by having not unduly extended evening sittings next week, and if we make appropriate progress on bills without undue repetition, we should be able to accomplish the full agenda in that time. But if that's not the case, I will certainly look to the opposition to assist with unanimous consent, if necessary, to extend the sitting.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, there are 30 bills before this Assembly; six days left. Legislation that touches on Albertans' fundamental rights deserves full debate. All the impacts need to be understood, all the voices need to be heard, and all amendments, including many from the government, need to be considered. One particularly contentious bill, for example, has had less than four hours of debate here, less than four hours to decide whether and how rights are going to be respected. Again to the Deputy Premier: will the Deputy Premier commit that time allocation or closure will not be used to stifle debate and stifle democracy?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very interesting in that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition attended in the House not too long ago when Bill 46 was up for debate and used 60 minutes of time to speak to an amendment, which is clearly, of course, within his right to do. But if he had been a little bit shorter and focused on why the amendment should have been voted on and we could have moved on to the other amendments, he might have afforded other members of his caucus and other members of the House the opportunity to actually speak to the amendment that was on the floor.

The Speaker: We're not going to use the question period for debate of bills.

The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'll look for a straightforward answer from the Deputy Premier. The question is this: will this government commit that it will not impose time allocation or closure to ram through legislation next week?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would never want to have anyone consider that legislation is being rammed through. There will be an appropriate amount of time available for debate on Bill 46 and other bills, but certainly, if necessary, time allocation is one of the tools of the House, one of the Standing Orders that this House passed, and it's available to be used.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Support for the Homeless

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the mercury drops outside, thousands of Albertans are on the streets freezing. These people rely on organizations such as the Bissell Centre in Edmonton to provide basic necessities, such as warm clothing. The demand is so great this year that the Bissell Centre is turning to the public to help people in need. They've run out of supplies. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. You talk about helping those in need, but what about walking the talk? Will you commit to helping the Bissell Centre and other similar organizations across the province by providing emergency funding so that they can meet this emergency demand?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We do provide \$35 million to agencies for the homeless to support approximately 3,100 spaces. We have also added 7 and a half million dollars for emergency funding for the homeless. The Bissell Centre has and

*See p. 2248, left col., para. 12

will continue to work with the government and provide services that they provide to individuals that aren't as fortunate as us.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I visited many shelters in Alberta: the Mustard Seed and Drop-in Centre in Calgary and last week the homeless shelter in Fort McMurray operated by the Wood Buffalo housing corporation. At each shelter I heard the same message: one-third of the homeless have mental health problems, one-third have addictions issues, and one-third are in situations of distress because of abuse. What these people need is the ability to move beyond the shelter into transitional housing and, even more, into permanent supportive housing. To the same minister. The homeless need two things. They need a roof over their heads for sure, but they also need support services to help them deal with the issues that they deal with daily. Why have these two solutions not been linked together and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we have linked those two solutions together. In fact, we have put funding aside and are using funding for transitional housing. It's important to look at housing or the homeless in four different aspects. First of all, prevention. The second one, shelters, making sure that all the homeless have a space. At this present time in Edmonton and Calgary there are still spaces available. All shelters are not full. The third one is transitional housing. The fourth one is independence. We are working with the agencies, and we are working with individuals that need support.

Dr. B. Miller: Well, Mr. Speaker, everybody needs a home. In the case of the homeless they need a place to move beyond the shelter. It's not just single adults. There are thousands of children who will end up in shelters, and the numbers keep growing in this province. In this rich province of prosperity no child should be without a safe place to live. We have to govern with compassion and not assume that the homeless should have their butt kicked and just get a job. That's what the President of the Treasury Board said in this House. We need compassion on the part of this government. To the same minister: I mean, a 10-year program for homelessness? We need action right now, not something that's going to happen 10 years from now.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously the member opposite wasn't listening to what the government is doing right now. I will tell the hon. member that we are working not only for today but working for tomorrow. About a month ago the Premier did announce a project to end homelessness in 10 years. At that time he also appointed an hon. member from this side of the House to be the secretariat for that committee. We are compassionate, and we are looking at the future to end homelessness.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Support for Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2005 Auditor General's report on seniors care stated that the Seniors and Community Supports department has not reviewed or assessed whether the monthly disposable income rate of \$265 for lodge residents is appropriate. Seniors in Lethbridge and throughout the province have told me that they cannot get by on \$265 a month. My question to the

Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: as the monthly disposable income for lodge residents was set in 1994 and has neither been reviewed nor increased since, will the minister adjust the monthly disposable income so that it reflects the lodge residents' increasing personal income requirements due to the increased care needs . . .

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I want to first point out that that program that we do have to see that seniors can be in supportive-living arrangements and have some form of income left on their behalf for disposable income is still one of the best among any of the provinces in this country. While you may look to some in the past, much of our supports have been much more targeted to the greatest need, ensuring that we have more spaces available.

Ms Pastoor: The rest of the provinces do not have our economy, which is why they can't afford it.

The dental assistance for seniors program provides up to \$5,000 for dental care. However, it is only of benefit to those who have dentures or require basic dental care. This program completely excludes seniors who have different varieties of dental care needs that exist, such as crowns, caps, implants, et cetera. A program that does not assist is not a benefit. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: will he review and amend this benefit so that it reflects and includes all dental needs required by our deserving low-income seniors?

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do review always the programs that we have available. We try to make sure that we have a good, comprehensive package that's available to seniors. It's in that response that designs were made to include optical and dental expenses. Those were recent additions to the program. Also, to ensure that supports are there, we give the targeted financial assistance to those in greatest need.

Ms Pastoor: They don't reflect the reality of dental care today. We're all going to be there, and we've all got caps.

A comment I heard in Public Accounts this morning about low-income seniors requires me to ask this question. Is it the position of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports that 40 per cent of Alberta seniors require Alberta seniors' benefits because they failed to plan for their future, keeping in mind that a goodly portion of these seniors are single women who spent a lifetime raising children?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, 40 per cent of Albertans, which is correct, do receive some form of the Alberta seniors' benefits. That's a correct statement. That's not an issue of design as to whether a person is prepared or not prepared; it was the design of our program. In that sense 40 per cent have qualified to receive those benefits.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I start, I want to indicate that it's very difficult to prepare questions when the

list of ministers in attendance constantly changes, almost by the minute, leading up to this session, and that's a serious concern.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Institute's 6th annual oil sands conference last week in Calgary was attended by a room full of big oil executives who paid \$2,000 for the privilege, among other things, of listening to the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance at that time, according to reports of people who were there, indicated that the review of royalties in this province was an idea that came from the media and was picked up on by some of the leadership candidates, who all then jumped on the bandwagon. I would like to ask the minister . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry, but the time has now evaporated, so I don't know where we're going with this one.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a well-documented fact that the royalty review was picked up by all of the leadership candidates in the past election, and everyone agreed. Our Premier was the one who won, and subsequently he instituted exactly what he had promised.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It would be interesting to know whether or not the Minister of Finance supports this process. Apparently, the Minister of Finance also voiced his concerns about the impact of changes to the royalty system to the Royalty Review Panel, but they told him to mind his own business. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Did he attempt to influence and interfere with the Royalty Review Panel in its discussions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much for that question, Mr. Speaker. My comments were in jest at that particular conference because I had absolutely no contact. I had absolutely zero contact with the people. Indeed, even if we were at a social occasion, it would be that the royalty panel would go to the other side of the room. So the royalty review report was 100 per cent absolutely independent. There was no government interference, and there was no interference from myself.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I wonder if the Premier shares the Minister of Finance's sense of humour.

If there are unintended consequences, said the Premier, they will change the royalty review framework. I'd like to ask the Minister of Energy now: what changes are you considering? When will you tell Albertans exactly what you intend to do about royalties? Are you not concerned that the government's position on royalties is becoming as vague and confused as that of the Liberals?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I would indicate to you and all Albertans is that who is confused here is the member opposite. The fact of the matter is that the Premier has come out very solidly and said that the new royalty framework is in place, it is solid, it's a framework for the future, and we'll move ahead with that framework. There is no intention with this government or this ministry to stray from that particular pathway. Twenty per cent, \$1.4 billion by 2010: that's what we're expecting. If there's any confusion, it rests over there.

Roles and Responsibilities for Advanced Education

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, it would be clear to everyone here in the House that the key to the future of Alberta, of course, is within our postsecondary system, the postsecondary institutions that we have throughout the province. The Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has tabled his roles and responsibilities mandate framework, and I want to question him on this from this perspective. In the late '90s and the early part of this century there was a fair amount of work and also political capital invested in terms of Campus Alberta.

The Speaker: I think the time is gone, so if the minister wants to respond.

Mr. Horner: Well, perhaps, Mr. Speaker, I would let the hon. member go to his next question. Being one of the members of this House and this government that actually started the idea of Campus Alberta, it would be most interesting to find out what his question is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dunford: Yes. If I may continue, then. What I'm most concerned about are the principles that surrounded that whole concept of Campus Alberta. Have they maintained their presence in the new roles and responsibilities mandate?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. One of the concerns that we've always had during the consultation that we started some 11 months ago was to ensure that we had a document that had some meat to it, that had the principles that everyone agreed to that would make the system that we have in this province the best in the world: the best at collaboration, the best at transferability, the best at access for our students, meeting the three goals of what our postsecondaries should be doing, and that is for the students, for the taxpayers of Alberta, and for our society, and they are entrenched in this document.

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, I have two very good institutions in the city that I represent: the Lethbridge College and, of course, the University of Lethbridge. The Lethbridge College had written the minister and used the term "diminished framework" in terms of their ability to look at degrees. I'm wondering now: can Lethbridge College continue to have flexibility and move forward in degree granting?

Mr. Horner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, a good question. This is about our institutions working together as a single system, Campus Alberta system, but we also know that all institutions can't be all things to all people at any given time. We want our institutions to focus on their strengths. We want them to focus on the delivery mechanisms that they do best. But we also recognize that there are exceptions. They are going to be rare. After consultation we have provided within the document some flexibility for colleges in very limited circumstances and, after a very thorough review as it relates to the Campus Alberta concept, the ability to offer degrees should the system see the need for that to happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Electricity Exports

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are still more scandals in the Department of Energy. Electricity deregulation has

increased prices and reduced supply. Last year there was a net decrease of 335 megawatts in the installed generating capacity in our province. Now we find out this Progressive Conservative government secretly wants to increase electricity exports even though there is a shortage of electricity here in Alberta and our prices are increasing at an alarming rate. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why does this government want to export large volumes of electricity from this province . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, this question relates to the fact that there had been a question put forward from our department to the AESO with respect to our interconnect capacity in the province of Alberta. I've answered this question previously, and again I'll say the same thing. Perhaps the member wants to climb a pole someplace and watch the electrons. They can go both directions. This whole issue has nothing to do at all with exporting electricity. There is a particular merchant line that's involved in an export capacity. The intertie connections in the province of Alberta, according to our interconnected capacity, are weak.

1:50

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I'm shocked by that answer.

To the Minister of Energy: how does the minister explain the Department of Energy's own proposal, which indicates that we want to export thousands of megawatts of electricity per day from this province to the American market by the year 2020?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, the AESO has the responsibility and the mandate to ensure that the electricity utility system in the province of Alberta, both on the generating side and the transmission of that commodity, is robust and meets the needs and requirements of Albertans. That is the number one priority of the Energy department and, most certainly, any of the bodies that work in conjunction with the Energy department. Our number one priority is Albertans, and interconnection may or may not allow the increased export of excess capacity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the Minister of Energy cannot pass the buck to the AESO. This is your own report, which indicates you're planning to export large volumes of electricity. My next question: given that Tonbridge Power Inc.'s own documents acknowledge that the rationale behind the Montana/Alberta tie-line project is to export Alberta's power to California, where it is needed, will the minister admit that this project is the first step in the plan to export large volumes of electricity to U.S. consumers? This isn't about Alberta's interests. It's about Americans with their interest in our power.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the situation that we have here is that Alberta is actually connected to a number of different places in North America with respect to commodities that we produce. We export grain. We export oil. We export natural gas. If a circumstance would arise through the prudent use of the systems that we have in Alberta, and perhaps 4,000 or 5,000 of megawatts of energy that could be produced in conjunction with cogeneration, some of our other industries – if that excess capacity became available, I don't think that commodity, if it wasn't needed in Alberta, should not be exported to someplace where it could be used.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Alberta Office in Washington

Mr. Lukaszuk: Castle Downs? Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This was such an electrifying conversation, I just couldn't stop listening.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a number of foreign offices throughout the world, and one of them is our office in Washington, which we've had for some three years. It is colocated with the Canadian embassy, and the official over there has the title of minister-counsellor. Can the minister of intergovernmental affairs please tell us: what actual value is there to taxpayers of having that office abroad?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that our neighbours to the south, as we're all aware, are the largest trading partner in the world, with almost 90 per cent of Alberta's exports, almost \$75 billion a year worth of goods and services, that go to the United States. I might also say that of Alberta's top 25 trade destinations, 21 of them are in the United States. It's very obvious that our office in Washington is doing very good work.

I might add that I'll be announcing, of course, as the Premier has done yesterday, that Gary Mar will be filling that position effective December 3.

The Speaker: That was inappropriate use of a member's name.
The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the United States is Alberta's largest trade partner and is also very important in the world economy. What will that newly appointed individual do to make sure that Alberta's views are duly represented to the U.S. government?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, in this past year the Washington office has given numerous examples. You may not be aware, but did you know that in the past year two federal government cabinet ministers, the Secretary of Energy and Secretary of the Treasury, have visited Alberta, have visited the oil sands capital of the world. They are clearly getting the message in Washington from our office: Alberta is a reliable, safe place, politically and otherwise, to be able to invest dollars. Billions of American dollars are being invested in Alberta, which is clearly excellent news for Albertans, with tremendous opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each office abroad has a different priority and a different focus. What will be the focus for the next few years of our Alberta office in Washington?

Mr. Boutilier: The message has to be very clear. Our royalty regime, one of the lowest taxes of provinces in all of Canada, in fact the lowest, clearly our commitment to resource development, environmental responsibility, and being good partners are good examples of what Albertans are doing in terms of investing and the opportunities and jobs that all members and their constituents enjoy because of how we manage the resources we enjoy in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Local Government Issues

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week Alberta's urban municipalities are holding their annual convention, and they're bringing with them many resolutions for the province to consider. The Municipal Government Act provides no formal consultation mechanism on matters affecting local government, so the resolutions are really the only available method they have to get the province's attention, and they have many concerns. To the Minister of Environment. A common resolution is ending the practice of giving water licences for deep well flooding with fresh groundwater. AAMD and C passed a similar resolution this year, and this has been brought up many times in the past. Will the minister commit to immediately phasing out this practice and protect fresh groundwater sources for human consumption?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this issue has been under discussion for quite some time. The member opposite should understand and should know that, in fact, we are moving in that direction, that we have recently initiated an agreement, put into place guidelines with respect to the use of fresh water for oil field operation. One of the first things that I did when I became minister was to ensure that those guidelines were implemented as quickly as possible.

Mr. Taylor: I guess he missed the word "immediately" in my question, Mr. Speaker.

Another common resolution that we've seen before and are seeing again is enhancing the ability of municipalities to protect natural areas within their boundaries. Cities and towns are willing to step up on this issue. The question is whether the provincial government will allow them to take strong environmental protection action. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: will you commit to amending the Municipal Government Act to give municipalities more authority to protect natural areas within their jurisdiction?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to add to the first question that the hon. member talked about, saying that there is no other way of consultation. First of all, the association, the AUMA, meets, has resolutions so that they can discuss the issues and have a democratic process to bring forward an idea and at the same time bring to the government those ideas, those directions. It is not the only way of consultation. In fact, this government through many ministries goes out and has meetings and has consultation with municipalities, with their associations throughout Alberta, making sure that the voices of municipalities are heard.

Mr. Taylor: You know, Mr. Speaker, I was going to be nice to him. All he has to do is answer my questions and I'll sit down. Affordable housing continues to be a critical issue in Alberta. Providing funding to municipalities is only part of the solution. A key element is bringing developers into the equation and making them an integral part of the solution. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who I guess isn't going to do anything on the natural areas file. In order to motivate developers to construct new affordable housing, there must be incentives offered. Will the minister follow the Alberta Liberal caucus affordable housing plan and the resolution of the city of Calgary and provide tax incentives to developers to get more affordable housing built faster?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, tax incentives are under the jurisdiction of the federal government, and we are continuing to work with the federal government to look at incentives of taxation for increased housing. Also, \$285 million of new money has been

put into the housing portfolio, \$143 million given to municipalities for them to have the autonomy to decide how they feel that the areas of concern in their municipalities are addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:00

Bow River Fishery

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not much of a fisherman, but in the past I enjoyed being able to see trout or whitefish in the beautiful Bow River, that flows through our constituency. Recently as the representative for Calgary-Bow my constituents have been telling me that they have been catching fewer fish than normal from the Bow River. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Is the minister aware that the quality of the fishery in the Bow River has degraded?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am aware of this change. The fishery in the Bow River is changing for the better, but you have to distinguish between upstream and downstream from the city. SRD's research on the fishery below Calgary this year confirmed very healthy trout populations and high densities of fish. I want to assure the House that I spent several hot, hard, long days personally verifying the research of our people.

Now, upstream is a little different. The good news, though, is that the water is cleaner. There are fewer nutrients, but fewer nutrients mean fewer fish. But there is a self-sustaining population both above and below the city of Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us whether his department plans to supplement the fishery in the Bow River and increase the number of fish by stocking the river?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that question is no. The Bow River has not been stocked since 1954, when we put rainbow and cutthroat in. Restocking is not appropriate on a river like the Bow. Fish stocking works best when fish populations have been eliminated either due to overfishing or a catastrophic change in the habitat, and neither of these situations applies here. I reiterate: there is a good, healthy fishery both above the city and below the city on the Bow River.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. My second supplemental to the same minister: are there any conditions under which his department would consider stocking the Bow River with trout?

Dr. Morton: Well, if the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow will let me set up a barbecue in her backyard and fish off the bank, maybe; otherwise, the answer is no. Our practice is not normally to stock rivers and other flowing bodies. This is due to the adverse effect on fish that are in the river – there's a risk of changing the gene pool – and also the poor survivability rate of the stocked fish. We believe in sort of free love when it comes to the fish: let the fish reproduce on their own. This is the most biologically sound and cost-effective way to maintain our fish populations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Childhood Obesity

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School board trustees in Red Deer and Edmonton have shown phenomenal leadership in the efforts to curb childhood obesity and have committed to ban the sale of junk food in schools. The Ministry of Education would do very well to make the most of this momentum and aid school boards in their efforts to promote healthy eating in schools. Will the Minister of Education implement initiatives in order to encourage this pattern to continue across the province of Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, just last week this hon. member was rather critical in a member's statement of the government interfering with what school boards' jurisdictions are. Clearly, this is a matter for school boards to assess, and I applaud those who have. But that is clearly something that school boards are elected to do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought the department was a leader in things. I may be mistaken.

A second critical factor to addressing the efforts to curb childhood obesity is poverty. Last May the Minister of Education stated, "It is not the government's responsibility to feed, clothe, and shelter every child in Alberta," yet the Centre for Science in the Public Interest emphasizes government responsibility to ensure access to healthy foods for all children. In 2005-06 the provincial spending average was \$5.54 per student per year for school meal programs. This government spent nothing. To the Minister of Education . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] We're out of time, hon. member. [interjection] The hon. Minister of Education has been recognized.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the provincial government through the Northland school division, which is the only one that we are directly involved in with a hot lunch program – again, the hon. member is asking the provincial government to get down into the day-to-day operations of school boards, and we simply don't do that. It is up to school boards to determine places of need where they feel that a hot lunch program would be appropriate. There are a number of those that are under way, and that's the way it should be.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, what about envelope funding, Mr. Minister?

Can I just go into this? Promoting physical fitness is another crucial aspect in fighting childhood obesity, yet high school students all over the province are often charged an annual fee in order to access their school's wellness centre. If the government and the minister are serious about tackling obesity problems, will they commit to elimination of exercise facility fees for students across the province?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this is just another spending ask of this particular opposition. I would ask this particular member to have the discussion with his colleague the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who at the same time wants to put 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenue directly into the heritage fund. Where is all the money going to come from?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Support for Cow-calf Producers

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has been talking about their losses every time the Canadian dollar goes up a penny, but the big hit is being taken by family farms. Low cattle prices and the high dollar make it near impossible to turn a profit these days for cow-calf producers. In the mid-1990s cow-calf producers got 60 cents to the pound while packers and retailers took a dollar. Now farmers get 35 cents for the same pound while packers get almost \$2.50. To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: will you do the right thing and help family farmers now, or will you just hand out subsidies to big packers like you did the last time with the BSE crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, I just have to say this over and over again, that we just came out with a \$165 million package for the red-meat industry. I think that if the hon. member across would check, at the present time the red-meat industry is in great distress, including the packers, who just happen to be all losing money at this particular stage of the game.

Mr. Eggen: Well, that's interesting, Mr. Speaker. Last year Cargill set a record profit of \$2.3 billion while family farmers across Canada had a combined debt of \$54 billion. Putting taxpayers' dollars in the pockets of the world's second-largest privately owned corporation does not help farmers here in Alberta. What would help farmers is a base price that would make sure that farmers got paid first for their cattle. To the same minister: when will you put local ranchers and farmers ahead of big-business profits?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would check, Cargill is an international company. It operates in Canada. Right now with Cargill the monies they make are international at this stage of the game. I think that probably the truth of the matter is that if he could come up with a program that he's talking about that's not countervailable, I'd certainly like to listen to it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. You know, I definitely sense that there's something wrong here. Farmers are going broke raising beef, but prices keep going up in the grocery store. Maybe the Minister of Agriculture and Food doesn't have an answer for farmers, but farmers do have an answer for him. For long-term success: number one, restore farmers' market power and limit the economic power of the big corporations. Number two, in the short term there is an answer as well: set a base price so that farmers don't go broke putting food on the table for all of us. Farmers are not asking for handouts. What they want is control over their own business. To the same minister: when will you do the right thing and set a base price for beef, paying the farmers first?

Mr. Groeneveld: I suspect, Mr. Speaker, I would have to move across the House before I could come up with a solution like that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Groundwater Stewardship

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no question that water, both above and below ground, is important to all Albertans. As we see more and more development in rural Alberta, we're also seeing more demand for both surface water and groundwater. While it's often easy to see how surface water is doing, it's much harder to see what's going on with groundwater aquifers. To the Minister of Environment: what is your department doing to gain more understanding about groundwater and groundwater supplies in Alberta?

2:10

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is indeed a need for us to learn more about Alberta's groundwater, in particular the interconnection between groundwater and surface water. We've made a significant commitment to work with Alberta's Geological Survey and the pool of knowledge that they have. We're working in conjunction with that data as well as completing groundwater protection mapping and a preliminary look at underground geology.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, on Friday of this week we will be announcing an aerial survey down the highway 2 corridor, further enhancing our knowledge of underground water. You might wonder how you study water from an airplane, but I'm told that the technology exists to actually use radar-like equipment that will actually allow them to view underground from an aircraft.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many people in my constituency who rely on groundwater for their household use and for their livelihood. There are also a large amount of oil and gas developments in the area, which some residents worry could impact the safety of the groundwater supply. How is the minister making sure that my constituents' groundwater supplies are not negatively affected by the oil and gas activities?

Mr. Renner: Protecting water supplies, Mr. Speaker, is critical. We first of all investigate each and every complaint that we have. To date there is no conclusive evidence of well contamination from coal-bed methane activities. All of our investigations show that in most cases well location, construction, and maintenance tend to be the main causes of water problems. Nevertheless, we will continue to work with the EUB as well as oil and gas companies to ensure that if there are issues that are identified, they're corrected and rectified as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The largest river in my constituency, the Battle River, has some unique constraints since it's not glacial fed but, rather, fed by runoff and groundwater. The river is often dry, and the groundwater levels fluctuate. Will the minister consider on-stream and off-stream storage to regulate more consistent river flow and enrich groundwater supplies for the Battle River watershed?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, considering off-stream storage and implementing are two different things. So the answer to "Will I consider?": of course I will. Will we in the next short period of time be able to implement? That's a bigger question. Frankly, work is under way to identify, first of all, opportunities for storage of upstream water and then, secondly, to prioritize those opportunities. Once that work is complete, I can assure the member that it will be part of the Water for Life strategy and is part of the Water for Life

strategy to begin to develop some of those storage opportunities as they become available.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Infection Prevention and Control in Hospitals

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have learned that former patients of Vegreville's St. Joseph's hospital have tested positive for hepatitis B and C. There are still some outstanding questions that need to be answered to assure Albertans in this community that their health is not at risk. To the minister of health: how is the minister going to determine if these hepatitis cases were linked to poor sterilization at St. Joe's?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That may not be something that can actually be determined. But what I would want hon. members to know and the public to know is that if you test any population within the province, any group of people within the province, you will find a certain incidence of hepatitis C and AIDS. What we've found in the testing that's happened with respect to East Central and particularly in Vegreville is that the incidence that has been discovered in the testing is no greater than one would expect in the normal population. So the conclusion that one might draw is that there hasn't been a linkage to that particular incident.

Ms Blakeman: You still need to identify the other risks.

Again to the same minister. Since day one the Alberta Liberals have been encouraging this government to put monitoring and enforcement mechanisms in place for infection control. You have plans but no action. When will the minister re-establish monitoring and enforcement responsibilities within the ministry?

Mr. Hancock: Well, we have plenty of action, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the Health Quality Council report, the infection prevention control report that we did relative to a review of standards for professions. We've brought forward Bill 41 and Bill 48, which deal with both the professions and with the health authorities and voluntary organizations, to put in place the structures. Within the department we're preparing a provincial standard with respect to infection prevention and control, and part and parcel of that will be an auditing and enforcement mechanism.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In June the minister said, "It would be unnecessary and premature to assess the risk of lawsuits." Now that people are testing positive for hepatitis B and C, will the minister now begin to determine the scale of this government's liability?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this minister and this government are focused on people, on making sure that they get the services they need when they need it, the quality of care they need when they need it, that there is an infection prevention control standard, that there is an assurance for the people of Alberta that standards are in place and that they're being followed. If there are legal implications of anything that happens in the province, those will happen, and we will deal with them as and when they happen, and we'll prepare for them where appropriate and where necessary. But our focus is not on our potential liability; our focus is on service to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Water Management and Erosion Control Program

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years many of my municipalities and, of course, my constituents and other Albertans have received financial assistance from the government's erosion control program. This funding is necessary to help cover the costs of water management of erosion control projects. My question is to the Minister of Environment. As there is such a high demand for this kind of funding, can Albertans expect to see more stable funding for the Alberta water management and erosion control program?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a very interesting question because, although a very popular program among municipalities, this has traditionally always been funded with a minimal amount of dollars. We have found in Alberta Environment that the opportunities to actually accomplish some significant amount of work have always been compromised by the relatively small budget that we have available. Given the fact that the government this year has announced that there will be \$1.4 billion made available to municipalities through the municipal sustainability initiative, we are in fact reviewing this policy.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, as much as I love to have reviews done, there are some issues relative to the water erosion control program in my municipalities. To the same minister: because this is such a well-used and critical grant program for Albertans, when can my constituents and other Albertans expect to see the results of the minister's review of this grant program? It is truly needed, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we are reviewing this program to determine whether there are some better alternatives to accomplish similar objectives. That review should be complete by September 2008, and that would be sufficient time to incorporate any outcomes from that review in the '09-10 budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Ms Calahasen: No. That's good.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

New Royalty Framework (continued)

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Premier announced his response to the Royalty Review Panel's recommendations, he proudly boasted that his government had delivered. Well, that remains to be seen. My question is for the Minister of Energy. Last week a former Royalty Review Panel member stated that the new oil sands royalty system may in fact leave Albertans worse off than they were in 1997. Given that the minister likes to ignore expert opinions and advice on royalties, how does the minister respond to the claim put forward by this expert economist? Is the economist wrong?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, certainly, everybody in the province of Alberta is entitled to an opinion with respect to what we may or may not collect at some point in the future in a royalty regime. There are a number of parameters around how we calculate the expected

outcome from our royalty regime. We have continued to hold true to the idea that our framework is solid. I believe it's solid on a go-forward basis. The Premier has indicated that we will have an increase of 20 per cent in the royalties we collect, and I am sure that we're going to attain that.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals committed to the same total increase as called for by the Royalty Review Panel. We acknowledged that reaching the benchmark would require further consultation with industry. Now, after weeks of criticizing us for our position, the Premier has admitted that details in his plan have unforeseen consequences. Will the minister admit that the Premier's plan was flawed from the start and that the government has now adopted the approach taken by the Alberta Liberals except that we're missing out on \$500 million?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what we have in front of us today is a framework that's a very solid framework to move forward and move the royalty structure forward in the province of Alberta to the benefit of all Albertans. There needs to be a balance reached here. Although the members opposite may not be responsible for Albertans' jobs, I believe that I am responsible for Albertans' jobs. The balance that we will find will provide jobs for Albertans, and it will also provide a maximum return for Albertans on the resources they own.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. The expert Royalty Review Panel strongly opposed the idea of ending the Crown agreements with Suncor and Syncrude. Doing so may cost Albertans tens of billions of dollars in settlement costs.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. R. Miller: Tens of billions. Further, Alberta's reputation as a secure place to invest may be irreparably damaged. How many billions of dollars will this government decision to ignore the expert advice once again cost Albertans? How much is it going to cost us?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, you know, I'm not going to go into this diatribe again that we keep hearing and answer these questions that have to do with what may have happened, what might have happened, what could have happened in the past. There are very clearly hundreds of billions of dollars and thousands and thousands of jobs that have been created for Albertans by the policy set by this government. Those members and any panel that's structured by this government are not responsible at the end of the day for government policy. We're responsible for the policy. We will develop sound policy to move forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, that was 88 questions and responses during today's Oral Question Period.

We'll now return to the Routine. We were on the subject of Tabling Returns and Reports. The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**
(continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Cardston-Taber-Warner Progressive Conservative Association Premier's golf tournament advertisement that they took out, indicating their platinum sponsors, one being a school division, which they accepted money from in that Premier's golf tournament.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings this afternoon. The first is from the parents and staff of Mr. Cake's Daycare in Sherwood Park, indicating that under the new Child Care Licensing Act, if they are required to comply, "the consequences would be devastating."

Another one is from Kathleen Vestby, indicating that "increasing the regulations and restrictions for licensed childcare facilities will only worsen the current crisis."

I have another one from Fred and Leah Sacha. "Currently wait lists are long and the new regulations [for child care] will increase the lists."

One from Marcie Whalen concerning the problem of homelessness in our city and province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters I've received from 200 of my constituents calling for changes to Alberta's labour laws. The letters express strong support for such changes as first contract arbitration, full legal recognition of bargaining rights for public employees, and one labour law for all unionized workers, among other issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings today. The first two are in regard to my questions earlier today regarding electricity exports. This is a document from the National Centre for Upgrading Technology, An Integrated Energy Solution, dated September 25, 2006, Alberta Department of Energy, oil sands business unit.

My second tabling is a PowerPoint presentation from Tonbridge Power Inc. It's regarding Merchant Transmission and Wind-powered Generation: A Natural Fit? It's the background to the Montana-Alberta tie project.

My third tabling is a proposed amendment that the Official Opposition caucus asks for to the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. This is amending section 28.

My next tabling is also a proposed amendment to Bill 46. This is regarding section 29(2).

My last tabling today is also an amendment to the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. This is a proposal to amend section 91.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter to table from Mr. William Eady, who was introduced earlier, whose concern is about education, that young people are not learning how to use a

cash register, especially grades 8 and 9, so they're not ready to take up their employment with adequate training and typing skills.

Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**
head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 56
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply)
Act, 2007 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. the President of the Treasury Board I would like to move Bill 56 for second reading.

It is, of course, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (No. 2). The Committee of Supply dealt with the details of the bill on Thursday afternoon in committee. Certainly, with respect to the supply that's requested there, I think there was three hours of debate at least on Thursday afternoon with respect to the responses. I would commend the bill to the House and ask for its support.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I'm looking forward to this opportunity to begin discussions about Bill 56, the appropriation bill. I have great concerns that a number of fixed-income individuals – those on AISH, those on PDD, seniors – are not getting the subsidy and the support that's necessary for them, whether they're fortunate enough to be able to maintain an independent residence, live in an apartment, or whether they're in a long-term care or an assisted living facility.

This past spring I brought up the fact that in a 292-complex apartment the individuals there, who are primarily on fixed incomes, received an increase in their rent of 50 per cent. What that resulted in was that for one individual on AISH, who lived in a 540 square foot apartment, his rent went up to \$1,100 a month. Keeping in mind that AISH payments were \$1,050, that provided him with a great deal of hardship. That hardship that this individual faced is repeated over and over again not only for residents of this particular complex but in apartments and basement suites throughout the province.

The failure of this government to provide subsidies other than through the eviction fund does not provide the type of stability that renters, especially the most vulnerable on fixed incomes, are reliant upon. Therefore, when we're talking about Bill 56, the appropriations bill, I would hope that the government, if not now at least in the very near future, would consider giving renters some kind of predictable, sustainable support and would consider what we have long said, and that's the idea of a temporary rent cap, a sunset clause, a rent cap which would provide the predictability and the sustainability that currently isn't available. Government subsidies have gone from \$10 million to \$21 million. This continual increase in subsidies, which go directly into the landlords' bank accounts through the tenants' temporary fingers, is not sustainable, and it is not a very good usage of taxpayers' money.

2:30

I also, when it comes to Bill 56 appropriations, have concern over support for education both in terms of programming and in terms of infrastructure. There are 60 schools in Calgary alone that have

reported leaks in their roofs. There have been examples, Brentwood elementary in Calgary-Varsity, where an entire ceiling of one wing and hallway collapsed after a heavy rainfall. Previously there was evidence of collapsing tiles in the library.

What adds to the concern with regard to the collapse not only is the concern for the children who are living underneath these roofs but the fact that a number of these schools were built in the 1950s, when asbestos was one of the key components of the roof tiles. When these roof tiles are damaged and the asbestos fibres are then exposed, it's not only the children who face the risks; it's the teachers and the maintenance staff who then go into these schools to provide the repairs.

When it comes to infrastructure, again, the average age of schools in Calgary is 40 years, and the Western Canada high school in my colleague from Calgary-Currie's ward has fencing around the front of the school because of fears of the windowsills falling out. Already we've had examples, and you can see on the school where plywood has gone over what used to be windows because the windows have actually dropped out.

The repair bill for that school has gone from an initial estimate of \$32 million to well over \$60 million now, and I'm just talking about one particular city, the city of Calgary, where the combined infrastructure deficit of both the Calgary public and the Calgary separate is now well over a half a billion dollars, at \$700 million and rising. With regard to appropriations, my suggestion would be that we have the pay now/pay later concept. The longer that these infrastructure concerns are not dealt with, the greater becomes the risk to the inhabitants: in this case, the children, their teachers, and staff caretakers. There is no acceptable reason in a province that is reporting billion dollar surpluses to not invest in education infrastructure.

Another infrastructure concern I have is that with Calgary's growing population and the area that the Calgary health region supports being well over a million individuals, the ability to keep up and provide programming through the health care – and, again, I'm going to refer to the health care infrastructure – is inadequate. The cost of the southeast hospital, which has recently at least had its ground broken, rose from approximately \$500 million to well over \$1.2 billion. While I appreciate the fact that the government has maintained its commitment to the project even though the price has escalated, with proper planning this hospital would have been up and built before the General was imploded.

A similar concern with regard to the Tom Baker cancer centre, which borders my constituency. It actually falls into the constituency of my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View. The Tom Baker cancer centre is so oversubscribed that the CHR is coming up with plans on how to alleviate and provide timely cancer care, and in their desperation they've considered leasing more space at great public cost at the Holy Cross hospital. Again, this was a hospital that had \$32 million of renovations to it before it was sold to the Huang brothers at a price of a little over \$3 million.

Since that time the Calgary health region has been forced to lease space from this facility of dubious infrastructure components. We're all very well aware of the asbestos that was found in the facility. We're aware that the government in its wisdom shut down the seniors' care facilities, yet the government seems willing to consider the temporary arrangement again of going back to the Holy Cross, which should never have been sold in the first place, to provide care for cancer patients. At some point we have to invest our money wisely the first time so that we're not doing band-aid repairs and continually contracting out and leasing space that was once public.

We had in the constituency of Calgary-Mountain View the wonderful Grace hospital, that was probably among the top hospitals

for serving women in Canada. That hospital, again, was sold, and what we're left with now is scrambling to keep up with the population.

The University of Calgary, while younger than the University of Alberta, recently reached the enviable age of 41 years and celebrated that anniversary. The buildings are starting to feel the wear of that 41 years of existence. I will credit the government for the \$260 million injection into the ISEEE building, the institute for sustainable energy, environment and – it has been changed from economy to experiential learning. But that \$260 million arrived about a year and a half too late. Then to cover the costs, it was estimated by the former head of the institute, Dr. Mansell, that to provide the thousand spaces that that \$260 million was supposed to cover would now in fact require closer to \$320 million to achieve the same effect.

These ad hoc decisions and this delay in agreeing to write the cheque but then deliver that cheque so that the actual construction could take place has proved extremely costly not only at the University of Calgary, in the constituency I represent, but also at the University of Alberta. The government has recently provided money to the University of Lethbridge. It has provided money to the college in Medicine Hat. While that money is appreciated, the longer we wait and the disbursement in sort of bits and pieces as opposed to having a long-range plan are very disconcerting.

Another concern, because I represent the University of Calgary, that comes out of Bill 56 and the appropriations is the fact that for two years the government held back on increases to postsecondary tuition. Well, that cap is now gone, and students are experiencing the additional costs not only of their tuition. When you apply the costs that they're experiencing from increased rents, then it is very hard for a student not to be simultaneously studying and holding down one or two jobs. In a province with such wealth based on our current nonrenewable energy, we need to be looking forth into the future and consider the effect of not providing the education and tuition support.

2:40

Last year with Bill 40 the decision on tuition raises went from legislation into regulation, and the opportunity for the discussion of tuition increases left the floor of this House. That's why with regard to Bill 56, the appropriations bill, I want to encourage the government to recognize the investment of postsecondary institutions not only in their infrastructure but also in tuition.

I would like them to recognize that providing residences on the universities enlivens the facility. Right now the University of Calgary cannot cope with more than 8 per cent of its population in student residences on the campus. That adds the extra costs of getting to and from their basement suites, whose exorbitant rents have gone through the sky, from apartments, taking transportation. All kinds of bills are added to those students.

The government has suggested that the ideal amount of money spent on housing or accommodation or rent for an apartment should not exceed 30 per cent of an individual's wages. But whether it's the students at Mount Royal or whether it's the students at the University of Calgary, Bow Valley College, SAIT, the Alberta College of Art and Design, these students are faced with putting forward 50 to 75 per cent of the money that they manage to scrape over the summer into accommodation as opposed to directing it towards their learning, their studies, their books, and decent food.

The government needs to realize that not only do they have to spend wisely, do they have to make investments wisely, but they need to realize that we have passed the peak for conventional oil and gas. If we don't put money away at this time in a balanced approach such as the Alberta Liberals have recommended, the saving of 30 per

cent and putting that into the heritage trust fund and then creating separate endowment funds for postsecondary – we recommended that 35 per cent of the 30 per cent of nonrenewable revenue that we receive be set aside for postsecondary. We recommended that 25 per cent of that 30 per cent be set aside for infrastructure, and we've said: let's take 35 per cent of that 30 and put it into the heritage trust fund so that we could wean ourselves from this one-trick pony of oil and gas revenue so that by 2020, using the old royalty scheme, we would have \$120 billion sitting in our heritage trust fund, which would . . .

Mr. MacDonald: How much?

Mr. Chase: A hundred and twenty billion, using the old figures. That would provide us more money through interest than we're currently receiving on conventional oil and gas.

When the government is deciding on areas to invest in, I would suggest that more of the money that comes from lotteries, slots, and casinos be put into preventative programs like AADAC. Currently AADAC receives only 3 per cent of the total monies that are earned from lotteries and casinos, et cetera. Therefore, what we have is kind of a revolving door. Whether it's addiction to gambling, whether it's addiction to alcohol, addiction to drugs, the pressures of a booming economy are driving people to areas that are of great concern not only to themselves individually but to the well-being of this wonderful province as a whole. So when we look at Bill 56, the appropriations bill, I would encourage you to put more of the profits from gambling, from lotteries, back into prevention programs like AADAC, also into shelters for individuals that have ended up on the street as a result of their addictions or the mental illnesses that have arisen from the stresses placed upon their lives.

We have a wonderful opportunity, but it's an opportunity that is rapidly drawing to a close, to invest in programs such as education, such as health care, such as crime prevention as opposed to the necessary expansion of remand centres because crime prevention wasn't a primary concern.

We are fortunate, but in Alberta our good fortune, dependent solely on nonrenewable resources, has an expiry date on it. So I'm encouraging this government to look at the investments: the investments in safe roads, in schools, in health, in education, in keeping seniors in their homes as long as we possibly can, in recognizing the contributions of caregivers, whether they're ones that are contracted directly by the government or are subcontracted and, unfortunately, on a different level of wage than those working directly for the government.

Our most important resources are people, and until we recognize that people require an investment and a security, a predictability, and a sustainability, Albertans will continue to be underserved. Let's make the expenditures right the first time so that we're not having to continually remake them into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 56, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (No. 2). This is the second time around that the government has come to the Legislature to seek funds to continue funding its business by way of supplementary supply estimates. This time around the government is asking for an additional \$1.498 billion or so towards defraying the further charges and expenses of the public service, classed as expense and equipment/inventory expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, looking at the various departments and the amount

of money they are asking for by way of this bill and the supplementary supply, I note one particular department; that is, the Department of Seniors and Community Supports. While Bill 56 shows that department asking for only an additional \$15 million, the supplementary supply estimates indicate, in fact, that it will be \$25 million that the department will be putting to new uses. Of that \$25 million, \$10 million have been slashed off the budgeted amount for one particular program, the assured income for the severely handicapped program, usually known as AISH, and those \$10 million are being transferred to approved rural affordable supportive living projects.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The fact that the rural affordable supportive living projects need more money is not something that I find difficult to understand given the growing costs of housing, whether it's new housing or rental housing or whatever. The concern that I have is with the transfer of funds out of one program which is in great demand by those Albertans who use AISH program arrangements and putting it in another area of high need. What worries me is that what's happening here resembles the old adage of robbing Peter to pay Paul.

2:50

I'm reminded of various phone calls and letters that my constituency office received in the summer in the wake of exorbitant rent increases that recipients of AISH in my constituency had begun to receive, the alarm on their part and desperation expressed in their letters as to how, with the given AISH amounts that they receive under the program, they're going to be able to pay for their increased rents and at the same time pay for other necessities of life in order to live a life which is more or less living at the margin of mainstream society. With these \$10 million being transferred from the money that was potentially available to AISH recipients, I am worried that their concerns are going to become even deeper and more serious.

The presumed argument that is given for this transfer is the fact that there has not been the expected uptake in the AISH program and that the lower than budgeted rate of growth in caseloads is the reason that there was this \$10 million sitting around to be transferred to some other areas. Mr. Speaker, my concern with respect to this alleged lower than budgeted rate of growth is that I wonder if the assessment criteria have been changed and altered in order to disqualify a larger number of Albertans, a larger percentage of applicants who try to access the assured income for the severely handicapped program. I must confess that I'm not entirely sure if those assessment criteria have in fact been changed to the detriment of applicants being accepted to the program. My fear is that that may be the reason behind the lower than budgeted rate of growth in caseloads in the AISH program.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I hope that the minister and the staff responsible for the AISH program are listening and would read the comments that I'm making and will address the two concerns that I've expressed: the need to perhaps bolster the minimum payments made to AISH recipients in order to enable them to not have to cut back on their food budget and other life necessities in order to pay for the increased rents that they must pay given the housing crisis that we face; secondly, I want some assurance that the lower than budgeted rate of growth in caseloads is not due to changes in assessment criteria which make it more difficult now than was the case before this current budget was passed for people to be able to access the AISH program.

With those two concerns expressed, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and let other members speak to Bill 56. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

There being none, the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I would like to address in terms of the debate on Bill 56, I believe, is the question of school maintenance. I've talked to a number of trustees about this in the last 10 days. They're really asking the government to consider regular ongoing maintenance dollars, and they're suggesting that they would like to have it in a three-year plan so that they can plan on it, do some planning in terms of school maintenance across different parts of the province. That's one of the things that seems to be very, very important in terms of giving them some idea of when the dollars are coming and how to plan for using the dollars.

Now, in terms of my own constituency, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about roads. We have two major road considerations in St. Albert. One is referred to as the West Regional Road. The fact is that we really don't have a clear understanding as of this moment, as I understand it – I was just talking to a person from city hall this morning – as to the dollars that are going to be allotted to the West Regional Road. The main thing I'm trying to speak to here is the fact that if St. Albert has to pay the total cost of the West Regional Road, it will have a very difficult impact, an insurmountable impact, on our tax base.

The other road that we're looking forward to hearing more clearly from the government about is what we refer to in St. Albert as the Anthony Henday extension. About a month ago, maybe two months ago – I think it was in September – we had a meeting regarding this in terms of the alignment of this new road. A number of citizens from the Akinsdale, Heritage Lakes, and Grandin Park areas of St. Albert attended those meetings regarding the alignment of the road and the issues related to it such as noise, pollution, et cetera, et cetera. It was their understanding that there was input taken from them which would have some bearing on maybe adjusting the alignment of where the road went. We're anxiously waiting to hear from the government if the concerns of the citizens of the communities mentioned will be taken into consideration. So that's dealing with roads.

One of the serious situations in St. Albert is housing, housing for young people and for seniors. We have a series of apartments in St. Albert that have just got an increase of 17 per cent. I was talking to one of my constituents on the phone this morning. Her rent in St. Albert went from \$860 to \$1,010. This particular lady is a mother with one child, and 45 per cent of her salary goes for rent. The other thing about this apartment that we're talking about with this increase of 17 per cent: there are a number of people living in that apartment that work at one of our largest long-term care facilities, Youville Home. Many of those people are going to have to relook at where they're living and may have to leave St. Albert. This really quite concerns me.

There is another issue in St. Albert facing us in long-term care. We have people now in our Sturgeon hospital waiting for long-term care facilities. There is not accommodation available to them, and they're waiting for this move. As a result, some of them are required to pay after I believe it's 30 days – Bridget is gone. I think it's some period of time before they have to start paying the hospital a stipend for daily care. This whole question of not having long-term care for those people is a concern. We have the Youville Home in St. Albert, which I've already mentioned. Unfortunately, the question there is: we have accommodation, but again we don't have the staff, and certainly all those people can't fit into that type of facility. It's a big issue for us. The long-term care issue for our seniors is a big issue for us in St. Albert.

Another area of concern is our agencies, our nonprofit agencies, particularly the agencies dealing with services for persons with disabilities and another agency called Help Society, offering seniors help staying in their own homes: maintaining them, supporting them. The issue here with these nonprofit agencies, as I've mentioned, Help and services to persons with disabilities transitions, is that there's not the dollars for staffing, there's not the dollars for professional development, and dollars are not available for these people for their benefits. This is becoming a very serious problem as to if these agencies are going to be able to carry on and not only provide service but maintain their staff. In fact, Help is down to having a board with two people on it. So anybody that's retiring, like Mr. Loughheed, and willing to sit on a board in St. Albert, we'd welcome that.

3:00

Ms Pastoor: He missed your offer.

Mr. Flaherty: Yes, I know. He wasn't paying attention, and he said that he was going to listen to my speech. I'm quite disappointed.

So we're talking about nonprofit agencies needing dollars for salaries, benefits, and . . .

Ms Blakeman: Capacity.

Mr. Flaherty: Excuse me?

Ms Blakeman: Capacity. Build capacity.

Mr. Flaherty: Build capacity. Thank you.

Another area that concerns us is a school. We understand that the Protestant board is receiving the possibility of having their prayers answered for a new school. The problem is, of course: where will that school be located? The whole question of school location is, to me, paramount. At one time this school was going to be located in the Erin Ridge community. Of course, it's very significant because it was going to be dedicated to Lois Hole. The rumour has it that that placement has changed now with what we call political implications. So the question is: where will the school be located, and, again, how long will it take for that school to get started? We're reaching a crisis stage. We understand it's a P3 school. It will be interesting to hear from the government, hopefully soon. Maybe when the election is called, we'll get some insight on where they plan to put this school. Unfortunately, right now we seem to be in muddy waters.

Mr. Speaker, I've tried to touch on school maintenance. I've touched on, in St. Albert specifically, the west regional road issue in terms of dollars, the Anthony Henday extension in terms of where the alignment will be, where we'd get the information on that. I've talked about, again, the question of housing and this whole question of how we look after people that can't take these heavy increases. This has been a discussion in this House in the spring and now. People are not going to be able to live in our constituency if this continues. They just can't do it. I've talked about the long-term care issue, by the way. I think it was when the audit was done. Was it in 2005?

One of the things that is very, very sad is that the most important people, in my opinion – maybe because I am one of them – have given us yeoman's service. I'm going to be at a Christmas party with our aquacaze group. You know, we don't even have someone that could advocate for them on a day-to-day basis. I think it's so sad. Our seniors are not getting the help they need, and it's a crisis.

I see the minister of health smiling. I can tell you, Mr. Minister,

I wish you'd come out and talk to our seniors. You wouldn't smile. It's a serious matter, I'm sad to say, even when you have lots of money, sir. My good friend who is a multimillionaire can't get help for his wife. It's serious, and I'm sad about it. Money doesn't solve all the problems – that's what we're finding – because there are no people. People can't go in his home. She's so big and heavy – no disrespect to her; I love her dearly – that they can't lift her. He can't lift her anymore. He's 76 years old. Now we're trying to fight for a place, hopefully the Citadel or somewhere, for him. It's a big issue, sir, and I feel very, very badly about that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll close up. Thank you very much for allowing me to address the issues that I think are facing our good citizens of St. Albert. I appreciate it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I may be repeating some of the things that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona has said, but I think that they bear repeating. The ministry that has supplied this, Seniors and Community Supports, has transferred \$10 million from the budget for the AISH program to rural affordable supportive living. I was absolutely flabbergasted when I read that. I could not believe that this type of thing had happened, so I have to find out how on earth they could have possibly had a \$10 million surplus when people who are on AISH are suffering. They can't afford the rent, they can barely afford their food, they're living in substandard housing, yet \$10 million is taken out of their allotment.

I suspect that the changes in the intake procedures include provision for vocational assessments and medical file reviews. There really should be a formal policy and procedure to reconcile conflicts between these and the opinions of the treating physicians. This is also where there are quite a number of appeals created. Many of these appeals I think would probably just be straightforward if we didn't have these arguments between different doctors on who is eligible and who isn't eligible.

On page 4 of the AISH medical exam there's the following question: given the impact of a patient's medical condition on their activities of daily living, in your opinion what is the degree of impairment caused by the diagnosed condition? There are four choices that the physician can choose. This is where the problems occur. Varying physicians obviously have different ideas on what constitutes the activity of daily living and how that actually would transfer to the ability of someone to carry on a position in the workforce. To my knowledge there's only one program available in Canada in which disability is assessed in terms of activities of daily living, and that's the federal disability tax credit. All other plans use variations on employability to define eligibility for benefits.

Again, to my knowledge there is no reference in the AISH or regulations to the activities of daily living. There are questions about them in the medical exam questionnaire, yet they aren't in either the act or the regulations. I find that a bit peculiar.

It also would appear that this is a criteria that they're using to assess employability, and I believe that that really is quite inappropriate. I think that this is the mechanism that has been used to decrease the number accepted into the AISH program for funding. If this is the case, then no wonder they've got \$10 million in the kitty.

To call this a lower than budgeted rate of growth in caseloads and then create \$10 million to transfer out, I think is just wrong, particularly wrong when the economy, inflation, and the cost of living are so beyond the vulnerable in our society. These people often use 80 per cent of their income for rent. Yes, AISH recipients do receive health benefits. They receive child care and transporta-

tion costs. Yes, they have benefits that are over and above the actual cash payment that they get; however, these benefits are not useful to be able to pay the rent or actually buy basics like food. I find this transfer of dollars to housing to be very, very wrong. These dollars could have created a small increase and certainly indexed AISH payments.

Reviewing AISH payments every two years is probably commendable, but it really isn't acceptable because people wait year after year to find out if they get a raise if it will even remotely catch them up to what inflation is. It's not fair to keep people dangling year after year after year. Be fair. Increase it, and index it. Increasing it based on the dollars that were at least six or seven years behind in terms of their meeting inflation . . .

3:10

Ms DeLong: No. It was already brought up to date. It is brought up to date and increased every year.

Ms Pastoor: I would beg to differ with my colleague sitting on this side of the House from the opposite party. That isn't true. They are not even close to what they should have been in terms of where it was. They have not caught up to inflation. On top of that, I then want it increased, and I certainly want it indexed. I only think it's fair. If MLAs can be indexed and they never have to worry and they know that every year they're going to get an increase, then so can AISH people. They deserve it. In fact, they probably deserve it a lot more than we do.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Members, Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have a question for the Member for Lethbridge-East. I'm wondering if she is aware – and perhaps it was before her time – that there were actually a couple of groups. There was a social advocacy group from Calgary that recommended that AISH be increased from I believe it was either \$800 or \$850 up to a thousand dollars a month. Also, the AISH review committee made the same recommendation, you know, in conjunction with this advocacy group from Calgary. They made this recommendation, and the government followed it. Since then the government actually increased AISH again more – more – than the cost of inflation for the past two years since we did that major increase. I'm wondering if she's aware of that or if she has done any research or if she is just kind of making these statements off the cuff.

Ms Pastoor: Oh, I can't thank my hon. colleague for that question; I couldn't possibly thank him enough for that one. There have been three increases since 1993. May I point out that two of them were under the auspices of the former minister, Yvonne Fritz, of Seniors and Community Supports. Two of those were made under her, and there are three since 1993. A very admirable job on her part, may I point out.

Yes, they did get increases, but as I've pointed out – and I will stick to that, and, yes, I have researched it and, yes, I know what I'm talking about – the original dollars that they started with and have then been given the increase for still were behind inflation because they started way back in '93. They still really do not have the money that would reflect this economy today. No one can live on a thousand dollars and fifty a month and actually pay the rents that they have to.

The Acting Speaker: We'll move on.

Ms Blakeman: I wonder if the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has a comment or a suggestion, given the housing crisis that we're experiencing in the urban areas, where the baseline studio apartment has increased from \$550 to \$850 a month. We now have people on an AISH rate of \$1,050 who are paying \$850 for their rent, which is far away and above the 30 per cent that is recommended. Has she considered whether it's appropriate to be advocating to government that they should be increasing the AISH rate by that same \$300 a month increase that most people on AISH have experienced with their rent increase?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you for that question. Certainly, I would advocate that. I think what might be better is that there would be that rule that many subsidized housing projects go by that it's actually 30 per cent of your income that goes towards your housing. That could easily be applied to people on AISH, and it would free up that money.

I think part of the point is that, really, we don't have any kind of affordable units that these people can live in. There is no supply out there. Yes, I sat here all night saying that we should have had a temporary cap, and I use the word "temporary" because whoever puts on the temporary cap also has the power to take it off. It would be only political will. If the political will has to put it on, then the political will would be there to take off a temporary cap. In my mind, I still believe that that's one of the things that would help not only the people on AISH but the working poor that we have in this province.

Ms Blakeman: I'm just wondering if the Member for Lethbridge-East has a comment on the fact that we are in need of 7 per cent of our housing units to be wheelchair accessible. Again, a large percentage of people in the wheelchair-using community are on AISH. Some are not and have employment of their own; they still require housing that is specifically wheelchair accessible. If she has any comment on that.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, you have 30 seconds.

Ms Pastoor: No comment other than to agree that the 7 per cent is just a number that really has to be addressed. People are house-bound, people are not getting out of their houses, and, yes, we have to start keeping track of suicide rates because it's happening because of those reasons.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to a Member by Name

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I just want to caution everyone that there is a practice in this House of not referring to members by name. That has already happened three times in the last little while, so I'm just cautioning you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Debate Continued

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 56, the appropriations bill, and add my comments to concerns on this side of the House regarding the extra requests each year. It's almost become a routine, and I guess it reflects, again, on the lack of planning and the lack of recognition

that Albertans expect. They expect a budget to be followed, and they expect an investment in the future that would recognize that the resources we're so richly blessed with, that we can take no credit for having, will be gone in just a few decades. We need to do ever more careful planning and hold ourselves to account for this wonderful province and the planning and investment that's going into it and not focus so much on the short term but look at the longer term impacts of some of our decisions.

Clearly, the public in Alberta has an appetite for improved infrastructure and education and all the important services that government provides. They also have a tremendous anxiety, I think, about the future and how we're going to manage within a much more stringent budget and are looking for signs that the government has a vision for the future, is setting aside an appropriate investment in the future, as we on this side have been advocating for a number of years, and are looking to diversifying and, again, get off our addiction to fossil fuels, to move us towards a more sustainable economy and the ability to live within our means.

Increasingly Albertans are asking whether it's possible for a government to have a backbone and stand up for sustainable planning, sustainable investments, and not continue to spend as if we don't know where we're going and allow for issues like infrastructure breakdown and maintenance costs as well as the investments that are needed in issues like housing and in people. If there's one area that I hear a lot about in my constituency of Calgary-Mountain View, it's people struggling with the rising costs of living, housing among them, but other expenses including medications for seniors are a big issue, some of which is covered by Blue Cross, but a good deal of the newer drugs are not covered by Blue Cross and represent an increasing load for seniors to bear.

I'm also very concerned because I have a number of housing support institutions in my constituency that house handicapped folks who are increasingly struggling to make ends meet. The notion that \$1,050 a month is adequate to have a quality of life in Calgary is absolutely absurd. The cost of living in Calgary has gone through the roof, and it's an embarrassment to me as their MLA to say that our government only provides \$1,050 a month for you to live, of which up to two-thirds or more of that goes into basic housing.

3:20

With my other colleagues on this side of the House I look forward to the time when we'll see an indexing of the benefits to people with AISH and those who need supports for living. It's clearly the case that we have fallen way behind what the real needs of people are, and we are paying very seriously in terms of their health, mental health, physical health. They end up in the health care system if they're not adequately supported financially. It's penny wise, pound foolish in terms of not investing in people and those who care for the handicapped, the persons with developmental disabilities. Unless we start to invest more fully in those areas, we are going to have to be facing increasing health care costs and criminal costs and lack of productivity among the very people that this government says they want to be more productive. People cannot be productive if they're not secure, and in many ways we have added to their sense of shame and powerlessness through not adequately supporting these folks.

Let me say that it's also an embarrassment to me as a member of the Legislature to receive an annual cost-of-living increase when the most vulnerable in our society are not treated in the same way. I find it difficult to stand up here and proudly represent a constituency when we are not treating the most vulnerable fairly by indexing their incomes each year.

On the issue of Environment, there is a small two and a half million dollars under supplementary budgets going into Environ-

ment. It's clear to me that this department is so inadequately funded that it is no longer able to be trusted in caring for, protecting, monitoring, and enforcing the legislation that we have to protect water, air, soil, and, indeed, human health. Until we take that more seriously, I think we're going to fail Albertans in a very significant way, not only in the present but for the future.

The government has less than 1 per cent of the annual budget. It's clear that the massive growth and development projects – the complexity of these projects, the cumulative impact of these projects – are inadequately assessed under the present dispensation for Alberta Environment. If there's any department that does need a supplement, it is the Department of Environment. People in the field, both some staff that I know of and those who are out in the field as private industry and landowners, call me on a regular basis about the lack of oversight, the lack of monitoring, and the lack of enforcement.

It gives me great anxiety about the future in terms of our groundwater, where 600,000 people depend, with the growing evidence from scientists of the U of A and the U of C that there is in fact gas migration into groundwater from oil and gas resources, and it's not being addressed. In this case we've been waiting two years since the minister instituted an investigation of groundwater and gas contamination for people living in the Horseshoe Canyon formation in southeastern Alberta.

Other aspects of the Environment department that are critically underfunded: the Water for Life program, that continues to rely heavily on volunteers and lacks technical and expert scientists to advise. We have talk by the Minister of Environment about a cumulative impacts framework for three areas in Alberta, including the Industrial Heartland. There's no talk of new funding, no talk of new expertise to assess the cumulative impacts, the total impacts on a region. It's hard to believe that a new program with such demands could be initiated without new resources and expertise, but that's what we're led to believe, that they're going to institute a brand new way of assessing development, called cumulative impact assessment, without any new resources.

The whole question of groundwater assessment has been alluded to, and the government, to its credit, is investigating more of the inventory of groundwater, its location and volumes and flows and its connection to surface water. That's welcome, and that's an appropriate investment. For many of us there is a need to speed this up and to expand it. Water is the critical issue for this next decade. In that context climate change has a tremendous potential for putting us in a very compromised position economically, not to mention socially and environmentally. The in-stream flow needs have been compromised in southern Alberta, and clearly climate change is only going to add to those problems, which have arisen partly because of seasonal rainfall shortages over the last while.

So if there is any need for supplemental supply, I would strongly encourage the other side of the House to look at its totally inadequate investment in the environment. Albertans have said that that is a number one consideration, right next to health care, and it's very clear that our future depends on a much more rigorous capacity to monitor and enforce existing environmental legislation, to upgrade environmental legislation to some of the best. It could be much, much better in the world than it is. It falls short even of the United States in many respects and certainly far short in terms of its monitoring and enforcement and prosecutions, which are extremely rare in this province.

The other area that needs, clearly, more adequate government involvement is the monitoring for gas leaks. There have been increasing numbers of hydrogen sulphide exposures of people in this province. The EUB website documents roughly 800 gas leaks per

year in this province, most of them very minimal, but it reflects an increasing risk and liability that all of us sustain as a result of lack of maintenance, lack of early identification, and prevention of these leaks in the first instance. It cannot be overstated: the risk of even a tiny leak in proximity to people and animals will cause death within minutes. So these are very significant issues that a supplemental supply, if it's serious, would have to look at in terms of the future.

Those are the key comments I needed to make in supplementary supply, Mr. Speaker, relating to housing issues, AISH and the indexing of their incomes, seniors and their supports, which are progressively being eroded, and the environment and our capacity to properly monitor and implement the legislation we have for the environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I have travelled with my colleagues to areas such as Ponoka, Trochu, Stettler, Drayton Valley, and I wondered if the hon. member could comment on what we heard from so many rural individuals about concerns over coal-bed methane intrusion and whether my colleague feels that .5 per cent of the total general revenue spent on the Environment ministry is sufficient for them to be stewards of our water resources.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, this is a grossly inadequate capacity in Alberta Environment to do the technical isotope assessment of groundwater. We've been waiting two years now to get the CBM assessments on groundwater. There's indication from scientists that there is migration into groundwater but no action and no communications about that. It's clear that it's a very serious concern and a threat to our rural folks. Rightly they're concerned about getting to the bottom of this with an independent assessment.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. When we met with members of the town of Nanton and the Pekisko Group about concerns over Compton's well proposal and fracking, did you share their concerns about the lack of their ability to intervene in the process for the drilling of that well that could affect the town's water supply and that of all the ranchers along the southeast slopes? Do you believe that Bill 46 will improve the appeal process, or will it further limit their availability to ask needed questions?

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, we're dealing with Bill 56, not 46. Go ahead.

Dr. Swann: Within the context of Bill 56 I think what we're talking about here is where we're spending extra money and are we seriously considering investments in what is going to be a long-term threat to not only the environment but to human health? I would definitely agree that the definition of directly affected needs to be expanded. It does not look like it's going to be expanded this session, and that is going to create increasing anxiety and anger in the rural area about the future.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, with Bill 56, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (No. 2), we're looking at, as they say, considerable ka-ching, and we first must look, whenever we are examining this bill in detail, at the estimates in supplementary supply. It's interesting to note that there were not only the estimates for expenditures, but there was a reallocation of previously approved estimates.

When we look at what happened in the Department of Agriculture and Food, we see that from the middle of October of this year the government, of course, announced the \$165 million farm recovery plan, a new financial assistance program to assist livestock farmers with rising fuel and feed and fertilizer costs. Benefits under this plan will be distributed by the Alberta Agriculture Financial Services Corporation using CAIS, Canadian agricultural income stabilization, program data and processes. Funding to the corporation for the plan will be provided using a portion of the department's \$62 million-plus that lapsed in crop insurance premiums and the entire \$135 million that was lapsed in its CAIS program. That is interesting, and I think we should note that because, certainly, Agriculture and Food has not been listed under the schedule here to receive additional monies under Bill 56, and one can only hope that that money – it's a significant amount – is well managed and goes to those who need it and fit the program criteria.

Now, there's also a reallocation of previously approved estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, and there is a surplus of money that is going to provincial highway systems and safety and also to Crown-owned facilities for preservation, \$20 million. Now, as I understand it from this information, Mr. Speaker, this is due to a decrease in anticipated natural gas rebates, and the voted authority on that was \$137 million, which remains unused. Of this amount \$22.6 million is being reallocated to provide for these capital maintenance and renewal projects. Now, I don't know where the rest of that money is going.

Not the past weekend but the previous weekend I had an opportunity to visit the project in Riverdale, a house being constructed that, actually, if everything works out – and I'm confident that it will – will have extra energy that possibly could be put into the electrical grid.

Mr. Liepert: For export. You could export it.

Mr. MacDonald: It's not for export. The hon. Minister of Education should be very careful before he promotes this government's plan on electricity exports. I can understand why the Minister of Education gets nervous whenever energy issues come up because the government's handling of any number of energy-related matters has been scandalous, to say the least, and I'm going to get to that in a minute, Mr. Speaker, with the Department of Energy.

Why some of this money in the natural gas rebate program – and the Alberta Liberals have been talking about this for a couple of years – could not be used to encourage more projects like the one in Riverdale, which is going to be very energy efficient, is beyond me. Conservation is a large part of the solution to our increasing energy use, but it seems to be lost on this government. Whenever they hear about conservation, I don't know what they think about, Mr. Speaker.

However, the Department of Energy: over \$3 million allocated here, but \$2 million of that, I believe, is going to be used to implement the royalty review program. Yes, \$2 million is to begin implementation of Alberta's new royalty framework. Now, I would like to know how much of that \$2 million is being used to deal with

the Suncor and Syncrude issue around their orders in council that were issued, again in secret, behind closed doors, by this government over 10 years ago, these orders in council that provided these special deals for Syncrude and Suncor, and if any of this money is going to be used to try to resolve these issues with these two corporate enterprises.

As I understand it, there's a bit of a rush on this because, initially, it was thought that this matter could be concluded by December 31, just like the implementation of Bill 46, which, as I understand it, if the bill goes forward, is going to be implemented on January 1. Now, I know you've got the \$500-an-hour guy hired to head up the implementation team, but that gentleman is probably going to have to work a lot of overtime, Mr. Speaker, in the month of December to get that project done.

The Crown agreements. How is all of this going to work for Syncrude and Suncor? Is any of this money going to be used to hire outside legal help to try to get around this? We know that this is an important issue, and we know that it's a complex issue. I would just like to know if any of that money is being used for that matter.

Also, is any of that money being used to resolve the issue over bitumen pricing? The Hunter report states, "Let the markets decide" appears unlikely to resolve this issue in the best interests of Albertans." Now, we both know, the panel and both sides of the Legislative Assembly, that the bitumen valuation methodology has been under discussion for quite some time with this government, but the Hunter panel thought that this issue should be resolved. Now, again I'm going to quote, Mr. Speaker.

A permanent, generic "bitumen valuation methodology" (BVM) applicable to all calculations requiring such a value, used by all participants in the exploitation of Alberta's bitumen resources where a bitumen price needs to be calculated, should be put in place by 30 June 2008. It would replace all current or intended uses of temporary BVMs and alternatives to the permanent BVM would not be allowed.

In very strong terms, the Panel recommends that a truly independent, unconflicted, world-renowned and highly experienced advisor be hired to consult widely, consider relevant international practices and then develop a permanent BVM, or bitumen valuation methodology.

3:40

Now, is this what part of the 2 million bucks is going to be used for? This is a very, very important issue, and I don't think it's good to deal with this behind closed doors. I'm not convinced that this government wants to deal with the issue of the bitumen valuation methodology. They've been working at it for quite some time unsuccessfully for whatever reason. Some of the producers of oil sands that appeared before the committee had a lot to say, as does Mr. Hunter and his panel, regarding this whole issue of bitumen valuation. In light of the time – and that's only seven months – is any of the money being used to deal with that? Also, with the \$2 million are there any calculations being done to determine exactly how the government's proposed oil sands royalty program is going to work?

I had the pleasure, Mr. Speaker – and I almost felt like I should have to pay something to attend. One of the panel members, Professor André Plourde, conducted a lecture in the basement of the Faculty of Business over at the U of A last Friday afternoon. Quite frankly, I was surprised to look around and not see any of my colleagues in attendance, particularly from the government side. I thought there would be at least two or three, if not four or five, of them over there with pens and notepads in hand getting advice from the good professor. Now, maybe there was an agent sent there. I don't know what goes on with agents these days, if the government or government agencies . . .

An Hon. Member: A spy.

Mr. MacDonald: There could have been a spy there. It wouldn't surprise me with this government. They laugh, but possibly that may have been how the information, if it did get back to the Department of Energy and the minister, got there. Or they could pick up the local newspaper the following day and read an interesting account of Professor Plourde's presentation.

The professor had a lot of questions, a lot of very good questions, about how this royalty rate would be calculated and whether it would be calculated on a credit or a deduction. I would strongly urge this government, if necessary, to use part of this \$2 million supply budget to maybe get some more advice from the professor. Maybe he'll give it to you for free, but his information is very sound. If he were to say, "Well, I need a few dollars for my time," I couldn't object to that. You're paying 500 bucks to a fellow to implement Bill 46. Surely, it would not be unreasonable if this gentleman asked to at least be provided with a modest sum for his time because we could collect, if we were to listen to this gentleman, I think, additional revenues for the resource owners of this province.

As the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has pointed out, we could really make our heritage savings trust fund something special with millions and millions of dollars in it. The public is finally waking up to the fact that the current government has done a very, very poor job of looking after their heritage savings trust fund.

Also, perhaps if it's not suitable for this government to go over to the university and talk to Professor Plourde, maybe they could go to PricewaterhouseCoopers with this \$2 million. Did I hear the hon. Minister of Justice say that \$2 million wouldn't be enough? No, I didn't hear that. Oh, dear.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Just a question to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Mr. Speaker, on the matter of the \$500 per hour consultant. I think it was to the Minister of Energy you were talking, and it was regarding bitumen. Would you prefer, hon. member, that there be a boilermaker or an operating engineer there? Which would you choose?

Mr. MacDonald: I would have to say that the operating engineer would be asking for a lot more money than the boilermaker, and I'm not convinced that he would do a lot more work.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? Any other speakers?
Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the President of the Treasury Board to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 56 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 9

Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my understanding that you do have the amendments that I will be tabling. If you could go ahead and pass those out, it would be great.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the amendments that are being proposed are being circulated, and we shall refer to them as amendment A1.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. May I go ahead?

The Deputy Chair: No. Just a minute.
You may proceed now.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment that is being put forward is a very minor amendment. It applies to a situation where employers have their employees living in a work camp. The proposed amendment expands the exemption to independent contractors who also stay in those work camps and who are providing services to the business. It is sometimes the case that a business, for example, operating in a remote location will hire both employees and independent contractors to work in this business. This exemption will put them both on the same footing. The other amendment clarifies that the work camp exemption does not apply to hotel operators who hire a contractor and provide a free room for the service. In those situations, the room is subject to a tourism levy.

3:50

Mr. Chairman, I also want to raise a few of the other issues that were brought up in second reading. First of all, when it comes to overcharges, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had commented about the number of overcharges. In fact, there were only a couple of these cases, and the amounts overcharged in both of these cases were less than \$1,000. There were also some cases where operators charged purchasers who had stayed in the room for more than 28 days, which obviously they're not entitled to. What Bill 9 does is allow those operators to be compelled to refund the overcharge to the customer or to remit it to Alberta Finance, which at the moment it does not.

There was a question about administrative costs. The annual costs for the tourism levy program are estimated at around \$200,000. System operating and maintenance costs cannot reasonably be estimated. They are not really that significant.

The other question that was brought up was about performance measures. Mr. Chairman, Travel Alberta has several performance indicators. First of all, there are five objectives: number 1, to increase awareness of Alberta as a tourism destination in all markets; number 2, increase and diversify tourism product marketing in primary geographic markets; number 3, expand and improve the market readiness and marketing capacity of Alberta industry operators; number 4, provide timely, accurate, and comprehensive travel planning information to customers; and number 5, collect, package, and distribute tourism data and market intelligence to the tourism industry. Mr. Chairman, included under these are 14 specific performance measures that support these objectives, which include things like total number of inquiries to Travel Alberta and so on.

There was also a comment about the Leitch report. Mr. Chairman,

the Leitch report looks at the governance of Travel Alberta whereas this amendment act proposes only administrative changes and improves clarity and compliance within the industry and does not deal with governance.

Mr. Chairman, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007, is before you, and I move the amendments as circulated. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the sponsoring member for clarifying some of the questions that were put on the record by members of my caucus previously.

Essentially Bill 9, Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007, is a housekeeping bill that seems to be trying to keep pace with the times. Clearly, the government listens very carefully to the Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association. I'm sure they'll turn up on one of our lobbyist registry lists right away quick here because they seem to talk and be very persuasive in getting the government to put in the changes that they're asking for. The industry does seem quite happy with this bill.

I know that when we first talked about this tourism levy, we had been raising concerns about how that would be affecting those that were in the work camps, and we were talking about the increasing number of them that we're seeing in the province. So the amendments that are being brought forward here appear to continue to protect those who are in a work camp situation or are getting lodging as a result of work in remote locations. Maybe I can put it that way as well.

At this time I believe that this tourism levy is functioning pretty well. We've had a significant amount of money returned to the tourism, marketing, and development fund. I sure hope that's being used to bring more people into Alberta. I'm sure it is.

Again, I thank the minister for providing answers to the most vexatious of our questions, which was primarily about the small operators being charged more in a fine than they seem to be for the original. So I appreciate that.

At this point I am happy to give our okay to Committee of the Whole for Bill 9. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Now, I'm just looking at the consolidated financial statements from 2005-06 and the tourism levy, the hotel tax. We've seen in 2005 a \$61 million amount and a \$58 million amount collected in 2006. I realize this is primarily a housekeeping piece of legislation, but the hon. member alluded to the purpose of this money. I'm just curious, with the expansion of the cabinet, if any of the money that has been collected in this is being used for tourism promotion here. It's the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw who is the associate minister of tourism, parks, and culture and something. Is any of the money here being used to fund that office? That would be one question. The second question would be: is any of this money dedicated to the Olympics in 2010 in Vancouver?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Currently, the associate minister's office is not funded by this tourism levy. It is purely for projects within Alberta and is utilized as such.

The Deputy Chair: Any others?

Are you ready for the question on amendment A1?

Mr. Backs: Mr. Chair, just a point of information or a clarification. I can ask a question on this amendment?

The Deputy Chair: We are at committee stage. You can do that.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. I just saw this, Mr. Chairman. A question to the minister on section A2(a)(vi).

(B) is not in the business of selling lodging, in a work camp that is owned by the employer or managed by or on behalf of the employer.

The practice that I've seen quite often is that there will be those types of situations where, for example, Suncor will own their main camp. There will be other situations where, for example, PTI will manage a camp for Albion. But there may be other situations as well where they are, in fact, work camps that are deemed commercial camps that are not at all in any way for tourism and that are in a situation where they are sometimes taking people for a week or two or for the short term for contractors that are not managing that camp. Would those fall under this provision?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Those camps that have occupants under 28 days would be required to pay the tourism levy. If they are over 28 days, they would not be required to pay the tourism levy. This covers a situation where an employer owns a camp and is having private contractors working on that particular project so that the private contractors can stay there and not pay the camp. But there are some commercial camps, as the hon. member has alluded to, which in essence and in reality are a variation on a hotel. They will have to pay the tourism levy unless the person is there for longer than 28 days.

Mr. Backs: Just another question or comment to the same minister. There's a very large industry in terms of shutdowns in this province, most of which actually employ people for less than 28 days. They may have as many as 4,000, 5,000, and 8,000 tradesmen on these shutdowns, which encompass the shutting down of a plant for debottlenecking, for annual maintenance, for fixing up certain projects. Contractors come in on behalf of these employers come and live in these camps. Would these employees be exempt?

Dr. Oberg: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

4:00

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else wish to speak on the bill itself? Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 9 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 11
Telecommunications Act Repeal Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West I would like to offer a few comments at the committee stage on the Telecommunications Act Repeal Act. This act received first reading during the spring session and second reading during the fall session and is now being considered for Committee of the Whole.

The Telecommunications Act was proclaimed in 1988 to regulate the operations of two public organizations, Alberta Government Telephones and Edmonton Telephones. Mr. Chairman, the reason I'm asking for this act to be repealed is because both of these organizations no longer exist as corporate entities. Furthermore, the regulation of all telecommunication companies remains under federal jurisdiction through the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'll be extremely brief. I realize that Bill 11 is strictly housekeeping, but I just wanted to get on the record that I miss the idea of government-regulated, publicly owned companies, such as Alberta Government Telephones. I miss the regulated services and the stability that organizations like AGT provided. I miss the same type of reliability, sustainability, predictability, and influence of the government, whether it be on water suppliers or telephones.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

In other words, governments in the past and in other provinces adjoining us continue to be in control of their public utilities and consider the greater good. While this Bill 11 is moving us to our current state, I just want to sort of bemoan the historic fact that public utilities are no longer regulated, controlled, supported, and as sustainable as they once were under the government's auspices.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to speak very briefly to Bill 11, Telecommunications Act Repeal Act. This certainly is a bill that reminds one of the history of the privatization drive that this government adopted and pushed forward with in the '90s and, in the process, left lots of roadkill.

AGT, Alberta Government Telephones, was one of the most successful public utilities. It was sold, and I think that in terms of the quality of service provided by its successor, which is a private unregulated utility, there has been a decline in that service. Lots of people complain about the way that one of these companies that replaced it, Telus, has not been upfront in terms of charges that it introduces once in a while, which people have to then object to. They can only read their bills and find out that if they don't buy this or that as part of this service, they will be charged. There's a question of the transparency of the business practices of this private company that replaced this wonderful, publicly built, publicly regulated, and publicly owned utility that Albertans once had. The revenues that it generated for the public treasury were quite considerable.

While this bill is housekeeping, the repeal of the act is to finally bury AGT for good from the records and the statutes of this province. It is regrettable, but it's history.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 11?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? It's carried.

Bill 24
Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've had some very good debate on this bill so far, and I'm looking forward to the conclusion of that debate.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I second the member's comments. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie waxed eloquent in second reading of the bill and provided the House, as I previously mentioned, with a fantastic in-service. The questions were answered in a very forthright manner, extremely knowledgeable, and concerns over property were dealt with. I, too, support the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and wish to get on with our next process.

Thank you.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Chairman, I also echo the statement and the position that's expressed by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity. The NDP caucus is in support of this bill. I think the bill does update the language and identifies ways to investigate suspected fraud or mishandling of mortgage transactions. Legislative changes include, of course, a criminal record check as a prerequisite for real estate agents, mortgage brokers, and appraisers who wish to be licensed. I think this is certainly a move in the right direction given the overheated real estate market and all kinds of fly-by-night types who want to enter it as agents to take advantage of that market by buying and selling. The changes in the language and the legislative ability to investigate suspected mishandlings is a good thing. We are supportive of the bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 24, Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

4:10

Bill 23
Unclaimed Personal Property and
Vested Property Act

The Chair: Are there any amendments, comments, or questions with regard to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm doing the cleanup batting for today. I just wanted to recognize, as I mentioned with Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007, that questions and concerns had been covered, such as if a property title was transferred and then there seemed to be confusion as to the ownership five years into the process, it would revert back to the original title and an individual's proprietary rights would not be lost.

I, again, commend the government and thank you for the thoroughness in which Bill 23 was debated and for the answers provided.

The Chair: Are there others?

Dr. Pannu: I'll be very brief, Mr. Chairman, again. The bill, I think, certainly has our support. It outlines policies and procedures over unclaimed properties and vested properties while at the same time repeals the Ultimate Heir Act. The bill outlines how unclaimed private properties and vested properties are to be dealt with. For unclaimed properties the bill certainly outlines the rights and responsibilities of the holder of the land in dealing with the owner of the land and regulations set out when the land is considered unclaimed.

All of these provisions, Mr. Chairman, are quite unproblematic. We have no problem with the provisions of this bill, so it has our support. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move to adjourn debate on Bill 23.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2
Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you very much. I cannot guarantee the speed with which the other bills were passed because there is controversy associated with the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. Part of that controversy relates back to Bill 1, the lobbyists registry act. The purpose of Bill 1 was to increase the transparency of the lobbying process, but Bill 2 after the fact contradicts some of that transparency. Under Bill 1 the government is not necessarily obliged to reveal to whom they are initiating the contact. On our first discussions of Bill 1 the sort of phrase I used was that if the government comes courting, there's no reporting.

We're very aware that there are so many individuals who were

appointed to boards and committees, whether it's the Energy and Utilities Board or whether it's a local health region. Without having elected individuals, who are the true representatives of the people who they've been elected to represent, then there is the potential for conflict of interest because of the old expression: you can't serve two masters. An individual who is appointed to a board by the government to represent the interests of the public is in a conflict of interest because: to whom do they report? The government. Who pays their salary? The government. Who are they expected to represent? The people. As such, there is a conflict.

It concerns me that we had the brief experiment with elected health regions. After a period of only nine months the government decided that there was just a little bit too much public contribution going on at board meetings and that the people who were elected did not necessarily represent the wishes and intent of the government. So after a brief sortie into the world of elected health boards, that ended.

In terms of elected boards I can't help but remember in the late '90s the firing of the entire Calgary public board. The individual who was the chairperson of that board at that time has now received the Conservative nomination. While that individual has worked very hard for a number of ethnic organizations and supports, it concerns me that the individual who was elected by the constituents basically called the then Minister of Education and indicated to that minister that in her opinion the board was dysfunctional. Therefore, the entire board, the elected members of the Calgary board of trustees, at that point were fired.

I would suggest that that was very much a conflict of interest, that the Education minister overrode the rights and responsibilities of a duly elected board that had very successfully managed at that point an over \$500 million budget, basically firing some individuals over allegations of note passing and considering that this was a dysfunctional board because there were divisive factions within that board. But despite those factions they were able to carry out the trusteeship that the people of Calgary had elected them to do. This is just one more indication of a conflict of interest.

What we need to be having is the best person for the job, and that best person for the job, whether it's on a board or a committee, should be reviewed in an elected fashion. Let the individuals – the electors, the voters – and the democratic rights of Albertans be recognized. Let them hear from the various candidates. Let them have a say in the decision that is made as opposed to strictly a government appointment.

In terms of conflicts of interests, I had and continue to have respect for a former Finance minister who recently received a government appointment. Given the rency of that appointment, I am not sure that the year-long aspects took place. There are just too many sweet deals going on. It seems that there's a board or a committee chair or some kind of an appointment for just about everybody that at one point served this government in some fashion or another, whether they were elected to serve or whether they worked within the ministries, and that is definitely a conflict of interest.

4:20

The individual whom I've replaced in Calgary-Varsity, former Energy minister Murray Smith, cost Alberta taxpayers \$500 million because he single-handedly decided that they should be paying for the transmission lines that formerly provided the service and continue to provide the service primarily for industry, that the taxpayers should be on the bill for half a billion dollars' worth in private transmission lines. For that act and for his warming comments of "If you're cold and you don't like the price of gas, put

on a sweater,” based on that resumé, the individual was promoted to a very plum position in Washington, DC.

Now, I don’t dispute the idea of having a trade office in Washington, DC, but the candidate who receives that position should be able to demonstrate a tremendous understanding of international relations. They should have a background in diplomacy. Simply finding a cozy, cushy job in a Washington appointment because they had a former Conservative connection is not acceptable.

Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007, doesn’t go nearly far enough in resolving the current and past conflicts of interest. I know several of my caucus colleagues would like to address other concerns with regard to conflicts.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Today is the second opportunity the House gets to talk to Bill 2 in Committee of the Whole, and I appreciate the opportunity to participate.

As I said yesterday, I sat on the first committee which studied the Conflicts of Interest Act, the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, in 2006, and then this year I also served as the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Government Services, which was tasked with the job to review Bill 2 and to solicit input and feedback from stakeholders and interested members of the public. We did that, and we issued a report, Mr. Chairman, as you know, and the recommendations contained in the report appeared before the House yesterday in the form of an amendment. That amendment was comprised of four parts, which were all passed yesterday, and I’m pleased about this.

Today we’re talking about the bill itself after it was amended by the committee. I think that overall, Mr. Chairman, I have to start by saying that I am quite pleased with the progress that has been achieved both in the House and in the committee. Bill 1 and Bill 2 are very important to the endeavour to renew democracy in this province. We all know that the Alberta government has been criticized on numerous occasions for failing to deliver on their promise to be open and accountable. The Alberta Liberal caucus, even in the 2004 campaign, when we were all candidates, advocated three things. We advocated for a lobbyist registry. We advocated for a revamping or strengthening of our conflicts of interest laws. The third thing, which hasn’t happened yet: we wanted a whistleblower protection mechanism to be put in place to protect whistleblowers, should they come across any wrongdoing, in coming forward and to not fear for their jobs and not fear for their employment or employability. I would say that this is two down, one to go in terms of our major democratic renewal initiatives.

One of the other ones would be to strike a citizens’ assembly to engage citizens in the dialogue with respect to proportional representation or some form of proportional representation and so on. So two initiatives are before the House: the lobbyist registry, Bill 1, the conflicts of interest act, Bill 2, and I have to say that I am quite pleased with the progress both in committee and in this House.

Now, let me recount a discussion we had in the committee, Mr. Chairman, whereby I actually moved a motion in the committee to strengthen a good act even more, to make it even better by extending the cooling-off period to senior political staff and deputy ministers and people like that in those capacities from the current proposed six months in the act to 12. This was done in the proper legislative fashion. It was basically moved by myself in the committee, and members of the committee had the opportunity to debate it back and forth, and then we had a vote. To my pleasure – and it was something that I felt was really reassuring as it’s an all-party committee

– members from all sides of the House agreed that this was actually a good move and that we would better increase that cooling-off period from the proposed six months to 12 to make it, you know, in line or uniform with what we’re doing with former ministers, for example.

Now, why are we doing this? Well, I know, Mr. Chairman, and you know that we’re doing this because people who have either held ministerial posts or people who worked with ministers, like chiefs of staff, like executive assistants, like deputy ministers, have a lot of inside information. We feel that it would actually give them an unfair advantage if shortly after they leave that post, they come back as a lobbyist and have the ear of government because these are the same colleagues and the same people they worked alongside, that they had many dealings with, that they had many interactions with. They probably worked in the same office space or, you know, shared elevator rides or water cooler talks. They know these people, and they’re using that information to further the interest of someone out there who is hiring or contracting that person to lobby his former colleagues, his former employees and subordinates in some cases to get stuff done for that entity that’s out there. So we felt that by, first, sending the message and, second, actually doing it, we are definitely moving in the right direction. I was really, really pleased that the committee in its wisdom actually agreed with the direction of that motion. It was voted for, and it was adopted. It was accepted.

Now, one week later, because the committee had not finished yet, my hon. colleague from Calgary-Bow came along and introduced a motion that basically rescinded the earlier motion. While I am not an authority on parliamentary practice, Mr. Chairman, I think that in my three years here I have learned a thing or two about parliamentary procedure. I checked *Marleau and Montpetit*, for example, and there is a clause – I can’t remember which page in particular – that basically talks about the fact that this is a practice that is frowned upon. When a motion is adopted by the House, you don’t come right away and reverse it immediately thereafter. Granted, it was a proper motion – the motion in its language and its content was proper – and there was another vote. The composition on the committee had changed, and the vote was reversed, so today I am willing to reintroduce my motion in the form of an amendment, Mr. Chairman. It was tabled with the table officers yesterday, and I will wait for the pages to distribute it, and then we’ll get the discussion going in this House.

4:30

The Chair: We will just give the pages a moment to distribute it. We will label this amendment A2.

I believe you may proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I think that part of *Marleau and Montpetit* was in chapter 19, talking about committees of the House. I think that basically, in layman’s terms, it was talking about the fact that no negative motion should be adopted immediately after a positive motion. So if you’re asking the House or the committee to do something, another motion should not be presented to negate it in effect or in language.

Anyway, regardless of the fact, today we have an amendment before the House, and the amendment is doing two things. It’s basically amending two sections. In section 22 subclause 32.1(1) modifies that six months to 12 months. That first part is on page 14, talking about former political staff. It basically extends the cooling-off period from six months to 12. Then the second section is on page 21 in section 30 on section 23.1(2), again, for deputy ministers extending it to 12 months from six.

Now, Mr. Chairman, let me reassure you. I am not attempting to restrict anybody’s employability after they leave office. I’m not

jeopardizing their right to seek work, to seek meaningful employment, to make tons of money should they choose. What I'm saying here is that the only restriction we're placing on them is a time restriction, that they cannot act as a lobbyist and use that inside information for the duration that is stipulated here. I'm not saying they can't go work for another department in government. I'm not saying that they can't work for private business, that they can't start their own business, and so on and so forth.

What I'm saying is: why are we so worried about some deputy minister or some executive assistant to a minister or chief of staff for the Premier, for example, after they leave their post, that they absolutely have to become lobbyists and they absolutely have to come and lobby within six months? Why is that? I don't think it's sending the right message, and I think anything we do in this House to tighten that law and to make people out there more comfortable and make us more transparent to those people out there is an advisable move. Again, nothing in here to restrict their employment: it's just basically restricting one activity that they cannot engage in before 12 months have elapsed.

I have to remind everybody that it was adopted by the committee, and the committee was an all-party committee. We had the discussion in the committee. I was really dismayed that that other motion came one week later, and it was actually reported in the media, too. People were puzzled. How come a good committee, a good group of people working together, has agreed to do something and then it was reversed just because the composition has varied from one week to the next? It was basically something that I felt a bad taste after in my mouth.

So an amendment before the House. I encourage all my hon. colleagues to support it, but should they choose not to, I really would like to hear why. What is the rationale that we have to go out of our way to protect people's right and ability to become lobbyists right after six months have elapsed? I think 12 months is not an unfair request and not an unfair restriction, and I honestly hope that members will show that progressivity today and adopt that amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on the amendment before the House, amendment A2. I was also pleased to have had the opportunity to take part in those policy field committees that considered bills 1 and 2. I found that the exchanges and the discussions and the debates in those committees were very helpful. They were frank. We engaged each other in good faith and came to some interesting conclusions that reflected a broad-based consensus across party lines on some important issues related to bills 1 and 2.

I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has summarized my feelings as well with respect to the rescinding of some of the decisions that the committee had made just a few days prior, the recommendations to amend the bill to make the provisions for the ministers and the political staff not to be able to engage in lobbying activities in relation to departments or in government entities for which they had worked prior to their retirement. A 12-month period seemed quite reasonable. If they're reasonable for ministers, we thought it's equally reasonable, if not more so, for senior deputy ministers and political staff. In fact, the senior political staff and deputy ministers and others get paid very well, so I didn't think that it was asking too much for the political staff and the senior ministry officials to be included in the provisions in the bill which would prevent them from being able to lobby vis-à-vis the departments they had served in.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman, one of the submissions that the Standing Committee on Government Services received was from the Sheldon Chumir foundation. That bill notes that the cooling-off period for ministers in the federal act is five years. We think that we needed to go farther. But at least the bill as it was considered by the committee was, we thought, a move in the right direction. So we tried to address the minor problem that we had with that exemption for the senior ministry officials and the political staff and to make it identical to the prohibitions that the bill intends to apply to the activities of ministers. I was very disappointed that the decision that had been made in its wisdom by the committee after full deliberation was quickly reversed within days after the committee made its first decision.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung raised issues about the procedural propriety of it. I'm not sure where to go with it. But I think it's a matter that perhaps needs to be addressed more clearly both by Parliamentary Counsel staff and by the committees in future so that we can clarify the procedures that we want to be guided by and be bound by. There was some confusion as to whether a motion passed two days ago or three days ago could be reversed so quickly by the same committee. It seemed to me a rather arbitrary use of the procedures at the time. But we are new committees, and I'm willing to give some leeway for us to have time so that we can find the right procedures and/or follow procedures well established and that seem to have done well in other jurisdictions so that we don't engage in a similar exercise again.

Mr. Chairman, I had prepared the exact same amendments that have been brought before us, so I am pleased to support amendment A2, introduced by the Member for Edmonton-McClung, which is identical to the amendment that I had also approved from the Parliamentary Counsel. With that, I'll take my seat and hope other members will have opportunity to speak to the amendment as well.

Thank you.

4:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise to join debate on the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize his contributions through the all-party committee to the work in examining Bill 2 very, very carefully and making some definite improvements with respect to the bill, which have already been accepted as amendments to the bill before the House.

Bill 2 proposes a six-month cooling-off period for the Premier's chief of staff or deputy chief of staff, for the head of the Premier's southern Alberta office, as well as executive assistants to ministers. Certainly, there were some members of the standing committee who felt that these officials should be subject to a full one-year cooling-off period. Indeed, I was in favour of that proposal as well. However, as the hon. member and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona have mentioned, there was a motion put by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, and upon reflection the majority of the committee agreed that six months was a more appropriate time period for that cooling-off or postemployment provision.

However, Mr. Chairman, I would say that there is no perfect time. There's no magic formula for a cooling-off period. A cooling-off period is a restriction in postemployment activities. As I stated in the report of the select special committee, the appropriate length of a cooling-off period is a question of judgment and balance. The right of the former employee to obtain gainful employment after leaving elected office is certainly a consideration. Desirability of

encouraging interchange between the public and the private sector is another consideration which was brought to our attention during our deliberations and the need to encourage qualified and successful people to public service. All of these factors mitigate for shorter cooling-off periods.

On the other hand, the reality or the perception that former officials may use inside information or close contacts to improperly benefit themselves or their employers or their clients mitigates for longer postemployment restrictions. Unlike ministers, however, policy officials do not have automatic transition allowance of three months per year of service, and I respect the fact that a majority of the members of the committee felt that the six-month period strikes a good balance between avoiding conflict of interest and the need to attract and retain good public servants. I think that all members can appreciate, as the committee did, that a fine balance is required here. While it is not the decision that I would have made, I'm prepared to support it in the interests of democracy and moving forward with the good parts of this bill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I have been listening to the discussion on amendment A2 to the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. I would urge all hon. members of this House to consider supporting the amendment in section 22 as proposed, to increase, essentially, the cooling-off period from six months to 12 months, and also in section 30 as well, which deals with the Public Service Act.

If we are to look at the three basic principles of the Conflicts of Interest Act – public disclosure, independent ethics commissioner, and rules for public office holders – this certainly would fall into all of that and more. When we consider that if we are to improve the integrity in government and in politics, I think this is worth while and certainly has merit. If we look at other suggestions that have been made over the years and what the committee has done in the recent past, then this is an amendment that I would encourage all hon. members to support.

It's interesting to note with this bill that, you know, the current time period as proposed is six months. This is regarding the dealings with government by former political staff members. Many of the former political staff members are members of whichever respective party is in power. In Alberta here, Mr. Chairman, for the last 36 years it's been the Progressive Conservative Party, so this is not an extraordinary request. I think this is fair.

We look at, for instance, ourselves, Mr. Chairman. If we were to have a cabinet minister that did not resign but for one reason or another – and I'm not going to get into this – was removed from cabinet, let's say at the middle of November, and they carried on their duties as an MLA until the middle of December, perhaps the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill could clarify this for me: does the six-month cooling-off period for that person start with their resignation from cabinet or their resignation from this Assembly?

There are a number of things that confuse me with this legislation, and that certainly would be one of them. What exactly is that cooling-off period for a cabinet minister who is removed or resigns from cabinet and then a month or two later resigns his or her seat? What is the cooling-off period? How is that determined? Is it six months from the resignation from cabinet or the resignation from the House?

With that, I would in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, encourage all hon. members to please have a close look at amendment A2 and consider supporting it. I think to increase these time frames from six

months to 12 months will go a long way to restoring public confidence in the whole political process. I'm not going to get into the long list of people who, in my opinion, have been not in violation of the act, because the act is too broad and too general, but have left one form of employment or another with the government and taken up another form of employment that certainly would not be suitable. I think if we strengthen this conflict of interest legislation, we're all better off.

Thank you.

4:50

Dr. Brown: Mr. Chairman, I may be able to clarify for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar the point which he raised, which is with respect to the application of the cooling-off period to ministers. Nothing has changed in that regard except for the time period which is proposed in Bill 2, which would extend it from six months to 12 months.

The purpose of that cooling-off period is to ensure that the minister in question does not take undue advantage of the special knowledge or the contacts that they've had in their position as a minister of the Crown. In that regard, I can advise that the cooling-off period would begin to run from the time at which they ceased to hold office as a minister regardless of whether or not they continued to be a member of the House. Of course, there aren't any cooling-off periods which apply to members at large in the House. They only apply to ministers of the Crown and now the policy officials which are stipulated in Bill 2.

Mr. MacDonald: I would just like to thank the hon. member for that explanation. I appreciate it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to make some brief remarks on this amendment A2 to the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. Everything that has been said by my other colleagues is certainly correct. We all sat on the same committee, and I believe that it really was a good process to have the all-party committee. However, this little manoeuvre disappointed me because up to that point it looked like we were all working together, sort of leaving party colours at the doors, so to speak.

I'm still puzzled. I just found that the complete reversal within one week, using different people on the committee, was very, very interesting; in fact, probably quite odd. It almost appeared to be staged, and then it was done, probably before we really thought about it. It just sort of appeared to be that, obviously, there was something going on in a different arena, and it really wasn't going on in the open committee. So I am disappointed about the process, the way this particular six months to 12 months has been reversed.

I think everything else has been covered, but I do believe that this should be approved by the House, which would then, I think, give even greater authenticity to the all-party committee. I guess it would send a message that maneuvering and questionable reversals wouldn't be allowed. Certainly, I think that, as has been mentioned, Parliamentary Counsel should look at this kind of behaviour and perhaps speak with all the other committees in terms of that.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The Member for Calgary-Nose Hill appeared to be suggesting that when a person applied for their first government job, they should potentially be lining up their next

job as a lobbyist internally. If a person is qualified and they're the most qualified person for that job, under most circumstances that job will wait for them for the time period necessary for them to assume that position. Asking people to sit back for a year is certainly a minimal expectation.

Now, the Premier, when he first was chosen by his Tory colleagues, started off with great guns in terms of bringing forth a number of innovations such as the all-party standing policy committees. I credit him for that consideration that combined wisdom trumps any wisdom that belongs to any one party. However, when it came to another action that he did in terms of cutting down the size of the number of ministries, again I was applauding him, sort of cheering from the sidelines.

I was extremely pleased, for example, when he got rid of RAGE, restructuring and government efficiency, and put it back under the auspices of Government Services. That was a good move. What I wasn't pleased about, however, was that there appeared to be a make-work project for every government member. When it appeared that there was a complaint about too many rural ministers, the Premier decided: well, I'll appoint a Deputy Premier from Calgary, and that will assuage some of the concerns of Calgarians.

Then when the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing seemed to run into a degree of trouble, we had a secretariat individual appointed. Actually, before the secretariat we had an associate minister, who then assumed the responsibility for a secretariat. As though there wasn't enough work involved for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, then we had an associate minister of, I believe it was called, sustainable development appointed to help out the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. So very quickly we ended up with just as many faces and places, only with new titles. They were no longer the full-fledged minister, but we had so many associates, and we had so many chiefs.

Mr. Hancock: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, yes. Relevance.

The Chair: Just one moment, hon. member. Hon. members, it's very difficult to hear with the background noise.

Mr. Hancock: I believe it's 459 of *Beauchesne's* on relevance. We are speaking to the amendment, and the amendment is relative to the time, whether it's six months or 12 months, relative to how long the cooling-off period is for a former political staff or a senior bureaucrat. It specifically mentions a deputy minister or other senior person under the Public Service Act. We should really try to stick to the point. That's the question. The question really is a very narrow one. It's a question of: how long is enough time for a cooling-off period? That's what the amendment is. I would hesitate, normally, to interrupt, but this is a very narrow amendment with a very narrow purpose.

The Chair: I'm assuming that the hon. member was going to link his remarks back to the amendment very quickly.

Mr. Chase: I am going to try and get into the framework of narrowness, and I will achieve that very quickly.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: You cannot talk about transparency and accountability if you keep voting on something until you get it right. It was the decision of the committee to extend the cooling-off period to 12 months. Then some members of the committee didn't like that original decision, so they revoted on it. What we have here today is a chance to bring it back to its historical significance, agreed upon by the members of that committee, and I suggest that we vote on the amendment and show that we are a transparent, accountable, collegial group.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Chairman. In regard to (b) of this proposed amendment A2 could any member of the House clarify for me in regard to the Public Service Act how, if in any way, this would catch contracted employees, individuals who are contracted for one reason or another by the government to provide advice or expertise for one reason or another?

5:00

It comes to my attention that we have started a process in this province of hiring individuals through contract that are outside, as far as I know, the Public Service Act. Would this cooling-off period affect them? We hired an individual on contract, Mr. Chairman, from California to advise and consult and direct the electricity business unit in the Department of Energy. I'm wondering if a position like that, that Mr. Kellan Fluckiger used to have here, would be caught in this cooling-off period. Or are those contracted individuals outside the Public Service Act?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will try to maybe explain my understanding as a layperson to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar. On page 14, part 6.1, Former Political Staff Members, Dealings with Government by former political staff members, 32.1(1)(a) talks about "on behalf of himself or herself, solicit or accept a contract or benefit from a department of the public service or a Provincial agency with which [that person] had significant official dealings." This offers the clarity and the focus that it's not all of government. It is not all of government boards, commissions, agencies, and departments. It's basically those particular ones with which that person had significant dealings, not even in passing. These are significant dealings, so a contract for either himself or herself.

Then sub (b). Now, my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar would be interested to find out that it talks about "any other person." So you're talking about the person himself, and then you're also talking about any other person as in advancing the interests of other people as well. The example you gave would probably be caught.

The idea behind my amendment is to basically extend that restriction time zone from six months to 12. I think it's a fair requirement. If we're doing it to ministers, why can't we do it to, you know, former deputy ministers and former chiefs of staff and former executive assistants to ministers? They have the same access to information, if not even more sometimes.

I can give you examples of people in the government in the front bench who probably know a lot less than the employees that work with them. Occasionally they even admit that, and they bring them here to the House and thank them, and they say: you know what, without you guys, we can't function and we can't shine and we can't

conduct the business of the government as we're supposed to. So I would argue that if we're doing 12 months for ministers, we should do it for the same length of time for those staff that have all the information at their fingertips. They know where things are, they know where the money is, and they know who to talk to.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A2?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:03 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Chase	MacDonald	Pastoor
Elsalhy	Mason	Swann
Flaherty		

Against the motion:

Abbott	Fritz	Morton
Ady	Goudreau	Oberg
Amery	Graydon	Pham
Backs	Hancock	Prins
Boutilier	Jablonski	Shariff
Calahasen	Johnson	Stevens
Cao	Liepert	Strang
Cenaiko	Lougheed	VanderBurg
Coutts	Lund	Webber
DeLong	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Ducharme		

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 31
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. This may seem like just the rejection of an amendment, but it goes much deeper, into the whole democratic fibre of the intention of Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. The government finally caught up with the rest of the nation by having all-party policy committees, and the reports that I've had from all my caucus colleagues were that these were effective representations on the committees, that, as my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-East expressed it, people park their partisan beliefs at the door. They came forward and recognized that there was one goal in mind, and that was achieving the best interest of Albertans.

What we have witnessed today is the type of rewriting of history that I have referred to before. When a decision is made within the standing policy committee process and that process is then brought to the larger House for approval, there is an expectation that in some ways while we may not agree with the whole idea, we support it. What we've seen today is that you'll just keep voting in that committee until the majority gets its way, which totally defeats the reasoning of having an all-party committee.

I just wanted to go on the record for saying that I'm disappointed in this process, that takes away from the validity of all-party

committees, and I hope each of the four committees does its best to restore confidence in the process, which I believe has been damaged in this House today.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Chairman, normally I wouldn't be provoked to rise, but I do want to make sure that I have some brief comments on the record with respect to the last comment. First of all, our rules provide that one should not go back and debate a matter that's already been voted on.

Secondly, the all-party committees did good work. They worked through the course of the summer, and all of the committees did excellent work and reported out to the House. The report says, as we've seen with respect to Bill 1 and are now seeing with respect to Bill 2 and which we will see with respect to Bill 31, that there are pieces that come back to the House. There was an amendment which I brought forward with respect to one of the bills which was with respect to volunteers. As we know in this House, once you've put a bill on the table, once you've seen a report, there's always some more opportunity for work. Even when a bill is passed and becomes legislation, the process of evergreening that legislation always continues.

I would not want someone reading the last speaker's comments in *Hansard* to not perhaps go to the next speaker's comments and would say that the field policy committees that we've set up, the all-party committees of this House, did good work, heard from the public, and responded. It is not in our mouths, then, to come back and say that the House itself, which is, of course, the master of the work, does not have the opportunity to come back and visit that and deal with it. It is not appropriate at all, in my view, to say that.

5:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It seems that revisionism suits at some points but not at others. I was not discussing the quality of the committee, and I want it on record that the committee made the right decision the first time. It was the revisiting that caused the problem. Then, when we had an opportunity to recognize and support the initial committee decision, that was turned down.

The Chair: Hon. member, we're debating Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, not the committee process.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate that, and you're seeing the conflicts of interest that are occurring today over Bill 2.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour for me to rise for the first time and have an opportunity to speak to Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. I want to commend the committee for its diligence and its work on this important issue for all Albertans. Clearly, the foundations of public trust rest in the ability of people to know what's going on and to recognize and address real and perceived conflicts of interest. So it's important that this be done. Obviously, from many of our points of view it's overdue that we have a strengthened conflicts of interest amendment here.

For the record, this amendment extends the ministerial cooling-off period to a year from six months. It creates the six-month cooling-off period for senior political staff, including EAs and the Premier's chief and deputy chief of staff. It extends postemployment restrictions to the deputy ministers. It strengthens postemployment

restrictions for ministers and increases fines for violations. It also strengthens rules against using office, including information, to further private interests of any individuals. This is all positive. It makes substantial improvement in a number of critical areas, including those that have been recommended for years by this side of the House and the all-party review committee.

It affirmed, basically, three principles of the Conflicts of Interest Act: public disclosure, an independent Ethics Commissioner, and rules for public office holders. It recommended but did not support the legislation against apparent conflicts of interest and the general impartiality clause to cover activity that's unethical or inappropriate, even if it doesn't involve financial conflict of interest.

I want to recognize that in my experience these all-party committees have been positive and constructive and useful, and I look forward to more of the kinds of activities and dialogue that is possible within these committees. Indeed, this has been a step forward, and I acknowledge the Premier for fulfilling his commitment during his leadership to establish these all-party committees. It's a very progressive step for democracy in Alberta, and people, frankly, have been dismayed and rather discouraged, shall I say, prior to these signs that the government of Alberta is interested in democracy and interested in a full and an open discussion and participation.

To close remarks, Mr. Chairman, I think I can say with some support from this side that in general we have positive feelings, and certainly I will support this bill in its final reading.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007?

The hon. leader of the third party opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to just very briefly put on the record my support for the passage of this bill. I certainly think that it's one of the issues that we've been talking about for many years, and we've seen many instances where high profile individuals, including our most recent Premier, have taken appointments or positions with law firms or other organizations. We felt that this is not right, that they possess so much knowledge of the government's plans . . . [interjection] Well, I'm speaking generally, hon. House leader, about your previous leader.

In general people who leave government as a senior official or an elected official in cabinet will have a tremendous knowledge of policy and plans of the government. It's the plans, the knowledge of what the government is planning to do, that are extremely valuable and give any firm or private interest that's able to acquire that individual a tremendous and an unfair advantage. That's why this kind of legislation is so important. To not have this kind of legislation really ends any sort of sense of a level playing field in business or in law or in professions or in any activity where lobbying or a government policy is of critical nature.

I just want to indicate that I think in some cases these cooling-off periods could have been extended even further, and it would have been in the public interest to do so. But this is a step in the right direction, Mr. Chairman, and I am prepared to support it. I think the whole question of conflicts of interest is something that we all need to be concerned about regardless of what political party we're from because a failure to deal properly and completely with conflicts of interest does undermine public confidence in the ability of government to provide equally for all without bias or unfair advantage for any party.

I think this is indeed a step forward. If the government continues along this line, they will, I think, move in a way to eliminate some

of the tarnished reputation the government earned under the previous Premier. I think it's clear that this Premier wants to put some distance between himself and the type of things that went on under the previous regime.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and indicate we'll be supporting the bill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very brief. I'd just like to rise in support of this bill. I think it's an indication of a new attitude in government and a new approach to government that we're seeing under the new Premier. I very much support this bill, and I commend the government for coming forward with it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 2 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 38

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I, again, cannot be as succinct as I was for bills 9, 11, 23, and 24. This is my first opportunity to speak on Bill 38; therefore, I want to point out my concern that Alberta did not follow the B.C. example of bringing the concept of a trade and labour mobility agreement to the Legislature and to its people first. In B.C. the democratic discussions took place before the fact, not looking for a simple rubber-stamping after the fact.

5:30

Now, what I find difficult with Bill 38 is that we're talking about sort of an economic bond between the province of British Columbia and the province of Alberta that potentially realizes the least standards of both. In other words, if there's a minimum wage in B.C. that is even lower than that of Alberta, it seems that the least attractive would be the concern expressed.

What I find surprising is, for example, when our leader from Edmonton-Riverview put forward the notion of a western tiger. He put it out there for discussion rather than that, you know, had we formed the government, the concept would have been discussed before it was rammed through the legislative process. The western tiger takes the TILMA concept and makes it considerably more transparent and accountable. What the western tiger recognizes is that instead of transferring our wealth to the south, having our bitumen and our raw gas and our raw oil upgraded in refineries in either Chicago or down in Texas, why not realize that advantage across western Canada? It also recognizes that we have limited

water resources. We can't necessarily upgrade all the bitumen in this province in the upgrader alleys that are proposed, the 10 upgraders, without it having a very damaging, detrimental effect on our water.

Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007, or in its acronym and briefer form, TILMA, does not take into account that we could, as is proposed by the western tiger concept, be sending some of our upgrading via pipeline to B.C., for example, or to Saskatchewan or Manitoba. Instead of relying on our current preoccupation with dirty, coal-fired generation, we could be using the much cheaper hydro from B.C. We could be trading bitumen processing for considerably less expensive power.

Likewise for Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Instead of us using all our water, whether it's potable or grey water, in the refining process, some of that refining could be shared with our western neighbours. I gather that with the election of the new government in Saskatchewan that process is more likely to occur. This government seems to be more ideologically connected to the new government. What we're commenting on in the western tiger is that not only do we share the potential gain of a western co-operation, such as Bill 38 suggests, with B.C., but we would expand that concept to include Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Manitoba has the advantage of also having hydro power. The transmission lines that the Minister of Energy noted in question period this afternoon, which go both ways: we could be trading the power, which would not result in extra emissions in Alberta but would result in hydro from Manitoba or hydro from B.C. powering the industrial separation and refining here. The western tiger concept recognizes that Alberta can be a leader in not only the transference of energy resources and refining but also the transportation of innovation and technology and, sort of, intellectual properties, sharing with the provinces and decreasing our dependency on our southern neighbour.

At some point I am sure that the province of Alberta will be urging their federal counterparts to revisit the trade agreements over natural gas because when our market does recover, with the type of cold winter that we're experiencing now and that is going to be prevalent throughout the States, with our current dollar being almost at par, we're no longer having the advantage that we once had with the higher American dollar.

What the western tiger says is: let's negotiate within our Canadian provinces, increase the economic clout of the western provinces, and do trades that work to the mutual benefit of our western Canadians. By sharing the bitumen, we share the stress. We recognize that we don't have the resources, whether it be using natural gas as an energy source for refining bitumen, nor do we have the water. So in order to eliminate those stresses, we share them as well as the profits with our neighbouring western partners, not just British Columbia but Saskatchewan and Manitoba. What we achieve as a result of this sharing is cleaner skies in Alberta, cheaper power for both industry and consumers, and a win-win circumstance for western Canada.

Bill 38 looks very narrowly at a trade deal with British Columbia. The western tiger concept looks at what's best for western Canada, not just what is best for the B.C. or Alberta internal governments.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. Colleagues, the Alberta/B.C. trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or TILMA, does what the national agreement on internal trade, AIT, which has been around for quite a while, was supposed to do, and it eliminates interprovincial trade barriers.

I would just like to remind the House that politics is the art of the possible. What we're doing here is we're doing the possible. We're doing the step that we can do with B.C. now when it comes to TILMA. This is a barrier-busting agreement and the most comprehensive internal trade agreement. The TILMA effectively creates a single market of 7.7 million people in Alberta and B.C. Yes, we can expand that, but it creates Canada's second-largest economy.

The TILMA came into effect April 1, 2007. On that date the movement of goods and services between Alberta and B.C. became a whole lot easier. For example, commercial vehicles no longer need additional registration and permits to carry loads across the Alberta/B.C. border. These changes have reduced administration and costs for Alberta companies that rely on commercial trucks, also for B.C. companies that rely on commercial trucks. Under TILMA Alberta and B.C. companies are now able to bid equally on more government procurement in both provinces. We've also made a commitment to end business subsidies that favour an Alberta company at the expense of a competitor in B.C. and vice versa.

5:40

When the TILMA is fully implemented in 2009, businesses and workers in both provinces will have seamless access to a larger range of opportunities across all sectors, including energy, transportation, and agriculture. A business registered in one province will be deemed registered in another, and there's no residency required, no added administration cost, and commercial vehicles no longer need to be reregistered for temporary travel in another province.

With a skilled tradesperson like a plumber or a welder, or a highly trained professional like a teacher or a nurse, they'll be able to move to Alberta or back to B.C., either way, and keep working without having to go through extensive recertification or retraining.

The TILMA is all about treating citizens within our country equally no matter whether they happen to be in Alberta or in British Columbia and, hopefully, the rest of Canada very soon. With the TILMA we cut the needless red tape put in the way of skilled Canadians seeking employment opportunities in another province within their own country. We break down the needless barriers in front of businesses seeking opportunities in another province within their own country.

We know from years of AIT disputes – that's the agreement on internal trade for Canada – that the national agreement lacks teeth. Provincial governments have ignored six of the last eight dispute panel decisions because there are no consequences for noncompliance. For example, Quebec continues to ignore a 2005 AIT panel ruling that prohibited the sale of coloured margarine in that province, and it's an impediment to interprovincial trade. It's estimated that the economic benefit from the opening of the Quebec market to coloured margarine may be worth as much as \$17 million per year to Alberta margarine producers and canola processors. This kind of thing won't happen under TILMA. Under TILMA Alberta and B.C. have taken firm steps to show consumers, workers, and businesses that our two governments are serious about dealing with interprovincial barriers.

Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, would be implemented in an enforceable dispute resolution process under the TILMA to ensure that provinces comply with dispute panel rulings. The legislation will allow for a penalty imposed by an impartial dispute panel established under the TILMA to be filed in Alberta courts. Such a penalty is strictly a last resort.

The TILMA itself lays out the process to resolve disputes, starting with dispute avoidance and then dispute resolution. The TILMA has a three-step dispute resolution process: dispute avoidance, consultation, and finally, if none of these are successful, resolution through

an impartial panel. In the third step complainants will be able to make their case before a dispute panel. The panels are independent and impartial. They have the ability to levy a financial penalty against a government but only if it does not change a measure that has been found to violate the TILMA.

The maximum penalty is \$5 million. The amount of a penalty, though, would depend on such things as the extent to which any harm is occurring in the province and on the complaining party. Monetary awards under TILMA are only available if a province has acted contrary to the agreement and only if that province does not comply with a panel ruling. If a government changes an offending measure, that's where the process stops. There's no penalty. This is to encourage compliance, not compensate individuals or companies for business losses.

Remember, the dispute resolution process is also a tool for Albertans to use to ensure open markets in B.C. Private parties cannot sue through the courts for damages under the TILMA. They can access the dispute resolution process, and they can seek recourse only on measures related to trade, investment, or labour mobility. Under the dispute resolution process only one dispute can be launched on what is essentially the same complaint at any one time. That allows the situation to be supported or corrected, reducing grounds for further complaints. To reduce the likelihood of frivolous complaints, the dispute panel can charge the full costs of the dispute resolution process to losing complainants.

Now, in no way does the dispute resolution process or Bill 38 put provincial authority at risk. The TILMA is very clear about what it does and does not cover. It specifically excludes legitimate public policy objectives; for example, water, labour standards, social policy, environmental and consumer protection, workers' health and safety, and provisions of health and social services. Okay? That's very, very clear in the agreement. It will not prevent local governments from acting in their citizens' best interests through such things as zoning bylaws or land-use decisions. Bill 38 is part of the process to fully implement TILMA by 2009. This amendment parallels legislation introduced in B.C.

During previous debate on Bill 38 some hon. members have stated that the TILMA process has been secretive, or that nobody knows about TILMA. In fact, TILMA includes a two-year implementation period so that Alberta and B.C. can get input from interested stakeholders to help shape what the final agreement will look like. The government of Alberta is working with regulators and professional organizations for more than a hundred occupations to ensure that their credentials are recognized in both Alberta and B.C. by 2009, when TILMA is fully implemented.

We consulted with municipalities, academic institutes, health authorities, Crown corporations, and financial institutions all across Alberta to get their input on TILMA provisions that may affect them by 2009. We discussed TILMA with groups such as the AUMA, the AAMD and C, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. We met with the city of Edmonton, the city of Calgary along with dozens of other cities, towns, counties, and municipal districts from all parts of Alberta. Consultations have been carried out with more than 60 professional regulatory bodies, such as the Alberta Association of Architects and the association of registered nurses.

Government has discussed TILMA with such diverse groups as the Council of Canadians, the chambers of commerce in Calgary and Edmonton. Officials have met with industry groups such as the Alberta building trades council, the Alberta Construction Association, the Alberta real estate council, and the Alberta funeral directors association.

TILMA has been presented to other governments in Canada through the committee on internal trade. We met informally with

officials from the federal government, from Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Yukon about TILMA. TILMA was even praised in the March 19 federal budget.

So has TILMA been a secret? I don't think so. If it is, it's the worst kept secret yet.

Lack of consultation with those who will be affected: if this is not a consultation to the highest degree, I don't know what is. TILMA has received positive reactions from various groups in Alberta and B.C.

A few weeks ago Alberta economist Mike Percy was quoted in the media as saying: I think TILMA should be the template that the rest of Canada looks like because it actually does allow for free trade in labour and investment across the provinces.

TILMA is consistent with our obligations under the pan-Canadian agreement on internal trade. Now, AIT public consultations in 2002 in Alberta indicated a strong desire to have government pursue further liberalization of interprovincial trade and labour mobility, and that is what we have done. We can ensure the benefits of TILMA by also ensuring that the agreement has teeth, and that's what we're doing today.

We've seen the negative impact on Albertans from the lack of an enforceable dispute resolution process under the pan-Canadian agreement on internal trade. Alberta's agrifood sector is still being denied access to the Ontario market for many of their products. Approval of the amendment that is before us will give the TILMA dispute resolution process teeth. TILMA panel decisions will be enforceable, unlike the decisions handed down by AIT panels that years later some Canadian governments continue to ignore.

Alberta has never been brought before a panel in the 12 years that we have been a party to the AIT. Any issue that was brought to our attention was resolved through consultation. Clearly, this is a demonstration of Alberta's commitment to dealing with unnecessary impediments to interprovincial trade and mobility. Alberta has a record of fairness in trade deals. Alberta has a record of compliance with its agreements. Alberta is not threatened by enforcement provisions.

I encourage all members to support Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007, to make any panels handed down under TILMA dispute resolution panels enforceable. Thank you very much.

5:50

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 38.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it would be prudent at this time to move that the committee rise and report bills 9, 11, 24, 2, and report progress on bills 23 and 38.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the

Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 11, Bill 24. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Bill 9, Bill 2. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 23, Bill 38. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 52
Corrections Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move Bill 52, the Corrections Amendment Act, 2007, at second reading.

The proposed amendments to the Corrections Act will enhance inmate disciplinary procedures, provide for safer correctional facilities and communities, and support victims of crime by providing greater access to information about offenders. Bill 52 will ensure that inmates subject to discipline are dealt with by hearing and appeal adjudicators who are external to the correctional centre, give victims access to more information about an offender convicted of a crime against them, and allow for electronic monitoring or recording of inmate phone calls to enhance safety within the correctional facility and in the community. Mr. Speaker, at this point I will speak to selected sections of Bill 52.

Amendments to section 15. These amendments respond to the December 4, 2006, ruling of the hon. Justice Marceau of the Court of Queen's Bench that some aspects of the current inmate disciplinary process breach the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Justice Marceau found a potential lack of impartiality when disciplinary boards are comprised entirely of staff members who work within the same correctional facility as the inmate who is subject to discipline. As a result, he struck down section 15 of the Corrections Act. The proposed amendments to section 15 will have disciplinary hearings and appeals conducted by individuals external to the correctional institution.

Hearing adjudicators may be appointed by the minister to review breaches of rules or regulations of the institution and determine punishment. Appeal adjudicators may be appointed by the minister to conduct appeals of decisions made by a hearing adjudicator in a disciplinary hearing. If an inmate or the director of a correctional facility is not satisfied with the decision of an appeal adjudicator, they can apply for a judicial review of that decision. We believe these amendments to section 15 will increase impartiality and independence of the hearing and appeals process.

Mr. Speaker, with the inclusion of section 14.4, which is a new section, this amendment would allow the electronic monitoring and

recording of inmate phone calls in certain circumstances. Similar legislation exists at the federal level and in Manitoba and British Columbia, where inmate calls have been monitored for some time. Telephones are an important way for inmates to communicate with individuals, including family members, outside of institutions. However, they can and have been used by some inmates to connect with gang members, to threaten, intimidate, or harass individuals, including witnesses or victims, or to continue their involvement in illegal activities. All monitoring would require the prior approval of the director of the correctional facility. The director could decide to monitor and/or record telephone calls if there are reasonable grounds to believe the calls, whether made or received by the inmate, would contain evidence of an act that would risk the security of the correctional facility or the safety of any person, be it a criminal offence or a plan to commit a criminal offence, harass, or intimidate the recipient of the call. Notice will be prominently displayed in all correctional centre admission areas and inmate housing units that telephone communications may be monitored or recorded.

Before drafting this amendment, we sought legal opinion with respect to possible Charter challenges and incorporated that opinion in the language of the proposed act. We are therefore confident that this amendment fully complies with the provisions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Inclusion of section 14.3, Mr. Speaker. This amendment would specify the kind of information the director of a correctional facility or a community corrections manager can disclose to victims about an offender convicted of a crime against him. There are similar sections in the federal Corrections and Conditional Release Act. The information provided could include the offender's name, the offence for which the offender was found guilty and the court that found the offender guilty, the date of commencement and the length of the sentence, the location of the correctional facility where the sentence is being served, the date of the offender's release from custody or on a temporary absence, the conditions attached to the offender's release that relate to the victim. Providing victims of crime with this information may contribute to their sense of safety and acknowledges the importance of victims' concerns at all stages of the criminal justice process.

Mr. Speaker, those are my comments regarding Bill 52. I'd like to move that Bill 52 be moved through second reading.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of clarification, hon. member. You're moving on behalf of another member?

Mr. Cenaiko: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm moving on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, and I'd like to adjourn debate as well.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, November 29, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/29

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have the great pleasure of introducing two different groups. First are 18 members of the Public Affairs Bureau that I'm introducing to you and through you to all members of the Legislature. Seated in the members' gallery, they are Jared Majeski, Cora Halter, Lucas Warren, Ruth Anne Beck, Miss Carrie Clifford, Miss Jill McKenzie, Miss Cyndi Hoekstra, Miss Mahjabeen Hussain, Bobbi Klettke, Beth McKinley, Wendy McGrath, Trisha LeTilley, Donna Doyle, Tim Chander, Dean Turnquist, Briar McGinnis, Jennifer Raimundo, and Sorcha McGinnis. I would ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it also gives me great pleasure today to introduce you and through you to all members of the Assembly an outstanding young lady seated in the members' gallery, and her name is Miss Alana DeMelo. Alana is an excellent student, attends Louis St. Laurent junior high school in Edmonton, greatly interested in helping people, very active in her community, participating in activities such as babysitting, Pathfinders, providing product input as a member of the international advisory committee for Build-A-Bear Workshop. I had the opportunity to meet Alana at the recent opening of the Robbins health centre at Grant MacEwan College. Her family tells me that she is interested in becoming a nurse. However, after seeing her work the room, I know she's going to have a tremendous future in politics. Alana is accompanied today by her parents, George and Selena, and her grandparents Patrick and Joan Gaughan. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, what an honour today to introduce a very special gentleman, a professional engineer, 27 years of age, who is a graduate of the University of Alberta in chemical engineering. I've been told that Jorj Sayde's strong technical/professional skills have been also topped by strong interpersonal skills and interest in business, and he's an active leader and volunteer in his community. He lives in Edmonton and is a process engineer with SNC-Lavalin. Jorj has worked in the pharmaceutical, oil and gas, oil sands upgrading, and consulting sectors, where he excelled in developing technical solutions for the challenges faced by industry in Alberta. As accomplished as he is, he is here today so that we can acknowledge a milestone in the history of Alberta's largest self-regulating professional group; namely, the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists. He is seated in your gallery. He is the 50,000th

member of this organization and he is seated with Neil Windsor, Pat Lobregt, John McLeod, and George Lee. I would ask them to please rise so that we can acknowledge Jorj and the engineers, geologists, and geophysicists.

Mr. Speaker, I have yet another group of very special people: 54 students, two teachers, and 10 volunteer helpers who are here from Our Lady of Perpetual Help school. Pam Gravelle and Cindy Seewalt have brought their classes along with parent helpers Donna Gravelle, Lisa Fairhurst, Gene Eberley, Suzanne Orht, Barb Kamstra, Cathy Henbest, Maureen Landry, Diane Young, Vicki Hildebrant, and Don Kolybaba. I apologize if any of those pronunciations were poor. I would ask them to please rise so that we can warmly welcome the group to the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of energetic grade 6 students from Graminia community school, which is located in my constituency of Stony Plain. There are 63 students here today accompanied by teachers Miss Poliakiwski, Miss Boyle, and Mrs. Wolff; parents and helpers Mrs. Gargas, Mrs. Ballard, Mrs. Wack, Mr. Normand, Mr. Aves, and Mr. Kanigan. I had the pleasure of meeting with these students today, and I can tell you that they are a very bright and intelligent group. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions this afternoon, if you'll indulge. First, it is an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of House two of my former constituents. Luke and Melissa Pantin are from Yukon now, but they were in Spruce Grove for a number of years. Many in this House will remember the great work that Luke did in the constituency, in the Edmonton region, on Edmonton Economic Development. Luke is now the director of the business and trade branch, Yukon Economic Development, for the government of the Yukon. Melissa is very involved with the MADD campaign in Yukon and also works in the area. I might add that since Luke has moved to the Yukon he's become quite an outdoorsman, I'm told, as I had an opportunity to have lunch with them. They are in the public gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled Dr. Austin Mardon. Austin is a member of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. I've come to know and appreciate his wisdom and insight. I'd ask him to please rise in the public gallery and be recognized.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the vice-president of communications and public affairs for the Alberta Research Council, Mr. Steve Hogle. Many of you probably

remember Steve for his 25 years at CFRN, where he was director of news and public affairs. Obviously, his decision to join ARC speaks very highly of the people and the programs there. Mr. Hogle is in the members' gallery, and I'd like to ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have one more introduction. Again, an honour to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two of my constituents, Brent Korte and his son Mark Korte. Brent grew up in Peace River but has been a resident of Spruce Grove for more than 15 years. He works for Janssen-Ortho as a government relations manager and is actively involved in the community as a coach in both minor hockey and minor football. Mark Korte is a grade 6 student at St. Marguerite school in Spruce Grove. He's currently studying government in social studies, and after touring the Leg. Building with his class, he wanted to come back and see question period one more time in action. He plays both hockey and football. They are, as well, seated in the public gallery this afternoon. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a very special introduction today. Joining us in the public gallery is a student at Laurier Heights elementary/junior high school in my constituency named Melissa Wilk. Along with some of her classmates she has written me an excellent letter, and we look forward to dealing with it later in the proceedings. She's joined by her parents, Karen and Steve, but that's not all who is joining us today. Her teacher, Mrs. Kirchner, and classmates are watching today's proceedings live from their classroom. That will be very good for them. I'd like our guest to rise and receive the warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the chairman of the board of the Aspen regional health authority, Mr. Robert Jackson, and the CEO of the Aspen regional health authority, Andrew Will. They're seated, I believe, in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I was able to introduce the first half of a school that is visiting, so today I'd like to introduce to you and through you all members of the Assembly the second half of Victoria school, who is spending some time here at the Legislature and visiting us I think in the public gallery today. There are 26 students, and they are joined by their teacher, Ms Carla Kerr. While these students are here, if I might gently nudge the Infrastructure and Education ministers to kindly provide these students with the school infrastructure they need to really support their talent. I would ask those students to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

head:

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Premier's Awards of Excellence

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday it was my honour to attend the 13th annual Premier's award of excellence ceremony alongside our Premier and many of my colleagues to recognize the excellent work of Alberta's public service. On behalf of all the hon. members I would like to extend the government's congratulations to the 30 teams that have been honoured with gold, silver, and bronze awards that have joined the more than 300 teams and thousands of employees recognized for their exceptional work in helping deliver high-quality programs and services.

Five of these teams were also honoured this year with Canada awards for excellence from the National Quality Institute. These teams are the bridges treatment program, which is an open custody residential treatment centre that provides care and treatment to male youths with mental health or addiction issues; Persons with Developmental Disabilities Central Region Community Board, ensuring that adults with developmental disabilities in central Alberta are supported to live, work, and participate in their communities; the office of the public guardian, providing decision-making support and respecting individual autonomy, helping to resolve conflicts that threaten family relationships; the Health Benefits Review Committee, providing access to health benefits that fall outside of the agreements with professional organizations for Alberta Works and AISH clients; and Alberta Aids to Daily Living, assisting people with long-term disability or chronic or terminal illness in maintaining independence in their own residence.

These national awards were presented last month, and it should be noted that Alberta received five of a total of 21 awards given. Mr. Speaker, This clearly illustrates that Alberta has one of the most adaptive and innovative public services in Canada.

The Premier's awards honour distinction, hard work, and teamwork, but probably most important, the awards recognize the respect that these individuals have for each other, both their character, their wisdom, and the individual and collective strengths they bring to the table.

Alberta is well positioned to move forward into the future, a very bright future, thanks to employees who continue to commit to best practices such as effective planning, project planning, implementation, communication, evaluation, and teamwork. The individuals are making significant contributions to the Premier's commitment to improving the quality of life for all Albertans.

Again, congratulations to the recipients of the 2007 Premier's awards of excellence. All public service employees should take great pride in their colleagues that were on the teams that received these awards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to respond to the minister. To begin, I'd like to offer my congratulations and those of my colleagues in the Alberta Liberal caucus to the award recipients. The recognition is well deserved.

Civil servants don't often receive the credit they should despite their tireless devotion to the public good. Without regard to which party is in power, they carry out their duties, understanding that their work has a huge impact on the lives of their fellow Albertans. The winning teams should all be very proud not just of last night's awards but for their exceptional commitment to excellence and

public service. We should all be working toward improving the quality of life for all citizens of this great province. Our civil servants sure put words into action. They get it, and they do it.

As the hon. minister said, these awards were bestowed upon a wide variety of public service departments. I note with special appreciation that the recipients of the national awards, the Canada awards for excellence, share one valiant distinction: they all do essential, crucial work for the most vulnerable members of our society. I'm very proud to live in a province, Mr. Speaker, where so many dedicated professionals work so hard under very difficult and stressful conditions to provide essential services to those people who need them most. Perhaps we can offer these fine institutions more public support so that they can serve the public even better.

The Alberta Liberal caucus is united in admiration for the good work of these dedicated public servants, and we congratulate the administration for recognizing their efforts. To the winners, thank you so much for stepping up and making a difference. To everyone else, let's follow these wonderful examples in our everyday work.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview I'm sure would want to rise now to seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to participate. Hon. members, I'll only ask one question. Anybody opposed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Members of the Legislative Assembly. I, too, would like to add our congratulations to the excellent work of Alberta's public service. I think often we underestimate the work that is done by the people in our public service, and they're often not appreciated.

If I may say so, often we worship at the altar of the private sector. It's all right to reward the private sector. The private sector works well in the economic area where there is legitimate competition. No doubt about that. I would say that the public sector works best in monopoly situations and dealing with human needs. Some of the examples here are exactly the type of work that they can do, so I say that perhaps the government in the future will recognize that these excellent people can do even more valuable work for us. We'd look forward to more excellent work from our public service with more responsibility in the areas that they should be involved in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Statement by the Speaker

Gary Mar, MLA for Calgary-Mackay

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call upon the first of six to participate today, I would like to draw to the attention of all hon. members that today will be the last day in this Assembly for one of our colleagues, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, who was elected in 1993 and will have served now until 2007 as a distinguished member of this Assembly and as a distinguished member of Executive Council. It is very important that men and women of good character and good integrity want to participate in this Assembly. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay leaves us today, this being his last day in this Assembly, we all want to wish him the very best. [Mr. Mar shook hands with colleagues on both sides of the Chamber while they accorded him a standing ovation]

So as to ensure that there is not a suggestion that the crossing of a floor in the midst of the Assembly is to become a daily routine, we

will accept this as being a practice only when a member has been designated to be leaving. No other occasion.

head: 1:20

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Dr. Austin Mardon

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Order of Canada is Canada's highest civilian order, and I'm privileged today to recognize one Albertan who recently was invested as a member. His name is Dr. Austin Mardon, and his personal story is an inspiration to anyone who lives with mental illness. Dr. Mardon holds masters degrees in science and education and a PhD in geography. He has written or coauthored nearly three dozen books and over a hundred academic articles. He has explored Antarctica, recovering meteorites for NASA, and has had a personal audience with Pope John Paul II. He has been an adjunct professor for several universities.

In addition to the Order of Canada, Dr. Mardon has had a host of honours and awards bestowed upon him, a list too long to mention now. Many of these accomplishments, including his PhD, were achieved after Dr. Mardon was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1992, at the age of 30. This is a remarkable achievement considering that schizophrenia is a lifelong illness that can only be controlled with medication and lifestyle adjustments. Schizophrenia affects about 1 in 100 Albertans, and managing the illness is a constant daily exercise.

After being diagnosed, Dr. Mardon worked hard to help health professionals, emergency workers, employers, community leaders, and elected representatives to understand what it means to have a mental illness. He speaks extensively to groups in the hope that one day we will learn that people with mental illness can live normal lives if they receive the proper support and understanding.

I've known Austin for a number of years and appreciate his advice and his insights. I know he has helped many people reclaim their place in society because of his advocacy and support.

Austin received the Flag of Hope from the Schizophrenia Society of Canada. I can think of no other person who is more deserving. Thank you, Austin.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Alberta Research Council

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently had the honour of attending the Alberta Research Council's employee day. It was a time to recognize the work of some 600 people for work that diversifies and sustains our province's economy. It has been a banner year for the people at ARC. Their innovation on the environmental front is symbolized by their expert on the capture and storage of carbon dioxide. Dr. Bill Gunter, a distinguished research scientist with the Alberta Research Council's carbon and energy management business, contributed to a report for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and was then honoured as a co-winner of the 2007 Nobel peace prize.

ARC is also home to three people who were named distinguished lecturers by the Society of Petroleum Engineers. It is an outstanding accomplishment when you consider that the society has only 30 distinguished lecturers in the whole world.

On the sustainability front the people in the heavy oil and oil sands group have been working for 25 years refining the process for extracting oil. Their work has increased the rates of oil recovery, found ways to reduce the impact on the environment, and has just been honoured by Alberta Science and Technology.

As for diversification, recent news stories have detailed the research with hemp. Scientists are combining the plant with plastics to try to come up with everything from car parts to housing materials. That is an example of the innovation at ARC at this time. That kind of thinking has also positioned ARC at the forefront for research in Canada. ARC has put forward a proposal to lead a national consortium called Innoventures Canada, a group that would elevate our nation's ability to compete on the world stage.

From what I witnessed at the employee day, the people at ARC thrive on challenge. They are intelligent and industrious, and their impact is felt in this province. On behalf of the ARC board of directors I was honoured to be there to salute their work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

HIV/AIDS Awareness

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. December 1 is World AIDS Day. To commemorate World AIDS Day and AIDS Awareness Week, HIV Edmonton is holding a series of community discussions, the annual AIDS vigil, and a memorial tree that can be visited all week at the Edmonton HIV office, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Similar events are being held in Calgary and other Alberta centres.

As of June 2006 there were 4,400 people living with HIV in Alberta. There were over 200 new reported HIV infections in Alberta in 2006. These were as the result of intravenous drug use; sexual encounters, both homosexual and heterosexual; people identified as heterosexual but who come from countries where there is an HIV epidemic; and from other and unknown sources.

HIV Edmonton reports that only 2 per cent of Albertans are getting adequate testing and suggests that at-risk populations account for far more than 2 per cent of the population. Concerns for anonymity, lack of access to testing facilities and education may be concealing a higher number of cases. While most people living with HIV and AIDS are still gay men, one of the largest new groups is young women. They are getting HIV because they thought birth control pills would protect them.

The World AIDS Day theme this year is Stop AIDS; Keep the Promise. The goal is to urge national governments and policy-makers to meet targets to provide universal access to HIV treatment, support, and prevention service by 2010. The blood-borne pathogen and sexually transmitted infection strategy, which unfortunately has not been released by this government, would assist in planning and preparing strategies for future programs.

As we go about our business this weekend and the rest of this week, I ask that you take a moment to reflect on the impact of AIDS in Alberta and think about how you can support the Living Positive community.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Fort Macleod Santa Claus Parade

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The town and district of Fort Macleod in my constituency is very high on tradition. This small, historic community has nurtured another tradition. For the past 26 years Fort Macleod has launched the spirit of the holiday season by hosting the biggest and best Santa Claus parade west of Toronto. This parade has grown over the years thanks to the promotion of the Main Street office and the dedication of long-time parade organizer, Mr. Garnet Stevens, who was distinguished this year as the 2007 honorary parade marshal.

The theme, Candy Cane Christmas, was organized by Kim Driscoll and Gordon McIvor with a committee and 100 community volunteers and sponsors raising funds to host 90 floats, entries, and bands, like the Stampede Showband, the Stetson Show Band, Bishop Grandin and James Fowler high school bands, all from Calgary; the Cranbrook girls bugle band; and the Spirit of Alberta Pipe and Marching Band from Magrath.

Town employees, RCMP, and volunteer firemen provide security and traffic control for over 9,000 spectators who jam picturesque, historic Main Street, appreciating festive outdoor decorations and beautiful store windows. Moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, and many children line the streets and wait with anticipation for the appearance of the main attraction, jolly old St. Nick. The entire weekend is truly a memorable one, beginning with the Friday night carolling and community tree lighting, Saturday morning parade, giant stocking sale, Rotary Club charity auction, food fair, seniors' luncheons, and the famous family dance.

Many communities across the province host Santa Claus parades, and all MLAs support these festivities by showing their appreciation for all volunteers. As a resident of Fort Macleod and their MLA I am proud of all volunteers, neighbouring towns, and villages and cities for their involvement in this event. The last weekend every November is truly a homecoming in Fort Macleod as children who once participated in the first parades now bring their children home to extend a Merry Christmas to family and old friends. Thus the holiday tradition continues.

Merry Christmas, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Questions from Laurier Heights School Students

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Students at Laurier Heights school in my constituency are taking part in an initiative that shows their commitment to democracy and learning. These students sent me letters and e-mails raising important issues that should be heard in this House. One student, Teagan Wensel, is her class's patrol captain. When she's patrolling, she sees people distracted on their cell phones driving straight through the school crosswalk. This kind of dangerous distraction, of course, is easily prevented. My question is to the Premier. Why won't this government put in place a ban on cell phone usage while driving?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, well, clearly now they've outlined the opposition position with respect to this matter. My understanding is that there's a private member's bill that will be going before the House, and we'll have a great opportunity to debate this legislation and look at other areas of improving not only driver attention but confidence on our city streets.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another student from Laurier Heights, Melissa Wilk, is sitting in the gallery today. I introduced her a few minutes ago. She's really concerned about the lack of seatbelts on buses. She has seen the same tragic stories about recent accidents in Calgary and near Grande Prairie as the rest of us have. My question again to the Premier: has this government assessed the merits of requiring seatbelt use in buses, particularly school buses?

Mr. Stelmach: First, let me commend the students on the questions that they've asked today. Much better job than the opposition asked for the last couple of months.

The matter of seatbelts on school buses has been researched considerably. There are two authorities here, not only the provincial authority but also a federal authority. A number of various case studies have been done. I remember, from the time that I was minister of transportation, that the evidence presented and research done was inconclusive in terms of seatbelts in school buses. Some changes have been made in the construction of school buses, where the seats are much higher and they're very well padded, so of course if there's a sudden stop, then the student will hit the seat in front. But there are other issues, especially when the bus flips over and you're hanging upside down in a seatbelt.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Melissa is also deeply concerned about the amount of litter on our streets and sidewalks. I'm sure we can all agree how bad things look in the cities particularly, and it's even worse when the snow melts in the spring. This affects everyone's quality of life, as Melissa points out, and, frankly, can be a danger to wildlife as well. Again to the Premier: will this government undertake a comprehensive, province-wide antilittering campaign, an aggressive one, to get on top of this issue, including working with school boards to promote antilittering awareness?

Mr. Stelmach: That is a good question because there are times of the year, especially in spring as the snow melts, when there's a fair amount of litter not only on city streets but on provincial highways. I first of all have to commend the 4-H clubs of Alberta, that on every first Saturday of May pick up garbage along provincial highways. I know that various municipalities have drives by their citizens to clean up city streets and make them more presentable. This is a great opportunity for citizens to participate, teach their youth not to litter, and I'm sure that practising the good practices of not littering, making sure that the garbage is put away where it's supposed to be rather than thrown on city streets or on provincial highways, will improve the aesthetics.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Children in Care

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a report was brought forward to the Ministry of Children's Services reviewing conditions surrounding particular cases of fatalities of children under provincial care. This report was requested by the ministry to review current practices and explore recommendations so as to ensure that the safest possible conditions exist for children under provincial care. Will the minister briefly outline the findings of this report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I just want to say that I do assume that you're talking about the foster care report. Is that correct? The first thing I want to say is that I agree with this hon. member. A couple of weeks ago she had stated in a member's statement that she wanted to make injuries and deaths among government care kids our number one goal and an objective of ours. I can tell you that I agree with that. It is a goal of this department. I can also tell you that any injury of a child or death of child in our

care is tragic and devastating. When something goes wrong with children in our care, the heartbeat of Children's Services stops.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree wholeheartedly with what the minister is saying. But since this report was funded with taxpayer dollars and Albertans have a right to know, when will it be available to the general public?

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Speaker. I can tell you that I do expect the report, hopefully in the next several weeks.

The other comment I want to make is about these tragic events. I think it should be noted that as terrible as they are and as devastating as they are, we are very transparent and open about these events. They're publicly reported. The circumstances around them are reviewed, like the report that you're referring to, and in most cases we also have a fatality inquiry. We also have to make sure, in terms of the case reviews, that we don't get in the way of those fatality inquiries.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess my next question would have to do with how you plan on actioning the recommendations. Who will be involved in planning the implementation of the recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. First I would have to see those recommendations. I can tell you that I take this report very seriously, that I will take a look at the recommendations.

I just want to end with this. The Auditor General did a fairly intensive audit on Children's Services. This is related to this topic. It's just something that he said that's really important. While he found Children's Services systems to be comprehensive, generally well designed, and operating as intended, he said:

However, no system can absolutely guarantee the safety of all children at all times, whether in government care or not. The unpredictable nature of human behaviour has caused tragedies in the best designed and operating systems.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Alberta Federation of Labour issued a report titled Temporary Foreign Workers: Alberta's Disposable Workforce. Its documentation of the abuse of temporary foreign workers, especially unskilled workers, is quite disturbing. Coping with the affordable housing crisis is hard enough, but they also face lower wages than promised and illegal deductions from their paycheques for airfare and accommodation. When questioned about establishing a licensing authority similar to the United Kingdom, the minister for Service Alberta praised the strict legislation coupled with severe penalties for brokers who would abuse temporary foreign workers, yet despite numerous cases reported, there has not been a single broker prosecuted under these laws. My question is for the Minister of Service Alberta. What is your policy in respect to brokers, and when are you going to actually enforce the rules and laws?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, to suggest that we're not enforcing the regulations or the laws is unfair. The penalty for this is jail time up to two years, fines up to \$100,000. The department is working very diligently and carefully with any foreign workers that have been either reported to us or have themselves come. If the hon. member has others that haven't been addressed, if he would please get their names to us as soon as he can, we'll start the process of investigating whether a contravention occurs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I asked the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry about available assistance programs for temporary foreign workers in Alberta, she applauded the nonprofit organizations, and she mentioned by name the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. But let's set the record straight. This agency and all other immigrant agencies are designed and funded to help new immigrants and refugees, not temporary foreign workers. So I'll ask my question again. What programs are in place to assist temporary foreign workers with employment standards issues, housing issues, and human rights issues? Why is it left to the Alberta Federation of Labour to fill in the vacuum? Isn't it the government's responsibility to fix this terrible program?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, since October 2006 there are whole hosts of advocates at the top of the Oxford building off Jasper Avenue, people who answer the temporary foreign worker hotline and deal with issues, most of which are questions for information and most of which deal with the kinds of information you want to know as a newcomer to the country.

I will read and pursue the AFL recommendations. We intend to have a response next week to the issues surrounding temporary foreign workers, but let me point out a good-news story in the face of all this gloom and doom. There's a group in Fort McMurray that took new workers off to buy the proper clothes. One came back with . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The AFL report points out that for the first time in Albertan history, in 2006, more temporary foreign workers arrived in this province than permanent immigrants. There are between – I don't know – 20,000 and 40,000 temporary foreign workers in the province. I don't think the minister really knows. She has told this House that she's not sure how to protect them because she doesn't even know who they are. But in the first five years of the provincial nominee program fewer than 2,000 workers were accepted into Alberta. Why are we lagging behind in attracting permanent immigrants into this province?

1:40

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it's true that about six years ago we had about 126 provincial nominees, and we have expanded on that. It is a function of an expanding economy and the needs that have been presented by employers. In Manitoba, by contrast, it's true that they had about 10,000 provincial nominees last year, but they were trying to build their communities. There was a targeted effort. Now the kinds of activities that we find ourselves doing are in support of the kinds of initiatives our employers and our companies and our universities are tackling today. So we are expanding the program, and we are making strides in improving our relationship with the federal government to do it as well as we possibly can.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Auditor General

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's Auditor General recently released a scathing report highlighting many ways the government had failed to collect Alberta's fair share of royalties. The AG has also sounded the alarm over appalling conditions in Alberta seniors' homes and long-term care facilities. The list goes on and on. It's no wonder the Conservatives don't want to hear from the Auditor General anymore. Every time he issues a report, Albertans learn more about the incompetence of this government. My question is to the Premier. Does the government support having an Auditor General who has the mandate and resources necessary to hold the government accountable regularly?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, going back to the preamble, let it be very clear that the Auditor General in his report said very clearly – it's right in front – that no rules, no breaches of any contracts, no breaches of anything had been done. The government has followed all the rules and has co-operated with the Auditor General in every way possible, ensuring that there was a good flow of information to the Auditor General.

With respect to the issue of budgets those budgets are held within the offices of the Legislature. This whole Assembly makes that decision, not the Premier of the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Not really quite on the question that was asked.

The federal Auditor General reports three times per year. In B.C. the Auditor General issues reports between eight and 12 times a year. Alberta's Auditor General wants to issue reports twice per year in his business plan, which was adopted by this House. But this government doesn't like to be held accountable. Half a million dollars was wasted on the Lieutenant Governor's residence that was never built, but \$20,000 to print a second report is too much. My question is to the Premier. Is it government policy to restrict the Auditor General to issuing only one report per year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the Auditor General can put the reports on the web, on the Internet, and the cost would be considerably less than the \$20,000 the member is talking about. In fact, it'll be free and easily accessed by all Albertans. But, once again, the budget is set by Legislative Offices. There are members of every political party on the committee, and that committee makes the decision.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, money spent on the Auditor General is the best investment this Legislature makes. For every dollar we spend on the Auditor General, the taxpayer saves hundreds or perhaps even thousands of dollars. The Auditor General is an effective thorn in the side of this government, and I have no doubt government members are often embarrassed by his reports. But it's not reports of the Auditor General which embarrasses the government; it's the waste and incompetence that he uncovers. My question is to the Premier. Will he tell his MLAs to stop trying to muzzle the Auditor General?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's a totally inappropriate statement for the Legislature and complete disrespect for the members of the committee.

Speaker's Ruling Criticizing a Committee

The Speaker: And it might be viewed as contempt of this Legislature as well, so let's be very careful. Legislative committees are created and elected to by the Members of this Legislative Assembly. They are made up of members of all political parties in this Assembly. They have their own agenda, they have their own powers, and they also have their own authorities. They cannot be controlled by a government, a leader of the government, a minister of the Crown. If ever a case were to come to the floor of this Assembly, that particular member of Executive Council will be held in contempt. The same is true of the opposite, for anybody to make a suggestion.

Now, if any hon. member who sits in the Legislative Assembly wants to stand up and raise a point of privilege, they're welcome to do it with that kind of language. I'm sorry, but the wrath of the chair will come down because there is integrity associated with this business, and all of us associated with this business must be honourable.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Dodds-Round Hill Coal Gasification Project

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that EPCOR has announced a plan for building a power plant along with water and waste-water treatment facilities that would provide power for the Dodds-Round Hill coal gasification project in east-central Alberta. To the Minister of Environment: the scope of this project is growing, and I would like to know how the government of Alberta will ensure that environmental issues relating to this development will be addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I answer the member's question, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the partners on signing the MOU this morning, EPCOR as well as Sheritt. I think that in agreeing to co-operate the way they have, they in essence have answered the member's question because it falls exactly in line with what we have in mind with respect to cumulative impact. We're maximizing the use of the resources. They're going to talk about using municipal waste water as an alternate source of water for the project. They're going to talk about how they can most effectively use energy multiple times in the course of this project. Overall, I think this project fits very well with the direction the government is heading.

Mr. Johnson: My first supplemental is to the same minister. It's encouraging that proponents of this first project are being innovative, but how will the government ensure that other developments will follow the same approach?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we talked about the fact that we're using a cumulative effects approach in the Industrial Heartland. I've also announced that we'll be initiating a number of other pilot projects throughout the province. This is the second of the pilots. The same approach that we'll be using in the Industrial Heartland will apply here. We'll be consulting with industry stakeholders and the community to set targets, to set the environmental standards that we want to meet, and then each of the proponents that are involved

in industrial development within this region will work towards ensuring that we're able to achieve those overall targets. I can assure the hon. member that there will be plenty of opportunity for community and for industry to be involved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that we know that traditional coal-fired generation has been a major contributor of greenhouse gases in Alberta, is there still a future for electricity generated by coal?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The answer to that is a resounding absolutely. We feel that EPCOR's announcement today is further proof that there's a very bright future for the use of coal and clean coal technology in our province. We have proven reserves of about 34 billion tonnes of coal, and EPCOR and TransAlta are currently leaders in technology to use coal and reduce carbon emissions. We think that the Genesee 3 and proposed new Kepphills 3 plants go forward meeting environmental requirements, including the Alberta air emission standard, mercury reduction standards, regulations, and current requirements for greenhouse gas management. This new development will even improve on that track record.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

School Construction in Edmonton-Ellerslie

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of the nine new schools requested for Edmonton's most rapidly expanding communities, three were denied by this government, as I have repeatedly – repeatedly – brought up in this House through tablings, statements, and questions. My questions are to the Minister of Education. The constituents of my wonderful riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie would like to know why their need for a new school was not deemed significant enough to deserve a new school at this time.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I trust the hon. member is asking a question relative to our P3 announcement in June because that's the only announcement we made on new schools. I can say that what we did with our announcement was that we announced three new Catholic schools and six new public schools in Edmonton, and in each one of those cases they were the highest priorities of the two school districts. I'm not sure exactly where the Ellerslie school was on the priority of either of those two school districts, but I presume it was not the highest priority.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That school has been postponed. It was in the capital planning for the year 2009, but the school is still not there.

Anyway, my second question. With the population increasing considerably every year, in my constituency it is unavoidable that this need for a new school will have to be met sooner rather than later. The most recent capital plan critiques the practice of backlogging projects as they will only carry forward into a growing list of priorities. My question to the same minister: when will this

government finally address the need of the constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is not alone in terms of those of us who have needs for new schools in growing communities across the province. I think almost all of us have that issue to deal with. The difficulty we have is that our enrolments are not increasing. It's just that the students are not living anymore where the schools happen to be located.

But I do need to mention, Mr. Speaker, that when we announced our modernization program in August, it's my recollection that the Edmonton public school board chose the Ellerslie school as one of its projects for modernization. So I think the hon. member should be quite pleased with that announcement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As this government will not commit firm dates for when we can expect them to address my constituents' needs for a school, can this government tell us what they expect my constituents to do in the meantime to work through their school shortages?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my last answer, it's not that there is a school shortage. It's that as communities grow, the schools are not exactly where the students live. It is causing school boards to make adjustments relative to transportation. We are attempting as best we can, and our announcement relative to the nine new schools that'll be coming on stream in September of 2010 will certainly be going a long way to address this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Noise Attenuation along Freeways

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our city of Calgary road construction is at a hectic pace almost everywhere. It is great to see many major overpasses, interchanges completed during this year's construction time. It is also great to see beautifully designed sound barrier walls constructed in many parts of the city and along the Deerfoot Trail area. However, my constituents in the area of Dover Glen backing directly onto Deerfoot Trail have suffered a great deal from the traffic noise level, and no noise barrier walls exist. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. How do you address traffic noise that has become day and night suffering for residents in areas next to a highway?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, my department has guidelines for noise attenuation that mirror the city of Calgary's noise bylaws. We take potential noise issues into account as part of the planning process before we build something. If noise is or is going to be an issue, my department considers mitigation measures such as sound walls or berms. However, we first must make sure the noise levels actually support building a wall or a berm, and we also consult with the affected residents beforehand and try to accommodate their wishes as best we can.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Dover in my constituency about a hundred homes backing right onto the increasingly high traffic of Deerfoot Trail and Peigan Trail have asked me to bring the

day and night suffering from traffic noise to the government's attention. In fact, I visited the area and took some photos of the heavy traffic congestion right behind the houses. My question to the same minister: what is our minister going to do to address this noise-headache environment for my constituents?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that we will be doing a major improvement project in '08 on the very intersection that he has just mentioned. According to the planning work we've done for this project, the improvement shouldn't have any more effect on noise in that area. However, we do take residents' complaints very seriously, and I can assure the hon. member that we will look into this issue. I'll also remind the hon. member that we need to make sure that the noise is actually close to or exceeding our guidelines before we go ahead and start building those walls.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. I would certainly host your visit to our area to actually see and hear the noise of the traffic. I just want to thank you for this initiative to go into the area and investigate the noise.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Did you want to respond, hon. minister?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can tell his constituents that we take their concerns very seriously, and we will be looking into the issue.

As for building a sound barrier this upcoming summer, I sure won't promise that today, Mr. Speaker. As I stated in my previous answer, we first have to make sure the sound barrier is warranted and what type of barrier may or may not be needed. We follow very well established engineering criteria for these types of things that need to be done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Water Quality in Fort Chipewyan

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the minister of aboriginal and intergovernmental affairs. The Fort Chip First Nations continue to plead for attention to the environmental and health risks in their community raised repeatedly by Dr. John O'Connor and others. A recent independent study by Dr. Timoney, supported by Dr. David Schindler and now an eminent U of A epidemiologist, strongly suggests more investigations. They simply want government to investigate their concerns. It's my understanding that the MLA for Wood-Buffalo hasn't even visited the community since these concerns have been raised. To the minister: what are you doing for the First Nations in Fort Chip and their health and environmental concerns?

The Speaker: Okay. Hold on. Is this a question to the minister as a minister of the Crown or to the member as a member of the Legislature because that question can be totally out of order. That kind of slur: you know, we're way above that. We're way, way, way above that. Way above that.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I didn't see the hon. member joining me as minister when I was travelling the Athabasca downward to the very community that he speaks of.

Second of all, I might add that the minister of health in this very Assembly the other day indicated doing the proper protocols, ensuring that the health of citizens in all of Alberta and certainly in the oldest settlement in Alberta is protected and secured. This government is taking very serious action, serious investigation of that action relative to their well-being, contrary to what the hon. member has indicated and intimated here in this House today. He honourably should apologize.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the minister of health. First Nations residents in Fort Chip tell me they have experienced a heavy-handed and arrogant response from Alberta Health officials in relation to their concerns about water, air, and soil contaminations with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, arsenic, and mercury. Mr. Minister, you must know that science has no idea what the combination of these contaminants does in the long term to people's health. An eminent U of A epidemiologist has called for with the Timoney report a need to look beyond cancer rates and mortality rates to chronic conditions, immune effects, neurologic impacts. What are you doing to move beyond this?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We take the issue of health very, very seriously, and environmental health is a very important part of that. The department has an environmental health division. We work closely with the Department of Environment with respect to what they're doing with respect to monitoring both naturally occurring chemicals and materials but also to monitor what's happening with environmental load. We're very interested in the impact of the environment on health, and we'll be doing a lot more in that area.

With this area in particular, in each incidence where there's been a suggestion of a higher level of arsenic or a higher level of some other complex, we've engaged studies to determine. With respect, for example, to the arsenic we've determined that in the food supply in that area the level of arsenic is lower than in other areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Environment minister. Water is the most fundamental human need and a measure of government's willingness to do its job. Safeguarding water is a public trust. To his credit the Minister of Environment is recognized in the community and has expressed his willingness to monitor the situation there. Leading scientists have suggested that more study is needed and that conditions are worsening downstream from oil sands plants. To the minister: why is your department dismissing Dr. Timoney's report and not showing why the conditions are changing and deteriorating downstream from the plants?

2:00

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, quite the contrary. Our department is as interested in this report as any. The fact of the matter is – and the member seems unwilling to accept the facts – that we have been doing extensive monitoring of this river basin since the early 1990s. There are literally thousands and thousands of samples taken throughout this region, and there is no evidence to indicate that anything is changing. The minute quantities of various substances that have been identified are naturally occurring, and there's no evidence to indicate that they're changing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Health Facility in High Prairie

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans living in the Peace Country health region are going without many services such as renal dialysis, cancer treatment, and CT scans. I have ragged incessantly on the Minister of Health and Wellness regarding these needed services in the High Prairie area being included in the new proposed High Prairie facility. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the new High Prairie health complex finally get these needed services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "Ragged incessantly" would be an understatement.

There is a need. The High Prairie hospital complex has been an ongoing project for a number of years. The nature and extent of it has been under discussion for a number of years as well in terms of what should be located there, what should be collocated there, including learning opportunities. I first was involved in this project when I was minister of advanced education. So there has been a long history, but it is coming together. The funding is in place. Yes, there's going to be an increase in the scope of it so that it can include provision for renal dialysis at the appropriate time in the future and CT scan and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Calahasen: Well, then, Mr. Speaker, if that's the case, can the same minister tell me that the architectural drawings can now go on? We've been waiting and waiting and waiting.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I've sent a letter to the chairman of the board of Peace Country health advising that they can include an increased scope in the building to include the space for renal dialysis, to include the space for chemotherapy, and to increase the space for the CT scanner that they may acquire in the near future. It's important when we're planning health facilities for communities around the province that we look to the future and build them so that they have the capacity that they will need.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope to God that there is no stoppage of any of this facility because we've seen that before. Mr. Minister, can you ensure and tell my constituents that you will not allow any stoppage to occur as a result of this announcement?

Mr. Hancock: That, Mr. Speaker, might be a little beyond my powers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Anthony Henday Ring Road

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his response to me dated September 25, the minister of infrastructure indicated that when daily average traffic noise levels exceed 65 decibels, noise mitigation is considered, not implemented but considered. The minister also denied that his department keeps any inventory of correspond-

ing maximums in other Canadian jurisdictions. My constituents are concerned about noise levels on the Anthony Henday. A quick search reveals that B.C., for example, has noise guidelines where levels as low as 55 decibels are considered for noise mitigation, and at 65 they're certainly implemented. How can the minister do his job properly if he does not know how we compare to other provinces? Will he take my constituents' concerns as seriously as he would those from Calgary-Fort?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member was listening – and I take all Albertans' issues very, very seriously – I would like to say to the hon. member that right now we follow the same bylaws and guidelines of the other cities, and we do make sure that we will test and we will look after the issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, what's worse than the noise are the delays and long waits, the safety and navigational challenges at those locations where the Henday intersects Lessard Road, Callingwood Road, and Cameron Heights Drive. Again, my constituents have been asking for overpasses to replace these intersections, but the minister's letter indicates to me that there is no room for us in his current three-year plan. To the minister: why are those residents in the west end treated this way as compared to those travelling the southwest and southeast and now the northwest leg, who enjoy faster and smoother commutes with no signal lights? This is a freeway, right? We're all equal, right?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we do plan on making both ring roads, the full ring roads, a freeway at some point in time. The second and third legs that we've been doing were done under a P3 partnership, and the full, complete freeway status was part of the RFP.

Also, I will say that when we took over the roads in that west end, they were city of Edmonton roads and the city of Edmonton had done a survey and a review that showed that we wouldn't have traffic counts until a lot further out. We have now got those traffic counts when we opened the east leg. I am proceeding as fast as I possibly can, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Funny the minister should say that the city of Edmonton now is raising and stating its concerns about the status of these intersections because the minister is now responsible for them. So has the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation. So has the chamber of commerce. It's not only a convenience issue anymore; it's actually starting to adversely affect business. Higher than expected growth across the city, particularly in my area, means that the department's forecasts, not just the city's but his forecasts and timetables, were also off and they need to adjust and move forward quickly. To the minister: when can the city, businesses, and my constituents expect to see these overpasses finally built?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I had stated before, on the Stony Plain Road one we're getting the functional engineering done as we speak. I am trying to move ahead as fast as I can to get it within our three-year plan. We do plan on trying to move it ahead as fast as we possibly can. I'm not sure we could move any faster than we're moving on it right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Public/Private Partnerships

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government likes to talk about how great P3 funding initiatives are, but ordinary Albertans are skeptical. They see P3s for what they are: private businesses out to make as big a profit as possible. But it's even more fishy than that. Many of the companies involved in the major P3 projects this government has announced have made tens of thousands of dollars in donations to the Conservative Party and, I might add, a significant amount to the Liberals. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Studies and previous examples have proven that P3s add costs and reduce accountability. Isn't that too high a price to pay your Conservative Party donors?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely have not seen – I have not seen – anywhere where the typical ordinary Albertan has ever come out and said that we're paying too much on a P3 and are skeptical of our P3s. When they look at the last two or three P3s that we've just done and look at the market comparisons and also see, because of the double-digit cost escalations we've been into, the kind of money we've saved, people are saying: why aren't you doing more of these?

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, they really get excited when you mention privatization, don't they? They howl like the wolves.

My question is simply this. A recent report on P3 models for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities shows that P3s are basically a tool to get government off the hook for bad management, and they cost more than traditional financing. That's what the studies say. My question is to the minister. These companies are private companies. Their job is to make the biggest possible profit. They've made thousands of donations to your party. How is this a good deal for the taxpayers of Alberta?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I have to tell this hon. member that it doesn't matter what walk of life you come from or what side of the fence you're on, everybody has to make a living, and profit is part of that. Absolutely, when you're in private competition, you only bid to get the job. Yes, it would be nice to have a big profit, but you have to get the job, and if there's a competitive way to do that, you have to be in the right ballpark.

2:10

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's precisely how traditional financing was done, the bidding. It's the maintenance after that is the problem. This government has managed to rack up \$56 billion in infrastructure debt. Now they're looking for the quick fix, but instead they'll be making it worse by incurring debts to these private companies. They'll be paying these P3 debts for 30 years in some cases. How can the minister claim that Alberta is debt free when he's incurring these 30-year P3 liabilities?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, if he considers a 30-year warranty a debt, then there's something wrong with his thinking. Just to bring to his attention: we just won an award as one of the best in Canada in doing P3s and delivering them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Operation of Traffic on Multilane Highways

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since we have the minister on the ropes, let me pitch in. There are ongoing requests to

twin highways and build new highways, yet we don't maximize on the infrastructure we already have. There are no laws on the books in the highway traffic act that require vehicles to stay in the right lane unless they're passing or about to turn left. Can the minister advise us why the highway traffic act doesn't require Alberta drivers to drive in the right lane unless they're passing or turning left?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it's understandable that motorists become frustrated when these rules are not obeyed. God knows I'm one of them that gets frustrated. But under the rules of the highway and road regulations a provision is in place for the operation of traffic along a multilane highway. Drivers are required to use the right or outside lanes unless their travelling speeds are at or near the posted speed. The inside or left lane is intended to accommodate faster traffic on most multilane highways in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Infrastructure and Transportation has placed signs all over Alberta highways indicating to drivers to stay in the right lane, but these are merely suggestions to stay in the right lane. When will we have a law on the books so that we can actually enforce these signs and move traffic to the right to get rid of the frustration that the minister indicates?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I just mentioned that we do have a regulation in place. The Solicitor General does the enforcement of the highway traffic act, and maybe the Solicitor General would like to comment on that.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member mentioned, we currently do not have any legislation in place in Alberta that restricts driving in the right lane, but we do have legislation that indicates that when you're in the right lane, when you're not passing, and the left lane when you are, you do have to make sure you're not driving too slowly to compromise traffic safety. Our sheriffs and RCMP are on the road every day to ensure that those laws are adhered to.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, since we don't have a law and only signs that make suggestions, can the minister look at reviewing the highway traffic act so that it reflects the rest of the civilized world where drivers do drive in the right lane?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure you and this hon. member that traffic safety is a very high priority of this government. We are always looking at ways to improve our roads and the safety of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mount Royal College

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mount Royal College is working towards being accepted into the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada by spring 2009 in order to ensure the credibility and recognition of its undergraduate degrees. To be accepted into AUCC some criteria need to be met first. This includes a new library and learning centre as well as some additional

laboratory facilities totalling around \$90 million. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: will the government commit to providing full funding and support for these projects in the 2008-2009 budget to ensure their completion?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, he's asking me to answer a question about our budget, which has not been tabled in this House yet, and quite frankly I can't do that. Secondly, I would like to add that we've been working with Mount Royal College over the past year under the roles and responsibilities framework document, which I tabled in this House yesterday. The hon. member might want to have a perusal of that. It sets out very clearly that Mount Royal College will be an undergraduate degree granting institution for the foreseeable future in exactly the type and methodology that they have said they want to do. The AUCC accreditation, if you will, is not an accrediting body. It is simply an association of university faculty members that have gotten together. There is no accrediting body for universities in Canada.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I did peruse the framework, and that's why I'm asking these questions.

Mount Royal's acceptance into the AUCC is essential for ensuring that students are receiving degrees that are recognized around the world. Students with degrees from institutions which are not part of AUCC have found that their credentials are not being recognized elsewhere, not even in other provinces in this country, leaving them high and dry with \$20,000-plus degrees that get them effectively nowhere. Calgary students at Mount Royal need to have the government's full support to ensure that their degrees are recognized internationally on the same footing as universities. To the same minister: can the government commit to students in Calgary that they will do everything necessary to ensure that Mount Royal is accepted into the AUCC and its degrees are recognized internationally without question?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the hon. member doesn't understand the postsecondary system very well. Simple membership in the AUCC does not guarantee that any institution is going to readily accept your degree or your credentials. Every institution has to have a bilateral agreement with that institution to say whether or not their students will be accepted by way of their degrees. To simply state that this membership is the all-encompassing, all-important item is wrong. Mount Royal College is a very high-quality institution which delivers a high degree of quality in their education system. That is the credibility that will get those students into those other institutions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I think the minister is the one who is wrong here. Not being a member of AUCC virtually guarantees that your degrees will not be recognized to the extent that they need to be.

The Alberta Liberals have been advocating for some time to make Mount Royal a university. The college is already well on its way to having the credentials and the environment of a university provided that this government makes sure that they get the appropriate tools. We believe that once an institution has received the necessary accreditation, there should be a name change to reflect this. To the same minister: will the government commit to a naming policy for Alberta's postsecondary system which would see institutions named to reflect their accreditation and the nature of their instruction and research?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I would encourage the hon. member to actually read the document, not peruse it, because it's obvious that he has not. It's unfortunate that he's neglecting the fact, as an example, that for Grant MacEwan College degrees, arrangements have already been made for transferability outside of this jurisdiction and within this jurisdiction. Grant MacEwan is not looking to become an AUCC member. They're doing it based on the quality of the degrees that they're providing, which is exactly what the president and chairman of Mount Royal College and I have spoken about. The idea that AUCC will simply automatically grant them that type of transferability is wrong.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Physician Supply

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is in desperate need of health care workers to meet its ever-growing population. To meet this demand, we need to ensure that postsecondary spaces are available for students to complete their health care education. Some people are concerned that Alberta is losing its future doctors because the province doesn't have enough seats for them. In fact, we've heard that 50 Canadian graduate students were turned away from Canadian medical schools and are about to begin their physician training in Australia. Nine of these students are from Calgary. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What are you doing to ensure that Alberta doesn't continue to lose medical students to other provinces and countries?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:20

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did see the article as well. We are working to increase access, quality, and affordability across the spectrum of Campus Alberta. It is a high priority for this ministry. In fact, as I mentioned earlier in a response to another question, we recently released the roles and mandates framework and tabled it in the House.

As part of the health workforce action plan, which we're working on with my colleagues in the other ministries, we recently increased funding for health programs and created 258 new health spaces for 2007-08 alone. As the students move through their programs, the total number of spaces is going to increase by 704. Specific to doctors, 50 new spaces have been added to the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta over the past two years. We'll continue to work with those institutions to expand their capacities as we can, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is currently short 1,100 physicians. As forecast, our health care system will be short 1,800 physicians by 2016. Clearly, we won't be able to train as many physicians here in Alberta as we will need to address the shortage. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: what is your ministry doing to attract and recruit physicians from outside the country?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the Alberta health workforce plan and the participation of the ministries of Health and Advanced Ed and Technology we're investing \$3.8 million quite specifically in the recruitment and repatriation of health care professionals offshore. To this end we're assisted by the college of physicians and other organizations, including health authorities. Just

recently in Dublin we reconnected with 18 Alberta students who are over there studying medicine. It's our hope that some of these particular candidates will come back and provide physician support in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council I've been lobbied by many municipalities who are indicating their shortage of medical doctors. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. In light of the demand for more physicians in Alberta what is the Department of Health and Wellness doing specifically to attract doctors to rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question. I want to start out by saying that while we talk about a shortage of physicians, in the nature of 1,000 to 1,800, we can deal with that shortage in another way: by making sure that we make the most effective use of our health care professionals, working together. The revamping of our primary care through primary care networks and bringing health care professionals together will put primary care at the forefront, and that in itself will be a real boon to rural Alberta.

I want to also say that the hon. member as chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council has done a lot of work with that council to bring this issue to the forefront. One of the areas where there's been some recent success is not in the department of health, actually, but under the rural development fund, which has recently funded 24 internship positions for rural Alberta, which is extremely important to attracting and keeping physicians in the rural areas.

There are a number of other programs I'd be happy to elaborate on.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 84 questions and responses today.

When we moved to Oral Question Period, we were in the Routine under the segment known as Members' Statements. I'll now call on the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

head:

Members' Statements

(continued)

Buffalo Hotel Housing First Project

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to tell you a great story about the Buffalo Hotel and a very unique and inspiring Housing First project in Red Deer. This project has been funded by our provincial and municipal governments as part of the goal to end homelessness in 10 years. Not only does this project provide homes for the hard to house, but thanks to a consortium of social organizations working together, on-site addictions counselling, on-site mental health counselling, on-site employment training, and on-site hot meals are provided for those in need.

This unique Housing First project, oddly enough, was born from an old, historic icon in Red Deer called the Buffalo Hotel. The Buffalo Hotel has stood in its place for over 100 years, providing shelter and food for tired and hungry travellers. It was well known for its bar, that gathered people from all over to partake of refreshments, to socialize, and to nourish their spirits. Musicians and stars, like k.d. lang, have been fans of the Buffalo Hotel, and k.d. even starred in a musical production with the hotel called the Buffalo Café, that won a Gemini award.

The newest owners of this historic building, Potter's Hands, will maintain the historic appearance of the Buffalo and its history of nourishing body and soul, but they intend to change its focus from a hotel and bar for the tired and hungry traveller to a home and chapel for the tired and hungry homeless.

Herds of buffalo once roamed this province, providing food, clothing, and shelter for our First Nations people. The buffalo also brought bright hope for their future. Perhaps it's not just a coincidence that this new, unique Housing First project will bring food, shelter, and a bright hope for the future and will continue to be called the Buffalo.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What about nuclear? Nuclear plants are supported by certain influential and credible Albertans as the way forward for hydrogen production. Some supported a paper released some months ago under the auspices of the little known McIntyre Collegium. This document advocates Alberta nuclear plants as the answer for oil sands hydrogen production. It provides one side of the discussion in an advocacy approach. This paper seems oddly out of touch, using the term "tar sands" rather than "oil sands" and not even mentioning geothermal as a potential energy source. It is relatively comprehensive but not complete. We must be careful with nuclear in relying on any such advocacy documents as a source for public policy development.

Nuclear is dangerous. Spent fuel simply cannot be stored safely. It takes 10,000 years to break down. Deep underground storage of radioactive debris sounds good, but who knows what hell we may be hiding for future generations? Above ground storage of radioactive junk may provide such a hell even sooner. Chernobyl was state of the art at one time. The McIntyre paper tries to downgrade this human disaster. Ask the human victims. I wish the McIntyre sponsors would have attended the Chernobyl anniversary memorial and vigil for the victims at Edmonton city hall in 2006. The human and environmental toll was set out clearly. Those that care for Chernobyl orphans in Alberta know that toll.

What about new technology? Terrorists destroyed the World Trade Center towers in New York City. When will they find a way to do a dirty destruction of plants upwind of Edmonton or the oil sands? A Peace River nuclear facility spewing radiation could shut down all of the oil sands region for years, not to mention the death and destruction.

Alberta should concentrate on its strengths and develop clean or carbon neutral alternatives. Uranium mining produces CO₂ in abundance. We have oil. We have gas. We have incredibly abundant coal. We have wind. We have lots of sunlight. We can develop geothermal. Let's be careful. Let's be conservative.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I proudly rise to present a petition consisting of 2,385 Métis people's signatures from across Alberta petitioning the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to "continue to accommodate Métis harvesting for food, throughout the province of Alberta, through a negotiated harvesting agreement with the Métis Nation of Alberta."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions. The first one, further to my questions earlier today, has 43 signatures mostly from people in the west end urging the government to as soon as possible finish the overpasses and interchanges at the locations where Anthony Henday Drive, otherwise known as the Edmonton ring road, intersects Lessard Road, Callingwood Road, and Cameron Heights Drive.

The second petition is actually two parts. One has 15 signatures from citizens of the neighbourhood of the Woods and 14 from the neighbourhood of Jamieson, both asking the ministry of infrastructure to immediately and again in six months measure the noise that's emanating from the Anthony Henday, and if these levels are found to exceed acceptable provincial or municipal thresholds, that noise attenuation and reduction measures be implemented immediately.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice today of a motion.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill at second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of this stage of the bill shall be put forthwith.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling some green ribbons and brochures to highlight the national campaign Christmas for Darfur: Troops on the Ground. Ribbons were created by Barbara Butt of Calgary to encourage people to communicate their concerns about the genocide going on there to MPs and the Prime Minister. MLAs can request the ribbons and brochure from the pages.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have letters from my constituents Dwayne White, Mohamed Jama, Akhtar Ahmad, Feroza Akhtar, Aileen Byzanko, Catherine Kankam, Harold Guignard, Carmelita Fernandez, Steve Dearing, Gloria Cote, Theresa Frauenfeld, Mathew Neuman, John Krieger, Surya Rambarran. They are expressing their concern with the Alberta labour laws and strongly believe in major changes to encourage fairness to all working people in Alberta.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first one is from a concerned student in my constituency at Laurier Heights school, Melissa Wilk, who was here earlier. We're fortunate to have her in the public gallery today. She writes, "Why does no one ever receive fines for littering?" As well, Melissa wants to know why school buses don't come with seat belts.

My second tabling is from another student at Laurier Heights school, Teagan Wensel. Teagan is her class school patrol captain. She writes, "While patrolling, I see people who are talking on their cell phone and driving right through the cross walk being completely irresponsible."

My third tabling is a list of the names of 298 Edmonton-Riverview

constituents concerned about Alberta's inadequate labour laws. They state, "Alberta's labour laws require major changes to encourage fairness to all working people in Alberta."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Two tablings that I have today. On one I was more prescient than I thought I would be. This is five copies of a letter from myself to the hon. Government House Leader expressing concerns on possible closure, particularly in Committee of the Whole, for Bill 46.

My second set of tablings are letters from constituents Saba Habte, Deron Bilous, Myrna Eggen, Amanda MacKenzie, Nadine McConnell, Hans Vullings, David Marar,* Tina Bak, and Younes Sakil. These constituents are all concerned with Alberta's labour laws, and I'll highlight one of their issues: "Automatic certification of workplaces where more than half the employees have clearly indicated their desire to be represented by a union by signing a union card."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today. The first is a letter that I wrote today, November 29, 2007, to the Minister of Energy, and this is demanding the immediate release of all the draft regulations for Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, the bill that's going to have closure implemented on it, unfortunately.

My next tabling is a notice of amendment for Bill 46, and this is an amendment to change how section 17 operates.

I also have another amendment to Bill 46, which is to section 9(4), Mr. Speaker. I have another tabling here, which is an amendment again to Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, and this is an amendment to section 11.

I have another amendment here to Bill 46, and this is an amendment to section 23(1).

I have another amendment still to Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, and this is an amendment regarding section 24.

I also have on behalf of a constituent, Neil Parks, a letter requesting that we change the Alberta labour law.

I have another letter from a constituent, Mr. Sean Grykuliak, and he is also requesting that we change our labour laws in at least five significant ways.

This is also a resident of Edmonton-Gold Bar, Mr. Siegfried Hauke, who is requesting that we change the Alberta labour laws.

My last tabling – and I thank you for your patience, Mr. Speaker – is from Mr. Michael Dahl, who is also a resident of our constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and he wants to see five significant changes to the labour laws as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter from one of my constituents. His name is Mark Hopkins. He is an AISH recipient, and he had a part-time job and was able to save money through his part-time job, but he doesn't meet the requirements for applying for rental supplements, and he's really, really upset about that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of 200 letters from constituents of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood calling for changes to Alberta's labour laws. The letters express strong support for such changes as first contract arbitration, full legal recognition of bargaining rights for public employees, one labour law for all unionized workers, among other issues.

Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. Both are letters. The first one is from the Central Area Council of Community Leagues in Edmonton. This organization is concerned about the way Bill 46 reduces the ability of groups such as theirs to access funding for intervening in decisions before the board, decisions which nevertheless affect the neighbourhoods that this organization represents.

The second letter is from Linda Cheu of Edmonton, Mr. Speaker. She writes that Albertans need more open and transparent government but that regrettably Bill 46 delivers the exact opposite.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, and they relate to my member's statement on nuclear energy. One is a Reuters report, released internationally, which has a quote that says that the parliamentary committee "recommends that no decision be made on using nuclear energy to extract oil from the [oil] sands until the repercussions of this process are fully known and understood."

The second is The Oil Sands: Toward Sustainable Development, a report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, chaired by Lee Richardson, MP, from our national Parliament, which contains that recommendation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a senior citizen in Edmonton whose rent, after eight years of living in his current home and five rent increases, now takes up two-thirds of his income, and he expects another increase this year. He asks: when will the government realize it must legislate rent guidelines?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one is, again, more letters I've received from constituents urging us to revamp Alberta's antiquated labour laws to ensure fairness for all working people in the province. One of the ideas, for example, is to have one law for all unionized workers. These letters are from Dianne Buga, Gordon Buga, Mercedes Araya, Don Kennedy, Roxanne Swook, Herbert Schmidt, Julie Parsons, and Noreen Walker.

My second tabling is a letter from a constituent, Kim-Mia Rudiger-Prybylski, detailing how she suffered from Crohn's diseases and polyarthritis and how pasteurized milk made her condition worse. She actually shares with us even some pictures as to how raw dairy products helped her, but she complains that they're considered illegal or dangerous in the province and in Canada, and she wants us to consider maybe offering that choice in product offerings.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling of seven letters from constituents of Edmonton-Mill Woods expressing concerns about Alberta labour laws; for example, asking for “legislation outlawing the use of ‘replacement workers’ to break strikes, a measure that will vastly reduce the likelihood of violent labour conflicts.” The letters are written by Monique Bellinger, Jeanette Berg, Twila Rurka, Brian Wilson, Maureen Humble, Lyle Halvorson, and Patricia Halvorson.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Hancock, Minister of Health and Wellness, the Alberta Cancer Board annual report 2006-2007, Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors annual report to government 2006-2007 with attached financial statements dated June 20, 2007;

pursuant to the Health Disciplines Act the Health Disciplines Board annual report, January 1, 2006, to December 31, 2006; pursuant to the Mental Health Act the Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate office 2006-2007 annual report; pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Alberta Mental Health Board annual report 2006-2007; pursuant to the Opticians Act the Alberta Opticians Association annual report 2006; pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the 2006-2007 annual reports for the following regions: Aspen regional health, Calgary health region, Capital health, Chinook health, David Thompson health region, East Central health, Northern Lights health region, Palliser health region; pursuant to the Health Professions Act the College of Alberta Dental Assistants annual report 2006, the College of Alberta Denturists 2006 annual report, the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists annual report 2006-2007, the College of Alberta Psychologists annual report 2006-2007, the College of Dietitians of Alberta annual report 2006-2007.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, the Advanced Education and Technology public postsecondary institutions’ audited financial statements.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Oberg, Minister of Finance, speaking notes of the Canadian Institute’s sixth annual oils sands conference, November 26, 2007.

head: 2:40 **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader to please share with us the projected government business for the week commencing Monday, December 3, with government business commencing I guess it would be Monday night.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, in anticipation of favourable consideration this afternoon of the motion requesting that the House sit on Monday night, December 3, and potentially Tuesday night, December 4, and Wednesday night, December 5, I would include the anticipation of those nights in projected government business.

Therefore, on Monday, December 3, in the evening for third reading Bill 56, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act,

2007 (No.2), and second reading of Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act. Time permitting, we may proceed with Committee of the Whole on Bill 46, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, or Committee of the Whole on bills 41 and 31, 52, 48, 49, and 47.

On Tuesday, December 4, in the afternoon under Orders of the Day in Committee of the Whole Bill 46, which we anticipate would take most of the afternoon, but time permitting, the Committee of the Whole could proceed on bills 41, 31, 52, 48, 49, and 47.

In the evening on Tuesday, December 4, at 8 under Orders of the Day third reading of Bill 46, Committee of the Whole on bills 31, 38, 41, 50, 53, 54, 55; in other words, Mr. Speaker, as per the progress on the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, December 5, both in the afternoon and the evening it would be first with respect to remaining matters in Committee of the Whole and then anticipating third reading on all bills on the Order Paper under third reading.

On Thursday, December 6, presuming that we’ve made progress, we may anticipate the attendance of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I’m not sure as to whether his schedule will allow him to give royal assent, but failing progress, we may need the afternoon to complete third reading on bills remaining on the Order Paper in that position.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before calling Orders of the Day, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is really a great honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very strong Métis leader within the province of Alberta. Audrey Poiras, president of the Métis Nation of Alberta, and Shelley Wegner, who’s the executive assistant of the Métis Nation of Alberta, are seated in the members’ gallery, and I’d ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Motions

Evening Sitzings on December 3, 4, and 5

35. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Legislative Assembly convene, if called, for evening sittings beginning at 8 p.m. on December 3, December 4, and December 5, 2007, for consideration of government business.

Mr. Hancock: I think I was clear on those dates, Mr. Speaker, this time. The fact remains that under our Standing Orders we have set sitting times so that people can plan their schedules. The House is scheduled to rise on December 6. That leaves two options for remaining bills in place because there is no automatic vote, as there is in many jurisdictions that have fixed sitting times, where there’s a process by which bills can come to an automatic vote after a certain amount of consideration. That not being the case, our two options if there is remaining business are to – sorry. I guess I should ask: is this debatable?

The Speaker: Very debatable.

Mr. Hancock: The two options we have are to extend the sitting date, which we could by motion, or ask the House for leave to sit in the evenings. We've chosen first to do the evenings process in the anticipation that we might make progress on the remaining bills in that period of time. I don't anticipate that the evenings will take us into the wee hours of the morning. I'm anticipating that with goodwill around the House we can achieve the business that remains on the agenda that needs to be accomplished. But, Mr. Speaker, given the interest in Bill 46 and some of the other bills that remain on the agenda with amendments, and given the time it took for us to make the progress we made on Bill 1, for example, with amendments there, I'm anticipating we will probably need those evenings.

If this motion is passed, Mr. Speaker, I can say that we would be for certain meeting on Monday evening, and I would anticipate that Tuesday evening would be for certain as well. Wednesday evening we would call if we needed it, based on progress. But I think, given the nature of the work that remains, one can anticipate that if the Legislature approved this motion, we should plan for all three evenings. I think it's prudent to do so given the amount of business that is remaining on the agenda, as was pointed out by the Leader of the Official Opposition just the other day.

The Speaker: The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition. Speaking time is 20 minutes for the second responder on this motion. After that, it reduces itself.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. On behalf of my colleagues in the Official Opposition we, in fact, support Motion 35 to institute evening sittings to allow progress on very important bills that we have before this House at this time. We would prefer that the sitting itself was extended. I can tell you that as House leader I was quite firm, in the negotiations for the temporary standing orders, that there were not to be fixed end dates because of this situation which starts to arise, that the end dates needed to be a goal but not an absolute rule and needed great flexibility around them. So we believe that it would be far better to extend the sitting for a week or two until the business could be completed.

Well, the situation that I'm now looking at next week is that there are a number of committee meetings that were scheduled to take place, and despite protests being raised, those committee meetings are still taking place. Now we have a situation where there are both evening sittings and all-party committee meetings happening at the same time, and some of them, actually, have been scheduled for early in the morning.

I had heard the Premier say that he wanted this to be a better quality of life for MLAs, and I would have to pretty strongly refute that statement, given the choices that have been made by government in proceeding with the business next week as they have. At least two members of the opposition are now scheduled into two different all-party committees, one at 8 in the morning and one across the supper hour, and of course expected to be here for duty in the House in an evening sitting. [interjections] Well, it's worth pointing out because I think it's an important part of how this government is making decisions and the arrogance that is preceding that.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the effect of this motion because I think that government is not supposed to be what it has become in Alberta. We are seeing what has become of government in this motion and in the plans this government has for the next week of Legislature business. Mr. Speaker, governments and barns have at least one thing in common. They need a regular supply of fresh air, and goodness knows no animal ever suffered from some time in the sun, and no truth ever cowered from exposure to light.

When deals are made behind closed doors, when open debate gets quashed and replaced by the whisper of lobbyists; when caring and concerned citizens, just regular folks, get spied on; when reports gets ignored, shelved, shredded; when secrecy stops citizens from simply finding out what's what – well, my colleagues in the Assembly, ladies and gentlemen, when those things and more are happening, I think we've got a problem. If that's not exactly what you think government should be – top secret, confidential, for their eyes only – well, I can tell you that's what government in Alberta has become. If you don't think that's wrong, terribly wrong, I can only stand before you and tell you that I do, because it is wrong.

2:50

Now, folks, I understand the loyalty that many Albertans still feel to the party that is now in power. But you need to understand that I'm not talking about the values or the beliefs once put forward by that party. I am talking about practice, not theory. I'm talking about how well they do what they were voted into power to do. I'm talking about government and governing. To govern means to conduct policy. It means to manage, to make and enforce rules and standards, and we all hope to do so fairly and openly and accountably in the light, not in the darkness of night and not at a time when the public and the media will be sleeping. There was a time when this Legislature did its business far more openly, but under this regime and under this Premier those days are long gone.

In the 1970s the opposition of the day was able to take stands on the issues and bring public attention to them over days and weeks, and the government and the Alberta Legislature made room for that. I remember the famous Bill 11 debates of seven years ago, when the rules of the Legislature allowed weeks of debate on a highly contentious and fundamentally important bill and, through that, gave voice to the public concerns. We saw the public, and we heard the public, and the public, the people of Alberta, won the day over government scheming. [interjection]

See, even trying to talk about this in the House brings the Minister of Education to such angst that he has to heckle me, Mr. Speaker. Very interesting.

Today the government has placed such a stranglehold on this Assembly that such options are no longer available, and this motion is part of that strategy. It's not that there's just one contentious bill on the books. There are still 30 bills on the Order Paper, and several of them are highly controversial. Thirty bills this government is determined to ram through next week. Among them we have Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act; Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 31, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 38, Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007, which is representing our one and only chance to debate TILMA in this Assembly, I'm told; Bill 41, Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, also highly contentious; Bill 46, the most contentious bill this Legislature has seen in many years; Bill 48, the Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007; bills 54 and 55, concerning interbasin water transfers; and there are many others.

Some of these bills have genuinely odious provisions in them, provisions such as allowing regulations to be made that supersede legislation, Mr. Speaker, that supersede legislation. The desire of this House can be superseded. The trend there is obvious, a trend that accelerates the decline of the role of this Assembly and the decline of democracy itself in Alberta.

These bills also represent another trend, a trend to undermining local authority, a trend towards centralizing control. We see it in Bill 46 around interveners. We see it in Bill 41 around the professions. Mr. Speaker, where's the Premier on these issues? Where is the Premier on Bill 46? The Premier remains silent. The Premier

who promised openness and accountability is instead leading a government that with the aid of this motion will ram through any number of these bills.

Mr. Speaker, let's look at Bill 46, which is about spying. It restricts the ability of citizens to intervene on the approval procedures of major developments that could practically be on their doorsteps. A bill so flawed that the government has over 20 of its own amendments. It looks like it is now scheming to arrange these things so that the opposition's amendments, developed in close conjunction with the citizens of this province, won't even get entertained. In fact, it looks like a striking irony is at play here. Bill 46 restricts the rights of citizens to be heard, and the strategy employed by this government to push it through makes it impossible for this Assembly's own members to be heard. The cone of silence is descending.

We all know how government is supposed to work, and I can tell you that what we are seeing here now is not it. The point of all of this is not any one particular bill or issue, though there are many of those. What I'm talking about is how this is not the way government is supposed to work. It's not the way government here used to work, but it is the way now, and I'm concerned because under this Premier it is getting worse. Locked-out technical briefings, phone systems disconnected, microphones shut down, frozen out of government buildings like McDougall Centre in Calgary, and now this.

The Speaker: Are you rising on a point of order, Government House Leader?

Mr. Hancock: Absolutely.

The Speaker: Okay. We'll deal with the point of order right now, please.

Point of Order False Allegations

Mr. Hancock: Under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) and reserving the right to bring forward a question of privilege if it is appropriate, the allegations that the hon. member just made are without any substantiation, without any evidence at all. She's suggesting that they're actions taken by or under the direction of the Premier, if I heard her right, which clearly she has no basis for. Suggesting that the Premier is shutting off her microphone. I mean, this is going a little bit beyond.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to I'm not sure what citation, but in fact all of those things have happened and have been put into play by this government, of which the Premier is the leader. [interjection] Indeed it has when there have been a number of media conferences. When the government member had left the room, the telephone lines opening, allowing the media in other centres to listen in, were shut off, and when members of the Opposition tried to use those lines, they were removed and shut off. When we inquired about it, we were told that that was the choice of the Public Affairs Bureau and that they would not remain open for the Leader of the Official Opposition or our shadow ministers. Microphones as well have been turned off. The microphones that worked through the public system in the basement, which feed out into the various reporters' offices: when the government member leaves the podium and the opposition member goes up, those microphones are shut off. So, I mean, these things have all happened.

Again, we have been given access to McDougall Centre for meetings, for media conferences, and a variety of other activities, certainly during my time here, and that is no longer allowed. All of these have happened. They've all happened under the auspices of the Public Affairs Bureau, which reports directly to this Premier, so I don't think that I cast any aspersions there. What I stated has in fact happened and has certainly been my direct experience.

The Speaker: We're on a point of order here. Are there other participants?

I don't know where we're going to go with this. The hon. Government House Leader raised a point of order with respect to this. The hon. Official Opposition House Leader responded. It seems to me there's a pretty important point of clarification here. I don't know if it's a point of order. I have never been contacted by anyone with respect to any of these things that have been identified here this afternoon. It would seem to me that should such things be happening, hon. members might be in a position to rise on a point of contempt or even privilege, perhaps. But I have never seen or heard of anything in here, so I'm going to take this under advisement, if nothing else, for the future.

I also want to remind hon. members that what we're discussing and debating here right now is a motion that calls for evening sittings at 8 o'clock on December 3, 4, 5. We're a long ways away from that, but that's what we're debating.

Proceed, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be happy to get you the names of the officials that we have raised this issue with.

The Speaker: No, raise all of this in the House. All of this will be dealt with in the House. Any kind of contempt, privilege, or anything else affecting a member's role must be dealt with in the House.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you for the advice.

Debate Continued

Ms Blakeman: To continue, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we are talking about here is a government motion to institute evening sittings throughout next week. I have said that the opposition will support this motion, but I've also said that the opposition believes that we should be extending the sittings. To us this is signifying a number of other choices that the government has made that we think signify something much larger than just being disorganized and needing to have additional night sittings.

Now, a number of the members over there have been saying: oh, well, if we didn't get up and speak to anything, then this would not be a problem. They could just pass every bill without anyone speaking to it. If you go back and look, Mr. Speaker, you will find that most of the speaking times to the bills that we've already had up have been less than four hours, and four hours is not very much time. As a matter of fact, even for every member on the nongovernment side to speak for an allowed 15 minutes would take something in the range of over seven hours. Just for those members on the nongovernment side that would wish to speak to a bill, express their constituents' point of view, raise some concerns perhaps, or even support the bill, that's how long it would take us to each speak once. So there is an issue here about where the government is shaping things to go, and this particular motion is indicative of other things.

3:00

I think that we need a better government. We need one that is more open and out in the light, one that we can trust again. We need the public to know what they know about royalties. We need the public to know all the details of the government spying on its own citizens.

Clearly, what is occurring here with this motion is to facilitate Bill 46. We hope we're going to get extended time on that, but I have the feeling – and we've already seen closure brought in on second – that what this is foreshadowing, Mr. Speaker, is closure being brought in on every stage of the reading of Bill 46, which we have as yet had four hours of debate on. Not even all the members of the opposition have been able to speak to it once, and they are talking about bringing in closure on it.

We need the public to know the details of the government's spying on its own citizens, how common it has been, and why the Premier and the Energy minister are defending it. We need to know that the government is enforcing the rules and not playing favourites, and I hope that we will be able to hear all of this during the debate that is now going to be brought in through this Motion 35. We need to know that professions can speak up and govern themselves, and we need to know what deals are being made by whom and for whom. I think we need to see changes to how government works and changes to level out the playing field.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this Motion 35. As I said, we do support it, but we do see in it shadows of many things to come, which we do not believe in and we do not support in the same way that we will support this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Having been involved with the other House leaders working out the fixed election dates, one of the cardinal things that we tried to deal with was night sittings. We said that only if a necessity arose would we have to worry about night sittings. Now, I recognize at this stage where we're at. With supposedly a week left, as the House leader said, there are two alternatives if they want to pass this legislation. If they want to pass it, we have to either extend the days or go to night sittings. I guess at this stage – I'll come back to the organization – night sittings: I've seen for a long time, and I don't think the best work is done at those particular times. I think it's much preferable, if we had to, to add to the number of days we're sitting to deal with the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I'd say to the government, though, that this is organization on the government's part, why we're at this particular perspective. We've had five weeks, and there's some major legislation here. Now, we'll talk about Bill 46, but major legislation that I think, contrary to what some of the government members would say, has to be debated and discussed in this Legislature. That's what we're elected to do. We had a whole spring session, and now we're into the last week of the fall session. Why we'd still have all these bills on the Order Paper, I would say, was organization.

Let me come to Bill 46, Mr. Speaker. The government knew that this was going to be controversial, and they knew that people across the public, across Alberta were very concerned about this bill. It seems to me that we did some other things. We set up policy field committees to try to deal with these sorts of issues. If they wanted

to take a look at this bill, what was the hurry to all of a sudden have this pushed through in five weeks? Even if we had a debate on it, Mr. Speaker, what is the hurry? We could have put this off to a policy field committee, dealt with it in a way that people could have had public hearings and gone through it because there was no hurry to do this.

This is why we're in the situation we're in: because of the government's disorganization, if you like, and wanting to push a controversial bill forward, you know, in a minimum period of time. So now we're into night sittings. We're into the start of closure. We're into all sorts of things that are unnecessary, Mr. Speaker. For the government to say that now they need to do this, with a little bit of planning and organization with some of these bills, we could have been dealing with some of these in the spring session. We could be dealing with them if need be by having a few more days. That wouldn't kill us. But we certainly could have dealt with Bill 46 in a much more democratic way than this.

The fact is that the government knew that this was controversial, knew this. People have been having demonstrations, have been talking about it. This has been through the spring. Now to say that we're going to deal with this in five weeks, and now we're going to deal with it at night, and now we're going to deal with it, at least in the first part, with closure is just simply unacceptable. I would say to the government: if they want this bill and they think it's fair, take the time. Send it back to the policy field committee, have the public hearings, and you'll probably have a bill. The fact that they brought in all these amendments after the fact: they must recognize that they have a political problem here. But rather than deal with it in the proper way, now we're going to try to cram this through in a week, Mr. Speaker. It's unacceptable, and it's – well, it's disorganization or deliberate or whatever. It's unacceptable.

The point that I make and conclude with, Mr. Speaker, is that we can do better than that in this Legislature. That's why we sat down as House leaders and tried to work out rules that were meaningful to both sides of the House: so that the government members would have a more meaningful role; so that all of us would. It was not meant to come back and deal with all these major bills and deal with Bill 46 in the way we're dealing with it. It was not meant to do that. The hon. Government House Leader, if he says that was the case, then I was misled by what we were trying to do in those House leaders' meetings.

The Government House Leader must recognize – I think he has instincts about democracy – how wrong this is, what we're doing here today with this particular bill, why we have to rush it through this House at this particular time in a week, along with some other major bills. It's just totally unacceptable, Mr. Speaker, and totally unnecessary. But, you know, I mean, I understand. I've been in this Legislature a long time. I understand the numbers, that we can get outvoted on everything when you're in opposition, but that doesn't make it right. A lot of people are going to be very disappointed that are especially following Bill 46 closely. They're going to be very disappointed. No. Let me restate that. They're going to be absolutely angry about this.

Thank you very much.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

The Speaker: Hon. members, the next speaker I'm going to recognize is the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, but I want to bring the point of relevancy back into this discussion. I'm sitting here chairing this discussion. I'm looking at the item. The subject we're talking about is Motion 35, which calls for the sittings on December 3, 4, and 5 in the evening, which adds more hours to the

Routine that we have, and all I keep hearing about is Bill 46, which I don't see anywhere in this motion. This motion has to do with evening sittings next week. We're going to now deal with some relevancy – okay? – associated with this.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Debate Continued

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Specifically, I want to talk about the motion in front of us. It's ironic that the past two speakers from Edmonton, not from a distance away that have not slept in their beds: you guys have had the opportunity to sleep in your beds, go to your homes, go to your families. [interjections] You know, I hear a lot of whining from across the way here.

3:10

The Speaker: Hon. member, it is not important information to the members of this Assembly where they sleep unless the member is leading to some definitive conclusion about why they sleep where they do.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, these are the issues that I'm trying to raise. You know, I am quite supportive of the times that we have to sit in this House. When I got elected, I knew exactly what was expected of me: to spend time here in Edmonton and spend time in the Legislature. I was very supportive of the times that we had adjusted our schedules to for a fall sitting and for the spring sittings. You know, you adjust your family lives and your work in your constituency accordingly. So I have done so, and I haven't complained that I haven't been home for the last month or so. Now the opposition members say: well, let's keep you here another week. Well, I'm not prepared to, and that's why I'm supportive of this motion.

You know, while I'm here, I'll put in the hours. I work 15 hours a day, and I don't mind it. I'm quite proud of it. The members opposite complain about working a few hours in the evening so that the majority of the members here, whether you're from Dunvegan or Slave Lake or from Calgary or from Fort McMurray or from Whitecourt, can go home to our families – I think this is a little bit of team play – and work in our constituency, where it really means a lot to the people that elect you. Mr. Speaker, I'm in favour of this motion, and I think that in fair play everybody here should support this motion.

Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 48 Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to move second reading of Bill 48, the Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill proposes a number of amendments to the Hospitals Act, the Nursing Homes Act, and the Regional Health Authorities Act. The proposed amendments respond to recommendations made by the Health Quality Council of Alberta about the need to clarify accountability for hospitals and nursing home services. This bill follows through on this government's and this minister's commitment to

make needed legislative changes to assure Albertans of the sound governance of our health system.

The Hospitals Act and the Nursing Homes Act predate regionalization. Amendments are required to bring these statutes in line with our current regional governance structure and ensure that regional health authorities and ultimately the minister have the tools and the authority needed to carry out their duties.

I'll just briefly outline, Mr. Speaker, the areas of need. The Health Quality Council of Alberta asked the ministry to review the RHA Act and clarify final authority for all matters and each component part of the matters pertaining to the operation of health care facilities in a regional health authority. We've clarified the final authority by ensuring that all hospitals are accountable to their respective health authority and to the minister.

Now, I want to be clear here, Mr. Speaker. We have a number of voluntary organizations, faith-based organizations, which have been part of our health system for in excess of a hundred years. They provide good service to Albertans, and they are a continuing part of the health system. This bill is not about taking them out of the health system, and it's not about putting them subjectively under the thumb of a regional health authority. They will continue to operate. We have met with the Catholic Health Corporation and others who are representatives of the voluntary service providers and assured them of the fact that they will continue to be part of the health system and a respected part of the health system.

The authority that's clarified under the act will be followed up, of course, with discussions that we're having now with the parties with respect to what's known as the master agreement, or the minister's agreement, relative to what role and function voluntary service providers and faith-based providers have in the system and the value that they bring to the system. That agreement and the service agreements, which I'll come to in a minute, will clearly spell out the faith-based principles or the values that are brought to the table and must be inherently part of and considered in the operation of the system and in the service provided by those organizations to their respective RHAs and ultimately to Albertans through the ministry. This act is setting up an assurance process whereby Albertans will know that there are clear lines of authority and that the ambiguities that were identified by the Health Quality Council have been cleared up. Albertans will also know that this is not in any way an intention to change the role and function of faith-based providers and voluntary providers in our health system.

The amendments that are being put forward will broaden current inspection practices and allow for inspections in places where health services are provided or funded directly or indirectly by a regional health authority. The expanded authority will better allow us to ensure that all publicly funded health services meet quality standards regardless of where they may be provided.

The key Hospitals Act amendments will include areas where matters of public health and safety are called into question. When we responded to the issues in East Central health and, in particular, with St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville this spring, I found as minister that I had very few tools available under the Hospitals Act. The actual role and function of the procedures that were set out under the Hospitals Act were circuitous, to say the least.

What these amendments are bringing forward is a very clear regime which will allow the minister to respond more quickly to put in place a necessary plan for a hospital in a circumstance such as we saw arise. The current act provides for boards of management, which may be required to carry out a plan for the hospital. That board of management under the current act requires the existing board of directors of both the hospital in question, if it's a voluntary hospital, and the RHA, the regional health authority, that's impacted

to ask the minister to put in place a plan. That's not really a clear role or a clear pathway for a minister to follow if you have a situation which you clearly believe to be in the public interest and a public health issue. This will allow the putting in place of a plan and establishing an administrator in appropriate circumstances. It's an authority which is similar to that established in the Nursing Homes Act and provides a consistent set of tools for the minister and the ministry. Without this amendment the ability of the minister to respond to emerging and urgent matters in the health authority may be compromised.

The recommendations of the Health Quality Council of Alberta are addressed by amendments requiring hospital boards to comply with the act or the regulations, the terms of a contract or agreement with the regional health authority, or direction of a region or a minister.

Other amendments to the Hospitals Act clarify that all hospitals in Alberta must operate in a co-ordinated fashion within the regional governance system and the requisite accountabilities and authorities that are in place to protect the integrity and the safety of the patients.

Mr. Speaker, again, I want to make it clear because it may not be, and we want it to be clear – and I've had meetings, again, with the Catholic Health Corporation and with others who carry out duties in the voluntary sector and the faith-based sector. The intention here is that those requirements that may be put in place by a regional health authority would be in the context of the service plan. In other words, a regional health authority would not be able to come along and issue a directive which would be outside what the service provider had contemplated, had agreed to under their service contract. We're continuing those discussions, and we may be back with amendments in Committee of the Whole – in fact, I anticipate we will – to clarify that, that there will be parameters around this and assurances that regional health authorities will not be able to act outside the confines of the service agreement.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments that are being proposed here also provide, of course, for some fines so that the provisions can be enforced, liability protection for those acting in good faith, and regulation-making authority, which is necessary, prescribing the basis upon which one can deal with a situation which has gone to a point where land or buildings or property used for a nonregional hospital can be dealt with, clarifying the role and authority of medical officers of health and the chief medical officer of health, et cetera.

3:20

Now, again, there are some concerns around that that have been raised in discussion since the bill was tabled. Of course, what we want to do is to be able to have people take a look at the bill and provide feedback. I've received that feedback and, again, anticipate making sure that we bring clarity to the Committee of the Whole when and if the bill gets there to show that this is not about expropriating anybody's property. In the normal course if there's a plan put in place and as a result of that plan it's not determined to be appropriate to return the facility to the board of management that was in place, to its original ownership or use, what happens then? We've seen that circumstance under the Nursing Homes Act, certainly, and this just brings it into the Hospitals Act.

The key element here is to make sure that our health facilities serve the public interest, that they're operated in a manner which is consistent with the best quality of care and infection prevention and control. That's got to be a priority. It's got to be auditable; it's got to be enforceable. These amendments to this bill will give us the tools that are necessary to make sure that that framework is in place and can be done in an appropriate way.

Amendments are being brought in this bill to the Nursing Homes Act. The language and concepts for both the Hospitals Act and the Nursing Homes Act are similar. We're basically ensuring a uniform and functional set of tools in place in our key health facility statutes to clarify authority and accountability. Currently under the Nursing Homes Act the minister may order that a correction plan be prepared but only in response to a contravention of the act or regulations. Another tool available allows the minister to suspend or cancel a nursing home contract if the nursing home is operated in a manner that could place the residents' health or well-being at risk.

The nature of this bill that we're bringing forward, Mr. Speaker, is really one of making it clear what the authorities are, what the lines of accountability are, how they operate in a health system, clearing up the issues of the ambiguities that were identified by the Health Quality Council by making sure that it's clear that service providers, if they're nonregional hospitals or nonregional facilities, operate within the context of a region. Their accountabilities have to be spelled out under a service contract, but the facilities have to be auditable, and there has to be an enforcement mechanism.

Ultimately, it comes back to the minister of health to be responsible and accountable, and it comes back to the minister of health to provide assurance to Albertans that their health facilities are being operated in a comprehensive and competent way, and we need the tools in place to make sure that that can be done, not only can be done but can be done in a timely and effective way.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the House to approve Bill 48 at second reading and allow us to take it on a timely basis to Committee of the Whole, where I will advise the House that I am engaged in discussions with the various service providers who will be affected by the bill, whom we've had discussions with throughout the course of this year but certainly starting in August about master service agreements, which are not in the context of this bill but certainly affected by it.

Now that we've tabled the bill and they've had a chance to look at it, we're talking about how we can make sure that they see themselves in the public health system in this province and that this bill is not intended to put them out of business but rather to enhance the accountability framework, which was called for by the Health Quality Council and is certainly necessary to make sure that government can play its role of assurance and the minister can assure the public of Alberta that health facilities across the province are being operated in a safe manner, are operating in accordance with appropriate standards.

We will be putting out provincial standards. We will, as we've talked about earlier, make sure that there will be an appropriate provincial audit and enforcement mechanism for those standards. This bill is one of the pieces in that whole process.

Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head:

Government Motions (continued)

Time Allocation on Government Motion 35

36. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Government Motion 35 regarding evening sittings on December 3, December 4, and December 5, 2007, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration to the motion, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the motion shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we start this debate, there is a time allocation with respect to the participation of speakers with respect to this. In essence, two people will be recognized at a maximum of five minutes each.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It had been my hope that I wouldn't actually have to move this motion. I had hoped that maybe in moving Motion 35 and outlining for the House the need for the evening sittings and the options that were available, we would hear from the Official Opposition and hear from the third party, but it became quickly apparent that other members were deciding to get into a debate on what I consider to be a procedural process. I don't have any problem with that. I understand the need for debate and people desiring to do it, but it is a procedural motion, and an hour should be sufficient time to dispose of that.

I won't respond further at this time to the issues that came up on Motion 35 but, rather, will speak to that in closing debate on that motion. I would ask the House under this motion to allot up to an hour for debate on Motion 35 – it doesn't have to take that long – so that we can get on with, as the Opposition House Leader pointed out, the rather extensive number of bills that are on the Order Paper.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader, maximum five minutes.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that reminder and for recognizing me. Well, on behalf of the Official Opposition we are not in favour of Motion 36. As I tried to think of how to respond to this, a number of sports metaphors came to mind. Having just heard the hon. House leader speak, I'm really starting to see this particular closure motion as a warm-up pitch for an entire game of closure motions to come, particularly on Bill 46 because we've already had the oral notice from the government that a closure motion will be brought in on second reading of Bill 46 on Tuesday night. I'm expecting that the government will probably try and do closure on every single stage of reading on Bill 46.

In some ways I've been trying to research how many of the many recommendations that were made at the 2004 Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying had actually been implemented. I'm finding not very many of them. The community has certainly done some work, and there's been some grant money, but the number of recommendations certainly haven't fulfilled the expectations from that round-table.

In considering why, I thought, well, I guess that's no surprise because I'm finding increasingly that this government is acting as a bully itself. In this case I find that the government is using the power that is granted to it by parliamentary process to tromp on, stomp on, smash, ransack democracy. They can call it anything else they want, but the point is that this House is here to debate ideas and bring forward the voices of Albertans. What I'm seeing is that like a schoolyard bully who breaks the baseball bat or punctures the soccer ball when they don't get their way or when they don't win the game, this government does the same thing for a process which should allow full debate on motions and bills.

Yes, today we're talking about a closure motion on a procedural motion to give us night sittings, but as we already know, it's the first of many motions. In my 11 years in this Assembly I've seen this government go from allowing dozens of hours of debate before bringing in closure to – this time what did we actually manage? – 20 minutes, 25 minutes before they brought in closure on it. There were three speakers. Interestingly, a number of the other speakers

that appeared on the list were in fact government speakers, private members who wanted to get up and speak and are not being allowed to. I have to wonder, you know, that there has to be a great deal of fear about what might get said in this place to work so hard to shut it down even on a procedural motion, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

The government is given a great deal of power in the parliamentary rules, but with that comes a responsibility to not abuse it. That set-up happens again and again and again. It's outlined again and again and again in the parliamentary books that I spend time trying to read, like *Beauchesne* and *Marleau and Montpetit* and *Erskine May*. They say we have freedom of speech. Yes, that's very special. Don't abuse it. Don't unnecessarily shout at people or call them names. That freedom of speech is not to protect you getting up and abusing someone. Well, I would argue the same thing comes into play here. The ability that is given to government to process business through should not be turned into an abuse of that process. I would argue that that is what we are seeing now with this motion and with the other closure motions that have been indicated to us already.

We know that it's only the first of many closures the government is bringing in. We've got three government sitting days and three nights now that we're expecting, and my spidey sense is telling me that closure will be used a number of times. I just think that's an aberration of what the parliamentary process is supposed to be about. I think it's wrong, frankly, and I think it's an abuse of that parliamentary power that the government side is given. The rules are weighted towards the government so they can get things done, but that power should not be abused.

Frankly, 25 minutes of speech: that's got to be shut down? Four hours of debate on Bill 46, and it's got to be shut down so they can move something through? Why? That is an abuse. I don't see how this Premier is more open or more democratic or having more participation from all the parties. You know, if closure is used to ram through Bill 46, even the government backbenchers won't get a chance to get on the record so their constituents can see what they did. How do the rural MLAs prove they fought for their constituents? This is wrong.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 21(3) is very clear in this matter. I must now call the vote, bringing the matter to the attention of the House.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 36 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:32 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Ady	Goudreau	Lund
Amery	Haley	Marz
Boutilier	Hancock	Oberg
Calahasen	Hayden	Oberle
Cao	Horner	Pham
Cenaiko	Jablonski	Shariff
Danyluk	Liepert	Snelgrove
DeLong	Lindsay	Strang
Doerkson	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Ducharme	Lukaszuk	VanderBurg
Dunford		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	MacDonald	Miller, R.
Bonko	Martin	Pastoor
Eggen	Mather	Tougas
Elsalhy	Miller, B.	
Totals:	For – 31	Against – 11

[Government Motion 36 carried]

head: **Evening Sittings on December 3, 4, and 5**
(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, do you want to continue?

Mr. VanderBurg: No, thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Hon. members, now we have a maximum of one hour allocated for this before it has to come to a resolution.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have listened to the previous speakers debate Government Motion 35. We are talking specifically in this motion about having evening sittings next week on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday if necessary. I, for one, certainly don't have any objection to working in the evenings, but there's more to this motion than just working in the evenings.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talked about the fact that this government has no plan, and it's clear, whenever you look at this motion and you look at what's happened in the previous four weeks of this legislative session, that this is a government with a new leader but still operating without a plan.

With this motion, as the hon. Government House Leader has suggested, there is a need for additional time to discuss a heavy legislative agenda. I don't disagree with that, but I think the other option that he suggested, which was to extend the session, is the direction, Mr. Speaker, that we should go in. The session should be extended far beyond next week, and if we have to rearrange our schedules, so be it. If the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne has difficulty finding a place, well, then he can come over, and we'll put him up. If his members' services allocation is not adequate to find a place for the second week of December, we'll certainly make sure that he has a warm place to sleep and nutritious meals so that he can further discuss Bill 46.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

If we are to have a valid discussion and a meaningful discussion on not only Bill 46 but Bill 38 on TILMA, I don't think we can do it just between 8 o'clock and 10 o'clock Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. In fact, I know we cannot do it.

Now, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne said, "I'm not prepared to" stay beyond next week. That really disappoints me because I have heard directly, Mr. Speaker, from constituents of the hon. member who have concerns specifically regarding Bill 46. I have heard concerns from citizens across the province who have concerns about Bill 46, and they're not addressed in the amendments that were proposed. I'm quite suspicious that we can deal with this contentious matter in a matter of a few hours, and this is what we're proposing here with Motion 35.

I have no problem coming in here a Monday, a Tuesday, a

Wednesday evening. I have no problem whatsoever. What I do have a problem with is the heavy-handed manner of this government. It's only two days ago that we saw 24 amendments to one piece of legislation which will be discussed either Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday. That's Bill 46. We've had 24 amendments to this, and the amendments are quite interesting. I don't think we can deal with them in a short period of time if we are interested in improving Bill 46. If we just want to force it through the Legislative Assembly and force this undemocratic legislation on Albertans, then so be it. This is what's going to happen. We're going to force this, through closure, onto Albertans, whose opposition to this bill intensifies every day.

3:50

Perhaps this is the reason why the government wants to have these night sittings and not extend the session. They know that as opposition to this legislative proposal intensifies, their support goes down even further, not only in rural Alberta but also in Calgary. The issues that His Worship Mayor Bronconnier articulated regarding Bill 46 are not addressed in those amendments. They're not addressed in those amendments. Some of the issues that he brought forward: certainly, there is an attempt to address the issues but not all of them.

Now, I don't have, in the time permitted, an opportunity to go through all the amendments A through X that have been proposed by this series of tablings of these amendments. When we look at this, Mr. Speaker, are we going to have time next week in debate to get to the bottom of the repeal of part 5 of Bill 46? In the hours, whether it's Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, will we have time to get an explanation from the government on why part 5 is now being deleted from Bill 46?

Part 5 talks in section 34 about water and about electric energy and natural gas. It goes on at length, and it mentions water. Water is an added commodity in this bill, but when this section is removed and we look at the amendments, we look specifically at amendment S, Mr. Speaker. S for Speaker. Okay. Amendment S, the letter S – we see where water has been removed. It's not a commodity like electric energy or natural gas, but the government has conveniently through regulation given themselves a wide open window to, at a later date in cabinet, when no one has an opportunity to watch or listen, secretly add water as a commodity. Now, is this democracy or democracy gone off the rails? I would say that it's democracy gone off the rails.

I was asked yesterday to sum up how I felt about Bill 46, and I had to go back and think. I thought: this government is still not listening to the many people who have valid, legitimate questions regarding the direction the government is going in with the energy regulatory process through Bill 46. But we find with this motion that those opinions, those concerns are not going to have an opportunity to be discussed in here, not if we support this motion and don't extend the session. There's not a chance that the issues that the landowners have with this bill, the issues that farmers have with this bill, the issues power producers have with this bill, the issues the city of Calgary has with this, the issues the Consumers' Association has – they're not going to have an adequate chance to hear this government out.

Why the rush to force this bill through the Assembly during the evenings next week? Why the rush? Certainly, the hon. member previous said, well, there's a lack of plan from this government. We know this. I can understand why this government is very sensitive. They have had to deal with some very embarrassing issues here, whether it's the spy scandal, whether it's the fact that we have not collected our fair share of royalties for an extended period of time,

costing the treasury billions of dollars in lost, uncollected revenue. I know the Minister of Finance is very disappointed that the heritage savings trust fund is not worth at least \$30 billion. I know he feels very disappointed that those royalties were not collected. There are so many issues that this government has handled poorly because it had no plan.

I can see why you would want to support this Government Motion 35, so you can exit this place and carry on with the social gatherings of the season. But I really think we should forgo our usual social gatherings of the season, extend the session, and deal with these very valid matters. You just can't escape.

I can't imagine what citizens in rural Alberta are going to think when they hear that we're going to meet briefly Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings, and at the end of the week, if this hon. Government House Leader and his colleagues have their way, Bill 46 will become law. We won't have an opportunity to examine publicly all the amendments that are being proposed.

I understand the Premier said earlier this afternoon – and I stand corrected if I'm wrong – that he wants to co-operate with the Official Opposition regarding Bill 46. Well, if he does, we're going to have to have a lot of time to discuss the many amendments that we have to try to fix this rather flawed bill. If we're going to run it through and we're not going to have any public consultations – and this is what Motion 35 is going to do. It's going to put Bill 46 on an express line, and it's going to become a law, and it's going to be in force on January 1.

Sure, you can hire these \$500-an-hour consultants to plan an implementation of this bill. You can do that. But you don't want a full public discussion on the bill, and we can't do it in the time that you are proposing here. It just cannot be done.

The regulations. There are in this statute many, many opportunities. In fact, there are 22, Mr. Speaker. There are 22 opportunities for the government to write these regulations behind closed doors, quietly in secret, and there will be not a thing said. Then in the amendments that were tabled here on Tuesday, there are an additional 10 mechanisms available for this government to rule by regulation. In total you have over 30 sections of this bill that will allow this government to rule by regulation.

This is a government that maintains that it wants to restore public confidence in the process that we follow for energy regulatory hearings. You want to restore public confidence, but you do not want to have any public consultation. It's not going to work. We just can't act in a draconian fashion. Whenever this government caucus assembles and they discuss among themselves, I can't imagine which governments they admire most.

Mr. Elsalhy: Russia?

Mr. MacDonald: It may be Russia.

An Hon. Member: Or Cuba?

Mr. MacDonald: It might be Cuba. It might be some of those old regimes from eastern Europe. But, certainly, it's not a progressive, enlightened democratic focus, you know, Mr. Speaker. This is what disappoints me about this government. Motion 35 is not the way to go.

4:00

Certainly, as I said, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I will set aside time and in the spirit of democracy will try to propose amendments to fix a proposed flawed law, which is Bill 46. When this motion was written, the hon. Government House Leader must have been

very nervous because rural support for this party is going to be diminished if this . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening to this member and the Member for Edmonton-Centre, and I must tell you that some of the comments that they were making were nothing less than offensive. [interjection] The Member for Edmonton-Decore might be moaning and groaning, but first of all, to compare this House and members of this Assembly to that of the Soviet Union is not only indignant but it's really insulting, not only to members of this House but to those who elected all of us to this House. This member obviously – obviously – may be ignorant enough not to know what he is talking about and what he is comparing this House to. He has obviously not lived in a regime that is totalitarian to be comparing this House and the government system that we have to the totalitarian regime in Cuba.

Mr. MacDonald: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs in my view is totally out of hand, and I rise under Standing Order 23(h), making "allegations against another Member." I would simply at this point ask the hon. member to retract his comments that he made.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, on the point of order. I would remind everybody that during a point of order the clock keeps running.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I have indicated that this member is ignorant in his statements of comparing this House to that of the Soviet Union. Ignorance is lack of knowledge, and I maintain that this member has clearly exhibited profound lack of knowledge and ignorance relevant to this House and those of others throughout the world where we know there are dictatorial regimes. So I have no apology. I can't apologize for the member's lack of understanding of the differences between different governments.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the point of order?

As was pointed out earlier this week, there is back and forth in debate. I think an opinion was expressed, and opinions get expressed back and forth. I think we would be better off if we stuck with the gist of the motion, which is talking about convening for evening meetings. [interjections] Order.

We're debating Motion 35, which is calling for evening sittings beginning at 8 p.m. on December 3, 4, and 5 for consideration of further government business. That's what we're debating, so let's stick to the debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Debate Continued

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. Now we have this comparison of this government to that of the Soviet

Union. This is the government that in the last 11 months has reformed the Public Accounts Committee, which this member is the chair of, and opened it up to all government departments for full and thorough examination. It is this government that created all-party field committees, so members of the opposition have the ability to fully participate in the democratic process. [interjection] The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is obviously insulted by having to hear the facts and truth, but let me carry on.

This government is the one who has limited night sittings, so we don't have to sit at night unless a situation like this arises. It is this government that is posting travel expenses of ministers on a publicly accessible website. It is this government that has created the lobby registry. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has the floor.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's obvious that facts really irritate them, but let's carry on.

It is this government that has created a lobby registry so that all Albertans know who the government is meeting with and who the government is lobbying with. [interjection] Mr. Speaker, should I sit down and allow the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to speak? He obviously will not allow me to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: Were you finished?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, I wasn't. I was trying, Mr. Speaker, to keep on talking, but I can't.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is finished.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This ought to be fun.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there have been only a few occasions in my three years here that I've considered to be black days. This is certainly one of them because as has been pointed out by many speakers already this afternoon, clearly . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has the floor, and we will allow that to happen.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, today is really a black day because, unfortunately, as has been pointed out by a number of speakers, this motion, Government Motion 35, which would allow us to sit evenings next week, is really just a precursor for what we all know is coming. The Government House Leader this afternoon gave oral notice that they will be using closure on Bill 46 next week.

I have to say up front, Mr. Speaker, that we're actually in support of Motion 35. In fact, as I know the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne indicated, he would be more than willing to sit evenings. So would this member be more than willing to sit evenings, as many evenings as it takes to deal with the very, very important piece of legislation that is in front of this House, and that is Bill 46. There are 22 amendments coming from the government side alone. I have no idea how many might be coming from the opposition side, but I'm going to suspect that it might be as many. Three evenings clearly are not going to be sufficient to deal with the legislation that's in front of this House.

Mr. Hancock: Who said it had to be three? There could be more.

Mr. R. Miller: It could very well be many more. The Government House Leader is indicating that perhaps there are more than 22 amendments coming on Bill 46.

Mr. Hancock: No, no. I meant days. Let's start with three and see how it goes.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, let's start with three days. Let's see where it goes. In fact, if the Government House Leader had been paying attention, Mr. Speaker, he would have heard that I said that I support this motion. I think this is a good motion. I think it's a great place to start.

What causes me concern, however, is that the Government House Leader has already signalled that he doesn't think that those evening sittings are going to be very long. He's quite confident, in fact, that they won't be late evenings. Well, I look at the Order Paper, and there are approximately 30 bills in front of us, and the Government House Leader is contemplating short evenings. Well, that can only tell me one thing, Mr. Speaker, that he's also contemplating closure. There's just no other way around it. The smugness that comes from the other side when we have a serious debate about democracy or lack thereof in this province and the number of times that this government has now taken to using closure to get through debate just astounds me.

I heard the Government House Leader in the media last night talking about the Leader of the Official Opposition and how if he hadn't spoken for 60 minutes the other night on some little amendment on Bill 46, then perhaps there would be more time to discuss Bill 46. Well, let me remind all members – let me remind all members – that when the Official Opposition leader spoke for 60 minutes on Bill 46 the other day, he was speaking to a very, very, very important amendment. The amendment was moved by the ND opposition, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the amendment was to take Bill 46, which is probably the most controversial piece of legislation that this House has seen in many years, and refer it to the policy field committee on energy and the environment, which, quite frankly, is exactly where that bill belongs, exactly where it belongs. This bill has been trouble from day one, and the government knows it.

Mr. Speaker, you look at a government that comes back after a whole summer off, 22 of their own amendments, and what happens?

Mrs. Jablonski: You might have had it off.

Mr. R. Miller: Actually, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North is suggesting that the Official Opposition had the summer off. Well, quite clearly, the Official Opposition works a whole lot harder than that member does. There's not much doubt in my mind about that, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

Mrs. Jablonski: Point of order.

Point of Order
Allegations against a Member

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North on a point of order.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm raising a point of order on *Beauchesne* 23(h), making an allegation.

Mr. Elsalhy: That's not *Beauchesne*.

Mr. Martin: That's a standing order.

Mrs. Jablonski: I was standing.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member on the point of order.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly the member who's raising the point of order doesn't even know the standing orders of this House. She's not familiar enough with *Beauchesne* to cite the proper citation. I would argue immediately that there is no point of order. But if there were to have been a point of order, the only difference between my comments and hers would be that mine were while I was standing speaking and I had the floor. Hers were in a heckling manner. If anybody contravened Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), it would be the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, who was making comments which clearly . . . [interjections] And they continue to do it while I'm speaking now.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe I'm ready to rule on this. I just ruled the same ruling on Edmonton-Castle Downs. Opinions are expressed back and forth, and I think that if everyone that had the floor expressed their opinions through the chair and the rest would listen attentively, we would have fewer of these points of order that aren't points of order.

Hon. member, continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll continue with my arguments in favour of Government Motion 35, which would see us sit evenings next week, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. As I was indicating, the government members had the entire summer to prepare amendments to Bill 46.

Mr. Bonko: How about getting it right the first time?

Mr. R. Miller: Well, clearly, as the Member for Edmonton-Decore suggests, had it been properly drafted in the first place and had proper consultation been done, none of this would have been necessary. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. Then, of course, the summer goes by and we come back and we start to hear rumblings of amendments, and in fact it turns out that 22 government amendments are to be dealt with. But, Mr. Speaker, for whatever reason – and remember, the government is in control of the agenda in this House, not the Official Opposition – the government chose to continue to defer debate on Bill 46 until here we are entering the last week of the fall sitting, the last projected week of the fall sitting, and the most controversial bill that has been in front of this House in many, many years has had I think less than five hours of debate to this point.

Now they want us to deal with 22 of their amendments, and Lord knows how many amendments might be coming from the Official Opposition party and the third party and the independent members of this House. I know that they all have amendments that they would like to have discussed in this House. Now suddenly the push is on. With only three government days left in the sitting calendar, the push is on to suddenly not only deal with these 22 amendments plus whatever amendments there might be coming from the opposition side of the House, Mr. Speaker, but, as well, the remaining 30 pieces of legislation that are on the Order Paper. It's insanity, if nothing else.

How can anybody reasonably expect us to do a legitimate job of debating legislation in this House, 30 pieces of legislation, in three

sitting days? That's not democracy. It is a black day. Frankly, it causes my heart to sink to look across the way and see the smugness on the faces of the government members who somehow think that this is democracy in action when they shut down debate and ram through legislation in the manner that everybody in this House knows is going to happen next week.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Start debating the bill, then.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, you know what? I would love to start debating the bill, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. I would love to start debating it. I would love to stand here and have the opportunity, as I should and as every member of this House should, to debate every single amendment that the government has on Bill 46, Mr. Speaker, and then to debate every single amendment that the opposition has on Bill 46 and to allow every single member of this House the same opportunity. But that is not going to happen. Everybody in this House knows that's not going to happen because these guys are going to use closure, and they're going to use closure more than once. They're going to use it at this point three times on Bill 46. We know that. They've telegraphed that to the whole world. This is no longer a secret. They're not going to allow proper debate to take place on their amendments, let alone on the amendments that the opposition might have prepared through consultation with Albertans. So this is not democracy in action in any way, shape, or form. What it really is, Mr. Speaker, is bad management, bad administration, and . . .

Mr. MacDonald: A Soviet style regime.

Mr. R. Miller: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar suggested it is also a Soviet style regime. Now where have we heard that before?

You know, I know that there's a long list of speakers who wish to debate and probably not an awful lot of time left on this particular motion. I'm not going to take my entire time, Mr. Speaker, but I really – well, I'm actually being encouraged now to take my entire time, but I know I have colleagues who wish to debate on it as well. I just really, truly believe that as legislators we should all be ashamed of the action that is being taken in this House today and over the next several days as we watch a government that is desperate to cram through legislation without proper debate. There is no way that anybody in this House should be proud of that. If they are, well, they'll have to answer to someone greater than myself, I'm sure.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've been in this House now for quite a while, and I have never heard so much nonsense in my whole life. I cannot believe that when we have a situation where our time to speak is going to run out next Thursday and the government offers you more time to speak, you spend all of this time talking about how you don't want it to happen and that it's a terrible thing.

If you really have something important to say about any of these bills that are coming up, then I encourage you just to get to the point. Get to the point. Get rid of this silly messing about. Give us more time next week to be able to speak, and let's get on with it, for goodness' sake.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Mr. MacDonald: Please. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow: I have a question, and it is this. Do you think that the opinions and the concerns of those who are opposed to Bill 46 will have an opportunity in this short period of time to be addressed?

Ms DeLong: I believe that if you are just concise and make your points concisely, then you will have plenty of time to get those ideas across. If you are simply putting in time, no, you will never have enough time to get those ideas across.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow. The mayor of Calgary, Mr. Bronconnier, on November 8, 2007, wrote a very concise four-page letter regarding Bill 46. Not only did he have concerns with the Utilities Consumer Advocate's office as it was proposed, but he had concerns about section 8, section 10, and section 22 of that bill. Do you think in the time that we're providing . . .

Mr. VanderBurg: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Point of Order

Question and Comment Period

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, under our Standing Orders, you know, we do have an opportunity to rebut and ask questions on bills, but I never thought that on motions this opportunity existed. Now, I stand to be corrected.

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(1): "Time limits on speaking in debate in the Assembly on Government motions, Government Bills and orders and private Bills shall be as follows."

Then you get down to Standing Order 29(2)(a): "Following each speech on the items in debate referred to in suborder (1), a period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly" on the subject matter in the debate.

There's no point of order.

Debate Continued

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be quick with my question. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow: will the mayor of Calgary's concerns regarding section 8, which is power of the commission, section 10, reviews and variances, and section 22, local intervenor costs in Bill 46 – in your opinion, are Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings of next week an adequate time to deal with his major issues?

Thank you.

Ms DeLong: I believe that the issues that were raised by the mayor were expressed very clearly, very succinctly, and they can be dealt with very quickly in this House.

Thank you very much.

Mr. VanderBurg: I'd like to ask the member from Calgary that just spoke if she thought that the time in the House has been well spent on Bill 1 and Bill 2. Given the 10 trips that many of us have had to

make to Edmonton and the hours that we've had to spend out of session hearing the debate that we've had and hours and hours spent on bills 1 and 2, if she felt that that was time well spent.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. I do believe that those field committees were very effective in terms of really exploring some of these issues, and I don't think that anybody that was there was actually putting in time as opposed to what I have heard today in the Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to the comments from the Member for Calgary-Bow, I'm curious to know whether or not she's completely comfortable with the way that we do business in this province because the other day when we were discussing Bill 38, which dealt with TILMA, she indicated that it's been available since April of '06. She said that according to the custom, we bring things forward into the Legislature; that's how we debate them. But did she fully understand at that time that the government had already signed the agreement and then brought it into the Legislature for debate? So that's my question for the hon. member. Is she comfortable with the way we do things, where we sign an agreement and then bring it into the Legislature for debate, after it's already a done deal?

Ms DeLong: I very much look forward to our finally debating TILMA. You are holding us back from actually getting to the debate. If we could just get on with the business of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support Motion 35, which is basically allowing the Legislature to sit evenings, if required, beginning at 8 p.m. on December 3, 4, and 5 for consideration of government business. As was expressed by some of my hon. colleagues, Motion 35 and Motion 36 really should be looked at together because one motion is inviting us to sit evenings, and we don't mind. I've certainly done it before in my three years in this Assembly, and I don't particularly mind it. I can appreciate where some of the members find it a bit difficult, you know, in terms of travel arrangements and in terms of their being away from their families.

Well, I'm away from my family as well when I'm here. I live in Edmonton. It takes me forty minutes to drive home. People think that I have this edge over them. Well, you know what? I have recently got blessed with the arrival of my third kid. My third kid, Mr. Speaker, is two months old, and I want to spend some time with my kid. But what I am doing here in this House is basically looking after him for when he is at that age when he requires those decisions that were made in 2007 to be favourable towards him and his future and his life and that of his kids as well. When he's 18 . . .

Mr. Liepert: Then he'll vote Conservative.

Mr. Elsalhy: No. I don't think he'll ever vote Conservative. As a matter of fact, I am really hoping that when I'm done politics, maybe he'll enter this field as well and carry the Liberal flag in Edmonton-McClung or whichever name the constituency is named then.

So both motions, one motion asking us to sit longer – and I don't mind – the other motion telling us, not asking us, that we are going

to be allowed one hour of debate. They're worded in such sanitized and innocent language, you know, that it's a matter of fact that the Assembly needs to move on. It's no big deal. Nobody should be worried.

Well, let me put on the record that the first reason why we're sitting nights is to catch up because the government itself had some difficulties in the drafting and in the introduction of their own bills. This government has many inadequacies, not the least of which is Bill 46, for example, this year arguably the biggest and the most controversial and the most contentious bill before this Assembly in many years.

Mr. R. Miller: Would you say they're incompetent?

Mr. Elsalhy: I'm saying that these are inadequacies.

An Hon. Member: Inept.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, inept would be a description that I would use.

Bill 46 was introduced in the Assembly on the last day of the spring session. If they thought it was such a huge deal and they wanted it – you know, “That’s an A bill; the government wants that bill to pass” – they should have introduced it the first day of session or the second day or the third day or the second week. They introduced it on the last day of the spring session. The reason, Mr. Speaker, is because they don't like the attention and the scrutiny that this House affords to all bills but, in particular, controversial ones. They know that when this House is sitting, for example, Mr. Speaker, their polling and their public opinion surveys indicate that they're actually going down. So they like to be out.

They bring it in the last day of the spring session, and then they wait and wait in this fall session. Now they say, “You know what? We're running out of time. Let's actually invoke closure. Let's bring the hammer down and censor everybody and not allow everybody to speak” because they know that when we're in the House, public opinion of them gets lower, gets weaker.

This is the same government, Mr. Speaker, that spied on unsuspecting Albertans in Rimbey and God knows where else. I have to tell you that these people who were spied on were not troublemakers, as was initially said. These were concerned citizens, citizens that have lost faith and confidence in this government, and they were expressing that concern.

Mr. Liepert: We'll see.

Mr. Elsalhy: The Minister of Education is saying, “We'll see,” and I agree with you. You know, only time will tell.

But this government also doesn't trust these citizens. This government finds it appropriate and okay and no big deal to spy on them. That's exactly what the Premier and the Energy minister initially said, that that was no big deal, that these were troublemakers. What's the big fuss? They also equally don't like the scrutiny and the questioning that they're subjected to when they're in this House, so they want out: let's just wrap it up and move on.

The Minister of Education earlier on blamed the opposition for what remains on the books. He says: because of you we can't move through our legislative agenda. [interjection] Yes, and I'm proud of that record. The Minister of Health and Wellness is saying that I spoke on Bill 1 repeatedly. I was doing my job. How many members from this government, including the Premier himself, spoke on Bill 1? That's the flagship bill of this government. How many times did members of the government speak? Let's actually tally up their speaking time. Let's tally up how many pages they

generated in *Hansard*. [interjection] Yeah, this government likes to make those decisions in the back rooms. We have to bring our ideas forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair, please.

Mr. Elsalhy: Through the chair, yes.

We have to bring our ideas forward. We debate their ideas good or bad, and they're mostly bad most of the time. We're the ones who actually do the legislative work in this Assembly. These guys are just happy to do their little talks in their own caucus room, and their whip tells them: vote yes en masse; vote no en masse. He shepherds them through these bills.

I challenge these people who are now yelling and heckling across the way to now tell us how they think. Tell us what you think about Bill 46.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Oberle: Under 23(h), Mr. Speaker, the member alleges that I tell the members on our side of the House how to vote, and I take exception to that. As much as they like to think of themselves as independent members, they must realize that we are all independent members. No member in this House can order another member on how to vote. I ask him to withdraw that remark. I would point out to him that that party has a whip, and none of us has made any similar allegation. The whip has duties with regard to House staff, with regard to research staff, and that's the position. I don't tell anybody in this House how to vote. It would be a violation of their privilege to do so.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on the point of order.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? This is really not the issue I am speaking about, so I will retract that comment.

An Hon. Member: Withdraw the comment.

Mr. Elsalhy: That's what I did. If you were listening, I was basically telling the Speaker that I was going to retract this statement. I don't want anybody to think that I don't think that some members in this caucus are free thinkers and really pay attention to the debates and participate.

Mr. R. Miller: Some of them are ignorant, though.

Mr. Elsalhy: My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford says that some of them are ignorant, as in not aware of the facts.

You know what? I think what we're doing here is twofold. We're allowing ourselves three days . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I haven't ruled on the point of order. Have you concluded your remarks on the point of order? Okay.

The member withdrew his remarks. I would like to make a comment on that. Every member here is elected by his electors in his constituency. They have the right in this House to vote however they choose. Yes, party whips on all sides of the House can make strong suggestions in certain situations. We all know that. But ultimately at the end of the day every member can vote according to the dictates of their heart.

I trust that the withdrawal of the comment puts an end to the matter, and we'll move on.

Mr. Oberle: Has he withdrawn the comment?

The Deputy Speaker: He has withdrawn his comment. If we can keep the side comments down, perhaps we could hear, when people make comments, what exactly they are.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Debate Continued

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, back to the issue. Do I mind sitting nights? No, I don't. Do I mind closure? Yes, absolutely. You bet I do. Closure basically amounts to censorship. It amounts to a limit of my freedom of speech and a limit or restriction on my ability to represent the people who voted me in. Let me remind you, further to your comments, that 30 per cent of the population voted for members of the Official Opposition. Some more voted for the third party, some more voted for the Alliance, about 7 or 8 per cent, and some voted for the independent Member for Edmonton-Manning. Collectively we probably, you know, add up to at least 50 per cent, if not more.

Mr. R. Miller: More than 50. It was more than 50.

Mr. Elsalhy: It was more than 50 per cent in the 2004 election.

So for a government that doesn't have that clear of a majority, they indicate that they've had it, that we've heard all we need to hear. For them to actually expect to move and pass 22 or 23 amendments in whatever, three hours or four hours, well, that's unrealistic. I mean, even if they just move, somebody speaks on it and sits down, and then move another one, speaks on it and sits down, they will not do it in, you know, three hours or so. They're basically invoking closure on themselves, not just gagging us and preventing us from speaking. They're actually invoking closure on their own. I will be really interested to see how that is done. You know, how can we do this in the span of three hours? I don't know. And then 40-plus amendments from the Official Opposition, some from the ND and maybe others. That is totally unacceptable.

Bill 46, Mr. Speaker, is really offensive to many people in rural and urban Alberta. You know, it deserves more attention than this.

The Deputy Speaker: We're debating Motion 35, not Bill 46. We'll get to Bill 46.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to belabour this more because I know some of my colleagues want to speak, and maybe they, too, will get points of order in the process. I don't know. But it seems to be a trend.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, on Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. minister of health.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I just would like to ask the hon. member if he has ever had occasion to go to any other parliaments, perhaps maybe the Parliament of Canada, with in excess of 300 members, or the Mother of Parliaments in London, with in excess of 600 members, and whether he really believes that every member should get up or have the opportunity to get up on every bill. I can tell you that no progress would ever be made on a bill if that was the test. And the volume of printing on the pages of *Hansard* with

respect to every bill, if that's the test of success: I'm wondering whether he really believes that. That's what he seems to be suggesting, that you can't effectively discuss and debate a bill unless every member has the opportunity to speak to every bill and every amendment. Surely, he doesn't mean that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This House has 83 members, and we're all duly elected to speak on those bills and those laws that we feel affect either directly or indirectly our constituents. Let me also remind you that in the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee we actually expanded that definition of a constituent to everybody who lives in this province. If I think that the government is moving 50 bills and I choose to speak to 30 of them, I should be given the opportunity to do that. Most of the time I speak when I have something to contribute. I speak about things that are relevant to either my constituents locally or geographically. I speak to things that I understand in terms of health care. I speak to things that I understand as a parent, and so on. I pick the ones that I want to research, and I pick the ones that I want to speak on. I don't speak on every bill, and I don't speak on every amendment. Some of the members across the way were surprised that I was speaking on Bill 1 repeatedly. Well, I sat on that committee. I was the deputy chair of that committee, and I was doing on behalf of the entire committee some of that work.

Mr. Snelgrove: The hon. member mentioned that they had a new baby in the family. That's great. Then he mentioned that they pretty well do all the work in government or for the province. I'm wondering if he might suggest the fact that he's away doing all this work has contributed in any way to that event.

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Speaker, we have a duty in this House to scrutinize and to go over government ideas and government decisions, either policywise or fundingwise. I'm not saying that I'm actually doing what the government is doing or doing all the work. I'm just saying that members of the Official Opposition and the third party and others have a role to play, and I think we're doing it. I think we're doing somewhat of a fine job here. We were the ones who stopped Bill 11. We were the ones who stopped privatization. We were the ones who voiced a concern to Bill 20 last year, when this government was talking about FOIP and trying to make our supposedly open and accountable government secretive and more secretive. You know, I would argue that this year as well. Every year there's one contentious bill; there's one area that the government tries to sneak in very unsavoury and very bad policy. Well, this is it. Bill 46 is that one this year, and we will not allow them to get off that easy.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on 29(2)(a)?

Okay. On the debate, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I support Motion 35 to sit evenings, and I have the same reasons for supporting this motion as the member opposite from Edmonton-McClung. I'd like to congratulate him on the birth of his third child. I'm very happy for him. I agree with him that it's important to spend as much time as you can with your children. In fact, it's something that I really like to do, and by sitting evenings I get that opportunity because I don't have to be here for what I might think is an inefficient time when we can save time by sitting evenings instead of coming back for another week or two. Not only are we then fulfilling my desire to see my

family more often and, as well, my constituents – my constituents are very, very important, obviously; I'm here to represent them – but I think we make things more efficient for this government. We save the government money by sitting evenings. We save time.

For those reasons I just wanted to stand and support that motion and also let the members opposite know that I agree with the importance of having more time to see your family. That's why I think sitting evenings for three days is important, especially in this season.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing no one, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore on the debate.

Mr. Bonko: On the debate, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. Well, I'll tell you that this afternoon has been one of the more interesting ones. It seems to get a little bit more engagement out of all members when they do take exception. Well, exception has been taken on several accounts, starting with the first one, which was Government Motion 36, time allocation.

Quite frankly, when I was elected, Mr. Speaker, I thought I was going to be able to have a democratic, free voice – and so did the citizens who elected me – and that it wouldn't be stifled with time allocation. Unfortunately, you know what? Certain governments do that when they don't want their citizens to have voices. It was raised already. Those are communist governments. [interjections] That's right. The Progressive Conservative Party is becoming partially communist because that way . . .

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I don't believe that it's parliamentary in this Assembly to be referring to any government in our nation, a free nation, as communist. I would like to give you the opportunity to withdraw that.

4:40

Mr. Bonko: Well, Mr. Speaker, the facts speak for themselves. When we do that sort of action, the only other place to be able to compare it to is some communist states that withhold and suppress their citizens. We're becoming that way more and more all the time, and I think the comments fit.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the term "communist" is unparliamentary to refer to any government in our country, and I will give you an opportunity to withdraw the comment.

Mr. Bonko: Well, I could take it back and then label it as corrupt, then, perhaps, Mr. Speaker. Because you know what? [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Are you withdrawing the comment? I'll ask the member one more time. This is the third time. Do you want to withdraw the comment?

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, I did say that I could withdraw the comment of communist and slip in corruption, then. I said that would be fine by myself as well. So I'll withdraw communist, and I'll put in corruption, then. What other government withholds \$14 billion from its province, from the constituents, from Albertans and denies it? That's corrupt.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'll accept withdrawal of the comment, but I also will rule that the term "corruption" is unparliamentary and ask you to withdraw that as well.

I'll ask you the second time on withdrawing the remark on corruption.

I'll ask you the third time. Do you wish to withdraw the comment?

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, at the urging of my colleagues I will withdraw the . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair. You withdrew the comment?

Mr. Bonko: Well, perhaps I wasn't able to be heard because of the heckling over there when I was able to make my statement.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll accept that. You may continue.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to continue. That's part of censorship here again, having to retract remarks here, but we'll continue.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you referring to the chair as censorship? Are you referring to the Speaker's ruling as censorship?

Mr. Bonko: No. I think there was a misunderstanding there, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, thank you for that clarification, then.

Mr. Bonko: Can I continue, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: You can continue, but I'll warn you one more time that the chair is not going to tolerate any more challenges in that regard. If you want to continue on the debate on Motion 35, keep your remarks relevant to the motion at hand.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will again continue, and I will choose my words carefully so as to not offend the sensitivity of some of the members across.

Debate Continued

Mr. Bonko: I have no problem sitting nights as I've sat nights several times in here. You know what? The point is: people don't plan to fail; they fail to plan. I think that's exactly what happened again, another example of this government not planning. They set on a specific date that we were to end session, and now we're going to stick to that mark because we're going to be sitting nights. That's breaking what they had originally agreed to in the House rules, that we aren't going to have any more nights because it was going to be more humane to the members. Well, quite frankly, if we're sitting nights again, that's breaking a rule, and that's again . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The time for this debate is over, and it's time for the vote on the motion. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Yes. I just have a question, Mr. Speaker. I had my clock running as well as the table officers did, and we've had several points of order throughout the hour. I'm wondering if you could clarify for me whether or not the time does stop or if the time continues to go.

The Deputy Speaker: No. The motion has received one hour of debate. I must now put the question on Motion 35.

[Government Motion 35 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

**Bill 56
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply)
Act, 2007 (No. 2)**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today to move Bill 56, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (No. 2), through to Committee of the Whole.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will begin my comments by expressing displeasure for the way this afternoon has unfolded. There was a House leaders' agreement last Thursday, and if you look at the projected government House business, everything went off the rails before we began doing government business on Tuesday afternoon. So whatever was planned to have been discussed this week, everything has gone sideways.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Again, as far as I'm concerned, mismanagement and . . . [interjections] I'm sorry. Did you wish to comment? We're in committee, so if you want to comment, hon. minister . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, through the chair, please.

Mr. R. Miller: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If the minister of advanced education would like to comment, we are in committee, and I'm happy to sit down and let him get up. If I could have the assurance of the chair that I would be allowed to respond to his comments, I'm happy to cede the floor to him and let him get his comments on the record.

The Deputy Chair: Well, we are in committee. If that's your intent, you can sit down, and I can recognize you later.

Mr. R. Miller: Anyhow, Mr. Chairman, my comments in respect to Bill 56 in committee. As I said, I was going to begin by talking about how badly things have gone off the rails. Here we are this afternoon, quite frankly, with Bill 56 not even on the most recent draft of the House leaders' agreement, which was concocted during question period today. It's not there. Now suddenly we're dealing with Bill 56. I'm looking at *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and on page 790 it says, "Often a Committee of the Whole examines non-controversial bills or bills dealing with matters of political importance on which arrangements on the use of House time have been made."

4:50

I suppose a point of order could have been called because this arrangement was not even made this afternoon between House leaders. I'm frustrated, quite frankly, because I did not bring my notes over on Bill 56 because the House leaders had an agreement, and Bill 56 was never contemplated being discussed this afternoon. That is a frustration, and it's likely to lead to even more disorder in this House this afternoon, Mr. Chairman.

However, I know a number of these issues quite well, and in particular the \$825 million that is contemplated to be moved into the heritage savings trust fund is certainly a part of the appropriation bill. The other day when we were in Committee of Supply, when we were discussing the monies that are being asked for by the government, first the President of the Treasury Board, I believe, and then also the Minister of Education, if I remember correctly, made comments about the Official Opposition's plan to save 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenues by putting that money up front, off the top, pay yourself first, into the heritage savings trust fund and a number of other endowment funds. There was a lot of discussion back and forth about the wisdom of putting money into the heritage savings trust fund and building the fund as opposed to the current practice, which is to take all of the money after inflation-proofing and administration fees are paid and put that money into general revenue. That is what we do now. Of course, I've expressed an awful lot of concern about that in the past.

Well, in response to some of that debate – and, as I say, I can't recall whether it was the President of the Treasury Board or the Minister of Education who went on and on about how the Official Opposition plan to save 30 per cent was actually not achievable. The Minister of Education, I believe it was, actually contemplated that four government departments would cease to exist, would have to be done away with because the Official Opposition plan to save 30 per cent wouldn't allow enough money to be in the treasury to operate those departments.

Mr. Chairman, you will know that members on the government side of the House, particularly during question period, often accuse members of the Official Opposition of fearmongering. Well, I guess that turnabout is fair play because I'm about to make the same accusation to members of the Executive Council. Very clearly – very, very clearly – this plan that we've put forward is achievable. All you have to do is look at the second-quarter update. As I say, I don't have my papers in front of me, but it contemplates approximately \$12 billion in nonrenewable resource revenue flowing into the government coffers this year, and 30 per cent of that, clearly, is less than one-third, so less than \$4 billion would be taken and set aside into these various savings trust funds and endowment plans under the Official Opposition plan.

Now, that would mean, as I said, that less than \$4 billion would go into savings, and in fact the government's own surplus projections for this year are in excess of \$4 billion. So I don't know where the math comes from, but clearly if the political will was there to adopt this plan, it's achievable using the government's very own numbers, using the second-quarter update. It would have been achievable this year to take 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenues, put that aside right off the top, and there would still have been a surplus at the end of the year according to the government's own numbers.

I see the Finance minister nodding his head, and I think I know why. The Finance minister has examined this document in great detail. Back in the spring sitting he had it in front of him on his desk almost every day that we were sitting. I was curious to know what the Finance minister thought of the plan, so we actually initiated a FOIP request to find out. "Okay. You know, the government is

clearly paying attention to the Official Opposition's plan to save resource revenues. Let's find out what they think." So we did a FOIP request. Well, you know what we got back, Mr. Chairman? It's actually quite comical. What we got back was almost a complete refusal to release any information in terms of what the government thoughts were on our resource revenue plan because of ministerial briefing notes. Under the FOIP legislation they were able to take everything – everything – that the minister might have contemplated in response to our savings plan and hide it away due to the FOIP legislation exempting ministerial briefing notes.

Of course, you'll know, Mr. Chairman, that I have asked questions in this House of the Premier, of the Minister of Finance, of the minister of health, of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development about their thoughts on saving 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenues, and we can't get those answers. Well, okay. So then we'll try the FOIP legislation and find out what they think about that. We can't get answers through FOIP either. As I said, the Minister of Finance was nodding his head. I can only assume that that means he's in agreement with me that, in fact, based on the government's own second-quarter update, it would have been very doable to adopt a savings plan.

I've always said that if the Minister of Finance or the President of the Treasury Board comes to the conclusion with all of their experts – clearly, they have an awful lot more in the way of resources than I have at my disposal – that 30 per cent is not doable, so it's 25 per cent. Maybe it's a sliding scale so that in really successful years it might be higher. It could be as high as 40 or 50 per cent, as some others have called for, and in the years that are a little more difficult, maybe it's only 10 per cent. I don't really care what the number is. What I care about, Mr. Chairman, through you to the hon. President of the Treasury Board, is that there be some concerted effort on the part of this government to save some of this money for the future.

Simply throwing the dog a bone, as we do now, where we take all of the money out of the heritage savings trust fund and then we throw some of it back in, is not good enough. It's not a plan. I've congratulated the government in the past for at least moving to a surplus plan. It's better than not having any plan at all, which is where we were in previous years. We now have a plan which in some respects mirrors the Official Opposition plan of three years ago. It's better than nothing, I suppose, but it's not a firm commitment by this government to save money.

In fact, the only savings plan they have is if there's a surplus above and beyond the projected government surplus. The only time that their plan contemplates actually putting money into the heritage savings trust fund is if there's a surplus above the projected government surplus. So we could have a budget that projects – let's just pick a number and say that the budget were to project a billion-dollar surplus. The government's own legislation, their own savings plan, doesn't contemplate actually saving any money until there's a surplus above the one-billion-dollar surplus that they've actually projected. It's just not good enough because, of course, we all understand that there is no guarantee that there would be a surplus although this government certainly has now conceded that they have been intentionally lowballing revenue figures for years. In fact, when you look at the last many years, we've had not just surpluses, but we've had multibillion-dollar surpluses for most of those many years.

I believe the only year that we didn't was 2001, and of course we all know the events of 2001. Whether it be the September 11 terrorist attacks or whether it be the dot-com meltdown, clearly that was a difficult year. Maybe that's a year when a sliding scale would have contemplated less than a full 30 per cent of savings going into the heritage savings trust fund. But without any question, Mr. Chairman, every other year with the exception of that year has seen

dramatically underestimated revenue forecasts, and it has seen dramatically significant surpluses at the end of the budget year. Yet most people in this province feel as if there's nothing to show for those multibillion-dollar surpluses.

You know, this isn't just the shadow minister of Finance for the Official Opposition talking. This is people all across the province. Everywhere I've travelled for the last three years since I've been fortunate enough to serve as the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford people say that we should be saving more for future generations. I know the government members have heard this, too. I'll run through the list again: the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Canada West Foundation, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and on and on it goes. Everybody is talking about doing this. It's the right thing to do.

5:00

Eight out of the nine leadership candidates in the PC leadership race last year talked about it being the right thing to do. I think it's, frankly, unfortunate for the people of this province that the man who is now Premier was the only person out of those nine who didn't believe in a savings plan. Had any of the other eight candidates succeeded the former Premier, we would probably not be having this conversation today because I'm going to guess that they would have been good to their word, and we would now have a savings plan for nonrenewable resource revenue.

An Hon. Member: We do.

Mr. R. Miller: No, we do not. We do not. Somebody on the other side is saying that we do have a savings plan for nonrenewable resource revenue. We do not. That is simply a falsehood. It's just not true. We certainly should have, but we don't.

I think that that's a really unfortunate thing for the people of this province, that we find ourselves in a situation once again this year with what is now projected to be a \$4 billion surplus, and the only money that is going into the heritage savings trust fund is in fact a portion of the money – not even all of the money – that was taken out of the heritage savings trust fund and transferred into general revenue, and it's simply not good enough, Mr. Chairman. That causes me untold concern. I've expressed those opinions ever since day one in this Legislature. I will continue to do so until somebody on that side finally recognizes the wisdom.

I shouldn't say it that way because I know that there are many members on that side who recognize the wisdom. In fact, the former Deputy Premier and former Minister of Finance, Mr. Chairman, actually told me one day: I agree with everything you're saying about a nonrenewable resource revenue savings plan. She told me this. I sat one evening in the Premier's chair while we were in committee. I sat beside the Deputy Premier, and she said: I agree with everything that you're saying about a nonrenewable resource revenue savings plan, but I'm only one vote. Then she told me: if you tell anybody that I said that, I'm going to have to hurt you. So I guess I'll be watching in my rear-view mirror now for a few days to see whether or not there are headlights approaching rather closely.

I know that members on the other side understand how important this is, Mr. Chairman. This is not a fly-by-night idea. This is not something that's way out there. This is the right thing to do. It's common sense. It's a no-brainer. It's an automatic. Why we see so much resistance to it, I cannot for the life of me understand. It doesn't make any sense. We all understand that this tremendous resource revenue boom that we're experiencing right now is not going to go on forever. It can't. It never does. We've been here before.

I won't read into the record the bumper sticker because the last

time I did, I got called on a point of order. But you all know what I'm talking about. Here we are again, 25 years later, and we're doing exactly the same thing we did in 1982-83. We're no better off than we were in 1982-83 in terms of economic diversification. In fact, I would argue, Mr. Chairman, that we're probably ever more dependent on the oil and gas sector today than we were in 1982-83.

So all of those lessons that we should have learned, that we promised we would learn have gone by the wayside, and we've not learned anything, or at least those on the other side of the House don't seem to have learned anything. In fact, I could probably say that they're ignorant to the fact that this is the right thing to do. Earlier today the Speaker ruled that that word used in that context is okay, so I'm going to continue to use it, I think, because it astounds me that when everybody, everybody is calling for this to be done – I shouldn't say everybody. I'm not sure about my colleagues in the ND opposition, whether or not they're supportive of a nonrenewable resource savings plan. Oh, they are, too. So, you know, everybody, from those on the far right to those on the far left, is saying that this is the right thing to do.

How can a government oppose an idea simply because the opposition says it's a good idea, simply because any number of stakeholder groups, most of whom would not normally be considered in alignment with the philosophies of the Liberal Party, all say that it's the right thing to do? In fact, Mr. Chairman, not only myself but our caucus have actually been accused of being more fiscally conservative and fiscally prudent than the government that's currently in power. I would argue that that's true. I've always considered myself to be a fiscally conservative citizen with a social conscience. I've always said: if that makes me an Alberta Liberal, then I'm perfectly happy to be where I am.

Now I hear, Mr. Chairman, the minister of health and the minister of advanced education say that that's the definition of a Progressive Conservative. You know what? They're probably right. In fact, I think they are right. The problem is that this so-called Progressive Conservative government is no longer progressive. We've seen that year after year. They've lost that side of it. In fact, when Nancy MacBeth became the leader of the Alberta Liberal Party in 1999, there were a lot of questions, quite frankly, from members of the Alberta Liberal Party as to her liberalism. What she said to me then was: I didn't leave my party; they left me.

Mr. Chairman, I could cite any number of other examples. In fact, the minister of health told me one day when he learned of some of the activities that the Official Opposition was undertaking: you guys are doing the right thing; you're doing what we used to do. Emphasis is on the word "used." So there's some understanding now – the minister of health is looking a little confused, so I'll remind him. It was actually a discussion that we had undertaken about the Official Opposition's outreach activities and the fact that rather than summoning people to Edmonton to come meet with politicians and officials, the Official Opposition en masse was going out to communities across this province to meet with stakeholder groups in their communities. The minister of health said to me: you guys are doing the right thing; you're doing what we used to do. I think that is one more example of how this government has moved away from being progressive conservatives and have more and more become conservative.

All you have to do is look at some of the people that they're nominating for the next election, Mr. Chairman, and clearly when you look at some of the nominations that are taking place across this province in that party, this is not a progressive conservative party anymore. This is a hard-right conservative party with, admittedly, some so-called red Tories in the caucus. I guess all I can say is: thank heavens that there are still some red Tories in that caucus.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, you know: where to start with this guy? This is the group that wants more time to debate bills. They can't understand why we'd want to move things in an orderly fashion, and for whatever time you allotted, he made references to Bill 56 only accidentally.

Let's remember what he said last week about it. He said: automatically, automatically. He didn't say, "Wait until the end of the year" or "Wait until second quarter." He said: automatically we're putting the money in the bank. Then today he said, "Well, I don't really mean that. I mean, if you've only got 10 per cent, we'll put 10 per cent. If you've got 25 per cent, we'll put 25 per cent." What he said is that he's starting to learn, like his leader, that whatever way the weather vane is blowing that day is where he's going. "Oh, put all the money in unless it means we won't have programs. Oh, then we wouldn't do it."

So we stand very high up here in our principle of looking backwards, and we'll spend the whole 20 minutes talking about nonsense. To even suggest at the start that this was something out of the ordinary, to have the supplementary supply now, means he's either not paying attention or he's not listening to his House leader or he's not watching. Either way, there's a difference, I guess, between not knowing and not caring. I think he really does care about his job. He just doesn't know what it is yet.

So, Mr. Chairman, unless there's going to be more productivity, this is a little bit of a waste. They don't want to discuss the bill, so I move we adjourn debate on Bill 56.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:10

Bill 31

Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today before the Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. This bill passed second reading on May 10, and on May 31 it was referred to the Standing Committee on Community Services, which I had the pleasure of chairing along with the deputy chair from Edmonton-Mill Woods.

The committee met a total of nine times, including a full day and evening of public hearings. We heard from 65 citizens and associations through both written submissions and public hearings. A number of issues were raised throughout the committee's review, and we had the opportunity to explore those issues with stakeholders.

Based on our consultation and deliberations, the committee had recommended a series of amendments, and I'd like to provide a brief summary at this time. Before we do that, Mr. Chair, I believe there are copies of the amendments for distribution, and if it's your pleasure, we'll just allow a moment for the pages to distribute them.

The Deputy Chair: Yes. Hon. members, the amendments that are being introduced are being circulated, and we shall refer to these sets of amendments as amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may proceed now.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before describing the amendments, I'd like to recognize the ongoing assistance and co-operation from the Ministry of Health and Wellness, which facilitated the committee's consideration of amendments, some of which originated with the minister and were supported by the committee. The

amendments are broken down into several sections, and I'll go through them one at a time.

Part A. This particular amendment to section 2 outlines the definition of health professional for the purpose of the Mental Health Act. This is necessary to give effect to the committee's recommendation that Bill 31 authorize other categories of health professionals in addition to psychiatrists and physicians to be involved in the issuance, renewal, amendment, and cancellation of community treatment orders, or CTOs. This recommendation is based on the premise that only those health professionals who meet the professional requirements and standards to be established through regulation will be authorized to issue community treatment orders.

Part B. This amendment to section 4 is one of the technical amendments proposed by the minister and subsequently approved by the committee. This provision clarifies that where a person who is subject to a CTO is apprehended and conveyed to a facility for an examination, the appropriate process for conveyance and examination after apprehension is that which is outlined in section 9.6(3) of the bill.

Part C. This is the lengthy amendment. Clause (a) replaces the existing wording for section 9.1(1) of the bill, which outlines the criteria for the issuance of a CTO. It addresses the following recommendations of the committee.

First, it allows for a broader category of health professional to be involved in the issuance of CTOs. The language now provides that two health professionals must be involved, and according to the definition section health professional means those classes of health professionals set out in regulation or designated by a board, a regional health authority, or the minister.

Second, the proposed section 9.1(1)(b) responds to the committee's recommendation that the category of persons eligible for CTOs should be expanded beyond what was originally provided for in the bill, which was restricted to formal patients, meaning that in order to be eligible, a person must be a patient in a designated facility under the Mental Health Act. Under the proposed amendment there are now three categories of persons that would be eligible for a CTO. The first category would be those who have been a formal patient or in an approved hospital or a custodial institution who satisfied the admission criteria for formal patients. The relevant time period that applies is the immediately preceding three-year period on two or more occasions or for a total of at least 30 days.

The second category of persons who are eligible would be someone who has been subjected to a CTO within the immediate preceding three-year period.

The third category of individual who would be eligible would be someone who in the opinion of two health professionals exhibits a pattern of recurrent and repetitive behaviour suggesting that he or she may likely cause harm to himself or herself or others or that the person will suffer substantial mental or physical impairment if he or she does not receive treatment and care while living in the community.

Another of the committee's recommendations is reflected in the proposed clause (f), which narrows the original provision of the bill, which allowed for what we termed a consent override if the issuing physicians were of the opinion that there would be a likelihood of harm to others if the person did not receive treatment. This consent override has been restricted to those persons who are deemed to be incompetent only.

The wording outlined in clauses (b) through (e) is consequential to the recommendation that allowed for health professionals to be involved in the issuance, amendment, and renewal of CTOs.

Clause (f) deals with the committee's recommendation that the bill include a requirement for interim steps to be taken prior to the issuance of an apprehension order where a person fails to comply

with the terms of the community treatment order. In accordance with the committee's recommendation this resembles the wording used in Newfoundland legislation and would require that reasonable efforts be made to inform the patient of his or her failure to comply. Reasonable efforts must also be made to explain to the patient that failure to comply may lead to involuntary psychiatric assessment, and reasonable efforts must be made to provide assistance to the patient to comply with the CTO.

Clause (g) provides new wording for the proposed section 9.6(3), and it accomplishes two things. First, it includes a consequential amendment to change the reference to either psychiatrist or physician to health professional. Secondly, this wording addresses a technical change recommended by the minister that provides clarity regarding the examination process that applies when a person who is subject to a CTO is apprehended.

Clause (h) is a consequential amendment to replace the reference to either physician or psychiatrist with health professional.

In part D this amendment to section 11 was proposed by the minister and adopted by the committee. This makes the criteria for transferring a patient into Alberta consistent with the new admission criteria.

Part E, the amendment to section 12, is a technical amendment that corrects a typographical error in the bill.

Part F. This amendment addresses the committee's recommendation that the bill provide for an automatic review by the panel after the first renewal of a CTO, which would occur after six months and then every second renewal thereafter except where the person has made an application for review within the preceding month.

Parts G, H, and I. These amendments include consequential amendments regarding the use of the term "health professionals." These amendments also address the review panel and hearing provisions and will require a supervising health professional where that person is different from the issuing health professional to receive notice and to attend hearings and court applications. The amendment was originally proposed by the minister and approved by the committee.

5:20

Part J. This is an amendment to section 49 of the act, which deals with ministerial powers. This addresses the committee recommendations discussed earlier that allow for other classes of health professionals besides psychiatrists and psychologists to be involved in the issuance of CTOs, and this will enable the minister to designate or identify the class of health professionals that will have this authority.

Part K. There are a number of different sections to this part. They're all amendments to the regulation-making power provision in the act. Clause (a) allows for regulations to be made in connection with examinations required for the issuance of CTOs or apprehension orders. Clause (b) addresses the earlier recommendation regarding health professionals and allows for the Lieutenant Governor in Council to establish by regulation the qualification required by health professionals in connection with the issuance, supervision, renewal, amendment, or cancellation of CTOs. Clause (c) is another consequential amendment.

Part L has two sections. The first section deals with the committee's recommendation that there be a review of the provisions in this bill by a committee of the Assembly within five years.

Finally, the last amendment is a consequential change to the Health Information Act to allow the nearest relatives of persons subject to CTOs to access health information in order to carry out their duties and obligations under the Mental Health Act.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all the members of the committee for their hard work and diligence in this new process, and

I'd also like to thank the Premier of the province for setting up this process. I would encourage all members of this Assembly to support the committee's recommended amendments.

I would now move these amendments as a whole and seek the advice of the chair in debating them perhaps a section at a time.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I have been informed by the deputy opposition House leader that we will be voting on this section by section as we proceed.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that request, but I would like to speak to the amendments that have been tabled and then move a subamendment.

The chairman of the committee has made some introductory remarks relative to the work of the committee, and I'd like to echo those remarks. This has been a very important subject, a very important topic for Albertans for a number of years. As I said in second reading, the issue was brought forward by this minister after having encouraged it to be brought forward in a number of previous years and from a number of previous chairs. I really believe that the community treatment order tool is very essential for us to be able to allow families to work with their adult children who have forms of mental disorder which can be controlled with appropriate treatment, with pro-active treatment in the community and to allow the individuals to have a good quality of life and to give the families of those individuals the opportunity to help those individuals in an appropriate way. So a very important tool.

I'd like to commend the committee because it'll afford Albertans the opportunity to be heard on this important issue. It then reported, reflecting what it had heard in many cases, and showed that the process can really work and be really beneficial. So I want to thank the committee for their work. I want to indicate that I believe that the committee members have done very, very good work on this on behalf of all Albertans, never losing sight of the bill's purpose: to improve care, to provide to those suffering from mental illnesses.

I want to indicate that I support the committee's amendments as they've been tabled, with some important exceptions, and I want to highlight that. Even since the bill has been tabled, since the committee has reported, there has been an opportunity for more input to come back. There are a couple of areas where the community, particularly those people who are actively involved in the mental health community and working with persons with mental health conditions to which this bill might apply, have raised some concerns.

The subamendments that I would propose are important because, first and foremost, one of the issues in the amendments that were put on the table is the question of changing the bill from a doctor and physician, essentially, which is the practice throughout the Mental Health Act, to two health professionals. By doing so, that impacts a number of the sections throughout the bill. By having that process of making that change, there is an issue about whether that's appropriate. Really, allowing two health professionals in the act without further definition could suggest, for example, that it could be two LPNs or two others. Clearly, that's not the intention. The intention is people who have been identified as having the appropriate competencies.

It's my submission to the House that we need to adjust the amendments that were just tabled to reflect that reality, so I'm going to propose a subamendment which in a number of the sections will deal with the issue of the words "health professionals" versus the issue of "physicians, one of whom must be a psychiatrist." So a number of the sections would be amended by removing "two health professionals" and substituting "two physicians, one of whom must

be a psychiatrist." That would be the first subamendment, and it does apply to a number of sections throughout the amendment.

The second one would be the issue of the consent override. It's important in this community to recognize that the fundamental purpose of the bill is to allow families and health professionals to intercede at the appropriate time. The appropriate time to intercede would be before . . . [interjection] Yes. I've moved the subamendment and asked that perhaps it be distributed so people could see it.

The Deputy Chair: Just a minute, hon. minister.

Hon. Government House Leader, I am being advised that because of the number of subamendments that exist, the best procedure for us would be to deal with each section at a time. As we deal with section A, you may move the subamendment to section A, and we would vote on it and then move to the next one.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, I would ask that we not deal with it in that way. The subamendments are integral as a package. They deal with issues that run throughout the process. So it's important to deal with the subamendments as a package and then deal with the section by section. Alternatively, we can move the subamendments as a package, and then if you wish to go to a vote on each section, we could have two votes on each section: a vote on the subamendment on the section and then a vote on the amendment. That would be preferable because if you don't pass the whole thing, you shouldn't pass any of it. It doesn't make sense to split it up and do it one by one.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the chair is being advised by the opposition deputy House leader that what you are recommending is acceptable to them. We will deal with them as a package; however, the vote will happen individually.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, because we can't accept one without the other because they're all related.

It having been distributed, I will end up very quickly because I would like others to have the opportunity to speak this afternoon, and we have used a lot of time. So the piece is the health professional issue with respect to physicians and psychiatrists. This accepts the concept that the committee wanted, which is that there is an allowance for an expansion passed, a physician, one of whom must be a psychiatrist in certain circumstances. We've kept the concept, but by bringing these subamendments, we clearly defined that the expectation is it will be two appropriate health care professionals, being two physicians, one of whom must be a psychiatrist in the normal course, and then only in exceptional circumstances would you allow it to be other health care professionals and then only when it's appropriately defined by the regulation and the structure. So that would be the gist of the subamendment.

The consent issue. It's important that the CTO be available even if the individual does not consent when competent if they have an exhibited history.

Mr. Chairman, I think that that gives the gist of these amendments. There is some detail in there, but I would leave it at that and ask the committee to consider the subamendments as well as the amendments.

5:30

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the subamendments that we're going to deal with now are subamendment A1, which deals with part A; subamendment C1, which deals with part C; subamendment G1, which deals with part G; subamendment H1, which deals with part H; subamendment I1, which deals with part I; and subamendments J1 and K1, which deal with parts J and K.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I first of all want to go on record as saying that the standing committee process, in my view, was very positive. We've been able to take a bill which we believe will improve the mental health structure in our province and then give people who are concerned about the bill an opportunity to be heard. We've taken comments and recommendations under very serious consideration to bring forward the best we can. So this is an encouraging demonstration of democracy.

What confronts us here is a real issue. We can tell it is a real issue because it's crossing party lines. When we face such issues of life importance, there are no Liberal and Conservative stands, no clichés of left and right, only members wrestling each with his or her own conscience and indirectly with each other in debate as we strive for an awareness of what is right. It is here that I begin. I respect the deeply held different positions held by my fellow members in this House, and what I have to say is that my statements grow from my own experience as a mother, a grandmother, a human being, and only incidentally as a trained psychologist. Before the bar of human need, there is no hierarchy of expertise. We are all equal here.

I'm personally well acquainted with the challenge of those who are struggling to maintain autonomy yet often find themselves incapable of meeting their own basic needs. I know this as a mother and as a daughter of a parent in care. I know the dilemma of good days when they seem to be making it and bad ones when the world seems to be falling in. I've been torn with the angst of respecting their choices and protecting others also near and dear who may suffer as a result of those choices. Many times the protection we most need is not from others but from our own less-conscious selves.

These are not abstractions. What we call rights, rules, and regulations are attempts to abstract something that seems external and solid and lasting as a basis for making decisions. Ultimately abstraction fails us for, as we're discovering in other parts of life and in the universe, all is relative. What is most real are the relationships of which we are a part that we must face on a case-by-case basis.

To apply individual rights here, we have to know the individuals. Each of us acquires rights as we mature and enter relationships. Birthdays and other rights of passage mark those rights in the eyes of the law, but in reality exercise of these rights is a reflection of responsibilities we take on for ourselves and for those around us.

At an extreme level all the rights of a CEO of Encor are suddenly negated by acts of social irresponsibility. Society then must act to protect others from past and possible damage, and the person proven incapable of responsibility must go back to kindergarten or whatever level until they learn what this means. In the lesser case of individuals suffering from various types of addictions and mental disorders the stakes are not as high for society. They have no shareholders or investors whose pensions or life-savings are at risk, but they have families and neighbours and next of kin, and they have the damage they inflict on themselves.

With less monitoring that exists of the choices these people make – that they take their meds, how they handle their money – we have had to rely on a very imperfect instrument, the criminal law. Only when a person crosses this line can he or she be taken into care or placed under supervision. With some of these chemically induced mental conditions the results are as predictable as for a person deprived of food or water. Their health will decline, and they will be drawn either to begging or stealing to avoid starvation. To refuse to intervene proactively here is as inept as the earlier practice of heavy sentences for stealing a loaf of bread. To justify this on the basis of the other's free choice was to abdicate our own responsibilities. For in a community and on a planet where we are all connected, we are all called to be responsible and to assume responsibilities for those who cannot do so themselves. Simply stated, we are all our brothers' and sisters' keepers, foster family to each other.

The intent of this bill is to balance our general responsibilities for each other and our individual needs, strengths, and weaknesses.

The role and the necessity, as this amendment is saying, of having a psychiatrist or physician as one of the consulting personnel is just that, a consulting one. It does not place some people or professions in a hierarchy over other people. Rather, it uses them as a resource to determine if those we fear are at risk are, in fact, capable of assuming their own responsibilities or whether they need help. It does not leave these people to run afoul of the law before we can help them and place them in holding tanks and other facilities that are unsuitable. It provides help without being a formal patient in a hospital. So it can save beds for those that need them.

The amendments that are proposed here I think reflect what the standing committee . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the chair is being advised that the noise level in the Assembly is pretty high, and there are some very diligent, dedicated individuals who would like to listen to the debate who cannot listen as they would like to. So, please, I advise you. I know it's Thursday afternoon.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. The amendments that are proposed here I think reflect what the standing committee heard from a variety of people who appeared before us, and they reflect the collective wisdom of the committee on some of these issues. The bill is the beginning of the recognition of a problem that we have in our province. It is a really good step, but in order for it to work, I need to stress that we need the experts to implement the services, and they need the services. Without the services and supports this bill will be meaningless.

I appreciate the correspondence I've had with the minister in regard to a subamendment that I had, which now is being taken care of with the subamendments from the government. I feel it's necessary to specify in legislation that the oversight and implementation of community treatment orders be led by a physician. I believe that was the intent of the Standing Committee on Community Services. The intention of the committee was also to broaden section 8 of Bill 31 to ensure that community treatment orders could be issued in all areas of the province, even when there's no psychiatrist available. That is why the addition of "health professionals" was approved in committee.

"Health professional" means a health professional or a member of a class of health professionals as set out in the regulations or designated by a board or a regional health authority under section 9.7(1) or by the Minister under section 49(2).

But we neglected to ensure by stating in fact the need to always have a physician's participation in issuing and overseeing CTOs.

In my opinion, the optimum situation is to have a psychiatrist oversee and supervise treatment; however, this is not always possible. We know that there is a shortage of psychiatrists in this province, especially in rural areas. We are trying to facilitate, particularly in small groups, the availability of help for people who suffer with mental illness when they need it and as soon as they can get it. It is essential that physicians be involved to ensure proper implementation of standards of care to individuals who require a high level of care. Physicians are more familiar with long-standing, noncompliant, and potentially aggressive patients.

Prescription and supervision of medication is also a key component of CTOs, and this is a key responsibility of physicians. A physician has the training and expertise to prescribe and oversee proper and conducive treatment and to consult with the psychiatrist. Critical public policy issues such as this should be established in legislation, not regulation. We owe it to Albertans to ensure that our

intent is reflected in legislation. We want to ensure the best possible care is taken when implementing and supervising CTOs.

5:40

I acknowledge with thanks the hon. minister's reply to my proposed subamendment and his effort to address that issue with the guarantee of a physician being involved in the first of the accompanying regulations, which now he has put into legislation with these subamendments. We are agreed on the substance and now the form of this matter.

I guess that when I was thinking about this, I had to ask myself if it was sufficient that this be put into regulation rather than legislation, whether the difference between the matter's inclusion in the legislation itself or in the first of the regulations that flow from the legislation makes any material difference in the implementation or the outworking of the legislation. After some thought and discussion I have concluded that it does. Regulations can be changed behind closed doors without our chance to review and revisit them in this Assembly. I respect this minister's judgment and trust his integrity, but no one wants to give carte blanche to what may happen under his successors or to what officials may lay before a future minister.

I was thinking about a situation I could envisage five or more years down the road. With continued growth and demand on medical services and facilities, there may not be a physician in every community near enough to respond to the situation every time it arises. Rather than placing a person at risk in a holding facility of the kind in which they do not belong or having to transport them to the nearest centre where a physician may be located, the pressure may arise to have a physician designate a paramedic or another staff officer to make this call. In fact, some medical practitioners approach that line already. I'm aware of former students who would obtain a medical exemption from high school phys ed from the medical doctor's nurse because she had a stack of forms with the doctor's signature on them already.

These things happen, but as long as the physician is personally and professionally responsible for what goes out over his or her name, the buck stops there. If, however, the right of determining a person's competence is assigned a step further from the physician, the degree of judgment and accountability that goes into this call is reduced. Such a change could be made in the future if the consulting professional is specified at the regulatory level rather than in legislation.

The scenario I'm describing in the medical realm applies to our role as legislators as well. Some powers, rights, and responsibilities cannot be delegated by societies to their executive officers, by shareholders to their boards of directors, by legislators to those among us who hold ministerial posts. We can see where the path of delegation has led over the past century and a half in our parliaments and Legislative Assemblies. First, the powers gained by Assemblies, what we call responsible government, were claimed by the majority party in those Assemblies. Then they were claimed by the cabinet, or front bench, of the parties. In the past generation they have passed almost exclusively into the hands of individual ministers and first ministers, Premiers, Prime Ministers, and their staff.

As an elected member of this Assembly, not merely a representative, I cannot abrogate my responsibilities as an MLA to another no matter how great his integrity or how sound his judgment. Likewise a physician, who is a member of a professional body that oversees training, certification, practice, and discipline, cannot delegate a professional status to an intern or resident, nursing assistant, or receptionist.

I'd like to affirm that we're making sure in legislation of the physician's involvement, the physician and possibly psychiatrist, and I believe that that's a really positive step.

In terms of the other amendments, I think that we recognize that this bill addresses concerns about a very small group of people. We have situations where families are dealing with an adult child, and they don't have the tools that they need to get treatment on a timely basis. If we require that the individual . . .

Bill 56 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (No. 2)

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, but under Standing Order 64(4) I must put the question proposing the approval of the appropriation bill referred to the Committee of the Whole. Does the committee approve the following bill: Bill 56, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (No. 2)?

[The voice vote indicated that Bill 56 was approved]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:45 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Ducharme	Lindsay
Amery	Dunford	Lougheed
Backs	Goudreau	Lukaszuk
Boutilier	Haley	Marz
Calahasen	Hancock	Oberg
Cao	Hayden	Oberle
Cenaiko	Horner	Pham
DeLong	Jablonski	Snelgrove
Doerksen	Liepert	Tarchuk

Against the motion:

Bonko	Elsalhy	Miller, B.
Eggen	Mather	Miller, R.

Totals:	For – 27	Against – 6
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[Motion carried; Bill 56 approved]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the committee has to now rise and report.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 56. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 31. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I was hoping to do was ask for unanimous consent to waive the rise and report and allow the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to finish her speech, which I understand has about 10 minutes, on Bill 31. I thought it would be in the spirit of goodwill after the afternoon we've had if the House was agreeable to doing that. I'm sure she would undertake to adjourn as soon as she's finished if the House would allow us to go back into committee for the period of time necessary to finish that.

The Acting Speaker: Government House Leader, are you asking for unanimous consent that the Assembly go back into committee for another 10 minutes?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: 6:00 **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Bill 31
Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007
(continued)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The intent of Bill 31 is in consideration of chronic illness with a subset of the mentally ill population. It is in reference to the needs of individuals with limited insight who are incapable of making decisions for themselves. These individuals may be addicted; they may have chronic schizophrenia and have bipolar mood swings. Undoubtedly, there is disruption for their families as well as for society. Their life is falling apart, and they may not be aware. At present certification for treatment is dependent on an assessment of dangerousness. Unfortunately, we often have to wait until the patient becomes dangerous.

Bill 31 amendments and subamendments will enable professionals to intervene earlier. Some patients will be dependent for a lifetime. If we put investment at the front end, there will be benefits for the long haul. Every individual has a right to treatment even if they are not capable of making that decision. We must not deny appropriate care to this small and very difficult population, the majority of whom are unable to make decisions for themselves. It is not a coincidence that the main groups who care for this population, physicians and mental health workers along with families, are in support of Bill 31, and that would include these subamendments.

There is overwhelming clinical evidence that it is needed for this population.

I think that I would like to just open up the idea briefly here of treatment as being more than medication. If we're just going to talk about issuing drugs, we're missing the target. I think that in looking at this, therefore, we need to broaden the spectrum here of people who are properly trained within mental health and have the skills – that could be psychiatric nurses, psychologists, and so on – so that treatment, again, is not just prescriptions and medication but that treatment involves other resources. We're making them available through this subamendment, that I feel covers the total intent of the standing committee; that is, a psychiatrist, a physician, and on other occasions possibly a health professional, which could be someone like a psychologist or a psychiatric nurse.

I will conclude by saying that I am in support of these subamendments. I want to stress again that if we don't have the experts available and the resources and supports for this wonderful intention that we have, then this will all be meaningless. We must keep in mind that we need to look at what supports are needed and address them in other ways.

With that, I'd like to adjourn debate for now.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the House. I think that was very worth while to do. I would now move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 31.

[Motion to report progress on Bill 31 carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 31. I wish to file copies of amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Hon. members, we have passed 6 o'clock. The House stands adjourned. Have a wonderful weekend.

[At 6:04 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, December 3, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/12/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant that we, the members of our province's Legislature, fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all of our people. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day. Amen.

Hon. members and guests here in the galleries today, we'll now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please feel free to join in and participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly some distinguished guests from the state of Jalisco, Mexico. I know they met with you earlier this morning and with the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, and I think that individually we all apologized to the delegation for the weather that we served them when they came here.

The province of Alberta and the state of Jalisco have a memorandum of economic co-operation and protocol, which includes a Spanish language development exchange program and an educator exchange program. It has significantly enhanced Spanish language programs in Alberta schools, as over 10,000 students now study Spanish at the K to 12 level.

I'm honoured today to introduce my counterpart, the Secretary for Education for Jalisco, Mr. Miguel Martínez Espinosa. With him in the Speaker's gallery I would like to introduce the following: Pedro Díaz Arias, co-ordinator of teacher training; Ana Bertha Guzmán Alatorre, co-ordinator of basic education; Eduardo Díaz Becerra, co-ordinator of high schools, higher and technological education; Héctor Salgado Rodríguez, principal of the polytechnic school of the University of Guadalajara; Enrique Valdez Tort, director general of the Higher Technological Institute of Puerto Vallarta; Gerardo Acosta Pazos, co-ordinator of international outreach and follow-up for the international affairs office; Mr. Franco Antonio Osuna Garzón, director of international affairs for Panamerican University – and Mr. Garzón, by the way, if any of us have experienced this: Air Canada lost his luggage, and that's why he's dressed the way he is – Benito Gutiérrez Levy, chief of an academy at Panamerican University; Francisco Lancaster Jones, director of Canadian studies, Autonomous University of Guadalajara; Raúl Rodríguez, director of internationalization, University of UNIVA; Ms Mónica Sánchez, director general of international affairs for the governor's office; also

from the governor's office, Ms Melissa Fierro, sister states co-ordinator; from Cecytej high school Hídalía Ahumada Quintero, principal, and Alejandro Fernández Paniagua, the state director general. They are accompanied today by Waldemar Riemer and Carole Pelé from our department. I would ask all of them to stand and be recognized by the members of the Assembly.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm likewise honoured today to introduce somebody from a very warm and wonderful country, Malaysia. It's the first visit to Alberta for the consul general of Malaysia, who is located in Vancouver. He is with us today. His name is Mohd. Hassan bin Bal. He and I share in common the fact that we have three sons, although his are younger than mine.

Malaysia and Alberta, of course, share much in terms of oil and gas exploration, the wonderful opportunity we have for trade, for importing and exporting telecommunications and other kinds of electronics. Mr. Speaker, our honoured guest today shared a luncheon where we discussed many of the partnerships currently under way with universities in Alberta and some of the other opportunities he has to visit with some of the nonprofit groups that are helping to make our Malaysian people coming to Alberta feel at home. We have about 1,100 people of Malaysian descent in Alberta.

I would ask Consul General Hassan to stand. He is accompanied by Tim Marriott on behalf of IIAR. Please, let's give them the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 42 grade 6 students from Brander Gardens elementary school located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Each year Brander school comes under the capable guidance of their teacher, Ms Natalie Gago-Esteves. She's accompanied this year by teacher Alissa Sept and student teacher Jocelyn Lee. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise. Each year I ask that the students who come help us with our job as MLAs by doing their job as citizens, by letting us know what's important to help build their community. I'd like to ask you to give them a warm welcome to this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I cannot believe how lucky I am today because on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview I get to introduce Lynnwood elementary school. Lynnwood is participating in the School at the Legislature program for the week. I'm just delighted that I got to be the person that is introducing them. They are very bright and inquisitive and asked excellent questions, I hear. We have 21 students joining us in the public gallery today. They are here with their teacher, Mrs. Heidi Medhurst, and parent helper Mrs. France Boucher. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also delighted and truly honoured to be able to introduce some child care operators and parents also joining us today. I'd ask you to please rise as I say your name: Judy Babyi, Patricia Drake, Le-Ann Ewaskiw, Roxanne Fournier, Kyle Dowdeswell, and Becky Quigg. They are here to express their concern and, hopefully, see some action on child care. Please join me in welcoming them to the Alberta Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

1:10

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with an interesting number of introductions: two and a half. Of course, my wife, Jennifer, is expecting our first child in just a few months. As you know, Jen is a friend of this Assembly. She continues to be the general manager of SpiritQuest Enterprises. She is my manager personally and professionally. On the political side I often say that Calgary-Lougheed has two MLAs for the price of one. She also continues to run our charity, the Top of the World Society for Children, which leads me to my next introduction, a very special one.

Danaru Sherpa is a dear friend. He comes all the way from the other side of the world, the village of Phortse in the Solo-Khumbu Valley beneath Mount Everest. He's a great inspiration to me. He's incredibly innovative, and he's an extremely hard worker and a wonderful husband and father. His wife is Yangzen Doma. His 14-year-old is Nawang Tshering, also 11-year old Paljom Tsomo, and nine-year-old Pemba Neru. For over a quarter century, Mr. Speaker, he has helped to make dreams come true for Canadians who go to the Himalayas to trek and to climb. He has climbed Cho Oyu, the sixth highest mountain in the world, three times; Makalu, the fifth highest; Kangchenjunga, the third highest; and Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world, not once or twice or three times or four times but a five-time Mount Everest summiteer. He will tell you that that is not the most important thing in his life, though. I will tell you that the strongest person I know in every way is Dawa Sherpa, not the biggest man but the biggest man in heart. He is gentle and strong, and I have literally seen him give the shirt off his back.

I say a big namaste to our friend, Dawa Sherpa, and my wife, Jennifer. Please rise and accept the warm congratulations of our House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you two people who are outstanding and tireless advocates for persons with disabilities. First, Dr. Austin Mardon, Order of Canada. Today Dr. Mardon was the keynote speaker at city hall, where International Day of Disabled Persons was recognized with a day-long fair. Dr. Mardon was diagnosed in 1992 with schizophrenia and advocates on a national and local level for those with schizophrenia. He is also a prolific author, space researcher, and world explorer. Dr. Mardon is the author of some 40 books, some in collaboration with his father, Dr. Ernest Mardon, and they tell Alberta history. They are presently working on a book that tells the story of political figures in the history of Lethbridge from all three levels of government.

The second person is Bev Matthiessen, who is currently executive director of the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities. Bev has volunteered over many years with numerous organizations and service clubs. She was instrumental in the creation of the Alberta Disabilities Forum, an advocacy partnership of 35 provincial disability organizations. Bev is a social justice advocate who believes in equality and fairness for all and works hard toward that goal.

They are sitting in the members' gallery, and I would ask them, please, to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House six more child care operators and parents who are visiting the Assembly today to observe the proceedings and to express their concern about child care spaces in this province. Please stand as I call your names: Robyn Zimka, Patricia McEwen, Jan Lawrie, Sue Bowman, Paulette Prosser, and Colleen Ruhl. Thank you very much for coming. Please enjoy your day.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly today a group of child care operators and parents who are visiting us for question period. I'd ask them to stand as I mention their names: Teena Tesluk, Leon Comer, Suzanne Vokurka, Jayne Brzezicki, Elaine Levy, Wendy Smith, Mima DeLilla, and Karen Sanderson. I'd like to have you all stand and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I introduce to you and members of the Assembly members of the Alberta Métis harvesting council and fellow Métis harvesters. These harvesters come from all parts of Alberta, including the most southern and northern communities. They are here today to observe the Alberta government in the hope that they will respectfully accommodate Métis harvesting rights. These members are: Wayne Hadley-Roberts, Valleyview; Matt Hadley-Roberts, Valleyview; Jim Lambert, Robb; Ron Jones, Leduc; Sam Stephenson, Boyle; Dennis Gable, Fort McMurray; Brian Hamelin, northwest of Cochrane; Jeannette McLelland, Edmonton; Pat Ronald, Okotoks; Robert Lee, Edmonton; Phil Leveque, Brooks; Ralph Servo, Edmonton; Josh Slager, Edmonton; Jordan Reves, Edmonton; Deanna Whitelock, west of Edmonton. They're in the public gallery. They are now standing, and I would ask them to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My guests have arrived, no doubt due to the weather today and the large amount of traffic that we have coming in from St. Albert, and no doubt we'll get that fixed in short order with the help of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. I have 53 students and eight adults in the galleries with us, five parent helpers and two teachers from the J.J. Nearing elementary school, whom I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly. The teachers with the group are Mrs. Christine Sowinski and Mrs. Jody Sekundiak; teacher aide Mrs. Rosemary Demers; parent helpers Mrs. Kim Ciampianelli, Mrs. Lorie Kary, Mrs. Wendy Battenfelder, Mrs. Renée Whitefield, Mrs. Jennifer Medwid. I know the school well, have been there many times. They're great kids, great staff, and a great facility. They are in both galleries. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four introductions today. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two outstanding constituents of

Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. Mr. Philip Rowe is a councilor and deputy mayor of the town of Vegreville, volunteer firefighter, and outstanding community supporter. Philip is accompanied by his daughter Jenna. Jenna is a grade 4 student at A.L. Horton in Vegreville, has been studying government and, I understand from her dad, has a very keen interest in politics. I would ask them now to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure again to introduce two more outstanding constituents of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville to the Assembly. I recently had the pleasure of attending the high school awards at Vegreville composite high school. The gentleman I'm going to introduce was the recipient of many, many awards, including the citizenship award, the Alexander Rutherford scholarship, without a doubt an outstanding student, an outstanding citizen of Vegreville. Mr. Curtis Steinbach is, indeed, a promising young Albertan. Curtis is accompanied today by his father Al, and I would ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. I believe Curtis is really interested in engineering, so we're in good hands.

The next gentleman I'd like to introduce to you, Mr. Speaker, and again to all members of the Assembly is the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the riding of Athabasca-Redwater. His name is Mr. Jeff Johnson. Jeff is a very active member of his community, raising significant funds for the sports complex in Athabasca, very involved in the local business community. He's a proud father of three young children, whom he raises with his wife, Kim, in the constituency. Of note to all hon. members in the House, Jeff is the son of our current MLA for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, and I am thrilled to see that this lineage will continue in our caucus. I'm proud to have Jeff as a member of our team, and I would ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, again my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the riding of Wetaskiwin-Camrose, and his name is Mr. Verlyn Olson. Verlyn has a great deal of experience both in his professional and community life. He has worked as a lawyer assisting farmers, seniors, and small-business people in the area; very active in his community, not only as a sports coach but a member of his church. Verlyn and his wife, Mardell, have raised three children in the community of Camrose and have recently been blessed with a grandson, Joshua. I am proud to have Verlyn as a member of our team, and we look forward to building our future. I would ask that Verlyn now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

1:20 head: **Members' Statements** **Hockey Alberta Centennial**

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday last week I attended the Hockey Alberta centennial gala at Rexall Place here in Edmonton. The 100th anniversary event showcased the core of Alberta values. One hundred awards were given to recognize the contribution of 100 individuals, including coaches, players, officials, parents, teams, and hockey enthusiasts, people who encouraged and built a game enjoyed and loved by young and old.

I'm sure that many of the hon. members have fond memories of playing hockey: putting on the pads and lacing up the skates, tripping over a battle for the puck or sliding into the boards, skating down on a breakaway or scoring in overtime, all the while thinking and dreaming of the thousands of fans cheering you on as the TV cameras follow your every move. In those moments, Mr. Speaker, nothing else mattered. We all played in the Stanley Cup finals and scored the winning goal at one time or another. Even though it was

fictitious, it meant the world. It was real to us. Of course, as kids we all wanted to make the NHL. It was not the money, though, that motivated us; rather, it was the love of the game, the desire to be the best.

Mr. Speaker, Hockey Alberta prides itself on allowing kids here in Alberta this same experience that we and many before us have had. I would like to commend Hockey Alberta and all the volunteers, parents, and contributors that make the minor hockey experience possible in our province. After 100 years we can reflect on the possibilities available in our next century of hockey here in Alberta. As we look forward, we must also embrace the past. By honouring the past, we can inspire the future.

Mr. Speaker, our colleague and friend the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose received one of these Hockey Alberta centennial awards. He has been a key figure in the development of hockey in Camrose, from founding the Camrose Sports Development Society to bringing the Viking Cup and junior A hockey to Camrose. He is truly deserving. I would like to acknowledge his contributions. He truly deserves this award.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Child Care

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The need for accessible quality child care is no longer primarily an issue for single-parent families or a narrowly identifiable sector of our population. It is no longer an issue of party politics since the hon. Premier declared support for increased child care availability on taking office a year ago. It is no longer primarily a matter of the pressures of growth or an expanding economy that implies it will go away next time we have a downturn or when supply catches up to demand in the housing market.

Each of these angles on this story is only a small part of a much larger picture of what is primarily a human issue and an issue of priorities. I therefore appeal to the Premier to make good on his promise and to the government to move this issue forward on its agenda. This is a season when our priorities are challenged. There is the contrast between the warm fireside ads and stories of homelessness, between spending on a new gadget for someone who has everything and sustaining a basic standard of living for those who struggle to make ends meet.

In the matter of child care I note with appreciation that Alberta Children's Services is rethinking its regulations for existing operators. This is a good step and a necessary one, yet it is only one small step to where we must go to make children's needs a primary focus of public policy. To go further will take more than programs and institutions. It will take a shared commitment to build a child-friendly society. It will take a new approach that looks at each new initiative in Health, Environment, Education, Justice, Energy, and Finance and asks: how will this affect Alberta's children? When we do this, Mr. Speaker, it will be able to be said of us, as it was of Ebenezer Scrooge after his awakening: he knew how to keep Christmas with the best of them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Awards of Excellence

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 2007 marks the fifth anniversary of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities awards of excellence program. The program was begun to highlight the good work of individuals or organizations that

enhance or enrich the lives of persons with disabilities in our province. The awards are usually presented on December 3, which is the International Day of Disabled Persons as recognized by the United Nations.

It's my pleasure to announce to the Assembly the 2007 awards of excellence winners. Faith Jahelka of Red Deer has been awarded the Gary McPherson award for outstanding leadership or achievement. Mrs. Jahelka has been an unrelenting advocate for survivors of brain injury and their caregivers since her husband suffered a head injury more than a decade ago. She has played a lead role in getting the voices of the brain injured heard. Her leadership and persistence were responsible in part for the creation of the provincial government's successful Alberta brain injury initiative in 2000.

Bill Hurley of Calgary has been honoured with the award of excellence in public awareness. Mr. Hurley is the game night entertainer at Calgary Vipers' baseball games, and thousands of fans look forward to his energetic performances as he interacts effectively with those of all ages. He's well respected by his employer and the fans.

The winner of the award of excellence in education is the Calgary public library. The library has had a long tradition of providing collections, programs, services, and facilities in a way that makes them accessible to Calgarians of all ages and abilities. In 2004 the library opened a diversity services department to integrate and co-ordinate accessible services.

The Grande Prairie Residential Society is being honoured with the award of excellence for community work. The society was formed in 1986 to provide affordable and accessible housing for persons with disabilities, and today the society has three major housing projects to its credit.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Royal Alberta Museum 40th Anniversary

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 6, 1967, the Royal Alberta Museum under its original name, Provincial Museum of Alberta, officially opened its doors. Then Premier Ernest Manning and former Lieutenant Governor Dr. Grant MacEwan were on hand for the opening ceremonies. For the last 40 years the Royal Alberta Museum has educated, entertained, and enlightened Albertans and visitors alike. Both in-house and travelling exhibits displayed at the Royal Alberta Museum over the last 40 years have covered all aspects of our society, including nature, culture, history, and technology.

To celebrate this 40-year milestone, Mr. Speaker, the Royal Alberta Museum will be holding a four-day extravaganza from December 6 to the 9th. Admission will be free, and the celebrations include a behind-the-scenes open house, new interpretations on 40 of the museum's most exciting objects, and special movie presentations. Exhibits like the immensely popular Southesk collection will continue to be on display.

For these last four decades the Royal Alberta Museum has been helping Albertans play an active role in shaping their world and inspiring Albertans to explore and understand the world around them. The museum tells the story of Alberta and preserves our rich natural and human heritage.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask all the hon. members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating the Royal Alberta Museum on reaching this significant milestone. The name may have changed, but it truly remains Alberta's museum.

Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Energy and Utilities Board

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The scandals and controversy plaguing the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board have made all Albertans aware of the critical role it plays in each of our lives. The independence of the regulatory process is crucial to the integrity of the board and to trust, public confidence in its decisions. Last week the Minister of Energy said in this Assembly that this government "would no more go and influence the hearings" of the EUB than "attempt to change the decisions of a judge." My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier concur with his position that direct government interference in the EUB is inappropriate?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Energy and Utilities Board is a quasi-judicial authority, and there are rules clearly established through legislation that not only conduct the way the business of the board is held but also any interference by any individuals.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government spent \$26,000 on a propaganda campaign in rural newspapers last week to support a bill many Albertans oppose. This same government would have the people of Alberta believe that it does not interfere in hearings of the EUB. That simply is not true. The Alberta Liberals have obtained a letter written by a top official of the Department of Energy to the EUB pressing the EUB to rush through a decision on the 500 kilovolt power line through west-central Alberta. Given that the Minister of Energy said in this House last week that interfering in an EUB hearing was akin to interfering in a court case, how does the Premier justify such meddling by his government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, at least the Alberta population knows what the cost of the ads were. We're still awaiting in this House the cost of the radio ads that the Liberal Party put out last spring. So much for openness and transparency from the other side.

I believe the 500 kVa line he was talking about is AltaLink. Those hearings, Mr. Speaker, are no longer proceeding. There will be a new board, that will hear the hearings on that particular line. There were many other issues that were assigned to it, and we want to make sure that it's open and transparent.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just as an aside, if the Premier did his homework, we released the cost of those ads, which were last February, in a news release the day the ads began.

My next question is to the Minister of Energy. Is the Minister of Energy aware of any conflicts of interest in this case, the 500 kilovolt line, involving the official as executive director of the electricity branch who wrote the letter to the EUB, a Mr. Kellan Fluckiger.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the situation with respect to the gentleman in question I think is a matter that has, again, been dealt with, as have most of the matters around that particular piece of business involving a hearing with respect to a 500 kVa line, that was an application in and before the EUB. As I had indicated, I believe that

I have taken very appropriate steps and used the procedures that are set out for me, the appropriate procedures to in fact deal with that particular issue. I believe I've dealt with that properly.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's well known that Mr. Fluckiger, the top government official who wrote the letter meddling in the EUB hearing, had a personal relationship with the top official at AltaLink, the owner of the project that he was supporting. The former Minister of Energy claimed that Mr. Fluckiger had no conflict of interest in his role with the department, but my question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why a senior government official is taking sides on contentious issues and undermining the independence of the EUB?

Mr. Stelmach: A couple of things. First of all, the hon. member said that they communicated the cost of the ads. I happened to miss that, so he has an opportunity to tell us what they were here in the most public forum.

The other is that the individual that's in question is no longer with the government of Alberta. Gone. He's retired.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, not only did the senior government official interfere in EUB deliberations; that same official does, as we say, have a conflict of interest. My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier agree that the interference and disregard for conflicts of interest raise serious questions about the entire process of regulating Alberta's electrical system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Energy took appropriate action with respect to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. We appointed a special chair to assume the duties and look at how we can make changes to ensure that the appropriate action was taken. A number of decisions have been made by that individual, and it's again to ensure that the confidence of Albertans is maintained in the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's well known that this same Mr. Fluckiger is the chief architect of one of this government's most controversial pieces of legislation. In fact, he was the one who signed on behalf of the government a \$500-an-hour contract with a consultant to implement changes before the bill has even passed this Assembly. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier do the right thing and pull this flawed piece of legislation until we can get to the bottom of this, until we can understand the full extent of Mr. Fluckiger's interest in the 500 kilovolt transmission line decision?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the bill is working its way through the process in this House. We're looking forward to debate over the amendments that have been tabled. This is a bill that's necessary, and we're working very hard with all parties in this Assembly to make sure that we pass the legislation.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Homelessness Initiatives

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If there was ever a day for all of us to think about those in our society who are living without a home, today is it. Right now, as the mercury drops and the snow falls, there are thousands of people on the streets. Addictions, mental illness, abuse: these are very real traumas that lead to chronic homelessness. We are the ones who are supposed to help them, and for so long we've neglected this duty. To the Premier: when are we going to see a specific plan from this government and a real commitment to end homelessness?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I find it amazing that he's asking that question today because the member was present when we made an announcement with respect to our plan to deal with homelessness. We are working with the Calgary Homeless Foundation. We're also doing the same work here in the city of Edmonton to ensure that over a period of time we find solutions to an issue that's really plaguing not only the province of Alberta but others across Canada. As I said when I made the announcement, every Albertan deserves a home, and we're working towards that.

Mr. Taylor: The Premier is right. I was there when he made that announcement. He announced a secretariat on homelessness and a plan to come up with a governance model for it next April. That is a plan to make a plan. That's not a plan of action. To the Premier: when will the government commit to specific assistance to cities and towns in implementing their own plans to end homelessness, specifics like funding assistance with permanent support of housing or Housing First initiatives?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, over and above the \$11.3 billion that will be going to municipalities over the next 10 years, we have committed this year \$7.5 million for winter emergency funding for Alberta communities: the city of Calgary, \$4.3 million, and that's for 450 spaces; Edmonton, \$2.2 million. Red Deer, Grande Prairie, High Level, Lloydminster, Lethbridge: there are an additional 940 winter emergency shelters. That's in addition to 3,100 spaces that are already available throughout this province. We are monitoring. As of last night I was given the fact that there were about 87 beds available in Calgary and about an equal number in the city of Edmonton.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, last night they were all full. You know, what I'm looking for is a commitment, a specific timeline from this government to start shutting down emergency shelters because it has done its job properly and those shelters are no longer needed.

Today the Alberta Liberal caucus released a draft strategy for ending homelessness for public feedback and response. We're looking for that feedback by January 15. We will incorporate this into a final draft by the beginning of February. Just so the government knows, these are firm deadlines to develop a plan. We're committed to helping communities end homelessness. We're committed to helping people move beyond the shelter, Mr. Speaker. Since the Premier's government has not developed any policies yet, I'm wondering whether he will commit to accepting and implementing the Alberta Liberal plan for ending homelessness.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it sounds good that they're finally getting down to work. They get a paycheck every month just like anybody else in this building, so I hope they're doing something.

On December 2 Calgary occupancy was 1,955; available spaces, 2,042. That leaves 87 unused. Edmonton occupancy was 810;

available spaces, 880. So that leaves about 70 unused. Those are the facts.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

1:40

Métis Hunting Rights

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Métis Nation started negotiating with the Conservative government over a year ago to develop a harvesting policy that satisfied the Métis constitutional right to harvest outlined by the Powley case in the Supreme Court. A draft agreement was negotiated by the Métis and members of the government. Instead of implementing the agreement, the Conservatives betrayed the Métis and unilaterally cancelled the agreement. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, why did your government lead the Métis Nation to believe that they were negotiating an agreement in good faith and then suddenly cancel it without notice and unilaterally impose another, less favourable agreement?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the member mentioned "without notice." If I recall correctly, in the discussion on this item we extended the period by 90 days, and we held very intense consultation and discussion and dialogue within an additional 90 days. But I'll await the next question, and maybe the minister for SRD or IAR could give further detail to it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. There were 10 months of negotiations between this government and the Métis Nation. There was an agreement reached in principle that satisfied all the conditions of the Powley case. The Conservatives threw all of this work out the window. The Conservatives have given the Métis Nation little reason to believe their word means anything. Mr. Premier, your government has betrayed the Métis people. What plans do you have to restore their trust in your government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe Alberta continues to be the only province that has recognized the Métis in many different ways. This special agreement: I believe we celebrated – what? – 25 years of agreement. That was under former Premier Don Getty. You were a member of the committee. We are also treating all Métis settlements as municipalities, so they receive funding on a similar base to other municipalities. We've also extended the municipal sustainability initiative to the Métis Nations. So we are working with them and continue to work with the Métis, and we'll find ways of resolving this issue, I'm sure.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's clear from this case that if you're not a powerful group, like the oil industry or a big landlord, working within the Tory government is a dead end. Other groups like building trades workers, the homeless, the seniors in long-term care, and Alberta landowners have learned the same bitter lesson: if your interest conflicts with someone with more money or more power, this Tory government will leave you out in the cold. To the Premier: why does your government consistently favour the rich and powerful over ordinary Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, that kind of preamble is

pure nonsense. I'd like to stand in front of this House and say that I'm not one of the rich and powerful. I happened to be raised on a farm south of Andrew. I didn't ever earn as much money as he did driving a bus in the city of Edmonton. I don't know where the guy is coming from.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The acclaimed international newsmagazine *The Economist* last week featured Canada's temporary foreign workers mess. Alberta was central to that story. It hit the mark in saying that the worst shortages are with unskilled labour. It also spoke of abuse. It spoke of the Chinese workers killed during unsafe work practice in Alberta. Treatment of temporary foreign workers is getting to be an international embarrassment. My question is to the minister of employment and immigration. When will the report on the deaths near Fort McMurray of the Chinese temporary foreign workers be released, and what will the government do to make sure this doesn't happen again?

The Speaker: The Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The death of any worker anyplace is always a tragedy, and the tragedy of the death of the Chinese workers is something that we certainly regret. A thorough investigation by occupational health and safety has taken time, but that file has been completed, and it has been passed to Alberta Justice for the review of Alberta Justice to make sure that the file is in an appropriate fashion. If any charges need to be laid, Justice will be the ones to make that determinant.

I would like to just respond to the second portion about: what will we do to make sure it doesn't happen again? Continually, in our government we work at adding people when it's necessary. Our monitoring has increased, and we've done employer sessions to make sure that we're getting more informed employers about health and safety regulations.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the same minister. Mr. Speaker, my father didn't speak English when he came to Alberta. My mother was born here and didn't learn English until she was eight years old. Neither spoke French even though they wished they did. They lived and prospered while they learned the language. Many Albertans have had the same experience. Many unskilled and semiskilled workers from places like eastern Europe are refused immigration because of poor English skills, yet those with English are readily employed nearby in Europe. We are losing out on a potential group of reliable and hard-working people because of rules that don't work. Will the government rectify this problem through its rapidly expanding provincial nominee program and pressure the feds to do better nationally?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have similar lineage from my grandfather, who did not speak English well when he came to Canada and had to learn on the job. The point that we're I think moving forward on at an accelerated pace is the provincial nominee program. We expect to have 2,500 PNPs, as they're known, this year. It's up from about 986 last year. Employers can bring them

over and provide them with the support to make sure they're able to work and learn the language if they need more application.

Mr. Speaker, with the federal government we are working to add to our language training with a million dollars to an enhanced language training program as well as \$12 million for English language training, separate from the enhanced training. We're doing a variety of things to try and help people who need language skills.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the second supplementary is to the Premier. Building trades say that some contractors use temporary foreign workers to avoid or undercut their work rates. These same contractors complain that these tradesmen won't work for them. Mr. Premier, what can the government do to end this unproductive war in our workplace, to create more harmony and make better use of Alberta and Canadian labour?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the construction trade organizations are working very closely with the minister and this government to increase the number of people in the workforce. There will obviously be some temporary foreign workers, but we're looking at expanding, reaching out to different corners of the world to bring skilled immigrants to the province of Alberta. We're working very hard to give our First Nations and our Métis opportunity to participate in very positive job opportunities through improved access and training in all of the trades. As the economy grows, certainly, we're feeling the pressure of a shortage of skilled workers. I do want to say that our labour laws don't discriminate against temporary foreign workers, but we're going to make sure that any issue that comes up is dealt with immediately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Child Care Licensing Regulation

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. We all know how important it is to have the best child care possible for our children. Earlier this fall the Alberta government released the results of a consultation on proposed standards for daycares and other child care programs licensed by the province. At the time the minister said that the feedback would be used to develop the child care licensing regulation. What is the status of this regulation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand up today and give an update on where we are with the child care regulations. Also, I'm pleased to see that we have so many operators and parents that have joined us today in the galleries. Just to let the House and the member know, today we have launched the second phase of our consultation process. A consultation document and a questionnaire have gone up today. It's posted on the Children's Services website and does reflect the input that we have received to date and also has some revised proposed standards. I would encourage anyone that has an interest in participating to complete the online survey. As well, we will be holding some information sessions early in the new year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. You say that you've made changes to the standards originally proposed. What types of changes have you made?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We feel it's important to approach the development of these regulations as a partnership between government, parents, and the child care community with a common goal that the regulations support quality, affordable, and accessible child care. I can tell you that our suggested responses for discussion coming from the first phase of consultation are that we move forward on the standards where we had overwhelming support, that we reconsider changing the standards that govern the provision of meals and location of washrooms and modify the standards related to staff/child ratios and staff certification requirements. Again, the document is on the website, and I look forward to getting feedback.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister again: when do you expect the new child care licensing regulation to be finalized?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The consultation document and the questionnaire will be posted and available for people to participate online until February 4. Information sessions will be held throughout the province in January. We'll take a little bit of time to analyze the results. My intention is to have the regulations finalized when we proclaim the child care act in the spring of 2008.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Child Care

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development a shortage of good-quality child care options not only diminishes the numbers among a potential workforce; it could also lead to a dangerous reliance on an underground economy of unregulated child care services. Other provinces have addressed these issues with a comprehensive plan to tackle affordability and availability with phenomenal results while this government continues to simply dole out occasional funding to the problem here and there. To the Minister of Children's Services: other than intermittent injection of funds, which has not seemed to be effective in the wake of recent daycare closures, what is the ministry's plan to address this crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I wouldn't call it occasional funding. We made \$134 million available today for parents in this province to access the five-point plan. I would also remind the member that the five-point plan, that we have in place today, was based on consultation. It was based on what families and child care operators wanted in this province, and it supports parental choice.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. New proposed regulations within Bill 4 only work to further exacerbate the problems facing the availability of child care spaces. Will the minister commit to ensuring that any regulations coming forth will not have any negative effects on space availability?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Just a reminder that what we are after is quality, affordable, and accessible child care, so I think that we have the same objectives in mind.

I would also make a comment on the effectiveness of the funding, that you had made a comment about. As I mentioned just a couple of weeks ago in the House, this past year we have seen 1,600 additional spaces in this province, and we have also seen over 400 child care workers come back and work in the industry.

As far as your comments, I think they're good ones with respect to the regulations for Bill 4, and I think that's all the more reason why we have to be very careful as we move forward and why I've committed to doing this with the child care community, with parents as a partner with government.

Mrs. Mather: And we're delighted to hear that.

Earlier this year the Banff Child Care Centre was presented with a \$75,000 grant from the community initiatives program to assist with the centre's interior renovations. This is the largest grant of this type to a child care facility in recent years. To the minister. While there are a number of city daycares that are forced to close due to lack of funding to attract staff, this facility receives a considerable sum for renovations. How are these grants prioritized?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah. First of all, just to comment, the project that you're talking about in Banff is a very good one. It was one that was put through the community initiatives program. To my knowledge I think many daycares are able to apply to that application.

In terms of how it was supported, they had community support, including the town council supporting that application.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Forest Products Industry Sustainability

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we learned of the indefinite closure of the Footner Forest Products mill in High Level. Now, this is just the latest forest products manufacturing facility to shut down temporarily or permanently in Alberta this year. Only a few months ago, for example, Weyerhaeuser announced the closure of its oriented strandboard mill in Drayton Valley, which will cease operation sometime this week. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is causing Alberta's forestry industry to close their mills?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar is correct. We have had a very high number of permanent and temporary mill closures in Alberta this year, and he's also correct in noting that this is very unfortunate. The government of Alberta appreciates that in this particular instance 150 employees have lost employment, and we are working with them to assist with that.

With respect to the industry itself they're in the second or third

year of sort of the perfect economic storm: high input cost in terms of transportation, the high dollar. Everything has gone wrong for this industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that this is such a hard blow to rural Alberta, what steps are being taken by the Alberta government to address the economic downturn in our forest products industry?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we're working closely with the industry to address the issue of global competitiveness. As I mentioned on November 6, I've appointed a special committee, three MLAs and three industry representatives, to develop policy recommendations that will address competitiveness. In fact, this committee met in Edmonton last week, and I had the opportunity to have dinner with them on Tuesday night. They have some exciting new ideas that address such things as cost savings in transportation and labour, new investments, and value-added opportunities. I put a high priority on this committee and expect to hear from them early in the new year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Good to hear.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. What is your department doing to provide support to the employees in High Level and Drayton Valley and other places around rural Alberta affected by these closures?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Works, my department staff, have been in touch with the mayor of High Level. Also, for December 4 and 5 we'll be working with Footner, the human resources department, and High Level to see what we can do for the employees. We intend to run advertisements to let employees and their families know how they can gain extra supports when required. We're very confident that we'll find other placements for them. I think the important thing is to deal one-on-one with the individuals, find out what their preference is, and find out what they're best suited for. The skills evaluation is taking place as we speak.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Supports for Disabled Persons

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. December 3 marks the International Day of Disabled Persons. The theme for 2007 is Decent Work for Persons with Disabilities and will raise awareness of the benefits of including people with disabilities in every aspect of social and economic life. My question is to the minister of seniors. People with disabilities are disproportionately poorer and more frequently underemployed. The salary for graduates with disabilities is 20 per cent lower than for other graduates. What is this government going to do to close the gap between people with disabilities and those without?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, we were already

at an event today honouring the international day for persons with disabilities. Those with disabilities, it's true, do not and have not had the same inclusion in the workforce as the rest of Albertans. It is in response to that that we are putting a very aggressive effort into employability of those with disabilities, trying to assess: how can we, not just with those on AISH but all forms of disabilities, recognize the many talents and strengths that they have to offer?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the minister of advanced education. While 50 per cent of Albertans have a postsecondary education, that number falls to 36 per cent among people with disabilities. When will the minister commit to providing Alberta's institutions with the funding, the resources, and the supports that are necessary to fulfill the recommendations outlined in the A Learning Alberta report?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, we are working on incrementally increasing the supports for all of our postsecondaries, not only for access but also for supports to the students with disabilities to ensure that they have a quality experience within our postsecondary system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Statistics released today said that there will be an increase in people with disabilities of 21 per cent. However, it looks like in Alberta the future will be 24 per cent for people with disabilities. My question to the minister of seniors: how can the ministries working together, i.e. yours and education, co-ordinate efforts, programs, and funding so that people with disabilities have the opportunity to go to school and not only go to school but find work without undue hardships?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I would say that's a very appropriate suggestion, that we do correlate a lot of the work that we have to ensure that they have opportunity for education, that they can have the skill sets that the employers would seek. In that regard, I'd be happy to see that we follow through with it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:00 Capital Infrastructure Planning

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In his most recent report Alberta's Auditor General made several recommendations about process relating to capital infrastructure planning, guidelines for assessing and prioritizing capital projects, and so on. Given the Auditor General's comments I have some questions for the Associate Minister for Capital Planning. What have you done to specifically address the Auditor General's recommendations in this important area?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a very important area, and I'm happy to report that we've made great progress in this area. We have to keep in mind, though, that our capital infrastructure plan this year alone is a record \$7 billion – it's the greatest ever in our history – 19-plus billion dollars over the next three years. That's nearly four times the national per capita average spent on

infrastructure, so it's quite a challenge. The Auditor General has pointed out to us as well that we have taken some significant steps already to improving our capital planning process overall, and I'm happy to tell you that we're right on track, right on time in finalizing those improvements.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that's very encouraging. However, the Auditor General specifically indicated that you should finish developing guidelines that describe roles and responsibilities surrounding assessment and prioritization of capital infrastructure projects. So where are you with respect to these guidelines? Are they ready?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we are indeed finishing those guidelines. We have under way a number of very significant projects to assist. For example, we have a new capital planning manual coming out. We have a new accountability policy on grant-funded programs. We also have a new framework for capital projects, and so on. All of these will be completed quite soon, but we have to keep in mind, too, that our capital infrastructure plan has nearly tripled in size over the last couple of years, so it's quite a daunting task. In the end we will do what's right to secure Alberta's infrastructure future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I note that the Auditor General also recommended that Treasury Board develop objectives, timelines, and targets for reducing deferred maintenance. I'm certainly in favour of recent announcements of new buildings, new roadways, new schools, and new hospitals, but we must also do a better job of maintaining our existing infrastructure such as Bowness high school. What have you done to address deferred maintenance projects?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, in short, Mr. Speaker, we've done a great deal. I've worked very closely with our Premier and with our President of the Treasury Board and other colleagues here on implementing the Premier's new unanticipated surplus policy, which requires one-third of those monies to go to savings and two-thirds to go toward capital infrastructure projects. Of the two-thirds amount more than half must obligatorily go toward deferred maintenance. For example, when the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation rolled out 1,100 kilometres of new roadway work this year, over 800 of those kilometres were for repaving projects that sufficed the deferred maintenance area. I could give numerous other examples, but suffice it to say that the 350 additional million dollars that we put out earlier also helped a great deal.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Municipal Funding

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Conservative government's incompetence and mismanagement of municipal funding is colossal. They've amassed \$56 billion in infrastructure debt. That is bad enough, but the government is playing favourites. Instead of addressing the problem honestly, the Conservatives use public dollars as a way to try to fix their political problems in Calgary. Calgary hollered for more funding; now Calgary will get \$393 a

person. Edmonton will only get \$357 a person. Meanwhile, Strathcona county gets \$415 per person. To the minister of municipal affairs: how can you justify this blatant unfairness to the citizens of Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This ministry went out and did consultation in the province. In fact, we visited eight locations across the province, talked to municipalities, had input from the associations, had input from both the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary. There are different views. Of course, the city of Calgary wanted to have the funding distributed by assessment. The city of Edmonton wanted it done by population. Mr. Speaker, in our consultation the municipalities asked us to be fair, and that was the priority.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, is the minister saying that it's fair that Edmonton gets \$357 a person, Calgary \$393 a person, the county of Strathcona \$415 a person? How is that fair to the citizens of Edmonton?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the allocation was not done on a per capita basis alone. The allocation was done on 48 per cent per capita, 48 per cent assessment, and 4 per cent by kilometres of road. On top of that, municipalities got a base of \$120,000, and there was also an allocation for sustainability. This focused on fairness for all of Alberta. Do not forget that Calgary has over a million people whereas Edmonton has over 700,000 people.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about per capita funding. That's what we're talking about. Edmonton is getting shortchanged.

My question to the same minister is simply this. What, then, is your message to Edmonton? Is the message: be happy with your status and accept being treated as second-class citizens? Because that's exactly what you seem to be saying.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, this is about fairness. It is a focus on fairness. This formula is not a population formula alone. This formula looks at a balance. It looks at a balance for all Albertans and municipalities. In fact, when we were in Calgary this last weekend, the AUMA very much supported this allocation and this direction. In fact, if you took the AUMA, the AAMD and C, the city of Edmonton, and the city of Calgary, this formula met 85 to 91 per cent of what they asked for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In discussions with a Calgary columnist last week a very positive alternative for the remaining approximately \$4.5 million which will no longer be spent on the Lieutenant Governor's residence was suggested. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Will you consider designating this available infrastructure money for a specific affordable, accessible housing complex in Edmonton?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we haven't made any decisions yet at all about where all this money is going to go at the time that we finish all of the plans that have been done so far. But I can tell you as Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation that it's my

responsibility to make sure that we are very careful with taxpayers' dollars. I also believe that we have a very capable President of the Treasury Board and a very capable Finance minister, and I believe that when we finalize the project costs, all the remaining money will go back into general revenue, and they will address issues that need to be addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that accessible, affordable housing is a constant challenge, will you consider making accessibility a priority for a project such as this?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing along with the associate minister worked very hard to develop affordable housing options for people in need. I'm sure that the associate minister would be happy to provide the hon. member with information about the work that she is doing in her department to address this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again I'm referring to a specific project, and I'll provide you with a little bit more detail. Considering the tremendous contributions of the Lieutenant Governors, the Queen's representatives in Alberta, will you consider a name for such a proposed complex which reflects their dedication to public service?
2:10

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has several significant buildings that we've named after Lieutenant Governors from the past. Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton, for instance, comes to mind along with the Lois Hole hospital for women. I'm sure that when the time comes for Alberta to recognize the contribution of our current Lieutenant Governor, we will find an appropriate way to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Legislation

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In its first year of implementation the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act has shown some very positive results, with about half of the youth who participated seeking voluntary treatment after discharge and more than half reporting improved quality of life. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: after evaluating the effects of this program for the past year, is there any evidence to suggest ways of improving outcomes even further?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the results of the PCHAD evaluation are encouraging and demonstrate the importance of government, community, and families working together, particularly with troubled teens and teens that are using drugs. The evaluation results indicate high levels of satisfaction by both parents and youth in the provision of assessment and information, and as the hon. member mentioned, many youth have continued further treatment through AADAC's voluntary services.

Amendments to the PCHAD legislation are being considered to address areas for improvement. The changes would consider, for example, extending the length of stay, helping parents to be more

aware of voluntary services, and improving family involvement, which we know from the evaluation increases positive outcomes.

Planning for the next phase of evaluation is currently under way. We'll look at the effectiveness of the service and examine the youths' and families' understanding of the voluntary resources before they reach the stage of filing a court order.

Mr. Marz: Thanks very much for that very excellent answer.

To the same minister. Many parents thought that the program was too short, while many of the youth thought it was too long. Is there any evidence to suggest that perhaps 10 days as opposed to five days would improve outcomes and reduce reoffending?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I wouldn't use the word "reoffending" because we're talking about young people who have not in fact been charged with or convicted of a criminal offence, at least not in the context of this treatment.

This is a mandatory treatment for substance abuse issues, and the legislation is put in place to address those issues. The purpose of PCHAD is to engage youth, provide detoxification, and begin a treatment plan to which they can commit. In some cases an extended period of time may increase the chances of engaging the young person or getting to the point where we're actually resolving the problem, so we will be looking at amendments to the act to accomplish that. I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force actually recommended that, and those recommendations have been accepted by the government.

Mr. Marz: Again to the same minister: depending on what substance is being abused, is there a case to be made for longer mandatory detoxification orders?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is evidence that some drugs, like crystal meth and cocaine, require a greater period of time for detoxification. That can occur, of course, in the mandatory setting or in a voluntary setting. AADAC offers youth detoxification programs that are driven by the individual assessments and have the option to extend time in detoxification as required. PCHAD provides a link to the youth treatment services that are based on what the young person needs. So it may be appropriate to have a longer period of time. Right now that's being done on an individual assessment basis. With the amendments which we hope to bring forward with respect to the act, we may provide for a longer time for that initial assessment period.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Blood-borne and Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past four years rates of HIV have been increasing, and for those same four years the government has refused to release the blood-borne pathogen and sexually transmitted infections strategy that would address these issues. My questions are to the minister of health. Why has it taken more than four years to approve this report?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question and one that I don't have a very good answer for. I have met with the chair of the committee and am very interested in the report and where it got hung up in terms of the process. I've been working on how we could bring that forward. It's a very important issue. We are seeing an

increase in infectious diseases and sexually transmitted diseases in the province, and it's important that we address those issues. What I'm looking at is to see whether the strategies need to be updated so we can bring them forward on a timely basis. I'm not sure why the report didn't come forward at the time it was created. I wasn't aware of it at the time, but I'm certainly working actively on it now.

Ms Blakeman: So we could have it updated before it's actually been released.

All right. To the same minister. There has also been a rise in sexual transmission of HIV as 73 per cent of infections in 2005 were sexually transmitted. Is there another plan to reduce HIV rates, or will the minister finally approve and implement this strategy?

Mr. Hancock: Well, as I said, Mr. Speaker, I think the prudent course of action is to look at the strategy that was presented in the context of today's information and determine whether it's still the most effective strategy or whether another strategy would be more effective. That's what we're in the process of doing.

Ms Blakeman: Well, okay. To the same minister, then. Capital health's medical officer of health pointed out that this region has become the STD capital of Canada. What preventive action is the minister taking in the meantime to reduce the risk for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I should reference that the comment that the hon. member is referring to was made during a forum on public health that was located at the university. That is one of the strategies that's very important, that we talk about public health issues and that we not be afraid to talk about those public health issues in public and raise awareness levels. It's very important that we raise awareness. We in fact issued a news release and made a public statement in the fall about the prevalence of sexually transmitted disease and the concerns. If I remember correctly, I made a statement in the House on that. I think it was earlier in the spring.

The first and most important thing is to raise awareness of the issue. Secondly, the provincial lab is gearing up to be able to do more testing to make sure that people know how they can deal with it themselves, but it's important that we bring a strategy forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Strength of Canadian Dollar

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Calgary-Fort has a major industrial park, the Foothills industrial park, where tens of thousands of Albertans are working hard in hundreds of manufacturing companies. In recent months these businesses have suffered many drawbacks, resulting in some downsizing. One of the drawbacks is the high Canadian dollar negatively affecting the exports, that results in low production and job loss. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. What do you do, Minister, to address the negative effect of the high Canadian dollar on our Albertan manufacturing businesses?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we are functioning today globally in an extremely competitive economy, and Alberta is no exception. It is both the best of times and the worst of times: low unemployment and a high need for labour. The Canadian dollar, of course, putting

it on par and even better than our American neighbour has meant that some people have to be looking at sharpening their pencils on productivity and innovation and ways to cope and still be competitive. It is a greater challenge. Our department offers the lean assessment. We will go in on the short term, help people assess how they can become more productive on the lines. We do industrial assessments for medium- and small-sized companies. We've done almost 40, and in our program . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Besides the high Canadian dollar, manufacturing management told me that their production costs are rising in spite of their productivity improvement efforts. One company told me that the new forward rates for electrical energy were about 60 per cent over their previous contract because of the supply/demand pressure in our province of Alberta, and energy costs are the highest cost driver. My question is to the same minister. What is our minister going to do to help address these production costs?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the cost of electricity is going up everywhere. There are pros and cons of doing business in Alberta, and this is one of the challenges. There are many other kinds of things that you can find in doing business in Alberta that are an extreme advantage, along with very many things in terms of our tax rate and the ability for workers to have a great service in education and in health care support services. The businesses admittedly will have higher costs in electricity than in some places, but across the globe, when you're using power, consuming power, you will pay the cost.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you. My question is to the same minister. Do you have any plans to help sustain the Alberta manufacturing industry like the government helps other industries in their time of trouble?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we talked earlier about how Alberta Works helps people who have had the misfortune of being unemployed for any reason. We continue in Alberta to have many advantages, many represented by ministers on the front bench who will tell you the piece of the economy that they hold dear, that helps them assure Albertans that they are getting the most competitive costs and the best living opportunity and place to raise a family anywhere in Canada. Where would you rather be than in Alberta to live, work, and do business?

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 90 questions and responses today.

Now we will return to our Routine that we were on prior to the Oral Question Period, and I'll recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East for a member's statement.

head: **Members' Statements**
(continued)

International Day of Disabled Persons

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the International Day of Disabled Persons. It was proclaimed by a collaborative effort of the United Nations in 1992. It is to celebrate and acknowledge the experience and capabilities of people with disabilities. The day is to remind us to promote understanding about disability issues and to

increase awareness of the gains to be derived from integrating disabled persons into all aspects of political, social, economic, and cultural life.

Let's think of science: Dr. Stephen Hawking, Dr. Austin Mardon. Sports: Rick Hansen, Special Olympics athletes. Politics: Gary McPherson, a candidate for the leadership of the Alberta PC Party, and MLAs Percy Wickman and Weslyn Mather. Economics: foot and mouth painters who support themselves with their paintings, the kids in the Champ program who live with limb prostheses. Heros all.

But – and it is a big but – the intestinal fortitude to fight through all these hardships is theirs and theirs alone. Yes, there has been support. We've come a long way but not nearly far enough. The government must admit that Alberta's boom is a bust for most people with disabilities. There is a crisis in the human-service sector, and blaming it on a lack of workers is a cop-out when, in fact, decent wages for workers and obtaining decent employment for the disabled is a prime concern. In a province this rich a cop-out borders on immoral.

The Speaker: The hon. member violated a long-standing rule of the Assembly during that last statement.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Alberta Urban Municipalities Association

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association recently held its 102nd annual fall convention in Calgary. This year's convention theme was Sustaining Our Success, which this government certainly embraces. It was attended by more than a thousand delegates from across the province, representing 284 municipalities. Mayor Lloyd Bertschi of the town of Morinville was elected by the delegates as association president. Alderman Bob Hawkesworth of the city of Calgary had served as president for the past three years. Our AUMA partners held this convention knowing that they will have sustainable, predictable, and long-term funding as promised by our Premier.

The association recognized the Premier's dedication and involvement in municipal politics by presenting him with an award of excellence. The purpose of this award is to recognize outstanding civic leadership by present and past municipally elected officials. It should be noted that our Premier received a standing ovation twice when he spoke and received the prestigious award. Also at this event the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing presented the Alberta municipal excellence award to a number of outstanding municipalities. They are the towns of Banff and Canmore, Parkland county, the town of Stony Plain, the city of Spruce Grove, the city of Calgary, and the town of Athabasca.

Mr. Speaker, the success of Alberta's municipalities is important. I invite all members to join me in congratulating the AUMA on their achievements of more than a century and for continuous success in the future.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my duty today to give oral notice of two motions, which would be, first, Government Motion 38:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, is resumed, not more than three hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill at Committee

of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of this stage of the bill shall be put forthwith.

Also, which would be Government Motion 39:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill at third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of this stage of the bill shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, did you send me a note about a notice of motion?

Mr. Martin: No. About a notice of motion?

The Speaker: That's what we're on, Notices of Motions.

Mr. Martin: Oh. Sorry. I was thunderstruck by what he was saying.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I wish to give notice for the introduction of Bill 225, Mines and Minerals (Alberta Value Added) Amendment Act, 2007, a bill to ensure greater upgrading of bitumen in the province.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, a notice of motion?

Dr. Pannu: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to give notice for the introduction of Bill 230, Protection for Persons in Care (Clients' Bill of Rights) Amendment Act, 2007, a bill to ensure that the rights of seniors in care are respected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 57

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2)

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to seek leave to introduce a bill being Bill 57, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, (No. 2).

By tradition, Mr. Speaker, miscellaneous statutes contain typically a number of provisions which are noncontentious. I'll just briefly list those acts which are affected by this particular bill: the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act, the Legal Profession Act, the Provincial Court Act, the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, and the School Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 57 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a petition. It's not in order for a petition, so I have to do it as a tabling. There are 185 signatures on here. It says that we the undersigned petition the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to

act immediately on the motion passed at a public meeting on the overstocking of walleye in Pigeon Lake, held in Thorsby on April 24, 2007. The motion to catch and retain one walleye per day, no size limit, on a regular license, from May Long Weekend to March 31 2008 was passed by 90% of the nearly 300 in attendance.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings today. The first is a letter to the hon. Premier of Alberta dated November 26, 2007. It's from the Alberta Wilderness Association outlining their concerns and their opposition to the proposed Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act.

My second tabling is a letter from a constituent, Mr. Lawrence Kaban. Mr. Kaban is concerned about Alberta's labour laws and is suggesting five significant changes.

My third tabling is also from a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar, Wilma Nerenberg. She, too, is concerned about our labour laws and what should be done to change the Alberta labour laws.

Marilyn Wells, also a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar, is writing expressing her concerns, as well, regarding the Alberta labour laws.

My final tabling is from Bruce Nelson, and he is a resident of Edmonton-Gold Bar. Mr. Nelson is also proposing five ways to change and improve the Alberta labour laws.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a card being distributed by ACTRA Canada asking people to support more Canadian films and asking Canadians to demand that big theatre chains and the Motion Picture Theatre Associations of Canada show more Canadian films. So far we've only got 1.7 per cent of the box office in Canada.

My second tabling is copies of letters from constituents Kevin Guenetta, Siu Yu, Robert Taylor, Miranda Mach, Trevor Semper, Linda Smith, Brendolyn Clarke, Brian White, Meredith Day, and Gloria Menjivar, and they are all concerned with Alberta labour laws. I will focus on one today, "Full legal recognition of bargaining rights for public employees, including the right to strike combined with reasonable essential-services legislation."

Thank you.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is from Leon Comer, who is talking about child care and the proposed regulations. These changes being proposed assume a utopian situation currently exists in the province of Alberta in respect to child care, be it daycare, day home, or preschool level.

The other tabling is from six constituents of Edmonton-Mill Woods expressing concern about Alberta labour laws. A number of requests are listed, and I will just mention one, "The introduction of a process for first-contract arbitration."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is an article from last week's *The Economist*, which I referred to in question period.

Another is the program for the International Day of Disabled Persons at Edmonton city hall today. That was mentioned also in Members' Statements by the Member for Strathcona and the Member for Lethbridge-East. Also, there was a speech there by the Member for Calgary-North West, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings here today. I've got correspondence from the Seniors' Action and Liaison Team. They're a group of seniors devoted to working towards a civil society. They're urging the government to withdraw Bill 46.

The second tabling I have is the appropriate number of copies of a government study from December 2006 concerning the Métis population in Alberta.

Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, the international day for persons with disabilities, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter I received from Matthew Russell. He writes that Alberta's postsecondary institutions are not providing adequate accessibility for disabled students and suggests that the postsecondary system could learn how to do so from the province's K to 12 education system, which he gives high marks in this regard.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first one is more copies of letters from my constituents urging us to revamp Alberta's antiquated labour laws to ensure fairness for all working people. One of their ideas, for example, is to prohibit the use of replacement workers that break strikes. These letters are from Marinela Gonzales, Olga Berry, Joan Daniel, Patricia Lundie, Reynaldo Espiritu, Scott Brannon, Edward J. Robinson, and Angela Manning.

The second tabling contains two letters from two corrections officers, Trevor Hansen, with seven years' experience, and Thomas Keenan, with 20 years. Trevor states the changes corrections officers experienced over the past seven years but more profoundly over the last two or three and how they have taken on more but have not been appreciated or compensated by this government like sheriffs are. Mr. Keenan tells us how similar . . .

The Speaker: Let's go on.

Mr. Elsalhy: Okay. The third one is an e-mail from Donna Cardinal expressing her support for raw milk being offered as an option, especially from a health promotion perspective.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first tabling is a series of signatures from my Calgary-Varsity constituents on a petition that reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to

urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

My next two tablings are from citizens concerned with lack of investment in Albertans who truly need a hand. The first is an e-mail and document from Dave Hughes calling on the government to immediately invest in supports for people with developmental disabilities.

The second is a letter from Linda Lyster outlining the negative and costly impacts of homelessness on children and urging the government to make affordable housing a priority.

My next set of tablings includes a program from Calgary's seventh annual Disability Arts Festival, entitled Balancing Acts, along with a poster advertising Balancing Act's visual art exhibits. I'm very proud of the organizer of this year's event, Nicole Dunbar, a fantastic former student from F.E. Osborne junior high school.

My next tabling is from Dan Hogg, a grade 10 constituent of mine who has chosen to exercise his democratic right by expressing his disagreement with requiring that at least 75 per cent of social studies curriculum be legislated as dedicated to Canadian history and requesting that I vote against Bill 215.

My last tabling is a \$26,000 taxpayer-funded government announcement running in rural papers entitled What Alberta Landowners Need To Know about Bill 46, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. This brings the two-month taxpayer advertising total close to \$400,000.

The Speaker: Anybody else? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of my letter dated October 16 to the Crowsnest Pass Food Bank. As per my pledge of April 2, '07, half of my MLA indexed pay raise, \$146.25, is donated monthly to a food bank until AISH is similarly increased and indexed. The Crowsnest food bank has 2,185 volunteer hours, filled 426 hampers, and helped 2,125 people between January and September of this year. It is co-ordinated by Carmellia Saretzky.

My second tabling is my donation for November to the Vulcan county food bank. It operates with 960 volunteer hours per year, preparing 290 hampers per year. Brenda English is the administrator of the Vulcan county food bank.

My third tabling is five copies of a letter from Marg Triskle at the Good Sam's facility in Medicine Hat, who feels that younger people who suffer from MS should at the very least have a small wing of the building dedicated to their needs instead of being separated throughout the huge building. This separation produces social isolation because the majority of the residents are elderly, and their needs and interests are very different.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 24 letters from my constituents Zena Rohoman, Carolyn Arcala, Mary Goberdhan, Muhammad Shahid, Anna Francis, Jeff West, Stuart Passey, Tracy Passey, Gemma Diaz, Rosita Hinds, Esmeralda Jose, Anita Escalona, Christine Dickson, Usha Belas, Maria Corpuz, Elisa San Jose, Deen Khotz, Sepina Williams, Nilesh Bali, Christine Buck, Mary Watson, Vilma Vasquez, Helen Savage, Judy Salicon. They're all concerned about Alberta labour laws and strongly believe in major changes to encourage fairness to all working people in Alberta.

Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Clerk: No notice having been given, written questions shall stand and retain their place on the Order Paper.

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Clerk: No notice having been given, motions for return shall stand and retain their place on the Order Paper.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading**

Bill 212

Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and move third reading debate for Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act.

Throughout the various stages of the debate I have been pleased to hear the numerous insightful comments made by the hon. members of this Assembly. After thoroughly engaging and contemplating this innovative legislation, it seems that my colleagues see how it will benefit their constituents and impact their daily lives.

We have all listened to countless ways that this bill will enhance Albertans' quality of life. Powered by a strong investigatory agency, they will be able to voice their concerns about wrongdoings, and if need be, these concerns will be addressed. Whether the crime or disturbing behaviour in our communities is subtle or overt, it can touch and affect many people in unimaginable ways such as instilling fear, paranoia, and insecurity. Having a safer communities agency dedicated to hearing and addressing Albertans' safety concerns will help Albertans find true enjoyment and appreciation of their neighbourhoods.

2:40

With every story I hear of properties in our province being used for less than honourable purpose, I am reminded that this bill will be an outstanding addition to our current resources. Based on the various conversations I have had with constituents and stakeholders, I know this bill will be put to good use. Specifically, I am sure the province's Block Watch associations are looking forward to this additional tool in their quest for safer communities for their families. Their work is invaluable and ought to be supported and bolstered in any way possible.

I have also heard from aldermen in Calgary and police officers throughout the province with respect to this act. They have championed it as a new way to deal with the continual crime and disturbances that cannot be addressed through our traditional means. By targeting properties, this bill covers another avenue to strengthen our crime prevention and reduction strategies.

Mr. Speaker, crime touches us all and is, therefore, everyone's responsibility. It requires committed efforts from citizens, governments, police services, and community organizations. Bill 212 allows all stakeholders to work together and penalize criminals and peace disturbers in an effective manner. Be it rural or urban area, all Albertans have the right to feel safe and secure in their place of residence. Bill 212 will help achieve this. By ridding a community of activities which adversely affect the health, safety, or security of its residents or by stopping activities which interfere with the peaceful use of a property in the community, this bill will effectively

make an increased number of communities more enjoyable and safe for Albertans.

I am honoured to have been given the opportunity to bring the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act in front of my colleagues as a government member. While this bill truly complements this government's many efforts towards safe communities, it is also very much in line with its approach to community safety. This bill involves working with and engaging Albertans as was done with the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force.

I am quite happy with the prospect of this legislation actually becoming an additional tool available to Albertans in their quest to continue and enhance our strong tradition of safe and pleasant communities. This type of legislation has made a huge difference in communities across Canada. I look forward to seeing it at work in our province.

In closing, I would like to thank my colleagues on either side of the House for their positive remarks and co-operation with respect to Bill 212 and hope that they will continue to lend their support to this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and say a few words with respect to Bill 212 in third reading. First of all, I'd like to congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing it forward. The hon. Premier, as one of his priorities about a year ago, asked that I as Minister of Justice and Attorney General put together a task force to address the issue of crime reduction and safe communities. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was appointed in the spring together with other members on that committee. They travelled to some 14 communities, held meetings, received input via the Internet and other fashions, and this fall produced their report. It was on November 6 that the government released that report together with its response to it, where the vast majority of the recommendations at that time were accepted.

The purpose of the report was to lay out a comprehensive plan, which, candidly, Mr. Speaker, is unique in Canada, with a view to crime reduction and making our communities safer. One of the specific recommendations in the report – and this is of course based on what Albertans asked – was that we adopt a safe neighbourhoods act. Indeed, the specific recommendations included the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays' Bill 212 because it was known to the committee. So the committee at page 49 of the report had this to say:

Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, was introduced as a private members bill in the spring 2007 session of the Legislative Assembly. This bill should be reviewed, adjusted as necessary, and passed, if not in the fall 2007 session, then as a government bill in the spring of 2008.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that the member and other members of this Assembly obviously took that recommendation to heart because amendments were introduced. They were debated. They were passed. Bill 212 is a better bill as a result of that. It provides very much the thrust of what the task force was asking for in their recommendations. I can tell you that as a member of the executive of this government I am in full support of this bill on a go-forward basis. I think it will accomplish what safe communities legislation does.

I first became aware of safe communities legislation on becoming Attorney General in 2004. I had an opportunity at that time to spend

a day or so with colleagues from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. It was at that time that I heard of the Manitoba and Saskatchewan experiences. Manitoba brought in similar legislation in 2001. It is the principal and earliest piece of legislation of this kind in Canada. I believe that since then Saskatchewan, the Yukon, and Nova Scotia have brought in similar legislation. Saskatchewan was second, so they have had some considerable experience with it also.

Effectively, many of the situations which make our communities less safe are criminal in nature, but there are also other aspects to them, and that is what this legislation deals with. It doesn't deal with the criminal aspect; it deals with the health and public safety aspects. Essentially, what it does is disrupt activities which are sometimes incredibly difficult to deal with through the criminal law. So what we have is a situation where prostitution houses, grow ops, drug houses, and other such activities, which can go on in our communities and avoid the criminal law because of some of the difficulties associated with enforcing that, can now be disrupted through this provincial legislation.

I have no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that this is a good bill. I will be supporting it as, importantly, it is one of the very early indications of the response of this Legislature in support of the safe communities task force recommendations, which is, indeed, a good thing for all Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, then Wetaskiwin-Camrose. Please proceed.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, support and thank the Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing forward Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. One of the main ingredients of this bill is the fact that residents will have direct reporting to police agencies and therefore help to make communities safer.

I would like to suggest that, unfortunately, at this time in Alberta there are a number of people who don't have residences, and their ability to report, therefore, is considerably limited. Of these who have no residence, the group that I'm very concerned about are children. A number of denominations not only in Calgary but in Edmonton and I'm sure in other municipalities run programs the equivalent of Calgary's Inn from the Cold, where children and their parents are sheltered in a church basement by, as I say, interdenominational groups. The stability that the children receive during the day in going to a designated school, unfortunately, is not paralleled in the evening because the parents line up at different churches each night to receive that shelter.

One of the ingredients of a safer community is having adequate food resources. As I pointed out in an earlier member's statement, 85 per cent of Albertans on fixed incomes or welfare are food insecure. Of course, children are among the most vulnerable. There are a number of creative programs that are run by nonprofit organizations, such as the food bank, that provide limited access to food, but unfortunately after I think it's five or six visits within a year, that is your absolute limit.

2:50

At a wonderful production of Theatre Calgary on Saturday night Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* was performed. The proceeds for that event went to the food bank. It was noted that no funding from the government supports the food banks. If we're going to be supportive of safer communities, such as Bill 212 puts forward to a small but

important extent, then we have to take into account not only home security in the sense of having a home to be secure in but then having the security of food so that vulnerable individuals have the same type of opportunities as those who are less vulnerable.

Another organization that helps to provide security to children, to the homeless working poor, and to seniors is the Meals on Wheels program. I thank the government for this summer having announced a sum of I believe it was \$5 million for this very worthy program, that helps children with their nutritional needs in a program called duck soup. It provides lunches for those children. Similar programs are happening in Edmonton and in our outlying communities. This program, Meals on Wheels, has been operating for 41 years. It has extended its program, which originally helped seniors who were at home, to now making bagged lunches for individuals who are in the drop-in centre who are able to work but don't have the luxury of a roof over their heads other than that mat on the floor in the drop-in centre, but they have the support of Meals on Wheels dropping off bagged lunches each day so that they can contribute to a small extent to the security of others through their employment.

If we're going to deal with safer communities, we have to also consider the vulnerable seniors beyond just the support that they receive from groups like Meals on Wheels. We know that from an economic standpoint as well as a moral standpoint seniors would like to be housed in their homes as long as they possibly can. In order to have the type of security that Bill 212 proposes, the seniors need to have the support. This can't all be put onto their families. Quite often the seniors' grown children live in other communities, and they can't provide the day-to-day support.

One of the things that would help with their security is bringing back the notion of seniors not having to pay the educational portion of property tax. This was an initiative that was taken away from them in the mid-90s, and it would provide them with some financial security and a safer community if the government were to restore that program. They do help some fixed-income seniors with their health, paying their health care premiums, and there is some assistance for extremely low-income individuals, seniors, living in their homes and trying to maintain them.

There are a number of seniors who would like to have greater security that are living in apartments, in rental accommodations, whose rents continue to rise. To provide them with the safer, secure communities that Bill 212 is beginning to address, then some type of control or ongoing support subsidy for those individuals who are vulnerable and could lose their accommodations.

Also in terms of safer and secure communities there are a tremendous number of seniors living in assisted living and long-term care where the ratio of caregivers to those in care has been dramatically reduced. These caregivers are doing their best to provide the security that the seniors require, many of whom are suffering from dementia and for whom these individuals are their only advocates. In terms of providing a more secure and safe community for those individuals, I would encourage the government to increase the wages of the caregivers, both the RNs, the LPNs, and the many individuals whose pay barely puts them above the poverty line.

Alberta is a wonderful province. It could be a more safe and secure province, as Bill 212 suggests, if we took into account the needs of individuals. We have attracted people from all over the world with our promises, and those promises stem primarily from our nonrenewable resource base: the oil and gas that is in the ground, the bitumen that is being extracted from the tar sands. To provide secure and safer communities, as Bill 212 suggests, then we have to make sure that the money that comes from these various enterprises, as the royalty commission noted, is sufficient to provide that quality of life for all Albertans.

We need to work to make Alberta a more inclusive province. We need to encourage immigration rather than just sort of a temporary taste that the temporary foreign workers receive. We need to provide them while they're here, helping our economy to prosper, with the same type of safe and secure communities that Bill 212 recommends for regular landed immigrants and Canadian citizens living in Alberta.

Alberta is a wonderful province. There should not be a need for a 10-year plan to end homelessness.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, Edmonton-Ellerslie, Red Deer-North.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to just make a few comments on Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I was very heartened to see this legislation appear because, in fact, I probably almost two years ago had a meeting with the Manitoba Solicitor General, and he was discussing a number of innovations that they had enacted in regard to law and order in the province of Manitoba. He described in some detail this basic framework that is outlined here in Bill 212. Considering the, I suppose, similar types of constituencies that both the Manitoba Solicitor General and myself represent in each respective city, his description of the program in Manitoba was very encouraging. I can't wait to see this functioning and enacted here in the province of Alberta, in Edmonton in particular.

I recognize from several experiences over the last three years that it's very difficult to target and close a problem house in a community. I also know that a problem house can be the source of a crime wave in an immediate area where certain residents might be engaging in criminal activity. It really just is quite miraculous when a certain house might be closed where there's known criminal activity because suddenly everything just changes and becomes like night and day in terms of break-ins and selling of drugs and prostitution and all other manner of activities that you don't want in your neighbourhood. You know, having a tool to target houses that are at the centre of criminal or illicit activity and just giving another tool available to the police is fantastic. I know that the police officers in Edmonton-Calder and across the city of Edmonton and in Calgary and other cities as well will welcome this with open arms because the traditional mechanisms by which you have to engage in surveillance and court orders and whatnot are certainly cumbersome.

3:00

Having the capacity to just focus on a landlord and on the tenancy side of the agreement allows the police to do an end around and save a lot of time once a house has been identified as a centre for criminal activity. As I said before, it's miraculous how a place will become safe and how criminal activity will disappear in the night when it's perhaps just a small group of people in one home that is causing the problems that hundreds have to suffer under when there is this sort of activity about.

We were talking, I guess about a year and a half ago, about bringing this very thing forward as a private member's bill. I guess the power of positive thinking and interaction between our government and the Manitoba government as well as Saskatchewan's – and I think even Yukon now has something like this – have brought about the potential for positive change here in the province of Alberta. Certainly, the Alberta New Democrats recognize the value of this, and we will support it wholeheartedly.

It's interesting to see. Manitoba, I think, was the first government that brought this forward and then Saskatchewan and then Nova

Scotia. I know for a fact that Manitoba in conjunction with some other innovative tools has reduced the crime rate in certain neighbourhoods quite dramatically with this. There's another piece of legislation that the same solicitor general was describing to me which was sort of working in concert with this particular bill on focusing on houses. It's to move certain types of court activity into the neighbourhoods as well so that you had the swift delivery of justice within reasonably close proximity to where the crimes were taking place so that people who had been aggrieved and were victims of crime could see justice unfolding in the neighbourhood in a reasonably swift way. Again, this was a very positive piece of legislation that I believe is part of a package of things that we need to do to prevent crime, which is much more cost effective and positive as opposed to chasing down crime after it's already happened.

Of course, the keystone to building safer communities is to encourage and to properly fund the capacity for municipalities to engage in neighbourhoods. Community policing in its truest sense, not just some lip service to it, is the lynchpin that can make all of these other pieces of legislation function. When law enforcement officers are assigned to a smaller geographic area and engage in community policing activities over time with the same officer staff, it's quite transformative and the very best sort of crime prevention model that can help reduce crime and increase a sense of community and safety in neighbourhoods all around the province of Alberta.

[Mr. Lukaszuk in the chair]

It's the model that I'm sure many people are familiar with. I believe it's called the London constabulary model of community policing as opposed to what often is used in North America here, which is the Ulster, sort of more military organization for policing. I believe that it's been proven that the London constabulary model, if it's properly funded and maintained, over time prevents crime, especially violent crime and property crime, more than any possible alternative that you could have. So having the London constabulary model of community policing, Mr. Speaker, in communities such as Edmonton-Calder – and Edmonton-Castle Downs as well, certainly, can use the same type of model. [interjection] Yeah, I heard that there is a certain church that talks about the imminent Apocalypse, and sometimes you see signs of the imminent Apocalypse. I don't know if I'm seeing something like that now. Anyway, I don't believe in that kind of thing. I don't believe in it and respect the chair in all of its various forms. Certainly, we have to. [interjection] Yes, that's right. Nothing ever stays the same.

Bill 212 is a good piece of legislation, and the Alberta New Democrats will wholeheartedly support it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing such a timely bill forward. Clearly, there is a growing need to address some of the problems that criminal and disturbing activities present to the safety of Alberta's communities, not to mention the impact on the children and youth who live in these environments.

This is not to say that the tools which currently exist to deal with crime and crime prevention are ineffective. In fact, Alberta's police and law enforcement services do an admirable job of serving and protecting the people of this province, a task that grows more challenging in the face of continued growth pressures. Law

enforcement cannot do the job alone, however. They require the help of concerned and engaged citizens who care as much about solutions and effectiveness as they do. Whether it is an organized committee such as the Neighbourhood Watch program or as simple as knowing who our neighbours are, law enforcement agencies have said over and over that simple awareness goes a long way to preventing crime from taking place.

The busybody in your neighbourhood that is constantly in everyone's business and knows all the goings-on in the neighbourhood may be intrusive, but they may also be on to something. It seems that we used to know more about those who lived on our streets and who our children were playing with. It seems that we used to be more aware of our neighbourhoods and less concerned about offending people. Maybe we need to be more active in our communities by helping our neighbours and observing activities that look suspicious. Bill 212 gives citizens the ability to put this awareness to use and allows them to monitor those who are disruptive in their neighbourhoods and hold them accountable for what occurs.

Not only can this act be useful in removing criminal elements and activities which interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of our own property, but it can also do a lot to discourage them. Whether it is prostitution, illegal drugs, or gang activity, we can make the business of crime inconvenient in our communities. Crime can be thought of as a disease affecting our communities. All diseases require a hospitable host in order to thrive and grow or a safe place where they may lay dormant until one day deciding to strike. The key, then, is to make our communities inhospitable hosts for criminal activities that affect the safety of our homes, our communities, and our children. Ultimately, we can discourage criminals from locating in Alberta's neighbourhoods and remove the influence they can have on our young people. This is particularly important in thwarting the activities of gang members.

Gang recruitment practices operate in specific ways that target young people in order to keep their numbers up and perpetuate their existence. This is particularly true in cases where youth feel more disconnected from their parents and communities. Gangs prey on this and provide the sense of belonging that these youths believe they are missing. By forming friendships with their peer group, new recruits may become desensitized to and more forgiving of the violent activity that they are eventually urged to commit due in part to a misplaced sense of loyalty.

3:10

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of gang behaviour is this groupthink that it promotes and supports. Gang success is based largely on destroying self-identity. What better targets than children and young people who are still trying to determine who they are and what their identity is? Individual identity and responsibility is replaced by the collective identity of the group. It allows them to remove themselves from responsibility and culpability and dissociate themselves from the real impact that their crimes have on communities. A study by the John Howard Society refers to this as the proud dynamic, sometimes referred to as the mob mentality, for normal reason and judgment seem to go out the window. Being a part of a crowd or group gives a kind of permission for people to commit the actions as a member of a group that they would never do as individuals.

Gangs have also become more clever, Mr. Speaker. Rather than only operating on the fringe as they used to, gangs are now trying to normalize themselves in the eyes of young people by becoming a legitimate part of the community. We see examples of this normalization in the popular culture that bombards our children and reinforces the impression that criminal activity is simply another lifestyle choice, in some cases a glamorous one.

At the same time, by entrenching themselves in these communities, criminals and gangs shelter themselves from scrutiny and attention by hiding in plain sight. The mechanisms of Bill 212 allow neighbourhoods to shine a very bright light on these and other interrelated disturbing and inappropriate activities in our communities, including illegal drugs and prostitution. This helps to remind our children who and what these people really are.

Now, we are not talking about sheltering our children from the world or placing them in a bubble. That's not the goal. The goal here is to reduce the likelihoods. By removing these criminal elements, we reduce the likelihood that our children and young people fall prey to these activities either as victims or participants.

One of the ways we prevent our youth from going down these paths is to reach them before the gangs do. The mechanisms of Bill 212 can be a very effective part of this strategy by working in conjunction with many of the things that the community organizations are doing right now. Rather than just addressing the criminal activity, community prevention awareness programs specifically target youth at risk and try to create a more negative attitude toward gang activity and gang membership. As funny as it may sound, making gang life uncool is one of the best means of prevention.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that whether it is gangs, prostitution, or drug houses, like attracts like. The more that criminal activity is left unchecked in our communities, the more it signals to criminals that these are safe havens for them. Silence is permission, and standing by because of either fear or indifference only allows these activities to thrive and grow. We must assure our children that we will protect them and that we will not let fear or indifference silence us when our homes and way of life are threatened.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 212 will go a long ways to help Albertans bring safety to their communities for themselves and their children. We cannot always control the influences our children are exposed to, but we can teach them about choices. I'm in strong support of Bill 212, and I encourage the other Members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in supporting this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. First of all, I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for introducing this badly needed legislation. The main purpose of this bill is to enhance community and neighbourhood safety by providing a way for people within the community to make a complaint to the government about properties that habitually negatively impact the health, safety, or security of one or more persons in neighbourhoods or interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of one or more properties in the community or the neighbourhood.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, will provide for a government agency to respond to these complaints and put an end to activity that adversely affects or harms a neighbourhood. I'm sure this bill allows for communities and neighbourhoods to have a say in the safety and security of their communities, and this is all about community empowerment and allowing people to be active in ensuring the safety of their neighbourhoods.

This will enable another tool for people to access above and beyond calling the police, who sometimes do not have the resources to effectively gather the necessary evidence to deal with some illegal activities. For instance, there may not be the necessary resources to conduct a full investigation of a possible house being used for purposes of meth production, drug trafficking, illegal liquor sales, or any other criminal offences.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

People within the community are witnesses to critical circumstantial evidence indicating illegal activities – vehicle traffic at odd times, noxious smells, and disposal of certain toxic substances – that police services could only determine through constant surveillance. Given the pressure the police face, this is another tool to be utilized for community safety.

A director in the Ministry of the Solicitor General and Public Security can investigate the complaint and take a number of steps, including informal resolution, warning letters, or application to the courts for a community safety order. These are all effective tools to discourage the illegal activities that may be harming the security of a neighbourhood.

This bill will be effective in putting more pressure on criminal organizations that use property to carry out illegal activities. It will also allow for people to take control of the direction their neighbourhoods take to ensure safe and healthy communities. [interjection] I'm not sure. They have the tools. What we need is a will. If there is a will, there is a way. The government has everything according to the recommendations of the task force, and my constituents are eagerly waiting because they have been suffering for a long, long time. This is a good bill. I am hopeful that this bill will definitely help the Edmonton-Ellerslie constituency as well as the other 82 constituencies throughout Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will be effective in putting more pressure on the criminal organizations as well that use property to carry out illegal activities. Investigators can also call in the support of police services or peace officers if need be, depending on the evidence. This ensures the safety of the civilian investigator and creates an integrated dynamic between the investigative unit and police services. A number of other jurisdictions have already passed a very similar version of this legislation. The provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Yukon all have brought forward this type of legislation. Bill 212 is very similar to the Saskatchewan version, and I'm sure it will help to combat crime in Alberta.

This is also about empowering citizens to take back their communities. It is another tool in the fight against illegal activities in our communities. The police do not have the resources to deal with all the complaints they receive. Even if the information is reliable, there simply are not enough police officers. This is a big question. Even though we had the task force and, you know, all the recommendations are on the table, I just want to know whether Albertans will see enough police officers on the road to protect Albertans. They are eagerly waiting because without a number of police officers, whatever we need, whatever is recommended in the task force – it is very important. With their help we can definitely reduce the crime in Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

This bill will create another investigative agency, staffed by trained investigators, to deal with problem properties in neighbourhoods where illegal activities are operating at this moment. Any tool to deal with the rise in crime in Alberta is welcome. This sends a message to criminal organizations and those who commit illegal activities that the people are watching and that they will not tolerate criminal behaviour in their neighbourhoods. The stakes can be high: meth houses, child exploitation. These are serious offences, Mr. Speaker, that need to be monitored by all sources, not just the police.

This bill provides that mechanism to help reduce crime. Empowering citizens in the war on crime is highly effective. People know what is happening in their neighbourhood and often can gather the evidence that is crucial in obtaining a community safety order, evidence that can only be discovered through proximity to the trouble property. For this reason, having a mechanism to allow them

to gather evidence and direct it to an agency of the government for investigation is a positive step in combatting crime.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, this same legislation has been passed in other jurisdictions. This legislation does not change much from province to province and even retains the same name. The legislation improves community safety by targeting and, if necessary, shutting down residential and commercial buildings and land that are habitually used for illegal activities. This bill is very close to the recommendations made by the task force, as the Minister of Justice already mentioned, and this bill is critical in the fight to win back our neighbourhoods from criminal activities. This bill is definitely worthy of support. The Alberta Liberal Party always works hard and finds . . . [interjection] Oh, no.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, anything for crime reduction, making communities safe, is always welcome. I raised this question many times in a different way through members' statements, tabling letters, and asking questions about crime reduction in my constituency. It's a big issue. I hope that with this legislation and the task force recommendations, which I really like – the task force worked really hard, and most of them are worthy of implementation – it will definitely help to reduce crime in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red-Deer North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad to rise and contribute to the discussion on Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, and I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing this legislation forward. There's been a great deal of debate over the issue of crime prevention, and within this discourse Bill 212 has emerged as a very proactive and pro community initiative that seeks to protect the neighbourhoods of Alberta. I know that my constituents in Red Deer-North would embrace this legislation as I've had many discussions with frustrated constituents who've had to observe drug activity going on in their neighbourhoods and have suffered, some actually with physical contact.

Essentially, this bill would create a mechanism for citizens to report suspicious activities taking place on private property which are considered unsafe or threatening to their surrounding locality. As a result of these reports an appropriate public safety agent would launch an investigation and, if warranted, would hold the private property owners accountable for the threatening activity. The intent is to enhance the public safety of our communities through a more direct fashion than currently available via city bylaws and criminal legislation.

I recognize that we have previously engaged in a great deal of dialogue regarding this issue. However, I feel there are still some points we should look at before we close our discussion. In Committee of the Whole concerns came up regarding how quickly the directors of these public safety organizations would be able to operate. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, who brought this up, expressed that people could move in and out of drug houses as fast as they need to so that they don't get caught.

The questions, Mr. Speaker, are: how long does it take for a complaint to be resolved when we engage in the process suggested by Bill 212, and what time frames are we looking at? As this bill has yet to become law, I feel we can best answer this question by looking at other jurisdictions with similar legislation already in place. In Saskatchewan the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act is legislation that was created to improve community safety. It allows communities to shut down residential and commercial buildings that are habitually used for prostitution, solvent abuse, or the unlawful sale and consumption of alcohol and illegal drugs.

When this program started in Saskatchewan, they found that with the caseload at the time, they were able to begin an investigation within a week or two. Their successes with the program led to an increased caseload, and they are presently at six to eight weeks before they can get to a new file. This will be remedied in Saskatchewan by the addition of two more investigators in the new fiscal year. Overall the Saskatchewan Department of Justice has indicated that the resolution of complaints normally takes two to four weeks. The program has been extremely successful so far.

The province of Nova Scotia also has a version of the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. This has created a public safety investigative unit which targets illegal activity such as the sale of illegal drugs and alcohol, prostitution, and illegal gambling. Mr. Speaker, in Nova Scotia I understand there has been a definite sense of public satisfaction that something was being done to address the problem areas in both rural and urban neighbourhoods. The manager felt that the increased workload the investigative units are currently experiencing can be correlated to the public accomplishments of this program.

The province of Manitoba also has a Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act in place, which works by holding property owners accountable for threatening or disturbing activities that occur regularly on their property. The manager of the province's public safety investigation unit has stated – this is in Manitoba – that there have been more than 100 arrests and that 99 per cent of landlords have been co-operative in evicting drug dealers.

There have been only five repeat dealers among the 258 crack houses shut down since the Saskatchewan government legislated the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act five years ago. Manitoba does not have statistics that indicate reaction times. They prioritize each complaint based on its seriousness; for example, if children are at risk or if there is an imminent threat of violence. Due to the degree of complaints they receive and their current resources, more serious complaints take precedence. This circumstance varies the reaction times. Some complaints are dealt with rather quickly while others are handled over an extended period of time. Mr. Speaker, it seems logical to assume that enacting Bill 212 will play out in a very similar fashion as in the provinces that have been mentioned although we can certainly learn from them as we move forward.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind the House that these other provinces have reported an overwhelming success rate in reducing crime in their communities. I would also bring up that with the additional niche role of this legislation and its agency, the traditional involvement of our police services is enhanced, not hindered. This synergy has led to the types of accomplishments that have been observed in these jurisdictions.

Safer community initiatives in other provinces have successfully helped people protect themselves and their properties and reduced the fear of crime by means of greater diligence and accurate reporting of suspicious incidents to the police and by fostering a community spirit. Communities with problem areas will keep investigators busy. This is a fact. However, with this legislation the message is being conveyed that law-abiding citizens won't tolerate criminal activities in their neighbourhoods. As this sinks in, it's reasonable to conclude that communities will shift from a stance of fixing their problem areas to one of maintaining the safety and order in their locales. In the end this community-based approach to crime prevention is an important one which has enjoyed a tremendous degree of success in other provincial jurisdictions.

I would conclude that the passage of Bill 212 would be in the best interests of all Albertan communities, and I urge my colleagues to support it. Thank you.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to add my remarks to Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, in third reading. I appreciate the hon. Member for Red Deer-North and her comments about the possible effects of this bill because in third reading we're talking about the effects of the bill. I'm really glad to hear that in other jurisdictions, in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, there has been positive feedback about the effect of their legislation, that it really makes a difference in the community. As I mentioned previously, in second reading, I meet on a regular basis with a group in my community called the safe and caring communities committee, which is obviously the committee that needs to look at this kind of legislation and the effect of this legislation.

I think that what is really important is the proper follow-up to this bill. It's one thing to pass legislation in this House, but it's another thing to trace how it's going to be followed up in the community. So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I expect that it's probably the Solicitor General's department that needs to follow up on this and to especially educate the police so that they can educate the community to be able to put this into practice.

In our safe and caring communities committee that meets on a regular basis there are Edmonton Police Service constables that meet with us so that to the extent that they are aware of this kind of legislation when it is finally enacted, then they can help people in the community to be educated to look for signs in the community of the kind of criminal activity that this bill is dedicated to investigating.

In terms of the effect I noticed that there is a very fine website that the Saskatchewan government, Saskatchewan Justice, has to educate the public to look for the signs of when there are buildings that are being misused for criminal activity. On their website they ask the question: what should I look for in my neighbourhood? And they list common signs of illegal activity. Alone any of these activities or signs may not necessarily mean that drug dealing, drug producing, substance abuse, prostitution, or any variety of other illegal activities are occurring on a property; however, a frequency of these signs would lead one to want to do something about it. So this legislation outlines the process that a person can pursue to deal with their concerns.

What I'm concerned about is that if this bill is truly to be effective, we have a similar kind of website and a similar kind of educational process so that people are alerted to what the signs are that they should be watching for. Some of these signs of a particular building include frequent visitors at all times of the day and night, frequent late night activity, windows blackened or curtains always drawn, visitors with expensive vehicles coming up – Mr. Speaker, through this committee that I meet with, that has been reported in terms of some buildings in our neighbourhoods, so I think that's really an important factor – unfriendly people who appear to be secretive about their activities, people watching cars suspiciously as they pass by, extensive investment in home security, garbage that contains numerous bottles and containers, particularly chemical containers, and putting garbage out in another neighbour's collection area. That's a useful list.

I think that in the follow-up to this kind of legislation we need to have that kind of publicity because this bill I think is about empowering people in the community to assist.

The Deputy Speaker: The time for this order of business has elapsed. I will now call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays to close debate on Bill 212.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a great honour and privilege to bring this legislation forward on behalf of the constituency of Calgary-Hays. I also appreciate all the supportive comments that were voiced during third reading. If passed, this act will work to make our great Alberta communities even stronger and more welcoming to good, hard-working Alberta families, business owners, and associations.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are smart people who are well connected and in tune with their communities. They know when something is off. I am glad that we as legislators are recognizing the tremendous resource that is at our disposal for the combat against activities which slowly eat away at our quality of life. Alberta communities on the whole are overwhelmingly safe and friendly. Families flourish, grow, and thrive in our province. We chat with our neighbour, have social events to stay connected, and bring our children to these activities to make friends.

However, there can be trouble spots in any community. These areas require a bit of help to eliminate any inappropriate behaviour. With this bill Albertans can feel comfortable about calling their local safer community and neighbourhoods agency when they observe a lot of suspicious traffic on their streets, when there is rowdy and disturbing behaviour on a property, or if they constantly find paraphernalia in certain locations. Communities are for raising families and enjoying our prosperity and good health. They should not be a place which is overshadowed by illegal activities or disturbing behaviours as is sometimes the case.

Mr. Speaker, our police services work nonstop to keep communities as clean as possible. They do a remarkable job. I commend them for that and have the highest respect for each man and woman who wears a uniform. I hope the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act helps ease the load of our protectors. As was demonstrated by my colleagues, I believe that our current law enforcement services stand to gain tremendously from the tools this legislation brings. I am confident that having the ability to shut down a property or evict certain troublemakers is a good complement to our highly developed systems. I look forward to seeing Alberta's strong police services work with the safer communities and neighbourhoods agencies to achieve greater peace where our homes and families are rooted.

I thank all the members who spoke in favour of Bill 212. I kindly ask my colleagues to support this bill on behalf of all Albertans and our great province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 212 read a third time]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 214
Healthy Futures Act**

[Debate adjourned November 26: Mr. Coutts speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak in support of a different bill, which is Bill 214, Healthy Futures Act. I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for introducing this bill.

Mr. Speaker, the object of this bill is to require government policy decisions to undergo a health impact assessment to examine a policy's effect on a wide range of factors like income, education, and environment that influence the health of our society and to ensure

that government decisions that could potentially affect the health of Albertans are subject to the greatest scrutiny to promote the protection, enhancement, and sustainability of the health of Albertans. A health impact assessment is a decision-making tool for predicting the effect of a proposed activity on the health of the population.

The World Health Organization supports the use of health impact assessments. HIA are based on four values. These values provide a platform from which the benefits of HIA can be derived and link HIA to the policy environment in which an HIA is being undertaken. The four values are democracy, equity, sustainable development, and ethical use of evidence. Democracy: allowing people to participate in the development and implementation of the policies, programs, or projects that may impact their lives. Equity: a health impact assessment assesses the distribution of impacts from a proposal on the whole population, with a particular reference to how the proposal will affect vulnerable people in terms of age, gender, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status. Sustainable development: both short- and long-term impacts are considered along with the obvious and less obvious impacts. Ethical use of evidence: the best available quantitative and qualitative evidence must be identified and used in the assessment. A wide variety of evidence should be collected using the best possible methods.

3:40

The EUB currently considers applications on a project-by-project basis, which results in short-term decision-making that doesn't consider environmental or health impacts. The perfect example of this is how completely unprepared the government was for the pace of development in northern Alberta. Former EUB chairman Neil McCrank commented to the *Calgary Herald* on March 15, Mr. Speaker, and I quote: we should look at the possibility of regional hearings where we examine the broader issues, the broader societal and environmental issues. It is expected that McCrank would be familiar with the flaws in the current process and sees a cumulative assessment as necessary as we look toward the future.

Mr. Speaker, oil sands development on the scale that we have in Alberta is bound to have an impact on the environment and, consequently, on the health of nearby residents, yet development continues with little consideration for the health of the community. Conducting health impact assessments on proposed developments would allow decision-makers to consider both short- and long-term impacts and prepare to mitigate potential health risks. According to the Radke report there are about 3,000 oil sands lease agreements with the provincial government, totalling 49,000 square kilometres. Approximately 97,000 square kilometres, or 69 per cent, of leasable oil sands areas are still available. For such an enormous geographic area with so much development the government should have a clear idea of what the impacts will be.

The 2006 urban service area population estimate represents an increase of 27,989 residents, or 77 per cent, an average annual increase of 8 and a half per cent per year. The 2006 population also includes some shadow population living in motels and campgrounds in the Fort McMurray urban service area. During the same seven-year period the number of people living in camps increased significantly and in the summer of 2006 stood at 10,442. Quite rapid population increases have implications for the entire community.

Mr. Speaker, the area northeast of the capital region centred in Strathcona and Sturgeon counties is within easy reach of the one million residents of greater Edmonton, and within 500 kilometres of the oil sands development around Fort McMurray. It is a prime area for growth in the oil and bitumen processing industry.

According to the Inventory of Major Alberta Projects, March

2007, there are potentially 12 more upgraders on the horizon. These upgraders, Mr. Speaker, would have an impact on air. They give off numerous harmful emissions, including sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide, volatile organic compounds, acids, ammonia, et cetera, and they require a large amount of water for processing. The key issues relate to the amount of surface and groundwater use in the extraction process, the overall impact on the quality of surface and groundwater, the level of greenhouse gas and other air emissions, land disturbance and the size of the footprints on the land base, land reclamation, and the impacts on wildlife, endangered species and population health. Health impact assessments are a prominent part of the Alberta Liberal Party's health policy, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 214 ensures that prevention and planning will secure a healthy future for all Albertans while maintaining our economic advantage. This bill enables health objectives to be considered on par with the socioeconomic and environmental objectives, bringing sustainable development closer. Development is crucial, Mr. Speaker, to Alberta's continued economic success, but such development must be sustainable and carefully planned.

The quality of public policy decision-making needs to be improved by taking the health of Albertans into consideration. The promotion and protection of health is essential to the well-being of society as a whole. This is a crucial time in Alberta's history, and we need to make the right decision to guide Albertans into the future. It is more sensible and cost-effective to focus on prevention rather than dealing with the problem created by unhealthy public policy, Mr. Speaker.

I think this bill is worthy of support, and definitely I'll support this bill introduced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. The Healthy Futures Act would require health impact assessments to be conducted for any major government project. These assessments would scrutinize government proposals in regard to the effect on public health. The focus would be on the potential effects on income, poverty, education, and the environment, among other things. Further, Bill 214 proposes the creation of a new committee which would collect and review all assessments and provide a generalized yearly analysis of the health regime. Bill 214 then aims to publicize all human impact assessments for public review before any projects are approved.

Mr. Speaker, if misunderstood, these assessments could precipitate misguided outcries. An example comes to mind. In February of 1998 Alberta Health released the Assessment of Respiratory Disorders in Relation to Solution Gas Flaring Activities in Alberta. Within the report no significant correlation between flaring and asthma was established, yet the fact that the assessment was conducted at all elevates unnecessary suspicion and fear in the public. Numerous articles were written regarding the potential effects of gas flaring in Alberta. Even those studies performed thus far negate any claims of harm. Public health impact assessments have the potential to become a public forum of opinion rather than informed decisions on empirical evidence.

Another concern is that the analysis of the data compiled by health impact assessments is subject to a significant degree of personal judgment and, therefore, is subject to misrepresentation or misappropriation. Mr. Speaker, personal judgment can often challenge the empirical data to represent a certain outcome. According to a May 1997 World Health Organization report . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time for this order of business is concluded. I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

3:50

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and my thanks to everyone that did stand up and participate in the debate on Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. I listened carefully to the points that were raised by members of the government caucus. You know, in going over the notes that I made, I really didn't hear good arguments as to why this particular bill shouldn't be passed. One of the strongest ones was, "Well, we can't do it because we're so short of physicians," which didn't strike me as a particularly good reason not to actually bring in something like health impact assessments. One person even said: health impact assessments are okay, just not this bill. Well, I'll come back to that a little later because I think there's something else going on here. We had another member who seemed to think that the bill was about joining a fitness club and some sort of wellness lifestyle and: get your vaccination, and everything will be good.

Really, the bill was based, in fact, on an environmental impact assessment, which this government currently uses or professes to use. That's the same sort of setup, and it is intended to be evidence-based. So contrary to what the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was just saying, the whole point of this is that you gather information and then decide whether, in fact, it is a good idea on the balance of all things considered to proceed with a particular kind of development, not only one that government is doing itself or is funding or licensing in a large way. I think that's important, that it is evidence-based; it is not subjective. But it does require the government to work together.

I heard a lot of, "Oh, we couldn't possibly," but no reasons as to why that couldn't happen. It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because at the very same time that you often hear members of the government caucus raising great alarm over the rate at which the health budget is increasing, when you put something in front of them that says, "Okay. Let's take a step back. Let's take a long-term approach to public health and wellness. Let's look at what we're developing in the province that may be affecting our health and costing us a lot of money, and let's do something about it," it's, "Oh, well, gee. No. Maybe not that. It's a good idea, but not this bill."

What I think might be happening here, Mr. Speaker, is that like many great Liberal ideas, they get pooh-poohed by the government caucus, but I suspect that the health impact assessment will miraculously be reincarnated as a government bill. We've seen that one before. We've got a health workforce strategy that the government just brought in. But oh, my goodness, when it was raised by the Liberal opposition, "Oh, we couldn't possibly; absolutely not." Or maybe the family violence bill that was originally brought in by the previous Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly by two, Alice Hanson. Or we've just had a bill come through on promoting awareness of personal directives. In fact, that's another policy position that is in the Alberta Liberal health policy book, called the red book, *Creating a Healthy Future*. So we have some 20-odd policies in here that, interestingly enough, are making their way into government policy. They don't want to give the Liberals credit, but there it is. This document has been out since 2003, and we're slowly seeing it turn up in government policy.

I suspect, Mr. Speaker, and I'm taking heart, that we will in fact see health impact assessments brought into place. This is an idea that Alberta needs. We need to balance industrial development with environmental protection and with public health and wellness. As I said, we have environmental impact assessments. Next I think we will see health impact assessments. That's what we need to have, or

we could be a very, very wealthy province with a lot of not very well people in it and not a lot of environment to support us once that development is gone. I don't think anybody in this Assembly wants to see that.

This is a very practical idea, and I expect that we will see it come back. I'm glad that a number of people got a chance to explore the idea. They could save themselves a lot of time if they'd like to vote for it now, but I suspect – and it's kind of sad – that just the very fact that it was brought forward by a member of the Official Opposition is enough for the government members to not support it, although, in fact, if they actually did look at it, or if it was coming from one of their members, they would support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:55 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Cao	Horner
Agnihotri	Chase	Johnston
Amery	Eggen	Miller, B.
Blakeman	Elsalhy	Miller, R.
Bonko	Fritz	Pastoor

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Johnson	Ouellette
Brown	Liepert	Pham
Cenaiko	Lindsay	Renner
Danyluk	Lougheed	Rogers
Ducharme	Lukaszuk	Snelgrove
Forsyth	Lund	Strang
Griffiths	Melchin	Tarchuk
Hayden	Mitzel	Webber
Jablonski	Oberg	

Totals:	For – 15	Against – 26
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 214 lost]

Bill 215 School (Canadian History Content) Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise in the Assembly as the sponsor of Bill 215, the School (Canadian History Content) Amendment Act, 2007. The central amendment to the School Act proposed through Bill 215 would enable the minister to prescribe a required number of hours of instruction in Canadian history for social studies courses in grades 10, 11, and 12, which shall be not less than 75 per cent of the total number of hours for each course.

Mr. Speaker, since the time I first introduced Bill 215 in the House, I have received lots of encouragement and support on the principle of the bill; that is, to have more Canadian history study in school. Support was expressed in e-mails, letters to the editor,

editorial columns, conversations. They are from individuals and organizations such as the Calgary Military Museum, the Historical Society of Alberta, history tellers, and book publishers. An interesting fact is that a few weeks ago a readership polled by the *Calgary Herald* indicated that 86 per cent of respondents agree that we need to learn and teach Canadian history in school. I would like to thank those who expressed their support for learning and teaching Canadian history.

Of course, like any matter of public interest, there is opposition and concern on the bill. I would like to address this concern as follows. The current School Act allows the minister to prescribe the content of school courses, so Bill 215 is just enabling that. It's not new; it's not a strange legislative process to specify content of school courses. The draft of Bill 215 currently specifies that the social studies courses must contain at least 75 per cent of Canadian history content. I plan to introduce an amendment to change 75 to 50 once the bill gets to committee stage, but it must be the first 50 per cent.

4:10

Bill 215 doesn't specify when the change in Canadian history content must be made in the curriculum. Certainly, I recognize the great effort spent developing and implementing the curriculum, so I leave the timing of the inclusion of Canadian history content to the next planned changes either in textbooks or teaching materials or the next overhaul of the curriculum. One university professor told me that Canadian history should be taught right at the beginning as part of the bachelor's degree in education or teacher professional development so that they can teach it in school.

In other words, Bill 215 doesn't and certainly doesn't propose to throw away everything now and to start all over. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, Bill 215 addresses the why and the what, not the how and the when, why we need to study and teach knowledge about our nation and what the content of our history is, the knowledge of our nation's past. The how and when are up to the experts, up to our hon. minister: the timing of the changes.

With that clarification, I can talk about the principle of the bill, but before I do that, I realize that the order of business in the House at the moment is not favourable for Bill 215. At best it can only be debated in second reading before the session ends, so I call on Albertans and my colleagues in the House to continue this initiative of requiring the learning and teaching of Canadian history. I will introduce similar legislation when the next opportunity arises.

Now, I would like to articulate in this Assembly that Bill 215 will serve a practical education purpose, will play a great role in enhancing societal awareness of Canadian identity and culture. Canada is defined by its land, people, and culture. Our Canada is a nation of citizens, a confederation of provinces with a past history, present loyalty, and strong patriotic pride. Canadian citizens must have a sense of belonging to and ownership of the nation. As a place to live, Canada is not a rooming or boarding house where residents are separate from the owner. As a place to live, Canada is more like co-operative and condominium housing, where ownership is the pride of caring residents.

What do we need to do to instill such caring ownership and pride in Canadians about our nation, Canada? There are many starting points, but we need to start somewhere, and that is what Bill 215 is about: starting at the learning stage in school. Mr. Speaker, hon. members of the House, if we don't fill the young minds with Canadian content, they will be filled with some other things, and some of it may be non-Canadian or anti-Canadian even. And if the minds have already been prefilled with only non-Canadian matters, what can we balance them with or tip them towards Canadian content for Canada's national interest?

Mr. Speaker, at this point I want to mention a number of points beyond the school class. Our citizens have the obligation for the future direction of our country, and this land is a place we belong to, the community we developed, and a nation of provinces we built together. Canada is not a place from which we demand and take but a place to give and to build collectively. Canada's citizens should have an appreciation for their country that goes beyond the shallow exterior or material layer. It's not just a place to make our living and pass our time. This country affords us the rights and values that are denied to many of our fellow human beings throughout the world. We must not take this for granted. We should encourage our citizens to learn how much effort and what sacrifices were made by people before us so that we can enjoy the freedom and the values of fairness, equality, and justice of Canada today.

Canada is not just a place to take refuge from patriotic activity in other countries. Any patriotic feeling and activity of the residents here must be, first, toward Canada. Canada has so much to offer. More than a place to emigrate, to make money, and then leave, Canada is a home country, a homeland of residents. People should not think, feel, or say that their homeland is somewhere else and take up residency in Canada and become Canadian citizens. Mr. Speaker, I believe the country where we live, work, play should come first. When we are citizens of Canada, it becomes our homeland, our home country. Canada is not like a shopping mall, where commerce takes place and everyone goes home after. Our country demonstrates some of the greatest aspects of unity, with cultures working harmoniously together to create a better life for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren. We need to have our hearts and minds behind our nation so that citizens will be empowered to enable our country to continually prosper and develop.

If we cannot concentrate on Canadian history or knowledge about Canada's interests, then citizens will seek other alternatives. These alternatives may negatively influence citizens' participation in decision-making. I believe it is important for our citizens to first have a thorough knowledge of our country as well as expanding the knowledge of other countries.

Although I encourage all citizens to take active engagement in Canadian affairs, Bill 215 is focused on educating a specific demographic of young Canadians to instill within them a passion for our nation. Canada has an eloquent history that, if we do not make an effort to study and learn, may be forgotten. Our understanding of the past will further our appreciation of who we are in the present and where we are going in the future.

Mr. Speaker, an interesting point. The two largest populated nations in the world, India and China, whose nations both have long histories, were only established as nations in 1947 and the other one in 1949 respectively. Canada was established in 1867. Unfortunately, recent statistics indicate that only 26 per cent of Canadians aged between 18 and 24 know this information. What's even more concerning is that when the same demographic of young people were asked this question a decade ago, a higher percentage of youth responded correctly.

Now, I believe that education is crucial in reversing our population's declining understanding or competency in Canadian history. Our current curriculum development process, which is designed to teach Alberta students to think critically and analytically, is important, but it cannot be the sole focus. Thinking critically, analytically is a skill set that we want all our students to have. However, we need to ensure that the content is Canadian history.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like to commend the Member for Calgary-Fort on his initiative 215 to in fact increase the amount of Canadian content taught in our schools. As a previous school trustee this is something that I struggled with, as to how much our students actually grasp as far as the history. I know that with their counterparts in the States, it's almost pounded into them, and they're very patriotic because of that fact, I think.

Getting back to Bill 215. I think the object of it is to prescribe that at least 75 per cent of the instructional time be allocated to the study of Canadian content through 10, 11, and 12. I think that does have some merit, like I said, but I believe that the decision should be left up to the school boards to determine that, obviously with a little bit of specific one-on-one with trustees, perhaps, or with the officials to find out exactly if they'd be in favour of this. Ultimately, I don't think that the government should be dictating this level of prescription for content in the social studies curriculum. I believe it should come from Alberta Education and/or from the school board itself.

Quite frankly, like I said, there is nothing wrong with it. I think it is an admirable thing. A lot of the individuals, as he was saying, later on maybe don't retain it. Maybe in the younger years they did retain it. Perhaps they need to do it in the earlier years, more content from K to grade 6 versus 10, 11, and 12. In the TV show right now *Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader?* these kids certainly are able to rattle off a number of specifics, whereas the adults seem to be dumbfounded when it comes to naming even some of the Great Lakes. These fifth graders are able to rattle it off.

4:20

Perhaps it would be more advantageous to give that Canadian content between K to 6 years versus the last years, when they're worried about specifically the mid-terms as well as departmentals. You know, you could be able to track that at 3, and they have 6 and 9, where they do the dip test, I guess, to find out exactly where they are with regard to the curriculum. That would be maybe a better route to find it, when you do it from K to 6, because you're going to be testing them twice as to some of the content that they would have in fact inherited through the program there.

One thing that kind of puzzled me when the member was talking – I'm not sure; I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, obviously – is when he says that when people come to Canada, this would be their country of choice. First and foremost they should in fact be, I guess, dedicated to it. It almost sounds as if you were trying to I guess tell people that Canada should be number one, and regardless of what other country you were from, that should be in the past. It almost was saying that, you know, you give up religious freedoms on that as well. I'm not sure where you were going on that one when you were strictly saying: "You know what? Once you're in Canada, Canada is first. The heck with the other places where you've come from." I'm not sure where you're going on that one.

Mr. Cao: Studying history.

Mr. Bonko: Oh, okay. History studies, he's saying. But for those particular reasons that I've listed, Mr. Speaker, again I think it would be better left up to the school boards. If we're going to do it, perhaps it would be better formatted from the high school level but drop it down to the K to 6, where they've a little bit more of an ability to grasp it and retain it a little bit better.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to

speak to Bill 215, the School (Canadian History Content) Amendment Act, 2007, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. As we know, Bill 215 seeks to amend the School Act and establish a legislated minimum amount of 75 per cent Canadian history content to be taught in Alberta's high school curriculum. Currently the School Act permits school boards to prescribe an element of patriotic instructions to students and allows the Minister of Education to establish and prescribe courses. However, this is not an exceptional amount of Canadian history content required to be taught in any grade throughout the Alberta school system.

Canadian history is important in that it forms the foundation of who we are as a nation and as a people. With other interests, such as pop culture, becoming increasingly dominant in today's society, some feel that our youth are becoming less and less interested and engaged in acquiring historical knowledge. Today youth often find their cultural identities from beer commercials, and they are relying on the Canadian post ad to realize a sense of patriotism. The Ipsos-Reid annual Canada survey of 2007 found that only 70 per cent of Canadians could identify the beaver and hockey as the most unifying Canadian symbols, and as many as 31 per cent of Canadians felt strongly or somewhat attached to Tim Hortons Timbits as a Canadian symbol.

Perhaps as a result of the dwindling interest in history among this generation's youth population as well as the culture shift from historical matters, we as a nation and a province have seen a significant decline in voter turnout and civic participation. After the 2004 federal election Elections Canada conducted a thorough investigation into voter turnout and found out that on the federal level 18- to 20-year-olds had only a 39 per cent average turnout across Canada and a 36 per cent average voter turnout in Alberta.

With Canadians fully engaged in globalization, it is important that youth leaving Alberta's high schools are well educated, knowledgeable individuals with patriotic ambitions. This is essential in making Alberta's future leaders more competitive in the global economy and better positioned to guide our province towards a successful future. We know that unified beliefs among a group of people are integral to creating a strong and dynamic citizenship. Thus, by teaching more Canadian history content in our high schools, we can empower the youth of our province to create cohesive and vibrant identifying perspectives. This would possibly translate to helping create a stronger nation as well as serve as a key factor in helping individuals find their own cultural identities with a broad focus of Canadian patriotism.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's schools are first class. Time and time again we see the comparison studies from around the world. But when Alberta Education undertook a review of the social studies curriculum beginning in 1999, it found that there were gaps in the historical knowledge of some Alberta students. This was especially prevalent in the area of history relating to aboriginal people and Franco-Albertans, both of which have a significant impact in the formation of our province.

High school serves as an important tool in assisting youth in developing their identities by helping them find a definition for who they are in relation to the world. It is only fair to provide students in Alberta high schools with more resources and knowledge to be able to more accurately assess their roots, hence solidifying their identity.

Canada is also largely comprised of immigrants who have already had strong cultural ties, which, I might add, Mr. Speaker, is a great asset, but it's also important to have a unified force to increase commonality and belonging to all Canadians. With our strong economy and boundless potentials our province is a destination of

choice for many international immigrants, which provides a welcome boost to our labour needs.

As a requirement to be granted Canadian citizenship, potential immigrants are asked to write a quiz on our country's history, politics, culture, and geography. It has been recorded that an overwhelming 70 per cent pass the exam. A poll by Ipsos-Reid released in July of this year found that when asked to write the same citizenship test, only 40 per cent of the current Canadian citizens actually passed due to the lack of knowledge of Canadian history and facts. Interestingly enough, according to the Ipsos-Reid study 69 per cent of Canadians believe that part of what makes Canada a successful society today is that Canadians share a common history, heroes, and national symbols.

Tell me, Mr. Speaker, how we can have a strong identifying force in our nation when a large portion of our population can't even answer a simple question: is Canada a constitutional monarchy? According to the annual Canada Day history quiz conducted by the Dominion Institute in 2005, out of a random sample of a thousand Canadians, it was found that the average Canadian could only answer 40 per cent of the questions correctly. Again, a failing grade. The survey also found that university graduates achieved the highest average score of 9.5 while respondents with only high school education or less performed the most poorly, scoring an average of 6.9 over 20. This fact shows that for the most part with only high school level education in social studies Canadian students are only knowledgeable on about 35 per cent of Canadian history content. From the evidence presented, it appears that the average person either entirely loses interest in Canadian history or doesn't have a solid enough foundation to build upon in future years.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, to further prove my point, out of 1,000 respondents only one individual answered all 20 questions correctly. If taken, potentially, to Alberta's population of 3.1 million, this equates to only 3,500 individuals that could answer all the questions presented on this general knowledge questionnaire. The survey has revealed that respondents overwhelmingly agree that knowing their national history, especially key economic events, is important and that they will have to learn more.

Albertans and all Canadians require an increased historical foundation so that tomorrow's youth can move around and be knowledgeable about citizenship. This would also help immigrants to Alberta and all our population, for that matter, to gain appreciation for roots and perhaps adopt a patriotic spirit through identifying with Canadian culture, a spirit that would nurture communities and increase the quality of life for all of us.

Alberta's current social studies curriculum supports students in their journey to become responsible citizens and powerful leaders. Since the social studies 10, 20, and 30 review was completed in 2003, the Alberta high school social studies curriculum has already been more focused on anticipating and planning for direct needs of the future in trying to teach our children a full view of history. However, we can see from recent studies that the knowledge acquired by youth when going through Alberta high school . . . [Mr. Strang's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. O Canada, our home and native land. O Canada, terre de nos aïeux. Pride isn't something you can simply cram into a series of memorized capitals, provinces, and territories. It's something you acquire through life experience.

Today I tabled a letter from a grade 10 constituent of mine, Dan

Hogg, who wrote expressing his disagreement with requiring that at least 75 per cent of the social studies curriculum be legislated. Earlier on the mover of this motion suggested: well, let's take it down to 50 per cent. Do I hear 25 per cent? 15 per cent? 10 per cent? 5 per cent?

I would like to start off by giving a little bit of background on my national identity. I had the good fortune of being the son of an air force pilot. As a result, I had a chance to live in each of the provinces with the exception of the Maritimes or British Columbia. I began my grade 1 schooling in Saskatoon, finished my grade 1 in Winnipeg, where I also did grades 2 and 3. The first part of grade 4 was again in Saskatoon. The rest of grade 4, grades 5, 6, and 7 were in Edmonton, Alberta, on the Namao air base. Grade 8 was in Toronto, grades 9 through 13 in Ottawa. As a young preschooler I lived in Quebec, in St-Jean, just outside Montreal. I also lived in Aylmer, Ontario. I said that I was fortunate because I got to live the life of Canada as opposed to just having it produced second-hand through textbooks or tests.

As a teacher for 34 years I taught Canadian history, and I taught it proudly. Within that teaching I always incorporated choice so students could choose which part of Canada they wanted to study, which province they wanted to specialize. In grade 4, when Alberta was a major component of the curriculum, I gave the students choices as to which western tribe or eastern tribe, for that matter, they preferred to study, and they, based on their personal interests and their personal pursuits, followed the curriculum with a degree of creativity and enjoyment because they had an opportunity to choose what they were going to study.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In junior high school in grade 8 we again studied Canada and got into a comparative circumstance between the economy and geography of Canada and the United States. We saw the similarities and the differences both geographically and politically.

I've heard comments that suggest to me an insular attitude: let's wrap ourselves around the flag; let's sing *O Canada* to the loudest potential. These outward acts do not make us more knowledgeable or better Canadian citizens. The best way to understand and appreciate the Canadian fabric is to travel and have that first-hand experience. We have had national programs that encourage students to go from province to province. I know that when I was teaching French at the junior high level, we partook of a particularly enjoyable French exchange down to Montmagny, Quebec. Then the students came back and had their Alberta experience. This was very meaningful for a number of the students who had never been out of either Quebec or out of Alberta, to have that first-hand experience.

Another troubling aspect that I see is pushing one more thing onto the school system as opposed to parent initiatives in terms of the education of their students. Mr. Speaker, 75 per cent or 50 per cent of the social studies curriculum: I'd be interested in what parts of the curriculum the member feels are not appropriate at this point or how many more hours he is potentially suggesting be added to that curriculum to fit all the Canadian content that he would like to see in place.

Then I would wonder: what specific parts of the Canadian content would he like to have included? For example, one of the things that isn't very much mentioned is our persecution of Ukrainians during the First World War. What also doesn't get a whole lot of mention is our persecution of black citizens who fled as United Empire Loyalists to the Maritimes and how badly they were treated there. We could talk about, perhaps, and provide a little more background for students about Mackenzie King and how he was very unwilling

to support Jewish refugees fleeing during the Second World War. There is a lot of history that does not get taught, but as we mature and as we become more informed through touring museums, through travelling across Canada, that is where we get the first-hand experience.

I was born, as I said, in Saskatchewan, but because of the number of eastern postings we had, travelling back and forth across the country was just part of my growing up. When I married the daughter of an Ottawa dairy farmer, the desire to connect with the Ottawa Valley was very strong. So those trips were very frequent. We spent a lot of enjoyable days and nights along the Trans-Canada with my daughter. We travelled to Newfoundland. She got a first-hand experience being on Signal Hill, where the first radio signal was received. She got to understand why they call Lake Superior a Great Lake. It's that kind of experience, rather than something grocery-listed or of a textural nature, that makes Canada great and appreciated by students.

4:40

Advocating that immigrants who come to Canada should have a knowledge of the country to which they have come is important, but I would suggest that a number of immigrants have a very good understanding. They did the research before coming here, some for economic benefits, others fleeing persecution. What we have in Canada is what I would refer to as a multipatched quilt as opposed to the traditional American melting pot. We want people to leave behind their baggage of past conflict, and we want them to embrace the Canadian values of inclusivity, of tolerance, but we don't expect them to leave behind any kind of cultural quality, arts, and background when they swear allegiance to the Canadian flag. The beauty of this country is that it's made up of immigrants from the first immigrants who crossed the Bering Strait thousands of years ago and joined with our first peoples. Canada has always been a country of immigrants, and that's what makes Canada so strong.

Pride is not something that you can teach. You can set it out. You can give reasons why a person would potentially want to be proud of the country, but mandating it in the form of an assigned curriculum, whether it be 75 per cent, 50 per cent, 10 or 2, is not going to accomplish the goal of creating better Canadian citizens. Giving students every opportunity to learn will achieve that goal.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make a few comments on this particular bill from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. First of all, I just want to say that we've heard a lot in this House this session about Bill 46, how controversial it is and how the entire province is in an uproar. I would have to say that as the MLA for Calgary-West I haven't received a lot of letters about Bill 46. In fact, I've received almost none, so I'm sure that some of the hon. members in the opposition are probably texting out to their friends right now in the Rocky Mountain House area saying: write letters to the Member for Calgary-West. I say that because since the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort introduced his bill, I think I've received between my office as Minister of Education and MLA for Calgary-West in excess of a hundred letters because this is something that really resonates with people. I would say that there were probably as many that were supportive of the initiative as there were opposed, and I think it's fair to say that there were as many opposed as were supportive. So this particular bill clearly does generate good debate.

Mr. Speaker, the current curriculum in Alberta requires that a

social 30 or 33 class is taken in order to receive a high school diploma, but in addition to that we also offer Canadian history 20 and western Canadian history 20. It's very important to note as well that the development of a curriculum and what is taught in the curriculum needs to be done in conjunction with our postsecondary institutes because you very much want to ensure that the entry that postsecondary institutes are requiring is met and probably in many ways exceeded in our high school teachings.

Now, as you're probably aware, Mr. Speaker, the department has just in fact implemented a new curriculum in social studies. It went into place this year in grade 10. It will be implemented in grade 11 next year and grade 12 in '09. In the development of that curriculum there was intensive research and consultation that occurred as it was being developed. I'd like to outline some of the steps that took place in the development of this new curriculum.

There were three independent literature reviews that guided the development of the foundation document, the framework, and ultimately the Alberta program of studies; focus groups and consultations with departments of history at the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge; and continued contact with these postsecondary institutions to ensure that the history components of the program were meaningful and relevant to students. Finally, there were over 200 separate information sessions, workshops, provincial consultations, meetings, and working groups over a four-year period to complete the writing and revising of the program.

I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, to note that the development of the new social studies curriculum was not done in isolation by someone holed up in an office somewhere in downtown Edmonton. It was developed with a very extensive public consultation process.

I think it's also important to talk a little bit about the emphasis of the new curriculum. I think there are probably three areas that were attempted to be enhanced. First, it was determined through that consultative mechanism that our social studies curriculum needed to focus more on our First Nations, on our Métis and Inuit, and on francophone perspectives. That's clearly what is part of the increased focus.

Also, the new curriculum, Mr. Speaker, increases focus on historical thinking. It's important to note that in order to do historical thinking, students need to study history, not only Alberta's history, Canada's history, but world and ancient history. These histories are being examined through historical and contemporary perspectives within and across those cultures.

Now, I believe it's important to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the student of today is the business leader of Alberta tomorrow. To do business worldwide, it's important that when we're dealing with different countries around the world, we understand their cultures; we understand their history. I think many of us have on occasion really questioned. In some cases we might see a particular television program where a reporter from Toronto will go down to the U.S. and ask the Americans some dumb question about Canada, and we're always astounded about how little the U.S. knows about our country. I want to ensure that our students and our future business leaders understand all parts of the world as well as they understand our Canadian history.

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, I thought it was important to explain a little bit about the development of our new curriculum, but I listen with interest and appreciate the opportunity to not only participate in this debate but to listen to other members of the House.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of minutes to just make some comment on this private member's bill. At the very least I would certainly value bringing up this topic of Canadian history content because I think it is, certainly, a perennially much talked about and discussed part of our public school system. But just the way in which this particular bill is constructed, I think I got the impression that the hon. member was talking about moving this from 75 to 50 per cent. Is that what you had mentioned previously? Yeah.

I guess regardless of where the number comes from, I just do question mandating the percentage of the content from this House. As the hon. Member for Calgary-West just pointed out, we've in fact just gone through an extensive change of the social studies curriculum here in the province of Alberta, and that is the page which school boards and schools and individuals teachers are drawing from. As a high school teacher myself, and a high school social studies teacher, in fact, I can attest to the fact that probably the Canadian content of the old curriculum – I've looked at it, but I haven't taught the new curriculum – is at least 50 per cent already.

4:50

I guess it calls into question the notion of picking an arbitrary number out of the sky and somehow dropping it down onto the schools here in the province of Alberta. Certainly, we do have a lot of power and responsibility here in terms of public education, but we also have a mechanism by which we develop the curriculum in a reasonable way to meet the needs of not only high school students but to have it integrated into postsecondary education and into the needs of our society as a whole in terms of social studies education, not just with history but geography, political science, sociology, and all of these important fields of study that fall under the larger umbrella of social studies.

Yes, certainly, people can be shocked and appalled about the lack of knowledge of Canadian history amongst our general population, but I would not say that that is a function of having a higher or a smaller percentage of Canadian history within the content but, rather, how much, number one, is that information sticking in the public's mind? How relevant does it become for them as they walk out of a high school and into the larger world? Are they retaining that knowledge? That opens a whole other can of worms of education pedagogy and of relevance and, certainly, doesn't have very much to do, I would venture to say, Mr. Speaker, with the actual percentage that we would be placing on Canadian history as part of the larger social studies curriculum.

Let's not forget, as well, that while Canada exists as a sovereign nation, our integration into the world in the past and the present and the future is integral to understanding what people we are and what our role is as a nation in the world. Considering the brief history, really, of Canada as a sovereign nation, it's absolutely essential to understand what is leading up to the formation of Canada as a nation from our global perspective, different European colonial manifestations and from other countries as well around the world. That all adds to the mix of understanding what and who we are. Simply drawing an arbitrary line of Canadian history I believe is somewhat deceiving because, of course, Canada is still forming its identity based on the widest swath of inferences from around the world.

So, certainly, as a parent and as a citizen and as a former teacher I encourage a very high value of Canadian content to exist in our provincial curriculum, and I do believe that it has been increasing and has been fortified over the years. As I say, the larger question is to make that information relevant so that it sticks with people and that people have the critical thinking skills to use that knowledge in

the broadest possible way. I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that that's when you will actually get Canadian content and Canadian history knowledge entrenched into the public's mind, and they will be able to use that information in an active way and become better citizens for it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak on Bill 215, the School (Canadian History Content) Amendment Act, 2007. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort brings forth an important issue for Canada, which is educating Canadians on their culture and history. While it is very important to educate Albertans on their history and promote Canadian culture, our education system should also reflect the diversity and growth of our society.

For example, in my own community Red Deer is the midpoint in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor, located in an area of rolling hills and aspen parkland. The name of this community came from the large herds of elk, or red deer, in this area. The Cree called the district Waskasoo, while the Blackfoot called it Ponoka, which meant elk. The first Europeans saw that the elk of western Canada were very similar to the red deer . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, but the time consideration for this item of business has concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Hunting and Fishing Tradition

515. Mr. Mitzel moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the tradition of hunting and fishing for all Albertans.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to begin the discussion on Motion 515. Every so often we have an opportunity to assemble to recognize the important contributions that certain groups have made in our province. We have a chance to provide them with the proper tribute that they deserve.

Motion 515 recognizes those that participate in hunting and fishing. Their contribution should not go unnoticed. From the early explorers to the settlers to the groups and organizations that still participate in these activities, I feel there should be an understanding of the important function these people who hunt and fish have made in Alberta throughout the years. Hunters and anglers are symbolic of our province's growth and success. This province was built upon those who are successful at these skills. These early people hunted and fished in order to survive and to earn a living.

Since these early days we have come a long way. We now earn our living in many, many other ways but still continue this tradition of hunting and fishing. Alberta can boast of having some of the best hunting and fishing spots in the world. Our diverse landscape provides for ideal opportunities to pursue these activities. There was a reason why early explorers and settlers immigrated to North America and eventually settled here. We have an abundance of wildlife.

We still have an abundance of wildlife, even after over 200 years. It's the hunters and fishers who keep most of our species going. They put in the money and they put in the hours. They really care

about what happens to our wildlife. They contribute millions of dollars to the economy. In 2006 the government of Alberta generated over \$150 million from fees, permits, and licences. This does not include the amount of revenue they provide to businesses across Alberta through rentals and purchasing equipment, not to mention the tourism each activity generates.

When it comes to the environment, the participants in outdoor recreational activities are some of the most educated and eco-friendly people in the province. These conservationists assist in the preservation of Alberta's natural habitat and the species through a variety of means, from acquiring private lands to put back into the public domain for the sole purpose of conservation, to the transplanting of species to encourage repopulation in areas which may have been depleted. Ask anyone from Ducks Unlimited, the Alberta Conservation Association, Pheasants Forever, the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, or the Alberta Fish and Game Association to only name a few, Mr. Speaker, and they will proudly tell you what they have done in order to enhance habitat and conserve and increase the species.

Hunting and fishing are well-regulated recreational pastimes that are available for all Albertans to enjoy. They're often used for sport but also to provide a necessary function to the province. There are many who work with conservation groups such as the Alberta Conservation Association that assist the provincial government to properly manage the environment. Hunting and fishing groups are the closest to the land and can and do spot situations that, with notification to wildlife officers and conservation officers, can be investigated and rectified. An example of this includes reporting a poacher or even witnessing a situation where a source of pollution is endangering habitat and wildlife.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 515 enables all Albertans to recognize and understand the importance of hunting and fishing as a tradition, both in the past use and in the present day. Some anthropologists would argue that humans are still programmed for this chase since our species has been doing this far longer than any other activity. After emerging from the plains of Africa, our ancestors began hunting more than a million years ago, doing so in order to survive. In the traditional cultures the skilled hunter was a respected figure with a relationship to the species he sought. If you could not hunt, you could not eat. In our culture as we've become more urbanized, many of us have lost this connection with the natural world. The further we get away from the wild, the less we understand it. Those who hunt and fish are still connected to this natural way of life. They understand the past, and they embrace the future.

Conservation organizations as well as those who take part in outdoor recreation are vital to the preservation and sustainability of the environment. Not only are these activities a benefit to our economy; they also provide support for our natural habitat. Mr. Speaker, we need to acknowledge the positive impact that hunters and anglers have made on the province of Alberta in the past and today.

Thank you.

5:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 515, hunting and fishing in Alberta. The mover is trying to make it sound like this is a tradition that all Albertans have. You know what? I don't know how many of us in the House have actually gone out and hunted or fished. It might be a little more of a catch on that one. But trapping? I come from a family

that does hunting and fishing, but we don't do trapping. I wouldn't call it a tradition in our house. It's kind of like a sport. We do it because we enjoy the sport of hunting as well as fishing, and it's become part of a tradition to go out and do it on a certain weekend and a certain month. To call it a tradition such as, you know, the Métis have done, that in itself is different. I'm not sure if this is to replace the interim Métis harvesting agreement with just the interim harvesting agreement for Albertans. I'm not sure where this one is coming from. Perhaps the mover would be able to clarify that one.

To call it a tradition where all Albertans go out, like on the annual hunting day, September 22 – the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development declared one day to be Provincial Hunting Day. I'm not sure if this is, you know, to up that one and make sure that everyone has the ability. Well, we all have the ability to go out. We just have to write an FAC, we have to go get a licence, and we have to make sure that we in fact have training in safe firearms use, that we're not going to angle the next person next to us with a long cast and hook them somehow. The other ones: make sure we don't get our leg irons caught when we're out there putting these big traps or snares out there.

But to ensure that this is a tradition for all Albertans I think is a bit of a stretch. A lot of people don't in fact own guns, don't in fact take part. [interjection] Yes. It's true. A lot of us don't own guns. In fact, there are vegetarians out there. To tell a vegetarian that, yeah, you have the right to go out there and hunt is, I think, a little bit of a stretch.

Like I said, the fact that we're trying to make this a tradition – I don't know. I'm not sure that we're trying to give the rest of the province and the rest of Canada the idea of where we are as Albertans. I mean, it's a great opportunity for us to get out in the wild and out in the wilderness to connect with our rural roots, to go out there and march within the trees and everything. We have to be environmentally sound as well as make sure that we respect nature. But to declare it a tradition I think is a little bit of a stretch.

You know, again, I talked about the First Nations people. I'm not sure if this is meant to, you know, take part in that or if it's to replace that. [interjection] The member is saying, "Not at all," but it's fairly vague in here where your motion is coming from. I'm not sure what the whole point of it is. It does recognize a tradition for all Albertans to be able to do it. I think we have that right right now without having this as a motion. Anyone can go out there and do it.

I just wanted to make a couple of specific points on that. I'll hear what some of the other speakers have to say, but I wouldn't be in favour of this particular motion as it is right now, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Motion 515, which proposes to recognize the tradition of hunting and fishing within the province of Alberta. I believe that tradition as it's used in the motion is meant as a collective tradition rather than a tradition that would necessarily apply individually to all Albertans, so for that reason I think it's a question of interpretation.

But I am supportive of the motion. I do believe, in fact, that the motion could have been somewhat broader, and I believe that it could have been inclusive with respect to providing some provision for the tradition of trapping in the province of Alberta. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I am proposing to move that Motion 515 be amended by inserting the word "trapping" after "hunting." The amended motion would read as follows: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the tradition of hunting, trapping, and fishing for all Albertans."

Mr. Speaker, hunting and fishing and trapping have all played a key role in the development of our province, and I support the goal of the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, which is to recognize the importance of that tradition in our history. Trapping has certainly been an integral part of the development of Alberta long before we were a province, when we were, in fact, a territory that was owned and fully governed by the Hudson Bay Company, and then for a hundred years following that period, we were also part of Canada as a part of the North-West Territories and later as a province. But in the early days of development of our province of Alberta through the Hudson Bay Company the trapping industry certainly was the most important industry. It was also a strong tradition in the First Nations and the Métis citizens before that time, and it continues to be an important part of our culture, particularly for the First Nations and Métis citizens of the province of Alberta.

I believe that the proposed amendment allows Motion 515 to reflect the importance of the activity of trapping for subsistence and recreational purposes. Mr. Speaker, that would conclude my remarks with respect to the amendment which I have proposed.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, we have an amendment before us. On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I appreciate the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill attempting to make this a more palatable motion. Mr. Speaker, are we going to designate it A1?

The Speaker: There's only one that we have. We'll assume it's A1, yes.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you.

Well, speaking to motion A1, to me what would have been considerably easier to accept is instead of flipping trapping and hunting, if we took out "for all Albertans" and just put "in Alberta," then it would make sense.

I've had the good fortune of having a father who thoroughly enjoyed outdoor pursuits, and last year, when he was 83, he managed to get two whitetail deer because he enjoys being out hunting, and for a number of years I enjoyed that same pursuit. By age four I had a pretty darn good aim with a .22, and I graduated, maybe to some people's horror, from bottle caps to gophers. I dispatched quite a few in my younger age. My father would pull me out of class, which I know my teachers were very appreciative of, and we'd go hunting, and what we would do is reward the teacher for having let me out of class by coming over and having a duck dinner or a goose dinner or pheasant or partridge, and it was very much appreciated.

When we lived on the bases throughout Canada, my father had the reputation of being a fantastic guide and sportsman, and therefore people would seek him out for his services and recommendations on where to catch the big one or, potentially, the big game. I can remember once having an air commodore come to visit our house at lunch and asking the air commodore if he could please pass his skin across the table – that was the duck skin – and, needless to say, my father was not appreciative of my comment.

But from an early age, as I say, I learned to shoot both with a gun and bow and arrow. Unfortunately . . .

An Hon. Member: Are you in favour of this amendment or not?

Mr. Chase: I'm speaking on amendment A1. I'm speaking on the joy that I personally experienced hunting and fishing. My trapping, I must admit, was limited to mice, and it was out of necessity.

By suggesting that the pursuits that I enjoyed and that my father

enjoyed numerous times, being the chairperson for Sarcee Fish and Game and having won numerous awards for his stewardship, such as the Order of the Big Horn – I at one point in my life enjoyed the experience of hunting and fishing, and it continues to be a pursuit enjoyed by my father. But pushing it to “for all Albertans” I think is too much.

5:10

If people choose to enjoy the outdoors, that’s their choice, but to sort of lord it over them as though this is an historical expectation for them in being part of the province of Alberta, I think, is taking it too far. People have to decide for themselves whether they want to pursue hunting and fishing and trapping. I will note that some of the greatest conservationists are in fact hunters, and the hunters and the fishermen serve as the first alert when a stream shows up with fish floating on it or when there is some kind of a disease that is affecting the wild animals.

There is a role for hunting and fishing, and some would suggest there is still a role for trapping although given what we’ve done to northern Alberta, that possibility is rapidly depleting because of the industrial development. The few animals that are left, especially when it comes to trapping, are having a hard enough time. The woodland caribou are being depleted. I’m not suggesting that anybody would consider trapping kit foxes, but the point is that sometimes traps that are intended for a particular animal end up taking another one. While we may have improved our trapping from the old-style vise traps to leghold traps and so on, in seeing a gnawed-off limb in a trap of an animal that found its only way of exiting, I question, given the space left in Alberta, whether trapping is still a pursuit. It’s not one, at least, for all Albertans, whether we stick it, as A1 suggests, before “fishing.” I don’t quite understand the change in the order. As I say, I would much rather see it: tradition of hunting, fishing, and trapping in Alberta.

I don’t want to denigrate our history, but I found it rather foolish, I would suggest, when the ministry of sustainable resources found it necessary to announce that we would have a special hunting day. We have a hunting season for various animals. We have fishing seasons for various types of fish. Designating a specific day I question. Also, the justification that if you shoot them in the woods, you’re less likely to run over them on the roads: I found that a little bit hard to deal with.

One thing I did know was that on that hunting day, when I was out in the area that the hon. minister represents, I surely wore my red jacket because I did not want to take any chances. I knew it was open season.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I have the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Did you wish to participate on this amendment?

Dr. Morton: Not on this amendment, no.

The Speaker: The President of the Treasury Board caught my eye first. On the amendment?

An Hon. Member: Question on the amendment.

The Speaker: There are no questions. There’s no question period.

An Hon. Member: Call the question on the amendment.

The Speaker: Well, no. There are still people wanting to speak. The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. I want to talk about the trapping. It’s not so much, Mr. Speaker, that people around the rest of Alberta would go do this, but I think it’s really important that children growing up in every part of Alberta have the opportunity, if they choose, to go hunting, to come out to the rural areas where we live and hunt and, if they wish, to apply for a trapline licence. My father had a trapline many, many years ago by the Mountaineer Lodge, so as young adults we could go there and actually really participate in trapping. When time permitted, as young people we obviously hunted and trapped rodents around the country.

One of the single biggest issues we face is the lack of respect for nature. I think the hon. member talked about the respect that hunters have. Many hunters are the most ardent conservationists we have because they know you have to look after your environment to ensure that what they care so deeply about is looked after, it’s replenished and regrown, it’s stocked, it’s managed, and it’s there for future generations.

I would hope that all the people that have had to live in the cities, where their parents moved for their jobs, know that as an Albertan, if they choose, they have the opportunity to come out to rural Alberta to hunt, to fish, to trap, to be a part of what many grandparents never had the opportunity to do because they weren’t in this country or be part of what the grandparents did because they pioneered this country. In fact, as early pioneers lived, much of what they ate was trapped, hunted. Many fish are trapped, and many of you will have probably watched or seen fish traps built that work much the same as an animal trap. So trapping was a part of gathering food for subsistence. Now it’s sport.

I think this is an appropriate amendment, and I think we should support it.

The Speaker: Speakers on the amendment? The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that this amendment is very fitting because when you think of our history, hunting and fishing for subsistence, as the hon. President of the Treasury Board just commented, was very, very important, but so was the trapping. When you think of Rocky Mountain House, the Hudson’s Bay Company established there. The big reason that they established there was for the furs. Most of those furs were trapped. I think that this amendment fits right in with the whole intent of this motion.

The Speaker: Additional speakers on the amendment?
Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, on the motion as amended.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Just to show that collaboration works well between the parties of this House, I appreciated a suggestion, basically an amendment to the now amended motion, that came from the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, and that motion will be provided to the tabling officer and to all members shortly. I would think that it’ll probably end up being called A2, and I’ll speak to that motion at that time.

The Speaker: We have no amendment approved, the table officer is telling me.

Mr. Chase: It's being produced. That's what I was saying, that we collaborated.

The Speaker: Well, we're not going to deal with something we haven't seen yet.

Mr. Chase: No, no. It was just an introduction of the fact that it'll be coming forward.

The Speaker: We don't do it that way.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Speaker: We're back to speaking, then, on the motion as amended. Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill spoke on the amendment, but he was speaking on the motion.

Dr. Brown: Correct.

The Speaker: Well, then you're out of this round too.
Who's next? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to stand as a Calgary MLA and speak for this particular motion. I grew up in Saskatoon as an only child, and my father was an avid hunter and fisherman, not so much a trapper, though he did snowshoe. At a very, very early age I had the opportunity to have a gun placed in my hand, probably at the age of four or five, because my father believed that if you eat it, you'd better learn how to hunt it. That not only went with hunting, Mr. Speaker, but it also went with fishing. In fact, my dad always used to laugh when we were at the lake fishing because he'd have these grown men that would come out once or twice a year to fish, and they'd see this little tyke of about 12 or 13, and I could outfillet them on any of the fish. Again, I think people need to understand the importance of having the ability to get out and do some hunting and some fishing and some trapping. We've had the privilege on several occasions of enjoying some of the – what do you call that stuff?

5:20

Dr. Morton: Jerky.

Mrs. Forsyth: . . . some of the jerky that the Member for Foothills-Rocky View has brought us. It is really very, very tasty, and we've enjoyed it. So when he's been hunting, we keep asking him how he's doing so that we can have the opportunity to do that. [interjection] Well, Mr. Speaker, the opposition wants to try some of his jerky also, but I think that's up to him.

Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say that I do support this particular motion from the member and will be supporting it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since I always enjoy contributing to discussions on quality of life with my colleagues, I'm delighted to rise today and address Motion 515 as amended. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for his drive to recognize the tradition of hunting, trapping, and fishing for all Albertans. Hunting, trapping, and fishing play a very important role in Alberta. They're part of our culture and are beneficial to maintaining a healthy environment.

The sponsoring member is right. Alberta does indeed have a very rich history with respect to these activities. For many years these

activities were performed out of necessity and for sustenance. However, they are now predominantly done for a very different reason, such as spending time with your family, recreation, and enhancing one's quality of life. My husband, Bob, has always said: if you don't want to hunt for your children, take them hunting; if you don't want to fish for your children, take them fishing.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans work exceptionally hard every day to bring our province the economic standing that it has. In order to achieve a healthy lifestyle, this work ethic must be balanced with challenging and relaxing activities. I also believe that hunting and fishing support the ancient hunter-gatherer habits buried deep in our genome. Many people find strength and peace when they go out to the beautiful countryside. For me this is a time to energize myself and get a little closer to nature. As Albertans we are privileged to have lush forests all over our province. Our citizens don't have to go very far to have adventure and fun-filled weekend getaways. Within Alberta's parks there are a number of activities they can choose from. Whichever they select, they will realize many benefits by participating.

Mr. Speaker, some people think that fishing is a very relaxing activity. The idea of being out in the middle of a lake with nothing to do but wait for a fish to bite your hook is a pleasant prospect for many people. Although putting a worm on a hook and waiting for a fish to bite is not my idea of a pleasant experience, I love to accompany my husband and read on the banks of the river while he fishes.

As of November 1 of this year 231,958 anglers had purchased a sport-fishing licence in Alberta. This is an increase of 2,618 over the same period in 2006. I guess this just shows that fishing is a very popular activity. Going out to Alberta's lakes and rivers also provides for family-building activities where parents can teach their children a new skill, and like Bob always says, it's better to go fishing with your children than to go fishing for them.

Hunting is another activity that requires Albertans to connect with nature, especially bowhunting, where wits, practice, and preparation combine to challenge the instincts and senses of the animals. Hunting is a very popular pastime in Alberta. When additional hunting opportunities were made available on September 4, 2007, nine hunting areas were sold out in the first 45 minutes, better than some concerts that come to Alberta.

Trapping is perhaps one of the oldest forms of harvesting wildlife and has been a traditional pursuit in Canada since the mid-1600s. Today there are over 2,300 trappers operating in the province of Alberta. Trappers are concerned with the well-being of the creatures they harvest. They seek to ensure that animals can be replaced by naturally reproducing wild populations. Indeed, without concerned trappers in the field constantly assessing fur-bearing populations, we would not be aware of the status of many species of Alberta wildlife.

Mr. Speaker, all of these activities promote healthy lifestyles, and they serve to develop characteristics such as patience, determination, and respect for nature. Spending more time on these types of expeditions also helps Albertans gain appreciation for and an understanding of the importance of wildlife in our province. Because of this hunters and fishermen and women are the best conservationists in the province.

I recognize the positive tradition of hunting, trapping, and fishing for all Albertans. I encourage all members to support Motion 515. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, on the motion as amended.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my

pleasure to rise this afternoon and add my thoughts to Motion 515 as amended. Mr. Speaker, I've discussed in this Legislature in the past my fond memories of growing up in this province and the many wonderful times that I had travelling I think pretty much to every corner of this province as a young person. My parents had one of the very first motorhomes on the highway. Between the Easter weekend and the Thanksgiving weekend myself and my siblings were never in the city on the weekend. We were always out somewhere in the motorhome camping and fishing, not necessarily hunting or trapping but certainly camping and fishing. I think it gave me and my brothers and sister and the many foster children that we had in our home a wonderful opportunity to experience some of what has been discussed in this House this afternoon.

I have particularly fond memories of fishing not just in Alberta, but having been born in a small community in north-central B.C. called Burns Lake, I spent an awful lot of time fishing in the lakes district. In fact, I did a fair amount of fishing in the Morice River as well, fishing for freshwater salmon. So fishing is certainly particularly close to me.

Mr. Speaker, myself and a number of other members of this Legislature have also taken advantage of an opportunity offered to us by Trout Unlimited, where every couple of years they do a float trip down the Bow River, starting in Calgary and spending an afternoon on the river learning a little bit about the river, particularly the trout population and so forth. A wonderful experience, and kudos to those folks for making that opportunity available because, once again, I think it gives members of this Legislature an opportunity to experience some of the things that we're talking about in the House this afternoon. For those of us that spend the majority of our time in the city, it's important that we have that experience.

There's a long history of trapping in my family, Mr. Speaker. My grandfather was a trapper in Burns Lake, B.C. I used to go out on the trapline with him, in fact, and check the traps. We'd occasionally bring in the odd beaver or the odd cougar.

An Hon. Member: Now, you're talking.

Mr. R. Miller: Yeah, there's an animal: the cougar.

You know, I have good memories of trapping. My uncle, my mom's brother, and then his children took over the trapline when my grandfather passed away, and as far as I know, they're still involved in that activity.

I also have a history, which I don't know if I've spoken about in this House before, and that is that I spent some time in Fort Smith in the Northwest Territories with the Hudson's Bay Company as a management trainee. At that time – this was in the late 1970s – that was a location that still collected pelts. The locals would bring them in, and we had a buyer right in the store who would assess the pelts and purchase them from the locals. Although I didn't train in buying, I certainly had exposure to it, and it was a fascinating process to watch.

I took a hunter training course, Mr. Speaker, when I was in grade 8 and very much enjoyed that. In fact, some of my fondest memories of school relate to that hunter training course. We went camping in the middle of January, a three-day trip up near Athabasca somewhere. Probably the reason it's most memorable is because it was colder outside than it has been this week. I think it was about minus 30, minus 35. That was quite an experience for grade 8 students to be out winter camping in those conditions.

5:30

So I respect what Motion 515 is trying to do here. I've experienced some of these myself. I've made an effort to make sure that

my children have had similar experiences, so it's all good on the surface, but I'm just not sure. There's something about this that is rubbing me the wrong way. I'm just not sure what the mover is trying to achieve with this motion. Perhaps when he has an opportunity in a few minutes to close the discussion, he may be able to express that. What's bothering me, I think, Mr. Speaker, is that I'm unsure what is being asked for by this motion when it says to encourage the government to "recognize the tradition of hunting, trapping, and fishing" because I'm going to guess that in many respects the government already does recognize that tradition. I guess my reservation hinges on the word "recognition" and what exactly we are asking for here.

As was alluded to earlier, we already have a Provincial Hunting Day, that was new this year, where the minister of SRD and his department officially recognized hunting. So I'm not sure now: are you asking for an official trapping day or an official fishing day? Maybe that can be rolled into the official hunting day, and we could change the focus of the official hunting day to capture trapping and fishing as well. I'm not sure.

I don't mean to belittle the motion because, as I say, I think there's a lot of good that can be recognized, but I'm just not sure what exactly we're trying to achieve here. It's sort of, quite frankly, motherhood and apple pie the way it reads right now. I hesitate to support something that is maybe going to go much further than that; that is, at least without knowing how much further it might go.

As I say, I've got great memories. I think the intention is honourable and probably something that I would vote in favour of, but I will need a little more information before I can make that determination because I'm just a little bit unsure as to exactly what it is that the member is trying to achieve.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will allow others to have the opportunity to speak to this motion as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development on the motion as amended.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to arise and speak to Motion 515, and I'm most happy to support the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and his motion. A lot of the comments to this point have been retrospective in character, looking back upon the tradition and heritage of hunting, fishing, and trapping in Alberta. My remarks will be more prospective, looking forward on the important connection between hunting, fishing, and trapping and the protection of our environment and the very significant support that the hunting/fishing community gives to conservation of important habitat.

There's been a long-standing and mutually beneficial relationship between hunters, fishers, and trappers and the environment. The hunting and fishing community has always recognized that healthy habitat and abundant habitat is the key to healthy animals and healthy game. If you go back into the conservation movement in North America and, in fact, also the parks movement, it was led by people who were active in the outdoor sports of hunting and fishing. In fact, even in our province of Alberta, if you go back to the 1880s, even prior to provincehood, the record shows that it was hunters that lobbied for restrictions on hunting to protect the dwindling buffalo herds.

Today hunting also has an important commercial value to our province. Hunting tourism: we have not reached our potential there, and I'm sure this government will look forward to doing more in that respect. Thousands of hunting tourists come to Alberta every year to hunt and fish, and of course many others come just to enjoy the wildlife, which are supported by the kind of habitat we're talking

about. These tourists, whether they're hunting or just viewing, are an important stimulus to local economies, particularly in rural Alberta, because they purchase many services provided by Alberta businesses.

As we grow as a province, from 1 million or 2 million residents to 3 million and soon 4 million and then 5 million, the importance of conservation and stewardship of habitat both for fish and for wildlife becomes more important. I want to point out the important role in Alberta that hunters and fishermen play in preserving this through the licence fees they pay, through what's done publicly, their public support, and also private donations and volunteer efforts. For example, the Alberta Conservation Association, or the ACA, is a nonprofit, nongovernmental association that works collaboratively to conserve, protect, and enhance our natural biological resources. It receives funding from a variety of Alberta conservationists, including significant contributions from hunters and anglers. Every time a hunting or fishing licence is purchased, the ACA receives a portion of the funds to allocate to conservation projects.

In the 2007-2008 fiscal year the ACA received just under \$1 million for conservation work in Alberta. The purpose of this funding is to ensure that existing ACA habitat protection enhancement projects – ACA is the follower to the buck for wildlife program that was instituted in the 1970s, so this has deep roots in Alberta policy already – continue to operate as intended and the ACA meets their legal and ethical obligations towards Alberta's public.

On the private side I want to point out also that there are many groups that are very active in Alberta in raising funds for habitat conservation. I'd mention Ducks Unlimited Canada, Pheasants Forever, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and also the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep. The Foundation for North American Wild Sheep raised over \$200,000 for conservation in Alberta at their annual convention in Salt Lake City last January. I'd also, on the fishing side, like to point out and also thank groups like Trout Unlimited and Streamwatch, both of whom have taken me out this summer and shown me the importance of not just a good day of fishing but the importance of our water policies to make sure that fishing stays good.

Our efforts here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, are just one part of a much larger puzzle of North American conservation. I want to give the House a sense of the magnitude of this effort by the hunting and fishing community of North America. I'm going to reference an article that the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat drew to my attention earlier last month. This is from the November 2007 *National Geographic*. It's a 30-page article. It's the lead article, actually, in the November issue of *National Geographic*. It's entitled *Hunters: For Love of the Land*.

National Geographic, which is a well-respected and completely authoritative and unbiased source, emphasizes the importance that North American hunters and fishermen have played both on the public side and also on the voluntary side in raising money, over \$280 million a year in the U.S. for scientific research on habitat. That's by Ducks Unlimited. Since 1937 Ducks Unlimited has protected 11 million acres of wetlands in North America, many of those on the Canadian prairie. I'd like to quote, if I might, from page 130 of the *National Geographic* article. *National Geographic* states, "The . . . irony is that many species might not survive at all were it not for hunters . . . the nation's 12.5 million hunters have become essential partners in wildlife management."

5:40

That's my basic message, Mr. Speaker, that the hunting, fishing, and trapping community are essential partners in wildlife conservation. They understand that healthy game populations require healthy

habitat. These groups spend a great deal of volunteer time, volunteer money to make sure that that habitat is there. For that reason I'm very proud to offer my support to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and to Motion 515.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Motion 515 as well as to speak in favour of the amendment that was introduced earlier. This motion is designed to recognize the important role of hunting and fishing activities in Alberta, past and present, and the economic benefits they bring to the province. In its 2006-07 annual report the Department of Sustainable Resource Development points out that hunting and fishing generated social and economic benefits for the province valued at more than \$1 billion.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Cenaiko: One billion dollars. These activities continue to have an important impact on the province and its economy either as industries or through recreation.

In addition to the \$5 million generated every year by the 800 commercial fishing operations in the province, recreational fishing contributes significantly to the Alberta economy: \$350 million in 2000, which rose to \$440 million in 2005. Much of this can be attributed to the economic trend emerging among the approximately 300,000 recreational anglers enjoying fishing in Alberta's lakes, streams, and rivers. Alberta's anglers are spending more time on sport fishing than at any other time in the last 30 years and in the process are generating real dollars for tourism and sport and recreation.

From 2000 to 2005 there was an impressive 28 per cent increase in spending on fishing packages, that include such things as guided trips, tours, and lodges. Rather than just heading to the nearest lake for an afternoon, fishing enthusiasts are planning vacations and weekend getaways that allow them to escape the city and spend time with their family and friends while picking up the latest in modern fishing gear. Much of this can be attributed to the continuing and sustained prosperity that the people of this province have been able to enjoy. With more money in their pockets Alberta's hunters and anglers can now spend more time and money on activities they enjoy and contribute to the economic growth of sport and recreational fishing.

Efforts are also being made to help these industries continue to grow and prosper by encouraging those who are currently non-anglers to take part in increased participation. In 2005 both the Family Day long weekend and the 9th and 10th of July, which coincide with National Fishing Week, were devoted to allowing anyone to fish without an Alberta sport fishing licence.

Not to be outdone, there were a number of game hunting opportunities provided for nearly 105,000 hunters in 2006-07, representing an increase of over 5,000 participants, almost 200 of whom were youth hunters. The popularity is growing, Mr. Speaker. Alberta recently designated September 22, 2007, as the first ever Provincial Hunting Day to promote hunting activities and awareness. Last year the province issued more than 381,000 big game and bird game licences to 100,000 hunters in Alberta, helping to contribute more than \$100 million annually to the provincial economy.

Mr. Speaker, hunting and fishing activities are clearly part of the active lifestyle of many Albertans as well as vital industries which

contribute to the economic prosperity of this province. I therefore encourage the passage of this motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and speak to Motion 515. This certainly, as others have said, is a very important activity that occurred primarily for sustenance years back but has now evolved into being more of a recreation activity. Many have mentioned, of course, the various groups that have surrounded these activities, like the Alberta Fish and Game Association, Trout Unlimited, ACA, and others. Ducks Unlimited, of course, is a very, very active group in conservation. These people have been hunters and fishermen and trappers over time. They all know how important it is for the habitat, but also they've got to make sure that they leave enough seeds so there's a crop next year. That's where they became very much conservationists.

I can remember. We think of it being quite a number of years ago. I'm not so long in the tooth, but I do already remember that as a young person our family relied very heavily on the ability to go out in the fall and early winter and harvest a number of animals, not close to home like we are today where you can stand on the veranda and shoot a moose in the wintertime but having to travel long distances with a sleigh and team and then come back with a wagon box full of wild meat. Then there was a great canning bee, and believe you me, by midsummer you were sorry that the folks went out and got those animals because you got pretty tired of the canned meat.

I remember, as well, as a young fellow the family going out to fish. There was a lake called Swan Lake that was a good day's drive by the team and wagon. That lake even today has a unique type of trout in it, a salmonid, that has a very red flesh, and years back they always referred to it as the lake salmon. The flesh was very similar, very, very good.

Trapping, of course, was a major activity. I remember that as a young person we walked about a mile and three-quarters to school, much of it through bush, so we had a little trap line all along the way. We would set traps and catch weasels, mink, squirrels, et cetera, and made a few dollars. It was a great activity. I didn't enjoy the smell of catching the weasel and having to skin it, but my dad always said: if you go out and set traps and catch animals, you have to harvest the fur. So we had to go through that. I think it's a great idea that we would make sure that we remember and honour what happened.

I want to talk a little bit more and zero in on the fishing part of it. Fish are arguably the most important component of Alberta's lakes. There are some 51 species of fish believed to be native to the province, with an additional eight introduced species that are reproducing and maintaining a viable population. Our province is also home to some of the top fisheries in North America, and our lakes, rivers, and streams house many unique and varied fish species, like the walleye, for example, the largest member of the perch family, which is seen in Alberta lakes and is world renowned and highly valued as an excellent sport and commercial fish. Lesser Slave Lake has acquired a reputation for being one of the top walleye fisheries in North America and has become the prime destination of anglers seeking walleye in this province.

Over time fishing has broadened its scope from solely food provision to becoming a popular sport and an enjoyable recreational activity. As I believe some of my colleagues have mentioned, currently it is estimated that there are over 300,000 active anglers in the province. In addition, there are over 800 commercial fishing

operations. Although the dynamics of fishing today are very different than when the province was first established, I am confident to say that the tradition of fishing lives on.

With increasing fishing pressure on Alberta's waterways, there being an increase in creative fishing opportunities, lately there has been a trend for remote fly-in fishing lodges, such as the ones located in northern Alberta. Due to the pristine and undeveloped wilderness of that area these lodges offer some of the best sport fishing in all of Canada. In recent years Alberta's major urban centres have gained popularity among residents and travelers.

As a result there has also been an increased focus on expanding fishing opportunities in waterways across major metropolitan cities such as Edmonton and Calgary. With the North Saskatchewan River being known for its walleye, pike, and grayling populations and the Bow River being internationally acclaimed as a superb trout fishery, these modern fishing locations have been providing vast opportunities to anglers, with all the comforts and amenities that a big city has to offer. As time has evolved, so has our province's approach to fishing. However, its core purpose remains unchanged, and that is the fact that fishing has always served to unite the people of Alberta and give our province momentum. However, it has never gained adequate recognition.

5:50

In 2006 through the draft discussion paper entitled *The Need for an Alberta Heritage Hunting, Angling and Trapping Legislation*, the Alberta Fish and Game Association acknowledged the need for legislation to be passed which recognizes the heritage of these outdoor pursuits in Alberta. The Alberta Fish and Game Association stated that the current legislation in Alberta, the Wildlife Act, does not give adequate meaning to protecting the rights of hunters, anglers, and trappers and that without proper legislation there will continue to be no measure for these rights.

It is clear that hunting, trapping, and fishing have played vital roles in the historical and cultural development of our province, and to this day they are not fully recognized. I hope to finally give hunting, trapping, and fishing the recognition they deserve, and for these reasons I fully support Motion 515 as amended.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to voice support for Motion 515. I don't personally hunt, nor do I trap. I do fish, and I think I should do more of this as a sport, as an outdoor activity.

Mr. Speaker, I know that hunting and fishing and trapping have been a tradition that goes back many, many years in this province. You know, the First Nations and aboriginal people, for example, have used it as a way to sustain their communities and so on, but I have an issue with the words "all Albertans." As such, I would like to move an amendment, which I have prepared.

The Speaker: And we'll have to have it circulated as well, please.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. By striking out the words "for all Albertans" . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, sorry. Parliamentary Counsel advises that it has not been approved by the House officers yet. Did you hear what I said? Parliamentary Counsel has advised me that the amendment has not been approved by the table officers yet. That's a requirement in terms of our amendments.

Mr. Elsalhy: Sure. Thanks. I'll just speak to the motion, then.

The Speaker: You'll speak to the motion as amended.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. Proceed.

Mr. Elsalhy: We will not bother with this amendment. I'll just tell you what I was trying to do, Mr. Speaker. We don't have an issue with the intention of this motion. We just felt that it's assuming that everybody in this province likes hunting or likes fishing or agrees with it. We were just saying that while we want to preserve the intention of this motion by recognizing it as something that people in Alberta do, we didn't want to be making a statement that it's acceptable by everybody in this province.

Now, some people oppose hunting or fishing or trapping because of religious or cultural reasons. Some people oppose it because of the angle that it's cruel to animals and that it's cruel to those wildlife that are hunted or that are caught. I don't personally have this issue, and I know my colleagues in the opposition don't as well. [interjections] Some do.

What this motion as worded is presuming is that everybody is okay with it, is okay with the practice, that it's an outdoor activity, that it's a pastime, that it's a sport. We just wanted in our amendment to remove that clause "for all Albertans" and just make it "in Alberta," as in geography.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I'd invite the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to now close debate on Motion 515 as amended.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I'd like to thank all that participated in the debate. Motion 515 as amended urges the government of Alberta to recognize the tradition of hunting, trapping, and fishing for all Albertans. Throughout the history of our province these activities have certainly, as many have mentioned, played a key role, and the goal of the motion is to recognize that importance.

To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, I would like to assure him that there was never any intention on my part or any part of this motion to have any part of this replace the IMHA, the interim Métis harvesting agreement. There was no intent whatsoever.

I think also, to the other hon. members, the MLAs from Calgary-Varsity and Edmonton-Rutherford, what I was trying to recognize was that getting back to nature is getting much more difficult. Our rights are being challenged by many, many groups, as perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung started to allude to, groups like PETA, the animal rights activists, and others like that. What we were trying to do is recognize a tradition.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford mentioned, the

memories that we have of what we did when we were kids are in danger, and we may not in the future be able to do some of these things. The numbers that were suggested on the number of tags and everything else perhaps are impressive, but in the future there could be some problem with that, and that's the reason for this. Really, traditionally hunting and fishing and trapping were used as means of survival, which made them a necessity for early inhabitants. These activities helped foster the country's growing population and economy. Also, I recognize that today hunters, trappers, and anglers play a large role in the conservation of our wildlife and the management of it.

I think Motion 515 as amended recognizes this as well as the recreational aspects of these activities. Caring for our province's natural habitat I think is important to all Canadians and all Albertans. Our wildlife is now continually managed and preserved by government, individuals, and groups. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, hunters and trappers are some of the most educated conservationists in Alberta.

Motion 515 recognizes the recreational benefits of hunting, fishing, and trapping for entire families in these activities in the healthy outdoor environment. They are an escape from the stresses of everyday life, which are so predominant in contemporary culture. It is also a way of reconnecting with nature as our forefathers did, something that is getting lost. I think this speaks to what I was talking about earlier: that we're in danger of losing that ability.

The positive contribution that hunters, anglers, and fishermen have made and still make in Alberta is considerable. Whether for necessity or recreation, the participants, including the people who first came to this province and those who hunt, trap, and fish today, have contributed significantly to conserving the province's natural habitat.

Motion 515 is a chance – a chance – to give these Albertans the recognition they deserve and to ensure that these activities continue well into the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 515 as amended carried]

The Speaker: Now, this was a very interesting debate this afternoon. Without any doubt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore is correct that not every Albertan carries a gun. I want hon. members to note, to the three hon. members who sent me a note wanting to know if the reason the chair wore a gown is to hide his two pearl-handled Colt .45s, that such is not the case.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to a government motion that was passed by the House last week, I would move that we now adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, December 3, 2007

8:00 p.m.

Date: 07/12/03

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Government Motions

Time Allocation on Bill 46

37. Mr. Renner moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill at second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill has already had in excess of four hours of debate in second reading. There are, as all members are aware, a number of very critical amendments that the government wishes to get onto the table, and with an additional one hour that will be in excess of five hours at second reading. We feel that it's reasonable to move forward at this point in time so that we can move into the Committee of the Whole and introduce the amendments.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course I am speaking against this motion, and again I will raise my deep concern with the government choosing to use special power that is granted to it through legislative or parliamentary procedure. Truly the government benefits from our parliamentary process. There are special provisions that are set up to allow or intended to be used for extraordinary circumstances. In a case where there had been, you know, hundreds of hours or tens of tens of hours of debate on a bill and some need to move along with it to meet a court ordered deadline or something like that, I could see a justifiable use of time allocation. But that's not what we're experiencing here.

Frankly, it takes over five and a half hours for every member not in the government caucus to speak in second to a bill, and we have not even been able to achieve that. In fact, given the time allocations that have already been brought forward, we will not be able to achieve that. So never mind backbenchers, never mind rural members of the government caucus who need to be able to be on the record to explain to their constituents why they would be supporting – or perhaps they're not – a bill that has a disproportionate effect on rural landowners. That's not even including time for them, Mr. Speaker.

There's the government with horror in their hearts that we might be going over five hours' worth of debate in second, Mr. Speaker. This is an appalling abuse of a special process that is granted to government under extraordinary circumstances that they now use, you know, like a glass of water. It really is abusing the situation. This Bill 46 is a bad bill. It should have been taken off the table and repaired or, perhaps, it could be argued, never brought in. It is curtailing democratic participation. It continues to do that despite the rumoured amendments that are coming. It does preclude that democratic participation from the government caucus's strongest supporters, and perhaps that's why they feel the need to rush this bill through so quickly.

Let's have a look at how much time has been spent in debate on some other bills. In British Columbia, a government that this government says it admires greatly, they spent over a hundred hours debating the land claims issue that they had a couple of years ago – over a hundred hours. When we were debating Bill 11, which is the biggest bill that has been debated in this House in many years, we, I believe, were up in the 60-hour mark before closure was brought in, and here we have a government bringing in closure after four hours of debate in second.

I don't need much of a crystal ball. Actually, we've already had oral notice that the government plans on bringing in closure in committee after three hours tomorrow afternoon and closure again in third after one hour. So we'd be looking at approximately nine hours' worth of debate on this entire bill, Mr. Speaker. That is an appalling – appalling – misuse of legislative process to be able to cover up a government embarrassment, and that's what's going on here. This is a government embarrassment. They're trying to get it off the record, get it off the page as quick as they can, and they have misused a parliamentary process in order to do so. I think it's about saving face for a minister who is in trouble. All I can see is a peevishness to get out of the session by Thursday in order to, I presume, attend Christmas parties.

Certainly, I can see a much better reason for staying in the House, debating this bill and other bills, but, no, there is a hell-bent for leather push to get out of here by Thursday. I cannot describe to you my disappointment in this government and in the tactics that it has chosen to use. None of it justifies the use of closure, and I object to the use of it strenuously, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this is a nondebatable motion. The mover and the Opposition House Leader each have five minutes to speak. They have done so.

[Government Motion 37 carried]

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 46

Alberta Utilities Commission Act

Mr. Eggen moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment.

[Debate adjourned November 20: Mrs. Mather speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and speak briefly on Bill 46, the principles of the bill. I think that it is very necessary that we do split the EUB and that we establish the ERCB and the utility commission. The reason I say that, of course, is because there is so much work going on on the energy side, and at the time when we amalgamated the two boards, there was not anywhere near the activity that there currently is. So I think that it's really important that we do split them and that we do have a utility commission.

I think that another principle of the bill, of course, is to enhance the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. Having been responsible for that position for some time, I can tell you that it played a

very, very important role speaking up for the consumers of the province. As we move forward, giving it even more ability and setting a board up that it would answer to is going to, I think, really enhance the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

When we look at the personnel that are involved, particularly if we can somehow use the services of David Gray, who is currently the Utilities Consumer Advocate – this gentleman knows the system. He knows how it all works. He's very, very intelligent. Mr. Speaker, I know that he's the type of person that if he needs some more expertise, he will get it. He will simply admit that there's something that he needs help with. I believe that they will do just a tremendous job for us and protect the consumer in the province.

Particularly as we move forward and we see the amendments – I know that the amendments were tabled so we know now that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is going to be housed. It has to be housed someplace, and it will be housed . . .

Ms Blakeman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, on a point of order?

Point of Order Relevance

Ms Blakeman: Yes. I'm sorry to interrupt the member, but we are speaking on a referral motion to refer this bill to a standing policy committee. If I may use citation 23(b), or also relevance under *Beauchesne* 459, and call the member to order.

Mr. Lund: Hon. House leader, I apologize.

Ms Blakeman: Well, you're supposed to be talking to a referral motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, on the point of order?

Mr. Lund: Yes, on the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologize if I'm speaking about the wrong thing. I did not know that it was simply with the motion to refer it to the committee. I'm sorry. I thought it was on Bill 46 as it's presented. Okay. I'm sorry. That'll be all I have to say for now.

8:10

Debate Continued

The Deputy Speaker: We're on the amendment. Okay? Anyone else on the motion to refer? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would vote in favour of this motion. [interjection] For a little while.

It really is sad that we want to call this a democratic process. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has brought up a lot of the points that I would like to bring up in order that we can go forward. We haven't spent any time on this. This is a new bill. It's going to make a dramatic change in how business carries out business in the province and how they expropriate land from landowners, and it needs more studying.

We had the bill in front of us, Mr. Speaker, for over five months, and they threw the 23 amendments, which goes to speak to how faulty this bill was, last Thursday and expected us through the weekend to be able to have digested that and to say: oh, everything's fixed now. It isn't fixed. It's not in the interest of Albertans. This is a bill that's making a major change in how business is going to be conducted and in the ability of landowners to say no to transmission lines, pipelines, and other things that cross their land and that are

going to affect them for a lifetime. Maybe, you know, three, four generations down the road are going to be affected by this bill, and to invoke closure is totally undemocratic.

We need to send this to committee. It needs to be studied. It needs to go out to rural Alberta again and the landowners so that they're comfortable with it. Even if it is a good bill, they're not comfortable with it. This government should know and understand that, but they're going to shove it down the throats of Albertans. I think they're going to pay a price for it, and that's fine, but then we still have to rescind the bill. So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's critical that this bill goes to committee, that it's studied, and that Albertans are familiar with it and not just a \$27,000 blitz campaign to say: oh, it's okay; trust us.

Mr. MacDonald: How much?

Mr. Hinman: I think \$27,000 just this weekend, taxpayer funded to promote their expropriation bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Is this after they rejected the Auditor General's report?

Mr. Hinman: Yes, after they rejected the Auditor General's report.

Anyway, I vote in favour of this amendment, and I hope that all the MLAs sitting in this House will consider that and the importance of this. This isn't a quick little amendment to some bill that's been floating around. Why didn't they use closure on 20 other bills that aren't as critical as this one?

I support this amendment, and I hope everyone will think it over twice before they vote. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Others?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is typically my pleasure to rise and participate in debates in this House, but tonight I am of two minds. Part of me is of course pleased that I am here advocating on behalf of my constituents and expressing either support or opposition to a government bill, in this case definitely opposition, but the other part of me is also angry, first of all, at the government which drafted Bill 46 and then also at members of the government caucus for now limiting debate to one hour in second reading, three hours in committee, and then one hour in third.

Every session, Mr. Speaker – and I have been here for three years – there are typically one, maybe two contentious bills, bills that are controversial enough to generate or awaken some interest among Albertans. I call these issues or these ideas or these bills Trojan Horses. Take, for example, Bill 11 a few years ago and to a much lesser extent the third way, which followed afterwards in 2005. Take Bill 20 last year, making government more secretive, less open and transparent. When we talk about closure or censorship, it was, I think, tallied that under the former Premier closure was used some 38 times. Well, under this Premier that's his first three in one session right there. If we spent more time, this government was going to be in extreme hot water.

The same happened with Bill 20. People were starting to catch on. They were starting to pay attention. They were starting to ask tough questions, writing to their MLAs, letters to the editor, and so

on, asking, "Why is the government so bent on hiding ministerial briefing notes?" for example, or "Why were they so adamant that findings of internal audits were to be sealed for 15 years out of sight, out of access?"

Instead of addressing these concerns back then in 2006, the government brought in closure. They said: well, let's just kill this issue and move on. I was the critic for government services back then, in 2006. In an exchange with the hon. Premier, before he became the Premier, I told him that Bill 20 was really offensive and that I felt very bad that the government did what it did. He replied to me that it was really the critic not doing his job; otherwise, how would we have accepted closure?

Well, the government has the numbers. If all of us say no to one issue and they all say yes or half of them say yes or a third of them say yes, then it's a done deal. I don't think it was really the critic not doing his job. I think it was just a government that is so adamant about keeping that distance between itself and the opposition, between itself and the media, and between itself and the public.

This year it is Bill 46. It follows on the heels of the EUB spying scandal, but this time, compared to other instances, the public is catching on and catching on very quickly and in larger numbers. I think that if we're using the Premier's argument, then I must say that the critic, or the shadow minister, this year is doing an extremely good job. He also happens to be the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. He is not going to let the government off this easy, and neither are we in the opposition. Edmonton-Gold Bar is opposed; the Official Opposition is opposed; the third party is opposed. Albertans have caught on.

Earlier in this House there was a bit of sniping and a bit of short temper. I think that if anything it is indicative of how potentially damaging this bill is to the Tories. A bill does not exist by itself or in isolation. It is a clear reference to a government policy or direction, one in this case which wants to deny basic rights to affected Albertans, a direction which would further weaken democracy in this province and erode public trust in this administration even more.

As I said, this bill is a Trojan Horse, and the Ministry of Energy is actually spinning it, or marketing it, as a solution, not as a problem. Well, I find it a problem. After 36 years under this government Alberta is suffering from a democratic deficit. We are doing good things to address it, but we are also equally doing bad things to further it or to make it even worse. Bill 46 does that. It takes people's rights away: the public's and, in particular, landowners'.

Trust is a two-way street, Mr. Speaker. I know the government sometimes considers the cities as iffy but takes the rural vote for granted. They rely on the rural vote. On Thursday the Education minister responded to one of my comments about rural Albertans being upset with something like: let's wait and see what happens in the next election. I know that the government is feeling heat. That might explain why they're spending thousands of dollars on a media campaign to reassure people: "You know what? Do not worry. Everything is fine. We listened to your concerns, and we're acting on them." But the rural folk are not buying it this time.

These ads, Mr. Speaker, which were tabled today, basically tell Albertans not to worry. I don't believe them, and I don't think most people do as well. There's actually a joke among reporters and Legislature employees that the government bought a \$30,000 car only to spend \$20,000 more on amendments, or improvements. Well, one has to question, then: how good a car was that? I think definitely the government bought a lemon, and it is leaving a very sour taste in many people's mouths. They are said to be bringing

about 22 amendments on their own, and then there are amendments of the opposition, and so on, so I don't think a meagre three or four hours is enough, nor is it realistic. I think it is really criminal.

Now, Mr. Speaker, before I go on, I would like to actually move a motion, which I'm going to give to the pages to distribute. I'll just keep one copy so I can read it at the appropriate time.

8:20

The Deputy Speaker: Are you introducing an amendment?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Could you just give the pages a moment to distribute them?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. I did.

The Deputy Speaker: Could we have the original at the desk?

You may proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am moving this amendment on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre. The amendment actually is to Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, to be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Now, why am I doing this, and why is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre doing this? Well, we both feel very strongly about the need for better consumer protection in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. I've always thought that consumers needed assistance and protection when it comes to corporations or providers or retailers. Never have I thought that there would come a day when these consumers would need protection from their own government, which is clearly working against them. Mind you, it happened before with deregulation, so I really should not be this surprised.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support Bill 46. Earlier we tried to refer this particular piece of legislation to a committee of this House for further deliberations. Something of this magnitude warrants examination and close scrutiny, but unfortunately the House did not accept this motion to refer.

I think the next best thing is to actually say: "Okay. Let's just pause it. Let's just put it on hold, spend six months." You know, tempers would settle. People are going to ask good questions and maybe, hopefully, receive good answers and in six months, which is not really that long a time frame given the bigger scheme of government. Come back and consider it, you know, potentially after the next budget, potentially after the next provincial election even.

This bill as it's read, as it's proposed, is really offensive. I find it really ironic that this is the 21st century, and this is Alberta, which is part of Canada, a democratic place where democratic procedures and protocols are in existence, for a government to do this, a government that should know better. It may be acceptable or expected in the Third World, for example, but I don't think it should be accepted or expected here, in a province like this. I should know. I come from overseas, and these are the types of tactics that some of the governments over there do.

As such, this explains my amendment, Mr. Speaker. This bill definitely should be receiving a lot more discussion, a lot more scrutiny, and I think, given the short duration that this House is going to be sitting, we should maybe postpone it till six months from now.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not surprised that the previous referral was turned down. I guess hope springs eternal. We have a new amendment to try to get the government to do the right thing, and as I say, hope springs eternal.

I certainly will support this amendment because I think we're rushing into something that we don't need to rush into at this particular time. So if we can put it off for six months, that would be a great thing.

Mr. Speaker, I'm curious about all this. The previous speaker said he's angry. You know, I'm not angry anymore – I'm dealing in the Legislature – but I'm a little bit dumbfounded by why we're pushing ahead with this in the way we are. You know, the government, the Premier has come to the Legislature, and he says it's going to be a new era of openness and transparency. We have a couple of bills that are supposedly taking us in that direction – we can debate those later as bills 1 and 2 – and all of a sudden we have this particular Bill 46, Mr. Speaker, and we're in such a hurry.

I noticed that the Minister of Energy said that we've been debating it for five months. I didn't know we were in the Legislature for five months, but that's precisely the point. The emotions have been running extremely high in this province for five months, and people were upset by what's going on with the EUB. As I said before, Mr. Speaker, the fact that after this ham-handed approach of spies and all the rest of the things and firings that have been with the AEUB, I'd think the last thing they'd want to do is rush through a controversial bill dealing with the EUB. For the life of me, I don't understand that.

You know, we could have had a policy field committee Mr. Speaker – that's what they were supposed to be there for, to check legislation that might be somewhat controversial, hold public hearings, do whatever is necessary – but we didn't do that. We come in with this bill, and now we're into time allocation. It doesn't surprise me – I've been around for a long time – when governments want to do this, but you know it's not like this is a bill that's so absolutely crucial to this government that they'd have to push it forward. That's what makes me confused and dumbfounded about this rush, especially with the timing.

Surely the government must recognize with what's been going on with the EUB, the spies and everything else and the firings and the rest of it, that any legislation coming forward, and one that looks like – it still does – in terms of cutting into public accountability is going to create a lot of friction, and it has, especially in the rural areas but not only the rural areas. We're getting letters from all over about this particular bill. I just, Mr. Speaker, for the life of me cannot understand what the hurry is.

You know, the government told us when they brought this bill forward: my, what a magnificent bill this is going to be. You know, this would solve all the problems of the EUB. Of course, they brought it in before we heard what was going on. But if this was such a perfectly good bill – now they're coming forward, saying they're in a hurry to bring forward amendments, and there is a myriad of amendments to a bill – if it was that good to begin with, why are we coming in with all these amendments? Most of the people that I've talked to don't think these amendments go nearly far enough in terms of what we were talking about in terms of openness and transparency, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we get these amendments. We want to bring them forward. We're going to have three hours in Committee of the Whole to discuss this myriad of amendments that still – I believe, especially when we take a look, there are still a lot of concerns about

the consumer's advocate, the intervenor funding. None of this is clear, even with all the amendments, Mr. Speaker. Anybody that has looked at the amendments is still not satisfied, but I would think that the last thing the government would want to do, especially in the real heartland with the Marthas and Henrys, is keep prodding them, you know, the way they are because they don't find this acceptable. That's what has me absolutely baffled.

You know, sometimes I understand there's a different philosophy across the way, and there's a bill that the government is staking their reputation on. Eventually there's enough debate, and then there's time allocation brought in. This bill just doesn't make that sort of sense to me, why they need it that quickly, you know, especially, as I said, in view of the timing with what's been going on with the EUB. It seems to me the more prudent thing would have been to say: "Okay, there have been some problems. We want to take a look at it. We want to break it up in two." That doesn't seem to be the problem. It's all the other things that go with it, Mr. Speaker, that are creating the problems. "Because we're an open, transparent government, we're going to do the right thing and hold some public hearings and get this bill right. Then we'll come back to the Legislature when we've heard from the people."

It seems to me from the government's own perspective that this would make a lot of sense. It makes so much sense to me that I don't understand why they want this fight with everybody over this particular bill. That's all that they seem to be doing is pushing this forward even with all the bad press that they've had with the EUB. Even if it was a great bill, if everything was perfect, the timing is so wrong, you know, after what's happened. Is it just stubbornness? Is it just bullheadedness, that we're right and everybody else is wrong, and we're going to bull ahead because we have the numbers here to do it? Well, they do have the numbers to do it. We're well aware of that on the opposition side, Mr. Speaker.

8:30

I know where this is going, and I'm sure the member that brought it in knows where it's going after the previous amendment. But, you know, I don't know why. Six months from now would not make a difference. I think that along with that, rather than just sitting there for six months, they should go out and talk to people and try to get this right. You know, bring a bill back that people can support generally.

Again, I stress that we were told that this was a necessary bill, and then we're raising things in the Legislature here and across the province, and then all of a sudden some amendments come in that don't go nearly far enough in terms of what the criticisms were. All these amendments come flooding in. Wouldn't that strike you that there's something wrong to begin with when you have to bring in all these amendments that were added to a perfect bill beforehand? It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that something is not right.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly will be supporting this hoist amendment. If we could get a break for six months, that would be great.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, if the government thinks that they've solved all the problems here and the people are going to just say, "Well, these amendments are great; now we support the bill," that's not happening in the letters I'm getting. It's not happening with the rural landowners that are upset. You know, we'll see where this takes them down the way. But it's just so ham-handed. I just don't understand – as I say, baffled is probably the word – why we're approaching this bill at this time in this way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the amendment that we're

debating is amendment A2, and Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, back on the debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I rise this evening to urge all hon. members to support this amendment, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. This amendment certainly reads like a lifeline for a government that is out of control. This is a lifeline that will allow them to do the public consultation that was never done before this bill was initially drafted.

Certainly, I would like to formally apologize to the hon. member for the third party, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and his colleagues. Earlier in debate at second reading I thought the only chance we would have to throw the government a lifeline was his party's amendment, and if I steered the House and the public wrong in this matter, I apologize. Certainly, you have two opportunities here, government members, to once and for all finally listen to Albertans, who are very, very concerned about the direction this bill takes us in.

Albertans don't have an issue with the splitting up of the EUB. That's not the issue here. But once this split occurs, the powers that different organizations will have is the issue. No one is denying that there's been a dramatic increase in the number of applications or hearings before the EUB. Everyone but this government seems to recognize that the EUB is understaffed and overworked. When we look at the applications that are before the EUB, we see clearly that the majority of them are in the oil and gas development sector.

With Albertans that I've talked to, they certainly do have issues with access and with tenure on oil and gas applications, but for the majority of citizens, after the spy scandal in Rimbey and again in Redwater was made public, that was the last straw. They could not believe that a government or a government agency would use spies to eavesdrop on and monitor innocent, unsuspecting citizens who were just exercising their democratic rights. They were just exercising their democratic rights.

The week before the spy scandal blew up, the Minister of Energy quietly stood in this Assembly and introduced Bill 46, the poorly drafted, flawed act that it was. He seemed bound and determined, the honourable minister, to have this sit on the Order Paper over the summer. Now, I don't know which groups of citizens that the government consulted with over the summer. I do know that this \$500 an hour consultant was hired to implement the bill. I do know that there was an active recruitment going on for various senior officials to operate these new boards or commissions. But if there was public consultation occurring, was it with the Alberta Beef Producers? Was it with the city of Edmonton? Was it with the city of Calgary? Was it with the Lavesta group in central Alberta? Was it with the Consumers' Association of Canada, the chapter in Alberta? Was it with the legal community? Was it with the AAMD and C? Was it with the AUMA? Just exactly who was consulted here? Or was this bill written by certain members of the electrical generation and transmission industry for certain members of the electrical generation and transmission industry? Who benefits from this bill?

That's why, Mr. Speaker, it would be very wise for us to refer this bill, for instance, to the hon. Member for Strathcona. He's doing such a great job as chairman of the elections and privileges committee.

Mr. Lougheed: What's the real name? Get the real name.

Mr. MacDonald: The real name? Hon. member, it hasn't met in 20

years, until you got it going here last week. I can't remember the name.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I'm distracted by this hon. member, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

The Deputy Speaker: I've been listening very intently to your most interesting comments, but we are debating amendment A2. I'd like to read it. It's moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day six months hence." I was trying to relate what you were saying to this amendment. I'm having a very difficult time. So if you could, maybe when you continue, get back kind of on track to the amendment.

Debate Continued

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Speaker.

What I was proposing was that the hon. Member for Strathcona be given this bill for up to six months to have a series of public hearings, hear directly from the groups that I mentioned just previously to your comments, and we could come back with a bill that would be suitable, not a bill that is declaring martial law on consumer groups or on intervenors or on people who want to stand up and speak out. This would be a bill that would perhaps meet all the requirements that were described briefly by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

8:40

Again, no one has a dispute with the splitting of these two boards, but everyone has a dispute with how they're going to work. If we were to give this bill a break, if I can use that term, Mr. Speaker, with amendment A2, it would give Albertans the opportunity that they have not had to date to give some public input into this bill.

Mr. Speaker, we can go through this bill from start to finish, part 1 through to part 10, and we can find areas that need improvement. If we were to support amendment A2, it would give us the time to fix this bill because it certainly is flawed. We could start in part 1, and we could determine if the membership of the commission should be changed. We could go on. We could talk about the duty of care.

Mr. Rodney: But why?

Mr. MacDonald: But why, hon. member? Because it's a flawed bill. It was hastily written. Clearly, that is articulated very well by the passionate, articulate letters and position papers that have been presented on this bill.

We could go, again, to section 8, Mr. Speaker. We could talk about the powers of the commission. Maybe there's some control that needs to be put on this commission that is not in section 8. We could look at further amendments to section 9. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne clearly knows that there are many improvements that could be made to section 9, the decisions and hearings portion. We could look at some of the reviews that the commission may do. We could also in this period of time question whether this commission should have or has the powers of a Queen's

Bench judge. I can't imagine what members of the judiciary think of this because this certainly is a new legal feature or a new legal wrinkle. I have no idea. I see the Minister of Energy shaking his head, but this is a first.

Now, we can go on here. If we were to adopt amendment A2, we could certainly have time to think about section 12 and how that should be changed. Section 18 is another one that comes to mind. Perhaps it should be amended. Section 17: the public interest. Now, that's a novel concept for this government, the public interest. I certainly wish they would put the interests of the public first for a change.

We can go on here. Section 21, the costs of proceedings. We could hear from the intervenors. We could hear from some of the citizens in Whitecourt. Maybe they would have some new information to provide to their hon. member. Section 22, local intervenor costs. I think we should support the proposed amendment A2 simply for this section alone because it is unclear. It is unclear what is going to happen in this section if this bill becomes law.

We can go on. Commission orders, orders without notice. Why is it necessary to have orders without notice? In that section, "A person entitled to notice under subsection (1) may, at any time within 10 days after becoming aware of any decision or order . . . apply to the Commission." Maybe that should be changed, and maybe in the period of time, in the six months, the government would see why it's necessary to change that.

We could have a look at section 26, the registration of order, Mr. Speaker. We could have a look at part 4, the appeals from the commission. We're giving this commission wide powers, and they have a lot of discretion here. For the hon. member – that is, the person who looks after Service Alberta – a lot of his constituents are phoning our constituency office asking for clarifications on this bill. If we were to accept this amendment A2, it would give that hon. member time to consult further with his constituents.

Now, the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate: the city of Calgary has had a lot to say about that. We need time to discuss what this government's future plans are for water. In this bill, again, we're talking about electric energy, natural gas, and water. Specifically, we're talking about the purchase of electric energy, natural gas, and water.

We have 24 amendments already tabled by the hon. Minister of Energy. I suspect we're going to have more. He's going to surprise us. Not only is he going to table more amendments, but he's also going to table the regulations that we all know he's got in his bag there somewhere. He really should table all those regulations. There are so many different avenues for regulations to be written in this act; it would take us six months alone, Mr. Speaker, to have a good look at all the regulations. If we're so open and transparent and we're accountable, recognizing that I haven't heard a public statement in this Assembly from the new Premier on this bill, but I certainly hear often about how open and transparent and accountable this supposedly new government is – it's not a new government; it's the same playbook, different quarterback. You can certainly read the plays that this team is attempting to implement.

But we need to see those regulations. If the minister is so confident in how this is going to improve the energy regulatory process in this province after the spy scandal, after the failures of electricity deregulation, show us the regulations. If there's anything we could do in the period of time that the hon. member is talking about here, in six months, we could have a good squint, as they say, at the regulations.

The hon. Minister of Energy is pulling something out there. It can't be all the regulations. There would be more than that. But I could be surprised.

Mr. Rodney: You could be.

Mr. MacDonald: I could be surprised.

But getting back, again, Mr. Speaker, to water.

Oh, dear, ran out of time again.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments if anyone wishes to participate.

Seeing none, back on the debate, the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as the MLA for Calgary-Elbow to support this amendment, to express concerns regarding Bill 46. Following on the heels of the comments from my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, I feel it's incumbent for me also to speak on behalf of citizens of Calgary. The Alberta Utilities Commission Act, Bill 46, is of concern, and as a Calgary representative in this Assembly I'm compelled to express concern on behalf of all Calgarians. Therefore, I would speak in favour of amendment A2, to allow further discussion, further review of this bill for a period of six months.

I feel that it's right and proper to relate to this House the concerns of Calgarians, including the concerns as expressed by the mayor of the city of Calgary, Dave Bronconnier, in a letter to the Premier. I would expect that, as I'll come to later on, he would have concerns and would like us to take our time in looking at this on behalf of consumers in this province. Bill 46 threatens all Albertans, not just landowners in rural areas. As Mayor Bronconnier has articulated in his letter of November 8, it's of concern to Calgarians and of concern to consumers; therefore, we do need to take a serious look at amendment A2.

The mayor has expressed a number of concerns. These concerns continue to have merit because they speak to the purpose or the spirit of this proposed legislation in its original form, yes, but that perverse spirit I think continues to haunt this bill. The mayor has indicated that this bill would negatively impact all Albertans, not just landowners but urban Albertans as well. It has far-reaching implications. This bill is wrong. It gets it wrong. It's very wrong. The bill has serious flaws in it, and I think the failure of this minister to properly consult with all stakeholders, both rural and urban, including the city of Calgary, is of concern and should be of concern to the members of this House.

8:50

Mr. Elsalhy: But they're advertising.

Mr. Cheffins: Yes. Despite this advertising that they've brought out at the cost of some \$26,000. Outrageous.

There are major concerns, including in the major metropolitan centres, and I think that it calls out for changes to this bill and for further study, and this is why I would be speaking in support of amendment A2. We do need to consider this bill very carefully. Now, admittedly, much of what it is that the mayor has raised in his letter has to do with the UCA, but I think that regardless of changes that may have been brought forward in that regard, there are concerns, and there are concerns relating to consumers.

The mayor has pointed out that the city of Calgary has owned an electrical utility for over a century, and for over 35 years the city has been involved in interventions. That's of concern, and I think that speaks, again, to the spirit of this bill in trying to change that intervention process in its original form. But, again, the concerns continue to be there for consumers in this province. Throughout the process we've seen an imbalance here, and the city shareholders have an interest in this on behalf of ratepayers.

Again, I think that perhaps the most important part of the mayor's letter as it went forward speaks directly to amendment A2, where he concluded by saying, "there is no reason to implement a new regulatory structure by January 1, 2008."

Mr. Elsalhy: What's the rush?

Mr. Cheffins: As my colleague from Edmonton-McClung has indicated, we need more time to speak to this bill. It's unfortunate that this bill wasn't sent to committee to have an opportunity to take a look at it. That would have given the public and consumers an opportunity to come forward and voice their concerns in the committee. Well, I think this is a good amendment brought forward by my colleague because, once again, it attempts to do the same thing, to bring this back to Albertans for them to take a long look at it. These are concerns that Calgarians have and that we should all have. They're not the only concerns with regard to this bill. This bill needs to be looked at on any number of fronts, and this amendment would allow an opportunity to do that.

Alberta Beef Producers have expressed concerns with regard to Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, and as the members of this House know, the Alberta Beef Producers is a commission incorporated under the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act to represent the interests of some 30,000 beef cattle producers. They've undertaken a detailed review of the proposed Alberta Utilities Commission Act, and they have concerns on any number of fronts. They've expressed serious concerns on the following sections of the bill. They've indicated that section 3, membership of the commission; section 8, powers of the commission; section 9, decisions and orders; section 17, public interest; section 96; section 24; and section 6 are all of concern. They have indicated that there are flaws in Bill 46, and for these reasons we need to take a serious look at amendment A2 and bring this bill back to the public, as I mentioned, to consumers in Calgary and throughout the province and also to concerned citizens such as those of the Alberta Beef Producers.

Mr. Elsalhy: That's an organization speaking on behalf of how many people, again?

Mr. Cheffins: There are some 30,000 beef producers, as my colleague suggested, and we need to clarify.

There are other concerns with regard to this bill as well. Coming back to what the mayor had to say and to reinforce again the need to take a look at amendment A2, the mayor outlined a couple of specific areas. Section 8 is one of the things that he expressed concerns about. Amendment 2 would allow us to take a longer look at section 8; section 8(1), for example: "The Commission has all the powers, rights, protections and privileges that are given to it or provided for under this Act and under any other enactment and by law." There's a lot of power in that statement. We need to take a long look at it.

Not only that, but in section (2) it states:

The Commission, in the exercise of its powers and the performance of its duties and functions under this Act or any other enactment, may act on its own initiative or motion and do all things that are necessary for or incidental to the exercise of its powers and the performance of its duties and functions.

Subsection (3), referring once again to the powers, indicates that the duties and functions . . . imposed on the Commission by this Act or any other enactment, the Commission may carry out any other powers, duties and functions determined by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

That's a lot of power. We need to be able to address that issue and take our time in taking a look at this. This is why amendment A2 as

moved by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-McClung deserves every consideration.

Mr. Elsalhy: We can give them the power, but we need to ensure accountability.

Mr. Cheffins: The power and accountability. Accountability best comes when we take a long time in taking a look at things.

Finally, just under section 8, I think, this bill allows for further delegation of power. There are questions with regard to that delegation because in section 8(7)

the Commission may delegate any of the powers, duties and functions conferred or imposed on it under this or any other enactment to any member or any other person unless the regulations under section 90 prohibit the delegation.

Again, there's a lot of power. There's a lot of concern with regard to that power, Mr. Speaker.

The mayor also raised concerns with regard to section 10. He points to concerns with regard to the commission, that

the Commission may in accordance with the rules made under subsection (2) review any decision or order made by it under this Act or any other enactment and after the review may confirm, rescind or vary the decision or order.

So these are all areas of concern.

I'd also like to raise one more area of concern not necessarily outlined by the mayor, but I think that this is something that would be of concern. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar raised this, and that has to do with the power that's given in section 12, the power of the commission with regard to contempt: "A person who commits or does an act, matter or thing that would, if done in or in respect of the Court of Queen's Bench, constitute a contempt of the Court." The previous section is giving the commission the powers of the Court of Queen's Bench. I would expect that some of the members across the way, perhaps the Justice minister, a respected member of the legal community – I'd wonder as to why it is that he sees the need for this and whether or not it would raise concerns for him with regard to the democratic aspects of this bill, perhaps some overreaching powers and implications of this bill.

Mr. Elsalhy: I bet you this doesn't happen in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Cheffins: Yes. I think it would be worthy of taking a long review as to how this bill stacks up with regard to other jurisdictions and the amount of power that's being granted to the commission on this front.

Again, I'm concerned about the amount of power that's given to the commission. I'm not sure why the commission has the same powers as the Court of Queen's Bench, you know, particularly after the EUB scandal. I think that Albertans and Calgarians are concerned about the amount of power that's granted here, and I'm concerned about the limitations that are placed on Albertans' ability to question.

Admittedly, there have been some amendments brought forward by this government. But as referred to by my colleagues as well, with the number of amendments that are brought forward under this legislation – it's quite dumbfounding, actually, that they would move forward with a piece of legislation that would seem to be so flawed at its very heart.

In conclusion, I'd just like to say, Mr. Speaker, that I'm speaking in favour of amendment A2. I think that there are concerns about this piece of proposed legislation. I think Albertans deserve an opportunity to take a longer look at this piece of legislation and its far-reaching implications, and I would urge members to support amendment A2.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: On Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I was just wondering if the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow – I thought that he was going to talk a little bit about how much the federal government sends everything to committee all the time and to the opposition and if the hon. member had any comments, you know, looking at the federal party. When bills were controversial, you know, even their accountability bill, they sent them to committee work. I'm just wondering if you had any comments on why this government isn't following that, realizing the importance of committee work. Do you have anything else you wanted to say about that?

9:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cheffins: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner. I appreciate that question. I do think that we can learn from other jurisdictions and from the federal jurisdiction in terms of referring things to committees, where much of the work and the detailed work can take place, and we can take a look at legislation. I think that that would also speak to whatever it is that we need to do in order to be able to take a longer look at this.

Previously we debated sending this motion to committee. Again, I know that many members on this side of the House voted in favour of that because, again, many of us on this side of the House see the problems with this bill and would really on behalf of Albertans like to take a longer look at it. So I thank you for your question.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) or on the debate?

Mr. Backs: To speak.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, back on A2.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak against this amendment. I see this as kind of a standard procedural amendment that's meant to limit debate. The same Member for Edmonton-Centre earlier on, just in the same hour that was meant to give that hour of debate for this important bill, moved an amendment that, in effect, limits debate. It seems to have not just a little bit of illogical inconsistency but a whole bunch.

This amendment seeks to push for six months. You say that there would be public hearings and all the rest of that in the six months. That's after the normal sitting of a spring session, and we all have some sense that there may be some other events in the meantime that might come in the way of hearing this bill. So this is, in effect, to limit debate, to kill any further discussion on this. We've wasted the whole hour in second reading that was allocated for this, Mr. Speaker, on something to limit debate on a procedural matter. It doesn't seem to make a whole bunch of sense and have a whole bunch of consistency with some of the earlier arguments, which said that we should be extending debate and giving full flow to a lot of the talk about the importance of the various amendments and all of the other things in this.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge the Assembly to defeat this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. When one travels through rural Alberta these days, regardless of whether it's before or after the snow has fallen, you will see on a lot of round bales beside the highway big signs and little signs that say: Kill Bill 46. My first question to the hon. member would be: in light of his comments does he agree or disagree that the sign that reads "Kill Bill 46" is valid, or is it just some sort of political prank?

Mr. Backs: The question doesn't pertain to, actually, this particular amendment, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I'm sure he has some strong views on this particular matter, but the fact of the matter is that those farmers, those people in rural Alberta will not have the opportunity to hear any debate, any amendments, any improvements to this bill if this amendment was to go through. If this amendment goes through, the debate will be ended here and now. It will be hoisted for six months, and that will have the effect of killing debate on this bill. The Official Opposition has effectively moved a motion to kill debate. What is going on?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I'd just like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, then: if this bill in another I don't know how many minutes is done, do you think that that hasn't moved the bill forward and assisted the government in stuffing something down the throats of Alberta landowners? I don't understand, Mr. Speaker. This will give landowners an opportunity. If you could ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, if you would speak into your microphone, it would be easier to hear you from up here, instead of having your back to the microphone.

Mr. Hinman: I apologize. We get too emotional on this stuff when we're running out of time and the bill is going to be worse than killed. It's going to be shoved through. What are we going to do about it then? The question to the Member for Edmonton-Manning is: do you see it as a benefit that in 10 minutes Albertans are going to have this bill the way it is and that there are no more amendments that we can make and that I don't think the 24 cover it yet? What's your feeling on that, hon. member?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the concern of the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, and I'm sure that the member would like to speak a whole bunch more on this bill, a lot more. This amendment, in fact, will stop that. It will end the debate for six months and, in effect, kill debate on this bill. The Official Opposition and, I'm sure, the party that you lead and the constituents that you represent would not like to see this particular debate killed. This is what is happening with this amendment. It doesn't seem to have any consistency. It doesn't seem to make a whole bunch of sense with some of the earlier debates and the requests that were brought forward in order to extend debate. Again, I just am saying that I've urged the Assembly to defeat this in order to ensure that we have some further debate on this matter.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Lund: I would like to ask the hon. member a question.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 37, as agreed to on December 3, 2007, I must put the following two questions, first on the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:08 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Cheffins	MacDonald	Miller, R.
Elsalhy	Martin	Pastoor
Hinman	Miller, B.	Tougas

Against the motion:

Ady	Johnston	Oberg
Amery	Knight	Pham
Backs	Liepert	Prins
Cao	Lindsay	Renner
Cenaiko	Lougheed	Rodney
Danyluk	Lukaszuk	Shariff
DeLong	Lund	Snelgrove
Forsyth	Magnus	Stevens
Goudreau	McFarland	Tarchuk
Jablonski	Melchin	VanderBurg
Johnson	Mitzel	Webber

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 33
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

9:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I must now put the other question pursuant to Government Motion 37 as agreed to on December 3, 2007, on second reading of Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:21 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Knight	Pham
Amery	Liepert	Prins
Boutilier	Lindsay	Renner
Cao	Lougheed	Rodney
Cenaiko	Lukaszuk	Shariff

DeLong	Magnus	Snelgrove
Forsyth	McFarland	Stevens
Goudreau	Melchin	Tarchuk
Jablonski	Mitzel	VanderBurg
Johnson	Oberg	Webber
Johnston	Ouellette	

Against the motion:

Cheffins	MacDonald	Miller, R.
Elsalhy	Martin	Pastoor
Hinman	Miller, B.	Tougas

Totals:	For – 32	Against – 9
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[Motion carried; Bill 46 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 46 Alberta Utilities Commission Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to stand in Committee of the Whole and speak to Bill 46, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. I'd like to note that the Minister of Energy tabled amendments in the Legislature on November 27. The package of amendments demonstrates that this government is listening to the concerns of Albertans. I'd like to move that the amendments identified as A through X be treated as a package before the committee. Mr. Chair, I believe you have copies of it as well.

The Deputy Chair: Pages, please distribute them to members that are in the Assembly first and then the empty chairs.

Hon. members, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1. However, is there an agreement on whether we'll have one vote, or will it be separated?

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Yes. On behalf of the opposition?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Is there an agreement?

Mr. MacDonald: No, there's not. I would really like to see each one of these amendments dealt with separately, the ones that are alphabetically listed, as it has been presented to me, A through X.

The Deputy Chair: Very well. Thank you.

Hon. members, we shall refer to this as amendment A1, but when it comes to voting, we shall vote on every section individually.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. I'd like to move that the

amendments identified as A through X be treated as a package for the committee and one vote, sir. The majority of the amendments are housekeeping in nature; they address the need for consistency in language and intent between this bill and existing energy regulation legislation.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you know, we are in a committee stage, where we technically go line by line. Unless there's an agreement between both sides of the House, the Chair is obliged to have a vote individually on separate sections.

Hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste-Anne, you may proceed.

Mr. VanderBurg: The majority of these amendments are housekeeping in nature. They address the need for consistency in language and intent between this bill and the existing energy regulation legislation, such as the Gas Utilities Act and the Electric Utilities Act. This is an intricate bill. Because it works together with other legislation, it's important to consider it in its entirety, not by individual clauses and certainly not out of context, as some have chosen to do. I ask that the amendments be considered in the same manner, in their entirety. Since they were tabled in the House a week ago, I trust that others have had the opportunity to review them in detail so that they may be considered as a package.

I spoke to this bill in second reading. I want to confirm my full support for the legislation. During my time today I'd like to highlight some of the key amendments government has proposed. As we all know, Mr. Chair, the Minister of Energy tabled the government's amendments to Bill 46 last week during question period. Listening to Albertans and hearing what they have to say is an integral part of the legislative process. We listened to landowners. We heard from Albertans, and we responded with changes.

Key amendments will answer Albertans' concerns about landowner participation in utility hearings and allow third parties to apply for funding when they intervene. To be clear, Bill 46 hearings must be held on all infrastructure applications where the rights of an individual may be directly or adversely affected. All interested parties will have the right to be notified of the facts, to participate in the hearing if they wish, to be represented by counsel if they choose, and to appeal questions of law or jurisdictions to the court.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to go through some of the key amendments during my time this evening. The way it was originally proposed, the AUC would make a decision without holding a hearing if it appears that no person will be directly or adversely affected in a material way by that decision. We have responded to the landowners' concerns. Section 9(3)(b), which uses the phrase "in a material way," has been removed. The intent of this section was to improve the regulatory process for infrastructure applications that have had minimal or no impact on people. Clearly, I'm not referring to major transmission infrastructure projects, that would impact Albertans. However, by removing this section, stakeholders can be confident that they'll be able to make their case to the regulator if they believe that they are directly or adversely affected.

This amendment ensures that those who are directly and adversely affected will be able to express their concerns to the regulator as part of the hearing process. In addition, section 9 goes on to state that the AUC shall provide the opportunity for parties to receive notice and the opportunity to learn all the facts about the application – that refers to section 9(2)(a) and (b), Mr. Chair – and that a public hearing be held if any person's rights may be directly or adversely affected by an AUC decision. That's section 9(2)(c).

9:40

I also want to comment about 9(4). The section reads:

Where a person is entitled to make representations to the Commission, the Commission is not required by subsection (2) to afford an opportunity to a person to make oral representations, or to be represented by counsel, if the Commission affords the person an adequate opportunity to make representations in writing.

Now, some parties have expressed concern over this point. They are concerned that landowners would not be able to present their views unless it was given by oral presentation. Section 9(4) of Bill 46 does give the AUC the ability to require testimony in written rather than oral format. This may be appropriate in certain circumstances, as in highly technical matters such as the determination of gas cost ratios. The current regulator has used the written format for hearings previously, and it has been successful. Some say this will be used to limit landowners' participation. Mr. Chairman, this is not the case. Keep in mind that this provision exists today – this is not a change from routine powers granted under the existing legislation – and that is section 40 of the PUB act.

In Bill 46 the commission has the authority under sections 91(1)(e) to make rules of practice governing hearings. The AUC will make rules surrounding hearings and proceedings, and rules regarding oral hearings will be developed in a transparent process with public input. As with any legislation it must be looked at in its entirety. Each section builds on the next, creating a clear set of rules. A clear set of rules.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to talk about intervenor funding. Before the amendments were introduced, the AUC act stated that the intervenor funding for participation in the AUC hearings or in other proceedings would be reserved for local intervenors; in other words, directly or adversely affected landowners. Other intervenors would have the ability to participate but would have responsibility for their own costs. Other intervenors would have been able to participate but would have been responsible for their own costs. I wanted to repeat that because there are some cloudy issues around that clause.

Again, this is a case where Albertans have expressed their concern and we have responded. Section 21 is being amended to allow the Alberta utilities commission the discretion to provide funding to a local intervenor or other intervenors in any hearing or other proceeding, just as the EUB does today. This allows the AUC the ability to provide any intervenor with funding to ensure that the public interest is considered in the AUC decisions. The right and opportunity for parties to intervene in proceedings has not been restricted in any way. In fact, this amendment to section 21 gives the AUC the discretion to provide funding to any third-party intervenors for participation in any hearings or proceedings.

Mr. Chairman, the Utilities Consumer Advocate, part 5. There were many concerns raised about Bill 46 establishing the UCA as part of the Alberta utilities commission and setting out its responsibilities. In response, the amendments we have introduced will remove the section of the act relating to the Utilities Consumer Advocate. The UCA will remain within Service Alberta, separate from the Alberta utilities commission and will continue to effectively represent Albertans at rate hearings. Independent consumer groups will continue to participate at rate hearings and can apply for funding to help cover their costs, just as they do today.

I would like to say that a majority of consumer groups, five of seven, have been part of a stakeholder consultation over the past few months and should be commended for providing their members and Albertans with excellent representation. Albertans can be confident that the Utilities Consumer Advocate will continue to represent the interests of electricity and natural gas small consumers. That's residential and small businesses and agriculture in Alberta. The UCA team works diligently to ensure that small consumers have the information and representation they need to assist them to make

informed choices in Alberta's restructured electricity and natural gas markets.

Well, Mr. Chairman, there have been a handful of amendments proposed by the Official Opposition, specifically from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. It appears that these amendments are relating to sections 8 and 9 and are designed to offer protection to stakeholders that have already been provided in this bill, so his work is done for him.

The sections in Bill 46 have been developed as a cohesive unit and the support for the commission in its present and future roles. Bill 46 is designed to ensure that Albertans have an effective and efficient regulator that will listen and respond to the concerns raised by Albertans who choose to participate in the regulatory process.

There were concerns raised by the Pembina Institute and other organizations that I'd like to talk to as well. Some other concerns raised during the recent weeks are not addressed in the amendments because they can be explained by considering the legislation in its entirety. For example, concerns have been raised about section 24(1), which gives the commission the authority to make orders without giving notice on matters that it considers to be urgent. Again, this is in no way intended to address major infrastructure projects. Rather, this is about responding to emergency situations such as when a power line comes down and it's minus 30 or if a generator comes off line unexpectedly. I'm sure my constituents and yours, Mr. Chairman, would be pleased to know that we have provisions to respond to emergency situations and keep the power on for them. I'm sure that's important for the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar as well. Plus, it's worth noting that this provision is not new as similar provisions exist in the PUB Act.

I've also heard concerns about section 14(3) and, because it is retroactive, claims that this will remove the right of Albertans to contest whether transmission line hearings are actually needed. Mr. Chairman, nothing could be further from the truth. Simply put, need must be considered at one point during the regulatory process. Plus, this change clears up an omission in the EU Act which leaves open the idea that need must be considered twice during the regulatory process. Obviously, a project is either needed or it's not. Looking at need twice is not an effective use of the regulator's time and in no way better addresses the interests of Albertans.

The intent of Bill 46, Mr. Chairman, is very clear, and I'd like to make note. We know that Bill 46 will separate the Energy and Utilities Board into two separate regulatory bodies, the Energy Resources Conservation Board and the Alberta utilities commission. This reorganization into two boards with clear mandates, improved management, and fresh leadership will help manage growth pressures brought on by increased oil and gas activity and demand for electricity-related infrastructures.

There has been almost unanimous support for this reorganization and restructuring from the public, consumer groups, and even the opposition, and consideration of the needs of an effective regulatory system for Albertans and the energy sector is a vital part of it. The energy sector accounts for tens of billions of dollars of economic activity, employs hundreds of thousands of Albertans, and provides economic benefit across the country, and none of it works without electricity.

Alberta's economy is strong, and Bill 46 is a proactive move to help the regulatory system respond to an increased workload brought on by growth pressures. The current regulatory system is strained under an ever-increasing workload. When I say increased workload, I'm referring to a 300 per cent jump in the number of applications before the EUB each year. Yes, it's 300 per cent, colleagues. In 1995-96 the EUB dealt with fewer than 19,000 applications, but in '06 the EUB had over 60,000.

Mr. Cenaiko: Sixty thousand?

Mr. VanderBurg: The Member for Calgary-Buffalo said: 60,000. Yes, it was 60,000. Keep in mind, though, that there were only about 20 hearings, which shows that nearly all of the applications before the EUB have no direct impact on Albertans. Obviously, with 60,000 applications it's not reasonable or cost-effective to hold a hearing in every case.

While this demand is remarkable and it's a testament to Alberta's prosperity, it also made the restructuring of the regulatory process for energy-related development very necessary. We have listened to Albertans. Through this legislation and the amendments we've introduced, Alberta landowners will have their say on proposed developments such as new electricity transmission lines. Under these amendments all intervenors will be eligible to apply for funding in any regulatory hearing or proceeding, just as they do today.

9:50

Landowners will be heard when there are developments that affect them. The Utilities Consumer Advocate will remain independent and speak up to represent consumers' interests. Under Bill 46 a wider range of factors must be considered when determining whether a proposed development is in the public interest. Section 17 explicitly requires the AUC to consider whether a proposed development is in the public interest and to take into account its social, economic, and environmental effects. Bill 46 will provide the regulatory process that citizens have confidence in.

The system must preserve the rights of affected individuals and third-party intervenors while addressing the interest of all Albertans in a reliable electrical system and responding to energy development. This is exactly what Bill 46 will do.

I want to thank the Minister of Energy. I know it's been a difficult time moving this bill through. Albertans have been concerned. There have been meetings around Alberta. I think I have to say, Mr. Minister, that you've responded well. This is a great package of amendments. I see that even the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar thinks so, too, and I thank him for that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. As much as I admire the speaking skills of the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, I certainly can't agree with his last statement. There are some improvements in these 24 amendments. Certainly, there are. But there are so many deficiencies in this that one could not feel comfortable that we would be doing Albertans a service by endorsing either these amendments or this bill.

First off, I have to express my disappointment, Mr. Chairman, that we didn't adopt either the New Democrats' or the Official Opposition's motion to refer this to a series of public consultations. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne seems to think that these amendments prove that this government is still listening, but I would have to say that they are still not listening to Albertans. To think that this bill is a reflection of the government: well, I could certainly agree with that because this government is operating without a plan. To introduce this bill in the middle of June and then see these amendments – major amendments, minor amendments, 24 in total – is certainly an indication that this is a government that is still operating with no plan. Again, it confirms that they're still not listening to Albertans.

Now, in the time that I had, I listened quite keenly to the hon. member trying to sell not so much this Assembly but concerned

Albertans that the first amendment, amendment A – and that is the removal of section 9(3)(b) and changing it – is suitable. It may be, but I would like a further explanation. You know, with the three hours that we have to debate this legislation, three hours is certainly inadequate.

How does the hon. member explain section 91 of this bill? Section 91 is in part 9, Mr. Chairman. Section 91(1)(g) is amended as well. This would be amendment A. Amendment A is also tied into amendment K. Currently section 91 provides the Alberta utilities commission the authority to make rules respecting the requirements that must be met by an applicant to avoid a hearing. Section K: I guess we could call it a reference amendment. It may be considered by the hon. member and his colleagues to be a minor amendment, a minor amendment to reflect that part of section 9 that has been deleted. This is the part that allowed the Alberta utilities commission to make a decision without holding a hearing if no person is directly and adversely affected in a material way.

But we look at section 91(1)(g): “The requirements that must be met by an applicant to satisfy the Commission under section 9(3)(c)” – that will now read 9(3)(b) – “that a hearing is not necessary.” This entire section deals with the commission being able to make rules governing any matter or person within its jurisdiction. Now, can we rely on or can we trust in this government? This is the same government that did nothing when the spies were hired. You know, I’m sorry. Albertans have every right to be quite skeptical. Trust is in the trench. The reason why trust is in the trench is because the last energy regulatory body, the one that’s still currently in existence, decided: “Well, we want to ram some things through. Let’s hire some private eyes. Let’s get them to do certain things which are despicable, and here we go.” So we have a new commission, this newly created commission, and the Minister of Energy should go back to looking for his regulations there and table them before we get too much further into this debate and give us an opportunity to have a look at them.

Mr. Chairman, regarding the commission, this commission in this section is given the authority to make its own rules. We go down a little further in this section. None of this has been amended yet. We have time to do our amendment, certainly. I would like to point out to all hon. members – and this is sub (5) in section 91 – that “the Regulations Act does not apply to Commission rules.” So when this commission makes rules that may or may not fit into the new section 9(3)(b), who’s to know? It won’t be printed in the *Alberta Gazette*, that I’m aware of. Why are we doing this?

The Regulations Act does not apply to this commission and its rules. If any of the hon. members would like to go to the cupboard down here and get the Regulations Act and have a look for themselves – they’re going to make the rules. People like Joe Anglin, the Alberta Beef Producers, any other group will have no way of knowing what the commission’s rules are. The first portion of this amendment may be suitable, but certainly whenever you read section 91, the commission is still going to be able to do what it wants, when it wants regardless. This is worth noting, Mr. Chairman.

Now, certainly, amendment B, which replaces the phrase “gas transmission pipeline” with “gas utility pipeline,” is considered a minor amendment. This amendment is being made so that there’s a consistency with the definition in the Gas Utilities Act. Could the hon. member or any of his colleagues across the way please tell me what the difference is between the definition of a gas transmission pipeline and that of a gas utility pipeline before we go any further in this debate?

10:00

Now, amendment C. Here we’re going to allow the utilities

commission to provide any intervenor with funding in respect of hearings or other proceedings, to ensure that the public interest is considered in utility commission decisions. All along – and this is section 21, intervenor funding – we were told initially by this government: “Oh, don’t worry about this. This is a myth.” And it’s not. It’s not. I would urge all hon. colleagues of this House to please read this amendment C very, very carefully because we can see that the commission may make rules respecting the payment of cost to an intervenor other than a local intervenor referred to in section 22.

Again, they have the discretion. I could live with this if “may” was made into “shall.” There are two words in the drafting of legislation that can completely change something, and those two words, Mr. Chairman are “may” and “shall.” Again, this is a commission that has the discretion. The last energy regulatory body had the discretion to do: guess what? Spy on innocent, unsuspecting landowners who wanted to participate in a public hearing. So these discretionary powers have been abused, to say the least.

For this government to come at this time with this amendment, quite frankly, I’m very disappointed. Rural Albertans are disappointed. Urban consumers of energy are disappointed. Hon. Minister of Energy, they’re very disappointed in this bill. You can get all the congratulations that you want from the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, but I’m sorry, this bill should have been removed from the floor of this Assembly. I believe the hon. Minister of Energy knows that deep down, that it should have been removed, but it wasn’t.

Mr. Chairman, with amendment D we’re looking at the question of the gas transmission pipeline and the gas utility pipeline. I won’t spend any more time on that because we’ve already had a little discussion on that one.

Part 5 must be a major disappointment for this government, to see that whole office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate deleted. I don’t know what sort of money was promised any of the people that were recruited. Surely the hon. Minister of Service Alberta, – whenever they get to his department, if this amendment becomes part of the bill and this bill becomes law, I’m confident that he’ll be going over their contracts with a fine-tooth comb, making sure that they’re not getting paid an extravagant amount. I’m sure he’s going to have a look to make sure that none of the people that are put in this department are just simple patronage appointments, that they’re hardworking Albertans.

When we look at that amendment where we delete part 5 – and that’s amendment E – we have to go on a little further because we have to look at the amendments that are included in the Government Organization Act, the ones that clarify that the Utilities Consumer Advocate will be part of a government department. Now, that would be amendment S. I was going to say S is for Service Alberta. I was going to say the minister in charge of Service Alberta, but that would be violating one of the laws of this Assembly, so I can’t say that.

This is listed as sort of a consequential amendment to the Government Organization Act, and it is supposedly necessary, again, to clarify that this advocate will be part of the government department. It sets out the responsibilities at a high level and provides cabinet regulation – here we go again; the ability to make regulations – with respect to the Utilities Consumer Advocate. Now, when we look closely at this, Mr. Chairman, we will again see the responsibilities of this UCA, Utilities Consumer Advocate, and we see how narrow the responsibilities have become. We can see from the original act that, again, water was one of the responsibilities, the purchase of electric energy, natural gas, and water.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation is looking at me. I know he gets frustrated at the end of every month when he

pays his high power bill because of electricity deregulation. I know he's frustrated with his natural gas bill. And he's just looking at me, knowing fully well that his water bill is the next thing that's going to be putting a big dent in his pocketbook. He just has that look.

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, water has been removed now from the responsibilities in this amendment S. But in the regulations – and I'm going to read this.

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations

- (a) adding to, clarifying, limiting or restricting any of the responsibilities of the Office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate or regulating how they are to be carried out;
- (b) respecting any other matter necessary to carry out the intent of this Schedule.

So here we go. You're going to hide the water bill for a little while. You're going to hope that this goes away. You're going to hope that no one remembers this whenever we have an election, regardless of when that date may be. People are not going to forget, Mr. Chairman. People certainly are not going to forget.

So we go from all this detail that's listed in part 5. We know that Mr. Bronconnier, His Worship the mayor of Calgary, has a lot of issues – and my hon. colleague from Calgary-Elbow has been on top of that – with how this Utilities Consumer Advocate is going to work.

An Hon. Member: Doesn't he own the power company?

Mr. MacDonald: He certainly does own the power company, yes.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, through the chair, please.

Mr. MacDonald: He's standing up for his consumers, and you are not, hon. member from this government. One-third of the energy consumers in this province reside in that gentleman's city, and when you drafted this bill, you forgot that fact. You forgot that one-third of them are in the metro area of Edmonton. I'm sorry, I don't understand why there are such hostilities toward MOUs, municipally owned utilities, on that side of the House. I don't understand why you're so hostile. I think there's a lot of hostility, and the hostility is reflected in the drafting of this bill.

An Hon. Member: But you don't understand the difference between who's selling and who's buying.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, Mr. Chairman, the hon. gentleman is just trying to distract me again.

That is schedule S, and there are a lot of questions still around schedule S. This is not your innocent little housekeeping amendment. This is leading a government that has abused in the past its regulation-making ability through cabinet, and now you want more. Now you want more. Maybe I could accept this amendment if only the hon. Minister of Energy would table all those regulations and let us have a look at them. He must have a suitcase full, Mr. Chairman, of regulations. There are at least 32 different ways for regulations to be written. I can understand why this government didn't want any public consultation when you drafted this bill, but in the drafting of the regulations surely you would learn from your mistakes and circulate them with the public so that they could see first-hand what you're up to because this entire bill allows you to govern behind closed doors, in secret, through regulation. That would be amendment S at this time.

10:10

Now, we go on with the administrative penalties, and that certainly is interesting. There have been some administrative penalties imposed, and there have been some changes made which, I guess, I could live with. I have had questions, the administrative penalties, but certainly in the time that we had and with the closure motion hanging over us like some sort of democratic guillotine, I've got to keep my remarks focused so that we can cover as much of this as possible.

We look at amendment H. This is an amendment to section 79, and there have been a few changes to that, certainly, regarding an offence. When we look at this carefully, I'm not so sure about this amendment. Perhaps the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne or maybe the hon. Member for Stony Plain – he's the Solicitor General – could advise all members of the House and the general public why it was necessary to have amendment H at this time because, Mr. Chairman, the original bill provided the court of Alberta the ability to impose a fine of up to \$5 million per day, and now we're down to \$3 million.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move that we adjourn consideration of Bill 46 for this evening and that progress be reported on the bill when the committee rises.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 23

Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move a package of amendments that I believe are with the table officers.

The Deputy Chair: If you'd just hold for a minute, please.

Hon. minister, you may proceed, and we shall refer to these amendments as amendment A1.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. What you have before you is a package of amendments. The first amendment is to remove gift cards and retail credits from being covered by Bill 23. The last thing the government wants is to have an inventory of gift cards at their disposal, and indeed we will be looking at legislation and/or regulation in the future that would ban expiry dates on the gift cards. That's very consistent with what has been adopted in other provinces, and we're currently under consultation on that.

Secondly, the bill covers property worth \$100 or more. We are now proposing that that be changed to \$250 or more for intangible property and \$1,000 or more for tangible property. This is simply the logistics of an administrative cost, Mr. Chairman.

The next excludes from the bill a list of funds payable under various provincial pension legislation as well as the Legal Profession Act. Other legislation covers the specific schemes to deal with pension or trust funds so doesn't need to be included in this bill.

The next proposed amendment would allow holders of unclaimed funds to recover their out-of-pocket expenses for turning property over to the minister under Bill 23. The cost burden to comply with this legislation should be minimized to the holder.

Mr. Chair, the bill relieves holders from liability for complying with the act. Another proposed amendment would expand this relief to any changes in value of property after it has been turned over to the minister.

The next relates to vested land. It currently provides that the Department of Finance can transfer the administration of land to another government department after a certificate of title has been issued. What we are proposing, Mr. Chair, is that we can actually transfer this at any time that the land has been vested in the Crown because there are other departments that have better expertise than the Ministry of Finance for looking after that.

We're looking at separating the registry into a public registry and a repository of information, with only the information in the registry being public. This is for a little bit of clarification, and it ensures that it is consistent with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

The next is the disposition of the ultimate heir trust fund. Mr. Chair, what we've done here is simply take from regulation and put into legislation that the ultimate heir trust fund, which is currently a little over \$600,000, will be given to the four postsecondary universities. There have been other questions on the Ultimate Heir Act. This is something that was set up to receive monies as a result of there being no will from people. It's currently \$601,170.21 and will be transferred to the ultimate heir trust fund for universities.

Another question was about consultation. Mr. Chair, this has had extensive consultation, starting in 2005 for the first set. The second set was in 2006. It's been posted on the GOA website and, indeed, had the tremendous amount of roughly 20 written submissions for feedback.

Mr. Chair, these are some of the issues that are included in this bill, that are included in the amendment. It's a bill that will make life a lot easier for government. It's a fairly clear bill, and it's certainly laid out as such. I would move the set of amendments for Bill 23.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to the amendments as proposed by the hon. Minister of Finance. I just have to start by stating that while this bill is not the thickest that we're presented with in this Assembly in terms of its size, I found it a bit more technical than I am used to.

Having said that, I don't think we're opposed to the amendments, and I am actually speaking on behalf of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford, who looks after the Ministry of Finance as well as the Treasury Board, you know, for the Official Opposition. I know that he actually went through some discussions with some stakeholders that he identified, and they didn't really voice major objections or concerns with the bill initially and then now with the amendments.

The one area which I found very interesting, Mr. Chairman, is the part that talks about the Ultimate Heir Act. You know, I definitely had questions whether other jurisdictions had similar provisions to deal with unclaimed property, if other provinces, states, or even the federal government have legislation in place to resolve property issues in terms of estates or in terms of formerly owned corporations in the manner that we're doing here. You know, the fact that the government is going to give them something but then also stop something in the future, basically, were questions that I had.

10:20

Overall I don't think we are opposed. I would much rather see revenues or income earned from Albertans' unclaimed property or

estates go to scholarships, not to the general revenue, in part because I think we have a tendency in this province to lump everything together in the same pot. You know, this seems to be the preference of the government, where all the money generated from whichever revenue stream goes into one big container, and then it is split up and spent on the various programs and the various government projects and agencies and boards. In fact, I would like some of this money to be allocated separately, to be earmarked, to be targeted towards certain areas. For example, health care premiums should be spent on health promotion and disease prevention. In this area here the money that is generated should be allocated towards scholarships and making postsecondary more accessible.

Again, having said that, the stakeholders have expressed support for the ideas contained in these amendments, and as such, I will be voting in favour.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 23 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Carried.

Bill 53

Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise just to express concern about this process, this situation, I think. Of course, I'd like to support the need to improve teacher pension plans. Our teachers deserve the security of knowing their pension is secure. However, I just couldn't allow this bill to move forward without taking this opportunity to express concerns about this whole issue and how it could have come about. Being somewhat new to this whole process, it just does strike me as being something that bears consideration and, perhaps, looking into it a little bit deeper, seeing how it is that this situation has arisen and how similar situations could be avoided, I think, is my main concern.

I have many constituents who are teachers. I know them to be hard working and deserving of a good and fair pension plan. I, of course, am very supportive of that. I believe that some of them would also like me to take this time to express concerns about how this situation came about. But it's not just teachers that I've heard from. I believe that all Albertans are concerned that this situation arose and are looking for better ways to be able to do things in this province, to be more proactive with regard to governance to ensure that situations like this don't arise again.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm not going to go on very long, but I think it's important. We've had this discussion. Clearly, we had to deal with the teachers' unfunded liability, and we certainly support the government in doing that. But I think the point that we still don't know is the other shoe to drop. Now that we've accepted and have the debt – I think we can call it a debt now – of the teachers' unfunded liability, we still do not know when the government is going to deal with this and how the government is going to deal with this. I would have hoped that fairly soon after the announcement about taking over the unfunded liability, which I believe was the right thing to do, we should have some idea about how we are going to deal with that unfunded liability. I think we recognize now that we do have a debt, and if we let it go for a length of time, obviously it will cost more. I don't know if the figures are right, but down the way it could end up \$46 billion. I would hope that we'd be dealing with it faster than that.

I guess I would say to the Minister of Education here and to others that any influence we can have to get this into the financial plan and show us how and when we will be taking care of this – are we looking at it in a five-year period, a three-year period, or longer? I think Albertans deserve that explanation relatively quickly.

In saying that, Mr. Chairman, I certainly will support the bill at this stage. Thank you.

The Deputy Chairman: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I, too, have similar questions to those that have just been presented to the public record by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I know that the time or the method as to how this debt will be reduced by the government will determine whether it's a good or a bad deal for the taxpayers, the length of time that it's going to take. Certainly, if we stretch it out for decades, it will be in the billions and billions of dollars. My question is to the hon. Minister of Finance. [interjection] It's your money, yes. It's not the Minister of Education's money in the stability fund or the sustainability fund.

Mr. Martin: It's Albertans' money.

Mr. MacDonald: Absolutely, hon. member. It is the citizens of this province: it's their money in the safekeeping of the Minister of Finance.

The over \$7 billion that's in the stability fund or the sustainability fund, whatever you want to call it: will any of that be used to deal with this matter as has been articulated by the previous speaker?

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman, I know it's getting late, but the two members who just spoke are actually confusing the legislation here. This pertains strictly to the \$25 million that was budgeted last spring, and I have to remind both members that this deal is not completed until the 62 school boards and union locals sign contracts at the end of January. Once that occurs – I'm confident it will – we will then be required to bring legislation into the following session to deal with that particular agreement that we just arrived at. I don't want the two members to confuse what we're doing here tonight.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 53 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Carried.

Bill 54

County of Westlock Water Authorization Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to take a few moments to address some of the issues that were raised during second reading on this bill.

10:30

At the outset I'd like to acknowledge that, in fact, all of the speakers that spoke to this bill recognized the need for this bill, so the questions that were raised were ones of detail and interpretation and in some cases, really, issues that are much broader than this bill. I will be reasonably brief in addressing some of the issues.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View raised a number of questions, as did the Member for Edmonton-Calder, around the planning in place for this bill. As members are aware, the purpose of this bill is to provide water to the village of Clyde. There will be an Athabasca River basin watershed planning and advisory council that will be developed, and that will provide that overall plan that the region can deal with.

It was also asked: how do we get a better handle on primary water conservation and measures? The region's per capita water consumption is already below the national average. The average consumption rate is 220 to 314 litres per capita, and the national average is 450. Now, that being said, we will continue to work with the community to implement water conservation strategies and do whatever we can to assist them in reducing that per capita consumption even lower.

Calgary-Mountain View also asked: are there restrictions on the purpose for which the water is used in an interbasin transfer? The licence is for household use, garden watering, stock watering, and light commercial and industrial uses; for example, restaurants, service shops, and strip malls. Irrigation and oil field injection is not an acceptable use of water. The cost of the water, really, precludes most commercial and industrial use, the cost being the cost to deliver the water, not the water itself.

Calgary-Mountain View also asked what process Environment follows when addressing the question of interbasin transfer. The Water Act requires the approved consultation plan, public consultation, and environmental assessment. Open houses will be held. The applicant will describe the project, potential impacts and benefits, record and address concerns raised by the public.

Also, he asked if there was any kind of public consultation both in the receiving communities and the donor communities. He asked: do Albertans have a vehicle for having input into this decision-making process? Notice is in the newspapers, sent to every business and residence in Westlock, Vimy, and Clyde. Open houses in Westlock and Clyde were held and comments and concerns recorded

and addressed. There's also extensive information on Alberta Environment's website.

There was also a question inquiring what, if any, are made public with respect to environmental impact assessments. Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to tell you that Spencer Environmental Management Services have done an assessment of the hydrology and biotransfer issues to source and receiving water bodies as well as impacts to existing users. The results were made public and shared at the open houses. Micro-organisms are eliminated in water treatment plant prior to entering any pipeline.

The member also asked: on what criteria would we say it's either in the public interest in the long term, which we increasingly have to look at, or is not in the public interest in the long term? The regional water supply supports the Water for Life goals. It's a cost-effective way to provide safe drinking water, eliminate the need for smaller communities to build, maintain, and operate expensive facilities. Westlock residents understand the importance of safe, secure drinking water.

I think that pretty much summarizes questions that were asked by members during second reading, and I'm pleased at this point to move forward with further discussion on the bill. There are no amendments to present.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to comment on Bill 54, County of Westlock Water Authorization Act. This bill, as everyone knows, authorizes the transfer of treated municipal water between the Athabasca River basin and the North Saskatchewan River basin to a maximum yearly amount of 208.78 decametres. The treated water will be transferred through the existing water treatment facility in Westlock county. It'll be transferred approximately 20 kilometres to the village of Clyde. This is an interbasin transfer because the village of Clyde is in the North Saskatchewan River basin, and Westlock county is mostly in the Athabasca River basin. Even though the two areas are geographically very close, the boundaries of each basin actually go right between the two areas.

While we do not support interbasin transfers as a matter of principle, and I think that's also the position of the government in its official position, this transfer seems necessary due to a lack of quality groundwater that the village of Clyde has access to. The people in the area have been trying for years to find a solution to the fact that they have very poor quality of groundwater that supplies Clyde. Over a number of years the councils of Westlock and the village of Clyde tried to come up with some kind of solution using filters, water treatment systems, and so on, but nothing seems to really work very, very efficiently. So there is really a need to help this village.

In principle the use of interbasin transfers as a management tool, of course, is contrary to our position and also the government's Water for Life Strategy, and any need for interbasin transfers indicates, really, a failure of water management planning. The province's water strategy should be directed at eliminating the need for such transfers. However, this interbasin transfer appears to be necessary for two reasons. One, it's an interbasin transfer mainly because of geography, as Clyde and Westlock although very close happen to be in two different water basins, and second, this is not a failure of water management but rather the culmination of years of attempting to rectify a quality issue with their groundwater source. This solution was done over years with the co-operation of various councils in the area and as such should be supported.

The final consideration. The denial of this licence would be extremely devastating to the village of Clyde as they do require a

high-quality water supply. Therefore, we must bear in mind that even if we have problems with making an exception to the basic strategy of not allowing interbasin transfers, there seems to be a real legitimate need here, and it must be addressed.

You know, it's not surprising that hon. members would want to comment on wider issues concerning water because we realize that as Alberta grows and water demand rises, the evaluation process that the Environment minister will have to go through will become increasingly important.

We must note, as we're looking at this particular bill, that this is not the first interbasin transfer bill to come along. In fact, there have been three other interbasin transfers in the past number of years: Bill 33, the North Red Deer Water Authorization Act in 2002; then in 2005 the government passed Bill 11, the Stettler water authorization act; then, of course, last spring Bill 33, the Bashaw-Ferintosh water transfer act. So we're just wondering how many other kinds of acts we are going to have. We have this one, 54, and then we also have Bill 55 in a few minutes. How many more are we going to be facing in the future? The issue is going to be really, really quite severe in the future.

I am very much beholden to Dr. David Schindler. He's an international water expert. He has written extensively about water in the Canadian context and especially in western Canada. He says that, you know, Canadians are always told by politicians in the media that we have abundant supplies of fresh water from our lakes and rivers, but that is not true. Canada has 7 per cent of the world's land mass and produces 7 per cent of the world's terrestrial runoff. In other words, we have just an average supply of sustainable fresh water by global standards. Of course, we have basins which can catch rain, but that doesn't mean that we actually would do so because rain has to fall. Much of northern Canada, where fresh water is most abundant, actually receives less than 250 millimetres of precipitation per year. Many of the larger lakes would require 100 years or more to refill if we emptied them.

10:40

Now, the western prairie provinces face a tremendous challenge because we live in the driest part of southern Canada. In the rain shadow of the Rocky Mountains some parts receive an average of less than 350 millimetres of precipitation per year, less than average evaporation, and the only reason that agriculture and large cities like Calgary have been able to thrive is because their shortage of precipitation has been offset by the rivers and aquifers draining from the Rocky Mountains, where there is high precipitation and also melting glaciers.

But, Mr. Chairman, that is a real problem. As Dr. Schindler and others have pointed out, we've been dependent on the glaciers and the snowpacks, but for the past 30 years the snowpacks have been getting smaller and melting earlier, and the major glaciers of the eastern slopes have lost 25 to 37 per cent of their mass in the past century. Every time we go to see the Columbia Icefield, which is the origin of the Athabasca River, and we see how far the Athabasca Glacier has receded, we all remember that it was much bigger when we were smaller years ago. So there's a great worry, I think, for us in Alberta now as we face the future.

We're kind of on a collision course. Dr. Schindler says that it's a collision course between increasing human demand for water – and all of our villages and our cities desperately need water, and our population is increasing, is increasing more than any other part in Canada. So there's the increasing human demand for water; then there's the increasing scarcity of water due to climate warming. I haven't mentioned that, but that's certainly a big part of this whole issue. There's a big United Nations conference meeting in Bali as we speak to deal with climate change.

If on the prairie provinces the temperature goes up even two or three degrees, that's going to have a devastating effect. We've had a history of droughts in the last century, and now we're going to probably have more history of drought in the future. So you have a collision course between the increasing demand for water and the increasing scarcity of water due to climate warming. If we have one of the long droughts of past centuries, then that's a collision course, and we will learn first-hand what water scarcity is all about.

Now, of course, there's much we can do to alleviate the situation, and that's where the whole issue of management of watersheds comes in. Government policy is right; we have to be extremely careful about transferring water from one water basin into another. There should be better management of our watersheds of lakes and rivers. There are certainly a lot of things that people can do, and perhaps it's time to provide incentives for landowners to retain or restore wetlands and plant more trees along rivers so that our watersheds can be improved.

Anyway, it's not surprising that a bill like this, which deals with just the needs of a small village – we're really quite concerned that this village be able to have a good water source. At the same time, we realize the huge issue that the issue of water brings to Alberta.

Those are my comments, Mr. Chairman, and we would be prepared to support this bill, Bill 54.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 54 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Carried.

Bill 55

East Central Regional Water Authorization Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to address Bill 55 by saying that many of the questions that were asked by speakers addressing this bill at second reading were very similar to those that I've already addressed in my comments respecting Bill 54, so I'm not going to repeat myself on what the process is about public meetings and notifications and all of those types of issues. They all apply in the case of this act in the same way as they would in Bill 54.

In addition, I also had an opportunity to deal with a number of specific questions during the questions and comments section when I spoke during second reading. I don't know that there is a whole lot that needs to be said on this bill other than some specific reference to the fact that here we're talking about a transfer from the Red Deer River.

I think there were some comments that were raised with respect to the amount of water that's involved. I want to go on record as indicating that the South Saskatchewan River basin management plan will require a thorough review when the allocation in the river

subbasin reaches 550,000 cubic decametres. That is a significantly higher number than the amount that's being contemplated in this bill. However, it is something that we need to watch and will as we develop the management plans for this river, like any other river in the province.

The question that was asked by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View in this case: is it sustainable to continue to expand the system into east-central Alberta? I want to advise the House that the commission completed a feasibility study to support their grant application, and that study identified the debt load from their portion of capital costs and the expected operation and maintenance costs, which the commission accepted. The member also asked: what kind of growth is expected, and what kind of industry demands might there be? The proponents anticipate 2 per cent rural and 3 per cent urban growth within the region. So this is a very conservative plan that's in place.

Bill 55 will allow Alberta Environment to amend and issue licences to address the long- and short-term solutions required by towns and villages throughout this region. The water, again, will be for household use, garden watering, stock watering, and very light commercial and industrial use such as restaurants, service shops, and strip malls.

Apart from the fact that we're dealing with a different set of realities on the ground, the principle behind Bill 55 is exactly the same as the principle behind Bill 54. We have a regional water system that happens to be geographically located in an area that straddles two different water basins. It is necessary to have this dealt with by the Legislature. But as previous speakers have indicated, although it's contrary to the overall philosophy, the overall policy of government to have interbasin diversions, it is not unusual nor is it, I think, unreasonable that where geography dictates, where we've got treated municipal water that crosses between interbasin water bodies, this Legislature should give careful consideration.

I would suggest that this legislation requires the same kind of support as we had for Bill 54.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I won't go on long. I think what makes this one a little more problematic – and the minister alluded to it – is the scope here. I think this is what perhaps makes people uneasy and, I'm sure, the minister to some degree uneasy, too. Just in the spring we were dealing with Ferintosh, and I believe it was in 2005 that we were dealing with Stettler, and now we're expanding this by 8,000 decametres to 10,800 decametres, and nine communities are accessing this instead of two. So that's sort of a huge leap for interbasin water transfers.

10:50

Now, I think I heard the minister right in saying that he has some concerns about this, that they are going to be working on a water management plan. I think the minister can see, you know, why there is this concern when we in the spring dealt with the ad hoc in Ferintosh before that, and then all of a sudden it's nine. I think the feeling is: is this the thin edge of the sword? Are we going to keep coming back? Is it nine communities? The minister alluded to his feeling that this, perhaps, can handle the increase in terms of the population living in this area. I guess we'll have to see, but we need very quickly, I would think, a cumulative impact plan. If I heard the minister right, that's what they're going to start to look at in a more serious way in the South Saskatchewan basin, to see if this is sustainable or not. I think I heard him right, but this is coming fairly quickly.

You know, the 10-year time span for the project indicates that this water will be allocated for future community growth. Again, the minister said in his studies that they thought this was sustainable. I'm not sure how we know that. With the population increase, certainly, the major population increases have occurred in certain areas of the province, but all the province is growing considerably. People are moving away from the cities to get cheaper rent in the rural areas. I hope this is sustainable, and I hope it's not the first sort of bigger step towards more interbasin transfers. The minister says not. We'll have to at this stage take him at his word about it. I would hope that we're not going to have to come back to the Legislature to deal with, you know, Ferintosh in the spring and then nine more communities and then come back next spring, and there are a few more. Then we've got a bigger situation.

I think we have to watch this very, very carefully. Obviously, these communities need water, but there has to be an overall plan of how we're going to deal with that, with population and the rest of it. I look forward to the minister following this closely and take him at his word that they will be taking a good look at this and these basins and seeing that it is being done, that there will be a comprehensive water management plan, and that we're not going to have to deal with this every year in that 10-year span and take more and more water out. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora is correct: this is going to be a major issue for us in this province in the very near future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to just make a couple of very brief comments about Bill 55 and, I guess, Bill 54 as well. I want to thank the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler for bringing this bill forward. I was the one that proposed Bill 33 this spring, the Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act. Basically, when I went out to talk to these people, I asked them if there were any more needs in the area, and they assured me that there weren't. We passed the legislation, and soon after they asked for more water in this area. I suspected that this would probably happen anyways, and I'm very pleased that we're moving forward with this bill at this time.

Because this bill is going to repeal two acts, the Stettler Regional Water Authorization Act and the Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act, it actually covers quite a large area, so it probably will take care of the needs of these small communities for many, many years. It will take care of Stettler's needs as well as in my constituency Alix, Mirror, Bashaw, Ferintosh, New Norway, and Edberg. This is a fairly large area, and there's a bit of concern here about: how far is this going to go? Are we going to hear about this every year? Are we going to keep on bringing this up? I believe that once we have a regional system that covers a large area, we won't hear from these people for a long time because they'll be satisfied.

People are right about being concerned about groundwater, aquifer water. This is the kind of water that currently we're using in these small communities. Farmers and all people in rural Alberta use aquifer water. People are right to be concerned about this. What I can say to you today, Mr. Chairman, and to all members is that I was part of the water commission that was built through Lacombe, the one that went from Red Deer, Blackfalds, Lacombe, and Ponoka. I was one of the founding members of the original water commission when I was a reeve with the county of Lacombe. What we found when we actually turned that water system on and took the towns of

Blackfalds, Lacombe, and Ponoka off the aquifer system, the aquifers that they were using before that: the aquifers recovered very nicely. The water level in the aquifers in Lacombe rose by many, many feet as soon as the water was turned on from the water pipeline from Red Deer.

What that does is that it provides more water for the surrounding areas for the farmers and the rural residents, that completely depend on aquifers for all of their water. They have no choice. They don't have pipelined water to their places. What happens when you turn a pipeline on to these communities is that you save the water that's in the aquifers and preserve that water for the people that have no choice. That's the good news about regional water systems. As the minister has said, when economics and geography dictate, it makes a lot of sense to build regional water systems, whether it's interbasin transfer of treated water or not. We just want to do what makes sense and what's right for Albertans.

I would support this bill, and I'd encourage all members to support it as well. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to obviously express support for this bill. We need to. There are people who are in need of drinking water and water for other basic needs, so I think we all need to do that.

I'd like to begin by thanking the minister for trying to address concerns that have been raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I think this is a good day to be actually thinking about the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View and his concerns for people, so I'm glad that you brought those forward.

I know that we've all got concerns about management of water. I think that, once again, we have to be in support of this particular bill and this particular interbasin transfer, and I emphasize this one in particular. Again, people do need to come first, and basic needs of human beings have got to be a priority. But we do have concerns about major water diversion and storage projects because it can significantly compromise aquatic and other ecosystems, and we have to at the same time remind ourselves that people in the ecosystems don't exist separately. There's an interdependency that's there. At the same time, as I say, we do need to support Bill 55 here.

There's not a whole lot more that I'd like to say. I am a little bit curious about the issue that was raised by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. I don't know whether or not this is the place to have further discussion on the aquifers in general and the effects that interbasin transfers can have on aquifers and that whole interdependency of the water system. I think it does call into question the need for an inventory, and I think questions should be raised as to why there hasn't been a complete groundwater inventory done.

I am interested in learning more about whether or not these transfers allow for recovery of the aquifers. Also, I want to make sure that this isn't just sort of an opportunity, then, to be able to use the aquifers for other purposes, that that's really not what it is that we're attempting to do here. I'm not necessarily suggesting that would be the case – I do believe that this bill has been brought forward primarily to address the concerns of the people in the area – but it still, I think, bears consideration. I do have some concerns on that.

11:00

Just for the minister, as well. I think he mentioned the reasons for this bill going forward, that the water uses would be for individuals, and I think you mentioned also light industry. With the previous bill that we talked about, I think you specifically indicated in Bill 54 that

the water transfers weren't to be for consideration of utilization for agriculture and for mining. I'm just wondering whether or not we can get assurances to the same effect with this bill as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 55 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report Bills 23, 53, 54, 55, and progress on 46.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 53, Bill 54, Bill 55. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 23. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 46. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head:

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 48

Health Facilities Accountability Statutes

Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate November 29: Mr. Hancock]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 48, the Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. The objective, really, of this bill is to amend the original acts to clarify the lines of accountability between hospitals, health regions, and the minister. Bill 48 is the government's response to the confusion in the accountability that resulted in the failure when it didn't close St. Joe's sterilization unit and was initially ordered to do that.

I believe that there are various reasons that St. Joe's was closed, and I think some of them were due to the differences between and the infringements of the infection controls. Mainly, part of it was

the legislation and the arguments governing the operations between East Central health region and St. Joe's. So I guess, basically, the question at that point was: who's really in charge?

However, I don't think that that's the question today. I believe that this bill tends at this point to be a bit of an overreaction to the issue. I am in no way making light of the fact that there was a serious breach of infection control. I think that that is what every citizen considers as basic human care and that we just take for granted that we can trust our health care providers. One of the things that you trust them with is the fact that when you go to a hospital, you're not going to come out with a worse infection than what you went in with.

I really believe that part of this is an overreaction because infection control really is based on cleanliness. In the early '90s there were severe cuts, of course, in the health care regions. One of the first ones to be cut was the staffing for the cleaning of all of these, not just in the ORs but, certainly, throughout all the hospitals and anywhere that patients actually were. Unfortunately, what's happened at this point is that, yes, there has been money put towards this bill, and there's also been money put towards the studying of infection control, et cetera, but in the meantime that money has now stayed at a level, certainly, way above the people that are actually doing the work.

Where has this extra cleaning now been downloaded onto? It's been downloaded onto the front-line staff, the PCAs and often the LPNs, which means that the residents and the patients in these particular health facilities now have even less care than what they had before. I think it's very serious. I think it's something that has to be looked at by the government when they evaluate how those dollars that they've put towards this particular issue have actually been spent and what they are getting for their money. Are they really getting cleaner OR rooms? Are they really getting cleaner hospitals? I would have to see that on a piece of paper to actually believe it.

The guiding principles of the government's review of the health agreements and the legislation were sort of as follows. They strengthen the accountability for quality and infection control for regional health authorities and voluntary health providers. The process was not about threatening the existence of voluntary health providers or eroding their ability to be an independent and integrated part of the regional health care system. The voluntary health providers have added value to the health system for over a hundred years, and this process should support documenting the current value-added and look for ways to enhance the value-added and the strategic continuation into the future of their contributions.

Bill 48 really is not designed to clarify and enhance that joint accountability of the regional health authorities and the faith-based organizations but instead actually imposes rigidity and control of the faith-based organizations. It limits the ability to add value to the system and completely contravenes the second and third principles that I mentioned above, number two and number three, which were that they weren't threatening the actual existence of the voluntary health providers through the faith-based community. As usual, unfortunately, this is a government bill that was drafted without stakeholder consultation or input from the faith-based providers of health care. The legislation effectively cancels the master agreement and other agreements with the regional health authorities, which effectively served the province since 1994.

The recommendation from Alberta Health identifies one entity to have final authority for all matters related to the operation of the health care facilities in a regional health authority. I believe that that recommendation in itself probably makes a great deal of sense. You can't have many bosses when you need to enforce one particular set of standards. However, I would be upset if I saw that the faith-based

community was cut out of the operation or out of being able to give their contributions because of the one system.

I also believe that the minister in this particular opportunity has again granted himself too much unchecked authority. The health care system clearly doesn't have the appropriate checks and balances for identifying and monitoring problems. The province had an effective centralized monitoring and enforcement standards branch, but it was dismantled by the same government in the '90s. This appears to be an attempt to return to that but using the minister as the authority.

11:10

I am going to support this bill with reservations, and I believe that I have spelled out the reservations. But I think that paramount in this whole discussion is the fact that we simply must have standards for infection control in our hospitals and in our nursing home facilities, actually in any facility where we have vulnerable people visiting and living where infection can rapidly get out of control. Again, I would go back to my belief that if we increase our cleaning staff, we would cut down on our infection control. So I would be supporting this with reservations.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am going to support this bill. I think it was clear from what happened in Vegreville and Lloydminster that it was broken and needed to be fixed. The Health Quality Council said as much, and they've asked the minister to establish a plan. You know, generally it makes a lot of sense.

There are always misgivings about centralizing power in the minister's office. Obviously, with that old saying, "The buck stops somewhere," it ends up stopping with the minister. I think he has to have that authority through a contract, you know, working down the way through the regional authorities and the rest of it.

I think we learned that you need a bill like this, Mr. Speaker. The centralizing power in the minister's office: hopefully, the minister will recognize that there are limitations to that and operate the way he has to if there is a pandemic or some other emergency.

There was one question – I'm just trying to pull it together – that just came to the minister. I'll just put it on the record. At some point he may want to talk about it. It came from the physicians. Unlike Bill 41, where I think there was a bit of an overkill – and I've said that, and there are some amendments now, which makes it better. I'm not sure that they're totally satisfied.

There was a letter sent to the minister and the Member for Edmonton-Centre and myself as health critics. The physicians were asking some questions about Bill 48 specifically, specifically about – here it is – certain clauses of the bill. I don't know if the minister has had a chance to look at this letter yet. I'm sure he will take a look at it. It just came in from Darryl LaBuick. He wants to seek assurance that these proposed amendments are not intended to include physicians' offices, offices associated with primary care networks, other facilities owned, operated, or managed by physicians, or offices of physicians associated with alternate relationship plans. Now, I'll leave that.

This letter was sent. I just picked it up, I think, today. So if the minister would take a look at that before we come back to Committee of the Whole, it would be appreciated. They perceive no urgency to these amendments, and they ask that it not be proceeded with. I disagree. I think there is some urgency. If something hit again, we'd need to do this. But I wish that the minister, if he hasn't,

would take a look at that letter that just came in addressed to the three of us and respond and let us know what they're saying and specifically about that insurance that I mentioned.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Questions or comments? Seeing none.

Anyone else wish to participate in the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Health and Wellness Minister wish to close?

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a second time]

Bill 52

Corrections Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate November 28: Mr. Cenaiko]

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to close? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned the other day, the amendments to this act are really going to provide us with enhanced inmate disciplinary procedures, provide for safer correctional facilities for communities that have those facilities in their neighbourhoods, and as well, especially and most especially, support victims by providing greater access to information about offenders.

[Motion carried; Bill 52 read a second time]

Bill 49

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to provide additional information about the bill introduced on November 20, Bill 49, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007. One of the amendments stems from work done by Infrastructure and Transportation on Alberta's traffic safety plan. The traffic safety plan is aimed at reducing fatalities and injuries and making Alberta's roads safer for everyone.

Speeding through intersections: we all know that speed causes many collisions and that many collisions occur at intersections in Alberta. In fact, Mr. Speaker, over the past five years 138 people have been killed, and 35,080 have been injured in collisions at our urban intersections. Accordingly, a key amendment is related to reducing speeding through intersections. To explain, red-light cameras currently located in municipalities act as a deterrent to help reduce red-light infractions and collisions. It is proposed that the same cameras be used to identify vehicles that speed through intersections.

Mr. Speaker, we know that enforcement is a key component of traffic safety. Using intersection safety cameras to discourage speeding is a prudent way to increase safety for all drivers and passengers. In fact, this has been the case in the United Kingdom. Through a four-year evaluation of fixed camera sites the U.K. Department for Transport found that there was a 70 per cent reduction in the number of vehicles travelling above the speed limit. In the same four-year evaluation it was noted that there were 42 per

cent fewer collision fatalities and injuries and a 91 per cent reduction in the number of vehicles speeding excessively.

Mr. Speaker, another amendment under Bill 49 would put the focus of liability for collisions on people who have day-to-day control over driving their vehicles. At present others who retain title to a vehicle they lease or sell to someone on a conditional basis can be found vicariously liable for damages and collisions where an individual who leased or bought the vehicle got into a collision or allowed someone else to drive who was in a collision. It is proposed that a cap be placed on liability by the vehicle leasing and sale industry and on the liability of lenders who retain title to vehicles as collateral for loans. The provinces of Ontario and B.C. have a similar cap on liability in place.

Mr. Speaker, the final three amendments under Bill 49 are housekeeping items. One amendment is related to upholding the validity of Alberta's administrative licence suspensions of those providing a breath sample over .08, or 80 milligrams, per cent. The Alberta Transportation Safety Board is currently required to make a common-sense assumption that a driver's blood alcohol level at the time of driving is the same as when the breath sample is provided in an approved breathalyzer. Some people question whether this is a reasonable assumption. It is proposed the act be amended so that the administrative licence suspensions will be confirmed if evidence taken within three hours of driving indicates that a motorist was over the legal blood alcohol limit.

Under the Alberta Transportation Safety Board, Mr. Speaker, another amendment to the act involves streamlining the process for court review of decisions made by the Alberta Transportation Safety Board. In a nutshell, if there is a concern about a decision made by the board, the applicant can apply to the Court of Queen's Bench, not other levels of court. This amendment also reaffirms the Alberta government's original intention to give significance to decisions by the Transportation Safety Board.

11:20

Mr. Speaker, the final amendment under Bill 49 addresses certificates of registration for certain types of trailers drawn by commercial vehicles. Specifically, the amendment involves trailers classified as class 4 commercial vehicles. For this kind of trailer the registration doesn't have to be renewed annually. Unlike other classes of trailers class 4 trailers are commonly pulled by a number of different drivers working for various commercial carriers. The registration is often kept in a pouch on the side of the trailer. That being the case, we propose that it would be sufficient for the carrier to attach a photocopy of the registration to the trailer as an option to the original registration. This will save the industry time and money.

Mr. Speaker, traffic safety is important to everyone, and traffic safety is an important part of our government's plan to secure Alberta's future. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this Bill 49, Traffic Safety Amendment Act. I recognize that this bill I believe is brought forward, at least to some extent, in the spirit of trying to make Albertans safer. We all have concerns with regard to speeding and to safety around traffic lights. I still have some concerns about just how it is that this bill will be implemented. I'm not sure whether or not it's trying to catch people who are speeding or going through red lights or both or which combination of that we're looking at. If it's to try to catch people who are speeding to try to make it through a light, obviously we've got concerns about that. That can be a danger to the public, and we should all be concerned about that.

But at the same time I'm not sure whether or not this bill shouldn't be debated further in terms of larger questions in terms of specific or general deterrence. I think that there are some questions also in terms of where it is that these measures would be deployed. Again, I believe that I and my constituents would like to see these measures deployed in areas where there's the greatest concern for public safety. I think that there is the issue of general or specific deterrence, and if in fact the measures are going to have the greatest impact in terms of deterring behaviours that are not safe in specific areas, then we'd like to see the resources deployed in those areas.

I think there's also a concern about where it is that the revenue from these measures will go. Would they be designated to a particular fund? Again, I think that that speaks to the purpose and the principle of this bill in terms of if this bill is not just an attempt to have more revenue in the coffers of the government but in fact if it's something to address safety issues of the public. I think designate the dollars to a particular fund which might go to victims or, even better perhaps, to driver education because prevention should be the key and it should be what is the most important thing that we're trying to address here, which is to improve safety and reduce the number of accidents, accidents that truly can be devastating for individuals and families.

Perhaps dollars could also go towards more policing. I think the general public would like to see more police involved in traffic issues as well. Often there's an education component that could come into that as well.

Finally, I think there are some concerns as to just how this would go about. Would there be private companies involved in this process? I'd like to see further discussion on that, and I look forward to further discussion, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to mainly comment about the speed-on-green cameras. I realize there are other aspects to the bill, some changes regarding drunk drivers, and so forth, but I want to talk about the references to the red-light traffic enforcement device.

Mr. Speaker, I know the government is saying that this is a safety issue, and perhaps it is, but I look at the statistics. I know the member, I think, said that there were statistics from Great Britain that he was quoting, but I have one closer to home. Statistics do not clearly indicate whether radar cameras, the ones we have now, change driver behaviour. A study conducted for the Edmonton Police Commission in September 2006 concluded that the statistics gathered by the city's photoradar program were inconclusive. This study reviewed the literature on photoradar around the world and found that red-light cameras reduced the number of red-light violations, only slightly reduced the total number of collisions, but lead to more significant reduction. I think those are the studies that you were talking to, but it didn't seem to make much impact here.

Now, we know it's obviously a cheaper way to catch traffic violations than stationing police officers to hand out tickets. The cameras also make it easy for municipalities to collect significant amounts of revenue, but whether they lead to improvement in driver behaviour, frankly, I think is unknown because there are no demerit points for radar tickets. You know, my leader called it robocops, but I'm not sure that this is going to work in the long run. I would rather save the money. I think we're in desperate need of more police.

And I think that when you hand out demerits, with the driver education that I was talking about – I used to work in that area in

Calgary at one time, working with people that were almost on the verge of losing their licence, in counselling programs. I'd like to think that we had an impact. Hopefully we did. But I'm not sure that this is going to lead to what the member wants it to do because, really, the evidence is inconclusive. I'd rather see, frankly, more police out there writing tickets, adding up the demerit points, you know, and then the driver education working there. I think that's the way to have impact over the longer run.

This will collect some money for the municipalities. I don't think that's the purpose of the bill, but other than that, I'm not sure that this is going to work because the evidence, as I say, is inconclusive. Again, I really stress – really stress – that we need more policemen out there. You know, our national average is way down in this province, and the cities are growing, and the police forces aren't keeping up. I know I'm probably talking to the converted there, but I'd much rather see that than these sorts of quick fixes because I'm not sure they're going to have much impact in the long run.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there others that wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to participate in debate on Bill 49, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007, which is before the House. I'm of two minds. I definitely support measures and tools which are meant to increase safety on our roads, to minimize accidents, to minimize injury and death, and I know that the government is actually looking at this as a measure to maybe improve safety or to discourage speeding, and so on. The other part of me is against tools that are meant to be money-generating mechanisms or cash cows.

11:30

Many, many people in this province have expressed concerns with photoradar, for example. Some people approached the issue from the angle that the money that is generated through photoradar is not necessarily spent on drivers' education or on road safety programs, and so on, that it's basically a way to supplement or to bring up the funding to certain local police services because the government underfunds police services in this province. So what these agencies have to do is to look for alternate means to raise that kind of revenue, and they do it through photoradar. People have complained that this money doesn't get put back into driver education or road safety programs, and so on, and that in fact photoradar penalizes the vehicle owner. It doesn't really penalize the person who was driving, who is the person to blame and should be the person really held accountable.

That is why I am hesitant to support Bill 49. What it's trying to do is to implement intersection safety devices, or speed-on-green devices, to basically catch people who are speeding in an intersection. We do have red-light cameras already, which catch people who go through a red light, and we catch these people typically from behind. We take that picture from behind, so we get the licence plate of the vehicle, but we don't know who's driving. Sometimes you do, but most of the time you don't. I would much rather see, you know, hopefully in the not-so-distant future, a way for us to actually catch the driver, identify the driver, issue demerits so that it acts now as a deterrent. People have to learn. To make a suggestion that somebody pays the fine and learns a lesson from just paying the fine I think is looking at maybe half the picture. Drivers have to be really held accountable. They have to be questioned, and they have to be pressured into behaving, into adhering to the code.

Driving is a privilege. Basically, we don't want to abuse that privilege. It's a privilege that's given to them pursuant to some basic driver education at the beginning, then owning a vehicle or having access to a vehicle, and then having driver's insurance, and that's it.

Many people go through red lights. Many people speed in intersections. We need to deal with them, yes. But I don't think we should be looking at this as just another cash cow to generate revenue.

Now, when people don't speed, they don't get caught. When people don't break the law, they don't get fined. That makes sense. What we're trying to say here is that this bill may give the impression that this government is serious about safety on Alberta's roads. Like I say, I'm not necessarily opposed to any measure that would improve that safety record, but this one here doesn't do it. This particular bill does not achieve this.

Legislation is, you know, one minor step in maybe dealing with this. I don't mind the fact that it streamlines the judicial review for Alberta Transportation Safety Board decisions. That's probably a good decision. It increases the amount of time during which blood and alcohol levels can be measured. Again, that is probably not a bad idea.

We also have to look at the technology that is being used. I recently toured some areas of the province and spoke to many people from the law enforcement community. It was actually brought up multiple times that maybe the technology we're using is not all-encompassing, and maybe we need to be upgrading and updating our technology in terms of the breathalyzer. Also, it was suggested to me by some sheriffs in southern Alberta that maybe we should be looking at other jurisdictions and incorporating drug testing, not just alcohol.

There are technologies right now, Mr. Speaker, that vary from a device that measures for seven well-known drugs that are abused by drivers that can be identified; then, there are other technologies that can identify up to 11. Now, whether you start with 7, whether you do the full thing and do 11 of them, it doesn't matter. You have to start somewhere. Recreational drugs, you know, while driving can cause the same level of impairment, if not more. Then sometimes they're actually combined with alcohol, so you get a drug and then you get alcohol on top, and it's a double impairment. So I think we should be looking at modernizing what type of technology we're using.

Another idea in terms of cameras was also brought up when we were touring southern Alberta. In fact, a place like British Columbia has those cameras that can identify a vehicle and instantaneously determine if that particular driver or that vehicle owner, you know, has an outstanding warrant, is wanted for a crime, or even as simple as being wanted for family maintenance arrears. If somebody owes money to their former spouse or to their kids, well, that camera can identify that person right there. There is a bulletin that is issued automatically, and then at the next stop or the next stretch of road somebody's waiting for them with open arms.

Are these improvements that I would like to see? Yes, absolutely. If you ask me how much money a device like this costs, it only costs about a hundred thousand. I would argue that it's money well spent because, you know, that is definitely something that would help with our outstanding warrants. I know the Solicitor General is moving in that direction now with his warrant apprehension crew, and that's one tool that might be made available to them.

Again, just to emphasize my point, sometimes drug impairment can do more damage compared to alcohol impairment, and sometimes the two substances are combined.

So some areas of this act are favourable, and I don't necessarily

disagree. I'm actually going to, you know, reserve my judgment until, maybe, we're in committee and discussing the clauses of this bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Amend this bill?

Mr. Elsalhy: I wasn't intending on amending it, but actually I might, given the encouragement from my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Just the fact that it's potentially going to be used as a revenue-generating cash cow is objectionable. I would really like drivers to be identified. Maybe now, as the province is considering redesigning the licence plate, there could be the discussion that licence plates would now be put on the front of the vehicle as well, and then we take a picture of the driver. It wouldn't be a huge cost, and it wouldn't be really that difficult in terms of getting some crews from Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation, for example, to retrofit these cameras. Instead of pointing them, you know, looking at the intersection from behind, maybe get them to look at the intersection from the front and catch people in the act and identify those drivers. The financial deterrent in the fines I don't think is adequate, and I don't think it's actually cutting it.

The liability and insurance issue is probably the most problematic section. While I understand the need to remove the vicarious liability, as in number 13 in the clause-by-clause analysis, there are some serious concerns with this section in particular, you know, a question that we have raised more than once in this House in terms of broad regulatory powers being given to the minister or being acquired by the minister. Definitely, the Solicitor General is no exception. We often raise concerns about this practice in terms of the consolidation and concentration of power in the hands of one person or a small group of people. We've seen it in this House time and time again with energy bills, with privacy bills, and so on. This again is taking the government further into that direction. I think, you know, that to offer one person or one member of the Executive Council that broad a power definitely invites attention and scrutiny, and we hope to afford this bill that type of scrutiny in Committee of the Whole.

11:40

More importantly is the amendment to the Insurance Act, which actually privileges regulations the minister may make over legislation itself. Again, we have seen this being a trend of this government, a direction that they like, a preference where, in fact, regulations which are not debated in the House, regulations that are passed behind closed doors, take precedence over legislation that is debated in this House, legislation that members from both sides of the House get to debate and talk about and consider. Regulations don't get the same type of attention. The government might argue that the minister has all the information at his fingertips, that he has the staff and the resources to go through these, you know, in as much detail as he or she wants, but I would argue that this is not good enough. Regulations are needed at times, but regulations do not have more importance or more precedence when compared to legislation itself.

Now, the ministry sometimes explains this as being necessary because of emergencies, because of situations which arise, and we need to deal with them. Fine. We need to deal with emergencies, and we need to deal with special situations when they do arise, but to give that blanket provision, that blanket licence to the minister to do what he pleases and to make his regulations more important than the legislation itself I think is ill advised.

Unless I bring an amendment forward or if other members would like to, you know, explore that option, I think I'm going to reserve

my decision on this, but I'm leaning more towards not supporting it in the meantime.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to participate in the debate? Does the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays wish to close debate?

Mr. Johnston: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a second time]

Bill 47

Livestock Commerce and Animal Inspection Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise tonight and move second reading of Bill 47, the Livestock Commerce and Animal Inspection Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

Bill 47 seeks to amend the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act and the Animal Health Act prior to bringing the acts into force by proclamation. Amendments to the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act will clarify the requirements pertaining to security interest disclosure, sale documentation, prompt payment, and livestock permits.

I'll provide a brief overview of the current provisions and the proposed amendments. Currently the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act sets out a mandatory requirement that sellers disclose security interests in the livestock they're selling. This will strengthen the due diligence practices of the livestock industry to better recognize the security interests of lenders and provide protection to buyers of livestock.

This provision received royal assent in 2006 and will come into force upon proclamation. At that time completion of the security interest declaration on the manifest will change from optional to mandatory. Sellers will be required to disclose to buyers the names of lenders holding security interests in the livestock. Buyers will be expected to issue payment jointly to the seller and security interest holders. Security interests are an important consideration, Mr. Speaker, as the vast majority of cattle are pledged as security. The amendments refine the legal language pertaining to security interest disclosure and directing the payment for the sale of the livestock. Bill 47 will improve the operation of the act in the interests of both the livestock industry and the lending community. Mr. Speaker, both the livestock industry and the lending community have worked together to prudently ensure that security interests are appropriately recognized to facilitate effective commerce in the livestock market.

We're also proposing amendments to sale documentation provisions. Currently the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act requires the use of a bill of sale for the purchase of livestock. The amendments seek to recognize the various types of sale documents used now and that have been traditionally used in the livestock industry, including bills of sale, invoices, and settlement statements. Sale transactions will need to be documented in one of these three forms and include the prescribed information. Sellers and agents can customize their choice of form to meet specific needs and practices. Bill 47 recognizes the three forms of sale documents that are considered valid by the livestock industry and lending community.

Minor amendments to prompt payment provisions are included

also in Bill 47, Mr. Speaker. Currently the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act requires prompt payment for livestock. Payment is to be within two business days after possession or price discovery, whichever occurs later. The amendments will recognize sales through agents such as auction markets and require that they also pay promptly.

We're also seeking to amend provisions related to livestock permits. Currently the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act defines a permit as a livestock permit, a horse permit, a pedigree cattle permit, or other type of permit as permitted in regulations. Permits are used for the movement of livestock when the livestock are not being sold. The amendments seek to facilitate the implementation of the variety of permits by moving details into the regulations.

The final amendments, Mr. Speaker, in Bill 47 are to the Animal Health Act. Currently livestock marketing facilities in Alberta are licensed under the Livestock and Livestock Products Act and are inspected by Agriculture and Food under the Livestock Diseases Act. The Animal Health Act provides for licensing these facilities. The amendments will add inspection authority over these facilities. Licensing and inspection will be consolidated under one act. That will be the Animal Health Act.

I can assure all hon. members that we've undertaken extensive stakeholder consultations to develop Bill 47, and we continue to work with industry and others affected by the legislative framework to ensure that the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act and the Animal Health Act will work for them. The amendments to the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act were developed with the input of representatives from the federal and provincial lending community and the livestock industry. These stakeholders are united and solidly in support of these amendments.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this legislation will enhance livestock identification and make sales transactions of livestock easier. The amended acts will help the day-to-day business of the livestock industry to work more consistently and efficiently.

In the interest of our livestock industry I urge all hon. members to support Bill 47. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to rise at this time and speak to Bill 47, Livestock Commerce and Animal Inspection Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. Certainly, it's so different from Bill 46. It's amazing.

First off, Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the co-operation that came from the Minister of Agriculture and Food regarding the briefing on this bill. Certainly, it was a lot more than what one got with Bill 46, if one could compare Bill 47 to Bill 46. If you look at

the consultation process that went on here, I think the name of the hon. member who proposed this bill should be added to the list for future ministers of energy because certainly the hon. member has been doing due diligence. There has been a consultation process. The Alberta Beef Producers have stated – and I appreciated the information and the time that they have provided to the Official Opposition – that due diligence has been done on this bill. They know the hard work that was done by the hon. member, and it's a pleasure to receive their comments on Bill 46. It's such a contrast to the comments they have provided whenever you consider Bill 46 and what they want and what they want to see in Bill 46 and why they have reservations about that bill. That's interesting, and the work that the hon. member has put into Bill 47 is interesting and why they're not only anxious to support it but to see all members of the House support it.

11:50

Hopefully, this bill will see speedy passage through the Assembly. The reason why it should receive speedy passage is because of, again, the work that the hon. member has done before it came to the House, unlike Bill 46. This bill clarifies requirements pertaining to security interest disclosure, sale documentation, prompt payment, and livestock permits through amendments to the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act.

Mr. Speaker, with that, certainly, I would urge all hon. members of the Assembly to support Bill 47 at second reading. [interjections] Not 46. No. Don't support Bill 46, period. But this is one bill up the numerical order, and it is suitable for all members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would just like to say that the consultations that we've had with various parties across the province are a testament to the work that this hon. member has done on this bill before it got to the Assembly, and I would like to again say thank you. Please vote for Bill 47.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 47 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to congratulate members for a considerable amount of work dealing with a number of pieces of legislation. I think good progress has been made. I suggest that we call it a night and adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 11:54 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, December 4, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/12/04

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. As we pray this afternoon, let me share with you some words from the author Judith Singer.

First one solitary light,
then each evening one more,
Until eight shining lights send forth
such a wonderful glow –
a message of freedom and faith
for all people.
these are the lights
of Hanukkah.

Happy Hanukkah.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the riding of Drayton Valley-Calmar, Mrs. Diana McQueen. Diana is seated in the public gallery. She's an active member of her community, her city, and her province, serving not only as the current mayor of Drayton Valley but also quite involved with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. I'm proud to have Diana on our team, and I would ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My next introduction, Mr. Speaker. Again it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the riding of Edmonton-Riverview, seated in the members' gallery. Mrs. Wendy Andrews is an active member of her community, her city, her province. She has extensive business experience, owning and operating her own company. Wendy and her husband have raised a grown son. I'm proud to have her on our team, and I would ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, again it is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the constituency of Calgary-MacKay, Teresa Woo-Paw. Teresa has worked tirelessly in her community as a social worker for 30 years, the founding member and chair of the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary, former chair of the Calgary board of education, the recipient of many, many honours, including the Queen's jubilee award for community services and the Alberta centennial commemorative award. I'm proud to have Teresa join our team. I would ask her to also rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for your patience. It is my pleasure to rise again and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the constituency of Calgary-Bufferalo, Mr. Sean Chu. Sean has a great deal of experience in both his professional and community life. He worked as a police officer with the Calgary Police Service for 16 years and has been active in his

community, a board member of Foundations for the Future Charter Academy, the director of the Federation of Calgary Communities. Sean and his wife, Karen, have proudly raised two wonderful girls and provide home care for a family member. I'm proud to have Sean as a member of our team. He's going to continue with the great tradition of former police officers in our caucus and in Calgary-Bufferalo. I would ask Sean to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Legislature a group of 48 constituents of mine from Edmonton-Castle Downs, more particularly from Lorelei elementary school. These 48 students, accompanied by Mr. Mark George, Ms Lorna McCurry, student teacher Miss Clare Young, and parent helper Janet Zahar, are enjoying touring our beautiful building today. I had the pleasure of visiting them in class just a few days ago, and I tell you, these students are prepared and will well understand what's going on because they were asking some really intriguing questions in class. I know that they were well prepared by these teachers. I will ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of our Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly 30 bright and energetic students from St. Vladimir school. They are accompanied by their teachers Mr. Paul Martel and Mrs. Marg Meronyk. They're in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and introduce some students from one of the very best schools in all of Alberta. They're from John Barnett, the grades 5 and 6. They're with Mrs. Cynthia Modyk and Mr. Glenn Newby, their teachers, and parents Tara Brooks and Amanda Donald. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure and an honour for me to rise today and to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House Dr. Stefan Bachu. Dr. Bachu is a senior adviser for the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. He works in the area of carbon capture and storage. Members should know that Dr. Bachu is co-sharing the 2007 Nobel peace prize for his work as lead author on the international panel on climate change special report on carbon capture and storage. His fellow laureate in receiving the honour is former U.S. vice-president Al Gore. He has also represented the Energy and Utilities Board on the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission, the task force on carbon capture and storage, and continues to represent Canada on the technical group of the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum. Dr. Bachu's work has been extensively published, and he is an associate editor of the *International Journal of Greenhouse Gas Control*. We're very fortunate to have a scholar and a Nobel laureate of Dr.

Bachu's stature representing our province on an issue so important and vital to our energy industry as carbon capture and storage. Dr. Bachu is here today in the Speaker's gallery along with Mr. Darin Barter of the Energy and Utilities Board. It may be chilly outside, but I would ask them both to stand now and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to stand and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a number of individuals, employees of the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports. These individuals work for the protection of persons in care, ensuring that they're looking through any complaints and investigations of abuse for those seniors and other adults in publicly funded care facilities like hospitals, seniors' lodges, and nursing homes. We're delighted that they could share this time with us today in the Legislature. We have with us Edith Baraniecki, Bobbie Murphy, Sandra Plupsek, Francine Gregory, Margaret Petryszak, Julie Buchy, and Lill Greenhalgh. If they could please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege today to introduce to you and through you a number of members of the Health Facilities Review Committee that are visiting with us today for their monthly meeting tomorrow but having a season's celebration tonight. These people work tirelessly throughout the province going to our health facilities and seeing the systems and the way they work through the eyes of the patients and the families. I'd like to introduce them and then have them stand: Glenna Bell from St. Albert, Velda Fulford from Sherwood Park, Barbara Hay from Lacombe, Elsie Kinsey from Stony Plain, Linda MacKay from the county of Red Deer, Noel McBride from St. Albert, Dorothy Patry from Medicine Hat, Ada Rawlins from Chestermere, Cliff Storvold from Calgary, and Coreen Thacker from Bow Island. We also have three administrative people: Nada Chelvam, our executive director; Debra Chesley, our editor; and Irene Sinclair, our administrative assistant. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly two separate parties that are present in the public gallery this afternoon. The first party is Joe Anglin. Joe is a resident of Rimbey. He and his wife are raising their family there. Joe has become very interested in Alberta politics since attending the energy regulatory hearings in both Red Deer and Rimbey this past year. He's here this afternoon to listen to the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 46. He is joined by Ron Hanson and his wife, Dot, residents of Drayton Valley. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the second introduction I have this afternoon is of Trixie Lohmann. Trixie Lohmann immigrated to our fine country from Germany. She came here as a 12-year-old. She is now a grandmother. She has five children, 10 grandchildren, and she lives in the community of Hoadley. She was never notified of a proposal

to build a power line across her property. She was denied notification, she was denied the right to be informed, and she was denied a hearing. She's very sad with AltaLink. She also is here to listen to some of the debate this afternoon in Committee of the Whole on Bill 46. I would now ask her to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe my guests are in just now, but I won't have an opportunity to do this later. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all the members of the Assembly 24 outstanding members of the Alberta public service working at Alberta Energy. I don't believe they're in, but I would like to list their names: Alasdair Mills, Lori Husak, Brian Edwards, Stéphane LaRochelle, Kirk Kropf, Kevin Beilman, Karen Vause, Jay Schaapman, Wei Liang, Shelley Hay, Jean Hattie, Nikki Lam, Marion Turner, Jimmy Ng, Debbie McGale, Elaine Umeris, Edward Boodle, Gail Starchuk, Marcel Boisvert, David Reeves, John Davies, Robert Tonkovic, Simon Lee, and Judy Tassie. I would ask that our members extend to them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three guests seated in the public gallery: Helene Walsh from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Dianne Pachal from the Sierra Club, and Rebecca Reeves from the Alberta Foothills Network. These three ladies presented a petition to me on behalf of the Alberta Foothills Network earlier today with 2,000 signatures. Would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Student Achievement Tests

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Every three years the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development conducts international student assessments. In 2006 400,000 students from 57 participating countries and jurisdictions took part in the assessments. This testing was carried out among 15-year-olds, and the focus was on science. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand here today and tell you and all Albertans that those test results, which were released today, show that Alberta students rank second in the world in science achievement results. Alberta students rank second only to the country of Finland.

One could ask: was this an anomaly? Did our students just get lucky, or did they just have a good day? I would say that the evidence suggests otherwise. Even though the focus was on science, the assessment also included reading and mathematics. Test results in these areas were also significantly higher than the Canadian average and among the world's best. In reading Alberta students tied for third, and in mathematics we placed fifth in the world. Just last week the Progress in International Reading Literacy assessment results were released for grade 4 students. Alberta scored third in the world.

Another promising statistic is how well our children of immigrant parents performed. Alberta is the only jurisdiction whose immigrant

children not only performed significantly better than or as well as the average nonimmigrant student but, in fact, demonstrated no difference from their nonimmigrant counterparts. This finding, Mr. Speaker, is contrary to national and international trends. I guess we should ask ourselves: who is responsible, and why does Alberta have such incredible achievements?

Well, first, we need to note that Alberta teachers and school support staff day in and day out not only instruct, mentor, and challenge our students in the classroom, but they commit to outside regular school activities. Our locally elected school trustees, superintendents, and principals support the delivery of education at the local level, albeit with input from home and school councils, and it's tailored to the communities that they serve. The Department of Education continues to develop a curriculum that is ever-changing to meet the needs of the 21st century learner, and it also provides an assessment and performance methodology that is envied around the world.

I think we also have to take some credit. Members of this Legislature supported the government when it had the courage to invest in an education system that works closely with our partners to offer choice and programs that meet the changing needs of the global economy.

But in the end we know that it is the student who is responsible to study and write the tests. Alberta is a province that is filled with bright and intelligent young people, and today we should all feel very proud of their accomplishments as they continue to strive to be the absolute best in the world.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to respond to the minister on the fantastic achievement by our Alberta students. The young people we recognize today will someday take the reins from our generation and lead Alberta to a better tomorrow. These results prove that Alberta's future is in very good hands. Consider the ranking of Alberta's children in science achievement: second in the entire world, just behind Finland. That is an accomplishment that deserves our congratulations.

And it doesn't stop there, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's students performed almost as well in assessments in reading and mathematics. Our grade 4 students scored third in the world in the Progress in International Reading Literacy assessment results. Our immigrant children are also rising to the top.

We should not forget, Mr. Speaker, that these results would not have been possible without the strength of our institutions and the talent of our school trustees, the dedication of our teachers, administrators, and support staff. All of the wonderful Albertans working in our schools are committed to excellence. They understand the paramount importance of their work. We should also be immensely grateful for their amazing contributions.

With these accolades comes another mission: making sure that all of our students perform equally at a high level. The Minister of Education has the responsibility to lay the foundation for good reading skills, for good science skills for all children entering grade 1. We must be vigilant in ensuring that no child in Alberta falls through the cracks, that every child in Alberta gets the chance to succeed when they go to school.

Today is a day to celebrate the great achievements by our youth, to celebrate the great achievements by our teachers and our trustees and support staff. We are humbled by these amazing results, and we honour them today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

1:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is rising, I'm sure, to ask for permission from the House to allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to participate in this ministerial statement. I take it that shortly thereafter the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner will do the same and that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning will do the same. Just to save some time, could I ask for permission of the House to allow all three to participate briefly?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Did anybody say no?

An Hon. Member: No.

The Speaker: Well, I have a problem now because I don't know who the "no" applies to, so I guess we'll take them one at a time.

To allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to participate, is there any opposition?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. That one is finished with.

To allow the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner to participate, is there any opposition?

An Hon. Member: Yes.

The Speaker: To allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to participate, is there any opposition? [interjection] I heard that negative, too, so let's go forward, Clerk.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the Assembly today in recognition of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a lay Catholic organization that was originally founded in Paris in 1833. It's an order open to all people who believe in the principles of the gospel and wish to follow Christ's example by committing themselves to serving the poor.

Mr. Speaker, I wish I had more time to go through the pages and pages I have been provided outlining the many positive things that this volunteer organization has done to help the underprivileged in my community. Their work within the Calgary parishes of Corpus Christi, Ascension, and St. John the Evangelist has provided immediate response to the immediate and pressing needs of dozens of families in need in my constituency of Calgary-Nose Hill. They have paid the rent for numerous victims of domestic abuse, helped needy families cover school expenses, helped people on the verge of eviction, and assisted the sick and disabled.

In addition to monetary assistance, in the past year alone they have provided 400 food hampers and 85 Christmas hampers. Their president, George Dorscher, and all members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are to be commended for their dedication to easing the suffering experienced by Calgary's poor. Their compassion provides all Albertans with a worthy example, the spirit of which is best summed up in the words of Albert Pike: "What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal."

Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Cheffins: The pace of ring road negotiations between the provincial government and the Tsuu T'ina Nation is even slower than traffic in Calgary during rush hour. Rush hour traffic will soon be a lot worse for many of my constituents as the Grey Eagle casino opens, dumping up to 4,000 additional vehicles into the area daily with no ring road agreement in sight.

It's clear to me that this government does not understand or care about what this traffic does to the quality of life in communities like Lakeview, Rutland Park, Glamorgan, and North Glenmore Park. With the casino scheduled to open sometime this month, my constituents have been left out in the cold and idling by this government. I've asked questions and received only vague some-days from the minister. I've tabled a petition with hundreds of signatures urging the provincial government to realize the urgency of the situation and get a deal done with the Tsuu T'ina. Meanwhile my constituents learn about further delays. In fact, my constituents hear more from newspapers, the radio, and city officials than they do from this government.

Furthermore, with no agreement in sight the lack of information is causing some to suggest alternate routes, many of which jeopardize the sensitive Weaselhead natural area. Any damage to this area could impact drinking water for over 400,000 Calgarians. This is entirely unacceptable.

I've asked the provincial government to be both vigorous in their negotiations so that there's real progress being made and open to the plight of the constituents of Calgary-Elbow so that these Calgarians are assured they won't be burdened with excessive traffic indefinitely. My constituents have exercised patience. What they're unprepared to accept is continued delays while the casino's opening date draws nearer. My constituents expect leadership, they expect a deal, and from this government they've waited far too long for both.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Primary Health Care Networks

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's health system must constantly change to meet the evolving needs of Albertans and the expanding skills and training of health professionals. A modern health system requires a diverse array of highly skilled and flexible professionals. Indeed, more than one kind of service provider may be capable of performing a particular procedure or service. To meet the needs of Albertans, the health system must ensure that health professionals are trained to work in teams that share the responsibility for patient care, and in the workplace programs need to be developed that encourage more team-oriented models of care. When we use the skills and training of health professionals to their fullest, people can get the care they need quickly from the most appropriate provider.

Mr. Speaker, much is being done in Alberta to advance team approaches to patient care. This approach is central to the new primary care networks that have been established throughout the province. There are currently 26 primary care networks serving 1.4 million patients throughout Alberta. Albertans served by these networks are benefiting from more comprehensive and co-ordinated care from a team of health professionals, including advice and support in making lifestyle changes to enhance their overall health.

When we look at the teamwork approach in the classroom setting, the Edmonton clinic will be a shining example when it opens in

2011. Not only will health services at the clinic be offered to patients through this multidisciplinary teamwork approach, but health students will learn together and interact with researchers in an active patient care setting. This training model is unique in Canada and will encourage a team-based approach to care.

Mr. Speaker, this government is working tirelessly to address retention and recruitment of health professionals. In addition to addressing the workforce supply issues we are facing today, initiatives such as primary care networks and innovative education models are a vital part of designing and building the health workforce of tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

World Cup Competitions

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The past two weeks have been incredible for sports fans in Alberta. The World Cup circuit made their annual stop at Lake Louise and Canada Olympic Park. Our province enjoyed hosting the world's best alpine skiers, bobsledders, and skeleton athletes. These early-season races can set the tone for the rest of the year, and Canadian athletes shot out of the gate with authority.

Calgary's Jan Hudec became the first Canadian ever to win a downhill ski World Cup event on home soil. In the skeleton events Canadians took home four of the six medals, including a gold for Calgarian Paul Boehm and a silver for the pride and joy of Eckville, Mellisa Hollingsworth. The big sleds then took over, and Canadians took home more hardware. The Calgary-Edmonton duo of Helen Upperton and Jenny Ciochetti could not be beaten in the two-woman bobsled, and the four-man team, which includes Albertans Pierre Lueders, Lascelles Brown, and David Bissett, won bronze. There was another first at Lake Louise, this time in women's downhill. Britt Janyk from Ontario became the first Canadian woman to finish on the podium at home, finishing third.

With this season and the next being crucial to preparations for the 2010 Olympics, these are the results everyone is hoping for. By all accounts the race organizers, staff, and volunteers did a tremendous job of hosting these events. The races were shown on TV in countries around the world and on the Internet, giving our province some tremendous exposure. I ask that the members of this Assembly join me in congratulating our athletes and the event organizers for a successful two weeks.

Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private/Public Partnerships

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Treasury Board documents from a meeting just a few weeks ago, this November 14, indicate that the costs of the 18 P3 schools announced in June of this year have more than doubled to over half a billion dollars. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Can the minister explain what happened? Who is responsible for this 156 per cent increase in just eight months?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can explain to you is that with the full co-operation of the department of infrastructure

and the Department of Education we are working together to build new schools for students in Alberta. The process is just under way, and how the hon. member would have already ascertained what the cost will be before we have even accepted a tender is somewhat miraculous.

1:30

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm working from Treasury Board documents. In these same documents the Treasury Board accepts the decision to amend the Fiscal Responsibility Act to take Alberta back into debt, yet this government just announced a \$4 billion surplus. My question is to the Premier. How can the Premier justify, in one of the wealthiest jurisdictions on the planet, squeezing public bodies to take on private debt?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we know that Alberta has seen an influx of about 500,000 to 600,000 new Albertans. We are looking at new ways of catching up with the necessary infrastructure that we require.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I think you've been watching this session. When they ask a question, I listen. I would hope that they'd sit quietly and listen to the answer. If they don't want the answer, don't ask the question.

We're looking at ways of catching up with the infrastructure. We have of course worked with the Auditor General. The Auditor General has said that using public/private partnerships is one way of addressing the infrastructure deficit, and we're doing that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. These same government documents are clear. They state that P3s are debt, and this government wants more of it. My question again is to the Premier. Can the Premier confirm that it is his government's intention to amend the Fiscal Responsibility Act to open the door to debt barely a year after Ralph Klein has been gone?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the way that public/private partnerships work is that there's always an amount that the government contributes to the project. What happens is if it is, let's say, a \$600 million project, depending on the agreements, then the amount that we contribute comes out of that whole fiscal year. So let's say that if we contribute a third, that'll be \$200 million. That has to come out of the capital account that particular year even though these payments will be made for not only offsetting the costs of the construction but also maintenance. Maintenance that is guaranteed for 30 years will take place over a period of 30 years. That's the point that this opposition is missing. They're way out of touch.

Water Management

Dr. Taft: Yesterday this government very quietly released a water report they've been sitting on since March. This government-commissioned report is another in a long line of reports clearly indicating this government's mismanagement of our most precious resource, our water. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why so many leading scientists and now this report, too, are critical of how this government is managing water?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I would put up our track record in this province in terms of protection of our air, water, and soil against any

jurisdiction in Canada, in fact in North America. We have the world's leading scientists working on our Water for Life strategy. We also have introduced recently a cumulative effect study of all of the major growth areas, including the Industrial Heartland and Fort McMurray. We're moving much faster than anybody in Canada in the whole area of environment, and we'll continue to show that leadership.

In terms of the very specifics of the Water for Life strategy I'll have the Minister of Environment answer.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. This same report makes a clear point: the lack of comprehensive and reliable data on actual water use. The report also states that watershed management planning is simply not possible due to the lack of data. Watershed management planning is at the heart of the Water for Life strategy and is critical to managing this resource. Again to the Premier. To make wise decisions, this government needs correct information. Why has this government not kept accurate data on water use?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to make it abundantly clear to this member and to all members that it is a case not so much of whether or not the government has kept accurate data but rather a case over whether or not the data has been collated in a manageable way. What the government has been concentrating on of late is bringing together all of the various forms of data that we have with respect to water and groundwater through Alberta Energy, through Alberta Environment, through SRD, and putting together a software package so that we can actually take all of that data and put it into a manageable form so that we can make intelligent decisions.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, we've been listening to this kind of thing for years. Let's see some progress, something more than lip service. To quote from the report on its very first page: "This report highlights the need for the collection of actual water use information if we are to make the best possible decisions about this critical resource." The truth is clear: this government has been making water decisions without credible information. To the Minister of Environment. He is responsible for Alberta's water. What explanation does he have for Albertans who trusted him to manage water for them? The evidence shows they have failed.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, the member has not been paying attention to the discussions that we've been having in this House throughout the entire session, as I've dealt with a number of issues related to water. The government is and continues to be committed to the Water for Life strategy. Included in the Water for Life strategy is a thorough analysis of the water licensing system that we have in this province and a determination of whether or not there is a use of the water that is indicated on the licences. Various licences for various reasons may or may not consume all of the water that's available. That is very much part of our long-term planning strategy to ensure that we have a better handle on water.

The Speaker: There will be two points of order that I'll recognize at the conclusion of the Routine. The hon. Leader of the Opposition, there will be two points of order with respect to a request that you table documents you referred to, Treasury Board documents.

Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Capital Cost Overruns

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The designs of both the University of Calgary and SAIT to take major steps forward in their development have suffered a setback. The U of C has been forced to dramatically scale back plans for its Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy because the cost has ballooned from \$283 million to \$400 million. SAIT has been forced to cut the size of its desperately needed trades and technology complex by half just to keep the project on budget. The government has told both SAIT and the U of C that when it comes to cost overruns on projects, they're on their own. To the Premier: is the government's decision not to fund inflationary overruns on the U of C and SAIT a signal that the days of covering cost overruns are now over?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in our capital budget we have, I believe, set aside \$1.4 billion for capital cost overruns. This is something that we're not only facing in government projects but in the public sector as well, again, a shortage of skilled individuals also with respect to many opportunities to look at bringing more people in so we can catch up with the badly needed infrastructure. But specific to these two projects the minister has a further response.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, on these two projects what we're doing is working collaboratively with the two institutions based on the needs analysis that we have for the spaces as well as the programming needs that are going to be designed for those two facilities. Programming will determine the size of the facility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's out of control construction costs are a direct result of this government's pedal to the metal, don't tap the brake attitude towards oil sands development. Again to the Premier: why are the U of C, SAIT, and their future students paying the cost for this government's self-inflicted inflationary spiral?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there have been no reductions in student spaces. However, with respect to – I think he used the words “pedal to the metal” or something like that. You want to come up with a strategy? You want to slow down the development and reduce revenues to the province? Go ahead. Finally tell us what your position is on the royalty framework. Oh, and by the way, you can also table the document that is supposed to give us the cost of the radio ads. I still haven't seen that today.

1:40

Mr. Tougas: Again to the Premier: can the Premier explain why the government said no to additional funds for the redevelopment of the Royal Alberta Museum, no to the University of Calgary, no to SAIT but yes to a \$300 million cost overrun at the Edmonton Remand Centre?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we didn't say no to anyone. What we're doing is that we're looking at the student spaces that are absolutely necessary. During this last year we increased student spaces in Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie and also in Edmonton and Calgary. We're at Red Deer College as well. We're having all of the technical schools and colleges and universities

coming together with an overall plan for the necessary student spaces across the province. That to me is true leadership.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alaska has raised their royalty rates twice in the last two years. As a result, the public's share for their oil resources is roughly \$21 per barrel. Compare that with Alberta, which will only get \$7 a barrel when the Premier's new royalty scheme kicks in sometime in 2009. Since the Premier dodged my question last week, I'm going to ask him again. Mr. Premier, Alaska legislators have made it clear that a full share of a barrel of oil is at least three times what Alberta will take under the Premier's royalty scheme. Why can the Republican governor of Alaska get a good deal on royalties and he can't?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if Alaska had to revisit their royalty framework twice, obviously they didn't do it right the first time.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps Alaska was dissatisfied with the results that they got. If the Premier is satisfied that that's an answer to my question, then he'd be satisfied with anything.

It costs 50 per cent more to get oil in Alaska than in Alberta, yet the public take is three times higher than Alberta. It's a serious question, Mr. Premier. Surely, you can understand the math. Why are you continuing to defend this weak-kneed sellout royalty deal?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think last time we chatted about the difference between the oil that Alaska extracts and what we develop in the province of Alberta in terms of the oil sands. There's a substantial difference in the API. There's a substantial difference in moving that product for further upgrading. But in terms of informing the hon. member, the Minister of Energy can better explain the differences in the quality of the oil.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I hope that somebody can explain it better than the Premier. Alaska just increased their share of oil revenues to nearly \$21 a barrel. Even though oil companies face higher cost, greater risk, and higher royalties in Alaska, they're continuing to develop new projects. The evidence is in, Mr. Premier. You've sold Albertans short to satisfy your political contributors in the oil industry. When are you going to do the right thing and get us a good deal on royalties?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, quite clearly the member opposite does not want to accept the absolute facts of the matter. The last time I checked, Alaska wasn't moving very much bitumen through their pipelines to the Port of Valdez. That's one very big difference, and I could just point out for the member opposite and certainly for all Albertans that I received a report about a week ago indicating that Alberta bitumen in fact was trading at a \$50 discount to WTI in certain contract circumstances in United States. If we got \$21 a barrel for the remainder of that, I'm afraid the business would not be in place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Cardston-Taber-Warner Issues

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's lucky we don't have to get unanimous consent for question period.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has outlined his five pillars for Alberta, that governing with integrity and transparency and providing safe and secure communities are his top priorities. The Premier talks about integrity and doing the right thing, but what he really means is for the Tory party. The Premier continues to attend functions in which his party has not only solicited illegal campaign funds but has accepted them only to return them after being caught. Will the Premier please apologize and do the right thing for the people of Alberta and the people of my riding for the shenanigans that went on at the Taber golf course fundraiser that he attended?

The Speaker: I gather there's going to be a point of order on this question. Does anybody want to respond?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, this member raised this issue before. He knows full well what the situation was. In the Municipal Government Act there's a provision that does not allow anyone that's locally elected, including public school trustees, to pay for any campaign funds or party funds. That's for any and every party. That's very straightforward. One particular situation was at the Taber golf course. In fact, the hon. member wanted to golf there. I said: well, you'd have to buy a membership, you know, if you want to golf in our tournament. But setting that aside, there was a cheque that was issued by a school division. We promptly returned it.

The Speaker: We'll have to come back to it because of the timing factor.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, the problems continue in my riding from inappropriate behaviour of the Premier in the past. Alberta taxpayers are on the hook for millions of dollars, an estimated \$40 million, because the Premier, when he was transport minister, interfered with the bypass route for Milk River. Would the Premier please explain to this House and all Albertans why he adopted a more dangerous and expensive bypass route in Milk River?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't even know how far back to start. This is going back to the late '90s, when I had the responsibility. One of the first meetings we had was in Milk River, a public meeting with a fairly large turnout from the residents in Milk River. We explained in great detail the reason we were making the decision in terms of the route of highway 4. That decision was made a long time ago. The information that he's bringing forward to this House in terms of the extra cost is totally, totally wrong. It's not substantiated by any engineering report that I'm aware of. There were other contributing factors in terms of a sewage lagoon. There were issues with a rail track and a bridge and also finding the best trajectory for the road.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Those are all the reasons why he shouldn't have gone that way, and he did. He's failed Albertans for safety and for dollars spent.

All the work that has been done is good for trying to provide safer communities, and we need to continue looking at that. Mr. Speaker, the mayor of Taber asked the Solicitor General at the AUMA when he was going to address the inequitable funding for communities

over 5,000. His response was: not in this budget. To the Premier: will he ensure that the Solicitor General accepts the AUMA resolution and adopts their funding recommendation now to ensure safer communities?

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to just clear the air from what the hon. member is speaking about. I did have a conversation with the mayor of Taber. His question wasn't about equitable funding for policing; it was about whether we were going to change the formula for policing. I indicated to him that considering the federal government is promising 2,500 officers across Canada, at this point in time we're going to continue on with the formula we have in this particular budget period.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Arts Funding

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is in a time of prosperity, but we must also support other important sectors within our communities such as the arts and culture industry. This can be done by developing a creative economy by encouraging film and television companies to work in Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Will you follow the Alberta Liberal Party policy and implement a film and television tax credit to make Alberta competitive with other provinces?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost I want to say that the film industry is growing in Alberta under the existing formulas. This past year we won a number of awards, that were the envy of many other provinces. Having said that, we are looking at different funding formulas for the film industry, and we will over time see how we can make the film industry grow with changes in funding formulas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton was named the cultural capital of Canada, and the Alberta Liberals want to see this accomplishment encouraged and expanded to other cities around our province. Support of creative arts not only helps the economy, but it strengthens our communities. My question is to the same minister. Will you follow our lead and support a provincial arts festival?

1:50

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we do support festivals right across the province. Our commitment to the arts in Alberta has been seen with the additional funding that's available to every organization across Alberta. A lot of those funds are available through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. The hon. member would know that over the last couple of years that funding has increased, and it's targeted to all groups right across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals have

spoken with many people in the arts community, and they all support the creation of a new ministry specifically for their community. My question is to the same minister. Will you show that you support the development of a creative economy and encourage your caucus to establish a separate ministry dedicated to the arts, culture, and heritage?

Mr. Goudreau: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, that question is, basically, not up to me to decide. But suffice it to say that under our new mandate the Premier has chosen to include tourism, parks, recreation, and culture. We had not seen the word “culture” used for many, many years as part of a ministry. While arts and culture is very important to building a strong quality of life for Albertans, we must recognize that there has to be a balance to ensure that all of our priorities are considered.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Venture Capital Funding

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Venture capital has been lacking for many projects in Alberta, whether it's agriculture, the forest industry, and, yes, even sometimes the oil patch. Over \$16 billion has been invested and has served Albertans very well in our trust fund today, with about a \$30 billion return since inception. I was reading in the report about public equities, that \$7.9 billion, 48 per cent of our trust fund, is invested in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, Australia, Italy, Sweden, Spain, Japan. To the Minister of Finance: when is it Albertans' turn?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When you take a look at the heritage savings trust fund, there's roughly 15 to 20 per cent that is actually invested in Alberta companies. I think that the larger question, though – and it becomes in many ways a philosophical question – is: what is the role of the heritage savings trust fund when it comes to venture capital? That was exactly one of the questions that I put through to the Financial Investment and Planning Advisory Commission. I hope to get the report within the next week or two.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another way to raise venture capital is through the use of flow-through tax credits. In every province but Alberta the mining sector has an opportunity to get a flow-through tax credit. Why would the minister allow this to continue and allow this uncompetitive advantage to our mining sector here in Alberta?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has a very good point. One of the nuances of our tax system is that we do have to have federal approval for the taxation and for the taxation forms. Coincidentally, on December 12 I will be heading down to Ottawa to talk to the Finance minister, and I'll give the hon. member my undertaking that I will bring this up with the federal Finance minister at that time.

Mr. VanderBurg: My final question is, then: after the meeting progresses with the feds, would the minister be willing to meet with the precious minerals and mining sector here in Alberta and talk about your progress on this issue?

Dr. Oberg: I'd be more than happy to, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Electricity Transmission

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only did electricity deregulation increase our bills; it also gave us a transmission system that is now unreliable. Because of this Progressive Conservative government's failed deregulation scheme, Albertans are now facing a crisis with their electricity system. I think I'll give the Minister of Energy a break – he's tired – and I'll ask the Premier: why are Albertans now faced with an increased risk of electricity outages and other symptoms of an unreliable transmission system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're doing whatever we can to introduce a policy that will facilitate newer and better transmission systems in the province of Alberta. It seems that when it comes to four-laning a highway, because people see more people on the highway, they say: yeah, it's reasonable, you know, to four-lane the road. When it comes to building a new transmission line, that party there has a difference of opinion, and they continue to bring it forward. You can ask yourself the very same question.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, that was interesting. Again to the Premier: why has the margin between our installed capacity and peak demand for electricity declined by nearly 17 per cent from 2005 through to 2006? Surely you know at least the answer to that.

Mr. Stelmach: Yes. I do know the answer, Mr. Speaker. It's 500,000 to 600,000 new Albertans and unbelievable development in the province of Alberta. It's development in manufacturing, development in oil sands, development in so many different industries including the petrochemical. That is the reason. There's just more demand.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the Premier: unbelievable power bills because of your government's dismal failure with electricity deregulation.

Now my third question. The North American Electric Reliability Corporation warns that winter capacity margins in our jurisdiction are tight. Mr. Premier, we are facing a crisis. When will this government unplug deregulation and go back to a system that gives Albertans reliability with their electricity and low electricity prices?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if it's a crisis, as the hon. member says, I'm sure, then, that he'll support the legislation that's going to be debated in the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Foreign Qualifications

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, recently a qualified doctor moved to Alberta from the United Kingdom. While the doctor was able to finally start practising here, the process to get an approval for registration was an exercise in duplication, delays, bureaucracy, not to mention very costly. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could you tell us in the Assembly what you're actually

doing to streamline the registration process for the doctors that we're trying to get here into this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the registration accreditation of doctors is something which has been delegated under self-regulation to the profession under the College of Physicians and Surgeons. I can tell you that our department has been working with all of the colleges and the health care professions to make sure that any barriers to success, to accrediting appropriately trained physicians or other health care professionals are streamlined and that we can move barriers out of the way. We do need to get those health care professionals into practice in this province as quickly as possible. The responsibility for accreditation is with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, but we're here to help.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In order to attract these qualified out-of-country doctors, are there particular issues around the barriers, such as duplication of qualifications or the cost factor, that you are willing to look at removing?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of barriers to access which can be dealt with. We've moved in some areas: the area of international medical graduates, for example, and having appropriate residency positions so that they can fulfill that requirement if necessary. There is, of course, the need to make sure that proper credentials are presented, so it's necessary for them to know what they have to bring. It should be clear that not all medical schools are created equal and not all criteria that people graduate with in various places in the world are the same. It's important to go through the appropriate process of credentialing. It's important to make sure that they have the actual credentials. The College of Physicians and Surgeons runs exams, et cetera, in that area. But we do need to make sure that residencies and other opportunities are available.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Madam Minister, can you explain to me if you have anything on the go that would assist new immigrants in the province, especially when it comes to helping them through this prolonged process and the duplication that's involved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're aware that to make a decision as a physician or as any person overseas to come and work in Alberta requires a great deal of research. To that end we recently opened a new portal that gives people information. We have conducted job fairs, with experts going to the United Kingdom, for example, in October. We had the College of Physicians and Surgeons involved with it. We use people from the professions to help. The Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan membership also went over. So we're trying to use experts. We're trying to give information on the web and in several different languages. We've developed other support materials so that they can learn in the language of their choice beyond U.K..

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:00

Corrections Officer Salaries

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the construction of a new Edmonton Remand Centre was announced. A week ago legislation was introduced in this House that addressed safety concerns in Alberta's correctional institutions. Clearly, the government has finally recognized the need to ensure a safe workplace for corrections officers. Based upon these new priorities, how can the Solicitor General justify his inaction in improving salaries for corrections officers working in our corrections institutions?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting that the hon. member brings this up again in the House. I firmly believe that we pay our corrections staff a very fair salary. As I mentioned before, we respect the value that's added by all of our employees, including our corrections officers, who do just a great job. It's interesting that they also recently agreed to a new agreement. I believe that agreement reflects the fact that they are being appropriately remunerated.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The local media, the members of the bar, and the corrections officers themselves have been diligent in making the shocking situation at our remand centres public in order to improve conditions. Will the Solicitor General finally commit to mitigating the inherent danger of that environment by reclassifying the salaries of these essential public servants like he did the sheriffs? Their jobs are equally stressful and demanding, they receive similar training, and their commitment and contribution must be valued just as much.

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is trying to compare apples to oranges. As I mentioned before, we value the contributions of all the employees of government services, including our corrections officers. I firmly believe that they are remunerated fairly and will continue to be so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During a recent discussion with a corrections officer I was shocked to learn that newly hired corrections personnel often receive a better wage than members with several years' experience. Can the Solicitor General offer an explanation as to why this is the case, and will he commit to addressing this absurd discrepancy? Should people with experience quit, only to apply in a few months to get better pay?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, again in regards to our corrections staff, we just finished in the last couple of weeks going through a process where we awarded our loyal staff long-service exemplary medals. The number of awards that we presented indicates that we do appreciate them and that, obviously, they are very long-term employees, and they're doing a great job for this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Child Care Funding

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Child care in Alberta has become very expensive for most families. Not being able to afford proper daycare has become a huge problem for many families in this province. Instead of ensuring improved quality of daycare and making it affordable, the government is watering down these proposed quality controls and downloading the costs onto daycare operators. To the Minister of Children's Services: instead of doling out assistance to daycares in dribs and drabs, why won't this government commit to a predictable and stable daycare funding model designed to ensure availability of affordable and quality daycare for families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would remind this member that the five-point plan is based on extensive consultation in this province and is a plan that was put forward because it was promoted by operators and parents and child care workers. The other thing I would say is that this past year we improved a number of areas of the five-point plan. But, in fact, the plan is very predictable and very well defined, the aspects of it.

Dr. Pannu: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. This government has decided to water down its proposed daycare licensing regulation. Some of the standards which are going to be watered down are increasing the staff-to-child ratio and lowering the staff certification requirements. These changes will reduce the quality of daycare, not enhance it. Why is the minister renegeing on this government's commitment to improve the quality of daycare in Alberta?

Ms Tarchuk: Now, Mr. Speaker, I would again suggest to the member that at this point we're not doing anything. We are in phase 2 of our consultation. We have some proposed standards that are out there based on the input that we received in phase 1. At this point we have made some modifications. We've put forward some that had in the first consultation huge support. We are suggesting withdrawing a few of our proposals, but, again, right now it's out there for Albertans to respond to, and I would be interested in getting further feedback from this member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of the other proposed changes which the minister has now decided to drop are improved nutritional guidelines to be in place to properly feed children in daycare centres and the requirement for operators to possess a cell phone for emergency calls. These health and safety proposals would have increased the quality of daycare in this province. Why has the minister failed to use funds from the federal transfer of \$25 million for child care purposes for this year to cover the costs, to pay for these changes, and to improve both the quality of daycare services and their affordability for Alberta families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would just suggest and encourage anyone that's interested in child care to go on our website, take a look at the report. Like I said, it is based on the feedback that we've received in the last couple of months. I think it's a very reasoned response. I'm looking forward to getting some more feedback. Just a reminder that we're suggesting moving

forward on standards that were well received, we have withdrawn a couple of standards that proved to be difficult for parents and for operators, and we have modified some that have to do with accreditation and certification and staff/child ratios. But at this point I look forward to the participation and the feedback.

Seniors' Benefits

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, senior citizens in my constituency, many of whom are on pensions or fixed incomes and who are coping with some sort of physical disability, are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet and maintain their own homes. My question is for the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Given the rising cost of property taxes based on market value assessments, what can the minister do to ensure that seniors will be able to continue to live in their homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The seniors' benefits that we provide in this province have been designed to help those and are targeted very much for financial assistance to those in the low income. With specific reference to those in their own home, one of the advantages that they do have is that their property tax increases will be capped. They will not face the escalation of the market value assessment that would go with an increase in taxes. They will be held to the same amount of taxes that they were paying last year, and that program has been in place for the last few years.

Dr. Brown: I am sure seniors are very pleased to hear that, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental question is for the same minister. Many seniors find it difficult to cope with living at home because of long-term disabilities. What supports can his department make available to persons with disabilities to help them maintain their independent lifestyle?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to first say that this province has one of the most comprehensive programs available to seniors. Over \$2.3 billion is made available to seniors. Much of that is provided through the Alberta seniors' benefit program, an income-based program, but in addition to that, those people with disabilities face special challenges. That's why there are avenues such as the Alberta Aids to Daily Living, which can provide medical equipment and supplies for those that need such assistance. Low-income won't be paying any fees at all. For those that have higher incomes, the maximum amount they would pay would be \$500 a year. Residential access modification programs to renovate their homes if necessary, to have access into their homes are just among a few of the programs here to assist those with disabilities.

Dr. Brown: I thank the minister for more good news for seniors. My further supplemental is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Many seniors would like to continue living in their own home but are unable to cope with the burdens of caring for a disabled loved one. Can the minister advise what supports his department is providing to assist Alberta seniors with home-care assistance?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, there is a home-care program which is run through each of the regional health authorities as part of the health delivery in their regions. They determine the qualifications for that home-care program through an

appropriate assessment process to determine whether there should be support, but I am pleased to say that in May of this year we removed the \$3,000 cap on home-care support, not just for seniors but for any Albertan who can live at home capably, who can be supported in living at home but where the costs may be in excess of what the individuals themselves can bear. The regional health authorities have the capacity to do the assessment and to provide the resources necessary to keep a senior or other Albertan in their own home for as long as possible where it is practical to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

2:10 Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There really is no essential link between the activities of daily living and employment or community involvement, but the AISH medical examination form considers activities of daily living as a factor when determining benefits. To the minister of seniors: will the minister commit to removing questions about activities of daily living from the AISH medical examination form?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, with respect to AISH qualifications there are a number of factors you look at with respect to health. Those, obviously, would be one. Medical issues and specifics that are related to it and, obviously, income-based questions: those are the paramount issues. If it's getting to the point that those things are not being provided because of an application form, we'd be happy to look at it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the same minister: will the minister investigate whether this questionnaire has resulted in any wrongful denials and immediately fix the situation, especially for anyone making an appeal on that basis?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the purpose is to provide those with severe handicaps with supports. Whether it's a medical condition, once it's verified, and also income based for those with low income, they would have the support necessary. That is the primary purpose. If you know of any individuals in particular that have been denied that yet would meet the qualifications otherwise, I would love to hear about it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I will do that. I suspect that this mechanism manages to keep people off the rolls.

Last year the ministry left almost \$33 million of the AISH budget unspent, and this year another \$10 million was transferred out of the AISH program. Why is the minister leaving millions unspent when so many vulnerable people need help to keep up with the cost of living today?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, as in any budget you estimate those that may come forward. You don't know that amount, the numbers of people who would come forward in any given year. It's not an amount that's unspent. We have an obligation to support those that come forward. What we are also working towards is ensuring employability and breaking the barriers so those with handicaps and disabilities would have an opportunity to have employability. That is really the long-term objective: how do you assist those with any

degree of handicap or disability to have the opportunities to be included, to provide for their own independence?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Climate Change

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This week and next 12,000 people from 190 countries, including our federal government, will be attending a United Nations summit on climate change. The summit in Bali is focusing world-wide attention on climate change. To the Minister of Environment: how does Alberta stack up? What real action has Alberta taken to address climate change?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to advise the member that Alberta stacks up extremely well. As a matter of fact, I along with a number of my key team leaders will be part of the Canadian delegation attending the summit in Bali. That will be the key message that we deliver there: that Alberta is the first jurisdiction in North America to have legislation requiring mandatory reductions of CO₂. In 2004 we were the first to require industry reporting, and we have brought this to the attention of this Assembly as early as 2002.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. I saw an industry report that says that moving to carbon capture and storage could reduce industrial greenhouse gas emissions by up to 20 megatonnes by the year 2020. Could the minister tell the House what kind of potential this technology really has, and will we invest in funding?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this technology has tremendous potential. In fact, the government has been saying all along that our long-term key with respect to climate change in Alberta is technology. Storage of CO₂ is just one part of the technology, but we have ideal geology that's among the best in the world for storage capacity. We have industrial point sources of CO₂, that allow us to implement the kind of technology that is being referred to. Just earlier today we see that right here in Alberta we have top Nobel-winning scientists that have been concentrating on the technology related to carbon sequestration.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how quickly will Alberta move forward with this technology?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's difficult to say with certainty how quickly we move forward because much of it depends on our ability to develop the technology, to commercialize the technology to the point at which we can implement it on a larger scale, but it certainly is promising. We expect a report back from the federal/provincial task force on carbon sequestration later on this year. I'm hoping to get a good idea from the report of that task force as well as the scientific community on how quickly we will be able to move forward and implement this technology.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Insurance Industry Regulation

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Insurance Council of B.C. recently cancelled the licence of Aurora Underwriting Services, an Edmonton-based wholesaler, because Aurora and two of its agents unilaterally and fraudulently altered policy documents to raise the price of insurance policies. Despite the ruling in B.C. the company continues to operate in Alberta. My questions are for the Minister of Finance. What action, if any, are Alberta regulators taking to ensure that Alberta consumers are protected?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We currently are looking into this situation, and as soon as it's resolved, I'd be more than happy to contact the hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, I hope he's true to his word, Mr. Speaker, because my understanding is that they don't normally report such decisions. I will look forward to the answer.

At a recent Insurance Bureau of Canada symposium in Toronto Deputy Minister Dennis Gartner admitted that Alberta doesn't even have an insurance complaint reporting system. It's kind of done on an ad hoc basis right now, he said. My question for the Minister of Finance: what action is your department taking to address this situation?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, we are looking into this very serious allegation, and we will act accordingly. When it comes to the insurance industry, it's something that we ensure, no pun intended, is good benefit for the citizens of Alberta. With this particular case we are looking into it, and I'll report back to the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alf Savage, the chair of the Automobile Insurance Rate Board and a past PC Party president, when asked about patronage appointments to government agencies, boards, and commissions had this to say: if the government was Liberal, they'd all be Liberals. Then he went on to assure us that his political affiliation had nothing to do with him getting the job. To the Minister of Finance: isn't it time to name qualified nonpartisan or, at the very least, not overtly partisan citizens to such important positions?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I do very much thank the hon. member for giving me that question. Alf Savage is a gentleman who has had numerous jobs around. He was actually head of the Chicago airport authority at one point in time. This is a man who has impeccable credentials, and this gentleman is doing a great job on this particular committee. I have no control over what Mr. Savage has to say when talking to committees or anything like that, but I will say that I absolutely, 100 per cent, have no hesitancy about the validity of Mr. Savage's work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Deer and Elk Hunting

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a strong, rich heritage of hunting and fishing. While Alberta has changed a lot over 100 years, the tradition of hunting and fishing remains a very important heritage that must be preserved, a point I made in Motion 515. Wildlife and habitat conservation is an important mandate of

all the hunting organizations I belong to. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How would the minister address those Albertans who believe that there are better ways to manage Alberta's wildlife than the tradition of hunting?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to answer that question. I'd like to begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for his successful motion yesterday. We had a very good debate and discussion yesterday. The key to that debate was a very simple message, that healthy wildlife needs healthy habitat. Healthy wildlife depends upon healthy habitat. The key to providing healthy habitat on private lands is the many hunting and fishing organizations: Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Delta Waterfowl, the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. I'd like to quote not from a hunting magazine but from *National Geographic* of November of this year, 2007 . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The farmers and ranchers in many parts of my constituency are concerned with the rising populations of elk and deer and the impact this has had on their crops and other areas as well, such as my wife's garden and flowers. How are you reducing these overpopulated herds?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I just want to finish my quotation from *National Geographic*. *National Geographic* in November stated that the "irony is that many species might not survive at all were it not for hunters," that "the nation's 12.5 million hunters have become essential partners in wildlife management." That's the key message: "essential partners in wildlife management."

With respect to ungulate damage, it's the issue we get the most letters on in the department. It's a serious issue. We have several different programs, intercept feed and fencing programs, that I encourage all landowners to take advantage of.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, over 10 years ago elk were reintroduced onto the Suffield prairie. At that time about 200 animals were introduced. In the last 10 years the population has grown to well over 1,600 today. They travel back and forth between the private lands and the Suffield Block, which is really a refuge to them. At this rate of growth in about another 10 years there could be well over 5,000 animals there. When will the minister open up the Suffield Block for elk hunting?

Dr. Morton: Well, 5,000 animals: that would be quite a hunt. Mr. Speaker, CFB Suffield is, of course, a military base. They've made it clear that they don't want any public hunting on the base. We do have elk season on the adjacent WMUs on the southern and eastern portions of Suffield. Those would be WMUs 148, 150, and 151.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

When we left the Routine to go to Oral Question Period, we were in Members' Statements.

head: **Members' Statements**
(continued)

The Speaker: I'll now call on the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Wetaskiwin Area Tourism

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Wetaskiwin region has just completed a major tourism study looking at ways to achieve new levels of tourism and economic impact by building on regional assets such as the Reynolds-Alberta Museum. The project steering committee included the mayors of Wetaskiwin and Millet, the reeve of the county of Wetaskiwin, the Wetaskiwin Member of Parliament, the joint economic development initiative, the Hobbema First Nations community, the private sector, Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame, the Friends of Reynolds-Alberta Museum Society, the Reynolds-Alberta Museum Advisory Board, and myself as MLA for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

In our region the Reynolds-Alberta Museum and Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame form a key tourism destination. The museum holds Canada's largest collection of vintage vehicles and agricultural equipment and the nation's second-largest collection of vintage aircraft. Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame is the only national organization dedicated to honouring those who have made outstanding contributions to aviation in Canada.

Two recommendations from the tourism report and endorsed unanimously by the steering committee are to expand much-needed artifacts storage but in a way that visitors can see the collections and to develop a new aviation gallery which would feature Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame. Recent donations to the museum include seven vintage aircraft, including the world's only Canadair Sabre Mark 3, in which America's aviatrix Jackie Cochran became the first woman to break the sound barrier, and the only Beechcraft Staggerwing custom manufactured in 1940 for the Canadian department of transportation.

In 2009 the museum will celebrate 100 years of powered flight in Canada and will receive an additional 25 vintage aircraft from the Reynolds family. With continued donations such as those to the people of Alberta and the overwhelming support of regional stakeholders, we are entering an exciting time of renewal and growth at the Reynolds-Alberta Museum and Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame in Wetaskiwin.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Labour Law Reform

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you compare labour laws across the country, you can't help but come to the conclusion that Alberta's laws are hopelessly one sided. They represent employers and are stacked against workers at almost every turn. Other provinces have rules that put a union in place if a majority of employees sign union cards. In Alberta that's not the case. In Alberta a majority isn't a majority until employers get one more chance to intimidate and threaten employees into changing their minds.

Historically first contract disputes are among the longest and most drawn out. Alberta allows employers to stretch out negotiations without penalty. Other provinces allow binding arbitration to achieve first contracts. With such legislation strikes like the recent violent dispute at Lakeside Packers would have been averted.

Alberta needs to take a page from Quebec and B.C. and outlaw the use of replacement workers. The practice of hiring someone to do the job of a striking or locked-out employee is the number one cause of violence on picket lines and has been shown to lengthen, not shorten strikes.

Mr. Speaker, it is almost impossible for construction employees to strike. To do so requires a maze of red tape, and regulation forces construction employees to accept whatever is offered from their

bosses. But that's par for the course. Our labour laws do everything possible to prevent unions from striking. A large number of unionized workers don't even have that right, including most public-sector employees.

Labour law reform requires a government not dependent upon hundreds of thousands of dollars in political donations from employers. Strong labour laws lead to strong communities. It means the wealth our province creates is distributed more evenly among all Albertans. It means people are not subjected to dangerous work situations, and it means happier and healthier families.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to present a petition from the Alberta Foothills Network asking the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to "support the establishment of a network of legislated protected areas in the Rocky Mountain Foothills of Alberta in the Kakwa, Little Smoky and Bighorn."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling the victims programs status report for 2006-2007. This annual report indicates that government has provided the largest amount of grant money to date for programs that assist victims of crime. Over \$4.4 million in grants were provided to 96 organizations in 2006-2007. Community- and police-based victims service units provide victims with information about the justice system, assistance through the court process, and referrals for additional information, financial benefits, or counselling. These programs reported handling more than 43,000 new cases, over half of which involved assisting victims of violent crime. It's important to highlight the incredible amount of time that's put in by volunteers . . .

The Speaker: That's all right, hon. minister. We'll go forward.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Two tablings today. The first tabling, Mr. Speaker, is on behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition. It is five copies of a document that appears to be Treasury Board meeting minutes from November 14, 2007.

My second tabling is letters from constituents on Alberta's regressive labour laws. They come from Myrtle Zastrisny, Diana Korol, Stephen Hughes, Michael Renton, Ursula Blackman, Karl Peters, Brian Campbell, Wendy Walker, Ken Isaacs, and Lisa Nelson. I'll just highlight one of their five points for change, which is the introduction of a process for first contract arbitration.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have six tablings today. The first is a letter from Mr. Richard Merry to all members of the Alberta Legislature regarding Bill 46.

The second tabling I have is from a farmer west of Rimbey named Mr. Michael Troitsky. He is 83 years old, and his letter is also regarding Bill 46.

My next tabling is a letter from a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar, Keith M. Johnson. Mr. Johnson is outlining changes he would like to see to the Alberta labour law.

My next tabling is from Richard James McEwen, a resident of Edmonton-Gold Bar on 105 Avenue. He is also outlining his issues with the Alberta labour law.

My next tabling is from Randy Koble, who is also a resident of Edmonton-Gold Bar, on 94th Avenue. This gentleman would also like to see the labour law changed in this province.

My final tabling is from Mr. Dan Hall, a resident of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and he, too, would like to see the Alberta labour law changed so that it is fair for everyone.

Thank you.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a letter from George Wayboer, a constituent of Edmonton-Mill Woods, regarding AISH funding. He required the rent supplement that was introduced in the spring and is pointing out that it is temporary and that his problems continue.

The other large tabling is from constituents of Edmonton-Mill Woods expressing concerns about Alberta's regressive labour laws. A number of requests are listed, specifically asking that legislation outlawing the use of replacement workers to break strikes, a measure that will vastly reduce the likelihood of violent labour conflicts, be considered. The letters are from Doug Reynolds, Marjorie Ursulum, Amanda Buckler, Ryan Holzinger, Claudio Tonn, Matt Cawthorne, Pauline Chambers, Kala Chambers, Michael Hennig, Wade McNeil, Stuart Switzer, Barry Hewitt, Walter Emberley, and Evan Evans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to make two tablings here today in support of the ministerial statement on the success of our education students earlier today. Just to add to that, the one tabling is a report that speaks about the fact of our young students having a great showing also in literacy and scoring up in the top in the world in literacy in grade 4.

Also, another report on the importance of some of our tradesmen that are going to represent Canada internationally at the tradesmen skills olympics in Japan, which is a competition in size almost equal to the size of the sports olympics and a very important contribution. It shows also the skills that we have in our province and the development of our apprenticeship system.

Those are my two tablings. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today. The first one is a letter from John Fawcett, and he's from Bluffton, Alberta. He is pointing out that he was forced to relocate as a result of a power line going across his property.

I have a letter as well from Warren Werner. He is from Rimbey. He had a transmission line built on his property, and then he was forced to move and is concerned about Bill 46 as well.

I've got a letter here as well from Michael Troitsky. He's from Rimbey as well. He had a gas well drilled on his property without permission and had trouble with the EUB. He's concerned about Bill 46, too.

Finally, I have the appropriate number of copies of three amendments that the Alberta New Democrat opposition has to bring

forward in regard to Bill 46 here today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one: I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter I received from Diane Millar, one of my constituents in Edmonton-Strathcona. Ms Millar is deeply concerned with the effects of Bill 46 on democratic rights and property rights and hopes that the bill is defeated.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, which I'm very pleased to table today, is the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Brian Staples, a spokesperson for A Circle of Alberta Seniors' Advocacy Group Chairpersons, and accompanying this letter, of course, the appropriate number of copies of the circle's proposal for the appointment of an independent seniors' advocate in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask your indulgence. I have five tablings today. The first one is from Sharon Cohen, telling us that her salary has increased only 5 per cent this year, but her rent is going up 31 per cent come March 1. She considers things like clothes, new shoes, and an occasional movie rental as luxuries and wants government to take action.

The second tabling is an e-mail from Dr. Judy Ustina, urging me to oppose Bill 41, which she argues will have many negative consequences on the public.

The Speaker: Fine. We're not going to have her debate, just that she opposes it. Good.

Mr. Elsalhy: The third one is copies of volume 17, issue 2, of *Libertas*, the newsletter of the organization Rights & Democracy, featuring Mr. Akbar Ganji, an Iranian journalist, who is the 2007 John Humphrey freedom award recipient.

My fourth tabling is a letter and signed petition from Maryclare L. Hall, recounting the fact that as recently as last year raw dairy was available in stores or from farms in Washington state, and she feels that it should be the same way here in Canada.

My fifth and final tabling is 11 more letters from constituents urging us to modernize Alberta's labour laws to ensure fairness for all workers. These letters are from Deborah Richards, Kathy Summerfelt, Marjorie M. Charles, Richard R. Weiss, Anne Weiss, Raj Sharma, Cindy Inman, Cindy Banh, Martin McDonnell, Thomas McDonnell, and Greg Leeti.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter to the Premier from a constituent of Calgary-Varsity, Jim Feeney. Mr. Feeney is supporting a call from the Pekisko Group to pause development on the eastern slopes grasslands to allow for scientific research to ensure that the fescue grasslands are not irredeemably damaged.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, then.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, a copy of an e-mail from a constituent of Edmonton-Rutherford, Mr. Chips Reid, expressing his concerns about Bill 46,

and specifically he says that Bill 46 will create a new EUB so powerful that they won't need spies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of my letter dated December 1, 2007, and cheque to the Medicine Hat and District Food Bank. As per my pledge of April 2, '07, half of my MLA indexed pay raise, \$146.25, is donated monthly to a food bank until AISH is similarly increased and indexed.

The Speaker: That's fine. We've heard that already, so let's just go on.

Ms Pastoor: I will also table five copies of a letter from Linda Egli, who is concerned that Park Lake provincial park has deteriorated drastically. Trees are dying. The area is unkempt. It's no longer an oasis on the prairies. The department says that most of the dollars go to capital projects and not maintenance.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 25 letters for tabling, and they have come from my constituents: Raymond Salicon, Murugesu Sahadevan, Gordon Crawford, Maureen Crawford, Mary Kutschke, Kevin McIver, Peter Weissbecker, Corinne Weissbecker, Margaret Potiuk, Richard Sharko, Jeff Oliver, Irene Gouin, Trevor Clark, Cindy Malec, Kiran Singh, Virginia Losier, Cecil Ramdass, Kris Madho, Amber McIver, Ernie Baird, Orest Johnson, Diana Koster, Greg Book, Renita Falkenstein, and Carol Storoschuk. They are all concerned about Alberta labour laws and strongly believe in major changes to encourage fairness to all working people in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: That was 15 minutes. Have we any others?

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Cited Documents

The Speaker: Hon. members, earlier today there were several points of order raised at various times. The hon. Minister of Finance and the hon. Government House Leader both advised the chair that they wanted to raise a point of order with respect to a document referred to by the Leader of the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre tabled such documents. This is going to be very, very brief. I'll hear one argument.

The bottom line was that there was no need to have those documents tabled. I want to make this very clear. Earlier this year and in the past we've had spirited debate with respect to this. Quite frankly, the Leader of the Official Opposition did not cite from any document. He referred to a document. I have no idea what these documents are. Our rules are very, very clear. He didn't quote from them. They don't have to be tabled by private members. The rules are very, very clear on that.

I'd refer you as well, hon. members, to a debate we had in the House here not too long ago with respect to the leader of the government quoting from certain papers and having a big debate back and forth, the Government House Leader arguing they had no reason to table those documents. We've got other statements in *Hansard* going back to May 17, 2005, when the hon. Government House Leader strenuously argued that there was no need to table anything because there was just reference to a document. So the sword swings both ways with respect to these matters, and the bottom line is there was no need to table these documents. They

have been tabled, though, as a courtesy, and that is appreciated by the chair. That always leads to some harmony.

2:40

Now, the second point. The hon. Government House Leader, on a point with respect to statements made by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, I believe.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although I'm tempted to ask whether it's appropriate to raise a point of order on the Speaker for ruling on a point of order that wasn't raised.

The Speaker: No. It's not appropriate.

Mr. Hancock: That would have been on 13(1), I guess.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Hancock: Under Standing Order 23(h), making allegations against a member, and *Beauchesne's* 64, attacking a member, I don't have the privilege of the Blues, but the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, as I heard it, made direct allegations against the Premier in his questions. The allegations related to the Premier and inappropriate fundraising.

Now, there are appropriate ways to raise appropriate questions in this House. As I've done I guess in virtually every session – and I hoped that we would make it through a session where I wouldn't have to do it – I raise a point of order that the type of question or the type of allegation which besmirches the reputation of an individual member of this House is not appropriate. It's always appropriate to hold government to account. No question about that. But it's not appropriate to drag either this institution, an individual member of this institution, or the whole nature of politics in government into the mud just because one member wants to make some political point. There are intelligent ways to do that. What we heard today was not one of them, and it was not appropriate.

With respect to the specific incident that the hon. member was trying to get at, if he had asked the question appropriately, he would have heard that the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta does have a screening mechanism for donations, that when inappropriate donations are made – and that happens; there are organizations, there are people in this province who would like to make donations – that screening will catch them and return them. With respect to the incident in Taber with respect to the golf tournament in question it is clear – and the hon. member ought to know or would have been able to know if he'd ever inquired civilly – that the donation from the school division to which he was referring was returned, in fact, uncashed.

But the offence is not in his questioning a donation. The offence is the offensive way in which he tied it directly to the Premier, who obviously, any member in this House would know, didn't go out and solicit a donation, legal or illegal, personally. To make that allegation personally against the Premier almost is a breach of privilege, Mr. Speaker, under 64. It is entirely inappropriate. It's offensive to be making these personal allegations about individual members and to be dragging the whole institution, both the House and every member of this House, into the mud purely to make a political point.

I would ask you to ask the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner to withdraw the remark.

The Speaker: Does anybody else want to participate? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, on the point of order.

Mr. Hinman: I would appreciate the opportunity to speak to this point of order, Mr. Speaker. I guess, first of all, to say in an intelligent way that I think an intelligent elected representative would see to it to pass the word down that there is an intelligent screening process for those who are soliciting for funds and prevent it from happening in the first place.

There's been a long history of these things coming into the party, and that's why I guess they now have this idea that after being caught shoplifting they can send it back. It's not a problem. I mean the crime was committed. It was picked up. It wasn't an allegation. It was in the paper. They even advertised it after they received it. So there's no question that they were aware of it. They had people that went out and solicited in the riding. There's public knowledge of that. I guess I'm just surprised that they would continue to refer to this as an allegation when I tabled it. Like I say, it's public knowledge, public information. So I don't think there was any point of order.

The Speaker: Well, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner used the following words:

The Premier talks about integrity and doing the right thing, but what he really means is for the Tory Party. The Premier continues to attend functions in which his party has not only solicited illegal campaign funds but has accepted them only to return them after being caught. Will the Premier please apologize and do the right thing for the people of Alberta and the people of my riding for the shenanigans that went on at the Taber golf course fundraiser that he attended?

Well, it is virtually impossible for the chair to deal with the matter without asking for a whole series of bits of information which no member of the government can provide to the chair because in essence this matter deals with party matters. However, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner did make a pretty serious allegation, that "the Premier continues to attend functions in which his party has not only solicited illegal campaign funds but has accepted them only to return them after being caught." There's a pretty dramatic assumption in there.

I would suspect that any political party in the province of Alberta would understand what the rules are, number one. Secondly, if an income tax receipt or a receipt had been provided by a political party and then after that somebody had made a complaint saying, "Well, why was this particular receipt provided?" and somebody then asked the next question, "Was this some difficult work that was done in a political office to basically cover up this cheque?" then one probably could arrive at saying that there was something illegal in here. But from what the chair has heard, there's absolutely no evidence that anybody accepted anything.

The chair does find the words quite offensive, and I think if you looked at page 522, *Marleau and Montpetit* makes the following comment:

Remarks directed specifically at another Member which question that Member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order. A Member will be requested to withdraw offensive remarks, allegations, or accusations of impropriety directed towards another Member. The Speaker has no authority to rule on statements made outside the House by one Member against another.

But this statement was made inside the House. The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner basically is saying in here that the Premier "has not only solicited illegal campaign funds but has accepted them only to return them after being caught." It's a pretty provocative statement. I can't believe that the Premier of Alberta or the leader of any party or, in fact, any member would actually go out and solicit and then return them after being caught. I find that more than just innuendo, so I'm going to ask the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner to withdraw those remarks.

Mr. Hinman: Well, I certainly respect the Speaker and his request, and I will gladly withdraw those remarks. If that's the way he found them, that they were offensive, I withdraw them. It wasn't the intention, so I apologize.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce Logan Lehune. Logan is a grade 8 student from Mary Butterworth school in Edmonton-Castle Downs. He is very interested in politics and current events and often watches proceedings of both the federal Parliament and this provincial Legislature. I'm sure he was interested in your wise ruling that you just made. This is his first visit to the Legislature Building and his first opportunity to watch the question period live. Logan is doing a work experience session with my former constituency assistant, Scott Hennig, who is the Alberta director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. I'd ask them both to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Orders of the Day**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent of the House with respect to divisions that may be anticipated this afternoon in committee. We will be going into committee, and we'll be dealing with a number of bills over the course of the afternoon and the evening, and I'm requesting unanimous consent that after the first division the time between bells be reduced to one minute.

The Speaker: Comments? There's a request here I guess by way of a motion.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm afraid I only heard part of the Government House Leader's comments, but certainly my understanding yesterday evening specifically dealing with Bill 46 was that . . .

2:50

The Speaker: No. The request was for division. I don't think a bill was mentioned. It was also a request for unanimous consent, which doesn't allow for any debate. So I'll make this very, very clear. The request, as I understand it, is that should there be divisions, the time between bells would be reduced to – what time?

Mr. Hancock: One minute.

The Speaker: One minute from the normal 10. That's the request. Unanimous consent. One member says no, it's not accepted. So we'll make sure that everybody understands this. The request is for unanimous consent of the House that should there be divisions later on today, in essence, the time between bells would be reduced from the normal 10 to one.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head:

Government Motions

head: **The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 46

38. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, is resumed, not more than three hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The outline for this was debated previously, last night, with respect to time allocation under the standing orders for second reading. There are three hours of time. Amendments to the bill have been placed on the table. Members of the House have had an opportunity for over a week now to see those government amendments. Certainly, I'm aware that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has tabled some proposed amendments, as well, although they haven't been moved as yet.

The allocation of three hours allows the opportunity for all members of the House to choose to deal expeditiously with certain amendments if they wish and the opportunity to move other amendments. Three hours is a lot of time, and I think it's an appropriate amount of time for us to be able to deal with this bill, to deal with the essential elements of the bill and the issues around the bill but still deal with the bill on a timely basis.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I speak on behalf of my caucus when I say that we do not support this government motion to reduce the amount of time that's available for Committee of the Whole discussion of Bill 46 to three hours. That is not a very long period of time in which to discuss some 22 government amendments that have been put on the floor and the bill. Committee of the Whole, of course, is where we are allowed to go through clause by clause and even, if necessary, word by word, plus amendments that the Liberals and, indeed, there may well have been amendments coming from the NDs, the Alliance, and perhaps the independent. Three hours is a very short period of time.

I'm interested in one of the stories that was told to me, and I wish I could give credit to the individual. They pointed out that Bill 46 is like buying a car for \$30,000 and being immediately told that it needs \$20,000 worth of repairs, at which point it wasn't a very good deal, and neither, Mr. Speaker, is Bill 46. It's not a very good deal. It's not very well written. To have 22 government amendments necessary to a bill . . .

An Hon. Member: Twenty-four.

Ms Blakeman: Twenty-four. I'm sorry.

Twenty-four amendments necessary to a government bill before it really even got any debate is showing us that this was very poorly drafted and needed a lot of work on it.

What I'm thinking, as we witness this rushing through of Bill 46, is that this bill must truly be an embarrassment of grand scale for the government, that it necessitates closure at every stage of the bill so they can get it out of the public eye and out of this Legislature as fast as possible. That's the only reason I can think of why they would need to do this. They got barely four hours of debate before they brought in closure at second, closure with one more hour in second.

Now we're three hours in Committee of the Whole, and we've already had notification that they're going to bring in closure with one hour at third. So less than 10 hours devoted to a bill that is in itself going to curtail democracy and citizen participation for all Albertans.

This is a very poor bill, indeed. A hundred and eighty minutes is being allocated to this. We've already heard of 24 government amendments and a dozen Liberal amendments. We would have to go through amendments at a rate of about four to six minutes per amendment, which, based on some of the ones I've seen from the government, you would not be able to actually read it off the page in that amount of time.

This is, well, what I've come to expect from this government. It does reflect the current Premier's lack of commitment to democracy. It's a slap in the face for those rural Albertans that have raised an issue around this, and if this is a showing of how this Premier wants to go forward with democracy in this Legislature, I think we're all in for a very bumpy ride, Mr. Speaker. This is – well, I'm actually running out of the rhetoric to describe this. I don't think there is hyperbole enough to describe what this government is doing in pushing through a bill that is supposed to be this important, bringing in closure through all three stages. I don't think there are words to describe it, Mr. Speaker.

We do not support this motion. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 38 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:58 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abbott	Graydon	Oberg
Ady	Hancock	Oberle
Amery	Horner	Ouellette
Backs	Jablonski	Pham
Boutilier	Johnson	Prins
Brown	Johnston	Rogers
Cenaiko	Liepert	Shariff
DeLong	Lougheed	Stevens
Ducharme	Lukaszuk	Strang
Dunford	Lund	Tarchuk
Evans	Marz	VanderBurg
Forsyth	Melchin	Zwozdesky
Fritz	Mitzel	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	MacDonald	Miller, R.
Eggen	Martin	Pannu
Elsalhy	Mason	Pastoor
Flaherty	Miller, B.	Taft
Hinman		

Totals: For – 38 Against – 13

[Government Motion 38 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Clerk will shortly call the committee. Just before the chair departs, under the motion just approved there are up to three hours set aside for committee review of this matter. It, of course, can be less than three hours, but there are three hours. So the chair will assume that if you begin in the next minute or two, at 6 o'clock you will rise and come back tonight

at 8 o'clock in committee for that 10 minutes to 11 minutes.

3:10

Now, earlier this afternoon the Government House Leader asked for unanimous consent to waive the time between bells. The Assembly said no. I would just draw to hon. members' attention Standing Order 32(3), in which it doesn't mean that this request cannot be made this evening. If this request was made in committee, it says: "When a division is called in Committee of the Whole or Committee of Supply, a Member may request unanimous consent to waive suborder (2) to shorten the 10 minute interval between division bells." It required unanimous consent. The Assembly disagreed to provide unanimous consent.

You shouldn't do this every three minutes. There has to be some order in the Assembly. So let's assume that you would have one opportunity or something. If you go in there with the divisions and no unanimous consent and there are 24 amendments, then you can just multiply 24 times 10 or 11, 12 minutes, and you know that you're there until 12:30 or a quarter to 1 before we get back to other business, just so there's clarification so that there won't be any request to call the Speaker at 12:30 in the morning to go back into the House per se. The Speaker will be very close by in any case, but we would hope that this matter would be dealt with in the committee.

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 46 Alberta Utilities Commission Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Hon. members, when we dealt with this matter yesterday, there was an amendment that was introduced by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. Just for reclarification purposes that amendment is referred to as amendment A1. When we arrive at the point of voting on them, unless there's an agreement, there will be a separate vote on every section.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In response to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar I wanted to use this time just to respond shortly to some of the comments and questions. I'll try not to take too much time.

The member asked for an explanation of section 91(1)(g). To the member: this is a renumbering that reflects the fact that section 9(3)(b), which included the clause "in a material way," has been removed from the bill. That would be on that question.

The member also asked about the commission being given the authority to make its own rules and suggests that they won't be public or known and thus could impact when the commission will hold hearings. Mr. Chairman, the commission will have a series of rules, which are determined by the commission. In fact, they are open for consultation now and are posted on the EUB website. No rules will be made that undermine or overrule the content or the intent of Bill 46, I can assure the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

I'm reading some scratches here. The member also asked why there was the difference in the definition between the gas pipeline

and the gas utility pipeline. To the member again: this just makes the wording consistent between Bill 46 and the Gas Utilities Act. So it's the same phrases, the same pipes we're talking about. It's just the phrases, to make the wording consistent between the two acts.

Also, the member raised questions about the payments of costs to intervenors other than a local intervenor referred to in section 22 and specifically the use of the term "may" provide costs and references to the discretion of the UCA to provide funding for costs. Mr. Chairman, this is not new with the EUB. The EUB has always had the discretion over which costs they would cover as they relate to both the landowners and third-party intervenors, so it's consistent with what presently happens.

The member expressed disappointment with the deletion of the UCA from the act and asks: I don't know what sort of money was promised any people that were recruited. Well, I don't know what money was included either, and these matters are currently under discussion.

You also asked about the regulations that can be made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council to address the roles and responsibilities of the UCA and specifically the questions of how this will affect water bills.

He also noted the issues raised by Mayor Bronconnier regarding the future structure of the UCA. Well, in response to that, the issues raised by the mayor were addressed when the current UCA structure was maintained by the government amendments, so it stays within Service Alberta. Questions about the current or future structure of the UCA are not addressed in this bill and should be discussed with the minister responsible for Service Alberta.

I think what I would do: I would offer to the member that sometime in the near future maybe the two of us could sit down with the Minister of Service Alberta and keep his feet to the fire on the UCA because this group has done some great work for Albertans – for you and your constituents, for me and my constituents, and for many members here – so I think it's incumbent upon both of us to keep his feet to the fire and make sure that that UCA keeps doing the good work that they do. I'd offer my support, and I hope that you would offer your support, and we'd do that together.

Mr. Chairman, there were mentions of the administrative penalties, but he didn't really have any questions, and you kind of suggested that you could live with the changes on the administrative penalties. Maybe we don't have to draw all that into a long vote because I want to get to your amendments too, and I want to give you fairness. That's why I'm trying to get through this.

Mr. Chair, the member asked about why the offence provisions have been decreased from the \$5 million a day to the \$3 million a day under section 79. Well, the \$3 million a day is sufficient to provide a significant deterrent and remedy for contraventions of the act in response to the concerns raised by IPPSA, the Independent Power Producers Society. Originally it was \$5 million a day in the initial draft, so this brings it consistent with other acts within the department.

Mr. Chair, I know the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and others would like to get to their amendments, and I know members on this side would like to speak. I'll sit down now. I do thank the member for his time and attention on the amendments raised in committee last night.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the explanation from the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. Certainly I have a lot more questions in regard to this bill, in regard to this matter of having closure on this bill at commit-

tee stage.

This is quite an extensive, substantial change, and regardless of whether we're talking about the 24 government amendments or we're talking about the amendments proposed by any other member of this Assembly or any suggestions from an interested party outside the House, we can't do justice to this in three hours. We have to go through these government amendments, the 24 of them, first. I mean, they're government amendments; we're dealing with them.

3:20

I haven't heard from anyone regarding the amendments that we have tabled, whether they're acceptable or whether they're not acceptable to the government, and I would remind all hon. members that this is the only time since there was no public consultation on this bill. The lead-up to the drafting of this legislation went on essentially without any public consultation. We've talked about this before. We're not wasting any time here this afternoon, hon. members, when we discuss this bill line by line, item by item and compare the amendments that have been proposed and perhaps what other amendments also should be and could be proposed.

Now, I certainly accept the explanation of the hon. member regarding the new 9(3)(c), or the amendment, and his explanation regarding part 9, section 91(1). But, again, there was no reason given that I could hear, at least – and there was some chatter behind me, Mr. Chairman – why the Regulations Act does not apply to commission rules. So I need further clarification on that. Certainly, whenever the hon. member was talking about some of the administrative penalties, well, there have been changes, as I understand it, when the amendments were presented.

Certainly we see changes, but I thought there was also in this a reduction in a corporate director or a CEO, their personal liability on a matter. I'm wondering if I could have a clarification from the government as to why this is necessary because there looks to be changes, Mr. Chairman, to that section, and I would be interested to know why that was done and, again, on whose advice.

Now, when we look at these amendments and we look at amendment X, for instance – and this is an amendment to the Surface Rights Act – one could possibly consider that this is an amendment that would change the reference in the Surface Rights Act to the Alberta utilities commission. We could also say that that is applicable to section 15(6) of the Surface Rights Act, but when we're looking at this and we look at section 96, there's an amendment that needed to be made, and unless I've overlooked it, it's certainly not in there. That's an amendment to section 96(14)(c)(ii). This is an amendment that was, I guess, declared necessary by the government. We are looking at changing the Hydro and Electric Energy Act to make it retroactive to June 1, 2003. As I understand it, this is the date the last amendments that were made to the Electric Utilities Act came into effect.

I'm told this is just a minor adjustment; it's just a housekeeping arrangement, but there have been so many parties that have so many concerns over this that I fail to understand why in this amendment A1 there is no reference to that. Now, if we look at that, Mr. Chairman, we can see. We only have to look at what the Environmental Law Centre had to say regarding this matter to know that it's a serious concern, it's a serious issue, and it has yet to be addressed by this government.

That amendment or that change that the government has overlooked in section 96 – and this is in Bill 46 – proposes to amend the Hydro and Electric Energy Act by removing from the act this subsection 14(3). Section 14(3) requires the EUB to determine whether a proposed transmission line for which an approval is sought is and will be required to meet present and future public convenience and need. The effect of this amendment of the Hydro

and Electric Energy Act would be that this newly formed commission, that we seem gung ho to set up, would not be required to consider public convenience and need when considering an application for a permit to construct a transmission line.

Now, I hope all hon. members have had a look at the documents that have been circulated by the Environmental Law Centre regarding not only this issue but other issues. To the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne: this issue has not been addressed in this series of 24 amendments. I don't know in the time that we have whether we'll get to this, but I can understand why this government at this time is so anxious to get by this criteria, which is public convenience and need. Why would they be so anxious, Mr. Chairman? I was quite surprised by this.

A year ago in June – this is a year before the spy scandal erupted in Rimbey and Redwater – we had the electricity business unit manager, the executive director of Alberta Energy, electricity division, Mr. Kellan Fluckiger, writing to the EUB, writing directly to the EUB regarding the 500 kV transmission system reinforcement project. We had this gentleman writing directly. I thought there was some sort of rule that would prevent this correspondence. If we're going to have this independent quasi-judicial board and we're going to have all this independence, I was quite surprised at this letter.

Now, maybe this is why, Mr. Chairman, we're not looking at a subamendment to correct this and leave the intent and the purpose of the Hydro and Electric Energy Act in place. This letter indicates that the Department of Energy supports the existing review and variance purpose. The letter goes on to say that there's a "demonstrated urgent need for the approved facility," and "we urge the Board to conduct the R&V proceedings as expeditiously as possible to avoid unnecessary delays." Well, we have a significant delay now. And this is the Department of Energy to the EUB.

In its original needs application to the EUB, the AESO, the DOE, [the Department of Energy] and many stakeholders clearly agreed that there is a critical need to reinforce the transmission lines from the Wabamun area into Calgary as quickly as possible. The need was documented in detail by the AESO and its technical experts. Whoever they'd be.

It is also documented by the AESO that such temporary measures are stop-gap at best, and if southern Alberta continues to grow, the risk increases for outages, and other symptoms of decreased reliability.

It is also critical for the continued development of a competitive market place that Alberta have a robust and reliable transmission system. As the DOE testified in the original needs application for this 500 kV line, it is imperative that transmission lead generation and does not hinder its development. Simply put, with the current constraints on the transmission system, it is extremely unlikely that investors will build any new economical coal fired generation in the Wabamun area. This is because it would be impossible to transport more electricity from this new generation to consumers.

3:30

Now, there are more interesting comments in this letter, including the fact that the frustrated consumer, the one that's asked to pay so much on their monthly bills, is being asked to pay more. Because if you add this up now, Mr. Chairman, what's going on, consumers are going to have an additional \$200 million to pony up on their monthly bills, whether it's for transmission-must-run payments or any other matter, but the transmission-must-run payments could be in excess of \$60 million per year of delay.

I think that the reason why we're trying to slip this bill through this Legislature so fast is because we have a major problem. We have a major problem that has been brought on by electricity deregulation, and this government needs to rubber-stamp a whole series of projects. They're going to ignore public convenience and

need, and when we do this, when we allow section 98(1) to proceed, we are ignoring the wishes of landowners.

Now, is there another solution to this problem? I certainly think there is, and we discussed that here last week, I believe, Mr. Chairman. But let's be very careful about this, and let's examine the need for the government to reconsider in its amendments section 98.

Another effect of the EUA 1995 was to amend the [Hydro and Electric Energy Act] to require the EUB to assess present and future public convenience and need when determining whether to approve a transmission project. Later steps of deregulation included the creation of an Independent System Operator,

the transmission administrator. There was a whole series of changes made, but through all this "the EUB is [still] required by the [Electric Utilities Act] 2003 to determine need when considering whether to approve the needs identification document."

Need has to be more than the need of AltaLink, the need of the government. When we consider need, we've got to consider the needs of the citizens who are going to be paying for these expanded transmission lines and the upgrades. Right now this government is quietly sitting across in its benches, knowing full well that in 12 years there are plans afoot to export large volumes of electricity out of this province, and this bill and these amendments are a big part of that plan. Again, it has to be done quickly and decisively, without any public notice, without any public consultation, without any public hearing. We just can't in good conscience allow this bill to go through this Assembly at this time. I believe the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne recognizes that.

Now, we should consider the advice and the conclusions and the recommendations that are coming from the Environmental Law Centre regarding section 98, but I think, Mr. Chairman, that I will leave that to other hon. members of this Assembly to deal with. The government because of deregulation has got themselves in a real fix here, but this bill and these amendments that we're discussing are not the solution.

When we look at other amendments that I'm very disappointed are not included in amendment A1, I have to look again at the section dealing with regulations. There are so many different regulations in here, and I still haven't received from the Minister of Energy all the regulations that have been drafted, the draft regulations. I asked for them last week. I asked for them again last night, and I'm not getting any word or any signal from any of the government benches that these regulations are going to be put forward. Again the Premier talked last week about co-operating with the opposition. Well, where are the regulations? We know they've been written, but there are no regulations.

This gets me, Mr. Chairman, to another section of the bill which I find very interesting – we've talked about it here before – and that's the transitional provisions in part 10. I had been listening very closely, and I regret if I have missed it, but no one on the record from the government has explained why it is necessary under part 10, Transitional Provisions, Related and Consequential Amendments, to have this rule where this government can simply rule by regulation that "if there is a conflict between a regulation made under subsection (7) and a provision in this Part, the regulation prevails." That's one of the amendments that we want to make on this side of the House. Not only that, but in the section above it, Mr. Chairman, a regulation "may be made retroactive to the extent set out in the regulation." Why on earth would this be necessary?

Now, above here the government writes in the bill: the cabinet may make any regulations "(h) to remedy any confusion, difficulty, inconsistency or impossibility resulting from the transition to this Act from an Act or a former Act." There are four words in there that I think would describe Bill 46 and this government very well.

Oh, I'm cut off. I'm sorry. I hope to have an opportunity to continue.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, a number of members have come before me to ask whether we will be debating every single part and have a vote: part A, vote on A, and then move to part B. I have also been advised that the Clerk of the Assembly feels that from a management point of view it would be better to have debate section by section and a vote on the sections as we progress. So what I've done is asked the Deputy Government House Leader to try and come to an understanding with the Opposition House Leader, and if the committee so directs me, I'd be happy to deal with it in whatever manner the committee feels appropriate.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, would you like to speak now or wait until that decision is made?

Dr. Pannu: Wait till later.

3:40

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, you had some generic remarks?

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to stand in Committee of the Whole and speak to Bill 46, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, and to offer my support of this legislation. The energy industry in our province is strong and growing. Albertans need a regulatory process capable of dealing with the increasing number of energy and utility development applications in an effective, efficient, and accountable way. That is exactly what Bill 46 is intended to do. Most importantly, Bill 46 and the recently tabled amendments will make sure that the rights and concerns of Albertans continue to be protected and respected throughout the regulatory process.

Public participation is very important. I'd like to talk about public hearings and how they will remain open and accessible to Albertans. A decision to participate in a public hearing, a formal and quasi-judicial process, is never made lightly. For those who may be directly and adversely affected by an energy or utility application, a hearing is a public forum at which to voice concerns. Hearings provide an equal opportunity for all participants – landowners and other intervenors, applicants, and other regulatory authorities – to know and to question the positions of others. For all energy and utility applications a fully informed decision must be made, which is why public participation is absolutely necessary.

Alberta's regulatory laws and process must provide ample opportunity for that public participation. In fact, section 9(2) of Bill 46 offers greater protection to the public than exists under the current legislation. Under Bill 46 if even one person is directly and adversely affected, a hearing must be held, as per section 9(2)(c).

Now, regarding the hearings, full public notification of any application where one person is directly and adversely affected must be made, and affected parties will receive notice as per section 9(2)(a). Notice will be given in different ways. A notice of hearing will be mailed to those people with organizations affected by an application. This same notice of hearing will be published in daily or weekly newspapers, hearing notices will also be made available on the Internet at publicly accessible websites, and companies involved in large projects may hold an open house to explain their proposed projects, answer Albertans' questions, and answer the community's concerns.

The notice will provide all the information needed for those affected: the date, time, and location of the hearings, the application number and nature of the application, a contact for the company that has filed the application, information about the regulatory authority,

that is the Alberta utilities commission, and the due date for filing objections or interventions. Affected parties will have the opportunity to learn all the facts about the application as per section 9(2)(b). The company submitting the application is required to provide a copy of the application and supporting information, such as an environmental impact assessment or geological interpretations.

Regarding the submissions, in most situations participants will be able to share their submissions in person verbally. While Bill 46 does give the Alberta utilities commission the ability to require written instead of oral testimony, this will not be the usual practice. Written testimony may be appropriate in certain circumstances, as in highly technical matters such as the determination of gas cost ratios. The current regulatory process uses written applications, written requests for additional information, and written responses to questions. After a hearing all the decisions are delivered in a written format. Justice is still served when written arguments are submitted.

Bill 46 in no way affects the rights to retain legal counsel. For some participants having a lawyer represent their interests may be a good idea because the hearings are in some ways like a civil case before a judge. Lawyers are retained to present a client's case, cross-examine the other side's witnesses, and make arguments on what the final decision should be. The retention of these valuable services will not be limited.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion I believe we can and must strengthen Alberta's regulatory system. The rights and concerns of those affected must be preserved while balancing the need for responsible energy development and a reliable electricity system. We cannot lose sight of the intent of this legislation. Reliable utility infrastructure is essential to the lives of all Albertans.

I look forward to achieving this goal together in this legislation. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 46 during the debate in committee. This bill is of great significance to the energy industry, to Albertans, who own the energy resources in the province, and to all of us as legislators. The bill has received a very, very widespread reaction from Albertans who would have liked to have had the opportunity to come before an appropriate committee of this House to make their presentations. In other words, they expect, I think rightly, this Legislature to give them the opportunity to appear at public hearings and have the opportunity to comment on the bill and its provisions in detail.

This concern on the part of Albertans to be heard, Mr. Chairman, has arisen on the basis of their previous experience in public hearings and their intentions and efforts to be heard, to speak either on behalf of the interests that they think are affected with respect to their own properties or to be able to speak on behalf of all of us as intervenors on behalf of the public interest in general. They're unhappy with the existing laws and the existing powers that the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board has had. They have been spied on while they tried to make presentations either as individuals or as organizations. So they have been deeply offended. They have been frustrated in their efforts to be heard. So when Bill 46 came, they looked at the bill and felt that they have reason to be even more concerned now than they have been in the context of the existing piece of legislation.

Bill 46, which will create an Alberta utilities commission, Mr. Chairman, is seen by concerned Albertans – and there's a very diverse group and a very large number of them, including industries, businesses, individuals, property owners, farming communities, ranchers, and concerned citizens in general – to be challenging their

democratic rights, rolling back their ability as citizens in a democracy to be able to be heard, to express their views on a piece of legislation that will have far-reaching consequences if it passes through this House without the desired public hearings.

Of course, people who were to appear before the public hearings had hoped that public hearings would result in some substantive changes to the bill. In fact, they were hoping that they'll be able to buy time so that they can engage decision-makers, members of this House, and people beyond in a broad-based conversation and dialogue related to the future of the energy industry and how it is to be regulated primarily in the interests of the people of Alberta and those who are more directly affected by either the running of new transmission lines or of pipelines or sour gas well drilling and development in their neighbourhoods or in their backyards. So there are a huge number of concerns, Mr. Chairman.

3:50

I just want to put on the record a short letter that I received from one of my constituents. She addresses the letter to me, and it came to me yesterday, December 3. The letter is from Diane Millar. This is what she says.

After learning about the content of Bill 46, which received first reading in the spring '07 sitting of the Alberta Legislature, and which is expected to receive second and third reading [in this sitting], I wish to express my concerns. In particular, I wish to state my objection to the following sections.

Since she's very specific, I thought I should put her concerns on the record, Mr. Chairman, with your permission.

- Section 9, which gives the proposed Alberta Utilities Commission the power to prevent landowners and consumers from making verbal representations in the event that a hearing is held;
- Section 9(1) which authorizes the Commission to make orders or decisions without giving public notice, and without holding a hearing;
- Section 9(4) which restricts the ability of landowners to hire outside legal counsel when intervening in regulatory hearings; and
- Section 98(2) makes the Bill retroactive to June 1, 2003, which would therefore eliminate the legal recourse that might otherwise be due to corporations and the EUB in the issue of the proposed AltaLink 500 kV line from Genesee to Langdon, and points further south.

She concludes, Mr. Chairman, by saying:

Bill 46 has a profound limiting impact on the democratic rights of all Albertans. It is legislation designed to violate and diminish the rights of property owners in this province, and I am not prepared to support a government that would pass such legislation that is clearly intended to facilitate the actions of large corporations at the expense of Alberta property owners and utilities consumers. The intent of Bill 46 is fundamentally wrong.

Then she says:

As my representative, I request that you [as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona] look seriously into the implications of Bill 46 insofar as they affect property owners and consumers in Alberta, and then reject its passage.

Mr. Chairman, I will certainly be voting against this bill. I'm very, very concerned about it.

I have before me a submission from the Environmental Law Centre, a highly respected public-interest, nonprofit charitable entity in the province, which has been providing important legal analysis in service of public interest since 1982. In the document before me, that's dated November 30, 2007, just three, four days ago, is a letter that is written to the Minister of Energy. There are some serious concerns expressed by the Environmental Law Centre after having had a chance to take a close look at the amendments before the House, amendments in the form of amendment A1, and the concerns

that they still have remaining in spite of the amendments that we are debating today, which I understand to address the fundamental concerns that organizations such as the Environmental Law Centre have placed before this government through a variety of communications and letters and submissions that they have made.

After a close analysis of the amendments that we're debating now, the outstanding concerns that the Environmental Law Centre have relate essentially to the following: the provisions in the bill that deal with the directly and adversely affected test for standing before the proposed commission that is to be created by Bill 46, the use of the directly and adversely affected test by the proposed commission, and the continued use of this test for standing by the Energy Resources Conservation Board under section 26 of the Energy Resources Conservation Act, ERCA, Mr. Chairman. So these are concerns that are outstanding with respect to this other piece of legislation, but they're also built into this act before us that we are now debating.

The amendments to Bill 46 before us, according to the Environmental Law Centre, that address the issue of the directly and adversely affected test for standing do not address the concerns expressed by the law centre, and I agree with their concern. I agree that the amendments do not effectively address the concerns expressed. The directly and adversely affected test for standing has been applied by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board for years and has served to limit public access – I want to emphasize this, Mr. Chairman: to limit public access – to regulatory processes, resulting in decisions with potentially significant consequences, both environmental and other.

Albertans have spoken to this matter in large numbers over the last many months and have expressed concerns about their rights to participate in energy-related hearing processes. The concerns of Albertans are being expressed, of course, in a broader context than just Bill 46, the context that I briefly referred to, where Albertans have been spied on during hearings; they have been obstructed from being able to make presentations at public hearings. So the directly and adversely affected test for standing before the commission, Mr. Chairman, is too narrow, particularly in the context of public interest determinations.

A more appropriate test would give the commission the discretion to grant standing to any person or group who has a legitimate interest that ought to be represented in the proceeding or process and has an established record of legitimate concern for the interest that they seek to represent. Of course, the AELC, the Alberta Environmental Law Centre, recommends that a similar test be used by the ERCB in respect of energy applications as well. I think that is true. But limiting our discussion to this bill, certainly the amendments do not address this issue of who has the right to appear and who has the legal standing to appear before the commission to be created.

Content of the right to a hearing. Section 9(2)(c) of Bill 46 requires the commission, where a decision or order may directly and adversely affect the rights of a person, to hold a hearing. Section 9(2) parallels to a degree section 26(3) of the Energy Resources Conservation Act, which enumerates the content of the right to a hearing before the EUB and makes clear that an intervenor will have a reasonable opportunity to furnish evidence, an opportunity to cross-examine the applicant if the intervenor will not otherwise have a fair opportunity to contradict or explain the facts or allegations in the application, and an adequate opportunity to make representation by way of argument to the EUB or its examiners.

4:00

Now, Bill 46, Mr. Chairman, differs in its description of the content of hearing rights. Bill 46 does not define the word "hearing." It is not clear how that word would be interpreted in a given case, but it is certainly foreseeable that applicants, intervenors, and the commission could have different interpretations. The commis-

sion, like all administrative tribunals, would be required to adhere to administrative law duties of fairness. As such, in a given case the commission would be required to interpret "hearing" in such a way that ensures that the process is fair and appropriate for the circumstances. However, this provides little comfort or clarity for intervenors who could potentially be confused by the use of the phrase "hearing" rather than an enumeration of process rights.

What we need to change in the bill is to fully enumerate the procedural rights to be allowed to an intervenor, which are not reflected in the amendments proposed by the government side, that we are debating right now. I consider that the procedural rights of an intervenor before the proposed commission should be consistent with those of an intervenor before the Energy Resources Conservation Board.

A third point, Mr. Chairman, that I'd like to make has to do with intervenor funding. Sections 21 and 22 of Bill 46 provide the proposed commission with the discretion to grant intervenor funding only to local intervenors. The ELC, the Environmental Law Centre, received many comments, and so have we, from Albertans concerned that this limitation on intervenor funding was too restrictive – and it is indeed very, very restrictive – and that the proposed commission should have the discretion to grant intervenor funding to a wider range of individuals or groups as appropriate and not only to those who are defined as local.

Amendment C put forward by the government, included in the package before us right now, includes a change that allows for the creation of commission rules that could allow for a wider range of intervenors who receive funding, so this amendment is a bit of an improvement, but this discretion should be provided in the legislation rather than in commission rules that can be easily changed with little or no public input.

Mr. Chairman, I want to emphasize this: that the changes attempted in amendment C to sections 21 and 22 do not go far enough. I think the ability of the commission to use discretion to grant funding must be entrenched in the legislation and shouldn't be allowed to be left to the rules to be developed by the commission, rules which can easily be changed without any public input or without any notice being given.

The next point that I want to make, Mr. Chairman, has to do with the consideration of public interest under section 34 of the Electric Utilities Act. Bill 46 would amend section 14 of the Hydro and Electric Energy Act by removing the requirement for the proposed commission to consider whether proposed transmission expansion or enhancement is required to meet public convenience and need. The existing regulatory system has a two-step approval process respecting transmission system expansion or enhancement. This regulatory process contemplates a broad consideration of need under section 34 of the Electric Utilities Act.

It is recognized that a subsequent determination of need under section 14 of the HEEA – that is, the Hydro and Electric Energy Act – is confusing at the best of times. For this reason the removal of the public convenience and need test from section 14(3) of HEEA was appropriate, but concerns have been expressed that the resulting legislative scheme leaves no clear opportunity for individuals and groups to comment on the issue of need as it is difficult to identify oneself as being directly and adversely affected by the commission's decision under section 34 of the EUA. No specific project is identified in the needs identification document submitted by the independent system operator.

Mr. Chairman, directly and adversely affected individuals and groups are still not identifiable at the needs determination stage notwithstanding the proposed amendment to 34.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Because of the restriction of time allocation I was not able to get up in second reading to provide some general remarks, so I'm going to begin with some general remarks and then look at some of the specifics of the amendment that the government has brought to Bill 46.

I'm going to begin by referring to a letter that we received from the Alberta Beef Producers because I think this letter puts the issue really well. In this letter dated November 15 they state that

our interest in this legislation is the impact it will have on the ability of owners and leaseholders of agricultural land to effectively participate in the decision making process regarding the location of pipelines and electrical transmission lines and the ability of the regulators to take into consideration the impact the location of same will have on agricultural production.

This really puts the issue very well. It has to do with the decision-making process and the fears that many have expressed that Bill 46 limits the decision-making process. I'm not convinced that the amendments that were brought today really change this very much.

Just to continue, in this letter there's also reference to some other acts besides this proposed Bill 46, namely the Surface Rights Act and the Land Agents Licensing Act. I know from my own investigation of the Land Agents Licensing Act that there's a similar dissatisfaction on the part of many landowners because of that particular act, which licenses land agents to enter into negotiations with landowners about the use of their land by oil companies in drilling for oil. Most, in fact almost all, the land agents actually work for the oil companies. There doesn't seem to be any real fairness or justice in terms of that particular act. Given that the other acts seem to not favour justice and present a fair playing field for all the people involved, then it's no wonder that people are really upset by Bill 46.

Now, Mr. Chairman, it is interesting to think historically about this. It's not the first time that there has been fierce debate on an issue that deals with the regulatory process that's going to oversee the making of decisions that involve various interests: companies, landowners, and residential people who have concerns about their utility rates and so on. We've had lots of decision-making processes in various kinds of events in Canadian history. I mean, we can go back as far as the 1950s to the famous TransCanada natural gas pipeline debate, which actually was marked by the authoritarian tactics of C.D. Howe and the use of closure, actually, to rush through a pipeline bill to meet the industry's deadline. That actually brought about the fall of the Canadian government in 1957-58. This kind of bill can incur a lot of anger and a lot of anxiety and upset people, so the government is actually treading on very, very dangerous territory in presenting this Bill 46.

4:10

I might also refer to the Mackenzie Valley pipeline debate, which had much greater participation. In fact, over the years there has been a demand for more and more public participation in energy decisions. In the case of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline debate there was a tremendous amount of participation, mainly because of the inquiry led by Judge Berger. That inquiry visited some 35 communities and listened to thousands and thousands of submissions. What was interesting in that debate, Mr. Chairman, was that, again, it's dealing with all kinds of so-called interests although the way the debate seems to be framed in all of these discussions is that on one hand you have objective claims about facts over against so-called interest groups, which are accused of not really having their facts, of being misinformed, and of being about subjective value judgments, and that leads to the marginalization of those interest groups.

I think we've come a long ways in all the years we've debated energy issues, and I think we've come to the point now where it's really important to hear from everyone and hear from everybody that

has an interest in the decisions that are going to be made about energy issues and about utilities. The idea of framing the way it's been framed in the past, in terms of hard facts against well-intentioned interest groups with inaccurate information, well-intentioned but ill informed, is a totally wrong way of approaching it. As a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman, no matter what side of the issue you're on, you have an interest, so you have an interpretation. If I can quote a famous philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche said, "There are no facts, only interpretations," and then he quickly added that that, of course, is also an interpretation.

Mr. Chairman, it's a question of these regulatory boards, like the Alberta utilities commission, being able to fairly listen to all of the interested parties and ensuring that they all are able to come to the table and say what they have to say.

Those are just my general remarks. I think this is a really serious debate, and it needs a lot more time than this House is giving us. It needs more public debate, and the idea of referring it to a field committee would have been a great idea. The idea of hoisting it for six months so that the public could have more involvement also was a good idea. Certainly, we need to have more time for people to consider a very, very complex bill.

Mr. Chairman, I do want to comment about some of the specifics of the amendments that are brought to us: the change in section 9(3), the objectionable part in section 9(3)(b), which so many have raised issues about – namely, that it was going to be restricted to people that only have a material interest – that phrase "directly and adversely affected in a material way." The amendment now takes out that whole section 9(3) and substitutes a section where it's not (a), (b), and (c) but just (a) and (b), so the objectionable part is not there anymore.

As many have already mentioned, there is not a clear idea of what kind of rules the commission is going to follow as they listen to various presentations. It says that

the Commission is not required to hold a hearing where . . .

- (b) on an application for the construction or operation of a hydro development, power plant or transmission line . . . the Commission is satisfied that the applicant has met the relevant Commission rules respecting each owner of land that may be directly and adversely affected by the Commission's decision on the application.

As many have already commented on, what rules are we talking about?

Now, this is a serious issue because, as we all know, there is the possibility of an application to have a nuclear power plant in northern Alberta. We note that Bruce Power has bought Alberta Energy and is going to promote that possibility. It's interesting that the Harper government is even considering selling Atomic Energy of Canada to a private corporation. So we don't know what is happening on the nuclear front. The federal government is certainly interested in marketing the CANDU reactor, and I'm sure they would love to have Alberta build a CANDU reactor.

That application will probably come before the EUB part of this split in the two commissions or maybe before the Alberta utilities commission for approval, and we're just not sure what kind of process would be in place and what kind of rules would be followed. This is a really serious issue. We want to ensure that there is totally public participation in the whole process, and we need to take as long as we can in order to decide something so serious as opting for nuclear power.

Now, the section in Bill 46 about public interest is section 17. I think it is a good statement about public interest that the whole question of public interest has to have "regard to the social and economic effects of the development, plant, line or pipeline and the effects of the development, plant, line or pipeline on the environ-

ment.” I think it probably could be written in a way that’s more extensive to include all kinds of other aspects of public interest. The amendment, though, is simply dealing with the change to section 17 by substituting the words “gas utility pipeline” for “gas transmission pipeline.”

Now, I understand the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne said that actually they’re talking about the same lines. My understanding is that since this bill is going to split the EUB into two parts – the ERCB, the Energy Resources Conservation Board, and the AUC, Alberta utilities commission – it makes sense to me that gas transmission pipelines would apply to the ERCB and that gas utility pipelines would apply to the Alberta utilities commission. We’re talking about, in terms of gas utility pipelines, pipelines in a city to everyone’s homes to supply heat for our homes, but when it comes to approving a gas transmission pipeline on the part of an energy company or TransCanada PipeLines, for example, then that’s an issue for the Energy Resources Conservation Board. But I’m not really sure what is at stake here.

Again, this is a serious issue because we are facing some major decisions in Alberta. As we speak, TransCanada PipeLines is considering building their enormous pipeline to bring natural gas from northern British Columbia to the tar sands, and they want to take it right through Lubicon land. This reminds me again of the whole Mackenzie Valley pipeline debate and how important it is to include everybody’s interests. It’s important that the Lubicon interests be considered because that particular pipeline is being considered to be built on land that the Lubicon claim as their land. Anyway, I was very confused about what that change really meant.

Now, I want to make a comment on section 20, rules of evidence, in Bill 46. You know, it seems that Bill 46 wants this utilities commission to go in two different directions at the same time. It wants this utilities commission to be a high court, so it’s giving this commission tremendous powers, saying that it has powers that are on the level of a Queen’s Bench judge. But, on the other hand, it wants to have rules of evidence that are not at the level of Queen’s Bench but rules of evidence that would be much looser. The statement here is that the commissioner “is not bound in the conduct of its hearings by the rules of law concerning evidence that are applicable to judicial proceedings.”

4:20

Now, that same sort of ruling has applied and was put into practice by legislation concerning the Law Enforcement Review Board. I think the purpose of that is to enable intervenors, people who are making applications to the board, to not have to face the strict rules of evidence that you would have in a court of law. If you’re going to follow that route, that it’s like a court of law, then obviously the people involved should have legal defence that they can refer to. By loosening the rules of evidence, that means that people are not intimidated by the process, and they can freely participate. Maybe this is a good change, but I’m a bit confused because at the same time this bill wants to establish the commission with tremendous powers as if it was at the level of a Queen’s Bench judge, yet the rules are not going to be followed at that high level. So there’s an ambiguity there that I think needs to be addressed.

I want to mention the fact that in this amendment part 5 is struck out. This is E under the amendments. Now, that part 5 in the bill is the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, but of course it comes back in. So we take out that whole section, but the suggestion is to bring it back in in amendment S, “Section 96(13) is struck out and the following substituted,” so it’s a change to the Government Organization Act, which is going to be amended by including schedule 13.1, Office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

Just in passing, the whole section that’s in part 5 is actually not

completely included under schedule 13.1. You have that the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate shall be responsible for these regulations. But all this other stuff about function of governance board, budget, representation of customers: I don’t know what happened to that. It’s actually quite a mess. I feel quite insulted as a legislator in this Assembly by having a bill presented and then all of these amendments when the whole thing should be sent back to the drawing board and reworked. Start over. I think that was the intent of referring it to a field committee, so that it could come back in a better form.

While I’m talking about the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, I just want to make a few comments because there’s a real history here of the relationship between consumer advocates and the utilities commission, or the EUB. You know, if we go back to the early 1990s, it became apparent to, for example, the Consumers’ Association of Canada, the Alberta chapter, that there really was an absence of a strong voice on behalf of residential utility customers and that because there was that absence, when public utility hearings took place, that tended to lead to increasing costs for residential customers and decreasing costs for large industrial customers. The Consumers’ Association received many, many calls from the public asking why the Consumers’ Association did not intervene.

The association went about trying to find the expertise they needed, and in order to be accepted as a proxy intervenor in regulatory hearings, it formed the Consumers’ Coalition of Alberta. It became the champion of residential interest, of householder interest. From 1993 to 2007 the EUB approved its interventions on behalf of residents and actually awarded the Consumers’ Coalition of Alberta recovery of costs of intervention.

Now, the Consumers’ Association of Canada, the Alberta chapter, has complained about Bill 46, that Bill 46 would limit the ability of the Consumers’ Association to represent residential utility customers in regulatory hearings and that the costs would not be provided. I know we have the assurance of the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne that there wouldn’t be any change because of section 21, that still intervenors and their costs would be covered, but I’m not sure. It seems to me to be quite ambiguous, and we need some clarity.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, just to reclarify, there has been an understanding among the House leaders, and we will proceed as we had discussed. We will be debating on all the sections of the amendment. However, when it comes time to vote, we’ll be voting on them separately, section by section.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I’m pleased to speak to the government amendment to Bill 46. It’s pretty clear that Bill 46 has been considered offensive by many, many Albertans from all walks of life. There has been a tide of opposition to this bill that we haven’t really seen I think since the days of Bill 11, that helped legalize for-profit hospitals in this province, and there’s a good reason for that.

The EUB in this province has been a power unto itself for far too long. It makes fundamental decisions not just about the future of the utility industry or the oil and gas industry but about people’s lives and people’s land and about people’s rights, and it has abused its authority. The EUB has got a clear mandate from the government to facilitate the development of energy in this province. That by itself is not a bad thing, but it is made a priority that is placed above the rights of individuals, the rights of property owners, and, first and foremost, above the environment.

The EUB has operated with a mandate that runs in conflict with the interests of many, many people in this province. It favours the energy industry in a very significant and consistent way. People

who have had difficulties, for example, and legitimate fears about sour gas in this province have been overridden. People who have had their property expropriated by oil and gas companies in order to facilitate the extraction of resources have been overridden. The EUB has of course most recently been identified as an agency that spies on citizens who are engaged in a legitimate action. In fact, that participation in that process is established by legislation to allow, ostensibly, citizens who are concerned about projects that come before the EUB. In that legitimate and legal activity in the furtherance of their rights they have been essentially subject to undercover, covert operations and spying.

Now, when this became known, there was, of course, outrage across the province. These are some of the things that you used to hear about in the '60s, when there were protests on the Vietnam War and all sorts of democratic concern about the direction.

4:30

You know, the government used to spy on people, and we thought that it had stopped. We thought it was over, and we thought that we had dealt with it. Then we find that the EUB has biased itself by essentially taking a side in the hearing and spying on landowners and environmentalists who were fulfilling their legitimate rights as citizens. The government was forced to call an investigation. But it's interesting because it was an investigation whose chief investigator was appointed by the Minister of Energy, whose terms of reference were established by the Minister of Energy, and which naturally didn't really get to the bottom of the whole issue.

The Perras report, Mr. Chairman, was nothing but a whitewash from start to finish. The investigation produced a report that didn't look at the role of anyone above the level of the director of security of that organization, notwithstanding the fact that Alberta's NDP produced some documents that had been FOIPed that showed that other members of the board, specifically the three-person panel that was hearing the case as well as other senior officials of the EUB, knew that this covert action was being undertaken, notwithstanding the fact that this was publicly known. The EUB investigation by former Justice Perras didn't even inquire into their role or their knowledge in the affair and did not inquire further whether other senior officials in the EUB had knowledge of this, didn't ask those questions, and didn't ask who in the Department of Energy knew about the spying and didn't ask whether the minister knew about the spying or whether, in fact, the minister had perhaps even approved it himself. So the whole investigation was a complete whitewash from start to finish.

It's interesting that those who have been fingered by the diligent efforts of some of the people involved in the landowners group have become an embarrassment to the government. For example, the three members of the EUB who were copied on that infamous e-mail have quietly chosen to resign. Somehow somebody is taking them out and getting rid of them without ever allowing the public to fully know what actually went on. They're being let go. Even though the minister calls it a retirement, we all know that that's really not the case. They've been sacked, and they've been sacked not because the government thinks they did anything wrong, but because they've become an embarrassment to the government. That's why they're gone.

How can we have confidence, then, in the two bodies that Bill 46 is intending to set up, that they are going to be any different? Mr. Chairman, I don't think they're going to be any different at all.

I had a look today on the EUB website. On the website are all of the rules for the new Alberta utilities board, the proposed rules. Now, these rules are established under the authority of Bill 46, which incidentally hasn't been passed yet. The old EUB has now

written all the rules for the operation of the new AUB, which has not even been established. Of course, the government has already advertised for the members and so on. So it's pretty clear, Mr. Chairman, that the fix is in on this bill. The closure that the government has imposed on this bill is simply the last brick in the wall of a scheme that has been cooked up and imposed from the beginning. I would like to just ask the question: how is an old body able to draft rules for the operation of a new body when the legislation establishing the new body has not yet even been passed by this House? That doesn't stop the government. They're just going to move ahead as they wish.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

Now, Mr. Chairman, I want to talk a little bit about these amendments because the government claims that they've fixed the problem, they've fixed the concerns that the landowners and the environmentalists and the general public have been expressing about the bill. But, you know, it will still allow the government or the new bodies to shut out legitimate intervenors, prevent them from taking part in hearings. It will give the commission the right to deny public testimony from intervenors, and it will take away the intervenor's right to conduct cross-examinations at hearings. If the EUB under the current legislation was already biased against the public and in favour of the big companies, then this will tilt the balance even further – even further – in favour of utility companies and oil and gas companies.

Let's just take one for a second, Mr. Chairman. I know that the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose said earlier that if you provide written testimony, that's just as good as verbal. I don't know if that's really constitutional or not, hon. member, but I do know that when you talk about people's right to be heard, it means the right to be heard. It means to come and appear before the bodies and speak directly to the people about your concerns and give the evidence that you have. You know, one of the easiest dodges there is is to say: write me a letter. That's what this legislation gives the AUB the power to do. It gives them the right to just sort of say: "You know, I can't be bothered to hear you. I can't be bothered to listen to you, so just drop me a note, and that should be good enough." Of course, we all know what happens to those written submissions. They go in the circular file. They get ignored, and the body is then able to claim that, well, they've received these submissions. It's just an easy way to ignore people and not have to listen directly to their concerns.

Mr. Chairman, the other concern that we have is that intervenors lose the right to cross-examine other intervenors. This is fundamental. This is how you arrive at the truth. We don't expect that the political appointees of the Conservative Party and Conservative government who are going to sit on these boards are going to be able to ask all of the tough questions necessary, but through the process of cross-examination of one side to the other you really will uncover a great deal more of the truth than if you just listen to people's submissions. People's submissions need to be challenged, and they need to be challenged by people who have an interest in disproving what it is they're going to say. That is the basis of the regulatory process in this country, and it has been for decades and decades. It's similar to the process in the United States and in other countries. This bill with the amendments that are proposed fundamentally undermines that process. It fundamentally takes away the right of cross-examination of an intervenor and makes it more difficult to arrive at the truth of the matter, and that is a fatal flaw as far as I'm concerned.

You know, Mr. Chairman, you have to ask the question of why

this government needs this kind of body to oversee these kinds of processes. Well, quite frankly, it's because the government strategy, if you want to call it that, is to produce energy for export in whatever form. That's a fundamental to this government's economic strategy for the province: to pump out the oil, pump out the gas, pump out the electricity, whatever it is, whatever energy source, as quickly as possible and as cheaply as possible. I don't know why that's their strategy. I actually have some theories, and I'll come back to that at the end. But it was pretty clear to me when I heard former Premier Ralph Klein talk about the 500 kV line, and it was in connection with a strategy of building more coal-fired power plants to export power to the United States. He clearly stated that that was the strategy, and he clearly associated this 500 kV line with that strategy.

4:40

Alberta's NDP took a position that we should not be burning coal and suffering the effects of pollution, the impacts on asthma and the health of Albertans, in order to produce electricity for export to the United States because it gives the Americans the cheap power, but all of the negative impacts then fall upon Albertans. In order to accommodate that, we've seen the EUB go so far as to spy on Albertans. They are there to facilitate this scheme, and these changes proposed in Bill 46, notwithstanding the amendments that we're considering, will enable them to do that.

Similarly, Mr. Chairman, with oil and gas the role of the EUB or its successor organizations remains to override legitimate political concerns – legitimate environmental concerns, social concerns, health concerns, and concerns about people's right to their land – in order to facilitate the export of energy as quickly and cheaply as possible from Alberta to the United States. That sums up succinctly, in my view, this government's economic strategy.

Why are they doing that? Well, Mr. Chairman, it's no secret that this Conservative government is a party of big business. They represent the companies, and these are, in turn, the same companies that finance the operations of the Conservative Party. They have millions of dollars in the bank ready to spend on an election. Where did it come from? Well, in the last two years alone just from oil companies the Conservative Party has received half a million dollars in donations. If you add up all of their corporate donations, it's close to a million dollars in a year. The Liberal Party is trying to catch up as best they can, and they've received in the last two years from oil companies nearly \$200,000 from these same corporations.

So what chance, Mr. Chairman, what chance does an individual landowner in Rimbey have against that kind of money and that kind of power? What chance does an individual environmentalist from Edmonton or Calgary have against that kind of money and power? Frankly, the deck is stacked against them. Bill 46 is about stacking that deck even further in the favour of powerful interests like utility companies, big oil companies, and gas companies. That, really, is what Bill 46 is about.

I think it's interesting that we have the social democrats in the Legislature standing up for property rights against the Conservative government. I always thought, Mr. Chairman, that the Conservatives were in favour of property rights, but here we are, standing in this Legislature, fighting for the rights of property owners in Rimbey and across the province against big oil companies, big utilities that have this Conservative government in their back pocket.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to just conclude by saying that this Assembly should take a clear position against Bill 46 unless some real amendments are brought forward by the government or by the opposition that will do away with the attack on people's rights that is contained in Bill 46. We should not pass it in this Assembly. These amendments by this government fail to protect people's

rights. They fail to completely eliminate all of the negative impacts of Bill 46. They will continue to shut out legitimate intervenors from the hearings. They will give the commission the right to deny public testimony from intervenors, and it will still take away the intervenors' rights to conduct cross-examinations at hearings. So it has gutted the limited public process that people have had under the EUB and replaced it with a far less democratic set of proposals, which I think this Assembly should reject. We should stand up for people, we should stand up for the environment, we should stand up to protect people's health, and we should stand up to protect property owners' rights from the intrusions of large corporations.

Unfortunately, these amendments don't do that, so I and my caucus, Mr. Chairman, will be voting against this bill and will not support these amendments. They don't go nearly far enough.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, leader of the ND opposition.

I'd like to now recognize the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to have this opportunity to rise today and speak to the amendments to Bill 46. Before I do, I want to first correct something that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said in his presentation. He commented that the one section makes the whole bill retroactive to 2003. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the reference to 2003 is the section in the Hydro and Electric Energy Act that was missed in 2003 when we were discussing the needs hearing. This section was not corrected, so really you have to hear the needs hearing twice, which doesn't make any sense. So we would be repealing that, and the needs hearing will be heard under the Electric Utilities Act.

I, too, yesterday was disappointed that I didn't have a chance to complete my comments in second reading. As we all know that were here, the opposition yesterday used up the whole hour arguing over a procedural issue, so we weren't able to discuss the bill. We simply had to spend the time doing that.

I want to make a couple more comments relative to the bill. I was commenting on the principles of the bill, where we are splitting the EUB. It is absolutely necessary that we do that. It was disgraceful – absolutely disgraceful – the way the EUB treated the landowners relative to that 500 kVa line. I was so disgusted with the way they were treating my constituents that I think the people that were involved got their just deserve. We have to put that behind us, and we have to move forward. Of course, even the court gave some indication that there was bias. So to have a fair hearing and to move this whole thing forward, we do have to set up another identity. That's what we're doing through this utility commission.

I view that by setting up the quasi-judicial body, we are setting up an identity as somewhat of a proxy. I'm not indicating for one moment – as a matter of fact, it would be absolutely wrong if government ever interfered with a decision of a quasi-judicial body. When the EUB was holding those hearings, I can tell you it was awfully tempting to go to those hearings and make comments because of the way the landowners were being treated, but it would be wrong because we could be looked at as affecting the decision of the board.

There's one area where I believe that we do have the ability. In many places in the bill and in the amendments we talk about the commission having rules. Yes, they will have rules. But I believe that there are certain things we could be saying to the commission because those are the procedures that they will be using and those are the rules that they will be establishing. I think it's critical that

we do make some comments along that line.

4:50

Actually, when we look at the very first amendment, I want to spend just a little time on that, Mr. Chairman. I think this is pretty critical to what we're talking about. This is section 9(1), and I think it's important that I read this into the record so that we get what's going on here. It reads:

9(1) Unless expressly provided by this Act or any other enactment to the contrary, and subject to this section, any order or decision that the Commission is authorized to make may be made without giving notice and without holding a hearing.

(2) If it appears to the Commission that its decision or order on an application may directly and adversely affect the rights of a person, the Commission shall

(a) give notice of the application in accordance with the Commission rules.

Here are the rules that I mentioned.

(b) give the person a reasonable opportunity of learning the facts bearing on the application as presented to the Commission by the applicant and other parties to the application, and

(c) hold a hearing.

That's very plain.

Then the amendments that we're putting in correct a problem that we had in subsection (3). The new one reads:

(3) Notwithstanding subsection (2), the Commission is not required to hold a hearing where

(a) no person requests a hearing in response to the notice of application.

That just makes all kinds of sense. Why would you have a hearing if no one wanted one?

(b) on an application for the construction or operation of a hydro development, power plant or transmission line under the Hydro and Electric Energy Act or a gas utility pipeline under the Gas Utilities Act, the Commission is satisfied that the applicant has met the relevant Commission rules . . .

Rules once again.

. . . respecting each owner of land that may be directly and adversely affected by the Commission's decision on the application.

Now, Mr. Chairman, here is where I still have a little discomfort because I know that some people are misinterpreting what this (3)(b) says. I've talked to the minister about it, and the minister does agree with me that we have to if it's going to adversely affect a landowner. In other words, if it's a line going across somebody's property, then that landowner must have the opportunity to be heard orally and must have the ability to have counsel. I'm urging the minister that in his response to our comments he will in fact have this on the record because there's a misinterpretation going on today on this very issue.

As a matter of fact, when I'm talking about the rules, I think that since we're making the commission as a proxy, we should be able to say in the rules that the commission will work under: you will allow for an oral hearing, and you will allow a landowner to be represented by counsel. I think that's just fairness. Of course, we know that under the administrative procedures act, in fact, the commission has to operate under them. That has to be part of their rules. I'm comfortable that it will happen, but we need the minister to put that on the record, that they will have that as a guarantee.

Now, Mr. Chairman, we're taking out part 5, and really that is the part that set up the Utilities Consumer Advocate. I'm going to be pushing very hard that, in fact, they would continue to go along this road. We need that Utilities Consumer Advocate. The idea that we have the Utilities Consumer Advocate, have a board that would

operate: I think that is just a super way to go because no matter where it's housed in government, then that removes the minister and the government from the operations of that board. This is really critical, that they be independent of government.

A seven-person board: just think of the composition that we could have to protect the consumer. I would suggest that we have a makeup like a member from the REAs, the rural electrification associations, that we have from the rural gas co-ops, that we have from the rural water co-ops, that we have from the AAMD and C, that we have from the AUMA, and we need to put in a consumers' association or some individual from that side. But I think that as the act describes, it really lays out the Utilities Consumer Advocate's roles, responsibilities, and what they would do.

Having had responsibility for that Utilities Consumer Advocate, I know the tens of millions of dollars that they saved the consumer over the last number of years in rate hearings. People like David Gray know this business. They know it inside out. An individual like him has the ability, and he knows his limitations. If he needs expert assistance, he's not afraid to get it. So I will be urging the minister of government services to move forward with setting up the board and giving the authority and power to the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

I think that for the other amendments, well, so many of them are just basically housekeeping. You clean up some other wording in some other acts. But this one that I was always hung up on and really had difficulty with was to make absolutely sure that landowners have the right, that they have the ability to get intervenor funding, and that's spelled out in section 21. That's all taken care of, that in fact they will be getting intervenor funding.

I think that the minister and the department have done a good job with the amendments, and that, in fact, this will be a very good piece of legislation to go forward with.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the remarks from the Member for Rocky Mountain House. I disagree with him on one and agree with him on the other. He used the word "disgraceful," and I think probably I could use the word "disgraceful" in the fact that the government is actually using closure on this bill at all three levels. I think that's disgraceful in a House that we call democratic.

Where I agree with the Member for Rocky Mountain House is that I think that the idea of a consumers' advocate is a very strong one. It absolutely must be independent, totally unbiased. I would probably reduce it to five. I think five would probably be a good number, and I would also like to see people from outside of the province actually placed on that consumers' advocate board that he's thinking of.

I believe that this bill was flawed right from the very start. It was quietly introduced on the very last day of the spring session until people realized exactly what was going on and understood the ramifications that this bill would have on their personal lives and, certainly, on their democratic rights. Then they got scared. They weren't just mad, but they got scared because they were wondering what kind of a province they were living in when, in fact, they were going to be muzzled and couldn't speak out loud to express their displeasure in any way.

The next step was interesting. In the *Globe and Mail* in July was the advertisement for the two people to run the two new arms which would be divided from the original EUB board. I believe, certainly, that the interviews, et cetera, have taken place, and I also understand that the signs are painted. So in a way it is a fait accompli. Then

you realize how flawed the bill is. If this was a good bill, we wouldn't have people so displeased with it and so scared of it. We also would not have 24 amendments coming forward from the government, and that's only the government side. Bills that are good, bills that should go forward, bills that can be discussed usually don't require that many amendments to them.

5:00

One of the things that has been changed in the amendments is that in fact legal counsel would be provided for intervenors. Now, this is certainly a good thing because the majority of the people I know that are running farms these days certainly can't afford lawyers, but I can see the Law Society jumping all over this one. This is really going to be paradise for lawyers.

The Alberta Beef Producers are another segment of our society that are very upset about this bill. There are 30,000 beef cattle producers in this province, and I think we're all more than aware of the extreme stress that this particular industry is under at this point in time. They've just managed to recover from BSE, they now have the high Canadian dollar, they have been allowed to get some of their cattle across the border, and of course they know they're fighting the lawsuit by R-CALF, all of which doesn't make them secure in their industry to go forward and to actually spend some kinds of major investment dollars to increase their status.

The Beef Producers have reviewed the status and regulations, and they want government policies to protect Alberta's agricultural land and water resources. None of this legislation should really adversely affect the interests of the members because they are landowners, leaseholders, and the beef cattle producers. They must effectively be able to participate in the decision-making processes regarding the location of pipelines, electrical transmission lines, and the ability of the regulators to take into consideration – and I think this is very, very important – the location of where these are going to go on agricultural production lands.

There has been talk of not wanting cattle running underneath these high-voltage lines, and I believe that they do have a point in thinking about that. Also, in terms of the agricultural production land there are things like: how do planes fly over for the crop-dusters to be able to put the chemicals on the fields? They're going to need a certain area around the bases of these posts to be able to not have anyone go into that, so it does take acreage away from the lands that people are using. Of course, those that just have land and are smaller farmers that are struggling: this will certainly be very onerous on them.

The Beef Producers also had some very serious concerns about the following sections. Some of them have been amended, but I'm not sure that they are to their total satisfaction. Section 3 is the membership of the commission. Again, they should be people that you could prove that they have an unbiased and certainly not a conflict of interest when they go forward. The Hydro and Electric Energy Act is of concern to them.

Section 24 is orders without notice. Some of that has been addressed in a small way. I'm not sure. In the amendment N it still says, "Consequential amendments to regulations." Regulations to me always means behind closed doors. It says that

95.1(1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations for the purpose of

- (a) amending references in regulations to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, the [Alberta] Energy Resources Conservation Board and the Public Utilities Board, or
- (b) adding references to the Alberta Utilities Commission or the Energy Resources Conservation Board

in consequence of the enactment of this Act.

(2) An amendment under subsection (1) may be made even if the regulation being amended was made by a member of the Executive Council or some other body or person.

To me, this is really quite upsetting because none of it is going to have to come back out into the public until the decisions are made and certainly will not see the light of day in this House for further discussion. I believe that that's also very troubling to the Beef Producers, in that they do want to be a part of any of the further amendments or the further regulations that would be coming forward.

I think it's fine to give the power to one landowner. However, we all know that one landowner has a ripple effect into a huge area from around him. Anyone that is even remotely connected where that ripple effect could be simply must be heard. They must be able to have a voice, to be a part of the decisions that are going to affect them.

It's okay to look at it now, but we're looking at decisions that will affect not only them but their families. I think many farmers have, unfortunately, given up and have had to sell their land and their dreams of having maybe a fourth generation. We certainly have third generation farmers in this province. That fourth generation just isn't going to be able to afford to stay on the land that their pioneer ancestors basically broke their backs on. They're the ones that cleared the land; they're the ones that pulled the rocks out; they're the ones that cut down the trees, pulled out the stumps. It wasn't easy. They've created wonderful legacies for their families, and now the families have to give up.

Section 17 of Bill 46. Also, the Beef Producers are concerned that in addition to the consideration of social and economic effects of a project on the environment, the Energy Resources Conservation Board and Alberta utilities commission should be required to take into consideration the agricultural operations. There should be business plans looked at. They should be looking at it in terms of the classic analysis of further on down the line what this will really cost this person in their farm operations or, in fact, just any operation that they happen to have on that particular piece of land. It truly has to be able to project into the future; it can't just be for now.

Another underlying source of producer frustration in the Alberta government's regulation of utility and energy development is the failure of the Surface Rights Act and the Land Agents Licensing Act to adequately balance and protect the interests of the producers as landowners, leaseholders, and stewards of agricultural land in the regulatory process.

One of the things that beef producers are interested in, too, is water. They need water for their cattle, of course. Where is the water going to come from? In the long run how will this affect them being able to have water that's suitable for their cattle? Do they really know how these either gas, oil, or electricity transmission lines are actually going to affect both the surface water and certainly the aquifers? I think we have enough research projects and reports to indicate that there isn't nearly sufficient enough data to say with certainty: yes, this is what's going to or not going to happen to the water in a particular area.

One of the things that the Alberta Beef Producers are asking for and have suggested, the same as many other people have in this province, is that Bill 46 really should have been referred way back when to the Standing Committee on Government Services for further discussion and review. I think the reason that this is not happening is because we probably have people hired and ready to go. Obviously, there was a huge push, or the ads wouldn't have been in the paper in July. So we should have taken our time in this.

This province always seems hell bent for election. We are going forward in a very questionable way, certainly in the oil sands. Should we not be stepping back? Should we not be taking our time? Why can we not have a balance? Certainly, there doesn't appear to be a balance in the debate on this Bill 46. It should have been

referred. I think then we would have come through with a better bill that more people would have had input into.

5:10

There doesn't appear to be any substantive or procedural safeguards in Bill 46 regarding the basis and the grounds on which the commission can determine whether or not its decision in order may directly or adversely affect the rights of a person. As my hon. colleague from Rocky Mountain House has said: where can these people go? Where is the complaint process? There has to be a better attitude than: we're the government, you're not, so suck it up. That really doesn't work well. We simply must have a commission where people feel free, where they're not afraid to go, and they're not living in fear as so many of the people in this province do. They are afraid of their government.

Not only are they afraid, but they don't trust it. I really think that that's quite a statement to be able to say about a government. Certainly, I think the spy debacle was a really good example. Now, these particular spies were caught. How many haven't been caught?

Mr. MacDonald: You mean if you're a good spy, you don't get caught?

Ms Pastoor: Good spies don't get caught.

With respect to clause (a) in section 9(3) it appears that it would not be necessary for notice. That has also been changed in the amendments. People have to be given the right, and they cannot be given the right to know that something's going to happen and then be expected to have a written submission within 30 days. People don't have time. Even we in this House know exactly how fast society is going and how hard we work. Thirty days is not time enough for someone to be able to put together a concrete, well-thought-out, probably with legal opinion, submission to a commission. They simply have to have longer. It doesn't appear that there's a specific time where this would happen.

The procedural rights available to the landowner, to the participant in the hearing, are not as clear as they could be either. Again, it's a time frame. People who live on farms don't always have the instant access that they would need to be able to work themselves through that.

I think that's basically what I would have to say on this particular bill and on the amendments at this point in time. Just that I believe that it is a disappointment not only to myself but certainly to all Albertans that a bill that is so flawed, that requires so many amendments has not been referred; that the arrangements that have been made around the fact that they assumed that this bill would fly through without any opposition – i.e., hiring staff, making up signs, probably having the office already leased and paid for – are really quite an insult to the people of Alberta; to just assume that the attitude of “I'm the government, you're not, so suck it up” is actually acceptable behaviour.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. members, we have about 59 minutes left of debate in Committee of the Whole, given the time allocation. We're going to go to the hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and then the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka and then the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I do have a few others on my list after that.

Little Bow, please.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy today to be able to stand up and speak a little bit about my experiences so far with Bill 46, particularly the amendments that the government has

brought through. I do think it's a very important piece of legislation because it ultimately affects every home; every farm; every business, community league, school; every hospital: every part of this province.

I've talked to a number of my constituents about the bill. It is, I think, rather interesting that when I asked them in a nonpartisan way what their opinion was on the bill prior to the amendments, most of them spoke about the very key phrases that they had heard through the various media and news outlets. If I asked them particularly where they got their information, it was a little frustrating to find out that most of it was coming strictly from the reports in the news broadcasts. Not that I'm blaming the media for anything, but actually a lot of the quotes were coming from opposition members.

Now, when I asked if many of them had actually read the bill, they said no. So I gave them a copy of the bill without any comment. I said: would you please read this, and then tell me what you think? Well, it was very interesting to have some of these constituents come back and say: what's the problem? They read it entirely. They read the full context. They didn't read bits and pieces.

I am more than happy now, happier than I was then, that the amendments that have been brought forward have maybe in some cases gone too far. You can put that in your propaganda all you want, but the fact of the matter is that I have a lot of constituents that don't actually appreciate taxpayer money going to outside interest groups that have absolutely no interest in the land. Now, at the same time I have the floor, and I'll wave my paper around.

The Minister of Energy brought forward these concerns. I think it's very interesting that everyone makes a lot to do about a hearing that was held about a project sometime in Alberta, but somebody is losing sight of the fact that business goes on, the province grows, and we need more power. And with or without some of the hearings, the way the legislation was worded in the past is that hearings were allowed; the way it's being proposed, hearings will be allowed. It is never a comfortable thing to have, in this case, a power line go across your property.

Mr. Chairman, I'm a landowner. I'm a farmer and damn proud of it. I can tell you that the Member for Rocky Mountain House is also a farmer as are some of my other colleagues. I can't believe that people would actually think that those of us that make our living from the land are now going to create legislation that's going to take away my rights as a landowner. I just can't believe it. We do get elected, and I don't think we get elected based on making people mad.

Now, I'll give you a little first-hand experience. Years ago when I started to farm, we had a single-phase line. For those of you who may not know, it belonged to a rural electrification outfit. I as a farmer was a member. The poles were on my land, on my actual land, and we were responsible for the upkeep. Unfortunately, I was at the end of the line, our family and a number of others, and quite often we were without power because as the voltage dropped and the lines got older and everything started to get many years out of shape, we were subject, maybe, to power outages at least once a week.

A couple of years later a three-phase power line – that's much higher voltage – went through, and it was going to come along some of our other land for a greater distance. I thought: well, this isn't a very neat thing because now I'm going to have a power line on a greater percentage of our land, and I can't really be happy about that.

Well, in fact, if I would have got my head around it, I would have understood that I'd have a more reliable source of power. It was a newer line. I had the opportunity to upgrade the transformer to have more power, to do more things on the farm. Quite frankly, I don't want to go back to the days of my grandfather or great-grandfather or anyone else's who maybe cooked with wood stoves, had a gas lamp to read by, didn't have the luxuries of a MIG welder, a

computer, all subject to availability of power and whether or not we are going to have a brownout.

5:20

As I said before, as a landowner it's not the nicest thing to have to put up with a new power line if I have cattle. Yes, I've heard the comments about how magnetic fields are going to impact the productive capability of my cows or do some other things. But I've often wondered and I've asked some of my constituents: if we did things right and we bought a utility corridor to start with, what would you think if the province bought this piece of land, put all the utilities down it, and paid you fairly, market value, for this strip of land, whether it was one or two or four rods wide, and turned around and leased it back to you? Would you like that? You bet.

Suddenly the issue of the cattle's health wasn't as big a deal as it was. Maybe we could lease this land back. We'd have a little bit more land and maybe get adequately compensated for the use of the land and/or the placement of the towers. Now, the towers themselves, I suspect that from looking at some of the drawings of different proponents who talked about new power lines there could be two, maybe three towers on a quarter section. That's half a mile long.

The issues that I also have heard, as the Member for Lethbridge-East talked about, seem to be related to land agent licensing and surface rights, which have absolutely nothing to do with this particular bill. They are issues, but they have nothing to do with this bill. What I have suggested in response to my constituents: I totally support a revision, an upgrade, bringing it up to date, whatever you want to call it, of the compensation or the rent paid for towers on land, especially for the new power lines that are being constructed. I totally agree. But that's a surface rights issue.

Maybe it's my bias as an agricultural producer, but I also agree that we should have a knowledgeable person on this new board that's going to be established to reinforce to the ag community because – again, I make no apologies – that the vast majority of power lines in Alberta are not going through, across, or on top of villages, towns, or cities. They're going across vast amounts of rural Alberta: agricultural land, forestry land, Crown land, native reserves. You name it, we've got it.

Mr. Chairman, when it comes to the issues that we've talked about in these amendments, I've glossed over them in a more general way, but I wanted to relate to the Assembly, to constituents that have asked, what my opinion is on it. Again, I'll reiterate: no, a new development is never something that everyone embraces with open arms, but I do really feel that if the amended bill as we've proposed is going to pass, it is the best situation for landowners.

Having spoken to landowners, I might also add that in our constituency – I know that there might be a few others around – a huge percentage of the land that people produce on today is not actually lived on by the landowners. I'm glad to see that it's landowners or affected parties because those affected parties in our area end up representing the renter of the land, who might have rented that parcel of land for 20, 30, or 40 years in a family, and they feel as much entitled to make comments on proposals as the actual landowner, who may very well be an absentee landowner and has been for 40 or 50 years and has moved back to the States or wherever they came from when they homesteaded. Those are minor things.

Again, when it comes to intervenor funding – I heard a lot of gasps before – I do think it's crucial that not everyone who actually has no vested interest in the immediate area should be able to, can I say, make a living intervening on behalf of somebody else for a

worthy cause that maybe is worthy in their opinion but maybe doesn't truly represent the majority of people in the area. God knows, it's hard enough to have eight people on a 10-mile stretch that are absolutely going to agree with the placement of any power line or any gas line.

But I think the community, the individuals making representation to the EUB will get a fair hearing. Hopefully, everyone's going to come up with an agreement that people can live with and make life better and give us an assured supply of power and other good stuff throughout the province for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much. We'll go to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I listened intently to the Member for Little Bow. I think all the government needs to do is just have him go around and hand out the bills, and everything will be okay. Apparently, all the people that read the act and disagreed with him just got it wrong. People like the city of Calgary, the Pembina Institute, the Parkland Institute, the environmental law society, the industrial consumers association, and industrial power producers just didn't have the ability to go forward. If the Member for Little Bow maybe could spend some time going around talking to these groups, then it would all be all right. Everybody would understand and get the proper political spin on this.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I mean, the arrogance of the government just to say that nobody else has read the bill; they've walked around, and they have the proper interpretation on it, Mr. Chairman. Therein lies the problem. You know, the arrogance has been alluded to. I know the government takes for granted that because of their numbers they're going to get everything done in this Legislature quickly, but when they're posting on the website ahead of the bill being even passed in this Legislature, I mean, how can you accept that in a democratic society?

I thought that maybe some of the backbenchers might say that that's wrong and start to vote against the bill, Mr. Chairman, but it just goes to show what we're dealing with here in this, sort of, used to one-party rule over a number of years. As I said before, and I'll say it again: I do not understand about the timing of this and what the hurry is, especially coming from a government with the Premier talking about openness and transparency. The fact of what we're doing right now, the fact that we brought in a bill in the spring and we were told at that time that it was a bill that was necessary and perfect in almost every way, and now we are here in time allocation, or closure, whatever term you want to give it, in three hours passing a major bill: how can that be open and transparent under the new government's procedures?

You know, I've tried to ask myself: what is the hurry? What is the rush? The only thing I can come to is that the timing is so awful because we talked about the spies that were involved and the disgust that people had. Even some of the backbenchers have talked about the disgust that they felt, Mr. Chairman. All Albertans did over that situation. But why are we in this hurry?

Well, perhaps it has to do with the pace of development. We're in this anxious rush to rip out the oil sands, to get our oil and gas into the American markets as fast as we can, forgetting about value-added jobs and doing the upgrading of our bitumen here, where the real value is. Now maybe we're in a headlong rush to get rid of our electricity, to get it down into the American market as fast as we

can. Maybe that's what the rush is all about.

The government denies it, but why else would you go ahead, Mr. Chairman, knowing what they knew under the bad publicity they've had with the spies and push ahead with this bill when it seems so unnecessary? We've tried to give them an out. The policy field committees were set up for precisely that reason: to take bills that were complicated, to take bills that may be controversial, take them to a policy field committee. We set that up in this Legislature to do that if necessary. In this case it should be necessary to have public hearings because this is important to all people. It's certainly important to rural landowners, but it's also important to people in the city. We tried to give that offer here, but that was turned down.

5:30

The only reason, Mr. Chairman, that I can come to is simply this: that they're going to ramrod this through as quickly as they can. Because of the pace of development, they say that we need this electricity immediately for southern Alberta. I think it's the whole idea of perhaps getting some coal down and shipping this electricity south of the border. I believe that that's partly why we're doing this. That would just fall in with the economic policies of the government. That's what they're doing with our oil and gas; that's what they're doing with our oil sands. Some people are profiting very much on that, but to most Albertans the so-called Alberta advantage is becoming a huge disadvantage with the pace of development, and this pace of development is certainly having an impact here in what we're doing.

Now, as I said, when they brought the bill in, we were told, Mr. Chairman, that that was, sort of, a big step forward, that it was a necessary bill. So we sat there in the spring. People started to read the bill. We know what happened: there was a big public outcry about the bill. They started to feel some political pressure, and rightfully so. Now they come back with, you know, amendments after amendments: 27 pages of amendments. The pages of amendments are more than most bills that we deal with in this Legislature. If this bill was so good to begin with, why would we have to come back with 27 pages of amendments? I mean, it goes beyond reason.

Remember that the bill is complicated enough. There's the bill, now the amendments, and now in this Legislature we are to debate one hour in second reading, three hours in Committee of the Whole, and another hour in third reading. Again: what's this all about? What are we missing here, Mr. Chairman, other than what I've suggested? It seems to me that with all the bad publicity we've had with this bill, they wouldn't want to be rushing through with this. So there has to be another reason. I hope I'm wrong about the massive transportation of electricity outside the province, but it's the only thing that makes any sense to me in the long run, why we're doing this in such a hurry.

Now, let me say that with these amendments we're told that, oh, well, they've solved all the problems, that the bill was flawed. Now I guess they have to admit that the bill was flawed to begin with. When you have 27 pages of amendments, it had to be a flawed bill. Now they say that everything is just hunky-dory; it's a great piece of work now; the legislation is moving ahead.

I want to be charitable here just for a second, Mr. Chairman. Of all the criticisms that I've seen, the most gentle was from – and you would expect that – the Environmental Law Centre. This is the best scenario that I've seen about this bill. In their conclusion, if I may quote from it, they start off being somewhat complimentary.

The ELC is somewhat encouraged by the amendments brought forward by the Government of Alberta.

To the hon. Member for Little Bow: these are people I think that read the bill.

However, Bill 46, even with the amendments, continues to be very vague and leaves a great deal of substance to be determined by Commission rules, which can be created at the Commission's discretion and changed with little or no public input. The content of hearing rights and the ability of the Commission to allow intervenor funding to intervenors other than local intervenors should be set out in the legislation, rather than in Commission rules.

Seems to be straightforward, but somehow the government missed that.

The ELC continues to be concerned with the application of the directly and adversely affected test by the proposed Commission. While the ELC considers the test to be too narrow for the ERCA and has recommended on previous occasions that it be broadened, it is particularly inappropriate for use in a regulatory approval process that contemplates the making of significant decisions of need before individuals and groups can be identified as being directly and adversely affected. The infusion of a public interest consideration into the determination of need under section 34 of the EUA does not necessarily broaden the standing for that proceeding, neither does the potential to combine that proceeding with an application under section 14 . . . The ELC considers that the test for standing that should be applied by the Commission should give the Commission the discretion to grant standing . . .

This is important.

. . . to any person or group who has a legitimate interest that ought to be represented in the proceeding or process, or has an established record of legitimate concern for the interest they seek to represent.

Now, they sent this letter off to Premier Stelmach, and what they had recommended is precisely what we had suggested here, that it go to a policy field committee.

The Chair: Hon. member, we don't refer to members' proper names in the House.

Mr. Martin: Sorry. I apologize. Yes.

To the hon. Premier, Mr. Chairman, and they suggested that it go to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment. Well, to me that was a no-brainer. That's what we should have done. That's what we debated here in the Legislature. They say there what we were saying:

Such a step would facilitate a full and open examination of Albertans' views and expectations regarding regulatory processes of the proposed Alberta Utilities Commission and Energy Resources Conservation Board, and would be a strong step towards restoring Albertans' faith in those regulatory bodies and processes.

Well, there was the out, Mr. Chairman. There was the out for the government to do the right thing. Again, as I say, the policy field committees: as one of the House leaders, we sat and worked on these committees. It seems to me that was precisely what we wanted to do: have all-party committees and if necessary public hearings. We did have some bills that went forward, important bills, bills 1 and 2, to take a look at these, and we're debating them now.

Mr. Chairman, if the government had done that, I think they would have got some credit from people in doing that. But they didn't. So here we are near the end of the Committee of the Whole under closure, time allocation as the government likes to call it, and they're going to push ahead with this particular bill.

You know, I certainly understand the numbers over there. They can certainly by the tyranny of the majority get what they want here. Mr. Chairman, I understand the purposes for time allocation. I do. If there's some bill down the way that had been debated for hours and days, there is a point. That's what it's for. That's how it's used in other Legislatures, and that's how it's used in the House of Commons. There is a point. But that certainly has not been the case here.

The government says that, well, they've got a lot of other bills. Well, it's their organization, their mismanagement that's causing us to be in this situation, you know, going into Thursday, which theoretically is the last day of the Legislature.

5:40

Mr. Chairman, this is extremely frustrating from the opposition perspective. I just want to say again: what is the all-fired hurry on this major bill? Is the province going to stop operating if we took five or six months to do this? Is the whole electricity grid going to fall apart, all the rest of it going to fall apart? No, it's not. Clearly, it's not the breaking up of the two organizations we have to deal with. As I say, I think the pace of development is a major problem here in what we're dealing with. When this Legislature decided to give the tools to legislative committees, to policy field committees, as the House leader for the NDP this is one of the things I thought we'd be dealing with in all-party committees, a bill like this. Precisely this was set up for this. I'm disappointed, to say the least, that the government doesn't see the need for that.

You know, it will be interesting to see. If the government thinks this is the end of it, it's not. People will remember this. It'll be interesting to see what they have in mind down the way. Maybe it's not even that far down the way that we will see why we're pursuing this particular bill, Mr. Chairman.

I know that there are other people . . .

Dr. Taft: More, more.

Mr. Martin: The hon. Official Opposition Leader wants me to carry on, and I always do what he says. Well, not always.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I want to come back and talk about the amendments because I think this is the crux of what we're talking about. A bill came in, and we were told it was a necessity. Now we have, really, a second bill within the bill, with 27 pages of amendments, and now we're to cover both of these in a matter of three, four, five hours of debate. To me it's mind boggling. As I say, I wish the government, the Minister of Energy, whoever is over there would tell us what the hurry is. What is the hurry? Why do we have to do this? There's been no logical reason given for why we have to do this. The answer is: well, we've got all these things coming on board. As I say, six months from now would not make that much difference.

Again, Mr. Chairman, think about what this looks like to Albertans, especially Albertans that follow this. We have the EUB in disgrace because of the spy affair. We have them in disgrace. Then we come back with a bill, with the same people bringing this bill together. We come in with a bill that they brought in. Some of them, admittedly, are fired now. Just think of this. Now we have on the website ahead of this bill being passed the new rules with the bill as if it had been passed: again, the arrogance of the government. We're saying that we don't have time to do this right, that we don't have time to spend a little bit more time with the policy field committee dealing with this particular issue. It seems to me, frankly, unbelievable that we're going along in this particular way.

Mr. Chairman, I will certainly give time for a couple more people that want to get on record about this. We could wax on about democracy in Alberta. People might say that's an oxymoron in this Legislature. We will have to, as I say, wait and see where this goes.

Thank you for your time, and I'll allow other people to have the chance to speak on this. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm also pleased

to be able to rise and speak to Bill 46. I have heard a lot from Albertans and from many of my constituents about Bill 46. A few weeks ago I attended a meeting in Lacombe – it was actually on November 7 – which was attended by a few hundred people from around the province. Throughout this meeting a number of issues were brought up. Most of these issues were related, of course, to the incident that happened in Rimbey with the EUB and the 500 kV line. I concur with everybody else here that was disgusted and abhorred by what happened there. I'm also a landowner, and if that happened to me, I would be very, very upset. I think that that is something that is behind us. We have to learn from that and make sure that it never, ever happens again in Alberta.

Many of the concerns that were brought up were about the rights of landowners when they might be possibly approached by energy companies for access to their land when a pipeline or a power line would come. As I said, I'm also a landowner. I own a fair amount of land near Lacombe, and I understand these concerns that these people have. There was concern that under the proposed Bill 46, landowners would not be able to speak to the commission in a public hearing setting, that they would be barred from being heard. While that was never the intent of Bill 46, it seemed to be necessary to change section 9 by removing 9(3)(b) from the bill. This ensures that all people that are directly and adversely affected will have the opportunity to participate in a public hearing.

Hearings must be and will be open and accessible to Albertans. Hearings are a quasi-judicial process and are very formal so that everyone will have a fair and equal opportunity to present their cases or participate either verbally or in writing if they wish. In fact, section 9(2) of Bill 46 offers protection to the public, even more so than what exists under the current legislation. Under Bill 46 if only one person is directly or adversely affected, a hearing must be held, as indicated in section 9(2)(c). Before a hearing is held, it is important that all the affected parties have the opportunity to learn all the facts about an application, which is stated in section 9(2)(b). The company that is making an application must provide to all parties a copy of the application and supporting information that they may have so that people can understand what the issues are.

As I mentioned before, submissions may be made verbally if the participants wish. I would also hope that this would be a guarantee if they so desire, that if people wanted to be heard verbally, it would be guaranteed that they would be able to be heard at least for a period of time. There might have to be some time limits on that.

If participants wish, they can provide their submissions in writing. This is sometimes more appropriate if the testimony is technical in nature and must be reviewed or compared to other testimony. Currently the process allows for verbal or written testimony, and all decisions are delivered in a written format, so this wouldn't change.

Mr. Chairman, I have chaired many public hearings in the past when I was reeve of Lacombe county.

An Hon. Member: And you did a good job.

Mr. Prins: Yes, I think I did a good job. I listened, and I made sure that everybody was heard well and that justice was done.

I know that written submissions are taken into account, contrary to what some people imply here, and I would expect that these hearings under the AUC would be treated exactly the same way. In fact, when I was reeve and we had public hearings on developments around Sylvan Lake and Gull Lake, we had days and days of public hearings, where we allowed people to speak. But if people wanted to, they could present written submissions. We had literally hundreds of written submissions, and I know for a fact that they were all taken into account. I would just purely expect that to be happening under this legislation as well.

Another issue that has been brought up is the right to retain legal counsel to represent participants' interests. Bill 46 does not affect the right to retain legal counsel. The retention of legal services will not be limited. I believe we must strengthen Alberta's regulatory system. Currently, Mr. Chairman, we receive about 60,000 applications per year from energy companies for different projects, and this results in about 20 or 30 hearings per year.

The rights and concerns of landowners and consumers absolutely must be protected and balanced. Justice must be done. It must not only be seen to be done; it must be done. First of all, the rights of rural landowners are paramount. Like I said earlier, I am a landowner. It seems like landowners must bear the burden or the brunt of power lines and pipelines and these types of activities in rural Alberta, and in the past they have not been fairly compensated. It is my hope that in the future as we go forward, we can also look after compensation so that landowners are fairly paid for the land and their inconvenience. I know that this is not part of Bill 46, but it is very, very important. I believe that fair compensation would go a long way toward alleviating tensions between landowners and energy companies.

5:50

We cannot lose sight of the intent of Bill 46. Reliable utilities are absolutely essential to the functioning of the entire province. This includes consumers, landowners, businesses, manufacturing industries, schools, hospitals, and all the many, many things that we take for granted every day. We need to move forward and achieve these goals by working together. I offer my support to this legislation as amended, and I encourage all others to support it as well.

This only covers a few of the points that we could be talking about. I look forward to other people's comments as well. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Bill 46 was promoted by this government as making the energy and utilities regulatory process more effective and efficient. By dividing the EUB into two separate bodies, the process is supposed to be better. I understand also the need to change the image of the EUB after the appalling incidents of spying. However, the apparent object of Bill 46 is to eliminate the public's ability to oppose, object to, and raise concerns about proposed energy and utility projects. As I said in second reading, this is a very contentious bill.

I know that the proposed amendments are supposed to answer Albertans' concerns about Bill 46. The need for so many amendments, of course, suggests that more thought should have been given to this bill in the first place. I looked at the amendments, and I cannot see where the ability of people living near a proposed project to appear before the Alberta utilities commission is improved because it's going to be at the discretion of the government-appointed commission, and the cost of legal representation for those appearing before the energy regulator will also be at the commission's discretion. We need some rules entrenched in legislation rather than at the discretion of a commission.

I also agree with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who states that the decision to leave the Utilities Consumer Advocate in the department of government services makes little difference because the Utilities Consumer Advocate has been weak and ineffective in the past.

I have received many, many letters of concern about Bill 46, but I'd like to focus on the Alberta Beef Producers.

The Chair: Hon. members, the background noise is getting too loud.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has the floor, so I would invite her to continue.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you.

As you know, Alberta Beef Producers is a commission incorporated under the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act and represents the interests of Alberta's 30,000 beef cattle producers. In working to strengthen the competitiveness of the beef cattle industry, Alberta Beef Producers reviews statutes and regulations to ensure that legislation and government policies protect Alberta's agricultural land and water resources and do not adversely affect the interests of their members as landowners, leaseholders, and beef cattle producers. To that end, they have given a very detailed review of the proposed Alberta Utilities Commission Act. Their interest in this legislation is

the impact it will have on the ability of owners and leaseholders of agricultural land to effectively participate in the decision making process regarding the location of pipelines and electrical transmission lines and the ability of the regulators to take into consideration the impact that the location of same will have on agricultural production.

In a letter to the Premier and the Energy minister the Alberta Beef Producers state that insofar as section 17 of Bill 46 is concerned, in addition to a consideration of the social and economic effects of a project on the environment the Energy Resources Conservation Board and the Alberta utilities commission should be required to take into consideration the effect a project will have on the agricultural operations, if any, conducted on the land on which all or part of the project is constructed and the potential impact the project will have on the current and future productivity of the agricultural land. These amendments are not going to do that.

I'm wondering why the government is in such a rush to push this. Why are we not referring this to the standing policy committee? I think that we need reasonable and considerable debate and careful consideration of what we're hearing from the various people and associations that are writing to us; for example, as I say, the Alberta Beef Producers. There needs to be a debate, more information to protect the rights of landowners as well as industry. Bill 46 does not deal with the fundamental problems that landowners have with energy and utility companies. I believe that we need fundamental change in the relationship between landowner rights, industry rights, government rights, and the processes used to deal with issues involving all three.

As I said in second reading, it is not democracy if it is not of the people and for the people but by one class or party and others do not qualify. It is not democracy if it is of and by the people but for interest groups. It is not enough to just to ignore people. These people must be involved in all three ways: as the recipients, as the beneficiaries, and as participants. Anything less is not enough. There is one body that matters: the people we serve. They may appear indifferent or ambivalent or slow to make up their minds. They will make them up given the information they need and the time to reflect on it. This process must not be short-circuited by those who have made up their minds already pressuring us to weigh the issues to decide what is right. Albertans deserve a fair and reasonable amount of time for debate.

For this important reason I have to reject Bill 46 and the amendments that it introduces. It is not introducing new opportunities for debate and discussion. It is not supporting those democratic principles. I think that the rural opposition to this bill is very strong. Due process and effective regulatory oversight of the energy and utilities sectors require public consultation and participation, and I think Bill 46 is a threat to this principle.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on Bill 46. I can say without fear of contradiction that there's been a tremendous amount of attention focused on this bill. Unfortunately, there have been statements made that reflect serious misconceptions about parts of this bill. As a government we have the responsibility to communicate the details of Bill 46 to landowners and to all Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, many have asked why government is changing the current system. One answer is simple: workload. In the past decade the Energy and Utilities Board has seen roughly a 300 per cent increase in the number of applications. To put this in context, in 1995-96 about 19,000 applications were made to the Energy and Utilities Board. Last year the board dealt with over 60,000 applications. This remarkable demand is a testament to Alberta's prosperity, but it also necessitated that restructuring of the regulatory process for energy-related development take place. That is what Bill 46 will accomplish.

Bill 46 will separate the Energy and Utilities Board into two separate regulatory bodies: the Energy Resources Conservation Board and the Alberta utilities commission. The new Energy Resources Conservation Board will focus on the responsible development of Alberta's resource wealth, ensuring that production of our province's oil and gas, oil sands, coal-bed methane, and other resources occurs safely and in the public interest. The new Alberta utilities commission will oversee the distribution and sale of electricity and retail natural gas to Alberta consumers and will . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(5) the Committee of the Whole stands adjourned until 8 p.m.

[At 6 p.m. the committee adjourned to 8 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, December 4, 2007**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 2007/12/04

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 46 Alberta Utilities Commission Act

The Chair: When we adjourned, the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti had started speaking. Did you have other comments to continue on?

Mr. Graydon: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Graydon: Well, thank you. Over the break I had many hon. members approach me and say they were anxious to get back in to hear the balance of my comments, so I will continue now. The new Energy Resources Conservation Board will focus on the responsible development of Alberta's resource wealth, ensuring that the production of our province's oil and gas, oil sands, coal-bed methane, and other resources occur safely and in the public interest. The new Alberta utilities commission will oversee the distribution and sale of electricity and retail natural gas to Alberta consumers and will make decisions on new transmission facilities.

Mr. Chairman, it has been said before but it bears repeating: under Bill 46 hearings must – must – be held on all infrastructure applications where the rights of an individual may be directly and adversely affected. All interested parties have the right to be notified of the facts, to participate in a hearing, to be represented by counsel if they wish, and to appeal questions of law or jurisdiction to the courts.

I would like to use the balance of my allotted time to focus my comments on the mandate of the Alberta utilities commission, specifically section 17. A summary of section 17 states that where the commission conducts a hearing, it shall give consideration to whether construction or operation of the proposed development is in the public interest having regard to the social and economic effects of the development. This means that Bill 46 explicitly requires the Alberta utilities commission to consider whether a proposed development is in the public interest and to take into account its social, economic, and environmental effects. It will not only maintain the current rights afforded to landowners and intervenors but adds an additional layer of consideration. Section 17 expands on the checks and balances currently in place.

Mr. Chairman, in developing Bill 46, government has carefully considered the concerns of all stakeholders, including those raised by landowners, consumer groups, various associations, and municipalities. The Minister of Energy has listened and responded with amendments to Bill 46. These amendments and the addition of section 17 will ensure that Albertans have the opportunity to be heard when the regulator considers the need for major infrastructure projects, such as transmission lines, and allows all intervenors to be eligible for funding in regulatory hearings.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 46 strikes a balance between the need to ensure there is enough power for Albertans and ensuring that development is carried out in a responsible manner. We will ensure fairness and efficiency when it comes to regulating Alberta's

electricity marketplace. I am confident that Bill 46 will preserve the rights of affected individuals and intervenors while ensuring that the interests of all Albertans are met. For those reasons I'm pleased to offer my support for Bill 46.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's interesting to listen to all the discussion here at committee. When we look at these amendments in the time that we have left, certainly I for one am not convinced that this is adequate or necessary. It's not an adequate or necessary debate on this bill nor are the reasons put forward by the government members as to why we should go ahead with this bill at this time. There is just too much wrong with this legislation for us to proceed.

Now, the hon. member previous talked about public interest in section 17, but certainly that section should be amended, Mr. Chairman. In fact, I'm really disappointed that that wasn't one of the long list of amendments that was provided by the government. A portion of this that should be removed and replaced would be the last portion of section 17, which reads, "is in the public interest, having regard to the social and economic effects of the development, plant, line or pipeline and the effects of the development, plant, line or pipeline on the environment." I think we should consider tightening that up, that entire section.

Section 18 – and we're obviously not going to have time – should be amended, and we should give due consideration to section 18(2), which talks about the giving of contradictory evidence. We still don't have an explanation for that. I see the Minister of Energy in the House, Mr. Chairman, with his coat off. He must be very excited after carrying in all the regulations that go along with this bill. He had to remove his coat because of that hard, diligent work. I'm certain at the end of this debate he must be going to table all the regulations.

Now, an amendment that certainly should be made is section 24. I'm very disappointed that section 24 isn't going to be amended. In fact, it should not be amended; it should be just deleted in its entirety. This bill as we allow it to continue in the Assembly in this form controls landowners and consumers, but it doesn't control generators of electricity nor the transmission organizations, and that is wrong. That's wrong. There are two sides of this to have a good regulatory system that's in balance, and this is not the proper balance. Certainly, we talked about this before. There should be an amendment to the period of 10 days from which one has time to make an appeal. It should be increased to 90 days. The appeals from the commission, section 29(2), should be amended as well from 30 days to 90 days.

When we use closure, we don't have time to even try to improve this flawed legislation. The exclusion of the judicial review: people have talked about this, previous speakers. Part 5 is going to be amended, and I for one think it should be. We can go through this. Part 6 is the Market Surveillance Administrator. This whole section hasn't even been touched in the limited discussions that we have had on the role of the Market Surveillance Administrator. I for one think that the Market Surveillance Administrator should come under the Auditor General Act, but it doesn't, and I'm puzzled as to why. I know the government is sensitive about the Auditor General since the report came out on the royalties and how they are or are not handled by the department, but I for one would certainly like to have seen that section amended to put the Market Surveillance Administrator and his department under the watchful eye of our Auditor General.

Certainly, I cannot understand why our Auditor cannot review and audit the financial statements of the Market Surveillance Administrator. Also, when they report in section 53, Mr. Chairman, that the Market Surveillance Administrator shall make available to the minister – the Minister of Energy in this case – reports on market events or conditions or other records, and the Market Surveillance Administrator shall, in my view, subject to regulations and rules under section 74 make public any report or records referred to it in subsection (3) or (4). Not may; not the Market Surveillance Administrator may. If we're really concerned and we're really sincere about the role of the Market Surveillance Administrator, then the Market Surveillance Administrator shall do those things. It's not discretionary. It's not may; it's shall. And that, Mr. Chairman, has not been done yet.

8:10

Now, certainly, we looked earlier at the Gas Utilities Act and its relationship to the Electric Utilities Act. I don't think our questions were answered. Maybe they were not understood. We're still not going to get to the court orders that are under the Market Surveillance Administrator, whenever that administrator may apply to the court by originating notice for an order under subsection (3). It's quite interesting, Mr. Chairman, because there was an originating notice, as I understand, initiated by the Market Surveillance Administrator in a case involving Enmax and the importing into this market of electricity that was uneconomically priced, whatever that means.

I just don't understand why, as other members have stated, we're so anxious to rush this bill through the Assembly. There are many things in here that we have not discussed like section 65(2), which in my view should be amended.

The Chair: Hon. member, we are debating amendment A1.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. We certainly are, Mr. Chairman. With amendment A1 there are 24 amendments in there, and these are some of the ones that should be added to that list.

An Hon. Member: We listen. We care.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm afraid you don't listen and you don't care, hon. member.

Now, the administrative penalties. We talked a little bit about that, Mr. Chairman. Some of these sections under part 7 have been suggested to me to be struck out.

The Public Service Act in part 8: "The Public Service Act does not apply to the Commission or to the Commission's employees or persons providing services to the Commission." Why not? We know that Mr. Kellan Fluckiger was a contractor, and I'm told that he was not part of any of the rules or regulations that govern public servants in this province. So is that why the Public Service Act does not apply to the commission or to the commission's employees? Surely we can get answers to these questions. Surely we can.

Mr. Chairman, we talked about part 9, the rules and regulations and the commission's rules. This is one that's not part of the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne's amendments, but 91(1)(c) should be amended.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but pursuant to Government Motion 38, agreed to December 4, 2007, which states that after three hours of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, in Committee of the Whole, I must now

put the following questions to conclude debate. We will be voting on amendment A1 on each part individually unless I get instructions from the House leaders otherwise at some point in time.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1A carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:14 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Fritz	Mitzel
Backs	Graydon	Oberle
Brown	Groeneveld	Ouellette
Cao	Haley	Prins
Cardinal	Hancock	Renner
Coutts	Horner	Rodney
Danyluk	Knight	Rogers
DeLong	Lougheed	Stevens
Doerksen	Magnus	Strang
Dunford	McFarland	VanderBurg
Forsyth		

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Hinman	Miller, R.
Blakeman	Macdonald	Pannu
Cheffins	Martin	Pastoor
Eggen	Miller, B.	Taylor
Elsalhy		

Totals:	For – 31	Against – 13
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[Motion on amendment A1A carried]

The Chair: Now we'll have the vote on amendment A1B.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1B carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:27 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Fritz	Mitzel
Backs	Graydon	Oberle
Brown	Groeneveld	Ouellette
Cao	Haley	Prins
Cardinal	Hancock	Renner
Coutts	Horner	Rodney
Danyluk	Knight	Rogers
DeLong	Lougheed	Stevens
Doerksen	Magnus	Strang
Dunford	McFarland	VanderBurg
Forsyth		

The Chair: Hon. members, I believe everyone is supposed to be in their seats while the votes are taking place.

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Miller, R.
Blakeman	Hinman	Pannu
Cheffins	MacDonald	Pastoor
Eggen	Martin	Taylor

Totals:	For – 31	Against – 12
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[Motion on amendment A1B carried]

The Chair: Now on amendment A1C.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1C carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:40 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Forsyth	McFarland
Backs	Fritz	Mitzel
Brown	Graydon	Oberle
Cao	Groeneveld	Prins
Cardinal	Haley	Renner
Coutts	Hancock	Rodney
Danyluk	Horner	Rogers
DeLong	Knight	Stevens
Doerksen	Lougheed	Strang
Dunford	Magnus	

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Miller, R.
Blakeman	Hinman	Pannu
Cheffins	MacDonald	Pastoor
Eggen	Martin	Taylor

Totals:	For – 29	Against – 12
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[Motion on amendment A1C carried]

The Chair: Now we have amendment A1, part D. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Given that we've now had three divisions – the bells have been rung – I suspect that all members that are in the vicinity will have had an opportunity to join us in the voting. There is a provision within our Standing Order 32(3) that allows for the House on unanimous consent to shorten the time between division bells to one minute or to what can be determined. I would request at this time that with unanimous consent we reduce the time on division to one minute. I think that members have had an opportunity to be here.

I recognize that there are some concerns that have been expressed by the opposition. Clearly, there is an opportunity for them to express those concerns; however, I think we do have to think about

wise use of taxpayers' resources and move on to the business of the House.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Chair: The next item for voting is amendment A1D.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1D carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:55 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Fritz	Oberle
Backs	Graydon	Ouellette
Brown	Groeneveld	Prins
Cao	Haley	Renner
Cardinal	Hancock	Rodney
Coutts	Horner	Rogers
Danyluk	Knight	Stevens
DeLong	Lougheed	Strang
Doerksen	Magnus	VanderBurg
Dunford	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Forsyth	Mitzel	

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Miller, R.
Blakeman	MacDonald	Pastoor
Cheffins	Martin	Taylor
Eggen		

Totals:	For – 32	Against – 10
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[Motion on amendment A1D carried]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My colleagues advise that although my argument was compelling last time, it obviously wasn't particularly persuasive, so I will again ask for unanimous consent pursuant to Standing Order 32(3) to reduce the time between the bells to one minute.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Chair: Back on the amendments. We're dealing with amendment A1E.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1E carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:09 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Fritz	Oberle
Backs	Graydon	Ouellette
Brown	Groeneveld	Prins
Cao	Haley	Renner
Cardinal	Hancock	Rodney
Coutts	Horner	Rogers
Danyluk	Knight	Stevens
DeLong	Lougheed	Strang
Doerksen	Magnus	VanderBurg
Dunford	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Forsyth	Mitzel	

9:20

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Pannu
Blakeman	MacDonald	Pastoor
Cheffins	Martin	Taylor
Eggen	Miller, R.	

Totals: For – 32 Against – 11

[Motion on amendment A1E carried]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My mother always taught me that if you want to learn to do something properly, you need to practise. So in the interest of learning to do it properly, I would move, subject to Standing Order 32(3), that the committee give unanimous consent to reducing the time between the bells to one minute.

Point of Order Division Bell Interval

The Chair: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much for recognizing me. I am mindful of the comments made this afternoon by the Speaker in the Assembly in which he said: “The Government House Leader asked for unanimous consent to waive the time between bells. The Assembly said no.” He would draw it to the hon. member . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, this is not debatable.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I’m calling a point of order on him for repeatedly doing this when we had instructions from the Speaker this afternoon that it could be done once and perhaps once again, but not repeatedly. He is violating the instructions that were given to us by the Speaker in this House this afternoon, according to what’s in *Hansard*.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader, on this point of order.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This afternoon, of course, we were in the Assembly, and I was asking the Speaker to make a ruling prior to all of this. Now we’re in committee, and Standing Order 32(3) clearly applies. It says:

Subject to suborder (3.1), when a division is called in Committee of the Whole or Committee of Supply, a Member may request unanimous consent to waive suborder (2) to shorten the 10 minute interval between division bells.

There’s clearly no limitation on that standing order, and it’s quite in order to ask because one might want to have one division or maybe two divisions or perhaps three divisions, but they may not intend to carry out 10 or 15 divisions. So one doesn’t know until one asks when one has reached the point where any member of the Assembly might feel that the point has been made and feel that it’s prudent now to act to suggest that the point having been made, we should no longer waste the resources of the public of Alberta on continuing to have 10-minute intervals between votes. So it is quite in order under Standing Order 32(3) to ask for each division, each time, because the circumstances may have changed.

The Chair: Anyone else on the point of order?

Ms Blakeman: That is contravening – the Speaker said you shouldn’t do this every three minutes. There has to be some order in the Assembly, and he was referring directly to Standing Order 32(3).

The Chair: Anyone else on the point of order? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on the point of order.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m speaking to 32(3). I’m looking to order in the Assembly, and I believe that not allowing this and allowing the division bells just to continue for 10 minutes in a subsequent and a repeated way is actually creating disorder in the Assembly. I think that in order to get into the debates of important questions tonight, we should be proceeding and having this go forward.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, on the point of order.

Rev. Abbott: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Referring to Standing Order 32(3), I would also agree that if we were to limit division bells to one minute, then perhaps we could have more time for debate.

The Chair: I’m calling for comments on the point of order. If there is no one else, I’m prepared to make a ruling on this.

It’s true that the Speaker did give some direction on the division in Assembly, but we are in committee right now. Standing Order 32(3) is quite clear, and I will read it.

Subject to suborder (3.1), when a division is called in Committee of the Whole or Committee of Supply, a Member may request unanimous consent to waive suborder (2) to shorten the 10 minute interval between division bells.

It doesn’t put any other restrictions on how many times this can be called for, so there is no point of order.

Debate Continued

The Chair: Now, on the request by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader. I don’t believe your request differs from the time before, so I’ll put the question to the Assembly.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Chair: Now we are dealing with A1F.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1F carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:26 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Fritz	Oberle
Backs	Graydon	Ouellette
Brown	Groeneveld	Prins
Cao	Haley	Renner
Cardinal	Hancock	Rodney
Coutts	Horner	Rogers
Danyluk	Knight	Stevens
DeLong	Lougheed	Strang
Doerksen	Magnus	VanderBurg
Dunford	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Forsyth	Mitzel	

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Pannu
Blakeman	MacDonald	Pastoor
Cheffins	Martin	Taylor
Eggen	Miller, R.	

Totals:	For – 32	Against – 11
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[Motion on amendment A1F carried]

The Chair: The next amendment is amendment A1G.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1G carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:40 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Forsyth	Mitzel
Backs	Fritz	Oberle
Brown	Graydon	Prins
Cao	Groeneveld	Renner
Cardinal	Haley	Rodney
Coutts	Hancock	Rogers
Danyluk	Knight	Stevens
DeLong	Lougheed	Strang
Doerksen	Magnus	VanderBurg
Dunford	McFarland	

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Pannu
Blakeman	MacDonald	Pastoor
Cheffins	Martin	Taylor
Eggen	Miller, R.	

Totals:	For – 29	Against – 11
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[Motion on amendment A1G carried]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Pursuant to Standing Order 32(3) I seek unanimous consent to reduce the time between the division bells to one minute.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Point of Order

Separating Amendments

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, if I could. Clarification, please. In the Standing Orders, Proceedings in Committee of the Whole, 81(2)

Where the Chair receives an indication that comments, questions or amendments will be offered with respect to any sections of the Bill, the committee shall consider every such section [of the Bill], with the title and preamble to be considered last.

Mr. Chairman, I submit to you that as we proceed through the sections – when we get to amendment M, it's section 95 in the bill. N is section 95 in the bill, and then from O I think there are five in a row that deal with section 96. I submit to you, Mr. Chairman, that they should be dealt with as one section of the bill.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. According to several rulings by both the chairperson and by the Speaker, these particular amendments were to be voted individually. I don't see why there would be a need to not do that at this point. We were not actually allowed to debate them individually. We weren't even afforded enough time to do that, and we will certainly take the time now by voting them one at a time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon member, we're not dealing with the bill at this particular time. We're dealing with amendments to the bill. I received indication from the House leaders earlier that we would be dealing with each part of the amendment in alphabetical order as they appear on the amendment A1 sheet. That's what we've been doing, and unless I get indication from the committee to deal with this otherwise, that's how I will continue to deal with it.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, if I may. With all respect, if we read section 81(2), it very clearly states that questions or amendments – questions or amendments – “offered with respect to any sections of the Bill, the committee shall consider every such section.” The Standing Orders there are very clear.

Ms Blakeman: At this point we're dealing with the voting of the amendments, not with the content of the amendments. It's the voting of the amendments that's on the floor, and that was the ruling that was given by both the Speaker and the chair.

The Chair: We've already ruled that this is the way the committee was agreeable to doing it. Unless I get an indication from the committee, we'll continue doing it this way. That was the indication to the chair when that was asked for earlier in the day, and that was agreed upon. Unless you want to take it up with the House leaders and change that indication to me.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. I have one last comment.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Knight: Very clearly, again, Mr. Chairman, up to this point in time we have only been dealing with one section of the bill at a time. As we move forward, there are a number of areas in this A1 package of amendments, a number of amendments dealing with one section, and that was what I was trying to bring to your attention.

The Chair: Hon. Government House Leader, you have some comments on this?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Chairman. If the hon. member is correct that a number of these lettered items that you've broken it down into amend the same section, I believe that the hon. member has a point. We were led to believe that it was broken down into sections. That wasn't an agreement of the House leaders. That was your ruling because the standing procedure of the House is that we deal with the bill clause by clause, and if any member wants it voted on separately, then you don't vote on it as a package. But that presumes that each of the sections broken down, the A to G or whatever it is, are dealing with sections. If, in fact, they've been broken down into subs of sections, I believe the hon. member has a point.

The Chair: Well, if we are going to change the process from this point on, I would ask for a vote of the committee to do it, or else we'll proceed the way we have been going.

Hon. members, at the very outset this evening it was indicated to me, the chair, that by an agreement of the House leaders we would be proceeding the way we have, by alphabetical part at the time. I asked if there was any change in that, I would get that change from those House leaders at that time. I have not got that indication yet. Unless I do, we will be continuing the way we have. I would suggest that members take it up with their House leaders to indicate that change to me.

Mr. Hancock: There's never been a House leaders' agreement on this point. It's up to members of the House to request if they want to proceed section by section, and if they request, we must acquiesce. It's not been a matter of a House leaders' agreement.

10:00

Ms Blakeman: We did in fact request a number of times on the record that these amendments be severed, and what we were told in response was that it would be debated as a package and voted separately by each differential section here. The amendments are identified alphabetically, A through X I believe, and that was how they were to be voted.

The Chair: Well, I've ruled on this, and we will proceed the way we have been going about this in the past.

Debate Continued

The Chair: The next section we're dealing with is A1, part H.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1H carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:01 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott

Forsyth

Mitzel

Backs
Brown
Cao
Cardinal
Coutts
Danyluk
DeLong
Doerksen
Dunford

Fritz
Graydon
Groeneveld
Haley
Hancock
Horner
Knight
Lougheed
McFarland

Oberle
Ouellette
Prins
Renner
Rodney
Rogers
Stevens
Strang
VanderBurg

Against the motion:

Agnihotri
Blakeman
Cheffins
Eggen

Elsalhy
MacDonald
Martin
Miller, R.

Pannu
Pastoor
Taylor

Totals:

For – 30

Against – 11

[Motion on amendment A1H carried]

The Chair: The next part is amendment A1I.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1I carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:14 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott
Backs
Brown
Cao
Cardinal
Coutts
DeLong
Doerksen
Dunford
Forsyth
Fritz

Graydon
Groeneveld
Haley
Hancock
Horner
Knight
Lougheed
Magnus
McFarland
Mitzel

Oberle
Ouellette
Prins
Renner
Rodney
Rogers
Snelgrove
Stevens
Strang
VanderBurg

Against the motion:

Agnihotri
Blakeman
Chase
Cheffins

Eggen
Elsalhy
MacDonald
Martin

Miller, R.
Pastoor
Taylor

Totals:

For – 31

Against – 11

[Motion on amendment A1I carried]

The Chair: The next amendment for consideration is amendment A1J.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1J carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:26 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Graydon	Oberle
Backs	Groeneveld	Ouellette
Brown	Haley	Prins
Cao	Hancock	Renner
Cardinal	Horner	Rodney
Coutts	Knight	Rogers
DeLong	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Doerksen	Magnus	Stevens
Dunford	McFarland	Strang
Forsyth	Mitzel	VanderBurg
Fritz		

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Eggen	Miller, R.
Blakeman	Elsalhy	Pastoor
Chase	MacDonald	Taylor
Cheffins		

Totals:	For – 31	Against – 10
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[Motion on amendment A1J carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members. We'll now vote on part K of amendment A1.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1K carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:39 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Fritz	Oberle
Backs	Graydon	Ouellette
Brown	Groeneveld	Prins
Cao	Haley	Renner
Cardinal	Hancock	Rodney
Coutts	Horner	Rogers
Danyluk	Knight	Snelgrove
DeLong	Lougheed	Stevens
Doerksen	Magnus	Strang
Dunford	McFarland	VanderBurg
Forsyth	Mitzel	

10:50

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Eggen	Miller, R.
Blakeman	Elsalhy	Pastoor
Chase	MacDonald	Taylor
Cheffins	Miller, B.	

Totals:	For – 32	Against – 11
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[Motion on amendment A1K carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll now vote on section L of amendment A1.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1L carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:51 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Fritz	Mitzel
Backs	Graydon	Oberle
Brown	Groeneveld	Prins
Cao	Haley	Renner
Cardinal	Hancock	Rodney
Coutts	Horner	Rogers
Danyluk	Knight	Snelgrove
DeLong	Lougheed	Stevens
Doerksen	Magnus	Strang
Dunford	McFarland	VanderBurg

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Eggen	Miller, R.
Blakeman	Elsalhy	Pastoor
Chase	MacDonald	Taylor
Cheffins	Miller, B.	

Totals:	For – 30	Against – 11
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[Motion on amendment A1L carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll next vote on section M.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1M carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:04 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Graydon	Oberle
Backs	Groeneveld	Pham
Brown	Haley	Prins
Cao	Hancock	Renner
Cardinal	Horner	Rodney
Coutts	Knight	Rogers
Danyluk	Lougheed	Snelgrove
DeLong	Magnus	Stevens
Doerksen	McFarland	Strang
Dunford	Mitzel	VanderBurg
Fritz		

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Eggen	Miller, R.
Blakeman	Elsalhy	Pastoor
Chase	MacDonald	Taylor
Cheffins	Miller, B.	

Totals:	For – 31	Against – 11
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[Motion on amendment A1M carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll next vote on section N.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1N carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:16 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Dunford	McFarland
Ady	Fritz	Mitzel
Amery	Graydon	Oberg
Backs	Groeneveld	Oberle
Brown	Haley	Pham
Cao	Hancock	Prins
Cardinal	Horner	Renner
Cenaiko	Johnston	Rodney
Coutts	Knight	Rogers
Danyluk	Liepert	Snelgrove
DeLong	Lougheed	Strang
Doerksen	Magnus	VanderBurg

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Eggen	Miller, B.
Blakeman	Elsalhy	Miller, R.
Chase	Flaherty	Pastoor
Cheffins	MacDonald	Taylor

Totals:	For – 36	Against – 12
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[Motion on amendment A1N carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will now vote on section O of amendment A1.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1O carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:29 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Haley	Melchin
Ady	Hancock	Mitzel

Amery	Jablonski	Oberg
Backs	Johnson	Oberle
Boutilier	Johnston	Pham
Cao	Knight	Prins
Cenaiko	Liepert	Renner
Coutts	Lindsay	Rodney
Goudreau	Lukaszuk	Snelgrove
Griffiths	Magnus	Strang
Groeneveld	McFarland	

11:40

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Eggen	Miller, B.
Blakeman	Elsalhy	Miller, R.
Chase	Flaherty	Pastoor
Cheffins	MacDonald	Taylor

Totals:	For – 32	Against – 12
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[Motion on amendment A1O carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will next vote on section P of amendment A1.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1P carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:42 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Hancock	Oberg
Ady	Jablonski	Oberle
Amery	Johnson	Pham
Backs	Johnston	Prins
Boutilier	Knight	Renner
Cao	Liepert	Rodney
Cenaiko	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Goudreau	Magnus	Strang
Haley	Melchin	

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Eggen	Miller, B.
Blakeman	Elsalhy	Miller, R.
Chase	Flaherty	Pastoor
Cheffins	MacDonald	Taylor

Totals:	For – 26	Against – 12
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[Motion on amendment A1P carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll now vote on section Q.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1Q carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:54 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

Chase
Cheffins

Flaherty
MacDonald

Pastoor
Taylor

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Totals:

For – 25

Against – 12

For the motion:

Abbott	Haley	Melchin
Ady	Hancock	Oberg
Amery	Jablonski	Oberle
Backs	Johnson	Pham
Boutilier	Johnston	Prins
Cao	Knight	Renner
Cenaiko	Liepert	Rodney
Goudreau	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Griffiths	Lukaszuk	Strang

[Motion on amendment A1R carried]

12:20

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will now vote on section S of amendment A1.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1S carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:21 a.m.]

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Eggen	Miller, B.
Bonko	Elsalhy	Miller, R.
Chase	Flaherty	Pastoor
Cheffins	MacDonald	Taylor

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Totals:

For – 27

Against – 12

[Motion on amendment A1Q carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will now vote on section R. We are voting right now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: I'm rising to request unanimous consent to reduce the amount of time for the bells.

The Deputy Chair: To one minute?

Mr. Backs: Under 32(3) of the Standing Orders, Mr. Chair.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Deputy Chair: Section R.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1R carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:08 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Jablonski	Melchin
Ady	Johnson	Oberg
Amery	Johnston	Oberle
Boutilier	Knight	Pham
Cenaiko	Liepert	Prins
Goudreau	Lindsay	Renner
Griffiths	Lukaszuk	Rodney
Haley	Lund	Strang
Hancock		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Eggen	Miller, B.
Bonko	Elsalhy	Miller, R.

For the motion:

Abbott	Jablonski	Oberg
Ady	Johnson	Oberle
Amery	Johnston	Pham
Boutilier	Knight	Prins
Cenaiko	Liepert	Renner
Goudreau	Lindsay	Rodney
Griffiths	Lukaszuk	Snelgrove
Haley	Lund	Strang
Hancock	Melchin	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Elsalhy	Miller, B.
Bonko	Flaherty	Miller, R.
Chase	MacDonald	Pastoor
Cheffins	Mason	Taylor
Eggen		

Totals:

For – 26

Against – 13

[Motion on amendment A1S carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will now vote on section T of amendment A1.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1T carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:33 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Johnson	Oberg
Ady	Johnston	Oberle
Amery	Knight	Pham
Boutilier	Liepert	Prins
Cenaiko	Lindsay	Renner
Goudreau	Lund	Rodney

Haley	Marz	Snelgrove	Ady	Johnson	Oberle
Hancock	Melchin	Strang	Amery	Johnston	Pham
Jablonski			Boutilier	Knight	Prins
			Cao	Liepert	Renner
Against the motion:			Cenaiko	Lindsay	Rodney
Blakeman	Elsalhy	Miller, B.	Goudreau	Lund	Snelgrove
Bonko	Flaherty	Miller, R.	Haley	Melchin	Strang
Chase	MacDonald	Pastoor	Hancock		
Cheffins	Mason	Taylor			
Eggen			Against the motion:		
			Bonko	Eggen	Miller, B.
Totals:	For – 25	Against – 13	Chase	Flaherty	Miller, R.
			Cheffins	Mason	Pastoor

[Motion on amendment A1T carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll now vote on section U of amendment A1.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1U carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:45 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Jablonski	Oberg
Ady	Johnson	Oberle
Amery	Johnston	Pham
Boutilier	Knight	Prins
Cao	Liepert	Renner
Cenaiko	Lindsay	Rodney
Goudreau	Lund	Snelgrove
Haley	Melchin	Strang
Hancock	Mitzel	
Against the motion:		
Blakeman	Eggen	Mason
Bonko	Elsalhy	Miller, B.
Chase	Flaherty	Miller, R.
Cheffins	MacDonald	Pastoor

Totals: For – 26 Against – 12

[Motion on amendment A1U carried]

The Chair: Hon. members, the next amendment is A1V.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1V carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:57 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Jablonski	Oberg
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Totals: For – 25 Against – 9

[Motion on amendment A1V carried]

The Chair: The next amendment is amendment A1, part W.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1W carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:10 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Jablonski	Oberg
Ady	Johnson	Oberle
Amery	Johnston	Pham
Boutilier	Knight	Prins
Cao	Liepert	Renner
Cenaiko	Lindsay	Rodney
Goudreau	Lund	Snelgrove
Haley	Melchin	Strang
Hancock		

1:20

Against the motion:

Bonko	MacDonald	Miller, R.
Chase	Mason	Pastoor
Cheffins	Miller, B.	Taft
Flaherty		

Totals: For – 25 Against – 10

[Motion on amendment A1W carried]

The Chair: The next amendment is amendment A1X.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1X carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:22 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Jablonski	Oberg
Ady	Johnson	Oberle
Amery	Johnston	Pham
Boutilier	Knight	Prins
Cao	Liepert	Renner
Cenaiko	Lindsay	Rodney
Goudreau	Lund	Snelgrove
Haley	Melchin	Strang
Hancock		

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 46. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you agreed with the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Against the motion:

Bonko	Hinman	Miller, R.
Chase	MacDonald	Pastoor
Cheffins	Mason	Taft
Flaherty	Miller, B.	

Total	For – 25	Against – 11
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head: **Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading**

**Bill 46
Alberta Utilities Commission Act**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

[Motion on amendment A1X carried]

[The voice vote indicated that the clauses of Bill 46 as amended were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:34 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Jablonski	Oberg
Ady	Johnson	Oberle
Amery	Johnston	Pham
Boutilier	Knight	Prins
Cao	Liepert	Renner
Cenaiko	Lindsay	Rodney
Goudreau	Lund	Snelgrove
Haley	Melchin	Strang
Hancock		

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to move third reading of Bill 46 after the stimulating debate that we had with respect to the amendments that were brought forward to in fact strengthen this bill for the protection of all Albertans and to provide for Albertans a utility commission that will in the future I'm very sure provide an excellent opportunity for Albertans not only to have the protection and the service of a strong utility structure but also to be very much engaged in that process as it moves along.

Mr. Speaker, a key area that was entrusted to me as the Minister of Energy for the province of Alberta includes the continuing effective operation of Alberta's electricity system to meet Albertans' growing needs, and it's a responsibility that I don't take lightly. I think that all hon. members here would agree with me that the intent of Bill 46 to create two entities out of the EUB is, indeed, something that is required and is a positive move for Alberta.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say in the context of that that some hon. members might suggest that it's an attempt to act against the interests of Albertans. However, the AUC, like the EUB, has an obligation to approve what's in the public interest, and I think that, in fact, what we've done here is to address exactly that.

I'm pleased that we're able to start the final debate with respect to Bill 46 here in third reading. Mr. Speaker, at this point in time I would like to move to adjourn debate.

Against the motion:

Bonko	Hinman	Miller, B.
Chase	MacDonald	Miller, R.
Cheffins	Mason	Taft
Flaherty		

Totals:	For – 25	Against – 10
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[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The clauses of Bill 46 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 57

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move Bill 57, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2) for second reading.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 46.

[The Speaker in the chair]

As was indicated in first reading when it was introduced, miscellaneous statutes usually is a statute which does not have much debate because it only gets introduced after all parties have agreed that the contents thereof are, in fact, miscellaneous. I will adhere to that concept, Mr. Speaker, and not debate it further and would at this time move that we adjourn debate on Bill 57.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 46

39. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill at third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've spoken to this motion twice. I won't speak to it further.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Although the hon. Government House Leader might not wish to speak to it further, I certainly think it's important that we speak to it further. This is now I believe the fourth time in just the last few days that we've seen this government invoke closure on debate in this Legislature. Yes, the fourth time. I think it's shameful, quite frankly, that we see this sort of thing happening.

You know, we've been through an exercise in democracy and parliamentary rules over the last six hours. I know that there are some members of the House who question the tactic. Quite frankly, there isn't a member on this side of the House who would not have rather spent the last six hours debating Bill 46 as opposed to doing the votes that we went through, but the government put the opposition in a situation where we weren't allowed to debate over the last six hours, unfortunately, and I think it's fair to say it's unfortunate for the people of this province. They lost six hours of debate on Bill 46 as a result of the government. In fairness, Mr. Speaker, as they with Government Motion 39, they are using the standing orders to their full advantage.

I think it's fair to say that the opposition used the standing orders to their full advantage, for whatever that might be worth. It can be questioned what it's worth, but nevertheless that is the way it works. Both sides of the House have shown tonight that they're willing to use the rules as they are to the best of their abilities and for the purposes as they best see fit; that is true. I hear the President of the Treasury Board agreeing with me. I'm glad that he sees some merit in my argument.

To speak specifically to Government Motion 39, clearly the opposition is going to vote against this motion, and clearly, if need be, there will be another standing vote on this. It is simply a matter of principle, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's an important principle.

Mr. Liepert: You don't have any.

Mr. R. Miller: I hear the hon. Minister of Education suggesting that

I don't have any principles. If he's looking for a point of order, he's dangerously close to finding one because, Mr. Speaker, as has been said by many members of this House many times – many times – we have nothing if we don't have our own dignity and our own honour. For that minister to sit there and question my dignity and my honour and suggest that I don't have any principles is not funny. It is not funny.

Mr. Speaker, I'm ashamed. It's 2 o'clock in the morning, and duly elected members of this Assembly are here to do a job on behalf of the people of this province. The smugness that comes from that side of the House is absolutely shameful. I have said this before, and here we are again: a black day for democracy in this province. The fourth time in only a handful of days that the government has invoked closure. They are denying the people of this province their rights in terms of having their voices heard.

The hon. Minister of Education should know that I tabled a letter in this House this afternoon that came from a constituent, totally unsolicited, suggesting that Bill 46, even as amended, is a terrible piece of legislation and in the letter asked me to vote against the amendments. He was suggesting in this House yesterday that that doesn't happen, that the only way that any members of this House are getting letters from constituents suggesting that they vote against Bill 46 is if they're solicited. Well, clearly that's just not the case. There are many people across this province that are incredibly concerned. [interjection] I certainly did not solicit a letter from the mayor of Calgary. I'm going to suggest that the Minister of Education probably didn't solicit that letter either.

Mr. Rodney: Can we go back to a division?

Mr. R. Miller: Oh, we will in a very short time, hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed. We will very definitely be back to a division in no time, I'm sure.

As I said, a black day for democracy. Here we are once again being forced into a closure motion by the government for whatever reason. You know, Mr. Speaker, I do not understand. This is the fifth week in this House in the fall sitting, and we could have started this debate five weeks ago. [Mr. R. Miller's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but under Standing Order 21(3) there are only two speakers permitted.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 39 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:58 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abbott	Jablonski	Oberg
Ady	Johnson	Oberle
Amery	Johnston	Pham
Boutilier	Knight	Prins
Cao	Liepert	Renner
Cenaiko	Lindsay	Rodney
Goudreau	Lukaszuk	Shariff
Griffiths	Lund	Snelgrove
Haley	Marz	Strang
Hancock	Melchin	

Against the motion:

Bonko	Hinman	Miller, B.
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Chase Cheffins	MacDonald Mason	Miller, R. Taft
Totals:	For – 29	Against – 9

[Government Motion 39 carried]

head: 2:10 **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 46
Alberta Utilities Commission Act
(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Energy, are you continuing?

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think for the purposes of third reading I would like to just say again that I hope that we have an opportunity here in the next something less than an hour to indicate to Albertans the concerns that some people have raised with respect to this issue and also, I believe, the opportunity to indicate how we've addressed those concerns to the greatest degree. With that, I think I would like to just allow the debate in third reading to continue.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, when we think of this hour and we think of the lack of proper time in committee that was used or in the absence of time to try to repair this bill, the 24 amendments, it's remarkable that this government would invoke closure again on this bill. There are, again, so many outstanding issues and so little time, and if this government continues with this pattern of closure, the citizens of this province are apt to invoke closure on this government.

Now, specifically with this bill and in third reading we have to ask ourselves: have we done enough? Obviously, hon. members, we have not. We have not done enough with this bill to improve it and to satisfy the concerns and the issues that have been brought forward. The 24 amendments are simply a reflection of how it was so poorly drafted in the first place.

Now, when we look at this series of amendments – I won't call them improvements to this bill – no one on the government side in the limited time we had at committee stood up and said that the proposed amendments, the changes in the intervenor funding, provided the Alberta utilities commission the discretion to provide funding to a local intervenor or other intervenors in a hearing or any other proceeding. I didn't hear that, Mr. Speaker, and when we look at some of the other attempts to satisfy the concerns of Albertans, they're not addressed here either.

Certainly, whenever we're looking at the administrative penalties, we clarified that the administrative penalties that the Alberta utilities commission can impose on a person are either a fine or other terms and conditions or both – and we talked about this earlier – but there's been really no satisfaction here where we're moving some officers' and directors' joint liability issues. I could go on and on, but I think what we need to do here with this bill in third reading is give it one more chance.

Now, with the time that we have, I think we should consider bringing this bill back to committee because we have not finished the work that needed to be done. [interjection] I'm sure the Minister of Energy is excited about that. We look at the regulations, which we have been patient for and we've been asking for. I'm very disappointed that we have not had a chance to review them.

Mr. Speaker, I have an amendment to the bill here, a notice of amendment. I would ask if the pages could please come by. We have lots of copies for everyone here, including the signed original on the top. If that could be distributed, please, I would be grateful.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm assuming that this is a committal amendment, so just proceed. It'll be circulated right now.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my notice of amendment. I will read it into the record for the benefit of the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. I move that the motion for third reading of Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering sections 3 to 24."

Now, there's a lot in sections 3 to 24 that we haven't had the time to address because of this government's habit of invoking closure. Mr. Speaker, I would urge all hon. members to consider this amendment at this time and for these very reasons. If we were to go back to Committee of the Whole and we were to deal with sections 3 through 24, these are some of the things that we could consider. In section 3(1) we could consider an amendment, and we could discuss changing the composition of the commission, eliminating the appointment of nine members chosen by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, changing it to better reflect the needs of Alberta consumers. This is done by adding five consumer appointees. Let's put the consumers first, not last. [interjection] The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has spoken. Unfortunately, I could not hear that. Perhaps it's better that I did not.

Now, if we were to adopt this amendment, it would also give us time to look at section 6(1)(a) in committee. If we were to have a look at section 6(1)(a) – and that's under Duty of Care, Mr. Speaker – we could discuss the idea and consider a change in language to broaden the concept of best interest. Defining the public interest can be done narrowly; for instance, the economic interest. This means that other concepts will be considered. If we have a look at this, we could consider the environment, for example.

If we were to go down here to section 8(1) – again, I would remind all hon. members that the approach, if we were to amend this, is based on limiting the powers of the commission and the extent to which it could exercise powers that are not contained or enumerated within Bill 46. I'm sure the Minister of Energy is having doubts about Bill 46, and he must be having doubts about the discretionary powers of the commission.

Mr. Knight: You don't get to determine when I have doubts.

2:20

Mr. MacDonald: I don't get to determine when the hon. Minister of Energy has doubts. I'm relieved to hear that, hon. member.

Now, section 8(5). This will give us an opportunity to have a look at this. If we were to do the right thing, we would rein in the power of the commission to ensure that only matters that are essential to the performance of the commission's mandate are dealt with during any proceeding. Without this, any matter could come into the mandated power of the commission.

We could also have a look at section 8(7). I think, again, that we would be better off without section 8(7).

Mr. Knight: There are a few things around here I think we'd be better off without as well.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, why didn't you say that in committee?

Now you're getting the chance, so I would encourage you to please support this proposal.

Now 9(1). You know, the Minister of Energy may be confident that section 9 is fixed, but Albertans are not. If we were to strike out section 9(1), this would ensure that the commission is unable to convene, make orders, or issue a decision without providing notice or holding a hearing. This ensures that some measure of accountability and due process remains for Albertans.

We can have a look at section 11. Again, we need to have a look at the powers of the commission, ensuring that it takes its powers from the act and not some expansive concept of the powers that a Queen's Bench justice wields. If we were to look further here, Mr. Speaker, we all know that Queen's Bench judges have a great deal of power. The amendment to this section spells out the powers of the commission, stopping short of granting them similar powers and immunities that are vested in a Queen's Bench justice. This is a very important limitation. The provision of these immunities could have broad, very serious implications.

Now section 12. If we were to use that, we've gotta be very careful. When we look at this section, if we were to change this and allow for greater civil enforcement of a finding that a contempt of the commission has occurred, it gives teeth to the powers to find persons who have been contemptuous and allows for real chances for the recovery of costs.

In section 15 we could consider some changes as well, Mr. Speaker. When we're discussing this, we cannot but remember that a few months ago, going back to May and June, specifically June, Albertans learned that the government had hired private investigators to spy on landowners and other concerned citizens who attended public hearings of the Energy and Utilities Board on a transmission line, to be specific, a transmission line hearing in Rimbey, and at a hearing in Redwater on the northwest upgrader.

The EUB spy scandal has made it clear that there are big problems with Alberta's energy and utilities regulatory system. Again, when the government spies on its own citizens, citizens who are only trying to express their concerns with regard to proposed power lines in their backyard and other utilities that could impact the quality of their life, the system is badly broken. Public confidence has been eroded by this government in the electric utility regulatory system. The government knows it, the Minister of Energy knows it, and Bill 46 is not going to fix it.

Mr. Boutilier: Bill 46 is going to serve Albertans well.

Mr. MacDonald: Bill 46 is not going to serve all Albertans, hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Now, instead of fixing the problem, the government has drafted, hastily I might add, this bill. Hastily.

Mr. Boutilier: Diligently.

Mr. MacDonald: Not diligently. Kellan Fluckiger has certainly been involved in the drafting of this, and if it was drafted really well, you wouldn't have had to hire this \$500-an-hour consultant to try to help out, throwing lifelines to \$500-an-hour consultants and then at the same time having the gall to say that this side of the House is wasting taxpayers' money. Shame on you. Shame on you after spending an additional \$26,000 on another propaganda campaign in 133 newspapers to try to convince rural Albertans that Bill 46 is the right thing to do. Shame on this government, Mr. Speaker. Shame on this government.

We still haven't satisfied with Bill 46 all the outstanding questions and all the outstanding concerns that Albertans have had. In the time

that I have left, Mr. Speaker, I would like to suggest regarding our amendment here to move this bill back to Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering sections 3 to 24. Let's have a look at, specifically, section 15, the absence of commission members. Here I think the interests of Albertans would be better served if we were attempting to limit anyone who has not taken part in any part of the proceeding from delivering any opinion or decision based on evidence that they had not been presented. We have to amend section 15.

We also have to have a look again at section 17 because this government has failed to do that, Mr. Speaker. We had a little chat about this earlier. This is the section about public interest. A lot of these suggestions have been made by many fine citizens from central Alberta, including Joe Anglin. I know the minister said in an e-mail: no to Joe. I can't believe it. We should be very pleased that we have a gentleman like that living in this fine province, and we should listen to him whenever he points out ways to improve this bill. You wouldn't have to pay him \$500 an hour. You wouldn't even have to pay him \$75 an hour, like you paid the spies. That's what the spies got in Rimbey: 75 bucks an hour plus expenses.

Mr. Knight: How much was his bill that he sent to the EUB?

Mr. MacDonald: I can certainly answer that for the hon. gentleman.

The Speaker: Please. Please. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much.

The Minister of Energy can check this out. It's \$600. Six hundred dollars is what Mr. Anglin's bill is, and he donated it, like the rest of the Lavesta group, into the pot – yes, into the pot – to pay their legal fees. Six hundred bucks. Six hundred bucks. Those allegations have been made against that gentleman by Conservatives throughout central Alberta. They have been dismissed as not true, and the minister knows that. The minister knows that. That's typical. I'm disappointed to say: that's very typical.

Now, when we look at public interest, section 17, Mr. Speaker, there are two amendments to this section that should be made. We're not going to just delete it.

An Hon. Member: Only two?

Mr. MacDonald: Only two. Two would fix this up. But the aim with both of them is the same: to keep this bill from narrowly defining what is in the interests of Albertans. These amendments aim to protect those who raise environmental concerns, et cetera, because section 17 as it stands now is dedicated to economic benefits.

We have a look at section 22, Mr. Speaker, and again we're talking about the local intervenor costs. I think the government should take some guidance from Joe Anglin. [interjections] Yes, I think they should. I think they should listen to him to try and broaden the term "local intervenor" by including those who have environmental concerns. It's just unacceptable that we have this narrow definition of local intervenor.

2:30

Now, section 22(2). This is the one that: oh, well, we're not to worry; things are going to work out. Intervenors may or may not get their costs covered. How can people trust the process when the process in the past has implemented a covert spy operation against them? How can they trust this system? How can they trust the

system when the system was spying on them? Again, I'm so disappointed in the government members across the way because you had an opportunity here with this bill to try to fix the problem, and I'm sad to say that you're determined to make it worse. Now, if we were to look at an extension of the provision to provide costs to intervenors to ensure that (a) they can get legal representation if they want it and to ensure that (b) lawyers are encouraged to act in the public interest instead of turning parties to the proceedings away because they can't . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: I'm afraid, hon. member, I recognize the following order. We're on the amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, then Cardston-Taber-Warner, then the President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to the amendment that has been put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. This amendment is very similar, in fact it's identical, to an amendment that the NDP opposition put forward at second reading on this bill. We continue to believe . . .

Dr. Taft: We enthusiastically support it.

Mr. Mason: Yes, and I support this, too. Maybe I won't be as ecstatic as you are, but I'll certainly support this motion.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things which the government is quite proud of and which we are prepared to give some grudging credit to them for . . .

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Wait for it, hon. member.

. . . is the establishment of permanent all-party standing committees which have the opportunity to hear from the public on important pieces of legislation. That's something that we have been calling for for years, and we were pleased to see that the government actually put that in place. But the government is being very selective about what use these committees will be put to and which pieces of legislation they're prepared to forward for public consideration.

The government has some flagship bills, Bill 1 and Bill 2, that they're prepared to take out because there's not very much in principle that's very controversial about them. Although the government did manage to create a controversy in some of the applications, nevertheless, they were prepared to have discussion and input from the public as was the intention. But on a very important piece of legislation and a very contentious piece of legislation, like Bill 46, the government is unprepared apparently to allow these committees to do their work and legislators from this Assembly from all parties to openly solicit input from the public on this bill. This has been by far the most controversial bill, and there's obviously a great deal of input that the public would like to provide, yet the government has refused, at least so far, to permit the standing committee to hear from it.

In this particular case the recommendation is to the Committee of the Whole. That's where this is different from our amendment. We wanted it to go to one of the standing policy field committees and have public input. But I think that it's still worthwhile to go back to Committee of the Whole. I think it's been really unfortunate that the government, in this particular case, has kept this bill out of the Assembly for most of the session. It has seemed to me, Mr. Speaker, that there would have been plenty of time to debate this bill without closure.

Mr. MacDonald: Do you think they're embarrassed?

Mr. Mason: I'm asked by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar whether they're embarrassed. No. I think that they were divided, confused, and disorganized, and they were unable to get their act together on how they were going to handle the public opposition to this bill.

Mr. Knight: They've figured us out.

Mr. Mason: You know, it's written all over you, hon. minister.

The problem is that the government was really unprepared to bring this forward and make it a central focus of debate in this Legislature. They kept it off the table for most of the Assembly's time in the session, and then they brought it forward for committee under conditions of closure. Of course, our friends in the Liberal opposition were openly threatening to prolong the debate and keep it going on, so they in a sense goaded the government into the action they've taken, but there's still no excuse for what the government has done.

I think this is an important bill, a serious bill, and a bill that Albertans have a great deal of concern about, and the amendments that the government has brought forward, which we've just spent so many hours voting on, don't deal with the concerns that people have. They continue to weaken the regulatory process and weaken the capacity of the public and concerned parties to have input into that process. It's better than the original bill, but it's still not as good as what we had before, and that's the bottom line as far as I'm concerned, Mr. Speaker.

The government's intention was to split the functions of the EUB into two, one to deal with oil and gas and one to deal with electrical utilities, and there's nothing wrong with that. It makes a great deal of sense. But they've tried to slip in at the same time changes that allow the EUB to restrict public input.

We've seen what's happened. We've seen what's happened with the EUB, where they began to take actions on their own, at least as far as we know, and interfered in their very own process. I've never seen anything like it, Mr. Speaker. Here it is, a quasi-judicial body appointed by the government, responsible for regulating very important parts of our economy, and they interfere in their own process and, effectively, take sides against the landowners, who are legitimate intervenors in the particular case, and they do that by violating, in my view, the civil rights of those individuals by spying on their activities.

Of course, we called immediately for the cancellation of the hearings. The government resisted that, and I heard the hon. Minister of Energy and other members of the government saying that that was absolutely ridiculous, but in the end that's exactly what they had to do. It was the equivalent of a mistrial because the process had become so tainted and so flawed that it had to be cancelled altogether, and they had to start over.

It's unfortunate that that happened, but that was the right thing to do. I just wish the government and the EUB would have taken the Alberta NDP's advice weeks before they actually did. It's pretty clear to us that that EUB has not been properly reformed because there's a fundamental culture that's going to be passed along to the next body through this bill, which is support for large private interests like utility companies and gas and oil companies over the interests of the public. The weakening of the provisions for public input in this bill I think is its fatal flaw, its Achilles heel, Mr. Speaker.

2:40

I think we have not got to the bottom of what went on in the EUB. We haven't even come close. The Perras report was a whitewash.

The terms of reference and the appointment of the person doing the investigation were entirely under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Energy. So, of course, certain questions weren't asked or addressed in the report, like: who on the EUB itself knew of or had approved a covert spying operation? Justice Perras just didn't ask that question. It's not in his report. He fingered the director of security, but he went no higher. We need to know, Mr. Speaker, who gave the director of security his marching orders. Was it the executive director of the organization? There were other officials of the EUB that were copied on that e-mail, which proves that they knew about the covert spying operation. They didn't get fired. The minister finally got around to quietly sacking three members of that board and called it a retirement, but that's like, you know, senior officials in the Kremlin all of a sudden announcing their retirement, and nobody really believes that they actually retired. In fact, they're just happy that they're still alive.

Mr. Speaker, we haven't got to the bottom of that. Of course, the real question, the \$64,000 question, that wasn't asked by Justice Perras is: what did the minister know about this? The minister has never said what he knew. We've asked him. We've asked him in question period to tell the House what he knew and what he did. What did he know, and when did he know it? We haven't got an answer to that, and we certainly haven't got that answer from Justice Perras because it was, of course, conveniently outside of his terms of reference.

Mr. Speaker, I think the culture of secrecy and collaboration with the oil and gas and utilities industry and hostility to legitimate citizens' concerns: that culture of the EUB is going to be transposed into the new Alberta utilities board. I'll tell you why I think that. I went today on the EUB website, and I found that they have drafted all of the rules which will govern the new AUB, and they've posted them on their website. They call them draft rules, but of course the jurisdiction to do that will only be provided when Bill 46 is passed into law, and here we are debating it. Obviously, it has not passed into law, yet the EUB has already generated the rules.

There are a dozen or two dozen documents up on their website that deal with the operation of this organization, which has no jurisdiction at all. I think it's a clear signal from the government that not only did they take the passage of Bill 46 for granted, but in fact the same gang is going to be running the show, and the culture of that organization, which is a horribly undemocratic culture, is going to continue. We're going to see the same kind of culture: the suspicion of environmentalists, the fear of landowners standing up for their rights, the motivation and the overwhelming desire to help big oil companies, big utility companies get their projects through. That's the culture of the EUB.

It shouldn't be a surprise because that's the culture that this government wanted. If you look at the mandate of the organization, its job is to get the energy and get the raw materials out of the ground and get them to market as quickly as possible, which is very consistent with this government's plan.

Unlike my friends in the Liberal Official Opposition I do believe that this government has a plan, but that plan is to extract the tremendous natural resources of this province, particularly hydrocarbon resources and energy resources, as quickly as possible, with as little regard for the interests of people who live in the vicinity or the environment or the effect on the economy and get it to the United States just as fast as they possibly can. Of course, they have a further plan, and that's to take as little as possible in terms of the royalties for those resources. I think the government does have a plan. It's just a plan that's unacceptable. I think that if all Albertans fully understood this government's plan, they would be shocked, frankly, Mr. Speaker.

I want to just indicate that we will support this. We think that we should go back to Committee of the Whole. We recognize that we're running out of time. Mr. Speaker, we have set fixed dates for this fall session, and all parties accepted those dates. So all parties I think have an obligation to make that system work. The government hasn't done that because they deliberately withheld this bill from active consideration of this Assembly. What we've just seen earlier tonight on the part of the Liberal opposition, wasting over five hours of time just ringing bells, is also something that . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time has now left us.

As strange as this may be, we still have an opportunity for Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, if I might. Thank you very much. I would like to just ask the member opposite if he would clarify for me, please, if he has some shred of proof that I somehow was involved in some particular piece of business that he seems to be, you know, just sort of accusing me of without really accusing me. I find it a bit distasteful. As a matter of fact, I would suggest that those kinds of accusations made in other quarters, perhaps not here, you know, might be met with a different result. I think that the types of things that they do that they get into *Hansard* and then pass around for other individuals to read – they puff their chests all out and say: that guy did something. I would like to ask the member, if he has a shred of proof with respect to those allegations, if he wouldn't mind sharing it with the rest of the members of this Assembly so we could deal with it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There was no allegation. There was a direct question to the minister, and I asked him this question in question period: what did he know, and when did he know it? He dodged the question. So I took this opportunity to ask it again, and I'm going to ask it again. Mr. Minister, what did you know, and when did you know it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would like the hon. member to perhaps elaborate on what he was saying just at the end of his comment about what productive work can be done in a session when all parties come to the table ready to work rather than wasting hours and hours of time ringing bells with 10-minute intervals.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you, hon. minister. It really seems to me that both the Conservatives and Liberals have done a disservice here. The Conservatives haven't brought this bill forward in a timely fashion and allowed a debate. Instead, they waited till the end and imposed closure. The repeated ringing of the bells and the wasting of time I think consumed a great deal of time. I think that it was worthwhile to have recorded votes on some of those amendments of the government, but we could have agreed to shorten the bells and saved time. It was a colossal waste of the Assembly's time, in my view.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, 29(2)(a).

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. To the hon. member: why then, if it was considered a waste of time, did the other members of your caucus support us on those votes earlier this evening?

Mr. Mason: On the votes we agree that the amendments are wrong. I think that they probably stood for a vote for the first one or two and after that didn't.

Mr. Hinman: I just wanted to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood regarding the House leaders: could they not have come to an agreement – I'm not part of those – to say, you know: we're going to take the five hours; why don't you allow us to have the debate, have it opened up? It just makes sense to me. They put it out to them, but it seemed like a refusal from the government. But I don't know. I wasn't part of that. Do you know from your caucus if that was not part of the session to say, "We're going to take the five hours; let's utilize it," and the government refused to accept that?

Mr. Mason: I really have no idea, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others?

Then we'll proceed. The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. President of the Treasury Board, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand and to discuss the amendment to consider sending this Bill 46 to the Committee of the Whole. I stand to speak in support of it. We discussed it earlier. Once again we're in the dilemma here where this is a major turning point for the property owners of the province and what the repercussions are going to be for not just one generation but many generations of Albertans going forward from this because it's very difficult to undo things once government has done them up. It's just, like I say, one step forward, three steps back, and we continue losing ground on a continual basis.

In the history of this province, Mr. Speaker, we've been very successful, for the most part, and the reason, I believe, is because of the respect for individual rights and property rights here in the province. If we limit those property rights, as the hon. Minister of Energy seems to have said so many times, in the public interest – those are the famous words of dictatorships and tyrannical countries around the world where they put forward this idea that it's going to be in the public's interest when it isn't. Those things need to go to committee, the all-party committee, so that they can really be opened up and discussed.

I will quote from Ayn Rand's crucial work, *Atlas Shrugged*: "Just as man can't exist without his body, so no rights can exist without the right to translate one's rights into reality, to think, to work and keep the results, which means: the right of property." In other words, all the other rights that we hold dear are in jeopardy if we allow the rights of Alberta landowners to be taken away. This just isn't right, Mr. Speaker.

You know, another thing, if it went back to the Committee of the Whole, is the discussion on the question of whether or not we really do need to split the EUB. It's been a disaster. It's been a disaster for a long time. We call it a quasi-judicial court. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to call it a kangaroo court. When the members go there and they speak and they try to address the concerns of their land, it's like talking to a brick wall. They can spend all day talking to this appointed judicial court, only to be told at the end, much like we've been told at the end on the royalty review: well, maybe the facts are wrong, maybe we don't understand the picture, maybe the future is in jeopardy, but we're not going to commit political suicide on this; we must go ahead with it. It's basically the same thing at the EUB, the same results: they listen, and then at the end they give their famous words, "This is in the public's interest." We need the landowners to be able to stand up and say no.

It's very interesting with the transmission line from Pincher Creek to Lethbridge that there are some property owners – and I guess that maybe we can't call them that, but there are some groups that do have the ability to say no. They can refuse entrance until they receive the compensation they want. That's the First Nations. We had a great example of this in the south where they said no to the transmission lines from Pincher Creek over to Lethbridge. Businesses just said: well, we're going to go north, and we'll go around it. There was a tremendous effort on the part of the landowners, and when there is a joining together of landowners, the strength comes forward. They were saying no to the crossing because there was a better way to go: directly through a less populated, less intense agriculture area, through the First Nations area. Finally, with enough resistance they went back and then with fair market price and agreement, both sides coming together. We understand that in a court of law, if we are going to look at contract law, it covers where both parties come in willingly and make an agreement. This isn't common law that we have in this quasi-judicial court. This is Her Majesty's court, and they dictate that this is what will come forward. It's not in the best interest.

When people lose their ability to say no and to defend their property, it escalates to a position where there is unrest. Then this government seems to think that the answer to that is: "We'll get spies. We have insurrection coming up. This is going to do damage to society." All of these things we continue to struggle with because this government won't open up and have an open and full-scale debate.

There are many other areas that are problems that need to be fixed before we ever consider changing the board, such things as the land agents, the monopoly that they have on the industry, the appointment of those people sitting on that court. There never has been a landowner representative. It's inappropriate to say that they have a knowledge and they have sensitivity to the landowners when it's in their mandate to say: "Well, it's for the oil and gas. It's for the power lines to go through. We can say that it's going to go through in the public interest." In fact, it really isn't. If it's in the public interest, we'll respect contract law. We'll be able to have two willing parties come together.

It's interesting when that event takes place even in rural Alberta, one neighbour will say: I really don't want that transmission line coming through here. Yet when the company has to bargain in good faith, all of a sudden the other neighbour says: "Well, you know what? At \$3,000 a kilometre it's worth it for me to have it over on my property." All of a sudden because there is real debate and a real contract where both parties are coming together, we get a consensus to let it go through. When you're told that you're just going to be expropriated and we're going to put it on your land, there isn't a good feeling, and therefore we start to have these battles. We're having more and more in Alberta. It's because of the way we're going about it. The landowners feel that they do not have a say.

I just want to say once again that this is an opportunity for the government. Because of poor planning on their part, it doesn't make it an emergency that has to be shoved through. It isn't right. It needs to go for more discussion, which would be much more open and beneficial for society.

On top of all the other things, you know, they've been overloaded at the EUB. There's no doubt that we've had a boom economy, but I have faith that the royalty framework is going to slow that down. The need will not be there. The growth will not come forward in this province. They can hire a few extras under the current system until they get this right. They will continue. It's not a crisis. We can have a proper debate, inform the public so that they really understand it. We could wait for that.

I speak in favour of this motion and one more time plead with the government to think of the people of this province ahead of their political careers.

An Hon. Member: Oh, give me a break.

Mr. Hinman: I'll give you a break all night. You can leave any time. I believe there are enough members over there that you don't have to sit in here if you don't want to. You don't want to listen and talk to the people. You don't want to be in here. It's evident. You don't want to have an open debate. That's why you invoked closure. There was no necessity for it. It was just poor planning or, maybe, excellent planning, as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood puts it.

We need to go to committee on this. The people need to have an opportunity to absorb this and feel comfortable with it. I would hope that all members would vote in favour of this motion.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Peace River, then Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of the many, many questions that one could ask of the hon. member after that wide-ranging dissertation, I would refer him to his comments early in his speech in which he was talking about the Alberta royalty review. He said something to the effect of: as with the royalty review where we were told that maybe the facts are wrong and maybe the future is in jeopardy, intimating I think that the government informed him of such. I would like to know when anybody from this government informed him of any such ridiculous notion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been several investment advisers and industry leaders that have met with this government, and they've spoken openly that when they've sat down with the Minister of Finance, when they've sat down with the deputy leader, they told them in that discussion that they understood those flaws, that they were a problem. As they left, though, they responded to industry, these individuals, by saying: we're not going to do anything about it. If the hon. member would like to discuss it outside, I'd be happy to discuss it further with him because of time allocations.

An Hon. Member: You want to discuss it outside?

Mr. Hinman: Oh, I could allow him.

There have been many discussions by the different, like I say, investment advisers that this government has gone to talk to. You could talk to your Deputy Premier. He could inform you of those that he talked to, and perhaps if he's open and honest, he will tell you the responses that he gave in those closed meetings, because I've talked to the individuals, and they've shared it publicly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner: being a rural landowner I'm sure you've had to do some carpentry in your past life, and in carpentry the rule is measure twice, cut once. I'm just wondering if the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner would see these 24 amendments as 24 cuts without any measurement ever having taken place.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you for the question. I guess I would have to say that I don't know that they had a full plan, but they maybe had 24 masterminds who came forward each one wanting to say: well, put this in the puzzle and put this in the puzzle. It doesn't come together, it doesn't make a whole picture, and it's very fractioned. I do not believe that they had a plan that was put together properly, let alone a measuring tape to measure it to see how it would perform for the landowners of this province.

The Speaker: Others on 29(2)(a)?

Then I'll recognize the hon. President of the Treasury Board, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the latitude you've shown. Obviously, this bill has a far-ranging perspective from the other side, so I do appreciate that the amendment has been allowed to wander, and I will try to be more direct if I can. We may have spent several hours here tonight in what might be considered a procedural thing, ringing the bells, but the one thing I will say for the bells ringing is that at least they were consistent.

The opposition started in second reading by spending most of their time in dissertations about previous royalty structures or events that had happened with the EUB or other hearings and never seemed to really want to focus on the actual bill that we were dealing with. It became very clear, Mr. Speaker, that their intent was not to help the bill or to promote the bill to Albertans; it was to stop it. That's their job, and that's fine.

It is the position of the government that you need to have an open discussion about the bills, Mr. Speaker, though it becomes very obvious that the discussion, as has happened on the amendment, soon becomes: you guys are bad, you did this wrong, you're not doing what we want, so we're going to talk about procedures and not about the bill. So that's their opportunity. There is a certain amount of amount of time, and it can be spent constructively debating the bill or it can be on the red herring issues that surround it.

One of the things the mover of the amendment talked about was the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. Mr. Speaker, it's as if somehow that office hadn't been accomplishing anything and that by reopening the bill in committee, it would. The fact is that we have one of the most expensive utility rate regulatory regimes in Canada, one of the most expensive in North America. As a matter of fact, one individual consultant managed to bill the Alberta ratepayers \$1.1 million over two years, with no review of any effectiveness or oversight. Even though most of the professional intervenors received \$200,000 to \$400,000 per year from the cost-recovery process, they do not and are not willing to participate in any of the unfunded policy or collaborative processes. It's very clear that the intervenor process as it was set up allowed special interest groups and people to come in to apply for money that the consumer pays for. It would be naive to suggest that if the utility company pays, somehow the consumer doesn't. It all gets back to: when you turn on the light switch, you pay.

Mr. Speaker, the cost to the user – I'm not saying the taxpayer – to the person turning on the switch, last year from the total utility things was between \$50 million and \$60 million because we pay the legal costs of the utility companies, too. The opposition would like to portray to the outside source there that they are willing to commit Alberta taxpayers' money to groups like the Sierra Club, groups like Greenpeace to come to Alberta and intervene in every hearing they choose.

There are around 60,000 applications a year around facilities, and there are less than 30 actual hearings. So a huge portion, Mr. Speaker, of the business of moving Alberta along goes very

smoothly. Occasionally, as would be in any circumstance where there are that many thousand applications for utilities or for energy growth, you are going to have differences. It's absolutely essential in those times where there are very serious concerns that they be addressed and that the real people involved have a chance to present and to be funded. It's essential. It's part of this legislation that if anyone wants to be heard, there'll be a hearing.

Now, I'm not sure what the strategy is on the other side, and I wouldn't want to speculate, but it's surprising that in second reading many of the things they demanded were presented in the amendments, and rather than deal with the amendments so that they could even deal with their amendments, they chose to filibuster about royalty structures and other events rather than deal with the amendments that they were asking for. They chose to ignore it. They got all wrapped up in the fact that there is a certain amount of time that we can spend on bills, and they lost their focus. So they have decided that if it's not their way, it's the highway.

Mr. Speaker, democracies aren't always pretty. It's like making sausage: maybe you don't want to see it being made. But there is an obligation on both sides to present their case. It comes in here. The opposition is quite willing to forget the bill. Let's not even talk about the bill. Let's talk about: you're going to put closure on it; we don't have time to talk. We can spend six hours in this building ringing bells. I have to again say that the bells were consistent. We knew what the bells were going to do, and they stopped occasionally. And what a pleasant sound when the bells stop. The other side doesn't quite get that out of their ears yet.

To turn this back, to go back into stages of a bill that they don't want to talk about – they're not prepared to deal with the issues. Like a *Mad* magazine they would rather talk about spies: spies are here; spies will be everywhere soon, Mr. Speaker, if we pass this bill. They question the credibility of judges who go out there with an impartial focus and they bring the facts forward, and because the facts don't suit their story, then it's bad: it can't be right because it doesn't suit our story. This isn't about stories. The legislation that we're passing is printed. The world can see it.

Now, that's not what they want. They would have liked to stay in second reading until we close this session so that they could continue to stand up around Alberta and spread falsehoods about what was in the bill.

3:10

This government listened to Albertans, they listened to the users, and they brought in appropriate amendments that will keep the lights on in Calgary and the rest of Alberta in an orderly manner, Mr. Speaker. That's what the people of Alberta elected us to do. They didn't elect us to ring the bells. They didn't elect us to spread falsehoods. They didn't allow us to impugn the motives of a minister, and a darn fine minister, too. They asked us to work with the industry, to work with consumers, and to put together a plan that will keep Alberta working. That's exactly what the bill has done.

We have gone through stages. Has it been productive? Not very from their side, Mr. Speaker. I would really appreciate if relevance were a part of this session around this bill. It would have made it better for all.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I must now proceed to the calling of decisions with respect to this.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:11 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Hinman	Miller, B.
Bonko	MacDonald	Miller, R.
Chase	Mason	Taft
Cheffins		

Against the motion:

Abbott	Johnson	Oberg
Ady	Johnston	Pham
Amery	Knight	Prins
Boutilier	Liepert	Renner
Cenaiko	Lindsay	Rodney
Goudreau	Lukaszuk	Rogers
Griffiths	Lund	Shariff
Haley	Marz	Snelgrove
Hancock	Melchin	Strang
Jablonski	Mitzel	

Totals:	For – 10	Against – 29
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[Motion on amendment to third reading of Bill 46 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, on the motion for third reading of Bill 46.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:24 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abbott	Johnson	Oberg
Ady	Johnston	Oberle
Amery	Knight	Pham
Boutilier	Liepert	Prins
Cenaiko	Lindsay	Renner
Goudreau	Lukaszuk	Rodney
Griffiths	Lund	Shariff
Haley	Marz	Snelgrove
Hancock	Melchin	Strang
Jablonski	Mitzel	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Hinman	Miller, R.
Bonko	MacDonald	Pastoor
Chase	Mason	Taft
Cheffins	Miller, B.	

Totals:	For – 29	Against – 11
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[Motion carried; Bill 46 read a third time]

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as we are about to proceed to further business on the Order Paper, I would like to suggest that should division be requested by members of the House, we give unanimous consent of the Assembly to reduce the time between the division bells to one minute.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

**Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole
(continued)**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

**Bill 50
Health Professions Statutes
Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2)**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to speak briefly in Committee of the Whole to Bill 50, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2). This is an act that essentially is extending liability protection to members of the health professions that are willing to assist with competency exams for internationally trained medical graduates. Certainly, in Alberta we are all looking forward to more doctors and health professionals to assist us, and since this is a bit of a roadblock in our way, we're certainly willing to support the intent of Bill 50 and what it's trying to do to protect other health professionals. On behalf of my colleagues in the Liberal opposition I'm happy to support this in committee.

3:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak in debate on the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2). The bill is worded broadly enough that the amendment applies to any person that a college determines is qualified to conduct assessments. I think this is a very good bill, that will give us more opportunity to have more health care professionals, so at this time I urge all members to join me in supporting Bill 50, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2).

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 50 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

**Bill 47
Livestock Commerce and Animal Inspection
Statutes Amendment Act, 2007**

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise in Committee of the Whole to present Bill 47, the Livestock Commerce and Animal Inspection Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. The bill would amend the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act and the Animal Health Act. Amendments to the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act will clarify the requirements and refine the legal language pertaining to security interest disclosure and directing of payment for the sale of livestock. The amendments to the Animal Health Act will add inspection authority over livestock marketing facilities.

I appreciate the support received in second reading of the bill, and I encourage all members of this House to give their full support to Bill 47.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to respond to Bill 47, the Livestock Commerce and Animal Inspection Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, who serves in the Official Opposition as the shadow minister for agriculture.

I would only like to echo his comments from second reading, when he indicated that this is a good bill and will have the support of the Official Opposition caucus. I recall hearing the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar congratulate the mover of the bill, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, for the good job that he did in preparing this bill and, in particular, the great job he did in consultation with various stakeholder groups. I remember specifically the comparison that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar drew with the work that was done by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and comparing that to the lack of consultation that was done by the Minister of Energy on Bill 46 and the stakeholder groups who wanted to be heard.

Having echoed the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar that this is a good bill, a timely bill, and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar having assured me he doesn't have any specific concerns as this bill moves through the committee stage, Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to advise that we will be supporting it as it is without amendments. We will look forward to further discussion in third reading.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 47 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

**Bill 49
Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity, who is the shadow minister responsible for Infrastructure and Transportation. I have the opportunity and the honour, as it were, to be responding to Bill 49, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007, in committee stage.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I think there are a number of things that this bill is attempting to do. For the most part members of our caucus are supportive of it, but there are a couple of specific areas in the bill that do cause some concern and one, in particular, that causes me a great deal of concern. When I get to that particular stage, I will be moving an amendment to address that.

A number of things here that this bill is doing. Probably the most notable, the one that has caught the public's attention, is the speed-on-green system. I think that when my colleague from Calgary-Varsity spoke to this bill in second reading, he discussed the fact that those of us in the Official Opposition certainly have concerns that some have viewed this as a cash cow. I believe the leader of the third party discussed the idea of robocops. I'm not prepared to go quite that far.

I certainly do have concerns that we're not targeting the cash that is going to be raised by the speed-on-green cameras into traffic safety programs. I would be much, much more comfortable with this bill and with the idea of speed-on-green were we to in fact be targeting that cash into some sort of accident reduction or traffic safety programs. Right now the way the bill reads, there is no guarantee that that would happen.

As I was reading through the bill, it caused me to think back to the number of times that I've had photoradar tickets. [interjections] It's only been twice. Both stories are anecdotal, but it's kind of interesting, Mr. Chairman. The first time that I had a photoradar ticket, I was actually on my way to a Rotary meeting in order to hear the chief of police of the city of Edmonton speak about the merits of photoradar. Of course, I didn't know at the time that I had received a photoradar ticket on the way to hear the chief speak, but I certainly found out some time later. I was late for Rotary, and of course being a committed Rotarian, I really wanted to be there on time to hear the chief speak. So that was a lesson. You know, as they say, if you don't want the ticket, don't speed. So that was a good lesson.

Mr. Elsalhy: You got fined twice because you got fined for Rotary.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, I didn't get fined for Rotary, because I was actually there on time. I paid a bigger fine.

The second time, Mr. Chairman, that I received a photoradar ticket was actually the morning that my father-in-law passed away. He had already passed, and we had a phone call from the hospital. Of course, you know, you jump in the car. It's 5 o'clock in the morning, and you're quite concerned to get there. Quite frankly, your head probably isn't in the space where it should be. I was quite distressed, I have to admit, some weeks later to get this thing in the mail and look at the time and date on it and realize that we were actually on the way to the hospital after my father-in-law had passed away. To learn that I had been speeding by a small margin – it wasn't a lot. Nevertheless, I was speeding. So there you go.

Now, I guess the reason for relating those two stories, Mr. Chairman, is that it always causes a lot of concern for citizens when they think about these cameras, whether or not they would be more effective if, in fact, there was a real policeman speaking to them at the time and giving them perhaps the opportunity to explain away why they were speeding but probably, more importantly, giving the officer that would be investigating the opportunity actually to . . .

3:50

An Hon. Member: Sass him out.

Mr. R. Miller: I wasn't going to say: sass him out.

. . . lecture or educate the motorist as to the dangers of speeding or the dangers of running through a red light. That, of course, is not available when it's a camera that does that and it's only a piece of mail that comes into the mailbox some weeks later. So certainly a lot of questions about the effectiveness of the program given that there are no demerit points attached to this violation ticket when it comes in the mail but, rather, simply a fine.

I would be much more supportive of this bill were there to be a section in here that would deal specifically with technology that would identify the driver of the vehicle and thereby allow us to attach demerit points to the violation. From what I understand, that technology is currently available. Of course, we don't currently demand that all vehicles have a front licence, but were that to be the case and were the technology to be used, I think this would be a more effective program in terms of reducing accidents and encouraging traffic safety. That's another change that I would have liked to have seen in here to in fact accomplish more of what is claimed to be the government goal, and that is a reduction in traffic accidents and traffic violations.

The one section in particular that causes me the most concern, however, is section 14. I'm just going to go to section 14 here and read some of it into the record, Mr. Chairman. It's the sort of thing that a lot of citizens may not glom on to initially, but when one pauses to think about it, it causes untold concern not just to myself but to anybody whom I've discussed this with. Section 14 on page 10 of the bill that we have in front of us contemplates the following. It says that the Insurance Act is amended in section 650 by adding the following after subsection (3):

- (4) Despite subsection (1), the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations.

The Lieutenant Governor in Council, of course, is the cabinet.

- (a) respecting the priority of payment of insurance held by a lessor . . .

And it goes on to describe that.

- (b) defining terms for the purposes of this section;
(c) where regulations are made under clause (a) or (b), modifying any provision of this Act to the extent that the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers necessary in order to carry out the purpose and intent of this section.

Now, the concern here is that what this really is saying is that despite whatever the legislation in subsection (1) of section 650 of the Insurance Act says, despite any of that, Executive Council, i.e. the cabinet, can in the backrooms – once again outside of public debate, public scrutiny, public consultation – pass regulations that would supersede the Insurance Act. Now, we saw a similar section in Bill 46, and it caused a great deal of concern for those of us in the opposition. It caused a great deal of concern for people like Mr. Anglin and others whereby regulation is trumping legislation.

This may be too fine a point for some members of the government to fully appreciate, Mr. Chairman, but in my mind it's unconstitutional. It's certainly undemocratic, and it certainly goes against all of the tenets of this Assembly. This is to be the final word on laws that govern activities that take place in this province. Here we have for the second time today a piece of legislation in front of us that says: "Oh, yeah. It doesn't really matter what this says. What we the cabinet decide in the backrooms, outside of public scrutiny, outside of public debate, outside of public consultation, is superior to anything that the legislators of this province should choose to pass in this Assembly."

I'm sure that somebody on the other side is going to get up and explain away the reasons why this is necessary, but I'm here to

submit to you, Mr. Chairman, that this is never necessary. This is always wrong. This should never happen. There is no plausible explanation that could be provided to me that would make this an acceptable clause in this bill, and for that reason I do have an amendment that I would like to pass to the table. It has with it the original copy and, as well, the appropriate number of copies to be handed out. So I'll just wait for a minute while that happens.

Thank you.

The Chair: We will refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Chairman, can I begin now?

The Chair: Yes, you may proceed.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Chairman, the amendment reads as follows: "Mr. Rick Miller to move that Bill 49, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007, be amended by striking out section 14." I think I've given the reasons for moving that amendment. In my mind I cannot in good conscience allow a piece of legislation to pass through this Assembly reading such as it does, that Executive Council would have the authority to pass regulations that would supersede legislation passed by this House. I'm recommending to all members that we strike section 14 from the legislation altogether and allow it such that Executive Council would no longer have the authority to supersede the Insurance Act, the way that this currently reads.

As I said, I think it's wrong. I think it's irresponsible for us to even contemplate such legislation. I do believe it's probably unconstitutional and certainly in my mind would leave the government in a position where they may face a court challenge, perhaps even a Supreme Court challenge, if they were to proceed with this the way it is.

I look forward to further debate on the amendment, Mr. Chairman, and I thank you for the time.

The Chair: Are there others on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be brief. I definitely wanted to make sure that I was on the record as supporting this amendment to Bill 49, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007. Not for a minute do I believe that this isn't a cash cow bill that's coming forward.

I'll be very brief here. At the 100th anniversary of the Legislature, in 2006 I believe it was, I can clearly remember Peter Lougheed standing up at that dinner and giving an address. At that time he used the words, if I recall correctly: always remember that the House takes precedence over the government. I don't believe that anybody that was elected after '93 truly understood what he was saying, and what he was saying is referring to this section 14. It is a very, very dangerous precedent when we actually can have the government take precedence over the House.

I am totally in support of removing 14 and putting it back the way it's supposed to be, in the hands of the people who elected us to make the rules, not with some of us making the rules but with all of us making the rules.

The Chair: Others? Are you ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I'd like to support my colleague in this amendment, and I am quite distressed that this is the second time this evening that such a clause has been brought

before this Assembly. It was also included in Bill 46. Unfortunately, we were not able to get amendments from our side up for debate and for voting, but one had been prepared to strike the corresponding section out of Bill 46, and here it is again in Bill 49. You know, my colleagues are right: it is unconstitutional. I'm sure it will end up being challenged. I hope this isn't another sign of what this new Premier views as democracy. Being able to go behind closed doors with cabinet and make regulations that trump legislation and trump the powers and privileges we enjoy in this Assembly would not make him a more democratic Premier, I would argue. It would put him at the back of the line. So I'm quite upset to see this come forward. I think it's very wrong.

4:00

Every other time I've predicted that something was unconstitutional and would be challenged, indeed it has been, and it's cost the taxpayers a heck of a lot of money. Considering that the government is supposed to know what they're doing and has lots of lawyers to tell them, I'm very disappointed to see this because they're basically putting before us something that is going to cost us a lot of money when it ends up at court. So I think the government would be wise to support this amendment and get rid of this before it does cost us more money.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A1?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Are there others that wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 49. I just want to express some concerns about some of the trends which are exemplified in Bill 49. One is the movement away from community policing and hands-on policing and real police officers. This is a concern that I have. We've called for an increase in the number of police officers in the province and, particularly, help for the larger cities to increase their financial capacity to have real policing.

Someone whom I've followed for some time since I was involved with city council, Mr. Chris Braden, who is now a consultant but was formerly an inspector with the Edmonton Police Service and helped pioneer some of the theories behind community policing, has actually gone to court to oppose photoradar. He has some interesting ideas about why he does that. It's because if you get your picture taken with photoradar, they know that the vehicle was speeding, but they don't necessarily know who was driving it. Nobody stops the driver, so nobody is able to observe whether or not there are outstanding warrants or whether or not that driver might be intoxicated or impaired in some way or might have some serious problem. They may have, you know, a medical problem, and they're trying to get to a hospital. That's also a possibility.

There are a number of good things that come from having a real police officer stop a vehicle that's speeding. They can observe the driver and may actually be able to provide assistance, if it's needed, or to apprehend somebody that has outstanding warrants or may be impaired.

We're seeing an extension of this kind of technology. As the technology develops more and more, policing, especially traffic policing, is taking place through these electronic methods with no personal interconnection between a police officer and members of

the public. It's advantageous to the government or the city for a couple of reasons. First of all, it's a lot cheaper than hiring real police officers and paying them, and it brings in lots of revenue for very little outlay. You know, we used to have a joke in Edmonton city council whenever we were faced with a cash crunch and were afraid that we might have to raise property taxes in the city. The joke was: just hire another photoradar van. It's not really a very funny joke, but it certainly exemplifies how both the police service and the city viewed photoradar; that is, as a cash cow. Now we're extending this principle even further with these speed-on-green lights and the red-light cameras. I think that there are some serious problems with this approach.

The other concern that I have, Mr. Chairman, is that we're increasingly becoming a surveillance society. We're increasingly getting to the point where individuals' actions are under surveillance at all times and not just by police forces or by governments but by private interests as well. In fact, there's product-tracking technology that's now being introduced where products purchased at a grocery store will actually be able to be traced all the way through. So there's a real risk, and I think privacy commissioners in this country and in other countries have talked about the erosion of people's personal privacy and the extension of the state, in particular, in its surveillance of individuals and tracking individuals on what they're doing and so on at all times. I think this is a legitimate concern.

Of course, it has to be balanced. It has to be balanced against the safety of the people in the community. But I think that we're not getting enough balance in that debate. The focus is much more on safety and, you know, people's fear of crime, kind of a very hard-nosed approach, and I think we're losing sight of some of the other aspects that need to be balanced.

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's comments about taking pictures of people with a front licence plate and then tracking down what they're doing. That just increases the intrusion and the surveillance of people a lot more even than this bill envisages. To me, it's really getting to be intrusive.

Mr. Chairman, I think those are the two aspects. I would rather see funding for more police, more live police, and of course a community-policing approach, which I fully believe in and in my experience as a municipal councillor for 11 years began to see great value in it. I really think that it's unfortunate that police services are moving away from it. It's kind of like a *passé* thing. It has kind of gone out of style. I actually think that it was one of the most effective ways of deterring crime and providing safety in the community. As Mr. Braden said: peace in the hood. That's the objective of policing.

In general I don't like the approach. I don't want us to become like Britain, where there are thousands of cameras, one on every corner, and people are observed going about their daily business in lots of ways. I think that kind of Big Brother approach is not necessary. I think that if you get enough police and they get connected and involved with their community and they know the people and they know what's going on in the neighbourhoods and so on, it is the most effective way of deterring crime.

Certainly, I think that having some real, live speed traps, good old-fashioned speed traps – I'm not going to tell stories about speeding offences, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford did, but I can tell you that getting a photoradar – Mr. Chairman, this is what people tell me. When you get a photoradar ticket in the mail, you may or may not slow down, and if you do, maybe for a little while. But when you have to face that cop and he's 15 or 20 years younger than you are and he gives you a ticket and says "Please slow down," then I understand that this often has a more significant effect on people's tendency to speed. That's what people tell me, Mr.

Chairman, and I believe that. I believe that actually getting a ticket from a real, live police officer is a far greater deterrent against future speeding than just getting some ticket in the mail.

4:10

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate that I do have some serious concerns about the direction here. I do believe that we need to deter speeding; we need to deter crime. The best way to do that is with real, live police officers and not with additional electronic surveillance equipment and technology.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe, speaking with regard to the bill, that there are some pros and some cons with regard to cameras. I can go into both of them. First and foremost, I don't believe that having more cameras on the road is going to deter people from speeding, especially at the red light. I've got young kids, and occasionally they do get letters in the mail. I know exactly what these are: "You know what, Dad? I don't know. Maybe I was speeding; maybe I wasn't." They pay the bill, but the problem is that it's not a deterrent.

As the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was saying – and I agree with that as well – there's no substitute for having a constable right there in front of you, pulling you over, and writing you the ticket. I know that for a fact. If I was pulled over, that does make you think twice. I've not been pulled over for an awful long time because – you know what? – they don't do that job anymore. Their job is doing something else. They leave it up to their photoradar vans. You never see a police officer. Rarely do you see them behind the cameras, jumping out and pulling you over except for bus lane infractions, maybe, on 97th in the morning. Quite frankly, that doesn't happen very often anymore either because it's cold, and they'd rather not be out writing tickets. They'll let the van do it because it's easy, it's nice, and they've got the ability to sit there, have their feet up like some of the members here right now. But you know what? Like I said, Mr. Chairman, I don't believe that that is, in fact, a replacement for police officers.

Where I do see the cameras working as a positive is if there is, in fact, a serious accident, and it's trying to determine exactly who was at fault. You'd be able to use that camera for court purposes to determine liability for individuals who are injured if a case is in fact going for serious court costs. You'd be able to go back and find out exactly who was at fault, not taking a person's word for it. You'd be able to use the camera.

A case where a camera was used was with regard to the murder that took place in Castle Downs with Michael White. It had shown the spot in Castle Downs from a convenience store where the individual had gone past once or twice. It did show him, and that was used in court and that was used with one of these cameras in a surveillance, so there is a pro to having the cameras out there, in fact, for this exact instance. They couldn't corroborate his story as to his whereabouts. It actually had him going back and forth. In that case I would be supportive of cameras, but for the fact of slowing down speeders, I don't see it. Even at the red lights I don't see it making a difference. There's no substitute, like I said, for having the constables right there and more police officers on the street.

I had a motion – at least, it was placed on the Order Paper, but it hasn't come forward – that we would in fact see an increase in policing for all communities with an increase in their population, so it would be on a comparison. If the population went up 10 per cent, the police force should go up 10 per cent. That would be perfect.

This hat-in-hand sort of thing, begging, basically, for more money all the time, I think is a disservice to the citizens who expect the police to be there doing their job.

That's what I have to say with regard to the photoradar, basically. That's what it is. I don't support that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 49, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 49 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 52 Corrections Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any amendments, questions, or comments with regard to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This is the first opportunity I have to speak to Bill 52, the Corrections Amendment Act, 2007. I will try to walk you through my concerns and what I feel about this bill.

Bill 52, first of all, is not doing something that is unique to Alberta. It is actually emulating or copying things that are done and have been tested in other jurisdictions. I think it was basically put together, a piece from here and a piece from there, to achieve three distinct and clear outcomes. The outcomes that I'm referring to are basically, number one, that we are trying to give some information and, quite frankly, some peace of mind to victims of crime – and I'm going to actually speak about the definition of a victim – but information about the offender, information about the crime the offender has committed, information about the sentence, and information about release.

The first area is trying to grant access to some information to the victim in terms of the offender and the offence.

The second part is dealing with electronic monitoring and recording of inmate communications. Again, this is not unique. It has been tried. Recently, in particular, we find ourselves talking about this more and more because sometimes the offenders in our correctional institutions use the phone to either harass their victims or further harass their victims. Sometimes they threaten or intimidate witnesses or sometimes even use the phone to conduct their illegal activities from within the institution, dealing with their partners and their friends and, you know, if it's a gang, their gang members outside of the institution. Then sometimes our corrections officers themselves get harassed or intimidated through these phone calls.

The third part is dealing with hearings and disciplinary matters in terms of an inmate, you know, causing trouble or doing something that warrants discipline inside the institution: how we do the initial hearing and then, should there be an appeal, how we actually deal with the appeal.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to tell you that, as worded, I don't find the bill too offensive or too objectionable. I'm going to offer,

maybe, some qualifiers initially in the area where we're releasing information to the victim. As I said, we're basically defining what a victim is. The victim is the person against whom the crime was committed, and now we're expanding this to their family and their spouse, for example.

4:20

I think that makes sense because – you know what? – you might come to me and say: "Well, you know, why do I need to tell the victim the name of the offender who actually did the crime? They should know. Why should I tell the victim what crime had happened? They should know." Yes, you're right. Sometimes the spouse doesn't know this, or with the passage of time may have forgotten. Sometimes, you know, the siblings of the victims, sometimes the sons and daughters of the victim, and so on, probably don't know the information. They don't know where the offender is housed. They don't know any conditions of release, and so on. Maybe sometimes it is prudent and advised to release that kind of information to them.

Think about the sexual offenders registry, for example. When someone is about to be released, be it on a temporary basis or actually even on a permanent basis, well, people need to know. That is why we have this registry, and that is why people – definitely the victims are notified, but then sometimes even the community to which that person is going to be released is also notified. I think that makes sense. It probably makes more sense. The more serious the crime, the more information that needs to be made available so people can either avoid that person, avoid potential harassment and intimidation, and so on.

You remember, Mr. Chairman, that there was that murder of that lady, Stephanie Butler, in Edmonton. Well, Mrs. Butler was actually killed by someone she knew. She was killed by her brother-in-law. I remember quite clearly how disturbed and how angry and sad and mad her husband was when he learned that his brother was basically released, I think, on bail, and he wasn't notified, and his wife wasn't notified. That person, before committing that crime, actually assaulted a cab driver, and then went on to break into that family house and kill the lady.

A simple phone call when that person was released on bail to the lady to alert her or to the gentleman to alert him that his brother had been released could have probably averted that tragedy, so Mr. Butler came to me and we actually worked together on a petition. His petition was basically just that: asking the law enforcement community to update their policies manual in terms of somebody who is known to police, somebody who is likely to reoffend, that there should be some notification. I think it makes sense. I agreed with it.

Now, one area here where I always have a question is basically where it says: subject to regulations. That's in the area talking about disclosure of information, 14.3(1), and then 14.3(2). In (2) it says "subject to the regulations." We see this more and more now, where regulations take a front seat, if you will, Mr. Chairman. Well, I need to know, you know: how tight are these regulations and how frequently do they change, and what are the criteria?

In that section (2) if you go all the way to (b)(iii), it talks about "conditions attached to the offender's release." So my question is: would that be in terms of a restraining order, for example, and so on? It's talking about a "temporary absence that relate to the victim." Part (iv) is talking about "the municipality or area," as I mentioned, "where the offender proposes to reside on temporary absence or while under court-ordered community supervision." Well, my question, then, is: and how about final release? What happens when

that offender is released finally into the community after they serve their time?

Subsection (3) is also talking about the regulations being sort of paramount, and I need to know, you know, what the regulations are and how we actually arrive at them.

Part 2 of this act is talking about recording and monitoring electronic communication, or phone calls. Now, I am not one who would go to great lengths to defend the rights of offenders. Mr. Chairman, I agree that when they committed a crime, they actually forfeited some of those rights, and now we're dealing with them as an offender who is hopefully being rehabilitated, you know, punishment being one part and rehabilitation being another. I don't want to see the monitoring or the recording of conversations or the restriction of access to the phone system as further punishment. I don't think this should be used as a tool to further punish inmates. I think that when there is a definite concern that this offender is likely to cause more trouble or to perpetrate a crime or to intimidate or harass someone, including our correction officers, then yes, definitely let's do this. I know that it's done now. People can currently record or monitor or intercept phone calls.

It talks about "subject to regulations." Again, I want to seek clarification with respect to this, and I want some qualifiers to be put in place. I want some assurances to be put in place that this is being used for what it's being used for.

The one question and the one area that I have to highlight is the distinction that has to be made between an inmate and an offender. An inmate is somebody who is actually housed in a correctional institution. Let me tell you that I actually found the definition of inmate defined in the Corrections Act itself, the current act, as follows:

"inmate" means a person lawfully detained or confined in a correctional institution or otherwise held in lawful custody but does not include a young person, as defined in the Youth Justice Act or the Youth Criminal Justice Act (Canada) in respect of whom no order has been made under sections 72 and 73(1) of the Youth Criminal Justice Act (Canada).

So an inmate is, basically, somebody who is housed in that facility, and it could very well be someone who's awaiting trial, someone who has not been convicted yet, versus an offender who is someone who was convicted.

Now, to offer this clarity and to offer this assurance, Mr. Chairman, I seek your permission to move amendment A1 to Bill 52. I've actually delivered it to the table, and they should have it.

The Chair: Okay. We'll just give the pages a moment to deliver it, and we will be referring to that as A1.

I believe you can proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you. I'm not sure if you remember, Mr. Chairman, but back in 2004 there were attempts made to monitor and intercept calls from the Edmonton Remand Centre, and it was actually deemed by the courts to be a Charter violation of the rights of those people awaiting trial. We don't want to be inviting Charter scrutiny. I think limiting it to offenders, leaving that discretion to the warden or the jail administration to do it when it's an offender, somebody who has been convicted, somebody who is tried and sentenced, makes sense. But if it's somebody awaiting trial, you know, that distinction has to be made. Then there is nothing to prevent the jail administration and the corrections people from actually obtaining a warrant and doing it. That's what they do now.

I'm not really taking anything away from them. I'm just saying that maybe an offender has to be dealt with more, you know, diligence and with more scrutiny, and I am allowing this flexibility

and room to manoeuvre for that warden to make those decisions. But I think the same does not apply to an inmate, again, somebody who has not been tried and sentenced yet, and it definitely would attract Charter scrutiny and potentially even waste a lot of taxpayers' money trying to defend those decisions one by one and then likely losing those decisions one by one as well, as we did in 2004.

4:30

I know that people say: "You know what? Well, these need to be dealt with, and we need to be going towards being tough on crime and being seen to be tough on crime." Yes. But I also draw your attention, Mr. Chairman, to the fact that a person is innocent until proven guilty. Inmates in the strict definition, as I told you, from the Corrections Act itself are not proven guilty yet, so till then they are treated as if they were innocent. If there is compelling evidence that there is something unsavoury going on or that they are posing a threat either to corrections officers or to people out there, then definitely. You know, the burden of proof rests with the state, rests with the Crown.

In terms of offenders it's a different story, and that distinction has to be made, and that's what this amendment is trying to do. It is basically amending section 2 in the proposed section 14.4 as follows: by striking out "inmate" and substituting "offender" and then in clause (c) by striking out "inmates" and substituting "offenders". I think it makes sense. I had a very brief discussion with the Solicitor General earlier today. I know we're still Tuesday, except it's actually Wednesday now and it's 4:30.

Mr. R. Miller: It's Tuesday in here.

Mr. Elsalhy: It's Tuesday in here.

I know he understands where I'm coming from, and I'm hoping that he would find this not too objectionable, to his liking. I'm hoping that colleagues and members of this Assembly are going to support this amendment as well.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak in favour of the Corrections Amendment Act, 2007, and the amendment that was put forward by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. I think it does make sense. Quite often we're trying to defend our honour, not only in the House but outside, and when someone is wrongly accused, it sometimes sticks with you for a while. In this case it makes perfect sense: is the person considered to be an inmate, or are they considered to be an offender? I think there is a distinct difference here because the charge has not been laid, and, as he said, everyone is presumed innocent until proven guilty. I would have no problem in supporting this. I think it does make perfect sense, and it would be something that we should all be able to support.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to remind the House of a discussion we had previously, when I asked the former Solicitor General, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, about the remand centre. The comment that he made was that if you're in the remand centre, you must be there because you did something wrong. You know, there wasn't a recognition that people in remand are awaiting trial and should be presumed innocent before they're proven guilty, if that's the case. So I respect this motion to change the word "inmate" to "offender." It's difficult in the current

circumstances when we have so many people in the remand centre, and quite a few people waiting in remand are actually at the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre. There's a kind of confusion of people who are offenders or inmates.

In looking at this whole section, electronic monitoring and recording – this doesn't pertain so much to the amendment – it's saying that "the director of a correctional institution may direct that telephone calls made by or received by an inmate be electronically monitored [if] the director believes on reasonable grounds" that such-and-such is the case. If the director has reasons to suspect that telephone calls are being misused, in a way that's too late because the abuse has already been made. I would think that probably there is a system already in place, an inmate telephone system or an offender telephone system, and that the director already has people appointed to monitor telephone calls and that there's a list of telephone numbers that an offender can phone, like his or her family and so on, that is kept track of and that there are already electronic recordings. I find this is just a curious way of putting the issue.

I hope that section 14.4(2), that "telephone calls that are or will be the subject of a privilege shall not be monitored or recorded," refers to attorney/client privilege, although it doesn't say that. I might even wish that it might include chaplain/client privilege since I have in the past done some chaplaincy work in correctional centres. To be able to have conversations with an inmate without being listened in on might be an important thing. But that probably doesn't cover the role of the chaplain and his relationship in counselling with an offender.

Those are some of the points that I have. I support the amendment to change the word "inmate" to "offender." Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are there others on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments that have been made so far on this particular amendment. I just have one brief comment to add. One of the more interesting correspondences I've had in my constituency office came just a few short weeks ago from a gentleman who was discussing exactly this situation; you know, the difference between an inmate, someone who's being held but not necessarily convicted, and an offender, someone who would have been convicted. He posed the question to me as his MLA. The question was: if a person were to have been held in the remand centre and found to be not guilty, would they then be eligible for the same 2 for 1 or 3 for 1 credit that inmates who are found guilty are given credit for on their next offence, as the minister of health just suggested? He was quite careful to point out that he wasn't asking this of himself. In fact, he was actually asking it in a facetious sort of way, but it does raise an interesting question, and it's entirely relevant to this particular amendment and the debate around an inmate and an offender.

As members of this House will know, because of the deplorable conditions in the Remand Centre in Edmonton right now, upon conviction many offenders are often given a 2 for 1 credit. I've heard, for sure, of 3 for 1 credits on occasion, depending on the situation in which they were held. So now we've got this situation. Although it was perhaps asked of me somewhat facetiously, I do believe it raised a serious question that perhaps my colleague the shadow minister for the Department of the Solicitor General – and the Solicitor General himself may want to contemplate it – and that is: what do you do with someone? There is this assumption, I think, by many people that someone who is in the remand centre must be guilty. In fact, we know that that's not necessarily true, and

oftentimes people who are held in remand are found not to be guilty and then released.

Is there any recognition whatsoever for those inmates for the time that they've served and the conditions under which they were held? We certainly do recognize and give credit to offenders for that, but I'm not sure that we do anything for inmates, for those that might be held and ultimately found to be not guilty, and perhaps we should. I'm not so sure that I would necessarily suggest a credit that they could bank for their next offence, but I think it's a very relevant question and one that I would encourage all members of this House to contemplate. In light of that, I will be supporting this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak to this. I'm going to speak to it because of some of the issues that have already been raised. I have spoken in this House a number of times about the number of people with mental illness that are constituents of mine in Edmonton-Centre. We now, I think, have collected enough statistics across the country and here in Alberta and here in Edmonton to understand that in a number of cases people that are in remand centres and further incarcerated after sentencing in fact have mental illnesses. But I'm most concerned about those with mental illnesses who are in remand centres because they may have committed a crime. They may not have, whatever. They are not guilty at the time they're there.

I think we have created a situation where remand centres become de facto shelters for the mentally ill. I think that when we start using a term like "inmate" and don't distinguish between someone who actually has been found guilty and sentenced – in other words, someone who is serving time in an institution. That I would define, certainly, as an offender. But when we mix the language between inmate and offender, we are capturing a population that I believe is inappropriate to capture. We need to do far more work in filtering out the people with mental illness that have found themselves in our judicial system and in our corrections system. What's in this act right now, because of the choice of wording, is not helping us to make that distinction.

You know, we do have some programs that are running, like the court diversion program for example, that are a step in the right direction, but I think there are parts of this act and this part in particular, 14.4, that are a step in the wrong direction. They're not helping us move toward that.

There aren't many people who will speak on behalf of the mentally ill. I'm one of them because they're my constituents, and I recognize that. I will speak on their behalf and try and defend them and actually try, when I see bills like this, to help them not get into trouble. This is what we're setting up here. By using the term "inmate" instead of "offender," we are capturing a population that we shouldn't be. We are not only not helping them, but we're punishing them, and that is my concern about this.

I would ask members of the government caucus to please have a look at what has been done here. I think what is intended is that we really want to direct this towards offenders and not inmates because that does in fact capture those that are in a remand centre, and they're not offenders. They haven't been proven guilty yet.

This monitoring of the phone calls – well, no. Sorry. Let me just stick to the amendment that's in front of us, and that is striking out "inmate" as it appears in section 14.4 and substituting "offender." I'm supporting this amendment. I think it's the right way to go and the right thing to do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to highlight two other points for everybody's consideration, maybe even add a little ripple to this pond. Sometimes people are held in the remands in protective custody. Sometimes people are actually put in the remand to protect them. You know, sometimes we do this. Do we treat them as somebody who is within that general population?

I was actually going through some of the other jurisdictions and what they do. Alabama, for example, has made that distinction in terms of people who are in protective custody and, you know, if we need to limit their access to telephones and people that they can contact. Well, they made that distinction that people in protective custody are not even sometimes, maybe even most of the time, accused of anything. They're basically just there to protect them and to protect their identity or ensure their safety and so on. So protective custody is one area.

The other thing is that this bill on page 1, under Disclosure of information, for example, is talking about an offender and what "offender" means. It says here under 14(3)(1)(c) that "'offender' means a person who has been found guilty of an offence, whether on acceptance of a plea of guilty or on a finding of guilt." The act defines what an offender is, but it doesn't tell us what an inmate is, so I think, as my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre was saying, the net is being cast too wide here, and it is catching people that maybe we're not intending to catch.

Again, I remind people that I'm not disallowing or denying this tool for the warden or the jail administration to use, but in terms of an inmate they can actually still do it the same way they do it now and get a court order or a warrant, versus an offender who has been found guilty, again be it by a plea or be it through a finding of guilt, that we deal with them, you know, more strictly or even with a little more free way of determining this. The warden can make those decisions on his or her own. So I think this makes sense. I repeat that we don't want to attract Charter scrutiny and then potentially lose these court challenges and then potentially even cost taxpayers money as we defend them one by one and lose them one by one. We're not denying that tool. We're not removing that tool, but we're making it extra clear and offering that assurance that an inmate is not what an offender is.

The Chair: Hon. member, if you want to cross the floor, you have to do it by different means.

Mr. Elsalhy: For the benefit of people who are either watching or listening or reading the *Hansard* later, the chair was not referring to me crossing the floor; he was referring to the hon. leader of the third party crossing the floor, and that's definitely up to him.

You know, Mr. Chairman, I think this makes sense, and I am going to speak to the issue of recording and intercepting phone calls in more depth, but for the time being, unless there is further comment from members of the government, I would invite the question on amendment A1.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A1?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much. I am definitely disappointed because, you know, the government sometimes dismisses these ideas offhand, and they don't at least even make the attempt to debate the merit of these ideas and tell us why they think it is not warranted or not necessary. I find this quite frustrating. However, moving on.

When we're talking about electronic monitoring and recording of telephone conversations, I need to ask: communicating by phone is one way, but what about actual visits that happen in the corrections institute? I mean, inmates or offenders get visits. They receive visits either in the group setting, or sometimes they even receive one-on-one visits. So if one person is going to potentially perpetrate a crime or potentially make arrangements for somebody to be harassed or threatened or intimidated, well, they can do it there. They can do it in those one-on-one meetings, or they can do it in that group setting, in those visits, you know, once a week or once every two weeks or whenever they are. What are we going to do to monitor that type of communication as well?

Other jurisdictions, Mr. Chairman, have made the distinction or have made the determination that sometimes there is something called conference calling, there's something called three-way calling. How are we going to monitor this? I could be monitoring a certain inmate, and that certain inmate has sort of a predetermined contact list. That's hopefully what the regulations are going to do: each inmate is going to be given a blank piece of paper, and he's going to list the phone numbers and the names of the 15 or 20 people that he's likely to call. That becomes part of the record for that particular inmate.

4:50

Well, I can be the inmate and I can call you as my partner in crime, Mr. Chairman, and you from your own home can actually dial a third person, and then we have three-way calling or conference calling. Well, then the effort that is done at the correctional institution is futile. It is not useful anymore. So what efforts and what initiatives is the government investigating in terms of three-way calling and conference calling?

I also have a question in terms of the pre-approved contact list, if it's in regulation. How many names and numbers are going to be allowed on that list? And then, also, how frequently could that list be updated? Again, some other jurisdictions restrict the frequency of updates to every three months or every six months or, you know, every month or whatever. So we need to know how frequently an inmate can update his or her contact list.

Restricting telephone privilege in terms of disciplinary action. Well, we need to know, again, be it in regulation or wherever, how somebody who has been the subject of a disciplinary hearing, how that might affect his or her phoning privileges and so on. I think there is also a need to make a distinction based on the seriousness of the offence. Some petty criminal who has been jailed for a minor crime should be treated differently from somebody who is in medium security versus maximum security and so on. Again, I bring you back to the case that maybe somebody is being held in protective custody and then on the other end of that spectrum somebody who is being segregated. So, you know, maybe these distinctions and scenarios have to be considered.

I think in terms of evidence, in terms of these conversations being recorded to be used in court or to be used in legal proceedings, we need to keep a log of all those phone calls: when they were made, the length, when they were recorded, and maybe the subject matter that was discussed, and so on. I think that log or that register should be kept for a certain period of time to allow it to be used as evidence and not only to be used as a means to punish further or intimidate

further our inmate population. I think that if we're serious about using it as evidence and we're serious about thwarting crime and, you know, maybe catching it before it happens or prevention in terms of alleviating some of that concern, then maybe we should keep that log.

The issue about notifying the offender as well comes to mind. So, as such, Mr. Chairman, it is my duty to maybe introduce amendment A2, which again I have delivered to the table officers. I will wait for the pages to distribute them.

The Chair: Thank you. It'll just be a moment until the pages get this distributed.

I believe you may proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am moving in this amendment A2 to Bill 52, Corrections Amendment Act, 2007, that in section 2 in the proposed section 14.4 we add the following after clause (c):

- (d) The director of a correctional institution must maintain a log or registry of monitored calls to be kept for a period of not less than 5 years.

Clause (e) is talking about giving notice.

- (e) Notice of the use of call monitoring apparatus shall be conspicuously displayed in order to provide offenders with sufficient notice that communications are not secure.

Now, again, it's the question of: what are we using this monitoring for? We're basically using it, hopefully, to prevent further crime, to prevent intimidation and harassment of our correctional officers. We're also trying to maybe limit criminal communication between somebody who's on the inside and somebody who's on the outside. If we're going to use this for evidence and we're going to use it in a court of law, then I think we should keep those records, and we should be very diligent in terms of accountability in recording those instances where a particular inmate or offender has actually spoken to someone on the outside. Keeping that log I think should be mandatory, and it should be for a period of time.

I'm a pharmacist, for example, and we are required by law to keep prescription records for a certain length of time. For example, people in the law community: when I come to you as my lawyer, Mr. Chairman, and I become your client and you defend me or represent me in a court of law, you keep those records for a certain period of time as well, and so on. I'm not asking for anything out of the ordinary. Certainly other jurisdictions do this.

I know I have a verbal commitment from the Solicitor General that this particular line in this amendment is not needed because we're going to do it anyways. A verbal commitment is just that. If we put it in legislation, then it's binding, and it becomes the way we do things versus a verbal commitment which might be implemented some times and not others or implemented in some facilities and not others. I'm making it part of the legislation so these people who administer and control our corrections institutions know that they're actually required to do it and expected to do it.

Clause (e) is also talking about notice. Again, I have the verbal commitment or the word of the Solicitor General informally that, yes, we're going to do this. When somebody first comes to the correctional institution, they're going to be sort of read their rights. They're going to be given a sheet or a manual of the protocols of this institution and what they should do and what they shouldn't do, what they should expect, what they shouldn't expect, and so on. Okay. Fine. We're going to do it, so this amendment as well is not needed. Well, I think we also have to enshrine it in legislation, again, like other jurisdictions are doing by posting this sign that says: your phone call may be monitored. Having it right there where that phone is serves as a reminder, and it averts the challenge that some inmate

can sue saying: "You know what? I was not told and I was not reminded and I was not informed that my communication was being monitored. That's an invasion of my privacy." Do you know what? Some good lawyer out there might actually take this case to court and win. We don't want that. We're trying to actually forecast what might happen and thwart it or avert it.

I think this amendment makes sense, Mr. Chairman. I invite comment from everybody in this House, certainly from my colleagues in the opposition but definitely people from the government. If they don't like it, I need them to speak, and I need them to convince me why they don't. And I'm sorry, but with all due respect, a verbal commitment from a minister doesn't cut it for me. We need to be putting things in legislation and not leaving everything to the direction or the whim of a certain minister. Ministers come and go and opinions change. Policies change. Putting it in legislation ensures that everybody reads the act the same way, everybody behaves, and everybody adheres to the act the same way.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I cannot support these amendments. Subsection (d) "the director of a correctional institution must maintain a log or registry of monitored calls to be kept for a period of not less than 5 years." Well, this would be regulation, not legislation. At this point in time it's actually posted that calls may be monitored, so this would be the same. In the inmate's handbook and again when that inmate is processed, they're given that information. The director would only be allowed to monitor calls with cause. So he or she would have to keep a record already, that would be monitored with substantiation on that.

5:00

Regarding (e), the "call monitoring apparatus shall be conspicuously displayed," well, again, that has been explained. It would provide offenders with sufficient notice.

So I would speak against this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm not sure exactly what the purpose would be for section (d), for the director of the correctional institute to maintain a log or registry for five years.

Mr. Elsalhy: Evidentiary benefit.

Mr. Bonko: Okay. That one was clarified quickly, then, by the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

The concern here with the wording – and I did raise it with them – of subsection (e), "notice of the use of call monitoring apparatus shall be conspicuously displayed in order to provide offenders . . ." Well, we still have "offenders" in here. "Offenders" was not passed in the previous amendment: by striking out "inmate" and substituting "offender." So I would say that this, in fact, still reads: inmates with sufficient notice that communications are not secure. So I don't know if the member was . . .

Mr. Elsalhy: That's what the hon. member said.

Mr. Bonko: Okay. Yeah. Exactly. So I would support that one as well.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was a bit puzzled by the response of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays about this. These are already in regulations; they're rules. What's missing from here is the rules – right? – for some sort of offenders' telephone system. That's in the handbook. It's in the regulations already. I don't understand why this part of the bill has to be in legislation. Why couldn't it also be covered by regulations? Is there a necessity to have this in legislation, that electronic monitoring? I'm not sure why. Maybe the hon. member could answer that.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. When I mentioned that, I was thinking of my policing days, seeing people taken into custody, and there were signs there at that time. Now, the hon. minister just walked by and reminded me that it's not that way in facilities now. When police take people in, there are signs in Calgary. So that's what I was referring to, and I just assumed that it was that way everywhere, but it's not. So that was incorrect, and I apologize for that.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A2?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. We're back on debate on the bill.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Back on the bill, Mr. Chairman. The issue of calls that are subject of a privilege. I know that I had this discussion with my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora in terms of inmates making phone calls to their clergy, for example, or their legal counsel, as in their lawyers, or the ombudsman. Now, I would have much rather followed the lead of other jurisdictions and allowed a secure line dedicated for use for these instances when an inmate has to make a call or wants to make a call to their clergyperson or to their lawyer or to the ombudsman.

The Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General would probably argue that that's not feasible because we're going to have to maybe modernize and upgrade our existing phone systems and so on. My counterargument would be, then, that most of our remands and certainly the new ones that we're constructing have the feature of having secure circuits and secure communication where sometimes an inmate is exactly where they are, and they're actually appearing before a judge or before a court remotely. We have that function, and we have that technology and that capability where somebody can actually appear before a court and be heard and even be sentenced remotely, from the comfort of their own facility, Mr. Chairman.

I want to receive the assurance from this Solicitor General and his staff that we're going to maybe use some of this technology to offer that security and that feature to an inmate who wants to speak to their clergyperson, who wants to speak to the ombudsman of prisons or their lawyer. I'm not going to introduce an amendment to dictate this because I'm forecasting that the government is going to refuse it regardless, notwithstanding the merit or the goodness of this idea, but I think we need this assurance that this is going to be in the cards, that this is going to be contemplated or looked at so inmates have that privacy.

We know that they've given up some rights, but they haven't given up all rights, and this is probably an absolute minimum that we

have to grant them for these situations when these calls have to be made and they need to be secure. I know that members from the bar and certainly the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association definitely raised that concern with the ministry and raised it in the media as well and with myself as the shadow minister, and I'm registering it and I'm putting it on the record that this has to be looked at as they do federally.

Now, moving on, as I told you earlier, Mr. Chairman, part 3 of this bill talks about disciplinary action, and it talks about hearings in terms of when an inmate is the subject of a disciplinary action. Then further to this, if there is need for an appeal, we have appeal adjudicators. This act is basically trying to streamline how we do this. I actually agree with it, and I like the direction. We're trying to maybe put some distance between the hearing adjudicators and, then again, the appeal adjudicators and the institution in question, the institution where that disciplinary action happened, or took place, and we're maybe ensuring neutrality. We're ensuring, maybe, objectivity. I like that direction, and I commend the minister for thinking of this. Again, like I told you, this act has three parts and it's emulating three different jurisdictions. We're taking some experience or some experiment from one and the second and the third, and we're putting them together. I like that direction.

Now, my preference is to copy the federal model again. The federal model is that lawyers are hired to do this. It's basically lawyers who actually conduct the appeal hearings, and when it's actually a hearing adjudicator, the hearing adjudicator does not work or has not worked in that particular institution, again to offer the assurance of neutrality and impartiality and objectivity and to alleviate any concern that somebody might have a bias.

Mr. Chairman, with your indulgence and permission I am going to move amendment A3. Again, it was shared with the table officers, and I'll just take my seat for a minute till it's distributed.

The Chair: Thank you.

You may proceed, hon. member, on amendment A3.

5:10

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now, this might look like it's a bit complicated, but I'm going to tell you how simple it really is. Under section 15(1) instead of the word "may," as in giving a licence or giving a tool for the minister to appoint people that he thinks are potential hearing adjudicators or good hearing adjudicators, I'm saying that he

must appoint persons as hearing adjudicators who are not employees of the correctional institution at which the disciplinary hearings will be conducted,

that he must appoint people who are at arm's length or detached from that particular institution,

to conduct disciplinary hearings in accordance with the regulations for the purpose of

- (a) reviewing breaches by inmates of the regulations or of the rules of a correctional institution, and
- (b) determining appropriate punishment for breaches of the regulations or of the rules of a correctional institution.

Very simply, he is now asked that these people must be from outside that particular institution. They must be detached from it. They must not be affiliated with it. I think that makes sense. You want to avoid even the remotest hint of bias. Again, we don't want somebody to take us to task or take the correctional institution to court, saying: "You know what? I had a hearing, and the hearing was skewed," or "It was biased," or "I was not treated fairly." We're trying to alleviate that potential, trying to prevent that from happening. Mr. Chairman and hon. colleagues, by saying that that person who conducts the hearing is somebody who is totally at arm's length and detached and neutral and impartial.

In clause (b) I'm actually also adding a phrase.

A person appointed under subsection (1) may be an employee of the Government of Alberta who is not an employee of the correctional institution at which the disciplinary hearing will be conducted.

I am not too rigid, and I am not too difficult here. I am actually offering the Solicitor General the freedom and the room to basically appoint somebody from a different correctional institution. So you can actually maybe bring somebody from Calgary to conduct a hearing in Edmonton or somebody from Fort Saskatchewan to conduct a hearing in Red Deer. It is available to him, and I'm not taking that away from him. I'm trying to demonstrate that our amendments are not unduly and unnecessarily restrictive or hindering. They're not frivolous. They're basically trying to make something good even better.

Now, further down I am talking about adding:

A person appointed under subsection (1) must disclose the following

- (a) any previous employment at the institution where the hearings will be conducted, and
- (b) any previous interaction or relationship with an inmate whose conduct is the subject of a hearing.

That makes sense. If I'm going to be conducting a hearing, Mr. Chairman, I need to tell you as the inmate in question: "You know what? I have a potential bias," or "I had dealings with this institution. I worked here before. I know the guards who are part of that hearing; I worked with them. We're part of the same union."

This concern was actually raised, again, by the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association. They said: "You know what? Disclosure is probably the least you can do." Disclosure of any potential bias or previous interaction or relationship is the absolute minimum if we want to maintain the integrity and we want to maintain the appearance of neutrality when we conduct these hearings. These hearings sometimes are really simple and really quick and, you know, quite simple in nature, but sometimes they're really sophisticated if it involves serious breaches of the code of conduct, serious breaches of the rules of the institution, or if there is definitely a threat to the corrections officers or other personnel in that facility or to other inmates.

I think we're trying to improve on an idea from the government. The government wants to put that distance in place. I'm trying to say that any hearing adjudicator must be totally detached, must be from either an arm of government or a member of a different corrections institution but not this particular one, and should there be previous interaction, or should there be any prior knowledge of either the guards in question or the inmate in question, then that has to be disclosed to maintain that integrity and that trustworthiness in this procedure. I think this makes sense.

Mind you, Mr. Chairman, the other two amendments I thought also made sense, but the government didn't. I'm hoping that this one in particular they are going to find amenable and they're going to find palatable and that, hopefully, this one gets supported by both sides of the House.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Speaking on the amendment here that was just put forward with regard to section 3 and proposed section 15(1): "must" as opposed to "may". I think that makes perfect sense with regard to the conflict of interest with appointing someone from within the correctional institution or finding someone from without. A similar instance is when we have the police investigating themselves. That is a direct conflict of interest. We were talking about an impartial, nonbiased person such as a police oversight committee. This would be exactly the same thing.

We have no problems with someone being appointed from within the government but not from within the same branch. Obviously, with direct interaction or direct contact with individuals that you may or may not be hearing or presiding over, there could be a perceived conflict by that individual. So this is just trying to eliminate that potential conflict in advance. I think this does make perfect sense, as was already explained by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. I don't see the reason for not wanting to have this.

Again, we've already made numerous comments with regard to the police oversight committee, and that one is still going to be dogging, I think, this Legislature in the future. We have an opportunity to do something right here, right now to correct what potentially could be a conflict of interest from here on in.

I would support the amendments as they are written here and proposed. I will leave some of this to more speakers from my colleagues as well. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's kind of amazing: we're agreeing on everything here.

These proposed amendments were responding to a recent judicial ruling with respect to the inmate disciplinary process. I'll expand on that. As I'm sure you're aware, in December 2006 Justice Marceau ruled that the current inmate disciplinary process breached the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In light of this ruling we're proposing changes to the act that address Justice Marceau's concern and ensure a fair and balanced disciplinary process.

Under the proposed amendments disciplinary hearings will be conducted by adjudicators who are external to the correctional institution and who are appointed by the department or the minister. Appeals of a hearing decision will be handled by an independent appeal adjudicator, and an inmate or the director of an institution will be able to request a judicial review of the appeal adjudicator's decision.

We're confident these amendments to the Corrections Act are in line with the letter and spirit of Justice Marceau's ruling. We're saying the same thing, so these amendments aren't necessary. It's here.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to reference an earlier discussion I actually had with the minister very briefly where he indicated, I think, that the direction of the government is that they're going to copy or imitate the federal model and appoint lawyers to be at least the appeal adjudicators, and they would be under contract to work in that capacity. I'm not sure if that means that one lawyer gets a contract for one hearing or for a set or a group of hearings or if it's the same lawyer maybe in Edmonton and the same lawyer in Calgary doing all of them. I want to seek that answer from the minister and his staff, if it's going to be like the serious incident investigative unit that he assembled, where we have one team in Edmonton and one team in Calgary, and it's the same people doing all of the cases and all of the work in those two cities – or maybe one for northern Alberta, I should say, and one for southern Alberta. Is this going to be where one lawyer or, you know, the same group of lawyers in northern Alberta does all of them and then one lawyer or the same group of lawyers in southern Alberta does all of them? I need to know.

With all due respect to the Member for Calgary-Hays, there is nothing in the act that actually stipulates what the minister should

say. We're basically giving the minister the ability to do it as the bill is currently worded. Members from the government are going to say that, you know, he has this ability: what are you concerned about? My argument is that an ability is not the same as a request or a mandate or a requirement.

5:20

What I'm doing here is putting the requirement in place that these people have to be a certain way versus the bill as it's currently worded, which indicates that the minister may appoint people that he chooses. You know, we might like 98 per cent of them, but we might actually disagree with maybe 2 per cent or however much. So it is not really a point of contention to that extent, and I honestly think that the government should accept it in good faith because it's basically making it clear. It's making it, you know, abundantly clear that the minister, yes, has that authority, but we're asking him to do it a certain way. You know, this is where the decisions should be made, in the Assembly, not just in regulation or not just left to the wishes of the minister of the day.

Mr. Chairman, on this amendment I think hon. colleagues should vote in favour. As I say, it doesn't contradict the bill. When I was first elected, I was told that your amendments, coming from the opposition, are likely to be defeated if they contradict or go against the intention of the bill, the content of the bill, the language of the bill. This doesn't. This particular amendment certainly doesn't. I hope that in the spirit of co-operation that we witnessed in this House today, we find this amendment agreeable, and hopefully people will vote for it.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A3?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I can't help but scratch my head at one particular clause in this bill. It appears on page 8. Again, I must confess that I actually asked that very question to the minister. Section 33 is amended at the bottom half of page 8. Clause (c) says, "in clause (x) by adding 'and other sources of revenue' after 'canteens'." My question to him was: what other sources of revenue are we talking about?

Mr. Bonko: Gambling? Illegal revenue?

Mr. Elsalhy: My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore is questioning the fact if inmates are maybe allowed to gamble. I don't think that's allowed.

I initially even thought that maybe we're talking about vending machines, and then I immediately realized that inmates are not allowed to carry coins. When I asked him, he basically referenced those instances where inmates leave for off-site work, for example. Sometimes they're engaged in projects outside of the correctional facility. Certainly, we see this with minimum security inmates and potentially even with medium security inmates. I am hoping that either today in Committee of the Whole or at a later point, maybe in third reading, that question is going to be answered on the record as to what really constitutes other sources of revenue. I honestly thought that it's basically the canteen that generates any and all income.

My second question would be: what is this money going to be used for? If we're going to generate a certain sum, how is this

money going to be allocated and disposed of? That's a question I wanted to put on the record, and hopefully I'll get an answer later.

Just to recap, Mr. Chairman, I think the issue of regulations – and this is certainly a trend that is developing and growing with this government. Everything is done in regulation outside of the regular legislative process that is done here in this Assembly. Hopefully, maybe regulations are going to be tabled in the Assembly or maybe referred to one of the four standing policy field committees as per the updated standing orders.

Mr. Chairman, these committees have the ability to review some of that work. I know that yourself and myself and other members from both sides of the House sit on one of them which I think is best suited to do that, Government Services, because one of the ministries that it looks at is the Solicitor General.

I think these regulations have to be reviewed, not just in terms of the Corrections Act only. I think that overall we should really start looking at regulations with more attention, more scrutiny. If we're going to allow more and more regulations to be taking precedence and to be the way we do business in this province, then maybe we should review them periodically. I'm not saying that we should do it all the time or that we should do it, you know, every couple of months. I'm saying that periodically, every three years or so, maybe we should highlight three or four acts and go through them and see what regulations are attached to them and try to update them, try to remove the obsolete ones and the ones that don't make sense, try to improve something, you know, and on we go.

Finally, I'm going to say that overall I actually support this particular piece of legislation, certainly when it comes to disclosure of information to avoid further crime and to thwart further crime and to grant some degree of protection to people who are working in our corrections institutions. These people are committed, and they are to be commended for their energy and for their contribution. They work in extreme circumstances, very stressful, very dangerous. One quick access to information request would reveal to you, Mr. Chairman, how much they're assaulted, for example, how much they're threatened, and then sometimes even members of their families are threatened outside of the jail or the correctional institution. So that area is fine with me.

Also, in terms of victims and the next of kin of victims – the spouse, the siblings, the sons and daughters – giving them information as to where the offender is housed, the length of the jail term, conditions of release, and so on: I feel that this is a good direction. I'm hoping that even though the government rejected the three amendments which I put forward, maybe they'll turn up in regulation. Hopefully, they would be implemented to my satisfaction and that of many people out there. I reference the trial lawyers association, for example, and other members of the legal community.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I really appreciate your patience and your indulgence this morning, and I thank you for this opportunity.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 52, Corrections Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 52 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 31
Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: We are debating subamendments SA1A, SA1C, SA1G, SA1H, SA1I, SA1J, SA1K. It's the chair's understanding that it's satisfactory to vote on these in a block with the exception of SA1C. Is that correct, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. As we launch into this complicated series of amendments and subamendments on Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. What we have is that the committee that had this bill referred to it in the summer, which was the Community Services policy field committee, did review this act. It was referred to it. They did review it. The committee brought forward a series of amendments, and the government has followed with a series of subamendments, and right now we're looking at the subamendments that the government had provided.

5:30

Now, what happened – and this was all, I'm sure, well intentioned. I did for the most part read the *Hansard* from the committees. There was a great deal of concern with the committee over the requirement that we have “two physicians, one of whom must be a psychiatrist,” which was the wording that was primarily used in the original amending act. There was concern that two physicians, one of whom is a psychiatrist, may not be readily available in many parts of Alberta, and there was a real concern on behalf of the committee members that something had to be done to be able to look after people with a mental illness who don't live in a metropolitan area. The act in other places had said: well, if there's no way to take someone into treatment and look after them, then we won't apprehend them under a community treatment order. But that left a lot of places in Alberta without any assistance for people with mental illness.

The committee went through a very long series of shifting definitions and ended up bringing forward in the committee recommendations a series of amendments to change it from “two physicians, one of whom must be a psychiatrist” to a much broader definition. I think they ended up with a result that they did not intend. Let me phrase it that way. Essentially they had ended with saying “two health professionals.”

Now, that's health professionals as defined under the Health Professions Act, which, as we know, has come back before this Assembly a number of times because we are adding in new health professions as they meet the criteria under the new Health Professions Act. So this is a range of . . .

An Hon. Member: A nutritionist and a dental hygienist.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. That's exactly right. Thank you. You must have been reading my notes.

That includes people from a nutritionist, a dental hygienist, nurses, nurse practitioners – you know, if we were going to have midwives, they would end up under that health professions designation – doctors, of course, nurses, speech therapists, optometrists. There are a number of health professionals that are coming under that. That is too wide a definition, a pool of people, to pull from, and I don't think it was ever intended by the committee. Again, I was not on that committee, so I am just discerning this by reading *Hansard*. Their concern had been to make sure that there would be someone available in nonmetropolitan areas to be able to designate someone under a community treatment order. They had it always in mind that

one of those health professionals would be a physician, but they didn't define it that way.

I'm speaking on behalf of the government here; I'm sure the minister himself will be speaking to it soon enough.

An Hon. Member: Don't be too sure.

Ms Blakeman: That's right; he already has spoken. My apologies.

This was an attempt to clarify that too-broad definition. I was willing to group together all of the government's subamendments that are essentially accomplishing the same thing. There's no need to go through and debate every single section of it. The one section that I did not agree to group in are the government's subamendments and the originating committee amendments in section C because that's dealing with competency, and I think there's a larger issue there. But I am willing to deal with – in fact, I'm speaking to the package of amendments now – government subamendments under A, G, H, I, J, and K, that are essentially changing the wording back to say in most cases “two physicians” and in some cases also gets specific by saying that one of them will be a psychiatrist to issue orders for apprehension and assessment and, potentially, a community treatment order.

I think that aside from my objection to the entire concept of a community treatment order, if this act is going to pass – and clearly the majority of people in this Assembly wish it to pass; I do not, and I will restate my objections – then even I would say it should be done by the professionals that are trained to do this. I know that there are additional regulations that are contemplated by the government, where in very particular areas under a regulation they could in fact designate someone that was a health professional that has met certain criteria to be able to perform those same functions. But we have to rely on the government that they're not going to put someone in a position where they would be working beyond their scope of expertise.

I'm willing to support the package of amendments that goes through the entire package from the committee and adjusts all of those definitions from health professionals back to the more specific physicians or two physicians or physician and a psychiatrist definition as appears throughout the amendments. I think that's an appropriate thing to do. I think it does protect people that are involved in this process or come into contact with this process, that have a mental illness or may be considered eligible for a community treatment order, aside from the issues of whether we should have these or not. But I think it's appropriate that it is a qualified health professional, like a physician or a psychiatrist, that deals with this.

So I'm in favour of the package of government subamendments that have been noted. Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on the package of subamendments A, G, H, I, J, and K?

[Motion on subamendments A1A, A1G, A1H, A1I, A1J, and A1K carried]

The Chair: Now, back to subamendment A1C.

Ms Blakeman: I asked for section C to be pulled out because that is a section that is dealing with a number of criteria, the criteria that these physicians or health professionals would be using. A number of changes were made in the committee recommendations, which are then being additionally adjusted by the government subamendment. But if I let the government subamendment go through, then I would lose the ability to talk about this section separately.

I think what's important here is that the criteria have been broadened quite a bit. It was much narrower in the original version. The committee has now expanded that, and the suborder that we are talking about here, government suborder to C, is reinstating the physicians instead of health professionals, but it's also adjusting and affects the way community treatment orders would be assessed or implemented, which I think is more problematic. This is appearing as government subamendment (a)(vi)(B), which strikes out paragraph (A), which was talking about that the person is not competent.

5:40

Just to put this in context, we're backing up, saying that these health professionals, once they examine somebody, and care and treatment for the person exists in the community, is available to them, and would be provided, and in the opinion of the physicians "the person is able to comply with the treatment or care" – and then there's a series of criteria – either they consent to the issuing of a community treatment order – if they're competent, that individual consents – or "if the person is not competent, in accordance with section 28(1)" or "consent to the issuing of the community treatment order has not been obtained" – and what's been taken out here is "the person is not competent." But the physicians maintain that the individual has "while living in the community, exhibited a history of not obtaining or continuing with treatment or care that is necessary to prevent the likelihood of harm" or section (C), which is, "a community treatment order is reasonable in the circumstances and would be less restrictive than retaining the person as a formal patient." Now, what happens, I think, is that that clause, "the person is not competent," actually turns up somewhere else as a slightly differing qualifier.

I just have concerns about this section overall because I think it is broadening and giving wider powers to be able to commit someone to a community treatment order. I continue to be concerned that individuals while they are ill are losing their right to refuse medical treatment, which is something we've been moving to overall. This is a difficult argument, I will admit. I just believe in the personal integrity and dignity of each person to be able to make those kinds of integral decisions over their lives. If they're not in great shape, I would have preferred that there was something like a personal directive that they could have put in place when they were better that would have indicated their personal preferences. My problem around the widening of all of this competency and commitment criteria is that I think the individuals are even less likely to be able to control their own lives given these new wider boundaries.

That was one of my original concerns coming into this bill. It's not been alleviated; it's been exacerbated. That's my concern around this. In order to talk about it I've got to be able to pull out that separate amendment C, which does amend and remove the clause about the person not being competent. That's my concern over this particular amendment.

Again, I'm a bit caught because it's amending a number of different clauses. There are probably a dozen of them in here under section C that it's amending. In most cases it's putting in the "physicians" requirement instead of the "health professionals," but it does deal in that one section with the competency issues. That's my dilemma. Once again, it's grouping a number of things together, some of which I would support and some of which I wouldn't.

The Chair: The hon. minister of health.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I appreciate the time and effort that the hon. member has taken to go through the amendment because while they look comprehensive and daunting,

they all do deal with two issues. The first issue is the question of two health professionals. Clearly, that, as I indicated when I introduced the amendments, needed to be cleared up. There are two values that needed to be expressed. One is that the act should be consistent throughout, and consistency suggests that it should be two physicians, one of whom should be a psychiatrist.

The other value, which of course we want to move to, is that all health professionals ought to be able to practise to the fullest extent of their training, capability, and expertise. There may be at some point a health professional who has appropriate training to participate in that decision-making, but it doesn't mean all health professionals. It can't be that broad. So the amendments that we voted on already and a piece of this amendment that's remaining deal with that, and it's very important that we deal with that because it is important that the decision be made by the appropriate health professionals. This is a very important decision.

The second piece, which the hon. member has quite rightly identified, is the issue of consent, and it's an important issue. It does go to the root of quality-of-life issues. Personal integrity, I guess, if you want to call it that, shouldn't be interfered with lightly and certainly not without their consent if they're competent to give a consent in the normal circumstance. One would hesitate to override that.

However, with respect to the purpose of a community treatment order it's probably one of the very exceptional circumstances in which I think it's necessary for the effectiveness of the order to say the purpose of the community treatment order: in circumstances where there's already been a recognition of the nature or the affliction that the individual has that needs to be controlled in order for them to be able to stay and live in the community and have a quality of life, and if they fail to take their appropriate medications and treatment, they will deteriorate to a point where at some point they will need hospitalization, they will need to be engaged in a much more comprehensive treatment program. Unfortunately, the intervention needs to be early in order to forestall that later piece.

This is one area where it makes sense to say that if all the other circumstances are there, if in the judgment of the health professionals that are involved, in this case the psychiatrist and the physician that are involved, a person is in need of the community treatment order in order to be discharged from hospital and live in the community, then this is the one circumstance where it doesn't make sense to say that consent needs to be provided if a person is competent to do so. By its very nature you're dealing with an intervention on a timely basis with someone where already all of the other characteristics have been identified and circumstances have been identified.

Now, I realize that this is one of the most controversial aspects of the whole concept of community treatment order, but it's also a very important part of the community treatment order. It's necessary for its proper operation, and it is something that has been utilized appropriately in other jurisdictions and has stood the test. So I would ask the House to approve this amendment to deal with this issue of consent. There is a review provision, I believe, in the bill which will allow us to review this on a timely basis, and if there's any suggestion that there has been an abuse or that people's personal rights are being unduly affected, I think we can keep close monitoring on that situation.

I can say that I have been working with a group of people, including the Canadian Mental Health Association and others, on a stakeholder group and have actually agreed to provide some funding* to them so that they can monitor not only the implementation of the act but the implementation of proactive community treatment processes so that we can see and have somebody who's

*See p. 2507, left col., para. 4, line 3

intensely involved in this help us keep a watch on this and make sure that it's appropriately utilized.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is the crux of it for me because this is around the definitions of how it is determined that somebody is eligible for or qualifies for or would fall under the need for a community treatment order. What has happened is that the committee widened that criteria and definition by quite a bit, in my opinion. Remember that we had started at a point where the original Mental Health Act had talked about: an imminent danger to themselves or to others. The bill then widened that to talk about the concept of deterioration which is not imminent, that has a longer time period attached to it, and the concept of harm rather than danger. So there were two fundamental definitions that got changed by this act.

Then all of that got widened by the criteria around it by the committee that met over the summer and the policy field committee. It's quite wide now, and that's my concern. We started out talking about people who had a serious psychosis or schizophrenia, but by the definitions that are available in here now, someone who is clinically depressed would now qualify and could be picked up and put under a CTO the way this is now sitting. That causes me great concern even when you layer in that we're back to two physicians, one of whom should be a psychiatrist unless you're in a nonmetropolitan area, I'm going to call it, where there aren't the resources to have those individuals available. This is what's really getting to me because when you look at the mental health statistics in Canada, where we're now looking at 1 in 3 people having an experience with mental illness at some point, the potential to capture far more people than I believe was originally intended now exists in this layering of amendments, and that's a real concern for me.

5:50

I don't think we started into this to pick up people that had a depression issue or bipolar or something like that. This was to deal with people who were in serious trouble of harming themselves or harming others. The whole definition has broadened itself. That issue of consent and who we're looking at capturing in this legislation is far more serious given the amendments that are under contemplation here today.

That's a lot of my issue because, yes, we're talking about mental or physical deterioration. We're talking about competency and consent. All of this is captured in this amending section C, which actually shows up in the bill as 9.1 and then all of the subs that are coming under that. It's around, you know, how we're defining this: whether the person has been incarcerated in any way in the immediate two years – that's now being amended to three years – from 60 days to 30 days. There are a number of changes that have happened back and forth here.

This is where you get the clause about: "The treatment or care the person requires exists in the community." Well, this is part of my original issue. We're now hearing the minister say in the House that, in fact, he has allocated some money to the Canadian Mental Health Association to help with this issue. But where I started from with this act is that we had people who had deteriorated because we'd never supplied them with adequate community supports, and this bill still doesn't give them adequate community supports. There's nothing in this bill that provides more community supports for people. There's nothing in this bill that sets up an assertive community treatment program at all.

What it does is set up the community treatment orders, and now

it has a very broad definition of who would qualify for that, and that's at the heart of my disagreement with what has happened in this process. On behalf of my constituents and others who have contacted me from across Alberta, that's my concern. I need to put it on the record and detail it on behalf of these people because I think we went far beyond where we started, and we will capture far more people. We were originally talking about maybe 30 or 60 people this would apply to in all of Alberta. That's much wider now. When you start to look at how many people will be touched by or experience some form of mental illness in their life, we could be potentially capturing a lot of people under this act.

We still have not put one more treatment bed in place, one more transitional housing apartment, one more support service. That has not happened through this bill. All we've done is put in place an ability to apprehend and incarcerate somebody in an institution or make them comply with medication requirements. That's what's happened with this bill, not anything else. Let's not kid ourselves that anything else is in that bill except for the community treatment orders.

I'm happy to hear the minister say that he has allocated some money to the Canadian Mental Health Association, but, you know, how much? For how long? Are we going to get transitional housing? Do we get treatment beds out of it? Do we get emergency treatment beds out of it? No. That's not what's in this bill.

I continue to have issues with this, but it's now 5 or 6 in the morning, and I won't make anybody stay up any later to hear me air my concerns about this. I think there's a real issue, and this may well end up getting challenged at some point down the line because it's too wide a net now, so I continue to object to it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on subamendment C1.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to speak on this subamendment. Having been a member of that committee, the importance of widening that criteria was something that very much troubled many members of that committee at the beginning of the deliberations as, Mr. Chair, you're very well aware, and you were a very able chair of that committee as well. Many of the committee members were told of the importance of this by organizations such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, people like Dr. Austin Mardon, who spoke so eloquently at an event in Edmonton city hall and was honoured here. He spoke of the need to widen these criteria because of the new medications that have allowed, for example, schizophrenics to operate in society and the need for them to be properly able to deal with situations where they may fall off their medications. These things are incredibly important.

The Chair: Hon. members, the side conversations are getting so loud that it's hard for the chair to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, who does have the floor.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Backs: I've also got a major institution in my riding, Alberta Hospital. I visited Alberta Hospital, and I spoke with them about this legislation and spoke to all the heads of departments and many of the health professionals and toured all the wards and got their views, and they were very supportive of these improvements in the legislation and the need to go forward on this.

There is a need, of course, to improve those facilities. There is a need to modernize some of them. Some of them do obviously have to have their planned improvements go ahead sooner rather than

later, and that would be very helpful for the treatment of people who are involved in our mental health system. The importance of going forward with this has been emphasized time and time and time again by those that the committee met with. I think that it is important that they do proceed and that we don't get sidetracked by a few things that the committee found were really not a part of the real experience of the mental health patients or the ones who use the facilities.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really agree with the Member for Edmonton-Centre in her concern about this bill. It seems to me that, really, the principle of freedom and self-determination is fundamental in our legal system, and courts have recognized that we are the masters of our own bodies and that we have the right to refuse medical treatment. In fact, the medical ethics literature is filled with references to cases where no matter what the arguments are, respect for the individual's autonomy is maintained. Even in cases where it is clear that refusing treatment is not in the interests of the patient's welfare, the patient's wishes should still be respected.

Really, freedom and autonomy are extremely important, so if a bill dealing with mental illness does not have a really strong focus on the element of consent, then I think there's a problem here. I appreciate the remarks by the minister of health about being concerned about this. I don't know whether the committee that looked at this bill – they must have studied the Ontario legislation. Ontario's mental health legislative reform in the year 2000, when it developed community treatment orders, focused on consent all the way through.

6:00

When the criteria were listed that must be considered when community treatment orders are given, many of the things that are mentioned in this bill and the subamendments and amendments are included in the Ontario one. They also include the ability of the person subject to the community treatment order to comply with it and consultation of the person and person's substitute decision-maker, if any, with a rights adviser and consent by the person or the person's substitute decision-maker to the community treatment order.

They have a section about safeguards, that the community treatment order process will be consent based, and all statutory protections governing informed consent will continue to apply.

Of course, in this whole process of community treatment orders and dealing with consent, there has to be a right of review, and I am pleased that the bill actually deals in detail with the right of review, that there's a procedure in place so that a person can challenge a community treatment order. I think that on the whole the bill is all right, except that the emphasis on rights and rights advice and legal advice and consent of a person subject to a community treatment order I think could be stronger.

A different angle that interests me is the fact that the whole matter of community treatment orders takes place now in a culture in which there is a propensity to depend on the pharmaceutical industry. I have no doubt whatsoever that drugs can be incredibly helpful for many people as long as the side effects are not too overwhelming and the drugs are affordable. I have no doubt that drugs – and they've improved so much over the years – can help people with serious mental illnesses, like schizophrenia, to be able to live a fulfilling, meaningful life.

I hear reference to an excellent book that should be on every-

body's reading list. It's by two Canadians, Ray Moynihan and Alan Cassels, called *Selling Sickness: How the World's Biggest Pharmaceutical Companies Are Turning Us All into Patients*. I'm concerned that the range of choices of treatment is narrowed through the whole culture of the connection between psychiatry and the pharmaceutical industry. It seems to me – and I appreciate the remarks of the Member for Edmonton-Centre – that what we need are adequate community supports and a range of alternative ways of dealing with mental illness. It's too easy for us just to depend on community treatment orders that are tied to the prescription of drugs as if that's the only possibility.

I'll just give some evidence of how psychiatry is tied into the pharmaceutical industry. In the book *Selling Sickness*, which actually doesn't deal with serious mental illnesses, it provides evidence about what I'm talking about. It mentions that when the former New England Journal of Medicine editor, Dr. Marcia Angell, published her famous editorial *Is Academic Medicine for Sale?* she was referring to psychiatrists. She wrote that when journal staff were searching for an experienced and independent psychiatrist to write a review article about antidepressants, they had difficulty finding one because only very few in the entire United States were free of financial ties to the drug makers. That chapter in the book *Selling Sickness* goes on to demonstrate at length the ties between medicine, psychiatry, and the pharmaceutical industry.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I really don't know what we're leading to in our society when we become more and more dependent on drugs as the final answer. So, Mr. Chairman, I applaud the efforts to find other solutions, other community-based solutions, in which people can live a full, meaningful life with the proper community supports so that they won't be so dependent on drugs. That's the only comment I have.

It's a very difficult issue. I'm really torn because, you know, on the one hand, I hear people who suffer from serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, actually saying that community treatment orders are a good thing, that they don't trust themselves when they are quite despondent that they will make the right decision, so in the interest of their own well-being they prefer to have community treatment orders.

There was an article in the *Edmonton Journal* just recently by Austin Mardon. It was about homelessness. I think he himself has suffered with mental illness, and he says, "In other jurisdictions some untreated schizophrenics have been helped by Community Treatment Orders to great success." So he's encouraging the passage of Bill 31.

On the other hand, I have experienced in my years of pastoral counselling dealing with people who had tremendous problems with mental illness but were not so serious that they needed to be considered at the level of a community treatment order. I think I would fear that their own ability to make decisions for themselves might be hampered or interfered with with a bill that's so strong as the one that we're dealing with.

I think those are the only remarks I have. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I stand here ambivalent, actually, about this bill because I can see many of the good things for it and, in fact, probably support it because the Schizophrenia Society is so supportive of this. One of the things that I think does happen is that if we can get people at a certain stage and get them

back on their medication, it's very helpful. However, I think it's been said time and time again that this is only beneficial so far. If we don't have the proper supports in place within the community that we return them to, they'll be back time and time again, and revolving-door medication is certainly not the answer.

One of the things that has been talked about, you know, is the rights of people – are we taking them away? – and having the ability to make voluntary decisions. I don't believe that when someone is mentally ill – for exactly the same reason that youth are picked up when they're involved in drugs – that when your mind is altered that way, you can be counted on to make a rational decision that would make sense for how you're going to be treated. I think sometimes we have to step in and make those decisions for people who can't make their decisions at that moment in time.

6:10

One other thing that disturbs me about this is that in terms of the community treatment orders there really isn't the existence of a lot of credible evidence that, really, these kinds of behaviours and bringing people into custody, for lack of a better word, and getting them back on their medications is really all that beneficial. I think that when we do have community treatment orders, the kind of people that this would benefit are often the ones that, because they have been perhaps assessed incorrectly in the heat of a moment of behaviour, may well end up in prison when, of course, that's not where they belong in the first place. They really belong back in the community.

I think that my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora has already spoken about the tie-in between psychiatry and the pharmaceuticals. Unfortunately, I don't think that tie-in is just necessarily with the mentally ill. We seem to rely on pharmaceuticals for everything and anything, and we certainly have some wealthy pharmaceutical companies. I would use the example of perhaps the flu shots. I don't think there's anything more beneficial to a pharmaceutical company than pushing flu shots.

The other thing is that if these amendments go through, Alberta would have the most flexible criteria for which medical professions can issue CTOs in Canada, and the more people who are able to write CTOs, the less protection that exists for patients. I believe that as much as I see this government often pulling power into themselves that I don't believe they should have, particularly being able to change rules or legislation or not even having the legislation, making the rules in regulations, this is one of the areas that I believe should be narrowed. Because we are playing with peoples' lives and often, as I've mentioned, for people who cannot make the decisions for themselves, I think we have to keep it in a very, very narrow focus. The broader it is, in my mind, the more damage you're actually going to do.

When you speak to some of the people that actually are on the front lines and working in these kinds of communities on a regular basis, they know their people. They know the community that they work in. Often with people who are sometimes homeless, there is a community that they live in, and they sort of protect each other. If you speak with front-line workers, they are certainly opposed to this type of protection, I guess, for lack of a better word.

So as I've said, I'm really ambivalent about this. I can see some good, and I can see some bad. But I think that overall, I would have to not support it based on the fact that I think it's way too broad and that we will be bringing in people that would be far better handled if we had a far better support system out there for them.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair, just to rise again. Some of the issues that have been raised are interesting, and I hate to be debating this, to be truthful, at a quarter after 6 in the morning after waiting for hours to do this and not being able to do this at a time when people would probably have a much clearer head. After having said that, some of the things that front-line workers have clearly said is that this is a good approach and something that is necessary however difficult in some ways when one thinks about it in terms of civil liberties.

You know, for example, even if individuals have a history of not continuing the treatment necessary to prevent the likelihood of harm to themselves, they should still be eligible for community treatment orders despite not being likely to cause harm to others. Too often persons with severe mental illness are misconstrued as dangerous when the vast majority are themselves victims of violence and much more likely to hurt themselves. Some, however, do hurt others. The Ostopovich case was one of the clear triggers to get CTOs going. An RCMP officer was killed in Spruce Grove by Ostopovich, who was diagnosed as paranoid and delusional and who gunned down a police officer after a standoff in Spruce Grove. His wife wanted him to take medication, but he would not continue on his medication. His paranoia, diagnosed as schizophrenia, was caused by an accident.

The necessity to deal with some of these through CTOs is clear and obvious, and the legislation here is something that is desired by many in the community. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I call the vote on subamendment C1, I just want to thank all the members. We worked all afternoon yesterday, all evening last night, and it's about 6:16 this morning. You've all co-operated really well, and the staff has been up and working all day, including the table officers. I just want to thank them before the next shift takes over for them. [applause] Democracy prevails, and Alberta is doing well.

So let's have the vote on subamendment C1.

[Motion on subamendment C1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Are we ready for the question on amendment A1?

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. It's important for me to take a little bit of time on behalf of a constituent that has contacted me. I'm going to read the story from Carol, who wrote me.

My husband and I strongly support proposed legislation that would implement Community Treatment Orders, provide for earlier interventions, and require treatment for the mentally ill who are deemed to be deteriorating and having a relapse with their illness.

Our son has been a victim of the "revolving door syndrome." That is: Admitted to a mental hospital involuntarily, received treatment for varied lengths of time, discharged, discontinued treatment, deteriorated and again admitted to hospital.

The member from Lethbridge spoke very well on this.

He was first diagnosed with schizophrenia in Nov. 1995, referred to a psychiatrist in Jan. 1996 and spent approx. 6 weeks in hospital for assessment and treatment. A few months after discharge when we visited him (he lives in Edmonton) we noticed his confused thoughts, lack of concentration, poor nutrition, loss of weight and an excessively gross apartment. We could do nothing!

Dec. 27, 1996 when coming to visit [out in Whitecourt] (he forgot when Christmas was!) he decided to go on a hike at -35° without telling us and not dressing warmly. He got lost for approximately 7 hours and was eventually found by some snowmobilers we had contacted earlier. His feet were frozen so badly that the attending

doctor feared they may have to be amputated. Luckily that wasn't necessary, but he needed weeks of hospitalization and extensive complicated plastic surgery at U of A Hospital. (We can't begin to imagine the financial costs to the health care system!) Because of hospital stays, home care and other supports, he did fairly well mentally for a while.

6:20

Other admissions were: January 1999, involuntary admission to Alberta Hospital Edmonton – 3 months; January 2000, involuntary admission . . . 3 months; January 2001, involuntary admission to A.H. Edmonton for 6 months; after a few days at the Remand Centre for disturbing the peace Sept. 2002, involuntary admission to A.H. Edmonton for 5 months; May 2005 – 1 month as a volunteer patient because he had trouble evicting roommates who intimidated and robbed him.

Mr. Chairman, this goes on and on for this family.

It is well known that with each relapse, a person with severe mental illness may have some cognitive abilities [affected] indefinitely. Our son is highly intelligent and took several university courses at one time [but may never do so again]. He has stayed out of hospital for almost two years now, but we have noticed some early signs of a possible relapse. We can do nothing but wait and wonder what will happen to him next and when. We have every confidence in his psychiatrist and C.L.I.P. worker who have been excellent [with him], but they can do very little either, if they suspect he is not taking his medication.

I am convinced that if Community Treatment Orders are in place and provisions made for earlier assessments and interventions, that hospital stays would be shorter and fewer in number.

I realize that there may be "Charter" concerns if people are held against their will when they are deemed to no longer be a danger to themselves or others. However, a mentally ill person also has a right to treatment and health. The community has a right not to have to put up with bizarre behaviour, acts of vandalism, destroyed apartments etc. by the mentally ill.

With most other serious diseases such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes, we are continually encouraged to seek medical attention before symptoms become life threatening. Surely people with mental illnesses deserve the same consideration whether they themselves recognize the symptoms or someone else does. Mental illnesses also have a chance of a better outcome if treatment is started early. In the long run, the mentally ill would also have a better chance of employment, instead of having to rely on the support of social services and AISH.

Carol, I thank you for your letter. I'm sure it will help this Assembly make the right decision dealing with this legislation.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the vote on amendment A1? Hon. members, we have a request on amendment A1 to break the vote down into three votes. The first would be for sections A, B, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, and K. The second vote will be for section C. The third vote will be for section L.

[Motion on amendments A1A, A1B, and A1D through A1K carried]

[Motion on amendment A1C carried]

[Motion on amendment A1L carried]

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 31 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

Bill 41

Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Bill 41, as I indicated in I believe second reading, was introduced – and I believe it's a very important bill – to deal with a number of matters which I think are necessary to make sure that as minister of health and as government we have the opportunity and the tools to be able to deliver on our role of assurance to the public, to ensure that there's public confidence in our health system. I'm not going to go through all the issues that I raised during second reading, but I do want to indicate that subsequent to tabling the bill – well, actually, even prior to tabling the bill. The bill was tabled in June and referred to the committee, and there was a lot of opportunity for input at the committee after first reading. Many of the professions appeared before the committee and made their case known.

During that process I've also had the opportunity to meet with and talk to members of various health professions. Understandably they have some concerns because while there's no intention to remove or, in fact, denigrate from the concept of self-governance, there is a necessary role for government to be able to, in the last resort, ask health professions and then, if necessary, tell health professions when we need changes to bylaws, regulations, et cetera. That has caused some concern among health professions – no question – but in an era where the health system is fast changing, where there are greater and greater complexities and where we need to ensure that health professions work together not only hierarchically but also horizontally, there is a strong ability for health professions to work together. There's a necessary role for the ministry of health to be involved in ensuring that certain things are taken care of.

In the ideal world the tools that are provided would not be used. In fact, some people have said: well, why would you ask for tools if you're not going to use them? But the reality is that when you write contracts, you don't expect to litigate them. You don't want to have to fall back on the contract ever. You want to be able to carry out the business of the contract without the need for that. That's the reality that you want to have. You need to have tools. You don't necessarily ever want to have to use the tools. These are tools of last resort.

There's a provision in the act which requires reporting under public health circumstances. I hope that nobody ever has to report, but we need to have the duty to report. I could go through that in detail.

Now, having said that, I have had some consultations. I have brought forward some changes to the bill in order to show that we do hear what the professions are saying. We do want to have a collaborative relationship with the professions. This is something where we need to be working collaboratively going forward. This is something where we do need to have goodwill on all sides. In review of the various sections of the bill, I was able to work through some of the sections and come up with some areas where perhaps it would be appropriate to make some changes. There are really three changes which I am proposing. I have at the table, I believe, a proposed amendment which I would now like to move and that I would ask be distributed.

6:30

The Deputy Chair: Just a minute, hon. minister.

Hon. members, the amendment that is being circulated to you shall be referred to as amendment A1.

Hon. minister, you may proceed.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. As I said, there are some amendments that I indicated I would be prepared to bring forward. They're included in the amendment which is now being circulated. It essentially does three things.

First of all, we've agreed to bring forward to the House an amendment which would remove the references to code of ethics in the various places that it appears in the act. I do that somewhat reluctantly because I think there may be circumstances where as you're asking health professionals to work together in teams and integrating the roles that they play, there may be some need to bring the professional bodies together and to ensure that their codes of ethics are consistent. I'm satisfied that there's sufficient overlap in the code of ethics as they stand that probably there isn't anything in that area that would provide what I would consider to be an area that would be of such a significance that it would pose a danger to the public or fit the tests that one would need to use in order to determine whether section 135 actually needed to be utilized.

Clearly, section 135 is to be utilized in areas where there are potentially public safety concerns. Some have asked: well, if you've got the duty to report, why do you need this opportunity to interfere? I would say that the duty to report is something that's after the fact. The ability to be proactive and to ask professions to look at their standards of operation is a preventative piece. I always have believed that prevention is better than cure. I think that in this case it is as well. In looking at it, while I do believe we need the opportunity to deal with the other areas, having had another thorough look at it, I'm prepared to remove the references to code of ethics. That at least will give some small measure of comfort to the professions that this is not about removing their self-governance. This is not about interfering with the operation of the profession. This really is about making sure that every profession has appropriate rules in place.

Again, as I said I think during second reading, when we did a review of infection prevention and control standards across the province and what professions were doing, at the same time we did that with respect to what regional health authorities and hospitals were doing. We did find a wide diversity of views. That was reported in the report released in mid-August. The short of it is that we're prepared to take the code of ethics out.

The second piece is a question of consultation, and here, Mr. Chairman, I'll have to eat a bit of humble pie. Just last week I was arguing that consultation was a standard practice and required and not something you would build into acts. I've always said that acts are framework pieces and that you hang the rules on the frame in the regulations and that before you do either acts or regulations, you ought to consult. But here I am today now moving an amendment saying that we will build into this act a commitment to consult pursuant to a process defined in the regulations. I can say nothing more than that it's a very pragmatic approach that I'm taking on this. Obviously, we're going to be dealing with the professions. Obviously, we're going to consult with the professions. Obviously, this section can't be used until it's a last resort; in other words, you've made every effort to make sure that every other process is undertaken.

Just saying that is not good enough, so what we're asking to build in in various places is a provision that says, "after the Minister has consulted with the college in accordance with the regulations made under section 134(e.1)." That consultation with the college means, of course, any college that you're affecting or proposing to affect. That's the provision that we're asking to put in. That's the second piece of this amendment package.

The third piece of the amendment package just elevates the place for the decision. In the bill itself the indication is that some of these

decisions can be made by ministerial order, that by ministerial order we can ask a college to adopt a change to regulation or bylaw. I didn't have a problem with that, to be perfectly frank, because if a college did not, the next step would be to pass an order in council. The minister had no tools or teeth to be able to enforce. That had to come through an order in council mechanism. But for some reason that didn't seem to be understood or to make sense. So to make sure it's perfectly clear, we've requested that this amendment be adopted to change it from ministerial order to "the Lieutenant Governor in Council, on the recommendation of the Minister after the Minister has consulted."

That's the nature of the proposed amendment. It does three things: it removes the code of ethics, it puts in a consultation process requirement by regulation, and it moves the decision-making request to "the Lieutenant Governor in Council" from "the Minister." I will make no pretense, Mr. Chairman: these amendments will not satisfy the colleges, but I would respectfully suggest that we have to agree to disagree on that.

We are in an era where there are things coming down the pipe in terms of serious issues around MRSA and C. difficile and other bacteria or viruses that are not easily controlled. We are in a situation where the acuity level in hospital facilities is much higher than it ever has been in the past. We are in an era where there are changing technologies and changing techniques. We are in an era of electronic health records. We're in an era where all health professionals are going to be essential parts of the system working in teams, and those teams have to have compatible sets of rules and structures in order to do it. Now, it's my belief that that can be managed.

I have to say, Mr. Chairman, that I was privileged, before I was minister of health, to be invited by the pharmacists and nurses to attend a conference, the first joint conference that they had, in Jasper, and to speak to that conference. I was invited because I had an exceptional relationship with the pharmacy at the time, and they approached nursing and asked that I be included on the agenda to be able to address my view of what the vision for health care professionals was, which, as I've stated many times in this House, is that all health care professionals ought to be able to practise to the full extent of their capability, expertise, and training.

I was equally delighted, then, as minister of health to be able to go to Banff earlier this year where the College of Physicians and Surgeons joined with the conference of nurses and pharmacists, the second conference that the nurses and pharmacists had together but the first where the College of Physicians and Surgeons joined. So I'm quite confident that the professions are working together in a way that they haven't before and that they recognize this need to work together. But I'm also concerned. I'm concerned that when we did the review of standards across the professions, we found such a strong diversity.

I won't repeat all the details of the report that was released in August, but suffice to say that we're not where we should be. We need to get there, and we need to get there soon. The government needs to be part of that to be able to fulfill its role, its obligation, its duty of assurance to the public, its duty to be able to assure the public that the system is a safe system, that we're operating at appropriate levels and standards, and to ensure public confidence.

So I would ask the House to approve the amendments that I've put on the floor and then to vote in favour of the bill.

6:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A bit of

housekeeping to begin with. I would ask that the amendments be severed so they can be voted separately, but at the same time, I will also acknowledge that I have allowed a grouping together of various amendments. We can't group them together unless we sever them, so the severing comes first. Then I have suggested that we vote on them in packages or groups, and those groups would be sections A, D, F, and G, which primarily cover the consultation powers or consultations sections that have been added in; a second vote for what I'll call the ethics section, which the minister has just referred to, specific to sections B and E; and finally, a third vote, on C, which covers some of the powers.

Now, to anyone who follows along with this at home, some of those powers that have been granted to the minister are mixed into some of those other sections, but this was the best severing and regrouping that I could do to allow us to vote appropriately. Thank you for the chair's co-operation in that severing and regrouping.

The minister is correct. The colleges are not happy. They feel that there are still a number of things that were not addressed that they continue to be concerned about. Just so that we have a sense of the scope of who's being affected here, we are looking at the College of Combined Laboratory and X-ray Technologists, College of Alberta Dental Assistants, Alberta Dental Association and College, the College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta, the College of Dietitians of Alberta, the College of Licensed Practical Nurses, Alberta College of Medical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Technologists, the College of Medical Laboratory Technologists, Association of Naturopathic Practitioners, and the Opticians Association.

The College of Optometrists has now opted out of the rest of this group and said they're okay with the bill. But I'll continue with the list of others who are not: the College of Pharmacists . . .

Mr. Hancock: Who was that?

Ms Blakeman: The College of Optometrists. [interjection] Yeah. It's a letter that was sent to you on December 3.

Continuing with a list of that grouping: The College of Physical Therapists of Alberta, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the College of Alberta Psychologists, the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, also known as CARNA, the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta, the College of Social Workers, the College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, and the College and Association of Chiropractors. So a significant body of our health professionals have joined together in their opposition to this bill. But I do acknowledge that the Alberta College of Optometrists did send a letter on the 3rd of December to the minister indicating that they were now willing to support Bill 41, given the amendments.

Some of the concerns that remain. They are pleased to see that the consultation has been included here, but their point is, as ours often is here in the opposition, that the devil is in the detail. Without seeing the regs that go along with this act, we don't really have a good sense of how this act will in fact play. It's very important that the regs are able to be debated openly, and in particular is the ability for the colleges to be able to present their position on a given desire of the ministry to make changes if we have a situation again like we had in Lloydminster, for example, which is what gave us – this is sort of the Lloydminster memorial bill. This is why we ended up with this bill: because of the situation that happened there last spring and everything that's fallen out from it.

On the one hand, I agreed that the situation that was brought to light in Lloydminster needed to be addressed through legislation. What the government did in response is they addressed it and then went far beyond it. That is my issue with this bill and the issue of

the organizations that I just read into the record. They feel very strongly that under this act they need to be able to present their position about why they made a certain choice, and they need to be involved and have the ability to appeal. They are truly offended by having the minister give himself or herself powers to come in and dictate things like bylaws or standards – I will note here that previously it also included a code of ethics, which has now been removed – and they really feel that that's wrong. It does go into that watershed; it goes down that slippery slope; it steps over that crack. Whatever metaphor you want to use, it crosses that line about self-regulating professions.

We do have a set-up that we've worked with, in some cases for over a hundred years, with various professions in the province where we give them rights and privileges and also expect responsibilities from them. We delegate that to them and say: "You set this up yourself. You have a college. You have an association. You self-regulate. You set the standards, and you make sure that your members adhere to that. You go and do that." We've delegated it to them. Now we have an act that comes in and goes: well, just a second; as the minister I'm going to be able to come in and change your bylaws of your college or change your standards or change your code of ethics. That is deeply offensive to these groups, and it is also marking a real change. It is a watershed in how we deal with self-regulated professions, which is why you're also getting a slop over, a flooding over of concern that is starting to be brought forward by other self-regulated professions outside of the health professions. Now we're starting to hear from lawyers who have concerns, accountants that have concerns, and other professions that are self-regulated going: boy, if that happened to health professions, it could happen to us next. So they all have a vested interest in this act.

The consultation is critical and is an improvement. I will indeed note that this was something that I had in an amendment in front of this House barely a week ago, I think. This was around the Lobbyists Act, Bill 1, and I was asking that the NGO sector be consulted about the regulations before they were implemented, and I was tut-tutted and oh, no, no'd by the minister. This wasn't possible. Well, gee, what a difference a week makes. Maybe what a difference the health profession makes over the not-for-profit sector. I'm not sure if that's a deciding factor, but here we are on a different bill, and now consultation written into legislation about consulting with a group before regulations are put out is before us in the House. I have enjoyed watching the minister eat a little crow. I'm not going to make him eat the whole thing, but that is worth noting.

6:50

The second issue is around that code of ethics section, which is regarded as deeply intrusive by the groups. They believe that the bylaws and standards section should also be removed, not just the ethics section. The Health Professions Act describes bylaws as internal, and they would argue that this should not be open for the minister to be able to interfere with.

There was also an issue raised with me about standards of practice, and in particular nurses were mentioned because their standards are very high. In fact, they are nationally set. So for a provincial minister to be coming in on a national set of standards is inappropriate – that is the argument – and should not be happening. That's a perfect example of why we've crossed a line here in what the minister is contemplating in Bill 41.

One of the last issues that is being raised is around liability protection. This is a point that I've often made with this government, and it's the reverse of it today. Usually I'm saying that if the government is going to delegate the responsibility for accomplishing

a task, they must also delegate the authority to be able to accomplish it. That argument is usually around delegated administrative organizations and their ability to have proper funding or around municipalities and corresponding funding. But we have a different situation here, where we've got an administrator that's appointed to be taking over. That's in section (c), that I'm calling powers, extra powers, which in the original act appears on page 13.

If the administrator is appointed to take over, if they, then, have the authority to do something, they also, the colleges believe, must be held responsible. They must be liable for anything that goes wrong. Referenced for me was the Finney decision in Quebec about good-faith clauses. That decision in Quebec basically said that good-faith clauses aren't holding up anymore. I think I agree. I think that there is an issue there, and those two things have to go together. This government is particularly bad about splitting them, but authority and responsibility do go together. If you're going to delegate that responsibility, the authority to do it has to go along with it, and they're liable, they're responsible, and they're accountable for it. I think that has to be part of it. What the group is demanding is that if an administrator is put in place over their heads, that administrator should also be liable for the consequences of the decisions they make, and that reflects directly upon the minister.

Again, those were issues that were raised in my consultations with some of those colleges, particularly the College of Physicians and Surgeons. I will note that with the government majority I am expecting that these amendments will pass, Mr. Chairman, and in doing so, they will then rule amendments I was going to bring in out of order. I was going to bring forward amendments that would have in fact struck a number of the sections that the groups felt were most offensive to them, in particular the whole 135 section: 135.1, 135.2, 135.3, et cetera. I was going to go through and methodically bring forward amendments to strike those sections in their entirety. Once this government amendment passes, of course – with their majority I expect it to – that then rules my amendments out of order because the decision has been made by the Assembly, and I cannot then, in essence, challenge a decision made by the Assembly. The decision has been made, so I have lost my ability to bring in those amendments, and that's just the luck of the draw in being the shadow minister, I'm afraid.

Those are the issues that I had wanted to raise as part of the debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill 41. Again, overall I think this bill started out with one small right idea, a correct idea, and morphed into some sort of health-profession-eating dragon that should not have been allowed to escape from its egg. It was hatched and birthed under Bill 41, and now we have to deal with this fire-breathing monster that's put out there. Even given the amendments that the minister has been willing to bring in, it diminishes the amount of fire that is coming out of the mouth of that dragon, but it does not extinguish it. It's still fire, and it's still a dragon, and this bill is still a problem even with those amendments.

I'm certainly willing to support the amendment group around the establishment of consultation. I will certainly support taking ethics out, but the section that I'm pinpointing as a power section, which is emblematic more than anything – there are a number of sections that are mixed into the other ones that are also power giving – is where I think we all really have the trouble here with this act. The amendments did not address it sufficiently in that the minister gave that position very far-reaching powers to affect the way self-regulatory health professions go about their business and how the minister can come in on them because he deems it in the public interest. There are no criteria set out. The minister himself or herself is not held responsible or accountable. There are no report-back provisions in this. There are no accountability provisions for

the very person who most needs to be held accountable with this change. So there will be long-lasting effects of this bill and not positive ones, I suspect.

I regret that the minister felt that he had to go this far. I think that merely settling the issue around the College of Physicians and Surgeons' requirement to report to public health that something had gone wrong would have been sufficient. We didn't need the rest of what happened with this bill, and that, I believe, is unfortunate.

I have spoken to the groupings of the amendments here, and I will cede the floor to those others who wish to comment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on the amendment?

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to also thank my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre for grouping the amendments the way she has because I think she's certainly captured what the problem is with this whole bill. I've always sort of believed that if it isn't broke, don't fix it, and I think that this is what's happened with this one. I think this bill has morphed out of an overreaction to the problems that they had in terms of not following proper infection control.

I noticed that on November 29 the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry actually stood up in the House and was more than delighted to say, as she was introducing somebody, that we can acknowledge a milestone in the history of Alberta's largest self-regulating professional group; namely, the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists. Also, I would probably like to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness just how excited his fellow lawyers would be if we started to take away their self-regulation. I'm not sure that that would go over very well. Something else the government has just done recently is to actually give self-regulation to real estate agents. So I don't understand why the need to try to water down the professions. Certainly, in their self-regulating capacity they have been doing this for almost a hundred years very successfully and proudly.

7:00

There are a lot of complexities out there within the health care system. I think that partly they're complex because of what the government appears to be trying to do, to create professional people and turn them into widgets. We'll have professional doctors, nurses, and pharmacists as little widgets in a system that, unfortunately, the bigger it gets, the more it lacks humanity. The health care system is about humanity and really nothing else.

We are losing our professional abilities to make decisions to technology and to rules. Where is the authority that comes with being a professional, with being educated so that when you make professional judgments, you can stand by them knowing that you have the education to back that up and also knowing that if some very unfortunate, untoward accident or episode may happen, you at least would be judged by people who would understand the circumstances under which that poor judgment had been made.

I don't believe that that would be possible in what I see as the system that's being created right now, a system with absolutely no humanity. It's getting too big. It's getting too many people. By trying to amalgamate professionals, we're watering down the standards. We're creating standards that are homogenous. We're going to the lowest common denominator. Each profession has its own standards and has its own levels. Most professions, in fact I would suspect all professions, actually are diligently working to improve their standards at all times, improving the behaviour of the people that are registered in their colleges.

The consultation section actually does cause me some concern because I have seen other instances of what this government calls consultation. They will bring in people who have actually spoken out against the government, bring them into Edmonton or wherever, sit them down, and create a little group who now truly believe that they will be listened to and therefore never speak out again. In fact, consultation in many instances that I've seen means: "Yes. We'll sit you down. We'll listen to you. But we're going to do exactly what we want to do anyway. In the meantime, we've given you a few little ego trips and a pat on the back, and now you're in line." Consultation to me really means nothing when I see how this government acts.

The removing of the code of ethics is certainly a step forward. It's a very positive amendment.

As far as the C part, in terms of the powers that a minister can have over professions that this person, either he or she, probably would never be trained in, I think it's really quite, quite scary. There is no recourse after this decision is made. It's made in some backroom. It's made through the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and we all know that that means the backrooms, sort of a code word for it. I just think that it's very wrong that this much power is being narrowed down without any sort of accountability behind it.

I think it's already been mentioned by my colleague that once this passes, I fear – I truly fear – for the health care system. More so I fear for the people that have to work in the system and feel like they're widgets and end up really, really losing the humanity that creates the health care system in this province.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to address very briefly a couple of the issues that have been raised. First of all, there's no suggestion of amalgamating professions anywhere in here. I mean, professions have their separate professions. There's no authority who will amalgamate professions. There's no intention to amalgamate professions. But what I did say is that there needs to be a synergy between professions, whether it's the bone and joint process, whether it's primary care networks, whatever it is in the health delivery process. We have the new Edmonton clinic being built, which will, from the University of Alberta's perspective, provide a platform to train professionals together. There's a lot more that needs to be done in the health system with respect to health care professionals working together. They'll be in their separate professions, but they have to be compatible. Right now there are areas of incompatibility in a lot of the areas. So that needs to be worked on.

There was a suggestion that professions are doing well, and they're working hard at things, and I would agree with that, some more than others. I would particularly, for example, mention dentistry. Dentistry has practice review teams that go out and review practices on a proactive basis without any hint or suggestion of punishment but by doing so can provide some tips and tools and suggestions and ideas with respect to how a dental practice might be improved and how infection prevention and control procedures and other things can be enhanced. That's a very positive step forward. I wish all professions were doing that type of thing.

So, yes, there are things happening, but there's obviously a need for improvement. I mean, what happened two years ago last spring and was reported last spring with respect to a medical office in Lloydminster should not be the case, should not happen. It should have been reported on a timely basis. Quite frankly, there should have been standards in place, auditable standards in place so that type of thing would not be the practice and couldn't happen.

Quite frankly, it's well and good to say that health professionals

are proud of their training and expertise – and they are. I think all professionals are. I'm a professional. I'm proud of my training and expertise, and I take responsibility for my actions. But it's not the health care professional that the public goes to when something goes wrong. It's not the health care professional that they look to for assurance that the health care system is going to be there for them, that it's going to be strong for them. Absolutely, they're an essential part of the system. But that assurance role is a role that comes back to government, so the tool is necessary from that perspective.

This is not applicable to other professions, and there's a very good reason why it's not applicable to other professions. First of all, the health profession is the one profession that is almost solely paid from the public purse. Not entirely true and certainly not of all health professionals, but a vast majority of the payment in the health system comes from the public purse, and the accountability for that has to come back to the guardians of the public purse, which is the government and the Legislature. That's one piece of it.

The other piece of it, clearly, is that – lost my train of thought on the other piece of it, so I'll have to come back to that.

On the question about consulting – and I raised this – there is a small difference between the consulting that we're talking about here and the consulting that was being asked for with respect to volunteers. Again, it comes down to the fact that in this case what we're consulting on is something which does go to the core of the profession. It's a direct impact or effect on the profession's bylaws and regulations. So I think it's appropriate, while probably not necessary, in that case to embed that concept of regulation here, and that, I think, distinguishes it from the situation with volunteers.

I just wanted to clarify those few areas.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A1?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we're going to have three separate votes. The first will deal with parts A, D, F, and G, the second with parts B and E, and the third with part C.

[Motion on amendments A1A, A1D, A1F, and A1G carried]

[Motion on amendments A1B and A1E carried]

[Motion on amendment A1C carried]

[The clauses of Bill 41 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Carried.

7:10

Bill 48

Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is a bill which I

would consider to be a companion bill to Bill 41. What we just did with respect to the health professions I think is even more necessary with respect to health facilities.

Again, the accountability structure within the provincial health system is absolutely important. It's absolutely important that the minister of health and the ministry of health be able to address this issue of assurance to Albertans, and that issue of assurance is not only with respect to professionals operating in the community or in a health facility but in terms of the operation of the health facilities themselves.

There was, in fact, this spring – well, I believe reporting in July there was a report from the Health Quality Council of Alberta. In that report it indicated that there were ambiguities – there were issues with respect to accountabilities between the voluntary providers and the regional health authorities; there were issues with respect to where final accountability and authority lay – and that those needed to be cleared up.

The health facilities legislation must require that health facilities in the province be operated safely, effectively, and efficiently. To do this requires integration, co-ordination, clear lines of accountability, and the ability to enforce. The health facilities legislation needs to reflect it. We have nine regional health authorities in the province and a number of voluntary health organizations that through service agreements with the regions provide acute and continuing care services in our health system. Some of those providers, of course, provide services to more than one health region through a number of different facilities.

This is not easy; it's complex. It's a complex system. Again, the legislation is not perfect, and in fact the legislation is in many ways outdated. Were I to have the opportunity to do so, I would want to fundamentally revisit all of this legislation over the next year or two with a thorough consultation process, with a thorough review, and provide some real restructuring of it. But that's for the future. Today we need to make sure that in the current legislation we have the tools and the accountabilities that we need to be able to get the job done.

Again, as with Bill 41, although Bill 48 has not been on the table the same length of time – it was just tabled in this fall session – we've had some feedback from parties that are affected. Particularly the voluntary sector are very concerned, quite frankly, about their role in the system. Mr. Chairman, I want to make it perfectly clear again, as I think I did when the bill was introduced in second reading, that this government believes that there's a role for faith-based providers in this province, that they play an important role in the health care delivery system, that voluntary providers play a very important role in this system, and quite frankly under the Nursing Homes Act many for-profit providers play a very important role in the system. So nonregional health authority facilities and organizations play a significant role and will continue to play a significant role. That needs to be said.

This bill is not about removing the voluntary sector and the faith-based sector from health service providers in this province. It is about making sure that a faith-based organization or a voluntary organization or a for-profit organization in the case of nursing homes understands that their contract is with the regional health authority for the services they provide. That contract can include faith-based principles, but their contract is with the regional health authority, and their accountability for the service provided is to the regional health authority, and the regional health authority's accountability is to the ministry and to the minister.

We need to be able to audit those lines of authority and what's happening. We need to have the tools to be able to deal with a breakdown in the system again. When I say a breakdown in the

system, under the current law the minister of health in a circumstance such as happened in East Central needs to go to the regional health authority board and/or the voluntary hospital board and ask them to ask the minister to put in a plan of management. That's not tenable. In a circumstance where the minister is responsible for ensuring public confidence, that's not tenable.

The bill provided for a more direct route, which was to be able to put in place a plan which could either be a complete operation of a facility or operation in a certain area of a facility, but clearly, again, that authority is to be used in the case of a situation where the system is not working; the job that's supposed to be done is not being done; the quality of care to the public cannot be assured. That's when the minister steps in. That's what the tool is for.

The second piece is to the ability to appoint an administrator. Again, I can appoint an administrator. The minister can appoint an administrator now but first of all has to replace a regional health authority board and has to go through that route into the process. Again, that's not tenable. You need to be able to have direct action when it's required to change a situation that's untenable with respect to the public safety. That needs to be there. It's not there. This bill will put it there.

Now the strength of the language in the bill has concerned some of the voluntaries, that said, "We might be requested or required by a regional health authority to do something that's outside what we contracted to do." Well, that's clearly not what's intended here. "We might be required by a plan to do something outside of what we contracted to do or outside what our faith-based principles would allow us to do or what we would want to do under our faith-based principles." That's not what we're attempting to do here.

So I bring forward amendments, Mr. Chairman, to make some of that clear so that faith-based organizations and voluntary organizations delivering to regional health authorities in the province understand that this is not about putting them out of business; this is about ensuring the lines of accountability and authority that are necessary for the role of public assurance and public confidence that I've been speaking about.

I would ask that the amendments be circulated. I presume, Mr. Chair, that you would entitle them amendments A1.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this amendment that is being circulated will be referred to as amendment A1.

Hon. minister, you may proceed.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will just briefly outline what's in it again. It looks like a complicated package of amendments, but it does have a few very simple things. First of all, it builds into the bill a provision for service agreements. It identifies what a service agreement is. In fact, a service agreement essentially is the agreement between a nonregional hospital – in other words, the voluntary or faith-based hospital or for-profit nursing home – and the regional health authority. It indicates that that service agreement may contain principles of faith or ethics that may govern their provision of services. In other words, for the first time it recognizes in the act, as opposed to relying on what I've called the master agreement, that those service providers that are faith based have principles of faith or ethics that are important to them in their participation in the health system, and they want those respected. We have no problem with that.

7:20

It essentially, as I said, inserts service agreements into the bill, and it defines what they are. It provides for them to have principles of faith or ethics included in them, and it assures, Mr. Chair, that the

service agreements are a fundamental accountability component because they provide the clear understanding of what services are being delivered and the roles and responsibilities of the parties under the agreement. In effect, it is how the health authority assures that it's doing its job of delivering the services in its region and has accountability to do that and the ability to satisfy that accountability, whether it's in its own facility or in a facility which is provided by and operated by a nonregional hospital.

Now, concern about how we come to a service agreement and how we make sure that a regional authority might just say: no, we won't enter into that kind of an agreement. Another of the amendments builds in the dispute resolution mechanism, which says that if they can't come to an agreement about the terms or about the interpretations, they can use the dispute resolution mechanism. We'll work out the details of that dispute resolution mechanism with the organizations involved, but ultimately it will undoubtedly come back in the final course – and I hope just in the final course – to the minister.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

Again, building in a consultation mechanism, the concept of a consultation with health authority, regional health authority, and voluntary organizations. Before the authorities that we have in the bill – the authority to put in place a plan, the authority to put in place an administrator or provide a direction – can be used, there needs to be consultation, so it makes it clear that this is not a first step but, rather, a last step. Of course, there is an emergency provision. If there is something that needs to be done right away, the consultation may in fact be after the fact, but there needs to be that consultation mechanism. If we put in place the administrator or plan, the administrator or the plan has to operate within the context of the service agreement and the faith-based principles and ethic as it's built into the service agreement. So those are important parts.

Now, another piece that's important, Mr. Chairman, is that the bill provides for the minister to involve him or herself in bylaws, and it contemplates two types of bylaws for the operation of a hospital facility. One type of bylaw is pretty straightforward; it's the medical bylaws. All health facilities have medical staff bylaws. Those bylaws, quite frankly, vary a great deal across the province, and that's something that we need to work on, so we are working on that. A consultation has started on developing a model set of staff bylaws, which doesn't mean to say that every facility will have the same one, but at least there will be some things which are the same for all medical staff bylaws. There are a number of reasons why that is important in being able to ensure that quality and patient safety are kept up to a certain standard.

There's a concern among faith-based organizations that they may have some things that they want to have in their medical staff bylaws in a faith-based hospital. Our assurance is that those can be added onto any standard bylaws. In other words, as long as patient safety is not compromised, they can have additions to a bylaw, just like, quite frankly, any other hospital can have additions to the bylaw that are not inconsistent with the standard piece that's necessary. So that piece is built in.

The other one, though, that is a bigger change in the bill that we're asking through this amendment is to take out the section that referred to the general bylaws because, as it turns out, there is not a consistent framework of general bylaws across the province now. This is a piece that I believe needs to be worked on. Some voluntary organizations do not make a distinction between their constating bylaws – in other words, the bylaws which set up the organization, which incorporate the organization and set up the structure and their

fundamental rules of who they are – and their operational bylaws with respect to how they operate a facility. I think, quite frankly, they should, but that's not where they are. They are concerned that by this provision in the bill the minister will be able to come in and change their board of directors and change the way they're constated. Well, that's not the intention.

What we're asking through this amendment is to delete the provisions which would have allowed us the authority to deal with the general bylaws, to reinstate the piece that's in the Hospitals Act now. I'm satisfied that in the short term and until this whole review of the Hospitals Act process takes place – and I hope that that will take place over the next two years – we can find other ways to deal with issues that need to be part of the operational bylaws. That's a change to the bill. It's a change where, in fact, we're acquiescing to the requests of faith-based organizations. That was one of their major concerns and one that we could deal with in this way.

I think that deals with most of the changes that are being requested in the amendment which I tabled and have moved. I would ask for the consideration of the House to those amendments and then, of course, to the bill.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to rise and comment on the Committee of the Whole debate opportunity for Bill 48, the Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, and also the series of 13 amendments that have been put on the floor by the minister.

At this time I will notify the chair that I ask that the amendments be severed, so that brings them into separate sections A through M. I have also notified the chair that I am willing to group the amendments for the purposes of voting, grouping together sections A to H, K, L, and M as one vote and voting sections I and J separately. Essentially, I have pulled out the sections on bylaws, particularly around medical staff and the minister giving himself the power to either order or to actually change medical staff bylaws, which I object to.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

What we have here, essentially, Mr. Chairman, is that Bill 48 is the Hansel to Bill 41, Gretel, and together they are skipping through the forest of Vegreville and Lloydminster. They are companion bills, as the minister mentioned. I have the same overriding concern with Bill 48 that I had with Bill 41, which is that the minister did need to address a problem that manifested itself, and that was the confusion in lines of authority, responsibility, and communication between the regional health authority, regional hospitals, and nonregional hospitals which were under contract, and those contracted hospitals are often charitable or voluntary-based hospitals.

We had a situation at St. Joe's hospital in Vegreville because of that situation, because those lines were not clear. The minister was right to try and address that. I think he's wrong to go beyond it. Again, Bill 48 has gone beyond simply addressing and correcting the issue that arose around St. Joe's at Vegreville.

7:30

In particular, when we look at the original act on pages 9 and 10 of the bill, specifically section 15 of the bill, which is amending section 17 in the original act, this is where my largest concern lies.

17.1(1) The Minister may

- (a) request the board of an approved hospital
- (i) to amend the medical staff bylaws enacted under section 17, or

- (ii) to adopt bylaws to replace those bylaws in accordance with the Minister's directions,
 - (b) amend or adopt medical staff bylaws on behalf of a board where the board fails to comply . . . or
 - (c) prescribe model medical staff bylaws.
- (2) Medical staff bylaws amended, adopted or prescribed pursuant to subsection (1) prevail over the bylaws that existed prior to the amendment, adoption or prescription.

Now, that's what's in the act. That, as has already been indicated to me, is offensive, again, to those health professionals that would be affected by that. All of the same concerns that were raised around the autonomy of our health professionals – their self-regulatory powers, standards, training, and all of that – fall into play here. They see it, and I agree, as an imposition on their professional purview. The amendments then try and soften that a bit by saying that they wouldn't amend the staff bylaws if it conflicts with principles of faith or ethics.

In section J – I'll call it the consultation section – we have a clause that the minister wouldn't do this until after he had consulted with everyone. Same problem: the minister shouldn't be interfering in that sort of thing. I hear his argument that, you know, we have varying standards and varying bylaws across the province. Well, back to him I give the argument that we have varying levels of service because of the checkerboarding that has come into place from the regional health authority structure, period. Frankly, what's good for the goose is good for the gander, and if he believes that he has the reason, the impetus to do that on the one level, then he'd better be prepared to do it on the larger level, the macrolevel.

We have been saying for some time in the Liberal opposition that the regional health authority structure has to be examined. We have never gone back and looked at it, tested it, run performance measurements against it to see whether it actually achieved what it was supposed to achieve, which was better delivery of health services to all Albertans. I think it can be well argued – and I won't do it here – that we have not achieved that. There are some real problems in differing standards of service delivery available across the regional health authorities. So that checkerboarding exists. If that's his argument for implementing section 15, which amends section 17 of the original act, you know, get out your big pencil, then, because we've got a lot of work to do on the regional health authority level.

Generally speaking, the amendments are addressing the issues around principles of faith and ethics, that are integral to, as they're described here, those nonregional hospitals, what we would also call faith-based or charitable or voluntary hospitals. This actually flows from when the regional health authority structure was put into place in the early '90s. At the time those hospitals were to be treated identical to everyone else. I gather from people who worked in the department at the time that there was a great lobbying to have this group excluded and treated differently. That, indeed, happened. I would say that the day that that happened, we were on the route to where we are today, with an amending piece of legislation.

I think it's important that we try and bring some consistency and predictability, some clear lines of roles and responsibilities and communication between all of our service providers in the health care field. We have not had that under the system to date.

I recognize that those faith-based hospitals, also called charitable or voluntary, have an argument, that they deliver that health service with something more, with something underpinning it that is very important to them. They fought hard – and I've got the letters to prove it – to say: this is part of how we do things, and you cannot interfere with those principles of faith and ethics that we carry with us in our very operation. Granted, but you still have to conform to everything else that's in place here.

I think the minister has probably tiptoed through the tulips pretty

well with this set of amendments. I do object to what happened around the medical staff bylaw section. As I say, I'm happy to support the amending package that I outlined – A to H, K, L, and M – but I will not be supporting I and J.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to those amendments to Bill 48 in Committee of the Whole. I know I have other colleagues that wish to speak to it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just really want to address, hopefully very succinctly, the issue of the medical staff bylaws because I'm not sure if the hon. member understands fully the nature of this. I don't want to get into a lot of details, but I am going to say that it's not good enough to say that that's in the purview of the professionals. Yes, it should be. Professionals should be making sure that those bylaws are totally appropriate. But we have areas in the province where there are differing bylaws within a region, where health care professionals practise in several settings which have different bylaws, different rules, and that creates the opportunity for error and problem. We have situations where the bylaws are not complete enough. We have areas where bylaws are too restrictive and don't allow other health professionals to come in and practise. In essence, the people who are there control the situation so tightly that others can't come in. In the same circumstance where a community is saying, "We need more health care professionals; we need more doctors to come in," they're not creating the environment to come in. In fact, the bylaws keep people out. Those are circumstances that we have in this province.

Now, they're not at a state yet where I have utilized any of the limited authorities I have under the act to do something or the circuitous routes that I would have to take to deal with it. But those are issues that are being dealt with in this province today, across the province, and quite frankly they're issues that the professions are not stepping up to the plate on and dealing with. I would hope that with the combination of Bill 41 and Bill 48 the professions would step up to the plate in some of those circumstances, but if they don't, the minister needs to be able to do so. There is a duty of assurance, and that duty of assurance means that a hospital that needs to have health care professionals come in and practise cannot have them kept out by the operation of the medical staff bylaws.

The amendment to the bill that I'm asking for about faith-based recognizes that some facilities may have some faith-based components, and they may want to have an acceptance of the corporate culture, if I can call it that, that someone is going into. I don't have any problem with that concept. But I do have a problem if the bylaws are not sufficient enough to ensure that proper practices are required, proper procedures are required. The bylaws have to operate to allow access for health professionals to be able to come in if they're appropriately trained and accredited to practise in the facility.

Again, we've got complex systems. I don't intend to be nor pretend to be a health professional. As minister I and, I hope, any other minister would rely on advice and support and work in collaboration and consultation to develop bylaws. Certainly, the process for developing a model medical staff bylaw, which would be a template for the province, will be done. I believe the consultation, the initial parts of it, have already started with the AMA and others to deal with that. But we cannot have medical staff bylaws in this province which do not allow appropriately accredited professionals to practise, which do not ensure a consistent standard of operation so that health care professionals going from one to the other know what the rules are, and which do not require medical standards to be complied with.

7:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'm just going to have a quick rebuttal here. First of all, I would have said that the minister should use his considerable powers of persuasion to work this rather than putting it in legislation. If the stick is needed, then the stick should be time limited.

What's happened here is that there's a whole new section of powers that will be granted to the minister with regard to that, that exist in perpetuity. There's no review clause in these amendments now. Essentially the minister, without accountability to the rest of us in any way, shape, or form, has granted himself new powers, and I think that's inappropriate. If he has to do it to get through something where there's not co-operation or where there is great unevenness, fine. I understand what he has said. But I would argue that if he's going to need to use that stick, there should be a stale-date on the stick, where he has to put it down at a certain point, and that is not in this legislation.

I understand what he's trying to say about needing to make it happen because of an unevenness across the province and, of course, because we need to be able to move our health professionals around right now, but I don't think he should enjoy those powers in perpetuity.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on Bill 48 in the Committee of the Whole debate. I'll be fairly brief. The bill is obviously, in my view, a response to the crisis at St. Joseph's in Vegreville last year or so, and in a sense it's also a response to the recommendations that came out of the Health Quality Council related to that particular risk to public safety and public health. Much of the bill, I think, is an effective response, a response of the type that certainly has our support.

I have a bit of a concern about the section that deals with the minister's powers to overrule the existing bylaws, medical staff bylaws, and bring in bylaws that he considers will limit the risk to patient safety or quality of patient care. In amendment I the minister does make an amendment to section 1(15) by clearly stating that with a nonregional hospital "the Minister shall not amend, adopt or prescribe medical staff bylaws that conflict with the principles of faith or ethics as identified in the hospital's service agreement." Then in amendment J he returns to a reference to model general bylaws and does in fact say, "The Minister may, after consulting in accordance with the regulations, prescribe model general bylaws."

He gives, I think, examples that express his concern about the fact that some medical staff or practitioners may create bylaws in a particular hospital or a setting that will prevent other appropriately accredited medical professionals from being able to come in and provide services in that hospital. I know that the right for doctors to practise in a hospital is strictly controlled, and sometimes the bylaws may be abused or perceived to be abused to keep certain other accredited professionals out.

I would like the minister to perhaps give us any example in the province where that might have been the case that has prompted him to introduce this fairly heavy-handed provision in the bill. I think it's best to rely on the co-operation and good judgment of medical professionals in the development of the bylaws that will govern their conduct in the hospitals. But if there is a need, I think I'm willing to grant the minister the right to intervene and bring in those bylaws provided there is some evidence that the minister can bring before

the House that will justify his proceeding with the proposed section of the bill, however, amended by J, to be able to have the power to make those bylaws and have them available for the guidance of boards of approved hospitals. So the concern is with the approved hospitals and with the regional hospitals, which are under the direct authority of the regional health authorities.

That's the only concern that I have, Mr. Chairman. I would like it if the minister has time to address that concern by giving me some examples of where he thinks that these provisions will be helpful and, because the provisions weren't there in the past, that the problems have arisen precisely because those bylaws were the source of those problems.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on the amendments?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendments A1A through A1H, A1K, A1L, and A1M carried]

[Motion on amendments A1I and A1J carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, on the bill as amended. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak in favour of Bill 48, Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. This bill I'm sure is in response to the Vegreville hospital crisis some time ago. The bill amends the Hospitals Act and Nursing Homes Act and regional health authorities to clarify the lines of accountability between hospitals, health regions, and the minister. This bill also is the government's response to the confusion in accountability that resulted in the failure to close the central sterilization room when initially ordered.

In July 2007 the Health Quality Council of Alberta released their review of the infection prevention and control practices of the East Central health region. In January 2007 an audit of St. Joe's hospital found problems with inadequate equipment sterilization and increased cases of MRSA, an antibiotic-resistant infection capable of causing boils and pneumonia. In February, Mr. Chairman, the East Central health region directed St. Joe's to immediately shut down the sterilization room. A follow-up inspection in March revealed that the directive issued in February had not been followed, and the sterilization room had not been closed.

7:50

Mr. Bonko: Putting people at risk.

Mr. Agnihotri: How many people?

Mr. Bonko: Putting several thousand at risk.

Mr. Agnihotri: Putting several thousand people at risk. There's no doubt at all.

The East Central health region ordered St. Joe's to stop accepting new patients and posted a sign in the hospital to notify the patients. The government publicly announced the closure of the hospital and initiated a review by the Health Quality Council and established a board of management to oversee the management of the hospital.

Ensuring that Albertans are safe requires clearly defined roles and

responsibilities; however, the minister has taken this opportunity to grant himself too much unchecked authority. Mr. Chairman, we want Albertans and especially Vegreville residents to have the reassurance they need to feel safe in their community. Alberta's health system clearly doesn't have the appropriate checks and balances for identifying and monitoring problems. The province had an effective, centralized monitoring and enforcement standard branch, but it was dismantled by this government in 1990.

I have a couple of questions, Mr. Chairman. What has the minister done to address the other Health Quality Council recommendations? These are: to define and create a culture of safety and empower all staff, managers, administrators, board members, physicians, and improve patient-related care; to develop processes and procedures that utilize a checklist and feedback mechanisms to communicate and implement new and revised policies, procedures, and directives and ensure compliance to same; and to develop provincial standards for MRSA screening and surveillance so all RHAs have consistent practices.

In August 2007 the minister released a response to the Health Quality Council report that identified five areas for improvement. The first one was clarifying accountability roles and responsibility in infection prevention and control. The second one was to implement and monitor provincial standards for infection prevention and control.

Mr. Chairman, another point I want to mention is that the patients who received treatment between April 2003 and March 2007 have been contacted by the East Central health region and tested for hepatitis B, HIV, and hepatitis C.

I would like to mention briefly a summary of the recommendation which was made on July 25 of this year.

Legislation and agreements governing regional health authorities and Voluntary facilities, coupled with poor working relationships, resulted in unclear accountabilities and responsibilities and presented patient safety hazards. The root cause of both the Central Sterilization Room (CSR) closure and the lack of containment of MRSA was found in legislation and agreements that governed operations of East Central Health (ECH) Region and St. Joseph's General Hospital (SJGH). Voluntary (often referred to as faith-based) facilities such as [St. Joe's and RHAs] had both been given "final authority" for operation of health facilities within the region by the Master Agreement [made in 1994], which covered Voluntary facilities, and the Regional Health Authorities Act (1994), which covered the regional health authorities respectively. Lack of agreement on which entity had working and governing authority led to lack of accountabilities and responsibilities for infection prevention and control, quality improvement, patient safety, and risk management.

A recommendation, of course, was that Alberta Health must identify one entity to have final authority for all matters relating to the operation of the health care facilities in a regional health authority.

Mr. Chairman, we want Albertans and especially Vegreville area residents to have the reassurance they need to feel safe in their own community and strengthen the health system's capacity for infection prevention and control, and we want to make sure of the availability of infection prevention and control education and training as well as the enhanced provincial co-ordination of infection prevention and control activities.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 48 clarifies roles and responsibilities for infection prevention and control, but what has the minister done to address the other four priority areas? We should establish, monitor, and enforce province-wide standards for infection prevention and control. Some amendments on the table here clarify some concerns, especially the provision of service agreement or regional health authority. I like that at least the minister has addressed some of the

issues in this bill as initially introduced, and I think it will make the bill a little better than what we had before.

I definitely will support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 48 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 38

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We're talking about Bill 38, Government Organization Amendment Act. I'm not sure why we just didn't come out and call it TILMA. This is basically trying to hide, I think, from the public exactly what it is. We had concerns with it when it was first proposed or introduced back in April, and labour groups as well as other groups from other provinces waded in on the issue. I believe that, again, if it was put out exactly as what it was supposed to be, the TILMA bill, we would have had a lot more demonstrations such as we had out in front of the steps with regard to Bill 46. We would perhaps have the Alberta Federation of Labour and their members out here. We could have probably had CUPE groups out here as well as AUPE and other organizations to stand out and have their say on it, but instead we kind of hide it here under a Government Organization Amendment Act, which I think is quite sad.

8:00

We don't support TILMA. We can't support a bill that ties the province closely to TILMA and, particularly, makes the province liable for TILMA-based rulings. We're concerned about that in itself. We didn't have it as an out-front, outright debate within the Legislature. It was supposed to come in on April 1, 2007, and it's going to be fully implemented in April 2009.

There are some, you know, if it could be said, positives to it, but overall I don't think that it's actually necessary. We're trying to make sure that the trade between the two provinces is, in fact, as seamless as possible with regard to certain things like commercial vehicles going back and forth, requiring perhaps to have only one registration between provinces. Sure. That makes sense. I'm not sure why we just couldn't put that in to begin with instead of having this tie to other organizations and groups.

The investment part was just raised the other day with regard to an insurance company that, in fact, had practices that had it barred from operating and being able to conduct business within B.C., but it's still allowed to operate here within Alberta. I'm not sure whether TILMA would in fact have an opportunity to play out for this business organization because they're being restricted from having business and trade in B.C. because of fines laid against them. That's up to that organization and to that business, but this would be a loophole, obviously, for them.

The other one is if it's okay for a particular business to operate in British Columbia and they try and set up shop here within any municipality, a town, and the town has an objection to it. Under TILMA they're able to sue for every infraction that they feel is being held against them, up to \$5 million. I think that's a little bit ridiculous. Who's going to be on the hook for that? Could it be the municipality, or is it going to be the government with regard to that particular piece?

We've also in the past had concerns with regard to labour and the standards. Right now we all recognize that the province, not just this province but other provinces, is very much shortchanged with regard to labour. That's why I can see labour mobility being a great component of this. But the concerns that we have with regard to the actual trades being recognized from one province to another, some of the concerns with regard to the Alberta Federation of Labour as well as CUPE, are that if you have one standard in one province having less of a requirement and then Alberta perhaps having four years – we go to a nurse or teacher or a carpenter. Maybe they have lesser standards for a journeyman carpenter. Perhaps they can do it in three years there, but coming from Alberta, where we do recognize and have the ability to have higher standards, in my opinion, in the trades three years would be recognized the same as the four years.

There's where some of the concern is. Are we dumbing down? Are we asking for lesser trades skills qualifications? As well, then, are we going to have, in fact, concerns with building codes? I'm not sure, but that was one of the concerns that we had. If it's less of a qualification there, why should it be recognized here? A teacher is a teacher, they're saying, regardless of the amount of time put in, and it should be recognized on both sides of the border. The same with a doctor or a physician or a nurse or an LPN, licensed practical nurse, or even an aide of some sort.

Those are some of the concerns that we've raised, and we're raising them again because, Mr. Chairman, these are some of the concerns that are going to continue to dog us even after this bill is passed. Then once it's passed, what are we going to do? Say "oops" and then try and put some amendments in because it was a half-hearted bill that was put in, like Bill 46, introduced and then later on 26, 28, 30 amendments because it wasn't thought out fully in the first place? I'm just issuing that caution here to the Assembly in advance.

Some of the exceptions we're talking about in the policy that are withheld from TILMA: for example, aboriginal policy, water services and investment, resource revenue generation with regard to royalties, social policies, labour codes – you know, again, I've said those – and minimum wages because it isn't going to transfer between provinces. At one point I think it probably will. If we're going to be closely aligned and tied, if there's a province that has labour within the same company, are they going to be able to sue for the same standard of minimum wage as the other province? I don't know, but right now it says that it's under the exemption.

Management and disposal of hazardous waste materials: again, that's completely exempt as well. While Alberta does hold, in fact, one of the hazardous waste material facilities, Swan Hills, are they going to be able to truck their waste to our province? Right now it says that it's under the exemption.

Some of the concerns are that it's not clear whether health services or public school boards are actually exempt from TILMA. It says that they are currently listed as being so. The intention of TILMA is that by April 2009, when it's fully implemented, the following groups would have been brought under the agreement: Crown corporations, government-owned commercial enterprises, the municipalities – that's where the concern is being raised with regard

to municipalities because with each and every infraction they're liable for a \$5 million fee – school boards and publicly funded academic, health, and social services entities. The discrepancies exist within the government's own literature promoting the agreement. Thus, in the brochure we see health and social services listed as both exempt on the same page, but we're concerned that they're on the page. So we need some clarification.

Article 3. There are to be no measures in place as obstacles to trade, investment, and labour mobility between the parties. We just, obviously, need some more clarification, or at least bring it into the full debate besides under cover, under the listing of the Government Organization Act.

I'm going to stop right there. Perhaps the sponsoring member would be able to, I guess, relay some of the concerns that we've issued, or some of the other members would be able to get up as well and speak to the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak in committee to Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007, which is really all about enabling, embedding TILMA within legislation of the province of Alberta. TILMA is an interesting little piece of work. I have to say that in broad general terms I've always been a supporter of free trade, whether that's between Canada and other countries or whether that's internally. I think that the more barriers to trade that you can eliminate, the stronger the economy will be. In my opinion, we've certainly seen that play out to the benefit of this province with NAFTA, with the Canada/U.S. free trade agreement. So in broad general terms I certainly wouldn't have a problem with any trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement involving this province and any other.

But in specific terms the problem here is the process. While I might be able to support an Alberta/British Columbia free trade agreement, I can't support the process by which this one was arrived at. It was developed, we feel, in a fundamentally undemocratic manner. We believe that the government of Alberta has refused to have a proper debate on it. We don't believe that debate on Bill 38 is the place to have a proper debate, a full and complete debate on the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement because this really is not about that so much as it is about incorporating TILMA into government legislation.

Here's the thing about TILMA, Mr. Chairman. It sort of took effect on April 1 of this year, but it doesn't take full effect until April 1, 2009, when it's fully operational. I'm always amazed – I know it's the beginning of our fiscal year, he said parenthetically – at how many bad pieces of legislation seem to come into effect on April Fool's Day. Anyway, back to the matter at hand.

8:10

We have in TILMA some basic contradictions, and my colleague from Edmonton- Decore alluded to some of these. There are areas of public policy withheld from TILMA: for instance, procurement of health and social services. Then there are areas or groups that are supposed to have been brought under the agreement by the time it's fully operational in April of 2009, and those include Crown corporations, government-owned commercial enterprises, municipalities, municipal organizations, school boards, and publicly funded academic, health, and social service entities. You know, you're kind of talking out of both sides of your mouth at once here. Health and social services are listed as exempt and at the same time forthcoming, so which is it? We don't really know. Contracts and other

issues in those areas cannot be challenged, as far as we can tell, under TILMA right now, but at the same time these groups and these organizations are supposed to use the TILMA framework. It's hardly clear, Mr. Chairman.

Given that there have been no challenges under TILMA so far and given the confusion around this and given that there has not been the opportunity for full debate on the floor of the Legislative Assembly of this agreement before it was signed, sealed, and at least partially delivered, you kind of get the feeling that on April 1, 2009, school boards and health regions and various other organizations and groups in the province of Alberta are going to wake up and discover that they are part of TILMA, embedded in TILMA, covered by TILMA – or not. Who knows? Who knows how it's going to turn out on April 1, 2009?

But there is very real reason for concern here no matter how much of a free trader you are, no matter how much of a basic belief you have in the ability of provincial economies to operate and co-operate interprovincially and interdependently and collaboratively, no matter how much you may support the basic idea that you want to make it easier for Alberta business to do business in other provinces in the country, and of course there's quid pro quo around that. You know, it has to be a vice versa situation. This agreement wraps – or certainly has the ability, the potential, and, I would argue, the intention of doing so – sovereign governance into what is essentially an economic free trade agreement, what is essentially a business agreement. You know, if you're a corporation, TILMA is great legislation, a great agreement, but if you're people – a person, a citizen, an ordinary Joe or Jane Average – maybe this is not so good because maybe it replaces your citizenship with consumership. It's a little light on the citizen side of things and pretty heavy on the consumer side of things.

Mr. Chairman, I just have a feeling that that's the wrong way to go. I don't think that sovereign governments, be they provincial, municipal, federal, should operate at the whim and wish of unaccountable corporations who have by the very nature of their design no duty to anyone but their shareholders and only one duty to their shareholders, and that is to maximize shareholder value come hell or high water. You want to maximize shareholder value, and you need the water that people need to drink to run your plant? Take the water. You want to maximize shareholder value, and citizens' rights are in way? Take away their rights.

I think our right as citizens to be represented by democratically elected governments and their responsibility to us to operate in the public interest, to put on the striped shirt of the referee and make sure that the playing field is level and make sure that the interests of ordinary people, who by themselves and in small groups are not and cannot ever hope to be as powerful as major corporations, is paramount. Anything that we do, anything that we allow to be done to put that responsibility that governments have and the rights that citizens have in jeopardy is a very, very foolhardy, foolish direction to take.

I don't care, Mr. Chairman, how much money there is in it. There comes a point at which for the rest of us who are not corporations, who are accountable to somebody else other than shareholders, there are more important things in life than maximizing shareholder value. Ensuring the quality of our air, our water, our land for our children and our grandchildren is far more important than the quarterly results for the XYZ corporation. I say that as somebody who may very well be a shareholder in the XYZ corporation, either directly or through some mutual fund that I have in my RSP.

Interestingly enough, because this generation is saving for its own retirement, as opposed to our parents' generation, who largely were able to take advantage of corporate pension plans to an extent that

the baby boom generation and younger generations have not been able to do, we are kind of individually and collectively, many of us, in conflict of interest positions, often several times a week, because it's in our best interests as shareholders for those corporations to maximize shareholder values so that we have enough money to live on in retirement. But we must proceed with caution, making sure that while we plan for our retirement, we're not sacrificing the future of the generations to follow after us.

Look around, Mr. Chairman. I think you see plenty of evidence that, in fact, we are doing exactly that. You can't pick up a newspaper these days without reading about the damage that has been done to the planet through global warming. Just about everybody except for a certain talk show host I know in Calgary, who referred to it as a religion the other day, acknowledges that climate change is very real. The most recent development there really has been the growing realization that not only do we have to try and mitigate against climate change, but we now have to start adapting to climate change because the genie is already out of the bottle.

You have, I guess, a choice to make when the genie is out of the bottle. You can either say, "Well, we'll try and get the genie back into the bottle, or try and make sure that if there are more genies in the bottle, we'll keep them in," or you can say, "Well, one got out, so we might as well let them all out." I choose not to pursue the second alternative. I choose not to throw up my hands and go, "Well, we've already done so much damage that we might as well cash in and make all the money we can while we can make it, while we've got time to make it now."

I don't think that I see anything in this government's approach to the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement with British Columbia that suggests to me that they're prepared to make the same choice. I think, in fact, they're prepared to adopt a gold rush mentality, take the money and run, and forsake their children, our children, our grandchildren. I think that's really rather sad, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

8:20

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak in Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 38, Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007. This bill is about TILMA, the so-called trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement that was negotiated between British Columbia and Alberta I think earlier this last year, on April 28, 2006, to be exact. This bill is to operationalize that agreement in terms of the legislation in this province that will affect that operationalization, so it amends that piece of legislation to operationalize it.

Mr. Chairman, I must note with deep regret that this trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement between the two provinces is deemed very important by this government, claimed to be very important by this government, but Albertans never had a chance to debate this agreement. It was negotiated behind closed doors and presented as a fait accompli for Albertans. No invitation for any potentially affected individual or organization or institution to give any input. So it's a highly antidemocratic act, in my view, for this government to have entered into an agreement which it says has far-reaching implications, yet no one was permitted – not even this Legislature was given the opportunity to debate the substance of TILMA.

TILMA, Mr. Chairman, is antidemocratic, as I mentioned. It's also very much anti working people, antilabour. It's modelled on the provisions of NAFTA and WTO, and the provisions of those two

acts have far-reaching implications and ramifications for the abilities of Houses like this to be able to exercise their sovereign right to enact laws and legislation which cannot be overruled by action taken by private interests. This bill strengthens immensely the hands of private interests, big corporations, and business associations at the expense of the rights of citizens of this province and by implication, of course, the citizens of B.C. as well. TILMA affects those rights.

If there is any doubt as to what the real intent of and the objective of TILMA was with respect to whose interest it serves, whether it serves public interest, whether it serves private interest, here's a small quote from Mr. Gary Mar, who was the cabinet minister responsible for negotiating TILMA on behalf of the government of Alberta. He said, "This resolution is everything that Canadian business asked for." So it's an agreement special ordered by Canadian businesses and Alberta businesses and struck into an agreement by this government in a very obliging fashion.

This doesn't really represent public interest. It doesn't strengthen public interest. It doesn't strengthen the ability of a House like this to affect matters of trade, labour mobility as such. In fact, it exposes the powers of this Legislature to arbitrary court action by powerful private interests to have any actions taken by this Legislature or by this government based on existing legislation to be overturned and not only overturned but having to pay damages to the so-called agreed parties; that is, the corporations who may take the government of this province to the courts on the pretext that their business interests have been damaged by one or other policy or decision taken by this government.

This is a custom-made bill, a bill designed to connect the provisions of the TILMA into legislation to strengthen immensely the hands of business and corporate interests, in other words private interests, and has little to do with enhancing protections for working Albertans and labour organizations. In that sense, this bill on TILMA is very consistent, as a matter of fact, with what this House has been debating all night, Bill 46. It really is to deprive Alberta citizens, through their representatives, to be able to have and exercise the power to fashion their own destiny and to determine what's in their best interest. These matters are being now transferred by way of the enactment that's before us to the courts and obliges all of us to recognize and respect the provisions of TILMA, an agreement over which Albertans absolutely had no say.

As I said, it's very consistent with the provisions of bills such as Bill 46. It's also very consistent with the privatization and deregulation agenda that the government has been pursuing for more than 15 years now and doing so in a very dogged manner regardless of the impact of deregulation policies and privatization policies. The privatization of utilities in this province is a very good example of how that agenda has really damaged enormously the interests of Albertans and has benefited only one group of Albertans, and that group is, of course, represented by the big corporate and business interests. So it's not surprising that this government would proceed with Bill 38 to entrench further limitations on the ability of Albertans to exercise their sovereign rights as citizens. This really is a very serious attack on the democratic rights of Albertans from all walks of life and is an attempt, of course, to give primacy to private interests at the cost of public interest and the common good.

TILMA itself is a legal document that gives special rights, therefore, to individuals and corporations to sue the provincial government, and that's what this act will enable these individuals and private corporations to be able to do. It's not an innocuous document. The question is why the TILMA agreement was not allowed to be debated by the public at large and by this House. Why was there no public consultation on this? The fears that Albertans – the labour organizations, the working people – are expressing are

appropriate fears. The reduction of standards – labour standards, safety standards, environmental standards – and the compromising of social values that Albertans have is a real possibility. It's more than a possibility; it's highly likely to be a consequence if this bill is passed and TILMA is legitimized in the form of a piece of legislation passed by this House. Albertans have already seen this government's actions related to privatization and deregulation. Bill 46, that we just finished debating, was the latest instalment of those actions, and this bill is the next step to put icing on that private-interest cake, as it were. This dismantles the ability of Albertans to make critical decisions that affect them on the ground.

8:30

So, Mr. Chairman, it's a bill that certainly does not have the support of the NDP caucus. We are totally opposed to the bill, as we are to TILMA. The presumption is that TILMA will remove interprovincial trade barriers and that the impact of the removal of the so-called trade barriers would be so significant that the trade-off between democratic rights of Albertans and the rights of private business is what the price is. But the question is: who will pay the price? The price is not going to be paid by businesses, by corporations. The price is to be paid by the citizens of Alberta. And for what?

The so-called interprovincial trade barriers are in fact nothing other than regulatory differences between provinces. All of the economic evidence indicates that these differences have small, very small, nonmeasurable effects on interprovincial trade flows. Knowing that there is no real, solid, hard evidence that these so-called interprovincial trade barriers have a real measurable effect on interprovincial trade flows, it's totally unjustified for this bill to be passed by this House, which, in effect, will have very little impact on increasing the trade flows, on facilitating more trade across provincial barriers, but it will have a tremendous negative impact on the democratic rights of Albertans and the powers of this House.

Mr. Chairman, for these reasons the NDP caucus expresses strong opposition to Bill 38. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by Edmonton-Manning, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Hon. Leader of the Opposition, did you want to speak?

Dr. Taft: I'll get there. There's lots of time. Thanks.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and debate Bill 38, Government Organization Amendment Act. This bill is all about TILMA. Definitely this bill will enable the government to pay out any penalties that may be awarded against the province due to a claim under TILMA, the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement.

The impact of this bill. This act recognizes TILMA as an agreement to which Alberta is liable and in which the province participates. The mechanisms by which that agreement operates are an adjudication panel and fines. Bill 38, in particular, makes TILMA fines, or we call it awards, enforceable in the Alberta court system. The awards to which this bill makes the government liable can be up to \$5 million per single infraction. This is a huge amount of money.

We do not support TILMA, Mr. Chairman. It was developed in a fundamentally undemocratic manner. I agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that this bill does not strengthen public strength and doesn't help the average Albertan. It helps big corporations, big business people at the cost of public interests. We didn't spend much time on, you know, the public debate. Time was not given. Not many stakeholders have been consulted, which we

should have. Finally, if we pass this legislation, the citizens of Alberta will definitely pay the price in the future. As I said, we do not support this bill, Mr. Chairman. As we do not support TILMA, we cannot support a bill that ties the province to TILMA, in particular making the province liable for TILMA-based rulings.

On April 28, 2006, the Premiers of Alberta and B.C. signed TILMA. It sets out liberalized trade, investment, and labour laws between the two provinces. It is set to come into force on April 1, 2007, with a two-year implementation period before it is fully operational in April 2009. TILMA follows from the agreement on internal trade, which we call AIT, which was signed between the Canadian provinces in June '94. Article 1800 of the AIT states that the provinces can negotiate further agreements with one another as long as they further the cause of liberalization of trade.

There are three main areas to this agreement, Mr. Chairman. On the trade side TILMA harmonizes the provinces' commercial vehicle registration, ending the need for dual registration. Electricity regulations are to be compatible with the generally accepted and applicable North American standard or standards of the western interconnection region. The parties shall also work to enhance interjurisdictional trade in energy. Government procurement is to be open and nondiscriminatory.

Now I move to investment, especially the business registration and the requirements of one province to be acceptable to the other and vice versa. A business is not required to maintain an office or be resident in the other province to conduct business there. The government entities not implicitly expressed in the agreement shall not provide business subsidies that distort investment decisions.

8:40

On the labour mobility side, Mr. Chairman, the workers who are recognized as qualified in one province will be qualified in both. As I said, there are definitely a few good things in this bill, but if we had debated it properly, and if we had given the chance to some other stakeholders for more discussion on this, we could have made this bill much better. Workers will be required to register with the regulatory authorities for their occupation in the province they enter but can do so without a significant amount of additional examination and training. If an internationally trained professional has been licensed in one province, this licence will also be recognized in the other.

There are some exceptions, Mr. Chairman, some areas of public policy withheld from TILMA: for example, aboriginal policies; water services and investment; resource revenue generation; royalty structures; social policy, including labour codes, employment insurance, workers' compensation, and minimum wages; procurement of health and social services; management and disposal of hazardous waste material.

Drawn out implementation. It's not clear whether health services or public school boards are actually exempt from TILMA, while they are currently listed as being so. The intention of TILMA is that by April 2009 the following groups will have been brought under the agreement: for example, Crown corporations; government-owned commercial enterprises; municipalities; municipal organizations; school boards; and publicly funded academic, health, and social services entities. These discrepancies exist in the government's own literature promoting the agreement, Mr. Chairman. Thus on one brochure we see health and social services listed as both exempt and forthcoming on the same page. Right now it appears that contracts, et cetera, made in these areas cannot be challenged under TILMA, but at the same time these groups and organizations must use the TILMA framework.

Important parts of this bill, TILMA. If we move on to article 3,

Mr. Chairman, no measure is to be in place that forms obstacles to trade, investment, and labour mobility between the parties.

Article 6, legitimate objectives: leaves an opening to retain powers and restrictions to TILMA, but it is weak, very weak; have to prove that no less restrictive alternative was possible.

Article 12, business subsidies and investment distortion: what is allowed and what isn't is unclear and potentially wide reaching.

Article 25: private individuals can challenge government under TILMA.

Article 30: \$5 million awards for successful challenges.

Part V, exemptions: a closed list. Unless things are in here, then there is no way you can claim an exemption from TILMA. Normally agreements leave some leeway for private companies, Mr. Chairman, to sue government bodies for distorting investment through regulation or policy.

Gil McGowan, president of the AFL, is quoted as saying that TILMA is a wolf in sheep's clothing, that it's a way for companies to control elected decision-makers. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives is not explicitly against but openly against NAFTA and skeptical of the need for TILMA.

The Ontario Federation of Labour received a review of TILMA from the law firm Sack Goldblatt Mitchell LLP of Toronto, stating that

TILMA represents a far reaching and corrosive constraint on the future capacity of the governments of British Columbia and Alberta to exercise the policy, legislative, and programmatic authority that is essential to their governance mandates.

And advise that Ontario or any other province should not adopt TILMA-like obligations without the fullest and informed public discussion and debate.

CUPE is against this bill, TILMA. As they say, this bill will provide multiple grounds for challenging government's right to regulate based on a myth, Mr. Chairman, and that there are substantial interprovincial trade barriers. Trade agreements can have great benefits to businesses. It can be a benefit to consumers and to governments. Clearly, where unnecessary barriers to creating investment and labour mobility exist, we should work to remove them. TILMA is potentially incredibly influential on future government behaviour. We, therefore, definitely need detailed discussion about it in the Legislature. If more and more policy areas come under its scope, as seems to be the intention, then this need becomes ever more important.

We need to know more about exactly which areas of the policy are to be included under TILMA. The agreement is not clear on this matter as to what government policy is going to have to change. This is the question. If none, then why have this agreement? If some, then what? Albertans need to know. All we are asking for is a debate here. Why are we not getting that?

I'm still not convinced to support this bill, Mr. Chairman. I will listen to some other speakers before I make up my mind to support or oppose this bill. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In speaking to Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007, I must say that the world is small and getting smaller, and we must recognize that. Canada is one of the greatest per capita trading nations in the world, and Alberta is the greatest per capita trading province in our country. If we don't recognize that we must break down trade barriers with our friends, like B.C. or Saskatchewan, then we're mistaken in looking at the future that will help all workers, all businesses, and all Albertans.

8:50

The need to move forward on this and to not erect fences and to not erect barriers and to not keep them in place is very important. The economy that we're seeing grow in Alberta for the future is affected by things like the terminal in Prince Rupert and how that will help grow good jobs in Alberta and how it will grow wealth in Alberta. The need to decrease the barriers in terms of transportation, in terms of doing business across provinces, in doing many trade and labour flows is just absolutely crucial.

Sure, there are some reservations on the part of some labour groups. Others quietly have said that maybe it's an opportunity; maybe it's an opportunity for their members to move more freely across borders, to move more freely across restrictions that they have seen in the past to work, as companies and contractors have had difficulties at times in moving across those borders.

We must, however, be careful to ensure that those conduits that have encouraged interprovincial mobility of labour are kept open and increased and encouraged. The red seal program, for example, in apprenticeship, that has brought about the standardization of certain apprenticeship capabilities, is something that we must be very careful to maintain and enhance. The agreements that have been brought forward by some of the trades, for example, ensuring that there is mobility across the provinces must be recognized.

On the other hand, maybe we should be looking at very closely harmonizing many of the ways that we improve the capabilities and the enhancements of some of our changing and progressing and increasingly more complex occupations. I've had discussions, for example, with the pipefitters in British Columbia about what they're dealing with and how they're looking forward to TILMA as a potential for greater development of their trade and to develop their trade across Canada through training that will help them in a way that can be cross-jurisdictional.

I think there's some potential for ways to work together on that in terms of the TILMA arrangement to ensure that these things become beneficial not only in Alberta but across British Columbia and Canada. I think it's very important to be outward looking, to ensure that we recognize that this is not a small world, Mr. Chair, and to begin to break down any barriers that we can in order to increase the future prosperity and the best interests of all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking to Bill 38, TILMA, I was very pleased to hear from the chair that there was no limit placed on the time for debating this bill, very unlike the circumstance that we experienced for several hours throughout last night and this morning with regard to closure.

Bill 38, TILMA, is just another example of this government's autocratic agenda. This government failed to do its homework on TILMA; it failed to do its homework on this legislative session. What has happened is the same as a student who has left his homework to the last night, and that's exactly what this government has done, whether it's on Bill 38 or in general. It didn't do its homework, it left it till the last minute, and now it's cramming for the exam. That exam comes in the form of a spring election, and I would suggest that many members of this government, like Bill 38, will be failed by Albertans.

At this point, when I look across the way at some of my bleary-eyed colleagues, I can't help but think that we should be sitting in the Public Accounts meeting right now talking about the Ministry of Energy. Very conveniently because of this government's lack of democratic process, it has been put off. [interjections] Yes, yes. And isn't that convenient?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor.

You may proceed.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for confirming that fact.

Very convenient. As I stand here talking about the right of democracy, I am very well aware that the opportunity in Public Accounts has temporarily passed. But if the ministry or the government thinks that the grilling that the Minister of Energy is going to temporarily avoid will not take place and the truth will not come out, the questions with regard to billions of lost royalties, the questions why the advice of members of his own ministry, to whom he referred as minions, was not followed, nor the advice of the royalty panel, nor the advice of the Auditor General: those questions will be asked, if not today, very soon.

This government believes that it can not only control the agenda within this House with bills such as Bill 38, TILMA; it believes it can control Alberta's agendas. That is what we experience when hearings are limited, when the opportunity for Albertans to intervene, whether in a paid fashion or not – and through the early morning hours groups such as Sierra and the Green Party were criticized, very much like when our former Premier Ralph Klein tried to sideline legitimate groups like Friends of Medicare, groups that sang on the steps, the Raging Grannies because they didn't fit into this government's view of a participatory, inclusive democracy.

So here we have this Bill 38. It surprised me that the previous speaker embraced it. What a distance he has gone from being a former shadow minister for labour to an individual who is willing to sacrifice the rights of members of labour organizations in both B.C. and Alberta under the TILMA to have the lowest common denominator in terms of workers' contracts and workers' rights. With TILMA the advances and the improvements are not at the level of the people. They're at the level of the employer, not at the level of the worker. We already had previously established good relations.

The Alberta government in its wisdom invested in the Prince Rupert container ports. I don't know where the Grande Prairie terminals have fit into that plan. I asked those questions last year. Hopefully, those container ports just outside of Grande Prairie are fully operational because they were to be a part of the process of getting grain and goods more quickly to Prince Rupert. That kind of transportation fluidity is of value, but TILMA goes way beyond that in terms of the liabilities that it provides for Albertans. If a B.C. company feels that they're not getting the same rights in Alberta as they have in British Columbia, then they have the right almost in the same way as our trade relations with the States of under debt basically launching legal action against us.

I don't believe that this government has any idea to what extent they have put Albertans in a libelous circumstance. Right now there is a government in B.C. that hides under the sheep's clothing of Liberalism. We're all aware that it's a Social Credit government, that it decided that to get rid of the bad taste that Social Credit had left in that province, it would simply create a new name and call itself the B.C. Liberals. Well, the name may have changed, but the policies of control have not.

9:00

What we need in this province and in this House is an opportunity to debate democratically, to give the people an opportunity to have their voices heard. This hasn't happened with Bill 38, TILMA. Again, the government in its patriarchal fashion has decided that this is best for Albertans. I would be interested to know – and I would hope that somebody in government could provide me with examples

– the type of consultation with individuals that took place prior to Bill 38 being drafted. Were there public forums that took place? There were certainly no public forums on Bill 46. So where was the input from the everyday person, whether they were the people living in the rural areas or those living in municipalities? Their voices have not been heard on Bill 38. They will not be heard on last year's Bill 40, that took away the opportunity of legislative discussions and put into regulations that the minister can determine what the tuition rates will be.

I wonder how many other ministerial behind-closed-door decisions will be made with regard to the trade agreement, the TILMA organization that this government is raising up the flag on and saluting. What we have in Alberta is the closest thing to a lack of democracy: the application of totalitarian principles that can be seen across this province.

It is very interesting that this particular bill does not have time limits. It is a significant bill but nowhere near the significance of more important bills, such as 46 and 41, that reach into individuals' abilities to intervene and have their voices heard. I have no idea what the government's agenda is, and I don't believe that the people of Alberta have any idea of the government's agenda, other than to keep ramming it down people's throats without consultation, without intervention until they plead surrender.

This has been the case with P3 schools. The public has become so desperate because of this government's freeze on school construction since the mid-90s that they're willing to swallow the idea of a P3, which puts them, not only them but their children, for the next 30 years on the private, for profit at public expense hook.

Again, the test will come in the spring, and it is my belief that this government will fail the test that Albertans have put for them.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise on this particular debate because we haven't had much chance before now to debate TILMA. [interjection] I see I'm getting heckled already; I only got started.

The fact is that we haven't had much opportunity to discuss TILMA on the floor of the Legislature. I think the process is backwards, in fact. Here we are discussing legislation that enables penalties for violations of TILMA when we never had a debate on the floor of Legislature about getting into TILMA in the first place, which is a debate that the people of British Columbia had in their Legislature, and it went on at some considerable length. I feel like we're debating where the horse is when the barn doors are already open and the horse is long gone. I guess in the case of this government, better late than never.

As some of my colleagues have said, in principle free trade or fair trade, certainly, between provinces is something we support. I think the Member for Edmonton-Manning even said that Canada is a trading nation, and Alberta is a trading province, and we flourish from that. We flourish when we are able to sell our products – our petroleum, our oil, our beef, our grain, our forestry products, our manufactured goods – in other provinces and countries and we buy back from them. So in principle open trade is a good thing, and we all understand that. It's a matter, though, of how that is implemented, particularly within Canada.

One of the first things that I think comes to mind with TILMA, once you get past the kind of rhetoric about it, is whether it's really necessary at all and whether we aren't actually using a \$5 million tool to solve a \$5 problem and in the process bringing in more legislation, more regulations, not less, more meddling, not less, creating more headaches, not reducing them. Really, unless this

government can bring other evidence forward – and I'd love to hear it. This is committee. We've got some government members here who might be able to address issues like that. Aside from very, very minor irritants to interprovincial trade, what's the issue here? Why do we need an agreement of this scale? Why do we need things like \$5 million penalties? Why do we need new legislation when, as far as I'm aware, the issues we're addressing are quite minor?

I'm looking, for example, at a list from the website of the agreement on internal trade. It documents over a period of 10 years only 23 complaints about barriers to international trade. These cover a range of topics, but one by one they can be addressed in their own right. They cover things like paramedic licensing, hair stylist licensing – and that wasn't even between Alberta and B.C.; that was with Nova Scotia – practical nurse licensing involving Ontario. In fact, when I go through this list, there's only a tiny handful of complaints involving B.C. or Alberta that affect interprovincial trade. There was one in 10 years on paramedic licensing. There was one on opticians' registration criteria that involved British Columbia. There was one on municipal fee differentials that involved Alberta and one on residence requirements involving B.C. So in 10 years the agreement on internal trade, if I'm reading the website correctly, identified a grand total of four complaints about barriers to interprovincial trade between B.C. and Alberta.

Now, I have to ask myself: why can't we just deal with those one at a time? Why do we need a whole big, highfalutin interprovincial agreement and a push for bringing in other provinces when we could solve these with pretty minor tweaks of standards and regulations? Question 1.

Coming at this from a free trade and efficiency provision . . . [interjection] If the Deputy Government House Leader can answer my questions, I'm here for genuine debate. Do you want to rise? We're in committee. I'm happy to participate. [interjection]

Ms Blakeman: That's a no.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Anyway, my point being that we may well be using much too big a tool to solve this problem. Unless there's other evidence – I did hear the only example I recall coming from the government side . . . [interjection] Sorry?

9:10

Mr. Hancock: I'd be happy to.

Dr. Taft: You'd be happy to . . .

Ms Blakeman: Deal with it.

Dr. Taft: Okay. All right. I look forward to some debate here. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has been waxing eloquent about the internal trade agreement. I have a little bit of knowledge of the internal trade agreement. From 1997 to '99 I was minister of intergovernmental and aboriginal affairs and was just coming in as chair of the Internal Trade Secretariat when I moved to the Justice portfolio, but I had attended a number of conferences dealing with the internal trade agreement. In fact, the labour mobility chapter was about 10 years old at that time and still wasn't done. No progress had been made. In fact, the internal trade agreement had a structure, it had a

secretariat, and it had a lot of hope and promise, but the problem was that it didn't have an awful lot of commitment.

I attended a Western Premiers' Conference just out of Campbell River, actually. B.C. was hosting it that year, and Premier Glen Clark from British Columbia was in the chair. Let me tell you what a difference is made by changing government there. The fact of the matter is that the Clark government in British Columbia was very, very protectionist, and notwithstanding the fact that they had signed on to the free trade agreement, they did not adhere to the principles of the free trade agreement and had no intention of promoting free trade even bilaterally with Alberta much less across the country.

The problem with the internal trade agreement and the reason why that tool doesn't work for what we're accomplishing with TILMA is that you cannot get all the partners to really get to the table and understand the value of doing the agreement, the value of putting the chapters together, the value of achieving the labour mobility issues and the other issues under the free trade agreement. A good concept, in fact, a pretty good agreement. It's just that the chapters weren't developed, the principles weren't utilized, and it hasn't been effective. It's small wonder that nobody has made complaint under it. It hasn't made the progress, and it hasn't achieved the promise. Part of that is because the partners haven't come to the table.

Now, with TILMA the partners have come to the table and have an opportunity to start and show – in fact, even at its very preliminary stages the promise of it is demonstrated to the extent that other provinces really are looking at it and saying: can we be a part of this? Not to probably build a new internal trade agreement to replace the old one, but with Alberta's leadership and British Columbia's leadership we might actually be able to build a trade structure in this province where it's easier to trade across this country between provinces and easier to have labour mobility across this country between provinces, easier for Canadians to do business in Canada and to live in Canada, to work in Canada, to raise their children in Canada than it is to trade north-south or off the continent.

Right now that's not the case in many cases. That's the reason why it's important to start with TILMA and to build on the TILMA partnership: to make it more possible, more practical for Alberta people and Alberta businesses to do business and to live with other Canadians in harmony and in concert across the country, to be able to trade freely, to be able to move freely, to be able to live and work freely across the country, Alberta and B.C. providing leadership in that through TILMA, the type of leadership that was never extant in the internal trade agreement.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. I appreciate that very much. I'd like, though, when I'm looking at legislation like this to really understand in concrete terms the problems that the legislation is trying to address. The Government House Leader – and I genuinely appreciate having some real discussion here – outlines some of the challenges or some of the considerations. But, for example, when I hear concerns about labour mobility and then I look at the evidence – we hear day after day in this Assembly about the tens of thousands of Canadians who are moving to Alberta. In fact, most people agree there's been a real resolving of labour mobility issues within Canada in the last 10 years, and the old impediments to labour mobility in Canada have largely gone. I've read any number of economists and even right-wing commentators who have expressed surprise at how mobile the Canadian workforce has become. That's played out most dramatically, I would say, in Fort McMurray, where something like 40 per cent of the population is from Newfoundland or from Atlantic

Canada. So I see within Canada a lot of labour mobility already occurring.

[Mr. Hayden in the chair]

The only example that I recall hearing from the government in terms of justifying TILMA was I think about truck weigh scales on one side of the B.C./Alberta border and on the other side: why do we need weigh scales on each side of the border when we could have co-ordinated weigh scales? Well, that's great. Let's co-ordinate our weigh scales. But I'm looking for more concrete examples and more significant examples than just that to justify bringing in something as far-reaching as TILMA.

Again, if the Government House Leader or somebody else there could bring forward a discussion paper saying that these are some specific examples of major impediments, and the only way we can solve these is by bringing in a bunch more laws and a bunch more penalties and all kinds of other red tape. This feels to me like creating red tape rather than cutting red tape. I don't know if the . . . [interjection] I appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, I'll provide another example for the hon. member. I see others want to get into this, so I'll be very brief.

I may be wrong on this because I haven't had a chance to look in the last day or two, but I'll give you an example. My son has moved to Abbotsford, British Columbia. He married a young lady there, and they're making their home there now. He used to teach. In fact, he taught for seven years in La Crête in northern Alberta. [interjection] Yes, and a wonderful place it is.

In order to get a teaching certificate in British Columbia after having taught for seven years in Alberta – and I think we heard a ministerial statement earlier today from the Minister of Education about the quality of students in Alberta. I think I heard the minister indicate that a good chunk of the results are due to the quality of teaching in Alberta. So this well-qualified teacher, who has taught for seven years, who has good results, who has contributed to those wonderful results in Alberta, moves to B.C. Guess what? He's teaching on a temporary certificate, and some time in the next five years he's going to have to take a lab science course in order to get his teaching certificate in British Columbia because – I don't know – he missed a lab science course, I guess. One-half a credit of a lab science course short of a teaching certificate in British Columbia yet perfectly able to teach in Alberta.

There is, in fact, a very well-qualified person in the education system – I won't describe him more than that because I don't have any authority to do that – who's moved from a fairly senior position in a school district in Alberta to a very senior position in a school district in B.C. He can't get a teaching certificate in B.C. So there are issues with respect to labour mobility.

The hon. member mentioned, you know, that there's a great deal of labour mobility. I'm sure the minister of advanced education might be able to add to the story with respect to the accreditation of apprentices and those sorts of issues. This is important in so many ways in terms of the leadership we can provide to the rest of the country on how to live together in our own country with a common set of rules where appropriate.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What a wonderful job you're doing, sir.

I just wanted to add from my perspective not only as the Minister

of Advanced Education and Technology but also from my past business dealings, where I was involved heavily in trade not only between Alberta and other provinces and jurisdictions in the United States, but probably 80 per cent of that business was into Central and South America and Southeast Asia.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I can tell you, Mr. Chairman, that labour mobility is extremely important on a number of different fronts. We just heard from the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness about an example with regard to teaching certificates. There are other examples within the red seal program, there are other examples within compulsory trades, there are examples within the noncompulsory trades in terms of ensuring that our industries have the appropriate skill sets and skill levels, so a welder on this side of the border can do the same type of welding on that side of the border. It isn't that you can just tackle each one of these things individually. You have to have a basis of an agreement from which to work in terms of a trade relationship and a mobility relationship.

9:20

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition mentioned one example which he's heard. I would suggest that there are dozens if not hundreds of examples that could be heard should one seek. As I mentioned, welders are a good example. Teaching certificates are a good example. Weights and measures are good examples. Automotive inspections are a good example. As you go down the list, there is a raft of very good examples where the basis of a trade agreement or the basis of an agreement on issues that relate to trade is where we start from to get to a common ground so that we can have freer movement of not only professionals but also of goods and services.

Mr. Chairman, when I was in a previous portfolio, in agriculture, I had the pleasure of working on the World Trade Organization file and had numerous discussions with international ambassadors as it relates to Canada's view on the World Trade Organization. I was somewhat chagrined when I would talk to them about the fact that we needed to reach an agreement in the World Trade Organization because without one we were actually hindering the very countries that we were trying to help, so they could move into the same kind of prosperity that western nations and the have nations, if you will, have. Several of them looked at me square in the eye and said: well, you're talking about opening free borders, yet you can't trade openly and freely within your own country.

We need to, as Alberta has done, take leadership in this kind of portfolio, Mr. Chairman. We need to take leadership to show not only the rest of the other provinces in Canada but also the nation and the world, frankly, that open trade does provide better prosperity for the people that are involved in those jurisdictions. There's a ton of different examples which I have seen in my travels in Central America where the closing of the border actually did more harm to the people they were trying to help than opening up the trade side of it.

Mr. Chairman, there are numerous other examples that I could cite, but in the interests of time and knowing that we've been here for some time and knowing that there are a number of others that want to get on board, I just want to put on the table for the hon. member across that there are numerous examples, and a trade relationship is how you build up from that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate both those sets of comments. It's good to get some light on these issues. I fully recognize the challenges around international trade and trade barriers. I understand and support Canada's role in addressing international trade barriers. But we're really focused on one boundary here, and that's between Alberta and B.C. It's a start. It's more than a start. I mean, the world really is a trading world now, and Canada sets the bar on that, by and large.

I am interested in building on the example of teachers given by the House leader. Teachers in B.C. require five years of training, and teachers in Alberta require four years of training. This is actually a very illustrative example because what we have under TILMA is a process in which the higher standard is being lowered. It's not the lower standard being raised in education; it's the higher standard being lowered. There are provisions under way right now in British Columbia through the British Columbia government and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation to lower the standards.

Again, I'm engaged in genuine debate here, folks, so I appreciate this. There's widespread concern with TILMA that this is an elevator to the basement, that in every case where there's a discrepancy in standards between one province and the other, it's the higher standard that will be brought down to the lower standard, not the lower standard that might be raised. Whether that's on labour, whether that's on environmental standards, whether that's on workers' safety standards, the general thrust of TILMA is toward the lower level. Maybe sometimes that's appropriate. Maybe it's fine to reduce unnecessarily high standards, but in other cases it may be exactly the opposite of what's needed. Maybe there are times on environmental issues, on workers' safety issues, on other issues where, in fact, we want standards raised.

Mr. Hancock: Under the appropriate standing order, Mr. Chairman, would the hon. member permit a question?

The Deputy Chair: Well, we are at committee stage, and there's no need for that. I can recognize you at this stage.

Mr. Hancock: Well, I appreciate he's ceding the floor.

I wonder if the hon. member knows or understands that the University of Alberta, one of the finest institutions in this country, is in his riding, in the riding he represents, and if he does, does he recognize that an education degree from the University of Alberta is one of the more respected education degrees across this country and that it's a four-year degree? In other words, it's not necessary to look and say: oh, five years in British Columbia. Not to be in any way derogatory at all, but they didn't have their students in the top two in the world.

Is the higher standard necessary for all purposes? That's what one should look to and say: what's the appropriate credential for the job being done, and how can we balance appropriately to the appropriate credential for the job being done? I think the evidence is there. We have teachers who can be certified with four-year degrees from one of the finest institutions in I would say North America, but I perhaps might be parochial about the University of Alberta, which I am very proud of, in my city. I'm wondering if the hon. member doesn't recognize that.

Mr. Horner: I was just going to answer the question.

Dr. Taft: I'll allow the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to answer my question. I'll be interested to see what my answer is.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister of advanced education.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Further to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, he has hit a very succinct point in this regard, which is that in Campus Alberta we have a number of different degrees that are matched up against degrees across this country. I would ask the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition if he believes that the three-year medical degree offered at the University of Calgary or at McGill would be comparable to the four-year medical degree offered at the University of British Columbia. The medical community does agree that that is the case, yet one is four years and one is three years.

You have a number of different types of programming offered in various institutions across the country, and one of the bases of an agreement like this is that it allows us to open up those discussions with those postsecondaries to provide for a number of things, Mr. Chairman: access to the universities, transferability amongst our institutions so that we can ensure that our students can go to various institutions within our two jurisdictions very similarly to how they can transfer around in our system in Alberta, which is a jewel. It truly is, when you have the accreditation and transferability that we have. B.C. at this point in time is trying to get to where we are.

Essentially, in answer to the hon. member's question, it isn't a question of dumbing down. It's not a question of this one is worth less than that one, especially when you take the very narrow view of, well, that one is five years to this one's four years, so it must be worth less. Entirely contraire, Mr. Chairman. It really is the basis of the programming within the program, and getting some level of continuity and co-ordination amongst those institutions will actually benefit students, our taxpayers, and society as a whole.

Dr. Taft: I appreciate everybody answering my question for me. It's good to have a response. Those are valid comments.

I guess one of my questions around TILMA and around standardization of these interprovincial agreements is: are we going to lose, for example, the diversity that's represented? The minister of advanced education raised the difference between the U of C medical program and the U of A medical program. They from the beginning were designed with very different focuses: the U of A, a much more traditional medical program, much more lab and class based; the U of C, a much more hands-on – no pun intended – medical program, patient-based learning, completely different approach. My question – and, again, it's a legitimate question – to the minister of advanced education: is there a risk under TILMA that as single standards are imposed, we lose the diversity that is represented in the differing U of C medical program and U of A medical program? Is there not, as I'm seeing in all kinds of testimony, a pressure to have a single standard, which will cost us some of that rich diversity that we have?

9:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's amazing when a debate breaks out. It's unfortunate, but I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 38 for the moment.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee rise

and report bills 31, 41, 47, 48, 49, 50, and 52 and report progress on Bill 38.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: bills 50, 47, 49, and 52. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: bills 31, 41, and 48. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 38. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 57
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2)
(continued)

The Acting Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 57 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading
(continued)

Bill 1
Lobbyists Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're looking very well for staying up most of the night.

Mr. Speaker, before I bring some comments with respect to third reading of Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, I'd like to just pay special thanks to, of course, our security, our pages, our people in *Hansard*, and all those that have worked with us during this extended day. It still bemuses me how we can control the clock, you know, and not call it a day until we vote on it. Anyway, I just want to thank them all because they've really put in a huge effort.

It is a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. As the House is aware, this is a bill that was chosen to be a flagship piece of legislation for my government, following through on my commitment to openness and transparency.

I'd like to begin my remarks by congratulating the all-party committee which worked on this legislation when this Chamber decided to lift the bill to be reviewed over the summer. This is an unprecedented move in Alberta on two fronts: first, the introduction of all-party committees, new to our province, certainly not new to the country of Canada but new to Alberta. It gives the opportunity for every MLA to contribute positively to the governing of our province. Mr. Speaker, this is really true democracy.

Secondly, it's the first time in which Albertans have had the

opportunity to have direct input into a bill before the Legislature. Because of these initiatives we have strengthened democracy, made the government more open, transparent, and responsive to the people we represent. The all-party committee did good work over the summer and put forward several amendments which would make the bill more workable for not-for-profit organizations. Our caucus went further and introduced an amendment which protects bodies working for the public good from needing to register. So, really, it reflects my thoughts for creating this legislation. My intent behind the creation of the bill is that Albertans should know not only who is lobbying the government but also who is getting paid by government.

The second part is a step which is new, really, anywhere in Canada. This has not been in legislation anywhere in this country. When the full registry is up and running, Albertans will be able to compare who is lobbying government with anybody who is being paid by government and ensure that no ethical lines are being crossed and that no conflicts of interest arise.

Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation is indicative of the way my government serves the people of Alberta in an open, responsive manner which reflects the values of the people of Alberta and gives them the accountable government they deserve.

I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank all members for supporting this legislation. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Premier for his comments. I think we all concur in our gratitude to those support staff who have suffered through the night with us. We did it voluntarily; they did it out of duty. There's a line I remember from *Hill Street Blues*. It went like this. It's a policeman talking to another policeman. He said: "I slept and dreamt that life was beauty. I woke and found that life was duty." The duty of the staff was fulfilled. Thank you all very much.

We have long called for a lobbyist registry in the Official Opposition. It's been long overdue. I think we can give credit to the Premier for bringing forward this legislation. It is a step in the right direction. It should have been brought in 15 years ago or so when, for example, the federal government implemented its lobbyist registry, which I think continues to set some of the standards for that sort of thing in Canada.

I also think it's important to note the work of the policy field committee on this legislation. They worked very hard. I know that the members of that put in a lot of hours. They paradoxically were lobbied heavily, if I can put it that way, for changes to the Lobbyists Act. There were a lot of concerns, and some of these are very complicated issues that were raised by people in the nonprofit sector, by groups like chambers of commerce, various other groups. There are some tricky judgment calls here to sort out what kind of lobbyist is what and who is a professional lobbyist. What is a lobbyist just stepping forward for a charity? What is actually a charity?

9:40

For example, I think we'd all agree that a homeless shelter would qualify as a charity and that somebody speaking to government or opposition officials as representing a homeless shelter is in a different category than CAPP, to pick an example, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, which I don't think anybody is going to think of as a charity even though they are a nonprofit group. So figuring out the difference between those and capturing that in legislation was a real challenge for the committee. Time will tell

whether they got that sorted out, and we'll see how this all gets implemented.

I think that the general sense I have is that we have through this legislation brought lobbying in Alberta into the 20th century. What the news is now: it's the 21st century. Instead of leading the issue of lobbyist registries and, in general, instead of leading democratic reform and renewal, we have a government that's catching up to what's normal in many, many other jurisdictions. I will say once again that this is a step in the right direction. We took the work of the committee seriously. We have brought a spirit of goodwill to the all-party policy field committees, and in this example I think they really rose to the challenge. I'm glad.

As I understand it – and I'm going from memory now – I think this legislation will be reviewed within two years so that if there are glaring mistakes in it or weaknesses, it won't be too long before we all have the pleasure of reviewing the legislation and hopefully correcting some of those problems.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take my seat and see if anybody else will comment on this legislation. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to also make some comments about Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. Certainly, this is a step in the right direction. I don't think there's any doubt about that. The Leader of the Opposition talked about the policy field committee and their work in terms of bringing this bill forward, and rightfully congratulations should go to them.

But I want to go back further, to a committee that I served on chaired by the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. Frankly, that was I think the courageous step right there because there was a great deal of cynicism about a lobbyist registry, certainly from the previous Premier – his comments were well known – and the fact that government members I think were skeptical in that select committee to begin with. Certainly, I think the chairman would agree with me. But after spending some time looking at it and reviewing it and to the credit of the committee, they came forward with the lobbyist registry. I dare say that if that committee hadn't done that, hadn't brought that forward, and with the majority of government members, it's unlikely that we'd be debating Bill 1 today. So I think also some credit should go to the select committee, certainly to the chairman and to other members of that committee.

I would say that, you know, we will support Bill 1, but I say to the Premier that there are a couple of I think major loopholes that obviously we're not going to solve here. Hopefully, they'll look at it in a couple of years. One that we've talked about before is fairly easy to get around: if a cabinet minister wants to talk to somebody that has influence – and that's what this bill is all about – they just make a phone call, and if that phone call says that the cabinet minister or the Premier or anybody else instigated that conversation or instigated that meeting, then they don't have to register for that. I think that's a serious loophole because it does allow people to get away from this if there's a close connection with the government and some of the lobbyists, and we know that has been the case.

That's one disappointment there, Mr. Speaker. I would hope the government would see in their review in two years that they would attempt to do something about that because I think that is a serious loophole, as I said.

The other one that bothers me is one amendment that was brought in, Mr. Speaker, and that has to do with spouses. We did pass the amendment here in this Legislature exempting spouses from the registry. Now, I don't quite understand the rationale for that,

frankly, because if we look at what we have to do – and the Ethics Commissioner will be responsible. We have to indicate to him the people close to us, you know, in terms of blood relation, certainly our spouse, and we have to report here in the Legislature.

That seems to me to be another major loophole that we brought in after the fact: that a way around it, then, is to have your spouse go talk to them. They're not lobbyists. I would have hoped that there would be serious second thought about that, just following the same sort of rationale as we do, you know, in terms of our reporting to the Ethics Commissioner. I mean, if it makes sense here, it should make sense for the lobbyists registry. I think that most people would see that, Mr. Speaker, as another serious loophole. I was surprised when this came about and surprised that it was accepted because I think it just watered down, again, the purpose of Bill 1, the lobbyists registry.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I think that there are two serious loopholes, that I've talked about. I would hope that the government, if they're serious about, you know, openness and transparency – and I take it they are – when they bring this particular bill, Bill 1, would be serious about it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I alluded to the fact about something that came in after the fact that certainly wasn't in the original Bill 1, the idea of spouses and blood relatives not being included in this. I'd like to bring forward an amendment to at least have serious second thought about this. I've got this amendment. I'll give a moment to pass it around, and then I'll speak to it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

You may proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've mentioned the second loophole that I think we brought forward here in the Legislature, and I'm asking for serious second thought about this. We don't have a senate here – mind you, that wouldn't be serious second thought anyhow – but I'd like to move that the motion for third reading of Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following: “Bill 1, Lobbyists Act, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering amendments to section 6.”

Mr. Speaker, again, this is the one that we brought forward that allows spouses and other blood relatives to not be included in the act. I would just say that in consistency with the Ethics Commissioner, if it's important for us to do that in our report – we've seen the need there – why would there not be the same need, when we're actually dealing with the lobbyist registry, for people that have, frankly, a lot more influence than MLAs do, certainly opposition MLAs, in dealing with the government, Mr. Speaker?

9:50

I'd ask this. This wouldn't have to take time if the government saw that this was a loophole and that we should reconsider. This, hopefully, could be done with not a great deal of extra time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, since we had an amendment introduced at committee stage, which we had referred to as amendment A1, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1R because it stands for reconsideration. So it's A1R.

Would anyone like to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Speaking to amendment A1R, just looking at A1R as I wrote it down, it could be read as “air.” What the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is saying is that this lobbyist registry, Bill 1, requires a little more airing. That's a-i-r as opposed to e-r-r-i-n-g.

I know the Premier was very proud of this bill. I'm very proud that the Premier and members of the government saw fit to put it through the committee stage because at the committee stage there was an opportunity to go back to the people. Those most directly affected, the not-for-profit groups, the charitable groups, were actually being hindered initially to a greater extent than before the lobbyist registry came forward.

Now, there has been a shadow hanging over this government with regard to the connections it has through appointments that we refer to as patronage and family connections. If we go back in time, we remember that horrible incident with regard to our former Premier and his wife and the Multi-Corp shares.

If we want to avoid the potential of a lobbyist circumstance being tainted by a family member's connections, then reviewing this particular section 6, as has been requested, would make ultimate sense because when we finish with this lobbyist registry bill, the one that has been so long in coming to Alberta, we want it to be the best piece of legislation possible. We want to demonstrate that while it took us a long time to arrive here, as the leader from Edmonton-Riverview noted, we're now up to the 20th century, and what this amendment would do would potentially bring us into the 21st century.

The policy field committees have proven to be of great value, and referring this through the A1R back to them to fine-tune it – to, after a fashion, ice the cake – makes ultimate sense to me. In those discussions on section 6 that A1R refers to, I would like to have that committee consider such things as the fact that the government isn't obligated to reveal whose business it is seeking, which is kind of a reverse lobbying process. But when so many multibillion-dollar contracts and multimillion-dollar overruns are taking place, as has been the case with the announcement on the 18 P3 schools that doubled in price, then we need to know who it is the government is lobbying, basically, or offering major multimillion-dollar contracts to because these contracts through the P3 format – private, for profit at public expense – have a 30-year term to them, their mortgage. When the government comes courting, as I've referred to it, and there's no reporting, we need to know that there was a public-sector comparator taken into account, that Albertans, taxpayers, who are on the hook for these projects that build up our debt for another 30 years, have been taken into account.

The Committee of the Whole has done a very good job. The policy field committees have done, as the member mentioned, the Senate's role of a sober second thought. Therefore, fine-tuning this bill, the flagship bill of the government, to make it a truly effective piece of legislation, the most effective in the nation, has merit, and I speak in support of amendment A1R.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Amendment A1R to Bill 1. Certainly, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is correct in requesting that the Lobbyists Act as we know it be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole. When we look at that and we look at section 6 as it currently reads, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's request is certainly reasonable. When we look at the contracting prohibitions in section 6, I think it is prudent.

Again, I would urge all hon. members to please consider this request and please consider it for the following reasons. Whenever we are looking at a consultant lobbyist or an organization lobbyist and we look at all the rules that are to be created for these individuals or these parties and we look, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has pointed out, at the past history of – I don't know if we would call it an industry – the lobbyist industry in Alberta, would it be just seen here as a way of doing government, the wrong way of doing government? When we look at, for instance, some of the past cases, we would only have to look at the Auditor General's report, whether it's this year or last year or the year before, to see that there are still serious issues to be dealt with that have not been dealt with so far in this bill.

When we consider, you know, the Premier, the Premier is very proud of this bill. I was going through *Hansard* to have a look at the comments that the Premier has made in debate. I was pleased to see that there have been comments made on the public record because we have to remember, Mr. Speaker, that it's taken years of, you could call it, lobbying or pressuring by opposition members, by members of the public to finally get this tired, old Conservative government to provide this. Now, it's certainly a step in the direction towards being more open and more accountable. But this is a government that's so far behind in that category that it's going to take a lot more than this bill.

10:00

Will this bill restore public confidence in the legislative process? It'll start. It's a good start. We can't think for one moment that this government is making a commitment to being open and transparent. If we have a look at today's proceedings and see the closure motions that were invoked, certainly not open and not transparent. The Premier in an earnest sort of way is making an effort, but when we look at the history and we look at the Auditor General's report and we see the consultants that have been hired, the consultants that have provided advice – and there are all these different categories of advice: written advice, oral advice, also a category that seems to be speech writing, whatever that is. These are very expensive speeches. Is all this, Mr. Chairman, going to be dealt with in section 6 at this time? I'm not confident that these issues will. That's why we would have to give serious consideration to amendment A1R.

Now, the lobbyist registry is a very good idea, but it has to be a registry that will work. The loopholes that the hon. member talked about, in my opinion, are still there, and this is one way to deal with these loopholes.

We're going to talk for a minute – and I know the hon. members across the way are tired of hearing this – about the \$500-an-hour guy that has been hired to make a transition for Bill 46. Would that individual fit into this section? Would that individual be considered – and we have no idea on this contract other than that it's for \$500 an hour. In an eight-hour day that's \$4,000. It's a lot of money. Would that person or that individual that's been hired by the Department of Energy be affected or should they be affected by section 6? Would it be a contract for providing paid advice? Yes, it would.

Now, when we look at that and we look at other examples, it's a good reason why we must support this amendment. The lobbying will go on and on and on. Whether they're professional lobbyists or whether they're retired from another job and all of a sudden they get a real sweet deal, section 6 should deal with that.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members of this Assembly to give careful consideration to this recommittal amendment and support it and move this bill back to committee. This amendment is essentially Alberta's Senate. We're going to have a second look at things.

Mr. Martin: A sober one.

Mr. MacDonald: Sober. You bet. Yes. Sleep deprived maybe, sober certainly.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all hon. members to have a good look at section 6 and to please consider the request from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make some brief comments on this amendment brought forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. You know, while the general framework, the intention of Bill 1, we certainly applaud in the widest possible way, it was just when we started to look at the details of how this unfolded over the last few weeks, I guess, that we had constructed this particular amendment. As well, I had the opportunity to reflect in general on what the composition of a lobbyist act should look like and how they are constructed in different places and how effective they are as well.

I think that when you're building a rule such as this, you certainly, number one, don't want to deter individuals from interacting with the government because, of course, it's a function of democracy, and you certainly don't want to build walls that would deter individuals or groups from interacting with the government in the formation of laws and bills and regulation. Also, I don't think that you want to construct any bill, particularly to do with this particular topic, that is too complicated or has too many exceptions built into it because, of course, when you start to construct a lot of exceptions to something like a lobbyist act, you essentially are I think sending a message that there's an essential weakness in trying to protect the transparency of these conversations and interactions and influences between the government and individuals and groups. Simplicity, I believe, is the key to a successful lobbyist act, potentially, and making the rules the same for as many people as possible.

I listened quite long and with intent to the issues that were brought up by nonprofits, and I did express my reservations about making that exclusion as part of this act. But then I certainly did recognize the essential difference in resources that nonprofits have and the important functions that they do have as well in our society, particularly how nonprofits have had to step into the fray of delivering a lot of essential services that otherwise the government should be meant to be delivering over the past 15 years or so. I did recognize the strength of the argument to exclude nonprofits although I still have my reservations about it. So we do have that provision of two years to deal with that.

However, on this other part, dealing with relatives and spouses, I just found the argument in regard to not excluding that population quite compelling because, of course, we have lots of examples that would demonstrate that this can go on and does go on. We don't have to look any further than to the neighbours to the south, in the United States, where lobbying is a huge industry and goes on in the most sophisticated and multilayered manner. Certainly, lobbyist acts in various states in the union of the United States do include this provision that we are bringing forward here with the intention of this amendment. I believe that it's worth while to include it with our own lobbyist flagship legislation here today.

It's no mystery to the public that things are decided sometimes with influential businesspeople and/or lobbyists behind closed doors or outside of public scrutiny. The public recognizes this, and I think it serves quite a negative purpose in disenfranchising a lot of people from the political process and contributes to a sense of cynicism that is not positive and useful for democracy.

10:10

This particular amendment that we've brought forward here, as I said, passes the litmus test that I put forward in that a good lobbyist act must be simple in its composition, it must be as all-encompassing as possible, and it has to demonstrate strength. The more you demonstrate strength with this kind of bill, the more you're sending out that message that the government is serious about showing transparency in regard to lobbying, and then you probably have a greater sense of compliance as well. How all laws unfold, Mr. Speaker, is that the laws are only as good as people are willing to comply. It's not a question of catching people who break the law, but it's a question of internalizing the law into the habits of the population. By having a strong, all-encompassing lobbyist act, which includes spouses and relatives, you're reinforcing that strong message that we're being as inclusive as possible and that you must internalize the fact that now lobbying must be registered, that it must be out in the open, and that will help to make this act be a success.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on amendment A1R to Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. First of all, I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I think the hon. member is trying to stop the loopholes in this bill. There is no doubt that this is a good bill, and everybody sitting in this hall is trying to make this good bill better for the coming generations, for a healthy democracy not only in Alberta but all over the country. He is trying to help this provincial government be open, transparent, accountable. My question is: is this government really open, transparent, and accountable, as they always claim?

I remember that last spring they rammed through Bill 20. I remember Bill 20, where they stopped us, you know, giving proceedings for 15 years and five years for the ministerial notes. I don't think that if this government had a record like this, they have any right to claim that they are honest, that they are transparent or accountable. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has a point, has a good concern. He's trying his best to give his suggestion to make this bill a better one.

Mr. Speaker, the lobbying poses two challenges to democracy: openness and transparency. That's what we are talking about in Bill 1, Lobbyists Act. The representative governments are accountable to their citizens, and this accountability requires transparency.

Citizens have to be able to evaluate the performance of representatives and governments, particularly whether the government is defending or pursuing the public interest. Particularly, private interest may be at odds with the public interest, so citizens have the right to know who their government is hearing from and on what issues. Absent this knowledge, Mr. Speaker, citizens may be left unaware of when their interests might be impacted by a decision. Disclosure and transparency are about levelling the playing field. Petitioning government for change is legitimate, but it must be public – must be public. It's very important.

Equal access and opportunity, of course. Certain groups and certain individuals may have special access or influence over the government. There's no simple legislative suggestion to this problem. Disclosure at least allows all citizens to try to compete with the more powerful voices that may be lobbying this government.

Some contend that lobbyists should have to disclose how much they are spending on a lobbying campaign, as is common in the U.S.A., and that limit on lobbying spending should apply here. This principle is very similar in spirit to campaign finance and spending

limits, that are designed to ensure the influence of the ordinary citizen is not overwhelmed by the more powerful interest.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, parliamentarians need to be attentive to this disparity to ensure that they are hearing from and reflecting the full array of voices that may be affected by policy decisions. This requires that efforts are made to enhance the ability of all Albertans to have an effective voice, like MLAs' constituency work, empowering opposition MLAs, all-party legislative and policy committees that are fully open to the public, petitioning, tabling, et cetera.

I think the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's amendment is another attempt to strengthen this bill. Definitely, he is trying to make sure that we could make this bill better than what we have right now. There's no doubt this is a good bill, and we all support it, but we want to make sure. We could make this bill even better.

When I saw this bill, Mr. Speaker, the first thing that came to my mind was why this government brought this bill now. This bill should have been brought 15 years ago. If we look at other provinces, other countries – I can give you examples – even Third World countries have lobbyist registries. Why did nobody think that we needed a bill something like this? Maybe, I think, because this government has been in power for the last, say, so many years, and they take everything for granted. So they thought, you know, nobody is going to challenge them. Maybe not political pressure but maybe the pressure from some media people changed their mind. But I think it's a good step forward, and we appreciate that. Even though this bill was overdue, and even though they brought it after 15 years, that's fine. That's welcome.

10:20

We all know that lobbying is not a bad thing. It's an important part of democracy. In democracy people should have the right to meet and discuss their issues or concerns with their elected representatives. We get input from them and voice their concerns. Lobbying definitely is legitimate, but it should be and must be public.

The definition of a lobbyist is not clear in some clauses. It's not very clear in this bill.

I have a couple of questions from this bill, Mr. Speaker. What if the lobbyist failed to disclose intentionally? Another question is: will the public office holder tell us that they were lobbied? What was the subject? What decision was made? There's still a loophole. I think we should keep debating this bill until we make this legislation a good example for the rest of Canada.

I have a question about public lobbyists like nonprofit associations. So many associations have concerns about this bill, like the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. They raised so many concerns on this particular bill.

Also, one of the trustees in my constituency actually discussed with me that MLAs, MPs are allowed to and why we have to register and those things. I'm sure the Premier is aware of this and might try to consider that sympathetically.

As I said, the question about the public lobbyist: what if they are a paid director of the association? Some people work in nonprofit organizations, but they are paid.

Also, how would we consider them if the lobbyist registered meets the Premier but if the Premier makes a call to the lobbyist? I mean, do they have to register if the Premier or the minister calls the individuals? Where do we stand on this bill? So many things are not clear, especially soliciting information. Sometimes the minister or the Premier can call it advice: I was taking advice from a person and that individual doesn't need to register as a lobbyist. So where do we stand on this situation?

There's no doubt that this is a good bill in the right direction. Something is better than nothing. But we definitely need very important changes in this bill. That's why, you know, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is trying his best to give some suggestions, and that's why amendment A1R is in front of us. It's another attempt to try to strengthen this bill, making this good bill a better one.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Liberal MLAs pushed very hard for a lobbyist registry as part of the review of the Conflicts of Interest Act last year. This is something that Alberta Liberals have been pushing for years. I'm pleased that the government decided to try to steal our ideas, and I just wish . . . [interjections] Yes. This is a Liberal idea.

Mr. Flaherty: We're having an impact.

Mr. Agnihotri: Yeah. And we are happy. I mean, we have so many good ideas. We don't mind if you take a couple of pages from our policies. We all work for the best interests of Albertans. That's why we get paid. Ministers get more money than even some people sitting here.

The reason I'm saying this is that we should always, you know, consider our constituents first. Constituents should be the first we consider. I don't know about the other people, but I'm an employee of my constituents.

An Hon. Member: Servants of the people.

Mr. Agnihotri: I'm the servant of the people, and it is our duty to look after them. This bill is another attempt. It's a good bill. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is like some other MLAs: they are trying to be helpful in strengthening this bill.

As I said, it's a good thing if you steal some ideas from the Alberta Liberals, and it will benefit our communities in Alberta. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, with all the loopholes they have left in this bill, they haven't really solved the problem so far.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else on the amendment?

Mr. Hancock: Is 29(2)(a) extant?

The Acting Speaker: Yes. Standing Order 29(2)(a): any questions or comments? Hon. Government House Leader, you had a question?

Mr. Hancock: I just wondered if the hon. member and the other colleagues who spoke in favour of this amendment understood that the amendment that they're talking about, referring it back to the committee for reconsideration, is the amendment that was brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre and the change that was made to the bill as a result of her motion.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to tell the hon. minister that I'm aware that some other speakers spoke on this one, but it's always good to say something for the record for my constituents. They want to hear from me as well, so that's the reason I put forward and discuss this.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else?

Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, do you want to speak on the amendment?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to talk to this amendment, which was proposed by my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Unlike some members who spoke before me, I have to regrettably speak against this particular amendment. What I'm basing my decision on is two things, actually maybe three.

The first one is that this amendment, while it's introduced and debated at a different stage – you know, this is third reading – we have actually dealt with this particular issue in Committee of the Whole. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre actually won an amendment, which doesn't happen too frequently, but she actually did in fact manage to convince the House and pass an amendment that was accepted by the House in terms of spouses and partners, placing an undue restriction and an undue expectation on them in terms of what a spouse can or cannot do, and the amount of information that might flow between somebody who works for government or is occupying a senior position in government, somebody who holds a contract with government, and their spouse or their partner who might be lobbying in the community or lobbying on behalf of a certain group or a certain interest.

10:30

I know what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is attempting to do, and I know what my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie was attempting to say as well. We have been faced with so many examples in this House, Mr. Speaker, where the opposition brings up an idea to make something good even better or to fix something that is broken, and most of the time the government rejects these ideas without awarding them the attention and the scrutiny that they deserve.

In that particular case last week when we were doing Committee of the Whole on Bill 1, this particular amendment from my colleague from Edmonton-Centre was actually accepted after extensive debate. I don't think, given the time and given the potential for this House to rise and adjourn, that sending it to committee would do any good. I think sending it to committee is basically telling us and telling everyone out there that it's going to die on the Order Paper, and I disagree with this. I think this is a first in this province regardless of who lays claim or takes credit for this idea: us the Liberals because we introduced it in our platform in 2004, for example, or the Premier as his flagship bill. I don't care, to be honest, Mr. Speaker. I think we need to move forward, and we need to actually put it in place and get it working.

You have to remember that the standing policy field committee and then later this Assembly agreed that the initial review was going to be done in two years, not in five. So I think by the time the Ethics Commissioner gets this lobbyist registry in place and working and by the time he and his staff get all the requirements and the components in place, that might take six months, so all we're looking at is about a year and a half after that for the initial review. I think that's a reasonable amount of time for people to wait and to test the lobbyist registry to see how effective it is. If this is identified as a weakness or an area that needs improvement, we can do it in two years. There is nothing to stop us from doing this and opening this file again then. So I'm speaking in opposition to this particular amendment.

My third point, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that, you know, we're always faced with the question: do you go this far to the right to appease and to address the concerns of people in the nonprofit community, for example, or do you go this far to the left to address the concerns from people who think the Lobbyists Act is weak? Well, I'll tell you that there's always disagreement in terms of lobbyist registries and lobbyist acts throughout the country and maybe even in other jurisdictions outside of Canada because some

people are going to argue that it is full of loopholes, and it is totally ineffective. Then others, on the other extreme, are going to argue: "You know what? It is too restrictive, and the net is always cast too widely." And so on.

Mr. Speaker, not to belabour this issue and not to repeat myself, I am definitely not in favour of this amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment to third reading of Bill 1 lost]

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

Bill 56
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply)
Act, 2007 (No. 2)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move Bill 56, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (No. 2), for third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 56 read a third time]

Bill 2
Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, this bill updates the rules governing elected members of this Legislature. First and foremost, the bill lengthens the time former ministers are limited in their ability to influence government decisions or to accept certain kinds of employment. Instead of lasting for six months, the cooling-off period will apply for a year. The bill also sets out stricter guidelines around the activities former ministers can participate in during the cooling-off period. As well, it increases the fine for breaching the act during that period.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The bill also imposes cooling-off periods for nonelected political staff. For the first time former political staff will be subject to legislative restrictions on their activities for six months after they leave the public service. Mr. Speaker, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act also sets the framework to establish cooling-off periods for deputy ministers.

There are a number of other provisions in the Conflicts of Interest Act that have been revised in this bill, and this includes a section and a provision which provides that a member may not influence a decision which would further the private interests of any other person and not just their spouse or minor children.

These amendments were recommended by the select special committee to review the act, and I would note for the House that the comity demonstrated by members of all parties during the course of that committee's deliberations was quite admirable. It's a comity which is so often not apparent in this Chamber, certainly as illustrated by the activities of the last evening.

Mr. Speaker, it's also an opportune time to mention the historic nature of the legislative process that this bill along with Bill 1 have

gone through. The all-party standing committees established in this legislative session by the Premier and his government are playing a key role in ensuring even more thorough input, review, and debate of key bills before the Assembly. The all-party committee chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has certainly done a good job in reviewing and suggesting amendments to the bill and, as I said, it too has demonstrated that MLAs can work together harmoniously for the public good.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, this is an interesting day because the last time that I was here when the Assembly went all night and well into the next day was in 2001, and the trigger of that very prolonged debate was, in fact, a conflict of interest issue, and it was specific to the regional health authorities. Here we are now, having gone through a very long debate, and what comes back six years later but a bill that, frankly, will address some of the concerns that stimulated the overnigher in 2001. So, you know, progress is slow, but it is progress.

I would like to commend the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for his work on this as well as many other members, including the Member for Edmonton-McClung, who helped so hard with the all-party policy committee that reviewed this.

10:40

Again, I believe this is legislation that was long overdue. I think we may find that there are some wrinkles in it that inadvertently capture potential conflicts that aren't justified to be captured. Undoubtedly, there'll be some that the legislation misses, and we will of course review the legislation in due course and, hopefully, tune it up in a good spirit of progress.

The effect of this bill, I hope, is to do at least two things. One is to clean up concerns around how government decisions are made and, two, simultaneously to restore some public skepticism about how government decisions are made. Unfortunately, too often the public views political decisions and politicians as compromised. The effect of this bill, I think, if it's well handled and well managed, will be to restore some of that public confidence in how decisions are made and how, for example, not just cabinet ministers and MLAs but public officials are also held to a higher standard.

I think that we can anticipate some of the effect of this particular bill by watching what's happened in the corporate sector, particularly large, publicly traded corporations, which went through a very difficult and tormented period of time a few years ago as scandal after scandal broke and as the public began to realize that too often people in positions of leadership in private corporations were not looking after the shareholders first but were looking after their own personal concerns.

The reaction to that was telling. The reaction to that was a real elevation of standards, particularly aggressive legislation addressing issues like conflicts of interest in the U.S. Some of that overflowed into regulations in Canada for the corporate sector, and we have a general rise of standards in the corporate sector as a result and much clearer rules. I think everybody has a bit more confidence as investors because things like conflicts of interest are addressed. I hope the same process plays through in the public sector. I'm not sure that it will because I think there continue to be too many shortfalls in the standards applied, in Alberta particularly, to democratic accountability.

This act is a small step in the right direction. I would be much more convinced if it was accompanied by proper whistle-blower

legislation, for example, by a strengthening of the role of the Auditor General, by a sorting out of the confused roles around the internal audit service and the fact that the membership of the government's Internal Audit Committee for many years, and as far as we know still, includes senior officials of the PC party. There's a whole bunch of other things that need to be addressed before the effect of this particular bill will be properly felt.

It's with mixed feelings that I stand here speaking today. I think it's going to be a long time and, frankly, require a new government before we get the full package of democratic reforms and accountability that's required. After all, Mr. Speaker, even in this short fall sitting we've gone through a number of other controversies, whether it's the role of Mr. Kellan Fluckiger in the drafting of Bill 46 and the fact that his wife was involved in one of the companies directly involved – we have no idea how that has played out except that he's suddenly out of his job – or whether it's the concerns that were raised over submissions to this very Assembly of legally required documents in the form of the annual reports of the Department of Energy. There's a lot of breakdown still, a lot of breakdown. A lot of room to be cleaned up.

However, the fact that this bill will extend the ministerial cooling-off period to one year is a good thing. Right now people may not be aware, but we have requested that the Ethics Commissioner look into the appointment of the former Deputy Premier to the board of a major private-sector corporation within, you know, a suspiciously short time after she left her position. This bill will have the effect of making that impossible, and that's a good thing.

I think the fact that it extends postemployment restrictions to deputy ministers is also a good thing. We need to make sure those deputy ministers are treated fairly, but we need to protect the public interest first and foremost.

I am generally pleased and in favour of this legislation. Our caucus generally supports it. Some of our members worked very, very hard to review and strengthen it. We will revisit it, and we look forward, whether it's through this governing party or after the next election through our governing party, to a series of other bills that continue the process of raising the standards of accountability of this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise just to make a few comments on this bill as we see it pass through its last stages before it becomes law. I would concur with the previous speaker's comments that this is certainly a step in the right direction in regard to some gaping holes in credibility that we've seen over many years in the provincial government of the province of Alberta. Once again, just going back to my previous comments from Bill 1, these issues of credibility contribute to the erosion of people's belief in and confidence in provincial politics, so Bill 2 does give us something to put our foot on and perhaps move ahead.

Again, my main reason to get up and just speak briefly was to reiterate my concerns about the about-face that took place in the all-party committee stage of developing this bill in regard to the cooling-off period for political staff and senior policy staff. I think initially the committee had agreed to keeping the 12-month cooling-off period the same for both ministers and for senior staff. You know, the essence, once again, of good legislation is that it's simple and has some symmetry to it. Just having this change I think weakens the overall legislation because, of course, senior policy and political staff have tremendous influence on how things move forward in terms of government policy and probably are making

more liaisons with the outside nongovernment sector than even some ministers. The incongruity here between having the cooling-off period at six months for one and 12 months for the other I believe is not a particularly wise choice and might send some mixed messages out to the public.

We are encouraged, however, by the fact that this even came through in the first place, and so in congruence with other pieces of legislation and/or strengthening of legislative offices, I believe that we could do a lot to restore the confidence of the public through legislation such as this.

10:50

Once again, in conclusion, I do want to express my concern about the about-face that took place in regard to the cooling-off period for political staff and senior policy staff because it seemed to be a manifestation of perhaps what we would be concerned about in the first place, which is that these people do have quite a lot of influence, and they do perhaps have influence on this very decision that caused the reversal at the committee level in the first place.

I believe we did have an amendment on this, and I believe the Member for Edmonton-McClung brought in an amendment in regard to trying to rectify this. I am a bit disappointed that it didn't pass.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments.

Seeing none, are there others?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Calgary Nose-Hill wish to close?

Dr. Brown: No.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

Bill 9

Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Bill 9, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007 on behalf of the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

The Tourism Levy Amendment Act, simply put, puts into place the provisions that were brought into the budget relative to the tourism levy. It has been explained more thoroughly at second reading and needs no further explanation.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Some very brief comments on Bill 9, Tourism Levy Amendment Act. We know that tourism is a very positive contributor to our economy. For every dollar that we invest in tourism, we receive \$10 in return. One of the destinations for tourists is our provincial parks. Unfortunately, only 4 per cent of our land area in Alberta is taken up with provincial parks, and those provincial parks and wildlife areas aren't protected to the extent they should be. I won't go into detail about the experiences I had at Cataract Creek, but it reflects a concern I have not even about having buffer zones around our parks but the fact that resource extraction can take place within the parks themselves.

If we want to sell Alberta as a tourist destination, then our wilderness, our parks, and protected areas are our keys zones of

attraction. I just want to suggest that without management plans for those parks and without some future plan that avoids full-scale practices like clear cutting in these treasured areas, there will be nothing for tourists nor Albertans to come to. So please note that we have tourism as a renewable resource, providing that we steward our province. I would encourage the expansion of our tourism market by protecting our limited parks resource and holding it dear to a greater extent.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will keep my comments brief. I had the opportunity a couple of times earlier, in various stages, to speak to the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007. As you well know, the Official Opposition is supportive of this bill.

I'd just like to put on the record how pleased I am that the Minister of Finance took such care and went to such lengths to consult with any number of groups on this, the Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association and the Alberta Bed & Breakfast Association, in particular, two groups that seem to have a good relationship with this government and seem to be very effective in their lobby efforts.

I guess I would just like to suggest that it's too bad that the government doesn't pay as careful attention to taxpayers as they do to some of these lobby groups. Maybe we would see some real progress, for example, in the elimination of health care premiums.

While I'm supportive of moves to address some of the difficulties that hotel operators were having – particularly, I understood that there were some instances where, in fact, the fines that were being levied against some of these hotel owners for amounts owing were actually in excess of the amount that was owing – clearly, when we're trying to recognize some of the challenges that small business faces, that's the sort of situation that is unacceptable. It looks as if Bill 9 will address that, and we're pleased to support it for that reason.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

Bill 11

Telecommunications Act Repeal Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move third reading of Bill 11, the Telecommunications Act Repeal Act.

I'll just remind members that this is a deletion, not an addition, repealing an outdated act for a couple of organizations that are no longer with us.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to remind members of the fact that I was actually the one responsible for pulling this particular piece of legislation out of the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, back in the spring. I did so for what I felt to be a very prudent reason, and that was because this is truly the final nail in the coffin of publicly owned telephone companies in the province of Alberta.

I'd like to acknowledge the many kind responses I had after I gave

that little history vignette a few weeks back on Edmonton Telephones and Alberta Government Telephones. I had many members from both sides of the House comment to me or send me notes suggesting that it was not only informative but quite entertaining to learn some of the history, particularly the very early history. I had referenced comments from the Lieutenant Governor in the very first throne speech that took place in the very first legislative sitting of the Alberta government and had an awful lot of response to that. I'd just like to thank members for their comments.

As I say, it's a bit of a sad day to see this now passed through third reading and know that it's the last time, perhaps, that we'll ever be talking about publicly owned telephone companies in this Legislature. I think I hear a violin in the background, actually. It's a little bit too bad; nevertheless, it's a step in the right direction. I appreciate the fact that we're now dispensing with a piece of legislation that is no longer required.

In fact, it reminds me of the motion that was recently referred to committee to look at red tape. I'm hopeful that we can make some progress on that file as well and perhaps adopt the model that the B.C. government uses whereby for every new regulation that comes into effect in B.C., they actually have to get rid of two. Maybe that's a model that we could look to in terms of legislation, as well. There may well be several other pieces of legislation still on the books that could be dealt with. I know we dealt with – I'm not sure if it was the Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act, which was actually not in use for many, many years already at this point and had sat on the books, if I remember right, for some 20 years without being in effect. If we have that situation and we know that this particular act as well has not been used now for several years, there may well be many others. So a little bit of pressure on the government in the way of a red tape review that might include legislation as well as regulation probably wouldn't be a bad thing.

11:00

Having said that, as I said before, we're supportive of this legislation, but I do believe that it was important to share a little bit of the history and just play the violin, as it were, for publicly owned telephone companies. We'll all remember fondly both Edmonton Telephones and Alberta Government Telephones.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Graydon: I'm not sure if I'm older than Alberta Government Telephones or if it's older than I am, but I did start with the company when I was 18 years old, worked summers between high school and technical school in Calgary with Alberta Government Telephones, and spent 10 years with that company, very good, productive years that I enjoyed very much. If the job I was doing then still existed, I would probably still be there. Well, I guess I'd be retired. At any rate, I would echo the member's comments: farewell to AGT.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there others?

Does the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West wish to close?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

Bill 13

Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed it is indeed my pleasure to move for third reading Bill 13, the Access to the Future Amendment Act.

Again, a good piece of legislation that has had good debate in this House, and I look forward to the support of all members.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just had to get involved in some way in this exciting, historic event.

As I recall, Bill 13 –I’m reading it on the screen here – first showed up on March 12, so it’s a long time that it’s been winding its way through the Legislature. As I recall, at the time it came up I said that the bill was so small that I actually read it. So it still stands, and we are quite pleased to support the legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Access to the future and providing educational opportunities for our future generations is absolutely essential. I am very concerned, as are a number of our Calgary constituencies and, I would suggest, Edmonton, Medicine Hat, and so on, about the limited opportunities that postsecondary institutions have in providing new spaces.

The government committed that there would be 15,000 new spaces by the fall of next year. They seem to have backed away from that. Likewise, there were supposed to be 60,000 new seats by 2020, but with recent developments, for example, at ISEEE, the institute for sustainable economics, environment, and experiential learning, the thousand seats that were initially intended to be built with that \$260 million will not take place. Those are a thousand seats that are very much needed at the University of Calgary. Likewise, the problems with the SAIT program; having to scale back their intended program by half is extremely worrisome.

We know that students continue to be turned away from institutions. That’s why I was elected in Calgary-Varsity to represent the University of Calgary, why my colleague was elected in Calgary-Mountain View to represent the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology and the Alberta College of Art and Design, and that is why in our most recent by-election my colleague from Calgary-Elbow was elected to represent Mount Royal. These aren’t chance occurrences. What is happening is that over the years the government members have not responded to the needs of postsecondary students or institutions, and as a result they are looking elsewhere.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make some brief comments on this particular bill, which, by my understanding, is just a mechanism by which to change the wording of the original Access to the Future Act. It’s interesting because now we are seeing this original piece of legislation unfolding over more than two years, and it’s an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of it. Certainly, the intention is honourable, but I think that the actual reality has some problems.

I know that there have been complaints that the funding has not been matched to the amount of the donations that have been coming

in to postsecondary institutions, which was the fund’s intention in the first place. I expressed, I guess, over the last couple of years the element of a flaw in this logic anyway because, of course, the vagaries of private donations might lead to unstable funding for postsecondary institutions if the donation system is not functioning or, perhaps, is not functioning in an equal sort of way between different postsecondary institutions. Also, there is this issue of the matching funds coming in a timely manner. Once again, it’s back to the issue of long-term stable funding that can be counted on for public institutions in general and for postsecondary institutions here specifically.

I think that what we must be looking at to ensure that our postsecondary institutions are strong is that we need to increase the amount of spaces, and in order to increase the amount of spaces, we have to ensure that there’s long-term stable funding for the institutions to commit to that. So, obviously, there’s I think a gap here in making this all function.

I guess my main concern is to focus more on the student than the institution and making it easier for students to access student loans and reducing the interest rates on student loans to prime lending rates, the removal of parental contribution expectations from student finance calculations. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, the key is to lower tuition for postsecondary students so that we are accessing the full potential of our population that should be going to postsecondary education.

While this specific bill, Bill 13, has an administrative capacity, certainly, I think it’s a worthwhile opportunity for us to reflect on the function of the Access to the Future Act, the larger piece of legislation that has been now around here for two years.

Thank you.

11:10

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, anyone else?

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology on behalf of the member to close debate.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will just take a few moments on behalf of the hon. member. I would like to first of all thank the opposition for their support of Bill 13, Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007, in its passage. I admire that and applaud it.

I do have some issue with some of the statements from the Member for Calgary-Varsity. While his party supports the bill, he took the opportunity to essentially state some incorrect facts, which I think need to be clarified on the record. The number of seats available at the University of Calgary is not going to be less than a thousand, and that was publicly announced the other day. It just plays to being somewhat ill informed and, obviously, not knowledgeable about the exceptional way that we are working with the colleges, the universities, and the technical institutes. We’ve expanded seats in Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Vermilion, Calgary, and Edmonton this year, Mr. Speaker. We have the joint support and endorsement of all three student groups. We also have the endorsement of the Universities Association and the colleges and technical institutes, which, I might add, are included in the institutes which he rattled off that he represents.

Obviously, they do endorse what this government is doing in postsecondary education. This is one facet of it. I encourage all members to support it.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the next member, hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you. It couldn't be a more appropriate time to do this, as we just passed the Access to the Future Amendment Act legislation. The future is with us today. Sitting in our gallery is a group of grade 6 students from Lynnwood elementary school in Edmonton who are here to observe our legislative procedures, have been spending time with us for the last day or so, I believe, and will be with us for a while. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you I would like to introduce this particular class, who is accompanied by Ms Heidi Medhurst. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading
(continued)

Bill 23
Unclaimed Personal Property and
Vested Property Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I move third reading of Bill 23, the Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act.

As the House will know, it was a fairly comprehensive rewrite of the rules relative to unclaimed property. The act was explained in second reading. There was an amendment in committee to ensure that gift cards were not included as unclaimed personal property so that there wouldn't be a requirement to handle gift cards with nominal amounts. Other than that, I think the bill was well understood. It sailed through without too much discussion because it's, basically, about a fairly important but obscure area of the law, and it was timely that there be a rewrite before us. I'd ask the Legislature to pass it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to add a few closing comments to Bill 23, the Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act, 2007. Before I do that – I can't see whether or not the students are still up in the gallery, but if they are, I'd just like to advise the grader 6ers that they are in fact witnessing a little bit of history today. I'm sure they've probably heard by now that the members of this Assembly have been hard at work since 8 o'clock last night, and many of us have not had any sleep at all. So this is what you can aspire to.

I always tell my students, when we take the pictures with them on the steps of the Legislature, that I still have my grade 6 picture that was taken with my classmates from McKee elementary with my MLA, who was Neil Crawford. I have that picture hanging in my home office, and I look at it every morning before I come to work. I'm hoping that some of the young people up there will make sure that they save their pictures. Perhaps, someday, we'll have an MLA from the gallery down here on the floor, and they can take pictures

with their grade 6 classes, too. So, welcome, and enjoy this little piece of history today.

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Government House Leader and minister for health had suggested, Bill 23, although a comprehensive rewrite of a previous act, the Ultimate Heir Act, really was quite noncontroversial. In fact, although there was \$11 million in the Ultimate Heir Act that was to have been transferred to universities to scholarships, I think I mentioned in second reading that when we checked with our stakeholders, most were unaware of that. I suppose it says something about the current state of our economy that \$11 million was considered to be a somewhat inconsequential amount of money, and there wasn't a lot of interest. When the government sought out input from stakeholders, there wasn't an awful lot of feedback either.

The purpose of the act, of course, is to establish a primary repository and claims system for unclaimed or abandoned personal property and is consistent with the recommendations that were made by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. We're supportive of that. I was, for the most part, happy with the explanations that were provided to the questions that I asked in second reading when the bill was in the committee stage. I do still question why this money that is realized from the unclaimed personal property should have to be transferred into general revenue as opposed to being directed to scholarships, as it was originally intended to do under the previous act. Nevertheless, we're certainly not going to hold up the business of the province over that relatively minor detail.

I will wish good luck and say goodbye to Bill 23 and look forward to further debate on the remaining bills this evening, if I can say that. I understand that according to the official records – this is a little fact for the students as well – we're still actually Tuesday evening, so we're in a bit of a time warp.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Chair, I'll just relay a little story from a former member of this Assembly who I was speaking to this morning, one who's well known to the Assembly, Mr. Frank Bruseker, the current president of the ATA. He told me that when he found himself in a similar situation several years ago, he actually stood at the door to the left of the Speaker's chair and had one foot outside the door and one foot inside the Chamber and asked the Speaker if, in fact, his right foot was in Wednesday and his left foot was in Tuesday. The Speaker confirmed that that was the case, so we really are in a bit of a time warp.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Does the hon. Government House Leader wish to close?

Mr. Hancock: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

Bill 24
Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to stand to speak this morning, even though it is officially yesterday evening, at this great demonstration of the unselfishness of the members of this House, sitting through the night, from 8 o'clock last night until some time yet to be determined, to do the people's business.

With that, it gives me great pleasure to move third reading of Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.
11:20

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and debate again on Bill 24, which I am supportive of. Once again, I thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. This is a good attempt to strengthen the ability of the RECA to investigate cases of mortgage fraud, criminal record checks for the realtors, appraisers, and some brokers. The hon. member was a licensed realtor some time ago.

Mr. Elsalhy: You, too.

Mr. Agnihotri: Myself as well.

Mr. Elsalhy: Did you know him before he became an MLA?

Mr. Agnihotri: Yes. I've known him for a long, long time, and he always had a very good record. He has been very honest and a good realtor in the area.

Mr. Elsalhy: Did he sell lots of houses?

Mr. Agnihotri: He sold many good houses. I don't know how much money he made, but he's a good realtor.

An Hon. Member: Did you make more money than he did?

Mr. Agnihotri: Well, I don't want to discuss what I earn. Okay?

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, it's a good bill. My question I raised in second reading as well. Some realtors in Alberta have a licence and some don't. According to the information I have, the RECA has the power to investigate or interrogate only the licensed realtors in Alberta. What about the realtors who don't have licences and are making deals under the table? I think this is not only unethical; it is wrong and criminal. What are we going to do for those people? All the realtors and even the RECA should be very responsible for the people who are dealing with huge amounts of money.

One more question I raised during second reading was all the regulations. We are giving powers to the minister. How come we don't deal with those regulations here in the legislation?

Another thing I raised in second reading was that I found out that in, say, 10, 20 years there was no member from the opposition involved in the real estate board. I just want to know what the government is trying to hide. Also, we should find some more ways to investigate and interrogate the people who have criminal records. I mean, if they do some sort of criminal act and they have a record, they get away one time. What are we going to do a second time?

Another thing I want to raise, Mr. Speaker, is that in December 2005 I already mentioned that a committee made up of government leaders, law enforcement, and the real estate industry put forward eight recommendations to the government regarding mortgage fraud. The hon. Member from Leduc-Beaumont-Devon knows very well those eight recommendations. I can repeat again.

The first was that the government of Alberta participate in a mortgage fraud prevention committee to encourage communication, develop best practices, and improve training for workers in the mortgage and real estate industry.

Declare mortgage fraud a government priority and establish specialized mortgage fraud investigation and prosecution units.

Quantify the financial impact of mortgage fraud in Alberta.

Amend the Real Estate Act to ensure the Real Estate Council of Alberta has the necessary investigative powers and the ability to share personal information about mortgage fraud perpetrators.

Review privacy legislation and suggest amendments to facilitate sharing of personal information related to mortgage fraud between law enforcement and investigating agencies.

The sixth one, raise public awareness of the criminal nature of mortgage fraud.

The seventh, amend Alberta's Law of Property Act to allow lenders to sue on the covenant except on farmland and owner-occupied residential property.

The last is to review whether the land titles office should send notices to lenders/property owners when there is a suspected incident of mortgage fraud or fraudulent transfer of title.

There were eight recommendations back in December 2005. My question is: how many recommendations has this government implemented so far? Lots of my colleagues in the past were talking about resumption of the mortgage fraud and the sometimes delay in the land titles office, and those problems still exist in the industry. Some time ago it was purely under the provincial government. What is the best thing for Albertans? How can they get the best value? How can they feel protected when they deal with a licence holder or without a licence holder? That's the big question. Lots of people have been asking this question for a long time, and they are still asking.

If the hon. member could discuss it with RECA or any official from the board, that would be really appreciated. I am interested. I want to know what exactly they feel. I'm 110 per cent in support of this bill because Alberta is one of the busiest markets for real estate and mortgage in North America. There are chances. If we don't take some concrete steps now, the effect of this fraud could be even worse in the near future, so we should start working on this. I'm sure we should involve the all-party committees and discuss with the real estate board to make sure that we find the solution for the fraud which has been happening for a long, long time in Alberta, especially resumption of the mortgage.

I think resumption of the mortgage is only available in Alberta. That's the loophole. People flip the properties. They buy and sell it to somebody else. Even the people working in the banks know how they can play the games. Some innocent people don't know, and they suffer because of that.

So these are some concerns that I repeat again, and I request the hon. member who sponsored this bill to pass on my message. This is a good bill. I want to see it better. We should lead on this matter in the nation.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Others?

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to close the debate.

11:30

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to sincerely thank the opposition for the constructive debate on this bill and particularly the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, with his extensive experience in the field.

I would say that this bill, being the first major revision of this act in 10 years, tried to encompass as much of what needed to be added to make the real estate industry in this province that much better and to protect the consumer. Whether we got it all I think time will tell, but I would suggest that maybe within a few years after the passage of this bill we will start the process again to deal with some of the pieces that we didn't quite capture in this go-round.

I would also remind the hon. member that it is illegal to trade in real estate in this province without a licence under RECA, and anyone that is found to be trading in real estate is subject to prosecution. There are companies, Mr. Speaker, that operate on the

periphery of this industry, but technically, as the definition stands today, they are not trading in real estate, and as such they are not covered by this legislation. I don't intend to name any of those companies at this time, but suffice to say that I believe that we've made a concerted effort, and I think that this amendment will go a long way to protecting the consumers of this province.

Again, I thank the hon. member for his support of the bill, and I would close debate and move third reading of the bill, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

Bill 35

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it gives me great pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007.

Again, Mr. Speaker, just to remind the Assembly that these amendments reflect changes in budget 2007-08 and also are meant to synchronize Alberta tax legislation with changes passed earlier this year in the federal budget, again solidifying the position of this province as the best tax environment across this country. I look forward to third reading.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Briefly on Bill 35, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007, as the mover of this bill knows and certainly the Finance minister knows, I spoke for the most part in favour of this bill in second reading and in committee, with a couple of provisos, the first being, of course, that the one income tax change that the Official Opposition wishes were in here and is not – in fact, it's noticeably absent – the one thing that not only ourselves but many others have been calling for for many years is the elimination of the health care premium tax. I would implore the member and the Finance minister to please consider making that change in the upcoming budget in February. It's something that is long overdue and certainly in the current economic climate is achievable. Over the past several years I've been accused when I've mentioned that: "It's not sustainable to remove that health care premium tax." But, in fact, the government's own financial records show that it's perfectly achievable to do so. All it really takes is the political will to do so. So I'll continue to talk about that at every opportunity.

The other thing I would just like to mention before we allow this bill to pass through third reading is the fact that while there are some amendments in here that will be favourable to a number of taxpayers, they don't go far enough. They don't go all the way. As an example, Mr. Speaker, we do have the increased amount of medical expenses that a caregiver can claim, that has been raised from \$5,000 to \$10,000. As the mover of the bill indicated, that is consistent with federal legislation. It's a good thing. However, it's not indexed to inflation. When I mentioned that in second reading, I know that we had the Minister of Finance nodding his head, and I think he even spoke at one point and suggested that that was a good idea and something that could be considered in future years, so I'm hopeful that the government will consider that.

Likewise, the eligible adoption expense is now a tax credit of the lesser of the total adoption expenses or \$10,000 I guess is the way it reads and, again, not indexed to inflation. I wish it were.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the monthly education expense claims were at \$400. That's being raised to \$600 for a full-time student, and a part-time student is being raised from \$120 to \$180 per month. Again, I would like to see those allowances indexed to inflation. In this economy that we find ourselves in, as we're experiencing somewhere between 5 and 7 per cent inflation, if we're not indexing those, then of course the taxpayers involved are actually losing benefits every year to inflation. I would strongly encourage and I know the Finance minister committed to looking at those proposed changes in future amendments. I would encourage the hon. mover of the bill to put the pressure on the Finance minister and make sure that he does in fact give serious consideration to indexing those amounts.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to recommend to my colleagues that we support Bill 35 in third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 35, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007. As I had previously stated in second reading, I certainly do approve of this particular bill. It's interesting, when one opens these personal income tax issues, that it brings to mind other personal income tax reform that would be I think welcomed and useful for the public here in the province of Alberta.

The most substantial part of Bill 35 seems to deal with the personal tax credits for donations above \$200. I just know from my own experience in looking at people's donation patterns here in the province of Alberta that people usually make smaller donations than that \$200. I would have liked to have seen that number lowered in keeping with what regular people are donating and to reward them for making that personal choice to donate to a charity.

I guess the incongruence between the credit donation level that registered charities enjoy and the level of return that political donations enjoy is something that has always concerned me as well because of course the level of political donation return is much more advantageous than any charity you could donate to. I think, once again, it's these perceptions that people have that contribute to a sense of perhaps injustice – right? – between donations to political parties and charities. I think that that could have been perhaps addressed here or later, in the future.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Looking at other forms of personal taxation in the province of Alberta to resolve some outstanding issues I think would be useful as well. The previous speaker mentioned quite correctly that a glaring omission is health care premiums. If we could see some movement on that, I think everybody would be happy. It's an overdue, unfair flat tax on the population here in the province of Alberta which unduly penalizes persons earning less money. I think everybody would welcome a revocation of the health care premiums here in the province of Alberta.

The logic behind them is very thin at best and somehow has some underlying sort of patronizing element to it, where I've heard people say: oh, well, it reminds people that it costs for health care. Well, I think that people know that health care does cost and that people are happy to have a public system and support it because it provides the best value for money and security for individuals and for their families. To suggest that you have to be teaching someone every month or every year to pay a premium to remind them of the value of their health care system seems spurious at best. I think people know that. They also know that a flat tax, which is what the health

care premiums actually are, is not particularly equal and/or fair and/or relevant here in the province of Alberta at this juncture.

11:40

Bill 35, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007: certainly I've expressed my support for the substantive parts of this bill, and I look forward to further personal income tax reform here in the future, not the least of which is a return to a progressive income tax system, which, again, is something that is a glaring omission in the regressive system that we have here in the province of Alberta. A progressive taxation system is the basis of an equal and fair tax system for people. It's used around the world, and certainly it would be in the best interests of Alberta to reintroduce it here too.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. There being none, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sitting with us in the members' gallery is a class from Lamont elementary school. They came here to visit us and learn about the process of the Legislature. Perhaps they will not get the regular spectacle of question period that they would normally get roughly at this time or shortly after this time, but I hope that they will learn from this experience and see what it is that we do in the Chamber through the whole night and throughout the day. To you and through you to all members of this Legislature, please welcome students from Lamont elementary school.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 35
Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2007
(*continued*)

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there additional speakers on Bill 35?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Should I call on the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to close the debate?

I'll call the question then.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a third time]

Bill 36
Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, like Bill 35 this bill amends the taxation act on the

business side, on the corporate side, to reflect the changes in Budget 2007 and also to synchronize with the federal budget of this year. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the members opposite for their spirited discussion of this bill and their ultimate support, and I'd move third reading.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, not an awful lot left to say on Bill 36, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007, although every time I hear that encouragement coming from the other side, it really does tempt me to find something to say.

I think, again, that for the most part this bill is making changes very similar to Bill 35 that mirror some changes and recommendations from the federal government, and we didn't have an awful lot of concern about it.

One thing I will point out, however, was that when I mentioned in second reading that small business was pleased to see the small business threshold raised from \$400,000 to \$500,000 in income to allow them to claim the small business tax rate of 3 per cent, I did suggest at that time that small business might really have liked to have seen that threshold raised immediately as opposed to over a period of years. When I made those comments, I can tell you that my phone was practically ringing off the hook and my e-mail was going crazy from stakeholder groups and small businesspeople saying: "Absolutely. That's exactly what we would have liked to have seen." I guess I perhaps struck a bit of a nerve there with small business. You know, as much as they certainly appreciate the gesture, they really would have liked to have seen it implemented all at once as opposed to being phased in.

I guess the last thing to reiterate is just the fact that we've now eliminated the Alberta royalty tax credit and the royalty credit for individuals and trusts, and that is something that the shadow minister for Energy, my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, has been calling for for some time, and he's very pleased to see that that has finally happened. According to the government's own figures it should result in approximately \$111 million extra into the provincial treasury.

It is interesting to note that as far as the Alberta royalty tax credit is concerned, industry was given only three months' notice to adapt to that as opposed to the approximately 15 months' notice that industry was given to adapt to the new royalty regime that the Premier announced on the 25th of October. That's just an interesting little side note, I suppose.

As I said, for the most part we are supportive of this bill, and I don't see any particular reason to spend any more time debating it, having made the comments that I wanted to make particular to the small business threshold and the royalty tax credit.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make some brief comments on this Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2007, as well, more specifically because most of it deals with the Alberta royalty tax credit regulation. I find it interesting to see the links between the earning of additional revenue to provincial coffers and just how much it is influenced by our royalty programs. This move is going to certainly bring in quite a lot of extra provincial revenue, but it's interesting to note that if our royalty program would be restructured to reflect the market rates for royalties as charged around the world in some reasonable way, of course, we would realize considerably more money from this restructuring.

I think that, once again, we have to remember the lesson that the royalty structure that we have in the province of Alberta is integral to so many aspects of the public expenditures that we have available to us here in the province, and the sooner we realize that we can collect our fair share in a much more reasonable way than has been outlined here now, the sooner we can get set to plan and to build a more diverse economy here in the province of Alberta that can meet the needs and challenges of the immediate and long-term future for the province. Of course, any of those revenues that we're not collecting, as we are failing to do on a daily and hourly basis here, is revenue that is gone. It's not available for us to collect again because of the nonrenewable nature of our resources. As a result, we've missed that opportunity to build a more diverse economy and to build the physical and social infrastructure that we require to meet the needs of the 21st century.

This Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act serves to meet a very functional need that we have, but I think it should serve as a lesson as well to remind us about both the challenges that we have in our reliance on royalty income and the need to diversify our economy and to build strength for the future.

Thanks.

11:50

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, hon. members.

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to close the debate, or should I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a third time]

Bill 40

Personal Directives Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Shaw I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 40, Personal Directives Amendment Act, 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to get a chance to speak to this bill in third reading. I haven't been able to get on the list prior to this. I'm really glad to see this bill come before the Legislature. It's important for a number of reasons.

I have had a number of constituents ask for improvements in a series of acts that affect dependent adults: the Public Trustee Act, the public guardian, and the Personal Directives Act. That, of course, also brings into play the Dependent Adults Act because we have a situation now where I think some seniors have been or certainly feel that they have been unfairly categorized under one of those acts, in which they are essentially declared incompetent or not able to manage their own affairs and make choices about their own lives. A number of these individuals say: well, you know, I might have had a bad time for a while, but I'm okay now, and now I find out that I've lost the right to control my own life, even to choose who I socialize with or where I live or how my money is handled. So this Personal Directives Act is one piece in a puzzle.

I have I think it's eight high-rise apartments that are dedicated to seniors' independent living in my constituency. Plus, I have a number of seniors who completely live independently on their own in the community. So lots of people who are getting on in years but

are still looking after themselves or are partially still in control of their life and choices, and these acts are really important to them.

Aside from that, I have also had constituents – I'm thinking of one particular story where the couple had actually come here from a different province in which a personal directive was not only allowed, but you were able to register it and it had effect. They were very frustrated when one of the couple had a heart attack on the sidewalk and emergency personnel came. Of course, there's no way to inform emergency personnel that you have a personal directive that says: don't revive me if I have a heart attack and fall down on the sidewalk. The emergency medical personnel are charged to revive you, and there's nothing that would allow them to not revive you.

So we have a missing link here. Even where we do have something like a revised Personal Directives Act, we still are missing that link between having that piece of paper that sets out how we want our personal health matters to be organized and handled if we're not competent to do so and having a direct link to those health providers and having it have some standing with them. Even if this individual I'm talking about, you know, had sort of collapsed on the sidewalk holding their personal directive out in their arms and going, "Please deal with me this way," the medical personnel could not have honoured it.

We need to keep working forward on this legislation. What has been done here today in Bill 40, the Personal Directives Amendment Act, 2007, are steps in the right direction. We've got things like a simplification and a standardization of the process for actually writing these personal directives that actually is based on a legislative review. It is setting out a way to determine regained capacity. We've just had a particular episode, that was actually championed by the Elder Advocates of Alberta, with a woman who had to go to court to try and regain her independence because she was deemed under the Dependent Adults Act not to be mentally competent to look after her own affairs. She was able to fight it out in court to regain some of her independence and some of the choices over her life.

I'm pleased to see that this does set out regulations, not legislation, for personal directives that do set out a process for determining regained capacity, care of minor children, a voluntary registry, and a number of other things. These are all the correct steps in the right direction, but we're still missing a number of other linkages that would make this a truly effective, all-encompassing act that fits in well and works well with those other acts, those being the Public Trustee Act, the public guardian, and the Dependent Adults Act.

I'm aware that my colleague did try hard to amend the act and wasn't successful, and I'm sure that when she spoke, she talked about what her amendment was trying to do. Specifically, she was trying to make sure that where a problem had been identified, which is also anticipated in this act, there would be a requirement that an investigation flow from that, and right now we don't have it. We have an obligation that when someone feels there might be a problem, they should take action, but it doesn't specifically say that there has to be an investigation, and I think that's part of the concern.

I have a number of constituents who have expressed a real interest in this act. I think they had high hopes that it was going to accomplish more than it actually does. The overriding concern that seems to be brought up most frequently around dependent adults is their ability to reverse that process and to prove their competence again, and that's a hard fight. There are very severe tests. The bar is set very high under certain pieces of legislation and no bar at all exists in other pieces of legislation where they could, you know, prove their ability to take back parts of their lives. It can be truly worrying.

I have a request from a person who is a constituent, but it's a third party who's requesting me to take action on their behalf. I can't until I can get a release signed by the individual, and we can't get access to the individual in the nursing home they're in because they're now in there under the Dependent Adults Act. So it becomes a very uncomfortable situation.

I'm pleased to see this. Thank you for the opportunity to let me speak to it. It is an important act for my constituents. I hope we will see passage of this but also that we'll continue to work forward on the rest of what we need.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there additional speakers on this bill? Shall I just call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a third time]

12:00 **Bill 50**
Health Professions Statutes
Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2)

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Red Deer-North I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 50, Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2).

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It seems like just yesterday that I was talking about this bill. In fact, I think that, strictly speaking, it is the same day that I was talking about this bill in Committee of the Whole. I am willing to support this bill because it fits in with the Alberta Liberal policy of health workforce strategy.

Essentially, we don't have enough health professionals. We're now facing a situation in a number of different areas that reflects what's being anticipated in this bill, and that is that as we try and either train or offer residencies, which need to be supervised, or to offer competency exams to those coming with international medical degrees, in each case we need a qualified Alberta professional who is going to either do that additional training, oversee that residency, or complete that competency assessment, and we don't have extra people around.

I have encouraged the government to go out and see what could be done to entice some retired professionals back in, almost in the same way that the teachers use retired teachers to come in and supervise student teachers. You know, the competency is still there. They're not that far out of their profession. They understand all of the requirements. They've done it for a while, so they can see the pitfalls of it, and they earn a little bit of extra cash, so everybody's happy. I think that's what we have to look for to solve some of our other health workforce problems creatively.

Specific to what's being anticipated in Bill 50, we have a situation where individuals were willing to conduct these competency examinations or assessments, but they did not want to be held liable if they passed somebody or gave them a satisfactory mark and that individual went out into the community and did harm, because number one in the medical profession is: first, do no harm. As we are aware, the medical profession also ends up with a lot of litigation against them is what I am trying to come around to there, Mr. Speaker. These individuals are not willing to sort of do a good deed by running these competency assessments and then get dinged with a lawsuit because someone that they had passed went out there and

did something that harmed someone or killed someone and that they would be held liable. So we had a blockage, a hitch in the git-along of how we were going to move these forward.

Frankly, these international medical graduates are important to us in Alberta right now. They are often highly trained professionals, but they're trained somewhere else. We need to come to an understanding. We have ways now of assessing their training, but we need to know what their hands-on competency is. That's what these exams are meant to test and assess. So this is to expand the liability protection to those members of the health profession colleges who are willing to come out and do these competency assessments.

I think this is a small but simple yet effective step that the government has taken here in Bill 50. I'm very happy to support that move and urge my colleagues to support Bill 50 in third reading.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Bill 50, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, is an important bill, I would say, a small step in the right direction. Clearly, we all know – and there has been some discussion in the Legislature – about the shortage of health professionals generally and certainly the shortage of doctors in this overheated economy.

We know what's happening within our hospitals and that, the code burgundies and the code reds. We're in desperate need – desperate need, Mr. Speaker – of more physicians. There has always been a group of immigrant doctors coming in here that we should have tapped and tapped sooner. I'm not sure this will solve all the problems, but I see this as taking one impediment away: the fact that doctors training and working with immigrant doctors now can't be sued. I understand that was a big issue with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. So we've removed that. Good. And so we should. I mean, when we travel around and talk – I think the member for Edmonton-Centre talked about this – and you take all the numbers of people that you see driving taxis or other things who are trained physicians, it seems to me we should be doing whatever we can to get them in, with the shortage that we're facing.

Now, I know that not all of the problems are coming from the government level of this. I think that the professional organizations, too, have to accept some responsibility here because I'm told that often it's very difficult for the people that work with immigrants in dealing with their own professions, to get them involved and to get them more inclusive, if you like, and give the professions a chance for these people to get involved and trained. I would hope that there would be some pressure at least to work in that direction, Mr. Speaker.

I mean, this is a step, as I've said, in the right direction, but I'm not sure what this would mean in terms of numbers. The college said this was an impediment, and we're removing that impediment. But I'm wondering, you know, how many numbers this would actually impact in terms of how many more doctors we can get. My own guess is that it's probably not a lot. So there's a lot more work to do on this, Mr. Speaker. As I say, good that we're removing this impediment; the college said that this was an impediment. Well, I guess, in the short run we'll see how much of an impediment it was. I hope I'm wrong, but I don't think that this is going to add to a big influx of immigrant doctors. I think the problem is deeper than that, much deeper than that. But at least this is a recognition that there is a problem, and we will certainly support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.
Are there additional speakers?
Should I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 50 read a third time]

Bill 47
Livestock Commerce and Animal Inspection
Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd first like to thank everyone who participated in this bill. It went through all the proper stages. Really, given that there were no concerns raised, as was indicated in the limited debate, in the approval of this bill in all the other stages, I'd like to move third reading of Bill 47, the Livestock Commerce and Animal Inspection Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad this bill turned out the way it did because I think there was some concern in the very beginning that there was more going on here, that there was something nefarious, something to be worried about. It looks like it turned out with everybody supporting it, which is always a good thing in this Assembly.

I think the concerns at the beginning were that this was somehow hooked to BSE and importing and being able to test and things, and that's always a worry in Alberta. What we actually saw here was clarification of requirements around security interest disclosure, sale documentation, the actual paperwork, prompt payment, and livestock permits. I think that this also has an amendment in it to the Animal Health Act which would add inspection authority over livestock market facilities as well as the other areas that they currently have.

12:10

Just a few concerns. There are a number of items being added into regulations again, and that never pleases me. The government always argues that this is useful for effective management. In this case they're arguing effective management of licensing and documentation and inspections, but I continue to argue that if they're that important, then the issues should be addressed in the legislation itself, and this should not be done behind closed doors. I think that what exacerbates a concern here is other choices that have been made where the government has made regulations weaker, such as with the confined feeding operations. Again, that happened away from the fresh air and the light of day.

The inspection powers. It's a question about whether the inspections will uphold the rules which have been set out. We have heard some concerns raised with us again around monitoring and enforcement, which has become a very common theme with this government. They set something in legislation or in regulations, and then there's no monitoring ability. There's no monitoring staff to follow up and see if, in fact, compliance is being achieved, if standards are being met, you know, if criteria are being handled appropriately.

Then, of course, there's enforcement. If there's actually monitoring and it's found that there's a lack of compliance, then enforcement needs to happen. Unfortunately, that is the one area where this government fails repeatedly. We had a lack of monitoring and

enforcement around infection control. We've had problems around environmental protection. We've had other health examples. There's a number of different sectors that this government just fails, frankly, on monitoring and enforcement. They don't put an emphasis on it. We have concerns about that possibility with this act as well.

Aside from those concerns which I have raised here but that have also been raised by others who have spoken to this bill, we did consult as widely as we could with the obvious choices: the Wild Rose Agricultural Producers, Chicken Producers, Alberta Pork, Alberta Turkey Producers, Alberta Beef Producers, and others that you would expect us to be talking to around a bill like this. Aside from the comments that I've raised, they were pretty much okay with it, so we are also.

Thank you for allowing me to put that on the record on Bill 47 in third reading.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just very briefly, this bill seems to make absolute good sense. I guess, you know, the point is that this is an important bill in some ways because we all know how important beef safety is, not only for the safety part of it but what happens whenever there is a bit of crisis with one cow or something and the R-CALF and all the rest of them get into it. The legal language is important and all the rest of it, but I take it from the minister, who I see is quoted in the paper, that this is really what this is all about: that we have to streamline and be able to move quickly in terms of our beef safety and our monitoring.

If this bill goes in that direction, Mr. Speaker – and I take it that that's what it's prepared to do; I'm not an expert in it, but it seems to me that that's what it's all about – then certainly it's welcome. This may be a more important bill at some point than we realize if we ever have to face some crisis again in the near future. Hopefully, this will go a long ways in the monitoring of beef safety. We certainly will support it at this time.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.
Additional speakers?

Shall I call on the hon. member to conclude? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments that were just made on this, and I assure you that I will be passing them on.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 47 read a third time]

Bill 49
Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll move third reading of Bill 49, please.

The Speaker: Okay. Bill 49 has been moved.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. In order to support Bill 49, which hopes to cut down on the number of injuries that are caused

by people who speed through intersections and through red lights, we need to know that this is not just a photoradar cash cow circumstance. Like photoradar, the punishment, the fine, comes in the mail some time after the inappropriate action took place, and therefore the potential for changing attitudes despite a fine is somewhat limited. It's kind of like, you know, getting after your young puppy for eating your slipper two weeks after the fact. However, I support this bill if the statistics that the government can produce show that by the actions of these cameras and the tickets that follow, driver safety is enhanced.

We weren't able to bring amendments forward. We talked to Parliamentary Counsel. Two amendments that I would have liked to have brought forward and that I would encourage the government to incorporate were on how the money that was collected would be spent. As I say, rather than it disappearing into general revenue, I was given assurance by members of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation that the money would be spent as determined by local police forces.

What I would like to have and would like to encourage government members to consider is using a portion of the money that is taken from these ticket fines and putting it into driver safety initiatives. There are two very highly successful programs that I would like to see potential investment in. One is the teenSmart program, which is aimed at young first-time drivers during the graduated licence stage of their education process. This program has been enthusiastically embraced in the United States and has demonstrated that by adopting this program, many young lives have been saved. The graduated licence program is improved by a lengthier process through the teenSmart program.

12:20

Another area where I would have liked to have seen the money under Bill 49 spent is on a sim program, a simulated driving education program, which takes a young student, or an older student for that matter, into a very safe environment, and they have an opportunity to progress through a series of simulated driving experiences that they might not have on the road prior to getting their licence. For example, it takes into account road conditions worsening, the onset of snow or heavy rain, and the slipperiness of the roads. In the safety of the chair in a room in front of the simulated program the student has an opportunity to develop the reactive measures necessary to then transfer it to the roads, all within the safety of the program. The beauty of the sim program is that if a student makes a mistake, the program shuts down as opposed to if they made a mistake in real life, which could cost their life or the lives of others. Spending money on safety initiative programs like sims and like teenSmart would be a terrific justification of the money that would be collected under Bill 49.

Another area that I would encourage the government to consider adopting is that if you want the offence of speeding through a red light and identify particular intersections that have become deadly through recurring crashes, then consider the idea of demerit points. If a person, particularly a repeat offender, sees the points on their licence disappearing, then they're more likely to take their actions seriously. We've had the situation of an individual from up in the Lesser Slave Lake area being considered potentially as a dangerous offender for repeatedly driving while under the influence of alcohol, sometimes going so far as to actually steal the vehicles with which his accidents have occurred.

There is no doubt that we need to improve traffic safety, and with the money that comes from these fines, I would hope that it would also contribute to the hiring of more police enforcement officers because no ticket, no fine can take the place of an on-duty officer

posted on a frequent stakeout circumstance at these troublesome intersections. I know we don't have resources such that we can have, obviously, a police officer at each of these intersections, but it's through these programs rather than after-the-fact tickets that driver safety will improve.

I do thank the mover of this Bill 49. I'm not worried about the confidentiality or the potential of prying into individuals' rights. These cameras are pre-established, and if they contribute to safer driving and save lives, then I'm extremely supportive of Bill 49.

I'm hoping to see in the near future – and I believe the Member for Calgary-Hays will reintroduce my Motion 506, that I introduced in the spring of 2005 – a ban on cellphones. Hopefully within his piece of legislation he will consider not only the hand-held version but also the hands-free version, as Dr. Francescutti, an emergency physician here in Edmonton, has suggested.

Again, I do thank the member for bringing forth Bill 49. I hope he will take into account the preventative safety measures I've suggested and also the hiring of more police forces for on-the-spot enforcement.

Thank you.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I feel it's very important that I get up and tell all Albertans how important this government feels traffic safety is in Alberta, and I know that all Albertans believe traffic safety is very important. In this bill today the speed on green seems to be what people are talking about a lot. I just want everyone to realize that what this is all about is strictly an enforcement tool that we are putting out there to help law enforcement make our streets safer, and they're to be used in high-collision intersections.

But I also want to state that unless we get everybody thinking strongly – we know that most collisions in Alberta are caused by people who just happen to not pay attention for a few minutes. The most important thing that will increase safety for all Albertans is for people to pay attention to what they're doing when they're driving. We know there are all kinds of distractions out there, and we are going to try to address those distractions and make sure that we make all of our streets and roads, especially the provincial highways, safe for Albertans so they all get home to their families and their loved ones.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we'll carry on with the bill.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Questions? Comments?

There being none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spoke in second reading on this, and I want to reiterate an important point, I believe. Frankly, traffic safety is important. The record lately, if you read some of the comments in the papers – and I think the minister of infrastructure is talking about it – is that we have problems. We all have to be concerned about that. I just saw some stats about, you know, the recent increases in casualties, and the number of collisions is going up, and that is a concern to all of us.

Whether this will help or not, though, is somewhat debatable. I'm sure the minister has talked about that. When the city of Edmonton's Police Commission looked at this – I'm talking about the green lights and red lights, not about the drunken driving thing – about the red-light cameras that are there now, they found that the statistics were inconclusive on whether it was solving the problem or not. So is there a better way to do it or not? I worry sometimes about Big Brother – I'm sure we all do – and the Member for Calgary-Varsity alluded to it. Not that I've had any experience with this, of course.

Dr. B. Miller: No. You've heard about it.

Mr. Martin: I've heard about this, getting tickets in the mail after the fact.

I guess I would argue that with the economy the way it is and people moving in, we definitely need more police, and I still think that that's the most effective way to deal with it, Mr. Speaker. There's a big difference between getting a ticket in the mail later on and saying, "Do I go through the court?" or whatever and paying it – there are no demerits – and being pulled over by a policeman and a ticket written. That has some impact.

The other thing I would say about it. I go back into ancient history, when I used to – and I've mentioned this – live in Calgary. I think this program was effective. As a high school counsellor in Calgary at the time they tried to bring in the idea that if you got so many demerit points or at a certain level, then you had to go and take some courses, and one of them was traffic safety and the rest of it. One was just counselling to deal with attitudes. It was interesting to see how people would change their minds after a few sessions there.

I think that if we could bring that sort of program in when people get up in the demerits because there are the perennial speeders, the perennial reckless drivers. The minister has talked about cellphones and distractions – it's true – but we do know there's a certain group of people that get up there and are creating havoc. With more police and more of these sorts of programs I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that this would be a much more effective way to deal with traffic safety, especially in view of the Edmonton Police Commission's study on what's already there, that they found it inconclusive. So I throw that in as an alternative that we should be looking at down the way. That's a budget item to get more police, but maybe there's a better way to deal with driver education and attitude changes and all sorts of things that we need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

12:30

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, hon. members. Additional speakers?

The hon. Member to close the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a third time]

Bill 52 Corrections Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move third reading of Bill 52.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I participated in the debate on Bill 52, the Corrections Amendment Act, 2007, in Committee of the Whole.

Mr. R. Miller: What time was that?

Mr. Elsalhy: It was earlier this morning, much earlier this morning. Now we're in third reading. I have to note, Mr. Speaker, that this bill did not receive second reading, actually, or received it without any debate because it was moved and passed in the span of about 30 seconds.

Mr. Rodney: Excellent.

Mr. Elsalhy: I actually question the Member for Calgary-Lougheed expressing his happiness and admiration with the way that this bill passed second reading. I have to disagree with the hon. member. This is the way, obviously, the government bills it as efficient, and the Member for Calgary-Lougheed calls it open and transparent. I disagree.

However, it did receive extensive debate in Committee of the Whole, mostly from this side of the House because members from the government only reacted to amendments and ideas I think once. It was unfortunate that three amendments were introduced in the House and that these amendments were rejected with really very little debate. I thought that the arguments from the government were particularly weak in terms of: "Well, you know, yeah, good idea, but we're going to do it anyway, so there is no need for amending the legislation. There is no need for putting it on the record. We'll just do it the same way, in regulation again." Which is something that is not debated.

Now, I'm going to briefly reiterate some of my comments from committee, Mr. Speaker. This bill does three things. The first part talks about disclosure, as in telling the victim of a crime the whereabouts, the sentence, and the release information of the offender that committed that particular crime, and we're expanding the definition of a victim to include sons, daughters, spouses, partners, parents, and so on. I agree with that.

Part 2 deals with monitoring or recording inmate phone conversations. I asked a few questions in committee, and I have one comment and one question. The reason we're doing this is to prevent the perpetration of further crime. The reason we do this is to maybe ensure the safety and security of our corrections officers because sometimes they get threatened or harassed or assaulted, and we are also doing this to enhance safety and security for the public outside of the correctional institution. So in that regard I don't disagree. Are we going to just use technology, or is there going to be an individual like a monitoring individual, a call monitor, that is assigned this particular task? I need that clarification because I mentioned places like Alabama and Saskatchewan in my remarks earlier today, and they basically have different ways of doing things. Some people have a person. Some people just rely on technology, and then that recording or that audio is reviewed later if it's necessary.

Then part 3 deals with hearings and appeals in terms of disciplinary action against inmates who break the rules or break the code of conduct within the institution.

My challenge to the hon. sponsor of this bill is with respect to regulations. I would really like this government, if it's true to its commitment to openness and transparency, to either table regulations, to be in the habit or to make this a practice that regulations are tabled periodically. We're not asking for them to be tabled once a month or every two months; we're asking that maybe twice a year regulations that are changed or updated be tabled in the Assembly or be put on the ministry's website for everybody to review and for everybody to go through. I would extend this to ministerial orders as well. People know about orders in council, but they don't know that there is something called a ministerial order, which has a lot of power and does a lot of things on direction from a minister. We don't see these unless we ask for them.

At one point I know that the library here at the Legislature kept some archives. That was the practice, you know, before. I remember, for example, looking through these records. When you, Mr. Speaker, were a minister of the Crown, I noticed that it was your practice to make available your ministerial orders for everybody to see. It was an open and transparent approach, and I commend you.

Mr. R. Miller: Those were the days.

Mr. Elsalhy: Those were the days. Absolutely. This cabinet and this administration should really borrow a page from your book from back then, Mr. Speaker.

I am willing to work together with the hon. member. We expressed support in committee. We're on the same page when it comes to making communities safer, making people safer both who work within the correctional institution and those who are outside.

I'm going to end by issuing another challenge to the sponsor of the bill and to the Solicitor General by extension. If we're truly concerned about the safety and the well-being of our correctional officers both emotionally and physically, I think there's another layer to add, which is their well-being financially. I have challenged the minister to reclassify correctional officers in this province and to modify their pay scale to reflect the value and the appreciation of this government and the people of this province for the work that they do.

In a correspondence with the minister between myself and himself and even in this House the minister has indicated that the situation hasn't changed from 2000 till now, over seven years, that they do the same work and they're exposed to the same stresses and the same difficulties, so maybe it doesn't warrant a pay increase of the same magnitude as the sheriffs have experienced. I have to argue that times have changed, and 2007 is nothing like the year 2000, Mr. Speaker. We have the incidence and the magnitude of violent crime increasing. The sophistication of crime is increasing. Gang activity is increasing, and that gang activity actually translates to the inside of our correctional institutions as well. It is a place that is very stressful. These people do excellent work dealing with these inmates and maintaining order, carrying out sentences. They do inmate transfers between institutions. They take inmates to courthouses and so on.

I think the time has come for them as well to be looked at favourably, with a favourable eye from this government to reflect our appreciation for their work. We worry about their safety. We worry about their well-being physically and emotionally. I think we should add that layer as well and worry about their well-being financially. I think it is ridiculous and it's absolutely unacceptable for a human resources individual to tell members from our corrections community that if they don't like their pay, they either quit and apply to be a sheriff or they quit and reapply in three months to get higher pay. I think this is just absurd.

This is a challenge that I am issuing, and I appreciate the opportunity. I am voicing support. I am urging the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays to continue to work with me as the shadow minister on this side of the House to make things even better in the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support in principle of this bill. I believe that intervention is required. I believe that we need to be aware of activities that are going on within the institutions, I think, for some of the reasons that have been outlined, including by my colleague here.

12:40

I'll begin by referring to part 1. I do think that our justice system needs to have more emphasis on victims and expand the definition of victims to include those that are parents and children and family members and recognize that when a crime is committed, it's not just committed against that individual. As serious as those consequences

may be, it's also committed against the community, in particular those that are closest to that victim. We need to recognize that, and I think we need to take a look at a number of measures that may be effective in that regard. I'm interested in perhaps pursuing that at a future date as well.

I do think we need to be concerned for the victims and bring them into the process and give them options and opportunities and help to make them feel empowered throughout the process. I have some experience with this in my previous work, and I know that improvements can be made in that regard. So I think that turning our attention to these issues is a good idea, and this is why, again, I rise to express support for Bill 52 and for the sponsor of this bill.

I also would like to express my support for measures that improve safety for guards and all the institutional staff that work with offenders, to try to address these issues that so badly need addressing.

I'm also interested in learning more about how this will all unfold. As a result, I do have concerns about regulations that might follow, and I think we do need to have those made public so that we can look at those and improve on them wherever possible.

I think the other thing is that as we're looking into conversations and activities within the institutions – and that's very necessary – I think we want to take a look at why it is that we want to do that. Yes, we want to intervene and try to be able to reduce crime and the incidence of crime. As my colleague has indicated, we have to make sure that our institutions don't become areas where the crime culture gets a boost, in fact. We want our institutions to be an area where concerns around crime and the crime culture actually get reduced by having the public, through the institutional process, including staff members and volunteers, come into the institutions and address some of those issues, including some of the core issues that are involved in the area of crime.

We're all interested in seeing crime reduction. That needs to be the important, critical component here: to reduce crime and to reduce the number of victims and reduce the price that we all pay, as I say, not just the victims and the grave price that the victims pay but also the price that's paid by family members and the community at large. I think we need to take a look at what it is we're trying to do and to what end. I think that as much as we need to address the issues of intervening to see that crime doesn't get increased or enhanced by the activities of offenders while they're in the institutions, we also need to have an opportunity to see that we're able to work with the offenders and try to increase the opportunities for positive interventions as well.

The reality is that many offenders are in the institutions and certainly have got negative contacts out in the community. We have to reduce that and eliminate those opportunities for that type of interaction, but also we want to be able to support the positive interactions because some of the inmates have also got interactions with positive supports within the community, and these are often the key to reducing crime and reducing the chances for recidivism.

I'm glad that this bill has been brought forward to be able to focus attention on these important issues, and I look forward to future opportunities to be able to address these issues.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, are you in the question-and-comment portion?

Dr. Pannu: Yes.

The Speaker: Then I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 52, Corrections Amendment Act, 2007, in its third reading. It's a pleasure to make some final comments on the bill. Bill 52 pertains to the trial and punishment of prisoners in Alberta's correctional institutions for institutional disciplinary offences defined in section 47 of the Corrections Act.

The majority of the prisoners held in Alberta's correctional institutions are the pretrial prisoners, who are presumed to be innocent of the commission of any offence. Nearly all of the remainder of the prisoners have been convicted and sentenced to terms of imprisonment of less than two years. The punishments that may be imposed by the disciplinary tribunals at issue include solitary confinement and the loss of early release. Now, the Supreme Court of Canada has noted that these punishments attract scrutiny under section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The bill before us, Bill 52, was put forward in response to the decision last year from Hon. Justice R.P. Marceau in *Currie versus Alberta*. In that decision Justice Marceau drew attention to section 15(1) of the Corrections Act, and sections 43 and 45 of the corrections institution regulations were declared to be of no force or effect in that they're contrary to section 7 of the Charter. So this bill is in response to fixing the problems to which Justice Marceau drew attention.

Justice Marceau's decision in *Currie* is not limited to abstract theoretical concepts. Rather, the decision documents many actual instances of human rights violations and gross miscarriages of justice which have occurred in Alberta prisons in recent years. Justice Marceau described disciplinary hearings evidence before him as "perverse" and reflecting "institutional bias and unfairness in the extreme." These are Justice Marceau's own words. He found not only reasonable apprehension of bias but the practice of actual flagrant bias on a widespread and systemic basis.

Mr. Speaker, while the first part of Bill 52, that dwells on providing protection for victims, has our support, I think that the provisions of Bill 52 related to providing more protection to victims and on balance giving victims the ability to seek information in spite of the fact that there may be contrary expectations with respect to the privacy of prisoners – I think that the right balance is struck in creating legislative provisions which enhance the rights of victims and the protections that they certainly deserve to have in law.

The concern that I have is with the part of the bill that deals with the disciplinary offences and the manner in which they will be put to trial and addressed. I think that Justice Marceau in paragraph 196 of his reasons held that

there is such a clear conflict between the duty of staff members of a disciplinary board in Alberta's correctional centres to maintain discipline and staff morale and the right of the prisoner to have his charges dealt with before a tribunal with a sufficient degree of independence and impartiality, that both the perception of lack of independence and bias and the fact (as proved in evidence) that in a substantial number of cases (almost all cases where there is a conflict between the evidence of correctional officers and that of inmates) there is a reasonable apprehension of bias.

12:50

Mr. Speaker, the section of the bill dealing with disciplinary hearings and appeals and the appointment of adjudicators I think falls short of what the problems were with meeting the requirements as set out in Justice Marceau's decision, so I have a fear that the bill doesn't really address the problems effectively. It doesn't effectively address the issues of independence of tribunals and the issue of impartiality.

Also, in terms of the remuneration to be paid to adjudicators, I think that there's an absence of evidence that their independence will

be exercised in making those decisions, which means, then, that either the correctional officers or the administrators of the corrections systems will still have a possibility of undue influence both on the adjudication process and on who makes those decisions; that is, in terms of the appointment of people who make those decisions.

That part of the bill is troubling, and I have difficulty supporting it unless the hon. member who sponsored the bill is able to address these issues in the next little while as we conclude the debate in third reading of the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Any questions? There being none, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. At the risk of being considered soft on crime, I would like to go back to my 34 years as a teacher and suggest that most people are reclaimable. In terms of this bill, Bill 52, I am hoping that the government will consider legislation that provides protection not only for guards but for inmates in overcrowded remand centres who are forced into double- and triple-bunking circumstances, to the point where the quality of their life is so reduced, keeping in mind that they have yet to be convicted of a crime. They're there on a holding pattern.

Also, it is my hope to avoid recidivism. For the people who find themselves on the wrong side of the law for a variety of reasons, whether it's fetal alcohol syndrome, whether it's drug abuse, regardless of the reason that they found themselves in prison, I am hoping that this government will look at education programs that will give them opportunities to take the straight path as opposed to the crooked one that they've taken so far.

It's not just that our laws don't allow for the hang 'em high, lock the door and throw away the key. We have to deal with the possibility that these individuals, except in extreme cases, will be released at some point after serving a portion or all of their sentence. If we don't have a program for them while they're incarcerated, then they will have that hands-on, special internship from the person with whom they share that cell or bed to get a training in crime. So we can't just deal with the monitoring of phone calls, the external observations. We have to deal with the root causes that led them to crime in the first place and then, once they're incarcerated, give them an opportunity through education and counselling to straighten their lives around and become productive citizens.

Also, when we are not necessarily tapping or taping phone call conversations, what protection do we have for the person with whom the conversation is being had? For example, are lawyer/client privileges maintained? If the person is talking to a family member who has had nothing to do with that crime, is that family member informed that their conversations are being taped? Between getting rid of recidivism and dealing with human rights both for the individual incarcerated and the third party with whom they are connected, I would hope that this bill and future bills would take into account improving the process, not just oversight but changing attitudes and giving people a second chance.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, on Standing Order 29(2)(a) or to participate?

Mr. R. Miller: To speak to the bill in third reading.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't take a lot of time.

I would just sort of like to expand upon the comment that my colleague from Calgary-Varsity made regarding the third party in the situation of the monitoring of phone calls. There was a lot of discussion when we were discussing Bill 49 earlier today about Big Brother watching. I share the same concerns that my colleague has mentioned, particularly in the case of lawyer/client privilege.

We've seen big government spy on its citizens this year. I heard the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House last night describe the treatment of his constituents. I can't recall the exact words that he used. He suggested, I think, that they were treated in a disgusting manner by their own government. Any time we have a situation where, particularly, lawyer/client privilege could be jeopardized, as I believe could be the case here, I think that we should all be concerned that that doesn't happen. I understand now through the ministry that it is up to an individual to make sure that that doesn't happen, that it's not enshrined in legislation that that doesn't happen. I really believe it should be. As I say, we've seen examples of this this year, and it's something that causes most people a lot of distress to know that that happened. Certainly, it caused the Member for Rocky Mountain House a lot of distress to know that his constituents were exposed to that sort of treatment.

Mr. Lund: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order?

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Lund: Yes. Under 23(i) and (j). Mr. Speaker, I never said that there was mistreatment by the government. I never said that. There was mistreatment by the EUB in a hearing. I would ask the hon. member to withdraw those statements. I did not say: by the government.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, I'm not sure whether or not there was a citation there, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes, there was a citation.

Mr. R. Miller: Certainly, there's no question that the Energy and Utilities Board is a functioning arm of this government. Mr. Speaker, it's been proven now through e-mails that the Department of Energy was aware of the fact that spies had been hired.

The Speaker: The point here is about the personal member.

Mr. R. Miller: Very clearly last night he was talking about the Energy and Utilities Board and the fact that their actions against his own constituents were disgusting. He may not have used the word "government," Mr. Speaker, and if everything hinges on the word "government," then I will withdraw the word "government" and happily suggest that the Member for Rocky Mountain House indicated last evening that the Energy and Utilities Board's actions against his constituents were disgusting.

Mr. Lund: I will accept that apology. I did not say: the government. He has acknowledged that. Thank you.

1:00

The Speaker: Thank you very much for that clarification, gentlemen.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, please proceed.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you. And thank you for the clarification, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

Mr. R. Miller: I'm not sure if I can pick up my train of thought here. We had talked about the third parties. Indeed, we were discussing the possibility of either the government or its functionaries spying on its citizens and how deplorable that situation would be.

The other point I wanted to make was that now that we're into this situation where we're going to allow these phone calls to be monitored, I'm hopeful that at some point in the relatively near future there would be some sort of an evaluation of this new protocol so that we could determine whether or not this measure is in fact accomplishing the goals that the mover of the bill set out – i.e., that it is either preventing future crimes from taking place or that perhaps it's bringing to light some crimes that have taken place or something – some sort of an evaluation of the protocol so that we know that, in fact, it's a useful thing that we're doing here. If it turns out, Mr. Speaker, that there was no real need for this measure, that, you know, we're monitoring phone calls for no real reason, that we're not accomplishing anything by doing so, then I would hope that there would be a review of this part of the legislation, and perhaps we could dispense with it if, in fact, it's found to be not useful.

The last thing I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, is just a bit of a compliment for my colleague from Edmonton-McClung, the shadow minister involved on this particular file, for the very hard work that he's done on this case. I have had the pleasure of hearing his arguments throughout today and last evening on this bill and particularly on the amendments, which I think were very well thought out and well argued. Unfortunately, there was very little response from the government side and certainly no support from the government side for what I thought to be very well reasoned and very rational amendments. I would like to congratulate my colleague for the effort that he put into this bill, and I hope that at some point perhaps the members from the other side will see the merit in those arguments. Maybe we'll see an amendment again next year that might address some of those points that were raised in debate in committee earlier today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 52 read a third time]

head:

Statement by the Speaker

All-night Sitting

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. Minister of Education, television has now kicked in, four minutes ago, so viewers across this province and anyone who would access the Legislative Assembly website or the television site will wonder what is happening. For all those who are viewing today and for all those in the galleries, normally the Legislative Assembly sits on a daily basis from 1 o'clock to 6 o'clock. We are currently in a unique situation that happens periodically, this being only the fourth time in the history of the province of Alberta that it's actually happened.

Yesterday the hon. members convened at 1 o'clock in the afternoon, sat until 6 o'clock, took a break for two hours, recon-

vened at 8 o'clock last evening, and have now been going continuously since that time, nonstop, so that session has not risen. We are in exactly the same kind of scenario as we were at 8 o'clock last evening, continuing with the work of the Assembly, but as we have now not risen, the normal Routine that would come in at 1 o'clock on a given day will no longer apply. So the business of the Assembly will continue.

We're currently in third reading process, but I'm now going to ask for the indulgence of the members if we might revert to the introduction of visitors and guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Speaker: If members will just bear with me. I have this list of notes from hon. members wishing to introduce a guest or a visitor, so it will take a few minutes. Then, in conclusion of this, we will revert, and we'll go to the Minister of Education.

The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the riding of Calgary-Mountain View, Ms Leah Lawrence. She's seated in the members' gallery. Leah has a great deal of experience in both her professional and community life. She is an engineer, an economist, and a writer. She also helped start Climate Change Central, the first public/private partnership on climate change in Canada, and is a member of the board of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. She has also worked for EnCana on finding viable answers to the environmental issues that face Albertans. Leah has lived in Calgary's inner city for over 13 years, where she's an active community volunteer, chairing the Hillhurst Sunnyside Community Environment Committee. I am very proud to have such a strong environmental and community advocate as a member of my team as we build Alberta's future. I would ask that Leah rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's once again a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the riding of Edmonton-Strathcona, Mrs. Hughena Gagne. Hughena is another familiar face for members of this Assembly as she serves in the office of the Minister of Finance. She has a long history of serving Albertans in a variety of capacities. Additionally, just the other day at a fundraiser I had the pleasure of discovering that she has a great singing voice and does an exceptional impersonation of Patsy Cline. I'm proud to have Hughena as a member of my team as we build Alberta's future. I would ask Hughena to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my third introduction today, and again to all members of the Assembly, is the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie, Mr. Naresh Bhardwaj. He's sitting in the members' gallery. Naresh is a graduate of the University of Alberta and has over 18 years of experience teaching in the public system. In fact, he's teaching at J. Percy Page high school. He's an active member of the community, a dedicated family man, president of the Council of India Societies, and has contributed vastly to a number of other organizations. He's also the co-ordinator of the registered apprenticeship program at that school. He obviously brings many

years of experience to the team. I'm proud to have him as a member of our team. I would ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, once again I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the riding of Edmonton-Rutherford, Mr. Fred Horne. Fred is a very familiar face to the members of this Assembly as he currently serves as the executive assistant to the minister of health. He has a great deal of experience in health care, working in the sector most of his life. He's an active member of his community and still manages to spend some time with his wife, Jennifer. I'm proud to have Fred as a member of our team. I'm going to ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister for Capital Planning.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to also introduce some of Naresh Bhardwaj's family, who are constituents as well. First, I'd like to introduce Naresh's wife, Synita. She's a very loving, caring homemaker who has contributed so much to the community, and obviously she's contributed a lot to Naresh's success to date. We want to invite her to please stand and receive our very warm applause. Thank you, Synita, for being here.

Also, I'd like to introduce Naresh's father, Mohinder Bhardwaj. Mohinder has had a very distinguished career with the Canadian National Railway since moving here to Canada in 1975. Seated right beside him is Naresh's son Neeraj. He's a brilliant high school student at J. Percy Page high school, and he's also in the elite level of soccer. If they would all rise now together, Naresh. Thank you all.

1:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since I have become Minister of Environment, I have come to meet a number of the most dedicated and talented public servants that there are in all of government, and those are the employees of Alberta Environment. Today we have a group of those employees who are visiting the Legislature, having an opportunity to see the legislative side of governance, and I will be very pleased to introduce them. I'll be shortly meeting them in my office to discuss a little bit of what they have seen during their tour. I know that they're all eagerly anticipating my reading their names to see how many I can actually mispronounce.

If I could, I would like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Liana Banek, Megan McLean, De-Nette Sawin, Mallory Chrusch, Camille Almeida, Santiago Paz, Angela McGonigal, Matt Meier, Robert Magai, Michelle Olsen, Joanne Barwise, Kate Spencer, Cathy Kingdon, Karen Thomas, Christy Foley, and Yayne-abebe Aklilu. I'd ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of all members of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured and touched to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a number of constituents of Edmonton-Centre. A group of them are residents of the Cascade Apartments and have just had lease renewal notices that indicate their rent is going to be going up between 26 and 68 per cent, so they have come to us asking for help. We're doing our best to help them,

but there's not a lot available. I would ask Minx Le and the rest of the residents of the Cascade Apartments group to also please rise, and we would welcome them to the Assembly.

Also visiting us today is constituent Linda Eckenswiller. Linda, if you could rise, please. Linda is another constituent who is experiencing very high rental increases and a likely condo conversion. She is working but is finding it a real strain and a diminished quality of life. I appreciate her sharing her story and coming down here today to watch us in the Assembly. Please help me welcome Linda as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 45 students of grades 5 and 6 from Youngstown elementary school in the Edmonton-Glenora riding. I've always enjoyed going to this school and engaging them in discussions about politics, so I'm glad they're here. They are with teachers Cindy Annala, Lyn Korah, Brenda Lemoine, and Nicole Holland; and parent helpers Dawn McGinnis, Kym Varro, Mike Sonier, John Donner, Penny Stinson, Ken Gee, and Laura Kerr. I invite them to stand and please receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we know, today may well be the last day of session. That's the rumour I'm hearing, but I've been around long enough to know that it's never over till it's over. But if it is the last day of session, then it will also be the last working day for Barney Stevens as he's retiring from the Legislative Assembly security service. Barney retired from the Edmonton Police Service in April of 1994 with the rank of inspector and has been in the service of the Legislative Assembly since September of 2000. He's seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask him to rise so that we can all wish him well in his future endeavours and thank him for all his good work for this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you my former football coach, Dennis O'Byrne. Would you please stand in the members' gallery and take a bow. He was famous for teaching me to be called Fingers Flaherty. Also, I'd like you to know that in this particular picture is the famous Bob Goulet. We were on the same team together. We have Paul Stehelin from St. Albert, the owner of the St. Thomas café: great cornbread, as hon. Mr. Horner will know, and also the odd drink there as well if you're lucky. They're standing. Would you welcome them. Thank you very much for coming.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone in this Assembly has heard me talk a lot about the co-operation and collaboration that we have with our postsecondary system, and that comes about through a great team that we have in our department, both on the innovation side and the postsecondary side. We work together as one team. We have in the members' gallery some members of that team from Advanced Education and Technology's human resources branch. It is an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the House this group of very talented

people. As I call their names, I would ask that they stand and remain standing while I call out the names: Miss Carrie Frey, Cheryl Beitel, Connie Scott, Debbie Bilotta, Heather Hansen, Inessa Serebrin-Janmohamed, Khadija Alidina, Laura Barr, Lauren Blasius, and Mike Annett. As I said, they are rising in the members' gallery, and I would ask all hon. members to give them a very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a very, very special guest, Dawna McGrath, who began her career as a correctional peace officer in 1966 at the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre. Dawna is here today with her son Greg and his wife, Janice. Also with her today is Cathy Scott, the director of the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre, and my executive assistant Maureen Geres.

For the past 41 years Dawna has worked in different units at the facility, rising to her current position as supervisor. Earlier today I presented Dawna with the first of the new badges we are giving to each of our 1,500 correctional peace officers throughout Alberta. These new badges are part of the renaming of the correctional peace officers to better reflect the extent of their professional role within the law enforcement community. We value the services they provide to all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Having sat in this chair for 22 of the last 24 hours, it's with great pleasure and a little bit of stiffness that I rise this afternoon to introduce to you and through you some very special faces that are already well known to many members in this House and around the building. The staff members of government caucus work tirelessly to ensure that the daily rigours of life in the Legislature run smoothly so that we as government MLAs can efficiently carry out our roles as representatives in our communities and our province.

I know I speak on behalf of all government members as I give my most sincere thanks and I introduce our staff of hard-working people. They are seated in both galleries, and I'd ask them to stand and remain standing as I call their names: from the whip's office Mike Simpson, Joanne Gaudet, and Craig Chupka; legislative assistants Jan Aldous, Alison Cheung, Carmen Frebrowski, Nicole Guenette, Megan Hampshire, Lerena Kelly, Bartek Kienc, Wendy King, Tracy Kully, Cheryl Lees, Barb Letendre, Hana Marinkovic, Brock Mulligan, Tennille Sadeghi, Lisa Stachniak, Robert Stephenson; and from our research branch senior researcher Brad Rabiey, Paul Bajcer, Jonathan Koehli, Andree Morier, Ben Coleman, Jeri Romaniuk, Warren Singh, and Brett Sparrow. I ask that they receive the warm welcome of all members of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

1:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a visiting delegation from our sister province in Russia, Khanty-Mansi. The group is here on a study tour examining Alberta's economic

development initiatives in northern regions and government programs that support our aboriginal communities. It's been my pleasure over the last hour and a half or so to host them at a luncheon, a very interesting luncheon, at which time we discussed a lot of issues of mutual concern between our two provinces.

Joining us today in the Speaker's gallery are Mr. Sergey Pikunov, who is the leader of the delegation, Ms Tatiana Kuchina, Ms Alena Shipilova, Pavel Kudym, Ms Anastasia Varakina, and Mr. Ivan Shiyatyy. The group is escorted by Mr. Brian Nicholson from the international governance office with the government of Alberta. The delegation's interpreter is Dr. Roman Shiyan. Mr. Speaker, I see they're all standing in your gallery, and I would ask that we all give them our warm traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I thank you as I make a second introduction. While our staff of the government members caucus are very efficient, they're not perfect. Missing from the list was Berenika Kalista, also in the research department. My apologies.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm also pleased today on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to introduce a group of 30 young children from Meadowlark elementary school that are in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the members of the Assembly as well.

Now, are there others? If not, then, hon. members, just to repeat to our visitors and the people who are viewing the Assembly today, normally at this point in time we're in the part of the Routine that goes from 1 o'clock to 1:30, but this is a unique event that we're currently in. The Assembly convened last evening at 8 o'clock and has run continuously through, and we're now in the business of dealing with third reading on a variety of bills. There will be no question period today. The remainder of the Routine is suspended as well. We're into the passing of bills, the making of laws, the ultimate objective for a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading
(continued)

Bill 53
Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: I'll now call on the hon. Minister of Education as he will move Bill 53, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, after some 16 or 17 hours of bells ringing and some debate that took us to some new levels in this Legislature, I found the introduction of guests incredibly refreshing. With some trepidation I stand here and ask that we move back into third reading of bills, but I know that we have to do that. So with that, I move Bill 53 for third reading.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and to speak to Bill 53 in third reading. I'll be brief. There are a few things that I want to go back to that I feel I want to encourage the government on. First of all, this has been an ongoing problem for decades that has not been addressed, and I want to refer back to a bill that this government had in that any surplus money was to go to paying off the debt. This Bill 53 is lacking in the fact that it's still

open ended, and this government could take 40 to 50 years to pay off this debt when they have a surplus budget and they put it into sustainability funds and other areas.

I think the first and most critical area is that for years they've been denying there was any debt, and now they've acknowledged it. They've taken on extra, that's going to burden the taxpayers of Alberta. Had they three or four years ago put in the \$4.1 billion that they had owing, that was their share, which they had signed and agreed was their share, had they put that \$4.1 billion the first time there was surplus money to pay off that debt, I do not believe the taxpayers of Alberta would be in the position now of having a possible \$38 billion or \$42 billion liability going into the future.

An Hon. Member: Forty five.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you very much. Forty-five billion dollars is the actuary's estimate on what the taxpayers will have to pay over the next 40 to 50 years.

I would urge the government to look at this bill and to use its option to pay off the \$4.1 billion debt immediately with any surplus dollars and eliminate that debt, thereby benefiting both the teachers and the taxpayers of this province going into the future. It's critical that we want a good working relationship. The neglect of not honouring that debt, especially in the last four years, when we've had huge surpluses, has raised the animosity.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

They've made a deal with the teachers, which I am grateful for, but I don't think the deal was in the best interests of both parties had they honoured their previous deal. Once again I want to stress that they need to put in at least the \$4.1 billion debt, go back and live the spirit of their old legislation that all surplus dollars must go to paying off the debt before we look at other things. I know that we can say that we have a \$60 billion infrastructure debt, but we still have to pay off our other debts. It needs to be a priority. I urge this government to move on it. We don't need to increase our sustainability funds. We need to pay off our debts. This teachers' debt is acknowledged now. They've signed a new contract, and I urge them to put in the \$4.1 billion immediately or in the next budget if they have to wait and to put the surplus dollars in there.

I appreciate the time to speak on Bill 53. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few comments. The fact that the government paid the public debt I think is good. However, the question becomes: where are they getting the money from? Where does the government put the role of the school trustee in this province? With government making all the decisions, what does this say about the role of school boards?

After a long battle I'm pleased that the government is finally addressing the issue of the teachers' unfunded liability. Last spring I put forward Motion 503, which urged the government to immediately address the issue of the teachers' unfunded liability and save Alberta taxpayers tens of billions of dollars over the long run. Had the government not considered the issue now, the public cost of the unfunded liability would have reached \$46 billion by 2060. Nonetheless, pension liability remains a \$6.3 billion debt, and the fact that the government of Alberta boasts it will cover the entire thing leads me to wonder where the money will come from.

The teachers' unfunded liability affects every taxpayer and will continue to do so for generations. The fact that the government of

Alberta claims that Alberta is debt free overlooks that the pension liability is a \$6 million debt. In that regard, although I say kudos to the Premier for finally addressing the important issue, an issue that former Premier Klein simply disregarded, I'm concerned about where all the money will come from, how it will affect Alberta taxpayers. Will it be drawn from the Education budget? The Stelmach government has said nothing about how the \$6.3 billion debt will be paid off or how quickly.

I'm also concerned about the role of the school trustees and Alberta school boards. As elected bodies the school boards are responsible for the governance of education. They have certain obligations to perform and certain powers to carry out their tasks. I'm concerned that the new agreement will diminish some of their roles and take power away from school boards and trustees and place it within the government. Once school boards enter into collective agreements for five years, it is not certain how much power they will have left in this decision-making process, Mr. Speaker.

In the meantime Alberta teachers have to ratify the deal, and in doing so, they have to agree not to strike for five years. As part of the agreement the Alberta teachers will also receive a one-time \$1,500 lump sum next April, and thereafter their wages will be automatically tied to the Alberta average weekly earnings index. Previously teachers had 3.1 per cent deducted from their paycheques to pay for the fund. Eliminating the 3.1 per cent deduction is certainly a step in the right direction as it will also encourage new students to join the teaching profession.

1:30

In my opinion, the unfunded liability has been provincial bargaining at its best. It has the appearance of a good deal, but as the shadow minister of Education I can't help but be cautious of the government's move. With elections just around the corner, it seems to me like a Tory attempt at its best to buy votes, not to mention eliminate the possibility of a teachers' strike.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Peace River, before we go there, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to take this opportunity to rise today and recognize an exceptional piece of work by the hon. Minister of Education. News of an agreement followed closely on the heels of the news of the exceptional performance of Alberta students on the world stage, speaking volumes about our youth and the future of our education system. The minister and his staff are to be congratulated, and I'm honoured to do so.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I wish the government and teachers and school boards, children, and parents every success with Bill 53. The concern I have, as the Member for St. Albert noted, is the potential for political opportunism rather than debt elimination/reduction.

The government, to cover the teachers' unfunded liability on a yearly basis, would contribute \$80 million, and the government could continue ad infinitum just paying that yearly amount without addressing the total debt, which approaches \$6.4 billion. Unless the government moves rapidly to address that overall debt, it is going to build, as was noted, to the \$45 billion figure, so I'm hoping that the government will move beyond opportunism and contribute more than strictly the minimal requirement of \$80 million a year to not

only address this debt but to remove it. That's going to take some commitment on the government's part.

I'm also concerned as to how well aware teachers are of the fine print of the details. The government has sort of encouraged teachers by putting in a part of their settlement bonus, I suppose you could call it, although it is their money: \$1,500. But that does not address the fact that my understanding is that the debt that was acquired between 1992 and 2007, to the best of my knowledge, may continue to be appearing as deductions in future paycheques. So while the government has said, "We will take over from here on into the future," there is still from 1992 to 2007 accumulated debt that the government, to my understanding, has yet to pick up. So when teachers sign on the dotted line, they are not necessarily losing that particular debt.

I'm also hoping that the government will work with school boards and recognize the valuable role that school trustees, elected representatives, provide. Of course, that role has been dramatically reduced going back to 1995, when the government became centralist and decided that locally elected school trustees weren't capable of managing and collecting one half of their total monies. That was from the educational portion of the property tax. When that was taken away from trustees, their autonomy was dramatically reduced. I am hoping that in the near future the government will give back that local responsibility that they took away from trustees, recognize the valuable work they do.

In praising the Minister of Education for his contributions to this settlement, he basically stated that his biggest contribution was not being directly involved. If not being involved contributed to the settlement, then I praise him for his absence.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on the debate.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few comments similar to what other people have made. In second reading I recall the minister saying that we misunderstood the bill.

Mr. Liepert: You still do.

Mr. Martin: No. We're well aware that this is \$25 million to additional contributions, but clearly it ties into the recent agreement, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Liepert: Everything in the world ties into that.

Mr. Martin: Well, say what you want, Mr. Minister. I'll give you lots of opportunity later to talk, I'm sure, and we'll look forward to it.

I think the point still has to be made – and all the speakers are saying this, Mr. Speaker – that we're glad that the deal was struck. We give you credit for that. Take that credit when you can from the opposition. But the important point that all speakers are saying here is that now we recognize that before, the government didn't accept this really as a debt. Now we have to accept it as a debt. I recollect – I don't have it down – I think it's something like immediately \$2.1 billion, and, you know, if it's allowed to escalate, it could lead up to \$46 billion. So that begs a question. This is a serious chunk of cash, and we're still not sure how the government plans to deal with it. Is it going to be done in the short run or the long run? I think that's what we're all saying is missing at this particular time.

I would hope – I know it's not going to happen – that the Minister of Finance is going to jump up and tell us today. I take it that's not going to happen. Oh, he is. I appreciate that. Mr. Speaker, it's incumbent, I think, on the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance that we do know this fairly quickly, about how we are going to handle this, because, as it's said, probably the sooner the better. I know we have to look at other financial things that we have to deal with, but this is fairly big. It's huge in terms of where we're going. So to the President of the Treasury and the Minister of Finance: I hope that fairly quickly we know how they are going to handle this.

As far as the case as a first step, I'm not going to be quite as cynical about the trustees, having formerly been a trustee. I had great rapport with the Minister of Education when we were in Edmonton, the ex-Minister of Education, the Minister of Finance, when I was with the Edmonton public school board and audits and all sorts of fun things that occurred, Mr. Speaker.

Clearly, the liability has to be dealt with at the provincial level. I'm going to give at this stage the benefit of the doubt that this is not another step towards dismantling or moving towards appointed trustees because obviously the boards could not begin to negotiate the unfunded liability because that's a provincial responsibility. So I will give them the benefit of the doubt now, but we'll watch in the future. Again, there's no doubt that we have to support this \$25 million for September 1 to December 31, but we'll look forward with great interest to how we handle the more important amount of money that has to be coming down the tube with the debt.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Chase: I just wanted to ask my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview if he was aware that the government is on the hook in terms of unfunded liabilities to the tune of \$1.5 billion for other public service sectors? Has he heard or been given any sense that the government is addressing the unfunded liability of these other deserving public-sector unions?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. Hon. member, I was not totally aware of that exact figure. I was aware that we had an unfunded liability. Thank you for alluding. When you add that together, that is significant. Clearly, the answer has to be that not only the teachers' unfunded liability but the other unfunded liabilities – we have to know very quickly what the government plans to do with that because that is, again, serious cash, even more serious than what I was talking about with the teachers' unfunded liability. So I look forward very quickly to the government telling us how they want to deal with this debt.

Thank you.

1:40

The Deputy Speaker: Others?

Back on the debate. The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and President of the Treasury Board, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly I just want to respond to the situation, how it will be dealt with. I can tell you that it will be dealt with with respect for the people involved because that's how this long-term agreement was arrived at.

I had the tremendous privilege of campaigning with our Premier

a year ago as we met many of the new teachers in this province that were being burdened with an unfair situation through no fault of their own. Mr. Speaker, the Premier dealt with these people in the way he does: open and honest. He came back to cabinet and said: we'll deal with this issue with respect for former teachers, respect for future teachers, and respect for children. The Education minister had enough respect for the system to step back and let the people involved in it do the negotiations. Mr. Bruseker had enough respect for what we needed to get done to step back and to let the people put forward a long-term solution to a very unfortunate problem.

I can only assure you, Mr. Speaker, that when we deal with these issues with respect for what people bring to the table, for what the consequences are, we will have many more solutions to long-standing problems when we are up front and honest about the situation. It was unfortunate for our new and valuable educators. I can assure you on behalf of the Minister of Finance that as we deal with the long-term solution to the unfunded pension, it will be done with respect to the taxpayers, to the teachers, and to the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'd very much appreciate it if the minister and President of the Treasury Board could clarify or give an idea, even sort of a futuristic plan, of how speedily you were hoping to address the entire unfunded liability of \$6.1 billion. I would like you to clear up the notion of just \$80 million a year to get us past the election. If you can provide detail, it would be most appreciated.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the government has entered into a long-term planning reinvestment strategy where the hon. Minister of Finance has set up a corporation called AIMCO, that's going to look after the investments of Albertans in a prudent, responsible way to return their investments. It's not just about saving. It's about reinvestment.

The member asked me about long-term, visionary thinking. If it were up to me, I would suggest that we could use the long-term investment of money to reinvest in our schools and pay a return on the schools back to the teachers' pension fund. I think that allows them to say: yes, this wasn't our making; our solution was solved with the injection of money. To show our commitment back to the students and taxpayers of Alberta, as the Ontario teachers' pension fund invests all over the world, we would like to reinvest in what's most important to them and to us: into the education system.

But I would correct the member about the other unfunded pensions being \$1.5 billion. It's about \$550 million.

I think we've set the stage, that we are going to deal with these issues responsibly, and I think AIMCO is a huge step forward to being able to do that. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the minister speaking at this time about this, but I want to come back. I agree that investments have to be done prudently and that we have to balance off different priorities and the rest of it. We all agree with that. No doubt about that. But, again, we're trying to get some handle because time is somewhat of the essence when we deal with this problem. I guess, just to follow up from the Member for Calgary-Varsity's, what sort of time frame are we looking at that we can take a look at how we're going to handle this? Rather than the

generalities about the investments and that, just a time frame. I know we can't begin to deal with it now because the agreements haven't been settled through the boards, and all 64 have to agree. Assuming that goes through, what sort of time frame are we looking at?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the time frame isn't as critically important to us as getting it right is. This has been a long, long-standing situation, and I think it's absolutely essential that we get our investment strategy solid first, build a solid foundation for investment. From that vehicle, from AIMCO, we may be able to offer better solutions after that's in place. It would be irresponsible for me to say that we'll deal with it next week, next year, two years. But the fact is that we'll be dealing with it, and the teachers won't have to. It's something they won't have to have over their head every day they go to the classroom.

I can appreciate that it is interesting. All of the progress as we come through will come back through the Legislature, but it really would be unfair to say a week, a year, a month. At least now teachers don't have to worry about it. Just we do.

The Deputy Speaker: Any more under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise on Bill 53, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2007. Around this time of year I always make a trip around all the schools in my constituency, and I have a lot in my constituency. This has been an issue ever since I was first elected, a little over three years ago, and I've talked to the teachers in the schools. I must very much congratulate the Premier, the Minister of Education, the Department of Education, the ATA, and its president, Frank Bruseker, for this tremendous achievement in settling this thing, which has lasted as a problem for so many years. Especially coming on, as the Member for Peace River mentioned, some test results which showed Alberta's students among the top in the world in science and math.

The importance of this bill just cannot be discounted. The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster mentioned that a year ago there was a leadership race in the Progressive Conservative Party, and this was brought up as a problem of many teachers and a problem for teachers coming in and holding them back. This is something that I heard a lot as well, and it's just so great to see this. I think that it can be said again: thank you, Mr. Premier; you're certainly a promise keeper on this one, and I congratulate the government on this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Seeing none, are you ready for the question? Does the hon. Minister of Education wish to close?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, a lot of great speeches and good questions but, as so often happens in this Assembly, none of it relevant to the bill. This particular bill, I need to remind everyone, simply allows us to pay the \$25 million or pick up the 3.1 per cent of teachers' salaries between the months of September and December. I would move that we approve third reading of this bill because that \$25 million has just about expired.

With that, I would say that next spring we'll have lots of time to hear these speeches all over again when we bring in legislation relevant to the actual deal. I would ask for third reading on this particular bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 53 read a third time]

1:50

Bill 41

Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to move third reading of Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

I'm not going to go through the details of the act. We did have that opportunity at second reading and in committee. I do want to say thank you to members of the House for your support in what I believe to be very necessary if somewhat painful legislation. Very necessary legislation because – I will say it again; I want to emphasize – this is about assurance. This is about government delivering on its need to be able to say to the people of Alberta: "We have a health care system which you can be proud of. We have a health care system which is of top quality. We have a health care system which is safe for you when you need it." And in that health care system – whether it's the health care professionals, which are the subject of Bill 41, or in one of the next bills coming up, the health facilities, Bill 48 – we have the tools as government to be able to say to the public: "You can have public confidence in your health care system. You can have confidence in the quality of the system. We have the structure in place to be accountable for that system." Bill 41 will help us do that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to the third reading of Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. It was a privilege to participate in discussions on bills 31 and 41 as a member of the Standing Committee on Community Services, and I'm delighted that we had a very democratic process. I appreciated the work that I was able to do with the minister and with the Parliamentary Counsel staff.

The more I think about this bill, the more I am surprised to see a bill like this coming from a Conservative government. I would be less surprised if it were coming from another party. It is my understanding that "conservative" in its historic sense means holding onto what is good and not being in a rush to overhaul institutions, customs, and practices that have served us well.

Conservatives uphold traditional pillars of society such as family, church, and the historic professions going back to early trades and guilds. They were loath to meddle in those without serious cause. There are, of course, exceptions in case of emergency or special need. The state will intervene if families where children are at risk need it. It will not permit religious practices that jeopardize life, health, and basic human rights.

In the case of a profession the state may supersede or override an action which it deems to be clearly against the public interest: a medical strike that jeopardizes health services, a teachers' walkout that drags on indefinitely and leaves children unoccupied. These may be grounds for government to intervene. When it does so, it is usually after a prolonged disruption and public calls for action: in short, when the nature of the emergency is clear for all of us to see. This is recognized as emergency legislation, and this is one occasion when a House may sit all night to enact it and to deal with the emergency. Even though some may not agree with the government's proposed course of action, most accept the right and need of government to act in such circumstances.

What is before us here, though, with Bill 41 is something of a very

different order. This is not a crisis that we must face but a list of possibilities that we may face at some time in the future. Conservatives and liberal democrats have generally been reluctant to resort to legislation for every ill or situation one can imagine. We accept that those who are members of the professions are for the most part responsible individuals with a right to make choices and set standards for their professions, accountable collectively to the public if they fail to do so. If they abdicate or derogate their responsibilities, the public may demand that government act, but there's no evidence of that here.

Some say we need this type of contingent legislation like we need fire extinguishers: as a backup we hope we will not have to use. There are stringent regulations around the use of fire extinguishers. We put them behind glass or under seals that must be broken if they are to be used. We don't permit their use casually to put out barbecues or douse fireplaces. They are strictly for emergencies, and there are fines and other penalties for misuse.

In the case of the legislation before us with Bill 41 we have a blend of emergency and extraordinary powers that is extending to situations that do not need them. If this government believes that we need legislation to deal with a breakdown in public order, let them enact it. Let them call it the emergency powers act for professions. Let them stipulate the criteria for determining what makes an emergency: who will decide this, how long it will apply, and how those who wield these special powers will be accountable for their actions and use of those powers afterwards. Let them not include organizational housekeeping duties in the same legislation as emergency powers. Let us not make it open season for fire extinguishers by making such powers available for annoyances rather than for emergencies. Fire extinguishers are not needed to zap flies and blow out candles.

History is littered with stories of abuse of powers intended for emergencies and used when there is not: martial law to stop street marches in Pakistan, pepper spray against protestors in Vancouver. B.C. has fired duly elected school boards when they stood up to education cuts. Alberta has fired health authority members when they criticized provincial policy. Let us not add traditionally self-regulating professions to the list of groups against which government can move when it finds itself in disagreement.

Mr. Speaker, this is a time for small "I" liberals and small "c" conservatives on both sides of this House to look beyond labels and see what's happening here. Conservatives are not living up to their principles if they allow the interest of being in government to give them a pass-key to people's houses, apartments, and professions for some unspecified circumstances that may arise in the future, and Liberals are not being liberal if we allow public leadership and planning to override the rights of citizens and professions to go about their duties unhindered.

In its broadest sense the word "conservative" means holding onto what is good, and "liberal" means benevolent, generous, and giving the other a break and the benefit of the doubt. These qualities are not mutually opposed. That is why the government that gave us Confederation, the party of Sir John A. Macdonald, was called Liberal-Conservative. This moment in our own province is another time that these two complementary perspectives of holding to the good and allowing for the better need to reach out and join hands across the floor. Conservatives are not holding to their values in allowing professions to be brought under state control, and Liberals are not serving the public by allowing that to happen. I really want to call on members on both sides of this House to defeat this bill on grounds of principle.

During the work with the standing committee I and all of our members heard and read many concerns from many stakeholders and

also from our own constituents. All agreed that public health must be a paramount concern of government. The amendments that are covered in Bill 41 are about a range of changes, a number of which are housekeeping amendments that will address some identified gaps in the legislation and streamline or clarify the process. Others, however, have much greater significance to the medical and other health professions and could undermine the principle of self-regulation.

Bill 41 requires the immediate notification of the medical officer of health should a health professional or a college employee, officer, or agent know of or have reason to suspect the existence of a nuisance or threat that is or may be injurious or dangerous to the public health. I believe that this amendment helps clarify the role of health professions when a breach of infection control practices may put the public at risk.

We heard concerns about the fact that this Bill 41 raises some significant points regarding the medical profession in particular but all health professionals because it empowers the minister to make orders directing the college to adopt a code of ethics for standards of practice, to appoint an administrator to carry out powers and duties of the college if in the opinion of the minister it would be in the public interest. The minister could make any regulation, bylaw, code of ethics, or standard of practice that a council may make, and those decisions override any made by the college. This potentially violates the principle of self-regulation that this government has said it was committed to over several decades. It raises a number of questions, the most fundamental of which is: what problem is being addressed by this, and what, really, is the best way to solve it?

The College of Physicians and Surgeons has pointed out that sections 135.1 to 135.4 are of real concern, especially 135.4, which would give authority to the cabinet to make any regulation, bylaw, code of ethics, or standard of practice that a council may make under various sections of the Health Professions Act, and such standards, codes, regulations, or bylaws made by the LGIC prevail over any order made by a council. As I'm looking at this, I am concerned about: what is the problem being solved or intended to be solved by this bill, or what policy issue is being addressed by the proposed amendments?

2:00

I believe that colleges and their employees take their statutory duties very seriously. They strive to fulfill their obligations to serve the public and guide the profession to the fullest of their ability. It is important to recognize the effective role of self-governing professions and the part that they play in setting and enforcing codes of ethics and standards of behaviour and practice.

In conclusion, I oppose Bill 41 because of the potential of undermining self-regulation of the medical professions. At the same time, I salute and want to champion the other part of this bill, which is making it very clear when we have concerns about infection or disease how the health professions need to handle those concerns. Overall, I think that the unfortunate part of this bill requires me to oppose it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister for Capital Planning.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise and make a few comments with respect to Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, during this very interesting third reading of the bill.

It's also of note that we have been sitting now for I believe it is 25 consecutive hours, so it's a bit of a historic day that way as well.

Directly with respect to the bill, I've been through the bill, Mr.

Speaker, and I've been listening intently to what comments others have made during third reading and as well during committee prior to this and also during second reading, and I appreciate a lot of the comments and the diversity of views that are being offered. I just want to reassure colleagues that the central parts of this bill really deal with things such as accountability and safety and protection of a health system that we're very proud of and one that we would never do anything to harm. I know that our Premier stands firmly in front of and behind as well – both sides, so to speak – anything that strengthens and improves accountability and safety of patients, care of patients, and so on.

In my view, there are some very good points in this bill that address exactly that. We know that no matter how perfect a system might wish to be, there are always going to be some small issues, some larger issues, and so on that arise. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when I was the associate minister for health for a couple of years, I saw a lot of aspects of the health care system that really opened my eyes to different approaches. I was delighted when we renamed the department to Health and Wellness because I focused a lot on the wellness side as the associate minister.

I know that at that time there were many speculations about what we could be doing to help improve accountability and patient safety. We know that nurses are accountable. We know that doctors are accountable. We know that administrators are accountable. But, you know, when it comes right down to it, the minister of health or the Premier, perhaps, is the person that people turn to when certain things need immediate attention that perhaps others cannot fix. This bill would enable some of that kind of additional, let's call it, accountability and additional concerns with respect to safety to be specifically addressed.

The other part is to instill in people a greater sense of confidence: confidence that the health system will be there, that it will remain as it always has, fully accountable in accordance with the five principles of the Canada Health Act, whether it's to do with the accountability or the comprehensiveness or the universality or the portability or the public accounting and administration of it. Those major principles of the Canada Health Act: no one is changing or altering anything of significance there. People need to understand that this is also about the confidence that we have in the system, not just confidence that we want Albertans throughout the province to have but also confidence as exhibited by our government.

I'm impressed that various stages of the committee looked at the details of this bill. I know that there were some changes made, and I have to support those. I think they are very proper, and they are very consistent with these kind of assurances that we're talking about. In the end quality care is what this is all about. We need to make sure that quality care continues to be provided and where and if it isn't that there are mechanisms in place, there are assurances that we can give people that those changes and improvements will and can be made. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Ultimately it's the government that has to usher in those kinds of changes. We know that people at the grassroots level that are at the first point-of-contact level are doing their best, but we also have to lead by example with the powers that we have as legislators and as a government.

I'm going to support this bill through its third and final reading to ensure that we don't get into more of those awkward situations that we've perhaps experienced on occasion up until now and to make sure that people feel the kind of confidence that we're hoping they will feel in the end.

I'll just close by saying that the Alberta health care system is one of the best in the world. We know that here in Edmonton, for example, our Capital health authority has been rated number one in

Canada time and time and time again, and we want to ensure that that level of patient satisfaction, of public satisfaction, of consumer use remains at that very high level of excellence which Albertans deserve and expect from this government.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I, too, have grave concerns about Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, because it intrudes into and questions the professionalism of doctors. Bill 41 resulted to a large extent from the infection spreading at the Vegreville hospital, and it is my feeling that doctors have been unnecessarily targeted for that particular failure. The failure occurred because the various levels of responsibility were not clearly delineated, and the sort of buck-passing and scapegoating that Bill 41 represents I don't believe addresses the problems into the future. A clear delineation of powers and responsibilities would accomplish that end.

I do want to under concerns over Bill 41 put a thank you out to a number of medical professionals that I've had the good fortune to deal with. To begin with, I'd like to thank the team of Dr. Brody, Dr. Davidman, and Dr. Gary Haywood. As a result of their concerns and diligence and many sleepless nights they saved the life of my daughter and wife 35 years ago. Dr. Brody, unfortunately, is no longer with us, but his family would appreciate the fact that he was a terrific heart specialist and specialist in blood pressure. Dr. Davidman, a fantastic kidney specialist, was recruited to the States, and to my knowledge he hasn't returned. Dr. Gary Haywood has been our family doctor for numerous years, and Dr. Haywood is carrying out a battle of his own right now. He has been a fantastic doctor throughout my time. I played rugby for 17 years, and my wife kept trying to convince him to have me stop playing rugby, but as he was a hang-glider, he saw that danger was part of the enjoyment.

Speaking in terms of life-saving and quality care, I'd like to thank the doctors of the neonatal team and the pediatricians at the Peter Lougheed Centre who made sure that both my grandchildren entered this world when initial complications arose for my daughter, Christina.

2:10

I'd like to recognize the contributions of Dr. David Patton at the Alberta Children's hospital in the constituency of Calgary-Varsity. Dr. David Patton is a pediatrician and a former student from my first year of teaching in 1971 at Jerry Potts school. Dr. David Patton and the terrific staff of the Alberta Children's hospital did their absolute best to stabilize a young Egyptian constituent, Malak Gouhar Youseff so that that little child could be transported safely to the Stollery hospital in Edmonton, where, unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond any doctor's control the young baby died.

I'd like to recognize the contributions of Dr. Louie, an infectious disease specialist at the Calgary Foothills hospital, who does constituency house calls and whose hard work and attempts to conquer MRSA will deal directly with the problems that occurred at Vegreville and occur throughout this province.

I'd like to recognize the efforts of Dr. Michael Hill of the Calgary Foothills heart and stroke unit, whose tremendous research efforts are saving lives and whose program needs the stability of provincial funding.

I'd like to recognize the tremendous contributions of Dr. Chris

Andrews, who has received training in Minnesota on treating gastroparesis. He has contributed to enhancing the lives of Krysta Livingstone, a nurse in Medicine Hat who is now, thanks to a gastroparesis device, able to return to nursing. He also was very instrumental in following up on and supervising the care of the children of Jeanne Keith-Ferris, who, both adolescents, received the implanted device in Minnesota. Thank you to Dr. Chris Andrews, who has the ability to provide the supervision and care of that device.

I would like to thank, without naming, my own doctor/colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, whose humanitarian efforts on behalf of the citizens of Iraq, Uganda, and Darfur, in addition to his constituents, require recognition. It is in his honour and the Darfur individuals who he is trying to protect by encouraging the federal government to provide funding to stop the terrible civil war in Darfur that he is not with us today.

I'd like to recognize the efforts of Dr. Bob Dickson, who like my Mountain View colleague, is working very hard. Dr. Dickson is one of the founders and supports of Results Canada. One of the biggest efforts that Results Canada is working on is making poverty history.

I recognize the tremendous talents and contributions of medical professionals throughout this province, and I believe that Bill 41 does them a disservice.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This particular bill, Bill 41, as I said in second reading, was like taking a sledgehammer to a nail. We all recognize that there was the problem, specifically, that the minister was upset about it, and rightfully so: what happened in Lloyd. I know the minister has been attempting to deal with the health professionals.

There seems to be some split. It gets difficult as a legislator to figure it out because one day you see a full-page ad in the paper by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and then we get a letter from the optometrists saying: disregard that; we support the bill. Then you get other people. I think the minister has made a serious attempt to deal with the more controversial parts of it. I guess the argument is whether this is enough and: why do we need it?

The minister has said that amendment A would allow the government to establish a consultation procedure through regulations. The consultation process would be used whenever an order is made under sections 135 and 134, and the minister would not be able to direct a college to adopt a particular code of ethics. I think that that goes some way. It would restrict the minister to providing support to colleges only in cases where "a college requires [such] support in carrying out its powers" or where "it is in the public interest." I think that's the smaller health professions that don't have the same clout or expertise as CARNA or the medical profession. The minister would have to act through an order in council only after following the consultation procedure laid out in regulations. The minister can only vary the provisions of the act as it applies to a college after he's followed the consultation process and resolved references to a code of ethics. It forces the minister to follow the consultation procedure.

It makes the same sort of changes to the Medical Profession Act amendments. That is, the minister must follow a consultation process and then act only as an order in council, which begs the statement – I know the minister sent out a press release after the full-page ad in the papers from the medical profession and then, as I say, the optometrists and others, which leads me to two sort of themes here, Mr. Speaker.

These amendments, clearly, I think are an improvement, but it begs the question of why we needed this to begin with, you know, the all-sweeping powers in dealing with it. I'd be interested in knowing from the minister if in the consultations that he's had – it's clear what the optometrists have said – is there anything new since he has come forward with his amendment, or is there still the same concern from the college of physicians and CARNA, for example? I'd be interested in that.

But, Mr. Speaker, even still with the amendments – and I give the minister credit for that – it begs the question why we needed those sweeping powers to begin with. I know the minister has said that it's only in an emergency; I take it that it's only in emergency sort of situations like a pandemic or something like this that we actually would need to use these. I think, then, that if that was the case, we could come back to the Legislature fairly quickly and do whatever we needed to do in an emergency way at that particular time.

I think the minister always needs the authority to deal with emergency situations. If there was a time when there was something like that sort of last resort that the minister talks about, I think he would still have the power. If not, we could, as I say, come back to the Legislature to deal with this. I give the minister credit for trying to bring in amendments that satisfy some of the concerns of the health professions. But, you know, putting that all together begs the question: what was the need for this particular power to begin with when we're dealing with the physicians?

We'll be talking about Bill 48 later. I certainly accept the premise of Bill 48 that the buck stops with the minister. I've said that he needs those sorts of powers, but I've never quite understood this bill, Mr. Speaker, and why we wanted, you know, to have this even in here even though, as the minister says, it's as a last resort. People say – and they have a powerful sort of a group that talks about things – that this could hurt us in recruiting new physicians, nurses, whatever the case may be. It could be counterproductive.

I still have not figured it out in my own mind. Again, as I say, the amendments are obviously good amendments to the bill, but the bill I think is flawed in the sense that we don't actually need this sort of power to deal with those sort of last resort or those emergency situations that the minister alluded to. Until he can give me a better idea why that is needed, you know, I can't see supporting the bill at this particular time.

Thank you.

2:20

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and speak to Bill 41 and to speak in support of Bill 41. The committee of which I was a part looked extensively at this bill and looked at the various parts of it and met with many stakeholders, many of the professional organizations. Many of us met with them separately and took their concerns to heart and were very pleased to even see the minister appear before the committee.

All of those associations very clearly looked at and agreed with the fact of the first section in dealing with potential pandemics. Certainly, this is an area that is of tremendous and increasing concern as we see new strains of superbugs and such and new types of diseases hit the news, communicated through an ever more efficient media very quickly to the public, and the need for government to act quickly if there is a problem.

The nature of professional organizations or professional associations means that they must represent their members and must represent them strongly, and certainly the more powerful ones in our

province have been doing so. I would be surprised if they wouldn't, Mr. Speaker. The nature of some of them is to do so. In the committee meetings it was clear that the need for this legislation was directed more at some of the newer associations, those with less and fewer resources, those with a lesser ability to deal with some of the challenges in the new and modern health care system that many are facing. The need to bring them all together is crucial in coming forward for our health care system in order to provide the best health care for Albertans. I think that something like dealing with health care professions will always be controversial, but sometimes it has to be done. I commend the minister for doing so, and I support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(9) is available. Seeing no one, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After 25 hours minus three for a nap, I would like to be able to just say amen to most of the speakers on this side of the House. However, I do feel very strongly that this Bill 41 remains very flawed despite the amendments. I believe that it's also an overreaction to the infection problems that occurred in Vegreville. I believe that it is flawed because it's reducing the self-regulation of doctors, nurses, and pharmacists among many others that I could name. I so fear that these professionals will become widgets in a huge unhuman system called the health care system. I look south of the border and I fear, but I don't fear for the rich. I do fear only for the perfectly ordinary Albertans.

The word care cannot be used in the same breath as efficient, business plans, teams, et cetera. Care equals time required to deliver that thinking care. Some decisions cannot be made as a team. Care is on-the-spot decisions by professionals who stand by their decisions, which in fact really just boils down to common sense, but that common sense is based on education and experience and backed by a self-regulating profession. When something goes wrong in such a large system, it can become systemic very, very quickly and also very difficult to track and correct.

Big is not always better in health care. In fact, I would put it to you that the bigger the system to deliver the care, the less efficient it is. It is the vulnerable person who is left at the mercy of this system who will actually end up losing out. I have many letters in my office regarding that very point and backing up my words.

I cannot support this bill mainly because of the degradation of the self-regulation of the professionals with whom I'm going to trust not only myself but all of my loved ones to receive personal, loving care when they need it.

The Deputy Speaker: Again Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak at third, in which I am speaking about the anticipated effect of the bill once enacted. I have to say, looking back at this, that the original version of the bill, the idea of the bill, the principle of it was one-quarter good and three-quarters bad. Then we went through a series of amendments in Committee of the Whole, and again I think there was good intention behind two-thirds of the amendments, and one-third didn't come up to the mark for me. I think there is still more about this bill that I am not comfortable with. I'm not willing to go forward with it.

A number of people have spoken about the anticipated effect upon our self-regulated professions. I agree with all of that. I've raised those issues. I think this continues to be very problematic for the

government. I would not want to be in the Minister of Health and Wellness's shoes at this point. I can tell you that if I am wearing the Health and Wellness minister's shoes after an election this spring, I would be repealing section 135.1 through to 135.3. I would in fact stand behind that at this point. It just is not right to me, what is being anticipated in this bill. I think it's wrong. The minister giving himself or herself additional powers without the corresponding responsibility and accountability is not good government, as far as I'm concerned.

I've thought about this a lot. I've spent a lot of time in debate on this bill now, and I can't support it. I won't support it. Thank you for the opportunity to put those comments on the record.

If I could just ask if there is unanimous agreement to waive Standing Order 32(1) for any upcoming division bells, which would bring the division bells down to one minute. Is it possible to have that agreement?

An Hon. Member: Pardon?

Ms Blakeman: Well, we've all been in here for a good long time.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any others who wish to participate in the debate?

Does the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness wish to close?

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say that I'm very disappointed. I'm disappointed with the members of the opposition, who this spring, when we were faced with an issue of importance to the quality of care and assurance to Albertans, suggested that the responsibility lay with the minister, and when the minister takes that responsibility, accepts that responsibility, looks at the legislative framework to be able to deliver on that responsibility and says that the legislative framework needs more tools, they turn around and say: you're going too far; you're power hungry. It's just not a consistent or appropriate reaction. However, it is their viewpoint, and they're entitled to it. That was the Liberal opposition that talked about it. The New Democratic opposition, my friend from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, was good enough to say, at least, that he didn't understand.

2:30

I do want to be clear again why this is important, because it is important. This is not about taking away authorities from self-regulating professions without any purpose. This is about making sure that government, the people that are elected to represent Albertans and the people who Albertans constantly look to for assurance in cases of pandemic, in cases of failure of the system — they don't look to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They don't look to CARNA. They look to their government for these sorts of things. We saw that in Ontario in the SARS epidemic. We saw that in Ontario with the water issue. They look to government, and government needs to have appropriate tools.

This is not about denigrating professions. I think every member on the government side of the House, certainly those of us who are members of professional organizations, believe very strongly in self-regulation of the professions. This is about having the authority, the ability not just to deal with an emergency situation after the fact. It brings small comfort to Albertans that the government has the authority to come in after the fact in the case of an emergency. Yes, you need the power to do that, but that's not enough.

What you need to be able to do is to look proactively at the

systems in place and say: are they good enough to protect Albertans? If they're not, you need to be able to say to the professions if it's the professional area that you're dealing with: there are holes in the system, and you need to work on those holes and fix them. And if they don't, if they don't see the same holes, if there's a disagreement with respect to whether there's a hole in the system, the people that are accountable are the elected representatives, and they need to be able to say: we believe that there is a hole in the system, and it needs to be fixed.

That's what this bill is about. That's why the authority of Bill 41 is necessary, to my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. It's absolutely essential that there be not an opportunity, as was mentioned in one newsletter from the AMA to their members, where the minister can act on a whim to interfere with self-regulation. Anybody who thinks that that is what's happening here has got it horribly wrong. Always an elected representative, a member of government has to act in the public interest. You just can't act arbitrarily. You have to use the authority of the legislation responsibly, and that's obviously necessary in this sort of case. Obviously – and we've now built it into the bill with the amendment on consultation – the first thing that one would do in a circumstance where you've determined that there's a failure of the system or a potential failure of the system is ask the people that are involved directly to have a look at it and to fix it and to work with them to get that done.

Now, there's another reason why the minister of health should have the responsibility and the ability in this area, and that reason is because we have a very complex system now where health care professionals are working together, and we want them to work together as teams. They've previously had a long history of working separately in the same system. Now they need to work as multidisciplinary teams, and the systems that they have need to be collaborative, need to be co-operative. They need to be able to work together and understand each other well. They're doing that, but we're not completely there yet, and there needs to be work done.

Why is Bill 41 here, and why is it essential that the House pass it today? It's here because we have had an incident that's pointed out that there are holes in the system, and we do need to fix those holes in the system. As a result of the incident, we did a review of the professions across the province, a self-reporting review of the professions across the province – there was a report made public in August as a result of that – and it disclosed that there were differences between the professions and that there were issues that needed to be dealt with. That's why we need Bill 41.

I hope that I have been able to answer the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's questions as to why this is necessary now and to clear up the fact that it's not just about emergency powers to act when an emergency happens, but it's the ability to act and to intercede and to work with the professions and to insist that situations be dealt with proactively so that Albertans don't have to be hurt first before you fix the system.

I'd ask the House to support this bill.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker . . .

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order?

Mr. Chase: No. Under 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: It's not applicable on closure.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:35 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Groeneveld	Oberle
Ady	Haley	Ouellette
Amery	Hancock	Prins
Backs	Jablonski	Renner
Boutilier	Johnston	Rodney
Cao	Knight	Snelgrove
Cenaiko	Liepert	Stevens
Evans	Lindsay	Strang
Goudreau	Melchin	Zwozdesky
Griffiths	Mitzel	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Martin	Miller, R.
Chase	Mather	Pastoor
Elsalhy	Miller, B.	Taylor
Flaherty		

Total: For – 29 Against – 10

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a third time]

2:40

Bill 31

Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007.

First of all, I'd like to thank the all-party Standing Committee on Community Services for all of its hard work. During the summer and the fall the committee reviewed the bill, and it was also the subject of extensive public consultations. Based on these public consultations, additional amendments were proposed and accepted. Members from all parties put in considerable time and energy to make Bill 31 better legislation. So, again, thank you to all.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The primary purpose of Bill 31 is to improve the care provided to Albertans with mental illness. Bill 31 includes new admission requirements that enable care to be provided sooner, community treatment orders, and a requirement that treatment recommendations be provided to an individual's family physician after the individual is discharged from a facility or a community treatment order ends. I will speak very briefly to each of these key amendments.

The Mental Health Act allows for the apprehension, examination, and involuntary admission of a person who is suffering from a mental disorder unwilling to be admitted voluntarily and in a condition presenting or likely to present a danger to self or others. Bill 31 proposes to amend the criteria from the current wording to apply to persons who are in a condition "likely to cause harm to the person or others or to suffer substantial mental or physical deteriora-

tion or serious physical impairment.” Plain and simple, Mr. Speaker, this amendment will enable care to be provided sooner.

Bill 31 also introduces community treatment orders. Despite the existing provisions in the Mental Health Act some individuals with serious mental disorders end up caught in a revolving-door syndrome. Time and again they are admitted to hospitals when they meet the criteria for involuntary admission but then are discharged once they are stabilized. When they are discharged, they often cease treatment in the community and thus are readmitted when they once again meet the criteria. So it goes: around and around. Community treatment orders introduce another option for providing ongoing treatment and care in the community.

Bill 31 also stipulates that a community treatment order can only be issued when the treatment or care the individual requires exists in his or her community and is available to him or her. The bill also includes safeguards for patients such as automatic reviews upon renewal.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the bill includes amendments requiring that treatment recommendations be provided to an individual's family physician after the individual is discharged from a facility or a community treatment order ends. Again, this assists with the ongoing care of the individual in the community.

Mr. Speaker, I've had a number of constituents asking for these changes over a number of years. As I mentioned in my opening speech, I did begin this process as a private member's bill and am very glad that it has turned into a government bill and that it's going to possibly be passed here in a few minutes.

Again, I would like to thank my constituents for their patience and all the staff and everybody who worked so hard on this bill. I urge all members to join me in supporting Bill 31 to help bring about improvements to the manner in which we care for Albertans with mental illness.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the Blues, so I can't get the exact wording of what the member started out by saying, but as I listened, my reaction was: no, it doesn't. This is a difficult bill, certainly for me and for a number of my colleagues in this House. It may well be that no one else in here has a struggle with it.

I had hoped that by the end of the process I would see enough change that I would be able to support the bill, but I'm not. When I listen to the sponsoring member do his recap, again what comes into my brain is: no, we are not actually offering additional supports or help to people with mental illness with this bill. What we are offering is a process by which they can be apprehended, assessed, incarcerated, which some may view as assistance or help, but I would argue many would not, and put under a medication order in which they must take their medication.

This bill is not getting us any more community assistance for people with mental illness. It is not getting us any more emergency treatment beds. It's not getting us any more community treatment beds. It's not getting us any more transitional housing for people coming out of treatment. It's not giving us any specialized housing for people with mental illness. It's not giving us any more day programming or respite care. It's not giving families any more direct assistance in trying to help a loved one that is struggling with a mental illness in Alberta.

This is a process tool. Community treatment orders are a process tool that is available, essentially, to take someone off the streets and either get them to agree to a certain treatment program or make them

take a certain treatment program. This bill goes against my belief in personal autonomy. It goes against an increasing movement towards the right to refuse medical treatment. It takes away choice and, I would argue, in some cases dignity and autonomy for individuals who have a mental illness.

I think that the committee worked very hard, and in no way do I wish to diminish their genuine concern for people, for their own constituents, for other people's constituents. I think everyone went in there with a pure heart and really, really tried to do the best they could. But for most people struggling with mental health issues, this bill is not going to improve their lives in any meaningful way, I would argue. It's not going to give them a place to stay or food to eat or a better way of managing their money or access to a shower or other ways to improve their personal hygiene. None of that is in this bill.

Of all of the studies that were looked at, that the committee looked at, that I read the *Hansard* about, none of them could prove conclusively that community treatment orders were it, that they were the panacea, that they would solve the problem. The best results we could find was when community treatment orders were absolutely partnered with, coupled with, Velcroed to community-based treatment, sometimes called assertive community treatment. That is not happening with this bill. This is not the community treatment order and assertive community supports bill. That's not what this bill is. This is an amendment to the mental health bill that puts in place a process so families or individuals can apply for a community treatment order, which is an apprehension order in most cases.

The other thing I want to acknowledge is that the committee did work hard to try and recognize that there is a lack of mental health professionals outside of the metropolitan areas. The committee really tried hard to find ways to assist people, especially for psychiatric assessment, that were outside of the metropolitan areas. I think it could be said that there were misunderstandings or maybe mistakes were made in the amendments that were brought forward from the committee that redefined the people able to make assessments as health professionals. That's now been addressed in the amendments that were brought forward by the government, and I appreciate that.

2:50

We agreed in the Official Opposition caucus that this would be a free vote for our caucus, and we have maintained that. This is a free vote. I'll put that on the record. I will not be supporting this bill. I will be supporting the wishes of my constituents on this. I received probably 10 to 1 visits, phone calls, letters, documents from constituents saying, "Please don't support this bill," for the number that I did receive saying, "Support it." So I will be supporting my constituents on this bill.

I really think what we really need and what the families need that are trying so desperately to look after their family members and their friends and co-workers and colleagues and everybody that gets concerned with this issue is a commitment to supplying and underwriting those community supports that allow people to stay in their homes, to be connected to communities, to have meaning in their life, to be able to volunteer or work or be engaged with their community, to have a safe place to live, to have some kind of economic security, to get assistance, if they need it, with their finances but to have essential control and dignity and meaning in their life. I don't think this bill gives us that.

I know that there are a number of other people that wish to get on the record with this bill, and it's getting very late. Maybe we'll see in a budget that the government brings forward that there is a real commitment to enhancing mental health services in the province.

The minister has said that he allocated some money to Canadian Mental Health to study the effects of this bill, if I heard him correctly.

I think we have failed this community. We continue to fail this community. This community is us. It's acknowledged that 1 in 5 will deal with a mental health issue in their life. If you're actually working closer with the mental health professionals, they will tell you that it's closer to 1 in 3 Canadians who will deal with a mental health issue at some point in their life. So this issue is us. How we look after ourselves, how we look after our colleagues, our loved ones is very important, and I don't think we have achieved a level of service that is really acceptable. I don't think any one of us in this House would want to find themselves in that situation. I think that's not good enough.

I continue to press for leadership. I continue to press for support, real leadership and funding support, for people that are dealing with a mental illness and support services for those people that work in the sector and for their families and friends.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bills like this are always difficult. There's no doubt about that. When I look at the letters I've been given, apparently the people that came to the groups, the people that deal with mental health, like the Schizophrenia Society and the Canadian Mental Health Association, are asking for a bill like this, a community treatment order. The other thing that came to me is the letters that I was getting from individuals that were forced into treatment by their families and these sorts of things, and they were saying to me: please have this bill; I would not be alive now if there was this situation because I was not able to make those decisions on my own.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Centre is correct. We do need the treatment and mental health treatments after the fact. But I think the important thing here as we're dealing with this bill is the community treatment orders, Mr. Speaker. The people that deal with this are the ones telling us that this is the first step. I believe it may be a first step. We should always be cautious – no doubt about it – when we're taking people's civil liberties away. But I think that the bill in itself is a necessity. I think there have been some changes that, you know, deal with health professionals, amendments and those sorts of things, that make the bill a little more palatable.

The only thing I would say – and it's not enough for me not to support it – is that where the original bill itself, which they talked about hospitalization in the previous two years and the amendment extended it to three years, then instead of hospitalization on at least three previous occasions it would be two, and instead of a total of 60 days it would be 30 days, I think we probably should have erred on the side of civil liberties. I didn't think that that amendment was necessary. I know that on third reading we're not going to be able to do much about that, but perhaps in the future I think the original criteria were better.

Mr. Speaker, when people that deal with these issues come to us and say that they need it, and when I read the letters that I've read from people, then I have no qualms about supporting this bill. I think we all agree on both sides of the House that we always have to be cautious, indeed. The fact that the amendments have made it a little easier for the health professionals, you know, to deal with people: I would certainly add our support for this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a privilege to participate with the Standing Committee on Community Services in careful consideration of Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. I appreciate the letters, the calls, and the meetings that I've been able to participate in with regard to Bill 31. I fully support CTOs, and I believe they are an important tool for families dealing with mental illness. They are not a panacea, but they are an important tool.

The intent of Bill 31 is in consideration of chronic illness with a subset of the mentally ill population. It is in reference to the needs of individuals with limited insight who are incapable of making decisions for themselves. These individuals may be addicted. They may have chronic schizophrenia and have bipolar mood swings. Undoubtedly there is a disruption for their families as well as for society. Their life is falling apart, and they may not be aware of it. Bill 31 will enable professionals to intervene earlier.

Every individual has the right to treatment even if they are not capable of making that decision. We must not deny appropriate care to this small and very difficult population, the majority of whom are unable to make decisions for themselves. It is not a coincidence that the main groups who care for this population, physicians and mental health workers along with families, are in support of Bill 31. There is overwhelming clinical evidence that it is needed for this population. Of course, this means comprehensive and intensive programming to help the individual and family on the road to recovery. Otherwise, the individuals in this population generally become victims, burdens to families and society, homeless, and probably self-medicating. There is no quality of life.

Bill 31 will allow intervention before destruction. Early intervention can prevent criminal activity and a record for life. Swift, efficient, and competent input is needed for recovery with the possibility of an individual becoming a contributing member of society who keeps appointments and pays his bills. There's a social spin-off as a result of the contact with a nurse or social worker or case manager on a regular basis. Once an individual is stabilized on medication, it is possible to start education for the individual and the family.

Essentially, we need to achieve a balance between the rights of the individual and the importance of treatment and the importance of the ability to help families who have adult children with mental health issues deal with those issues on a timely basis. This act has the right of appeal, and that right is crucial. Bill 31 will be a positive step if it is implemented properly with proper community services.

For many reasons the individuals that would benefit from a CTO tend to congregate in the urban areas of our province, where there are services, so CTOs can be a tool right now. However, housing concerns and the lack of outreach workers and crisis workers continue in the urban areas, and we need more resources, of course, in the rural regions.

3:00

A benefit of CTOs will be that some chronically disabled patients will be kept in the community with continuous treatment. There is evidence in New Zealand and other jurisdictions of tremendous success where there are good community supports. The Canadian psychologists association's position paper on CTOs is also encouraging. Some patients become less cognitively impaired, and families benefit with a more stable relationship.

Our focus must be on the target population. We have learned that this population is getting younger and will need care for the rest of

their lives. Many are addicted to drugs like crystal meth, which cause significant damage to the brain. They are more volatile and more dangerous. They have a limitation of insight. They do not exercise appropriate judgment in making decisions for themselves. Competency is subjective, and some who are deemed competent at times may not agree to treatment. There must be flexibility in allowing psychiatrists and physicians with experience, who can foresee problems, to make recommendations on behalf of the patient.

The idea of Bill 31 is that there will be an outpatient team or an outreach team with a nurse, possibly a social worker, and a psychologist. Treatment is more than medication. There must be qualified resources to help with psychotherapy and social needs. Family medicine is important, and the psychiatrist and other health specialists must work with the primary care network.

In time this act will make a great difference with the population it addresses. It will break the dreadful cycle of recurrent relapse, which is a tremendous cost to the system but also a human cost and a family burden. These patients need help, and we must provide leadership to make difficult and unpopular decisions with some in order to get the care for those who have a right to it and are unable to advocate for themselves. Early intervention and a broad range of community support services can help people experiencing mental illness enhance their quality of life, achieve their goals, and live in the community. This bill commands the mental health system to provide resources.

Families need support as well. There must be a team of psychosocial supporters – for example, occupational therapists, social workers – and there must be adequate housing. Pharmacists are also part of the team. We must build supportive communities, including rural areas. Telepsychiatry may be one of the tools.

As these individuals are stabilized, there is hope that their level of functioning will improve. CTOs will provide an opportunity for someone to visit the patients and direct them to resources. Help needs to be better co-ordinated through work with the general practitioners on joint care initiatives and with a mental health co-ordinator. Psychologists working with a physician would make a great difference, and the need to see the patients will decrease as they get better.

Housing, again, is still a huge issue. Another issue is with the general public, which stigmatizes this very disabled and difficult population. We need to get away from that bias.

A review panel and appeal system need to be in place with the opportunity to clearly articulate the processes and opportunities to the patients and/or the guardians. The current Mental Health Act does have an automatic appeal, and Bill 31 must ensure the same.

This bill is not a solution. It is an extra legal tool that the psychiatrist has to deliver care to a very vulnerable population that is getting younger. A review panel lawyer, family, and physicians will be able to act on the patient's behalf with safeguards in place. It is essential that physicians be involved to ensure proper implementation and standards of care to individuals who need a very high level of care. Physicians are more familiar with long-standing, noncompliant, and potentially aggressive patients. Prescription and supervision of medication is also a key component of CTOs, and this is a key responsibility of physicians.

We need to make use of specialists that we have for those that need psychotherapy. Primary care networks are still flawed because psychologists are not included under Alberta health care fees, yet many psychologists have appropriate skills to offer. At present the patient must pay for their service. Consequently, most psychologists are in private practice. Consequently, a large group of citizens do not have access to treatment. We have 2,138 psychologists in this province while we only have 552 psychiatrists. Many psychologists

are able to assist psychiatrists with assessment and treatment because treatment must be more than medication.

If psychologists were involved more in the health system, we could reduce the lengthy lineups we have for mental health clinics. Chronic cases need continuous access. We need adequate community resources to implement CTOs. CTOs are not a substitute. The argument not to introduce CTOs for this reason is false and unfair. CTOs are an extra tool in caring for patients. We must allow physicians and psychiatrists to do the best they can with what we have in the communities. At the same time we must recognize the need for resources and work to ensure that everything possible is being done to improve access to resources.

Bill 31 is a medical/legal solution to complex medical, legal, and social problems. In order to achieve the desired benefits of this legislation, resources must be available and accessible to people experiencing mental illness, to the community, and to the care team. In this regard drug costs should not deter us from trying to provide the best and safest treatments possible. We heard of the benefits of Consta, which is a cleaner drug in that it does not produce the undesirable side effects of other drugs that have been used for years. Yet Consta is not supported by Alberta health care. Bill 31 needs to be supported in the community. There needs to be assertive community treatment with resources available.

Again, housing is an issue. There need to be resources available to deal with these situations. This legislated piece is one of the pieces. The resources are another important piece that we still need to address for mental health issues. Many of the stakeholders that we spoke with say that we need the resources to back it up with respect to the community support. However, Bill 31 will make a significant difference for the target population.

I have a friend who returned to Edmonton in the middle of winter a few years ago to be part of the funeral of a man who ended his life by jumping off the High Level Bridge. The man who died was gifted and artistic. He was a member of a grown professional family with siblings who loved him, and he was bipolar. To the best we know, he never harmed anyone but himself, but he could not maintain any stability in his life – housing or job or intimate relationships – because of his condition. Sometimes when he was in need, he called on family members, but they could not allow him to move in as he was a grown man, and his erratic mood swings and comings and goings, often in the middle of the night, were enough to destabilize any family. Sometimes he was picked up on the streets and taken to a psychiatric facility. There he was made to take his meds and monitored until he seemed to no longer be at risk. Then he was let go. This repeated time and time again. He'd forget to take his meds, become more and more disoriented till he was picked up and placed in treatment again, but because he seemed to be normal when he was medicated, because he was only a nuisance to others but not harmful or criminal, because he was of age and otherwise competent, he was left on his own, to his own devices, ultimately to a self-inflicted death. "We all feared that this is what would happen," one of his siblings said at the funeral. They feared and they dreaded and they were powerless to avert it.

To speak of individual rights and responsibilities in a case like this is as tragic and pointless as his ending. The only right that applies was the man's right to be well. The only responsibility is ours collectively for those who cannot be self-sustaining. By passing this bill, those of us who call ourselves well are shouldering that responsibility. Let us not leave others like him on their own to perish. Bill 31 needs our support.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. minister.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find myself torn between supporting and rejecting this bill because it is such a personal circumstance. One of the worries I have about Bill 31 is the same concern that I had I believe it was two years ago, when the Member for Red Deer-North brought forward the crystal meth bill. The Member for Red Deer-North in her wisdom suggested that a solution to treatment was a 90-day program. In order for that program to work, you had to have 24/7 care. You had to have facilities that would provide the treatment, not just strictly a lock-up circumstance.

3:10

After her colleagues reviewed that plan and after we took the special steps of moving that plan ahead in legislation and on the Order Papers because we felt that it was a very good plan, partisanship went out the window. But that got reduced from a 90-day plan to basically a five-day voluntary detox circumstance. Here again we're talking about not voluntary but a commitment, after a fashion. I have great sympathy with the families of individuals whose hearts are broken as they see a family member out on the streets in an uncontrolled fashion that the medication could at least deal with. I understand the need for human rights, and I can't help but think of the film *Miracle on 34th Street*, which is somewhat of a comic/tragic story of Christmas, but it's also a story of commitment. The individual who was committed was committed for the wrong reasons, so there's always that balance.

One of the problems associated with Bill 31 is the lack of specialists, the lack of psychiatrists, the lack of mental health professionals to provide the diagnosis and to provide the necessary 24/7 support care. Also, there is a great desire by both specialists and community support workers to get rid of the old-style institutions, like what we had in terms of mental hospitals such as in Ponoka. There is a desire to try and provide that kind of care in the community and as much as possible in as close to a home circumstance as possible.

One of the problems, again, is the lack of a transitional facility. We know, for example, that over a third of homeless people suffer from mental illness, and last year at the drop-in centre there were 14 individuals who had amputations, and it wasn't just fingertips and a frozen toe. We're talking about some major limbs being removed because of frost and gangrene and health concerns. We have heard of programs that both our Alberta Liberals and the government support, and those are programs like the one that Dr. Sam Tsemberis from New York provided and shared with us at the Rotary House at the Stampede grounds in Calgary. Dr. Sam Tsemberis's program takes people who suffer from mental illness, people who are addicted, people who are, in quotations, hard to house, and what it does is provide 24/7 care.

One of the reasons this program is so successful in New York – I believe a similar program has taken place in Seattle and Toronto – and is being embraced in many cities in the States is that it provided 24/7 care, but a key component beyond the 24/7 care was the fact that there was accommodation. In Calgary, where we have a .5 per cent rental vacancy, and in Edmonton, where I think it's at 1 per cent, trying to find housing for these individuals is extremely difficult.

Now, the 10 years to end homelessness group, that members of my caucus have met with and planned with on numerous occasions, particularly our deputy House leader, the Member for Calgary-Currie, have gotten together with groups like Boardwalk, for example, which is among those with the greatest amount of real estate, and with the support of the government they are going to do an initial sort of pilot project determining 50 individuals based on input from drop-in centres, from the Mustard Seed, from community

groups who work with the homeless, to see if the type of program that has had success in American cities and in Toronto could potentially be moved into Alberta. I wish tremendous success for this program. Whether the government sort of rushed to get in front of an already existing parade or not, I appreciate the fact that they support or will at least initially support this pilot project.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Member for Calgary-Currie committed himself at a public forum during Homeless Awareness Week, that we held in Calgary-Varsity the third week in September, to come up with a plan to end homelessness within a 10-year period, and to his credit the deputy leader, the Member for Calgary-Currie, delivered on his plan. This isn't something that one political group or another or one community group or another can do in isolation. This is going to take the combined efforts of all of us. We have a number of community support programs that to a degree are co-ordinated under the 10-year plan. We have also programs like – and I'm afraid I can't recall the exact name, but what it is is a schizophrenic outreach on 10th Avenue S.W. in Calgary where individuals provide support for each other. In this equivalent of a day program drop-in circumstance, individuals provide help for each other. This is a wonderful program.

There is no simple solution. Bill 31 raises the challenge that individuals with mental illness need our support. One such support that I had an opportunity to attend the groundbreaking for was in Inglewood, in an area very close to the Inglewood bird sanctuary, along with a number of members of the Calgary Conservative and Liberal caucuses. We stood and sat in the glaring sun and looked at a stretch of gravel which will eventually turn into I believe it's a 120-bed facility. Other members who were there can correct me if I'm overestimating the number of beds. The history of this particular facility was three and a half years in the realization and three and a half years to get to a piece of gravel that was partially government funded and, to the larger extent, funded by a series of philanthropic organizations.

The problem is that we can't wait three and a half years. We can't wait for 10 years to finally come to grips with the problem. That's one of the problems that we're facing right now. The government has announced, so many times that I've forgotten, \$285 million that's going to go into affordable housing. I am not aware of any actual completed house or project, and members opposite may wish to correct my lack of understanding. The point is that from the idea of accepting the \$285 million, which incidentally is half of what the Affordable Housing Task Force recommended, to actually putting that money into projects that rise from the ground and have the community and the 24/7 government-funded support will take years. As a result, we need immediate action.

3:20

The Boardwalk program and the identification of the individuals is as close to immediate as we have, but taking 50 individuals off the street is a very small first step. The individuals that we encounter on our day-to-day walks who are talking to themselves or communicating with imaginary friends are suffering, and their families are suffering, if they're lucky enough to have families. We need to do something immediate, and if Bill 31 speeds up the process of supporting individuals with mental illness, then my leaning would be to support Bill 31 in the hope that that goal, that extremely important goal, could begin to be accomplished.

We need the facilities. Just talking about legislation without 24/7 funded support and facilities in which this care will take place to

support the family members who can no longer control the efforts of the person who wanders continuously away from their home – this must take place. Again, if Bill 31 addresses it even in a small way, then there is validity to it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to participate in debate on Bill 31, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. I had actually spoken in second reading early in the spring, when we first received this particular bill. After that, it got referred to one of the four standing policy field committees. I must commend the Assembly for referring it to the committee, and I must also commend the members of the committee for their extensive work and, in particular, my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, who served as the deputy chair of that particular committee.

Now, as with my committee, Government Services, this particular one, Community Services, received a lot of submissions and a lot of information from concerned Albertans and concerned stakeholders. I noted in the committee report, which was tabled in the Assembly in November after the committee finished its work, that individuals, private citizens, made many submissions and that church groups made submissions and then people who are experts in the field, if you will, Mr. Speaker.

I am going to reference the fact that, for example, the Alberta College of Social Workers made a submission. Just as examples: the Alberta Medical Association; the Canadian Mental Health Association; the Psychologists' Association of Alberta; the people who represent the Citizens Commission on Human Rights; the Information and Privacy Commissioner, who is actually an officer of this Legislature; again, the department of psychiatry at the U of A; the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta; and so on. Definitely, there was a lot of interest in this particular bill, and it received a lot of attention. I know that the committee struggled, as did all of us in the Assembly, with whether we should support this particular idea or whether we should oppose it.

Now, with all due respect to my colleague from Edmonton-Centre, I think that where you are an MLA actually does make a difference. She represents downtown Edmonton, and downtown Edmonton has a certain constituency that is probably more needy or requires more assistance and requires more support. She has, really, a pronounced issue with respect to homelessness, with respect to mental illness, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, and so on. So her constituency is different in this way.

I represent part of the west end, Mr. Speaker, and I have to confess that if she received 10 to 1 communication from people in her constituency telling her to oppose this particular idea, I think the opposite is quite true in my case. I received communication, mostly from parents and families, urging me to actually support it. That's why it was deemed prudent and the right thing to do for our caucus, the Official Opposition, the Liberal caucus, to treat this as a free vote. We felt that we were not going to reach a consensus or a united opinion on this one. It does vary from constituency to constituency, and it changes depending on the nature of the communication that we're receiving. I was certainly receiving more communication that was in favour of community treatment orders, that was in favour of Bill 31.

Now, although not as much as I had hoped to, I followed the work of the committee. I like the fact that now we are talking about the referral being conducted or done by two physicians. I like the fact that we're now advocating that one of the two has to be a psychia-

trist because these are the people who are qualified to make these decisions. It's not just any two practitioners because that was very broad and very elastic.

I'm a practitioner. I'm a pharmacist. I think I know a thing or two about mental illness, but I don't for a minute think that I would be qualified to make a judgment of this nature and say: "You look like you could use a community treatment order. I think you should be committed." I don't think I'm qualified. I don't think that necessarily people who are considered practitioners in that expanded definition have that ability. I think it's actually quite favourable that we're now limiting it to two physicians, hopefully one of which is going to be a psychiatrist.

I'm going to emphasize something that was said before. I'm not repeating stuff that was mentioned before; I'm basically highlighting it and emphasizing it. Hopefully, it is the way the government is going. We have to look at the big picture, Mr. Speaker. It is more than just drugs. It is more than just pharmacotherapy. It is psychotherapy. It is social. It is income related. It is looking at life skills, looking at employment, and so on.

We have to look at the triggers for why somebody falls through the cracks, why somebody is sucked in or brought into the situation that we're trying to deal with here. Also, we have to look at the triggers that maybe may lead to relapse. Someone might be looked after. They're looked after for 30 days, and they're released. Then they fall into a relapse quickly, within a day, within two days, within a week. We have to look at that big picture to avoid something like this happening.

Part of that big picture, Mr. Speaker, would involve the supports in the community. When these people are in care, when these people are under care of government – and that's what the parents are advocating – yes, it is allowing these parents to maybe relax or recuperate or recover from that continuous pressure that they're under, the continuous struggle to look after their son or daughter, to provide for that son or daughter, and to still conduct their daily life. You know, these people are employed. They're not dedicated caregivers; they're basically trying to juggle two or three things at the same time. These parents understandably want government to shoulder some of that pressure and to shoulder some of that responsibility.

3:30

I think we have to look at ways to empower these parents and empower these families to maybe do some of that work. And do you know what? I am not going to stop at maybe offering them visits from social workers or case management assistance. I'm going to say: "Do you know what? Maybe the time has come for us to consider even financial assistance for these parents and these families because they are saving taxpayers a lot of money." When somebody is committed and somebody is in care, as in a community treatment order, well, who's picking up the tab? It's the taxpayers and it's the government, when these parents are doing that excellent work. Let me tell you, the best work is going to be done by parents and by families. It's the best type of care because you're in your home in the setting that you're used to and that you're familiar with and that you're feeling safe in. They don't receive any compensation. As a matter of fact, it probably adversely affects their regular life. So I think these parents need to be empowered and recognized. If financial is one of the ways we can do it, I think we should be investigating this.

I mentioned the big picture: the continuation of care, the maintenance of care. When somebody is finishing their community treatment order period and they're being released, I think there should be the mechanism in place to utilize the electronic health

record, for example, to maybe carry on that information back into the community. If someone was receiving assistance and they're released, I as their pharmacist, for example, need to know which therapies they were on, the dosage, the combination of whichever therapies they were receiving, and so on, so I can provide better care.

We have a tendency sometimes to press reset and start all over. Somebody is on a certain medication or a certain modality, a certain package. Then, when they're released, we just press reset and we start all over. You know, sometimes these medications need to build up over time to reach something called steady state. If we press reset and start all over again, well, you've just wasted 10 days at least because your body doesn't have the medication stored in adequate enough amounts to take you to that steady state and to avoid the fluctuations, the ups and downs, especially with something like bipolar. So communication with community practitioners has to be highlighted. We need to maintain that level of care, and we also need to look at ways to avoid relapse.

The other thing is that when somebody is in care, they're in custody, we have to look at other angles and other skills; for example, interaction with other patients, interactions with the outside world in terms of visits, in terms of communication, maybe taking day passes to visit their family or to allow their families to visit them.

It's not just about drugs, Mr. Speaker. You know, we were approached by an agency like the Church of Scientology, for example, which is led by people like Tom Cruise, who advocated that we oppose Bill 31 because they think that the population is being overmedicated. They think that psychiatrists are crooks – not Tom himself, but he is basically leading that church – and they think psychiatrists are up to something and governments are servants of that big conspiracy. I think that while we don't believe that to be the case, there is also a point to be made that it's not just about drugs. Drugs are one component – and I'm a pharmacist; I should know – one component of many. It is one part of many.

I want to tell these parents that we heard their plights and we heard their concerns. We're hopefully moving in the right direction, but they're watching us. I'm going to be watching the government as well, that supports have to follow . . . [interjections] Well, that is the duty of, hopefully, every member in this House. If we're going to agree to a good idea, it has to be followed with action, and it has to be done in such a way that it's a comprehensive package, that it's not just done in silos where Alberta Health doesn't talk to Seniors and Community Supports; they don't talk to Children's Services; they don't talk to Education. It has to be in that big collaborative approach, where all of these ministries work together.

That's our duty in the opposition to maybe talk to them and hold their feet to the fire, quite frankly, and to also keep these parents in the loop because these parents need to be involved. They need to be communicated with, and they need to be engaged.

I'm hoping that there's also going to be periodic evaluation, certainly within maybe a couple of years, to see how effective this has been and if it should be continued. I'm hoping that there is going to be an advisory element, where parents sit on that board or that committee in an advisory capacity and tell us what they think. The government might think it's a successful project or experiment, but maybe the parents or the families think otherwise.

We need to maybe engage some of the patients who get better, some of the patients who find it useful and beneficial, to tell us what they think and to learn from their experience, to make it even better and to further benefit other members in the community who might need community treatment orders. So evaluation initially and periodically afterwards, collaboration between the different ministries, Mr. Speaker, and the reporting mechanism to see if it did what

it was intended to do and what more we can do besides just giving drugs and keeping people medicated. We have to look at the bigger picture, as I mentioned.

I am going to voice support, and I'm going to vote in favour of Bill 31. We're certainly treating it as a free vote. I commend both the sponsor of the bill, the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar – this is not an easy bill to be introducing, and he probably went through a lot of soul-searching to arrive at this – and I commend the members of the committee and everybody in this House for their participation and co-operation.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a very, very, very short speech, and that is to indeed add additional thanks to our hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar and, if I may, not just for his effort on this bill but his efforts for the people of his constituency over the years.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been very interesting to sit here and listen to the debate in third reading on Bill 31 this afternoon. As a couple of my colleagues on this side of the House have indicated, for the Alberta Liberals this is a free vote. It's obvious that different members of our caucus are going to vote in different ways, and that's because this is a complex and contentious piece of legislation, I think. It has its good points; it has its bad points.

In my view, on balance the good in this bill outweighs the bad, but some very key issues I think have been raised here over the last hour or so, that this House ignores at its peril some very key issues that this House has a responsibility to address when we come back next year for the 27th session, or however it numbers, 27th and/or 28th, however it goes.

The Mental Health Amendment Act does allow for community treatment orders. I found it interesting that when the Member for Edmonton-Centre was speaking, she said that her correspondence with her constituents is running, I believe she said, 10 to 1 against the concept of community treatment orders and against support for this bill. I would have to say that the response, the correspondence that I have had and the contact that I've had with constituents in Calgary-Currie must be pretty close to 10 to 1 the other way around, in favour. This is a tool requested by family members of seriously mentally ill people, this is a tool requested by organizations that speak for the mentally ill in some cases, and as I said, this is a tool that has been requested by a number of constituents of mine who have been touched, usually indirectly, by serious mental illness involving a family member.

Some of them have pointed out to me, Mr. Speaker, that this is a particularly difficult issue in the family because family sometimes are reluctant to intervene, to get involved, to try and get a loved one committed because the options without community treatment orders, the options available, are really quite limited and quite awful in some cases. So I think this is a tool that's needed.

When we look at tools like this, there is always the danger of getting too heavy handed. I think, as we discussed in committee earlier this afternoon, there is a very real, potential danger in the way in which this bill is worded, that there could be a heavy-handed approach taken to community treatment orders.

3:40

Over the short term, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to assume and I'm going to trust and I'm going to watch to make sure that these community treatment orders are issued in the spirit in which I think this bill, the sponsor of the bill, and the committee that did such hard and really very good work on the bill intended. That is that they will be used sparingly in cases that are really quite serious, quite severe, quite acute, quite urgent.

I do believe that we would have been better off had we – and I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, the number of the amendment escapes my memory right at the moment – passed the amendment that spoke specifically to the issue of competence and consent because I do agree with the Member for Edmonton-Centre that there is a chance that the bill as it is worded now could see us applying community treatment orders to people suffering from lesser mental illnesses, such things as severe episodes of chronic depression. But as we know, chronic depression can be treated in many cases quite successfully over a relatively short period of time.

There is a danger that if you get into the community treatment order stream, you could get better yet still have the ongoing nature of community treatment orders, the potential ongoing nature, the fact of the community treatment order having negative effects on your ability to get insurance, et cetera, et cetera, that sort of thing. I think that's a real concern that we need to watch for very carefully in the future. I don't think it's enough of a concern that we should not support this bill. I think that on balance this is, as I said, a bill that has much more to recommend it than to condemn it.

I'm going to come back to this notion of community treatment orders being a tool and Bill 31, in effect, then, being the tool that enables community treatment orders and stress that I think that's exactly how we should look upon community treatment orders and upon this bill. It is only one tool in a toolbox that needs to be filled with considerably more tools than what we have at our disposal right now.

That's why I suggest that this House needs to come back next spring and do more work on this issue, do more work on the broader issue of mental health. When we pass Bill 31 – and I assume, Mr. Speaker, that it is going to pass today on third reading – we will have created the ability to have community treatment orders, but in isolation they don't begin to solve the overall problems connected to mental health in the province of Alberta: the need for more treatment facilities, the need for more beds, the need for more psychiatrists specifically but mental health professionals generally, especially in rural areas, especially outside of Calgary and Edmonton. Let's be honest: there are not enough of them in Calgary and Edmonton either.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre touched on the generally accepted statistic that 1 in 5 of us will suffer a form of mental illness at some point in our lives and mentioned as well that sort of within mental health circles the feeling is that it's probably closer to 1 in 3. Our system simply is not geared up to deal with that.

I don't think, Mr. Speaker – and I'll hasten to add that I'm now expressing an opinion that I cannot back up with hard scientific evidence – that the shortage of mental health facilities and mental health treatment options and regimens and the shortage of mental health professionals that we have in this province and in many other jurisdictions around the western world has nearly as much to do with not having enough money to be able to deal with the problem as it does with the stigma that still hangs over mental illness. It may very well be that 1 in 5 of us or perhaps even 1 in 3 of us will have a mental health issue either singly or chronically over the course of our lives, but many of those who do will go to great lengths to try to hide it, as will their families, as will their friends.

Many of the rest of us who are not suffering from mental illness, whether it be severe or really quite mild and the sort of thing that you can talk through in a few sessions with a good psychologist, if we stay on the track that we've been on since we had that aha, eureka, moment some years ago that we really should stop institutionalizing the mentally ill, but never kind of filled in with the part 2 of what actually integrating them into the community really needs to look like, will be quite happy to pretend that mental illness doesn't exist, to turn away and refuse to acknowledge it. We do that at our peril. We do that at the peril of the people who suffer it. We do that at the peril of our loved ones, of our families, of our relatives.

Austin Mardon, who was in this House a couple of times in the last few days, recipient of the Order of Canada, member of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, wrote a really quite good op-ed piece in the *Edmonton Journal* a week or so ago speaking about homelessness. As my colleague from Calgary-Varsity pointed out a few minutes ago, there is a real point of intersection between chronic homelessness and mental health issues. I just want to quote very quickly from the article, if I can, to give you an indication of why I will be supporting Bill 31 even though it is not a perfect piece of legislation, and it's something that we need to do much more about going forward.

Austin Mardon writes:

We would not allow people in our families with Alzheimer's to wander the streets homeless. We would never think twice about obtaining a court guardianship to help an elderly person. But when the afflicted person is young and has an illness like schizophrenia, we sometimes balk at the idea of forcing them to take medication. We don't think it is our place to interfere with their right to refuse treatment.

I think he makes a very good point, Mr. Speaker. It's a point that I agree with. It is a point that I have had some experience with as my late father was in the early stages of dementia. You know, when that occurs in your family, it gives you some experience and insight into that part of it. We would not let our parents or our grandparents or our elderly spouses wander the streets homeless because they were suffering Alzheimer's or some other form of dementia. We should not do that to our younger, and potentially much more productive than they are, members of society who with treatment could reach their productive potential but who, when needing treatment, don't always realize that that's what they need.

Bottom line, Mr. Speaker: I will be voting in favour of Bill 31 because I am for it with the reservations that I've expressed. I think we need to keep a good watch on how it plays out because there is the potential, a small potential, for it to paint too broad a brush. If it ends up doing that, we need to get back in here real quick and make a correction, make an amendment to the bill. Also with the proviso that we need to come back in here next spring and do some serious work on addressing the whole mental health and our approach to mental illness treatment issue in the province of Alberta. It needs to be done holistically, crossing such things as homelessness, community facilities, community supports, and on like that.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for your time. I'll take my seat now.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a): any comments or questions?

There being none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

3:50

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 31, and I will try to be brief. There has been a lot spoken on this important bill. I speak in favour of it. I think it's something that is necessary yet difficult in many ways. You know, there are really certain strong concerns that were expressed to the

committee, of which I was a part, on civil liberties, individual responsibility, and other things, and those cannot be taken lightly.

There was also the input from many parents, many groups, many individuals that spoke of the problems in schizophrenia and all the rest of it. I visited Alberta Hospital as I have in my constituency also seen many people from Alberta Hospital from time to time and dealt with some who have become homeless coming from there and some of the problems that are sometimes in the community because that institution is nearby. I'm not saying that we don't welcome it but that it tends to have some of the former residents congregate in the area. I would challenge, actually, all members to take a tour of Alberta Hospital to see the real need in that facility for some major improvements. There is a need for institutionalized care, and it is not something that we can get away from completely.

There's a desire, absolutely, to get into increased community care. CTOs, involved in Bill 31, will allow for that individual capability and family capability to be able to live in the community. One of the things that was an instigator of this legislation was certainly the Ostopovich case in Spruce Grove and the lack of a spouse to be able to get a husband to take his medication even though he wanted to when he was in the right spot in his medication cycle, or whatever you want to call it. He got into an incident that prompted a fatality inquiry and the justice reported the need for CTOs. Unfortunately, he was killed, and a police officer was killed in that unfortunate incident.

The need in our community for this is clear. There are many, many individuals that are affected by this. In my communities the response was overwhelming in terms of the need for this. I had a great deal of people call me on this, and people as families and individuals asked for this legislation to be instituted.

I do not doubt that the Member for Edmonton-Centre might have had 10 to 1 in terms of response on that. There are different aspects of this bill that must be monitored very closely in the next couple of years. Certainly, the need to approve some of the drugs for use with schizophrenics and for the department of health to look very closely – the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, I think, spoke about that – is clear. But there are also some problems with, perhaps – and we heard that from a number of presenters – excessive medication with the use of methadone. That may be a very clear difficulty that we might have to monitor very closely to ensure that that is not something that is abused through CTOs.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The need for community supports. On housing, the Canadian Mental Health has a project coming up in Edmonton that is looking for support, that I think has wonderful merit. The need for supports for that is clear. The homelessness issue: it's not all of the homelessness issue, but Austin Mardon, in his report mentioned earlier and in some of his speeches just in the last week as we've looked at this issue in the city on certain days and weeks marking the need to address this issue, said very clearly that it is a part of the issue of homelessness. We must remember that and look at that.

I do support this bill very strongly. I think we must monitor it closely over the next couple of years, Mr. Speaker, and I ask the Assembly to pass this. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Should we call the question?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been an interesting exercise to listen to debate on this bill this afternoon because, as has

been alluded to by the House leader for the Official Opposition, this is a free vote in our caucus, and it's a free vote because it's such a difficult issue. I hear the agriculture minister suggesting that it shouldn't make any difference. He said: what difference should it make? Well, you know what? It makes an awful lot of difference, and members on this side of the House, at least, take debate on such serious issues very, very seriously. I'm a little dismayed, quite frankly, that the agriculture minister would belittle the seriousness with which we take this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I've listened intently this afternoon as members from both sides of the House relayed not only concerns about this bill and how it affects constituents of theirs but particularly some of the personal stories that have been related. My colleague from Edmonton-Manning mentioned a few minutes ago Alberta Hospital. I happen to have relatives that operate a farm just very close to Alberta Hospital. In fact, I've got several relatives in the area. One cousin and his family operate a farm literally across the road from Alberta Hospital, but several relatives have farms in the area, and I spent a large part of my youthful summers working on one of those farms. They always employed patients from the hospital, many of whom were victims of schizophrenia, absolutely wonderful, wonderful people, but of course they had their challenges. So I grew up as a young child being exposed to people who suffered this affliction.

I had another very personal and moving experience when my family lost our daughter through an accident in 1993, and I've spoken of that several times in the Assembly over the years. One of the first support services that was offered to our family after that accident was through a group called Compassionate Friends. Some members may remember earlier this year when I gave a member's statement in support of the Compassionate Friends and the work that they do.

The first people I met through Compassionate Friends was a fellow by the name of Jerry Calder and his wife, Dee, who live in Leduc. Their son Jay lost his life at the age of 21, if I remember correctly. Yes, he was 21 years old. He fell to his death. To this day it's unclear whether or not it might have been a suicide or if it was an accident, but Jay fell to his death at the age of 21 after suffering with schizophrenia for years. I know, having spoken to Jerry and Dee, a lot of the struggles that they faced as they watched their son deal with this disease.

I have in my own family watched members of my family struggle with depression. I've literally lived through some of the angst and anxiety that families live through when they watch loved ones potentially harm themselves, so I recognize all of the emotions and issues that families go through as they deal with loved ones who are in this situation, yet I struggle with my own personal position on this. I'll be honest with you, Mr. Speaker: at this point, probably mere minutes away from a vote being taken on this bill, I'm not sure how I'm going to vote. I'm really not. I am conflicted. There are some very important issues around individual freedoms and freedom of choice, and I don't think that we should treat those lightly.

4:00

A lot of talk today on a number of bills about Big Brother and, you know, interference by the state in individuals' lives. Again, I don't think we should take those concerns lightly. Over the three years that I've been a member of this Assembly, I've built quite a relationship with the Canadian Mental Health Association, their Edmonton regional office, and come to know a number of people that work there, both staff and volunteers, and a number of the individuals that they've helped over the years, including Dr. Austin Mardon, as a matter of fact. They do absolutely tremendous work.

When I speak to the people that are involved with CMHA and their Edmonton office, Mr. Speaker, even there I sense that there is a great deal of trepidation when it comes to developing a position around this bill. My understanding is that for the most part they're supportive of it, but as my colleague from Edmonton-Centre pointed out in her comments earlier, this piece of legislation may not actually help a lot of these individuals unless the government steps forward with the supports that are required.

To simply apprehend someone and ensure that they're put back on their meds doesn't necessarily address the bigger picture. It doesn't necessarily address the problem. I know that in discussion with my colleague from Lethbridge-East earlier this afternoon we agreed that so often people who are facing these afflictions, once they're stable and doing well, the first thing they want to do is to go off of their meds. I understand that that is exactly the sort of situation that this legislation is contemplated to address, but I'm not convinced in my own mind that it will effectively address that situation. So I really have to think carefully over the next several minutes as to exactly what my position will be when it comes time to vote on this bill.

I want to commend my colleague from Calgary-Currie for his comments a few minutes ago in terms of tying this piece of legislation, this debate, and this conversation this afternoon to the situation around housing and homelessness. I think all members in this House recognize that those that are facing issues of mental health are also facing so many of the other challenges that we see in our society in Alberta right now. To think that we can just sort of treat one aspect of it and not all of the other aspects of the challenges that these people face is simply not going to accomplish the goal that we've set out for ourselves. It really has to be a holistic approach.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, I really, really must commend the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for her comments. I will confess to having had a tear in my eye this afternoon when she was speaking. As is so often the case, when the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods opens her mouth to speak in this Assembly, it gets very, very quiet. The reason for that is because she does not use her words lightly. They're always very well considered, very well measured, and I think all members in this House recognize that. There are certainly those of us in this House – and I would never suggest that I might be one of them – who can chew up time on the clock if there is a desire to do so. The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is not one of those. When she speaks, I think everybody understands that there's a message there that needs to be heard, and I thought that her words this afternoon were particularly powerful. I hope that all members will reflect upon those words and those of many other colleagues on both sides of the House this afternoon who have spoken very eloquently on this issue, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, it's a difficult decision for myself and certainly many members of our caucus and, I'm going to guess, for many members of this Assembly to decide exactly where they come down on this bill. We understand what we're trying to accomplish here. We're hopeful that if it's passed, it will do some of that, but I hope that it's not just one of those pieces of legislation that we can hold up and say, "Look, we did this," as we've done with a couple of other pieces of legislation that I've supported in the past. The PCHAD legislation certainly was one that I supported. But sometimes I worry that when we pass bills like that, we give the government and the agencies that work with less fortunate people some tools but not necessarily the solution.

I guess it's a good step forward, and certainly one of the emotions or one of the expressions that you'll hear from families that are facing these challenges is: give us whatever you can; give us something; give us some hope. I certainly recognize that, and it's part of the reason why I struggle with this decision. Having lost a

child, I know on a very deep personal level how difficult it can be to watch people who might in fact hurt themselves and who in many cases have hurt themselves. We don't take that lightly, but at the same time, as I said, there are serious issues around personal freedoms and personal liberties and some real questions as to whether or not the tools themselves that we're discussing here today are enough or if, in fact, there isn't a lot more that has to be done in order to provide a solution as opposed to just a tool.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will allow others to participate in the debate. I will once again just implore everybody to think really, really carefully about this before they make their decision. It's not an automatic, in my mind, and I believe many others feel the same way.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief, but I did want to do a couple of things before debate closes. First of all, I wanted to thank the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for sponsoring the bill. He had intended to bring forward a private member's bill on this topic, and as we wanted to bring forward a government bill on the topic, he acquiesced and then sponsored the government bill, and I very much appreciate that. I appreciate the enthusiasm that he brought to the task and the passion for the purpose, which I thought was very important.

We've had a number of very powerful comments made. Yesterday in committee, I believe it was, the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne read portions of a letter which he'd received which I think really expressed all of those letters that many of us could have tabled. This is a bill that is going to serve a purpose.

I disagree with the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, not in terms of his viewpoint on how difficult a bill it is but in terms of being able to make a decision. This is an easy decision for me and, I think, for many members of the House because we know what this particular tool will do to assist families who have an adult child with a mental disorder such as schizophrenia to actually live a life in the community, to give the family a life back because it has a very powerful impact on the family. It is going to be a very, very useful tool, but it's just a tool. It's just one of the tools. All of us have those letters, and most of us, I think, have had opportunities to know families that will be well served. We know families who've had pain in their family as a result of having to live through the deterioration of their adult child and live through the recovery and then the deterioration again and that cycle over and over again.

4:10

I wanted to comment particularly on Edmonton-Mill Woods and her comments because – I don't think I've ever felt this way before – her comments are ones that I'm going to go back and read in *Hansard* because they were powerful comments, and I think they were very well said. I'm not going to try and repeat those sentiments; I just want to adopt those sentiments because she expressed it very well.

I've had the opportunity to hear from a number of very strong advocates on this bill. I'm not going to name them, but I do want to just mention that they have been there all the way through, providing advice and insisting on how important this piece of legislation is for them and for the community. I want to thank them. As I say, I won't name them because that would be too long a list, but I do want to thank them. They'll know who they are because they've been calling and sending e-mails and encouraging.

I did want to mention that we've had a steering committee with respect to this bill to help guide it in terms of its content, in terms of how it should be created because it had to be created carefully, and that included a number of the major advocacy groups and interest groups in the area. That steering committee has been and will be very useful for us as we draft regulations, as we move forward towards implementation.

Certainly, some concerns have been raised about the community resources. There have to be community resources. They're not in the bill – Edmonton-Centre is absolutely right: they're not in the bill – but they are important. Assertive community treatment is absolutely important, and we need to make sure that that goes forward. Housing for the hard to house is equally important. Many of the hard to house, in fact, I'd hazard to guess that most of the hard to house, have either a mental issue or perhaps an addiction issue or both, and codependency is very common.

I won't go on. This is a very important bill. I did want to take the opportunity to rise and thank Drayton Valley-Calmar again and to thank Edmonton-Mill Woods because she has been very staunch in her advocacy on this issue. Again, her words this afternoon were powerful. I'd like to ask the House for its support for this bill so that we can get on with the implementation.

I need to correct one misapprehension that I think I created yesterday for Edmonton-Centre in terms of funding the CMHA. We're not funding the CMHA.* It's the alliance that we're going to give a relatively small budget, in the nature of \$80,000 to \$100,000, for them to continue their advocacy work in the area and to help us with some of the co-ordination and monitoring type issues in the area. It's important, though, because we need these groups to be out there, to be communicating from the community, and to be continuing to keep the focus on the issues. So I just wanted to make that correction on the record.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar to close the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to spend a moment thanking everybody for their excellent debate. I am actually a little bit surprised that we had such meaningful speeches after 20 hours of straight debate in this House, probably 25 hours if you count that we started at 1 o'clock yesterday. I really agree with the minister of health in that every speech that was given today was very powerful. I just want to thank the minister for the opportunity to carry this bill, thank everybody that helped to work on it, and I do want to encourage everybody to read *Hansard* and to try to make this bill better by adding the dollars that are needed into the system to make this possible.

Again, just an excellent step forward here to help people with mental health issues, and therefore I would call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a third time]

Bill 48
Health Facilities Accountability Statutes
Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move Bill 48, Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, for third reading.

I'll save the rest of my eloquence for response.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I saw this to some degree as a companion to Bill 41, and as I said, in this particular instance Bill 48 was also a direct result of what happened in St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville. This is one time that I believe the minister had to step up and had to organize the authorities, how it works, and ultimately the minister had to have the power to react in terms of serious situations. There are likely some misgivings about centralizing power in the minister's office, but in this case I don't think there is any doubt that that's where it has to be. As I said, the buck stops there. I think the minister, with the amendments that he's brought in, has allayed the fears of the faith-based. At least, I would hope that he has. They're worried that they would be out of business, I guess.

Again, unlike 41 – I didn't see the need for the power there – I absolutely do see the need for the power in Bill 48. As I say, this came from the Health Quality Council of Alberta. I think this is their recommendation generally, and I think it should be supported.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak briefly in third reading of Bill 48, the Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. This was a pretty good debate. We had some rousing disagreements and a package of 13 amendments that came forward from the government, mostly to address the issues around faith-based principles and ethics. Ah, yes. The famous consultation clause that the minister wouldn't put in for me last week he's more than willing to put in this week, so I'm going to make him eat a bit more crow about that one. It just shows that you can do it if you want to, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview pointed out, this is the second piece, the companion bill – what did I call it this morning? – the Hansel to the Gretel of Bill 41, springing from the episode in particular that happened in Vegreville last spring. This was to make sure and to clarify the lines of accountability and roles and responsibilities for all of the hospitals, in particular bringing the faith-based ones, which are also called volunteer-based hospitals in our system, under the roles and responsibilities and clear lines of communication with the regional health authority and other hospitals in the area. So this bill needed to happen.

4:20

My concern with this bill, as with Bill 41, is that the minister takes another step and does give more control to himself – you know, pulls all those reins, driving those horses into a hand that gets pulled ever closer toward the bosom of cabinet – and that always causes me concern. It was, I think, a bit more appropriate with Bill 48 than Bill 41, which I wouldn't support. Bill 48 I am willing to support.

Having made those comments, I will cede the floor to someone else that wishes to speak to the bill.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. minister to close the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

*See p. 2443, right col., para. 7, line 4

The Speaker: Sorry. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I should have hopped up faster.

This goes back to Bill 41. There is a direct connection, and that's the linkage and the line of responsibility: what does the government have in its sort of stewardship, legislative regulatory role, and where do the various health regions and the hospitals within those health regions have control? Delineating that authority is absolutely key to the proper delivery of health services.

Years ago, going back to the early '90s, before the primary concern of this government was defeating the debt regardless of what ramifications occurred as a result, hospitals were sort of entities unto themselves. There was both good and bad associated with that because if a patient had a concern, they could go directly to that facility and the board, and those concerns could be dealt with in a very accommodating, very straightforward arrangement. But when the government, in its wisdom or lack thereof, decided to consolidate the health regions, there was a fragmentation, an unintentional occurrence which resulted. Similarly, when the government felt that there were too many school boards, too many school districts, and they decided through former Treasury minister Jim Dinning to make cuts to the various districts and to the health regions, then the authority, particularly in the health regions, became very, very unconnected.

I think what's happened in Vegreville is that the who's in charge aspect of it was lost because we had faith-based hospitals, we had our regular public hospitals, and the oversight in the authority and the funding and the support were rather disjointed. We had examples not just in Vegreville, but we've had examples of MRSA appearing in Claresholm, in Canmore. I know a constituent's first-hand experience in the Calgary health region. The authority and the decision-making has been sort of tossed back and forth, sometimes, between the Alberta Medical Association and the government.

I can remember the debates over Bill 11. It was such a hot potato in terms of preserving our public health care or having a single public administrator that the line of authority became blurred. Unfortunately, we're still suffering from that lack of authority. I know the government is trying to decide who does what, but I would suggest that putting things in regulation and making it a ministerial responsibility as opposed to in legislation, where it could be openly debated and the line is clear with associated reviews built into the legislation – then we have a chance of that authority being more clearly understood. Right now we have the case of the government, sort of, as so many other bills have demonstrated, in a regulatory mood.

Now, what I find very frustrating as a member of Public Accounts is the changing authority. When we call a ministry before us, it's very hard, particularly when we have to focus on the previous year, to get the type of straightforward answers we need to get. For example, in the shadow ministry that I represent, Infrastructure and Transportation, in the space of a year we went through three ministers. Some ministers have somewhat limited memory. They sometimes do not realize when they assume the ministry that all past sins are now their sins because they have taken over a ministry. I think in the case of the Ministry of Health and Wellness the hands-off, hands-on, third way, and Bill 11 have taken away a great deal of the responsibility for health and have just added confusion to the whole process.

Elected health boards, where the responsibility is directed to the constituents, where the authority is recognized as that given to them by the voter as opposed to appointed to the government, where the mixed authority causes confusion – for example, are David Tuer or

Jack Davis primarily responsible to the government who appointed them or are they responsible to the constituents, the million individuals? Well, it's actually over a million because the Calgary health region covers a wide area surrounding Calgary, reaching out to High River and so on.

That line of authority is very difficult. Sometimes within any kind of organization that is built on a kind of a military model, this top-down approach doesn't necessarily work. What we need is a kind of collegial, collaborative process whereby everyone from the orderly through to the head surgeon through to the chair of the board through to the minister of health works in a collegial manner, and they realize who is responsible to whom. Of course, the bottom line is that we're responsible to Albertans, and it's very important that we remember that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak to Bill 48 because I think, as has been mentioned, it certainly is a companion bill to Bill 41, and my problems with Bill 48 are, certainly, basically the same as the ones for Bill 41. I do believe that this is an overreaction to the infection problems that they had in East Central.

The main objective of this bill is to clarify the lines of accounting between hospital, health regions, and the minister. I think that, in itself, was absolutely necessary, and I think that in the way the government has come through and put this together, that part is very, very good. What I have a problem with is that in doing that, the minister has taken on far more responsibility and far more power than is necessary. I don't think that that's good governance. I believe that governments are here to govern by policies, not necessarily by absorbing all the power from the organizations that they're supposed to be just basically writing the rules for, to be able to keep the playing field equal so that people can live fair and balanced lives throughout.

4:30

The other thing that I have a big problem with – and certainly it's from my own personal experience working in the health care system – is that it really is: the bigger you get, the more impersonal it is and the more difficult it is to actually get any of your complaints or any of your fears answered. More often than not if you run into the bureaucracies or the people that are supposed to be helping, you'll get an attitude of: "I'm the government; you're not, so too bad. Get on with it." That's not good enough. We need compassion in our systems. The bigger the systems get, the less compassion there is.

To think that someone in some obscure little place in the corner of this province would have the same kind of hearing from a minister's office as they would from, say, a local board who actually understands the dynamics of the area that they're working in and actually often understands the dynamics of the families that would be involved, whatever their problem with the health care system may be, it's just understood on a different level. I'm so against big health care. To use a word that I've heard from the other side, it really does create a bunch of little minions running around. I think that it degrades their ability to use their own compassion because they're so boxed in with rules and bureaucratic nonsense that really restricts the ability for someone to have the compassion.

I look at what's happening in our long-term care facilities. Certainly it happens in children's services as well, and it's actually happening in all of our human services side of things: the ones that care are out there working 12, 14 hours a day. But it isn't that. It's

that they're giving a hundred per cent for those 12 and 14 hours a day. They love their jobs. They love what they do. They get the altruistic value of what they do at the end of the day, but if they don't get that altruistic value, if they realize that the system – the system – is stopping them from being able to do their job correctly and with compassion, then there's something wrong with the system. [interjections] I have to assume that that last desk thumping was in support of what I'm saying and that people really are understanding that compassion is necessary in our health care system.

I have questions that aren't answered. I really don't believe administrators should report only to the minister. Why isn't there a time limit on administrators' powers? Why aren't people moving through the system perhaps a little quicker? It's not that people are necessarily bad, but they do get complacent, and I don't think we should have complacency in our health care system. I'm not sure why the minister needs the oversight over the bylaws. Why not just the regions? What I'm afraid of is that when the minister has this kind of power, we will hear some of the same rhetoric that we get from some of the other ministers who then download the responsibilities onto whichever boards they've appointed, which isn't fair. If the minister is going to take this, then the minister is responsible, not the boards that are underneath him.

So I won't support this bill. I certainly have reservations. When I spent some more time between second, committee, and third, I rethought it, so I won't be supporting it at this time. I think it's too big, and I think it reduces us to noncaring people who are just part of a large system that can't respond to the actual needs of people in the health care system.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-East: don't feel the need to mention names unless it's in praise, but based on your years as a nurse working primarily in long-term care, could you give examples of when the line of administration, the line of responsibility was clear, based on your experience, and how that helped with the efficiency of the operation overall through collegiality, through collaboration versus maybe a story where when that collaboration and order and delineation wasn't necessarily there, it caused you undue work? I know that when there is a team approach and when everybody shares the authority, things work much better. But there is a final decision. If you've had experiences like that. I know I have in education, and I'm assuming you have in health care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I think that I can probably speak as a professional to the power of working as a team. I think that as the RN in charge it was very, very clear to me that without my PCAs, without good PCAs, personal care aides, without people that cared but, more importantly, without people that I could trust because I knew they were trained and they had the experience, then basically my job – we had to work together. I had to be able to trust them, and they had to be able to trust me, particularly if we had, you know, emergencies and I may be in a different part of the building because we could have been understaffed that night or whatever. You simply have to work as a team, and, yes, you're right: ultimately I did make the decisions on what was going on.

I think the other thing was that I was very, very fortunate to actually work in the time when nursing was an art and I could practise the art of nursing as opposed to the science of nursing, which I think sometimes takes the human side of it out because you're so busy and you tend to push a little more paper instead of pushing people.

However, to take it to the next step, I worked very collegially with the doctors. Now, the doctors didn't always come to the nursing home, so they had a great deal of trust in the nurses that they got to know and trust their abilities. Again, I was fortunate to practise the art of nursing and, in fact, made many decisions that doctors respected. When I would call, I would need a change in medication or, in fact, I needed to send someone to the hospital, and they knew that I wasn't doing that lightly.

As time went on, I found it more and more difficult to send people to the hospital because I would be getting questions like, "Well, how old are they?" Of course, my answer was always: "It's totally irrelevant. The woman has a broken hip. I'm sending her," blah, blah. So it got to be more and more and more administration, more and more bureaucracy. It was more and more somebody filling in the blocks on a page at the other end of the telephone, so it did get disconcerting.

Another thing that I certainly noticed – and I think it's going on in our society today, particularly at all levels in the human service sector – is that if we pull the volunteer sector out of this province, I'm sorry, but I think it will fall flat. When I think of all the volunteer hours that not only the RNs but the PCAs put in in the particular nursing home that I worked in, if you pulled all those hours out, it makes it look like the system truly is functioning, but without those volunteer hours it's not functioning. I think it's a misconception that we are not looking at volunteer hours and really counting them into the system because without them the system would fall apart.

Teamwork is absolutely essential, but I also agree with my hon. colleague that there does have to be a boss and that there has to be someone that does take that responsibility and that whoever is at the top cannot download it onto someone else. You're responsible. You're responsible for the people under you. You stand up for what you believe, and you stand up for your responsibilities. So trying to download it onto other segments underneath is just not the way to go.

4:40

The Speaker: Shall I call on the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to close the debate?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had a good discussion of this bill at the three readings. I'd request that the Legislature now support the bill and pass it.

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a third time]

Bill 55

East Central Regional Water Authorization Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment on behalf of the hon. member.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Drumheller-Stettler I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 55, East Central Regional Water Authorization Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I know that my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View would very much like to add his comments

on this point. I'll attempt to provide some of those comments for him as he is doing good work in Ottawa on behalf of the poor individuals who are in war-torn Darfur.

At some point we're going to have to take the wisdom of individuals like Dr. Schindler. We're going to have to listen to people like Martha Kostuch, I believe it is, and – I know beyond a doubt – Dan Woynilowicz of the Pembina Institute. These were people that the government asked to be part of an advisory committee. One of the common things that they've said that the government has yet to completely grasp is that unless you know what water is available, both surface and aquifer, you can't conserve or preserve something that you're not familiar with its extent.

This is either the third or the fourth water transfer in the three years that I've been in this House, and again it's an interbasin transfer. Yes, it's treated water, and it's going by pipeline, and pipelines are certainly more efficient than our rural irrigation ditch system. But there comes a point, again, as Dr. Schindler has said, that you've got to move the people to the water rather than the water to the people.

The direction of these transfers more and more is from north to south. I don't want to see Alberta getting into the situation that happened in B.C., where large dams have been built with tremendous flooding and loss of arable land. We have to make these decisions wisely. While I don't want to see ghost towns forming, such as when the railroad no longer had elevators along the way and towns sort of quietly died, if we don't base our decisions on water transfers based on availability and the cost of those transfers, then we're going to be in a great deal of trouble.

This past week at the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association a gentleman from Sundre, a reeve I believe, got up and asked the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation an infrastructure question. He indicated that in the town of Sundre they didn't have a backup source for their water tower. He was very concerned that in times of, you know, low flow in the river they needed a reliable water source for filling that tower for fire and other emergency uses. The minister of infrastructure's response was: I'm afraid that water tower reservoirs aren't even on our list for funding.

With the number of times my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View has stood up and talked to the government about the need to finance and support the Water for Life strategy, which has to take in a comprehensive review of our aquifers, of our surface water, the government has made some wise decisions in terms of shutting down the Oldman River and in terms of shutting down the Bow. We're very aware that these rivers flow from the mountains and glacial sources, and we know how rapidly our glaciers are depleting. So what we've taken for granted for years and years and years, we can no longer take for granted. Regardless of whether you believe in global warming or not, the reality of it is ever present in Alberta.

The solution is not to continue to draw water from the north to feed the south. We've got to stop the types of developments in the north that go sort of helter-skelter, approval after approval after approval, because we're getting to the point where some of our best agricultural land in the north, in terms of Grande Prairie and High Prairie, are starting to become compromised by industry. We know that the old system of grandfathering water licences no longer works because the concentration in a few small hands of large water quantities is not working in this modern day and age.

The answer is not simply to treat water as a commodity and put a price tag on it. We need to measure the water that's being used – of that there is no doubt – because the government has indicated that in terms of the various organizations in the water districts, we don't

have an accurate understanding or calculation of how much water they actually use. Because we have no measuring tools to completely understand that usage, such as we have water meters in our urban centres, then there is a tremendous amount of wastage.

In oil and gas extraction potable water is still being flushed down holes and is not retrievable. I know there's a greater move towards grey water. There's a greater move towards using saline water. But the reality is that if we don't have water and we don't manage it and we don't test for its quality, then we're going to be in great trouble.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View also pointed out that it's not simply enough to do baseline testing. He's talked about the need for isotopic testing, where the types of gas that are in low levels in the underground aquifers, especially where there's a proximity of coal-bed methane – and fracking can cause that gas to mix more freely than it does in its natural state. Without that kind of isotopic testing we have no idea what types of gases are present, and that has to be absolutely known before fracking takes place.

A former Minister of Environment, Lorne Taylor, was at the Rozsa Centre at the University of Calgary, and he announced a \$35 million Water for Life initiative. That's a good starting point, but I know and as the current Minister of Environment would I believe agree and the former minister of environment, who is just leaving the room temporarily, would probably also agree . . . [interjections] Oh, pardon me. Pardon me. Sorry. I apologize. Here he is. As I said, it was a temporary movement.

Anyway, what I'm getting at is that they realize how drastically underfunded their ministry is. They have fought for funding, but unless things have dramatically changed – and one of the ministers can clarify if that's the case – the Ministry of Environment receives less than a per cent of the entire general revenue. I would suggest that the role the Environment ministry absolutely has to play is key to that of the health ministry and it's key to that of the Education ministry because without the environmental controls and measurements and protections and enforcements, what have we got left? Oil and gas are not going to replace water.

4:50

The Speaker: Hon. member, I've now allowed you to go 10 minutes without interruption, but there is still the principle of relevancy. The name of this bill is the East Central Regional Water Authorization Act.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The relevancy, Mr. Speaker – and I appreciate your focusing; I think we're approaching 20 hours, possibly longer – is that water can't be taken for granted, that this may appear to be only one more small transfer, but what is missing is the definition of this transfer. It says that it's for home usage, but it also says that it's for commercial activities.

Now, if, for example, in this particular area a bottled water organization wants to set up, such as we see in Nanton and such as we see in Calgary and Edmonton with regard to producing Coca Cola, Pepsi, and a variety of soft drinks or bottled water, then under the municipal agreement that it can be used for industrial use, there is going to be a significant draw on that water. What I'm asking the government to do is clearly define who's receiving the water, and if it is for industrial use, then charge that industry a significant amount that recognizes that water for industrial use isn't free, just the way it's not free in the cities because it's metered and we pay.

In the case of farming let us make better, more efficient use of our irrigation systems. Instead of having sprayers going at all times of the day, concentrate it during the evening. Let's get rid of just the open-flow ditches, which are . . .

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, again on relevance. I think it's *Beauchesne* 459. This is a bill about domestic water being piped to towns that may have their outflow into another river basin. That's what this bill is about.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. And to the hon. minister . . .

The Speaker: No. That's not the way it works. Just a few minutes ago the chair actually rose on the point of relevancy. This is the second point on the question of relevancy. I would now ask the member to continue but to be relevant to the bill at hand.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: I'll finish with this, Mr. Speaker. My concern is not for the residents who will receive their water piped to them. My concern is the definition of the individuals and companies who will receive the benefit of that water for industrial use. How far does industrial extend, and to what extent is the value of that water recognized that is being piped to this district?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, promise to be very brief. One area which was actually mentioned in debate but which I would like to again put one more time on the record is the fact that part of this whole discussion has to actually centre around the fact that we need to plan for communities' growth. Sometimes communities grow, and their needs grow. My hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity and previously the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View have expressed their desire and their preference for the government to do mapping of groundwater, mapping of surface water, and so on and to have an inventory of what we have, how much we can allocate, how many in terms of licences we can grant.

The angle I want to highlight is basically that when these communities experience growth – and I make the distinction, as my colleague did, that domestic growth or residential use is one way. If we're talking about commercial or industrial growth, that's definitely another layer that has to be factored in. If the Assembly finds it agreeable to come to the assistance or the aid of communities in smaller towns or smaller cities that need more water because their supply is diminishing or maybe their needs are growing, that's one thing, but if we're actually doing this to advance industrial or commercial interests or to help people in industry, then it's definitely a different question, and maybe the reaction from this Assembly is going to be different.

As these communities grow, definitely the plan should be for this government to forecast that growth and to maybe be ahead of the curve, not only react to a situation where these communities are faced with a water shortage. Maybe they should be able to tell ahead of time that communities A, B, and C in northern Alberta and communities D, E, and F in southern Alberta are going to likely be in this situation a year from now or two years from now, and here's what we're doing now to prevent this from happening or to address this concern before it actually arises. So the need for planning and the need for this government to be proactive rather than reactive I think is something that is valid, and it's a concern that my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity was trying to frame, but he was

being directed to always keep his remarks within that relevant framework, if you will, Mr. Speaker.

This is where I'm coming from. Certainly, we don't object to a small town getting some extra water, definitely treated water, being piped or being trucked in. That is okay. We just need that plan to be in place so these situations do not arise and this Assembly is not faced with this request more than once every session. This is certainly the fourth or fifth time that I have seen this, and it shouldn't be happening. It shouldn't be allowed to happen. [interjection] Well, this is it. The relevance is the need for that plan to be in place, to be in existence. Be it the Water for Life strategy or a one-off request, I'm just hoping that we don't get it repeated frequently, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. By recognizing the hon. member, that closes this debate.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to close this debate. This is an issue that's affected the people that are going to be served by this waterline for many, many years. This great decision that the members have made on the treated water, a decision that my members have worked on and my colleagues are working on, will satisfy what people have dreamt about for many, many years, and that's safe and secure drinking water in communities that have contributed so greatly to the province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close debate. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 55 read a third time]

Bill 54

County of Westlock Water Authorization Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to move third reading of Bill 54, County of Westlock Water Authorization Act.

This is a similar project to the bill that we just passed, only on a much smaller scale, probably 5 per cent of the size. It is for domestic water within the county of Westlock, primarily for two small villages served by the town of Westlock.

I urge all members to support this bill.

5:00

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I just want to comment briefly about our ongoing concerns, just to be on the record, about interbasin water transfers. Every time we come . . .

An Hon. Member: It's treated water.

Dr. Taft: I know. I understand it's treated water.

It seems that every time we have a session, there's another interbasin water transfer. At some point we need to face up to the reality that we need to move people to the water more than we're moving water to the people. We've had some interesting discussions on that in this Assembly, but it's important to drive that message home because every time we say that this is the last one, and every time we do it again.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

The hon. Minister of Environment to close the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The Speaker is prohibited from participating in the debate, but the two communities are Clyde and Vimy.

[Motion carried; Bill 54 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 57

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 57 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Carried.

Bill 38

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007 *(continued)*

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. There are a few general comments that I think need to be made about this bill. I guess the first sort of source of misunderstanding around this bill is that we are in the first part of TILMA, and this is the part where we and the government of British Columbia – we are moving along in parallel on this. There's been some talk about how B.C. has been debating it whereas we haven't. Essentially, what happened with B.C. is that they had a procedural motion regarding TILMA. We don't have that kind of process within our House.

Essentially, what we are doing is moving along with B.C., and we are saying that, hey, we believe in free trade between the provinces. We believe in free trade, so what we're going to do is that we're going to put some teeth into the interprovincial agreement. Okay? This is our commitment that we are going to be moving forward with this. That's why this part of TILMA is moving forward at this point whereas there are other parts of TILMA that will be moving forward later.

Now, I'm going to have to draw your attention to article 9, part 2 of TILMA, where it says

During the transitional period,
 which is what we're in right now,

the Parties shall undertake further consultations and negotiate any required special provisions, exclusions and transitional provisions to determine the extent of coverage of Part II to measures listed in Part VI.

Essentially, what that says is that TILMA is still under negotiation – okay? – and it's under negotiation on an enormous number of fronts.

Let me tell you a little bit about what's happening in that area if you would just give me a moment here. Now, this is the consultation. I know there were some concerns in the House regarding consultation, so I'm going to go through the kinds of consultations that we as a province, not just as a government but as a province, have been involved in to date. Since April 2006 the ministry has been meeting with stakeholders across Alberta, including municipal associations, professional regulatory bodies, and industrial associations, the AUMA, AAMD and C, city of Edmonton, city of Calgary, and city of Red Deer. They've met with more than 60 professional regulatory bodies: APEGGA, Alberta Association of Architects, the association of registered nurses. I don't think I have to name all 60 of these associations. They've met with the Council of Canadians. They've met with the chambers of commerce in Calgary and Edmonton. They've met with industrial groups, including the Alberta building trades council, Alberta Construction Association, Alberta Real Estate Council, Alberta funeral directors' association, Western Canadian Forum on Employment Law, the U of A School of Business.

We've also discussed TILMA with the governments in Canada, the Committee on Internal Trade. They've met informally with officials from the federal government, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and the Yukon, and TILMA was praised in the March 19 federal budget. One of the more recent things that has happened is that Ontario and Quebec are now trying to set up their own version of TILMA between them.

So this is very much a work in progress, and this is the first step, that says: "Hey. We as provinces want to open our borders." We know that we already have the agreement on trade provincially, but we know that it's not working. We have hundreds of examples of places where it's not working. What we want is that we want it to work. We can't make it work all over Canada all at once, but what we can do is make it work between Alberta and British Columbia. This is the first step. This is where we're saying: you know, we are committed – okay? – and essentially we're going to agree to put some money behind our mouths.

Now, I'd like to also just address a few of the things that have been brought up. Here's something else that I think we should bring up. It was something that was brought up by Calgary-Currie, and that was a concern regarding the environment. What I'm going to do is that I'm going to refer to article 5, part 4, and that says, "Parties shall continue to work toward the enhancement of sustainable development, consumer and environmental protection, and health, safety and labour standards and the effectiveness of measures relating thereto."

5:10

I think I should also mention: MLA for Edmonton-Riverview, you were really concerned about the race to the bottom. You were really concerned about it. If you just look at, you know: hey, we've got organizations in B.C., we've got organizations in Alberta, and they're working to get their regulations together. Okay? Anyway, they're getting their regulations together, and that is part of the whole process of TILMA.

As part of that, you know, to sort of balance off, to make sure that it is not the race to the bottom, this clause was put in there, that "parties shall continue to work toward the enhancement of sustain-

able development, consumer and environmental protection, and health, safety and labour standards and the effectiveness of measures relating thereto.” If we didn’t have that clause in there, I can see how you might be concerned that, yes, it would result in a race to the bottom. I think that’s about all in terms of – oh, just one other point. [interjections]

The MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie, I was very heartened. You could tell that his speech was based on having actually read the agreement, and I really appreciated that. He had a concern about the \$5 million of damages that could be called against us. When it has come to the internal trade within Canada, we have been challenged. Okay? There has been no money behind it, but we have been challenged in that arena. In that arena there is something that’s very similar, and that is that if you have a disagreement, then the first thing is that you meet and try to resolve it before it ever goes to a panel.

In the history of Alberta we have always resolved the issue before it even got to the panel. So in terms of our exposure here – okay? – our exposure is extremely low, partly because we actually do believe in free trade. We actually do believe that we want industry to move. We want prosperity for our people. [interjections] In other words, in terms of the exposure that we have, it’s not a high exposure. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Bow has the floor. The chair would be happy to recognize you if you wish to participate in the debate.

Ms DeLong: I know that other people do have other concerns about this legislation, so I will sit down so that when I do stand up again, I’m very much to the point of what your concerns are.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, after that passionate speech from the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, are there any further comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Member for Calgary-Bow had talked about how this is just the first part of TILMA. Well, as far as we see so far, there is just one part. The only part is the introduction of this on April 1, and it does become lawfully binding as of April 1, 2009. I’m so glad that the Member for Calgary-Bow is listening so she can be able to respond to some of the queries that are coming to her right away.

What are the other parts that are going to be introduced here right away? She’s talked about: this is just the first part. What are the other parts?

She talked about section 9, with other consultations that the government is going to be doing. We already heard about what’s gone on to date so far, but what are the other consultations that the government is proposing on doing in the next stages here?

You’ve still not been clear with regard to the government policy. Is it going to need to be changed? If not, then why do we need the agreement in the first place?

These are three specifics that I’m hoping that the Member for Calgary-Bow would be able to give me some information on.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I listened to the comments from the Member for Calgary-Bow, and I appreciate the sincerity and clarity of those comments, especially after some 25 hours or 28 hours of being in here. I have a few comments I need to raise.

First of all, the Member for Calgary-Bow talked about the consultations that occurred in developing this agreement. They may have been extensive – I don’t know; certainly, the opposition wasn’t involved in those – but she did mention municipal governments, and I am aware that some municipal governments are very uneasy about the implications of TILMA. There are real concerns from some of the significant cities in this province that the implications of TILMA may entail a real restriction of their municipal powers, whether those might be on environment issues, on development issues, on economic issues, so while there may have been consultation, that doesn’t mean that the people who were consulted and the groups who were consulted are fully at ease with this bill. They’re not. There’s a lot of unease in municipal government about this particular agreement. I want to make that point clear to the Member for Calgary-Bow.

I appreciated her comments about the race to the bottom. I am not convinced, and certainly the information I’m working from doesn’t give me reassurance, that that particular clause that the member cited is, in fact, a safeguard. There are so many ways around that clause that I think there is a genuine risk of a race to the bottom. We were in the middle of a very interesting debate earlier today on this exact issue regarding teachers’ certificates and other concerns.

You can be assured that as the Alberta Liberal caucus we will be very alert and others will be very alert to this leading to a consistent downgrading of standards across the board, whether they’re environment standards, labour safety standards, training standards, and on and on. [interjections] Sorry. I’m getting comments from the House leader, and I’m not hearing. There’s so much enthusiastic chatter around the Assembly right now.

I also want to make a couple of other notes. I have a question. I don’t know whether the Member for Calgary-Bow or others would be able to answer, but I’m wondering: what is the equivalent among U.S. states? I know that in the U.S. among the 50 states there are a huge number of trade barriers. There are all kinds of differences in how states handle all kinds of issues: safety issues, environment issues, and so on. I suspect that the U.S. states are at least as divided on many issues of internal trade and investment and labour mobility as are the Canadian provinces. I’m wondering if the U.S. states have any equivalent to TILMA at all or if they’re working in that direction or not and, if they are, how that’s proceeding.

I know, for example, that California has very different standards on all kinds of things than neighbouring states like Oregon or Nevada or Arizona, not to mention Yukon and then the special map of the member from Lethbridge . . . [interjection] Oh, Utah. Okay. Anyway, we won’t bother going there. I mean, I love Utah and all that, but we won’t go there in this debate. So what’s happening in the States?

5:20

I also am concerned that because TILMA links into NAFTA or complements NAFTA, we are opening ourselves up to complications through NAFTA and that some of the big winners through TILMA are not directly mentioned in TILMA but are indirectly brought into it because TILMA fits in with NAFTA. I’m thinking there particularly of foreign investors. We may well be in a situation where foreign investors empowered through NAFTA now gain the opportunity to take, say, Alberta-based municipalities or public bodies to court because TILMA gives them that power.

I’m very concerned that we may see a one-sided gain in the rights of foreign investors through TILMA when we don’t gain any corresponding benefit on the other end. There’s nothing in here that’s going to allow an Alberta-based organization, a company or anybody else, to take an American or a Mexican state to court, but

those American and Mexican investors can take Alberta to court through TILMA, linked through NAFTA. There's a real risk here that this is a one-way street and we're on the losing end of it. Again, I would like the Member from Calgary-Bow or anybody else on the government side to answer that.

There are other options to this particular approach. I think that we should be looking at unifying western Canada more than we are. As we have said here, free trade among provinces is a good idea. We will all by and large prosper as a result, but it needs to be sensible. I have been heckled a few times by various members in this Assembly, including the Premier, about shipping jobs to Manitoba. I actually think it's a chance here to become clear on our western tiger position because it does link to interprovincial trade.

As things stand right now, within about eight years a million barrels of raw bitumen a day will leave Alberta for the United States to be processed in places like Texas and Montana and Illinois and Ohio and Indiana. I think that we should be using that bitumen to strengthen interprovincial trade on this side of the 49th parallel. I think we should be considering that bitumen as a strategic opportunity to build interprovincial trade.

Rather than shipping it with a casual shrug of our shoulders to the U.S., let's sit down with the other western provinces and see if we can work together using bitumen processing as a base to leverage western Canadian development, perhaps co-operate with B.C. or Manitoba so that if bitumen goes east-west, hydropower can come from those provinces into Alberta and we don't need to go nuclear. We can build a western Canadian economy on that kind of a strategic basis rather than strictly relying on a legalistic approach that, in fact, distinctly carries the risk of integrating us more closely into the U.S. economy rather than the Canadian economy.

I greet this bill with support in principle but great skepticism in detail, and I look forward to getting good, clear answers to my questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, just for your information, about three minutes ago we passed that marker point where we've had the longest sitting evening session. I don't know whether that's something to celebrate, but someday when history is written and someone does research, we'll find out the level of verbosity and whether we were dialecticians in futility sitting around here.

The chair will now recognize the Minister for International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. I want to first of all thank the hon. Member from Calgary Bow. I want to also say that I appreciate the Leader of the Official Opposition with his guarded optimism about this important bill that is in front of us today. As you know very well, both we and the province of British Columbia came together in joint cabinet meetings, actually much on the tone and theme of what the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has talked about, even as western Canada coming together in terms of jointly, in terms of ensuring that we are benefiting all of our citizens relative to this issue of barrier busting.

I also want to say that we're eager, I know, in the next short period of time to perhaps be meeting with our neighbours to the east, in Saskatchewan, with the same tone that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has talked about, and I think it's very important. I want to assure the hon. member and all members of the Assembly on Bill 38: clearly, this is not harmonization to the lowest common denominator. Rather, TILMA does not include the word "harmonization." It does not require provinces to have uniform or identical regulations. It is an extensive process under way to look critically at regulations to ensure that we have a standard. It's often been said

that the enemy of excellent is average. I can assure you that the theme and the tone of what is being worked on relative to this bill and what the British Columbia government is doing today is a tone of: how can we better help our citizens in knocking down barriers? That's exactly what we're doing.

Finally, I want to say on unifying western Canada, as the hon. member of the Official Opposition has said, that we agree with that principle, clearly. We also believe that future meetings with British Columbia and western provinces such as Saskatchewan on a strategic basis, as the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition talked about, are exactly what the purpose of this bill is. So in many ways we do have a lot of common ground in what we are trying to achieve here. I want to say that I believe that at the end of the day perhaps I can summarize by saying: in all of the consultations we have had, let me best describe this as quoted by numerous economists across the world. The United States was mentioned, but in March of this year the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada said, "The TILMA will advance what many Canadians assume already exists." In actual fact, they do not.

In fact, I quote a former Liberal who sat on this bench along the way, Dr. Mike Percy, the dean of the School of Business, as saying: I think TILMA will be a template for the rest of Canada to look towards because it actually does allow for free trade in labour and in investment across the provinces. I think that really speaks volumes in terms of the intent and the purpose of what Bill 38 and what the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow have brought up to this House today.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. You know, I notice that this bill started – we're connected in here – on April 1, 2007. Now here we are in December of 2007 debating a bill about what started to happen back in April. Does anybody see the logic to that? That just doesn't make any sense. At least in B.C. they started talking about it in the Legislature with the bill ahead of time. No matter how they cut it, there are still various groups that say that they haven't been consulted. Municipal groups, AUMA: all sorts of them have concerns, so we're really forced into this without proper consultation. I'm sure there's been some consultation with some people.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that this bill, until it's proven differently, until we see the i's dotted and the t's crossed, takes away democratic and government accountability, holding it, I believe, at this stage hostage to private corporate business interests. I say this because of this: the conflict resolution is similar to that of the WTO. According to the Council of Canadians in 9 out of 11 rulings at the WTO where government has tried to defend their regulations, the government lost. That's 9 out of 11 rulings. Therefore, governments trying to make decisions can't do it against private interests. This particular bill cannot be amended in any meaningful manner given the governing structure of TILMA. That's not even within the bill. We're not negotiating, as I say, all the details of the bill, and the details are the most important part.

5:30

Now, I recognize that a lot of the things don't come forward till 2009, Mr. Chairman, but the concerns that we have – I think this was quoted in the B.C. Legislature when they were having a debate. It was on Monday, October 29, 2007. I believe I can say the name now.

The modus for it is spoken to well by Gary Mar, the cabinet minister responsible for negotiating TILMA in Alberta. He said: "This resolution is everything that Canadian business asked for."

This resolution is everything that Canadian business asked for: well, that's fine. That's private interests – I understand where they're at – but that doesn't necessarily represent the public interest, and that's what the concern is with TILMA.

Let me just go through two or three concerns that we have. A lot of these don't come forward, admittedly, till 2009. As of 2009 TILMA will apply to school boards, municipalities, municipal organizations, and publicly funded academic, health, and social services entities. This will unnecessarily, I believe at this stage, expose the public service sector to new legal and financial risk. If that's not the case, why haven't we had this debate? It's not only us; it's all these organizations that are asking for clarification. They don't have it. As I say, this started in 2007. We're debating the first bill in this Legislature, you know, in November.

The other concern that we have is this, Mr. Chairman. Individuals and businesses can seek up to \$5 million in compensation per claim if government legislation or regulation is perceived to restrict or impair trade. Up to \$5 million. There's no limit on the number of claims that can be filed against any single government measure. Company W, X, Y, Z, anyone could keep filing claims against the government. That comes out of the public purse. Well, that's not laid out in this bill, I can assure you, and that's a concern. If we'd had the public hearings, maybe that would be the case.

This should be of some concern to rural Alberta, and maybe there will be a clarification on this. When you look at it in the broad sense – our agricultural sector is much different, Mr. Chairman, than the B.C. sector – this could take away the government's right to provide assistance to farmers after the transitional period. Now, that could be very serious in many parts of rural Alberta. If that's not the case, why haven't we had this debate? Why don't we see the details?

You know, I won't go into the thing about lowering the bar and the rest of it. There's been some discussion about that, but that still is a concern. It's a concern among many Albertans. It's a concern both ways in the B.C. government.

Mr. Chairman, we know this is good for business. I have no qualms about that. That doesn't always necessarily mean it's good for all the public interests. We should have had a debate. As I say, I want to be clear about this. Think about it again. This came in on April 1 of this year. We're into December before we've even got this bill, and this bill doesn't give us the details. Doesn't anybody see something wrong with that? We'll have to see when 2009 comes along: are there going to be a lot of surprises? You know, as I said, I'm worried if we're following the WTO model because, frankly, the WTO model doesn't work very well for elected governments. As I say, what's good for the private sector is not always good for the public sector. Now, if these concerns can be worked out in some way, I'd be prepared to take a look at it and see.

But we certainly at the minimum – at the very minimum, Mr. Chairman – have no answers to these questions. We're asked to follow in blind faith, that somehow this will work out, that in 2009 everything will be all right. It's not the way to do government business, not the way at all. As I said, the fact that even this bill, without the details, we're debating six months after it has come into account. It's just unbelievably offensive as far as I'm concerned.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll be extremely quick. Whether or not you support the TILMA bill, there's a reality, and that's the reality

of the Crowsnest Pass and the Rogers Pass, that in historic times provided a challenge in just locating those passes. We've got highway 3 and we've got the Trans-Canada, neither of which as they get to the mountains or en route to the mountains are completely four-laned.

Now, we have to balance our need for transportation with, again, safe corridors. Obviously, highway 3 and the Trans-Canada are east-west, but we also have to have protected crossings for the animals so that they don't interfere with the transportation that we're trying to promote and protect. One of the main directions that the animals tend to travel is the Yellowstone-Yukon direction, which is north-south. So what I'm suggesting is that for the sake of trade and for the sake of the environment, let's come to four lanes with crossings for the animals, either underpasses or overpasses, and that will promote both the quality of our environments, whether they're in B.C. or Alberta, and also the improving of our transportation systems and, therefore, our joint economies.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is an important issue and merits comment. However, I will try to set an example given the hour and juncture in the debate. I talked with a lot of Calgarians this spring and summer, many of whom are of a very pro trade, pro free enterprise perspective, and they voiced concerns with regard to TILMA, unsolicited.

I also follow municipal government and municipal politics quite closely. I know there was a municipal election in Calgary this fall, and there were concerns expressed there. I would say, Mr. Chairman, that I would urge caution and taking the time for full consideration of this very important issue.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 38 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 57 and Bill 38.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton-Valley Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 57, Bill 38.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

5:40

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek the unanimous consent of the House to allow Bill 57, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2), to proceed to third reading on the same day as second reading and committee.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading
(continued)

Bill 57
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2)

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Justice I am pleased to move third reading of Bill 57, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (No. 2).

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Shall the question be called?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 57 read a third time]

Bill 38
Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007

Ms DeLong: First of all, I'd like to move third reading of Bill 38.

I would also like to bring to people's attention something called a legitimate objection when it comes to TILMA. This is an objection that a government such as B.C. or Alberta could use to say, "Hey, you know, this doesn't line up with TILMA because of," and these are the different because of's: public security and safety; public order; protection of human, animal, or plant life or health; protection of environment; conservation; prevention of waste of nonrenewable, exhaustible resources; consumer protection; protection of health and safety provisions; affirmative action programs for disadvantaged groups; prevention or relief of critical shortage of goods essential to a party. I just wanted to get that out so that you understand that there are legitimate objections. You don't have to just go with TILMA. Okay? That's one of them that I wanted to make sure that we had.

If there are other questions that I have not yet addressed, I'd be really happy to provide that for you.

I urge everyone to support Bill 38 for third reading.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There has been an awful lot of rigorous debate on Bill 38 today, and I appreciate the conversation that has taken place. There is one thing, however, that I would like to get on the record. Many groups have expressed concern about this particular piece of legislation, one of them having been the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, there has been a letter-writing campaign under way for some time now, and I've actually had

letters from 197 constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford expressing a number of concerns. One of their concerns is that there be one labour law for all unionized workers so that all Alberta labour would treat working people in Alberta the same. Of course, we understand that there may well be TILMA implications there.

Another one of the things that they're asking for in their letter-writing campaign, Mr. Speaker, is the right for first contract arbitration. The last paragraph in this letter says, "All these measures have been adopted in other jurisdictions, resulting in a positive and fairer labour relations climate." They're asking for Alberta citizens to receive, in fact they suggest that they deserve the same protections. So I thought that given the implications of TILMA and the concerns that these supporters of the AUPE have, it would only be appropriate to raise that in debate on Bill 38 in third reading. In fact, I believe that given the circumstances this would be the appropriate time to table a report to Albertans of the 197 constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford who have expressed those concerns as well as a copy of one of the letters.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much. I appreciate all the comments from the members across the way and also from this side. I do believe that, ultimately, to all of our constituents this Bill 38, that has been brought up by the Member for Calgary-Bow, truly is there to help all of our citizens and give us this right to be here today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member to close the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a third time]

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, I think I anticipate what you want to say, but could you just bear with me a few minutes because traditionally on this day we ask all our pages to assemble, and we collectively say thank you to them via comments that will be provided now by the hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and all hon. members. You know, each day in this session we were served by the tireless efforts of all our pages, and last night was a fine example. Even though 11 o'clock rolled around – that's the traditional time they are allowed to go home – some actually chose to stay with us, working shoulder to shoulder all night long. So on behalf of all of the members of this Assembly I would like to give each page a small Christmas gift just to say thank you and to wish each and every one of them a very merry Christmas. I'll ask our head page, Luke Wilson, to distribute these gifts and ask all the members of the Assembly to now show our appreciation for them. [applause]

The Speaker: Hon. members, just briefly, I'd like to bring you up to date with some statistics as we now, I believe, are going to be closing the Legislature of the year 2007. As an example, in terms of evening sittings and the length of the evening sittings, the Deputy Chair of Committees advised the members here a few minutes ago that they've passed a certain threshold. But you may be interested in knowing that of the four longest evening sittings that we've had in the history of this Legislative Assembly, evening sitting number 4, the fourth longest, occurred on May 9 of this year, when the

Assembly convened at 8 p.m. on May 9 and sat till 10:45 a.m. on May 10. The third-longest sitting occurred on November 9, 1993, when the evening sitting began at 8 p.m. on November 9 and the House rose at 4:11 on the afternoon of November 10. The second-longest sitting occurred on May 28, 2001, when the evening sitting began at 8 p.m., and then the House rose at 5:20 p.m. on May 29. Today being December 5, we started sitting on December 4 at 8 o'clock, and we'll be rising here in a few minutes from now, so that will extend almost 30 minutes beyond the previous longest one.

In terms of the number of sitting days this year, calendar year 2007, the Assembly has sat for 62 days, which includes 13 evening sittings, and I'll give you the numbers compared to 2006. In 2006 the Assembly sat for 47 days, which included 31 evening sittings. So this year it was 62 and 13. Last year it was 47 and 13.

In terms of the number of minutes sat in 2007, we'll be approaching 21,670 minutes compared to 16,019 in 2006. The number of hours sat in 2007: we're approaching 361 hours compared to 251 hours and 13 minutes in 2006.

The number of words spoken – and there is a way of determining this – will be approaching 2,973,000 words compared to 2,070,000 a year ago.

5:50

In terms of Oral Question Period this year, in 2007, there were 22 occasions when we had 15 sets of questions or more. That was 90 questions and answers. We had 12 occasions when there were 16 sets of questions and responses, or 96. We had one occasion when there were 17 sets of questions. In 2006 there were six occasions when we had 15 sets of questions. This year it was 22. In 2006 we had two sets. This year we had 12. The total number of questions this year in Oral Question Period: 5,371 compared to 3,483 a year ago.

Now we can assume that we've received third reading on bills. There were 55 this year compared to 42 last year. Government bills left on the Order Paper: I do believe there was one and one left on notice compared to two last year. Private members' bills which received royal assent: two compared to one in 2006. Private members' public bills that received royal assent since 1993, when we made the changes to Standing Orders: it has now become 42. We had 1,224 tablings this year compared to 737 in 2006.

I would just ask one last thing before I recognize the hon. Government House Leader, and that is that tomorrow we've scheduled a seminar for all constituency assistants. Some 80 of the 83 will be in attendance tomorrow. One of the aspects we were going to have is that I was going to invite them in to be introduced in the Assembly, but I anticipate something may happen in the next minute or two. What I will do tomorrow is hold a little seminar with these people in the Assembly and have them sit at your desks. So if you wouldn't mind just taking your papers off your desks – if you don't have time to do it, the pages tonight will do it – and locking your desks, and then you can retrieve them tomorrow so that everything will be as private as possible.

Before I call on the Government House Leader, again let me extend season's greetings to all of you. Let me wish all of you and your families peace, harmony, love, and safety first and foremost, and be good to one another.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your anticipation, as always, is so correct. As provided for in Standing Order 3.1(6), I would now move that we adjourn the fall sitting.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m.]

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